



# Literary Analysis of Mary's Lineage: Unraveling the Controversy in Quranic and Biblical Texts within the Context of Literary Studies

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## Abstract

The controversy over Mary being termed the "sister of Aaron" in the Quran prompts a critical examination of its impact on the Quranic narrative. This study explores historical, literary, and cultural contexts, utilizing intertextuality in the Quranic and Christian traditions. Employing a methodology involving a thorough analysis of Biblical and Quranic texts, along with relevant secondary literature, we scrutinize language styles, genre specifications, and cultural contexts. The investigation reveals diverse perspectives on Mary's lineage. In alignment with some mainstream Islamic interpretations, the paper posits that the Quran's reference to Mary as Aaron's sister is symbolic, not a literal biological relationship. This interpretation is supported by the distinctive portrayal of Aaron in the Quran and the Bible, emphasizing Mary's unique role. Additionally, the paper draws evidence from accepted religious sources in Jewish and Christian traditions, reinforcing the Quranic term "Mary, sister of Aaron." In conclusion, the study advocates for a nuanced understanding, asserting that interpreting the Quran's symbolic connections does not undermine its authenticity. Instead, it aligns with a broader tradition of symbolism and intertextuality in religious texts, reinforcing the Quran's distinct portrayal.

## 1. Introduction

The Bible, a profoundly influential text in human history, extends its impact beyond Western literacy, particularly shaping the English language (Malasit, 2006). This sacred compilation, described as an “anthology” encompassing a diverse range of writings, demands a contextual analysis based on history, literacy, geography, and culture (Ondich, 2022, pp. 6-9). The primary goal for readers is to establish a foundation for comprehending the text, considering its language styles, genre specifications, characters, and themes. Building on this exploration of the Bible’s multifaceted nature, we now turn our attention to specific theological concerns that emerge in the text.

To effectively approach the Bible, it is crucial to employ the aforementioned techniques. Among the numerous stories that delve into theological concerns, the issue of incest stands out as particularly intriguing. Carmichael (1995) highlights various instances of incest in Biblical verses, such as relationships between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, and siblings. The correct interpretation of these stories is essential for proper classification and understanding. As we explore these challenging narratives, the complexity and contextual influences on interpretation become apparent.

Differences in historical and cultural contexts, especially in the religious backgrounds of organized communities, significantly influence the representation of entities. An illustrative contrast is evident in the interpretation of God between Christianity and Islam, where nuances in contextualization can present conflicting depictions. In Christian texts, the perception of the attributes of God often relies on anthropomorphism within the realm of the Trinity. For instance, passages depict God as a murderer of the men of Beth Shemesh (1 Samuel 6:19)<sup>1</sup>, a roaring God (Jeremiah 25:30), a hissing God (Zechariah 10:8), a cherub rider (2 Samuel 22:11), or even a barber (Isaiah 7:20). These

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<sup>1</sup> “The Biblical verses referenced in this article are drawn from the King James Bible (2017), which is based on the original English version first published in 1611, with the Oxford edition published in 1769 being a significant revision.” To conserve space and streamline citations, the in-text references within brackets include only the Book, chapter, and verses. Instead of providing the full citation format (e.g., King James Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Samuel 6:19), the author has opted for a condensed form, indicating only the Book, chapter, and verse(s). Thus, the mention of “1 Samuel 6:19” signifies the first Book of Samuel, chapter 6, and verse 19.

depictions stand in contrast to the Islamic understanding, which adheres strictly to monotheism, presenting God as One and Unique; Eternal, Absolute; Begetting not nor Begotten; and incomparable (The Quran, 112:1-4)<sup>2</sup>. The examination of theological paradigms reveals differences and raises questions about the authenticity of sacred texts, emphasizing the need for nuanced interpretation.

Controversies surrounding the authenticity of the Quran add another layer to the exploration of theological differences. Critics raise questions about potential mistakes in the Quran, among specific verses cited is found in the chapter on Mary. One such verse in the chapter of Mary (The Quran, 19: 27-28) is particularly contentious. It narrates, “*She went back to her people carrying the child, and they said, ‘Mary! You have done something terrible! Sister of Aaron! Your father was not an evil man; your mother was not unchaste!’*” Scrutinizing specific verses, like the one concerning Mary (The Quran, 19: 27-28), leads to broader debates on authenticity and interpretation, deepening the discourse on religious texts.

Alleged confusions in the Quran regarding Mary’s identity and the criticism suggesting its reliance on pre-existing sources intensify the discourse. The claim that the Quran mistakenly equates Miriam with Maryam (Dawood, 2014, p. 706), and the assertion that it was copied from earlier religious texts, form integral aspects of the controversy that predated it, including early poetry, rhymed prose, and modern wise phrases. According to this view, the author of the Quran tended to gather information and incorporate it into the book. It is suggested that upon hearing statements about Mary, the author became confused and unable to differentiate between the Mary who

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<sup>2</sup> The Quranic verses referenced in this article are sourced from *The Qur’an*, an English-translated version by M.A.S Abdel Haleem, published by Oxford University Press in 2004. The in-text citation format employs the chapter of the Quran followed by its corresponding verse(s). For instance, Quran, 112:1-4 denotes chapter 112 and verses 1-4. It is noteworthy that the author consistently uses Quran instead of Qur’an for the sake of convenience, despite the latter being a more accurate spelling with the apostrophe representing a glottal stop. Furthermore, elsewhere in the paper, a more concise citation style is adopted, wherein only the chapter and verse(s) are enclosed in brackets. For instance, the notation “4:163, 10:87” signifies references to Quranic chapter 4, verse 163, and chapter 10, verse 87, respectively. This abbreviated format aligns with the paper’s overall approach to streamline references while clearly indicating the specific chapters and verses discussed.

lived during the time of Moses and the Mary who lived during the time of Jesus (Margoliouth, 2003, pp. 60-61). According to critics, one error in the Quran is the merging of these two distinct Marys (or Maryams in Greek and Arabic). The Quran portrays Mary as the daughter of Imran (The Quran, 3:35-37), seemingly equating her with Biblical Mary (or Miriam), the sister of Aaron and Moses, and the daughter of Amram (Numbers 26:59). These issues are not only points of contention between Muslims and non-Muslims but also among various religious dialogue groups. The examination of textual criticisms prompts consideration of external sources' potential influence on the Quranic narrative, highlighting the interconnected nature of religious discourse.

The Quran's designation of two chapters referring to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and The Family of Imran adds depth to the exploration. However, the parallels drawn between Islamic figures and the biblical counterparts raise questions about the historical accuracy of these connections. The complexity deepens as Islamic tradition attributes the title of the father of Mary to Imran, mirroring the biblical figure of Amram, father of Miriam, as we can see that in Islamic tradition, Imran, the son of Qahith, the son of Azir, the son of Lavy, the son of Jacob, the son of Ishaq, the son of Abraham, is considered the father of Moses (and therefore Aaron) (Katheer & Maqbool, 2006, p. 349). This seems parallel to the Biblical figure of Amram, the father of Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses (Numbers 26:59). Exploring these connections prompts an examination of historical accuracy and the intersection of Islamic and biblical traditions.

The coexistence of similar names among prominent figures, a common practice in ancient times, leads to debates about the historical accuracy of the Quranic narrative. Critics argue against the possibility of Mary, the Virgin and mother of Jesus, being a biological sibling of Aaron, who lived a thousand years earlier. These disputes extend beyond Mary's name, encompassing key characters such as Imran and Aaron. Debates over historical accuracy invite consideration of broader implications for textual interpretations, reinforcing the interconnectedness of historical and textual analyses.

The ancient roots of these arguments, as noted by Stowasser (1996, p. 156), reflect two possible interpretations: a literal and a metaphorical understanding of the phrase "sister of Aaron." These interpretations open intriguing avenues for exploring

typology and its significance in understanding the deeper layers of meaning present in the texts.

In conclusion, examining the Quranic portrayal of Mary as the sister of Aaron, found in the 19th chapter (verses 27-28), proves invaluable. This portrayal sparks scholarly and theological debates, delving into the intricacies of religious discourse. The controversy surrounding this depiction extends to discussions on the authenticity of sacred texts, shedding light on the challenges of interpreting religious scriptures. Beyond academia, investigating the Quranic figure of Mary as a sister of Aaron contributes not only to the academic understanding of religious texts but also to broader conversations surrounding authenticity, interpretation, and interfaith engagement.

## **2. Objectives and Research Questions**

### **2.1 Objectives**

2.1.1 To analyze the portrayal of Mary in selected verses from both the Bible and the Quran, through linguistic nuances, character attributes, and thematic elements that contribute to her identity and relationships with other relevant figures, particularly emphasizing verses 27-28 of chapter 19.

2.1.2 To explore the intertextual connections between narratives featuring Islamic figures (Mary, Imran) and Christian (and Jewish) counterparts (Miriam, Amram).

### **2.2 Research Questions**

How is Mary depicted in Islamic and Biblical traditions, with a focus on linguistic, thematic, and character aspects contributing to her portrayal?

## **3. Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study involved a meticulous examination of both primary and secondary sources to achieve the stated objectives. The primary sources that were scrutinized included Biblical and Quranic texts, which were analyzed with a focus on language styles, genre specifications, characters, and themes. Special attention was given to considering the historical, literary, geographical, and cultural contexts surrounding these texts (Ondich, 2022). Through a close examination of these

primary sources, valuable insights about the depictions and narratives surrounding the two Marys and other relevant figures were extracted.

In instances where literal obstacles or complexities arose during the analysis of the primary sources, the author consulted a range of secondary sources. These secondary sources included Quranic commentaries, Christian apocryphal literature, and other relevant texts that served as the theological foundation for this study. These additional sources provided valuable insights and perspectives that contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter at hand.

#### **4. Findings**

##### **4.1 Quranic Mary (or Miriam): a sister of Moses and Aaron**

In the Quran, there is no explicit mention of a character named Mary (or Maryam, Miriam, Merriam) being the sister of Moses and Aaron. However, according to Islamic historian Ibn Katheer, supported by Quranic verses 10-13 of chapter 28, it is suggested that the sister of Moses (and Aaron), who was the eldest daughter, played a significant role in the story. When Moses's mother was ordered to cast him into the river Nile, she instructed her daughter to follow the floating basket carrying the baby. This was a clever ploy by the mother to protect the baby from Pharaoh's soldiers. The sister dutifully obeyed her mother's command. Eventually, the baby Moses was discovered by the wife of Pharaoh, Asiya, who took him into her care. The sister reappeared later when the Pharaoh's household was searching for a wet nurse to feed Moses, as he had refused to be nursed by any of the handmaidens provided by Asiya. According to Ibn Katheer, it was Moses's sister who offered assistance and guided Moses to nurse from his own mother's breast (Katheer & Maqbool, 2006, pp. 355-356). However, there is some dispute regarding whether it was the sister or the mother who acted as the nursemaid to Moses without Pharaoh's wife recognizing the truth.

##### **4.2 Biblical Miriam: Sister of Moses and Aaron**

In contrast to the Quran, the Bible provides more comprehensive details about this individual. According to biblical texts, there was an elder sister of Moses who played a crucial role in his delivery at the Nile River (Exodus 2:5-10). Although her name is not

explicitly mentioned, she is commonly believed to be Miriam (or Mary). Miriam is also referred to as a prophetess (Exodus 15:20). Moreover, Exodus 6:20 states that Amram, after marrying his father's sister named Jochebed (another case of incest as Jochebed is Amram's aunt), had two sons, Aaron and Moses. From this genealogy, Aaron and Moses are considered Levites, as Amram's father Kohath was among the children of Levi (Exodus 6:16-20). While the Bible does not explicitly mention if Miriam was the daughter of Amram, it can be inferred that she was the daughter of Jochebed, who gave birth to Aaron and Moses. Therefore, Miriam was a Levite.

Additionally, Miriam is identified as an Israelite prophetess. Her role in religious missions is prominently highlighted. She assisted Moses in leading the Israelites across the river and led the women worshippers in singing and dancing (Exodus 15:20-22). However, Miriam encountered an unfortunate situation when she became leprous, with her skin turning as white as snow (Numbers 12:10). This was a consequence of speaking against Moses after he married an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1) or due to her jealousy of Moses being the exclusive recipient of the Lord's messages (Numbers 12:2). The former reason indicates her lack of resistance against racism (as Ethiopians are black), while the latter points to her envy of Moses. From the account of her leprosy in the Book of Numbers until her death mentioned in the Book of Numbers (20:1), there appear to be no other significant events directly related to Miriam. The fact that Miriam died and was buried in Kadesh (Numbers 20:1) suggests that there was no resolution for her leprosy, and her death resulted from the condition.

#### **4.3 Quranic Aaron**

There is no significant disagreement between the theological sources regarding Aaron. Both the Bible and the Quran explicitly portray Aaron as the brother of Moses. However, there is a difference in the characterization of Aaron in the Quran compared to the Bible. In the Quran, Aaron is consistently depicted with a positive personality, whereas the Bible portrays him with both positive and negative attributes.

In the Quran, Aaron is recognized as one of the prophets inspired by God (4:163, 10:87) and was chosen and guided on the path of righteousness as a prophet (19:53). His exceptional behavior is emphasized, as he is described as a "doer of good" among the prophets (6:84) and guided on the "straightway" (37:118). Moses trusted

Aaron and requested that God allow him to accompany him to the palace of Pharaoh (26:13, 28:34). Aaron served as Moses's assistant and was entrusted with the task of inviting Pharaoh to embrace God's religion (10:75, 20:30, 20:42, 23:45-46, 25:35-36). On one occasion, when Moses needed to leave the people for thirty nights, Aaron was appointed as a deputy leader (7:142).

Aaron held a position of high regard among the people, almost equal to that of Moses. Egyptian magicians, upon converting to Moses's faith, invoked the names of both Aaron and Moses, professing their belief in "the Lord of Aaron and Moses" or "the Lord of Moses and Aaron" (20:70, 26:48). Aaron's character is portrayed with honesty, courage, remorsefulness, compassion, and innocence. He openly declared that he did not endorse the worship of the golden calf, attributing the misleading to another individual. Despite facing opposition, he demonstrated bravery by standing up to the mob, putting his own life at risk. He expressed regret for the situation and showed care and empathy towards others. Moses considered him blameless and prayed for his forgiveness (7:150-151, 20:92-94). It is also mentioned that Aaron was "more eloquent in speech" than Moses (28:34).

Both Aaron and Moses were recipients of God's favor, assistance, and guidance, and they were rewarded for their righteous deeds with "peace and salutation" (37:114-122). Aaron and his family were entrusted with relics from God, which were passed down through subsequent generations as a testament to God's authority (2:248). The prayers of Aaron and Moses were accepted by God, and one of their requests was for Moses to be strengthened through his brother Aaron (28:35). They were given the "Book" as a criterion for judgment, enabling them to make sound decisions (21:48, 25:35, 37:117).

#### **4.4 Biblical Aaron**

In the scholarly examination of Biblical Aaron, the author references Findley's (2017) specialized analysis of Aaron's characterization. By engaging with specific biblical passages and employing a literary analysis approach, Findley's work provides a comprehensive perspective on the subject, expanding the scope of critical analysis. Utilizing this secondary source enhances the author's analysis and deepens their understanding of Aaron's portrayal in the Bible. Findlay (2017) highlights several positive aspects of Aaron's character.

Firstly, Aaron is depicted as an ideal priest who is obedient to commands, proficient in ritual actions and symbolized as a leader in the Temple. He is seen as the preeminent priest with no rivals in his position, considered the best possible priest. These depictions align with Aaron's role as a priest, akin to the Levites and Zadokites mentioned in the Bible (1 Chronicles 23-24; Ezra 7:1-5; Exodus 28-29; Leviticus 8-9; Numbers 26:50). The priestly group was even named after him as the "Aaronites" (Exodus 28:1). Secondly, Aaron is portrayed as more than just a priest. He is depicted as a responsible human being, reflected through the tone of his speech. His high level of compassion is emphasized, surpassing that of Moses or even God. He exhibits the ability to effectively plead for others and upholds human character affirmation according to God's laws. These aspects suggest his role as a community leader or even a prophet. Thirdly, Aaron is seen as an obedient servant of God who shows loyalty to Moses and unquestioningly follows commands. He acts without hesitation or questioning when commanded to do so. However, despite these positive attributes, Findlay (2017) also explores the negative aspects of Aaron's character. This includes his association with the golden calf or idol worship, his disagreement with Moses, and his disobedience of God's command at Meribah. Findlay's analysis delves into Aaron's limitations as a prophet, his lack of freedom to act or speak independently, and his unfortunate exclusion from entering the promised land.

#### **4.5 Biblical Mary as the Mother of Jesus**

Both the Quran and the Bible agree that Mary is the mother of Jesus. However, other concerns are different from each other. The difference starts from the theological foundation to a broader aspect. In the Bible, where Mary was mentioned (in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) not more or less than 17-18 times), there is no mention of Mary's genealogy. According to Brock (2006), the fact that Mary's father is believed to be Joachim is a result of "speculation", which is mentioned in the *Protogospel of James*. The work was found to contain "various misconceptions about Jewish traditions". Meanwhile, in the Bible, the books of Matthew and Luke only provide a genealogy for Joseph. To this issue, another theory says that (to be found in Sinai Syr. 16), Mary was the daughter of Zadoq and Dina. Then, the story about Mary (the mother of the Christian God) starts when she was visited by the angel Gabriel who informed her about God's

(the Almighty) favor on her and intention of providing her with a son named Jesus. This unnatural phenomenon of the virgin girl having a child seems likely similar to that of the wife of Zachariah, Elizabeth, who got pregnant while she was “well stricken in years” (Luke 1:18). At the time of the first angelic visit to Mary, Elizabeth was carrying a six-month pregnancy (Luke 1:26). Though “espoused” (engaged) to a noble man named Joseph, Mary was still virgin. Knowing that Mary was stunned about the impossibility as she “knew not a man”, the angel soothed her heart by (i) foretelling that her son would be “great” and given the kingdom which would continue till eternity (Luke 1:32-33) and (ii) reminding her of the case of her old cousin (Elizabeth) with the hidden message that everything is possible under God’s permission (Luke 1:36-38). Another incentive given by this archangel may include the explanation of the causal phenomenon that led to this pregnancy, that the Holy Ghost would come upon her, and the highest power would overshadow Mary (Luke 1:35). The remarkable aspect of the Bible as far as the mother of Jesus is concerned is that there is no mention about Mary’s biological parents except relatives. From this lack, we can never trace her genealogy exactly as we did with Miriam.

Mary’s second scene is shown through her “haste” visit of Elizabeth, who after being filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:41-3), informed her that the baby in her womb (John the Baptist) was leaping due to the joy after hearing Mary’s salutation, which means the mother of the Lord was coming (Luke 1: 43-44). Mary resided with the mother of John the Baptist for “three months” (Luke 1: 56). From verse 46 to verse 55 the same chapter of Luke shows Mary’s gratitude towards God the Almighty. However, the statements regarding God’s attributes like “strength with his arm” (51) and “to his seed forever” (55) can be considered examples of one of the theological differences between Islam and Christianity.

Prior to her delivery was the situation where Mary was registered as Joseph’s “betrothed wife” following the requirement of the government (Luke 2:5). The details of the story may be a bit dissimilar from the book of Matthew where he states that Mary was found to be pregnant (by the Holy Spirit) even before she moved into Joseph’s

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<sup>3</sup> This Biblical verse is evidence of the claim that Jesus is not the only one who was filled with the Holy Ghost. Another figure is Simeon (Luke 2:25).

house, who was implicitly intending to “put her away privily” before the angel came to his dream prohibiting him to do so (Matthew 1:19-20). However, these verses have similarly brought into the academic world a longstanding issue<sup>4</sup>. He eventually, did what the angel told him to, and he “knew her not” (meaning not having sex with her) until she gave birth. It was Joseph who named the child Jesus (Matthew 1:25).

On the night Mary gave birth, there were countryside “shepherds” watching over their sheep to make sure they were safe. Prior to their finding of Joseph, Mary, and the baby and sharing their observations with others (Luke 2:15-17), these shepherds were visited by an angel sent by the Almighty God to inform them about the coming of Baby

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<sup>4</sup> It refers to the questioning of “the virgin birth” or the virtue of Mary. The argument flowing among the accusers is as follows: If Mary was pregnant before getting married to Joseph, and that her pregnancy happened without miracles, she must have committed adultery, and Jesus is then illegitimate. The evidence that the Jews accused Jesus of illegitimacy and Mary of adultery can be seen from Dummelow (1909), in his commentary of the Book of Matthew, chapter 12, at notes 22-37 (second paragraph), where he mentions that apart from being accused by the Pharisees of being in league with Beelzebub, or learning the miracles from an Egyptian juggler and the heathen Celsus (pagans), Jesus also was called by the Jewish Talmudists as “the son of the adulteress” (p. 668). Another evidence is in McDowell (1986, p.195), where he cites a Jewish historian and prominent Zionist Joseph Klausner (1874-1956) who confirms the existence of the idea of Jesus’s illegitimacy among the Jews. McDowell (1986) continues the statements that Jesus is referred to as “ben Pantera”. The term for many scholars may only be used for the purpose of making fun of another word “parthenos” which means “virgin” in Greek. However, according to Zeichmann (2020) the term implies that Jesus was the son of Pantera, a Roman soldier. Meanwhile, McDowell (1986, p. 196) reports that Klausner refers the term “a bastard of an adulteress”, found in R. Shimeon ben Azzai, to Jesus. In addition, Klausner comments on the term and its variants like “Pantera” or “Pandera” that, it was the name of “the reputed father of Jesus”, widely known among the Jews (McDowell, 1986, p. 198). Meanwhile, according to Christian scholars the accusations of Jesus’s illegitimacy and Mary’s adultery are historically baseless, thus but a conjecture (Miller, 2008, 2023). This claim is in line with what was found earlier by MaGrath (2007), who examined Jesus’s social status through his association with marginalized individuals. The analysis of several primary sources from the period reveals that though Jesus had associations with the marginalized people, that cannot imply that he shared the same status or he was born of “suspected adultery”, meaning the scandal that Jesus is illegitimate is groundless.

Jesus “wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger” (Luke 2:8-12)<sup>5</sup>. Though the way she gave birth to the child was without miracles, except there was no room available in the inn, which caused her to wrap the child in the cloths and put him in a manger (Luke 2:7), Mary reflected carefully on everything that was happening around her trying to understand its wisdom (Luke 2:19).

Mary is portrayed in the Bible as a caring and devoted mother to Jesus, with several significant events highlighting her role. One such event is when she and Joseph brought the young child Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, where they encountered Simeon, who prophesied about Jesus (Luke 2:33). Another notable event is when wise men from the east came to Jerusalem to worship Jesus and presented him with gifts (Matthew 2:1-12).

During this time, Mary, Joseph, and the young Jesus were visited by an angel in a dream, who warned them of King Herod’s plans to harm Jesus. They were instructed to flee to Egypt, which they did under the cover of night (Matthew 2:13). They remained in Egypt until after Herod’s death, when they were permitted to return to Israel. However, due to concerns about Herod’s successor, Archelaus, Joseph decided to settle with his family in Nazareth (Matthew 2:14-23).

Mary’s love and concern for her son are evident in another event when Jesus was 12 years old. On their way back from Jerusalem after celebrating the Festival of the Passover, Mary, and Joseph realized that Jesus was missing. They searched for him anxiously and eventually found him in the temple, engaging in deep discussions with the

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<sup>5</sup> That “shepherds were in the fields” implies that the day Jesus was born is not 25th December, since the weather in December in Judea is too cold for the shepherds to take the sheep out for pasture. They must have kept their sheep under cover at night. Similarly, Laymon (1971) notes on this phrase that “These humble pastoral folk are out in the field at night with their flock—a feature of the story which would argue against the birth’s occurring on December 25 since the weather would not have permitted it” (p. 676). Seiglie (2018) discusses that despite compelling evidence that Jesus was not born on December 25th, there is a strong desire among some Christian scholars to reinterpret the evidence in favor of the winter Christmas using the “temple-sheep theory”. The theory suggests that these shepherds were watching over sheep that were being especially pastured for the temple and destined for Temple-sacrifices. The second theory is the “conception/death theory”. This theory justifies the date of December 25 for Jesus’ birth with the claim that Jesus was conceived and crucified on the same day of the year, and born exactly nine months later.

teachers there. Mary expressed her astonishment and asked Jesus why he had caused them such worry. Jesus replied that he had to be in his Father's house, although the full meaning of his words may not have been understood by Mary at the time. Nevertheless, Mary treasured these experiences and conversations in her heart (Luke 2:42-51).

These accounts depict Mary as a devoted and attentive mother who played a significant role in nurturing and supporting Jesus throughout his childhood. Her willingness to reflect on and ponder these experiences demonstrates her spiritual openness and deep connection to her son's divine purpose.

Mary was mentioned implicitly, not by name, in John 2, which depicts the wedding ceremony in Cana of Galilee. Mary also was present with Jesus and his disciples in the ceremony. When they were running out of wine, Mary informed Jesus (hoping for a miracle from him?)<sup>6</sup>. However, after Mary was responded to by Jesus's insolent behavior of calling her "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"<sup>7</sup>, she seems to remain obedient to what he said (John 2:1-5).

Mary is mentioned together with "his brethren" also as attempting to listen to Jesus's preaching. She stood outside and sent someone to "call him" (Mark 3:31). When Jesus was informed about Mary's coming looking for him, he then defined mother, sister, and brethren as "whosoever shall do the will of God" (Mark 3:35) to his disciples after questioning them (Mark 3:33).

She was present while Jesus was on the cross standing with "his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas (or the mother of James the Less), and Mary Magdalene" (John 19: 25)<sup>8</sup> and was reminded by Jesus that "Woman, behold thy son" (John 19: 26)

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<sup>6</sup> The statement which mentions "the water that had been turned into wine" (John 2: 9) can be referred to as the very first miracle ever performed by Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> The noun "woman" Jesus used for his mother is the same noun that he used with "a woman taken in adultery" (John 8:3), to whom he said "Woman, where are those thine accusers?" (John 8:9). In addition, while on the cross, he used the same noun calling his mother "Woman, behold thy son!" (John 19:26).

<sup>8</sup> Calculating without the inclusion of Miriam (the sister of Moses) as Mary, now we have three Biblical Marys. Actually, in the New Testament, there are other three individuals who share the same name, Mary of Bethany (John 12:1); Mary mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); and Mary of Rome (Romans 16:6).

and after the incident, was taken by “the disciple” to “his own home” (John 19: 27). The last mention of her (by name) appears when she was among other disciples of Jesus including women performing “prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14).

This is the last time Mary the mother of Jesus is mentioned in the Bible. As to her death, the Bible does not give an explicit reference to it nor provide details about the end of her earthly life, other than what has been mentioned. However, according to Pelikan (2022), Mary has been a subject of contemplation and thought for Christian theologians, with different interpretations of her role and significance. The development of doctrine about Mary has continued to evolve, with different Christian communities setting different terminal points for this development. A historical survey of this development provides insight into contemporary Christian thought about Mary.

#### **4.6 Quranic Mary (the mother of Jesus) and her Legacy**

The story of Mary is told primarily in chapters 3 and 19 of the Quran. The honor the Quran gives to Mary the mother of Jesus is visualized through its dedication to name one of its chapters as Mary (chapter 19). Such honor cannot be found in the Bible otherwise. The story begins even before the birth of Jesus Christ, with the parents of Mary themselves. The term “Imran’s wife” mentioned in verse 35 of the Quran’s chapter 3, contextually implies Mary’s parents. While her father’s name is Imran, the mother is traditionally believed to be Hannah or Anna, or Anne (Ali, 2016, p. 99, n. 375), who “dedicated” the child in her womb to God with the expectation that it would be a male child. However, though she realized that the child was female, she was not disappointed. Her attitude towards males and females is fundamentally different and cannot be compared or equated in all aspects. However, it does not mean that the girl has no benefits to God at all. Everything about the child relies on her attitude toward God. This is the reason why she “commended the child (Mary) and her offspring to God’s protection” from the devil, hoping that God would accept her request (The Quran, 19: 36) or give her better than she had planned.

God “made” Mary “grow in goodness, and entrusted her to the charge of Zachariah”, as the result of the priests’ casting lots (3:44). Zachariah once witnessed Mary in her sanctuary, adorned with provisions supplied by God (19: 36-37). This event seems to be a key inspiration for Zachariah to pray to his Lord to give him (like God did to Mary’s

parents) also a “virtuous offspring” (19: 38). It can be said that it was Mary who inspired Zachariah to ask God for an offspring. In another sense, Zachariah might not have supplicated God to grant him a virtuous child if he had not seen the blessings Mary was given.

Mary is introduced in the Quran when the angel Gabriel, identified as God’s Spirit, appears before her in the form of a perfect man (19:17). Seeking protection from God (19:18)<sup>9</sup>, Mary likely experiences this encounter in a private eastern chamber in the Temple, where she withdraws in seclusion (19:16) (Ali, 2016, p. 513, n. 2471). The conversation conveys several key messages.

“The perfect Man” informs Mary that he is a Messenger sent by God to announce the gift of a pure son (19:19). This son is conceived through “His word, directed to Mary” (4:171) and God’s Spirit (21:91), serving as “a sign to all people” (23:50, 19:21). Mary, being a virgin, expresses wonder at the possibility, stating, “no man has touched” her (19:20). God, through the Messenger, assures Mary that it is easy for Him to grant her a son without male intervention (19:20).

Mary’s miraculous virgin birth is presented as a sign and a blessing from God. Her son is promised honor in this world and the next, nearness to God, righteousness, and the ability to speak in infancy (3:45-46) along with other miracles (3:48-49). Mary is confirmed as pure by God, chosen above all women (3:42). This confirmation aligns with her own declaration of purity and devotion (66:12, 21:91, 3:47, 5:75), emphasizing that Mary never claimed her son to be God (Ali, 2016, p.186, n.783).

Mary is commanded to worship God through acts of devotion, prostration, and bowing down with those who pray (3:43). The angel teaches Mary various lessons, including attributes of God and the favors God will bestow upon her son (3:48). Regarding Mary’s delivery, passages in the Quran describe her withdrawal to a distant place after conceiving the child (19:22).<sup>10</sup> Mary undergoes painful labor, clinging to a palm tree and expressing a wish for death (19:23). As the delivery nears completion, the child speaks to Mary from below (19:24). In a state of shock, Mary is reassured by

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<sup>9</sup> Mary feared the man approaching her with ill intentions.

<sup>10</sup> “Distance” refers to the separation between the annunciation and delivery locations, possibly indicating both physical and concealed distances from the public eye (Ali, 2016, n. 2475, p. 514).

the child that God's provision is available as a stream and fresh ripe dates (19:24-25).<sup>11</sup> The child instructs Mary to eat the dates and drink water, advising her against sadness and discouraging any interaction with those she encounters (19:26).<sup>12</sup>

The Quran further depicts the aftermath of Mary giving birth to Jesus. Mary returns to her people carrying the child, facing accusations of a terrible deed (19:27, 4:156). Unable to explain rationally, Mary points to Baby Jesus, who speaks miraculously, defending his mother and declaring essential theological principles (19:29, 19:30-33).

Unlike the Bible, the Quran does not go into detail about the life of Mary after giving birth to her son nor any essential events regarding her death.

#### **4.7 Biblical Amram: the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam**

The inclusion of the term "Amram" as Mary's father based on Biblical interpretation is not supported by the available evidence. The Bible does not provide any specific information about the parents of Mary, thus making it unsuitable to draw a connection between Mary and Amram. Amram, as mentioned in the Bible, is identified as the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. His genealogy is traced back to Levi, with Kohath being his father. He had siblings named Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The biblical references in 1 Chronicles 6:2, 1 Chronicles 6:18, 1 Chronicles 23:12, 1 Chronicles 26:23, Exodus 6:18, Numbers 3:19, and Numbers 3:27 provide further details about Amram's lineage and family. Additionally, 1 Chronicles 6:3, Numbers 26:59, and Exodus 15:20 confirm that Moses and Aaron were indeed his sons. It is worth noting that Amram's marriage to Jochebed, who was a sister of his father or the daughter of Levi, is mentioned in Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59. This particular marriage can be seen as a union between close relatives, as Amram in this sense married his aunt<sup>13</sup>. However, it is important to mention that Amram is also mentioned among the religious leaders who

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<sup>11</sup> Ripe dates are known for their sweetness and potential impact on reducing blood loss in childbirth (Khadem et al., 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Mary's obedience is reflected in her gesture of pointing to the child when inquired (Quran 19:29).

<sup>13</sup> If the term incest can refer to sexual relations between family members or people being too closely related to marry each other, then Amram in this Biblical context committed an avunculate marriage, which leads to aunt-nephew incest.

married foreign wives, later separating from them and offering sacrifices for their wrongdoing, as recorded in Ezra 10:34. In conclusion, while Amram's role as the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam is well-established in the Bible, there is no biblical basis to suggest that he was the father of Mary.

#### **4.8 Quranic mention of two *Imrans***

The third chapter of the Quran is entitled "Al-Imran", which translates to "The Family of Imran". According to Ali (2016), the title of the chapter is derived from the name of Moses and Aaron's father (p. 92).<sup>14</sup> Conversely, Ibn Katheer citing *Al-Qurtubi's* view asserts that the chapter's name is based on the name of Mary's father or Jesus's grandfather (Muzaqqi, 2016, pp.23-25).

The term "Imran" is mentioned in the Quran thrice, twice in chapter 3 (verses 33 & 35), and once in Quran 66:12. Notably, scholars agree, without any disputes, that the term "Imran" mentioned both in Quran 3:35 and Quran 66:12 refers to the father of Mary. Out of the three instances where the term "Imran" appears in the Quran, it is only in verse 3:33 that its interpretation can be understood in two distinct ways, namely, Mary's father (or Jesus's grandfather) and Moses and Aaron's father.

##### **4.8.1 Imran: the father of Moses, Aaron, (and Miriam)**

Regarding the mention of Imran in Quran 3:33, the specific note provided by Ali (2016) lacks detailed information. However, according to Katheer (2010, p. 18), Imran, who was the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, can be traced back through his lineage as the son of Qahith, son of 'Azir, son of Lowi, son of Ya'qoob, son of Ishaq, son of Ibraheem. Upon reviewing Ali's (2016) running commentary in rhythmic prose (C.) 56 and his introduction to the chapter (p. 92), it becomes evident that he potentially understands the term Imran mentioned in "the family of Imran" in the verse as referring to the father of Moses and Aaron. Furthermore, Ali (2016) suggests that the term refers to the "priestly house of Imran," which includes Aaron, the first lineage of the Israelite priesthood. Considering Imran as the father of Aaron and Moses, Imran becomes a great, great, great-grandfather of the family of Imran, who is identified as the father of Mary (Hannah's husband and Jesus's grandfather) (n. 375, p. 99, n. 2481, p. 515). In conclusion,

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<sup>14</sup> See also the running commentary in rhythmic prose (C.) 56 (Ali, 2016, p. 98).

according to Ali (2016), interpreting Imran in Quran 3:33 as the father of Moses and Aaron does not alter the meaning of Quran 3:35, as these are distinct figures from different eras.<sup>15</sup>

According to Ali's (2016) interpretation, the term "Imran" in verse 3:33 refers to the father of Moses and Aaron, while in verse 3:35 it refers to the father of Mary. This suggests that two distinct individuals with the same name are being referred to, and this view aligns with the view that both the family of Abraham and the family of Imran mentioned in the verse are descendants of a common ancestor. Muzaqqi (2016), citing Al-Nur As-Shiddiqy Hasbie's work, explains that Ibrahim's family includes Ismail, Ishak, and their descendants, who trace their lineage back to Ibrahim, Nuh, and Adam. Similarly, Imran's family comprises Moses, Aaron, Mary (the mother of Jesus), and Jesus, who are also considered descendants of Ibrahim, Nuh, and Adam (pp. 25-27). The connection between Aaron and Mary (the mother of Jesus) can be understood through the priestly lineage, as Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, is part of the priestly line (Ali, 2016, n. 375, p. 99, n. 2481, p.515).

Another similar interpretation to that of Ali (2016) in this sense is that of Muhamad Asad<sup>16</sup>, whose interpretation of the chapter is "The House of 'Imran". According to him, the term "House of 'Imran" refers to a lineage that includes Moses and Aaron, who were both sons of 'Imran (also known as Amram in the Bible), and the priestly caste among the Israelites, which included Aaron's descendants. This lineage also encompasses John the Baptist, whose parents were of the same descent, as biblically mentioned that John's mother was Elizabeth, one "of the daughters of Aaron". The House of 'Imran is introduced as a precursor to the narratives of Zachariah, John, Mary, and Jesus (Asad, 1980, note 22, to verse 3:33, p. 71). Therefore, all the names mentioned in verse 3:33 are linked by kinship, providing evidence for the existence of

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<sup>15</sup> The distance between the life span of the first and second Imran is about 1800 years old (Muzaqqi, 2016, p. 25).

<sup>16</sup> Born as Leopold Weiss, he was a Jewish-Austrian-born Muslim (converted to Islam in 1926) who is widely recognized as one of the most influential Muslim thinkers and writers of the 20th century. One of his significant works is "*The Message of the Quran*".

two distinct Imrans, one of whom was the father of Moses and Aaron, and the other the father of Mary.

#### **4.8.2 Imran: the father of Mary**

According to Kathir (2013, p. 565), Imran, the father of Mary, was a son of Bashim, son of Amoun, son of Misha, son of Hazqia, son of Ahrik, son of Mouthem, son of Azaziya, son of Amsia, son of Yawish, son of Ahriho, son of Yazim, son of Isha, son of Ivan, son of Rakhim, son of David. David was a son of Eesha, son of Uwaid, son of Ba'az, son of Salmoon, son of Nahshoon, son of 'Uwainazab, son of Iram, son of Hisroon, son of Faras, son of Yahooza, son of Ya'qoob, son of Ishaq, son of Ibraheem (Katheer, 2010, p. 73). It is well known among Muslims regarding this figure (Imran) that he was a prominent figure among the Israelites who married Hannah, the sister of Zakariyah's wife. Unfortunately, Imran and Hannah faced the hardship of being childless for an extended period. Hannah's yearning for a child intensified whenever she saw other women with their children, yet she never lost hope. Her unwavering faith led her to believe that God would one day grant her the blessing of a child, whom she could wholeheartedly embrace with her maternal affection.

Muzaqqi (2016) supports the interpretation that the term "Imran" in verse 3:33 of the Quran specifically refers to the father of Mary and the grandfather of Jesus. In addition, this position is founded on two key arguments: Firstly, that verses 3:33 and 3:35 are followed by accounts of Imran's wife and their daughter, Mary; and secondly, that the name "Imran", as the father of Mary, is repeatedly mentioned in the Quran while Imran, the father of Moses, is not. This reasoning suggests that "Imran" refers to the father of Mary and that "the Family of Imran" therefore pertains to the family of Mary, Jesus, and Imran's wife. Moreover, both families probably shared virtuous qualities, which contributed to their selection by God as a distinguished family in terms of religious belief and devotion (pp. 25-27).

In conclusion, interpreting "Imran" in verse 3:33 as the father of Mary does not diminish the significance of verse 3:35. It is important to recognize that Imran, the father of Mary, and Imran, the father of Moses and Aaron, are distinct individuals who lived in different historical periods. The understanding of "Imran" as Mary's father aligns with the broader context and narrative of the Quranic verses concerning Mary and her family.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study significantly contribute to our understanding of the term “sister of Aaron” mentioned in verses 27-28 of the Quran’s chapter 19. Several hypotheses have been proposed to interpret this term. *Hypothesis 1* suggests the existence of an unknown biological brother named Aaron, who is associated with Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, there is limited evidence to support this claim. *Hypothesis 2* proposes that the term symbolically represents Mary’s resemblance to any pious man named Aaron living during her time. This view aligns with Ibn Kathir & Mubarakpuri’s interpretation (2003, p. 252), emphasizing Mary’s righteousness and connection to a righteous man named Aaron. *Hypothesis 3* posits that the term “sister of Aaron” is figurative, signifying Mary’s descent from Aaron in lineage. Mourad (2008) supports this perspective, linking Mary’s possible Levitical heritage and highlighting her relation to Elizabeth, assuming her father was Elizabeth’s biological brother, who was a Levite. *Hypothesis 4* suggests a symbolic interpretation, suggesting that Mary’s character and piety resemble those of Aaron, the first in the line of the Israelite priesthood. Ibn Kathir and Mubarakpuri (2003, p. 252) and Ali (2016, n. 375, p. 99, n. 2481, p. 515) support this view, emphasizing Mary’s exceptional morals and her connection to the priestly lineage. In conclusion, Ibn Kathir and Mubarakpuri (2003) support two hypotheses: 2) Mary’s righteousness and connection to Aaron of her time; and 4) Symbolic interpretation, highlighting Mary’s character resembling Aaron the brother of Moses, emphasizing exceptional morals and priestly lineage.

Given the lack of substantial evidence for Hypotheses 1 and 2, which propose a biological relationship between Mary and Aaron, it is more reasonable to rely on Hypotheses 3 and 4, which provide a figurative or symbolic understanding of the term. This implication also is to build the fact that the Quran employs typology, as the use of such figurative language provides frameworks for interpreting texts beyond their surface-level meanings, allowing for a deeper exploration of themes, symbols, and underlying messages. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings embedded in the Quran, which may offer valuable insights into the nature of Mary’s relationship to Aaron and its broader theological significance.

Notably, typology is not unique to the Quran but also emerges in the Christian tradition. Dye (2022) highlights “The Lection of Jeremiah” as an example, incorporating elements related to prophecy, the coming of Baby Jesus, and the association with the Ark of the Covenant. The mention of Aaron as Mary’s brother in this text is not an error but an intentional distinction between Mary and Miriam, serving a typological and symbolic significance within the context of the text. Further arguments presented by Dye (2022) suggest parallels between Mary, the family of Imran, and Aaron and Moses, along with connections to the Ark of the Covenant and Moses’ role, including the fact that the expression “Mary sister of Aaron” found in the Quran has a precedent in a text read at the Kathisma church during the early 7th century Jerusalem liturgy. This is highlighting shared traditions and iconography between the two traditions.

In exploring the lineage of Jesus, a significant aspect to consider is the traditional belief that the Messiah would descend from the line of David, which forms the basis of his messianic claim for most Jews and Christians. However, it is intriguing to delve into an alternative perspective that suggests the Messiah could also come from the line of Aaron. While this theory may appear to conflict with the widely accepted Davidic lineage of Jesus, there is evidence to indicate the existence of a group of Jews who believed in the possibility of a priestly messiah from the lineage of Aaron. According to Crone (2016, pp. 11-14), one of the earliest sources that present the idea of Mary’s lineage from Aaron can be traced back to the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran, which are commonly associated with the Essenes, an ascetic Jewish sect during the time of Jesus. These scrolls contain texts and teachings that indicate a belief in Mary’s affiliation with the tribe of Levi, from which the priestly lineage emerged. However, it is noteworthy to mention another Jewish Christian sect, the Elchasaites, who also subscribed to the notion that Mary hailed from the tribe of Levi and, consequently, possessed a bloodline connection to Aaron. This belief among the Elchasaites further reinforces the existence of diverse perspectives regarding Mary’s ancestry and highlights the recognition of her potential descent from Aaron within certain factions of Jewish-Christian communities. These phenomena indicate the striking similarities between the beliefs of the earliest followers of Jesus and the teachings of Islam regarding Jesus.

Indeed, the existence of the similarities and shared elements between the Quran and the Bible in this context provide some possibility for critics to claim that the Quran copied the Bible to a certain extent. This alternative viewpoint, on the other hand, sheds light on an intriguing aspect of the historical and theological discourse surrounding Jesus's ancestry and messianic identity, proving that the way the Quran uses the term "Mary, sister of Aaron" is backed up with historical basis, the accepted tradition circulated among the former followers of Jesus. Therefore, to say that the Quran copied the Bible based solely on the presence of shared similarities between the two texts just as in this case in particular is an oversimplification.

## **6. Conclusion**

Among the controversies resulting from the literary analysis of the Quranic and Biblical texts is the authenticity of the Quran. Critics claim that the Quran contributes to an alleged confusion between Miriam (the sister of Aaron and Moses) and Maryam or Mary (the mother of Jesus). However, our study reveals that mainstream Islamic sources do not mention Mary as the sister of Moses and Aaron, but instead emphasize the role of Miriam, Moses's sister, in saving and nurturing him. Miriam is depicted in the Bible with multiple roles and is of religious significance as a Levite. The Quran consistently portrays Aaron in a positive light as a prophet closely associated with Moses, whereas the Bible presents a mix of positive and negative attributes, including his involvement in idol worship and disagreements with Moses. The Bible provides limited information about Mary's genealogy and emphasizes her role as the mother of Jesus. In contrast, the Quran honors Mary as a pious woman chosen by God, highlighting her conversations with the angel Gabriel, her unique birthing experience, and her reliance on God's provisions. The term "Imran" in the Quran refers to two distinct individuals: the father of Moses and Aaron, and the father of Mary.

The Quran's mention of Mary as Aaron's sister or Imran's daughter is symbolic and prefigurative, rather than indicating a literal biological relationship. Symbolism and intertextuality are present in both the Quran and the Christian tradition. The mention of Aaron as Mary's brother in the Lection of Jeremiah, for example, holds typological and symbolic significance. In addition, evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish-Christian

sects supports diverse perspectives on Mary's ancestry and her potential descent from Aaron, thereby reinforcing the Quran's use of the term "Mary, sister of Aaron." Although the Quran's use of symbolic connections may raise accusations of copying the Bible, this phenomenon strengthens the authenticity of the Quran by providing historical evidence. It is important to recognize that building an alleged claim solely based on this verse is farfetched from reality.

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