

Forum

The Virgin Annunciate in the Meccan Qur'an: Q. Maryam 19:19 in Context

SEAN W. ANTHONY, *The Ohio State University**

Introduction

The intriguing textual history of Q. Maryam 19:19 remains neglected in modern scholarship. This study offers an analysis of this textual history in light of new insights from the codicology of early Qur'an manuscripts. Further, it puts forward suggestions for how one might interpret the verse and its rival readings in light of its textual history and motifs associated with the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary in the homiletic literature of Syriac Christianity in Near Eastern Late Antiquity.

In Q. Maryam 19:19, a spirit (*rūḥ*) sent by God announces to Mary the birth of her child Jesus by declaring, “I am but a messenger of your Lord [sent] so that I may give you a pure son” (*innamā 'ana rasūlu rabbiki li-'ahaba laki gḥulāman zakiyyan*). This verse boasts a fascinating textual history that has somehow hitherto largely escaped the attention of modern scholarship; however, it occupied the attention of pre-

modern scholars considerably. The early philologist al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH/822 AD, Kūfah) provides one of our earliest comments on the curious wording of the verse; he observes that, at first blush, the statement, “so that I may give you (*li-'ahaba laki*) a pure son,” appears to imply that the spiritual messenger impregnates Mary—i.e., that he *himself* gives Mary the child rather than God. But al-Farrā' rejects this interpretation and explains that, “the giving [of the boy] is from God, though [the spirit] Gabriel speaks to her as though he himself is the giver.” In other words, the spiritual messenger said what he said, but he did not do what he said. Noting that such ambiguous phrasing is common in the Qur'an, al-Farrā' offers us a simple, if not entirely satisfying, solution to the peculiar wording of the annunciation to Mary.¹ Besides this solution,

¹ Farra', *Ma'ānī*, 2: 163, *al-ḥibah min allāh ḥakābā jibrīl lahā ka-annahū huwa al-wāhibu wa-dhālika kathīrun fī l-qur'ān khāṣṣatan*; cf. the skepticism voiced by Beck, “Die b. Mas'ūdvarianten” (1959), 249. Against Beck's skepticism, consider Q. 19:7–10, an earlier annunciation scene in which Zechariah receives the news of John the Baptist's birth. Do the words, “Zechariah, We give you tidings (*innā nubashshiruka*) of a boy named John ...” in v. 7 reflect the speech of God employing the *pluralis maiestatis* or do they reflect the reported speech of angels (cf. Q. 15:53–54)? If the words reflect the speech of angels, why does Zechariah reply,

*I would like to thank Gabriel Reynolds for inviting me to present a work-in-progress version of this paper at one of the online IQSA Covid Qur'an Seminars and for the feedback of the attendees. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Marijn van Putten, Hythem Sidky, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful criticisms of earlier drafts, as well as to Christian Robin for granting permission to use images from the Sanaa palimpsest.

however, a far more brazen solution appears in the early literature as well: this solution was simply to read the text of the verse differently. Many early scholars of the Qur'an preferred to read the spirit-messenger not as saying *li-'ahaba* ("so that I may give") but, instead, *li-yahaba* ("so that He [i.e., God] may give").

The present essay explores the rationale behind the two rival readings of the annunciation to Mary in Q. 19:19 and how these rival readings impact how one might interpret this scene in light of the late antique and Arabian context of the Qur'an.

A Textual History of Q. 19:19

The Andalusian scholar Abū Bakr al-Zubaydī (d. 379/989) records an entertaining anecdote concerning this verse and the consternation it inspired. Zubaydī's anecdote depicts a renowned Qur'an scholar named Muḥammad ibn Abī Muḥammad al-Yazīdī at the twilight of his career and serving as tutor to the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 197–218/813–833). The story is recounted from the perspective of the scholar's brother Ibrāhīm, who narrates:²

My brother Muḥammad ibn Abī Muḥammad used to instruct al-Ma'mūn in Qur'an-recitation on a daily basis, but when al-Ma'mūn had grown weary of my brother's instruction, he said to him, "Muḥammad, it is too burdensome for me to recite the Qur'an to you because I am forced to raise my voice more than I can manage. Order your brother Ibrāhīm and your son Aḥmad"—that is, Abū Ja'far—"to come one day so that I may read to him instead. You will be present, and if any question occurs to me, I will ask you about it."

[Ibrāhīm continued:] When the day of my turn came, [al-Ma'mūn] recited Sūrat Maryam to me, and he said, «I am merely a messenger of your Lord, [sent] so that He may give you . . . (*innamā anā rasūlu rabbiki li-yahaba laki*)» (Q. 19:19). Yaḥyā ibn Aktham³ then interrupted saying, "Commander of the Faithful, I prefer for you not to read this recitation (*hādhibi l-qirā'ah*)!"

"My Lord (*rabbī*)," in vv. 8, 10? There is no clear way to resolve the ambiguity. See Alhassen, "A Structural Analysis of *Sūrat Maryam*" (2016): 103.

² Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 76–77.

³ Yaḥyā ibn Aktham al-Tamīmī (d. 242/857), Grand Judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) of Baghdad under al-Ma'mūn; see *EI*², art. "Yaḥyā b. Aktham" (C. E. Bosworth).

"And why not?" asked al-Ma'mūn.

"Because," Yaḥyā said, "it contravenes the received text (*al-muṣṣhaf*)."

Al-Ma'mūn then turned to me and said, "What do you say, Ibrāhīm?"

I replied, "Commander of the Faithful, this is a reading that was recited by more than one of the Companions of the Prophet, the first of whom was your very ancestor, 'Abdallāh ibn al-'Abbās!"

My brother Muḥammad then turned to me and said, "What are you all discussing, Ibrāhīm?" I replied, "The Commander of the Faithful recited, «I am merely a messenger of your Lord [sent] so that He may give you . . . (*innamā anā rasūlu rabbiki li-yahaba laki*)» (Q. 19:19), and Yaḥyā said, 'I prefer for you not to read this recitation (*hādhibi l-ḥarf*).' And when he asked why, he said, 'because it contravenes the received text'"

My brother then said to al-Ma'mūn, "Of what concern is this to Yaḥyā! This is a reading (*ḥarf*) that many of the Companions of the Prophet recited, as well as their followers! Is whatever is found in the received text (*al-muṣṣhaf*) recited? By God, Commander of the Faithful, were it not recited that God informed us that the angel came to her and said, "I am merely a messenger from your Lord [sent] so that He may give you . . ."—and not, "so that I may give you . . ."—then it would be necessary for it to be read that way!"

Yaḥyā was silent and spoke no more.

As the caliph's wizened tutor observes, al-Ma'mūn follows a reading of Q. 19:19 that is indeed an ancient one, even if unexpected. This alternative reading of Q. 19:19, which the caliph's tutor favors and which swaps out *li-'ahaba* for *li-yahaba*, boasts quite a formidable pedigree—so much so that it eventually comes to rank among the seven qur'anic "readings" (*qirā'āt*) venerated as canonical. Indeed, Ibrāhīm and Muḥammad al-Yazīdī are both sons of Yaḥyā ibn Mubārak al-Yazīdī (d. 202/818), the main transmitter for the canonical Baṣran reading tradition of Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā' (d. 154/770), who also read *li-yahaba* rather than *li-'ahaba*.⁴

⁴ See *EI*², art. "al-Yazīdī" (R. Sellheim) on the history of the family.

Among the famous “seven readers” whose readings Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936, Baghdad) canonized in his *K. al-Sab'ah*, Ibn Mujāhid attributes the reading “He shall give (*li-yahaba*)” to at least two of his vaunted authorities: the Baṣran reader Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ (d. 154/770), mentioned above, and the Medinan reader Nāfi’ (d. 169/785).⁵ Ibn Mujāhid’s student, Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987, Baghdad), lays out the ostensible rationale behind the different readings in his commentary on his teacher’s *K. al-Sab'ah*.

The majority of the readers, al-Fārisī notes, read *li-‘ahaba* (“so that I may give”) because that reading conforms to the consonantal tracing, the *rasm*, of the codex codified by the third caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 23-36/644-656). al-Fārisī also observes that the majority of the readers maintain that, although the subject of the verb is indeed the spiritual messenger—identified with the angel Gabriel by most exegetes—the giving itself is necessarily God’s alone, thus offering the very same rationale voiced by al-Farrā’ in the second/eighth century. The minority, however, provide an entirely different rationale for their reading. According to al-Fārisī, they read *li-yahaba* (“so that He may give”) in order to rectify the wording to accord with the meaning (‘*alā taṣṭih al-lughah ‘alā l-ma’nā*)—i.e., to clarify that it is “your Lord” who actually gives the child, not the messenger/spirit sent to Mary.⁶ In other words, the minority’s reading aimed to banish any notion that it was the messenger-spirit rather than God who impregnated Mary. Again, this rationale should sound familiar, for it is more or less the same rationale given by Muḥammad al-Yazīdī to the caliph al-Ma’mūn in the anecdote recounted above.⁷ This very same rationale is attributed to the Baṣran reader Abū ‘Amr at least as

early as the writings of the Baṣran philologist Quṭrub (d. 206/821, Baghdad).⁸ What is so exceptional about the minority reading of Q. 19:19 is that the scholars who endorse it cite such discrete theological concerns to justify deviating from the consonantal text of the ‘Uthmānic codex.

The minority reading did, of course, become a target of vehement opposition. In Zubaydī’s anecdote recounted above, this opposition is represented by the Grand Judge Yaḥyā ibn Aktham. When Yaḥyā objects that the reading contravenes the *rasm* of the ‘Uthmānic codex, Muḥammad al-Yazīdī hectors him into acquiescence. Yet far weightier authorities also strongly disapproved. For example, the renowned philologist Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/838, Mecca) rejected this reading of Q. 19:19 in clear and damning terms:⁹

This [reading] contravenes every single codex of the Qur’an (*hādhā mukhālīfun li-jamī’ al-maṣāḥif kullihā*). Were it permissible to alter a letter of the *textus receptus* due to discretionary opinion, then it would be permitted in other instances, too (*wa-law jāza an yughayyara ḥarfūn min al-muṣṣaf li-l-ra’y la-jāza fī ghayrih*). Doing this is tantamount to altering the Qur’an in such a way that the revealed becomes indistinguishable from the non-revealed (*fī hādhā taḥwīl al-qur’ān haṭṭā lā yu’rafa al-munzal minhu min ghayrih*).

All the same, the minority reading persisted and enjoyed popularity despite the remonstrations of scholarly authorities like Abū ‘Ubayd, often through a tacit or explicit defense of the readers later chosen by Ibn Mujāhid a century later.

Here I mention only two examples. The Egyptian exegete Abū Bakr al-Udḥwī (d. 388/998) rebutted Abū ‘Ubayd’s objections by simply noting that the Baṣran reader Abū ‘Amr claimed to derive the reading *li-yahaba* from none other than Ibn ‘Abbās, the Prophet’s paternal cousin and so-called *ḥibr al-ummah*, “master scholar of the community.”¹⁰ Another famed philologist and student of Ibn Mujāhid, Ibn Khālawayh (d. 370/980, Aleppo), provided a different, albeit

⁵ In addition to these readers, the Medinan Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) and the Baṣran Ya’qūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205/820) also read *li-yahaba*; see Hudhalī, *Kāmil*, 392 and Rūdhbārī, *Jāmi’ al-qirā’āt*, 2: 772. On Ibn Mujāhid and the wide-reaching legacy of his influence, see now Nasser, *Second Canonization* (2020).

⁶ Fārisī, *Hujjah*, 5: 195–96. See also the comment of Hudhalī, *Kāmil*, 392, *wa-l-ikhtiyār al-yā’ li-anna ma’nāhu li-yahaba rabbuki*.

⁷ According to Pethion (fl. second half of the 3rd/9th century), al-Ma’mūn affectionately called his court physician Gabriel ibn Bukhtūshū’, a Christian, by the agnomen “Abū ‘Īsā/Father of Jesus”—likely a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the angel Gabriel being the father of Jesus. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’ah, 8.3.5. In a somewhat similar vein, the traditionist Ma’mar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770) records in his *Jāmi’* a report claiming that the caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb forbade a son from taking the agnomen Abū ‘Īsā, declaring, “Jesus has no father!” See ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 11:42; cf. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 7:318 (*k. al-adab, bāb 71*, no. 4963).

⁸ Quṭrub, *Ma’ānī*, 889.

⁹ Naḥḥās, *I’rāb al-Qur’ān*, 562. See also Nasser, *Second Canonization* (2020), 123–24; Dānī, *Muqni’*, 354; and Sakhāwī, *Wasīlah*, 371–72.

¹⁰ Udḥwī, *Istighnā’*, fol. 8a; see also Makkī, *Hidāyah*, 7: 4512.

no less effective, response to Abū ‘Ubayd. He observed that in some recitation modes of the Qur’an, the *hamzah*, or glottal stop, was often softened and read as a *yā*—as when *li’-allā* is read by some readers as *liyallā*—and such softening of the *hamzah* was not regarded as contravening the *rasm* of the ‘Uthmānic codex. To soften the *hamzah* in *li’-ahaba* in order to read *li-yahaba*, Ibn Khālawayh argued, ought not to be seen, therefore, as contravening the ‘Uthmānic text either.¹¹

Ibn Khālawayh’s response is particularly interesting. The first grammarian on record to propose such an explanation for reading *li-yahaba* in Q. 19:19 seems to be Abū l-Ḥasan al-Akhfash (al-Awsaṭ, d. 215/830), after whom it becomes a mainstay in the *qirā’āt* literature.¹² Although this explanation is technically correct according to the conventions of the Qur’an-readers, it appears nevertheless to be a secondary intervention. Yet: does that matter? Even though it may be a *post hoc* explanation, the observation strikes on an important insight nevertheless: in the absence of a strongly articulated *hamzah*—an absence famously characteristic of Ḥijāzī Arabic¹³—both *li’-ahaba* and *li-yahaba* would be a reasonable inference for a scribe transcribing the dictation of a reciter. In other words, the lenition of the glottal stop (*takhlīf al-hamz*) offers a perfectly cogent, technical explanation for the emergence of the discrepancy in the readings, even if the variant readings of Q. 19:19 had long been a *fait accompli* by the time this explanation appeared.

Recent research into the codicology of early Qur’an manuscripts also permits us to subject the contention of Abū ‘Ubayd that the reading *li-yahaba* contravened *all* the codices to further scrutiny. By *all* codices, Abū ‘Ubayd most likely means the so-called *maṣāḥif al-amṣār*—the exemplars commissioned and dispatched to the major urban centers of the early Islamic polity as the *textus receptus* of the Qur’an after the commission of caliph ‘Uthmān completed their codification of the text.¹⁴ Abū ‘Ubayd, alongside other early scholars,

explicitly recognized the presence of textual variants in the *rasm*, the consonantal tracing, of the *maṣāḥif al-amṣār* commissioned by ‘Uthmān. However, the variant reading of Q. 19:19 does not appear in the early lists of these variants.¹⁵ Indeed, the reading *li-yahaba* is often portrayed as non-‘Uthmānic despite its survival among the readings of Ibn Mujāhid’s seven canonical readers. Early scholars attribute the variant *li-yahaba* to the standard counterfactual Companion codices that pre-dated the ‘Uthmānic codex, such as the codex of Ibn Mas‘ūd and the codex of Ubayy ibn Ka‘b.¹⁶

The codicological evidence provided by the earliest extant manuscripts of the Qur’an reveals that the reading *li-yahaba* was not merely an oral variant imposed onto an ‘Uthmānic *rasm*; it was a reading textually expressed in the *rasm* of at least some codices based on the ‘Uthmānic archetype as well. I restrict my comments here to the earliest extant manuscripts currently known and of these only those which attest to the text of Q. 19:19. We are fortunate to have at our disposal attestations to Q. 19:19 in at least four early codices copied in the so-called Ḥijāzī-type script—namely, codices that, by paleographic criteria, belong to the earliest stratum of extant witnesses to the text of the Qur’an.¹⁷ Two of these—Marcel 19 (National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg) and R 119 (Kairouan, Musée des arts islamiques)—conform to the hypothetical ‘Uthmānic *rasm* and thus read لا هب.¹⁸

The remaining two do not. The first, British Library Or. 2165, reads لهب (Fig. 1), a consonantal skeleton that accommodates the reading *li-yahaba* but precludes reading *li’-ahaba*. In two independently authored studies, Yasin Dutton and Intisar Rabb subject this manuscript to meticulous analysis and conclude that it represents the Syrian reading tradition of Ḥimṣ based on the ‘Uthmānic archetype, a forerunner of the canonical reading tradition of Ibn ‘Āmir (d. 118/736).¹⁹ However, they both uncharacteristically overlook this important consonantal variant, perhaps because it is not attributed to Ibn ‘Āmir in literary accounts of his reading.²⁰ Nonetheless, *li-yahaba*

¹¹ Ibn Khālawayh, *I’rāb al-qirā’āt*, 2: 14; cf. Nasser, *Second Canonization* (2020), 13–14.

¹² Fārisī, *Hujjah*, 5: 196, where the “Abū l-Ḥasan” appears to be al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830), though it may be al-Akhfash al-Aṣghar (ca. 235–315/849–927) who is intended. See *ET*³, art. “al-Akhfash” (R. Weipert). See also Naḥḥās, *I’rāb al-Qur’ān*, 562 and Ibn Khālawayh, *I’rāb al-qirā’āt*, 2:14–15.

¹³ Rabin, *Ancient West-Arabian* (1951), 131–33; cf. van Putten, “Hamzah in the Quranic Consonantal Text” (2018).

¹⁴ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’*, 15:488.

¹⁵ Sidky, “Regionality of Qur’anic Codices” (2020): 138–45, and Nasser, *Second Canonization* (2021), 144–48.

¹⁶ Farrā’, *Ma’ānī*, 2:163; Qutrub, *Ma’ānī*, 889; Fārisī, *Hujjah*, 5: 195–96.

¹⁷ Déroche, *Qur’ans of the Umayyads* (2014), 37–73.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42–43, 59–61.

¹⁹ Dutton, “Some Notes,” (2004): 44–48; Rabb, “Non-Canonical Readings,” (2006): 89–91.

²⁰ E.g., Ḍamrah, *Zād al-sā’ir* (2006), 83.

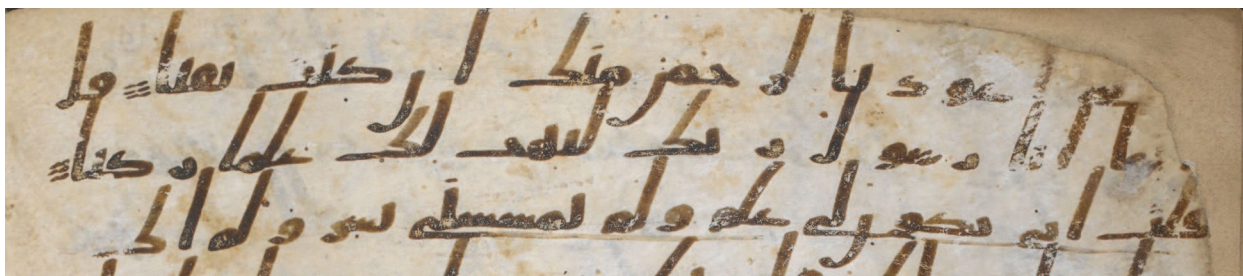


Figure 1—Q. 19:19 in British Library Or. 2165, fol. 48v.

seems to have been the ancient Syrian reading attested in the early codices of the region, perhaps even a variant reading of the very *muṣḥaf* dispatched by the caliph ‘Uthmān to Syria (most likely to Ḥimṣ). Indeed, *li-yahaba* is recorded as a Ḥimṣī reading by both Abū Bakr al-Rūdhbārī (d. after 489/1096)²¹ and Abū Ma‘shar al-Ṭabarī (d. 478/1086).²² One finds further confirmation for this hypothesis in a later observation of al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), who mounted a defense of Abū ‘Amr’s reading of *li-yahaba* by noting, “thus did I see it written in the Syrian codex (*kadhālika ra’aytuhu fī l-muṣḥaf al-shāmī*).”²³ Indeed, this reading also appears in later codices that depart from the conservative orthographic conventions of the ‘Uthmānic *rasm* and transcribe particular readings in the orthography of the *nashḥ* script. An early example is to be found in the *muṣḥaf* of the renowned calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 413/1022) copied in 391/1000–1001,²⁴ but the most extravagant example may be found in a magnificent 14th-century codex commissioned by Rukn al-Dīn Baybars II.²⁵ Both of these later codices reproduce the reading attributed to the Baṣran reader Abū ‘Amr.

Our second example derives from the undertext of the famous San‘ā’ palimpsest, Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt 01-27.1.²⁶ Unlike BL Or. 2165, the undertext of the pa-

limpsest does not conform to the ‘Uthmānic archetype and, thus, may be considered as the only attestation of Q. 19:19 from a non-‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*. The *scriptio inferior* of the palimpsest contains seventy out of the ninety-three verses of Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19:1–70). In the case of v. 19, the undertext of the palimpsest quite visibly reads ليهب. Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi further suggest that the undertext may even read ليهب, “so that *We* may give (*li-nahaba*),” while cautiously noting that “There is a small chance that the dash above the first tooth is a smudge rather than a consonant-distinguishing mark.”²⁷ While Sadeghi and Goudarzi are duly cautious, I myself find their proposed reading of *li-nahaba* to be clearly visible in the undertext of the palimpsest (Fig. 2).²⁸

The material evidence, therefore, attests to at least *three* readings from the earliest stratum of qur’anic manuscripts: *li-‘ahaba* (“so that I may give”), *li-yahaba* (“so that He may give”), and *li-nahaba* (“so that We may give”). While the first and second readings attained canonical status, the third reading stands out because it seems to have been completely overlooked by the *qirā’āt*-literature: without the discovery of the Sanaa palimpsest, it would have been irretrievably lost to time. In the apparent absence of any attestations outside the San‘ā’ palimpsest, evaluating the semantic importance of this third reading is difficult. For this reason, the analysis below will focus predominately on the first two readings. Yet, the third reading does raise intriguing questions. For instance, does “We shall give you” reflect God’s reported speech inflected through the divine plural (cf. Q. 19:21), or is the messenger-spirit speaking

²¹ Rūdhbārī, *Jāmi‘ al-qirā’āt*, 2: 772.

²² Abū Ma‘shar, *Sūq al-‘arūs*, 445.

²³ *Wasīlah*, 372. On the features of this “Syrian exemplar,” see now Sidky, “Regionality of Qur’anic Codices” (2020): 171–74.

²⁴ Chester Beatty (Dublin) MS. Is 1431, fol. 144v: https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/Is_1431/284/ (last accessed 22 April 2021).

²⁵ British Library (London) MS. Add. 22409, fol. 91v: http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100057224650.0x000001?_ga=2.171982115.1096335830.1587912577-1427527343.1534510509#:c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=189&xywh=-2801%2C-459%2C11259%2C9146 (last accessed 22 Apr 2021). I owe these observations to Hythem Sidky and Marijn van Putten.

²⁶ See now the analysis of Cellard, “The San‘ā’ Palimpsest,” (2021) (with Hythem Sidky’s preliminary decipherment of the more recently discovered folios).

²⁷ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “San‘ā’ 1,” (2012): 54 n. 227.

²⁸ Sadeghi and Goudarzi (*ibid.*) find the reading *li-nahaba* attributed to Abū ‘Amr by al-Zajjāj (*Ma‘ānī*, 3: 323); however, this claim is dubious—due either to a misprint, a misreading by the editor, or a corruption of the manuscript—as it is uncorroborated and contradicted by a host of other sources who state that Abū ‘Amr read *li-yahaba*.



Figure 2a—Q. 19:19 in Ṣan‘ā’ 1 (lower text), fol. 22b; 2b—detail. Image courtesy of CNRS-DATI.

on behalf of God as well as himself (cf. Q. 37:101, 112; 51:28)? Alternatively, the reading of *li-nahaba* might have arisen from a harmonization of the annunciation in Sūrat Maryam (where only a single spiritual messenger addresses Mary) with the annunciation in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (where a host of angels [*malā’ikah*] address her [Q. 3:43, 45]). The *qirā’āt* literature does also preserve further testimonies to readings not (yet) attested in early manuscripts. Hence, an unnamed codex purportedly read, “I am merely a messenger of your Lord. He *commanded me* to give you . . . (*‘innamā ana rasūl rabbiki ‘amaranī ‘an ‘ahaba laki*),” a reading which strikes me as merely a paraphrastic expansion of the ‘Uthmānic text.²⁹ Similarly, at least one report claims that the codex of the Prophet’s wife Ḥaḥṣah bint ‘Umar read, “I am merely a messenger of your Lord. Rejoice, for I shall give you . . . (*‘innamā ana rasūlu rabbiki ‘abshirī ‘an ‘ahaba laki*),”³⁰ a reading which seems to assimilate into Q. 19:19 elements from Q. 19:7, where angels announce the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah, “We give you tidings of a boy . . . (*nubashshiruka bi-ghulām*).” At the very least, however, the San‘ā’ palimpsest points to the fact that the fluidity of the wording of Q. 19:19 predates even the codification of the text of the ‘Uthmānic archetype.

The Annunciation Scene in Sūrat Maryam

To delve deeper into the significance of these rival readings of Q. 19:19 first requires a few words about

²⁹ Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 83–84.

³⁰ Dahhān, *Mughnī*, 3: 1198.

the verse’s place in Sūrat Maryam as a whole. Fortunately, our task is aided considerably by a remarkable number of studies on the sūrah that have appeared in recent years.³¹ The annunciation narrative in Q. 19:16–21 strings together a straightforward series of episodic events, even if closer analysis reveals layers of meaning. The basic narrative is this: Mary withdraws away from her people to “an easterly place” where she weaves a curtain/veil alone. God sends his spirit who, assuming the shape of a man, appears before her. This portion one may term “the setting.” What follows is the second portion of the annunciation pericope, which one may term “the dialogue.” Mary is first to speak. Frightened, she invokes the Merciful (*al-rahīmān*) to protect her from the unexpected visitor. The spirit announces his presence as a messenger from her Lord and states his mission: to give her a son. Mary inquires how this shall be, since she is chaste and untouched by a man, and the spiritual messenger delivers the declaration of the Lord that such matters are easy for him and that he foreordained for her son to be a mercy and a sign from him.

Below I provide my rendering of the annunciation scene into English. Like any translation, it is the product of some idiosyncratic choices, but I believe my choices to be well justified and expand on these in the notes where necessary.

16 And mention in the book Maryam,
when she withdrew from her family to an easterly
place
wa-dhkur fī l-kitāb maryama
‘idhi ‘ntabadhat min ‘abliḥā makānan sharqiyā

17 and away from them fashioned a curtain.³²
We sent our spirit to her,

³¹ Most notably: Geissinger, “Mary in the Qur’an,” (2009); Toorawa, “Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19)” (2011); Abboud, *Mary in the Qur’an* (2014); G. Dye, “Lieux saint communs” (2015); Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, 2/1 (2017), 584–658.

³² Here my interpretation of *ittakhadhat min dūni abliḥā biḥā-ban* departs from other translations, e.g., “she took a veil apart from them” (Arberry). I take the verb *ittakhadha* as referring to the act of fashioning/weaving, as the verse alludes to a scene popularized by the *Protevangelium of James* (10:1–10, 11:4–9), discussed below. This reading also conforms to qur’anic usage, as this passage is not the only one in which *ittakhadha* carries this meaning; see Ambros, *Koranic Arabic* (2004), 22. Q. ‘Ankabūt 29:41, for instance, famously speaks of, “the spider who fashions/weaves a house (*al-‘ankabūt ittakhadhat baytan*)”; see further examples in Q. A’rāf 7: 74, 148; Naḥl 16:68; Kaḥf 18:21.

and he assumed for her the shape of a man standing upright.³³

fa-'ttakhadhat min dūnibim hijāban
fa-'arsalnā ilayhā rūḥanā
fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawiyyā

18 She said, “May the Merciful protect me from you,

if indeed you are god-fearing!”

qālat 'innī 'a'ūdhu bi-r-raḥmāni minka
in kunta taqīyyā

19 He said, “I am but a messenger of your Lord, [sent] so that I/He may give you a pure boy.”

qāla 'innamā 'ana rasūlu rabbiki
li-'ahaba/yahaba laki ghulāman zakīyyā

20 She said, “How shall I have a boy?

For no man has touched me,³⁴

and I am no harlot!

qālat annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun
wa-lam yamsasnī basharun
wa-lam 'aku baghiyyā

21 He said, “Thus says your Lord,

‘It is easy for me,

and We shall make him a sign to humanity and a mercy from Us,

for it was a command firmly decreed.’”

qāla kadhāliki qāla rabbuki
huwa 'alayya hayyininun
wa-li-naj'alahu 'āyatan li-n-nās wa-raḥmatan
minnā
wa-kāna 'amran maqḍīyyā

The case for viewing Sūrat Maryam as a literary unity and not a bricolage of shorter texts subsequently pieced together has, in my view, been considerably strengthened by recent analyses. However, the sūrah does nevertheless bear the marks of at least one substantial textual expansion, which requires us to view

³³ For this sense of *sawiyy*, see Q. Mulk 67:22 and Ambros, *Koranic Arabic* (2004), 142–43. I take the occurrence of *sawiyy* here as a wordplay on its prior occurrence in 19:10 with reference to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, “Your sign is that you shall not address the people for three nights consecutively (*āyatuka allā tukallima n-nāsa thalātha layālin sawiyyā*)” (cf. Lk 1:20) and anticipating its recurrence in Abraham’s statement to his father in 19:43 “I will guide you to a straight path (*ṣirātan sawiyyā*).” See Toorawa, “Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19)” (2011): 59.

³⁴ Cf. Luke 1:34.

the sūrah as comprised of at least two compositional layers. While early exegetes do posit Medinan additions to this sūrah, the revisions posited by modern scholars such as Angelika Neuwirth are far more extensive.³⁵ The outline below adopts in simplified form the scheme proposed by Neuwirth, where textual blocks within brackets [] indicate later expansions inserted into the core text. The verses belonging to the earliest stratum of the sūrah are readily discernable by reliance on the end-rhyme *-iyyā*.³⁶

- I. (v. 1) *kāf-hā-yā-'ayn-ṣād*
- II. Narratives from the Biblical Tradition
 - A (vv. 2–15) Zachariah and John *-iyyā*
 - B (vv. 16–40) Mary and Jesus
 - 16–21 Annunciation *-iyyā*
 - 22–26 Nativity *-iyyā*
 - 27–29 Infancy *-iyyā*
 - 30–33 Jesus foretells his ministry *-iyyā*
 - [34–36 polemic against divine sonship *-ūn/in/im*]
 - [37–40 judgment against sectarianism *-ūn/in/im*]
 - C (vv. 41–74) Abraham and other Prophets *-iyyā*
- [III. Closing Section *-dā/zā*
 - A (vv. 75–96) Polemics against polytheism
 - B (vv. 97–98) Confirmation of Revelation]

That sūrahs were elongated, truncated, and (in some cases) rewritten to a degree is abundantly reported in the early tradition. Thus, the tradition purports that Q. Bayyinah 98 contained substantially more verses,³⁷ Q. Aḥzāb 33 was once equal to Q. Baqarah 2 in

³⁵ Neuwirth, *Der Koran 2/1* (2017), 599–601. According to Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe* (1995), 53–54, only Q. 19:58, 71 were regarded as potential Medinan insertions by early commentators.

³⁶ Neuwirth, *Der Koran 2/1* (2017), 602–603. See also Stewart, “Introductory Oaths” (2021), 275–76. Stewart notes that the opening verse of the sūrah, which consists merely of the letters *kāf-hā-yā-'ayn-ṣād*, does not adhere to this strict end-rhyme; however, most readers do not count the letters as an independent verse as does the reading of Ḥafṣ-‘an-‘Āsim.

³⁷ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 35: 128–32 [V 131–32]; Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, 6: 190–91 (*al-mānāqib*/bāb 64, no. 3898). A tradition attributed to 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr even depicts Muḥammad as establishing the final version of the Q. 98 by writing it out by hand on a piece of parchment (Ar. *adīm*) for his wife Ḥafṣah; see Ibn Wahb, *Jāmi'*, 3: 62. See the important analysis of this tradition by Geissinger, “No, a Woman Did Not ‘Edit the Qur’ān’” (2017): 420–24.

length,³⁸ Q. ‘Aṣr 103 circulated in multiple versions,³⁹ etc.⁴⁰ Such claims must, perhaps, be taken with a grain of salt without confirmation in the codicological evidence. However, some textual revisions presumably transpired in the lifetime of the Prophet himself and in response to the early community’s changing circumstances. Nevertheless, some decisive textual interventions into the qur’anic corpus do indeed post-date his death—most prominently via the editorial decisions of the ‘Uthmānic codification itself, which entailed excluding some purported sūrahs and including others.⁴¹ What deserves emphasis here for our purposes is that the annunciation pericope (vv. 16–21) pertains to the earliest chronological stratum of Sūrat Maryam—recognizable by, among other things, its strict adherence to the *-iyyā* end-rhyme for each verse.

For heuristic purposes, I posit that the earliest layer of the sūrah—the layer to which the annunciation narrative belongs—first circulated in the Meccan period. Numerous features render these later expansions conspicuous, such as their referring to God by the divine epithet *allāh* instead of *al-rahmān*,⁴² their change in end rhyme, and their shift in topical focus. That the annunciation pericope in Q. 19 belongs to the Meccan period is not merely confirmed by its stylistic features but also considerably strengthened by the fact that the Qur’an subsequently expands on its themes. One can observe this in shorter reminiscences of the annunciation scene such as Q. Anbiyā’ 21:91 and Taḥrīm 66:12, as well as in later references to Jesus as “a word (*kālimah*)” and “a spirit (*rūḥ*)” from God cast into Maryam (Nisā’ 4:117). Lastly, the fact that the parallel annunciation in Q. Āl ‘Imrān 3:32–47 simultaneously cites Q. 19 (see the citation of 19:20–21 in 3:47) and provides a starkly different and more expansive account of the event⁴³ strongly suggests that the annunciation scene in Q. 19 pre-dates the annunciation scene in Q. 3.

³⁸ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 35: 133–34 [V 132].

³⁹ Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā’il*, 2: 143; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 2: 297.

⁴⁰ Modarressi, “Early Debates,” (1993): 11–13.

⁴¹ Anthony, “Two ‘Lost’ Sūras of the Qur’ān” (2019): 69–70, 86–88.

⁴² On this sūrah’s use of *al-rahmān* and its place among the so-called “Rahmān sūrahs,” see Neuwirth, *The Qur’an and Late Antiquity* (2019), 291.

⁴³ Most prominently, whereas only a single spirit-messenger announces the birth of Jesus to Mary in 19:16–21, a host of angels (*malā’ikah*) announces his birth to her in 3:32–47.

There are two further points worth emphasizing regarding the Meccan context of Q. 19. Firstly, throughout this early layer of Q. 19, the divine voice addresses the messenger almost as a type of amanuensis: the messenger is instructed to “mention in the book (*wa’dhkur fī l-kitāb*)” no less than five times throughout the sūrah (vv. 16, 41, 51, 54, 56). This straightforward demand begs a rather simple question: What sort of book? One solution has been to read the command *wa’dhkur* not as a command to “make mention of” but rather as an exhortation to recall to memory something already recorded in *al-kitāb*, presumably meaning “the scripture.” However, this reading interprets the sūrah as akin to a sermon that exhorts its audience to recall the words of an authoritative scripture that its message merely recapitulates. I am skeptical of this reading, as it does not sufficiently attend to an important polemic that the Meccan Qur’an directs against its pagan opponents. In my view, the instruction *wa’dhkur fī l-kitāb* reflects not the exhortation of a sermon grounded in appeals to an external scriptural authority but, rather, a command to deposit a new revelation into a larger register of revelatory remembrances (cf. *al-qur’ān dhī l-dhikr* in Q. Ṣād 38:1, also Meccan).⁴⁴ Elsewhere the Meccan Qur’an already appeals to the pagans’ manifest *lack* of a scripture (*kitāb*) to rebut their claims that God has children, especially daughters (Q. Ṣāffāt 37: 151–157; cf. Aḥqāf 46:4). The subtext is clear: the messenger’s authority is already conceived of in scriptural terms in the Meccan period.

Secondly, if one accepts that the sūrah originates in a Meccan context, then the Christian themes in the sūrah ought to be viewed as directed towards a pagan audience and, in a real sense, representing the messenger’s first sustained invocations of the figures of Mary and Jesus to his people in his preaching. The sūrah thus introduces Christian materials into the broader bibliocizing current characteristic of the messenger’s preaching in the Middle Meccan sūrahs. Indeed, the Meccan Qur’an explicitly records how the messenger’s people (*qawm*) received these exhortations: they derided and jeered the messenger’s appeal to the stories of Jesus and Mary. Q. Zukhruf 43:57–58 thus declares, “And when Jesus son of Mary is put forward as an example,

⁴⁴ Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” (2018), 287–88; *pace* Madigan, *The Qur’an’s Self-Image* (2001), 20–21, who allegorized the meaning of *al-kitāb*, and Neuwirth, *The Qur’an and Late Antiquity* (2019), 74, who sees this conceptual development as solely a Medinan phenomenon.

lo, your people jeer and clamor (*qawmuka minbu yašiddūn*) and say, 'Are our gods better or is he (*a-ālibatunā khayrun am huwa*)?'” Clearly, neither sūrah addresses a Christian audience, let alone a syncretic one which had integrated Jesus into their pantheon, however conceived.⁴⁵

All the same, this qur'anic annunciation scene also brims with allusions to, and reminiscences of, motifs from the retellings of the annunciation scene found in the Christian literature of Near Eastern Late Antiquity. The annunciation scenes in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1: 26–37) and in the *Protevangelium of James* (*Pro Jas* 10:1–11:09) provide most of the background material for the annunciation scene in Sūrat Maryam, as they likewise do for the Christian homiletic literature of Late Antiquity in the centuries preceding the Qur'an. Thus, the qur'anic mention of the spirit in 19:17 evokes the coming of the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:35, and Mary's response to the spirit-messenger in 19:20 echoes her response to the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:34. Also, it is notable that this sūrah first presents Mary as separated from her family in “an easterly place” (19:16)—likely an allusion to the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. 19:11 and 3:37)⁴⁶—and occupied with fashioning a curtain or veil. These two motifs appear in the depiction of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James* (*Pro Jas* 10:1–10, 11:4–9), where Mary is occupied with fashioning a new curtain for the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁷

To go beyond such observations in order to find one, specific text from which the sūrah draws is, in my view, likely a fool's errand, yet the importance of Christian devotion and preaching and its penetration into Late Antique Arabia ought to be kept in mind. Artistic representations of the Annunciation from the era and neighboring regions consistently depict an annunciation scene in which Mary sits spinning thread and weaving the Temple curtain as she receives the annunciation of her child Jesus from the angel Gabriel.

⁴⁵ Saleh, “Meccan Gods, Jesus' Divinity,” (2019), 103–107.

⁴⁶ As argued by Marx (“Glimpses of Mariology” [2010], 542–44), who takes “easterly” to refer to the door of Temple in Jerusalem. According to Abū 'Ubaydah Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā (d. ca. 210/825), “easterly” here merely carries the sense of a blessed place, since the easterly direction, he notes, “is more highly regarded among the Arabs than the western side which faces the westerly direction (*wa-huwa 'inda l-'arab khayrun min al-gharbī alladhī yalī al-maghrīb*)”; see Abū 'Ubaydah, *Majāz*, 2: 3.

⁴⁷ See note 32 above. On the role of women in fashioning the curtain of the Temple, see Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers* (1997), 139–43.



Figure 3—Pilgrim's ampulla depicting the Annunciation bearing Lk 1:28 in Greek (6th c. CE). Mary can be seen seated on the left, spindle in hand. The angel Gabriel stands on the right. © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Such images adorned not merely extravagant church icons and luxury textiles, but also appeared on humbler, mobile media, such as ampullae and clay tokens which pilgrims carried far and wide from their sacred sites of origination in Palestine (see Figs. 3–5).⁴⁸ Though these artifacts depict an annunciation scene drawn from Christian texts and preaching, the imagery they carry could fit the later qur'anic annunciation scene just as well. Likewise, though the sūrah deftly pairs the annunciations of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and of Jesus to the Virgin Mary in a manner that certainly stands on its own literary merits,⁴⁹ such a pairing also has roots as old as the Gospel of Luke itself. Indeed, it is a homiletic technique attested in an Arabian context at least as early as the homily on the Annunciation composed by Antipater, a bishop of Bostra and metropolitan of Arabia who flourished in the mid-fifth century AD.⁵⁰ The Arabic literary tradition later claimed that the famous pre-Islamic poet

⁴⁸ van Dijk, “The Angelic Salutation” (1999): 430; C. Taylor, *The Virgin Annunciate Spinning* (2018), 106–12, 116–24, 138–55.

⁴⁹ Toorawa, “Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19)” (2011): 26–27.

⁵⁰ Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, Bd. 4 (1924), 304–307 (§ 63.2); see also Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts* (1870–72), 2: 885–86 for the Syriac translations of his homilies.



Figure 4—Pilgrim's token depicting the Annunciation (Qal'at Sim'an, Syria, 6th–7th c. CE). Mary is seated on the right, spindle in hand. On the left stands the angel Gabriel. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 5—Pilgrim's token depicting the Annunciation (Edfu, Egypt, 6th–7th c. CE). Mary is seated on the left with spindle in hand and a basket of thread at her feet. On the right stands the angel Gabriel. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

from al-Ṭā'if, Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt al-Thaqafī, also composed an ode about the annunciation to Mary just prior to the prophetic career of Muḥammad (see the Excursus, below). In any case, by the early seventh century, Christian missions to Arabia, not just on the frontiers of Roman power but even well into Yemen and Ḥimyar, continued to find no small success in the region while building upon inroads made for at least two centuries prior to the advent of the Qur'an.⁵¹

Yet these observations should also not be taken as saying that overlaps between the Qur'an and these texts and devotional objects are simply a straightforward matter. The *Protevangelium of James* 11:4, for instance, appears to place the angel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary in her house, not explicitly in the Temple. In the Syriac version of the *Protevangelium of James* 11:4, the Greek οἶκος, "house," is rendered as *baytā*,⁵² and in the course of its reception history in Syriac, this "house" was soon elevated to "the Temple (*byt qwds'*)" and "the great house of the Lord (*byth rbbh d-'lh*)."⁵³ In

a versified homily of Pseudo-Ephrem, Joseph asks Mary whether she has forgotten the angel, "who spoke with you in the Temple (*d-mll 'mky b-byt qwds'*)."⁵⁴ Hence, in a sixth-century Syriac hymn attributed to Ephrem, we encounter the scene narrated from Mary's perspective placed squarely within her quarters at the Temple (Hymn XVI.7; ed. Lamy, 2: 589):

When I was a child, they raised me,
the priests of the people, in the Holy Temple
(*bykl qwds'*)
They came and betrothed me to just Joseph.
A man of fire came and hailed me
and gave me salutations, and I received concep-
tion (*w-yhb ly šlm' qblt bṭn'*)

Hence, the Qur'an, like other re-imaginings of the setting of the annunciation in the *Protevangelium*, places Mary within the Temple, although this occurs explicitly only in Q. 3:37, 39 and must be inferred in Q. 19:16.

Another example of qur'anic reinvention may be seen in its rescripting of the dialogue between Mary and Gabriel found in Luke. Such rescripting was commonplace in the homilies of Late Antiquity, as one can see in the following Syriac re-telling of the Lukan annunciation

⁵¹ Hoyland, "The Jewish and/or Christian Audience" (2018), 38–39; Forness, *Preaching Christology* (2018), 120–25.

⁵² Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca* (1902), ٧. The Jerusalem temple itself is usually called *hayklā*.

⁵³ Budge, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (1899), 1:21 (Syr.), 2: 22 (Eng.). Recent research even suggests that an older annunciation tradition underlying *Pro Jas* may have indeed intended to place the scene inside the Temple; see Zervos, *The Protevan-*

gelium of James (2019), 1: 41. Of course, the Greek οἶκος may also be used to refer "the House of God" (e.g., Mt. 12:4).

⁵⁴ Brock, *Eight Syriac Mimre* (1993), 59. An English translation appears in Brock, *Bride of Light* (2010), no. 47.

attributed to Ephrem the Syrian (Sermo II.93–108; ed. Beck, 40):

Look upon Mary, my beloved,
when Gabriel entered to see her
and she spoke with him words of enquiry,
“How shall this be?”
and the minister of the Spirit gave
reply to Mary and said,
“It is easy for God;
all things are simple for Him”

Mary's question in the scene above (“How shall this be?”) directly cites the words of Mary in Syriac Luke, “How shall this be, as no man has known me (*'ykn' thw' hd' d-gbr' l' h'kym ly*)” (Luke 1:34 Pš.). Likewise, Q. 19:20 attributes a similarly worded question to Mary, but in a looser paraphrase, “How shall I have a boy (*annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun*),” a paraphrase which also appears on the tongue of Zechariah earlier in the sūrah (Q. 19:8; cf. Luke 1:18). Likewise, the Syriac sermon adds to the Lukan account a statement of consolation from Gabriel voiced in the third person, “It is easy for God (*d-dlyl lw lh l-'lh'*)”; whereas Q. 19:21 offers a divine statement voiced in the first person, “It is easy for me (*huwa 'alayya hayyinun*)” (also in 19:9), albeit much to the same effect.

Many motifs that derive from Christian scriptural and homiletic sources thus appear in this qur'anic annunciation scene. However, there is a great deal absent, too, such as the divine sonship of Jesus, his descent from king David, and his reign over an eternal kingdom of God—and that is just limiting ourselves to the central motifs found in the Lukan annunciation scene, not to mention homiletic motifs current in the broader panorama of Christian preaching in Near Eastern Late Antiquity. In the case of the Qur'an, one finds that the shared motifs that do appear have often been (to borrow Neuwirth's useful phrase) “de-allegorized” in their qur'anic form.⁵⁵ The motifs may precede the Qur'an, but in their qur'anic context, they are denuded from their older theological connotations and either imbued with new ones or merely rendered into banal narrative elements.

Revisiting Q. Maryam 19:19

Such is the broader context for Sūrat Maryam's annunciation scene. However, as noted above, the meaning of this qur'anic annunciation scene hinges on the

wording of Q. 19:19, where the spirit appears before Mary and declares, “I am but a messenger of your Lord [sent] so that I may give you a pure boy (*innamā ana rasūlu rabbiki li-'ahaba laki ghulāman zakiyyan*).” That the spirit/messenger quite literally says, “I will give you,” is striking. This phrasing gives rise to a peculiar question: Why does the spirit/messenger declare that *he* rather than *God* “will give you a boy”? Is it not God who gives Mary the child rather than the spiritual messenger whom God sent her?

The wording of Q. 19:19 in which the spiritual messenger “gives” Mary her infant son may reflect a widespread development in how Christians throughout the Late Antique Near East had begun to imagine the annunciation to Mary and, more importantly, her virginal conception of Jesus. According to a widespread view of the annunciation, Gabriel delivers not just the words announcing to Mary her virginal conception of the Messiah but also delivers *the* Word, the preincarnate Logos himself who is to be her child Jesus. The annunciation and conception of Jesus are, thus, not two discrete events but, rather, simultaneous.

This late antique view of the simultaneity of the annunciation, incarnation, and conception emerges due to a preoccupation with a rather simple question: just how and when did Mary conceive of the Word of God? Answers and explanations abound. Some churchmen purported that she conceived upon being perfumed by the angel and thus from her sense of smell, while others proposed that she received Gabriel into her mouth who then entered her womb or that she conceived through her eyes after receiving a vision of her infant child.⁵⁶ By the fifth century, there emerged a broad consensus on the matter of Mary's virginal conception: she conceived of the Word via her ears. The annunciation and conception were held to be simultaneous events. Upon hearing the annunciation of the angel Gabriel, Mary also received the Word of God and conceived thereof. Already one encounters this view in the writings of Ephrem, who wrote regarding the annunciation, “Consider the angel who came to deposit in Mary this seed, that is by this word which he began to sow.”⁵⁷ The view

⁵⁵ Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity* (2019), 365–68.

⁵⁶ Constan, *Proclus of Constantinople* (2003), 278–79. Similar ideas appear in the *tafsīr* literature. According to the early Baṣran exegete Abū 'Āliyah al-Riyāhī, Jesus entered Mary's womb via her mouth, and al-Māturīdī likewise purports that some scholars maintained that Jesus was conceived when God blew from his spirit “into the bosom of Mary, her nose, or elsewhere (*fī jayb Maryam aw fī anḥihā aw fī ghayrihā*)” (*Ta'wīlāt*, 9:128). Such views were known to the rabbis, too; see Rosenberg, “Penetrating Words” (2016).

⁵⁷ Ephrem, *Comm.*, 102 (IV.15)

that Mary conceived by means of the angel sowing his words, and thus the Word/Logos, into her ears gained wide currency beyond Syriac literature as well. It appears in the homilies and hymns of the likes of Romanos the Melodist (ca. 490–556), Abraham of Ephesus (ca. 550), Anastasius of Antioch (d. 599), Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638), and many more.⁵⁸ The appeal of the idea of Mary’s *conceptio per aurem* was considerable—as Nicholas Constat wryly notes, “the solution was elegant, the orifice inoffensive.”⁵⁹

All of the above, I believe, clarifies considerably why, and in what way, the spiritual messenger “gives” Jesus to Mary in the majority’s reading of Q. 19:19. The Qur’an does not endorse or describe a *conceptio per aurem* as such, but it *does* posit that the angel *gave* Mary her son—i.e., the annunciation of Jesus’ birth is simultaneous with his conception.⁶⁰ Indeed, subsequent verses seem to imply that the spiritual messenger sent by God gives her a generative “word (*kalimah*)” from God who becomes her child Jesus (Q. 3:59, 4:171). Although the simultaneity of the annunciation and conception appears in the writings of Syriac-speaking Christians as early as Ephrem,⁶¹ it is illustrative to read a few examples of how later Syriac-speaking churchmen, influenced by this idea, re-imagined and re-narrated the events of the Lukan annunciation under its influence. Thus, one reads in a homily on the annunciation by Narsai of Nisibis (d. ca. 500) that (*Nativity*, ed. McCleod, 42):⁶²

⁵⁸ Constat, *Proclus of Constantinople* (2003), 280–81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁶⁰ Q. 66:12 might state that Mary conceived by God blowing a measure of his spirit into her womb (*farj*; lit. “vagina”). Whereas Q. 21:91 reads *wa’llatī aḥṣanta farjahā nafakhnā fīhā min rūḥinā* (“and she who guarded [the chastity of] her womb, We blew into her of our spirit”), Q. 66:12 alters the wording slightly, reading *nafakhnā fīhī minhā* (“We blew into it”). See Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an* (1994), 74. According to some early exegetes (e.g., Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 15:280), *fīhā* in 21:91 rather refers to the soul (*nafs*) of Jesus and *fīhī* in 66:12 to Jesus himself. However, neither Q. 66 nor v. 12 mentions Jesus—unless one reads the phrase immediately following, *wa-ṣaddaqt bi-kalimāti rabbihā* (“and she believed in the words of her Lord) as *bi-kalimat rabbihā* (“in the word of her Lord”). In this latter reading, “the word (*kalimah*)” of the Lord would refer to Jesus, as the Qur’an elsewhere identifies him as a word (*kalimah*) from God (Q. 4: 171). Though attributed to some early authorities, the latter reading of *kalimāt* as *kalimah* was broadly rejected; see Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt* (2018), 9: 532–33.

⁶¹ Brock, “Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis” (1982): 226–27.

⁶² See also Macabasag, *The Annunciation* (2015), 249–52.

[God] sent his Will (*šbynh*) through a spiritual messenger (*’yzgd’ rwhny’*), and the Watcher proclaimed a new voice into mortal ears.

With a sign of peace, he sowed his Will into mortal soil (*zr’ šbynh b-’r’ bsr’*).

As one can see, Narsai envisions the preincarnate Christ—here called the divine will (*šbyānā*)—as accompanying the angel Gabriel, called a spiritual messenger and watcher, on his journey to the Virgin Mary and thereafter planting/sowing the preincarnate Christ into the soil of Mary’s mortal flesh through the words of the annunciation. Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523) likewise portrays the preincarnate Christ as accompanying the angel Gabriel on his journey to Mary in a sermon on the annunciation. As the angel flies down from Heaven to appear before the Virgin, he writes, “even his Lord flew down on the wings of wind/spirit (*kenpē d-rūḥā*);⁶³ he came and dwelled [in her].”⁶⁴ However, perhaps the most striking text comes from a homily of Jacob of Serugh on the annunciation (Homily I, ed. Bedjan, 629):

Against these came and stood the Watcher, the messenger of the Son,
and he brought Mary tidings of life from God.

ܘܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ
ܘܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ

Salutations he gave her; life he sowed in her;
peace he proclaimed to her.

With love he met her and brought an end to all former things.

ܘܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ
ܘܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ ܠܘܠܗܘܢ

Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Serugh are especially important figures when taking the Arabian context of the Qur’an into account because of these two scholars’ well-documented ties to the region. Philoxenus ordained the first two bishops of Najrān⁶⁵ and Jacob corresponded with Christians in Najrān, even on the matter of the annunciation itself.⁶⁶

All the same, we are occupied with not just a single textual reading of Q. 19:19 but two. If the majoritarian reading of Q. 19:19 benefits from a comparative

⁶³ Cf. 2 Sam. 22:11.

⁶⁴ Krüger, “Der Sermo des Philoxenos,” (1954): 157.

⁶⁵ Hoyland, “The Jewish and/or Christian Audience” (2018), 39.

⁶⁶ Forness, *Preaching Christology* (2018), 115 ff.

reading, what about the minority reading in which the spiritual messenger announces to Mary that “He [i.e., God] shall give you (*li-yahaba laki*)” rather than “I shall give you (*li-'ahaba laki*)”?

In the annunciation scene in Q. 19, the spirit sent to Mary is not explicitly identified. The spirit is merely called “our spirit (*rūḥanā*)” (v. 17) and “a messenger (*rasūl*)” (v. 19).⁶⁷ The majority of early Muslim exegetes, as well as their heirs, consistently identify this *rūḥ* and *rasūl* whom God sent to Mary with the archangel Gabriel. Yet one dissenting, early view breaks with this broad consensus among the exegetes. It first appears in Baṣrah, notably the same city where the reading of Abū 'Amr and thus the reading of *li-yahaba* prevailed. This view is attributed to an interesting figure, too: Ubayy ibn Ka'b al-Anṣārī, the so-called “master lector (*ṣayyid al-qurrā*)” of the Companions of the Prophet. Ubayy's view was, purportedly, that the *rūḥ* was not Gabriel but, rather, Jesus himself. The spiritual messenger declares to Mary that her Lord “will give you (*li-yahaba laki*)” a child because he himself is that child. How does this reading of the annunciation pericope work?

To be more precise, the *rūḥ* whom God sent to Mary was, according to Ubayy, the pre-incarnate Jesus. This statement requires an important qualification. This *rūḥ* is not to be conflated with the Johannine Logos, at least not within the parameters of this particular exegetical reading, nor even with the Qur'anic Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*). Rather, this pre-incarnate *rūḥ* must be seen in light of another Qur'anic theme, that of humanity's primordial covenant with God—a covenant to which God bound humanity after creating Adam and before any other human had yet been born. In the Qur'anic vision of human history, this divine covenant is simultaneous with the creation of humankind, and it imbues all human history with its moral arc, culminating in the Day of Judgment.⁶⁸

The Qur'an mentions this covenant in multiple passages; however, the aforementioned tradition in which Ubayy identifies Jesus with the *rūḥ* of Q. 19:17 arises as an exegetical gloss on Q. A'rāf 7:172-73 in particular. Ubayy interprets this passage from Sūrat al-A'rāf as claiming that the spirits (*arwāḥ*; sing. *rūḥ*) of all human beings existed prior to their mortal lives, and that the prophets, like every person, were bound by this primordial divine covenant. However, the pre-

incarnate spirits of prophets were bound by yet a further covenantal pledge, distinct from the one exacted from the mass of humankind. God took this additional “solemn pledge (*mīthāq ghalīz*)” from the pre-incarnate spirits of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and even Muḥammad himself (Q. Aḥzāb 33:7). The tradition attributed to Ubayy explains the scenario as follows:⁶⁹

Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabīb ibn 'Arabī related to us: al-Mu'tamir ibn Sulaymān related to us, saying: My father [Sulaymān al-Taymī] said on the authority of al-Rabī' ibn Anas, from Abū l-'Āliyah, from Ubayy ibn Ka'b concerning God's decree: «And when your Lord took out from the children of Adam, from their loins, their offspring and made them testify against themselves—“Am I not your Lord?” [He said,] and they answered, “Yes, we bear witness!”—lest you all say on the Day of Resurrection, “We were unaware of this!” Or lest you say, “Our ancestors ascribed partners to God before, and we were their offspring who came after them. Will you send us to perdition because of the falsehoods they invented?» (Q. A'rāf 7:172–73).

Ubayy said: [God] gathered them and made them spirits (*ja'alahum arwāḥan*) and gave them the ability to speak. They spoke and He took from them the covenant and the pledge (*al-'ahd wa-l-mīthāq*) . . . [then God] said, ‘I shall call on the seven heavens and the seven earths (cf. Q. Ṭalāq 65:12) to testify against you, and I shall call on your father Adam to testify against you for you will say on the Day of Resurrection, “We did not know this!” Know that there is no god but I and no lord but I. Make no partners with Me. I shall send you messengers to remind you of my covenant and my promise. I shall send my Scripture down to you.’ They said, ‘We bear witness that you are our Lord and our God and that we have no lord but You and no god but You.’ . . .

Then [Adam] saw among them the prophets, like lamps shining with light, and they were given another special pledge of messengership. The one concerning which God said, «When We took from the prophets their pledge—from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus son

⁶⁷ Crone, “Angels versus Humans” (2011): 322.

⁶⁸ Qāḍī, “The Primordial Covenant” (2003).

⁶⁹ Firyābī, *Qadar*, 63–64.

of Mary—We took from them a solemn pledge» (Q. 33:7) . . .

The spirit (*rūḥ*) of Jesus was among those spirits from whom the covenant and the oath were taken. That spirit was sent to Mary . . . She conceived of the very one who addressed her, the spirit of Jesus (*ḥamalāt bi-lladhī khāṭabāhā wa-huwa rūḥu 'īsā*).

[Al-Rabī' ibn Anas] said: I asked Muqātil ibn Ḥayyan, 'Where did the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) enter?' He recounted on the authority of Abū l-'Āliyah from Ubayy ibn Ka'b that it entered via her mouth.

For a relatively strange view, this tradition is well attested. It is transmitted by the Baṣran traditionist, al-Rabī' ibn Anas (d. 139/756–57, Merv), who is likely responsible for the basic wording, but the view may reasonably be attributed to his teacher, the prominent Baṣran Successor and exegete Abū l-'Āliyah al-Riyāḥī (d. ca. 94/712).⁷⁰ The earliest testimony to the tradition appears among the addenda (*zawā'id*) that 'Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad (213–290/828–903) added to the *Musnad* of his father, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal,⁷¹ but it also appears in a host of other sources thereafter.⁷² Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) also transmits the tradition; however, he truncates the text and omits the section concerning the *rūḥ* of Jesus.⁷³ Few exegetes endorsed the view attributed to Ubayy. The only early exegete who seems to have fully adopted it for himself whom I could find is the Mu'tazilite Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (d. 322/934), who maintained that God created and formed the earthly Jesus into a human from the very spirit that God sent to address Mary.⁷⁴

Although rarely defended, the view attributed to Ubayy certainly has its merits. Nothing in the wording of the annunciation scene in Q. 19 precludes it, and at least three other Qur'anic passages may be mustered to strengthen it. The first comes in a verse from a Late Meccan sūrah which alludes to (but does not directly name) Mary, "And one who guarded her womb, We breathed of our spirit into her (*fa-nafaknā fīhā min rūḥinā*), and We made her and her son a sign for all people" (Q. Anbiyā' 21:91). The verse clearly depicts

the prenatal Jesus as quickened, if not even conceived, by a measure of God's spirit (*rūḥ*), a phrasing repeated nearly verbatim in Q. Taḥrīm 66:12, a Medinan verse. Moreover, in 21:91 and 66:12 it is God himself who blows a measure of His spirit (*rūḥ*) directly into Mary's womb—it is thus God, not an angel, who directly gives Mary her child.⁷⁵ Finally, Q. Nisā' 4:171 explicitly describes Jesus as a "messenger" (*rasūl*), a "word" (*kalimah*), and a "spirit" (*rūḥ*) whom God cast into Mary, declaring, "Jesus, the son of Mary, is merely the Messenger of God and His word (*rasūlu 'llāhi wa-kalimatuh*), which He cast into (*'alqāhā ilā*) Mary, and a spirit (*rūḥ*) from Him."⁷⁶ The interpretation attributed to Ubayy is anything but specious.

Ubayy's reading of the annunciation scene in Sūrat Maryam resonates with many parascriptural retellings of the Annunciation which hold that Christ himself assumed the form of an angel, even Gabriel himself, at the moment of his annunciation.⁷⁷ The earliest example comes from the *Epistula Apostolorum*, a second-century text purporting to record a dialogue between the risen Jesus and his eleven remaining apostles prior to his ascension to heaven. Likely written in Asia Minor and in Greek, it survives today only via its ancient Coptic, Ethiopic, and Latin translations.⁷⁸ In one key passage, Jesus describes his own role in the Annunciation as follows (*Ep. Apost.* 14.5; *NTA* 1: 257, tr. Müller):

[Jesus said,] 'For you know that the angel Gabriel brought the message to Mary.' We [his disciples] answered, 'Yes, O Lord.' Then he answered and said to us, 'Do you not remember that a little while ago I told you: I became an angel among the angels. I became all things in everything? We said to him, 'Yes, O Lord.' Then he answered and said to us, 'On that day, when I took the form of the angel Gabriel, I appeared to Mary and spoke with her. Her heart received me and she believed [Eth.: and laughed]; I [Eth.: the Word] formed

⁷⁵ See note 60 above.

⁷⁶ This argument appears in Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 3:322, albeit unattributed to Ubayy.

⁷⁷ Constan, *Proclus of Constantinople* (2003), 300.

⁷⁸ The text was largely unknown to Western scholarship until Carl Schmidt's discovery in 1895 of a fragmentary Coptic version dating to the 4th–5th centuries AD; however, the work continued to be read as authoritative in Ethiopic tradition as part of a larger work called *Māṣḥafū Kidān* (Eng. *The Book of the Testament*) where the text, particularly its angelomorphic christology, exerted a marked influence on Ethiopic religious literature. See Hannah, "The *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic Version" (2021).

⁷⁰ *EI*³, art. "Abū l-'Āliyah al-Riyāḥī" (G. H. A. Juynboll).

⁷¹ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 35: 155–56 [V 135].

⁷² E.g., Firyābī, *Qadar*, 60–64; Ājurri, *Sharī'ah*, 4: 858–61; and Ibn Mandah, *Tawḥīd*, 3: 76.

⁷³ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 10: 558.

⁷⁴ Jishumī, *Tahdhīb*, 6: 4535.

myself and entered into her womb. For I alone was servant to myself with respect to Mary in an appearance of the form of an angel.'

Much like Ubayy's tradition, Jesus announces his own birth to his mother, albeit explicitly in the form of Gabriel and not merely as a preincarnate *rūḥ*. The angelomorphic pre-incarnate Christ appears even more fully realized in an account of the Annunciation in the Christian Greek poetry attributed to the Tiburtine Sibyl (*Sibyl. Or.* VIII.457-72; *NTA*, 2: 679-80, tr. Treu):

From the womb of the virgin Mary he arose, a
new light,
From heaven he came and put on mortal form.
First then the holy, mighty form of Gabriel was
displayed.
And second the archangel addressed the maiden
in speech:
'In thine immaculate bosom, virgin, do thou re-
ceive God.'
But she then was seized with alarm and wonder
together as she listened,
And stood trembling: her mind was in turmoil,
Her leaping, at such unheard-of tidings.
But again she rejoiced and her heart was warmed
by the saying,
And then laughed, her cheeks flushed scarlet,
Gladly rejoicing and touched in her heart with
shame;
Then took she courage. The Word flew into her
body,
Made flesh in time and brought forth life in her
womb,
Was molded to mortal form and became a boy
By virgin birth-pangs; this, a great wonder to
mortals,
Is no great wonder to God the Father and to
God the Son.
A word flew to her womb.
In the time it was made flesh and came to life in
the womb,
And was fashioned in mortal form and became
a boy.

Like many retellings of the Annunciation, the *Epistula Apostolorum* and Christian Sibyllist amalgamate the annunciation scene from Luke 1:26–56 and the account of the incarnation of the Word in John 1:1–14 into a single literary account, but with result of fusing

the pre-incarnate Christ and the angel Gabriel into a single figure.⁷⁹ One might expect as much from the history of Christian literature, but to find it emerging in Muslim exegetical literature, and perhaps even the Qur'an, is extraordinary indeed.

Conclusion

The Qur'anic view of Jesus is distinct in manifold aspects—not just in the Qur'an's account of the annunciation of his conception but also of his nativity, mission, preaching, death, and much else besides. Outsiders noticed this early on in its reception history. One of the earliest observers was the bishop Jacob of Edessa. In a letter to John, the Stylite of Litarb, likely written in the late-690s or early-700s, Jacob remarks:⁸⁰

So too the Muslims (*mlḡry'*)—though they do not recognize nor wish to say that this true Messiah (*mšyḥ' šryr'*), who came and was recognized by Christians, is God and the Son of God—nevertheless all adamantly confess that he is the true Messiah who was to come and who was foretold by the prophets. They have no dispute with us about this . . . They declare to all and at all times that Jesus the son of Mary is truly the Messiah, and they even call him the word of God (*mlth d-'llh'*), as do the holy scriptures, even adding in ignorance that he is the spirit of God (*rwh' d-'llh'*), since they are incapable of distinguishing the Word from the Spirit just as they will not accept to call Christ “God” or “the Son of God.”

Jacob's letter to John likely summarizes here the declaration found in Q. Nisā' 4:171,

Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, is only the messenger of God and his word cast into Mary and a spirit from him. Believe in God and his messengers and do not say 'three'! Cease, it is better for you! God is but one god. He is exalted beyond having a son!

After all, Jacob's letter recapitulates all the verse's major themes, and it is certainly no coincidence that this very verse features in the inscriptions adorning the Dome of the Rock, constructed atop the Temple Esplanade in Jerusalem by the Umayyad caliph 'Abd

⁷⁹ Hill, *Johannine Corpus* (2004), 94.

⁸⁰ Nau, “Lettre de Jacques d'Édesse” (1901): 518–19; see also Tannous, *Medieval Middle East* (2018), 202–204.

al-Malik in 692, likely less than a decade before Jacob set pen to papyrus.⁸¹ One must also consider the regional Syrian variant of the Muslim confession of faith (*shahādah*) promoted by the Umayyads.⁸² The variant is attributed to ‘Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit al-Anṣārī, a prominent early Companion of Muḥammad who settled, and later died in, Palestine; it reads as follows:⁸³

‘Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit said: The Messenger of God (ﷺ) said, “Any who testify that there is no god but God alone, with no partner, and that Muḥammad is his servant and messenger and that Jesus is the servant of God and his messenger and his word cast into Mary and a spirit from him and that Paradise is real and the Inferno is real—God shall grant him access to Paradise according to his deeds.

All the same, Jacob’s remarks are also an imperfect summary of the qur’anic Jesus. Contrary to Jacob’s claim, Jesus is clearly not identical with the Holy Spirit (Ar. *rūḥ al-quḍus*; cf. Syr. *rūḥā d-qūḍṣā*)—or at least the qur’anic version thereof—whom God sends to support Jesus during his ministry (Q. 2:87, 153). Rather, Jesus receives a measure of God’s spirit (*rūḥ*), which God breathes into Mary’s womb at his conception (21:91, 66:12), as God breathes of his spirit (*rūḥ*) into Adam’s form after his creation (15:29, 32:9; 38:72). He is *a* spirit, not *the* Spirit. But these objections are beside the point really. What is striking is that Jacob recognized the Muslims’ view of Jesus of Nazareth as unique to them and distinctive of their creed, despite the commonalities shared with his own Christian creed.⁸⁴

Despite his missteps, Jacob of Edessa nevertheless teaches modern historians something about the Qur’an and its view of Jesus of Nazareth. For one, qur’anic biblicism is familiar to outsiders insofar as it is eclectic and interacts with its late antique environment, but it is also recognized as a novelty. This observation leads us to the second insight Jacob teaches us. Jacob sees in the creed of his Arab Muslim rulers certain affinities with the Christian creed, but he also sees differences. He himself does not let on whether he learned of these novel views from the Qur’an—in-

deed, he makes no mention of the Arabic scripture and thus likely acquired his knowledge elsewhere. Modern scholars can be more certain that it is the discourse of the Qur’an that animates this new vision of Jesus, diminished though still quite exalted, and that it succeeds in doing so, moreover, only by displacing the New Testament as an authoritative scripture. By the sixth and seventh centuries, as Stephen Shoemaker has astutely put it, any community “using any of the canonical writings of the New Testament would simply have to accept the language and status of Jesus’ sonship.”⁸⁵ For the Qur’an to deny the sonship of Jesus and fashion its own vision of him for its community, it had to displace the New Testament as an ultimate scriptural authority.

With this in mind, I wish to conclude with the following takeaways from our close reading of Q. 19:19 and its variant readings. The first takeaway is that historical-critical readings of the Qur’an require reading the text within the epistemic fabric of its era and environment—both the confines of Arabia and the broader world of Late Antiquity. The threads of this fabric are by no means self-evident; they must be reconstructed and inferred. Although every reconstruction is flawed, an endless pursuit of an asymptote, the process itself carries intrinsic merit. The companda on which it depends illuminate how stories travel, how their meanings and contours change, and, in our specific case, how they gain new significance through distinct qur’anic processes of interpretation and reconfiguration.

The second takeaway is that Islamic scriptural traditions of curation (scribal, performative) and interpretation (exegetical, theological) are indispensable to this historical project. The foregoing analysis proceeds from two equally plausible, yet rival, readings of Q. 19:19 preserved, parsed, and contested in the Islamic tradition. Insofar as both readings offer important insights, I have avoided speculating which reading reflects the text of some elusive Ur-Qur’an. Both readings shed light on the textual history of the Qur’an at its earliest stages and beyond. In this case—and likely many others as well—one may learn more about the Qur’an and its textual formation not when one discards the philological resources of the Islamic tradition but, rather, when one integrates them with the other resources at our disposal and takes seriously the considerable insights they convey.

⁸¹ Milwright, *Dome of the Rock* (2016), 223.

⁸² Bashear, *Early Islamic Tradition* (2004), XV 4.

⁸³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 37: 349 [V 313–14].

⁸⁴ E.g., the statement attributed a Muslim *amīr* in another early Syriac text, “According to Muḥammad . . . [Jesus] is the Word of God and his Spirit (*mlth d-’lh’ w-rwḥ*)”; D. Taylor, “A Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥalē” (2015), 222 §29.

⁸⁵ Shoemaker, “Jewish Christianity” (2018), 113.

**Excursus: The Annunciation in a Poem
attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt**

Much of this paper has required us to investigate what sorts of annunciation accounts might have reached the Arabian Peninsula prior to the advent of Islam by looking at sources written and composed either outside of the Ḥijāz or on the peripheries of Arabia. However, there is one text that might be both contemporary with the Qur'an and from the Ḥijāz: a *qaṣīdah* on the annunciation to Mary attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt al-Thaqafī.

Umayyah is an intriguing figure. An older contemporary of Muḥammad, Umayyah was ostensibly a leader of the Thaqīf tribe that dominated al-Ṭā'if, a city that, like its neighbor Mecca, could scarcely be described as thoroughly Christianized. Nevertheless, the corpus of poems attributed to Umayyah, like the Qur'an, often draws on biblical themes and bears the marks of being profoundly shaped by the exegetical cultures of Christians and Jews of Late Antiquity. Generally speaking, later accounts of Umayyah's life portray him as cultivating extensive contacts with Christian scholars and their communities in Arabia and beyond.⁸⁶

The text of Umayyah's poem about Mary, or at least what remains of it, reaches us only by the slimmest of threads. Its most complete attestation survives in an Arabic encyclopedia called *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-tārīkh*, written in Bust by a certain Abū Naṣr al-Maqdisī in 355/966.⁸⁷ Outside this text, one only finds scant citations of a line thereof here and there. The grammarian Abū Bakr Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940) cites the second verse in his works,⁸⁸ and likewise, several geographical works cite the fourth line of the poem due to its mention of the otherwise unattested toponym "Damdām." The earliest such geographical work to do so seems to have been Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī's (d. 368/979) *Kitāb Jazīrat al-'Arab*.⁸⁹ Such citations indicate that this poem attributed to Umayyah entered circulation at least as the early tenth century AD, but they cannot take us further back. To evaluate its authenticity fully

necessitates a close reading of the poem itself. The text is as follows:⁹⁰

1 – In your religion is a sign from the Lord of Mary

announcing the servant Jesus son of Mary
*wa-fī dīnikum min rabbi maryama 'āyatun
munabbi'atun bi-l-'abdi 'īsā 'bni maryamī*

2 – She sought the face of God and vowed to be chaste
and He exalted her beyond the censure of the censor

*'anābat li-wajhi 'Llābi thumma tabattalat
fa-sabbaha 'anhā lawmata 'l-mutalawwimī*

3 – Neither did she resolve to wed nor to approach any man near her, carnally or verbally

*fa-lā hiya hammat bi-n-nikāh wa-lā danat
'ilā basharīn minhā bi-farjīn wa-lā famī*

4 – Behind the veil of the temple she hid away from her people

as she hid from them in the desert of Damdam
*wa-laṭṭat ḥijāba 'l-bayti min dūni 'ablihā
tughayyabu 'anhum fī ṣaḥāriyyi damdamī*

5 – The traveler under cover of night would be at a loss to find her

even in daylight it would not be a place well-known

*yaḥāru bihā 's-sārī 'idhā janna laylubū
wa-laysa wa-'in kāna 'n-nahāru bi-mu'lamī*

6 – He descended to her after her people slept, a messenger who was neither dumb nor silent

*tadallā 'alayhā ba'damā nāma 'abluhā
rasūlun fa-lam yaḥṣar wa-lam yataramramī*

7 – He said, "Do not be afraid and do not disbelieve

angels from the Lord of 'Ād and Jurhum!"
*fa-qāla a-lā lā tajza 'ī wa-tukadhdhibī
malā'ikata min rabbi 'ādin wa-jurhumī*

8 – Come and give what is asked of you, for I am a messenger from the Merciful who brings you a boy."

*'anībī wa-'a 'ṭī mā su'ilti fa-'innanī
rasūlun min ar-raḥmāni ya'ṭiki bi-'bnamī*

9 – She said to him, "How shall it be? I was not a harlot, nor am I with child or caring for a ward.

*fa-qālat labū 'annā yakūnu wa-lam 'akun
baghiyyan wa-lā ḥublā wa-lā dhāt qayyimī*

⁸⁶ E.g., Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq*, 9: 256–65.

⁸⁷ On the problems dating this work, see *EIr*, art. "Bad' wa'l-tārīkh" (M. Morony).

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Anbārī, *Zābir*, 2: 61, 378.

⁸⁹ This work appears to be lost, but is explicitly cited for the line in question by Abū Bakr al-Ḥāzīmī, who states, "I copied it from the handwriting of al-Sīrāfī (*naqaltubu min khaṭṭ al-Sīrāfī*)" (*Amākinah*, 1: 503).

⁹⁰ Schulteß, *Umayyah b. Abī-ṣ-Ṣalt* (1911), no. 38.

10 – Shall I sin against the Merciful? If you accept my words, stay as you see fit or depart.”

'a-'alraju bi-r-rahmāni 'in kunta musliman kalāmī fa'q'ad mā badā laka aw qumī

11 – He magnified God and overtook her suddenly, and she received him,

a boy of sound body and without a twin,
fa-sabbaha thumma 'ghtarrabā fa'taqat bihī ghulāman sawiyya 'l-khalqi laysa bi-taw'amī

12 – by his blowing into the bosom though her open chemise,

and the Merciful by no means severed her chastity

bi-nufkhatihī fī 'ṣ-ṣadri min jaybi dir'ihā wa-mā yaṣrumu 'r-rahmānu mi-l-'amri yuṣramī

In a mere fourteen syllables, the first line nearly gives the fraud away: line 1 refers to Jesus by his qur'anic moniker, “Jesus son of Mary,” calls him and Mary a “sign” (*āyah*; cf. Q. 19:19, 25:50), and designates him a “servant” (*'abd*; cf. Q. 19:30, 4:122). One could reasonably posit that the first line is an interpolation, but the problem is that, as one proceeds, the evidence for the poem's textual dependence on the Qur'an only continues to mount. Indeed, it borrows not just from the Qur'an but also the *tafsīr* literature. The phrase *lawmat al-mutalawwim* in line 2 is merely an adaptation of the qur'anic *lawmat lā'im* to fit the poetic meter; line 7 introduces the multitude of angels from the annunciation scene of Q. 3:42-47, rather than the singular spiritual messenger one finds in Sūrat Maryam; line 9 is nearly a direct quote of Q. 19:20 (cf. 3:46); line 12 combines the conception scene in Q. 21:91 and 66:12 with its depictions in the exegetical literature.⁹¹ Simply put, the poem is not a pre-Islamic composition but, rather, a pastiche and a post-qur'anic forgery.

Commentary

Shawkat Toorawa, Yale University

Sean Anthony's study of the variants—in his salutary locution, “rival readings”—of Q. Maryam 19:19—which he renders: «I am but a Messenger of your Lord [sent] so that I might give you a pure son»—is wide-ranging and illuminating. He is absolutely correct that “historical-critical readings of the Qur'an re-

quire reading the text within the epistemic fabric of its era and environment—both the confines of Arabia and the broader world of Late Antiquity.” He is in my view right, too, to “avoi[d] speculating which reading reflects the text of some elusive Ur-Qur'an.” Such rigorous and judicious respect for the primary sources is the hallmark of a careful and deliberative historian on whose work I can always rely for a better understanding of the Qur'an's Arabian and Late Antique intertexts and intercontexts. Anthony quite rightly says that “one may learn more about the Qur'an and its textual formation not when one discards the philological resources of the Islamic tradition but, rather, when one integrates them with the other resources at our disposal and takes seriously the considerable insights they convey.” Important—and neglected—resources include rhetorical ones: the literary study of the Qur'anic text, and also reading with and against a major “Qur'anic” literary genre/intertext, the *Qisas al-anbiyā'*, “stories of the prophets.”⁹²

I am very interested in the literary aspects of the Qur'an. Word choice for me reflects rhetorical choices. When I look at the verse—*qāla innamā anā rasūlu rabbika li-ahaba laki ghulāman zakiyyā*—the key for me is not so much the expression *li-ahaba* (“so that I grant”) versus *li-yahaba* (“so that he grant”), but rather the word *rasūl*, “messenger.” Messengers carry messages. I would therefore translate the verse: “I am just (*innamā anā*) the one sent by your Lord (*rasūlu rabbika*), to announce [that you will conceive] (*li-ahaba* [or] *li-yahaba laki*) a pure son (*ghulāman zakiyyā*),” which captures the rival readings and (thereby) renders them less significant. (In a previously published translation, I opted for: “I am a Messenger, come from your Lord,” he said, “to bestow on you a son of great purity.” There, too, the rival readings are captured; and “bestow” attempts to convey something that in the Qur'anic worldview only God can do, namely bestow a child, whatever the mechanism involved: breath, angel, emissary, etc.)

The message—that Mary will conceive—is the Annunciation. The focus of the verse is the announcement, not the gift, though admittedly Mary will shift the focus by asking how such a thing can be possible: the angel can then remind her that for God, the only one who can in fact do this, it is easily done. This is also how the commentarial tradition sees it. By the

⁹¹ See also Seidensticker, “Authenticity” (1996), 90–91 and “Die Authentizität” (2011): 57–58.

⁹² See, e.g., Blatherwick, “Textual Silences and Literary Choices” (2019).

12th century, and very likely much earlier, precisely who was giving/gifting/granting in the verse was not in dispute: it is the emissary who announces, and God who grants. Here is the polymath Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) entry for the verse in question in his *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr* ("The Journey's Provisions for the Discipline of Exegesis"), an excellent summary of Qur'an commentary up through the 6th/12th century:

«He said, I am but an emissary of Lord» — i.e., "Do not fear."

«So that He grant you» — Ibn Kathīr, Nāfi', 'Āṣim, Ibn 'Āmir, Hamzah, and al-Kisā'ī read «So that I may grant you», with a *hamzah* prefix [= first person singular marker]. Abū 'Amr and Warsh citing Nāfi' read it «So that he grant you», not with a *hamzah* prefix. As for the import, it is: "I have sent my Messenger to you so that I may grant you."

Both rival readings are invoked and attributed, but the summarized meaning removes any ambiguity about who is granting.

My interest in rhetorical choices might explain why the "rival" uses of the first person singular (*li-ahaba*), the third person singular (*li-yahaba*) or the first person plural (*li-nahaba*) remind me of the explanation provided by the unnamed guide (identified by the Prophet Muḥammad as Khiḍr) to Moses, justifying his remarkable actions, at Q. Kahf 18:78–82:

«But first I shall explain the meaning of the things you were unable to forbear ♦ The boat belonged to poor fishermen—I wanted (*aradtu*) to damage it because a tyrant was close by and seizing every boat forcibly ♦ ⁸⁰The boy's parents were believers we feared he would overburden with his cruelty and blasphemy ♦ We wanted (*aradnā*) their Lord to replace him with someone of greater affection and purity ♦ The wall belonged to two orphans in the city: beneath it was buried their rightful treasure. Their father had been virtuous so your Lord wanted (*arāda*) them to reach maturity and find their treasure as a mark, a mark of Your Lord's Clemency.

I did nothing of my own accord—this is the explanation of what you could not forbear patiently.»

Admittedly, these are three separate uses: of the first person singular "I wanted to" (*aradtu*), the first

person plural (*aradnā*), and the third person singular (*arāda*). But here, too, an envoy—Khiḍr is sent to the Prophets—is speaking to a major Qur'anic character, explaining something remarkable. Here, too, the real agent is divulged: "I did nothing of my own accord" (*wa-mā fa'altubu 'an amrī*). In Q. Maryam 19:19, the angel says "Your Lord says, 'It is easy for me!'" (*qāla rabbuki huwa 'alayya hayyin*).

Ultimately, it is that ease—encapsulated in the answer given in Q. Āl 'Imrān 3:47 to Mary by the despatched messenger—

«"My Lord," she asked, "how am I to have a child when no man has touched me?" "It shall be so," he replied. "God creates what he wishes. He has only to say, 'Be' and it is!»

—that Q. Maryam 19:19 is rhetorically reproducing.

Author Response

Shawkat Toorawa's insightful response turns our attention to the rhetorical strategies that help convey the message in Q. 19:19. I am essentially in agreement that one may grasp the significant literary aspects of the verse regardless of the rival reading one chooses. One way to gain insight into how this Qur'anic rhetorical strategy works in this particular instance is to compare the Qur'anic annunciation in Sūrat Maryam with its counterparts in the "stories of the prophets" (*qisās al-anbiyā'*) literature, another genre mentioned by Toorawa but largely set to the side in my study. There are too many examples in this extensive literature for a comprehensive discussion, so I ought to first follow Toorawa's example and commend to our readers again Helen Blatherwick's exemplary study.⁹³ But one brief, illustrative example from this genre might demonstrate how the subtleties of the Qur'an's rhetorical strategies seem to dissolve at the hands of early Muslim storytellers, whose retellings of Qur'anic stories, though anchored in the Qur'an, considerably reshape them.

My example is a tradition attributed to an early Syrian renunciant and scholar named Nawf al-Bikālī (d. ca. 707–708).⁹⁴ Though of Ḥimyarite origins, he eventually settled in the Levant where he gained a reputation,

⁹³ Blatherwick, "Textual Silences and Literary Choices" (2019).

⁹⁴ He died fighting on the frontier at the Umayyad siege of Tyana (Ar. al-Ṭuwānah) (Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq*, 62: 311); on this siege of Tyana, see Hoyland, *Theophilus* (2011), 201.

like his stepfather Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, for his knowledge of scripture and as a popular preacher (Ar. *qāṣṣ*).⁹⁵ Nawf recounts the annunciation in his broader retelling of a larger cycle about the story of Zechariah and Mary.⁹⁶

Mary, peace be upon her, was a maiden, a virgin, and Zechariah, peace be upon him, was her sister’s husband. He acted as her guardian, and she was under his care . . . While seated in her home (*fī manzilihā*), there suddenly appeared a man standing before her who had rent the veil of seclusion (*qad bataka l-ḥajb*).⁹⁷ When she saw him, «she said, “May the Merciful protect me from you, if indeed you are god-fearing!”» (Q. 19:18). And when she mentioned the Merciful, Gabriel, upon him peace, took fright and «said, “I am but a messenger of your Lord [sent] that I may give you a pure boy”» (19:19) until the words of the Most High «it was a command firmly decreed» (19:21). Gabriel, upon him peace, then blew into the opening of her garment, and she conceived and eventually grew heavy with child. She succumbed to the same pains as other women also suffer, but when her pains overtook her, she was in the house of prophecy and felt ashamed. She thus fled out of diffidence for her family towards the East. Her family set out to search for her, asking what had happened to her, but no one was able to inform them of where she went. The pangs of labor then overwhelmed her, and she leaned against the date-palm, and «she said, “If only I had died and become long forgotten before this!”» (19:23).

Nawf recasts the qur’anic narrative while simultaneously being moored to it rather than any other alternative account. At first glance, he introduces little outside material, certainly no Christian material, and his story hews closely to the qur’anic narrative in Sūrat Maryam, direct quotations of which are interspersed throughout. But under closer scrutiny, one finds that he does

⁹⁵ Ibn Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2: 18; Armstrong, *The Quṣṣās* (2017), 293. He also appears anecdotally as a companion of ‘Alī in, e.g., Quḍā‘ī, *Dustūr*, 100 (§4.6).

⁹⁶ Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-awliyā‘*, 6:51; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dimashq*, 70: 87–88.

⁹⁷ Another version attributed Nawf varies slightly in wording, “Gabriel approached her in her dwelling till he ripped the veil from her (*wa-jā’ ahā jibrīlu fī manzilihā ḥattā bataka l-ḥijāba ‘anhā*)”; see Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dimashq*, 70:85. The veil referenced here is that mentioned in Q. 19:17.

introduce all sorts of exegetical considerations. For instance, Nawf identifies the unnamed “spirit (*rūḥ*)” explicitly with Gabriel, an identification that excludes the possibility of the spirit being the preincarnate Jesus as some exegetes maintained. And although Gabriel merely obeys God’s designs, he assumes an expanded role nevertheless. Gabriel still delivers a message as an envoy, but Nawf adds more information about his role in the mechanics of Mary’s conception: Gabriel blows something (the spirit of Jesus? the divine utterance, “Be”?) into Mary thus giving rise to her pregnancy. The Qur’an does indeed assert that God breathed a measure of his spirit in Mary (Q. 21:91, 66:12) and cast his word into her (4:171), but these assertions do not appear in Sūrat Maryam. Moreover, Nawf’s story not only adds this (admittedly qur’anic) detail to the annunciation story, it also attributes the action directly to Gabriel, God’s agent rather than God himself. Although the motif of Gabriel’s blowing Jesus into Mary is common in *tafsīr* and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā‘* literature alike—indeed, these genres often merely reflect the scholarly versus popular sides of the same exegetical coin—these narratives are a marked departure from the literal phrasing of the Qur’an. In the Qur’an, it is God who acts as the main agent in the creation of Jesus in Mary’s womb, as God declares, “*We breathed* of our spirit into [Mary], and *We made* her and her son a sign for all people” (Q. 21:91).

All the same, Gabriel’s increased prominence notably has little to do with whichever rival reading of Q. 19:19 one adopts. Thus, the version of Nawf’s story preserved in the *Hilyah* of Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1038) adopts the reading where the messenger-spirit says, “so that I may give” (*li-‘ahaba*), but in the two versions recorded by Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176)—who even cites Abū Nu‘aym’s *Hilyah* directly for one version—the verse is reproduced with the reading “so that He may give” (*li-yahaba*).⁹⁸ By the exacting standards of the meticulous expositors of the Qur’an in the *tafsīr* literature, the purveyors of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā‘* run roughshod over these subtleties.

Exegetes and pious storytellers were not so much ill-at-ease with the idea of God himself blowing a measure of his spirit into Mary’s womb as they were enthralled to the notion that God acts in the world via his agents and intermediaries. And when God acts through his agents, curious things happen to language, especially in the Qur’an. One sees this in the qur’anic accounts

⁹⁸ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dimashq*, 70: 85.–3, 87.–1.

of God's annunciation of Abraham's son, too, although in some sūrahs the angelic guests announce the birth a son to Abraham or Sarah directly (Q. 15:53, 51:28), while elsewhere it is God himself who announces the news without a mention of intermediaries (11:71, 37:101, 112). Such divergences likely seemed rooted in the different rhetorical strategies for how the episode was being retold in each instance and the respective shifts in focus. Toorawa's wonderful example of the speech of al-Khiḍr in Sūrat al-Kahf may indeed show that not all such examples need be angelic.⁹⁹

Works Cited

Abbreviations and Primary Sources

- 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* = 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11 vols., ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A'zamī (Beirut, 1983).
- Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* = Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *al-Sunan*, 7 vols. ed. Shu'ayb al-ʿArna'ūt, et al. (Beirut, 2009).
- Abū Ma'shar, *Sūq al-'arūs* = Abū Ma'shar al-Ṭabarī, *Sūq al-'arūs*, ed. Ḥāmid ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad 'Ālī al-Anṣārī (Mecca, 2009).
- Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* = Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, 10 vols. (Beirut, 1996).
- Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il* = Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols., ed. Aḥmad al-Khayyātī (Casablanca, 1995).
- Abū 'Ubaydah, *Majāz* = Abū 'Ubaydah Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols., ed. Fuat Sezgin (Cairo, 1954–62).
- Ājurri, *Sharī'ah* = Abū Bakr al-Ājurri, *Kitāb al-Sharī'ah*, 6 vols., ed. 'Abdallāh ibn 'Umar al-Dumayjī (Riyadh, 1997).
- Dahhān, *Mughnī* = Muḥammad ibn Abī Naṣr al-Dahhān al-Nawzāwāzī, *al-Mughnī fī l-qirā'āt*, Maḥmūd al-Shanqīṭī, 4 vols. (Riyadh, 2018).
- Dānī, *Muqni'* = Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni' fī ma'rifat marsūm maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār*, ed. Nūra bint Ḥasan ibn Fahd al-Ḥamīd (Riyadh, 2010).
- ET² = *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (Leiden, 1960–2002).
- ET³ = *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edition, ed. G. Krämer et al. (Leiden, Brill, 2007–).
- ET^r = *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York, 1982–).
- Ephrem, *Comm.* = Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant ou Diatessaron*, tr. L. Leloir (Paris, 1965).

⁹⁹ A minority position apparently did consider al-Khiḍr to be an angel rather than a prophet or righteous man (Māwardī, *Nukat*, 3: 325), though one is hard-pressed to find actual proponents of the view. See Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr* (2000), 367–68, and Totoli, *Stories of the Prophets* (2003), 105 (§ 478).

- Ephrem, ed. Beck = E. Beck, *Nachträge zu Ephraem Syrus*, CSCO 363, scr. syri 159 (Louvain, 1975).
- Ephrem, ed. Lamy = T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, 4 vols. (Mechliniae, 1890).
- Fārisī, *Hujjah* = Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī, *al-Hujjah li-l-qurrā' al-sab'ah*, 6 vols., ed. Badr al-Dīn Qahwājī and Bashīr Juwayjātī (Damascus, 1984–93).
- Farrā', *Ma'ānī* = Abū Zakariyyā al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, 3 vols. (Beirut, 1983).
- Firyābī, *Qadar* = Abū Bakr al-Firyābī (d. 301/913), *Kitāb al-Qadar*, ed. 'Abdallāh al-Manṣūr (Riyadh, 1997).
- GAS = Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 9 vols. (Leiden, 1974–1996).
- Hāzimī, *Amākinah* = Abū Bakr al-Hāzimī, *al-Amākinah*, 2 vols., ed. Ḥamad al-Jāsir (Riyadh, 1994).
- Hudhalī, *Kāmil* = Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhalī, *al-Kāmil fī l-qirā'āt al-'ashar wa-l-arba'in al-zā'idah 'alayhā*, ed. Khālid al-Shāyib (Cairo, 2007).
- Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif* = Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, 3 vols., ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn 'Abd al-Sabḥān (Beirut, 2002²).
- Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah = Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *A Literary History of Medicine ('Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā')*, 5 vols., ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Simon Swain, and Geert Jan van Gelder (Leiden, 2019).
- Ibn al-Anbārī, *Zāhir* = Abū Bakr Ibn al-Anbārī, *al-Zāhir fī ma'ānī kalimāt al-nās*, 2 vols., ed. Sayf ibn Aḥmad al-Gharīr (Damascus, 2004).
- Ibn 'Asākir, *Dimashq* = Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnāt Dimashq*, 80 vols., ed. 'Umar al-'Amrawī (Beirut, 1995–2000).
- Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* = Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 50 vols., ed. Shu'ayb al-ʿArna'ūt, et al. (Beirut, 1993–2001).
- Ibn Khālawayh, *I'rāb al-qirā'āt* = Ibn Khālawayh, *I'rāb al-qirā'āt al-sab' wa-'ilaluhā*, 2 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Uthaymīn (Cairo, 1992).
- Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar* = Ibn Khālawayh, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhidh al-Qur'ān min kitāb al-Badī'*, ed. G. Bergsträsser (Leipzig, 1934).
- Ibn Mandah, *Tawḥīd* = Abū 'Abdallāh Ibn Mandah (d. 1005/396), *K. al-Tawḥīd*, 3 vols., ed. 'Alī al-Faqīhī (Medina, 2002).
- Ibn Wahb, *Jāmi'* = 'Abdallāh ibn Wahb al-Miṣrī, *al-Jāmi'*, 3 vols., ed. M. Muranyī (Beirut, 1992).
- Jacob of Serugh, ed. Bedjan = Paul Bedjan, ed., *S. Martyrii qui et Sabdona quae supersunt omnia* (Paris, 1902).
- Jishumī, *Tahdhīb* = al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī, *al-Tahdhīb fī l-tafsīr*, 10 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-Sālimī (Cairo, 2018).
- Makkī, *Hidāyah* = Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Hidāyah ilā bulūgh al-nihāyah*, 12 vols. (Sharjah, 2008).
- Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt* = Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, 18 vols., ed. Ahmet Vanlioğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul, 2005).

- Māwardī, *Nukat* = Abū l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-uyūn*, 6 vols., ed. al-Sayyid ibn ‘Abd al-Maḥṣūd ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (Beirut, 1992).
- Nahḥās, *I’rāb al-Qur’ān* = Abū Ja‘far al-Nahḥās, *I’rāb al-Qur’ān*, ed. Khālid al-‘Alī (Beirut, 2008).
- Narsai, ed. McCleod = Narsai, *Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension*, ed. Fredrick McCleod, PO 40/1 (Turnhout, 1979).
- NTA = *New Testament Apocrypha*, rev. ed., 2 vols., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, tr. R. Wilson (London, 1992).
- Quḍā‘ī, *Dustūr* = al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā‘ī, *A Treasury of Virtues (Dustūr ma‘ālim al-ḥikam)*, ed./tr. Tahera Qutbuddin (New York, 2013).
- Qutrub, *Ma‘ānī* = Muḥammad ibn al-Mustanīr Qutrub, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān wa-tafsīr mushkil i’rābih*, ed. Muḥammad Laqrīz (Batna, 2016).
- Rūdhbārī, *Jāmi‘ al-qirā‘āt* = Abū Bakr al-Rūdhbārī, *Jāmi‘ al-qirā‘āt*, 3 vols., ed. Ḥanān bint ‘Abd al-Karīm al-‘Anzī (Medina, 2017).
- Sakhāwī, *Wasīlah* = al-Sakhāwī, *al-Wasīlah ilā kashf al-‘Aqīlah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭāhiṛī (Riyadh, 2003).
- Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* = Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, 26 vols., ed. ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo, 2001).
- Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘* = Abū ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-kabīr*, 6 vols., ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf (Beirut, 1996).
- Udfuwī, *Istighnā‘* = Abū Bakr al-Udfuwī, *al-Istighnā‘ fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Ms. Selim Aḡa Kütüphanesi (Istanbul), 297/1.
- Zajjāj, *Ma‘ānī* = Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, 5 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Jalīl ‘Abduh Shalabī (Beirut, 1988).
- Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt* = Abū Bakr al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt al-nahwīyyīn wa-l-lughawīyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Abū Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1984).
- Bashear, Suliman**, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition* (Jerusalem, 2004).
- Beck, Edmund**, “Die b. Mas‘ūdvarianten bei al-Farrā’, III,” *Orientalia* NS 28 (1959): 230–56.
- Blatherwick, Helen**, “Textual Silences and Literary Choices in al-Kisā’ī’s Account of the Annunciation and the Birth of Jesus,” *Arabica* 66 (2019): 1–42.
- Brock, S. P.**, *Eight Syriac Mimre on Biblical Themes* (Glane, 1993).
- Brock, S. P.**, “Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis: Some Remarks on the Term *Aggen* in the Syriac Versions of Lk. 1:35,” *Novum Testamentum* 24 (1982): 222–33.
- *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, rev. ed. (Piscataway, 2010).
- Budge, E. A. Wallis**, ed./tr., *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the History of the Likeness of the Christ*, 2 vols. (London, 1899).
- Cellard, Éléonore**, “The Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest: Materializing the Codices,” *JNES* 80 (2021): 1–30.
- Constas, Nicholas**, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Homilies 1–5, Texts and Translation* (Brill, 2003).
- Crone, Patricia**, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God,” in *Revelation, Literature, and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Townsend and M. Vidas (Tübingen 2011), 315–36.
- Ḍamrah, Tawfīq**, *Zād al-sā‘ir ilā qirā‘at Ibn ‘Amir* (Amman, 2006).
- Déroche, François**, *Qur’ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview* (Leiden, 2014).
- Dutton, Yasin**, “Some Notes on the British Library’s Oldest Qur’an manuscript,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 6 (2004): 43–71.
- Dye, Guillaume**, “Lieux saint communs, partagés ou confisqués: aux sources de quelques péricopes coraniques (Q. 19: 16–33),” *Partage du sacré: transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, ed. I. Depret and G. Dye (Louvain, 2015), 55–121.
- Forness, P. M.**, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob Serugh* (Oxford, 2018).
- Franke, Patrick**, *Begegnung mit Khidr: Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im traditionellen Islam* (Beirut, 2000).
- Geissinger, A.**, “Mary in the Qur’an: Rereading Subversive Births,” in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture*, ed. R. S. Sabbath (Leiden, 2009), 379–92.
- “No, a Woman Did Not ‘Edit the Qur’ān’: Towards a Methodologically Coherent Approach to a Tradition Portraying a Woman and Written Quranic Materials,” *JAAR* 85 (2017): 416–45.
- Goudarzi, Mohsen**, *The Second Coming of the Book: Rethinking Qur’anic Scripturology and Prophetology* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018).
- Hannah, Darrell**. “The *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic Version of the *Epistula Apostolorum*: Greek or Arabic?” in *Beyond*

Secondary Literature

- Abboud, Hosn**, *Mary in the Qur’an: A Literary Reading* (London, 2014).
- Alhassen, Leyla**, “A Structural Analysis of *Sūrat Maryam*, Verses 1–58,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 18 (2016): 92–116.
- Ambros, Arne**, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden, 2004).
- Anthony, Sean**, “Two ‘Lost’ *Sūras* of the Qur’ān: *Sūrat al-Khal’* and *Sūrat al-Hafd* between Textual and Ritual Canon (1st–3rd/7th–9th Centuries),” *JSAI* 46 (2019): 215–52.
- Armstrong, Lyall**, *The Quṣṣās of Early Islam* (Leiden, 2017).
- Bardenhewer, Otto**, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur, Bd. 4: Das fünfte Jahrhundert mit Einschluß der syrischen Literatur des vierten Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1924).

- Canon: Early Christianity and the Ethiopic Textual Tradition*, ed. M. Gebreananaye, L. Williams, and F. Watson (London, 2021), 97–116.
- Hill, C. E.**, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford, 2004).
- Hoyland, Robert**, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool, 2011).
- “The Jewish and/or Christian Audience of the Qur'an and the Arabic Bible,” in *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam* ed. Francisco del Río Sánchez (Turnhout, 2018), 31–40.
- Ilan, Tal**, *Mine and Yours Are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden, 1997).
- Khaṭīb, 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-**, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 11 vols. (Damascus, 2018).
- Krüger, Paul**, “Der Sermo des Philoxenos von Mabbug de annuntiatione Dei Gentricis Mariae: Zum ersten Mal herausgegeben mite inter Einleitung und Übersetzung,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 20 (1954): 153–65.
- Lewis, Agnes Smith**, ed./tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca: The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae* (London, 1902)
- Macabasag, Nora Q.**, *The Annunciation (Lk 1:26–38) in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh and Early Syriac Fathers* (Kerala, 2015).
- Madigan, Daniel A.** *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, 2001).
- Marx, Michael**, “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. A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (Leiden, 2010), 533–64.
- Milwright, Marcus**. *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 2016).
- Modarressi, Hossein**, “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'an: A Brief Survey,” *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993): 5–39.
- Nagel, Tilman**, *Medinensische Einschübe in mekkanische Suren* (Göttingen, 1995).
- Nasser, Shady Hekmat**. *The Second Canonization of the Qur'an: Ibn Mujāhid and the Founding of the Seven Readings* (Leiden, 2020).
- Nau, François**, “Lettre de Jacques d'Édesse sur la généalogie de la sainte Vierge,” *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, ser. 1, 6 (1901): 512–31.
- Neuwirth, Angelika**, *Der Koran, 2/1: Frühmittelmeckkanische Suren* (Berlin, 2017).
- *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, tr. S. Wilder (Oxford, 2019).
- Qāḍī, Wadād al-**, “The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qur'an,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147 (2003): 332–38.
- Rabb, Intisar**, “Non-Canonical Readings of the Qur'an: Recognition and Authenticity (The Ḥimṣī Reading),” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8 (2006): 84–127.
- Rabin, Chaim**, *Ancient West-Arabian* (London, 1951).
- Rosenberg, Michael**, “Penetrating Words: A Babylonian Rabbinic Response to Syriac Mariology,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 67 (2016): 121–34.
- Sadeghi, Behnam and Mohsen Goudarzi**, “Šan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'an,” *Der Islam* 87 (2012): 1–129.
- Saleh, Walid**. “Meccan Gods, Jesus' Divinity: An Analysis of Q 43 *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*,” in *The Qur'an's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity*, ed. H. M. Zellentin (London, 2019), 92–111.
- Schultzeß, Friedrich**, *Umajja b. Abī-š-Šalt: Die unter seinem Namen überlieferten Gedichtfragmente gesammelt und übersetzt* (Leipzig, 1911).
- Seidensticker, Tilman**, “The Authenticity of the Poems Ascribed to Umayya ibn Abī al-Šalt,” in *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*, ed. J. R. Smart (New York, 1996), 87–100.
- , “Die Authentizität der Umayya Ibn Abī š-Šalt zugeschrieben Gedichte II,” *ZDMG* 161 (2011): 39–98.
- Shoemaker, S. J.**, “Jewish Christianity, Non-Trinitarianism, and the Beginnings of Islam,” in *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, ed. F. del Río Sánchez (Turnhout, 2018), 105–16.
- Sidky, Hythem**. “On the Regionality of Qur'anic Codices,” *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 5 (2020): 133–210.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer**. *Women in the Qur'an: Traditions and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1994).
- Stewart, Devin**, “Introductory Oaths and the Question of Composite Surahs,” in *Structural Dividers in the Qur'an*, ed. M. Klar (London, 2021), 267–337.
- Tannous, Jack**, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton, 2018).
- Taylor, Catherine Gines**, *Late Antique Images of the Virgin Annunciate Spinning: Allotting the Scarlet and Purple* (Leiden, 2018).
- Taylor, David**, “The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥalē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation,” in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. S. H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden, 2015), 187–242.
- Toorawa, Shawkat**, “*Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19): Lexicon, Lexical Echoes, English Translation,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23 (2011): 25–78.
- Tottoli, Roberto**, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī* (Berlin, 2003).
- van Dijk, Ann**, “The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery,” *The Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 420–36.
- van Putten, Marijn**, “Hamzah in the Quranic Consonantal Text,” *Orientalia* 87 (2018): 93–120.
- Wright, William**, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (London, 1870–72).
- Zervos, G. T.**, *The Protevangelium of James: Greek Text, English Translation, Critical Introduction* (London, 2019).