

# Bnay Qyāmā and Bnāt Qyāmā

also known as “Children of the Covenant”

By Jonathan Warner, Cornell University

Entry tags: Orthodox/Eastern Christian, Religious Group, Early Christianity, Christian Traditions, Jacobite/Syrian Orthodox

The Bnay Qyāmā and Bnāt Qyāmā (“Sons of the Covenant” and “Daughters of the Covenant” respectively) were Syriac Christian ascetics first attested in the fourth century CE. These individuals, sworn to an ascetic and celibate life, served public and liturgical functions within Syriac churches and communities. Evidence of their activities survives in remarks in a variety of religious treatises and hagiographical texts as well as rules promulgated by religious leaders. This article summarizes the known origins, social significance, and ecclesiastical functions of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā. The precise social and linguistic origins of the designation are debated. The noun often translated “covenant” (qyāmā) derives from the root qwm (“to stand”), and it has a wide range of meanings, including status, station, oath, and contract. Robert Murray has suggested an origin for the term in baptismal rites, where the catechumen took a proverbial “stand” and rose from the waters (Murray 1974/5). According to another view, the related noun for “resurrection” (qyāmtā) may have played a role in this use of bnay qyāmā (cf. Luke 20:36). Finally, M.R. Macina has argued that the term related to Greek kanon and tentatively proposed that the bnay qyāmā – “members of the [church] institution” – were more integrated into the clerical hierarchy (Macina 1999). If we are to believe fourth and fifth-century martyr narratives which claim that children of the covenant were targeted in the persecutions of Diocletian and Shapur II, “covenanters” probably existed as pre-monastic ascetic movement in the third century (Harvey 2005, 126). The most important early source is Aphrahat’s sixth demonstration which dates to around 336/7 and describes the renunciatory ideal of the bnay qyāmā. His text, replete with military and athletic imagery, exhorts the children of the covenant to reject the refinements and attachments of the world and instead embrace a spiritual marriage with Christ. Aside from passing references to the group in hagiographies and church histories, most of our knowledge of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā derives from lists of canons, most notably the rules attributed to Rabbula, bishop of Edessa in 411-32 (see Phenix and Horn 2017), but also in canons attributed to Maruta of Maipherqat in the fifth-century and John of Tella in the sixth-century (see Vööbus 1975 and 1982). These rules prescribe communal and celibate living, either with ones family or with fellow children of the covenant (of the same sex). It can be inferred that vows of poverty were not required based on their prohibition from usury and exemption from collections from priests. Clothing was to be uniform and modest, and outside business and legal entanglements were not allowed. Prayer and fasting were their primary responsibilities, but they also cared for church administration, the staffing of hospitals, and the care of the poor. One feature of the “covenanters” which distinguishes them from later monastic communities in the west was their central role in public liturgical singing. The bnāt qyāmā were particularly unique in this regard (on which, see Harvey 2005). The fifteenth canon of the synod of Phrygian Laodicea restricted singing in church to these women. According to Jacob of Sarug, Ephrem the Syrian (late 4th c.) established a choir of women to sing his hymns. In this role, they embodied and taught the eschatological and soteriological ideals of the wider religious community. By the medieval period the bnay/bnāt qyāmā had declined in importance. On the one hand, the bnāt qyāmā became assimilated with deaconesses and nuns. On the other hand, bnay qyāmā were eclipsed by both clerics within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and cenobitic monks. Aside from a smattering of literary references, the bnay/bnāt qyāmā had largely disappeared by the tenth century. The geographic extent of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā was much broader than the region marked here, namely the Roman province of Osroene in the fifth century, which was chosen both for the sake of simplicity and due to the importance of Edessa as a cultural and religious center. Syriac Christianity and the institution of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā certainly extended into other provinces of the Roman empire and the Persian empire to

the east.



Date Range: 300 CE - 900 CE

Region: Osroene

Region tags: Middle East, Syria, Turkey

The Roman Province of Osroene in the Fifth Century

## Status of Participants:

✓ Religious Specialists

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Phenix, Jr., Robert R., and Cornelia B. Horn, eds. *The Rabbula Corpus: Comprising the Life of Rabbula, His Correspondence, a Homily Delivered in Constantinople, Canons, and Hymns*. 1 edition. SBL Press, 2017.
- Source 2: Vööbus, Arthur. "The Institution of the Benai Qeima and Benat Qeima in the Ancient Syrian Church." *Church History* 30, no. 1 (March 1961): 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3161262>.
- Source 3: Vööbus, Arthur. *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*. 3 vols. Louvain: CSCO: 1958-1988.

Notes: See below for a short bibliography of additional primary and secondary sources.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Bnay-Qyama-Bnat-Qyama>
- Source 1 Description: Robert A. Kitchen, "Bnay Qyāmā, Bnāt Qyāmā," *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition*
- Source 2 URL: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662778.001.0001/acref-9780198662778-e-761>
- Source 2 Description: Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Covenant, Sons and Daughters of the (Bnay and Bnat Qyama)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, Oliver Nicholson, ed.
- Source 3 URL: <https://hugoye.bethmardutho.org/article/hv8n2harvey#>
- Source 3 Description: Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity†," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 8.2

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

- Source 1 URL: <https://archive.org/details/patrologiaorient17pariuoft>
- Source 1 Description: John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, E. W. Brooks, ed. and trans. *Patrologia Orientalis* 17, Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co., 1923.

Notes: See especially pp. 229-247 for the story of Simeon the Mountaineer in Syriac and English translation.

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/370106.htm>
- Source 1 Description: Aphrahat, "Demonstration VI," John Gwynn, trans. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene*

Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 13. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.)

— Source 1 URL: [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_Sy0vAAAAMAAJ](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_Sy0vAAAAMAAJ)

— Source 1 Description: Aphrahat, Demonstration 6 (in Syriac with Latin translation), I. Parisot, trans. *Patrologia Syriaca* 1 (1894): 239-312.

— Source 1 URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-edition-of-early-christian-writings/rabbula-canon-for-monks-and-clerics/3E52218160FE221C6B4A1A37B7D9FA34>

— Source 1 Description: Rabbula, Canons for Monks and Clerics. In E. Muehlberger (Ed.), *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings* (The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings, pp. 204-212). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781107449602.021

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

— Yes

Notes: Over the course of this period, Christians in this region were in contact with a diverse array of different religious groups: other Christians with heterodox beliefs, Pagans (or traditional polytheists), Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, and Muslims. Scholars emphasize that the nature of these interactions ranged from peaceful and pluralistic to competitive and even violent. For the *bnay/bnāt qyāmā*, the interactions conveyed by our sources appear to be more competitive than pluralistic. Rabbula's canons, for example, advise the destruction and appropriation of pagan sites and forbid interaction between *bnay/bnāt qyāmā* and heretics or pagans (Canons 48-53). Be that as it may, the bias of the surviving sources (overwhelmingly from a rigorist and "orthodox" perspective) should not persuade us to ignore the more nuanced possibility of individuals possessing multiple religious identities in late antiquity and interacting differently with other groups in different contexts, on which see Rebillard 2012.

Reference: Eric Rebillard. *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

— Yes

Notes: In the Canons ascribed to Maruta, the chorepiscopus (local bishop) is tasked with persuading parents with multiple children to set aside some sons and daughters for the covenant, and these are dedicated through the laying of hands (Vööbus, "So-Called Canons of Maruta," 26.2-3). John of Ephesus reports that Simeon the Mountaineer set aside 1/3 of the children of a pastoral community for dedication and that he used a razor to tonsure the selected children (*Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16). We do not know precisely at what age such a dedication was made.

Reference: John of Ephesus. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (*Patrologia Orientalis* 17-19). Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co..

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

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↳ Assigned at birth (membership is default for this society):

– No

↳ Assigned by personal choice:

– Yes

↳ Assigned by class:

– No

↳ Assigned at a specific age:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Assigned by gender:

– Yes

Notes: The texts that come down make a terminological and functional distinction between bnay and bnāt qyāmā. Each group was not allowed to cohabitate with the other (Canons of Rabbula, 2, 10). Both groups took part in singing and worship, but the bnāt qyama served a distinct liturgical role (e.g. for Ephrem) and the bnay qyāmā could supply church stewards and persons to the clergy (Vööbus 1961, 24-5)

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. The Institution of the Benai Qeiamā in the Ancient Syrian Church. Church History, 30(1) doi: 10.2307/3161262.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

↳ Assigned by participation in a particular ritual:

– Yes

↳ Assigned by some other factor:

– No

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– Yes

Notes: Syriac missionaries were important in spreading Christianity into the east, illustrated through the spread of the script as far afield as Sogdia and X'ian. We do not know how involved the bnay/bnāt qyāmā were in missionary activities, and they probably did not travel on long journeys, as they picture that emerges from the canons is one of sedentary members of established church communities. Still, there are suggestive indications that the institution of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā played an important role in proselytizing and instructing others in the faith. Rabbula, the purported founder of many of the rules that governed the covenants, is reported by his biographer to have played a role in spreading

the orthodox faith in and around Edessa, dismantling local shrines, and reducing the influence of heterodoxy. And when Simeon the mountaineer came upon a group of pastoralists who did not adhere to his preferred flavor of Christianity, he first forcibly established a group of bnay/bnāt qyāmā whom he trained in scripture and who subsequently taught others (John of Ephesus, *The Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16). So given the important community and liturgical role of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā, it is plausible that they played a role in proselytizing at least at a local level.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. *The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns*. Atlanta: SBL.

Reference: John of Ephesus. *Lives of the Eastern Saints (Patrologia Orientalis 17-19)*. Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co..

## Does the religion have official political support

— Yes

Notes: In the time period here, this was only true for the Roman empire after the adoption of Christianity by the emperors (post-Constantine, excepting Julian). The level of official support must have varied at a local level depending on the favor of local officials and the vagaries of church controversies. The bnay/bnāt qyāmā would have benefited indirectly from the special status of the church, but there are no explicit references to them as a distinct group in surviving imperial legislation.

## Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: In addition to the general Christian ideology of apostasy, which we can surmise was applicable, we know of particular procedures for discipline which applied to children of the covenant. If one was caught in adultery, one was anathematized, that is cast out from the church, and sent to town for punishment (Rabbula, Canon 28). Another rule indicates that those who had "fallen from their rank (dargā)" be sent to the monasteries for repentance and not be allowed back into church along with their parents for a time being. This suggests that the typical notion of apostasy took on a familial dimension when it came to children of the covenant, who sometimes lived with their families.

↳ Are apostates prosecuted or punished:

— Yes

↳ Apostates are socially shunned and/or publicly vilified:

— Yes

↳ Wealth, civil rights, and/or social capital are taken by authorities:

— Yes

Notes: The famous Edict of Thessalonica, the so-called "cunctos populos" edict, decreed that "all peoples under the moderate rule of our Clemency practice this [orthodox] religion" (Codex Theodosianus (CTh) 16.1.2.pr, translation my own, see <https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Constitutiones/CTh16.html> for Latin text), and an entire section of the Theodosian Code (16.5, De haereticis), was dedicated to meting out punishment on wayward Christians. Legislation against apostates and heretics was

probably implemented on a more ad hoc basis than the grand pronouncements of legal codes might suggest. Even so, apostates could run afoul of local and imperial authorities, and we must presume that children of the covenant were no exception.

Reference: Malcolm Errington R.. Christian Accounts of the Religious Legislation of Theodosius I. *Klio: Beiträge zur alten Geschichte*, 79(2)

↳ Do apostates receive corporal punishment:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The Canons of Rabbula explicitly contemplate beating as a punishment (Rule 35). It is discouraged, but allowed when necessary in order to frighten. Whether this was intended as applying to apostates is unclear, but those who commit adultery were to be bound before being sent for punishment, which might suggest a similar binding before being sent off to a monastery for repentance.

↳ Do apostates receive divine punishment:

– Yes

↳ Punished in the afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Cursed by "high god":

– Yes

↳ Cursed by other supernatural being(s):

– No

↳ Other divine punishment:

– No

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Population estimates for antiquity are notoriously difficult. On top of the normal demographic challenges, we do not have a reliable indication of how many bnay/bnāt qyāmā there were in each community or the geographic extent of the group. But we can make an educated guess by analogy with other groups for which we have some more data points. Ewa Wipszycka estimates communities of 200-300 monks in Egypt (2009, 403-36, revising down the huge numbers seen in the *Historia Monachorum*, *Historia Lausiaca*, and Jerome), and a few hundred monasteries in Constantinople ranged from small establishments of 50 to large institutions of several hundred (Wood 2018, 68-70).

We possess no comparable numbers for Osrhoene, not to speak of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā, but the story of Simeon the Mountaineer mentions 30 children selected from a population of 90 children in a small pastoralist community (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 16). According to the canons, parents were encouraged to give up a child if they had multiple. While these statements may represent an ideal, the fact that covenanters could continue to dwell with their families might suggest that somewhat large numbers could have been accommodated without too much social disruption, even in small communities. Given the comparanda of ascetic communities elsewhere in the Mediterranean, it would not be unreasonable to assume that a small town could have around a hundred children of the covenant while in a larger city like Edessa they may have numbered in the hundreds or even thousands.

Reference: Ewa Wipszycka. Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IVe-VIIIe siècles). *Journal of Juristic Papyrology, Supplements* 11. Warsaw: Faculty of Law and Administration and Institute of Archaeology. isbn: 9788392591900.

Reference: Ian N. Wood. *The Transformation of the Roman West*. ARC - Past Imperfect. isbn: 9781942401438.

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

— Field doesn't know

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

— Yes

Notes: The main scriptures were the Syriac translation of the Old and New Testaments, now known as the Peshitta (not including 2nd and 3rd John, 2nd Peter, Jude, Revelation, and a few passages and verses). There were earlier versions of scripture in Syriac (the Diatesseron and the so-called “Old Syriac Version” or “Vetus Syra”), as well as later recensions such as the Philoxenian version. The bnay/bnāt qyāmā received some training in reading scripture and sang the psalms (see below under “education” and “participation in large-scale rituals”). Although not on the same level as scripture, the children of the covenant also were well versed in learning and singing metrical poems, which occupy a special didactic role in the Syriac tradition. For a detailed discussion of the Peshitta, see <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Peshitta>



Are they written:

— Yes



Are they oral:

— No

↳ Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

– Yes

↳ Revealed by a high god:

– Yes

↳ Revealed by other supernatural being:

– No

↳ Inspired by high god:

– Yes

↳ Inspired by other supernatural being:

– No

↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings:

– No

↳ Originated from non-divine human being:

– Yes

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

Notes: Sources attest to many churches, martyria, and public buildings like infirmaries (esp. Chronicles of Edessa, which attests to a church, cemetery, and chapel built in Edessa in 312/3), but we only have a few traces of christian architecture (many remains likely missed and then lost to flooding in the hasty archaeological surveys before the dam projects of the 1970s). As a result, as the Roman historian Fergus Millar put it, "The social structure, the languages and the art and architecture of the whole region [the Euphrates and Mesopotamia] ... all remain mysterious, to be glimpsed only in scattered items of internal and external evidence" (1993, 482). Archaeological surveys have shown extensive late Roman and early Byzantine remains, and even a small settlement like Keloşk Kale (northwest of Edessa) evinces impressive masonry, some of which buildings may have been religious (Baumeister 2011, 228-235), although without epigraphy, identification is impossible, and in any case there was likely overlap in function.

Reference: Fergus Millar undefined. The Roman Near East 31BC-AD337. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reference: Peter Baumeister. Some aspects of the development of Osrhoene in late antiquity. (Dally Ortwin , Christopher Ratté John), Archaeology and the cities of Asia Minor in late antiquity. Ann Arbor,



Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes

↳ Tombs:  
– Yes

↳ Cemeteries:  
– Yes

↳ Temples:  
– Yes

↳ Altars:  
– Yes

↳ Devotional markers:  
– No

↳ Mass gathering point [plazas, courtyard, square. Places permanently demarcated using visible objects or structures]:  
– Yes

↳ Other type of religious monumental architecture:  
– Yes [specify]: large scale churches and (in the later period) monastic complexes

Is iconography present:

– Yes

Notes: By the fourth or fifth century, the tradition appears in "The Doctrine of Addai" that the king of Osrhoene, Abgar the Black, was sent a letter by Jesus along with a painting of him ([http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/addai\\_2\\_text.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/addai_2_text.htm)). This story is one of the earliest indications of a tradition of relic veneration, and it is explicitly linked to the Syriac church in Edessa. In the sixth century, Evagrius Scholasticus reports that an image of Christ "divinely wrought" (θεότευκτος) played a role in the 544 CE defense of Edessa against the Persians (Evagrius, PG 86.2.2748-9: [https://books.google.com/books?id=37\\_UAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=37_UAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)). Based on these and other sources (for a survey of which see Chaillot 1993, 17-18), it is clear that an iconic tradition developed that was linked to the legendary origins of the Edessene church, but whether the children of the covenant had any unique or distinct relationship to this iconic tradition or

church iconography more generally is unclear. In the canons regarding children of the covenant, there are no mentions of icons, but there are some important statements regarding the sanctity of liturgical implements along with injunctions that they not be handled by the covenanters (Canons of Rabbula 58). There is also mention of the need to maintain white walls within churches and to repurpose wood from pagan shrines for religious purposes (53-4). In keeping with local tradition, we may suppose that such objects and architectural elements bore religious iconography.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Reference: Christine Chaillot. Rôle des images et vénération des icônes dans les églises orthodoxes orientales: Syrienne, Arménienne, Copte, Éthiopienne. Geneva: Dialogue entre orthodoxes.

↳ Where is iconography present [select all that apply]:

- On persons
- At home
- Some public spaces

↳ Are there distinct features in the religious group's iconography:

- Field doesn't know

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

- Yes

Are pilgrimages present:

- Yes

## Beliefs

### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

- Yes

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

- Yes

Belief in afterlife:

— Yes

Notes: Belief in the afterlife is critical to most Christian traditions, but it was especially significant for the bnay/bnāt qyāmā. Their role as a focal point and embodiment of the coming kingdom of heaven for the church (Harvey 2005; cf. Markus 1990, 157ff. for a similar assessment of western monasticism). The designation "qyāmā" may have also called to mind the idea of the related term for resurrection (qyāmtā), both that of Christ and that of all believers, to which the life of the dedicated "covenanters" was meant to point.

Reference: Robert Markus. *The End of Ancient Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reference: Susan Harvey Ashbrook. *Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity*. *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 8(2)

Reincarnation in this world:

— No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

— Field doesn't know

Notes: Although we have burials from the region, scholars have not identified any burials as specifically those of bnay/bnāt qyāmā, and textual sources are silent on the matter. From Rabbula's order that monks be buried quietly by their comrades and without a procession through town (Vööbus, "Rules of Rabbula for the Monks," 24), we might infer that bnay/bnāt qyāmā were similarly isolated from typical funerary practices. Another restriction on covenanters - that they should not drink wine at funeral feasts (Canons of Rabbula, 46) - might also suggest that their funerary rites would have been somewhat different, particularly if the decedent surrounded by their fellow "children of the covenant."

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

— No

Are grave goods present:

— Field doesn't know

Are formal burials present:

— Field doesn't know

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

— Yes

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic:

– Yes

Notes: Not only is God (alāhā), the Father (abbā), often described in anthropomorphic terms, but Christ (mšīhā), his Son, is the Word made flesh, literally in human form. The third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (ruhā qadīšā), is not typically anthropomorphized.

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity:

– Yes

Notes: In most Christian traditions, God can be described using imagery of the sky, such as thunder and lightning. Among early Syriac Christian writers when people go to God, who resides in heaven (šmayā), they "ascend," so there is a spatial conception that maps roughly onto the sky.

↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld):

– No

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):

– No

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:

– No

↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites:

– No

↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites:

– No

↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good:

– Yes

↳ Other feature(s) of supreme high god:

– Yes [specify]: Triune

↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ The supreme god's knowledge is restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god knows your basic character (personal essence):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god has other knowledge of this world:

– Yes [specify]: Omniscient and knowledgeable of all supernatural powers the

world

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can reward:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god can punish:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– No

↳ The supreme high god exhibits positive emotion:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god exhibits negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god possesses hunger:

– No

Notes: § Although in general God does not feel hunger in most Christian theologies, this question impinges upon a major Christological question, namely: when Jesus experienced human feelings such as hunger (e.g. Mark 11:12), what part of him experienced those human needs and in what way? A number of different Christianities responded in different ways to this issue. Among the most significant splits for this region was that following the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE). At that council, a creed was agreed upon that promulgated a dyophysite understanding of Christ: Christ has two natures, one human and one divine, in hypostatic union - each complete and distinct, but both united in his person with no division. Those who reject the council of Chalcedon are dubbed "miaphysites" (or more pejoratively "monophysites") and hold to some variant of the position that Jesus is at once fully divine and fully human, of one nature. The explanation of Christ's hunger would differ depending on one's theological inclinations.

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:

– No

↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature:

—Yes [specify]: Trinitarian

Notes: One interesting feature of the Syriac tradition is that the word for spirit (ruhā) is normally feminine, and in some early texts the Holy Spirit is grammatically feminine as well and even described with maternal imagery. Eventually this proper noun became masculine, but it still appears as a vestigial feminine noun in some hymns.

Reference: Susan Harvey Ashbrook. Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 37(2)

↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:

— Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

— Yes

↳ In dreams:

— Yes

↳ In trance possession:

— No

↳ Through divination practices:

— No

Notes: Divination practices are explicitly forbidden, being associated with demons and not actual knowledge of the future. The rules of Rabbula for covenanters call for the expulsion "diviners and wizards and those who write charms" (Canon 17, Vööbus, trans.).

↳ Only through religious specialists:

— No

↳ Only through monarch

— No

↳ Other form of communication with living:

—Yes [specify]: Through signs, animals, nature, and any other means.

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

— Yes

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– Yes

Notes: Aside from folklore traditions, of which we have scanty information, hagiographic texts often describe visions or encounters with deceased humans, especially the holy. John of Ephesus reports the tale of a man in prison visited and fed by a mysterious man in white, perhaps an angel or saint, and another monk sees John, the still alive bishop of Constantinople, in a vision (Eccl. Hist. 2.6 (<https://archive.org/stream/ecclesiasticalhi00johnuoft#page/n135/mode/1up>) and 1.13 (<https://archive.org/stream/ecclesiasticalhi00johnuoft#page/n49/mode/1up>)). These visions could be deceptive and appearances could be changed. In a rather bizarre episode, two monks believed that they had met Mary, mother of Christ, but were in reality encountering a women surrounded by demons (Lives of Eastern Saints, 15, PO 17: 225-8; cf. 32, PO 18:586-92).

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

– No

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: According to Christian theology, this was only possible in accordance with the sovereignty and will of God. For example, in the story John relates of the man in prison, his mysterious visitor is interpreted as sent by God (Eccl. Hist. 2.6, <https://archive.org/stream/ecclesiasticalhi00johnuoft#page/n135/mode/1up>)

↳ Human spirits can reward:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can punish:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:



– Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– No

↳ In dreams:

– Yes

↳ In trance possession:

– No

↳ Through divination processes:

– No

↳ Only through specialists:

– No

↳ Only through monarch:

– No

↳ Communicate with living through other means:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: These consist primarily of demons (including Satan) and angels.

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– Yes

Notes: Both demons and angels can sometimes be seen by humans in visions, during dreams, and in waking life. Appearances vary, and humans do not always recognize

what they perceive (Hebrews 13:2). John of Ephesus relates a story of monks deceived by Satan and demons with false images of brightness to simulate angelic appearances (Lives, 15, PO 17: 225-8; cf. Lives 32, PO 18:586-92). In the Life of Anthony, demons take on the likeness of beasts, a woman, and an Ethiopian.

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

– No

- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings know your basic character (personal essence):
  - No
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):
  - No
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have other knowledge of this world:
  - Yes [specify]: Angels and demons have knowledge of the world only insofar as they are permitted to by divine ordinance.
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings can reward:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings can punish:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:
  - I don't know
- ↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:
  - No
- ↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:

– No

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

Notes: An elaborate hierarchy of angels appears in the writings of some, notably Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 5th-6th c. CE, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Dionysius-the-Areopagite-Pseudo->) whose writings were translated into Syriac by Sergios of Resh‘ayna. Demonology also could be quite complex and involved military and hierarchical imagery, especially in ascetic literature.

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– Yes

↳ Other organization for pantheon:

– No

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans’ behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: God’s omniscience is an important aspect of Christian theology, and his knowledge of what happens, even in secret, is mentioned throughout the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Proverbs 15:3; Psalms 139:1-6; Matthew 6:4).

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously “moral” or “ethical” norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: For example the care for strangers and the poor had as an important dimension the idea that anyone in need could be Christ or an angel (e.g. Matthew 25:35, Hebrews 13:2). For an account of this motif and its social implications in late antiquity, see Brown 2002.

Reference: Peter Brown. *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*. UPNE. isbn: 9781584651468.

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Yes

Notes: The rules make clear that there were taboos against eating certain kinds of foods, wearing certain kinds of clothes, etc. Aphrahat suggests that this is rooted in a desire to imitate Christ to whom they are yoked (Dem. 6.8, on which image see Koltun-Fromm 2001).

Reference: Naomi Koltun-Fromm undefined. Yokes of the Holy-Ones: The Embodiment of a Christian Vocation. *The Harvard Theological Review*, 94(2)

↳ Food:

– Yes

↳ Sacred space(s):

– Yes

↳ Sacred object(s):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Adultery:

– Yes

↳ Incest:

– Yes

↳ Other sexual practices:

– Yes [specify]: Celibacy

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:

– Yes

**Notes:** To offer but one example, the story of Simeon the Mountaineer includes the detail that parents who took away children who had already been consecrated as children of the covenant were struck dead by God, not by Simeon (John of Ephesus, *Lives of Eastern Saints* 16). This confirms the seriousness with which at least John of Ephesus took the oaths sworn by covenanters. Other injunctions against offering surety or falsely producing documents in a legal setting appear in the rules for children of the covenant (Canons of Rabbula 41, 47).

**Reference:** Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. *The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns.* Atlanta: SBL.

↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery:

– Yes

**Notes:** This is explicitly forbidden by the rules for covenanters (Canons of Rabbula 17). Other early Syriac texts present sorcerers as the antagonists who are discredited by divine intervention (e.g. "The Doctrine of Simon Cephas, in the City of Rome" in Cureton 1864, 35-41 - [https://books.google.com/books?id=xddCAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=xddCAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) )

**Reference:** Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. *The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns.* Atlanta: SBL.

↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes:

– Yes

Notes: Not only were bnay/bnāt qyāmā of course forbidden from property crimes such as theft, they were also excluded from usury, the receipt of bribes, contracting out their labor, and legal actions. Along with the injunctions in Aphrahat's sixth demonstration we might infer a connection between this and the idea that such activities would entangle the covenant in worldly affairs in a way that was incompatible with their calling (cf. 2 Tim 2:4). Another inference to be drawn from these commands is the fact that there may not have been an explicit vow of poverty required of all bnay/bnāt qyāmā (Vööbus 1961, 21-2).

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. The Institution of the Benai Qeiamā in the Ancient Syrian Church. Church History, 30(1) doi: 10.2307/3161262.

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:

– Yes

Notes: Not only do the canons of Rabbula for covenanters mention restrictions on performance of rituals (no rituals without priest, no approaching the raised altar, no handling of the sacramental implements), but such violation of rules could be seen as dire from the standpoint of supernatural implements. While there are scriptural and theological discussions of this (e.g. 1 Cor 11:23-27), it is also clear from hagiography that the fear of violating rituals (such as ordination) could implicate a variety of supernatural forces in late antiquity (see, for example, John of Ephesus, Lives, 15, PO 17: 225-8, on which see Harvey 1993, 118-20).

Reference: Susan Ashbrook Harvey. Asceticism and Society in Crisis. University of California Press. isbn: 9780520301450.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness:

– Yes

Notes: This must be substantially qualified. If by economic fairness we mean the avoidance of

deceit and fraud, this was by all means a spiritual concern. If, however, we mean some kind of socio-economic fairness, the answer would probably be no. In late antiquity, the care of the poor was not strictly speaking concerned with "economic fairness" in the modern sense. Rather almsgiving was thought of as a way of living out the joining of God and humanity, an act of condescension imitative of Christ, who stooped down to live among man. For further discussion of this theme, see Brown 2002.

Reference: Peter Brown. Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire. UPNE. isbn: 9781584651468.

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene:

— Yes

Notes: A curious detail that emerges in the anonymous fifth-century Life of Rabbula is an injunction against bathing. These requirements of ascetic practice can be seen as part of an overall program of control in Edessa, set against the backdrop of "Rabbula's veneration of the True Cross as a symbol of victory over all defects of human life and society" (Drijvers 1996, 151).

Reference: H.J.W. Drijvers. The Man of Edessa, Bishop Rabbula, and the Urban Poor: Church and Society in the Fifth Century. Journal of Early Christian Studies, 4(2) issn: 1086-3184. doi: 10.1353/earl.1996.0018.

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

— No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

— Yes

Notes: In addition to inferences that can be drawn from more general beliefs about God's punishment in the period, John of Ephesus offers a concrete example of belief in God's wrath in connection with the bnay/bnāt qyāmā (Lives of the Eastern Saints, 16). In the story of Simeon the Mountaineer, the holy man comes upon a nomadic community in mountains near the Euphrates. Shocked that they do not have a church building or formal institutions, he establishes a church and with the promise of gifts entices children of the community to come to him. From these 90 children, he consecrates 30 as children of the covenant. When two parents object and removed their children, they were struck dead as a divine punishment.

Reference: John of Ephesus. Lives of the Eastern Saints (Patrologia Orientalis 17-19). Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co..

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

— Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

— Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:



– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– No

↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]

– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– No

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– Yes

↳ Done randomly:

– No

↳ Other [specify]

– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of mild sensory displeasure:

– No

- ↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory displeasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form:
  - No
- ↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm:
  - No
- ↳ Other [specify]
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of political failure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of defeat in battle:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of disaster on journeys.
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of mild sensory displeasure:
  - No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of impaired reproduction:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck visited on descendants:

– Yes

↳ Other [specify]

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– No

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– No

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

- ↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:
  - Yes
- ↳ Done randomly:
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:
  - Yes
  - ↳ Supernatural rewards in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:
    - Yes
  - ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of mild sensory pleasure:
    - No
  - ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory pleasure:
    - No
  - ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of eternal happiness:
    - Yes
  - ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as a superior life form:
    - No
  - ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:
    - No
  - ↳ Other [specify]
    - No
- ↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:
  - Yes
  - ↳ Supernatural rewards in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:
    - Field doesn't know

- ↳ Reward in this life consists of good luck:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of political success or power:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success in battle:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of peace or social stability:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of healthy crops or good weather:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success on journeys:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants:
  - Yes
- ↳ Other [specify]
  - No

## Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– Yes

↳ Is the messiah's whereabouts or time of coming known?

– No

↳ Is the messiah's purpose known:

– Yes

↳ Messiah is a political figure who restores political rule:

– No

*Notes:* Although Christ could be described in political terms, he was not strictly speaking thought of as "restoring" political rule, but rather as establishing a new kingdom.

↳ Messiah is a priestly figure who restores religious traditions:

– No

*Notes:* Although Christ could be described in priestly terms, he was not strictly speaking thought of as "restoring" religious traditions, but rather as fulfilling a new covenant.

↳ Other purpose:

– Yes [specify]: Messiah is Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead and establish the kingdom of heaven. The children of the covenant took on an eschatological significance in this respect, as they embodied the perfection of the heavenly community and the church's union with Christ.

*Reference:* Susan Harvey Ashbrook. Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity. *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 8(2)

## Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

*Notes:* The rules governing the behavior of the *bnay* and *bnāt qyāmā*, although specific to their ascetical practices and not necessarily applicable to all members of society, imply social norms for society at large, especially with regard to honest dealing and care for the poor.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: There are conventional/moral distinctions generally present in Christianity and implied in the case of the children of the covenant. One simple division would be the distinction between earthly and heavenly law. The Pauline command to obey earthly authorities (Rom 13) establishes that there is a class of laws to which all men should adhere, separate from religious norms, but for Christians, this is subordinated to an ethical and moral framework that comes from God. In the case of the *bnay/bnāt qyāmā*, the rules governing their behavior imply an interdependence between secular and sacred authorities (Doerfler 2019, 202-7). For example, wrongdoers were encouraged to deal with their differences within the church institutions, but they could also be handed over to the authorities in the case of adultery.

Reference: Maria Doerfler E.. The Holy Man in the Courts of Rome: Roman Law and Clerical Justice in Fifth-Century Syria. *Studies in Late Antiquity*, 3(2) issn: 24702048. doi: 10.1525/sla.2019.3.2.192.

↳ What is the nature of this distinction:

– Weakly present

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are implicitly linked to vague metaphysical concepts:

– No

Notes: Moral norms are concretely rooted in the idea of a divine law revealed in scripture.

↳ Specifically moral norms are explicitly linked to vague metaphysical entities:

– No

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked to impersonal cosmic order (e.g. karma):

– No

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked in some way to an anthropomorphic being:

– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked explicitly to commands of anthropomorphic being:

– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are have no special connection to metaphysical:

— No



Moral norms apply to:

— All individuals within society

Notes: General moral norms, such as those found in scripture and expounded upon in homilies, are considered to apply to all members of society, not just the children of the covenant.

— Only specialized religious class

Notes: Ascetic rules preserved in canons such as restrictions on dress and sexual behavior are considered to apply exclusively to children of the covenant and other ascetics.

## Practices

### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

— Yes

Notes: Bnay qyāmā and bnāt qyāmā were restricted from living with members of the opposite sex, and they faced punishment from both secular and ecclesiastical authorities if they engaged in sexual intercourse in violation of these injunctions (Canons of Rabbula 28-9). These rules may create the impression of simple lifestyle restrictions, but they reflect the ideal recorded in Aphrahat's sixth demonstration: children of the covenant were to remain "brides of Christ." In this sense "the yoke of celibacy metaphorically connects these men to God and is the conduit of God's holiness to earth" (Koltun-Fromm 2001, 217).

Reference: Naomi Koltun-Fromm undefined. Yokes of the Holy-Ones: The Embodiment of a Christian Vocation. *The Harvard Theological Review*, 94(2)

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

— No

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

— No

Notes: In fact, castration was explicitly forbidden for bnay qyāmā in Rabbula's rules (Canon 55).

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. *The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns*. Atlanta: SBL.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

— Yes



Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

— Yes

Notes: Rabbula's Canon 23 forbids bnay/bnāt qyāmā from consuming wine and meat, except in modest quantities in the case of sickness.

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Notes: The consecration of children rather than their literal sacrifice was the source of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā, and such an act of commitment could be described in terms of death and new birth, a common motif in Christian traditions.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

– No

**Notes:** This needs some qualification. While the restrictions on residency, travel, and gathering handed down in church canons would have restricted interactions outside of the group of covenanters, this did not amount to full "marginalization." Bnay/bnāt qyāmā could still live with their families even if they could not engage in sexual relations, travel freely, or interact with avowed heretics.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– Field doesn't know

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

i.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– Yes

**Notes:** In the words of Arthur Vööbus, "a reasonable margin of elasticity must be allowed" in the local situation of bnay/bnāt qyāmā in rituals (Vööbus 1961, 24). On the one hand, we have the case of Edessa, where Ephrem established and oversaw a standing choir of daughters of the covenant to sing his hymns (for a discussion of which, see Harvey 2005). On the other hand, we have the case found in the life of Simeon the Stylite of covenanters accompanying priests to worship at the saint's column (Acta martyrum et sanctorum, ed. P. Bedjan, 4:534ff.). Such episodes suggest the range of liturgical functions that bnay/bnāt qyāmā could play. But there were also important limitations. According to the canons of Rabbula, covenanters were not allowed to approach the altar, and they could not perform the sacraments (canon 58). Nor could sons and daughters gather publicly without priests and deaconesses respectively (canon 37). Despite their unique function in the Syriac church, the bnay/bnāt qyāmā largely operated fully beneath the clerical hierarchy.

**Reference:** Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

**Reference:** Susan Harvey Ashbrook. Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity. Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies, 8(2)



On average, for large-scale rituals how many participants gather in one location:

– Field doesn't know

↳ What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to large-scale rituals.

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The exact liturgical schedule for the service of bnay/bnāt qyāmā is not known, but prayer and worship must have been frequent. The canons of Rabbula merely state that they "shall be continually in the worship-service of the church and shall not neglect the times of prayer and psalmody night and day" (Canon 27), but such a statement is vague enough to prevent the mapping onto a particular liturgical schedule.

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks:

Orthodoxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are interpreted in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper interpretation, etc.

– Yes

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:

Orthopraxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are performed in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper procedure, etc.

– Yes

↳ Does participation entail synchronic practices:

– Yes

↳ Is there use of intoxicants:

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– Yes

↳ Tattoos/scarification:

– No

↳ Circumcision:

– No

|

↳ Food taboos:

– Yes

↳ Hair:

– Yes

Notes: From the earliest sources for the bnay/bnāt qyāmā it is clear that hair is one of the clearest visual indicators of membership would have been hair. Aphrahat frequently mentions abstaining from long hair in his sixth demonstration, and this accords with a more general rhetoric of ascetic control explored well by David Caner (2002). John of Ephesus suggests that tonsure was a clear indicator of entrance into the bnay/bnāt qyāmā, both for men and women (Lives of the Eastern Saints, 16)

Reference: Daniel Folger Caner. Wandering, Begging Monks. Univ of California Press. isbn: 9780520928503.

↳ Dress:

– Yes

Notes: Like hair, clothing was one of the clearest visual indicators of membership from the earliest sources of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā. Several times, Aphrahat encourages simplicity of dress in his sixth demonstration, and Rabbula is reported in his biography to have regulated clothing. The rules of John of Tella explicitly regulate this aspect of behavior (canon 10).

Reference: Arthur Vööbus. The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition. Louvain: CSCO.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

↳ Ornaments:

– No

↳ Archaic ritual language:

– No

↳ Other:

– Yes [specify]: Hygiene

Notes: Members of the qyāmā were forbidden from washing themselves according to the life of Rabbula.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Yes

Notes: The designation of son or daughter was essential to the definition of this group, and we can infer that it was widely used along with the honorific address of priests as father (abbā). This does not mean that pre-existing biological family ties were eliminated, as covenanters were permitted to remain with their families (Rabbula, Canons 2, 10).



Fictive kinship terminology universal:

– No



Fictive kinship terminology widespread:

– Yes



Fictive kinship terminology employed but uncommon:

– No

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– An empire

### Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– Yes

Notes: Famine and poverty relieve was provided to the poor and elderly to a limited degree by the church through hospitals (xenodocheia). The bnay/bnāt qyāmā appear to have operated many of these institutions. In the life of Rabbula, the biographer states that the bishop placed deacons and deaconesses in charge of the hospitals for men and women respectively, but the bnay qyāmā and bnāt qyāmā were tasked with providing the services there. These hospitals should not be understood in any sense to be like modern medical hospitals. Instead, they should be thought of as more akin to poor houses that provide charity and basic care rather than sophisticated medical attention.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

— Yes

Notes: See above in notes on famine relief. Rabbula's rules for the bnay/bnāt qyāmā state that "in every church that exists a house shall be known in which the poor, that come there, shall rest" (Canon 16, Vööbus trans.).

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

— Yes

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

## Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

— Yes

Notes: Rabbula's Canon 20 indicates that the bnay qyāmā should learn psalms (mazmūre) and the bnāt qyāmā should learn hymns (madrāše). This formal education must have included some training in literacy. For example, John of Ephesus relates that Simeon the Mountaineer taught his covenanters the psalms and scriptures with tablets for writing (Lives of Eastern Saints, 16). Likewise, the rule of John of Tella (Johannan Bar Qursos) indicates that children of the covenant should be sent off to monasteries for instruction rather than to far off lands.

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

Reference: John of Ephesus. Lives of the Eastern Saints (Patrologia Orientalis 17-19). Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co..



Is formal education restricted to religious professionals:

— No

Notes: Formal education of the sort received by the bnay/bnāt qyāmā does not appear to have been generally offered, but it would go too far to say that only religious professionals could receive training in scripture. We know, for example, that Didymus the blind in Egypt used scripture to transmit grammatical and textual knowledge.

Reference: Blossom Stefaniw. Christian Reading: Language, Ethics, and the Order of Things.



Is such education open to both males and females:

— Yes

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

— No

Notes: There were private teachers and instructors in society (esp. of grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy), but the special conditions under which the children of the covenant lived presumably forestalled this upon entry into the group.

### Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

— Yes

Notes: The bnay/bnāt qyāmā submitted to the wider hierarchy of the church, seen in the role of priests in overseeing their liturgical and ecclesiastical functions. The canons ascribed to Maruta mention a biannual visit from the bishop in which the covenanters were to honor him and participate with him in rites (Vööbus, "So-Called Canons of Maruta," 27.1-3). But the church hierarchy was not entirely external and the bnay qyāmā were to a large extent integrated with the clerical functions, as Macina has argued on philological grounds. We have evidence that priests could be drawn from the bnay qyāmā and a deaconess could be chosen from among the bnāt qyāmā to lead in services (Harvey 2005, 130). Moreover, bnay qyāmā could take on the role of caretaker in churches (Rabbula, Canon 45).

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

Reference: Susan Harvey Ashbrook. Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity. Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies, 8(2)

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Reference: M. Macina R.. Les bnay et bnat qyama de l'Église syriaque: une piste philologique sérieuse. Le Monachisme syriaque: du VIIe siècle à nos jours: Patrimoine syriaque, actes du colloque, 6(1)

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

— Yes

Notes: Although there were restrictions on legal and governmental interaction for covenanters, one could infer from such rules that there must have been some interaction with imperial authorities. In the case of adultery or other crimes, the bnay/bārt qyāmā could be handed over to local judicial authorities (Rabbula, Canon 28).

### Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— No

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

— No

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

— No

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

## **Taxation**

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

— Yes

*Notes:* Strictly speaking, the bnay/bnāt qyāmā do not collect tithes, but priests and deacons do on their behalf to provide for their needs, as they are forbidden from working to provide for themselves (see, e.g. Rabbula, Canon 19)

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

*Notes:* This was generally the case, although in many cases tax exemption was provided to the clergy by imperial authorities (see e.g. Basil, Letter 87, 104), and we can infer that this may have also applied to the group of bnay/bnāt qyāmā. But even in such supposed cases, the taxation on other members of the community must have had some indirect incidence on the ability of ecclesiastics to collect money to provide for their needs.

## **Enforcement**



Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

*Notes:* This needs some qualification. The Roman empire did not have a formal police force, but at a local level there were a number of actors who filled this role informally. On the one hand, soldiers on secondment and imperial officials saw to it that laws were enforced. On the other hand, local elites and town councils put together such forces as were necessary to look after their own interests and prevent brigandage.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– Yes

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

*Notes:* Covenanters who committed adultery and other crimes could be handed over to the local authorities (see, e.g. Rabbula, Canon 28).

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– Yes



Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:

– Yes



Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:

– No



Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

– Yes

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

— Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:

— Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

— Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:

— No

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

— Yes

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

— Yes

Notes: if we understand the various canons regarding the behavior of bnay/bnāt qyāmā to constitute a "formal legal code."

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: Since the fifth century, imperial laws were legally codified, but regardless of the extent to which these codes (such as the Codex Theodosianus or the Codex Justinianus) were known or used at a local level, imperial rescripts and laws could be cited in support of a legal claim or decision.

## Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

— No

Notes: This does not mean that under exigent circumstances men and women of the church could not take up arms. Acts of self-defense are known to have taken place in the face of invasion (see for example, Synesius, Letter 122, who records an attack of barbarians repulsed by priests of Axomis - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/synesius/synesius-letter-122/> ). There was also the possibility of violent actions against perceived pagans and heretics. The anonymous life of Rabbula describes the

tearing down of shrines and a foray into the temples at Baalbek where the bishop sought martyrdom (but was instead beaten). It is unknown how involved children of the covenant were in such incidents, but Rabbula's rules for priests and bnay qyāmā decree that trees dedicated to demons be cut down and temples of idols be "destroyed in silence without commotion" (Canon 53, translation my own).

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

Reference: Arthur Vööbus undefined. Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile.

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Notes: There was of course the possibility of forced conscription. According to his biography, Pachomius was pressed into service before escaping to his ascetic life.

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

## Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

— No

Notes: Although Syriac was distinct from the main languages of imperial administration in the Roman (Latin and Greek) and Persian (Persian) empires, Syriac was not confined to religion-specific contexts.

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

## Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

— Yes

Reference: F. Nau. Un martyrologe et douze ménologes syriaques (Patrologia Orientalis 10). Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co..

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: Municipalities possessed their own calendars of local festivals, holidays, and legal/political events.

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

— No

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: The rules attributed to Rabbula (Canons 12 and 19) call on the church hierarchy to provide for the needs of the bnay/bnāt qyāmā, and several rules explicitly or implicitly forbid them from providing for their own needs through business dealings or hiring themselves out for labor (3, 4, 9, 19, 25, 26, 38, 42).

Reference: Robert Phenix, Jr R, Cornelia Horn B. The Rabbula corpus, comprising the 'Life of Rabbula', his correspondence, a homily delivered in Constantinople, canons, and hymns. Atlanta: SBL.

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Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

— Gathering

— Fishing

— Pastoralism

— Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

— Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: Although we do not have detailed knowledge of the covenanters diet, we can infer that all kinds of food production attested in the region would have been relevant, save hunting (given the restriction on the consumption of meat, on which see Rab. Canon 23)

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