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Mary in the Qur'an: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother

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From Our Lady of Victory to Our Lady of Dialogue: Do Muslims Today “Call on Mary with Devotion?”

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Abstract

(This paper fits under the conference sub theme “Mary as Bridge Builder between Islam and Christianity”)

Nostra Aetate 3 lists beliefs and practices shared by Muslims and Christians such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, worshipping the same one God, and honoring Mary . To underscore the last point, the document adds, “at times they even call on her with devotion ”. (3§) While some Muslims take issue with this phrase, arguing that their coreligionists should invoke no one but God, the reality is that many ordinary Muslims do in fact have a devotion to Maryam umm ‘Isā. This paper will consider various examples of such devotion around the globe today: from highway billboards in the USA, to pilgrims at Meryem Ana Evi in Turkey, to a shared Annunciation holiday in Lebanon, to mosques named (and renamed) Maryam in Ireland, Australia, Abu Dhabi, Syria, etc. I’ll end by attempting to answer the question with which I began: in what way can we say that Muslims today “call on Mary with devotion”? I’d like to suggest that whenever Muslims invoke Mary’s name expressly for reasons of promoting harmony between Christians and Muslims, we can call that a form of devotion. In the past, Mary has been both a barrier between Christians and Muslims (e.g., Our Lady of Victory) and a bridge (mainly for conversion to Christianity). But today, she has become almost exclusively another kind of bridge: a bridge to dialogue and friendship and is acknowledged explicitly as such not only by Christians but by Muslims too. Dare we call her the patron saint of Christian-Muslim dialogue?

“the one who guarded her chastity”

The role of historical reconstruction in comparative theology

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Abstract

In my contribution to the conference on the book, *Mary in the Qur'an*, I want to offer some methodological reflections on the central second part of the book in which the authors discuss Mary in the Qur'an. As they write in the introduction, one of the characteristics of their work is that they “have worked in consistently diachronic fashion while at the same time adopting a holistic approach toward the surahs” (p.2).

One can clearly see the influence of Angelika Neuwirth and of Zishan Ghaffar in the particular manner in which they give a reconstruction of the order of the surahs in the Qur'an, and of the historical and political context of these surahs. All of this is commendable and of the highest academic quality. At the same time, such a diachronic approach that is determined by a historical reconstruction of the context in which the Qur'an was revealed, seems to be in tension with the methodology of comparative theology that the authors discuss in the fourth and final part of their book, stating that “this has also been our guiding principle throughout the book” (p.4).

The most common form of comparative theology, developed by Francis Clooney and Catherine Cornille, among others, works with the basic metaphor of “passing over” to learn from another religious tradition, and “coming back” to apply the results of this learning to one's home tradition. However, the complicated situation of a Christian – Muslim comparative theological study is that the two traditions are already historically connected, so the metaphor of “passing over” and “coming back,” and the processes of learning discussed in part four of the book *Mary in the Qur'an* suggests a mutual exteriority that is in tension with the historical framework in part two of the book.

My contribution will suggest that a fuller discussion of Mary in the Qur'an might use not only historical but also literary approaches that take the canonical form of the Qur'an as point of departure, such as the structuralist approach by Michel Cuypers (inspired by Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī) and the contemporary movements in biblical exegesis (specifically the Psalms) to integrate traditional and historical-critical approaches. I will use the phrase “the one who guarded her chastity” (Qur'an 66:12 and 21:91) to discuss how such an approach might be used as a complement to the historical reconstruction used by Tatari and von Stosch.

Son of Mary or Son of God: The Reasons for the Qur'an's Emphasis on Mary

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Abstract

Readers of the Qur'an readily discern its references to Jesus Christ as the "Son of Mary." Historically, this characterization has been perceived as the Qur'an's counterpoint to the prevalent Christian conception of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity — the Son of God. This is often interpreted as the Qur'an's way of challenging Christ's divinity. However, such an interpretation risks oversimplifying the intricate theological, and more specifically, Christological debates of Late Antiquity, as well as the nuanced deliberations among church theologians of that era. The Qur'anic emphasis on Jesus as the "son of Mary" as opposed to the "son of God" can be more thoroughly comprehended within the context of the seventh-century Christological milieu.

Late Antiquity marked a tumultuous period in Church history, characterized by profound tensions between various Christian factions and theologians with differing Christological views. Numerous ecumenical councils were convened to address issues of creed and doctrine. However, many of these councils were fragmented by political allegiances, leading certain churches to feel marginalized or to believe that the councils' deliberations were not wholly relevant to them. Primarily, these ecumenical councils aimed to delineate orthodoxy, often by labeling certain views as heretical, excommunicating their proponents, and denouncing their doctrines. Setting aside contemporary academic debates regarding the origins of the Qur'an, its significance in Arabia during Late Antiquity is undeniable. To more fully grasp the Qur'an's Christological positions, it is paramount to understand the Christological debates and perspectives prevalent in and around Arabia during the seventh century. Seventh-century Arabia was surrounded by a myriad of churches, each asserting its distinct authority and, at times, advocating a unique Christology. To the south, the Ethiopian Church exerted considerable influence, particularly during the Abyssinian rule of Yemen. Islamic tradition recounts two notable migrations of Muslims to Abyssinia in the nascent years of Islam, as they sought refuge from Arab persecution. Given these interactions, it is likely that Muhammad was acquainted with the theological tenets and stature of the Ethiopian Church. To the west, the Coptic Church of Alexandria had a great presence and influence. Islamic sources suggest that Muhammad dispatched an emissary to the Patriarch of Alexandria and also married a Coptic woman. Hence, Muhammad and his early followers were likely familiar with both the Ethiopian and Coptic Churches and the theological interconnections between them. To the east, the Church of the East had entrenched itself in Persia and the eastern provinces of Arabia. To the north, both the Byzantine and Syriac churches were prevalent, with the Byzantine Church, in particular, being deeply influenced by imperial politics, a factor that also informed numerous ecumenical councils. Drawing from Islamic traditions, Muhammad's emissary to the Byzantines debatably referred to the Arians. Thus, seventh-century

Arabia was situated amidst a tapestry of churches, each championing its Christological interpretations. The Arabian deserts, somewhat distant from the stringent jurisdiction of these churches, often provided sanctuary for those fleeing ecclesiastical persecution. Understanding this background is pivotal. Numerous ecumenical councils were specifically convened to condemn various models of monophysitism, which posited Christ as possessing a singular nature that is profoundly divine. One such monophysite stance, Eutychianism, was formally rejected by the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon giving birth to the Chalcedonian formula, and precipitating a schism between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches. Notably, while the Oriental Orthodox churches repudiated the tenets of the Council of Chalcedon, they too distanced themselves from Eutychianism, which the Council aimed primarily to denounce. Eutychianism proposed that Christ embodied a single nature, formed from the mixture of his divine and human natures, but that since his divine nature was profound, it completely obliterated his human nature. Monophysitism persisted beyond its condemnation at the Fourth Ecumenical Council. John Philoponus (d. 570), who passed away roughly around the traditionally accepted time of Muhammad's birth, was regarded as exhibiting tritheistic tendencies, which many church theologians considered an error into which monophysitism usually is entrapped. Notably, some of his students discerned monophysitism in his Christology. The tension against monophysitism, particularly in the seventh century, was of such magnitude that it necessitated the convocation of the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680–681 CE in Constantinople. This Council further repudiated monophysitism and its nuanced offshoots that sought reconciliation through various theological models. Philoponus himself was explicitly denounced.

This historical backdrop underscores the palpable theological tension surrounding monophysitism concurrent with the time of the Qur'an. Chalcedonian churches were not alone in grappling with the challenges posed by monophysitism; other ecclesiastical communities, including the Oriental Orthodox churches and the Church of the East, were also embroiled in this debate. Given monophysitism's negation of Christ's human nature, one prevailing defense adopted by Christian theologians, echoed in the Chalcedonian formula, was to emphasize Mary and her role. For many ecclesiastical theologians, Christ was consubstantial with the Father in his divinity but also consubstantial with Mary in his humanity. Invoking Mary thus emerged as both a linguistic and theological tool during Late Antiquity, instrumental in affirming Christ's humanity—a tenet also encapsulated in the Chalcedonian Creed. In light of the pervasive belief that Christ encompassed or emanated from dual natures, theologians crafted specific formulations to articulate the dichotomy between Christ's divine and human natures. This was a strategic counter to monophysitism that obliterated Christ's human nature.

This nuanced theological landscape offers insights into the Qur'an's deliberate reference to Jesus as the "son of Mary." In referring to Christ as such, the Qur'an seems to be engaging in a dialogue with church theologians who defended Christ's humanity. It suggests that the Qur'an's approach was not fundamentally a repudiation of Christ's divine nature, but rather an argument against monophysitism who denounced Christ's human nature, and whose views were contentious during the seventh century. Recognizing the Qur'an's invocation of Mary in its portrayal of Christ, particularly set against the Christian theological backdrop of Late Antiquity, challenges any reductive assessment of the

Qur'an's Christology as being overtly antagonistic to Christian beliefs. In fact, several passages in the Qur'an, such as Q. 5:17 and 5:72, when scrutinized within this context, suggest not an outright denial of Jesus's divinity but a nuanced engagement with prevailing Christological debates. For instance, the Qur'an's rejection of those who identify God as Jesus, the son of Mary, should not necessarily be construed as a denial of Jesus's divine nature. Late Antiquity's Christian theologians frequently invoked Mary when emphasizing Jesus's humanity, clearly delineating his human nature from his divine nature. This directly countered monophysitism that postulated a single, predominantly divine nature for Christ. Thus, this discourse endeavours to unpack the intricate Christological formulations of Late Antiquity and posits that the Qur'an actively engaged with them, especially when referring to Christ as the "son of Mary." This opens doors to further interfaith dialogues between Christians and Muslims.

Scriptural Reading of Christian-Muslim Marian Texts:

How God Reveals Through the Embodied Experience of Pregnancy

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Abstract

In a 2022 issue of *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* Martin Nguyen gave a Muslim reading of the *Fratelli Tutti* encyclical, suggesting that the most compelling symbol for future work of Christian-Muslim fraternity may be found in chapter eight, where Pope Francis states that “For many Christians, this journey of fraternity also has a Mother, whose name is Mary.” Nguyen proposes further analysis of Mary as bridge-builder: “While Pope Francis emphasizes Mary’s role as ‘mother,’ Mirza has importantly noted that she also powerfully figures as a pious and devoted ‘daughter’ in the Qur’an (2022: 102). How might this other familial role be understood from the vantage of fraternity and social friendship?” We have been intrigued by this line of thought, and moved to further develop its scope: to look with new eyes on Mary as an exemplar of human relationality, providing a model of how the human person is called to be in relationship with God and neighbor. Engaging the content of *Mary in the Qur’an*, and the work’s method of Christian-Muslim authorship, has sharpened our own, much more modest project: a joint Christian-Muslim scriptural study bringing two scriptural accounts of Mary and Divine action into close comparative study. We bring two unique scriptural accounts into dialogue with one another—one contained in the Bible, the other Qu’ranic. In side-by-side reading, we explore how narrative accounts of Mary’s visceral, embodied experience of pregnancy exemplify God’s intent for creaturely relationality, or, how humans are called to be in relationship with one another, and to the Creator, God.

As graduate students taking courses together on the Qur’an, hermeneutics and interreligious dialogue, a strong friendship formed. As partners in dialogue, we found Mary to act as a bridge-builder, or, as Valkenberg writes: a “God given opportunity” to “understand both the other and oneself better” and “gain a better insight into both the possibilities and the limits of our understanding of God.”¹ In the

¹ Pim Valkenberg, “Comparative Theology as a Pilgrimage,” *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 2023.

summer of 2022, we, Christian and Muslim women interlocutors in dialogue, had the opportunity to participate in the Washington Theological Consortium and the Institute for Islamic, Jewish and Christian Study's first Christian-Muslim Emerging Religious Leaders (ERL) immersion program. In preparation to lead a prayer moment within ERL, and motivated by our own personal affinity and affection for Mary, we began a scriptural reasoning study. Insights from that initial study fed what became the only interreligious prayer moment during the ERL. Several of the world's leading proponents of scriptural reasoning, such as David Ford, Peter Ochs, and Steven Kepnes, describe their scriptural encounters as a ritual. Following them, Marianne Moyaert elaborates on scriptural reasoning as a specific and unique manifestation of interrituality; in other words, an interreligious encounter which occurs ritually.² Our scriptural reading–inspired by personal affinity and informed by scholarship–created a public-facing, sacred moment of interrituality between a group of Christian and Muslim faith leaders. This moment, we found, reflected a contemporary reality of the faith-lived. That the Virgin Mary prompts sincere acts of faith from both Christians and Muslims invites exploration as an interreligious bridge that speaks to our moment in history.

At the same time, we reach to Mary with caution, aware of the ways in which Mary has historically been used as a barrier in Christian-Muslim relations.³ Any attempt to build bridges must also respect the different contexts and presentations of Mary of the New Testament and the Qur'an, and our traditions' interpretations of these texts. *Mary in the Qur'an* systematically lays out how Mariology has historically, for both traditions, been deeply connected to and in tension with Christology—to define who and what Jesus was to the world. Informed by, and grateful to this recent systematic work, and its careful articulation of the interweaving, historical tensions, we prioritize the effort of this study toward what Saqib Hussain describes as “the subtlety and the inherent ambiguity of narrative in place of systematic theological pronouncements.”⁴ The reading of our selected texts on Mary requires us to bring forward and ask questions about the secondary theological effects of that tension, and how emphasis on Christology may damper opportunities for understanding Mary as a model of relationality.⁵

Within this paper, we bring together accounts where God reveals Godself within and through the visceral, embodied experiences of pregnancy, through a side by side reading of two accounts of Mary—one from the Gospel of Luke, the other from Surah Mariam (Q 19). The first account, the story of the

² Marianne Moyaert, *Scriptural Reasoning as a Ritualized Practice*, 2019.

³ George Tvrtkovic, *Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History*, 2019.

⁴ Scholars in Dialogue Presentation: Response to “Perceiving Divinity, Cultivating Wonder: A Christian-Islamic Comparative Theological Essay on Balthasar's Gestalt,” by Axel M. Oaks Takacs, 2023.

⁵ For example, the motif of labor pain.

Visitation, which in the Christian tradition takes place immediately following the Annunciation. Mary, having just learned she will be mother to Jesus, has “experienced this immense moment, but doesn’t let it capture her whole being, and moves with abandon and in charity to help her cousin.”⁶ In a rare moment where two women come together in friendship, God reveals a message through the physical state of Elizabeth, pregnant with the Prince of Justice, marking her and the baby in her womb as the first to recognize and rejoice in Mary and Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Tatari and von Stosch highlight that the Gospel of Luke is the most often referenced of the Gospels in the Qur’an,⁷ but this moment between two women is not held within the Qur’an. This absence invites unique reflections when brought into a Qur’anic account of Mary’s pregnancy and labor, an account that is absent from the Biblical canon. This second account is from Surah Mariam (Surah 19: 22-33), the narrative regarding Mary giving birth to Jesus and the Divine protection. It is a moment in which Mary experiences Divine Support as she embodies strength and surrender coexisting. God doesn’t lift her beyond the experience of the human condition—childbirth—but meets her in it—and provides what she needs: shelter and sustenance in that process.

In considering what it means to be in a relationship, we analyze how these particular Marian texts challenge and transform barriers to encounter. We ask how reading these two accounts together can inform and reframe our traditions’ articulated understandings of God’s relationship to and with humanity, specifically women. From the Christian perspective, this side-by-side reading brings forward questions about what the Catholic tradition means in defining Mary as “the New Eve,” and how Mary as a woman open to Divine encounter, and open to human-to-human encounter, can help us understand God’s intention for humanity. From the Qur’anic perspective, we start to explore the Qur’anic Mary as a stimulus to understand God’s miraculous action exemplified in Mary’s pregnancy, labor, submission, and faith. As stated by Tatari, throughout the experience of pregnancy, Mary develops a profound relationship with God from within herself.⁸

Following the example of the Christian-Muslim authors of *Mary in the Qur’an: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother*, we, Ghada and Kate, start from a place of friendship, of shared personal affinity for Mary, and move to explore two different textual accounts, before coming back together to contextualize how these two particular accounts continue to motivate, shape and sustain particular, real communities of women in the Christian and Muslim traditions. The paper ends with questions

⁶ Interview with Sister Mary Berchmans, Georgetown Visitation Convent, 2023.

⁷ Tatari and von Stosch write: “This scripture (Luke) is also the main source for the veneration of the Virgin Mary within Christianity, which commences very shortly after its writing. Interestingly, it is also the text with which the proclaimer of the Qur’an engages most intensively,” 15.

⁸ Muna Tatari and Klaus von Stosch, *Mary in the Qur’an: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother*, Gingko, 2021, 247.

about how Mary, as a shared exemplar of relationality can guide Christian-Muslim relationships. Thus, the participation in this online conference provides us with the opportunity to deepen our research and to engage with careful, critical-historical and comparative theological work toward the opportunity for mutual learning.

The Divinity of Mary in the Qur'an: From Polemic to History

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Abstract

A challenging notion among the Christian beliefs reflected in Quranic verses is that of the "divinity of Mary", mentioned specifically in Q. 5: 116, which has been subject to many debates, particularly over the recognition of its audience. The book *Mary in the Qur'an*, is one of these efforts that has tried to present a new concept of it by looking at new sources. In this article, I take issue with the book's view and after assessing various interpretations of this verse, from Islamic tradition to Western Quranic scholarships, I take a historical look at available sources from the late antiquity to show that the notion was indeed polemical. The main questions of this article are as follows: How did the notion of the "divinity of Mary" appear in the Quran and in what ways did it come to be understood in the Islamic tradition and Western Qur'anic studies? What is the account provided by "Mary in the Quran", and what are its flaws/disadvantages? Finally, how should Quranic phrases associated with this notion be read so as to overcome the challenges?

I conclude that since "Mary in the Quran" fails to provide of providing sufficient evidence and to adopt a proper approach to its reading of Quranic verses, it is subject to objections and thereof is not very reliable. Besides, the interpretation of this book from the "divinity of Mary", is in contradiction with other parts of the same book. I argue that, to understand the notion of the "divinity of Mary" and to recognition of its audience, we should first note the polemical language of the Quran, and second, we should consider the cultures of the late antiquity.

Against Masculine Discourse in Sacred Texts:

Phenomenology of Qur'ānic Verses in Confronting the Patriarchal Approach

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Abstract

In modern times, the feminist approach to sacred texts, especially the Qur'an, has gained significant importance. This is while in pre-modern times, the approach of commentators on the Qur'an was mainly from a masculine/patriarchal perspective. One of the important methods that enables us to look at the Qur'anic verses from a different perspective than the past, especially the patriarchal approach to them, is the phenomenological approach. According to the phenomenological method, this research seeks to answer the question from a first-person perspective: Has the Qur'an, as one of the sacred texts, been against the dominant masculine norms of its time? Additionally, this research will demonstrate the Qur'an's approach against the masculine discourse by examining the most important verses that have had such a feature concentrating the story of Mary in the Quran and especially the main themes surrounding this story in the book "Mary in the Qur'an: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother."

The story of Mary in the Qur'an is one of the most prominent sections of the Qur'an, showcasing gender equality in various ways. There have been various works analyzing this story in the Qur'an (Ibrahim⁹, 2020; Robinson¹⁰, 2016; Horn¹¹, 2007; Stowasser¹², 1994). Some of these works have specifically focused on a patriarchal approach to the Qur'an and highlighted evidence of patriarchal

⁹ Ibrahim, M. Zakyi, 'Ibn Ḥazm's theory of prophecy of women. Literalism, logic, and perfection.' In: *Intellectual Discourse* 23 (2015) 75–100.

¹⁰ Robinson, Neal, 'Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an: Some neglected affinities.' In: *Religion* 20 (2016) 161–175.

¹¹ Horn, Cornelia 'Mary between Bible and Qur'an: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the Protoevangelium of James on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt.' In: *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 18 (2007) 509–538.

¹² Stowasser, Barbara Freyer, *Women in the Qur'an, traditions, and interpretations*, New York – Oxford 1994.

and egalitarian attitudes (Neuwirth¹³, 2010). Others have emphasized the anti-patriarchal approach and opposition to male norms during the time of the Prophet, particularly in the story of Mary (Buisson¹⁴, 2016). Still others have considered Mary's relationship with Jesus as inspired by other prophets in the Qur'ān and given her a prophetic role (Abboud¹⁵, 2014). However, one prominent work that has provided a comprehensive and well-analyzed approach to the story of Mary is the book "Mary in the Qur'ān: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother." The authors have effectively highlighted evidence of anti-patriarchal attitudes in various sections of the book. It is mentioned that granting Mary's mother's prayer and giving her a daughter challenged the patriarchal tradition during the time of the Prophet. "By responding to Mary's mother's prayer of supplication in an unexpected way and giving her a daughter, it seems to us that God was inciting her to call into doubt a central privilege of the patriarchal tradition, which to a large extent still preoccupies Judaism and Christianity today." (254-255) Furthermore, the Qur'ān's attention to Mary's work in the temple also represents a change in the social capacity of women during Mary's time and the Prophet's time:

"For God's initiative serves to underline the fact that a woman is able to serve in the Temple, and hence naturally also in the synagogue or church, and is permitted to be ordained to perform such a role Here God himself initiates a rupture of social norms, and it is the young Mary who exemplifies these new possibilities for women to serve in a liturgical capacity... According to her, the text on Mary finds its sounding board above all in the change that ensues in the situation for women with the onset of Islam." (p: 255)

The authors of the book argue that these pieces of evidence are convincing in overcoming the dominant patriarchal traditions in the Arabian Peninsula (p: 255). Although the researchers have correctly addressed the position of verse (Q 3:36) [male is not like a female] in adopting a gender approach (p: 259), the prominent position of this verse in an anti-patriarchal approach has not been considered as it should be. However, attention to the context of the verse shows that there is a high capacity for displaying this approach based on this verse in the Qur'ān . One of the shining parts related to the anti-patriarchal approach in this book is related to Mary's prophetic relationship. This relationship shows itself in two ways: 1- her direct relationship with angels and receiving food in the temple (p: 161), which is not at all consistent with common norms for a woman in a patriarchal society. 2- her relationship with Zachariah, which in the Qur'ān , breaks the norms of male dominance

¹³- Neuwirth, Angelika, 'The house of Abraham and the house of Amram. Genealogy, patriarchal authority, and exegetical professionalism.' In: Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and literary investigations into the Qur'ānic milieu*, Leiden 2010 (*Texts and Studies of the Qur'ān*; 6), 499–532.

¹⁴- Buisson, Johanna Marie, 'Subversive Maryam or a Qur'anic view on women's empowerment.' In: *Crosscurrents* 66 (2016) 450–459.

¹⁵- Abboud, Hosn, *Mary in the Qur'an. A literary reading*, London – New York 2014.

towards Mary in various situations and sets aside patriarchal approaches. “we should also remember that Zechariah is actually appointed as Mary’s guardian in the Qur’anic narrative. But whenever he wants to pursue his typically patriarchal role, it turns out that Mary is already provided for – through divine assistance. In this way, the relationship of the provider and the protégée is turned on its head.” (p: 269)

Based on this, it seems that the book "Mary in the Qur’ān: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother" has developed a very good idea in various places, but this idea needs further development. It appears that the Qur’ān has seriously challenged patriarchal traditions both in the story of Mary and in other positions it takes, and given the repetition of this idea in the Qur’ān, it can be considered intentional. Therefore, the main effort of this article is to focus and develop the central idea that Tatari and Von Stosh have raised in various sections of the book. Accordingly, three categories of relevant verses have been addressed:

1- Verses about Mary, her birth, growth, and puberty; these verses prominently show that the Qur’ān’s connection with Mary is aimed at weakening the masculine gaze that existed in her time, and by granting a daughter to her mother, it shows how a girl can be much more influential than boys who were expected of her (The Qur’ān, 3:36). In her adolescence, she also has a position that Zacharias, as a prophet, asks God to grant him a similar position (The Qur’ān, 3:37). Such a position for a woman challenges the patriarchal idea of continuing the lineage through male offspring and also challenges the idea that only men can attain the highest religious position, namely prophethood. In this story, even the idea that a woman can have a higher position than her contemporary male prophet is presented as normal.

2- Women’s authority and governance in the Qur’ān: This category of verses either shows women’s authority for all human beings, including men and women, against the patriarchal approach (The Qur’ān, 66:11-12), or by portraying a desirable image of women’s governance, it shows that women can also accept and achieve the highest social positions in the best possible way. Such an approach against the masculine discourse is even more progressive and desirable in modern times.

3- Confronting the patriarchal discourse of the Prophet’s audience. Unlike the first two categories, which are related to the era before the revelation of the Qur’ān, this category of verses is dedicated to the Prophet’s audience’s patriarchal traditions; positions that gave preference to boys over girls and yet attributed girls to God (The Qur’ān, 53:21-22; 52:27). It also severely criticizes the false traditions among the Arabs that made them angry and ashamed of giving birth to daughters (The Qur’ān, 16:58-59). The results of this research show that the phenomenological approach to the Qur’ān demonstrates numerous evidence of a discourse against the masculine approach in the Qur’ān . Of course, this does not mean that patriarchal approaches or even anti-women attitudes are not

observable in the Qur'ān; rather, it criticizes the prevalent view that the Qur'ān is merely a representative of the patriarchal approach and shows its rival approaches.

Fashioning Maryam: *Hijāb*, Collective Memory, and Materiality of the Qur'anic Mary

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Abstract

This article discusses the imagination of modern society in perceiving the dress style of Mary as holiest female figure in the Qur'an. Muslims recognize Mary's persona as emblematic of purity and piety, taken together the moral values extracted from her story in Qur'anic narrative, and modesty idea from Mary's body depicted in artistic medium. Magdy and Naby shed lights on the portrayal of Mary in multifaceted Islamic arts during Abbasid era and witnessed the headdress in every single of them. The presentation of Mary in the Iranian film "Maryam Mughaddas" directed by Shahriar Bahrani visually illustrates her figure in a multi-layered veil, showing Mary's bodily imagination that symbolically expresses purity. The portrayal of Mary, visually illustrated wearing a veil and fully covered attire, represents the prevailing perception within the Muslim community regarding the appearance of such Qur'anic Mary.

The veil or head-covering garment itself has evolved into fashion element that not only sets the standard for Muslim women appearance in their pursuit of piety, but also serves as a symbol of religious identity. Veiling has become a common and mandatory practice among Muslim women in multiple countries which frequently sparks controversies due to allegation of oppression to their profound faith in wearing a headdress. The perception of veiling as a pious fashion has been repeatedly addressed in various studies, such as the work of Elizabeth Bucar who investigates Muslim women's modest clothing including headdress in three different locations, and Katherine Bullock who examines the hijab as representation of piety. The practice of veiling and body-covering appear to be a rendition of the Companions such 'Aisha bint Abu Bakr, given the regular manner of Islamic literature to refer the early Muslim community when discussing fatwas and defining piety. The female figures of the early Islamic era served as role models in terms of appearance, considering the assumption that they were the initial recipients of Qur'anic revelation, thus making them the most credible examples. Hence, the idea of veiling and covering the body stands as the foremost cornerstone of appearance, asserting itself as quintessentially Islamic and drawing reference from the Qur'an

Examining how the female prophet's companions are perceived as ultimate role models for Muslim attire, along with the portrayal of Mary's body in veil and covered dress, both instances share the notion of modesty and honor in a visual manner. They share a pattern, symbol, and image to convey how the idea of modesty, honor, and also chastity has shaped within Muslim community in the form of dress code. This study adapts the Jungian archetype to illuminate the fashion matter of Mary's figure as a collective material memory recurred in early Muslim women's clothing. Mary's fashion acts as a prototype of modesty that is collectively inherited in the memory of Muslim community, in line with the clothing behaviour of female companions recorded in hadith narrations. The disparity revealed by the differences in temporal and situational contexts highlights the contrast between the documentary and archaeological evidence of clothing worn by early Muslim women and the figure of Mary as envisioned by the Qur'an reader community.

However, there is a limited amount of academic discourse discussing the Mary's body within the realm of her fashion or dress style. In addition, despite the specific discussions concerning the portrayal of Mary's body, those studies approach the topic from a perspective that differs from the Qur'anic view. Most previous studies on Qur'anic exegesis research focusing on Mary's persona have revolved around her personality and her status within the family and social community. The work of Hosn Abboud which is devoted to Mary herself, doesn't discuss her visual appearance in terms of clothing, the same goes for other studies about Qur'anic Mary such as Neuwirth who focused on the intertextuality of Surat Maryam to Biblical tradition. The closest study related to the discussion of Qur'anic Mary's body is presented in Muna Tatari and Klaus von Stosch's work titled "Mary as an Aesthetic Role Model," which doesn't even imply Mary's physical appearance, especially in terms of fashion. The scarcity of discussions regarding Mary's figure also occurred in tafsir literature which hardly touch upon matters of materiality on Mary's appearance. This is in stark contrast to the artistic depictions of Mary which claim to draw from the Qur'an. The term "ḥijāb" in Q. Maryam (19): 17 can serve as a guide to uncover the imagination of Mary's fashion, aligned with the traditions of clothing among early Muslim women and consideration on the shift of ḥijāb's meaning from a "barrier" to a "head-covering attire".

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology, employing a literature review as the primary data collection method. Diverse sources addressing the portrayal of Mary and the clothing practices of early Muslim women, in conjunction with artworks such as paintings and movies depicting Mary, serve as subjects of analysis. The aim is to elucidate the imaginative perceptions of Qur'an readers concerning Mary's attire, a subject not explicitly mentioned in Surat Maryam. This study confines its research scope to the domain of materiality embodied in Mary's dress style. It delivers this exploration in a descriptive and analytical manner to unveil how the imagination of Mary is shaped by a collective

memory that shares patterns and symbols with the attire of early Muslim women. This research essentially examines the aesthetic manner that portrays Mary as a role model with adaptation from Tatari and von Stosch's work aforementioned. Mary's fashion which part of her visual appearance is regarded as a frequently neglected aspect, thus the idea of locating Mary as an aesthetic role model lead this research to a more specific and tangible discussion.

The imaginative clothing style of Mary envisaged by the community of Qur'an readers assumes a reconfiguration of the "ḥijāb" in Surat Maryam as the source of this imagination. This form of reconfiguration serves as basis argumentation to rethink the fashion of Mary in more Qur'anic context. Among the tafsir literature, interpretations of "ḥijāb" vary, with scholars like al-Baidawi and Jalaluddin al-Mahalli referring to it as a veil or curtain, while others like az-Zamakhshari and at-Tabari emphasize its general sense as a covering. Ar-Razi on the other hand, interprets "ḥijāb" as a barrier between Mary and those behind her mihrab, aligning with the notion of protection and concealment. Interestingly, the basis for this "ḥijāb" installation extends beyond concealing Mary's state of purification from menstruation--as predominantly expounded in tafsir--, but "ḥijāb" also functions to shield her from the view while she uncovers her head covering. These various interpretations of "ḥijāb" reveal how exclusive Mary's clothing style was; the additional layer of protection, which conceals her body and positions her in such a secluded manner, underscores how her attire effectively separates her from much of society's gaze.

The imagination of Mary's figure in fashion manner, namely cloaked in a head-to-toe covering, appears to be applied as a symbolic code of Muslim women dress that references the attire of the female companions of Prophet. The authority held by these figures within Muslim community and ethical similarities they share in dressing practices are significant links to be connected and evaluated in the study of aesthetic aspect of Qur'anic Mary. Female companions in the time of Prophet Muhammad were the first readers of the Qur'an, thus their behaviour became an exemplar model for Muslim community. Their clothing styles, culturally influenced by preceding societies and eventually adapting after the revelation, serve as fragments of a sartorial archetype—a concept explaining shared patterns, symbols, and myths within the collective memory of the society. The imagery of Mary's headdress and the clothing of early Muslim women which both contributing to body concealment and veiling, constitute elements of this archetype that underpin the argumentation of this research.

The imagination of Mary's figure, depicted in a wide and long veil, expresses her purity, sanctity, and her inherent dignity. The modest attire associated with Maryam in various artistics medium such as paintings, mosaics, calligraphy, films, and literary works like poetry, reflects the imagination of modern muslim community that continues to appreciate and constantly reinterpret Mary's figure as a

symbol of purity. Her inspirational life story, drawn from the narratives in the Quran, has yielded numerous lessons, wisdom, and values that remain highly relevant to contemporary circumstances. Mary is often regarded as a bridge for interfaith discussions, argumentation of gender equality, testament to the power of God, and a symbol of the most pious female servants. Moving beyond the discourse surrounding Mary's persona, this study highlights the material aspects that center on the modern imagination of her dress style, while emphasizing the core aspect of her purity and piety as presented in the Quran, which serves as the primary focus of this research.

Islamic Debates on Mary's Prophethood

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Abstract

Medieval Islamic scholars engaged in a debate about whether women could hold the role of prophetess, with the majority opposing this notion. However, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), a prominent polymath from Andalusia, passionately argued for the possibility of prophethood for women and highlighted four notable women mentioned in the Qur'an as prophetesses. He considered Moses' mother a prophetess due to her reception of divine revelation, as told in the Qur'an (28:7). He believed that Pharaoh's wife, known as Āsiya in Hadith sources, who protected Moses, earned the status of a prophetess by being praised in the hadiths. He also regarded Sāra, the wife of Prophet Abraham, as a prophetess as she received divine messages through the angels she was able to see (11:71-73; 51:29). Lastly, he recognized Mary as a prophetess due to her reception of divine communication through the appearance of an angel (3:42-47; 19:17-21). Another scholar who particularly emphasized Mary's prophethood was al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), a renowned Andalusian exegete.

Since the Qur'an restricts *risālah* only to men (12:109; 16:43; 21:7), Ibn Ḥazm attributes *nubuwwah* to these women drawing on the distinction between the two terms. *Nubuwwah* and *risālah* are the terms employed within Islamic terminology to denote the concept of prophethood. The words *nabī* and *rasūl* are used in the Qur'an to convey the notion of a prophet, and no inherent differentiation is expressed in the Qur'an. However, in scholarly discourse, there is generally a distinction drawn between these two terms. Muslim scholars commonly classify *rasūls* as messengers who were bestowed with a religious law (*sharī'a*) presented in the form of scriptures. On the other hand, *nabīs* are regarded as prophets who received divine messages but were not bestowed with a *sharī'a* of their own, consequently adhering to the *sharī'a* given to the *rasūls*.

Whereas prominent commentators like al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), and al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1319) briefly dismissed the concept of Mary's prophethood, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) extensively wrote against it. His opposition was primarily rooted in the absence of explicit statements in the Qur'an and the hadiths designating Mary as a prophetess. To substantiate his argument, Ibn Kathīr also claimed that Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī opposed the idea of female prophethood.

The medieval debate surrounding Mary's prophethood has received limited attention from contemporary Western scholars, with only a few authors briefly addressing the matter. Barbara Freyer Stowasser, for instance, asserts that Mary's prophethood defended by Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī was strongly rejected as a heretical innovation by consensus-based Sunni theology. Stowasser argues that this rejection was grounded in the authority of verses 12:109 and 16:43, as well as considerations of purity. However, she does not provide a source to substantiate her viewpoint. Maribel Fierro focuses on the polemic surrounding female prophecy in 10th and 11th century Andalusia. She contributes to the discussion by contextualizing the debate within Islamic theological disputes and the historical developments of the time when Christian conversions to Islam peaked. Hosn Abboud reads the debate as the result of distinction between the Islamic East and West. She concludes that "Western" scholars, like Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī, advocate a pro-woman stance, while "Eastern" scholars, like al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī, adopt an "androcentric" approach.

A comprehensive study regarding Mary's prophecy was published by Younus Y. Mirza in the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* in 2021. In this study, Mirza extensively discusses the writings of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī, which advocate for the notion of Mary's prophethood, and the writings of Ibn Kathīr, which counter the notion. In his conclusion, Mirza challenges the perspective that highlights a dichotomy between Eastern and Western Muslim scholars in their approaches towards women. He further connects the fact that Mary's prophethood was not widely accepted by Muslim scholars to the dominance of Ibn Kathīr's commentary in Islamic scholarship. He states, "Attitudes towards Mary's prophetic status could have been entirely different if al-Qurṭubī's tafsīr had become more widespread, and overtaken Ibn Kathīr's in popularity."

Mary in the Qur'an also offers an insightful subchapter titled "Was Mary a prophet?" In this section, after introducing the Andalusian scholars who advocated Mary's prophethood, such as Ibn Ḥazm and al-Qurṭubī, the author emphasizes the importance of the historical Muslim Spain as a significant example for contemporary interfaith conversations. She also makes a great effort to find other examples that transcends the Andalusian context. In this sense, she interprets al-Ghazzālī's hermeneutical theory in a manner that indirectly supports Mary's prophethood. Furthermore, she expresses her optimism about discovering more non-Western examples like Ghazzālī's view. This part of the book makes a significant contribution to the discussion by demonstrating striking similarities between Mary and the other Qur'anic prophets.

Interestingly, the aforementioned researchers have overlooked a significant piece of information: Al-Ash'arī (d. 935/6), one of the founders of the orthodox theology, regarded Mary as a prophetess, as he emphasized the prophethood of the four women mentioned in the Qur'an. Although this belief is not found in the extant books of al-Ash'arī, it was attributed to him by Ibn Fūrak, Abū Bakr Muḥammad

ibn al-Ḥasan (d. 1015/6), a notable theologian who compiled al-Ash'arī's teachings. While early theologians either disagreed with or remained silent about this viewpoint of al-Ash'arī, transmitted through Ibn Fūrak, later Māturīdī theologians consistently identified it as one of the disagreement points between the Ash'ariyya and the Māturīdiyya. As a result, the contemporary research on the topic in question should be reevaluated in the light of this missing information. For instance, the distinction drawn between "Western" and "Eastern" scholars, the assertion that there is a "consensus within Sunni theology on that Mary's prophethood is a heretical innovation," and the assertion linking the rejection of Mary's prophethood by the majority to the popularity of Ibn Kathīr's tafsīr, should all be revised.

My paper aims to enhance the ongoing scholarly discussion by incorporating the overlooked elements, thus offering a comprehensive understanding of the historical debates surrounding Mary's prophethood in both medieval and pre-modern contexts. By filling these gaps, my work seeks to facilitate more well-founded conclusions in future studies on the topic. The paper will begin with a comprehensive survey of existing literature on the subject. Then, it will delve into an analysis of the arguments put forth by various scholars, with a particular emphasis on al-Ash'arī as well as other Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians. Within this examination of scholars' viewpoints, I will particularly focus on identifying fallacies that have not been thoroughly examined in contemporary research. In this way, I anticipate making a significant contribution to both the conference and the forthcoming edited volume that is scheduled for publication. I also hope to respond to the author's invitation in *Mary in the Qur'an* by providing non-Andalusian examples that argue for Mary's prophethood.

“I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before this!”

– Maryam’s Labor Pains as Part of the Qur’anic Ethos

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Abstract

The Qur’an describes Maryam’s labor which fits within the larger Qur’anic framework of acknowledging mothers’ pain in giving birth and work in nursing. It further addresses the Christian debate in late antiquity of whether Maryam experienced labor pains which connects to arguments around the divinity of Jesus. In their book *Mary in the Qur’an Friend of God, Virgin, Mother*, Muna Tatari and Klaus von Stosch highlight the fact the Qur’an speaks to this debate and that “Consequently, the heavy emphasis on Mary’s birth pains in the Qur’an is remarkable”.¹⁶ For instance, as the pangs of labor arrive, she cries out “I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before this!” (19:23). Commentators have debated the meaning of this phrase with some finding it to be blasphemous: was Maryam rejecting the divine decree in giving birth?¹⁷ At first Maryam seemed to accept God’s command when the angel first appeared but now she wishes death upon herself?¹⁸ This statement is further unique to the Qur’an as in the canonical Bible “Mary does not complain; instead, she sings a song of praise, the Magnificat: “My soul magnifies the Lord...” (Luke 1:46-55).¹⁹ Some scholars have “speculated that Mary was reacting to the shame that the birth of a child out of wedlock would bring upon her family and their honor. According to such interpretations, death would be a

¹⁶ Muna Tatari and Klaus von Stosch, *Mary in the Qur’an Friend of God, Virgin, Mother* (S.l. : GINGKO LIBRARY, 2021), 134.

¹⁷ For instance, the Study Qur’an notes that “al-Razi observes that longing for death is often the response of the righteous to suffering, as they refuse to abandon their moral or spiritual duties, but are nonetheless fearful of or saddened by the consequences that may result...On a spiritual level, Mary’s statement can be understood as expressing the ultimate victory against the worldly ego, for it indicates that she wished not only to withdraw from and forget the world, but also to be utterly forgotten by it”; *Study Qur’an*, 770

¹⁸ As Rita George-Tvrtković notes, “Another interesting difference between the birth stories is the Qur’an, where Mary is described as delivering Jesus under a palm tree and is miraculously provided with dates to eat (19:22-25). Neither the Bible nor the Protoevangelium mention a palm tree or dates, but these details can be found in other Christian apocryphal texts like the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, the *Apocryphal Gospel of Matthew*, and the *Book of Mary’s Repose*”; George-Tvrtković, 11.

¹⁹ George-Tvrtković, 2.

lesser evil than the possibility of dishonoring herself and her family.”²⁰ In this reading, Maryam wished death upon herself because of the potential shame she would cause to her and her family for having a child without a husband. However, such an interpretation is suspect because Maryam does not voice such a concern when the Angel first approaches her. Why would she only be concerned about her honor when she was about to give birth and not before?

Rather a more plausible answer is that Maryam cries out when she begins to feel the pain of childbirth which is more consistent with other Qur’anic verses that address the challenges of motherhood, specifically pregnancy and labor. For instance, the Qur’an states that “We have commanded people to be good to their parents: their mothers carried them, with strain upon strain, and it takes two years to wean them. Give thanks to Me and to your parents—all will return to Me” (31:14). After speaking about the importance of monotheism, the divine voice of the Qur’an encourages humanity to be good to their parents, by highlighting the roles of mothers since they become pregnant “with strain upon strain” and nursed them afterwards. Gratitude is connected to both God and one’s parents because of the toil that they spent in giving birth and raising them. In another similar verse, the Qur’an states: “We have commanded humanity to be good to their parents: their mother struggled to carry them and struggled to give birth to him” (46:15). In this verse, labor is specifically mentioned alongside that of pregnancy as a form of struggle that a mother goes through and a reason why children should be good to their parents. Commenting on these verses, some exegetes observe that the Qur’an makes a general proclamation to be good to one’s parents, but specifically mentions the struggles and hardships of mothers. One commentator even states that these verses “indicate that [the mother’s] rights are more” and there are various prophetic traditions that support this.²¹ Modern scholars also note that in the Qur’an “The role of mothers — women who conceive, give *birth* and sustain infants through the period of lactation — is noted with respect. Muslims are commanded to ‘honor the mothers that bore you’ (4:1) and to show kindness to parents”.²² Moreover, the Qur’an uses labor metaphors to discuss the end of time. For instance, in the chapter of the Earthquake (*Zalzalah*) the

²⁰ Asma Sayeed, “Mary,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Here Saritoprak states that in this verse 19:23 “Her frustration is understandable. This is a woman of chastity and honour and such a woman with such an important place in her society is now facing a social dilemma. She is unable to explain her situation, a situation which had never before happened”; Saritoprak, 96. However, I read this section as Mary complaining about the labor pains, not necessarily concerned here about the reaction of her people, which only comes later. Such a reading corresponds with the larger Qur’anic narrative that emphasizes labor pains and travails of mothers.

²¹ Al-Razi on 46:13.

²² Donna Lee Bowen, “Birth” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 2021).

second verse reads “when the earth throws out its burdens”.²³ The verse personifies the earth as a mother in that it is bringing out the lives within it.

²³ In a similar way, Loren D. Lybarger connects the story of Maryam with the Qur’anic theme of the Day of Judgement. For instance, Lybarger notes, “One event in the Maryam narrative that strikes an apocalyptic tone is the scene in which the pangs of labor fall upon 'Isa's mother. With relentless drive, the story moves directly from the angel's visitation to the girl's withdrawal and ordeal: ‘And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm tree. She said: ‘Oh, would that I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten’ (Q19:22-23); Loren D. Lybarger, “Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur’anic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach,” *The Journal of Religion* 80 (2000): 267. Lybarger makes the connection between particular chapters like *Surat al-Zalzala* which personify earth as a woman and Mary in that they both give birth to what’s within them.