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## WHEN MARY MET MUHAMMAD: THE QUR'AN AS RECEPTION HISTORY OF THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY

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By Jessica Markwood

Eighth century tradition tells of the Prophet Muhammad storming into Mecca to destroy more than 360 gods housed in the Ka'aba so that he may reclaim the holy site for a new monotheistic religion. He cleared the sanctuary of every idol and icon – all but one. Only an image of the Virgin Mary and Jesus remained.<sup>1</sup> This was no oversight. Instead it acknowledged a veneration of the Virgin that spanned across Christendom and the emergent Islamic world. Mary went on to become an integral character of Muslim religion, being the only woman to have a surah named after her and the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup> While the Quranic Mary narrative finds parallels in the canonical Gospels, it has several additions that reveal a connection to apocryphal Christian traditions present in pre-Islamic Arabia and Arab polemics that would validate the proto-Muslim community. The annunciation narrative, in particular, receives special emphasis in the Qur'an and reflects a diverse milieu of Christian doctrines and practices with its inclusion of the Annunciation to the pious wife of Imran, the mother of Mary. This narrative development is known as reception history, which is the way biblical texts have been interpreted and altered over time through culture, translation, or retelling. The Annunciation to Mary in the Qur'an acts as a reception history of the biblical account and Marian traditions in Byzantine Christianity, Christian heterodoxy, and Syriac Christianity active on the Arab Peninsula during the time of Muhammad.<sup>3</sup>

The Quranic Annunciation to Mary, found in Q.3 and Q.19, shares plot and stylistic elements with the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-56, but also includes the Annunciation to Anna the mother of Mary, a story typically

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<sup>1</sup> David D. Grafton, "The Identity and Witness of Arab Pre-Islamic Christianity," *Hervomde Teologiseses Studies* 70, no.1 (2014): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015): 763.

<sup>3</sup> To say that the Qur'an is reception history goes against a phenomenological understanding of Quranic revelation, which does not acknowledge any influence outside of the direct revelation from Allah. The research done here reflects an etic perspective, addressing Judeo-Christian resources that may have been available to Muhammad.

associated with second-century Christian apocryphal literature. In both Luke 1 and Q.3 Gabriel is sent to the Virgin Mary; Gabriel greets her; Mary fears; Gabriel announces Mary's favor; Gabriel says Mary will conceive a child named Jesus who will be sent to the people of God; Mary questions Gabriel; Gabriel states that God can do anything; and Mary departs for a time. However, the story of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, is entirely extrabiblical.

The story of the immaculate conception of Mary seems most obviously correlated with the presumably Gnostic work, the *Protoevangelium of James*. The text was penned circa 150 CE, though perhaps earlier due to its use of Synoptic material but lack of Johannine references, which would have emerged close to 90 CE.<sup>4</sup> The text rose in popularity throughout the second century, receiving mentions in the works of Clement of Alexandria, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons.<sup>5</sup> More than one hundred fifty manuscripts survive in various forms and languages. Most notably, there are manuscripts in Greek from the fourth century, Syriac from the fifth century, Coptic from the tenth century, Arabic from the tenth century, and Ethiopic from the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Fragments of Sahidic and Coptic versions have been discovered from earlier centuries, but entire manuscripts have not yet been found in these languages of the Arab world.<sup>7</sup> The author, who identifies himself as James the half-brother of Jesus, tells the story of a wealthy Jewish couple, Joachim and Anna, who fast so that they may receive a child from God. Finally, an angel appears to Anna and announces that she will conceive a daughter, Mary. The tale satiated a rising curiosity about the early life of Mary, largely absent from the canon, and defended the perpetual virginity of Mary that was disparaged by Jewish skeptics.<sup>8</sup>

The *Protoevangelium of James* uses the Lucan account as a source

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<sup>4</sup> Nasr, 382.

<sup>5</sup> Mary B. Cunningham. "'All-Holy Infant': Byzantine and Western Views on the Conception of the Virgin Mary," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50, no. 1-2 (2006): 131.

<sup>6</sup> Reck, 360.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelia B. Horn, "Mary between the Bible and the 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, no. 4 (20017): 514.

<sup>8</sup> Jewish antagonists claimed that Joseph was the true father of Jesus while others claimed that Jesus was the illegitimate child of Pantera, a Roman soldier. [Reck, 357.]

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because both accounts include similar elements of the annunciation story. However, the *Protoevangelium of James* presents new information that parallels the Qur'an. For example, the *Protoevangelium* and Qur'an include Mary's mother dedicating her unborn child to the Lord, Mary living in the temple with Zechariah, and being miraculously fed.<sup>9</sup> The information found only in the Qur'an likely serves to create an Arab culture in the narrative by linking Mary to the house of Imran and legitimizing the new movement by connecting it to the temple and well-established Judaism. For example, the Annunciation to Mary's mother utilizes the familiarity of the Christian story in a Jewish setting while replacing the Jewish names, Joachim and Anna, with Arab names that connect the characters to the historic line of Imran. The new information also serves to preserve Mary's purity by emphasizing her time alone in the temple and omitting the role of Joseph entirely.<sup>10</sup>

Though the Quranic Annunciation appears to be a combination of the canonical Gospels, the *Protoevangelium of James*, and Arab influences, the question still remains: how did Muhammad know about these Christian traditions and why did he add them to the Qur'an? Most historians, regardless of religious affiliation, agree that Muhammad was illiterate and would not have been able to comprehend Christian literature himself.<sup>11</sup> It would not be text, but oral tradition and popular liturgy that would impact the Arab world. Jewish exile, increased trade along the Silk Road, and widespread use of the Aramaic language facilitated the eastern spread of Christianity in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>12</sup> Christian communities grew in size throughout the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Najran, Mecca, and Yemen.<sup>13</sup> Even after Islam took hold of the Middle East, Christian converts brought with them the stories that coincided with the Abrahamic monotheism preached by Muhammad. Most of these Christian communities and converts were associated with Byzantine Christianity, Christian heterodoxy, or Syriac

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<sup>9</sup> "The Protoevangelium of James," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1886): 361.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan M. Reck, "The Annunciation to Mary: A Christian Echo in the Qur'an," *Vigiliae Christianae* 68, no.4 (2014): 358.

<sup>11</sup> Darren M. Slade, "Arabia Haeresium Ferax (Arabia Bearer of Heresies): Schismatic Christianity's Potential Influence on Muhammad and the Qur'an," *American Theological Inquiry* 7, no.1 (2011): 44.

<sup>12</sup> Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London: Tauris, 2006) 25.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

Christianity. Through these groups Christianity was transmitted to the Islamic world.

In the seventh-century the Byzantine Empire, which spanned from Spain to Asia Minor, represented Christendom to the Eastern world. Meccans interacted with Christian traders and monks and were familiar with the ongoing conflict between Persia and Byzantium.<sup>14</sup> This interaction almost certainly included an increasingly developed Mariology that was gaining prominence in the Church of the East. From the fifth century onward, a unified devotion to Mary as the pure and sinless Mother of God permeated the Byzantine church. It was even sanctioned by the Church in 431 at the Council of Ephesus.<sup>15</sup> Though the emphasis was originally a Christological attempt at defining Christ's humanity and divinity in light of his relationship to Mary, sermons and hymns praised the ever-virgin Mary as the temple of the incarnate God.<sup>16</sup> Mary B. Cunningham, an authority on pre-Islamic Mariology in Arabia, expands upon this idea in her study of Byzantine Mariological development claiming, "During the late sixth and early seventh centuries, Mary had come to represent for the people of Constantinople not only a symbol of the reality of Christ's human incarnation, but also a powerful, intercessory figure."<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps of greater importance was the role that the *Protoevangelium of James* came to play in Byzantine culture and art. Beginning in the mid-sixth century, feasts to honor various events in Mary's life were added to the Christian calendar.<sup>18</sup> Once the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin became an integral part of the liturgical cycle in the seventh century, portrayals of the Annunciation to Anna began appearing across the empire. A fifth century medallion and some fifth century Egyptian woodcuts are some of the earliest artifacts to show Mary drawing water at the time of annunciation, a stereotypical scene from the *Protoevangelium of James*.<sup>19</sup> Some engravings of Anna are dated even earlier. The infancy of Mary is depicted on a sixth century column that is most likely of Oriental origin and was pillaged by

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<sup>14</sup> J. Spencer Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (New York: Longman, 1979): 258.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, 130.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 135. The Eastern Church believed that if Christ was truly divine as the ecumenical councils confirmed, Mary would be the only truly human point of access to God, making her the intercessory figure instead of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>19</sup> Horn, 524.

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Crusaders in Constantinople in 1204 CE.<sup>20</sup> Two sixth century ivory plates, likely originating in either Syria or Egypt, also reveal the angel's annunciation of Mary's birth.<sup>21</sup> The fact that this pre-Islamic art existed in Constantinople, Syria, and Egypt means that the proto-Muslim community as well as Muslims involved in conquest of the Christian East had the opportunity to frequently interact with these common images from the *Protoevangelium of James*.<sup>22</sup> Though Mary was deeply venerated and the images relating to apocryphal Marian traditions were common enough to assume Muhammad would have seen them, it still does not explain the textual transmission of the story that becomes Q.3 and Q.19 of the Qur'an.

The diverse Christologies presented in the Qur'an lead many scholars to attribute Quranic development to the numerous schismatic and heretical Christian groups that found refuge on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>23</sup> The most influential splinter groups contemporary to Muhammad were Gnostics, Nazoreans, Monophysites, and Nestorians. The Qur'an clearly shows a familiarity with various Christological controversies and Muhammad's overall agenda seems to be an attempt to resolve these divisions in the Judeo-Christian world. Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, in his comparison of the Qur'an and Aramaic Gospel Traditions, states, "The Prophet Muhammad sought to bring an end to the sectarianism of his world by calling the People of the Scripture to join him by coming to a 'common word' and commanding his early community to 'hold on to the cord of God and not to the splinter.'"<sup>24</sup>

Gnostics and Nazoreans had a small but significant role in formation of Quranic Mariology. The Gnostics represented a group who claimed to have special knowledge from God that led them to reject the material world, and therefore could not accept the humanity of Christ. Arabs were drawn to the spirituality of Gnosticism and its docetic tendencies in the second century, but these communities had largely dissolved by the fifth century.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps more important than the physical communities were the Gnostic agendas that gave way to the *Protoevangelium of James* and later works depicting the life of Mary and Christ's omniscience in infancy, such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-*

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<sup>20</sup> Horn, 524.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Slade, 44.

<sup>24</sup> Erman Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qur'an and Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 4.

<sup>25</sup> Slade, 49.

*Matthew*, the *Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas*, and the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*.<sup>26</sup> The Nazoreans, a Jewish sect that accepted Jesus as Messiah while rejecting his divinity, produced texts such as the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, which affirm Mary as the divine third member of the Trinity.<sup>27</sup> In his investigation of pre-Islamic heretical influences, Darren Slade notes that though there is no certifiable way to confirm transmission of Nazorean doctrine into mainstream Arab culture, the Qur'an does reflect an abnormally similar deification of the Virgin.<sup>28</sup>

Monophysites, most notably characterized by their belief that Jesus was only divine in nature, composed one of the largest Arab sectarian groups. Many were part of the Coptic Church or desert monastic movements.<sup>29</sup> Ethiopic and Coptic Christians made numerous liturgical references to the *Protoevangelium of James*, especially after they began celebrating the feast days of Saint Mary.<sup>30</sup> Scenes from apocryphal traditions of Mary also appear in Egyptian Coptic art in sequences depicting the entirety of the life of Anna and Joachim through the birth of Christ.<sup>31</sup> Arabs would have certainly interacted with Monophysites not only through art, but also in person. Monophysites were active missionaries to the Arabs, developing small Christian desert communities throughout the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>32</sup> Even more directly, Muhammad had a Coptic wife named Mariya and sent many of his early followers to Negus, an Ethiopian Monophysite king.<sup>33</sup> The Qur'an is evidence that these interactions allowed Muhammad to become very familiar with Monophysite doctrine, not because Muhammad supports it, but because Monophysitism consistently coincides with the Christology that the Qur'an explicitly rejects.<sup>34</sup>

The heterodoxy that most profoundly influenced Muhammad's understanding of Christianity was likely Nestorianism, a view promoted by Nestorius's teaching that Jesus was not fully divine. In 431 the Council of Ephesus exiled Nestorius and triggered the move of his followers into

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<sup>26</sup> Reck, 358.

<sup>27</sup> Slade, 50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Slade, 44.

<sup>30</sup> Reck, 362.

<sup>31</sup> Horn, 526.

<sup>32</sup> Slade, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> Baumer, 161.

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neighboring Arabia and Persia to avoid persecution.<sup>35</sup> Church historian Cristoph Baumer refers to Nestorian Mariology as the “Pandora’s Box” that initiated Nestorian exile. Nestorius rejected the council-approved Marian title *Theotokos*, “God-bearer,” and proposed the use of *Christotokos*, “Christ-bearer,” to place emphasis on the humanity of Christ rather than the divinity of Mary that could be interpreted in *Theotokos*.<sup>36</sup> Nestorius supported the veneration of Mary, but opposed worshiping her like the Nazorean desert tribes that turned her into a Mother god and part of another pagan divine triad.<sup>37</sup> Like his contemporaries, Nestorius held Mary in high honor, viewing the Annunciation as key to the unity of Christ’s humanity and divinity. Baumer writes, “[Nestorius] emphasized again and again the complete ontological unity of Christ and the genuine incarnation of the word in him, which did not happen only at his baptism but, rather, simultaneously with the Annunciation to Mary.”<sup>38</sup>

This adoration of Mary, importance of the Annunciation of Mary, and emphasis on the humanity of Christ all closely resemble the Mariology and Christology presented in the Qur’an. Just as Nestorians presented Jesus as a saint more divine than others, Muhammad presented him as a prophet holier than others.<sup>39</sup> Even the name for Jesus the Messiah in the Qur’an, *Isa al-Masih*, seems to stem from the Nestorian Syriac, *Isho Mshiha*.<sup>40</sup> Nestorians were some of Muhammad’s key mentors in Islam’s formative years, particularly Bahira, the Nestorian monk who affirmed Muhammad’s prophetic authority and taught Muhammad about Christianity.<sup>41</sup>

Though the various heterodoxies present in pre-Islamic Arabia had great influence on the Qur’an, it is also clear that Muhammad did not fully adhere to any. Muhammad utilized the Gnostic and Nestorian positions that emphasize the humanity of Christ and Mary to oppose the Nazorean and Monophysite positions that deify them, but these schismatic traditions were not the dominant influences in Quranic development. Heretical movements obviously impacted Muhammad’s Christology, but the Qur’an does not reflect loyalties to any one creed. Instead it reflects Muhammad’s response to

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<sup>35</sup> Baumer, 49.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Trimmingham, 267.

<sup>41</sup> Slade, 45.

divided Christianity and a call to unity for the Arabs.

The greatest Christian influence on the Quranic text and Islamic Mariological development was Syriac Christianity, which refers to the earliest forms of Eastern Orthodoxy that emerged among Aramaic-speaking people in Asia. According to Acts 2, Arabs had been hearing the Gospel since the very foundation of the Church.<sup>42</sup> The Syriac Gnostic Bardaisan mentions an active Christian presence in Parthia, Gilan, Kushan, Media, Edessa, and Hatra in *The Book of Laws of the Lands*, meaning that Christian cells had developed throughout the whole of Mesopotamia by the time of his writing in 224 CE.<sup>43</sup> Eusebius also makes references to Christianity flourishing all over the Arabian Peninsula in the third and fourth centuries.<sup>44</sup>

The canon most often used in Syriac Christianity and most familiar to Arabs was the Aramaic Gospel Traditions rather than an Arabic translation. Aramaic Gospel Traditions refers to the canonical Gospels written in either Syriac or Christian Palestinian Aramaic, both corpuses translated from an original Greek text.<sup>45</sup> This text, which replaced the earlier Old Syriac Gospel, was circulated during the final years of Tatian's life around 180 CE.<sup>46</sup> It was translated from Greek but stylistically Syriac.<sup>47</sup> Though translating the Gospels into the local vernacular was considered standard protocol for many monastic movements, an Arab translation of the Bible was not complete until more than two centuries after Muhammad.<sup>48</sup> Though many off-handedly attribute this lack of Bible translation to stereotypes that Christians had about the nomadic Arab peoples, which certainly existed, there are various additional explanations for why a written

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<sup>42</sup> “And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites...both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.’” (Acts 2:8-11 ESV)

<sup>43</sup> Baumer, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Grafton, 4.

<sup>45</sup> El Badawi, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Aramaic Gospel Traditions were likely influenced by Tatian's *Diatessaron*, a one-volume harmony of the four Gospels, that was most often utilized in Syriac Christianity.

<sup>47</sup> El-Badawi, 33.

<sup>48</sup> “Kachouh has argued that the earliest Arabic Gospel text that we now possess is Vatican Arabic Manuscript (MS) 13 from the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem that can be dated to around 800 CE. It includes Matthew, Mark, and a portion of Luke and was more than likely translated from Syriac.” [Grafton, 2.]

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Arabic translation did not exist. Firstly, written Arabic was rarely seen prior to the Qur'an.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, many Arabs who would have been in contact with these monastic Christians could have been largely illiterate.<sup>50</sup> Thirdly, Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of Egypt and Asia Minor as far as India and would have been understood by most Arabs as a trade and liturgical language.<sup>51</sup> Finally, and least suspected, all early Arabic Gospel texts could have been destroyed in Muslim conquest.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of the explanation of the absent Arabic texts, it is clear that Arab Christians were utilizing the Syriac Gospels and Aramaic liturgical material. Syriac worship emphasized the public recitation of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions and liturgies that honored the Virgin Mary. Though this lack of textual tradition is typically a problem for scholars looking to explain the transmission, Grafton asks,

How do we abandon the prejudice that persons, who encounter Scripture through its oral reception, its recitation, or changing, or even by seeing its stories portrayed in visual images, are somehow less scriptural or orthodox than those who read the silent pages for themselves? How do we recognize that even for someone who is highly literate scriptural words that are spoken, recited, or changed have an impact different from that of the written text read in privacy or silence?<sup>53</sup>

These Syriac readings would soon enter the pre-Islamic oral milieu to define much of the material that composed the Qur'an and the style in which it was written. Because the Qur'an was the next step in Arabic language development, moving from an oral to written tradition demanded theological loan words from Syriac, Ethiopic, Persian, and Hebrew, with the greatest number coming from Syriac.<sup>54</sup> Aramaicists identify significant linguistic and poetic similarities between the Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospels, particularly the Syriac, that are largely absent in the Greek text, which led scholars to infer that the recited Aramaic Gospel Traditions served as a textual template for the Qur'an.<sup>55</sup> The earliest surah to strongly use this

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<sup>49</sup> El Badawi, 36.

<sup>50</sup> Baumer, 143.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>53</sup> Grafton, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Trimmingham, 266.

<sup>55</sup> El Badawi, 35.

Syriac styling and mention Gospel characters is the nineteenth surah, the surah named after Mary.<sup>56</sup>

It was not only the Syriac text that was passed from Christianity to Islam, but also the values, particularly devotion to the Virgin Mary and emphasis on the annunciation narrative. In his treatment of Syriac Mariology, James Puthuparampil claims, “For the Syriac Fathers, the scene of the Annunciation was the most favorite topic of erudition on Mary. In presenting Mary before Gabriel, the messenger of God, they presented Mary’s characteristics as a model to humanity, and her consent to cooperate with God as marking the beginning of the redemption from sin.”<sup>57</sup> The Feast of the Annunciation was of utmost importance on the Syriac calendar, and was even declared the “beginning and source of all other feasts.”<sup>58</sup> In the fourth century St. Ephrem interprets the Annunciation as a parallel to Moses seeing the burning bush, which though aflame would not wither, just as Mary would have a child but her purity would never be compromised.<sup>59</sup> In his “Hymn on Nativity,” St. Ephrem writes, “In her virginity Eve put on leaves of shame. Your mother put on, in her virginity, the garment of glory that suffices for all,” defending the necessity of Mary being eternally virginal.<sup>60</sup> Later in the fourth century Mar Jacob describes Mary as the “mouth of the Church,” because she quickly enters into an active dialogue with a holy angel and she submits to the Lord without any hesitation.<sup>61</sup> Mary was also called the Second Heaven, because Christ left Heaven to dwell in her. Mary’s proclamation that “all generations shall call me blessed,” reveal that the whole of Israel is personified in her and that through her the hope of redemption is manifested.<sup>62</sup> Just as Abraham submitted to the call of God to uncertainty in order to initiate the Old Covenant, so Mary submitted to uncertainty to

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<sup>56</sup> Luxenberg 13; Nasr also notes, “Maryam has several unique characteristics that give it a distinct linguistic and thematic unity. It is one of the longest surahs to have a clearly defined rhyming pattern; sixty-seven of its ninety-eight verses end with the same final sound, and other, shorter passages contain separate, but related, rhyming patterns.” [Nasr 764]

<sup>57</sup> James Puthuparampil, “Mariology in Syriac Traditions,” in *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Pauly Maniyattu, (Satna: Ephrem’s Publications, 2007): 324.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

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initiate the New Covenant.<sup>63</sup> Her role as divine intercessor, perpetual virgin, bearer of redemption, and submitter to God's will made Mary an exemplary Christian, and an exemplary Muslim.

As Muhammad travelled across his sixth century trade routes he encountered tales from soldiers at war with the Byzantine Empire, heretical exiles escaping state persecution, and fellow merchants practicing a distinctly Eastern form of Christianity. By the time the account of the Annunciation reached Muhammad it had already been enhanced by Gnostic writers to secure Mary's eternal purity and divine origins. Muhammad appropriated the story to maintain Mary as exemplar while introducing particularly Arab details increased legitimacy of a new religious movement. He followed no particular doctrine, but saw a need for unity in an environment overrun by religious factionalism. Though there was no text, the diverse homiletics, liturgies, hymns, artwork, and celebrations of the Byzantines, Syriac Christians, and even heretics in pre-Islamic Arabia molded the fluid oral tradition to esteem Mary and humanize Jesus. Like his religious contemporaries, Muhammad upheld the Annunciation to Mary in the Gospel of Luke and the *Protoevangelium of James* as a turning point in prophetic history, when God would break his silence to commission the righteous to submit to him – but now the righteous would be Arab.

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<sup>63</sup> Puthumparampil, 338.