

EL RELATO DEL NACIMIENTO DE JESUS: A TRANSLATION AND STUDY OF  
THE ALJAMIADO STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

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This paper is a translation and study of *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*, an aljamiado story of the birth of Jesus, written by underground Muslims in Spain during the Spanish Inquisition circa the sixteenth century. Main findings include parallels between the text, the Bible, the Qur'an, and other traditional Islamic texts. In general, the narrative favors Muslim principle over Christian parallels, though the two are interwoven in order to reconcile the dual Catholic/Islamic identities of the sixteenth century Moriscos.

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## **Contextual Introduction to Aljamiado Literature and Morisco Life**

Though the Romans and the Visigoths left their own indelible footprints on the history of Spain in the early centuries of the current era, the North African Arabs and Berbers conquered the peninsula like none had done before them. Crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, the conquerors invaded from the south in 711, and in a few short years they controlled nearly all of Iberia. Although this territory, known as Al-Andalus, gradually shrank as the Christians of the north slowly pushed the Muslims south, seven centuries of Islamic domination changed the landscape of the peninsula in dramatic ways. The phenomenon in which Christians, Jews and Muslims coexisted fairly peacefully in many areas of the peninsula during this time has become known as *convivencia*, and while there is much debate as to whether or not the Muslim rulers fostered true religious and cultural tolerance, it is clear that the daily interaction between religious groups was unique in medieval Europe (Ray). This legacy of interaction would continue, even as conflicts and tensions rose throughout subsequent centuries.

Eventually, what is now known as the Christians' *Reconquista* ('reconquest') campaign became extensive enough to create a frontier lifestyle for those living on the ever-fluctuating border between Al-Andalus and Christian Spain. Periodic raids and fighting made the frontier both dangerous and lucrative for all involved, though the Muslims of the fertile south had the burden of possessing more land to raid, and wealth enough to pay the Christians' *parias* ('ransoms') to keep their olive trees and other crops safe for another year (Reilly 194).

As the centuries progressed and the Christian populations advanced down the peninsula, the sporadic fighting and frontier lifestyle resulted in a crusade-mentality in which both sides were propelled by the idea of a holy war. Joseph O'Callaghan provides evidence from as early as the eleventh century that the northern kings believed "the liberation of the kingdom, following the destruction and expulsion of the Muslims and the extirpation of their rite, would result in the recovery, growth and fostering of the Christian religion" (9). This idea was further popularized by the actual Crusades taking place in Europe and the Middle East, and the Pope encouraged such activity. By the late fifteenth century, Granada was the only Muslim kingdom left in Iberia, protected by the nearly impenetrable walls of the Alhambra. Nevertheless, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, (the Catholic Monarchs), conquered Granada in 1492, thus ensuring the future unification of a Christian-ruled Spain.

For the first few years, especially in Granada, Muslims were granted some leeway in the new rigid Catholic system. Under the *Capitulaciones*,<sup>1</sup> or terms of surrender, Muslims were guaranteed the right to continue practicing their religion and customs. By 1525, however, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella had issued orders for all Muslims to convert to Christianity or leave the kingdom. The orders were widely enforced, though conversion was mostly nominal and whole communities continued practicing their Islamic faith. Vincent Barletta notes that "as late as 1565 Iberian Muslims continued to practice their religion and maintain their cultural characteristics- in some cases openly- in areas where their population was most concentrated" (xxvi). He calls these populations

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<sup>1</sup> "Capitulaciones de la guerra de Granada." *Los Moriscos*. Ed. Mercedes García-Arenal. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1996.

‘crypto-Muslims,’ though by this point in history they are known as ‘Moriscos.’ The term is understood to mean ‘former Muslims,’ but comes from the pejorative diminutive of the word- basically, ‘little Moors.’

The year 1567 saw a distinct change in royal policy on the issues of religion and culture. The new laws and policies were as follows:

Use of the Arab spoken and written language is prohibited.

Morisco robes for men and women are prohibited, and women must keep their faces unveiled.

Weddings, engagements, and any kind of party or festival where *zambras* or *leilas* or other Morisco instruments or singers might play are prohibited, so that there they may not speak against the Christian religion, nor be suspected of such.

The doors of Morisco houses must remain open at all times. Women are prohibited from using henna, and from using Moorish names and last names.

Baths are prohibited.

Moriscos shall not keep *gacis* slaves. Free *gacis* should leave the kingdom of Granada within six months.

Neither shall Moriscos keep black slaves. (“Memorial” 47)

The Morisco Francisco Núñez Muley from Granada wrote a response to these new laws, detailing the ways in which they violated the terms of capitulation, and also the ways in which the new policies not only outlawed religious practices, but regional cultural traditions as well. In a very logical manner, Núñez Muley takes each new law and proves that it has no intrinsic connection to religion. For instance, he mentions how dress and language have nothing to do with Islam, and uses Christians in Egypt and Palestine as an example. He demonstrates how much it will cost everyday people to change everything about their daily lives, both financially and culturally. He is nearly sarcastic while explaining that bathing is simply a question of staying healthy: “This is not against the

faith (Christianity), but good for the body; tightening the muscles and curing illnesses” (“Memorial” 52). More than once he asks, rhetorically and with increasing frustration, “¿*De qué sirve?*” Meaning, “What is the point?”

Unfortunately, Núñez Muley’s address had little effect, and Moriscos continued to be persecuted for their religion and their culture. Historians have debated for centuries as to the necessity of this oppression; indeed, the Catholic Monarchs felt they needed complete geographical, political, and religious unity in order to create their ideal society. Nonetheless, most will agree that “Spain’s treatment of the Moriscos stands as a tremendous scar on its national history...[they singled] out this minority population of several thousand people, harassing them by varying degrees for more than a century before expelling them by force” (Barletta xxviii). With these stringent and oppressive laws in place, and the Inquisition always lurking and investigating suspicious behavior, one might wonder how any non-Christian culture survived at all.

While a few sincerely converted, and some sold their possessions and left the peninsula, most Moriscos were forced to live double lives: Christian externally and Muslim internally. The Mufti of Oran even issued a fatwa in 1563 declaring *taqiyya* (‘precaution’) permissible in Spain. Under *taqiyya*, if the lives of Muslims are in danger, they may hide their faith as long as they keep their hearts and minds pure. Thus, “if, at the hour of prayer you are forced to bow down to Christian idols, do so with the intention of praying to Allah instead...If you are forced to drink wine, drink it, without intending to become intoxicated...If you must eat pork, eat it, purifying your intentions and recognizing your sin, as you would with any other prohibited thing” (“Respuesta” 45).



These *taqiyya* principles covered all aspects of daily life, and gave the Moriscos the freedom to act in accordance with Spanish law without violating their religious beliefs.

Nevertheless, maintaining a cultural identity after decades of covert practices cannot have been easy; surely the Moriscos would have done whatever possible to preserve the traditions, beliefs and stories that did survive. Documents like *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*, which served such a purpose, were extremely dangerous. If found by the Inquisition, or by someone willing to tell the Inquisition, a document written in Arabic letters would be enough evidence to convict the owner of heresy.

Religious and secular, Morisco texts were written in *aljamiado*, a unique way of writing Spanish Castilian with Arabic script. “This term comes from the Arabic adjective ‘*aljamiyya*,’ which means, in different though related contexts, ‘barbarian,’ ‘non-Arabic,’ or ‘foreign’” (Barletta xxix), and generally refers to any language, other than Arabic, spoken in a given country or region. Vincent Barletta has studied these *aljamiado* texts, and explored their cultural significance as well. According to his studies, “the Moriscos made use of the traditional narratives not only in order to preserve and guide their practice as Sunni Muslims, but also in order to deal with— within more locally-negotiated Muslim moral frameworks— the increasingly difficult triple bind within which they found themselves as practicing Muslims, new Christian converts, and subjects of the Spanish Crown” (9).

In my translation and analysis of *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús* I found this ‘triple bind framework’ to be particularly salient. As both the central figure in Christianity, and an important one in Islam, Jesus represents a unique point of overlap in

the different frameworks within which the sixteenth century Moriscos lived. This particular narrative implies that Moriscos actively tried to reconcile their conflicting identities by exploring the character of Jesus.

### **The Translation Process**

Of the three surviving manuscripts of *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*, two were written in aljamiado. The third used Roman characters, and was edited by Francisco Guillén Robles in 1885. Not much is known about the exact history of each manuscript. Dating them is very difficult, and even the original region they might have come from is practically impossible to determine. Nevertheless, “in many cases it is possible to make a conjectural dating of the aljamiado manuscripts on the basis of deterioration of Muslim religious ideas in them and of the Arabic they employ” (López Baralt and Hurley 245). While this postulation falls outside the scope of this study, the theory makes sense, and I will assume that even if the reasoning is flawed, the conclusion is probably accurate.

F. Guillén Robles’ edition of third manuscript is the earliest edited version of the text available, and because he used the original, and stayed as close to the original wording as possible, I chose to use his edition for my translation. Another more recently updated edition is available, but I felt it would provide a less authentic final product. Unlike Robles, however, I decided not to change the names of the characters of the story. He converted them to make them more familiar to Spanish readers, while I chose not to anglicize them for the exact opposite reason—I wanted to preserve their Hispano-Arabic identity to its fullest. By the end of the sixteenth century most Moriscos were prohibited from keeping their traditional Arabic Moorish names, and if the characters of the story

were meant to preserve a part of their religious and cultural history, I believe that is significant.

I took a very straightforward approach to translating this document, doing my best to preserve not only the original meaning of each phrase, but as much of the original word choice as well. Nevertheless, I sought to make the story interesting, understandable, and easily read in English. This narrative uses unique phrasing that blends religious expressions and ideas with popular vernacular. It was meant to be instructive in that it was a way for people to grasp a theological idea through an entertaining and non-ceremonial channel. Stories such as *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*, (while written and read by scholars and academics), were probably familiar to the Morisco general population through a long history of oral tradition and storytelling (Barletta 18). Evidence of this can be seen in the both the colloquial language and the lyrical repetition used throughout the narrative. I believe I succeeded in producing a document that maintains this unique phrasing, and gives the reader an understanding of the distinctive essence of the narrative's utility and its aesthetic value.

### **Exploring the Texts**

Breaking down the content of the narrative was both interesting and surprising. My goal was to untangle the various influences, religious or otherwise, that appear in the story. Originally, I believed this would include a comparative analysis of *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*, the Qur'an, and the Christian New Testament, but as the project evolved, the preliminary corpus expanded. The two major scriptural texts do play substantial roles in the aljamiado narrative, but Islamic hadith and religious commentary

are also featured, along with a few instances of Old Testament parallels. Ultimately, *El Relato* contains a unique combination of religious influences, with the Islamic traditions dominating and prevailing over the present, but less significant, Christian storylines.

Initially, I recognized many similarities between *El Relato* and the Qur'an, especially portions of Sura 3 (The Family of Imran) and Sura 19 (Mary). Indeed, I found many relevant verses to parallel the narrative in several Suras of the Qur'an. Before these similarities are elaborated, however, the distinction between the text of the Qur'an and the hadith, and the religious commentary that surround them, must be explained.

In Islam, the Qur'an is regarded as the primary holy text. It was given to Muhammad directly from God in a series of revelations, which were then transcribed and joined into one book, organized by suras (chapters). Its verses are meditated upon, learned by heart and recited, sometimes as prayers, sometimes as a form of music, and its beautiful Arabic script is frequently used as an art form itself (Denny 145). The words of the Qur'an are considered authoritative in regards to the Islamic religion; they are "inimitable," and of a "miraculous nature" because they come directly from God (Denny 145).

The hadith are also important religious texts. They are generally attributed to Muhammad, and consist of reports on his life and his teachings, or those of his followers, during the formative years of Islam. Though the hadith are sometimes considered lower in rank than the Qur'an, because their words are attributed to Muhammad and not to Allah directly, hadith are used for clarification when verses or parts of the Qur'an are unclear.

Hadith are formatted into two distinct parts: the *isnad* and the *matn*. The *isnad* documents the route by which the report has been made, or conveyed to each generation, while the *matn* of a hadith is the actual narrative. The authenticity or weakness of a hadith depends upon the reliability of its *isnad* and the legitimacy of each of its transmitters (Denny 152). The opening paragraph of *El Relato* is striking in its similarity to an *isnad* of a hadith:

The narrator said: This was made known to us through Alhaçán, son of Abilhaçan Albocriyo, by Macatil son of Çuleymén, who said that Imrán was the father of Mariem, and he had a wife who was named Hanna and she was the most excellent of all women.

Finally, “Muslims interpret their Qur’an through layers of exegetical tradition,” and so other religious commentary, or *tafsīr*, is incorporated along with the hadith to complete the majority of Islamic literature (Denny 142). One genre of Islamic commentary is the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, “usually translated as tales, stories or legends of the prophets” (Brinner xi). However, the translator of al-Tha‘labī’s extensive collection (d. 1036), William Brinner, gave his work the title Lives of the Prophets, “to indicate that to many Muslims these are not mere tales or legends but actual historical accounts, relating what is known about the about the lives of the prophets” (xi).<sup>2</sup> In his introduction, he explains the interesting dynamic of this collection of stories as having “varied aspects, gravitating between classical, medieval and popular Islam, undoubtedly meant for the enjoyment of many, while simultaneously giving religious instruction with scholarly commentary on

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<sup>2</sup> I have also used Brannon Wheeler’s collection of Islamic exegetical texts, Prophets in the Quran, though often the passages matched Brinner’s translation of al-Tha‘labī’ identically.

the Qur'an as a background" (xi). His analysis is strikingly similar to my conclusions about *El Relato de Nacimiento de Jesús*, in which those same elements can be found.

Another corresponding characteristic found in both al-Tha'labī's collection and the aljamiado narrative are the "aspects of shared folk-religious beliefs of Muslims, Christians and Jews" (Brinner xi). This particular feature of *El Relato* highlights the fact that Islamic texts are not the only literary influences on this narrative. It can be difficult to decipher the roots of the similarities between the texts, because one must keep in mind the similarities between the Bible and the Qur'an, and determine the original source. I have provided the excerpts from each relevant religious text within my translation, whether the passage shows a comparable narrative or a divergent one.<sup>3</sup> I will demonstrate that the amount of comparable text between *El Relato* and the Christian New Testament is significant, though in general, the phrasing is closer to the Islamic literature than to the Christian verses.

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<sup>3</sup> All textual and parenthetical references to the Old and New Testament are from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (2001), and all verses cited from the Qur'an are from Ahmed Ali's translation (1993), though my list of Works Consulted also cites a second translation from 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Alī (2003), which was used for its concordance only.

*El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús: The Story of the Birth of Jesús*

In the name of Allah, who is above all in mercy, may Allah increase the honor of Mahoma the righteous.<sup>4</sup>

The narrator said: This was made known to us through Alhaçán, son of Abilhaçan Albocriyo<sup>5</sup>, by Macatil [118]<sup>6</sup> son of Çuleymén,<sup>7</sup> who said that Imrán<sup>8</sup> was the father of Mariem, and he had a wife who was named Hanna and she was the most excellent of all women.

And Hanna became pregnant by her husband; and as she began to show, she raised her eyes to heaven and said, “Oh Lord, give me an infant to live on the face of the earth, and everything I bear, male or female, I will offer to you for the temple, for your holy service. So receive this from me, oh Lord, for you are the most powerful of all.”<sup>9</sup>

On that day, there were three people serving in the temple, Zacariye and two others with him. The wife of Zacariye was the sister of Hanna, the mother of Mariem.<sup>10</sup> And Hanna went to Zacariye and said to him, “Oh Zacariye! I have promised to give any child I bear to the temple, to put him in your service in the sacred house of the Lord.”

<sup>4</sup> Q 49:13 “He who has more integrity has indeed greater honor with God.”

<sup>5</sup> Probably Abu 'l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī, also called “Abu 'l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad, the alleged author, or final *rāwī*, of historical novels dealing with the early years of Islam, who also is credited with a *mawlid* and a fictional life of Muḥammad” (Rosenthal).

<sup>6</sup> Numbers in brackets indicate the page numbers of Guillén Robles’ original.

<sup>7</sup> Muḳātil b. Sulaymān b. Bashīr al-Azdī al-Ḳhurāsānī al-Balkhī (d. 767), “Abu 'l-Ḥasan traditionist and commentator on the Ḳur’ān... His elaborations of Biblical elements in the Ḳur’ān and his tracing every allusion back to the “People of the Book” heightened his disrepute in later centuries” (Plessner).

<sup>8</sup> Or “Amran” which is the Biblical name for Imrán; also Mariem is “Maryam” in the Qur’an and “Mary” in the Bible; Zacariye is “Zakariya” in the Qur’an and “Zechariah” in the Bible (Wagner 450).

<sup>9</sup> Q 3:35 “Remember, when the wife of ‘Imran prayed: ‘Oh Lord, I offer what I carry in my womb in dedication to your service, accept it for you hear all and know everything.’”

<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:5-80 In the New Testament, Mary is a relative of Zachariah’s wife Elizabeth, and both women become pregnant miraculously: Mary as a virgin, and Elizabeth as an elderly barren woman. Mary stays with them for three months at the beginning of her pregnancy.

[119] And Allah ordained that she give birth to a girl, and she called her Mariem.<sup>11</sup> Then she said to Zacariye, “You already know I have given birth to a girl, and promised her to the temple, and I want to fulfill that which I have promised the Lord.”<sup>12</sup>

Zacariye said to her, “Women are not suited for service in the house of the Lord; but watch and care for her, so that Allah might use her for his good work.”

Then she thought to return home, but suddenly Zacariye called to her saying, “Wait Hanna! Return to me with her, so that I may see her.”

And Hanna returned with Mariem, and he uncovered her face, and it shone like the moon.

And Allah put great love in the heart of Zacariye for Mariem, and he loved her and adored her very much. In that year, and the ones to follow, the crops and pastures did very well, and bore good harvests. And the crops in that particular year were harvested in a single month, praise and thanks to [120] Allah, honored and noble is he. And Zacariye looked at Mariem’s beauty and said, “Oh Hanna, leave her in my care, and fulfill that which you have promised.”<sup>13</sup>

So Zacariye took her into his care, and his companions said to him, “We will join with you, and raise her and instruct her, and we will obtain Allah’s great reward as well.”

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<sup>11</sup> Q 3:36 “And when she had given birth to the child, she said, ‘Oh Lord, I have delivered but a girl.’ But God knew better what she had delivered: A boy could not be as that girl was. ‘I have named her Mary,’ (she said), ‘and I give her into Your keeping. Preserve her and her children from Satan the ostracized.’”

<sup>12</sup> 1 Sam. 1:1-28 Story of Hannah, wife of Elkanah, who was barren until she prayed in the temple for God to give her a son, promising to give him to the service of the Lord and his temple. She conceived and Samuel was born. When she had weaned him she took him to Eli at the temple and said, “For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.” (There is no evidence in the Gospels of a Hannah, or Anna, who is the mother of Mary.)

<sup>13</sup> Q 3:37 “Her Lord accepted her graciously, and she grew up in excellence, and was given to Zachariah.”



But Zacariye said to them, “My brothers, let Allah chose the one of us that is most entitled to look after her, for it is not fitting that all of us assume responsibility for her. We will settle this by casting lots.”<sup>14</sup>

So each man took a reed<sup>15</sup> and wrote his name on it, so that each man present had his own reed. And they wrote Mariem’s name on another reed, and put all the lots together, and cast them into the running water. Then they prayed to Allah, honored and noble is he, and they said, “Lord, designate the one of us that is the most righteous and the most entitled; the one who, with the fear of God, will protect her and instruct her such that you, Lord, may be pleased; join his lot with [121] Mariem’s, and leave the other reeds submerged in the water.”

And they were all cast into the water, and Mariem’s lot emerged with Zacariye’s on top of the water, and the other lots of his companions were left submerged under the water.

They cast them three times, and they all arose in favor of Zacariye.<sup>16</sup> With this, Zacariye said to them, “I say to you now that I clearly have the most right to advocate on her behalf, more so than any of the rest of you.”

So they left her to the care of Zacariye, and he raised her and taught her, until she was older and wiser. He constructed a house for her there, so that she might serve Allah.

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<sup>14</sup> Tha‘labī: “The priests vied over her... Zachariah said to them, ‘I am more worthy of her than you because I married her maternal aunt.’ But the priests said to him, ‘Don’t say that; for indeed if she were given to the worthiest of all people and her nearest relative she would be given to the mother who bore her. However we will cast lots for her and she shall go to him who wins” (625).

Q 3:44 [The angels said], “For you were not there when they cast lots with quills (to determine) who should take care of Mary, nor when they disputed it.”

<sup>15</sup> Or “straw,” as in, “to draw straws.” In al-Tha‘labī, the word used in the narrative is “pens,” “It is said that these were the very pens with which they used to write the Torah” (625).

<sup>16</sup> Luke 1:8 “Once when [Zechariah] was serving as a priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense.”

And he put locks on the house so that no one might enter the place she lived; and he provided all the things she needed, he brought all her food and other provisions.<sup>17</sup>

And she lived this way, until the time came for her first menstruation. On that day, when Zacariye entered with her rations, Mariem said, “Zacariye, my dear, I am experiencing the natural course of womanhood, my menstrual cycle has come.”

He replied, “Then go to the house of your *hala* (maternal aunt), [122] and stay with her until you can be made clean, and once you are clean and pure again, return here to your place.”<sup>18</sup>

So she left for her aunt’s house, and she stayed with her until she was clean of her cycle. Then she asked Zacariye for permission, and she returned to the place that was hers to serve Allah.

As she was serving Allah, honored and noble is he, *Djibrīl* (Gabriel) appeared. He descended upon her on behalf of Allah, exalted may he be.<sup>19</sup> And he brought fruit from the trees of Heaven,<sup>20</sup> and *Djibrīl* said to her, “Eat, oh Mariem.”

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<sup>17</sup> Tha‘labī: “God said, ‘*she was given to the care of Zachariah*’ (3:37)... when she had grown up and attained the maturity of womanhood he built a little niche for her- that is to say an elevated room- in the house of prayer, and placed a door in its middle, so that no one could get up to it except by a ladder, like the door of the Ka’bah; no one went up to her except him. Every day he used to bring her food, her drinks and her ointment. And when Zachariah departed, he would lock the door upon her” (625).

<sup>18</sup> “Menstruation being one of the circumstances which, involving a major impurity, invalidate the state of purity, a *ghuṣl* [*q.v.*] (complete washing of the body) with water which is legally pure is necessary to re-establish that state of purity in which the performance of the *ṣalāt* etc. is valid. To those in this state of major impurity, in addition to the consequences of *ḥadath*, the following prohibitions apply: they may not recite the *Qur’ān* (except for one or two verses only to ward off the Devil) nor remain in the mosque (or even walk through it). Furthermore the Ramaḍān fast and the *ṣalāt* performed by those menstruating are not valid, and the fast is even forbidden to them” (Bousquet).

<sup>19</sup> Q 19:17 “We sent a spirit of Ours to her who appeared before her in the concrete form of a man.”

<sup>20</sup> Literally, “la Gloria,” or Glory.

And ʒjibrīl stood before her, and Mariem turned her face from him, and ʒjibrīl turned to the other place, and she hid her face in fear because she thought he was the *taquiye*— the man with a face that stole the love from any woman that saw it.<sup>21</sup>

For there had been a man during the time of the Beni Yçraile called ‘*taquiye*’ because he was the most handsome man anyone had ever seen; indeed there was not a single woman he met that he could not have.<sup>22</sup>

So Mariem was afraid that he was (the) *taquiye*; and when ʒjibrīl appeared in front her, she said: [123] “I defend myself against you, if you are the *taquiye*, may Allah protect me, too.”<sup>23</sup>

ʒjibrīl spoke, saying: “Oh Mariem, I am a messenger sent to you by Allah, and I bring you a message and present to you the fruit of paradise, and I greet you and announce to you that you will have a son who is pure.<sup>24</sup> So eat the food of Allah, for Allah chose you over all women on earth, and he purified you, oh Mariem. Humble yourself before your Lord, prostrate yourself before him, and obey him.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The precise meaning of the word *taquiye* is unclear. It might indicate a proper noun, but its origin could not be found.

<sup>22</sup> Tha‘labī: “She entered the cave, and there she found Gabriel, whom God made appear to her as a shapely human (footnoted as ‘a well-made man; a perfect man, a man without fault’)... ‘Ikrimah said that Gabriel appeared to her in the form of a beardless young man, with a bright face, curly hair and regular features. The learned men say that God sent him in human form only so that Mary might stay and listen to him. If he had descended in his own angelic form she would have been frightened, scared away, and would not have listened to him” (638-9).

<sup>23</sup> Q 19:18 “‘I seek refuge in the Merciful from you, if you fear him,’ she said.”

<sup>24</sup> Q 19:19 “He replied, ‘I am only a messenger from your Lord (sent) to bestow a good son on you.’”

<sup>25</sup> Q 3:43 “So adore your Lord, O Mary, and pay homage and bow with those who bow in prayer.”

Luke 1:28-32 “And [Gabriel] came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High.’”

Mariem replied: “Oh my dearly loved ʒjibrīl! How can this be? For I have never been with a man, nor have I acted improperly.”<sup>26</sup>

“This is what your Lord wants, and he wishes it to be so, as a miracle among the nations; and it is an official commandment.”<sup>27</sup>

“But, dear ʒjibrīl, as soon as I become pregnant, I will surely die at the hands of the Beni Yçraile.”

“Mariem, you are the most honored and protected by the power of Allah, and they will not be able to kill you.”

[124] “Oh my dearly loved ʒjibrīl! I will be shamed and abused and exiled by the Beni Yçraile.”

“You will not be shamed nor abused, nor exiled, for Allah is powerful enough to protect you from them.”

“Oh my dear ʒjibrīl! Then I will be stoned by the Beni Yçraile.”

“Their hearts are under the control of Allah.”

“Dearly loved ʒjibrīl! How can this be? I would quickly be killed, and later I will be forgotten.”

“Oh Mariem, you will be pregnant this very hour by the power of Allah, for such is the work of my Lord, that when he wishes something, he says, ‘Be!’ and it is.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Q 3:47 “She said, ‘My Lord, how shall I have a child when no man has touched me?’”

Q 19:20 “How can I have a son when no man has touched me, nor am I sinful?”

Luke 1:34 “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’”

<sup>27</sup> Q 19:21 “He said: ‘Thus it will be. Your Lord said: “It is easy for Me,” and that: “We shall make him a sign for men and a blessing from Us.” This is a thing already decreed.’”

Luke 1:35 “The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.’”

<sup>28</sup> Q 3:47 “He said: ‘That is how God creates what he wills. When he decrees a thing, He says ‘Be,’ and it is.’” Cont’d...

Then as ʒjibrīl spoke to her, she conceived, with the food of ʒjibrīl in her body.

[125] And as she spoke with him and he with her, she clearly felt the infant in her womb, and Mariem was afraid, and she felt a great burden of worry come upon her. And ʒjibrīl laughed, and Mariem said to him:

“Dear ʒjibrīl! I feel the infant in my belly!”

And at once ʒjibrīl looked at her, and saw her face change color,<sup>29</sup> and he said, “Oh Mariem, This is the will of the Lord of all the earth.”

Then ʒjibrīl departed, and Mariem was left marveling at what had happened, and she ate the fruit he left behind, and it calmed her heart.

Then Zacariye came into her room, bringing her food and other necessary items; he saw the fruit on the table and took it for something wicked. He wondered aloud who had brought it in the house, for the door had been locked, so how could it have been left there? Mariem explained, “Oh my dear Zacariye! Eat of the food of Allah, for Allah provides for those he loves, without justifying himself to anyone.<sup>30</sup> ʒjibrīl brought it to me by mandate from the Lord of the earth.”

Luke 1:37 “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

<sup>29</sup> “*Demudada*” means either to turn pale or to flush, but that is unspecified here (“Demudar.” Diccionario de la lengua española. Real Academia Espanol. Spring 2009 <rae.es>).

<sup>30</sup> Q 3:37 “Whenever Zachariah came to see her in the chamber, he found her provided with food, and he asked: Where has this come from, Mary?’ And she said:’ From God who gives food in abundance for whomsoever He will.”

Tha‘labī: “‘*Whenever Zachariah came to see her in the chamber, he found her provided with food*’ that is to say, fruit out of season: summer fruit in the winter and winter fruit in the summer. So he would say to her, ‘*Where has this come from, Mary?*’ and she would say, ‘From God, from the fruit of Paradise’”

At once the love in [126] Zacariye's heart grew, and in that moment he gave praise to Allah for it. Then Zacariye ate of the fruit, and found it tasted better than anything he had ever experienced in his entire life. Then he went out, locking Mariem in the house, and returned to serving Allah in the mosque.

(The narrator) said that on that day, that very hour that ʒjibrīl spoke to Mariem and told her she would give birth, she left the house she lived in, fleeing for fear of Zacariye and the other Beni Yçraile<sup>31</sup>. So she went to a deserted place,<sup>32</sup> and situated herself under a dry, fruitless date-palm. It was well-known amongst the people for being barren and leafless.<sup>33</sup> Inside it was a hollow, and Mariem got into it, saying, "Alas! I hope I die so I will not become disgraced and wretched."<sup>34</sup>

Then, ʒjibrīl called to her from another place, and said, "Oh Mariem, do not be sad, for your Lord has already made a bed for you to sleep in."<sup>35</sup>

At once she gave praise to Allah for this; and then she cried out to him a second time. ʒjibrīl said to her, "Oh Mariem, take hold of the branches, and the dates from the date-palm will fall down for you."<sup>36</sup>

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(625-626). [Later, in Joseph's care] "...Zachariah would come to her and see that she had an excess of provisions, out of proportion to what Joseph brought her. So he would say to her, 'Where has this come from, O Mary?' And she said, 'From God Who gives sustenance to whom he pleases without measure' (3:37)" (626).

<sup>31</sup> The Sons of Israel, or the Children of Israel, i.e. the Jews.

<sup>32</sup> Q 19:22 "When she conceived him she went away to a distant place."

Luke 1:39 "In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country."

<sup>33</sup> Tha'labī: "The story goes that when the pangs of childbirth came upon her violently, she took shelter under a palm-tree. It was a withered palm tree, having no boughs, or stumps or branches or roots, but the angels surrounded it, and rank upon rank they encompassed it" (642).

<sup>34</sup> Q 19:23 "The birth pangs led her to the trunk of a date-palm tree. 'Would that I had died before this,' she said, 'and become a thing forgotten, unremembered.'"

<sup>35</sup> Q 19:24 "Then (a voice) called to her from below: 'Grieve not; your Lord has made a rivulet gush forth right below you.'"

[127] She was dehydrated, and weak, and he said to her, “Eat and drink and rest.”<sup>37</sup>

Later she gave birth to Jesús, may salvation be upon him, in the greatest of births. Indeed no daughter of Edam has ever given birth in such a way.

And Ibnu Abeç<sup>38</sup> said that Allah was so pleased with him that he opened the gates of heaven, and seven rows of angels descended to earth in a pillar of light; and it made heaven and earth resplendent with the power of the Lord of all the earth.<sup>39</sup> At once, Jesús fell from his mother’s womb, and he came out speaking, saying, “There is no god but Allah and Jesús is his spirit and his word.”<sup>40</sup>

When she heard that, Mariem rested and gave thanks and praise to Allah for it, she was so entirely grateful for him.<sup>41</sup>

The narrator says that Zacariye went to look for her, but he did not find her where he had left her. He cried out at the top of his lungs to the other Beni Yçraile, and they came to him, and with them Ybliç,<sup>42</sup> may Allah curse him.

<sup>36</sup> Q 19:25 “Shake the trunk of the date-palm tree, and it will drop ripe dates for you.”

<sup>37</sup> “*Come y bebe y dáte placer.*” Literally, “Eat, drink, and take pleasure.”

Qur’an 19:26 “Eat, drink, and be at peace.”

<sup>38</sup> Probably Ibn ‘Abbās, (d. 687) “called *al-Hibr* ‘the doctor’ or *Baħr* ‘the sea’, because of his doctrine, [he] is considered one of the greatest scholars, if not the greatest, of the first generation of Muslims.” (Veccia Vaglieri). Much of the commentary from al-Tha‘labī’s collection cited in this work is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās.

<sup>39</sup> Luke 2:13 “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’”

<sup>40</sup> Q 4:171 “Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and his Word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him” (Ali).

Ibn ‘Abbas says... The Prophet Muhammad said (to his companions) ‘I heard your words and your amazement that... Jesus is the spirit and word of God: that he is’ (Wheeler 107).

<sup>41</sup> Luke 2:19 “But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

As they were walking in their search, [128] the wicked one saw a shepherd fleeing; he was in a state of shock<sup>43</sup> and his face was discolored.<sup>44</sup> And the wicked one said to the shepherd who came running, “What have you seen to make you so discolored and so terribly afraid?”

The shepherd replied, “Oh Elder, I saw something I haven't seen the likes of in my entire life.”

“What have you seen?”

“I saw the gates of heavens open up, and seven rows of angels came down to the earth from heaven, and I saw a pillar of light that lit up heaven and earth, and I saw a woman give birth beneath a date-palm, and the pillar of light was in front of her, and so were the angels, and I saw a child come out of her womb saying, “there is no god but Allah, I am Jesús, the spirit of Allah, and his word.”<sup>45</sup>

When the old one (Ybliç) heard that, he returned to the men saying, “Men, go to the sinful Mariem; she was pregnant by a shepherd and has given birth.”

Then they said, “May she die...”<sup>46</sup>

[129] “Go and you will find her under the date-palm.”

When they heard him they said, “If it is so and we find her, we shall catch her and stone her.”

<sup>42</sup> “Iblīs, proper name of the devil... Until the Day of Judgment God will allow Iblīs to tempt men, but not the true believers, the servants of God (Q 15:39-42; cf. 34:20-1). He is the “sly tempter” who whispers evil thoughts into men's hearts” (Wensinck).

<sup>43</sup> Luke 2:8 “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”

<sup>44</sup> Again, “demudada” (4 n. 27).

<sup>45</sup> Luke 8-20 The angel tells the shepherds about Jesus, and they go and find him in Bethlehem. Then “the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

<sup>46</sup> Guillén Robles footnotes that there is probably text missing from the original manuscript here (128, 2).



Said the boys, “We will put her to shame.”

Said the young men, “We will give her a thrashing.”

And each one took a stick in his hand, and they left. When they arrived at where she was, they found Jesús standing in front of her.

They said to her, “Oh Mariem, you have been wicked, and you have brought yourself here to hide it. Your father was not such a sinful person as this.”<sup>47</sup>

She said to them, “I have not been wicked, nor have I sinned at all. But ask the boy, he will tell you the truth, if he is *halel* or *haram*.”<sup>48</sup>

They replied to her, “How far you go in your treachery and wickedness! How do you expect us to speak to a newborn baby?”<sup>49</sup>

And the infant's mother indicated that he would respond to them; and Allah, exalted is he, [130] caused Jesús to speak. And Jesús, Mariem's son and Allah's servant, said to them, “Allah has given me his blessing and urged me to perform prayer and give alms as long as I might live.<sup>50</sup> Allah is my god and your god,<sup>51</sup> so serve him; he is a right and true guide.”<sup>52</sup>

Then the group of them marveled to themselves about the words of Jesús, and his answer. And others of them threw stones at him, but the stones returned with force to

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<sup>47</sup> Q 19:27 “Then she brought the child to her people. They exclaimed: ‘O Mary you have done a most astonishing thing! O sister of Aaron, your father was not a wicked person, nor your mother sinful!’”

<sup>48</sup> From Arabic: *halāl* and *harām* mean “permitted” and “forbidden,” respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Q 19:29 “How can we talk to one who is only an infant in the cradle?” (Also Tha‘labī, 646).

<sup>50</sup> Q 19:30 “‘I am a servant of God,’ he answered. ‘He has given me a Book and made me a prophet, and blessed me wherever I may be, and enjoined on me worship and *zakat* for as long as I live.’”

<sup>51</sup> John 20:17 “Jesus said [to Mary Magdalene], ‘...But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and our Father, to my God and your God.”’”

<sup>52</sup> Q 3:51 “Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him; this is the right path.”

those that threw them and the boys' sticks fell from their hands. Thus most of them were left fairly injured. And Jesús said to them, "Bring the wounded to me."

The injured approached him, and he passed his hand over their wounds, and they were healed by the grace of Allah and his power. For this they called him Jesús *Almasih*,<sup>53</sup> because everything he touched with his hands was healed, by the grace of Allah, exalted is he.

Then Jesús went with his mother where Allah wished them to go, and Mariem said, [131] "Dear son, would you like me to put you in school, to learn something of wisdom and knowledge?"

Jesús replied, "In obedience to you, Mother, I will do as you say."<sup>54</sup>

So then she went with him to the schoolmaster, and Mariem said, "Would you teach my son whatever knowledge that you have? You will receive the highest reward from Allah, because he is an orphan, without a father."

"What is his name?"

"Jesús."

"Leave him here in my care."

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<sup>53</sup> Guillén Robles footnotes here that the "text indicates that *Almasih* means *el frotador*, (or one who touches, caresses or rubs), because, according to the Arabs, Jesús healed by passing his hand over the sick or wounded area [of the body]" (my translation). Encyclopedia of Islam suggests it means Messiah (al Masih), which is probable because the definition of the word in Hebrew is literally 'anointed one' (Denny, 19), though it is also defined and more widely known as 'savior,' and used interchangeably with 'Christ' (New Oxford Annotated Bible). The title *Almasih* is used in the Qur'an, probably due to tradition and for identification purposes, and not because Muslims actually believed Jesus was the Messiah in the 'savior' sense of the word. This theory is upheld by the definition provided in the text, which is much closer to that of 'anointed' than that of 'savior.'

Qur'an 3:45 "God gives you news of a thing from him, for rejoicing, whose name will be Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary."

<sup>54</sup> Q 19:32 [He has made me] "be dutiful to my mother. He has not made me haughty or rebellious."

Luke 2:51 "Then [Jesus] went down with [his parents] and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them."

So she sat him down next to the teacher, who said to him, “Sit down, my son, and I will teach you what I can of wisdom and knowledge.”

“Oh Master,” Jesús said, “Teach me that which is revealed by God.

“Sit yourself down. It is not your place to tell me what I must teach you.”

[132] “I sit before God’s authority, not yours.”

“In the name of God, then,” said the master, as Jesús sat down next to him.

Jesús said, “How good he is, and how great! In the name of Allah is the name that cures all illness and heals all pain.”<sup>55</sup>

“Ah, son,” the master began, “ai-bee, ceedee, eee, ef, gee, aitch-i, jaykay, elemenopee.”<sup>56</sup>

“But Master, what does ‘elemenopee’ mean?”

“I said what I said, and I will not be told by you what I must teach.”

“Oh Master,<sup>57</sup> you must know that the *alif* is the name of Allah, the *bā* is the eternity of Allah, the *hā* and the *wāw* and the *zayn* are a valley in Hell, Allah guards and protects us from it. As for the *hā*, [133] it shows that sins are forgiven by petitioning a

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<sup>55</sup>Q 59:24 “He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fasioner. His are all the names beautiful.”

John 20:31 “But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

Prov 18:10 “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are saved.”

<sup>56</sup> Originally, “*dí, abu, ched, heguaz, hottaye, quelemun, ccayfet, coracet.*” (Letters of the Arabic alphabet, Guillén Robles notes that they are grouped by grammatical convention [132]). The next line as well: “what is *abuched?*”

<sup>57</sup> Guillén Robles notes here that Jesús is explaining the mystical meaning of the Arabic alphabet to his master, so it was appropriate to leave the letters in their original Arabic form, though I have used their official names rather than the Spanish representations of them (132).

pardon from Allah. The *tā* is a tree in paradise called *ttobe*,<sup>58</sup> and there in the paradise citadel where the branches cannot reach, are a multitude of precious stones, pearls, and rubies. The *yā* is the hand of Allah stretched out over all his creatures. The *qāf* is the word of Allah, given to Moisés. As for the *lām*, it stands for the one who does not turn away from evil; he will feel the pain of the eternal fire. And the *mīm* shows, without a doubt, that those who disbelieve will arrive at sorrowful pain as well. With regard to the *sād*, it is the spoken word of Allah *layllah ila Allah* (there is no God but Allah). The *ayn*, then, is the forgiveness of Allah for those who believe. The *fā* says that the Lord of the earth is exalted above his servants, the believers. The *dād* means that measure for measure, he who sows well reaps a good harvest; he who sows badly reaps badly and gathers only bitterness. The *kāf* will show that the sinner will come to the Day of Judgment with his sin clearly evident.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The tree of *Tūba* appears in a Shi'i ascension narrative in which the Prophet Muhammad “justifies to his wives why Fatima holds a special place in his heart: ‘When I was caused to journey by night to the heavens, Gabriel took me to the limit at the tree of *Tūba*. Gabriel was intent upon one of its fruits, which he rubbed between his fingers and then gave me to eat.’” From thus came the seed which conceived Fatima (Colby 73).

<sup>59</sup> Tha'labī: “After nine months, his mother took him to the boys’ school and seated him before the teacher. The teacher said: ‘Say: In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.’ So Jesus said that and the teacher said, ‘Recite the alphabet in the *abjad* order (traditional Semitic order).’ And Jesus raised his head and said to the teacher: ‘Do you know what *abjad* is?’ The teacher came towards him to strike him, but Jesus said, ‘Do not strike me if you know; if you do not, then ask me and I shall interpret it for you.’ The teacher said, ‘Interpret it for us.’ Jesus said, ‘ABJaD—the *alif* states for “there is no god (*ilāha*) but Allah”; *bā*’ is the splendor (*bahajah*) of God; *jīm* is the majesty (*jalālah*) of God; *dāl* is the religion (*dīn*) of God; HaWaZ—the *hā*’ is Hell, and it is the bottomless pit (*hāwiyah*); *wāw* stands for woe (*wayl*) to the people of the fire; and *zāy* is for the stench (*zafīr*) of the people of Hell; HaṬaYa—the sinners are lower (*haṭṭat*) than those that ask God’s pardon; KaLaMaN—the word (*kalām*) of God is not created and there is no (*lā*) substitute (*mubaddil*) for His word; Sa’aFaṢ—measure for measure (*ṣā’un bi’ ṣā’in*), and punishment for punishment; QaEaSHTa— You (God) will take them from here-and-there (*taqrishuhum*) when You harvest, i.e., when You assemble them (on the Day of Judgment).’ The teacher then said to [the boy’s] mother, ‘Woman, take your son, for he has learned it all, and has no need for a teacher’” (647-648).

The master marveled at how little he was and at the quickness of his answer and his understanding.<sup>60</sup> He got up and kissed Jesús on the head.

Later his mother came to the master and asked, [134] “Has my son, by chance, learned anything?”

The master replied, “Your son knows more than I do, and he has been teaching me. Your son does not need a teacher, he is wiser than any man I have ever seen, and you may take him away.”<sup>61</sup>

And so he went with his mother, and she took him to a clothes-dyer, who was the greatest master-dyer in the land at the time.

Mariem said to him, “I have here my orphaned son, he is without a father. I would like you to teach him the skills of your craft. Allah will surely give you a great reward.”

The dye-master replied, “Leave him with me and I will teach him.”

Then Jesús sat down next to the master, and he showed the boy what he had to do. Jesús paid close attention, and then they returned to the shop.

Later Jesús prepared the kettle boiler and the pots and vats. He took the clothing that was in the shop, and put it all into one vat.

And this was the powerful will of Allah: Jesús prayed to Allah, holy is he, and Allah answered his prayer for the cloth— for each piece to come out of the vat as the

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<sup>60</sup> Luke 2:46-47 “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

<sup>61</sup> Luke 2:52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

color [135] it should be— because Allah wished to demonstrate and inspire wonder and amazement in the people.

The dye-master came home and, finding none of the clothing he had left in the shop, began shouting, “People! Is there anyone to help me? My fortune! I am lost!” For he thought some thief had stolen everything in his shop.

Jesús said, “Oh Master, there is no need to yell, no one has stolen a thing.”

“Then where has all the people's clothing gone? It was all here.”

“It's all on the kettle in a vat.”

“Oh no!” said the master, “What have you done? How much have you cost me! The clothes were all to have been different colors, but you have put them in one pot, and made them all one color!”

Jesús replied, “Take each piece of clothing and look at the color your client wishes it to be, then you will see it become that color.”

[136] So the master took some cloth and declared its color, and Jesús passed his blessed hand over it and prayed to Allah. And each piece of cloth came out the color it was supposed to have been, in the most beautiful and vibrant hues ever seen.

And when each piece came out in its specific color, the master couldn't help but yell, saying, “People! Never have I seen or heard of a better magician<sup>62</sup> than this young man.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Q 5:110 “And the disbelievers among them said, “Surely these [miracles and signs] are nothing but pure magic.”

<sup>63</sup> Tha‘labī: “‘Atā’ told of another miracle... Mary put Jesus out as an apprentice in various trades. The last of these was that of the dyers, and she sent him to the master-dyer... He proposed to go on a journey, so he said to Jesus, ‘You have now learned this trade. I am going away on a long journey and shall not return for ten days. These garments are to have various colors, and I have marked every one according to the color it should be given.’ But Jesus boiled a single vat of dye for a single color, and put all the garments in it,

And when the people saw the clothing with so many different colors from one pot, everyone who was there said, "Let us take it all to the river and wash it, and if it is bewitched, the colors will disappear and we will bring it all back here the way it was before. This is indeed what we must do."

So then they went with all the clothing to the river; and when they washed them, the colors became even more perfect than they were before. And all the people were filled with amazement and wonder, and they said, "If we banish this wizard and his mother from their village, maybe we will all become wizards."

So they took them out of the village. And Jesús went with his [137] mother, serving Allah, exalted is he, as much and as best they could.

When they left the place, they arrived at a mountain thicket, and Jesús and his mother drew near to a cave at the foot of the mountain. And Jesús found good, tender herbs, and his mother came and they ate them and took solace.

Later Jesús made a place for his mother to serve Allah and pray, and he made another place for himself; they served and prayed, each one in his and her place.<sup>64</sup>

And when the night grew dark, Jesús was serving Allah in his place, and his mother in hers. And when the night was half gone, Jesús looked to his mother, and found her sleeping, or so he thought. And Jesús called to her when he saw her that way, saying,

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saying to them, 'By the permission of God, be as I wish you to be.' The dyer returned... and said, 'What have you done, Jesus?... You have indeed spoiled those clothes.' 'Get up and look,' said Jesus. So he arose and Jesus took out a yellow garment and a green one and a red one, until he had taken them all out in the colors he had wanted. Then the dyer began to marvel, and he knew this was from All-powerful God. So he said to the people, 'Come and look at what Jesus has done.' And the [dyer] believed in him, he and his friends, and they were the Apostles. But God is All-knowing" (652).

<sup>64</sup> Luke 6:12 "Now during those days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God."

“Praise be to Allah, Mother, who makes peace over you as you dream, for I have never seen you in such a deep sleep.”

Then Jesús returned to his place to continue praying to Allah until dawn arrived. When it did, Jesús went to his mother and found her as he left her, and said to her, “Mother, it is time to get up, the dawn has come and gone, [138] and this sleep is like nothing I have ever seen.”

And she was dead.<sup>65</sup> But Allah gave Jesús a sense of acceptance for the death of his mother, and he took her in his arms and took her to be buried. When the sun had risen, he looked away from the foot of the mountain and saw some of the Beni Yçraile. He went towards them so that they might help him bury his mother and say a prayer for her.

When he got close, he bowed his head and said, “Please help me bury my mother, she has passed away.”

They said to him, “Aren't you that magician, exiled from the land of Yemen?” and they began to pelt him with stones. When he saw that, he escaped from them and returned to the foot of the mountain. He was thinking about his mother when suddenly he heard a voice from the heavens, and it said, “Jesús, spirit of Allah, release your mother and leave her here so that the women of paradise<sup>66</sup> can come and purify her.”<sup>67</sup>

[139] So then Jesús left her and departed from there. And then suddenly he heard a voice saying, “Jesús, return to your mother and say a prayer over her.”

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<sup>65</sup> In the both the Bible and the Qur'an Mary lives past the time of Jesus' death/(resurrection)/ascension.

<sup>66</sup> “hurías de la gloria” (138).

<sup>67</sup> Guillén Robles footnotes here that “Muslims wash their dead to purify them before dressing them in their burial clothing, except for those who die on the battlefield fighting for their faith” (my translation 138).



And Jesús returned and said a prayer for her along with so many rows of angels that none but Allah, exalted is he, could count them.

Then he buried her, and Allah smoothed the earth on top of her; and Jesús worshiped Allah on her behalf, and gave him great praise.

And after he buried her he returned to the Beni Yçraile, and he walked with them, teaching them and calling them to serve Allah, honored and noble is he. He ended up teaching and instructing the children of the group. He foretold to them what they ate at home, and the things they kept safe.<sup>68</sup> And they took him to their parents to call them to serve Allah as well. But the Beni Yçraile took their children and hid them in a house, saying that if he could not find them, he would not talk to them, nor deceive their hearts.

Then he (Jesús) went to look for the children, and not finding them, he went to the house where they were hidden, and stood at the door. Jesús said to the master of the house, [140] “Open the door, I wish to know who is inside.”

The master of the house replied, “You will not find anyone here but the pigs.”

Now then, Jesús prayed to Allah that he might turn them into pigs. And indeed, everyone in the house was turned into a pig, all of them by the power of Allah, honored and noble is he.

Jesús then opened the door and all the pigs came running out; they did not even recognize themselves or each other except for their own names. And so the people there marveled, and Jesús came and showed them which were their sons and daughters, and

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<sup>68</sup> Q 3:49 “I will tell you what you devour and what you hoard in your homes” (Also Tha‘labī, 660).

Jesús called each one by name, and they responded. And the Beni Yçraile said, “What is this that has happened here to us?”

Jesús said, “You painted them as such with your tongues and you said that they were pigs, and because of that Allah, my Lord and your Lord, converted them to pigs.”<sup>69</sup>

They asked Jesús to pray to his Lord for them.

And Jesús said, “Fear Allah and turn away from those who plot against me, for, by the grace of Allah, my Lord, [141] I will give you wonders like you have never seen nor heard.”

So they said to him, “What is it you have to show us?”

He replied, “Serve Allah, and profess that there is no other Lord but him, for he created all things, and it is to him you must turn.”

“What are the miracles and signs you have to show us?”

“I will pray to Allah, my Lord, that whoever may have an illness of any kind might be healed at once, and I will make the mute and the small infant born today able to speak, by the grace of Allah, my lord.”

They said to him, “Oh Jesús, when will you show us that which you tell us?”

“This very hour I will heal the paralyzed, the blind, and the lepers.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Tha‘labī: “They made their sons avoid him, saying, ‘Don’t play with this magician,’ and they assembled them in a house. Jesus came looking for them, but they said to him, ‘They are not here.’ So he said to them, ‘Then what is in this house?’ ‘Swine,’ they replied, and Jesus said, ‘So shall they be.’ When the door was opened upon them, lo, they were swine indeed. News of this spread among the people; and the Israelites were curious about it” (650).

Three gospels have a story of Jesus and the pigs, all similar to each other, but very different than this one. Jesus arrives in a city, and meets a man who has demons inside of him. The man and his demons beg Jesus for mercy, so he casts the demons out of the man and into a herd of swine. The pigs then rush down a steep embankment and drown in the lake. The swineherds tell the townspeople of the event, and they ask Jesus to leave the area (Matt. 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-17, Luke 2:26-37).

<sup>70</sup> Q 3:49 “I will heal the blind and the leper and infuse life into the dead, by the leave of God.”

[142] And they brought him a newborn baby, and Jesús spoke to it, and the infant responded. And they brought him men who were paralyzed and blind and mute, and he healed them all by the grace of Allah.

Then he ordered them to go with him to the cemetery; and when they arrived at a tomb, he said to them, “Do you know the man who resides in this tomb?”

“No we do not know who he is,” they replied.

Then he performed ablution and two prostrations in prayer. Then he said, “Get up, oh resident of this tomb!”

But he did not get up; so he called once again, and said, “Arise, by the grace of Allah.”

And suddenly the earth opened up and the tomb's occupant came out; half of his head was white, the other half black.

Jesús said to him, “What is your name?”

“Çem, son of Noe.” (Shem, son of Noah).<sup>71</sup>

[143] “What happened to you, that half your head is white and the other half black?”

“Oh Jesús, oh spirit of Allah, when you called to me the first time, half my head went white for I expected that it was the calling of the Day of Judgment. When you called

Luke 7:21-22 “Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to those who were blind. And he answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.’” (Also Matthew 11:4-5).

<sup>71</sup> Gen 5:32 “After Noah was five hundred years, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japeth.”

Luke 3:23-38 Tracing of Jesus’ genealogy, including through Shem, son of Noah (3:36). This is the only mention of Shem in the New Testament.

to me the second time I confirmed that it was the end of the world and half of my head stayed the way you see it now.”

Jesús said, “Oh Çem, would you like to stay here in the world, and pray to Allah and devote yourself to his good work, and live a good, long life?”

“Oh Jesús, do not pray to Allah that I might return to the world of the living, nor for his benevolence. The other world is dearer to me; I pray that you might pray to Allah for me to be returned to the state in which you found me.”

“Well then, by the grace of Allah, return to your resting place.”<sup>72</sup>

And he returned to seal himself in the tomb, by the power of Allah, exalted is he, and his deed amazed the Beni Yçraile.

And they said, “Oh Jesús, if we have really seen that which [144] you have told us, you would favor us with provisions from your Lord.”

Jesús replied, “Oh people, believe in Allah, my Lord and yours, and I will pray to him to send you manna from heaven for sustenance.”

“Oh Jesús, we promise you that we really do believe!”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Tha‘labī: “According to Ibn ‘Abbās... He said, ‘This is the heel of Shem, son of Noah.’ Then he smote the ground with his staff and said to it, ‘Rise, with God’s leave.’ And behold, Shem stood up, shaking the dirt from his head, and he was white-haired. Jesus said to him, ‘Was it thus that you perished?’ He said: ‘No, for I died when I was young. But I thought that the hour had come, whereupon I turned white.’ ... They said, ‘Messenger of God, shall we not take him to our people so that he may sit with us and report to us?’ He said, ‘How can someone who has no substance follow you?’ Then he said to him: ‘Return, by God’s leave.’ And (Shem) returned to dust” (100-101). Cont’d...

“And forth from his grave came Shem, the son of Noah. Half his head had become white, and he said, ‘Has the Day of Resurrection come?’ Jesus said, ‘No, but I have summoned you by the Mightiest Name of God.’ The story goes that people did not go white in those days, for Shem was five hundred years old and he was still a young man. Then he gave them an account of the ark, and Jesus said to him, ‘Die.’ But Shem said, ‘Only on the condition that God protect me from the pangs of death.’ Jesus prayed to God, and He did so” (658).

Wheeler: Same story, from Ibn ‘Abbas (100-101), but with Ham b. Noah instead of Shem (55).

And then Jesús performed ablution and prayer, and he appealed to Allah, exalted is he, so that he would send them manna from heaven. And it descended upon them by the will of Allah, and some of them believed in what he said, and others did not. But what Jesús prayed came true, and the manna came down from heaven.<sup>74</sup>

And he went to the Beni Yçraile with two loaves of bread and five fish, and it fed five thousand men of the Beni Yçraile, in addition to the women and children.<sup>75</sup> And this manna lasted as long as Allah wished it to, honored and noble is he. Then the people of the Beni Yçraile came to him and said, “Oh Jesús! Pray to Allah to give us more fish like that which we have just eaten, by the power of Allah.”

[145] They were thinking evil thoughts about Jesús and about everything he had been doing. When he realized this, Jesús prayed to Allah, exalted is he, that he might lift up and take away from them that which he had given them, for they were walking in

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<sup>73</sup> John 6:30-51 “So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life... Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die.’”

<sup>74</sup> Q 5:112-115 “When the disciples said: ‘Oh Jesus, son of Mary, could your Lord send down for us a table laid with food?’ he said: ‘Fear God, if indeed you believe.’ They said: ‘We should like to eat of it to reassure our hearts and to know that it’s the truth you have told us, and that we should be witness to it.’ Said Jesus, son of Mary, ‘O God, our Lord, send down a table well laid out with food from the skies... And God said: ‘I shall send it down to you; but if any of you disbelieve after this, I shall inflict such punishment on him as I never shall inflict on any other creature.’”

“Ibn Kathir: There is disagreement about the table: Did it come down or not? Tabari reports that Mujahid and Hasan b. Abi al-Hasan al-Basri said that it did not come down, for the disciples withdrew their request after God said: ‘I shall send it down to you; but if any of you disbelieve after this, I shall punish with a punishment unlike I have punished anyone from among the worlds’ (Q 3:115). This supports the Christians who claim that they do not know the story of the table, and that it is not mentioned in their Bible” (Wheeler 310).

<sup>75</sup> Mark 6:41-43 “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves, and...divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled... Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.”

treachery. And Allah took back up what he had sent down to them, because of the prayer of Jesús.

And the people were filled with the wonder of this. As they were there in that state, Ybliç, may he be cursed by Allah, appeared to them in the shape of a wise old man. With him came two sons, and they went among the Beni Yçraile. And the people asked him and his sons if they were wise-men or prophets, and told them about the deeds of this young man from the lands of Yemen who had done things they had never seen or heard of anyone doing before.

And so then they said to Ybliç and his sons, “This youth came from the lands of Yemen and settled among us; and he was healing wounds with his hands. He made the blind man see, and he healed the crippled and the lepers, and he resurrected the dead, and he brought down manna from the heavens, and he made it return to the heavens when he wished it to be so.”

And suddenly Ybliç the wicked said to them, “People! I declare to you: [146] you should know that no man could do the things you say this young man has done. But, know that the Lord of the heavens and the earth has a son who he commanded to come down to earth. He is the son of Allah, and he who disobeys him disobeys Allah, and what this boy has done he could not have achieved unless he was Allah or his son or his brother.”

Then great thoughts came down upon the people, and their hearts were moved to many opinions, and they were scandalized by the sayings of Ybliç, may Allah curse him,

and by the deeds of Jesús. And so some people said that he was Allah and others said that he was the son of Allah.

And when Jesús saw this he said, “People, the old man did not tell you the truth. My Lord is the most honored and powerful, and Allah is so far removed from what you are saying. My Lord has never taken a wife, or a companion, nor has he had a son. So do not believe his (Ybliç’s) words, for he does not speak the truth.”<sup>76</sup>

And one that came with Ybliç, the wicked, was a young man, and he said, “People, do not be fools, for this boy from the lands of Yemen is hiding among you. Love him and care for him, for he is the brother of Allah. [147] Don't you see that he could not possibly do what he has done unless he is either Allah, or his brother acting with the power of Allah? He was seen making birds of clay, and he blew on them and they took flight, and don't you know that our father Adan was formed with clay, and our Lord blew his breath upon him, and he got up and walked.<sup>77</sup> So, know that all these works are one; he who obeys this man is in obedience to Allah, and he who disobeys him, is in disobedience to Allah.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Q 5:17 “Verily they are unbelievers who say” ‘The Messiah, son of Mary, is God.’” Q 5:72 “They are surely infidels who say: ‘God is the Christ, son of Mary.’” Q 9:30 “The Christians say: ‘Christ is the son of God’...May they be damned by God, how perverse are they!”

Matt. 3:17 “And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” Luke 22:70 “All of them asked, ‘Are you, then, the Son of God?’ He said to them, ‘You say that I am.’” Other references to Jesus as the ‘Son of God’: Matt 27:43, Mark 9:7, John 5:18, John 10:36.

<sup>77</sup> Q 3:49 “Now I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: Out of clay I will make you the figure of a bird, and I will breathe into it, and it shall become, by God’s leave, a bird.”

Q 5:110 “Then you will make out of clay the shape of a bird by My permission.” (Also Tha’labī, 656)

<sup>78</sup> “Wahb b. Munabbih: Iblis came to [Jesus] in a dazzling shape, and when the people saw it they began to follow him. He began to tell them of the miracles: ‘This man is a wonder. He spoke in the cradle, he raises the dead, he prophesies about hidden things, he heals the sick. This is God.’ One of the companions of Iblis said, ‘You are ignorant, old man. What you say is wrong. It is not consistent with God that he would reveal himself to worshippers nor does he live in the womb or in the hollows of women. Rather, this is the son of God.’ The third companion of Iblis said, ‘What you two say is wrong, and you are ignorant. It is not

Then the people of the Beni Yçraile were split into three groups: those that said he was (one with) Allah, those that said he was the son of Allah, and those that said he was the brother of Allah. How dissimilar is Allah from what the nonbelievers say! And how holy is Allah! There is no god but him.<sup>79</sup>

The narrator said: Since then, Jesús preached to them and taught them and called them into the service of Allah. And wherever his news extended to different regions, everyone that heard about him was filled with wonder, and they were divided among various different opinions on him. Until the point that the people of the Beni Yçraile rose up, saying, “If we don't kill this boy from the lands of Yemen, [148] he will create doubt in the hearts of all our people.”

And they had this counsel: that a man who might want to kill Jesús would be advantageous to the Beni Yçraile, and he might come among them secretly and they would give him many riches.<sup>80</sup>

And so Jesús was with them, which was the wish of Allah.

After that, Jesús went one day to an honest man. He was very old, and had two sons. The first was a merchant, who traveled from place to place with his goods, and the other son was paralyzed on both sides of his body, he could not move, nor could he feed

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consistent with God that he would take a son, but he is a deity along with God.’ Then they left and were never seen again” (Wheeler 313).

<sup>79</sup> Q 19:37 “Yet the sectarians differed among themselves. Alas for the unbelievers when they see the Terrible Day!”

<sup>80</sup> Possibly a reference to Judas Iscariot. Matt 26:14-15 “Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver.”



himself. And Jesús went to their house; he called at the door, and the old man came out and said, "Who are you?"

Jesús said, "Open the door to me and you will have great joy."<sup>81</sup>

"What is it you will do to me young man?"

Jesús replied, "Be delighted and let go of all your worries, for I want to cure your son, the one that is paralyzed."

"Who has told you that I have such a son? For no one knows of his infirmity, [149] except he who raised him, and he who raises us all."

"Please old man, I would like to stay in your house tonight."

"My eldest son has been gone for a long time, traveling to sell his goods, and I am expecting him home tonight. He is a jealous and suspicious man, and if he finds you here I fear that you will be lost at his hands, for he is a rigid man, and he would kill you and your wife."<sup>82</sup>

"Relax, and do not worry about that."

Then he gave him permission to enter the house, and Jesús entered, sat down, and said, "Old man, bring me your son, the one who is ill, for I want to cure him by the grace of Allah and his power."

And the old man got up and brought him his son; he was stiff like a log, he could not move either side of his body. And the old man set him down in front of Jesús, and he

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<sup>81</sup> Rev. 3:20 "Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." Contextual note: This is clearly not the same reference. The images are parallel, but this verse uses it as a metaphor for repentance/conversion, while the narrative seems to be operating within a literal framework.

<sup>82</sup> This writer does not believe this refers to the fact that Jesús actually had a wife, but is probably a euphemism for "he would kill you and your loved ones," or "you and your family," or even "you and your wife" in a hypothetical sense.

put his hand over him, and prayed to Allah for his healing. And then he said, [150] “Get up, young man, by the grace of Allah.” And he stood up, and Jesús said, “Young man, walk, by the grace of Allah, exalted is he!” And he walked. “Young man, declare that there is no god but Allah, and the Jesús is the spirit of Allah and his word.”

And the young man said just that, and he was healed of all his infirmity.

At this point, the other brother was arriving home. He called at the door, and heard Jesús talking inside the house. He took it as a bad sign and said to his father, “Open the door for me, who is that talking to you?”

His father said to him, “Son, he is a traveler and he has come into our home.”

(The brother) said to Jesús, “Who has let you in my house without my permission?”

“The man of the house has invited me inside.”

And so he and Jesús were introduced. [151] Then he looked at his brother and saw that he was healed, and asked, “Who has cured you?”

His brother replied, “This young man, that you have badly repaid, healed me with the power of Allah.”

And his dislike was replaced with love, and he gave [Jesús] great honor.

When the sun rose with Allah at dawn, Jesús said to the boy he had healed, “Young man, will you do something I ask of you?”

The young man replied, “Oh Jesús, I will obey Allah and do anything you ask.”

Then Jesús said to him, “Go to the king of the Beni Yçraile, and say to him, ‘Oh King, if you confess that there is no god but Allah, and Jesús is the spirit of Allah and his word, I will be your guarantor in paradise. Give me your daughter for my wife, and half of all your possessions and your kingdom.’ Watch closely to see how he responds, and return to me with his answer.”

And the young man went to the king with the message from Jesús. When he arrived at the king's gate he tried to force his way inside. And the gatekeeper locked the door, [152] but the young man seized it and forced it open; and he entered door after door, going through room after room, speaking to no one, until he entered the king's chambers. And his knights and his officials were there with the king, and the boy said to him, “Oh King, I am a messenger, sent to you from Jesús. He asks you to confess that there is no god but Allah, and Jesús is the spirit of Allah and his word, and he promises you paradise in return. He asks that you give me your daughter's hand, along with half of your kingdom and half of all your possessions.”

The king said to those around him, “What will I do with this messenger who brings me such a request?”

They replied, “Oh King, tell us what punishment you would like us to give him.”

“Take off his head and feed him to the lions.”<sup>83</sup>

So they took him and cut off his head and threw him to the lions, who ate him.

When the young man did not return for some time, Jesús said to his father, the old man, [153] “Go to the king and find out why your son has delayed his return.”

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<sup>83</sup> Daniel. 6:16 “Then the king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said, ‘May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!’”

And so he went to the king and inquired about his son, and (someone) said to him, "Friend, the one you inquire about you will never see again."

And the old man asked, "Why will I never see him again?"

They replied, "Because the king ordered him to be beheaded and thrown to the lions, and they ate him."

Then the old man said, "Open the gate to the lions' den for me, so that they will eat me also, for I am his father, and I wish to die as he did."

And the gatekeepers were amazed, and they went to the king and told him the old man's demand. The king ordered them to open the gate to the lions' den. So the old man went in and raised his hands and made signals to the lions. And he showed them a seal that Jesús had given him,<sup>84</sup> and he said to them, "Lions, I command you, by the authority of the owner of this seal, to expel my son from your bodies, as you have eaten him, and expel him into my robe."

[154] And they regurgitated him in many pieces, and the old man took him home, crying and beating his chest.

Jesús said, "Why are you crying, old man?"

"And how can you not cry at the sight of my dead son?" And the old man recounted all that was done, and what had happened with the lions. Jesús took the pieces of the dead boy, and put his hands on them, saying, "Rise, young man, by the grace of Allah!"

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel 6:17 "A stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel."

And indeed, the boy stood up, raised his head, and said, “There is no god but Allah, and Jesús is the spirit of Allah and his word.”

“You speak the truth,” said Jesús. “Young man, will you return to the king once again with my message?”

“Yes, oh Jesús.”

“Go then, and tell him the same thing as before.”

And the boy went, and entered the door of the king, and no one stopped him. And he stood in front of the king, and said, [155] “Oh King, listen to my words, and fulfill the request I bring to you from Jesús: to testify that there is no god but Allah, and that he has no equal. That Jesús will speak on your behalf in paradise, and that he is the spirit of Allah and his word. He asks you to wed your daughter to me and to give me half of all you own, along with her.”

The king said to his nobles, “Is this not the boy that we beheaded and threw to the lions?”

“Oh King, it does appear to be him,” they said.

The young man said, “Oh King, I am the one you killed; you gave me to the lions, and my Lord has brought me back, as you can see.<sup>85</sup> And you will not best him; even if you kill me a hundred times, I believe that you will lose. So, King, give me a response to my message.”

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<sup>85</sup> Daniel 6:21 “Daniel then said to the king, ‘O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so they would not hurt me.’”

And Ybliç came to him in the shape of one of his ministers, and told him, “King, you yourself are a respected lord, other people serve you! Why would you want to be a servant to someone else?”

The king said to his minister, “Then how shall I respond? We have already killed him once; we threw him to the lions and they ate him. [156] Now he returns to me with braver words, without fear of anyone or anything.”

Ybliç replied, “I would respond and demand something from him that he cannot possibly give you, and we will send him away. Say to him that you want to give him your daughter, but only after he does what you ask. Tell him to bring you, as collateral,<sup>86</sup> a house of gold for you to see with your own eyes, and a castle in the skies; one that has no foundation on earth, but exists completely in the air.<sup>87</sup> And if he brings this, you will give him your daughter and half of everything you own.”

And the king made these demands with the advice from Ybliç, who came in the form of his ministry official. Then the young man went back to Jesús with the king's answer and told him of the demands.

Jesús said, “Return to him and tell him it would be your pleasure to give him everything he has asked for.”

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<sup>86</sup> “*Traiga de arras*,” literally, “bring a downpayment.”

<sup>87</sup> Mirrors Muslim image of paradise: “And God says to the one who made the request, ‘Lift up your head, and look to the Gardens!’ This he does, and he says, ‘O my Lord! I behold lofty cities of silver and golden palaces wreathed about with pearls’ (Al-Ghazālī 203).”

Also, Biblical references to heaven: 2 Samuel 14:11 “Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.” John 14:2 “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places.”

So the boy returned to the king, but when he was halfway there, he stopped and thought, “How can it be that I will be able to give him a house of gold and a castle in the sky that doesn't touch the ground?”

Then he lifted his eyes up to the heavens, [157] and saw there everything the king had asked for. And he said (to himself), “I do not even want the king's daughter for my wife. And I can be content by following the way and wisdom of Jesús. Indeed I prefer his companionship over all the rest.”

So he went back to Jesús, and when Jesús saw that he had not gone to the king, he left in the direction of the mountain, and the young man followed behind him.

When the king found out that Jesús had gone to the mountain, he sent for him and for the young man. And they asked the old man where Jesús and the boy were going, and he said that they were going to the mountains. And they went back to the king with the answer. And he ordered many of his people to ride out and go after them, and to kill them both. And so they went out after them.

And Allah, exalted is he, made the face of the boy to look like the face of Jesús, and the men found him and took him back to the king. Mistaking the boy for Jesús, they killed him. And so the Beni Yçraile thought that Jesús, son of Mariem, was dead.

And Allah, exalted is he, declared in his honored Alcorán, “*güa me catelóhu guame ççalabuhu gualequin xubihelehum,*” which means, “they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but so it appeared to them.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Q 4:155, 157 “So they were punished for breaking the covenant and disbelieving the signs of God... And for saying ‘We killed the Christ, Jesus, son of Mary, who was an apostle of God;’ but they neither killed nor crucified him, though so it appeared to them.” (Also Tha’labī 670.)

Gospels repeatedly detail the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension:

[158] And Allah, exalted is he, lifted Jesús up into the heavens, as he wished.

There is no god but Allah, he does what he wants, and he is the most powerful of all.<sup>89</sup>

The king, and those that had gone, returned with the dead boy, and they hung him up and later they buried him; for which the Beni Yçraile said that Jesús was the one who had died, but they were mistaken. Others said that Allah lifted him up to the heavens because he was his son, and others said that he was Allah himself. How mysterious<sup>90</sup> is Allah, and how independent and free from the words of the nonbelievers! And Allah called him Jesús *Almasih*, because he put his blessed hand upon the wound and Allah healed it.

All this took place by the power and wisdom of Allah.

And Allah makes a greeting upon Mahoma the honored, and upon his followers, and gives them good salvation.<sup>91</sup> Amen, Allah! And praises to Allah, Lord of all things.

## Study

Mary, Hannah, and Zachariah

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Matt 28:5-6 “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.’” Mark 15:32, 37 “... Those that were crucified with him also taunted him... Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.” Mark 16:6 “But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.’”

John 19:33 “But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.)” Also Luke 23:46, Acts 1:1-3.

<sup>89</sup> Q 2:253 “And if God had willed they never would have fought among themselves. But God does whatsoever He please.”

<sup>90</sup> *Cuán guardado*

<sup>91</sup> Q 33:56 “God and his angels shower their blessings on the Prophet, O believers, you should also send your blessings on him and salute him with a worthy greeting.”



To begin with, although the first sentences of *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús* resemble the *isnad* of a hadith, the narrative content more closely resembles Sura 3 (The Family of Imran) of the Qur'an; even the aljamiado transmission record leads to Imran and his descendants. This is the only Sura that mentions Mary's mother (she is left unnamed), or the way in which Mary was given to Zachariah. In it, she prays to God for a child, promising to dedicate it to the service of the Lord. When she bears a girl, the Lord accepts her "graciously" and she is given to the care of Zachariah (Q 3:37).

The narrative of *El Relato* mirrors the brief Qur'anic story, though it elaborates upon the details and the personalities of the characters involved. The aljamiado story shows more concern for whether Mary, as a female child, may be given to the temple, and includes an entire episode regarding who shall be allowed to take care of her. In Sura 3 it appears as a one line reference: "For you were not there when they cast lots with quills (to determine) who should take care of Mary, nor when they disputed it" (Q 3:44). But in *El Relato*, there is embellishment and rhythmic repetition: "And they wrote Mariem's name on another reed, and put all the lots together, and cast them into the running water.... And they were all cast into the water, and Mariem's lot emerged with Zacariye's... They cast them three times, and they all arose in favor of Zacariye." The lyrical reiteration suggests that one might recite it, or teach it to others to memorize more easily, which is supported by Barletta's assertion that "aljamiado-Morisco narratives are, for the most part, anonymous translations of traditional narratives that had been passed along for several generations, even back to the earliest days of Islam" (18).

The elaboration on the Qur'anic narrative is very similar to the version of the story found in al-Tha'labī's collection of commentaries. Here, the scene where the priests vie over Mary is played out similarly: they cast lots, and Zachariah is determined the most worthy. In a scene attributed to Ibn Ishāq,<sup>92</sup> there is a glimpse of the source of the account of Mary's adolescent isolation: "[Zachariah] built a little niche for her... so that no one could get up to it except by a ladder, like the door of the Ka'bah; no one went up to her except him. Every day he used to bring her food, her drinks and her ointment. And when Zachariah departed, he would lock the door upon her" (625). The passage in *El Relato* is comparable: "[Zacariye] raised her and taught her, until she was older and wiser. He constructed a house for her there, so that she might serve Allah. And he put locks on the house so that no one might enter the place she lived; and he provided all the things she needed, he brought all her food and other provisions." These creative, almost fanciful accounts depict Zachariah building a little private loft for Mary, though nothing in the Qur'an indicates he did so. It is difficult to draw conclusions about Zachariye from these depictions, because later in the story the people he sends to find Mariam turn against her and try to hurt her; therefore to portray him as a benevolent protector has little narrative use, except to make him a traitor. The emphasis on keeping Mariam apart from the population at large, however, could be a way to explain and defend her virginity, which is accepted by the Qur'an, and touted by Christian theology. By stressing the truth of the virgin birth of Jesús, and then maintaining his humanity, the text helps to refute the

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<sup>92</sup> Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yassār b. Kḥiyār (d. 767) "One of the main authorities on *sīra al-nabawiyya*" or the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Jones).

dominant Catholic belief of Jesus' deity and to reconcile that belief with Muslim principles.

Comparing the opening pages of *El Relato* to the Biblical narrative of the life and pregnancy of Mary highlights striking similarities and obvious differences. Interestingly, the New Testament Gospels do not say much about Mary's family, other than the fact that Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, are her relatives. She is not raised by Zachariah; the only contact indicated between them is the few months she stays with them early in her pregnancy, and the emphasis of the trip is on Elizabeth, who is also miraculously pregnant at the time: "And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son...And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home" (Luke 1:36, 56). It would seem as though the Morisco version has little to do with any Biblical one; the wife of Zacariye is not even given a name. And yet, upon further investigation, unanticipated similarities arise.

Although neither the Qur'an nor the New Testament calls Mary's mother by name, a woman named Hannah plays an important role in the Old Testament as the mother of the prophet Samuel. Her story is much like the Hanna of *El Relato*: she cannot conceive, so she asks God for a child in exchange for a pledge to give that child to the Lord's service. When she does conceive, she fulfills her promise to God, saying "For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord" (1 Sam 1:27-28). While the contexts of these stories are very different, the narrative structure is remarkably

similar suggesting that the Biblical plot was fairly well known, but the identity of the characters confused.

The existence of the Islamic passages in which the priests cast lots for Mary has already been shown, but (again unexpectedly) a parallel story in the New Testament also exists. The reference is very brief, and it does not involve Mary whatsoever, but it does feature Zachariah in the temple: “Once when [Zachariah] was serving as a priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense” (Luke 1:8). This verse also shows that the practice of casting lots was a customary ritual in the temple.

#### Mary and Gabriel, and the Birth of Jesus

The aljamiado scene between Mariam and Djibril is very similar to the Qur’anic one between Mary and Gabriel. In fact the structure and phrasing of their dialogue is closely mirrored in every text I studied, including the Islamic commentaries and the New Testament accounts. After their exchange, however, things diverge once again.

There is no apparent Qur’anic correlation to the shepherd’s vision of the heavens opening up with “seven rows of angels descending to earth in a pillar of light.” A similar heavenly episode does appear in the New Testament however, as a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’” (Luke 2:13). The fact that the angels in Luke’s account also appear to shepherds connects these stories undeniably. The actual birth of Jesús

according to *El Relato*, however, bears more resemblance to the Qur'an than to the Gospels.

In Sura 19, Mary goes to a distant place and gives birth to Jesus under a palm tree. *El Relato* follows suit, but the narrative is much more explicit about the hostile nature of her escape. She has no choice but to “[flee] for fear of Zacariye and the other Beni Yçraile.” Indeed the Children of Israel do come after Mary, and again the Qur'anic version is much less threatening: “Then she brought the child to her people. They exclaimed: ‘O Mary you have done a most astonishing thing! O sister of Aaron, your father was not a wicked person, nor your mother sinful!’” (Q 19:27). In contrast, the aljamiado version is basically a riotous, pitchfork-wielding search party: “‘Go and you will find her under the date-palm.’ When they heard him they said, ‘If it is so and we find her, we shall catch her and stone her.’ Said the boys, ‘We will put her to shame.’ Said the young men, ‘We will give her a thrashing.’” The hostile aura surrounding this Morisco representation of the Jews is a consistent thread throughout the narrative, subtly portraying them as negative characters, both in their own right, and as the Christians some of them will one day become.

As in the Qur'an, infant Jesús speaks from the cradle to defend his mother's honor. He then performs his first miracle by causing the stones of his attackers to ricochet and hit them instead of him, and heals their resulting wounds, which is unique to *El Relato* and distinct from any other narrative. It is important to note that with this miracle and with the others in the story Jesús performs the act, but he does so only by the power of Allah, not by his own: “and he passed his hand over their wounds, and they were

healed by the grace of Allah and his power.” In this way the text maintains the holiness of Jesús as a prophet while refuting his deity or equality with God.

The last phrase of the passage continues to clarify Jesús’ rightful place in history, explaining, “For this they called him Jesús *Almasih*, because everything he touched with his hands was healed, by the grace of Allah, exalted is he.” The original definition of *Almasih* (in Hebrew, *Mashiah*), or Messiah is ‘anointed,’ which literally means ‘to rub with oil.’ This root significance has been lost somewhat in the traditional Christian reference to Jesus Christ the Messiah, because of the religious connotation it has as ‘Savior’ or ‘Lord.’ The fact that the text includes this definition indicates a refusal to acknowledge the Christian theory of Jesus as a savior figure, which is consistent with the Qur’an and Islamic belief.

#### Jesus, the Teacher, and the Master Dyer

The New Testament Gospels say very little about Jesus’ childhood. One of the few stories that do exist is of Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem for Passover as a young boy. Jesus goes to the temple, unbeknownst to his parents, and they accidentally leave town without him. After searching for him for three days, they finally find him with the religious scholars, talking to them and asking questions (Luke 2:41-52). The passage is presumably included to demonstrate Jesus’ intelligence and knowledge of religious matters, but also to show his obedience to his parents in returning to Nazareth with them.

While the *aljamiado* narrative is quite different, the two main points of the Biblical story are present and featured in *El Relato*. Not only does Jesús obey Mariam, saying, “In obedience to you, Mother, I will do as you say,” but he ends up giving the

teacher a lesson of his own, revealing the depth of his knowledge of the significance of each letter of the alphabet. Neither episode of Jesus as a boy appears in the Qur'an, but an account in al-Tha'labī's collection is almost identical to the Morisco version, extensively specifying how Jesus interpreted the alphabet and its mystical significance (648).

Next, Mariam takes Jesús to the "greatest master-dyer in the land," and asks him to teach her son the trade. In this episode Jesús shows his knack for surprising and amazing the people. He goes directly against the instructions of the dyer, but miraculously the clothing emerges in perfect condition. The performance succeeds in shocking all who hear of it, though it seems to have a negative effect on the people of the village, because they run Jesús and Mariam out of town. This narrative is completely absent from New Testament scriptures and the Qur'an, but again an almost identical story appears in al-Tha'labī's work, though some of the wording is different (652). Here again it is important to note that the miracle was not done by the power of Jesús, it "was the powerful will of Allah: Jesús prayed to Allah, holy is he, and Allah answered his prayer for the cloth... because Allah wished to demonstrate and inspire wonder and amazement in the people." The consistency of this distinction is constant throughout the text.

#### Mariam's Death, and Jesús and the Pigs

After leaving town, Jesús and Mariam spend the night in a forest, Jesús prays and Mariam sleeps. The next morning Jesús realizes that his mother has not been sleeping, she has passed away in the middle of the night. Her death and the details of her burial are unique to the Morisco narrative. There is no mention of her death in the Qur'an or in the

New Testament. Al-Tha‘labī’s collection includes a small passage, attributed to Wahb,<sup>93</sup> in which Mary and John (a disciple) flee from the king of Byzantium. “When they were on part of their way, a pursuer overtook them and they were afraid” (674). By apparent “Divine” intervention, “the Earth split open for them and they disappeared into it” (674). This account, however, bears no resemblance to *El Relato* (except for the fact that, one way or another, she ends up in the ground); even here Mary lives through the end of Jesus’ life.

When he has buried her, Jesús returns to a group of Beni Yçraile. While it is unclear if it is the same group who recognized him as “that magician, exiled from the land of Yemen,” they were nevertheless suspicious of him, hiding their children away so he would not “deceive their hearts.” When he goes to the house where they are hidden, they lie to him, saying, “You will not find anyone here but the pigs.” Once again Jesús relies on Allah to answer his prayer, this time “that he might turn them into pigs...Indeed, everyone in the house was turned into a pig, all of them by the power of Allah, honored and noble is he.” This point is emphasized even further as Jesús explains to the Beni Yçraile: “You said that they were pigs, and because of that Allah, my Lord and your Lord, converted them to pigs.”

It is interesting from an outside perspective to note that up until this point, Jesús has performed several miracles; all of them demonstrate the power he has through Allah, but arguably, none of them has helped anyone in the real world. That changes at the end of this section, though it is not recounted in the same story-telling mode of the rest of the

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<sup>93</sup> “Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728 or 732) “Yemeni narrator and author-transmitter from South Arabia, (of Persian origin). He left a *Šahīfa* with almost 140 translations and commentaries ... [and] was correctly recognized as a great authority in the field of biblical traditions” (Khoury).



text, in which the miracles are given details and elaborated. Instead, (after the people demand to see a sign of proof), Jesús claims, “This very hour I will heal the paralyzed, the blind, and the lepers,” and there is one brief sentence saying, “And they brought him men who were paralyzed and blind and mute, and he healed them all by the grace of Allah.” The relation of these phrases to both the Qur’an and the New Testament is clear. In Sura 3 Jesus says, “I will heal the blind and the leper and infuse life into the dead, by the leave of God” (Q 3:49), and in the Gospel of Luke he says, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (7:22). Though the Morisco Jesús says nothing here about raising or infusing life into the dead, it is significant that in the very next passage he does just that.

#### Çem, and the Feeding of Five Thousand

As a part of his demonstration to the Beni Yçraile that he really does serve Allah, Jesús takes them to a cemetery, where he raises a dead man from his tomb. While it is reminiscent of the story of Lazarus, the details are very different. In the New Testament Gospel of John, Jesus’ friend Lazarus dies unexpectedly, and by the time Jesus can make it to him, he has been dead four days. Jesus goes to his tomb, and the text indicates he is “greatly disturbed” by the death of his friend (11:38). Disregarding the stench of the decaying body, Jesus tells them to remove the stone from the tomb,

So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father I thank you for hearing me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips

of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him and let him go.”

John 11:41-44

The most similar aspect of the two resurrections is the clear need for Jesus to prove himself to the people around him. In John’s version, Jesus states explicitly that he prays to God “for the sake of the crowd... so that they may believe that you sent me.” In the text of *El Relato*, the people ask Jesús, “What are the miracles and signs you have to show us?” and raising Çem from the dead is part of his response. The first time Jesús calls to the dead man, nothing happens. The second time, he invokes the name of Allah, “‘Arise, by the grace of Allah.’ And suddenly the earth opened up and the tomb's occupant came out.” The similarities between the stories end here.

The Morisco Jesús does not resurrect a recently dead man; he calls from the tomb Çem, the son of Noah (of the Ark), who has been dead many, many years. The call of Jesús to arise scares him so badly that he emerges and “half of his head was white, the other half black.” Then, when Jesús gives Çem the option of staying in the living world, he declines, preferring to remain dead. This episode might seem odd, why raise a man from the dead who wishes to stay in the ground? But “his deed amazed the Beni Yçraile,” which was the purpose all along. In this way, Jesús performs another miracle “by the power of Allah.”

The Beni Yçraile, however, are not fully convinced. They say to him, “Oh Jesús, if we have really seen that which you have told us, you would favor us with provisions from your Lord.” After making them promise that they already believe in what he says, Jesús prays, and “what Jesús prayed came true, and the manna came down from heaven.

And he went to the Beni Yçraile with two loaves of bread and five fish, and it fed five thousand men of the Beni Yçraile, in addition to the women and children.” This can only be an allusion to the Biblical story known as the ‘Feeding of the Five Thousand,’ the details of which are very similar: “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, [Jesus] looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves, and...divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled...Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men” (Mark 6:41-43).

While the story of Jesus’ feeding miracle in the Qur’an makes no mention of loaves of bread, fish, or five thousand people, the context matches the Morisco version much more closely. Rather than helping to feed a hungry crowd of people, Jesús and the Qur’anic Jesus are asked to bring food down from heaven by the disciples, who want the food for their own benefit. In Sura 5 Jesus prays, “O God, our Lord, send down a table well laid out with food from the skies” (Q 5:114). God agrees, but issues a warning to them, saying, “I shall send it down to you; but if any of you disbelieve after this, I shall inflict such punishment on him as I never shall inflict on any other creature” (Q 5:115). The story ends there, without an indication that the disciples heeded God’s warning, or that they actually ate of any food from heaven. To end the passage with such admonition by God and suspicion of the people emphasizes a lack of trust between the two.

The Beni Yçraile show a comparable tendency to greed and deceit. After eating their fill of the manna from heaven, they go to Jesús and ask for more. But according to the text, “they were thinking evil thoughts about Jesús and about everything he had been doing.” When Jesús perceived this, he “prayed to Allah, exalted is he, that he might lift

up and take away from them that which he had given them, for they were walking in treachery.” While no punishment befalls them as the Qur’an suggests, Jesús and Allah do not allow the people to continue eating the miraculous food, which might have been consequence enough. The ways in which this episode compares and contrasts to the Christian narrative and the Muslim one reinforce the idea that the Christian story was probably well known, but that the Moriscos looked to Islam for its context and meaning.

### The Devil Speaks

The next passage of *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús* is a short sequence of exchanges between Jesús, the Beni Yçraile, and Ybliç (the devil). While it does not reveal anything new about Jesús, it is a key segment in the Morisco definition of him as a religious figure. It opens up the debate on his identity, his deity, and the purpose of his life. The fact that it is the devil who is advocating for Jesús’ deity is significant; identified as “Ybliç, the wicked,” his arguments, and those of his sons, are automatically given a negative connotation. Even when they appear to be supporting Jesús and his ministry, telling the people to “Love him and care for him,” Ybliç is portrayed as devious, and his sons misleading. They try to convince the Beni Yçraile that Jesús’ miracles prove that he is either “Allah or his son or his brother.” This provides Jesús with an opportunity to refute his own godliness, which he does emphatically, saying, “People, the old man did not tell you the truth. My Lord is the most honored and powerful, and Allah is so far removed from what you are saying. My Lord has never taken a wife, or a companion, nor has he had a son. So do not believe his words, for he does not speak the truth.”

Jesús' repudiation is important. It upholds the Islamic belief that Jesus was a great prophet, but not the Son of God, nor God himself. Equally important, however, is the fractured public opinion on the subject. Regardless of his denial, many people believe the words of Ybliç, and "were split into three groups: those that said he was (one with) Allah, those that said he was the son of Allah, and those that said he was the brother of Allah." The text itself takes an opinion here, indicating its Islamic sympathies: "How dissimilar is Allah from what the nonbelievers say! And how holy is Allah! There is no god but him." These phrases match up with a verse in the Sura of Mary on the same subject: "Yet the sectarians differed among themselves. Alas for the unbelievers when they see the Terrible Day!" (Q19:37). In this way, *El Relato* follows the narrative of the Qur'an, and elaborates upon the Muslim explanation for the differences between Jews, Christians and the 'true believers.'

#### The Honest Man and his Sons

While there are many stories in the New Testament of Jesus healing people,<sup>94</sup> none of them resembles this one in a substantial way. The Qur'an speaks generally of Jesus' ability to heal, but gives no explicit examples of him doing so. Thus, the exchange between Jesús and the honest old man serves mostly narrative purposes, specifically two.

First, it gives the only detailed account of Jesús healing a sick person, the old man's son. The miracle is made even more special by the fact that the ill boy does not ask Jesús to heal him. Jesús seeks him out at his home, which is a miracle in itself because "no one knows of his infirmity, except he who raised him, and he who raises us all,"

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<sup>94</sup> Among others: Matthew 8:3 "He stretched out his hand and touched him saying, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed." Also: Matthew 8:15-16 Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law's fever; casts out spirits, and "cured all who were sick."

meaning only his family and God had knowledge of the boy's sickness. Jesús must also face the challenge of the old man's other son, who is suspicious of him, and only allows Jesús to stay in the house once he sees his brother healed.

Second, this passage sets up the eventual end of the story in an important way. Jesús has a task to give, and he needs a faithful servant to complete it for him. Healing the young man provides him with a devoted follower he can trust to complete the mission. The boy will play an important role in providing an explanation for the Islamic view of Jesus, which makes him a crucial part of the Morisco narrative, as he will help them reconcile the opposing beliefs that are a part of their everyday lives.

#### The Boy, the King, and the Lions

It is unclear exactly why Jesús wants the boy to go to the king, except that he appears to be testing the boy's devotion and the king's spirituality. Not only does he want the king to "confess that there is no god but Allah, and Jesús is the spirit of Allah and his word," in exchange for the promise of a guarantor in paradise, his message to the king is to "give [the boy] your daughter for [his] wife, and half of all your possessions and your kingdom." Jesús seems to be asking for a massive concession, but the boy is faithful and takes the message to the king. Unsurprisingly, the king does not react well to such an insolent request from a young boy. He has the boy beheaded and thrown to the lions.

The boy's father goes to the king and discovers what happened to his son. Distraught, he enters the lions' den and tells the animals to give back the pieces of his son, which they ate. They regurgitate him, and the old man takes him home, where Jesús performs another miracle in bringing the boy back to life, ensuring not only the boy's

continued faithfulness, but his undying gratitude. Thus, when he asks the boy to return to the king with the same message, the boy goes.

The most obvious Biblical reference here is to the lions' den, which is featured prominently in the story of Daniel. The stories, however, are very different. Daniel lives in a foreign court, where his enemies have conspired to create a law for the king to sign saying that "whoever prays to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions" (Dan.6:7). Apparently the king actually likes Daniel, but there is nothing he can do about the law, which Daniel must break because he is faithful to his God. So, the "king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said, 'May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!'" (6:16). Miraculously, Daniel survives, explaining, "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him" (6:22).

Despite their differences, the two narratives have some aspects in common. The noticeable points are the king, the young man, and the sentence to the lions' den as a result of an impertinence or infraction. One obscure parallel detail is more difficult to connect: the old man in the Morisco version shows the lions "a seal that Jesús had given him," and commands them, "by the authority of the owner of this seal" to release his son (albeit the pieces of his dead, digested son). While the context is not the same, the language is similar in Daniel. In order to offer whatever protection he could, "a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel" (6:17).

Thus, a seal of authority helps save the young man in both cases, though in each one the seal can only do so much: an angel sent by God really saves Daniel, and Allah, through the healing hands of Jesús, is the boy's true rescuer.

Whether or not it is a reference to Daniel and the lions' den, the episode serves its purpose in moving the plot forward. The boy can now return to a shocked and confused king, and repeat Jesús' message once again. This time, the king realizes he will need to be cleverer, and Ybliç appears in disguise to help him devise a plan. The devil's idea is to make an impossible demand in exchange for the requests in Jesús message: "Tell him to bring you, as a token of proof, a house of gold for you to see with your own eyes, and a castle in the skies; one that has no foundation on earth, but exists completely in the air. And if he brings this, you will give him your daughter and half of everything you own." This extravagant request mirrors Muslim images of Paradise, but could also stem from medieval folklore, and other popular tales of the time.<sup>95</sup>

The boy returns to Jesús with the king's response, and Jesús agrees to grant the demand. On his way back to the king, however, the boy gets halfway there and experiences a moment of doubt. He does not see how such a request could be granted. In this state he receives a vision; "he lifted his eyes up to the heavens, and saw there everything the king had asked for." Somehow, though, this does not convince the boy to complete his mission. Instead, "he said (to himself), 'I do not even want the king's

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<sup>95</sup> Keller's Motif Index of Mediaeval Spanish Exempla makes no mention of a palace in the sky, but it does cite a story in which someone is given "Kingdom and hand of princess as a reward for virtuous life" (45). The story can be found in "Castigos é documentos del Rey Don Sancho." *Escritores en prosa anteriores al siglo XV*. Ed. Pascual de Gayangos. Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1860 (91).



daughter for my wife. And I can be content by following the way and wisdom of Jesús.

And I prefer his companionship over all the rest.” And he returns to Jesús.

The change in plan was not what Jesús had in mind, clearly, but the text does not explicitly state his reaction, just that he immediately “left in the direction of the mountain.” Similarly, the fact that the boy is killed in Jesús’ place by the Beni Yçraile is plainly stated, but the context is ambiguous. He is either being punished, or immortalized as a martyr; one possibility is a disgrace, the other an honor. Either way, however, his role is crucial to the Morisco narrative of Jesús. Islam does not agree with the Christian belief in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the verses of the Qur’an on the subject can be hard to decipher: “they neither killed nor crucified him, though so it appeared to them” (Q 4:157). The last clause is the most difficult to interpret. It could mean that he was on the cross, and appeared to die but really survived. Another possibility, explored by Geoffrey Parrinder, is that while Jesus was on the cross, God brought him up to heaven before his body died. Parrinder explains the reasoning behind this alternative, suggesting that “men could not kill the Messiah; only God could do that, in his mysterious purposes” (120).

Otherwise, someone who looked like him had to have been crucified in his place, so that the people believed it was Jesus, as in the *aljamiado* text. Arguments can be made for each of these explanations, but according to *El Relato*, the Moriscos believed that someone other than Jesus died on the cross: “Allah, exalted is he, lifted Jesús up into the heavens, as he wished... [And they] returned with the dead boy, and they hung him up

and later they buried him; for which the Beni Yçraile said that Jesús was the one who had died, but they were mistaken.”

The aljamiado narrative’s refutation of the crucifixion and resurrection is further enforced by the last few lines of the text. First, it denies the Christian explanations of these events: “Others said that Allah lifted him up to the heavens because he was his son, and others said that he (himself) was Allah. How mysterious is Allah, and how independent and free from the words of the nonbelievers!” Then it repeats the previously described clarification of the word Messiah, (which is a word used by the Qur’an in reference to Jesus, without the Christian connotation of “Savior”): “And Allah called him Jesús *Almasih*, because he put his blessed hand upon the wound and Allah healed it.” By continuing to praise Allah and give him credit for the miracles, the Moriscos maintain their core Muslim beliefs in this narrative. By highlighting the differences in Muslim and Christian theology, the narrative itself draws an interesting dynamic between religious traditions: according to it, the disparities are the direct result of a series of misunderstandings. The fact that Beni Yçraile are wrong about Jesús is a direct parallel to the Christians in Morisco society who are wrong about Jesus Christ. Surprisingly, the text does not seem spiteful or bitter about the mistake. Instead, it celebrates the fact that Muslims have found the truth, indicating that this narrative’s purpose was as much to promote understanding and reconciliation, as it was to preserve the remnants of Islamic history and faith within a Catholic-dominated culture.

### **Conclusions: Adapting the Catholic Jesus to Muslim Principles**

In Christianity, Jesus is the ultimate leading figure; he is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God who brings salvation and all that is holy down to earth from heaven. In Islam, Jesus is an important prophet, much loved and favored by God. He is not one with God, nor is he God's son, and he absolutely is not the Savior of the world. So how can these incompatible pictures of the same man be resolved? How can his image as Jesus Christ the Savior be refuted without tarnishing his image as a holy prophet, chosen by Allah and recognized as such in the Qur'an? Barletta writes about the aljamiado texts as tools for religious teaching (4). In this case, it is not necessarily pure doctrine that is being reinforced by the narrative, although the text is clearly heavily influenced by the Qur'an and the prominent Islamic scholar-commentators such as Ibn Abbas. Instead, this narrative's purpose seems to be to elaborate and to explain.

According to *El Relato*, Jesus is important to the Christians (who were at one time the Beni Yçraile), because of the miracles he showed them, and because they believed the crucifixion and resurrection really took place. The story shows the Christians easily misled by Ybliç, the devil, and how that misunderstanding distinguishes them from Muslims, who are fortunate to know the Truth.

To modern Christians, the Morisco story might seem to be a horrendous deviation from the story of Jesus as they have learned it. Their Jesus performed miracles out of compassion, was fully God and fully man; he taught love and kindness, and sacrificed his life for all of humanity. To them, this Jesús— who speaks at birth, sorts dyed laundry, raises Noah's long-dead son and sends him back to the grave, and heals a boy only to

make him his scapegoat— this Jesús is very wrong. However, when the aljamiado Jesús is put into larger context, as the dominant symbol of an oppressive culture (who nonetheless plays an important role in Islam), this account is actually very generous. It presents Jesús as a respected figure, blessed and loved by God, who was on earth to show the way to Islam, if only anyone had been paying attention. This answers the question as to how Catholic Jesus and Qur'anic Jesus can be reconciled (a simple lack of understanding), but not the question of why it was so important to the Moriscos in particular.

The aljamiado image of Jesús and the colorful stories elaborating on his significance hint at the daily struggles of life as a crypto-Muslim during the Spanish Inquisition. Catholicism had become the rule of law, and the way of life, and reconciling that reality to their own beliefs was crucial to Morisco survival. Catholicism, with its plethora of religious images in the form of paintings, sculptures, glasswork, its ever-present crucifixes and physical manifestations such as the sign of the cross, the rosary, and communion, is not an easy religion to avoid. For a Muslim, the daily visible and tangible reminders forced upon them would have been sacrilegious and repugnant to the extreme. And at the center of all of those things is one figure: the image of Jesus Christ. With that in mind, what better way to make such disgusting yet obligatory practices tolerable than to cast a new light on the central figure? Here, at least one answer to the question of 'why' can be found. Moriscos could survive physically by keeping their dual identities separate, but their spiritual morale needed a reason to persevere. By making Jesus their own, they made the Catholic symbol one they could live with both externally

and internally, and thus, through narratives such as *El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*, they were able to find a sense of reconciliation.

## Appendix



*Relato del nacimiento de Jesús*  
a. m. (*alaihí ssalam—sobre él sea la salud.*—)

**E**N el nombre de alh.—Allah—piadoso de piedad y crezca Allah honor sobre Muhamed—sobre Mahoma—el honrado (1).

Dixo (el narrador): Hízonos á saber Alhaçan fijo de Abilhaçan Albocriyo, por Macatil

(1) Bibliot. de Gayangos, m. s. S. 1.—Recuerde el lector lo indicado en el Prólogo. La traducción de las palabras árabes ó lemosinas va entre paréntesis de este modo — — la primera vez que aparezcan; después, cuando se hallen en el texto, sólo indicaré la traducción; repetir las con ésta siempre que se presentan, haría oscura y enfadosísima la lectura. Bien hubiera querido que lo impreso fuera una copia exacta del texto, pero entre esta exactitud absoluta, y la claridad del sentido y la mejor inteligencia del lector, he tenido que optar por estas últimas; á ello me obliga, sobre todo, el carácter de vulgarización, más literario que erudito, de esta obra. Las palabras que se hallan más frecuentemente en este caso son: *ad* por *á*; *la ora* por al momento, en el instante; *ye!* por *¡oh!*; *tan* por *cuán* y los nombres propios. Además colocaré entre líneas la explicación de algunos conceptos, que por arabismos ó defectos de redacción resultan oscuros. Las letras, voces ó frases, que he aña-

fijo de Çuleymén, que dixo, que era Imrán (1) padre de Mariem—María,—y tenía una mujer que se llamaba Hanna—Ana,—y era señora de las mujeres.

Y ella empuñóse de su (2) marido; y como se vió preñada debantó su vista al cielo y dixo:

—¡O(h) mi Señor! dáme criatura que viva sobre la faz de la tierra, que todo lo que para de macho ó de hembra, yo te lo ofrezco para el templo, para tu santo serviçio, pues esto reçíbelo de mí, ¡oh mi Señor! que tú eres sobre toda cosa poderoso.

Y era que aquel día servían al templo tres personas, Zacariye—Zacarías—y dos otros con él; y era la mujer de Zacarías hermana de Ana de su madre de María. Y vino Ana á Zacarías, y díxole:

—¡Oh Zacarías! yo tengo prometido todo lo que parí(e)re de darlo al templo, y de meterlo para su señor á su serviçio en la casa sancta.

dido para completar el sentido, las he colocado entre paréntesis en esta forma ( ); cuando la falta de las letras se repta mucho, como la de la h en la interjección *oh*, suprimiré el paréntesis. En cuanto á la ortografía he adoptado la moderna, procurando conservar todo lo más posible de la antigua, y en absoluto cuanto pueda dar idea de la pronunciación. En estas composiciones huelgan á veces algunas palabras; dejo el suprimirlas á la discreción del lector, pues no he querido quitarlas por no alterar demasiado el texto.

(1) Confúndese á Imrán con Joaquín; véase la noticia acerca de Jesús en el prólogo de este tomo I.

(2) Fol. 99 v.

Sample of original text, edited by F. Guillén Robles.  
*El Relato del Nacimiento de Jesús*

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