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# Mary in the Qur'an

A literary reading

Hosn Abboud

With a foreword by Angelika Neuwirth



# Mary in the Qur'an

Providing an analysis of the complete story of Mary in its liturgical, narrative and rhetorical contexts, this literary reading is a prerequisite to any textual reading of the Qur'an whether juristic, theological, or otherwise.

The application of modern literary theories to the Qur'an is essential in order to fully comprehend the history of the development of literary forms such as poetry, storytelling and speech giving, from the pre-Islamic period to the present. Moreover, *Mary in the Qur'an* argues that there is a need, from a feminist perspective, to understand why a Christian mother figure such as Mary was important in early Islam and in the different stages of the development of the Qur'an as a communication process between Muhammad and the early Muslim community.

Introducing modern literary theories, gender perspective and feminist criticism into Qur'anic scholarship for the first time, this book will be an invaluable resource for scholars and researchers of Islamic Studies, Qur'anic and New Testament Studies, Comparative Literature and Feminist Theology.

**Hosn Abboud** holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in Islamic Religion and Philosophy with a focus on gender issues in Islam. *Mary in the Qur'an* has also been published in Arabic (Dar-al-Saqi, 2010).

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**To my husband**



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# Abbreviations

<i>AJISS</i>	<i>American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences</i>
<i>Alif</i>	<i>Journal of Comparative Poetics</i>
<i>AO</i>	<i>Acta Orientalia</i>
<i>Arabica</i>	<i>Revue d'études</i>
<i>ARS</i>	<i>ARS Orientalis</i>
<i>BO</i>	<i>Biblioteca Orientalis</i>
<i>BRIFS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies</i>
<i>BSMESB</i>	<i>British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin</i>
<i>Der Islam</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients</i>
<i>EEC</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Early Christianity</i>
<i>EFLT</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i>
<i>EI2</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Religion</i>
<i>ERE</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i>
<i>IC</i>	<i>Islamochristiana</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JAL</i>	<i>Journal of Arabic Literature</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQS</i>	<i>Journal of Qur'ānic Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>MO</i>	<i>Manuscripta Orientalis</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Muslim World</i>
<i>NPEPP</i>	<i>The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
<i>OLA</i>	<i>The Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i>
<i>ZAL</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für arabische linguistic</i>

# Foreword

Hosn Abboud's study of the Virgin Mary in the Qur'an—first published in Arabic, "Al-Sayyida Maryam fi l-Qur'an al-karīm: Qirā'a adabiyya", Beirut 2010—is to be welcomed as a most spirited intervention in the rather conservative discourse, presently pursued in the predominantly historical study of the Qur'an. The author deserves recognition as a courageous and innovative voice in the field. Her monograph is particularly indebted to Northrup Frye's work on the Bible as a subtext of European literature, which inspired Abboud's both typological and psychological reading of her Qur'anic texts.<sup>1</sup> The choice of this scholarly orientation undoubtedly proves rewarding. Although Biblical scholarship is usually claimed as a sound foundation for Qur'anic studies, this reference often remains limited to positivist historical analysis, without regarding those more recent approaches that focus the literary character of the scriptural text, paying due attention to its complex subtextual layers. Hosn Abboud's study provides a new argument for the necessary reconsideration of Frye's path-breaking approach in the context of Qur'anic Studies.

Her study is devoted to an intriguing but by no means easy-to-treat subject, the Virgin Mary in the Qur'an. Although some scholarly works on the subject exist,<sup>2</sup> these are devoted to individual aspects rather than to the figure of Mary as such. Whereas the range of works on the Christian Mary is broad, there is no monograph on the Qur'anic Mary yet; even more recent attempts at a synopsis of the image of

1 Northrup Frye, *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature*. (Toronto, 1982). Frye, *Words with Power Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature*, (Toronto, 1990).

2 On the image of Mary in the Qur'an, see Barbara Freyer-Stowasser, 'Mary', in *EQ* III, 288–96. As to the understanding of the Qur'anic texts as readings of earlier extra-Qur'anic texts, particularly Syriac and Coptic traditions, see C.B. Horn, "Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and in the Qur'an", *Apocrypha* 17 (2006): 113–150; Horn, "Mary between Bible and Qur'an: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18 (2007): 509–538; Horn, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The 'Book of Mary', the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur'an", *Apocrypha* 19 (2008): 267–291; and Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, (London and New York, 2008), 130–147.

Mary in the Christian and Muslim tradition have little to say about her appearance in the Qur'an itself. Hosn Abboud's work thus comes as a most desirable attempt to fill a desideratum.

The field of Qur'anic narrative has not yet been systematically explored. For a long time the relationship between individual Qur'anic stories and their Biblical counterparts has been defined in terms of a unilateral process, an "appropriation" or even a "borrowing".<sup>3</sup> It is true that this view—developed in the beginning of critical Qur'anic scholarship—in itself marked a decisive step forward in the process of reassessing the Qur'an as a serious and honest voice in, what I would like to call, the concert of late antique debates going on in the seventh century Near East that opened the way for a meaningful juxtaposition of contemporaneous readings of Biblical traditions in the various post-Biblical cultures,<sup>4</sup> which has brought about a number of valuable studies, among them still indispensable reference works.<sup>5</sup> Yet, scholarship proceeding from this premise leaves one with the impression that a rationalistic and positivistic historicism still prevails, which induces scholars to focus on the "sources" rather than the literary artifact of the text. "Appropriation"—a term used frequently to describe the transfer of knowledge from the surrounding ancient and late antique cultures to Islam—to more critical scholars appears as "a surreptitiously servile term"<sup>6</sup> that risks to overshadow the culturally creative activity involved in the process of recoinning older traditions, according to the newly emerging Qur'anic and then Islamic world view. The prevailing approach applied in reading Qur'anic narrative thus has to be revisited. To have embarked on this venture is one of the merits of Hosn Abboud's new monograph.

What goes hand in hand with the misinterpretation of the Qur'anic versions of stories that are familiar from the Biblical tradition is the application of literary standards taken over from the Biblical scholarship and, in particular, from the new approach of "reading the Bible as literature". It is true that Qur'anic story-telling does not allow an auctorial stance, such as is realizable in Biblical narrating characterized by Robert Alter: "In the Bible . . . the narrator's work is almost all recit, straight narration of actions and speech, and only exceptionally and very briefly discourse, disquisition on and around the narrated facts and their implications."<sup>7</sup> As against the meticulous shaping of personages and the sophisticated coding and decoding of their motives, which characterizes Biblical narrative, Qur'anic

3 This reading was initiated by Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohamed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, (Berlin, 1833). It remained valid for several generations of scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

4 Earlier as well as later approaches to the Qur'an tend to view the text as a local Arabian phenomenon, the message of the Prophet Muhammad to his local audience.

5 Most importantly Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an*. (London, 1902), Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, (Berlin, 1926), and Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, (Berlin, 1931).

6 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)*. (New York, 1998).

7 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Literature*. (New York, 1981), 184.

narrating—in narratological terms—appears far less refined. This feature, which is lamented as a flaw by a number of modern scholars,<sup>8</sup> needs, however, to be contextualized with the overall genre of the Qur'an, which is not narrative but of a different and most complex kind. One might speak of a discursive rather than a descriptive text, the transcript of a process that pursues complex “para-narrative” aims. Qur'anic stories known from Biblical literature are presented as messages from the transcendent “Scripture”, *al-kitab*, which is obviously taken to be a corpus ranking beyond all other stories known through oral tradition and which needs to be communicated to an audience. It is this audience that Hosn Abboud is taking very seriously. She by no means confines herself—as is the rule particularly in the discussion of the narratives related to the New Testament<sup>9</sup>—to investigate the relation to the Biblical models of the Mary stories, but for the first time in scholarship pays attention to pre-Islamic Arab intertexts as well. Thus she contextualizes Mary's retreat to the “remote place”, *makanan qasiyan* (Q 19:22) with the pre-Islamic topos of the poet's journey, his *rahil*. But she goes decisive steps further, engaging with a plurality of new approaches that had hitherto not been introduced into the Qur'an, as such, or at least not been connected to the Mary story, such as motif studies, psychological readings, studies in myths and archetypes, and gender studies.

Though ultimately aiming at a reading that renders due attention to the text's deep structure, the author starts out with a set of preliminary steps of analysis which remain very much “down to earth”. She lays a firm basis for her research by examining the form of the texts under scrutiny, first turning to the verse structure which she studies according to the colometric approach.<sup>10</sup> This analysis enables her to make the poetic character of the story's language discernible, a Qur'anic characteristic that is important for her overall argument. She subsequently presents a clear disposition of the texts under scrutiny, based on observations from both form criticism and semantic analysis. Her analysis of the Qur'anic form is further substantiated through the introduction of the concept of “stylistics” developed by the modern literary critic, Muhammad al-Hadi al-Tarabulsi. Yet, she does not dispense with the experience of classical Arabic scholarship, whose most prominent representative, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (471/1078), provided her with valuable insights into the “structure”, *nazm*, of the Qur'anic language. What is most important, the author's focus on the final shape of the Qur'anic texts secures their perception as elements of an integral overall text. Contrary to the usual practice in Qur'anic scholarship, the narratives under scrutiny are not rashly severed from their discursive contexts in their sura, but rather highlighted as parts of the

8 See in particular Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough. Reconstructing Arabian Myth*, (Bloomington, 1996).

9 Heribert Busse, *Die theologischen Beziehungen des Islams zu Judentum und Christentum*, (Darmstadt, 1994); and Neil Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity. The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Classical Muslim Commentaries*, (London, 1991); and more recently Martin Bauschke, *Jesus im Koran*, (Köln, 2001).

10 It was introduced into Qur'anic studies in Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, (Berlin & New York, 1982, 2009).



more complex argument they are embedded in. Privileging the final text over its historical layers the author has chosen an unconventional approach, which has proven rewarding.

It is only as a subsequent step that she turns to contextualizing the stories with their pre-Qur'anic precursors. In view of the obvious fact that in Q 19 the beginning of the Gospel of Luke is renarrated, it is all the more amazing to find that the figure of Mary in the sura text reflects a totally new vision. This vision in Hosn Abboud's conviction cannot be properly perceived through mere textual description. It requires, in particular, a psychological reading. It is true that earlier scholars such as Suleiman Mourad<sup>11</sup> had already drawn attention to such powerful symbols as the palm tree, but Hosn Abboud goes a step further, extending the interpretation of symbols into a study of the concept of fertility that in her view underpins the Meccan story of Mary's early life as a powerful subtext. Mythical and archetypal subtexts—already assumed for the case of another Qur'anic text, Q 18, by C.G. Jung<sup>12</sup>—in Hosn Abboud's view play an important part in Mary's narrative, in particular.

Her focus on the Qur'anic final form of the text does not mean that the author is unaware of the fruitfulness of a comparative reading of the Qur'an and its Biblical intertexts. This approach is not new, but is applied for the first time to the figure of Mary in a comprehensive way. The author, who devotes several chapters to an intertextual reading of the infancy story of Mary in the Qur'an in the light, not only of the Gospel of Luke, but in particular of the Protevangelium of James, as well as the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, succeeds to add important insights to the hitherto rather general observations. She consciously draws on the theory of intertextuality developed by the linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva.<sup>13</sup> This intertextual reading enables her to carve out the essential common traits as well as the still more relevant differences and redefine the relationship between the diverse text traditions.

Now, a work on Mary in the Qur'an cannot but pay attention to the fact that there is more than one image of Mary in the text. Since Hosn Abboud reads the Qur'an diachronically, she is aware that the figure of Mary passes through a most significant theological development. The rereading of Q 19 in Q 3, which occupies a large section of the work, manifests a new, religious political intent. Whereas in her first depiction in Middle Mecca the figure of Mary was presented as a female symbol of fertility and maternal power, a figure endowed with almost mythical traits, her person in Medina is relocated in a historical context. The Medinan version of the story in Q 3 obviously is part of the more discursive agenda of the Qur'anic proclamation that is adopted in Medina, in view of the new necessity to

11 Suleiman Mourad, "From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam. The Origin of the Palm tree Story concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur'an" In: *Oriens Christianus* 86 (2002) 206–216.

12 C.G. Jung, *Gesammelte Werke*. 18 vols., Zürich / Olten 1958–81.

13 Julia Kristeva, "From one Identity to an Other" In: Leon S. Roudiez (ed.), *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. (New York, 1980). 124–147.

cope with the challenges of the powerful Jewish tradition. Already David Marshall, in his survey on “Christianity in the Qur’an”, had described this sura as marking a change: “We find slightly more attention (than in the Meccan and earlier Medinan texts, A. N.) paid to Jesus and Mary, especially at 3:33–58. This long narrative section must be understood in the light of Muhammad’s relationship with the Jews of Medina in the period shortly after the battle of Badr. The refusal of the great majority of the Jews to acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet, along with the political threat to Muhammad, which they posed, made this relationship extremely tense, with the threat of violent conflict in the air; this mood of hostility is reflected at various points in the rest of surah 3 (e.g. vv. 19–25, 65–85, 110–112, 187).”<sup>14</sup> The argumentative device applied in Q 3 to counter the prevailing Jewish tradition is the establishment of a counter-tradition that responds to the patriarchal Jewish tradition with a new valorization of the, until then, scarcely considered Christian tradition, which is based on a female genealogy.<sup>15</sup> The text of Q 3:33–63—as is already signaled by its vocabulary, which mirrors female language and, moreover, by its choice of protagonists—is unmistakably concerned with building up a female-based counter-tradition to the Al Ibrahim, the Jewish patriarchal tradition. This interest in female concerns, of course, yields most important insights applicable in a feminist reading. Such a feminist reading is undertaken in one of the last chapters of the work, though the author never loses her main tenet of scope, that is, the interpretation of the Qur’anic stories themselves. Without subscribing to the frequent attempts presently en vogue<sup>16</sup> to turn the Qur’anic text into a particularly female message, the author limits herself to focusing on the particular sensitivity and concern that the Qur’an harbors for the female condition, which are expressed in no other text as clearly as in the two suras about Mary.

It is only logical that the author, after this discursive tour de force in the last chapter, comes to discuss a more general issue that reflects not least a personal concern of hers: the question of the possible extension of the concept of prophecy to include a female agent, the Virgin Mary. It is in this context that she draws most relevant parallels between Mary and the prophet Muhammad. The idea is, of course, not entirely new. The Iranian philosopher of religion Seyyed Nasr already states: “The medium of the divine message in Christianity is the Virgin Mary; in Islam it is the Prophet’s soul.”<sup>17</sup> He thus contextualizes Mary’s virginity with the Prophet’s traditionally maintained illiteracy: just as Mary, who had “known no man”, bore a son who, consequently, was completely God’s creation, so Muhammad (according to Muslim tradition) is represented as having been completely

14 David Marshall, *Christianity in the Qur’an*. (Richmond, 1999), 12 f.

15 For more details see Angelika Neuwirth, “Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs. A Re-reading of *Sūrat Maryam* in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (Q. 3:1–62)”, in: Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, (Oxford, 2013).

16 Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an*. (Austin, 2002).

17 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London, 1966; Paperback reprint 1979), 43–44, see also Daniel Madigan, “God’s Word to the World: Jesus and the Qur’an, Incarnation and Recitation”. (Leuven, 2012).

untouched by earlier knowledge of any written document, Scripture or literature; the *nabi al-ummi* of Q 7:157f. is interpreted as being an “illiterate prophet”. Consequently, the Qur’an is put into relief as exclusively God’s creation. Abboud’s parallelization is less theological but rather prophetological. She advocates a rethinking of the “conditions of prophethood” and thus to concede a prophetic rank to Mary as well.

It is obvious that Hosn Abboud’s study, which consciously transgresses the limits of the hitherto probed canon of methodological approaches to the Qur’an, is apt to demonstrate the limitations of an exclusively historical critical reading of the Qur’an, even when combined with a close reading of the sura text. What her work shows is that one would fail to grasp the full meaning of the stories by the mere step of tracing the individual Biblical and post-Biblical traditions underlying the Qur’anic version. The Qur’anic text is a much more fertile territory. It is the immense openness to various approaches and the insistence of valorizing more recent experiences with scriptural texts that make her monograph particularly challenging. Its fresh ideas will certainly inspire a community of young scholars to rethink the hitherto somewhat closed discipline of Qur’anic studies fundamentally.

*Angelika Neuwirth*

# Introduction

## Sources and methodology

The topic of this book was born from a need to understand and resituate the central role that Maryam, mother of 'Isa, plays in the Qur'anic texts. She is the only female exemplar that has a story devoted to herself; she is named, and has the power to name. The story of her journey and struggle, like the stories of Qur'anic prophets and apostles, is a model for the Prophet Muhammad's struggle with his own people. She is also the great link that binds Christianity and Islam. Her role for centuries has been marginalized: her story, historically, was never admitted as hers solely but as the story of the birth of 'Isa. Studying the suras and narratives of Maryam within the Qur'anic context is justified, for the Qur'an seems to give greater attention to Maryam than to 'Isa, revealing some issues of the feminine and the maternal through the figure of Maryam.

This Qur'anic study depends on a literary approach to the suras that relate to the Qur'anic story of Maryam. The aim is to be able to read the sura as a discourse and to locate and appreciate the story of Maryam within the sura and within the Qur'an as a whole; then we will eventually recognize the development of the story of Maryam and its function, within the structure of the Qur'anic corpus, taking into consideration the Qur'an's nature as a communication process between the holder of the message, Muhammad, and the community of recipients of the message, the early Muslims. Moreover, this study depends also on the reliability of the Qur'an as a corpus (of religious texts), from the seventh century Hijaz (Meccan and Medina).<sup>1</sup>

1 For a Western revisionist, reading of the Qur'an fostering doubt of the whole Islamic tradition on the history of the compilation of the text, see John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978). My original thesis and this work both support the argument of the reliability of the Islamic tradition on the history of the Qur'an. See chapter two in my original thesis, Hosn Abboud, "Mary Mother of Jesus and the Qur'anic text: A Feminist Literary Study," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2006). See also, Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'an and History—a Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5 (2003): 1–18; Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'an, Crisis, and Memory," in *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies: Proceedings of the Third Summer Academy of the Working Group Modernity and Islam held at the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society in Beirut*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch (Beirut, 2001); and Angelika Neuwirth, "Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden, 1996).

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Although several English translations of the text of the Qur'an have been consulted in preparing this work, primary use is made of the translation of Yūsuf 'Alī due to the special attention paid to the verse group divisions through *Sūrat Maryam*. In some instances, where it has been necessary, his translation has been revised.

Several points of mechanics need to be made clear. Arabic text has been transliterated into Latin characters. The general transliteration guidelines of the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* have been followed with the exception of the rhyme endings in the suras of the Qur'an. In this instance, the aural rhymes, which are spoken by those who read the Qur'an with proficiency, have been recorded, allowing the reader to see what is heard. This is significant concerning the spoken word of the Qur'an and thus its composition. Many words found in this text are of Arabic origin but are now commonly used in the English language; some are written in a regular typeface, rather than italic. These specifically include the following: Qur'an, sura, Hadith, hajj, Sunnite and Shi'ite. All other Arabic words are presented in an italic typeface. Chapters of the Qur'an, when named, appear as *Sūrat* followed by the Arabic name. When a specific reference is made to one verse, it will follow the format of Q x:x or Q x:x-x when referring to multiple verses together. When referred to by sura number, it will appear with the English word as Sura x. The names of Qur'anic figures will appear in their Arabic forms transliterated into English but without diacritical markings, except for the *hamza* and *'ayn*; for example, Muhammad, Maryam. Non-Qur'anic historical Arab individuals will appear with full transliterated names including diacritical markings. When dates appear with both a Gregorian calendar reference and a *Hijri* calendar, they will appear in the order of *Hijri*/Gregorian. Modern (eighteen to twenty-first century) dates will appear in a Gregorian format only. Modern figures who are still living will be dated according to their birth dates. Translations of text, either Arabic into English or English into Arabic, will appear in parentheses directly following a quotation. Titles appearing in square brackets represent an unpublished translation of a title. Oftentimes when Qur'anic text is quoted, a reference will immediately follow the text. Where the specific sura is clearly understood from context, only a verse number will appear.

In the Qur'an, the main story of Maryam mother of 'Isa appears in *Sūrat Maryam* (Sura 19) and in the first section in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q 3:1–63). Maryam appears on a few other occasions. In two Meccan suras, she is positioned within the list of twelve prophets and is recalled as “she who had guarded her chastity” (Q 21:91) and that she was appointed with her son as one sign above all people (Q 23:50). There are two Medinan verses that mention Maryam. They refer to her, however, in two opposite directions: one in the context of insulting those who accuse Maryam of slander (Q 4:156) and another which criticizes those who say that God is the Messiah, 'Isa, son of Maryam (Q 5:19). In *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, 'Isa, son of Maryam is asked “whether he told the people to worship him and his mother as two gods in derogation of God” (Q 5:119). In the same sura, Maryam is addressed as “the veracious” (*ṣiddīqa*), and the Messiah, 'Isa, son of Mary as an apostle (*rasūl*), and both are reminded how “they used to eat food” to substantiate their human nature. The research of this book, however, will focus on the main

narratives of Maryam's story, the Meccan sura named after her: *Sūrat Maryam* and *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, an early Medinan sura, named after her family name.

The first chapter, focusing on *Sūrat Maryam*, will structurally and thematically divide the whole sura into verse units in order to identify the sura composition. Avoiding breaking the sura into unrelated fragments, the objective will be to situate Maryam's story within the sura's own structure and context. This suggests a new approach to the structure of the sura units, paying special attention to the discourse of the sura. It is understood that the discourse is one stage of many in the communication process between the prophet and the recipients, and thus reaches an approximate understanding of its coherent and subdued texts. Thus, knowledge of the sura as a literary genre, sura studies and the literary approaches to Meccan suras,<sup>2</sup> require particular readings.<sup>3</sup> Familiarity with the Muslim art of reciting the Qur'an (*'ilm al-tajwīd*),<sup>4</sup> especially "the rules of pause and beginning", (*qawā'id al-waqf wa'l-ibtidā'*) and Angelika Neuwirth's colometric analysis, which she applied<sup>5</sup> in her form study of all Meccan suras, provide the right tools for the reading of texts that are of oral and liturgical character, as is clearly implied in the Qur'an: "When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace, that you may receive mercy" (Q 7:204); "By degrees shall We teach you (Muhammad) to recite, so you shall not forget" (Q 71:6); "Or a little more; And recite the Qur'an in slow, measured rhythmic tones" (Q 73:4).

Basic classical literatures on Qur'anic sciences (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) like al-Suyūṭī's *Itqān*,<sup>6</sup> and al-Dānī's *Kitāb al-taysīr fī al-qirā'āt al-sab'*<sup>7</sup> are essential sources for the recognition of the scientific tools for studying the Qur'anic texts. Knowledge of pre-Islamic poetry is central to understanding the Arabic of the Qur'an and the medium through which the Qur'an was verbally inspired to Muhammad. Muslim scholars and exegetes, from al-Ṭabarī's time onward, always refer to pre-Islamic poetry to comprehend the vocabulary, language and rhetoric of the Qur'an. Also, there are excellent studies on the approaches to the study of the Qur'an in many European languages.<sup>8</sup>

2 Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, 1981).

3 Alford Welch's article "Sūra" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 9 (1997): 885–886; and Angelika Neuwirth's article on sura as a genre are a good starting point "Einige Bemerkungen zum besonderen sprachlichen und literarischen Charakter des Koran," *Deutscher Orientalistentag 1975* (Stuttgart, 1977): 736–39. Trans. by Gwendolin Goldbloom as "Some Remarks on the Special Linguistic and Literary Character of the Qur'an," in *The Qur'an: Style and Content*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Aldershot, 2001).

4 The best sources on this subject are: Abū 'Umar 'Uthman ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī, *Kitāb al-taysīr fī al-qirā'āt al-sab'*, ed. Otto Pritzel, *Bibliothica Islamica*, Part 1, (Istanbul, 1930); Shams al-Dīn ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Tamhīd fī 'ilm al-tajwīd*, ed. Ghānim Qaddūrī Ḥamad (Beirut, 1986); and Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo, 2002).

5 Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*.

6 Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abu al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Saida, 1997).

7 Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī, *Kitāb al-taysīr fī al-qirā'āt al-sab'*.

8 I will only mention the English. See, Nöldeke, Theodor et als. *Geschichte des Qoran*. 2nd rev. edn. Vols. 1 and 2 revised by Frederich Schwally. Vol 3 revised by G. Gergasser and O. Pretzl. Leip-

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Familiarity with the canonical Gospels and the Apocryphal Infancy Gospels are essential in our case, primarily because the Qur'an claims that the Torah, *Injīl* (Gospels) and the Qur'an are derived from one heavenly book (*umm al-kitāb*) and secondly because the Qur'an seems to undertake a reading through an oral medium of both canonical as well as extra-canonical Christian themes and lore. It is logical to refer to Christian sources in a research on a Qur'anic Christian figure. This reference, through intertextual readings, helps to appreciate the manner in which some stories generate other stories and to pinpoint the new function of the Qur'anic Mary story.

An examination into Maryam's narratives, particularly at the construction level of the syntax, word and letter, which are part of the correspondence achieved between the structure and the meanings of the verses (*naẓm al-āyāt*), will be made in chapter two. Verbs, subjects, rhythmic-verse endings, foreign and key words will be grammatically identified and explained and special attention will be paid to phonological repetitions which show that certain letters, words and expressions are repeated to create internal rhythm between the verses and units. The narrative of Maryam will be studied stylistically,<sup>9</sup> in the context of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's theory of *naẓm*,<sup>10</sup> relying on the methodology of Tunisian scholar 'Abd al-Hādī al-Ṭarāblusī.<sup>11</sup> It is important to understand how classical scholars of rhetoric as al-Jurjānī defined *naẓm*, which is directly related to the oral composition of the Qur'an. Exposure to al-Ṭarāblusī's analysis of one phrase written by the famous humanist and man of letters, al-Jāhīz, led to the use of his methodology in this work.

Next, an examination of all Qur'anic stories of Christian figures that exist side by side with other Biblical stories will be undertaken in addition to the examination of other Qur'anic stories of female figures. This will help situate Maryam in her proper framework. Maryam is an Arab female figure as well as a venerated Christian mother figure.

On the study of Maryam's narrative components, a study of the literary "motifs" as the small components of the tale, as suggested by V. Propp's theory of folk-tale,<sup>12</sup> will be undertaken; but not without the assistance of Northrop Frye's

zig: Dietriche Velagsbuchhandlung, 1909–26. *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*. Translated into Arabic by George Tāmer. Beirut: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2004. Rudi Paret, "The Qur'ān" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad period*, (Cambridge, 1983), 186–227; Alford Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān" in EI2 5:400–429; Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh, 1970); and Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, (New York, 1952).

9 For more on the general literary theory of Stylistics—the approach that uncovers the interdependence between the form and the content, and enters into the thought embedded in the texts while avoiding value judgments—see 'Abd al-Salām al-Massaddī, *al-Uslūbiyya wa-l-Uslūb* (Tunis, 1982).

10 The theory involves infinitely varied arrangements of elementary "grammatical meanings" (*ma'ānī al-naḥw*). For more on this see 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, ed. Muḥammad al-Tūnǧī (Beirut, 1992).

11 See 'Abd al-Hādī al-Ṭarāblusī, "Fī Manhajīyyāt al-dirāsa al-ustūbiyya," in *Ashghāl nadwat al-lisāniyyāt wa'-lughā al-'arabiyya* (Tūnis, 1978).

12 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd edn., trans. Laurence Scott, ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin, 1996).

pioneering work on the *Bible and Literature* and *Words with Power*.<sup>13</sup> This will allow the re-establishment of a relationship with similar literary motifs from Biblical stories that were very popular in Near Eastern culture and civilization. The study of the literary motifs will ultimately give insight into the variations of the same story and will lead, at the sub-textual level, to the appreciation of the contribution of the story to Arabic literature.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Carl G. Jung's study of archetypes and his analysis of the mother archetype are particularly pertinent, because of the dual nature of Maryam at the symbolic level.<sup>15</sup>

Muslim scholars have written extensively on the art of Qur'anic narrative.<sup>16</sup> These studies have contributed tremendously to understanding the artistic features of Qur'anic storytelling but have not yet attempted to establish a relationship between these features and the pre-Islamic or Biblical art of the narrative. They do not pursue studies of Biblical figures which could trace them throughout the Qur'anic communication process. *Sūrat Yūsuf*, the Qur'an's longest narrative, is an exception, for there are many studies that compare Yusuf's story to the Biblical Joseph.<sup>17</sup> Such studies recognize the importance of introducing literary theories into Qur'anic narratives for establishing a literary approach to studying the Qur'an.<sup>18</sup>

In chapters three and four, the same approach of form study, stylistics and narrative analysis, undertaken for the study of *Sūrat Maryam*, will treat sixty-three

13 Northrop Frye, *Words with Power* (Toronto, 1990) and *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto, 1982).

14 An interesting study by Aḥmad Ismā'īl al-Nu'aymi on the myth in pre-Islamic poetry is helpful on the level of development of literary structures. See Aḥmad Ismā'īl al-Nu'aymi, *al-Uṣṭūra' fi al-sh'ir al-'arabī qabl al-Islām* (Cairo, 1995).

15 Carl G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, Trans. R.F.C. Hull (London, 1982).

16 See Muḥammad Mushrif Khaḍar, *Balāghāt al-sard al-qaṣaṣi fi 'l-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Cairo, 2004); Maḥmūd al-Bustānī, *Dirāsāt fanniyya fi qīṣaṣ al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1989); Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fi al-Qur'ān* [The Art of Visualisation in the Qur'an] 17th edn. (Cairo, 2004); Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allah, *al-Fann al-qaṣaṣi fi al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, 2nd edn. (Cairo, 1965); Tharwat Abāza, *al-Sard fi al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Cairo, n.d.); Sulaymān al-Ṭarawna, *Dirāsa naṣṣiyya fi al-qīṣa al-Qur'āniyya* (n.p., 1992); Al-Tihāmi Nuqra, "Sycholojiyyat al-qīṣa fi al-Qur'ān" (PhD diss., Algeria University, 1971).

17 See Gayane Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story,'" *IJMES* 29 (1997): 486–508; Allen Johns, "The Qur'anic Presentation of Joseph Story," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London, 1993); Gary A. Rendsburg, "Literary Structures in the Qur'ān and Biblical Stories of Joseph," *MW* 78 (1988): 118–120; M.S. Stern, "Muḥammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative," *JNES* 44, no. 3 (1985): 193–204; Marilyn R. Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," *MW* 1 (1985): 1–16. See also the study on the Prophet Sulayman by Hamādī al-Mas'ūdī, "al-Nuṣūṣ al-muqaddasa wa-tawālud al-qaṣāṣ," in *al-Fikr al-'arabī al-mu'āṣir*, 122–123 (2002), 110–124.

18 Articles written by prominent scholars and contributors to literary studies of the Qur'an can be found in 'Isa Boullaṭa, *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān* (Richmond, 2002). One article deserving attention is Michael Sells, "A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras of the Qur'ān: Spirit, Gender and Aural Intertextuality" in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, ed. 'Isā Boullaṭa (Richmond, 2002), 3–26. See also, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūra al-Qadr," *JAOS* 2 (1991): 239–259 and "Sound and Meaning in Sūra al-Qāri'a," *Arabica* 60 (1993): 403–430.



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verses of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. Studying the complete Medinan *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* is extraneous, since the sura tends to be a composite and not coherently delivered. Thus, no structural display of the verse units will be carried out. Rather, verse units will be included with the correct reading tools and in transliteration whenever the explanation of the texts requires it. The verse units pertinent to Maryam in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* are very important for completing the Qur'anic story of Maryam, for these texts seem to embark on the task of interpreting already delivered themes from *Sūrat Maryam*. They also include a reference to the biography of Maryam, which was very popular in early Christianity and continues to be tremendously admired in the art of music and iconography. The *Protevangelium* or *The Book of James* will be the source from the second century concerning Maryam's infancy, which is relevant to the Qur'an's infancy story of Maryam. The retelling of the story and the referral or overlapping with the *Protevangelium*'s outline uncovers differences in the scenario and project values, which are inherent in the linguistic structure of the Arabic language. In chapter five, intertextual study and analysis, between the Qur'anic infancy story of Maryam and that of the *Protevangelium* is undertaken. The term intertextual, *al-tanāṣ*, does not imply that the Qur'an has the full story and is retelling it, rather it implies that there is a net of connections between the two stories.

Chapter six will move the research further into the history of the reception of the text within the framework of Qur'anic exegesis, or *tafsīr*. Qur'anic scholars have to examine the works of classical exegetes (*mufasīrīn*) because the early *mufasīr* plays the role of the intermediate between the text and the modern reader.<sup>19</sup> Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, the author of *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ: Dirāsāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (*The Conception of a Text: A Study in the Sciences of al-Qur'ān*) differentiates between interpretation (*al-ta'wīl*) and exegesis (*al-tafsīr*). The former is associated with the inductive method, while the latter depends predominantly on the transmission and precedence of the past tradition (*al-naql wa al-riwāya*). Within this differentiation lies the basic dimension of the process of *ta'wīl*, which is the role of the interpreter in confronting the text and revealing its significance. The role of the interpreter is not absolute in the sense that he will make the text comply with his self-interest; *ta'wīl* must depend on knowledge of the necessary sciences, which come under *tafsīr*. Thus, the interpreter, *al-mu'awwil*, must know of the science of exegesis that will equip him to make an adequate interpretation of the text.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore a Qur'anic study needs the two methods: that of transmission and also precedence of the past tradition (*al-naql wa-l-riwāya*) because it relates to those scholars who were temporally closer to the text than modern readers and also they exerted effort in reading and responding to the text each from his own scientific area of expertise. So the people of *al-naql* discussed the readings (*qirā'āt*), going back to pre-Islamic poetic stylistics for the Qur'anic terms and tools of eloquence,

19 See Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation* (Aldershot, 1999), xi. See also Andrew Rippin, "The Qur'ān as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects", *BSMESB X* (1983): 38–47.

20 Naṣr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ: Dirāsāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1996), 234.

offering the people the meanings of difficult words. *Al-riwāya* is the scientific method that makes the text comprehensible in every period of time, applying the necessary modern literary theories so that twenty-first century readers, who have new interests and literary objectives, can receive and appropriately respond to the text.

A group of classical and modern exegetes will be chosen to read and interpret their exegesis of one particular Marian/Miriamic trait. Each exegete will be examined critically, analyzing their objectivity as they assess specific traits related to Maryam's receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration. This exercise in "hermeneutics of doubt", specifically from a feminist perspective, will attempt to understand the extent that each exegete reflects their own prejudice and cultural milieu. In Barbara Stowasser's words:

Neither the formal *tafsīr*—past nor present—nor Qur'anic-based literature in other forms could be classified as "interpretation" in the sense of analytical and /or unengaged enquiry. All (or most) Muslim writings are extensions of scripture . . . part of its productivity . . . hence [in the modern sense of scriptural criticism they] themselves (are) in need of interpretation.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to this, classical as well as modern Muslim exegetes continue to treat the Qur'an seriatim verse by verse. The exegete would first give the verse, or a part of it, and then the exegesis following it, a method which runs the risk of atomism "by taking individual words or usages cut off from the general context of the Qur'an as a whole, though some exegetes included occasional cross-references to other Qur'anic words or usages in their exegesis".<sup>22</sup>

The appearance of the angel is a manifestation of God's verbal inspiration (*al-wahī*) to Maryam, Mother of 'Isa. Andalusian classical exegetes interpreted this as a sign of prophethood (*'alāmat al-nubuwwa*). This issue of Maryam's prophethood is not implausible in Miriamic salvation history from the time of Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, who is the first Biblical woman figure to become a prime example of the female prophetic tradition (Deut 34:10).<sup>23</sup> Commentary from a selected group of exegetes who argue for or against this Marian/Miriamic prophetic office will be presented: from al-Ṭabarī of the tenth century to 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Rahmān (also known as Bint al-Shāṭi') of the twentieth century, both Sunnite and Shi'ite exegetical tradition shall be consulted. This critical reading will give a chance to appreciate and be critical, at the same time, of the classical exegetical literature and will show the importance of the role that the exegete plays in interpreting the text.

21 Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretations* (Oxford, 1994), 4.

22 See 'Issa Boullata, "Modern Qur'an Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi's Method," *MW* 64 (1974): 107.

23 For further Biblical sources on Miriam, see Phyllis Trible, "Miriam 1" in *Women in Scripture*, ed. Carol L. Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross Shepard Kraemer (Michigan, 2000), 127–128.

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Qur'anic sciences as well as modern literary theories are employed in this literary study of the Qur'anic story of Maryam, mother of 'Isa. This means that the study will probably reach the meanings and representations of the feminine and the maternal in the story of Maryam. In addition, working with the right tools of research in Qur'anic scholarship that are developed by Muslim as well as western scholars, past and present, will lead certainly to the uncovering of the multivalent meanings of the texts.

The interest in the subject of Maryam, mother of 'Isa, in the Qur'an has been reflected in western scholarship for the sake of inter-faith dialogue for the last sixty years.<sup>24</sup> The late Louis Massignon, the prophet of mutual understanding between Islam and Christianity, contributed fundamentally in the official and non-official interest of Maryam in Islam.<sup>25</sup> There is a further interest in comparing Fatima and Maryam in Islamic tradition, expressed by Jane McAuliffe,<sup>26</sup> the author of *Qur'anic Christians* and the chief editor of the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*.<sup>27</sup> Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad wrote an article on "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary", pointing out the need for ethnographic studies to examine how Muslims live their veneration of Mary in Muslim societies.<sup>28</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, the late German scholar specialist on Sufism, discussed the Sufis exaltation of Maryam. In Sufism, Maryam becomes a symbolic figure of highly spiritual values and a model "unspoiled by worldly concern".<sup>29</sup> A chapter on Maryam is included in Barbara Stowasser's *Women and the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation*.<sup>30</sup> Neal Robinson has written a number of articles on certain doctrinal issues related to Maryam in Qur'anic classical exegetical literature.<sup>31</sup>

24 See Tim Winter, "Pulchra Luna: Some Reflections on the Marian Theme in Muslim-Catholic Dialogue," JES 26 no. 3-4 (1999): 439-469. Neal Robinson, "Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion," in *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* (Birmingham, 1991), 182-205; Samir Khalif, "Quelque expressions de la piété mariale contemporaine chez les Musulmans d'Égypte (et d'Iraq)," in *Maria Nell'Ebraismo E Nell'Islam Oggi* (Rome, 1986), 142-166; R. J. McCarthy, "Mary in Islam," in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue* (Connecticut, 1982), 202-213; George Anawati, "Islam and the Immaculate conception," in *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance* ed. Edward Dennis O'Conner (Indiana, 1958), 447-461; 'Abd al-Jalil, *Marie et L'Islam* (Paris, 1950).

25 See Louis Massignon, "Le signe marial," in *Rythme du Monde* 3 (1948): 7-16. See also Neal Robinson, "Massignon, Vatican II and Islam."

26 Jane Dammens McAuliffe, "Chosen of all Women: Mary and Fāṭima in Qur'anic Exegesis", *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 19-28.

27 Jane Dammens McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians* (Cambridge, 1991); J. D. McAuliffe, ed. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 6 vols. (Leiden, 2000-2006).

28 Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary," *MW* 79 (1989): 487-505.

29 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (North Carolina, 1975).

30 Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, (1994), 67-82.

31 Neal Robinson, "Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an: Some Neglected Affinities," *Religion* 20 (1990): 161-175; "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the Virginal Conception," *Islamochristiana* 14 (1988): 1-16 and "'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī's Comments on Sūra Nineteen (1-4)," *Islamochristiana* 17 (1991): 21-33.

While western scholars pay special attention to Maryam, mother of 'Isa, to examine the meeting point between Christianity and Islam, female Muslim scholars are busy reinterpreting certain Qur'anic verses for the sake of freeing some concepts from a long history of male misogynist interpretation, which will contribute to a better understanding of the gender egalitarian message of the Qur'an.<sup>32</sup> The pioneer Qur'an scholar, the late Bint al-Shāṭi' (d. 1998) who wrote the first article on gender issues in the Qur'an, "The Islamic notion of the emancipation of woman," published a series of books on the biographies of the women figures of the household of the Prophet.<sup>33</sup> She started the first Qur'anic exegesis ever initiated by a female scholar in Islamic history, treating fourteen Meccan suras from a rhetorical point of view.<sup>34</sup> Bint al-Shāṭi', however, did not dedicate any Qur'anic study to the figure of Maryam, mother of 'Isa.

Other Muslim scholars who are reinterpreting certain Qur'anic concepts or verses, from a feminist point of view, are unfortunately not Qur'anic scholars, and thus fail to introduce and combine scriptural hermeneutics and textual politics. They lack the legitimacy of the authoritative body of Muslim scholars ('ulamā'), which remains dominated by male scholars.<sup>35</sup> Fāṭima Mernissi is a good example of a social scientist and an activist of women's rights who, for the first time, has used "science for the authentication of hadith" ('ilm al-rijāl) for the interest of women in Islam in order to criticize the interpretation of two prophetic traditions that manipulated hadith to belittle the participation of women in politics.<sup>36</sup>

Scriptural scholarship from a literary and feminist perspective will unravel the Qur'anic language and the meanings of the concept of the feminine and maternal through the portrayal of Maryam. Is the feminine through the portrayal of Maryam

32 For a document of a workshop initiated by the feminist activist Fāṭima Mernissi, see Farida Bennānī and Zainab Ma'ādī, *Mukhtārāt min al-nuṣuṣ al-muqadasa al-murassikha lil-ḥuqūq al-insāniyya fī al-Islām*, (Rabat, 1995); For a historical perspective on issues of gender and women in Islam, see Leila Aḥmad, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven and London, 1992); For a male conservative perspective on the emancipation of women in early Islam and studies of Qur'anic and Hadīth texts, see 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Abū Shiqqa, *Tahrīr al-mar'a fī 'aṣr al-risāla: dirāsa jāmi'a li-nuṣuṣ al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī wa-Muslim* 4 Vols. (Kuwait, 1990). For the first attempt which reflects a feminist awareness of gender issues in the Qur'an, see 'Āisha 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Mafhūm al-islāmī li-tahrīr al-mar'a* (Cairo, 1967) and on the mother, women, daughters and other related family members of the household of Muḥammad, see Bint al-Shāṭi''s biographical dictionary *Tarājīm sayyidāt bayt al-Nubuwwa* (Cairo, n.d.).

33 See the translation of Bint al-Shāṭi''s article into English, "The Islamic Conception of the Emancipation of Women," *al-Raida*, 125 (2009): 37–43.

34 The claim that Bint al-Shāṭi' initiated, in the sixties of the twentieth century, the first Qur'anic exegesis by a female scholar is based on intensive research by the author of this book.

35 On the concept of "woman" in the Qur'an, see Amīna Wadūd-Muḥsin, *Qur'an and Woman* (Kuala Lumpur, 1992). On the Qur'anic concept of men gaining qiwāma (trusteeship, caretaking status) vis-à-vis women, see 'Azīza al-Hibrī, "An Introduction to Muslim Women's Rights," in *Windows of Faith*, ed. Gisela Webb (Syacuse, 2000), 51–71.

36 Fāṭima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York, Reading, Massachusetts, 1991).

repressive or emancipatory to Muslim women? And is femininity, as the psychoanalyst, linguist and semiotician Julia Kristeva asks, defined biologically or relationally as that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order?<sup>37</sup>

This book is dedicated to the literary and linguistic study of Maryam's Qur'anic narratives since the Qur'an, as Amīn al-Khūlī states, "is the great Arabic book and its literary classical heritage" (*kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar wa-atharuhu al-adabī'l-a'zīm*).<sup>38</sup> So any textual study is a study in the essence and nature of the Qur'an, which is in Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's words, a "linguistic Text" (*bi-wasfihī naṣan lughawīyyan*). The main focus, thus, is through the language and meanings of Maryam's journey into motherhood in *Sūrat Maryam* and through her entry into sacred space in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. Maryam's journey to the wilderness, which portrays her in an analogous pictorial image with earth fertility, invites the question of whether or not feminine attributes are only biologically determined. This issue has long been debated between essentialists, who argue that femininity resides in the body, and constructionists, who argue that femininity is socially constructed and hence detachable from the body.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, both positions generate forceful arguments for the empowerment of women.<sup>40</sup>

Feminist criticism also refers to any linguistic, stylistic and narrative construction that sees the relationship between the sexes as one of inequality, subordination, or oppression. The Qur'anic statement that suggests gender preference, "no wise is the male like the female", will be examined and conclusions will show this may be an insertion by the first narrator, in the name-giving speech given by Maryam's mother, who is seeking her daughter's entry into the temple. This invites the whole question of the validity of the division between public and private space and highlights the question of gender equality in the endowment of intelligence, ethics, talents, or anything needed to carry out the vice-regency (*taklīf*). It is such feminist questions that this research will eventually try to answer through the portrayal of the most prestigious woman of the Qur'an.

37 See Julia Kristeva, "From One Identity to an Other," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1980), 6–7.

38 Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij tajdīd fi 'l-naḥu wa-l-balāgha wa-l-tafsīr wal-l-adab* (Cairo, 1961), 229.

39 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York, 1989); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with Ellen Rooney, "In a Word: Interview," in *Difference* 1.2 (1989) [special issue on essentialism].

40 Rebecca F. Stern, "Feminine," *EFLT* (1997) 151.

# 1 Form of *Sūrat Maryam*

Middle Meccan, Sura 19

98 āyas, 89 rhyming; main rhymes:

*-iyyā/-ūn/-dā*

This chapter will examine the inductive and literary analysis of the whole of *Sūrat Maryam* with special emphasis on the narrative portions. Particular consideration will be given to the sura's rhyme sequences and narrative units. The first section displays the fixed sequences of formally and thematically defined verse-units that are distinctly separated by a change in rhyme or other clearly discernible, sometimes formulaic, markers of caesura (*waqf*).<sup>1</sup> The second section exposes these verse-groups for explanation and examines the links and connections between narrative units on the one hand, and polemic units on the other. The third section, focusing on form, discusses thematic features and the literary genre of the small units and of the whole sura. The fourth section investigates elements of structural unity and thematic coherence and draws a final conclusion about the redaction of the sura units, the coherence of the sura, and its function as a whole. Prior to beginning this inductive examination, some brief comments concerning the structure of the Qur'an as a whole are appropriate.

The beginning of every sura in the official Egyptian text of the Qur'an<sup>2</sup> lists the title, the number of verses, the place of revelation (Mecca or Medina), and its position in the chronology of the revelation.<sup>3</sup> According to Nöldeke's division of the Meccan suras,<sup>4</sup> *Sūrat Maryam* belongs to the middle Meccan

1 Caesura as in poetry is "a break or pause in a line of poetry, dictated, usually, by the natural rhythm of the language. A line may have more than one caesura or none at all. It is often marked by punctuation . . . The caesura is used in two contrary ways: (a) to emphasize formality and to stylize; and (b) to slaken the stiffness and tension of formal metrical patterns". J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary terms and Literary Theory*, (Oxford and Cambridge, 1991), 112–113.

2 The most widely accepted canonical reading (*riwāya*) is that of Ḥaḥḥ from 'Āḥim, and is the basis of the standard Egyptian text first published in 1342/1923. The verses follow the "standard" Ḥaḥḥ *riwāya* of the reading of 'Āḥim, divided according to rhyme-endings, verse and paragraph structure, and semantic elements. For the canonical seven readings of the text (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'an and for the reasons for the success of Ḥaḥḥ *riwāya* reading of 'Āḥim, see A. Jones, "The Qur'an 11" in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L. Beeston *et al.*, (Cambridge, 1983), 244–245.

3 See Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology and the Qur'an", *EQ* 1(2001) 316–335.

4 According to Nöldeke, the Meccan suras can be divided into three periods. The suras of the second Meccan period are 54, 37, 71, 76, 44, 50, 20, 26, 15, 19, 38, 36, 43, 72, 67, 23, 21, 25, 17, 27, and 18. Nine out of the twenty-one suras begins with the disconnected letters. See, Theodor Nöldeke,

period<sup>5</sup> and in the order of the ‘Uthmānic recension (*al-tartīb al-‘uthmānī*) lies between *Sūrat al-Kahf* (18) and *Sūrat Ṭaha* (20).<sup>6</sup> According to al-Suyūṭī, suras 17 (*Banū Isrā’īl*), 18 (*al-Kahf*), 19 (*Maryam*), 20 (*Ṭaha*) and 21 (*al-Anbiyā’*) seem to belong to one group of *al-‘itāq* (early revelations).<sup>7</sup> The *basmalla* at the beginning of the sura is merely a sura heading which marks the beginning and end of each sura.

The disconnected letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘a fi fawātiḥ al-suwar*)<sup>8</sup> open most of the Meccan and a few of the Medinan suras. Some occur as groups of letters, such as *alif-lām-mīm*, *alif-lām-rā’*, *hā’-mīm*, *tā’-sīn-mīm*, followed by such patterns as *dhikr al-Qur’an* or *al-kitāb* or *al-dhikr al-ḥakīm*. The disconnected letters of *Sūrat Maryam*, *kāf-hā’-yā’-‘ayn-ṣād*, are not followed by any formula on the Qur’an or *tanzīl*.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.1 A structural diagram of *Sūrat Maryam*

The structural diagram of *Sūrat Maryam*—laying its text out verse-by-verse—reveals the units of its syntactical-rhetorical structure. This format was an indispensable component of Angelika Neuwirth’s method in her pioneering form study of all the Meccan suras.<sup>10</sup> The method clearly illustrates the literary and oral forms

*Geschichte des Qorans*, Bd.1. (New York, 1981), 66–164; Theodor Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’an*, tr. Georges Tämer (Beirut, 2004), 66. Nöldeke acknowledges that G. Weil was the first to point to this division in his small book, *Einleitung in den Koran*, [Introduction to the Qoran], see, Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’an*, 213, n66.

- 5 Nöldeke places *Sūrat Maryam* in the middle Meccan period, (AD 616 or 617), justified on the basis of the immigration of Muslims to Abyssinia in the seventh or eighth year after prophethood when the Muslims recited the first part of the sura to the Negus of Abyssinia. Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’an*, 116.
- 6 The chronological order according to Muir, Nöldeke, Grimme and the official Egyptian text are given in a table of suras in Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’an* (Edinburgh, 1977), 205–213.
- 7 Al-Bukhārī related on the account of Ibn Mas’ūd that suras Banī Isrā’īl, al-Kahf, Maryam, Ṭaha and al-Anbiyā’ are from the early suras which were first revealed to Muḥammad “al-‘itāq al-ūwal wa-hunna min tilādī”, thus Ibn Mas’ūd mentioned these suras in their order “fa-dkakarāh nasaqan ka-mā staqarra tartībuhā”. See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, (Saida, 1997), 1:178.
- 8 Twenty-nine out of the 114 suras begin with the disconnected letters, *al-ahruḥ al-mutaqaṭṭa‘a*. These letters are in 26 Meccan suras, and 3 Medinan suras. Gerhard Böwering explains “the disconnected letters are related to an ordering of sūras, using the letters of the Arabic alphabet in the time when Muḥammad collected sūras (q.v.) for liturgical purposes and began to take the first steps toward a written scripture. This rather general explanation of the function of the disconnected letters in the chronological genesis of the text of the Qur’an could be confirmed by the fact that certain groups of sūras introduced by the same letters – especially those beginning with the letter patterns *alif – lām – mīm*, *alif – lām – rā’*, *hā’ – mīm* and *tā’ – sīn – [mīm]* – have been kept together in the actual order of the Qur’an despite their sometimes widely varying lengths and by the fact that in almost all cases the disconnected letters are followed by a usually explicit or occasionally implicit reference to the revelation of scripture as a “Book” sent down or a “Qur’an” made clear.” Böwering, “Chronology and the Qur’an”, (2001), 327.
- 9 The suras that do not start with the introducing formula on Qur’an and *tanzīl* are *Sūrat al-‘Ankabut* and *Sūrat al-Rūm*.
- 10 For Neuwirth’s inductive or literary study of all Meccan suras see her *Sudien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, 1981). See how A.H. Mathias Zahniser follows Neuwirth’s method in his “The Word of God and the Apostleship of ‘Isā: A Narrative Analysis of Āl ‘Imrān (3) 33–62”, *JSS* 37, 1 (1991): 80.

of the units. Following Neuwirth, the sura and the *āya* will be carefully examined as units selected by the Prophet as the formal communication of his revelation. Attention will also be paid to the thematic unit, a unit of revelation marked as such in the Qur'an. This independent verse group and form of speech is the unit that Neuwirth considers to be the building block of the sura.

Due to its specific significance in Qur'anic literary analysis, the colon of the *āya* will be examined.<sup>11</sup> This is a small unit of speech that makes sense independently of what precedes and follows it, and of which one particular type, the final colon or clause, is particularly significant.<sup>12</sup> Colometric analysis considers the natural unit of speech to be the sentence. However, in the case of a very short sentence, which forms a metrical unit, or in the case of a sentence with long structural parts, which are divided into more than one metrical unit, the colons become more or less numerous than the sentences. Following Eduard Norden's method of colometric analysis in analyzing Greek and Latin texts, Neuwirth has applied similar principles to Qur'anic analysis. When Greek orators gave a convincing speech, their concern was to keep the speech units short enough so that they could express them in one breath, recite them loudly, and reach the next pause in the communication without running out of breath. As the Qur'an was intended for oral recitation, Neuwirth believes that it is also structured similarly.

Colometric division is not exactly like "the rules of pause and beginning" (*al-waqf wa'l-ibtidā'*), which divide the Qur'anic text into four basic types of phrases that are characterized by their syntactic and semantic independence or dependence on what follows. This set of rules differs from those of *tajwīd*, because it acts to preserve the clarity of the meaning rather than the accuracy of the sound.<sup>13</sup> *Sūrat Maryam* displays a distinctly poetic style, the two-to-four colon structure ends up in a unique rhyme (*-iyyā*, or *-ayyā*) only from verse seventy-five onwards; consonants other than *yā'* are admitted to constitute the rhyme, which thus turns into the lightened pattern of *ā*, *ī*, *ū*. The main rhyme-endings found within *Sūrat Maryam* are more difficult to stop at than other rhyme-endings, which are more common throughout the Qur'an.

Below is a transliteration of *Sūrat Maryam*.<sup>14</sup> A description of the rhyme-endings *-iyyā/-ūn/-dā* (highlighted in bold type) is necessary for the analysis of the composition of the sura, since only a précis of all the rhymes figuring in the sura will allow for the isolation of rhyme sequences and the examination of their

11 A colon is part of a sentence composed of primary or secondary periods, or sentences. The measurements of the colon are both structural and rhetorical. The rule of thumb is that the length of a human breath determines a colon unit, to be recited without the reciter becoming restless.

12 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*.

13 For the rules of pause and beginning (*al-waqf wa'l-ibtidā'*) and the positions of famous Qur'an reciters see, al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:243. For the science of Qur'an recitation (*ʿilm al-tajwīd*) see Muḥammad ibn al-Jazāʾī, *al-Taḥdīd fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ghānim Qaddūri Ḥamad (Baghdād, 1986). For a comprehensive study on the art of Qur'anic recitation, see Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo, 2001).

14 I would like to specifically acknowledge the transliteration of Angelika Neuwirth of *Sūrat Maryam* taken from her *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, 1981), 388–393. Some changes have been made concerning diphthongs and to comply with transliteration guidelines.



relation to semantically coherent groups of verses. The length of thematic units based on individual personalities will be indicated in parentheses at the beginning of a section. Demarcation lines separate independent units within the sura, indicating the organic units and separating them from later additions and commentaries. *Sūrat Maryam* appears in the appendix in Arabic.

*bismi'llāhi'l-rahmāni'l-rahīm*

- 1 *kāf hā' yā' 'ayn šād*
  - 2 *dhikru rahmati rabbika 'abdahu Zakariyyā*
- 

- 3 *idh nāda rabbah nidā'an khafiyyā*
  - 4 *qāla: rabbi*  
*innī wahana l-'azmu minnī*  
*wa-shta'ala r-ra'su shaybā*  
*wa-lam akun bi-du'ā'ika rabbi shaqiyyā*
  - 5 *wa-innī khiftu l-mawāliya min warā'ī*  
*wa-kānati mra'atī 'āqirān*  
*fa-hab lī min ladunka waliyyā*
  - 6 *yarithunī wa-yarithu min āli Ya'qūba*  
*wa j'alahu rabbi raqiyyā*
- 

- 7 *yā-Zakariyyā*  
*innā nubashshiruka bi-ghulāmini smuhu Yaḥyā*  
*lam naj'al lahu min qablu samiyyā*
  - 8 *qāla rabbi*  
*annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun*  
*wa kānati mra'atī 'āqirān*  
*wa-qad balaghtu mina l-kibari 'itiyyā*
  - 9 *qāla: ka-dhalika qāla rabbuka*  
*huwa 'alayya hayyinun*  
*wa-qad khalaqtuka min qablu*  
*wa-lam taku shay'ā*
  - 10 *qāla: rabbi*  
*ij'al lī āyatan*  
*qāla: āyatuka allā tukallima n-nāsa thalātha layālin sawiyyā*
  - 11 *fa-kharaja 'alā qawmihi mina l-mihrābi*  
*fa-awḥā ilayhim*  
*an: sabbihū bukratan wa-'ashiyyā*
- 

- 12 *yā Yaḥyā khudhi l-kitāba bi-quwwatin*  
*wa-ataynāhu l-ḥukma ṣabiyyā*
- 13 *wa-ḥanānan min ladunnā wa-zakātan*  
*wa-kāna taqiyyā*

- 14 *wa-barran bi-wālidayhi wa-lam yakun jabbāran ‘aṣiyyā*  
 15 *wa-salāmūn ‘alayhī yawma wulida wa-yawma amūtu*  
*wa-yawma yub‘athu ḥayyā*
- 

- 16 *wa-dhkur fi ‘l-kitābi Maryama*  
*idhi ntabadhat min ahlihā makānan sharqiyyā*  
 17 *fa-ttakhadhat min dūnihim ḥijāban*  
*fa-arsalnā ilayhā rūḥanā*  
*fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawiyyā*  
 18 *qālat: innī a‘ūdhu bi-r-raḥmāni minka*  
*in kunta ṭaqiyyā*  
 19 *qāla: innamā anā rasūlu rabbiki*  
*li-ahaba laki ghulāman zakiyyā*  
 20 *qālat: annā yakūnu lī ghulāmūn*  
*wa-lam yamsasnī basharūn*  
*wa-lam aku baghiyyā*  
 21 *qāla: kadhāliki qāla rabbuki:*  
*huwa ‘alayya hayyinun*  
*wa-li-naj‘alahu āyatan li-n-nāsi*  
*wa-raḥmatan minnā*  
*wa-kāna amran maqḍiyyā*
- 

- 22 *fa-ḥamalathu*  
*fa-ntabadhat bihi makānan qaṣiyyā*  
 23 *fa-‘ajā‘ahā l-makhāḍu ilā jidh‘i n-nakhlati*  
*qālat: yā-laytanī mittu qabla hadhā*  
*wa-kuntu nasyan mansiyyā*  
 24 *fa-nādāhā min taḥtihā*  
*allā taḥzanī*  
*qad ja‘ala rabbuki taḥtaki sariyyā*  
 25 *wa-huzzī ilayki bi-jidh‘i n-nakhlati*  
*tusāqit‘alayki ruṭaban janiyyā*  
 26 *fa-kulī wa-shrabī wa-qarrī ‘aynan*  
*fa-immā tarayinna mina l-bashari aḥadan*  
*fa-qūli: innī nadhartu li-r-raḥmāni ṣawman*  
*fa-lan ukallima l-yawma insiyyā*
- 

- 27 *fa-atat bihī qawmahā taḥmiluhū*  
*qālū: yā Maryamu*  
*laqad ji‘ti shay‘an fariyyā*  
 28 *yā ukhta Hārūna*  
*mā kāna abūki mra‘a saw‘in*  
*wa-mā kānat ummuki baghiyyā*

16 *Form of Sūrat Maryam*

29 *fa-ashārat ilayhi*  
*qālū: kayfa nukallimu*  
*man kāna fī l-mahdi ṣabiyyā*

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30 *qāla: innī ‘abdu llāhi*  
*ātānī l-kitāba*  
*wa-ja‘alanī nabiyyā*  
31 *wa-ja‘alanī mubārakan ayna mā kuntu*  
*wa-awṣānī bi-s-ṣalāti wa-z-zakāti*  
*mā dumtu ḥayyā*  
32 *wa-barran bi-wālidati*  
*wa-lam yaj‘alnī jabbāran shaqiyyā*  
33 *wa-s-salāmu ‘alayya yawma wulidtu wa-yawma amūtu*  
*wa-yawma ub‘athu ḥayyā*

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34 *dhālika ‘Īsā bnu Maryama*  
*qawla l-ḥaqqi lladhī fīhi yamtarūn*  
35 *mā kāna li-llāhi an yattakhidha min waladin subḥānahu!*  
*idhā qaḍā amran*  
*fa-innamā yaqūlu lahu:*  
*kun fa-yakūnu*  
36 *wa-inna llāha rabbī wa-rabbukum*  
*fa-‘budūh*  
*hadhā ṣirāṭun mustaqīm*

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37 *fa-khtalafa l-aḥzābu min baynihim*  
*fa-waylun li-lladhīna kafarū*  
*min mashhadi yawmin ‘aẓīm*  
38 *asmi‘bi-him wa-abṣir yawma ya’tūnanā*  
*lākini z-zālimūna l-yawma fī ḍalālin mubīn*  
39 *wa-andhirhum yawma l-ḥasrati*  
*idh quḍiya l-amru wa-hum fī ghaflatin*  
*wa-hum lā yu‘minūn*  
40 *innā naḥnu narīthu l-arḍa wa-man ‘alayhā*  
*wa-ilaynā yurja‘ūn*

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41 *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi Ibrāhīma*  
*innahū kāna ṣiddīqan nabiyyā*  
42 *idh qāla li-abīhi:*  
*yā abati li-mā ta‘budu mā lā yasma‘u wa-lā yubṣiru*  
*wa-lā yughnī ‘anka shay’ā*

- 43 *yā abati*  
*innī qad jā'anī mina l-'ilmi mā lam ya'tika*  
*fa-ttabi'nī ahdika širāṭan sawīyyā*
- 44 *yā abati*  
*lā ta'budi sh-shayṭāna*  
*inna sh-shayṭāna kāna li-r-raḥmāni 'aṣīyyā*
- 45 *yā abati*  
*innī akhāfu an yamassaka 'adhābun mina r-raḥmāni*  
*fa-takūna li-sh-shayṭāni waliyyā*
- 46 *qāla: a-rāghibun anta 'an ālihaṭī yā Ibrāhīmu*  
*la'in lam tantahi la-arjumannaka*  
*wa-hjurnī maliyyā*
- 47 *qāla: salāmun 'alayka*  
*sa-astaghfiru laka rabbī*  
*innahu kāna bī ḥaṣīyyā*
- 48 *wa-a'tazilukum wa-mā tad'ūna min dūni llāhi*  
*wa-ad'ū rabbī*  
*'asā allā akūna bi-du'ā'i rabbī shaqīyyā*
- 49 *fa-lammā 'tazalahum wa-mā ya'budūna min dūni llāhi*  
*wahabnā lahū Iṣḥāqa wa-Ya'qūba*  
*wa-kullan ja'alnā nabīyyā*
- 50 *wa-wahabnā lahum min raḥmatinā*  
*wa-ja'alnā lahum lisāna ṣidqin 'aliyyā*

- 
- 51 *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi Mūsā*  
*innahu kāna mukhlaṣan*  
*wa-kāna rasūlan nabīyyā*
- 52 *wa-nādaynāhu min jānibi ṭ-ṭūri l-aymani*  
*wa-qarabnāhu najīyyā*
- 53 *wa-wahabnā lahū min raḥmatinā*  
*akhāhu Hārūna nabīyyā*

- 
- 54 *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi Ismā'īla*  
*innahu kāna ṣādiqa l-wa'di*  
*wa-kāna rasūlan nabīyyā*
- 55 *wa-kāna ya'muru ahlahu bi-ṣ-ṣalāti wa-z-zakāti*  
*wa-kāna 'inda rabbihī marḍīyyā*

- 
- 56 *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi Idrīsa*  
*innahu kāna ṣiddīqan nabīyyā*
- 57 *wa-rafa'nāhu makānan 'aliyyā*
-

18 Form of Sūrat Maryam

- 58 *ulā`ika-lladhīna an`ama llāhu `alayhim mina-n-nabiyyīna  
min dhurriyyati Ādama wa-mimman ḥamalnā ma`a Nūḥin  
wa-min dhurriyyati Ibrāhīma wa-Isrā`īla  
wa-mimman hadaynā wa-jtabaynā  
idhā tutlā `alayhim āyātu r-raḥmāni kharrū sujjadan wa-bukiyyā*
- 59 *fa-khalafa min ba `dihim khalfun  
aḏā`ū ṣ-ṣalāta wa-ttaba`ū sh-shahawāti  
fa-sawfa yalqawna ghayyā*
- 60 *illā man tāba wa-āmana wa-`amila ṣāliḥan  
fa-ulā`ika yadkhulūna l-jannata  
wa-lā yuḏlamūna shay`ā*
- 61 *jannāti `adnin  
allatī wa`ada r-raḥmānu `ibādahu bi-l-ghaybi  
innahu kāna wa`duhu ma`tiyyā*
- 62 *lā yasma`ūna fihā laghwan illā salāman  
wa-lahum rizquhum fihā bukratan wa-`ashiyyā*
- 63 *tilka l-jannatu  
allatī nūrithu min `ibādīnā  
man kāna taqiyyā*
- 

- 64 *wa-mā natanazzalu illā bi-amri rabbika  
lahu mā bayna ayḏīnā wa-mā khalfanā  
wa-mā bayna dhālika  
wa-mā kāna rabbuka nassiyyā*
- 65 *rabbu s-samāwāti wa-l-larḏi wa-mā baynahumā  
fa-`budhu wa-ṣṭabir li-`ibādatihi  
hal ta`lamu lahu samiyyā*
- 

- 66 *wa-yaqūlu l-insānu  
a-idhā mā mittu la-sawfa ukhrajū ḥayyā*
- 67 *a-wa-lā yadhkuru l-insānu  
annā khalaqnāhu min qablu  
wa-lam yaku shay`ā*
- 68 *fa-wa-rabbika  
la-naḥshurannahum wa-sh-shayāṭīna  
thumma la-nuḥḏirannahum ḥawla jahannama jithiyyā*
- 69 *thumma la-nanzi`anna min kulli shi`atin  
ayyuhum ashaddu `alā r-raḥmāni `itiyyā*
- 70 *thumma la-naḥnu a`lamu  
bi-lladhīna hum awlā bihā ṣiliyyā*
-

71 *wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā*  
*kāna ‘alā rabbika ḥatman maqḍiyyā*

---

72 *thumma nunajjī-lladhīna ttaqau*  
*wa-nadharu z-zālimīna fīhā jithiyyā*

---

73 *wa-idhā tutlā ‘alayhim āyātunā bayyinātin*  
*qāla lladhīna kafarū li-lladhīna āmanū:*  
*ayyu l-farīqayni khayrun maqāman*  
*wa-aḥsanu nadiyyā?*

74 *wa-kam ahlaknā qablahum min qarnin*  
*hum aḥsanu athāthan wa-ri’iyyā*

---

75 *qul: man kāna fī ḍ-ḍalālāti*  
*fa-l-yamdud lahu r-rahmānu maddā*  
*ḥattā idhā ra’aw mā yū‘adūna*  
*immā l’adhāba wa-immā s-sā‘ata*  
*fa-sa-ya‘lamūna man huwa sharrun makānan*  
*wa-aḍ‘afu jundā*

76 *wa-yazīdu llāhu lladhīna htadū hudā*  
*wa-l-bāqiyātu ṣ-ṣāliḥātu khayrun ‘inda rabbika thawāban*  
*wa-khayrun maraddā*

77 *a-fa-ra’ayta lladhī kafara bi-āyātīnā*  
*wa-qāla: la-ūtayanna mālan wa-waladā*

78 *a-ṭṭala‘a l-ghayba ami ttakhadha ‘inda r-rahmāni ‘ahdā*

79 *kallā sa-naktubu mā yaqūlu*  
*wa-namuddu lahu mina l-‘adhābi maddā*

80 *wa-narithuhu mā yaqūlu*  
*wa-ya’īnā fardā*

81 *wa-ttakhadhū min dūni llāhi ālihatan*  
*li-yakūnū lahum ‘izzā*

82 *kallā sa-yakfurūna bi-‘ibādatihim*  
*wa-yakūnūna ‘alayhim dīddā*

---

83 *a-lam tara annā arsalnā sh-shāyātīna ‘alā l-kāfirīna*  
*ta’uzzuhum azzā*

84 *fa-lā ta’jal ‘alayhim*  
*innamā na’uddu lahum ‘addā*

85 *yawma naḥshuru l-muttaqīna*  
*ilā r-rahmāni waḥdā*

86 *wa-nasūqu l-mujrimīna ilā jahannama wirdā*

87 *lā yamlikūna sh-shafā'ata*  
*illā mani ttakhadha 'inda r-rahmāni 'ahdā*

---

- 88 *wa-qālū: ttakhadha r-rahmānu waladā*  
 89 *laqad ji'tum shay'an iddā*  
 90 *takādu s-samāwātu yatafaṭṭarna minhu*  
*wa-tanshaqu l-arḍu*  
*wa-takhirru l-jibālu haddā*  
 91 *an da'aw li-r-rahmāni waladā*  
 92 *wa-mā yanbaghī li-r-rahmāni*  
*an yattakhidha waladā*  
 93 *in kullu man fī-s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*  
*illā ātī r-rahmāni'abdā*  
 94 *laqad aḥṣāhum wa-'addahum 'addā*  
 95 *wa-kulluhum ātīhi yawma l-qiyāmati fardā*  
 96 *inna lladhīna āmanū wa-'amilū ṣ-ṣāliḥāti*  
*sa-yaj'alu lahumu r-rahmānu wuddā*  
 97 *fa-innamā yassarnāhu bi-lisānika*  
*li-tubashshira bihi l-muttaqīna*  
*wa-tundhira bihi qawman luddā*  
 98 *wa-kam ahlaknā qablahum min qarnin*  
*hal tuḥissu minhum min aḥadin*  
*aw tasma'u lahum rikzā*

## 1.2 Explication of the narratives units

Formulaic introductory phrases, themes, number of verses and verse-groups, rhyme-endings, key words, and the titles of the prophets and apostles are listed and explained below to identify patterns of similarities or dissimilarities between independent speech units. English readers should be careful when it comes to a translator's order of formally and thematically defined verse-groups, and their interpretation of certain important terms and phrases. For example, key formulaic phrases, such as "*wa dhkur fī'l-kitābi*", which appear at the beginning of the prophet's short narratives, "seem to have emerged from a ritual context that was a reprise of Christian and Jewish liturgies of the Word".<sup>15</sup> This particular phrase explicitly means "call in remembrance from the *kitāb*, God's words". Hence, "*wa dhkur fī'l-kitābi Maryama*" means "and call in remembrance from the *kitāb* (the heavenly book) the story of Maryam". *Kitāb*, as "heavenly book", was a concept that had a long history in the religious thought of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean and it involved the idea of a progressive revelation.<sup>16</sup> Most of the translators, however, have misinterpreted the meaning of this phrase by missing its liturgical

15 Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001), 88.

16 Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture* (New York, 1952), 17.

context or implying the physical act of writing down a book or scripture at this period of Muhammad's activity. Yūsuf 'Alī translated it as "relate in the Book (the story of) Mary";<sup>17</sup> Arberry translates "and mention in the Book Mary";<sup>18</sup> Dawood says "and you shall recount in the Book the story of Mary";<sup>19</sup> Pickthall writes "and make mention of Mary in the Scripture";<sup>20</sup> Abdel Haleem says "Mention in the Qur'an the story of Mary";<sup>21</sup> and Khalidi writes "and mention in the Book Mary".<sup>22</sup>

### 1.2.1 Zakariyya

*dhikru raḥmati rabbika 'abdahu Zakariyyā* (2): "and call in remembrance the mercy of the Lord to his servant Zakariyya". The sura starts by invoking God's mercy (*raḥmat al-Rabb*), which God bestowed upon His servant Zakariyya. The narrative consists of fourteen verses (2–15), divided into three passages. The *fāṣila*<sup>23</sup> rhymes with the *-iyyā*.<sup>24</sup> In verse 12, Yahya,<sup>25</sup> Zakariyya's son, was commanded to take hold of the *kitāb* with might (*khudhi l-kitāba bi-quwwatin*). Daniel Madigan argues that *kitāb* functions in the Qur'an as a symbol, rather than a concrete entity: "To have been given the *kitāb* is to have been given some access to that divine realm where everything is 'written,' that is, known and determined."<sup>26</sup> Neuwirth, moreover, explains that in this middle Meccan period the term *kitāb* functions as a symbol of the shared prophetic heritage, the common memory of "salvation history" that the Muslims now share with the Christians and Jews.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.2.2 Maryam

*wa-dhkur fi'l-kitābi Maryama* (16): "and call in remembrance from the *kitāb* (the heavenly book) the story of Mary".<sup>28</sup> The Biblically inspired narrative of Mary

17 See *The Holy Qur'an*, Yūsuf 'Alī, 771. (USA, 1946)

18 *The Koran*, Arberry, 303. (London, 1964)

19 *The Koran*, Dawood, 33

20 *Holy Quran*, Pickthall, 300. (Karachi, n.d.)

21 *The Qur'an*, Abdel Haleem, 191. (New York, 2004)

22 *The Qur'an*, Khalidi, 242. (Great Britain, 2008)

23 The rhythmic verse ending.

24 In *Sūrat Maryam*, the verse-endings stop at *madd al-'iwaḍ: -iyyā* (*'iwaḍ' 'an al-madd al-ṭabī' wa-miqdār al-madd ḥarakatan bi-miqdār baṣṭ al-iṣba' wa-qabḍih*) except for 34–40 which the verse-endings stop at *madd al-'arḍ li'l-sukūn: -ūn, -īm* (*wa-miqdāruh ḥarakatan, 4 or 6 ḥarakāt*). I would like to thank the reciter (*qāri'*) Wisām al-Toum for explaining the different recitations (*qirā'āt*) of the verse-endings.

25 John.

26 See Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 76.

27 Neuwirth, "Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon: zu Entstehung und Wiederauflosung der Surenkonposition im Verlauf der Entwicklung eines islamischen Kultus", in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden, 1996), 92.

28 Al-Rāghib says in *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*: "*inna kalām Allah wa-in lam yuktab yusamma kitāban*". The meaning is: "*udhkur kalāma Allah fī Maryam ma'a hifdhīhi wa-tadabburih*". See Al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*, ed. Dawoodi (Damascus and Beirut, 1997), 699.



is emphasized by this introductory formula “*wa-dhkur fi l-kitābi*”, as it was for Zakariyyā.<sup>29</sup> The narrative is seventeen verses (16–33) divided into four passages. Verse endings rhyme in *yā’ mushadda rakhiyya,-iyyā*. *Al-raḥmān* occurs twice, *al-raḥma* once. ‘Isa is *raḥmatan min ’l-rabb*. ‘Isa proclaims that he was given *al-kitāb (ātānī l-kitāba)*.

### **1.2.3 Commentary on Maryam’s narrative and the nativity of ‘Isa son of Maryam**

Two passages (34–36 and 37–40) appear as exegetical additions on account of their reaching a deduction based on the story and on account of their stylistic changes such as rhythmic verse-endings. The first passage, which begins with “*dhālika ‘Īsā bnu Maryama . . .*” (34–36) is the theological deduction from the story, which rejects the idea of God having an offspring (*ittikhādhu llāhi ’l-waladā*). The term *Allāh* appears for the first time in connection to *rabbī*. The term *ghulām*, which was used twice in the story, once by the messenger and once by Maryam, shifts in the commentary to *waladin*. The rhymed verse-endings change from *-iyyā* to *-ūn* and *-īm*. Nöldeke suggests that verses 34–36 were added at a later stage, either at the end of the second Meccan period or at the beginning of the third. The prosaic style of the verses and the appearance of the term *aḥzāb* in the second passage (37–40) (*fa-khtalafa l-aḥzābu min baynihim*) suggest a Medinan addition.

### **1.2.4 Ibrahim**

*wa-dhkur fi l-kitābi Ibrāhīma* (41): “and call in remembrance from the *kitāb* (the heavenly book) the story of Ibrahim”. Ibrahim is identified as “eminently veracious” and a prophet (*innahu kāna ṣiddīqan nabiyyā*). The narrative of Ibrahim could have followed Maryam’s were it not for the commentary (37–40). This invoking of God’s words on Ibrahim (*dhikr Ibrāhīm*) consists of ten verses (41–50) divided into two passages. Rhythmic verse-endings continue in *-iyyā*. *Al-raḥmān* is mentioned twice, *al-raḥma* once. Ibrahim was given two male descendants like Zakariyya and Maryam; he was given two sons who were prophets, gifted with God’s mercy and His true words.

### **1.2.5 Musa**

*wa-dhkur fi l-kitābi Mūsā* (51): “and call in remembrance from the *kitāb* (the heavenly book) the story of Musa”. Before identifying Musa as an apostle and a prophet (*rasūlan nabiyyān*), he is described as one from among the faithful (*innahu kāna mukhlašān*). This account is three verses (51–53). The rhythmic verse endings continue in *-iyyā*. Musa is given his brother, Harūn, as a prophet rather than

29 The *dhikr* is “the act of reminding, the oral mention of the memory, especially the tireless repetition of an ejaculatory litany, finally the very technique of this mention”. See L. Gardet, “Dhikr”, in *EI* 2 (1983): 222–227.

progeny. The account, an allusion only, is brief and no dialogue takes place. *Al-rahma* is mentioned once.

### 1.2.6 *Isma‘il*

*wa-dhkur fi l-kitābi Ismā‘īla* (54): “and call in remembrance from the *kitāb* (the heavenly book) the story of Isma‘il”. Isma‘il used to keep his word, and his status is that of an apostle and a prophet (*rasūlan nabīyyā*). His account consists of two verses (54–55). Verse-endings continue in *īyyā*. Isma‘il used to observe prayers and alms-giving and God was happy with him.

### 1.2.7 *Idris*

*wa-dhkur fi l-kitābi Idrīsa* (54): “and call in remembrance from the *kitāb* (the heavenly book) the story of Idris”. Idris, like Ibrahim, is called a *ṣiddīqan nabīyyā*, recalling the beginning of the list. His account consists of two short verses (56–57). Rhythmic verse endings continue in *-īyyā*.

The theme of miraculous progeny is presented as mercy (*rahma*) from *al-rahmān*, and filial duty between parents and sons is accounted for and all the prophets and apostles from Yahya and ‘Isa to Ibrahim and Idris are celebrated and complemented for their righteousness.

### 1.2.7 *Commentary on the prophets from Ibrahim to Idris*

*ulā’ika lladhīna an‘ama llāhu ‘alayhim* (58): “those were some of them upon whom was the grace of God”. This section consists of six verses (58–63), divided into two passages. The verses continue with the same rhythmic verse endings *-īyyā*. While verses 58 and 59 seem appropriately to make a statement on the aforementioned list of prophets, both al-Suyūṭī and Nöldeke consider the two verses as Medinan additions.<sup>30</sup> There is a stylistic change—the verses become prosaic and long—and it is unlikely that the Qur’an criticizes the descendants of the prophets at this stage. Only in Medina had Muhammad started to debate with the Christians and attack the Jews, and his debates with the Christians were, in most cases, on the theoretical and not the factual level. The commentary or exegetical addition (58–63) was probably added in Medina to show that the progeny (*khalf*) that came after these prophets had been misled and would not be saved unless they followed Muhammad. *Al-rahmān* is mentioned once.

### 1.2.8 *Commentary on tanzīl*

Verses 64 and 65 constitute an angelic discourse on revelation (*tanzīl*).<sup>31</sup> It comforts Muhammad reminding him that his God (*rabb*) has not forgotten him and

30 See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:42; Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 116.

31 Al-Suyūṭī contends that this verse is delivered by the angel Jibrīl (*al-āya ‘alā lisān Jibrīl*) See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:101.

commands him to worship God and be patient. The verses, however, appear out of context and do not seem to fit. They have the same rhythmic verse endings in *-iyyā*.

### 1.3 Explication of the polemic units

#### 1.3.1 *Man*

*wa-yaqūlu l-insānu* (66): “Man says.” Although this verbal sentence is spoken by Man in general (*al-insān*), “the disbeliever” in resurrection is the specific speaker.<sup>32</sup> The rule of “mentioning the whole to mean the specific” (*dhikr al-‘ām wa-iradat al-khāṣ*) is a rule deduced from the Qur’an. The eight verses (66–74) are divided into two passages: the first verse starts by addressing this particular man who doubts resurrection “*wa-yaqūlu l-insānu a-idhā mā mittu la-sawfa ukhrajū ḥayyā*”; then the answer comes as a logical argument against this man who does not believe in resurrection (67). A rigorous language of threat is employed in verbs such as “*naḥshurannahum*”, “*nanzi‘anna*”, and “*awlā ṣiliyyā*” (68–70). Al-Suyūṭī considers verse seventy-one to be a Medinan addition without justification; however, it is obvious that it does not make sense in the sequence of the previous verses and the one that follows (72). In verse seventy-two, the listeners are reminded of the salvation for those who fear God and the disgrace for the wrongdoers. Verses seventy-three and seventy-four bring relief to Muhammad: the unbelievers (probably the arrogant Quraysh) were intimidating the believers by contrasting their status and wealth with the poverty and lack of prestige of the early Muslims. Nöldeke, in agreement with al-Bayḏāwī and al-Suyūṭī, considers verse seventy-three and seventy-four Medinan. The structure is as follows: disbelief in resurrection followed by a logical argument against it (two verses, 66–67); threat (four verses, 68–72 excluding 71); arrogant disbelievers (two verses, 73–74). Surprisingly, the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*) is mentioned in the course of punishment. Rhythmic verse endings continue in *-iyyā*. The religious topic of resurrection alludes to the period when Muhammad was preaching basic Islamic doctrines in Mecca and naturally relates to ‘Isa’s *ba‘th*.

#### 1.3.2 *Say!*

*qul* (75): “Say, Muhammad!” means Muhammad is receiving God’s words and is bidden to proclaim them. These “say-statements”,<sup>33</sup> as Madigan explains, “are not merely one of the Qur’an’s several characteristic rhetorical devices; they demonstrate its fundamental sense of itself. It is the record of God’s centuries-long

32 *Dhikr al-‘ām wa iradat al-khāṣ* “*wa-yaqūlu l-insānu*” addressing specifically *al-kāfir*, the disbeliever.

33 There are 323 occurrences of the singular imperative *qul* (say) and 26 of other imperative forms of the same verb—constituting over five percent of the Qur’anic verses. See, Madigan, *The Qur’an’s Self-Image*, 64.

address to doubting, questioning, searching and straying humanity. The Qur'an is the place where the Arabs are finally brought into the conversation directly."<sup>34</sup> This unit consists of thirteen verses (75–87) and is divided into two passages; “*qul*” is the response to “*wa-yaqūlu l-insānu*” inquiry. This “silent dialogue” is not between two persons but between two communities, “the community of believers” and “the disbelievers”. The *fāṣila* changes in verses 75–78 and 79–87 from *-iyyā* to *-dā*; there is a variation in the sound pattern *-iyyā, -iddā, -izzā*; the closeness of the vocal sounds (*makhārij al-ḥurūf*) in verses 83–87, plus the *shadda*,<sup>35</sup> as in *-iddā* and *-izzā*, exhausts the *qāri*.<sup>36</sup> A more forceful threatening language appears which contrasts with the awakening of the desire for the mercy of God (*targhīb birahmati rabbika*) evoked at the beginning of the narrative section. *Al-raḥmān*'s power to punish the wrongdoers and reward the righteous is cited through the example of one specific, unnamed person who is arrogant and who will be punished (77). Then, the text shifts from addressing a particular person to addressing a group who have taken (for worship) gods other than God (81). These unnamed people, as the text promises, shall reject their worship and become adversaries against them (81–82). This verse-group is structured as follows: threat (*tahdīd*)/awakening of a desire (*targhīb*) (75–76); account of one disbeliever (77–78); threatening this disbeliever (79–80); and warning the polytheists to reject their belief in idols (81–82). The term *al-raḥmān* is mentioned once.

### 1.3.3 *Have you not seen?*

a-lam tara (83): “Have you not seen?” (83–87) comforts Muhammad by promising to send the Evil Ones to severely punish the disbelievers. *Al-raḥmān* is mentioned twice.

### 1.3.4 *On God begetting a child*

Commentary of the sura: *wa-qālu: ttakhadha r-raḥmānu waladā* (88): “They said: God has begotten a child.” There are eleven verses (88–98) divided into two passages; the verb *qālu* is in the past tense which means the Christians, to whom Muhammad might be alluding in this discourse on the idea of “*ittikhadhū'llāhi waladan*”, are not his immediate audience. This section ends the sura with strong argumentation against the dogma that “*al-raḥmān has begotten a child*”. The earlier argument against the Meccans, who “*wa-ttakhadhū min dūni llāhi ālihātan*” (81), and the argument here, “*qālu ttakhadha r-raḥmānu waladān*”, emphasize the sura's main theme, monotheism. In a sura that glorifies the maternal and miraculous progeny, the issue appears, if we read the sura synchronically, to be the rebuttal of the belief in the son of Maryam as the son of God. The ardent monotheistic language employed at the conclusion of the sura is strong and so is the rhyme at the verse-

34 Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 64.

35 stress

36 reader

endings in *-dā* for *waladā* and *-iddā* for the punishments and rewards. The verses become short and assertive since the sura is at its end. *Al-rahmān* is mentioned five times: three times in connection with *waladā* and once with *'abdā*, and once with *wuddā*. This means that the use of *al-rahmān* (*the Merciful*), a name of God derived from the term *rahma* (mercy) and *al-rahm* of the mother, *r-ḥ-m*, being the root of the term, and the introductory key word in *Sūrat Maryam*, disappears because of a sermon that ends the sura in a polemic manner. Thus, while the narrating part at the beginning, which pleases both the reciter and his listeners, can be seen as the climax, the sura ends with an anti-climax, as a result of the interference of the homiletic element. In the last two verses (97–98), God addresses Muhammad in the first person plural to instruct him concerning the revelation and to remind the hearers of God's power to destroy people. This is in a sura where the power of God's mercy is assumed to extend beyond His power to destroy. This ending gives the sura an atmosphere of dogmatic persistence and the polemic appears like a reading or a counter-text to the stories of Zakariyya, Maryam, and Ibrahim.

## 1.4 Composition and genre of *Sūrat Maryam*

### 1.4.1 General considerations

An analysis of the structure of *Sūrat Maryam* in terms of its division into units and the relationship between the grammatical structure of each unit and the thematic contents (section 1.1) helps to understand the typology of the sura. How should this literary type be understood, assuming the sura (except verses 37–40, 58–63, 64–65 and 71) has structural and thematic unity?

On the textual level, the theme of the angelic annunciations to Zakariyya and Maryam of the births of Yahya and 'Isa respectively, form the introductory part of the sura exactly as it is related in the introduction of the Gospel according to Luke (2:1–21) when the two angelic annunciations are made to Zechariah and Mary.<sup>37</sup>

The list of seven prophets leading from Ibrahim down to Idris (Q 19:41–57), structured from the longest to the shortest, might be referring to the Biblical pattern of dividing history into fourteen periods from Ibrahim to Jesus, as in the Gospel according to Matthew (1:2–25). Matthew's genealogy or history, which he divides into fourteen periods, includes, after each list of seven male prophets, the name of a woman of gentile origin involved in some sort of questionable sexual behavior. Matthew's genealogy begins with Abraham and ends with Jesus,<sup>38</sup> while the list of seven prophets in *Sūrat Maryam* starts with Ibrahim and ends with Idris and not 'Isa. Idris, who comes at a later period than Ibrahim, is introduced at the end of the list.<sup>39</sup>

37 See, Hosn Abboud, "Qiṣṣat Maryam wa-l tanāṣ bayna-l Qur'an wa-l Injīl," in *The Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Literary Criticism: Hermeneutics and Contemporary Literary Theory*, December 14–18, 2010 (Cairo, 2010).

38 See the commentary on Matthew 1:2–17 in *The Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in twelve volumes*, vol. 8 (1995), 128.

39 See *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* 37 (early-middle Meccan period) where the stories of the seven prophets of Israel are listed as follows: Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Iṣḥāq, Mūsa, Hārūn, Ilyās, and Lūṭ.

The number of verses in *Sūrat Maryam*, ninety-eight, is notably close to the number of verses of the pre-Islamic ode known as the *mu‘allaqa*. The standard type of the *mu‘allaqa* usually ranges from about thirty to one hundred lines, but seldom exceeds one hundred. *Sūrat Maryam*, like the pre-Islamic ode, follows a polythematic style.<sup>40</sup> The three figures (Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim) share the theme of the prophets’ struggles with their own peoples. There is also the theme of the genealogy of prophets and apostles starting from Ibrahim and ending with Idris, and a “silent dialogue” within the Qur’an concerning themes of monotheism and resurrection.

At the sub-textual level, the first three narratives seem to follow a pattern parallel to that in the pre-Islamic panegyric ode, *qaṣīdat al-madīh*. The standard pattern of the panegyric ode consists of three sections, the amatory prelude, *nasīb*, the “disengagement”, cast in the form of a camel journey, *takhalluṣ*, and the final section, dealing with the motive, *gharaḍ*, of the poem.<sup>41</sup> Rogers M. A. Allen explains, “it is now suggested that the choice and ordering of the various segments of the *qaṣīda* reflect the poet’s desire to illustrate by conjunction and opposition the glaring contrasts in community life, making these elaborate poems a public event of almost liturgical significance”.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the *nasīb* of the *qaṣīda* will often be placed within the context of *al-aṭlāl*, the section describing the poet’s arrival at a deserted encampment. A transitional section describing a departure, *raḥīl*, or desert journey, permits the poet to give a description of his riding animal. This section is often intricate and lengthy, and provides some of the most impressive lines.<sup>43</sup> From this intertwining of segments the poet will then turn, usually by means of insightful sentiments, to the purpose of the poem—the strengthening of the community through praise of its virtues, criticism of any breach of them, and sheer self-aggrandizement as a means of nurturing tribal pride and solidarity.<sup>44</sup> The strategy in the Qur’anic sura is to turn away from this self-aggrandizement and self-glorification towards the aggrandizement of “the other community”,<sup>45</sup> that is, the religious or pious community, and the glorification of the prophets and apostles. The journey of the she-camel section, which usually forms the building block of a *qaṣīda*, and the *takhalluṣ* for the poet, is similar to Maryam’s journey in *Sūrat Maryam*, which plays a role of *passage*, possibly mirroring the

40 The polythematic poem is an established fact of the pre-Islamic ode although as Renati Jacobi argues, “we cannot know at what time the polythematic poem was created, and which factors determined selection and sequence of themes.” Renati Jacobi, “The Camel-Section of the Panegyric Ode”, *JAL* 8 (1982): 4.

41 See ‘Abdullah al-Ṭayīb, “Pre-Islamic Poetry”, in *Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L. Beeston *et al.*, (Cambridge, 1983), 43.

42 See Roger M.A. Allen “Arabic Poetry”, in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993), 86.

43 For a representative selection of the she camel-section (*wasf al-nāqa*) see Jacobi, “The Camel-Section”, 5–8.

44 I borrow here some of the terms used in Allen, “Arabic Poetry”.

45 It is interesting that one of the reasons behind the revolutionary changes against some of the pre-Islamic values, defined as *jāhili*, is ‘*aṣabiyya* (pride in one’s own tribe).

*takhalluṣ* of the Prophet Muhammad. This is the same in Labīd's *mu'allaqa* (33 out of 89 verses describe the she-camel), Ṭarafa's *mu'allaqa* (30 out of 100 verses on the she-camel), and al-A'shā's *mu'allaqa* (20 out of 75 verses on the she-camel).<sup>46</sup> The fact that the she-camel plays the role of the poet's *passage* is determined by the importance of the she-camel to the pre-Islamic Arab in his journey. The she-camel embraces characteristics perfect for a long tiresome journey; she is patient, fearless in difficult times and swift in her movement.<sup>47</sup> An argument for an analogous relationship existing between Maryam's role of *passage* in the sura and that of the she-camel in the pre-Islamic ode is supported by the maternal role Maryam played when she accepted to be impregnated by the Lord's spirit and she made a journey on her own to a remote place surrounded by a setting of elements of nature and fertility.

Additional comparisons can be made between this sura and the *qaṣīda*. As the *nasīb* sometimes used nature and the environment to substitute reflections on the theme of life and death, so too is Zakariyya's introductory narrative of mourning his old age and fearing that he will have no inheritors a similar reflection. Maryam's journey to a remote place is also like the she-camel's journey to the desert and her struggle to survive (*riḥlat al-nāqa ilā'l-ṣaḥrā'*), which the poet anxiously describes in different images. Similarly, praising the prophets and apostles (Yahya and 'Isa, and the list from Ibrahim to Idris) is a transfer of the poet's personal praise of his own (and his people's) courage (*madīḥ al-shā'ir 'alā shajā'atihi*)<sup>48</sup> to the praise of the "other" community, which is now that of believers. If the commentary section is regarded as a Medinan addition and excluded in the comparison, the three verse units covering the narratives of Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim are parallel to the three sections of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*.<sup>49</sup>

It has already been noted that *Sūrat Maryam*, as a whole, does not fit with the most common sura type suggested by Neuwirth, "the revelation-confirmation-framed" sura, with a narrative comprising the middle part, but rather starts out with direct narration and without any discourse on revelation (*tanzīl*) or on the Qur'an. Also, as shown, *Sūrat Maryam* combines structural and thematic elements from the Gospels (those of Luke and Matthew) and the pre-Islamic *mu'allaqa*.<sup>50</sup>

46 Yahya Shāmī, *Labīd ibn Rabī'a al-Āmirī* (Beirut, 2002), 47. See also Muḥammad Husayn, *Asālib al-ṣinā'a ft shi'r al-khamr wa-l-nāqah bayna al-A'shā wa-al-jāhiliyyīn* (Alexandria, 1960), 52.

47 These characteristics that determined the importance of the she-camel as the camel perfect for the journey or the *passage* in the desert is taken from the poems themselves. See Muḥammad Husayn, *Asālib al-ṣinā'a*, 51–95.

48 The analysis of Suzanne Stetkevych of the structure of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* which lead her to posit three stages was criticised by Rita 'Awaḍ, in *Bunyat al-qaṣīdah al-jāhiliyya: al-ṣūrah al-shi'rīyah ladā Imrī' al-Qays* (Beirut, 1992), 33.

49 See Neuwirth's section on the *qaṣīda* and the *sura* in her "Rhetoric and the Qur'ān", *EQ* 4 (2004): 472–475. See also Neuwirth's study, "Images and metaphors in the introductory sections of the Makkan sūras", *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. by Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London, 1993).

50 See Hosn Abboud, "Sūrat Maryam and the Pre-Islamic Panegyric Ode: A Study of the Tripartite Structure", in *Sources and Approaches across Disciplines in Near Eastern Studies: Proceedings of the 24th Conference of L'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants* (Leuven, 2013).

Although Neal Robinson maintains that “in some instances, we should assume that the auditors were familiar with the stories, and that only *the form* of the stories and *the purpose* for which they were narrated were new to them”,<sup>51</sup> I argue here that the form was not unfamiliar, at least on the subconscious level, to Muhammad, Christians (Meccans or Abyssinians) and Arab poets in general. Now, that the form study of *Sūrat Maryam* has shown the central narrative section to be devoted to Maryam’s journey, it will not be difficult to understand the central role given to Maryam in a milieu of Arabic and Christian culture that cherished both motherhood in general and Mary, mother of Jesus, in particular.

*Sūrat Maryam*, thus, can be identified as a special type of literary expression since it combines features from Christian scriptural and Arabic poetic literary traditions. Angelika Neuwirth advanced the term “sura” as a genre, as a mixed composition, “a complex later stage, coming after a long process of religious and historical development. It is not a historical homogeneity but rather a secondary genre composed of elements that originally came from a variety of sources”.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore:

The Arabian Prophet, who stands on a much later stage of religious-historical development, found various religious groups, already in existence. All of them have in common that their religious services are composed of various elements such as pericopes, songs that introduce or come between segments of services and prayers among others. At this time, a variety of forms within a common framework are already normal phenomena. The Prophet’s awareness of form must have oriented itself according to such phenomena, if it developed at all in terms of liturgical form. . . . The compound genre that we encounter in the case of the sura becomes much more understandable when one takes into consideration that the complex form of liturgical discourse was “something natural” in the time of the Prophet.<sup>53</sup>

*Sūrat Maryam* begins by calling to remembrance the stories of Zakariyya and Maryam from the *kitāb* without introducing any formula on revelation or Qur’an. Passages of different dates must have found their way in for reasons of homiletics or composition (37–40, 58–63 and 71), and a group of two verses (64–65) must have lost their places in the sequence of the building blocks of the sura. Such passages and verses, although they sometimes do not interrupt the rhyme at the verse endings (*-iyyā*), and keep the discourse of *al-rahmān*, tend to lean more towards prosaic than poetic composition. Therefore, if Muhammad himself,<sup>54</sup> at a later stage in Medina, combined and expanded earlier revelations to form longer

51 Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London, 1996), 147.

52 Neuwirth, “Some Remarks”, 256.

53 Neuwirth, “Some Remarks”, 256.

54 That the Qur’anic texts were written from Muhammad’s period under his supervision is an uncontested opinion of the Muslim tradition and most western scholars. See the prophetic ḥadīth on the writers of *al-waḥy* in M. ibn Ismā’il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Mahmud Muhammad Nassar (Beirut, 2007): 944.



suras as parts of a written scripture, are some coherent elements still visible?<sup>55</sup> The diachronic approach,<sup>56</sup> which involves an examination of a sura's origin, development, history<sup>57</sup> and change, has led to the conclusion that the suras were, in any case, fluid during Muhammad's lifetime.<sup>58</sup>

## 1.5 Structural unity and thematic coherence of *Sūrat Maryam*

### 1.5.1 Structural unity

Despite these diverse elements in *Sūrat Maryam* and considering the Medinan additions and the subordination of the narrative to the rhetoric of salvation and damnation, certain elements of structural unity and thematic coherence are recognizable in both the narrative and polemic sections. These are as follows.

#### *Repetitive formulaic introductory verses*

“*wa-dhkur fi'l-kitābi*”: Maryam's narrative begins with this phrase and it is repeated seven times with seven prophets.

#### *Forms of the three narratives are nearly equal in length*<sup>59</sup>

- i. Zakariyya's and Maryam's narratives and commentary:  $14 + 18 + 7 = 39$   
Zakariyya's narrative: 3 verse-groups ( $5 + 5 + 4 = 14$ ).

55 The subject of the sura as a unity is the most debated topic in western Qur'anic scholarship: Theodor Nöldeke uncovered the suras as unities and admitted that passages of different dates have found their ways into the same sura. See Nöldeke on the additions of *Sūrat Maryam*, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, 116. See also al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1: 38. While later scholars, Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt, maintain the sura itself as the final unit and show unwillingness to admit breaks in its composition, they have allowed more intrusion of later passages into earlier suras. See Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 111. Although Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967) did not do sura studies, he gave an opinion of the sura as an “incoherent unity” since, in his opinion, “the lack of chronological order in one sūra and the different artistic devices and themes are all integrated in each sūra”. See Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij tajdīd*, 231. For studies on the sura as a unity, see Mustansir Mir, “The *Sūra* as a unity: A twentieth-century development in Qur'anic exegesis”, in Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, (London & New York, 1993).

56 The synchronic approach does not go beyond the history of the present suras and of the Qur'an as a whole.

57 Welch in his article “*Sūra*” in *EI2* gives the following insights about the history of the sura from the references in the Meccan and Medinan verses. In Qur'an 11/13, the challenge to produce ten suras equal to Muhammad's revelations reflects the period when the Qur'an consisted of a collection of mostly short recitations (Bell-Watt, 137–41). Whereas the challenge to produce one sura equal to Muhammad's revelation (10/38 & 2/23) reflect the later period in Medina when the Prophet was combining and expanding earlier revelations to form longer suras as parts of a written scripture. Therefore, Qur'an 9: 64, 86, 124, 127, which refer to specific instructions or information being “sent down” to Muḥammad, suggests short units of revelation, rather than the present suras. See Welch, “*Sūra*” in *EI2* vol. 9 (1960) 885.

58 Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij tajdīd*, 231.

59 Numbers in this section refer to the number of verses of each section.

Maryam's narrative: 4 verse-groups (6 + 5 + 7 = 18).

Commentary: 2 verse groups (3 + 4 = 7).

- ii. Ibrahim's list, commentary and angelic discourse: 10 (6 + 4), 7 (3 + 2 + 2), 6 (2 + 4), 2 = 25 verses

Ibrahim's narrative: 2 verse groups (6 + 4 = 10).

Musa (and Harun): 1 verse group (3).

Isma'il: 1 verse group (2).

Idris: 1 verse group (2).

Commentary: 2 verse groups (2 + 4 = 6).

Misplaced Angelic discourse: (2).

The polemic units have some symmetrical structure:

"*wa-yaqūlu l-insānu*": 2 verse groups (6 + 1 + 2 = 9 vv).

"*qul*": 2-verse groups (8 + 5 = 13 vv.).

"*wa-qālū*": 2-verse groups (8 + 3 = 11 vv.).

*wa-yaqūlu/qul* discourse and *wa-qālū*: 9 + 13 + 11 = 33 vv.

64 + 33 = 97 + *kāf hā' yā' 'ayn šād* = 98.

It should be noted that coherence derives, on one level, from numerical patterns and, on another level, from the principle of duality, in balancing forms of disputation (66 and 67) by comparing those who go astray with those who advance in guidance (75 and 76), and threat in contrast with promise (83 and 84; 85 and 86). McClain suggests that the symmetry of opposites, which is a primary principle in virtually all ancient art, philosophy, and religion, is seen in the Qur'an's affection for duality. It is demonstrated in the tension between God and Satan, the paths to Heaven and Hell, the alternation of threats with promises, and the very great concern with "Balance".<sup>60</sup> This balance also aids with the need for memorization—the instrument necessary for oral transmission and keeping the Qur'an in the hearts of the believers and the reciters of the Qur'an. If one group is mentioned, then the opposite group is too; if the wrongdoers are described in two verses, then the righteous are equally described in two verses.

### *Rhythmic verse-ending*

A major verse-ending in *Sūrat Maryam* is *-iyyā*. This rhyming pattern occurs only once in the Qur'an, making it a *fāšila nādira*.<sup>61</sup> Other verse endings appear in verbs such as *-ūn* in *yamtarūn* and *yakūn* (34–40) and *-dā* in nouns such as *jundā*, *'ahdā*, *fardā*, *wafdā* (*al-rahman*'s *waladā* probably necessitated the rhyme *-dā*); the *-dā* interchanges with the "stressed" *-dā*, *-dāl mushaddā*, as *maddā*, *'addā*, *iddā*, and

60 Ernest McClain, *Meditations through the Qur'an: Tonal in an Oral Culture* (York Beach, ME, 1981), 101.

61 A rare verse-ending. See the survey of all rhyme-endings in Syed Kazim and Hāshim Amīr 'Alī, *Rhythmic Verse-Endings of the Qur'an* (India, 1969).

*haddā*. Although the rhythmic verse endings vary from *-iyyā*, *-ūn*, *-dā* and *-iddā*, the ending involving the *shadda* is the common rhythm in the whole sura and *-iyyā* appears in the narrative as well as in the polemic sections.

Neuwirth's observation on the changing sound pattern from the early to the middle Meccan period deserves mention:

The transition from *saj'* speech to a more ordinarily flowing, though still poetically tinted, articulation attests to the transformation of an adherence to the standard pre-Islamic tradition into a novel literary paradigm that may be considered as a genuine Qur'anic development marking a new stage in the development of the Arabic language.<sup>62</sup>

### 1.5.2 *Thematic unity*

Central themes of monotheism and resurrection are manifested in the narrative section as well as in the polemic section, which is more or less like a reading of the infancy narratives and the genealogy of the prophets. This theme is also manifested in the *khuṭba* style argumentation carried out at the end of the sura against *al-rahmān* begetting a child. This argumentation was seriously contested among Nestorian and Jacobite Christians before the rise of Islam. However, reading this dispute in the conclusion in the past tense (*wa-qālū*) again means that the Qur'an was not addressing the Christian community but referring to it. The teaching of monotheistic themes in narrative form was inspired by Biblical narratives of salvation history, which provide the best examples of arguments against polytheists in general. As Nöldeke points out: "we should not consider all the situations in which Muhammad criticizes the teaching of *ittikhadhū'llāhi waladan* as an attack on the Christian doctrine 'Jesus is the son of God'; since the Arab polytheists called their goddesses '*al-Lāt wa-Manāt wa-l-'Uzzā*' as well the 'daughters of God'".<sup>63</sup> It is, thus, apparently a reaction against the polytheists and metonymically a criticism of the Christians who are like the polytheists attributing a child to God (*ṣarīḥ al-kalām radd 'alā'l-mushrikīn wa kināyatuhu ta'rīd bi'l-Naṣārā'l-ladhīna shābahū'l-mushrikīn fī nisbatī'l-walad ilā'llāh*).<sup>64</sup>

The evoking of the stories of Christian figures from the past is probably a new subject for the Prophet and his audience. But the themes and motifs that these stories reveal concern their situation of fear. For instance, the motif of "the fear of the people" manifested in Zakariyya's fear of his people (*al-mawālī*), Maryam's fear of her people (*al-qawm*) and Ibrahim's fear for his own father, certainly reflect the fear of Muhammad and his people in Mecca. These themes are, however, universal themes of ethical value because they represent father-son and mother-son relationships. The inquiry about resurrection (*ba'th*) in *wa-yaqūlu l-insānu a-idhā*

62 Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qur'an", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* 2 (2001): 252.

63 Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, 212n66.

64 Muhammad al-Ṭāhir ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa-al-Tanwīr*, (Tunis, 1997), 16:169 as cited in 'Abd Allah Ṣūla, *al-Hijāj fī al-Qur'an: min khilāl aḥam Khaṣā'ṣ al-Uslūbiyya* (Tunis, 2001), 247.

*mā mittu la-sawfa ukhrajū ḥayyā* obviously relates to the resurrections of Yahya and ‘Isa, praised at the end of their infancy narratives.<sup>65</sup> The theme of *tawḥīd*,<sup>66</sup> however, does not bring the sura to its synthesis; on the contrary, the polemic section offsets the pleasure of narration about Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim and brings the sura to an anti-climax. Jaroslav Stetkevych’s statement, “rarely do we sense in the Qur’an self-sufficient and self-justifying joy in storytelling”,<sup>67</sup> might be justified. It is interesting, however, to note here that when *Sūrat Maryam* is recited, the *qāri’* usually stops at the end of Zakariyya and Maryam’s narratives and does not include the polemic section, allowing the narrative, in an oral setting, to retain its function as a recitation capable of pleasing its hearers. This suggests that Muslim and Western Qur’anic scholars can feel confident in accepting Ibn Ishaq’s account of the immigration of early Muslims to Abyssinia and their reading the first part of *Sūrat Maryam*, *kāf hā’ ‘ayn šād*, to the Negus of Abyssinia, in the presence of a delegation from Quraysh.<sup>68</sup> The hearers were really touched by Zakariyya’s words about his old age (*wahana l-‘azmu minnī wa-shta‘ala r-ra’su shaybā*), Maryam’s wish to die (*yā laytanī mittu qabla hādha wa-kuntu nasyan mansiyyā*) from the pain of labor (or guilt) and Ibrahim’s intimate and repetitive calling of his father, “Oh father!” (*yā abati*).

The key word *al-rahmān* in *Sūrat Maryam* is a unifying element since it occurs throughout the narrative section, thesis, and the polemic section, anti-thesis. It is mentioned sixteen times in the sura<sup>69</sup> and appears five times in the concluding argumentative *khuṭba* -style piece:<sup>70</sup> *wa-qālū ttakhadha r-rahmānu waladā*. This means that, besides the meaning of ultimate mercy, *al-rahmān* has first and foremost a monotheistic meaning. The term *al-rahmān* was typical of the second Meccan period but was later dropped in Medina, especially after it was clearly stated that it is a synonym of the term Allah (Q 17:110).

In *Sūrat Maryam*, the Qur’an calls in remembrance (*wa-dhkur*) God’s words from the *kitab* (the heavenly book) on Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim and the

65 Neal Robinson is of the opinion that the polemic section is closely related to the narrative. For instance, the criticism of those who deny resurrection (66) has its counterpart in the references to the day Yahya and ‘Isa will be raised alive (15 and 33); similarly there is an implicit contrast between those criticized for relying on wealth, posterity and other gods, and the model behavior of Ibrahim (72–87, cf. 41–50). See Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an*, 147.

66 monotheism

67 Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Indiana, 1996), 11.

68 See the account of the first immigration to Abyssinia in Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq *The Life of Muḥammad*, 9th edn., trans. A. Guillaume, (Oxford, 1990), 152. Nöldeke, who is very critical of Muslim sources, does not seem to doubt this historic account; see Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 116.

69 The word “al-rahmān” is the most characteristic signal of Mecca, and western scholars have used its presence as a sign of the texts of the second Meccan period. The word occurs in most cases in Meccan suras: Maryam (sixteen times), Tāha (four times), al-Anbiyā’ (four times), Al-Furqān (five times), al-Shu‘arā’ (once), al-Naml (once), Yāseer (four times), Fuṣṣilat (once), al-Zukhruf (seven times), Qāf (once), then comes *Sūrat al-Rahmān*.

70 See Alan Jones “The Qur’an in the Light of Earlier Prose”, in *University Lectures in Islamic Studies*, vol.1 (London, 1997).

genealogy of prophets and apostles as signs of *al-raḥmān* (*āyāt al-raḥmān*) (58). In the introductory words of *Sūrat Maryam*, *dhikr* is associated with God's mercy (*raḥmat al-rabb*), to which the three Biblical figures aspire in their struggle with their own people.<sup>71</sup> Maryam also seeks refuge into *al-raḥmān*: *innī a'ūdhu bi-r-raḥmāni minka* and in her vow of silence *innī nadhartu li-r-raḥmāni ṣawman*; Zakariyya's *dhikr* is *raḥma*, 'Isa is *raḥmatan minna* [*ar-rabb*], Ishaq and Ya'qub (*wa-wahabnā lahum min raḥmatinā*) were given as a *raḥma* to their father, while Harun was given as a *raḥma* to his brother Musa. Drawing on the tradition of salvation history, the Qur'an seems to be consciously invoking *al-raḥmān*'s mercy, which made a difference for prophets before Muhammad and will eventually also make a difference for Muhammad. Moreover, the excessive use of the term *al-raḥmān*, a descriptive term of Allah already known in Jewish texts and Christian inscriptions,<sup>72</sup> “deepens the belongingness of the new religion of Muhammad to the two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity”.<sup>73</sup>

The key word *al-raḥmān*, the profound Qur'anic and Biblical idea of the immense divine goodness, however, expands to promise mercy and inflict punishment on people. This positioning of *al-raḥmān* as the merciless does not come only in the polemic section but also in the narrative section—Ibrahim's narrative: *yā abati innī akhāfu an yamassaka 'adhābun mina r-raḥmāni*.<sup>74</sup> This means that from the beginning *al-raḥmān* is the Almighty and not strictly the Merciful and is, therefore, a synonym for Allah. In *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q 17:110), after the Meccans had charged Muhammad with adoring two gods, the Qur'an explains clearly that *al-raḥmān* is another word for Allah (*quli 'd'ū'llaha'wi' d'ū 'l-raḥmāna*).

## 1.6 Conclusion

The display of fixed sequences of formally and thematically defined verse groups, and the explication and examination of the links and connections between independent units, demonstrate a final redaction of the sura units as follows.

Maryam's narrative, located as the central narrative (16–33) between Zakariyya's (2–15) and Ibrahim's (41–50), forms the central building block of the narrative section. 'Isa is not featured in a narrative section of his own but speaks on behalf of himself and his mother. The exegetical verses (*āyāt al-ta'qīb*), which reject the idea of God having offspring and also criticize the popular conception

71 The meaning in Arabic of *raḥma* (to be merciful) appears to be the same in all Semitic languages; see Martin Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'anic Arabic* (Leiden, 2002), 191.

72 The inscriptions discovered in South Arabia show that before Islam *Raḥmanan* served to designate God in Jewish texts and the father in Trinitarian Christian inscriptions. See G. Ryckmans, *Les religions arabes préislamiques* (Louvain, 1951), 47–48. See also Jacques Jomier, “Le nom divin al-Raḥmān dans le Coran”, *Melanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus, 1957), 361–81, transl. A. Rippin, “The Divine Name *Al-Raḥmān*” in ed. A. Rippin, *The Qur'an: Style and Contents* (Aldershot, 2001).

73 For the use of *al-Raḥmān* as a meeting point between the three monotheistic religions, see Şūla, *al-Hijā' fī al-Qur'an*, 246.

74 The term *Allāh* appears in the polemic section and not in the narrative section.

of the Meccans as well as the Christians, demonstrate a change in the rhythmic verse-endings from *-iyyā* to *-ūn* (34–36). This stylistic change does not necessarily imply that these verses were added at a later period since the interior presentiment of unity (*al-wiḥḍa al-shu‘ūriyya al-dākhiliyyā*) remains intact. Nöldeke suggests that Muhammad might have added these verses at the end of the second Meccan period or at the beginning of the third period, “to give a dogmatic or aggressive end to the Jesus verses”.<sup>75</sup> As for the commentary (37–40), which introduces new terms, such as *aḥzab*,<sup>76</sup> it definitely reflects a Medinan situation.

Verses 58 and 59, after the genealogical list from Ibrahim to Idris, are long prosaic verses that introduce the term *dhurriyya* and *khalf*. The polemic, against the posterity of these prophets who were misled, is a later addition since Muhammad started to criticize the Christians only in Medina.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the whole polemic unit (58–63) is a Medinan addition. The angelic discourse (64–65) suggests misplacement since it appears out of place in the sequence of formally and thematically defined verse groups.

The narratives of Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim, and the genealogical list of the seven prophets and apostles, form the narrative section, the central thesis being devoted to Maryam’s journey; the polemical in the *wa-yaqūlu/qul* silent dialogue, along with the *khuṭba*-style conclusion against the claim that *al-raḥmān* has begotten a son, forms the counter-thesis section. Although the polemic-disrupting element counters the self-conscious and pleasant narration and appears as a “*kitāb* reading” of narratives of “salvation history”, the units still retain some organic unity and thematic coherence.<sup>78</sup>

It is worth noting that in admitting Maryam’s impregnation from God’s spirit in the narrative section, one would expect a specific rebuttal in the polemic section, where the calling of any association with *al-raḥmān* is severely contested. This rebuttal, however, is passed over, and early Muslim theologians and exegetes, in an effort to distance themselves from Christians, did not acknowledge that the Qur’an admits this kind of consummation nor did they assert that the polemic section is a reading of acceptable or non-acceptable Christian themes. Nevertheless, turning to ardent monotheism at the end of the sura, in an argument full of paral-

75 Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 116. Bell considers that the sequel to the narrative about the birth of ‘Isa is a later addition. See Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’ān*, 96.

76 parties

77 F. Buhl, “When did Muḥammad begin to criticise Christianity?” *Acta Orientalia* 3 (1924): 97–108.

78 Equally, the polythematic style of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah* does not suggest a lack of coherence. See the interesting study by Rita ‘Awaḍ, *Bunyat al-qaṣīdah al-jāhiliyya*. Zwettler says that formative and thematic comparison between the early Meccan suras and the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas* shows that there is no basis for such a comparison. He refuses to mix between the two literary types. ‘Awaḍ observes that the Qur’an lacks rhythmic unity which is very essential for Arabic poetry and the *fawāṣil* which differentiate between the rhythmic passages are far from poetic in style. Neuwirth, however, has done an interesting comparative study between the introductory sections of early Meccan suras and the introductory section (*an-nasīb*) of the pre-Islamic ode. See Neuwirth, “Images and Metaphors”.

lelism, *al-raḥmān* is recalled five times and the verses become short and assertive. This certainly suggests that the sura includes a text and a counter-text, that is, a “re-reading” of Christian themes by the Qur’an itself. However, the emotional presentiment, which runs through both the text and counter-text, and the elements of coherence, specifically the rhythmic verse endings, the symmetrical structure, the central theme of monotheism, and the key word, *al-raḥmān*, allow one to argue that there is an organic unity and that *Sūrat Maryam* was composed at an early date.

*Sūrat Maryam* was delivered early, since it is the oldest to include Biblical figures and to list names of prophets and apostles.<sup>79</sup> There is, however, some confusion in the Qur’anic reference to Ibrahim’s descendants; Ishaq and Ya‘qub<sup>80</sup> are cited as Ibrahim’s direct progeny (49–50), while the name of Isma‘il appears without any reference to the person and history of Ibrahim (54–55). In addition, Idris, known as the grandfather of Nuh, is introduced at the end of the cycle of Biblical prophets (56–57), pointing to the possibility of Arab prophetic ancestry. This genealogy has no historical meaning whatsoever (unlike the Old Testament and the New Testament) and is probably an early attempt to Arabicize the list in order to relate Muhammad to Ibrahim’s descendants, and may reflect what Muhammad knew at that point from his regular contacts with the Christians (*Naṣārā*) of his milieu.

Nonetheless, *Sūrat Maryam* demonstrates continuity on both the textual and sub-textual levels. Textually, structural continuity exists with Christian scriptural tradition; and on the sub-textual level, Arabic poetic tradition suggests the continuity of literary forms from the *shi‘riyya al-‘arabiyya*. This is manifested in the tripartite structure of the Qur’anic three narratives, which seem to resonate with the tripartite structure of the panegyric ode. Of course, the function of Maryam’s story depends on whether one is reciting parts from the narrative section or parts from the polemic section.

Maryam must thus function in harmony with both Christian and Arab ideals: she receives the annunciation from God’s messenger, just as in the Gospel according to Luke, and she goes on a journey alone into the desert, just as the she-camel in the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*. Sympathy for Maryam, whose images are related to survival in the wilderness and the experience of childbirth, is exactly like the sympathy expressed for the she-camel. In Suzanne Stetkevych’s words, “the she-camel is poetically and ritually appropriate for a ‘passage’ since it is *par excellence* that beast most suited for surviving the arduous desert crossing”.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the identification of the poet with his mount and Muhammad with Maryam ensures, as it

79 These names will recur from now on, not only in the Meccan suras (*al-Anbiyā’* 21, *al-Mu‘minūn* 23, *al-Zukhruf* 43, *al-Shūra* 42, *al-An‘ām* 6) but also in the Medinan suras (*al-Baqara* 2, *Āl ‘Imrān* 3, *al-Nisā’* 4, *al-Mā‘ida* 5, *al-Tawba* 9, *al-Aḥzāb* 33, *al-Ḥadīd* 57, *al-Jum‘a* 62, *al-Tahrīm* 66).

80 The idiomatic phrase “*Iṣḥāqa wa Ya‘qūba*” is employed in two passages (Q 12:38; 38:45; but cf. Q 2:132).

81 Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca and London, 1993), 27.

were, the poet's and Muhammad's successful passage. Moreover, as Ibrahim is the precursor of Muhammad and later the founder of "the true religion", Zakariyya and Maryam play the same roles as the precursors of Muhammad, thus Muhammad, becomes related to Maryam on the same level as the other prophets. The two prophets Yahya and 'Isa were given access to the *kitāb* (12 and 30), while Ibrahim was given male descendants (Ishaq and Ya'qub) thus making Muhammad a future heir to those prophets with the *kitāb* and those with Abrahamic ancestry. Finally, through this list of prophets, Muhammad is the only one still entrusted with this prophetic genealogy because he follows the right dogma against God begetting a child (*ittikhadhū'llāhi l-waladā*) alluding to the Jews (78),<sup>82</sup> the Meccan polytheists (81–82)<sup>83</sup> and the Christians (88–92)<sup>84</sup> at one and the same time.

82 Although the text addresses a Qurayshi (*afar'ayta al-ladhī*), the allusion to the Jews is implicit in the "knowledge of the unseen" or the "taking a covenant with God" (*ittala'a'l-ghayba am ittakhadha 'inda'l-raḥmāni 'ahda*) which is a privilege of the Jewish prophets.

83 The criticism is on those "who have taken (for worship) gods other than God" which implies the address is to the polytheist Meccans.

84 The criticism is on those "who say: (God) Most Gracious Has begotten a son!" which implies that this address is to the Christians.



## 2 Maryam's story

### Stylistic and narrative analysis

This chapter examines Zakariyya and Maryam's intertwined stories in order to show the correlation between them. Stylistic analysis will determine the linguistic components of Maryam's story and appraise the story's contribution to the artistic value of the text.<sup>1</sup> Components such as verbs, grammatical subjects, rhythmic verse endings, phonology, rhetorical devices and foreign words are studied in the light of *naẓm*—the artistic fusion of wording and meaning in accordance with the principle of *naḥw*, *bayān* and *ṣawṭ*.<sup>2</sup> Narrative analysis will expose the narrative components of the story itself and facilitate the differentiation between the discourse of the first person narrator (*ṣāḥib al-khitāb al-aṣl*) and the tale itself (*al-matn al-ḥikā'i*), including the relation between the voices, their dialogues, and the events happening around them. The narration time is compared to the telling time and the rhythmic narration represented by the four narrative movements: ellipse, pause and two mediums: the scene and the *sommaire*.<sup>3</sup> The untying of narrative components is followed by the identification of all characters, including the recognition of the main characters. Evidence will demonstrate the story is Maryam's herself and not that of her son, 'Isa. Answers will surface concerning the purpose of Maryam's own journey to be in touch with the sacred through a physical experience of childbirth. Explorations will be made into the fidelity of Maryam's expression of the feelings and aspirations of women and the truth in the text—whether it lies within the tale or in the relationship between truth and language.

1 This study of stylistics is inspired by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's work on *naẓm*, see *Asrār al-balāgha*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul, 1954) and *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, ed. Muhammad al-Tunji (Beirut, 1995). See also Kamal Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjānīs Theory of Poetic Imagery* (Warminster, 1979). Stylistic analysis motivates the study of the systematic construction of the verses (*naẓm al-āyāt*), and it refuses to give ready-made judgments, while at the same time uncovering sexual/textual politics that are hidden within the linguistic and literary construction of the texts.

2 grammar, rhetoric and pronunciation

3 This narrative division by Gerard Genette is adapted to the study of Qur'anic narrative by Muḥammad Khaḍar. See Khaḍar, *Balāghat al-sard* (Cairo, 2004) 95.

## 2.1 The stories of Zakariyya and Maryam: Two intertwined narratives

There are parallel forms, motifs and linguistic formulaic phrases connecting the stories of both Zakariyya and Maryam. The form is manifested in the structure of the verse units and the number of verses of each unit; the motif of miraculous births is manifested in God's gift of progeny to both Zakariyya, despite his age and the sterility of his wife, and to Maryam despite her unmarried status and being virtuous. Some common formulaic phrases exist with little alteration, as in God's statement about His power to create (9 and 21) and in the glorification verse of Yahya and 'Isa at the end of both narratives (15 and 33).

Once we examine the dialogues, we notice slight differences in the discourse between the addressor (God) and the addressee (Zakariyya/Maryam). Zakariyya's secret calling to his God and the direct annunciation to Zakariyya (3–9) shifts in verse nine into an indirect address from God to point to an indirect verbal transmission from God: "O Zakariyya! We give you good news of a son: His name shall be Yahya . . . He said: So (it will be): Your Lord said, . . ." (*yā Zakariyya innā nubashshiruka bi-ghulamīni smuhu Yahyā . . . qāla: kadhālika qāla rabbuka. . .*). Although Zakariyya is always asking God directly (4–10), the addresser is never identified as God or the messenger. Although in Maryam's *dhikr*, which follows, the speaker is identified either as God's spirit or as God's messenger: "then we sent to her our Spirit" (*fa-arsalnā ilayhā rūḥanā*, 17) and "I am only a messenger from your Lord" (*innamā anā rasūlu rabbiki*, 19). Moreover, in Maryam's case, the dialogue (18–21) is between Maryam and a human being, since the messenger appears to her as a man without fault, "and he appeared before her as a human being in all respects" (*fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawiyyā*, 17). There are also other speakers in Maryam's story: an angel (*al-rasūl*), the one who called from underneath (*al-munādī min taḥtiḥā*), her people (*qawmahā*), and the infant 'Isa (*qālū: kayfa nukallimu man kāna fī l-mahdi ṣabiyyān? qāla: innī 'abdu llāhi . . .*); hence more dialogues and more events take place. At the end of Zakariyya's story, the birth of Yahya is celebrated in eight glorifying phrases connected by the conjunction article, *wāw al-'atf*. Yahya, however, does not glorify himself in his own voice; instead, the magisterial speaker glorifies him: "and We gave him wisdom even as a youth . . ." "So peace on him the day he was born, the day that he dies and the day that he will be raised up to life (again)" (*wa-ataynāhu l-ḥukma ṣabiyyā . . . wa-salāmun 'alayhi yawma wulida wa-yawma yamūtu wa-yawma yub'athu ḥayyā*, 4 *āyas*). Whereas the infant 'Isa glorifies himself in his own voice in the first person singular: "So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)" (*qāla innī 'abdu llāhi . . . wa-s-salāmu 'alayya yawma wulidtu wa-yawma amūtu wa-yawma ub'athu ḥayyā*, 4 *āyas*). 'Isa's glorification of himself allows 'Isa a higher status than his predecessor, Yahya.

'Isa's glorification of himself is followed by an exegetical addition, which concerns 'Isa and not Yahya. This exegetical addition rejects the idea of God having offspring and constitutes, in a sense, a contribution of Christian contemporary

debates in this regard (34–36). *Dhikr* Zakariyya and *dhikr* Maryam is the subject of both narratives although the nativity events of Yahya and 'Isa are celebrated, equally with filial piety towards both parents (*barran bi-wālidayhi*) and the mother (*barran bi-wālidati*). It is worth emphasizing that the purpose behind the retelling of the nativity story of 'Isa is not for the sake of Maryam's motherhood of 'Isa only, but for the sake of Maryam's feminine attributes in the first place; the sub-textual level will later confirm this. Moreover, it is important to mention that 'Isa does not appear in his own story, identified by his name before the commentary verse, and the story of his birth focuses on the story of Maryam's journey where she confronts difficulty and returns to her people triumphant. Thus, the story is the story of Maryam, even if it is celebrating the birth story of 'Isa as well. And even, if 'Isa speaks in defense of his mother, 'Isa does not feature in any extended narrative from the whole Meccan period.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Stylistic analysis of Maryam's narrative (16–33)

Although the Qur'an became the fundamental Book of Islam, the Qur'an was, from the beginning, a literary phenomenon<sup>5</sup> and a new genre. Ṭaha Ḥusayn said, "The Qur'ān is neither poetry nor prose; it is Qur'ān."<sup>6</sup> Sa'īd has said, "If the Qur'an represented a break with the *jāhiliyya*<sup>7</sup> of pre-Islam on an epistemological level, it also represented a break on the level of forms of expression."<sup>8</sup> Knowing that poetry is the medium of the history and culture of the Arabs (*al-shi'r diwān al-'arab*), the Qur'anic texts, communicated by Muhammad, sought to challenge poets on their own grounds by using the same Arabic medium, yet negating what poetry represented in terms of ideals and values. Hence, studies of the inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jāz*)<sup>9</sup> by Muslim scholars are in effect studies of the linguistic phenomena of the Qur'an as a text, to which recipients respond in every period.<sup>10</sup> These studies matured with the work of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) on

4 See David Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'ān", in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Curzon, 2001), 5.

5 Amīn al-Khūlī contends, "You cannot do any research on the Qur'ān without including a literary study of 'the first Arabic book' because there is no way to comprehend the objective of the Qur'ān or understand its meanings without such an understanding." in *Manāhij tajdīd*, (Cairo, 1961) 230.

6 "*inna al-Qur'ān laysa shi'ran wa-lā nathran*" Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *al-Fitna al-Kubrā* (Cairo, 1970), 32.

7 On jāhiliyyā see "Djāhiliyya" in *EI* 2 (1960): 383; also Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (London, 1971). See also Jaroslav Stetkevych's introduction in *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, 5–9.

8 Adonis [Alī Aḥmad Sa'īd], *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham (London, 1990), 37.

9 For a thorough article on I'jāz, see 'Issā Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān: I'jāz and Related Topics", in *Approaches to the History of the Qur'ān*, ed. A. Rippin, (Oxford, 1988).

10 All the early studies on the inimitability of the Qur'an (I'jāz al-Qur'ān), from al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012–3) to al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), compare the poetics of the text to the poetics of Arabic poetry as a foundation of their studies.

literary construction, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, which he derived entirely from his concept of language as being a system of relations (*systeme des rapports*).<sup>11</sup> Al-Jurjānī defined Qur'anic style as *naẓm*,<sup>12</sup> not as an arbitrary grouping (*ḍamm*) of elements, but rather as an activity similar to construction in which “there is a reason for putting a certain (unit) in a definite place, so much so that if the unit was placed in a different position it would not fit”.<sup>13</sup>

The modern linguist Muhammad al-Hādi al-Tarābulṣī explains: “Stylistics, which centers on the linguistic phenomena, the essence of speech, studies the principles of aesthetics thinkable for speech formation.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, to study the linguistic phenomena in Maryam's *dhikr*—which is a short story (*qiṣṣa qaṣīra* or *uqṣūṣa*)—at the level of stylistics is to investigate whether the story provides an illuminating contribution to the aesthetic value of the text. The study of stylistics here is also motivated by an awareness of the idea of Qur'anic *naẓm*, which classical Muslim linguists and exegetes elaborated on and developed as a theory of meaning in Arabic linguistics which argues that the Qur'an uses the best *naẓm*.<sup>15</sup> The way these authors discussed the grammatical-rhetorical devices, in the context of a relationship between words used and meanings intended, is quite instructive for this study of stylistics. Consequently, in this section, the data of the linguistic phenomena employed in Maryam's story will be collected and classified according to priorities of “the oral/written” and according to *naẓm* in preparation for their examination.

The short story starts by calling in remembrance (*dhikr* or *istid'ā'*) Maryam's story from the *kitāb*, God's words or “the heavenly book” of “Salvation history”.<sup>16</sup> There are two dialogues: one between Maryam and the spirit/messenger

11 This is the opinion of Muḥammad Mandūr, the influential literary critic, who argues that Jurjānī's work on construction derives entirely from his concept of language as a system of relations; al-Jurjānī belongs to “the greatest school in linguistics, namely that of Ferdinand de Saussure and A. Meillet”. Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, 25.

12 In al-Jurjānī's words, *naẓm* is “*tawakkhkhī ma'ānī al-nahwū wa-ahkāmihī fimā bayna al-kalim*”. See al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*, 79.

13 See al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-i'jāz*.

14 Muḥammad al-Hādi al-Tarābulṣī, “fī Manhajīyyāt al-dirāsa al-uslubīyya”, in *Ashghāl nadwat al-lissāniyyāt wa'l-lughā al-'arabiyya* (Tunis, 1978), 216.

15 For a brief history of the development of the idea of *naẓm* from al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 386/996 or 388/998), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012–3), al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), al-Zamakhsarī (d. 538/1144), and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), see Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islāhī's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an*, (Washington, 1986), chapter one.

16 For the meaning of *kitāb*, see al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī's interesting definition in *Mufradāt al-Fāz al-Qur'an*, ed. Ṣafwān 'Adnān Dāwūdī, (Beirut, 1997), 699. Madigan devoted a book on the meanings of *kitāb* in which he discusses the following, “the fact that the concept Qur'an is steadily crowded out by the concept *kitāb* in general shows that the aspiration of a book, such as that possessed by ‘the people of the Book’ (*ahl al-kitāb*), enforced itself more and more, thus, ‘*wa-dhkur fī l-kitāb Maryama*’ does not involve writing down the revelation at this stage”. On the concepts of “Qur'an” and “*kitāb*”, see Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (New Jersey & Oxfordshire, 2001), 165. On the relation between the oral and written components of transmission in early Islam, see Gregor Schöeler, “Writing and Publishing: On the Use and Function of Writing in the first Centuries of Islam”, *Arabica* 44 (1997): 423–435.

(unidentified) and the other between Maryam and her people (unidentified), who accuse her of misconduct. Maryam reacts by taking a vow of silence, after which 'Isa comes to the rescue of his mother. While still in the cradle, he speaks to identify himself as a servant of God (*'abdu llāhi*) who is given revelation (*al-kitāb*) and made a prophet; he was blessed and required to observe prayers and alms-giving and to be kind to his mother. Amidst the unfolding of these dialogues, the text relates, in a compassionate way, Maryam's experience of her bodily and psychological pain in the journey she undertakes through the wilderness and through the accusations heaped upon by her own people.

In Maryam's story, most of the verbs are in the past tense, which is a characteristic of narrative texts; thus events happened in the remote past: "she withdrew", "she placed", "she said", "We sent to her", "he appeared before her" (*intabadhat, ittakhadhat, arsalnā, tamaththala lahā*). Most present tense verbs are preceded by interrogative particles (*adāt al-istifhām*): "how shall I have" (*annā yakūnu*); or negative particles (*adāt al-naḥy*), "no man has touched me", "I am not", "grieve not", "He made me not", (*lam yamsasnī, lam aku, allā taḥzanī, lam yaj'alnī*). This is done to signify that there are questions awaiting answers and matters to be negated. Some present tense verbs are of the form "I seek *al-rahmān*'s refuge" (*a'ūdhu*) from the horror of the surprising appearance of the spirit as a good-looking man; and "to give you as a gift" a holy boy (*li-ahaba* or *li-yahaba*).<sup>17</sup> Verbs in the imperative tense come in the form of consolation and not in the form of threat, discipline or sanction, "invoke God's words", "shake towards yourself", "eat, and drink, and cool (your) eye", "say" (*wa-dhkur, wa-huzzī, fa-kulī, wa-shrabī, wa-qarrī, fa-qūlī*). In the invocation verse, verbs carry three different tenses—past, present and future (passive): "So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!" (*wa-salāmu 'alayya yawma wulidtu wa-yawma amūtu wa-yawma ub'athu ḥayyā*).

The grammatical subjects (*al-fawā'il*) are: the first person narrator (*ṣāhib al-khiṭāb al-aṣl*), Maryam, the spirit (*al-rūḥ*), the Lord (*al-rabb*), labor (*al-makhād*), the messenger (*al-rasūl*), (a voice) called from beneath or beside her (*fa-nādāha min taḥtīhā*),<sup>18</sup> the trunk of the palm tree (*jidh' al-nakhlati*), and the people (*al-qawm*). Maryam is the subject of the largest number of verbs (17), which shows that the *dhikr* is devoted to her and the main events of her life: separation from her people, withdrawal behind a "veil", fear from the spirit, isolation, pain of labor, vow of silence (*intibādh, ittikhādh al-ḥijāb, isti'ādha bi-r-rahmān, ṣawm li-r-rahmān*). The functions of the subjects are as follows: the spirit appears as a human being/a messenger who will give Maryam a gift of a holy boy (*li-ahaba*) and announces that the Lord will make the child "a sign for people and a mercy from Him". A voice, implied in the text, which calls from "beneath" or "beside" Maryam,

17 There are two readings *li-yahaba* (according to Warsh, Abū 'Amru and Qālūn) and *li-ahaba* (according to the rest of the readers). See Abī 'Amrū 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī, *Kitāb al-tayysīr fī l-qirā'āt al-sab'*, ed. Pretzl (Istanbul, 1930), 146.

18 According to al-Dānī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Āmir, and Abū Bakr, this passage reads "*man taḥtaha*" while the rest of the commentators read "*min taḥtīhā*". See al-Dānī, *Kitāb al-tayysīr*, 148.

comforts her about food and water, reassures her and advises her to take a vow of silence. Finally, the people accuse Maryam of evil and unchaste behavior, when labor takes her to the palm tree.

The Qur'anic rhythmic verse-endings, *al-fawāṣil*, like poetic rhythmic verse endings, *al-qawāfī*, demand similar sounds in the pauses, a device that ensures that the meanings are well understood. *Fawāṣil* in the Qur'an function like *qawāfī* in poetry; they are the form binder that contributes to manifest the unity and the beauty of the text. The Ash'arite theologian Abu Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012–3), unlike the Mu'tazilite theologian 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), refuses to ascribe the term *saj'* (assonance), a term famous in ancient Arabic prose used by soothsayers (*kahāna*), to Qur'anic *fawāṣil*.<sup>19</sup> *Al-fawāṣil* in the *saj'* form are common in the short Meccan suras<sup>20</sup> and they appear as in *-iyyā* in *sharqiyyā*, *sawiyyā*, *taqiyyā*, and *zakiyyā*, providing the rhyme of *yā* in *mamdūda rakhiyya*. Some *fawāṣil* fall as specifiers (*tamyīz*) as in *taqiyyan*, *zakiyyan*, *baghiyyan*; others fall as predicates (*khobar*) such as in *sharqiyyan*, *sariyyan*, 'ayman. Even *nasiyyā*, when associated to God, appears in the form of *fā'īl* instead of *fā'īl*: “*wa-mā kāna rabbuka nasiyyā*” while *ma'tiyyā* in “*wa-kāna wa'dahu ma'tiyyā*” appears in the form of the object instead of the subject (as in *ātiyyā*). *Baghiyyā* is one of two words uttered twice (the other is *ghulāman*), once by Maryam and once by her people. Towards the end, the soft tone of *al-fāṣila* gives way to the hard tone of *dāl mushaddada* such as *madda*, and *hadda*.

Phonological repetition, *al-takrār al-ṣawṭī*, typical of “orally based thought and expression”,<sup>21</sup> appears in the repetition of letters, words and formulaic expressions. In his theory of *naẓm*, al-Jurjānī did not reflect on phonetics, which gives the verses its musical rhythm. Repetition is a Qur'anic technique suitable for the Qur'an's oral and hymnic nature and its development as a recited text.<sup>22</sup> It is also appropriate in view of the “illiteracy” of the recipients who depend on hearing, not reading for acquiring their knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Repetition also brings harmony to the rhythm and assonance and, of course, emphasizes certain meanings in the text. For example, the letter *al-dhāl*, as in the verbs *wa-dhkur* (itself repeated in the formulaic introduction of the accounts of the prophets), *intabadhat*, *ittakhadhat*, *nadharat*, *a'ūdhu*, emphasized the word *dhikr* (the invoking of the memory) and its oral medium. The gender implication of this letter, moreover, accentuates the word *dhurrīyya* (progeny) brought up in the exegetical addition of the Ibrahimic list of seven prophets, and consciously presents the idea of miraculous gifts of male progeny given to Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim. Although the

19 See Angelika Neuwirth, “Ṭarīqat al-Bāqillānī fī i'jāz al-Qur'ān”, in *Festschrift for Ihsān 'Abbās*, (Beirut, 1981), 295.

20 Suras *al-Qamar*, *al-Qadr*, *al-'Asr*, *al-Kawthar*, *al-A'lā*, *al-Layl*, *al-Shams*, *al-Munāfiqūn*, *al-Fīl*, *al-Ikhlāṣ* and *al-Nās*.

21 For the orality of language see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, 1982), 36.

22 See Neuwirth, “Vom Rezitationstext”, 69–105.

23 See Muḥammad Karīm al-Kawwāz, *Kalām Allāh: Al-Jānīb al-shifāhī min az-zāhira al-qur'āniyya*, (Beirut, 2002), 33.

term *dhurīyya* is later introduced in verse fifty-eight and, in view of its length and theological message, is a Medinan addition, the verse falls in agreement with the deliverance of prophetic progeny.

In Maryam's question: "How shall I have a son seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste" (*annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun wa-lam aku baghiyyā*), the letter *sīn* is repeated twice in one verb "yamsasnī", although each *sīn* is vocalized differently, one with *fatha* and the other with *sukūn*. In addition, the letter *ghayn* in *ghulāmun* and *baghiyyā* bonds the two words conceptually and linguistically together.<sup>24</sup> Another repeated letter which influences the narrative tone and brings to it some harmony is the inter-sentential conjunction, *fā' al-ta'qīb*, in *fa-ttakhadhat*, *fa-arsalnā*, *fa-ntabadhat*, *fa-ajā'ahā*, *fa-nādāhā*. This *fā'* recounts the events one after the other by compressing time between announcement, pregnancy and delivery.<sup>25</sup>

The introductory past tense verbs *qāla* or *qālat* are repeated to animate the dialogue, which is central to the story. These technical verbs have already appeared in story-telling from pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas*.<sup>26</sup> Some expressions (*tarkībāt ta'bīriyya*) are repeated with mild changes as in "*ntabadhat min ahlihā makānan sharqīyyā/ fa-ntabadhat bihi makānan qaṣīyyā*", "*mā kāna abūki-mra'a saw'in/wa-mā kānat ummuki baghiyyān*" "*wa-ja'alanī nabiyyān/wa-ja'alanī mubārakan*". Or in the invocation of Yahya "*wa-salāmun 'alayhi yawma wulida wa-yawma yamūtu wa-yawma yub'athu ḥayyā*" paralleled to the invocation by 'Isa "*wa-s-salāmu 'alayya yawma wulidtu wa-yawma amūtu wa-yawma ub'athu ḥayyā*".

At the intertextual-level, there are repeated expressions as in Maryam's question: "*qālat: anna yakūnu lī ghulāmun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun*", which reappears later in Maryam's panorama of her life in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* with a change of the term *ghulām* into *walad*. The prophetic, ready-made formulaic phrases "*idhā qaḍā amran fa-innamā yaqūlu lahu kun fa-yakūn*" (Q 19:35 and 3:47) and "*wa-inna llāha rabbī wa-rabbukum fa'abudūhu hādihā širāṭun mustaqīm*" (Q 19:36 and 3:51) brings the two narratives in *Sūrat Maryam* and *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* to an end. These formulaic endings of suras bring accord between the two stories, the annunciations to Zakariyya and Maryam, and extend the accord to other stories, such as the annunciation to Maryam's mother (the wife of 'Imran) in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*.

There are many rhetorical devices (*adāt bayāniyya*)<sup>27</sup> implemented to create vivid imagery and aesthetic effectiveness on the verbal level. These rhetorical devices,

24 *Ghalima*, the root verb of *ghulām*, and *ghulma* mean "the excessive sexual desire", and the root verb *bagha* of *baghiyyā* means an illicit sexual relationship. See *Lisān al-'arab* (Beirut, 1995), 5:55. See Leila al-Akhayaliyya's poetic verse in Qurṭubī *tafsīr*: "*shafāhā minā al-dā'ī l-'uḍāli l-ladhī bihā ghulāmun idhā hazza l- qanātā sqāhā*" in Qurṭubī's *tafsīr* of the term "*ḥaṣūr*" in Q 3:39, see Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an* (Cairo, 1967), 74.

25 *Fā' al-ta'qīb* does not contain any time signification (*dalāla zamanīyya*). For the philosophy of time in a Qur'anic worldview, see Muḥammad ibn Mūsā Baba 'Ammī, *Mafhūm al-zaman fī 'l-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Beirut, 2000), 23.

26 The dialogue in pre-Islamic mythic poetry also appears in the form of repetitions. See al-Nābigha's ode in al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 312.

27 *Ilm al-bayān* is the branch of Arabic rhetoric that deals with metaphorical language.

like simile (*tashbīh*), metaphor (*isti'āra*), analogy (*tamthīl*) and metonymy (*kināya*) are part of *naẓm*,<sup>28</sup> and are important for their performative representations, expressiveness and their power to raise certain emotions that the narratorial voice is hoping to evoke in his listeners. These artistic devices depict images, representations and meanings in the *thinkable and imagined* of the Arabic “Qur’anic event” communicated by the Prophet Muhammad and his community.<sup>29</sup> The Arabic language is the medium of communication and represents the values, ideals, and hopes to which the messenger and the community aspire. Al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505) said the Arabs considered metaphor more eloquent than the proper telling of the truth (*al-majāz ablagh min al-ḥaqīqa*),<sup>30</sup> and that “the Qur’ān avoids using language which, on hearing, one turns away from, especially if the meaning betrays feelings that are inappropriate to our natural disposition (*tab’*)”.<sup>31</sup> This is why the Qur’an employs “eggs” as metonymy (*kināya*) for women: “delicate eggs closely guarded” (*ka-annahunna bayḍun mahnūn*; Q 37:49), a rhetorical device very popular in pre-Islamic poetry. In Maryam’s bewildered question: “*annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun wa-lam aku baghiyyā*”,<sup>32</sup> the text uses *al-mass* (lit. touching) as metonymy for legitimate sexual intercourse (*al-nikāḥ al-ḥalāl*) as in “*min qabli an tamassūhunna*” (Q 33:49) and “*aw lāmastunu ’n-nnisā’a*” (Q 4:43). Maryam says: “*wa-lam aku baghiyyān*”<sup>33</sup> not “*wa-lam aku baghiyyatan*” (without *tā’ al-ta’nīth*), Zakariyya says: “*wa-kānati mra’atī ’āqiran*” (not *’āqiratan*),<sup>34</sup> and likewise the Arabs say “*imra’a ṭāliq*”,<sup>35</sup> and “*imra’a ḥā’iq*”.<sup>36</sup> The exegete, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), justifies this grammatical irregularity as follows: “When it comes to traits that are specific to women, the feminine *tā’* (*tā’ al-ta’nīth*), is taken out since there is no room for controversy”,<sup>37</sup> clarifying that there is no room for gender controversy. Hence this negation of the feminine *tā’* (*tā’ al-ta’nīth*) is not sexism in language, especially as the Qur’an, in some cases, takes sides with the feminine against the masculine.<sup>38</sup>

A type of rational metonymy, *majāz ‘aqlī*, exists in subjects (*fawā’il*) of concepts or plants, beginning with the labor (*al-makhḥāḍ*) which forces Maryam to withdraw

28 Al-Jurjānī considers these rhetorical devices requisites for the composition of the Qur’an (*naẓm*), stating that these meanings, which are the metaphorical, metonymy and analogy and other rhetorical devices are requisites for *naẓm*, “*wa-dhālika li-anna hadhihi al-ma’ānī allatī hiya al-isti’āra wa-l-kināya wa-l-tamthīl wa-sā’ir ḍurūb al-majāz min ba’dihā min muqtaḍayāt al-naẓm*”, in al-Jurjānī, *Dalā’il al-i’jāz*, 293.

29 The Arabic language as the medium of the “Qur’anic event” represents the values and attitudes of Muhammad and his community.

30 For the early meanings of *majāz* as rhetorical language see Ella Amagor “The Early Meanings of *majāz* and the nature of Abū ‘Ubayda’s exegesis”, in *The Qur’ān and Formative Interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Ashgate, 1999), 263–282.

31 Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāshim al-Sharīf, *Al-Suyūfī wa-juhūdih fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Cairo, 1991), 179.

32 She said: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?”

33 “And I am not unchaste?” (Q 19:20).

34 “But my wife is barren: . . .” (Q 19:5).

35 a divorced woman

36 a menstruating woman

37 See, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Shākir (Beirut, 1978), 45:64.

38 See Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Majīd Dawa, “al-Lughā al-‘arabiyya bayna al-mudhakkar wa-l-mu’annath” (Ph.D. diss., Cairo University, 1992).



to the trunk of the palm tree. This trunk would offer Maryam, in the pangs of labor, something to hold on to and would throw ripe dates to feed her (*tusāqiṭ 'alayki ruṭ aban janiyyān*). The trunk of the tree acts as a subject and is reminiscent of a phase in language when mythic beliefs led to the personification of plants, angels and the gods. When labor takes Maryam to the trunk of the palm tree, Maryam says: “Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!” (*ya laytanī mittu qabla hādhā wa-kuntu nasyan mansiyyā*). *Al-nasī* is the name of sticks, cups or trivialities that the Arabs usually leave behind in the encampments, which they abandoned. Here Maryam is wishing to be something unworthy for remembrance.<sup>39</sup> Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamaksharī says *al-nasī* stands for “what usually is thrown away, like the cloth of menstruation or left over animal sacrifice . . . meaning she had wished she were a triviality often forgotten behind”. It is interesting that al-Zamaksharī related the *nasī* to menstruation, which usually follows childbirth—which is Maryam's situation; “*nasyan mansiyyā*” is a phrase with the same meaning and root as the one preceding it and is repeated for the sake of affirming a psychological effect. Also, the *sīn* in *nasyan mansiyyā* recalls the *sīn* in *yamsasnī basharun* where there is softness in such a repeated letter (*al-suhūla fī kalima takarrara fīhā al-harf nafsuḥu*).

Qarī 'aynan (lit. cool your eyes) is a metaphor for “comforts the self” (*ṭib nafsan*); “*al-qarr*” or “*al-qarra*” is coolness and the Arabs, owing to their hot climate, prefer coolness to warmth. “*Qarra*” is the cold tear of happiness as opposed to the hot tear of sadness. The literal meaning is “May God brings coolness (*qarār*) and comfort to your eyes, when looking at the beloved, until they are content and calm.”<sup>40</sup> In a similar case, at the sight of the newborn Musa, the wife of Pharaoh says to her husband “*qurratu 'aynin lī wa-laka*”,<sup>41</sup> in order to express her happiness at the possibility of adopting the child (Q 28:9). So probably “*qarī 'aynan*”, addressed to Maryam, means “comfort yourself by seeing your newly born infant”.

Foreign words do occur in the Qur'an. Al-Suyūṭī lists the meanings of seventeen “foreign or loan words” (*fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*) in *Sūrat Maryam*, based on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās as transmitted by Ibn Abī Ṭalḥa, a source which al-Bukhārī also depends on in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>42</sup> Concerning al-Suyūṭī's inquiry into foreign languages existing in the Qur'an, modern linguists confirm that Muslim dictionary compilers generally were aware of the relationship between Arabic and other Semitic languages, especially Syriac.<sup>43</sup> This is why, in some Arabized words, we find confusion in translating their meanings by al-Suyūṭī.<sup>44</sup>

39 Ma'mar Abū 'Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, al-Kanjī, 1954), 4. Abū 'Ubayda gives many examples of *al-nissīr* or *al-nasī* from poets like al-Shanfāra, al-Kumayt and al-Fuqaymiyya.

40 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām*, 11:89–108.

41 The wife of Pharaoh said: “(Here is) a joy of the eye, for me and for you.” (Q 28:9).

42 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:5.

43 Ramzi Ba'albali, “Early Arabic lexicographers and the use of Semitic languages”, *Berytus* 31(1983): 11727.

44 Following are some Arabized words which are defined by al-Suyūṭī. His original definitions in Arabic are in parentheses following the English translation. However, some of these meanings are incorrect. *sawiyyā*—a man without fault (*min ghayr khars*); *hanān min ladunnā*—a tenderness as

As to proper names, al-Suyūfī, according to al-Jawālīqī, acknowledges that all the proper names of the prophets (except for Adam, Salih, Shu'ayb and Muhammad) are of non-Arabic origin ('ajamī);<sup>45</sup> he cites from *Sūrat Maryam* Zakariyya, Yahya, 'Isa, Ibrahim, Ishaq, Ya'qub, Musa, Harun, Isma'il and Idris, but he fails to mention Maryam, and in most cases does not note their Semitic origin.<sup>46</sup> An exploration into the origins of the name Maryam is needed.

The etymology of 'Maryam' (Old Testament Miriam) is debatable. While there is no absolute proof that it is of ancient Egyptian origin, there is no absolute certainty that it is of Semitic origin, either.<sup>47</sup> Jewish legend, *Haggadah*, equates Miriam's name with "bitter" (cognate to Arabic *murr*), asserting she was so called in reference to the bondage in Egypt. Some Muslim exegetes suggest the meaning of Maryam to be of the original Hebrew name "girl" or "worshiper" (*jāriya/ābida*).<sup>48</sup> In his study of the etymology of the name Maryam, Michael B. Schubb explains the Hebrew derivation of the name "Miriam" from "bitter" as merely an ad hoc folk etymology and notes that the rational Muslim exegetes did not rely on any *Isrā'īliyyāt* (Jewish sources) but rather invented their own ad hoc solution.<sup>49</sup>

Arthur Jeffrey, the author of a pioneer book on *gharīb mufradāt al-Qur'an* (*The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*), asserts: "Undoubtedly, 'Maryam' goes back to Hebrew, but the vowelizing of the Arabic 'Maryam' would point to its having come from a Christian source (hence Syriac) rather than directly from the Hebrew."<sup>50</sup> The Syriac origin, *maryamo* is a subjective noun (*ism fā'il*) from the verb *romo*, meaning "the high, elevated, supreme" (*al-murtafi'a, al-sāmīya*), coming from the root *r-w-m*, "high place" (*murtafi'*).<sup>51</sup>

from Us (*raḥmatan min 'indanā*); *sariyyā*—rivulet (*'Isā*); *jabbāran shaqiyyā*—arrogant, unprosperous (*aṣṭyyan*); *wa-hjurnī*—forsake me (*ijtanibnī*); *bī- ḥaṣṭyyā'*—is ever gracious (*latīfan*); *lisāna ṣidqin 'aliyyā*—a tongue of truthfulness, sublime (*al-ṭhanā' al-ḥasan*); *ghayyā*—destruction or error (*khusrānan*); *laghwan*—vain talk (*bāṭilan*); *athāthan*—furnishing (*mālan*); *ḍidā*—a might (*a'wānan*); *ta'ūzuhum azzā*—incite them with fury (*taghwiḥim ighwā'an*); *na'uddu lahum 'addā*—count out to them a (limited) number of days (*anfāsahum allatī yatanafasūn fī-d-dunyā*); *wirdā*—thirsty (*iṭāshan*); *'ahdā*—covenant (*shahādat lā ilāha illā Allah*); *iddā'*—a thing most monstrous (*'aẓīman*); *haddā*—in utter ruin (*hadman*); *rikzā*—a voice (*ṣawtan*).

45 Al-Suyūfī, "Fīmā waqa'a fī al-Qur'ān min al-asmā' wal-kināya wal-alqāb", in *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (1997) 4:58–67.

46 One can check the Semitic origin of proper names in Joseph Horowitz, *Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran* (Hildesheim, 1964) and also in Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938). Jeffery's text is also useful for the Semitic (Nabatean, Aramaic, Hebrew, Syriac and Ethiopic) and non-Semitic (especially Coptic) origin of religious vocabulary. Syriac (and Hebrew) religious terms such as *dhihr*, *ḥanānan*, *al-rabb*, *al-Raḥmān*, *ṣalāt*, *zakāt*, *ṣawm* are all discussed by Jeffery (pages 151, 111, 137, 140, 198 153 and 201 respectively).

47 For more details see Alan H. Gardner, "The Egyptian Origin of some English Personal Names", *JAOS* 56 (1936): 194–197.

48 Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, 262.

49 See Schubb, "The Male is not like the Female".

50 Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, 262.

51 For the derivatives of the root *r-w-m* in Syriac, see Louis Costas, *Dictionnaire syriaque-français. Syriac-English Dictionary*. Qāmūs siryānī-'arabī, 2nd edn. (Beirut, 1994), 342.

Maryam is also called by an indirect mode of address, the epithet (*kunya*) “the sister of Harun” (*ukht Harūn*) (Q 19:28), ‘Isa’s mother (*umm ‘Īsā*) (Q 23:50 and 5:17) and “the daughter of Imran” (*ibnat ‘Imrān*) (Q 66:12). The alternating of name-giving or calling Maryam by alluding to a Biblical personality is a typological inference and not a new phenomenon in scriptural literature and the Miriamic tradition.<sup>52</sup> Karla G. Bohmbach argues that some of the many different women named Mary in the New Testament (seven of them) might well have received their names because it was deemed attractive to be associated with and to honor the heroism and leadership of the Miriam of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, al-Suyūṭī, in another entry on foreign languages, “*fīmā waqa‘a bi-ghayri lughāt al-‘arab*”, acknowledges that the Qur’an contains words that come originally from Persian, Greek, Nabatean, Ethiopian, Berber, Syriac, Hebrew and Coptic.<sup>54</sup> In Maryam’s narrative, he notes that “*fa-nādāha min taḥtiḥā allā taḥzanī qad ja‘ala rabbuki taḥtaki sariyyā*” contains foreign vocabulary.<sup>55</sup> This phrase caused confusion in the identity of the person who calls upon Maryam by reading the proposition as *min* (from underneath a place), which would indicate the place where the speaker (an angel or ‘Isa) is situated, that is *from underneath* Maryam; or as *man* (who), indicating the angel or ‘Isa who would be speaking to her from “underneath her” (*taḥtiḥā*). In addition, the phrase contains two words, “*taḥt*” and “*sariyyā*” that are of non-Arabic origin (Semitic and non-Semitic).

## 2.3 Narrative analysis

### 2.3.1 General considerations

Narratives about Christian figures<sup>56</sup> in the Qur’an are few.<sup>57</sup> There is the story of ‘The People of the Cave’ (*aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*) (Q 18:9–31), and the pair stories of

52 See the alternating of names in the introduction by Deirdre Good in *Mariam, the Magdalen and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Indiana, 2005).

53 See Karla G. Bohmbach, “Names and Naming in the Biblical World”, in *Women in Scripture*, ed. Carol Meyers *et al.*, (Cambridge, 2000).

54 See “fī-mā Waqa‘a bi-ghayri lughāt al-‘Arab” in al-Suyūṭī’s *Itqān*, (Beirut, 1997), 2:105. Also, al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Mutawakkilī: fī-mā warada fī’l-Qur‘ān bi-l-lughāt: al-ḥabashiyya wa’l-fārisiyya wa’l-rūmiyya wa’l-hindiyya wa’l-siryāniyya wa’l-‘ibriyya wa’l-nabaṭiyya wa’l-qibṭiyya wa’l-turkiyya wa’l-zinjīyya wa’l-barbariyya*, ed. al-Zubaydī (Beirut, 1988), 8.

55 See *al-Mu‘jam al-jāmi‘ li-gharīb muḥradāt al-Qur‘ān al-karīm: Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Qutayba, Meccī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Abu Ḥayyān*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Sayrawān (Beirut, 1986), 474.

56 Stowasser explains the significance of Qur’anic women as follows: “From the beginning, the women figures signify themselves and also something else. Actors in Qur’anic history, they function as images, or metaphorical extensions, of that historical reality which God revealed to his prophet. Thus their stories are specifically Qur’anic, in the casting of the individual tale and also its larger message.” See Stowasser, *Women in the Qur‘ān*, 82.

57 The story of the brothers of Ephesus, *Ahl al-Kaḥf* (Q 18:9–31), Zakariyya and Yahya (suras 19 and 3), Maryam and ‘Īsā (Q 19:16–33) the wife of ‘Imrān (Q 3:35–36), ‘Īsā and his disciples (*al-ḥawāriyyūn*, Q 3:51–52 and 5:112–123) are the major Christian narratives in the Qur’an. Although Maryam has the major narrative in *Sūrat Maryam*, ‘Īsā does not feature in any narrative in the Meccan suras.

Zakariyya (Q 19:2–16 and 3:36–40) and Maryam (Q 19:17–33 and 3:34–47) and the story of 'Isa and his disciples (*Isa wa'l-hawāriyyīn*) (Q 3:51–52 and 5:112–123). These figures are evoked from the “heavenly book” of “salvation history” and are represented concisely functioning in new scenarios and rhetoric.<sup>58</sup> Maryam, an important Christian figure in the Gospels,<sup>59</sup> appears in a narrative in the second Meccan period, in a reading parallel to the Gospel according to Luke and the infancy Gospel according to the Protevangelium. The appearing of such Christian narratives point to a particular stage in Muhammad's activities, where the element of dialogue emerges in such themes as monotheism and resurrection, and the prophets appear as arguing with their own people.<sup>60</sup>

The story of Maryam,<sup>61</sup> like the stories of “The People of the Cave” (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*) and “The Man of the two Corns” (*Dhu'l-Qarnayn*), is not repeated in other suras of the Qur'an.<sup>62</sup> Another version, however, which is not a story but rather a panoramic view embedded in a theological discourse of Maryam's life, is given in *Sūrat Āl Imrān* (Medinan period); 'Imrān is Maryam's family name, which was given the same status as that of the family of Ibrahim (*Āl Ibrāhīm*). It ranges from her infancy story and her special privileges to the annunciation scene. The repetition of the stories of the prophets in different suras of the Qur'an (like the stories of Adam, Ibrahim and Musa) is a pattern directly associated with “the literary image of the Qur'an as reflecting a text still in progress”.<sup>63</sup> Therefore,

58 Categorization of literary types and motifs in the Qur'an must, with some exception like *Sūrat Yūsuf*, rely on parts of suras rather than suras as wholes. For the first modern attempt to classify all of the major literary types in the Qur'an, see Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London, 1902). His categories include “confirmatory, declamatory, narrative, descriptive, and legislative”, along with “parables, political speeches, and passages on Muhammad's affairs”. Angelika Neuwirth concentrates on the building blocks of the sura “enjeaux” and lists the main types of “enjeaux”, focusing on the main manifestations of the particular elements: Oaths and oath clusters, Eschatological passages, Signs implied in nature and Signs implied in history (retribution legends), Salvation history narratives (occurring as complete suras and central sections), and Debate. See Neuwirth, “Form and Structure”. Modern Muslim scholars do not cover as wide a range of Qur'anic literary types; however, there are many studies on the art of the narrative in the Qur'an. See the pioneer work of Khalaf Allah, *al-Fann al-qaṣaṣī*; al-Ṭarāwna, *Dirāsāt naṣṣiyya*; Nuqra, “Sycholojiyyat”; and al-Bustānī, *Dirāsāt fanniyya*.

59 Also, the Old Testament cites women who were given miraculous offspring for Salvation History: Sāra, the mother of Isaac (Gen 17:15), the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:7–8) and the mother of Samson (Judges 13:2–25) are all barren and cannot hope to bear children. The birth of miraculous children were called for salvation of Israel and as a result of God's mercy to his servants, when God had decreed a plan, He but said to it, “Be” and it is! (1 Sam 2:7–8; Luke 1:38 and Q 2:47) The theology of mercy and miracles continues with the mother of John to reach Mary, the mother of Jesus. For Old Testament women see, Meyers *et al.*, eds., *Women in Scripture*.

60 Nuqra, “Sycholojiyyat”, 92.

61 The Qur'anic stories, with the exception of the story of Joseph (*qiṣṣat Yūsuf*), are considered short accounts (*uqṣāsāt*) since they do not include the usual components of the story. The artistic and psychological effects on the hearers, however, necessitate calling them stories.

62 The stories of Biblical figures like Adam, Ibrahim and Musa are repeated in many suras. See, for example, the story of Musa in *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* (Q 5:23–29), *Sūrat al-A'rāf* (Q 7:103–137), *Sūrat Al-Kahf* (Q 18:60–82), *Sūrat Ṭāha* (Q 20:9–56), *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (Q 28:46–52).

63 Neuwirth, “Form and Structure”, 246.

the quoting of a story (or one sequence of the story) and the different occasions during which Muhammad discussed or responded to the questions of his community are directly related to Muhammad's "communication process" and the emergence of a community.<sup>64</sup> The diversification of the stories within the one sura, as in *Sūrat Maryam*, to serve the same theme, God's gift of miraculous progeny to Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim, is closely associated with the art of Qur'anic story-telling (*lawn min ṭasrīf al-bayān al-Qur'ani wa-taghayyur ashkālīh*). That is, Qur'anic story-telling functions as a means to enforce Muhammad's situation and to increase the impact of his teaching, especially that of monotheistic themes, on his hearers. For example:

Arguments within the story point to the falsehood of the beliefs of the polytheists; and the subject of the story might be about an apostle whom they (Muhammad's audience) recognize and venerate since the disputants claim that they follow him and take him as their leader. Thus, the proof comes from the disputants' own words which make it more attractive as a teaching device and more influential as a psychological tool.<sup>65</sup>

Qur'anic stories thus are exclusively relevant in their didactic function which subdues the narrative to the moralizing element, consequently depriving the prophetic discourse of any "self-sufficient and self-justifying joy in story-telling",<sup>66</sup> as suggested by Jaroslav Stetkevych. This position, however, neglects the oral aspect of the Qur'an, which in recitation makes the stories independent verse units by themselves rather than subordinating them to their polemics. The Qur'an, nonetheless, explicitly justifies the telling of stories with the need to reflect,<sup>67</sup> to instruct men,<sup>68</sup> to present a model figure,<sup>69</sup> to comfort Muhammad,<sup>70</sup> and to confirm his prophecy.<sup>71</sup>

The stories prevailing in the passages of the Qur'an revolve around an "archetype", a "figure";<sup>72</sup> at a later stage, the stories become more sophisticated, staging complex personalities from salvation history. In the Meccan period, the prophet

64 See Nicolai Sinai, "The Qur'an as Process", in *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (Leiden and Boston, 2011).

65 Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *al-Mu'jaza al-kubrā li'l-Qur'ān* (Cairo, n.d.), 375.

66 Stetkevych, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough*, 11.

67 "Perchance they may reflect" (*la'allahum yatafakkarūn*) Q 7:176.

68 "To instruct men endued with understanding" (*'ibra 'l-ūlī 'l-albāb*) Q 12:111.

69 "An example to those who believe" (*mathalan li'l-lladhīna āmanū*) Q 66:11.

70 "To make firm Muḥammad's heart" (*mā nuthabbitu bihi fū'ādaka*) Q 11:120.

71 "This is part of the tidings of things unseen . . . for you were not with them when they cast lots with arrows as to which of them should be charged with the care of Maryam" (*dhālika min anbā'i l-ghaybī nūḥīhi ilayka wa mā kunta ladayhi . . .*) Q 3:44.

72 Frye explains: "Typology as a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process". See Frye, *The Great Code*, 81.

or apostle receives the message from God, calls upon the people to believe in his message, after which they reject him until God intervenes at the end to defend him and punish the disbelievers. The messengers and prophets in these stories, therefore, serve as exemplars for Muhammad and the believers in Mecca as an encouragement to him and his followers in their difficult situations. Hence, Maryam's story is invoked from the memory of the Heavenly Book to portray Maryam's struggle with her people (*qawm*), which runs parallel to the struggle of another figure with his own relatives and clients (*mawālī*), namely Zakariyya, in order to give evidence of divine intervention on the side of the righteous.

### 2.3.2 Maryam versus other female Qur'anic figures

The portrayal of Maryam in the Qur'an is unique in several respects. In addition to being a holy mother figure, whose memory is called in remembrance for the importance of her motherhood of 'Isa (the Word of God, 'Isa the Messiah), she is also the female who stands for the importance of fertility to the Arabs. Barbara Stowasser confirms the role that Maryam and other Qur'anic women have: "Women figures associated with the Qur'anic prophets from Adam to Jesus are a living part of the Qur'anic worldview, and their lessons are powerful teaching devices for the community of Muhammad."<sup>73</sup> Short accounts exist for the mother of Musa (Q 28:7) and the wife of 'Imran (Q 3:35), but these women do not have stories nor do they act independently, let alone undertake a journey (*riḥla*) through the wilderness by themselves. Further, almost all Qur'anic women figures, including "the wife of Adam" (*zawjuka*, Q 7:19 and Q 20:117), "the woman of Ibrahim" (*imra'atuhu*, Q 11: 71), "the mother of Musa" (*umm Mūsā*, Q 28:7), "the woman of Potiphar" (*imra'atu'l'Azīz*, Q 12: 30 and 51), "the woman who rules over them" (*imra'atan tamlikuhum*, Q 27:20–40) and also "the daughters of Midian" (*imra'atayni*, Q 28:23) are known exclusively by their epithets. These women are named in relation to their marital, maternal and filial belonging or, in the case of Queen of Sheba, to her government status as "the woman who rules over them" (Q 27:23). These husbands, sons or fathers have the power of naming, and these associated women are not identified as individuals.

There is a group of good female figures (Maryam and the woman of Pharaoh) and also a group of evil female figures (the woman of Noah and the woman of Lot);<sup>74</sup> these are presented as paradigms, but there is never a demonic maternal figure. Also, women figures related to the household of Muhammad and the early Muslim community are mentioned by their descriptive tag: "the one who disputed with you" (*al-mujādila* Q 58), or "the one who swore allegiance to Islam" (*al-mumtahana* Q 60), or "your wives" (*azwājika* Q 66:1).

In the whole Qur'an, Maryam is the only woman referred to by her proper name. She is known for her own person and is called upon on many occasions by her

73 See part I of Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 3.

74 See chapter three of Stowasser's *Women in the Qur'an*, 39.

personal name: “*Yā Maryamu*”,<sup>75</sup> she is often addressed as “the mother of ‘Isa” (*umm ‘Īsā*) and also referred to as “the sister of Harun” (Q 19:29) and later as “the daughter of ‘Imran” (Q 3:31 66:12).

The etymology of the name “Maryam” has been presented above and, in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*, we shall see how her mother, “the wife of ‘Imran”, makes a speech to announce the naming of her daughter Maryam. In Maryam’s story, ‘Isa’s name does not appear before the exegetical addition (Q 19:34–36), and neither God’s messenger nor the people who accuse Maryam of slander are identified.<sup>76</sup>

Why does the Qur’an give Adam a name and the power of naming,<sup>77</sup> while omitting the name of Eve, Adam’s wife, or the names of the wives of the patriarchs or the name of the Queen of Sheba? The issue of unnamings in general is directly related to the relationship between knowledge and power, “so when one is not called by his name this person becomes unknown, and we are hesitant to approach this person, while by naming the person, he does not remain simply an idea or a thought, but one comes into existence so that his name even surpasses the named”.<sup>78</sup> But in light of the position that God undertakes in the Qur’an regarding the ethical responsibility that was allotted equally to Adam and his wife (*Ḥawwā*), this issue of unnamings deserves reconsideration.<sup>79</sup> The namelessness of individuals is not restricted to female figures. Male figures also remain unidentified. Namelessness is more acute among Qur’anic figures contemporary with Muhammad.<sup>80</sup> Unnaming even extends to Muhammad’s companions, his wives and his community of believers or disbelievers. The Qur’an appears more keen on hiding details of factual history, from this period, perhaps to emphasize Islam’s religious message or to protect the innocent.<sup>81</sup>

75 Q 19:27 and Q 3:37, 42–43, and 45.

76 Although not specifically named in this sura, it is traditionally believed that the messenger was the angel Jibril. The name *Jibrīl* appears in only two suras in the Qur’an: *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q 2:97–98) and *Sūrat al-Tahrim* (Q 66:4).

77 See Q 2:31.

78 Adonis, *al-Naṣṣ al-qur’ānī wa-āfāq al-kitāba* (Beirut, 1993), 75.

79 The Qur’anic narratives on Ādam and his wife do not imply that Eve is responsible for the fall of humanity; thus, there is nothing equivalent to the Christian doctrine of the Immaculate Conception which was originally initiated to dissociate Maryam from the “original sin of Eve” which was in accordance with the biblical story.

80 Muhammad is mentioned by name only four times (Q 3:144, 33:40, 47: 21 and 48:29), Zayd (Muhammad’s stepson) is mentioned once. Not one of the companions are named, like Abu Bakr or Umar.

81 On the Qur’an’s disinterest in history, Fred Donner explains the following: “The purpose of stories in the Qur’an, then, is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel’s history, the former to illustrate—again and again—how the true believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, Qur’anic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil. . . . (The Qur’ān) is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets or peoples before Muḥammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the Qur’anic view the identity of the community to which Muḥammad was sent is not historically determined, but morally determined.” See Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing* (New Jersey, 1988), 84.

### 2.3.3 Narrative components

In the previous section, Maryam was identified in contrast to other Qur'anic women figures that neither have stories of their own, nor take part in dialogue as major interlocutors. Maryam is allowed all this; she has a story of her own and she is part of the dialogue that forms an important element of Qur'anic story-telling. In the following section on narrative components, a distinction is made regarding the speakers, the chronological order of events, and the setting and motifs, which eventually leads to understanding the different components of the narrative.

The tale text (*al-matn al-hikāṭ*) of Maryam's story is narrated by many voices including the first narrator's voice (*ṣāhib al-khiṭāb al-aṣl* or *al-ṣawṭ al-sardī*), the unnamed spirit/messenger (*rūḥanā/rasūl*), the Lord (*al-rabb*), Maryam, 'Isa, and people (*al-qawm*). Generally speaking, the Qur'an is cast mainly in the form of God addressing Muhammad and not of Muhammad addressing his fellowmen directly, though he is constantly ordered to convey a message to them. In Zakariyya's story at the beginning of *Sūrat Maryam*, Zakariyya converses privately with God but the narratorial voice creates a barrier between them: "He said: So (it will be): Your Lord said." In Maryam's story, God's speech appears emphasized in the first magisterial plural: "We sent to her our spirit" (*fa-arsalnā ilayhā rūḥanā*), but God only alludes to Maryam's story and does not speak to her. From the beginning, it is clear that God's messenger announces the good news to Maryam as he previously had announced the good news to Zakariyya: "He said: So [it will be]: Your Lord said:" (*kadhālika/i qāla rabbuka huwa 'alayya hayyinun*, Q 19:9 and 21). "This question of who speaks and who is addressed, that is, of the dramatic form, is worthy of consideration",<sup>82</sup> bearing in mind that in Maryam's story the narratorial voice allows the same space for the protagonists as for Himself, in order for them to express themselves in dialogue. This is done by means of a smooth shift between narration and dialogue, which means that there is a pleasant feeling about the narration!

Maryam's story starts with her withdrawal to a remote place and ends with 'Isa's birth and his speaking from the cradle.<sup>83</sup> Three events take place during Maryam's journey: the appearance of the spirit or messenger of God in the shape of a man; the falling of the ripe dates from the palm tree; and the birth of 'Isa, along with Maryam's presentation of the infant to her people on her way back from the journey. Maryam responds to the first event by denying "the man" his presence: She said, "I seek refuge from you in God" (*qālat: innī a'ūdhu bi-r-rahmāni minka in kunta taqiyyā*) and to the second event, by wishing to pass away: "She cried [in her anguish]: Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" (*qālat: yā laytanī mittu qabla hādhā wa-kuntu nasyan mansiyyā*). And to the third event by way of assumption (*'alā al-taqdīr*) in shaking the trunk of the palm tree, eating and drinking and then leaving the place with her newborn. The people respond to these events by accusing Maryam

82 See Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 65.

83 I am indebted to al-Bustānī's framework of narrative analysis in *Dirāsāt fanniyya*, 339–348.



of adultery: They said: “O sister of Harun! Your father was not a man of evil, nor your mother a woman unchaste” (*qālū: yā Maryamu laqad ji'ti shay'an fariyyā; yā ukhta Hārūna mā kāna abūki mra'a saw'in wa-mā kānat ummuki baghiyyā*). There are three individual protagonists, Maryam, the messenger and 'Isa, and one group protagonist, the people. The individual protagonists belong to the realm of the sacred or the miraculous and divine: Maryam encounters the miraculous and she is impregnated by God's spirit; the spirit is God's messenger, and 'Isa is a prophet who speaks from the cradle. The setting is one of isolation for Maryam, who withdraws towards the east (*makānan sharqīyyān*) and then to a remote place (*makānan qaṣīyyan*) to deliver. Both places represent withdrawal from the people in social terms, and aridness in symbolic terms. The places, however, are potentially fruitful: the trunk of the palm tree turns fruitful, the rivulet provides water and Maryam experiences her fecundity; she delivers a holy son. This is suggested by the term *ghulām*<sup>84</sup> (boy), which emerges twice in the story of Maryam and indirectly emphasizes the fertile power of the female. Therefore, the withdrawal from the world of people to the world of the miraculous leads eventually to an unexpected impregnation and unlimited satisfaction.<sup>85</sup> In contrasting the barren setting with the divine power of fertility, Muhammad is perhaps unconsciously hoping for divine intervention and for his birth as a prophet. In verse ninety-seven, the verb *tubashshir* (to give glad tidings), which is also a reference to the annunciation story (*al-bishāra*) to Zakariyya and Maryam of the coming of male progeny, is used for the announcement of the Qur'an to the righteous (*al-muttaqīn*): “So have We made the (Qur'an) easy in your own tongue that with it you may give glad tidings to the righteous, and warnings to people given to contention” (*fa-innamā yassarnāhu bi-lisānika li-tubashshira bihi l-muttaqīna wa-tundhira bihi qawman luddā*).

## 2.4 The motif, as an analytical component

The al-kitāb-generated narrative, invoking Maryam's memory from the “heavenly book”, consists of many literary motifs, which together form the thread that unites the two components of the story-telling: narration and dialogue. The motif, according to Vladimir Propp, author of *Morphology of the Folktale*,<sup>86</sup> is different from “subject” or “theme” in its details and repetitive image. Therefore, the use of the motif, as an analytical component of the tale, uncovers the retelling of the story and its transformation from one tradition to the other and, thus, the motif is “a part [that] is more primary for description than the whole”.<sup>87</sup> There may be more motifs than is suggested in this section, but we will discuss only those motifs that are already familiar from Christian tradition and Arabic poetic tradition. These

84 the root *gh-l-m* means the craving of sexual desire

85 Al-Bustāni, *Dirāsāt Fanniyya*, 344.

86 Since Maryam's story belongs to oral tradition, it can be studied also as a folktale and can be studied scientifically according to Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*.

87 Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 13.

motifs will be studied in light of Christian scriptural and apocryphal literature that the “heavenly book” seems to be invoking in Arabic, and in a new scenario and a new function for Muhammad and his emerging community.

#### 2.4.1 *The first motif: The annunciation*

This “heavenly book” generated narrative, invoking Maryam the mother of ‘Isa from the Christian memory of “salvation history”, revolves around three major motifs. The first is that of the annunciation (*al-bishāra*) of the miraculous birth of a holy son. “God’s spirit was sent to her (Maryam) (*fa-arsalnā ilyahā rūḥanā*) to pronounce: ‘I am only a messenger from your Lord, to announce to you the gift of a holy son’” (*qāla: innamā anā rasūlu rabbiki li-ahaba laki ghulāman zakīyyā*).<sup>88</sup> This motif of miraculous childbirth, the male impregnating spirit descending upon the female virgin, who becomes pregnant with a future hero, is an old motif from the Song of Songs<sup>89</sup> and the New Testament (Luke 1:28–35). The Qur’an equally admits God’s spirit impregnating the virgin, but the spirit appears to Maryam as a man without fault (*fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawīyyā*); perhaps by introducing God’s spirit incarnated in a man, the Qur’an is alluding to a union between the male and the female,<sup>90</sup> which is part of a demythologizing process that scripture seems to be credited with.<sup>91</sup> Zakariyya, on the other hand, whose narrative precedes and intertwines with Maryam’s narrative thematically and stylistically, receives the annunciation from God, but God’s spirit or messenger, does not appear to him. God’s spirit appearing to the female, in the image of a human that causes the virgin to become pregnant, is special to Maryam.

#### 2.4.2 *The second motif: Fertility*

When Maryam withdraws to a distant place to give birth, her labor pain brings her to the trunk of the palm tree “*fa-ajā’ahā l-makhādu ilā jidh’i n-nakhlati*”; Maryam’s labor pain drives her to wish that she was dead and in oblivion (*yā laytanī mittu qabla hādhā wa-kuntu nasyan mansīyyā*).<sup>92</sup> At this instant, “the one beneath

88 Interestingly, the verb *bushshira* (to announce the good news of the coming of a child) is also associated with the coming of a daughter “*wa-idhā bushshira aḥaduhum bi’l-unthā*” and it is a beautiful reflection on those who feel ashamed at the good news of the birth of a baby girl (Q 16:58–59 and 81:9).

89 “The bride of the Song of Songs is also the Virgin who is impregnated by the Holy Spirit, the wind blowing over the enclosed garden (Song of Songs 4:12–16; *hortus conclusus* in the Vulgate) which is the body of the Virgin”. See Frye, *The Great Code*, 155–156.

90 Muslim exegetes, al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Tha’labī, tend to use verbs “*nafakha*” (blow) and “*walaja*” (enter) and “*farj*” (metonymically female sexual organ) that denote a ritual of sacred sexual interaction between Maryam and the Angel *Jibrīl* (Gabriel). See Turkī al-Rabī’u, “Al-Jins al-muqaddas fī’l al-mythologiyya al-Islamiyya”, *Mawāqif*, 73–74 (1993–4): 104.

91 See Angelika Neuwirth “Myths and Legends” in *EQ* 3 (2003): 478.

92 Most Muslim classical exegetes interpret Maryam’s wish to die as an expression of guilt for having delivered her son—because she is unmarried and without doubt a chaste woman—but I am more inclined to interpret her words, at the textual level, because of the sequence of the sentence before, as an expression of labor-pain.

or beside her” calls her to comfort her about water whilst she is advised to shake the trunk of the palm tree; the effort on her part would result in the dropping of ripe dates for her to eat, and the rivulet underneath her giving her water to drink. This image of the female, the tree, and the rivulet makes up one of the oldest images of fertility. This image, as Northrop Frye points out, is common to all cultures and civilizations and the association between garden and female runs throughout literature.<sup>93</sup> Suleiman Mourad also points out that “the association of the palm tree with divine persons is not unique to Maryam and ‘Isa’”;<sup>94</sup> even in Greek mythology one finds the palm tree associated with Leto’s labor and the birth of Apollo.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes the tree is a sycamore tree, as in the beautiful mural painting in the tomb of Si-Amun in the oasis of Siwa (in the western desert of Egypt), which dates back to the third century BC. This mural painting depicts the goddess Nut beside a sycamore tree, holding a tray with offerings of bread and incense in her right hand, while pouring water from a vase into a pond with her left hand. Between the two streams of water is a chain of the “signs of life”.<sup>96</sup> Whether the female changes from Leto to Maryam or the tree changes from a sycamore to a palm, it remains a fact that the fertility image associates the female with the tree and water. Thus, it is not important to find, as Stephen Shoemaker proposes,<sup>97</sup> an origin to the Qur’anic story of Maryam’s encounter with the palm tree and the rivulet. What is of importance is to see the way in which old motifs are reworked in a new language (Arabic) and scenario to release a new signification.

In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (composed in the late sixth or early seventh century),<sup>98</sup> Mary mother of Jesus is depicted with the palm tree, in the context of “Joseph’s escape with Mary and the infant through the desert to Egypt”.<sup>99</sup> The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew was composed at a date too late to have had an impact on the Qur’anic text, and it was originally composed in Latin. Yet it relies on earlier sources for many infancy traditions, including the story of Mary and the palm. In the Gospel, the infant Jesus tells the palm tree “to bend its trunk and feed

93 See “Garden”, “Eden” and “Female” in Northrop Frye, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of The Bible and Literature* (Toronto, 1990).

94 Suleiman Mourad suggests a hypothesis for the Greek myth of Leto’s labor and the birth of Apollo as the source for both texts, the Qur’an and Pseudo-Matthew. See “From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm Tree Story concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur’an”, *Oriens Christianus* 86(2002): 206–216.

95 The veneration for that palm tree derives from the legend describing Leto sitting by its trunk while in labor for the twins Apollo and Artemis.

96 See this beautiful mural in Ahmad Fakhry, *Siwa* (Cairo, 1973), 195.

97 See Stephen Shoemaker, “Christians in the Qur’an: The Qur’anic Account of Jesus’ Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition”, *JSAI* (2003): 11–39. Stephen Shoemaker unsuccessfully tries to find historical evidence to a literary motif maybe to deprive the Qur’an of any capacity for literary creativity and certainly because he is trying to argue for a late Qur’an compilation to be in line with Wansbrough’s hypothesis in Qur’anic Studies.

98 For the dating of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew see Mourad, “From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam”, 207.

99 The stories are in the Gospel known as “Pseudo-Matthew”, see “Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew” in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. M.R. James (Oxford, 1980), 75. See also al-Anājīl *al-manḥūla*, trans. Iskandar Shdīd (Lebanon, 2004), 100.

[his] mother with [its] fruit". A spring gushes forth and Joseph, Mary and Jesus rejoice and drink from it. The similarity between the narrative of Pseudo-Matthew and the narrative of the Qur'an is indisputable; however, there is a diversion in the Qur'anic scenario of Maryam's story. In the Qur'anic story, Maryam takes the journey to the wilderness alone, without the company of Yusuf; and the journey is associated with the event of the nativity of 'Isa. The event of childbirth brings about the fruitful date tree and the water spring. Also, the dropping down of ripe dates from the tree to feed Maryam (*tusāqit 'alayki ruṭaban janiyyā*) resonates with the descending of God's spirit to impregnate Maryam and the descending of a table for 'Isa to feed his disciples and to serve as a sign for them (Q 5:112–114).<sup>100</sup> Thus Maryam's palm tree is the miraculous tool that assists her throughout the labor of childbirth in the wilderness, just as other miraculous tools, such as Solomon's hoopoe (*hudhud Sulaymān*), Musa's stick (*'aṣā Mūsā*), 'Isa's table (*mā'dat 'Īsā*) and Saleh's she-camel (*nāqat Ṣāleḥ*), all assist these male prophets. In addition, the image of Maryam shaking the trunk of the palm tree to feed herself forms one of the pictorial elements of Maryam's story (*taṣwīr mashhadī li-qīṣṣat Maryam*) and subsequently became the subject of iconography in the Islamic art of the book.<sup>101</sup>

Maryam's journey through the wilderness is not explicitly indicated in the Qur'an as the anecdote of her flight into Egypt. Before assuming the destination is Egypt, as we are told by the author of Pseudo-Matthew, it is necessary to investigate some terms that Muslim exegetes have identified as loan words and which the Qur'an seems to employ as signposts. The word "rivulet" in Maryam's story is *sarī*, cognate to *sharī*, the term originally from Coptic which means in old Egyptian "the water of the red sea or a pool".<sup>102</sup> In the same phrase *fā-nādāhā min*<sup>103</sup> *taḥtīhā allā taḥzanī qad ja'ala rabbuki taḥtaki sariyyā* (Q 19:24), al-Suyūṭī explains<sup>104</sup> that "*taḥt*" was considered by Abū al-Qāsīm in his *Lughāt*

100 This old image of a descending Godly spirit or sustenance from heaven can be interpreted according to H.T. Norris as: "Here, in the Qur'an there is a clear evidence to suggest that the Prophet was aware of the importance, if not the exact function, of the rites of the Eucharist in Eastern Christianity". See H.T. Norris, "Qīṣṣ Elements in the Qur'an", in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, eds. A.F.L. Beeston et al., (Cambridge, 1983), 225.

101 The image of Maryam shaking the trunk of the palm tree has become the subject of miniature painting in Persian Islamic art of the fourteenth century onwards. See *Qīṣṣ al-anbiyā'* (Chester Beatty, folio 225) which reflects the Ṣafavid style of the sixteenth century. See also Tharwat 'Akāsha, *Al-taṣwīr al-islāmī: al-dīnī wa-l-'arabī* (Beirut, 1977), 156.

102 "Sarī" has no relation to Syriac, however, *sarīn* Arabic is cognate to the word *sharī* in Coptic, written as *waps* and means "the Red Sea" or "Egyptian water plant". See, W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1979), 584. The author Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum* vol. IV chap. 9 mentions the word *sarī*. See Henrico Tattam, *Coptic-Latin Lexico* (Beirut, 1991), 580.

103 Muslim scholars seem to confuse the reading of *min* with *man*. See al-Allūsī's relating according to Mujāhid, Wahāb, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Zayd and Jubbār and al-Ṭabarī after al-Ḥasan that it was read by al-Abnān, 'Āṣim, al-Ḥajdarī, and according to two related *khābars* by Ibn 'Abbās and al-Ḥasan "*man taḥtahā bi-faḥ al-mīm bi-mā'nā alladhī fā'ala nādā'*". See Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī taṣwīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm wa-l-sab' al-mathānī*, ed. 'Alī 'Abd al-Bārī 'Aṭīyya (Beirut, 1994), 8:401.

104 See al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Mutawakkilī*, 4n143.

*al-Qur'ān* and by al-Kirmani in his *al-'Ajā'ib* to be of Nabatean origin. One of the meanings of the word *taht* in Nabatean, is belly (*batn*).<sup>105</sup> This may suggest that the identity of the caller (*al-munādī*) is 'Isa who speaks to his mother from *within* her. Given that it is not unheard of in old Egyptian for a fetus king to speak from within his mother before birth this verse may well indicate that 'Isa is the speaker, not the Angel. The Protevangelium of James reads: "And they came to the midst of the way, and Mary said unto him: Take me down from the ass, for that which is within me presseth me, to come forth."<sup>106</sup> This may suggest that the Qur'an refers to the Protevangelium version of Christ's birth and indirectly to the story of Mary's flight into Egypt, recorded in Chapter Two of the Gospel according to Matthew and the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.<sup>107</sup> Although the Protevangelium of James and Psuedo-Matthew are the best possible versions of the two separate events—the flight into Egypt and Maryam's encounter with the palm tree and the rivulet—these two versions do not associate the two events with the story of 'Isa's birth.<sup>108</sup> The Qur'an places the events of the nativity of 'Isa in a setting of nature's symbols of rejuvenation not because the Qur'an wants to alter the original Christian motif<sup>109</sup> but certainly the Qur'an wants to associate female fertility with earthly fertility, which forms a very important image for celebrating female fecundity and the power of the maternal. Feminist criticism would object to this old image of associating the female with fertility images because it limits the female in her fertility role, and always draws her to the picture of the environment of nature to emphasize female "essence". The next chapter on the family of Maryam (*Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*) will discuss the image of the female in the social and the sacred through the issue of Maryam's entry into the temple (*al-mihrāb*).

#### 2.4.3 *The third motif: The removal of some stain from the Virgin*

When Maryam comes to her people carrying her newborn with her, her people address her as "the sister of Harun" and accuse her of being both evil and unchaste. They said: "Oh sister of Harun your father was not a man of evil, nor your mother a woman

105 In Nabatean "*taht*" means "below" but there is a secondary meaning from the actual situation of inscription or coffin or sacrophagus if you indicate "the one beneath", it means "the one within". See Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North West Semitic Inscriptions*, (Brill, 1995), 11:1209–1210.

106 See "The Book of James, or Protevangelium", in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. Montague Rhodes James (Oxford, 1980), 46.

107 Andrew Rippin understands it as deception: "perhaps Coptic played a cultural role as a language of deception for Arabic speakers; there may well be a larger imagination behind this that pictures Copts as deceptive in their dealings with Muslims and twisting the Arabic language to their own advantage". See Andrew Rippin, "The designation of 'foreign' languages in the Exegesis of the Qur'an", in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, the proceedings of the conference *With Reverence for the Word* held at U of T, May 17, 1997 (Oxford, 2003): 441.

108 The setting of the birth stay of 'Isa, underneath the palm tree and underneath (or beside) the river, is *par excellence* a "fertility motif" setting..

109 As proposed by Shoemaker, see Shoemaker, "Christians in the Qur'an", 18.

unchaste”, (*yā ukhta Hārūna mā kāna abūki mra'a saw'in wa-mā kānat ummuki baghiyyā*). On the one hand, Christian commentators on the Qur'an<sup>110</sup> are critical of the soubriquet “the sister of Harun”, “which links” a period of one thousand five hundred years between Maryam the mother of 'Isa, and Miriam the sister of Aaron and Moses. On the other hand, Muslim commentators appeal to the explanation that Arabs prefer calling themselves by their epithet (*kunya*) rather than by their proper name (*ism*); by calling Maryam “the sister of Harun”, they are implying that Maryam comes from the genealogy of Aaron, not that she is his direct sister.<sup>111</sup> Northrop Frye proposes an alternative to either Christian or Muslim ad hoc solutions, contending that “from the purely typological point of view from which the Qur'ān is speaking, the identification between Maryam and Miriam makes good sense”.<sup>112</sup> We can easily elaborate on this typology since Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, first appeared by name in the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20–21) and was called “the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister”. “Though the meaning of the term prophet is here indeterminate, Miriam is the first woman ever to bear it. She becomes thereby the archetype of the female prophetic tradition, just as Moses heads the male (compare Deut 34:10).”<sup>113</sup> Moreover, Aaron is designated, in *Sūrat Maryam* as the “the brother of Musa and a prophet” (Q 19:53),<sup>114</sup> in conformity with the Hebrew text of Exodus 7:1. Thus, by referring to “the sister of Harun” (Miriam) who is the archetype of the female prophetic abilities, the Qur'an seems to suggest that Maryam signifies Miriamic traits of prophetic vision. Also, the connection between the Hebrew prophet Miriam and the Qur'anic mother of 'Isa is not unique to the Qur'an, as Mary Foskett contends, “from the very first, we know her name—Maryam, or Mariam, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Miriam. Thus, the Lukan mother of 'Isa carries the name of the first woman prophet of the Jewish and Christian scriptures.”<sup>115</sup> Also, in the extra-canonical lore, in the Protevangelium of James one passage alone calls 'Isa's mother “Miriam”,<sup>116</sup> and “the alternate forms of the name continue as late as the eleventh and twelfth century to indicate prophetic activity”.<sup>117</sup>

110 From Yūhannā al-Dimashqī in his *De Haeresibus* to Mishāl al-Hāyik in *al-Masīh fi l-Islām*, this calling of Mary in the Qur'an as “the sister of Harun” was criticized. See Mishāl al-Hāyik, *al-Masīh fi l-Islām* (Beirut, 1961), 70. See also 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Defense du coran ses Cirtiques*, trans. Kamal Jād Allah as *Difā' 'an al-Qur'ān 'al-dīd muntaqidih* (Cairo, 1997), 152.

111 See Michael Marx, “Glimpses of Mariology in the Qur'an: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate,” in *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (Leiden and Boston, 2011), 533–563.

112 Frye, *The Great Code*, 172.

113 See Tribble, “Miriam 1”, 127.

114 Q 19:53 “And, out of Our Mercy, We gave him his brother Aaron, a prophet” (*wa-wahabnā lahū min raḥmatinā akhāhu Hārūna nabiyyā*).

115 See Mary F. Foskett, “Miriam/Mariam/Maria: Literary Genealogy and the Genesis of Mary in the Protevangelium of James”, in *Mariam the Magdalen and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Indiana, 2005), 64.

116 See the “Protevangelium of James” 17:1–2.

117 The prophetic role of Mary as a composite figure with different traits, cf. Luke 1–2, in addition to prophetic vision, is discussed by Deirdre Good, “The Miriamic Secret”, in *Mariam the Magdalen and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good, (Indiana, 2005), 3–24.

When Maryam's people doubt her virtue and integrity, Maryam points to the child as a sign that he will be talking on her behalf.<sup>118</sup> Soon 'Isa speaks in the cradle, as a miraculous sign of his mother's innocence, saying that he is a blessed prophet and a servant of God, who commands him to observe prayers and alms-giving and filial duty to his mother. Like Yahya, who is dutiful to both his parents (*wa-barran bi-wālidayhi*), 'Isa is dutiful to his single parent (*wa-barran bī wālidati*), his mother. In the encounter between Maryam and her people, the Qur'an thus takes sides with the virgin against her slanderers, which implies the removal of some stain from Maryam, reverberating as an old motif from the Old and New Testaments. "Tamar is accused of adultery and narrowly escapes death by fire, Susanna is successfully defended by Daniel against the slanders of the elders, and a similar theme lurks in the background of the Virgin Birth (Matthew 1:19)."<sup>119</sup>

Accordingly, the three old motifs of "the angelic annunciation to the virgin and the miraculous birth of a male child", "the image of fertility or associating the female with the fruitful palm tree and water of gardens", and "the removal of some stain from the virgin to defend her against her slanderers" are not new motifs. They exist in Near Eastern culture in artistic (Egyptian and Byzantine)<sup>120</sup> and narrative forms, from the Old Testament, the New Testament (especially the Gospel according to Luke), and the linguistically diverse Infancy Gospels (Protevangelium of James and Pseudo-Matthew). The motifs are reworked in the sequence of events of the story to function for a new scenario that reflects Muhammad and his community's general concerns.

## 2.5 The function of the main protagonist

### 2.5.1 *Maryam and the power of dialogue*

The new scenario that the Qur'an improvises, by linking Maryam's encounter with the palm and the rivulet with 'Isa's birth, is not the only addition to the original Christian motifs. Maryam plays a crucial role in dialogue; she interacts with other interlocutors in a style that is embodied by the development of the story, and by the psychological and social structure of those who speak Arabic.<sup>121</sup> For example, the use of dialogue as an artistic tool of story-telling is developed to draw char-

118 'Isa speaking in the cradle is found only in the "Arabic Infancy Gospel", which is probably not known before the sixth century.

119 Frye, *Words with Power*, 213.

120 One example is given, from the Egyptian relief (third century BC) of the Goddess Nut in the tomb of Si Amūn in Siwa; see, also, the Byzantine mosaic of the female saints and the virgin in the church of S. Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna. Procession of female saints standing under palm trees with dates, is set up about AD 560 as part of the mosaic decoration of the church of S. Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna. The Procession moves from a depiction of the city of Classis to an enthroned figure of the Virgin, and is headed by the three Magi. See David Talbot Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era* (London, 1963) 50.

121 For the Qur'ān's influence on Arabic poetics, see Adonis, *An Introduction to Arabic Poetics*, 37.

acters and represent their position at some point in the events of the story. The portrayal of such characters as Maryam and her people, through dialogue, makes it the best and only tool for self and group expression. In the dialogue between the protagonist Maryam and the Angel, and between Maryam and her people, Arab character and propriety are revealed in the type of phrases and expressions uttered by the interlocutors. For example, when Maryam seeks God's refuge against the messenger, who appears as a man without fault, she says: "*a'ūdhu bi-r-rahmāni minka*" (I seek refuge from you [to God], Q 19:18), which is a typical Arabic exclamation of opposition or surprise. When the pain of childbirth drives Maryam to the trunk of the palm tree, she utters her own death wish as an expression of self-pity and anguish: "*yā laytanī mittu qabla hadhā wa-kuntu nasyan mansiyā*" (Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight, Q 19:23). This self-inflicted ill wish brings to mind an old and established literary tradition of male and female poets in grief,<sup>122</sup> among them the famous pre-Islamic poet al-Khansa', who is known for the elegy of her two deceased brothers: "Ah! would that my mother did not bear me in the shape of all respects/and I were sand in the hands of midwives" (*alā layta ummī lam talidnī sawiyyatan wa-kuntu turāban bayna aydī'l-qawābili*).<sup>123</sup>

In addition, the Qur'an portrays other cases of women involved in dialogue with other interlocutors who are a good example of the acceptable space of women within the domain of the sacred and its medium of "words with power". The queen of Saba, a ruler enjoying great wealth and dignity and the full confidence of her subjects, does nothing without consulting her government body or council when she has to respond to Sulayman's letter. She said: "Ye council! Advise me in (this) my affair: no affair have I decided except in your presence," and she said "Kings, when they enter a country, despoil it, and make the noblest of its people its meanest thus do they behave." (*qālat: yā ayyuhā 'l-mala'ū aftūnī fī amrī mā kuntu qāti'atan amrān hattā tashhadūni; . . . qālāt: inna'l-mulūka idhā dakhālū qaryatan afsadūhā wa ja'alū 'izzata ahlihā adhillatan wa-kadhālika yaf'alūn.*)<sup>124</sup>

One of "the daughters of Midian" converses with her father frankly on her admiration of Musa. She said: "O my dear father! Engage him in wages: truly the best of men for you to employ is the (man) who is strong and trustworthy." (*qālat ihdāhumā: yā abati 'sta'jirhu inna khayra mani'sta'jarta'l-qawiyū'l-'amīn.*)<sup>125</sup>

Then God Himself *listened* to the unnamed woman's words of complaint, who continuously disputed with Muhammad (*al-mujādila*) regarding the abolishment of a pre-Islamic way of divorcing women (*al-zihār*): "God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who disputes with you concerning her husband and

122 The famous elegies in pre-Islamic poetry were characteristic of women's poetry. Among famous women poets of marāthī are Asmā', the sister of Kulayb, and Jafila, the wife of Kulayb; see Marāthī shawā'ir al-'arab in, Shaykho, *Riyāḍ al-adab fī-marāthī shawā'ir al-'arab*, (Beirut, 1897).

123 'Āisha 'Abd al-Rahmān [Bint al-Shāṭī], *al-Khansā'* (Beirut, 1957), 89.

124 Q 27:29–44.

125 Q 28:26–28.



carries her complaint to God . . ." (*qad sami'a 'llāhu qawla'l-latī tujādiluka fi zawjihā wa tashtakī ilā'llāhi wa'llāhu yasma'u taḥāwurakumā . . .*).<sup>126</sup>

Therefore, dialogue with women generally, and with Maryam specifically, portrays an outspoken image of the Arab woman. In addition, filial duty towards the mother in general is stressed throughout the Qur'an, at times in connection with the father (*wa-bi'l-wālidayni ihsānā*),<sup>127</sup> and at times to reward the maternal care (*ḥamalathu ummuhu wahnān 'alā wahnin*).<sup>128</sup> Verbal expressions of surprise, pain, shame and filial duty, thus, represent the psychological truth behind the telling of a story that reworks old motifs from both Christian literary as well as Arabic poetic traditions. Even the theology of mercy, expressed in God's gift of progeny to the three protagonists (Maryam, Zakariyya and Ibrahim), which shows divine intervention in favor of the righteous is an old theological theme from the Old and New Testaments.<sup>129</sup> In Maryam's story, the theology of mercy portrays Maryam into her simple receptiveness (just as in Luke) of the annunciation by God's spirit or his messenger. At the sub-textual level, however, Maryam is capable of taking a journey alone to be in touch with the sacred and to give birth to a son on her own, of which the end result is the celebration of the mother archetype, under the nourishing maternal tree and the running water of the rivulet. The female remains, be it from the actual or symbolic perspectives, the source of the image of the triumph of fertility and the continuation of life. Maryam takes the journey to partake in an experience of transformation into motherhood, which was considered sacred by the Arabs. Ahmad Isma'il al-Nu'aymi confirms this: "The image of the sacredness of the mother appears in poetry—at the subconscious level—especially in the introductory section (*al-nasīb*) of the pre-Islamic ode, which attributes both characteristics of fertility and sacredness to the mother."<sup>130</sup>

### 2.5.2 *Maryam and the mother archetype*

Maryam's encounter with the palm tree and the rivulet, in her journey of transformation into motherhood, is not strange to the maternal order evolving around female fertility. In *Sūrat Maryam*, the first narrative invokes the memory of Zakariyya's anxiousness about the lack of progeny, which makes him fear those who will come after him (*wa-innī khiftu l-mawāliya min warā'ī*).<sup>131</sup> The following narrative, Maryam's narrative, reflects nature's answer to the eternal anxiety about infertility and barrenness expressed in Zakariyya's own words. Maryam thus journeys to the wilderness where a form of celebration of female fertility takes place in

126 Q 58:1.

127 See Qur'an 2:83, 6:151, 17:23, 31:14, 29:8, and 46:15.

128 See Qur'an 31:14 and 2:233.

129 For the theology of mercy, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum* (Kösel-Verlag, 2000), trans. Nabil Khūrī as *Madkhal ilā al-imān al-massiḥī*, 4th edn., (Beirut, 1994), 203.

130 See al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 263.

131 Qur'an 19:5.

the presence of a palm tree and rivulet, which is the stratum of life and growth, and is most directly attached to earthly fertility. The celebration is portrayed not only in the garden image of the fertile tree and the river water, but also in the events themselves. The concern of Maryam's fear, which the narrative connects instantly with the possible lack of water and her anguish in labor, merges the earth image with the feminine image. "(A voice) cried to her from beneath (or within) 'Do not grieve! For your Lord had provided a rivulet beneath you.'" This concern with water, and the repetition of the word "beneath" as the location "from within her" or "underneath the earth", points inwardly to the mother's womb and the earth's womb, that is, to the maternal concept dominating both. The first "beneath" (*taht*) seems to mean "from within" Maryam's womb that will give birth to a son, and the second "beneath" (*taht*) is associated with the rivulet that shall bring rejuvenation to the earth. This positioning of Maryam's procreation on an equal level with that of the earth gives Maryam an essentialist image and reminds us of the goddess of fertility in archaic eastern civilization. Maryam is given a place as in the garden of paradise, since "gardens of the heavens with rivers flowing from underneath", is a common Qur'anic formulaic phrase and place which is always reserved for the believers.<sup>132</sup>

The image of Maryam shaking the trunk of the palm tree in order to feed herself merges Maryam's female power with that of the tree power, which also nourishes life. We can imagine this image merging with that of the image of the date palm goddess dispensing nourishment in an Egyptian relief of the eighteenth dynasty, which is a dramatic image of the maternal significance of the tree.<sup>133</sup> Here the female is inside the tree and only her two arms are depicted; her right hand holds a tray with offerings of bread and incense, and her left hand pours water from a vase into a pond. "The symbol equations of a Feminine that nourishes, generates, and transforms, tree, *djed* pillar, tree of heaven, and cosmic tree belong together."<sup>134</sup> Water and earth as generative principles stand close together, and, like the water, tree blossoms are archetypal places of mythical birth. The tree birth of Osiris recurs in Adonis and in the Qur'an, a son ('Isa) to be born under a feminine concept or a tree. The fear for the fertility of the earth and the female goes in parallel. Therefore, the removal of some stain from Maryam or the removal of some undesirable feature connected as a rule with the female protagonist is, furthermore, a rejuvenation theme.<sup>135</sup> Thus, the fear for the female's fertility is no less important than the fear for the earth's fertility; however, the difference is that Maryam takes the trip into nature and not vice versa; Plato's words echo:

132 There are over forty verses under the entry *al-anhār* (rivers) in twenty-nine Meccan and Medinan suras associating "gardens of heavens with rivers flowing from underneath". See Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'an* (Beirut, n.d.), 719–720.

133 Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton, 1974), 242.

134 Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 243.

135 Frye, *Words with Power*, 215.

In fertility and generation, woman does not set an example to the earth, but the earth sets an example to woman. Since the earth, as a creative aspect of the *feminine*, rules over vegetative life, it holds the secret of the deeper and original form of “conception and generation” upon which all animal life is based. For this reason, the earth and its transformation symbolize the highest and most essential mysteries of the Feminine.<sup>136</sup>

The theme of the paradox of life and death, at the sub-textual level, thus, is expressed in the dual nature of Maryam. Maryam is impregnated by God’s spirit who “appears to her in the body of a man without fault”; the messenger is, thus, represented as a spirit and a man, portraying female-male union. Although Maryam is neither married nor unchaste, she is pregnant by the divine spirit. Maryam’s asexual pregnancy, however, does not stop her from experiencing labor pains, which are represented in the environment of a nourishing earth, a palm tree with ripe dates, and water flowing from a rivulet. Although Maryam can shake the trunk of the palm tree to feed herself, she retreats to allow the infant boy to talk on her behalf. Maryam’s dual nature represents the anxiety over the issue of fertility and procreation. Maryam, being a virgin and a mother, is the historical example of the mother archetype, that is, mother in the figurative sense, the earth.

In explaining this dual nature of Maryam, the mother archetype, one can use Frye’s words, “Mythical structures continue to give shape to the metaphors and rhetoric of later types of structure”,<sup>137</sup> although Neuwirth says that Scripture has been credited with being a medium of demythification par excellence: “It has been noted for the three monotheistic religions that their Scriptures do not refer back in the way mythic thinking does, to an archaic sacred order, anchored in a primordial beginning that needs to be restored but refer to events that themselves are part of an extended continuous nexus of happenings.”<sup>138</sup>

In Maryam’s story, there certainly is no craving for a return to the archaic matriarchal order but there is definitely some nostalgia for it. Maryam’s impregnation by God’s spirit alludes to the female power within the sacred; her pregnancy and her closeness to her bodily experience and the source of earth fertility (the palm tree and the rivulet) allude to the time when woman was worshipped for her fertility. Even the Qur’an admits that there were those who worshipped Maryam and her son as two gods (Q 5:116) and there were those who worshipped female deities (Q 53:19). The ritual of the worship of Maryam as a goddess was criticized in the Qur’an. Although Muhammad, on one occasion, consented to the continuation of the cult of worship of three female deities, *al-Lāt wa-l-‘Uzza* and *Manāt*, called “the high flying cranes” (*al-gharānīq al-‘ūlā*),<sup>139</sup> women were already losing power within the realm of the

136 Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 51.

137 Frye, *The Great Code*, 35.

138 Neuwirth, “Myth and Legends in the Qur’an”, in *EQ* 3 (2003) 478.

139 The account of the Prophet’s praying that *al-gharānīq al-‘ūlā*’s (the high flying cranes)—the three female deities *al-Lāt wa-l-‘Uzza wa-Manāt*—intercession is longed and hoped for, is quoted by Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīkh*, 1. For the account of *al-Ṭabarī* and the diverse reports of the story, see chapter

sacred at the highest level. This is discernible in Maryam's words of invocation, which unconsciously express mixed feelings of pain from the labors of childbirth and awe: "Ah would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight" (*yā laytanī mittu qabla hādhā wa-kuntu nasyan mansiyā*). These words, typical of self-lamentation in classical Arabic, recall the description of Mary in the Gospel according to John, where Mary is silently standing under the cross in agony. Frye's analysis is pertinent: "Metaphorically, the cross (of agony) or the tree (of life) that have been set into a common motif in Christian theology is one of the myths of what has been called the 'lost phallus'."<sup>140</sup> To put it in simpler terms, if the angel assured Maryam that it is God's decree to give her a holy son, then why, out of pain or shame, would she express her wish to pass away? Although the palm or the tree of life is a typical background to the image of the goddess of fertility or the goddess of generativity, Maryam's words offset the scene and automatically prepare for the unnamed infant who intercedes on her behalf by speaking in the cradle. However, if the woman was, from the mythic or social perspective, still celebrated as a source of fertility and life, then why would Maryam wish to be a thing long forgotten? It is because Maryam stands for the mother archetype that has lost her rank as a central figure of a traditional age of authority.

Another trace of the matriarchal order is the matrilineal system, which still existed, in early Islam, side by side with the patrilineal system.<sup>141</sup> There are many instances of poets and kings<sup>142</sup> being named after their mothers, or of prominent women being named after their mothers and grandmothers.<sup>143</sup> The proclamation of 'Isa as the son of his mother in the commentary verse on Maryam's story: "Such (was) 'Isa the son of Maryam: (it is) a statement of truth, about which the (vain) dispute" (*dhālika 'Īsā bnū Maryama qawla l-ḥaqqi lladhī fīhi yamtarūn*) probably means that the Qur'an finds no problem with naming a son after his mother and acknowledging a fatherless situation, which was certainly not unknown or uncommon in pre-Islam (Q 7:150, Q 20:94). 'Isa, on some occasions, was also called "the son of Maryam and his mother" *ibna Maryama wa-ummahu* (Q 5:17 and 23:50). Furthermore, in many cases the lineage of the mother was a source of pride for the sons, poets and kings.<sup>144</sup> Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, according to Ibn Sa'd's biographical dictionary, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, was ascribed to both her father and mother, and her maternal grandmother.<sup>145</sup> With the establishing of

"The daughters of God" in Gerald A. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: from Polemic to History* (Cambridge, 1999).

140 Frye, *The Great Code*, 147.

141 See Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1956).

142 See "al-nasab ilā al-umm" in Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī, *al-Mar'a fī al-shi'r al-jāhili*, 2nd edn., (Cairo, 1963), 105; and in 'Alī al-Ḥāshimī, *al-Mar'a fī al-shi'r al-jāhili*, (Baghdad, 1960), 187–191.

143 See the oldest biographies of the prophet and his wives in Muḥammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās 8 (Beirut, 1960–68), 14.

144 King of al-Ḥira 'Amru ibn Hind was named after his mother, also, al-Manādhira were attributed by lineage to their mother Mā' al-Samā, Māwiya bint 'Awf ibn Jusham; Al-Ḥārith al-A'raj was attributed by lineage to Mārya and so were the Ghassāsina. See al-Ḥūfī, *al-Mar'a fī al-shi'r*.

145 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 8:14.

the first Islamic community in Medina, however, the call for a strictly patrilineal genealogy (Q 33:5) was probably ordained for the first time.<sup>146</sup>

Another trace of the ancient matriarchal order is presented in the story of Musa and the daughters of Midian, whose father requested that the husband (Musa) be kept for a certain period of time “in the house of the wife (one of his daughters)” before they allowed him to consummate the marriage (Q 28:24). This tribal custom was not unknown among the Arabs before Islam. Among Muhammad’s wives, there was “the woman believer who gave herself to the prophet” (*wa-’mra’atan mmu’minatan in wahabat nafsahā lilnabi*) admitting the pre-Islamic right of women giving themselves away in marriage (Q 33:50).

Finally, the ceremonial narration (*al-sardiyya al-i ḥtifāliyya*),<sup>147</sup> expressed in the systematic way of composition (*naẓm*) of the three narratives of Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim, makes Maryam the mother archetype of *Sūrat Maryam*, (in that Maryam’s narrative is the central building block of the sura and the “*passage*” (*takhalluṣ*) for the Prophet Muhammad in the calling in remembrance the Biblical figures, from “the heavenly book” of salvation history). Let us look at the concept of some key words. *Al-rahma*, God’s mercy, given at the introductory statement of the sura: *dhikru rahmati rabbika ‘abdahu Zakariyyā* and emphasized in the three narratives of the thesis part. This *rahma* was associated with God’s three gifts of progeny to Zakariyya “*fa-hab lī min ladunka*”, Maryam “*li-ahaba laki ghulāman zakariyyā*” and Ibrahim “*wa wahabnā lahu Iṣḥāqa wa-Ya’qūba*”. These gifts (*hiba*) of progeny would not have been possible without the womb of a woman, *al-rahm*. Therefore in a sura that recalls *al-rahmān* sixteen times, starts with *al-rahma*, and situates Maryam’s narrative as the nucleus of the sura, there is definitely a correlation between *al-rahmān*, *al-rahma* and *al-rahm* of the mother, *r-ḥ-m*, being the root of the three terms. Given that ‘Isa was commanded to observe *ṣalāt* and *zakāt* on an equal level with loyalty to his mother (*barrā bi-wālidatī*), this emphasis linguistically and theologically on *al-rahma*, *al-rahmān* and Maryam is the best historical example given of Maryam as a mother archetype.<sup>148</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

By examining Zakariyya and Maryam’s intertwined stories, the affinity and distinction between the two emerges. Zakariyya and Maryam represent the ambivalent situation of the struggle for life, between aridness and fertility. ‘Isa is a prophet like Yahya but he is of a higher status; he glorifies himself in his own voice. Stylistic analysis appraised the linguistic components of Maryam’s story and revealed the story’s contribution to the artistic value of the text. Linguistic components

146 For the history of patriarchy, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1986), 212–213.

147 This descriptive label I learned personally from Maḥmūd Ayyoub, Professor of Islamic Studies, who has written extensively on Christian–Muslim perceptions and inter-faith dialogue.

148 This issue of Maryam as a mother archetype raises many questions and deserves definitive investigation.

were collected and examined in order to appreciate *al-naẓm*, that is, the artistic fusion of wording and meaning in accordance with the principle of grammar (*naḥū*), rhetoric (*bayān*) and phonology (*ṣawt*). We can appreciate this in the way Zakariyya expressed his fear of death (mourning of his old age), in the way Maryam expressed her discomfort, and her concern about thirst and hunger (Q 19:23), in the way Ibrahim feared for his father who continued to disbelieve, and in 'Isa's words of kindness and modesty towards his mother (Q 19:32), which emphasize a sympathetic attitude towards universal issues and moral values related to the paternal and maternal in general.

Most of the linguistic and rhetorical components are of Arabic origin,<sup>149</sup> comparable to components from pre-Islamic poetry. The construction of the verses (*naẓm al-āyāt*), however, cannot be compared to the construction of pre-Islamic verses (*naẓm al-abyāt*) since the Qur'an marks a break on the level of forms of expression with pre-Islamic poetry. Stylistic analysis provides the means to view textual politics, without pre-assumption or stereotypical representations; the case of a loan word from Coptic was analyzed, and this word suggests that the Qur'anic text might be referring indirectly to the story of Maryam's flight into Egypt, a story that was very popular among Christian communities. Stylistic analysis allows the recipients of the Qur'anic recitation, the hearers, to appreciate the expressive and essentialist language used in a story that involves a woman's experience of her labor and child delivery.

Through narrative analysis, we learn that Maryam speaks (*tahkī*) and it is as if she pronounces indirectly that fertility and motherhood were sacred to Arabs (*ka-annahā tu'lin anna l-khuṣūba wa l-ummūma kānat muqaddasa 'inda'l-'arab*).<sup>150</sup> The story of 'Isa's miraculous birth and his equally miraculous speaking from the cradle is presented as one sign of God's mercy, and in defense of his mother's integrity. Maryam becomes an anti-type to Zakariyya, an old man with a barren wife, while she is young and fertile. Maryam, here, becomes a symbol of fertility and a model for those women who suffer childlessness.

A review of the motifs in Maryam's story, motifs that were already well known from the canonical Gospels and "apocryphal" infancy Gospels, has shown identical and different narrative components between the Qur'an and the Gospel according to Luke and the infancy Gospels according to the Protevangelium of James and Pseudo-Matthew. The motif of Maryam's journey to the wilderness differs from its Christian counterpart in that Maryam travels alone, without the company of Yusuf, and that the journey is associated with the event of the nativity of 'Isa. The Qur'an places this event in a setting of nature's symbols of rejuvenation, not because the Qur'an does not know the original Christian setting,<sup>151</sup> but maybe the Qur'an wants to express something that is particular to the sacredness of the female and the fertility of the earth. The images of female fertility and earth

149 Components of non-Arabic proper names are from Hebrew and Syriac origins and some terms are Coptic.

150 Al-Nu'aymī, *al-Uṣṭūra*, 263.

151 As wrongly proposed by Shoemaker, "Christians in the Qur'an", 18.

fertility are merged to form a very important image for celebrating female fecundity and the power of the maternal. Hence, Maryam's journey into the wilderness takes the specific, Maryam mother of 'Isa, into the general, that is, the mother archetype and the maternal in the figurative sense. This, as Mircea Eliade explains, has to do with the collective memory that modifies historical events in such a way as to enter into the mold of the archaic mentality, which cannot accept what is individual and preserves only what is exemplary. He explains:

The recollection of an historical event or a real personage survives in popular memory for two or three centuries at the utmost. This is because popular memory finds difficulty in retaining individual event and real figures. The structures by means of which it functions are different: categories instead of events, archetypes instead of historical personages.<sup>152</sup>

Maryam, thus, falls in her story and sura into an ambivalent situation where the mythic and the real are combined. The anxiety about the paradox of life and death is evident from the outset: the barrenness of Zakariyya and the fertility of Maryam, as two main abstract themes, are in accordance with the aridness of the wilderness and the fertile land of the palm tree and the rivulet. This paradox is also evident in Maryam's nature, as a virgin and a mother. This nature of the Virgin Maryam, in Carl G. Jung's words, is the historical example of the dual nature of the mother archetype.<sup>153</sup>

Nevertheless, Maryam *is* the main character in a Qur'anic story that forms the central building block of the narrative section in a Meccan sura, named after her and she speaks in her own story in her own voice; and her story is called upon in remembrance on an equal level with other male prophets, Zakariyya and Ibrahim. Maryam is also the heroine who returns victorious from her journey after she passes through hardship, both on the personal and social level. She returns victorious, carrying her child in her arms. Maryam's truth, further, does not lie in the mythic order itself as much as it does in the relationship between myth and literature. Verbal expressions of surprise, pain, shame and filial duty, as communicated by Maryam and the other interlocutors, represent the psychological truth behind the retelling of a story that seems to integrate old motifs from both Christian literary tradition as well as the pre-Islamic Arabic poetic tradition. This synthesis has been realized, in the most creative capacity, which the Qur'an reveals on behalf of the most prestigious of women of the Qur'an.

Maryam has a story called upon in remembrance from *al-kitāb*, "the heavenly book" of salvation history and she, in her struggle against fear, labor pains and the accusations of her people, becomes an exemplar for Muhammad in his own struggle against his own people. Maryam's journey, situated as the central building block of the (thesis section) of *Sūrat Maryam*, thus makes Maryam play the role

152 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1954), 43.

153 See Carl G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London, 1982), 110.

of the “passage” for the Prophet in the communication process for the emergence of a new community. During the middle Meccan period the Muslims, according to Ibn Ishāq immigrated to Abyssinia;<sup>154</sup> in this escape into Abyssinia, the Muslims are said to have recited the first part of *Sūrat Maryam* to the Negus of Abyssinia, which resulted in a receptive attitude towards the Muslims who had sought their first refuge into the land of Christianity.

154 See Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭāleb's speech to the Negus under the subtitle, “The Quraysh send to Abyssinia to get the emigrants returned” in Ibn Ishāq's *The Life of Muḥammad*, 151–152.



### 3 Form of the verse units of the infancy story of Maryam in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (Q 3:1–63) (Main rhymes: -āb/-ād/-ār -ūn -īn/-īm)

Explication of the polemic (1–30) and the narrative units (31–63) of *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*

In *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*<sup>1</sup> (Medinan),<sup>2</sup> the verse units that recall the infancy story of Maryam constitute the first section of the sura (1–63). The sura is two hundred verses long and has one hundred and eighty-three rhymings. It is logical to assume such a long sura arose from the amalgamation of originally distinct units from different dates. This assumption is favored by several traditions that give us the circumstances under which some short units, now incorporated in a larger section, were revealed, also by the fact that the association of ideas between distinct units in the long suras often seems to be interrupted.<sup>3</sup> Thus, *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*, unlike *Sūrat Maryam*, was not delivered as one unit.<sup>4</sup> In this regard it should be mentioned that in the verse units that are under study in this chapter (1–63), the polemic of the first section of *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (1–30) appears as a prologue to the narrative scenes (31–63).

*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* stands in the ‘Uthmānic order of the collection of the Qur’an (*al-tartīb al-‘uthmānī*) between *Sūrat al-Baqara* (2) and *Sūrat al-Nisā’* (4). The

1 *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* contains 200 āyas, 183 rhyming.

2 The twenty-four suras, which Nöldeke ascribed to the Medinan period, comprise approximately forty percent of the Qur’an. The suras of the Medinan period according to Nöldeke’s order are: 2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 95, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5. See also Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’an*, (Edinburgh, 1977), 111.

3 See how Nöldeke, according to Muslim sources and his own understanding, dates certain verses according to different events in the early period of Muslim immigration to Medina, which proves that many verses of different dates were grouped together. This makes the sura a composite: verse 26 is from the fifth year when the Muslims dug a trench in Medina; verses 87/93–113/117 originate from after the battle of Badr; verse 93/98, according to some, alludes to the Jews of *banī Qaynuqā’* in the fourth year after the subjugating of *banu an-Naḍīr*; and verses 123/128 are from the time when the Prophet lay down wounded in the battle of Uḥud. Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’an*, (Beirut, 2004), 172–3.

4 Even with *Sūrat Maryam* being read as a text and a counter-text, it is for most of its verse units, coherent.

disconnected letters *alif, lām, mīm*<sup>5</sup> introduce both *Sūrat al-Baqara* (2) and *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (3), which are the longest in the Qur’an. The main rhyme-endings *-ām, -āb, -ād, -ār*, consist of a closed syllable containing an elongated sound letter *ā* (*tantahī bi-maqṭa‘ mughlaq dhī ḥarf ṣawṭī madīd*). The sound effect of the end-rhyme *-āb* resonates with the word *al-kitāb*, which is a key word in this sura. The musically attuned *-īm, -īn, -ūn* (*madd al-līn or madd al-‘ārḍ li’l-sukūn*) often come up in this sura.

Because the verse units are prosaic and are no longer poetically tinted, it is pointless to lay out the texts verse-by-verse as was previously done in *Sūrat Maryam*. Therefore, there is no need to examine whether the sura is coherently delivered or not. *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* is a composite. This is established by its extensive length, which is not determined by consideration of form but by the subject treated in each verse unit, like some other suras of the Qur’an.<sup>6</sup> Verses or verse groups, however, shall be cited both in English and transliterated Arabic, whenever the explication of texts is required. The fixed sequences of formally and thematically defined verse groups can be discernible due to elements marked by changes in structure and style and by linking the verse groups through the connection of their dominant ideas. Each section will indicate the verse groupings by number followed by the respective verse endings for that grouping.

The Qur’anic verses, here, are prosaic and there exists a variety in the length of verse groups with three-to-nine cola verses (verse 7 has 10 colas); on the other hand, short rhythmic units—particularly evoked from Christian liturgy—add a distinct soft tone, contrasting the polemic tone of the sura. It is clear from the outset that the people addressed in the sura are “those who were given the *kitāb*”, the Jews and the Christians, and “those who were not given the *kitāb*” (*al-ummiyyīn*), the polytheists. The polemic discourse, however, is implicitly directed against one particular group of “those who were given the *kitāb*”, mainly the Jews of Medina, and not the Christians,<sup>7</sup> who appear in their chosenness, prayers, hymns and short stories, presented in full esteem and admiration. Many doctrinal themes come up in the middle of the discourse units which show that Muhammad’s project is still in the making (2–3 and 18–19).

Theodor Nöldeke is inclined to allocate the first part of *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* after the battle of Badr (2/624) to a time when Muhammad started to speculate about the *millet Ibrāhīm* idea—that is, the idea of Islam as the religion of Ibrahim.<sup>8</sup> Equally, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1967), in his exegesis, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*,<sup>9</sup> unlike al-Suyūṭī,<sup>10</sup> attributed this section to the early Medinan period on the basis of the

5 Al-Suyūṭī said the *alif-lām-mīm* covers the three articulation letters, that of the throat, tongue and the lips. See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, (Saida, 1997), 3:335.

6 For the argument for and against the unity of the suras, see Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’ān*, 113 and A.T. Welch, “Sūra” in *EI* (Leiden, 1997), 9:888. See also ‘Isa J. Boullata, “Literary Structures of the Qur’ān”, in *EQ* (Leiden, 2003), 194–196.

7 The Christians are always alluded to in the Qur’ān as *an-Naṣāra*. See Sidney Griffith, “Christians and Christianity”, in *EQ* (Leiden & Boston, 2001) 1:307–316.

8 Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 170–171.

9 Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, 8th edn., (Cairo, 1979), 1:348.

10 al-Suyūṭī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl: al-musammā lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl*, ed. Khālid ‘Abd al-Fattāh Shibl (Beirut, 2002), 53.

allusions to the battle of Badr (13) and on Muhammad's calling "those who were given the *kitāb*" and "those who were not given the *kitāb*" to submit peacefully to God (20). This invitation, by means of argumentation and persuasion, implies that Muhammad, by that time, had not clashed with any of the Jewish clans of Yathrib and its neighboring oasis. These clans opposed the Prophet in a way as serious as that of the disbelievers of Quraysh, since they were among "those who were given the *kitāb*" and could easily boast their superiority over the Arabs who "were not given the *kitāb*" (*al-ummiyyīn*).<sup>11</sup> They could also easily pose questions of theological importance to embarrass the newly rising Prophet.<sup>12</sup> Muhammad, at the very beginning, had hopes in them as "people who knew revelation" but who refused to give up their power or submit to the *dīn* of Allah.

The allusion to the Jews who were invited to become Muslims, "Say to those who were given the *kitāb* and those who were unlearned in the *kitāb*: Do you submit yourselves?" (*qul lli-lladhīna 'ūtū 'l-kitāba wa'l-ummiyyīna a-aslamtum?*, 20), is implicit in the arguments made against one particular group (*min* or *ṭāifa*) of "those who were given the *kitāb*". Many scholars are justified in their reluctance to consider the imprecation (*mubāhala*) of the delegation of Najrān, alluded to in verse 61, as part of the revelation of this section of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*.<sup>13</sup> The allusion to the *mubāhala*, which occurs towards the end of Muhammad's political activities in Medina (after the capture of Mecca in 10/630), suggests that the verse was inserted at a later period.

### 3.1 Polemic section: 1–30

Three polemic units make up this section (1–9, 10–20 and 21–30). Each of these lengthy verse groups includes a pattern of one or two verses, appearing either at the middle or the end of the unit with the themes of supplication (8–9), a revelation of God's witness to His divine unity supporting submissiveness to *dīn Allāh* (18–19) and a verse appealing to Maryam's "Magnificat" (26). Such a diverse discourse is complex; confirmation of doctrines of faith is mixed, from the very beginning, with argumentations, prayers and prophetic witness. Formulaic introductory phrases cease to have importance and what seems to give form to the verse groups is a variety of stereotyped refrains at the end of each verse unit, which are particularly common in the Medinan suras.<sup>14</sup> Most of these refrains are divine names and attributes: God "the Almighty, the All-knowing" (*huwa'l-'azīzu al-ḥakīmu*, 6, 18, 62), "in God's sight are (all) His servants" (*wa'llāhu baṣīrun bi'l-'ibādi* 15, 20, 30), "over all things He has power" (*'alā kulli shay'in qadīr*, 26, 29), "the All-hearing, the Omniscient" (*wa'llāhu samī'un 'alīmu*, 34, 35), "God accomplishes and creates what

11 For literacy in the Qur'an, see Sebastian Günther, "Literacy" in *EQ* (Leiden, 2003), 3:188–192; and "ummi" in *EQ* (Leiden & Boston, 2001), 5:399–402.

12 Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, 152.

13 Sayyid Quṭb suggests: "We are more inclined to consider the subject of Āl 'Imrān as not related to the event of the delegation of Najrān of the ninth year; and that there are other early occasions which prepared for the revelation of this Qur'an". See Quṭb, *fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1:362.

14 For the divine names see Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, (London, 1996) 198.

He wills” (*Allāhu yaf‘alu/yakhluqu mā yashā’*, 40, 47). Few verses describe God as unloving to the disbelievers or the plotters, as in “God does not love those who reject faith and do wrong” (*Allāha lā yuḥibbu’l-kafirīna, lā yuḥibbu’l-zzālimīna*, 32, 57), “and God is the best of plotters” (*wa’llāhu khayru’l-mākīrīn*, 54).

### 3.1.1 Introduction (1–9)

1 (*alif lām mīm*), 3 (*-ūm/-ān/-ām*) 3 (*-ā’/-īm/-āb*) 2 (*-āb/-ād*)

The sura starts with the disconnected letters, *alif, lām, mīm*,<sup>15</sup> followed by the hymnal affirmation of divine oneness, the unicity of God, and the proclamation of the idea of the unity of the “heavenly revelation” through the descent of the *kitāb* to Muhammad (*nazzala ‘alayka l-kitāba*) vis-à-vis other revelations (*tanzīl*): the Torah and the Gospel (*al-tawrāt wa-l-injīl*) as a guide to humankind, and through God passing the *Furqan* down (*al-furqān*) (vv. 2–4).<sup>16</sup>

Table 3.1 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:2–4

God! There is no God but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting,	<i>Allahū lā ilāha illā huwa’l-ḥayyu’l-qayyūm</i>
God who sent down to you (Muhammad) in truth, the <i>kitāb</i>	<i>nazzala ‘alayka’l-kitāba bi’l-ḥaqqi</i>
confirming what was sent before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel	<i>muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi wa-anzala’l-tawrāta wa’l-injīl</i>
before this, as a guide to humankind	<i>min qablu hudān lil-nnāsi</i>
and He sent down al-Furqān (revelation)	<i>wa anzala’l-Furqān</i>
...	...

The polemic, from the beginning, is addressed against “those who rejected faith in the signs of God”, (*inna’lladhīna kafarū bi-āyāti’llāhi*, 4),<sup>17</sup> which means that in spite of such benevolence on His part, most of them remain negligent of the duty of being grateful to Him;<sup>18</sup> and they are reminded that they will suffer severely (4).

The text then tells the hearers that “from God nothing is hidden on earth or in the heavens” (5) maybe to relate to “those who are hiding what is in their hearts or revealing it” (29), or to relate to Him “who shapes you in the womb as He pleases” (6), which in a way prepares the hearers for forthcoming birth stories.

15 The *alif, lām, mīm* suras are placed in different positions, for example, suras 2 and 3, the longest at the very beginning.

16 Jeffery argues that in all passages save *sura* 8: 42, *furqān* is used as though it means some sort of a Scripture sent from God; however, as Nödleke contends *furqān* does not mean Scripture but an abstract name, step-by-step revelation, and it is used as such in relation to Muḥammad or other prophets as *Hārūn* and *Mūsā*, see Nödleke, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, op.cit. 32.

17 “*inna’lladhīna kafarū*” or “*yakfurūn*” comes up five times in our portion of the sura, Q 3:10, 12, 21, 55 and 56.

18 The meaning of *kufr* here is not disbelief, but rather its original sense of “ingratitude”. For the different structured etymology of *kufr*, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran* (Tokyo, 1959).

“God the all-mighty, the all-wise” is marked by His power to create offspring on one level, “He who shapes you in the wombs”, and revelation on another level.

Table 3.2 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:6–7

He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases there is no God but He, the Exalted in Might, the Wise	<i>huwa'lladhī yuṣawwirukum fī'l-arḥāmi kayfa yashā' lā ilāha illā huwa'l-'azīzu'l-ḥakīm</i>
He it is Who has sent down to you the <i>kitāb</i> in it are verses fundamental (of established meaning) they are (lit.) ‘the mother of the <i>kitāb</i> : others are allegorical (of ambiguous meaning) . . .	<i>huwa'lladhī anzala ‘alyaka'l-kitāba minhu āyātun muḥkamātu hunna ummu'l-kitābi wa-ukharu mutashābihātun . . .</i>

*Al-arḥām* (wombs), specific to mothers, and *umm al-kitāb* (lit. the mother of revelation), the heavenly prototype (*aṣl*) of the Qur'an and of all revelation,<sup>19</sup> analogous both to the origin (*aṣl*) of both “sacrosanct life” and “heavenly revelation”, highlights the subject of the honorable role of the mother which is at the centre of the matrilineal stories of the family of 'Imran. The impressive Qur'anic self-referentiality, attested in the *kitāb*'s distinguished *āyāt* between “established” (*muḥkam*) and “ambiguous” (*mutashābih*), warns against those who have perversity (*zaygh*) in their hearts and follow the part that is ambiguous (*mā tashābaha minhu*), seeking dissension (*ibtighā' l-fītnati*) and interpretation (*ibtighā' ta'wīlihi*), and interpretation is restricted to God and those who are well rooted in knowledge. The use of terms with the letter *ghayn* such as *zaygh*, *ibtighā'*, *baghyan*, recalls expressions of backsliding themes from *Sūrat Maryam*, particularly where Maryam was accused of being a *baghiyyā* (a whore); this time, however, “Maryam's people” who originally doubted her purity are themselves accused of seeking discord ‘*ibtighā' l-fītna*'.

The two prayers in *du'ā*' style (8–9) include the verbs *hab* (to give as a gift) and *raḥma* (mercy), which recall God's mercy and gift to his servant Zakariyya “*dhikru raḥmati rabbika 'abdahu Zakariyyā*”; this prayer is indirectly saying that an account on Zakariyya is forthcoming.

Table 3.3 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:8–9

Our Lord! (They say), Let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us, and grant us mercy from You; for You are the Granter of bounties without measure.	<i>rabbānā lā tuzigh qulūbanā ba 'da idh hadaytanā wa hab lanā min lladunka raḥmatan innaka antā'l-wahhāb</i>
Our Lord! You are He Who will gather humankind together against a Day about which there is no doubt; for God never fails in His promise.	<i>rabbānā innaka jāmi'u'l-nnāsi li-yawmin lā rayba fih inna'llāha lā yukhlifu'l-mī'ād</i>

19 See E. Geoffroy, “Umm al- *kitāb*” *EI2*, 20:854.

3.1.2 Polemic (10–20)

2 (-ār/-āb), 6 (-ād/-ār /-āb -ād/-ār/-ar), 3 (-īm/-āb/-ād)

“Those who reject faith (in divine Providence), their possessions will not avail them, neither their children, aught against God” (*inna’lladhīna kafarū*<sup>20</sup> *lan tughnī ‘anhum amwāluhum wa-lā awlādūhum mina’llāhi shay’an*). The disbelievers already introduced (4), are told that their wealth and children will not protect them against disbelief and are reminded of the people of Pharaoh (10–11). The allusion to the destruction of Pharaoh and of their predecessors is very familiar to the Meccans (Q 7:136, 17:103 and 20:78) and abounds in Medinan punishment narratives (Q 8:52 and 54). David Marshall has recognized the different use of these punishment narratives before and after the migration (*hijra*): “At Mecca, it was addressed to the pagan unbelievers, and served as a threat to them of a coming punishment, with the implied equation being between them and the Egyptians. Here at Medina, however, the narrative is addressed to the Jews, who are being invited to identify with those whom God mercifully delivered.”<sup>21</sup>

“Say to those who rejected faith” (*qul lli’lladhīna kafarū*) is the silent dialogue to those who continue to reject Muhammad. Those who reject faith are reminded of the example of the battle of Badr (12–13). The example of possessions of this world’s life are contrasted with the rewards of the hereafter for the righteous (*alladhīna’ttaqū*) who say to their God that they believe (*rabbānā innanā āmannā*, 14–15). It is interesting to note here that among worldly possessions are “women and sons, gold and silver, horses and cattle”, while the rewards of the Hereafter are cited as “gardens of heaven” (with flowing rivers beneath) and “purified wives” (*azwājun mutahharatun*), just like Maryam’s garden and purification. Against such love for worldly possessions (*ḥubbu’l-shshahawāti*), the threat to the disbelievers (*lilladhīna kafarū*, 12–14) is contrasted with the promise to the believers (*lilladhīna’ttaqū*, 15–17). The unit ends with a short prayer voiced by the righteous (*’lladhīna yaqūlūna*, 16–17) and the prayer is strongly reminiscent of the “Our Father” prayer: “Forgive us our sins and redeem us from the evil” (*rabbānā innanā āmannā fa-’ghfir lanā dhunūbanā wa qina ‘adhāba’l-nnār*) and reminds us of Zakariyya’s piety (*wa’l-mustaghfirīna bi’l-ashhār*).

Table 3.4 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:16–17

(Namely), Those who say: “Our Lord! We have indeed believed: Forgive us, then, our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;	<i>Al-ladhīna yaqūlūna rabbānā Innanā amannā fa-’ghfir lanā dhunūbanā Wa qina ‘adhāba’l-nnār</i>
Those who show patience, firmness and self-control; who are true (in word and deed); Who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God); And who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning	<i>Al-ṣābirīna wa’l-ṣādiqīna Wa’l-qānitīna wa’l-munfiqīna Wa’l-mustaghfirīna bi’l-ashhār</i>

20 For the semantic structure of “kufir”, see Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms*, 113–142. (Tokyo 1959)

21 David Marshall, *God, Muḥammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur’ānic Study*, (Richmond, 1999), 126.

“God bears witness that there is no God but He.”<sup>22</sup>

Table 3.5 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:18

There is no God but He: that is the witness of God,	<i>shahida’ llāhu annahu lā ilāha illā huwa</i>
His angels, and those endowed with Knowledge	<i>wa’l-malā’katu wa-uwlū’l-’ilmi</i>
Standing firm on justice.	<i>qā’imān bi-’l-qisṭi</i>
There is no God but He,	<i>lā ilāha illā huwa</i>
The Exalted in Power, the Wise	<i>l-’azīzu’l-ḥakīm</i>

God’s witness for Himself concerning His oneness is a self-referent verse and “a common Arabic style usually uttered for the sake of exaggeration and affirmation”.<sup>23</sup> In addition, by God speaking of His Oneness to Muhammad, an element of empowerment is certainly secured. God’s witness for Himself on His oneness is put on an equal level with the witness of the angels and “those endowed in knowledge” (*al-malā’ikatu wa’l-rāsikhūna fī’l-’ilm*). The proclamation of the oneness of God, the first requirement of the testimony of Islām (*al-shahāda*), is repeated with God’s attribute “the Almighty, the All-wise” (*al-’azīzu’l-ḥakīm*), which already appeared in the first unit (6). “*Al-’azīzu’l-ḥakīm*” also prepares the hearers for the hymn of supplication, in *du‘ā*-style, of one verse of Maryam’s “Magnificat” (26).

“The *dīn* (profession of faith) before God is submissiveness (*islām*)” (*inna’l-dīna ‘inda’ llāhi’l-islām*) addresses “those who were given the *kitāb*” (*’l-ladhīna ’ūtū’l-kitāba*, 19). For the first time, Islam as verbal noun (*maṣdar*), is connected with *dīn* to proclaim that there is no alternative for man as far as the profession of faith (*dīn*) except in submission (*islām*), although the polemic calls for peaceful delivery in case of argumentative situations: “*fa-in ḥājjūka . . . fa-innamā ‘alayka’l-balāghu*”; “those who were given the *kitāb*” (*lladhīna ’ūtū’l-kitāba*) are mentioned twice, once alone, and once in connection to “those who were without the *kitāb*”, (*al-ummiyyina*, 20). The former group were disputing their knowledge (*’ilm*) “through envy of each other” (*baghyān baynahum*); the term “*baghyān*” again calls forth “*baghiyyā*” (adulterer) articulated against Maryam’s purity;<sup>24</sup> the interesting thing, here, is that the conflicting groups are put in relation to adultery done out of envy (*baghyān baynahum*) “not until after that there was given to them knowledge” which may refer as Hirschfeld interprets, “to the rabbinical interpretation of the Law, on the basis of which the Jews used to argue with Muhammad”.<sup>25</sup>

22 God made oaths in seven situations in the Qur’an.

23 Al-Suyūfī says that the Qur’an descended in the language of the Arabs, and it is in their custom to give an oath if they want to confirm a matter. Even God gives an oath “to perfect the argument and affirm it” (*li-kamāl al-ḥujja wa-ta’kidahā*). See al-Suyūfī, *Itqān*, 4:46.

24 The term “*baghiyyā*” was given twice: once by Maryam to deny herself any association with slander “*wa-lam aku baghiyyā*” and second by Maryam’s people to deny Maryam’s mother any association with slander “*mā kāna abūki ’mra’ saw’ in wa-mā kānat ummuki baghiyyā*”. In both cases women were accused of *al-bighā*.

25 This is the opinion of Hirschfeld. See Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, (London, 1902) 113.

### 3.1.3 Polemic (21–30)

2 (-īm/-īn), 3 (-ūn), 2 (-īr/-āb), 3 (-īr/-īr/-ād)

“Those who deny the signs of God, and in defiance of right, slay the prophets” (*inna ’lladhīna yakfurūna bi-āyāti’llāhi wa yaqtulūna’l-nnabīyyina bi-ghayri ḥaqqin wa yaqtulūna ’lladhīna ya’murūna bi’l-qisṭi mina’l-nnāsi*, 21) is an elaboration on the same group reported on earlier (4). Verbs in the past tense are given in the present tense, “*yakfurūna*” (those who deny us) and “*yaqtulūna*” (those who slay us) allude to the criticism of a contemporary group that has killed the prophets. The attack on the disbelievers among the Jews seems to be shaped according to the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke, where the Jews are already accused of having persecuted and murdered their own prophets.<sup>26</sup> Their works “will bear no fruits in the two worlds and they will not have anyone to help”. And this group “who have been given a portion of the book?” (*alam tara ilā’lladhīna ’ūtū naṣībān mmina’l-kitābi yud’awna ilā kitābi ’llāhi*) is a reminder to Muhammad of those who are invited to the *kitāb Allāh* to settle their dispute, a number of whom, however, turn back and decline.

The next verse quotes them as claiming to be fearless and includes an indirect threat against them: They are saying: “fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days” and the response is “their forgeries deceive them as to their *dīn*”. The disbelievers are further reminded of the Day when God will gather them and “each soul will be paid out just what it had earned” (*wa wuffiyat kullu naṣsin mmā kasabat*) also known as the Day of Judgement; the word “*wuffiyat*” in the passive tense will reappear in the fifth form “*mutawaffika*” in verse 55 where God speaks directly to ‘Isa about his end of term and God raising him to Himself. Muhammad seems to have been rejected not only by some Medinan groups, but also by a specific party, after which the Qur’an puts a curse on them and promises them Hell.

The tone of this polemical verse is of anger and frustration, which the Prophet seems to be experiencing towards those who refuse to submit to *Allāh*. These remain an unnamed group that belong to those “who were given a portion of the Book” (*al-ladhīna ’ūtū naṣībān mmina’l- kitābi*). After this verse, the tone shifts from the language of disappointment to the language of hope in change and renewal. A prayer reminding Muhammad of Maryam’s “Magnificat” is transmitted, which is an appeal for God’s power to act for the benefit of the weak and destitute.

Table 3.6 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:26

Say (Muhammad):	<i>qulī:</i>
O God! Lord of Power (and Rule),	<i>’l-llāhumma mālika’l-mulki</i>
You give power to whom You please,	<i>tu’īr’l-mulka man tashā’</i>
And You strip off power from whom You please	<i>wa tanzi’u’l-mulka mimman tashā’</i>
You endue with honour whom you please	<i>wa tu’izzu man tashā’</i>
And You bring low to whom You please	<i>wa tudhillu man tashā’</i>
In Your hand is all Good.	<i>bi-yadika’l-khayr</i>
Verily, over all things You have Power.	<i>innaka ’alā kulli shay’in qadīr</i>

26 See Matthew 5:12, 23:30 and Luke 11:47.



The universal message of God's power to change things for those who are humble against those who are arrogant is manifested discreetly in the reference to the message of Maryam's "Magnificat" (Luke 1:51–53). This reminds us of the strong tradition in the Old Testament of women giving thanks to God and of Maryam giving God glory before the coming of a child. The striking aspect of this part of Maryam's hymn<sup>27</sup> is its delivery to Muhammad, as if to link God's respect for Maryam's humility with God's respect for those who live with Muhammad in humility; the hymn does not mention the group that God endows with honor or the group that God humiliates but one can tell from the earlier verse unit that reference is being made once again to "those who were given a portion of the Book" (21–25). The power of God, whom Muhammad seeks, will "give" (*tu'tī*) and "strip off" (*tanzi'u*), "endow with honour" (*tu'izzu*) and "bring low" (*tudhillu*) to whom God pleases. In these actions of God's giving and taking power and rule (*mulk*), honoring and bringing low as He chooses, God's hands are referred to as all good (*bi-yadika'l-khayr*), hence alluding to sustenance of all kinds. Maryam's hymn, uttered by the Prophet's voice to glorify God's power, is not out of place, as suggested by Nöldeke,<sup>28</sup> because the verse acts as a prelude to Maryam's birth story and her Godly-chosen family, "the family of 'Imran" (next to the family of Ibrahim), which soon appears in the narratology of three interrelated offspring: Maryam, Yahya and 'Isa. Therefore, the short hymn is an exultation before the Lord, who will give, through Maryam, the progeny to "the family of 'Imran", just as in Luke, where Mary concludes with a recapitulation that refers to the help God gave to Israel in the past, and to Abraham and his seed forever (Luke 1:54–55). This hymn or glorification of God's power (and goodness) occurs only once in the Qur'an (in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*). The next hymn (*tasbīḥa*, 27), glorifies the power of creation of God who reproduces the day from the night and the living from the dead, which is a Self-subsisting power that is essential for the circle of life. This hymn is found in other Meccan and Medinan suras<sup>29</sup> and is pertinent here to the subject of procreation, which is a key image of the sura. The verse glorifies procreation or the Life-Giving power of God which takes us back to the first attribute of God, introduced at the very beginning of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, God as "the Living, the Self-subsistent".

*Table 3.7* Translation and transliteration of Q 3:27

You cause the Night to gain on the day, And You cause the Day to gain on the Night; You bring the Living out of the Dead, And You bring the Dead out of the Living; And You give sustenance to whom You please without measure.	<i>tūliju'l-layla fī'l-nnahāri</i> <i>wa tūliju'l-nnahāra fī'l-layli</i> <i>wa tukhriju'l-ḥayyā mina'l-mayyiti</i> <i>wa tukhriju'l-mayyita mina'l-ḥayyi</i> <i>wa tarzuqu man tashā'u bi-ghari ḥisāb</i>
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27 The "Magnificat" is also found in different sources reminding one of some Old Testament verses and the Psalms. See Boulos Basīm, *al-Kitāb al-muqaddas: al-'ahd al-jadīd* [*The Bible: New Testament*] 6th edn., (Beirut, 2000), 191.

28 See Nöldeke, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, 171.

29 Q 22:61, 31:29, 35:13 and 57:6.

The “silent polemic” between Muhammad and this unnamed group, who continue to disbelieve, ends with warning the believers against taking the unbelievers as friends or helpers (28–30). A large portion of this polemic was delivered mainly for the benefit of one party of the Jews, whom Muhammad hoped to win through persuasion. This is evident from the leading ideas of the polemic, which seem to be that Islam is so closely tied to Judaism that the Jews should feel no scruples in recognizing Muhammad as a true Prophet. This is best stated by Hirschfeld, who says, “the conspicuous accumulation of formulas of unification in a small compass (1, 4, 16) with *huwa* instead of Allah, and with a supplement so familiar to Jewish ears as ‘the Living and Self-subsistent’ is anything but accidental”.<sup>30</sup> The unit ends with a warning that God knows what they hide in their hearts or what they reveal of it and that He has power over all things, threatening at last with the Day of Judgment.

Table 3.8 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:30

On the Day when every soul, will be confronted with all the good it has done	<i>yawma tajidu kullu nafsin mmā ‘amilat min khayrin mmuḥdarān</i>
And all the evil it had done,	<i>wa-mā ‘amilat min sū’in</i>
It will wish	<i>tawaddu</i>
there were a great distance between it and its evil.	<i>law anna baynahā wa-baynahu amadan ba‘īdan</i>
But God cautions you (to remember) Himself.	<i>wa yuḥadhdhirukum’llāhu nafsahu</i>
And God is full of kindness to those that serve Him.	<i>wa’llāhu ra’ūfu bi-’l-’ibād</i>

## 3.2 Narrative section: 31–63

### 3.2.1 Introduction (31–35)

The biography of Maryam, which is also the story of the genealogy of ‘Isa’s family, starts with the scene of the wife of ‘Imran, Maryam’s mother, praying to God in a monologue. It then continues with Zakariyya’s scene of his visit to Maryam’s sanctuary (*miḥrāb*),<sup>31</sup> which alternates with Maryam’s scene of her miraculous sustenance. The third scene covers the angel’s announcement of Maryam being chosen, her upbringing and sponsorship. The narrative ends suddenly with the declaration of ‘Isa’s status as a messenger who was sent to the children of Israel. In the last scene, God speaks to ‘Isa about his special relationship to God and about ‘Isa’s struggle with his own people. The end of the narrative of ‘Isa confirms his likeness to Adam, who was fatherless and motherless and was born from dust. These similarities confirm ‘Isa as being human. Muhammad seems to have been asked to clarify ‘Isa’s ambiguous birth story. This would explain why the narrative is delivered especially to include a prestigious matrilineal family to Maryam,

30 Hirschfeld, *New Researches* (London 1902), 113.

31 The *miḥrāb* is always described in Islamic exegesis as the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple.

while at the same time reducing ‘Isa to the likeness of Adam regarding the fact that he is a human being. ‘Isa’s birth story, stated earlier as coming from God’s spirit or His messenger (Q 19:17), seems to have been misunderstood or is a matter of ambiguity which might cause doubt about the oneness of God.

The sura, as a reminder, starts by affirming the divine oneness (2), the connection between divine revelation, scripture and communities (3), and God’s power to shape new life in the wombs of mothers (*yuṣawwirikum fi’l-arḥāmi kayfa yashā’*). It also elaborates on His sending down the *kitāb* with fundamental verses of established meanings (*ummu’l-kitābi*—lit. the mother of *kitāb*) and others of ambiguous meanings (4) which may cause dissension in the hearts of those who have already submitted. The term *arḥām* (wombs) is associated to the power of God to shape (male or female) and the term mother (*umm*) to locate the foundation (*aṣl*) for the heavenly book. These two key terms, wombs and mother, ultimately bring together the two main discourses of our sura: the discourse of oneness of revelation with that of gender and procreation.<sup>32</sup>

Two introductory verses (31–32) prepare for the change in the tone of the polemic and they are suggested to the Prophet as a maxim.

*Table 3.9* Translation and transliteration of Q 3:31

Say (Muhammad):	<i>qul (Muḥammad):</i>
if you (people) do love God follow me	<i>in kuntum tuḥibbūna’llāha</i>
(Muhammad)	<i>fa’ttabi’ūnī</i>
God will love you	<i>yuḥbibkumu’llāhu</i>
and forgive you your sins	<i>wa yaghfir lakum dhunūbakum</i>
for God is Oft-Forgiving and most Merciful	<i>wa’llāhu ghafūrun rraḥīm</i>

The term “*ghufrān*” and the tone of the verse is reminiscent of “The Lord’s Prayer” of the Christians, and thus acts as an introduction (like a *basmala*) to the infancy narratives of the family of ‘Imran. The theme of the prophetic offspring, “one of the other” (*dhurriyyatan ba’duhā min ba’din*), introduced in the Qur’an for the first time, seems to imply a divine announcement of a law of nature which was an old Christian idea. This idea of the miraculous births, given to the family of ‘Imran, is also applicable to the father of Moses in the Old Testament and to the father of Maryam in the Qur’an; thus making the five—Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and ‘Isa—as one genealogy.<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that, in *Sūrat Maryam*, the commentary verse (Q 19:58) stresses the theology of grace (*an’ama’llāhu ‘alayhim*) given to the offspring (*dhurriyya*) of Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim and Israel. It does not, however, include the family of ‘Imran in this list of progeny. The idea of “offspring, one of the other” (*dhurriyyatan ba’duhā min ba’din*) was absent, also, at this stage.

32 I am indebted to Angelika Neuwirth for this idea, which she communicated to me at the conference on Christian Arab Studies in Lebanon, 20–25 September 2004.

33 See Samīr Khālīl, “al-Da’awāt al-khams wa-sūrat Āl ‘Imrān”, in *al-Masīḥiyya wa’l-Islam: Marāya mutaḡābila* (Tripoli, Lebanon, 2002), 113.

Table 3.10 Translation and transliteration of Q 19:58

Those were some of the prophets on whom God did bestow His Grace, of the offspring of Adam, and of those We carried in the (Ark) with Nuh, and of the offspring of Ibrahim and Israel of those whom We guided and chose . . .	<i>ūlā'ika'lladhīna an'ama'llāhu 'alayhim mmina'l-nnabiyyīna min dhurriyyati Ādama wa-mimman ḥamalnā ma'a Nūhin wa-min dhurriyyati Ibrāhīma wa-Isrā'īla wa-mimman hadaynā wa'jtabaynā . . .</i>
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The idea of chosen prophets, one of the other, (*dhuriyyatan ba'duhā min ba'din*) is important for the establishment of a chosen genealogy for Maryam and her son, 'Isa. The Muslims in Mecca were severely oppressed and, thus, the stories of the prophets focused more on their struggles with their own people rather than on the importance of their progeny. This struggle is recorded in Ibrahim's list of prophets without any concern for chronological order.<sup>34</sup> In the prologue of the *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, progeny is not only important but seems to require a genealogical justification. As a result, the family of 'Imran is introduced in Medina, for the first time, as a new genealogy for the offspring of Maryam. That is, it is introduced as a matrilineal foundation (*aṣl li-nasab umūmī*), for 'Isa always appears with a matronym: 'Isa the son of Maryam. This suggests two things: first, that the issue of 'Isa's matrilineal genealogy needs to be legitimized and that the issue seems to be connected to those "ambiguous verses" (*mā tashābaha minhu*), which may cause dissension among those who already have submitted to the faith. Second, the family of 'Imran has been appointed a status equal to that of the family of Ibrahim, a genealogy that refers to the patriarchal tradition of the prophets, while the family of 'Imran can boast of having originated from a matrilineal tradition.

Table 3.11 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:33–34

God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Ibrahim and the family of 'Imran above all people	<i>inna'llāha iṣṭafā Ādama wa-Nuḥan wa-Āla Ibrāhīma wa-Āla 'Imrāna 'alā'l-'ālamīn</i>
Offspring, one of the other, and Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower	<i>dhurriyyatan ba'duhā min ba'din wa'llāhu samī'un 'alīm</i>

The chosenness of the family of 'Imran as offspring, one of the other (33–34), is illustrated in the intertwined series of three birth stories: the wife of 'Imran and her daughter Maryam, Zakariyya and his son Yahya, and Maryam and her son 'Isa.

The following intertwined narrative scenes range from a minimum of three verses to a maximum of six verses. They are treated here as scenes (or as reported pieces of news—*anbā'*)—as the term is clearly suggested in 44) because they are presented as a series within an originally long narrative which was already known and very popular in many Christian circles. The story in its entirety is not presented, as is the case in the Protevangelium, for which there are various possible reasons. One can, however, confirm that there is an interest in giving a brief outline of the

34 See the chronological confusion in the list of seven prophets in chapter three; Christians disputed the genealogy given in the Qur'an. See R. Blachere, *Le Coran* (Paris, 1949) 11:331 into Q 19:28–29.

story: either because it is assumed that the audience already knows the full story, or because there are other reasons for leaving out parts of the original version.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Five narrative scenes (35–47): Maryam’s biography and ‘Isa’ speech*

3 (-īm/-īm/-āb) 4 (-ā’/-īn/-ār) 6 (-īn/-ūn)

#### 3.2.2.1 *The first narrative scene: Maryam’s infancy (35–37)*

The scene of the wife of ‘Imran is a re-narration of the familiar Christian infancy story, given in full detail in the Protevangelium of James.<sup>36</sup> The Qur’an, here, refers to the story more for the general polemic of the sura than for a specific didactic purpose. Although the narrative scene of the wife of ‘Imran can be taken as an independent short story since the outline has a beginning, middle, and an end, only with the appearance of the other scenes, can the narrative come to an end.

*Table 3.12* Translation and transliteration of Q 3:35–37

Behold! (When) the wife of ‘Imran said: “O my Lord! I do dedicate to you what is in my womb for your special service; so accept this of me for You are the All Hearing, the All knowing”.	<i>idh qālati’imra’atu ‘Imrāna: rabbī innī nadhartu laka mā fī baṭnī muḥ arrarān fa-taqabbal minnī innaka anta’l-ssamī ‘u’l-‘alīm</i>
When she was delivered, she said: “O my Lord! I am delivered of a female! and God knew best what she brought forth and nowise is the male like the female and I have named her Maryam, and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the Evil One, the Rejected”.	<i>fa-lammā waḍa ‘athā qālat: rabbī innī waḍa tuḥā unthā – wa’llāhu a ‘lamu bimā waḍa ‘at wa-laysa’l-dhdhakarū ka’l-unthā wa-innī sammaytuhā Maryama wa-innī u’idhuhā bika wa-dhurriyyatahā mina’l-shshayṭāni’l-rajīm</i>
<i>Right graciously Did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty: To the care of Zakariyya was she assigned. Every time that he entered the-mihrāb to see her, He found her supplied with sustenance. He said: “O Maryam! From where comes this to you?” She said: “From God: For God provides sustenance To whom He pleases without measure”.</i>	<i>fa-taqabbalahā rabbuhā bi-qabūlin ḥasanin wa anbatahā nabātān ḥasanān wa kaffalahā Zakariyyā kullamā dakhala ‘alayhā Zakariyyā’l-mihrāba wajada ‘indahā rizqān qāla: yā Maryamu! anna laki ḥādhā? qālat: huwa min ‘indi’llāhi inna’llāha yarzuqu man yashā’u bi-ghayri ḥisāb</i>

35 The version of Maryam’s biography in the Protevangelium will be discussed in chapter seven.

36 See the story in the “Protevangelium” as discussed in chapter five.

The narratorial voice starts with the deictic element *idh* (when): “When the wife of ‘Imran says:” (*idh qālati ‘imra’atu ‘Imrāna:*) and the story (three verses) covers Maryam’s dedication, birth, and sustenance. The wife of ‘Imran confides in her Lord (*rabbī*) in speech form about consecrating her child before birth to serve in the Temple (*muḥarraran*), and she asks Him to accept her consecration. She addresses her Lord as “the All Hearing, the All Knowing”. When she gives birth (*fa-lammā waḍa’athā*), she informs God that she has delivered the child, a female, and before any information is given on the newborn, two parenthetical clauses (*jumlatayn i’tirāḍiyyatayn*) interrupt the sequence of the wife of ‘Imran’s speech to God stating that God need not be informed of such an event: “and God knew best what she had brought forth” (*wa’llāhu a’lamu bimā waḍa’at*), “and nowise is the male like the female” (*wa-laysa’l-dhdhakru ka’l-unthā*). This means that the wife of ‘Imran need not inform God of the sex of her newborn when “it is He Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases” (*huwa’lladhī yuṣawwirukum fī’l-arḥāmi kayfa yashā’*), as was pre-stated in the prologue of the sura (6). The wife of ‘Imran’s implied disappointment at the event of the discovery of the biological sex shows the gender concern of the issues of accepting the female as a *nazīr* in the temple. The sentence which denies similitude of the male and the female (*jumla nafti tashbīh al-dhakar bī’l-unthā*) as uttered, either by the narratorial voice or the voice of the wife of ‘Imran, implies that there is a logic of preference of the male over the female for the service of the Temple of God. Or that according to the custom of the people of ‘Imran (the Israelites), the female is not as equipped as the male to serve in the Temple of God.

She continues her confidential speech and tells God that she has named her Maryam as if to make the naming a public event, which also means that the wife of ‘Imran has the power of naming; for in a patriarchal society, those who undertake the act of naming are men and not women.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the act of naming is in the hand of those who have the legitimate right of naming, like Adam, who was taught all names by God (*wa’allama Ādama’l-asmā’*). The wife of ‘Imran, however, soon “entrusts Maryam and her offspring to God’s protection from the Evil One, the Rejected” (*wa-innī u’īdhuhā bika wa-dhurriyyatahā mina’l-shshayṭāni’l-rajīm*). This alludes to two issues: first that Maryam and her offspring are of future importance and second that this “seeking the protection of Maryam and her progeny from the Evil” (*al-isti’ādha*) might be interpreted as being exclusive to Maryam and her son ‘Isa. This question of exclusive protection for Maryam and her son ‘Isa leads to the question of whether the Qur’an may be referring to the formulation of an early Christian doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>38</sup> God, however, accepted

37 In the Qur’an, Adam is entrusted with the privilege of naming: “And He taught Adam the names of all things; then placed them before the angels, and said: ‘Tell Me the names of these if you (angels) are right.’” (Q 2:31). “The wife of Adam”, ‘Hawa’, enjoys neither the same privilege nor has a name. For the interrelations of power and naming see Hosn Abboud, “Gender Concerns on Names and Naming in the Qur’ān: A Semiotic Study”, (paper submitted to the Comparative Literature Department, University of Toronto, Dec. 1997).

38 See my “al-Islam wa-‘aḳīdat al-ḥabal bilā danas aw al-‘iṣma mina’l-khaṭī’a’l-‘ulā” [Islam and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception], in *al-Majallat al-Kahanūtiyya* [La Revue Sacredotale] 2–3

Maryam graciously (*bi-qabūlin ḥasanin*) in the Temple as a manner of admitting that the notion of the feminine is fundamental in terms of serving God and to confirm Maryam’s special upbringing, which God caused to be in purity and beauty.

At this point of the story, Zakariyya is introduced to Maryam in her private room in the Temple, named as *al-miḥrāb*, to witness Maryam’s miraculous sustenance. He asks Maryam about the source of this sustenance and she answers that it is from God: “for God provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure” (*inna’llāha yarzuqu man yashā’u bi-ghayri ḥisāb*). Here, Maryam’s miraculous sustenance and her speaking as a child were interpreted by some Muslim classical exegetes as a miraculous sign of Maryam’s high religious status.<sup>39</sup> They even disputed the question of whether the sustenance and speaking as a divine favor (*karāma*), understood as either a privilege of the saints or a miracle (*mu’jiza*), was restricted to prophets.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2.2.3 *The second narrative scene (38–41): The angels’ announcement of Yahya to Zakariyya and Maryam’s miraculous sustenance*

#### 4 (-ā’/-īn/-ā’/-ār)

Table 3.13 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:38–41

There did Zakariyya pray to his Lord, saying: “O my Lord! Grant me from You a progeny that is pure: for You are He who hears prayer!”	<i>hunālika da’ā Zakariyyā rabbahu qāla: rabbi hab lī min lladunka dhurriyyatan ṭayyibatan innaka samī‘u’l-ddu‘ā’</i>
<i>While he was standing in prayer in the miḥrāb, the angels called him: “God gives you glad tidings of Yaḥyā, witnessing the truth of a Word from God, and (besides) noble, chaste, and a Prophet, of the (goodly) company of the righteous.”</i>	<i>fa-nādathu’l-malā’ikatu wa-huwa qā’imun fī’l-miḥrābi anna’llāha yubashshiruka bi-Yaḥyā muṣaddiqa bi-kalimatin mmina’llāhi wa-sayyidān wa-ḥaṣūrān wa-nabiyān mmina’l-ṣṣāliḥīn</i>
He said: “My Lord! “How shall I have a son, seeing I am of old age and my wife is barren?”	<i>qāla: rabbī anna yakūnū lī ḡhulāmun wa-qad balaghanī’l-kibaru wa’mra’atī ‘āqirun?</i>
He said: “Thus God accomplishes what He wills.”	<i>qāla: kadhālika’llāhu yaf‘alu mā yashā’</i>
He said: “My Lord! Give me a sign!”	<i>qāla: rabbī’ij‘al lī āyatan!</i>
(He) said: “Your sign shall be that you shall not speak to people for three days except with signals.	<i>qāla: āyatuka allā tukallima’l-nāssa thalāthata ayyāmin illā ramzān</i>
Then evoke you Lord again and again And glorify Him in the evening and in the morning.”	<i>wa’dhkur rrrabbaka kathīrān wa-sabbih bi’l-‘ashiyyi wa’l-ibkār</i>

(2004): 169–176. See also George Qanawāfī, “Islam and the Immaculate Conception”, in *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance*, ed. E.D. O’Conner (Indiana, 1958).

39 Al-Āllūsī says: “She spoke as an infant like ‘Īsā”, and he quotes al-Suyūṭī’s poem which lists all those who spoke as infants, including Maryam. See Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Āllūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī* (Cairo, 1854), 2:133–144.

40 The debate among classical exegetes over Maryam’s miraculous sustenance—being a divine favor or a miracle—will be discussed in chapter six.

The narrative starts with the deictic element *hunālika* (there); after Zakariyya saw the miraculous sustenance of Maryam, “he prayed his Lord to give him from Him a progeny that is pure”. The angels (*al-malā’ika*) called him while he was standing in prayer in the *mihrāb*, to announce the glad tidings of Yahya “witnessing the truth of a Word from God and (be besides) noble, chaste (*ḥaṣūr*)<sup>41</sup> and a prophet of the (goodly) company of the righteous” (39). Zakariyya asks God (as in *Sūrat Maryam* and Luke) about the annunciation of a son (*ghulām*) when he is old and has a barren wife, and the angel answers back on behalf of God saying: “thus God accomplishes what He wills” (*ka-dhalika’llāhu yaf’alu mā yashā’*). Then Zakariyya asks his Lord for a sign (*rabbī’j’al lī āyatan*) because he needs confirmation, whereas on a similar occasion, the annunciation of ‘Isa, Maryam does not ask for a sign.

### 3.2.2.4 The third narrative scene (42–47): The angels’ announcements to Maryam’s chosenness and the news of the dispute over her sponsorship (-īn/-ūn)

#### 3.2.2.4.1 THE ANGELS’ ANNOUNCEMENT OF MARYAM’S CHOSENNESS (42–43)

#### 2 (-īn/-ūn)

The annunciation to Maryam starts with the deictic element *idh* (when).

Table 3.14 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:42–43

<i>And (remember) when the angels said: “O Maryam! God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above women of all nations”</i>	<i>wa-idh qālati al-malā’ikatu: yā Maryamu inna’llāha’ṣṭafāki wa ṭahharaki wa’ṣṭafāki ‘alā nissā’i’l-‘ālamīn</i>
<i>“O Maryam! Worship your Lord devoutly: Prostrate yourself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down.</i>	<i>yā Maryamu’qnuṭī li-rabbiki wa’sjudī wa’rka’ī ma ‘al-rrāki īn</i>

The angels announce “the chosenness of Maryam” over the women of the world (*‘alā nissā’i’l-‘ālamīna*), which is in line with the introductory verse of the chosenness of Adam, Noah, the family of Ibrahim and the family of ‘Imran over all people (*‘alā’l-‘ālamīn*). The “chosenness of Maryam” is intended to show that her special religious upbringing in the Temple, now located as the *mihrāb*, and her miraculous sustenance are not the only criteria for being accepted for special deeds but that Maryam is already included among God’s elect.

Maryam is thus requested to constantly submit herself to God, and absorb herself in prayer and invocation (*uqnuṭī*), and bow down (in prayer) with those (men)

41 to abstain from sex



who bow down (*irkaṭ ma'a'l-rrāki'īn*). The fact that the text places Maryam's act of worship with the men (*al-rāki'īn*) and not specifically with women (*al-rāki'āt*) is indicative of gender equality with regard to rituals in terms of shared sacred place: first in terms of her presence in the *mihrāb* and second in terms of her presence with other male worshipers. Maryam's prayer is portrayed in terms of general ritual performance—from absorption in worship to prostrating and bowing down while Zakariyya's prayer is specified in terms of time—within the prayer hours of the evening and morning (*bi'l-'ashiyyi wa'l-ibkār*).

3.2.2.4.2 REVELATIONAL CONCLUSION: THE NEWS OF MARYAM'S SPONSORSHIP IS GOD'S TESTIMONY TO MUHAMMAD OF HIS PROPHETHOOD (44)

1 (-ūn)

*Table 3.15* Translation and transliteration of Q 3:44

This is part of the things unseen, which We reveal unto you (O Apostle!) by inspiration:	<i>dhālika min anba'i'l-ghaybi nūhīhi ilayka</i>
Thou was not with them when they cast lots with arrows,	<i>wa-mā kunta ladayhim idh yulqūna aqlāmahum</i>
as to which of them should be charged with the care of Maryam	<i>ayyuhum yakfulu Maryama</i>
Nor was not thou with them when they disputed (the point).	<i>wa-mā kunta ladayhim idh yakhtašimūn</i>

“Dhālika” points to the aforementioned news (*anbā'*) of Maryam's infancy story, described as the hidden news revealed to Muhammad, who never witnessed them by sight. The Qur'an's argumentation for Muhammad's non-presence at the event “when they cast lots with arrows, as to which of them (the rabbis) should be charged with the care of Maryam . . .” occurs elsewhere in other occasions in the Qur'an: “and you were not on the western side” (*wa-mā kunta bi-jānibi'l-gharbī*, Q 28:44) “and you were not beside the *tūr*” (*wa-mā kunta bi-jānibi'l-ṭṭūri*) (Q 28:46) “and you were not with them when they made a final decision” (*wa-mā kunta ladayhim idh ajma'ū amrahum wa-hum yamkurūna*, Q 12:102). This knowledge of the unseen, interestingly, becomes a testimony to Muhammad's knowledge of Maryam's unseen news “*anbā'*”, and thus a testimony of his prophethood.

3.2.2.4.3 THE ANGELS' ANNUNCIATION TO MARYAM (45–47):

The angels' annunciation of the glad tidings to Maryam is a direct address (just like the prior appearance of the angel to Maryam) which raised the issue of Maryam's prophethood because the angel “spoke to her and addressed her directly”<sup>42</sup>

42 It was recorded by Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī that the prophethood of women generally and that of Maryam particularly had caused serious debate in Muslim Spain (Andalusia). See chapter three of Ibn Ḥazm's *al-Faṣl fī'l- Milal wa'l-ahwā' wa'l-niḥal* (Cairo, AH 1347) and chapter six below.

Table 3.16 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:45–47

When the Angels said: “O Maryam! God gave you glad tidings of a Word from Him:	<i>idh qālati’l-malā’ikatu: yā Maryamu inna’llāha yubashshiruki bi-kalimatīn mminhu</i>
His name is Christ ‘Isa, the son of Maryam held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God	<i>‘smuhu’l-masīhu ‘Īsā’bnu Maryama wajīhān fī’l-ddunyā wa’l-ākhirati wa-mīna’l-muqarrabīn</i>
He shall speak to the people In childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous	<i>wa-yukallimu’l-nnāssa fī’l-mahdi wa-kahlān wa-mīna’l-ṣṣāliḥīn</i>
She said: “My Lord! How shall I have a son when no man had touched me?”	<i>qālat: rabbī anna yakūnu lī waladun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun</i>
He said: “Even so: God created what He wills: when He had decreed a plan, He but said to it, ‘Be’ and it is!”	<i>qāla: kadhāliki’llāhu yakhluqu mā yashā’u idhā qaḍā amrān fa’innamā yaqūlu lahu: kun fa-yakūn</i>

and “the angel’s annunciation of a word from Him whose name is the Messiah ‘Isa, son of Maryam” (*al-Masīhu ‘Īsā’bnu Maryama*) clearly connects the word (*kalima*) of God to the creation of ‘Isa. The commentators regarded this “word from Him” (*kalimatīn minhu*) who is ‘Isa as a divine word linked to the creative *kun* “be” and subsequently related the creation of ‘Isa to that of Adam (59).<sup>43</sup> ‘Isa is further regarded as “held in honour (*wajīhān*) and of those nearest to God (*wa-mīna’l-muqarrabīn*)”. In the next verse (46), the text mentions one particular miracle of ‘Isa, his speaking as an infant and in maturity, which also occurs in *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy* which is a late compilation.<sup>44</sup>

Maryam asks the same question she asked in *Sūrat Maryam* (and in Luke): She said: My Lord: “How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?” (*qālat: rabbī annā yakūnu lī waladun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun*). Here, however, the first narrator alludes to her virginity without elaborating on any further details already mentioned in *Sūrat Maryam*. In addition, two phrases from *Sūrat Maryam*: “*ka-dhāliki’llāhu yakhluqu mā yashā’u*” (Q 19:21)<sup>45</sup> and “*idhā qaḍā amran fa’innamā yaqūlu lahu kun fa-yakūn*” (Q 19:35) are joined together in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* to refer to a previously delivered verse, where any idea of the claim of God’s begetting a child was deemed unacceptable (see Q 3:47 in Table 3.16).

43 For the Qur’anic concept of the Word of God, see Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Rome, 1948).

44 See “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy”, in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. Montague Rhodes James (Oxford, 1980), 80.

45 “The angel said: ‘So’ (it will be): Your Lord said, ‘That is easy for Me’: and (We Wish) ‘to appoint him as a sign into men and a Mercy from Us’: It is a matter (So) decreed.” (*qāla kadhāliki qāla rabbuki huwa ‘alayyā hayyīnun wa-li-na’alahu āyatan lil-nnāsi wa-rahmatan minnā wa-kāna amrān maqḍīyyā*, Q 19:21)

3.2.2.5 *The fourth narrative scene (48–54): ‘Isa’ speech to the children of Israel*

(-īl/-īn/-ūn/-īm)

3.2.2.5.1 *‘ISA DELIVERS A SPEECH TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL**Table 3.17* Translation and transliteration of Q 3:49a

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And a messenger to the children of Israel . . . *wa-rasūlān ilā banī Isrā’īl . . .*

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The Qur’an speaks in the third person “he” (46) and then makes a sudden shift to the first personal singular “I” (49) in order to shift to ‘Isa speaking about himself in the first person singular in speech form.

*Table 3.18* Translation and transliteration of Q 3:49b

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“And (appoint him) an apostle to the Children Of Israel, (with this message):	<i>wa-rasūlān ilā banī Isrā’īl</i>
I have come to you with a sign from your Lord,	<i>annī qad ji’tukum bi-āyatin min rrab̄bikum</i>
In that I make for you out of clay, as it were,	<i>annī akhluqu lakum mina’l-ṭṭīni ka-hay’ati</i>
The figure of a bird, and breath into it, And it becomes a bird <i>by God’s leave</i> ( <i>bi-idhni-Allah</i> )	<i>’l-ṭṭayri a-anḥukhu fīhi fayakūna ṭayrā bi-idhni’llāhi</i>
And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, And I quicken the dead, <i>by God’s leave</i> ( <i>bi-idhni Allāh</i> )	<i>wa ubri’u’l-akmaha wa’l-abraṣa wa uhyi’l-mawtā bi-idhni’llāhi</i>
And I declare to you what they eat and what they store in your houses.	<i>wanbi’kum bi-mā ta’kulūna wa-mā taddakhirūna fī buyūtikum</i>
Surely therein is a Sign for you if you did believe	<i>inna fī dhālika la-āyatan llakum in kuntum mmū’minīn</i>

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“I have come to you, to attest the Law” (*wa muṣaddiqān llimā bayna yadayya mina’l-ttawrāti*, 50) ‘Isa continues to say that he has come to them “to attest the Law which was before him, that is, the Law of the Jews. And to make lawful to them part of what was (before) forbidden to them.” He recalls before the end of the verse that he had come to them with a “sign” from their Lord that they should fear God, and that they should obey him.

3.2.2.5.2 *THE ISLAMICIZING OF ‘ISA’S STORY*

A thematic verse is put in ‘Isa’s mouth probably to Islamicize his story in his own words.

*Table 3.19* Translation and transliteration of Q 19:36

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<i>It is God Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him</i>	<i>wa-inna’llāha rabbī wa-rabbukum fa’budūhu</i>
This is a way that is straight” (īm)	<i>hādhā ṣirāṭun mmustaḡīm</i>

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This formulaic phrase, repeated word for word from *Sūrat Maryam* (Q 19:36), brings ‘Isa’s speech, in his own voice, to an end (Q 3:51).

3.2.2.5.2 ‘ISA’S FINAL STRUGGLE WITH HIS DISCIPLES: (52–54)

3 (-ūn/-īn/-īn)

‘Isa’s final struggle with the apostles or disciples, named *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, is portrayed in one verse delivered in the form of a question and an answer.

Table 3.20 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:52

<i>When ‘Isa found unbelief on their part Jesus said:</i>	<i>fa-lammā aḥassa ‘Īsā minhumu’l-kufra qāla:</i>
<i>Who will be my helpers to (the work of) God?</i>	<i>man anṣārī ilā’llāhi</i>
<i>and al-ḥawāriyyūn answered :</i>	<i>qāla’l-ḥawāriyyūna:</i>
<i>“We are God’s helpers We believe in God, and bear witness that we are Muslims”</i>	<i>naḥnu anṣāru’llāhi āmannā bi’llāhi wa shhad bi-annā muslimūn</i>

The term “*anṣār*” (helpers) of ‘Isa, is a cognate to the “*anṣār*” of Muhammad in Medina (*al-Aws* and *al-Khazraj*) and the question is typical of Muhammad’s circumstances at Medina. The submission of ‘Isa’s helpers to Islam, put in the mouth of the *ḥawāriyyūn* (disciples), is intended to make ‘Isa look like the other Qur’anic prophets, a facsimile of Muhammad himself. The *ḥawāriyyūn* responded by admitting their belief in *tanzīl* (revelation), although the term *tanzīl* is a Qur’anic expression. The admission of the *ḥawāriyyūn* in their belief in *tanzīl* and their following of the messenger (*wa’ttaba’nā’l-rasūla*), of course, make ‘Isa and his disciples one with Muhammad and his followers the *Anṣār*. This certainly is the best example of the merging of two levels of reading, a Christian reading reworked in Islamic concepts and expressions.

Table 3.21 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:53

<i>Our Lord! We believed in what You have revealed, and we follow the apostle;</i>	<i>rabbānā āmannā bi-mā anzalta wa’ttaba’nā’l-rasūla</i>
<i>then write us down among those who bear witness.</i>	<i>fa’ktubnā ma’a’l-shshāhidīn</i>

Then suddenly the Qur’an shifts from dialogue back to the narratorial voice in the third person. The narrator informs that the disbelievers plotted anyway (57) and their plot could have been an allusion to the attempt on ‘Isa’s life (Q 5:110, Luke 4:30 and John 8:59). Then the verb “plotted” (*makarū*) is transferred to God, who can also plot and be the best of plotters. Neal Robinson argues that God’s counter-plot could have entailed his rescue of ‘Isa, but it might equally have been His punishment of the Jews.<sup>46</sup>

46 See Neal Robinson, “Jesus” in *EQ* (2003) 3:18.

## 3.2.2.6 The fifth narrative scene (58–63): God’s speech to ‘Isa (55–57) and the Islamization of ‘Isa’s birth story

3.2.2.6.1 “WHEN GOD SAID: ‘O ‘ISA!’” (IDH *QĀLA’LLĀHU: YĀ ‘ĪSĀ*)

2 (-āl/-ū)

In the first scene, the wife of ‘Imran directly addresses her Lord by delivering a speech to Him. ‘Isa also gives a speech to the children of Israel by listing his capacity as a messenger who does miracles. In the following scene, God directly addresses ‘Isa also in speech form, which starts with the deictic element ‘*idh*’ (when).

Table 3.22 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:55

<i>When God said: “O ‘Isa</i>	<i>idh qāla’llāhu: yā ‘Īsā</i>
<i>I am going to receive you to myself And raise you</i>	<i>innī mutawaffika wa rāfi’uka ilayyā</i>
<i>to Myself</i>	
<i>and purify you (of the falsehood) of those who</i>	<i>wa mutahhiruka mina’lladhīna kafarū</i>
<i>disbelieved;</i>	
<i>I will make those who follow you superior to</i>	<i>wa jā’ilu’lladhīna’ttaba’ūk</i>
<i>those who disbelieved, to the day of resurrection:</i>	<i>a fawqa’lladhīna kafarū ilā</i>
	<i>yawmi’l-qiyāmati</i>
<i>Then shall you all return unto me,</i>	<i>thumma ilayyā marji’ukum</i>
<i>And I will judge between you of the matters</i>	<i>fa’ḥkum baynakum fīmā kuntum fīhi</i>
<i>wherein you dispute.”</i>	<i>takhtalifūn</i>

The commentators have had trouble understanding the meanings of *mutawaffika wa rāfi’uka ilayyā*, especially as the word *mutawaffika* (“bring your term to an end” or “take you to me”) is understood to mean “cause you to die”.<sup>47</sup> The combination of *mutawaffika* (cause you to die) and *wa rāfi’uka* (raise you beyond death unto myself)<sup>48</sup> stirred up controversy over the death of ‘Isa. ‘Isa’s death and resurrection, however, are already stated in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q 19: 33): “so peace is on me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again).<sup>49</sup>

“Those who follow ‘Isa” and who are told then that they will be made superior to “Those who disbelieve in ‘Isa”, although not named, are assumed to be a group of the children of Israel, since it is clearly stated in the introduction to ‘Isa’s speech that he is a messenger to the children of Israel “*wa rasūlān ilā banī Isrā’īla annī*” (49).

A statement of threat and promise is juxtaposed: “As to those who reject faith”, they are promised punishment in the two worlds, this world and the Hereafter; and “As to those who believe and work righteousness” God will pay them (in full)

47 See A.H. Mathias Zahniser, “The Forms of ‘Tawaffā’ in the Qur’ān: A Contribution to Christian-Muslim Dialogue”, in *MW* 79 (1989): 14–24.

48 This verb is in the fifth form of the root *w-f-y* which expresses the idea of fulfilment, execution and completion. The terms “*wafā bi’l-shay*”, “*awfā*” and “*waffā*” are of the same meanings of “*atamma*” “to be completed” see *Lisān al-‘arab* (Beirut, 1997) 6:469–370.

49 Later in Q 5:117, ‘Isa himself speaks of the end of his term: “When You did take me to yourself” (*fa-lammā tawaffaytanī kunta anta’l-rraqība ‘alayhim*).

their reward, *fa-yuwaffihim ujūrahum*. This is the third time the word of the root *w-f-y* is used.

3.2.2.6.2 REVELATIONAL CONCLUSION (58)

God speaks a brief concluding remark of revelation to Mohammed in the magisterial plural, “We”. “This is what We recite to you (O Muhammad!) of the verses and the Wise Reminder (that is, the Qur’an)” (*dhālika natlūhu ‘alayka mina’l-āyāti wa’l-dhdkri’l-ḥakīm*).

3.2.2.6.3 COMMENTARY AND ISLAMICIZATION OF ‘ISA’S BIRTH STORY (59–60), THE MUTUAL IMPRECATION AND THE CONFIRMATION OF THE TRUTH OF THE STORY OF ‘ISA: (59–62)

4 (-ūn/-īn/-īm/-īm)

After God confirms his revelation to Muhammad, the next verse appears as the commentary to the whole subject of the controversy over ‘Isa’s birth story and Maryam’s single parenthood to ‘Isa which necessitated, as a start, introducing a family of matrilineal genealogy to ‘Isa.

‘Isa’s birth story required interpretation to clear its ambiguity (*mā tashābahā minhu*, “the ambiguous verses”) according to verses labelled *mūḥkamat* (clear).<sup>50</sup> Thus, it is clearly stated that the likeness of ‘Isa before God is as that of Adam: He created ‘Isa, and then He said to him “Be!” and he was. Thus, the equivalence of ‘Isa, who is fatherless, before God, to that of Adam, who is fatherless and motherless, settles the controversy over any association of ‘Isa to the divine, that is, like Adam who was created without a mother or father, ‘Isa came to “Be” with only a mother. In addition, by confirming ‘Isa’s earthly constituency—Adam being the first human being—clearly substantiates that God created him, like every human being, from dust and by commanding him to exist with the use of the word “Be!” It is important to note that the comparison between Adam and ‘Isa occurs frequently in the writings of Saint Paul in the New Testament.<sup>51</sup>

Table 3.23 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:59

<i>Truly, the likeness of ‘Isa in God’s sight, is as Adam’s likeness;</i>	<i>inna mathala ‘Isā ‘inda’llāhi ka-mathali Ādama</i>
<i>He created him of dust, then said He unto him,</i>	<i>khalaqahu min turābin thumma qāla lahu:</i>
<i>“Be,” and he was.</i>	<i>kun fa-yakūn.</i>

50 For an analysis on how the Qur’an contains “ambiguous” and “firmly established” verses see Stefan Wild, “The Self Referentiality of the Qur’an: Sūra 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge”, in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* ed. Jane McAuliffe et al., (Oxford, 2003), 422–444. See also Jane McAuliffe, “Text and Textuality: Q 3:7 as a Point of Intersection”, in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an*, ed. ‘Issa Boullata (Richmond, Surrey, 2000), 56–76.

51 See specifically Romans 5:12–19.

A prophetic statement (60) ends the discourse by emphasizing the Godly truth of Muhammad's revelation and by warning against "those who doubted" (*al-mumtarīn*), a term which also concludes 'Isa's infancy story in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q 19:34). In fact this verse is a confirmation of the end result of the narratives in both *Sūrat Maryam* and *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*:

Table 3.24 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:60 and 19:34

<i>This is the truth from your Lord; so be not of those who doubt.</i>	<i>al-ḥaqqu min rrabbika fa-lā takun mina'l-mumtarīn (Q 3:60)</i>
<i>This is 'Isa son of Maryam; a true saying of which they doubt.</i>	<i>dhālika 'Isā'bnū Maryama qawla'l-ḥaqqi 'lladhī fi-hi yamtarūn (Q 19:34)</i>

### 3.2.2.6.4 THE MUTUAL IMPRECAATION (V. 61)

Table 3.25 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:61

<i>If any one disputes in this matter with you, Now after (full) knowledge had come to you, Say: "Come! Let us Gather together, our sons and your sons Our women and your women, Ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, And invoke the curse of God on those who lie!"</i>	<i>fa-man ḥājjaka fīhi min ba'di mā jā'aka mina'l-'ilmi fa-qul ta'ālawā nad'u abnā'anā wa-abnā'akum: wa-nissā'anā wa-nissā'akum wa-anfusana wa-anfusakum thumma nabtahil fa-naj'al lla'nata'llāhi 'alā'l-kādhībīn</i>
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The *mubāhala* (*mulā'ana*), literally "mutual imprecation, curse"<sup>52</sup> implies swearing a conditional curse<sup>53</sup> and a purifying oath (*nabtahilu*).<sup>54</sup> The call for mutual imprecation after the statement "the likeness of 'Isa before God is as that of Adam" involves the calling of "our and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves", which shows that women are included as political agents at least on such a public occasion of this sort. This invitation for a mutual imprecation may allude to the event of the *mubāhala* which occurs towards the end of Muhammad's political activities in Medina, after the capture of Mecca in 10/630. The subject of the delivery of this section of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, is directly related to the events of the early period of the immigration to Medina.<sup>55</sup> Thus, this verse may have been added at a later date because of its thematic proximity.

52 An example of this would be, "May God's curse be over the one of us who is wrong, the one who lies."

53 An example of this would be, "May God's punishment hit me, may I be cursed if . . ."

54 See W. Schmucker, "Mubāhala", *EI* (Leiden, Brill, 1993), 7:276–277.

55 See al-Suyūṭī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 56–57.

Table 3.26 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:62

This is the true account	<i>inna hādhā lahuwa'l-qaṣaṣu'l-ḥaqqu</i>
There is no god except one God;	<i>wa-mā min ilāhin illā'llāha</i>
And God-He is indeed the Exalted in power, The Wise	<i>wa-inna'llāha la-huwa'l-'azīzu'l-ḥakīm</i>

This thematic verse describes the Qur'anic story of 'Isa as the true story (*inna hādhā lahuwa'l-qaṣaṣu'l-ḥaqqu*) to confirm the unicity of God (*wa-mā min ilāhin illā'llāhu*) and ends by calling on God the Almighty, the All wise (*wa-inna'llāha la-huwa'l-'azīzu'l-ḥakīm*). Of the Godly attribute al-'azīz, the Qur'an gives the last emphasis to this word which also appeared in Maryam's "Magnificat" (26) to emphasize God's power to create what He wills. This was the central theme behind introducing the family of 'Imran in the first place. The last verse (63) warns those who may turn back that God has full knowledge of those who do harm. This verse may be a different text altogether since the sense of the narrative appears to have come to an end by the previous verse.

### 3.3 Conclusion

The classification of the polemic and narrative verse units, thematically and structurally, has led to the explanation of the meanings of these units and the identification of the literary and oral forms. The variety of forms marks a development from the uniform semi-poetic style of *Sūrat Maryam*. The variety of style in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* is determined by the interpretive discourse undertaken for the sake of explaining verses delivered earlier which are ambiguous. Interpretation involves more prose than poetic narrative, however, a pattern of prayers of markedly rhythmic couplet verses, moderates the language of threat addressed to those who did not yet submit to *dīn Allāh*. Prayers with a backsliding theme, such as Zakariyya's request for mercy "*rabbānā hab lanā min ladunka raḥmatan*", reappear (8–9). The tone and vocabulary of some of the prayers evoke verses from Christian liturgy, reminiscent of verses from The Lord's Prayer, and express an indirect admiration of Christian piety (16 and 17). Additionally, a nucleus verse is delivered to Muhammad which recalls Maryam's "Magnificat", (from Luke 2:46–54), going back to a rich tradition of thanksgiving Psalms.

Maryam's concise biography is given in a series of three interrelated narrative scenes that end with a statement on 'Isa's apostleship and his creation as a human descendant. Dialogue is still a feature that highlights the protagonists' participation in their own stories and their expressions of their own characters and values in the first person. With the exception of the wife of 'Imran, the angels<sup>56</sup> speak to

56 In Qur'anic linguistic style known as *ta'zīm*, the angels appear as speaking as one, but are plural in the text.



each protagonist at one point in the story and God speaks only to 'Isa. One dialogue in the form of a question and answer appears in the case of 'Isa's struggle with his disciples. The giving of a speech seems to be the mode of communication in these stories: the wife of 'Imran gives a speech before her Lord about her consecrated child and its naming (35–36); 'Isa gives a speech to the children of Israel (49–51) and God gives a speech, at the end, to 'Isa (55) to confirm his special privilege before confirming his subjectivity as human and earthly. Revelational themes are interwoven within these intertwined narrative scenes, equally structured among the protagonists, the wife of 'Imran, Maryam, Zakariyya, and 'Isa seeking the establishment of doctrinal issues and Islamic concepts. These are included throughout the polemic and narrative sections: "God's witness of His oneness" and the proclamation of God's *dīn* as submissiveness (18–19). The knowledge of the news of Maryam's sponsorship is transferred as a revelational testimony of Muhammad's prophethood (44). Also, Allah becomes one Lord to Muhammad and 'Isa and his opponents, as put in the mouth of 'Isa: "It is God who is my Lord and your Lord . . ." (51); "this is what We recite to you (O Muhammad) of the Verses and the Wise Reminder (that is, the Qur'an)" (58).

Examples to "those who were given the *kitāb*" are given from past history, "the people of Pharaoh" (11), as well as from contemporary history, "the unnamed battle (of Badr)" (13). The verses start with anaphoric markers or formulaic markers: Anaphoric *huwa'lladhī or rabbanā*, formulaic marker of deictic elements *idh, humālika, dhālika, fa-lammā*. The imperative verb *qul*, "Say! (Muhammad) to those who disbelieve" (12) or "Say! (Muhammad) Shall I inform you of things far better than those" (15) is used to assist Muhammad in his argumentations with the disbelievers and with the believers. Stereotyped refrains of God's attributes occurring twenty-five times at the end of each verse group, assist one in understanding the division between verse groups structurally and thematically and in understanding the relationship between God's good names (*asmā'llāha'l-ḥusnā*), His attributes and the nature of the request behind seeking God's salvation. For example: to His oneness "*Allah lā ilāha illā huwa*", two attributes are added, "the Living, the Self-subsisting" (*al-ḥayyū'l-qayyūm* 2). *Al-qayyūm*, an attribute of God as *al-qā'im al-dā'im*, obviously stressing that God never dies, likely an allusion to 'Isa, whom God causes to die (*mutawaffika*); when God's dominion (*mulk*) is sought to topple the exclusivity of one group and give rise to another group, God's power becomes his attribute, "*innaka 'alā kulli sha'in qadīr*". When the wife of 'Imran confides in her Lord of her wish to consecrate her child to serve in the temple, God's attribute becomes "the All hearing of supplication" (*innaka anta'l-ssamī'u'l-'alīm*); God's attribute as "the Mighty, the Wise" (*al-'azīzu'l-ḥakīm*) (6, 18 and 62), leads to the fear of God once the people know how aggressive God can become to those who underestimate his Might. Stereotyped refrains of God's attributes always appear with the conjunction *wāw al-'atf*,<sup>57</sup> with *inna*

57 *wa'llāhu shadīdu'l-'iqāb* (11)

*wa'llāhu 'indahū ḥusnu'l-ma'āb* (14)

*wa'llāhu baṣīru bi'l-'ibād* (15)

*wa'llāhu baṣīru bi'l-'ibād* (20)

(it is)<sup>58</sup> and *kadhālika* (so it will be)<sup>59</sup> in the Medinan period, and they are given more in the positive sense (ten attributes) than in the negative sense (two attributes).

One can conclude from these various literary forms that unlike *Sūrat Maryam* where the semi-poetic form of the sura determines some uniformity in the verse units, here a variety of different forms appear because of the language of prose and the kind of polemic rhetoric. Thus, *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* does not read Christian themes in a form of a text and counter-text as was the case in *Sūrat Maryam*, rather, the discourse blends two readings, Islamic and Christian, into one. The Qur’an blends Christian prayers (“The Lord’s prayer”) and hymns (Zakariyya’s prayer and Maryam’s “Magnificat”) with Islamic expressions and concepts (‘Isa’s story with the *ḥawāriyyūn*). The polemic addressed against one group who were misinterpreting ambiguous verses definitely indicates this group cannot be the Christians. The Christians, represented by figures such as Maryam’s mother, Zakariyya, Maryam and ‘Isa, are staged from the beginning to the end within a discourse full of admiration of their religiosity and piety.<sup>60</sup> So the polemic in *Sūrat Maryam*, which may appear to be against the Christian doctrine of “God begetting a child” (*ittakhadha’llāhu walad*), is situated in *Āl ‘Imrān* not against any Christian group. This is probably why in the middle of the polemic, one frequently encounters exhortatory and revelatory hymns of Christian tone and vocabulary (8–9, 18–19 and 26–27), which express implicit admiration for Christian devoutness. There also seems to be a contiguity of two levels of readings. The first is of a Christian reading which is reconsidered in Islamic expressions and concepts—a perfect example would be when the *ḥawāriyyūn* said: “*rabbanā āmannā bi-mā anzalta wa-’ttaba’nā’l-rrasūla*”. The second is the concept of *tanzīl* and ‘Isa being a *rasūl*, which are Islamic concepts that can not possibly have been uttered by ‘Isa’s disciples. Furthermore, ‘Isa, who was unnamed and excluded from any narrative in the

*wa’llāhu ‘alā kulli shay’in qadīr (29)*

*wa’llāhu ra’ūfu bi’l ‘ibād (30)*

*wa’llāhu ghafūrun rraḥīm (31)*

*wa’llāhu sami ‘u ‘alīm (34)*

*wa’llāhu khayru’l-mākirīn (54)*

*wa’llāhu lā yuḥibbu’l-ẓẓālimīn (57)*

58 With “it is” (*inna*), God’s attributes are:

*inna’llāha lā yukhlifu’l mī’ād (9)*

*fa-inna’llāha sarī’u’l-ḥisāb (19)*

*innaka ‘alā kulli shay’in qadīr (26)*

*fa-inna’llāha lā yuḥibbu’l-kāfirīn (32)*

*innaka anta’l-ssamī ‘u’l-‘alīm (35)*

*inna’llāha yarzuqu man yashā’u bi-ghayri ḥisāb (37)*

*innaka samī ‘u’l-du’ā’ (38)*

*inna’llāha rabbī wa-rabbukum fa-’ ‘budūhu hādihā širāṭun mmustaqīm (51)*

59 With “so it will be” (*kadhālika/i*), God’s attributes are:

*Allāhu yaq’alu mā yashā’ (40) Allāhu yakhuqu mā yashā’ (47)*

60 The expressions “those who were given the *kitāb*” or “the people of the *kitāb*” come up 18 times in the sura.

Meccan period and from *Sūrat Maryam*, appears here as a named speaker with a narrative and as one who is directly addressed by God.

The polemic seems to be against one unnamed group of “those who were given the *kitāb*”. It is interesting to observe that the descriptive tag “those who were given the *kitāb*” or a portion of the *kitāb*, alternates with the descriptive tag, “the people of the *kitāb*” (*ahl al-kitāb*). But the former appears more often in our section and the latter in the “Say” statement “O people of the *kitāb*” (*Qul: “yā ahlal-kitāb!”*) particularly in the Medinan suras, and occurs fourteen times in the other sections of this sura.<sup>61</sup> One must note here, that the concept *kitāb* remains, at this stage, far from being “a bounded text and fixed canon”.<sup>62</sup>

Messianic stereotyped references to the rewards in store for the righteous and the punishments awaiting the wicked continue in this early Medinan sura, where Muhammad is still arguing with one group of “the people of the *kitāb*” and with those who were without the *kitāb* (*al-umiyyīn*) and hoping that they become Muslims (52–53). “*Alladhīna kafarū*” (those who rejected faith) are addressed throughout the sura, and they are not explicitly named as one group or another especially at the beginning. However, when the hearers are reminded of Pharaoh (11), those who killed the prophets (21) and the two groups who fought in Badr (13), one can argue that the two groups must be the Jews and the polytheist Quraysh.

61 See the following verses: 64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 98, 99, 100, 110, 112, 113, 199.

62 In support of a view of the *kitāb* as a process and symbol rather than bounded text and fixed canon, see Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self Image*, 194. See also the Appendix on “the People of the *Kitāb*”, Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self Image*, 193–213.

## 4 Stylistics analysis of Maryam’s infancy, chosenness and annunciation scenes and ‘Isa’s apostleship and birth story (Q 3:31–54)

Stylistics analysis of the linguistic components of the narrative units (33–51) will examine the contribution of these Medinan texts to the artistic and literary value of the Qur’an. Stylistics is important for understanding “the correspondence achieved in construction between the structure of meanings and the structure of words” (*nazm al-āyāt*). Stylistics is intellectually important for the position it takes in refusing to give ready-made judgments while simultaneously uncovering sexual/textual politics, which are hidden within the linguistic and literary texts. In this section, the data of the linguistic phenomena employed in five narrative scenes, that of the wife of ‘Imran, Zakariyya, Maryam, ‘Isa, and God, will be collected and analyzed according to the priorities of the oral/written text and to *nazm al-āyāt*.

The narration starts with the wife of ‘Imran’s words of request about her consecrating the child that is in her womb (*mā fi baṭnī*) to the service of God, and ends with ‘Isa speaking in his own voice about his miracles and God speaking to ‘Isa about his death and resurrection and purification from those who disbelieve. The concluding verse, “the likeness of ‘Isa before God is the likeness of Adam” appears as the commentary to all of the narrative units on the family of ‘Imran. *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* again presents the motif of miraculous gifts of progeny to two females: the wife of ‘Imran and Maryam; and one male: Zakariyya. However, the difference between *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* and *Sūrat Maryam* is that for the first time miraculously given progeny include the gift of a female progeny, whom her mother named ‘Maryam’. Maryam speaks twice in the *miḥrāb*: once with Zakariyya (37) and once with the angels (47). Also, Maryam’s narratives connect all the birth stories together to form the genealogy known as the family of ‘Imran. The first three interwoven narrative scenes are very brief and are rich with gender terms. In them Maryam’s childhood, upbringing and chosenness are given as a legitimate background to the genealogy, named the family of ‘Imran, which is equal in status to the genealogy of the family of Ibrahim.

### 4.1 Stylistic Qur’anic features

The study of stylistics will assist in determining the kind of discourse in this sura. For example, the excessive use of *inna* or *anna* (*lil-ta’kīd*) in the

polemic<sup>1</sup> as well as in the narrative section, is a stylistic feature for confirmation and to emphasize the voice of the speaker:

*fa-nādathu al-malā'ikatu wa-hwa qā'imun yuṣallī ft l-miḥrāb*  
*anna Allāha yubashshiruka (3:39)*  
*wa-rasūlan ilā banī Isrā'īla annī qad... (49)*  
*āmānā bi-llāhi wa-shhad bi-annā muslimūn (52)*

An adverb of time, as a deictic element, *idh* (when), *hunālika* (at that time) or *fa-lammā* (then when), marks the beginning of each of the five interconnected narrative scenes: *idh qālat imra'atu Imrān/ hunālika da'ā Zakariyyā/ idh qālat al-malā'ikatu/ fa-lammā aḥṣāsā 'Īsā/ idh qāla Allāhu*.

## 4.2 Grammatical subjects and verbs within the five narrative scenes

### 4.2.1 First narrative scene: The wife of Imran (33–37)

*“Idh qālati'mra'atu Imrāna”*

The wife of Imran, as a subject, employs six verbs in the past tense, namely: “She said” (*qālat*, occurring twice), “consecrated” (*nadhartu*), “gave birth to” (*waḍa'athā*), “brought forth” (*waḍa'tuhā*), “have named her” (*sammaytuhā*); and two verbs in the present tense: “I seek refuge with You” (*ū'īdhuhā*), and “so accept” (*fa-taqabbal*). Allah has three verbs in the present tense: “Allah knows better” (*a'lamu*) “provides sustenance” (*yarzuqu*), “does what He will” (*yashā'u*); and “her Lord” (*rabbuhā*) has two verbs in the past tense: “accepted her” (*taqabbalahā*), and “made her grow” (*anbatahā*). Zakariyya has three verbs in the past tense: “he entered” (*dakhala*), “he found” (*wajada*) and “he said” (*qāla*). Maryam has one verb: “she said” (*qālat*). We notice from the use of the term “*al-rabb*” as Lord within the story, and “Allah” as God by the first speaker, the narratorial voice, that *al-rabb* always appears in the dialogue between the protagonists and their Lord and thus the Lord is more intimate than Allah, who always appears in the debate or the polemic.

### 4.2.2 Second narrative scene: Zakariyya (38–41)

*“hunālika da'ā Zakariyyā”*

Zakariyya has six verbs in the past tense: one “invoked” (*da'ā*) and five “said” (*qāla*, occurs five times); and one in the present participle: “standing in prayer”

1 See the following verse in the polemic section: *inna Allāh lā yakhfā 'alayhi... (3:5)*  
*rabbānā innaka jāmi'u'l-nāssi li-yawmin ... (3:9)*  
*inna 'lladhīna kafarū... (3: 10)*  
*inna ft dhālika la-'ibratan lli-ūl'l-abṣār (3: 13)*  
*rabbānā innanā āmānā (3:16)*

(*yusṣallī*); and two as requests: “grant me” (*habb lī*, occurs twice). The angels’ has one verb: “called him” (*nādathu*). The angel has three verbs in the imperative form: “you shall not speak” (*allā tukallima*), “invoke” (*wa dhkur*), and “glorify” (*wa sabbih*). Allah has three verbs: “gives you Glad tidings” (*yubashshiruka*), “does” (*yaf’alu*), and “wills” (*yashā*). Yahya has one verbal pronoun form of “believing” (*muṣaddika*). Old age is used as the subject for the verb “*balaghani*” although in English it is translated as such: “See, I am very old” (*balaghani al-kibaru*).

#### 4.2.3 Third narrative scene: The angels (42–51)

“*wa-idh qālati al-malā’ikatu*”

Allāh has three verbs in the past tense: “chosen” (*iṣṭafāki*, occurs twice), “purified” (*tahharaki*), and “decreed” (*qaḍā*); and four in the present tense: “gives you glad tidings”, (*yubashshiruki*), “creates” (*yakhlūqu*), “wills” (*yashā’u*), and “says” (*yaqūl*); and one in the imperative form “Be” (*kun*). The angels use the following verbs: “said” (*qālati*), “worship” (*uqnuṭī*), “prostrate” (*usjudī*) and “bow down” (*irkaṭ*). The angels at one time speak as one angel (*qāla*): “*kadhāliki/a Allāhu yakhlūqu*”. Allah as “We” has one verb in the present tense “reveal” (*nuwḥīhi*). An unnamed group, the rabbis, has three verbs in the present tense: “cast lots with their arrows” (*yulqūna*), “be in charge” (*yakfulu*), and “dispute” (*yakhtasimūn*). God’s address (to Muhammad) with the negative form “you were not with them” (*mā kunta*) is repeated. Maryam uses the verb: “she said” (*qālat*), “a man” (*bashar*) “has not touched me” (*lam yamsāsnī*). The Messiah, ‘Isa son of Maryam, has the largest number of verbs and most verbs are in the present tense, namely: “He will speak” (*yukallimu*), “I have come to you” (*ji’tukum* occurring twice), “I design for you” (*akhlūqu*), “I breathe into it” (*fā-anfukhu*), “I heal him” (*ubri’ū*), “I bring the dead to life” (*uhyī*), “I inform you” (*unbi’kum*), “confirming” (*muṣaddiqan*), “to make lawful” (*li-uḥilla*), “fear” (*fā-ttaqū*) and “obey me” (*‘Isā*)” (*wa aṭī’ūnī*). Other subjects are mud (*al-ḥīn*) with one verb “to be” (*fā-yakūn*); the children of Israel (*banī Isrā’īl*) with the verbs “you eat” (*ta’kulūn*) and “you store” (*taddakhirūn*); and Allāh with the verbs “teaches him” (*wa yu’allimuhu*) and “plotted” (*wa makara*).

There are verbs of supplication addressed to God by the wife of ‘Imran: “O my Lord! So accept this of me” (*rabbī fa-taqabbal minnī*) and by Zakariyya: “O my Lord! Grant unto me” (*rabbī hab lī*) reflecting the same tone of humility expressed before God. The angels always “call” (*tunādī*) on Maryam by her personal name “*yā Maryamu*” (42, 43 and 45).

#### 4.2.4 Fourth narrative scene: ‘Isa (52–54)

“*fā-lammā aḥassa ‘Isā*”

The following verbs are found in this section: ‘Isa “came to know” (*aḥassā*) and “said” (*qāla*); the disciples (*al-ḥawāriyyun*) “said” (*qāla*), we “believed” (*āmannā*, twice) and “bear witness” (*wa shhad*), “and we followed” (*wa ttaba’nā*), “so write us down” (*fā ktubnā*) and “they plotted” (*wa makarū*).

#### 4.2.5 Fifth narrative scene: God (55)

“*idh qāla'llāhu yā 'Īsā*”

God “said” (*qāla*) and the rest are verbal nouns: “*mutawaffika*” from the root *w-f-y*, “*rāfi'uka*” from the root *r-f-ʿ*; “*muṭahhiruka*” from the root *ṭ-h-r*, and “*jā'ihu*” a form from the root *j-ʿ-l*.

The end-rhymes (*al-fawāṣil*) do not follow the *sajʿ* style, they are not uniform and they alternate between the *-āb/-āʾ/-ār* and the soft rhyme of *-īn/-ūn* (*madd al-līn*); the end-rhymes fall as adjectives in the singular form (*al-ʿalīm*, *al-rajīm*) and the plural form (*al-ṣāliḥīn*, *al-rākiʿīn*, *al-muqarrabīn*) and as verbs in the present tense (*fa-yakūn*, *fa-aṭīʿūn*).

### 4.3 Phonological repetitions and their impact on meaning

There are repetitive questions posed by Zakariyya and Maryam, who share the same motif of the miraculously God-given son. Zakariyya said: “O my Lord! How can I have a son when I am very old?” (*qāla rabbī: annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun wa-qad balaghanī al-kibaru?*). Maryam said: “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?” (*qālat: rabbī annā yakūnu lī waladun walām yamsasnī basharun?*). The word “*ghulām*” is put again in Zakariyya’s mouth and the letter *ghayn* in *ghulām* and *balaghanī* plays the *gh-l-m* (sexual desire) against *balaghanī al-kibar* (the coming of old age) and *ghayn* in the polemic section (1–30) is associated with adjectives that embrace meanings of *zaygh* (perversity), *ibtighāʾ al-fītna* (seeking dissension) and *baghyan* (through envy of each other) and with other verbs which embrace eschatological and messianic promises *lan tugh nī* (will avail them), *sa-tughlabūna* (soon will you be vanquished), *fa-ghfir* (forgive us), *al-balāgh* (to convey the message), *gharrahum* (deceive them), *yaghfir* (forgive us) and *ghafūr* (forgiving). Also, the verbal noun *muṣaddiqan* (confirming) is repeated once by Yahya “who confirms the word [‘Isa] from God” and once by ‘Isa “who confirms that which was before me of the Torah”.

The verbs, in the maternal naming-speech of the wife of ‘Imran, are constructed by the letter of conjunction the *wāw al-ʿatf*: *innī waḍaʿtuhā unthā/ wa-innī sammaytuhā Maryama/ wa-innī uʿīdhuhā bika*. In this case, the verb *uʿīdhuhā* (in the present tense) falls as a predicate for *innī*, which indicates that her request is about a continuing wish for Maryam’s protection against evil (*dalāla ʿalā ṭalabiha istimrār al-istiʿādhā dūna inqitāʾ*).<sup>2</sup> It is very interesting that the medieval classical exegetes, al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), both noticed that there is an etymological aspect to the maternal name-giving speech of the wife of ‘Imran. She mentions Maryam’s name to God and asks for His protection for her and for her progeny (*dhuriyyā*), so that Maryam might become worthy of her name. As early as the thirteenth century, al-Rāzī acknowledges the relationship

2 Maḥmūd al-ʿĀllūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī fī tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿaẓīm wa-l-sabʿ al-mathānī*, ed. ʿAlī Abd al-Bārī ʿ. Aṭīyya (Beirut, 1994), 3–4:130–131.

between the name, the named and the naming as the sign, the signified and the significations in the following observation: “the wife of ‘Imran mentioned the name Maryam because the name, the named and the naming are three dissimilar matters (*inna al-isma wa-l-musamma wa-l-tasmiya umūrun thalāthatun mughāyira*)”.<sup>3</sup>

The verb *waḍa‘tuhā* (I have given birth to, lit. to lay down) is used three times and the letter of conjunction *wāw al-‘atf* is used eight times in the maternal name-giving speech, which serves to elicit a feeling of modesty before God (*tawāḍu‘*: a form of *waḍa‘*). Sayyid Quṭb notices the way the wife of ‘Imran made her request to her God, although he does not associate the sound impact of the verb *waḍa‘tuhā* and the conjunction letter *wāw* with the construction of the individual words and the meanings of the request. Quṭb remarks: “This ḥadīth is in the manner of soliloquy (*munājāt*); it is a *munājāt* of someone who knows she is alone with God. This is the state which these pious people chose to be in while in the presence of their God; it is a state of love, intimacy and sincere affection and this secret talk has simple utterance and no pretension or artificiality.”<sup>4</sup>

The letter *al-dhāl*, which already stood out as an effective vocal letter in *Sūrat Maryam*, in the evocation *wa-dhkur* and in its repetitiveness and association with *al-dhakar* (male) and *dhurriyya* (progeny), is re-emphasized here in the words: *dhurriyyatan, nadhartu, al-dhakar, u‘īdhuhā* and *dhuriyyatahā*. This letter becomes visible after the verse “and no wise is the male like the female” (*wa-laysa’l-dhakarū ka’l-unthā*) which is at the centre of the controversy of Maryam’s entry to sacred place. The wife of ‘Imran, contrary to her expectation of giving up her child by dedicating it to the service of the Lord, delivered a female and not a male; she knew well that the female was not permitted to serve in the Temple; hence, she expressed her disappointment. We know that the original infancy stories of the Biblical prophets and patriarchs are presented to partly celebrate their male progeny; however, this clearly cannot be the case with the wife of ‘Imran, who had a female child. Thus, *al-dhāl*, a component letter of *wa-dhkur* (invoke the memory of) and *dh uriyya* (progeny), conveys a feeling of the dominance of masculinity over femininity. The common root of the two words *dhakar* (male) and *dhikr* (recitation/reminder) is one, *dh-k-r*.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the statement “*wa-laysa’l-dhakarū ka’l-unthā*” (and no wise is the male like the female) is inserted in the speech of the wife of ‘Imran as Al-Zamakhsharī explains,<sup>6</sup> places the male and the female as if in binary opposition by suggesting male preference over female (*mufāḍala*).<sup>7</sup> The narratorial voice (*ṣāhib al-khiṭāb al-aṣl*), however, soon responds to the wife of ‘Imran’s implicit gender concern, and offsets the sound influence of the letter *al-dhāl* when God immediately accepted Maryam to

3 Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Cairo, 1934–1962), 8:29.

4 Sayyid Quṭb, *fi Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, (Cairo, 1978), 3:392.

5 For the meaning of “*dhakar*” (male), “*tadhkir*” (maleness) and “*dhikr*” (the Reminder /the recitation) see *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut, 1995 & 1997), 2:464–465.

6 See al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshaf*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salam Shahin (Beirut, 1995), 1:350.

7 See Hosn Abboud, “al-Jumla al-i‘terādiyya ‘wa-laysa al-dhakarū kal unthā’ wa-thaqāfat al-mufassir wa-zamanih” in the proceedings of the International conference *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Impact*, Gottingen, Germany, Oct 1–5, 2011.



serve in the Temple regardless of her mother's doubts. The sound emphasis placed on the male progeny because of the visibility of the letter *al-dhāl*, however, cannot be counterbalanced by the letter *al-thā'* of *al-unthā* (female), occurring only once in "*wa-innī waḍa'tuhā unthā*" and *al-dhāl*, additionally, is a loud *thā'* and *al-thā'* a soft murmuring *dhāl*.<sup>8</sup> It is a paradox, on the other hand, that the simile "*wa-laysa'l-dhakarū ka'l-unthā*" does not follow the logical rule of likening the imperfect to the perfect (*tashbīh al-anqaṣ bi'l-akmal*); the Arabs say: "*lastunna ka-aḥadin mina'l-nisā'*", which means that the wives of the Prophet Muhammad are not like the rest of the women. The justification of Arabic linguists of this syntactical device is that one does not make a simile by likening the imperfect to the perfect or by starting with the imperfect, that is, one does not say: "*wa-laysat al-unthā ka'l-dhakar*" (and no wise is the female like the male) making the female precede the male in the construct of the simile.<sup>9</sup> This issue highlights the fact that even language has its own subtleties in a passage that accepted a female to worship God equally with men in an exclusive way, and that even grammar is conscious of its bias. This also explains why the simile, "*wa-laysa'l-dhakarū ka'l-unthā*", is an inserted sentence (*jumla i'tirāḍiyya*) which was probably placed in by the first person narrator (*sāhib al-sard*). It interrupts the flow of the maternal name-giving speech of the wife of 'Imran, to pose a controversy over Maryam's acceptance in the temple.

The letter *al-qāf*, one of the high sound letters (*ḥurūf al-isti'lā'*), is a letter that can come silent and appears only with another sound because of its high pitch.<sup>10</sup> *Al-qāf* acts in a way that neutralizes the impact of the letter *al-dhāl*, which is part of the patriarchal language presented for the prophetic family which is always transmitted through male progeny *dhurriyya dhukūr*. *Al-qāf* (existing ten times) is present more than the letter *al-dhāl* in words like *fa-taqabbal*, *qabūl*, *qā'im*, *qāla*, *qad*, *āqir*, *qālat*, *uqnuṭī*, *yalqūn*, *al-muqarrabīn*, *yakhluq*, *qaḍā*, *yaqūl*. Also, *al-qāf* becomes a visible letter in the word *fa-taqabbal*, which is repeated and is part of *qabūl*, a rare form occurring only once in the Qur'an (*maṣdar shādh*) and in relation to Maryam: "*fa-taqabbalahā rabbuhā bi-qabulīn ḥassanīn*" (God has accepted her in a spontaneous way or without second thoughts). In the sentence there is *muḍāf maḥdhūf* and the sense is *ra'īya bihā mutalabbisatan bi-amrin dhī qabūl* (he saw that she was distressed from a matter that was accordingly accepted).<sup>11</sup> Al-Rāzī says that *qabūl* is a better-chosen word than *taqabbul* since *taqabbul* has a notion of artificiality (*takalluf*) as opposed to that of innate disposition of *qabūl*. "*Al-taqabbul* is appropriate in situations where exaggeration is required, whereas *qabūl* is suitable for situations which do not require conformity with disposition."<sup>12</sup> Al-Rāzī goes on to explain that the use of the word *qabūl* is unique and points to the great attention and consideration that Maryam must have

8 al-Jazarī, *al-Tamhīd* (Beirut, 1986), 132.

9 See how al-Āllūsī explains the formula of *nafī 'an al-nāqis shibhuhu bi'l-kāmil*, al-Āllūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, 3–4: 130–131.

10 Al-Jazarī, *al-Tamhīd*, 100–101.

11 This is the explanation given by al-Āllūsī in *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*

12 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (Cairo), 8:29.

enjoyed from God. Moreover, *al-qāf* is a throat letter, it starts from the throat (*al-ḥalq*), not from the tip of the tongue, it emanates from the heart rather than from the mouth.

From the grammatical subjects and verbs in the five integrated narrative scenes, listed at the beginning of this chapter, one can conclude the following: “Isa” and “God” as *Allāh* govern the largest number of verbs in the past, present and imperative tense. “Lord” as *rabbī* or *rabbānā* always appears in the supplication (*du‘ā*) constantly uttered by one of the protagonists, the wife of ‘Imran, Zakariyya or Maryam, or uttered by the voice of the unnamed group (8–9, and 53). At the same time, “God”, as *Allāh*, is continuously used with the first person narrator at the introduction (31–32, 42 and 45) and at the commentary (the last phrases of 37, 40, 47 and 51).

The angel who always responds to the protagonist’s question on behalf of God, appears as a group of angels: “Behold!” The angels said: (*idh qālat al-malā’ikatu*), however, the text always means that Jibril is the speaker. This is explained usually by the specific being named in terms of the general (*tasmiyat al-khāṣ b’ism al-‘ām*). Al-Zamakhsharī explains that the Arabs do this for the sake of glorification and this is called synecdoche (*al-majāz al-mursal*). There is also ellipsis (*ḥadhf*) of the verb “to see” in:

Table 4.1 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:44

...	...
When they cast lots with arrows (to see)	<i>idh yulqūna aqlāmahum</i>
as to which of them should be charged with the care of	<i>ayyuhum yakfulu Maryama</i>
Maryam	
...	...

Hence: “*yulqūna aqlāmahum (li-yanzurū) ayyuhum yakfulu Maryama.*”

Zakariyya says: “*wa qad balaghanī’l-kibaru*” (lit. “old age had befallen me”) instead of “*balaghtu’l-kibar*” (I am of old age). Abu ‘Ubayda explains how the Arabs say: *hadhā’l-qamīṣ lā yaqṭa’anī*, that is, *anta la taqṭa’ahu*, which is an inversion and means “it cannot reach what you estimated for it”.<sup>13</sup>

The metaphor (*isti‘āra tamthīliyya*) of Maryam’s growth as a good plant “*wa anbatahā nabātan ḥasanan*” is a synecdoche (*majāz mursal*) of the good upbringing of Maryam. This is used in the same sense as that of the farmer who “takes it upon himself to water his plantation and protects it from disease”.<sup>14</sup> There also is verbosity (*iṭnāb*) in the word *nabāt*, which is repeated “*wa anbatahā nabātan ḥasanan*”. The narrative contains other *iṭnāb* in the word “chosen you” “*iṣṭafāki wa ṭahharaki wa ṣṭafāki ‘alā nisā’i’l-‘ālamīn*” and the word “bow down in prayer” “*irka’ī ma’a’l-rāki’īn*”. It is interesting to note that the three verbs *anbata*, *iṣṭafa* and *irka’ī* are repeated for the sake of emphasis on Maryam’s upbringing, chosenness and piety.

13 Abū ‘Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, (Cairo, 1954), 92.

14 See al-Allūsī in *Rūḥ al-Ma‘āni*, 3–4:130–131.

When Maryam is notified to worship God and pray, three different terms of the same meaning are used in a gradual form—from the intense to the moderate (*yata-darraḡ min al-kithra ilā'l-qilla*): “*yā Maryamu'qnuṭī li-rabbiki wa'sjudī wa'rka'ī ma'a'l-rāki'in*”. Since *al-qunūṭ* is absorption in prayer and invocation, and *al-sujūd* is kneeling down (in worship), so is *rukū'* prostrating oneself (in worship).

#### 4.4 Foreign words, names, epithets and verbs

Al-Suyūṭī does not mention the name 'Imran in his list of foreign names of the prophets. Horovitz gives the name 'Imran as an example of a name formed in agreement with a genuine Arabian name, as was current in pre-Islamic times. He further suggests that we must assume the genuine Arabic name 'Imran, which is found transcribed as “*Eupovns*” in a Houranian inscription (Ephemeris, vol.11, p. 331),<sup>15</sup> to have brought the change from the Biblical Amram to Qur'anic 'Imran.<sup>16</sup> The Qur'anic form of the Biblical Amram is the name given in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* for the first time to the father of Maryam. The Biblical Amram, however, is the father of three prophets, Miriam, Aaron and Moses. It was argued in the previous chapter, from a typological point of view, that Maryam was called upon by her people as “the sister of Harun” (Miriam) who was the first female to be called a prophetess. Therefore, in line with this typology, we may suggest that Maryam is also the daughter of 'Imran whose family is now placed on a level equal to that of the family of Ibrahim. As to the etymology of the word 'Imran, western scholars seem to agree this to be both Hebrew and Arabic. It is imperative to pay attention to the alternating family connections of Maryam as mother of 'Isa, sister of Harun and daughter of 'Imran (Q 66:12), a pattern in Scripture regarding the naming of females, and where the female is always (except for most cases with Maryam) identified in terms of being a mother, sister and daughter.<sup>17</sup>

*Nadhara*, the idea of dedication, from the root *n-dh-r*, is found in Southern Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic and to some extent in Assyrian.<sup>18</sup> The Arabic *nadhara* and the Hebrew *nazar* have the same definition, “to make a vow”. A related root, *n-z-r*, means “to dedicate oneself” to a deity or to live as a *nazīr/nazirite*.<sup>19</sup> The motif of dedication at or before birth in the infancy stories of the prophets are not uncommon in the Jewish and Christian traditions. One example of a *nazīr/nazirite* is the prophet Samuel, whose mother Anna made a promise just like the promise made by the wife of 'Imran, whose name in the Protevangelium is Anna. The

15 Ephemeris, vol.11, p. 331 as cited by Horovitz, *Jewish Proper Names* (Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), 15.

16 Horovitz, *Jewish Proper Names*, 15.

17 For the epithets of the Qur'anic women see chapter four.

18 See J. Pederson, “*nadhīr*” in *EI* 2 (7) 846–847; and Arthur Jeffery, “*nadhīr*” in *Foreign Vocabulary*, (Baroda, 1938), 278.

19 For the Hebrew meaning of “*nadhīr*”, the root *n-z-r* with the letter “*al-zayn*” instead of “*al-dhāl*”, *nazīr* in Syriac, thus *nazirite* (Judaism) means continent, sacred, vowed, see Costas, *Dictionnaire syriaque-français*, 201. See also Nevin Reda, “Women in the Mosque: Historical Perspectives on Segregation”, in *AJISS*, 21(2004).

mother of Samuel consecrated her child, before he was conceived, as a *nazirite* (1 Samuel 1:11); but the Qur'anic Anna, the wife of 'Imran, consecrated the child after she was already conceived (*innī nadhartu laka mā fī baṭnī*). It is important to note that the denominative verb *nadhartu* was used first by Maryam when she made a vow of silence to *al-raḥmān*<sup>20</sup>, and second, by her mother the wife of 'Imran when she consecrated her already conceived child for the service of God.<sup>21</sup> This act of taking a vow by two prominent female figures, the wife of 'Imran and her daughter Maryam, means females can bind themselves by a vow and can be consecrated to the life of the sanctuary or the domain of the sacred.

Al-Suyūṭī, in his list of foreign words, does not include the verb *nadhar*. Jeffery confirms that *nadhara* must have been an early borrowing, but a look at the Qur'anic index of the root *n-dh-r* shows that it is not often used to mean "to make a vow" but is commonly used to mean "to warn", and as such appears in many forms.

'Īsā, the Arabic name of Jesus, always appears in connection with his mother—'Īsā'bnū Maryam,<sup>22</sup>—and often in Medinan verses. 'Īsa is also indicated by New Testament titles: "Spirit of God" (*rūh Allāh*), "Word of God" (*kalimat Allāh*) and "the Messiah Jesus son of Mary" (*al-Masīḥu 'Īsā'bnū Maryam*) as in Q 3:45. Few Muslim scholars interpreted the name as Arabic, and many actually recognized the name as a foreign word (*a'jamī*): In *Lisān al-'arab*, we read that Sībawayh classed it as *a'jamī*, *al-Jawhari* as either Hebrew or Syriac, and al-Zajjāj classed it as Arabized (*mu'arrab*) from the Syriac *Īsū*.<sup>23</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī recognized *al-Masīḥ* as an epithet from the Hebrew origin *Mashīḥ* and 'Īsā as an Arabized form of *Īshū*.<sup>24</sup> Al-Suyūṭī classifies it as either Hebrew or Syriac, without any attempt at comparison between the Christian and Arabic name.<sup>25</sup>

The Qur'anic spelling of 'Īsa, 'Īsā, has caused controversy since it is markedly different from any Greek, Hebrew or Syriac. Neal Robinson explains the grounds for thinking that Jesus's original name was Hebrew, *Yeshūa'*.<sup>26</sup> The original meaning of *Yehoshua'* was "Yahweh helps", but it was popularly understood to mean "Yahweh saves". When the New Testament was translated from the Greek into Syriac, *Iesous* was rendered *Yesū'*, although Syriac-speaking Nestorian Christians called him *Ishu'*. Now the problem is, in fact, in the change of the first letter *yā'* (ī) into *'ayn* (ʿ), which is a rare inversion as "it is unusual that the *yā'* changes into *'ayn* in the Semitic languages".<sup>27</sup> There is the suggestion made by some scholars

20 Maryam said: "*innī nadhartu li'l-raḥmāni sawman fa-lan ukalimma'l-yawma insiyyā*" (Q 19:26).

21 'The wife of 'Imran' said: "*innī nadhartu laka mā fī baṭnī muharrarān fa-taqabbal mimī*" (Q 3: 35).

22 See the entry on 'Īsā in Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, n.d.).

23 *Lisān al-'arab*, 4 (1997), 477.

24 Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq ghawāmid al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Shāhīn, (Beirut, 1995), 1:356.

25 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 4:67.

26 See Robinson "Jesus", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (2003) 3:7..

27 I am indebted to Father Khalīl Rashīd, Professor of Aramaic and Syriac at the Lebanese University for his continuous valuable opinions on the relationship between the Arabic and Syriac languages.

that *y-sh-*ʿ, the Hebrew consonants of *Yeshūa* ʿ, have been reversed for some cryptic reason to give ʿ-*s-y*, the Arabic consonants of ʿ*Īsā*. There is another plausible explanation that a rhyming formation was invented to correspond with *Mūsā* and *Yaḥyā*, on the analogy *Hārūn* and *Mārūt*; *Yājūj* and *Mājūj*.<sup>28</sup> The issue remains unresolved since there is no evidence that the name ʿ*Īsā* was in use in pre-Islamic poetry or in pre-Islam, although there was a monastery in Syria which may have been known as the ʿ*Īsāniyya* as early as 571 CE.<sup>29</sup> Maybe Jeffery's final opinion, on the origin of the Qur'anic name of ʿ*Īsa*, still holds some truth:

"Till further information comes to hand we shall have to content ourselves with regarding it as some form of 'konsonanten permutation' due maybe, to Muhammad himself, or perhaps influenced, as Horovitz, KU, 128, suggests, by Nestorian pronunciation."<sup>30</sup>

*Al-ḥawāriyyūn*, apostles, the word borrowed from Ethiopic, in which the word *ḥawāriyā* has the same meaning.<sup>31</sup> *Al-ḥawāriyyūn*, the title of ʿ*Īsa*'s disciples appears only in Medinan verses (Q 3:52, 5:111–112; and 61:14). Although *al-Suyūfī* gives the word the meaning of washermen and admits it as Nabatean,<sup>32</sup> many Muslim scholars try to find their ad hoc solutions to give it distinct Arabic roots, from either *ḥawara* "to return" or *ḥawira* "to be glistening white". Al-Zamakhsharī explains *ḥawari* men as "the best of chosen me" and quotes a verse by al-Yahskuri describing urban ladies as *ḥawāriyyāt* (*al-ḥadāriyyāt al-ḥawāriyyāt*) because of their colors and cleanliness.<sup>33</sup> The word, however, means apostles and it is an (early) borrowing from Ethiopic.<sup>34</sup>

A key verb, "*iṣṭafā*", appears in a key statement at the introduction of the narrative section. *Allāh iṣṭafa* means God had chosen (*ikhtāra*)<sup>35</sup> Adam, Nuh, the family of Ibrahim and the family of ʿImran above all people. The verb also appears in relation to Maryam, whose chosenness is certainly central to the chosenness of her family of ʿImran. In "the chosen verse", the word is repeated to emphasize the different occasions of Maryam's chosenness (Q 3:42). In a descriptive form, the term appears in the Meccan period: Musa is mentioned as one of "those chosen by God" (*al-mu ṣṭafīn*) (Q 7:144). The same applies to Ibrahim and his two staged sons, Ishaq and Ya'qub (Q 38:47) according to the Qur'anic narrative. Ibrahim alone then appears to be "the chosen one" in a Medīnan sura (Q 2:130). The verb, interestingly, in all the Meccan suras as well as in the early Medīnan suras, occurs with gender controversy, particularly, with the issue of "preference of males over females", which is also a key statement inserted (by the narratorial voice) in the speech given by the wife of ʿImran "and the male is not like the female" (*wa-*

28 Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 220.

29 Robinson, "Jesus", 3:9.

30 Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 220.

31 See A. J. Wensinck, "Ḥawārī", in *EI* 3 (Leiden, 1979) 285.

32 Al-Suyūfī, *al-Mutawakkilī*, 130.

33 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:359.

34 Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 116.

35 See *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 4:54.

*laysa'l-dhakarū ka'l-unthā*) (Q 3:36). This formula that is interpreted as preference of males over females is used in specific arguments in the context of freeing God of any association with female deities and to put emphasis on the doctrine of the oneness of God. The people, who preferred male and attributed female deities to God, were described as people who are unfair (*idhān hiya qismatun ḏīzā*).<sup>36</sup>

Table 4.2 Translation and transliteration of Q 17:40 and Q 37:149–153

Has your God chosen for you sons, and taken for Himself daughters among the angels?	<i>afa'asfākum rabbukum bi'l-banīna wa'ttakhadha minā'l-malā'ikati ināthān</i>
truly you utter a most dreadful saying! (Q 17:40)	<i>innakum lataqūlūna qawlān 'azīmā! (Q 17:40)</i>
Now ask them for their opinion: “Is it that your Lord has only daughters, and they have sons?”	<i>fa'stafūhim alirabbika'l-banātu wa-lahumu'l-banūn</i>
or that We created the angels females, and they are witnesses (thereto)?	<i>am khalaqnā'l-malā'ikata ināthān wa-hum shāhidūn</i>
It is not they say, from their own invention, “God had begotten a child”?	<i>alā innahum min ifkihim layaqūlūn walada'llāhu</i>
They are liars. did He (then) choose daughters rather than sons? (Q 37:149–153)	<i>wa-innahum lakādhībūn iṣṭafā'l-banāti 'alā'l-banīn (Q 37:149–153)</i>

It is clear, however, that there is gender awareness within the Qur'an. This is also clarified when reference in the Qur'an is made to those who associate girls (*banāt*) to God and whose faces turn black upon hearing the news of the birth of a girl. Such people are presented as hypocrites. It is important to note here that the phrase “to give glad tidings of the birth of a female” (*bushshira aḥadukum bi'l-unthā*) is used on an equal level with the occasion of the announcement of the birth of male prophets (Q 43:17). Gender sensitivity, however, seems to concern preaching ardent monotheism against those who claim that God has female deities, attributed to God as daughters, which seems to have been a custom of the Arabs of Mecca.<sup>37</sup>

In the early Medīnan period, Maryam is chosen in an exclusive way by God and for a special role: Maryam is given a genealogy named the family of 'Imran which is of prophetic descent and on a level equal to that of the family of Ibrahim. Moreover, the female protagonists are given the power of naming to legitimize this matrilineal genealogy: the wife of 'Imran is given the power to name her daughter

36 See Q 53: 30.

“I have seen Lāt and 'Uzzā and another, the third Manāt?  
What! For you the male, and for Him the female?

Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair” (*tilka idhān qismatun ḏīzā*) Q 53: 19–22.

37 See Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge, 1999).

and Maryam is given the power to ascribe her first name as a family name (*nisba*) to her son, who is always called the son of his mother. Therefore, the children of Israel (the Jews) who come from the father of patriarchy are not alone in their chosenness by God; 'Isa who comes from a maternal ancestry is equally chosen before God. This implied friction between patriarchal and matriarchal standards is best illustrated in the hymn of the "Magnificat", *allāhum mā mālika'l-mulk*, which calls the humiliated to rise up and put down the arrogant: it is thus postulated as maternal modest attitude against patriarchal presumptuous attitude. This also may be an attempt to bring disequilibrium to those who claim exclusivity for themselves in prophetic genealogy and in their chosenness (Jews). In other words, Maryam and her son 'Isa are not only called upon in remembrance with the most sympathetic rhetoric of hymn, prayers and stories for themselves but are evoked to offset the patriarchal arrogant claims of their adversaries, the Jews.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

The stylistics approach has estimated the linguistic literary material grammatically and artistically, which is the secret behind the beauty of the text or its inimitability (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*), as was first suggested by the great mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Asadabādī (d. 415/1025)<sup>38</sup> and then applied in the works of the great Ash'arite linguist (*nahwī*) 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. And in applying the modern methodology of stylistics, a list of the grammatical subjects and their verbs is given, which determines the speaker and the role of each of the protagonists. It also exposes the interchangeability of the speakers: God as Lord and Allah, the angels as one angel and 'Isa as "he" and as a magisterial "I" in *fa-atī'ūn* (so follow me).

The repetition of the letter *wāw*, the word *waq'at*, the letter *qāf* and the word *qabūl*, show how the letter and the word play a role in the sound effect.<sup>39</sup> The repetition of the letters *al-dhāl* and *al-qāf*, appearing in the two key words of *al-dhakar* and *qabūl*, shows how the phonetics charge the linguistic discourse with gender awareness.

As for the metaphorical language (*al-ādāt al-bayāniyya*), stylistics explains the textual employment of every technique known to the Arabs in the art of metaphor and simile and the science of meaning (*ilm al-ma'ānī*), as we have thoroughly discussed in the denial of similitude phrase (*jumlat naḥī al-tashbīh*) "and the male is not like the female" and its textual context as an inserted sentence.

We have discussed the meanings of foreign names such as the name of Maryam, her mother's family *Imrān*, *Isā* and *al-hawāriyyūn*, which point to the milieu of the Christian influences that existed in Arabia. It is interesting to point out that, not only are names and nouns arabized, but a verb like *nadhara* is arabized in the

38 See Abd al-Jabbār al-Asadabādī, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wa'l-'adl*, ed. Amīn al-Khawālī (Cairo, 1960), 16:316.

39 Michael Sells records that the sound effects of poetry are divided into seventeen categories, most of which can be applied to the Qur'an. See his article, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in *Sūrat al-Qadr*", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 111 no. 2 (1991) 240.

speech-giving uttered by the wife of 'Imran. The discussion of the Arabic key word *iṣṭafa* in the Qur'anic context uncovered the gender politics raised against those who chose for themselves the boys and attributed to God the female deities (as daughters of God), which makes "the chosenness of Maryam over all women of the worlds" in reality, exclusivity to Maryam.

Stylistics has unveiled textual politics in the maternal name-giving speech of the wife of 'Imran.<sup>40</sup> It has shown how language brings equilibrium, in this effect, since God's acceptance of the female seems to be fundamental to the narratorial voice and then the tone of the text changes by the use of an unusual and beautiful form *qabūl*, which compensates for the dominance of the word *al-dhakar* (male). A question arises from such amazing gender sensitivity in language, which is worth raising and which continues to perplex some readers: Why does the text label the angel (the unnamed *Jibril*) by the plural feminine "the angels" (*al-malā'ika*), especially when we know that the Qur'an warns against calling the angels with female names and calls those who do unbelievers (*inna'lladhīna lā yu'minūna bi'lākhirati l-yusammūna'l-malā'ikata tasmiyata'l-unthā*)? (Q 53:27). Issues of theological concern may not follow the linguistic traditional patterns like this old custom in Arabic which continues to name one angel by the plural feminine angels, although this may give the impression of female intercessors. This further draws attention to the visibility of the role of the feminine in Qur'anic Arabic. Questions like this will always keep the text open to multidimensionality in meaning. Stylistics is one method of apprehending the aesthetic value of the Qur'anic metaphorical language, which is one source of its ambiguity and another source of its beauty. Such characteristics of the Qur'an are typical of classical literature (*al-adab al-khālid*).

40 For the biblical tradition of the maternal name-giving speech, see Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, England, 1992).



## 5 The infancy story of Maryam

### Gender and narrative analysis and intertextuality between the Qur'an and the Protevangelium

#### 5.1 Maryam's entry into the temple: Gender analysis

Gender analysis in the infancy story of Maryam is clearly relevant. From the beginning, we hear of the story of the mother of Maryam, the wife of 'Imran, acting as an initiator of the genealogy of Maryam.<sup>1</sup> The story starts with the narrative verse scenes (31–51), introduced in the beginning with the main theme of the chosenness of two Biblical figures, Adam and Nuh, and two families, the family of Ibrahim and the family of 'Imran, over the rest of the world. Their chosenness is based on genealogy as much as on their history as pious people. The privilege or chosenness of this family is transmitted through blood relations, “offspring as one of the other”, and through religious expressions of their piety. This is emphasized in the story of the wife of 'Imran, the originator of a chosen family that combines both prophetic genealogy and commitment to piety.

This combination of a prophetic bloodline with piety is demonstrated in the choice of the wife of 'Imran to consecrate (*nadhartu mā fi baṭnī*) her child for the service of God. The practice of vow (*nidhr*), as stated by Mahmud al-Bustani, “expresses woman's serious devout consciousness and her recognition of the importance of the viceregency on earth” (*al-wazīfa'l-khilāfiyya 'al'āl-arḍ*).<sup>2</sup> Maryam also was assigned to the care of Zakariyya, who witnessed Maryam's miraculous sustenance. Zakariyya also used to pray equally in the same sanctuary at the Temple “*wa-huwa qā'imun yuṣallī fī'l-mihrāb*”. Zakariyya's prayer to

1 Gender, as a category for analysis in the Qur'an, questions any gender differentiation, dualisms, or inequality on the basis of sexual (biological) differences between women and men. I have given my own translation of “gender” in this context as “the discourse of bias or neutrality to maleness and the social-cultural recognition of women” (*al-khitāb bayna'l-ḥiyad wa'l-taḥayyuz li'l-dhukūra wa'l-i'tirāf al-thaqāfi'l-ijtimā'i bi'l-nissā'*). For gender definition see Pam Lieske, “Gender” in *EFLT*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, (New York, 1977), 178–179. See also Asma Barlas, “Believing Women” in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, (Austin, 2002); Umaima Abu Bakr and Shireen Shukry, *al-Mar'a wa'l-gender: ilghā'altamyiz al-thaqāfi wa'l-ijtimā'i bayna'l-jinsayn* (Damascus & Beirut, 2002); and Eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Womenspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York & London, 1979).

2 See Maḥmūd al-Bustānī, *Dirāsāt faniyya fī qaṣaṣi al-Qur'an* (Beirut, 1989).

his Lord, which was already presented in *Sūrat Maryam*, “*fahab lī min lladunka waliyyā*” (Q 19:5) implicitly reappears in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*, “*rabbānā . . . wa hab lanā min lladunka raḥmatan*” (Q 3:8). This also shows the importance of prayers and the role they play in relation to the needs of these religious people who fear death and the end of the prophetic line.

Maryam’s upbringing in the Temple was a matter of controversy from the beginning because according to religious custom “the male is preferable to the female for service in the temple”, but God accepted Maryam graciously and made her grow in righteousness. It is worth mentioning that the acceptance of Maryam’s entry into the temple (*miḥrāb*) relates significantly to gender equality within the right of worship on a high level being analogous to the gender equality that Islam emphasized in the rite of pilgrimage to Mecca and the *ka’ba*.<sup>3</sup> This gender equality in the entry to the *ka’ba* at Mecca was adopted by Muhammad from pre-Islamic times, and the breadth of influence on the women of the Muslim world attests to its importance both to the Arabs and within Islam generally. The following analysis will explain the gender equality in observing the act of circumambulating (*tāwāf*) the *ka’ba* and running (*sa’ī*) between Ṣafā and Marwā.

During the pilgrimage to Mecca, men and women alike circumambulate the *ka’ba* seven times. The *ka’ba*, the symbolic house of Ibrahim, is the focal point for every male and female Muslim, just as the Holy of Holies of Maryam (*miḥrāb* Maryam) was for the pious in Maryam’s day. After they finish circumambulating the *ka’ba* seven times, men and women run (*sa’ī*) seven times between two focal points at the two hills of Ṣafā and Marwā. Pilgrimage is never complete without both forms of movement—the circumambulation around one focal point at the *ka’ba* and the back and forth motion between two focal points at Ṣafā and Marwā—making the two movements of equal importance. This supports the equal level of the re-enacting (*muḥakāt*) of both a fatherly image, symbolized in the circumambulation of the *ka’ba* which represents the house of Ibrahim, as well as a motherly image, symbolized in the running between Ṣafā and Marwā, representing Hajar’s search for water for her newborn son.<sup>4</sup> Circumambulation takes on a paternal image, whereas a back-and-forth motion, identifying with the experience of the anxious mother, becomes a maternal image. These motions, executed together in the pilgrimage, bring gender equality to the level of the signification. The mother is the person who can think in terms of ‘I’ and the ‘other’ because of the physical experience of the female body carrying two human bodies at one time during pregnancy: the body of the mother and that of the child. Did not the Qur’an clearly decree that ‘Isa and his mother are one sign in *Sūrat al-Mu’minūn*?<sup>5</sup>

3 For Muslim women’s discussion of Maryam’s example as a significant aspect of understanding the Qur’an’s position on women’s access to sacred space, see Nevin Reda, “Women in the Mosque: Historical Perspectives on Segregation”, *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 21 (2004): 77–97.

4 For the action of the “running ritual” (*sa’ī*) of Hājar in Mecca, see Reuven Firestone, “Abraham” in *EQ* 1,(2001), 9.

5 *Sūrat al-Mu’minūn* is Q 23:50.

This gender analysis supports that this is a right for all Muslim women and not exclusive to Maryam.

Again, this gender equality falls in line with Maryam's role as a maternal and central figure in the genealogy of the family of 'Imran: she was accepted graciously by God, she was given miraculous sustenance, she was chosen over all women of the world and she was also equipped to receive God's verbal inspiration (*wahī*) by her good and pious upbringing. However, Maryam's upbringing and training, at some point in the narrative, was considered controversial by those who were to be entrusted with her upbringing (Q 3:44). The issue of "who would care for the virgin in the Temple" caused conflict, for girls were considered defiled at a certain age. This is also very clearly stated in the infancy story of Maryam in the Book of James or the Protevangelium, but the purification of the Qur'anic Maryam, while implied in terms of physical cleansing and ritual observance is not associated with any taboos regarding the body of the female. This, however, did not prevent exegetes at different intervals in the history of Islam, depending on the cultural environment of the exegete, to dissociate or associate female defilement with the female body.<sup>6</sup> In addition, like his mother who was purified, 'Isa was purified from those who disbelieved (*wa-muṭahhiruka mina'l-ladhīna kafarū*).

## 5.2 Narrative analysis

### 5.2.1 Dialogue and the first narratorial voice (*ṣāhib al-khiṭāb al-aṣl*)

The style of the four integrated narrative scenes, embraces narratology, dialogue and speech-giving to form a complete narrative unit of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. There are four short dialogues, the first between Zakariyya and Maryam (37), the second between the angels and Zakariyya (39–41), the third between the angels and Maryam (45–47), and the fourth between 'Isa and his disciples (49–53).

There are privileges in the way the first narratorial voice (*ṣāhib al-khiṭāb al-aṣl*) speaks directly or indirectly to these holy characters. The wife of 'Imran speaks to her God in the manner of soliloquy (*munājāt*), and the first narratorial voice responds to her soliloquy, so the angels do not speak to her directly. The angels call upon Maryam by her first name, "*yā Maryamu*" (O! Maryam), three times: once to announce her chosenness over all women of the world, a second time to tell her to absorb herself in prayer and invocation (*qunūt*) and a third time to announce to her the coming of a holy son. In addition, God and all the four protagonists, the wife of 'Imran, Zakariyya, Maryam, and 'Isa, are given a chance

6 Al-Rāzī's suggested different explanations to the word "purified you" (*tahharaki*), of which only one is related to menstruation while the others concern purification from bad manners or from the accusation of the Jews. See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (Cairo), 8:42. Sayyid Quṭb also interpreted the purification as from the accusations of the Jews; see Sayyid Quṭb, *fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo, 1978), 1:395.

to speak in the first person singular.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the angels respond to the questions of both Zakariyya and Maryam as an intermediary between God and His chosen people. God's messenger or His spirit, who appears to Maryam in the Meccan period, is identified as the angels in the feminine plural *al-malā'ika*. At this point Maryam speaks only twice, once with Zakariyya in the *mihrāb* (37) and once with the angels (47), while God does not speak directly to Maryam, but only to 'Isa: "O 'Isa! I will" (*idh qāla'llāhu: yā 'Isā innī*, Q 3:55).

The narratorial voice speaks to Muhammad about God's *tanzīl* (3 and 7); God is evoked in the third person singular (*ṣiḡhat al-ghā'ib*): "There is no God but He" (*lā ilāha illā huwa*, 6 and 7). In God's witness of his oneness (16), God also evokes Himself in the third person singular: "God witnesses that there is no God but He" (*shahida'llāhu annahu lā ilāha illā huwa*). This Arabic grammatical regularity is typical on occasions when God is described; it is better in this case that He becomes third person because it is rhetorically finer for the other to describe Him. God, however, addresses Muhammad in the first personal plural "*nūḥīhi*" (44); this is a common grammatical attitude for the sake of exaggeration intended to express might, responsibility and verbal expressiveness, and is a form of *ta'zīm* that is famous in Arabic rhetoric (*ṣiḡhat al-ta'zīm*). At the same time, God addresses 'Isa in the first person singular, "*innī*", (55) in order to emphasize the difference between Him and 'Isa. Accordingly, the presence of the magisterial speaker, God, on many levels as "He", "We", and "I" proves His presence on many levels. The interchangeability between different speakers and the difficulty in determining who is speaking, at what time, and on what occasion, seems to be particular to the art of Qur'anic narrative.

### 5.2.2 Narrative components

The narratorial discourse reaches its purpose in presenting the pictorial dialogue as prevailing over narratology, at the moment the infancy story of Maryam comes to an end. If one recalls the mythic structure in Maryam's story (Sura 19) and projects it onto Maryam's biography given in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, one can easily recognize the effort at demythologizing 'Isa's birth story, which involves unpacking the meaning of the ambiguous "*al-mutashābih*" so the truth "*al-muḥkam*" contained in them can be discerned. This is an early attempt at self-referentiality or interpretation in the Qur'an.<sup>8</sup> We can understand this exegesis in the progression of the events them-

7 "When the wife of 'Imran said: 'O my Lord!'" (*idh qālat imr'atu 'Imrāna rabbi*, Q 3:35); "at that time Zakariyyā invoked his Lord saying:" (*hunālika da'a Zakariyyā rabbahu qāla: rabbi hab lī*, Q 3:38); "He [Zakariyyā] said: 'O my Lord! How can I have a son when ...'" (*qāla: rabbi anna yakūnu lī ghulām*, Q 3:40) "She (Maryam) said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?'" (*qālat: rabbi anna yakūnu lī walad wa-lam yamssassnī bashar*, Q 3:47); "Then when 'Isā came to know of their disbelief, he said: 'Who will be my supporters in Allah's cause?'" (*fa-lammā aḡassa 'Isā minhumu l-kufr qāla: man anṣārī ilā Allah*, Q 3:52) "Then God said:" (*idh qāla Allāhu*, Q 3:55).

8 "*Al-Qur'an yufassuru ba'dahu al-ba'd*", as Shaykh Muhammad 'Abdu once said.

selves. The setting, the wilderness, is no longer identified in a general sense; Maryam is located in the *miḥrāb*, the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple. Maryam is situated in the *miḥrāb* where she grew in righteousness; Zakariyya is also associated with the *miḥrāb* where he used to visit Maryam (*idh dakhala ‘alayha’l-miḥrāb*) and where he used to pray (*wa-huwa qā’imun yuṣallī fī’l-miḥrāb*). The alternating of the stories of Zakariyya and Maryam parallels the space they share.

The sequential correlation of the scenes (*tajānus bayna’l-mashāhid*) is manifested in the nature of the characters, their situations and the kind of events that they experience. It is structurally manifested: Maryam’s story appeared in the first three narrative scenes. The scenes are short in size and Maryam is the thread that weaves the birth scenes together, one from the other, just like the umbilical cord that ties the mother to the fetus, so that the family members, her mother, Zakariyya and her son, ‘Isa, come together in one genealogy. This is similar to the mother of “the heavenly book” (*umm al-kitāb*), which brings together the Torah, the Gospel and what descended on Muhammad. This rhetorical image, which made physical procreation an idea for the descending of the *kitāb*, “the heavenly book”, just like natural births, is an innovative idea, which deserves further research.

The first scene focuses on her infancy. The second scene centers on Zakariyya and alternates with the first scene, just as in *Sūrat Maryam* and the Gospel of Luke. The third scene is the longest and covers the religious upbringing and preparation of Maryam before she receives the annunciation.

The introductions of the chosen persons, Adam and Nuh, the family of Ibrahim and the family of ‘Imran as well as the protagonists, the wife of ‘Imran, Zakariyya, Maryam and ‘Isa, are all chronologically placed. The time component, however, remains abridged: in a few verses, the text covers the family background, upbringing and virtue of Maryam. Then suddenly ‘Isa appears talking to the children of Israel as an adult and as their own messenger.

The family of ‘Imran is a matrilineal family founded by a female ancestor. Though named after her (absent) husband, the wife of ‘Imran has the power of naming; she names her daughter Maryam and Maryam gives her first name as a family name (*nisba*) to her son, *‘Isā’bnu Maryama*, the final protagonist in the series, whose birth story is controversial in the eyes of those who seek dissension. It is important to note here that ‘Isa’s special miracles and religious status are understated against God’s attributes or power to create, which are stressed at the commentary of each verse unit.<sup>9</sup> In the last unit, “So (it will be) for God creates what He wills” (*kadhāliki/a’llāhu yakhluqu mā yashā’*) ends the ambiguity over ‘Isa’s birth story, which must have been at the centre of the issue of the interpretation of the ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt or mā tashābahā minhu*). By confirming the power of God to create what He wills, Christ ‘Isa, son of Maryam, just like Adam (who is born fatherless and motherless), is born fatherless with a matrilineal

9 Examples are “God provides sustenance to whom He wills” (*Allāha yarzuqu man yashā’u*), “God does what He wills” (*Allāhu yaf’alu mā yashā’*), “So (it will be) for God creates what He wills” (*kadhāliki’llāhu yakhluqu mā yashā’u*).

descent.<sup>10</sup> The confirmation of a matrilineal descent and a fatherless situation does not completely remove the element of the marvel in 'Isa's birth story. Some elements of the miraculous, therefore, do not disappear completely and, at the centre of the retelling of the stories, it seems the demythologizing process has no interest, or vision, in removing all the elements of marvel. *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* presents again the old motif of miraculous gifts of holy sons, to Zakariyya and Maryam, and one protagonist is added, who is given a gift of a holy female progeny. Furthermore, the element of the miraculous continues in the role that the angels play in giving Maryam sustenance, the annunciation, to both Zakariyya and Maryam, and in the entire list given of 'Isa's miracles executed by God's permission (Q 3:49).

### 5.3 Intertextuality between Maryam's infancy story in the Qur'an and the Protevangelium<sup>11</sup>

There is a striking phenomenon in the Qur'anic presentation of Maryam, which reveals elements in the recounting of her infancy story reflecting canonical and extra-canonical lore. Elements of similarities and differences between the brief biographies of Maryam in the Qur'an and that in the Protevangelium exist, which make the reader appreciate the value of the comparison. These reveal the level of intertextuality that the Qur'an seems to make with the Protevangelium and further show the purpose of the Qur'an's dedication of a biography to Maryam's infancy. A brief historical background of the Protevangelium is provided below prior to any explication of the texts.

#### 5.3.1 Historical background of the Protevangelium

The Protevangelium is as old as the second century AD, evidenced by the Church Fathers who quoted it.<sup>12</sup> The book is available in its original Greek<sup>13</sup> and in

10 The employment of the mother's name in lieu of the father's is not very rare among the Arabs; sometimes the reason lay in the history of the family, other times, because the father was unknown, in both cases, the child might be called after the mother. Examples of mothers' names given in lieu of the fathers' are many: the first Mahdī was called Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya ("Son of the Hanifite Woman") to distinguish him from the sons of 'Alī by the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima; 'Alī ibn Mubārak was known as Ibn al-Zāhida ("Son of the Female Ascetic") because of his mother's renown as a saint. The poet Ibn Mayyāda claimed that his mother was of noble family, therefore he took her name. For names and naming see David Margoliouth, "Names (Arabic)", *ERE* 9 (1956): 136–140.

11 Inter-textuality as used here is according to Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. See the definition in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Columbia University, 1980) 15. See "Intertextuality" in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd. edn. comp J. A. Cuddon (Oxford, 1991), 454. In Arabic "Intertextuality" is "*al-tanāṣ*" or according to Muhammad Arkoun "*al-tadākhul al-naṣṣānī*" which he used in his study of "*Sūrat al-Kahf*", which means that a particular text, like the Qur'an, has a net of relationships with previous texts like the Torah, the New Testament and earlier ancient texts. In that sense these texts or portions of them are continued within the Qur'anic text and assimilated until they become part of it. This does not mean copying, as some imagine it to be, rather, it means responding, assimilating and innovative merging. See M. Arkoun, *al-Qur'ān; min al-Tafsīr al-mawrūth ilā taḥlīl al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*, trans. Hisham Saleh, (Beirut, 2001), 40.

12 Clement of Alexandria d. before 212 CE and Origen d. 253–254 CE

several eastern versions, the oldest of which is Syriac. The translation used in this research is from Montague Rhodes James' translation from Greek into English (original edition 1924).<sup>14</sup> The author of the Protevangelium is unknown, although the research of many western scholars suggests that it is highly unlikely he was a Jewish Christian.<sup>15</sup> The Protevangelium was very popular in early Christianity and it must have been in circulation among Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopic communities. Despite the incongruity of the birth narrative in the Protevangelium with canonical narratives in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, the authority of this extra-canonical text had an obvious influence on early Christian liturgical practice, which continues to shape the nativity's representation in Eastern Christian iconography.<sup>16</sup> The author's sensitivity to the role of the female in his community's religious tradition is evident in the text, just as that of Luke. The Protevangelium of James had a great influence on the development of Mariology. It is also important to acknowledge that Maryam's infancy story was excluded from the canonical Gospels but included in the Qur'an, an important event which demonstrates the continuation of the Mariamic tradition (and vision) from Christianity to Islam.

The biographies of Maryam in the Qur'an and the Protevangelium seem to be incompatible for reasons that are inherent to the nature of the textual structure and language. The Qur'anic biography was delivered orally in Arabic, while the Protevangelium was composed in Greek. While the Qur'anic biography according to Muslims is God's speech, the Protevangelium is authored by a well-educated man, writing perhaps in second century Syria or Egypt.<sup>17</sup> The size of the Qur'anic biography of Maryam is one tenth the size of that of the Protevangelium: ten pages in James' translation. The Qur'an seems to present the biography as a sequence of narrative scenes interwoven with other narrative scenes, which makes the biography unable to stand by itself, while the Protevangelium is a literary genre of biography called "encomium" which in itself can stand as a full text.<sup>18</sup> In spite of these differences in the historical background of the two biographies, a reading of the Protevangelium is essential to know what Christian traditions were familiar to Muhammad and his community at the time.

Passages of the Protevangelium will be presented up to the end of section XI, where the Qur'an seems to depart from the scenario in the Protevangelium.<sup>19</sup> It is very important to pay attention to the two biographies in order to appreciate the literary styles that eventually reveal textual politics of all kinds. The texts of the

13 Papyrus Bodmer V., *Nativité de Marie* (Bibliotheca Boderiana, 1958); this is the only copy from the fourth century. There is a recent French translation of several manuscripts mending Bodmer entitled: *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, édition Publié sous la Direction de François Bovon et Pierre Geoltrain, Index Etablis par Server J. Voicu: Gallimard, 1997.

14 *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. Montague Rhodes James (Oxford, 1980).

15 See Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:425; Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, (CA, 1997), 27–28; and Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 310–311 as quoted in Suleiman A. Mourad, "On the Qur'anic Stories about Mary and Jesus", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1, 2 (1999): 13–24.

16 Shoemaker, "Christians in the Qur'ān", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (2003), 12.

Protevangelium will be presented first, followed by the text of the Qur'an where it is relevant.

### 5.3.2 The Protevangelium and the Qur'an on Maryam's infancy

In this section, the infancy story of Maryam in the Protevangelium is presented following the exact roman numeral divisions of James.<sup>20</sup> After each narrative unit, a summary is added where intertextual issues between the Qur'an and the Protevangelium are discussed, demonstrating both continuity and disruption.

#### I. Ioacim's withdrawal into the wilderness

1 In the histories of the twelve tribes of Israel it is written that there was one Ioacim, exceeding rich: and he offered his gifts twofold saying: that which is of my superfluity shall be for the whole people, and that which is for my forgiveness shall be for the Lord, for a propitiation unto me.

2 Now the great day of the Lord drew nigh and the children of Israel offered their gifts. And Reuben stood over against him saying: It is not lawful for thee to offer thy gifts first, forasmuch as thou hast gotten no seed in Israel.

3 Ioacim was sore grieved, and went unto *the record* of the twelve tribes of the people, saying: I will look upon the record of the twelve tribes of Israel whether I only have not gotten seed in Israel. And he searched, and found *concerning* all the righteous that they had raised up seed in Israel. And he remembered the patriarch Ibrahim, how in the last days of God gave him a son, even Isaac.

4 And Ioacim was sore grieved, and showed not himself to his wife, but betook himself into the wilderness, and pitched his tent there, and fasted forty days and forty nights, saying within himself: I will not go down either for meat or for drink until the Lord my God visit me, and my prayer shall be unto me meat and drink.

**Intertextuality:** The story begins with Joachim and his wife Anna, Mary's parents, who suffer the consequences of barrenness on the personal and community level. The Qur'an does not go into details as the Protevangelium does in the portrayal of the social status of Mary's family; her family is described here as rich and royal. There is also a great day of the Lord that is celebrated; however, God, as well as the people, described as the tribes of Israel, seem to humble and reproach

17 On the background of the author of the Protevangelium or the Infancy Gospel of James see Ronald F. Hock's opinion in *The Life of Mary and the Birth of Jesus: The Ancient Infancy Gospel of James*, ed. Ray Riegert (Berkeley, 1997): 18–19.

18 For the literary style of 'encomium', see Hock, *The Life of Mary*, 23.

19 Maryam's infancy story in the Qur'an is given in twelve verses (35–47), while a longer biography of Mary appears in the Protevangelium in twenty-five passages (I–XXV). Only the first eleven passages are examined here.

20 *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. James, 38–49.



those who leave no seed in Israel. Judith said to Anna: “How shall I curse thee, seeing the Lord had shut up thy womb, to give thee no fruit in Israel?” (39) The curse seems to be that the seedless “is brought forth out of the Temple of the Lord” because there seems to be a certain cherished relationship between the Temple and the procreation of progeny given to the seed of certain families. This was also alluded to in Zakariyya’s words of fear from his people after he would die leaving no progeny (Q 19:5). At every stage in the development of the story, the first person narrator gives equal space to the events surrounding Joachim and Anna, alternating their narratives in a continual pattern. In the Qur’an, however, ‘Imran, Maryam’s father, is completely absent, although his wife, who is the active participant, is named after her husband. The use of dialogue in the Protevangelium, unlike the Qur’an, is rare. After the birth of Maryam, the first person narrator in the Protevangelium always refers to Mary as “the child”, whereas the Qur’an addresses her personally through the angels.

There is a custom of the children of Israel offering their gifts, and Joachim could not offer his gifts because he had “no seed in Israel”. We see that the lack of progeny is a shortcoming in royalty, for progeny determines the relationship between the servant and his Lord. Joachim expresses his disappointment in his failure “concerning all the righteous that they had risen up seed in Israel”.<sup>21</sup> Joachim remembers how in the last days God gave the patriarch Ibrahim a son; thus the Old Testament is extensively drawn upon and imitated.

Joachim’s withdrawal into the wilderness can be likened to that of Maryam’s withdrawal into a far place in the Qur’an, as both result in the annunciation of a coming child. Note that this is featured with female and male alike and is not unique to females. Fasting and prayer is the attitude of the pious in seeking God’s help and salvation.

## II. Anna’s lament

1 Now his wife Anna lamented with two lamentations, and bewailed herself with two bewailings, saying: I will bewail my widowhood, and I will bewail my childlessness.

2 And the great day of the Lord drew nigh, and Judith her handmaid said *unto* her: How long humblest thou thy soul? The great day of the Lord hath come, and it is not lawful for thee to mourn: but take this headband, which the mistress of my work gave me, and it is not lawful for me to put it on, for as much as I am an handmaid, and it hath a mark of royalty. And Anna said: Get thee from me. Lo! I have done nothing (*or* I will not do so) and the Lord hath greatly humbled me: peradventure one gave it to thee in subtlety, and thou art come to make me partaker in thy sin. And Judith said: How shall I curse thee, seeing the Lord hath shut up thy womb, to give thee no fruit in Israel?

3 And Anna was sore grieved and mourned with a great mourning because she was reproached by all the tribes of Israel. And coming to herself said:

<sup>21</sup> *The Protevangelium*, trans. Rhodes James, 39.

What shall I do? I will pray with weeping unto the Lord my God that he visit me. And she put off her mourning garments and cleansed (*or* adorned) her head and put on her bridal garments: and about the ninth hour she went down into the garden to walk there. And she saw a laurel-tree and sat down underneath it and besought the Lord saying: O God of our fathers, bless me, and hearken unto my prayer, as thou didst bless the womb of Sarah, and gavest her a son, even, Isaac.

**Intertextuality:** The narratorial voice gives equal space to both Joachim and Anna on each level in the development of the story. The presentation of the intertwined stories reminds us of the same structure in the pair story of Zechariah and Mary in the Gospel according to Luke and in *Sūrat Maryam* in the Qur'an. This shows that this pair story has developed into a literary "motif" to be assimilated by later texts. This is exactly what Kristeva means by literary intertextuality. The Qur'an, however, does not give the same space to 'Imran in the way the Protevangelium gave to Joachim. Even naming the wife of 'Imran after her husband does not give 'Imran any space in the dialogue between the interlocutors. The great intertwined story of Joachim and Anna points to the same disappointments that men and women share when they are deprived of progeny. Just as this part ends with Anna's prayers to receive the blessing of the Lord, so also Hanna prays at the end to get the blessing of the Lord; this being a reference to Sarah and her prayers. The name Anna also reminds us of Anna, the mother of Samuel; this being adapted from the Book of Samuel.<sup>22</sup> Also the laurel tree under which Anna, Mary's mother, stands, reminds us of Maryam's palm, which she stood underneath. The upcoming section, however, reveals differences between the lamentation of Anna and Maryam.

### III. Anna's cry of anguish

And looking up to the heaven she espied a nest of sparrows in the laurel-tree, and made a lamentation within herself, saying: Woe unto me, who begat me? And what womb brought me forth, for I am become a curse before the children of Israel, and I am reproached, and they have mocked me forth out of the temple of the Lord? 2 Woe unto me, unto me what am I likened? I am not likened unto the fowls of the heaven, for even the fowls of the heaven are fruitful before thee, O Lord. Woe unto me, unto what I am likened? I am not likened unto the beasts of the earth, for even the beasts of the earth are fruitful before thee, O Lord. Woe unto me, unto what I am likened? I am not likened unto these waters, for even these waters are fruitful before thee, O Lord. 3 Woe unto me, unto what I am likened? I am not likened unto this earth, for even this earth bringeth forth her fruits in due season and blesseth them O Lord.

**Intertextuality:** The cry "woe unto me" sent up by Anna puts Anna in a pejorative position in comparison with the fruitful fowls of heaven, the fruitful beasts of the

<sup>22</sup> See Hanna's prayer in the Bible: I Samuel 1

earth, and even the waters which are fruitful and the earth which brings forth its fruits in due season. Maryam's mixed feelings of pain and joy from the experience of labor, in *Sūrat Maryam*, may be an answer to her mother's cry of pain from the experience of barrenness. Biblical women and Qur'anic Mary, thus, in particular lament in the shades of the trees, in times of deprivation as well as in times of delivery.

#### IV. The Angel's annunciation to Anna and Ioacim

1 And behold an angel of the Lord appeared, saying unto her: Anna, Anna, the Lord hath hearkened unto thy prayer, and thou shalt conceive and bear, and thy seed shall be spoken of in the whole world. And Anna said: As the Lord my God liveth, if I bring forth either male or female, I will bring it for a gift unto the Lord my God, and it shall be ministering unto him all the days of its life.

2 And behold there came two messengers saying unto her: Behold Ioacim thy husband cometh with his flocks: for an angel of the Lord came down unto him saying: Ioacim, Ioacim, the Lord God hath hearkened unto thy prayer. Go thee down hence, for behold thy wife Anna hath conceived.

3 And Ioacim got him down and called his herdsmen saying: Bring me hither ten lambs without blemish and without spot, and they shall be for the Lord my God; and bring me twelve tender calves, and they shall be for the priests and for the assembly of the elders; and an hundred kids for the whole people.

4 And behold Ioacim came with his flocks, and Anna stood at the gate and saw Ioacim coming, and ran and hung upon his neck, saying: Now know I that the Lord God hath greatly blessed me: for behold the widow is no more a widow, and she that was childless shall conceive. And Ioacim rested the first day in his house.

**Intertextuality:** The Qur'anic version of the story starts at this point of the narrative in the Protevangelium, with the wife of 'Imran appearing after she conceived and before she swore the oath to the Lord. She said: "I have vowed to You, in dedication, what is within my belly" (*innī nadhartu laka mā fī baṭnī muḥarrarān*, Q 3:35). The difference in the two scenarios lies in the timing of the name-speech of the wife of 'Imran; in the Qur'an she gives the speech after getting pregnant, while in the Protevangelium this speech occurs at the occasion of the annunciation of the angel. Also, Anna consecrates the child to serve the Lord, whether the child is male or female: "as the Lord my God liveth, if I bring forth either male or female, I will bring it for a gift unto the Lord my God, and it shall be ministering unto him all the days of its life" (IV:1) is transformed by the narratorial voice into a "preference" of the male over the female in the service in the temple: *wa'llālu a'lamu bimā waḍa'at wa-laysa'l-dhakarū ka'l-unthā*, Q 3:36.

When Anna conceived, the angel of the Lord also appeared to Joachim to announce to him the good news, after which he gave offerings to the Lord. When Anna saw Joachim coming she said: "Now know I that the Lord God hath greatly

blessed me: for behold the widow is no more a widow, and she that was childless shall conceive” (IV:4). The term “blessing” is a key term in the Protevangelium and shall reappear often with the Lukan Mary, but this key term “blessing” (*ni'ma*) seems to be transformed in Qur'anic Arabic into mercy (*rahma*).

### V. Anna is pregnant and she gives birth

1 And on the morrow he offered his gifts, saying in himself: If the Lord God be reconciled unto me, the plate *that is upon the forehead* of the priest will make it manifest unto me. And Ioacim offered his gifts and looked earnestly upon the plate of the priest when he went up unto the altar of the Lord, and he saw no sin in himself. And Ioacim said: Now know I that the Lord is become propitious unto me and hath forgiven all my sins. And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and went unto his house.

2 And her months were fulfilled, and in the ninth month Anna brought forth. And she said unto the midwife: What have I brought forth? And she said: A female. And Anna said: My soul is magnified this day, and she laid herself down. And when the days were fulfilled, Anna purified herself and gave suck to the child and called her Mary.

**Intertextuality:** In the Qur'anic version, the wife of 'Imran makes a speech to the Lord to announce the sex of the baby and that she will name her “Maryam”, asking the Lord for the protection of her daughter and her daughter's son. This maternal naming-speech seems to draw upon Eve in Genesis 4:1, for she who was previously an object of naming became a subject of naming. At the birth of her first son, Eve, as the primordial mother, delivers a fascinating naming-speech: “I have created a man [equally together] with the Lord.”<sup>23</sup> It is interesting here that the wife of 'Imran seems to follow the example of the Eve of Genesis and not the example of the Protevangelium's Anna. Further, the maternal naming-speech of the wife of 'Imran is interrupted, as Al-Zamakhsharī interprets, by the narratorial voice in two phrases, “God knows best what she had delivered” and “and no wise is the male like the female”, which means that God needs not be informed of things which He knows and that the male entry into the *mihrāb* is preferable to the female's entry. The author of the Protevangelium makes Anna swear the oath of dedication to the service of God whether the child is female or male, while the Qur'an is blunt about the implicit logic of male preference, inserted in the speech of the wife of 'Imran: “and the male is not like the female”. This statement is presented as a postulate, for soon God accepted Maryam's entry into the *mihrāb* equally as that of a man. However, this inserted expression “and the male is not like the female” must be understood in the context of consecrating children in the Jewish temple to serve the Lord and not the Qur'an's final word on the matter, that is, it should not be selected out of context to be manipulated for the “divine” logic

23 The translation is rendered by Cassuto and quoted by Ilana Pardes *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge Massachusetts & London, England 1992), 40.

of sexual preference for the service of God.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the wife of 'Imran gives a maternal naming-speech and speaks to her Lord in the first person singular but it is always the narratorial voice which speaks on behalf of the Protevangelium's Anna. In Greek manuscripts of the Protevangelium, both ancient and medieval, it is also the narratorial voice which speaks on behalf of Anna.

## VI. Celebrating the birth of Mary

1 And day by day the child waxed strong, and when she was six months old her mother stood her upon the ground to try if she would stand; and she walked seven steps and returned unto her bosom. And she caught her up, saying: As the Lord my God liveth, thou shalt walk no more upon this ground, until I bring thee into the temple of the Lord. And she made a sanctuary in her bed chamber and suffered nothing common or unclean to pass through it. And she called for the daughters of the Hebrews that were undefiled, and they carried her hither and thither.

2 And the first year of the child was fulfilled, and Ioacim made a great feast and bade the priests and the scribes and the assembly of the elders and the whole people of Israel. And Ioacim brought the child to the priests, and they blessed her saying: O God of our Fathers, bless this child and give her a name renowned for ever among all generations. And all the people said: So be it, so be it. Amen. And he brought her to the high priests and they blessed her saying: O God of the high places, look upon this child bless her with the last blessing which hath no successor.

3 And her mother caught her up into the sanctuary of her bedchamber and gave her suck.

And Anna made a song unto the Lord God, saying:

I will sing an hymn unto the Lord my God, because he hath visited me and taken away from me the reproach of mine enemies, and the Lord hath given me a fruit of his righteousness, single *and* manifold before him. Who shall declare upon the sons of Reuben that Anna giveth suck? Hearken, hearken, ye twelve tribes of Israel, that Anna giveth suck. And she laid the child to rest in the bedchamber of her sanctuary, and went forth and ministered unto them. And when the feast was ended, they gat them down rejoicing, and glorifying the God of Israel.

**Intertextuality:** The upbringing of Mary is given in details in the Protevangelium: “When she was able to stand, when she walked seven steps, and when her mother made her a sanctuary in her bedchamber so that nothing common or unclean could

24 Bint al-Shāṭī, in her anthology of short stories of a selected group of Egyptian women who “paid the price for the emancipation of women”, entitled *Ṣuwar min ḥayātihinnā*, introduced her entire book with the Qur’anic formula of “and the male is not like the female” but Bint al-Shāṭī never tried to study and interpret the meaning of “*jumlat n aḥī tashbih al-dhakar bi’l-unthā*”. See Bint al-Shāṭī, *Ṣuwar min ḥayātihinnā: fī Jil al-ṭalī’a min al-ḥarīm ilā’l-jāmi’ā*, 2nd edn., (Cairo, 1991), 8.

pass through it.” This separation is in preparation for the next step, when her father and mother prepare her for being given to the Temple, following the vow made to the Lord.

It is interesting that “her father made a great feast and bade the priests and the scribes and the assembly of the elders and the whole people of Israel. And Ioacim brought the child to the priests and the scribes, and they blessed her, saying: ‘O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name renowned for ever among generations.’” Can this fatherly and patriarchal celebration on the occasion of the coming of a female child be seen as for Mary’s own sake, that is, without the presumption that she is the future mother of Jesus?

Furthermore, it is interesting that when Ioacim brought the child to the priests, it is they who blessed her: This blessing among all generations is very central in the Miriamic tradition; it reappears in Luke as well as in the Qur’an, although in the latter it is in the context of chosenness and not of blessing. At this instant, Anna addresses a song unto the Lord God, saying:

“I will sing a hymn unto the Lord my God because he had visited me and taken away from me the reproach of mine enemies” (PJ VI: 3). The hymn or the song at the rejoicing of the coming of a child by Mary has a long Biblical tradition: a song was sung by Anna, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2), and by Anna the mother of Mary (PJ) and later by Mary the mother of Jesus, who sang the “Magnificat” as recorded in Luke. This is in addition to a motif of “the reversal of standards” in the “Magnificat” which is evoked in Muhammad’s mouth (Q 3:26). This exposes the resonance between all these mothers and Muhammad, and the established tradition of songs of female rejoicing and thankfulness on the occasion of the coming of a child. The passing of the hymn of thanks and its Mariamic tradition brings the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions together in a song of rejoicing.

## **VII. Mary’s entry into the temple**

1 And unto the child her months were added: and the child became two years old. And Ioacim said: Let us bring her up to the temple of the Lord that we may pay the promise which we promised; lest the Lord require it of us (lit. send unto us), and our gift become unacceptable. And Anna said: Let us wait until the third year, that the child may not long after her father or mother. And Ioacim said: Let us wait.

2 And the child became three years old, and Ioacim said: Call for the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take every one a lamp, and let them be burning, that the child turn not backward and her heart be taken captive away from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they were gone up into the temple of the Lord.

And the priest received her and kissed her and blessed her and said: The Lord hath magnified thy name among all generations; in thee in the latter days shall the Lord make manifest his redemption unto the children of Israel. And he made her to sit upon the third step of the altar. And the Lord put grace upon her and she danced with her feet and all the house of Israel loved her.

**Intertextuality:** The narratorial voice speaks of how the unnamed priest received, kissed, and blessed Mary and said: “The Lord hath magnified thy name among all generations; in thee in the latter days shall the Lord make manifest his redemption unto the children of Israel.” This statement is clearly a retelling of Mary’s role as the mother of the Messiah, Christ Jesus. Also, this exclusive status of Mary “among all generations and the hereafter” reappears in the chosenness of Maryam (*‘alā nisā’i’l-‘ālamīn*).

### VIII. Mary reaches puberty

1 “And her parents gat them down marveling, and praising the Lord God because the child was not turned away backward. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as a dove that is nurtured: and she received food from the hand of an angel.”

2 “And when she was twelve years old, there was a council of the priests saying: Behold Mary is become twelve years old in the temple of the lord. What then shall we do with her? Lest she pollute the sanctuary of the Lord. And they said unto the high priest: Thou standest over the altar of the Lord. Enter in and pray concerning her: And whatsoever the Lord shall reveal to thee, that let us do.

3 And the high priest took the vestment with the twelve bells and went in unto the Holy of the Holies and prayed concerning her. And lo, an angel of the Lord appeared saying to him: Zacharias, Zacharias, go forth and assemble them that are widowers of the people, and then let them bring every man a rod, and to whomsoever the Lord shall show sign, his wife shall she be. And the heralds went forth over all the country round about Judaea, and the trumpet of the lord sounded, and all men ran thereto.

**Intertextuality:** In the Qur’an, Maryam’s acceptance and growing “like a good plant” (*wa anbatahā nabātān ḥasanān*, Q 3:37) and her miraculous food which was given in the temple (*miḥrāb*) resonates with the Protevangelium; also, when Zakariyya asked her about the source of her sustenance, Maryam answered, “that it was from God: For God provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure.” The food that was sent from God, just as in the Protevangelium, was interpreted by some Muslim scholars as a miraculous sign (*mu’jiza*) attributed to Maryam, while other Muslim scholars considered this sign a mere divine favor (*karāma*).<sup>25</sup>

### IX. Mary’s sponsorship

1 And Joseph cast down his gaze and ran to meet them, and when they were gathered together they went to the high priest and took their rods *with them*.

25 For the debate of this issue and its relationship to Maryam’s prophethood in Islam see Maribel Fierro, “Women as Prophets in Islam”, in *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources* (London and New York, 2002).

And he took the rods of them all and went into the temple and prayed. And when he had finished the prayer he took the rods and went forth and gave them back to them: and there was no sign upon them. But Joseph received the last rod: and lo, a dove came forth of the rod and flew upon the head of Joseph. And the priest said unto Joseph: Unto thee hath it fallen to take the virgin of the Lord and keep her for thyself. 2 And Joseph refused, saying: I have sons, and I am an old man, but she is a girl: lest I became a laughing-stock to the children of Israel. And the priest said unto Joseph: Fear the Lord thy God, and remember what things God did unto Dathan and Abiram and Korah, how the earth clave and they were swallowed up because of their gain-saying. And now fear thou, Joseph, lest it be so in thine house. And Joseph was afraid, and took her to keep her for himself. And Joseph said unto Mary: Lo, I have received thee out of the temple of the Lord: and now I do leave thee in my house, and I go away to build my buildings and I will come *again* unto thee. The Lord shall watch over thee.”

**Intertextuality:** The Qur’anic version does not mention Joseph at all and there is no allusion as to the identity of the sponsor as a husband for Maryam. What the Qur’an is interested in mentioning is the dispute among the priests—as to who should be charged with the care of Maryam—which is transformed into evidence of Muhammad’s knowledge of unseen news (*min anba’ al-ghayb*) which was revealed to Muhammad as a witness of his prophethood (Q 3:44).

#### **X. Mary is given the hyacinthine, the scarlet and the true purple**

Now there was a council of the priests, and they said: Let us make a veil for the temple of the Lord. And the priests said: Call unto me pure virgins of the tribe of David. And the officers departed and sought and found seven virgins. And the priests called to mind the child Mary, that she was of the tribe of David and was undefiled before God: and the officers went and fetched her. And they brought them into the temple of the Lord, and the priest said: Cast me lots, which of *you* shall weave the gold and the undefiled (the white) and the fine linen and the silk and the hyacinthine, and the scarlet and the true purple. And the lot of the true purple and the scarlet fell unto Mary, and she took them and went unto her house.

[And at that season Zechariah became dumb, and Samuel was in his Stead until the time when Zachariah spake *again*.] But Mary took the scarlet and began to spin it.

**Intertextuality:** There is an allusion in the Qur’an to Maryam being of the house of David by way of calling her family name ‘Imran or the Biblical Amram. As to this issue of the defilement of the temple and this excessive concern with cleaning and purifying, it does not reappear in the Qur’an. Also there is no mention of her spinning. Zechariah’s fast of silence, however, reappears in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q 19:10) and *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (Q 3:41).



**XI. The Annunciation to Mary (of the son of God)**

1 And she took the pitcher and went forth to fill it with water: and lo a voice saying: Hail, thou that art highly favored; the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And she looked about her upon the right hand and upon the left, to see whence this voice should be; she went to her house trembling, set down the pitcher, and took the purple and sat on her seat and drew out the thread.

2 And behold an angel of the Lord stood before her saying: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace before the Lord of all things, and thou shalt conceive of his word. And she, when she heard it, questioned in herself saying: Shall I verily conceive of the living God, and bring forth after the manner of all women? And the angel of the Lord said: Not so Mary, for a power of the Lord shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Highest. And thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord is before him: be unto me according to thy word.

**Intertextuality:** In the Qur'an, it is the angels who utter the words of blessing upon Maryam: "The angels said: 'O Maryam! God has chosen you and purified you, and chosen you above the women of all generations. O Maryam! Worship your Lord devoutly: Prostrate yourself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down'" (Q 3:42–43). It is interesting to note that the angels' annunciation to Maryam is translated in Islamic art of the book into the angel's appearance to her, either while she was at the well with the pitcher or as she was weaving, just like in the Christian iconography of the Annunciation. Hence, Muslim artists did not hesitate to imitate Christian pictorial images related to Mary, in particular in the Persian art of the Book.<sup>26</sup> This verse precedes the verse of the dispute over who shall be charged with taking care of Maryam, meaning that the chosenness and purification of Maryam is originally related to an issue of her coming of age and the possibility of her polluting the Temple, which is mentioned in the Protevangelium and not in the Qur'an.

**5.3.3 Qur'anic departure from the narrative of the Protevangelium**

This last unit (PJ XI: 2) seems to be the beginning of the Qur'an's departure of the Protevangelium's narrative, and the Qur'an ends the short biography by the angel's annunciation of 'Isa's birth: "O Maryam! God gives you glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be 'Isa son of Maryam, held in honour in this

26 Two miniature paintings beautifully depict the annunciation to Maryam. The first depicts Maryam beside the well with the angel appearing to her in human form, see Basil Gray, *The World History of Rashid al-Din: A Study of the Royal Asian Society* (Edinburgh, 1978) and the second depicts Maryam weaving with the angel appearing in angelic wings, see P. Soucek, "An illustrated Manuscript of al-Biruni's *Chronology of Nations*", in P.J. Chelkowski, *The Scholar and the Saint* (New York, 1975). The two miniature paintings are from AD 1307.

world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God” (Q 3:46). Maryam questions the angel about the annunciation, as in Luke and in the Protevangelium: “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me? He (the angel) said (answered): “Even so, God said: ‘God creates what He wills, when He decrees a thing He does but say to it “Be,” and it is!” (Q 3:47).

This change in the scenario appears to be for a matter of doctrine, that is, for the sake of the controversy over ‘Isa’s birth story earlier mentioned from *Sūrat Maryam*. The story of the birth of ‘Isa, the son of Maryam and not the son of God, is now confirmed in the scenario of the matrilineal genealogy that the Qur’an is interested to give to Maryam; and she being the only parent of ‘Isa. The proof which is given is in the analogy between Adam and ‘Isa. For as Adam, the first human being was born from no father and mother, ‘Isa is fatherless and was born only from his mother. “For God created what He willed: When He had decreed a plan, He but said to it ‘Be,’ and it is!” (Q 3:47) In this argument, the story of the birth of ‘Isa like every human birth is confirmed and made of “the firmly established verses” (*al-āyāt al-muḥkamāt*) as in opposition to any of “the ambiguous verses” (*al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt*).

As to Maryam’s submission to God, whose power “to create what He wills”, this is an exact remembering of Mary’s own words in Luke 1:38: “Be it unto me according to thy word” as well as in the Protevangelium: “Be it unto me according to thy word” (PJ X1: 2). This submission of Maryam is “The Marial Sign” (*Le Signe Marial*) which Louis Massignon, the father of inter-faith dialogue, invoked for a mutual understanding between Christianity and Islam.<sup>27</sup>

## 5.4 Conclusion

Before narrative and gender elements are analyzed in this chapter, the most fascinating image of a maternal concept in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* is restated as a reminder: the kitāb family (*tanzīl*). *Tanzīl* is analogous to the genealogy of the Āl ‘Imrān founded by a female ancestor, and delineates revelation as a charged physical phenomenon analogous to procreation, in order to re-emphasize the sacred role of the mother. As far as the development of literary forms is concerned, one notices that unlike *Sūrat Maryam*, where the reading serves as a text and a counter text, in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* Christian themes and vocabulary become integrated with Muslim polemic and concepts.

Maryam’s entry into the *miḥrāb*, the holy of holies of the Temple, was compared to the female’s entry into the *ka’ba*, a comparable holy of holies of the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) at Mecca. This led to examining the full presence of the pilgrim’s experience at the *ka’ba* in the symbolic ritual of re-enacting a mother experience, in running to look for water for her newborn child, between two focal points (*saṭ*), in contrast to the circumambulation of one focal point to re-enact a father experience of building the one house, Ibrahim, the first patriarch of the monotheist

27 Louis Massignon, “Le Signe Marial”, in *Rythme du Monde* 3 (1948).

tradition. This interesting gender equality in the realm of sacred space led to the insight about gender equality in the textual space which makes one understand, for the first time, the verse that decreed that 'Isa and his mother are one sign in *Sūrat al-Mu'minūn*.<sup>28</sup> The child and mother go through one experience in conception and childbirth. Further, the otherness of Hajar, who was left to survive on her own in this barren land and was running between two places, is the sign that the mother is always "one" and "the other". This maternal experience might make the mother more tolerant of difference than the father and thus more accepting of otherness.

This drama that all pilgrims re-enact at the *ka'ba* emphasizes gender equality in the pillars of Islam and adds to the argument Muslim women often make that "Islam stresses the importance of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of being and the equality of all individuals."<sup>29</sup>

A review of the narrative components addressed the issue of the narratorial voice and dialogue, which continues to be of importance in this early Medinan sura. Some explanation is given on the elements of interpretation that the Qur'an seems to undertake for the sake of demythologizing and Islamicizing the birth story of 'Isa. Such elements are apparent in the setting which is now located in the *mihrāb*, in the scenes which are correlated to form the whole narrative, in the time component and in the issue of naming and unnamng. 'Isa's matronym and the likening of him to Adam, who is fatherless and motherless, still maintain the mythic element to a certain degree. The most important role that Maryam continues to play, as in *Sūrat Maryam*, is given in the most fascinating image found among Qur'anic woman: Maryam is the thread that weaves the narrative scenes of her mother, Zakariyya and her son 'Isa, together. This is just like the *kitāb*, which refers to the Torah, the Gospel and what descended on Muhammad together to one foundation called *umm al-kitāb*. If in *Sūrat Maryam*, the female was venerated for her power of fertility, here the female is venerated for her maternal power.

Elements of intertextuality between the infancy story of Maryam in the Qur'an and the Protevangelium are given without presupposing whether or not the Qur'an depended on the Protevangelium. This approach is important in order to show the uniqueness, the strategies and constraints of each telling in its larger context(s). According to Barbara Herrnstein Smith "there is never a single context in which a story can be heard or read or told, stories always have plural contexts".<sup>30</sup> The Protevangelium seems to follow the strict rules of composition of a literary style that was used by writers to praise their subjects called encomium, while the Qur'anic telling tends to merge transformed texts with new ones to create a harmony between them for the sake of developing a theological argument. The encomium,

28 *Sūrat al-Mu'minūn* (Q 23:50).

29 For the spiritual equality between men and women in Islam, see Leila Aḥmad, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven and London, 1992), 66–67. See also Bint al-Shāṭi', "al-Mafhūm", (Cairo, 1967).

30 See Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories", *Critical Inquiry*, VII (1980): 213–36 (c.f. Marilyn R. Waldman "Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'an" in *MW* 1 (1985): 3.

a literary genre, has a long history in the Hellenistic culture that pervaded the Roman Empire during the second century. Roland F. Hock explains, “An encomium, students were told, includes an introduction; details of the person’s family background, childhood and adult life; a list of deeds illustrating their virtues; and a conclusion, usually in terms of prayer.”<sup>31</sup> The biography of the Qur’anic Maryam seems to follow this literary style, though in a very abridged way, for the Qur’an is never interested in presenting a long story (with the exception of *Sūrat Yūsuf*). Rather it tends to build on omitting, adding and modifying. Only some scenes of the original story are given, which means that the narratorial voice assumes that the listeners already have some knowledge of the story, or that further details are irrelevant to the Qur’an’s purpose in the retelling of the story for reasons that never depart from the main religious objective of the Qur’an.

31 See Hock, *The Life of Mary*, 23.

## 6 Muslim classical and modern exegesis on the doctrinal issue of Maryam's prophethood

A review of the reception of one Mariamic trait by the early Muslim exegetes, particularly by those who succeeded in becoming the authority for the interpretation of the text (*mufasssirs*), is undertaken in this chapter. A selective group of Muslim exegetes, classical and modern, is sufficient to show how the meanings of one Mariamic trait were translated at different times in Islamic history. In addition, the following exposition will allow one to consider a "hermeneutics of doubt", or a feminist interpretation, to a long history of male-centered exegesis. This selective group of exegetes, as will be shown, had gender bias, although they were not insensitive to the gender equality inherent within the Qur'anic linguistic, ethical and spiritual message.

The case of Maryam's prophethood (*nubuwwat Maryam*) is one Mariamic trait which is implicitly manifested in Maryam's miraculous sustenance and the angels' appearing to her and giving her glad tidings from God. Maryam's receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration, surprisingly, caused severe debates among classical Andalusian exegetes and was refuted by most Eastern exegetes, both Sunni and Shi'i. Raising the issue again in our modern times is not unwarranted; primarily, it shows the high prestige of Maryam's position in Islam,<sup>1</sup> secondly, it reveals the androcentric views and intellectual background of each exegete, which stand behind the perception of the position of women in Islam and, finally, it gives Muslim women confidence to claim more authority and space, which is in harmony with Islam's gender equality inherent in its ethical and spiritual vision of its original message, the Qur'an.

From Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī (of Andalusia) to al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭūsī of (Eastern) medieval Islam and from Mūḥammad 'Abdu to Bint al-Shāṭi' (Egypt) of modern times, Muslim exegetes have discussed, or avoided discussing, the issue of Maryam's receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration with some awareness of their tradition's gender equality and their own cultural gender bias. These

1 For Maryam's position in Islam, see the studies by Jean Muḥammad 'Abd al-Jalīl, *Marie et L'Islam* (Paris, 1950); Louis Massignon, "Le signe marial" in *Rythme du Monde* 3 (1948); R. J. McCarthy "Mary in Islam", in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Connecticut, 1982); Jane D. McAuliffe, "Chosen of all Women: Mary and Fāṭima in Qur'anic Exegesis", in *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 19–28; Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary", in *MW* 79 (1989): 161–187.

*mufassirs* contributed, to a certain extent, to establishing the authority for the meanings of Maryam's status and religious contribution of women in sacred space. *Tafsīr*, Qur'anic exegesis, is one of the rich literary disciplines of the history of the reception of the Qur'anic text, the others being the sciences of *tilāwa* or *qirā'a* (recitation or reading), and *kitāba* or *naskh* (writing or copying).

Below, I show how Muslim classical exegetes of medieval Andalusia argued for the prophethood of Maryam, mother of 'Isa, and for the receptiveness of women to God's verbal inspiration through the angels or directly from God. These exegetes, contrary to the exegetes of Eastern medieval Islam, Sunni and Shi'i, based their arguments on Qur'anic scriptural evidence and prophetic tradition. That is, they based their arguments on evidence outside and inside the text. My feminist analysis of the signs of Maryam's prophethood not only exposes the limitations of gender-insensitive exegetical readings of Maryam's narratives, but also demonstrates that signs of Maryam's prophethood (*'alāmāt nubuwwat Maryam*) may well have been of the firmly established verses of the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup>

## 6.1 Andalusian and Eastern medieval Muslim exegetes on Maryam's receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration

### 6.1.1 Andalusian classical exegetes: Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī

About the prophethood of women, Abu Ahmad said: "This treatise (*faṣl*) had caused a great controversy only in Cordoba and in our days, since a group (*tā'ifa*) negated prophethood to women altogether and accused those who proclaimed it of heresy (*bid'a*); so, there are those (*tā'ifa*) who admitted women to prophethood and others who preferred to take a neutral position."<sup>3</sup>

These are the words of Ibn Ḥazm the Andalusian (d. 456/1064), the Zāhirite<sup>4</sup> ("literalist") jurist who is well known for his *Treatise of Differentiation between the Prophet's Companions (Risāla fī'l-mufāḍala bayna'l-ṣaḥāba)*.<sup>5</sup> In this treatise, he argues that the wives of the Prophet Muhammad are superior to all male

2 A shorter version of this feminist criticism of the exegetical tradition was published in the proceedings of the conference on "Mary Magdalen: Prophet and Apostle in the Miriamic Tradition" held in New York: Centre of Religious Inquiry, June 5–9 (2001). See Hosn Abboud, "Idhan Maryam Nabiyya (Hence Maryam is a Prophetess): Muslim Classical Exegetes and Women's Receptiveness to God's Verbal Inspiration", in ed. Deirdre Good, *Miriam, the Magdalen, and the Mother* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2005) 183–196.

3 Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *al-Faṣl fī'l-mīlāl wa'l-ahwā' wa'l-nihāl* (Cairo, 1347 AH), 3:12.

4 Al-Zāhiriya, a school of law, which would derive the law only from the literal text (*zāhir*) of the Qur'an and the Sunna. "Ibn Ḥazm, in keeping with the *Zāhirite* tradition, rejected all kinds of inference (*qiyās*) or deduction and adhered to the literal, narrow signification of the sacred text, considering that the different theological schools, the conservative or the liberal, Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite, had gone astray". See Mājid Fakhrī, *Tārīkh al-Falsafa'l-Islāmiyya* [History of Islamic Philosophy], (Beirut, 1974), 431.

5 Ibn Ḥazm, *Ibn Ḥazm wa'l-risāla fī'l-mufāḍala bayna'l-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Sa'īd al-Afghānī (Beirut, 1969), 223.

companions of the Prophet and that women are equally entitled to perfection (*al-kamāl*), that is, messengerhood and prophethood (*al-rissāla wa'l-nubuwwa*), as referred to in the prophetic tradition Hadith.<sup>6</sup> His opinion rests on scriptural evidence and authority, since, in his own words, “Prophethood is verbal inspiration (*waḥī*)<sup>7</sup> designed for those whom God intends to inspire with what God wills to inform them about. This verbal inspiration takes the form of the appearance of an angel or a recited speech, which the inspired addresses to himself; in this case the speech is derived from God’s knowledge without an intermediate teacher.”<sup>8</sup> In the first form of delivery, the Qur’an mentions God’s sending of angels to women to give them glad tidings from His true revelation: “*laqad jā’al-Qur’ān bi-anna’llāha ‘azza wa jal arsala l-malā’ika ilā n-nisā’i l-ikhbārihinna bi-waḥyin ḥaqqin mina-llāh.*” Thus Maryam, mother of ‘Isa, Sara, mother of Ishaq, and the mother of Musa are to be reckoned among God’s prophets because angels spoke to them, therefore God inspired them.

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), the Andalusian exegete who died two hundred years after Ibn Ḥazm, refers to this in his Qur’anic exegesis *tafsīr, al-Jāmi’ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*. This exegesis was written with a remarkable adaptability in exploring and playing across the disciplines. It combines hadith with popular piety, jurisprudence, and linguistic concerns. Al-Qurṭubī shares Ibn Ḥazm’s opinion on the prophethood of women. Citing “the choosing verse” (Q 3:42):

Table 6.1 Translation and transliteration of Q 3:42

“Behold! The angels said: ‘O Maryam! God has chosen you And purified you – chosen you Above the women of all nations”	wa-idh qālātī al-malā’ikatu: yā Maryamu inna’llāha iṣṭafākī wa ṭahharakī wa-ṣṭafākī ‘alā nissā’i’l-‘alamīn
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Al-Qurṭubī interprets “God’s choosing of Maryam” (*iṣṭifā’u’llāhi li-Maryam*) as an admission of Maryam to prophethood. He insists: “Truly Maryam is a prophetess because God (may He be praised) inspired her through the angel in the same way He inspired the rest of the male prophets.”<sup>9</sup> He quotes the following hadith to corroborate the Qur’anic evidence: “many were perfect among men

6 “*Ḥadīth*” is the term used for Tradition, being an account of what the Prophet said or did, or of his tacit approval of something said or done in his presence. *Ḥadīth*, along with the Qur’an (the Book revealed by God), and *ijmā’* (general consensus) formed the source of law and the standard for distinguishing the true from the false, the permitted from the forbidden; both shaped Muslim ethics and values. See Subḥī al-Sālīḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut, 1966), 3.

7 For the theory of revelation in Islam, see Ibrāhīm Madkūr, *fi al-Falsafa al-islāmiyya: manhaj wa-tatbiqah*, (Cairo, 1947), 93. See Joseph van Ess, “Verbal Inspiration? Language and revelation in classical Islamic theology”, in *The Qur’an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden, 1996), 177–194.

8 Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Faṣl*, 13.

9 Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Beirut, 1985) 4:83.

but only Maryam the daughter of ‘Imran and Assia the wife of Pharaoh were perfect among women and the favor of ‘Ā’isha (the daughter of Abi Bakr al-Ṣiddīq) over other women is like the favor of bread [soaked with stock] (*tharīd*) over the rest of food”.<sup>10</sup> He explains that absolute perfection is for God and certainly the most perfect among humankind are prophets, followed by saints (*siddīqīn*), martyrs (*al-shuhadā*) and the righteous (*al-ṣāliḥīn*). If this were comprehensible, al-Qurṭubī confirms, then the perfection mentioned in the Hadith implies prophethood, and accordingly Maryam (peace be upon her) and Assia are two prophetesses. He adds that Assia, however, has evidence of her true belief and grace (*ṣiddīqatahā wa-faḍlahā*) but not of her prophethood. He quotes another Hadith to confirm his argument and is careful to attest its reliable chain of transmitters from the Prophet Muhammad himself: “the best women of the world are four: Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imran; Āssia the daughter of Muzāḥim, the wife of Pharaoh; Khadīja, the daughter of Khuwaylid (the first wife of Muhammad) and Fāṭima, the daughter of Muhammad”.<sup>11</sup> He concludes that “according to the apparent meaning in the Qur’ān and the prophetic traditions (*Ḥadīths*), Maryam is preferable to all women of the world, from Eve to the last woman till the Hour of Resurrection; for the angels had inspired her verbally by way of entrustment (*taklīf*), telling (*ikhbār*) and glad tidings (*al-bishāra*), in the same way they gave news to the rest of the male prophets. Thus, Maryam is a prophetess (*idhan Maryam nabiyya*) and a prophet is preferable to a saint and she is preferable to all women entirely: those who passed and those who shall come”.<sup>12</sup>

He further adds:

In consequence of this preference, the Holy Spirit spoke to her, appeared to her, and blew in her coat and came close to her, while this had never happened to any woman before. Also, Maryam believed God’s words and did not ask for a sign when she was given the annunciation, the way Zakariyya asked for a sign (may peace be upon him), and accordingly, God named her in His revelation “she who believed in God’s words”, *al-ṣiddīqa*. She also believed in His Books and was from among the God-fearing people.<sup>13</sup>

One is impressed by al-Qurṭubī’s high esteem of Maryam and his keen effort to give proof of her prophethood from the sacred Scriptures. Does al-Qurṭubī’s interpretation of the doctrinal issue of Maryam’s Prophethood reflect a *zāhirī* reading of the texts, although he was not a *zāhirī*? Or was the issue of the prophethood of women (*nubuwwat al-nisā*) in Andalusia, as argued by Maribel Fierro, severely

10 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkām*, 4:83.

11 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkām*, 4:83.

12 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkām*, 4:83.

13 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkām*, 4:83.



disputed as part of the contemporary debate on whether Maryam was a saint or a prophet?<sup>14</sup> Andalusian women seem to have enjoyed a particular status as evidenced in other literary works authored by scholars and philosophers.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Qurṭubī (and Ibn Ḥazm) expounded on the Qur’anic vision of Maryam’s receptiveness to God’s verbal inspiration. It must be emphasized, however, according to scriptural evidence, that Maryam is an important link in a genealogically determined chain of prophets, from the posterity of Adam to the posterity of Ibrahim (Q 3:32). It can be stated that Maryam is a prophetess in Islam, relying on the evidence of ‘Isa’s matrilineal name (‘Isa, the son of Maryam). Although this lineage is certainly given to the fatherless ‘Isa to emphasize his human nature and to avoid attributing any paternity to God, ‘Isa’s matrilineal name does, if Qur’anic tradition is to be adhered to, suggest the prophethood of both mother and son. For, if the wife of ‘Imran and her daughter Maryam, Zakariyya and his son Yahya, Maryam and her son ‘Isa are chosen from the offspring one from the other (the same genealogical line as Q 3:32 indicates) then for ‘Isa to be a prophet—knowing he is the son of only a mother—his mother Maryam must also be a prophetess.<sup>16</sup> In other words, if ‘Isa is to remain firmly embedded in the line of prophets his mother must also be considered a prophetess. There is further logical evidence inherent in the biography of Maryam which alludes to such Miriamic traits of prophecy, not the least important is that the Qur’an typologically called Maryam “the sister of Harun” (*yā ukhta Hārūna*) who was Miriam the sister of Aaron and Moses, “the first prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister” (Ex 15:20–21).

### 6.1.2 Eastern classical exegetes: From al-Ṭabarī to al-Rāzī

Abū Ja‘far ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), in his comprehensive compilation of the first two-and-a-half centuries of Muslim exegesis, was occupied in incorporat-

- 14 The issue, as Fierro explains was “between those who sought to strengthen the position of the followers of the ‘miracles of the saints’ (Maryam was not a prophet) or those who sought to weaken the position of its opponents (Maryam was a prophet)”. See Maribel Fierro, “Women as Prophets in Islam”, in *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources*, edited by Manuela Marin and Randi Deguilhen, (London and New York, 2002) 190. Since this question of the origin of the debate among Muslim Andalusian scholars is not germane to the subject at hand, it will not be addressed but recent studies on the social status of Andalusian women have offered a different perspective on the debated issue. For a very good article on the progressive situation of Andalusian women see Maria J. Viguera, “Taṣluḥu lil-Ma‘ālī: On the Social Status of Andalusī Women”, edited by Salma Khadra al-Jayyūsī, in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, (Leiden, 1992), 710–724.
- 15 For the status of Andalusian women, see “Kitāb al-nisā” in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, edit. Aḥmad Amīn *et.al.* (Cairo, 1940–49); and see Ibn Rushd, Abu-l Walīd Muhammad. *Al-Darūrī fi’l-Siyāsa: Mukhtaṣar kitābal-Siyāsa li-Aflaton*, translated from Hebrew into Arabic by Ahmad Shaḥfān (Beirut: 1998); and L. Lerner (Ithaca and London, 1974) and his *fiqh* (jurisprudence work); Ibn Rushd, Abu-l Walīd Muhammad, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtaḍir*, (Beirut, 1999).
- 16 The significance of lineage and the relative importance of matrilineal and patrilineal ascription to the Arabs did not stop with the coming of Islam. See the genealogy of Khadīja, the first wife of Muḥammad in Ibn Sa’d’s (d. 845) Biographical Dictionary, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, edited by Iḥsān ‘Abbās, (Beirut, 1958), 8 (14).

ing a tremendous number of exegetical hadiths.<sup>17</sup> In relating the annunciation to Maryam, al-Ṭabarī was particularly interested in collecting the different Hadiths to identify the angel. As to the exegetical hadiths that support “God’s choosing of Maryam”, he quotes three different hadiths which revolve around the same idea as *ḥadīth al-kamāl*, which is but an elaboration of the status of the most prestigious women in Islam: Maryam, Assia, Khadija, and Fatima. In the three variations of the hadith, Maryam, as the most perfect woman among all women, was never superseded by any of the other women. Al-Ṭabarī, however, does not relate this privilege of Maryam to the issue that the angels spoke to her and inspired her verbally.

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥassan ibn ‘Alī Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066–7) was born some seventy-five years after the death of al-Ṭabarī. He was known as Shaykh al-Ṭā’ifa (pre-eminent jurist of the Shi‘ite rite).<sup>18</sup> Of his works, al-Ṭūsī’s commentary on the Qur’an, entitled *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (The Elucidation of the Interpretation of the Qur’an), is famous for its categorization of the diverse exegetical elements of his time.<sup>19</sup> Al-Ṭūsī’s comprehensive coverage of the entire *tafsīr* literature made the book a valuable source for later Shi‘ite exegetes, such as Abū al-Futūh Rāzī, Mullā Fath Allāh Kashānī, and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabātabā’ī.<sup>20</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, in his discussion of Maryam’s miraculous sustenance in the *mihrāb* and her speaking in infancy (*fī’l-mahd*) to Zakariyya, allows the possibility of a favor (*karāma*) to Maryam. He says: “Maryam spoke as an infant and was never breastfed, and her sustenance used to come to her from paradise; and this from God the exalted is a *takrima* to her. And this is possible for the saints (*al-awliyā’*) and the righteous (*al-ṣāliḥīn*) even if they were not prophets”.<sup>21</sup> At the occasion of God’s sending His spirit to Maryam in *Sūrat Maryam* (*fa-arsalnā ilayhā rūḥanā*), al-Ṭūsī, like his predecessor al-Ṭabarī, is more interested in identifying the unnamed spirit and in the etymology of the term *rūḥanā* (Our Spirit) than in

17 Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* (The Comprehensive Clarification of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur’an), ed. Maḥmūd M. Shākir (Cairo, 1969), 6:395–398.

18 Jane McAuliffe states that “in his four-part chronological division of Shi‘ī intellectual history, Henry Corbin places al-Ṭūsī in the second period, one noted principally for its summative theological work”. *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 54. See Jane McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians* (Cambridge, 1991), 48n48. Maḥmūd Ayoub places al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016) and his famous brother, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) and Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī (d. 459–60/1066–7) as the third generation of Shi‘ī commentators, which extended well into the sixteenth century. See, Maḥmūd Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’an and the Silent Qur’an: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Shi‘ī Tafsīr”, in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford, 1988), 185.

19 Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Shawqī al-Amīn and Aḥmad Ḥabīb Qaṣīr, 10 vols. (Najaf, 1957).

20 For a comprehensive biography of these Shi‘ite exegetes see Jane D. McAuliffe, “From Ṭabarī to Ṭabātabā’ī”, in *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991), 37–89.

21 Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Shawqī al-Amīn and Aḥmad Ḥabīb Qaṣīr (Najaf, 1957), 2:447.

the subject of God sending to a female His spirit and His messenger (*innamā anā rasūlu rabbiki*).<sup>22</sup>

Ismā'īl 'Imād Abū al-Fidā' ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), the author of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*,<sup>23</sup> was a famous Shāfi'ī jurist, traditionist, and historian. He was a student and strong defender of Ibn Taymiyya and the traditional *tafsīr* trend of *bi'l-ma'thūr*. Although Ibn Kathīr came at a later phase than al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, his work is treated after al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭūsī because his thought was based, like al-Ṭabarī's, on tradition. On "the choosing verse", Ibn Kathīr's position is clear, namely that this is information from God through the angels, and by God's command, *hadhā ikhbār min Allāh ta'ālā bi-mā khāṭabaṭ bihi'l-malā'ika Maryam 'alayhā'l-salām 'an amri'llāhi lahum bi-dhālika*.<sup>24</sup> He quotes six different chains of transmitters of *ḥadīth al-kamāl*, an elaboration of the most prestigious women in Islam. Ibn Kathīr, however, stops at this point and refers the reader to the story of 'Isa the son of Maryam in his historical work, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, where he traced the chain of the transmitters of this hadith and its vocabulary. In *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, he mentions Ibn Ḥazm's claim of the prophethood of the three women, Maryam, Sara, the mother of Ishaq, and the mother of Musa. Ibn Kathīr takes the consensus-Sunnite position as related by Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and other Sunnites (*ahl al-Sunna wa' l-Jamā'a*) that prophethood is exclusive to men and that there is no prophet among women (*anna'l-nubuwwa mukhtaṣṣa bi'l-rijāl wa-laysat fī'l-nisā'i nabiyya*). He then ascribes, according to Q 5:75, to the sobriquet "*ṣiddīqa*" as representing the religious status of Maryam.

Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), closely associated with "rationalist" Mu'tazilite<sup>25</sup> ideas, is famous for his study of Qur'anic philology and syntax in his exegesis, *al-Kashshāf*.<sup>26</sup> In his interpretation of the annunciation event, al-Zamakhsharī, like his predecessor al-Ṭabarī, is only interested in identifying the angel, since, as a rule, the Qur'an does not name the angels.<sup>27</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, however, has something to say on behalf of Zakariyya, whose story in the Qur'an always alternates with that of Maryam. He writes: "the angels spoke orally to Maryam as a miracle to Zakariyya, whose story is a prelude to Maryam's story, and as a sign of 'Isa's prophethood".<sup>28</sup> As for "God's choosing of Maryam" (*iṣṭifā'u Allāhi li-Maryam*) he explains: "God chose Maryam in the first place because He accepted her to

22 Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān*, 7:113.

23 Ismā'īl 'Imād Abū al-Fidā' ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Beirut, 1981).

24 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, 363.

25 *Al-Mu'tazila*, the name of a religious movement founded at Baṣra, in the first half of the second century/eighth century by Wāsil ibn 'Aṭā', became one of the most important theological schools of Islam, considering that certain awareness is accessible to man by means of his intelligence alone in the absence of, or prior to revelation.

26 Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaā'iq ghawāmid al-tanzīl wa-'uyān al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta' wīl* [*Unveiler of the Real Meanings of the Hidden Matters of What Was Sent Down and the Choicest Statements About the Various Aspects of its Interpretation*], ed. M. Abd al-Salam Shahin (Beirut, 1995).

27 Only three times does the Qur'an mention the names of the angels. See Q 2:97–98 and Q 66:4.

28 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:355.

serve in the Temple, raised her up and made her distinguished by the sublime charisma (*al-karāma al-sanniyya*); and in the second place, God had chosen her when He gave her 'Isa without a father and this had never happened before."<sup>29</sup> Even though al-Zamakhsharī does not discuss the issue of Maryam's prophethood, we know that *karāma* (marvel of a saint) is associated with sainthood while *mu'jiza* (miracle) is unique to prophethood.<sup>30</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, therefore, interprets Maryam's conceiving by (*bi*) "the word of God"<sup>31</sup> neither as a miracle, nor as a sign given to her for her own person, that is, as a woman equipped to receive Godly verbal inspiration. Albeit, Maryam's miraculous impregnation by God's spirit, according to the Qur'an, occurred out of her acting self (*khārija 'an af'ālīhā*). She also challenged her people after birth when she carried the child to present him to them and this challenge (*al-taḥaddī*) is the difference between the miracle (*mu'jiza*) and the charisma (*karāma*).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) massive work of thirty-two volumes of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) combines philosophical and theological erudition.<sup>32</sup> Al-Rāzī, in his usual way of dividing the topics into issues or questions, discussed Zakariyya's questioning of Maryam on the source of her miraculous sustenance. Al-Rāzī then interpreted this miraculous sustenance as "the emergence of the uncustomary or unprecedented at her hand the way it emerged with her son" (*ẓuhūr khawāriq al-'ādāt 'alā yadayhā*). Al-Rāzī thus admits it either as a divine favour (*karāma*) to 'Isa, or to Maryam. Al-Rāzī further admits the sending of Jibril to Maryam and "God's choosing of Maryam" as *karāma* to Maryam, which was permissible to saints "because no prophethood was granted to Maryam as is well known": *wa-stadal bi'l-āya 'alā jawāz al-karāma li'l-awliyā' li-anna Maryama la nubuwwata lahā 'alā'l-mashhūr*.<sup>33</sup> Al-Rāzī adds that "this was the opinion of mainstream Sunnites and the Shi'ites, but that the Mu'tazilites held a different opinion".<sup>34</sup>

29 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:355.

30 "While the miracle is a public act, preceded by a "proclamation" (*da'wa*) and a "challenge" (*taḥaddī*), by means of which the prophet demonstrates incontrovertibly the "impotence" (*'ajz*) of his hearers to reproduce likewise the miracle thus brought about, the *karāma* is a simple, personal favour. It should be kept secret, and is in no way the sign of a prophetic mission". See L. Gardet, "Karāma" in *EI2*, 4:615.

31 The annunciation verse in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*: "Behold! The angels said: O Maryam! God gives thee Glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be 'Isa, the son of Maryam, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God" (Q 3:45).

32 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb* [The Keys of the Unseen] or *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* [The Great Commentary], (Beirut, 1981). *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* is al-Rāzī's magnum opus. Jane McAuliffe compares *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, "in terms of method and arrangement, the closest, near contemporary Western parallel to *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* would be the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. In a manner analogous to the structure of that work, Fakhr al-Dīn frequently divides his analysis of a particular verse into a series of 'questions' (*mas'āl*)". Each *mas'ala* may then be further subdivided to present a full range of possible interpretations. See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 69.

33 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*.

34 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*.

After identifying Jibril as the angel, al-Rāzī says Maryam (peace be upon her) was not a prophetess because God states according to Q 12:109: “Nor did We send before you (as apostles) any but men, whom We did inspire, (men) living in human habitations” (*wa-mā arsalnā min qablīka illā rijālan nūḥī ilayhim min ahl al-qurā*). To justify the sending of Jibril to Maryam, al-Rāzī speaks of the event as a *karāma* and informs us that those who admitted *karāma* to saints took this position. He also informs us that there were those who saw the annunciation to Maryam as a sign to ‘Isa and that he and al-Ka‘bī, the Mu‘tazilite, accepted this opinion but that there were those who saw it as a miracle to Zakariyya, an opinion held by most of the Mu‘tazilites. Thus, al-Rāzī does not acknowledge the annunciation to Maryam as a sign given to her, but as a sign given either to ‘Isa or Zakariyya. That is, al-Rāzī does not admit it as a sign of Maryam’s receptiveness to God’s verbal inspiration, when, in fact, the Qur’an (Q 23:50) expressly identifies Maryam and her son as such: “And We made the son of Maryam and His mother as a Sign: We gave them both shelter on high ground, affording rest and security and furnished with springs.” Moreover, al-Rāzī does not see Maryam’s sign in God’s choosing her like that of the choosing of Adam, Nuh, the family of ‘Imran and the family of Ibrahim, above all people as “offspring, one of the other” (*dhurriyyata ba‘duhā min ba‘ḍin*) as Q 3:34 indicates.<sup>35</sup>

As has become apparent from the above, Muslim exegetes throughout the history of Islam reinterpret certain Qur’anic ordinances in different manners, when the Qur’an seems to be clear on these issues. Muslim classical exegetes of medieval Andalusia argued for the prophethood of Maryam, mother of ‘Isa, and for the receptiveness of women to God’s verbal inspiration through the angels or directly from God. Exegetes of Eastern medieval Islam, Sunnites and Shi‘ites, based their arguments on pre-conceived ideas and thus never admitted the prophethood of Maryam, mother of ‘Isa.

Prior to turning to a feminist criticism of Muslim classical exegetical justification of a refusal to admit Maryam’s prophethood, a review of the position of some contemporary Muslim exegetes is vital at this point.

### **6.1.3 Modern exegetes: From Muḥammad ‘Abdu to Bint al-Shāṭi’**

Qur’anic exegesis witnessed a tremendous change with the publication of Muḥammad ‘Abdu (d. 1905) and Rashīd Riḍa’s (d. 1935) *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm*, known as *al-Manār*.<sup>36</sup> *Al-Manār* is an example of modern *tafsīr*, characterized by personal opinion (*bi’l-ra’i*); it was aimed to meet the needs of a movement that aspired for Islamic reformation (*al-Iṣlāḥiyya al-Islāmiyyā*). ‘Abdu, in his *Tafsīr*, pays special attention to ordinances that have a specific impact on family law, such as polygamy and divorce, in an attempt to address serious family ills of

35 See how “God’s choosing of Maryam” as the offspring of the family of Ibrahim and the family of ‘Imran is a prelude to the narrative of the nativity of Maryam in Q 3:33.

36 Muḥammad ‘Abdu and Rashīd Riḍa, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, famous as *Tafsīr al-manār* (Cairo, 1917–1934), 3:341.

Egyptian society in the nineteenth century. ‘Abdu followed the Mu‘tazilite rational principle of *al-taḥsīn wa’l-taqbīḥ*; the Ma‘tazilites understand “good” as what reason perceives to be good and “bad” as what reason perceives to be bad, contrary to the Sunnites, who see good and bad according to religious law.<sup>37</sup> ‘Abdu does not admit Maryam’s sustenance in the *miḥrāb* as a miraculous phenomenon (*min khawāriq al-‘adāt*). He also refrains from adding any “*Isrā’ilite lore*” or other lore to interpret the story as miraculous. ‘Abdu refuses to discuss the different Hadiths concerning this issue and he advises: “It is sufficient to know that she (Maryam) was blessed and her goodness and sustenance emanate in abundance around her. Even he (Zakariyya) who sponsored her, and he is a prophet, is astonished at this abundant sustenance.”<sup>38</sup> While ‘Abdu does not discuss any description of Maryam’s sustenance in an attempt to refute *tafsīr* that still believes in miracles, he does not hesitate to call Zakariyya a prophet, although the Qur’an never claims him as such.

Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), executed during Nasser’s regime for his political views and his influence on the Muslim Brotherhood movement, wrote his exegesis *fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān* in prison. Quṭb paid special attention in his exegesis to the sura’s discourse, Qur’anic stories and the art of portrayal in the Qur’an, *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī’l-Qur’ān*.<sup>39</sup> On Maryam’s chosenness, Quṭb comments:

What exclusive Chosenness! Did He (God) choose her to receive direct breath (*naḥkha*) in the same way as that of the first created being, Ādam? And (God) illustrates this miracle to human kind through her and by her example? It is an exclusive chosenness in the history of humanity . . . and without any dispute it is a great thing. And here, Muhammad transmits or relates (*yuḥaddith*) from his Lord the great truth of Maryam and her chosenness “over the women of the world” in this emanation which raises her to a high exalted sphere. And he was in arguing with those who are proud of Maryam and take Maryam’s exaltation as a justification for not believing in Muhammad and the new religion.<sup>40</sup>

While Sayyed Quṭb equates Maryam to Adam and claims that God conveyed a miracle through her to humanity, that her chosenness is exclusive and that Muhammad, by way of transmitting narratives from his Lord, relates her story, Quṭb does not relate such a privilege to the doctrine of prophethood.

*Al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*<sup>41</sup> by Sayyed Muhammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. 1981) addresses the young intellectuals of the Shi’ite Muslim community and

37 For a discussion of Muḥammad ‘Abdu’s method of *tafsīr*, see *‘Abd al-Majīd al-Muḥtasib, Ittijāhāt al-tafsīr fī’l-‘aṣr al-rāhin*, (Amman, 1982).

38 ‘Abdu, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*.

39 Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr*.

40 Quṭb, *fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, 395–405.

41 Sayyed Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1974) 3:214.

often approaches the verses of the Qur'an from philosophical, sociological, and traditional viewpoints.<sup>42</sup> The author adds a large section to each verse or verse group commented on, citing both Shi'ite and Sunnite Hadiths. Like his Shi'ite and Sunnite predecessors, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī is interested in identifying God's spirit which was sent to Maryam in *Sūrat Maryam*. He argues that if the spirit is neither human nor jinni then he must be angelic. He quotes Qur'anic verses where the spirit is named "*Jibrīl*" Gabriel (Q 2:97) and an honored messenger "*rasūllun karīm*" (Q 69:40). Although al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī pays attention to the harmony within the related stories of Zakariyya, Maryam, Ibrahim, and Musa in *Sūrat Maryam*, and he describes this harmony in the motif of God's gifts of miraculous progeny, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not make any link between Maryam and the list of male prophets. Concerning Maryam's sustenance in the *mihrāb*, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī considers it a *karāma* to Maryam from God. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī admits that the angels spoke to Maryam and he calls her a *muḥaddatha* "one who was spoken to" and a listener to their speech. In al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's opinion, her chosenness by God is not absolute, and her "chosenness over women of the world" is restricted in the sense of her miraculous birth of 'Isa. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his usual way of adding a small commentary at the end of each passage, called "the research in narratology" (*baḥṭh riwā'ī*), gives the following interpretation: "God chose you to be a progeny worthy of a lineage to the prophets, and then so that He purified you by giving you the Immaculate Conception (*īṣma*)."<sup>43</sup> Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes eight prophetic hadiths, with the exception of one where Fatima comes before Maryam, which positions Maryam as the most prestigious women of Islam.<sup>44</sup>

The late 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi' (d. 1998), authored two volumes of *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī li'l-Qur'ān al-karīm*.<sup>45</sup> The importance of her *tafsīr* lies in the method she acquired from the principles expounded by the late Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966) in his book *Manāḥij Tajdīd* (Cairo, 1961).<sup>46</sup> Amīn al-Khūlī introduced literary studies of the Qur'an at the University of Fu'ād the First (old name of Cairo University) and he supervised the famous Aḥmad Khalafalla's thesis on the *Art of the Narrative in the Qur'ān*.<sup>47</sup> The importance of Bint al-Shāṭi''s studies from a feminist perspective is remarkable, since she pioneered and wrote exten-

42 For a review of Shi'ite exegetical tradition, see Maḥmūd Ayoub's introduction in *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters* (Albany, 1984).

43 Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān*, 3:188.

44 Jane McAuliffe studied the commentaries of four classical Sunnite exegetes and three classical Shi'ite exegetes concerning "the choosing verse" (Q 3:41), see Jane McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fāṭima in Qur'anic Exegesis", in *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 19–28.

45 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān [Bint al-Shāṭi'], *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 7th edn., vol.1 (Cairo, 1962), 2nd edn. (Cairo, 1966), 3rd edn. (Cairo, 1968), 5th edn., vol.11 (Cairo, 1990).

46 For a comprehensive study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s method of Qur'anic exegesis, see 'Īsā Boullāṭa, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method", *The Muslim World* 64 (1974): 103–13.

47 Aḥmad Khalafallah, *al-Fann al-qaṣaṣi fi'l-Qur'ān* [*The Art of the Narrative in the Qur'ān*] 2nd edn., (Cairo, 1958).

sively on the Egyptian woman peasant,<sup>48</sup> Arab women poets<sup>49</sup> and the biographies of women in the household of Muhammad.<sup>50</sup> She was also the first to write on the Islamic conception of the emancipation of woman and to show a conscious understanding of gender issues in Islam.<sup>51</sup> Bint al-Shāṭi', however, did not theorize for feminism within an Islamic paradigm,<sup>52</sup> or study a sura or a verse that has caused exegetical controversy among Muslim women. She also did not dedicate any exegetical study to suras or narratives that relate to prestigious woman figures such as Maryam mother of 'Isa. Her *tafsīr*, written at a late age in her life, allowed her to cover only fourteen short Meccan suras.

### 6.1.4 Feminist exegesis of Maryam's prophethood

Rather than engaging in a discussion of the relative merits of the two opposing arguments carried by the Andalusian and the Eastern classical exegetes, I will endeavor in the rest of this chapter to offer a modern, admittedly feminist, interpretation of Maryam's prophethood apparently envisioned in the Qur'an. Moreover, it is important, at this point, to be aware of the Qur'anic ordinances of 'Isa's apostleship and Maryam's religious title, since these ordinances are equally critical to the arguments used by al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī in negating Maryam's prophethood.

Table 6.2 Translation and transliteration of Q 12:109

Nor did We send before thee (as apostles) any but	wa-mā arsalnā min qablika illā rijālān
men,	
Whom we did inspire, (Men) living in human	nnūhī ilayhim min ahli'l-qurā
habitations	
...	...

Table 6.3 Translation and transliteration of Q 16:43

And before thee also the apostles We sent were but	wa-mā arsalnā min qablika illā rijālān
men, to whom We granted inspiration: if ye realize	nnūhī ilayhim fa-s'alū ahla'l-dhdhikri
this not, ask of those who possess the Message.	in kuntum lā ta'lamūn

48 See Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Fallāḥa al-miṣriyyā* [The Egyptian Woman Peasant] (Cairo, 1934)

49 See Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Shā'ira al-'arabiyya al-mu'āṣira* [The Modern Arab Poetess] (Cairo, 1962); and *al-Khansā: al-Shā'ira al-ūlā*, (Beirut, 1957).

50 See Bint al-Shāṭi', *Tarājum sayyidāt bayt al-nubuwwa* [The Biographies of Ladies of the household of Prophethood] (Cairo, n.d.).

51 See Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Mafhūm*; "The Islamic Conception of the Emancipation of Woman", Trans. John Hoover, *al-Raida*, 125 (2009).

52 "Islamic feminism", a recent term, employed from the nineties by feminist Muslims who claim a feminism within an Islamic paradigm. See Margot Badrān, "Toward Islamic Feminisms: A Look at the Middle East", in *Hermeneutics and Honor*, ed. Asma Afsaruddin (Cambridge, MA, 1999). See also Hosn Abboud, "Bibliographia ittijahat 'amma wa-assassiyya li'nisswiyya islamiyya" 'arabiyyat al-mansha'" in *the Proceedings of the Conference on Feminism and Islamic Perspectives: New Horizons of Knowledge and Reform*, (Cairo, 17–18 March, 2012).



In fact, a plausible interpretation of these Qur'anic polemic ordinances is that they argue against those who said to Muhammad that if God wanted to send a messenger, He would have sent an angel, and not a messenger in human form. They thus seek to confirm Muhammad's claim of apostleship within his capacity as a human being and not within his capacity as a male messenger. Al-Ṭabarī, however, reads them as follows: "We did not send before you Muhammad to inspire except men, i.e., neither women nor angels",<sup>53</sup> and al-Rāzī says: "When all messengers were human beings, how come they had wondered about your truth O Muhammad, and the verse shows that God had never sent a messenger from among women and, also God had never sent a messenger from the people of the desert."<sup>54</sup> Al-Qurtubī, the Andalusian exegete who spoke vigorously of Maryam's prophethood, interprets these verses as a rebuttal to those who asked Muhammad "for an angel to be sent from God". He points out that those who maintain that "men were sent but that there were no women, jinn and angels from among them" are in fact contradicting the Hadith that admits four women to prophethood: Hawwā, Assia, the mother of Musa and Maryam.<sup>55</sup> He does not fail to mention, however, the opinion of Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–6) who argued that God never sent a prophet from the desert or from among women or *jinn*, and that (religious) scholars believe that it is necessary that the messenger be human, a man, and urban.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, the following Qur'anic polemic verse reveals 'Isa's status as an apostle and Maryam's religious status as a woman of truth (*ṣiddīqa*).

Table 6.4 Translation and transliteration of Q 5:75

<i>Christ, the son of Maryam was no more than an Apostle;</i>	<i>mā al-Masīhu'bnū Maryama illā rasūlun</i>
<i>many were the apostles that passed away before him.</i>	<i>qad khalat min qablihi'l-rrusulu</i>
<i>His mother was a woman of truth (ṣiddīqa).</i>	<i>wa-ummuhu ṣiddīqatun</i>
<i>They had both to eat their (daily) food.</i>	<i>kānā yā'kulāni'l-ṭṭa'āma</i>
<i>See how God doth make His Signs clear to them;</i>	<i>'nzur kayfa nubayyinu lahumu'l-āyāti</i>
<i>Yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth.</i>	<i>thumma'nzur annā yu'fakūn</i>

Clearly, the emphasis in this verse is on the human nature of 'Isa and Maryam, 'Isa being strictly an apostle and Maryam "the woman who always confirms the truth", *al-ṣiddīqa*.<sup>57</sup> If we recall the two previous verses, which identified only men

53 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 16:293.

54 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 9:230.

55 Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām*, 9–10:274.

56 Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām*, 9–10:274.

57 *Ṣiddīq* or *ṣiddīqa*, meaning "the eminently veracious", and "she or he who always confirms the truth" is a sobriquet, also, applied to the first caliph Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. Its etymology is derived from Aramaic-Hebrew *ṣaddi* "pious" in Rabbinic literature. See *EI* (1960), 9:535.

as messengers (Q 12:109 and 16:43) and put them together with the verse, which refers to Maryam as a *ṣiddīqa*, then one would think that the androcentric readings by al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī are justified. Their readings, however, collapse when one learns that there is a distinction between *nabī* (giver of news from God) and *rasūl* (God's messenger), on the whole established in the Qur'anic text, and recognized and elaborated upon by mainstream orthodox theologians. *Nabī* to them generally means a divine envoy without a revealed book, while *rasūl* is an emissary with a law and a revealed book.<sup>58</sup> Vigilant analysis indicates that *nabī* tends to be applied to Biblical figures (including Zakariyya, Yahya and 'Isa) that "are exclusively among the descendants of Ibrahim".<sup>59</sup> The term *rasūl*, on the other hand, which appears more than four times as often as *nabī*, usually denotes "above all those who had been sent to a certain folk or community, in particular to warn them of impending disaster".<sup>60</sup> These theologians have always restricted both categories of envoys to males, and Ibn Ḥazm insists that no one claims that God sent a female apostle, but he distinguishes *nubuwwa* (prophethood) from *risāla* (messengerhood), the latter restricted to men.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, he employs two interesting pieces of scriptural evidence, which make him, by today's feminist standards, a precedent to the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi by nine centuries.<sup>62</sup> First, he brings to our attention the location of Maryam's account among the accounts given of male prophets in *Sūrat Maryam*. Second, he argues precisely that Yusuf is a *ṣiddīq* but nonetheless is a prophet. Following the same logic of Qur'anic nomenclature, Ibn Ḥazm argues that, like Joseph, Maryam's address as a *ṣiddīqa* does not negate her prophethood.<sup>63</sup>

Also, Ibn Ḥazm's commonsense (or *zāhirī*) reading of the texts is confirmed by Maryam's prophetic signs (*'alāmāt nubuwwat Maryam*) which are clearly manifested in the Qur'anic account of her life story, which have been discussed in the chapter on *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*: being accepted by God to serve in the temple, her purity and sinlessness (*iṣma*), her righteous upbringing (*anbatahā nabātan ḥasanan*) and miraculous sustenance (*al-rizq min 'ind Allāh*), God's annunciation to Maryam (*al-bishāra*) through the angel's appearance to her in human form and her being impregnated by the Holy Spirit (*fa-nafakhnā fīhā min rūḥina*) and by

58 Fazlur Raḥmān, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis, 1994), 81–82.

59 Michael Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of 'The Poets' and the Qur'anic Foundations of Prophetic Authority", in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. James L. Kugel (London, 1990), 86.

60 Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto", 86.

61 Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī l-mīlāl*, 5:12. See the similar argument discussed by Barbara Freyer Stowasser in *Women in the Qur'ān*, 67.

62 Fāṭima Mernīssī, a Moroccan sociologist, was the first feminist to use the technique of "*ilm al-rijāl*", which Muslim scholars employed to check the trustworthiness of religious men who transmitted hadith from prophet Muhammad. See Fāṭima Mernīssī, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Reading, Massachusetts, 1991).

63 See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī l-mīlāl*, 5:13.

God's word (*nubashshiruki bi-kalimatīn minhu*),<sup>64</sup> and last but not least, her being chosen by God above women of all nations (*iṣṭafāki 'alā nissā'i'l-'ālamīn*).

Placing Maryam's Qur'anic story within the context of Muhammad's Meccan struggle (*Sūrat Maryam* is a Meccan sura) would add further weight to the thesis that Maryam is evoked in the Qur'an on the same level as other male prophets.

## 6.2 The immediate relevance of Maryam's evoked memory (dhikr) to Muhammad's situation in Mecca

The memory of the messengers sent before Muhammad and their stories are evoked in the Qur'an in a spirit of concern for salvation history, and also with reference to the events around Muhammad.<sup>65</sup> These stories or accounts<sup>66</sup> in essence alternate on one basic model or prototype. They portray a messenger or a prophet sent by God who preaches to his people, is rejected by them, but is finally vindicated when God intervenes to punish the unbelievers. David Marshall explains: "These stories or accounts are so often repeated in the Meccan period that it is natural to assume that they are particularly relevant to Muhammad at Mecca: they reflect his situation as an embattled preacher of monotheism and his hopes of vindication through God's intervention."<sup>67</sup> The messengers or prophets in these stories therefore serve as exemplars to Muhammad and the believers in Mecca; their stories are an encouragement to him and his followers in their difficult situation. Kenneth Cragg in *The Event of the Qur'an* alludes to the same implied reading:

The wide canvas from Adam to 'Isa depicts for Muhammad's people the meaning and destiny of their own cause. Biblical material, in independent shape, is rehearsed in lively corroboration of Qur'anic authority. All prophecy accumulates towards it, so that revelation may culminate. Other Scriptures are mentors, not masters. It is the ruling theme of prophecy as crisis, which they consistently serve.<sup>68</sup>

64 The Qur'anic textual evidence of Maryam's signs of prophethood as argued is mine. See the signs of prophethood (*'alāmāt al-nubuwwa*) in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* (Beirut, 1957), 1:345. In classical Islam, a literary genre grew to defend the prophethood of Muḥammad and to clarify the signs of prophethood (*'alāmāt al-nubuwwa*). See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Nubuwwa wa-mā yata'allaq bihā*, (Cairo, n.d.); Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Gabbār al-Hamadhānī, *Tathbūt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, vol.2 (Beirut, n.d.); Muḥammad al-Māwurdī al-Shāfi'ī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa* (Beirut, 1987).

65 See Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'an", 4. Marshall paid attention to this relevance to Muhammad's situation in Mecca of the different Qur'anic stories and I am indebted to him to the way he expressed it. I contribute in explaining the form and the meaning of the story, and add the term "prophet" to the term "messenger" since the Qur'an seems to either put them together or to differentiate between them.

66 The Qur'anic stories, with the exception of the story of Joseph (*qiṣṣat Yūsuf* in *Sūrat Yūsuf*), can be considered short stories (*uqṣuṣat*) since they are short stories or sometimes scenes which do not meet the usual components of the story. The artistic and psychological effects of the narration on the hearers, however, necessitated calling them stories.

67 Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'an", 4.

68 Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in its Scripture* (Oxford, 1994), 17.

Looking closely at the extended narrative from the whole of the Meccan period (Q 19:16–33) where ‘Isa equally features with other male prophets, Zakariyya, Yahya, Ibrahim, Musa, Isma‘il and Idris, we notice that the narrative, in reality, focuses more attention on Maryam than on ‘Isa.<sup>69</sup> An angel is sent by God (literally “Our spirit”, Q 19:17) to announce to Maryam the gift of a holy son (Q 19:19). Maryam is surprised by the news and wonders how she can have a son when no man has touched her and she has not been unchaste (Q 19:20). She is assured that it is easy for God and that the child will be appointed “as a sign for people and a mercy from God” (Q 19:21). Maryam conceives him and retires to a remote place, where she delivers her child under the palm tree. She becomes fearful and sad, but soon “the one inside her” comforts her and tells her that she will have water, food and comfort and that if she does see any human being, she must declare that she has vowed not to talk with anyone (Q 19:23–26). On her return to her people, she is accused of a shameful thing but her son speaks from the cradle to vindicate her against her slanderers (Q 19:30–33). Near the end of the narrative, ‘Isa makes a compassionate statement on behalf of himself and his mother, expressing deep respect for his mother or motherhood in general: “He had made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable” (*wa-barra bi-wālidatī wa-lam yaj‘alnī jabbārān shaqiyyā*, Q 19:32).

Finally, how is Maryam’s drama relevant to Muhammad in Mecca? Like Muhammad, Maryam received a divine message from an angelic being. Like Muhammad, Maryam was abandoned and slandered by her own people because of this divine choosing. Like Muhammad and his followers, she experienced fear, hunger, thirst and insecurity. God then miraculously vindicated her before those who ridiculed her, exemplifying the end which the rejected Muhammad waited for and anticipated. Like David Marshall, who drew an affinity between Muhammad and Maryam,<sup>70</sup> ‘Adnān al-Maqrānī, in his study entitled *Mariamitic Contemplations*, recognized a list of traits common to both Muhammad and Maryam:<sup>71</sup>

- Maryam was an orphan sponsored by Zakariyya (Q 3:44), and likewise, Muhammad was an orphan sponsored by his grandfather Abū Ṭālib.<sup>72</sup> Sympathy to the orphan expressed throughout the Qur’an is of extreme importance (Q 6:93).
- Maryam used to worship God in isolation in the *mīhrāb* (Q 3:37), and Muhammad used to worship God in isolation at the cave of *Ḥirā’* (*ghār Ḥirā’*).<sup>73</sup> Devotion and worship represent a spiritual preparation for the annunciation of the word of God.

69 As the form study of Maryam’s narrative discloses (chapter two) Maryam is the hero in the story: she takes the journey to the wilderness on her own and returns victorious to her own people. Even ‘Isa’s name appears only in the commentary of the narrative and as alluded to by the narratorial voice.

70 See similar affinities drawn between Muhammad and Maryam in Neal Robinson, “Jesus and Mary in the Qur’an: Some Neglected Affinities”, *Religion* 20 (1990): 161–175.

71 ‘Adnān al-Maqrānī, *Ta’ammulat Maryamiya*, commentary by metropolitan George Khodr (Lebanon, 2001).

72 Ibn Iṣḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 79.

73 *Ibid.*, 105–106.

- In the case of both Maryam (Q 19:17) and Muhammad,<sup>74</sup> the messenger is the Holy Spirit, the angel *Jibrīl*, who appears in the form of a human being.
- Maryam's virginity and Muhammad's illiteracy are similar: Maryam was impregnated by the word of God,<sup>75</sup> namely 'Isa, son of Maryam, without physical intercourse (Q 3:45–47) and Muhammad was verbally inspired by the word of God, namely the Qur'an, without any knowledge of reading and writing (Q 7:157).
- Maryam's response to the angel's annunciation, by the question, "How would I have a child when no man has touched me and I had never been unchaste?" is similar to Muhammad's cry to *Jibrīl* when he was asked to recite the Qur'an, "I am not one who recites!" (*mā anā bi-qāri'*!).
- Muhammad's struggle to deliver the Qur'an is like Maryam's struggle to deliver under the palm; although Muhammad's struggle lasted an interval of thirty years and Maryam's struggle probably lasted only a few months, the analogy between the two concepts of revelation and procreation is significant and we have already elaborated on this analogy which comes very strongly in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*.

Thus, Muhammad's identifying his own struggle with Maryam's struggle makes Maryam a model for Muhammad just like other male prophets. What is unusual about Maryam's becoming a model for the prophet Muhammad is Muhammad's identifying with Maryam and not with 'Isa, for 'Isa does not feature in a story during the entire Meccan period. That is, Muhammad identifies more with a Christian female/mother figure than with 'Isa Christ, who was God's messenger and his Word (Q 3:45). Since Maryam carried the Word<sup>76</sup> and Muhammad carried the Qur'an, and since 'Isa is the Word<sup>77</sup> revealed to Maryam and the Qur'an is the Word revealed to Muhammad, does that not make 'Isa analogous to the Qur'an, and Maryam analogous to Muhammad?<sup>78</sup> And does this not make Maryam a prophetess and a precedent to Muhammad in her receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration?

74 Bukhāri *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. by Aḥmad Muḥamad Shākir (Beirut, n.d.), 1:2–3.

75 The virginity of Maryam is certain and confirmed for two reasons: one because the spirit of God cannot impregnate except a virgin, and second, because being in touch with the divine cannot happen except through a pure vessel.

76 Jesus' name as a "Word" is originally Christian but his name 'Isa, son of Maryam is strictly Qur'anic.

77 See Donald F. Winslow, "Logos", in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson, 2nd edn., (New York, 1997), 1:688. Winslow says: "No wonder that the early Christians would think of scripture itself as the 'Word of God'; and no wonder they would think of Christ, 'the Word,' as the divinely planned fulfilment of God's creative and redemptive plan, to which the whole of Hebrew scripture, they believed, bore ample testimony".

78 Read on the *theory of the reception* and the analogy between 'Isa and the Qur'an in Muḥammad Arkoun, *Al-Qur'ān min al-tafsīr al-mawrūth ilā taḥlīl al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*, trans. Hāshim Sāliḥ (Beirut, 2001), 23.

### 6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the authority of Andalusian exegetes who argue for Maryam's prophethood was contrasted with the authority of Eastern exegetes who are androcentric in their Qur'anic reading of the receptiveness of Maryam to Godly verbal inspiration. This important Miriamic prophetic ability is implicitly included at the textual and sub-textual levels of the Qur'anic narratives on Maryam. One no longer needs to wonder about the Qur'anic typological calling of Maryam by the epithet, "sister of Harun" (*yā ukhta Hārūna*), reminding of Miriam, the first female to be called a prophetess. In Maryam's miraculous sustenance, and in her chosenness above women of the world as well as in the prophetic hadith of perfection (*ḥadīth al-kamāl*), Muslim Andalusian exegetes busied themselves in reading right into the text. Although, in Andalusia, the dispute over the prophethood of women was severe and was in a way part of the dispute on the divine favors of the saints and the miracles of the prophets, the issue was also discussed by medieval Eastern exegetes from the point of view of *karāma* of the saint versus *mu'jiza* of the prophet, not admitting Maryam to the experience of the challenge of the miraculous. A group of classical and modern exegetes, from Sunni and Shi'i Islam, including one woman Muslim scholar, was selected to represent the commentaries of the *mufasssirs* which were based more on elements external to the text, mainly hadith, than those that are internal, and were androcentric in their reading more into the text than what the text originally might have alluded to.

Calling attention to Maryam's signs of prophethood, well established in the text, will eventually inaugurate Maryam on a level equal to that of other male prophets within the Qur'anic representation of salvation history. The logical argument concerning 'Isa's matrilineal name, by which the Qur'an solely identifies 'Isa in relation to his mother, highlights the Qur'anic vision of Maryam's prophethood. In evoking her memory and retelling Maryam's story and struggle with her people, Muhammad identifies more to Maryam than to 'Isa, which further confirms the image of Maryam as a prophetess.

Finally, what is learned from a rereading of the exegetical tradition from classical to modern times, and what is gained in claiming Maryam's status as a prophetess? One learns that Qur'anic traditional exegesis is not divine and is open to feminist criticism and interpretation. By excluding Maryam's prophethood, traditional exegetes excluded women from religious authority in general and deprived them of claiming their equal spiritual rights. Alternatively, as Leila Ahmad argues, they emphasize the essentially egalitarian Islamic vision, ethical and spiritual, of men and women, which serves as a counterweight to the ubiquitous forces seeking to perpetuate a hierarchically structured marriage model, a model that reflects the norms of classical Islam more than the ability of modern Islam to adapt to ever-changing situations in different times and places.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the similar paths of Muhammad and Maryam or their experience of carrying God's Word should motivate both Christians and Muslims to come together in a spirit of mutual understanding.

79 See Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven and London, 1992), 64–67.

## 7 Conclusion

Following the reading of the story of Maryam in the Qur'an in exegetical and interpretative forms, this literary study of the suras and verses that were called in remembrance of Maryam comes to some conclusions.

### 7.1 Reading *Sūrat Maryam* as a literary genre and a discourse on the Merciful (*al-rahmān*)

The form study of the narrative section of *Sūrat Maryam* has shown some level of inter-textuality on a textual level between this Meccan sura and the Gospel according to Luke, and on the sub-textual level, with the pre-Islamic panegyric ode. This proves that *Sūrat Maryam*, as noted by al-Suyūṭī, was of the old established suras which belonged to one group in the Meccan period: *Sūrat Banī Isrā'īl* (17), *Sūrat al-Kahf* (18), *Sūrat Ṭaha* (20) and *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* (21). The new reading of *Sūrat Maryam*, introduced by a display of the verse units, both structurally and thematically in accordance to colometric analysis, was achieved. The literary type of the sura was identified: a blending of Christian liturgical and Arabic poetic forms. These forms are mixed in a fascinating synthesis that can only emerge in an orally cultured environment.

The explication of the verse units led to the examination of links and connections between narrative units on the one hand, and those of the polemic and commentary units on the other hand.

The explications uncovered stylistic features in the thesis and anti-thesis sections, such as repetitive formulaic introductory expressions, narrative forms of nearly equal length, polemic units with a degree of symmetrical structure, uniform rhythmic verse-endings, key words (*al-rahmān*) and units of similar length, which prove that the sura, with the exception of a few verses (37–40, 58–63, 64–65, 71), is semi-poetic and coherently delivered.

The sura, commencing with a narrative section (thesis) followed by a polemic section (anti-thesis), is not a typical sura type. The polemic section tends to subdue the pleasure of the narrative section. The subduing of the pleasure of narration, however, halts oral recitation. Qur'an reciters (*muqris*), many of them personally interviewed by me, affirm that they choose to read from the narrative units because it appeals more to the hearts of the believers/hearers than the harsh language of

threat and warning, which is strongly present in the polemic section of the sura.<sup>1</sup> This is also emphasized by the effect brought on by argumentation, which tends to create tension in the Qur'anic recitation. Hence, the narration retains its power to please, in the context of public recitation. This means that the Qur'an plays a double role in the lives of the Muslims: one as a "silent Qur'an" (silent recitation) and another as a "speaking Qur'an" (public recitation).

The location of Maryam's story on an equal level as that of other male prophets has revealed other textual politics: 'Isa, son of Maryam, does not have a story in *Sūrat Maryam* and 'Isa's name appears only in the commentary. Although the story ends with the birth of 'Isa and his speaking in the cradle, the story is that of Maryam and she is the protagonist. The journey that she takes into the wilderness is a direct contribution on the part of Maryam in salvation history.

The Qur'an evoked the memory of Maryam's delivery under a noble tree (palm) with the rivulet underneath to identify with the female essentialist role, thus, indirectly stating that fecundity and motherhood is sacred to the Arabs. This is not the only Qur'anic addition to the Lukan, Pseudo-Matthew and the Protevangelium Marian themes. The theme of Maryam's journey into the wilderness, cited as the building block of the thesis section, appeals, furthermore, to the journey that the she-camel takes in the pre-Islamic panegyric ode. Three themes associated with the three Biblical figures suddenly appear, on the sub-textual level, as a transfer of old themes of the pre-Islamic panegyric ode: The prelude (*nasīb*) is transferred to Zakariyya's eternal question about life and death, "if he does not bear a child". The *passage* of the poet, which takes him to describing the journey (*rahīl*) on his she-camel mount, is transferred here into Maryam's journey into the wilderness, her suffering on her own and her coming back to her people victorious. The last part, usually the eulogy (*madīh*) of the poet of himself or his tribe, is transferred instead into the Qur'an's expressed admiration to the community of Biblical apostles and prophets. Thus, although the Qur'an tends to break the rules at the level of the form of pre-Islamic poetry, in *Sūrat Maryam*, the appeal to the classical ode may be interpreted as nostalgia for the archaic mother. The compliments directed towards the community of Biblical prophets and apostles, on the other hand, are an attempt to transgress the personal towards the "other", that is, to stress the theology of divine mercy and not personal pride that are now prescribed as ignorant (*jāhili*) values. The location of Maryam's journey between the lamenting and the panegyric part is not the only point that invited the idea of a transfer of the image of the journey of the she-camel to the journey of Maryam; the

1 Ibn Iṣḥāq (d. 150/767) related a Hadith on the occasion of the first emigrants to Abyssinia who sought protection and security against their fellowmen of Quraysh. They paid the Negus of Abyssinia a visit, and after they were asked what they had brought with them, they chose to read the thesis part of *Sūrat Maryam*. This points to two things: One, that the Muslims avoided the reading of the polemic passages and second, that the sura was communicated to a Christian audience of some importance in the future history of the early Muslims.



Qur'an's mentioning of the water before food and security also makes the image plausible because of the journey that the she-camel always makes in the pre-Islamic ode toward the source of water. This proves that literary structures, in Maryam's story, had some continuation from pre-Islamic poetic traditions. The Qur'an evokes the memory of Maryam's labor experience in an environment of nature is without doubt projected partly to affirm 'Isa's birth through his earthly mother and partly because the power of the feminine and the maternal is fundamental to Muhammad and his Arabic-speaking community.

The key word *al-rahmān* (God as the Merciful) stresses the theology of mercy (*al-rahma*) in the stories of miraculous births and warns against designating a child to God in the polemic and commentary. The first uttered phrase of *Sūrat Maryam* commences with the remembering of God's mercy for Zakariyya. The evoking of *al-rahmān* sixteen times in a sura that takes Maryam, the female, on a journey into motherhood, the womb (*al-rahm*), with the same root *r-ḥ-m*, becomes envisioned in an image of "underneath" (from within or *baṭn*) Maryam and "underneath the earth". In addition, this accordance of the linguistic with the metaphorical is certainly at the centre of the theology of mercy given as gifts of progeny to the Biblical figures Zakariyya, Maryam and Ibrahim. In the Qur'an, the theology of mercy (*rahma*) is equivalent to the theology of blessing (*ni'ma*) which is present in the Gospel according to Luke.

Narrative analysis of Maryam's story (16–33) has shown that Maryam is the main protagonist in her story. Maryam speaks in her own voice and is not shy to express feminine language. This means that the language of the female and her relationship with her body does not intimidate the narratorial voice. In the journey that Maryam takes into motherhood, Arab female propriety are expressed in her shyness towards the appearance of the angel as a man, in her shock at the news of the annunciation and in her physical and psychological pain. Three motifs, annunciation, fertility and defending the virgin against her slanders, were analyzed with similar motifs from Christian traditions. This has resituated Maryam within her Marian tradition and has reclaimed the affinity between the canonical Gospels (especially according to Luke and Matthew), the Apocryphal Infancy Gospels (Protevangelium and Pseudo-Matthew) and the Qur'an.

It has been proposed that the depiction of Maryam with an earth setting and a maternal tree confines the female to her biological role. This argument is partly true and partly false. It may be true because of the psychological truth that Maryam seems to be expressing—with the angel and within herself—about her experience of childbirth, and her journey is a truth about the weakness of the female in such situations. It is falsified, however, because for the linguistic symbolic order to successfully produce a typical feminine representation, including feminine feelings, implies that women already participate in the making of language.

Is Maryam, however, an exemplar to Muslim women or only to the Prophet Muhammad? On the one hand, the portrayal of Maryam, in *Sūrat Maryam*, in a dual nature prevents her from becoming a model to Muslim women. She is a virgin and a mother, an active interlocutor that must leave the final word, and her defence, to her infant. She is portrayed only in her capacity as a fertile female,

where the maternal concept is further extended by the cry underneath the fertile tree. The transformation of Maryam's figure from an earthly image into the mother archetype, in the Jungian sense, explains the whole feminine mystique or the paradox of being virgin and a mother.

On the other hand, Maryam's journey into the maternal and her drama is evoked for the sake of getting in touch with the sacred, here God's spirit or His messenger. Although Maryam suffers the consequences of being alone in the wilderness and having to face the accusations of her own people, Maryam returns from her journey victorious. Thus, Maryam is certainly a model to the Prophet Muhammad. This is confirmed by the pattern in the stories of the prophets that always appear as struggling with their own people, who doubt them. The suffering is ended, however, when God interferes on their behalf and after which they return to their own people victorious. Therefore, Maryam's journey celebrates the powerful role of the feminine in the fertile land of the maternal and renders Maryam, from this essentialist perspective, on an equal level with other male prophets and apostles.

Moving away from the imagery and into the stylistics, one uncovers sexual-textual politics that are hidden within the linguistic and literary construction of the texts. In both suras, the linguistic data of the grammatical subjects, verbs, and end-rhymes were collected to identify the speakers and their speech formation. Special attention was given to named characters versus those who are unnamed. The issue of naming and un-naming is very important in the narratorial strategy: Maryam's mother has the power of naming her daughter "*innī sammaytuhā Maryama*" and Maryam has the power of ascribing her first name as a *nisba* to her son, 'Isa, son of Maryam (*'Īsā'bnū Maryama*). The power of naming, a privilege of fathers, is given here probably to mother and daughter as a result of the absence of the father. Qur'anic textual politics, in Jaroslav Stetkevych's words, tends to hide names of persons or places<sup>2</sup> since "scripture is itself that implicitly hermetic textual phenomena torn by the tension between message and secrecy, between the 'revealed', with its intent of communicability and the 'hidden occult'".<sup>3</sup>

The data of the phonetical repetitions on the level of the phrase, word and letter on the intertextual level within the sura and on the intra-textual level with the Qur'an has unveiled the level of the poetic of *Sūrat Maryam* and the inter-relationship between *Sūrat Maryam* and that of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. Focus has been placed on the repetitive letter that accentuates certain words and brings harmony between the verses. The letter *al-dhāl*, a component of the term *al-dhakar* (male) in both suras, is repeated to emphasize the discourse of the gifts of male progeny (*dhurriyya dhukūr*) given to prophetic figures. The visibility of the letter *al-dhāl* was equally stressed in the wife of 'Imran's speech to her God and in the denial of similitude

2 See, Muḥammad Saeed Siddīqī, *Who is Who in the Holy Qur'an: Qur'anic Names and Symbols* (Lahore, 1994).

3 Jaroslav Stetkevych, "Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning", in *JNES* 48 (1989): 83.

between the male–female phrase *wa-laysa al-dhakarū ka-l-unthā* (and the male is not like the female) that presupposes sexual preference of the male over the female to the service of God in the temple.

Special attention has been made to the rhetorical devices employed in the texts: metaphors, similes, analogy and metonymy are important ingredients of *nazm*, the correspondence achieved in construction between the structure of the meanings and the structure of the words or morphemes, and are important means of performative expressiveness in both the thinkable and imagined of the Arabic language. Space was dedicated in both suras for the interpretation of foreign words (*gharīb al-Qur’ān*) that have caused severe controversy in the history of Islamic studies. In *Sūrat Maryam* the question of the identity of the speaker from underneath Maryam (‘Isa or the angel) “*fa-nādāhā min taḥthā*” has been resolved by the suggested translation of the term “*taḥt*”, which means “from within” in Nabatean. The Coptic origin of the word “*sarī*” gave the insight on the affinity between the story of Maryam’s journey in the Qur’an to that of the story of Mary’s escape into Egypt in Pseudo-Matthew. The issue of Maryam being given the epithet “the sister of Hārūn” in the Qur’an was finally resolved as a typological mean and not a miscalculation or error. The Qur’an is not unique in this tendency to relate Maryam to the first Miriam who was given a prophetic vision.

In *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*, many nouns of foreign origin (*gharīb al-Qur’ān*) were also researched and these terms mirror the kind of Christianity that must have been in contact with the early Muslims, especially in the milieu of Mecca. Like Maryam’s name, ‘Īsā’s name was explained along with his apostles, *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, which is of Ethiopic origin. In research of this nature, it is not only important to use dictionaries of Semitic languages (mainly Hebrew, Syriac and Ethiopic) and non-Semitic languages (mainly Coptic), it is also important to admit the common heritage of many liturgical and literary texts that the Qur’an seems to evoke in prayers, hymns and stories. The best translation of the formulaic phrase “*wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi Maryama*” was sought out, which has been mistranslated by many western Qur’anic translators as “reading from a book”, while it is a “calling in remembrance of Maryam”. Unfortunately, Muslim scholars and exegetes, classical and modern, have failed to interpret many Qur’anic words that are of non-Arabic origin and have, as a result, missed or confused the meanings of many Christian themes. The best example is the motif of “the reversal of standards” of Maryam’s hymn, the “Magnificat”, which reappears only in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*, as an introductory verse to the infancy story of Maryam and reappears nowhere else in the corpus of the Qur’anic texts.

## **7.2 *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*: A literary genre and a discourse on Interpretation (*ta’wīl*)**

The study of the verse units pertinent to Maryam in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* only covers the first sixty-three verses (early Medinan). These units display the disappearance of the liturgy and its distinct tripartite composition, earlier associated with the structure of *Sūrat Maryam* (middle Meccan). Small liturgical units (a group of

two verses), however, appear merged with revelational themes and polemics. The tendency towards prosaic and long verses frees the composition, in many respects, from poetic literary devices. Thus, the discourse is free to merge many discourses together as in the most fascinating merging of the discourse of procreation with that of revelation. Further, the Qur'an here engages in the interpretation of already delivered themes from *Sūrat Maryam* to classify the existence of two types of verses, those described as “the firmly established verses” (*muḥkamāt*) and others as “the ambiguous verses” (*mutashābihāt*, 7). The Qur'an's striking phenomena of self-referentiality reflects an extended process of communication involving a speaker and addressee and the issue that necessitated reinterpreting 'Isa's birth story in relation to God's essence and his oneness.

The form of the verse units is structured as follows: the polemic section appears as the prologue to the narrative section and the forms are more complicated than the forms of *Sūrat Maryam*. The discourse is not divided, as in *Sūrat Maryam*, into a thesis and anti-thesis. On the contrary, the discourse merges Islamic revelational doctrines and concepts with Christian hymns and stories like that of Maryam's “Magnificat” and Maryam's infancy story. The narratorial voice allows for dialogue and interaction between Zakariyya and Maryam, then for Maryam and Zakariyya or the angel and finally for 'Isa and his apostles. However, what seems to be an established form is the distinctive feature of speech-giving: that of the wife of 'Imran, 'Isa's speech to the children of Isrā'īl, and God's speech to 'Isa. This speech-giving has its own *Sitz im Leben*, which is a typical life situation of the early Muslim community or the pre-Islamic Arabs, famous for their speech-style (*khuṭba*) address. Maryam's infancy story is structured as a weaving thread of all the narrative scenes: her consecration by her mother to the service of God (Q 3:35–37), Zakariyya's discovering Maryam's miraculous sustenance (Q 3:38–41) and the angel(s') annunciation to Maryam (Q 3:42–47). 'Isa for the first time gives a speech (Q 3:48–54) and God addresses 'Isa directly to confirm the Islamicization of his birth story (Q 3:58–63). 'Isa and God have the highest frequency of verbs. God speaks in the first person, both singular “I”, and plural “We”, but is spoken of as “He”, as proof of his existence on many levels. The fascinating image of the sura is given, again, to Maryam, not only for her miraculous fecundity, but for her maternal power that can bind progeny together in the prophetic line, in the sense of initiating a matrilineage. In *Sūrat Maryam*, Maryam's fertility was an answer to the eternal question about the puzzle of life between aridness and fecundity. The answer came in Maryam's return from the journey victorious and with a child. In *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, Maryam's power of the maternal becomes one, analogous to the mother of revelation; “*al-arḥām*” (wombs) of mothers and “*umm al-kitāb*” (the mother of the revelation), analogous both to the origin (*aṣl*) of both “sacrosanct life” and “heavenly revelation”. This highlights the subject of “the honourable role of the mother”, which is at the center of the matrilineal stories of *Āl 'Imrān*. Situating the family of 'Imran as a chosen family initiated by a female ancestor, equal to that of the family of Ibrahim, initiated by the father of patriarchy, at the introductory verse of the narrative scenes, suggests another *Sitz im Leben*, that

is, the existence of the matrilineal features along with the patrilineal features in the pre-Islamic social system.<sup>4</sup> A perfect example of this is the ability of Maryam to give her son his matronym, ‘Isa, son of Maryam.

### 7.3 Gender analysis

Gender analysis addresses the issue of Maryam’s entry into sacred space, the *miḥrāb*. Maryam’s entry into the Holy of Holies relates significantly to gender equality and indirectly points to the assimilation of males and females within sacred space.<sup>5</sup> Gender equality at this high level of ritual performance is in line with the pre-Islamic gender equality within sacred performance. A perfect example of this gender egalitarian performance of ritual, embraced later by Muhammad, is the ritual of pilgrimage to Mecca (*al-ḥajj*) where men and women together circumambulate the *ka’ba*, the focal point of prayer for every Muslim. One must note, however, that there is a difference between the maternal and paternal image of the performance of *hajj*.

In the performance of the *hajj* in Mecca, where both the re-enacting of the symbolic order of the father of monotheism, Ibrahim, is accompanied with that of the re-enacting of Hajar’s running between two places, a symbolic dimension is present. One is of “the otherness” of the mother who can be in two places versus the centrality of father who must be represented around one focal point. Maryam’s entry into the *miḥrāb* coincides with the female’s entry into the *ka’ba*,<sup>6</sup> and Maryam being commanded by the angel to pray in the same space with other male worshippers can be reinterpreted as a license for Muslim women, in present times, to pray in the same space in the mosque.

In returning to the issue of name-giving, Maryam’s power to name her son and give him a genealogy from the family of ‘Imran, which is then considered on an equal level with that of the family of Ibrahim, can be reinterpreted as an advantage to Muslim women, allowing them to claim a legitimate right to name and give their family name in cases where it is most needed. Maryam’s claim for prophethood, as has been argued, invites them to seek religious status on a high level. This is not alien to Muslims who know very well that men and women are equally entrusted to the vice-regency (*taklīf*) on earth, which is beautifully visualized in the Qur’anic image of Maryam shaking the palm tree.

For the first time, elements of intertextuality in Maryam’s Qur’anic story have been studied. Elements of continuity and disruption in the scenario between the Qur’anic infancy story of Maryam and the Protevangelium Infancy Gospel were

4 For the existence of patrilineal and matrilineal features in early Islam see Gertrude Stern, *Marriages in Early Islam* (London, 1939); Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1968).

5 For a Muslim women’s discussion of Maryam’s example as a significant aspect of understanding the Qurān’s position on the access of women to sacred space, see Nevin Reda, “Women in the Mosque: Historical Perspectives on Segregation”, in *AJISS* 21 (2004): 77–61.

6 The direction of the *ka’ba* is correctly identified as the *qibla*.

discussed. A difference of both contexts has been identified to appreciate the comparison between the two stories and to show that the Qur'an may be referring to the Protevangelium for the sake of establishing an understanding of Christian themes and to retell a story that seems to be dear to the heart of Muhammad and his Arabic-speaking community.

The reading of Maryam's infancy story in light of the Protevangelium version of Maryam's infancy leads to important insights. The scenario seems to be the same, to a certain point, until the Qur'an departs from the Protevangelium to present a different story of 'Isa's birth and then to Islamicize the birth story. There are stylistic features which seem to be the same in both versions, such as the deictic elements "when" (*idh*) at the beginning of each passage. The name-giving speech does not seem to be a characteristic of the encomium, the literary type of the Protevangelium, which has been introduced in accordance to Ronald Hock's description. The differences are apparent in the diversion that the Qur'an undertakes in the retelling of 'Isa's birth story. In addition, Anna's consecrating the child to the service of God prior to its conception—regardless of whether it is a male or a female—is different from the Qur'anic version, which presupposes sexual preference in the service of the temple. This formula "*wa-laysa'l-dhdhakaruka'l-unthā*", however, was neutralized to confirm God's acceptance of Maryam in the vicinity of the temple without restriction.

The walk of Anna into the garden and her standing under the tree surrounded with signs of life-giving from earth and heaven, along with her lament over her infertility lead to the insight to which Maryam's image of the Palm and the rivulet may be an answer—in defence of the infertile woman. The Qur'anic Maryam's mixed feelings of pain and joy from the experience of labor in *Sūrat Maryam* may be a resonance to her mother's cry of pain from the experience of barrenness.

Anna's hymn or song of rejoicing after the birth of Maryam has a long Biblical tradition: a song was given by Anna, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2), and by Anna the mother of Maryam (PJ) and later by Maryam the mother of 'Isa who sings the "Magnificat" in Luke. In addition, a motif of "reversal of standards" of the "Magnificat" is delivered to Muhammad (Q 3:26). This exposes the resonance between all these mothers—in their traditional song of rejoicing and thankfulness—with Muhammad. The existence of such an ancient hymn and its continuation from one religious tradition to another proves the strength of the Miriamic traits that bring the Jewish, Christian and Islamic literary traditions together in a song of rejoicing.

While the theology of blessing (*ni'ma*) in Luke is transferred in *Sūrat Maryam* to a theology of mercy (*rahma*), in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, the Protevangelium theology of blessing (*ni'ma*) is transferred into a theology of chosenness (*iṣṭifā'*).

#### 7.4 Marian/Miriamic Qur'anic traits

A study of Maryam's journey and biography, in both *Sūrat Maryam* and *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, has revealed some characteristics which are typical of the Marian and

Miriamic Biblical tradition and some which are unique to the Qur'an. Maryam is the *only named female* in the Qur'an; her mother gives a naming-speech to her Lord on the occasion of her birth. Maryam, the named (*al-musammāt*), like her mother has the power of naming, she gives her son his lineage (*nisba*), 'Isa, the son of Maryam. A first reading of the wife of 'Imran's call to her Lord to protect Maryam and her progeny against the Evil One (*al-isti'ādha*) places them under a special protection (*'iṣma*) and she becomes, if the text is read independent of other Qur'anic suras, sinless—compare with the Immaculate Conception.<sup>7</sup> Maryam is also the female accepted to serve in the temple in spite of the uttered fear that the male is more equipped for the service in the temple than the female; Maryam is graciously accepted by her Lord to serve in the temple (*fa-taqabbalahā rabbuhā bi-qabūlin ḥasanin*). Maryam's admission as an infant to the Holy of Holies (*al-miḥrāb*) was imperative in her upbringing and readiness to receive the angel's annunciation by way of direct transmission. She is addressed by the angel three times to be informed that she is the chosen and the purified (*al-muṣṭafāt*, *al-muṭaḥhara*) and the one who worships God equally with other men and in all forms of prayers (*al-qāni'a*, *al-sājida wa'l-rāki'a ma'a'l-rāki'īn*). Maryam, by her piety and her chosenness, is therefore equipped to receive miracles of special kinds (*muhayya'a li'l-a'ājīb*): her miraculous sustenance in the *miḥrāb* (*rizq fī'l-miḥrāb*), her receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration through the angels (*tatalaqqā'l-wahī minā'llāh 'an ṭarīq al-malā'ika*) and her impregnation with the word of God. This Word which God throws from His spirit into Maryam (*kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā Maryam*) certainly alludes to conceiving without carnal intercourse. Therefore, the Qur'anic Maryam is a virgin, and this Word from God is given the name: the Messiah 'Isa, son of Maryam (*kalimatun minhu'smuhu'l-Massīhu 'Isā'bnū Maryama*).

In *Sūrat Maryam*, Maryam's *dhikr* is called in remembrance from the "heavenly book" on an equal level to that of other male prophets. She is a woman of memory (*ṣāhibat dhikr*) and the narratorial voice depicts her as taking an unaccompanied journey through the wilderness to be in touch with the holy. Maryam, in her journey, which she undertakes on her own, was to be defended against her slanders (*al-mubarra'a*) by her son who spoke as an infant in her defence. She is also respected because of her son's gratefulness to her (*al-mubarrara bi-waladīhā*).

Maryam, in other Qur'anic suras, is appointed with her son as one Sign (*āya*, Q 23:50) and she is called "the veracious" (*al-siddīqa*), an epithet equal to that of Ibrahim and Yusuf (Q 5:75); and she is called upon as an exemplar to the believing women (Q 66:12). All these Marian, or Miriamic, traits and images are exclusive

7 For the affinity between 'the wife of 'Imran' call of protection (*isti'ādha*) for Maryam and her progeny and the doctrine of "the Immaculate Conception", see George Anawātī, "Islam and the Immaculate Conception" in *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance*, ed. E.D. O'Conner (Indiana, 1958). See also Hosn Abboud, "al-Islam wa-'aqīdat al-ḥabal bilā danas aw al-'iṣma min al-khaṭī'a al-ūla" [Islam and the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception], in *al-Majalla al-kahanūtiyya* [La Revue Sacredotale] 2–3 (2004): 169–176.

to Maryam who is, among other Qur'anic female figures, situated at a later stage as a prototype figure.<sup>8</sup> Maryam, at the highest level, becomes, through the exteriorization of the eternal Word of God, powerful and vital.

### 7.5 Feminist criticism of the response of exegetes to Maryam's prophetic signs

Maryam's prophetic signs have been exposed by the medieval Andalusian exegetes Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī, who argued vehemently in support of the receptiveness of women to God's verbal inspiration. A review of the positions of the most influential and learned classical and modern exegetes, from al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭūsī of medieval Eastern Islam up to those of Sayyid Quṭb and Bint al-Shāṭi' in modern Egypt, regarding the issue of Maryam's miraculous sustenance and Maryam's receptiveness to God's verbal inspiration has been presented. There is definitely a unique position taken by Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī in defense of Maryam's prophetic signs, which certainly had to do with numerous elements: the intellectual milieu of Andalusia, the social status of Andalusian women, and the Zāhirī and Mālikī schools of law. The position that Eastern Muslim exegetes have taken against Maryam's prophetic signs was based on their misinterpretation of a Qur'anic verse that never argued for the ability of men against women to receive God's verbal inspiration; the reasoning that al-Rāzī and others used to justify an argument refuting God granting Maryam prophetic abilities was not based on male–female gender politics but rather on angelic–human politics.

Classical Muslim exegetes were occupied with hadith tradition. Although some of them use Christian lore to name the characters of the family of Maryam and to place the events in their Christian context, they do not establish a correlation between the Qur'anic story and the Gospel story of Maryam. As a result, they establish a schism between the three scriptures affirmed by the Qur'an as of one fundamental source, the mother of revelation (*umm al-kitāb*). By this, they also tear Maryam from her powerful tradition—being Jewish in her upbringing, Christian in her motherhood and Muslim in her chosenness over all women of the world. This may also answer their neglect of her role as the great link and meeting point between Christianity and Islam. These exegetes also neglect the fact that she was a model to the Prophet Muhammad in his own struggle with his own people and in his carrying the Word of God, which is, in his case, not 'Isa, but the Qur'an.

This literary study of Maryam's story in the Qur'an has hopefully succeeded in breaking new ground for Qur'anic studies and gender issues. Modern literary theories were utilized according to the structure and content of the texts: form study (for texts of liturgical character), stylistics (of language and representation), narrative and motif analysis (of folk-tale), feminist criticism (essentialist versus constructionist arguments, and private versus public space analysis) and readers-response theory (of classical and modern exegetes). No discussion of these

8 For the symbolic dimension of the Qur'anic message of women figures of the sacred past see Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, (1994) 20–21.



theories was undertaken, but the fact that these theories were applicable demonstrates their significance in the modern study of the Qur'an as a corpus of liturgical and literary texts. The vitality that this study has shown is due to the attitude employed in including western as well as Muslim scholarship on the subject, with the knowledge of the latest academic contributions on the topic of the Qur'an, literature and Maryam. Further, this approach hopes to contribute in the modern debate, not over a "clash of civilizations", but over a mutual understanding between the peoples of different cultures and civilizations.

## Appendix: *Sūrat Maryam*

سورة رقم 19

مريم

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

كاف هاء ياء عين صاد

{1} ذَكَرُ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُ زَكَرِيَّا {2} إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ نِدَاءً خَفِيًّا {3} قَالَ رَبِّ  
"إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَاسْتَعَلَ الرَّأْسُ شَيْبًا وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا {4}  
وَإِنِّي خِفْتُ الْمَوَالِيَ مِنْ وَرَائِي وَكَانَتِ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا فَهَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا  
{5} يَرِثُنِي وَيَرِثْ مِنْ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ وَاجْعَلْهُ رَبِّ رَضِيًّا {6} يَا زَكَرِيَّا إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ  
بِغُلَامٍ اسْمُهُ يَحْيَى لَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَّ مِنْ قَبْلُ سَمِيًّا {7} قَالَ رَبِّ أُنَى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ  
وَكَانَتِ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا وَقَدْ بَلَغْتُ مِنَ الْكِبَرِ عِتِيًّا {8} قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ  
عَلَيَّ هَيِّئْ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتُكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكُ شَيْئًا {9} قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً قَالَ آيَتُكَ  
أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَ لَيَالٍ سَوِيًّا {10} فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنَ الْمِحْرَابِ فَأَوْحَى  
إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ سَبِّحُوا بُحْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا {11} يَا يَحْيَى خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْحُكْمَ صَبِيًّا  
{12} وَحَنَانًا مِّنْ لَّدُنَّا وَرَكَّةً وَقَانَ تَقِيًّا {13} وَبَرًّا بِوَالِدَيْهِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ جَبَّارًا  
عَصِيًّا {14} وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُبْعَثُ حَيًّا {15} وَادْكُرْ  
فِي الْكِتَابِ مَرْيَمَ إِذِ انْتَبَذَتْ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا مَكَانًا شَرْقِيًّا {16} فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ  
حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا {17} قَالَتْ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ  
بِالرَّحْمَنِ مِنْكَ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَقِيًّا {18} قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا  
{19} قَالَتْ أَنَى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا {20} قَالَ كَذَلِكَ  
قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّئْ وَلِنَجْعَلَهُ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مُّفْضِيًّا {21}  
فَحَمَلَتْهُ فَانْتَبَذَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا {22} فَاجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ



الْوَعْدُ وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَبِيًّا {54} وَكَانَ يُأْمُرُ أَهْلَهُ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَكَانَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ  
 مَرْضِيًّا {55} وَادْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِدْرِيسَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا {56} وَرَفَعْنَاهُ  
 مَكَانًا عَلِيًّا {57} أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مَنْ ذُرِّيَّةَ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ  
 حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا إِذَا تُتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ  
 آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا {58} {س} فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا  
 الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهْوَاتِ فَسُوفَ يَلْقَوْنَ غِيًّا {59} إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ  
 صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا {60} جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدَ  
 الرَّحْمَنُ عِبَادَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَأْتِيًّا {61} لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لُعَاوًا إِلَّا سَلَامًا  
 وَلَهُمْ رِزْقُهُمْ فِيهَا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا {62} تِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي نُورِثُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا مَنْ كَانَ  
 تَقِيًّا {63} وَمَا نَنْزِلُ إِلَّا بِأَمْرِ رَبِّكَ لَهُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِينَا وَمَا خَلْفَنَا وَمَا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ وَمَا  
 كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا {64} رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فَاعْبُدْهُ وَاصْطَبِرْ  
 لِعِبَادَتِهِ هَلْ تَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا {65} وَيَقُولُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَيْدَا مَا مِتُّ لَسُوفَ أُخْرَجُ حَيًّا  
 {66} أَوْلَا يَذْكُرُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ يَكْ شَيْئًا {67} فَوَرَبِّكَ  
 لَنَحْشُرَنَّهُمْ وَالشَّيَاطِينَ ثُمَّ لَنُحْضِرَنَّهُمْ حَوْلَ جَهَنَّمَ جِثِيًّا {68} ثُمَّ لَنَنْزِعَنَّ مِنْ كُلِّ  
 شِيعَةٍ أَيُّهُمْ أَشَدُّ عَلَى الرَّحْمَنِ عِتِيًّا {69} ثُمَّ لَنَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِالَّذِينَ هُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِهَا صِلِيًّا  
 {70} وَإِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَقْضِيًّا {71} ثُمَّ نُنَجِّي الَّذِينَ  
 اتَّقَوْا وَنَذَرُ الظَّالِمِينَ فِيهَا جِثِيًّا {72} وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا نَبِّئَاتِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ  
 كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَيُّ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ خَيْرٌ مَقَامًا وَأَحْسَنُ نَدِيًّا {73} وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ  
 مِنْ قَرْنٍ هُمْ أَحْسَنُ أَثَانًا وَرَثِيًّا {74} قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الضَّلَالَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ  
 مَدًّا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَأَوْا مَا يُوعَدُونَ إِمَّا الْعَذَابَ وَإِمَّا السَّاعَةَ فَسَيَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ هُوَ شَرٌّ  
 مَكَانًا وَأَضْعَفُ جُنْدًا {75} وَيَزِيدُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا هُدًى وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ الصَّالِحَاتُ  
 خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ مَرَدًّا {76} أَفَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ بِآيَاتِنَا وَقَالَ لَأُوتِيَنَّ  
 مَالًا وَوَلَدًا {77} أَطَّلَعَ الْغَيْبَ أَمْ اتَّخَذَ عِنْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ عَهْدًا {78} كَلَّا سَنَكْتُبُ مَا  
 يَقُولُ وَنَمُدُّ لَهُ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ مَدًّا {79} وَنَرْتُهُ مَا يَقُولُ وَيَأْتِينَا فَرْدًا {80} وَاتَّخَذُوا  
 مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لِيَكُونُوا لَهُمْ عِزًّا {81} كَلَّا سَيَكْفُرُونَ بِعِبَادَتِهِمْ وَيَكُونُونَ  
 عَلَيْهِمْ ضِدًّا {82} أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَا أُرْسَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ تَوَزُّهُمْ أَزًّا {83}  
 فَلَا تَعْجَلْ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّمَا نَعُدُّ لَهُمْ عَدًّا {84} يَوْمَ نَحْشُرُ الْمُتَّقِينَ إِلَى الرَّحْمَنِ وَقَدَا

{85} وَتَسْوَءُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ وَرُدًّا {86} لَا يَمْلِكُونَ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنِ اتَّخَذَ  
عِنْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ عَهْدًا {87} وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا {88} لَقَدْ جِئْتُمْ شَيْئًا إِدًّا  
{89} تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْهُ وَتَنْشَقُّ الْأَرْضُ وَتَخِرُّ الْجِبَالُ هَدًّا {90} أَنْ  
دَعَوْا لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدًا {91} وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لِلرَّحْمَنِ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا {92} إِنْ كُلُّ مَنْ  
فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا آتَى الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدًا {93} لَقَدْ أَحْصَاهُمْ وَعَدَّهُمْ عَدًّا  
{94} وَكُلُّهُمْ آتِيهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَرْدًا {95} إِنْ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ  
سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا {96} فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لِئُبَشِّرَ بِهِ الْمُتَّقِينَ وَنُنذِرَ بِهِ  
قَوْمًا لُدًّا {97} وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِّنْ قَرْنٍ هَلْ يُحِسُّ مِنْهُمْ مِّنْ أَحَدٍ أَوْ تَسْمَعُ لَهُمْ  
رِكْزًا {98}

## سورة رقم 3

آل عمران

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الم {1} اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ {2} نَزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا  
لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنْزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ {3} مِنْ قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنْزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ  
إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انْتِقَامٍ {4} إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا  
يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ {5} هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي  
الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ {6} هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ  
الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ  
زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ  
وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو  
الْأَلْبَابِ {7} رَبَّنَا لَا تُرِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ  
الْوَهَّابُ {8} رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ جَامِعُ النَّاسِ لِيَوْمٍ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ  
{9} إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَأُولَئِكَ  
هُمُ وَقُودُ النَّارِ {10} كَذَّابِ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَأَخَذَهُمُ  
اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ {11} قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَعْلَبُونَ وَنُحْشَرُونَ إِلَى  
جَهَنَّمَ وَبَسَّ الْمِهَادُ {12} قَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فِي فِئْتَيْنِ النَّعْتَانِ فَإِنَّهُنَّ تُقَاتِلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ  
وَأُخْرَىٰ كَافِرَةٌ يَرَوْنَهُمْ مِثْلَيْهِمْ رَأْيَ الْعَيْنِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤَيِّدُ بِنَصَرِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ  
لَعِبْرَةً لِّأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ {13} زَيْنٌ لِّلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ  
وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ذَلِكَ  
مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَآبِ {14} قُلْ أَوْبَيْنَاكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْ ذَلِكَ  
لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ  
مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ {15} الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا آمَنَّا  
فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ {16} الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ  
وَالْمُنْفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ {17} شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ  
وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ {18} إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

الإسلامَ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوْتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعِيًّا بَيْنَهُمْ  
وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ {19} فَإِنْ حَاجُّوكَ فَقُلْ أَسْلَمْتُ  
وَجْهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنَ وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْأُمِّيِّينَ أَسْلَمْتُمْ فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ  
اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَاغُ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ {20} إِنَّ الَّذِينَ  
يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الَّذِينَ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْقِسْطِ مِنَ  
النَّاسِ فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ {21} أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا  
وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ {22} أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا نَصِيبًا مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ  
يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ لِيَحْكَمَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ يُتَوَلَّى فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ وَهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ {23}  
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَنْ نَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ وَغَرَّهُمْ فِي دِينِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا  
يَفْتَرُونَ {24} فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جَمَعْنَاهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ وَوَقَّيْتُ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ  
وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ {25} قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَن تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ  
مِمَّن تَشَاءُ وَتُعْزِزُ مَن تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَن تَشَاءُ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ  
{26} تُوَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَتُوَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ  
وَتُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَن تَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ {27} لَا يَتَّخِذِ  
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِن دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي  
شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَن تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمُ نِفَاءً وَيُحَدِّثْكُمْ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ {28} قُلْ إِنْ  
تُخَفُوا مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ أَوْ تُبْذَوْهُ يَعْزِمُ اللَّهُ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي  
الْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ {29} يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ  
مُّحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا بَعِيدًا وَيُحَدِّثْكُمْ اللَّهُ  
نَفْسَهُ وَاللَّهُ رَؤُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ {30} قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ  
وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ {31} قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا  
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكَافِرِينَ {32} إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ  
عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ {33} ذُرِّيَّةً بَعْضُهَا مِن بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ {34} إِذْ  
قَالَتْ امْرَأَةٌ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَدَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ  
السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ {35} فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا أُنْثَىٰ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا  
وَضَعَتْ وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنْثَىٰ وَإِنِّي سَمَّيْتُهَا مَرْيَمَ وَإِنِّي أُعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذُرِّيَّتَهَا مِنَ  
الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ {36} فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنْبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا  
زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ أَنَّىٰ لَكَ

هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ {37} هَذَاكَ  
دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ {38}  
فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيحْيَى مُصَدَقًا  
بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ {39} قَالَ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ  
لِي غُلَامٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي الْكِبَرُ وَامْرَأَتِي عَاقِرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ {40}  
قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا رَمْرًا وَذَكَرَ رَبَّكَ  
كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ بِالْعُشِيِّ وَالْإِنِّكَارِ {41} وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ {42} يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ  
وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ {43} ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا  
كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يُتْلَى أُولَآئِكَ الْأَقْلَامُهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ  
{44} إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى  
ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَحِيهَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُفْرَبِينَ {45} وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ  
وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ {46} قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ  
قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَى أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ {47}  
وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنجِيلَ {48} وَرَسُولًا إِلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ  
أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ  
فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَبْرَأُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ  
وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَكْفُرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ  
{49} وَمُصَدَقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلِأَحْلِ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ  
وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا {50} إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ  
هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ {51} فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى  
اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ {52} رَبَّنَا  
آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ {53} وَمَكْرُوهًا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ  
وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ الْمَاكِرِينَ {54} إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قُمْ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ  
وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ  
الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ {55} فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ  
كَفَرُوا فَأَعَذَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ {56} وَأَمَّا  
الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمُ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ {57}



ذَلِكَ تَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ {58} إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ  
 آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ {59} الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ  
 الْمُمْتَرِينَ {60} فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ  
 أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَل لَّعْنَةَ اللَّهِ  
 عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ {61} إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ  
 لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ {62} فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُفْسِدِينَ

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