

John, the message of God

يحي، رسالة الله

John, the Message of God. A Study into the Role of Yaḥyā ibn Zakarya in the Quran.

Thesis for the Master “Ancient Scriptures.”

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Abstract.

The figure that Muslims call Yaḥyā is known as John (the Baptist) in the Christian tradition. He appears in four places in the Quran and the purpose of this paper is to assess his role. To this end a literary analysis is made, that focusses on John as he is presented in Q3, 6, 19, and 21. The outcome of this analysis is that John is the representation of the message of God. This message is: "Remember God". And this message, as represented by John, is told by his qualities. The main work making the analysis is unwrapping these qualities from the text. The pericopes are considered in their textual context, in the time of their origin, in the religious context of late antiquity in the Fertile Crescent, and in their relation to the older traditions that they are a reception and an appropriation of. The conclusions of the analysis are, that the Quran in the texts where John plays some role, gives a new interpretation of the tradition, and seeks to include the whole audience. The rhetoric is aimed at a public that is well versed in Jewish and Christian lore, and that can appreciate the persuasive arguments to accept the new interpretation of John. He is not the pioneer for Jesus Christ, but a message in his own right, to bring the believers to the one God by showing them through his qualities what God considers the right behavior of the human beings in His creation.

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Note to the reader.

Account for the addressing and naming of the figures in this study.

Yaḥyā is in the Quran always part of an enumeration of Jewish/Christian prophets. There is no evidence what the sources for the Quran are for the prophets they name. Because it is not certain whether they were known from both Jewish and Christian sources, or from Christian sources only, I use the construction “Jewish/Christian prophets,” when I mean the frequently used row of prophets appearing in the Quran in changing compilation, ranging from Adam to Jesus.

The biblical figures that have a role in the Quran all had there Hebrew, or Greek, or Aramaic name already. In the case of John the Hebrew name is יוֹחָנָן, Yoḥānan (The Lord is merciful), the Greek name is Ἰωάννης (a transliteration of the Hebrew), the Aramaic and Syrio-Aramaic are also handed down.¹ The name used in the Quran is Yaḥyā. In Arabic this name has a sensible meaning, *He lives* or *He will live*. But with the knowledge that the first written manuscripts were written as rasm, a skeleton script of consonants without any diacritical marks (no dots for distinguishing the consonants, nor accents for the vowels), the rasm can read as easily یحٰن (Yuḥānan) as یحٰی (Yaḥyā). It is impossible to see from the first manuscripts what is meant. In the Christian tradition he is indicated with his epithet *the Baptist*. Partly to honor him in his most distinguishing feature, but also not to confuse him with the many other Johns, such as one of the disciples, or the Gospel writer, or the writer of the Apocalypse, to mention only a few. But to call Yaḥya John the Baptist does not fit with his role in the Quran: he does not baptize in the Quran. One solution for addressing John would be to let him keep his Arabic transcription in this paper, but there is no need to avoid the normal English rendering, as John is the only one of all the biblical figures called John that has a role in the Quran. He and all the other biblical figures, like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Mary and Jesus, will be called by their English name.

The same applies to other choices: the spelling of Arabic words like Qur’ān and Muḥammad. In this paper they will be written in the English fashion: Quran and Muhammad. Incidentally occurring names of Muslim exegetes will get their transcription of the Arabic.

¹ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2007, p. 290. The lemma یَحْيٰی explains all the aspects that are relevant for the name Yaḥyā. I do not master Syrio-Aramaic writing, so cannot show that here.

Introduction.

Yahyā ibn Zakarya, in the the non-Muslim world known as John the Baptist, is an enigmatic figure. His role in Christianity is small but to some extent clear: he preaches, baptizes, prepares the people for the mission of Jesus and is executed by order of king Herodes.² He is described as a historical figure by Josephus who grants him a bigger role than Jesus in his *Antiquities*.³ His role in the Quran is markedly different from the Gospel tradition, and less easy to sum up. This observation is the reason for this research into his role in the Quran.

In the Quran John occurs four times, in Q 3.38-41, 6.85, 19.2-15, and 21.89-90, and his role seems modest. In the passages where he appears his father Zachariah, God and angels are speaking, but he does not say anything himself. He is highly esteemed though: “noble and chaste, a prophet, from among the righteous” (Q 3.39).⁴ “He has judgment as a child and a tenderness from Our Presence, and purity; and he was reverent, and dutiful toward his parents. He was not domineering, rebellious.” (Q 19.12-14). He has a task: “O John, Take the Book with strength!” (Q 19.12). What did the first people listening to these passages hear? What did they know that made these passages understandable for them and so enigmatic for us? What is the role of John? To find answers to these questions several tracks will be followed. The passages afore mentioned will be carefully scrutinized and compared. The immediate context of each occasion of John entering the scene will be regarded closely. The larger context of the Surah’s in which John appears in the Quran will get a more cursory treatment, only to the extent that an assessment can be made about the function of the passages concerning John for the message of the Quran. An educated guess will be made about the likely chronology of the Surah’s, and the possible audience that the Surah’s were directed at.

Scholars of all ages have developed tools and methods to obtain an understanding of important, often holy texts. Modern scholars of the Quran have inherited useful tools and methods from the early Muslim scholars. Some characteristics of the Quran have stimulated the development of these tools. One characteristic is the relatively short period of supposedly 22 years in which the the text was revealed between 610 and 632.⁵ There is no need to search through centuries or even millennia to find the first possible source for the text under research. A second characteristic is the short period of some mere decades between the revelation and the moment of canonization.⁶ There was no time for the development of very different traditions before the text was canonized with a handful of officially allowed (slight)

² Matthew 3, 14.9-10; Mark 1.1-13, 6.27; Luke 3.1-18, 7.9; John 1.19-34.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Loeb Classical Library, digital, Book 18.116-119.

⁴ Citations from the Quran are taken from *The Study Quran*, ed. Sayed Hossein Nasr, Harper Collins, 2014. From now: SQ.

⁵ Toby Lester, “What is the Qur’ān?,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 23.1 (January 1999), pp. 43-56, gives an overview of theories about the Quran possibly originating from as early the 500s or as late as the 800s. All theories are hypothetical, just as the official Muslim narrative is, that I use lacking better knowledge. There is of course a small chance that the stories about John are completely different in a version that we do not know. But somehow John does not seem controversial enough to invite various interpretations.

⁶ With this statement I link up with the point of view of the majority of today’s scholarship, that Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah (ca. 570-632) existed and that the Quran was codified by Uthman ibn Affan (ca. 577-656) during his caliphate (r. 644-656). After the flowering of Orientalism and the study of the Quran by Western non-Muslim scholars from the 18th century onwards, who adopted the Muslim narrative, this view has been contested from the 1980s onward by the so called *Revisionists*. See for this discussion e.g. Andrew Rippin, *Western scholarship and the Qur’ān*, Cambridge Collections Online, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

variations.⁷ This early canonization stands in contrast with the history of the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Gospels. The Canon of the Hebrew Bible was not closed yet in the first century CE and the Christian Canon only started to be established in the 300s, when it became the leading religion in the Roman empire.⁸ Greatly different views on Scripture and variant texts have been handed down and are still being discovered that shed light on the Jewish and Christian rich religious past. For this study the relevance of these observations is, that Islam became the religion of a people in power within decades of the start of the religious movement. There has not been a long period of flowering diversity in the shelter of being irrelevant to the worldly powers. The consequence of this rapid rise of Islam to the creed of the dominant power in a rapidly growing empire is the absence of very different traditions of the Quran text. And the result of this is that all scholars through the centuries have been using roughly the same basic text making text critical analysis of texts like the ones about John irrelevant.⁹ A third characteristic of the Quran is that it is a layered document, in that sense it is comparable to Jewish or Christian texts. This means that within the Quran the same subject can be taken up several times in more or less changing wording or even meaning. This has led to much work for the scholars in their commentaries to account for these differences.¹⁰ A fourth characteristic of the Quran is, that the Arabic language of the text is so much part of the text itself, that God talks about the Quran as of an Arabic text: “Truly We sent it down as an Arabic Quran”.¹¹ For that reason translations do not count as equivalent to the holy text. Muslims do not call the rendering of the Quran in another language a translation but a rendition or interpretation. This forced all believers to learn

⁷ Fred M. Donner, “The historical context”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge University Press, 2007, page 31-33. Reports of the existence of numerous collections of variant readings, based on pre-Uthmanic traditions, implies that the recitation of the text was not uniform. In 1924 an edition of the Quran was printed in Cairo, based on one reading, that has become so influential that the other extant variants are mainly ignored, even by scholars. Certainty about any version of the Quran is fictional, because the first written texts consisted of a consonantal ‘skeleton’ (rasm), without vowels or diacritical marks. To what extent the current text of the Quran mirrors the text that was revealed to Mohammad no one knows. Claude Giliot, “Creation of a Fixed Text,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 52-53, concludes that there is no critical edition of the Quran. A lot of work has been done in the preparation in Germany before WW II, but this has got lost through the bombing of München or is hidden somewhere and not found back yet. *The Study Quran* pays no attention to variant readings. See note 5 and 9 for my hypothesis that the texts on John are not religiously disputable enough to have been transmitted very differently in variant readings.

⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 231, “when we talk about the ‘final’ version of the New testament, we are doing so in (mental) quotation marks, for there never has been complete agreement on the canon throughout the Christian world.” Ehrman describes in Chapter 11, that orthodoxy has won to a large extent, but that the establishment of the church in late antiquity has not been able to get the canon of the New Testament *officially* accepted throughout the Christian world (p. 246).

⁹ In this study about the role of John the discussion about possible other readings from the rasm or a theory like that of Christoph Luxenberg of a Syrian-Aramaic reading, is not relevant. The role of John has no controversial content that could be turned upside down with a different diacritical mark or a different Semitic background.

¹⁰ In Chapter 1.d. I elaborate further on the problems with the chronology of the Surah’s and the implications for the interpretation.

¹¹ SQ. Q 12.2, i.a. This idea of Arabic being the perfect language for the expression of the message of God was so strong that until today worldwide Muslims see translation as an ineffective tool for understanding the text. The Arabic is considered to be the language that the angel Gabriel used to transmit the message of God to Muhammad. The language of revelation became as a consequence a sacred language (Study Quran, General Introduction, p. XXX). Claude Gilliot, “Creation of a Fixed Text,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge University Press, 2007. p. 43, explains that the word used for *clear*, *mubīn*, is an active/factitive participle of *bānā*, *to make clear*. He suggests that the Muslim theologians and philologists interpreted it as *clear Arabic*, where according to Gilliot *clarifying Arabic* is meant. He challenges the Quran’s evidence of Arabic being an “exalted language”.

Arabic in order to be able to understand their holy script.¹² In Persia this led from the 700s onwards to the scholarly enterprise of writing grammars based on the Arabic of the Quran. Because the Arabic in the Quran was the basis of the grammar that was compiled very early in Muslim history, this has resulted in a scripture, that actually *is* written in clear Arabic, it fits in its grammar. I am not going into a discussion on the difficult passages here As far as the passages on John are concerned the Arabic is as clear as a language can be. Summarizing, the Quran has four characteristics that have shaped the way the text has been treated by its scholars: it originated during a short period of some 20 years, was codified within decades of origin, is a layered document, and is the basis for Arabic grammar. The work of the Muslim exegetes from the 600s onward can be characterized by working through each verse of the Quran meticulously, down to level of words. The early exegetes had no problem in explaining passages with the help of Jewish or Christian scripture, the so called *Israiliyyat*. Later this source of knowledge became suspect. And in the Sira of the Prophet Muhammad occasions are given when the prophet rebuked followers using knowledge from Jewish and Christian Scripture.¹³ The exegetes worked on giving details and background to the prophets named in the Quran to give the audience context and help believers in later times who were less familiar with the Jewish and Christian stories than the first public had been.¹⁴ Exegesis of the Quran has been assembled in collections of commentary. Sayings supposedly from the Prophet Muhammad, examples and stories from his life, as well as the commentaries on the Quran itself by scholars have been meticulously researched through the ages to find the best text, manuscript, transmission and tradition. All exegetes had to be successors of the Companions of Muhammad or connected to them by a chain of transmission. The process of exegesis is called tafsir or ta'wil.¹⁵ 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbas (c. 619 – 688 CE) is reported to have classified exegesis of the Quran in four aspects: tafsir ("which scholars know," exoteric explanation), Arabic ("with which the Arabs are

¹² This does not work for not native Arabic speakers, like the Dutch author Naema Tahir writes in Trouw (Dutch newspaper), July 19, 2017, "I attended that [Quran] school for several years and I have gone through the Quran several times from a to z in the Arabic language. So I know Arabic as well. I can read it, I can speak it. I can recite complete Surah's from the Quran, with a very melodious intonation. But – and now comes the clue – I do not understand what I say and recite. Because I have never learnt what all this Arabic that I learnt to read and speak actually meant." (My translation).

¹³ Ismail Albayrak, *Qur'anic Narrative and Isrā'īlyyāt in Western Scholarship and in Classical Exegesis*, University of Leeds, 2000, Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/1145164.pdf>, p. 116, "A third report, narrated on the authority of Jābir, states that Umar wrote some part of the Torah in Arabic and brought it to the prophet. When he started reading what he wrote, the face of the prophet started to change. Then one of the Madinians told Umar: 'Shame on you O Umar! Look at the face of the messenger of God.' The Prophet said 'Do not ask the People of the Book about anything, because they will not show you the right path, having already led themselves astray. Otherwise you accuse the truth of falsehood and confirm the wrong; I swear that even if Moses was alive among you nothing would be opened to him but to follow me.'" This report shows an extremely strict attitude towards any knowledge deriving from the People of the Book. Muslims are explicitly discouraged from questioning them." This report has been handed down by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855), who narrates it on the authority of Jābir, one of the companions of Muhammad.

¹⁴ Albayrak, p. 115.

¹⁵ Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval," *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane McAuliffe, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2004, p.100: The meaning of the word Tafsir is uncertain. In Q 25.33, it occurs as a hapax legomenon and is translated with *explanation* (The Study Quran, ed. Sayed Hossein Nasr, Harper Collins, 2014). Gilliot does not agree with Quranic commentators who connect this occurrence of the word tafsir to the technical term that is in use in later time. Ta'wil occurs 18 times in the Quran, where it is used for the interpretation of dreams (Q 12.36, 101), or a deeper interpretation (Q 3.7). According to Gilliot it was used originally meaning "to apply a verse to a given situation" but was later used for an allegorical interpretation. There seems to be a clear distinction between tafsir and ta'wil, but they have also been claimed to mean the same, and the distinction is theoretical.

acquainted”), lawful and unlawful (halal wa-haram, of which it is not permissible for people to be unaware), and ta’wil (“that only God knows,” esoteric explanation).¹⁶ For this study the first two aspects, tafsir and Arabic will be used for the exegesis in a modern study into the role of John in the Quran.¹⁷

Methodology

For this study into the role of John in Q3.38-41, 6.85, 19.2-15, and 21.89-90, I analyze the Quranic texts in a step by step process.¹⁸

1. Study of the Quranic verses in Arabic. And a translation into English, with the emphasis on literacy and consistency in using the same English word for the same Arabic word (Appendix I).
2. Attention for problems on the level of words, grammar and syntax (these are hardly under discussion in the researched passages. So this point is interwoven in the whole analysis wherever deemed useful).
3. Creation of a synopsis of the passages on John (Appendix I).
4. Analysis of the synopsis concentrating on:
 - a. Attention for the context of the episodes on John in the Surah’s (Appendix II and III).
 - b. Listening to the voices that are speaking.
 - c. Examination of form, structure, rhetoric, and style.
 - d. Thoughts about the Islamic tradition of the chronology of the Surah’s (Appendix IV).
 - e. Assessment of the composition of the addressed public.
5. Analysis of the function of the passages of John in the Quran. Looking for the reason of John appearing in the Quran.
6. An effort to connect the passages of John in the Quran with Jewish/Christian traditions (Appendix V).¹⁹

An interest in connections between the Quran and other traditions in combination with a sensitivity for the purposes for which elements are employed in the Quran, puts me in the long row of exegetes from within Islam and some non-polemical ones from outside, who have sought for new and possibly better insights in the Quranic text.²⁰ As this study will

¹⁶ Gilliot, EoQ, p. 100, To categorize the exegesis of holy texts in four areas reminds of the practices that were used in rabbinic discussions on the four meanings of Scripture: peshat (literal translation), remez (implied meaning), derash (homiletic comprehension), sod (mystical, allegorical meaning). In patristic and medieval times Christian exegesis was divided in four as well: literal/historical, allegorical/spiritual, tropological/moral, and anagogical/eschatological.

¹⁷ In this study the role of Muslim scholars and tafsir appears smaller than it has been in reality. Behind the translation in Appendix I lies a host of interpretation, that is gleaned mainly from the dictionaries in *ej-taal*, that reflect much of the thoughts of the Islamic exegetes.

¹⁸ To a large extent these overlap with the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis as that has been developed from the 1700s with its center of gravity in protestant Germany.

¹⁹ The analytical method with which scholars of historical texts look for contributions from other traditions, like *Israiliyyat* (connecting Islamic tradition with the Jewish and Christian traditions) was part of Muslim exegesis, but became suspect in steps from the 800s to the mid-1200s. Exegetes had no problem before this time to explain the Quran with help of the Hebrew bible or Christian texts. And there has always remained a movement of Muslim thinkers who have no reserves in seeing the connection.

To what extent Muslim exegetes have used mythical sources I do not know.

²⁰ Andrew Rippin, “Western scholarship and the Qur’ān”, *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, p. 242. “[Mohammed] Arkoun notes that the topics discussed, the areas of concern and the fundamental assumptions of the scholarly discipline have not changed significantly from the outline of them provided by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in the fifteenth century, itself based on a long heritage of

show, the Quran “tells a quite different thematic, moral and theological story” in general than the narrative in the Christian tradition.²¹ Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010) pleads for “a protocol of interpretation that is free from both the dogmatic orthodox framework and the procedural disciplines of modern scientism which is, it must be admitted, no less constraining.”²² I am not so sure about Arkoun’s problem with science. As I hope to show in this study it is fun to puzzle on these texts and their context with scientific tools. The research is driven by curiosity so rigidness and bias should be kept at bay. This work on finding the role of John resembles the careful unwrapping of a present, taking care not to damage the paper and the ribbon; they are of value.

Muslim scholarship on the Qur’ān. When modern scholars approach the Qur’ān, the core assumptions of the Muslim tradition about the text are not challenged.”

²¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Qur’ānic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1996, p. 143.

²² M. Arkoun, “Contemporary critical practices and the Qur’ān”, ed. McAuliffe, *Encyclopedia of the Qurān*, vol. I, p. 429.

Chapter 1. John in the text of the Quran.

Introduction

The literary analysis of the passages about John will lead to an interpretation of the meaning of John in the Quran. To this end an assessment will be made to what extent the passages originated in an active debate with changing audiences and if contrast between earlier and later writings can be discerned. This exercise will answer the question whether these passages are a redaction of a larger tradition, and if grounds for a chronology in the texts can be discovered.

The passages will be presented in a form that makes a comparative study possible, aided by a translation that consistently renders the same Arabic word with the same English equivalent. Even though the passages are not very long and numerous, not every detail will fit into this research. In the description of the texts, I will account for what I have researched, and what the relevance for this study is.

This will result in a play with context, form and content, with the purpose to shed light on the role of John and the reason why he is in the Quran. Form and content can not be completely separated, but I have made an effort to puzzle first on the form of the passages and to postpone a focus on the content to the last possible moment to enable me to draw only those conclusions that come from the text.²³

The chosen passages are not independent separate literary units, but integral part of the larger unit, the Surah. At some point in time the stories about John have been put in their contexts for a reason.²⁴ The Quran gives a new interpretation of the figure of John and discloses what lore the public must have been familiar with in order to understand what was new and possibly better in this reframing of an old story.

The first two steps to enable a literary analysis of a group of texts are a rendering of the passages into a language that is accessible for both the analyst and the public, and to put comparable texts next to each other in a synopsis. The synopses of the Arabic and the English rendering can be found in Appendix I, charts 1 and 2.²⁵

The synopsis will be analyzed in the next paragraphs concentrating on:

- a. Attention for the context of the episodes on John in the Surah's.
- b. Listening to the voices that are speaking.
- c. Examination of form, structure, rhetoric, style, and genre.
- d. Thoughts about the Islamic tradition of dating the Surah's.
- e. Assessment of the composition of the addressed public.²⁶

²³ There is no separate paragraph on word-meaning, grammar, or syntax. In the few instances where something needs to be said about these subjects, this is integrated in the paragraph where it is relevant.

²⁴ Uwe Becker, *Exegese des Alten Testaments*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2015, p. 48, A thorough look at the context of the passages helps one to decide where the texts one wants to research begin and end and in what manner they fit into the context considering form, structure and content of the surroundings in relation to the passages.

²⁵ The English rendering of the passages of the Quran is from my hand. I have taken care to use consistently the same English word for the same Arabic word.

²⁶ Becker, p. 105-106. In the historical critical method that has been developed for the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, attention is paid to form criticism, with which one tries to answer questions like: who is talking, who are the (intended) listeners, what were the historical/social circumstances, what is the tone, the structure and rhetoric, what effect is aimed at, what is the genre?

1.a. John in his context in the Quran.

How ever entertaining, surprising or interesting some stories in the Quran may be, those properties are the vehicle for something else. And this “something else” is what I am after to disclose the role of John. In order to get a feel of the place that John occupies in the Surah’s where he is named, it is good to start with a look at his surroundings. He operates in a context that gives information about John himself.

The context of the passages Q3.38-41, 6.85, 19.2-15, and 21.89-90 has a number of shared characteristics:

- the passages are always preceded by a reference to God choosing his prophets.
- the passages of John and his context are marked by the word *ḍakar* (remember) or a reference to this word.
- the Book, meaning the Jewish Bible or Gospel is always referred to.
- John is embedded in a Jewish/Christian prophetic milieu.
- John is connected with Mary and Jesus.
- the passages are always concluded with warnings for those who do not heed the admonitions and rewards for those who do.

God choosing his prophets is an element in the four passages before John is mentioned.²⁷

Q3.34-33, “Truly God chose Adam, Noah, the House of Abraham, and the House of ‘Imrān above the worlds.”

Q6.84-85, “And We [God] guided Noah before ... , And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah.”

Q19.2: “A reminder of the mercy of thy Lord unto His servant, Zachariah.”

Q21.51, “And We [God] indeed gave unto Abraham his sound judgment aforetime, and We knew him.”

God chooses his prophets to teach the believers the truth about Him. And at the time of the origin of the Quran the public is reminded that God chose his prophets in the old days.

The second shared feature, that the opening phrase of a passage begins with the admonition: remember (*ḍakar*), followed by the name of the prophet(s) that the focus is on, is most clearly visible in Q19.2. The Surah starts with the admonition that the human being has to remember God’s mercy done to Zachariah.²⁸ But in the run up to the other passages this clear admonition to *remember/reminder* (*d/k/r*) seems to miss. This is compensated by the use of the word *id* (إِذْ *when*), that the Study Quran renders with [*remember*] *when* ...²⁹ It occurs on the places where the attention of the public is drawn to the beginning of a new passage: “Do you remember?” What does the audience have to remember? The guidance of God through

²⁷ See appendix III for an overview of what happens before and after the passages on John in the four Surah’s.

²⁸ The *reminder* is double in this verse, because the root of the name Zachariah, is z/k/r (remember, from the Hebrew זכר). In the development of the Semitic languages and the writing thereof the proto-Semitic *d*, became in Hebrew *z* (ז), in biblical Aramaic either *d* (ד) or *z* (ז), and in Arabic *ḍ* (ذ) or *z* (ز). This explains why Zachariah will have sounded for the Arabic listeners very much like meaning something about *remembering*. If they understood that the Hebrew means to say: *God remembers*, the reverse of the message of the Quran: *Remember God*, this must have given food for thought. An extra thought is, that lacking vocalization in the early manuscripts, the pronunciation of Zachariah may have been Zechorya (Qal imperative singular), *Remember God*, which would have synchronized the name with the message.

²⁹ Brill’s Dictionary explains that “when *id* is used adverbially, it can be the complement of a verbal element, that is not given. The reader/listener fills in this verb.” The passages that are not introduced with an explicit *remember*, *reminder* (*d/k/r*), but begin with *when* (*id*) may be considered to start with [*remember*] *when* ... This use of the adverbial *id* occurs several times in the researched passages about Yaḥyā, and their context: 3.35 “[Remember] when the wife of ‘Imrān said.” 3.42, 45. “And [remember] when the angels said.” 6.74, “And [remember] when Abraham said ...” 19.2, “[Remember] when he called upon his Lord.” 19.16, “and [remember] Mary...” 21.76, “and [remember] Noah ...” 21.78 “and [remember] David and Solomon ...” 21.85 “and [remember] Ishmael, Idrīs and Dhu’l Kifl ...” 21.87 “and [remember] Dhu’l Nūn ...”

his chosen prophets, as the passage they are about to hear will reveal. To give an example, “And [*remember*] when (id) the wife of ‘Imrān said, “My Lord, truly I dedicate to Thee ...” (Q3.35).” She is brought back in the memory because of her right attitude towards God, that is put up as an example for the public.

A third aspect is that The Book, meaning the Torah or the Gospel, plays a role in the context (Q3.48; 6.89; 19.30; 21.48³⁰). Using the generic word Book may be a rhetoric device to include the Quran in the (near) future as part of this concept “Book.”

As a fourth feature the surroundings of John share lists of Jewish/Christian prophets. Not the scriptural prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) from the Hebrew bible, but the figures who tell Gods message through their lives.³¹ ‘Imran, Zachariah, Mary, and Jesus are without discrimination included in the lists of Old Testament prophets. The Quran does not differentiate between Jewish and Christian scriptures. The lists of prophets seem modeled on the genealogies in the Jewish Bible (e.g. Gen 5, 10-11) and the Gospels (Luke 3.23-28; Matthew 1.1-17, or those fused in the Diatesseron 532-4).³² What the choice for and ordering of the prophetic figures in the Quran means and what this may mean for the position of John needs to be researched in a follow up of this project.

A fifth characteristic of the environment of John is that Jesus is always mentioned (or referred to) after John. Mary is of greater importance than John in Q3 and 19, in Q6 she is absent, and in Q21.91 she and her son are only alluded to.³³

Mary and Jesus are in Q3 and 19 in position and description so strikingly near to Zachariah and John that they deserve some close attention. John and Jesus are presented in the Quran in a way that the differences are so slight, that they are easily overlooked, or the focus is on the more radiant one.

Charts 3 and 4, Appendix II, give a synoptic overview of what is said about John compared with what is said by and about Jesus.

John and Jesus have many characteristics in common. They are both good news from God. They are promised boys with God given names announced by angels. Their parents are connected to the Temple, and the sons are devoted to their parent(s), not behaving as tyrants. They are both called prophet, righteous, possessing wisdom, and blessed with the same blessing. But assessing the relative weight of what is written about John and Jesus, the Jesus-scale seems the heaviest. A weighty factor for Jesus is that he has an active role. He talks as a messenger from God (Q3.49-52), and when newly born he speaks to comfort his mother (Q19.24-33). John is silent, what is know about him, is told by God and his father. In most comparable qualities Jesus is John+. And in some characteristics it is John’s father who shares characteristics with Jesus, not John. Jesus and John’s *father* are servants of God. Jesus is *not wretched*, probably meaning that God has always answered his praying, in analogy with the *father* of John in Q19.4. The success of John’s prayers is not mentioned. And John’s *father* exists because of the will of God, just like Jesus. Jesus *is* and *brings* a sign from God, where it is John’s *father* who *asks* and *gets* a sign. Four of the qualities of Jesus are attributed to Johns father Zachariah as well. Zachariah is the lesser only with respect to the sign.

³⁰ The root d/k/r, to remember, is used in Q21.48, not k/t/b, book, but most scholars think that the Torah is meant here (SQ note Q21.48).

³¹ Adam, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Elijah, David, Solomon, Job, Ezekiel (Dul Kifl, which means something like *man with a double portion*, which might as well indicate Job), and Jonah, are mentioned near John in the four Surah’s. They have in common that they are from the Jewish/Christian tradition.

³² Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur’an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, Routledge, 2013, p. 78. El-Badawi made me aware of this similarity.

³³ Q6 is to a large extent a polemic against idolaters, only Abraham is present with the story against his kinfolk worshipping idols. The other Jewish/Christian prophets are exemplary for the right attitude to God, without embellishment in stories.

And regarding John, he is a *reminder* of the mercy of God, Jesus *is* a mercy from God. John *believes* in a word from God, but Jesus *is* a word of God and a statement of the truth. John is ordered to *hold* on to the Book, but God *gives* it to Jesus and *teaches* it to him. John *enjoys a tenderness* from God, God has *blessed* Jesus wherever he is and has highly honored him in this world and the one hereafter and declared him to be near God. John has the assets, but Jesus possesses them in a higher degree.

John “wins” once, God *gives* him piousness and purity where he *ordains* these to Jesus. If we subtract from the list of similarities between John and Jesus the ones attributed to the father of John, and the ones where Jesus and John are similar, we can check if John has characteristics that belong to him alone. The unique assets that are left over are: his name is unique, he is an inheritor, a leader, an ascetic, and not rebellious.

John is the lesser of Jesus in some 10 factors (the speaking included). But Jesus has no characteristics that are unique to him in the passages in the near context of John. So strictly looking at the text with a literary focus, John has more independent features.

And the last characteristic of the context of John is that at the closing of each episode of John, Mary, Jesus and other biblical prophets, there is a summary announcing a punishment for those who do not believe, and a reward for those who do. Par example Q3.56-7, “And as for those who disbelieve, I shall punish them with a severe punishment in this world and the Hereafter; and they shall have no helpers. And as for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, He shall pay them rewards in full.” The same pattern is visible in the other three Surah’s.³⁴

The conclusion about the the structure of the context of the four passages in which John plays a role is that the passages have similar components to address the public with the message that it has to remember God en what that means. There is a consistent manner of presenting the message of God by means of the Jewish/Christian prophets who embody the sought for virtues in the believer.

³⁴ In Q3.56; 6.93, 190; 19.37, 59 and 21.98 punishment is promised to the unbelievers. In Q3.57; 21.94; 19.60 and 21.94 there is a reward for the believers. Q6 does not give a reward for the believers, this Surah is all about the disappointment in the people of the Book and the idolaters *not* believing the messenger.

1.b. Listening to the voices that are speaking.

One of the tools to examine a text is to analyze the figures who act and speak.³⁵ Three of the passages where John occurs have the form of a dialogue. Dialogue is a frequently used form in the Quran, not only in the texts of John, but in many other places, Q12 on Josef is nearly all dialogue, just like Abraham in discussion with his father and his people about the idols (Q21.51-72), or Moses in discussion with God, Pharaoh and his people (Q7.103-157), and of course Mary and Jesus (Q19.23-33).

In Q 3.38-41 John's father Zachariah is in dialogue with angels and God. He asks three questions and gets three answers.

Prologue, an all-knowing narrator informs the public about the place of action: "In that place Zachariah invoked his Lord," (3.38^a).³⁶

Question 1, He (Zachariah, third male singular) to God: "Grant to me from near you good offspring," (3.38^b).

Answer 1, the angels (third female plural) to Zachariah: "God announces you good news of John ...," (3.39^{c-f}).

Question 2, He (Zachariah, third male singular) to God: "my Lord, how will there be a boy ...," (3.40^{abc}).

Answer 2, He (God, third male singular): "It is like that, ...," (3.40^d).

Question 3, He (Zachariah, third male singular) to God: "my Lord, make for me a sign ...," (3.41^a).

Answer 3, He (God, third male singular) to Zachariah: "your sign is ...," (3.41^b).

Epilogue, The all-knowing narrator, possibly God, (imperative male singular) to Zachariah: "remember your Lord much ...," (3.41^c).

In Q 19.1-15 John's father Zachariah is in dialogue with God. He asks three questions and gets three answers.

Prologue, An all-knowing narrator (possibly God) talking to the public: "An admonition to remember the mercy of your Lord ...," (19.2-3).

Question 1, He (Zachariah, third male singular) to God: "... grant to me from near you a blood-relation ... and make him, my Lord agreeable" (19.4-6).

Answer 1, We (God, first plural) to Zachariah: "... We give you good news ...," (19.7).

Question 2, He (Zachariah, third male singular) to God: "how will there be a boy for me ...," (19.8).

Answer 2, He (God, third male singular) to Zachariah: "... for Me it is easy ...," (19.9).

Question 3, He (Zachariah, third male singular) to God: "make for me a sign." (19.10^a).

Answer 3, He (God, third male singular) to Zachariah: "your sign is ...," (19.10^{bc}).

Entr'acte, God/narrator to the public: "then he went to his people ...," (19.11).

Epilogue a, (God/narrator, imperative male singular) to John: "O John take in hand the Book with resolution (19.12^a).

Epilogue b, We (God, first plural) to the public: "We gave him wisdom ...," (19.12^b-13^a).

Epilogue c, God/narrator to the public: "he (John) was ...," (19.13^b-15).

³⁵ For the analysis of the texts of John I use the translation in Appendix I, not the Study Quran.

³⁶ H. van Gorp e.a., *Lexicon van Literaire Termen*, Wolters-Noordhoff, 1993. Now online, http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/dela012alge01_01/dela012alge01_01_02650.php, lemma: *perspectief*.

In Q 21.89-90 John's father Zachariah is in dialogue with God. He asks one question and God gives one answer.

Prologue, An all-knowing narrator introducing the scene: "and Zachariah, when he ..." (21.89^a)

Question 1, Zachariah (imperative male singular) to God: "Do not leave me alone ..." (89^b).

Apology, Zachariah to God (second male singular): "You are the best Inheritor." (89^c).

Answer 2, We (God, first plural) to Zachariah: "We answered him and we gave him John and we cured his wife for him" (21.90^{abc}).

Epilogue, God/narrator to the public: "they (John's parents, male plural) were quick in good deeds ..." (21.90^{def}).

Observations:

- An unidentified all-knowing narrator (indirect speech) gives in 3.38^a, 19.2-3, 21,89^a the introductions to the scenes that follow and in 19.11 the setting of the next scene. In 19.2-3 it may be God Himself.
- Zachariah (direct speech) is speaking first in all three passages. He speaks once (21.89^{bc}) or thrice (3.38^b,40^{abc}, 41^a; 19.3-6, 8, 10^a)
- The angels (direct speech) are speaking once (3.39)
- God (direct speech) is speaking in all three passages: 3.40^d, 41^{bc}; 19.2-3 (?), 7, 9, 10^{bc}, 12-13^a; 13^b-15 (?); 21.90 (?).
- An unidentified narrator gives an entr'acte in 19.11^a and possibly the epilogue in 19.13^b-15, and 21.90.
- God gives the epilogue to Zachariah in 3.41^c, with possibly the intention that the listeners feel addressed and take heed to the admonition as well.
- God gives the epilogue to John in 19.12^a, with possibly the intention that the the listeners feel addressed and take heed to the admonition as well.
- God directs the epilogue to the listeners in 19.12^b-13^a (and possibly 19.13^b-15, and 21.90).

Analysis of the dialogues.

Zachariah seems to be the protagonist in all three "plays". He sets the scene in motion (calls, asks, doubts, flatters). Zachariah describes himself and his circumstances (3.40^{bc}; 19.4, 5, 6, 8, 2189^b). God seems the secondary character, He reacts to every utterance of Zachariah by complying. John is being talked about (3.39; 19.7, 12^b-15; 21.90), or spoken to (19.12^a).

But not all is what it seems, and this is disclosed in 3.38^a, 19.2, and 21.89^a, Zachariah is not the main character, but functions as the informant (stooge is the technical drama term, but that does not sound respectful) whose task it is to put the full light on God. These dialogues are dramatic explanations to the public of the message from God. The message is put right in the beginning of Q19, "An admonition to *remember* the mercy of your Lord." In the other three Surah's this admonition to remember God is not so obviously present, but as shown before in chapter 1.a., it is always there. The adverse circumstances of Zachariah serve to emphasize the need to *remember* God. John is the carrier of the qualities that a person has to develop, in order to show that he remembers God. John's role is the minor character, who carries the message.

The angels in 3.39 are not independent characters, they transfer God's message and have the dramatic dynamics of a letter or an email.

The analysis of the dialogue results in the conclusion that God is the main character in the Surah's 3, 19, and 21. And the message is: "Remember God." Zachariah is the informant and John the embodiment of the message.

1.c. Examination of form, structure, rhetoric, and style.

As is shown above, the form of all the selected passages is basically the same: ‘rhymed prose’ in a straightforward dramatic staging: introduction of the main characters (Zachariah and God), the dialogue, the action and the message.³⁷ Given this observation it becomes clear that 21.89-90 gives a skeleton version and that 19.1-15 gives the most elaborate one. To look in a more detailed fashion at the form in which the stories appear, it is sensible to look first at the structure of the three passages.

An analysis of the structure of a text looks at the “building bricks” with which the text has been put together. The structure analysis looks at how those elements have been applied. The synopsis conveys what the basic elements of the story are:

Zachariah: 3.38^a, 19.2/3, 21.89^a
Question: 3.38^b, 19.5^c, 21.89^b
God: 3.39^c, 19.7^a, 21.90^a
Response: 3.39^c, 19.7^a, 21.90^b
Divine action: 3.40^d, 19.9^a, 21.90^c
Message: 3.41^c, 19.2, 11^b, 21.90^{def}

As stated above, Q 21.89-90 gives the skeleton of the story, as we can see in the elements that build the stories.³⁸ From studying the synopsis the idea that the three passages are related gets a stronger foundation: the 6 essential bricks (or bones of the skeleton) appear one by one on the same level in the synopsis. This assessment of the trimmed down structure helps for the next step. To look into the rhetoric of the texts, *how* the message is conveyed presupposes knowledge of *what* the actual message of the researched passages is. This is already revealed in the analysis of the voices in the dialogue above, verse 19.2 reveals it’s message right at the beginning: “a reminder/admonition to remember the mercy of your Lord.” In Surah 3, 21, and 6, there is quite a distance between the message and the passages of John. He is part of a sequence of exemplary Jewish/Christian prophets that all illustrate God’s guidance and mercy. This observation underpins my hypothesis further, that the narratives, or even the mere naming in a list, are *illustrations* of the *message*. The message of the four passages (Q6.85 shows the same) is: “remember your Lord.” What follows in the passages are clarifications with examples why God deserves that, and how the believer must do this.

The Quran uses rhetorical tools to convey its message, in the first place the tool *illustration by example*.³⁹ Zachariah and his wife are such an illustration. They show the right attitude to God, and therefor get rewarded.⁴⁰ A second illustrative example that the Quran uses to explain how “remember your God” has to be understood, is the emphasis that Zachariah puts on the biological impossibility for him and his wife to have a son; without divine action no son will appear.⁴¹ And the third example is God himself stating, as a reaction

³⁷ For this chapter I am much indebted to the site:

http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/dela012alge01_01/dela012alge01_01_02650.php, that answered my questions in this for me not very familiar area.

³⁸ The statement of Zachariah in 21.89^c, “And you are the best Inheritor,” is an element that does not occur in Q3 and 19. This verse may be an interesting contribution to the role of John, as I will suggest in chapter 2.

³⁹ Van Gorp, lemma: Retoriek: ““Rhetoric is the exposition of examples, metaphors, hyperboles, anything to lift a text above the ‘normal’ sober way of saying the same thing.”

⁴⁰ Zachariah, 3.38^c, 39^b, 41^c, and his wife, 21.90^{def}.

⁴¹ Q 3.40^{abc} and 19.4^a and 8.

to Zachariah's doubts, that it is "like that" and even "easy for Me."⁴² All illustrations serve to show that man has to remember that only God decides what happens.

Another rhetoric device, *the hyperbole*, is used in those same passages. In Q19 the impossibility to conceive offspring is stressed by presenting it twice. And Zachariah exaggerates in how he describes the physical state of himself: "my head is aflame with white hair" and "I have reached exceeding old age" (Q 19.4^a and 8). In rhetoric terms the power of God as described in 19.9, can be seen as a hyperbole and the same counts for the divinely inspired miracle, "you will not speak" (3.41^{ab} and 19.10^{bc}).

The descriptions of John in 3.39 and 19.12-15 do double duty: they fit in the rhetoric term *praise, eulogy*. The only one to be praised as we have seen in asserting the message, is God. John comes from God, and is the vehicle for an exposé of the qualities of a man coming from God. The description of John also serves as an *illustrative example* for the ideal attitude of man towards God.

The style of the four Surah's is not uniform. Each Surah can be considered as a unity, as much as the books in the Jewish and the Christian bible. A notable difference is that they do not function as a narrative, but as a homily or an admonition like the letters of Paul, with a message. This explains that, just like in Paul, the narratives are not complete, but allude to the full narrative in the biblical books.

The tone of Q19 is persuasive, that of Q6 polemic. Q3 and 19 make use of illustrative pieces of narrative, Q6 and 21 hardly do so. Chapter 1.d. goes into more detail of the meaning of the differences of style of the Surah's and what conclusions may be drawn from those differences.

Genre is the name for the classification of literary texts. The three main categories have been epic, lyric and drama from classical times onward. The Quran as a whole is epic, in the sense that it is a *message* from God. The Quran is rhymed, and that it allows beautiful recitation, indicates a good rhythm on top. According to Islamic tradition, this message has been given as a prophecy to Mohammad. So the genre is epic appearing as prophesy voiced with end-rhyme and rhythm. Within this framework other genres are used to convey the message. In the passages under scrutiny, within this framework of the prophesy and as illustration of the message, we see fable-type stories.⁴³ This is how the stories of John function. And the form of the stories is drama, dialogue.

To summarize the conclusions so far at the end of this paragraph: the main characters of the stories are the all-knowing narrator (sometimes God himself), Zachariah and God. John has the role of the silent expression of the message of God. This message is: "Remember God." The three stories in which John has a role in the Quran, and his appearance as name in a list of prophets in 6.85, are shaped as fable-type stories that function as illustrations to the message of God.

⁴² Q 3.40^d, 19.9 and 21.90^c.

⁴³ Van Gorp, lemma: fable: a fable illustrates a general truth or wisdom with a typical example.

1.d. Thoughts on the Islamic tradition of dating the Surah's.

An other approach that can help to find the meaning of the passages of John is to assess the chronology of the origin of the Surah's 3, 6, 19 and 21.

The main division in the chronology of the Quran is formed by the decision whether a Surah is thought to have its origin in Mecca or Medina. This division goes back to the tradition that Mohammad had revelations of a number of Surah's while he was living in Mecca in the period 610-622. He recited these revelations to his fellow citizens, but they became increasingly inimical. Mohammad and his followers fled (called *hijra*, emigration) in 622 to Yathrib (later called Medina). There Muhammad had revelations till his death in 632. This division is broadly agreed upon by scholars worldwide, by some wholeheartedly, by others for want of something better.

The problem with the chronology of the Quran is, that there is no historical evidence up till now, that founds the Muslim tradition. The Muslim tradition has been compiled from the 700s onwards, and forms the only basis for the the actions of Muhammad. So a circular argument is threatening the reasoning about what happened first and what later, because we cannot be sure that it happened. This predicament is comparable with efforts to reconstruct the lives of John and Jesus. Hardly anything has been put on record that can count as solid historical evidence for his life. Josephus has helped to establish some certainty that John and Jesus at least existed and died. About Muhammad's existence even less evidence is available, only very few short messages from Christian sources (among others).⁴⁴ But nothing about revelation of the Quran, the Hijra, his wife/wives, nor any of the battles. So any hints from within the Quran that could help for the dating are speculative.

After these preliminary words, the only possibility to say anything about the chronology, will lean on presumptions about style⁴⁵ and content.⁴⁶ The oldest Surah's resemble the traditional Arabic poetry most, the oldest Surah's are persuasive and later ones more polemic, the older Surah's are inclusive of other monotheistic religions. And wherever a clear occasion is mentioned, like the battle of Badr (Q3.13, 123-127), this is taken as a possible terminus post quem, with the itching consciousness that this possibly is a date based on a story.⁴⁷

Occurrences with a terminus ante quem are not possible, because the Quran does not give clues about historical events that involve for instance a Roman Emperor or other occasions that have evidence outside Arabia. In short, the only foundation to build a chronology on, is the Muslim tradition.

⁴⁴ Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, 1997.

⁴⁵ Neuwirth, p.147: "sūras commonly considered the oldest, i.e. those that display *saj'*, rhymed prose, ... are made up of mono-partite verses containing one phrase each, ...". "the transition from *saj'* speech to a more ordinarily flowing though still poetically tinted articulation attests to the transformation of an adherence to the standard pre-Islamic tradition into a novel literary paradigm of artistic prose, one that may be considered as a genuine Qur'ānic development marking a new stage in the history of the Arabic literary language."

⁴⁶ Erich Zenger i.a., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Neunte, aktualisierte Auflage herausgegeben von Christian Frevel, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 2016, Chapter "Das Buch Jesaja," p.529, 540-548. Zenger (e.a.) gives for each book of the Hebrew Bible indications of how the chronology of the book can be assessed. For example, the book Isaiah has a very complicated history of origins and redactions. Scholars of Isaiah have to take into account the markers of place names and historical events/names that can give indications for the dating before or after a certain event. An other chapter "Das Buch der Psalmen," discusses problems that resemble the difficulties in assessing the chronological order of the Quran to the extent, that it is a collection of individual psalms and small collections.

⁴⁷ Q3.123 the battle of Badr, 624, is named, in Q3.155-174, the battle of Uḥud, 625.

Angelika Neuwirth has developed criteria to distinguish early and later, Meccan and Medinan Surah's.⁴⁸ For an application of the criteria on Q3, 6, 19 and 21, see Appendix IV, chart 7. The outcomes are that Q3 has the highest mark on Medinan traits, Q6 and 21 score best on early Meccan characteristics. Q19 scores high on being not Medinan, but does not stand out specially as early or late Meccan.

Neuwirth additionally describes the specific linguistic characteristics, that single out early (Mecca) and late (Medina) Surah's. She distinguishes Meccan Surah's especially by their "rhymed prose, labeled *saj'*," that possesses as one of its characteristics a pattern where the verses have phonetic end-rhyme.⁴⁹ This is seen best in the short Surah's that are found in the last part of the Quran, but the phenomenon is also manifest in the much longer Q19.

Q6, 19, and 21 can by their end rhyme schedule be considered as truly Meccan. Q3 follows the more prosaic style, that Neuwirth considers to be Medinan. See for more details on the end-rhyme Appendix IV.

An assessment of the intended public is another way to determine the chronology of the Surah's.

Q3.38-41 and 19.1-15 give the most extensive stories. Q3 is the most elaborate with the birth story of Mary included in 3.35-37 in advance of the story of John and the story of the birth and acts of the adult Jesus after John (3.16-63). Q19.16-35 tells a birth story of Jesus as well, in a different version. Q6.85 names John as part of a long list of prophets; he is grouped with his father Zachariah, Jesus and Elijah.⁵⁰ Q21 gives the story in its most concise fashion. These stories and their surrounding admonitions have been told to a public. If the composition of the public can be assessed at certain points in the development of the Quran, the chronology can be determined by reasoning back from the text who the intended public of a Surah can be. For this exercise it is indispensable to take Muslim tradition as the point of depart, otherwise the public may be determined, but without references as to which public was present when and where, this knowledge does not help. Apart from my own observations, I use the chronology that the Corpus Coranicum has made and the Study Quran. Leemhuis tells for each Surah what the previous one was.⁵¹ He differs with the CC insofar that for him Q19 is the 44th Surah, while in the counting of CC it is the 53^e. But his sequence is the same, in chronological order: 19, 21, 6 in Mecca and 3 in Medina. The Study Quran does not give a list of times of revelation. It does tell in the introduction to each Surah the time whether it is revealed in Mecca (Q6, 19, 21) or Medina (Q3).

According to the Islamic tradition, the relationship with the Jews and Christians was quite friendly in the days in Mecca.⁵² Surah Maryam (Q19) does not start in a polemical way, there is no argument yet. The public is cognizant of Jewish and Christian prophets, but no group is spoken to directly, as does happen in Surah 3, 6, and 21. Q19 does definitely not belong to the oldest, in the sense that the form is not like the first ones, starting with a

⁴⁸ Angelika Neuwirth, "Structure and the Emergence of a Community," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, Jawid Mojaddedi, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Oxford, 2006.

⁴⁹ Neuwirth, p. 142.

⁵⁰ For the connection Elijah – John: see chapter 3.

⁵¹ De Koran, Een weergave van de betekenis van de Arabische tekst in het Nederlands door Fred Leemhuis, Spectrum, Houten – Antwerpen, 1989. <http://corpuscoranicum.de>

⁵² Reuven Firestone said on the conference "Intolerance – Polemics – Debate: Cultural Resistance in the Ancient World 16-18 May 2017, Department of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Origins, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen", that probably Mohammed would have made the hijra to the Christians in Najran 300 miles to the Southeast, if the Jews in Medina had not been nearer at 200 miles to the North.

generalizing oath (Q103.1, “By the declining day.”), but also not to the younger ones, that start with a credo, “God, there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting (Q3.2).” Surah 19 starts with a clue, “a reminder of the mercy of your Lord,” followed by two stories: first the plight of Zachariah and his wife, and second the plight of Mary. The two stories are similar in their problem with childbearing (childlessness/unasked for pregnancy), and message: if something unheard of, or unasked for happens, remember your God, He is the only one who governs your life. Q19.2-33 has a friendly tone and knowledge of and respect for Christian lore. A hypothesis is, that the intention of the passage is to create a common ground of agreement between the speaker and the Christians (or those feeling connected with that tradition).⁵³ And consequently, the verses Q19.34-40 work as a wakeup call (or a cold shower): Jesus is the word of the truth, but not son of God.⁵⁴ Followed by an eschatological threat for those who “are in manifest error.” The aim of the speaker is to convince the audience of the new insight: there is only *one* God and if you do not acknowledge this, things will turn bad.

The same rhetorical construction is used in the sequence of the passage of Jesus (19.16-40), starting off with well known stories to create a feeling of connection, directed at Jews and polytheists this time, followed by what will happen with those who believe the messenger and those who do not (Q19.41-98).

The overall picture is one of a messenger with a prophetic mission, coaxing his public by giving a new interpretation of their own narratives, to follow the new idea of who God really is: One, metaphysical, universal and omnipotent. Different from polytheism and Christianity in His Oneness, from Judaism in His universalism, and from polytheism in His being the only absolute power and completely metaphysical. Not new for Christians and Jews are the eschatological expectations in an apocalyptic episode, that is approaching rapidly.

Q21.89-90 is a pearl of concise storytelling. This could only work with an audience that was already acquainted with the full tradition. Therefore it belongs after Q19: the narrative and its new interpretation are well known. The right attitude of a person toward God is explained here more acute, for the now experienced listener, by a new element: God is the best Inheritor. The admonition is as always: remember your God, but the new element is: stop thinking in earthly concerns, because everything belongs to God. Only when the human recognizes that in full, like Zachariah, does God hear. After a short reference to Mary and Jesus, follows a sketch of the future of those who do not remember God.

A much more explicit episode than in Q19 follows in Q21 about the Fire for the disbelievers: “If those who disbelieved but knew of the time when they shall not be able to hold back the Fire from their faces or from their backs, nor be helped. Nay, but it will come upon them suddenly, and confound them. Then they will not be able to repel it, nor will they be granted respite (Q21.39-40).” And their repentance will come too late: “...Oh, woe unto us! We have certainly been heedless of this! Indeed, we have been wrongdoers.” Surely you and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell ...,” (Q21.97-98). The tone is not persuasive, but threatening. The increase in eschatological threats in Q21 fits with the increasing frustration of the messenger that the audience in Mecca displays growing resistance to the message. In case there was a new audience, this must have been very

⁵³ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2007, p 26, suggest the same idea about the approach of the *Jews* by Muhammad as is developed here with regard to the Christians here: “Geiger seems to suggest that perhaps Muhammad deliberately sought for and incorporated Jewish terminology into his revelation in order to win over the Jews before he made his final break with them.”

⁵⁴ The references to Jesus being not the son of God are quite explicit in Q3.59 or 19.35. In Q5.116 it is shown most clearly that according to the Quran Christians have no right to call Jesus thus. God asks: “O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, ‘Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?’” He said, “Glory be to Thee! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right, ...”

familiar with the ins and outs of the story of Zachariah. They can have been Christians or John-followers, of whose existence there is no evidence, but if they still thought along the lines that the Gospels talk about John, they will have been familiar with sinning, atonement and urgency. What pleads against John-adherents is that the Quran does not mention baptism, which for them must have been as important as for Christians.⁵⁵ What pleads against Christians is the scant attention for Mary and Jesus.

Q6 shows a messenger who is struggling with an audience that does not take his message serious (Q6.3-5). The messenger has given his reinterpretation of all the stories, customs, and convictions that reign under the public, but does not feel that he is succeeding. He warns the polytheists once more with the story of Abraham (Q6.52-70), this is the only full story in this Surah. Many biblical prophets are named with their distinguishing qualities, but everything has been said, no excursions are made into narrative any more. The warnings for the erring Jews, Christians and polytheists occupy the rest of the Surah. They will be punished for not believing the messenger. The tone is not fierce, rather disappointed, “Say, “I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds.”” (Q6.90) This is the third and last Surah that originates in Mecca, of the four Surah’s that mention John.

Q3 gives a new full story, going back to the parents (and forefathers) of Mary. The fact that Mary, Jesus and John are firmly placed in the Judean tradition, suggests a different audience from the one in the previously mentioned Surah’s. This idea is reinforced by the introductory verses that seek connection with the Hebrew bible and the Gospels, “He sent down the Book upon thee in truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel” (Q3.3). There is respect for the biblical prophets. The stories about Mary, Jesus and John have to be told again in full to acquaint the public with the fact that the messenger has intimate knowledge of their traditions and to insert his new interpretation that will bring them salvation if they believe. But this covers only the first one third of the Surah, the largest part is a long reinforcing sermon for the followers of the messenger (You who believe ...), who are addressed from Q3.102 onward with compliments, warnings and rules for a good life. This indicates that there are four categories in the audience: Jews, Christians, polytheists, and followers of the new religious movement. The movement has become an independent body.

My study about John has not given me new insights to suggest a different chronology of the Surah’s than experts like Angelika Neuwirth have worked out. Though some points itch, that I cannot solve: what if Q3 is a later compilation of older elements with younger ones, like the battles or the polemics with the Jews. What if those battles never were fought? One only has remember that quite a few biblical battles sound very convincing, but later archaeological evidence shows that they cannot have taken place at the described time and place.

Though the question seems equally valid what need there is to read the Quran historicizing. In chapter 2 I shall make an effort to assess if the role of John changes if chronology is not reckoned with.

⁵⁵ The normal Arabic word for baptizing is *عمد* (‘amad), this word does not occur in the Quran in the meaning *to baptize*. Q2.138 is often translated with “The baptism of God, and who is better than God in baptism?” There the word is *صبغ* (ṣabaḡ) which means *dying, coloring*.

1.e. Assessment of the composition of the addressed public.

What I am interested in for this study, is not where the stories that are told in the Quran come from, but what they may mean and who the public may have been that they were directed to. A message that does not connect with the audience does not achieve its aim. From the texts of this study one thing stands out in particular: the audience/public has knowledge of Jewish and Christian prophets. It would have been useless to remind the public of the qualities of prophets that it was not familiar with. The first careful conclusion is thus, that the public of the Surah's 3, 6, 19 and 21 had knowledge of Jewish and Christian prophets. Possibly part of the public adhered to one of those religions, but all had knowledge. Very little is known for sure about the religious groups that were present in Arabia at the turn of the 7th century. From the Quran itself polytheists (idolaters), Sabians (see note 60), Jews and Christians surface. But that simple statement does not answer at all who they were. The social organization was to a large extent based on blood ties and clan loyalties. What the religious convictions of most clans were, is only handed down through Muslim tradition, that has been put on record at least one hundred years later. No written contemporary records are extant nor much archaeological evidence of which god(s) were revered by whom in which place. All that scholars can do is to make educated guesses. The Christendom around, and possibly within Arabia, consisted of several groups. The Byzantine, state church of the Roman Empire, using Greek, the language of the empire, was known in Arabia as "*Melkites*."⁵⁶ In the north west of Arabia they had their allies and possibly monasteries in the area of the tribe of the Hassanides.

The *Nestorians* dropped out of main stream Christendom after the council of Ephesus, because Nestorius wanted to keep a clear demarcation line between the divine and the human aspects of Jesus. This group resided in the part of Persia that is now Iraq and used the Syrian-Aramaic language. The Lachmides, an Arabian tribe in the north-east of Arabia, that was under Persian influence, housed a large community of Nestorians.

A third group were the Meaphysites, who rejected the outcome of the council of Chalcedon, that Jesus had a divine and a human nature. They recognized only the divine nature of Jesus. They are in Arabia best known as the *Jacobites*, after bishop Jacob Baradeus (d. 578), who founded a Syria based meaphysite church that used the Syrian-Aramaic language.

In Egypt the *Copts* separated from the Byzantines after Chalcedon, partly for religious and partly for political reasons. They used after the separation the Coptic language.

The *Abyssinian Christians* had strong connections with the Arabian Christians in Yemen, they had rejected the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and they used their own language, Ge'ez.

To what extent desert fathers and mothers were present and of influence in pre-Islamic times, I have not found evidence of.⁵⁷ There were monasteries in the periphery of the Arabian desert along the Persian Gulf (Nestorian) and in Yemen in pre-Islamic times.

⁵⁶ Council of Nicea, 325: issue was the Trinity, the accepted doctrine: homoousia = the Son is one in being with the Father. Arius rejected this and left the Byzantine Church, his adherents were to be found mostly in North Africa and Spain.

Council of Ephesus, 431: issue was the position of Mary: the accepted doctrine: theotokos = mother of the one Jesus Christ. Nestorius adhered the doctrine of a strict double nature for Christ and left the Byzantine Church. Council of Chalcedon, 451: issue was the nature of Jesus, the accepted doctrine: one person with two natures, human and divine. Meaphysites in Egypt, Abyssinia, Syria and Yemen/Himjar did not accept this and left the Byzantine Church.

⁵⁷ Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 80, states that too little research has been done in this field, on the contrary, too much the idea reigns "that a single Arab faith system linked the communities of pre-Islamic Arabians."

Through trade routes and possibly through groups living in the sphere of influence of the cities Mecca and Medina, the supposed first places of recitation of the Quran, there existed knowledge about a wide variety of Christian groups. And of religious/political conflicts involving Christians that were fought out on the Arabian Peninsula, like the Byzantine/Ethiopian alliance taking revenge in 520 for the massacre of (possibly) Christians by (the possibly Jewish) king Dhu Nuwas in Najran. Or the story (said to have happened in 570) about the Christian ruler Abraha from Yemen/Himjar, who wanted to destroy the Ka'aba, but failed because of divine intervention. And the Hassanides and Lachmides who played their role as Arabian buffer states between the Roman and the Persian Empires. Whether the Christians in Mecca were fully Christian or syncretistic is unsure.⁵⁸ However, the emphasis in the Quran on God having no offspring and the references to internal doctrinal differences among Christians, indicate familiarity with the Christian doctrines and debates about the nature of Jesus and his mother.⁵⁹ That Mohammad is reported to have spared icons of Mary, Jesus and a fresco of Abraham in the Kaaba after conquering Mecca in 629 indicate that Christianity was present in Mecca and the surrounding area. The reported presence of many idols would advocate a form of Christianity that did not mind to be part of a polytheist surrounding. The presence of Abraham does not necessarily refer to Jews in the area, because Abraham may have been revered as a local holy person.

The presence of Jews on the Arabian Peninsula is sure, in Medina and the area north-west of the city were three Jewish tribes. But Judaism was in the centuries after the Roman War and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in a phase of transition. To what extent Jewish Arabian tribes fitted in the rabbinical doctrines that developed in Palestine, is not certain at all. There may have been considerable heterodoxy, whether accidentally or on purpose. And there was a group of Jewish Christians in Syria, who professed Jesus.⁶⁰

Apart from the fact that there were Jews around Jathrib/Medina and Christians in Yemen/Himjar in the 600s, there is no actual evidence about what type of Jews or Christians they were.

The conclusion must be, that nobody knows who the public of the first readings/recitations of the Quran were. After this long introduction to give a rough sketch of the religious map of the

⁵⁸ Neuwirth chooses for syncretistic, in part adhering to the rites of the Ka'aba.

⁵⁹ In quite a few Surah's God says that he does not take a child (walad), sometimes the context shows that the pronouncement is obviously directed against the idolaters. Sometimes it is not clear who the addressees are, idolaters or Christians. In the following verses the message seems clearly against Christians, because they are mentioned in the direct neighborhood. But *never* does the Quran state explicitly: "Christians, do not say that God has a son," the condemnation is always more implicit, a word is enough to the wise. Q2.116, "And they say, "God has taken a child." Glory be to Him ...", 117, "... When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is." Q3.59: "Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be!" and he was." Q4.171, "Verily the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word, which He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not "Three." Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one God; Glory be to Him that He should have a child." Q6.73, "He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in truth; and on the day He says "Be!" and it is, His word is the Truth." Then follow from 6.74-87 the illustrious prophets, followed by Q6.88, "That is the Guidance of God, with which He guides whomsoever he will among His servants. But were they to ascribe partners unto God, all that they were doing would have come to naught." Q10.68, "They say, "God has taken a child." Glory be to Him!" Q19.35, "It is *not for God to take a child*. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, "Be!" and it is." idem Q19.88, 92. Q21.26, "And they say, "The Compassionate has taken a child." Glory be to Him! Nay, but they are honored servants." Q19.37, "Yet the *parties differed among themselves*, ..." Q21.93, "But they have *fragmented their affair* among themselves." But Q5.116 is very clear: God asks: "O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?'" He said, "Glory be to Thee! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right, ..."

⁶⁰ Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, Routledge, 2013, p 53, gives a concise overview of the developments in Judaism in Late Antiquity. Neuwirth, p. 156 "In Medinan times, a new group of listeners, if not always real, at least virtual, appears on stage: the Medinan Jews."

Middle East, that had its influence on the Arabian Peninsula in the 600s, it is now time to analyze the texts that name John for signs that indicate what the knowledge and beliefs of the public consisted of. Appendix V provides an overview of Christian (canonical and extra-canonical) sources that the public had knowledge of and that the messenger who composed the Surah's drew from for the composition of the narrative about John.

In order to understand Q19, the public must have been able to connect to Christian and Jewish Books and prophets. That John is put first in Q19 as a reminder of God may reflect how the messenger follows the fixed order of Luke. But more likely it reflects sensibilities that were obvious in the 600s, because the Quran nowhere slavishly follows Jewish or Christian stories, but uses what it needs for its own message. John seen in this way can for the public be the idealized portrait of a prophet who is the true "Reminder of God". He is acceptable for Jews (because of the connection with the Jewish Temple and the inclusion of John being the inheritor of the people of Jacob), and also for the new religious movement because no claims of being son of God are attached to him. For Christians it is normal that John appears before Mary and Jesus, but it is doubtful if they feel reassured by Q19.16-40. This is not the place to go into a thorough analysis of the position of Mary and Jesus, but the story takes some bizarre turns and ends with a rebuke of the Christians: "It is not for God to take a child," (Q19.35).⁶¹ John on the contrary is presented as the perfect object of identification, being caused against all odds by God (19.9), from near God (19.5), pleasing to God (19.6) and with a tenderness from God (19.13), but with nobody claiming that he is a child of God. Polytheists would have listened if they had nothing special to do at the moment, but if they joined the public later, they were served with the narrative of Abraham and the idols of his father (Q19.41-50). Q19.60-62 may be directed at future or possibly already existing followers of the new religious movement of the Prophet, when a Garden of Eden is "promised His servants in the Unseen." The Surah is well composed to appeal to listeners of all backgrounds in the public, the rhetoric is used to create an atmosphere of inclusion of all possible groups, with the Christians possibly least pleased if they listened well, but plenty of nice things are said about Mary and Jesus to compensate the rebuke.⁶² No group is addressed directly, the tone is general, "We shall pluck out from every group whosoever among them was most insolent toward the Compassionate." (Q19.68).

Q21 begins with the messenger expressing annoyance for not being believed, and warnings to the polytheists. They are the group who are addressed directly (Q21.24, 42) followed by the story of Abraham and the idols (Q21.52-70), with all the arguments against polytheism in a catching narrative. Then the messenger turns the attention to other biblical prophets, possibly connecting with Jews in the public. He ends with hinting at Mary and Jesus and a criticism of Christians "fragmenting their affair among themselves," preceded by, "Truly this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me. (Q21.92-93)." In the last part of Q21 the messenger recapitulates that whoever does not submit to the One God "shall be fuel for Hell" (Q21.98). This statement excludes Jews, who

⁶¹ There is no indication of John adherents in the public, for them his role is too modest and too much modelled on Mary and Jesus. To what extent there was a movement of followers of John the Baptist is not certain. In Q2.62 i.e. "Sabians" are mentioned, with which a group of worshippers of John the Baptist may be meant, who nowadays live on the borders of the Euphrates in Iran and Iraq. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2007, Introduction, p. 3, relates uncertainty among Muslim scholars about the identity of the Sabians as example of the problems with all the exegesis going back to Muhammad and his inner circle, with often contradictory outcomes. See also page 22 above for the improbability of John followers among the public.

⁶² The only group that I do not find traces of in the researched Surah's are Zoroastrians. This may well be due to my own lack of knowledge of and consequent lack sensitivity for this religion.

have the same doctrine of strict monotheism, so they are maybe not addressed in this Surah after all.

The conclusion is that in Q21 polytheists are warned directly (21.24), Jews not, so it is not certain that they were among the audience. Christians are criticized and admonished directly.

Q6 begins even stronger than Q21 with expressed disappointment and annoyance of the messenger that the public does not believe him. The audience that is addressed in a long polemic sermon, is polytheistic, with knowledge of Jewish and Christian prophets. The address (Q6.2-73) culminates in the only narrative of this Surah, the story of Abraham and the idols with him rejecting the polytheist gods, star, moon, and sun as creations of the One God and not divine in themselves. This polemic sermon concludes, “That was Our argument, which We gave unto Abraham against his people.” (Q21.83). If there are Jews as well among the public, the relationship has soured, in Q6.89-93 they are accused of meddling with the Book that God has sent down to them and their food laws are interpreted as a punishment by God for their “willful disobedience” (Q6.146). If there were Christians present, they were only addressed indirectly, because the accusations of attributing partners and children to God may be directed at them, but just as well be a continuation of the sermon against the polytheists (Q6.88, 94, 107). The conclusion is that polytheists (Q6.2, 46), Jews (Q6.89-93), and followers of the messenger (Q6.115-122) are spoken to directly, whether Christians were in the public cannot be said for sure, because they are only indirectly spoken to.

The introductory verses of Q3 indicate that the messenger is involved in an ongoing debate with the public about the Torah and the Gospel in relation to this new “discernment” (= possibly the Quran, Q3.4). The public is familiar with the three Books sent down by God, so probably they are Christians, Jews, and followers of the new movement of the messenger with a polytheist background. Stubborn polytheists are addressed directly in Q3.3-13. Biblical images are being used as illustrations of the argument (Pharao, 3.11). The verses 3.33-63 presuppose a Jesus believing audience, specially as they are directly addressed in 3.64 with an appeal to join the messenger, “O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you, that we shall worship none but God ...” The Jews seem spoken to directly as well in 3.65, “Why do you dispute concerning Abraham, as neither the Torah nor the Gospel was sent down until after him?” That the narrative with three birth stories (Mary, John, and Jesus) is included in this Surah may be necessary to introduce the new public in Medina to the material the Quran uses in order to fashion it to express its own message. This is one of the arguments for Q3 to be situated in the Medinan period. Another reason for the elaborate story can be that Q3 was recited to reconcile a public in Medina that was involved in Jewish – Christian polemics. The program of Q3 is the same as Q19, 21 and 6 to include all groups and to motivate them to join the new movement. Q3 gives a synthesis of the Jewish roots of the parents of Mary, Mary, Zachariah, John, and Jesus with the new message: the only relevant thing that these four did, was that they remembered God. An appeal to stop the Jewish – Christian polemics that were still going on in Medina.

In Q3 Polytheists, Christians, Jews and followers of the messenger (ḥayra ummah, the best community, Q3.110) are spoken to directly.

The address of the Quran (the messenger) in a schedule:

	Jews		Christians		Polytheists		Followers of the messenger	
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Q 19	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Q 21	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-
Q 6	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
Q 3	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Recapitulation of the conclusions about the possible public in the chronology as determined above: all the four Surah's are addressed at a public that is cognizant of Jewish and Christian prophets. Q19 addresses a broad public that has knowledge of those prophets, but they are not spoken to directly, there is only a very slight sign that there were followers of the new religious movement to be addressed. In Q21 the focus shifts very much to the polytheists combined with Christians. In Q6 and 3 the attention goes increasingly to the followers of the messenger, who are comforted, admonished and shown the right path. The tone to unbelievers of all types becomes harsh and threatening. The schedule underpins the chronology of the origins of the Surah's. This outcome is in line with the Muslim traditional view on the nascent Quran.

Chapter 2. The meaning of the message “Remember God.”

The observation earlier made that John is the silent expression of the message of God, rouses the curiosity how and why John of all characters to chose from has been given this role.

In order to get a clear view of the message, the first task is to extract from the text what the attributes of John are, that he can fulfill the role of the message “remember God.”

In Q3.39 John is attributed with: “one who believes in the truth of a word from God, and a leader and an ascetic and a prophet from among the righteous.”

In Q6.85, “And Zachariah, John, Jesus and Elijah - each was among the righteous.”

In Q19.6, Zachariah: “he [John] will inherit from me and he will inherit from the kinsfolk of Jacob, and make him, my Lord, agreeable [to you].”

In Q19.7, God: “a boy, his name is John, We did not make [his name] before to a namesake.

In Q19.12-15, John is ordered to take the Book in hand with resolution. He has wisdom from childhood onwards. He enjoys a tenderness from God. He is pure, pious, devoted to his parents, no tyrant and not rebellious.

In Q21.89-90, John gets no attributes. But possibly a reflection on Q19.6, “You [God] are the best Inheritor.”

It is now possible to create an image of John. An important part of the picture of John has been drawn in chapter 1.a., because the context of the passages of John enforces a comparison with Jesus. There the attributes of Jesus were subtracted from John and five unique assets of John were left: his name, his being an inheritor, a leader, an ascetic, and not rebellious. For the purpose of getting a good view of his role as message of God, unconnected to Jesus, some qualities that were not taken in consideration before, are taken into account here. The extra considerations are the wishes of his father, for “a next of kin from near You,” and “make him, my Lord, agreeable [to you].” And the admonition of God to John to keep a good hold of the Book, that was earlier subtracted from Jesus, seems worthwhile here in order to investigate what God may have intended with this admonition to John.

Q21 gives the most concise version of the story of the annunciation of John, but even so manages to add a new element that is a reaction to Q19.6. In chapter 1.d., wherein an effort is made to assess the chronology of the Surah’s that name John, one of the conclusions is, that Q19 is the older one and Q21 follows some seven Surah’s later. In Q19.5 Zachariah asks for a walī, that I have translated as a *next of kin*, to distinguish it linguistically from the word for *inheriting* (warat) of 19.6.⁶³ A walī is as next of kin *an heir* or *successor*, the word has juridical connotations.⁶⁴ Whether Zachariah asks for a heir of his worldly possessions, for someone to care for him in his old age, or for a successor of his priesthood, is possibly settled by the addition that he asks for a heir to the people of Jacob.⁶⁵ The people of Jacob are blessed by God (Q.12.6) and they are people of the Book (through the House of Abraham, 4.54).⁶⁶ Whether the writer of this passage identifies himself to the extent that he realizes that Zachariah is intent on continuing the Jewish Temple cult, is improbable. The idea is rather,

⁶³ <http://ejtaal.net/>

⁶⁴ Penrice renders walī as *Heir Apparent* or *Next of kin*. Brill places these last terms in a juridical context. SQ says that Zachariah, being a prophet, was not interested in passing on his wealth, but his religious leaderships and prophethood, SQ, Q19, note 4-6, p. 765.

⁶⁵ The word āl is used most often for the *people of Pharaoh* (14x) and that of *Lot* (4x). And once or twice for *Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Imran*, The word is only used to refer to biblical peoples (Egyptian and Jewish).

⁶⁶ The Quran demonstrates intimate knowledge of the Hebrew bible, that the bloodline of Abraham and Jacob is brought in relation with the Book, the twelve tribes, that are made up out of the heirs of Jacob being present when Moses received the Law.

that the Book and its message of “remember God”, that is of central importance in the Quran, have to be passed on to the heir of Zachariah. Q21.85 explicates this more precisely, God is the best Inheritor. This statement removes all doubt of too human motives in Zachariah, it is only for the service to God that he asks for an heir. And for that purpose his request is granted.

In 19.6 Zachariah adds that he wants his heir to be *raḍiyya*, *agreeable [to God]*.⁶⁷ Zachariah wishes that his son and God will have a reciprocal love, a mutual contentment with each other. This wish connects with the wish a verse earlier: a next of kin *from near You*. On top of this, John enjoys a tenderness from God (19.13). In chapter 1.a., this quality was counted less than what God blessed Jesus with (19.31). But the tenderness (*ḥanan*) from the side of God is the third sign of God being close to John.⁶⁸ If John is God’s message, he comes *from near to God* and they enjoy a *reciprocal love and contentment*.

The name John is given by God and unique (Q9.7). It is not the meaning of the name necessarily, that makes it special, but the claim that God attaches to it, it is new.⁶⁹ The suggestion is, that the qualities that John represents are new, not seen before in a person. But now that he is there, people can see what a person from near God, who is content with God is like, so that they can imitate him.

John is connected to the tradition before him as well, he has to take the Book in hand with resolution (Q19.12). This image suggests that the Quran, as the new revelation from God gives a new exegesis of the Hebrew bible and the Gospel. In the manner that the Christians held on to the Hebrew bible, with the New Testament commenting on parts of it added as a new book to it. The reinterpretation of John in the Quran is conservative compared to how Christians reinterpreted the Jewish Scripts. Compare what Paul does in his letter to the Galatians 4.21-23, where he uses Genesis 16.15; 21.2, 9-10, and Isaiah 54.1, in his argumentation that the Christian Galatians represent the heavenly Jerusalem, the true heritage of Abraham and Sarah, reducing all who disagree with him to slaves, offspring of the slave Hagar.

The Quran can be added to the “Torah and Injil” with its own new interpretation. John is to be the intermediary prophet between Moses and Mohammed: he holds on to the tradition with strength and he represents the qualities of the new believer. These qualities, wisdom, purity, piety, and righteousness signal what qualities are commended to the believers.

John is not rebellious (Q19.14). By the position of this word rebellious concluding the verse that starts with John’s attitude towards his parents, the impression is created that he is not a tyrant and not a rebel in relation to his parents. This is the most logical way to read this verse. The SQ thinks this as well and cites Ṭabarī and Rāzī “Rather than domineering and rebellious, he was gentle and humble by nature toward both God and his parents.”⁷⁰ John and Jesus are the only two children in the Quran that are related to disobedience to parents. This part of the verse can as well be an independent sentence, not related to the relation of John to his parents. The verb *aṣā*, *to rebel*, disobey, is in the Quran mostly used as rebelliousness against God or his messengers (Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Mohammad). This would be the only place where it is used in the context of disobedience against parents. The same is the case with the word *jabar*, *tyrant*, it occurs 10x in the Quran and is used 6x for unbelievers,

⁶⁷ The word *riḍa* is described in Q5.119, “God is content (*riḍa*) with them [the believers], and they are content (*riḍa*) with Him.”

⁶⁸ Lane gives an etymology for *ḥanan*: “the moaning sound of a she-camel yearning towards her young one.”

⁶⁹ Through the shared root *s/m/w* *namesake* (*samiyya*) is connected with *to name* and with *to be or become high*, *samā* (pl. *samāwā*), *heaven(s)*. To name someone is connected with the idea of elevation by this shared root *s/m/w*. The name connects a person with his reputation, and this verse claims that nobody has the same reputation as John up to this moment. Compare Paul, Philippians 2.9: “Therefore God also highly exalted him [Jesus] and gave him the name that is above every name,”

⁷⁰ SQ, p. 768, note 14-15

once for God (one of His 99 names), 1x for Muhammad, 1x for John, and 1x for Jesus (the last 3 in the negative, that they are no tyrants). If the disobedience and tyranny are indeed connected with the behavior to the parents of John and Jesus, this possibly reflects the impossibility to oppose parents that are faithful servants of God. In the case of Jesus (Q19.32) this would be a reinterpretation of Mark 3.32, where the gospel describes a sharp difference with his mother. Jesus claims in the Gospel to follow a greater authority than his mother. But I rather think that the holiness of the parents is not the issue here, on the contrary.

This sudden pronouncement that John is not a tyrant and not a rebel is a comment of the Quran on the tradition of John, that is taken further in Q3.39, where John is a leader, an ascetic and a prophet. This is a reflection on the John tradition in the Gospels, where John was opposing the religious authorities and king Herodes, he was in *their* eyes rebellious. The reinterpretation that is Q19.14 says: John is devoted to his parents, he follows only God, the highest authority, and this cannot be rebellious and tyrannical. A Quranic exegesis of a tradition. If read in this way Q19.14 reflects a reinterpretation of the new religious movement of the family/clan loyalties as well as. John reflects this new attitude: devotion to the family, but if this devotion comes in conflict with the will of God, then opposition to the family is not rebellious and not tyrannical. And the same counts for Jesus and corresponds with the Gospel of Mark. It is outside the scope of this paper, but the reaction of Abraham to his idolatrous relatives has the same tension, see Q19.41-49. Abraham tries all he can to persuade his father. When his father threatens to stone him, Abraham does not get angry, but withdraws. Abraham is devoted to his father and not tyrannical or rebellious.

In Q3.39 God tells Zachariah in advance that John will have his own tasks, God does not say that John will be a Temple priest like his father, but that he is to be a leader, an ascetic, a prophet. Zachariah does not react that he rather abandons his wish for a son in that case. Quite contrary, he asks for a sign from God, that God is really going to be true to His word. And God complies again: He gives Zachariah speechlessness for three days. Yet another reinterpretation of the tradition. In Luke 1.20 this speechlessness is presented as punishment by Gabriel/God for the lack of trust of Zachariah. Q19.10 and 3.41 are clear in the purpose of the muteness: it is a sign for reassurance. Just long enough for Zachariah to be convinced, that it is really going to happen. The punishment bent to be a sign, and as that a very gentle sign.

John, the personified message, is only intent on the service of God. He has a close relation with God expressed in mutual contentment and God has a tenderness for him, yearns for him. John has wisdom, purity, piety, and righteousness. He is a leader, an ascetic and a prophet. He follows the highest authority, which is God, and this cannot be rebellious and tyrannical. That John does not speak is irrelevant. The story is well known enough by the public, and John's doctrine, as far as it is handed down to us, does not differ from what the new messenger says now in his own words, "Repent, turn to God before it is too late."⁷¹ What John is doing in the Quran is illustrating this message for the new prophet, "Repent from your old ways, Jews, Christians, pagans, and turn to God, the time is short." Wherever and whenever the Surah's 3, 19, and 21 have been compiled, the image of John is consistent. I can not think of differences in the interpretation of the role of John if the sequence of origin was different.

The fourth reference to John in Q6.85, connects him with Elijah, "Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah – each was among the righteous." In the Gospels John has been associated with

⁷¹ Compare with Matthew 3.7-11; Luke 3.3, 7-9, 17, where John admonishes the people to repent to be saved from the fire.

Elijah.⁷² He supposedly looked like Elijah,⁷³ and he resembled Elijah who only recognized God as his authority, and confronted king Ahab, his wife Jezebel, and king Ahaz with their devotion to other gods, and their other misdeeds.⁷⁴ John confronted king Herod and the religious authorities in the same fashion.⁷⁵ “For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”” This reference to Elijah reinforces what Q19.14 said about John not being a rebel, a tyrant. Just like Elijah he only accepted God as leading, not human authorities. This connection of John with Elijah is in line with the other Surah’s, the interpretation does not change with a different chronology.

John is the personification of the tradition that is valuable to the new religious movement. God urges John to hold on to the Book. The Quran is the continuation of the tradition of the Book. And John is the model for the new believer who will be guided towards the ideal of a reciprocal loving relation between man and God. Symbol for this newness is the “new name” of John. He stands for family loyalty with the big reserve, that this loyalty cannot come between him and God, but like Abraham, does John not revolt.

⁷² Compare for the connection Elijah – John: Luke 1.17: “The angels said: ...he will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” or Matthew 11.14: “He is Elijah, who is to come,” and 17.12: “But I (Jesus) tell you that Elijah has already come.” Luke 9.8 John 1.21 and 25: “Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?”

These pronouncements reflect the expectation that is expressed in Malachi 4.5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”

⁷³ 2 Kings 1.8, “They answered him, ‘A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.’ He said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite.’” and Matthew 4.4, Mark 1.6.

⁷⁴ 1Kings 22.17-26; 2Kings 1.16.

⁷⁵ Matthew 3.7-10, 14.3-4; Mark 6.18.

Conclusion.

The main conclusion from this study is, that John, as he is presented in the Quran, is a good example of the creative use that the Quran makes of a well known prophet in a well known story, to tell something new. The process gives a good insight in the rhetoric use that the Quran makes of traditions that its public can appreciate. The Quran gives in the texts where John plays a role, a new interpretation of the tradition, and seeks to persuade the audience. The rhetoric is aimed at a public that is well versed in Jewish and Christian lore, that can appreciate the persuasive arguments to accept the new interpretation of John. He is not the pioneer for Jesus Christ, but a message in his own right, to bring the believers back to God.

John is one of the many Jewish/Christian prophets in the Quran, that God chooses to teach the believers the truth about Him. God enjoins the public to remember Him. The prophets are put on stage as exemplary figures for the right attitude of the believer toward God. The believers are promised a reward if they remember God with the right attitude, and the unbelievers are warned that they will be punished.

The public is made aware of the importance of scripture by references to the Book, often meaning the Jewish and Christian Scripture, but also including the Quran.

Whether prophets were rooted in the Jewish or the Christian tradition was not a point of concern for the Quran, they appear in the same lists. All the prophets have a trait in common: monotheism. The Quran is an effort to merge the polytheist, the Jewish and the Christian traditions: there is only one God, the God of all human beings, He governs the universe and everything in it, and He allows no thoughts of offspring being attributed to Him.

John is the intermediary prophet between Moses and Mohammed: he holds on to the tradition with strength and he represents the qualities that are expected of the new believer. These consist of the “normal” qualities, wisdom, purity, piety, and righteousness. But John also reflects a new attitude: devotion to the family, but if this loyalty comes in conflict with the will of God, then opposition to the family is not rebellious and not tyrannical. And he represents for the new believers God’s desire for a relationship that is reciprocal, based on mutual love. That he is silent is a sign, like it was for his father Zachariah. John represents enough within himself, he does not need words to express what he stands for. John is the figure whose role in the Quran is to play down the role of Jesus, by having to a large extent the same qualities without the claim of being a child of God. He is the “Joker” to reconcile all possible believers and gather them in the new religious movement.

Appendix I, Arabic and English synopses of Q3.38-41; 6.84-87; 19.2-15; 21.89-90.

Chart 1. Presentation of Q 3.38-41, 19.1-15, and 21.89-90 in a synoptic overview.

سورة آل عمران	٣	سورة مريم	١٩	سورة النبياء	٢١
		كهيعص	١		
		ذَكَرْ رَحْمَتَ رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُ، زَكْرِيَّا	٢		
هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ،	a٣٨	إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ نِدَاءً خَفِيًّا	٣	ح وَزَكَرِيَّا إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ،	a٨٩
		قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَهَنَ الْعَظْمُ مِنِّي وَأَسْتَعِلُّ الرُّأْسَ شَيْبًا	a٤		
		وَلَمْ أَكُنْ بِدُعَائِكَ رَبِّ شَقِيًّا	b٤		
		وَإِنِّي خِفْتُ الْمَوَالِيَ مِنْ وَرَأْيِ وَكَانَتِ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا	a٥		
			b٥		
قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً	٣٨ ^b	فَهَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا	c٥	رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْنِي فَرْدًا	b٨٩
إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ	٣٨ ^c				
		بِرثني	a٦	وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْوَارِثِينَ	c٨٩
		وَيَرِثُ مِنْ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ	b٦		
		وَأَجْعَلْهُ رَبِّ رَضِيًّا	c٦		
فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيحْيَى	٣٩ ^a ٣٩ ^b ٣٩ ^c	يَا زَكَرِيَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَامٍ اسْمُهُ يَحْيَى	a٧	فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ، وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ يُحْيَى	a٩٠ b٩٠
		لَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ، مِنْ قَبْلُ سَمِيًّا	b٧		
مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ	d٣٩ e٣٩ f٣٩				
قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي الْكِبَرُ وَأُمْرَأَتِي عَاقِرٌ	٤٠ ^a b٤٠ c٤٠	قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَكَانَتِ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا وَقَدْ بَلَغْتُ مِنَ الْكِبَرِ عِتِيًّا	a٨ b٨ c٨		
قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هِينٌ	d٤٠	قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هِينٌ	a٩	وَأَصْلَحْنَا لَهُ زَوْجَهُ	٩٠ ^c
		وَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكُ شَيْءً	b٩		
قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً	٤١ ^a	قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً	a١٠		
قَالَ آيَاتُكَ إِلَّا تُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا رَمْرًا	b٤١	قَالَ آيَاتُكَ إِلَّا تُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ	b١٠		
		ثَلَاثَ لَيَالٍ سَوِيًّا	c١٠		
		فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنَ الْمِحْرَابِ فَأَوْحَى إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ سَبِّحُوا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا	a١١ b١١	إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يُسْرِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَيَدْعُونََنَا رَعَبًا وَكَانُوا لَنَا خَاشِعِينَ	d٩٠ e٩٠ ٩٠ ^f
وَأَذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ			١٢		
		يَا يَحْيَى خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ وَأَنْبِئْهُ الْحُكْمَ صَبِيًّا	١٣		
		وَحَنَانًا مِنْ لَدُنَّا وَزَكْوَةً وَكَانَ تَقِيًّا			

سورة آل عمران	٣	سورة مريم	١٩	سورة النبيا	٢١
		وَبَرًّا بَوْلِدِيهِ	١٤		
		وَلَمْ يَكُنْ جَبَّارًا عَصِيًّا			
		وَسَلَّمَ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ	١٥		
		وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُبْعَثُ حَيًّا			

Chart 2. A synoptic overview in English of Q 3.38-41; 19.2-15 and 21.89-90.

3 Sūrah āl ‘Imrān	19 Sūrah Maryam	21 Sūrah l-anbiyāa
	¹ Kāf hā ‘ayn šād	
	² An admonition to remember the mercy of your Lord (to) his servant Zachariah	
^{38a} In that place Zachariah invoked his Lord	³ when he called upon his Lord a call in secret	^{89a} And Zachariah when he called his Lord
	^{4a} He said: my Lord, indeed my bones are feeble in me and the head has become aflame with white of hair	
	^{4b} And I was not wretched in praying (to) you.	
	^{5a} And indeed I feared my bloodrelations after me	
	^{5b} and my wife is barren	
^{38b} He said: my Lord grant to me from near you good offspring	^{5c} so grant to me from near you a bloodrelation	^{89b} Do not leave me alone
^{38c} Indeed, you are the hearer of the prayer		
	^{6a} he will inherit from me	^{89c} And you are the best inheritor
	^{6b} and he will inherit from the kinsfolk of Jacob	
	^{6c} and make him, my Lord, agreeable	
^{39a} Then the angels called to him ^{39b} and (while) he prayed standing in the Temple ^{39c} Indeed, God announces you good news of John,	^{7a} O, Zachariah, indeed we give you good news in a boy his name is John	^{90a} So we answered him ^{90b} And we gave him John,
	^{7b} we did not make (this name) before to a namesake	
^{39d} One who believes in the truth of a word from God		
^{39e} and a leader and an ascetic		
^{39f} and a prophet from among the righteous	<i>Attention: Surah 6.85 inserted in column Q21. In next cell →</i>	^{6.85} And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah – each was among the righteous.
^{40a} He said: my Lord, how will	^{8a} He said: how will there be	

3 Sūrah āl ‘Imrān	19 Sūrah Maryam	21 Sūrah l-anbiyāa
there be for me a boy ^{40b} when verily old age has reached me ^{40c} and my wife is barren	a boy for me ^{8b} and my wife is barren ^{8c} and I have reached (from) exceeding old age	
^{40d} He said: It is like that ⁷⁶ , God does what he wills	^{9a} He said: It is like that your Lord has said: for me it is easy	^{90c} And we cured his wife for him
	^{9b} and certainly I have created you earlier and you were not a thing	
^{41a} He said: my Lord, make for me a sign	^{10a} He said: make for me a sign	
^{41b} He said: your sign is that you will not speak to the people three days except a gesture	^{10b} He said: your sign is that you will not speak (to) the people	
	^{10c} being sound in mind and body	
	^{11a} then he went to his people out of the Temple	
^{41c} And remember your Lord much and worship/bow down in adoration in the evening and the morning	^{11b} and indicated to them you must worship/bow down in adoration in the morning and in the evening	^{90d} And they were quick in good things/deeds ^{90e} And they invoked us with desire and fear ^{90f} And they were humble for us
	^{12a} O John take in hand the book with resolution	
	^{12b} and we give him judgment/wisdom a child	
	^{13a} and a tenderness from our side and purity	
	^{13b} and he was most pious	
	^{14a} and devoted to his parents	
	^{14b} and he was not a rebellious tyrant	
	^{15a} and peace on him the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he is woken alive.	

⁷⁶ Kaḍālīka, a preposition Ka with a demonstrative occurs in the Quran in nearly all cases with God speaking: “and thus ...” One example: Q 2.73, kaḍālīka yuḥyī l-lahu almawtā wayurīkum āyātihi, *Thus God will make the dead living and show you his signs*. This sentence seems to be a key to as well the name John/Yaḥya and the sign (āyā) given to Zachariah. Plus of course the sign of God that Jesus is (19.22; 21.91).

In order to construct the above synopsis, I have worked with the following assumptions:

1. The longest piece of text in the middle gives the best overview.
2. The order of the verses has to remain unaffected.
3. Corresponding verses have to appear on the same level in the chart.⁷⁷

Q 19.1-15 has the most verses, so I have put that in the middle, with Q 3.38-41 and Q 21.89-90 on each side. A challenge for my assumptions two and three is that the lamentation of Zachariah in Q 19.3-5b, where he complains to God, that he is too old and his wife is barren, is being repeated in 19.8. The other 2 Surah's are more concise, Q21 does not even mention a problem, only a cure. Therefore I had to choose whether to put the corresponding verses of Surah 3 and 21 next to 19.3-5 or next to 19.8. Verse 3.40^{abc} corresponds much better with 19.8 than with 19.3-5b, therefore it is put next to 19.8. Consequently 19.3-5b have been granted no corresponding verses.

In the case of 3.40^d it is obvious to put 19.9^a on the same level. It may seem surprising that the short sentence: 21.90^c "We cured his wife for him," has been put next to 3.40^d and 19.9^a, that are more abstract pronouncements, but: 21.90^c expresses the action that is the result of God saying: Kaḍālika, "*It is thus.*"

My basic assumptions lead to a problem with 39d, e, f, these enumerate a list of qualities of John, that might fit better next to 19.12-13, but then I have to put them out of their order. To my judgment they do not compare that well that I must bend my third assumption.

⁷⁷ Kurt Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, 1967, p. XI uses the same assumptions: "the relevant passages are given in full" which means to my understanding, that verses within a passage are not mixed around to suit the comparison better. And the passages are presented on the same level. In the New Testament the four Gospels are presented in a synopsis in their usual sequence: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This can obviously not be done in the case of a synopsis of Quranic passages, so I have felt free to put the longest passage in the middle. That doing so, I happen to maintain the order of the Surah's, is accidental.

Appendix II, comparison of the attributed qualities to John and Jesus in Q3.33-50; 6.84-87; 19.1-35, and 21.89-90.

Here is compared what is said about John in and about (or by) Jesus and his mother in 3.33-37, 42-50; 19.16-35 and 21.91 in a synoptic overview. The first passage, 3.33-37, that results in only two entries in the chart, is useful in two respects: God choses people for His aims and the mother of Jesus is living in the Temple. Passage 3.42-47, finishes in the same fashion as 19.16-35 with the statement that “When He decrees a thing, He only says to it: “Be,” and it is,” which is the natural end of a “chapter”. I include 3.48-50 nevertheless as well, though it comes after this closing statement, because of the references to the Book and the sign. I am aware that I cross the border of what is a new “chapter” in which Jesus will manifest himself as a sign of God by doing miracles. In the context of this research into the role of John the rest of this passage is not relevant.

Chart 3. A comparison of the **similarities** in the descriptions of John and Jesus in Q 3.33-50; 19.1-35, and 21.89-91

John	Jesus
19.2 John is a <i>reminder</i> of the mercy of God	19.21 Jesus <i>is</i> a mercy from God
19.2 <i>John's father</i> is God's servant	19.30 <i>Jesus</i> is God's servant
19.7; 3.39 God gives good news of John	3.45 God gives good news of Jesus
19.7; 3.40 a boy is promised	19.19, 20 a boy is promised ⁷⁸
19.7 God gives the name	3.45 God gives the name
19.9; 3.40 it is like that 19.9 it is easy for God	19.21 it is like that 19.21 it is easy for God
19.9 <i>Father</i> is (šayan) result of what God wills; 3.40 <i>creation John</i> , God [does what He] wills (yašāu). ⁷⁹	19.27 <i>Jesus</i> is (šayan) result of what God wills; 3.37 <i>food for Mary</i> , 47 <i>creation Jesus</i> , God [does what He] wills (yašāu).
19.10; 3.41 <i>John's father</i> can not speak to the people	19.26 <i>Mary</i> (as a fast) does not speak to the people
19.10; 3.41 <i>the not speaking of his father</i> is a sign from God	19.22; 21.91 <i>Jesus</i> is a sign from God 3.50 <i>Jesus has come with</i> a sign from God
19.11; 3.39 <i>Father</i> in Temple	3.37 <i>Mother</i> in Temple

⁷⁸ The word *boy* (ḡ/l/m) occurs 13 times in the Quran: 3x John, 2x Jesus, 1x Joseph (12.19), 3x Isaac (15.53; 37.101; 51.28), 3x in the story of Moses and the servant from God (18.74, 80, 82), and 1x for young male servants in heaven (52.24). Brill, Farid and Lane give as basic meaning for this root: *exited or overcome by carnal desire, lust*. My idea about the use of this word for these pre-Islamic and heavenly boys, is that they are very attractive. To what extent the sexual component is involved here, I do not know.

⁷⁹ The root š/y/ā, expresses: *to will, want, wish*. Used as a noun it means: *something, thing, matter, affair*. Farid explains that what is *willed* into being becomes a *thing* (šayan). This brings 3.40 *God does what he wills* (yašāu) in “creating” Yaḥyā, in direct connection with the being *willed* of his father Zachariah in 19.9 and the being *willed* of Jesus in 19.27.

The word for *thing* (šayan) has led to much scholastic and philosophical debate. Farid: “According to some it is a name for anything that has been made, to have being, whether an accident, or attribute, or a sustenance, and such that it may be known, and that a thing may be predicated thereof. Some other writers say that it is an inf. noun used in the sense of a pass. part noun meaning, what is willed, and meant, or intended, without restriction to its actuality or possibility of being, so that it applies to that what necessarily is, and that which may be, and that which cannot be. Imam Raghib, however, says that it denotes whatever is caused to be or exist, whether sensibly, as material substances, or ideally as sayings.” Lane gives more or less the same connection between *will* and *thing*.

19.12 John has <i>to hold</i> the Book and God will <i>give</i> him wisdom	3.48 <i>God will teach</i> Jesus the Book and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel 19.30 God <i>gave</i> Jesus the Book
19.13 God <i>gives</i> John purity	19.31 God <i>ordained</i> Jesus the purity/almsgiving ⁸⁰
19.13 John <i>is</i> pious	19.31 God <i>enjoined</i> him to pray
19.14 John is devoted to his parents	19.32 Jesus is devoted to his mother
19.14 John was not a tyrant	19.32 God has not made Jesus a tyrant
19.4 <i>John's father</i> has not been wretched (miserable) in praying to God.	19.32 God has not made <i>Jesus</i> wretched
19.15 and peace on him the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he is woken alive.	19.33 and peace be on me the day I was born and the day I dies and the day I am woken alive.
3.39 Speaking angels	3.42; 19.45 Speaking angels
3.39 John <i>believes</i> in a word from God	3.42, 45 Jesus <i>is</i> a word from God 19.34 a statement of the truth
3.39 John is a prophet	19.30 Jesus is a prophet
3.39 John <i>is</i> righteous	3.46 Jesus <i>will be among</i> the righteous
19.5; 3.38; 21.89 John is <i>asked from</i> God	3.42 Jesus's mother is <i>chosen by</i> God 3.47; 19.21, 35 he is decreed by God
19.7 John's name is <i>not given before</i>	3.45 Jesus' name is <i>Messiah Jesus son of Mary</i>
19.13 John enjoys a <i>tenderness from</i> God.	3.45 Jesus is <i>highly honored is this world and the one hereafter and he is near</i> God 19.31 God has blessed him wherever he is

Chart 4. A comparison of the **differences** in the descriptions of John and Jesus in Q 3.33-48; 19.1-35, and 21.89-91.

John	Jesus
19.6 he is an inheritor of his father and of the people of Jacob	
19.7 we did not make [his name] before to a namesake	
19.14 John was not rebellious.	
3.39 he is a leader and ascetic	

⁸⁰ The definite article is the only indicator of the difference translators make between *purity* (indefinite) and *zakat/almsgiving* (definite).

Appendix III, overview of the passages that form the context of Q3.38-41; 6.84-87; 19.2-15; 21.89-90 (not synoptic!).

Chart 5. Context of what happened **before** the stories of John.⁸¹

3 Āl ‘Imrān	6 al-An‘ām	19 Maryam	21 al-Anbiyā’
²⁹ God is powerful over all things	⁷¹ the guidance of God is the true guidance	² A reminder of the mercy of thy God	⁴⁸ We gave Moses and Aaron a reminder ... ⁵⁰ This is a blessed reminder that We have sent down ⁸²
³¹ God is forgiving, merciful	⁷³⁻⁷⁴ On the day He says “Be” and it is, his word is the truth. And [remember] when Abraham said		⁵²⁻⁷⁰ <i>Abraham in dispute with his people about idols</i>
³³ God chose Adam, Noah, the house of Abraham, and the house of ‘Imrān above the worlds ³⁴ as progeny, ...	⁷⁵⁻⁸² <i>story of Abraham becoming a ḥanīf and disputing with his people.</i>		⁷¹ We delivered him and Lot to the land that we blessed for all peoples.
³⁵ [Remember] when the wife of ‘Imrān said: ... God is hearing, knowing	⁸³ We raise in degrees whomsoever we will, truly thy Lord is wise, knowing.		⁷² <i>God gives Isaac and Jacob to Abraham. They are: righteous, imams, God reveals them doing good deeds, praying, giving alms</i>
³⁶ <i>story of dedication of Mary to God,</i> ³⁷ <i>placed under care of Zachariah, who asks:</i>	⁸⁴ And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, each We guided. And We guided Noah before, and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron – thus do We recompense the virtuous		⁷³⁻⁷⁵ Lot We gave ... judgment and knowledge ... We caused him to enter our Mercy ... he was among the righteous. ⁷⁶ <i>God saved Noah</i> ⁷⁸⁻⁸² [remember] David and Solomon, <i>God teaches them practical skills.</i> ⁸³⁻⁸⁴ Job: Thou art the most Merciful. ⁸⁵⁻⁸⁷ Ismael, Idrīs, Dhu’l-Kifl enter in Mercy, Dhu’l-Nūn saved.
³⁷ ”Mary, from whence comes this	⁸⁵ And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias,		⁸⁸ Thus to We save the believers

⁸¹ Bold letters are citations from the SQ (with small adaptations), *Italics* are summaries by me.

⁸² The root ḍ/k/r , to remember, is used here. By most scholars this is thought to mean in this place the Torah (SQ note Q21.48).

(provision) unto thee?” She said: “from God”	each was among the righteous.		
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Chart 6. Context of what happened **after** the stories of John.⁸³

3 Āl ‘Imrān	6 al-An‘ām	19 Maryam	21 al-Anbiyā’
⁴² And [remember] when the angels said: Mary, God has chosen you and purified you, and has chosen you above the women of the worlds.	⁸⁶ And Ishmael, Jonah, and Lot We favored ... <i>and some of their relatives</i> We have chosen and guided onto a straight path.	¹⁶ And remember Mary in the Book... We sent unto her Our Spirit.	⁹¹ <i>And as for Mary:</i> We breathed into her of Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for the worlds.
⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ <i>The angels announce Jesus</i>	⁸⁸ That is the guidance of God ... <i>a warning against ascribing of partners unto God, then all that they were doing would have come to naught.</i>	¹⁹ <i>The Spirit announces her pregnancy of a boy. And replies to her amazement:</i> Thus shall it be. Your Lord says, it is easy for Me.	⁹² Truly this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me.
⁴⁷ She said: my Lord how shall I have a child ... He said: thus does God create whatsoever He will ... He only says it to “Be!” and it is.	⁸⁹ They are those to whom We have given the Book, judgment and prophethood. So if they do not believe in them, We have entrusted them to a people who will not disbelieve in them.	²⁴⁻²⁹ <i>Jesus guides Mary during childbirth and in her contact with her people.</i>	⁹⁴ And whosoever performs righteous deeds and is a believer, there shall be no ingratitude tor his endeavor,
⁴⁸ And he will teach him the Book, Wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel.	⁹³ If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are in the throes of death,	³⁰⁻³³ <i>Jesus describes himself</i>	⁹⁸ Surely you and that which you worship apart from God shall be fuel for Hell.
⁵⁶ And as for those who disbelieve, I shall punish them with a severe punishment in this world and the Here after; and the shall have no helpers. ⁵⁷ And as for those	¹⁶⁰ Whosoever brings a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof; but whosoever brings an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the like thereof, and they shall not be		

⁸³ Bold letters are citations from the SQ (with small adaptations), *Italics* are summaries by me.

who believe and perform righteous deeds, He shall pay them rewards in full.	wronged.		
⁵⁹ <i>Jesus is like Adam:</i> He (God) created him from dust, then said to him: Be! and he was.		³⁴ <i>Narrator:</i> that is Jesus son of Mary, a statement of the truth, which they doubt	
⁶⁷ Abraham was ... a ḥanīf ... not one of the idolators.		³⁵ It is not for God to take a child ... He only says to it Be and it is.	
⁸⁴ Say, we believe in God ... and what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses, Jesus and the prophets were given from their Lord.		³⁶ God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path. ³⁷ and woe unto those who disbelieve for the witnessing of a tremendous day!	
		⁴¹ And remember Abraham ... he was truthful, a prophet. <i>Story of the idols.</i>	
		⁵¹⁻⁵⁸ Remember <i>Moses, Aaron, Ishmael, Enoch, Adam, Noah.</i>	
		⁵⁹ So they shall meet [the reward of] error, ⁶⁰ save for those who repent and believe and work righteousness. It is they who shall enter the Garden, ...	

Appendix IV, Chronology of the Surah's.

Assessment of the chronology of Q3, 6, 19, and 21 following the distinguishing marks as suggested by Angelika Neuwirth.

Neuwirth gives criteria for the distinguishing of

Early Meccan Surah's:

1. Introductory oaths and oath clusters.
2. Clusters of *id* (when) phrases (often preceding eschatological prophecies, but in the passages about John and his immediate context the word is also used instead of *remember* to draw attention to illustrative examples).
3. Sections about signs (*āyāt*, applied to divine omnipotence).
4. Sections of debate, both apologetic and polemic.
5. (Very) short narratives or evocations of stories, sometimes in the form of lists.
6. Longer narratives split into two equal halves exactly after the turn (*peripetia*) of the story.
7. Direct interaction with the public by direct address to behavior of the listeners.
8. Eschatological prophecies.⁸⁴

Late Meccan Surah's:

1. Biblical narratives.
2. Holy/Blessed Land, orientation towards Jerusalem.
3. Emphasis on *al-kitāb* (the Book).
4. Use of *rabb al-‘ālamīn* (Lord of the Universe).

Medinan Surah's:

1. Complex and often long.⁸⁵
2. Prophet directly addressed by God as *al-nabī*.
3. All the previous elements of Meccan Surah's are present, but more summarized.
4. Elaborate communal regulations.
5. Contemporary events.
6. Orientation towards Mecca and Ka'ba.
7. Abraham role model for the prophet.
8. Moses and exodus no role.

Chart 7. Characteristics of Q3, 6, 19, and 21.

Period	Theme	3	6	19	21
Early Meccan	Opening oath	-	-	-	-
	Use <i>ida</i>	+	½	+	+
	Sign (<i>aya</i>)	+	½	+	+
	Debate	33v = ½	88v = +	32v = ½	40v = ½
	Short biblical narr.	27v = ½	16v = +	57v = -	21v = ½
	Narr. halved	-	+	-	+
	Interaction public	+	+	+	+

⁸⁴ Neuwirth, p. 147-148.

⁸⁵ Neuwirth, p.155, gives "Less sophisticated composition" as a mark for recognizing a Medinan Surah. I leave this out, as my knowledge of composition is not developed enough to assess that item.

	Eschatology	15v = ½	21v = +	18v = +	13v = ½
	Summed up	4 ½	6	3 ½	5 ½
Later Meccan	Biblical narr.	27v = ½	16v = ½	56v = +	40v = +
	Holy Land	-	-	-	-
	The Book	33x = +	13x = ½	7x = ½	1x = -
	rabb al-‘ālamīn	-	3x = +	-	1x = ½
	Closing sentence	+	-	-	-
	Summed up	2 ½	2	1 ½	1 ½
Medinan	Long	200v = +	165v = +	98v = ½	112v = ½
	topics	5 = +	4 = +	1 = -	2 = ½
	Contemporary events	4x = +	-	-	-
	Regulations	1x = -	11v = +	-	-
	Abraham model Moh.	5x = +	-	-	-
	Moses model Mohahammad ⁸⁶	-	-	-	-
	Closing sentence	+	-	-	-
	Summed up	5	3	½	1

Survey of end-rhyme in Q19, 21, 6 and 3.

Q19.2-33 long yā

Q19.34-40 ūn, ūm or īn, (a homiletic interlude in the long narrative about Zachariah, Jesus and Abraham of 19.2-58).

Q19.41-74 long yā,

Q19.75-98 dā or zā.

Q21 has only end rhyme on -īn (45x), -ūn (61x), -īm (5x, of which 3x the name Abraham), and once -kum.

Q6.74-90, īn (4x) – ūn (3x) – īm - īn (3x) – īm – ūn - īn (2x), the end rhyme is not as regular as in Q19, but much more regular than Q3.

Q3.33-42: īn – īm – īm – īm – āb - dā’ – īn – šā’ – ār – īn – īn – ūn – īn – ūn, the variety in end-rhyme is greater even in this small pericope. The whole of Q3 gives very irregular end-rhyme. Most remarkable are two sections, 3.7-17 and 190-199 that end on long ā-sounds with an end-b, -d, or -r.

⁸⁶ What is meant is Moses leading the people in the Exodus and giving the Law. He is named in all 4 Surah’s, but not explicitly in this role.

Appendix V. Sources outside the Quran that may shed light on the development of the role of John in the Quran.

Mark, Matthew, Luke and John testify about John. But only Luke has the nativity story, that is used in the Quran, to express the new message. The Diatessaron gives the nativity stories of both John and Jesus. The text has been created by Tatian (from Syria, ± 170) and was *the* Gospel used in Syria, handed down in Syriac and Arabic.⁸⁷ Which source lies under the stories about John in the Quran, is in this case not relevant, because the wording of Luke and the Diatessaron are nearly identical. And the Quran is not citing, but using the story for its own interpretation of the message of God

Chart 8. Q3, 6, 19, and 21 compared with Luke 1.5-25.

Verse	Quran	Verse	Luke
21.90	And they were quick in good things/deeds And they invoked us with desire and fear And they were humble for us	1.6-7	Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.
		1.7	But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.
		1.8	Once when he was serving as priest before God.
		1.11	Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.
3.39 19.7 ^a 21.90 ^b	Then the angels called to him and (while) he prayed standing in the Temple Indeed, God announces you good news of John, O, Zachariah, indeed we give you good news in a boy his name is John And we gave him John,	1.13	But the angel said to him, "Zachariah, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.
6.85	And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah, each was among the righteous	1.16-17	He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
3.40	He said: my Lord, how will there be for me a boy when verily old age has reached me and my wife is barren	1.18	Zachariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years."

⁸⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p277,note 21.

Verse	Quran	Verse	Luke
19.8	He said: how will there be a boy for me and my wife is barren and I have reached (from) exceeding old age		
3.40 ^d 19.9 ^a 21.90 ^c	He said: It is like that, God does what he wills He said: It is like that your Lord has said: for me it is easy And we cured his wife for him	1.19	The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
3.41 ^b 19.10 ^b	He said: your sign is that you will not speak to the people three days except a gesture He said: your sign is that you will not speak (to) the people	1.20	But now, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."
19.11 ^a	then he went to his people out of the Temple	1.22	When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ⁸⁸

Chart 9. Q3 and 19 compared with Luke 1.67-80, Song of praise of Zachariah.

Verse	Quran	Verse	Luke
3.39 ^f	and a prophet from among the righteous	1.76	And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High
3.39 ^d	One who believes in the truth of a word from God	1.77	to give knowledge of salvation to his people
19.13 ^a	and a tenderness from our side and purity	1.78	By the tender mercy of our God
3.39 ^e	and a leader and an ascetic	1.80	The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel

Luke 1.67-80, Song of praise of Zachariah.

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁸ This citation from the NRSV has been cut to measure the Quran, all details that are not taken over in Q3, 6, 19, or 21 have been left out.

⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

The place of an inheritor, that plays an important role in Q19 and 21, does not occur in the nativity story of Luke. The connection with the inheritor is very much present in the Jewish tradition of Abraham, who complains to God, that his inheritor will be the slave Eliezer (Gen 15.2-6).” And the plight of the wife of Zachariah is given a voice by Hannah, “O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, (1Samuel 1.10-11).” Or the mother of Samson, who was barren, but an angel appears and promises her a son (Judges 13.2-5). The link between sons given by God to barren wives and those children, Isaac, Samson, and Samuel, being prophets is as obvious in the Hebrew bible as it is in the Quran, though the latter two are not present in the Quran. What Samson and Samuel do share with John in Luke, is that of them too is said, that they do not drink wine and intoxicants.

Paul does refer very strongly to the spiritual heritage of believers in Jesus Christ being *heirs*. Letter to the Romans, 8.12-17,

“¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” Here we see a statement that resembles closely the relation between John being very close to God and as a result *heir*.

Proto-Gospel of James.⁸⁹

Another story of divine intervention in the birth of a child, is the nativity story of Mary in the Proto-Gospel of James. Mary’s father Joachim withdraws in the desert for 40 days, saying: “I will not come down for either food or drink until the Lord my God visits me. My prayer will be my food and drink.” His wife Anna is praying as well, at home, “O God of my fathers, bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed the womb of Sarah and gave her a son, Isaac.” Then an angel of the Lord came to her and announced he offspring. An angel of the Lord has descended to Joachim and said: “Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer.” What follows resembles Q3.35-37. Just like the forming of a clay bird (Q3.49), appears in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.⁹⁰ And the palm tree and rivulet (Q19.23-24), occur in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, chapter 20.

At one point I made an excursion into the realm of myths. For that I have made an effort to apply mythical motifs to the passages with John, but I have decided, that this does not add to the insight into the role of John in the Quran. Annunciation of birth, unusual conception, prediction of the child’s fate before his birth, the naming of a child, God as helper, angels as messengers, they all have their own number in the system of mythical motifs.⁹¹ By the time I had this list composed, the question arose, which problem it was an answer to. The

⁸⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures, Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 2003, p. 63

⁹⁰ Ehrman, p. 57.

⁹¹ Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion, The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, Neukirchen – Vluyn, 1978. Through her examples of Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of World Folklore*, Copenhagen and Bloomington, Indiana, USA, 1957-1958 6 volume work.

knowledge of unusual conceptions does not help for this research, because this study into the role of John is not a comparative study about children who are the result of an unusual conception through the ages in the texts that have been handed down. It helped to the extent that it made more clear than before that other traditions are not the purpose of this study, but how the Quran gives a new interpretation of the figure of John, and what knowledge the public must have been familiar with in order to understand what was new and possibly better in this reframing of a well known story.

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