From *Ḥawwāʾ* to *Ḥūrīs:*

Female Figures in the Qur'an

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Brandeis University

Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctorate of Philosophy

By

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August 2018

The signed version of this form is on file in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

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Dedication

To the Author of the Qur'an

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for my advisors, mentors, colleagues, and family members who supported this endeavor with their expertise and generosity of spirit. I would like to thank my advisor Carl Sharif El-Tobgui and my committee members Suleyman Dost, ChaeRan Freeze, and Jonathan Decter of the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University as well as my outside reader, Marion Holmes Katz of New York University. Joseph Lumbard provided early support for the project. I am grateful too for the exceptional mentorship and teaching of Marc Brettler as well as the guidance and instruction of Bernadette Brooten, Leila Ahmed, Baber Johansen, Ahmed Ragab, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ann Braude, and Susan Abraham, who each inspired my pursuit of women's studies. I still reflect deeply on the influences of my early mentors at Princeton University, in particular Hossein Modarressi, Barbara Romaine, Hisham Mahmoud, Amaney Jamal, Abdellah Hammoudi, Shaun Marmon, and John Borenman for their inspired teaching.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation provided a dissertation completion grant, and my colleagues in the Mellon Fellowship, including Gregory Freeze and Sara Shostak, offered helpful feedback. Bruce Lawrence, Marlyn Miller, and Joan Listernick offered invaluable feedback on my work in progress, as did Nora Zaki, Shenila Khoja-Moolji, Tasneem Zawahreh, and Umar Shareef. To Rev. Greg McGonigle, my chaplaincy colleagues, and my students at Tufts University, and to my former students and colleagues on the faculties of Hebrew College and Andover Newton Theological School, I am indebted to your kindness, wit, and the warmth of your presence. I am deeply grateful for the companionship and encouragement of Seema Ahmed, Cassie Webb, Carol Zahra Lee, Megan Fairweather, and the Morrissey and Sperling families.

My parents Cynthia and Salvatore Lizzio, and my beloved in-laws Awatif Abu Shady and Mahmood Mostafa are sources of encouragement. My dearest Ahmed and Rahma deserve credit for their patience over the long duration of this project, for providing comic relief at just the right moments, and for believing me when I insisted that I did not love my laptop more than I loved them. At one point, my brilliant and ever assertive daughter erased the entire to-do list on my whiteboard and wrote "NOTHING BUT DISERTATION [sic]" in order to keep me focused. (Or was it to keep me distracted while she ate ice cream, watched movies, and orchestrated playdates?) Finally, I must give some credit to the kitten who would fall soundly asleep in my lap, morning, noon, and night, prompting me to remain at my desk just a while longer so as not to disturb her carefree napping. At least one of us was getting respite.

I am emboldened and simultaneously humbled by the possibility that this work will inspire readers well beyond the academy. My gratitude goes to the many individuals who engaged with my work in progress and whose suggestions, insights, and wisdom I have attempted to channel and credit. All shortcomings are my own.

Wa-l-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabb al-ʿālamīn.

ABSTRACT

From *Ḥawwāʾ* to *Ḥūrīs*:

Female Figures in the Qur'an

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Brandeis University

Waltham, Massachusetts

By Celene Marie Ibrahim

This work offers a comprehensive literary analysis of the trials and triumphs of female figures in the Qur'an, from accounts of human origins, to stories of the founding and destruction of nations, to female-like figures who delight the faithful of Paradise. With attention to the wide-ranging depictions of femaleness, including in sexual relations, in kinship relations, in divine-human relationships, and with regard to female embodiment and social roles, I provide a more robust delineation of concepts such as "female" and "woman" in Qur'anic discourse. My analyses demonstrate how females—women, girls, old, young, barren, fertile, chaste, profligate, reproachable, and saintly—enter Qur'anic sacred history and advance the Qur'an's overarching didactic aims. The work includes all of the major and minor female figures who are referenced in the Qur'an, whether in the context of narratives of sacred history, in parables, in verses that allude to events that are contemporaneous with the Qur'an, or in descriptions of an eternal abode. The work raises questions about female voice and agency in the Qur'an and probes the

interplay between the Qur'anic prophets and the figures who are their mothers, wives, daughters, female supporters, and even occasional adversaries. I examine narratives of conquest, filial devotion, romantic attraction, and more, paying close attention to how Qur'anic rhetoric, thematic interconnectivity, linguistic structure, and other literary features reinforce core Qur'anic dictates involving sex and sexuality, gender and kinship relations, the feminine voice, and female dignity. I ultimately demonstrate how conspicuously gynocentric exegetical approaches can advance the field of Qur'anic studies by illuminating novel horizons of interpretive possibility.

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Notes on Transliteration, Translation, and Abbreviations

In this work, I have utilized the Arabic transliteration method as outlined in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*) with the exception that I have included "h" for the final *tāʾ marbūṭah*. For Qur'anic names with common English uses, I give the Arabic on the first occurrence and thereafter use the common English name. I have not transliterated terms that are increasingly common in English dictionaries, such as Qur'an, hadith, and surah.

In terms of abbreviations in citations, the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006), is abbreviated as *EQ* and followed by the volume number. The Qur'anic concordance developed by Laleh Bakhtiar, entitled *Concordance of the Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2011), is abbreviated as *CSQ*, and the *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, developed by Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), is abbreviated as *AED*. The *Arabic-English Lexicon,* compiled by Edward William Lane (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), is abbreviated as *AEL*.

Unless otherwise noted, English translations of the Qur'an are taken from *The Study Quran*: *A New Translation and Commentary*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), abbreviated as *SQ*. As a stylistic adjustment to androcentric terms in *The Study Quran*, I regularly substitute more gender-neutral terms such as "humankind" for "mankind" and employ "the human being" or similar terms where *The Study Quran* chooses "man" for the Arabic word for "person" (*insān*).

Along similar lines, the pronoun that the Qur'an regularly uses to refer to God, *huwa*, has a wider semantic range than the pronoun "He" does in current gender-conscientious English

usage. Muslim theologians have not understood God to have an ontological gender,[1] so the use of an English pronoun that strongly denotes a specific ontological gender in contemporary English parlance falls short as a signifier for God. In keeping with the explicitly gynocentric focus of the study, and in an attempt to deal with the dilemma of English's lack of a non-gendered pronoun that would adequately refer to God, I have italicized pronouns that refer to God, including *I*, *Me*, *My*, *Thou*, *Thee*, *Thy*, *He*, *Him*, *His*, *We*, *Us*, and *Our*. I have made these conscientious choices to ensure that my language conventions do not inadvertently convey an inaccurate conception of the Qur'anic God for those readers who may be more familiar with theological paradigms focused on a male-centric God or who may not be accustomed to the Qur'an's use of a variety of pronouns to refer to God (such as the frequently employed majestic plural, or royal we). Devotionally oriented readers can appreciate that human language is inherently inadequate for capturing the nature of cosmic Reality and that, as such, I am seeking to honor the principle expressed axiomatically in Q. 42:11, "Naught is like unto *Him*."[2]

English does not have a non-gendered pronoun to aptly signify God, as the non-gendered pronoun "it" that is used for inanimate objects, and often non-human animals, is insufficient for communicating the appropriate divinely stature, omniscience, and omnipotence. I am also not inclined to substitute "She" for "He" as some before me have done; using "She" in English could be seen as tampering with the Qur'an by moving too far away from a literal translation. At the same time, the word "She" could also inscribe gender to God in the mind of the English-speaking reader, leaving me no better off than when I began. ("She" for divine beings is suited

[1] For extensive discussion of this point in relation to contemporary feminist discourses, see Abdal-Hakim Murad, "Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender," April 1999, accessed January 15, 2018, at: http://masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/gender.htm.

[2] And if there is anxiety provoked by the matter for my Muslim readers in particular, I refer to the sentiment of the previous verse, Q. 42:10: "As for anything wherein you differ, judgment thereof lies with God . . ."

for goddess traditions, but the Qur'anic case is different in that God is widely understood by Muslims to be—without interpretive intervention needed—decisively beyond ontological gender.) As such, I needed an orthographic mechanism for rendering translations of the Qur'an adequately for English readers, given that English language conventions regarding grammatical gender have developed away from using the male pronoun also as a generic pronoun and that basic English grammar does not gender entities without an ontological gender.

I also employ the orthographic convention *he* and *his* in cases where a non-gender specific human pronoun is implied, such as for the Arabic word for "person" (*insān*). For pronoun references to the human soul (*nafs*), which is grammatically feminine but ostensibly not ontologically female, I employ the pronoun *her*, also in italics. Many English translations employ the pronoun "it"; however, the human soul could be considered a higher-order, animate entity, in which case the pronoun "it" arguably falls short as an appropriate translation.

Introduction

"And She Confirmed the Words of Her Lord" (Q. 66:12)

On the occasion of the birth of a girl, a girl whose "Lord accepted her with a beautiful acceptance, and made her grow in a beautiful way,"[1] the Qur'an declares: "the male is not like the female."[2] This girl, about whom the Qur'an speaks, is later "purified by her Lord" and chosen for the unique task of birthing a "Word from God."[3] To be sure, other individuals in the Qur'an are given the task of bringing "God's Word" to the world in the form of scriptural revelation, but this girl child—Mary (*Maryam*)—will go on to *corporally* deliver God's Word.[4] In one surah of the Qur'an known as "The Prophets" (*al-Anbiyā'*), Mary is mentioned as a culminating figure in a long series of righteous individuals, some described as "guiding imams," others as having been bestowed with divine mercy, others as possessing "judgment and knowledge," still others with gifts and powers by God's leave.[5] In these verses, over a dozen men are mentioned as in some way or another receiving divine grace and benefit. One family—

[1] Q. 3:37.
[2] Q. 3:36. For analysis of this phase, see Michael B. Schub, "'The Male Is Not Like the Female (Qur'ān 3:36)': An Eponymous Passage in the Qur'ān," *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik*, 23 (1991): 101–4.
[3] Q. 3:42.
[4] For a discussion of this and other features of Mary's labor, see Aisha Gessinger, "Mary in the Qur'an: Rereading Subversive Births," in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an*, ed. Roberta Sterman Sabbath (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 379–92. See also Daniel A. Madigan, "Mary and Muhammad: Bearers of the Word," *Australasian Catholic Record* 80 (2003): 417–27. For discussion of Mary's figure in comparison to individuals who are explicitly named as prophets, see Loren Lybarger, "Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur'anic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach," *The Journal of Religion* 80, no. 2 (2000): 240–70.
[5] Q. 21:71–91.

Noah's—is saved with him "from great distress," and one wife—Zachariah's—is "set aright for him," that is, she becomes fertile, such that Zachariah's prayer for an heir is granted. Finally, enter "she who preserved her chastity," she who becomes impregnated by God's "Spirit" (*rūḥ*) and who is made, with her son, "a sign for the worlds."[6] A "feminist hermeneutic of suspicion" might muse about why so few females are mentioned in this litany of righteous men.[7] Furthermore, why are the few female figures who are mentioned known only relationally through male figures? And finally, why are the two females figures who are directly evoked both mentioned in the context of becoming impregnated? Such questions lay at the genesis of this project.

The work provides analysis of the complete female cast in the Qur'an, including figures who appear in parables, allusions, and in the Qur'anic meta-narrative of sacred history from the prototypical human female and her descendants to the ethereal feminine beings of Paradise. From aristocrats to the beleaguered, from ingrates to paragons of virtue, from escapades of young women to miracles for barren matriarchs, female figures are featured throughout the Qur'an in accounts of human origins, stories of the founding and destruction of nations, and in

[6] Q. 21:91. See also 23:50: "*We* made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and *We* gave them refuge in a high place of stillness and a flowing spring."

[7] Popularized by Catholic theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the notion of a "feminist hermeneutic of suspicion" has become mainstream parlance in feminist theological studies. Following the framework developed primarily by Schüssler Fiorenza, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines feminist hermeneutics of suspicion as "a consciousness-raising activity that requires one to take into account the influence of culturally determined gender roles and attitudes on whatever is being examined," and a hermeneutic that is "concerned not only with critical engagement about what is said about women that may diminish their full human dignity, but also with the silences that presume women's secondary status by ignoring their experiences of the divine." See A. Clifford, "Feminist Hermeneutics," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Catholic University of America (Detroit, MI: Thompson/The Gale Group Inc., 2003), 674. For an analysis of the legacy of this hermeneutic on Muslim feminist theology, see Aysha Hidayatullah, "Inspiration and Struggle: Muslim Feminist Theology and the Work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 35, no. 1 (2009): 162–70.

narratives of conquest, filial devotion, romantic attraction, and more. With a comprehensive scope, I explore the entire cast of Qur'anic female figures and therein probe themes related to biological sex, female sexuality, feminine voices, and femaleness in ontological, cosmological, biological, social, and spiritual dimensions. The Qur'an contains nearly three hundred verses that involve the character and experiences of specific female figures, and in addition to these specific females, topics related to females—in the context of family or gendered social relations for instance—permeate the Qur'an. My analysis here is informed by broader Qur'anic themes involving gender relations but specifically probes Qur'anic passages on all of the major and minor female figures who are referenced explicitly in the Qur'an, whether in the context of narratives of sacred history, in parables, or in verses containing allusion to events contemporaneous with the advent of new Qur'anic verses.

As is clear to even a neophyte reader or listener, the Qur'an addresses frequently the contemporaneous struggles unfolding within the Prophet Muhammad's intimate family and geopolitical community, and such struggles are the immediate and often explicit context for many verses of the Qur'an. As such, oral history and early works of prophetic biography are key to exploring the relationship between the expanding revelation and the events reported to have transpired during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.[8] The Qur'an is—perhaps also surprisingly for those who encounter its prose for the first time—not primarily invested in the recounting of history in a chronological ordering. It may frequently relate narratives about the

[8] The main source for prophetic bibliography is a detailed work by Ibn Hishām (d. ca. 218/833-4), which is a redacted version of an earlier work by Ibn Isḥāq (d. ca. 150/767-8) that is no longer extant. Another early, influential biographical work, the *Ṭabaqāt* (Generations) of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), includes extensive entries on the Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries. Scholarly and popular biographies of the Prophet Muhammad are surveyed by Kecia Ali in *The Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). For an English translation of entries on many of the Prophet Muhammad's women companions in Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, see Aisha Bewley, *Kitab at-Tabaqat Al-Kabir* [Sic], Vol. 8: *The Women of Madina*, 3rd ed. (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1995).

trials of Semitic prophets and their families and it may regularly allude to events during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, but these chronologies are not in fact the meta-narrative at the core of the Qur'an. Taken in its entirety, Qur'anic discourse is primarily concerned with the genesis and fate of individual human beings, not merely on earth, but in other divinely fashioned realms. Thus, Qur'anic discussions of events in the temporal past, what I refer to here as sacred history, are interwoven with discussions of biodiversity on earth, the moral constitution of human beings, and the nature of other phenomenal realms, to name a few central themes. These subjects are addressed throughout the Qur'an in service of the Qur'anic aims of inculcating monotheism, imparting piety, and preparing human beings—female and male—for their impending death and judgment in the final abode.

Given the unique composition of the Qur'an as the sum total of a gradual revelatory process,[9] it is fruitful not just to explore isolated examples of how the Qur'an represents a subcategory of human beings, such as "females," but to look holistically at the roles and purposes of the subcategory in relation to overarching Qur'anic epistemic claims and ethical injunctions as they developed over time and often in relation to, or in conversation with, specific stories from sacred history. Thus, I consider here female figures in parables and in narratives of the creation of humankind, through the accounts of Semitic prophets and their families, to the Prophet Muhammad and his contemporaries, and to accounts of the feminine beings in the realm of Paradise. How does the Qur'an depict femininity in its biological and social dimensions? What

[9] The Qur'an itself refers to this gradual revelatory process, addressing detractors and supplying a reasoning for the graduation: "And the disbelievers say, 'Why was the Qur'an not sent down upon him as a single whole?' It is so, that *We* may make firm thine heart thereby. And *We* have recited it unto thee in a measured pace." Q. 25:32. A related verse asserting the didactic purpose of the Qur'an's stage-by-stage process of revelation states: "a recitation *We* have divided in parts, that thou mayest recite it unto men [people] in intervals, and *We* sent it down in successive revelations." Q. 17:106.

are attributes and behaviors generally ascribed to female figures? How do the experiences of female figures bear upon law and ethics? How does the Qur'an explain the phenomena of sex and gender in cosmological and theological terms? Attention to these themes enables me to probe, and ultimately more robustly delineate, concepts such as "female" and "woman" in Qur'anic discourse. I will begin with an exhaustive list of the Qur'anic female cast to demonstrate, from the outset, precisely how many female figures actually do emerge in Qur'anic narratives, even if in singular verses, or brief parables, or as part of larger families or social collectives.

The Qur'anic Female Cast

The cast of Qur'anic figures includes the following individual females, female family members, and female groups:[10] the spouse of Adam (*zawj Ādam*), known by extra-Qur'anic sources as Eve (*Ḥawwāʾ*);[11] the parents of Noah (*Nūḥ*) and the wife of Noah;[12] the family of Job (*Ayyūb*);[13] the parents of Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*), the family of Abraham more generally, including the concubine known in extra-Qur'anic sources as Hagar (*Hājar*) and the wife of Abraham who is known in extra-Qur'anic sources as Sarah (*Sārah*);[14] the wife of the Lot (*imraʾat Lūṭ*), Lot's daughters

[10] See appendix A for a quick guide to the main Qur'anic female figures, including groups of women figures. See appendix B for a comprehensive listing of the female figures in the Qur'an with verse numbers. See appendix D for a listing of female figures by Surah.

[11] See, for example, Q. 2:35–37, 7:19–25, and 20:117–23 for verses that specifically mention Adam's spouse.

[12] See Q. 71:28 for a mention of Noah's parents. For verses that mention the family of Noah in general, see 11:40, 11:45–46, 21:76, 23:27. See Q. 66:10 for a mention of the wife of Noah specifically.

[13] See Q. 21:84 and 38:43 for mentions of the family of Job.

[14] See Q. 14:41 for mention of Abraham's parents. See appendix B for a listing of verses pertaining to the House of Abraham and his family. For an episode concerning the eventual mother of the prophet Isaac (*umm Isḥāq*), see Q. 11:69–73 and 51:24–30; see also 15:53 for this same episode but recounted without specific mention of Abraham's wife. The House of Abraham includes presumably Hagar and her descendants who settled in a barren valley that was to become Mecca; for verses that relate to Hagar's role in the establishment of Mecca, although they do not mention her by name, see Q. 2:126, 2:158, and 14:37.

(*banāt Lūṭ*), and the family and House of Lot more generally;[15] the wife of the viceroy of Egypt (*imraʾat ʿazīz Miṣr*), who is widely known in extra-Qur'anic sources as Zulaykha (*Zulaykhā*);[16] the consorts of the wife of the viceroy, who are referred to as "women of the town" (*niswatun fī al-madīnah*);[17] the parents of Joseph (*abawā Yūsuf*), and the family and House of Jacob (*Yaʿqūb*) generally.[18] My analysis includes as well Moses's family and the "House of Moses" (*āl Mūsā*) generally, including his mother and his sister, his foster mother, who is the wife of Pharaoh (*Firʿawn*), Moses's unsuccessful wet nurses (*al-marāḍiʿ*), and his wife and her sister from Midian (*Madyan*).[19] I include the parents of a boy (*abawā ghulām*) that Moses witnesses being slain,[20] as well as references to the women of the "Children of Israel" (*Banū Isrāʾīl*) who are oppressed by the "House of Pharaoh" (*āl Firʿawn*).[21] The analysis also includes the reference to the "House of David" and the reference to the parents of the prophet Solomon,[22] and the Queen

[15] For verses on Lot's wife, see Q. 15:60 and 66:10. She is also alluded to in two verses simply as "an old woman" (*ʿajūz*); see 26:171 and 37:134. For verses on Lot's daughters, see Q. 11:78–79 and 15:71. For general references to the family and House of Lot see appendix D.

[16] For verses on the wife of the Egyptian viceroy, see Q. 12:21–35 and 12:50–53. It is not until verse 30 in this episode that the woman is specifically identified as the "viceroy's wife" by her gossiping friends. In verse 21, the reader/listener knows only that she is the wife of "the man from Egypt who bought him [Joseph]."

[17] For verses on Zulaykha's consorts, the "women of the town," see Q. 12:30–32 and 12:50–51.

[18] For verses that refer to Joseph interacting with his parents, see Q. 12:99–100. For a reference to the "House of Jacob" (*āl Yaʿqūb*), see 12:6 and 19:6.

[19] See Q. 2:248 for the single mention of the "House of Moses" (*āl Mūsā*) alongside mention of the "House of Aaron" (*āl Hārūn*). For mention of the "family of Moses" (*ahl Mūsā*), see 20:10, 20:29, 27:7, and 28:29. For verses involving the mother of Moses, see 20:38–40 and 28:7–13. For verses on the sister of Moses and on her encounter with the wet nurses, see 20:40 and 28:11–12. For verses on the wife of Pharaoh, known widely in extra-Qur'anic sources as Āsiyah bint Muzāhim, see 28:8–9 and 66:11. For the encounter with the eventual wife of Moses and her sister, see 28:23–29.

[20] See Q. 18:80–81 for mention of the parents and 18:74 for the boy getting slain by the enigmatic figure *al-Khiḍr*.

[21] See appendix D for partial listings of verses containing the expression "House of Pharaoh" (*āl Firʿawn*) as well as verses referring to the women who were being oppressed by his rule, including 38:4 and 7:141.

[22] See Q. 34:13 for the single mention of the "House of David" (*āl Dāwūd*).The mother of Solomon is mentioned in the context of Solomon praying for his parents; see 27:19. The scandal and intrigue associated with Bathsheba and David in biblical literature does not play an overt role in the Qur'an; however, debate occurs as to whether the biblical mother of Solomon, Bathsheba, is alluded to in the episode when David mediates between two men who scale the walls of his palace to seek judgment regarding the fair distribution of ewes in their possession. See Q. 38:21–26. Specifically, in 38:24, David is depicted as realizing that the trial was from God and repenting. In 38:25,

of Sheba (*malikat Sabaʾ*), who is widely known in extra-Qur'anic sources as Bilqīs.[23] Female figures also include the wife of Zachariah (*imraʾat Zakariyyā*),[24] the wife of ʿImrān (*imraʾat ʿImrān*), who is the mother of Mary;[25] and Mary herself, who is the mother of Jesus (*ʿĪsā*).[26] Additionally, I study here different female collectives from among the Prophet Muhammad's immediate family and close female relations, including those referred to as "people of the house" (*ahl al-bayt*), as the "women of the prophet" (*nisāʾ al-nabī*), as the "mothers of the believers" (*ummahāt al-muʾminīn*), and as "spouses of the Prophet" (*azwāj al-nabī*).[27] Also mentioned from his family are his daughters (*banāt*) and a host of other female familial relations.[28] I also give

God accepts his repentance. Then, in 38:26, a verse addressed to David specifically, the Qur'an includes a warning against following "caprice" (*al-hawā*), a word also potentially translated as "lusts," as discussed in chapter 1. Due to these references and the parallels in biblical texts, some commentators link to the biblical story of David and Bathsheba. For an analysis of how the figure of Bathsheba factors into Muslim interpretations of the Qur'an and of the status of prophets, see Khaleel Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition: The Bathsheba Affair* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). See also Peter Matthews Wright, "The Qur'anic David," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former & Latter Prophets & in Other Texts*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Martii Nissinen (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 187–96.

[23] For verses mentioning the Queen of Sheba, see Q. 27:22–44.

[24] For verses mentioning the wife of Zachariah who is the mother of the prophet John (*Yaḥyā*), see Q. 3:40, 19:5, 19:8, 19:14, and 21:90.

[25] For verses mentioning the wife of ʿImrān (mother of Mary), see Q. 3:33–37.

[26] There are thirty-four mentions of her name; eleven of these instances refer to her by name specifically, and the remaining twenty-three times refer to her in the context of naming her son. For verses that depict or mention her directly, see Q. 3:33–37, 3:34–48, 4:156, 4:171, 5:17, 9:31, 19:16–34, 21:91, 23:50, and 66:12; for a mention of her as the mother of Jesus, see the expression "son of Mary" (*Ibn Maryam*) in 23:50 and 54:57; see the expression "The Messiah, Son of Mary" (*al-Masīḥ ibn Maryam*) in 5:117, 5:72, 5:75, and 9:13; and see the expression "Jesus Son of Mary" (*ʿĪsā ibn Maryam*) in 2:87, 2:253, 5:45, 4:157, 4:171, 5:46, 5:78, 5:110, 5:112, 5:114, 5:116, 19:34, 33:7, 57:27, 61:6, and 61:14.

[27] See references to the family (*ahl*) of Muhammad in Q. 3:121 and 20:132; see 33:33 for a mention of "people of the house" (*ahl al-bayt*) as referring to the people of the Prophet Muhammad's household. See Q. 33:30 and 33:32 for two occasions in which the wives of the Prophet Muhammad are addressed as "women of the prophet" (*nisāʾ al-nabī*). See 33:6 for a mention of the "mothers of the believers." See Q. 33:50 and 33:5 for verses mentioning "spouses of the Prophet" (*azwāj al-nabī*). For verses relating to the family of the Prophet generally as well as verses that relate to particular female members, see 24:11–26, 33:28–62, and 66:1–6, as discussed in subsequent chapters.

[28] See for example, Q 33:50, a verse that also refers to additional categories of women with a relation to the Prophet Muhammad whom he can marry, including his war captives and the daughters of his paternal and maternal aunts and uncles who emigrated, and any "believing woman" (*imraʾtun muʾminatun*), if she gives herself in marriage and he accepts. See appendix E for a listing of key female contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad whose circumstances are alluded to by the Qur'an. There is yet to be a non-devotional work that treats this whole cast of female figures,

attention to other Meccan female figures in the Qur'an: one who is described as "the disputer" (*al-mujādilah*);[29] one referred to as "she who is examined" (*al-mumtaḥanah*);[30] and one known as the wife of Abū Lahab (*imraʾat Abī Lahab*), a vehement critic of the early Muslims who is insulted as a firewood carrier (*ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab*) by the Qur'an.[31] Female sorceresses are also referred to by the Qur'an on one occasion as "the blowers on knots" (*al-naffāthāti fī al-ʿuqad*),[32] and a woman is mentioned briefly in a parable as "she who unravels her yarn" (*allatī naqaḍat ghazlahā*).[33] My analysis of the Qur'anic female figures also includes the female-like inhabitants of Paradise, including those of "restrained glances" (*qāṣirāt al-ṭarf*)[34] and the "wide-eyed" ones (*ḥūr ʿīn*, Anglicized as houris).[35]

In addition to the specific female figures delineated in detail above, several key terms also signify females in a general sense (e.g., women) or indicate a specific subset of females (e.g., wives).[36] I give attention to these terms primarily as they relate to the specific female figures who are the subject of this analysis. Qur'anic readers/listeners will observe that only one female—Mary—is referred to by her first name, and all of the other females are referred to by

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but among the most well-sourced Muslim works on the topic in English is Muhammad ʻAli Qutb, *Women around the Messenger*, trans. ʻAbdur-Rafiʻ Adewale Imam (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2008).

[29] See Q. 58:1; the woman is widely identified as Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah.

[30] See Q. 60:10; she is identified in extra-Quranic literature as Umm Kulthūm bint ʿUqbah.

[31] See Q. 111:4–5; she is identified in extra-Quranic literature as Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb.

[32] See Q. 113:4.

[33] See Q. 16:92.

[34] See Q. 37:48, 38:52, and 55:56.

[35] For use of the phrase *ḥūr ʿīn*, see Q. 4:54, 52:20, and 56:22. Multiple other verses evoke beings of Paradise with other phrases and epithets; see, for example, 2:25 for a reference to pure spouses (*azwāj muṭahharah*); 37:48–49, 38:52, and 55:56 for a reference to those of restrained glances (*qāṣirāt al-ṭarf*); 55:70–72 for a reference to "good and beautiful ones" (*khayrātun ḥisān*) and "wide-eyed ones in secluded pavilions" (*ḥūrun maqṣūrātun fī al-khiyām*); 56:35–37 referring to "virgins" (*abkāran*) and "amorous peers" (*ʿuruban atrāban*); and 78:33 for a description of "adolescent-like peers" (*kawāʿiba atrāban*). See chapter 1 for detailed discussions.

[36] For key Qur'anic terms that relate specifically to female-centric themes, I include in the footnotes etymological notes and frequency of usage in the Qur'an.

titles (e.g., Queen of Sheba), by their roles in the story (e.g., women of the city), or by their familial affiliations (e.g., wife of so-and-so).[37] Throughout the work, I explore these different titles as well as how familial relations influence female identity and agency. Much has been said about particular female figures in Muslim and academic literatures; hence, my analyses here focus on highlighting novel dimensions in conversation with previous scholarship.

My research approaches the Qur'an simultaneously as aural phenomenon, self-proclaimed scripture, and a literary artifact stimulating and defining the rise of the religion of Islam in early seventh-century Arabia.[38] The Qur'an as a literary phenomenon has distinct characteristics, including abundant self-reflexivity,[39] the brevity and unconventional ordering of stories, routine references to scriptural antecedents,[40] allusions to concurrent and future events, and the prevailing presence of God qua narrator.[41] I explore these literary features as they relate

[37] On the first usage, I employ Qur'anic appellations transliterated from Arabic, but on subsequent usages I employ a literal translation into English. For example, I refer to *imraʾat al-ʿazīz* as "the wife of the viceroy" or "the viceroy's wife" in keeping with the Qur'an itself. Likewise, the spouse of Adam (*zawj Ādam)* is widely known as *Ḥawwāʾ* in Arabic or Eve in English, but I refer to her here as "the wife of Adam" or "Adam's wife"; see appendix B for a full list of Qur'anic references alongside widely used names of figures as found in extra-Qur'anic sources.

[38] For an extensive overview of Arabian society and the legacy of the Qur'an and Islam more broadly therein, see Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017). For a concise discussion of the challenges and benefits of treating the Qur'an as a literary artifact, see the chapter entitled "Toward a Literary Reading of the Qur'an," in *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide with Select Translations*, by Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 205–12.

[39] For instances of such self-referential verses, see Qur'an 29:45, 27:91–92, and 73:2. See also Daniel Madigan, *The Qurʾân's Self-Image*: *Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[40] See remarks by Edward W. Said on general literary differences between biblical texts and Qur'anic texts as well as on the "dialectic between oral and written language" in Islamicate literary cultures in "The Text as Practice and as Idea," *MLN* 88, no. 6 (1973): 1073–75.

[41] Jane McAuliffe summarizes the distinct nature and characteristics of Qur'anic prose and their corresponding implications for exegesis: "With God as the direct author of the scripture, discussions of cultural borrowing or authorial development are pre-empted. Lexical and grammatical analysis have proceeded within the assumption of the divinely-wrought perfection of the text. Matters of canonical formation and structure became theological postulates during the very first centuries of the community's growth. Moreover, within that canon itself are to be found certain self-reflective statements that must necessarily guide the exegete in the elaboration of his [or her] exegetical approach. The Qurʾān, in other words, makes reference to itself, characterizes itself in various ways, and defined (in at least a preliminary way) what might be termed the exegetical relationship that coheres between God, the Prophet and the faithful. These reflexive characterizations were of central importance in charting the

to Qur'anic depictions of female figures and femininity more broadly, and I include regular philological observations as well as further secondary literature on linguistic and structural aspects of Qur'anic prose.[42] I examine how each Qur'anic female figure is situated vis-à-vis other Qur'anic figures along the arc from the genesis of humanity, through the ancient peoples and their prophets, to the advent of the Qur'an in Arabia. I place a methodological emphasis on intra-textual readings; however, due to the predominantly non-linear style of Qur'anic discourse and other features discussed below, extra-Qur'anic sources become essential to my efforts to ascertain how different renditions of sacred history inform the larger theological and political aims of the Qur'an. I consulted early prophetic biographies as well as a variety of secondary literatures.[43] Yet, even as I trace the footsteps of female figures across the arc of sacred history, my project is not to provide a definitive rendering beyond what the Qur'an itself explicitly declares or describes. Instead, I reflect upon the art of Qur'anic storytelling with regard to female figures and upon the ways in which retelling the sacred past through a specific theological and ethically focused paradigm generates a new sacred present that is simultaneously didactic and affective.

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development of a specifically Qurʾānic hermeneutics. In commenting upon them, individual exegetes revealed the systemic perspectives of their exegetical methodologies." See "Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (New York: Routledge, 2009), 56–76, see in particular, 56.

[42] For a reflection on the study of the Qur'an in the Western academy and an analysis of recent efforts at reading the Qur'an as literature, see Travis Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 2 (2015): 329–43. Zadeh writes, "A literary reading can indeed avoid an overtly theological approach to the Quran. Nonetheless, while such interpretive engagements may not be predicated on theological commitments, they still transmit values and assumptions," 334. For my part here, this work does not engage at any length the merit or veracity of the Qur'an's claim of providential origins; rather, I abide by the precedent set by my predecessors in the academy, from Montgomery Watt to Carl Ernst, who put aside claims of divine authorship by using phrases such as "the Qur'an says . . ." or "the Qur'an contains . . ." My aim is to be accessible to audiences of various backgrounds and theological commitments within and beyond the academy.

[43] Including most prominently the writings of Ibn Isḥāq (d. ca. 150/767-8), as synthesized in the work of Ibn Hishām (d. ca. 218/833-4).

At the most basic level, narratives related to female figures are interspersed throughout the Qur'an and do not generally have an overt chronological ordering. The Qur'an is not organized as a linear retelling of sacred history; hence, a reading or recitation of the Qur'an from cover to cover does not supply a linearly reconstituted account for its reader, reciter, or listener. Furthermore, Qur'anic topography only occasionally provides indicators of setting and epoch, and even where given, details are more often than not terse in keeping with the Qur'an's overarching style.[44] I take cues from scriptural antecedents to the Qur'an and their subsequent commentary traditions as discussed in academic literatures in order to better situate Qur'anic timelines and topographies. These sources also enable me to differentiate and explore key moments where Qur'anic assertions related to any given female figure are novel and where the narratives explicitly confirm or refute details from pre-Islamic stories.

Qur'anic stories at times explicitly confirm details found in biblical and extra-biblical accounts and at other times contradict details.[45] The intertextuality of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian exegesis, storytelling, and scriptural ethics is ultimately beyond the scope of the present work. Nonetheless, the commentary traditions are thoroughly intertwined in a manner

[44] For further discussion of the Qur'anic idea of history, see Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "The Qur'an and History," in *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 15–36. See also Franz Rosenthal, "History and the Qur'an," *EQ* 2:428–42, and Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *The Qur'anic Concept of History* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1984). For a discussion of the Qur'an's concept of geography, see Angelika Neuwirth, "Geography," *EQ* 2:293–312.

[45] Summarizing the dominant Muslim exegetical perspective on the issue, Jane McAuliffe observes: "Previous revelations and scriptures do not authenticate the Qurʾān. Rather, the Qurʾān mandates how they are to be read and received, thereby providing what partial authorization or authentication it chooses to bestow. Some earlier revelations may be permitted predictive value, but even this degree of authentication is an act of retrojection, not of authorizing attribution." "Text and Textuality," 66. See also Angelika Neuwirth, "The Qurʾān's Staging, Penetrating, and Finally Eclipsing of Biblical Tradition," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (New York: Routledge, 2016), 178–206.

that is not readily disentangled,[46] and often the broad contours of shared narratives run parallel, even if important details differ.[47] This subject alone requires its own volume-length analysis, even just in relation to the shared female figures. On the whole, the shared figures—including female figures—reinforce the fact that the Qur'an is directly engaged in a dialogue with biblical and post-biblical ideas, as were the early Muslims.[48] The dialogue continues as contemporary exegetes interact with this voluminous material in their attempts to fill in, compare, dispute others' understandings of sacred truth.[49] Even though many Qur'anic females have biblical antecedents, to dismiss the Qur'anic stories as simple misappropriations from earlier scriptures ignores the unique aspects of these narratives in the Qur'an, in the formative Islamic milieu, and in the devotional relationship of Muslims to the Qur'an.

A few additional notes on the scope of the present work are also relevant here: many females who are important in Muslim sacred history or the establishment of Islam do not appear frequently—or at all—in the Qur'an. For instance, the prophet Abraham's consort (*Hājar*/Hagar)

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[46] For reflections to the effect, see also Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 339.

[47] In this context, Travis Zadeh rebukes a trend in orientalist Qur'anic Studies scholarship that seeks to depict the "derivative and fragmentary nature of the Quran," in a trend of scholarship that is nearly two centuries old and that "often in a blaze of philological erudition, seeks to highlight not only the dependency of the Quran upon Jewish and Christian sources, but also to expose the Quran's imperfect understanding of these original materials, a fault usually imputed directly to Muḥammad." See "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 338.

[48] The corpus on biblical and Qur'anic intertextuality is rich and burgeoning, and in this milieu, I have had the good fortune of being in sustained conversations with scholars of early Christianity and Judaism, as well as Christian and Jewish constructive theologians. This exposure to biblical literature and commentary has enabled me to access a range of interpretive strategies and viewpoints. In this sense, my engagement with pre-Qur'anic interpretative traditions is not dissimilar from the way many Muslim exegetes would have experienced Qur'anic storytelling, that is, in part through their encounters, whether deliberate or fortuitous, with the stories and scriptures of other Semitic monotheisms.

[49] For instance, an excellent recent academic work with a comparative scope on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim depictions of shared figures, including some attention given to female figures, is Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). My analyses here aim to inform and enrich potential subsequent scholarship, and as such, I make regular reference to such comparative works treating biblical and Qur'anic figures, even as my project as a whole remains focused on inter-textual aspects of the Qur'anic discourse itself.

is not named explicitly in any Qur'anic narrative; yet, she is of central importance to the establishment of rituals that are mentioned while visiting God's "sacred house" (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*).[50] As another example, the Prophet Muhammad's first wife, Khadījah bint Khuwaylid (d. 619 CE), made major political, financial, and charismatic contributions to the establishment of Islam in Mecca,[51] yet she is not mentioned directly in the Qur'an, but only implicitly via general verses referring to the Prophet Muhammad's family.[52] The same can be said for many figures—both male and female—who played pivotal roles in the establishment of Islam in Arabia.

The Qur'an is sparse on names of companions of the Prophet Muhammad, female and male alike; *Zayd* (Zayd b. Ḥārithah, d. 8/629)[53] is the only follower of the Prophet mentioned by name in the Qur'an. His name appears in an episode concerning the divorce of his wife, a woman who is subsequently married to the Prophet Muhammad directly by God in the same verse, making for a unique, divinely enacted union.[54] The only other figure who is contemporary to the Prophet mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an is referred to by his moniker *Abū Lahab*,[55] a man known to be

[50] See Q. 2:158 for mention of the ritual involving hastening between two hills (*al-Ṣafā* and *al-Marwah*) in a ritual reenactment of Hagar's struggles in an uncultivated valley where she was settled by Abraham, as mentioned in Q. 14:37. According to sacred history, that valley is where Abraham and Ishmael "raise the foundations of the house" (Q. 2:127). The valley becomes the site of Mecca with its ancient shrine, the Kaʿbah.

[51] For a critical discussion of biographies of Khadījah throughout Muslim intellectual history, see Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 114–54.

[52] Verses that address the Prophet Muhammad's wives, as discussed in later chapters, are held to be from the Medina period, several years after the death of Khadījah in the year 619 CE.

[53] For analysis of the figure of Zayd, see David S. Powers, *Zayd* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). I do not ultimately find the revisionist claim that Powers makes persuasive (that Zayd and his consorts are after-the-fact literary constructions modeled on biblical figures); however, the work is a foray into texts and traditions surrounding this important early Muslim figure.

[54] See Q. 33:37. As discussed in subsequent chapters, the commentary tradition identifies the woman as Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (d. 20/641), a paternal cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. See *The Study Quran*: *A New Translation and Commentary* [abbreviated as *SQ*], ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 1030–31n37.

[55] Abū Lahab is a moniker meaning "father of the flame," on account of the striking color of his hair, according to popular bibliographic sources. He is a paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad named ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. ca. 2/624).

a paternal uncle of the Prophet; Abū Lahab is rebuffed by the Qur'an for his haughtiness, and his aristocratic wife is castigated with the disparaging and ironic title "firewood carrier" (*ḥammālat al- ḥaṭab*); with it she feeds the fires of hell with the flame (*lahab*) that consumes them both.[56] The pair represent the only irretrievably corrupt husband and wife duo.[57]

Many notable female persons from among the companions of the Prophet, including, for instance, the woman remembered as the first Muslim martyr,[58] are not referenced explicitly in the Qur'an, even if a host of verses address the companions of the Prophet Muhammad in general. The present work does not address such figures, who are significant early Muslim female figures but who are not, to the best of my discernment, alluded to directly and individually within the Qur'an. I have included discussion of female figures, such as the slanderer Ḥamnah bint Jaḥsh,[59] who are remembered in early biographical reports as having a direct link to particular verses, even if the verses in question only allude to and do not explicitly mention the given figure. This methodology enables a more robust engagement with the significances of the Qur'an and its narratives in the early Muslim milieu, as I elaborate in more detail below.

I am indebted to the scholarship that has gone before, including the work of Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, *Traditions, and Interpretation*, in particular, which was the first attempt within Islamic studies to bring together discussion of many of the female figures in

[56] See Q. 111:1, see also *SQ* 1575–76. She is identified by name and genealogy in the biographical traditions by the moniker Umm Jamīl and by the name Arwā bint Ḥarb. See Mona Zaki, "The Depiction of Hell in Medieval Islamic Thought" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015), 324–25.
[57] One other morally questionable husband and wife duo are mentioned in the context of a parable (Q. 7:189–91), but they are not subject to malediction in the same way as are Abū Lahab and his wife.
[58] She is remembered in biographical literature as a woman of Ethiopian origins, Sumayyah bint Khayyāṭ (d. ca. 615). For analysis, see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14.
[59] See Q. 24:11, as discussed in chapter 4.

one volume.[60] Contemporary interest in gender constructs in the Qur'an has been propelled by the rise of feminist studies, women's studies, and gender studies in the academy over the last four decades in particular.[61] The emphasis of much recent scholarship is on the roles of Islamic family law in defining women's experiences,[62] and some recent work has explored Muslim feminist analysis of core textual sources as "Muslimah theology."[63] Several books, the most relevant of which are surveyed below, and a plethora of articles, which are included in the bibliography and referenced throughout this work, analyze particular female figures within the exegetical corpus and within devotional Muslim discourses more broadly, including in artistic renderings and in poetic imagery. Several recent publications in Qur'anic studies are noteworthy. Rowand Osman's *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna: Examining the Major Sources of Shi'i Islam* surveys primarily Shī ī exegetical material and gives substantial attention to women within the prophetic milieu who, while not prominently featured in the Qur'an itself, are

[60] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). The scope of my work includes female figures not covered in Stowasser's volume. I also deal substantively with structural aspects of the Qur'an as well as theoretical questions within Islam and gender studies that were not yet being asked at the time in which Stowasser was writing. Finally, my discussions of female figures are embedded in wider depictions of sexual difference, sexuality, and gender in the Qur'an in a manner that differs from Stowasser's rootedness in the history of exegesis more so than the Qur'an itself.

[61] For a genealogical survey with attention to the ways in which feminist political activism in the modern and contemporary period has shaped intellectual production, see Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

[62] One recent such work is Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger, eds. *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015).

[63] For analysis of the concept of "Islamic Feminism" in the work of contemporary academics, see Fatima Seedat, "When Islam and Feminism Converge," *The Muslim World* 103, no. 3 (2013): 404–20. Fatima Seedat stresses "the need to maintain a critical distance in the convergence of Islam and feminism so that each intellectual paradigm may be allowed to produce critical assessments of the other," in "On the Convergence of Islam, Feminism, and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Critical Review of Aysha Hidayatullah's *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*." *Journal of the Society for Contemporary Thought and the Islamicate World*, March 24, 2016: 1–10, p. 2. For my part, I understand the term "feminism" as miriam cooke [sic] has aptly defined it, as a "contextually determined strategic self-positioning"; see miriam cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 59. See also Seedat, "When Islam and Feminism Converge," 409.

central in the early Islamic polity.[64] Angelika Neuwirth's work, entitled *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*,[65] explores literary aspects of the Qur'an and includes some attention to women and gender. Karen Bauer's volume, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*,[66] provides a valuable window onto how contemporary Muslim religious authorities are attempting to deal with exegetical matters regarding women and gender. The work of Aisha Geissinger, including her most recent volume entitled *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority*,[67] is also focused on interpretations of sexual difference and construction of gender in early Islamic history, and I build upon her insights on depictions of the women of the Prophet Muhammad's household in particular. In addition, I am indebted to the work of Ayesha Hidayatullah, including her monograph *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, which focuses on the genealogy of gynocentric Qur'anic hermeneutics in the secular academy.[68] Hidayatullah's work gives detailed attention to the luminaries in the field of feminist engagement with the Qur'an as well as rough "edges" of the discourse, the epistemic dilemmas where feminist exegesis still falls short of its central collective aims.[69] Asma Lamrabet, in her volume entitled *Women in the Qur'an: An Emancipatory Reading*,[70] provides provocative psychoanalytic analysis of select female figures

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[64] Osman Rowand, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna: Examining the Major Sources of Shi'i Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[65] Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[66] Karen Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[67] Aisha Geissinger, *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
[68] Ayesha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[69] For a succinct discussion of how feminist exegesis compares and contrasts with other modern trends in Qur'anic hermeneutics, including Islamist, scientist, traditionalist, and revisionist, see Erik Ohlander, "Modern Qur'anic Hermeneutics," *Religion Compass* 3, no. 4 (2009): 620–36.
[70] Asma Lamrabet, *Women in the Qur'an: An Emancipatory Reading*, trans. Myriam François-Cerrah (New York: Kube Publishing, 2016).

in the Qur'an for an intended audience of devotional readers. Within Qur'anic studies in the English-speaking academy, the subfield of women's and gender studies was propelled by luminaries including Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas.[71] The aforementioned works, alongside contributions to the study of gender in Islamic thought by the likes of Sachiko Murata, Kecia Ali, Saʿdiyya Shaikh, Marion Holmes Katz, Ayesha S. Chaudhry, and Fatima Seedat, constitute the most influential recent contributions on themes related to gender in Qur'anic studies and Islamic intellectual thought more broadly in Euro-American settings.[72] My analysis is invested in these overarching conversations about the construction of gender in the Qur'an and the merits of different exegetical strategies.

The field of Qur'anic literary criticism in the Euro-American academy includes studies of structure and coherence by such authors as Irfan Shahid, Mustansir Mir, Carl Ernst, Neal Robinson, Issa Boullata, Salwa El-Awa, Michel Cuypers, and Raymond Farrin, among others. Pioneering studies of the Qur'an's oral/aural dimensions have been conducted by William Graham, Michael Sells, and most recently Lauren E. Osborne. Notable studies of the Qur'an's compilation history include works by Theodore Nöldeke, Harold Motzki, Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, Hossein Modarressi, and Mahmoud Ayoub. Behnam Sadeghi has contributed immensely to the study of early Qur'anic codices.[73] Jane McAuliffe has explored provocatively classical modes of Qur'anic commentary and twentieth-century critical discourses on the Qur'an,

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[71] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

[72] For analysis of the exegetical works produced to date by North American female scholars, see Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More Than a Prayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 56–76.

[73] For arguably the most novel and provocative work on the dating of early Islamic sources, see Behnam Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qurʾān: A Stylometric Research Program," *Arabica* 58 (2011): 210–99.

including in her curation of the multivolume *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*.[74] Excellent recent resources also include Laleh Bakhtiar's *The Sublime Quran* series,[75] as well as *The Study Quran*, a volume whose editorial board includes Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E. B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom. Despite these important contributions, no book-length literary study of the Qur'an explores the entire cast of Qur'anic female figures with substantial attention to Qur'anic structure and coherence, Qur'anic prosody, and potential affective dimensions of the aural Qur'an.

With a work as studied as the Qur'an, attempting to unearth novel insights is perhaps a tall order, but as I demonstrate here, new framings and new vantage points can augment previous scholarship and advance contemporary discourse on femaleness, womanhood, girlhood, and femininity in the Qur'an in potentially fresh, incisive, and edifying ways. In particular, I emphasize here an intra-textual approach to Qur'anic exegesis, therein pointing out instances of structural and thematic correspondences within and across narratives involving female figures. I know of no other work that simultaneously provides a topical analysis of the complete cast of female figures and also gives attention to structural and thematic interconnectivity on topics related to womanhood, girlhood, and gender more broadly. Where certain themes are discussed thoroughly in previous works, I include references in the notes rather than duplicate scholarship.

What does the presentation of females—and their interactions with the men and boys in their midst—suggest about Qur'anic depictions of biological and socially constructed aspects of

[74] *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān* [abbreviated as *EQ*], 6 vols., ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006).
[75] Including Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007); *Concordance of the Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2011) [abbreviated henceforth as *CSQ*]; and *Chronological Quran as Revealed to Prophet Muhammad* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2015).

femininity? Overall, what virtues, vices, and personality traits do female figures have in the Qur'an? What is the nature of their worldly agency, faith, and knowledge? To answer these queries in subsequent chapters, I foreground information provided directly about each female or female group by the Qur'an itself before supplementing the Qur'anic discourse with extra-Qur'anic sources that proffer further context and interpretive possibilities. It is my hope that the novel etymological and conceptual analysis here will spark healthy debate and facilitate subsequent academic study of sex and gender in the Qur'an.

Chapter 1, entitled "Female Sexuality in Qur'anic Stories," explores Qur'anic terms for sexed beings and probes the ways in which human beings of different genders are differentiated from one another in biological and social contexts, according to Qur'anic characterizations. I then map these concepts onto Qur'anic narratives that involve female figures in order to demonstrate how depictions of female sexual desire and female sexual behavior reinforce ethical and legal principles related to sex—as a feature of embodiment and as the act of intercourse. Through close philological inquiry, I explore notions such as virginity and female beauty. Reading intra-textually from a gynocentric perspective, I also give attention to sex in and beyond the confines of marriage, including the aesthetic and erotic appeal of sexualized beings in Paradise. On this latter subject, I point out that the Qur'an never uses the terms "woman" or "maiden" to describe beings in paradise, despite the fact that leading English Qur'an translations interpolate such terms.

Chapter 2, entitled "Procreation, Parenting, and Female Kin," looks at Qur'anic descriptions of childbearing, motherhood, daughters, sisters, and kinship generally. This chapter allows me to approach "male-female relationships within the broader context of human relationships of

dependency,"[76] therein building upon the previous discussion of sexual difference and gendered bodies. Nearly all of the female figures mentioned in the Qur'an appear in conjunction with a family member—a spouse, parent, sibling, or child, and often a combination of such relations. In fact, the Qur'an narrates stories that epitomize nearly all of the different constellations of parent-child relationships, including different foster relationships. Looking in detail at familial relationships, I provide a gynocentric lens on Qur'anic family relations that is lacking in academic literature to date. I demonstrate that female figures are not just auxiliaries or helpmates in the domestic and reproductive spheres; some bear progeny, but often female figures provide, using their wit and stratagems, vital lifelines to male figures in their care. From daring rescues, to securing offers of employment, the Qur'an depicts several female figures leveraging their kinship networks to the benefit of vulnerable male figures in distress. In short, this chapter looks at Qur'anic descriptions of daughters, sisters, wives, and extended kin, highlighting relationships of dependency, of affection, of familial discord, and of heroinism. The chapter looks comparatively, where relevant, at depictions of male figures in order to better situate females, femininity, women, and girls in this Qur'anic familial context.

Chapter 3, entitled "Feminine Voices," focuses on dialogic exchanges involving female figures as well as divine and angelic speech directed toward females. When, where, how, and to whom does the Qur'an depict females speaking? What information does their speech imply about their character, values, and outlooks? The chapter focuses on female speech itself and dialogic exchanges involving female figures, including the multiple verses containing divine and angelic speech directed toward female figures. I also discuss potential affective responses

[76] See Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, 191. See also Saʿdiyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ʿArabī, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 131.

engendered for a Qur'anic listener, reader, or reciter by moments of heightened female emotion, such as the utterance in Q. 19:25, as prompted by Mary's birth pangs, "Would that I had died before this and were a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!"[77] In conversation with works on Qur'anic affects, I explore how this impassioned speech arguably enables momentary access to something of the primal and self-effacing nature of childbirth, therein inviting empathy toward females who experience labor. Taking into consideration such vignettes, the chapter highlights patterns of female speech throughout the *muṣḥaf*, the Qur'an in its final comprised form. Every instance of Qur'anic female speech is analyzed in this chapter, including the speech of the Queen of Sheba, the Qur'an's most loquacious female. The chapter takes its subtitle from the utterance of an unnamed wife of the Prophet Muhammad who gets caught divulging a secret and seeks to find out who betrayed her trust, only to find out that it was God, the ultimate dispeller of affairs. Previous works have discussed utterances of individual female figures, but no prior scholarship has examined patterns of Qur'anic female speech in a comprehensive manner against the backdrop of Qur'anic orality.

Chapter 4, entitled "Qur'anic Narratives in the Emerging Muslim Milieu," explores how stories of specific female figures relate to events within the nascent Muslim polity—in its emerging theological discourses, in its ritual practices, and in its many encounters with other religiously identified communities. For instance, in early biographical sources, early Muslim refugees to Abyssinia are reported to have recited Qur'anic verses on Mary in an attempt to win favor, and ultimately refuge, with the ruling Christian monarch. Expanding upon insights made by previous scholars, I show how shared figures like Mary underscore the highly dialogic nature of the Qur'an with preceding Semitic interpretive traditions. I argue that Mary, and the host of

[77] See Q. 19:25.

other previously known female figures, serve simultaneously as points of relationship but also of differentiation for the nascent Muslim polity in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. The chapter also probes narratives in which the Prophet Muhammad's female contemporaries are involved in the establishment of new communal moral and legal precedents, such as in the case of a slander against a righteous wife, as highlighted in this chapter's subtitle. This entails probing hadith and similar such accounts that constitute and inform prophetic biography (*sīrah*), as well as other early biographical literatures that discuss the interplay between Qur'anic narratives and the early Muslim communal experience.[78] On a dozen or more occasions, the direct "cause" (*sabab*) of particular Qur'anic verses is an action, request, or specific need of a female figure. Several of these "occasions of revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) have axiomatic bearing on subsequent law and legal discourse.[79]

[78] Hadith, the vast corpus comprised of the purported sayings, teachings, and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, began predominantly as oral traditions that were later recorded in compendia. A full survey of this literature as it relates to the female figures is well beyond my scope here, but I do turn to hadith when necessary to explain or provide helpful details about otherwise elusive Qur'anic verses. For succinct commentary on the nuanced relationship between the hadith sayings that relate information about the Qur'an and the Qur'an itself, see G.H.A. Juynboll, "Hadith and the Qur'an," *EQ* 2:376–97. For a female-centric discussion of the legacy of hadith interpretation on a range of issues of key importance to women, see Nimat Hafez Barazangi, *Women's Identity and Rethinking the Hadith* (New York: Routledge, 2015). For a discussion of the history of hadith scholarship, see also Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), especially chapter 2. For discussion of prophetic bibliography as a contested source of Islamic knowledge, see Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld, 2014), especially 141–147 on the Prophet Muhammad's mariages. See also Maher Jarrar, "Sira," in *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ed. Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Greenwood, 2014), 2:568–82.

[79] *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (lit. the reasons, causes, or circumstances of descent) refers to the circumstances surrounding particular verses. For a synopsis of the roles of these "reasons of revelation," see Andrew Rippin, "The Function of 'Asbāb al-Nuzūl' in Qur'anic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51, no. 1 (1998): 1–20. For a discussion of Qur'an and hadith as a basis of law, see Amir Toft, Mariam Sheibani, and Ahmed El Shamsy, "The Classical Period: Scripture, Origins, and Early Development," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law*, ed. Anver M. Emon and Rumee Ahmed, Oxford Handbooks Online, April 2017. See specifically 5–7 for a synopsis of scholarly methods for treating questions of hadith authenticity.

In places, female individuals are extolled, and in other places specific females are rebuked for their moral comportment. In their breaches, however slight, and in their virtues and all their magnanimity, I demonstrate how the wives of the Prophet Muhammad and a handful of his other early women companions and supporters, alongside female figures depicted afresh from their biblical roots, serve as didactic reminders for how to navigate the everyday and extraordinary struggles experienced by female believers and human beings generally. In short, this chapter includes discussions of narratives in which the Prophet's female contemporaries are involved in the establishment of new communal moral and legal precedents. This heuristic enables me to demonstrate how female personalities serve as exemplars of vice and virtue against the backdrop of early Muslim communal formation.[80]

Finally, chapter 5, entitled "Female Agency and Destiny," summarizes my overarching findings and suggests further avenues for investigation. I highlight the heterogeneity of female figures in the Qur'an, arguing that no single archetypal female figure is to be found. Rather, the Qur'an's female figures fall on a spectrum between pious and impious, insightful and ignorant, commanding and timid, old and young, famous and obscure, married and single, ruling and ruled over, fertile and childless, and so forth. I argue that the Qur'an regularly depicts female character, wit, and spiritual excellence; it is often engaged with affairs of direct importance for

[80] A similar methodology is proposed by Carl Ernst, who reads the Qur'an through a literary and historical lens by "shifting the Qurʾan out of the framework of theological authority, leaving aside for the moment the question of its status as a divine communication," and instead placing the emphasis on its initial audience. On the merits of this approach, Ernst writes: "The chronological approach to understanding the unfolding of the Qurʾan offers instead an opportunity to grasp the way that it was received by its first listeners, as a fresh oral composition. In this way, modern readers can see how the Qurʾan builds up a vocabulary and repertoire of themes and styles in dialogical communication with its audience. As a result, it becomes possible to grasp the development of the Qurʾan over time, the literary structure and organization of the sura as a literary unit, and the intertextual approach of the Qurʾan in its engagement with biblical and other early sources, with cautious use of external historical sources to provide a context for the explanation of particular sections of the Qur'an." See *How to Read the Qurʾan*, 205–6.

females in a highly female-centric manner, even while depicting certain female figures who exercise their agency only to their own detriment.

In summary, chapter 1 takes up questions of sexual difference and sexuality; chapter 2, female social and biological roles within kinship structures; chapter 3, female speech and female interlocutors; chapter 4, female figures in the unfolding Qur'anic milieu, particularly with regard to questions of polity and law; and chapter 5 delineates my interventions in the existing scholarship and my directions for further inquiry. Several appendices are also included to enable direct access to data compiled from primary sources. One appendix provides a dramatis personæ of the Qur'anic female cast, including entries for eighteen females or groups of females. Another appendix provides listings and verse locations of all terms that refer to female figures in the context of their family relations including over fifty relevant terms, organized along the arc of sacred history from the female progenitor to the women of the Prophet Muhammad's family and his other female contemporaries who are directly mentioned in the Qur'an. A third appendix provides data on the location, content, context, and quantity of Qur'anic female speech, as well as divine and angelic speech directed toward female figures. A fourth appendix includes listings of references to female figures and female family members according to the approximate chronological order of the advent of new Qur'anic verses, providing a quick guide to the development of the female cast across the duration of the revelatory period from the Meccan to the Medinan context. A final appendix provides a listing of names of female family members and close female relations of the Prophet Muhammad who are alluded to within the Qur'an and whose stories are preserved in hadith collections and early biographical works.[81]

[81] These female figures are the subject of my current research and are not treated here beyond the Qur'anic allusions to the female family members of the Prophet Muhammad.

Beyond the novelty of its topical treatment and scope, how can this particular exegetical project make a distinct hermeneutic contribution? It is to this question—and the potentially uneasy ways that it sits in relation to the Euro-American academic discourses on Islam—that I now turn.

Qur'anic Studies in the Madrasa and in the Academy: An Impossible Dialogue?

In her recent monograph, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, Aysha Hidayatullah argues that sexual difference, as depicted in the Qur'an, is "based not on fixed binaries but rather on constructive, interdependent relationality" wherein "difference does not derive from one's self-generated 'uniqueness' but rather from a dynamic and relative contrast with the other."[82] Examining the writing of other Muslim feminist authors in the academy, including Saʿdiyya Shaikh, Kecia Ali, Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud, Raja Rhouni, and others, Hidayatullah argues against reifying "essential, fixed, self-same differences between men and women" while nevertheless recognizing the need to acknowledge "material, embodied differences" between the two.[83] Hidayatullah is writing in opposition to the historically predominant trend of malestream scholarship,[84] wherein

[82] Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, 189. This dynamic is discussed at length by Sachiko Murata in *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). For comparison between different scholars writing in the field of gender studies, see Fatima Seedat, "On Spiritual Subjects: Negotiations in Muslim Female Spirituality," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 22, no. 1 (2006): 21–37.

[83] Ibid., 189–90.

[84] The term "malestream" originates with feminist discourses of the 1970s as a play on the word "mainstream" and is used to call attention to how the producers of dominant societal discourses are largely men. This is not a generalization about the quality or merits of previous scholarship; I use the term malestream here to observe that nearly every single preeminent exegete before the modern period has been male. Etin Anwar summarizes how androcentrism has broadly configured—and in many instances constrained—women's intellectual activities: "Men, not women, have been the ones to engender knowledge, history, religion, civilization, and other institutions necessary for the survival of the society. Women are constantly depicted as lacking the reason needed to generate their own knowledge, culture, religious interpretations, and institution[s]." Etin Anwar, *Gender and Self in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 55. As Shuruq Naguib observes in her survey of one of the few influential women

the male human being is often depicted as the normative human prototype with the female being a necessary but ultimately less interesting permutation from the normative masculine ideal.[85] Deconstructing and critiquing gender biases in the production and transmission of knowledge is one salient objective of a growing body of scholarly work within Islamic studies that draws upon the richness of the Muslim intellectual tradition while simultaneously noting—and where plausible rectifying—gaps of female representation within fields of Islamic knowledge,[86] not to mention occasionally reinterpreting or correcting misogynistic or otherwise blatantly derogatory assertions therein.[87]

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exegetes, "women's exegetical agency was on the whole constrained, particularly in its written articulation." See Naguib, "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's Approach to *tafsīr*: An Egyptian Exegete's Journey from Hermeneutics to Humanity," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2015): 45–84, p. 60.

[85] For a concise account of the social contexts in which malestream orthodoxy took shape from the ninth to the nineteenth century, see Ahmed El Shamsy, "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter, 97–116 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Regarding female scholarship and the social factors that led to women's "conspicuous absence," El Shamsy observes, and I quote at length: "Given that the process of transmitting knowledge was based on an intimate relationship between student and teacher, the socially prescribed distance between the sexes severely curtailed women's opportunities to become apprentices to famous scholars. In effect, such apprenticeships were possible only in the rare instances when the senior scholar was female or the student's close relative. This is not to deny that women attended the public lectures of jurists, traditionists [hadith transmitters], theologians, Sufis and other scholars. However, women were rarely among the closest or most advanced students of the teacher. In general, although there are countless examples of highly educated women in the medieval Islamic world, they are conspicuously absent in the production of scholarly literature and do not feature in the top echelons of any field of study. The only real exception to this trend is represented by the study of prophetic traditions," 103. For thorough analysis of the roles and contributions of women scholars particularly in the domain of hadith transmission from the earliest Muslim generations through the 1500s, see Muḥammad Akram Nadwī, *Al-Muḥaddithāt: The Women Scholars in Islam*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2013). For an analysis of the ninth century through the modern period, see Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Bibliographical Collections, from Ibn Saʿd to Who's Who* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

[86] As Fatima Seedat summarizes, "the recognition of women scholars of *tafsir* [Qur'anic exegesis] is more than a simple historical correction to their absence but a necessary realignment of the trajectory between the Creator, the text, and the addressee that identifies women as learned scholars and readers of the text." See Seedat, "On the Convergence of Islam, Feminism, and Qur'anic Interpretation," 6. For an overview of some of the most contentious theological issues and the ways in which Muslim feminist thinkers have approached them, see Ndeye Adújar, "Feminist Readings of the Qur'an: Social, Political, and Religious Implications," in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, ed. Elif Mendeni, Ednan Aslan, and Marcia Hermansen (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2013), 59–80.

[87] I will not reproduce deprecating and belittling assertions here; suffice it to say that misogynistic sentiments prevail partly as a result of—one could speculate—women's curtailed authorship and output for much of Islamic intellectual

The contemporary period represents the first time in history that exegetical works on the Qur'an are readily and widely available from the perspectives of female Muslim authors themselves.[88] This is not to undermine the influence of the female scholars who have contributed to Islamic intellectualism from the nascent days of the tradition;[89] however, the arrival of more

history, a history whose residues still endure. Aspects of this legacy are discussed at length by Ayesha S. Chaudhry in *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law and the Muslim Discourse on Gender*, Oxford Islamic Legal Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), among other works.

[88] Widely regarded as a *mufassira* (female exegete), ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 1998, who is known by her pen name Bint al-Shāṭiʾ) is characterized by Arab women's historian Ruth Roded as "an ambitious woman carefully invading a traditionally male domain," 57; see Ruth Roded, "Bint al-Shati's Wives of the Prophet: Feminist or Feminine?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006): 51–66. On the sexism ʿAbd al-Raḥmān strove to overcome and the way in which she struck a balance between a continuity with the past and reevaluation of the legacy of interpretations, see Shuruq Naguib, "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's Approach to *tafsīr*," 55–61. For the North American context, Amina Wadud's topical exegesis, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, first published in 1992 in Kuala Lumpur), broke substantial ground and was soon after augmented by the exegetical work of Asma Barlas in *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002). Laleh Bakhtiar is one of the first women worldwide to produce a critical translation of the Qur'an (*The Sublime Quran*, [Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007]), and she has gone on to develop several other resources for Qur'an study, including a thorough concordance and a volume organized in the revelatory order of the Qur'an, resources that have assisted me in this work. In addition, Maria Massi Dakake has made significant contributions to the translation and commentary in *The Study Quran* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015). Many other scholars have made substantial issue-specific exegetical contributions. For analysis of such contemporary American Muslim women's exegetical efforts and their wider political and social context, see Hammer, *American Muslim Women*, 56–76.

[89] For a discussion of one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, as a prominent early exegete, see Aisha Gessinger, "The Exegetical Traditions of ʿAʾisha: Notes on their Impact and Significance," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004), 1–20. Asma Sayeed traces the "fluctuating fortunes" of Sunni female religious scholars and finds that "women's initial participation—a largely ad hoc, unregulated enterprise—was sharply curtailed by the professionalization of this field in the early second/eighth century, only to be resuscitated in the mid-fourth/tenth century." She notes that this later revival "drew strength from precedents of the female Companions [of Muhammad] whose contributions as transmitters of reports were recalled in modeling feminine piety and religious learning." See *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2–3. Here Sayeed draws an important distinction in that the later women authorities were "honored primarily as faithful reproducers," while by contrast the initial generation of female scholars were themselves contributing to new Islamic knowledge and contributing generatively on matters of law, ritual, and creed. See ibid., 5. For an analysis of women's epistemic authority in comparison to that of men, see Ahmed Ragab, "Epistemic Authority of Women in the Medieval Middle East," *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 8, no. 2 (2010): 181–216. For reflections on middle class and elite women's religious education and teaching prospects in the medieval through colonial periods in the Arabic-speaking Mediterranean, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: The Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 113–14. Ahmed observes that "apparently women attended men's lectures, and men studied with women, but histories of education in the Islamic world make no mention of women's attending any of the

"believing women" (*muʾmināt*) on the scene, to use a Qur'anic expression, is a result of social, political, and even technological forces that have enabled and accelerated a changing intelligentsia wherein female Muslim scholars have more abundant access to the sources of credibility and resources that enable the widespread dissemination of their writings and viewpoints on a global scale.[90]

This shift has been enabled in part by deliberate—albeit often insufficient and curtailed—attention to gender, racial diversity, identity, and representation within the academy.[91] Paradoxically, however, secular academic discourses have also imposed constraints on these very same Muslim female scholars with respect to how they orient their scholarship and how they perform their femininity, embody their womanhood, and express their "Muslimness" in the context of a historically male-dominated and often blatantly Eurocentric and secular academic milieu. Ayesha Chaudhry reflects on the field of Islamic studies and the compound marginalization of Muslims who are racialized as people of color and who are subjected to the

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numerous *madrasas* (schools) or public institutions of learning," 114. As Sayeed observes, the "collective gatekeepers of tradition embraced and sanctioned" the transmissions of Sunni female scholars and, in turn, female scholars promoted and reinforced the orthodoxy. Those who "articulated its [orthodoxy's] social vision *upheld* the tradition of female transmission of religious knowledge, as originally instituted by the Companion generation, and *adjusted* the practice in accordance with their needs" in later eras, 6–8 [emphasis original].

[90] These changes are eloquently summarized by Chaudhry: "The printing press, increased literacy, and the internet have made it possible for many more people of different races, ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic classes and political leanings to access and produce knowledge, knowledge that can be disseminated and consumed widely. . . . Increased literacy has allowed Muslims once on the margins of Islamic scholarship, about whose lives and fate Islamic studies pondered from a distance, to now speak for themselves." See Ayesha S. Chaudhry, "Islamic Legal Studies: A Critical Historiography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law*, ed. Anver M. Emon and Rumee Ahmed (Oxford Handbooks Online, Oxford University Press, 2017), 20. For analysis of the transnational horizons and limits of women's religious authority and activism in Western and majority Muslim post-colonial societies, see Meena Sharify-Funk, *Encountering the Transnational: Women, Islam and the Politics of Interpretation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

[91] See Kecia Ali, "Muslim Scholars, Islamic Studies, and the Gendered Academy," Annual al-Faruqi Memorial Lecture at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, November 19, 2017, accessed December 10, 2017, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ai5XF-bP3KE.

prevailing white supremacist tropes in the Euro-American academy and the broader societal dispositions that have shaped and epitomized it. Chaudhry elaborates how this discourse marginalizes, in compound fashion, the voices and interests of contemporary Muslim women who are subjected not only to the legacies of colonizing discourses but to the structures that normalize sexism as well.[92]

Given the sexism and Eurocentrism that Chaudhry and others so poignantly describe, female-centric and decolonizing approaches to the Qur'an are much-needed heuristics, but there are further considerations. Owing in part to the original colonial bent of Qur'anic Studies as a subset of Oriental Studies in the Euro-American academy, the field can involve a veritable methodological mélange, and scholarship ranges in ideological orientation between those who deploy a research agenda aimed at affirming the Qur'an's unicity and sacred origins and scholars whose driving objective is to discredit religious claims of Qur'anic originality or conceptual coherence.[93] Given these widely diverging modalities for studying and engaging the Qur'an—modalities that are grounded in vastly different starting points with respect to Qur'anic origins and worth[94]—I prefer to be clear about how my own work is embedded within the "apparatus"

[92] Chaudhry writes: "Colonialist Islamic studies, which is to say, white supremacist Islam[ic] Studies, designates above all else, pre-colonial, medieval male Muslim voices, as captured in pre-colonial texts as the most important, and authentic expression of Islam and Muslims eternally. So, a small, male, Muslim elite comes to speak for Muslims universally and eternally. Thus, a living religion—an evolving and vibrant religion—is treated like a dead religion, captured only in medieval texts." Chaudhry, "Islamic Legal Studies," 5–6. Chaudhry poigninetly articulates the ways in which Muslim women legal scholars, in particular, are disadvantaged both within textual traditions and by the prevailing gendered norms promulgated by certain contemporary religious scholars and academics.

[93] Joseph Lumbard outlines this dynamic in detail in his remarks entitled "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies," presented at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London on November, 11, 2016. See also Angelika Neuwirth, "Orientalism in Oriental Studies? Qur'anic Studies as a Case in Point," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2011): 115–27 and Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 334–35 and 339.

[94] For instance, speaking in 1982, Andrew Rippin outlines his reservations for studying the Qur'an as literature, including the peril of the "committed critic." See Andrew Rippin, "The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects," *British Society of Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (1983): 38–47.

(the Foucauldian *dispositif*) of a secularized episteme that is inherently skeptical of—or at worst at times openly hostile to—historically Muslim modes of engaging the Qur'an.[95]

On many occasions over the course of my scholarship, I have had to ask myself: To what extent can I be substantively engaging with explicitly devotional writings on existential topics while simultaneously performing secularized objectivity as demanded by disciplinary requirements? Am I at liberty to intervene in the field in such a way that devotional writings are not so much the *object* of study but where their concerns also become my subject? Who will police the boundaries and for what ends?[96] To what extent must this study, situated as it inevitably is within the apparatus of the secularized episteme, be subject to the presumptions of that discourse, a discourse that is—by virtue of its insistence on secularity—antithetical to the underlying premises of the Qur'an?[97] I have asked myself on numerous occasions: Within this

[95] As a corrective to epistemic biases found within Euro-American discourses in Qur'anic Studies, Joseph Lumbard argues for a "transmodern" approach that enables "discourse across methodological and epistemological divides" in order to "decolonize" the field of Qur'anic Studies. Lumbard argues for the flourishing of new "ecologies of knowledge," as articulated by De Sousa Santos, that validate multiple "loci of enunciation" as theorized by Walter Mignolo, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies," 10. See also Miranda Fricker's notion of hermeneutical marginalization in *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153–55.

[96] Similarly, Angela Neuwirth observes, "those very 'inspectors' of scholarly borderlines who still loom large in our approaches have imposed their rules—or defined their objectives—not without ideological bias, but, as we shall see, with a sizable interest in their own identity politics." Angelika Neuwirth, "Orientalism in Oriental Studies?" 115.

[97] The roots of Islamic studies in the Western academy can be described as part of a colonialist, white supremacist project wherein "white scholars can presume to master and speak authoritatively" about their Muslim subjects "based on 'arms length,' 'objective' study, treating their distance as an asset rather than as a weakness and shortcoming." Chaudhry, "Islamic Legal Studies," 5. Reflecting on the "problems that the category of literature itself poses," Travis Zadeh reflects that "the constitution of literature as a secular domain, bearing authority and authenticity divine neither in its origin or scope, forms part of a particular process within the history of Western secularism that could occasion fuller reflection as we consider the political implications of reading the scriptures of others." Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 334. Toward this end, Jane McAuliffe asks: "Can we construct cultural bridges between medieval commentaries and contemporary theories that approach the Qurʾān and its exegetical elaboration as a literary artifact?" (57). She goes on to explore the "worlds behind and in front of the text" (66) and the limits imposed by the "interpretive community," language popularized by Stanley Fish (67). She also explores the dynamics of repetition and "textual receptivity" on the part of the listener/reader (68) and the culturally and historically tempered "horizons of expectation" as theorized by Hanz Robert Jauss (69). See "Text and Textuality," 57–69.

apparatus, what may I contribute to a devotional episteme while remaining endorsable by the gatekeepers of secularized knowledge, or otherwise armchair scholarship? In many ways, this study is as much an exploration of the state of the field and its limits as it is an exploration of the female figures in the Qur'an. The two lines of questioning are perhaps related; both involve the examination of historically dominant frames of reference in intellectual climates that will likely not be entirely hospitable to the reappraisal.[98]

The Qur'an is widely esteemed as a scripture; it is a source of moral and ethical guidance for upwards of a billion and a half people in the contemporary world who esteem it as the unadulterated Word of God. As such, the Qur'an commands an influential platform for impacting communal values and propagating particular ethics, and exegesis of the Qur'an, especially with regard to themes as primal and contentious as sexuality and gender, offers tremendous possibilities to sway opinions, to impact subcultures, and to inspire. Given this social currency, scholarship on the Qur'an can hardly be devoid of moral implications. Yet, established standards in the academy often value "objective distance" and moral neutrality on the part of authors as an indicator of the quality of scholarship.[99] This dynamic undermines the fact that Qur'an interpreters—even those based in the secularized academy—often *do* have personal stakes in the results of their interpretations; this is all the more germane for scholars who are situated within gender studies and thus, in many ways, indebted to forebearers who so eloquently

[98] Ayesha Chaudhry outlines these two dominant forces in Islamic studies as "White Supremacist Islamic Studies" and "Patriarchal Islamic Legal Studies," but the third, and preferred way, she argues, is an intersectional approach, an orientation that "asks questions about the political nature of Islam," that "names and challenges existing white supremacist and patriarchal power structures," and that "use[s] subjectivities as a way to make scholarship accountable." Chaudhry, "Islamic Legal Studies," 6.

[99] For a critique of the necessity of suspending moral judgment in Islamic studies, see Chaudhry, "Islamic Legal Studies," 10–11.

articulated the moral urgency of their theoretical interventions.[100] To feign detached distance from the subject matter is antithetical to my project's original impetus: if I were not invested in the outcomes and implications of the study—beyond mere curiosity or the quest for highbrow prestige—what motivation would remain? While it may not be front and center in subsequent chapters, I am fully and unabashedly invested in Qur'anic interpretation well beyond its scholarly dimensions: this is to say, the quest for knowledge is not simply a matter of armchair intellectual curiosity or thinly veiled self-aggrandizement, but is driven by a sense that the stakes are high, that living human beings orient themselves, their actions, and their understandings of their world—and in some ways their most intimate selves—vis-à-vis the subject of my study. Has male bias in some way curtailed understandings of the Qur'an and the extant tradition of exegesis? Is the Qur'an androcentric or perhaps even gynocentric in any noteworthy dimensions? These inquiries are in no way trivial—not for me, and not for others who may venture to engage with the work.[101] In the larger arena encompassing both academic and confessional modalities of Qur'anic interpretation, and in the often ideologically driven field of Qur'anic studies, where factions of scholars from different persuasions have disparate and often rival stakes, what can this study hope to contribute methodologically and conceptually to the intellectual fracas and fray? Beyond the secularized episteme with its morally ambivalent commitments within which I am—possibly precariously—located, what promise or further conceptual constraints and methodological limits does this project have?

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[100] I am indebted to the work of bell hooks [sic] in particular for articulating so poignantly the necessity of feminist theory to "speak with diverse audiences" in and beyond the academy. See bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4, no. 1 (1991): 1–12, 10.

[101] This dynamic is elaborated by Kecia Ali in remarks entitled, "Muslim Scholars, Islamic Studies, and the Gendered Academy," in which she discusses the intersections between female and Muslim identity in Islamic studies and in the academy more broadly.

In her aforementioned analysis of contemporary feminist exegetical engagement with the Qur'an, Ayesha Hidayatullah identifies several shared aims of the rather new academic genre of feminist exegetical writing, among them "advocating the full personhood and moral agency of Muslim women within the parameters of the Qur'an."[102] But as many Muslims and those sympathetic to Islam have long argued, the Qur'an *itself* can be seen as advocating the full personhood and moral agency of women. Hence, my contribution to this discourse lies primarily in the re-centering of this female subject and in weighing in on open questions within the subfield of gender studies on the Qur'an. For instance, is Qur'anic discourse indeed androcentric, or is it merely the cumulative history of its interpretation that bears this blatantly androcentric tinge?[103] If searching for a Qur'anic endorsement of utter male-female parity is the dead-end pursuit that many of us believe it to be,[104] how can gynocentric scholarship nonetheless play a role in confirming the "full personhood and moral agency of women"?[105] In many ways, these

[102] Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, 4.

[103] For analysis of the intersections of Islamic ontology, anthropology, and cosmology in this regard, see Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 7–9.

[104] As Raja Rhouni writes, "Islamic feminist theory based on the postulate of the normativity of gender equality in the Qur'an has reached a theoretical dead end." Raja Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 251, as quoted in Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, viii. In her path-setting work, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, Kecia Ali warns against a pastiche approach in attempting to prove that the Qur'an is egalitarian with respect to men and women: "Progressive approaches to the Qur'anic text cannot be limited to selective presentation of egalitarian verses in isolation from their broader scriptural context. Such an approach is both fundamentally dishonest and ultimately futile; arguments about male-female equality built on the systematic avoidance of inconvenient verses will flounder at the first confrontation with something that endorses the hierarchical and gender differentiated regulations for males and females that so many reformers would like to wish away." See Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2016), 196.

[105] Questions of women's religious belonging and authority are recently being approached under the rubric of "Muslimah Theology." For one definition, "*Muslimah* theology is a branch of theological studies that is conversant with other confessional and/or regionally situated feminist discourses and that offers an intellectual platform to advance female-centric contemplations of piety, female-centric modes of leadership, and female-centric epistemological authority, all as inspired by engagement with Islamicate heritages. This gynocentrism does not represent the social ideal of female superiority at the exclusion and expense of male engagement; gynocentrism aims to create a discourse wherein the contributions and perspectives of women in the sphere of religion are valued and actively solicited, not merely within the sphere of exclusively "women's issues," but across a spectrum of

existential questions inform my markedly gynocentric scholarship and its discursive context in the academy.

This "gynocentric scholarship" to which I refer is a body of intellectual work wherein women are the conscientious producers of and primary audience for knowledge that centers the female human being, in part as a way to transcend the societal structures that have enabled their domination and exclusion. I prefer "gynocentric" to the adjective "feminist" here because of the long history of political and intellectual disputation over what constitutes "feminism," and who can be rightfully regarded as a "feminist." I recognize the ways in which western feminist rhetoric and advocacy, in particular, has historically been damaging in a number of ways to the well-being of colonized people and migrants in particular.[106] While I certainly do care about the well-being of women writ large, the notion of "gynocentric scholarship" allows me to describe the *focus* of the study without necessarily ascribing to it a menagerie of political motives that could otherwise cloud the reception of the scholarship itself.[107]

From a theoretical perspective, I describe my gynocentrism under the rubric of standpoint theory, which is a theoretical framework that places value on experience, embodiment, and positionality—particularly in relation to loci of power—in situating any exercise of knowledge production. Consider—as standpoint theory contends—that the production of knowledge cannot be disassociated from human experience; knowledge is a priori situated in epistemic and social contexts that bear intrinsic influence. Inspired by Marxian epistemology, Nancy Hartsock

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theological, judicial, and social issues." See Celene Ibrahim-Lizzio, "'The Garment of Piety is Best': Islamic Legal and Exegetical Works on Bodily Covering," *Claremont Journal of Religion* 4, no. 1 (2015): 19–54, p. 21.

[106] On this point see the work of Lila Abu Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), and the recent work of Sara Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[107] For a discussion of the term "feminism" and its varied use by women exegetes in the North American context, see Hammer, *American Muslim Women*, 57–59.

observes: "a standpoint indicates a recognition of the power realities operative in a community, and point to the ways the ruling group's vision may be both preserved and made real by means of that group's power to define the terms for the community as a whole," whereby power is exercised both in "control of ideological production, and in the real participation of the worker in the exchange."[108] My standpoint *qua* Muslim woman exegete, or something akin to that, is in some ways analogous to the experience of this worker. Incidentally, the metaphor also translates to my location as a female junior scholar in the Euro-American academy, a milieu which has its own gendered and hierarchical norms and its own presuppositions and systems of authority that exert ideological and real control.[109] For example, writing within this environment I cannot purport to elucidate the Qur'an as part of a constructive theological inquiry; this modality of reading would entail my transgression of the boundaries of the discipline in which I, presumably, study intellectual history as an observer and commentator, not as a participant, or so it is orchestrated.[110]

Having situated my scholarship—however uneasily—within the academy and within the domain and prerogative of women's studies generally, I will briefly situate my exegetical orientation in relation to historically non-Eurocentric Muslim modalities of exegesis.

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[108] Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Feminism and Philosophy: Essential Readings in Theory, Reinterpretation, and Application*, ed. Nancy Tuana and Rosemarie Tong, 69–90 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 73. This turn to standpoint theory as justifying an intervention in the classical heritage was originally developed for a paper entitled, "Intersectionality and Standpoint Theory: Integrating Scholar/Practitioner Perspectives in Religious Studies," for my presentation at the Ways of Knowing Annual Conference hosted by Harvard Divinity School on October 27, 2012.

[109] For one incisive critique of these dynamics in the fields of Islamic and religious studies, see the remarks of Kecia Ali, "Muslim Scholars, Islamic Studies, and the Gendered Academy." See also Kecia Ali, "The Omnipresent Male Scholar," *Critical Muslim* 8 (September 2013): 61–73.

[110] The work of Amina Wadud is particularly notable in that she claims to be—and is widely regarded as—the first female exegete working within the academy. She describes her influential first book as "mak[ing] a 'reading' of the Qur'an from within the female experience and without the stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretations." See Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 3.

Muslim Hermeneutics and Exegetical Traditions

Commentary upon the Qur'an, most frequently referred to as *tafsīr* (pl. *tafāsīr*, lit. to explain details),[111] involves explaining, interpreting, and analyzing Qur'anic verses, and has been regarded in Islamic intellectual history as one specialized niche of knowledge production within the umbrella discipline of Qur'an studies (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*).[112] In addition to the concept of *tafsīr*, other words in the Qur'an itself also signify exegetical endeavors, including the word *taʾwīl*, which implies an effort to reveal original significances or authorial intent.[113] As noted above, the Qur'an is often self-referential, including in the sense that it contains verses that directly discuss hermeneutics. For instance, one verse posits that the Qur'an contains both narrowly defined, determined (*muḥkam*) verses as well as metaphorical or otherwise figurative (*mutashābih*) verses.[114] Another verse prioritizes the mission of the Prophet Muhammad not only to relate the Qur'an, but also to clarify its messages for people (*li-tubayyina li'l-nās*).[115]

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[111] The word *tafsīr* is derived from the verb *fassara*, which means to interpret or explain, and the word *tafsīr* as a verbal noun appears just once in the Qur'an in the context of God instructing the Prophet Muhammad on how to respond to detractors: "And the disbelievers say, 'Why was not the Quran sent down upon him as a single whole?' It is so, that We may make firm thine heart thereby. And We have recited it unto thee in a measured pace. / And they come not to thee with any parable, but that We bring to thee the truth and a better explanation [*tafsīr*]." See Q. 25:32–33.

[112] For a discussion of influential principles and trends of Qur'anic interpretation, see Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 193–223. For a survey and reflections on the short history of "feminist *tafsīr*" specifically, including reflections on the advantages and drawbacks of the use of the term "feminist," see Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. See also Seedat, "On the Convergence of Islam, Feminism, and Qur'anic Interpretation," 4–5.

[113] The word *taʾwīl* occurs seventeen times in the Qur'an and is a verbal noun whose meanings encompass the idea of returning something to its source or origin.

[114] See Q. 3:7, "He it is Who has sent down the Book upon thee; therein are signs determined; they are the Mother of the Book, and others symbolic. . ." For detailed commentary, see *SQ* 129–32n7.

[115] See Q. 16:43–44. Specific instructions are also included to the Prophet on how to receive the revelation and then rely on God for the explanation: "Move not thy tongue therewith to hasten it. / Surely it is for Us to gather it and to recite it. / So when We recite it, follow its recitation. / Then surely it is for Us to explain it." Q. 75:16–19.

Following from this latter principle, Qur'anic discourse is intimately intertwined with the lived experiences of the Prophet, a characteristic that almost ubiquitously informs exegesis. Widely known as "exegesis by narration" (*tafsīr bi-l-riwāya*),[116] or alternately as "exegesis by remnants" (*tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr*), this modality of exegesis privileges the reported assertions of the Prophet himself alongside explanations and elucidations provided by his followers. The testimonies that comprise hadith and prophetic biography recount all manner of details about communal life and events related to the revelation and compilation of the Qur'an during and after the Prophet's lifetime. The hadith and biographic literature (*sīrah*) illuminates otherwise vague Qur'anic references. However, this vast corpus also has limitations; for instance, partial or sometimes conflicting accounts can thwart attempts to arrive at conclusive evidence with regard to a veritable host of potentially contestable issues. In short, delving into this corpus is a necessary but ultimately complex affair.[117]

Another pervasive hermeneutic is an intertextual method of reading known as "exegesis of the Qur'an by the Qur'an" (*tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi-l-Qurʾān*). This method emphasizes that the Qur'anic Author—who for devotionally inclined readers or listeners is God—generated a revelation with a thematic unity that is rendered apparent to the discerning mind and ear.[118] The Qur'an is not a collection of standalone surahs, but significances can readily be found in the macro and micro-organization of surahs—a facet of Qur'anic structure that I highlight

[116] S. Leder, "Riwāya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill Online Reference Works, 2012).

[117] For a discussion of the science of hadith criticism and the epistemic levels assigned to different hadith reports, see Brown, *Hadith*, 67–122.

[118] See, for instance, Q. 4:82, "Do they not contemplate the Qur'an? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found much discrepancy therein." For an overview of the genesis and development of this notion, see Mustansir Mir, "Unity of the Text of the Qur'an," *EQ* 5:405–6.

throughout this work with respect to the narratives involving female figures.[119] This aspect of structure and coherence is one dimension of classical notions pertaining to Qur'anic rhetorical finesse, uniqueness, and ultimate inimitability (*iʿjāz*) as a literary feat,[120] a concept that is informed by the Qur'an's own self-referential claims.[121]

My hermeneutics adhere to well-established exegetical methods and follow customary presuppositions about the semantic variance and polyvocality of Qur'anic verses. My initial research, an *ad seriatim* approach,[122] enabled me to engage the Qur'an as a recitation from beginning to end, as laid out in the final composition in book form (*muṣḥaf*).[123] This line-by-line reading enabled me to track how stories involving female figures related to overarching Qur'anic tropes. I plotted how and for what reasons female figures appeared in the arc of Qur'anic sacred history. I then observed instances where the female voice is subtle, or comes to a crescendo, or is absent. I plotted the approximate sequence of verse revelations from earlier Meccan verses to later Medinan verses, with reference to secondary sources, to determine how Qur'anic stories involving female figures relate to and reinforce ethical lessons derived from events within the

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[119] Numerous works—classical, modern, and contemporary—have studied this aspect of the Qur'an. I am indebted in particular to compelling studies on this subject by Salwa M. S. El-Awa in *Textual Relations in the Qur'ān: Relevance, Coherence, and Structure* (Routledge: New York, 2006), as well as Raymond Farrin in *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2014).

[120] For further discussion, see Angelika Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic, and Literary Features," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97–113. See also Richard C. Martin, "Inimitability," *EQ* 2:526–536.

[121] For example, Q. 2:23, 10:38, 11:13, 17:88, 52:34.

[122] See appendix B of this work for an extensive listing of verse numbers in which female figures and households are mentioned. As I was wrapping up this work, an excellent volume with short synopses of many different Qur'anic figures and their biblical counterparts was published by John Kaltner and Younus Y. Mirza entitled *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury-T & T Clark, 2018). The volume is helpful not only in the synopses it provides, but also in the comprehensive listing at the beginning of each section for where specific figures are mentioned in the *muṣḥaf* (the Qur'anic revelation in final compiled book form).

[123] For insightful reflections on the distinctions between the Qur'an as recitation and as book, see Angelika Neuwirth, "Two Faces of the Qur'ān: *Qur'ān* and *Muṣḥaf*," *Oral Tradition* 25, no. 1 (2010):141–56.

Prophet Muhammad's life and nascent faith community. In this respect, the book fluidly integrates analysis of female figures shared from pre-Qur'anic scriptural traditions with a female Qur'anic cast from the Arabian milieu, figures who have been considerably less studied in academic literatures. Rather than treat the female Qur'anic figures individually, in an atomistic fashion as most other works have done, I draw out the thematic and structural connections across stories, pointing out the many provocative juxtapositions between characters, the situations that they navigate, and the moral valences of their actions and intentions.

My study is distinctive in its female-centric topical approach and in my standpoint as something akin to a female Muslim exegete (*mufassirah*).[124] I consult the seminal masters—there is in fact no other comparable repository of Islamic knowledge to which I *could* turn—yet my approach makes recourse to the decidedly androcentric legacy of scholarship in a manner that deliberately centers the Qur'anic female figures themselves, and not the history of their interpretation.[125] Whether pious protagonist or cursed ingrate, their explicit Qur'anic words, deeds, and escapades are the foundation of this inquiry.

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[124] This is a title I evoke with some hesitation simply as a means to *describe* a facet of what I am attempting to do in this work, namely elucidate select Qur'anic verses; I am keenly aware of the multiple ways in which I would fall short of this title in qualifications and do not evoke it as an attempt to confer status within a devotional Muslim paradigm.

[125] Claiming the capacity to produce new knowledge, while acknowledging indebtedness to a hermeneutic legacy, is an intricate dance. In an essay chronicling the strategic interventions of ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭiʾ), Shuruq Naguib notes: "For an exegete whose self-authentication is premised upon a sense of belonging to a past generation of the interpretive community, moving beyond the boundaries and authority of their permitted readings requires a manner of legitimization that would be meaningful to those who belong to the tradition, thereby permitting its expansion to incorporate the new reading." See "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's Approach to *tafsīr*," 59–60. As Amina Wadud observers concerning the corpus of Qur'anic exegesis, "women and women's experiences were either excluded or interpreted through the male vision, perspective, desire. . .. Their voicelessness during critical periods of development in Qur'anic interpretation has not gone unnoticed, but it has been mistakenly equated with voicelessness in the text itself." See *Qur'an and Woman,* 2.

In selecting not to foreground the androcentric exegetical tradition per se, I am not seeking to delegitimize the entire Muslim exegetical corpus,[126] nor am I advocating a sola scriptura method, even if intra-textual analysis is a prominent dimension of this particular project. I situate myself qua reader/researcher primarily within the parameters of Qur'anic discourse; however, I consult other formative literature and I am, at certain junctures, forced to ask: Where are ambiguities best left as such? For ambiguities that warrant clarification, which extra-Qur'anic sources hold the most promising clarifying potential, and why? Such hermeneutical queries are central concerns of Qur'anic studies more broadly as pursued within the halls of the contemporary academy and within the arena of the Islamic intellectual tradition writ large.

My driving inquiries aim to facilitate a gynocentric perspective on the Qur'an that I see as indispensable for appreciating Qur'anic meanings and significance: What does the Qur'an's presentation of female agents—and their interactions with the men and boys in their midst—suggest overall about Qur'anic depictions of female biological sex, sexuality, and the feminine gender? Beyond undeniably unique reproductive capacities, what differentiates human females ontologically from males in Qur'anic discourse? What virtues, vices, and personality traits do female figures display in the Qur'an? How is female worldly agency informed by faith and by knowledge? Why, for instance, is no female figure explicitly named as a prophet (*nabī*) or messenger (*rasūl*) when two dozen male figures or more are called to such lofty stations?

[126] Travis Zadeh highlights a stream of Qur'an scholarship that has "sought to sidestep the classical exegetical sources of Islamic religious authority." He writes, "ever since the penetrating critique leveled by John Wansborough (1977), who questioned the validity of reading the Quran through autochthonous Muslim authorities—material that is necessarily shaped by a particular Islamic salvation history—there has been a growing chorus in the field of Qur'anic textual studies doubting the usefulness of the exegetical tradition for accessing the original formation of the text." See "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 338.

Without further ado, we now pursue these inquires in full, keeping in mind that he Qur'an is delimited by its letters and words but undeniably vast in its interpretive horizons. Here, I humbly pursue one path toward a vast and ultimately illusive horizon.

Chapter 1

Female Sexuality in Qur'anic Stories:

"She Inclined toward Him" (Q. 12:24)

From a human being's origination in a sex act, to her awareness of her sexed body, to her desires, inclinations, and sexual encounters, and even to possible otherworldly sexual experiences, discourse on sex in the Qur'an is highly salient. Qur'anic female figures often have experiences pertaining directly to human sexuality in cosmological, biological, or social realms. As an aspect of embodiment, and as the act of intercourse, how does sex factor into the experiences of Qur'anic female figures? How and when do figures in the Qur'an engage in sexual intercourse? In such encounters, what constitutes a reprobate sexual partner as compared to a pious one? Previous scholarship has considered questions of sex and sexuality in the Qur'an, often from a legal studies vantage;[1] however, this chapter explores Qur'anic sexuality from the vantage point of Qur'anic stories, specifically the stories animating the Qur'an's female figures. Reading intra-textually, I look at sex in and beyond the confines of marriage as well as in and beyond the earthly realm. From human reproduction, to terms referring to sexed anatomy and sexual intercourse, to the many Qur'anic stories involving sexual desire and licit versus illicit sex, I argue that the imperative to regulate sexuality is one of the Qur'an's most accentuated

[1] For instance, a number of studies highlight the rights and duties of females and males in the Qur'an itself and in later discussions among Muslim legal scholars. For one recent example, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger, eds., *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015). See also Celene Ibrahim, "Family Law Reform, Spousal Relations, and the 'Intentions of Islamic Law'," in *Women's Rights and Religious Law: Domestic and International Perspectives*, ed. Fareda Banda and Lisa Fishbayn Joffe (New York: Routledge, 2016), 108–22.

narrative tropes. Before we can delve into the stories themselves, clarification of Qur'anic terms and concepts is in order.

Sex and Telos

What, according to the Qur'an, is the divine design behind sexed human forms? In the Qur'anic cosmic schema, God creates at will, but human beings have a derivative capacity to give life only in consort with a mate (*zawj*, pl. *azwāj*).[2] This dyad, composed of the female (*unthā*)[3] and the male (*dhakar*),[4] enables the "spread abroad [of] a multitude of men and women,"[5] by God's leave. The genesis of human beings as a male and a female,[6] and the subsequent pairing of human mates, male and female, are oft-repeating Qur'anic tropes.[7] The bifurcation of the human species mirrors other aspects of cosmic duality[8] and stands in contrast to the primal unicity of

[2] The root *z-w-j* has a wide semantic range and can signify an even number, a pair, two things that are connected in some way, a spouse, one of a pair, or a species or kind (as in 56:7). See *AED* 405–6.

[3] The root *ʾ-n-th* occurs thirty times in the Qur'an, twenty-four times as a singular noun (*unthā*) and six times as a plural noun (*ināth*); see, for example, 42:50. See also *AED* 56.

[4] The noun that means "male" (*dhakar*, pl. *dhukūr/dhukrān*) is mentioned eighteen times. Overall, the root *dh-k-r*—with the general meaning of "mention" or "remember, recall"—is mentioned 292 times in fourteen different grammatical forms. See *AED* 328–32.

[5] Q. 4:1.

[6] See, for example, Q. 49:13, 75:39. Regarding verse 75:39, *The Study Quran* translates *al-zawjayn* as "two genders"; however, this could be seen as an imprecise use of the term gender according to many contemporary gender theorists who recognize the term "sex" as primarily an indicator of anatomy and the term "gender" as a socially constructed identity. The extent to which "gender identity" is or should be dependent on anatomy is a broader conversation that cannot be sufficiently discussed here. In brief, the Qur'an consistently depicts biological sex as binary and does not seem to directly address the phenomenon of intersexed human bodies or the intersexed person (*khunthā* in Arabic), themes that are subsequently taken up in Islamic legal discourse with reference to other foundational Islamic sources, such as hadith. See Mobeen Vaid's analysis of gender nonconformity and intersexed persons in Islamic intellectual thought, "'And the Male Is Not Like the Female': Sunni Islam and Gender Nonconformity," *Muslim Matters*, July 24, 2017, accessed December 10, 2017, at https://muslimmatters.org/2017/07/24/and-the-male-is-not-like-the-female-sunni-islam-and-gender-nonconformity/.

[7] See, for example, Q. 4:1, 7:189, 39:6, 30:21, 51:49.

[8] For example, Q. 75:39.

God, who has no mate or equal partner (*kufu'*),[9] and no gender. Creation is fundamentally an expression of duality: "And of all things *We* created pairs, that haply you may remember."[10] Human beings are made from a pair and formed in a womb, "creation after creation, in threefold darkness,"[11] but God alone is "the Light of the heavens and the earth."[12] God, furthermore, has no need for human beings, as the Qur'an uncompromisingly asserts in a sequence of verses describing the place of the human being in the cosmic creation:

> *He* created the heavens and the earth in truth. *He* rolls the night up into the day and rolls the day up into the night, and *He* made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed. Is *He* not the Mighty, the Forgiving? / *He* created you from a single soul, then made from *her her* mate, and sent down for you of cattle eight pairs. *He* creates you in your mothers' wombs, creation after creation, in threefold darkness. *He* is God, your Lord; to *Him* belongs sovereignty. There is no god but *He*. How, then, are you turned away? / If you do not believe, surely God is beyond need of you. . . ."[13]

The bifurcation of species into male and female contrasts with God's unicity, and this contrast holds a theological lesson; humans, unlike God, require mates to exist as a species. Furthermore, just like the sun and the moon mentioned in the verse above, human beings too run for an appointed term as material bodies and then become extinguished, unlike the Everlasting, who forever remains.[14]

God has ultimate and uncompromised unicity, but human beings are made from a mold and move continually toward increasing multiplicity, generation upon generation. As one verse comments, "God has ordained mates for you from among yourselves, and from your mates *He*

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[9] See Q. 112: "And none is like unto *Him*." This word and its root, *k-f-'*, only appear once in the Qur'an. See *AED* 809.
[10] Q. 51:49.
[11] For example, Q. 39:4–7.
[12] Q. 24:35.
[13] Q. 39:7.
[14] See, for example, Q. 55:26–27 for a poetic rendering of this concept: "Everything that is upon it [the earth] passes away. / And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty."

has ordained for you children and grandchildren. And *He* provided you with good things. Will they then believe in that which is false, and show ingratitude for the blessings of God?"[15] Reproduction is one discernible outcome of having a mate, but the Qur'an never makes procreation obligatory as a dimension of pious obedience to God;[16] procreation—about which the Qur'an speaks at length—is never a divine command, and the act of procreation never carries an inherent moral reward in Qur'anic discourse. The moral rewards with respect to sex, procreation, and kinship lie in treating relatives justly and mercifully by minding the "bonds of the wombs,"[17] as will be discussed further in a subsequent chapter.

Sexual difference in the Qur'an is not the only way in which human beings are interconnected across somatic differences.[18] The creation of human beings "from a male and a female" is highlighted alongside ethnic diversity and kinship lineages as a sign of God's purposeful creation: "O humankind! Truly *We* created you from a male and a female, and *We* made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you [*ʿinna akramakum ʿinda Allāhi atqākum*]. Truly God is Knowing, Aware."[19] This verse situates biological reproduction in a theological telos; human beings, all of them, are bound together, and in this primal connection lies the potential for mutual knowing across lineages. God's ultimate and supreme knowledge—one of the many traits

[15] Q. 16:72.
[16] In contrast, for instance, to the command in Genesis 1:28.
[17] For example, Q. 4:1.
[18] A similar verse makes reference to the multiplicity of human skin tones and languages as part and parcel of divine design: "And of God's signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge," Q. 30:22.
[19] See Q. 49:13. For analysis of this and related verses, see Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, "From Sexual Difference to Religious Difference: Toward a Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, ed. Elif Mendeni, Ednan Aslan, and Marcia Hermansen (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2013), 231–45.

that differentiates God from humans—is also the discerning perspective for distinguishing human nobility. Piety, not biological sex or ethnic origins, is the criteria for human differentiation when the matter is placed upon the divine scales.[20]

Further observations can be made on the bifurcation of the human species into sexed dyads as it relates to other phenomena in God's creation.[21] Consider, for instance, the water in the following segment of a verse: "And *He* it is Who created the human being from water, and made of *him* lineages [*nasaban*] and [kinship through] marriages [*ṣihran*]. And thy Lord is Powerful."[22] The water is evocative of the "fluid" that is mentioned in many verses on human conception and embryonic development: "Truly *We* created the human being from a drop of mixed fluid that *We* may test *him*, and *We* endowed *him* with hearing, seeing."[23] The water of which human beings are made, in literal and metaphorical senses, also links them inextricably with other cosmic phenomena, as in the fuller context of the verse just quoted: "And *He* it is Who mixed the two seas, one sweet, satisfying, the other salty, bitter, and set between them a divide and a barrier, forbidden. / And *He* it is Who created the human being from water, and

[20] This point has long been a cornerstone of feminist scholarship on the Qur'an and a point that resonates in Islamic theology and discourse more broadly.

[21] For an in-depth discussion of human nature as it relates to the rest of the created world in Qur'anic discourse, see Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 23–37.

[22] Q. 25:54. The grammatical case endings create consonance for the words "lineages" (*nasaban*), "kinship through marriage" (*ṣihran*), and "powerful" (*qadīran*). The root *ṣ-h-r* that translates as "[lineages through] marriage" above appears twice in the Qur'an and also has a meaning of fusing or bonding, as in Q. 22:20. The term *ṣihr* (pl. *aṣhār/ṣuharā'*) can be used to refer to in-laws more generally in Arabic, although the verse cited above is the one Qur'anic use of the word in the context of family relations, with the metaphorical sense of becoming joined or fused to a new family through marriage. See *AED* 539. The root *n-s-b*, as in the word *nasab* (pl. *ansāb*) in this verse, refers to family relations through descent. See *AEL* 1737–38. Other terms for kinship relations include *'ashīrah* (e.g., 26:214), *qurbā* (e.g., 2:83, 2:177, 4:36), and others. See also Anver Giladi, "Family," *EQ* 2:173–76. Several other Qur'anic terms also refer to different aspects of familial relations, as discussed further in chapter 2. Arguably the many terms and multiple occurrences of words related to family relations underscore their conceptual importance in the Qur'anic worldview.

[23] Q. 76:2. See also 80:19 for a similar trope.

made of *him* lineages and [kinship through] marriages. And thy Lord is Powerful."[24] The dividing of the waters of the seas here bears some likeness to the sexual fluids of the female and the male in sexual union; like the fertile estuaries where the fresh and salt waters engage in a dance of currents, the sexual waters mix and on occasion fuse to create new life, extending lineages. The verse also emphasizes the common material point of origin of all human beings, in terms of their creation from the same sources and by the same processes.

The creation of human beings as sexed dyads is also reflective of duality in other aspects of creation,[25] such as the heavens and earth, or the day and night, which mutually interpose and interpenetrate. For instance, the following verse evokes the metaphor of water, as well as the original unity of the heavens and the earth, a unity that—like the pattern of human creation—also moves from unity, as we shall see, toward duality: "Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were sewn together [*kānatā ratqan*] and *We* rent them asunder [*fa-fataqnāhumā*]? And *We* made every living thing from water. Will they not, then, believe?"[26] What does the metaphorical ripping apart of the heavens and the earth have to do with the creation of "every living thing from water"? Aside from being two examples of the creative power of God, a contemporary reader might note that the sewing and rending of the cosmos in its bifurcation process bears a playful metaphorical similarity to the lengthwise splitting of the strands of chromosomes in the nucleoplasm of cells in the process that allows for reproduction. The Qur'an explicitly plays on the notion of cosmic scale in another verse discussing the signs of

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[24] Q. 25:53–54.

[25] This dynamic is discussed at length by Sachiko Murata throughout her volume entitled *The Tao of Islam*.

[26] Q. 21:30. The imagery of the heavens and earth being metaphorically sewn together and unstitched is complemented by the rhyme of the roots *r-t-q* (closed up mass of darkness; to mend, join together, repair, to patch up; sticking together) and *f-t-q* (to split, rip open, to slash lengthwise). This verse is the only occurrence of either of these words or their roots in the Qur'an. See *AED* 346 and 691, respectively. For philosophical and mystical discussions on heaven and earth, see Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 117–41.

God's majesty, as manifest for human beings: "*We* shall show them *Our* signs upon the horizons and within themselves till it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice that thy Lord is Witness over all things?"[27]

The Qur'an does not limit its discussions of human production and reproduction to material forms alone. In similar fashion to the heavens and earth before their bifurcation, the Qur'an describes human creation at a unique primordial moment when there was simply "one soul" (*nafs wāḥidah*).[28] Several verses, such as the following, depict this spiritual origin of the human being as a single soul from which God forms a mate:

> O humankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from *her* created *her* mate, and from the two has spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Reverence God, through Whom you demand your rights of one another, and family relations [*wa-l-arḥām*]. Truly God is a Watcher over you.[29]

From one soul, God made two; the process is an inverse of human reproduction whereby two beings are needed to engender new life.

In the Qur'anic descriptions, spiritual bifurcation from a single soul to a pair does not—as many contemporary commentators in particular have been quick to point out—ascribe a differing value, worth, or capacity to either entity. Just as the night is not worthier than the day, nor the day more valuable than the night, nor the heavens more remarkable than the earth, nor the earth more wondrous than the heavens, the original human unicity in the primordial realm engenders a type of equivalency which, in turn, engenders a relational difference when

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[27] Q. 41:53.

[28] See Q.4:1, 6:98, 7:189, 31:28, and 39:6.

[29] Q. 4:1. *Arḥām* literally means "wombs." For its rhetorically powerful call to piety (*taqwā*), this verse is widely recited at the beginning of the communal Friday prayer, a liturgical use that is attributed to the Prophet himself and one that underscores the importance of the verse in inculcating an Islamic worldview.

manifested, after bifurcation, in the earthly realm.[30] One verse describes a purpose for this bifurcation into dyads: "It is *He* who created you [pl.] from a single soul [*nafs wāḥidat*], and made from *her her* mate/spouse [*zawjahā*], that he might find rest in her [*li-yaskuna ilayhā*]."[31] This passage seemingly intertwines the metaphysical and the corporal and grounds sexual intimacy in a shared metaphysical and ontological reality. While the bifurcated soul is grammatically gendered feminine, the verse goes on to describe an instance of intercourse that results in pregnancy. Another verse echoes these themes: "And among *His* signs is that *He* created mates/spouses [*azwāj*] for you [*lakum*] from among yourselves [*anfusikum*], that you might find rest [*li-taskunū*] in them [*ilayhā*], and *He* established between you [*baynakum*] affection and mercy. Truly in that are signs for a people who reflect."[32] Contemplating this verse does indeed allow subtitles to emerge: the construction of "in them" refers back to the mates/spouses (a gender inclusive term), such that to read this verse as "*He* created wives for you [men]…so that you [men] can find rest in them [your wives]," would be imposing a preconceived notion about gender relations onto the verse. This reading would require that the word *azwāj* be narrowly defined as "female spouse" and that females are explicitly excluded from the pronoun "yourselves" and the verb "find rest" (*li-taskunū*). A more inclusive reading would see these terms as pertaining to males and females alike, a reading that is supported by the

[30] For example, Q. 33:35. The language of complementarity can be deployed to create hierarchical schema rather than a robust recognition of reciprocal rights across sexes; the language of complementarity can be used for the purposes of subjugation, but the premise of complementarity itself does not entail hierarchy. See Celene Lizzio, "Courage at the Crossroads," in *A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Work and Life of Amina Wadud*, ed. Juliane Hammer, Laury Silvers, and Kecia Ali (2012), 85–89, accessed August 10, 2017 at: http://www.bu.edu/religion/files/2010/03/A-Jihad-for-Justice-for-Amina-Wadud-2012-1.pdf.

[31] Q. 7:189. *The Study Quran* translates soul (*nafs*) in this verse and similar verses as "it"; however, here, as explained in the introduction, I retain the original grammatical feminine in italics, in a similar manner that I treat references to God. [You may not need to explain this at all, since you have already laid it out in the intro.]

[32] Q. 30:21.

relational aspect of "affection and mercy" being established "between you [*baynakum*]."[33] The final use of the pronoun suffix *-kum* in the verse must be gender inclusive for the verse to be about male-female intimacy, and so why restrict the other instances to males exclusively? Another verse expresses the ideal of spousal reciprocity with respect to the enjoyment of intercourse, this time explicitly addressed emphatically to males *about* females, using a pronoun that is specific to the female gender: "They [f., *hunna*] are a garment for you [m., *lakum*], and you [m., *antum*] are a garment for them [f., *lahunna*]."[34] This metaphor of garments evokes an intimate, protective relationship, one that is fundamentally characterized by reciprocity, as highlighted in the repetition of the parallel sentence structure. Why is the verse addressed to males *about* females? From a gynocentric vantage point, it reiterates—for a male audience specifically—the reciprocity entailed in sexual intimacy. Rather than draw the conclusion—as others before me have done—that the Qur'an is androcentric because it *addresses* males *about* the sexuality of females, we can just as readily conclude that the Qur'an has a gynocentric thrust in that it reaffirms female sexuality in an edifying manner by underscoring the female spouse's entitlement to a gratifying experience with her partner.

Anatomical Difference: "Their Nakedness Was Exposed" (Q. 7:22, 20:121)

[33] The use of the second person pronoun suffix (*-kum*) and its corresponding verb in this verse is the plural Arabic form, which can be gender inclusive. Likewise, a grammatically masculine verb does not necessarily correspond to an ontologically male actor.

[34] Q. 2:187: "You are permitted, on the nights of the fast, to go unto your wives. They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them." As with most verses giving instructions about sexual intercourse, this verse is directed *to* men *about* women. Notably, verses that urge guarding of the private parts are addressed to both females and males (see 24:30–31); however, instructions limiting the when, where, and how of sexual relations, as discussed below, are frequently addressed specifically to men. The Qur'an seems to suggest that, on balance, males would need more explicit guidance on such matters. Even in Q. 24:30– 31, verses that command lowering the gaze and guarding the private parts for both men and women nonetheless address men first.

Naturally, sexual difference entails human bodies that have particular somatic markers. Among the first narratives in the *muṣḥaf* is that of a female and a male who seemingly become aware of their sexed anatomy for the first time.[35] When Adam and his spouse (*zawj*) are expelled from the Garden of Eden after "tast[ing] of the tree," they become aware of their nakedness: "And when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness [*saw'ātuhumā*] was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden to cover themselves."[36] Satan had succeeded in "expos[ing] to them that which was hidden from them of their nakedness."[37] Their "tast[ing] of the tree," which causes their expulsion from their garden home, introduced a new type of socialization in which it was shame-producing to have nakedness exposed.[38] That Adam and his spouse ate from the tree and became aware of their nakedness suggests that they began sensing a newfound shame, and a subsequent need for new decorum.[39] Presumably, this is the point in Qur'anic sacred history at which human beings became aware of somatic sexual difference. Does

[35] The first mention of the story, which occurs at Q. 2:35–37, is less than forty verses into the *muṣḥaf* and is then repeated in different contexts, as discussed in subsequent chapters. For an analysis of Eve in formative Muslim exegesis, see Catherine Bronson, "Eve in the Formative Period of Islamic Exegesis: Intertextual Boundaries and Hermeneutical Demarcations," in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, ed. by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, 27–61 (New York: Oxford University Press and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014).

[36] Q. 7:22.

[37] Q. 7:20. For discussions of the pudenda of Adam and Eve, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[38] Notably, the fruit of the tree is the reproductive structure of the organism, evoking a potential contrast between the human and vegetal worlds: in the vegetal worlds, the reproductive organ is often eye-catching and on display for other organisms. In the kind of socialization mandated by the Qur'an, human reproductive organs are meant to be covered and guarded.

[39] This is perhaps akin to the socialization of a child who, at a certain age, discerns that public nudity is a social taboo, whereas previously her genital area was not differentiated in her body-consciousness. Alternately, the primordial couple had clothing in the Garden and then were stripped naked before their descent to Earth. See Q. 20:118 when God says to Adam, "Truly it [the Garden] is for thee that thou shalt neither hunger therein, nor go naked (*lā ta'rā*)." The root of *ta'rā* is *ʿ-r-y* [The verb is عَرِيَ، يَعْرَى، عُرْيٌ . *ʿ-r-w* exists as well, but with an entirely different meaning: "to befall, grip, seize, strike, afflict." Due to his meaning of gripping and seizing, you have "*'urwa*" meaning handle, grasp, as in the famous verse about "*al-'urwa al-wuthqā*." The root *ʿ-w-r*, however, from which "*'awra*" is derived, is a third and different root altogether.] For the Qur'anic usage of a similar root that can signify exposure of the private areas (*ʿ-w-r*), see Q. 24:31, as in "the private areas of women" (*'awrāt al-nisā'*).

awareness of sexual difference change at all when human beings are no longer in the earthly realm?

Otherworldly Sexualities

Mention of the "witnessed" realm (*al-shahādah*) in Qur'anic theology is always accompanied by—and, in fact, preceded by—mention of "the unseen" or "unknown" realm (*al-ghayb*), which is occupied by other, non-human beings, such as *jinn* (beings created of "smokeless scorching fire")[40] and *malāʾikah* (angels, beings made light).[41] Occasionally these beings take human form in the seen realm. For instance, Mary interacts with an angel, the "spirit from God" that delivers the news of her impregnation, who "assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man."[42] The angels that visit the prophets Abraham and Lot and their families are manifest in the form of men, which is the cause of some commotion, as discussed in later chapters. Angelic figures mentioned in the Qur'an all appear in masculine forms with masculine names.[43] Even Joseph is equated to an angel by the enraptured townswomen: "When they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands [with the knives that they had been given to cut fruit] and said, 'God be praised!

[40] See Q. 15:27 for a Qur'anic description of the *jinn*. See also Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

[41] That angels are made of light is derived from a hadith attributed to ʿĀʾishah. See Gisela Webb, "Angels," *EQ* 1:84–92. References to an angel or angels occur 73 times in the Qur'an from the root *m-l-k*, a root that occurs a total of 206 times with other meanings. See *AED* 893–95. See also Kaltner and Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, 21–22.

[42] Q. 19:17. See also 3:42.

[43] For instance, see Q. 2:97–98 for mention of Gabriel (*Jibrīl*) and 2:98 for mention of Michael (*Mikāʾīl*), angelic personalities that are shared with the biblical tradition. See also 43:77 for the name Mālik, a guardian of Hell who is held to be an angel as well. To the best of my discernment, there is no mention of angels appearing in female form in the Qur'an or hadith. In the instances of angels appearing in the seen realm in the likeness of males, do they become fully sexed beings or do they merely resemble males, perhaps without functioning pudenda? It stands to reason that reproductive organs may not be suited to the angelic constitution, since presumably angels do not mate. Nor would other internal organ systems be necessary, such as a digestive system for instance, since angels do not require alimentation. See, for example, Q. 51:26-28 and 11:70.

This is no human being. This is naught but a noble angel!'"[44] In one verse, disbelieving people are condemned for their fabricating lies: "And they have made the angels, who are servants of the Compassionate, females. Did they witness their creation?"[45] These descriptions beget the question: Do angels *ever* appear in the semblance of females?[46] Angels with the likeness of females are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an; however, among the beings in paradise, female-like beings are mentioned. Do the beings in paradise have sexed bodies akin to earthly bodies? In what ways are these beings sexually differentiated?

The term for spouse that connotes "one of a pair" (*zawj*, pl. *azwāj*) is consistently employed by the Qur'an in verses about human telos, in verses about the primordial couple, and to refer to the coupling of beings in the realm of Paradise. *Zawj* can refer equally to the male or the female human spouse as well as non-human mates, depending on context.[47] Notably, no term that exclusively means "wife," "woman," or "maiden" is used in reference to the paradisal beings. The Qur'an refers to some beings in Paradise with grammatically feminine adjectives, but it is arguably more accurate to describe "women" as beings in the earthly realm and to simply note the degree of ambiguity with regard to the gender and potential sexual differentiation of different types of Paradisal beings.[48] Do any beings in Paradise have intercourse or experience something akin to sexual pleasure?

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[44] Q. 12:31.

[45] Q. 43:19.

[46] Satan too is referred to in the masculine grammatical gender, but this begs the question: in what way is Satan male-like? Are there male and female *jinn*? The Qur'an is not specific.

[47] The Qur'an also employs other terms for human female and male spouses, as discussed in the next chapter; however, these other terms that signify "spouse" are never used in relation to heavenly beings in the Qur'an.

[48] For reference to the intentional mysterious nature of the beings of paradise, see Q. 56:60–61: "We have decreed death among you, and none outstrips Us / in replacing [you with] your likenesses and bringing you into being again in what you know not."

The Qur'an does use sensual language and sexual innuendo on multiple occasions to describe the pleasure experienced by the beings in Paradise who are rewarded for their conduct in the earthly realm.[49] They are depicted as reclining "upon embroidered couches," and "facing one another,"[50] while "immortal youths [*wildān mukhalladūn*] wait upon them / with goblets, ewers, and a cup from a flowing spring."[51] One rhyming segment describes wide-eyed beings (*ḥūr ʿīn*)[52] that have "the likeness of concealed pearls" who are a reward, "a recompense for that which they used to do."[53] The segment proceeds to describe "abundant fruit, / neither out of reach, nor forbidden."[54] The lack of forbidden fruit in this paradise is in direct contrast to the primeval Garden where Adam and his spouse ate of the forbidden tree.[55] Even the rudimentary clothing quickly stitched by the primordial couple from plant matter contrasts with the elaborate silk garments and jewelry worn by beings in paradise.[56] The Qur'an goes on to describe the sensuousness of the beings: "Truly *We* brought them into being (f., *anshaʾnāhunna*) as a [new]

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[49] For an account of the depiction of Paradise in the Qur'an, see Muhammad Abdel Haleem, "Quranic Paradise: How to Get to Paradise and What to Expect There," in *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol. 1, *Foundations and the Formation of a Tradition: Reflections on the Hereafter in the Quran and Islamic Religious Thought*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 49–66. Haleem has a section entitled "Women in Paradise." There may be female-like beings in Paradise based on Qur'anic descriptions, but to call these entities "women" is not a precise use of Qur'anic terms and shoud be avoided so as not to mix categories of beings or potentially inaccurately project earthly descritptions onto the Paradisal ones.

[50] Q. 56:15–16.

[51] Q. 56:17–18. *Wildān*, a plural of the word *walad*, can be read as inclusive of female youth or as exclusively male youth.

[52] See Q. 44:54, 52:20, and 56:22 for three instances of the phrase *ḥūr ʿīn*. For further discussion on the depictions of the *ḥūr ʿīn* in literary and oratory sources, see the work of Maher Jarrar, "Houris," in *EQ* 2:465–58 and in "Strategies of Paradise: Paradise Virgins and Utopia," in *Roads to Paradise*, 1:256–88. See also *AED* 241–42.

[53] Q. 56:22–24. Here the pronoun "they" could be understood in a gender-inclusive sense. For a discussion of symbolism and metaphor regarding the pearl, albeit in a different historical context, see Karen Raber, "Chains of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity," in *Ornamentalizing the Renaissance*, ed. Bella Mirabella (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 159-180. Raber notes that "unlike other gems, the pearl is notoriously ephemeral, fragile and prone to degradation when exposed to any kind of rough treatment," 162.

[54] Q. 56:32–33.

[55] See Q. 7:22, 20:121, for their eating of the tree.

[56] For example, see descriptions in Q. 18:31, 22:32, 76:12, and 76:21.

creation, / then made them virgins (*fa-jaʿalnāhunna abkāran*),[57] / amorous peers (*ʿuruban atrāban*),[58] / for the companions of the right."[59] These verses give rise to a host of interpretive possibilities.[60]

In arguably the most straightforward reading, the newly created beings are the recreation of earthly beings made into a "new creation" fit for Paradise.[61] If the process of being created

[57] See Q. 56:35–36. *The Study Quran* translates *fa-jaʿalnāhunna abkāran* as "then made *for them* virgins," (emphasis added), but I have adopted Bakhtiar's more accurate translation "made them virgins." See Bakhtiar, *The Sublime Quran*, 624. This is also the translation adopted by Badawi and Haleem in *AED* 108. See also *SQ* 1323n35–40. The word *abkār* (s. *bikr*) is derived from the root *b-k-r*, and it can also mean "unprecedented, novel, new." The root relates to young age, particularly in animals (as used once in Q. 2:68 with reference to a cow). See *AED* 108–9; see also *AEL* 239–41. See Q. 66:5 for the only other use of the word *abkār* in the Qur'an, appearing in the context of spouses from among the previously married and the virgins. Much could be said about notion of "virginal" here. The notion of being virginal and being youthful may be thoroughly intertwined in popular imagination, but it is, of course, possible to have a youthful, spritely non-virgin or a virgin who is advanced in age. Does the term *abkār* signal both qualities simultaneously? Does *abkār* necessarily exclude male or male-like virgins? If in predominant Arabic usage only a previously unmarried *female* is referred to as a *bikr*, as seems to b the case, does this preclude the term also potentially applying to male or male-like beings in Qur'anic usage? Such questions would require a more through survey Arabic usage pre- and post-Qur'an as well as a deeper engagement with philosophies of language and meaning that are ultimately beyond the scope of this particular project. My aim here is to simply raise questions that could enable deeper engagement with the gendered aspects of Qur'anic language for contemporary readers.

[58] Q. 56:37. Notably, the root *ʿ-r-b* and the root *t-r-b* have consonance and are both used in exactly twenty-two instances in the Qur'an. (On a more esoteric level, this parallel root occurance could be seen as subtly reflecting the meaning of *atrāb,* that is, to be "well matched.") Concerning the root *ʿ-r-b*, this verse is the only use of this particular adjectival form; other meanings in the Qur'an include Arab and Arabic. See *AED* 131–32. A primary meaning of the root *ʿ-r-b* is to have or revert to speech that is pure and free from error. Another meaning is to be lively and sprightly. A derived meaning with a usage pertaining specifically to women according to Lane's nineteenth-century dictionary of usage is "to act amorously." In addition, the term is used to refer to "a woman who is eager for play, or sport" and for "a woman who is a great laugher," among many other usages given by Lane. See *AEL* 1991–95. In terms of the root *t-r-b,* the word *atrāb*, which is the plural of *tirb*, meaning "well-matched" or "equals in age," also occurs in Q. 38:52 and 78:33. The word *turāb*, derived from the same root, also means "dust," which is used seventeen times in the Qur'an, including as the metaphorical or primordial substance from which humans are made. The root is also used to refer to the upper chest or rib area (*tarā'ib*) in 86:7. See *AED* 131–32.

[59] See Q. 56:38.

[60] For a further discussion of the history of exegetical debates on this topic, see Jarrar, "Strategies of Paradise." My analysis here considers the Qur'anic terminology; however, for a discussion of different hadith involving virgins in Paradise, including discussions of authenticity, see Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 238–46.

[61] The pronoun "them" (*hunna*) in *anshaʾnāhunna* above is a grammatically feminine plural (*hunna*), although the feminine plural here could potentially pertain to the individual souls (f. *nafs*, pl. *nufūs* or *anfus*). If the feminine pronoun used here is seen as referring to the souls (f., *nafs*) themselves, this is consistent with the sentiments of the remainder of the verse, since "companions of the right" is not restricted to males: "Truly *We* brought them (*the*

anew refers to both female and male earthly human beings who are recreated in an unprecedented state, it might be the *quality* of being virginal that the Qur'an is evoking, not necessarily something that would coorespond to, for instance, having a hymen. In just one instance,[62] a term used for beings in Paradise, *kawāʿib,* potentially evokes an anatomical part of the sexed body: "Truly the reverent shall have a place of triumph, / gardens and vineyards, / *kawāʿib* of like age, / and an overflowing cup."[63] The term *kawāʿib* (s. *kāʿib*) occurs only in this instance in the Qur'an.[64] Some have rendered the term *kawāʿib* as "buxom maidens" in English; however, the verse is argulably better understood again as evoking newness and youthfulness, a description that is more consistent with the notion of "like age" that immediately follows. This is also an interpretation that reinforces the multiple other Qur'anic references to the youthfulness and spriteliness of beings in Paradise.[65]

In any case, the clear implication is that for proper restraint of sexuality in worldly life, combinded with other praiseworthy qualities, the "companions of the right" will be recompensed with pleasure in the gardens of the next world. A similar segment of Qur'anic prose describes the

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souls, f.) into being as a [new] creation, / then made them new (*abkāran*), / amorous peers (*ʿuruban atrāban*), / for companions of the right."

[62] As Haleem observes, "any physical description of the people of paradise is very sparse," *Quranic Paradise*, 61. A similar observation could be made about the Qur'anic depictions of human beings in the earthly realm, where the emphasis is placed on character traits and actions over appearances. Physical features, when described, often have metaphorical or abstract descriptions (e.g., Q. 3:106, 80:38–41, 88:2, and 88:8 among other verses describing faces). At the same time, this focus on character traits and actions over appearances certainly does not negate the reality of physicality of sex and sexual difference in earthly and potentially also heavenly realms.

[63] Q. 78:31–34.

[64] The term *kawāʿib* is translated in *The Study Quran* as "buxom maidens," and the term is explained in the commentary as "maidens with full breasts" who are "fully mature," *SQ* 1466n33. Bakhtiar translates as "swelling breasted maidens," *The Sublime Quran*, 683. Haleem argues, the term in its Qur'anic use indicates the *onset* of puberty when a female *begins* to develop breasts. See Haleem, *Quranic Paradise*, 60–61. For the connotation of youthfulness, see also *AEL* 2616.

[65] If *kawāʿb* does indeed signify a voluptuous female, what would be the significance of combining it with a term that means "peer" or "of like age"? Context considered, youthfulness, akin to the onset of puberty in human beings, seems to be the most likely signifigance of the word.

pious (*abrār*), again using a gender inclusive term. The "immortal youths" (*wildān*) serve the pious, immortal youths who "when you see them [*hum*] you would suppose them to be scattered pearls."[66] The sensuality and majesty of the scene give rise to literal or metaphoric ecstasy: "And when thou seest, there thou wilt see bliss and a great kingdom."[67] There is plenty of sensuousness to be certain, but is there actual sex in the paradisal garden? Is there something *akin* to earthly sexual pleasure?

Qur'anic descriptions of Paradise make no explicit mention of sexual intercourse, even though several terms for intercourse are used in other places in the Qur'an, as we will see. This can be interpreted as consistent with the widespread Qur'anic use of sexual euphemisms, as we will also see, or it could potentially be argued that *actual* intercourse is not applicable to the paradisal realm. The observation that intercourse is not explicitly promised might disenchant earthly aspirants, but then again, could Paradise, by its very definition, possibly disappoint? One segment of verses mentions "raised beds" immediately followed by the discussion of heavenly spouses.[68] Another two verses mention that God will "pair" or "marry" (*zawwajnāhum*) inhabitants, here employing the word that is also regularly used in the Qur'an for human spouses and non-human mates as well.[69] It is ultimately unclear from Qur'anic assertions if heavenly

[66] Q. 76:19.
[67] Q. 76:20.
[68] Q. 56:34–35. Some exegetes have stressed that the *ḥūrī*s do not menstruate, procreate, or have bodily excretions. See Jarrar, "Strategies of Paradise," 277–78.
[69] See Q. 44:54 and 52:20. *The Study Quran* translates *zawwajnāhum* as "wed" and renders the verse "we shall wed them to wide-eyed maidens." The male plural object pronoun *hum* in *zawwajnāhum* could be understood as gender inclusive, and in a literal translation of the verse, there is no word "maiden"; the spouses are simply described as "wide-eyed" (*ḥūr ʿīn*). Both spouses from among the Paradisal immortal youth could potentially have wide eyes, but in dominant strains of Qur'anic interpretation the term is sexed to refer to virginal females. See *AEL* 666. Bakhtiar renders the phrase in question as, "we shall give in marriage lovely-eyed houris." See *The Sublime Quran*, 578; see also v. 52:20, p. 610.

beings have sexual relations akin to human beings on earth,[70] but the most internally consistent position is that there could be a semblance to intercourse, like other things in Paradise.[71]

In one verse, the Qur'an depicts paradisal beings of "restrained glances" (*qāṣirāt al-ṭarf*), "whom neither human nor jinn has ever touched [*lam yaṭmithhunna*]."[72] The strong implication for earthly aspirants of this Paradise is that the ones admitted to the abode will get to "touch" these previously untouched beings, although the Qur'an never explicitly makes such a promise. The idea of "deflowering" heavenly virgins also creates an interpretive dilemma. Namely, once "deflowered," a virgin is no longer a virgin, and so the notions of having one or more virginal maidens for all of eternity, and also having intercourse with her or them, are mutually exclusive propositions, at least with reference to our understanding of sex in the earthly realm. Having a great number of virgin brides would allow for sex with virgins for a time, but in an *eternal* realm, eventually would not one exhaust one's share of virgins? If, as it might be argued, the female-like beings are restored to a state of virginity after every sexual encounter, do male-like beings in Paradise experience a similar renewal? Or, is "virginity" in this usage only applicable to female beings? How, one might continue to wonder, is virginity marked somatically in Paradise?

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[70] As Haleem observes, "nowhere are they [beings of Paradise] seen in any sexual situations or even sleeping," *Quranic Paradise*, 61.

[71] See Q. 2:25: "And give glad tiding to those who believe and perform righteous deeds that theirs are Gardens with rivers running below. Whensoever they are given a fruit therefrom as provision, they say, 'This is the provision we received aforetime,' and they were give a likeness of it. Therein they have spouses [*azwāj*] made pure, and therein they shall abide."

[72] Q. 55:56. Here, I adopted Bakhtiar's more precise and literal choice of "those who restrain their glances" for the *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* over *The Study Quran*'s choice of the translation "modest gaze." For this translation, see *The Sublime Qur'an*, 621. The verb *ṭamatha*, from the root *ṭ-m-th* is used only in the form *yaṭmith* in this verse and in an exact repetition of the verse in 55:74, keeping with the repetitive style of the surah as a whole. Primary meanings of the root *ṭ-m-th* are agricultural and pastoral, including metaphorical uses pertaining to the female body: "to place a halter on a horse or camel for the first time; to graze a piece of land for the first time; to deflower; to menstruate," see *AED* 571. See also *AEL* 1878, which specifies that the term is used particularly for the onset of menses or a first experience of coition that causes bleeding.

The Qur'an describes both the *ḥūrī*s and the youth who are made eternal (*wildān mukhalladūn*) in general using the metaphor of pearls, a metaphor that is evocative of their purity and aesthetic appeal, but possibly also sexuality.[73] These heavenly beings have aesthetic—potentially erotic—appeal, but perhaps not a tangible function with regard to intercourse itself. Consider that heavenly beings are depicted on numerous occasions with abundant fruits and drinks,[74] circulating among them golden goblets,[75] but the Qur'an specifies that they do indeed consume the fruits: "abundant fruit *from which you will eat* shall be yours therein."[76] On another occasion, the Qur'an describes the bliss of the pious in Paradise who are "upon couches, *gazing*,"[77] and who are "given to drink of pure wine sealed, / whose seal is musk—so for that let the strivers strive."[78] The sensuality of the imagery is ostensibly intended to motivate pious action in the worldly realm,[79] but the depictions leave plenty for the inquiring mind: In what ways are these heavenly beings sexed somatically such that sexual intercourse would be possible? Do heavenly beings even have genitalia? Qur'anic discourse does not provide this level of detail. With no need for reproduction, and hence no need for reproductive organs, perhaps the paradisal gardens are pleasure enough in and of themselves without the need for somatic sexual

[73] As discussed in Haleem, *Quranic Paradise*, 64–65. See Q. 55:58 for *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* compared to rubies and coral.
[74] For example, Q. 56:29–33. See also 37:45–47, 47:15, 76:15–18, and multiple other verses.
[75] For example, Q. 43:71.
[76] For example, Q. 43:73. Emphasis added. See also 52:19, "Eat and drink in enjoyment for that which you used to do."
[77] Q. 83:23. Emphasis added. Unlike the elaborate alimental fare in Paradise, the Qur'an provides innuendos, but it does not explicitly specify that beings in Paradise have sexual intercourse. This could be seen as consistent with the Qur'anic habit of addressing sexuality primarily in euphemistic terms.
[78] Q. 83:25–26.
[79] For example, in one instance, in describing the pious of this world the Qur'an states, "No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for them as a recompense for that which they used to do." See Q. 32:17. See also Haleem, *Quranic Paradise*, 61.

pleasure. In that case, the heavenly beings are aesthetically pleasing but do not have the teleological purpose of sexually pleasuring inhabitants of the garden.

Logistical questions involved in potential sexual encounters in Paradise must remain unanswered if we confine ourselves to Qur'anic discourse, but we can logically posit that the *ḥūrī*s should be understood as a subset of the more general category of immortal youths, since *ḥūrī*s are both youthful and immortal inhabitants of the gardens of Paradise.[80] The "females of restrained glances" (*qāṣirāt al-ṭarf*) and the wide-eyed beings (*ḥūr ʿīn*) may be one and the same, but it is also possible that the *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* are a subset of the *ḥūr ʿīn*, or a subset of the immortal youth in general.[81] The "wide-eyed" *ḥūr ʿīn* are described by the shape of their eyes, and the *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* are described by the gesturing of their eyes. Notably, the behavior of the *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* extends the virtue of restrained glancing from the earthly realm to the realm of Paradise.

Sexual Relations and the Regulation of Desire

Back in the human realm, much of the Qur'anic discourse on sexual relations is in the context of spelling out which sexual relations are licit and which are illicit. Multiple Qur'anic stories involve sexual relations or sexual desire in some way, and these narratives complement verses that directly permit and proscribe. There are several fundamental questions that are relevant to establishing what constitutes licit versus illicit sex: With whom? How? According to what

[80] See Jarrar, "Houris," in *EQ* 2:465–58.

[81] The most internally consistent possibility, given the various Qur'anic verses on the subject, is that "human being" is a creature bound exclusively to this present world, whereas in the gardens of the next world, all former human beings are varieties of the "immortal youths" of which the Qur'an speaks; the *ḥūr ʿīn*, from this understanding, are former human beings in their transformed state.

terms?[82] And finally, how should marital disharmony or breaches of proper sexual etiquette be handled? The Qur'anic narratives involving female figures often help to clarify such questions regarding illicit versus licit sex as well as other matters related to the etiquette of relations. I will survey the relevant episodes in brief here, as these episodes are also taken up with more detail in subsequent chapters. My contributions here are in linking and probing Qur'anic stories that involve sexual ethics; Islamic sexual ethics in general is a vast and highly contentious field, and my aim here is to highlight how an intra-textual reading of Qur'anic stories can serve to illuminate the most emphatic points pertaining to sex and sexual ethics within Qur'anic discourse itself.[83]

Sex with Whom?

The Qur'an alludes to several incidents that address the question of "with whom?" In the context of the Qur'anic emphasis on heteronormativity, same-sex relations are addressed by the story of

[82] Notably, marriage is not the only contractual agreement that makes sex licit between a man and a woman. Unfree persons, known in the Qur'an literally as "what your right hands possess" (*mā malakat aymānukum*, see, for instance, Q. 2:221, 4:25, and 24:32), are also eligible as sexual partners with some exceptions. The Qur'anic references to such unfree persons are gender neutral, but within legal works, only men can take female unfree persons as sexual partners; the opposite situation, a free female with an unfree male, is forbidden by jurists. For a detailed consideration, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). For an excellent historiographical approach to themes of intent (*irāda*) and consent (*riḍā*) in Islamic legal discourse on licit and illicit sex, including with discussion of unfree persons, see Hina Azim, *Sexual Violation in Islamic Law: Substance, Evidence, and Procedure*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[83] To date, the most thorough treatment of matters pertaining to sex and sexuality from an academic and explicitly female-centric perspective is the work of Kecia Ali, who places emphasis on "meaningful consent and mutuality" as "crucial for a just ethics of sexual intimacy," and argues that among the virtues that sex should embody from a Muslim perspective are "kindness, fairness, compassion, and generosity." See *Sexual Ethics and Islam,* 193–94. For a contemporary reappraisal to shift Muslim contract from the medieval notion of "ownership" to a framework of "partnership," see Asifa Qureishi-Landes, "A Meditation on *Mahr*, Modernity, and Muslim Marriage Contract Law," in *Feminism, Law, and Religion*, ed. Marie A. Failinger, Elizabeth R. Schiltz, and Susan J. Stabile, Gender in Law, Culture, and Society (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 173–195.

Lot, his daughters, and the townspeople who are "confused in their drunkenness."[84] Other Qur'anic incidents that clarify the permitted versus proscribed sexual partners occur within the context of the life of the Prophet Muhammad himself, as discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. The issue of incest is also addressed by an episode involving the Prophet's foster son Zayd and Zayd's ex-wife Zaynab, wherein the Qur'an clarifies that fostering does not in itself generate an incest prohibition.[85] Additional stories and verses related to the Prophet's sexual partners (his wives and a concubine) illuminate the interpersonal dynamics involved in plural marriages.

Positioning Sex

No full-fledged narratives clarify the matter of how, physically, sexual relations should occur. The only narrative description of an act of intercourse in the Qur'an is as follows: "When he covered her [*taghashshāhā*], she bore a light burden, and carried it about."[86] The verb in this passage meaning "he covered her" (*taghashshāhā*) is also used in a different grammatical form

[84] Q. 15:72. This story is discussed in the subsequent chapter in the context of father-daughter relationships. The Qur'an's depiction of heterosexual relationships as normative is a point of much scholarly analysis that is beyond the scope of this work. See Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, 96–125; see also Mobeen Vaid, "Can Islam Accommodate Homosexual Acts? Quranic Revisionism and the Case of Scott Kugle," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 34, no. 3 (2017), 45–97.

[85] See Q. 33:3–5 and 33:37 in which the Qur'an clarifies that adoption will be prohibited as it is essentially an attempt to change lineage through the act of renaming. Fostering, however, is encouraged and is not included in this prohibition against adoption. As I discuss in chapter 2, Qur'anic narratives include several foster children and parents.

[86] Q. 7:189. Some have speculated that this unnamed couple is Adam and Eve, but the verse seems more likely to be a parable. See *SQ* 476n189–90. The story is not taken to mandate a normative sexual position, with the male necessarily "covering" the female; on the contrary, with the exception of prohibiting anal sex, Islamic jurisprudence does not regulate sexual positions, and it is perfectly licit for the female to "cover" the male. In any case, anatomically speaking, it is the female sexual organ that "covers over" the male sexual organ in intercourse.

with reference to the night, which "covers over" the day.[87] The verse above describes a sexual position with a male on top of a female, but it is just one description of one sexual act; it does not function as a prescriptive for sexual relations. Another verse uses the metaphorical notion of covering in a more enveloping and wholly reciprocal way, this time in both a descriptive and arguably prescriptive sense: "They [your women] are a garment [*libās*] for you, and you are a garment [*libās*] for them."[88]

Another verse likens sexual intercourse to plowing a field: "Your women are a tilth to you [*ḥarthun lakum*], so go unto your tilth [*fa'tū ḥarthakum*] as you will."[89] This metaphor could implicitly liken male sperm to seed and the ovum or uterus to a field, wherein an agricultural laborer cultivates the fecund soil. From the vantage point of an ecologically pillaged modern world, this agricultural metaphor may at first conjure up an idea of exploitation, but this interpretation of exploitation blatantly counters the many Qur'anic verses that point to the wondrous nature of cultivated earth and the sanctity of the womb.[90] The metaphor need not be an explicitly reproductive one. In other verses, the *ḥarth* is equated not with the act of tilling but with bounty, enjoyment, or the metaphorical act of harvesting. For example, the Qur'an declares, "Whosoever desires the harvest [*ḥarth*] of the Hereafter, *We* shall increase for *him his* harvest. And whosoever desires the harvest of this world, *We* shall give *him* some thereof, but *he* will

[87] For example, Q. 7:54. There are a multitude of literal and metaphorical usages and eleven different grammatical forms of the root *gh-sh-w/gh-sh-y* that occur in the Qur'an, but of the twenty-nine total occurrences of this root, only in the aforementioned verse is it used explicitly in reference to having sexual relations. See *AED* 666–668. See also *AEL* 790. Notably in Islamicate poetry the night is often equated to the beloved, God, or a human lover.
[88] Q. 2:187.
[89] Q. 2:223. See related discussions in Wills, *What the Qur'an Meant*, 183–84.
[90] For example, Q. 22:5 connects *turāb* to the creation of the human being in stages in the womb. Over a dozen verses echo the idea that human beings were created from *turāb*, or soil/dirt/dust; this, not to mention that human beings themselves, like the remains of the cultivated fields, return to the earth in death. See also 18:37, 33:11, 65:7, and multiple other verses on human origins and material mortality.

have no share in the Hereafter." In this case, the bounty could be the enjoyment of sexual intercourse itself.

The Qur'an also employs the notion of "inclining" as a euphemism for sexual allure as in the story of Joseph and the wife of the viceroy: "She inclined toward him, and he [would have] inclined toward her" (*hammat bihi wa-hamma bihā law lā*).[91] Sexual relations are often discussed in such innuendo, but intercourse is mentioned specifically in a lengthy verse that permits "intercourse with your women [*al-rafathu ilā nisāʾikum*]" during the nights of the fast but not during the days of the fast, therein instructing that "[women are] garments for you and you for them."[92] The verse continues by permitting sexual relations in the context of the nights of the fasts, "so now lie with them [*bāshirūhunna*] and seek what God has prescribed for you," and it prohibits intercourse (*lā tubāshirūhunna*) during menses with a direct command.[93] In the

[91] Q. 12:24. The verse goes on to stress that he "would have" inclined toward her "had he not seen the proof of his Lord [*law lā an raʾā burhāna rabbihi*]." The parallel structure of the language here (*hammat bihi wa-hamma bihā*), and the use of the conditional structure stresses that the inclination was just on the verge of happening. See Q. 22:52 for a verse that discusses the desires of messengers and prophets in general and the way in which "God makes firm *His* signs" to them.

[92] Q. 2:187. *The Study Quran* renders *al-rafathu ilā* in innuendo as "going unto," to imply intercourse. See also 2:197 for the only other Qur'anic occurrence of the word *rafatha* in the context of a prohibition of sexual relations (*lā rafatha*) for pilgrims on *hajj*. These two instances are the only occurrences of this term or its root *r-f-th* in the Qur'an. In addition to sexual intercourse, the term can mean "obscenity, indecency, indecent action or speech, to behave in an obscene manner." See *AED* 373–74. *The Study Quran* renders the occurrence of *nisāʾkum* in this verse as "your wives," but another potential translation could be "your women" more generally. In later chapters, I will look in more detail at this distinction between "wives" and "women" as categorical references to females.

[93] Q. 2:187. *The Study Quran* renders *bāshirūhunna* as "to lie with" but then for reasons that are unclear translates the negative form of the command (*lā tubāshirūhunna*) with a euphemism, as "do not approach." The root *b-sh-r* appears 122 times in 13 grammatical forms. A primary meaning of the root is skin, and so sexual relations in this sense are intimacy through skin-to-skin contact. The root also has the connotation of giving good tidings, as in Q. 41:30. See *AED* 92–94. Given the wide range of possible terms that could convey a similar meaning, the choice of terminology for sexual relations is also quite precise here because it is skin-to-skin contact with the genital areas that is prohibited during menses, but other forms of sexualized contact are permissible according to normative legal thought. For a discussion of the derivation of these rulings, see Shuruq Naguib, "Horizons and Limitations of the Muslim Feminist Hermeneutics: Reflections on the Menstruation Verse," in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 33–50. For a detailed discussion of menstruation in Islamic law, see Celene [Ibrahim] Lizzio, "Gendering Ritual: A Muslima's Reading of the Laws of Menstrual Preclusion," in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women*

stories and poetic descriptions of sexual relations the Qur'an evokes innuendo and metaphor, but when it comes to matters of ritual purity and ritual performance, the Qur'an employs a more direct, literal term for sexual relations that arguably pertains specifically to penetration during intercourse, not to other modes of "inclining" or intimacy. Thus, it can be observed that the Qur'an distinguishes multiple different aspects of human sexuality, ranging from the emotional-cognitive dimensions of attraction and mutual companionship to the physicality of contact itself.

Tempting Sex

Regulating sexuality is one of the major tests for human beings, female and male alike, in Qur'anic stories and ethical injunctions. One segment of the Qur'an in *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (the surah entitled "Women"), outlines verses on fornication and ends with the verses: "God desired to make [this] clear unto you [*li-yubayyina lakum*], and to guide you to the traditions [*yahdiyakum sunan*] of those who went before you, and to relent unto you. And God is Knowing, Wise. / God desires to relent unto you, but those who follow lusts [*al-shahawāt*] desire that you go tremendously astray. / God desired to lighten [your burden] for you, for the human being was created weak."[94] The language here is notable in evoking God's "desires" to relent unto the human being and to lighten her burdens; God's inherently good desires are contrasted to the desires of "those who follow lusts" (*al-shahawāt*).

Given this stress on licit relations and proper restraint in matters of sexuality, what makes sex licit or illicit from the Qur'anic point of view? Many Qur'anic verses discuss the circumstances and the necessary commitments between parties that are pre-requisites to licit sex,

Theologians, ed. Elif Mendeni, Ednan Aslan, and Marcia Hermansen, 167–79 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013).

[94] Q. 4:26–28.

including but not limited to the theological conviction or religious affiliation of the individual,[95] and the necessity of the bridewealth transaction.[96] A number of verses deal in general terms with the issue of marital financial agreements, but one story in particular (that of a woman who marries Moses) models the applied ethics and dispositions involved in negotiating a marital arrangement, including the financial dimensions, as we will explore momentarily below.

Bad Sex and Severing Intimate Bonds

How should improper etiquette or disharmony between sexual partners be addressed on the interpersonal and communal levels? On this question, several Qur'anic stories are relevant. In fact, more Qur'anic stories are devoted to these themes than stories bearing on other aspects of sexual relations or even family relations. Judging by the sheer number of stories that broach the topic, the issue of illicit sex is a major human deliemma from within the Qur'anic worldview, both for the chaste who are unjustly accused of illicit sex and for the profligate who raise havoc for themselves and others through their profligacy.

One incident referred to in the Qur'an involves the Prophet Muhammad's wife ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr (d. 58/678), who is falsely accused of having engaged in adultery, as discussed in chapter 4.[97] Mary is herself accused of illicit sex upon encountering her people while carrying her infant son Jesus while still being an unmarried woman.[98] Add to these instances Joseph's encounters with the wife of the viceroy and Lot's encounters with the drunken mob for the broad

[95] See Ali's discussion in *Sexual Ethics*, 14–22.
[96] See, for example, Q. 4:24–25. Notably, the word "their [f.] bridewealth" (*ujūrahunna*), in these verses is the twenty-seventh word in both verses, suggesting therein by structure, perhaps, the principle of balance.
[97] For a critical overview of biographies of ʿĀʾishah throughout Muslim intellectual history, including with attention given to aspects of sexuality, see Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 155–99.
[98] Q. 19:27–29.

range of Qur'anic stories that somehow involve the prospect of illicit sex.[99] Notably, no female figure in the Qur'an is ever depicted as enduring sexual violence.[100]

In an episode mentioned in brief above, the Prophet himself fears accusations of illicit sexual behavior if he were to marry the divorcee of his formerly adopted son, Zayd b. Ḥārithah. The Qur'an narrates that the Prophet Muhammad's first advice to Zayd when Zayd came to the Prophet to propose a break from his wife was, "Retain your wife for yourself and reverence God"; yet, the Qur'an narrates that God had already willed that Zayd and Zaynab separate and that the Prophet Muhammad subsequently marry Zaynab.[101] From another angle, the story reinforces what other verses of the Qur'an plainly state: separation between spouses who are not wholly compatible for some reason or who do not otherwise have a mutually beneficial relationship can serve as a divinely sanctioned solution. In this case, God explicitly promises to provide for both.[102] Divorcees may remarry, and even remarry each other within certain Qur'anic limits.[103] With the exception of marrying the Prophet Muhammad's wives after his death, as

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[99] For an overview of the Qur'anic passages on illicit sex, and a discussion of the verses that prescribe penalties for illicit sex or for falsely accusing someone of illicit sex. Barazangi notes, "Both men and women are punished by the same means for fornication, lewdness, and adultery. In addition, the Qur'an emphasizes the need of four witnesses against a woman in order to protect her from false accusations; and that those who accuse women without providing four witnesses should be flogged. Finally, the Qur'an reminds the believers that they should leave alone the guilty if he/she repents," *Women's Identity and Rethinking the Hadith*, 8–9.

[100] For Abrahamic perspectives on this issue, see Amy Kalmanofski, ed., *Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Feminist Studies in Religion Books, 2017).

[101] Q. 33:37.

[102] For example, Q. 128–30, "If a wife fears animosity or desertion from her husband, there is no blame upon them should they come to an accord, for an accord is better. Souls are prone to avarice, but if you are virtuous and reverent, surely God is Aware of whatsoever you do. / You will not be able to deal fairly between women, even if it is your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, so that you leave her as if suspended. If you come to an accord and are reverent, truly God is Forgiving, Merciful. / If the two separate, God will enrich both out of *His* Abundance, and God is All-Encompassing, Wise."

[103] See Q. 2:226–32. For an overview of normative Islamic rulings regarding divorce, see Celene [Ibrahim] Lizzio, "Law: Islamic Traditions," *Cultural Sociology of Divorce: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert E. Emery (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), 670–73.

explicitly prohibited by the Qur'an,[104] there is otherwise no prohibition on marrying divorcees or on marrying widows. For widows in particular, the Qur'an renders it explicitly permissible according to specified guidelines that ensure the remarriage happens "in an honorable way."[105] In retelling aspects of the Prophet's relations with his wives, the Qur'an also gives the example of husband-wife conflict that gets resolved without moving to the stage of divorce. Although the Qur'an gives solemn admonitions to the Prophet's wives on two occasions,[106] according to biographical literature, the Prophet Muhammad never permanently divorced a wife with whom he had consummated a marriage, even if there were moments of tension and discord as recorded both in the Qur'an and as passed down with more details in communal memory.[107] In short, Zaynab is the Qur'an's only divorcee female figure; her divorce is rather revitalizing for her as she is married *by God directly* to a beloved prophet.

Female Sex Drives: An Intra-textual Reading

The wife of the viceroy is a clear Qur'anic affirmation of female sexual drive, although in her case it is a drive that is catastrophically misplaced. The story begins with the power of desire:

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[104] See Q. 33:53.

[105] See Q. 2:234–235: "And those among you who are taken by death and leave behind wives, let them wait by themselves four months and ten days. And when they have fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you in what they do concerning themselves in an honorable way. And God is Aware of whatsoever you do. / And there is no blame upon you in intimating a proposal to [these] women, or in keeping it within yourselves. God knows that you mean to seek them in marriage, but do not pledge your troth with them secretly save that you speak in an honorable way, and resolve not upon the marriage tie until the term prescribed is fulfilled. And know that God knows what is within your souls; so beware of *Him*, and know that God is Forgiving, Clement." Though the Qur'an does not relate stories of their marriages to the Prophet Muhammad, biographical traditions relate that the Prophet married a number of widows.

[106] See Q. 33:28 and 66:5, as discussed in later chapters.

[107] Some reports suggest that one wife was briefly divorced but then the marriage was shortly after reinstated. For discussion, see Scott Lucas, "Divorce, Ḥadīth-Scholar Style: From al-Dārimī to al-Tirmidhī," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 3 (2008): 325–368, especially 340. Biographical literatures also discuss other proposed and unconsummated marriages, a subject that is beyond the scope of this work.

"She in whose house he was staying sought to lure him from himself," that is, to seduce him against his better judgment.[108] She proceeds to lock the doors and exclaim, "Come, thou!"[109] Here even a righteous human being such as Joseph, who was explicitly given "wisdom and knowledge" by God,[110] risks "being lured from himself," and inclining toward illicit sex. Instead of inclining, however, Joseph demonstrates the Qur'anic ideal of prudent sexual behavior by taking refuge in God and by demonstrating how to fulfill the instruction to "guard the private parts."[111]

Fortified Pudenda

The notion of guarding private parts is oft-repeated in the Qur'an, as in the following verses listed here in the order of their appearance in the Qur'an in its final liturgical and book form, as it would be encountered by a reader, reciter, or listener: in Q. 21:91 for Mary specifically "who fortified her pudenda" (*allatī aḥṣanat farjahā*); in Q. 23:5 for human beings who preserve (gender inclusive, pl. *ḥāfiẓūn*) their private parts; in Q. 24:30 (as a plural verb, *yaḥfaẓūna*); in Q. 24:31 as specifically directed to believing females (ya*ḥfaẓna*); in Q. 33:35 as "male preservers of their private parts and female preservers," al-*ḥāfiẓīna furūjahum wal-ḥāfiẓāt*); in Q. 66:12 regarding Mary, "who fortified her pudenda" (*allatī aḥṣanat farjahā*) (a repetition of 21:91); and in Q. 70:29 (a repetition of 23:5). Consider momentarily that all of these mentions of "fortifying" (for women) and "preserving" (for women and men) pudenda come *after* the story of Joseph encountering the viceroy's wife in the liturgical Qur'an. In this case, the medium of storytelling

[108] Q. 12:23.
[109] Ibid. Her speech in this encounter is taken up in chapter 3.
[110] See Q. 12:22.
[111] For an extensive discussion of the word *ḥāfiẓāt* and its historical interpretations, see Chaudry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition*.

first broaches this issue of chastity.[112] Qur'anic readers, reciters, and listeners see the issue within the complex social web in which sexual relations play out, before the Qur'an begins to reinforce the moral driving theme: avoid illicit sex.

In this series of verses above involving guarding the pudenda, both females and males are "guarders" of their external sexual organs, but females alone "fortify" their pudenda. Both sexes are responsible for preserving their chastity presumably against the inclinations of the self and the potential advances of others; but females, in particular, "fortify" against sexual aggression. Namely, it is the female herself who is the "fortifier" and the "guarder"; she takes agency and authority in ensuring that *licit* intimate interactions bring about the sensation of being "adorned," as in the metaphor of garments discussed above, and that *illicit* intimate interactions are "repelled," as the inhabitant of a fortress seeks to repel invading forces. The illicit penis, it would seem, it something for female pudenda to "fortify" against.

The Viceroy's Scandalous Wife

In the stories it tells, the Qur'an gives examples of women who fortify but also gives the example of a woman who is herself the intimate invader. Namely, in the figure of the wife of the viceroy, the Qur'an gives an example of a woman who is a willing and even proactive adulteress; rather than fortifying, she invites: "She locked the doors and said, 'Come, thou!'"[113] Other female figures seemingly balance out the sexually-driven scandalousness of the viceroy's wife. Mary, for instance, a Qur'anic female figured celebrated for her chastity,[114] also has a run-in with an

[112] One mention of pious women who are "guarders" (f. pl. *ḥāfiẓāt*) of the "unseen" (*al-ghayb*) occurs in Q. 4:34, but it is only after the encounter between the vizier's wife and Joseph that direct mentions of guarding the pudenda occur.
[113] Q. 12:23.
[114] See, for example, Q. 66:12.

intruder in her private quarters, on which occasion she immediately asserts: "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if thou art reverent!"[115] The contrast to the wife of the viceroy could not be starker; Mary seeks refuge in God when a male figure suddenly appears in her private chamber, and the viceroy's wife seeks to lock a man in her chamber.[116] Mary seeks refuge from God from someone; the wife of the viceroy *causes* someone to seek refuge in God. The viceroy's wife attempts to have an affair and then accuses someone else of attempted fornication; Mary is chaste but then gets accused of fornication: "Then she came with him unto her people, carrying him. They said, 'O Mary! Thou hast brought an amazing thing! / O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not an evil man, nor was thy mother unchaste.'"[117] In the case of the viceroy's wife, a "witness from among her family" points to the presence of physical evidence against her in the form of Joseph's shirt, torn from his back as he tried to escape her. In the case of Mary, the infant Jesus, also someone from Mary's family, defends her honor, using his infant testimony as evidence that her birthing experience was no ordinary affair.

Marry Me Moses!

In a story involving Moses's eventual wife, the Qur'an gives another example that contrasts the imprudence of the wife of the viceroy. Moses has just fled Egypt when he, dejected, comes across a watering hold in Midian where he chivalrously, despite his own disheveled and

[115] Q. 19:18. I have adapted *The Study Quran* translation of this verse from "you are" to "thou art" here for stylistic consistency.
[116] In chapter 3, I highlight the similarities in language between Mary and Joseph when confronting their respective intruders.
[117] See Q. 19:27–29. For reflections on the births of Jesus and Moses as being subversive, see Geissinger, "Mary in the Qur'an," 388–91. For reflections on the terminology "Sister of Aaron," see Michael Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate," in *The Qurʾān in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān (Leiden: Brill, 2010), specifically 539–41 and 553–54.

desperate state, helps two women water their flock. Moses—like Joseph—is stranded and far from home, and the woman at a watering hole in Midian could very well also feel attraction to this young stranger, a strapping prophet in the making, but she, however, does not turn to impious seduction. The Qur'an describes the encounter that unfolds:

> Then one of the two [sisters at the watering hole] came to him [Moses], walking bashfully. She said, "Truly my father summons you, that he might render unto you a reward for having watered [our flocks] for us." When he [Moses] came and recounted his story unto him [the father], he said, "Fear not. You have been saved from the wrongdoing people." / One of the two [sisters] said, "O my father! Hire him. Surely the best you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy."[118]

The Qur'anic narrative notes that the sister was "walking bashfully," likely as an indication of her virtue.[119] As his daughter enthusiastically and endearingly suggests, the father does indeed hire Moses, as part of a package deal that includes marriage to his daughter.[120] Not so dissimilar from the passions of the viceroy's wife for Joseph, this woman in Midian seemingly falls for a strong, trustworthy young man, an eventual prophet of God; unlike the wife of the viceroy, however, she had discretion enough to pursue her interest through licit means from beginning to end, serving therein, we can infer, as a model for how to pursue a relationship through licit means. She approaches the matter with fitting reserve in her mannerisms and affectionate discretion in speaking with her father, and she licitly—and even quite swiftly as the story

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[118] Q. 28:25–26. For discussions of the figure of Moses, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Qur'an and Islamic Exegesis*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (London: Routledge; Curzon, 2002).

[119] Q. 28:25. For a discussion of the virtue of modesty and inhibition in Islamic ethics, see Marion Holmes Katz, "Shame (*Ḥayāʾ*) as an Affective Disposition in Islamic Legal Thought," *Journal of Law, Religion and State* 3 (2014): 139–69. Katz posits a definition of *ḥayāʾ* as "anticipatory shame" noting that "in its broadest usage, the word does not suggest the possession of a retiring of self-effacing personality"; rather it denotes the possibility that a "specific action may be unbecoming," 143; furthermore, Katz observes that to have *ḥayāʾ* is "an affective disposition rather than simply an evanescent feeling," 144. As a desirable quality for a young woman entering a marriage, see Katz's discussions, 153–54. See also previous discussions of the paradisal female-like beings of "restrained glancing" (*qāṣirāt al-ṭarf*) in 37:48, 38:52, and 55:56.

[120] As discussed further in subsequent chapters.

progresses—attains a husband. Curiously, the identity of the two sisters is not differentiated, and the sister who speaks to Moses may or may not be the same sister who advocates with her father for Moses' employment. Potentially one sister was speaking up for the interests of the other? In any case, as if guarding the privacy and emphasizing the decorum of the woman, the Qur'an only intimates her desire; she does not, for instance, say: "Marry me Moses!" She is assertive, but with prudence. The mannerism of her walking toward Moses is also echoed in the modesty of her speech with regard to urging her father to keep Moses around a little while loger.

"The Command of God Shall Be Fulfilled"

In another marriage depicted in the Qur'an, God intervenes directly to make a man, in this case the Prophet Muhammad himself, licit for a woman. She, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh as the commentary tradition preserves, was married to the Prophet's formerly adopted son Zayd, who found her to be pious and kind, but too aristocratic for his preferences.[121] The Prophet Muhammad initially encourages Zayd to "retain your wife for yourself and reverence God," but God's will, as the Qur'an relates, was that Zayd should divorce Zaynab so that she could be married to the Prophet, "so that there should be no restriction for the believers in respect to the wives of their adopted sons when the latter have relinquished their claims upon them."[122] The divorce was indeed secured, but as the Qur'an again relates, the Prophet "fear[ed] the people" would accuse him of breaking an incest taboo on account of his prior declaration of Zayd's adoption years earlier. In this instance, the Prophet and Zaynab are married *by God directly*: "*We* wed her to thee. . . And

[121] The Qur'an does not make mention of ʿĀ'ishah by name, but the story is widely narrated in early biographical literatures. For a contemporary English rendering, see Lings, *Muhammad*, 248–54.
[122] Q. 33:37.

the Command of God shall be fulfilled."[123] Thus, the revelation of the verse enacts the marriage and the subsequent ruling that the incest prohibition does not apply to cases of fostering or adoption.[124] The wife of the viceroy faced the inverse problem: she was attracted to Joseph, her foster son.[125] Unfortunately, for her, God did not intervene, and despite her ardent efforts, her infatuation remained unquenched.

"This Is a Tremendous Calumny!"

In yet another Qur'anic story, the character of an upright woman can be juxtaposed with the case of the wife of the viceroy; ʿĀʾishah, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, was accused of adultery but was then declared to be upright and innocent by the Qur'an, as discussed in later chapters. In this instance, the Qur'an condemns at length those who gossiped and accused a chaste woman of indecency:

> Why, when you heard it, did not the believing men and women think well of their own, and say, "This is a manifest lie"? / Why did they not bring forth four witnesses thereto? For when they brought not the witness, it is they who were then liars in the Eyes of God. / And were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy, in this world and the Hereafter, a great punishment who have befallen you for having engaged [in vain talk] concerning it, / when you accepted it with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, supposing it to be slight, though it is great in the Eyes of

[123] Ibid. This is one of many verses in the Qur'an where the Qur'anic narrator speaks in both the first and third person. The word for marriage is also a word that signifies copulation: *nikāḥ*, from the root *n-k-ḥ*, holds the meanings to become commingled, to copulate, and to take in marriage; it refers to "coitus; and coitus without marriage; and marriage without coitus," see *AEL* 2848.

[124] I will discuss this episode in more detail in chapter 4 in the context of the ways in which the female companions of the Prophet Muhammad were involved in legal precedents.

[125] See Q. 12:21: "The man from Egypt who brought him [Joseph] said unto his wife, 'Give him honorable accommodation. It may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son.' And thus did *We* establish Joseph in the land, that *We* might teach him the interpretation of events. And God prevails over *His* affair, but most of humankind know not."

> God. / And why, when you heard it, did you not say, "It is not for us to speak of this! Glory be to *Thee*! This is a tremendous calumny!"[126]

This episode includes a cadre of gossipers who were also implicated, and the larger story in the biographical literatures also includes family members who bore testimony to ʿĀʾishah's upright character.[127]

While both politically prominent wives, ʿĀʾishah's situation directly contrasts with that of the wife of the Egyptian viceroy in several key ways. The viceroy's wife followed her caprice, slandered the person she herself had accosted, consorted with accomplices among the women of the town to exacerbate the situation, and caused an innocent person to be committed to prison; later, the Qur'an relates the viceroy's wife's own testimony of her wrongdoing: "The viceroy's wife said, 'Now the truth has come to light. It was I who sought to lure him from himself, and verily he is among the truthful.'"[128] In direct contrast, ʿĀʾishah acts with discretion when she finds herself in seclusion with an unrelated young man, only to be accused of infidelity by the people of her town, but the Qur'an *itself* testifies to her innocence: "Truly those who brought forth the lie were a group among you. . . .."[129] Both episodes touch upon communal responses to alleged sexual impropriety; in the first instance the woman in the relationship is indeed a seductress, and in the other instance, she is chaste. One story is derived from pre-Qur'anic sacred history, and the other story plays out within the nascent Muslim polity; the very theme that was initially raised in the story of Joseph's encounters with the viceroy's wife has direct bearing for

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[126] Q. 24:12–16. See also the latter verses 24:23–24, "Truly those who accuse chaste and heedless believing women are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and theirs shall be a great punishment / on the day their tongues, their hands, and their feet bear witness against them as to that which they used to do."

[127] The incidents that led to the accusation, the accusations themselves, and the accusers are not recounted in the Qur'an, but the Qur'an does relate extensively the moral and ethical lessons of the episode for the different parties involved, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

[128] Q. 12:51.

[129] Q. 24:11, as discussed further in chapter 4.

the emerging Muslims, a dynamic that is explored further in chapter 4. The wife of this Egyptian viceroy is not, of course, the only Egyptian woman mentioned in Qur'anic narratives. The character of this Egyptian aristocrat can be directly juxtaposed as well with a woman from another story in sacred history, namely Moses's foster mother, the wife of Pharaoh, who despite being married to a tyrant is extoled as an epitome of virtue, as is explored in subsequent chapters.[130]

Pursue Justice, Not Lusts

The wife of the Egyptian viceroy, one of the Qur'an's handful of wayward women, is the only woman whose moral folly is discussed at any length and in any detail in the Qur'an. As we will see, the episode even ends on a slightly redeeming note, ultimately leaving the status of this morally troubled female figure up for debate in a way that contrasts with the irrevocable damnation of the Qur'an's other three irrevocably corrupt wives. The episode of the wife of the viceroy's failed seduction of Joseph has an undeniable theatrical quality;[131] however, approaching this story from another angle—as a narrative about what is commonly referred to in contemporary parlance as "sexual assault"—provides insights into the dynamics of sex, political power, coercion, testimony, and the pursuit of justice, as we will now explore.[132]

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[130] Although not mentioned directly in the Qur'an, Hagar, the consort of Abraham, is also widely understood to be of Egyptian background.

[131] See Mustansir Mir, "Irony in the Qur'ān: A Study of the Story of Joseph," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. J. Boullata (New York: Routledge, 2000). See also Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters," *Muslim World* 1 (1986): 1–15; and James Morris, "Dramatizing the Sura of Joseph: An Introduction to the Islamic Humanities," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 18 (1994): 201–24.

[132] For analysis of the interactions between the two, their giving of testimony subsequent to the assault, Joseph's unjust imprisonment, and the viceroy's wife's eventual confession all in relation to the experience of contemporary sexual assault survivors and perpetrators, see Celene Ibrahim, "Sexual Violence and Qur'anic Resources for Healing Processes," in *Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts*, ed. Amy Kalmanofsky (Cambridge, MA: Feminist Studies in Religion, 2017), 80–88.

The narrative also prompts an examination of these underlying power dynamics in a manner that involves, but that ultimately blurs and transcends, categories of femaleness, maleness, masculinity, femininity, and womanhood. At the same time, the gender of figures cannot be overlooked: why does the Qur'an's most detailed account of what we might refer to in contemporary parlance as "attempted sexual assault" involve a female perpetrator and a male victim?[133] The Qur'an could have otherwise depicted a female subject to male aggression, a female-female encounter,[134] or no instance of sexual assault at all. Not addressing the issue, or depicting a female subject to male sexual aggression, could arguably be less female-affirming than depicting a woman as powerful—yet morally troubled—protagonist next to a vulnerable male figure. From another angle, Joseph, while male in biological sex, epitomizes the intersection of several socially disadvantaged identities that make him particularly vulnerable to exploitation: he was subjected to violence, displacement, and migration (his brothers intended to kill him out of jealousy and then abandoned him for dead in a well),[135] he was an ethnic minority as a Hebrew under an Egyptian aristocracy,[136] he was a youth in a foster situation which rendered him without certain protections, and he was sold into slavery and thus was a liminally

[133] See Gayane Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story?'" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (1997): 485–508. On a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion, see my introductory comments.

[134] Male toward male desire is alluded to in the story of Lot's people; however, female-upon-female sexual desire is not directly alluded to within any specific Qur'anic story.

[135] Q. 12:15–18.

[136] For analysis of the biblical "ambivalent and self-contradictory masculinity of Isaac and Jacob," that then "culminates in the history of representations of Jacob's favorite son, Joseph," see Lori Hope Lefkovitz, *In Scripture: The First Stories of Jewish Sexual Identities* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 85. See also Lori Lefkovitz, "'Not a Man': Joseph and the Character of Masculinity in Judaism and Islam," in *Gender in Judaism and Islam: Common Lives, Uncommon Heritage*, ed. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet and Beth S. Wenger (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 155–80, and Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

unfree person.[137] The "women of the city" even refer to Joseph by highlighting his youth and his status as a "slave boy," gossiping: "The viceroy's wife sought to lure her slave boy from himself!"[138]

Despite the biological sex of the protagonists, power dynamics between the socially dominant and the wrongfully oppressed are arguably the more dominant driving forces of the narrative, as evidenced, for instance, when Joseph is punished with imprisonment by the sovereigns, even in light of the clear physical evidence that supports his innocence and his good faith efforts to resist and flee from the sexual advances of the viceroy's wife: "He [Joseph] said, 'It was she [the viceroy's wife] who sought to lure me from myself.' And a witness of her own people testified: 'If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has spoken the truth and he is among the liars. / But if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is among the truthful.'"[139] Notably, someone from the viceroy's wife's own family comes forward to offer this empirical, logic-based method of treating the evidence. That her relative testified against her is a detail reinforcing the Qur'anic ethical commandment to the believers to advocate for justice even if against blood ties:

> O you who believe! Be steadfast maintainers of justice, [*kūnū qawwāmīna bi-l-qisṭ*],[140] witnesses for God, though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kinsfolk, and whether it be someone rich or poor, for God is nearer unto both. Follow not your caprice [*al-hawā*], that you may act justly. If you distort or turn away, truly God is Aware of whatsoever you do.[141]

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[137] Q. 12:19–20.
[138] Q. 12:30.
[139] Q. 12:26–27.
[140] For analysis of this concept of "*qawwāmīna*" with respect to gender relations in the Qur'an, see Celene Ibrahim, "Verse 4:34: Abjure Symbolic Violence, Rebuff Feminist Partiality, or Seek Another Hermeneutic?" In *Muslima Theology*, ed. Dina El Omari, Juliane Hammer, and Mouhanad Khorchide (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).
[141] Q. 4:135. See related discussions on familial ethics in chapter 2.

The command to "be steadfast maintainers of justice" even against kin or those with financial capital in these verses is directly followed by a mention of caprice, a term that can also indicate more specifically lusts or sexual desires.[142] In Joseph's case, the female protagonist not only follows her lusts but then exacerbates her moral failing by initially distorting and declining to witness against herself, until a later time in which she does, then, testify in truth against herself. The phrase "distort or turn away" could even be understood as more specifically applying to the content of the testimony, therein reinforcing the importance of bearing true witness, as in, "Do not distort justice by turning away from the truth." Hence, the importance of testifying directly corresponds to her relative, "a witness from her own people [*ahlihā*]," who gives testimony and stands up for justice, even against kin and even against a figure who presumably has political stature.

In direct contrast, the viceroy's wife, and others in influential positions, including her husband, decline to do justice at several points in the narrative. For instance, the women of the town, who witnessed firsthand the pressure that the viceroy's wife was exerting upon Joseph, functioned as enablers of the exploitive dynamic and did not stand up for the less politically influential and affluent individual who was being threatened and placed in a compromising situation: "And if he does not do as I command, he shall surely be imprisoned; and he shall be among those humbled," boasts the viceroy's wife to her consorts.[143] Despite the physical evidence attesting to Joseph's victimization, and despite all of the witnesses to the transgressive intentions of the viceroy's wife, the more powerful member of society receives only light

[142] The root of *hawā* (*h-w-y*) signifies falling down, literally and metaphorically. In derived grammatical forms, it can mean to seduce or enrapture. Aside from caprice, other possible translations are affection, passion, longing, and so forth.
[143] Q. 12:32.

chastisement. The one who was assaulted and then threatened gets unjustly thrown in prison where he remained "for a number of years."[144] The Qur'anic narration makes it clear that Joseph's punishment was an intentional—not an accidental—oversight of justice: "It occurred to them [presumably the viceroy and those assembled], *after they had seen the signs*, to imprison him [Joseph] for a time."[145] Those in charge acted punitively toward Joseph, even after having clear indications of what had transpired. The narrative points toward the human impetus to exert power over the vulnerable and to cover potential scandals at the expense of justice, rather than pursue the truth with upright intentions and integrity. It also points to the key role that enablers are known to play in instances of sexual coercion.

At first, the situation for Joseph seems bleak; he spends a number of years in prison as a result of refusing to cooperate with the advances of the wife of the viceroy. However, her misconduct and lies are indeed exposed in the end. Several years later (the Qur'an is not specific)—when pressed—she finally admits to her culpability, and the truth of the affair is exhumed. She declares, "Now the truth has become evident. It was I who sought to seduce him, and indeed, he is one of the truthful."[146] Despite the delay in securing this truthful testimony, and despite the years that Joseph spends in prison, a modicum of justice does eventually prevail. At the end of the scene, the point at which the wife of the viceroy exits from the Qur'anic stage, so to speak, she has redeemed herself to some extent. She expresses no remorse and gives no apology, but at the very least, she does testify against herself and affirms the character of Joseph. It may have taken her years, and it may have only come about because of Joseph's insistence, but she does, eventually, come clean.

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[144] Q. 12:42.
[145] Q. 12:35, emphasis added.
[146] Q. 12:51.

In this narrative, the perpetrator initially denies and conceals the wrong, and then the ad hoc justice system proves inadequate in the handling of evidence. Yet, truth prevails in large part because Joseph insists upon extracting it. At opportune moments, he presses his case with those who are in positions of influence. When the king sends a messenger to beckon him from prison, Joseph says, "Return to your lord and ask him, 'What of the women who cut their hands? Surely my Lord knows well their scheming!'"[147] Joseph presses his case to the sovereign, therein pursuing the aim of exposing truth and seeking justice. His self-advocacy reifies and elevates the communal standards that protect human dignity. The commandment for believers to "bid what is right and forbid what is wrong" (*yaʾmurūna bi-l-maʿrūf wa yanhawna ʿan al-munkar*) is axiomatic in the Qur'an,[148] and in this particular example, the wife of the viceroy and her cohort are on the receiving end of this bidding.

The wife of the viceroy—in her susceptibility to desire, in her moral failings, in her impulse to save face, and in her later struggle to make amends—is *relatable* in her flawed moral constitution, and is, perchance, more relatable to the vast majority of Qur'anic readers, reciters or listeners than a figure like Mary who represents an aspirational level of piety. Had *every* Qur'anic female figure be an epitome of Mary-like piety, what hope could there be for the ordinary woman?

Female Beauty: Virtue, Not Aesthetics

[147] Q. 12:50.

[148] For example, Q. 3:104, 3:110, 31:17 and others. The command to "bid what is right and forbid what is wrong" is also preceded by an explicit reference to gender in one instance: "The faithful men and the faithful women are protectors [*awliyāʾ*] of one another; they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong." Q. 9:71.

The wife of the viceroy and her consorts are smitten by Joseph's angelic presence, but how does the Qur'an depict *female* attractiveness? Aside from the female-like beings in paradise, as discussed above, the Qur'an contains no descriptions of the physical beauty of any human figure.[149] Mary is characterized with beauty in relation to her formidable piety: "So her Lord accepted her [Mary] with a beautiful acceptance, and made her to grow in a beautiful way."[150] In a series of verses that address the sexual and marital life of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet is described as a "beautiful example" (*uswah ḥasanah*),[151] and the Qur'an seems to explicitly affirm the Prophet's recognition of female beauty. After giving detailed instructions forbidding incest and permitting concubinage, the Qur'an asserts, "Women are not lawful for thee [Prophet Muhammad] beyond that, nor [is it lawful] for thee to exchange them for other wives, though their beauty impress thee [*aʿjabaka ḥusnuhunna*], save those whom thy right hand possesses. And God is Watcher over all things."[152] Here, beauty (*ḥusn*) of women pleases the Prophet, who is himself described with the characteristic of beauty. Are we to assume that in the case of these either hypothetical or actual women, the "beauty" is of the superficial, aesthetic variety; or is it, as in these other instances in the Qur'an, a reflection of character? We will return to verses pertaining to the Prophet Muhammad's marital relations with women in subsequent chapters, but it remains here to be emphasized that the Prophet was impressed by the beauty of particular

[149] Only three mentions of specific body parts of specific females are mentioned in the Qur'an. One is in the case of the Queen of Sheba in Q. 27:44, "It was said unto her, 'Enter the pavilion.' But when she saw it, she supposed it to be an expanse of water and bared her legs. . .." A second female body part is the neck of the wife of Abū Lahab in Hell, upon which is a "rope of palm fiber." See Q. 111:5. Finally, the nakedness of the primordial couple is mentioned, as discussed above.

[150] Q. 3:37. See discussions of this verse in subsequent chapters. The word signifying beauty comes from the same root as the root for words denoting goodness, probity, and spiritual excellence (e.g., *iḥsān, muḥsin*). See also 33:52 for a mention of female beauty (*ḥusn*) that pleases the Prophet Muhammad as cited immediately below.

[151] Q. 33:21.

[152] Q. 33:52.

women. Given that he is described himself as a "beautiful example" (*uswah ḥasanah*) for the believers,[153] it stands to reason that this attraction is not limited to a superficial, aesthetic one, but extends to beauty on a moral plane. Taken together, the verses suggest that appreciating female beauty is not merely an allowable sentiment, but a virtuous one: recognizing the beauty of women is *part of* the Prophet's beautiful example. From the Qur'anic depictions of human beauty as a whole, however, we see that beauty (*ḥusn*) is not primarily an aesthetic quality, but rather has an arguably more primary relationship to virtue, the beauty of good character.[154]

With the exception of beings in Paradise, whose eyes the Qur'an describes as wide, and who are youthful—and potentially virginal—no Qur'anic story focuses on physical traits as a function of human desirability; even Joseph, the only character whose attractiveness is a driving theme of a Qur'anic storyline, is not described in terms of the features of his physical appearance. The viceroy's wife, and the women of the town, are enraptured by an angelic quality about him, but no where do they make reference to the characteristics of his physical appearance per se. Here again, attractiveness, even sexual appeal more narrowly, is articulated more in terms of character, not aesthetic appearance, and beauty is never merely—or even primarily—an aesthetic quality; beauty is more precisely the epitome of virtue.

Females and Qur'anic Sex: Poetics and Practicalities

[153] Q. 33:21. The term is also used with regard to Abraham in 60:4 and 60:6, "There is indeed a beautiful example [*uswah ḥasanah*] for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, 'Truly we are quit of you and of all that you worship apart from God. We have rejected you, and enmity and hatred have arisen between us and you forever, till you believe in God alone.'" See discussions in chapter 4.

[154] The word signifying beauty comes from the same root as the root for words denoting goodness, probity, and spiritual excellence (e.g., *iḥsān, muḥsin*).

This chapter began with an overview of sexual difference and then demonstrated in a preliminary way how the notion of female sexuality factors into Qur'anic narratives. For as many verses as it has dealing with human sexuality and sexual encounters, the Qur'an tends to be poetic and lyrical about the matter, often employing insinuations and innuendos.[155] Notably, narratives involving sensuality and desire are not limited to the earthly plane; sensual delights—if potentially not sex itself—await believers in Paradise.

Imparting sexual ethics is a strong undercurrent of several Qur'anic stories involving female figures, including the wife of the viceroy, the Prophet Muhammad's wives (Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr in particular), the wife of Moses, and Lot's daughters. Moses's future wife serves as a model for how to develop a licit relationship, and the Prophet Muhammad himself is in many respects the exemplar of licit male sexual desire. Mary and Joseph are epitomes of sexual restraint. In her unbridled desire for the angelic-like Joseph, the wife of the viceroy, by contrast, is a Qur'anic exemplar of improprieties. A similar observation can be said of the mob of men who desire Lot's angelic guests. Taken together, these stories and edicts teach the basic lesson that intercourse is meant to be a gratifying experience when falling within the ordained limits.

The concept of "guarding the private parts" is also taught by the primeval couple, who in a dramatic moment develop awareness of their sexual embodiment and hasten to cover their nakedness. The Qur'an in no way overemphasizes the trope of woman as seductress; in fact, of the dozens of female figures in the Qur'an, only one female plays a temptress role, and even she can be directly contrasted to female figures in similar situations who take the correct moral

[155] For further context, see Mustansir Mir, *Verbal Idioms of the Qur'ān*, Michigan Series on the Middle East (Ann Arbor: Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, 1989).

action in potentially compromising situations. Two marriages, that of the Prophet Moses to one of the sisters of Midian and that of the Prophet Muhammad to the former wife of Zayd, are the only newly contracted marriages depicted in Qur'anic stories, though the Qur'an contains many verses discussing the circumstances and conditions involved in making sex licit.

With this chapter as a backdrop, it is now possible to explore with more depth and breadth the importance of Qur'anic female figures in the context of the family (in chapter 2), in the context of the dialogic narratives involving feminine voice (in chapter 3), and in the context of the developing Qur'anic discourse in its original Arabian milieu, including the enduring legacy of females in instituting or reinforcing moral, ethical, and legal precedents in sacred history (in chapter 4).

Chapter 2

Procreation, Parenting, and Female Kin:

"I Seek Refuge for Her" (Q. 3:36)

The vast majority of Qur'anic narratives involve family relations of some kind.[1] Nearly all of the female figures mentioned in the Qur'an appear in conjunction with a family member—a spouse, parent, sibling, or child, and often a combination of such relations. All of the main figures considered "messengers" (*rusul*, s. *rasūl*) have at least one female relation explicitly mentioned,[2] and many other male figures in the Qur'an interact with their families.[3] Upon closer examination, we see that in the Qur'an female figures are not just auxiliaries or helpmates in the domestic and reproductive spheres; they may bear progeny, but they also provide vital lifelines to male family members in distress. The Qur'an highlights intimate mother-daughter interactions in the case of the mother of Mary and the mother of Moses with their respective daughters. Sister figures too factor into Qur'anic stories and are consistently depicted in a positive light. Given the centrality of kinship in the Qur'an, this chapter situates Qur'anic female figures as women, girls,

[1] See appendix B for a complete listing of female figures, including references to the families of different figures. These family relations can sometimes be subtle. For instance, as we have seen in chapter 1, the wife of the Egyptian viceroy also has "a witness from among her family" (*shāhidun min ahlihā*) mentioned in Q. 12:26, in addition to her husband. Other than the Queen of Sheba, female figures without relatives are all minor characters: (1) the "women of the city" who tempt Joseph, (2) Moses's unsuccessful wet nurses, and (3) the woman who "unravels her yarn," as mentioned in the context of a brief parable in Q. 16:92.

[2] See Q. 46:35 for use of the term "the resolute among the messengers" (*ūlu al-ʿazmi min al-rusul*). See also 33:7 for a mention of the specific prophets with whom God made a "solemn covenant" (*mīthāqan ghalīẓan*), who are commonly given special status by exegetes, namely Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

[3] For reflections of the importance of family to Islamic sacred history depicted as an extension of this importance in biblical texts, see David S. Powers, *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1–10.

spouses, consorts, wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. God's caretaking and disciplining roles toward human beings, and the key ethical directives pertaining to family relations, are our point of departure.[4] We then explore comparisons between female family members and their male counterparts, the fathers, sons, grandfathers, brothers, and husbands with whom the cohorts of female kin interact.[5]

"From the Bellies of Your Mothers" (Q. 16:78)

Procreation, and specifically the role of the female body therein, is repeatedly evoked in the Qur'an as a "sign" (*āyah*) of the divine design of the universe, and of the human being in particular. Before considering female roles in procreation and human kinship, a few words about divine-human relations are in order by way of context and comparison. The Qur'an is abundantly clear that God does not beget, nor is God begotten, and God has no consorts:[6] the Qur'an never refers to God as father or mother, nor does it refer to human beings as "children of God," employing instead phrases like "Children of Adam"[7] and "Children of Israel."[8] Many Qur'anic verses discuss children, including female children specifically, and children in general factor into Qur'anic narratives, including several girl figures. At the same time, verses refuting the idea that God has consorts, or female children, or children in general are numerous.[9] In utter contrast to God, things in God's creation have partners and procreate: "The Originator of the heavens and

[4] For an excellent overview of Qur'anic ethical and legal directives on the family as a unit of society, see Maria Massi Dakake, "Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society," in *The Study Quran*, 1785–1804.
[5] No prior work comprehensively approaches Qur'anic female figures in the context of kinship family ethics. For encyclopedic entries on specific kinship roles, see works by Avner Giladi, "Children," *EQ* 1:301–2, "Family," *EQ* 2:173–76, and "Parents," *EQ* 4:20–22, as well as Talal Asad, "Kinship," *EQ* 3:95–100.
[6] The Qur'an is replete with this sentiment, for one example, see Q. 112.
[7] For example, Q. 7:26–27, 7:31, 7:35, 7:172, and others. On the progeny of Adam being misled by Satan, see 17:64.
[8] For the first Qur'anic mention, see Q. 2:40 and subsequent verses.
[9] Q. 17:111. See also 2:116, 5:17, 5:116, 6:100, 9:30, 10:68, 16:57, 17:40, 18:4, and others.

the earth, *He* has appointed for you mates from among yourselves, and has appointed mates also among the cattle. *He* multiplies you thereby; naught is like unto *Him*, yet *He* is the Hearer, the Seer."[10] Many verses celebrate the miracle of procreation, human and otherwise, as a reflection of God's attributes of majesty: "God knows that which every female bears, how wombs diminish and how they increase. Everything with *Him* is according to a measure— / Knower of the Unseen and the seen, the Great, the Exalted."[11] The Qur'an echoes this idea of intimate divine awareness of each and every female (human and otherwise) in another verse depicting both biological sex and propagation as part and parcel of the powerful sovereignty of God:

> Unto God belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth; *He* creates whatsoever *He* will, bestowing females upon whomsoever *He* will, and bestowing males upon whomsoever *He* will, / or *He* couples males and females and causes whomsoever *He* will to be barren. Truly *He* is Knowing, Powerful.[12]

In this way, procreation in the human and non-human realms is a sign of divine power, majesty, and knowledge, and the selection of a female, or a male, or both, or neither, is God's prerogative.[13] God is not a parent-God, but God takes interest in each being in each womb.

In addition to the role of Omniscient Creator, God has nurturing roles vis-à-vis human beings, as expressed in appellations such as Bestower and Provider, as illustrated in the following verse: "And *He* it is Who brought you into being from a single soul, and then [has given you] a dwelling place and a repository. *We* have expounded the signs for a people who understand."[14] Similarly, the divine appellation *Rabb* (commonly translated as Lord), includes, in

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[10] Q. 42:11.
[11] Q. 13:8–9.
[12] Q. 42:49–50.
[13] See also Q. 42:50, described below.
[14] Q. 6:98. See 3:8 for the Bestower (*al-Wahhāb*) and 51:58 for the Bestower of Sustenance (*al-Razzāq*). Related nurturing names include the Guardian (*al-Wālī*), the Trustee (*al-Wakīl*), the One Who Responds (*al-Mujīb*), the One Who Averts Harm (*al-Māni'*), and other such appellations known as "the Most Beautiful Names of God" (*asmā'*

addition to the sense of "possessor" or "owner," the sense of "caretaker," one who properly orders affairs and establishes someone firmly[15]—in God's case, through bestowing spiritual knowledge and material provisions, as in the case of the girl child Mary, when "her Lord [*rabbuhā*] accepted her with a beautiful acceptance, and made her to grow in a beautiful way, and placed her under the care of Zachariah," and then went on to supply her with regular divine provisions.[16] Blessings and divine care are also a means by which God tests the faithful in their gratitude: "And God brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers [*ummahātikum*], knowing naught. And *He* endowed you with hearing, sight, and hearts, that haply you may give thanks."[17] Within Qur'anic anthropology, external sensory faculties (such as the hearing and sight evoked above) combine with corresponding internal faculties such as discernment and insight (as evoked by the metaphor of the heart) to provide the human being with information about the seen and unseen dimensions of the created world. By employing these external and internal senses, human beings are capable of moral judgment, discernment, and ethical action. The human being's knowledge and awareness—even in adulthood—is drastically limited. One verse bluntly reinforces this differential: "*I* [God] did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor to their own creation."[18] The emphasis of the verse is on human beings eschewing pretentiousness before the divine creative force. At the same time, the Qur'an encourages its readers, reciters, and listeners to use their intellect, and to ponder the stories that it tells of past families and their respective moral successes and failures.

Allāh al-ḥusnā), for example, Q. 20:8. See Teresa Soto González and Celene Ibrahim, "Al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā (Allah's Most Beautiful Names)," in *Islam: A Worldwide Encyclopedia*, ed. Cenap Cakmak (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 98–101.

[15] See *AEL* 1008–9.

[16] See Q. 3:37.

[17] Q. 16:78.

[18] For example, Q. 18:51.

Family in Life, in Death, and in Eternity

It is no exaggeration to claim that the entire Qur'an revolves around themes of moral success and failure. Morality is not just about doing what is right, but about securing good credit and "guard[ing] against a day that would make children go grey-haired."[19] The clear Qur'anic message is that God takes to ultimate account those who pervert justice or attempt to turn deliberately away from the divine decree.[20] The Qur'an reminds its hearers/readers that each individual with sound faculties of reason bears personal responsibility and that God's judgment is not swayed—like human tendencies—toward nepotism: "Your family relations and your children will not benefit you on the Day of Resurrection; *He* will distinguish between you. And God sees whatsoever you do."[21] One rhetorically powerful rhymed surah contains a chilling description of the testimony that the innocent female child will bear on the Day of Judgment as she is vindicated against her oppressor: "When the female infant buried alive is asked / for what sin she was slain; / when the pages are spread, / and when Heaven is laid bare; / when Hellfire is kindled, / and when the Garden is brought nigh, / each soul shall know what it has made ready."[22] In this way, family relationships, and the human life cycle itself, are situated within the larger Qur'anic apocalyptic schema:

> O humankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, [remember] *We* created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, that *We* may make clear for you. And *We* cause what *We* will to remain in the wombs for a term appointed. Then *We* bring you forth as an infant, then

[19] Q. 73:17, "So if you disbelieve, how will you guard against a day that would make children grey-haired?"
[20] For God as Lawgiver (*al-Shāri'*), see, for example, Q. 42:13; for God as Arbitrator (*al-Ḥakam*), see 22:69. For an analysis of the ways in which human genders can be seen as reflections of God's attributes and appellations, see Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 172–84.
[21] Q. 60:3.
[22] Q. 81:8–14.

> that you may reach maturity. And some are taken in death, and some are consigned to the most abject life, so that after having known they may know nothing. And thou seest the earth desiccated, but when *We* send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and produces every delightful kind.[23]

From an apocalyptic vantage point, as depicted in the verse above, Qur'anic stories involving husband-wife interactions, parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, and kinship in general serve to inculcate virtuous action and encourage human beings to accumulate credit for the "Day of Recompense."[24]

In this respect, family relationships remain important well beyond the death of a relative, for these relationships continue in the afterlife, when the righteous are reunited: "Gardens of Eden that they shall enter along with those who were righteous from among their forebearers, their spouses, and their progeny; and angels shall enter upon them from every gate."[25] Even spousal relationships in the eternal heavenly abode are enriched; couples drink in good company and abundance without suffering from intoxication or hangovers.[26] Moreover, relationships troubled in worldly existence can be ameliorated: "*We* shall remove whatever rancor lies within their breasts—as siblings (*ikhwānan*), upon couches, facing one another."[27] In this ideal case, the

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[23] Q. 22:5.

[24] For merely one example, in Q. 1:4, the "Day of Recompense" (*yawm al-dīn*) is one of many Qur'anic names for this time of accounting, judgment, and reckoning.

[25] Q. 13:23. I have substituted "forebearers" (*ābāʾ*) here as a translation for the word "fathers" in *The Study Quran*. I explore the use of this term *ābāʾ* in more detail below.

[26] For the most elaborate and lengthy descriptions, see Q. 56:10–40; see also discussions below.

[27] Q. 15:47. I have substituted "brothers" in *The Study Quran* with the gender-inclusive term "siblings"; *ikhwān* caries the sense of "companions" or "friends" in other Qur'anic verses, for instance in Q.49:10: "The believers are but brothers (*ikhwān*); so make peace between your brethren, and reverence God, that haply you may receive mercy." The verse in question above is describing the beings in Paradise in peace and as beneficiaries of the mercy of God. There is no reason I can see to restrict such verses to male human beings to the exclusion of females. See also 3:103: "And hold fast to the rope of God, all together, and be not divided. Remember the Blessing of God upon you, when you were enemies and *He* joined your hearts, such that you became brothers (*ikhwān*) by *His* Blessing …" See *AEL* 34.

individual soul earns divine rewards, including being reunited with kin. The Qur'an describes a grimmer possibility for those on the other end of the arc of moral justice, "those who lose their souls *and their families* on the Day of Resurrection."[28] From the womb to the grave and the world beyond, the human being is held accountable for appropriately maintaining family relations.

Perhaps because of the centrality of family relations—in this earthly realm and the future realm—the vast majority of Qur'anic stories involve family relations in some way.[29] We will turn now to the Qur'an's depiction of individual roles within the nuclear family and how these roles figure into Qur'anic narratives involving females.

Parenting in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains a plethora of verses with explicit guidance for parents, female and male alike.[30] In particular, it condemns infanticide in no uncertain terms and chastises cultural motives surrounding female infanticide in particular:

> And when one of them receives tidings of a female [child], *his* face darkens, and *he* is choked with anguish. / *He* [the person] hides from the people on account of the evil of the tidings *he* has been given. Shall *he* keep it in humiliation, or bury it in the dust? Behold! Evil indeed is the judgment they make![31]

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[28] Q. 39:15. Emphasis added. See also an echo of this verse in 42:45.

[29] This is a point to which I will return again when looking at the Qur'anic concept of sacred history and prophetic lineage in chapter 4.

[30] For secondary literature on social history, as well as on relevant hadith and subsequent Islamic legal discourses related to parenting specifically, see works by David Powers and Avner Giladi [also Gilʿadi]. See also Janan Delgado and Celene Ibrahim, "Children and Parents in the Qur'an and Premodern Islamic Jurisprudence," in *Religious Perspectives on Reproductive Ethics*, ed. Dena Davis (New York: Oxford University Press), forthcoming.

[31] Q. 16:58–59. See also Q. 17:31, a verse that mentions economic motivations for infanticide: "Slay not your children for fear of poverty. *We* shall provide for them and for you. Surely their slaying is a great sin." Condemnations of infanticide occur in several verses, including 6:137, 6:140, 6:151, 17:31, 60:12, and those on female infanticide below. The pronoun in these verses could be read either as a male pronoun specifically, or as a gender inclusive pronoun.

With a similar emphasis on protecting vulnerable female children, the Qur'an expresses a special concern for protecting orphan females from being taken advantage of sexually,[32] and it outlines prohibitions against incest with detailed directives to males about prohibited females.[33] Many other verses urge concern and protection for the material interests of the vulnerable.[34] For example, in a related passage dealing with the righteous division of inheritance, the Qur'an urges parents to have empathy for the children of others: "Let those who would dread if they left behind their own helpless progeny have fear; let them reverence God and speak justly."[35] This verse is followed immediately by a caution against consuming the wealth of orphans.[36]

The Qur'an's emphasis on protection of the socially vulnerable is found in tandem with verses that exhort to virtue and humility. For example, the Qur'an stresses that parents should not be deluded by pride in material matters, including in their progeny: "Wealth and children are the adornments of the life of this world, but that which endures—righteous deeds—are better in reward with thy Lord, and better [as a source of] hope."[37] This cautionary lesson is embedded in a Qur'anic recounting of the wretched fate of an arrogant man who boasted about his wealth and progeny.[38] The Qur'an also cautions the Prophet Muhammad—and by extension any hearer/reader—against looking in an envious way at the children of others: "And let not their

[32] For example, Q. 4:3–4 and 4:127.
[33] See Q. 4:22–23. In the Qur'an and subsequent Islamic law, suckling confers kinship status.
[34] For example, Q. 4:75, "And what ails you that you fight not in the way of God, and for the weak and oppressed—men, women, and children—who cry out, 'Our Lord! Bring us forth from this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from *Thee* a protector, and appoint for us from *Thee* a helper.'" See also 4:98.
[35] Q. 4:9. Siblings are prescribed a share of inheritance upon the passing of either parent (or their agnates) without preference for birth order but with some consideration given to biological sex. Females, as wives, daughters, and agnates have Qur'anic rights to inheritance. For an overview of normative Islamic principles for inheritance and their Qur'anic basis, see *SQ* 192–195n7–14.
[36] Q. 4:10.
[37] Q. 18:46.
[38] Q. 18:39–41. This episode occurs in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, which is widely recited on Fridays as a weekly reminder of the temporal nature of blessings and the swift recompense for wrongdoers.

wealth or their children impress thee. God desires but to punish them thereby in the life of this world, and that their souls should depart while they are disbelievers."[39] Hence, life is a test and the world is the testing ground; one potential facet of that test is progeny: "And know that your property and your children are only a trial, and that God—with *Him* is a great reward."[40] The mention of property and children is not to suggest that children are akin to chattel, but rather to point out that in both are delights that could prompt vanity or distract from life's central purpose: "O you who believe! Let neither your property nor your children divert you from the remembrance of God. Whosoever does so, it is they who are the losers."[41] Having numerous children could signal virility and confer worldly esteem, and several righteous individuals in the Qur'an—including the prophets Abraham and Zachariah—are explicitly rewarded with progeny;[42] but in general, offspring are not to be taken as a measure of a person's standing with God.

Like children, family in general can be an immense blessing and comfort. In the story of Job in the Qur'an, as in the biblical tradition,[43] Job patiently perseveres in affliction, calls out to God for mercy, and is explicitly rewarded by having his family returned to him. In fact, his family is multiplied out of God's providence: "So *We* answered him and removed the affliction that was upon him, and *We* gave him his family [*ahlahu*], and the like thereof along with them,

[39] Q. 9:55. See also 9:85 and 9:69.
[40] Q. 8:28. See also 2:155, 6:53, 6:165, 7:168, and others.
[41] Q. 63:9.
[42] See Q. 37:112 and 3:38–39 respectively.
[43] For a succinct comparative perspective and summary of the wife of Job in later Muslim exegetical traditions, see Kaltner and Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an*, 91–93. See also A. H. Johns, "Narrative, Intertext and Allusion in the Qurʾānic Presentation of Job," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 1 (1999): 1–25. Some commentators tie Q. 38:44 to Job's wife, who is said to have provoked Job into making an oath against her, but the Qur'an does not contain a specific mention of the wife's role in these verses, and no authentic hadith tradition preserves this particular interpretation. See *SQ* 1111n44.

as a mercy from *Us* and a reminder to the worshippers."[44] Yet family does not always have positive connotations, and not all Qur'anic families get along, as we will see. The Qur'an in general warns that dealings with family could be a source of distraction, or worse; even within the nuclear family individuals could be a source of direct malice: "Among your spouses and your children there is indeed an enemy unto you; so be wary of them."[45] Having provided this general context of the human life cycle and highlighted the significance of family, we will turn now to Qur'anic depictions of mothers, daughters, and sisters.

Mothers and Daughters

Reproduction, wombs, pregnancy, and birthing are repeated themes in Qur'anic rhetoric and also feature heavily in Qur'anic stories. Four females in Qur'anic stories become impregnated with children who become prophets or otherwise exceptionally holy individuals: (1) the mother of Isaac (wife of Abraham); (2) the mother of John (wife of Zachariah); (3) the mother of Mary (wife of ʿImrān); and (4) the mother of Jesus (Mary).[46] Two female figures mentioned in the Qur'an are grandmothers, both of prophets: the mother of Mary is the grandmother of the prophet Jesus, and the mother of Isaac is the grandmother of the prophet Jacob and the *great-grandmother* of the prophet Joseph. She is directly informed of her future status as a grandmother by God through angelic visitors.[47]

In the four examples of these Qur'anic infants above who become prophets, a righteous woman begets a righteous child; however, this is not a general rule. In several Qur'anic stories,

[44] See Q. 21:84. See also 38:43.
[45] Q. 64:14.
[46] I do not include Hagar in this count, as neither her impregnation nor the birth of the prophet Ishmael are related in Qur'anic stories beyond references to Abraham's family and descendants.
[47] See Q. 11:71, "*We* gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob."

children are not among the righteous, even though a parent is righteous and a moral exemplar. Several Qur'anic verses redefine the very notion of kinship in cases where the immediate family is irreparably divided between the righteous and unrighteous. For instance, when the prophet Noah (*Nūḥ*) beckoned his son to join him on the ark to avoid the rising floodwaters, his son "remained aloof" and refused to heed his father's calls: "And the waves came between them, and he [the son] was among the drowned." Noah proceeds to plead with God on behalf of his son, but without success:

> And Noah called out to his Lord and said, "O my Lord! Truly my son is from my family. *Thy* Promise is indeed true, and *Thou* art the most just of judges." / *He* said, "O Noah! Truly he is not from thy family; surely such conduct was not righteous. So question *Me* not concerning that whereof thou hast no knowledge; truly *I* exhort thee, lest thou be among the ignorant."[48]

This intimate conversation between God and Noah reinforces the general Qur'anic precept that "none shall bear the burden of another."[49] Not only is Noah's son drowned, but his wife is also emphatically damned in a verse that will be the subject of my analysis below and in subsequent chapters.[50] In another instance, Abraham, the "Friend of God" (*khalīl Allāh*),[51] attempts to secure the fate of his progeny right after he is informed by God of his own elevated status as a leader (*imām*) of humankind: "*He* [God] said, '*I* am making you [Abraham] an imam for humankind.' He [Abraham] said, 'And of my progeny?' *He* [God] said, '*My* covenant does not include the wrongdoers.'"[52] In another instance, the prophet Abraham prays for his children and descendants, this time more fully acknowledging that each soul bears its own burdens and will be

[48] Q. 11:42–46. See also 17:3.
[49] For example, Q. 53:38. See also Q. 80:33–37 as discussed below.
[50] See Q. 66:10.
[51] See Q. 4:125.
[52] Q. 2:124. For Abraham's role in the establishment of Mecca, see 2:125–31.

at the mercy of God: "And whoever follows me, he is of me. And whosoever disobeys me, surely *Thou* art Forgiving, Merciful."[53]

Most Qur'anic stories focus on pious and effective parents like Abraham, including mothers of prophets or individuals who are exceptionally pious, such as the mother of Moses, the mother of Mary, and Mary herself. There are no stories of verbally abrasive or unscrupulous mothers in the Qur'an. By contrast, Abraham's verbally abusive and hard-hearted father is depicted throwing a forbearing Abraham out of his life, saying, "Do you reject my gods, O Abraham? If you cease not, I shall surely stone you. Take leave of me for a long while!"[54] The parental incompetence of Abraham's father is made even more stark in that it follows a long segment of verses in the beginning of *Sūrat Maryam* that relate and celebrate the loving, nurturing, and respectful bonds between other central Qur'anic personalities and their parental figures. The difficulties experienced by the young Abraham amidst an unrighteous people, and with a father who is described in no uncertain terms as an "enemy of God" (*ʿaduwwun li-llāh*),[55] can be contrasted to the figure of young Mary, who has a father who "was not an evil man."[56] She is dedicated to the cause of monotheistic worship by her prayerful mother and is raised by the prophet Zachariah in the temple.[57] Unlike Mary, who has a mother who dedicates her unborn child to the service of her Lord,[58] Abraham has no mother figure in any of the Qur'anic accounts of his escapades as a young monotheist in a society captivated by the veneration of idols. He

[53] Q. 14:30.
[54] Q. 19:46. Abraham's father is named in one verse as *Āzar*, see Q. 6:74. For other verses on Abraham's relationship with his father, see 9:114, 11:69–104, 14:41, 19:42–49, 21:51–71, 37:85–99, 43:26–28, and 60:4.
[55] Q. 9:114.
[56] Q. 19:28.
[57] For comparative perspectives on this motif in Christian literatures, see Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an," 554.
[58] Q. 3:35.

does, however, pray for his parents,[59] and promises to ask God for forgiveness for his father.[60] Abraham's trials with his father also stand in sharp contrast to a figure like the prophet Solomon (*Sulaymān*), who has a righteous parent in the prophet David (*Dāwūd*).[61] Abraham's circumstances, a pious child with a corrupt father, also stand in direct contrast to the circumstances of another set of parents who are mentioned as having a child who is destined to become corrupt and who is hence slain in his youth by a mysterious servant of God before he can grow up to create havoc and heartache for his pious parents.[62] These righteous parents with an insubordinate child stand in contrast to an anonymous couple who pray for a healthy child and then are ungrateful and negligent:

> When he covered her, she bore a light burden, and carried it about. But when she had grown heavy, they called upon God, their Lord, "If *Thou* givest us a healthy child, we shall surely be among the thankful." / Then, when *He* gave them a healthy child, they ascribed partners unto *Him* with regard to that which *He* had given them. Exalted is God about the partners they ascribe. / Do they ascribe as partners those who created naught and are themselves created?[63]

[59] See Q. 14:41, in which Abraham prays: "Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and the believers on the Day when the Reckoning is come." In Q. 6:74, Abraham confronts his father, "Do you take idols for gods? Truly I see you and your people [*qawm*] in manifest error." The situation escalates, and Abraham destroys his father's idols in a bold public display; see 21:51–70. Abraham is then exiled, but he says to his father: "I shall assuredly ask forgiveness for you, though I have no power to avail you aught from God," 60:4. With regard to verse 6:74 quoted here, the word *The Study Quran* renders as "people" in Abraham's speech, "Truly I see you and your people in manifest error," is not a similar word that could be used here, namely *āl*. The differences between such terms in their Qur'anic usage are taken up later in this chapter.

[60] See Q. 60:4 as quoted immediately above. See also 9:114 and 19:47 for Abraham's prayers for his father.

[61] Q. 27:19. See Q. 34:13 for a verse celebrating the work of the family or House of David. For further discussions, see Wright, "The Qur'anic David," 187–96.

[62] Q. 18:74 and 18:80–81.

[63] Q. 7:189–91. As mentioned above (p. x), some have speculated that this unnamed couple is Adam and Eve, but the verse seems more likely to be a parable. See *SQ* 476n189–90. [It seems odd to have not only the same point, but the same exact sentence, occur twice in a work without acknowledging to the reader that he has already come across this. Otherwise he's left wondering, "Wait, didn't I already read that before?"]

This parable of parents who begin as pious supplicants but then attribute partners to God after the birth of their child is the only Qur'anic instance of a mother lapsing in piety.

In fact, of the handful of female figures who are in some small or more substantial way iniquitous, none are depicted birthing or otherwise interacting with their children. For instance, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot, two irrevocably corrupt women in the Qur'anic account, are *never* depicted in their capacity as mothers, even though their respective progeny feature in a handful of other verses.[64] An example of nursemaids who forget their charges and women who miscarry is given as an illustration of the catastrophic enormity of "the Hour" (*al-sāʿah*), the apocalyptic end of the universe: "O humankind! Reverence your Lord. Truly the quaking of the Hour is a tremendous thing. / On the day you see it, every nursing woman will forget what she nurses, and every pregnant woman will deliver her burden, and you will see humankind drunk, though drunk they will not be. Rather, the Punishment of God is severe."[65] In this verse, the punishment is not on female figures specifically, but the female figures do bear a collective share in the failures of humankind and do experience the bewilderment of the apocalypse in corporal ways. In general, one of the signs of the distress and havoc of the end of times is the fleeing from family members, including the mother and father: "So when the Piercing Cry does come, / that Day when a person will flee from *his* brother [sibling] / and *his* mother and *his* father, / and *his* spouse and *his* children / for every person that Day *his* affair shall suffice *him*.[66] The concept of children in the Qur'an is not limited to the period of youth, but more precisely evokes a kinship relation whose importance is not confined to the early years of life or even worldly life. In this

[64] For the account of the two flawed wives of Noah and Lot together, see 66:10. For depictions of the wife of Lot, see 7:83, 15:60, 29:32–33, 26:171, and 37:134.
[65] Q. 22:1–2.
[66] Q. 80:33–37. Here the mother is mentioned before the father, perhaps owing to the rhyme scheme in the preceding verse and the two subsequent verses, making four verses in a row that end with *-īh*.

sense, "child" (*walad*) can be used to signify a young person, but its significance is much broader.[67]

Qur'anic Daughters

In all of the different family configurations depicted in the Qur'an, it is notable that no corrupt daughter figures are ever depicted, and this applies to mother-daughter and father-daughter relations alike. Two mothers, the mother of Mary and the mother of Moses, are mentioned in conjunction with their praiseworthy and obedient daughters, as explored in detail in subsequent chapters. The Qur'an mentions the daughters of Lot, and Mary's father is also mentioned.[68] The Prophet Muhammad's daughters appear briefly in the context of God instructing the Prophet to extort them and his wives and female followers in general to wear concealing clothing, "to draw their cloaks over themselves," so as not to be harassed by "those in whose hearts is a disease."[69]

One particularly endearing father-daughter moment is set in motion when two sisters meet the wandering, dejected, but still good-natured Moses at a watering hole. One of the sisters encourages her father to keep Moses around as an employee with a not-so-subtle cue: "O my father! Hire him. Surely the best you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy."[70] The father reads

[67] See Giladi, *EQ* 1:301 for a list of terms specifying youth and progeny.
[68] The reference to the daughters of Lot can be understood literally as biological daughters or figuratively as the young women of his tribe. For the reference to Mary's father, see Q. 19:28.
[69] See Q. 33:59–60. This verse has received a preponderance of attention in academic literatures for its implications regarding female veiling, a topic that is vast and ultimately beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to note that the clear Qur'anic rationale for covering given explicitly is: "Thus is it likelier that they [aforementioned women] will be known and not be disturbed [*wa-lā yuʾdhayna*]." Whatever arguments can be waged about the effectiveness of the strategy in contemporary times, the intention of the Giver of the Qur'an is rather overt. See also Q. 2:222 for a verse employing the same root (*ʾ-dh-y*) with regard to men not having sexual relations with women during menstruation, here also ostensibly out of concern for the well-being and ease of the women. For a critical reading of this verse and the subsequent commentary tradition, including interpretations of the word "*adhā*," see Naguib, "Horizons and Limitations of the Muslim Feminist Hermeneutics," 33–50.
[70] Q. 28:26.

the unstated intent of his daughter's words and makes Moses a two-part offer for marriage and employment: "I desire to marry you to one of these two daughters of mine, on [the] condition that you hire yourself to me for eight years."[71] By requiring that Moses work for him for such a substantial period, he is effectively still maintaining his daughter under his watchful care while securing her a husband of prophetic caliber.

When the prophet Lot discusses the marriage of his daughters the circumstances are quite different. This time, a daughter is not the one initiating the affair. The circumstances are depicted in several surahs of the Qur'an, including in one instance as follows:

> When *Our* [God's] messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account, and felt himself powerless concerning them. And he said, "This is a terrible day!" / And his people came hurrying toward him, while earlier they had been committing evil deeds (*kānū yaʿmalūna al-sayyiʾāt*). He said, "O my people! These are my daughters; they are purer for you (*hunna aṭharu lakum*). So reverence God, and disgrace me not with regard to my guests. Is there not among you a man of sound judgment (*rajulun rashīd*)?"[72]

The hypothetical nature of Lot's offer, as captured in another surah, "These are my daughters (*banātī*), if you must act (*in kuntum fāʿilīn*),"[73] is not lost on Lot's people, who respond with a taunt of their own: "Certainly you know that we have no right to your daughters, and surely you know that which we desire."[74] Considering their disreputable moral condition and "evil deeds" (*sayyiʾāt*), Lot's offer is rhetorical mockery—not a solemn offer for marriage. Lot's language can be contrasted to the manner in which that the father of Midian offered one of his daughters to Moses—ostensibly with *her own* subtle prompting. That a prophet of God, who is by definition a herald of virtue, would compel his daughters into relations with people described as lacking

[71] Q. 28:27.
[72] Q. 11:77–78.
[73] Q. 15:71.
[74] Q. 11:79.

"sound judgment," as "committing evil deeds," and then in the subsequent verse as "confused in their drunkenness,"[75] would be inconsistent with Qur'anic familial ethics, the ethics of marriage, and the Qur'anic advice on finding spouses, as discussed further in subsequent chapters. "Daughters" in these instances could also plausibly be understood metaphorically as referring to the young women of Lot's tribe, thus insinuating, in a general sense, that females are "purer" (*aṭharu*) for males than are other males.[76] This episode is the primary Qur'anic context in which same-sex relations are explicitly condemned by a prophetic figure. Seen in another light, Lot's words reinforce the male-female sexual dependency within the Qur'an's moral schema.[77]

Foster Mothers, Foster Daughters

In terms of extending kinship relations to foster mothers, the Qur'an includes among its female cast one epitome of vice and one paragon of virtue. As we have seen, the foster mother figure of Joseph attempts to seduce her charge but years later exonerates him of all wrongdoing when she is coerced into speaking the truth. Her example of illicit sexual pursuit is counterbalanced with other female figures who pursue their sexual desires through licit means, as we saw in chapter 1. Here, her character as a lying, inept foster mother who persuades her husband to throw her foster son in prison, is also counterbalanced with the example of a God-fearing foster mother who is called "an example for those who believe."[78] Known through oral history as Āsiyah, this wife

[75] Q. 15:72.

[76] For a detailed analysis of verses involving Lot's people and same-sex relations in the Qur'an, see Amreen Jamal, "The Story of Lot and the Qur'ān's Perception of the Morality of Same-Sex Sexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 41, no. 1 (2001): 1–88.

[77] In this situation, females are described by Lot as "purer" than males. This is, in my reading, not a general Qur'anic assertion giving females a degree over males categorically; the degree of superiority is relational and contextual. I point this out simply as a counterbalance to other highly disputed places in the Qur'an (e.g. Q. 2:228 and 4:34) where males have a degree over females in some way and where previous exegetes have taken the Qur'an to be making a statement about male worth being grater than female worth.

[78] Q. 66:11.

skillfully convinces her tyrant of a husband, Pharaoh, to spare Moses's life by appealing, at last, to the lure of kinship: "A comfort [*qurratu ʿayn*] for me and for you! Slay him not; it may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son."[79] Āsiyah is not alone in her desire for a child. The distress of desiring children without the ability to procreate is epitomized by the "secret cry"[80] of the prophet Zachariah (*Zakariyyā*), who is at the time the guardian of Mary,[81] a righteous child whose keen awareness of God's blessings in her daily life inspires Zachariah to pray for a biological heir:

> He [Zachariah] said, "My Lord! Verily my bones have grown feeble, and my head glistens with white hair. And in calling upon *Thee*, my Lord, I have never despaired. / Truly I fear my relatives after me, and my wife is barren. So grant me from *Thy* Presence an heir / who will inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, well-pleasing."[82]

[79] Q. 28:9. On the male side too, the Prophet Muhammad himself is exemplary as a foster father to Zayd, as discussed in the previous chapter.

[80] Q. 19:2–3, "A reminder of the Mercy of thy Lord unto *His* servant, Zachariah, / when he cried out to his Lord with a secret cry." See also 21:89–90 and chapter 3 for an analysis of this secret cry in relation to a secret cry of Mary. For a general mention of barrenness, see Q. 42:49–50.

[81] See Q. 3:37, which discusses at length the beautiful character of Mary and the way in which her Lord selected for her a suitable prophetic guardian. The verse is, in certain aspects, parallel to Q. 33:37, in which a woman, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, is also given a blessed prophetic caretaker through a direct intervention by God—in her case a husband. Other topical parallels between these surahs are discussed in later chapters in service of the argument that the Qur'an sets up the family of the Prophet Muhammad as continued recipients of the divine favor and blessings that were also bestowed upon other prophetic families. See, for instance, 3:44 for a direct address to the Prophet Muhammad regarding the decision of who would be Mary's caretaker: "This is from the tidings of the Unseen, which *We* reveal to thee. And thou wast not with them when they cast their lots [to choose] who among them would care for Mary, and thou wast not with them when they were disputing."

[82] Q. 19:4–6. I have substituted "despaired" for *The Study Quran*'s "been wretched" to mimic something of the Arabic rhyme according to the translation methodology laid out by Shawkat M. Toorawa in "*Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19): Lexicon, Lexical Echoes, English Translation," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 25–78. In the Arabic, the verses in question end with the long vowel *alif*, therein adding to the consonance of the verses. As Geissinger further notes, "the aural similarity between the *–iyyā* verse-endings and the Arabic feminine suffix *–iyya* helps evoke associations with femaleness, and gives the recited text a gentle and compassionate tone overall." See Geissinger, "Mary in the Qur'an," 383.

A dialogue between Zachariah and God ensues, the result of which is that Zachariah and his wife are granted a righteous son, the prophet John (*Yaḥyā*).[83] Other surprise pregnancies resulting in righteous babies include Abraham's wife's pregnancy with the prophet Isaac[84] and Mary's unique impregnation with the prophet Jesus (*ʿĪsā*).[85] Neither Abraham's wife, nor Mary, nor the wife of Zachariah are depicted as being particularly desirous of children before their miraculous impregnations.[86] Āsiyah's desire for a child may be because she herself is barren, or may simply be because she feels endearment toward the infant Moses and is using her influence to save him from certain doom; "Slay him not," she implores Pharaoh. The child is a comfort (*qurratu ʿayn*), literally, a coolness to her eyes. Her desire is similar to that of Zachariah, who seeks a child who is "well-pleasing."[87]

Motherhood and Fatherhood Compared

In terms of the obligations upon mothers, compared with those upon fathers, the Qur'an outlines principles of division of labor with regard to nursing, permits wet-nursing, places the material costs of provision on the father,[88] and emphasizes the principle of doing no harm, all in one lengthy verse:

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[83] On *Yaḥyā*, see Q. 3:39, 6:85, 19:7–15, and 21:90.
[84] See Q. 11:71–73, 15:53–56, and 51:28–30.
[85] See Q. 3:42–45 and 19:16–24.
[86] For a contemporary treatment of the subject of barrenness with reference to the Qur'anic stories of these women, see Ayesha S. Chaudhry, "Unlikely Motherhood in the Qur'ān: Oncofertility as Devotion," *Cancer Treat Res*. 156 (2010): 287–94.
[87] Q. 19:6. This could be "well-pleasing" to Zachariah, to the child's Lord, or to both.
[88] Presumably the material costs are upon the father because the mother contributes to the development and nurturing of the child with her physical being through the period of gestation and potentially through the period of lactation. This division of labor could be seen as a sociologically based ruling, one that takes into consideration the biological realities of reproduction wherein females bear the greater reproduction load—literally, in an embodied sense—and on account of this are granted compensation, as a degree of social security. In certain cases, the male heirs receive a larger portion of inheritance, presumably because they may have costs to cover related to marriage

> And let mothers nurse their children two full years, for such as desire to complete the suckling. It falls on the father to provide for them and clothe them honorably. No soul is tasked beyond *her* capacity. Let no mother be harmed on account of her child, nor father on account of his child. And the like shall fall upon the heir. If the couple desire to wean, by their mutual consent and consultation, there is no blame upon them. And if you wish to have your children wet-nursed, there is no blame upon you if you pay honorably that which you give. And reverence God, and know that God sees whatsoever you do.[89]

In addition to stressing "mutual consent and consultation" between parents, these passages clearly put a material value on the work involved in nursing, in this case wet-nursing specifically.[90] The Qur'an also contains multiple other lengthy verses acknowledging the demands of gestating. In this way, the Qur'an pays tribute to females, who birth and potentially also suckle, in addition to the labor of parenting in general that falls upon both females and males:

> And *We* have enjoined the human to be virtuous unto *his* parents. His mother carried *him* in travail and bore *him* in travail, and *his* gestation and weaning are thirty months, such that when *he* reaches maturity and reaches forty years *he* says, "My Lord inspire me to give thanks for *Thy* blessing with which *Thou* hast blessed me and hast blessed my parents, and that I may work righteousness such that it pleases *Thee*; and make righteous for me my progeny. Truly I turn in repentance unto *Thee*, and truly I am among those who submit."[91]

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including the marriage gift, the expenses of maintaining a spouse, and the unilateral responsibility of financially supporting children, as well as unmarried female family members who might fall to their charge. See arguments to this effect in Celene Ibrahim, "Family Law Reform, Spousal Relations, and the 'Intentions of Islamic Law'," 108–22.

[89] Q. 2:233.

[90] In another verse, the Qur'an outlines what may be thought of as a principle of equal opportunity with regard to compensation of males and females, here with regard to works with spiritual merit: "*I* shall not let the work of any worker among you, male or female, be in vain; each of you is like the other." Q. 3:195. See also 4:124: "And whosoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, and is a believer, such shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be wronged so much as the speck on a date stone." See also Q. 16:97, 40:40, and 49:13 for males and females having equal opportunity for God's pleasure and rewards.

[91] Q. 46:15. See also 31:14–15.

This verse stressing the physicality and exertion of pregnancy, birthing, and nursing complements verses that call for patience with aging parents, mothers and fathers alike. The command to be virtuous unto parents imediately follows the central Qur'anic command of worshiping God: "Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but *Him*, and be virtuous unto parents. Whether one or both of them reaches old age, say not to them 'Uff!' nor chide them, but speak unto them a noble word. / Lower unto them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small.'"[92] This Qur'anic mandate is embodied by the prophet Joseph, a grown son who expresses his physical affection for his mother when he joyously embraces his parents after years of separation.[93] John is "dutiful toward his parents," and as the Qur'an states, "he was not domineering, rebellious."[94] Jesus, who does not have a full set of parents, declares that he was made "dutiful toward my mother."[95] These sentiments are reinforced on several instances by prophets who pray for their parents, mothers and fathers together.[96]

The aforementioned verses are several of the Qur'an's many validations of the importance of mothering, and of parenting in general. Positive connotations regarding mothers and motherhood are found in many Qur'anic metaphors. In describing revelation itself, for instance, the Qur'an evokes the term *umm* to confer grandeur and the notion of sacred origins: "Truly *We* have made it an Arabic Quran, that haply you may understand, / and truly it is with

[92] Q. 17:23–24.
[93] Q. 12:99.
[94] Q. 19:14.
[95] Q. 19:32.
[96] For instance, other supplicants include the prophets Noah (in Q. 71:28), Abraham (in Q. 14:41), and Solomon (in Q. 27:19).

Us in the Mother of the Book [*umm al-Kitāb*], sublime indeed, wise."[97] The "blessed" city of Mecca is described as the "Mother of Cities" (*umm al-Qurā*).[98] Qur'anic language is repeatedly celebratory of the capacity of the womb (*raḥim*) and employs the concept of wombs (*arḥām*) in connection with the importance of kinship ties.[99] The wives of the Prophet Muhammad are given an exalted status by the Qur'an with the honorific "Mothers of the Believers" (*ummahāt al-muʾminīn*).[100] Finally, the Arabic word for womb is also closely linked to the word for mercy or compassion (*raḥmah*) as well as to the divine names *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm,* words that begin all but one of the Qur'anic surahs and that are among the most regularly repeated divine epithets in the Qur'an.[101] Whether in the actual role of mothering, or in the metaphors related to motherhood, or in the linguistic associations with motherhood, the Qur'an is celebratory of the maternal status.

The Qur'an contains no explicit stories of daughters or sons being disrespectful toward or disobeying their mothers. Noah's wife and his son are both destroyed for their disobedience to God, but the Qur'an does not make any explicit connection between Noah's son's faults and incompetence in parenting on the part of Noah or his wife. The wife of Adam, the wife of Noah, and the wife of Lot all have progeny who are mentioned in separate verses, but these women are not depicted as interacting with their children in any way. Notably, all three are also involved in Qur'anic examples wherein family relations are somehow strained: the wives of Noah and Lot

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[97] Q. 43:3–4. See also 3:7, 13:39, and others. The root of *umm* (*ʾ-m-m*) occurs in ten forms a total of 119 times throughout the Qur'an; see *AED* 47. Notably, the root for the Arabic word for "father" and related concepts (*ʾ-b-w*) occurs a nearly matched total of 117 times in three forms. See *AED* 7.

[98] Q. 6:92 and 42:7. See 48:24 for the one Qur'anic instance of *Makkah*, and see 3:96 for *Bakkah*, another name for Makkah, described by the Qur'an as the location of the "first house"; see *SQ* 156n96. For another use of this figurative language as referring to a group of towns having a "mother city," see 28:59.

[99] For example, Q. 4:1, 31:34, 47:22, and others. See Marcia Hermansen, "Womb," *EQ* 5:522–23.

[100] Q. 33:6.

[101] For discussion, see *SQ* 503–4.

have such irredeemable character flaws that they are both damned despite being the wives of prophets, and the two brothers described specifically as the "sons of Adam" have a conflict that results in fratricide.[102] The Qur'an also explicitly condemns the method of repudiating a wife by declaring her to be akin to the backside of one's mother. Termed *ẓihār*, this practice is denounced not only in that it is unjust to a wife as a mechanism for denying her wifely rights, but also in that it is a discourteous deployment of the esteemed concept of motherhood. Notably, verse 33:6, the verse that institutes the notion that the Prophet Muhammad's wives are "Mothers of the Believers," is in *direct* proximity to verse 33:4, a verse in which God condemns the practice of *ẓihār*. Q. 33:6 demonstrates an ethically appropriate representation of the concept of motherhood; the metaphor "Mothers of the Believers" elevates female figures in dignity through the valuation of the Prophet Muhammad's wives specifically, and simultaneously it is a corrective to the derogatory evocation of motherhood implied in the practice of *ẓihār* as a method for repudiating a wife.

Fathers and fatherhood have both positive and negative illustrations in Qur'anic narratives. In addition to depicting the shortcomings of Abraham's theologically misguided and incompetent father, even referring to him as an "enemy of God," a plethora of verses depict theologically misguided polytheistic peoples attributing their beliefs to their ancestors with statements like: "our [fore]fathers (*ābā'unā*) ascribed partners unto God beforehand, and we were their progeny after them."[103] Dozens of verses depict the prophets struggling against the

[102] See Q. 5:27–31. For comparative perspectives on this story in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 7–113.

[103] Q. 7:173. The term (*abā'*) could also be rendered in a gender inclusive translation as "forebearers," but the term still does share signification with the word "fathers" and is a term that does not have a conventionally employed feminine conjugation as does, for instance, other words for family relations, brother/sister, aunt/uncle, grandfather/grandmother, etc.

objections of their people who are being heedless and ignoring prophetic warnings in favor of the beliefs and practices of their forefathers.[104] One verse describes the adoration of forefathers in a slightly more positive light but then urges the believer to instead channel his or her dedication and enthusiasm toward the worship of God over ancestral pride: "Remember God as you remember your [fore]fathers, or with more ardent remembrance. For among humankind are those who say, 'Our Lord, give to us in this world,' but [they] have no share in the Hereafter."[105] The implicit rationale here is that fathers and forefathers—progenitors more broadly—may provide benefit to their heirs in this worldly life, but God provides better benefits in the worldly life *and* provides benefit in the Hereafter. God is no "father" in Qur'anic discourse, but *He* is the "Best of Providers," among other such attributes of munificence.[106] The copious number of verses describing God as Provider, Protector, Guardian, etc., are rechanneling potentially patriarchal impulses into the theological framework of a God beyond gender.

Another set of verses cautions against taking disbelieving fathers and brothers—understood as ancestors/parents and siblings in a gender-inclusive reading—as protectors (*awliyāʾ*). The verse goes on to caution against placing family bonds of any kind above commitment to religion, love of God, and love of the Prophet Muhammad, this time explicitly expanding the familial circle and emphasizing contemporaneous family relations through ancestry, procreation, sibling relations, and marriage. In this verse, family relations could have a

[104] For example, Q. 2:170, 7:70, 11:87, 14:10, and many others. Verse 6:91 stresses the lack of knowledge of forefathers. For a contrasting example of positive connotations, see God's support of the progeny of a righteous forefather in 18:77, 18:82, and others.
[105] Q. 2:200.
[106] See, for instance, Q. 5:114, 21:26, 22:58, 23:72, and 62:11 for the epithet "Best of Providers" in context. See also 2:126 for the patriarch Abraham beseeching God as "Provider" for his family.

negative net effect on a person's spiritual standing; family—like wealth—could drive an otherwise upright believer toward iniquity:

> O you who believe! Take not your fathers [*ābāʾakum*] and your brothers [*ikhwānakum*][107] as protectors if they prefer disbelief to belief. As for those among you who take them as protectors, it is they who are the wrongdoers. / Say, "If your fathers [*ābāʾukum*], your children [*abnāʾukum*], your brothers [*ikhwānukum*], your spouses [*azwājukum*], your tribe [kin] [*ʿashīratukum*], the wealth you have acquired, commerce whose stagnation you fear, and dwellings you find pleasing are more beloved to you than God, and *His* Messenger, and striving in *His* way, then wait till God comes with *His* Command." And God guides not iniquitous people.[108]

The ultimate takeaway message is one that is echoed in numerous edicts, parables, and stories: theological commitments triumph over familial bonds if the two come into conflict. As important as family relations are, the relationship a believer has with God is of paramount importance in the relationship hierarchy.

Qur'anic Sisters, Sisterhood, and Brotherhood Compared

The Qur'an depicts sibling relationships, both cooperative and dysfunctional, on a number of occasions. One sister depicted is the older sister of Moses who, using her courage and wit, gets the infant Moses returned to their mother following his being cast into the river and picked up by the House of Pharaoh (*āl Firʿawn*):[109]

> And she [the mother of Moses] said to his sister, "Follow him." So she watched him from afar; yet they were unaware. / And *We* forbade him to be suckled by foster mothers before that; so she said, "Shall I direct you to the people of a house who will take care of

[107] As noted, these terms could potentially be understood and translated with the gender-inclusive meanings "ancestors" and "siblings" respectively.

[108] Q. 9:23–24. *The Study Quran* itself renders *abnāʾukum* as "children." Another possible rendering is more gender specific as "sons." Inversely, the terms "fathers" and "brothers" could be read as "ancestors" or "parents" and "siblings" respectively.

[109] See Q. 28:7–8. See also 20:39. In the biblical account, the female figure that rescues Moses from the water is identified as the daughter of Pharaoh. While the daughter could be included in the Qur'anic reference to the "House of Pharaoh," Pharaoh's daughter is not specifically mentioned in the Qur'anic account.

> him for you and treat him with good will?" / Thus *We* returned him to his mother, that she might be comforted and not grieve, and that she might know that God's Promise is true. But most of them know not.[110]

Moses's sister is immediately obedient when her mother says one brief command: "Follow him" (*quṣṣīhi*).[111] The girl is not only amenable to performing a potentially perilous task, but she is also capable of thinking quickly and astutely in trying circumstances.[112]

Strikingly, the Qur'an includes several stories featuring unrighteous brothers, but does not include any stories featuring unrighteous sisters. The one sister-sister relationship featured, that of the two sisters of Midian, is a relationship characterized by collaboration as the sisters accompany each other to water their flocks. The sisters even reply in unison when a rather tousled Moses addresses them brusquely, "What is your errand?"[113] The first sibling relationship in sacred history, that of "Adam's two sons" (*ibnā Ādam*), is characterized by extreme jealousy resulting in one murdering the other.[114] Brother-upon-brother jealousy, verging upon fratricide, again surfaces when Joseph's brothers dispose of him in a well and lie that he was slain by a wolf, all in order to get the more exclusive attention of their father.[115] Joseph's brother's malevolent subterfuge in the beginning of the narrative creates the crisis, and Joseph's well-intentioned brotherly subterfuge is what finally enables family harmony to be restored in the end.

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[110] Q. 28:11–13. For a parallel account, see Q. 20:40. For a discussion of this episode in the context of infant prophets who are depicted in the Qur'an, see Geissinger, "Mary in the Qur'an," 389–90.
[111] Q. 28:11. For further discussions of the mother and sister of Moses, see Geissinger, "Mary in the Qur'an," 388–90.
[112] For a brief comparative discussion of the sister of Moses in Jewish literatures and in the Qur'an, specifically in relation to Mary the Mother of Jesus in the Qur'an being called by her people the "Sister of Aaron," see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 541–42 and 549–50.
[113] See Q. 28:23. The address is in the dual grammatical form. The translation could also be rendered, "What is your affari?" In a more colloquial translation the question could be rendered, "What's the matter with the two of you?"
[114] For the account of "Adam's two sons," see Q. 5:27–31. As I have pointed out, the sons are specifically attributed to Adam, and Adam's wife is not mentioned in verses recounting this fratricide.
[115] Q. 12:8.

Joseph's saga ends better than that of Adam's two sons, with forgiveness and an affectionate reunion between Joseph, all the brothers, and Joseph's parents in fulfillment of Joseph's dream.[116]

Moses also has a mostly cooperative relationship with his brother, the prophet Aaron (*Hārūn*), except in one dramatic instance when Moses momentarily loses his temper and accosts his brother in a scene that verges on the comic despite its intensity: "And he cast down the Tablets and seized his brother by the head, dragging him toward himself. He [Aaron] said, 'Son of my mother! Truly the people deemed me weak, and they were about to kill me. So let not the enemies rejoice in my misfortune, and place me not with the wrongdoing people.'"[117] Moses is placated by the plea of the "son of his mother" and supplicates, "My Lord, forgive me and my brother and bring us into *Thy* Mercy, for *Thou* art the most Merciful of the merciful."[118] Here, the repetition of the concept of mercy three times is significant, as mercy (*raḥmah*) is connected etymologically to the womb (*raḥim*) as described above. In this instance, Moses's supplication to God as "the most Merciful of those who show mercy" (*arḥam al-rāḥimīn*) is directly linked to Aaron's evocation of their connection through the womb. A second Qur'anic retelling of this encounter relates how Aaron placated the irate Moses by appealing to their womb-connection: "O son of my mother [*ya'bna umma*]! Seize not my beard nor my head."[119] The phrase "O son of my mother" requires a rather clunky English translation, but the Qur'anic expression itself imparts meaning through the quickened cadence of parties in an altercation.

[116] See Q. 12:90–100.
[117] Q. 7:151.
[118] Q. 7:152.
[119] Q. 20:94.

In contrast to this brotherly jousting, the brotherly subterfuge of Jacob's sons, and the eventual fratricide involving "Adam's two sons," the Qur'an does not depict a single instance of sisterly skirmish. The *metaphor* of sisterhood is, however, used elsewhere with both positive and negative connotations. For instance, God's signs (*āyāt*) become metaphorical sisters: "Not a sign did *We* show them, but that it was greater than its sister."[120] In contrast, the metaphor of sisterhood also extends to the communities who enter Hell and quibble therein: "Every time a community (*ummah*) enters, it curses its sister (*ukhtahā*), till, when they have all successively arrived there, the last of them will say of the first of them, 'Our Lord, it was they who led us astray; so give them a double punishment in the Fire.' *He* will say, "For each of you it shall be doubled, but you know not.'"[121] These two evocations of metaphorical sisterhood, one positive and one negative, are the only such metaphorical uses of the concept "sister" in the Qur'an.[122]

Females as Spouses

In chapter 1, I outlined the Qur'anic idea of "pairing" on the cosmic level. For instance, in speaking about Adam's spouse, the Qur'an consistently uses the term "spouse" (*zawj*), that is, one of a pair. Other spouses, including the Prophet Muhammad's spouses, are referred to using the term "*zawj*" or its plural "*azwāj*." Several other Qur'anic terms also pertain to female spouses, or households more generally, and an overview of these terms will enable a more textured delineation of kinship dynamics, as depicted in the Qur'an.

[120] Q. 43:48. The word (*āyāt*) is also used for verses of the Qur'an, which are regarded as "signs" in their own right.
[121] Q. 7:38.
[122] Of the fourteen total references to sister or sisters in the Qur'an, the majority are in the context of legal rulings on marriage and inheritance.

In addition to *zawj*, the word *imraʾah* (lit. woman) can mean "wife," depending foremost on context and then ultimately upon interpretation in the absence of a clear indication.[123] Also, the word *nisāʾ* (pl. of *imraʾah*) refers to women categorically and is used abundantly in the Qur'an in verses relating to legal matters within the family; it can also refer to the wives of a given figure or to female members of the extended family, including in verses 33:30 and 33:32 to refer to the women of the Prophet Muhammad's household, as explored in later chapters.[124] In addition to *zawj*, *imraʾah*, and *nisāʾ*, the word *ahl* may also designate a wife specifically, or members of a household, or people of a kinship group more generally.[125] A closely related word, *āl*, is also used in several places to refer to people of a close kinship group, including in the surah title *Āl ʿImrān*.[126] Most of the named Qur'anic prophets are mentioned in relation to either their wife or wives specifically, using *zawj*, *imraʾah*, and/or *nisāʾ*, or to their family, people, or a wife

[123] The root *m-r-ʾ* occurs thirty-eight times in the Qur'an overall in five forms: once as an adjective (see Q. 4:4), eleven times in gender-inclusive usages to mean "person," (*imruʾ*/*imraʾ*/*imriʾ* in different grammatical cases), twenty-four times to mean woman or wife depending on the context, and two times in the feminine dual. See *AED* 874.

[124] The word is from the root *n-s-w*. It is used fifty-nine times in the Qur'an, including twice in 12:30 and 12:50 as a so-called "plural of paucity" (*niswah*) to refer to the "women of the city" who are consorts of the viceroy's wife. See *AED* 935–36. The word is also used as a title for the fourth surah of the Qur'an, *al-Nisāʾ* (The Women), a lengthy surah that contains long segments of verses pertaining to women's affairs, for example, 4:1–35 and 127–30. For structural and thematic observations of these verses in the context of the surah as a whole, see A. H. Mathias Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Suras: al-Baqara and al-Nisa'," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (New York: Routledge, 2000), 26–55.

[125] Examples of this usage include Q. 3:33, 33:33, 19:6, 11:73, 15:65, 15:67, and others; *ahl* is from the root *ʾ-h-l*, which occurs 127 times across the Qur'an with shifting meanings, depending on context, meanings that range from "people" generally, to family or household, to a euphemism for wife, or as a designation of individuals or groups who are owners or possessors of something or some quality. See *AED* 61. See also appendix B for a listing of usages pertaining to female figures discussed in this work.

[126] A common opinion in lexical works is that the letter *hāʾ* in the root of the word *ahl* contracted to become the letter *ḥamzah*, and that the two *ḥamzah*s of the new word *ʾ-ʾ-l* then contracted to an *alif* to form the word *āl*. The word *āl* occurs twenty-six times in the Qur'an and is also used to mean family or household (e.g., Q. 3:33 referring to the *āl* of Abraham and the *āl* of *ʿImrān*). See appendix B for relevant verses containing this term. See also *AED* 64–65.

specifically using *ahl*, or to their household using *āl*, or a combination of these possibilities.[127] Given the wide semantic range of terms, context must be taken into consideration to determine to whom or about whom particular terms refer in any given instance.

Finally, consider again the word *zawj*, which can refer to the female spouse, or the male spouse, or to the idea of a spouse or a pair in general, and which is not confined to human beings. Of the eighty-one times that the root *z-w-j* appears in the Qur'an, it is used over twenty times to refer to the female spouse specifically; it is only used once to refer explicitly and exclusively to the male spouse.[128] The one husband referred to as *zawj* is a man whose wife complains to the Prophet, prompting a Qur'anic verse that addresses the situation and affirms the woman's rightful complaint against her negligent husband: "God has indeed heard the words of her who disputes with thee concerning her husband [*zawjihā*] and complains to God. And God hears your conversation. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing."[129] Another term refers to the male spouse specifically on six occasions, but this term, *baʿl*, is used only for male spouses in the Qur'an, despite having a corresponding female form in the Arabic language.[130]

[127] For illustrative examples of the terms *ahl* and *āl* used to mean people and/or family in different contexts, see 15:65–67 and 55:33–34, verses regarding the family and/or people of Lot.
[128] See Q. 58:1.
[129] See Q. 58:1. This surah (Q. 58) is widely known as "*al-Mujādilah*" (f., lit. the disputer) after this phrase in the first line describing the woman who "disputes with thee [Muhammad]." See *SQ* 1342n1–4 for the context of this episode, as discussed further in subsequent chapters.
[130] The word appears twice in the context of divorce negotiations (2:228 and 4:128), three times in the context of males toward whom females can have relaxed standards of dress (all in verses 24:31), and once in a Qur'anic narrative involving the wife of Abraham addressing Abraham as such (11:72) as discussed in chapter 3. The root appears a seventh time (37:125) as the name for a false god worshiped by misguided peoples, an overt reference to the biblical use of the word. Other meanings of the root in general Arabic usage include to be in a state of perplexity or to be confounded. See *AEL* 228.

On one occasion, a female personality refers to her spouse not as *zawj* or *baʿl*, but as *sayyid*, a polysemous term that can mean both master, husband, and leader.[131] Why does this woman use the term *sayyid*? The context is once again the climactic interactions between the adolescent Joseph and the Egyptian aristocratic couple who acquired him from a slave trader:[132]

> And they [Joseph and the wife of the viceroy] raced to the door, while she tore his shirt from behind. And they encountered her master [husband] [*sayyidahā*] at the door. She said, "What is the recompense for one who desires ill toward thy wife [*ahlika*], save that he be imprisoned, or a painful punishment?"[133]

This is the single instance in the Qur'an where the word *sayyid* is used in this way.[134] In this story, the husband is a viceroy of Egypt; his title, *al-ʿazīz,* reflects his occupation as a political leader for his people, including his wife. The use of *sayyid* to mean "master/husband/leader" occurs not in the context of verses describing human creation or telos, but in the context of a story wherein the personalities are members of an aristocratic family. Hence, this Qur'anic use of *sayyid* (master/husband/leader) could be seen as reflecting a sociological dynamic, not an ontological reality.

In the example above, the wife of the viceroy refers to herself using the euphemism *ahl*, which is a term in the gendered social realm that means both the wife of a given figure but can

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[131] As derived from the root *s-w-d*, a root occurring ten times in total. In two verses, it occurs with the meaning of master, leader, chief, as in Q. 12:25 (quoted above) and 33:67. It carries the meaning of noble in Q. 3:39 to describe the prophet John. It also occurs with the connotation of darkness, blackness, or the process of becoming black in seven other instances. See *AED* 464–65.

[132] "The man from Egypt who brought him said unto his wife, 'Give him honorable accommodation. It might be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son'," Q. 12:21.

[133] Q. 12:25.

[134] The polysemic nature of "master" and "husband" is of note. The double connotation in this verse, Q. 12:25, echoes another instance of polysemy a few verses earlier, in 12:23, where the word *rabb* is used by Joseph to mean "lord" as in "person with authority over someone else" or possibly as "Lord" as in an appellation of God. Both meanings of *rabb* are contextually plausible. For a discussion of other linguistic echoes in the surah as a whole and the ways in which these patterns are part of a larger ring composition, see Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 34–43.

also signify the familial household more broadly. In this way, her question, "What is the recompense for one who desires ill toward thy wife?" carries the significance, "What is the recompense for one who desires ill toward thy family?" With her words, the viceroy's wife calls attention to the ways in which a man's social capital, particularly in a patriarchal kingdom such as hers, is linked to the protection of the sexual integrity and honor of the females in his charge. Thus, she is not only deceitfully cunning in that she blames the affair on Joseph, but in that she does so using the idiom that would be most effective in achieving her desired ends.[135] Female speech, including the viceroy's wife's speech in these aforementioned verses, is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusions

Ethical lessons pertaining to familial cooperation and intra-familial struggles are nestled in the stories the Qur'an tells about mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives interacting with one another and with their male family members. These narratives complement the Qur'an's many direct ethical injunctions pertaining to family life. The early and latter stages of human life are moments that the Qur'an highlights, in particular, where humility, gratitude, generosity, and righteousness are incumbent upon—and due toward—females and males alike. A number of female figures are depicted as becoming impregnated or even birthing, and two aging mother figures (the mothers of John and Isaac) are depicted with reference to their familial roles. The wife of Lot is also alluded to as an "old woman," and she is identified as a treacherous wife, but

[135] Such instances of female speech are the subject of the next chapter.

she is never depicted interacting with children in Qur'anic accounts.[136] The same can be said for the wife of Noah.[137]

Just as we saw in chapter 1 with regard to the Qur'an's depiction of multiple scenarios of marital in/fidelity and im/piety, the Qur'an also contains stories that epitomize nearly all of the different constellations of parent-child relationships, including some foster relationships. However, the Qur'an never depicts theologically or ethically corrupt daughters, or girls more generally, whereas it does contain several narratives involving corrupt sons and boys more generally. Righteous daughters in Qur'anic narratives display courage and obedience, collaborate with parents on important matters, and are sources of wisdom. Numerous verses, female figures, and metaphors reinforce the lofty station of motherhood, and only one brief parable directly depicts a mother figure (along with her spouse) engaged in a condemned behavior, namely, forgetting the blessings of God upon them in the form of their righteous child and instead associating partners with God. In the broader Qur'anic context, the ethics of being righteous, whether as a daughter or son, include being virtuous to parents and to extended kin,[138] remembering parents and relatives properly in bequests,[139] and being "steadfast maintainers of justice," even if it be against parents and kinsfolk.[140] These are overarching ethical mandates and trials that are not dependant on biological sex or gendered social roles.

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[136] For comparative perspectives, see Nora K Schmid, "Lot's Wife: Late Antique Paradigms of Sense and the Qurʾān," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells. Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (New York: Routledge, 2016), 52–81.

[137] For comparative perspectives on Noah and his family, see Christine Dykgraaf, "The Mesopotamian Flood Epic and Its Representation in the Bible, the Quran and Other Middle Eastern Literatures," in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an*, ed. Roberta Sterman Sabbath. Biblical Interpretation Series 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 393–408.

[138] Q. 17:23–24.

[139] Q. 2:180.

[140] Q. 4:135. This verse, 4:135, bears a topical connection to 4:35, one of the many places in the *muṣḥaf* where verses with similar numbering have topical correspondences.

With regard to spousal relations in Qur'anic narratives, the Qur'an includes a full spectrum of possibilities: righteous couples, unrighteous couples, righteous husbands with unrighteous wives, and even one righteous wife with an unrighteous husband. Multiple terms describe spouses in the Qur'an, with the most frequently mentioned term being *zawj*, a term that carries the sense of being one of a pair. As underscored as well in the previous chapter, the frequency of the Qur'anic usage of this term for the female spouse is an indicator of the Qur'an's emphasis on the reciprocity of the marital relationship. All couples depicted in Qur'anic narratives are female-male pairings, in keeping with the Qur'anic emphasis on females and males as spouses for one another. Male-male desire is directly mentioned on several occasions, all involving the people of Lot, but no female-female sexual relationships are depicted or otherwise directly discussed.[141]

In its stories and in its direct ethical injunctions, the Qur'an reinforces the idea that human beings, female and male, are responsible for striving for justice within their families and societies—and within their souls. Toward that end, Qur'anic narratives regularly feature wives, mothers, and sisters whose characters serve to demonstrate God's ultimate wisdom and omnipotence in family affairs and to inculcate piety in the reader, reciter, or listener. As explored in more detail in subsequent chapters, the Prophet Muhammad himself has the most family relations mentioned of any Qur'anic figure, with the vast majority of those figures being females. In addition, regular Qur'anic references to family and extended kin with terms such as *ahl* and *āl* are abundant in the context of Qur'anic depictions of prophets, messengers, and their nemeses. Regular occurrences of the words *ahl* and *āl* situate individual male figures in extended familial

[141] Some commentators have suggested that references in Q. 4:15 may refer to females who have engaged in same-sex acts, but there is "significant doubt about this interpretation." See *SQ* 196n16.

contexts; female kin—even while remaining at times anonymous—are present nonetheless as social actors in a larger story.

Having covered Qur'anic depictions of females vis-à-vis issues of sex and sexuality in chapter 1, and females as kin in the present chapter, we now turn to female speech and females as interlocutors.

Chapter 3

Feminine Voices:

"Who Informed Thee of This?" (Q. 66:3)

The prophet Moses converses directly with God;[1] what is the nature of divine-female communication in Qur'anic stories? How do female interactions with the divine and angelic realm compare or contrast to the interactions of male figures? Do females assert political, religious, or other types of epistemic authority through their speech? Does female speech inculcate particular virtues? From mothers-to-be and their angelic interlocutors, to the gossiping accomplices of a politician's guilty wife, my focus here is on female voices, and specifically, Quranic verses with direct female speech.[2] I give consideration to the affective dimensions of female speech as a didactic feature of Qur'anic discourse, and my treatment of female speech aims to be comprehensive of all instances of female speech in the Qur'an, thirty-four verses in total. I touch on male speech when a comparative lens is illustrative. As this chapter shows, Qur'anic females often speak with authority, insight, and wit, but on rarer occasions, female speech has more nefarious aims.[3]

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[1] The dialogue that transpires in one instance is nearly forty verses long. See Q. 20:11–48.

[2] See appendix C for a listing of verses containing female speech by their order of occurrence in the *muṣḥaf* as well as a listing of verses containing divine and angelic speech directed toward female figures, as listed by figure. Qur'anic Arabic does not have quotation marks, but I take verbal cues such as "she/they said" to signal the beginning of speech. The end of a direct quote, or sometimes the speaker, or the addressee/s, can, at times, be a matter of debate. According to my count, thirty-four total verses include female speech, not including the laugh of Abraham's wife in Q. 11:71 or the speech of the ant as discussed below.

[3] See appendix C for a full listing of Qur'anic verses containing female speech listed by figure and for a listing of female speech from beginning to end of the Qur'an, that is, from cover to cover of the *muṣḥaf.* My efforts here constitute the first attempt that I have found to look comprehensively at female speech in the Qur'an, but I am

By way of introduction, this chapter begins with one exceptional figure in the Qur'an, a figure possessing a feminine voice that is neither human nor otherworldly, yet whose speech is nonetheless a part of the Qur'an's narrative drama.

"And He Smiled, Wondering at Her Words" (Q. 27:19)

Like his prophetic father David (*Dāwūd*), the prophet Solomon (*Sulaymān*) has gifts of wisdom, eloquence, and a unique ability to commune with the natural world. These gifts, in Solomon's case, manifest in an ability to understand the speech of non-human animals, as attested to in his encounter with a preoccupied ant, related by the Qur'an as follows:

> And gathered for Solomon were his hosts of jinn and men and birds, and they were marshaled [in ordered ranks], / till when they came to the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants! Enter your dwelling, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you, while they are unaware." / And he smiled, wondering at her words,[4] and said, "My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for *Thy* blessing wherewith *Thou* hast blessed me and my parents and to work righteousness pleasing to *Thee*, and cause me to enter, through *Thy* Mercy, among *Thy* righteous servants!"[5]

Not only does Solomon hear the ant, but her speech triggers a shift in consciousness for Solomon, prompting him to pray: "My Lord! Inspire me" (*awziʿnī*) to give thanks."[6] Whereas

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indebted to prior studies that give attention to speech and dialogue in the Qur'an in general as well as to the speech of specific figures.

[4] The single ant is grammatically gendered female in the Arabic language, but from a perspective of myrmecology, the female ant would be the one leading the colony and hence issuing the marching orders. The feminine voice of the aunt protecting her people and the direct parallel to the Queen of Sheba in the subsequent verses are a subtle but noteworthy aspect of structure and coherence.

[5] Q. 27:17–19. I have substituted "wondering" for *The Study Quran*'s translation of "laughing," as the word in question can have both senses with the preposition *min*; see *AEL* 1823–24. Laughing could imply a mocking quality, whereas the humility expressed by Solomon's accompanying speech suggests a spirit of awe, not arrogance.

[6] See Q. 46:15: "And *We* have enjoined upon the human being to be virtuous unto *his* parents. *His* [the human being's] mother carried *him* in travail and bore *him* in travail, and *his* gestation and weaning is thirty months, such that when *he* reaches maturity and reaches forty years *he* says, "My Lord inspire me to give thanks for *Thy* blessings which *Thou* hast blessed me and hast blessed my parents, and that I may work righteousness such that it pleases

previously the narrative was devoted to Solomon's military forces, ordered and "marshaled" (*yūzaʿūn*), after hearing the ant's speech, Solomon is moved to communicate with his Lord beseeching inspiration. The two verbs, to inspire and to marshal, share a common root, suggesting a subtle shift in the attention of Solomon from managing his military expedition to attending to his duties as a servant of his Lord. The ant inspires Solomon to remember the blessings of his parents and to beseech God for righteous actions, and in doing so, Solomon repeats nearly verbatim a praise formula in another Qur'anic verse that begins by extolling the role of the mother in gestation and weaning, as discussed in the previous chapter.[7]

In her minute stature and in her sincerity, this ant is a reminder for Solomon of his own dependency on the human beings whose union brought him into the world, and of his dependency on the Lord who is over him and his affairs.[8] Even as Solomon prepares for military conquest, he is reminded of his blessings, his parents, his spiritual and teleological purpose, and his ultimate servanthood. His shift of consciousness in these verses foreshadows the shift of consciousness that the Queen of Sheba, as we will see, undergoes as well in her shifting of perspective from a military to a theological outlook. In another element of foreshadowing, the ant acts as a proficient protector of her people against the might of Solomon, and so too it will be

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Thee, and make righteous for me my progeny. Truly I turn in repentance unto *Thee*, and truly I am among those who submit."

[7] The root, *w-z-ʿ* occurs five times in the Qur'an in two forms. See *AED* 1023–24. See *AEL* (*Supplement*), 3052. See also Steingass, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1210.

[8] The topical correspondence between an early verse of the Qur'an on the use of metaphor is also striking here; see Q. 2:26, "Truly God is not ashamed to set forth a parable of a gnat or something smaller. As for those who believe, they know it is the truth from their Lord, and as for those who disbelieve, they say, 'What did God mean by this parable?' *He* misleads many by it, and *He* guides many by it, and *He* misleads none but the iniquitous."

with the Queen of Sheba (popularly known as Bilqīs).[9] Both the aunt and the Queen use their voices to warn their respective constituents of the danger brought on by Solomon's marching.

Previous chapters have pointed out topical correspondences in Qur'anic narratives and their importance for understanding gender relations in the Qur'an, and the speech of this ant can also serve to highlight and emphasize a critical gender-related aspect of Solomon's engagements with the Queen. Namely, Solomon's interaction with the ant provides a heuristic for interpreting the subsequent narrative of Solomon and the Queen: Solomon is not a callous king assailing a defenseless queen who eventually capitulates to the male's conquest. Rather, both leaders, Solomon and the Queen, ascertain through their encounter with one another the magnitude of their servanthood to the Ultimate Ruler. It is arguably for this reason that the narrative ends with the Queen of Sheba's speech: "I submit *with* Solomon to God, Lord of the worlds."[10] On the Queen's part, she is tested to see if she can recognize the truth regarding her throne, a metaphor that foreshadows her ability to recognize her worldly throne as metaphorically subservient to the Throne of God.[11] On Solomon's part, he is tested several times as to the intensity of his gratitude and humility toward God despite the fact that his might and perception are unparalleled on earth.[12] Despite their lofty political stations, and their immense affluence, the Queen of Sheba

[9] The Qur'an does not specifically refer to this ant as a queen of her colony; however, given the social organization of ant colonies and the narrative involving Solomon that immediately follows this one in the *muṣḥaf*, the correspondences are potent.

[10] Q. 27:44. Emphasis added. It is almost as if the Queen's speech about submission completes the prayer that is given by the Qur'an as an example of upright worship in Q. 46:15, the prayer that bears a striking resemblance to the words of Solomon in 27:19. See n5 of this chapter.

[11] See Q. 41–42. For an analysis of the symbolism in her conversion to Islam, see Mustansir Mir, "The Queen of Sheba's Conversion in Q. 27:44: A Problem Examined," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2007): 43–56.

[12] For example, Q. 27:36 and 27:40. In another instance, when told by the hoopoe of the majesty of the Queen's throne, Solomon demonstrates his righteousness by praising God's throne. See Q. 27:22–26.

and King Solomon are called to see past deceptive material realities to perceive the transcendent ones.

The Queen of Sheba's speech is included in eight Qur'anic verses in total, slightly more than Mary, the Qur'an's most oft-mentioned female figure.[13] Through her speech in particular, the Queen is depicted as a competent ruler who has diplomatic prowess and the respect of her advisors. She is balanced in her approach to diplomacy: keen on listening to advice yet also persuasive when taking a stance; collaborative in soliciting feedback, but also decisive in her resolutions.[14] Despite initially "prostrating to the sun instead of God," as the hoopoe bird observes on his scouting mission, she immediately recognizes the letter that Solomon sends as "a noble letter" (*kitābun karīm*),[15] and this begins her journey towards submission (*islām*), a journey that ends with her repentance. She says, "My Lord! Surely I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to God, Lord of the worlds."[16] In reading her noble letter from Solomon to her circle of advisors the Queen utters, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" (*bismi-llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*). As commentators have noted, this is the only verse in the entirety of the Qur'an in which the full *basmalah* occurs,[17] therein honoring and elevating the Queen's speech with one of the Qur'an's most sacrosanct praise formulas. Through the letter that

[13] See appendix C for a listing of the eight verses containing her speech, all in *Sūrat al-Naml*.
[14] See Q. 32–35. For discussion of this aspect of the Queen's persona, see Jeenah Na'eem, "Bilqis—a Qur'ānic Model for Leadership and for Islamic Feminists," *Journal for Semitics* 13, no. 1 (2004): 47–58. For a discussion of the ways in which the figure of the Queen influences debates about women's political leadership, see David Solomon Jalajel, *Women and Leadership in Islamic Law: A Critical Analysis of Classical Legal Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[15] Q. 27:29.
[16] Q. 27:44.
[17] Q. 27:30. See *SQ* 953n30. The *basmalah* is the formula that begins the Qur'an and each subsequent surah with the exception of one surah that begins not with God's compassion and mercy, but with God's wrath: "A repudiation from God and His Messenger to those idolaters with whom you made a treaty," Q. 9:1, see SQ 505nn1–4 for context.

the Queen reads to her inner council, she delivers Solomon's message: "Do not exalt yourselves against me, but come to me in submission [*muslimīn*]."[18] The statement is simultaneously an act of proselytization and an assertion of political dominance, due to the polysemantic valances of the word *muslim*.[19] Upon receipt of this letter, which on its surface threatens political aggression, the Queen is seemingly able to discern a "noble" implication in the message, even if she is not initially able to discern the precise nature of the submission to which Solomon is calling her.[20]

This narrative is one example in which a female figure is made to articulate speech affirming the compassionate attributes of God. Mary is also intimately aware of the compassionate divine presence, and when she births a child without a spouse, she is instructed by an angelic messenger to say, "Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate [*al-raḥmān*], so I shall not speak this day to any human being."[21] The words come to Mary from a divinely inspired source, and she vows as she is commanded to vow. The words that the Queen utters also come to her from a divinely inspired source, this time not an angel but a prophet. The Queen of Sheba and Mary are both tested in insight, obedience, and resolve, and both receive God's message and submit. This is one of several examples in the Qur'an in which female speech has a revelatory quality and wherein female figures excel through difficult circumstances by listening to subtle guidance from a divinely inspired source.

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[18] Q. 27:31.

[19] Even Solomon's name, *Sulaymān*, could be a reflection of these multiple valences.

[20] For comparative perspectives, see Toni Tidswell, "A Clever Queen Learns the Wisdom of God: The Queen of Sheba in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Qur'an," *Hecate* 33, no. 2 (2007): 43–55. See also George Archer, "A Short History of a 'Perfect Woman': The Translations of the 'Wife of Pharaoh' before, through, and beyond the Qur'ānic Milieu," *Mathal/Mashal* 3, no. 1 (2013): 1–20. For comparative perspectives, see also Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).

[21] Q. 19:26.

God Reveals to a Woman

In the beginning of this work, I pointed out how Mary is described as delivering, literally, the "Word" of God; the mother of Moses too receives revelatory speech and is commanded to see through the rather grave implications of the words to the reassurance that through her submission, all will be well in the end. When God "desired to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs, / and to establish them in the land,"[22] as a first intervention toward this lofty vision of social change, God gives revelation to an individual woman, specifically, a mother with an infant.[23] The Qur'an describes Moses's mother as receiving direct revelation (*waḥy*), even using the first-person pronoun: "So *We* revealed to the mother of Moses (*umm Mūsā*), 'Nurse him. But if you fear for him, then cast him into the river, fear not, nor grieve. Surely *We* shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.'"[24] On another occasion, God recounts the episode to Moses: "When *We* revealed to thy mother that which was revealed: / 'Cast him into the ark and cast it into the sea. Then the sea will throw him upon the bank. An enemy unto *Me* and an enemy unto him shall take him.'"[25] In this example, God's speech to the mother of Moses is imbedded in God's speech to Moses.[26] Stylistically, the prose itself in these verses displays an echo effect. For instance, several phrases reoccur: "We revealed . . . that which was revealed"; "an enemy unto *Me* and an

[22] Q. 5–6.

[23] There is a parallel between God "establishing the people in the land" by beginning with revelation to the mother of Moses, and extra-Qur'anic narratives of God's establishing Hagar, and through her the House of Abraham, in Mecca. See Q. 2:126, 2:158, and 14:37 for discussions of Mecca and the role of the family of Abraham in establishing the sacred rites therein; see also discussions in chapter 4.

[24] Q. 28:7.

[25] Q. 20:37–39.

[26] For further discussion of the aural dimensions of this surah, see Michael Sells, "The Casting: A Close Hearing of Sura ṬāHā 9–79," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (New York: Routledge, 2016), 124–77.

enemy unto him," and "cast him . . . and cast it . . . *I* cast upon thee," and other such examples. In addition to the aural echoes, the story is framed by a reoccurring emphasis on the idea of God's capacity for "seeing" (as *al-baṣīr*). Moses says: "Truly *Thou* dost ever see us [Moses and his brother]."[27] God, in turn, after relating the harrowing story of Moses being thrown into the river, says to Moses: "I cast upon thee a love from *Me*, that thou mightest be formed under *My* eye."[28] In the very next verse, it is Moses's sister who has the guarding eye upon Moses.[29] In this instance, God is enacting God's purpose through the courageous actions and instinctive wit of Moses's sister.[30] In all of these cases, the command of God is manifest through communication to, and through the actions of, female figures. Do women figures receive God's revelation? The example of Moses's mother leads us to answer in the affirmative.[31]

God also acts directly to "fortify the heart" of the mother of Moses, a woman who has been subjected to tremendous oppression and intense grief at having been forced to cast her infant child into the river to escape the decree of Pharaoh: "But the heart of Moses's mother became empty, and she would have disclosed it, had *We* not fortified her heart, that she might be among the believers."[32] Here, not only does God know the most intimate states of a woman's heart but also directly acts to alter those states. The English rendering of "heart" does not capture a subtle detail of the original Arabic: in the first instance, her heart (*fuʾād*) becomes empty (*fārigh*); in the second instance God says "*We* fortified (*rabaṭnā ʿalā*) her heart (*qalbihā*). In

[27] Q. 20:35.
[28] Q. 20:39.
[29] Q. 20:40.
[30] As discussed in the previous chapter.
[31] Moses's mother's receipt of revelation is similar to that of Joseph, in Q. 12:15, in which he too receives a personal revelation in a time of tribulation. For a summary of the debate on the possibility of women being prophets, see Adújar, "Feminist Readings of the Qur'an," 66.
[32] Q. 28:10.

order to appreciate the Qur'anic descriptions of this woman's state, it is necessary to probe these terms further. What does it mean to "become empty" for a heart? The term *fuʾād* in the plural form, *afʾidah*, is also used in the Qur'an in several instances to mean "feelings," coming from a root that means "to affect," and the adjective *fārigh* has the sense of being void, vacant, exhausted, poured out, and finished.[33] Hence, one interpretation is that she became despondent over the loss of her child. Here is another point of exceptional affective power for a reader, reciter, or listener who can empathize, or potentially even revisit, the trauma of losing or being separated from a child. Even more poignantly, the loss endured by the heart of Moses's mother happens as a result of political persecution, a phenomenon that haunts contemporary peoples as much as it did the ancients. But the verse does not leave the emotional wound of trauma completely raw, for the meaning of *rabaṭa,* particularly when said of God, is to bestow patient perseverance, but also to remain calm, to be undismayed, and literally, to bandage up.[34] The root word for "heart" (*qalb*) also has a root meaning that signifies "turning."[35] God, the "Turner of Hearts" (*muqallib al-qulūb*), turned Moses's mother's heart from despondency toward hopeful perseverance. Her intimate relationship with the presence and wisdom of the ultimate Fortifier was her source of intense courage and emotional strength, and God did indeed keep God's promise. Her child was returned to her through a turn of events she could have least expected.

Female Speech that Only God Hears

[33]The root *f-ʾ-d* occurs sixteen times in the Qur'an and has derived meanings that include to affect, to be hurt, and to be burned up, see *AEL* 2322–23. The root *f-r-gh* occurs six times in the Qur'an with meanings including those named above. Additional derived meanings cited by some scholars that also fit this Qur'anic context perhaps even better than the translation of "empty" include impatient, disquieted, or disturbed; see *AEL* 2380–82.

[34] See *AEL* 1013–15.

[35] See *AEL* 2552–55. Words derived from the root *q-l-b* appear at least 168 times in the Qur'an in twelve grammatical forms. See *AED* 770–72.

God not only expresses divine will through the actions of female figures, but on several occasions, female figures are depicted as having intimate conversations with God, or God is depicted as hearing the speech of females who are being wronged in some way.[36] For instance, when a husband dishonors his wife and, in her distress, she comes complaining to the Prophet Muhammad, God explicitly hears and responds with a resolution on behalf of the wife: "God has indeed heard the words of her who disputes with thee concerning her husband and complains to God. And God hears your conversation. Truly God is Hearing, Seeing."[37] The surah, entitled *al-Mujādilah* (She Who Disputes), condemns the husband's actions as being "indecent words and calumny," but goes on to provide options for expiation and therein a resolution between the pair.[38] Another instance of God hearing a wife who is wronged by her husband is the wife of Pharaoh, who is described as "an example" for the believers: "And God sets forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said, 'My Lord, build for me a house near *Thee* in the Garden, deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people.'"[39] Here the wife of Pharaoh turns to God, and God hears her supplication. Notably, the wife makes a unique request that is not made anywhere else in the Qur'an in that she asks not just for salvation but for a "house" (*bayt*) in proximity to God in Paradise. Here the desire for a house readily functions as a metonym for the basic desires for safety, security, and freedom from oppression.[40] That a woman who was subjected to the whims of a tyrant husband would ask for a house is, in a contemporary context, akin to survivors of domestic violence beseeching God for

[36] See also related discussion of the Qur'an responding to women in Lamrabet, *Women in the Qur'an*, 93–98.
[37] Q. 58:1. The woman speaker here, known as "*al-mujādilah*" (lit. the female disputer), is identified by the commentary tradition as Khawla bint Thaʿlabah and her husband as Aws b. al-Ṣāmit. See *SQ* 1342n1–4.
[38] Q. 58:2–7, as discussed further in chapter 4.
[39] Q. 66:11.
[40] Arabic words for "dwelling place" can also mean a place of rest, peace and tranquility, as derived from the root, *s-k-n*. See *AED* 444–46.

an escape from the maltreatment. Herein too the verse has an affective potential both in increasing compassion for women under the control of tyrannical forces at home, and also for readers, reciters, and listeners who may, alas, find themselves in such a situation to take consolation from the fact that God hears. In these senses, the wife of Pharaoh is, as the verse itself reiterates, "an example for those who believe."

In other verses, the Qur'an recounts the speech of oppressed peoples—women and children explicitly included: "And what ails you that you fight not in the way of God, and for the weak and oppressed—men, women, and children—who cry out, 'Our Lord! Bring us forth from this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from *Thee* a protector, and appoint for us from *Thee* a helper.'"[41] Here the speech is not of specific people in a specific town, but it represents the sentiments of the weak and oppressed in general. In highlighting the speech of the oppressed, speech that has a quality of urgency, the Qur'an gives voice to the suffering. God hears their cries, and in turn, the reader, reciter, or Qur'anic listener also hears their cries. From an affective perspective, the verses could also fortify Qur'anic readers, reciters, or listeners—including women and children—facing oppression in their lived experience in providing reassurance that God also hears their cries, condemns the oppressors, and urges upright people to act in their support.

In these ways, the Qur'an depicts God as not only knowing the intimate needs of female figures, but as responding to these needs. The very first instance of this dynamic in the *muṣḥaf* itself is the case of the mother of Mary: "[Remember] when the wife of ʿImrān said, 'My Lord, truly I dedicate to *Thee* what is in my belly, in consecration. So accept it from me. Truly *Thou* art

[41] Q. 4:75.

the Hearing, the Knowing.'"[42] God "the Hearing, the Knowing" is present to the mother of Mary when she makes her vow regarding her child in the womb. In this case, the wife of ʿImrān desires to please God, and God responds to her intention with a righteous *girl* child. God's manifestation to the wife of ʿImrān as "the Hearing, the Knowing," is not only a fulfilment of her own supplication to God by those attributes, but in the verse immediately preceding, God explicitly asserts the attributes "the Hearing, the Knowing." The wife of ʿImrān's supplication demonstrates that she has an intimate knowledge of the divine attributes. Her story, and more specifically her piety and theological acumen as captured in the Qur'an by her prayer, serves as a specific example of general theological principles: God is Hearing and Knowing.

The wife of ʿImrān's prayer also has intra-textual significances. One juxtaposition emerges between Mary's mother and Mary herself. Mary's mother makes a vow in secret dedicating Mary to God while Mary is in the womb; later, just after Mary herself delivers her child, God instructs Mary also to take a vow, this one in public in defense of her pregnancy. Mary's vow of silence in *Sūrat Maryam* is also a thematic echo, and in certain aspects also a juxtaposition, of her caretaker Zachariah's inability to speak after having beseeched God for a sign that his prayer for an heir had been answered.[43]

God's Speech to Female Interlocutors

On several occasions, God speaks to females directly, or speaks directly to males and females together. From the very beginning of sacred history, Adam's spouse (*Ḥawwāʾ*, Eve) speaks to God in unison with her spouse. In fact, the only time that Adam prays to God in the Qur'an, it is

[42] Q. 3:35.
[43] Q. 19:10–11.

in unison with his spouse. When the pair repented from following the promptings of Satan over the command of God, "They said, 'Our Lord! *We* have wronged ourselves. If *Thou* dost not forgive us and have Mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers.'"[44] This is the singular verse in which the speech of the spouse of Adam is quoted in the Qur'an, making prayer the entirety of her Qur'anic speech. Do the pair literally utter these exact words spontaneously in unison, or does the Qur'an simply summarize the essence of their speech? Rather than being extemporaneous speech, the words that the pair utter together could very well be the prayerful formulaic "words" of repentance that were "cast upon Adam from his Lord."[45]

A hermeneutic of suspicion would probe why the Qur'an describes these words as being cast upon Adam specifically, when Adam and his spouse use them together. Did Adam teach the words to his spouse? Were the words cast upon her by God at the same time they were cast upon Adam alone? The Qur'an itself is not specific on this point, but an inter-textual reading of God's other speech to the pair, taking into consideration the revelatory order of the surahs, can provide insights.

As shown below, God addresses the spouses in the dual grammatical form, and sometimes also in the plural, including in the address their nemesis Satan (and potentially other figures who are present but unnamed). Taking into consideration the order in which the surahs are widely held to be revealed, verses in which God addresses the spouses occur in the following order (the grammatical dual or plural is clarified):[46]

Q. 7:22 (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*)

[44] Q. 7:23.
[45] Q. 2:37, "Then Adam received words from his Lord, and *He* relented unto him. Indeed, *He* is the Relenting, the Merciful."
[46] I have had to depart slightly from *The Study Quran* translations in order to present a more direct, literal translation for the purposes of intra-textual analysis.

Thus he [Satan] lured them [dual] on through deception. And when they [dual] tasted of the tree, their [dual] nakedness was exposed to them [dual], and they [dual] began to sew together the leaves of the Garden to cover themselves. And their [dual] Lord called out to them [dual], "Did I not forbid you [dual] from that tree, and tell you [dual] that Satan is a manifest enemy unto you [dual]?"

Q. 7:24 (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf)*
He said, "Get down [plural], each of you [plural] an enemy to the other! There will be for you [plural] on earth a dwelling place, and enjoyment for a while."

Q. 7:25 (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf)*
He said, "Therein you [plural] shall live, and therein you [plural] shall die, and from there shall you [plural] be brought forth."

Q. 20:123 (*Sūrat Ṭā Hā*)
He said, "Get down [dual] from it, all together, each of you [plural] an enemy to the other. And if guidance should come unto you [plural] from *Me*, then whosoever follows *My* Guidance shall not go astray, nor be wretched.

Q. 2:36 (*Sūrat al-Baqara*)
Then Satan made them [dual] stumble therefrom, and expelled them [dual] from that wherein they were, and *We* said, "Get you down [plural], each of you [plural] an enemy to the other. For you [plural] in the earth is a dwelling place, and enjoyment for a while."

Q. 2:38 (*Sūrat al-Baqara*)
We said, "Get down [plural] from it, all together. If guidance should come to you [plural] from *Me*, then whosoever follows *My* Guidance, no fear shall come upon them [plural], nor shall they grieve."

As we can see, *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*, the first surah listed above, contains a greater emphasis on the spouses as a pair, as evidenced by the repetition of words containing the dual grammatical form. *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, coming between the two other surahs in the revelatory order, is much more focused on Adam's role in the disobedience, likely as a corrective to pre-Qur'anic versions of the story.[47] Verses in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, a chronologically later surah, relate this episode more specifically

[47] For thorough discussions of the Muslim incorporation of pre-Qur'anic narratives regarding Eve, see Bronson, "Eve in the Formative Period of Islamic Exegesis."

with a focus on Adam's words.[48] In *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*, God's speech is related in the third person, "*He* said," followed by a rhetorical question to the pair in the grammatical first person: "Did *I* not forbid you [dual] from that tree, and tell you [dual] that Satan is a manifest enemy unto you [dual]?" The emphasis here is on God's speech to the pair. *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* combines the third and first person, moving seamlessly between the perspective of the Omniscient Narrator and the immediate intimacy of God's speech.[49] Finally, God's speech in *Sūrat al-Baqara* is related in the grammatical first person, "*We* said," making it even more immediate and emphatic. Thus, the account that specifically highlights *Adam's* intimate interactions with God is the surah in which the "words" are "cast upon him." Arguably, this is a matter of narrative focus and does not exclude Adam's spouse from being the recipient of the words as well, particularly given that she is the recipient of God's words together with Adam in other verses. Taking this observation one step further from a female-centric perspective, it is worth noting that the verses focusing on Adam specifically occur at the very beginning of the Qur'an and establish quite emphatically for a reader or reciter that a woman was not singularly at fault in the fall of humanity.[50] In this sense, the first mention of a female figure in the *muṣḥaf* is a refutation of arguably one of the most patriarchal and demeaning pre-Qur'anic theological claims arising from the Near Eastern milieu.

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[48] For a provocative structural analysis of the depiction of the primordial couple in this surah, see Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 74–75.

[49] Dialogue and the frequent change of addressee (a device known as *iltifāt*) are common storytelling devices in the Qur'an. See Mir, "Dialogues," *EQ* 1:532.

[50] See discussions in Hatice K. Arpagus, "The Position of Women in the Creation: A Qur'anic Perspective," in *Muslimah Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, ed. Elif Mendeni, Ednan Aslan, and Marcia Hermansen (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2013), 115–32. For comparative perspectives, see Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler, eds., *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). For a formative analysis of Jewish and Christian interpretations, see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1989).

To call further attention to a feature of Qur'anic structure,[51] note that the first speech *by* God *concerning* a female figure, in this instance Adam's spouse, appears in Q. 2:35–7.[52] The first speech *by* a female *concerning* God appears in Q. 3:35–7, exactly one surah later in the same verse placement:

> Q. 2:35–6
> *We* said, "O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof freely wheresoever you will. But approach not this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." / Then Satan made them stumble therefrom, and expelled them from that wherein they were, and *We* said, "Get you down, each of you an enemy to the other. On the earth a dwelling place shall be yours, and enjoyment for a while."

> Q. 3:35–6
> [Remember] when the wife of ʿImrān said, "My Lord, truly I dedicate to *Thee* what is in my belly, in consecration. So accept it from me. Truly *Thou* art the Hearing, the Knowing." / And when she bore her [Mary], she said, "My Lord, I have borne a female,"—and God knows best what she bore—and the male is not like the female, and [the wife of ʿImrān said], "I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in *Thee*, and for her progeny, from Satan the outcast."

In addition to this structural correspondence, other observations on the structure and placement of verses in the *muṣḥaf* with regard to female speech—and the topical content of that speech—are warranted.

The speech of individual female figures in the *muṣḥaf* is bracketed by wholehearted, prayerful requests, first on the part of the wife of ʿImrān, and lastly on the part of the wife of

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[51] For discussions of structure in the Qur'an as a methodology of exegesis, see Daniel A. Madigan, "Reflections on Some Current Directions in Qur'anic Studies," *The Muslim World* 85 (1995): 345–62. For another example of structural analyses, see Mustansir Mir, "The Sūra as a Unity: A Twentieth-Century Development in Qur'an Exegesis," in *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Colin Turner (London: Routledge, 2004), 4:198–209. For observations on structure and coherence of the Qur'an's longest surah, see Raymond Farrin, "Surat al-Baqara: A Structural Analysis," *Muslim World* 100, no. 1 (2010): 17–32.

[52] In alternate verse numberings, the *basmalah* is counted as the first verse of the surahs, making these verses 36–37 of their respective surahs.

Pharaoh. The first *individual* female speech (not including the joint speech of the primordial couple elaborated above) is the verse quoted immediately above, which relates the speech of the wife of ʿImrān, who offers a prayerful dedication of the baby in her womb: "[Remember] when the wife of ʿImrān said, 'My Lord, truly I dedicate to *Thee* what is in my belly, in consecration. So accept it from me. Truly *Thou* art the Hearing, the Knowing.'"[53] This prayerful request is followed by God's affirmation of the child, the *female* child.[54] The last female speech in the *muṣḥaf* is the wife of Pharaoh's prayerful request for "a house near *Thee* in the Garden" and deliverance from her husband and the "wrongdoing people" (*al-qawm al- ẓālimīn*).[55] The verse links the ill treatment of one woman to the corruption of the society more generally. Notably, both the first and the last instance of individual female speech in the *muṣḥaf* address endemic issues related to chauvinism on the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. The first instance of speech asserts the value and worth of the individual girl child, and the last instance of female speech points toward marital abuse and endemic moral corruption.[56] In this context, the first appearance of a female figure in the *muṣḥaf*, namely Adam's spouse in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, directly addresses another rather chauvinistic idea, that women are the genesis of humanity's fall.

God Addresses the Wives of the Prophet Muhammad

[53] Q. 3:35.

[54] See Q. 3:36–37, "And when she [the wife of ʿImrān] bore her [Mary], she said, 'My Lord, I have borne a female,'—and God knows best what she bore—and the male is not like the female, 'and I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in *Thee*, and for her progeny, from Satan the outcast.' / So her Lord accepted her with a beautiful acceptance, and made her to grow in a beautiful way."

[55] Q. 66:11.

[56] Q. 66:11. This verse is the last in the order of the *muṣḥaf*, and this surah is held to be among the last in the revelatory order of the Qur'an. See appendix D for an approximate revelatory ordering of surahs.

In the Qur'an, God's direct speech to the primordial pair has certain topical correspondences with God's direct speech to the Prophet Muhammad and the women of his household. For instance, the only female figures God addresses directly in the Qur'an, beyond the plentiful addressees to females as believing women in general, are the Prophet Muhammad's womenfolk and the spouse of Adam, the female progenitor. As we will see, these individuals occupy lofty stations in Qur'anic sacred history, but at the same time, the Qur'an does depict them in the fullness of their human capacity for making mistakes. At different instances, both Adam's spouse and two of the Prophet's wives must turn to God in repentance for specific actions of disobedience.[57] In their need for repentance, these women are no different than their respective prophetic husbands, who are also corrected explicitly by God at times.[58] The takeaway is perhaps that even exemplary people—whether female or male—sometimes make mistakes.

The only direct Qur'anic speech by an immediate female relation of the Prophet Muhammad appears in this context. One of his wives, who remains unnamed in the Qur'an but who is known in early exegesis as Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar al-Khaṭṭāb, divulges a secret that the Prophet has asked her to guard.[59] God informs the Prophet of her having divulged the secret, the Prophet confronts her about it, and she retorts, "Who informed thee of this?"[60] As the Qur'an highlights, her first impulse was not to apologize or even try to cover over her slip, but rather to find out who had betrayed her confidence. Her speech is concise, direct—just three words in

[57] For Adam and his spouse, and two of the wives being chided, see Q. 7:22 and 66:4 respectively.
[58] The extent to which prophetic figures can err has, of course, been a much-debated question in Islamic intellectual history. Suffice it to note here that the Qur'an does indeed depict prophetic figures making mistakes, however slight.
[59] For a concise account of the backstory and figures involved, see *SQ* 1389n1–4. Many opinions hold that the secret had to do with the Prophet Muhammad's Coptic concubine, Māryah (also vocalized "Māriyyah"); for a detailed source-critical feminist reading, see Aysha A. Hidayatullah, "Māriyya the Copt: Gender, Sex and Heritage in the Legacy of Muhammad's Umm Walad," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 3 (2010), 221–43.
[60] Q. 66:3.

Arabic. The Prophet responds back equally directly with three concise Arabic words that cannot be rendered quite as succinctly in English: "The Knower, the Aware informed me." The Qur'anic conversation between the pair ends there, as the voice of God interjects with emphatic force. The essence of the message to the mischievous wives is clear; do not "aid one another against him" for he is protected by God, Gabriel, the righteous believers, and all of the angels.

In this context, the wives of Noah and Lot are also given as negative examples: "They were under two of *Our* righteous servants; then they betrayed them, and they availed them naught against God . . ."[61] This mention of the wives of Noah and Lot is the only Qur'anic instance of female figures being described as "under" (*taḥt*) male figures. Is this a specific case, we might wonder, are all wives to be thought of as "under" their husbands? In the verse in question, God specifically refers to Noah and Lot as "*Our* righteous servants," therein putting Noah and Lot into a specific category of individuals as "righteous servants" of God, a category to which females and males belong in numerous other instances in the Qur'an. In this reading, the wives are not "under" their husbands by virtue of their status as wives but are "under" their husbands by virtue of having an inferior moral character and disposition decidedly lacking in piety.[62] God's voice declares, "They were under two of *Our* righteous servants"; here, the appellation "*Our* righteous servants" or "*Our* righteous slaves" (*ʿabdayni min ʿibādinā ṣāliḥayn*) emphasizes the utter servitude of Noah and Lot, who are righteous in their humble submission to

[61] Q. 6:10. For other Qur'anic instances of Lot's wife's betrayal, see 7:83, 11:81, 15:60, 27:57, and 29:32. This is the first and only instance in which Noah's wife is condemned.

[62] See, for instance, Q. 49:13 a verse that explicitly establishes reverence as the distinguishing factor in human nobility: "O humankind! Truly *We* created you from a male and a female, and *We* made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most nobel of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware."

God. The wives of Noah and Lot "betrayed" their husbands, who were calling them to the way of God, and hence, rather than being elevated in righteousness, they are debased.

Lest the reader, reciter, or listener take away an erroneous conviction that all wives are "under" husbands, the surah that began with emphatic addresses to the Prophet and two noble but mischievous wives then ends with God "set[ting] forth as an example for those who believe" two righteous women, one without a husband in the Qur'an at all (Mary), and one (the wife of Pharaoh) with a husband who is the epitome of tyrannical rule who is damned by God. In this respect, *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm* begins with a husband needing God's intervention against the plotting of two of his wives, includes two examples of irrevocably corrupt wives of other prophets, and draws to a close with two righteous women, including a wife requesting deliverance against her tyrant of a husband, pleading to God for an escape from his deeds.[63] The surah begins addressing the Prophet Muhammad, and then it ends with praise of Mary, who "was among the devoutly obedient,"[64] that is, devoutly obedient to God.

As we have now seen, God's direct addresses to the Prophet Muhammad's wives appear in two surahs, *al-Aḥzāb* and *al-Taḥrīm* (surah 33 and 66 respectively). In *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, God first addresses the Prophet's wives through the Prophet himself, "O Prophet! Say unto thy wives…"[65] The subsequent verses address the wives themselves directly. The same pattern is then repeated in *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*. We will examine the *content* of the verses quoted at length momentarily, but let us begin by considering how structural aspects reinforce the meaning of the verses. First, note below the parallel structure of the addressee in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* and *Sūrat al-*

[63] Q. 66:11.
[64] Q. 66:12.
[65] Q. 33:28.

Taḥrīm, moving from the Prophet Muhammad himself, to his wives directly, to the believers more generally (as depicted in bold below):

> *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33): **O Prophet! Say unto thy wives** [*azwājika*]*,* "If you desire the life of this world and its ornament, then come! I shall provide for you and release you in a fair manner. / But if you desire God and *His* Messenger and the Abode of the Hereafter, then truly God has prepared a great reward for the virtuous among you." / **O wives of the Prophet!** [*nisāʾ al-nabī*] Whosoever among you commits a flagrant indecency, her punishment will be doubled; and that is easy for God. / And whosoever among you is devoutly obedient to God and *His* Messenger and works righteousness, *We* shall give her reward twice over, and *We* have prepared for her a generous provision. / **O wives of the Prophet!** [*nisāʾ al-nabī*] You are not like other women. If you are reverent, then be not overtly soft in speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease be moved to desire; and speak in an honorable way. / Abide in your homes and flaunt not you charms as they did flaunt them in the prior Age of Ignorance. Perform the prayer, give the alms, and obey God and *His* Messenger. God only desires to remove defilement from you, **O People of the House** [*ahl al-bayt*], and to purify you completely. / And remember that which is recited unto you in your homes and among the signs and Wisdom of God. Truly God is Subtle, Aware. / **For submitting men and submitting women**. . .[66]
>
> *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm* (66)**: O Prophet!** Why dost thou forbid that which God has made lawful unto thee, seeking the good pleasure of thy wives [*azwājika*]? And God is Forgiving, Merciful. / God has already ordained for you the absolution of your oaths. And God is your Master. He is the Knower, the Wise. / When the Prophet confided a certain matter to one of his wives [*azwājihi*], but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said, "Who informed thee of this?" He replied, "The Knower, the Aware informed me." / **If you both repent unto God** . . . For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, *He* is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal. / It may be that if he divorces you, his Lord would give him wives in your stead who are better than you, submitting, believing, devoutly obedient, penitent, worshipping, and given to fasting—previously married, and virgins.[67] / **O you who believe!** Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is *people* and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what *He* commands of them and who do what they are commanded.[68]

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[66] Q. 33:28–34.

[67] The term *sāʾiḥāt* is translated by *The Study Quran* as "given to wayfaring," that is, "given to emigrating for the sake of their religion"; however, the authors also note that the meaning can be "given to fasting," a meaning that better fits the context here, as discussed below. Additionally, *The Study Quran* translates the Arabic word (*thayyibāt*) as "previously married"; another meaning of the word is given by Lane, who writes, "it [the term] is also applied to a woman who has attained the age of puberty, though a virgin." See *AEL* 363. This is the only place in the Qur'an where the word occurs.

[68] Q. 66:1–6. In the commentary tradition, the two wives here are said to be Ḥafṣah and ʿĀʾishah. See *SQ* 1389nn1–4.

Zooming further out, the addresses, "O Prophet!" and "O you who believe!" appear rhythmically in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* in the following alternating pattern:

Verse 1	O Prophet!
Verse 9	O you who believe!
Verse 28	O Prophet!
Verse 40	O you who believe!
Verse 45	O Prophet!
Verse 49	O you who believe!
Verse 50	O Prophet!
Verse 53	O you who believe!
Verse 59	O Prophet!
Verse 69	O you who believe!
Verse 70	O you who believe!

The Qur'an's addresses "O wives of the Prophet!" (*nisāʾ al-nabī*) and "O People of the House" (*ahl al-bayt*), in the verses below fall into the rhythmic structure of the changing addressees. This structure has an implication for the overarching meaning of the surah, an aspect that makes this surah stand out as highly unique. Namely, the addresses to the Prophet and to the believers are regularly interspersed with verses that declare the unique status of the Prophet and/or his wives in relation to the rest of the believers. At least seven verses in this surah confer some kind of exemplary status upon the Prophet and/or his wives.[69] For instance, the Qur'an specifies that the Prophet is set apart from the rest of the believers with respect to marriage; he is not limited in the

[69] See Q. 33:6, 21, 32, 36, 38, 50, and 56.

number of women that it is lawful for him to take as wives,[70] and unlike all other women, his wives cannot have husbands after him.[71]

In verses where God speaks *about* the Prophet's wives, the more general term for spouses, *azwāj*, is used. Later in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, the Qur'an follows this pattern as well when it comes to the matter of women "draw[ing] their cloaks over themselves" to avoid being bothered: "O Prophet! Tell thy wives [*azwājika*] and thy daughters [*banātika*], and the women [*nisāʾ*] of the believers to draw their cloaks over themselves. Thus is it likelier that they will be known and not be disturbed. And God is Forgiving, Merciful."[72] In this verse, the guidance begins with the Prophet Muhammad's wives, then his daughters, then the "women of the believers" more generally. Notably, the Qur'an uses the term "spouses" in "spouses of the prophet" (*azwāj al-nabī*) when dealing directly with marital relations. The more general term, women (*nisāʾ*), as in "women of the prophet" (*nisāʾ al-nabī*) or "women of the believers" (*nisāʾ al-muʾminīn*), is

[70] Q. 33:38, "There is no restriction for the Prophet in what God has ordained for him. [That is] the wont of God with those who passed away before—and God's command is a decree determined." He is, nonetheless, limited to a certain degree with respect to who the women are who are eligible for him to take as spouses, as detailed in Q. 33:50–51: "O Prophet! *We* have made lawful for thee thy wives to whom thou hast given their bridewealth, as well as those whom thy right hand possesses of those whom God has granted thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thy paternal uncles and the daughters of thy paternal aunts, and the daughters of thy maternal uncles and the daughters of thy maternal aunts who emigrated with thee, and any believing woman if she gives herself [in marriage] to the Prophet and if the Prophet desires to marry her—for thee alone, not for [the rest of] the believers. *We* know well what *We* have enjoined upon them with respect to their wives and those whom their right hands possess, that there may be no blame upon thee. And God is Forgiving, Merciful. / Thou mayest put off whomsoever of them thou wilt and receive whomsoever thou wilt. And as for whomsoever thou mightest desire of those whom thou hast set aside, there is no blame upon thee. Thus is it likelier that they will be comforted, that they will not grieve, and that they, all of them, will be content with that which thou hast given them. God knows what is in your hearts. And God is Knowing, Clement."

[71] Q. 33:53, "And you should never affront the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him. Truly that would be an enormity in the sight of God." From a female-centric perspective, one might speculate that such a ruling protects his widows from a barrage of marital proposals. There is another aspect too: after enjoying relations with such a prophet of God, how could an ordinary man compare?

[72] Q. 33:59. On clothing for women, see also 24:31, a verse that is ostensibly addressed to "O you who believe!" in Q. 24:27, which is the preamble to a series of commandments.

employed by the Qur'an when dealing with affairs that do not pertain immediately and specifically to marital relations. *The Study Quran* and multiple other English Qur'an translations render the phrase *azwāj al-nabī* and *nisāʾ al-nabī* both as "wives of the Prophet"; however, the terms are different in the Qur'an itself. What significance does the difference have?

The term *nisāʾ al-nabī* should arguably be seen as including the Prophet's daughters, as the verse immediately following makes reference to God desiring to purify the "people of the house" (*ahl al-bayt*), and the verse later in the same surah explicitly instructs the Prophet to "tell thy wives [*azwājika*] and thy daughters [*banātika*] and the women of the believers [*nisāʾ al-muʾminīn*]," as noted above.[73] The Prophet's daughters would be included in the terms "women of the prophet" and "people of the house," and likewise, the terminology *nisāʾ al-nabī* comes in verses that address general matters of household ethics. The Qur'an uses the term *azwāj al-nabī* in the conversations between God and the Prophet that pertain to his marital relations specifically; "spouses of the Prophet" (*azwāj al-nabī*) has a more narrowly defined meaning than "women of the Prophet" (*nisāʾ al-nabī*), which could be slightly broader and include the other women of his houshold.

I will make one final point about God's definition of feminine excellence as captured both in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* and *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*. In *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*, the mischievous wives of the Prophet are told, "It may be that if he divorces you, his Lord would give him wives in your stead who are better than you, submitting, believing, devoutly obedient, penitent, worshipping, and given to fasting...."[74] This definition of feminine virtue resonates closely with the description

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[73] Q. 33:59.

[74] Q. 66:5. As mentioned above, the term *sāʾiḥāt* is translated by *The Study Quran* as "given to wayfaring," that is, "given to emigrating for the sake of their religion"; however, the word can also mean be "given to fasting," which I argue is a more appropriate meaning since it coheres with the parallel listing in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb.* The term *sāʾiḥāt*, with its two long vowels, fits the prosody of the verse better than the more conventional term for fasting (*ṣāʾimāt*)

found in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, a description that follows a series of verses addressed to the Prophet's household. In *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* the desirable virtues listed are submitting, believing, devout, truthful, patient, humble, charitable, fasting, guarding their private parts, and remembering God often in an axiomatic verse of the Qur'an that includes identical virtues for males and females.[75] The list in *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm* appears in the context of God describing an ideal wife of the Prophet; however, the traits described directly parallel those enumerated in the listing in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* and therefore desirable *human* virtues, not exclusively female ones. Hence, an ideal spouse—female or male—should have these virtues and characteristics to allow for a fruitful marriage, and notably, the traits that enable marital prosperity are also those that ensure otherworldly success. Notably too, verse 66:5 ends with affirming wives who are "previously married or virgins," a clear indication that the status of virginity does not have a superior station to a woman being previously married, even if cultural values often place an emphasis on female virginity as desirable for marriage. The verse is also, in this respect, an affirmation of widows or divorcees, who might otherwise face misplaced social stigma.

We will return to these verses in the subsequent chapter from other angle; however, keeping the focus on female addressees and female speech, we now turn to angelic-female communications.

"Do you marvel at the Command of God?"

[but "*ṣāʾimāt*" has two long vowels as well!], which is the word appearing in the enumeration of virtues in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*.

[75] Q. 33:35, "For submitting men and submitting women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, men who fast and women who fast, men who guard their private parts and women who guard [their private parts], men who remember God often and women who remember [God often], God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."

The women of the Prophet Muhammad's family and the spouse of Adam are the only female figures to receive direct divine messages in the Qur'an, but several other female figures receive God's messages through the speech of angelic intermediaries. The wife of Abraham receives divine blessings, "glad tidings" of not just a son, but also a grandson: "Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob."[76] The divine blessings come directly from God: "*We* gave her. . . "; the pronoun "*We*" stresses the intimacy of the conferral. The blessing is then followed by angelic speech reassuring her that she will indeed bear a child, and speech that further blesses and elevates the "people of the house" (*ahl al-bayt*): "They [angelic messengers] said, 'Do you marvel at the Command of God? The Mercy of God and *His* Blessings be upon you, O People of the House! Truly *He* is praised, Glorious.'"[77] Here, the address "*ahl al-bayt*" could mean either Abraham's wife specifically, as *ahl* can mean wife, or it could be a general address to all of those under Abraham's household and patriarchal care.

Like Abraham's wife, Mary also has conversations about pregnancy with angels. In fact, overall, Mary is the figure in the Qur'an—whether female or male—who has the most extensive conversations with angelic figures.[78] Both in her miraculous pregnancy and in her delivery, she is in communication with angelic messengers, who share news of her lofty status, commands to piety,[79] news of her miraculous pregnancy and prophetic child,[80] and even offer postpartum

[76] Q. 11:71.
[77] Q. 11:73. For other depictions of the scene but with a focus on the angelic messages to Abraham, see 51:28–30, "Then he conceived a fear of them. They said, 'Fear not!' and gave him glad tidings of a knowing son. . . . They said, 'Thus has thy Lord decreed. Truly *He* is the Wise, the Knowing.'"
[78] For additional analysis, see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 555–62.
[79] Q. 3:42–43, "And [remember] when the angels said, 'O Mary, truly God has chosen thee and purified thee, and has chosen thee above the women of the worlds. / O Mary! Be devoutly obedient to thy Lord, prostrate, and bow with those who bow.'"
[80] Q. 19:21.

coaching and comforting,[81] support that is akin to that provided by doulas. She receives these messages and direction from angels, and yet she addresses her questions not to the angels but to God directly, whereupon a single angel responds as in the instance described here:

> When the angels said, "O Mary, truly God gives thee glad tidings of a Word from *Him*, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, high honored in this world and the Hereafter, one of those brought nigh. / He will speak to people in the cradle and in maturity, and will be among the righteous." / She said, "My Lord, how shall I have a child while no human being has touched me?" *He* said, "Thus does God create whatsoever *He* will." When *He* decrees a thing, *He* only says to it, "Be!" and it is.[82]

From an intra-textual reading, it would seem that she first hears the voices of angels, but then, when she cries out to her Lord, she actually sees a single angel in human form: "Then *We* sent unto her *Our* Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man."[83] This angel then says, "I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow unto thee a pure boy."[84] In response to her justifiably confused state, which parallels what we have seen above in the example of Abraham's wife, the angel then responds with a message from God, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for *Me*, and [it is thus] that *We* might make him a sign unto humankind, and a mercy from *Us*, and it is a matter decreed.'"[85] The emphatic nature of the language, "thus shall it be," and "it is a matter decreed,"[86] echoes the angelic message to the wife of Abraham, "Thus has thy Lord

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[81] Q. 19:24–26. The "he" in this verse who speaks to Mary could be the angel or the baby Jesus himself miraculously talking, as he is depicted as doing later in the surah. Or, it could be the angel calling out from the bottom of a hillock, as Mary has given birth in a "refuge in a high place [*rabwah*] of stillness and a flowing spring," Q. 23:50. See *SQ* 770n24. See also discussions in Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 549. For a discussion of pre-Islamic and Hellenistic birth motifs and a comparison to Hagar being given provisions for her son in the desert, see Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an," 539.

[82] Q. 3:45–47.

[83] Q. 19:17.

[84] Q. 19:19.

[85] Q. 19:21. Rather than being part of the angel's speech to Mary, *The Study Quran* interprets the phrases, "And [it is thus] that *We* might make him a sign unto humankind, and a mercy from *Us*. And it is a matter decreed," as God's general speech in the voice of Qur'anic narrator. Both interpretations are plausible.

[86] Q. 19:21.

decreed."[87] It is also an echo of the message for Zachariah, who, like Mary, also beseeches and questions God directly.[88] The divine blessings that surround Mary from the time of her girlhood are such that her prophetic caretaker is even astounded: "Whenever Zachariah entered upon her in the sanctuary he found provision with her. He said, 'Mary, whence comes this unto thee?' She said, 'It is from God. Truly God provides for whomsoever *He* will without reckoning.'"[89] The Qur'an is not specific about who, precisely, is delivering these provisions to Mary without her caretaker's full knowledge, but given the context, it is possible to intuit that the Godly provisions are supplied by angels.[90]

"And It Was Said unto Both"

The wives of Noah and Lot also receive a divine decree in the Qur'an, but in direct contrast to the female figures who are either addressed by God directly or who commune with angles, the decree addressed to the wives of Noah and Lot is phrased in the passive voice, without a known speaker. The wives are readily discarded by the Qur'anic narrator, not even worthy of being addressed with an active verb: "And *it was said* unto both, 'Enter the Fire with those who enter.'"[91] The passive dismissal of these two females underscores their detestable nature for having "betrayed" God's "righteous servants." As described above, the Qur'an emphasizes the stature of the two prophets as "slaves/servants of God," and then describes the ultimate futility of opposing God, even with the benefit of a prophetic intercessor: "They [Noah and Lot] availed

[87] Q. 51:30.
[88] Q. 19:6. See discussions of God's statement "Be!" in Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 561.
[89] Q. 3:37.
[90] Somewhat akin to Mary and the wife of Abraham, the Prophet Muhammad's first wife, Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, also receives communication from God through an angelic medium in a story narrated in early bibliographic literature and hadith collections. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, n3820, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, n2432.
[91] Q. 66:10. Emphasis added.

them [their wives] naught against God." The otherworldly speech directed toward these two women, essentially the Qur'anic equivalent of "Go to Hell!" is directly contrasted to the ethereal beings who enter paradise and utter within it naught but "Peace! Peace!"[92] In considering the speech of all the Qur'anic female figures taken together, significantly, not a single one of the three who are irrevocably damned utter any words.

Female Speech Compared to Prophetic Male Speech

Several female figures articulate clearly and effectively under pressure. For instance, Moses's sister, Moses's foster mother, and the Queen of Sheba are all examples of effective speech under trying circumstances. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the viceroy's wife's speech is also clever and witty, but to disreputable ends. On occasion, female figures also fumble for words when they are caught off their guard. For instance, the wife of Abraham rather comically expresses her astonishment at the prospect of bearing a child in her old age with the dramatic expression, "Woe unto me!" (*yā waylatā*).[93] The wife of Abraham does not just speak expressively, but she also is reported as laughing,[94] giving a loud cry,[95] and making a dramatic gesture to complement the speech: "she struck her face."[96] Other females are also expressive in moments and contemplative in others; Mary, who is otherwise depicted as conversing with angels and crying out with birth pangs, is intentionally silent when it comes to defending her

[92] Q. 56:26.
[93] See Q. 11:72: "She said, 'Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing.'" See also 51:29: "Then his wife came forward with a loud cry; she struck her face and said, 'A barren old woman!'"
[94] Q. 11:71. It is possible that the Qur'an may be playing on a derivative sense of the word *ḍaḥikat*, as the word can also be used according to some linguists as a euphemism for female menstruation. In this case, the menstruation would be a sign of her fertility. See *AEL* 1823.
[95] Q. 51:29.
[96] Ibid.

honor in front of those who accuse her of being licentious.[97] When confronted by the Prophet Muhammad for divulging a secret he had asked her to keep, one of his wives responds not with remorse but with the rejoinder: "Who informed thee of this?"[98] Just as females can be eloquent or ineloquent when caught off guard, or even silent, so too do male figures have a range of eloquent and ineloquent moments. For instance, Solomon prays to God with utmost eloquence, but when Moses encounters transcendental speech directed at him from out of a desert shrub, he rather ineloquently—almost comically—fumbles for words as he ruminates on the various practical uses of his staff, including for leaning upon, for beating down leaves for sheep, and for "other uses."[99]

In several instances, the speech of females closely parallels that of males. After speaking multiple times to people in her court and in the court of Solomon, the Queen of Sheba ends her speech by addressing God and articulating her religious conversion: "I submit with Solomon to the Lord of the Worlds."[100] Her declaration of conversion to the religion of Islam is preceded by the line: "Surely I have wronged myself."[101] This line is echoed by Moses's speech in the very next surah, *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*; after he accidentally kills a man, he exclaims, "My Lord! Truly I have wronged myself. Forgive me."[102]

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[97] Mary's vow of silence is a thematic echo, but also a juxtaposition, of her caretaker Zachariah's inability to speak after asking God for a sign that his prayer for an heir had been answered, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

[98] See Q. 66:3; "When the Prophet confided a certain matter to one of his wives, but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said, 'Who informed thee of this?' He replied, 'The Knower, the Aware informed me.'"

[99] Q. 20:17–18, God says: "And what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?" and Moses replies, "It is my staff. I lean upon it and beat down leaves for my sheep. And I have other uses for it."

[100] Q. 27:44.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Q. 28:16. From the perspective of sacred history, the Queen is in a later epoch, so her speech can also be described as echoing that of Moses. For other thematic similarities between *Sūrat al-Naml* and *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (surahs 27 and 28), see Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 103. See also 21:87 for a similar prayer of

The Queen of Sheba is not the only female figure in the Qur'an to speak using rhetoric that mirrors that of a named prophet. Mary has speech that echoes speech of the prophet Joseph. When Mary is confronted by a "well-proportioned" man in her private chamber,[103] she immediately seeks refuge in God, exclaiming, "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if thou art reverent!"[104] Similarly, when Joseph is hemmed in by the wife of the viceroy he immediately says: "God be my refuge! Truly *He* is my Lord, and has made beautiful my accommodation. Verily the wrongdoers will not prosper!"[105] Similarly, the Qur'an calls Mary "a woman of truth" and Joseph a "man of truth."[106]

In another place in the Qur'an, Mary's speech is also comparable to that of a prophetic figure, Zachariah. Namely, *Sūrat Maryam* begins with "a reminder of the Mercy of thy Lord unto *His* servant, Zachariah, / when he cried out to his Lord with a secret cry."[107] Here, the idea of a secret cry has a parallel later in the surah when Mary, having conceived and withdrawn "to a far-off place," also makes a cry, a cry that like of Zachariah's that is immediately answered.[108] Zachariah cries with the agony of not having a child, and Mary cries with the agony of delivering a child. In her cry, the young Mary is asking for death and to be utterly forgotten, and in his cry, the aged Zachariah is asking for an heir to carry the legacy of prophecy to survive him after his death. Both end up becoming the parent of a prophet as a result of their secret cries, whether

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forgiveness on the part of the prophet Jonah, who cries out: "There is no god but *Thou*! Glory be to *Thee*! Truly I have been among the wrongdoers."

[103] For analysis of the prayer niche, *miḥrāb*, of Mary, see Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an," 542.

[104] Q. 19:18.

[105] Q. 12:23.

[106] See 5:75 and 12:46 respectively. For discussion, see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 574–75.

[107] Q. 19:2–3.

[108] Readers will note that Zachariah's secret cry is located in Q. 19:2–3, and Mary's in Q.19:23. Not only do these two cries have conceptual complementarity, these verses form the outer edges of an intricate ring structure that is layered on top of a parallel structure. See Geissinger, "Mary in the Qur'an," 384–85. *Sūrat Maryam* also has structural connections with the preceding surah, as outlined in Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 102.

direct in the case of Mary or indirect in the case of Zachariah. Both Mary and Zachariah are in private prayer when the respective angels appear to them, and moreover, it is Mary's own prayerful and miraculous intimacy with the divine in her sanctuary (*miḥrāb*) that "then and there" inspires Zachariah to "call upon his Lord" for "a good progeny."[109] While complementary in many respects, the experiences of Mary and Zachariah are also differentiated in other aspects. Namely, Zachariah is rendered unable to speak by God for a period of three nights after receiving news of the conception; Mary's vow of silence is undertaken out of voluntary obedience to God following her birthing of Jesus.[110] Both of their periods of silence are stark contrasts to God's generative speech, the single-word, single-syllable command that sets all of creation in motion: "Be!"[111] As a juxtaposition to the struggles Zachariah and Mary experience, God describes this creative speech to Zachariah, and also to Mary, as "easy for *Me*."[112]

Mary and the Queen of Sheba, the two most loquacious females in the Qur'an, both have speech that mirrors the speech of prophets. Both women pray to God and speak wise words to their interlocutors; Mary converses with at least one angel, but neither female preaches, for instance, to gatherings of people. They teach by example, but they are never depicted chiding wayward peoples or publicly commanding to the worship of God. This seems to be the crucial

[109] See Q. 3:37–9. For a comparative analysis of Mary in the Gospel traditions and extra-biblical literature, including reflection on Mary's speech, figures around Mary, and debates around females as prophets, see Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 457–593, especially 468.
[110] See Q. 19:26 and 19:10 respectively.
[111] See, for instance, Q. 3:47 and 19:35 for examples of God's speech, "Be!" (*kun*). See also Q. 3:59, "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."
[112] See Q. 19:9 and 19:21 for references in this context to the ease with which God's decree brings something to fruition. See also 30:27 for mention of the ease by which God creates. Other words derived from this root (*h-w-n*) are humility as a virtue, used once in 25:63, as well as in the sense of something that people deem insignificant, used once 24:15 in the context of thinking the slander of chaste women a small thing while in the eyes of God it is a major sin, and finally as used in 16:59 in a condemnation of the social humiliation experienced by the person who bears a girl child. All seventeen other Qur'anic uses are in the sense of God's "humiliating" punishment.

difference between the exemplary female figures in the Qur'an and the male figures who are specifically bestowed with the title of "prophet" (*nabī*). The difference is in the specific tasks that God charges them with carrying out, not in the sincerity of their worship, their capacity for conviction, or the degree of their closeness to God.

Affective Dimensions of Feminine Voices

From Qur'anic discussions of practical, mundane affairs to its cosmic assertions, the Qur'an describes itself as a book (*kitāb*) containing a "clarification of all things, and as a guidance and a mercy and glad tidings for those who submit."[113] For those listening to, reciting, or reading the Qur'an as an act of devotion, the aim of the listening, reciting, or reading may be to get clarification, guidance, mercy, good news, or some other benefit or desired effect, including somatic and emotional affects.[114] Self-proclaimed as an Arabic Qur'an,[115] the Qur'an as speech has an aural dimension that is crucial to the Qur'an's character. Thus, the listening, reciting, or reading is—for one so disposed—pregnant with sacred possibility. Given all of these facets, the Qur'an's discourse and rhetoric, specifically here on issues related to gender broadly and female

[113] Q. 16:89.

[114] The Qur'an describes its potential to arouse somatic affects through "most beautiful discourse" (*aḥsan al-ḥadīth*): "God has sent down the most beautiful discourse, a Book consimilar, paired, whereat quivers the skin of those who fear their Lord. Then their skin and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God. That is God's Guidance, wherewith *He* guides whomsoever *He* will; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has *he*." See Q. 39:23; for a range of interpretations of this verse, see *SQ* 1124n23. For a comparative consideration of the interplay between written and oral dimensions of scripture, see William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[115] See, for example, Q. 12:2, 13:37, 16:103, 20:113, 26:195, 39:28, 41:3, 42,7, 43:3, and 46:12. For a theoretical discussion of the Qur'an as God's speech and the implications for historical and literary studies of the Qur'an, see Neuwirth, "Two Faces of the Qur'an."

speech specifically, can generate particular affects for readers, reciters, and listeners, particularly those who regard it as a "Book in which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the worlds."[116]

As Jane McAuliffe points out, Qur'anic literary studies is beginning to appreciate "the temporal linearity of the reading/listening event" and "the transformative quality of that experience [in which] the reader/hearer is changed through the event and brings that transformed consciousness back to the text in an ever-adjusting series of reciprocally transformative exchanges."[117] McAuliffe goes on to suggest that attention to the active participation of the reader/hearer potentially "recasts the foundational semantic equation" by bringing attention to how meaning is augmented by experience. Here, summarizes McAuliffe, "a perception of meaning as stable and determinate is replaced with an awareness of meaning as something created in the activity of reception, in the interplay of text and recipient."[118] This method recognizes the operative quality of language "as rhetoric that achieves its effect through the experience-in-time of hearing/reading," a methodology that "supersedes more static conceptions."[119] McAuliffe refers to this dynamic as "the morphogenesis of meaning," where "textual comprehension" is "created and recreated in the interactive encounter of hearer/reader and text."[120] This more experiential, dynamic, and fluid hermeneutic inquiry does not stand in opposition to, or function independently of, philological or historically grounded hermeneutics; it simply adds another layer of potential meaning.

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[116] Q. 10:47.
[117] See McAuliffe, "Text and Textuality," 68.
[118] Ibid., 69.
[119] Ibid. For an analysis of the ways in which meaning is performed by a contemporary, well-known Qur'an reciter, see Lauren E. Osborne, "Textual and Paratextual Meaning in the Recited Qur'an: Analysis of a Performance of Surat al-Furqan by Sheikh Mishary bin Rashid al-Afasy," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (New York: Routledge, 2016), 228–46.
[120] McAuliffe, "Text and Textuality," 70.

Considering momentarily the Qur'an as a recitation, one that is often performed as part of ritual devotion and pious practice, the *performance* of gender, through the reenactment of Qur'anic speech, adds another interpretive layer to the ways in which gender is inscribed. Consider, for instance, the verses in which Mary complains of the pains of labor: "Would that I had died before this and were a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!"[121] Her utterance gives expression to the discomfort and pain many embodied women experience during labor.[122] When these verses are performed, as they often are, by male Qur'anic reciters, the reenactment of the Qur'anic speech has a "queering" effect; distinctively female speech, here the distressed cries of labor, is articulated by male reciters who would not ordinarily have occasion to articulate labor pangs. Ultimately, the act of revisiting such speech with regularity in the context of a devotional, ritual practice could, perchance, work on the consciousness of a conscientiously disposed individual to increase empathy regarding this exceptionally wondrous, but also physically and emotionally demanding, moment, one that is necessarily and uniquely in the domain of female experience.

The last verse of the *muṣḥaf* containing female speech is another occasion wherein a female figure experiencing a trial cries out to God for solace. As we have seen above, the wife of Pharaoh, Āsiyah, exclaims, "My Lord, build for me a house near *Thee* in the Garden, deliver me

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[121] Q. 19:23. For discussions of Mary's birthing of Jesus and its parallels in early Christian texts, see Mustafa Aykol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017), 104–32.

[122] As Robert Gregg observes, "she has the response of a fully human woman," *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 549. In an essay that argues for valuing motherhood as a distinct category of experience needing more scholarly attention, Irene Oh observes that "available information about mothers is often secondary, told through the voices of male observers, redactors, or authors, not through the voices of the mothers themselves." See Irene Oh, "Motherhood in Christianity and Islam: Critiques, Realities, and Possibilities," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38, no. 4 (2010): 646–47. Despite exploring depictions of Mary in the Islamic tradition to some extent, Oh does not observe that the Qur'an actually does posit Mary speaking on the agony of labor pangs, a notable dimension of the experience of pregnancy and motherhood.

from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people."[123] As exegetes describe, this speech occurs in the moment before Āsiyah passes away from the torture inflicted upon her by Pharaoh for her belief in the prophetic message and leadership of her foster son Moses.[124] The Qur'an contains little by way of specific information on the circumstances of Āsiyah, other than general descriptions of the excessive wrongdoing and tyrannical nature of her husband, Pharaoh, and no Qur'anic verse depicts a female figure suffering from physical pain, with the notable exception of Mary's labor pains. However, given the likely context of Āsiyah's speech as that of a female in extreme distress, the verse expresses the lived—and tragically common—domestic reality of spousal abuse.

Speaking [of] Females

The Qur'an gives speech to female figures who are young and old, oppressed and empowered, pious and nefarious, and shades in between. In attempting to hone in on the artistry and potential affective dimensions of Qur'anic prose, as reading and as recitation, I have asked here: With whom do females speak? How do they speak? How does the Qur'an depict feminine voices? Qur'anic females on occasion speak in the same idioms as do prophets when addressing God, as in the cases of the Queen of Sheba and Mary, the mother of Jesus. When it comes to Adam and his spouse (Eve), the pair only speak in unison. No small portion of female speech—seven verses to be exact—consists of supplications to God. In fact, moving chronologically through the *muṣḥaf*, until the wife of the viceroy enters the picture more than a quarter of the way through the *muṣḥaf*, every instance of female speech is either directed to God or pertains in some way to

[123] Q. 66:11.
[124] See *SQ* 1392n11 for commentary.

God's blessings or benevolence. Although the viceroy's wife herself never mentions God, even her consorts from among the townswomen speak in a theological idiom upon encountering Joseph: "God be praised!"[125] The Queen of Sheba and the wife of the viceroy, both aristocratic women who are depicted in their respective journeys away from falsehood and toward truth, are the two most loquacious female figures; their speech becomes a vehicle to convey their eventual, respective transformations of outlook and character.

In addition to highlighting patterns of female speech across the *muṣḥaf*, this chapter has explored how the affective dimensions of female speech can illuminate the Qur'an's rhetorical influence for those readers, reciters, and listeners who interact with its words. In particular, I have suggested some of the moments of powerful potential affect for those who regard the Qur'an to be, as it self-proclaims, a tool for moral self-development, a "reminder for all the worlds."[126] More remains to be explored regarding the affective dimensions of the Qur'an, but now we will turn to another aspect of the Qur'an's didactic undertones.

[125] See Q. 12:31 and 12:51 as they express, on the first occasion, their astonishment at the beauty of Joseph and, on the second occasion, their affirmation of his innocence in the affair involving the viceroy's wife.
[126] Q. 81:19.

Chapter 4

Qur'anic Narratives in the Emerging Muslim Milieu:

"As for Those Who Accuse Chaste Women . . ." (Q. 24:4)

When Ḥamnah bint Jaḥsh places family bonds over justice, the Qur'an issues words of emphatic condemnation: "Truly those who brought forth the lie were a group among you."[1] The affair begins, as it is remembered, when one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, ʿĀʾishah, was accidentally left behind in the desert, and, as commentary traditions report, her absence having gone unnoticed, the caravan moved on with its journey. ʿĀʾishah was later stumbled upon and rescued by a scout from among the Muslims, Ṣafwān ibn Muʿaṭṭal, who happened to be a handsome youth of similar age. Upon the return of the pair together to the caravan, gossip about the character of ʿĀʾishah, the wife of the Prophet, began to spread through the promptings of several people from within the wider Medinan community, each having personal motivations for the slander.[2] The Qur'an eventually rebukes ʿĀʾishah's defamers, and among them, Ḥamnah too faces the Qur'an's corporal penalty for the unsubstantiated defamation of chaste women, or slander (*qadhf*).[3]

Like this episode involving ʿĀʾishah and Ḥamnah, the affairs of several women within the milieu of the Prophet Muhammad serve as the backstories of Qur'anic verses, and these women's stories become important for establishing normative practice and communal standards

[1] For a discussion of this episode, see *SQ* 870–71nn10–22.
[2] Some speculated that Ḥamnah spread the gossip in the hopes that her cousin, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, another wife of the Prophet and an aristocratic woman from among the Prophet's clan, the Banū Hāshim, would then win favor over ʿĀʾishah in the Prophet's household.
[3] See Q. 24:4 and 24:11–26.

of justice.[4] In chapter 1, we took up questions of sex and sexual difference in narratives involving female figures; in chapter 2, we looked at female figures in the context of familial relations; and in chapter 3, we considered female voices and revelatory messages to females. I now speculate, with close attention to Qur'anic structure and style, how different moral lessons involving the female figures may have been especially pertinent to the nascent Muslim community's self-definition at the time in which the Qur'an was first promulgated. Specifically, I highlight how episodes involving female figures not only serve to inculcate piety and virtues, as we saw in previous chapters, but that these instances serve as the equivalent of Qur'anic "case studies" explicating new legal standards, as a teaching paradigm for the developing Muslim polity.[5]

In its organization, this chapter is inspired by another technique within Qur'anic scholarship, namely, pairing verses of the Qur'an with their related events in the life of the Prophet Muhammad in a revelatory progression from early Meccan verses through to late Medinan verses. This heuristic enables further consideration of the contexts in which the verses were taught or retaught by the Prophet Muhammad himself in order to enrich interpretive possibilities. What significances could Qur'anic narratives involving female figures have had on

[4] For insights on how this history has been shaped in periods past and present, see Denise E. Spellberg, "History Then, History Now: The Role of Medieval Islamic Religio-Political Sources in Shaping the Modern Debate on Gender," in *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 7–14.

[5] In her reappraisal of hadith, Nimat Barazangi argues that "Qur'anic authority is primarily a moral guide, neither legal as understood in the Western concept of law, nor dogmatic as understood in the general meaning of religion," 7. While I agree that the Qur'an does blend discussions of morality into discussions of law, a notion of rule of law is found in the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad did initiate a legal system and adjudicated affairs himself with deference to Qur'anic prescriptions. For an overview of the role of Qur'anic verses in legal theory, see Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib, "The Quran as Source of Islamic Law," trans. Maryam Ishaq al-Khalifa Sharief, in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 1695–718.

the immediate social and political milieu? What might be gained from such a heuristic if the aim is not a veritable account of history? Extra-Qur'anic sources, whose authenticity can be fiercely contested, are nonetheless useful for situating the function and import that stories involving Qur'anic female figures had in their initial context, as best as it can be discerned.[6] Much prior scholarship has been devoted to reconstructing likely surah progressions, including works by Muslim exegetes as well as Western academic authors who have attempted to track a development in Qur'anic themes and lexical styles and who have matched Qur'anic allusions with the concurrent events in the Prophet Muhammad's biography (*sīrah*), as passed down through oral teachings and written works of exegesis.[7] To my knowledge, no previous author has systematically explored this material with the explicit task of tracking themes related to Qur'anic female figures. Hence, as a preliminary attempt to fill this gap, I survey here the revelatory progression of verses involving female figures in Qur'anic sacred history through to those Qur'anic females from the nascent Muslim polity in Arabia.

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[6] As Travis Zadeh summarizes, "while the hadith corpus in its earliest protean, divergent, and heterogeneous forms undoubtedly postdated the Quran, the historical gulf separating the two is perhaps not so vast as to warrant the complete disavowal of one for the other, not at least without an internally consistent methodological reason for doing so. This is not to argue that the Quran must be read solely through its later interpreters, subject entirely to the epic history of the *sīrah* and *maghāzī* literature on the life of Muḥammad and the early community. Yes, the formative exegetical tradition of the second/eighth century is deeply connected to early hadith material associated with the history of the Prophet and the early community of believers. But it is also profoundly invested in the recuperation of meaning at the basic level of the grammatical and lexicographical significance of the Quran." See "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 339.

[7] For a concise summary of this prior scholarship as well as discussion of the specific sources and methods for hypothesizing about the revelatory order of surahs and individual verses, see Gerhard Bowering, "Chronology and the Qur'ān," *EQ* 1:316–35. See also Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), chapters 4–5. In my research for this chapter, I have relied on a prevalent schema for ordering surahs, that of Theodore Nöldeke (in *Geschichte des Qorāns*, originally published in 1860). I supplemented this schema with analysis found in the surah introductions throughout *The Study Quran*.

The metaphorical waters of communal memory are perpetually turbulent and contested; I intentionally dive just deep enough into this repository to recover the relics of memory that prove the most illuminating in reconstructing a *possible* rendition of Qur'anic backstories, for literary—not historical—analysis.[8] This undertaking requires substantial recourse to the extra-Qur'anic sources that relate information about the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his milieu, sources that have historically been regarded with varying degrees of reliability for Muslim scholars and have had controversial receptions in the Euro-American academy. I confine myself here to dealing with only the most widely accepted of such reports so as to avoid wandering off my main course pursuing speculative details. When I make recourse to this formative literature, I am ultimately concerned with the pedagogic functions of female figures and their stories in the inculcation of morality and in the potential affective dimensions of verses.

Like the preceding chapters and the project as a whole, my aim is not to establish the veracity of any particular account, but rather to discern the driving theological and ethical lessons. The task is eased in that the Qur'anic Narrator does not just relate stories but is situated as an omniscient Seer who regularly intervenes in narratives to provide theological and ethical perspectives. Hence, in my engagement with the Qur'anic vignettes that are highlighted in this chapter, I foreground the particulars that this omniscient Narrator provides as pedagogic takeaways of a given narrative, paying particular attention to the ways in which narratives build upon one another, structurally and stylistically, to inculcate a Qur'anic worldview of sacred history and the spiritual station of individuals therein.

[8] For an early academic reflection on studying the Qur'an through literary approaches, see Andrew Rippin, "The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects," *British Society of Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (1983): 38–47.

Beginning with Meccan Surahs and moving to Medinan surahs, thereby following the development of Qur'anic discourse, we now turn to additional stories involving female personalities and to the specific lessons that they impart—whether in their sagely qualities or in their heedlessness. I also reappraise stories mentioned in previous chapters, here with an eye for how these narratives fit within the arc of Qur'anic sacred history and within the development of the Qur'an in the immediate milieu of the Prophet Muhammad.

"And His Wife, Carrier of Firewood"

In the revelatory order of the Qur'an, the wife of Abū Lahab, an aristocratic woman ironically dubbed the "firewood carrier" (*ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab*), stands out as the first specific female figure to be mentioned in the Qur'an's revelatory order. This is, of course, despite her mention being ultimately located near the very end of the *muṣḥaf*, like many other early revelations.[9] In this sense, her negative example (alongside the negative example of her husband) receives special emphasis: it was the first to be given to the earliest Muslims and the last to be given to the reader or reciter of the *muṣḥaf*. On account of the fact that it is a short surah with lyrical qualities, including rhyming prose, it is in practice often among the first taught to those learning recitation of the Qur'an, therein reinforcing its affective potency as a cautionary tale: "May the hand of Abū Lahab perish, and may he perish! / His wealth avails him not, nor what he has earned. / He shall enter a blazing Fire. / And his wife, carrier of firewood, / upon her neck is a rope of palm fiber."[10] The lessons in *Sūrat al-Masad*, alternately referred to as *Sūrat al-Lahab*, are as glaring as the flames described in its imagery: wealth and social prestige avail not; bad company

[9] For detailed analysis of this collection of surahs in their form, content, and aural dimensions, see Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999).
[10] Q. 111:1–5.

corrupts bad character even more; and the enemies of God do not stand a chance of victory in the long run—their status in the afterlife will be a direct manifestation of their actions and dispositions in the world. In commentary literatures, the rope of palm fiber is said to correspond to a valuable *necklace* that the wife of Abū Lahab used to flaunt, even being so bold on one occasion as to swear upon it against the Prophet Muhammad and his message.[11] The task of "firewood carrier" is not only a lowly domestic charge for an aristocratic woman, but the notion of a "firewood carrier" could also be someone who stirs up the flames of dissent or gossip thereby seeking to spread animosity. Some reconstructive schemas of the revelatory order of the Qur'an place this surah immediately after *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, the opening surah of the Qur'an and the most liturgically significant Qur'anic surah in its status as a mandatory component of every unit of ritual prayer (*rakʿah,* pl. *rakaʿāt*). Especially as set against the *Fātiḥah*, the negative examples of the wife of Abū Lahab and her husband stand as clear warnings of the ultimate potential corruptibility of the human being.

As direct kin of the Prophet Muhammad, the couple are also implicated in another set of reportedly Meccan verses located in the closing passages of *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, verses that command the Prophet Muhammad to "warn thy nearest kin [*ʿashīratika al-aqrabīn*] / and lower thy wing to the believers who follow thee. / And should they disobey thee, say, 'Truly I am quit of that which you do.'"[12] That the couple in question, close kin of the Prophet Muhammad, should defy and mock a prophet sent by God to provide means of liberation from an eternal fire

[11] See *SQ* 1575–76 for a discussion of the context of this surah and the personalities involved, as preserved in early biographical sources and exegetical works. As the literary qualities and symbolism of the verse is well covered in *The Study Quran*, I will not duplicate it here.

[12] Q. 26:214–16. For discussion of the context and personalities involved, see *SQ* 924n214.

is akin to other disbelieving peoples who mock and even attempt to assassinate their prophets and messengers, as detailed throughout *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* in particular.

Other than the wife of Abū Lahab, the earliest Meccan revelations do not contain specific female personalities.[13] *Sūrat al-Falaq* (Q. 113) mentions female sorceresses, literally the blowers (f. pl.) on knots, *al-naffāthāti fī al-ʿuqad*, but there is a dispute as to when this particular surah was first revealed and if it pertains to specific female figures or merely to sorceresses generally.[14] Middle to late Meccan revelations introduce female figures who are shared with the biblical tradition, but not until after the immigration to Medina (in 622 CE) do further female figures from the Arabian context of the Prophet Muhammad feature in Qur'an narratives again, as discussed below.

"We Shall Attack Him and His Family"

A brief mention of the family (*ahl*) of the Arabian prophet Ṣāliḥ[15] is, to the best of my discernment, the one example of a non-biblical family depicted in the Qur'an, aside from female contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad. The reference to the family of Ṣāliḥ, a prophet sent to the people of Thamūd, has significant parallels to the circumstances of the family of the Prophet Muhammad in the Meccan period. The brief Qur'anic reference describes the plotting of

[13] See appendix D for a listing of families and individual female figures from the earliest revelations to the later revelations.

[14] See Q. 113:4. For discussion of these verses and the episodes in the life of the Prophet Muhammad to which they may correspond, see David Cook, "The Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī and the Commentaries to Sūra 113," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2000): 323–345. For a perspective on sorcery in the ancient Near East, including blowing on knots, see Adam Collins Bursi, "Holy Spit and Magic Spells: Religion, Magic and the Body in Late Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," (PhD Diss., Cornell University, 2015). For contemporary perspectives and debates, see Arnold Yasin Mol, "The Denial of Supernatural Sorcery in Classical and Modern Sunnī Tafsīr of Sūrah al-Falaq (113:4): A Reflection of Underlying Construction," *Al-Bayān* 11 no. 1 (2013): 1–18.

[15] Q. 27:49. For a comparative perspective on Arab prophets, see Brannon M. Wheeler, "Arab Prophets of the Qur'an and Bible," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006): 24–57.

disbelievers against Ṣāliḥ's family, a plot which mirrors trials faced by the Prophet Muhammad's own family, who were also fiercely persecuted by their own kin. The mention of the attempted assassination of Ṣāliḥ also foreshadows an attempt on the Prophet's own life, as recorded in biographical traditions and as coordinated by power-brokers from among the Prophet's own tribe, the Quraysh. In this context, the Qur'an stresses that the plotting of the corrupted people of Thamūd against the family of Ṣāliḥ will not ultimately succeed in harming their prophet because of the protection God has bestowed; instead, they themselves are the ones harmed—destroyed even—by their plotting:

> They [the corrupted people of Thamūd] said, "Swear by God to each other that we shall attack him and his family [*ahlahu*] by night. Then we shall surely say to his heir that we were not present at the destruction of his family [*ahlihi*] and that surely we are truthful." / Then they devised a plot, and *We* devised a plot, while they were not aware. / So behold how their plot fared in the end; truly *We* destroyed them and their people all together. / And those are their houses, lying desolate for their having done wrong. Surely in this is a sign for a people who know.[16]

Here, the Qur'an specifically mentions the utter destruction of the physical houses of the corrupt, the home being, in one sense, a metonym for family. Here too, God speaks in the grammatical first-person plural, "*We*," indicating that a plot against a prophet is a direct offense against God, and one that draws severe retaliation at that.

This story of the destruction of the corrupt people of Thamūd is followed in *Sūrat al-Naml* by the story of the family of Lot (*āl/ahl Lūṭ*), another story in which a corrupt segment of the population torments the family of a prophet. However, in the case of Lot, someone from his own family, his wife, "lagged behind" and was not saved from destruction alongside the rest of her family.[17] In the early Muslim context, such a reminder that familial affiliations alone are not

[16] Q. 27:49–52.
[17] Q. 27:57.

sufficient to ward off the wrath of God would have been exceptionally potent as parties from within the Prophet's own clan, the Banū Hāshim, were being forced to choose sides between the Prophet Muhammad and his powerful detractors. Though the Qur'an does not discuss her circumstances at length, the wife of Lot is mentioned both in the Meccan and Medinan periods, including for the first time simply by the reference "an old woman" (*ʿajūz*). In late Meccan surahs, the family of Noah is also introduced, but it is not until the Medinan period that a verse damns the wife of Noah, alongside the wife of Lot, for treachery: "They were under two of *Our* righteous servants [Noah and Lot]; then they betrayed them, and they availed them naught against God."[18] In this later Medinan surah, *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot are stark reminders, in an immediate sense, for two of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, whom God chides in no uncertain terms for their mischievous trickery of the Prophet. The Qur'an encourages the wives to repent and emphasizes again the theme of God as Protector, emphatically describing God's proctorship with the stylistic use of Arabic, rendered in translation in bold below: "your hearts (*qulūbukumā*) did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him [the Prophet], then truly God, *He* is his Protector (*fa-inna Allāha huwa mawlāhu*)." And as if that promise of Divine succor left anything uncertain, the verse continues by reinforcing the proctorship with hosts of angelic and believing human beings, "as are [i.e., also his protectors] Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal."[19] For a God-fearing person, such a comprehensive warning would make quite an impression. God is also depicted as knowing the state of their hearts, implying that God "sees" not merely actions, but the feelings and intentions behind the actions. Here too, the phrase "aid

[18] Q. 66:10 (partial quotation).
[19] Q. 66:4.

one another" can be rendered more literally as "back each other" (*taẓāharā*); we have seen a verb from the same root used in verse 33:4 of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* to condemn husbands for their practice of *ẓihār* against their wives. Here we see a different form of the same root used in verse 66:4 to condemn the actions of two wives against their husband. Such a structural parallel (the verbal root is repeated in the fourth verse of each surah) further reinforces the topical and stylistic connections between the two surahs that we have seen in the preceding chapter.

We have thus far seen a female slanderer, all three of the Qur'an's treacherous and irrevocably corrupt women, female sorceresses from whose evil the Qur'an offers a prayer of protection, a family who is escaping assassins, and mischievous wives who are chided in the strongest of terms by God for what might otherwise seem like a minor infraction, based on the details that the Qur'an provides.[20] Based on these examples alone, the Qur'anic depiction of females could seem quite negative. However, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the Qur'an presents women along the whole spectrum, from moral exemplars to ingrates, and even the otherwise pious figures, such as the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, occasionally face steep learning curves as we have seen. As we have also seen in the case of the viceroy's wife qua temptress in chapter 1, negative depictions of female figures are on the whole balanced by positive depictions of females. For instance, the viceroy's wife stands in contrast to the many female figures who pursue sexual relations through lawful means or who circumvent transgression when they find themselves in potentially compromising situations. Another example of ways in which the Qur'an balances out depictions of female piety and its absence is the wife of Lot, a woman damned to hell and the most frequently mentioned of the irrevocably corrupt female figures, who is only mentioned in surahs that contain at least one other righteous

[20] For a succinct account of the contextual details drawn from extra-Qur'anic sources see SQ 1389 n1–4.

female figure.[21] In some cases, otherwise clear-cut binaries of good and evil are complicated by a female figure's own moral or theological development, as in the viceroy's wife's eventual candid testimony against herself, or as in the case of the Queen of Sheba, who transforms from a sun-worshipper to a God-worshipper.

A Prophet-King and a Queenly Proselyte

In a Meccan surah, the Queen of Sheba is commendable not only for her skillful diplomacy but ultimately for the power of her perception; she a powerful aristocratic woman who nonetheless chooses to submit to "the Lord of the mighty throne."[22] A story of a politically powerful female's conversion comes at a time when the women of the esteemed Quraysh tribe were being forced to choose their own loyalties between the followers of Muhammad and the polytheists of their clans, a point to which I will return below. In terms of the Queen's political leadership, neither God's voice in the Qur'an, nor the prophetic voice of Solomon, in any way challenges her status as a *female* sovereign of her people. The hoopoe bird, however, does mention her gender; he reports back to Solomon, "I found a *woman* ruling over them"(emphasis added).[23] From another perspective, this story of two sovereigns engaging in diplomacy and statecraft foreshadows the Prophet Muhammad's own soon-to-be political ascendency, which was driven in large part by the commitments of women—a number of them aristocrats with considerable influence.

"We Sent unto Her *Our* Spirit"

[21] As just one example, in *Sūrat al-Naml*, as discussed above, the mention of the wife of Lot is preceded by mentions of the family of Ṣāliḥ, the family of Moses, and the Queen of Sheba. See appendix D for a listing of families and female figures by surah.
[22] See the hoopoe bird's description in Q. 27:26.
[23] Q. 27:23.

In previous chapters, we have seen the theological importance of Mary, the one who is "chosen above the women of the world."[24] We have explored the many different stylistic elements that the Qur'an uses to depict her in words and deeds. Here, a few words on the geopolitical importance of Mary as a figure also introduced into Qur'anic discourse in the Meccan period whose presence, unlike the Queen of Sheba, is also robust in Medinan surahs. In the Meccan period, Muslim refugees to Abyssinia are said to have recited parts of *Sūrat Maryam* in an attempt to win favor and ultimately refuge with the ruling Christian monarch.[25] In this way, the extraordinary honor given to the figure of Mary in Qur'anic discourse serves as a force of reconciliation between distinct faith communities, even as key doctrinal differences involving her son remain a point of acute theological difference.[26] Notably too, Mary, without a doubt the most dominant female figure in the Qur'an, is a Jewish woman initially made known to history by Christian traditions. Mary being the most celebrated female in Qur'anic discourse reinforces the highly dialogic nature of the Qur'an's relationship with preceding Semitic monotheisms; for matters of creed, no other woman in the shared—albeit disputed—history holds such a simultaneously unifying and divisive position.[27] In the same way that Mary both linked and

[24] Q. 3:42.

[25] See Angelika Neuwirth, "Imagining Mary—Disputing Jesus: Reading Surat Maryam and Related Meccan Texts within the Qur'anic Communication Process," in *Fremde, Feinde und Kurioses: Innen- und Außenansichten unseres muslimischen Nachbarn*, ed. Benjamin Jokisch, Ulrich Rebstock, and Lawrence I. Conrad (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 383–416. For further discussion, see Hosn Abboud, *Mary in the Qur'an: A Literary Reading*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014). For a contemporary English rendering of the account, see Lings, *Muhammad*, 83–86.

[26] For further discussion, see Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, "The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary," *Muslim World* 79 (1989): 161–87.

[27] For a thorough exploration of how the biblical Abraham and a figure such as Mary come to play a distinctive role in Qur'anic sacred history, see Angelika Neuwirth, "The House of Abraham and the House of Amran: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism," in *The Qur'ān in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 499–532. In general, Travis Zadeh observes of this shared legacy that there are "many historical communities implicated within the Qur'anic text," that there is a "profound dialectic relationship that the Quran evinces with the pre-existing textual corpora of late

differentiated Jewish and Christian civilizational paradigms, the nascent community of the Prophet Muhammad straddled alliances and attempted to forge a renewed commitment to monotheistic polity, one with a robust connection to a sacred past. As comparative historian Robert Gregg observes, "For Muslims Maryam is the blessed virgin mother of a prophet who is a forerunner to Muhammad, the woman of whose household will ultimately command preeminence."[28] In this context, Mary—alongside other biblical figures in the Qur'an—are points of convergence with prior Semitic peoples who arrive on the Qur'anic scene as the Prophet Muhammad's community is in a process of forging new alliances grounded primarily in a theological—not an immediate biological—sense of kinship.[29]

Structurally too, there is significant association between these most influential prophetic households in the organization of the *muṣḥaf*. Consider that *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* has the most extensive verses on the women of the Prophet Muhammad's family.[30] Within this surah, verse number 33 contains the axiomatic Qur'anic reference to the purity of the "people of the house" (*ahl al-bayt*), that is, the Prophet Muhammad's family: "God only desires to remove defilement from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely."[31] In the narrative flow of *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*,[32] Q. 3:33 also contains an axiomatic reference to the womenfolk of prior holy

antiquity," and that "Quranic intertextuality and self-referentiality [are] deployed within a broader sectarian environment." Zadeh, "Quranic Studies and the Literary Turn," 338. For a provocative discussion of this intertextuality and its application to one of the Qur'an's narratives of sacred history, see Nevin Reda, "The Qur'anic Talut and the Rise of the Ancient Israelite Monarchy: An Intertextual Reading," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25, no. 3 (2008): 31–51.

[28] See Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 589, see also discussions on 543–44.

[29] See discussions to this effect in Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an," 535–36.

[30] For instance, as we have seen in chapter 3, most of the divine speech to females in the Prophet Muhammad's orbit takes place in this surah.

[31] Q. 33:33.

[32] For analysis of this narrative structure, see A. H. Mathias Zahniser, "The Word of God and the Apostleship of ʿĪsā: A Narrative Analysis of Āl ʿImrān (3): 33–62," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37 (1991): 77–112.

families, that is, "people of Ibrahim" (*āl Ibrāhīm*) and "people of ʿImrān" (*āl ʿImrān*), who were chosen by God in a similar fashion: "Truly God chose Adam, Noah, the House of Abraham, and the House of ʿImrān above the worlds."[33] If we accept the premise that the Qur'an was deliberately and meaningfully—rather than haphazardly—composed, these correspondences hold significance; at the very least, they make for a helpful heuristic for locating interconnected topical content. Notably too, in the revelatory order, *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33) directly follows *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* (3), therein furthering the significance of such a structural correspondence. *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, the primary surah that defines the nature of the Prophet and the status of his female family members, also contains an early explicit reference to past prophets: "And [remember] when *We* made with the prophets their covenant, and with thee, and with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary; *We* made with them a solemn covenant, / that the truthful may be questioned concerning their truthfulness. And for the disbelievers *He* has prepared a painful punishment."[34]

Explicit links between the prophetic families of Moses and Muhammad are also noteworthy. For instance, a relatively early Meccan surah that traces key moments on the prophetic journey of Moses, *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, draws to a conclusion with this explicit instruction to the Prophet Muhammad regarding his family (*ahl*): "And bid thy family [*ahlaka*] to prayer and be steadfast therein. *We* ask no provision of thee; *We* provide for thee. And the end belongs to reverence."[35] Then, as if in mirror fashion, *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, a later surah that is focused on the proper etiquette of and with the Prophet Muhammad and his family, draws to a conclusion with

[33] Q. 3:33. See also 11:73 for a mention of "people of the house" in the context of angelic speech directed to Abraham's wife: "The Mercy of God and *His* Blessings be upon you, O People of the House! Truly *He* [God] is praised, Glorious."
[34] Q. 33:7–8.
[35] Q. 20:132. This is the fourth to last verse.

an explicit association between the followers of the Prophet Muhammad and the followers of Moses: "O you who believe! Be not as those who affronted Moses, whereat God declared him innocent of what they alleged, and he was honored with God."[36] Such verses reinforce the connection, stylistically and typologically, not just between past prophets, but across the households of these figures and their followers.

An Abrahamic Polity: From Mecca to Medina

The figure of Abraham enters the Qur'anic discourse in the middle Meccan period, and stories of Abraham and his family members then continue into the Medinan period.[37] The approximate revelatory schema agreed upon by early Muslim exegetes and academics alike points to an early reference to the worship of the family of Ishmael (*ahl Ismāʿīl*) in *Sūrat Maryam*: "He [Ishmael] used to bid his family/people to prayer and almsgiving, and he was pleasing unto his Lord."[38] This reference to Ishmael is followed in the revelatory schema not long after by a reference to the "people of the house of Ibrahim" (*ahl bayt Ibrāhīm*), and to the wife of Abraham (*imraʾat Ibrāhīm*) directly in *Sūrat Hūd*.[39] Later Medinan revelations explicitly emphasize the pious example of the family of Abraham for the Prophet Muhammad and followers: "There is indeed a beautiful example for you in Abraham and those with him (*wa-lladhīna maʿahu*), when they said to their people, 'Truly we are quit of you and of all that you worship apart from God. We have rejected you, and enmity and hatred have arisen between us and you forever, till you believe in

[36] Q. 33:69. This is the fifth to last verse.
[37] See detailed discussions of the development of the Qur'anic Abraham in Neuwirth, "The House of Abraham and the House of Amran," 499–503.
[38] Q. 19:55.
[39] Q. 11:69–73.

God alone.'"[40] A closely following verse in this same surah, *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*, reinforces the beautifully exemplary nature of Abraham "and those with him," expanding the sense of polity to "whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day."[41] As we have seen previously, in the structural organization of the *muṣḥaf*, the first use of the concept "beautiful example" comes in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, when the Qur'an declares the Prophet Muhammad to be a "beautiful example" (*uswah ḥasanah*).[42] Both *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* and *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah* are late Medinan, and both surahs solidify the connection between the two prophets and between those *with* them—including, it is worth noting, their female family members and companions. The "beautiful example" is not limited to the prophetic persona but extends also to the prophetic household and then to members of the faithful polity together.

Teaching through Case Study: Female Figures and Legal Precedents

We have looked at the connections between different prophetic families in sacred history as one aspect of the female presence and legacy in shaping and defining a sense of polity, but the female legacy also has many direct points of bearing on matters of law and ethics. As I outlined in the opening of this chapter, the Qur'anic penalties for slander initially pertained directly to a formative episode involving female figures in the nascent Muslim polity. In previous chapters, we have also seen the Qur'an's condemnation of the practice of *ẓihār*,[43] another form of degrading speech with potential penal implications. The Qur'an does not just prohibit this practice of repudiation in the beginning of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, but an entire short surah, *Sūrat al-*

[40] Q. 60:4. Although family is not mentioned specifically in this reference to "those with him," following an intra-textual analysis, the followers of Abraham are also his family members.
[41] Q. 60:6.
[42] Q. 33:21.
[43] See Q. 33:4 and 58:2–3.

Mujādilah, is named for a woman who came to the Prophet Muhammad with a complaint that her husband had repudiated her using the practice of *ẓihār*, namely, declaring her to be like the backside of his mother. The formula of *ẓihār* effectively releases a husband from the financial support of his wife, without releasing the wife to remarry. According to the Qur'an, "the disputing woman" (*al-mujādilah*) brought a valid claim of wrongdoing, as *ẓihār* is "indecent" and a "calumny."[44] The Qur'anic solution—the new law established to counter the practice—is that the husband, should he wish to resume a relationship with his wife and "before they touch one another," would have to expiate his sin by first freeing a slave,[45] fasting two consecutive months, or feeding sixty indigent people.[46] With this incident, the Qur'an does not just establish a new law but gives the nascent Muslim polity a tangible, immediate example in which the new law is applicable. The Qur'an uses what contemporary law schools refer to as the "case study method" in order to teach law; many of those case studies involve women figures.

In another instance also, the Qur'an teaches by case study on questions of polity and loyalty. How, during a conflict that divided households into supporters of the Prophet Muhammad and detractors, should the loyalty of females be established? Given that marriages between monotheist and polytheist are explicitly prohibited in the Qur'an, what is the litmus test for accepting women into the Muslim polity through marriage? How should the legal apparatus

[44] Q. 58:2. For reflections on women's "freedom of expression" in relation to these verses, see Lamrabet, *Women in the Qur'an*, 131–34.

[45] Slavery is not instituted or explicitly encouraged by the Qur'an; rather, manumitting slaves is encouraged both as an excellent deed and as an expiation from sins; "it [slavery] is regulated in ways that ostensibly aim at ameliorating negative consequences unfree persons may experience as a result of their vulnerable social station." See Celene Ibrahim, "'The Garment of Piety is Best,'" 10. For a critical reading of jurisprudence related to slavery and sex, see Kecia Ali, "Slavery and Sexual Ethics in Islam," in *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*, ed. Bernadette J. Brooten with the editorial assistance of Jacqueline L. Hazelton (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 108–22. See also, Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics*, 50–71.

[46] Q. 58:3–4.

deal with previously existing marriages where one spouse is a monotheist and the other a polytheist? Beyond basic theological convictions, what are the basic ethical standards incumbent upon a woman desiring residency and marriage among the Muslims? These practical questions, and the financial transactions potentially involved in dissolving marriages, are taken up by *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*, (lit. "she who is tested").[47] As we have seen in other late Medinan surahs, the voice of God addresses the believers and the Prophet directly:

> O you who believe! When the believing women come unto you as emigrants, examine them. God knows best their faith. Then if you know them to be believers, do not return them to the disbelievers. They (the women) are not lawful for them, nor are they (the men) lawful for [the women]. And give them [the disbelieving men] what they have spent. There is no blame upon you if you marry them when you have given them their bridewealth. And hold not the ties of disbelieving women. Ask for what you have spent, and let them [the disbelieving men] ask for what they have spent. That is the Judgment of God; *He* judges between you. And God is Knowing, Wise. / And if any of your wives should go over to the disbelievers, and then you have your turn [to make amends], give those whose wives have gone the like of what they have spent. And reverence God, in Whom you are believers. O Prophet! When believing women come unto thee, pledging unto thee that they will not ascribe any as partners unto God, nor steal, nor fornicate, nor slay their children, nor bring a slanderous lie that they have fabricated between their hands and feet, nor disobey thee in anything honorable, then accept their pledge and seek God's Forgiveness for them. Truly, God is Forgiving, Merciful.[48]

In the verse above, "O you who believe!" is generally a gender-inclusive term, but the verses that describe the exchange of bridewealth are clearly directed to men, who are required to give bridewealth to their new wives. Notably too, the verse above suggests that those who lost wives on account of following the religion of the Prophet Muhammad should be compensated for what

[47] The surah is so named after the phrase in Q. 60:10. For a discussion of women's oaths of political allegiance in the time of the Prophet Muhmmad, see Lamrabet, *Women in the Qur'an*, 116–22.

[48] Q. 60:10–12. The ethics involved in how to treat potentially vulnerable migrant females is a matter of pressing contemporary concern, and future scholarship, including in the theological and ethical realms, could examine such Qur'anic dictates as expressed in this verse and others in order to probe the similarities to and tensions with immigration policy as articulated within contemporary nation-state systems of governance.

they had spent in bridewealth. These marriage restrictions are later loosened to include marriage to "the chaste [*muḥṣanāt*] women of those who were given the Book before you" at the beginning of one of the latest Medinan surahs.[49] The change suggests that the more restricted circumstances of the earlier Medinan period were merely temporary, a measure to draw together the polity and to deal with marital schisms created because of the spread of a new religious paradigm among the early Muslims. In the earlier instances, the women were to be tested with a more elaborate ethical standard, but the later verse simply specifies chastity as the necessary initial criteria. In general, the criteria outlined for women in the pledge of loyalty are virtues and behaviors that are also incumbent upon men. So too are men held to the standard of upright sexual conduct in the Qur'an; chastity is not simply a feminine virtue.

Females in the Drama of Qur'anic Sacred History

This chapter has traced female figures along the arc of Qur'anic sacred history and has reflected upon some dynamics of sharing stories from sacred history with other Semitic monotheisms. Approximately half of Qur'anic female figures are shared with Jewish and/or Christian biblical stories, and numerous Quranic verses contain allusions to contemporaneous events in the Qur'an's Arabian milieu, events whose details are only preserved in repositories of oral culture, such as hadith collections and biographical works. With reference to details found in these extra-Qur'anic sources, I have shown how Qur'anic renditions of events involve and define feminine virtue and vice. I have not only discussed the dramatic progression of female personalities in the

[49] Q. 5:5, "This day, all good things are made lawful unto you. The food of those who have been given the Book is lawful unto you, and your food is lawful unto them. And likewise the chaste women of the believers, and the chaste women of those who were given the Book before you, when you have given them their bridewealth as married women, not as fornicators, nor as paramours. . ."

Qur'an from the female progenitor through to the female contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad, but I have done so in a way that demonstrates the multiple ways in which issues faced by female figures in sacred history intersect with the trials and triumphs of the emerging Muslim polity. Taken together, these stories construct from the past a sacred present for contemporary readers, reciters, and listeners; they engineer a moral framework that projects into the future but also harkens back to the contexts and situations of the Qur'an's immediate audience, the women and girls, men and boys of the earliest Muslim polity.

In terms of what may be referred to as a revelatory structure, Qur'anic verses begin with an early emphasis on the single soul and first couple, then progress to a period where females in the shared biblical sacred history take precedence, and finally, in the latter years of Qur'anic compellation, to verses and surahs that emphasize detailed aspects of spousal relations and gender relations more broadly, featuring prominently examples of the female figures surrounding the Prophet Muhammad. Organizing the stories in their approximate revelatory order has enabled me to track the emphasis from female figures who are shared with the biblical tradition in chronologically earlier verses when the nascent Muslim community was first orienting itself vis-à-vis pre-Islamic religious movements, to a heavier emphasis on females who were contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad in chronologically later verses, verses that were revealed when the community needed to learn how to function ethically and efficiently as a polity in a Muslim-ruled city-state. In these later verses, the escapades of female figures affiliated with the Prophet Muhammad become case studies for teaching new legal precedents, in particular involving the ethics and rules governing female-male kinship interactions.

In both chronologically earlier and chronologically later verses, values and virtues, such as justice, equity, integrity, and sincerity, are emphasized at the micro-level of the soul and at the

macro-level of society. The demands for justice and accountability made by females alluded to in the Qur'an bring legal order and communal definition to the burgeoning Muslim polity. The Qur'an regularly alludes to such unfolding incidents with a moral lesson or new normative legal ruling as guidance for the entire community of "believers" and their allies. The Qur'an on several occasions responds directly and immediately to the needs of specific female demands for justice and accountability. Multiple female figures who are involved in the circumstances leading to the establishment of new Qur'anic laws and ethical norms, most explicitly in the later years of the development of the Qur'an, leave a legacy, a female legacy, worthy of further consideration.

In my efforts to explore inter-Qur'anic connectivity, I have pointed out instances of structural and thematic correspondences with regard to narratives about female figures. Reading in or from the *muṣḥaf*, from the first surahs to the later surahs, female figures and female issues regularly constitute a Qur'anic point of concern. The stories that the Qur'an narrates regarding female figures in sacred history provide explicitly female-affirming perspectives on human nature, agency, and moral capacity—often directly from the vantage point of the Qur'an's omniscient Narrator, God.

In exploring the female voice in the preceding chapter, and in demonstrating here how experiences of individual female figures become central for matters of communal law, I have argued that Qur'anic discourse is decidedly responsive to female concerns. In places, female figures are rebuked for their comportment; in places, they are extolled. In their breaches, however slight, and in their virtues and all their magnanimity, the wives of the Prophet Muhammad and a handful of his other early women companions are examples of struggles experienced by human beings generally and female believers specifically. Stories of their virtuous deeds, their gaffes, and in some cases their major moral failings, have been enshrined in

perpetuity in a recitation that has reached billions of people over the course of more than fourteen hundred years.

Chapter 5

Female Agency and Destiny:

"When the Believing Women Come" (Q. 60:10)

With attention to thematic and structural dimensions of Qur'anic discourse, this work has analyzed the Qur'an's "female cast," from the female leads, such as Mary, to the "extras," such as the cohort of the infant Moses's unsuccessful wet nurses and the gossiping aristocrats who get an innocent young man thrown into prison and later help exonerate him. I have explored the narrative structures involving female personalities and have relied upon philological methods to illuminate the artistry of Qur'anic storytelling. I have touched on intertextuality and Qur'anic antecedents, on the inculcation of religious law and virtues, and on key female figures in the Qur'an's early reception history, as canonized in hadith and biographical accounts. I have examined female speech in the Qur'an and drawn upon theoretical insights afforded by affect studies to examine select aural aspects of the Qur'an, showing how, as a liturgical text, the persistent repetition of stories involving female figures, potentially over a lifetime, may induce particular affects, and through these affects, inculcate piety and virtue.

I have shown how Qur'anic stories of female figures often weave together theology and ethics to demonstrate God's ultimate wisdom, justice, and omnipotence and to reinforce the believer's—female and male—ultimate subservience and moral accountability. Narratives of sacred history, parables, and incidents in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the experiences of his associates—friend and foe—hold didactic import for Qur'anic readers, reciters, and listeners. As a pedagogical work, the Qur'an has clear, oft-repeated ideas, but also deeper, more

subtle lessons that reveal themselves after rigorous engagement using intra-textual and intertextual modalities. That it is a profound vessel of meaning is part of the Qur'an's enduring appeal. Taken as a whole, these narratives provide memorable and often humorous vignettes that offer striking juxtapositions of corruption and piety.

Far from being ancillary to the drama of sacred history, female figures drive action and often reinforce the message and mission of their prophetic companions. Female figures are key to the narrative arc of sacred history, even if this narrative arc takes interpretive labor to generate schematically, since the predominantly non-linear style of Qur'anic discourse demands that extra-Qur'anic sources be used to establish such a rendition of sacred history. Through the non-chronological rendering, sacred history impinges upon the reader's or reciter's present to deliver ethical and theological lessons embedded in a distinct blending of narrative and poetic forms. The stories do more than establish a sense of group identity constructed from an ethnonationalistic past; they offer a values-based shared present wherein the Qur'anic reader, reciter, or listener is invited to scale up her own virtue against the characters of an otherwise ephemeral history.

There is no single archetypal female figure to be found in the Qur'an. Rather, the Qur'an's female figures are decidedly heterogeneous, falling on a spectrum between pious and impious, insightful and ignorant, commanding and timid, old and young, famous and obscure. Should there be one thing common across these disparate female figures, it is that the Qur'an depicts them with the agency and responsibility for refining their character and shaping their destinies, for better or worse. The Qur'an is highly celebratory of the aptitudes and competencies of females in realms of spirituality and piety, in political maneuvering, and in the important work of preserving family relations—although women too, as the Qur'an demonstrates with a number

of examples, can also use their agency to promote corruption and treachery as in the case of the wives of Noah, Lot, and Abū Lahab, as well as the wife of the viceroy and, to some extent, her aristocratic consorts. For these female figures who are explicitly damned, notably little about their circumstances is narrated; the Qur'an names their treachery in passing but does not emphasize much by way of their personas. The Qur'an supplies a few examples of irrevocably corrupt female figures; however, many more pious female figures inspire, protect, guide, and raise prophets from among their men.

Moving through the vignettes of sacred history, I have focused on thematic connections between and across the female figures who play key roles in sacred history or who are depicted in Qur'anic parables. As I retraced the narrative arc of Qur'anic sacred history, I noted in particular how vignettes concerning women in previous prophetic households set the stage, so to speak, for a fuller appreciation of the role of female figures in and around the orbit of the Prophet Muhammad. In sum, I have labored to demonstrate the epistemic violence of *only* construing the women figures as ancillary in the drama of sacred history. Despite an emphasis on the trials and adventures of the male cast of prophets, female figures consistently play pivotal roles in narratives of sacred history and in the revelation of Qur'anic truth itself.

Female figures, although not explicitly named as prophets or messengers, often function to confirm God's Word and promises; Mary, for instance, "confirmed the Words of her Lord and *His* Books."[1] Male figures are regularly and explicitly tasked with preaching to their communities and at times conveying new scripture, but female figures too are charged with carrying, protecting, and establishing God's message, albeit in slightly different ways. Female

[1] Q. 66:12. Of the thirty-four mentions of Mary's name throughout the *muṣḥaf*, this is the final mention and seems to function as a summary of her lofty status and import. The reference here to "books" in the plural, is also a likely reference to the presence of Mary in pre-Qur'anic scriptures, namely in the Christian Testament.

figures are depicted birthing and raising prophets, saving them from calamities, and accompanying them—literally and metaphorically—in sacred journeys.

Sacred history is just one genre of storytelling in the Qur'an. Stories involving well-known pre-Qur'anic figures, the Adamic matriarch, Abraham's wife, or Mary the mother of Jesus, for instance, are just one type of Qur'anic story that brings the past into a new sacred present. A second type of story is the vignette that alludes to contemporaneous events unfolding in the life of the wider community of the Prophet Muhammad, as related frequently in prose containing allusions that require extra-Qur'anic sources to explicate. A third type—one that only occasionally involves female figures—is storytelling in parable form with typecast figures. Whether through sacred history, vignette, or parable, storytelling is a primary medium through which the Qur'an achieves its didactic purpose, and stories involving female figures reiterate core Qur'anic themes, including the agency and moral responsibility of the individual and the need to guard the self against being overtaken by base desires.

From within the Qur'anic worldview, physiological differences between males and females, namely their distinct biological functioning in the reproductive sphere, have implications within the gendered social world. I have made subtle suggestions about how renewed attention to Qur'anic stories involving female figures can inform contemporary Muslim conversations about sex, sexuality, and gender, including notions of sexual assault, domestic violence, marriage, parenting, and other concepts that often relate directly to gendered social experiences. I have touched upon many licit and illicit issues related to sex and gender and have tried to situate them in an overarching Qur'anic framework; however, assessing the intricacies and applied dimensions of Qur'anic principles remains well beyond the scope of this work.

I have also raised questions in the course of this work that can only be answered as the field of Qur'anic studies and its related fields continue to develop. I am situated within a subfield in its infancy, it as such, is valuable to frame the central questions at stake, even if many answers remain elusive. For my part, subsequent research will examine further female figures and their reported contributions to the rise of Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad and just beyond. The lives and legacies of these female companions, as depicted in early prophetic biographies and lore, holds much promise for enriching academic scholarship as well as enhancing conversations in devotional contexts. Further work could also continue to explore how gendered metaphors and imagery in the Qur'an compare and contrast to pre-Qur'anic literary works, including Arabic poetry and even works of early midrash. Further probing of Qur'anic depictions of manhood and masculinity also holds promise in terms of providing a more complete literary treatment of gender in Qur'anic discourse. Masculinity in Islam has garnered attention from sociological, political, and anthropological perspectives, but the foundational religious sources—chief among them the Qur'an itself—hold substantial potential for future scholarship.[2]

Attention to sexed and gendered bodies—human and otherwise—raises questions about embodiment more generally. The Qur'an offers many vivid and sometimes even chilling descriptions of human bodies. Whether in its depictions of pain and torture, its corporal metaphors, its depictions of human dis/ability, its discussion of human bodies in relation to other animal bodies, its references to bodily functions and states, its renderings of ritual worship, its descriptions of bodily resurrection, or its discussions of the relationships between physical

[2] For preliminary considerations, see, for instance, Omaima Abou-Bakr, "Turning the Tables: Perspectives on the Construction of 'Muslim Manhood'," *Hawwa, Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 1, no. 2–3 (2014), 89–107.

bodies and desires and their prescribed regulation, the Qur'an underscores that bodies matter and that rhetoric and imagery about the body and its various frailties and mysteries induce powerful affects. Of the existing literature on bodies and embodiment in the Qur'an, previous authors have looked at different body parts, at theological concepts such as creation and resurrection, and at topics such as beauty, purity, and health, but a comprehensive approach that augments this literature could be a substantial contribution to the field.

As a literary artifact and as a ritualized aural phenomenon, the ubiquity of the Qur'an is unparalleled within the realm of Islamicate culture. It provides a window into Arabian late antiquity and insights into the theological, social, and political forces driving the subsequent spread of Islam to societies throughout the world. I have illuminated the importance of Qur'anic female figures in the overarching project of inculcating monotheism, defining law, teaching virtue, and exemplifying ethical action. Far from being androcentric, the Qur'an is regularly celebratory of female character, wit, and spiritual excellence; it is often engaged with affairs of direct importance for females in a highly female-affirming manner.

Appendix A

Dramatis Personæ:
The Qur'anic Female Cast

(Listed by Qur'anic Name or Title Alphabetically by English Transliteration)

Banāt Lūṭ: Lot's daughters, offered by Lot as a decoy for an unruly mob from among Lot's people who were committing crimes that no peoples before them had committed

Imraʾat Abī Lahab: wife of Abū Lahab, made to accompany her husband into blazing hellfire and become a firewood carrier, feeding the flames; wears rope of palm fiber around her neck therein

Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz: wife of the viceroy of Egypt, attempts, unsuccessfully, on two occasions to seduce her foster son; lies about the affair and consorts with townswomen; admits to her culpability years later when interrogated by the sovereign

Imraʾat Ibrāhīm: wife of Abraham, old barren woman who is given news from angels in the form of men that she will become pregnant; converses with said angels; wonders and marvels at the command of God as she receives news of her progeny Isaac and Jacob

Imraʾat ʿImrān: wife of ʿImrān and mother of Mary; dedicates her unborn infant in consecration; is surprised by a girl child; names the child Mary and seeks refuge for child and child's progeny from Satan

Imraʾat Firʿawn: wife of Pharaoh, convinces her otherwise mass-murderer and tyrant of a husband to adopt an infant found floating in a basket in the river; later beseeches God to be delivered from her husband and his iniquitous people

Imraʾat Lūṭ: wife of Lot, treacherous old woman who gets left behind and destroyed with her people while the rest of her family escapes the destruction

Imraʾat Yaʿqūb: wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph, is reunited with her son after years of separation and is embraced by Joseph alongside her husband in the joy of the reunion

Imraʾat Zakariyyā: wife of Zachariah, barren woman who, nonetheless, by God's intervention, conceives a child named John described by God as dutiful, tender, and reverent

Imraʾtāni min Madyan: two women of Midian, daughters of a wise old man who help water the family's flocks, who take an interest in a disheveled yet obliging fugitive who appears at their watering hole; encourage their father to hire said fugitive; one of the two marries this fugitive, named Moses

Malikat Sabaʾ: Queen of Sheba, wise leader who has a magnificent throne; vies with Solomon for political might; travels to visit Solomon on a diplomatic mission and is impressed by his architectural prowess; converts to monotheism

Maryam: Mary, girl child consecrated by her mother and placed in the care of the prophet Zachariah; resides in the sanctuary and receives miraculous divine provisions regularly; is selected by God and purified; communes with angels; is impregnated through miraculous means; delivers said baby under a date palm near a spring; is instructed by God to take vow of silence; is ridiculed by her people but has her honor defended by her loquacious, prophetic infant

al-Mujādilah: "she who disputes," woman who complains to the Prophet Muhammad about her husband's unjust treatment of her; receives a favorable divine reply

Nisāʾ al-Nabī: Women of the Prophet, female family members of Muhammad, pious exemplars for the prophet's followers, addressed by God on one occasion as "People of the House" (*ahl al-bayt*); Prophet's wives must follow supererogatory rules on account of their elevated prominence; two among the group receive a direct divine threat on one occasion for divulging an intimate secret of the Prophet; also referred to as "spouses of the Prophet" (*azwāj al-Nabī*); given the honorific title "Mothers of the Believers" (*Ummahāt al-Muʾminīn*)

Niswatun fī-l-Madīnah: women of the town who are prone to gossiping; attend a banquet thrown by the wife of the Egyptian viceroy; conspire to get an innocent youth, the prophet Joseph, thrown into prison only to later give testimony that the young man did no wrong

Ukht Mūsā: Sister of Moses, uses her wit to help get her infant brother safely returned to his household under the guise of finding him wet nursing services

Umm Mūsā: Mother of Moses, receives revelation from God to cast her infant into river to save him from the hostile machinations of Pharaoh; has her heart fortified by God and then receives her infant back again, as promised to her by God, albeit under the guise of being his wet nurse for the House of Pharaoh

Zawj Ādam: spouse of Adam and female progenitor, is lured with her husband into deception by Satan and is expelled from the paradisal garden; sent to earth to dwell for an unspecified time; stitches, along with her husband, garment of leaves to cover their nakedness

Appendix B

Female Figures and Their Families in Qur'anic Narratives

Table 1: Female figures and families listed by the approximate order of Qur'anic sacred history

Qur'anic Terms	Translation (Name or Title as derived from context or non-Qur'anic sources with English translation)	Verse(s) Where Explicitly Mentioned or Otherwise Implied (comprehensive listing unless otherwise noted)
zawj Ādam	spouse of Adam (Ḥawwāʾ or Eve)	2:35–37, 7:19–25, 20:117–23
ahl Nūḥ	family of Noah	11:40, 11:45–46, 21:76, 23:27
imraʾat Nūḥ	wife of Noah	66:10
ahl Ayyūb	family of Job	21:84, 38:43
ahl Ṣāliḥ	family of Ṣāliḥ	27:49
āl Ibrāhīm	House of Abraham	3:33, 4:54
ahl Ibrāhīm	family of Abraham	51:26
ahl bayt Ibrāhīm	family of the house of Abraham (likely reference specifically to Sārah, *umm Isḥāq*, the mother of Isaac)	11:73
wālidā Ibrāhīm	parents of Abraham	14:41
imraʾat Ibrāhīm	wife of Abraham	11:69–73, 51:24–30
ahl Ismāʿīl	family of Ishmael	19:55
āl Lūṭ	House of Lot	15:59, 27:56, 54:34
ahl Lūṭ	family of Lot	11:81, 15:65, 26:169–70, 27:57, 29:32–33, 37:134
imraʾat Lūṭ	wife of Lot	

		7:83, 15:60, 29:32–33, 66:10
ʿajūz	old woman (wife of Lot)	26:171, 37:134
banāt Lūṭ	daughters of Lot	11:78–79, 15:71
imraʾat al-ʿAzīz	wife of the viceroy (Zulaykhā)	12:21–35, 12:50–53
ahlihā	her family	12:26
niswatun fī al-madīnah	women of the town	12:30–32, 12:50–51
ahl Yaʿqūb	family of Jacob	12:65, 12:93
āl Yaʿqūb	House of Jacob	12:6, 19:6
abawā Yūsuf	parents of Joseph	12:99–100
āl Mūsā and *āl Hārūn*	The House of Moses and the House of Aaron	2:248
ahl Mūsā	family of Moses	20:10, 20:29, 27:7, 28:29
umm Mūsā	mother of Moses	20:38, 20:40, 28:7–13
ukht Mūsā	sister of Moses	20:40, 28:11–12
imraʾat Firʿawn	wife of Pharaoh (Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim)	28:9, 66:11
āl Firʿawn	House of Pharaoh	Multiple, e.g., 2:49–60, 3:11, 28:8, 7:130, 7:141, and others
nisāʾ Banī Isrāʾīl	women of the Children of Israel (who were oppressed by Pharaoh)	Multiple, e.g., 38:4, 7:141, and others.
al-marāḍiʿ	the wet nurses	28:12

ahl Madyan	people of Midian	20:40
imraʾtāni min Madyan	two women of Midian (Moses's future wife and her sister)	28:23–29
abawā ghulām	parents of a boy (boy who is slain by the enigmatic *Khiḍr*)	18:80–81
āl Dāwūd	House of David	34:13
wālidā Sulaymān	parents of Solomon	27:19, 38:21–25
malikat Sabaʾ	Queen of Sheba (Bilqīs)	27:22–44
imraʾat Zakariyyā	wife of Zachariah (*umm Yaḥyā*, mother of John)	3:40, 19:5–14, 21:90
imraʾat ʿImrān	wife of ʿImrān (mother of Mary)	3:33–37
ahl Maryam	family of Maryam	19:16
umm (*Maryam*)	mother of Mary	19:28
Maryam	Mary (*umm ʿĪsā*, mother of Jesus)	3:33–37, 3:34–48, 4:156, 4:171, 5:17, 19:16–34, 21:91, 23:50, and 66:12; as "son of Mary" (*Ibn Maryam*) in 23:50 and 54:57; as "The Messiah, Son of Mary" (*al-Masīḥ Ibn Maryam*) in 5:117 (mentioned twice), 5:72, 5:75, and 9:13; and as "Jesus Son of Mary" (*ʿĪsā ibn Maryam*) in 2:87, 2:253, 5:45, 4:157, 4:171, 5:46, 5:78, 5:110, 5:112, 5:114, 5:116, 19:34, 33:7, 57:27, 61:6, and 61:14.

allatī naqaḍat ghazlahā	she who unraveled her yarn	16:92
ahl (*Muḥammad*)	family (of Muhammad)	3:121, 20:132
ahl al-bayt	people of the house (of the Prophet)	33:33
ummahāt al-muʾminīn	Mothers of the Believers	33:6
nisāʾ al-nabī	women of the Prophet	33:30, 33:32, (see also 3:61)
azwāj (*al-nabī*)	spouses of the Prophet	33:28, 33:50, 66:1, 66:3
banāt al-nabī	daughters of the Prophet	33:59 (see also 3:61)
al-ʿashīrah al-aqrabīn	closest kin [of the Prophet]	26:214
al-mujādilah	the disputer (Khawlah bint Thaʿlabah)	58:1
al-mumtaḥana	she who is examined (Umm Kulthūm bint ʿUqbah)	60:10
imraʾat Abī Lahab	the wife of Abū Lahab (Arwā Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb)	111:4–5
ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab	firewood carrier (derogatory term for the wife of Abū Lahab in the Qur'an)	111:4
al-naffāthāti fī al-ʿuqad	the (female) blowers on knots (sorceresses)	113:4

Appendix C

Qur'anic Verses Containing Female Speech and/or Female Addressees

Table 2: Female speakers, listed by the order of female speech in the Qur'anic muṣḥaf

Speaker	Audience for Speech	Verse Number
Wife of ʿImrān	God (*Rabb*)	3:35–6
Maryam	Zachariah (*Zakariyyā*)	3:37
Maryam	God (*Rabb*)	3:47
Adam and Adam's Spouse	God (*Rabb*)	7:23
Expectant Couple	God (*Rabb*)	7:189
Imraʾat Ibrāhīm	Angels, others present, or simply bemused speech	11:72
Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz	Joseph (*Yūsuf*)	12:23
Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz	The viceroy (*al-ʿAzīz*), possibly others present	12:25
Niswatun fī al-Madīnah	Gossip among themselves	12:30
Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz	Joseph (*Yūsuf*)	12:31
Niswatun fī al-Madīnah	Expressive speech	12:31
Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz	Women of the town (*niswatun fī al-madīnah*)	12:32
Niswatun fī al-Madīnah	Their king/sovereign (*al-malik*), others present	12:51
Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz	The viceroy (*al-ʿAzīz*), possibly others present	12:51
Maryam	*Our* [God's] Spirit (*rūḥanā*) resembling a man	19:18, 19:20
Maryam	Exclamation	19:23
Ukht Mūsā	Unspecified, presumably the attendants of the wife of Pharaoh (*Firʿawn*)	20:40
Malikat Sabaʾ	Her notables and those in the court of Solomon (*Sulaymān*)	27:29, 27:31–32, 27:34–35, 27:42
Malikat Sabaʾ	God (*Rabb*)	27:44
Imraʾat Firʿawn	Pharaoh (*Firʿawn*)	28:9
Umm Mūsā	Sister of Moses (*ukht Mūsā*)	28:11
Ukht Mūsā	Unspecified, presumably the attendants of the wife of Pharaoh (*Firʿawn*)	28:12
Sisters in Midian	Moses (*Mūsā*)	28:23

One of the two sisters	Moses (*Mūsā*)	28:25
One of the two sisters	Her father (*yā abati*)	28:26
Imraʾat Ibrāhīm	Expressive speech	51:29
Zawj al-Nabī	The Prophet Muhammad	66:3
Imraʾat Firʿawn	God (*Rabb*)	66:11

Table 3: Female speakers, listed by the frequency of their speech

Female Speakers	**Number of Verses Containing Direct Speech**
Queen of Sheba (*Malikat Sabaʾ*)	8
Wife of the Viceroy (*Imraʾat al-ʿAzīz*)	6
Mary (*Maryam*)	5
Women of the Town (*Niswatun fī al-Madīnah*) (in unison)	3
Wife of ʿ**Imrān** (*Imraʾat ʿImrān*) (Mother of Mary)	2
Wife of Abraham (*Imraʾat Ibrāhīm*)	2
Mother of Moses (*Umm Mūsā*)	2
Wife of Pharaoh (*Imraʾat Firʿawn*)	2
One of the two sisters in Midian	2
Sisters in Midian in unison	1
Sister of Moses (*Ukht Mūsā*)	1
Adam's Spouse (in unison with Adam)	1
Expectant woman (in unison with partner)	1
Wife of the Prophet Muhammad (*zawj al-Nabī*)	1

Table 4: Verses containing female speech, listed by the order of occurrence in the muṣḥaf with female speech in boldface

Verse Number	Full Verse
Q. 3:35	[Remember] when the wife of ʿImrān said, **"My Lord, truly I dedicate to *Thee* what is in my belly, in consecration. So accept it from me. Truly *Thou* art the Hearing, the Knowing."**
Q. 3:36	And when she bore her [Maryam], she said, **"My Lord, I have borne a female,"**—and God knows best what she bore—and the male is not like the female, **"and I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in *Thee*, and for her progeny, from Satan the outcast."**
Q. 3:37	So her Lord accepted her [Maryam] with a beautiful acceptance, and made her to grow in a beautiful way, and placed her under the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah entered upon her in the sanctuary he found provision with her. He said, "Mary, whence comes this unto thee? "She said, **"It is from God. Truly God provides for whomsoever *He* will without reckoning."**
Q. 3:47	She [Maryam] said, **"My Lord, how shall I have a child while no human being has touched me?"** *He* said, "Thus does God create whatsoever *He* will." When *He* decrees a thing, *He* only says to it, "Be!" and it is.
Q. 7:23	They [Adam and Eve] said, **"Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If *Thou* dost not forgive us and have Mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the losers."**
Q. 7:189	*He* [God] it is Who created you from a single soul, and made from *her* *her* mate, that he might find rest in her. Then, when he covered her, [unnamed couple] she bore a light burden, and carried it about. But when she had grown heavy, they called upon God, their Lord, **"If *Thou* givest us a healthy child, we shall surely be among the thankful."**
Q. 11:72	She [Abraham's wife] said, **"Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing."**
Q. 12:23	But she in whose house he [Joseph] was staying sought to lure him from himself. She locked the doors and said, **"Come, thou!"** He said, "God be my refuge! Truly *He* is my lord, and has made beautiful my accommodation. Verily the wrongdoers will not prosper!"

Q. 12:25	And they [Joseph and the viceroy's wife] raced to the door, while she tore his shirt from behind. And they encountered her master at the door. She said, **"What is the recompense for one who desires ill toward thy wife, save that he be imprisoned, or a painful punishment?"**
Q. 12:30	Some women of the city said, **"The viceroy's wife sought to lure her slave boy from himself! He has filled her with ardent love. Truly we consider her to be in manifest error."**
Q. 12:31	So when she [the viceroy's wife] heard of their [the townswomen's] plotting, she sent for them, and prepared a repast for them, and gave each of them a knife. And she said [to Joseph], **"Come out before them!"** Then when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands and said, **"God be praised! This is no human being. This is naught but a noble angel!"**
Q. 12:32	She [the viceroy's wife] said, **"This is one on whose account you blamed me. I indeed sought to lure him from himself, but he remained chaste. And if he does not do as I command, he shall surely be imprisoned; and he shall be among those humbled."**
Q. 12:51	He [the king] said, "What was your purpose when you sought to lure Joseph from himself?" They [the townswomen] said, **"God be praised! We know no evil against him."** The viceroy's wife said, **"Now the truth has come to light. It was I who sought to lure him from himself, and verily he is among the truthful."**
Q. 19:18	She [Maryam] said, **"I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if thou art reverent!"**
Q. 19:20	She [Maryam] said, **"How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?"**
Q. 19:23	And the pangs of childbirth drove her [Maryam] to the trunk of a date palm. She said, **"Would that I had died before this and were a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!"**
Q. 20:40	When thy sister went forth and said, **"Shall I show you one who can nurse him?"** Thus *We* returned thee to thy mother that she might be comforted and grieve not. And thou didst slay a soul, but *We* saved thee from sorrow. And *We* tried thee with trials. Then thou didst remain some years among the people of Midian. Then thou didst come, as determined, O Moses.

Q. 28:9	And the wife of Pharaoh said, **"A comfort for me and for you! Slay him not; it may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son."** Yet they were unaware.
Q. 28:11	And she [Moses's mother] said to his sister, **"Follow him."** So she watched him from afar; yet they were unaware.
Q. 28:12	And *We* forbade him [Moses] to be suckled by foster mothers before that; so she [Moses's sister] said, **"Shall I direct you to the people of a house who will take care of him for you and treat him with good will?"**
Q. 28:23	And when he [Moses] arrived at the wells of Midian, he found there a community of people watering [their flocks]. And he found beside them two women holding back [their flocks]. He said, "What is your errand?" They said, **"We water not [our flocks] until the shepherds have driven [theirs] away, and our father is a very old man."**
Q. 28:25	Then one of the two [of the sisters of Midian] came to him, walking bashfully. She said, **"Truly my father summons you, that he might render unto you a reward for having watered [our flocks] for us."** When he came and recounted his story unto him, he said, "Fear not. You have been saved from the wrongdoing people."
Q. 28:26	One of the two [of the sisters of Midian] said, **"O my father! Hire him [Moses]. Surely the best you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy."**
Q. 27:29	She [the Queen of Sheba] said, **"O notables! Truly a noble letter has been delivered unto me.**
Q. 27:30	**. . . Verily, it is from Solomon and verily it is, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" . . .**
Q. 27:31	**. . . Do not exalt yourselves against me, but come unto me in submission."**
Q. 27:32	She [the Queen of Sheba] said, **"O notables! Give me your opinion in this matter of mine. I am not one to decide on any matter unless you are present."**
Q. 27:34	She [the Queen of Sheba] said, **"Verily, kings, when they enter a town, corrupt it, and make the most honorable of its people the most abased. They will do likewise . . .**

Q. 27:35	**. . . I will send a gift to them and observe what the envoys bring back."**
Q. 27:42	Then when she [the Queen of Sheba] came, it was said, "Is your throne like this?" She said, **"It seems the same."** [Solomon said], "And we were given knowledge before her and we were submitters.
Q. 27:44	It was said unto her, [the Queen of Sheba] "Enter the pavilion." But when she saw it, she supposed it to be an expanse of water and bared her legs. He said, "Verily it is a pavilion paved with crystal." She said, **"My Lord! Surely I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to God, Lord of the worlds."**
Q. 51:29	Then his [Abraham's] wife came forward with **a loud cry**; she struck her face and said, **"A barren old woman!"**
Q. 66:3	When the Prophet [Muhammad] confided a certain matter to one of his wives, but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said, **"Who informed thee of this?"** He replied, "The Knower, the Aware informed me."
Q. 66:11	And God sets forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said, **"My Lord, build for me a house near *Thee* in the Garden, deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people."**

Table 5: Divine and/or angelic speech to specific female figures, listed according to the approximate chronology of sacred history with speech to females in boldface

Female Addressee/s	**Verse Number and Full Verse**
Zawj Ādam (Spouse of Adam)	Q. 2:36 Then Satan made them stumble therefrom, and expelled them from that wherein they were, and *We* said, **"Get you down, each of you an enemy to the other. On the earth a dwelling place shall be yours, and enjoyment for a while."** Q. 2:38 *We* said, **"Get down from it, all of you. If guidance should come to you from *Me*, then whosoever follows *My* Guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve."** Q. 7:22 Thus he lured them on through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness was exposed to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden to cover themselves. And their Lord called out to them, **"Did *I* not forbid you from that tree, and tell you that Satan is a manifest enemy unto you?"** Q. 7:24 *He* [God] said, **"Get down, each of you an enemy to the other! There will be for you on the earth a dwelling place, and enjoyment for a while."** Q. 7:25 *He* [God] said, **"Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from there shall you be brought forth."** Q. 20:123 *He* [God] said, **"Get down from it, both you together, each of you an enemy to the other. And if guidance should come unto you from *Me*, then whosoever follows *My* Guidance shall not go astray, nor be wretched.**
Imraʾat Nūḥ and *Imraʾat Lūṭ* (Wife of Noah and Wife of Lot)	Q. 66:10 God sets forth as an example for those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of *Our* righteous servants; then they betrayed them, and they availed them naught against God. And **it was said** unto both, **"Enter the Fire with those who enter."**

Imraʾat Ibrāhīm (Wife of Abraham)	Q. 11:71 And his wife was standing there and she laughed. Then ***We*** **gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob**. Q. 11:73 They [angels] said, **"Do you marvel at the Command of God? The Mercy of God and *His* Blessings be upon you, O People of the House! Truly *He* is praised, Glorious."** Q. 51:28 Then he conceived a fear of them. They said, **"Fear not!"** and gave him glad tidings of a knowing son. Q. 51:30 They said, **"Thus has thy Lord decreed. Truly *He* is the Wise, the Knowing."**
Umm Mūsā (Mother of Moses)	Q. 20:39 [God "revealed"] **"Cast him into the ark and cast it into the sea. Then the sea will throw him upon the bank. An enemy unto *Me* and an enemy unto him shall take him."** And *I* cast upon thee [Moses] a love from *Me*, that thou mightiest be formed under *My* eye. Q. 28:7 So *We* revealed to the mother of Moses, **"Nurse him. But if you fear for him, then cast him into the river, fear not, not grieve. Surely *We* shall bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers."**
Maryam (Mary)	Q. 3:42 And [remember] when the angels said, **"O Mary, truly God has chosen thee and purified thee, and has chosen thee above the women of the worlds.** Q. 3:43 **O Mary! Be devoutly obedient to thy Lord, prostrate, and bow with those who bow."** Q. 3:45 When the angels said, **"O Mary, truly God gives thee glad tidings of a Word from *Him*, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, high honored in this world and the Hereafter, one of those brought nigh.** Q. 3:46

	He [the child] **will speak to people in the cradle and in maturity, and will be among the righteous."** Q. 3:47 She said, "My Lord, how shall I have a child while no human being has touched me?" He said, "**Thus does God create whatsoever *He* will.**" When *He* decrees a thing, *He* only says to it, "Be!" and it is. Q. 19:19 He [the angel] said, **"I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow unto thee a pure boy."** Q. 19:21 He [the angel] said, "**Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for *Me*.**'" And [it is thus] that *We* might make him a sign unto humankind, and a mercy from *Us*. And it is a matter decreed. Q. 19:24 So he [the angel] called out to her from below her, **"Grieve not! Thy Lord has placed a rivulet beneath thee.** Q. 19:25 **And shake toward thyself [Mary] the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon thee.** Q. 19:26 **So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if thou seest any human being, say, 'Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate, so I shall not speak this day to any human being.'"**
Nisāʾ and *Azwāj al-Nabī* (Women and Spouses of the Prophet [Muhammad])	Q. 33:30 **O wives of the Prophet! Whosoever among you commits a flagrant indecency, her punishment will be doubled; and that is easy for God.** Q. 33:31 **And whosoever among you is devoutly obedient to God and *His* Messenger and works righteousness, *We* shall give her reward twice over, and *We* have prepared for her a generous provision.** Q. 33:32 **O wives of the Prophet [Muhammad]! You are not like other women. If you are reverent, then be not overtly soft in speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease be moved to desire; and speak in an honorable way.**

	Q. 33:33 **Abide in your homes and flaunt not you charms as they did flaunt them in the prior Age of Ignorance. Perform the prayer, give the alms, and obey God and *His* Messenger. God only desires to remove defilement from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely.** Q. 66:4 **If you both [two wives of the Prophet Muhammad] repent unto God. . . For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, *He* is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal.** Q. 66:5 **It may be that if he divorces you [two wives of the Prophet Muhammad], his Lord would give him wives in your stead who are better than you, submitting, believing, devoutly obedient, penitent, worshipping, and given to wayfaring—previously married, and virgins.**

Appendix D

Qur'anic Female Figures and Families by Surah

Table 6: Female figures and named families listed by approximate revelatory sequence of surahs, beginning from Meccan revelations to the Prophet Muhammad's death in Medina

Surah Name (Number in *Muṣḥaf*)	**Approximate Revelatory Sequence**[a]	**Female Figures/Families Explicitly Mentioned, (Name as Given in Extra-Qur'anic Sources)**
al-Masad (111)	6th	*Imraʾat Abī Lahab* (Arwā Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb)
al-Falaq (113)	20th	*al-Naffāthāti fī al-ʿUqad* (the blowers [f.] on knots)[b]
Ṣād (38)	38th	*Ahl Ayyūb* (family of Job) *Wālidā Sulaymān* (parents of Solomon)
al-Aʿrāf (7)	39th	*Zawj Ādam* (spouse of Adam, *Ḥawwāʾ* or Eve)
Maryam (19)	44th	*Imraʾat Zakariyyā* (wife of Zachariah) *Āl Yaʿqūb* (House of Jacob) *Maryam* (Mary) *Ahl Maryam* (family of Mary) *Umm* and *Abū Maryam* (mother and father of Mary) *Ibn Maryam* (Mary's Son, Jesus) *Ahl Ismāʿīl* (family of Ishmael)
Ṭā Hā (20)	45th	*Ahl Mūsā* (family of Moses) *Zawj Ādam* (spouse of Adam, *Ḥawwāʾ* or Eve)

[a] For this approximate ordering, see Bakhtiar, *Chronological Quran as Revealed to Prophet Muhammad*. For a similar ordering per the orientalist Theodore Nöldeke, see Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*, 125–28. This table does not include all references to *Maryam* (Mary) or *āl Firʿawn* (the House of Pharaoh) on account of their distribution throughout the *muṣḥaf*.

[b] Some commentators consider this surah to be much later, and some relate it to the daughters of Labīd al-Yahūdī. See David Cook, "The Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī and the Commentaries to Sūra 113," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 45 no. 2 (2000): 323–45.

al-Shuʿarāʾ (26)	47th	*Ahl Lūṭ* (family of Lot) *ʿajūz* (an old woman, i.e., the wife of Lot) *ʿashīratika al-ʾaqrabīn* (your [Muhammad's] closest kin)
al-Naml (27)	48th	*Ahl Mūsā* (family of Moses) *Wālidā Sulaymān* (parents of Solomon) *Malikat Sabaʾ* (Queen of Sheba) *Ahl Ṣāliḥ* (family of Ṣāliḥ) *Āl Lūṭ* (House of Lot) *Ahl Lūṭ* (the family of Lot) *Imraʾat Lūṭ* (wife of Lot)
al-Qaṣaṣ (28)	49th	*Umm Mūsā* (mother of Moses) *Ukht Mūsā* (sister of Moses) *al-marāḍiʿ* (the wet nurses) *Imraʾat Firʿawn* (Āsiyah) *Imraʾatāni min Madyan* (two women of Midian, Moses's future wife and her sister) *Ahl Mūsā* (family of Moses)
Hūd (11)	52nd	*Ahl bayt Ibrāhīm* (family of the House of Abraham) *Imraʾat Ibrāhīm* (wife of Abraham) *Ahl Nūḥ* (family of Noah) *Banāt Lūṭ* (daughters of Lot)
Yūsuf (12)	53rd	*Āl Yaʿqūb* (House of Jacob) *Imraʾat ʿAzīz Miṣr* (wife of the viceroy of Egypt) *Niswatun fī-l-madīnah* (women of the town) *Ahl Yaʿqūb* (family of Jacob) *Abawā Yūsuf* (parents of Joseph)
al-Ḥijr (15)	54th	*Āl Lūṭ* (House of Lot) *Banāt Lūṭ* (daughters of Lot)
Sabaʾ (34)	58th	*āl Dāwūd* (house of David)
al-Dhāriyāt (51)	67th	*Ahl Ibrāhīm* (family of Abraham) *Imraʾat Ibrāhīm* (wife of Abraham)

Ibrāhīm (14)	72nd	*Ahl Ibrāhīm* (family of Abraham) *Wālidā Ibrāhīm* (parents of Abraham)
al-Anbiyāʾ (21)	73rd	*ahl Nūḥ* (family of Noah) *ahl Ayyūb* (family of Job) *imraʾat Zakariyyā* (wife of Zachariah) *Maryam* (Mary, and her son, *ibnuhā*)
al-Muʾminūn (23)		*Maryam* (in "Son of Mary," *Ibn Maryam*)

		Beginning of verses attributed to Medina (*al-Madīnah*)
al-Baqarah (2)	87th	*Zawj Ādam* (spouse of Adam) *Ahl Ibrāhīm* (family of Abraham) *āl Mūsā* (House of Moses) *āl Hārūn* (House of Aaron) *Maryam* (as in "Jesus Son of Mary," *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*)
Āl ʿImrān (3)	89th	*Āl Ibrāhīm* (House of Abraham) *Āl ʿImrān* (House of ʿImrān) *Imraʾat ʿImrān* (wife of ʿImrān) *Maryam* (Mary) *Imraʾat Zakariyyā* (wife of Zachariah)
al-Aḥzāb (33)	90th	*Ummahāt al-Muʾminīn* (Mothers of the Believers, i.e., wives of the Prophet Muhammad) *Azwāj al-Nabī* (wives of the Prophet, i.e., Muhammad) *Ahl al-Bayt* (family or "people of the house" of the Prophet Muhammad) *Nisāʾ al-Nabī* (women of the Prophet, i.e., Muhammad) *Maryam* (as in "Jesus Son of Mary," *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*)
al-Mumtaḥanah (60)	91st	*al-Mumtaḥanah* (She who is tested, said to concern Umm Kulthūm bint ʿUqbah)
al-Nisāʾ (4)	92nd	*Āl Ibrāhīm* (House of Abraham)

		Maryam (Mary) *Maryam* (as in "Jesus Son of Mary," *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*)
al-Ḥadīd (57)	94th	*Maryam* (as in Jesus Son of Mary, *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*)
al-Ṭalāq (65)	99th	(Discussions of divorce therein may have concerned Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb or a woman from among her kin)
al-Nūr (24)	102nd	(Contains verses reported to concern ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr and Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith)
al-Mujādilah (58)	105th	*al-Mujādilah* (she who disputes, reported to concern Khawlah bint Thaʿlaba)
al-Ḥujurāt (49)	106th	(Surah named after the private apartments of the Prophet's wives in Medina)
al-Taḥrīm (66)	107th	*Azwāj al-Nabī* (verses reported to specifically concern Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, potentially also indirectly Māriyah al-Qibṭīyah) *Imraʾat Nūh* (wife of Noah) *Imraʾat Lūṭ* (wife of Lot) *Imraʾat Firʿawn* (wife of Pharaoh, i.e., Āsiyah) *Maryam* (Mary)
al-Ṣaff (61)	109th	*Maryam* (as in "Jesus Son of Mary," *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*)
al-Māʾidah (5)	112th	*Maryam* (as in "Jesus Son of Mary," *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*)

Appendix E

Key Female Relations of the Prophet Muhammad

The following female figures are alluded to within the Qur'an by their relationship to the Prophet; their names are listed below as captured in early biographical literature:

Spouses of the Prophet, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 11/632)[a]

Khadījah bint Khuwaylid

Sawdah bint Zamʿa

ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr

Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb

Zaynab bint Khuzaymah

Umm Salamah, Hind bint Abī Umayyah

Zaynab bint Jaḥsh

Juwayriyah (formerly Barrah) bint al-Ḥārith

Umm Ḥabībah, Ramla bint Abī Sufyān

Ṣafiyyah, Zaynab bint Ḥuyayy b. Akhṭab

Māriyah bint Shamʿūn, aka Māriyah al-Qibṭiyyah (concubine)

Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith

Daughters of Muhammad (*banāt Muḥammad*): Zaynab, Ruqqayyah, Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭimah

[a] This listing does not include reportedly unconsummated marriages.

Additional Female Kinship Relations of the Prophet (Select):

Asmāʾ bint ʿUmays: wife of the Prophet's paternal uncle, Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib

Fāṭimah bint Asad: wife of Prophet's paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib

Ḥamnah bint Jaḥsh: paternal cousin of the Prophet through his aunt Umaymah bint ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib

Ṣafiyyah bint ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib: paternal great aunt of the Prophet, the full sister of famed martyr Ḥamzah b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib

Umaymah bint ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib: paternal great aunt of the Prophet, the full sister of ʿAbd Allāh, Abū Ṭālib, and Zubayr, later the Prophet's mother-in-law through his marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh

Umm al-Faḍl, Lubābah bint al-Ḥarith: wife of the paternal uncle of the Prophet ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, later the Prophet's sister-in-law through his marriage to her full sister Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith

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