

Textual Silences and Literary Choices in al-Kisāʾī's Account of the Annunciation and the Birth of Jesus

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Abstract

The story of the annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible has been the subject of several recent literary studies that bring up the use of textual silences, and the significance of speech and speechlessness as themes in the text. This paper focuses on three recensions of the story available to us in printed editions of al-Kisāʾī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* in similar vein, through intertextual comparison of these accounts with Mary stories as told in the Qur'an, premodern *qiṣaṣ* collections, and Islamic historiographical sources. By comparing al-Kisāʾī's accounts of the Annunciation with those told in the Qur'an and the wider Islamic Mary corpus it is possible to gain insight into the author's literary agenda, and also into the ways in which he draws on the wider narrative pool for his material, makes reference to the Qur'an, and manipulates theme and characterisation.

Keywords

al-Kisāʾī; Annunciation; Mary; Mary in the Qur'an; *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*; Islamic legends of the prophets; *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*; *Sūrat Maryam*; Isaac Eisenberg; al-Ṭāhir b. Sālīma; Ḥalīd Šibl

Introduction¹

The stories of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible have been the subject of several recent literary studies that bring up the use of silence in the text.² These

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¹ An early version of this paper was presented at the joint IQSA/SBL panel on 'al-Kisāʾī's The Tales of the Prophets' at the 2016 meeting in San Antonio. I would like to thank Carol Bakhos for organising the panel. I would also like to thank Karen Bauer, Marianna Klar, Suleiman Mourad, Walid Saleh, and Shawkat Toorawa for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this article.

² In 2009, two articles that addressed the Annunciation and birth of Jesus were published in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture* (ed. Roberta Serman Sabbath (Biblical Interpretation Series, 98), Leiden—Boston, Brill, 2009). The first of these, "Mary in the Qur'an: Rereading Subversive Births", by Aisha Geissinger (pp. 379–392), explored the Qur'anic accounts given in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* (Kor 3) and *Sūrat Maryam* (Kor 19), while the second, "Mary and the Marquis: Reading the Annunciation in the Romantic Rape Tradition", by Betsy Bauman-Martin (pp. 217–232), addressed the New Testament account in Luke 1. Geissinger and Bauman-Martin approached the material in very different ways, but both undertook literary readings that addressed the issue of textual silences in the respective Annunciation stories: the importance of what is not said as opposed to what is said. More recently, both Shawkat Toorawa and Leyla Ozgur Hasan have commented on the themes of silence and speech in *Sūrat Maryam*, in which the ability of characters to speak, and the divine enjoinder upon them to be silent, are major tropes (see Shawkat Toorawa, "Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19): Lexicon, Lexical Echoes, English Translation", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13:1 (2011), pp. 25–78, and Leyla Ozgur Alhassen, "A Structural Analysis of Sūrat Maryam, Verses 1–58", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18:1 (2016), pp. 92–116). Toorawa's article explores *Sūrat Maryam* in its entirety, at a lexical level, and proposes that "a central idea in *Sūrat Maryam*—besides the obvious theme of the impossibility of God taking a son in spite of His ability to occasion wondrous human births—is that of the power and nature of speech (and

studies have explored how silence functions as a textual device in the Annunciation stories and what these textual silences may signify and, further to this, how the ability of characters to speak, and God's enjoinder upon them to be silent, are major tropes in Qur'anic Annunciation narratives. In this article, I extend this literary discussion of textual and thematic silences to the story of Mary as told in a premodern collection of prophetic stories, al-Kisā'ī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ('Tales of the Prophets'), by comparing the accounts of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus found in three different modern editions of this work with those told in the Qur'an and the wider Islamic *qiṣaṣ* corpus.³ (This article does not, however, address the relationship between the al-Kisā'ī Mary story and *tafsīr* literature, nor what has been said in literature on the Biblical and apocryphal Christian Mary stories.) The main aim is to explore the extent to which al-Kisā'ī's account relates to the Qur'anic pericopes in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Kor 3) and *Sūrat Maryam* (Kor 19) and is representative of the Islamic *qiṣaṣ* tradition in terms of its use of literary choices and textual silences: how it draws on this narrative pool for its material, how it makes reference to the Qur'an, how it manipulates theme and characterisation to tell its story, and to what end.

As Michael Pregill *et al.* have recently pointed out, the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* have been subject to very little examination and "the relationship of these works to their milieus, to other textual-traditional strands, and to each other ... are all areas of inquiry that remain ripe for exploration."⁴ There is still a broad divide between the study of premodern religious thought and literary output, and the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* fall between these two stools: they have historically been neglected by scholars working in both Islamic studies and Arabic literature, who have tended to dismiss them as having neither religious nor literary merit. In the case of al-Kisā'ī's collection, this situation has been exacerbated by the long-standing barriers between the study of popular and elite literature, which are only recently beginning to be dismantled. The neglect of popular texts is, in fact, underserved: as a literary expression of popular religio-cultural ideas and concepts, the literary merits of al-Kisā'ī's *qiṣaṣ* collection are worthy of consideration.

In what follows, I will first introduce the three editions and their characteristics as recensions of a 'popular' text, and outline al-Kisā'ī's Annunciation story. The al-Kisā'ī narratives will then be compared to those found in the Qur'an and other *qiṣaṣ* accounts. The second section looks at al-Kisā'ī's use of textual silences, and the third at the characterisation of Mary, reading them through the recent discussions of these aspects of her story cited in footnote 2 above. As will become clear, the retelling of the story of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus as told in all three al-Kisā'ī editions does not simply flesh out the story as told in the Qur'an, but reshapes and reframes it so as to fulfil its own, different, literary agenda. Through a process of writing out the textual silences found in the Qur'anic pericopes, and writing in new silences, al-Kisā'ī not only changes the characterisation of Mary, and the way we as readers respond to her persona, but there is a fundamental shift in the underlying theme of the story between Qur'an and *qiṣaṣ*, from that of God's power to His provision for His creation. Last but not least, it will become clear that al-Kisā'ī's account has a distinctive shape that is quite different to those found in the other Islamic Mary narratives explored in this article.

speechlessness). This is developed in multiple ways, all of them lexical" (p. 61). Ozgur Alhassen's article is a literary study that focuses on "the dramatic tension and irony in the subtextual juxtaposition of the signs for secrets maintained and secrets revealed in these verses" (p. 92). Her discussion explores the various "ambiguities and silences" in the Mary pericope in *Sūrat Maryam*.

³ By '*qiṣaṣ*' I am referring in this article not only to *qiṣaṣ* in the strict sense of collections of Islamic legends, but also to accounts of prophetic legendary history found works such as al-Ṭabarī's *History*.

⁴ Michael Pregill with Marianna Klar and Roberto Tottoli, "*Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* as Genre and Discourse: From the Qur'an to Elijah Muhammad", *Mizan* 2:1 (2017), http://www.mizanproject.org/journal-post/qisas-al-anbiya-as-genre-and-discourse/#_ftnref15.

Al-Kisāʾī's *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is, in some ways, a problematic text because, unlike the *ʿArāʾis al-majālis* of al-Thaʿlabī, for instance, we do not have any biographical information about the author: he is not listed in any biographical dictionaries.⁵ It has been presumed that this is because his *qīṣaṣ* collection has historically been regarded as being a work of popular literature, used by medieval storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) rather than a respectable work of elite culture, and that the attribution of the work to his name is simply a literary trope.⁶ This perception of the corpus is reflected in Tilman Nagel's description of the text as "the vivid expression of the religious feeling of the average mediaeval Muslim".⁷ The earliest manuscript we know of is a British Museum manuscript dated 617/1220. Other manuscripts date from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards and, according again to Nagel, "differ considerably in size, contents, and even arrangement of stories."⁸ The general consensus among scholars seems to have been that the manuscript corpus is very unstable, and it has been implied by some that the attribution of the name al-Kisāʾī to collections of prophetic legends might be just a narrative convention.⁹

This article focuses on the story of the Annunciation and birth of Jesus in three print editions of al-Kisāʾī's *qīṣaṣ* collection, on the basis that, these can be said to represent strands of the current, living textual tradition of this work (the editions all claim, to varying degrees, to be critical editions based on a number of manuscripts). As mentioned above, al-Kisāʾī's *Qīṣaṣ* has historically been classified as a work of popular literature, both within the Islamic literary tradition, and in Western scholarship. If one accepts this classification, whether one subscribes to the idea that it was originally an individually authored work that has been treated as a popular narrative within the Islamo-Arabic literary tradition, or to the more extreme position that the attribution of the collection to al-Kisāʾī is a narrative convention, this means that any attempt to reconstruct a manuscript stemma becomes problematic. Even within elite literary culture, there was often a degree of flexibility involved in the copying and transmission of texts, although this is less true of later Arabo-Islamic literary culture, in which texts had stabilised and there was a professional academic structure within which texts were produced and transmitted.¹⁰ Popular works such as the *sīras* are certainly significantly

⁵ For more on the identity of al-Kisāʾī, see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*, Richmond, Curzon, 2002, pp. 151–152.

⁶ This attitude has persisted into modern Western scholarship on the genre. As Michael Pregill *et al.* point out, "It was long ago postulated by Nagel that Thaʿlabī's *qīṣaṣ* is the more 'orthodox' and scholarly distillation of this material while Kisāʾī's work—still of uncertain provenance—represents a more popular presentation of it." (Pregill *et al.*, "Introduction").

⁷ T. Nagel, "al-Kisāʾī", *EP*.

⁸ This is echoed by Ján Pauliny's statement that "aus der grossen Menge der erhaltenen Abschriften wurden wir kaum zwei finden, die sich ihrem Inhalt und Umfang nach decken würden. Ja, wir würden sogar kaum ein und dieselbe Legende finden, die wenigstens in zwei Handschriften identisch eingetragen wäre" ("Even among the large number of extant manuscripts, we can barely find two which are comparable in scope and contents. Indeed, we can barely find one instance of a single legend that is provided identically in two manuscripts") (J. Pauliny, "Kisāʾī's Werk *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*", *Graecolatina et Orientalia* 2 (1970), p. 191–282, at p. 201, cited here from Marianna Klar, "Textual Stability in al-Kisāʾī's Shuʿayb Narrative", paper delivered at the "Islamic Stories of The Prophets: Semantics, Discourse, and Genre" conference held in Naples on 14–15 October 2015. I would like to thank Marianna for sharing this paper with me).

⁹ Further to Ján Pauliny and Tilman Nagel's work, with the exception of Klar's paper on "Textual Stability", to my knowledge there has been no systematic comparison of different variants in detail to determine the limits of variation in the al-Kisāʾī corpus.

¹⁰ As Klar points out in "Textual Stability", Travis Zadeh has recently noted, scribes and editors routinely "mixed and matched" material, even when reproducing manuscripts in high-culture genres, and "across a range of genres, from exegesis to historiography, it was common for transmitters (*ruwāt*) to expand and improve upon the material that they inherited" (Travis Zadeh, "Of Mummies, Poets, and Water Nymphs: Tracing the Codicological Limits of Ibn Khurradadhbih's Geography", *Abbasid Studies IV: Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies, Leuven, July 5–July 2010* (2013), pp. 8–75, at p. 53). He later goes on to say "While [the] variants

unstable: there is a degree of licence permitted in their telling and retelling which is looser than that found in high-culture texts, and they can also have distinctive regional traditions.¹¹ However, the fact that they are unstable does not detract from the literary qualities of the individual recensions (or indeed the narrative corpus), or from their importance as expressions of religio-cultural concepts and beliefs. If literature is conceived on a sliding scale from high-culture, elite works to orally transmitted folklore, then, from what we know about the performance and transmission of Arabic popular and folk literature, narratives such as al-Kisāʾī's *Qīṣaṣ, Sīrat Sayf b. Ḍī Yazan*, and *Alf layla* exist somewhere in the middle of the spectrum: they were transmitted as written texts (rather than orally), and were read rather than orally composed or recited from a prompt manuscript.¹² Above and beyond this, in premodern Arabic literary culture generally, the degree of freedom that transmitters have to play with the text they are transmitting seems to have depended upon a perception of how important it is that each narrative is transmitted faithfully: thus the Qur'an must be transmitted verbatim, whereas the *siyar šaʿbiyya* operated under different rules, according which their "truth" was more fluid.¹³ In the case of the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, the fluidity of the various legends was clearly circumscribed by the relationship between these texts and material relating to the prophets in the Qur'an, but was also limited by the long provenance of these narratives in an extra-Qur'anic context. As will become clear, there is a tension between the archetypal stability imposed on Islamic *qīṣaṣ* by Qur'anic elements and the more flexible use of extra-Qur'anic material drawn on by the authors of the various other works containing *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* referenced in this article.

The earliest of the three editions discussed in this article is the Eisenberg edition, published in 1922–1923, which has been the primary source for al-Kisāʾī's *Qīṣaṣ* in the Euro-American academy since its publication.¹⁴ It is based on a Leiden manuscript (Leiden 89/1068), dated 781/1379, which Eisenberg supplemented with information from München 444 and München 445 (dated 1088/1677 and 1150/1737 respectively). Eisenberg's edition has been criticized on the basis that he added material in without indicating where this was done, "thus reconstructing a text with no textual consideration nor clear justification in a corpus of many

may be authorial, they could also indicate a later process of 'determined variation,' whereby subsequent scribes of editors intentionally improved the text, a practice entirely in keeping with the reception and reinscription of manuscript culture. Given the range and nature of these variants, the shortcomings of subjecting the *Masālik* to the artificial strictures of a critical edition are legion. The very artefact of the critical edition forces us to trace after a vanishing horizon of authorial intention, while often arbitrarily bracketing out variants as either earlier stages of composition or signs of spurious contamination" (p. 59).

¹¹ See, for example, the discussion of narrative stability in *Sīrat Sayf b. Ḍī Yazan* in Helen Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings in Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan: An Intertextual Reading of an Egyptian Popular Epic*, Leiden, Brill, 2016, pp. 10–14, 20–22.

¹² Lane, in his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* reports that *Alf layla* and *Sīrat Sayf b. Ḍī Yazan* were read rather than recited/composed orally, and states that he is informed that the high prices of manuscripts are said to be the reason that these works were no longer performed (E.W. Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, The Hague & London, East-West Publications, 1978, pp. 21–22).

¹³ The popular *sīra*'s are given defining shape by their hero, main protagonists, and plot structure in the very widest sense. In addition, they demonstrate coherence in the early stages of the narrative in which the hero's birth and childhood are related, i.e. during the establishment of the hero's heroic identity, after which the different recensions often diverge widely. However, the different tellings of the *sīras* are given narrative unity, despite their sprawling and seemingly chaotic structures, through their consistent use of theme within their specific story patterns, through using as building blocks small interchangeable narrative episodes that share a distinctive theme within the plot structure. For more on the compositional techniques of the *sīras*, and by extension other popular narratives, see Peter Heath, *The Thirsty Sword: Sīrat ʿAntar and the Arabic Popular Epic*, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1996, pp. 89–149, and Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, pp. 51–61.

¹⁴ Isaac Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum auctore Muḥammed ben ʿAbdallāh al-Kisāʾī ex codicibus, qui in Monaco, Bonna, Lugd. Batav., Lipsia et Gothana asservantur*, 2 vols, Lugdun-Batavorum, E.J. Brill, 1922–1923.

testimonies displaying a high level of variability,”¹⁵ and for being an incomplete, or shortened, version due to his poor choice of manuscripts with which to work.¹⁶ This edition is available in an English translation, by Wheeler Thackston Jr, published in 1978.¹⁷ The second edition is al-Ṭāhir b. Sālīma’s 1998 edition, which is based on a much later Tunisian manuscript dating from 1220/1805 (Dār al-Kutub al-Waṭāniyya, Tunis, 6219), and gives details of variations with a number of other manuscripts.¹⁸ The most recent edition was published in 2008 by Ḥalīd Šibl, and relies on a single manuscript in the author’s possession, dating from 1274/1858.¹⁹

Comparison of these three editions indicates that, while the core narrative is stable and consists of the same basic episodes taking place in the same order, and there are many instances of shared vocabulary and duplicated material, there are some significant differences between the three texts. (In fact, the differences between the accounts given in the printed editions seem to be greater than the differences Ibn Sālīma finds between the manuscripts he uses in his edition.) The most striking difference takes the form of additional/missing material. However, these additions/omissions are, as will become clear, thematically coherent: they explore the same underlying themes and highlight certain aspects of the Mary narrative that are characteristic of al-Kisā’ī’s “vision” of her story, which, as again will become clear, bears significant differences to the Mary story in Islamic accounts by other authors. The Mary narrative in Eisenberg is the most concise of the three accounts, and provides a relatively ‘bare bones’ narrative. The Šibl account adds in some further detail in places, but is essentially the same in that it gives the same episodes in the same order. However, the Ibn Sālīma account contains a significant amount of material not found in the other two, including a remarkable extended account of the annunciation to Zachariah that contains material which is not present in any of the other *qiṣaṣ* I have looked at. The extent of the differences in the actual material can be seen in the fact that the Ibn Sālīma account is just over twice as long as the Eisenberg.

The second aspect of difference is that of format. Whereas the Eisenberg and Šibl editions (henceforth referenced as “Eisenberg” and “Šibl”) comprise a text in which the citations from

¹⁵ Roberto Tottoli, “New Sources and Recent Editions of *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* Works and Literature”, in *Legendaria medievalia: En honor de Concepción Castillo Castillo*, ed. R.G. Khoury, J.P. Monferrer, and J.M. Viguera, Cordoba, Ediciones El Almendro, 2011, pp. 525–539, at p. 527.

¹⁶ On the stability of al-Kisā’ī’s *Qiṣaṣ* and for a critique of Eisenberg’s edition, see T. Nagel, “Die *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*. Ein Beitrag zur arabischen *Literaturgeschichte*” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1967); Pauliny, “Kisā’īs Werk”; J. Pauliny, “Literarischer Charakter des Werkes Kisā’īs *Kitāb qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*”, *Graecolatina et Orientalia* 3 (1971), pp. 107–125; and Ján Pauliny, “Some Remarks on the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* Works in Arabic Literature”, tr. Michael Bonner, in *The Qur’an: Formative Interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Formation of the Classical Islamic World, 25) Aldershot, Ashgate Variorum, 1999, pp. 313–326.

¹⁷ Wheeler M. Thackston (tr.), *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā’ī*, Boston, Twayne, 1978.

¹⁸ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kisā’ī, *Bad’ al-ḥalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’ li-l-Kisā’ī*, ed. al-Ṭāhir b. Sālīma, Tunis, Dār Nuqūš ‘Arabiyya, 1998. Ibn Sālīma consulted sixteen manuscripts (six from Tunis, nine from Paris, and one from Damascus), and chose to use the 1220/1805 ms as his base on the grounds that it was the most complete, and the clearest, of the manuscripts he consulted. His edition has a clearer critical apparatus than Eisenberg’s: he provides footnotes giving details of all variations between his 1220/1805 manuscript and two other variants, a Paris manuscript, dated 1160/1747 (Paris, Arabe 1912), and a Tunis manuscript dated 1178/1764 (Tunis, 6159). The level of textual variation Ibn Sālīma finds between the manuscripts he consults is not all that great (although he does not address the issue of whether he deliberately chose similar manuscripts or not). For details of all the manuscripts Ibn Sālīma consulted, see 82–84. As Klar has noted, “The rest of the variations recorded in al-Ṭāhir b. Sālīma’s footnotes are very small, not really any different from the sort of variation exhibited, for instance, in the footnotes to Devin Stewart’s recent edition of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Iḥtilāf uṣūl al-maḍāhib*, a totally different genre of work” (Klar, “Textual Stability”).

¹⁹ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ wa-mawālīd al-anbiyā’*, ed. Ḥalīd Šibl, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008. Šibl gives only a very brief (one page) introduction to the text, which provides no detail about the provenance of the manuscript, and does not contextualize his edition in the wider manuscript corpus.

the Qur'an are woven directly into the narrative, making them an integral part of the story, Ibn Sālīma's edition (henceforth "Ibn Sālīma") incorporates the Qur'anic material it references in a different way, breaking the verses down into short phrases which are glossed, and usually prefacing the gloss with *ya'nī*, "meaning," as in some Qur'an commentaries. Although Ibn Sālīma's account is definitely not *tafsīr*; the way it presents the Qur'anic material by referencing the conventions of the *tafsīr* form means that there is a significant difference in the way it frames its metanarrative; there is a conceptual shift away from the text as storytelling towards the idea of it being commentary on the Qur'anic pericopes in the manner of *tafsīr*. This creates distance between the Qur'anic text quoted and the story it is telling, but also creates distance between the reader, or audience, and the act of storytelling. In similar vein, whereas both Eisenberg and Šibl simply title the beginning of the story (with *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Maryam* ["Account of Jesus, son of Mary"] and *Qiṣṣat Zakariyā wa-Yaḥya wa-Maryam wa-ʿĪsā wa-l-ḥawāriyīn ʿalayhum al-salām* ["The Story of Zachariah, John, Mary, and Jesus, and the Disciples, Peace be upon Them"] respectively), Ibn Sālīma's narrative is broken down into four sections.²⁰

Despite their differences, the texts do, as mentioned above, seem to reflect a coherent legend corpus. The three al-Kisāʾī accounts (not to mention the manuscript witnesses they are based on) may vary in detail and presentation, and Ibn Sālīma's might include additional material that is not found in the other two, but the texts do share a lot of common phrasing and have a strong sense of coherence, in terms of plot, tone, and characterisation, especially when read in the light of other premodern Islamic stories of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus: they consistently make the same narrative choices. The manuscript tradition upon which these editions are based may not be as stable as the more high-culture accounts of prophetic legends (this is a moot point, as the textual stability of these narratives is, as yet, unexplored), but it does seem to be undergirded by a written tradition that is more consistent than has been previously allowed.²¹ On the basis of the comparison of these three editions, it seems unlikely that al-Kisāʾī's Mary story is as fluid as has previously been assumed.

Al-Kisāʾī's Account of the Annunciation and Birth of Jesus

i) Summary of al-Kisāʾī's Account

The al-Kisāʾī Mary story, summarized below, is, as in the Qur'an, closely linked with the story of Zachariah and the annunciation of John. The summary given below is based on the shortest of the three accounts, that found in the Eisenberg edition, with additional information from the other two where they diverge, in both the main text and footnotes.²² Quotations from the Qur'an in the summary are italicized.²³

²⁰ *Ḥadīth Zakariyā' bin Aḍan wa-ʿImrān bin Mātān wa-Yaḥya bin Zakariyā' ʿalayhum al-salām* ("Account of Zachariah bin Aḍan and ʿImrān bin Mātān, and John bin Zachariah, peace be upon them"); *Ḥadīth milād Maryam ʿalayhā al-salām* ("Account of the birth of Mary, peace be upon her"); *Ḥadīth ṭalab Zakariyā' al-walad* ("Account of Zachariah's request for a son"); and *Ḥadīth wad' Maryam ʿĪsā ʿalayhu al-salām* ("Account of the birth of Jesus to Mary, peace be upon him").

²¹ This corroborates Marianna Klar's findings on textual stability in al-Kisāʾī's Šuʿayb narrative, that "The type of variation recorded in the printed editions of the Šuʿayb narrative, however, and in the British Library manuscript version of the same tale, does not seem to me to be in any way suggestive of [an] orally transmitted, fluid text. There seems to me to be every suggestion of a written tradition undergirding the manuscript witnesses." Klar's findings are based on detailed comparison of the Šuʿayb narrative in the three printed editions addressed in this article and one British Museum manuscript (IO Bijapur 76, dated 1049/1639).

²² For the various accounts, see Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, pp. 301–304; Thackston, *The Tales*, pp. 326–328; al-Kisāʾī, *Qiṣaṣ wa-mawālīd*, ed. Šibl, pp. 315–319; and al-Kisāʾī, *Bad' al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, pp. 368–372.

²³ All translations of the Qur'an are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: English Translation and Arabic Parallel Text*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

The story begins with a brief introduction to Zachariah and Imran, who are descendants of Solomon. (In Eisenberg, we are also told that Zachariah's wife is called Elizabeth (al-Saba') and Imran's is Anna (Ḥannā)). This is followed by a short section describing how the angel Gabriel came to Zachariah, who was a carpenter before being called to prophethood, and announced that he was to be sent as a prophet to the Banū Isrā'īl, to call them to God.²⁴ He goes out among the people and preaches; some believe him and some do not. (In Šibl and Ibn Sālīma, we are also told that Imran listens to Zachariah and joins him in his faith.)

Neither Zachariah nor Imran have children. There then follows an account of the conception of Mary, who is the daughter of Imran and Anna. One day, Anna sees a dove sitting in a tree, providing for her young, and weeps. She asks her husband to pray to God that He will bless them with a child.²⁵ (In Eisenberg's and Ibn Sālīma's accounts Imran then receives a divine message in a dream to wake up and lie with his wife, and she will conceive. In Šibl he is simply visited by a voice in his sleep which tells him that God has answered his prayer.) Imran and Anna conceive a child, and Anna promises to dedicate her unborn child to the Temple if it is a boy.²⁶ Imran tells his wife that the unborn child will be a girl, but she nevertheless cites "*Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You: so accept this from me*" (Kor 3, 35).²⁷ Anna takes her daughter to the Temple (which is termed *miḥrāb*²⁸ in all three variants) after she has been weaned.²⁹ Zachariah says that the girl is small and must have someone to provide for her until maturity, when she can become a Temple servant. He volunteers to provide for her, as he is her uncle. However, the other priests insist on casting lots for her. The priests write their names on reed stalks which they cast into the Well of Seloam. Zachariah's reed floats, while the others sink.³⁰

At this point we are told that Imran dies, and that God causes Mary to flower (Ibn Sālīma's narrator quotes Kor 3, 37, *God made [Mary] grow in goodness*, and remarks that she grew as much in one day as a normal child would in a month). Zachariah builds her a secluded place in the Temple, where she resides in solitude, visited only by him and Joseph, her cousin.

²⁴ In Ibn Sālīma's account we are told that Zachariah was sitting in the Temple (*miḥrāb*) of David when Gabriel descended to him.

²⁵ In Šibl's account, Anna cries from sadness at having no child, and tells her husband why she is sad. He suggests to her that they pray. In Ibn Sālīma, Anna begins to cry, and her husband asks her why. She tells him that the bird is providing for its young, but God has not provided them with a son. He suggests to her that they perform ablution and pray.

²⁶ In Eisenberg, we are simply told that they conceive; in Šibl, Imran tells his wife that she is pregnant; and in Ibn Sālīma, Anna tells Imran that she is pregnant.

²⁷ Šibl and Ibn Sālīma include here an explanation that it was the custom of the time to send boys to serve God at the Temple until they reached maturity, at which time they could choose whether to stay or leave. Ibn Sālīma adds a further passage in which Imran tells his wife that if the child she carries is female, she will not be able to be a Temple servant (*muḥarrar*) because she will menstruate. Anna worries until she gives birth. She names the child Mary, and says "*My Lord! I have given birth to a girl!*"—*God knew best what she had given birth to: the male is not like the female*—"I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to your protection from the rejected Satan" (Kor 3, 36). *Her Lord graciously accepted her* (Kor 3, 37)

²⁸ According to Michael Marx, the term *miḥrāb* in the Qur'an is "used to denote a form of arched architecture of a canopied structure [and] occurs mainly in contexts where Christian traditions are being addressed", while the word *masjid* is used to denote Temple in the Jewish context (Michael Marx "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an", in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, Leiden, Brill, 2010, pp. 533–564, at p. 542.

²⁹ Šibl cites "... *I commend her and her offspring to your protection from the rejected Satan*" (Kor 3, 36) here, and Ibn Sālīma cites "*Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You: so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all*" (Kor 3, 35) here instead of above.

³⁰ Ibn Sālīma gives a slightly different account: Anna takes her infant daughter to the Temple where Zachariah is sitting with the other priests. She tells them that God has accepted Mary's consecration to the Temple. Zachariah says that he will provide for her because he is her uncle. The other priests insist on casting lots for her. Zachariah wins and appoints a woman to suckle the baby.

Whenever Zachariah visits her, he finds her provided with fruit; summer fruit in the winter, and winter fruit in the summer (the Eisenberg and Šibl editions both cite extracts from Kor 3, 37 here).³¹ When he asks her about this, she tells him that God has provided for her, and then offers him some of the fruit to eat—the exact combination of fruit differs, but all three variants include grapes, dates, and figs. Zachariah is moved by God’s provision of these fruit to pray to God for a son, citing “*Lord, from Your grace, grant me virtuous offspring*” (Kor 3, 38), on the basis that if God can provide fruit out of season, he can provide an old man and woman with a child. His prayer is heard and Gabriel descends to earth and announces that his prayer will be granted. Zachariah asks for, and is given, a sign: “*My Lord Give me a sign,*” and [the angel] said: “*Your sign is that you will not communicate with anyone for three days, except by gestures*” (Kor 3, 41).³² The Eisenberg and Šibl editions deal with this episode in comparative brevity, but the Ibn Sālīma edition expands on it considerably, as we will see later.

Mary reaches puberty, and one day Zachariah comes to visit her and she tells him she has “seen a horrible thing” (*ra’aytu amran qabiḥan*), that is, begun to menstruate.³³ He sends her to stay with her aunt, and she returns to the Temple when she is “again pure”. (The other two editions have more elaborate variations on this segment, according to which Mary visits Zachariah in his house. He is surprised that she has been able to leave her room in the Temple, as the door was locked and he had the key. She tells him she has “seen a horrible thing”, and came to him with God’s permission and help. Zachariah tells her to go and stay with her aunt until she is pure again. When her menstruation ends, she washes and goes back to God’s service. The Šibl edition has her remaining in Zachariah’s household rather than returning to the Temple). It is at this point that Mary is visited by Gabriel, who proclaims the Annunciation, and the baby Jesus is conceived when he reaches out his hand towards her and breathes into her garments. All three editions are vague when it comes to the actual events of the Annunciation: we are given very few details other than the relevant Qur’anic verses.

³¹ “Whenever Zachariah went in to see her in her sanctuary, he found her supplied with summer fruit in winter and winter fruit in summer, He said, ‘Mary how is it you have these provisions?’ and she said, ‘They are from God’, and ‘Mary how is it you have these provisions?’ and she said, ‘They are from God: God provides limitlessly for whoever He will’” respectively.

³² Šibl quotes from the Qur’an more extensively here, citing Kor 3, 40–41: Zachariah says, “My Lord! How can I have a son when I am so old and my wife is barren?” Gabriel answers, “It will be so: God does whatever He will.” He said, “My Lord, give me a sign”, that is a sign that my wife is pregnant, “Your sign”, [the angel said], “Is that you will not communicate with anyone, that is you must refrain from speaking to them apart from mentioning God, for three days, except by gestures”.

³³ The wording used here is consistent across all three editions, although Šibl has *innī ra’aytu amran ‘aẓīman qabiḥan*. This is relevant to ideas of Mary’s purity. Some exegetes take the position that part of Mary’s purity (mentioned in Kor 3, 42, *The angels said to Mary: “Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women”*) was that God made her free from menstruation (see Jane McAuliffe, “Chosen of all Women: Mary and Fatima in Qur’anic Exegesis”, *Islamochristiana* 7 (1982), pp. 19–28, esp. pp. 20–21). However, others oppose this reading on the grounds that Kor 3, 55 makes reference to God’s “purifying” Jesus later in the pericope using the same verb, *ṭahharaka*. In all three al-Kisā’ī variants Mary is clearly described as leaving the Temple during the time of her menstruation, and this is included in three of the other accounts I have looked at. Ibn Wathīma includes a statement that Mary leaves the Temple to stay with her aunt whenever she menstruates, but has this at a different place in the narrative, before the episode in which Zachariah finds her provided with fruit (see 305), while al-Tha’labī includes a tradition which presents an alternative account according to which Mary goes to the East to wash and purify herself before returning to the Temple, where she is visited by Gabriel (Arabic p. 343, English p. 639). The historian Ibn ‘Asākir includes a different version of the same anecdote (pp. 86–87). Al-Ṭabarī does not mention the subject at all, while only Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī explicitly states that God has *chosen her and made her pure* (Kor 3, 42), i.e. free from menstruation. It is interesting that although Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī does not explicitly mention Mary’s menstruation, he cites this verse at the same point in the narrative structure, after Zachariah is told he will have a son, and immediately preceding the Annunciation. This could imply that he is responding to the inclusion of material relating to Mary’s menstruation in other accounts.

Eisenberg's edition simply tells us that "as we are told in the Qur'anic verses: *Mention in the Scripture the story of Mary* (Kor 19, 16) etc, *We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a normal human* (Kor 19, 17), *she said: "How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste?"* (Kor 19, 20)" before moving on to describe how Gabriel reaches out towards Mary's side and breathes into her body. Šibl's edition prefaces his account with the comment that Mary put on a veil, and Gabriel visited her in the form of a young man, before citing from the Qur'an at greater length.³⁴ According to the Šibl edition, Gabriel blows into the opening at the front of Mary's garment (*ğayb dir'ihā*), the breath enters her womb, and she conceives. Ibn Sālīma's edition contains the longest extract of Qur'anic text, and cites the entirety of Kor 19, 16–19, *Mention in the Scripture the story of Mary. She withdrew from her family to a place east and secluded herself away; We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a normal human. She said, "I seek the Lord of Mercy's protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]!", but he said, "I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son"* She said, "How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste." Gabriel reassures Mary, "This is what your Lord said: 'It is easy for Me—We shall make him a sign to all people,'" following which, we are told, she was calmed by his words (*fa-sakanat Maryam ilā qawlihi*).

John is conceived by Zachariah and his wife on the same day, and while Eisenberg simply states this fact, the story in the Šibl and Ibn Sālīma editions is elaborated: in the Šibl account, Zachariah's wife goes out into the courtyard of the house. God has increased her beauty, so that the other women are astonished. Zachariah wants to say something, but he is unable to speak because of the prohibition on him speaking. The rest of the people learn of Elizabeth's pregnancy and they come to her and congratulate her. Elizabeth later gives birth to John, who is devout and well-mannered. In Ibn Sālīma's version, it is Zachariah who is blessed—he takes on the appearance of a young man of twenty-five. People question him, but he is unable to speak because of the prohibition on him speaking. He thus writes in the earth that he is not permitted to speak for three days, and asks them to go about their business. The text then includes a citation from Kor 19, 11, *he went out of the sanctuary to his people and signalled to them to praise God morning and evening*. The people congratulate Zachariah again, and his wife gives birth to John who, we are told, is found to be more devout than anyone else has ever been when he reaches the age of seven.

When Mary's pregnancy begins to show, she becomes afraid that she will be reviled by her people, but receives a second visitation from Gabriel, who reassures her again, and she is again comforted. Again, while the Eisenberg edition just gives these bare bones of the story, the other two editions are more detailed. According to the Šibl edition, Mary becomes afraid that the Banū Isrā'īl will defame her for her pregnancy. The angels visit her and reassure her with Kor 3, 42–43 *"Mary! God has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women. Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray."* Following this, Gabriel gives her the good tidings of all Jesus' signs, and she is further calmed. The Ibn Sālīma edition builds up the predictions about Jesus by citing more material from the Qur'an here.³⁵

³⁴ "[Mary] said, *I seek the Lord of Mercy's protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]! but he said, 'I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son.'* She said, *How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste.'* Gabriel told her, *'This is what your Lord said: "It is easy for Me—We shall make him a sign to all people, a blessing from Us.'* And so it was ordained."

³⁵ Kor 3, 45–46, *"God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, who will be held in honor in this world and the next, who will be one of those brought near to God. He will speak to people in his infancy and in his adulthood. He will be one of the righteous",* and Kor 3, 48–49 *"He will teach*

There then follows a section in which Joseph realizes that Mary is pregnant and questions her, asking how there can be a child without a father, to which she replies that Adam was without a father or mother, and that her child is a gift from God, citing Kor 3, 59, *Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, 'Be', and he was.* Jesus defends his mother from the womb, and rebukes Joseph, going on, in Šibl and Ibn Sālīma, to admonish him to pray to God and seek forgiveness for his sin in questioning Mary. Zachariah is also aware of Mary's pregnancy, or is told of it by Joseph (in both Šibl and Ibn Sālīma) and is concerned that she might be accused of fornication with Joseph. In both the Eisenberg and Ibn Sālīma editions we are told that word has, in fact, spread as far as King Herod ('Hirdudūs' in Eisenberg, 'Aḥyūš b. Ġandarūš' in Ibn Sālīma), who asks his advisors about her, and is told that she is possessed (Eisenberg) or carrying a jinn in her womb (Ibn Sālīma). In the Eisenberg account, on hearing this, Herod falls silent (*sakata*).

When Mary's time comes, she goes out into the wilderness and seeks refuge under a dry, leafless tree, which flourishes and becomes leafy and green. God also provides a stream of running water for her. When her labour pains become too great, she calls out, lamenting her fate, *"I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before all this!"* but a voice (which could, we are told, be either Jesus or Gabriel) *cried out to her from below, "Do not worry: your Lord has provided a stream at your feet"* (Kor 19, 23–24).³⁶

John is born on the same night, and Zachariah goes to visit Mary in the Temple. When he cannot find her, he sends Joseph to look for her (in Eisenberg they go together). Joseph eventually finds her, still under the tree with her infant baby. She refuses to reply when he speaks to her, but Jesus responds, announcing his prophethood as glad tidings, saying "Joseph, I bring glad tidings that I have emerged from the darkness of the womb into the light of the world. I have come to the children of Israel as a messenger."³⁷ Mary carries her child on her breast and accompanies Joseph (or Joseph and Zachariah) back to the Banū Isrā'īl, who also challenge her. Eisenberg includes a short citation from the Qur'an here (*"Sister of Aaron! Your father was not a bad man; your mother was not unchaste"* (Kor 19, 28)), which is elaborated on in the other two editions.³⁸ Again, the baby Jesus responds on her behalf, announcing his

him the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, He will send him as a messenger to the Children of Israel, [saying] 'I have come to you with a sign from your Lord ...'

³⁶ In Eisenberg, she is told *"So eat, drink, be glad, and say to anyone you may see: 'I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today'"* (Kor 19, 26), while in the other two editions she is told, *"If you shake the trunk of the palm tree towards you, it will deliver fresh ripe dates for you, so eat, drink, be glad, and say to anyone you may see: 'I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today'"* (Kor 19, 25–26). The Šibl edition also cites Kor 19, 23, *and the pangs of childbirth drove her to [cling to] the trunk of a palm tree* here. Ibn Sālīma has: "as we are told in the Qur'an, *she conceived him. She withdrew to a distant place* (Kor 19, 22) then *the pangs of childbirth drove her to [cling to] the trunk of a palm tree* (Kor 19, 23)."

³⁷ The three editions have slight variations in wording: *ubaššir yā Yūsuf fa-qad ḥarajtu min zulumāt al-arḥām ilā daw' al-dunyā wa- sa-ātī ilā Banī Isrā'īl wa-a'ūduhum ilā 'ibādat Allāh 'azza wa-ġalla* (Šibl, p. 318); *yā Yūsuf ubaššir fa-qad ḥarajtu min zulmat al-baṭn ilā daw' al-dunyā wa-sābaqtu ilā Banī Isrā'īl rasūlan* (Eisenberg, p. 304); *fa-qad aḥrajani rabbī min zulumāt al-aḥshā' ilā daw' al-dunyā wa-sa-ātī Banī Isrā'īl wa-a'ūduhum ilā tā'at Allāh ta'ālā* (Ibn Sālīma, p. 372).

³⁸ Šibl includes a longer citation: *"Mary! You have done something terrible!* (Kor 19, 27), something not expected of you or your house, *Sister of Aaron! Your father was not a bad man; your mother was not unchaste!* She pointed at [Jesus]. They said, 'How can we converse with an infant?' (Kor 19, 28–29)". Ibn Sālīma's account has *"She went back to her people carrying the child* (Kor 19, 27), and when they saw her they lamented and said *'Mary! You have done something terrible! Sister of Aaron! ... Your father was not a bad man; your mother was not unchaste!'* (Kor 19, 27–28). Aaron, her paternal uncle, who was one of the elders of the Banū Isrā'īl, approached Mary and asked her, 'Where did you get this baby?' *She pointed at [Jesus]* (Kor 19, 29), meaning 'Ask him', and [the people] struck their faces with their hands and said, *'How can we converse with an infant?'* (Kor 19, 29)."

prophecy for a second time, this time using the words from Kor 19, 30–33, “*I am a servant of God. He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet; made me blessed wherever I may be. He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live, to cherish my mother. He did not make me domineering or graceless. Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on the day I die and the day I am raised to life again.*”³⁹ The Šibl and Ibn Sālīma editions have a short passage here relating that the people then realize that Jesus has no father and was created as Adam was created; Zachariah praises God.

The story ends by telling of how the news of Jesus’ birth had reached Herod, who orders that Mary and her son be killed. Zachariah, fearing for their safety, instructs Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, puts them on a donkey, gives them provisions, and sends them off under cover of night.⁴⁰

ii) al-Kisā’ī’s Text and the Qur’anic Accounts of the Annunciation and Birth of Jesus

The story of the Annunciation and birth of Jesus are addressed in two main pericopes in the Qur’an, the first in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* at Kor 3, 33–49, and the second in *Sūrat Maryam* at Kor 19, 1–34. The *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* pericope begins with the statement that “God chose Adam, Noah, Abraham’s family, and the family of ‘Imrān, over all other people, in one line of descent” (Kor 3, 33–34), and follows this by recounting (in direct speech) Imran’s wife’s dedication of her unborn child to God, and her commendation of her daughter Mary to God when she is born. It then tells the story of Mary’s seclusion in the Temple, where Zachariah finds her “supplied with provisions” and questions her. This is followed by the annunciations to Zachariah and Mary in the Temple, both again taking the form of the actual conversations had by Zachariah and Mary with the angels. The pericope finishes with the angelic predictions of Jesus’ prophethood and deeds. The *Sūrat Maryam* pericope begins with the annunciation to Zachariah, who asks for, and is given, a sign (that he not speak for three days), and a brief segment on John’s virtues. This is followed by a much more detailed account of the annunciation to Mary, who has withdrawn from her family to a place in the East and is visited by “Our Spirit” (*rūḥanā*) in the form of a man, and the birth of Jesus. The birth story follows the same pattern as it does in al-Kisā’ī: in the throes of childbirth Mary clings to a palm tree and laments her fate, whereupon a voice tells her not to worry, and that God has provided her with a stream at her feet, and ripe dates in the palm tree. The pericope closes by recounting Mary’s return to her people and her infant son’s miraculous speech, in which he announces his prophethood.

As has been explored by various scholars, most notably Cornelia Horn and Suleiman Mourad, the account of Mary’s consecration to the Temple and the Annunciation to Mary and Zachariah in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* corresponds with that given in the *Protoevangelium of James*, while *Sūrat Maryam* follows the narrative sequence as it is also found in the Bible in Luke 1–2 and the *Diatessaron*.⁴¹ There are further parallels with other apocryphal Christian texts

³⁹ Šibl and Ibn Sālīma both cite this passage in full, but Eisenberg has a truncated quotation: “*I am a servant of God. He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet* (Kor 19, 30) *Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on the day I die and the day I am raised to life again* (Kor 19, 33).”

⁴⁰ Ibn Sālīma adds the detail that Zachariah chose Joseph because he was a *maḥram* to Mary (a close relative that she could not marry).

⁴¹ See Suleiman Mourad, “On the Qur’ānic Stories About Mary and Jesus,” *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 1:2 (1999), pp. 13–24; Suleiman Mourad, “Mary in the Qur’ān: A Re-Examination of her Presentation,” in *The Qur’ān in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, Routledge Studies in the Qur’ān (London–New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 163–174; and Cornelia B. Horn, “Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels Regarding Jesus’ Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The “Book Of Mary”, the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel Of John*, and the Qur’ān”, *Apocrypha* 19 (2008), pp. 267–291, at p. 281. For more on the relationship between the Qur’anic pericope and the *Protoevangelium of James*, see Hosn Abboud, *Mary in the Qur’an: A Literary Reading*, London–New York,

such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (a reworking of the *Protoevangelium of James* and “the most important noncanonical gospel to provide information about Mary’s life”⁴²), which tells of how Mary gave birth to Jesus under a palm tree, accompanied by the miraculous provision of fruit and water for Mary (in this story provided by Jesus’ command immediately following his birth), or the *Infancy Story of Thomas*.⁴³

Al-Kisāʾī’s story follows the Qur’anic accounts put forward in these two Qur’anic pericopes fairly closely, and quotes them extensively: in fact, the only verses that are not quoted (either in full or in part) are Kor 3, 44–49, which deal with the Annunciation itself, as the text draws on the account in Sura 19 instead, and the verses about John in Kor 19, 12–15.⁴⁴ All three recensions are consistent in generally *only* quoting directly from the *Āl ‘Imrān* and *Maryam* pericopes—they very rarely directly quote from anywhere else in the Qur’an (with one exception, Kor 3, 59, “In God’s eyes, Jesus is just like Adam. He created him from dust, said to him ‘Be’ and he was” which is quoted by Mary when she is questioned by Joseph about the father of her baby). They are also very consistent on exactly where in the narrative they do this and the actual verses that they cite, although Ibn Sālīma quotes at the greatest length, and Eisenberg the least. All three editions cite first from *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (Kor 3) during the initial part of the story that relates the conception of Mary and her consecration to the Temple, switch to *Sūrat Maryam* (Kor 19) for the Annunciation itself, revert to *Āl ‘Imrān* during the episode in which the angels visit Mary to reassure her during her pregnancy, then back to *Maryam* again during their accounts of the birth of Jesus. The only place in which the three editions differ substantially in their use of Qur’anic quotation is in their accounts of Zachariah’s prayer to God for a son, and his visitation by the Angel Gabriel and the annunciation of John, which is considerably expanded in Ibn Sālīma’s edition (and will be

Routledge, 2014, pp. 110–129; Cornelia B. Horn, “Mary Between Bible and Qur’an: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the Protoevangelium of James on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18:4 (2007), pp. 509–538; and Johnathan M. Reck, “The Annunciation to Mary: A Christian Echo in the Qur’ān”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 68 (2014), pp. 355–383.

⁴² Mourad, “Mary in the Qur’an”, p. 167.

⁴³ See Mourad, “Mary in the Qur’an”, pp. 167–168. Mourad traces this story of Mary giving birth against a palm tree back to the Greek myth of Leto’s labour and the birth of Apollo.

⁴⁴ For more on Mary in the Qur’an, see Hosn Abboud, “Qur’anic Mary’s Story and the Motif of the Palm Tree and the Rivulet”, *Parole de l’Orient* 30 (2005), pp. 261–280; Abboud, *Mary in the Qur’an*; Aisha Geissinger, “Mary in the Qur’an”; Samir Ḥalil Samir, “The Theological Christian Influences on the Qur’an: A Reflection”, in *The Qur’an in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, London–New York, Routledge, 2008, pp. 141–162; Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 543–590; Loren D. Lybarger, “Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur’anic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach”, *Journal of Religion* 80:2 (2000), pp. 240–270; Marx “Glimpses of a Mariology”; Suleiman A. Mourad, “From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm-Tree Story Concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur’an”, *Oriens Christianus* 85 (2002), pp. 206–216; Mourad, “On the Qur’anic Stories About Mary and Jesus”; Mourad, “Mary in the Qur’an”; Angelika Neuwirth, “Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus: Reading *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) and Related Meccan Texts in the Context of the Qur’anic Communication Process”, in Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur’an as a Literary Text*, Oxford, Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, pp. 328–358; Angelika Neuwirth, “Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs: A Re-reading of *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* (Q. 3)”, in Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur’an as a Literary Text*, Oxford, Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2014, pp. 329–384; Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, New York–Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 67–82; Toorawa, “*Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19)”; and A.H. Mathias Zahniser, “The Word of God and the Apostleship of ‘Īsā: A Narrative Analysis of *Āl ‘Imrān* (3):33–62”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37:1 (1991), pp. 77–112. See also the additional sources on the relationship between the Qur’anic pericopes and pre-Islamic sources in n. 41.

addressed in more detail below). Eisenberg and Šibl both quote from *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* here, but Ibn Sālīma goes backwards and forwards between *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* and *Sūrat Maryam*.⁴⁵

There does seem to be a tendency to prioritize sura order over chronology of revelation in al-Kisā’ī’s use of Qur’anic material (*Sūrat Maryam* is a middle to late Meccan sura, whereas *Āl ‘Imrān* is a Medinan sura). For example, the annunciation to Zachariah is addressed at the beginning of the pericopes in both suras, but the tendency in al-Kisā’ī is to quote from *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* rather than *Sūrat Maryam*. All three editions do, however, supplement this direct quotation with the addition of paraphrased material taken from other parts of the Qur’an, which write out some of the silences found in the Qur’anic Mary narratives. As both Geissinger and Bauman-Martin point out, the actual act of conception is skated over in the scriptures.⁴⁶ The Qur’an’s description of the event in Kor 19, 16–22 is, indeed, somewhat allusive:

Mention in the Scripture the story of Mary. She withdrew from her family to a place east and secluded herself away; We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a normal human. She said, “I seek the Lord of Mercy’s protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]!” but he said, “I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son.” She said, “How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste.” Gabriel told her, “This is what your Lord said: ‘It is easy for Me—We shall make him a sign to all people, a blessing from Us.’” And so it was ordained: she conceived him.

This textual silence heightens the sense of Mary’s vulnerability and confusion and raises narrative tension: her uncertainty about what is actually happening is mirrored by our own uncertainty. In al-Kisā’ī, this tension is neutralized when it is immediately followed by the clarification that Gabriel reached out his hand and breathed into her side in Eisenberg⁴⁷ and Ibn Sālīma,⁴⁸ or that he blew into the opening in her robe in Šibl’s edition.⁴⁹ The inclusion of this explanation of the act of conception does not just remove our uncertainty, but completely removes all the accompanying ambiguity around the sexual (or rather, very clearly non-sexual) act that is taking place. It is made very clear that there was no violation of Mary’s physical body—Gabriel does not even touch her. This additional information draws on Kor 21, 91 (“Remember the one who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her from Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people”) and Kor 66, 12 (“... We breathed into her from Our spirit ...”), material that was omitted from the pericope in Kor 19 to literary effect. In al-Kisā’ī’s story Mary still has no choice but to accept God’s will (“it was ordained”⁵⁰), but the sense of confusion and potential physical violation engendered by the textual silence in the Qur’anic account has been largely neutralized.

iii) al-Kisā’ī’s Annunciation and the qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’ Accounts

The next observation that can be made about al-Kisā’ī’s Mary story is that it has significant differences to the variants found in the other Islamic narratives I have looked at: ‘Umāra b.

⁴⁵ Ibn Sālīma’s recension starts off by citing the same verse as the other two, Kor 3, 38, but then cites Kor 19, 3–6 and 7, Kor 3, 39, Kor 19, 8, and Kor 3, 40–41 when it describes Gabriel’s conversation with Zachariah. Eisenberg cites only part of Kor 3, 41 here, while Šibl cites Kor 3, 40 and part of Kor 3, 41.

⁴⁶ As Bauman-Martin puts it “the text refuses to describe the actual sexual act, leaving instead a textual-sexual hole” (Bauman-Martin, “Mary and the Marquise”, p. 217).

⁴⁷ *madda Ġibrīl yadahu naḥwa ġanibahā wa-nafāḥa fihā wa-waṣalat al-nafāḥa ilā baṭnihā* (Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, p. 303).

⁴⁸ *fa-madda Ġibrīl iṣba‘ahu ilā ġanbi Maryam wa-nafāḥa fihī fa-waṣalat al-nafāḥa ilā baṭnihā* (al-Kisā’ī, *Bad’ al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, p. 370).

⁴⁹ *fa-nafāḥa Ġibrīl fī ġaybi dir‘iha fa-waṣalat al-nafāḥa ilā baṭnihā* (al-Kisā’ī, *Qīṣaṣ wa-mawālid*, ed. Šibl, p. 317).

⁵⁰ *kāna amran maqḍiyyan* (Kor 19, 21).

Wathīma⁵¹ (d. 289/902), al-Ṭabarī⁵² (d. 310/923), al-Tha‘labī⁵³ (d. 427/1035), Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī⁵⁴ (d. 454/1062), and Ibn ‘Asākir⁵⁵ (d. 571/1176). There appear to be two basic

⁵¹ ‘Umāra b. Wathīma’s account can be found in Raif Georges Khoury (ed.), *Les légendes prophétiques dans l’Islam. Depuis le I^{er} jusqu’au III^e siècle de l’Hégire. D’après le manuscrit d’Abū Rifā‘a ‘Umāra b. Waṭīma, K. Bad’ al-ḥalq wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (Codices Arabici Antiqui, 3), Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1978, pp. 298–321. The narrative takes the form of *ahbār* and contains a lot of additional discussion of various issues, such as the fact that John was the first person to be called John (pp. 307–308). The story begins with genealogical discussion, according to which Imran is the descendent of David and Solomon, and then goes into the story of Anna and the dove. It accords with al-Kisā’ī in then including the episode in which the priests draw lots over Mary’s care, but there is an additional element in which Zachariah becomes unable to care for Maryam, because he is too elderly and feeble, and lots are drawn again to find another guardian for her. Mary sees that her new guardian, Ğurayḥ, is displeased and tells him that God will provide for both him and her. We are then told that whenever Mary menstruates, she leaves the Temple (*miḥrāb*) and goes to stay at her aunt’s house. Next, the story goes on to the episode of the divine provision of fruit to Mary that inspires Zachariah to pray to God for a son. When Zachariah’s son John is three years old, Gabriel visits Mary in the Temple, and the Annunciation takes place. We are then told that Mary had a companion in the Temple, her cousin Joseph, who used to serve her from behind a curtain (*hiġāb*), and he was the first to become aware of her pregnancy. The two used to fetch water from a cave, and Joseph overheard what Gabriel said to Mary when he visited her. The narrative then recounts the episode in which Joseph questions Mary and she defends herself, but in this account Jesus does not speak from the womb.

Mary leaves to the East to give birth, and Joseph and Zachariah go looking for her when they cannot find her in the Temple. They hear the call of a magpie from the tree under which she is resting and approach it. When she sees her people, she carries her baby to meet them. They challenge her, she signals to them in response, and Jesus announces his prophecy.

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī’s *History* gives two accounts of the Annunciation and birth of Jesus (see al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ğa‘far Muḥammad b. Ğarīr, *Tārīḥ al-ummam wa-l-mulūk*, 6 vols, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d., vol. 1, pp. 349–353, and Moshe Perlmann (tr.), *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume IV: The Ancient Kingdoms*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1987, pp. 112–120). The first account does not contain either the story of the conception and dedication of Mary to the Temple found in al-Kisā’ī, or any mention of Zachariah, and has only one episode in common with al-Kisā’ī’s account: Joseph’s confrontation of Mary about her pregnancy. It begins with the story of the Annunciation: in this account we are told that Mary and Joseph, who are Temple servants, used to go to a cave to fetch water in pitchers. On one occasion, Mary goes by herself, and is visited by Gabriel who delivers the Annunciation (following Kor 19, 17–21). The story then recounts the anecdote in which Joseph confronts Mary about her about her pregnancy, and she defends herself and Jesus speaks from the womb. When Mary’s time comes, God warns her to flee as her people will want to kill her baby. After meeting with Elizabeth, whose unborn son John bows to Jesus from the womb, Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt. The birth takes place under a palm tree on the way to Egypt, and retells the story found in Kor 19, 24–27. Idols everywhere are toppled by this momentous event, and the devils that used to inhabit them, unaware of the cause of this consternation, flee to Iblīs, who is on his throne deep in the sea. Iblīs sets out to find out what is going on, and comes across Mary, surrounded by angels who are protecting her. He tries to approach them, but the angels prevent him from doing so, and he returns, defeated, to the devils. That night, Mary and her son are visited by the magi, who had been seeking the birth of a child, as indicated in the Book of Daniel. They are supposed to report to Herod if they find the child, but are warned by an angel that Herod will kill Jesus if they do so. After the birth, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus continue on their way to Egypt.

The second account sticks closely to the pericope found in *Sūrat Maryam*, from which it quotes extensively. It again begins with the Annunciation, following Kor 19, 16–31. It then mentions a meeting between the pregnant Mary and Elizabeth, during which John bows to Jesus from the womb. John is born, and Mary goes out into the wilderness to have her child. This episode follows the birth account in the Qur’an, with the added detail that Iblīs tells the Banū Isrā’īl that she has given birth. The story ends with an anecdote according to which, after Jesus announces his prophethood, the people accuse Zachariah of fathering the child and hunt him down. Iblīs hides Zachariah in his tree, which his pursuers cut through with saws. (Al-Tha‘labī also includes this anecdote in a section on the death of Zachariah).

⁵³ See al-Tha‘labī, Abū Iṣḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’ al-musammā ‘Arā’is al-maġālis*, Beirut, al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, n.d., pp. 333–336, 342–347, and William M. Brinner (tr. and annot.), *‘Arā’is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, or “Lives of the Prophets” as Recounted by Abū Iṣḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha‘labī, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2002, pp. 622–646. Al-Tha‘labī’s narrative seems to be closer than al-Ṭabarī’s to the Qur’anic version, and al-Kisā’ī, in the initial stages, but includes a lot of additional information not included by al-Kisā’ī. It begins with the story of the conception of Mary and her consecration to the Temple. In this, Zachariah becomes old and frail after the episode in which he finds Mary provided with food in her sanctuary, and there is a second game of lots, which her cousin Joseph wins, and he becomes Mary’s guardian in Zachariah’s place. An anecdote about God providing food for the Prophet Muḥammad is inserted here, followed by separate sections devoted to the story of the annunciation and birth of John, John’s attributes, and then

accounts of his prophethood and life, the murder of John, and the murder of Zachariah. The text then moves to the story of the Annunciation, using the water pitcher story told in al-Ṭabarī, followed by a variant account according to which Mary had left the Temple for her aunt's house during her menstruation, and the Annunciation occurred one day while she was washing to clean herself from menstruation behind a screen. Al-Tha'labī has the same account of Joseph confronting Mary as is found in al-Ṭabarī, and of the interaction between Mary/Jesus and Elizabeth/John prior to her giving birth. Al-Tha'labī's account also accords with al-Ṭabarī and the Biblical accounts in that she is fleeing Herod when she gives birth, although in this version she flees because she has been promised in marriage to Herod and he will want to kill her for (supposed) fornication when he finds out she is pregnant. As in al-Ṭabarī's first story, when Mary gives birth under the palm tree, the idols are toppled and Iblīs tries to approach Jesus, but is prevented from doing so by the angels. This episode is followed by the account of the visitation of the magi. Joseph then hides Mary and her son in a cave for 40 days, following which she goes back to visit her family, who challenge her, and Jesus defends her. God reveals to both Joseph and Mary that Herod will kill the baby Jesus if he finds him, and so Joseph takes Mary and her son to Egypt.

⁵⁴ See Roberto Tottoli (ed.), *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003, pp. 161–174, and the English translation in *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, ed. and trans. Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, 2nd edn, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, pp. 101–105. See also Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, pp. 562–572. This account follows the same plot as al-Kisā'ī in the opening stages, and begins with the story of Anna and the birds, followed by the story of the casting of lots after which Zachariah becomes Mary's guardian. The next episodes recount the story of God's provision of food for Mary in the Temple, and Zachariah's prayers for a son. There is then a passage on John's attributes. Zachariah is visited by Satan (*al-Shayṭān*), who persuades him to doubt that God will give him a child. God sends an angel to reassure him, but Zachariah asks for a sign that he will have a son, following which God tells him that his sign will be to not speak to anyone for three days (this is the only account which explicitly says that the angel took his tongue, so that he was not able to speak (p. 164)). We are then told that God has made Mary pure from menstruation, which is followed by a passage on the four best women in creation, and told that Mary chose to go to the East because it was considered better than the West by the Christians of her time. This is followed by an account of the Annunciation: God has made Mary pure from menstruation, but one day she sees a man, who is actually Gabriel, and he blows in her sleeve. She visits Zachariah's wife and they confide in one another that they are pregnant. Mary then visits the cave with her cousin Joseph to fetch water, and is visited again by Gabriel, who tells her that she is bearing a boy. The text next recounts the episode of Mary's conversation with Joseph (in which Jesus does not speak). Mary goes away to give birth under the date palm (the text tells us that the mysterious voice that reassures her is Gabriel's). In this variant, the people tell her cousin she has had a baby and he wants to kill her, until Gabriel tells him not to, and when Mary returns to face her people, she is apparently confronted by 40,000 sons of Aaron. It is only now that Jesus speaks up in her defence, giving quite a long speech. Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī's account makes no mention of Herod or of Mary and her son fleeing, but goes straight on to the life of Jesus.

⁵⁵ See Ibn 'Asākir, Abū Qāsim 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Hibbat Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh al-Šāfi'ī, *Tārīḥ Madīnat Dimāšq*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abī Sa'īd 'Umar b. Ġarāma al-'Amrawī, 80 vols, Beirut, Dār al-Fīkr, 1995–1998, vol. 70, pp. 75–101. Ibn 'Asākir's account provides two variants of the story, and the narrative is interspersed with commentary that expands on the issues raised. The first variant roughly accords with that told in al-Kisā'ī. It begins with the story of Anna and the dove, followed by consecration of Mary to the Temple and the drawing of lots. It then presents a *ḥadīth* stating that Mary and Jesus were the only people not to have been touched by Satan's finger on the day of childbirth (p. 80). He then cites the episode in which Zachariah is too weak to care for Mary, so lots are cast again and she is given into the guardianship of Ġurayḥ and Mary tells him that God will provide for them both. Next, the story goes on to the episode of the divine provision of fruit to Mary. Ibn 'Asākir inserts a discussion of the customs of dedicating young boys to the Temple at the time, and Zachariah's building of a secluded space for Mary, and his prayer to God for a son and subsequent silence, after which the narrative moves on to the Annunciation (for which Gabriel visits Mary in the Temple), and Mary's departure to the East. Satan searches for her, East and West, but when he finds her she and her infant are surrounded by angels who protect them. The text then has a discussion of the provisions provided for Mary in the Temple and Zachariah's prayers for a son. Next, we are told that Mary left the Temple to menstruate, and when she became pure again she was visited by a stranger, Gabriel. Following the Annunciation she visits Elizabeth and they confide in each other about their pregnancies, and John bows down to Jesus from the womb. Mary goes out to the East to give birth under a palm tree, and we are told that it is Gabriel who speaks to her when she calls out. Her people (implicitly not Zachariah or Joseph, or both, the verbs used are all plural rather than dual) go to look for her, and confront her. When they do so, Jesus ceases suckling and declares his prophethood.

Ibn 'Asākir then gives a variant account, which follows the alternative pattern. This begins with the story of Joseph serving Mary from behind a curtain, and the two going to the cave to fetch water, with the Annunciation occurring there (as in Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī's account Joseph overhears Gabriel speaking to Mary and is astonished—in fact there are many similarities between these two accounts). Joseph questions Mary, and she responds (Jesus does not speak from the womb). Mary leaves the Temple and people begin to ask where she

story patterns for the Annunciation stories. The first is that followed by al-Kisā'ī's account, which accords with the story as told in *Sūrat Maryam*. The second pattern is very different: it begins by recounting how Mary and Joseph were both Temple servants and used to go to a particular cave to draw water. One day Mary goes to the cave and is approached by a strange man, who turns out to be Gabriel, and the Annunciation takes place there (in some versions she goes to the cave alone, and sometimes she is accompanied by Joseph, who overhears her conversation with Gabriel from a distance). After some time, her pregnancy starts to show and Joseph challenges her, asking her "Tell me, Mary, does a crop grow without seed?"⁵⁶ Mary responds, "Yes," and he asks her a series of questions, to which Mary replies, explaining that God created Adam and Eve, and that He is capable of creating a child in her womb without a male (al-Ṭabarī's version of this variant is the only one apart from al-Kisā'ī to have Jesus also announcing his prophecy to Joseph from the womb here, thereby defending his mother). From this point onwards this second pattern is roughly in accordance with the first: Mary leaves for the East to give birth, and either returns to her people with her newborn, or is approached by them, and Jesus announces his prophecy when Mary is confronted about her child. Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Asākir, and al-Tha'labī also include an episode recounting how Iblīs searched for Mary while she was giving birth, and tried to approach her, but she was surrounded by angels who comforted and protected her.

None of the Islamic narratives follow exactly the same pattern and they differ in details. However, they do follow either one, or both, of the two main schema, or they combine the two. Thus, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn 'Asākir provide two variant accounts, one of which broadly follows the al-Kisā'ī pattern, while the other follows the alternative pattern. Al-Tha'labī chooses to combine the two patterns, giving a more linear narrative that incorporates both variants of the Annunciation story at the appropriate point in the story (in the first Gabriel visits Mary in the cave, and in the second he visits her in the Temple), and he includes the anecdote about Iblīs' attempt to approach Mary. Umāra b. Wathīma and Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī both combine the two patterns in an even more seamless way: in their stories, the Annunciation takes place in the Temple but Gabriel pays a second visit to Mary to reassure her when she is fetching water from the cave with Joseph, who later challenges her with a series of questions (they both omit the Iblīs episode from their accounts). As is clear from these brief comparisons, al-Kisā'ī's account is singular in that it does not include any material from the second pattern. The different patterns followed by the various accounts are summarized in the table below.

al-Kisā'ī	Ibn Wathīma	Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī	al-Tha'labī	Ibn 'Asākir	al-Ṭabarī
Story of Anna and the Dove	Story of Anna and the Dove	Story of Anna and the Dove	Story of Anna and the Dove	Variant 1: Story of Anna and the Dove	Variant 1: Annunciation to Mary in the cave
Temple guardian story	Temple guardian story	Temple guardian story	Temple guardian story	Temple guardian story	Joseph confronts Mary (Jesus defends her from the womb)
Divine provision of food in the Temple, annunciation to Zachariah and birth of John	Second game of lots, Jurayḥ appointed as guardian. Divine provision of food in the	Divine provision of food in the Temple, annunciation to Zachariah and birth of John	Second game of lots, Joseph appointed as guardian [... <i>long sections on divine</i>	Second game of lots, Jurayḥ appointed as guardian Divine provision of food in the	God warns Mary to flee Elizabeth and Mary meet, John

is. Zachariah enters her (locked) sanctuary and finds her missing, and they (again plural) go to search for her. As with the previous account, when Mary sees her people approaching, she holds her baby out to them and he announces his prophethood when they confront her.

⁵⁶ Brinner, *'Arā'is al-majālis*, p. 640.

Annunciation to Mary in the Temple	Temple, annunciation to Zachariah and birth of John	Annunciation to Mary in the Temple	<i>provision of food to Muḥammad, the annunciation and birth of John, his life, and the murder of John and Zachariah ...]</i>	Temple, annunciation to Zachariah	bows to Jesus in the womb
Second visit from Gabriel.	Annunciation to Mary in the Temple	Elizabeth and Mary meet, their sons greet each other from the womb	<i>Annunciation in the cave</i>	Annunciation to Mary in the Temple	Mary flees to Egypt
Joseph questions Mary (Jesus defends her from the womb)	Second visit from Gabriel.	Joseph and Mary fetch water from the cave, second visit from Gabriel.	Variant Annunciation story:	Story of how Mary went to the East to give birth, and Iblīs searched for her	Birth of Jesus
Mary goes to the East	Joseph questions Mary (no defence by Jesus)	Joseph questions Mary (no defence by Jesus)	Annunciation while Mary has left the Temple to menstruate, just before she returns.	Variant Annunciation story.	Story of the toppling of the idols and Iblīs' search for Mary and Jesus
Birth of Jesus (John is born the same night)	Mary goes to the East	Birth of Jesus	Joseph questions Mary (no defence by Jesus)	Annunciation to Mary in the Temple	The Magi visit Mary
Joseph and Zachariah look for Mary	Birth of Jesus	Joseph hears of Mary's pregnancy, plans to kill her, Gabriel intervenes	Elizabeth and Mary meet, John bows to Jesus in the womb	Elizabeth and Mary meet, John bows to Jesus in the womb	Mary, Joseph, and Jesus continue flight to Egypt
Jesus announces his prophethood	Joseph and Zachariah look for Mary	Mary returns to her people, Jesus announces his prophethood	Mary flees from Herod	Variant 2:	Annunciation to Mary in the Temple
Mary returns to her people, Jesus announces his prophethood for a second time	Jesus announces his prophethood		Birth of Jesus	Annunciation to Mary in the Temple	Elizabeth and Mary meet, John bows to Jesus in the womb
			Story of the toppling of the idols and Iblīs' search for Mary and Jesus	Elizabeth and Mary meet, John bows to Jesus in the womb	Birth of John
			The Magi visit Mary	Mary goes to the East	Mary goes to the East
			Joseph hides Mary and Jesus in a cave	Birth of Jesus	Birth of Jesus
			Mary returns to her family who challenge her, Jesus announces his prophethood	The people confront Mary, Jesus announces his prophethood	Mary returns to her people, Jesus announces his prophethood
			Flight to Egypt from Herod	Variant 2:	The people hunt down Zachariah and kill him
				Annunciation in the cave	
				Joseph overhears Gabriel on his second visit to Mary and questions her (no defence by Jesus)	
				Mary goes to the East	
				Zachariah and Joseph look for Mary, Jesus announces his prophethood	

From comparison of the al-Kisāʿī recensions with the Mary stories told in these other narratives it is evident that, although the three recensions in the printed editions have differences, they are much more similar to one another than the story found in works by the other authors. As can be seen from the table above, there is a great deal of variation between Mary stories told in these different accounts. There is also a difference between the narrative included in the historical works of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn ʿAsākir and the *qiṣaṣ*-proper works of the other authors which clearly reflects the literary conventions of the respective genres. The

former report variant traditions, while the latter present the reader with a more linear narrative (that is, more of a story). We can also see something else: al-Kisāʾī's Mary story sticks more closely to the Qur'anic story than any of the other texts. For example, al-Thaʿlabī and al-Ṭabarī draw to a greater extent on the 'Biblical' Mary story, as we can see, for example, in their inclusion of material about the visit of the Magi, while al-Thaʿlabī, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn ʿAsākir also use material drawn from apocryphal sources that we don't see referenced in the Qur'anic Mary pericopes, for example in their inclusion of a narrative segment in which Mary is surrounded by angels who protect her from Iblīs.

Textual Silences in al-Kisāʾī's Account of the Annunciation and birth of Jesus

Although the plot of al-Kisāʾī's story of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus follows the Qur'an more closely than the other accounts, when one looks at the relationship of the al-Kisāʾī story with the Qur'anic pericopes a number of significant differences can be seen. All three variants have in common a trend of, for want of better terms, "normalizing," "dehumanizing," and "patriarchalizing" the Mary story in the Qur'an. By this I mean that the singular, highly emotional, and potentially traumatic nature of the events that Mary undergoes are rendered less singular, and "normalized"; that Mary's character, which is mainly depicted through her spoken responses in the Qur'an is largely stripped of her emotional dimension and "dehumanized"; and that al-Kisāʾī shifts the narrative focus away from her and onto male characters, thus "patriarchalizing" the story. One of the most obvious ways that al-Kisāʾī does this is by playing with the textual silences of the Qur'anic story. On some occasions the silences of the Qur'anic pericopes are written out, as in the example given above in which the author fills in the narrative silence over how Jesus was actually conceived. On other occasions, non-Qur'anic material is brought into the narrative to flesh it out, filling in the broader silences in such a way as to facilitate the re-framing of the story (for example in including the story of Anna weeping at the sight of the dove caring for its young, which leads Imran to suggest that they pray to God for a child). The inclusion of additional information about characters and events is used to shift the narrative focus away from Mary and onto male characters, most notably Zachariah. Furthermore, the thematic use of speech which figures so prominently in the Qur'anic pericopes is manipulated: in al-Kisāʾī the trope of character's ability and inability to speak, of speech and silence, is subtly reconfigured. Whereas in the Qur'anic pericopes speech and speechlessness are used to convey the theme of God's absolute power, most notably through the "sign" given to Zachariah and Mary that they not speak, in al-Kisāʾī's story the predominant theme is one of God's *rizq*, His provision for humankind. This process is most obvious in the Ibn Sālīma recension.

One of the main differences between the Qur'anic and al-Kisāʾī accounts of the Annunciation and birth of Jesus is one of narrative voice. In the Qur'anic account Mary's isolation and confusion are conveyed with an immediacy and urgency that is often remarked: although the account is brief, it is presented in a way that is highly emotionally charged, for example in Mary's desperate plea in Kor 19, 23 that "I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before all of this." The use of terse and elliptic storytelling, and the presentation of emotionally-charged vignettes is a feature of Qur'anic style, and it is not surprising that the *qīṣaṣ* accounts, which are more linear narratives that partly serve to expand upon and explain the Qur'anic stories, lose this sense of immediacy as they fill in some of the gaps. However, it is very noticeable that two of the three al-Kisāʾī accounts remove nearly all the Qur'an's narrative tension (the third, Šibl, maintains it). I have given one example of this above, the removal of the Qur'an's textual silence around the act of Jesus' conception. However, this is not the only element of the Annunciation story in which al-Kisāʾī manipulates textual silences. For example, although Ibn Sālīma's account replicates the Qur'anic verses (Kor 19, 16–21) that report, in direct speech, Mary's plea for God's protection against the stranger who has approached her during

the Annunciation in full,⁵⁷ Mary's confusion and emotional distress is neutralized by the addition of explicit statements that when Gabriel reassured her, she became calm (*sakanat*):

When Mary had finished menstruating, she cleansed herself and returned to her normal duties, and soon after, God's will came about, in accordance with His words *Mention in the Scripture the story of Mary. She withdrew from her family to a place east and secluded herself away; We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a normal human*, meaning 'in the form of a handsome youth'. *She said, "I seek the Lord of Mercy's protection against you: if you have any fear of Him"*, meaning 'obedience to your Lord', and Gabriel said to her, *"I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son"*, meaning 'informing [you]'. *She said, "How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste,"* meaning 'an adulteress with [anyone from] the Banū Isrā'īl'. Gabriel told her, *"This is what your Lord said: 'It is easy for Me—We shall make him a sign to all people,'"* meaning "a warning or example because of his being created without a father". And Mary became calm (*sakkanat*) at his words ...⁵⁸

In contrast, the Eisenberg text takes a different approach, and simply omits the parts of these verses that convey Mary's emotional state, neutralizing their emotional impact in a different way. Eisenberg's edition has the following:

When Mary reached puberty, Zachariah came in to her and she said to him, "I have seen a horrible thing" (meaning that she had begun to menstruate). So he ordered her to remain in her aunt's house until she was pure again. Then she returned to her chamber in the Temple, as He hath said: *Mention in the Scripture the story of Mary ... We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a normal human ... She said: 'How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste?'*

Gabriel stretched out his hand toward her and breathed into her: the breath reached her womb, and she conceived Jesus.⁵⁹

The Eisenberg account is very clearly writing *in* its own textual silences here, but on this occasion they do not serve to heighten narrative tension, but remove it by leaving out the Qur'anic verses in which Mary invokes God's protection. Through their different strategies for writing out the textual silences of the Qur'an, these two al-Kisā'ī recensions normalize Mary's situation—the sense of the awe-inspiring power of God's will in tension with Mary's human frailty in the Qur'anic Annunciation story is greatly downplayed.

The narrative tension around the issue of Mary's emotional state, her isolation and fear, which has been downplayed during the account of the Annunciation rears its head again later when her pregnancy begins to show. The texts tell us that she becomes afraid that she will be reviled by her people, but is visited by angels who reassure her, from which time she is comforted.

⁵⁷ "Mention in the Scripture the story of Mary. She withdrew from her family to a place east and secluded herself away; We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a normal human. She said, 'I seek the Lord of Mercy's protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]!' but he said, 'I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son.' She said, 'How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste.' Gabriel told her, "This is what your Lord said: "It is easy for Me—We shall make him a sign to all people"" (Kor 19, 16–21).

⁵⁸ See al-Kisā'ī, *Bad' al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, p. 370.

⁵⁹ Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, p. 303; translation from Thackston, *The Tales of the Prophets*, p. 328, with some amendments, mainly to reflect the citations in Eisenberg's Arabic text more accurately.

The Šibl and Ibn Sālīma variants of this episode have the angels citing Kor 3, 42–43 “Mary! God has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women. Mary, be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself in worship, bow down with those who pray” following which Gabriel gives her the good tidings of all Jesus’s signs.⁶⁰ All three editions then tell us explicitly that Mary was comforted and became cheerful after hearing these reassurances: *tābat nafsuhā*.

This is an intriguing use of these verses. By treating the two angelic visitations in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* and *Sūrat Maryam* as different occasions (as opposed to both referring to the Annunciation), and placing the second visitation after the Annunciation, the al-Kisā’ī texts again remove the tension surrounding Mary’s emotional state, for a second time, and replace this tension with the sense of God’s care and provision, *rizq*, for His creation, helping to reframe the Qur’anic story in such a way that this becomes the major theme of the al-Kisā’ī Mary narrative. (This second visitation does not seem to be a core element of the Islamic legend: al-Ṭarafī, and Ibn Wathīma include it, as does al-Ṭabarī in his second variant, but neither al-Tha’labī nor Ibn ‘Asākir mention it). In her discussion of *Sūrat Maryam*, Geissinger has also noted the stark contrast between the ageing Zachariah’s prayers for a son, his social inclusion with his people and joy at the impending birth, and Mary’s conception, which is not something that she has anticipated, is not celebrated by her or her people, and is accompanied by her social isolation.⁶¹ The Šibl account heightens this oppositional parallelism by including an episode here, immediately preceding the second visitation to Mary, in which, we are told, God makes Zachariah’s wife more and more beautiful during her pregnancy, and when people notice this they are amazed:

[Elisabeth] went out into the courtyard of the house, and she was pregnant with John, peace be upon him. God had increased her beauty such that the women of the Banū Isrā’īl were astonished by it, and Zachariah wanted to explain it to them ...⁶²

This motif is replicated in Ibn Sālīma’s account, although in this recension it is Zachariah rather than his wife who is rejuvenated:

Zachariah returned to the Temple, and God, most Blessed and Exalted, had clothed him in beauty. When the Banū Isrā’īl saw this they approached Zachariah and his wife, both men and women, and congratulated them. They were astonished, as he looked like a young man of twenty-five. They asked him about it, and Zachariah wanted to explain it to them ...⁶³

Zachariah is unable to explain because of the prohibition on him speaking, but writes in the earth that he is not permitted to speak for three days, and asks them to go about their business. The people congratulate Zachariah again, and his wife gives birth to John.

The addition of this material means that the annunciation to Zachariah, his wife’s pregnancy and the birth of his son are given much more narrative focus than they are in the Qur’anic pericopes. When combined with the insertion of the second angelic visitation to Mary just after this, this additional element of the story has a significant literary impact. The narrative tension, which, in the Qur’anic pericopes, has been highlighted by the juxtaposition of Mary’s

⁶⁰ Ibn Sālīma cites Kor 3, 44–45 and Kor 3, 48–49 at this point.

⁶¹ See Geissinger, “Mary in the Qur’an”, pp. 384–385.

⁶² al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ wa-mawālīd*, ed. Šibl, p. 317.

⁶³ al-Kisā’ī, *Bad’ al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, p. 370. The text contains a footnote saying that in some of the manuscripts he used, both Zachariah and his wife are blessed with youth and beauty.

isolation with Zachariah's social inclusion, is diffused in the text through the reassurance Mary receives from the heavenly host. Furthermore, the added emphasis that the al-Kisā'ī account puts on the miraculous nature of John's conception and birth, God's gift of beauty to Zachariah or his wife, and the joy with which it is met, work to counter the miraculous nature of Jesus' conception and birth, and the idea of Mary as uniquely divinely favoured.⁶⁴ The overall effect is that through these additions, which write out textual silences at a broader level by fleshing out the plot, Mary's story is pushed into the background and Zachariah's is foregrounded.

The issue of the thematic use of silence in al-Kisā'ī's Mary narrative is also interesting, in relation to the Qur'anic account. Al-Kisā'ī maintains the Qur'anic trope that both Zachariah and Mary are forbidden to speak following the respective conception and birth of their sons.⁶⁵ In fact, there is a tendency for the al-Kisā'ī texts to elaborate on this. As mentioned above, in Ibn Sālīma's account, Zachariah wants to respond to his people when they ask him about his miraculous rejuvenation, but because of the prohibition on him speaking, he writes a message to them in the earth that he is not permitted to speak for three days, and asks them to go about their business. The trope is replicated when we are told that he later goes out among them to ask them to praise God by signalling to them. In the case of Mary, the motif is also replicated. All three al-Kisā'ī texts incorporate an episode just after the birth of Jesus in which either Zachariah and Joseph (Eisenberg) or Joseph alone (Šibl and Ibn Sālīma) realize that Mary has gone missing and go out to search for her. They find her resting under the palm tree with her newborn son, and question her. Mary refuses to answer because she has been told by God to "say to anyone you may see: *I have vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation, and I will not talk to anyone today*" (Kor 19, 26), and instead Jesus responds:

[Zachariah] went to Mary but could not find her, wherefore he called for Joseph, and together they set out in search of her. They found her seated beneath a tree. He spoke to her, but she did not speak to him. Jesus, however, spoke and said, "O Joseph, I bring glad tidings that I have emerged from the darkness of the womb into the light of the world. I have come to the children of Israel as a messenger."⁶⁶

This is immediately followed by Mary's return to her people, when they also confront her and, again, she refuses to speak and signals to her child, who again speaks, declaring his prophethood. The additional narrative attention given to Zachariah's silence emphasizes the parallels between him and Mary, while the repetition of the trope of Mary's silence primarily

⁶⁴ Jacob Fareed Imam was kind enough to share with me his draft article on "The Missing Fiat: The Annunciation Narrative in *Sūrat Maryam*", in which discusses the parallelism between Zachariah/John and Mary/Jesus as part of a Qur'anic process of "flattening out" of Jesus into a cycle of prophets, in line with a cyclical prophetic paradigm as conceptualized by Nicolai Sinai and Walid Saleh. See also Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-critical Introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, pp. 85–86. Sinai makes the point that, in the Qur'an, "the Jesus of surah 19 does not play a unique soteriological role but is demoted to one in a series of God-given prophetic descendants or relatives who, apart from Zachariah's son John, also include Isaac and Jacob (v. 49) and Moses' brother Aaron (v. 53)." A similar process of "flattening" seems to be at work in al-Kisā'ī's *Qiṣaṣ*, but here it is Mary's role that is being downplayed.

⁶⁵ The question of whether Mary and Zachariah are forbidden to speak, or unable to speak (i.e. struck mute) is one that is much discussed. The al-Kisā'ī texts do not clarify or explain this issue. Eisenberg and Ibn Sālīma simply cite the relevant Qur'anic verse, while Šibl uses the term *tamtani'u min al-kalām*, i.e. "refrain from speaking". See al-Kisā'ī, *Bad' al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, p. 370, and *Qiṣaṣ wa-mawālid*, ed. Šibl, p. 317.

⁶⁶ Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, p. 304; translation from Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets*, p. 329, with some amendments.

functions as a device through which to allow Jesus' voice to be heard, and his announcement of his prophethood is given greater focus.⁶⁷

There is one further, intriguing thematic use of silence, which is not found in the Qur'anic account at all, nor in any of the other *qiṣaṣ* accounts I have consulted, and that is the issue of Herod's silence. All three al-Kisā'ī variants are united in mentioning that, when Herod hears that Mary is carrying a child, "He falls silent (*sakata*)":

News of Mary's pregnancy reached the king of the Banū Isrā'īl, whose name was Hirudūs. To the Banū Isrā'īl he said, "Who is this woman of whose pregnancy I have heard from you?"

"Sire," they said, 'She is possessed.' And the king was silent.⁶⁸

Given the thematic significance of Mary and Zachariah's silence, this choice of words is striking. It is clearly an authorial choice of significance, because it appears in all three variants, but it is unclear to me what Herod's silence is supposed to signify, and how it fits in thematically with the silences of other characters. It seems that the text is suggesting some kind of equivalence here, but there is a juxtaposition between the divinely-ordained silence of Zachariah and Mary and that of Herod, whose silence would seem to be due to personal choice, and certainly does not reflect either obedience to God or divine favour.

Literary Choices: The Characterisation of Mary

Another major point of difference between the Qur'an and al-Kisā'ī lies in the actual personification of Mary, and this is especially true in the Ibn Sālīma variant. In addition to normalizing the event of the Annunciation, the al-Kisā'ī texts seem to somehow dehumanize her, distancing her from the reader. Angelika Neuwirth, amongst others, has posited a shift between the depiction of Mary in *Sūrat Maryam* and in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* which reflects changing theological concerns at the time of the Qur'an's revelation. This rests upon the idea that the chronologically later pericope in *Āl 'Imrān* places the Mary story in the context of a genealogical discourse "that presupposes a divine project of prophethood to be enacted by a plurality of prophets, no longer labelled individually as *rasūl* (messenger), but collectively, in accordance with the Jewish model of this concept, as *nabiyyūn* or *anbiyā'* (prophets), a counterpart of the Hebrew *nabhi*."⁶⁹ In contrast, in the earlier sura, *Sūrat Maryam*, Mary is portrayed in a way reminiscent of a pagan goddess and her depiction draws on Patristic Christian traditions that view Mary as an allegory for the Temple, "whose locked gate corresponds to her virginal womb that will be opened only by the birth of Christ the Messiah,"⁷⁰ "Thus Mary, allegorically representing the Temple, has been replaced in the Qur'an by the veristic image of Mary in the Temple. Mary, who allegorically represents the Rod of Aaron placed in the Temple, is now replaced by the 'real' person, Mary, the 'sister of Aaron'".⁷¹

Approaching the Biblical text from a totally different angle, Mary Bauman-Martin likewise speculates on the conceptual similarities between Mary and the sacred female oracles of the

⁶⁷ Loren Lybarger has also noted that "The male-centered image is clearly discernable in the contrast between Maryam's silence and 'Īsā's miraculous speech from the crib in exoneration of his mother before her scandalized clan" (Lybarger, "Gender and Prophetic Authority", p. 241 n. 4).

⁶⁸ Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, p. 303; translation from Thackston, *The Tales of the Prophets*, p. 329, with amendments to Herod's name (which he has as Hirdaws).

⁶⁹ Neuwirth, "Mary and Jesus", p. 371. See also Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'an", pp. 163–166, on Mary's identity in the Qur'an.

⁷⁰ Marx, *Glimpses of a Mariology*, pp. 542–544.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 559.

ancient world, who similarly functioned as channels between human and the divine, and were “possessed” by the deity for the purposes of prophecy.⁷² The role of Mary in the Qur’an is one in which she is defined by her role as the mother of Jesus, but the way that Mary is presented in the Qur’anic pericopes is very human—she is primarily portrayed through her emotional responses to events, for example in her reaction to Gabriel’s announcement of her pregnancy, which we hear in her own words, in direct speech. The Qur’an’s focus on Mary’s vulnerability when she is approached by Gabriel, a stranger who claims to represent an omnipotent deity, works to create a tension between human frailty and divine omnipotence which is also a characteristic of the Biblical Annunciation story, but it also creates a human protagonist with whom the audience of the Qur’an can readily identify.

In contrast to the more human woman we encounter in the Qur’an, the al-Kisā’ī accounts accord very much with the concept of Mary as an allegorical representation of the Temple, a sacred vessel through which divine purpose is achieved. This shift in characterisation is realized through the addition of material that fills in the gaps in the Qur’anic story and puts additional stress on Mary’s seclusion and ritual purity.⁷³ Thus, in contrast to the Qur’an, in which the first thing we hear of Mary is her mother’s dedication of her to God’s protection, in al-Kisā’ī’s story the reader is introduced to a Mary whose birth is, like John’s and Jesus’, an act of divine intervention, following Anna’s prayers to God for a daughter. We are then told the story of Mary’s seclusion in the Temple, which is accompanied in the Ibn Sālīma text by comments on her supernaturally fast growth as she grows up.⁷⁴ This dehumanisation of Mary, the reduction of the emotional individual of the Qur’anic pericopes to a more one-dimensional figure who is essentially characterized as a sacred vessel without agency, is heightened by the fact that she is consistently presented in the story as Zachariah’s ward and a servant of the Temple. It is also heightened by the way she is linked with the annunciation to Zachariah through her provision of the “divine fruit” to him, following which he and his wife miraculously conceive. This clearly prefigures the divine provision of dates to Mary herself as she gives birth, but it also inserts Mary directly into the story of the annunciation to Zachariah by making her a conduit between him and the divine. In the Qur’an, Zachariah merely finds Mary provided with food in the Temple and this triggers his prayer to God for a son, but in two of the three al-Kisā’ī accounts (Eisenberg and Ibn Sālīma) there is a small but significant change: Mary offers some of her fruit to Zachariah, and it is only after eating the sacred fruit that he is able to conceive a son. Mary’s intervention is now an essential link in the chain of events. This link is made particularly explicit in Ibn Sālīma’s account, which contains an extended episode, summarized below, that deals with the conception of John.⁷⁵

Zachariah prays in the Temple (*miḥrāb*) of David for a son, but the Temple responds and tells him this is impossible because he is too old:

The *miḥrāb* responded to him, saying, “O Zachariah, you are my shining and brilliant beacon in the darkness of night, but you have become old, and your body has become frail. There will be no son for you, and who will take your place after you?”⁷⁶

He goes home to his wife in sadness and she tells him to have faith. He then visits Mary, who also asks him why he is sad. When he tells her, she offers him grapes, figs, olives, bananas, and

⁷² Bauman-Martin, “Mary and the Marquise”, pp. 219–221

⁷³ See Neuwirth, “Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus”, pp. 339–340.

⁷⁴ See al-Kisā’ī, *Bad’ al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, p. 369.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 369–370.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 369.

pomegranates, and tells him to eat them, that they will take away his sadness because they come from Paradise. Once Zachariah has eaten, he feels strong, and goes back to the Temple to pray, with the intent of then asking God to provide him with a son. After he has been praying for seven days, the Temple speaks to him again, saying “Do you find your lord *baḥīl* (stingy), Do you not know that he is *raḥīm* (merciful, kind, compassionate)?” Only after this does Zachariah pray to God for a son:

Zachariah’s prayer rose, shining due to the sheer amount of his praise for God, Almighty and All-Powerful, and He sent down a troop of angels who carried it up to God, Blessed and Almighty. God responded to [Zachariah’s] prayer and sent Gabriel to him, accompanied by a troop of angels, to give Zachariah the good news. And they bore it to the Temple, which they encircled. A brilliant light shone upon them from the Temple, and Zachariah greeted them, perfumed with fragrant musk.⁷⁷

Ibn Sālīma’s account of Zachariah’s prayers for a son clearly demonstrates another thread that seems to run through the al-Kisā’ī accounts, which is the shift of narrative focus away from Mary and on to the role of Zachariah, that is the patriarchalization of the story. As Shawkat Toorawa has commented,⁷⁸ it is quite hard *not* to notice the prefiguration of the annunciation of Jesus that takes place in the accounts of the birth of John in the Qur’an, but this aspect is really built on in the Ibn Sālīma edition, to the extent that Mary’s annunciation, which follows immediately afterwards, is somewhat pushed into the background. The divine favour that God bestows upon her pales in comparison to the treatment given to Zachariah’s plea for a son, and Zachariah’s piety, which is such that he exudes a saintly light and perfume, implicitly outweighs Mary’s.

This ‘patriarchalization’ of the Annunciation is also prefigured in the Ibn Sālīma and Šibl editions by Imran’s role in the conception of Mary at the very beginning of the story. Although it is Mary’s mother whose prayer figures in the Qur’anic account, in al-Kisā’ī it is her father’s role that is foregrounded through the addition of the story of the dove and her young; it is through his agency that the child is conceived:

One day, while Imran’s wife was sitting in the house, she saw a dove brooding over her young. Anna wept and said to her husband, “Pray to God to bless us with a child.”

“Rise up,” he said, “Perform the ablutions and pray. We will ask our Lord.”

When they had prayed, they fell asleep. Imran dreamed of someone saying to him, “O Imran, God has answered your prayer. Rise up and lie with your wife and she will conceive.”

So

He awoke and lay with her, and she conceived a child.⁷⁹

Another example of the shift of narrative stress away from Mary in the Ibn Sālīma edition can be seen in the treatment of Mary and Elizabeth’s pregnancies following their conception. In all three editions, the text immediately follows on from its account of the Annunciation by telling us that “Zacharia[h] had lain with his wife at the same time, and she conceived John” (note the narrative stress on Zachariah here, his wife remains unnamed and, like Mary, is

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Toorawa, “*Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19)”, p. 26. As he points out, this parallelism exists at a lexical level, as well as at the levels of plot and motif.

⁷⁹ Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, pp. 301–302; translation from Thackston, *The Tales of the Prophets*, p. 327.

simply a vessel).⁸⁰ As mentioned above, the Šibl and Ibn Sālīma editions then include a brief episode in which we are told that God increases the pregnant Elizabeth's beauty, and the people come to ask Zachariah about it and congratulate him. Elizabeth gives birth to John, who is more devout and well-mannered than anyone before him.⁸¹

The insertion of this anecdote in between the story of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus not only interrupts Mary's story but reminds the reader that Zachariah is also favoured by God. As I mentioned earlier, the congratulations and good wishes that he and his wife receive from the people provide a direct contrast with Mary's concerns about the reception of her pregnancy in the next section, not to mention the reception she encounters when she returns to her people with her newborn baby later in the story. In the Qur'anic account Mary is challenged with the words "Sister of Aaron! Your father was not a bad man; your mother was not unchaste" (Kor 19, 28) on her return, and this verse is cited in all three al-Kisā'ī texts. As Suleiman Mourad has pointed out, the reference to Mary as "Sister of Aaron" "is especially appropriate in this context for the questioners, the Temple's priests, to magnify Mary's moral transgression (her pregnancy) by appealing to her ancestor Aaron, whose descendants are the only Israelites qualified to serve in the Temple, where Mary herself was raised."⁸² In other words, her shameful act is made even more shameful by her apparent defiling of the sacred religious space. This subtext is carried over from the Qur'an, in which it serves to heighten the sense of Mary's isolation. However, while the juxtaposition of the people's reaction to the birth of John and Jesus does in some way highlight Mary's plight in al-Kisā'ī, it does not seem to function primarily to heighten narrative tension. Rather, it is very noticeable that the continued foregrounding of Zachariah's story means that Mary is again pushed out of the limelight in favour of Zachariah.

In the context of masculine textual appropriation, one final element in al-Kisā'ī is interesting, the repetition of the motif of Jesus speaking up in defence of his mother. In the Qur'anic story this happens once, when Mary returns to her people with her infant son after having given birth. However, the three al-Kisā'ī texts consistently describe Jesus speaking up to defend his mother from her detractors not just once, but three times. The first occasion occurs when Joseph questions her about her pregnancy, and Jesus admonishes him from the womb, telling him to seek forgiveness for his sin in questioning Mary. He defends her a second time when Joseph (or Joseph and Zachariah in the Eisenberg edition) go out in search of Mary, and find her resting under the palm tree shortly after giving birth. Finally, when Mary returns to her people and is confronted by them, Jesus defends her for a third time. On the second and third occasions Mary has "vowed to the Lord of Mercy to abstain from conversation" (Kor 19, 26), and so points to her infant son, who speaks up, announcing his prophethood, implicitly defending her by doing so. On the first occasion Jesus' defence of his mother is much more explicit. Mary does defend herself when challenged by Joseph, but the episode ends when Jesus speaks from the womb, criticizing Joseph for questioning his mother and, in Šibl and Ibn Sālīma's accounts, admonishing him to pray to God and seek forgiveness for his sin in questioning Mary:

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 328. Eisenberg has *wa-kāna Zakarīyā' qad waqa'a zawğatahu fī dālika l-sā'a wa-ḥamalat minhu bi-Yaḥya* (p. 303); Šibl has *thumma inna Zakarīyā' waqa'a zawğatahu fī dālika l-waqt fa-ḥamalat bi-Yaḥya* (p. 317); and Ibn Sālīma has *wa-waqa'a Zakarīyā' zawğatahu fī dālika l-waqt fa-ḥamalat bi-Yaḥya* (p. 370).

⁸¹ Eisenberg does not include this episode and maintains the focus on Mary herself by following the Qur'anic pericope and moving straight on to the episode (Kor 3, 42–48) in which Mary is visited by angels for a second time and reassured that she will not be defamed for her pregnancy.

⁸² Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'an", p. 165.

Maryam had a cousin called Joseph who was well known for his piety, and he used to visit her frequently. He was the first to know of her pregnancy, and he said to her, “Mary, does anything grow without seed?”

“No,” she answered.

“Can there be a child without a father?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, “Adam was without father or mother.”

“True,” he said, “But this child in your belly, who is its father?”

“He is a gift from God,” she said. “*In God’s eyes Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, ‘Be’, and he was* (Kor 3, 59).”

Jesus spoke from his mother’s womb and said, “O Joseph, what is this that you say to my mother? Hasten to your prayers, and beg God for forgiveness for your sin in what you have said.”⁸³

The extra-Qur’anic episode in which Joseph challenges Mary occurs in all of the *qiṣaṣ* accounts I have looked at, and appears to be a core element of the Islamic Mary story, however it is only in the al-Kisā’ī recensions that Jesus speaks from the womb in his mother’s defence—in all the other accounts Mary defends her honor herself. Thus, even though Mary does speak up herself when Joseph questions her pregnancy in al-Kisā’ī’s account—and this could be said to go against the general tone I have identified in al-Kisā’ī’s narrative, in which she is presented as a passive agent, defended and guarded by male characters, when looked at in the comparative context of the wider *qiṣaṣ* corpus exhibits—her agency in this version is still notably passive, and is eroded by the more prominent role given to her son’s speech than in other variants: it is he who delivers the final words that silence Joseph.

Conclusion

As I hope I have demonstrated above, the retelling of the story of the Annunciation and birth of Jesus in al-Kisā’ī is not just a simple fleshing out of the story, but is a reshaping of the narrative which, although it presents itself as being reliant on the Qur’an for plot, and through its extensive use of quotation, actually contains significant differences. It very clearly has its own narrative agenda, which is not exactly the same as the Mary pericopes in the Qur’an. This is, undoubtedly, in some part due to the fact that al-Kisā’ī’s account is functioning as a story in its own right, in the wider framework of a linear collection of stories of prophets. In contrast, the Mary pericopes in the Qur’an appear in a very different context—they are subsumed within their relevant suras, with which they share thematic aspects in the service of a different narrative goal. Thus, the Mary pericope in Sura 3 reflects the sura’s concern with the issue of devotion to God as a central tenet of faith, and unity in belief. Sura 19 has a number of thematic concerns, which reflect the overarching concerns of the sura: the impossibility of God taking a son, the contrast between speech and speechlessness which can be read as (among other things) a meditation on God’s omnipotence and human frailty, the power of the divine Word and prophecy, the power of speech itself, and God’s knowledge of what is seen and unseen (or said and unsaid) in comparison to human ignorance.⁸⁴ A fundamental thematic shift takes place when the story is removed from its Qur’anic contexts and reworked by al-Kisā’ī, and the main theme of his version becomes that of God’s provision for His creation, *rizq*. This may also be one reason for the way that Mary is rewritten by al-Kisā’ī as a more passive character. It seems that her primary function is to act as a recipient of God’s favour, His divine provision. In this sense, although the annunciation to Zachariah and the

⁸³ al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ wa-mawālīd*, ed. Šibl, p. 318. See also *Bad’ al-ḥalq*, ed. Ibn Sālīma, p. 371. For the shorter account, in which Jesus simply questions Joseph, saying “O Joseph, what are these words that you speak?”, see Eisenberg, *Vita Prophetarum*, p. 303, and Thackston, *The Tales*, p. 329. The same questions and answers are replicated in all the accounts, with minor differences in wording.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Toorawa, “Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19)”, pp. 61–62; Ozgur Alhassen, “A Structural Analysis”; and Lyberger, “Gender and Prophetic Authority”.

birth of John are undeniably foregrounded to the expense of Mary's story, these events also serve as examples of God's provision for the faithful. This thematic concern would seem to be a major underlying factor in the way that the existing parallelism between the stories of these two characters in the Qur'an is built upon so heavily in al-Kisā'ī's account. What is incredibly clear, and very interesting, is that the use of speech and speechlessness, or silence, as a device through which the text explores issues of God's omnipotence and omniscience has been almost entirely written out of al-Kisā'ī's Mary story even while it has been retained as a key element of the narrative, now used to convey instead God's beneficence to His creation. Those who are pious, obedient, and pray to God with their requests are rewarded.

Al-Kisā'ī's Mary story also has significant differences to other well-known Islamic accounts, such as those of al-Tha'labī and al-Ṭabarī. It is not clear if this is related to the fact that it reflects a more "popular" version of the Mary story, or just a different one, but it is intriguing, at least, to note that the more high-culture narratives seem to focus more on Mary and do not subordinate her story to Zachariah's to the same extent, and that none of the other Mary narratives conform completely to the al-Kisā'ī story pattern. In his account, al-Tha'labī inserts four entire sections dealing with the Annunciation of John, John's prophethood, his murder, and the murder of Zachariah, in between the story of the birth and consecration of Mary, and the Annunciation and birth of Jesus, but he does not interweave the stories of Zachariah and Mary in the same way that al-Kisā'ī does, and the element of prefiguration is almost totally absent from his account. The other accounts also seem to me to be less patriarchal in tone, not least because Joseph, who is Mary's main masculine counterpart in many of the other versions, is generationally speaking her equal, whereas Zachariah in al-Kisā'ī has the symbolic generational authority of an elder. It is also notable that Joseph plays a much bigger role in the other *qīṣaṣ* collections, but is very much written out of the al-Kisā'ī account, which follows the Qur'an's silence in this respect—Joseph does not figure in the Qur'anic account at all. In this light, it is interesting that, despite the closer relationship between al-Kisā'ī and the Qur'an in terms of plot, the other accounts could be said to stick more closely to the spirit of the Qur'anic pericopes, in terms of their focus on Mary as the main protagonist of the story.

The other thing that has become clear from a comparative exploration of the various *qīṣaṣ* accounts is that the differences between the three editions of al-Kisā'ī's story of the annunciation and birth of Jesus notwithstanding, the texts are very clearly closely related. On the basis of this small sample, the indications are that the textual corpus is actually fairly stable: all three accounts are very recognisably "al-Kisā'ī" when read in the light of other Mary stories from the *qīṣaṣ* genre. Despite the fact that there are not insignificant differences between the three texts, I would argue that the three Mary stories presented here are recognisably part of the same narrative tradition, although the degree of conformity may not be the same as is found in, for example, *ḥadīth* transmission in the post-classical period, for which there are stringent standards for maintaining textual stability inherent within the methodological apparatus of Islamic scholarship.

This leads me to my last point. Although the three editions of al-Kisā'ī follow a common story pattern, and are consistent in adapting the Qur'anic story into a framework that takes as its main theme God's provision to His creation, and share a tendency to normalize, dehumanize, and patriarchalize the story, reducing Mary's agency as a protagonist, they do encompass a degree of variation in content. Eisenberg, which provides the most skeletal and unembroidered account, is the version most available to an English-language readership, in Wheeler Thackston's translation. Thus, in terms of the living, textual tradition that al-Kisā'ī's *qīṣaṣ* collection has today, the texts that are currently in circulation outside the manuscript corpus to a more or less accessible degree, the al-Kisā'ī Mary story to which an English-language readership is exposed paints a subtly different picture of the Annunciation and birth

of Jesus to the more expanded, male-dominated, narratives that are found in the two printed editions in circulation in the Arabic-speaking world.