

Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority

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Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority

*A Rereading of the Classical Genre of
Qurʾān Commentary*

By

Aisha Geissinger



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Cover illustration: 16th century Ottoman miniature showing Muḥammad (on the right) with a flaming halo; seated with him (from right to left) are: his daughter Fāṭīma, his wives ʿĀ'isha and Umm Salama, as well as his client Umm Ayman. In the foreground is a servant with a gift for Fāṭīma which has miraculously descended from heaven. This scene is from a manuscript of the *Siyer-i Nebi* (Life of the prophet), CBL T 419, f. 40b.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Geissinger, Aisha.

Gender and Muslim constructions of exegetical authority : a rereading of the classical genre of Qur'an commentary / by Aisha Geissinger.

pages cm. — (Islamic history and civilization ; v. 117)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-26935-4 (hardback : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-90-04-29444-8 (e-book) 1. Women transmitters of the Hadith. 2. Hadith—Authorities. 3. Qur'an—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

BP136.485.G424 2015

297.1'25082—dc23

2015009391

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0929-2403

ISBN 978-90-04-26935-4 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-29444-8 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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Acknowledgments

The writing of this book would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of people. Over the course of researching and writing it I have incurred many debts that I am glad to acknowledge.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to those who oversaw this book's initial incarnation. The careful direction, sound advice and support of my thesis advisor Sebastian Günther were indispensable. I am particularly thankful to him for introducing me to literary approaches to reading ḥadīths. Todd Lawson, Michael Marmura and Walid Saleh were on the advisory committee, and I am very grateful for the time and effort that they expended on my behalf. I would like to give special thanks to Walid Saleh for allowing me access to his extensive collection of Quran commentaries in manuscript and print form, which made it possible for me to carry out research of this scope, as well as for giving me a quiet place to research and write. My thanks also go to Camilla Adang, for encouragement and suggestions for sources in the early stages of this project, as well as to Huda Khattab, Nadum Jwad, Barzan Ibrahim, and Lynda Clarke, who helped me to obtain copies of several sources that I needed. Lynda also provided me with a quiet place to write at a critical juncture. Asma Afsaruddin served as the external examiner for my thesis and provided helpful and constructive feedback, for which I am grateful.

A number of individuals also helped make the revision process possible. I am thankful to Sebastian Günther for his helpful advice, as well as for sending me copies of several important sources. I am very grateful to Walid Saleh for reading and commenting on drafts, for his generous sharing of his expertise in *tafsīr* and Arabic, for access to his manuscripts of al-Tha'labī's Quran commentary, and for his constant advice and encouragement throughout. I will never be able to thank him enough. Special thanks go to Laury Silvers for providing me with copies of a number of key biographical sources, for reading and commenting on drafts, and for giving me a quiet place to write for several crucial weeks, as well as for thought-provoking discussions about textual representations of women in classical Muslim sources. I would also like to thank her class, RLG 457S at the University of Toronto (Winter 2013) for their feedback on an earlier draft of Chapter One.

My sincere thanks go to Hinrich Biesterfeldt, Sebastian Günther, and Wadad Kadi for including this book in the Islamic History and Civilization Series, as well as to the two anonymous reviewers, who provided valuable suggestions for improvement and saved me from a number of embarrassing errors. A word of appreciation goes to Kathy van Vliet, Nienke Moolenaar, and Teddi Dols,

editors at Brill, for their assistance during the various stages leading to this book's publication.

Finally, I would like to thank Barbara Stasiuk for her friendship and moral support throughout this process, as well as my children, Hazhaar, Salman, Maryam, and Khadijah for their endurance.

List of Journal Abbreviations

BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
IC	Islamic Culture
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
JAL	Journal of Arabic Literature
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JQS	Journal of Qur'anic Studies
JSAI	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
SI	Studia Islamica

Introduction: The Classical Genre of Quran Commentary, Exegetical Authority, and Gender

Is it possible to chart a history of the pre-modern genre of Quran commentary without considering gender? Or, if one were to attempt to do so, would anything fundamental be omitted?

A number of Quran commentaries from the formative¹ and medieval periods incorporate several different types of exegetical materials attributed to a few female figures from the first century AH/seventh century CE: *āthār*, ḥadīths, legal opinions and variant readings, as well as lines of poetry. Writing over a century ago, Theodor Nöldeke drew attention to the fact that the name of ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr (d. 58/678) appears with noteworthy frequency in the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) of ḥadīths found in some of the Quran commentaries to which he had access.² More recently, Claude Gilliot reiterates this observation of Nöldeke's.³ But what is the place and significance of such exegetical materials within the history of the genre of pre-modern Quran commentary?

This study examines the attribution of exegetical materials to female figures during the formative and early medieval periods, and what this phenomenon indicates about the hermeneutical bases upon which the genre of Quran commentary authored by medieval Sunnīs (and largely, Ash'arīs) came to be built. As will be demonstrated, concepts that are central to pre-modern quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*)—as a process and as a textual genre—are gendered. That is, ways of conceptualizing gender that were widespread during the formative and early medieval periods underpin the historical processes that constructed quranic exegesis as a sacred undertaking, which therefore must be carried out in certain ways, by those who possess the requisite authority. Historical debates as to which hermeneutical approaches to the Quran are appropriate, what ways of doing *tafsīr* are methodologically inferior or unacceptable, as well as what interpretive authority is and who can exercise it were carried out using gendered language and categories.

1 The span of time extending from the lifetime of Muḥammad (d. 11/632) to 338/950 is conventionally designated as the formative period. However, the question of how best to periodize Muslim history is an issue of ongoing debate.

2 Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans* ii, 163 n. 2.

3 Gilliot, The beginnings of quranic exegesis 8.

Moreover, a number of proto-Sunnī and Sunnī Quran commentators from the formative and early medieval periods utilize gendered figures and evocations of gendered spaces (such as the abode of the wives of the prophet) in order to negotiate complex exegetical issues involving social hierarchies, as well as communal and sectarian boundaries. Gender was far from being a marginal concern for pre-modern exegetes; rather, it is central to their visions of a divinely-mandated social order. Therefore, an analysis of how gender functions in their works is in fact an examination of the very foundations of their worldviews.

Valuing the Gecko? Several Key Methodological Questions

The incorporation of exegetical materials attributed to female figures into Quran commentaries is a fascinating historical and literary phenomenon that has received little sustained analytical interest from historical-critical scholars to date.⁴ An important reason for this is the considerable methodological challenges involved in attempting to determine the significance of materials of this type within the overall genre of medieval Quran commentary. These challenges stem from several sources: (1) the many unsolved historical questions about the historicity of the ḥadīth literature, (2) the nature of the genre of medieval Quran commentary itself, as well as the present state of the field of Tafsīr Studies, and (3) the current lack of agreement among historians regarding the relevance of gender for the study of pre-modern Muslim intellectual history.

At this point, I would like to discuss each of these issues in turn, utilizing the following ḥadīth as a point of departure. A version of this ḥadīth is discussed by Norman Calder in his seminal article on the classical genre of Quran commentary.⁵ For reasons that will become apparent, it provides a particularly apt illustration of several facets of the methodological challenges under discussion here:

Ṣaʿīd—Ayyūb—Nāfiʿ—Umm Sayāba al-Anṣāriyya—ʿĀʾisha, (who related)
that the Messenger of God told her that when Abraham was thrown

4 Some aspects of this have been discussed in a preliminary fashion in the following articles: Geissinger, The exegetical traditions of ʿĀʾisha; Geissinger, The portrayal of the *Ḥajj*; Geissinger, ʿĀʾisha bint Abi Bakr. My thinking on a number of facets of this question has evolved significantly as the field of Tafsīr Studies has advanced and I have carried out further research.

5 Calder, Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr.

into the fire, all of the animals tried to extinguish it, with the exception of the gecko. It blew on (the fire), so the Messenger of God ordered that (geckos) be killed.⁶

This ḥadīth is quoted in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, at the conclusion of its commentary on Q 21:69—“But We said, ‘Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham.’”⁷ Abraham’s people are incensed that he has broken all but one of the statues of their deities, and decide to burn him alive, but divine intervention ensures that he is unharmed (Q 21:51–70).

The *isnād* of this ḥadīth (henceforth, “the gecko tradition”) as it is found in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* immediately presents the audience/reader with a question: While most of the names it contains are those of well-known transmitters—Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. 131/713), Nāfiʿ the *mawla* of Ibn ʿUmar (d. 117/735), and ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr⁸—who is Umm Sayāba? A search through the standard biographical works on the Companions⁹ as well as of later ḥadīth transmitters yields no biographical notice for a woman known by this *kunya*.¹⁰ However, the *Sunan Ibn Māja* contains a similar ḥadīth that Sāʾiba, the *mawlat* (client) of al-Fākih b. al-Mughīra is said to have related from ʿĀʾisha.¹¹ “Umm Sayāba” may be a transmitter’s or copyist’s mistake, a result of confusion with the female Companion Umm Sharīk, who is widely credited with having transmitted ḥadīths recounting that the prophet instructed that

6 Yaḥyā b. Sallām, *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* i, 325.

7 Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotations from the Quran in this study follow Abdel Haleem’s translation, though in the interest of clarity, I have often made minor adjustments to the translation.

8 For ʿĀʾisha, see: Muḥammad b. Saʿd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* viii, 63–90; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ* ii, 135–201; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* xii, 384–6.

9 Al-Bukhārī defines a “Companion” (*ṣaḥābī/ṣaḥābīyya*) as any Muslim who saw the prophet Muḥammad and died a Muslim; see: Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. al-Mughīra al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Arabic-English) i, 1. It should be noted that the question of how exactly to define who qualifies as a Companion was debated. A “Successor” (*tābīʾī/tābīʾīyya*) is a Muslim who met a Companion.

10 The works consulted are: the *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), Ibn ʿAbd Barr’s (d. 463/1070) *al-Istīʾāb*, the *Usd al-ghāba* of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), al-Mizzī’s (d. 742/1341) *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, as well as Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī’s (d. 852/1449) *Iṣāba* and *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*.

11 Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd b. Māja al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Māja* ii, 1076 (*K. al-Ṣayd*). For this ḥadīth in the *Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), see below.

geckos be killed,¹² or it might be an attempt at *isnād* “correction.” While there is some debate in classical biographical works about Umm Sharīk’s name and precise identity, she does have a somewhat well-developed persona,¹³ at least in comparison to the *mawlāt* of al-Fākih b. al-Mughīra, who is an elusive figure at best. It is possible that this *mawlāt*—Sā’iba, or possibly Munādiyya, or Šādiqa, or even Sādiyya¹⁴—was a historical person, albeit so obscure that she was remembered for little more than transmitting this one ḥadīth. However, it could also be theorized that Sā’iba receives an entry in al-Mizzī’s *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*¹⁵ due to the presence of this name in the *isnād* of this ḥadīth, which led him to presume that a person of that name had existed.

The historical questions posed by the *isnād* are only multiplied when the body (*matn*) of the gecko tradition is examined. A number of variant versions of this ḥadīth have come down to us, including one recounting that ‘Ā’isha stated that while the prophet spoke disparagingly about geckos, she did not hear him say that they should be killed.¹⁶ Moreover, a search for this ḥadīth in other Quran commentaries under Q 21:69 reveals that the two assertions it makes are separately attributed to different Successors in the Quran commentaries of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and al-Tha’labī (d. 427/1035). Thus al-Ṭabarī recounts that the Successor Qatāda (d. 117/735) said that the only creature that blew on the fire was the gecko, while another Successor, al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) reported that therefore, Muḥammad had instructed that geckos should be killed.¹⁷

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- 12 E.g.: Abū Bakr ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī, *Musnad al-Ḥumaydī* i, 344; Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Shayba, *Al-Muṣannaḥ* vii, 126 (*K. al-Ṣayd*); Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* vi, 484; al-Bukhārī iv, 334 (*K. Bad’ al-khalq*); Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 985 (*K. al-Salām*). Some biographical notices for Umm Sharīk from works conventionally dated to the formative period attribute this ḥadīth to her; see: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 180; Landau-Tasseron, *The history of al-Ṭabarī* xxxix, 204.
- 13 See for example: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 177–82; Yūsuf b. ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Barr, *Al-Istī‘āb fī ma’rifat al-aṣḥāb* iv, 496–7; Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl* xxxv, 367.
- 14 These last three possibilities appear in different manuscripts of Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḥ*; see: Ibn Abī Shayba vii, 127, n. 1 (*K. al-Ṣayd*).
- 15 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 192–193. Significantly, there is no entry for Sā’iba in Ibn Sa’d’s *Ṭabaqāt*.
- 16 Al-Bukhārī iv, 334 (*K. Bad’ al-khalq*).
- 17 Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* xvii, 52. For a fairly similar pattern, see: Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Tha’labī, *Al-Kashf wa-l-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-ma’rūf bi-tafsīr al-Tha’labī* iv, 246.

This raises some obvious questions about the provenance, “original” form and transmission history of this ḥadīth. As is well known, Joseph Schacht concludes that legal traditions with less complete *isnāds* are likely to be older than ḥadīths with *isnāds* extending all the way back to Muḥammad that address the same topics, because the latter were retrojected to the prophet in order that they might function as effective proof-texts in legal debates.¹⁸

The ongoing debates about the authenticity of *isnāds*, and whether any ḥadīths can be dated with confidence to the first/seventh century, as well as about the historical reliability or otherwise of classical biographical dictionaries are too well known to require detailed discussion here.¹⁹ A great deal of effort has been expended by historical-critical scholars on questions of origins and authenticity. In the process, some scholars have attempted to evaluate several well known ḥadīths attributed to early Muslim women—most often, to ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr—that often are quoted in Quran commentaries. The findings of these scholars range from skepticism to cautious optimism.²⁰

In my view, the work of scholars such as Harald Motzki allows for the working assumption that some of the traditions discussed in this study could conceivably be dated as far back as the first/seventh century.²¹ Nonetheless, this study will not attempt to date individual traditions. As Uri Rubin perceptively points out, there is no way to know if a given ḥadīth does in fact go back to the person to whom it is attributed, even if the process of attribution began in his or her lifetime.²² Nor will this study utilize the ḥadīths or other exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in order to attempt to reconstruct early Muslim women’s interpretations of or responses to the Quran. In my view, it is likely impossible to do so due to the myriad historical problems involved. Among these problems are the roles played by authorial selectivity and

18 Schacht, *The origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence* 4ff.

19 For the major features of these debates, particularly as they pertain to ḥadīths found in exegetical works, see: Berg, *The development of exegesis*; for a rejoinder, see: Motzki, The question of the authenticity in *Method and theory* 211–57.

20 On the skeptical side, see for example Goldziher’s assessment of several traditions attributed to ‘Ā’isha that address theological-exegetical controversies in his *Die Richtungen der Islamischen KoranAuslegung* 106–7. For a somewhat more optimistic view as to whether the well-known tradition recounting the story of the slander against ‘Ā’isha might go back to her, see: Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie* 153. As we will see, versions of this tradition often appear in classical Sunnī Quran commentaries as part of the discussion of Q 24:11ff.

21 Motzki, *The origins of Islamic jurisprudence*; see also his article: The *Muṣannaḥ* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq.

22 Rubin, *The eye of the beholder* 249–50.

framing in decisively shaping which exegetical materials attributed to female figures came to be recorded in writing, as well as what they appear to “mean.”²³

While the origins and dating of ḥadīths have received the lion’s share of critical scholarly attention to date, questions related to their literary aspects as well as their reception history have unfortunately not attracted the same level of interest until recently. However, several studies demonstrate that there is much to be gained from a detailed examination of the literary structures and contents of individual ḥadīths²⁴ as well as of the multifaceted history of their reception.²⁵

In this study, modern literary approaches will be used in order to examine the various types of “cultural labour”²⁶ that ḥadīths (as well as other types of exegetical materials attributed to female figures) which are quoted in works that comment on the Quran perform.²⁷ *Isnāds* will be read primarily as literary devices;²⁸ accordingly, our main focus is on what they can tell us about the gendered dimensions of how selected exegetes in the second/eighth century and later elected to memorialize the first few generations of Muslims as sources of materials deemed relevant to Quran commentary. While classical biographical dictionaries²⁹ will be used in order to identify persons mentioned in *isnāds*, they will be read with attention to the literary shaping that their contents have undergone.³⁰

With these points in mind, it can be observed that taken together, ḥadīth compilations and biographical dictionaries present a composite picture of specific ḥadīths as well as the early Muslims who are reported to have transmitted them, variously positioning them on a spectrum ranging from well known to obscure, as well as on a spectrum ranging from more to less reliable. For several

23 Brenner observes that “embedding, by definition, affects the indigenous sense of the source text”; see her article: M text authority in biblical love lyrics 137.

24 E.g.: Beaumont, *Hard-boiled: Narrative discourse in early Muslim traditions*; Günther, *Fictional narration and imagination*; see also his article: *Modern literary theory*.

25 See for example: Brown, *The canonization of al-Bukhārī*.

26 I owe this expression to Afsaneh Najmabadi; see her monograph, *Women with mustaches* 1. For more on the concept of “cultural labour,” see below.

27 For the use of literary approaches to non-literary texts, see: Günther, *Introduction* esp. xvi–xx.

28 For the *isnād* as a literary device, see: Berg, *Competing paradigms* 275.

29 For an overview of this genre, see: al-Qadi, *Biographical dictionaries*.

30 For some of the problems involved in mining biographical dictionaries as sources of “pure information,” see: Malti-Douglas, *Dreams, the blind, and the semiotics*. For evidence of literary shaping in entries devoted to several female Companions in order to downplay “controversial” aspects of their personae, see: Afsaruddin, *The first Muslims* 161ff.

reasons already noted, the version of the gecko tradition under discussion here is located at the lower ends of these spectra. Whatever the historical accuracy of such determinations, they are an important aspect of the reception history of this particular ḥadīth, and form part of the background of its presence or absence in exegetical works.

Assessing the significance of the gecko tradition within the classical *tafsīr* genre as a whole is a challenging task, to say the least. It seems that the earliest surviving example of this ḥadīth being quoted in a Quran commentary is in the *tafsīr* reportedly authored by Yaḥyā b. Sallām (d. 200/815). As is well known, questions relating to the origins and early development of quranic commentary have long been the focus of much attention in Tafsīr Studies,³¹ and it is apparent that a number of historical issues are involved in interpreting the significance of the quotation of the gecko tradition in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* as it has come down to us.

According to the classical biographical literature, Yaḥyā was a scholar from Baṣra who settled in Ifrīqiyya, where “(people) heard from him his *tafsīr*.”³² The word “*tafsīr*” in such a context could be taken to mean that he simply engaged in oral explanation of the Quran (without, however, producing any written text), or that he wrote a commentary, which he also taught.³³ Gregor Schoeler’s research on several different types of sources conventionally dated to the formative period points to a difference between the written personal notes used by some teachers and transmitters and formal written texts in which the contents and order are fixed.³⁴ The printed edition of the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* was prepared using manuscripts from Tunisian libraries which have been dated to the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, and these appear to be the oldest that have survived.³⁵ Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether or not the gecko tradition was “originally” part of Yaḥyā’s exegesis of Q 21:69.

31 There are numerous studies addressing various facets of the debate. Positions range from dating the beginnings of quranic commentary to the first/seventh century, to a rejection of the historicity of any *isnāds* (whether of individual exegetical ḥadīths, or of exegetical works) prior to 200/815. For an overview of these debates that takes a skeptical position, see: Berg, *Development*, esp. 65–111. For fairly “centrist” attempts to outline early stages of quranic exegesis that take these debates into consideration, see: Gilliot, *Beginnings* 1–27; Shah, *Introduction* 3–16, 53–61.

32 “*wa-samī’ū minhu tafsīrahu*” (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* ix, 397). Similarly: Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn* 549.

33 For these two senses of the word in classical texts’ discussions of reputed exegetes of the formative period, see: Gilliot, *Beginnings* 2–3.

34 Schoeler, *The oral and the written in early Islam*.

35 Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums* i, 39; Shalabī, *Introduction* i, 21–4.

While the existence of two Quran commentaries that are based on the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*—that authored by the third/ninth century Ṭbāḍī exegete, Hūd b. Muḥakkam (or Muḥkim),³⁶ as well as the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Zamanīn (d. 399/1008)—might be expected to provide an indication, unfortunately neither quotes this ḥadīth in their discussions of this verse.

Given the well-known methodological problems involved in utilizing *tafsīr* texts conventionally dated to the second/eighth century in any historical study, it might well be asked what sorts of results can be expected. Debate continues regarding the age and provenance as well as history of redaction of a number of the exegetical works used in this study, which will be noted as we proceed. Moreover, a significant number of *tafsīr* texts that were reportedly authored during the formative period do not appear to have survived to the present day,³⁷ and it is unclear how representative those exegetical works that have come down to us might be of what once existed. Conclusions about the state of quranic exegesis in the second/eighth century are thus unavoidably provisional. Nonetheless, fragmentary as our evidence from this period is, it can provide some insight into the historical background of the fascinating phenomenon apparent in some third/ninth century *tafsīr* works: the quotation of a small yet noticeable number of ḥadīths, *āthār* and several other types of exegetical materials ascribed to women.

While there is usually little controversy about the dating of *tafsīr* texts from third/ninth century and later, these works present another type of challenge: how to go about assessing significance. When even the place of mammoth Quran commentaries themselves within the classical *tafsīr* genre is a question of debate (as we will see), how can the significance of individual ḥadīths or other exegetical materials attributed to early Muslim women within this genre be determined?

Norman Calder observes that classical *tafsīr* involves the systematic juxtaposition of the quranic text and the disciplines involved in the study of the Arabic language (such as grammar, vocabulary, syntax and rhetoric) as well as other medieval Muslim fields of religious learning: law, theology, eschatology, prophetic biography (i.e. of Muḥammad as well as of earlier prophets), and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*).³⁸ He demonstrates that the hermeneutical approach employed and promoted by late medieval Quran commentator Ibn Kathīr

36 For Hūd's commentary, see: Gilliot, *Le commentaire coranique*. For more on Ibn Abī Zamanīn, see Chapter Two.

37 See for example the list of non-extant *tafsīr* works utilized by al-Tha'labī in his Quran commentary in: Saleh, *The formation of the classical tafsīr* 245–9.

38 Calder, *Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr 105–6.

(d. 774/1372) attempts to displace centuries of commentators' intellectually rich reflections on the quranic text in favour of a much narrower interpretive approach primarily focused on the citation of traditions. Calder presents the gecko tradition as an apt illustration of how Ibn Kathīr's hermeneutic results in the foregrounding of inherited material that is "marginal" as well as in itself "trivial." Despite its inconsequential nature, because the gecko tradition takes the form of a ḥadīth that appears to have some tangential relationship to an aspect of the quranic text, it is treated by Ibn Kathīr as though it merits serious and sustained attention.³⁹

Here, Calder raises the important question of how to assess significance—primarily, at the level of individual Quran commentaries in relation to the *tafsīr* genre, but also at the level of the single tradition or other item of exegetical material that is quoted in one or more Quran commentaries. More recently, Walid Saleh has further pursued the former issue. Demonstrating that the classical *tafsīr* genre is "fundamentally genealogical,"⁴⁰ his study of al-Tha'labī's Quran commentary is based on both a macro level and a micro level reading of that text. At the macro level, he reads al-Tha'labī's *tafsīr* in concert with several other Quran commentaries, in order to situate it within the *tafsīr* genre. The micro level reading is a close reading of the work itself. These two types of reading are complimentary and intertwined.⁴¹ In my view, this approach can be adapted to the task of attempting to gauge the significance of a single ḥadīth or other item of exegetical material within the *tafsīr* genre: On the macro level, the presence or absence of this ḥadīth (or other item) in Quran commentaries can be traced down through the centuries. A micro level reading examines its textual functions in the passage in which it is quoted.

For example, in order to read the gecko tradition on the macro level, we determine its presence and absence in Quran commentaries. One or another version of it is quoted as part of the interpretive discourse on Q 21:68–69 by the following Quran commentators: Yaḥyā b. Sallām, Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938),⁴²

39 Calder, *Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr 115–27.

40 "One cannot study any given Qur'ān commentary in isolation. It has to be seen in conjunction with the tradition that produced it and the influences it left behind. . . . Soon, a pattern emerges in each commentary that shows both its indebtedness to the [interpretive] tradition and its variance from it" (Saleh, *Formation* 15). For further discussion of this issue, see: Saleh, Preliminary remarks 18–20.

41 Saleh, *Formation* 11.

42 Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm musnad^{an} 'an Rasūl Allāh wa-l-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābi'īn* viii, 2456.

al-Samarqandī (d. 375/985),⁴³ al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122),⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr,⁴⁵ al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)⁴⁶ and al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834).⁴⁷ When these results are considered in light of the “fundamentally genealogical” nature of the classical *tafsīr* genre, as well as with attention to the differences and interrelationships between what Walid Saleh terms “encyclopedic” and “*madrasa*-style” Quran commentaries, several patterns emerge.

First, the gecko tradition (i.e. in the form of a ḥadīth rather than as a report attributed to a Successor) was not quoted in any of the encyclopedic commentaries used in this study.⁴⁸ Encyclopedic commentaries are typically large, multi-volume works that incorporate a wide variety of materials and possible interpretations, presenting a polyvalent discourse on the Quran’s meanings.⁴⁹ They fit the profile of a classical *tafsīr* work provided in Norman Calder’s above-mentioned article. Examples include the Quran commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha’labī as well as of al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944).⁵⁰ Even a late medieval encyclopedic commentator like al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), who includes a significant number of ḥadīths from well-known Sunnī ḥadīth collections in his commentary, does not elect to quote the gecko tradition in his discussion of Q 21:68–9. Rather, he opts to follow al-Tha’labī in briefly attributing the claim that all creatures tried to extinguish the fire except for the gecko, so the prophet instructed that geckos be killed, to several Successors—Ka’b, Qatāda and al-Zuhri.⁵¹

43 Abū l-Layth Naṣr b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā Baḥr al-‘ulūm* ii, 372.

44 Al-Ḥusayn b. Mas‘ūd al-Farrā’ al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā Ma‘ālim al-tanzīl* iii, 221.

45 Norman Calder’s discussion of Ibn Kathīr’s exegetical use of the gecko tradition focuses on its multiple quotations in the latter’s *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*. Ibn Kathīr also includes a version of this ḥadīth in his Quran commentary; see: ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū l-Fidā’ b. Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm* v, 205. All references to Ibn Kathīr’s Quran commentary are to this edition, unless otherwise specified.

46 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-manthūr fī l-tafsīr al-ma’tūr* v, 638–9. Al-Suyūṭī includes two versions of this ḥadīth.

47 Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-qadīr al-jāmi‘ bayna fannay al-riwāya wa-l-dirāya min ‘ilm al-tafsīr* 138.

48 The discussion of Q 21:68–69 in the encyclopedic commentaries of the following exegetes were consulted: al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Tha’labī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Wāhidī (his *al-Basīṭ*), Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī and Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī.

49 For the characteristics of encyclopedic commentaries, see: Saleh, *Formation* 17–21; Saleh, Preliminary remarks 20.

50 For more on these particular works, see below.

51 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi‘ li-l-aḥkām al-Qur’ān* xi, 304.

Madrasa-style Quran commentaries, however, are dependent on encyclopedic Quran commentaries in several ways: they emerged after the development of encyclopedic *tafsīr* works, and they were often intended to summarize the main ideas in them, thus providing a type of commentary more suited to teaching or quick reference. Examples include al-Samarqandī's *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, al-Baghawī's *Maʿālim al-tanzīl* and al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 791/1388) *Anwār al-tanzīl*.⁵² Or, in contradistinction to encyclopedic Quran commentaries, some *madrasa*-style *tafsīr* works present more monovalent approaches to quranic exegesis reflecting particular theological or hermeneutical stances—such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr* and al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *Al-Kashshāf*, as well as Sufi commentaries.⁵³

Most of the Quran commentaries that elect to quote the gecko tradition belong to the *madrasa*-style category. Moreover, in most cases, their so doing is not so much a reflection of this ḥadīth's (marginal) presence in some Sunnī exegetical discourses (except possibly in the case of al-Samarqandī), as it is an indication of their affiliation with a particular hermeneutical approach to the Quran—that based entirely on the citation of traditions. This method of interpretation appears to have flourished in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries in particular, and was promoted by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) as well as his student Ibn Kathīr. Nonetheless, it remained hermeneutically marginal until the twentieth century CE.⁵⁴ Ibn Abī Ḥātim employs this approach in his Quran commentary, in which he endeavours to interpret the Quran by quoting traditions reliably transmitted from the prophet, the Companions, the Successors, and the Successors of the Successors (in that order).⁵⁵

Ibn Abī Ḥātim's decision to include the gecko tradition in his commentary could be understood as a straightforward reflection of his hermeneutical theory, according to which a ḥadīth with a complete *isnād* extending back to

52 Yet another example is Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1200) *Zād al-masīr*, which he wrote so as to enable students to memorize it. For his hermeneutics, see: McAuliffe, Ibn al-Jawzī's exegetical propaedeutic 107.

53 Saleh, *Formation* 21–2; Saleh, Preliminary remarks 21. This is not to imply that particular theological, sectarian or hermeneutical perspectives did not shape the contents of encyclopedic commentaries, as will become evident.

54 For an overview of the historical development of this approach, as well as its main representatives, see: Saleh, Preliminary remarks 25–30. However, for reasons discussed in Chapter Four, I do not agree that the *tafsīr* chapters found in several third/ninth century Sunnī ḥadīth compilations should be deemed to belong to this hermeneutical category.

55 Ibn Abī Ḥātim i, 14. For a translation of Ibn Abī Ḥātim's introduction to his commentary with a few brief remarks on his hermeneutic, see: Dickinson, *The development* 37. For more on this commentator, see below.

Muḥammad is to be preferred over an interpretation that is attributed to one or more Successors. However, given the fact that as we have seen, its *isnād* contains a very obscure transmitter, his inclusion of this ḥadīth should probably be seen as an instance of his departure from his stated methodology. Given the shortage of available prophetic ḥadīth with sound *isnāds* that deal directly with the interpretation of the Quran, Ibn Abī Ḥātim had to make concessions to this reality by admitting ḥadīths deemed to be less reliable, if he was to be able to provide anything approaching a complete exegesis of the Quran.⁵⁶ In any case, the gecko tradition is in turn quoted directly from Ibn Abī Ḥātim by Ibn Kathīr, al-Suyūṭī (in his *Durr al-manthūr*) and al-Shawkānī.⁵⁷ Al-Suyūṭī also includes another version of the gecko tradition credited to Umm Sharīk, on the authority of the exegete Ibn Mardawayh (d. 410/1019).⁵⁸ All of these Quran commentators attempted to follow a ḥadīth-based approach to quranic exegesis. Thus, most available evidence points to the comparative marginality of the gecko tradition historically within classical Sunnī exegetical discourses.

Nonetheless, it is also cited by al-Baghawī in his *tafsīr*. This work, which belongs to the medieval Sunnī exegetical mainstream,⁵⁹ was evidently quite popular in the centuries following its writing. It summarizes the Quran commentary of al-Thaʿlabī, while replacing unreliable ḥadīths found in the latter with comparatively sound ones.⁶⁰ Its citation in al-Baghawī gave the gecko tradition a toe-hold within the Sunnī exegetical mainstream. Nonetheless, once again, it did not survive epitomisation; al-Khāzin's (725/1324) summarised version of al-Baghawī's *tafsīr* does not quote this ḥadīth in its discussion of Q 21:68–9.⁶¹

Reading the gecko tradition on the micro level involves examining its position and function(s) within the text in which it is quoted. In the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* it is not cited until the very end of the discussion of Q 21:69.

56 For Ibn Abī Ḥātim's usage of ḥadīths transmitted by unknown persons or persons of dubious reliability, see: Koç, *Isnāds and rijāl* expertise 155ff.

57 The latter two also mention that this ḥadīth appears in several ḥadīth compilations, including those of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Abū Yaʿlā (d. 307/919), and al-Ṭabarānī (360/971). Al-Shawkānī also notes its presence in the ḥadīth compilations of Ibn Māja and Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) respectively.

58 For Ibn Mardawayh's Quran commentary, see: Saleh, *Formation* 3 n. 6, 210, 217 n. 47, 226. This work does not appear to have survived.

59 The version that al-Baghawī cites is credited to Umm Sharīk, and its *isnād* indicates that he received it through oral transmission. Apparently, he is neither quoting Ibn Abī Ḥātim nor ḥadīth compilations.

60 Saleh, *Formation* 209, n. 17; Saleh, Preliminary remarks 20.

61 For al-Khāzin's Quran commentary, see: Saleh, *Formation* 209; Shah, Introduction 37–8.

The gecko tradition is an anecdote of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the prophets) genre that has been given a complete *isnād*, so that unlike most materials of this type, it is related on the authority of Muḥammad rather than one or another of the Successors. Nonetheless, it is best described as an etiological myth. It links the notion that geckos belong to the category of creatures that are bothersome or harmful to humans in some way, and thus should be killed,⁶² with the Abraham story, which provides the justification for this classification.

This ḥadīth is not quoted in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* in order to provide a direct explication of Q 21:69—"But We said, 'Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham.'" Rather, it is an example of what Walid Saleh terms "adjacent interpretation." In this type of interpretation, a theme or word appearing in a given quranic verse is expanded upon by the Quran commentator through the quotation of one or more ḥadīths.⁶³ Here, the gecko tradition not only briefly summarizes the tale about all of the creatures trying to extinguish the fire (with the exception of the gecko), but it links two periods of the community's sacred past—the lifetimes of Abraham and Muḥammad, respectively—by referring to a very mundane aspect of daily life: dealing with "pests." In so doing, it connects sacred story to the lived realities of the audience/reader. Its main exegetical function within the text is therefore pietistic.

The tools for measuring significance that we have been discussing up to this point provide the starting points for the foundations of what could be termed a topographical map of some parts of the famously immense genre of classical *tafsīr*. Such a map is indispensable in order to begin to analyze the significance and textual functions of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures within this genre. However, as the scale of this map unsurprisingly renders these exegetical materials virtually invisible, the challenge becomes how to study them within the context of the classical *tafsīr* genre without inadvertently distorting their place within the overall historical picture.

In pre-modern Quran commentaries from the Sunnī exegetical "mainstream," the quotation of ḥadīths is only one interpretive tool among many. While historically *tafsīr* consisting of little more than narrating ḥadīths was exegetically marginal, its present prominence is very much linked to the modern

62 Creatures belonging to this category include: scorpions, rats and crows, as well as rabid dogs and some types of snakes; e.g.: al-Bukhārī iii, 33–5 (*Abwāb al-Muḥṣar wa-jazā' al-ṣayd*); iv, 334–5 (*K. Bad' al-khalq*).

63 Saleh, *Formation* 195–6.

rise of Salafi-influenced interpretations of Islam.⁶⁴ An undue focus on ḥadīths in exegesis can thus risk overinflating their significance, or even falling into an ahistorical theologically-flavored approach to Muslim intellectual history. This is even more of a possibility when examining those ḥadīths attributed to female figures, as these only comprise a very small proportion of the total number of traditions quoted in pre-modern exegetical works and moreover have often been highlighted for various theological-confessional reasons from the twentieth century onward.

For example, two books purporting to present ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr’s commentary on the Quran were published in the 1990’s. Both books are modern compilations of traditions credited to her that are deemed relevant to exegesis; each is arranged as though it were a ḥadīth-based Quran commentary.⁶⁵ A recent book by a Deobandi *‘ālim* calls attention to several medieval Muslim women who reportedly achieved a high level of proficiency in the Quran’s readings (*qirā’āt*), or studied its meanings. He also presents ḥadīths credited to Umm Salama and especially to ‘Ā’isha that are quoted in exegetical works as examples of women’s *tafsīr*.⁶⁶ In publications of this type, which are primarily aimed at lay Muslim audiences, the chief significance of such ḥadīths (or such medieval women) is their potential usefulness as evidence in contemporary Muslim debates about gender.

Although some of the exegetical materials ascribed to women that will be discussed in this study pertain to key exegetical issues, have been widely quoted in classical *tafsīr* works, and are credited to well-known female figures, many such items lack some or all of these characteristics—and with these, the problem of historical significance is particularly acute. Once again, the gecko tradition provides an apt illustration of this. As we have seen, the name of its female transmitter is rendered differently in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, the *Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abī Shayba and the *Sunan Ibn Mā’ja*, and practically nothing is reported about her by biographers beyond stating that she transmitted this ḥadīth. I term such historically indeterminate and indeterminable female figures “obscuras.” The vagaries of manuscript transmission tend to disproportionately affect such obscuras—for their name(s) to drop out, or even be rendered male. Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes the same version of the gecko tradition

64 For a critical survey of several recent Arabic-language works on the history of quranic exegesis, see: Saleh, Preliminary remarks 6–17. For a study of a twentieth-century Sunnī (non-Salafī) historical overview of *tafsīr*, see: Saleh, Marginalia and peripheries.

65 See: Sa’ūd b. ‘Abdallāh al-Fanīsān, *Marwīyyāt Umm al-Mu’minīn ‘Ā’isha*; ‘Abdallāh Abū l-Sa’ūd Badr, *Tafsīr Umm al-Mu’minīn ‘Ā’isha*.

66 See: Nadwi, *Al-Muḥaddithāt* 275–7.

that is found in Ibn Abī Shayba and Ibn Māja, except that as his Quran commentary has come down to us, this *mawlāt* is left unnamed. It is unclear why; it is possible that her name dropped out in the process of transmission of the work. Ibn Kathīr quotes Ibn Abī Ḥātim directly when he includes this ḥadīth in his Quran commentary. Some surviving manuscripts of Ibn Kathīr's Quran commentary simply state that this was related from "the *mawlāt* of al-Fākih b. al-Mughīra," but a couple render it as "*mawlā*"—i.e. a male client of al-Fākih's.⁶⁷

In addition to the obvious historical problems (as discussed above) that anomalies of this type present, they also raise interpretive questions. Perhaps in the very act of examining the textual functions of ḥadīths ascribed to women such as the gecko tradition, we over-value them? Why devote sustained attention to material that is often marginal on multiple levels? I would argue that studying what is comparatively marginal or even widely regarded as dispensable in a given historical context can provide significant, even at times unparalleled insight into the worldviews of the time, as reflected in its constructions of memory. As Jan Assmann observes, forgetting is an essential component of remembering, because "[r]emembering means pushing other things into the background, making distinctions, obliterating many things in order to shed light on others."⁶⁸

This study examines the various types of "cultural labour" that exegetical materials attributed to female figures perform in *tafsīr* works. Afsaneh Najmabadi uses this expression in her explanation as to how writing Iranian women's history differs from using gender as an analytical category in Iranian historical studies. Adapting the questions that she poses about early modern Iranian history to my research, I ask: what cultural labour did gender perform in the making of the classical Sunnī *tafsīr* genre, and how? If concepts that are central to the development and methodologies of pre-modern quranic exegesis are gendered, how are they gendered, and what effects did their genderedness produce?⁶⁹

Within the fields of Quranic and Tafsīr Studies, a commonly held assumption has been that pre-modern quranic scholarship was almost exclusively a

67 Abū l-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* v, ed. Muḥammad al-Salāma 1997, 352, n. 10.

68 Assmann, *Religion and cultural memory* 3.

69 The original wording of these questions posed by Najmabadi is: "What work did gender do in the making of Iranian modernity, and how did it perform this cultural labor? If central concepts of Iranian modernity were gendered, *how* were they gendered, and *what* effects did their genderedness produce..." (*Women with mustaches* 1). The italics are in the original.

male domain. “Gender” has also often been implicitly equated with “women,” with the resultant tendency to presume that gender is only a relevant factor in the academic study of the Quran or its history of interpretation when female figures (such as Mary) or matters directly pertaining to women (such as veiling or marriage) are mentioned in the text. As a result, gender has typically been treated as a specialized sub-topic in Tafsīr Studies rather than as an integral aspect of the history of the classical genre of quranic exegesis.

The presumption that pre-modern quranic scholarship was almost entirely a male domain is accurate in the sense that this is how it typically presents itself. In medieval biographical dictionaries of exegetes, Quran reciters, and other specialists of various aspects of quranic study, entries for women are virtually absent. Farid Esack characterises the study of the Quran by medieval and modern Muslims (as well as by others) in terms of a heterosexual male approach to a female body.⁷⁰ While such a characterisation can become a justification for treating Muslim approaches to the Quran in an androcentric way, literally consigning any evidence of women’s involvement to the footnotes, it can also draw our attention to the fact that the entire enterprise of quranic exegesis (as well as the field of Tafsīr Studies) is far from being gender-neutral. On the contrary, its foundational concepts are based on gendered notions that have more often been taken for granted than critically examined.

Gender is a social construction, and gendered categories, whether of persons or concepts, take different forms in various cultural, religious and historical contexts. As Judith Butler contends, the conceptions of gender that any society has are not “natural” or simple reflections of human biology. On the contrary, gender categories (such as “male” and “female”) are historically contingent, and have to be constantly (re)created and performed on both individual and societal levels through a variety of means, such as bodily practices, attire, and legal strictures.⁷¹ Rather than simply engaging in the regulation of self-evidently, always already-existing “men” and “women” through their interpretations of quranic strictures, exegetes textually negotiate and (re)construct gender—including (if not especially) the gender categories that they them-

70 Esack, *The Quran: A short introduction* 1–10. For the assertion that classical Muslim epistemology in general conceived of knowing as akin to (a man’s) unveiling of a female body, see: Saleh, *The woman as a locus* 140.

71 Butler, *Gender trouble*, esp. 32–3. A pioneering article that applies such insights to early modern Iranian history is Najmabadi’s *Beyond the Americas*. For an introduction to some of the debates that Butler’s ideas on gender performance have sparked, see: Hall, *Queer theories* 72–6.

selves attempt to inhabit.⁷² Therefore, treating gendered concepts or gendered figures in *tafsīr* works as though these do not require historicisation or critical analysis tends to involve reading such texts on the basis of ahistorical (and often implicitly theologically-based) assumptions.

While from time to time, this study does touch on the question of what fragments of information have survived that might tell us about a few, mostly elite pre-modern women's historical access to or involvement with various aspects of quranic interpretation, this is not an attempt to reconstruct such a history. As the gecko tradition illustrates, the historical problems involved in any reconstruction of the situation during the formative period would be legion. This is in and of itself very telling about the ways that the past is gendered when it is memorialized in the pre-modern *tafsīr* genre, as well as in classical works related to various aspects of the study and interpretation of the Quran. In addition, it should be noted that this study deliberately departs from the convention of quarrying the past in order to build something in the present. In my view, it is both possible and valid to appreciate the past on its own terms.

The *Tafsīr* Texts Used in this Study

A number of exegetical works conventionally dated to the second/eighth century are used in this study to varying extents. As has been already noted, there are longstanding debates about the origins, dating and redaction history of these texts.⁷³ Barring the discovery of new materials that can be dated with certainty, these issues may never be definitively resolved. In this study, no position is taken on the age of particular second/eighth century works. References to, say, Muqātil's *tafsīr* are to be understood as expressions of convenience, not as definitive statements on the age of the work. The state of the debate with regard to particular exegetical works will be referred to as the discussion proceeds. The aim is to avoid getting bogged down with individual texts, and to survey the wider picture to the extent that this is possible. Given these well-known historical problems, it must be borne in mind that the seeming glimpse that these sources present of quranic exegesis in its early stages is at

72 Such textual constructions are neither unique to either classical Muslim texts nor to *tafsīr* works. For textual constructions of gender in rabbinic Jewish writings, see: Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*; Peskowitz, *Spinning fantasies*. For textual constructions of gender in early modern Iran, see: Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches*.

73 For a recent summary of these debates, see: Shah, Introduction 53–61. These *tafsīr* texts will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

best a highly selective one, which has passed through multiple layers of filtration before it reaches us. All we have is what later generations of subsequent Muslim scholars deemed worthy of preservation, most often, in only one surviving recension, which may not have been the most “complete” or “accurate” one.

In view of the considerable challenges involved in working with ostensibly early *tafsīr* texts and the many unanswered historical questions surrounding them, it might well be asked why this study examines them in such detail rather than, say, making the focus of this project an analysis of the exegetical materials attributed to women in a classical Quran commentary whose date of composition and history of transmission are not topics of ongoing debate. There are several important reasons for choosing to do so.

By far the majority of such exegetical materials credited to female figures in classical *tafsīr* works are ascribed to female Companions and (much less often) to female Successors. It should be emphasized that this is the inverse of the situation for male authorities who are cited by name in classical Sunnī Quran commentaries belonging to the exegetical “mainstream,” in which male Companions are clearly outnumbered by male Successors, who are in turn outnumbered by a profusion of later male figures ranging from grammarians to jurists.⁷⁴ A number of the exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in the Quran commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī (for instance) are related on the authority of or *via* second/eighth century authorities who are said to have authored a *tafsīr* text, and in some cases, it would seem that such texts have come down to us. Whether or not all the historical questions associated with these texts can ever be definitively resolved, they do end up being granted what could be termed an existence in memory in the classical *tafsīr* genre.⁷⁵ Moreover, certain patterns in the citation and use of exegetical materials attributed to female figures which characterise some classical Quran commentaries are also apparent in *tafsīr* texts conventionally dated to the formative period. These factors make such ostensibly early exegetical works directly relevant to the study of literary invocations of the sacred past through quotations of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in classical Quran commentaries.

For these reasons, the formative period as well as the *tafsīr* texts conventionally dated to it loom much larger in any historical study of exegetical materials

74 For an overview of the roles in exegesis attributed to some of these figures from the formative period from the Companions to various early grammarians in classical Sunnī *tafsīr* works, see: Shah, Introduction 5–16.

75 As in al-Thaʿlabī’s list of sources that he used, for example. For more on this, see Chapter Two.

ascribed to female figures in a work belonging to the classical *tafsīr* genre than it would if the focus of attention were exegetical materials attributed to male figures. While our findings are necessarily provisional, the aim here is to lay the groundwork for future research on representations of female figures as sources of materials deemed relevant to exegesis in medieval Quran commentaries, setting out what can be known at present about the early development of this phenomenon and opening up new avenues of investigation.

In this study, I have utilized several encyclopedic *tafsīr* works from the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries extensively: the Quran commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), and al-Thaʿlabī.

With its famously extensive quotation of traditions as well as a significant number of variant quranic readings, the commentary of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī⁷⁶ is an important witness for the incorporation of several types of exegetical materials credited to women into Sunnī exegetical discourses in the third/ninth century.⁷⁷ Moreover, the inclusion of a given item of exegetical material credited to a woman in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* is at times a fairly accurate predictor of whether it will be quoted in several later Quran commentaries. In part, this is because their authors utilized al-Ṭabarī to various extents, though in some cases the more salient factor is likely that the item in question was well known in exegetical circles.

Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī (in his *Durr*) cite al-Ṭabarī extensively,⁷⁸ as does al-Shawkānī. More importantly, several *tafsīr* works belonging to the Sunnī exegetical mainstream also use him. Al-Māwardī's (d. 450/1058) *Al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn* is based on al-Ṭabarī, while another *madrasa* Quran commentary, Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1200) *Zād al-masīr*, also cites him. The encyclopedic Quran commentary of Ibn ʿAṭīyya (d. 546/1151)⁷⁹ makes significant use of al-Ṭabarī, and al-Qurṭubī also quotes from the latter now and again.

76 For him, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 374–9. For a study of his Quran commentary, see: Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam*. For several theological aspects of his exegesis, see: Shah, Al-Ṭabarī and the dynamics of *tafsīr*. See also the bibliography of the latter article for a recent list of studies of al-Ṭabarī and his exegesis.

77 For al-Ṭabarī's hermeneutics, see: McAuliffe, Quranic hermeneutics. However, it should be noted that al-Ṭabarī's commentary is not an example of *tafsīr bi-l-maʿthūr*; see: Saleh, Marginalia 297–8. For a history of the term “*tafsīr bi-l-maʿthūr*,” see: Saleh, Preliminary remarks 31–7.

78 Saleh, *Formation* 208.

79 For Ibn ʿAṭīyya's importance in charting the history of *tafsīr*, see: Saleh, Marginalia 301, 303. For a brief discussion of his approach to exegesis, see: Shah, Introduction 36.

The Quran commentary of Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī al-Naysābūrī⁸⁰ includes a wide variety of early exegetical materials in his commentary. As al-Thaʿlabī's *tafsīr* is independent of al-Ṭabarī's, reading these two works in tandem is key to determining what exegetical materials credited to female figures were in circulation among exegetes during the formative period.⁸¹ Moreover, it appears that al-Thaʿlabī had a notably more significant role in the subsequent development of the classical *tafsīr* genre than al-Ṭabarī.⁸² The following Quran commentaries depend to varying extents on al-Thaʿlabī: al-Wāḥidī's (d. 486–1076) *al-Wasīṭ*, al-Baghawī (and through al-Baghawī, al-Khāzin), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and al-Qurtubī.⁸³ Moreover, the extent of al-Thaʿlabī's influence is yet to be fully determined. He is cited in Ibn ʿAṭīyya's *tafsīr*. Reference is sometimes made to al-Thaʿlabī's commentary in sources where the secondary literature has not led us to expect this.⁸⁴ Interestingly, his *tafsīr* is quoted on the margins of some Quran manuscripts from northern Nigeria (Borno Sultanate) written in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, so it apparently had at least a limited circulation there at that time.⁸⁵ In my research, I have found that the inclusion of a given item of exegetical material credited to a female figure in al-Thaʿlabī's Quran commentary can be considered a likely predictor that a version of this item will also reappear sooner or later in at least one (or more) of the *tafsīr* works that quote him.⁸⁶

80 For him, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 50–1. For a study of his commentary, see: Saleh, *Formation*.

81 Saleh, *Formation* 8–9.

82 Saleh, *Formation* 4–5. For the origins of the notion that al-Ṭabarī's commentary played a key role in the development of the classical Sunnī *tafsīr* genre, see: Saleh, *Marginalia* 298–9.

83 Saleh, *Formation*, 208ff. Al-Wāḥidī was al-Thaʿlabī's student (Saleh, *Formation* 28). For al-Wāḥidī's Quran commentaries, see: Saleh, *The last of the Nishapuri School*. For a study on al-Zamakhsharī, see: Lane, *A traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān*.

84 For instance, in the *tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Zamanīn, Ibn al-Jawzī's *Zād al-masīr*, and al-Suyūṭī's *Durr al-manthūr*.

85 Bondarev, *Arabic and Old Kenembu tafsīr*.

86 As the printed version of al-Thaʿlabī's *tafsīr* used in this study is not a critical edition, in every instance where my contentions depend on the *isnād* of a given tradition or on the precise wording of its *matn*, or where the *isnāds* or wordings of traditions appearing in the printed edition seemed doubtful, I checked them against manuscript copies of the work: Veliyuddin Efendi, nos. 131, 132 and 133 (henceforth, VE), and Maḥmūdiyya, no. 99 (henceforth, M), from the personal collection of Walid Saleh (for these manuscripts, see: Saleh, *Formation* 231–41). All references below are to the printed edition, except in the

While these two Quran commentaries need little introduction, I have also used a couple of other encyclopedic commentaries from the same time period that are less well known. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mundhir (d. ca. 318/930), was a scholar originally from Nishāpūr who lived in Mecca. He appears to have been chiefly remembered as a jurist who exercised his own independent legal judgment (*ijtihād*), and wrote a number of books on *fiqh*. Nonetheless, he also authored a Quran commentary.⁸⁷ Most of it does not appear to have survived, but a small portion of it has been published: the commentary for verses 272 to the end of Sūrat al-Baqara (S. 2, “The Cow”), all of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (S. 3, “The Family of Imran”), and verses 1 to 92 of Sūrat al-Nisā’ (S. 4, “Women”).

The impact of Ibn al-Mundhir’s Quran commentary on the development of *tafsīr* appears to have been very limited. Al-Qurṭubī quotes him at times, and al-Suyūṭī cites him extensively in his *Durr*, although it is hard to say if/when either commentator is referring to Ibn al-Mundhir’s *tafsīr* or his legal works. Al-Suyūṭī’s frequent quotation of Ibn al-Mundhir is likely due to Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 728/1328) endorsement of him as a supposed practitioner of ḥadīth-based exegesis,⁸⁸ although in actuality, Ibn al-Mundhir’s commentary cites the views of Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 210/825) on linguistic issues as well as lines of poetry (*shawāhid*) alongside ḥadīths. As he was a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī (and interestingly, al-Tha‘labī does not include Ibn al-Mundhir’s commentary in the list of sources that he used), I refer to his *tafsīr* when possible as an additional witness to the quotation of exegetical materials credited to female figures in Quran commentaries at that time.

In this study, I make fairly extensive use of the *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-sunna* authored by Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Māturīdī. A Ḥanafī theologian, jurist and exegete, he is celebrated as the founder of the Māturīdī school of Sunnī theology.⁸⁹ According to a later commentator on this work, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Abū Bakr al-Samarqandī (d. around 540/1145), al-Māturīdī did not write the *Ta’wīlāt* himself; rather, it is a compilation of his teachings that was prepared by his students.⁹⁰ This is possible, as in some parts of the text the line of argument is rather convoluted and repetitious and does not appear to have been composed by a single author.

rare instances where the differences between it and the manuscripts are significant for this study.

87 Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 337–8.

88 See: Saleh, Ibn Taymiyya 140, 159, n. 59.

89 For a study of his commentary, see: Götz, Māturīdī and his *Kitāb* 181–214.

90 Götz, Māturīdī 184.

Frequent reference is made to this work in this study for several reasons: Al-Māturīdī, who was a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī, is also a key source for the development of quranic exegesis at that time,⁹¹ including the citation of exegetical materials credited to women in *tafsīr* texts. As the hermeneutical approach in this commentary⁹² is significantly different from that of al-Ṭabarī or al-Thaʿlabī (or Ibn al-Mundhir), when the *Taʿwīlāt* incorporates ḥadīths, *āthār* or variant readings attributed to early female figures, it does so from a distinct perspective. Also, al-Māturīdī often indicates what the theological or sectarian issues at stake in debates over the meanings of a given verse are, when other exegetes merely hint at these or pass them over in silence. Therefore, the *Taʿwīlāt* can provide unparalleled insight into the gendered workings of *tafsīr* during that period.

In addition, this study refers to several other encyclopedic *tafsīr* works as needed. This has usually been done in order to chart the quotation of specific traditions ascribed to female figures in Sunnī Quran commentaries written after the fourth/tenth century—or in some cases, to provide a Twelver Shiʿi perspective on a particular exegetical debate.

Several *madrasa*-style *tafsīr* works are also referred to in this study. In particular, I have often used what has survived of the Quran commentary of the ḥadīth scholar Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī.⁹³ Useful in order to gauge the circulation of traditions attributed to women in exegetical contexts, it is a particularly interesting source in view of his hermeneutical theory. According to Ibn Abī Ḥātim, it is designed to be a “stripped down” (*mujarrad*) approach to quranic exegesis, based on traditions that he deems “soundest with regard to *isnād* and most full in regard to substance”⁹⁴ and giving preference to those ḥadīths that

91 For the significance of al-Māturīdī’s commentary to the study of early *tafsīr*, see: Saleh, *Marginalia* 295–6.

92 For aspects of al-Māturīdī’s hermeneutical approach, see: Gilliot, *Maturidi’s treatment*; Saleh, *Medieval exegesis*.

93 For him, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 198–9. Much of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s commentary does not seem to have come down to us. One printed version only comments on parts of Sūras 1–3 (*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīm musnad ʿan al-rasūl wa-l-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābiʿīn li-Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*). Of the other version, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīm musnad^{an} ʿan Rasūl Allāh wa-l-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābiʿīn*, 14 vols, the following portions are based directly on manuscripts: Sūras 1-mid-3, 3–4, 5–8, 8–13, and 23–29; the rest is based on quotations. All references are to the latter edition unless otherwise noted. Mehmet Akif Koç notes that as of yet, there is no critical edition of this Quran commentary (*Isnāds and rījāl expertise* 146–7).

94 “. . . *aṣaḥḥi al-akḥbār isnād^{an} wa ashbahahā matn^{an}*” (Ibn Abī Ḥātim i, 14). The translation is Dickinson’s (*Development* 37).

can be traced all the way back to Muḥammad.⁹⁵ While Ibn Abī Ḥātim does not always adhere to these exacting standards (as was noted above), the fact that he elects to incorporate a number of traditions credited to women in his Quran commentary sheds some light on the gendered dimensions of the efforts of some ḥadīth critics to intervene in the process of quranic exegesis.

Although a significant proportion of Ibn Abī Ḥātim's Quran commentary is not extant, quotations from it do survive through Ibn Kathīr, al-Suyūṭī (in his *Durr al-manthūr*), and al-Shawkānī. I have at times noted the presence of a given ḥadīth related on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim in al-Suyūṭī's *Durr*. Nonetheless, in view of the well-known historical problems involved in using later sources in order to attempt to reconstruct earlier, now-lost works,⁹⁶ such quotations should only be regarded as suggestive of what Ibn Abī Ḥātim's commentary might have contained.

Several other *madrasa*-style commentaries have been referred to as needed, primarily in order to further illuminate aspects of the circulation of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in the fourth/tenth century and later. Chief among these is Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī's (d. 375/985) *Baḥr al-'ulūm*.⁹⁷ This work appears to be the first *madrasa*-style Quran commentary intended to summarise Sunnī exegesis as it then existed to have been written—in many ways, as a reaction to al-Ṭabarī's enormous *tafsīr*.⁹⁸

A couple of linguistically-focused exegetical works have also been utilized in this study: the *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān* of al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), and al-Naḥḥās' (d. 338/949) *I'rāb al-Qur'ān*. Al-Zajjāj's interpretive approach differs greatly from his contemporary al-Ṭabarī, dealing chiefly with the Quran's linguistic aspects and granting traditions very little attention in his exegesis.⁹⁹ While al-Naḥḥās is mainly concerned with linguistic issues as well, his work does contain some traditions, including a number attributed to early Muslim women.

95 Ibn Abī Ḥātim i, 14. For Ibn Abī Ḥātim's hermeneutics, see: Saleh, Preliminary remarks 27–9.

96 Regarding such issues, see: Landau-Tasseron, On the reconstruction. It is often unclear whether such quotations from Ibn Abī Ḥātim were known to al-Suyūṭī through the former's *tafsīr*, or from other works that he authored, or perhaps even from a quotation found in the book of yet another author.

97 For him, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 530–1. For a brief discussion of his interpretive approach, see: Shah, Introduction 21.

98 Saleh, Personal communication.

99 For al-Zajjāj, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 13–15. It should be noted that his *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān* is an epitome of his larger work, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān wa-ma'ānīyahu*; see: Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. al-Sarrī al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa-i'rābuhu al-musammā Al-mukhtaṣar fi I'rāb al-Qur'ān wa-ma'ānīyahu* i, 34.

Both are particularly useful for illuminating the grammatical issues at stake in particular exegetical debates; al-Naḥḥās also at times serves as a witness for the circulation of several types of exegetical materials—*āthār*, ḥadīths and variant readings attributed to early Muslim women.

A few *aḥkām al-Qurʾān* works have also been referred to as appropriate: in the main, that of al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/980), which takes a Ḥanafī legal approach, and occasionally, the one authored by Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148), the Mālikī traditionist and judge from Seville.¹⁰⁰ Both summarize legal debates surrounding particular quranic verses and contain a number of traditions ascribed to women as well.

A wide array of exegetical works written from various sectarian, theological and mystical perspectives have come down to us, and a number of these contain traditions or other types of exegetical materials attributed to women. However, practical considerations have led me to focus this study on the literary functions of such materials in certain select proto-Sunnī or Sunnī commentaries. Nonetheless, one Ibādī Quran commentary—that of Hūd b. Muḥakkam (or Muḥkim)—and several Twelver Shiʿi *tafsīr* works¹⁰¹ have been referred to at times for comparative purposes. Sunnī exegetical debates did not unfold in isolation, and cannot be fully understood apart from those of commentators writing from other sectarian perspectives. Sufi Quran commentaries are not used in this study. However, it should be noted that a few Sufi biographical works occasionally depict ascetic or Sufi women interpreting the Quran.¹⁰² Whether the interpretations attributed to such women were ever conceived of as “exegetical,” much less suitable for inclusion in any Sufi (or other) *tafsīr* work, is hard to say.¹⁰³

This variety of exegetical works has been utilized for this study because when taken together, they provide insight into different levels of exegetical

¹⁰⁰ Not to be confused with the Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 637/1240). For Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Maʿāfirī Ibn al-ʿArabī, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 411–14.

¹⁰¹ These are: the *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (d. 307/919), what has survived of the *Tafsīr al-Ayyāshī* (d. 320/932), al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 460/1067) *Al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, the *Majmaʿ al-bayān* of al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153) and the *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* of Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1089/1697). For early Twelver Shiʿi *tafsīr*, see: Bar-Asher, *Scripture and exegesis*. For late medieval Twelver exegesis, see: Lawson, Akhbārī Shiʿi approaches.

¹⁰² Cornell, *Early Sufi women* 84–5, 104–5, 126–7.

¹⁰³ Some similar anecdotes appear in medieval literary (*adab*) works; for a few examples, see: Malti-Douglas, *Playing with the sacred* 57–8. However, this does not necessarily mean that such depictions of Sufi women would not have been incorporated into any Quran commentary; for al-Thaʿlabī’s use of *adab* materials in his *tafsīr*, see Saleh, *Formation* 173–5.

discourses at particular points in time. They indicate what sorts of exegetical materials attributed to early female figures would tend to be quoted by those exegetes who aspired to be comprehensive, as well as what materials of this type appear to have been widely regarded as fairly central to the discourse (if only because they had become virtually inescapable). They also enable us to study the incorporation of these materials within the contexts of various exegetical and hermeneutical debates.

Chapter One

Gender, as Judith Butler observes, is not an ahistorical “essence” that is constant across time, place and culture, but a construct. Therefore, any historical analysis of gender in the *tafsīr* genre must begin by asking how pre-modern exegetes understood gender. The “commonsensical” binary view of gender common today in North America, Western Europe and many other parts of the world as well differs significantly from the assumptions that were predominant in the historical contexts within which pre-modern Quran commentaries were written. As this chapter demonstrates, pre-modern Quran commentators generally present socio-political as well as more specifically “religious” authority in masculine terms. Moreover, they construct such divinely-approved authority over/against femaleness, which they associate with intellectual, physical, moral and spiritual deficiency. In many ways, they construct the quranic text so that it appears to virtually refuse the possibility that a woman could possess the authority to legitimately interpret it.

At the same time, these exegetes grapple with what relationship if any notable women from the dawn of Islam—especially the wives of the prophet—should have to religious authority. While the quranic text refers to these women as “mothers” of the believers, and singles them out with the instruction to remember Muḥammad’s revelations, even proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes are at best highly ambivalent about ascribing authority to them. This is particularly the case where such authority would have direct implications for the community as a whole.

Chapter Two

Al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī and some other contemporary Quran commentators construct what I term “transhistorical exegetical communities” in their works, by quoting various authorities as well as sources of a range of different types

of materials deemed relevant to quranic exegesis. Significantly, not only do al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī (and others) include a small number of female figures into the transhistorical exegetical community that they construct—chiefly by quoting traditions attributed to (or reportedly transmitted by) early Muslim women—but they present these women’s relating of traditions relevant to quranic exegesis as a textual “fact” requiring neither explanation nor justification.

In order to determine what can be known about the literary-historical background of this textual “fact,” this chapter surveys the quotations of exegetical materials of various types that are ascribed to female figures in eight *tafsīr* works conventionally dated to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries. No survey of exegetical materials of this type in these texts has been carried out before. Issues examined are: the frequency of such quotations in these various texts, the literary genres of these citations, which women these exegetical materials are attributed to, and which quranic verses or exegetical topics are these quotations used to explicate. The extent to which these exegetical materials are taken up in third/ninth century Quran commentaries is also charted. This systematic approach lays the foundation for an analytical discussion of these exegetical materials, in which they are read within their textual contexts as well as with regard to their impact on exegetical discourses of the formative period and later.

Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, I take a closer look at the patterns that became apparent in the exegetical materials surveyed in Chapter Two, situating these configurations within their literary-historical contexts, and examining the gendered “labour” that these exegetical materials attributed to female figures perform. A number of these gendered patterns are precursors of several significant developments in quranic exegesis in the century or so following.

There are several different genres of exegetical materials attributed to early female figures in these sources—*āthār*, ḥadīths, quranic readings, lines of poetry, and stereotyped speech. In general, each genre implies different degrees of interpretive intentionality on the part of the putative female speaker. Typically, the intention of the putative female source—whether to interpret, or to make her interpretation generally known (or both)—is either ambiguous or altogether absent. This is part of the way that the *tafsīr* texts discussed in this chapter construct exegetical authority as “masculine.” Nonetheless, some of these exegetical materials depict a woman who clearly intends not only to interpret a particular verse or passage of the quranic text, but also to convey

her view to the community at large. Portrayals of this latter type serve as particularly effective vehicles for exegetes' negotiation of hermeneutical questions.

Chapter Four

Ḥadīths ascribed to early Muslim women are quoted in small yet noticeable quantities in third/ninth and fourth/tenth century Quran commentaries. In this chapter, this practice is examined primarily through the lens of the traditions credited to women in the *tafsīr* chapters found in four ḥadīth collections—those of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915–16), and al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014). These *tafsīr* chapters provide a particularly useful vantage point from which to survey this phenomenon for several reasons: they provide a manageable yet representative sample of traditions credited to women that were deemed by some in the third/ninth century to be relevant in one way or another to quranic exegesis. They also provide an overview of the main types of ḥadīths credited to women that were being quoted in Quran commentaries at this time. The traditionists who compiled these *tafsīr* chapters were both critiquing the traditions already in circulation among exegetes in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, and putting forward ḥadīths that they regarded as more reliable. In this attempt by traditionists to intervene in exegetical discourses, gendered voices and gendered bodies serve as important vehicles for this construction of the *sunna* as all-embracing and preeminently authoritative.

These *tafsīr* chapters are also worth examining in and of themselves. They compile statistically significant number of ḥadīths attributed to women for the purpose of Quran commentary, a development that appears to have few, if any, precedents. Moreover, these chapters make ḥadīths of this type readily available for exegetical use, which had some impact on the medieval Sunni genre of *tafsīr* from the fifth/eleventh century onward. Finally, some *tafsīr* chapters undergo further elaboration or commentary—or even abridgement intended to make them more accessible to laypersons. This latter phenomenon raises some interesting questions about the “popular” and gendered dimensions of medieval *tafsīr*.

Chapter Five

In the Quran, the abode of the prophet's wives is presented as a site where divinely-ordained values revealed to Muḥammad ought to be exemplified, although there is a decided tension in the quranic text between such an ideal

and lived reality. This chapter examines the ways that exegetes elect to memorialize this abode and the implications of this for their constructions of interpretive authority. Classical Sunni exegetes construct this site as an imagined, idealized physical space demarcated by the secluding curtain and transcending space and time, and also evoke it through quoting traditions attributed to particular wives (most notably, to ʿĀʾisha). Within this imagined space, these exegetes attempt to debate and authoritatively resolve interpretive issues involving legal, theological, sectarian and other boundaries. The abode of the wives of the prophet is a particularly attractive site for such fraught interpretive negotiations in part because invoking it simultaneously evokes its image as an authoritative source of norms as well as the various controversies and ambiguities associated with it.

Moreover, these works construct the exegetical gaze in what I term “primary” and “secondary” modes. The primary exegetical gaze is constructed as an omniscient gaze that surveys the body of the quranic text, other texts that the possessor of this gaze regards as relevant to the interpretation of the Quran, and also the Muslim communal body as a whole. This gaze, which (re)affirms the social and religious power and authority of (free) men, is the gaze that the authors of *tafsīr* works claim for themselves. The secondary exegetical gaze is textually constructed as subordinate to and dependent upon the primary exegetical gaze. Limited in its scope as well as its interpretive authority, this is the gaze that the holder of the primary exegetical gaze (i.e. the Quran commentator) concedes to the authorities and sources of exegetical materials—who could be female as well as male—that he elects to quote in his *tafsīr*. This chapter examines the potential as well as the limitations inherent in the secondary exegetical gaze. ʿĀʾisha is sometimes depicted as a mediator between Muḥammad and later generations of believers, and she as well as Umm Salama are quoted as authoritative sources of ḥadīths or opinions on legal-exegetical questions. Yet, they do not ultimately control how such exegetical materials will be used or to what ends. Some of the ḥadīths ascribed to them and widely quoted in pre-modern Quran commentaries arguably contribute towards constructing interpretive authority as very rarely legitimately attainable by women of later generations.

Chapter Six

A number of medieval exegetes followed the practice of forerunners such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī and others in citing exegetical materials ascribed to early female figures to different extents. While patterns of citation of such exegetical

materials found in Quran commentaries such as al-Ṭabarī and even more so al-Thaʿlabī continued to be influential to varying degrees, the extent to which their interpretive precedents would be followed was mediated by a range of factors. This chapter examines the interaction of some of these factors and the resulting generation and (re)constructions of ineluctably gendered visions of the sacred past in several medieval Quran commentaries, and their implications for conceptions of interpretive authority. These (re)constructions most commonly associate female participation in quranic exegesis with transmission of traditions, and moreover firmly locate it in the ever more distant sacred past. This persistent linking of women's involvement in exegesis with transmission has a rather paradoxical result: it plays a role in the gendering of exegetical authority as emblematically "masculine," but also leaves a limited and conditional space within which a small number of medieval women from scholarly families were apparently able to participate in certain ways on the margins of the *tafsīr* tradition.

Constructions of Gender in Pre-modern Quran Commentaries

One day, two people were visiting with one of the prophet's wives, Hind bt. Abī Umayya b. Muḡhīra (d. ca. 59/679), or Umm Salama, as she is more commonly known, her brother 'Abdallāh, and a *mukhannath*. As Muḡammad entered in upon the small gathering, the *mukhannath* was telling 'Abdallāh, "If God grants you victory at al-Ṭā'if tomorrow, I direct you to the daughter of Ghaylān—she approaches with four, and departs with eight!"

"Ah, I see that this one knows what is what!" Muḡammad observed. And, addressing his wives, he said, "Do not allow this one to visit you."¹

Al-Māturīdī recounts this anecdote in the form of a tradition on the authority of Umm Salama, as well as a variant version of it on the authority of 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr, in the course of his exegesis of a quranic phrase—*who have no sexual desire* (*ghayr ūlī l-irba*).² While this ḥadīth (henceforth, "the Ghaylān's daughter tradition") is rather obscure for most contemporary readers, it was evidently in wide circulation by al-Māturīdī's time. That it had become a recognized part of the exegetical discourse on this quranic expression by the late third/ninth century is clear from the fact that the Quran commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Jaṣṣāṣ and al-Tha'labī all recount at least one version of it,³ although these four exegetes all take significantly different hermeneutical approaches.

1 Abū Maṣū' Muḡammad b. Muḡammad b. Maḡmūd al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna* vii, 552. We begin here with this version from al-Māturīdī because it is particularly illustrative for the purposes of this discussion. For other versions, see below.

2 This phrase appears in Q 24:31. The entire verse reads: "And tell the believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; they should let their head coverings fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no sexual desire, or children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet so as to draw attention to any hidden charms. Believers, all of you, turn to God so that you may prosper."

3 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 148; Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2579; Abū Bakr b. 'Alī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* iii, 318–19; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 368.

As the Ghaylān's daughter tradition vividly illustrates, both Quran interpreters of the formative period and their audiences understood gender in ways that differ significantly from the assumptions about it that are commonly found today in North America, Western Europe, and many other parts of the world, including many Muslim-majority communities. It is notable that at no point in his discussion of the two versions of this tradition that he cites does al-Māturīdī see fit to address the question that is likely to be foremost in the mind of the average educated, non-specialist reader today: What is a *mukhannath*?

Significantly, in this way al-Māturīdī's commentary is typical of the many legally focused compendia of traditions⁴ and ḥadīth collections,⁵ as well as exegetical works from the formative and early medieval periods that quote various versions of the Ghaylān's daughter tradition.⁶ Some apparently wondered about the meaning of the statement that "she approaches with four, and departs with eight" (which is explained as a reference to the rolls of fat on her belly and back).⁷ A legal issue of evident concern is whether the prophet's command to his wives that they not allow the *mukhannath* to visit them in future indicates that the entry of *mukhannaths* into the quarters of secluded women is always prohibited.⁸ The question of what the *mukhannath*'s name was (Hit) garnered some attention.⁹ But the term "*mukhannath*" itself was evidently not regarded as requiring explanation in these texts.¹⁰

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- 4 Mālik b. Anas, *Muwaṭṭaʿ al-Imām Mālik* 685; Ibn Abī Shayba viii, 587 (*K. al-Adab*).
- 5 Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 323; Muslim 964 (*K. al-Salām*); Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ashʿath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* iv, 30 (*K. al-Libās*) and 307, (*K. al-Adab*); Ibn Māja i, 613 (*K. al-Nikāḥ*). Al-Bukhārī also has a few versions of it; see n. 7.
- 6 As is fairly typical of ḥadīths in general, several variant versions of this tradition with different *isnāds* that go back to male as well as female Muslims of the Companion generation were in circulation. For an overview of this phenomenon, see: Speight, A look at variant readings 79–89.
- 7 Al-Bukhārī vii, 514 (*K. al-Libās*). For another slightly different version of this tradition; see: al-Bukhārī vii, 118–19 (*K. al-Nikāḥ*). The Arabs of the time regarded plumpness as a very desirable female attribute.
- 8 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ iii, 318–19.
- 9 Al-Ḥumaydī i, 309; al-Bukhārī v, 429 (*K. al-Maghāzī*). For a biographical notice on Hit in a seventh/thirteenth century biographical compendium, see: ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Jazarī, *Usd al-ghāba fi maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba* v, 395–6. However, another version of this tradition (on the authority of a male Companion) gives the name of the *mukhannath* as Matīʿ (*Usd al-ghāba* v, 3–4). A discussion of the manifold historical questions that this tradition raises is beyond the scope of this study.
- 10 Although the situation was different in legal works. For more on *mukhannaths*, see below.

Nor is it merely the *mukhannath* in the Ghaylān's daughter tradition that signals to us that both Quran interpreters of the formative period and their audiences inhabited contexts in which common assumptions about gender differed significantly from those that are often taken for granted today. This tradition's matter-of-fact presentation of polygamy and its assumption that men are entitled to make sexual use of female war captives both reflects and affirms cultural constructions of "masculinity" and "femininity" that are unfamiliar to many contemporary readers. Moreover, yet another feature of both versions of this tradition under discussion here that has few real equivalents in today's world is the way that they straightforwardly depict a female figure authoritatively conveying information relevant to quranic exegesis to the community at large. Significantly, none of these aspects of the Ghaylān's daughter tradition receives any explanation or justification in sources from the formative or early medieval periods either.

As the evident contrast between the questions that this tradition apparently prompted for audiences/readers over one thousand years ago and those that are most likely to puzzle or even disturb readers today vividly illustrates, gender categories are cultural constructs that can and do change considerably over time. In addition, while we often perceive the gender categories with which we are familiar as primarily biological, in reality, they are thoroughly moralistic and prescriptive, having at least as much (if not more) to do with dominant views within a given culture about "proper" social order than observations of biological phenomena. It follows from these observations that critical scholarship on early and classical *tafsīr* works must begin by asking how gender is being depicted and constructed in these texts, rather than proceeding from the (usually unstated) assumption that contemporary commonsensical notions of gender generally suffice for our understanding of them. Otherwise, we risk imposing essentialized, ahistorical or even current ethically- or theologically-based notions about gender on this body of literature.

But how can such impositions best be avoided? Not only are we as historians unable to stand outside our own cultures and historical contexts, but a body of detailed and critical academic research on gender in the formative period of Islam that is not shaped by ahistorical assumptions of the types just discussed has only recently begun to be carried out, so there is little available to be built upon. Critical research of this sort faces a number of challenges. In addition to well known problems such as the nature of the available sources and the difficulties associated with dating these, there is the question of determining their significance within their historical context. Rather than being treated as though they are merely a disconnected assortment of "exotic" curiosities, texts such as the Ghaylān's daughter tradition need to be read as part of the larger

context of historically situated constructions and negotiations of gender that they variously presuppose, (re)affirm or contest.

In this chapter, the groundwork will be laid for a historical reading of gender constructions in pre-modern Quran commentaries. Beginning with a closer look at the Ghaylān's daughter tradition, it examines several salient features of the various commonsensical and medical notions of gender that were common currency during the formative and early medieval periods. Then, the exegetical discourses associated with several quranic verses that deal with cosmic, legal and theological-polemical aspects of gender are analyzed, with specific attention to the ramifications of these discourses for the construction of interpretive authority as gendered. Finally, this chapter examines gendered constructions of mother- and wifehood found in Quran commentaries as these relate to Muḥammad's wives as putative sources of exegetical materials in these works. How exegetes discuss this latter issue brings into focus the complex interplay between their theoretical constructions of interpretive authority as emblematically masculine, and their actual practice of citing exegetical materials attributed to some early Muslim women.

It should be emphasized that the evidence available to us does not indicate that Quran commentators during the formative and early medieval periods had what could be described as a unitary "gender system" as their frame of reference. Rather, these exegetes selectively draw upon a number of notions about gender that are based on a variety of sources, ranging from scriptures to late antique medical theories. While these notions often intersect at various points, they do not always fit together harmoniously, and at times, their disjunctures result in inconsistency or paradox.

1 What is a *Mukhannath*? Gender in Late Antiquity

During the formative period, *mukhannaths* were a class of male singers and entertainers who were apparently known for speaking and moving in a manner that was stereotypically associated with women, as well as for certain types of personal adornment that males did not typically use, such as decorating their hands and feet with henna.¹¹ As they were presumed to lack sexual interest in females, *mukhannaths* were permitted to visit with elite secluded women who did not as a rule interact informally with free males who were not close relatives.¹²

11 Abū Dāwūd iv, 307 (*K. al-Adab*).

12 The classic study of the *mukhannaths* in early Islam is: Rowson, *The effeminates*.

As this brief description illustrates, the word “*mukhannath*” as it is used in the Ghaylān’s daughter tradition¹³ has no real equivalent in contemporary North American or British English. This is because in the majority English-speaking North American and British cultures today, gender is usually thought of in binary terms—each person is assumed to be either “male” or “female.” Furthermore, males and females are generally thought of as two distinct types of human being, as “opposite” sexes, and this oppositeness is underscored by the presumption that sexual attraction “naturally” exists between them. As a result of these assumptions, there is little or no recognized place (outside certain self-consciously alternative subcultures) for people who do not identify as one or the other.¹⁴

While the word “*mukhannath*” has sometimes been translated as “effeminate” or “transvestite,” the latter terms refer to certain aspects of a given individual’s gender presentation, specifically to mannerisms or clothing, but do not denote membership in an identifiable group that is both regarded as neither “male” nor “female,” and also allocated a recognized social role. Moreover, terms of this type—and even recently coined North American subcultural expressions such as “genderqueer”—reflect our culturally and historically conditioned assumption that gender is self-evidently and necessarily binary.¹⁵

Today, binary presumptions about gender are far from being unique to North America and Western Europe. Modern conservative Muslim discourses also present humanity as made up of two “opposite” sexes—“male” and “female”—that are said to be characterized by intrinsic and immutable physical and psychological differences. These differences (it is argued) in turn dictate that men and women must play distinct, complementary social roles, and thus have different legal rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, such discourses simply assume that this understanding of gender goes back to the dawn of Islam, and that the Quran, the ḥadīth literature, and early *fiqh* (jurisprudence), as well as the entire edifice of classical Muslim scholarship, are based upon it.¹⁶

13 Several centuries later, “*mukhannath*” came to mean a man who seeks to play the “passive” role in same-sex anal intercourse (Rowson, *The effeminates* 675–6, 686). However, its older meaning evidently continued to be regarded as straightforwardly comprehensible; see for example Ibn Manẓūr’s (d. 711/1311–12) quotation of the Ghaylān’s daughter tradition in his definition of the word “*mukhannath*” (*Lisān al-‘Arab li-Ibn Manẓūr* v, 163).

14 For the historical development of these notions in North America and Europe, see: Dreger, *Hermaphrodites*.

15 For reflections on similar terminological and conceptual problems, see: Najmabadi, *Beyond the Americas*.

16 While these notions are based on popular, commonsensical assumptions that are often alleged to be scientifically demonstrable, they arguably owe their centrality in contempo-

But what the Ghaylān's daughter tradition confronts us with is a set of assumptions which are not congruent with a binary model of gender. This tradition accords better with the late antique medical theory famously held by Galen, which saw all human beings as existing on a spectrum or scale of humanness. It should be recalled that by the third/ninth century, key Greek medical and scientific texts were being translated into Arabic. This development had a decisive impact on ways of thinking about human bodies as well as the natural world by doctors and those involved in scientific inquiry,¹⁷ but echoes of it can arguably be seen in the ḥadīth literature,¹⁸ as well as in some pre-modern commentaries on the Quran.¹⁹

One well known perspective strongly influenced by Galen's theories held that there is only one basic body type that all human beings share. Free, able-bodied males are seen as the most complete examples of what it is to be human, in their physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities. Male and female bodies were thought to differ in degree rather than in kind, so it was theorized that heat and dryness must be present to a sufficient degree to enable a human body to develop to its full potential—that is, to grow into an adult male. But when moisture and coolness predominate instead, it was thought that the result would be an adult female body. Therefore, females were seen as intrinsically deficient. Contemporary historians have variously characterized this way of understanding gender as “the one-sex body,”²⁰ “the imperfect-man model”²¹ or as the classification of people as either “male” or “not-male.”²²

Galen's ideas about human anatomy and reproduction were apparently widely influential in medieval Europe and the pre-modern Middle East, although they were not the only theories on these matters in circulation, and the extent of their impact continues to be debated by historians.²³ Available

rary Muslim religious discourses to their evident usefulness to apologists seeking logical-sounding rationalizations for markedly inegalitarian laws and practices.

17 Musallam, *Sex and society* 40–1; Gadelrab, *Discourses on sex* 51, 53–61. I would like to thank Noor Naga and Laury Silvers for bringing this article to my attention.

18 For a few examples of ḥadīths affirming that women produce semen—as was asserted in the Hippocratic corpus as well as by Galen, but denied by Aristotle—see: Gadelrab, *Discourses on sex* 78. The apparent influence of such medical debates and theories on the ḥadīth literature is a topic that needs further research.

19 For examples, see below.

20 Laqueur, *Making sex*.

21 Ze'evi, *Producing desire* 23.

22 Rowson, *Gender irregularity* 63.

23 For a more historically nuanced discussion of the situation in Europe than that offered by Thomas Laqueur's *Making sex*, see: Cadden, *Meanings of sex*.

evidence appears to indicate that by the fifth/eleventh century some notable Muslim thinkers were formulating hypotheses about these questions that had also been influenced by Aristotle's theories to varying extents.²⁴ Nonetheless, Galen's views seem to have left their mark on some late medieval texts written by Muslims.²⁵ While the details of these debates need not detain us here, they do indicate that pre-modern Quran commentators were informed by various assumptions about human bodies that are significantly different from those that are generally familiar to contemporary readers.

In addition, Muslim understandings of gender during the formative and medieval periods were further complicated by the different ways that gender categories were "internally fractured"²⁶ by a number of social distinctions. Free or slave status was the most salient of these distinctions, although other socially significant characteristics such as tribal or familial affiliation, lineage, religion, sect, ethnicity, and age were also important. As we will see, pre-modern exegetes routinely discuss whether or to what extent the quranic verses ostensibly laying down directives to adult Muslim women or men in general are applicable to enslaved women or men.

Where gender was thought of in terms of a spectrum extending from "men" to "not-men," or even when the boundaries between what constituted "male" and "female" bodies were seen as fluid, categories such as "*mukhannath*" did not present the conceptual problems that they generally do for the societal "mainstream" in North American and European cultures today. Rather than being outside recognizable social categories and thus barely comprehensible as social beings,²⁷ they constituted just another category of persons who were

24 Gadelrab, Discourses on sex 62–79. Unlike Galen, Aristotle held that male and female reproductive organs are distinctly different, and that when a child is conceived the father contributes the seed, while the mother's contribution only consists of matter (ibid. 49–50).

25 For example, Dror Ze'evi finds that in the Ottoman Empire, medical treatises reflected the notion of the one-sex body; see his *Producing desire* 22–45. Moreover, he asserts that it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that binary conceptions of gender began to be introduced to Ottoman urban elites. For a detailed study of the transformation in prevalent views of gender which occurred in Iran during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches*.

26 I owe this expression to Najmabadi, Are gender and sexuality 12.

27 The extent to which this continues to be the case in many countries in North America and Europe is illustrated by the number of government-issued documents and forms (to say nothing of those produced by the private sector) that require individuals to identify themselves as either "male" or "female" and do not provide any other possibilities.

seen as falling short of free, adult maleness.²⁸ But while the *mukhannaths* could be thus explainable in commonsensical and medical terms, this did not mean that jurists in the formative period (or later) regarded their existence with equanimity.²⁹ Even in conceptions of gender as a spectrum, social categories were nonetheless hierarchical. The classical texts examined in this study typically insist that social-hierarchical distinctions be clearly marked, often visibly, through social role, dress, deportment and access to space for example.³⁰ They also evince concern that people will not stay in place, either through their own “inappropriate” actions, or due to events beyond their control. In some cases, such shifts might implicitly call into question the stability of the social order.

The Ghaylān’s daughter tradition vividly illustrates the difficulties that might result from such a turn of events. By this later stage of Muḥammad’s career, his wives are secluded, as was thought befitting for free, elite women.³¹ Therefore, males who are not their close relatives or slaves are not permitted to address them face to face (Q 33:55). The *mukhannath* is allowed to interact with them freely because, as the version attributed to ‘Ā’isha recounts, up to this point, it has been assumed that he is among “those who have no sexual desire.”³² That is, as a “not-male,” he apparently lacks the desire to sexually dominate females. This desire was highly valued as integral to a (free) man’s performance of masculinity and thus his dominant status on the gendered spectrum, but was at the same time regarded as a potential source of social havoc if directed toward the “wrong” object.

But while this tradition depicts the seclusion of free elite women from the sight of men who are not closely related to them as appropriate, it simply takes for granted the notion that enslaved women do not merit such protection from

28 For several examples in the Abbasid period, see: Rowson, Gender irregularity.

29 For medieval jurists’ attempts to classify all persons as either “male” or “female,” see: Sanders, Gendering the ungendered 74–95. The attitudes of individual jurists to the different Greek medical theories and how these variously informed their work is another complex issue that has barely been researched to date.

30 See for example a summary of the ḥadīths cursing *mukhannaths*, men who dress or behave like women, and women who wear men’s attire or conduct themselves like men in Rowson, The effeminates 673–5. For examples from exegetical works, see below.

31 Available evidence suggests that in pre-Islamic Arabia, free, elite women were veiled and secluded, in contradistinction to slaves (Stetkevych, *The poetics* 11). The origins of the veiling practices propounded by pre-modern jurists and exegetes are disputed, due to the scarcity of unambiguous evidence as well as contemporary controversies surrounding Muslim women’s dress and comportment; see: Stowasser, *The ḥijāb* 87–104. For an overview of the evidence from the ḥadīth literature, see: Clarke, *Ḥijāb* 214–86.

32 Al-Māturīdī vii, 551–2.

lecherous or acquisitive male eyes. The *mukhannath* anticipates that Ghaylān's daughter will soon be among the captives that Muḥammad's army will take if they succeed in conquering al-Ṭā'if. Through his lascivious description of her body, the *mukhannath* verbally strips her before the listener/reader—and in so doing, reimagines a free woman as a captive, and by implication, her father as humiliated, impotent to prevent this from happening. In this way, he momentarily appropriates for himself the emblematic (free) man's gaze and aggressive erotic subjectivity.

As a result, the *mukhannath* is barred from visiting the wives of the prophet in future. Not only had he demonstrated that he could not be relied upon to stay in his appointed place in the gendered hierarchy, but the possibility that what he had done to Ghaylān's daughter (and by extension, her father) might be repeated in the case of one or more of the prophet's wives (and thus, Muḥammad) could not now be ignored. By banishing the *mukhannath* from Muḥammad's wives' quarters, the threat that he poses to the gendered social order is held at bay.

That he could credibly pose such a threat underlines two things: first, that gender categories in late antiquity were constructed over/against one another. And second, that speech is an integral aspect in performing gender roles. These are themes which constantly recur in the texts under study, and have particular relevance to their constructions of exegetical authority.

2 Gender in Quran Commentaries from the Formative and Medieval Periods

Interpreters of the Quran in the formative and medieval periods maintain that all sane, adult persons, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy, are responsible before God for fulfilling a number of basic obligations of belief and ritual, and that therefore, all must acquire sufficient knowledge to enable them to do so correctly—a doctrine that I term the “monotheistic imperative.”³³ However, this doctrine is not a central focus of their elaborations of the gendered social order. An examination of how exegetes during the formative period (and later) dealt with quranic verses that discuss the creation of the first human beings, human bodies, and laws governing family order, among others, makes this clear. Various mythological, legal, linguistic, and at times medical discourses are employed in their interpretations of verses of these types. Through the intertwining of these discourses with the quranic verses in

33 Geissinger, 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr 45.

question, exegetes textually (re)create and (re)affirm late antique perceptions of gender on the pages of Quran commentaries.³⁴

2.1 Q 4:1—“*And We created you from a single soul . . .*”

The Quran refers to Adam and his unnamed wife in several passages. Aside from briefly recounting that God created Adam by forming him from clay and breathing his spirit into him (e.g. Q 15:28–9; 38:71–2), the quranic text provides few details about Adam’s creation and says nothing specifically about his wife’s. Nonetheless, exegetes from the formative period onwards were evidently quite familiar with the story of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib along the lines found in Gen. 2:18–23, as well as traditional or “popular” expansions and interpretations of it, that present Eve (and by extension, women in general) as physically, intellectually, spiritually and socially inferior. They freely incorporated these into their Quran commentaries, in the form of narratives as well as ḥadīths.³⁵

While the extra-quranic (and often apparently biblical) sources of these materials have attracted particular attention, dwelling on the question of where they “originally” came from is in many ways beside the point. The notion that Eve was created from Adam’s rib “made sense” to Quran commentators from the formative and medieval periods because it generally fit well with the dominant mythological, legal, social and medical discourses of their times. Medical theories that explain female bodies as incomplete and/or deficient male bodies are an obvious example of such discursive affinities, as is the well-known prophetic ḥadīth that describes women as “deficient in reason and religion” (*nāqīṣāt ‘aql wa-dīn*).³⁶ Therefore, most exegetes appear to have had little compunction about utilizing the story in their works. That modern Muslim

34 While a historical-critical investigation into the ways that gender is constructed in the quranic text itself that avoids ahistorical or theological approaches is highly desirable, it is beyond the scope of this study.

35 For an overview of the quranic retellings of the story of Adam and his wife, as well as how classical Quran commentators further elaborated upon it, see: Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an* 25–34.

36 Al-Bukhārī i, 181–2 (*K. al-Ḥayḍ*); Muslim 90 (*K. al-Īmān*). For its circulation, see: Juynboll, *Some isnād-analytical methods* 379–81. For its medieval interpretation, see for example: Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl al-‘Asqalānī al-ma‘rūf bi-Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* i, 421–2 (*K. al-Ḥayḍ*). For a brief overview of two contemporary Muslim approaches to this ḥadīth, see: Bauer, “Traditional” exegeses 136–7. The fact that it is often seen today as in need of special “explanation” (whether by Muslims writing from confessional perspectives, or by secular academics) is a telling indication of the degree to which contemporary commonly accepted views about gender differ from those reflected and (re)affirmed by such ḥadīths. For more on this ḥadīth, see below.

interpretations of verses such as Q 4:1 often diverge markedly from those typically found in classical *tafsīr* works vividly illustrates the significant differences between the commonsensical notions of gender that typically inform pre-modern and contemporary quranic exegesis respectively.³⁷

The opening verse of Sūrat al-Nisā' ("The Women," S. 4) in the Quran alludes to the creation of human beings: "People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide..." Quran commentaries from the formative period onwards typically interpret this "single soul" (*nafsⁱⁿ wāhida*) as a reference to Adam, and "its mate" (*zawjahā*) as Eve (Ḥawwā'), who is usually also said to have been created from Adam's rib.³⁸

Some exegetes note that the word "*nafs*" is grammatically feminine, and then go on to assert that it is nonetheless linguistically possible to identify this "single soul" with a male figure.³⁹ Al-Zajjāj even goes as far as to state that reciting this phrase as "*nafsⁱⁿ wāhīd*" (thus getting rid of the feminine suffix which calls attention to the grammatical gender of "*nafs*") would be permissible.⁴⁰ In this way, they attempted to counter any doubts about the usefulness of the rib story in order to interpret this verse—apparently over against a Mu'tazilī interpretation maintaining that "... and from it created its mate" means "from the same kind as it."⁴¹

It should be noted that the possibility of interpretations of this verse that we might describe today as "non-patriarchal" or "egalitarian" is not what is at

37 The quranic creation story has been a particular focus of contemporary Muslim reinterpretation from various perspectives. For conservative and Islamist reinterpretations, see: Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an* 34–8. For a brief summary of a few feminist reinterpretations, see for example: Barlas, Women's readings 259–60.

38 E.g. Abū al-Ḥasan Muqātil b. Sulaymān b. Bashīr al-Azdī, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān* i, 213; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 270–2; Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 852; Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-'azīz* i, 345; Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mundhir al-Naysābūrī, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* ii, 547.

39 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 270; Abū Ja'far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. al-Naḥḥās, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān* i, 197.

40 Al-Zajjāj ii, 3.

41 "*ayy min jinsihā.*" This interpretation is attributed to Abū Muslim Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-Iṣbahānī, who reportedly pointed to a similar grammatical construction in Q 3:164, 9:128, and 16:72 in support of his argument; Nabhā, *Tafsīr Abī Bakr al-Aṣamm 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Kaysān (d. 225 H)* ii, 96. While centuries later, al-Rāzī mentions this interpretation of Q 4:1, he does so only to reject it; see: Fakhṛ al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Tamīmī al-Bakrī al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-kabīr aw Maḥāṭiṭ al-ghayb* ix, 131.

issue here. Pre-modern exegetes did not equate casting doubt on the veracity of the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib or the tale's relevance to Q 4:1 with denying that Adam was created first—nor with a less hierarchical view of how human society “should” be organized, as the commentary of al-Ṭūsī makes clear.⁴² Rather, the story was widely appreciated as a vivid yet economical way of conveying a number of ideas about what commentators regarded as the divinely designed ontological and social order. Traditions that assert that Eve was created expressly for Adam's sake, in order that he might find rest in her⁴³ are congruent with such a vision of Eve's creation, as is the notion that the only workable social order is an unambiguously patriarchal one. In his exegesis of Q 4:1, Ibn Abī Ḥātim recounts on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, “The woman was created from the man; therefore, she desires men. The man was created from the earth, therefore, he desires land. So, sequester your women!”⁴⁴ In a particularly pointed fashion, this tradition expresses the notion that as women lack self-restraint, they require constant supervision and control by their male relatives—who fortuitously enough are presumed to be innately inclined to acquisition and conquest.

Examples of traditions in a similar vein that are cited by exegetes could be multiplied. Tellingly, traditions attributed to women do not make an appearance in the discussions of this verse in any of the commentaries consulted for this study. In part, this likely stems from the fact that comparatively few of the traditions that are traced back to early Muslim women deal with the stories of the prophets.⁴⁵ But it is also a reflection of how the very act of exegesis comes to be constructed as a performance of (free) masculinity. To be an exegete is to claim the right to authoritatively define the human condition past and present in the course of one's explication of scripture, and for reasons that will become apparent, such an entitlement was typically presented as emblematically masculine.

42 Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Tibyān li-Shaykh al-ṭā'ifa Abī Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī* iii, 99. See also his interpretation of Q 4:34 (below).

43 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 270–2.

44 Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 582.

45 I.e. stories of the lives of prophets other than Muḥammad. For more on this point, see Chapter Four.

2.2 Q 4:34—“Men are in charge of women . . .”

“Men are in charge of women,⁴⁶ because God has made some of them excel the others . . .” (Q 4:34) has long been a key text in Muslim scholars’ delineations of social order.⁴⁷ Pre-modern exegetes regarded marriage as but one of the many interconnected hierarchical relationships—along with ruler/ruled, master/slave and father/child for example—that make up a divinely guided and hence “properly” ordered society. How they understood the relationship between gender and socio-religious authority in the formative and medieval periods is made particularly explicit in their interpretations of the phrase, “. . . because God has made some of them excel the others” (Q 4:34).⁴⁸

The interpretation of this verse found in the *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān* (d. 150/767) presents its meaning as being that in any marriage, the husband holds the dominant position as a result of his payment of the *mahr* (dower), and is empowered to exercise authority over his wife as well as to discipline her. If her husband strikes her, she is not entitled to retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*).⁴⁹ Similar interpretations continued to appear in Quran commentaries during the formative and medieval periods.⁵⁰ These reflect several key exegetical concerns.

On the legal level, such interpretations of Q 4:34 both reflect and (re)affirm pre-modern jurists’ visions of marriage as an intrinsically asymmetrical contract: The husband is obliged to pay the *mahr* and support his wife, while as a result

46 “*al-rijālu qawwāmūna ‘alā l-nisā’.*” While Abdel Haleem translates this phrase as “Husbands should take good care of their wives,” I have used Majid Fakhry’s translation here, as it is more in keeping with pre-modern exegetes’ understandings of this verse. For a comparison and discussion of different translations (and hence, interpretations) of Q 4:34, see: Ali, *Sexual ethics and Islam* 117–22.

47 As such, there is a large and growing literature on it. See for example: Marín, *Disciplining wives* 5–40; Chaudhry, *Domestic violence*. It should be noted that a number of other verses and portions of verses—such as “. . . and men have a degree over them” (Q 2:228)—have also been historically important in pre-modern exegetes’ constructions of hierarchical models of gender and have been read in tandem with Q 4:34; for more on Q 2:228, see Chapter Six.

48 “*bi-mā faḍḍala ‘llāhū ba’dahum ‘alā ba’d*”

49 Muqātil i, 227. Muqātil does allow for retaliation in cases involving death or injury; other exegetes also permit it in the case of the first, but disagree about the second. Al-Tha’labī, for instance, states that retaliation is not permitted for anything short of death, even if a man fractures his wife’s skull (*al-Kashf* ii, 279). Retaliation most unproblematically takes place between two parties of like social status: “the free man for the free man, the slave for the slave, the female for the female” (Q 2:178).

50 See for example al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* v, 74–6; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* ii 279; al-Māturīdī iii, 158–9. For a detailed discussion of pre-modern exegetes’ interpretations of Q 4:34, see: Chaudhry, *Domestic violence* 29–94.

she is legally required to grant him sexual access and to obey him; if she is disobedient, he has the right and duty to discipline her, through physical chastisement if he deems this necessary. A man also has the right to end a marriage at any time by unilaterally divorcing his wife, should he wish to do so.⁵¹ In the jurists' eyes, each of these rights and duties is gendered, as well as integral to their vision of marriage. Therefore, they did not countenance the possibility that these duties and rights might be apportioned differently.⁵²

The textual and ritual functions of gendered violence in classical exegeses of Q 4:34 should be noted. The references to hitting wives, as well as the discussions of whether any injuries short of death would give the wife (or her heirs) the right to retaliation (re)construct and (re)affirm idealised conceptions of an unambiguously hierarchical social order. The distinction between the authority of the husband and the subordinate position of the wife in relation to him (as well as her status as a "not-male") is textually and physically marked and enacted upon her body. Moreover, every time these exegeses were read, whether aloud to an audience or by an individual reader, as well as taught, quoted, epitomised or glossed by medieval scholars, or expounded upon by preachers, these visions of a hierarchical social order—not society as it existed, but as it "ought to" be—were ritually (re)affirmed.⁵³ Through such historical interactions with these exegetical works, gender as well as gendered religious authority was performed, individually as well as in more "public" venues.

Classical interpretations of Q 4:34 are ultimately based on ontological beliefs.⁵⁴ Quran commentators in the formative and early medieval periods matter-of-factly explain that men excel women because men possess ritual

51 For a detailed discussion of how pre-modern jurists of the four surviving Sunni legal schools interpreted Q 4:34, see: Chaudhry, *Domestic violence* 95–132.

52 A few jurists in the formative period posed the theoretical question of whether a wife could be the one to give instead of receive the *mahr*, and if she were would this entitle her to require her husband to have sex with her, or allow her to unilaterally divorce him? However, they agreed that such arrangements are not permissible; see: Ali, *Sexual ethics* 94–5.

53 For a suggestive example of how lived realities could be more complex than such ideals, see Marín's discussion of al-Qurṭubī's statement in his exegesis of Q 4:34 that disobedient wives of high social status should only be admonished, while those of lower social status could be whipped. She links this to a notion of wifely obedience that varied depending on the woman's social class (*Disciplining wives* 26, 34–5).

54 Ayesha Chaudhry has recently discussed this issue in detail, pointing out that pre-modern exegetes presented husbands as "shadow deities" who "mediated their wives' relationship with God" (*Domestic violence*, esp. 40–4).

and/or legal advantages,⁵⁵ economic, social and political preeminence, greater physical, spiritual and intellectual prowess,⁵⁶ or some combination of these. Third/ninth and fourth/tenth century exegetes often impute superior intellectual capacity to males when discussing Q 4:34, expressing this in terms of men's purportedly greater "knowledge (*'ilm*) and discernment (*tamyīz*),"⁵⁷ intelligence (*'aql*) and managerial abilities,⁵⁸ or capacity to make judgments.⁵⁹ Al-Samarqandī's interpretation of the verse explicitly references Greek medical theories that are based on humoral medicine, stating that while heat and dryness predominate in a man's natural disposition (*ṭab'*), moisture and coldness preponderate in a woman's, and as a result, males are strong and forceful, while females are soft and weak.⁶⁰ In these ways, women are constructed in these texts as intrinsically deficient and in need of male guidance and discipline.

In their expositions of Q 4:34, exegetes sought to both map and maintain the hierarchical model of gender upon which they believed that the social order depends—a vertical axis with (free, Muslim) males positioned at the top, and all other human beings located beneath them to varying degrees. This hierarchical imperative comes to be expressed in increasingly elaborate and rhetorically crafted terms. For example, in his discussion of this verse, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143) writes that men are superior

... in intellect (*'aql*), prudence, decisiveness, strength, writing—in most cases—and in horsemanship and throwing. There are prophets and scholars (*'ulamā'*) among them. And for them is the greater imamate [i.e. the caliphate], as well as the lesser [i.e. leadership of congregational prayer], the *jihād*, the call to prayer (*ādhān*), the sermon, the retreat to the mosques for worship (*i'tikāf*), and the *takbīrāt al-tashrīq*, according to Abū Ḥanīfa.⁶¹

55 For different dimensions of this, see: Hūd i, 377, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii 939.

56 Al-Tha'labī lists all of these possibilities, neither accepting nor rejecting any (*al-Kashf* ii, 279).

57 E.g. al-Zajjāj ii, 28.

58 E.g. al-Nahḥās i, 212.

59 E.g. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Māwardī al-Baṣrī, *Al-Nukat wa-l-'uyūn Tafṣīr al-Māwardī* i, 480; similarly, al-Ṭūsī iii, 189.

60 Al-Samarqandī i, 351. See also: al-Qurṭubī v, 169.

61 The *takbīrāt al-tashrīq* is a traditional chant in praise of God that is recited aloud by pilgrims near the conclusion of the ḥajj, as well as by non-pilgrims before and after the Eid prayer, and following the five daily prayers for the next few days. While Abū Ḥanīfa reportedly held that it was to be recited only by men who were resident in a town following their congregational performance of one of the five daily prayers, Abū Yūsuf is said to have taught that anyone, whether male or female, resident or travelling, living in the town or

[And for men are] witnessing in [cases of] *ḥudūd*⁶² and retribution, and a greater share in inheritance and in blood-money, [as well as] the taking of oaths in case of murder,⁶³ the authority (*wilāya*) in marriage, divorce and revocation of divorce, and in [determining] the number of wives. Lineage passes through [men], and they are the possessors of beards and turbans.⁶⁴

This passage is a rhetorically polished version of the rather haphazard list of possible explanations as to how men are superior to women given in al-Thaʿlabī’s commentary and supplemented by a number of additional points.⁶⁵ Interestingly, Ibn al-ʿArabī’s discussion of Q 4:34 suggests that this list and others like it were shaped by, if not perhaps “originally” derived from, the well-known prophetic ḥadīth that describes women as “deficient in reason and religion.”⁶⁶

Al-Zamakhsharī here is primarily concerned with delineating the stations that (free) men and women “should” occupy in the social hierarchy. His brief allusions to biological-medical notions in his mention of beards⁶⁷ as well as physical strength, along with his reference to men’s allegedly greater intellectual powers and his listing of legal and ritual distinctives, make it clear that in his view all these factors are interlinked. Notably, the ostensible markers of (free) masculinity listed here tell us less about reality—al-Zamakhsharī is

the country, and praying in congregation or alone should chant it; see: *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ li-Shams al-Dīn al-Sarakhsī*, ii, 44 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*).

- 62 *Ḥudūd* (sing. *ḥadd*) are defined by the jurists as crimes against God that have fixed penalties specified by the Quran. Among these are: theft, highway robbery, *zinā* (fornication/adultery), and making a false accusation of *zinā*.
- 63 “*al-qasāma*.” According to the Ḥanafīs, if the body of a murder victim is found and his relative comes to demand justice from the people of the locale, the free men among the latter are bound to take an oath declaring where the corpse was found, and that they do not know who the killer is. However, a free woman is not to take part in such an oath, unless the body was found on property belonging to her; see: Abū l-Zuhra, *Mawsūʿat al-fiqh al-Islāmī* ii, 256.
- 64 Jār Allāh Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fi wujūh al-taʿwīl* ii, 67.
- 65 Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 279.
- 66 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Abdallāh Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* i, 416.
- 67 Some medieval Muslim scholars theorized (based on humoral medicine) that men are able to grow beards because their bodies have greater heat; it was also suggested that beards are connected by veins to men’s testicles. Beards were given symbolic value in part because they served to distinguish men from women, eunuchs, and children (Gadelrab, Discourses on sex 77).

constrained to admit that there are exceptions to some of his statements—than about what he regards as emblematically “masculine.”

The “men” referred to in this passage are clearly free, as the extent to which a number of these ostensible markers of “masculinity” applied to male slaves was a matter of ongoing debate.⁶⁸ In line with late antique socio-legal norms, classical Islamic law marked the distinction between free and slave in a multitude of ways, with a tendency towards granting a slave less than what a free male is entitled to in a given circumstance.⁶⁹ The free/slave binary was not necessarily unalterable at the individual level, as slaves could be, and sometimes were, freed, but it was a permanent feature of the social hierarchy as far as legal theory was concerned.⁷⁰ The abilities and socio-religious roles, as well as ritual and legal privileges listed here are intended to mark the boundaries of (free) maleness, over against male slaves as well as all females. Nonetheless, even a male slave could exercise some of the emblematically masculine prerogatives listed here.

Significantly, many of these markers of masculinity involve speech that is both public and authoritative. Giving testimony in cases involving *ḥadd* punishments, summoning people to prayer, leading congregational prayer and giving sermons are classified here as quintessentially masculine, as is the right to make certain performative utterances, such as pronouncing unilateral divorce (*ṭalāq*), and revoking it. With a performative utterance, an authorized person brings a relationship or state of affairs into being through the use of a word or words.⁷¹ In the Quran, this is presented as a divine power first and foremost—“When [God] wills something to be, He says, ‘Be!’ and it is” (Q 36:82)⁷²—but also as a power that has been divinely apportioned to human beings, though to widely variable degrees, in accordance with their ranks in the social hierarchy.

68 For example, while free men could serve as witnesses in almost every situation (barring specific circumstances that could invalidate a given individual's testimony, such as conflict of interest), according to most jurists, slave men could not. Exegetes thus routinely interpret the directive in Q 2:282 to “call in two men as witnesses” as referring to free men only; see for example: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* iii, 153; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashfī*, 475.

69 For slavery and class in medieval Muslim societies, see: Keddie, *Women in the Middle East* 41–2.

70 For the existence of slavery as a foundational assumption in classical Islamic legal debates about marriage and divorce, see: Ali, *Marriage and slavery*.

71 For performative utterances, see: Austin, *How to do things with words*.

72 Similarly: Q 2:117, 3:59, 19:35. For a discussion of the theological centrality of the spoken and written word in classical Muslim thought, see: Saleh, *Word* 356–76.

Free males are given the broadest access to this power in the Quran,⁷³ and the jurists both affirmed and further extended this pattern. A man's ability to unilaterally divorce his wife for any—or no—reason at all (as well as the right of a male or female slave-owner to manumit his or her slave) by simply pronouncing certain words is, as Yossef Rapoport observes, “an extreme manifestation of patriarchal authority.” Through these performative utterances, the speaker unilaterally breaks the social bonds that make up a household at his⁷⁴ discretion.⁷⁵

Moreover, al-Zamakhsharī here presents differential access to “words of power” as much more than a mere social arrangement, as he identifies the prophets down through the ages as male figures. Receiving the divine word as well as proclaiming it in order to guide humanity, acts that the Quran depicts as the most theologically central to human history, are presented here as intrinsically masculine. It is no accident that al-Zamakhsharī mentions the *‘ulamā’* right after the prophets. As the “heirs of the prophets,”⁷⁶ it is the *‘ulamā’* who are empowered to authoritatively interpret the Quran as well as the teachings and life-example of Muḥammad.

2.3 Q 43:18—“Someone who is brought up amongst trinkets . . .”

In the classical interpretive discourse on Q 4:34, intelligence and rationality function as markers of gender difference. In a similar vein, Q 43:18—“Someone who is brought up amongst trinkets, who cannot put together a clear argument”—was widely interpreted by Quran commentators from the formative period onward as a reference to women's allegedly lesser intelligence, lack of eloquence and limited ability to reason.⁷⁷ When exegetes' interpretations of this verse are studied synoptically as well as analytically, its function in Quran commentaries as a locus for the textual negotiation and construction of the gender category of (free) “men” as well as the implications of the latter for commentators' theorizing on hermeneutics and interpretive authority becomes clear.

73 The Quran speaks of men as the ones who pronounce and revoke *ṭalāq* (e.g. Q 2:228–9), and who have the power to suspend their marriages by pronouncing *ilā'* (2:226) and *zihār* (Q 58:2–4). Significantly, while the practice of *zihār* is condemned in these verses, the husband's words are nonetheless presented as effective.

74 Or her, in the case of a female slave-owner manumitting a slave.

75 Rapoport, *Marriage, money and divorce* 108–9.

76 According to a well-known statement from a longer *ḥadīth*, “. . . The *‘ulamā’* are the heirs of the prophets . . .”; e.g.: Abū Dāwūd iii, 313 (*K. al-‘Ilm*); Ibn Māja i, 81 (*Bāb faḍl al-‘ulamā’ wa-l-ḥathth ‘alā ṭalab al-‘ilm*).

77 E.g. al-Ṭabarī xxv, 66; al-Thaḥlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 408–9; al-Samarqandī iii, 204.

Q 43:18 presented exegetes with more than a few problems of interpretation. Its correct recitation, the meaning of several key words, and its relation to the gendered social order were all issues of debate that are often explicitly intertwined in their discussions of it. In the quranic text itself, this verse is part of a polemical passage that condemns pagan Arab beliefs in goddesses:

Yet they assign some of His own servants to Him as offspring! Man is clearly ungrateful!
 Has He taken daughters for Himself and favoured you with sons?
 When one of them is given news of the birth of a daughter, such as he so readily ascribes to the Lord of Mercy, his face grows dark and he is filled with gloom
 Someone who is brought up amongst trinkets, who cannot put together a clear argument?
 They consider the angels—God’s servants—to be female. Did they witness their creation?
 Their claim will be put on record and they will be questioned about it. . . . (Q 43:15–19)

What has survived of the commentary attributed to Ibn Wahb simply reports that according to Ibn Zayd, the verse refers to the deities (*aṣnām*) which were worshipped by the Arabs before Islam.⁷⁸ However, Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722) is said to have interpreted the verse as referring to “girls” (*jawārī*),⁷⁹ adding by way of explanation: “they [i.e. the pagans] claimed that these females are God’s offspring—how wrongly they judge!”⁸⁰ Muqātil b. Sulaymān informs us that the first half of the verse—“someone who is brought up amongst trinkets”—refers “those who grow up in adornment, i.e. jewellery, in the company of women, that is, daughters (*banāt*),” while the second half—“who cannot put together a clear argument”—means that “this female offspring is frail, weak in stratagem, and it does not speak eloquently in debates or disputes, due to her impotence.”⁸¹

The ambiguity inherent in the interpretations credited to Mujāhid and especially Muqātil is noteworthy. Is this verse about the pagan Arab statues of

78 ‘Abdallāh Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi‘: Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān (Die Koranexegese)* 1993, fol. 23a, 1–2.

79 Abū ‘Ubayda also gives this synonym (Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā, *Majāz al-Qur’ān* ii, 203).

80 Mujāhid b. Jabr al-Makkī, *Tafṣīr al-Imām Mujāhid b. Jabr* 593; Bukhārī vi, 328 (*K. al-Tafṣīr*). This explanation intentionally echoes quranic phraseology; see for example Q 37:149–58.

81 “*hādihā l-walad al-unthā da‘īf qalil al-ḥīla wa-huwa ‘inda l-khuṣūma wa-l-muḥāraba ghayr bayyin da‘īf ‘anhā*” (Muqātil iii, 187).

female deities, or pagan beliefs that angels are the daughters of God, or about human females—or perhaps all three? With the argument that the pagans were obviously wrong to give divine status to something as supposedly incapable as a female, the horror of “idolatry” slides almost seamlessly into misogyny, so that the one becomes hardly separable from the other in this interpretive discourse.

Parallel to such periphrastic interpretations,⁸² exegetical works with a predominantly linguistic focus note the existence of several different ways of reciting as well as of writing it. Al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) notes several, including one recitation attributed to the Companion Ibn Masʿūd (which “clarifies” its meaning by adding a couple of words),⁸³ and al-Zajjāj provides yet another.⁸⁴ The issue at stake is whether the “someone” (*man*) referred to in this verse could have been manufactured (i.e. like an inanimate object such as a statue) or has grown and developed, and is therefore human.⁸⁵ Al-Farrāʾ informs us that the second half of the verse—“who cannot put together a clear argument”—means that this one is not able to attain the degree of debating skill that men can reach.⁸⁶ Similarly, al-Zajjāj states that a female (*unthā*) is not able to present a complete argument or to make her meaning clear; therefore, it is said that a woman cannot articulate any argument that is not in actuality an argument against her.⁸⁷ While the view that Q 43:18 refers to the “idols” of the pagan Arabs is often mentioned by proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes from the formative period onwards,⁸⁸ they clearly prefer interpretations holding that the verse is referring to “females,” “girls” and/or “women.”⁸⁹

82 I.e. interpretations which briefly provide synonyms or short phrases in order to clarify the meaning of a particular word, expression or verse.

83 According to the reading of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim, which is the most widely used reading today, the word is recited as “*yunashshaʿu*.” Al-Farrāʾ relates that Yaḥyā b. Wathāb, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and the students of Ibn Masʿūd wrote it slightly differently, but it seems that the sound would have been the same nonetheless; ʿĀṣim and the people of Ḥijāz recited it as “*yunshaʿu*” (Abū Zakariyya Yaḥyā b. Ziyād al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* iii, 29).

84 “*yunassaʿa*” (al-Zajjāj iv, 106).

85 E.g. al-Naḥḥās iv, 68–9.

86 “*lā yablugh min al-ḥujja mā yablugh al-rijāl*” (al-Farrāʾ iii, 29).

87 Al-Zajjāj iv, 106.

88 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xxv, 66; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 409; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān* ix, 189. Al-Māturīdī discusses this view, as well as the “mainstream” Sunni opinion that it refers to women, but seems dubious about both (*Taʿwīlāt* ix, 155).

89 By contrast, some early Twelver Shiʿi commentators regard Q 43:18 as a sarcastic comment made about Moses by Pharaoh; see: Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* ii, 256. However, al-Ṭūsī’s discussion of the verse replicates that of Sunni exegetes (*al-Tibyān* ix, 189–90).

In these Quran commentaries, such depictions of linguistic mastery—signaled by debating skills and clarity of expression—as a quintessentially masculine ability are more than simply a reflection of biases that were common at the time. Rather, it is linked to contestations over hermeneutics, as well as interpretive authority. In their discussions of Q 43:18, exegetes from the formative period onward typically link femaleness to a lack of eloquence, limited intelligence and weak reasoning abilities, through the medium of jewellery. For instance, in al-Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 43:18, he notes that authorities have differed as to whether the verse refers to the "idols" of the pagans, or to girls and women. Among the proof-texts that he quotes in favour of the latter view (which is the interpretation that he agrees with) is the following tradition:

... on the authority of Mujāhid, (who) said, "Women have been given a legal concession allowing them to wear silk and gold," and he⁹⁰ recited, "Someone who is brought up amongst trinkets, who cannot put together a clear argument' (Q 43:18)—meaning, the woman."⁹¹

Jewellery functions as a highly charged marker of gendered differences in social status in these exegetical discourses. Women's wearing of gold jewellery in particular was controversial among jurists and traditionists in the formative period, apparently because they associated it with excessive worldly indulgence as well as hoarding wealth.⁹² However, some argued through the medium of ḥadīths that it is permissible to women because they need to adorn themselves for their husbands.⁹³ Thus, jewellery-wearing is made to represent not only defective intelligence, irrationality, and reprehensible worldliness, but also sexual abjection. While the latter is presented as appropriate for females, exegetes depict it as the antithesis of free Muslim masculinity. Accordingly, al-Wāḥidī (d. 486/1076) in his commentary, *al-Basīṭ*, glosses "someone who is brought up amongst trinkets" as "*al-ubna*" (i.e. a *ma'būn*, or a male who desires to be anally penetrated).⁹⁴

90 I.e. presumably Mujāhid.

91 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxv, 66. Al-Tha'labī also cites this (*al-Kashf* v, 408–9).

92 The Quran emphatically condemns hoarding, see for example Q 9:34–5.

93 For a selection of traditions on this issue, see: al-Jaṣṣāṣ iii, 387–8.

94 For medieval attitudes toward *ubna*, see: El-Rouayheb, *Before homosexuality* 18–25. For an overview of the classical legal discourse on same-sex sexual acts, see: Adang, Ibn Ḥazm on homosexuality 5–31.

It is unclear where al-Wāḥidī got this particular periphrasis from.⁹⁵ He is evidently not quoting his teacher al-Thaʿlabī,⁹⁶ and it is probably revealing that he only includes it in *al-Basīṭ*—the commentary in which he is at his most iconoclastic, attempting to base his exegesis entirely on linguistic considerations and largely ignoring inherited tradition.⁹⁷ In his other two commentaries, *al-Wasīṭ* and *al-Wajīz*, which take a far more conventional approach to exegesis, he glosses it as “daughters.”⁹⁸ Yet, it is the explicitness of the gloss “*al-ubna*” that is highly unusual, not the sentiment behind it.

The *maʿbun* is excoriated by medieval Muslim authors because through his sexual receptivity, he reveals the fragility of the hierarchical gender categories of “male” and “female,” and thus the impossibility of fixing their boundaries. While a number of medieval exegetes are content to merely underline what they see as the quintessential femininity of both jewellery-wearing and weakness in linguistic expression, some explicitly voice their horror of free men “lowering” themselves to the level of women by adorning themselves. In his interpretation of Q 43:18, al-Zamakhsharī, who explicitly attributes women’s alleged inability to make strong logical arguments to “their falling short of the nature of men,”⁹⁹ exhorts men to keep themselves well away from the “shame” associated with luxurious lifestyles. Quoting ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, he asserts that men should be hard and rough, and directs men to adorn themselves inwardly, with God-consciousness (*taqwā*), rather than through attire or ornament.¹⁰⁰

95 Al-Wāḥidī states, “Muqātil says: ‘Raised in adornment’—meaning, *al-ubna*” (al-Wāḥidī, *al-Basīṭ*, fol. 121, *sub.* Q 43:18). I would like to thank Walid Saleh for this reference. In the *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* as it has come down to us, this verse is glossed as a reference to daughters (*banāt*); see: Muqātil iii, 187. However, it is possible that the Iranian or Khorasani recension of the *Tafsīr Muqātil*, now lost to us, might have contained the gloss that al-Wāḥidī cites—or that he is in fact quoting the exegete Muqātil b. Ḥayyān (d. ca. 150/767). For the latter, see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 520.

96 Al-Thaʿlabī. *al-Kashf* v, 408–9.

97 See: Saleh, The Introduction 67–100. For al-Wāḥidī’s various hermeneutical approaches in his Quran commentaries, see: Saleh, The last.

98 Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd* iv, 67; Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Al-Wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-ʿazīz* ii, 972.

99 “*wa-nuqṣānihinna ʿan fiṭrat al-rijāl.*”

100 Al-Zamakhsharī v, 433. This is an allusion to Q 7:26—“...the garment of God-consciousness (*libās al-taqwā*) is the best of all garments...”

This theme is presented in increasingly categorical terms in several late medieval *tafsīr* works.¹⁰¹ For instance, al-Rāzī (d. 604/1207) stresses the link between the legal permission for women to wear jewellery and their supposed intellectual deficiencies (*nuqṣān*) and impotence in debate, emphatically declaring that jewellery is forbidden for men, because Q 43:18 brands such adornment as “disgraceful and causing deficiency.”¹⁰² Rather, he insists, men should remember the saying of the prophet: “It does not behoove a believer to disgrace himself,” and instead, adorn themselves with virtuous characteristics, such as steadfastness and God-consciousness.¹⁰³ In a similar vein, Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) states that jewellery-wearing is not appropriate for anyone save “females, who, lacking virility, beautify themselves for their husbands.”¹⁰⁴ Thus according to him, males should disdain such adornments, as “virile men hate to be described as though they have women’s characteristics.”¹⁰⁵

There is far more at issue here than some Quran commentators’ dislike for male urban elite fashions of their times. In this interpretive discourse, exegetes link the “proper” attire and comportment of (free Muslim) “male” bodies to gendered notions of rationality, intelligence and linguistic mastery, which are defined over/against the presumed intellectual deficiencies and limited command of language said to be typical of females. Such gendered *topoi* became part and parcel of hermeneutical formulations in the formative period.

For example, in the lengthy introduction to his Quran commentary, al-Ṭabarī gives eloquence (*bayān*) a pivotal position in both his assertions of the divine nature of the Quran itself—the quintessentially eloquent revelation—and his interpretive theory. In his view, the Quran’s status as divine revelation does not place the understanding of its meanings beyond the grasp of humans, because God has made this divine scripture clear to whoever possesses the requisite understanding. But God (al-Ṭabarī says) has given some people more

101 This is a particularly interesting development in view of the well-known involvement of women in some fields of religious learning, most notably in ḥadīth transmission, during this period.

102 “*min al-ma’ayib wa-mūjibāt al-nuqṣān.*” For a similarly emphatic description of women as innately deficient, see: Ibn Kathīr vii, 148.

103 Al-Rāzī xxvii, 174. For similar sentiments expressed by exegetes writing in the century following, see: Abū l-Barakāt ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī* iv, 115; Niẓām al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qummī al-Naysābūrī, *Tafsīr Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān wa-raghā’ib al-furqān* vi, 88.

104 “*wa-huwa l-hulī lladhī lā yaliq illā bi-l-ināth dūna l-fihūl li-tazayyanuhunna bi-dhālik li-azwājihinna*” (Athīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. Ḥayyān al-shahīr bi-Abī Ḥayyān al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* viii, 14).

105 “*wa-l-faḥl min al-rijāl abā an yakūn mutaṣṣifan bi-ṣifāt al-nisā*” (ibid).

linguistic ability than others, thereby raising some above others in rank. Both quranic and human eloquence are gendered masculine in his discussion, in part through his citation of Q 43:18.¹⁰⁶

Such interpretations illustrate that gender categories are far from being static, universally agreed-upon textual entities in medieval Quran commentaries. Rather, they are continuously constructed and ever (re)negotiated. The main issue at stake for exegetes, however, is the establishment and maintenance of social order rather than gender *per se*. Not only was it their conviction that the Quran provided the wherewithal for them to make sense of their world—and that world was replete with hierarchies—but for them, a “true” religion is one that establishes and sustains a hierarchical social order.¹⁰⁷ They viewed the Quran’s ability to realize the latter as a proof of the veracity of its message.

Moreover, we see that as exegetes construct and (re)produce gender categories, they also construct their own interpretive authority as emblematically masculine, over against what they regard as the Quran’s equation of femaleness with intrinsic physical, intellectual and spiritual deficiency. It would not be too much to say that they brought into being a quranic text that appears to virtually refuse the possibility that any woman could possess the authority to legitimately interpret it. Yet, because both the gender categories that exegetes construct as well as interpretive authority are continually being textually (re)negotiated, the historical situation is more complex than this observation might suggest.

As we have already seen, a number of exegetes in the formative and early medieval periods and later did at times quote traditions in their Quran commentaries that are attributed to early Muslim women, particularly to a few of the wives of the prophet. Examining the interpretive history of two quranic verses which appear to grant the wives of the prophet a degree of authority provides further insight into the ways that exegetes gendered interpretive authority.

3 Gender, Authority and the Wives of Muḥammad

The portrayal of the wives of Muḥammad in the Quran is often characterized in general as one of a group of women who are subject to increasing degrees

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* i, 16.

¹⁰⁷ For the justifications given by two medieval exegetes, al-Māwardī and al-Rāzī, of social hierarchies, see: Marlow, *Hierarchy and egalitarianism* 145–7.

of constraint, on the strength of the well-known verses rebuking them, and prescribing obedience, very restrained interaction with males, and seclusion (i.e. Q 33:32–3, 53).¹⁰⁸ However, little critical scholarly attention has been paid to two aspects of the depiction of these women in the Quran that complicate this rather subdued image: the apparent reference to the title that they are often given in the ḥadīth literature, “Mothers of the Believers” (Q 33:6), and a command that they remember the revelations received by Muḥammad (Q 33:34). Moreover, the quranic verses mentioning or addressing Muḥammad’s wives are often read today in terms of anachronistic or even ahistorical conceptions of wife-, mother- and widowhood, as well as dichotomous categories such as public/private, political/domestic, and sacred space/profane space. That complex historical processes have taken place in order to produce these concepts as we now know them is seldom acknowledged, much less critically examined.

While a detailed reappraisal of the quranic portrayal of these women is beyond the scope of this study, an analytical examination of exegetes’ interpretations of Q 33:6 and Q 33:34 is key to understanding the ways that Quran commentators in the formative and early medieval periods constructed interpretive authority as gendered. In particular, the interpretive discourse associated with both verses vividly illustrates some of the tensions that arise when idealized, theoretical, gendered constructions of authority intersect with various (and varying) communally held memories of historical figures whose lives famously departed from such ideals.

3.1 Q 33:6—“... as his wives are their mothers...”

As is well known, the wives of Muḥammad as a group are frequently referred to in the ḥadīth literature as the “Mothers of the Believers” (*ummahāt al-mu’minīn*). As individuals, they are sometimes addressed as “Mother of the Believers” (*umm al-mu’minīn*), or more simply as “Mother” (*yā ummatāh*). Contemporary scholarship generally assumes that this title is derived from Q 33:6—“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers...” Nonetheless, it is unknown whether the title developed as the result of this quranic verse, or, conversely, if the verse is referring to an already existing title.¹⁰⁹

108 For a discussion of these verses, see: Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an* 85–102; Ahmed, *Women and gender* 52–7.

109 But cf: Abbott, *A’ishah the beloved* 57. It is interesting to note the structural parallel with the title, “*amīr al-mu’minīn*”, which was used to refer to a man exercising military command during the lifetime of Muḥammad, and was first adopted as the title of the caliph

Different explanations have been advanced as to its significance. It has been variously argued that this title reflects Muḥammad's desire to prevent his wives from being able to remarry after his death,¹¹⁰ or that it may have been intended as "compensation" for the imposition of particularly stringent limitations on their conduct,¹¹¹ or that it refers to their status (along with Muḥammad) as exemplars for the community.¹¹² By contrast, Barbara Stowasser asserts that it expresses these women's authority within the early Muslim community.¹¹³ She points to two traditions which are cited by Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/844) as commentary on Q 33:6:

... Masrūq, regarding [God's] statement, *The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers* . . . said: A woman said to 'Ā'isha, "O Mother!" 'Ā'isha said to her, "I am the mother of your men; I am not the mother of your women."

Al-Wāqidi said: I mentioned this to 'Abdallāh b. Mūsā al-Makhzūmī, and he said, "Mus'ab b. 'Abdallāh b. Abī Umayya informed me that Umm Salama, the wife of the Prophet, said, 'I am the mother of the men among you and (of) the women.'¹¹⁴

This debate underlines the historically and culturally constructed nature of motherhood—be it physical or metaphorical—in these texts. When designating the wives of the prophet as "mothers" of the believers, Q 33:6 apparently gives them a title (or alludes to one by which they are already known) that has analogies in a number of late antique religious communities. For example, the title "mother (or father) of the synagogue" was apparently used for some of the leaders of certain synagogues in the diaspora,¹¹⁵ while desert-dwelling female ascetics in late antique Egypt and Palestine, as well as nuns and women

by 'Umar. Its origins are unclear, though it is thought to have been inspired by Q 4:59—"O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those who are in authority among you (*ūlī-l-amri minkum*)"; see: Gibb, Amīr al-Mu'minīn, *EI* i: 445a.

110 Ascha, *The 'Mothers of the Believers'* 92–3.

111 Ahmed, *Women and gender* 57.

112 Spellberg, *Politics, gender and the Islamic past* 154.

113 Stowasser, *The status of women* 12. Cf.: Spellberg, *Politics* 154.

114 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 230–1.

115 Brooten, *Women leaders* 70; Kraemer, *Her share of the blessings* 121. This title has antecedents in both the Hebrew Bible and in Greco-Roman culture. Deborah, a prophet, judge, and leader, is called "a mother in Israel" (Judg. 5:7). Greco-Roman public benefactors who made generous contributions to temples or other civic institutions held titles such as "mother (or father) of the city" (Kraemer, *Her share* 88).

who headed monasteries in Egypt bore the honorific title of “*amma*,” meaning “mother.”¹¹⁶

It has been observed that such titles can express or be used to legitimate female religious authority, but can also become the means through which female religious authority is limited or even contested. Some scholars who have studied the use of titles of this type in the Hebrew Bible have suggested that such titles ostensibly honour influential women, while at the same time minimizing their power and the possible threat that this might pose to dominant gender ideologies, by rhetorically situating them within the sphere of home and family.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, others have pointed out that titles of this type may enable some women to take on nontraditional roles by constructing their actions in the public sphere as an extension of their domestic responsibilities.¹¹⁸

The traditional Muslim accounts of the turmoil in the latter stages of the caliphate of ‘Uthmān (r. 24–36/664–656) as well as during the reign of ‘Alī (36–41/656–661) famously portray some of the Mothers of the Believers apparently attempting to do the latter. ‘Uthmān attempts to placate his critics by undertaking to obey the decisions taken by the wives of Muḥammad as well as other leading figures in Medina,¹¹⁹ and ‘Ā’isha employs “maternal” rhetoric in order to rally men to her side against ‘Alī.¹²⁰ The number of men who answered her call and fought on her side at the Battle of the Camel (36/656)¹²¹ would seem to indicate that a significant number of her contemporaries agreed that the title, “Mother of the Believers” did endow her with a degree of political authority.¹²²

It should also be noted that some discourses in classical Muslim texts on the legitimacy of ‘Ā’isha’s political involvement, and particularly of her presence on the battlefield appear to have been shaped to varying degrees by anachronistic assumptions about the way that space was gendered in Muḥammad’s community. Moreover, in their readings of the quranic verses mentioning his wives, contemporary historians at times seem to be influenced by the views expressed by some modern conservative Muslim scholars and ideologues opposed to women’s playing active or leading political or otherwise “public”

116 Vogt, *The desert mothers* 209.

117 Brenner, *Women’s traditions* 60.

118 Kraemer, *Her share* 142.

119 Madelung, *The succession* 106.

120 Madelung, *The succession* 164, 167–8.

121 The Battle of the Camel, so called after the camel that ‘Ā’isha sat on while exhorting the soldiers to fight, was one of a series of battles between ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and various political factions which opposed his accession to the caliphate. For ‘Ā’isha’s part in this battle, as well as in the events leading up to it, see: Madelung, *The succession* 147ff.

122 Though cf.: Spellberg, *Politics* 102–3.

roles, as well as by pre-modern texts discussing ‘Ā’isha at the Battle of the Camel.¹²³ As a result, the quranic verses mandating his wives’ seclusion are sometimes presumed to have been understood by their “original” audience as relegating these women to “private” domestic space, severely limiting their active involvement in most “public” aspects of communal life, and separating them from the sacred space of the mosque as well. However, available evidence strongly suggests that such neat separations of spheres of existence did not exist for the quranic text’s “original” audience. It appears that the “mosque” established by Muḥammad in Yathrib was in fact a “house-mosque,” intended to function primarily as a dwelling, but not conceptualized as either “private” or purely “domestic” space. The rooms that his wives lived in opened onto the courtyard, where his followers would come together for congregational worship as well as a number of other communal activities.¹²⁴ Even after men had been famously instructed to speak to Muḥammad’s wives from behind a screen (Q 33:53), the courtyard remained the centre of community meetings as well as worship. It seems most unlikely that these women were expected to be unaware of (or uninvolved in) these, and what they portended for the community’s future.¹²⁵

Nonetheless, later generations of Muslims—both Sunni and Shi‘i—would look back with horror at the carnage which resulted from the Battle of the Camel in particular and maintain that ‘Ā’isha should have abstained from taking part. Exegetes from the formative period generally attempt to preclude the possibility of a reading of Q 33:6 that could retroactively justify her having played a leading role in that event. At the same time, proto-Sunni (and later Sunni) Quran commentators were also clearly trying to place all of the wives of Muḥammad on a pedestal of sorts, in part in order to counter Shi‘i efforts to downgrade or dismiss the significance of any of them.¹²⁶ Therefore, they address the question of the scope of these women’s “motherhood:” Were they “mothers” of the community as a whole, or only of its male members?

123 For a critique of interpretations of medieval texts that tend to reduce presentations of ‘Ā’isha’s role in that battle to a blanket condemnation of women’s political activities, see: Meisami, *Writing medieval women* 68–70.

124 Campo, *The other sides* 50–3; Peters, *Muhammad* 194–7.

125 For more on this, see Chapter Three.

126 Al-Māturīdī claims that the Bāṭiniyya (i.e. Ismā‘īlis) deny that the verse refers to Muḥammad’s wives, arguing that if they were in fact the mothers of the believers, then their children—as sisters and brothers of the believers—would not have been able to marry anyone in the community (*Ta’wīlāt* viii, 354).

A number of exegetical works declare that the “Mothers of the Believers” are (only) mothers “in their inviolability” (*fi l-ḥurma*)—meaning, no man may marry them; that a degree of respect is their due is also implied.¹²⁷ The historical-political concerns underlying this interpretation are hinted at by the fifth/eleventh exegete al-Wāḥidī, who cites al-Shāfi‘ī’s (d. 204/819) declaration that its meaning is that while the wives of the prophet remain unmarriageable in perpetuity, nonetheless, no man is permitted to interact with them as he may do with his mother; he may not meet with them in privacy, nor travel with them.¹²⁸ This of course evokes—and implicitly criticizes—‘Ā’isha’s well-known journey to Baṣra prior to the Battle of the Camel.

Classical exegetical works continue this interpretive trajectory. Although Ibn Sa’d gives Umm Salama the last word on the scope of the “maternity” referred to in Q 33:6, this view credited to her does not appear to have been included often in Sunni Quran commentaries.¹²⁹ The first of the two traditions of Ibn Sa’d, in which ‘Ā’isha says that she is the mother only of the men in the community, is quoted in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* as evidence that such motherhood implies nothing more than their inviolability.¹³⁰ The popularity of this interpretive move is evidenced by the number of subsequent exegetes who employ it. These include not only Ibn Abī Zamanīn (quoting Yaḥyā),¹³¹ and several exegetes who are evidently following the lead of al-Tha’labī,¹³² but some others as well.¹³³ Its advantage is that it causes ‘Ā’isha herself to implicitly admit that whatever her past actions might suggest, Q 33:6 does not in fact endow her

127 E.g. Muqātil iii, 36; Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Muslim b. Qutayba al-Dīnawārī, *Ta’wīl mushkil al-Qur’ān* 70; al-Zajjāj iii, 373; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxi, 131.

128 “. . . wa-huwa annahunna muḥarramāt ‘alā l-ta’bīd wa-mā kunna maḥārim fi l-khalwa wa-l-musāfara” (al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iii, 459).

129 A few commentators mention the view that the Mothers of the Believers are the mothers of both women and men, but do not cite the Umm Salama tradition; e.g.: al-Māwardī iv, 375; Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* 1509. While Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī cites the Umm Salama tradition, he traces it back to Ibn Sa’d, but significantly, not to any of the *tafsīr* works which are his basic sources (*Durr* vi, 567). It would seem that this tradition was not often quoted in exegetes’ discussions of Q 33:6.

130 Yaḥyā ii, 699–700.

131 Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Īsā Ibn Abī Zamanīn al-Murrī, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Zamanīn wa-huwa mukhtaṣar Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* ii, 158.

132 E.g. al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* v, 80; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iii, 459; Nāṣir al-Dīn Abū Sa’īd ‘Abdallāh Abū ‘Umar b. Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī al-musammā Anwār al-tanzīl wa-l-asrār al-ta’wīl* iv, 364.

133 E.g. Ibn al-‘Arabī iii, 1508–9; Abū l-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fi ‘ilm al-tafsīr* vi, 353.

with political authority; all it does is to prohibit the wives of Muḥammad from remarrying after his death.¹³⁴

But the main focus of much of the commentary on Q 33:6, even in the formative period, was to delineate the preeminent position of the prophet in relation to his community.¹³⁵ A variant reading of the verse adds the words, “and he [Muḥammad] is their father” (*wa-huwa ab^{um} la-hum*).¹³⁶ The popularity of this explanatory addition to the verse was apparently such that al-Zajjāj even feels the need to caution his audience/readers that it is not to be recited as part of the quranic text.¹³⁷ Such interpretations also have the effect of overshadowing the reference to Muḥammad’s wives as mothers.

Nonetheless, such exegetical efforts never entirely succeeded in rendering the quranic reference to Muḥammad’s wives as the “mothers” of the believers completely innocuous. One factor in this was the continued salience of two of the wives of the prophet (particularly ‘Ā’isha, and to a much lesser extent, Umm Salama) in Sunni-Shi‘i polemic, which left its mark on the medieval genre of Quran commentary.¹³⁸ Such ongoing sectarian sniping helped to ensure that ‘Ā’isha’s leading role in the events culminating in the Battle of the Camel remained an ever-relevant concern that few medieval Quran commentators would neglect to discuss. But it is important to bear in mind that for proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes in particular, the larger question at stake was the spectre of a woman wielding authority during the exemplary era of the Companions—the time that Sunnis would come to idealize as the era when political and religious authority were one, not only in theory, but in lived reality. Thus, exegetes’ efforts to limit the scope of the motherhood imputed to the wives of the prophet in Q 33:6 was also related to the often controversial question of what (if any) level of religio-interpretive authority could be legitimately imputed to a woman.

134 Al-Wāḥidī makes this explicit (*al-Wasīṭ* iii, 459).

135 For Twelver Shi‘i exegetes, this verse also refers to the imāms; e.g. al-Qummī ii, 176; Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* iv, 164–5.

136 ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* iii; al-Farrā’ ii, 335; Yaḥyā ii, 699; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xxi, 131; al-Samarqandī ii, 38.

137 Al-Zajjāj iii, 373. Ibn Kathīr, writing centuries later, points out that this reading contradicts Q 33:40—“Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men” (*Tafsīr* vi, 175).

138 For late medieval examples of sectarian point-scoring in the course of discussion of Q 33:6, see: Ibn Kathīr vi, 175 (for a fervently Sunnī viewpoint), as well as the mordant comment of the Twelver Shi‘i exegete Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, writing several centuries later (*Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* iv, 167).

3.2 Q 33:34—“Remember what is recited in your homes . . .”

In Q 33:34, the wives of Muḥammad are instructed:

Remember (*adhkurna*)¹³⁹ what is recited in your homes of the signs of God and wisdom; surely God is subtle, aware. (Q 33:34)

Despite its most unusual direct address of the women themselves, this short verse has received very little attention from modern critical scholarship.¹⁴⁰ This is likely in part because Q 33:34 immediately follows a well-known and lengthy admonition of the prophet’s wives—also directly addressed to them—which sternly warns of divine punishment if they commit any act of indecency, prescribes limits on their interaction with unrelated males, and emphatically exhorts them to be obedient (Q 33:30–3). In addition, classical exegetes seldom appear to attach much importance to either the Quran’s direct address of Muḥammad’s wives, or to the specific commands given to them in Q 33:34.¹⁴¹ Thus, neither the context in which Q 33:34 appears in the quranic text nor its readily accessible history of interpretation seems at first glance to suggest that it contains much of interest to historians.

However, it is noteworthy that elsewhere in the Quran, Muḥammad’s prophetic mission is summed up as teaching his people God’s signs (*āyāt*) and wisdom (*ḥikma*).¹⁴² Evidently, what his wives are being commanded to remember in Q 33:34 is the totality of his teachings—both his recited revelations and other teachings as well.¹⁴³

139 This imperative form of the verb is in the feminine plural.

140 The only recent critical attention to this verse appears to be the mention that it receives from Stowasser (*Women in the Qur’an* 98, 173, n. 83).

141 This is so much the case that some exegetes discuss it primarily as grammatical evidence in relation to the perennially contentious and politically sensitive issue of the identity of the family of the prophet (*aḥl al-bayt*) mentioned in the previous verse; e.g. al-Zajjāj iii, 379; al-Baghawī iii, 456.

142 E.g. Q 3:164—“God has been truly gracious to the believers in sending them a messenger from among their own, to recite His revelations (*āyātihi*) to them, to make them grow in purity, and to teach them the Scripture and wisdom (*ḥikma*)—before that they were clearly astray”; see also Q 2:129,151; 62:2.

143 Cf. Gertrude Stern’s comments on this verse; in her view, Q 33:34 likely means that Muḥammad’s wives “were to memorize his teachings, which they heard in the *masjid* or in their homes, and those revelations, which took place in ‘Ā’isha’s home” (The first women 304–5.)

In *tafsīr* works from the formative and medieval periods, the “signs of God” mentioned in Q 33:34 are usually glossed as “the Quran,”¹⁴⁴ while “wisdom” is typically defined either as referring to the commands and prohibitions given by God in the Quran¹⁴⁵ or as a reference to the *sunna*,¹⁴⁶ a number of Quran commentaries give both explanations.¹⁴⁷ But these interpretations are anachronistic. During Muḥammad’s life, revelation was an ongoing process rather than a book, while the concept of the prophetic *sunna* as it later came to be elaborated by legal scholars did not yet exist. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the interpretation equating the “*ḥikma*” which the wives of Muḥammad are to call to mind with the *sunna* implies that these women are commanded here to be thoroughly conversant with the two sources that came to be regarded as indispensable to *fiqh* by the Sunni legal schools. Yet significantly, prior to the fourth/tenth century, Quran commentators do not appear to have wished to expound at length upon the implications and scope of this in their discussions of Q 33:34.

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, who does provide more than a cursory gloss for this directive, interprets it as an emphatic command to the wives of Muḥammad to be obedient, refraining from any action that would cause harm or annoyance to the prophet.¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, his commentary quotes some traditions attributed to a few of Muḥammad’s wives in the course of his discussion of a number of verses. Nonetheless, in his interpretation of Q 33:34, he does not even hint that this verse charges these women with conveying their knowledge of Muḥammad’s revelations to the community.

In a similar vein, al-Wāḥidī asserts that through these women’s remembrance of the teachings of the Quran and the prophetic *sunna*, they will be reminded of the boundaries set by Islamic law:

This [verse] commands them to memorize the Quran and the traditions and call both to mind, in order to understand the legal limits and the (prophetic) message. This was particularly for them to focus on these because the law is built on these two [sources]: the Quran and the *sunna*.¹⁴⁹

144 E.g. Muqātil iii, 45; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 39; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxii, 12; al-Māturīdī viii, 384; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* v, 111.

145 Muqātil iii, 45; al-Samarqandī iii, 50.

146 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 39; Ibn Abū Ḥātim is also quoted as citing this view (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 607). Interestingly, al-Māturīdī additionally defines it as “philosophy” (*falāsifa*) in the sense of uniting knowledge with action (*Ta’wīlāt* viii, 384).

147 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxii, 12; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* v, 111.

148 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ iii, 359.

149 “*hādihā ḥaththa la-hunna ‘alā ḥifẓ al-Qur’ān wa-l-akhbār wa-mudhākiratihinna bi-himā li-l-ihāṭa bi-ḥudūd al-sharī’a wa-l-khiṭāb wa-in ikhtaṣṣa bi-hinna dākhil minhu li-anna mabnā al-sharī’a ‘alā hādhayn al-Qur’ān wa-l-sunna*” (al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iii, 470).

This line of interpretation holds that the wives of the prophet are instructed in Q 33:34 to learn and remember the Quran and *sunna* so that they will know how to conduct themselves in accordance with the strictures laid down by Islamic law—which also has the effect of reminding the reader/audience of the times when they arguably did not act thus.¹⁵⁰ But although al-Wāḥidī here explicitly imputes to these women the knowledge of the two main sources of the Sharī‘a, he does not imply that they were charged with transmitting this to the community. Nonetheless, he is clearly not averse to quoting ḥadīths attributed to several of Muḥammad’s wives (to ‘Ā’isha in particular) in the course of his exegesis of a range of other verses in his commentary *al-Wasīf*, in which this quotation appears. Evidently, including traditions ascribed to a wife of the prophet in a *tafsīr* work was one thing; explicitly imputing interpretive authority to such a woman was quite another.

However, Ibn al-‘Arabī does understand Q 33:34 as a command to Muḥammad’s wives to teach their knowledge to others. In his *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, he states:

God instructed the wives of his Messenger with [this] because they were thoroughly familiar with the quranic revelations that God had sent down in their homes, and the actions and speech of the Prophet when in their company, intending that [this knowledge] would reach the people, and they would know it, and follow it. And this indicates that it is permissible to accept a singleton tradition¹⁵¹ in [matters of] religion from men and women.¹⁵²

Sunni jurists made use of traditions credited to women—most often, to ‘Ā’isha—in their articulations of Islamic law, and, as will be seen, such traditions came to be incorporated into classical *tafsīr* works to varying extents. Here, Ibn al-‘Arabī naturalizes this “orthodox” Sunni legal development as an unproblematic, historically direct response to the divine command to

150 Al-Wāḥidī likely has in mind the Battle of the Camel, as well as a couple of incidents during Muḥammad’s lifetime when his wives were rebuked for their conduct (Q 33:28–9 and 66:1–5).

151 A singleton tradition (*khābar al-wāḥid*) is one that has only one or a few transmitters at every stage of the *isnād*.

152 “*amara Allāhu azwāj rasūlahu bi-an yukhbirna bi-mā anzala Allāh min al-Qur’ān fī buyūtihinna wa-mā yarayna min af’āl al-nabī wa-aqwālihi fihinna, ḥattā yablughu dhālika ilā l-nās, fa-ya’malū bi-mā fihi wa yaqtadū bihi. Wa-hādha yudillu ‘alā jawāz qabūl khābar al-wāḥid min al-rijāl wa-l-nisā’ fī dīn*” (Ibn al-‘Arabī iii, 1538).

Muḥammad's wives in Q 33:34. Nonetheless, available evidence suggests that such a forthright attribution of this role to the wives of the prophet may well have been unprecedented in the exegetical discourse on this verse, and its seeming novelty in the context of the *tafsīr* genre as it had developed by his time should be appreciated.¹⁵³

As Ibn al-ʿArabī's rather defensive assertion that singleton traditions from men and women alike are acceptable proofs in matters of religion suggests, the status of such traditions was controversial in the formative period.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, as we will see, debates on this question were sometimes carried on through the medium of polemical traditions in which a female transmitter (usually from the Companion generation) is accused of being an unreliable source—or at least, of failing to understand that the ḥadīth she is relating only pertains to quite specific or exceptional circumstances, and is not proof of a general legal ruling. Some polemical traditions of this type (henceforth, “hierarchization traditions”) occasionally appear in Quran commentaries from the second/eighth century on, even after the debate on the acceptability of singleton traditions had long since been resolved in Sunni circles. In part, this can be attributed to the genealogical nature of the *tafsīr* genre,¹⁵⁵ but it also reflects the complex textual labour that they perform in these works.¹⁵⁶

Concluding Remarks

As pre-modern interpretive discourses on Q 4:1, Q 4:34 and Q 43:18 illustrate, Quran commentators from the formative and medieval periods construct gender in ways that have direct implications for their understandings of interpretive authority. They present the free Muslim male in the abstract as embodying human intellectual, physical and spiritual potential in its most complete form. Such emblematically masculine completeness is constructed in these texts over against the deficiencies and weaknesses in intellect, linguistic expression and

153 Given that it is unknown to what extent the surviving pre-modern Quran commentaries might or might not be representative of the genre, this observation is unavoidably provisional. But it is telling that although both al-Ṭabarī and a “*mukhtaṣar al-Ṭabarī*” are among Ibn al-ʿArabī's sources, he is clearly not quoting or summarizing al-Ṭabarī here. Ibn al-ʿArabī's formulation of these women's role in this way had some impact on later exegesis; see: al-Qurṭubī xiii, 184.

154 For an overview of this debate, see: Robson, Traditions from individuals 327–40. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

155 Saleh, *Formation* 14.

156 For a detailed discussion of hierarchization traditions, see Chapter Three.

body as well as religious practice that supposedly typify femaleness. Therefore, interpretive authority as it is variously conceived of in formative and early medieval *tafsīr* works is invariably gendered. Gendered tropes serve as the vehicles of its ongoing negotiation and contestation and are central to debates over hermeneutics.

Certain historical factors made these tropes both compelling and assured their longevity. For instance, the construction of an “active,” dominant masculine sexuality that is a concrete expression of rationality, linguistic mastery and hence interpretive authority over/against a putative feminine sexual submissiveness that represents intellectual, linguistic and other myriad forms of “deficiency” was reinforced by discourses in other realms, such as the legal. Nonetheless, the notions of interpretative authority in the Quran commentaries examined in this study did not only rest upon such theoretical constructions of gender.

Two quranic verses appear to have “originally” extended a degree of authority to the prophet’s wives (or perhaps, recognized an already existing dynamic), referring to their honorific title of “Mothers of the Believers” (Q 33:6) and singling them out among his followers by instructing them to be guardians of his revelations (Q 33:34). Nonetheless, as an examination of formative and early medieval exegetes’ interpretations of these two verses indicates, neither Q 33:6 nor Q 33:34 were typically read in ways that might have posed any challenge to the gendering of interpretive authority as emblematically “masculine.” Available evidence suggests that it was not until the sixth/twelfth century that Q 33:34 was explained in an exegetical context as a command that Muḥammad’s wives convey their knowledge of his revelations and teachings to the community. But even then, the ability to authoritatively interpret the Quran is not attributed to them. Rather, they are cast in the role of supplier of materials whose relevance to exegesis is to be determined by (male) scholarly authorities—a role that certain early female figures, particularly ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr (and to a much lesser extent, Umm Salama)—had already been playing in Sunni Quran commentary for several centuries.

Moreover, this role is defined in these very Quran commentaries in paradoxical terms. Interpretive authority is emblematically “masculine.” As singular and highly exceptional figures who have at best a perennially unfixed relationship to interpretive authority, several of the wives of the prophet in particular (and to a markedly lesser extent, a small number of female Companions) can function very effectively in these texts as vehicles for negotiating various types of hermeneutical questions.

Gender is a construction that is being forever negotiated in *tafsīr* texts, and with it notions of interpretive authority. As we will see in the next chapter,

available evidence would seem to indicate that in the second/eighth century, the notion that exegetical materials of various types and provenances that were attributed to women could be used in the interpretation of the Quran was apparently accepted in some circles. Nonetheless, this was clearly not an uncontroversial practice, nor was it always equated with conceding a degree of exegetical authority to the female figure in question.

From Unwitting Source to Quran Commentator: Gender and Early Transhistorical Exegetical Communities

“Prophet, say to your wives, ‘If your desire is for the present life and its finery, then come, I will make provision for you and release you with kindness, but if you desire God, his Messenger, and the Final Abode, then remember that God has prepared great rewards for those of you who do good’ (Q 33:28–9).” Commentators on the Quran have sought to explicate the circumstances leading up to this famous ultimatum directed at Muḥammad’s wives as well as these women’s response to it.¹ What would appear to be the earliest Quran commentary that has come down to us, the *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*,² recounts their reaction in this way:

When the Prophet gave them [i.e. his wives] the choice [to remain with him or not], ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq responded, ‘Rather, we choose God and the Final Abode. We are not concerned with this world. This present life is the abode of impermanence (*fanā’*), but the Final Abode is everlasting, and more beloved to us than the impermanent.’ Each one of his wives agreed with this response of ‘Ā’isha’s. Then, once the women had chosen God and his Messenger, God, the Mighty, the Glorious, sent down [this verse], *You [Prophet] are not permitted to take any further wives, nor to exchange the wives you have for others . . .* (Q 33:52).³

In this brief story, ‘Ā’isha’s response to the revelation of “the Verse of the Choice” (as it is traditionally known) adroitly brings together key words from it with a paraphrase of two well-known quranic verses: “Everyone on earth

1 For a historical overview of exegesis of these verses, see: Stowasser, *Women in the Quran* 95–7.

2 The age of this work is debated, and it has clearly been redacted by later transmitters; see: Versteegh, *Grammar and exegesis* 206–42; Andrew Rippin, *Studying early tafsīr texts* 319–20. Moreover, the *Tafsīr Muqātil* that has come down to us is only one recension (the Baghdad recension) of the several that were in circulation in al-Tha’labī’s time; see: Gilliot, *Beginnings* 17; Goldfeld, *Qur’anic commentary* 39–40. For more on Muqātil and his exegesis; see: van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 516–32; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*. For a late medieval biographical entry for Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 520–1.

3 Muqātil iii, 44.

perishes (*fān*); all that remains (*yabqā*) is the Face of your Lord” (Q 55:26–7). Not only does she apparently know Muḥammad’s revelations well, but in a most exemplary fashion she makes a major life decision in accordance with them.

Significantly, these words attributed to ‘Ā’isha receive divine approval in this anecdote. All the other wives of Muḥammad agree with her, and once they express this agreement, the rightness of their choice is divinely validated by the revelation of a quranic verse that further augments their elite status. Not only are they to remain wives of the prophet, but they—unlike other married women in their community—need no longer fear that they will be divorced or have to accept additional co-wives. This idealized, hagiographic retelling of the incident contrasts with other versions of the tale that do not single out ‘Ā’isha as a praiseworthy figure.⁴

But although this anecdote idealizes ‘Ā’isha, it does not impute any exegetical role to her whatsoever. Rather, she (along with the other wives of the Prophet) is presented in it as an object of the (male) exegetical gaze. While the *Tafsīr Muqātil* portrays her as eloquently expressing her knowledge and understanding of Muḥammad’s revelations, her relation to these revelations is depicted as both reactive and ultimately passive.

In this story, ‘Ā’isha only speaks at the time that this incident took place. There is no suggestion that she subsequently told anyone else about it, much less that she had ever expressed an opinion about the meaning or scope of the Verse of the Choice for the community as a whole. Nor does she appear to have any inkling that her words will be quoted in connection with these verses in future. In sum, this is a story with an admonitory purpose that is also apparently intended to satisfy the curiosity of any who might wonder how Muḥammad’s wives reacted to the new revelation, and in it, ‘Ā’isha is made to unwittingly play an edifying role for the audience/reader of the *Tafsīr Muqātil*. While the Verse of the Choice itself depicts the wives of the prophet as intimately involved in “the Quran-as-process,”⁵ with their words and actions receiving a revelatory response, the *Tafsīr Muqātil* does not present any of these women explaining the verses for the benefit of later audiences/readers.

But by about a century and a half later, a significant shift is evident in Sunni exegetical discourses associated with the Verse of the Choice: ‘Ā’isha no longer appears as an entirely unwitting participant. In the Quran commentary of al-Ṭabarī, of the several ḥadīths quoted that retell the incident, no fewer than three are related on the authority of ‘Ā’isha herself. In the following ḥadīth, she ostensibly recounts her reaction to the new revelation in her own words:

4 See n. 16, below.

5 This apt expression was coined by Barbara Stowasser; see her *Women in the Qur’an* 85.

Sa'īd b. Yahyā al-Umawī—his father—Ibn Ishāq—'Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr—'Amra—'Ā'isha (who related) that when [Muḥammad] came down to his wives,⁶ he was instructed to give them the choice. He came to me, and said, "I am going to tell you about a [certain] matter—and don't act hastily; first, consult your parents."

I said, "What is it, O Prophet of God?"

He said, "I have been commanded to give all of you a choice." He recited the Verse of the Choice to her, right to the end of these two verses.

['Ā'isha] said, "I responded, 'What are you saying—don't act hastily; first, consult your parents?! I *myself* choose God and his Messenger!'"

That made him happy.

Then he presented [this choice] to his [other] wives, and every single one of them remained with him, choosing God and his Messenger.⁷

Here, 'Ā'isha tells the story to 'Amra, who is apparently the female Successor, 'Amra bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. As'ad (d. 103/721), celebrated for her transmission of ḥadīths from 'Ā'isha.⁸ 'Ā'isha is presented here as a firsthand source of valued information that few people can claim to have direct knowledge of. While, as in the case of the *Tafsīr Muqātil*, this retelling also idealizes her, it presents her in a manner that is notably less detached or austere.

Not only does 'Ā'isha ostensibly recount this tale in the first person, but its structure attracts and keeps the attention of the audience/reader by creating suspense: what should 'Ā'isha avoid being hasty about? What will her choice be? How will the other wives respond? Such suspense, as well as the depiction of emotion on the part of both 'Ā'isha and Muḥammad as the story unfolds, brings it to life for the audience/reader, and creates a sense of emotional investment in its outcome, although it would have taken place over two centuries before al-Ṭabarī authored his *tafsīr*.

Moreover, in another version of the tradition which al-Ṭabarī also quotes, 'Ā'isha adds that the prophet's presenting his wives with the choice to remain with him was not counted as a divorce.⁹ The question of whether a man's giving his wife the option to stay or leave (*yaj'alu amrahā fi yadīhā*, lit. "putting her affair in her hand") qualifies as a pronouncement of male-initiated divorce

6 I.e. apparently from the upper room where Muḥammad had sequestered himself for a month, following a disagreement with his wives; see: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 206–7.

7 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xx, 170.

8 For more on 'Amra, see below.

9 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xx, 170.

(*ṭalāq*) was a matter of debate by jurists in the formative period.¹⁰ This latter tradition goes beyond representing ʿĀʿisha as the source of an edifying and emotionally affective tale to portraying her as speaking in an exegetical mode: she applies this short quranic passage about a specific incident that directly affected a small number of individuals in Muḥammad’s time to a later legal problem that would remain relevant to later generations of believers. Thus, in this latter tradition, the shift in the depiction of ʿĀʿisha’s relationship to these quranic verses from an exegetically unwitting to a seemingly conscious and purposive one is complete.¹¹

Similar developments in the portrayals of certain male figures have been critically examined by historians; the evolution of the image of the Companion ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās (d. 67/686–7), the nephew of Muḥammad who later came to be memorialized as “the father of *tafsīr*” is a well-known example.¹² However, little detailed critical attention has been given to this process as it pertains to female figures as sources of exegetical materials. One unfortunate result is that the gendered nature of constructions of interpretive authority in the formative period has not been a focus of historical-critical study until now.

This chapter examines the early stages of the development, whereby certain ancient female figures (occasionally even from before the dawn of Islam) come to be portrayed as possible sources of materials deemed relevant to quranic interpretation by later male exegetes. First, it introduces what I term the “transhistorical exegetical communities” that the third/ninth century Quran commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and others construct. Then, we will examine the patterns of citation of exegetical materials ascribed to women in what would appear to be their chronological precursors: eight works of quranic exegesis that are conventionally dated to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries. Issues of particular focus are: how frequently such citations appear in the various texts, the literary genre of these citations, which women these exegetical materials are attributed to, and what quranic verses or exegetical topics these citations are used to explicate. In addition, the presence of these particular citations in several Quran commentaries, particularly the encyclopedic *tafsīr* works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī and al-Thaʿlabī¹³ will also be noted,

10 See: *Muwaṭṭaʿ* 505–9 (*K. al-Ṭalāq*). For jurists’ discussions of this issue during the formative period, see: Ali, *Marriage and slavery* 143–6.

11 For the complex issues of historical anachronism that this shift raises, see Chapter Three.

12 See for example: Gilliot, *Portrait ‘mythique’* 127–83.

13 Reference will also be made as appropriate to their presence in the tradition-based *tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim (insofar as this can be determined), as well as in the *madrasa*-style Quran commentary of al-Samarqandī.

in order to gauge the extent to which they entered Sunni exegetical discourses in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries.

1 Transhistorical Exegetical Communities

In their *tafsīr* works, classical Sunni Quran commentators typically bring two communities into being:

- (1) The community of those of Muḥammad's followers—the Companions, male and female, including his relatives and his wives—who are named or referred to in the course of a given commentator's exegesis.
- (2) The transhistorical community of named past and contemporary exegetes and/or other authorities. These figures provide the information that the exegete quotes or alludes to in order to derive his interpretations, or in support of them. Some common examples of such information include interpretations ascribed to past authorities (named or otherwise), as well as views on philological or grammatical points, legal rulings, *āthār*, ḥadīths, or lines of poetry. As will become evident, these are not necessarily interpretations that the exegete agrees with.

Exegetes construct these communities differently. Moreover, while these two communities are intertwined to varying degrees in some *tafsīr* works, in others there is little or no overlap between them. Factors that affect the ways that these two communities are constructed in a given Quran commentary (as well as the presence or extent of the interrelationship between them) include the hermeneutical approaches used, the sources—oral and/or written—available to the exegete, the work's intended purpose and scope, as well as the exegete's sectarian or theological leanings. In the exegesis of the Verse of the Choice in both the *Tafsīr Muqātil* and al-Ṭabarī's Quran commentary, the wives of the prophet belong to the first of these communities. However, although al-Ṭabarī also incorporates ʿĀ'isha into the transhistorical community of exegetes that he constructs, Muqātil does not.

While the origins of the textual genre of Quran commentary as well as the shape of its early evolution remain issues of debate, surviving sources seem to indicate that the notion of a transhistorical community of exegetical authorities emerged gradually. In its early stages, interpretation of the Quran was apparently an oral/aural process, and until such interpretations came to be written down, there was little or no felt need to attribute single items of it to

specific individuals.¹⁴ The notion of a transhistorical community of exegetes could only be said to exist in embryonic form at best in the *Tafsīr Muqātil*, which in its “original” form did not usually give its sources for the periphrastic interpretations, narratives or other information that it recounts.¹⁵

However, surviving sources point to a more complicated situation with regard to ascription in *tafsīr* works by the third/ninth century, particularly in encyclopedic commentaries. Al-Ṭabarī typically names his sources, and provides *isnāds* for the *āthār* and ḥadīths that he quotes; his reasons for so doing appear to be in part a reflection of the growing expectation in some quarters that sources be named,¹⁶ but may also be an expression of his theological-hermeneutical concerns.¹⁷ In this way, his Quran commentary paints a picture of several generations of people—from the Successor generation onwards to al-Ṭabarī’s own time, in the main—whose knowledge of quranic recitation, Arabic syntax, grammar and philology, poetry, legal rulings, *āthār* (and much less commonly, prophetic ḥadīths) comes together in order to make the process of *tafsīr* possible. While the vast majority of the authorities and transmitters thus named are male, several different types of exegetical materials are ascribed to (or are said to have been transmitted by) a small number of women Companions and less often, female Successors.

Nor was al-Ṭabarī alone in so doing. Imagined transhistorical exegetical communities that contain a few early female figures are also variously brought into being in the surviving pages of the Quran commentary of his contemporary, Ibn al-Mundhir, as well as in those of al-Māturīdī¹⁸ and later, al-Tha‘labī.

Significantly, these Quran commentators do not present themselves as having originated such representations. Rather, by quoting earlier authorities

14 Leemhuis, *Origins and early development* 28.

15 Thus later authorities pronounced him an unreliable ḥadīth transmitter (al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 521). For an overview of Muqātil’s exegesis, see: Goldfeld, *Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* 1–18; I would like to thank Walid Saleh for drawing my attention to this article. However, later transmitters added some traditions and additional material to the *Tafsīr Muqātil*, duly authenticated with *isnāds* (Versteegh, *Grammar* 207–9).

16 Evidence for such an expectation on the part of some can be seen from what survives of the Quran commentary of his contemporary Ibn al-Mundhir, which likewise usually provides *isnads* for the materials that he cites. However, it is unclear how widespread this practice was in the third/ninth century, and al-Māturīdī provides an example of a commentary that does not adhere to it.

17 For a discussion of this, see: Saleh, *Medieval exegesis*.

18 While al-Māturīdī’s *tafsīr* does not typically provide *isnāds*, it does sometimes name the early figure to whom a given tradition is attributed.

whose careers are conventionally held to date back to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, they present such depictions of women as sources of exegetical materials as an already-established textual “fact” that they did not invent.

At the same time, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Māturīdī (and later, al-Thaʿlabī) apparently saw themselves as engaging in something more than perfunctorily reproducing an already existing textual convention. To continue with the example of the exegetical discourse associated with the Verse of the Choice, while these four Quran commentators elected to quote a version of the ḥadīth that is attributed to ʿĀʾisha in the course of their interpretations of it,¹⁹ a number of works penned by their contemporaries do not. Significantly, the Twelver Shiʿi commentary *Tafsīr al-Qummī* instead recounts an edifying anecdote in which it is Umm Salama (i.e. rather than ʿĀʾisha) who sets the example for Muḥammad’s other wives by being the first of them to declare her willingness to stay with him.²⁰ Al-Zajjāj’s linguistically-focused commentary simply rephrases the verses, neither naming nor singling out any particular wife,²¹ while al-Naḥḥās, another author whose chief concern is the Quran’s linguistic aspects, devotes his comments on this verse entirely to its grammatical features.²² It is important to bear in mind that the ways that al-Ṭabarī and others who include ḥadīths attributed to ʿĀʾisha when discussing the Verse of the Choice elect to structure their commentaries are no less indicative of *their own* theological allegiances and chosen hermeneutical approaches.²³

2 Gender and Exegesis in the Second/Eighth Century

In works of quranic exegesis that are conventionally dated to the second/eighth century, several different types of exegetical materials ascribed to women can be seen: *āthār* and variant readings attributed to early Muslim women, ḥadīths that are traced back to Muḥammad through his female contemporaries, lines

19 Al-Māturīdī viii, 375; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 104. According to al-Suyūṭī, Ibn al-Mundhir also related a ḥadīth on ʿĀʾisha’s authority about the Verse of the Choice (*Durr* vi, 596).

20 Al-Qummī ii, 167.

21 Al-Zajjāj iii, 377–8.

22 Al-Naḥḥās iii, 213.

23 For an examination of al-Ṭabarī’s theological approach as reflected in his Quran commentary, see: Shah, Al-Ṭabarī.

of poetry credited to several Arabian pre- or early Islamic female poets, and examples of speech ascribed to (usually unnamed) women.

The eight works examined below fall into several categories, based on their structure and interpretive methods: four are *āthār*-based exegetical works, while three chiefly employ linguistic approaches. The remaining work is a Quran commentary in the classical sense, and as such it employs several different interpretive strategies. The significant differences in hermeneutical approach that are evident within as well as among these three categories reflect the often vigorous debates in the formative period as to how quranic exegesis “should” be done.

As with any works that are conventionally dated to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, their age, authorship, and “original” form often continue to be matters of scholarly disagreement. While these debates will be noted as we proceed, none of what follows stands or falls on the age or authorship of any one work. Most of the texts discussed below have evidently undergone editorial reshaping to varying degrees. As such, they may provide important clues to some aspects of the evolution of hermeneutical discourses during the formative period, particularly to the ways that key categories that make these discourses possible came to be gendered.

Exegetical materials ascribed to women were clearly not universally regarded as an indispensable tool of quranic exegesis in the second/eighth century, nor in subsequent centuries. In view of this, it is significant that no less than eight of the comparatively few exegetical works that appear to originate from this historical period either contain or later came to contain such materials. How representative they might be in this respect is difficult to know, given the number of *tafsīr* works that reportedly were authored in the second/eighth century but do not appear to have survived, as well as the fact that most of the eight works surveyed below seem to reflect exegetical discourses current in Iraq, and particularly, in Baṣra, to varying extents. But what is evident is that these texts cite materials of this type both against a backdrop of heated debates about hermeneutics and authority, and also at times as a way of participating in such debates. As we will see, while there are many obvious differences among these eight texts, certain common themes emerge, both in the quranic verses and/or exegetical topics that tend to be associated with exegetical materials attributed to women, as well as the ways that these women are depicted as sources of such information. In particular, exegetical unwittingness is a recurrent theme associated with women; while this partly stems from the various interpretive approaches used in these works, it also highlights the gendered nature of these approaches.

2.1 *Āthār-Based Exegetical Works*

A small number of exegetical traditions ascribed to female Companions (and in a few instances, to female Successors) appear in the short commentaries from the formative period that are traditionally traced back to Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), ‘Abdallāh b. Wahb, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/826), and Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722)—as transmitted by Ādam b. Abī Iyās (d. 220/835). These four works hold special interest because their putative “authors” are widely, even routinely quoted in many later *tafsīr* works. These figures are among the authorities to which al-Ṭabarī traces back a number of the exegetical traditions that he cites in his Quran commentary. Al-Tha‘labī lists the *tafsīr* texts of Sufyān al-Thawrī and Ibn Wahb among his sources,²⁴ and he also quotes a number of traditions that are traced back through ‘Abd al-Razzāq, which he apparently obtained from his teachers.²⁵

In the four short exegetical works under discussion here, a selection of verses of the Quran is interpreted almost solely by the citation of *āthār*. These traditions are only infrequently traced back to Muḥammad; the *isnāds* usually stop at the name of a (male) Successor or, much less commonly, a (usually male) Companion. Most are periphrastic traditions, providing periphrastic exegesis of the verses in question by supplying the meaning of unusual words or phrases. Like most traditions of this type, they are usually tersely worded, often to the degree that they are unintelligible in the absence of the quranic verses that they are intended to explicate.²⁶ However, these four works also contain some legal traditions, as well as a number of traditions that recount short narratives.

In the fragments of Ibn Wahb’s *Jāmi‘*, the exegetical traditions are organized on the basis of the transmitters, so those that relate to the same quranic verse or passage are not generally grouped together. However, in the *tafsīrs* of al-Thawrī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Mujāhid as we now have them, the traditions are arranged according to the canonical order of the verses that they comment upon. When compared to, say, the Quran commentary of al-Ṭabarī, these works initially appear to be simply collections of exegetical traditions that the authors/redactors had happened upon, or perhaps (as Kees Versteegh suggests) compilations

24 Goldfeld, *Qur’anic commentary* 42, 48, 54, 56–57. Al-Tha‘labī also lists several recensions of the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid, none of which is the one discussed in this chapter (*Qur’anic commentary* 27–8), as well as the *Tafsīr Warqā’*, via Ādam b. Abī Iyās (*Qur’anic commentary* 44), which seems to be yet another recension of it.

25 For the use of *isnāds* of individual traditions in al-Tha‘labī’s commentary, see: Saleh, *Formation* 74.

26 For examples, see below.

of quotations culled from later *tafsīr* works, that moreover lack any organizing principle.²⁷ This impression is heightened by the fact that the editorial voices of the authors/redactors are only overt on very rare occasions, when a comment by the author/redactor is included in a tradition cited by him. However, Fred Leemhuis asserts that closer examination of the *tafsīr* works credited to Mujāhid, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and ‘Abd al-Razzāq reveals that they possess an underlying authorial structure.²⁸ While the literary dimensions of this debate need not detain us here, it should be noted that an important reason why these works often appear to lack internal structure is that while many of the traditions they contain relate directly to exegetical questions raised by particular quranic verses, a significant number do not. Traditions of the latter type do not seem to have been “originally” circulated in order to address matters of Quran interpretation—and as such, they raise important questions about hermeneutical developments in the formative period.

2.1.1 The *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī*

Sufyān b. Sa‘īd b. Masrūq Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Thawrī was a well-known traditionist, jurist, and ascetic, who is also said to have authored a Quran commentary. He was born in Kūfa, and places he traveled to included Mecca and Yemen (where ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī reportedly studied with him), as well as to Baṣra, where he finally died.²⁹ The *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* contains 911 traditions, which are attributed to various Successors, as well as to a handful of Companions. Only four, or 0.4 percent, are ascribed to women, and both of these women are wives of Muḥammad. It is possible that at one time it might have contained more such traditions, as the printed edition, which only contains sūras 2–52, may have been based on an incomplete manuscript.³⁰ Nonetheless, the *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* as it has come down to us gives little reason to suppose that its author regarded such traditions as a significant source of material relevant to quranic exegesis. Out of the four *āthār*-based exegetical works surveyed here, this one shows the least inclination to grant interpretive authority to any female figure.

27 Versteegh, *Grammar and exegesis* 207.

28 Leemhuis, *Discussion and debate* 324–5. Andrew Rippin observes that the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* is a “highly sophisticated” work that needs further study so that its place within the *tafsīr* tradition can be known (*Studying early tafsīr texts* 322).

29 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* vii, 229–79; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 135–7.

30 The edition used here is: *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1983), which is a reprint of the Rampur edition. Based on only one manuscript, it also lacks sūras 44 and 47. For an assessment of this edition, see: Gilliot, *Beginnings* 14–16.

This work contains one tradition ascribed to Umm Salama and two to ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr, who is also given the last word in a hierarchization tradition.³¹ In addition, the tradition that is cited as commentary on Q 33:33 is probably meant to be understood as a statement of ‘Ā’isha’s. While most of the traditions that make up the *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* are periphrastic, only one of the traditions ascribed to women in this work belongs to this category:

Sufyān—Hishām b. ‘Urwa—his father—‘Ā’isha regarding [God’s] saying, *do not be loud-voiced in your worship, nor be silent therein* (Q 17:110): He said (*qāla*),³² ‘In the supplications (*du‘ā*)’.³³

While some works do ascribe this tradition to ‘Ā’isha, in several relatively early sources the *isnād* of this tradition stops at Hishām’s father ‘Urwa (d. 93/711–12 or 94/712–13).³⁴ This appears to be an example of *isnād* extension, but it is nonetheless ascribed to ‘Ā’isha in some classical Quran commentaries.³⁵

The tradition related on the authority of Umm Salama states that the last verse to be revealed to Muḥammad was Q 3:195—I will not allow the work of a worker among you, whether male or female, to perish. . . .³⁶ Traditions that recount the circumstances under which a particular verse or passage was revealed sometimes have a legal purpose. This tradition appears to have been

31 A hierarchization tradition is a polemical tradition which presents at least two viewpoints on a controversial question, with an early Muslim female figure speaking on behalf of one perspective, while at least one other early (typically male) figure represents the other perspective(s), arguing against her reported view or otherwise dismissing it. For more on this type of tradition, see Chapter Three.

32 I.e. presumably ‘Urwa, which would make ‘Ā’isha’s name a later addition to the *isnād*, unless the *qāla* is a scribal or printer’s error.

33 Al-Thawrī 175.

34 E.g. *Muwatta’*, 214 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*); ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 321. ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr is a Successor, a well-known jurist and historian who was the son of ‘Ā’isha’s half-sister Asmā’. He is credited with the transmission of a large number of traditions on the authority of ‘Ā’isha; see: Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* vii, 159–62. While many *isnāds* of traditions which are traced back through ‘Urwa to ‘Ā’isha contain ‘Urwa’s son, Hishām (d. 146/763), it should be noted that the latter was accused of transmitting material from his father which he had not heard from him (Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xi, 50). For a study of ‘Urwa’s traditions, see: Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*.

35 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xv, 203–4. However, al-Māturīdī credits this opinion to unnamed authorities (*Ta’wīlāt* vii, 130).

36 Al-Thawrī 83.

intended to address an exegetical controversy over whether the entire verse, which goes on to speak of fighting in God's way, applies equally to women.³⁷

In another tradition, 'Ā'isha recounts, "There came a time when I did not anticipate that a quranic revelation would descend about me."³⁸ This allusion to the well-known accusation of adultery against 'Ā'isha is one of the two traditions cited as commentary on Q 24:11; the other is a hierarchization tradition featuring a dialogue between 'Ā'isha and Masrūq (d. 63/682)³⁹ regarding the controversial matter of Ḥassān b. Thābit's visits to her.⁴⁰ Finally, the sole tradition cited for Q 33:33 simply reads, "*And stay in your houses* (Q 33:33)—I cried until my head covering became wet."⁴¹ While the (female) speaker is not identified, nor is it clear what prompted her tears, it would seem that the audience/reader is meant to conclude that it is 'Ā'isha, lamenting her participation in the Battle of the Camel.⁴²

2.1.2 The *Jāmi'* of 'Abdallāh b. Wahb

Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Wahb b. Muslim al-Fihri al-Qurashī was an Egyptian traditionist and jurist. He was born in Cairo and died there, although he also studied in Medina for a time.⁴³ Sufyān al-Thawrī is listed among those from whom he related ḥadīths, and he also is said to have heard ḥadīths from Yaḥyā b. Sallām when the latter visited Egypt.⁴⁴ The text of Ibn Wahb's *Jāmi'*, in the recension of Saḥnūn b. Sa'īd (d. 240/854) has come down to us in a fragmentary state.⁴⁵ It is another example of early periphrastic exegesis. In this

37 For more on this exegetical debate, see Chapter Five.

38 Al-Thawrī 222.

39 Masrūq b. Ajda' was a Successor (Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* x, 100–2).

40 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 103–4; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 358–9; Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2545. Ibn Abī Ḥātim cited it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 157–158). For this controversy, see Chapter Three.

41 "*bakaytu ḥattā uball khimār*" (al-Thawrī, 241). This tradition lacks an *isnād*. However, the *isnād* of the version quoted by al-Tha'labī passes through "Sufyān" (*al-Kashf* v, 106).

42 Cf. Muḥammad b. 'Umar—Sufyān al-Thawrī—al-'A'mash—'Ammāra b. 'Umayr, (who) said: "A person informed me that he heard 'Ā'isha weep until her *khimār* became wet whenever she recited the verse, *And stay in your houses*" (Ibn Sa'īd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 90).

43 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* ix, 223ff.

44 Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 135, 549.

45 The edition that I am using is: *Al-Ġāmi': Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān (Die Koranexegese)*, ed. Miklos Murányi (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993); *Al-Ġāmi' Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān—Koranexegese 2 Teil 1*, ed. Miklos Murányi (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995). These two volumes contain photographic reproductions of the manuscript, along with the editor's transcriptions. Recently, another edition has been published: *Al-Ġāmi' tafṣīr al-Qur'ān li-'Abdallāh bin Wahb bin Muslim Abī Muḥammad al-Miṣrī (125–197 AH)*, ed. Miklos Murányi (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003), 3 vols, which includes Ibn Wahb's '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Rippin

work, out of some 719 traditions, a total of ten—1.4 percent—are reportedly traced back to or transmitted by women. However, it is unclear if this percentage is representative of the original.

Two of these traditions, which are periphrastic comments on the word “*ilhād*” (wrong-doing) in Q 22:25, and the identity of “the greatest losers by their works” (Q 18:103) are transmitted via Fāṭima al-Sahmiyya and the mother of al-Sakan b. Abī Karīma respectively.⁴⁶ No biographical information appears to be available about either of these two obscuras, which suggests that these may be instances of *isnād* extension or repair.⁴⁷

The remainder of the exegetical traditions that are ascribed to women by Ibn Wahb are traced back to (or through) ʿĀ'isha. Half of these are periphrastic traditions: on the meaning of the word “*ghayy*” (Q 19:59),⁴⁸ and of the statement in Q 68:4 that the prophet has a “strong character” (‘*alā khuluqin ʿaẓīm*’),⁴⁹ on the identity of those who are commended in Q 41:33 (via two different *isnāds*),⁵⁰ and “the perverse at heart” denounced in Q 3:7. Of these four traditions, it is only the last that is further traced back to Muḥammad,⁵¹ probably because Q 3:7 is a key verse in exegetes’ methodological debates, as we will see.

One exegetical tradition is cast in the form of a brief dialogue:

Al-Ḥārith—Ayyūb—Ibn Abī Mulayka—ʿĀ'isha, that the Messenger of God said, “Anyone whose account is examined on the Day of Judgment will be punished.” She asked, “Doesn’t God say, *And he will have an easy*

expresses skepticism as to whether this *tafsīr* work can be traced back to the early second/eighth century, but concedes that the manuscript itself most likely dates to the late third/ninth century; see: Studying early *tafsīr* texts 323.

46 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ: Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (1995), fol. 18b, lines 17–19; fol. 15a, lines 10–13.

47 Murányi was not able to trace either of these latter women, nor was I. The first tradition does not appear in either al-Ṭabarī or al-Thaʿlabī. While one suspects that the mother of al-Sakan—and perhaps also al-Sakan himself, who is likewise apparently unknown (*majhūl*); see: *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1995), 76, 95—is the invention of someone trying to rectify the *isnād*, al-Ṭabarī does have the second tradition, with the same *isnād* (*al-Ġāmiʿ* xv, 37). Al-Thaʿlabī has it without an *isnād* (*al-Kashf* iv, 161).

48 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1995), fol. 17a, 25–17b, 2. Here, ʿĀ'isha says that “*ghayy*” is a river in hell; other views include: a spring or valley in hell, evil, or loss; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xvi 111–12.

49 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1993), fol. 25a, lines 12–13. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xxvi, 20–21; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* vi, 249.

50 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1993), fol. 10b, 9–12. Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 373.

51 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1995), fol. 12a, 23–12b, 1. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* iii, 219–21; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 9. Ibn Abī Ḥātim cited it, according to al-Suyūṭī (*Durr* ii, 148), but while the 1987 edition of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s *tafsīr* has ʿĀ'isha as the authority, the 1999 edition does not.

reckoning (Q 84:8)?” He replied, “That [refers to] the presentation [of accounts].”⁵²

A couple of rhetorically complex traditions depict ‘Ā’isha debating theological matters. In one such tradition, ‘Ā’isha is asked by her nephew ‘Urwa about the recitation and meaning of Q 12:110, which according to the recitation of Ḥafṣ (d. 180/796) on the authority of the Kūfan Quran reciter ‘Āṣim (d. 127 or 128/745)⁵³ reads—“Til when the messengers despaired, and suspected that they were denied” (*ḥattā idhā stay’asa l-rusul wa-ẓannū annahum qad kudhibū*).⁵⁴ How the tense and form of the latter verb are to be rendered is at issue in this tradition, with the underlying concern being eliminating the possibility of reading the verse as meaning that the prophets doubted or lost hope in God. The theologically freighted question as to whether prophets can err was vigorously debated in the formative period. Another hierarchization tradition included in Ibn Wahb’s *Jāmi’* portrays her refuting the belief that Muḥammad ever saw God.⁵⁵

Only one of the traditions traced back to (or through) women seems to address an issue explicitly related to gender roles—the circumstances of revelation of Q 4:128,⁵⁶ a verse that discusses the permissible response of a wife to her husband’s indifference or ill-treatment. While the incomplete state of Ibn Wahb’s *tafsīr* as it has come down to us leaves open the possibility that at one time this work may have contained more traditions attributed to women on topics of this type, in its present form, female transmitters are hardly credited with an exegetical interest in these, not even in the “affair of the slander.”

52 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi’* (1995), fol. 12a, 11–13. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxx, 127–9; al-Māturīdī x, 472; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 409.

53 The majority of printed Qurans today follow the reading of Ḥafṣ, except in West Africa and the Maghrib, where the reading of Warsh (d. 197/813) is generally used. Ḥafṣ and Warsh are two of the so-called “seven readings”; for these, see: Gilliot, Creation of a fixed text 49–52. For the availability of these readings in print, see: Brockett, The value 31–2.

54 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi’* (1995), fol. 3b, 22–4a, 4. According to al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim cited it (*Durr* iv, 595). Other versions of this tradition will be discussed in Chapter Three.

55 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi’* (1995), fol. 12a, 18–23. This tradition will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

56 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi’* (1995), fol. 9b, 24–10a, 1. Al-Ṭabarī has this tradition, with the same *isnād* (*Jāmi’* v, 376). Al-Māturīdī has a similar tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha (*Ta’wilāt* iii, 377).

2.1.3 The *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*

The *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* contains a large number of traditions that ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām b. Nāfi‘ al-Ṣan‘ānī is said to have transmitted from his teacher, the Baṣran traditionist and exegete Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), with whom he is reported to have studied for seven years. On his trading journeys to Syria, it is recounted that he collected many traditions from a large number of other authorities as well.⁵⁷ While ‘Abd al-Razzāq is often represented as an important early authority in proto-Sunni and Sunni commentaries, he was reportedly accused by some of Shi‘ism.⁵⁸ The question of what, if any, historical substance there might be to this charge is difficult to determine.⁵⁹ As we will see, several of the purported authors discussed below have been at times alleged to have held theological or sectarian views at variance with those that would later come to be endorsed by Sunnis.

The recension used here is transmitted on the authority of a student of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, the Meccan hadith scholar Salama b. Shabīb (d. 247/861).⁶⁰ While manuscript evidence appears to indicate that the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* existed as a discrete work by the sixth/twelfth century,⁶¹ it is possible that at an earlier

57 Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 209; al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* ix, 563ff; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* x, 219–21.

58 “His Shi‘i inclinations were held against him, though he did not go to extremes; he loved ‘Alī and hated those who had killed him” (al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 209).

59 Harald Motzki suggests that the charge that ‘Abd al-Razzāq had Shi‘i inclinations was an attempt to discredit him; see: al-Ṣan‘ānī, *ET* ix:7a.

60 Two editions of this recension have been published: *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān li-l-Imām ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī* 4 vols., and *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq taṣnīf al-Imām al-Muḥaddith ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī* 3 vols. Both used the same two manuscripts: the Ankara Maktaba Ṣā‘ib manuscript no. 4216, and the Cairo Dār al-Kutub Tafsīr no. 242. All references in this study are to the latter edition, unless otherwise noted.

61 Fu‘ad Sezgin dates the Ankara Maktaba Ṣā‘ib manuscript no. 4216 to the sixth century AH, and the Cairo Dār al-Kutub Tafsīr no. 242 to 724 AH (*Geschichte* i, 99). Also, Ibn Taymiyya mentions the “*tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*” (seemingly as the title of a book) in his *Muqaddima fi uṣūl al-tafsīr*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (Cairo: al-Matba‘a al-Salafiyya, 1965), 79. However, I have not been able to find evidence for the existence of the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* as a discrete book prior to the sixth/twelfth century. While Sezgin states that al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘* “incorporates the entire commentary” (i.e. of ‘Abd al-Razzāq) through traditions from al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā b. al-Ja‘d al-‘Abdī al-Jurjānī (d. 263/876), the text of the *Jāmi‘* would seem to indicate no more than that al-Ḥasan is cited as the source for traditions from ‘Abd al-Razzāq; there is no suggestion that these traditions come from a written source, much less from a commentary in particular. (For al-Ḥasan’s career, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xii, 356–7). And significantly, while al-Tha‘labī quotes traditions on the authority of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, he nowhere mentions any commentary by ‘Abd al-Razzāq in his exhaustive list of the sources that he used.

date, it formed part of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*. If this is in fact the case, then the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* is likely the oldest surviving example of a chapter devoted to quranic exegesis in a ḥadīth compilation.⁶²

In the form that it has come down to us, the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* is composed of traditions that chiefly interpret the quranic text through the use of paraphrase, gloss, and completion; it does not contain much linguistic material.⁶³ Out of the total of 3,755 traditions contained in this work, 33 are ascribed to women (0.8 percent); in addition, there are three traditions addressing controversial questions that present views credited to early Muslim women. These figures are apparently the cumulative result of a process of redaction. A significant number of the traditions in this *tafsīr* are not traced back through Ma‘mar, but through other early authorities. Of the traditions ascribed to women, almost one-quarter do not contain Ma‘mar’s name in their *isnāds*, and therefore would seem to have been added by ‘Abd al-Razzāq or someone else.⁶⁴

A much greater variety of female transmitters appear in ‘Abd al-Razzāq than in the works surveyed thus far, although most of the traditions credited to women are ascribed to a few of the wives of the Prophet, with twenty-five to ‘Ā’isha, three to Umm Salama, and one apocalyptic ḥadīth on the appearance of Gog and Magog to Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh (d. 20/640),⁶⁵ via Zaynab bt. Abī Salama (d. 73/692).⁶⁶ One tradition is attributed to a female Companion, Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Uqba (d. 33/653), the half-sister of ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 36/656),

62 For the significance of such chapters in ḥadīth compilations to the history of *tafsīr*, see Chapter Four.

63 Rippin, *Studying early tafsīr texts* 321.

64 The *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* contains a few traditions that are not traced back through him, and which appear to have been added by Salama b. Shabīb; i.e. *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* i, 271. While none of these traditions are attributed to women, such seeming evidence of further redaction does raise the question of whether Salama might have also removed any traditions from this work.

65 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 110–32; Ibn al-Athīr, *Uṣd al-ghāba* vii, 126–8; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 371.

66 Zaynab bt. Abī Salama, who was Umm Salama’s daughter, is known for her transmission of a number of traditions from various wives of Muḥammad (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 503–4; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 371–372). In one of the manuscripts of the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, the names of these two women do not appear in the *isnād*. However, they do appear in the *isnād* of this ḥadīth in the *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘* of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid; see ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Al-Muṣannaf* xi, 363 (*K. al-Jāmi‘*); cf. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 293. Al-Ṭabarī has this tradition via Ma‘mar, and its *isnād* only extends back to al-Zuhrī (*Jāmi‘* xv, 68). This appears to be an example of *isnād* extension.

who is chiefly remembered for her solo migration to Medina following the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya.⁶⁷

Two of the traditions that are traced back to Umm Salama are transmitted by women: the well-known traditionist Ṣafiyya bt. Shayba,⁶⁸ and Ḥafṣa bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr, a niece of both Umm Salama and ‘Ā’isha.⁶⁹ ‘Amra bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān transmits a tradition from ‘Ā’isha. ‘Amra is primarily known for her legal rulings, as well as for her transmission of traditions from ‘Ā’isha on a wide variety of subjects;⁷⁰ among the latter are a small number of exegetical traditions, as well as a few variant readings.

In addition, several female Successors transmit from men: Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib⁷¹ from a male Companion, and the ascetic traditionist Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn (d. 101/719)⁷² from the Baṣran Successor Abū l-‘Āliya (d. 90/708–9 or 96/714).⁷³ Asmā’ bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr⁷⁴ (along with her husband) appear in the *isnād* of a legal controversy tradition concerning inheritance.⁷⁵

67 For her, see: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 266–9; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 425.

68 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 51. The 1989 edition gives her name as “Ṣafiyya bt. Nasība,” which appears to be a mistake (*Tafsīr al-Qur’ān li-l-Imām ‘Abd al-Razzāq* ii, 123). There is a difference of opinion as to whether Ṣafiyya bt. Shayba is a Companion or a Successor (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 513; Ibn al-Athīr, *Uṣd al-ghāba* vii, 170–1; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 381).

69 Ḥafṣa is a Successor. Umm Salama was her maternal aunt (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 512; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 361).

70 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 432. For ‘Amra, see: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 524–5; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 389; Roded, *Women in Islamic* 48–9.

71 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 505–8.

72 This tradition is repeated twice. In the *isnād* of the first version, which is transmitted via Ma‘mar, the manuscripts do not agree as to whether the tradition goes back to Ḥafṣa; the *isnād* of the second version (apparently added by ‘Abd al-Razzāq) does clearly extend back to her; see also: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xx, 15. For Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn, see: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 528; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 360–1.

73 Abū l-‘Āliya Rufay’ b. Mihrān al-Riyāḥī is a traditionist and a Quran reciter who is also credited with a *tafsīr* (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* vii, 128–35). He is traditionally included in the list of the ten Successors prominent in exegesis.

74 She is a half-sister of Ḥafṣa bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān; her mother was a concubine. Asmā’ is said to have grown up in her aunt ‘Ā’isha’s care, and to have related a few traditions from her (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 512; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 349).

75 A controversy tradition is a polemical tradition that depicts an early Muslim figure arguing on behalf of his or her opinion regarding a debated issue. While a controversy tradition indicates at least indirectly that there are different views on the issue in question, it only presents one side of the argument (unlike a hierarchization tradition, which presents both, though not necessarily in a “fair” or even-handed way).

In addition, a tradition about a theo-political⁷⁶ controversy quotes ‘Ā’isha twice, while a hierarchization tradition portrays Fāṭima bt. Qays vigorously defending her interpretation of Q 65:1, a verse relating to the much debated legal question of whether an irrevocably divorced woman is entitled to support from her ex-husband during her waiting period (*‘idda*),⁷⁷ and where she is to live during this time.⁷⁸ Also, the Successor Shahr b. Ḥawshab rather dubiously attributes an interpretation of Q 4:159—“There is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in [Jesus] before his death”—to “Umm Salama.”⁷⁹

Approximately one-sixth of these traditions which are attributed to women can be classified as periphrastic, and all of these are traced back to ‘Ā’isha. The only one of these that is further extended back to Muḥammad discusses Q 3:7.⁸⁰ ‘Ā’isha comments briefly on the nature of the oaths referred to in Q 2:225,⁸¹ and the identities of “those among them who wrong themselves” mentioned in Q 35:32,⁸² as well as the meaning of the phrase “*aladd al-khiṣām*” in Q 2:204,⁸³ and “Tubba’” in Q 44:37.⁸⁴

A significant proportion of the traditions ascribed to women in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* are primarily concerned with various pietistic topics. Several traditions relate brief, edifying anecdotes which illustrate the character traits that believers should possess. Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Uqba recounts that when her husband fell unconscious, she went to the mosque in order to “seek help through steadfastness (*ṣabr*) and prayer (Q 2:153).”⁸⁵ ‘Ā’isha speaks of her father

76 For this term, see below.

77 The Quran lays down a period of waiting to be observed by divorced and widowed women before they can remarry; see: Q 2:228, 234.

78 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 317. Fāṭima bt. Qays was reportedly among the earliest Companions to make the *hijra* to Medina. She is best known for her part in this legal debate (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 316–18; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 393–4). For more on this tradition, see Chapter Three.

79 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 486–7. This attribution is doubtful, because the same tradition recounts that on another occasion, Shahr ascribed this interpretation to someone else. It is also unclear which “Umm Salama” is meant here—the wife of Muḥammad, or another female Companion. For more on this, see Chapter Three.

80 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 383.

81 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 342. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* ii, 498. Al-Ṭabarī has this tradition, with the same *isnād* (*Jāmi’* ii, 498); see also: al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* i, 353; Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 408.

82 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 70.

83 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 329.

84 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 186. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxv, 147; al-Samarqandī iii, 219; al-Māturīdī ix, 208; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* v, 433. ‘Ā’isha states here that Tubba’ was a righteous man; some other authorities cited in these *tafsīr* works identify him as a Yemenite king.

85 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 297–8.

Abū Bakr's cautious approach to making oaths.⁸⁶ Muḥammad, of whom it is said by ʿĀ'isha that his character was the Quran,⁸⁷ is also presented as a model of behaviour. ʿĀ'isha describes his measured response to a hostile group of Jewish visitors,⁸⁸ as well as his pious fear whenever the weather became unsettled, because it would remind him of divine chastisement.⁸⁹

A significant number of the traditions ascribed to women in the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq* deal with various legally oriented exegetical problems. These represent several literary genres.

A variant reading of Q 2:184, which has implications for debates concerning the practice of feeding the poor in lieu of fasting in certain circumstances, is attributed to ʿĀ'isha.⁹⁰ As this reading is also attributed to several Successors who are traditionally regarded as authorities on Quran exegesis,⁹¹ ʿĀ'isha's reported recitation functions here as one component of an impressive array of proofs intended to support a particular legal interpretation.⁹² A periphrastic tradition, also credited to her, describes the types of oaths referred to in Q 2:225.⁹³

It is noteworthy that a number of these legal traditions deal with matters that relate to the structure and maintenance of the gendered social order. Traditions are ascribed to ʿĀ'isha on topics of the women's oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*),⁹⁴ the marriage of orphan girls,⁹⁵ men's same-sex sexual acts,⁹⁶ and

86 When commenting on Q 5:89 (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 23).

87 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 330.

88 When commenting on Q 58:8 (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 292). Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xxviii, 17–18; Ibn Abī Ḥātim cited it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* viii, 80).

89 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 254. It is cited as comment on Q 46:24 in al-Thaʿlabī (*al-Kashf* v, 462); see also al-Samarqandī iii, 235.

90 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 310. Al-Ṭabarī has this tradition, with the same *isnād* (*Jāmiʿ* ii, 169). Al-Samarqandī (*Baḥr* i, 184) and al-Thaʿlabī (*al-Kashf* i, 257) also credit this recitation to her. The reading of ʿĀṣim is: “*wa ʿalā ʿlladhīna yuṭīqūnahū*” (and upon those who are able); here ʿĀ'isha is said to have recited it as “*wa ʿalā ʿlladhīna yuṭawwaqūnahū*” (and upon those for whom it is difficult). For a discussion of this controversy, see: Brockett, The value 42–3.

91 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 309–10.

92 Different readings of the same verse are credited to the same early authorities. ʿĀ'isha (and Ṭāwūs as well) is said to have read the word “*yūṭīqūnahū*” in Q 2:184 not only as “*yuṭawwaqūnahū*,” but also as “*yaṭawwaqūnahū*.” Mujaḥid is credited with these two readings, and a third as well; see: ʿAbd al-ʿĀl Sālim Makram and Aḥmad Mukhtār ʿUmar, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt al-qurʾāniyya maʿa muqaddima fī l-qirāʾāt wa-ashḥar al-qurrāʾ* i, 141.

93 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 342.

94 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 304; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xxviii, 75; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* vi, 173.

95 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 432; al-Māturīdī iii, 7; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 225; Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 857, and see also *Durr* ii, 427. Several versions appear in al-Ṭabarī (*Jāmiʿ* iv, 280–1).

96 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 194.

the question of whether a *mukhannath* is permitted access to the women's quarters.⁹⁷ Umm Salama, for her part, is credited with a tradition on veiling (via Ṣafīyya bt. Shayba),⁹⁸ and another on sexual positions (via Ḥafṣa bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān).⁹⁹ As commentary on Q 9:60, a legislative verse that lists the categories of deserving recipients of charitable donations (*ṣadaqa*), two traditions are found that are transmitted by women: Umm Salama relates that the Prophet instructed a woman who had been given a leg of mutton as alms to accept it, while Umm Kulthūm bt. 'Alī asserts that persons belonging to the *ahl al-bayt* (the household of the prophet) do not take alms.¹⁰⁰

Addressing another financially oriented legal-exegetical question, a hierarchization tradition presents Asmā' bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr and her husband recounting that her brother 'Abdallāh divided up the inheritance left by their father, and distributed it among the poor and other relations present in the house, in accordance with his understanding of Q 4:8—"If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are present at the distribution, give them something too. . . ." While the tradition implies that 'Ā'isha approved of this action of 'Abdallāh's, it states that once Ibn 'Abbās hears of it, he objects that such an interpretation of this verse is incorrect.¹⁰¹

Several traditions attributed to 'Ā'isha in the *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* deal with theological questions. In one tradition, which is the last cited in explanation of Sūr al-Muzammil (S. 73, "Enfolded"), 'Ā'isha recounts that when a man came to Muḥammad and asked how revelation comes to him, Muḥammad responded that sometimes it comes "like the ringing of a bell," which is most difficult for him, and sometimes "in the form of a man."¹⁰² In another tradition, which is the only one adduced for Q 36:69, 'Ā'isha is asked if Muḥammad had ever quoted poetry, and replies that not only did he not do so, but that he

97 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 436–7. For *tafsīr* works which cite this tradition, see Chapter One.

98 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 51; Ibn Abī Ḥātim x, 3154, and see also *Durr* vi, 659.

99 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 340–1. Al-Ṭabarī has several versions (*Jāmi'* ii, 487–8). A version was cited by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (*Durr* i, 628–9); for another, see: Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 404.

100 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 153, 154.

101 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 438–9. Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 242; al-Māturīdī cites it, but without an *isnād* (*Ta'wilāt* iii, 23). Al-Suyūṭī states that 'Abd al-Razzāq, Ibn Jarīr [al-Ṭabarī], and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have it from Ibn Abī Mulayka, who says that Asmā' bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān and al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad informed him of it (*Durr* ii, 441). However, neither of the *isnāds* that al-Ṭabarī gives for this tradition contain Asmā's name (*Jāmi'* iv, 321), although Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *isnād* does (iii, 875). This is one illustration of the hurdles facing any attempt to use the *Durr al-Manthūr* in order to reconstruct lost works.

102 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 359. Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 302.

detested it.¹⁰³ A tradition that comments on Q 26:223 dismisses the *kāhins* as recipients of mainly unreliable inspiration from the *jinn*.¹⁰⁴ These three traditions are part of a larger exegetical discourse that attempts to address the theological-apologetic problem of the existence of parallels between Muḥammad's revelations and analogous pagan religio-cultural phenomena such as sooth-saying and poetry.

A theological controversy tradition, which is framed by a discussion between Ka'b al-Aḥbār¹⁰⁵ and Ibn 'Abbās affirming that Muḥammad saw his Lord twice, also depicts an interchange between Masrūq and 'Ā'isha on this issue. However, her assertion that Muḥammad must have seen Gabriel rather than God is summarily dismissed by Ma'amar b. Rāshid.¹⁰⁶

The quranic text has very little if anything to say about the issue that tore the fledgling Muslim community apart several decades after the death of Muḥammad—the question of who should lead it.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, exegesis could and ultimately did make the Quran address this as well as other related theo-political questions.¹⁰⁸ Muḥammad's contemporaries, particularly those who played prominent political roles following his death, as well as his close relatives and other members of the Hāshimite clan, and his wives came to be associated with particular theo-political positions. Also, a number of events, such as the accusation of adultery against 'Ā'isha, her leading role in the Battle of the Camel, and Abū Bakr's refusal to allow Fāṭima to claim any inheritance from Muḥammad were retrospectively invested with a heavy theological and political valence.¹⁰⁹ As a result, any reference to these persons or allusions to such occurrences in exegetical material conveys a theo-political message.¹¹⁰

103 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 86–7. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxii, 30; al-Samarqandī iii, 105; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 205; Ibn Abī Ḥātim cited it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vii, 71).

104 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 470. Al-Samarqandī ii, 486; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xix, 135.

105 Ka'b was a convert of Jewish origin, famed for his knowledge of Judaeo-Islamic traditions (Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* viii, 382–3).

106 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 251–2. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxvii, 61; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 10–11. For more on this tradition, see Chapter Three.

107 Donner, *Narratives* 43; Saleh, *Formation* 180; cf. Madelung, *Succession* 8ff.

108 Walid Saleh terms this type of exegesis “political interpretation.” I refer to it here as “theo-political” in order to highlight the theological-sectarian dimensions of most traditions of this type that are attributed to women. For this sort of interpretation, see: Goldziher, *Richtungen* 263ff; Afsaruddin, *Constructing narratives* 315–51; as well as her *Excellence and precedence* 229ff.

109 For a discussion of these events and the political significance that came to be attached to them, see: Spellberg, *Politics* 61ff; 101ff; Madelung, *Succession* 50–1.

110 Saleh, *Formation* 178–9.

While this type of interpretation sees its fullest development in classical *tafsīr* works,¹¹¹ some examples, ranging from the fairly direct to the more allusive, can be seen in earlier sources. Of the traditions credited to women in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, only one is inescapably theo-political—a (negatively phrased) occasion-of-revelation tradition that defends the reputation of a son of Abū Bakr. Immediately following a tradition on the authority of Qatāda and al-Kalbī asserting that Q 46:17—“And he who says to his parents, fie on you both”—refers to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr,¹¹² another tradition presents ‘Ā’isha denying that this verse had been revealed about him.¹¹³ This controversy is linked to anti-Umayyad polemics.

Nonetheless, several of the traditions already discussed above have political overtones. In classical *tafsīr* works, such “dual use” traditions could be cited in order to convey particular theo-political views. The tradition about Abū Bakr’s careful approach to making oaths is but one of the many laudatory traditions about him that are ascribed to his daughter ‘Ā’isha.¹¹⁴ The tradition transmitted by Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Alī stating that the *ahl al-bayt* do not receive alms not only asserts the privileged status of Muḥammad’s kin, but also undermines Abū Bakr’s reported reasoning for refusing to allow Fāṭima to claim her inheritance—that henceforth the prophet’s family could accept charity.¹¹⁵ And the tradition that addresses Q 4:8—significantly, a legal verse discussing inheritance—sets the views of the family of Abū Bakr in opposition to the interpretation of none other than Ibn ‘Abbās, who famously defended the political interests of the Banū Hāshim, and fought on the side of ‘Alī against ‘Ā’isha in the Battle of the Camel.¹¹⁶

Moreover, this latter tradition is a hierarchization tradition, as is the tradition that discusses the theological question of whether the opening verses of Sūrat al-Najm (“The Star,” S. 53) describe a vision of God or of Gabriel, as

111 For examples of this in al-Tha‘labī, see: Saleh, *Formation* 180ff.

112 Al-Ṭabarī has a tradition asserting Q 46:17 was revealed about him (*Jāmi‘* xxvi, 23). ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr (d. ca. 53/672), otherwise known as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Uthmān, was ‘Ā’isha’s full brother (Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* iii, 462–4).

113 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 201. Al-Samarqandī has a version of it (*Bahr* iii, 233).

114 Madelung, *Succession* 20.

115 Madelung, *Succession* 14, 50. As a political symbol, Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Alī has a rather ambiguous significance. As the youngest daughter of Fāṭima, she evokes Muḥammad’s kin’s disinheritance. Yet, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have married her (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 505–6; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 256). In medieval Shi‘i literature however, as the sister of Imam Ḥusayn, she becomes a symbol of resistance to Umayyad oppression of the *ahl al-bayt*; see: Pinault, *Zaynab bint ‘Alī* 82–3.

116 Madelung, *Succession* 18–19.

well as the ḥadīth of Fāṭima bt. Qays. Significantly, in all three of these, a woman's interpretation of a quranic verse is dismissed by a male authority. In general, the *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* presents a fairly variegated picture of women as sources of exegetical traditions, and depicts 'Ā'isha in particular as the pre-eminent female authority on these. Nonetheless, through its citation of these hierarchization traditions, this work also appears to convey a significant level of ambivalence about attributing exegetical authority to 'Ā'isha or to any other early Muslim woman.¹¹⁷

2.1.4 The *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*, as transmitted by Ādam b. Abī Iyās
The Successor Mujāhid b. Jabr is a Meccan client who is celebrated in Muslim sources as both a Quran reciter and as a source of *tafsīr*, as well as a student of none other than Ibn 'Abbās.¹¹⁸ However, there is no consensus as to how or when this commentary originated, on its authorship, or when it attained its present form.¹¹⁹ The *isnāds* suggest that it is the work of several redactors, including Warqā' (d. 169/776),¹²⁰ who seems to have added about 80 traditions to the commentary, and particularly Ādam b. Abī Iyās (d. 220/835),¹²¹ who incorporated more than 300 additional traditions.¹²² But regardless of the approach one takes to the dating of this work, it is evident that none of the traditions that its printed version cites that are attributed to women have the *isnād* common to the bulk of the material that it contains: 'Abd al-Raḥmān—Ibrāhīm—Ādam—Warqā'—Ibn Abī Najīḥ—Mujāhid. Thus, this work does not present Mujāhid as having obtained any of the interpretations that it ascribes to him from a woman. These (few) traditions ascribed to female figures are not being represented as part of the nucleus of the work, but as the product of later

117 For a more detailed discussion of these three traditions, see Chapter Three.

118 Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 504–6; al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 449ff.

119 Herbert Berg refers to it as the *tafsīr* of Ibn Shādhān (d. after 424/1032), because he is the first transmitter named on the title pages whose name is not also found in the *isnāds*; see his Weaknesses 333; for Harald Motzki's rejoinder, see: Question 231–2. Fred Leemhuis asserts that the Cairo Dār al-Kutub manuscript *Tafsīr* 1075 probably does contain Ādam b. Abī Iyās' redaction of a collection of exegetical traditions that go back to Mujāhid; see his ms. 1075 *Tafsīr* 169–80.

120 Warqā' b. 'Umar b. Kulayb was a well regarded ḥadīth transmitter whose geographical origins are unclear. He was among those reported to have transmitted the *Tafsīr Mujāhid* (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* vii, 419–22).

121 Ādam was a traditionist from Khorāsān, who traveled to Baghdad and then to 'Asqalān, where he finally settled. He learned traditions in Iraq, Egypt, Mecca and Medina, as well as in Syria (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* x, 335–8).

122 Leemhuis, Discussion and debate 325.

elaborations by transmitters/redactors upon an “original” and purportedly ancient store of exegetical opinions—and as such, they are positioned as peripheral rather than central to the interpretive process.

The printed edition of the *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*¹²³ contains a total of 2,249 traditions; only 0.4 percent of these are attributed to women. Seven traditions, plus one additional *isnād*, are ascribed to ‘Ā’isha, and one to Umm ‘Aṭīyya, a prominent Medinese Companion known for her participation in seven military expeditions with Muḥammad.¹²⁴ Warqā’ is credited with having added only one of these traditions, a periphrastic comment on Q 24:31 credited to ‘Ā’isha. It states that she explained the quranic phrase, “except what appears of them” as referring to “the face and the palms” (*al-wajh wa-l-kaffayn*).¹²⁵ The incorporation of the remaining traditions attributed to women is ascribed to Ādam b. Abī Iyās.

Several of these traditions give periphrastic commentary on various verses. ‘Ā’isha explains that Q 23:60—“And those who give what they give with hearts afraid”—means “those who fear God and obey him.”¹²⁶ A tradition is attributed to her on the meaning of the *hapax legomenon* “*kawthar*” (Q 108:1); in addition, another tradition on this subject on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās is buttressed by an *isnād* that goes back through her to Muḥammad.¹²⁷ ‘Ā’isha also relates Muḥammad’s comment on the “easy reckoning” mentioned in Q 84:8.¹²⁸

These traditions attributed to women play various literary roles in relation to the other material in the *Tafsīr Mujāhid*. The traditions ascribed to ‘Ā’isha on Q 23:60 and Q 84:8 are the only traditions contained in this work that discuss these particular verses; the *isnāds* suggest that they were included at a later stage of redaction so that the commentary would be more complete. However, the tradition traced back to ‘Ā’isha on Q 108:1 is part of an array of eight traditions that explain what “*kawthar*” connotes.

123 *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhid b. Jabr*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām Abū l-Nīl (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Ḥadītha, 1989). This is a new edition of al-Sūrati’s work of the same name, which was published in 1976. As with the *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī*, both of these editions are based on only one manuscript, which is in this case ms. 1075. Moreover, this version differs to some extent from the traditions ascribed to Mujāhid in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* (Gilliot, Beginnings 13–14).

124 Also referred to as Nusayba al-Anṣāriyya, she is credited with several traditions about issues connected with funerals and the women’s *bay’a*; see Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 498; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* vii, 356–357; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 404.

125 Mujāhid 491. Al-Samarqandī ii, 437.

126 Mujāhid 486.

127 Mujāhid 756. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xv, 361.

128 Mujāhid 714.

The work also contains several short narrative traditions attributed to women. With regard to the theological controversies about the meaning of the verse, “the heart did not lie about what it saw” (Q 53:11), ‘Ā’isha tersely states, “Whoever claims that Muḥammad saw his Lord, the Mighty, the Glorious, has certainly lied.”¹²⁹ This tradition functions in Mujāhid’s *tafsīr* as part of an exegetical debate apparently augmented over time by several redactors.¹³⁰

A short apocalyptic prediction credited to ‘Ā’isha as commentary on Q 47:4, “until the war lays down its burdens,” is one of three traditions on this verse. It further expands on the brief description already given in a tradition traced back to Mujāhid of some of the events heralding the end of the world.¹³¹

In addition to the periphrastic comment on Q 24:31 discussed above, two other traditions deal with explicitly gendered topics. According to a tradition credited to ‘Ā’isha, when the verse, “You [Muḥammad] can defer whom you please of them [i.e. his wives] and receive whom you please . . .” (Q 33:51) was revealed, she mordantly responded, “O Messenger of God, I see that your lord hastens to (fulfill) your desire!”¹³² A tradition about the women’s pledge of allegiance (*bay’a*) referred to in Q 60:12 is attributed to Umm ‘Āṭiyya.¹³³

2.2 *Material Attributed to Women in Linguistically-Focused Exegetical Works*

The *Majāz al-Qur’ān* of Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 210/825) and the *Ma’ānī l-Qur’ān* works of al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822) and al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830) provide further examples of the exegetical use of material ascribed to women during the formative period.¹³⁴ These works are among the earliest surviving representatives of an exegetical genre that attempts to interpret the Quran by focusing on its lexical and grammatical features. Accordingly, the authorities that they quote are most often poets of the pre- and early Islamic periods, other figures who are deemed to have been exemplary speakers of Arabic, and early Quran reciters. To the extent that the exegetical authority of the Successors or the Companions is invoked in these works, it is most often as poets, Quran reciters or speakers of pure Arabic, and this is equally true of the few female figures cited.

129 Mujāhid 626.

130 For the later addition of more traditions to the *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr* in order to produce exegetical debates, see: Leemhuis, Discussion and debate 325–6.

131 Mujāhid 604.

132 Mujāhid 550.

133 Mujāhid 656–7.

134 Rippin regards the ascription of these works to al-Farrā’ and Abū ‘Ubayda respectively as plausible, though he notes that editorial intrusion and reformulation may have occurred; see: Rippin, Al-Zuhri 24.

These three linguistically-focused works were drawn upon extensively by later exegetes, and thus played important roles in the classical *tafsīr* genre. Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī make extensive use of the *Majāz al-Qurʾān* of Abū ʿUbayda as well as of the *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* of al-Farrāʾ,¹³⁵ and many other later exegetes do likewise. Al-Akhfash is quoted in the *Iʿrāb al-Qurʾān* of al-Naḥḥās, in al-Samarqandī’s Quran commentary, as well as in a number of other exegetical works.

2.2.1 The *Majāz al-Quran* of Abū ʿUbayda

Maʿmar b. al-Muthannā, otherwise known as Abū ʿUbayda, was a client apparently of Jewish origin who spent most of his life in Baṣra.¹³⁶ Famed for his mastery of Arabic grammar,¹³⁷ Abū ʿUbayda based his interpretive approach on the conviction that as the Quran describes itself as having been revealed in Arabic so that its message could be understood (e.g. Q 12:2; 20:113), therefore, it can and should be interpreted by referring to Arabic as it was spoken at the time of Muḥammad. In his view, the grammatical and stylistic features of that first/seventh century Arabic can be known through poetry, as well as by well-known expressions and sayings.¹³⁸ It should be noted that such a “secular” approach to quranic interpretation reportedly met with opposition even from some of the other linguistically-oriented exegetes of his time, such as al-Farrāʾ.¹³⁹

Abū ʿUbayda quotes sixty citations of poetry (*shawāhid*) in this work.¹⁴⁰ Of these, six—or ten percent—are credited to female poets. A few verses of al-Khirmīq bt. Badr b. Hiffān, a pre-Islamic poet chiefly remembered for her elegies in memory of her kinsmen,¹⁴¹ are quoted by Abū ʿUbayda in order to show that a grammatical peculiarity of Q 2:177 and Q 4:162, in which a noun in the accusative is followed by a noun in the nominative, is in accordance with Arabic usage.¹⁴² A brief quotation from the celebrated poet al-Khansāʾ, otherwise

135 Al-Ṭabarī not only made use of al-Farrāʾ’s *Maʿānī* in his commentary, but also critiqued some of his theological stances. For examples, see: Shah, Al-Ṭabarī 84–90.

136 His sectarian or theological leanings are unclear. The claim that he was an ʿIbādī is made by some medieval biographers; see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* x, 446–7; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 518. Abū ʿUbayda was also apparently accused of having Muʿtazilī sympathies, a charge that has been dismissed in several recent studies; see: Shah, Al-Ṭabarī 95; 127, n. 74.

137 Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 518–19.

138 For an analysis of his exegetical method, see: Almagor, The early meaning 307–26; Abu-Deeb, Studies in the *majāz* 310–53.

139 Almagor, Early meaning 278.

140 For the use of poetry as an exegetical tool, see: Goldziher, *Richtungen* 69–71.

141 ʿUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Aʿlām al-nisāʾ fi ʿālamay al-ʿArab wa-l-Islām* i, 348ff.

142 Abū ʿUbayda i, 65, 142–3. For more on this, see below.

known as Tumāḍir bt. ‘Amr b. al-Sharīd (d. 24/644)¹⁴³ is used to elucidate the rather baffling instruction to Abraham in Q 2:260 to “Take four birds and train them to come back to you . . .”¹⁴⁴ A line of poetry attributed to “Khansā’, or her daughter ‘Amra,” is also cited in order to define the word “*fākihūn*” in Q 36:55.¹⁴⁵

As is typically the case with *shawāhid*, there is little or no relation between the meanings of these poetic citations and the quranic verses that they are made to comment upon. The dissonance that sometimes results can seem rather humorous, or even ironic. In his discussion of Q 23:12—“We created the human being from an essence of clay” (*sulālatⁱⁿ min ṭīn*)—Abū ‘Ubayda interprets the meaning of “*sulāla*” as “offspring,” on the strength of a few biting satirical lines that Hind bt. al-Nu‘mān b. Bashīr al-Anṣāriyya is reported to have recited to her jealous husband, when he accused her of having an unseemly interest in a group of leprous men:

Am I not an Arab filly
the seed (*sulāla*) of horses, mounted by a mule?
If I bring forth a noble colt, it would be but barely
And if it is base, then this results from the stud.¹⁴⁶

As the story goes, these lines not only resulted in the termination of the marriage (which she appears to have wanted), but also later deflected the unwelcome attentions of al-Ḥajjāj, who had come to consummate his marriage to her, but was so humiliated that he divorced her.¹⁴⁷

Interestingly, ‘Ā’isha is presented as an authority only once in Abū ‘Ubayda’s *Majāz*. A line from a letter that she reportedly wrote to another wife of the prophet, Ḥaḥṣa bt. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 45/665), which reads: “certainly, the son of Abū Ṭālib sent his step-son (*rabīb*)—an evil one” is cited as evidence for the meaning of the word *rabā’ib* (“step-daughters”) mentioned in the list of women that a man may not marry in Q 4:23. Abū ‘Ubayda explains that the step-son referred to by ‘Ā’isha is Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr, whose mother was the well-known Companion Asmā’ bt. ‘Umays. Asmā’ had married ‘Alī b. Abī

143 For al-Khansā’, see: Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* vii, 89–91.

144 Abū ‘Ubayda i, 80–1. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha’labī cite it (*Jāmi’* iii, 69; *al-Kashf* i, 441).

145 Abū ‘Ubayda ii, 163. This word occurs in Q 36:55—“The people of Paradise this day are happily employed (*fi shughulⁱⁿ fākihūn*).”

146 Abū ‘Ubayda ii, 55. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha’labī cite it without attribution (*Jāmi’* xviii, 11; *al-Kashf* iv, 320).

147 Kaḥḥāla, *Alām* v, 256–7.

Ṭālib¹⁴⁸ after the death of her second husband, Abū Bakr.¹⁴⁹ As we have seen, ‘Ā’isha and a few other wives of the prophet sometimes appear in *āthār*-based exegetical works as transmitters of traditions on various subjects, including legal verses regulating marriage and familial relationships. By contrast, Abū ‘Ubayda here depicts ‘Ā’isha and Ḥafṣa as two elite Arab women who are apparently corresponding about a familial-political matter. It should be noted that neither is there any illusion here that ‘Ā’isha’s reported words were “originally” intended to shed light on the meaning of a quranic verse, nor that she envisaged that they would come to be employed exegetically. Rather, she—like the male and female poets whose lines Abū ‘Ubayda quotes—is presented here as an unwitting source of exegetical material.

2.2.2 The *Ma‘ānī l-Qur‘ān* of al-Farrā’

Yaḥyā b. Ziyād b. ‘Abdallāh b. Marwān al-Daylamī, known as al-Farrā’, was a Kūfan scholar with alleged Mu‘tazilī inclinations who had studied with the Quran reciter and grammarian al-Kisā’ī (d. 189/805).¹⁵⁰ The exegetical material ascribed to women in this work in its present form is of several literary types: poetry, stereotyped female speech,¹⁵¹ traditions, and variant readings.¹⁵² Much of this type of material has *isnāds*, and where these read: Abū l-‘Abbās—Muḥammad—al-Farrā’, it would appear that the material in question was subsequently added by the grammarian Abū l-‘Abbās al-Tha‘lab (d. 291/903).¹⁵³ Where the material lacks an *isnād*, or the *isnād* does not extend beyond al-Farrā’’s time, it would seem more likely to have been part of the “original” text.

Al-Farrā’ cites a few lines of poetry that are attributed to anonymous Arab women. In his explanation of Q 7:31—“Children of Adam, dress well whenever you are at worship”—he explains that in pre-Islamic times, men and women would circumambulate the Ka‘ba nude, and as evidence of this custom, he quotes a couplet about it that is said to have been recited by an anonymous

148 Abū ‘Ubayda i, 121–2.

149 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 324–30; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* vii, 12–14.

150 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* x, 118–21; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 545–6. These biographers assert that al-Farrā’ had Mu‘tazilī leanings, but whether this is likely to have been the case is an ongoing issue of debate among historians. See for example: Beck, *The dogmatic* 137–58; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 87; Shah, *Al-Ṭabarī and the dynamics of tafsīr* 87–9.

151 I.e. statements that are said to be typically uttered by Arab women in specific situations; for an example, see below.

152 For al-Farrā’’s interpretive approach, see: Kinberg, *A lexicon*; Dévényi, *On Farrā’’s linguistic methods* 101–9.

153 Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Yazīd al-Shaybānī was a grammarian and traditionist in Baghdad (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xiv, 5–7).

woman of the Banū ʿĀmir.¹⁵⁴ When discussing Q 17:88—“Say: if [*la-in*] human-kind and jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Quran”—he cites a few verses reportedly recited by “a woman of the Banū ʿAqīl,” in order to show how *la-in* is used.¹⁵⁵ However, these latter verses also appear earlier in the work, where they are attributed to a male poet of this tribe.¹⁵⁶

An example of what appears to be stereotyped female speech also appears. In his discussion of a variant reading of Q 10:16 credited to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, al-Farrāʾ quotes a sentence that he says he heard from “a woman of Ṭayy.”¹⁵⁷

Several traditions or statements about the recitation of various quranic verses are attributed to women in al-Farrāʾ’s *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* as it has come down to us, and all but one of these to ʿĀʾisha. These readings serve several textual purposes.¹⁵⁸ For Q 24:15, the variant reading credited to ʿĀʾisha, *idh taliqūnahu*, is cited alongside another recitation which is traced back to Ibn Masʿūd.¹⁵⁹ Deriving as it does from *walaq* (“lie”), the reading attributed to ʿĀʾisha can be read as intensifying the condemnation of those of the community who participated in spreading scandalous rumours about her. The reading of Q 36:72 attributed to ʿĀʾisha, *fa-minhā rakūbatuhum*, is cited as additional support for the majority reading (*rakūbuhum* as opposed to *rukūbuhum*).¹⁶⁰ Two traditions, one attributed to ʿĀʾisha and the other to an “Umm Salama” attest to the same variant reading of Q 11:46, *innahu ʿamila ghayru ṣāliḥ*,¹⁶¹ and both further trace this recitation back to Muḥammad. The text does not identify Umm Salama as a wife of Muḥammad, and according to al-Tirmidhī, the “Umm Salama” who is credited with this variant reading is in actuality a female Companion, Umm Salama al-Anṣāriyya, also known as Asmāʾ bt. Yazīd.¹⁶²

154 Al-Farrāʾ i, 377.

155 Al-Farrāʾ ii, 131.

156 Al-Farrāʾ i, 67.

157 Al-Farrāʾ i, 459. Her words, “I bewail my husband in verse (*rathaʿtu zawjī bi-abyāt*),” are used to illuminate the discussion of the form of the verb *adrākum* (“made known to you”) in Q 10:16. No *isnād* is given, as al-Farrāʾ says that he heard her words himself (perhaps as a prelude to the recitation of an elegy?).

158 For an overview of the use of variant readings in works such as this, see: Baalbaki, *The treatment* 159–80.

159 Al-Farrāʾ ii, 248. No *isnād* is given. This reading credited to ʿĀʾisha also appears in al-Ṭabarī (*Jāmiʿ* xviii, 117), al-Thaʿlabī (*al-Kashf* iv, 360), and al-Māturidī (*Taʾwīlāt* vii, 532).

160 Al-Farrāʾ ii, 381. No *isnād* is given. The reading of Ḥafṣ is: *fa-minhā rakūbuhum*.

161 Al-Farrāʾ ii, 17–18. The *isnāds* of both traditions begin with al-Farrāʾ. The reading of Ḥafṣ is: *innahu ʿamal^{un} ghayru ṣāliḥ*.

162 Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā b. Sawra b. Mūsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* 659 (*Abwāb al-qirāʾāt*). For more on this, see Chapter Three.

In a few passages in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī*, 'Ā'isha is portrayed a source of materials relevant to exegesis in ways that are more akin to the *āthār*-based exegetical works discussed above. She is credited with an opinion on one exegetical-legal question: that the verse, "God will not call you to account for oaths you have uttered unintentionally . . ." (Q 2:225) refers to the use of the common expression "by God" (*wa'llāh*) in day-to-day conversation.¹⁶³ A couple of traditions are also attributed to her. However, one gets the impression that this aspect of her persona is not meant to be taken too seriously—or that it may have been intended as a rather dismissive comment on tradition-based approaches to exegesis. The *isnād* of a brief tradition on *kawthar* (Q 108:1) is extended back to (*rafa'ahu ilā*) 'Ā'isha; it reads: "Al-Kawthar is a river in Paradise. Whoever would like to hear the sound of it should put his fingers in his ears."¹⁶⁴ Another tradition recounts that when 'Urwa b. Zubayr asked her about three verses (Q 4:162, 5:69 and 20:63), all of which have nouns in the accusative case in apparent violation of the norms of Arabic grammar, she responded, "Nephew, this is a mistake made by the scribe."¹⁶⁵ This is clearly not an explanation that al-Farrā' accepts, as is quickly made clear by his detailed discussion of this grammatical point, which includes an (anonymous) citation of a few verses credited to al-Khirmīq in order to demonstrate that this stylistic feature is in accordance with recognized Arabic usage.¹⁶⁶

According to the *isnāds*, a small amount of additional material attributed to women was incorporated after al-Farrā's time. While some of this, such as a periphrastic comment on Q 53:15 ascribed to 'Ā'isha,¹⁶⁷ does not appear to add much to the work, a few other instances relate to controversial issues. Al-Tha'lab inserts an example of stereotyped (anonymous) female speech in the exegeses of Q 33:40 and Q 83:26, both of which address the theologically significant question of the meaning of the quranic description of Muḥammad as the "seal of the prophets."¹⁶⁸ Al-Tha'lab also may have added another, similar version of the tradition in which 'Ā'isha asserts that three quranic verses

163 Al-Farrā' i, 144. No *isnād* is given.

164 Al-Farrā' iii, 295–6. See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxx, 361; al-Tha'labī *al-Kashf* vi, 564.

165 "hādha kāna khaṭa' min al-kātib" (al-Farrā' i, 106). Al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha'labī cite it (*Jāmi'* vi, 32; *al-Kashf* ii, 387), while al-Māturīdī has an abbreviated version of it (*Ta'wīlāt* iii, 416).

166 Al-Farrā' i, 105. For more on this tradition and poetic citation, see Chapter Three.

167 Al-Farrā' iii, 97. The *isnād* begins with Muḥammad b. al-Jahm.

168 Al-Farrā' iii, 248. However, in one manuscript, the names of Abū l-'Abbās—Muḥammad do not appear in the *isnād* (n. 7). It is difficult to know who incorporated this "repeat" tradition.

contain scribal errors to the discussion of Q 20:63.¹⁶⁹ In addition, he appears to have included several more readings, all attributed to ‘Ā’isha—a variant recitation of Q 23:60,¹⁷⁰ and one for Q 21:98 is extended back to (*rafa’ahu ilā*) her,¹⁷¹ as well as a tradition in which she confirms that Muḥammad’s recitation of Q 56:89 was in accordance with its generally accepted reading.¹⁷² Nonetheless, it should be noted that even after these additions, the number of readings credited to women in the *Ma‘ānī l-Qur’ān* is infinitesimally small for a work of this size. By way of comparison, readings attributed to Ibn Mas‘ud are cited 411 times, and those credited to his companions 98 times. The recitation of Ibn ‘Abbās is mentioned 129 times, while ‘Alī is credited with 42 readings.¹⁷³

2.2.3 The *Ma‘ānī l-Qur’ān* of al-Akhfash

Sa‘īd b. Mas‘ada (d. 215/830), better known as al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, was a client of the Banī Mujāshī‘ b. Dārim in Balkh, who lived in Baṣra for much of his life. He is said to have been a Mu‘tazilī. A prominent student of Sībawayh (d. ca. 180/796), al-Akhfash was a recognized authority on Arabic grammar who is reported to have authored a number of books on grammar, prosody and linguistic features of the Quran.¹⁷⁴

The *Ma‘ānī l-Qur’ān* of al-Akhfash illustrates yet another linguistically-focused approach to citing women as sources of exegetical materials. Unlike al-Farrā’, al-Akhfash did not opt to include exegetical materials ascribed to ‘Ā’isha of any type whatsoever.¹⁷⁵ The only type of exegetical material that is attributed to women in this work is citations of poetry.

A line from the celebrated female poet al-Khansā’ is quoted as part of the explanation of the rather puzzling command given to the Israelites in Q 2:58—“... enter its gate humbly and say, ‘Relieve us!’”¹⁷⁶ A line ascribed to

169 Al-Farrā’ i, 106; ii, 183. The latter version, which has slight differences, is an Abū-l ‘Abbās tradition.

170 Al-Farrā’ ii, 238; see also al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi‘* xviii, 40; al-Māturīdī vii, 476. Al-Tha‘labī attributes a different variant to her (*al-Kashf* iv, 329).

171 Al-Farrā’ ii, 212. Despite its dubious ties to ‘Ā’isha, this reading is credited to her by al-Ṭabarī (*Jāmi‘* xvii, 112) and al-Tha‘labī, though without *isnāds* (*al-Kashf* iv, 275). Al-Māturīdī attributes a different variant to her (*Ta’wīlāt* vii, 377).

172 Al-Farrā’ iii, 131. However, al-Māturīdī and al-Tha‘labī attribute a variant reading of this verse to her (which she in turn credits to Muḥammad); see: *Ta’wīlāt* ix, 509; *al-Kashf* vi, 100.

173 These statistics are from: Dévényi, Al-Farrā’ and al-Kisā’ī 160–1.

174 Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 134–5; al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* x, 206–8.

175 As he is reported to have related from Hishām b. ‘Urwa among others (al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 134), and Hishām was well known for relating traditions which are attributed to ‘Ā’isha, this omission would seem to be deliberate.

176 Abū l-Ḥasan Sa‘īd b. Mas‘ada al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, *Kitāb Ma‘ānī l-Qur’ān* i, 103.

the Companion ʿĀtika bt. Zayd that appears to be from the elegy that she is said to have composed when mourning the death of her third husband, al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām (d. 36/656)¹⁷⁷ is used in order to illustrate the grammatical acceptability of a variant reading of Q 23:114, "... you stayed but a little."¹⁷⁸ Also, the same few verses credited to al-Khirniq that are quoted by Abū ʿUbayda and al-Farrāʾ are cited (though without attribution) in order to demonstrate that the anomalous nouns in the accusative case in Q 2:177 and Q 4:162 conform to Arabic usage.¹⁷⁹

2.3 *The Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*

Yaḥyā b. Sallām was a second/eighth century scholar from Baṣra who lived in North Africa for many years, where he reportedly taught his *tafsīr*. Yaḥyā is said to have related ḥadīths from several early authorities, including Mālik b. Anas and Sufyān al-Thawrī, and among those who transmitted from him was ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb.¹⁸⁰

This *tafsīr* of Yaḥyā's, which the Andalusian scholar al-Dānī (d. 444/1053) described admiringly as unlike anything ever authored previously,¹⁸¹ was sufficiently well regarded in Andalusia by the fourth/tenth century to have been summarized by Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿĪsā al-Murrī, better known as Ibn Abī Zamanīn.¹⁸² That the third/ninth century ʿIbāḍī exegete, Hūd b. Muḥakkam, relied heavily on the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* when writing his own Quran commentary despite the fact that Yaḥyā did not share his theological views¹⁸³ also points to the level of esteem that this work commanded in North Africa at that time, notwithstanding sectarian differences.

177 ʿĀtika bt. Zayd b. ʿAmr was a Qurayshi woman who apparently converted fairly early; she pledged allegiance to Muḥammad, and migrated to Medina. She was married to ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Bakr, who died in the siege of al-Ṭāʿif, then to her cousin, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and then to al-Zubayr (Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 306–9; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* vii, 181–3).

178 Al-Akhfash ii, 455.

179 Al-Akhfash i, 167.

180 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* ix, 396.

181 "... *laysa li-ahad min al-mutaqaddimīn mithlahu*" (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* ix, 397).

182 Ibn Abī Zamanīn was a Maliki jurist, traditionist and poet, whose written output ranged from a commentary on Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʾ* to books on aspects of asceticism. Al-Dāwūdī credits him with authoring a "*tafsīr al-Qurʾān*" in addition to a "*mukhtaṣar tafsīr Ibn Sallām li l-Qurʾān*" (*Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn* 410–11).

183 This difference meant that Hūd could not merely summarize the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* and have his commentary conform to his ʿIbāḍī beliefs; some rewriting was in order; see: Gilliot, *Le commentaire de Hūd* 182.

But despite the historical significance of the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, it has thus far received little attention in the secondary literature.¹⁸⁴ One reason for this appears to be that much of this work does not seem to have survived. The printed version only contains the commentary from Sūrat al-Naḥl (S. 16, “The Bee”) to Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt (S. 37, “Ranged in Rows”). Moreover, until its publication in 2004, it was reportedly difficult to access.¹⁸⁵

The *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* contains periphrastic exegesis—most of which is not ascribed to any named authority—as well as short narratives, legal opinions credited to various early authorities, variant readings, and traditions. While there are some ḥadīths that are traced back to Muḥammad, the majority of the interpretations given are attributed to various early figures, often from well-known Successors such as Qatāda, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid, and al-Suddī, as well as the controversial Kūfan exegete Muḥammad b. al-Sā’ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763).¹⁸⁶ This work contains a number of examples of exegetical materials that are ascribed to women.

The female figure most often cited is ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr, and she is largely depicted as a transmitter of ḥadīths, as well as a legal authority in her own right. In seven ḥadīths, she is depicted as quoting Muḥammad’s words or describing his customary practice on a variety of issues, including his explanation of the quranic reference to an “easy reckoning” on the Day of Judgment,¹⁸⁷ the words of a supplication he used to recite when praying the dawn prayer,¹⁸⁸ and his course of action whenever he was presented with a choice between two licit possibilities.¹⁸⁹ One tradition relates the way that Ibn ‘Abbās and ‘Ā’isha recited Q 23:60.¹⁹⁰ In ten other traditions, however, the opinions presented rest on ‘Ā’isha’s authority alone. These latter traditions discuss a wide range of issues,

184 Two recent articles that briefly discuss this commentary are: Gilliot, *Le Commentaire Coranique de Hūd* 181–2; Saleh, *Marginalia* 293–4.

185 Saleh, *Marginalia* 294.

186 Al-Dhahabī says as little as possible about al-Kalbī, declaring that his ḥadīths are to be rejected due to his Shi’i views (*Sīyar* vi, 248). Nonetheless, his exegetical views were evidently influential. Several versions of his commentary (supposedly transmitted from Ibn ‘Abbās) are listed by al-Tha’labī among his sources (Goldfeld, *Qur’anic commentary* 22–6).

187 Yaḥyā i, 190. However, this ḥadīth is quoted as part of the exegesis of Q 18:48. Hūd quotes it under this verse (*Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz* ii, 466); Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not.

188 Yaḥyā i, 170, *sub.* Q 17:111. One manuscript of the *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz* includes this ḥadīth (Hūd ii, 449); Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not quote it.

189 Yaḥyā i, 391, *sub.* Q 22:78. See also: Hūd iii, 128. Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not quote this ḥadīth.

190 Yaḥyā i, 406. Similarly, see also: Hūd iii, 142. Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not include this reading.

including the covering of the Ka'ba,¹⁹¹ and the meaning of the theologically freighted expression, "seal of the prophets" in Q 33:40.¹⁹² A couple of these traditions are transmitted by female Successors—'Ā'isha's client Umm 'Alqama,¹⁹³ and a Baṣran woman called Umm Shabīb.¹⁹⁴

Another wife of Muḥammad, Umm Salama, is credited with an apocalyptic tradition, as well as a legal tradition on the status of slaves who are in the process of buying their freedom.¹⁹⁵ Two female Companions also transmit one ḥadīth each: Asmā' bt. Abī Bakr (d. 73/692)¹⁹⁶ recounts that Muḥammad advised her to continue to maintain a relationship with her pagan mother,¹⁹⁷ and Umm Ḥumayd al-Sā'idiyya relates that the prophet stated in emphatic terms that the best place by far for women to pray is in the innermost parts of their own homes rather than in his mosque.¹⁹⁸

An admonitory saying encouraging charitable giving which is cited in the interpretation of Q 23:72 is attributed to "Umm al-Dardā'."¹⁹⁹ Several late medieval authors of biographical compendia claim there were two women named Umm al-Dardā': one, whom they term Umm al-Dardā' the Elder, is said to have been a Companion named Khayra (or possibly Karīma) bt. Abī Ḥadrad al-Aslamī, while the other, Umm al-Dardā' the Younger, otherwise known as Hujayma (or Juhayma) bt. Ḥuyayy al-Waṣṣābiyya (d. 81/700),²⁰⁰ was a Successor. Both were reportedly married for some time to the Companion 'Uwaymir b. Zayd b. Qays, or Abū l-Dardā' (d. 32/652), who is memorialized as one of several men who collected the Quran during the lifetime of Muḥammad, as well

191 Yahyā i, 363. See also: Hūd iii, 109. Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not quote this tradition.

192 Yahyā ii, 723. Neither Hūd nor Ibn Abī Zamanīn quote this tradition.

193 Yahyā i, 363. "She related from 'Ā'isha, and her son 'Alqama b. Abī 'Alqama related sound ḥadīths from her" (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 533–4).

194 Yahyā i, 440. For Umm Shabīb, see: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 530.

195 Yahyā i, 341; ii, 735. Neither of these traditions is quoted by Hūd or Ibn Abī Zamanīn.

196 She is the elder half-sister of 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr; see: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 289–6.

197 Yahyā ii, 701, *sub.* Q 33:6. Neither Hūd nor Ibn Abī Zamanīn quote this ḥadīth.

198 Yahyā i, 451–2, *sub.* Q 24:37. Neither Hūd nor Ibn Abī Zamanīn quote this ḥadīth. Umm Ḥumayd is an obscure figure, apparently remembered for little more than transmitting this ḥadīth, as well as having been the wife of a Companion, Abū Ḥumayd al-Sā'idī; see: Ibn al-Athīr, *Uṣd al-ghāba* vii, 311.

199 Yahyā i, 411. See also: Hūd iii, 145–146. Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not quote this tradition.

200 There is a fair amount of uncertainty about her name, and the name of her father (Ḥuyyay or Ḥayy), as well as her *nisba*: al-Waṣṣābiyya or al-Awṣābiyya. Waṣṣāb is in the interior of Ḥimyar (al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 352).

as an ascetic who served as a judge in Damascus during the reign of ‘Uthmān.²⁰¹ Different personas are attributed to these two women in late medieval biographies. Umm al-Dardā’ the Elder is said to have related a few ḥadīths from the prophet, and to have predeceased her husband. Following her death, Abū l-Dardā’ is related to have married Umm al-Dardā’ the Younger, who is depicted as a transmitter of his traditions, a Quran reciter, and an ascetic.²⁰²

If there were in fact two different women with this *kunya*, then the *isnād* of the tradition quoted in Yaḥyā’s *tafsīr* would appear to indicate that it is attributed to the female Successor, Umm al-Dardā’ the Younger.²⁰³ However, some earlier medieval biographers evidently regarded the two women as one and the same,²⁰⁴ and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr presents Umm al-Dardā’ the Elder in glowing terms as an ascetic known for her ḥadīth transmission and insight into legal matters.²⁰⁵

While this historical problem cannot be resolved here, at the literary-textual level, two things can be noted: first, the precise identity of this woman (or women) is often attended by ambiguity in sources conventionally dated to the formative period. While several classical biographical dictionaries attempt to delineate the identity of this woman/these women, those which do so (and have also survived to the present day) were written from the fifth/eleventh century onward. Therefore, trying to determine whether the Umm al-Dardā’ quoted in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* is a Companion or a Successor could risk ahistorically retrojecting later ḥadīth scholars’ efforts at systematisation onto an earlier text. Second, in sources conventionally dated to the formative period, “Umm al-Dardā’” is what I term a “dually signifying figure”—meaning, a figure

201 For his career, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* ii, 335–53; Shams al-Dīn Abī ‘Abdallāh al-Dhahabī, *Ma‘rifat al-qurrā’ al-kibār ‘alā al-ṭabaqāt wa-l-iṣṣār* 38–9.

202 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 277–8; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 352–4; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 414. Al-Dhahabī and al-Mizzī died in the mid-eighth/late fourteenth century, while Ibn Ḥajar died in 852/1449.

203 Its *isnād* contains ‘Uthmān b. Ḥayyān al-Dimashqī, who is among those who is listed as having transmitted from Umm al-Dardā’ the Younger; see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 277; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 414. While the editor of Hūd’s *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz* identifies her as the Companion Umm al-Dardā’ the Elder, he gives no reason for having done so (Hūd iii, 145, n. 1).

204 See for example Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* vii, 100, 316–17. For an attempt to explain how two separate women have the same *kunya*, see: Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *Ṣīfat al-safwa* iv, 244.

205 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘āb* 488–9. For further discussion of the historical problems surrounding her/their identity, see: Geissinger, ‘Umm al-Dardā’ sat in *tashahhud* like a man’ 307–11.

that is at times portrayed as a Companion, and at other times as a Successor, as is demanded by the internal logic of these various depictions.²⁰⁶ Therefore, attempting to definitively locate this woman (or women) in time may be missing the literary-textual point.

Most of the traditions attributed to women in the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* seem to have been fairly well known. Some appear in ḥadīth compilations; many came to be quoted in *tafsīr* works of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. As similar versions of a number of these traditions also are found in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, they were likely in circulation in Baṣra in the second/eighth century.²⁰⁷

However, an interesting exception to this is four unusual traditions that ‘Ā’isha bt. Sa’d b. Mālik relates about several aspects of her father’s ritual practice at Ḥajj.²⁰⁸ She would appear to be the daughter of the well-known Companion, Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ.²⁰⁹ There is a difference of opinion as to whether she was a Companion or a Successor; she is yet another dually signifying figure. Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) includes her among the Successors.²¹⁰ However, in some well-known versions of the ḥadīth about the will of Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ, Sa’d asks Muḥammad how he should divide his estate, as he has only one daughter.²¹¹ If this daughter was ‘Ā’isha, then she would be classified as a Companion. However, she is said to have met Imām Mālik, which raises chronological questions. Ibn Ḥajar “resolves” the problem of how such a meeting could have taken place by positing that Sa’d had two daughters named ‘Ā’isha—an elder, who was a Companion, and a younger, who was a Successor. Thus in his view, it was ‘Ā’isha bt. Sa’d the Younger who met Mālik, and who was known for relating ḥadīths from several of the wives of the prophet.²¹²

206 “Internal logic” here means the coherence and literary effect of the depiction; it is far more than simply a question of a technically “complete” *isnād*.

207 Given that many of these traditions in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* are transmitted by the Baṣran Ma’mar b. Rāshid.

208 Yahyā i, 367, 373, 376, 377. I have not been able to find these traditions in any ḥadīth compilation. Two of these traditions are quoted in the *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz* (Hūd iii, 11, 117, *sub*. Q 22:28 and 22:36). Ibn Abī Zamanīn does not include any of them.

209 The Companion Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ is also known as Sa’d b. Mālik. He is remembered as one of the first Meccan converts, and as one of the ten to whom Muḥammad promised Paradise (Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* ii, 452–457). For ‘Ā’isha bt. Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ, see: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 510–11.

210 Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* ii, 429; see also: Abū ‘Abdallāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* i, 107.

211 For a study of this ḥadīth, see: Speight, The will of Sa’d b. a. Waqqāṣ 259–77.

212 Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba* viii, 235.

As so much of the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* does not appear to have survived, determining the significance of these exegetical materials within the overall work is challenging. These materials are distributed very unevenly throughout the text. Of the twenty-one sūras contained in the printed version, only nine (i.e. 42.86% of the total) quote any exegetical materials attributed to a woman at all. Therefore, it is difficult to know how much material of this type might have been present “originally” in the commentary, and what weight it had within the overall work.²¹³ However, even if one adopts what could be termed the most optimistic approach, by examining the patterns of citation in the two of these nine sūras that contain the largest number of citations of a female figure—S. 22 (Sūrat al-Ḥajj, “The Pilgrimage”) and S. 33 (Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, “The Joint Forces”)—the results do not suggest that other portions of this work likely contained much in the way of exegetical materials of this type.

The commentary on Sūrat al-Ḥajj, a sūra comprising 78 verses altogether, contains a fair amount of periphrasis that is not credited to any particular individual. However, a total of 182 items (i.e. periphrastic interpretations, traditions, etc.) are attributed to named authorities. In some of these cases *isnāds* are supplied as well. Only 24 of these items (i.e. 13.19%) are traced back to Muḥammad himself, while 36 (i.e. 19.78%) are ascribed to various Companions. Nearly all of the rest of the named authorities are Successors: Qatāda (31 items, or 17.03%), Mujāhid and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (30 items respectively, or 16.48% each), as well as al-Suddī (7 items, or 3.85%). In addition, al-Kalbī is credited with 10 items (5.49%). Oral exegeses are often attributed to these latter five authorities (e.g. “*qāla al-Ḥasan . . .*”), but in a number of cases, reference is made to their “*tafsīr*” (e.g. “*wa fī tafsīr Qatāda . . .*”). While “*tafsīr*” in this context could mean orally delivered quranic interpretation,²¹⁴ the connotation here seems to be exegesis that was being transmitted in written form.

It is clear from these figures that in the exegesis of this sūra, it is the interpretations credited to several (male) Successors that predominate, not only due to their sheer numbers, but also because it is they who are explicitly presented as sources of *tafsīr*. By contrast, interpretations attributed to Muḥammad and his Companions play a comparatively minor role. Moreover, it is several male Companions who are most often cited: one-third (i.e. 33.3%) of the interpretations for which the earliest authority is a Companion are ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās, while a quarter (25%) are credited to Ibn ‘Umar. A mere two items are

213 While the commentaries of Hūd and Ibn Abī Zamanīn occasionally give some suggestion about this in the case of specific traditions, they are epitomes, so their authors unsurprisingly pruned a good deal of material.

214 Gilliot, Beginnings 2.

traced back to ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr, and she also transmits one prophetic ḥadīth, while ʿĀʾisha bt. Saʿd transmits four *āthār* about her father's ritual practice at Ḥajj. Thus, of the 182 items attributed to named authorities in the commentary on this sūra, a female figure is credited with involvement in the transmission of only 3.85% of these.

A similar picture obtains in the exegesis of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb. The total number of items ascribed to named authorities is 176. Only 30 items (i.e. 17.05%) are traced back to Muḥammad himself, and a meager three of these are transmitted by female Companions—ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr, her sister Asmāʾ, and Umm Salama respectively. Another 31 items (i.e. 17.61%) are traced back to a Companion as the penultimate named authority. Just three of the items in this latter category are credited to a female figure—who is in all cases ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr. Therefore, out of a total of 176 items, only 3.98% are presented as originating with or having been transmitted by a woman. It is evident that even in these surviving portions of the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām* in which exegetical materials attributed to female authorities or transmitters are most numerous, such materials only form a small percentage of the total.

Concluding Remarks

The transhistorical communities of exegetes constructed on the pages of these eight works surveyed in this chapter all include a few female figures—at least, in the form that these texts have come down to us. When these texts are read side by side, some common themes emerge, both in the quranic verses and/or exegetical topics that tend to be associated with exegetical materials attributed to women, as well as the ways that these women are depicted as sources of such information. However, as has been shown, these works differ significantly in the extent to which they include such exegetical materials, as well as in the literary genres to which these exegetical materials that they do cite belong.

When comparing the wording and content of these exegetical materials, as well as their linkage to particular quranic verses and/or quranic themes, there are again more differences than similarities. Only the following are found in more than one of these eight works: one variant reading (for Q 23:60), a few lines of poetry credited to the pagan poet al-Khirmīq, similarly worded ḥadīths attributed to ʿĀʾisha and cited as commentary on the following quranic verses: 3:7, 36:69, 68:4, and 84:8, a tradition credited to her about a legal issue raised by Q 2:225, and finally, an apocalyptic ḥadīth about Gog and Magog that is ascribed variously to Umm Salama and Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh.

There is nothing in this meager harvest to suggest that a discrete body of exegetical materials credited to any female figure had been compiled, whether orally or in writing, much less that anything of the sort was in circulation among scholars involved in the interpretation of the Quran in the second/eighth century. Not only is it uncommon for more than one of these eight works to quote the same (or very similar) variant readings or traditions attributed to women, but when they do so, the *isnāds* and/or the wordings differ. Moreover, even within the same work, any *isnāds* given for the *āthār*, ḥadīths or variant readings credited to women that it contains typically present these as having been collected by the compiler and/or by subsequent redactor(s) from disparate sources.

The ongoing debates regarding the dating and redaction histories of these eight exegetical works, as well as the fact that how representative their contents might be of the early *tafsīr* texts that reportedly once existed is unknown render any generalisations on the basis of these patterns of citation tentative at best. With the provisional nature of the following observations in mind, it can be posited that these sources seem to preserve glimpses of several stages of an unfolding process: for a number of reasons, various materials ranging from lines of poetry to *āthār* attributed to female figures come to be included into second/eighth century exegetical discourses on a small but slowly expanding selection of quranic themes and topics. From the second/eighth through the third/ninth centuries, the tendency on the part of some exegetes to quote certain specific ḥadīths, poetic verses, variant readings, and so forth ascribed to women in their discussions of a small number of specific quranic verses starts to become somewhat conventional. Finally, the incorporation of such materials in exegetical works appears to become *more* rather than less expected by the third/ninth century, as the inclusion of a small selection of materials of this type by redactors of texts as different as al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* and the *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr* illustrates. While this process of incorporation evidently continued into the fourth/tenth century in Sunni Quran commentaries, it was neither uncontroversial nor always predictable.

The eight exegetical works under discussion here would seem to chiefly illustrate the earlier and middle stages of this process. More than one of these eight works include exegetical materials attributed to female figures in their discourse on the following quranic issues: oaths and vows, free women's veiling, the women's *bay'a*, issues of justice in polygamous marriage, the incident of "the choice" (Q 33:28–9), the accusation of adultery against 'Ā'isha, and the meaning of the quranic expression "seal of the prophets" (Q 33:40) as well as the *hapax legomenon* "*kawthar*" (Q 108:1). In addition, traditions ascribed to

women are cited regarding two doctrinal issues that some second/eighth century Muslims apparently sought to find quranic support for: the theological debate as to whether humans can see God, as well as the belief in the return of Jesus at the end of the world. In third/ninth and fourth/tenth century exegetical works, linkages of this type become increasingly regularized, typically through the citation of particular ḥadīths transmitted by specific women.

A few women Companions, most notably ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr, and to a much lesser extent, Umm Salama, are presented in many of these texts as particularly prominent female sources of exegetical materials that belong to a variety of genres. In several of these works, the image of ʿĀ'isha as a preeminent source of exegetical materials seems to have been notably enhanced over time. Nonetheless, while most of the male authorities quoted in these works are two or more generations removed from Muḥammad, the obverse is true of the few female figures cited. The few female dually signifying figures or Successors who do appear are not presented as prolific sources of exegetical materials, nor is there ever any suggestion that the interpretations credited to them had been written down prior to their inclusion in the works surveyed above. From that vantage point, female involvement in quranic exegesis in general is thus depicted as shrinking rather than growing through time, with the few female Successors cited portrayed as significantly less renowned for their interpretative expertise than (a select number of) female Companions. Significantly, the women who are granted entry into the various transhistorical communities of exegetes that these works construct are not the authors' contemporaries; rather, they lived in an ever more distant, idealized past.

But beyond these commonalities that have been shaped (and in one case, apparently produced *in toto*) by later redactional activity, these eight works are decidedly more different than similar in the ways that they position female figures within these transhistorical exegetical communities. The degree of such difference is particularly interesting in view of the fact that most of these works apparently either have their origins in southern Iraq, or were redacted by someone who had stayed there for a time. The town of Baṣra seems to have played an especially noteworthy role in this regard. Yaḥyā b. Sallām was from Baṣra, Abū ʿUbayda reportedly spent most of his life there, and both Sufyān al-Thawrī and al-Akhfash eventually moved to Baṣra. Traditions related on the authority of Ma'mar, a Baṣran traditionist, are a central component of the *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* as it has come down to us. Ibn Wahb reportedly learned from Sufyān al-Thawrī as well as from Yaḥyā. When taken together, these works associated with Baṣra suggest a lack of consensus there as to the place of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in the interpretation of the Quran.

The exegetical materials attributed to women in these works belong to a number of genres: periphrastic comments on particular quranic verses, *āthār*, prophetic ḥadīths, legal rulings, lines of poetry credited to female poets, stereotyped female speech attributed to anonymous women, and a few variant readings. These materials are credited to various female figures, including several wives of the prophet, a few female Companions and Successors, unnamed female speakers of pure Arabic, and several female poets. All in all, some twenty-six named women are cited as sources or transmitters of exegetical materials.

The woman who is most often thus cited is ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr, particularly in the *Jāmi‘* of Ibn Wahb and the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, as well as in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*. Nonetheless, a comparison among the eight works surveyed appears to suggest that there was a lack of consensus in Baṣra in the second/eighth century regarding her potential usefulness as a source of exegetical materials. Nor is there an agreement as to the basis of any interpretive authority that she might be held to possess. In the *āthār*-based works as well as in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, the value of ‘Ā’isha and other female Companions as sources of exegetical materials lies in their proximity to Muḥammad and presumed familiarity with his teachings and practice. By contrast, for the second/eighth century partisans of linguistically-focused exegesis, neither religious faith nor the presumed status of eyewitness to Muḥammad’s daily life in and of themselves make anyone’s words worth citing when interpreting the Quran. Thus Abū ‘Ubayda pointedly quotes ‘Ā’isha only once, as an unwitting source of a philological point. This is a fascinating illustration of how the differing and competing hermeneutical approaches being championed by these eight works can result in significantly different presentations of individuals.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān* as it has come down to us presents early Muslim women as having an entirely passive relationship to the quranic text. While ‘Ā’isha (and occasionally, Umm Salama and a few female Companions) are portrayed now and again as performing actions, making particular statements, or posing questions that are associated with the descent of revelation to Muḥammad,²¹⁵ there is no suggestion in the *Tafsīr Muqātil* that these women are the ones who decided that these incidents should be remembered or recounted to others—much less that they are relevant to the interpretation of the Quran. However, in the *āthār*-based works surveyed in this chapter, as well as in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, some of these anecdotes or stories begin to be related on the authority of their female protagonists.

215 E.g. Muqātil i, 282; ii, 411; iii, 46, 332.

Nonetheless, a particularly noteworthy aspect of all of these eight works, despite the significant differences in hermeneutical approach among them, is the degree to which these female figures are more often than not presented as unwitting sources of exegetical materials. This is particularly evident in the linguistically-focused works, with their quotations of speech attributed to anonymous Bedouin women or even lines of poetry credited to a pagan poet, whose words cannot possibly be imagined to have been intended by their speakers to interpret the Quran. However, much the same could be said about many of the *ḥadīths* or traditions that the *āthār*-based works ascribe to early (and hence, deceased) Muslim women, particularly if these make no obvious reference to particular quranic verses or themes.

To be sure, *male* Companions can also be fairly described as unwitting participants in these imagined interpretive communities. Ibn ‘Abbās has all sorts of opinions attributed to him in the pages of the exegetical works surveyed here that would probably have surprised or even appalled him. The same is quite possibly true of various Successors. This is even more the case in some third/ninth century *tafsīr* works; it seems unlikely that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (for example) would have been entirely pleased to see the many words attributed to him quoted on the pages of the Quran commentary authored by the Khārijī Hūd b. Muḥakkam.

Nonetheless, even in the *Tafsīr Muqātil*, male Companions as a group are not presented as having a passive relationship to scripture; not only do revelations descend to Muḥammad as occasioned by their queries and predicaments, but men such as Ibn Mas‘ūd are occasionally credited with variant readings of quranic verses. Thus, from the beginning of written quranic exegesis as it has come down to us, certain male Companions are endowed with a degree of definitional authority over the Quran and its explication. Moreover, proportionately speaking, females are presented as unwitting participants in the exegetical discourse much more frequently than males in the second/eighth century works surveyed above. One could almost say that in the minds of the men who authored and/or redacted these works that women function well (or even, perhaps, best) as sources of materials relevant to quranic exegesis when they do not realize that this is what they are doing.

In part, such an attitude stems from hermeneutical presumptions. For grammarians, the Quran’s meaning is to be understood through the analysis of its linguistic structure. A pagan poet’s lack of interpretive intention is quite beside the point; it is his or her command of the Arabic language that makes their words worth quoting. For those who based exegesis on *āthār* or *ḥadīths*, the “original” purpose of these oral texts was also superfluous, as was the growing gap of time between the first few generations of Muslims and later

exegetes. As a well known ḥadīth has it, those who had not been present when Muḥammad said something and had only heard it later as conveyed to them by others might nonetheless understand it better than those who had heard it with their own ears.²¹⁶

But these hermeneutical presumptions, divergent as they are in many ways, variously construct interpretive authority in strikingly gendered terms. For it is male exegetes who construct transhistorical communities of exegetes, and thus are empowered to decide which of the words attributed to certain female figures of the past merit inclusion or exclusion—and who moreover interpret the significance of such words. The power to define what constitutes exegesis and how it is to be “correctly” done is nearly always (re)affirmed in these eight works as masculine. That this (re)affirmation is central to the construction of these hermeneutical approaches is underlined in works as different as the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* and the *Ma‘ānī l-Qur‘ān* of al-Farrā’ through the medium of controversy traditions and hierarchization traditions. These complex and fascinating traditions, which function in these texts as vehicles for the negotiation of hermeneutical issues, will be closely examined in the next chapter.

Finally, while most of the works surveyed in this chapter would seem to reflect the nascent state of quranic exegesis in southern Iraq, particularly in Baṣra, these developments in one part of the empire subsequently had an impact on other geographical regions to varying extents. Yaḥyā b. Sallām’s teaching of his commentary in Tunis influenced local ‘Ibāḍī Quran interpretation, as well as the Sunni exegete Ibn Abī Zamanīn in al-Andalus a century later, both of whom at times elected to reproduce some of the exegetical materials attributed to women found in Yaḥyā’s *tafsīr*. Also, as this chapter has shown, many of the exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in works such as the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Wahb*, the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* and al-Farrā’’s *Ma‘ānī l-Qur‘ān* were not only in circulation in the east of the empire by the third/ninth century, but they also were regarded as part and parcel of the exegetical discourse, as they were being included in a number of Quran commentaries of the time. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, and al-Tha‘labī, and also Ibn al-Mundhir authored encyclopaedic *tafsīr* works that were intended to be comprehensive, so it might be expected that they would strive to include all materials available to them that might conceivably have a bearing on exegesis. Yet al-Samarqandī, the author of a *madrasa*-style commentary that by definition was written with a more specialized purpose also quotes some of these exegetical materials. And interestingly, even Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s expressed desire to avoid what he regarded as

216 Al-Bukhārī i, 58 (*K. al-‘Ilm*).

unnecessary repetition in his Quran commentary²¹⁷ did not lead him to avoid including some of them.

While statistically speaking the proportions of exegetical materials attributed to women in the eight sources surveyed in this chapter rarely constitute a significant percentage of any of these texts, they nonetheless were apparently regarded by some influential exegetes in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries as worth passing on. As we will see, this interpretative decision was apparently connected to the rise of ḥadīth movement in the same region at that time. This movement among other things had the effect of raising the ḥadīths attributed to a small number of early Muslim women to an even greater prominence as part of the body of oral and written texts that for its partisans constituted the core of authoritative “religious knowledge” (*‘ilm*).

But before turning to this development, some of the patterns that emerge in the citations of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures in the eight works surveyed above merit a closer examination. In particular, the persistent association between exegetical unwittingness and women arguably has several important implications for the gendering of hermeneutical approaches to *tafsīr* as well as of interpretive authority, and it is to these issues that we now turn.

217 See the Introduction, above.

Negotiating Interpretive Authority in Second/ Eighth and Early Third/Ninth Century Exegesis: Shifting Historical Contexts

In his discussion of Q 2:177,¹ al-Farrāʾ acknowledges that it contains a grammatical anomaly. A debate exists as to why the phrase, “and the steadfast (*wa-l-ṣābirīna*)” is in the accusative case. However, he says, this is an instance of the Quran’s use of a particular linguistic construction: the accusative of praise. He immediately adduces a few verses from an unnamed poet (who is, in fact, al-Khirmīq bt. Badr b. Hiffān) in order to demonstrate its occurrence:

Let my kinsmen not be distant
Men who are the enemy’s poison
The slaughter camel’s bane
The attackers on every battleground
The perfumers of their loincloths’ knots²

Al-Farrāʾ goes on to point out that this same linguistic construction occurs elsewhere in the Quran, such as in Q 4:162, “and those who perform the prayers and pay the prescribed alms (*wa-l-muqīmīna l-ṣalāta wa-l-muʿtūna l-zakāta*).” True, ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr related that he had asked ʿĀʾisha about this latter verse, as well as about two others, Q 5:69, “The believers and the Jews and the Sabians (*inna lladhīna āmanū wa-lladhīna hādū wa-l-ṣābiʿūn*)” and Q 20:63, “these two sorcerers (*in hādhāni la-sāḥirānī*),” and that she had responded, “Nephew, this is a mistake made by the scribe (*khaṭaʾ min al-kātib*).” But, (al-Farrāʾ continues) grammarians have explained that this feature of quranic expression,

1 The verse reads: “Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them, and the steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.”

2 “*lā yabʿadan qawmī lladhīna humu | sammu l-ʿudāti wāfat al-juzru | al-nāzilīna bi-kulli muʿtarikⁱⁿ | wa-l-ṭayyibūna maʿāqid al-uzri*.” This translation is from: Stetkevych, *The mute immortals* 168.

while anomalous, is nonetheless in accordance with the norms of Arabic grammar, and have offered several possible explanations of the grammatical principle underlying it. He discusses one such explanation, as well as another from al-Kisā'ī. Finally, he reiterates that it is an instance of the accusative of praise, and provides another few lines of poetry as proof of this assertion.³ Thus, al-Farrā' decisively rejects the notion that Q 2:177 (as well as Q 4:162, 5:69 or 20:63) contains a grammatical error.⁴

This passage in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* provides a particularly illustrative example of several of the complex hermeneutical and historical factors involved in the incorporation of a small number of exegetical materials attributed to female figures in the second/eighth and early third/ninth exegetical works surveyed in the previous chapter. In this period, characterized as it was by a number of historical-intellectual shifts that had variable but significant impacts on the developing genre of *tafsīr*, such materials, which apparently originated in several diverse historical and social contexts, are brought together in these eight exegetical works. There, they serve different and sometimes divergent hermeneutical functions.

First, this chapter examines a particularly forthright instance of the use of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures as vehicles for debates on hermeneutical approaches to the Quran—al-Farrā's exegesis of Q 2:177. Then, the exegetical materials attributed to women in these eight works are examined more closely. Analyzed through the lens of their putative intentionality, they are read both within their shifting historical contexts (to the extent that these can be reconstructed), as well as with reference to the gendered “labour” that they perform in these exegetical texts. It will become apparent that gendered figures serve at times as vehicles for the negotiation of hermeneutical questions in the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries. As has already been shown in Chapter One, *tafsīr* works from the formative period onwards gender interpretative authority as “masculine”—and the female figures quoted in these exegetical materials typically further reinforce rather than undermine this. Finally, as will be noted, some gendered features of these eight exegetical works seem to be precursors of several significant developments in quranic exegesis in the century or so following.

3 Al-Farrā' i, 104–7.

4 For an overview of this passage in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* as well as of how several later exegetes deal with this grammatical issue, see: Burton, Linguistic errors 181–96.

1 Female Figures as Vehicles for Debating Hermeneutics

The first verses of poetry that al-Farrāʾi cites in support of his grammatical analysis of Q 2:177 are the opening lines of the elegy composed by al-Khirniq for her husband, son and two brothers who had died in battle. A poet from pre-Islamic times, she extols her kinsmen because they are warriors who fight for the tribe, generously provide food, and furthermore do not leave any tribesman's death unavenged.⁵ This unabashedly pagan conception of a virtuous life worthy of poetic immortalization contrasts with the description of the righteous in Q 2:177, who are characterized by their faith and performance of acts of worship. But despite the straightforward paganism of these lines, they merit citation in this context because they have already become a grammarians' proof-text. Sībawayh quoted them in his chapter on the accusative of praise,⁶ and exegetes interpreting the Quran through the use of grammatical analysis followed suit.⁷

The controversy tradition attributed to ʿĀʾisha deals explicitly with the question of grammatical anomalies in the Quran. For some time after the promulgation of the ʿUthmānic recension, there does not seem to have been a consensus as to whether reciters must always adhere to its consonantal skeleton (*rasm*).⁸ This issue appears to have been debated in part through the medium of traditions. A well-known example of a tradition of this type asserts that when ʿUthmān was informed that there were grammatical errors in his recension, he responded that the Arabs will “correct these with their tongues” (i.e. as they recite the text).⁹ Similarly, this tradition attributed to ʿĀʾisha implies that in the case of three quranic verses at least, departing from the *rasm* of the ʿUthmānic recension is not only possible but advisable.¹⁰

Nonetheless, it appears that with ongoing efforts during the formative period to standardize the variant recitations of the Quran having resulted in the widespread rejection of the validity of recitations that departed from the *rasm*,¹¹

5 For a detailed discussion of this elegy, see: Stetkevych, *Mute immortals* 168–74.

6 Al-Zajjāj ii, 77–78; al-Nahḥās i, 91 (*sub.* Q 2:177).

7 Abū ʿUbayda i, 65, 142–3; al-Akhfash i, 167.

8 Gilliot, *Creation of a fixed text* 48–9.

9 “*wa rawaytum ʿan ʿUthmān annahu naẓara fi l-muṣḥaf fa-qāla arā fihi laḥn^{an} wa-sataqayy-imuhu l-ʿArab bi-alsinatihā*”; see: Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl* 25; (similarly) Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Kitāb faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān* 287 (*Bāb taʾlīf al-Qurʾān*).

10 This tradition also appears in: Abū ʿUbayd 287 (*Bāb taʾlīf al-Qurʾān*); Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl* 24; Jeffery, *Materials for the history* 34; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* vi, 32. For a few other examples of traditions found in early *tafsīr* texts asserting that particular verses contain scribal errors, see: Versteegh, *Arabic grammar* 80.

11 For a summary of this process, see: Gilliot, *Creation of a fixed text* 49–52.

the quranic text's linguistic anomalies could no longer be dealt with in such a way. Moreover, exegetes increasingly express opposition on explicitly doctrinal grounds to assertions that such anomalies are due to a scribe's mistake (*khaṭa'*) or are grammatical errors (*lahn*).¹² Writing several generations after al-Farrā', al-Zajjāj spells out the ways that such assertions contravene key aspects of the emerging Sunni "consensus": in his view, they are neither congruent with the recognition of the unique position enjoyed by Muḥammad's Companions as the generation favoured with unmatched proximity to Islam's foundational events, nor with confidence in the Companions' trustworthy transmission of the Quran from the prophet, nor with the belief that the Quran itself is complete and perfect.¹³ Not coincidentally, these particular beliefs define Sunni "orthodoxy" in contradistinction to Shi'i movements of the time.¹⁴ In view of this, it is not surprising that traditions such as this one ascribed to 'Ā'isha came to be seen in Sunni circles as highly problematic.

As we have seen, al-Farrā' bases his assertion that the use of the accusative case in the phrase in Q 2:177, "and the steadfast (*wa-l-ṣābirīna*)" is in accordance with correct Arabic usage on a grammatical argument. In his discussion of this verse, he places a hermeneutical approach to quranic exegesis that is based on grammar in the role of upholding the banner of "orthodox" belief—in contrast to an approach based on the citation of traditions, which spectacularly fails to do so.

It is noteworthy that this jibe of al-Farrā's is couched in gendered terms. Significantly, the representative of the hermeneutical approach that he rejects as inadequate is none other than 'Ā'isha, the most prolific female source of ḥadīths in proto-Sunni texts. Even the verses of a pagan female poet—once they had been selected and vetted first by a (male) grammarian as well as a (male) exegete—thus prove better able to explicate Q 2:177 than the tradition credited to 'Ā'isha. That 'Ā'isha in this tradition clearly intends to comment on this quranic verse while al-Khirniq just as clearly does not only serves to emphasize the "masculinity" of linguistically-based exegesis *vis à vis* the

12 That a shift in theological sensibilities took place is also reflected in rather forced reinterpretations of the word "*lahn*" (as used in traditions about the Quran), e.g. Ibn Abī Dāwūd's statement, "*wa-l-alḥān al-lughāt*" (*Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, 32). Ibn Ḥajar claims that a reference to "*lahn Ubayy*" in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* means his recitation—i.e. that Ubayy transmitted some recitations, unaware that they had been abrogated; see: *Fath* x, 429–430 (*K. Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*).

13 Al-Zajjāj ii, 77 (*sub. Q 4:162*).

14 For early Shi'i claims that the quranic text is incomplete, see: Modarressi, *Early debates* 5–39; Shah, *Introduction* 42.

“feminine” weakness of hermeneutical approaches based on the citation of traditions, which even the best intentions of its proponents apparently cannot obviate.

1.1 *A Continuum of Interpretive Intentionality*

The eight works surveyed in Chapter Two—the *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī*, the *Jāmiʿ* of Ibn Wahb, the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, the *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*, the *Majāz al-Qurʾān* of Abū ʿUbayda, the *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* of al-Farrāʾ, the *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* of al-Akhfash, and the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*—all contain exegetical materials attributed to early female figures. A small number of female figures, nearly all from the dawn on Islam, came to be allotted a space within the various transhistorical communities of exegetes constructed on the pages of these works.

This process occurred within the context of several far-reaching intellectual-historical developments: with Sībawayh’s famous book, Arabic grammar became a subject of systematic, formal and specialized study in the second/eighth century. *Fiqh*, ḥadīth transmission, and *tafsīr*, on their way to becoming distinct disciplines, were developing their own methodological approaches and modes of specialization. Meanwhile, the Arab Muslim ruling elites consolidated their imperial hold over lands (and over largely non-Arab, still often non-Muslim populations) extending from Spain to Central Asia. It is not surprising that in such a historical context, negotiating inter- and intracommunal boundaries as well as delineating social order would be matters of concern to Muslim scholars. Moreover, discussions of explicitly gendered issues often functioned as a medium for negotiations of this type. These factors interact in various ways in the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, at times making possible or even promoting the inclusion of materials attributed to female figures in exegetical works, but more often sharply limiting this.

It is important to note that this process of inclusion is anachronistic. Quranic exegesis did not exist as a discipline when the Companions and Successors were alive, so they could not have perceived themselves as “doing *tafsīr*” in the sense that such interpretive activities came to be understood in the second/eighth century and later. Nonetheless, exegetical materials attributed to these figures impute a range of levels of interpretive intentionality to them. While the historicity of such attributions is likely impossible to establish with any degree of confidence, these portrayals do provide us with insight into constructions of interpretive authority.

While the concept of a continuum of intentionality is being used here primarily as a lens to examine portrayals of the female figures that populate the transhistorical communities of exegetes which are brought into being through

quotations in *tafsīr* works, it could be utilized when analyzing figures of this type regardless of their gender. Nonetheless, this continuum does not function in a gender-neutral way in the *tafsīr* texts under examination here. On the contrary, for reasons that will become apparent, it plays an important role in constructions of interpretive authority as gendered.

1.1.1 Entirely Unwitting Sources: Female Poets and Anonymous Speakers

At one end of the continuum of intentionality are the depictions of women and men as entirely unwitting sources of exegetical materials, such as in quotations of poetry attributed to male or female poets. In these, there is no illusion that when the persons in question speak that they have any intention to interpret the Quran.

In pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, women were usually objects of the male poet's gaze. They are presented in various ways: as longed-for beloveds, dutiful daughters, tragic figures, and sometimes, as persons who possess prestige. It appears that in pre-Islamic Arabia, eloquence and poetic ability were important means through which a freeborn Arab man performed his masculinity, social status and cultural identity.¹⁵

Some freeborn Arab women are also memorialized as having authored poetry. However, if what survives of pre-Islamic Arabian poetry is representative of the genre, it seems that while male poets used a number of different poetic forms, female poets were chiefly concerned with the composition of elegies (*marāthī*) in memory of their male relatives, usually those whose deaths were the result of intertribal warfare.¹⁶ These poems immortalize deceased warriors and summon the tribe to exact vengeance for their deaths. Far from being simply an individual expression of grief, the composition of elegies in accordance with the particular conventions typical of the genre was a ritual obligation of freeborn women, and an aspect of the pre-Islamic religious life of the tribe.¹⁷

Given the pagan ethos of poetry of the latter type, as well as its connection to the pre-Islamic cycle of blood revenge, it is perhaps unsurprising that it was censured by Muslim scholars in the formative period, along with the

15 Kahf, Braiding the stories 153–5.

16 al-Sajdi, Trespassing the male domain 121–3. For a survey of pre-Islamic poetry credited to women, see: al-Ḥūfi, *Al-Mar'a fi l-shi'r al-jāhili* 603ff.

17 For a detailed study of several such elegies, see: Stetkevych, *Mute immortals* 161ff. Stetkevych suggests that some of these elegies may in fact have been composed by men.

traditional women's mourning practices that accompanied it.¹⁸ This condemnation came to be read into the Quran itself through the medium of ḥadīths (often ascribed to early Muslim women) recounting that when women gave the oath of allegiance to Muḥammad, they had to promise not to take part in the customary lamentations over the dead.¹⁹

Nonetheless, as we have seen, lines from elegies were sometimes utilized as *shawāhid* in *tafsīr* works from the third/ninth century onward. While the majority of such poetic citations are credited to male poets, a small number attributed to female poets continue to appear. For example, in his exegesis of Q 4:3—"If you fear that you cannot be just to the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four. . . ."—Ibn al-Mundhir includes the view that the phrase, "if you fear" actually means, "if you are certain." This interpretation is supported by a couplet credited to a female poet:

I said to you, 'Fear a thousand horsemen
Veiled in hard iron.'²⁰

While she is not addressing the subject of marriage, her words are appropriated here—though by whom is uncertain—for use as a linguistic proof-text in an exegetical debate on that topic.²¹

Quotations of pre-Islamic poetry such as the opening lines of the elegy attributed to al-Khirmīq in *tafsīr* works express the power of (male) exegetes to appropriate voices from the pre-Islamic past at their discretion, in the service of a very different socio-religious worldview. Moreover, the use of verses credited to transitional female poets such as al-Khansā' as *shawāhid* serve as vehicles for more than linguistic information, as traditional Muslim accounts of her life indicate.

18 Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām b. Ayyūb al-Ḥimyarī al-Ma'āfirī, *Al-Sīra al-nabawīyya li-Ibn Hishām* 724; Halevi, *Wailing for the dead* 3–39.

19 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxviii, 86–7.

20 "*qultu la-kum khāfū bi-alfi fārisin | muqanna'ina ft-l-ḥadīdi l-yābisi*" (Ibn al-Mundhir ii, 555–6). For a late medieval citation of this couplet in the exegesis of Q 4:3, see al-Qurṭubī v, 12.

21 This couplet—along with this interpretation—are related on the authority of Abū 'Ubayda, along with the statement from a transmitter that "I did not hear that from Abū 'Ubayda" (Ibn al-Mundhir, *ibid.*). Interestingly, the interpretation and the couplet, as well as the transmitter's interjection also appear in the *Majāz* as it has come down to us (Abū 'Ubayda i, 116). Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī cites this opinion as Abū 'Ubayda's, along with a similar though anonymous line of poetry, but rejects his interpretation of the phrase as incorrect (*Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* iii, 227).

Before the rise of Islam, al-Khansā' is said to have been famous among the Arabs for the elegies she had composed for her brothers, who had been killed in inter-tribal skirmishes.²² Biographers recount that she accepted Islam along with her tribe, and is therefore counted among the Companions. Muḥammad himself is said to have appreciated her poetry. During the caliphate of 'Umar, al-Khansā' is present at the Battle of al-Qādisiyya, exhorting her four sons to fight against the Sassanid army with the (quranic) words, "...endure, outdo all others in endurance (Q 3:200)." After they are slain, she memorializes their deaths in verse.²³

While the general outline of this tale—a woman who urges her menfolk on in battle and then immortalizes them through her poetry—reflects pagan Arabian cultural ideals, its details convey Islamic mores. Even a poet of al-Khansā's caliber can find no words more suitable at the decisive moment when she sends her sons to fight to their deaths than a verse from the Quran. Thus, the citation of her poetry in exegetical works serves as a powerful illustration of the Islamic supercession of pagan sensibilities, exemplifying the transition from a scriptureless paganism to a scripture-bearing community that moreover is now an imperial power.²⁴

Another type of exegetical material in which its putative source is presented as entirely unwitting is quotations of purported speech. These are ascribed to women as well as men, who may be named or anonymous. Sometimes, these quotations recount expressions said to be typically used in particular situations. There is absolutely no suggestion that the person whose words are being quoted intends to interpret the Quran, nor that he/she might be aware that their words could be quoted by others in future for this (or any other) purpose.

For example, in support of the recitation by 'Alqama b. Qays²⁵ of Q 33:40—"but he is the messenger of God and the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*)"—a verse which came to be invested with considerable

22 For a translation of one of al-Khansā's poems that mourns her brother Ṣakhr, see: Nicholson, *A literary history* 127.

23 Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb* iv, 387–9; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba* vii, 89–91.

24 It should be noted that with al-Tha'labī's Quran commentary, poetry also becomes a medium for admonition and edification in *tafsīr* works; see: Saleh, *Formation* 174–5. However, this development is beyond the scope of this study.

25 'Alqama was a well-known jurist and Quran reciter who was a student of Ibn Mas'ūd; see: Shams al-Dīn Abī al-Khayr Muḥammad b. al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihaya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'* i, 516.

theological significance²⁶—al-Farrā’s *Ma‘ānī l-Qur‘ān* as it has come down to us recounts that

... ‘Alqama used to recite, “*khātamuhu misk*,”²⁷ and he would say, “Certainly, you have heard a woman saying to a perfume seller, ‘Give me *khātamahu misk*’; meaning, ‘the last of it [musk].’”²⁸

The function of this example of stereotyped female speech, which also appears in the discussion of Q 83:26,²⁹ is to support the assertion that the expression “*khātam al-nabiyyīn*” unambiguously refers to Muḥammad as the last of the prophets, after whom no more shall come.³⁰ The incongruity between the reportedly customary words used by Arab women when buying perfume and the theological-exegetical use to which they are being put here by male scholars is apparent. This is a particularly vivid illustration of the central role that framing plays in making quotations of this type useable as exegetical commentary, regardless of such words’ “original” context.

1.1.2 Witting, Unwitting, or Somewhere in Between?: Female Sources of *Āthār* and Ḥadīths

While some exegetical materials attributed to female figures clearly do not present the women in question as having any intention to interpret the Quran, the degree of putative intentionality is often ambiguous in many if not most such *āthār* and ḥadīths quoted in exegetical works. The woman or man relating or transmitting a prophetic saying, or an anecdote about Muḥammad, or the words or deeds of one or more of his Companions or Successors apparently intends to pass on a given saying or anecdote to one or more of their contemporaries. However, it is often unclear whether she or he expects (or even

26 For early and medieval differences of opinion on the meaning of this verse, see: Friedmann, *Prophecy continuous* 53ff.

27 I.e. that this is how ‘Alqama recited Q 83:26—“its seal is musk” (*khītāmuhu misk*).

28 Al-Farrā’ ii, 344. The *isnād* begins with Abū l-‘Abbās.

29 Q 83:26—“its seal is musk . . .” (Al-Farrā’ iii, 248). There are slight differences in the wording and *isnāds* of these two versions; in one manuscript, the names of Abū l-‘Abbās—Muḥammad do not appear in the *isnād* (n. 7).

30 The issues at stake include: how any person claiming prophethood after Muḥammad is to be viewed, as well as the theological problem posed by apocalyptic traditions stating that Jesus will return to earth, when this would mean that chronologically, he both precedes and follows Muḥammad (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 618). For an example of a similar quotation (as related by ‘Alqama from Ibn Mas‘ūd) and quoted in order to interpret Q 83:26, see: Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi‘* (1995) fol. 21a, 9–12.

wishes) it to reach a broader audience, much less anticipates that it might be quoted in order to shed light on the Quran's meaning. It should be emphasized that our concern here is not to determine the "original" intentions of women who are credited with having related or transmitted ḥadīths, but rather, the level of intentionality being attributed to them in these texts. The quotations of *shawāhid* and especially stereotyped speech in the linguistically-focused exegetical works discussed above raise some complex questions as to how depictions of women or men as sources of *āthār* and ḥadīths are to be understood within the context of these eight exegetical works under discussion.

Little is known about the historical origins of the practice of ascribing *āthār* and ḥadīths to female figures. There is a degree of similarity between the literary image of the pagan woman composing an elegy and the depictions of early Muslim women as transmitters of ḥadīth. Analogous in some ways to the poet, the transmitter of *ḥadīth* has the task of memorializing the dead, and instigating her community to act in accordance with the *sunna*,³¹ through her use of well-chosen words that nonetheless follow particular conventions. Interestingly, the same Arabic term, *rāwī* (pl. *ruwāt*) is used for a person who recites and transmits poetry, or ḥadīth.³²

The circulation of *logia* that present female figures as sources of religious knowledge predates Islam by several centuries at least. In general, the rabbinic Jewish and Christian works from late antiquity that have come down to us portray religious learning and authority as a male preserve, and usually have little to say even about women who had apparently achieved some degree of prominence in these areas. Yet, some of these texts do occasionally portray a few women transmitting religious laws or teachings, or even at times interpreting scriptures.³³

A well-known example of this in talmudic literature is the learned wife of Rabbi Meir, Beruriah, who is credited in some eight *logia* with knowledge of Jewish purity laws, the teachings of the rabbis, and Torah exegesis.³⁴ In another

31 While the pre-Islamic meaning of "*sunna*" was "tribal custom," in the formative period it came to mean the rightly-guided practice of Muḥammad that should be emulated by the believers; see: Goldziher, *Muslim studies* ii, 25–6.

32 For the role of the *rāwī* as a transmitter of pre-Islamic poetry, see: Nicholson, *A literary history* 131ff. For *rūwāya* in early and medieval Islam, see: Rāwī (Renate Jacobi), *EI* viii: 466b; Leder, *Spoken word*.

33 For a survey of some such sources and the information that can be culled from them, see: Kraemer, *Her share* 93ff. For the paucity of references to women in the surviving works of late antique ecclesiastical historians, see: Jensen, *God's self-confident* 5ff.

34 It is unclear when and where Beruriah lived, if she was in fact a historical person. The earliest tradition mentioning her is found in the Tosefta, a Palestinian source conventionally

example, a late antique Christian text, the *Apophthegmata patrum* (“The sayings of the desert Fathers”) recounts a small number of anecdotes about several of the female ascetics living in the deserts of Palestine and Egypt in the third and fourth centuries CE, as well as a few *logia* attributed to them. As ascetics, they were expected to memorize and recite scripture (particularly the Psalms); in some cases, they also seem to have received instruction in certain aspects of its meanings. Some reportedly received visits from pious laypeople hoping to hear words of wisdom or inspiration.³⁵

Therefore, the circulation of *āthār* and ḥadīths credited to early Muslim women during the formative period in regions such as southern Iraq and Egypt, and their incorporation into male-authored legal or pietistic-ascetic texts was not entirely without historical antecedents. Nor was the quotation in a male-authored religious text of a few sayings attributed to a woman about the interpretation of a verse of scripture. Quranic exegesis developed in times and places where older and more numerically strong religious communities already had their long-established traditions of study and commentary on their various scriptures,³⁶ which were evidently based on gendered conceptions of knowledge and interpretive authority.³⁷ Recognizing the existence of such parallels in turn suggests new ways of analyzing some types of ḥadīths attributed to women that are quoted in exegetical works, as will become apparent when considering the textual functions of hierarchization traditions (below).

Available evidence strongly suggests that the state of legal discourses during the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries played a significant role—or perhaps even provided a key initial impetus—in the process of incorporation of *āthār* and ḥadīths attributed to women in several of the eight exegetical works surveyed in the previous chapter. Ibn Wahb and ‘Abd al-Razzāq were primarily jurists, and over half of the 25 traditions credited to women in the

dated to 250 CE, but the bulk of traditions about her are first attested in the Babylonian Talmud (500 CE). For a translation of the traditions mentioning Beruriah, as well a discussion of some of the historical problems connected with them, see: Goodblatt, *The Beruriah traditions* 68–85. Judith Romney Wegner questions Beruriah’s historical existence; see her: *The image and status* 76. For readings of these traditions as literary texts, see: Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 182ff; Adler, *The virgin* 102–5.

35 Vogt, *The Desert Mothers* 203–5. For a portrayal of a female ascetic asking an archbishop about the meaning of a biblical verse, see: Ward, *The sayings* 71–2.

36 For the development of Jewish and Christian interpretive approaches to scripture, see: Benin, *The search for truth* 13–32.

37 See for example: Wegner, *Chattel or person?* 161–2; Doumato, *Hearing other voices* 177–99. For a brief discussion of a 9th century CE Zoroastrian priestly code that bars women from becoming priests, but allows them to attend religious schools except when menstruating, see: Choksy, *Evil, good and gender* 91.

Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām deal directly with legal topics. During this selfsame period, *āthār* credited to a select number of early Muslim women, as well as ḥadīths reportedly transmitted by them, were being included by some jurists in their *muṣannaḥ* works in relatively small yet statistically significant proportions.

For example, in the *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ*, which is a lengthy chapter in the *Muṣannaḥ ʿAbd al-Razzāq* composed of traditions recounted on the authority of his Baṣran teacher Maʿmar b. Rāshid that deal with a wide variety of topics, four percent are traced back to female Companions and (much less often) to female Successors.³⁸ Seven percent of the traditions in Mālik b. Anas' (d. 179/795) *Muwaṭṭaʿ* in the recension transmitted by Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī (d. 234/848) are credited to women;³⁹ while it is unclear when this text finally achieved the form that it now has,⁴⁰ this figure is suggestive. Significantly, both of these texts contain a number of the *āthār* and ḥadīths attributed to women that are also found in the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām*, and Ibn Wahb's *Jāmiʿ*. This suggests that such traditions were already part of some jurists' discourses in Baṣra and perhaps also the Ḥijāz before they appear to have begun to be incorporated into the exegetical works under discussion here.

Yet, it is noteworthy that the percentages of traditions ascribed to women in the *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ* and Yaḥyā's recension of Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʿ*, though quite low, are still statistically significant, while those in Ibn Wahb's *Jāmiʿ* and the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq* (as well as the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām*) are not, as was shown in the previous chapter. A possible interpretation of this difference could be that traditions attributed to women were somewhat more acceptable in juristic than in exegetical discourses in the second/eighth century, but more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

As we have seen, most of the traditions in these exegetical works are traced back to female Companions, with few female Successors appearing as quoted authorities or transmitters. In this way, these works present women's authoritative knowledge about the interpretation of the Quran as an anomaly that

38 However, this figure does not include reports about women's customary practices or legal views attributed to them in traditions credited to men. For the age of the *Muṣannaḥ ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, see: Motzki, *The Muṣannaḥ*. For reasons for regarding the *K. al-Jāmiʿ* as originating from Maʿmar, see: Motzki, *The author and his work* 180–1.

39 Roded, *Women in Islamic* 19.

40 The age and redactional histories of the various recensions of Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʿ* continue to be debated. Norman Calder argues for a late third century AH date for Yaḥyā's recension; see his *Studies* 20ff; for a counter-argument, see: Motzki, *The prophet and the cat* 18–83. Jonathan Brockopp asserts that while the *Muwaṭṭaʿ* is an organic rather than a fixed text, it is possible to extract an authentic core of Mālik's teachings from early Mālikī texts; see his *Early Mālikī law* 68–81.

moreover is hardly to be found after the Companion generation. Also, the *Tafṣīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* contains several hierarchization traditions that appear to present such authoritative knowledge in rather ambivalent terms.

These observations both parallel and appear to bear some relationship to the trajectory of decline for female ḥadīth transmitters during the formative period delineated by Asma Sayeed in her groundbreaking research on this phenomenon. Sayeed demonstrates that available evidence indicates that women’s participation in ḥadīth transmission had decreased sharply by the middle of the second/eighth century, and points to several historical factors that likely played a key role in bringing this about: (1) the initial lack of clear distinction between ḥadīth transmission (*riwāya*) and serving as a witness, which meant that some male authorities were reluctant to accept traditions related by women as legal proofs, (2) the development of more rigorous criteria for evaluating ḥadīth transmitters that put emphasis on their reputation for memory, as well as their having a comprehensive understanding of the legal implications of the traditions they were passing on, and (3) the growing emphasis on travel to learn ḥadīths (*riḥla fi ṭalab al-‘ilm*). She also suggests that the shift from the informal, primarily oral transmission of ḥadīths in the first/seventh century to their transmission in assemblies in which students would read them out as well as record them in writing would also have increasingly limited women’s participation, due to their lower rates of literacy.⁴¹

While Sayeed examines these factors primarily in order to offer a historical explanation as to how and why women’s involvement in the transmission of ḥadīths had become very unusual by the end of the second century *hijrī*, what is of particular interest here is what they indicate about how leading figures in the ḥadīth movement claimed religious authority. The establishment of norms of proficiency is typically an important part of the process of development of any specialized field of study, so it is foreseeable that this would occur in the case of ḥadīth as well. However, the extent to which most if not all of these norms construct the transmission and study of ḥadīths as an emblematically (free) “masculine” undertaking is noteworthy. This is especially interesting given that this was apparently occurring at the same time as ḥadīth transmitters and compilers were also in the process of constructing the possession of reliable memory and intellect (*‘aql*),⁴² as well as self-directed mobility⁴³

41 Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* esp. 97–157.

42 For the well-known ḥadīth in which Muḥammad describes women as “deficient in intellect and religion (*nāqiṣāt ‘aql wa-dīn*)”; see Chapter One.

43 E.g. “. . . On the authority of Abū Hurayra, that the Messenger of God said, ‘It is not lawful for a woman who believes in God and the Last Day to go on a journey lasting a day

as quintessentially “masculine” attributes through the medium of ḥadīths. Through these emerging norms of proficiency, the claim for the religiously authoritative status of ḥadīths is couched in masculine terms.

As living female ḥadīth transmitters were rare by the time that men such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Ibn Wahb and Yahyā b. Sallām were authoring their works,⁴⁴ it is perhaps not surprising that no traditions related on the authority of any of their female contemporaries are quoted in these texts. In this context, the quotation of ḥadīths and *āthār* attributed to early Muslim women in a number of these eight exegetical works under discussion takes on a paradoxical quality. This makes such traditions particularly apt vehicles for negotiating issues involving inter- or intracommunal boundaries.

A particularly fascinating example of this can be seen in debates in the formative period over hermeneutical approaches to the Quran. A key quranic verse in such debates is Q 3:7,⁴⁵ and as we have seen, a brief and rather enigmatic ḥadīth credited to her on this verse is quoted in a couple of the eight exegetical works under discussion:

Al-Ḥārith—Ayyūb—Ibn Abī Mulayka—‘Ā’isha, wife of the Prophet, [who] said:

The Messenger of God recited this verse: *It is He who has sent this scripture down to you. Some of its verses are definite in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the scripture—and others are ambiguous. . . .* (Q 3:7) Then, the Messenger of God said, ‘If you see those who *eagerly pursue the*

and a night, unless a *maḥram* is with her’”; see: Mālik 854 (*K. al-Jāmi*); “... Ibn ‘Abbās reported that the Prophet said, ‘A woman is not to travel except with a *maḥram*, and no man may visit her unless there is a *maḥram* with her’”; see: al-Bukhārī iii, 50 (*Abwāb al-Muḥṣar*). A *maḥram* is a close male relative that a woman cannot marry, such as her father, brother, or son. Ḥadīths on this theme are commonly found in sub-canonical and canonical compilations.

44 Asma Sayeed notes that only fifteen women are recorded as having participated in ḥadīth transmission during the second half of the second century *hijrī* (*Shifting fortunes* 108).

45 Q 3:7 reads in its entirety: “It is he who sent this scripture down to you. Some of its verses are definite in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the scripture—and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: it is all from our Lord’—only those with real perception will take heed.” A number of studies have examined classical exegetical discourses on Q 3:7; see for example: Kinberg, *Muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* 283–312; McAuliffe, *Text and textuality* 56–76.

ambiguities of it, or those who argue about it, then they are the ones God is referring to (in this verse), so do not keep company with them.’⁴⁶

This ḥadīth asserts that there is a distinction between “acceptable” and “unacceptable” hermeneutical approaches to the Quran. Yet, the features said to distinguish the purveyors of “unacceptable” interpretations mean little or nothing when this ḥadīth is heard/read on its own. Much depends on how terms such as “definite” (*muḥkam*) and “ambiguous” (*mutashābih*) are understood, as well as what is deemed to be “arguing,” given that exegetical approaches usually involve debate and disagreement almost by definition. Ibn Wahb’s *Jāmi’* provides few clues as to this ḥadīth’s intended target. The *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, however, quotes a briefer version—“If you see those who argue about it, then they are the ones that God means, so be wary of them”⁴⁷—immediately following a lengthy tradition in which Qatāda says that those condemned by Q 3:7 are either the Sab’iyya, or more likely the Khārijīs.⁴⁸ By framing the ḥadīth credited to ‘Ā’isha in this way, it is made clear what types of interpretations of the Quran are to be shunned.

Sunni exegetes from the formative period onwards list various groups who might be “the perverse at heart” spoken of in Q 3:7—religious Others, especially from the time of the prophet, such as certain Jewish or Christian individuals or groups who opposed him, or the (Medinan) “Hypocrites,”⁴⁹ as well as Khārijīs and innovators, among other possibilities.⁵⁰ Then, by quoting this ḥadīth credited to ‘Ā’isha, an exegete could claim the hermeneutical high ground for his own interpretive methods (however distant from the

46 “*idhā ra’aytum alladhīna yatabī’ūna mā tashābaha minhu aw alladhīna yujādilūna fihi fahum alladhīna qāla Allāhu fihim, fa-lā tujālīsūhum*” (Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi’* (1995), fol. 12a, 23–12b, 1; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* iii, 220). For a similar version, see: al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 9.

47 “*‘Abd al-Razzāq—Ma’mar—Ayyūb—Ibn Abī Mulayka—‘Ā’isha, anna l-nabī qara’ahā fa-qāla: idhā ra’aytum alladhīna yujādilūna fihi fa-hum alladhīna ‘annī Allāhu fa-ḥdharūhum*” (‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 383).

48 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 381–2. The editor identifies the Sab’iyya as the followers of ‘Abdallāh b. Sabā, an early proponent of “extremist” (*ghuluww*) Shi’i views (n. 6). For the legend of Ibn Sabā and the “extremist” Shi’i group that purportedly originated with him, see: Momen, *An introduction* 46–7.

49 An advantage of locating such groups in the past was that this potentially reduced the perceived usefulness of Q 3:7 in order to attack or dismiss contemporary exegetical approaches.

50 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* iii, 216–22; Ibn al-Mundhir i, 123; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 9.

“mainstream” these might be in actuality) by rhetorically distancing himself from such blameworthy Others.⁵¹

While it might appear that this ḥadīth lends itself particularly well to being quoted in support of proto-Sunni hermeneutical approaches, its wording was sufficiently general that it served as a mirror within which exegetes of almost any stripe could plausibly claim to see their opponents reflected. In quoting this well-known and widely circulated ḥadīth attributed to ‘Ā’isha,⁵² Quran commentators invoke the abode of Muḥammad’s wives, which is where this interchange of words between husband and wife would be assumed to have taken place. This ḥadīth transports the audience/reader back to an imagined time of communal innocence, before the theo-political strife that would tear the *umma* apart within a few decades of Muḥammad’s death had erupted—and when the “correct” way to understand God’s revelation was clear and agreed upon by all. In this way, the abode of the wives of the prophet is made to play a legitimating function for whatever hermeneutical approach a given exegete is championing, even if—like Hūd b. Muḥakkam—he is an ‘Ibādī.⁵³ As we will see in the next chapters, the abode of Muḥammad’s wives would increasingly be presented in *tafsīr* works as a space within which a variety of issues involving inter- and intra-communal boundaries could be authoritatively resolved.

A similar invocation of the abode of Muḥammad’s wives is evident in the sole tradition adduced by ‘Abd al-Razzāq in explanation of Q 36:69—“And we have not taught him poetry, nor is it appropriate for him. This [Quran] is nothing but a reminder (*dhikr*) and a clear recitation.” This ḥadīth recounts that when ‘Ā’isha was asked if the prophet had ever quoted poetry, she responded: “Poetry was the type of speech that he detested the most,” and then related an incident in which he made a mistake when attempting to quote some. When corrected by Abū Bakr, he reportedly replied, “I am not a poet, nor is it appropriate for me.”⁵⁴ Similarly, in explanation of this verse, the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* relates that ‘Ā’isha said that Muḥammad never recited poetry, except on one occasion when he tried to do so but did not succeed.⁵⁵

The status of poetry was evidently a controversial question in the formative period for several reasons. For pietists who took a serious approach to life,

51 For a good example of this dynamic, see: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr* ii, 60–4.

52 For the many ḥadīth compilers who cite a version of it, see: al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* ii, 148.

53 Hūd i, 267. As might be expected, Hūd does not reproduce proto-Sunni claims that “the perverse at heart” in Q 3:7 are the Khārījīs; he sides with the view that it refers to some of Muḥammad’s Medinan Jewish opponents.

54 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 86–7.

55 Yahyā ii, 818.

poetry—particularly that composed in pre-Islamic times—might be regarded as a frivolity that believers ought to avoid. But more importantly, the place of poetry in the life of the community also posed hermeneutical and theological questions.

As we have already seen, second/eighth century linguistically-focused exegetical works had adopted the grammarians' method of utilizing poetry as proof-texts for correct Arabic usage. In so doing, they had seemingly given this "profane" material the power to determine what the sacred text means—although this was more appearance than reality.⁵⁶ In addition, there was the theological issue of the relationship between prophecy and poetry. The quranic text itself reproaches the Meccans for dismissing Muḥammad as no more than a poet.⁵⁷

These ḥadīths attributed to ʿĀ'isha that are cited in explanation of Q 36:69 denigrate poetry in order to locate the source of Muḥammad's revelatory experiences entirely beyond his own self, as well as to present the Quran as clearly distinct from (as well as superior to) even the most eloquent type of human speech. The theological weight given to such ḥadīths is evident from their continued appearance in *tafsīr* works from the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, and even later.⁵⁸ These ḥadīths can also be understood as disparagement of grammarians or linguistically-focused hermeneutical approaches. Al-Zajjāj voices his objections to the literalistic interpretations of Q 36:69 that traditions of this type express.⁵⁹

Here, the abode of the wives of the prophet (again, as represented by ʿĀ'isha) is evoked by some exegetes in order to assert the Quran's peerlessness. That these ḥadīths are unlikely to be a simple reflection of an actual attitude to poetry held by ʿĀ'isha is evident from the fact that elsewhere, a number of traditions make divergent claims about her views on it.⁶⁰ The *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* in fact contains a tradition that portrays her approvingly listening to Ḥassān b. Thābit recite poetry that he had composed in praise of her.⁶¹

56 Similarly, when classical Sunni exegetes employed linguistically-based approaches, they did not give grammar or philology the final verdict when the result would be at variance with "orthodox" beliefs, see: Saleh, *Formation* 130–40.

57 E.g. Q 37:35–36—"Whenever it was said to them, 'There is no deity but God,' they became arrogant, and said, 'Are we to forsake our gods for a mad poet?'"

58 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxiii, 30; al-Samarqandī iii, 105; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 205. According to al-Suyūṭī, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim cite a version of it (*Durr al-manthūr* vii, 71).

59 Al-Zajjāj iv, 36.

60 E.g. Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 237, 266–7 (*K. al-Jāmi'*).

61 Al-Thawrī 221–2. For the complete poem, see: Ibn Hishām 680.

Those who wanted to assert that poetry has a legitimate place in the life of the community as well as in exegesis also could and sometimes did quote traditions depicting ‘Ā’isha (as well as other prominent early figures, most notably Ibn ‘Abbās) endorsing it.⁶² Moreover, it was claimed that none other than ‘Urwa had said that he “did not see anyone more knowledgeable than she [‘Ā’isha] about the Book of God, or the *sunna* of the Messenger of God, or poetry, or shares of inheritance.”⁶³ Again, what is at issue here for exegetes is not determining her “actual” view on the question so much as the legitimation that invoking the abode of the wives of the prophet might provide for a particular interpretative stance.

A number of the eight exegetical works that are the focus on our discussion here contain *āthār* or ḥadīths attributed to early Muslim women that deal with several types of legal matters. More than one of these works contains such traditions on the following: the nature of the “unintentional” oaths referred to in Q 2:225,⁶⁴ marriage and divorce, the women’s *bay‘a*, and free women’s veiling. It seems that the issue of unintentional oaths was widely associated with ‘Ā’isha by the second/eight century,⁶⁵ likely at least in part because of its indirect connection to the story of the accusation of adultery made against her.⁶⁶ However, none of these eight exegetical works presents any female figure as an important source of legal materials.

On one level, the traditions on marriage, divorce, *bay‘a* and veiling textually underscore the contrast between purported pagan dissoluteness and the

62 For example, al-Ṭabarī quotes a tradition that relates that when ‘Ā’isha praised Ḥassān’s panegyric about Muḥammad, she was asked, “But isn’t this vain talk (*laghw*) [i.e. what Q 23:3 directs believers to avoid]?” She is said to have responded, “No, vain talk is about women (*innamā l-laghw mā qīla ‘inda al-nisā’*)”—presumably meaning slanderous rumours about them. (*Jāmi‘* xviii, 103–4). Numerous traditions attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās use poetry as an exegetical tool, see: Boullata, Poetry citation 123–36. The point of interest here is not the dating of such attributions, but their role in efforts to legitimate this type of hermeneutical approach.

63 Ibn Abī Shayba viii, 503 (*K. al-Adab*); al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* i, 28. This is evidently a stereotyped statement intended to express the breadth and depth of her knowledge. For a similar statement about Ibn ‘Abbās, see: Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 513–14.

64 Al-Farrā’ i, 144; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 342.

65 It appears in al-Farrā’’s *Ma‘ānī* (and does not seem to have been added by a later redactor), as well as in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, where it is related on the authority of Ma‘mar. This suggests that it was in circulation in Kūfa and Baṣra at this time, and in quite different exegetical circles.

66 The statement that God will not take people to task for unintentional oaths also appears in Q 5:89. This verse came to be connected to Abū Bakr’s expiation of an oath in the aftermath of the accusation of adultery against ‘Ā’isha; for more on this, see below.

Muslim social order based on divinely given morality that had superseded it—although in historical reality, it seems that free, upper-class women in pre-Islamic Arabia were also veiled and secluded, in contradistinction to slaves.⁶⁷ In this way, free female bodies become textual boundary markers of the saved community, and none more so than the wives of the prophet. In addition, exegetes extend this textual function of (free) female bodies into their imperial present, so that in their works, Muḥammad's wives (particularly ʿĀ'isha) as well as a few select female Companions come to be increasingly deployed as exemplars of “proper” gendered social order, in implied contrast to religious Others within or without.

A couple of the wives of the prophet are also credited with ḥadīths on various pietistic themes. ʿĀ'isha relates short ḥadīths about the conformity of Muḥammad's character with the Quran (Q 68:4),⁶⁸ and one about the taking of accounts on the Day of Judgment. This latter tradition seems to have been fairly widely known in the second/eighth century, and these exegetical works variously apply it to several different quranic verses.⁶⁹ An apocalyptic tradition about the appearance of Gog and Magog, which is ascribed variously to Umm Salama⁷⁰ and Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh,⁷¹ appears to have been retrojected back to them.⁷² These examples exemplify the initial stages of what was to become a fairly common feature of third/ninth century *tafsīr* works—the quotation of pietistic ḥadīths of various types ascribed to early Muslim women.

Several traditions attributed to ʿĀ'isha that briefly discuss particular aspects of the story of the accusation of adultery made against her are included in the *āthār*-based exegetical works under discussion here, as well as in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*. Proto-Sunnis held that Q 24:11–26 refers to this incident. However, as the Quran does not name either the slandered woman or her accusers, the interpretation of these verses could readily serve as a vehicle for theo-political debates or polemics, as occurs in this tradition from the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*:

... I [al-Zuhri] was with al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik, and he said, “*The one who had the greater share* [Q 24:11] (was) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.”

67 For this issue, see Chapter One.

68 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1993), fol. 25a, 12–13; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 331.

69 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmiʿ* (1995), fol. 12a, 11–13; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 62 (*sub.* Q 34:17) and Yaḥyā i, 190 (*sub.* Q18:48); see also Mujāhid 714 (*sub.* 84:8).

70 Yaḥyā i, 341.

71 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 293.

72 See Chapter Two, n. 56.

I said, “No! Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, ‘Alqama b. Waqqāṣ and ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Utba b. Mas‘ūd—all of them informed me that they heard ‘Ā’isha say, ‘*The one who had the greater share (was) ‘Abdallāh b. Ubayy.*’”

[Al-Zuhrī] said, “And he [al-Walīd] said to me, ‘And what [bad] thing did he say?’”

He said, “I said: Two *shaykhs* of your people—Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥārith b. Hishām and Abū Salama b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān informed me on the authority of ‘Ā’isha, that she said, ‘He did not act well in my case.’”⁷³

Here, the Umayyad caliph, al-Walid b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 86–97/705–715) asserts that ‘Alī is the person condemned in Q 24:11 for taking the lead in spreading slanderous rumours about ‘Ā’isha. This is a transparent attempt to utilize the quranic text for theo-political purposes, by ridiculing ‘Alī (and by extension, his partisans), while also indirectly justifying the controversial attacks on ‘Alī’s caliphate by Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty. However, the well-known traditionist Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742)⁷⁴ energetically counters this claim, recounting that no less than four early authorities had related from ‘Ā’isha that the offender was in fact ‘Abdallāh b. Ubayy, the leader of the Medinan “Hypocrites.”

The structure of this tradition presents ‘Ā’isha primarily as a pawn in a men’s debate. Here, she functions as a source of information that al-Zuhrī draws upon at his discretion. Another tradition credited to her on this topic very briefly recounts how the slanderers were punished.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, the only tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha on this issue in the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* discusses Abū Bakr’s atonement for an oath that he had initially made to cease all financial support to Miṣṭaḥ, a poor relative of his who was one of the slanderers.⁷⁶

73 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 427.

74 For al-Zuhrī, see: Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 538–40; al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* v, 326–50.

75 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 432.

76 Yahyā i, 435. According to this well-known story, before the incident of the slander, Abū Bakr had been supporting Miṣṭaḥ. However, when he found out that Miṣṭaḥ was one of those spreading rumours about ‘Ā’isha, he swore that he would not give him any further assistance. However, when Q 24:22—“Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kinsmen, the poor, those who emigrated in God’s way. Let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful”—was revealed, Abū Bakr resumed supporting Miṣṭaḥ. As he had gone back on his oath, he then atoned for it. For the atonement (*kaffāra*) to be made for broken oaths, see: Q 5:89.

One tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha in the *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* presents her in a passive, self-effacing light—“There came a time when I did not anticipate that a quranic revelation would descend about me.” By contrast, the tradition following it recounts that on one occasion when Masrūq visited ‘Ā’isha, he encountered the poet Ḥassān b. Thābit. The latter was reciting his well-known verses in praise of her:

Chaste (*ḥaṣān*), modest, above suspicion
she never backbites the unwary (*ghawāfil*).

When Masrūq asks her, “How can you invite this [person] to visit you when he is of those who ‘took the greatest part in it’ (*tawallā kibrahu*)?” she replies, “But don’t you see that he has been afflicted with ‘a painful punishment’ (‘*adhāb^{un} ‘azīm*’)?”⁷⁷

This is a particularly adroit (and rather ironic) anecdote. Ḥassān’s lines evoke Q 24:23—“Those who accuse honourable but unwary (*al-muḥṣanāt al-ghāfilāt*) believing women are rejected by God, in this life and the next. A painful punishment awaits them.” Masrūq objects to Ḥassān’s presence by identifying him as one of those who had played a leading role in circulating the rumours about her, in his quotation of a phrase from Q 24:11—“It was a group from among you that concocted the lie . . . He who took the greatest part in it (*tawallā kibrahu*) will have a painful punishment (‘*adhāb^{un} ‘azīm*’).” But ‘Ā’isha, by stating that Ḥassān has been afflicted with “a painful punishment,” not only caps Masrūq’s quotation, but also evokes the same quranic verse that Ḥassān’s poetry does—Q 24:23, which also ends with this phrase. By so doing, she asserts her mastery not only of a potentially compromising social situation, but of the meanings of quranic verses in question.

These traditions on “the affair of the slander” illustrate the ambiguities surrounding the level of intentionality imputed to female sources of ḥadīths and *āthār* in these exegetical works. While several of these traditions directly refer to particular quranic verses, their “original” focus appears to have been to counter the use of these verses in non-exegetical contexts, rather than to interpret the Quran *per se*. Also, it is evident that most of the authors/redactors of these exegetical works are neither particularly interested in presenting ‘Ā’isha’s retellings or reflections on this incident, nor do they wish to make it central to her persona as a source of exegetical materials. However, this situation changes in third/ninth century, as we will see.

77 Al-Thawrī 221–2; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 358–9. The “terrible punishment” is said to refer to his becoming blind (*ibid.*)

That traditionists held ḥadīths dealing with eschatological or edifying topics, as well as those about various incidents in Muḥammad's life to less exacting standards than ḥadīths having direct implications for legal rulings or key theological questions, seems likely to have been a factor favouring the incorporation of these types of ḥadīths credited to women into *muṣannaḥ* works and ḥadīth compilations. An analogous dynamic appears to have also been at work in quranic exegesis in the formative period.

As is evident, neither the *āthār*-based exegetical works under discussion here nor the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* contain statistically significant percentages of *āthār* or ḥadīths attributed to women. On the whole, their authors/redactors appear to have seen little reason to include traditions of this type—and, when they did do so, these are for the most part ascribed to ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr. The reasons for this marked preference on the part of authors/redactors of these exegetical works for *āthār* and ḥadīths credited to ʿĀ'isha (coupled with feeble levels of interest at best in citing traditions attributed to any other early Muslim woman) seems likely to stem from a combination of several factors.

First, there appear to have been significantly more traditions ascribed to her in circulation during the second/eighth century than to any other female figure, even including the other wives of the prophet. The majority of the traditions credited to women in the *muṣannaḥ* works such as Maʿmar's *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ* and Mālik's *Muwattaʿa*⁷⁸ are related on the authority of ʿĀ'isha. This pattern is also starkly apparent in *musnad* ḥadīth collections, such as those of al-Ṭayālīsī (d. 204/818) and al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834).⁷⁹

Whether this might be more reflective of a greater interest and involvement in passing on memories of Muḥammad's life and teachings on the part of ʿĀ'isha than her female contemporaries or of biases of later transmitters is hard to say. A tradition related by a number of Quran commentators asserts that when Q 33:51—"You may make any of (your women) wait and receive any of them as you wish"—was revealed, Muḥammad decided to divide his time chiefly among four of his wives: ʿĀ'isha, Umm Salama, Ḥafṣa and Zaynab bt.

78 In the *Muwattaʿa*, 83 traditions from or about Muḥammad are attributed to her; she also recounts a tradition about Abū Bakr and another about ʿUmar. In addition, she appears in 51 anecdotes (Roded, *Women in Islamic biographical collections* 28).

79 In the *Musnad* of al-Ṭayālīsī, ʿĀ'isha is credited with a total of 218 ḥadīths. In this work, other wives of the prophet are credited with the following numbers of ḥadīths: Umm Salama with 21, Maymūna with 6, Ḥafṣa and Umm Ḥabība with 2 each, and Sawda, Juwayriyya, and Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh with only 1 each. In al-Ḥumaydī's *Musnad*, ʿĀ'isha is credited with 128 ḥadīths, Umm Salama with 16, Maymūna with 8, Ḥafṣa and Umm Ḥabība with 2 each, and Juwayriyya and Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh with only one each.

Jahsh.⁸⁰ Her socio-religious prominence as a daughter of Abū Bakr as well as a wife of Muḥammad—whose marriage to him was distinguished by its length as well as her reputed status as his favourite wife—may well have made her recollections of the prophet as well as her views on a range of issues particularly noteworthy in the eyes of proto-Sunni ḥadīth transmitters. Also, ‘Ā’isha’s longevity,⁸¹ along with her residence at Muḥammad’s house-mosque, a holy place frequented by pilgrims, would have made her fairly accessible to them.

But whatever the historical factors involved in the origination of traditions ascribed to ‘Ā’isha, biases held by some ḥadīth transmitters seem likely to have also helped to promote the circulation of ḥadīths attributed to her. Asma Sayeed draws attention to evidence that during the formative period, some authorities in Kūfa, Baṣra, Mecca and Medina held that ḥadīths about “matters of religion” transmitted on the authority of women should not be accepted (or at least, are not to be preferred): it is recounted that ‘Umar declared, “We do not accept the word of a woman about the religion of God” (*lā nujīz qawl al-mar’a fī dīn Allāh*)⁸²—a statement that he is said to have made about the ḥadīth of Fāṭima bt. Qays.⁸³ However, some early authorities reportedly made an exception for ḥadīths from the wives of the prophet.⁸⁴

1.1.3 Apparently Witting: Female Sources of Quranic Readings

The eight exegetical works surveyed in the previous chapter contain a number of quranic readings—variant readings, as well as some traditions or statements affirming canonical readings.⁸⁵ When these readings are attributed to named persons, in the overwhelming majority of cases these are male figures. Only nine such readings⁸⁶ are credited to a woman.

While this is a very small number of readings, they hold particular interest here for two main reasons: first, variant quranic readings *as a genre* likely

80 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xx, 28; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf*v, 123.

81 Roded, *Women in Islamic* 28–9.

82 Ibn Abī Shayba vi, 531–2 (*K. al-Ṭalāq*). This is the *lector difficilior*; the editor notes that some manuscripts have ‘Umar say, “The word of a woman about the religion of God is not to be given precedence” (*lā yukhayyir qawl al-mar’a fī dīn Allāh*), 531, n. 6. For the latter wording, see also: Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Faḍl b. Bahrām al-Dārimī, *Musnad al-Dārimī al-mar’ūf bi-Sunan al-Dārimī* iii, 1464 (*K. al-Ṭalāq*).

83 For more on this ḥadīth, see below.

84 Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 178–82, 191, 196–7; Sayeed, *Gender and legal authority* 130–2.

85 For variant readings in exegesis, see: Rippin, *Qur’an* 21:95 43–53; Rippin, *Qur’an* 7.40 107–13.

86 I.e. when the quranic readings ascribed to women in these eight works are taken together.

reflect one of the earliest forms of quranic exegesis.⁸⁷ Second, quranic readings attributed to women unambiguously present them as intending to delineate how a particular verse (or part of a verse) should be recited—and thus, making interpretive decisions on its meaning. Therefore, of all the types of exegetical materials that the eight sources under discussion here credit to women, quranic readings as a genre are not only the most likely to have some historical basis, but also are among those that seem to impute a high level of intentionality to them.

As was discussed in Chapter One, the wives of Muḥammad are singled out among other members of his community in Q 33:34, with its instruction to them to preserve his revelations and teachings. Nonetheless, what the historical relationship between this verse and the quranic readings under discussion here might be is unknown. The Quran itself does not provide any indication as to how these women responded to this directive. Moreover, while Q 33:34 apparently places this responsibility on the wives of the prophet as a group, these quranic readings are nearly all attributed to only one of their number. The reasons for these historical disjunctures are unclear at present.

However, the question of how these quranic readings relate to the literary-historical context of the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries is somewhat less uncertain. A small number of variant readings are attributed to several of Muḥammad's wives—Ḥafṣa, ʿĀʾisha and Umm Salama.⁸⁸ These three women are also depicted as having commissioned their own codices.⁸⁹ Several well-known traditions recount that Ḥafṣa played a role in safeguarding the written quranic materials used in the preparation of the ʿUthmānic recension.⁹⁰ Moreover, a number of more obscure traditions which depict

87 This does not of course imply that any individual reading can necessarily be traced back historically to the authority (or authorities) with whom it is said to have originated. For the argument that reports about Companion codices are unhistorical, and that variant readings are a later exegetical development, see: Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic studies* esp. 43–52. For a critique of this view of variant readings, see: Versteegh, *Arabic grammar* 81–4.

88 Jeffery drew attention to some of these (*Materials* 214, 232–3, 235). A small number of such readings—26 credited to ʿĀʾisha, 8 to Ḥafṣa, and 5 to Umm Salama—are scattered throughout Makram and ʿUmar's *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt* (8 vols).

89 Mālik 140–1 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*); ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* i, 578–9 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*); Abū ʿUbayd 292–3 (*Bāb al-riwāya min al-ḥurūf*); Jeffery, *Materials* 212–13, 231, 235.

90 E.g. Bukhārī vi, 477–9 (*K. Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*). These traditions on the collection of the Quran have been studied extensively by modern critical scholars. For a useful summary of their various conclusions, as well as an argument for believing that these two traditions were already in circulation towards the end of the first/seventh century, see: Motzki, *The collection* 1–34.

Ḥafṣa and ʿĀʾisha as guardians or transmitters of written quranic materials also appear in some sources conventionally dated to the formative period.⁹¹

It appears that when such traditions are transmitted by jurists or traditionists, or incorporated into their works, these are often but an aspect of the portrayal of the wives of Muḥammad as guardians of his legacy. In some traditions, this role is given a notably concrete form, so that it is recounted that ʿĀʾisha as well as Umm Salama kept certain relics, such as his hair, and the clothes that he was wearing when he died, which they sometimes showed to visitors and pilgrims.⁹² That some of his wives are also be memorialized in *muṣannaḥ* works or ḥadīth compilations as having transmitted such a central and enduring aspect of Muḥammad's legacy as the Quran (whether orally or in written form) can plausibly be seen as a further extension of this role.

The *Jāmiʿ* of Ibn Wahb and the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq* each include one variant reading attributed to ʿĀʾisha: In the former, the variant reading for Q 12:110 intervenes in a theological debate about the prophets' divine protection from error and sin (*iṣma*),⁹³ while in the latter, the variant reading for Q 2:184 addresses a legal-ritual aspect of the Ramaḍān fast.⁹⁴ Thus, ʿĀʾisha is presented as safeguarding "orthodox" proto-Sunni belief and ritual practice.

Only four variant readings attributed to women—for Q 24:15, Q 36:72, as well as two traditions giving a variant reading of Q 11:46—appear to have been "originally" included in al-Farrā's *Maʿānī*. A couple more (for Q 21:98 and 23:60), as well as a tradition affirming the canonical reading of Q 56:89, were apparently added subsequently. It is noteworthy that there is little overlap in the quranic readings ascribed to women given in the eight exegetical works under discussion here. That is, in only one instance does the same reading (for Q 23:60) appear in more than one work,⁹⁵ and the *isnāds* credit different Successors and subsequent transmitters with passing on these nine readings.

The quranic readings attributed to women in these eight exegetical works are all credited to ʿĀʾisha, with the exception of one. In al-Farrā's *Maʿānī*, a variant reading of Q 11:46 is transmitted from Muḥammad on the authority of an

91 Aliza Shnizer calls attention to a couple of such traditions regarding ʿĀʾisha, see: Shnizer, *Sacrality and collection* 168. I am presently preparing a study on traditions of this type.

92 These relics were also reportedly used at times for healing and exorcism; see: ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaḥ* xi, 309 (*K. al-Jāmiʿ*); Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 329; Muslim 929 (*K. al-Libās*); al-Bukhārī vii, 518 (*K. al-Libās*). For the political valence of such relics, see: Madelung, *Succession* 100–1.

93 This reading is discussed below.

94 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 310.

95 Yaḥyā i, 406; al-Farrāʾ ii, 238; see also: ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb, *Al-Ġāmiʿ die Koranwissenschaften* fols. 10a, line 16-10b, line 2.

“Umm Salama,” as well as by ‘Ā’isha.⁹⁶ This reading is linked to an early theological-exegetical controversy as to whether the son of Noah who had drowned in the flood was in fact his biological son. The suggestion on the part of some that Noah’s wife had committed adultery and that the boy in question was the result drew indignant responses from a number of early authorities. At stake was the developing doctrine of prophetic *‘iṣma*, which came to include the belief that no prophet’s wife could ever have been sexually unfaithful.⁹⁷

As was noted in the previous chapter, it is unclear whether this “Umm Salama” is Hind bt. Abī Umayya, the well-known wife of Muḥammad, or Umm Salama al-Anṣāriyya, a female Companion otherwise known as Asmā’ bt. Yazīd; al-Tirmidhī holds the latter view, which he credits to ‘Abd b. Hamīd (d. 249/863).⁹⁸ This uncertainty provides an apt illustration of some of the historical issues involved in interpreting the significance of these attributions of quranic readings to female figures: could memories of the role of a female Companion in the early transmission of the quranic text have been subsequently occluded by the mistaken attribution of readings credited to her to a wife of the prophet? Or is this simply a transmitter’s error or confusion due to a similarity of names?

Relatively little is known about Asmā’ bt. Yazīd, though medieval biographers made various rather strained attempts to “clarify” the uncertainties about her precise identity.⁹⁹ According to Ibn Khayyāt (d. 240/854–5), Asmā’ was a Medinese Companion who related ḥadīths.¹⁰⁰ In Ibn Sa’d’s *Ṭabaqāt*, however, Asmā’’s biography appears under the *kunya* Umm ‘Āmir al-Ashhaliyya; she is said to have been a Medinese Companion who gave allegiance to Muḥammad and was present at some of his battles. A food multiplication miracle is said to have occurred when Muḥammad visited her house. She kept the water-skin that he had drunk from on that occasion, and later used this relic to bless

96 Al-Farrā’ ii, 17–18.

97 For this controversy, see: Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi‘* (1993), fol. 12b, 7–12; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xii, 58–62.

98 Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd b. Ḥamīd b. Naṣr al-Kissī (or al-Kashshī) compiled a *musnad*, and also reportedly a *tafsīr* work; the latter does not seem to have survived. Among those he is said to have learned ḥadīth from is ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xii, 235–8).

99 E.g. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Al-Istī‘āb* iv, 350; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Iṣāba* viii, 21–22, 407. For an analytical discussion of how biographers from Ibn Sa’d onwards have variously constructed Asmā’’s biography, see: Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 81–4.

100 Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt* ii, 882.

members of her household, as well as the sick.¹⁰¹ There is no suggestion in either of these biographical notices that Asmā' was memorialized as a source of knowledge about quranic readings (nor for that matter that she had the *kunya* Umm Salama)—though it could be conjectured that her image as a keeper of a relic from Muḥammad may have played some role in the attribution of a few variant readings to her.

A couple of variant readings credited to Asmā' bt. Yazīd appear in Abū 'Ubayd's *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, including one for Q 11:46.¹⁰² Interestingly, this reading appears in al-Ṭayālīsī's *Musnad* in the chapter of ḥadīths related by Asmā', as well as in the chapter of those related by Muḥammad's wife Umm Salama.¹⁰³ This is also true of the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal.¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that in all of the *isnāds* given in these three works, Shahr b. Ḥawshab (d. ca. 111/729) is named as the transmitter who recounted this reading on the authority of the woman in question. As a ḥadīth transmitter, Shahr had a rather dubious reputation.¹⁰⁵ We have already seen an example of a tradition that he related on one occasion on the authority of Umm Salama, but when he recounted it another time, he reportedly ascribed it to someone else.¹⁰⁶ If, as Asma Sayeed suggests, Shahr attempted to pass off forged ḥadīths by attributing them to Asmā' bt. Yazīd,¹⁰⁷ it is possible that he exploited the potential for confusion between her *kunya* and that of a wife of Muḥammad—or even that his transmission practices were the source of this confusion in the first place.¹⁰⁸ Which of the two women might have “originally” been regarded as the source of this reading (or even if both or neither of them were) is difficult to determine, although the principle of *lectio difficilior* suggests that Asmā' is the more likely candidate.

Which “Umm Salama” is meant in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* is hard to say. As the reading attributed to her does not stand alone, little weight rests on it in this

101 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 364–6. Interestingly, Ibn Khayyāṭ also has a brief biographical notice for an “Umm 'Āmir bt. Yazīd” (*Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt* ii, 885). While the editor suggests that “Umm 'Āmir” may be Asmā' bt. Yazīd, Ibn Khayyāṭ apparently regards them as two different women.

102 Abū 'Ubayd 311, 318 (*Bāb al-rivāya min al-ḥurūf*).

103 Sulaymān b. Dāwūd b. al-Jārūd, *Musnad Abī Dāwūd al-Ṭayālīsī* iii, 171, 200.

104 Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 326, 481.

105 Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 85–6. See al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 372–8 for widely varying assessments of his reliability as a transmitter.

106 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 486–7.

107 Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 86.

108 Shahr was Asmā's client, so it would not be surprising for him to transmit from her. However, he is also said to have transmitted ḥadīths from a number of other Companions, including two of Muḥammad's wives, 'Ā'isha and Umm Salama (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 372).

text. In any case, as this uncertainty illustrates, neither al-Farrā' nor his redactors were particularly interested in valorizing the relatively few quranic readings credited to female figures that appear to have then been in circulation. Much the same seems to have been true of Yaḥyā b. Sallām, Ibn Wahb, and 'Abd al-Razzāq.¹⁰⁹

In these exegetical works, quranic readings credited to female figures are decidedly marginal. Not only are there very few such readings quoted, but those that do appear are firmly located in the now-superseded oral past of the first generation of Muslims. No quranic readings attributed to any female Successors or later generations are given. The controversy tradition in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* which has 'Ā'isha assert that several quranic verses contain scribal errors is the only point in these eight exegetical works that her authority extends beyond the realm of the oral, recited Quran to its written form. And perhaps not coincidentally, the view that she expresses in this tradition is rejected, as we have seen. This forms a telling contrast to al-Farrā's frequent references to the codices of Ibn Mas'ūd and his students as sources of variant readings.

These quranic readings credited to women in the second/eighth century exegetical works under discussion here present an inherently archaic model of female textual-exegetical authority that is bound to the past, and highly unlikely to be repeated. This is especially interesting given the existence of some scattered evidence that at least one female Successor discussed in the previous chapter was reportedly known for her proficiency in Quran recitation.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, a number of historical factors appear to have played a role in creating a context in which regardless of the possible existence of a few women beyond the Companion generation with such expertise, constructions of Quran recitation as a "masculine" field of endeavour could appear to be increasingly commonsensical.

One factor was that during the formative period, Quran recitation was on its way to becoming a discipline in its own right. Later, well-known classical authorities would present it as a discipline passed down from (male) teacher to (male) student for the most part, thus rendering female reciters anomalous by default.¹¹¹

109 It should be noted that the latter two apparently knew a few more variant readings credited to women than they seem to have elected to incorporate in their exegetical works; see: 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannafī*, 578–9 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*); Ibn Wahb, fols. 10a, 16–20 to fol. 10b, 1–2.

110 For more on this, see below.

111 See: Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-sab'a fī l-qir'āt*; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya*.

Another important factor was that in the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, the (gendered) questions of who may touch or carry the *muṣḥaf* or even recite the Quran from memory were being debated. These debates were an aspect of efforts in the formative period to delineate inter- and intra-communal boundaries. Certain ritual acts, spaces, and items were elevated to the status of particularly charged symbols of a distinctive, “orthodox” Muslim identity over/against religious Others both within and without. An important way that this took place was through emphasizing the sanctity of such ritual acts, spaces and items through legal debates aimed at minutely regulating how much access to these females might be permitted to have. By limiting or tabooing women’s vocal participation, active involvement or even presence at rituals such as congregational prayers and funerals, or at sites such as mosques,¹¹² the sacred (as opposed to profane) status of these rites and places was underlined, and the boundaries of the morally superior (and hence, the rightly guided) community affirmed. This dynamic is evident in the legal discussions regarding purity regulations and the Quran.

On the one hand, *faḍā’il al-Qur’ān* works from the formative period depict the quranic text—in oral or written form, and in small portions as well as in its entirety—in ways that are increasingly icon-like. Not only are believers in general regardless of their social station encouraged to recite it regularly as a supererogatory pious act,¹¹³ but it is said to have protective and healing powers.¹¹⁴ Particular sūras are to be recited over the sick, and quranic verses can be written and worn as amulets.

Traditions attributed to or depicting a few female figures play a role in this process. A tradition recounting that Ibn Mas‘ūd instructed his daughters to recite a sūra every night, adding that he had heard Muḥammad say that whoever recited Sūrat al-Wāqī‘a (S. 56, “That Which is Coming”) every night will not be afflicted by poverty¹¹⁵ conveys the notion that this can and should be practiced by everyone, regardless of his or her position on the social scale. Ḥadīths transmitted by ‘Ā’isha link the practice of reciting the last two sūras of the Quran in order to cure illness with the prophet himself.¹¹⁶ In traditions

112 For examples of such debates, see: Halevi, *Muḥammad’s grave* esp. Chapter Four; Sadeghi, *The traveling tradition* 203–43.

113 I.e. recitation in and of itself, not as a component of *ṣalāt*.

114 This practice is said to be based on Q 17:82—“We send down the Quran as healing and mercy to those who believe”; see: Abū ‘Ubayd 384 (*Jamā’ ahādīth al-Qur’ān wa-ithbātīhi*).

115 Abū ‘Ubayd 257 (*Jamā’ ahādīth al-Qur’ān wa-ithbātīhi*).

116 E.g. Abū ‘Ubayd 383 (*Jamā’ ahādīth al-Qur’ān wa-ithbātīhi*). For such traditions’ entry into the *tafsīr* genre, see Chapter Four.

such as these, the ubiquity of the Muslims' scripture in the lives of the believers testifies to its unmatched sacred power, that cannot be equaled by any of the scriptures or sacred objects that Other religious communities possess.¹¹⁷

Nonetheless, promoting such popular access to the Quran carried with it the risk that this might undermine rather than enhance its status as a sacred text. It would not do for the Quran to be regarded just one religious text or talisman among many. Thus, sources from the formative period indicate that barring non-Muslims from contact with the *muṣḥaf*,¹¹⁸ as well as carefully regulating the access that Muslims had to it (and even to objects containing quranic verses such as amulets) were issues of legal concern.¹¹⁹

The dominant view of the jurists came to be that a person had to be in a state of ritual purity in order to touch or read the Quran. Most physical processes that bring about states of major or minor impurity¹²⁰ typically affect both males and females, and a person in such a state can achieve a ritually pure status in minutes by performing a ritual cleansing. The exceptions are menstruation, as well as post-natal bleeding, which place the woman experiencing them in an ongoing state of major impurity—and she has little control over either its timing or duration.¹²¹ Thus, purity-based restrictions on access to the Quran fall disproportionately on women, both in actuality and at the level of association.

While it is likely impossible to gauge the extent to which such rules have been strictly adhered to historically,¹²² their gendered symbolism is evident. As

117 Interestingly, several traditions present the recitation of scripture over the sick as a Jewish practice: e.g.: Abū 'Ubayd 384 (*Jamā' aḥādīth al-Qur'ān wa-ithbātihī*). Whether or not this was actually the case historically, such traditions strongly suggest that the Muslim use of the Quran for this purpose emerged in a context of intercommunal "competition."

118 Abū 'Ubayd 400–1 (*Bāb al-Muṣḥaf yamassuhu l-mushrik aw al-muslim alladhī laysa bi-ṭāhir*).

119 See for example: 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannafī*, 341–6 (*K. al-Ḥayḍ*); Abū 'Ubayd 192–7 (*Bāb al-Qāri' yaqra' al-Qur'ān 'alā ghayr wuḍū'*), 385 (*Jamā' aḥādīth al-Qur'ān wa-ithbātihī*).

120 E.g. having sexual intercourse, urination, defecation, falling asleep or becoming unconscious.

121 For an overview of ritual purity in Islamic law, see: Reinhart, *Impurity/no danger* 1–24. The efforts of jurists to differentiate between menstruation and "bleeding due to illness" (*istihāda*) provided some limited scope for a woman familiar with the details of the legal discourse to "manage" the duration of her impure states. Folk practices have also played a role in such efforts at times. Today, medical means are increasingly deployed to this end, especially by women going on Ḥajj.

122 For example, the fourteenth century CE scholar Ibn al-Ḥājj complained that women in Cairo often do not follow the laws governing menstruation "correctly"; see: Lutfi, *Manners and customs* 108–9. However, it is difficult to know how accurate his claims might have

Mālik's *Muwatta'* states, the legal opinion that only a person in a state of purity should carry the *muṣḥaf* exists "out of reverence for the Quran, and to show respect to it."¹²³ The sanctity of the quranic text is constructed here by distancing it from the bodies of those lacking the requisite state of purity—which in legal theory as well as in lived reality are female bodies in particular. Debates about the precise details of these regulations as well as people's lived experiences of such quotidian gendered ritual (re)affirmations of the Quran's sacredness during the formative period are a noteworthy part of the contexts within which exegetes developed and debated various hermeneutical approaches to the quranic text.¹²⁴

Such legal-ritual concerns ultimately become part of the exegetical discourse itself, once they came to be linked by some to Q 56:77–9—"that this is truly a noble Quran, in a protected record that only the purified can touch." An apparently old and fairly widespread view held that these verses refer to the Quran's heavenly prototype, which is only touched by the angels.¹²⁵ But some read them as prohibiting the touching of a *muṣḥaf* by anyone not in a state of ritual purity.¹²⁶ The *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* presents both views: the first tradition cited asserts that Q 56:79 evidently refers to the heavenly Quran, because on earth it might happen that a copy of the Quran would be touched by "Magians, the impure, and the filthy hypocrite." However, the second tradition relates that Muḥammad wrote a document that stated, "None touches the Quran except the pure (*ṭāhīr*)."¹²⁷ Through such debates, exegetes not only (re)inscribed the boundaries of the saved community over/against religious Others, but (re)affirmed understandings of ritual purity that construct regular, fairly direct access to the quranic text as masculine, over/against women's proverbially irregular ability to approach it.

been, and his polemical tone should be taken into consideration when attempting to make historical inferences about people's actual behaviour.

123 Mālik 198 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*). In Mālik's own opinion, it is disliked (*makrūh*) rather than prohibited (*ḥarām*) for someone who is not in a state of purity to carry the Quran.

124 See for example: Ibn Wahb, *Koranwissenschaften* fol. 6b, 15–18.

125 E.g. Muqātil iii, 318; al-Farrā' iii, 129–30; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxvii, 237.

126 Even classical exegetes who do not agree with this more literal interpretation sometimes take the opportunity to affirm the "orthodox" purity requirements for anyone touching the Quran in their discussions of Q 56:79; e.g. al-Samarqandī iii, 319.

127 *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* iii, 282–3. Interestingly, this second tradition also made its way into the *sīra*; see: Ibn Hishām 863.

1.1.4 Constructing Wittingness: Controversy Traditions and Hierarchization Traditions

A category of traditions that we have not yet examined in detail are those which are structured around a debate, usually about a legal or theological question. These are often particularly apt examples of ḥadīths that Josef van Ess describes as “exegesis in disguise.”¹²⁸ While traditions belonging to this category are uncommon in the eight exegetical works under discussion here as well as in classical *tafsīr* works, they tend to attract attention, in part because of their vivid portrayals of early Muslim women participating in debates about controversial questions.¹²⁹ They are particularly relevant to this study, as unlike many of the *āthār* and ḥadīths discussed above, they typically impute a high level of intentionality to the woman who transmits them or whose interpretation is quoted. Before discussing specific examples, it should be noted that our purpose is neither to determine their historicity nor what their “original” form might have been.¹³⁰ These traditions as they have come down to us are mired in historically anachronistic concerns. What is of interest here is how they function as literary texts that negotiate interpretive authority.

For the purposes of analysis, I further categorize traditions of this type as controversy traditions or hierarchization traditions.¹³¹ A controversy tradition not only presents the stance of an early Muslim figure on a matter that was the subject of debate, but the figure in question arguing in favour of his or her opinion. The rhetorical structure of a controversy tradition often makes it clear to the audience/reader that this issue is contested; however, it only presents one side of the argument. We have already discussed an example—the tradition quoted by al-Farrāʾ, in which ʿĀʾisha states that the Quran contains several scribal errors.

By contrast, a hierarchization tradition presents at least two viewpoints, that of an early female figure making an assertion about a legal, theological or

¹²⁸ van Ess, *Vision and ascension* 52.

¹²⁹ Several studies have called attention to particular examples of traditions of these types in non-exegetical texts; for some of these, see below. Denise Spellberg discusses Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī’s (d. 794/1392) compendium of traditions in which ʿĀʾisha “corrects” views held by (usually male) Companions or Successors (Spellberg, *Politics* 55). Some of the traditions in this work have been popularized for non-specialist Muslim audiences; see: Geissinger, ʿĀʾisha bint Abi Bakr 42, 45.

¹³⁰ Aside from the well known complexity of the issues involved in attempts at dating traditions, a number of these have come down to us to multiple variant versions.

¹³¹ Conflict arbitration traditions constitute a third sub-category of traditions of this type, but there are none in the eight exegetical works under discussion here. For these, see Chapter Four.

other religio-interpretive controversy, and at least one other early figure (who is usually male) attempting to rebut it, or passing negative judgment on it. The tradition in the *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* in which Masrūq quotes a quranic verse in order to argue against ʿĀ'isha allowing Ḥassān to visit her, and ʿĀ'isha parries this by capping his quotation is an example of a hierarchization tradition. As the seeming opposite of the majority of traditions discussed thus far—which, as we have seen, appear to present the incorporation of *āthār* and ḥadīths to several early Muslim women into second/eighth and early third/ninth century exegetical works as hermeneutically marginal and fairly unremarkable—hierarchization traditions call our attention to the gendered and highly contested significance of this process of inclusion. Therefore, a critical analysis of these provides important insight into how exegetical authority is gendered in these works that cite traditions.

In one controversy tradition in the *Jāmi'* of Ibn Wahb, ʿĀ'isha is asked by her nephew ʿUrwa about the meaning of Q 12:110—“Til when the messengers despaired, and suspected that they were denied” (*ḥattā idhā stayʿasa l-rusul wa-ẓannū annahum qad kudhibū*). The “correct” tense and form of the latter verb is at issue in this tradition:

Ibn Lahīʿa—ʿUqayl—Ibn Shihāb, [who] said: ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr informed me that he asked ʿĀ'isha, wife of the Prophet—“I questioned [her], ‘What do you think about God’s words, *when the messengers despaired, and suspected that they were denied* (kudhibū) or *had misled others* (kadhabū)?’

She replied, ‘Rather, *they were denied* (kudhibū).¹³²

I said, ‘By God, [if] they were certain that their people had dismissed them as liars (*kadhhabū*), why [the mention of] suspicion (*ẓann*)?’

She responded, ‘Upon my life, they were sure of it.’

I said, ‘Perhaps [it is], *they suspected that they were deceived* (kadhibū)?¹³³

She replied, ‘God forbid! The messengers would not think thus of their Lord!’

I said, ‘And what of this verse?’

She answered, ‘The followers of the messengers believed [in] and testified to the truth [of their message], but tribulations were prolonged, and

132 While Murányi transcribes this as *kudhdhibū* in the 1995 edition, the 2003 edition has *kudhibū*, and the photographs of the manuscript in the 1995 edition appear to bear out the latter reading.

133 The 1995 edition transcribes this word as *kudhibū*, but both the manuscript and the 2003 edition have *kadhībū*.

[God's] help was delayed, until the messengers gave up hope for those of their peoples who denied them, and suspected that their followers had dismissed them as liars. Then, God's help came.'¹³⁴

The theological issue underlying this debate is the scope of prophetic *ʿiṣma*. ʿUrwa's suggestions of different readings and ʿĀ'isha's responses apparently lay out the theological ramifications of what appear to be various rival recitations,¹³⁵ but in fact primarily serve to rhetorically place the possibility of understanding the canonical text to mean that the prophets had ever doubted God's promise beyond the theological pale.¹³⁶ This tradition concludes with ʿĀ'isha's triumphant reconciliation of what eventually became "orthodox" Sunni doctrine with a widely recognized reading.¹³⁷

Also in the *Jāmi'* of Ibn Wahb, she is credited with emphatically expressing her views on three questions, at least two of which apparently relate to Muḥammad's theological status:

Al-Ḥārith b. Nabhān—Ayyūb—*rajuḷ*—Masrūq or someone else (*aw ghayrihi*) related that ʿĀ'isha, the wife of the prophet, said:

Whoever claims that Muḥammad saw his Lord has certainly told an outrageous lie against God. God said to Muḥammad, 'It is not granted to any mortal that God should speak to him except through revelation...'
(Q 42:51)

And whoever claims that Muḥammad concealed anything of the revelation has certainly told an outrageous lie against God. God says,

134 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi'* (1995), fol. 3b, 22–4a, 4.

135 As was noted in the previous chapter, *kudhibū* is the reading according to Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim. The reading of "*kadhabū*" came to be ascribed to a number of early authorities: Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujaḥid, al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Ḥamīd, while "*kadhhabū*" is attributed to Ibn Masʿūd and (again) Ibn ʿAbbās (Makram and ʿUmar, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt* iii, 198). When these readings came to be attached to these figures is unclear, however.

136 The version in Ibn Wahb's work on quranic sciences (with a different *isnād*) asserts that ʿĀ'isha used to recite Q 12:110 as "*kudhdhibū*" and that she explained this by saying, "Their followers denied them"; see: Ibn Wahb, *Koranwissenschaften* fol. 13a, 9–13. The reading of *kudhdhibū* is attributed to a large number of early authorities (Makram and ʿUmar, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt* iii, 197), and al-Farrā' credits it to the Quran reciters of Medina (*Maʿānī* ii, 56).

137 Al-Ṭabarī recounts a couple of traditions that give her reading as "*kudhdhibū*" (*Jāmi'* xiii, 100); al-Thaʿlabī credits ʿĀ'isha with both this reading, and the reading of "*kudhibū*" (*al-Kaṣf* iii, 418).

‘Messenger, proclaim everything that has been sent down to you from your Lord . . .’ (Q 5:67)

And whoever claims that he knows what will happen tomorrow has certainly told an outrageous lie against God. God says, ‘Say: No one in the heavens or on earth knows the unseen except God and they do not know when they will be raised from the dead’ (Q 27:65).¹³⁸

In this tradition, ‘Ā’isha forcefully counters three claims with those of her own. Her assertion that Muḥammad never saw God (i.e. either on the famous Night Journey, or during a revelatory experience)¹³⁹ seems to be intended to address the much debated issue as to whether humans will ever be able to do so.¹⁴⁰ The statement that there was no part of Muḥammad’s revelation that he had not made public appears to be a dismissal of Shi’i (or possibly, proto-Sufi) claims that a chosen few among his followers were privy to teachings that no one else had received.¹⁴¹ Finally, the third and final assertion, that no one can foretell the future, may have been aimed at those crediting such a power to Muḥammad, or at groups claiming that their leaders had this ability.

‘Ā’isha follows each theological statement with a quranic proof-text. The repetition of the phrases, “whoever claims (*man za‘ama*)” and “has certainly told an outrageous lie against God (*fā-qad a‘zam ‘alā ‘llāh al-firyā*)” has the effect of welding together three otherwise rather disparate statements. The repetition emphasizes the allegedly outrageous nature of the claims that this tradition is designed to refute, and also makes it easy to memorize, rendering it an effective tool for preaching or debate. Such rhetorically polished traditions seek to place human eloquence in the service of quranic interpretation.

Hierarchization traditions are based on a literary *topos* that has a long history, and is far from being unique to the Ḥadīth literature.¹⁴² Stories or anecdotes presenting a woman besting a man (or of a woman attempting to do so, and being put in her “proper” place) also appear in texts from other late antique

138 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi‘* (1995), fol. 12a, 18–23.

139 As could be inferred from Q 53:4–17. For this theological-exegetical debate, see: van Ess, *Vision and ascension* 47–62.

140 For more on this debate, see below.

141 van Ess notes that some traditions on this topic attributed to ‘Ā’isha contain polemic against Shi’i theological ideas (*Vision and ascension* 59).

142 This *topos* appears in several different types of medieval Muslim textual genres. For examples from *adab* literature, see: Malti-Douglas, *Playing with the sacred* 51–9. Some biographical notices and hagiographic anecdotes about women also contain this *topos*. My thinking about how hierarchization traditions “work” textually owes much to conversations with Laury Silvers about hagiographic representations of ascetic or Sufi women.

religious communities. For example, several of the anecdotes recounted in talmudic literature about Beruriah, the learned wife of Rabbi Meir, depict her outshining and even at times rebuking learned men.¹⁴³ In a similar vein, the *Apophthegmata patrum* quotes a saying from a venerable Egyptian Christian ascetic, Amma Sarah, in which she rebukes a fellow ascetic for his treatment of a monk,¹⁴⁴ while another saying describes an interchange that results when two male ascetics attempt to put her in her place.¹⁴⁵

While little is known as to how the literary-historical context within which second/eighth and early third/ninth century Muslim exegetes interpreted the Quran was gendered, these rabbinic and late antique Christian examples are suggestive of some of the dynamics involved. Religious Others—who were still the numerical majority in most regions of the empire¹⁴⁶—had already been debating the extent of access that women might be permitted to have to scriptures as well as to religious authority for centuries, and had managed to accommodate these things within strict limits so as not to risk calling their various (patriarchal) social orders into question.¹⁴⁷ Muslim writers, pietists, traditionalists and exegetes would do no less.

The *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* includes three hierarchization traditions. One of these, known as the ḥadīth of Fāṭima bt. Qays,¹⁴⁸ recounts that when Fāṭima was irrevocably divorced, Muḥammad had ruled that as she was not pregnant, she was neither entitled to provisions nor housing from her ex-husband.¹⁴⁹ Also, he instructed her to go and spend her waiting period in the house of Ibn

143 Goodblatt, *The Beruriah traditions* 69, 77–8.

144 Ward, *The sayings* 171.

145 Ward, *The sayings* 193.

146 For statistical estimations of how conversion to Islam proceeded in various regions of the empire, see: Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*.

147 For rabbinic debates about women’s Torah study, see Chapter Four. Whether women could teach men or hold positions of authority over them was an issue of contention in many late antique Christian churches; see: Kraemer, *Her share* 174ff. Eleanor Doumato points out that in the churches in Syria and Yemen at the time of the rise of Islam, approved roles for women complemented or supported men’s roles rather than competing with them (Hearing other voices 188).

148 This well-known tradition is also found in a number of *muṣannaf* works and ḥadīth compilations from the formative period, and has attracted a fair amount of recent scholarly attention. For several studies on it, see below.

149 In the case of a revocable divorce (i.e. when the husband has pronounced the *ṭalāq* once or twice), the woman is entitled to provision during her waiting period, and must live in the house of her soon-to-be ex-husband. For revocable and irrevocable divorce, see: Ali, *Marriage* 83–9; 140–2.

Umm Maktūm, as he was blind and would not be able to see her if she were in a state of undress. Years later, Marwān sent a messenger to Fāṭima asking her about this incident, presumably when he was governor of Medina. But after he had heard the entire tale, he responded, “We do not hear this account from anyone except a woman. So, we will adhere to the [practice of] restraining [any divorced women from departing] that we find the people following.”¹⁵⁰ The tradition goes on to further relate that Fāṭima indignantly responded to Marwān, “Between you and me is the Quran!” and then proceeded to argue on the basis of Q 65:1 that the directive that divorced women should remain in their (ex)-husbands’ homes for the duration of the *‘idda* only applies to those who have received a revocable divorce.¹⁵¹

While several versions of this tradition circulated widely, formative period texts typically present it as problematic. This is perhaps to be expected, as it does not accord with the reported views of most early legal authorities,¹⁵² and also appears to contravene the most obvious sense of the quranic directives to men to provide provision and lodging to their soon-to-be ex-wives during the *‘idda*. Moreover, it provides ostensible prophetic support for a woman in a liminal state—newly divorced, but not yet able to remarry—to leave those deemed most likely to have an interest in ascertaining if she is pregnant, i.e. her ex-husband and his family.¹⁵³ In these texts, careful attribution of paternity is presented as both emblematic of Islam (in putative contrast to some pagan Arabian customs) and as necessitating patriarchal supervision of women at all times. Thus Fāṭima was reportedly accused by the well-known Successor, Sa’īd

150 “*lam nasma‘ hādihā l-ḥadīth illā min imra‘a sa-na’khudhu bi-l-‘iṣma allatī wajadnā l-nās ‘alayhā*” (‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 317). For the translation of “*iṣma*” here as “restraining,” see: Hawting, *The role of the Qur’ān* 440, n. 36.

151 The verse reads: “Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start, and calculate the period carefully: be mindful of God, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes—nor should they themselves leave—unless they commit a flagrant indecency. These are the limits set by God—whoever oversteps God’s limits wrongs his own soul—for you cannot know what new situation God may perhaps bring about.” Fāṭima reportedly interpreted the “new situation” as a reference to reconciliation between husband and wife, which would lead the husband to take her back—as he would not be permitted to do if he had already given her an irrevocable divorce.

152 For more on this tradition and the wider legal debate that it comments on, see: Hawting, *The role of the Qur’ān* 177–88; Sayeed, *Gender and legal authority* 123–39.

153 Hawting, *The role of Qur’ān* 440.

b. al-Musayyab, of having caused confusion or social disorder (*fitna*) by relating her ḥadīth.¹⁵⁴

While in this hierarchization tradition, a woman is given the last word, in the other two examples from the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, the final verdict on the interpretation of the quranic verses in question is given to Ibn ‘Abbās. Another hierarchization tradition addresses Q 4:8,¹⁵⁵ a much debated legal verse discussing inheritance:¹⁵⁶

‘Abd al-Razzāq—Ibn Jurayj—Ibn Abī Mulayka, that Asmā’ bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr and al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad [b. Abī Bakr] both informed him that ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr divided his father ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s estate while ‘Ā’isha was (still) alive. He said, “He did not leave a (single) poor person or relative in the household without giving them some of his father’s legacy, and he recited, ‘If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are present at the distribution . . .’ (Q 4:8).” Al-Qāsim said, “I mentioned this to Ibn ‘Abbās, and he said, ‘That wasn’t correct. That wasn’t for him (to do), but for the will (to stipulate). This verse refers to the will; it means that the deceased ought to bequeath (something) to them.’”¹⁵⁷

In this tradition, Abū Bakr’s grandson ‘Abdallāh holds an interpretation of Q 4:8. He acts in accordance with this, and nobody who is present at the division of the inheritance (i.e. Abū Bakr’s descendants) seems to have had any reservations about it. Moreover, this occurs during ‘Ā’isha’s lifetime. The presumption here is that she would have been aware of her nephew’s actions, and if she had disagreed with them—and hence, with his interpretation of the verse—she would have voiced an objection. Ibn ‘Abbās, however, differs with this interpretation, and explains why: in his view, the verse pertains to the testator rather than to the person carrying out the terms of the will. This tradition

154 “*kānat fatanat al-nās*,” or according to another version, “*fatanat al-nisā*” (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 527). The concept of *fitna* (trial, chaos, temptation) and the notion that women in particular embody it has been examined and utilized as an interpretive lens in a number of studies; see for example: Mernissi, *Beyond the veil* 4; Malti-Douglas, *Woman’s body* esp. 43–4. For an application of what could be termed the “*fitna* paradigm” to ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr’s life story, see: Spellberg, *Politics*, esp. 138ff. For critical evaluations of this paradigm, see: Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches*, 132–3; Meisami, *Writing medieval women* 67.

155 The verse reads: “If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are present at the distribution, give them something too, and speak kindly to them.”

156 For the debates about the legal implications of this verse, see: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* iv, 318–25.

157 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 438–9.

gives him the last word, implying that whatever legal-exegetical knowledge that ʿĀ'isha might possess cannot equal that of Ibn ʿAbbās.

A tradition that discusses the theological question of whether the opening verses of Sūrat al-Najm ("The Star," S. 53) describe a vision of God or of Gabriel dismisses ʿĀ'isha's interpretive authority even more overtly:

ʿAbd al-Razzāq—[Sufyān] b. ʿUyayna—Mujālad b. Saʿīd—al-Shaʿbī—ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ḥārith, (who) related:

"Ibn ʿAbbās and Kaʿb met."

He related, "Ibn ʿAbbās said, 'As for us (of the) Banū Hāshim, we believe and we say that Muḥammad saw his Lord twice.'"

He related, "Kaʿb exclaimed, 'God is great!' so (loudly) that the mountains echoed it.

Then he said, 'Surely God divided his vision and his speech between Muḥammad and Moses. He spoke with Moses, and Muḥammad saw Him with his heart.'

Mujālad recounted (that) al-Shaʿbī said: Masrūq informed me that he asked ʿĀ'isha, "O Mother! Did Muḥammad see his Lord?"

She replied, "You have certainly said something that makes my hair stand on end!"

He said: I said, "Wait!"

He said, "I recited to her, *By the star when it sets . . . until I uttered, . . . two bows' length or even nearer* (Q 53:1–9).

Then she responded, "Wait! Where does this take you? Certainly, he saw Gabriel in his (angelic) form. Whoever tells you that Muḥammad saw his Lord has certainly lied. Whoever tells you that he knows the treasures of the unseen has certainly lied: *God—with him is knowledge of the hour. He sends down rain, and knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn on the morrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Certainly God is the Knowing, the Aware* (Q 31:34)."

ʿAbd al-Razzāq said, "I mentioned this ḥadīth to Maʿmar, and he said to me, 'In our view, ʿĀ'isha is not more knowledgeable than Ibn ʿAbbās.'"¹⁵⁸

Here again, ʿĀ'isha weighs in on the theological controversy as to whether Muḥammad saw God. It seems that she was associated with this issue fairly early on. But in this tradition, her views are framed quite differently than in the controversy tradition on this question examined above. Here, the initial

158 "... mā ʿĀ'isha ʿindanā bi-aʿlam min Ibn ʿAbbās" (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* iii, 252).

meeting of two male figures and their interchange sets the tone for what is to follow. While ʿĀʾisha's view on the question is quoted, it is not couched in the rhetorically polished terms that we saw in Ibn Wahb. Moreover, in this tradition, Ma'mar does not simply reject ʿĀʾisha's interpretation of these particular verses, but makes a general statement that brands exegetical views credited to her as less reliable than those attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās.

It would be misleading to read traditions of this type as though they are transcripts of actual conversations that can moreover be assumed to reflect a timeless communal consensus on the epistemological status of any woman's attempt to exercise interpretive authority. These three hierarchization traditions also appear in variant versions in other texts conventionally dated to the formative period, including ḥadīth collections, where they are presented as part of wider legal or theological debates. Their meanings shift through time and literary context. For example, Marwān's dismissal of Fāṭima's ḥadīth as a report that he had "only" heard from a woman appears to have "originally" reflected an actual reluctance in some quarters to accept women's traditions as legal proofs. However, as Asma Sayeed points out, it would have been heard/read by medieval audiences in light of the formative period debate about the legal weight of singleton traditions in general,¹⁵⁹ as well as of the approaches of jurists to this ḥadīth in particular.¹⁶⁰

Hierarchization traditions are literary constructions that never cease to belong to the immense and polymorphous genre known as the Ḥadīth literature, even once they enter the quranic commentarial genre. Therefore, they should be read thematically against the backdrop of the Ḥadīth literature. When hierarchization traditions are read in this light, it becomes apparent that in part, they are further elaborations on a theme found in some traditions in early biographical compendia such as Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt* in which some early Muslims give various and at times conflicting assessments of others' knowledge or accuracy in transmission. While most such traditions present male figures, some traditions of this type occasionally feature women (typically, ʿĀʾisha or at times Umm Salama) as either the assessors or the assessed.¹⁶¹

159 Sayeed, Gender and legal authority 144–9.

160 For example, al-Shāfiʿī accepts Fāṭima's ḥadīth as reliable, but argues that it pertains only to her (unusual) circumstances, so that it cannot be used as a proof-text for any claim that an irrevocably divorced woman can leave her soon-to-be ex-husband's house to spend her *ʿidda* elsewhere (Sayeed, Gender and legal authority 134–5).

161 E.g. for ʿĀʾisha and Umm Salama respectively attesting to Ibn ʿAbbās's unmatched knowledge about the Ḥajj rites, see: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 514–15. For the well-known tradition in which ʿĀʾisha charges that Abū Hurayra is recounting things that she never heard the

Hierarchization traditions typically combine this theme of assessment of the authority of an early figure relative to others with a legal or theological issue involving differentiation, such as distinguishing between valid and invalid legal rulings, or true and false beliefs or interpretations. As such, they often involve the negotiation of communal boundaries, as “true” beliefs and practices demarcate a distinct, rightly-guided community, over against religious Others, whether such Others be within or without.

Moreover, hierarchization traditions explicitly bring together and hold in tension two of the gendered textual themes discussed in Chapter One: (1) a select number of early Muslim women are depicted as reliable sources of religious knowledge for the community. (2) The mythological, social, legal and medical discourses prevalent in the formative period typically present free Muslim males as the human beings who as a group are closest to actualizing human intellectual, spiritual and physical potential, while femaleness is equated with being innately flawed.

The wives of the prophet—and most especially, ‘Ā’isha—can serve as particularly apt vehicles for the negotiation of exegetical authority due to their rather ambiguous or even paradoxical status. As has been discussed above, there is evidence of bias in their favour among proto-Sunni jurists and ḥadīth transmitters, as well as those exegetes who quote traditions in their commentaries on the Quran. Even some of those jurists and ḥadīth transmitters who expressed opposition to accepting traditions from women nonetheless reportedly made an exception for the wives of the prophet, particularly ‘Ā’isha and Umm Salama. Yet, as the latter two hierarchization traditions illustrate, even ‘Ā’isha’s interpretive authority is not immune to challenge. While the two traditions that set opinions attributed to ‘Ā’isha in opposition to views of Ibn ‘Abbās may well have been “originally” intended at least in part to convey the pro-Shi‘i notion that it is Muḥammad’s relatives (i.e. rather than his wives or the first three caliphs) who are the true custodians of his teachings, their presence in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* cannot be simply attributed to ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s reputed Shi‘i sympathies. The fact that a few ḥadīths that downgrade the authority of the prophet’s wives’ ḥadīth transmission appear in canonical Sunni ḥadīth collections strongly suggests that the issue is significantly more complex.¹⁶²

prophet say (and Abū Hurayra’s cutting rejoinder that she must have been busy with her kohl and mirror at the time), see: Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 507–8.

162 For a couple of examples from medieval texts of dismissive attitudes to the tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha (discussed above) on the question of whether humans will be able to see God, see: Geissinger, *The exegetical traditions* 7.

A well-known example is found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, in the brief chapter on the acceptance of singleton traditions related by a trustworthy person regarding rituals, as well as legal obligations and rulings. The last tradition in this chapter, under the heading, “Traditions from one woman,”¹⁶³ recounts an anecdote in which some of the Companions are about to eat some meat, but an unnamed wife of the prophet warns them that it is from a lizard.¹⁶⁴ They stop eating, but Muḥammad tells them that they may eat it, though he himself chooses not to do so.¹⁶⁵ In another, lesser-known example, from the *Sunan Ibn Māja*, ʿĀ'isha is reported to have weighed in on the legal-ritual question as to whether it is permissible for men to urinate in a standing position,¹⁶⁶ saying, “If anyone informs you that the Messenger of God urinated while standing, do not believe him! I used to see him do so sitting.”¹⁶⁷ But Sufyān al-Thawrī dismissed this ḥadīth by saying, “A man would know more about this than she.”¹⁶⁸

In both of these traditions, the prophet’s wives’ knowledge of the *sunna* is presented as limited rather than comprehensive. One of his wives, having observed that Muḥammad does not eat lizard meat, wrongly concludes that it is therefore religiously prohibited.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, ʿĀ'isha bases her claim about Muḥammad’s manner of urination on what she saw him do when she was with him. Al-Thawrī’s objection not only points out that she would seldom have

163 “*Khābar al-mar’a al-wāḥida*”.

164 The underlying issue here appears to be the delineation of communal boundaries through food laws. In the Torah, lizards are classified as unclean (Lev. 11:30).

165 Al-Bukhārī ix, 278 (*Bāb mā jā’a fī ijāzat khābar al-wāḥid*). My attention was drawn to this tradition by Sachedina’s article, *Woman, half-the-man?* 172–3. More recently, Asma Sayeed also briefly discusses it (*Gender and authority* 148, n. 84). However, my reading of this tradition differs significantly from either Sachedina or Sayeed.

166 This was an issue because it might lead to men’s clothing or bodies being stained with urine, which is classified as an impure substance.

167 Ibn Māja i, 112 (*K. al-Ṭahāra*); see also: Ibn Abī Shayba i, 227 (*K. al-Ṭahāra*), and similarly: al-Tirmidhī 4 (*K. al-Ṭahāra*).

168 “*al-rajul a’lam bi-hādhā minhā*”; Ibn Māja i, 112 (*K. al-Ṭahāra*).

169 In his comments on this ḥadīth, Ibn Ḥajar notes that it also appears in an earlier chapter—the Book of Hunting and Slaughtering; see: *Fath* xvi, 374 (*K. Akhbār al-āḥād*). Significantly, that version of the ḥadīth retells the anecdote differently: Muḥammad, accompanied by a male Companion, enters the house of his wife Maymūna, and food is set before them. An unnamed woman says that the prophet should be warned what he is about to eat, so they (masc.pl.) tell him that it is lizard meat. Muḥammad does not eat it, but when he is asked if it is unlawful, he responds that as it is not found in the land of his people, he dislikes it; see: al-Bukhārī vii, 316 (*K. al-Dhabā’ih wa-l-ṣayd*). In this retelling, there is no hint of any deficit of knowledge of Muhammad’s *sunna* on the part of any of his wives. Evidently, its various versions have been shaped by different legal concerns.

been able to witness how Muḥammad conducted himself when he was with his male Companions, but also implies that it can be presumed unlikely that ʿĀ'isha would have taken the trouble to verify if his practice in her presence also held true for other situations. In these two traditions, while the wives of the prophet are presented as potential sources of religious knowledge, their knowledge is also proverbially limited in its scope and depth, especially when compared to that of their male contemporaries. These two traditions both construct and (re)affirm the methodical and detail-oriented pursuit of knowledge—and the religious authority associated with it—as emblematically masculine.

Reading the three hierarchization traditions in the *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* against this complex thematic and textual background, it becomes apparent that traditions of this type are based on the gendering of advanced levels of religious knowledge, of the authority to instruct others, and also, the authority to interpret scripture, as emblematically masculine. A few early Muslim female figures, particularly several of the wives of the prophet, have a degree of communally recognized religious or even interpretive authority attributed to them in traditions of this type. Yet, this status of theirs is textually constructed as highly anomalous—and therefore, as potentially subject to challenge in ways that the authority of their male counterparts is not. Above and beyond their relevance to various legal and theological debates that they address, such traditions convey ideological assertions about the nature of interpretive authority and who “rightfully” exercises it. In the case of the latter two hierarchization traditions which set opinions attributed to ʿĀ'isha over against those of Ibn ʿAbbās, the concern is not so much to diminish whatever degree of interpretive authority that ʿĀ'isha might be held to possess, as it is to construct and elaborate the image of Ibn ʿAbbās as the “father of *tafsīr*,” through presenting ʿĀ'isha as a foil for these assertions of his unparalleled exegetical expertise.

2 Post-Companion Female Sources of Exegetical Materials

As was shown in the previous chapter, most of the female figures that are quoted as sources of exegetical materials in the eight exegetical works under discussion here are a select number of female Companions. In addition to ʿĀ'isha, who is a prominent source in many of these works, a few other wives of Muḥammad, particularly Umm Salama, and a few female Companions are quoted. Moreover, when redactors of several such works added materials attributed to women, it was traditions or variant readings credited to ʿĀ'isha that were most often incorporated. As we will see, this is a trend that continues

to varying extents in some Sunni exegetical works of the third/ninth century and later.

This ongoing construction of ‘Ā’isha’s image as a (mostly) reliable and often authoritative source of exegetical materials on the part of several authors and redactors of the eight exegetical works examined here forms a striking contrast to their evidently low levels of interest in quoting female Successors, much less women from subsequent generations. As we have seen, the names of a couple of obscuras who were evidently not Companions appear as transmitters in the *isnāds* of a couple of traditions in the *Jāmi‘* of Ibn Wahb. A few female dually signifying figures and Successors are occasionally mentioned in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq*, as well as in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, and in most cases, their association with exegesis apparently does not go beyond the fact that their names happen to appear in an *isnād* of a tradition that the author/redactor has chosen to quote.

In a few such instances—Umm al-Dardā’, Ḥaḥṣa bt. Sīrīn and perhaps also ‘Amra bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān—it is possible that the woman’s involvement with the transmission or nascent interpretation of the quranic text is being understated in these works. Yet, gauging the extent to which this might be the case is challenging. The example of Umm al-Dardā’ is a good illustration of some of the historical and interpretive problems involved.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, her identity is unclear, which makes it difficult to place the various traditions ascribed to her within a historical or geographical context. In the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*, a tradition that encourages giving in charity credited to Umm al-Dardā’ is quoted as commentary on Q 23:72.¹⁷⁰ This pietistic tradition does not directly explicate the verse; rather, it extends a statement that the verse makes (that God is the best of providers) in another direction altogether, so that a directive to Muḥammad himself during the Meccan phase of his career is transformed into a pietistic exhortation to believers in general.

Interestingly, Umm al-Dardā’ the Younger is one of the few female figures deemed worthy of memorialisation in Ibn al-Jazarī’s well-known biographical dictionary of Quran reciters. According to Ibn al-Jazarī, she learned to recite the Quran from her husband, Abū al-Dardā’, and he names three male students to whom she taught quranic recitation.¹⁷¹ While Ibn al-Jazarī is a late medieval figure, it is noteworthy that a couple of traditions found in works conventionally dated to the formative period imply that Umm al-Dardā’ was quite familiar

170 Yaḥyā i, 411. Q 23:72 reads: “Do you [Muḥammad] ask them for any payment? Your Lord’s is the best payment; He is the best of providers.”

171 Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* ii, 354.

with Quran codices and some of the issues of the day relating to them: regional orthographic peculiarities,¹⁷² and debates as to whether they should be vocalized (*i'rāb*).¹⁷³

The claim has often been made that early ascetic (and later Sufi) movements, as well as ḥadīth transmission have historically provided some Muslim women opportunities for involvement in scholarly discourses as well as to exercise some types of religious authority. It is difficult to know what historical realities might lie behind any of these traditions ascribed to Umm al-Dardā'. However, "her" textual image as it appears in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*—and which is absent from the other seven exegetical works under discussion here¹⁷⁴—suggests some questions about the potential as well as the limitations of such opportunities at the level of recorded memory during the formative period.

The authors and redactors of these eight works made choices in their various and varying representations of interpretive authority, which resulted in the memorialisation of certain of its reputed bearers. Umm al-Dardā' reportedly possessed specialised knowledge of the quranic text and its recitation. "She" is also portrayed in some ḥadīth compilations and works on aspects of the quranic text and its recitation which are conventionally dated to the formative period as an occasional source of pietistic traditions.¹⁷⁵ But to the extent that "she" is memorialized at all in these eight *tafsīr* texts, it would appear to have been as a source of the latter type of information and not the former.

Another early female figure who is said to have had expert knowledge of the recitation of the Quran but nonetheless is not presented as a source of such information in the eight exegetical works examined here is Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn. Al-Dhahabī counts her among the scholarly Successors of Baṣra,¹⁷⁶ and she is occasionally cited as a source of traditions on the recitation of the Quran as an act of individual piety.¹⁷⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī reports that her deep familiarity with quranic recitation was such that whenever her scholarly brother Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/728–9) was asked a question about it that he could not answer,

172 Abū 'Ubayd 330–2 (*Bāb wa-hādhihi l-ḥurūf allatī ikhtalafat fihā maṣāḥif ahl al-Shām*).

173 Ibn Abī Shayba x, 207 (*K. Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*).

174 At least, it is absent in the form that these seven works have come down to us.

175 E.g.: Ibn Wahb, *Koranwissenschaften* fol. 2a, 10–15; Abū 'Ubayd 236–7 (*Abwāb Suwar al-Qur'ān wa-āyātahu*); Ibn Abī Shayba x, 212 (*K. Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*); al-Dārimī iv, 2170, 2174, 2177 (*K. Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*).

176 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* i, 102.

177 E.g. she appears in the *isnād* of a tradition regarding the minimum number of nights that one should take to recite the Quran in its entirety; see: 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* iii, 354; Ibn Abī Shayba iii, 576 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*).

he would tell the questioner to ask Ḥafṣa how she recites.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, she does not appear in any of the eight exegetical works discussed here as a source or transmitter of quranic readings. In a tradition quoted in the *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq*, she asks Abū l-Āliya about the meaning of a verse (Q 27:82) concerning the end of the world.

While these female figures are made textually present in a couple of these eight works through their transmissions of a pietistic saying, materials of this type simply were not accorded the same interpretive weight as exegetical materials deemed directly relevant to grammatical, legal or theological matters. It could therefore be argued that these portrayals ultimately have the effect of downplaying whatever degree of exegetical authority they might have been thought to possess.¹⁷⁹

Concluding Remarks

When the exegetical materials attributed to female figures in the eight exegetical works surveyed in the previous chapter are closely examined in their historical-textual contexts, as well as with reference to the gendered “labour” that they perform in these texts, a number of patterns become evident. While there is a range of intentionality that is apparently attributed to the putative female sources of exegetical materials in these works, depictions of a woman clearly intending to interpret a quranic verse are uncommon.

In quotations of lines ascribed to poets, as well as in stereotyped speech, any interpretive intention on the part of the woman or man with whom they are said to have originated is entirely absent. Rather, the interpretive intention clearly rests in the hands of the exegete who elects to quote materials of this type. Such quotations underline the exegetes’ power to appropriate pagan Arabian cultural forms and ideas as they saw fit, and to put them to use in the service of a very different worldview. Through this type of literary supercessionism, the act of quranic interpretation mirrors the conquests and empire building of Islam’s formative period, which is one way that *tafsīr* is represented in these texts as an emblematically “masculine” undertaking. These quotations also raise some important questions as to how “intentionality” might be understood in traditions attributed to women that are cited in exegetical works.

178 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-safwa* iv, 20–2.

179 Though the situation with Umm al-Dardā’ in particular is somewhat different in the third/ninth century and later in some Quran commentaries. For more on this, see Chapters Four and Six.

In the case of the *ḥadīths* and *āthār* credited to or transmitted by women or men, it is usually unclear how the intentions of the putative originators or transmitters were understood by these second/eighth and early third/ninth century exegetes and their audiences/readers. This is because it was not apparently an issue of concern in these texts, for several reasons: citing traditions in order to interpret the Quran is a hermeneutical approach based on anachronism, which is not usually concerned with what the person on whose authority a given *ḥadīth* is transmitted “originally” meant by it. As this relates to women in particular, living female *ḥadīth* transmitters were rare by the end of the second/eighth century, so the notion that women can be actively and intentionally involved in passing on *ḥadīths* was an ever-distant memory rather than an aspect of most exegetes’ day-to-day experience. In any case, the standards of proficient *ḥadīth* transmission were increasingly defined by *ḥadīth* scholars during the formative period in emblematically (free) “masculine” terms, with emphasis on any would-be transmitter’s freedom of movement, study with a variety of teachers, socially recognized powers of memory and intellectual discrimination, as well as literacy.

While in comparison to linguistically-focused exegetes, they often made greater use of exegetical materials attributed to women (i.e. largely *ḥadīths* and *āthār*), exegetes who quote traditions were no less concerned with presenting this hermeneutical approach in “masculine” terms. As traditions depicting women whose intention to interpret the Quran is made clear are uncommon in the exegetical works under discussion here, the interpretive authority of the male figures whose traditions are quoted is thus positioned in the textual foreground.

In contrast to many if not most of the *ḥadīths* discussed in this chapter, controversy traditions and hierarchization traditions clearly present their female protagonists as intentionally interpreting a quranic phrase, verse, or passage. It is in traditions of this type that the tensions involved in granting any female figure interpretive authority are made especially evident. Whether the female protagonist is put in her place by one of her male contemporaries, or is allowed the last word in a debate, her very exceptionality is underlined, thus (re)affirming that exegetical authority is emblematically masculine.

Like the female poets whose lines are quoted in some exegetical works, women as sources of quranic readings are reciting women who textually embody the transition from a scriptureless paganism to a scripture-bearing community that now is an imperial power. Nonetheless, they are also inescapably intentional transmitters of the Quran who express standpoints on the meanings of particular words, phrases or verses. However, as there are few such readings found in the works under discussion here, virtually all go back

to one woman of the Companion generation, and none refer to the quranic text in written form, they present female expertise in the recitation of the Quran as it pertains to exegesis as both exceptional and located firmly in the past. Historically, this is an aspect of a much larger process, through which the Quran came to be officially promulgated in an imperially sanctioned text, which would soon be written in a *scriptio plena* and be ritually elevated in its sanctity above all other texts—in part, through its proverbial distancing from female bodies in particular.

While a small number of early Muslim women were included in the transhistorical exegetical communities constructed by the exegetes who authored and redacted the eight works discussed here, in nearly all cases their contributions are presented as occasional and not very consequential for major grammatical, legal, or theological issues related to the interpretation of the Quran. The main exception is of course ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr, although there is also a certain level of ambivalence about this. Yet, despite the evident overall lack of interest in citing exegetical materials attributed to women, one appears to catch glimpses of the beginnings of certain noteworthy features of classical Sunni *tafsīr* works, such as the evocation of the abode of Muḥammad’s wives as a space within which controversial issues involving inter- and intra-communal boundaries can be authoritatively negotiated.

In the third/ninth century, however, ḥadīths attributed to or transmitted on the authority of early Muslim women are quoted in statistically significant numbers for the first time in the *tafsīr* chapters of al-Bukhārī and several other traditionists. As the next chapter demonstrates, this fascinating development which occurs on the margins of the genre of *tafsīr* proper, both provides insight into the hermeneutical debates of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries and subsequently has an impact on classical quranic exegesis.

Ḥadīth, Hermeneutics and Gender in the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries

Sa'd b. Hishām b. ʿĀmir al-Anṣārī, a man whose father had been killed fighting on Muḥammad's side in the Battle of Uḥud (3/625),¹ had come to a momentous decision: he would go to the frontier of the new Arab empire, and fight against the Byzantines until his last breath. And so (it is recounted), Sa'd went to Medina, intending to sell his property and purchase the equipment that he would need for this venture.

However, when Sa'd reached Medina, he found that the townsfolk he encountered did not approve of his decision. No less than six of their number (they informed Sa'd) had wanted to do much the same thing when Muḥammad was alive, but he had forbidden them to adopt such an ascetic approach to life, saying, "Am I not an example for you?"² Dissuaded from his original plan, Sa'd—who had divorced his wife—revoked the divorce in front of witnesses.

Then, he went to see Ibn ʿAbbās, and asked him about how Muḥammad used to perform the *witr* prayers. Ibn ʿAbbās responded by directing him to go and ask ʿĀ'isha, "the most knowledgeable of people on earth about the *witr* of the Messenger of God," and then to come back and tell him what she had said. Sa'd then requested Ḥakīm b. Aflaḥ to take him to see ʿĀ'isha. But Ḥakīm was quite reluctant, saying that he was not close to her, because although he had tried to restrain her from "speaking about those two factions," she had nonetheless "insisted on departing." But Sa'd kept on asking, and Ḥakīm finally agreed to come with him.

When they requested permission to enter, ʿĀ'isha recognized Ḥakīm immediately. When he introduced Sa'd to her, she invoked God's mercy on his father, who had died at Uḥud.

Then, Sa'd posed his question:

I [Sa'd] said, "Mother of the Believers, tell me about the character (*khu-luq*) of the Messenger of God."

1 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* vii, 243–4. However, al-Dhahabī identifies Sa'd's grandfather as the one who had died at Uḥud. Sa'd's father reportedly settled in Baṣra; see his *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr al-a'lām*, years 41–60 AH, 321.

2 Q 33:21—"The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often."

She [ʿĀ'isha] replied, “Do you not recite the Quran?”

I said, “Yes indeed!”

She responded, “Certainly, the character of the Prophet of God was the Quran.”

I began to get up, deciding that I would not ask anyone about anything else until the day I died. But then it seemed good to me [to ask more], so I said, “Tell me about the night vigils of the Messenger of God.”

She responded, “Do you not recite, ‘You, enfolded in your cloak’ ”?³

I answered, “Yes indeed!”

She said, “God, the Mighty, the Glorious, made standing in prayer at night an obligation in the first part of this sūra. The Prophet of God and his Companions performed night vigils for a year. For twelve months, God held back its concluding verse in the heavens. Then God sent down the conclusion of this sūra—the lightening [of this obligation]. Standing in prayer at night became a supererogatory act, after having been obligatory.”

Sa’d then asked ʿĀ'isha about Muḥammad’s *witr* prayer specifically. She provided a detailed description of it, including his slight attenuation of this practice when he had become old, and how he would elect to pray extra prayers during the day instead when circumstances made it difficult for him to perform *witr* at night. She concluded by stating that

[t]he Prophet of God would not recite the entire Quran in one night, nor would he stand in prayer all night until dawn. He would not fast for an entire month aside from Ramaḍān.

Sa’d then went back to Ibn ʿAbbās, and related to him everything that ʿĀ'isha had told him. “She speaks the truth,” Ibn ʿAbbās responded. “If I was close to her, or visiting her, then *I* would have come to her in order to hear it for myself!”

“If I had known that you do not visit her,” Sa’d retorted, “Then I would not have related this report of hers to you.”⁴

This complex tradition (henceforth, “the would-be ascetic warrior tradition”) is recounted in two of the *ṣiḥāḥ sitta*, or the “Sound Six” ḥadīth collections compiled in the third/ninth century that are regarded as most reliable by Sunnis today: the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and the *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*;⁵ summarized forms

3 I.e. S. 73, “Enfolded” (Sūrat al-Muzammil).

4 Muslim 328–9 (*K. Ṣalāt al-musāfir*).

5 Abū Dāwūd i, 499–500 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*); Ibn Māja i, 376 (*K. Iqāmat al-ṣalāt*).

of it also appear in the *Sunan Ibn Māja* and the *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*.⁶ This ḥadīth also is found in the *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*.⁷ On one level, this tradition serves as a proof-text for some issues regarding the status and performance of the *witr* prayer, as well as of supererogatory prayers at night.⁸ But the larger question that it addresses is asceticism and the challenges it posed to emergent Muslim communal identities in the formative period.

Significantly, al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915–16) also includes a short excerpt from this tradition in the *tafsīr* chapter of his *Sunan al-kubrā*, as commentary on Sūra 73.⁹ In so doing, he follows a tendency among some Quran commentators of his time to cite traditions attributed to 'Ā'isha about Muḥammad's prayers at night as part of their exegeses of Sūrat al-Muzammil.¹⁰ Moreover, the ḥadīth credited to her on this topic that al-Nasā'ī quotes is a summarized version of one that he as a traditionist deems fairly reliable, as his inclusion of a non-summarized version in his *Sunan* indicates.

As this example illustrates, ḥadīths attributed to early Muslim women continue to be incorporated into some exegetical discourses during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries to a limited yet notable extent. In this chapter, we will examine this tendency primarily through the lens of the “chapters on *tafsīr*” found in four well-known ḥadīth collections from this period, beginning with the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and ending with the *Mustadrak* of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī. These *tafsīr* chapters provide a particularly useful vantage point from which to survey this phenomenon for several reasons:

First, the surviving Quran commentaries from this period that quote sizeable numbers of traditions credited to women are typically either extremely large (such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi'*) or have a specialized focus. In either case, the question facing any researcher is how to extract a manageable yet representative sample of such traditions from these works. These four *tafsīr* chapters all contain variable but statistically significant numbers of ḥadīths attributed to women,

6 Ibn Māja i, 376 (*K. Iqāmat al-ṣalāt*); Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī bi-sharḥ al-Ḥāfiẓ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī wa-hāshiyat al-Imām al-Sindī* iii, 199 (*K. Qiyām al-layl wa-taṭawwu' l-nahār*).

7 Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 61.

8 *Witr* is a prayer which may be performed after the night (*'ishā'*) prayer. The Ḥanafis argued that the *witr* prayer is obligatory (*wājib*), while the other three Sunni legal schools disagree.

9 Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Nasā'ī* ii, 470.

10 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxix, 133; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 301.

and as they are concentrated in one chapter rather than spread out over many pages of text, they are considerably easier to examine. Second, as the would-be ascetic warrior tradition illustrates, these *tafsīr* chapters are “in dialogue” (so to speak) with quranic exegetical discourses of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. The traditionists who compiled these chapters were both critiquing the traditions already in circulation among exegetes of the time, and putting forward ḥadīths that they deemed more reliable—typically, because they regarded them as having stronger *isnāds*, or their *isnāds* extend back to the prophet, or they are better known to ḥadīth critics.¹¹ Therefore, these *tafsīr* chapters when taken together can provide a fairly comprehensive overview of the main types of ḥadīths credited to women that were (or were not) being incorporated into Quran commentaries at this time. And importantly, they also constitute a sample of such ḥadīths that were deemed relevant to exegesis on the basis of criteria current in that historical period—meaning, that its selection was neither affected directly or indirectly by later medieval nor by contemporary theological, hermeneutical, apologetic or political concerns.

These *tafsīr* chapters are also worth examining in themselves. They gather a statistically significant number of ḥadīths ascribed to women for the purpose of Quran commentary—a development that appears to have few if any precedents—and make them available for exegetical use. This milestone had some impact on the medieval genre of *tafsīr* from the fifth/eleventh century onward. Also, some *tafsīr* chapters have their own late medieval “afterlife” through commentary, or even abridgment for the edification of laypersons. Therefore, these chapters raise some interesting questions about the “popular” dimensions of medieval *tafsīr*.

This chapter will first discuss the gendered dimensions of the use of ḥadīths in third/ninth century quranic exegesis through examining several aspects of the would-be ascetic warrior tradition. Then, the four *tafsīr* chapters and the ḥadīths attributed to women that they contain will be briefly surveyed, with an emphasis on their relationship to the wider state of quranic exegesis in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. The extent to which ḥadīths of this type ascribed to women appear in Quran commentaries from this time will be noted. Finally, the long-term historical impact of this intervention both on the *tafsīr* genre as well as on some aspects of late medieval ḥadīth discourses will be discussed.

11 For the development of pre-modern Sunni ḥadīth criticism, see: Dickinson, *Development*; Lucas, *Constructive critics*.

As will become evident, these ḥadīth compilers construct the prophetic *sunna* as both knowable through the authentication of ḥadīths, and as providing authoritative guidance for every conceivable aspect of life in the past, present and future, for communities as well as individuals. The *sunna* is made to speak to issues that emerged after Muḥammad's death, as well as to political and sectarian developments, and the emergence of disciplines, including the discipline of *tafsīr*. Significantly, gendered voices and gendered bodies serve as important vehicles for this construction of the *sunna* as all-embracing and preeminently authoritative.

1 Ḥadīth Compilers and Quranic Exegesis: A Gendered Intervention

Efforts on the part of ḥadīth compilers to critically comment on the traditions used in exegetical discourses by incorporating chapters devoted to *tafsīr* in their ḥadīth collections appear to have been spearheaded by the well-known traditionist, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mughīra b. Bardizbah al-Bukhārī, in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹² This initiative of al-Bukhārī's may not have been entirely without precedent. The *Muwatta'* of al-Shaybānī (d. 189/804–5) as it has come down to us contains a very short "*Bāb al-Tafsīr*."¹³ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī was one of al-Bukhārī's teachers,¹⁴ as was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), to whom Ibn Taymiyya attributes a Quran commentary.¹⁵ Nonetheless, al-Bukhārī's intervention reflected an approach to ḥadīths and quranic exegesis that differed significantly from his predecessors, as well as from most of his contemporaries.

12 For al-Bukhārī, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xii, 391ff. For an overview of the *tafsīr* chapters in three of the *ṣiḥaḥ sitta*, see: Speight, The function of ḥadīth 63–81. More recently, Walid Saleh has drawn attention to these chapters in his article, Preliminary remarks 26–7, as has Mustafa Shah (Introduction 49–50). As will become evident, my reading of these chapters differs from these studies.

13 This section contains only 11 traditions in total; two of these are attributed to 'Ā'isha, and one to Ḥafṣa bt. 'Umar; see: al-Shaybānī, *The Muwatta' of Imam Muhammad* 424–8. Ṣabrī b. 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Shāfi'ī and Sayyid b. 'Abbās al-Jalīmī call attention to its existence in their introduction to al-Nasā'ī's *tafsīr* chapter (*Tafsīr al-Nasā'ī* i, 106). One study on the *Muwatta'* as transmitted by al-Shaybānī asserts that it is likely an accurate reflection of one of the latter's students' lecture notes, see: Sadeghi, The authenticity 305–7.

14 As discussed in Chapter Two, it is possible that the *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq* may have started out as part of the *Muṣannaf 'Abd al-Razzāq*, but this is unknown at present.

15 Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddīma* 80; see also: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 54. However, if such a work ascribed to him did in fact exist at some point, it does not appear to have survived.

Al-Bukhārī, along with Muslim b. al-Hajjāj, held that there were enough ḥadīths in circulation which they regarded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) that they could avoid including any ḥadīths not meeting this standard in their compilations. As Jonathan Brown demonstrates, in the third/ninth century, this was an unusual and often controversial view. Their claim that specialized scholars of ḥadīth such as themselves were the rightful custodians of the prophetic *sunna* who were to guide non-specialists, as well as their view that non-specialists should not undertake the compilation of ḥadīths was often perceived as elitist, as well as dismissive of other past and contemporary ḥadīth collectors.¹⁶ While their teacher Ibn Ḥanbal apparently did not regard it as necessary to provide complete *isnāds* for ḥadīths relating to quranic exegesis,¹⁷ al-Bukhārī attempted to extend his ḥadīth methodology to the selection of traditions by Quran commentators. In so doing, his main concern does not appear to have been the interpretation of the Quran *per se*. Rather, he seems to have sought to apply the typical traditionalist concerns—preserving and upholding the prophetic *sunna*, and energetically opposing innovation (*bid'a*), particularly Mu'tazilī views—to as many aspects of Muslim life and thought as possible.¹⁸ Quranic exegesis was but one of these aspects.

As has been shown in the previous two chapters, 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr seems to have come to be associated with debates about hermeneutical approaches to the Quran fairly early on, and she is often though not always associated with interpretive methods based on the narration of *āthār* or ḥadīths. Moreover, she is seemingly made to exemplify the failings of such interpretive approaches in the tradition quoted in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* in which she is reported to have stated that the codex contains scribal errors.¹⁹ In the *tafsīr* chapter of al-Bukhārī, however, a much less ambivalent message is relayed, with 'Ā'isha depicted quite positively as a preeminent source of authentic ḥadīths relevant to quranic exegesis. But while she is given a noteworthy role in this chapter, al-Bukhārī (as well as other ḥadīth compilers following in his exegetical footsteps) was no less eager than the practitioners of linguistically-based quranic interpretation to represent his approach to *tafsīr* as “masculine” to the core.

The would-be ascetic warrior tradition provides an apt illustration of the centrality of gendered bodies and voices in this construction of the prophetic

16 Brown, *Canonization* 54–8, 90ff.

17 Or for ḥadīths about Muḥammad's battles (*maghāzī*) or apocalyptic predictions; see: Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima* 59.

18 For traditionalism, see: Graham, *Traditionalism in Islam* esp. 500–13; Fueck, *The role of traditionalism* 3–26.

19 For this, see Chapter Three.

sunna as all-embracing in its authority. The Baṣran protagonist, Saʿd b. Hishām (and vicariously, the audience/reader of this ḥadīth), faces a dilemma: how does one live according to the teachings of Muḥammad when one’s social, economic and political context differs markedly from his, and moreover, people disagree as to how this should be done? Since Muḥammad’s death, his followers had conquered vast lands outside of Arabia, faced civil war and the assassination of three caliphs, and then finally, witnessed the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty, which had turned the caliphate into a kingship. One possible response to such developments was to retreat into ascetic practice. But (some asked) was such a response in accordance with Muḥammad’s teachings?²⁰

The would-be ascetic warrior tradition represents an attempt to delineate the boundaries of Muḥammad’s community in contradistinction to the “blameworthy” asceticisms identified with religious Others by asserting that there are both praiseworthy and “excessive” ascetic practices, and that a clear distinction can (and must) be drawn between these categories. According to this ḥadīth, the only ascetic practices that qualify as praiseworthy are those that are in accordance with Muḥammad’s *sunna*. Even more crucially, this tradition also serves as a vehicle for internal boundary drawing. The questions of what exactly constitutes Muḥammad’s *sunna*, how it can be known by those who lived after him, its relationship to the customary practices that were reportedly instituted by other leading early figures,²¹ as well as the extent to which it is legally binding on later generations were vigorously debated in the formative period.²²

The would-be ascetic warrior tradition presents the “correct” process (according to the ḥadīth critics) for determining the answers to these complex questions: the prophetic *sunna* is straightforwardly equated with Muḥammad’s customary practice; believers must act in accordance with it; those living after Muḥammad are authoritatively informed about the *sunna* through the medium of ḥadīths reporting his actions and/or words that have been accurately transmitted by reliable persons. Thus, the consensus of the Companions, which they support by their own reports about Muḥammad’s practice, provides the authoritative standard for judging the acceptability of Saʿd’s decisions.

In this ḥadīth, the concept of prophetic *sunna* as well as visions as to how it is to be enacted are profoundly gendered questions, and significantly, they are negotiated in the abode of the wives of the prophet. Saʿd wants to become

20 The quranic text itself presents Christian monasticism rather ambivalently; see for example Q 57:27.

21 E.g. practices of the first few caliphs, as well as the practice of the people of Medina.

22 Hallaq, *A history* 16ff.

an ascetic warrior, freed from worldly ties (exemplified here by his wife) so that he can seek martyrdom—a desire branded here as contrary to the *sunna*. The first step he takes towards bringing his conduct in line with the *sunna* is to unilaterally revoke his divorce of his wife. The second step Sa'd takes is to go and learn the *sunna* from a wife of the prophet—a well known eyewitness to Muḥammad's practice who is moreover endorsed by none other than Ibn 'Abbās as a reliable source.

But while 'Ā'isha's extensive knowledge about the contentious issue of Muḥammad's night prayers is underlined in this ḥadīth, the religious authority that she possesses as a reliable transmitter of the prophetic *sunna* is nonetheless placed in tension with her leading role in the Battle of the Camel. Ḥakīm only reluctantly accompanies Sa'd on his visit to her, as she had ignored his advice to avoid getting involved in the events leading up to that battle, while Ibn 'Abbās refuses to go to hear the ḥadīth about the prophet's *witr* prayer from her directly. The scope of her "legitimate" authority is ever open to question. Nonetheless, due to 'Ā'isha's well-nigh unmatched access to detailed and direct knowledge of Muḥammad's practice, even Ibn 'Abbās does not ignore or dismiss her as a transmitter.

In this ḥadīth, 'Ā'isha, a female Companion, has a name, a voice and a personality, while Sa'd's wife (who is evidently not a Companion) is not accorded any of these things. At no point is the latter's reaction to any of her husband's decisions even hinted at. Her only function in this ḥadīth is to mutely mark the boundary between male conduct that complies with the *sunna* and that which does not, and so it is upon her body that Sa'd's resolve to adhere to the *sunna* "correctly" is first enacted.²³

As this ḥadīth illustrates, while a small number of early Muslim women were given roles to play in the ḥadīth critics' retrospective (re)constructions of the prophetic *sunna*, and women's bodies serve as important vehicles of this process, the women being thus memorialized were not their historical contemporaries. Rather, these are memories of a select number of often highly exceptional women who had passed away generations ago. Likewise, Quran commentators from the Sunni "mainstream" in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries rarely if ever quote traditions in their *tafsīr* works on the authority of any of their female contemporaries.

23 The divorce of a woman by her husband has immediate bodily consequences for her, as she then enters the liminal stage of *'idda*. The *'idda* places restrictions on her mobility, and its duration is determined by bodily processes over which she has little if any control—her menstrual cycles, or (if pregnant) her delivery. If he then revokes the divorce, then her *'idda* automatically ends, and the marriage resumes, regardless of what her wishes might be.

In part, this is a reflection of that fact that in the third/ninth century, there were very few living female ḥadīth transmitters. Asma Sayeed demonstrates that women's involvement in the transmission of ḥadīth was extremely limited in both scope and scale from the mid-second to the late third centuries after the *hijra*.²⁴ However, it also appears to relate to notions of what exegesis is, and who is to be deemed a reliable source of exegetical materials, as we will see.

Why does the attention paid to traditions attributed to early Muslim female figures as potential “raw material” suitable for exegetical purposes increase in the third/ninth century, when these women's lives are even more distant in time than they were in the second/eighth century? One reason that is mainly pertinent to the ḥadīth compilers who authored *tafsīr* chapters is their concern with bringing “authentic” ḥadīths—i.e. those with sound *isnāds* extending back to the prophet—to the fore. One side effect of this focus on authenticity as determined by *isnāds* was that ḥadīths attributed to female Companions (particularly, to those credited with significant numbers of ḥadīths) came to be highlighted. A factor that appears to have been more relevant to exegetes at this time is that incorporating some traditions ascribed to female Companions (or much less commonly, to female Successors) into their Quran commentaries was one way that they could express their Sunni allegiances. By so doing, they could symbolically distance themselves from not only Mu'tazilīs, but also (by giving particular prominence to traditions credited to 'Ā'isha) from Shi'is as well.²⁵

The would-be ascetic warrior tradition raises some interesting questions about the boundaries of quranic exegesis. It briefly explains a couple of quranic verses—and as we have seen, the statement that Muḥammad's conduct is the Quran is apparently already being used exegetically in the second/eighth century.²⁶ This ḥadīth, or at least parts of it, could be said to lend itself to exegetical use. Nonetheless, its *Sitz im Leben* is not primarily exegetical. When Sa'd asks 'Ā'isha about Muḥammad's night prayers, she refers to verses from Sūrat al-Muzammil in order to support her assertions as to how his customary

24 Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 109.

25 It should be noted that some of these exegetes (as well as the ḥadīth compilers under discussion here) were from Khurāsān or Central Asia. Therefore, among the factors that likely influenced their utilization of traditions attributed to women were attitudes to women and religious/interpretive authority in local text-centred religious communities, which were not only Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian, but also Manichean and Buddhist. This complex issue requires more research; however, it is beyond the scope of this study.

26 For this statement as an explanation of Q 68:4 in classical *tafsīr*, see Chapter Five.

practice of night prayers evolved during his career. While she apparently possesses detailed knowledge of matters that are of key importance to the interpretation of this sūra, such as the circumstances of the revelation of specific verses, she is not here portrayed as engaging in exegesis of it herself. The extent to which it entered exegetical discourses was subject to the determinations of (male) Quran commentators. Yet, it never ceases to remain part of the ḥadīth discourse.

1.1 *The Tafsīr Chapter of al-Bukhārī*

A characteristic feature of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* is that its chapters are structured around sub-chapter headings (*tarājīm*, sing. *tarjama*). The *tarājīm* typically contain excerpts from quranic verses, or short traditions (often without *isnāds*), and they guide the audience/reader in the interpretation of the ḥadīths that follow.²⁷

The chapter on *tafsīr* that this work contains is divided into sub-chapters, and each deals with one of the Quran's 114 sūras, in canonical order. Each of these sub-chapters begins with a *tarjama* that gives the name of the sūra to be discussed. In most cases, these *tarājīm* also recount periphrastic interpretations of unusual words; at times, they also use grammatical terminology,²⁸ relate variant readings, or recount short traditions, which often lack *isnāds*. Many of these sub-chapters are further divided by short *tarājīm* quoting the quranic verse that the traditions following it are intended to explicate; such *tarājīm* sometimes also contain a few periphrastic comments on words contained in that particular verse. The *tarājīm* and periphrasis that often accompany them comprise the framework around which the chapter is composed.²⁹

These predominantly periphrastic sections of the chapter³⁰ are generally credited to figures such as Mujāhid, Ibn ‘Abbās, or (much less frequently) to Ma‘mar or Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna (d. 196/811),³¹ but are often anonymous.³² Material

27 Guillaume, *The traditions of Islam* 26–7.

28 See for example: al-Bukhārī vi, 197, 296, 329 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). In one case, a poetic citation is used to explain the meaning of a word (vi, 142).

29 But cf: Wansbrough, *Qur’anic studies* 181.

30 These sections are generally found in the *tarājīm*, but in some cases are appended to the traditions.

31 Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna was a Kūfan traditionist, who was also credited with opinions on Quran recitation, as well as extensive knowledge of *tafsīr* (al-Dhahabi, *Sīyar* viii, 400ff).

32 Some periphrastic interpretations are credited to one authority, while his opponents are left unnamed: “Ibn ‘Abbās says x; others (*ghayrihi*) say y.” Other views are presented in even more imprecise terms: “Some of them say . . .” (*wa-qāla ba‘ḍuhum*), or “It is said . . .” In other cases, no source whatsoever is provided for the interpretations given.

attributed to female figures is completely absent in these sections. In form and content, these chiefly periphrastic sections typify older exegetical material that has come down to al-Bukhārī; much of it in fact is drawn from Abū ‘Ubayda’s *Majāz al-Qur’ān*.³³ In general, al-Bukhārī treats this material conservatively, and does not drastically reconfigure it.³⁴ It appears that in his view, exegesis need not comprise more than a brief periphrastic comment on unusual words.

A number of *tarājim* in other chapters of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* lack traditions as well. It has been theorized that he composed the *tarājim* first, and left some chapters incomplete while hoping to find suitable ḥadīths to insert in future.³⁵ While it is not impossible that such a scenario explains the present configuration of the material presented in his chapter on *tafsīr*, the sheer bulk of periphrastic material that he includes—out of 456 *tarājim*, 222 are accompanied by periphrasis, some quite lengthy—strongly suggests that for him, this is the most essential function of quranic exegesis. While this chapter contains some 501 ḥadīths in total, the sub-chapters devoted to no less than 31 sūras lack any ḥadīths whatsoever, and contain only periphrastic commentary.³⁶

If it can be assumed that the present arrangement of this *tafsīr* chapter largely stems from al-Bukhārī himself,³⁷ the lengthy citation of periphrastic exegesis without *isnāds* strongly suggests that his aim in compiling was not to call into question or oppose linguistically-focused approaches to quranic exegesis. He does not attempt to separate out and reject all exegetical material

33 Fuat Sezgin quoted in Speight, Function 74. None of the material attributed to women by Abū ‘Ubayda is included in al-Bukhārī’s *tafsīr* chapter, however.

34 For example, the opening periphrastic section of S. 36 cites comments credited to Mujāhid on a number of verses until v. 75. Then, an interpretation of a word in v. 41 is attributed to ‘Ikrima. Following this, ‘Ibn ‘Abbās comments on verses 19, 51, 52, 12, and 67 (vi, 308). Many other illustrations of this lack of integration of the materials that he cites could be given.

35 Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam* 26. The irregularities found in the *tarājim* throughout al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* occasioned much discussion and debate among medieval scholars; see: Fadel, Ibn Ḥajar’s *Hady al-sārī* 161–97.

36 These sūras are: 23, 27, 29, 35, 51, 57, 58, 64, 67, 69, 70, 73, 76, 81, 82, 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 94, 97, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, and 109. By contrast, only two sūras—31 and 62—completely lack periphrastic interpretation.

37 There is some reason to question this. According to Ibn Ḥajar, a fourth/tenth century scribe reportedly stated that when he was copying al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* he saw titles with no ḥadīths following them, as well as ḥadīths that had not been placed under any title, so “we put the two together” (Fadel, Ibn Ḥajar’s *Hady al-sārī* 173). It is not clear whether or to what extent such scribal interventions might have affected his *tafsīr* chapter; however, it seems that if anything, the result would have likely have been a reduction in the number of *tarājim* lacking ḥadīths than was “originally” the case.

that could not be traced back to the first few generations of Muslims through sound *isnāds*. Even more tellingly, a number of the ḥadīths that he relates in his *tafsīr* chapter appear in one or more of the *āthār*-based exegetical works discussed above in Chapter Two, or in the *Tafsīr Yaḥyā b. Sallām*—and as we will see, an even greater number are to be found in third/ninth and fourth/tenth century Quran commentaries. Nor was al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter intended to introduce ḥadīths into the *tafsīr* discourses of his time; as we have seen, they were present already in some types of exegesis. Rather, his primary concern appears to have been the vetting of the traditions in fairly common use by exegetes—which in his view should be undertaken only by those qualified to do so, i.e. ḥadīth critics such as himself.

The approximately 501 traditions with *isnāds* that appear in al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter are ascribed to 76 persons, mostly Companions. Of these traditions, 61 (i.e. 12 percent) are traced back to a total of four women. Once repetitions are eliminated, out of a total of 457 traditions, 43 are traced back to women—in nearly all cases to ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr. She is presented as a pre-eminent figure in this *tafsīr* chapter; three controversy traditions and one hierarchization tradition underline her status as an authority. Two traditions are ascribed to her mother, Umm Rūmān,³⁸ one to Umm Salama (through Zaynab bt. Abī Salama), and one to Umm ʿAṭiyya, via Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn. Ṣafiyya bt. Shayba and Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya³⁹ each transmit one tradition from ʿĀ'isha. In addition, the name of Umm Yaʿqūb⁴⁰ is mentioned as an alternate narrator for a tradition cited by al-Bukhārī in explanation of Q 59:7.

1.2 A Note on the *Tafsīr Chapter of Muslim*

The traditionist Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj b. Muslim b. Ward b. Kawshādh al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī, primarily known today for his ḥadīth collection, the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, was a student of al-Bukhārī,⁴¹ and his “junior partner”⁴² in pioneering the compilation of ḥadīth works containing only *ṣaḥīḥ* ḥadīths. A number of ḥadīths in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* cite and interpret the quranic text. Also, as it has come down to us, this work contains a very short *tafsīr* chapter.

38 For Umm Rūmān, see: Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 319–20; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 415–16.

39 Muʿādha bt. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAdawiyya was a Successor from Baṣra who related from ʿĀ'isha and several others (Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 527; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 401). For more on her, see below.

40 Umm Yaʿqūb is a very obscure figure about whom little is known; see: Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 431.

41 For Muslim, see: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* xii, 557ff.

42 Brown, *Canonization* 81.

The structure of this *tafsīr* chapter is markedly different from that of al-Bukhārī. It is considerably shorter, containing only a total of 34 traditions (or nineteen, once repetitions and alternate *isnāds* are eliminated), that are credited to ten early authorities. The scope of its subject matter is much more limited. In the main, these traditions deal with legal topics, recounting the occasions of revelation of various verses, though some pertain to “historical” and political questions. Eleven of the total number of traditions in this chapter (i.e. 32.35 percent) are credited to ‘Ā’isha, who is the only female authority cited. After repetitions and additional *isnāds* are subtracted, five different traditions are traced back to her.

This *tafsīr* chapter is markedly different from most other surviving representatives of the genre. Not only is it extremely brief, but the traditions contained within it neither follow the canonical order of verses in the Quran, nor any other readily apparent order. Recent scholarly appraisals of it are often rather dismissive, while also expressing puzzlement as to why Muslim would have bothered to include such a brief and poorly structured chapter in his ḥadīth collection.⁴³ Ṣabrī b. ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Shāfi‘ī and Sayyid b. ‘Abbās al-Jalīmī assert that this chapter was not originally part of the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, but was added later by al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) in his well-known commentary (*sharḥ*) on the work.⁴⁴ However, this seems unlikely, given that his predecessor al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād’s (d. 544/1149) commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* contains precisely the same *tafsīr* chapter as that contained in al-Nawawī—and al-Qāḍī seems to be commenting on an already-existing text.⁴⁵ But regardless of its historical origins, this *tafsīr* chapter is primarily of interest here on account of what could be termed its “afterlife” in medieval ḥadīth commentary as well as in a ḥadīth abridgment intended for lay consumption, which will be briefly discussed below.

43 E.g. Birkeland, *Old Muslim opposition* 31; Wansbrough, *Qur’anic studies* 180.

44 In support of this contention, they point to a statement from Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dihlawī (d. 1239/1824), as well as evidence from al-Mizzī’s (d. 742/1341) *Tuḥfat al-ashrāf*; see their introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Nasā’ī* (al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* i, 104–5).

45 See: Abū l-Faḍl ‘Iyād b. Mūsā b. ‘Iyād al-Maḥṣabī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim li-l-Qāḍī ‘Iyād al-musammā Ikmāl al-mu’lim bi-fawā’id Muslim* viii, 578–94. It should also be noted that in his own commentary on the *tafsīr* chapter in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, al-Nawawī quotes directly at times from al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād; see: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ al-Imām Muḥyi al-Dīn al-Nawawī al-musammā Al-Minhāj sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* b. al-Ḥajjāj xviii, 352, 355, 356.

1.3 *The Tafsīr Chapter of al-Tirmidhī*

Among the teachers of the Central Asian traditionist Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā b. Sawra b. Mūsā b. al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) was al-Bukhārī.⁴⁶ Al-Tirmidhī's well-known ḥadīth compilation, the *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, contains a *tafsīr* chapter. As it has come down to us,⁴⁷ this chapter is composed mainly of traditions, arranged according to the canonical order of the quranic verses that they comment upon. Traditions are supplied for a total of 99 sūras. Appended to many of these traditions are comments on their lines of transmission, as well as notations as to the existence of other versions and/or alternate *isnāds*.

The chapter contains 419 traditions in all. Thirty traditions, or 7 percent of the total, are ascribed to female authorities. Once repetitions are eliminated, the chapter contains a total of 393 traditions, 27 of which are attributed to women. Women also appear as authorities in three controversy traditions. In addition, in the comments which follow many of the traditions, other versions or alternate *isnāds* are traced back to women in twelve instances. In contrast to the *tafsīr* chapter of al-Bukhārī, periphrastic interpretation without an *isnād* is virtually absent.⁴⁸

Most of the *isnāds* of the ḥadīths cited in this chapter extend back to the Companions, and, where possible, to Muḥammad himself. The comments appended to many of these traditions evaluate these texts in terms of the standards championed by ḥadīth critics. The *isnāds* are assessed, and in some cases, transmitters are classified as “weak” (*yudaʿafa fi l-ḥadīth*).⁴⁹ One *isnād* is deemed unsound because it contains Muḥammad b. al-Sāʿib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), “and the people of knowledge of ḥadīth have left him aside; he is an exegete.”⁵⁰ But a tradition transmitted on the authority of another early exegete, Sufyān b. ʿUyayna, is accepted over the tradition of another transmitter, because Ibn ʿUyayna “is more careful and sound in ḥadīth” (*aḥfaz*

46 For al-Tirmidhī, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xiii, 270–7.

47 For an outline of the transmission history of the various recensions of the *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, see: Robson, *The transmission* 258–70. Only one of these recensions is in circulation today, and it is unclear when it attained its present form.

48 The exception to this is a periphrastic tradition for Q 15:75 which is cited in the comments, although it lacks an *isnād*; it is simply attributed to “some of the people of knowledge in *tafsīr*”; see: al-Tirmidhī 706 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

49 Al-Tirmidhī 694, 762, 767 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

50 “*wa-qad tarakahu ahl al-ʿilm bi-l-ḥadīth, wa-huwa šāḥib al-tafsīr*”; see: al-Tirmidhī 689 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

wa-aṣaḥḥu ḥadīth^{an}).⁵¹ Traditions are also classified according to the number of transmitters.

The traditions in this chapter are traced back to 93 early authorities; interestingly, only 38 of these persons also have traditions credited to them in al-Bukhārī.⁵² Of the traditions traced back to women, several are attributed to female Companions: Umm Hānīʾ bt. Abī Ṭālib, who was a cousin of Muḥammad,⁵³ Umm ʿUmāra, a Medinese woman famed for her participation in a number of battles,⁵⁴ and another Medinan, Asmāʾ bt. Yazīd, whom we are told is also known as Umm Salama al-Anṣariyya.⁵⁵ Three traditions are attributed to Umm Salama. The rest of those traditions that are traced back to a woman of the first generation are attributed to ʿĀʾisha. One dually signifying figure, Umm al-Dardāʾ, transmits a periphrastic tradition from her husband, Abū l-Dardāʾ.⁵⁶ A few female Successors also appear in the *isnāds*. Ḥafṣa bt. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān transmits a tradition from Umm Salama; ʿAmra bt. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and Umayya each relate one tradition from ʿĀʾisha.⁵⁷

Of the twelve comments appended to various traditions, one notes the existence of another version of a political tradition cited as explanation of Q 33:33 that is credited to Umm Salama, another mentions a variant quranic reading reportedly transmitted by Ḥafṣa bt. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and one notes that a tradition on the women’s *bayʿa* is related from Umm ʿAṭiyya. The rest discuss similar traditions or alternate *isnāds* that are ascribed to ʿĀʾisha.

1.4 *The Tafsīr Chapter of al-Nasāʾi*

The traditionist Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad b. Shuʿayb b. ʿAlī b. Sinān b. Baḥr al-Khurāsānī al-Nasāʾī, from the town of Nasā in Khurāsān,⁵⁸ is often remem-

51 Al-Tirmidhī 767 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). As the discipline of ḥadīth criticism developed, many traditionists came to privilege word-for-word transmission (*riwāyat al-ḥadīth ʿalā l-lafẓ*) over “transmission according to meaning” (*riwāyat al-ḥadīth ʿalā l-maʿnā*). For a detailed discussion of this, see: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Kiṭāya fi ʿilm al-riwāya* 228ff.

52 These figures are from Speight, Formation 76.

53 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 52; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 429.

54 Also known as Nusayba bt. Kaʿb, she was seriously wounded in the Battle of Uhud, and lost a hand fighting against Musaylima (Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 450–5; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 422).

55 Al-Tirmidhī 736, 752 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

56 Al-Tirmidhī 713 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). As the Successor Makḥūl transmits it on her authority, by the standards of later medieval biographical dictionaries, she would be Umm al-Dardāʾ the Younger, i.e. a Successor (al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 352).

57 Al-Tirmidhī 670, 722, 673. For Umayya, see below.

58 For al-Nasāʾī, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xiv, 125–135.

bered today as the compiler of the *Sunan al-ṣuḡhrā* (also called *Al-Mujtabā*, or the *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*), which is one of the *ṣiḥāḥi sitta*. The *Sunan al-ṣuḡhrā* does not contain a chapter on *tafsīr*. However, al-Nasā'ī's larger ḥadīth compilation, the *Sunan al-kubrā*, does. This *tafsīr* chapter has been published recently as a separate work.⁵⁹ In it, at least one ḥadīth is provided as commentary for all but nine sūras.⁶⁰

The 735 traditions contained in this chapter are placed under the headings of the relevant sūras, in accordance with the canonical order of the quranic verses that they are intended to comment on. Aside from this, no overt attempt is made by al-Nasā'ī to guide the reader's interpretation of the traditions, nor does he provide additional material such as assessments of their reliability.

Of these 735 traditions, 61 (i.e. 8.3 percent) are ascribed to women, or contain one female transmitter (or very occasionally, more than one) in their *isnāds*. By far the majority of the ḥadīths are attributed to 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr. Three are credited to Umm Salama. An apocalyptic ḥadīth about the appearance of God and Magog is related on the authority of another wife of Muḥammad, Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh, with her co-wife Umm Ḥabība bt. Abī Sufyān (d. ca. 44/644),⁶¹ as well as Zaynab bt. Abī Salama appearing in the *isnād* as transmitters.⁶² Another slightly different version of this ḥadīth also includes Umm Ḥabība's daughter, Ḥabība, in this rather convoluted *isnād*, which thus includes no less than four female Companions.⁶³ Zaynab bt. Abī Salama is also credited with having related another ḥadīth on the authority of her mother, Umm Salama. Several other female Companions have one ḥadīth each related on their authority: Umm al-Faḍl,⁶⁴ Umm Mubashshir,⁶⁵ Umm Hishām bt. Ḥāritha b. al-Nu'mān⁶⁶

59 Al-Shāfi'ī and al-Jalimī, *Tafsīr al-Nasā'ī*. For the manuscripts used, see their Introduction (i, 112–18). For the evidence that this work originated as a chapter of al-Nasā'ī's *Sunan al-kubrā*, see pp. 94–6 of their Introduction. While the editors have appended a section (*dhayl*) that contains several ḥadīths attributed to or transmitted by women, this addendum will not be discussed here.

60 These nine sūras are: 71, 90, 94, 100, 101, 103, 105, 113 and 114.

61 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 109–15; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 369–70.

62 Al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 72 (*sub.* Q 21:96).

63 Al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 23–4 (*sub.* Q 17:95).

64 Umm al-Faḍl, or Lubāba the Elder, was reportedly among the first Meccans to follow Muḥammad. She was married to his uncle, al-'Abbās, to whom she bore six sons, including Ibn 'Abbās (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 320–3).

65 Umm Mubashshir was from Medina. She married the well-known Companion, Zayd b. Ḥāritha (Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 500–1).

66 For Umm Hishām, see: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 483–4.

and al-Furay‘a bt. Mālik b. Sinān. The (one) ḥadīth from al-Furay‘a is transmitted from her on the authority of her sister-in-law, Zaynab bt. Ka‘b b. ‘Ujra.⁶⁷

It is unclear whether any female Successors are to be found in the *isnāds* of the ḥadīths in al-Nasā‘ī’s *tafsīr* chapter. Ṣafiyya bt. Shayba transmits one tradition from ‘Ā’isha; as is noted in Chapter Two, medieval Muslim biographers do not agree as to whether Ṣafiyya is to be counted among the Companions or the Successors. A Kūfan woman, Jasra bt. Dajāja al-‘Āmiriyya transmits a tradition from the Companion Abū Dharr. While what little is known of her life suggests that she was a Successor rather than a Companion,⁶⁸ there is a difference of opinion on this question.⁶⁹ Finally, the ḥadīth related by Umm Hishām bt. Ḥāritha was transmitted by “‘Amra”—though one manuscript has “‘Amr” as the transmitter instead. If “‘Amra” is the correct reading,⁷⁰ she is presumably Umm Hishām’s sister, the well-known Successor ‘Amra bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.⁷¹

1.5 *The Tafsīr Chapter of al-Ḥākīm al-Naysābūrī*

Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ḥamduwayh b. al-Ḥakam (d. 405/1014), otherwise known as Ibn Bayyī‘ or al-Ḥākīm al-Naysābūrī,⁷² is a traditionist and historian from Nīshāpūr in Khurāsān whose ḥadīth collection, the *Mustadrak*, contains a *tafsīr* chapter. While unlike the other traditionists discussed above, he is a fourth/tenth century figure, his *tafsīr* chapter is of interest here for a couple of reasons.

As Jonathan Brown demonstrates, the ḥadīth compilations of al-Bukhārī and Muslim were not immediately regarded by Sunnis as preeminently authoritative. Rather, they achieved this status later, largely due to the efforts of some fourth/tenth century scholars; among their number was al-Ḥākīm al-Naysābūrī. His *Mustadrak* is composed of ḥadīths that he deemed *ṣāḥīḥ* because, according to him, they meet the criteria of authenticity that al-Bukhārī and Muslim utilized. In this way, al-Ḥākīm employs the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and the *Ṣaḥīḥ*

67 Both women are Medinese. Al-Furay‘a was a sister of a well-known Companion, Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, who was married to Zaynab (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 407–10).

68 Not only was she from Kūfa, but she only relates from Companions. Jasra is said to have performed the *‘umra* (the “Lesser Pilgrimage”) repeatedly, which seems to have enabled her to hear ḥadīths from Abū Dharr when she was passing through the village of al-Rabdhā; see: al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 143; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 532.

69 Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 357. Ibn al-Athīr includes Jasra among the Companions (*Usd al-ghāba* vii, 49–50).

70 Al-Shāf‘ī and al-Jalīmī assert that “‘Amra” is the correct reading (al-Nasā‘ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 326, n. 1).

71 Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 430.

72 For his career, see: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* xvii, 162–77.

Muslim as the authoritative standard to be used to determine what “authentic” ḥadīth are, elevating these two ḥadīth collections to canonical status, which played an important role in their achievement of this position among Sunnis.⁷³ This key development in the reception history of these ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim likely had significant bearing on their use as exegetical materials by some medieval exegetes, as we will see. Al-Ḥākim was also one of al-Thaʿlabī’s teachers.⁷⁴ Therefore, it is certainly of interest to see how al-Ḥākim himself handled traditions attributed to women in his chapter on *tafsīr* in the *Mustadrak*.

Al-Ḥākim’s *tafsīr* chapter contains a total of 1,117 traditions; of these, 67 (or 5.1 percent) are credited to early Muslim women. This chapter begins with a short section composed of 32 ḥadīths about the occasions-of-revelation of particular quranic verses. Aside from two versions of the same tradition which are transmitted on the authority of ʿĀ’isha bt. Abī Bakr, all of the ḥadīths it contains are credited to men. Following this is a section on the *qirāʾāt al-nabī*, which is chiefly devoted to ḥadīths that recount how Muḥammad is said to have recited various verses of the Quran. Of these 112 ḥadīths, 15 are traced back through female figures, with seven from ʿĀ’isha, five from Umm Salama, and two from Asmāʾ bt. Yazīd.⁷⁵ While this is a small number when compared to those readings ascribed to male figures, it does comprise 13.39 percent of the total. Also, one ḥadīth found in this section that does not deal directly with *qirāʾāt* is related on the authority of a female Companion, Ḥabība bt. Shurayq.⁷⁶ But the bulk of the chapter is the 973 ḥadīths that provide commentary on the Quran; of these ḥadīths, 50 go back to women.

The majority of the ḥadīths in this part of the chapter that are attributed female figures are credited to several wives of the prophet, with 33 to ʿĀ’isha, 5 to Umm Salama, and one to Sawda bt. Zamʿa.⁷⁷ A small number are also ascribed to other women of the Companion generation, such as Umm Hānīʾ (three ḥadīths), and Asmāʾ bt. Abī Bakr (two ḥadīths), as well as Umm Kulthūm bt. ʿUqba, Umm al-ʿAlāʾ al-Anṣāriyya,⁷⁸ and Fāṭima bt. ʿUtba b. Rabīʿa⁷⁹ (one

73 Brown, *Canonization* 160ff.

74 Saleh, *Formation* 73.

75 These figures include repetitions. The “Umm Salama” cited in these traditions is apparently Muḥammad’s wife. This section of the chapter will be discussed in more detail below.

76 She was a Medinese Companion who appears to have been an obscure figure; see: Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb* iv, 371; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 148–9.

77 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 57–63.

78 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 501.

79 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 276–7.

ḥadīth each). A dually signifying figure, Umm al-Dardā', appears in one *isnād*.⁸⁰ A few female Successors are to be found; 'Amra bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān transmits a ḥadīth from 'Ā'isha, and Umm Salama bt. al-'Alā' b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ya'qūb recounts a ḥadīth to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Makhzūmī on the authority of her father, who reported it from her grandfather, who heard it from Abū Hurayra. However, neither al-Mizzī nor Ibn Ḥajar have a biographical entry for her,⁸¹ and in any case, al-Ḥākim grades both the *isnād* and the *matn* of this ḥadīth as *gharīb*, while in his comments on the *Mustadrak*, al-Dhahabī rejects the *isnād* due to al-Makhzūmī's presence in it.⁸² If this Umm Salama was in fact a historical person, she seems to have been a very obscure figure not known for transmitting ḥadīths.

Significantly, al-Ḥākim manages to find at least one ḥadīth (and usually more) to quote as commentary on every single sūra in the Quran. In this regard, his chapter on *tafsīr* in the *Mustadrak* differs from the *tafsīr* chapters authored by al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, and even al-Nasā'ī, none of which does so. While this difference is in part due to their varying approaches to the use of ḥadīths as exegetical materials, it also reflects the wider circulation of ḥadīths as exegetical materials by his time. Nonetheless, the proportion of ḥadīths attributed to women in al-Ḥākim's *tafsīr* chapter is less than half that of al-Bukhārī's. The expansion in the use of ḥadīths as exegetical materials did not necessarily result in a corresponding increase in ḥadīths ascribed to or transmitted by female figures.

2 From Prominence to Pre-eminence: 'Ā'isha as a Source

In the *tafsīr* chapters surveyed above, traditions related on the authority of women comprise a variable yet in all cases a statistically significant proportion, in contrast to the situation in the exegetical works conventionally dated to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries discussed above. However, the markedly greater tendency of these traditionists to utilize ḥadīths attributed to or transmitted *via* female figures for exegetical purposes does not mean that they present a more variegated image of women as part of the transhistorical exegetical communities that they construct.

80 This is the same periphrastic tradition cited in al-Tirmidhī; see n. 54, above.

81 Neither is there an entry for her in Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*, or in any of the biographical dictionaries devoted to the Companions that have been utilized in this study.

82 Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Al-Mustadrak 'alā l-Ṣaḥīḥayn* iv, 1397.

As with the exegetical works surveyed in Chapter Two, ʿĀ'isha is by far the most oft-cited female figure. Nonetheless, there are significant differences among their presentations of her. While ʿĀ'isha is a prominent source of ḥadīths in the *tafsīr* chapter of al-Tirmidhī (and later, of al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī), a number of ḥadīths credited to other women are also recounted. By contrast, ʿĀ'isha is not only the preeminent female source of exegetical ḥadīths in al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter, but significantly, he repeatedly calls attention to controversial incidents in her life story in ways that emphasize her religious worthiness as well as her knowledge of matters that are germane to quranic exegesis.

Although the story of the accusation of adultery against ʿĀ'isha is addressed in almost all of the second/eighth century exegetical works surveyed in Chapter Two, it is dealt with fairly succinctly. If any traditions attributed to her on this topic are quoted at all, they are typically brief and not positioned as central to the exegesis of the verses traditionally related to this incident. In the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām*, for instance, most of the commentary on Q 24:11–26 is short and to the point, focusing mainly on identifying the particular persons or events alluded to in these verses. While some of this commentary is not attributed to any particular person, parts of it are related on the authority of several well-known early figures such as Qatāda, Mujāhid, and al-Suddī. Only one tersely worded tradition credited to ʿĀ'isha appears, and it simply states that Abū Bakr expiated his oath (i.e. to no longer financially support Miṣṭaḥ).⁸³

In al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter, however, the difference in emphasis is apparent. Not only do these quranic verses receive more detailed exposition, but most of the traditions cited are credited to ʿĀ'isha. She recounts the story of the accusation and her subsequent vindication at length, in explanation of Q 24:12–13, and Q 24:19–20, 22.⁸⁴ Interestingly, a small section of this tradition is cited as comment on Q 12:18, along with a tradition credited to her mother Umm Rūmān about ʿĀ'isha's shocked response upon first hearing the rumours being spread about her.⁸⁵ ʿĀ'isha also identifies the one “who had the greater share” (Q 24:11) in scandal-mongering as ʿAbdallāh b. Ubayy b. Salūl,⁸⁶ gives her

83 Yahyā i, 432–5.

84 Al-Bukhārī vi, 248ff, 261ff (*K. al-Tafsīr*). See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xviii, 106–13; Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2539–43; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* iv, 352–8.

85 Al-Bukhārī vi, 176–7, see also 258 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Q 12:18 describes Jacob's patience in adversity.

86 Al-Bukhārī vi, 247–8 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); similarly, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xviii, 105; Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2544–5.

variant reading of Q 24:15,⁸⁷ and justifies allowing Ḥassān b. Thābit to visit her.⁸⁸ In addition, in a hierarchization tradition, she challenges Marwān's claim that Q 46:17 was revealed about her brother 'Abd al-Raḥmān.⁸⁹

As is well known, the "original" meaning and implications of the Tale of the Slander continue to be a subject of debate.⁹⁰ Al-Bukhārī's treatment of it in his chapter on *tafsīr* is a particularly telling illustration of the fact that the story's purported meaning(s) are dependent on context. By repeatedly citing traditions attributed to 'Ā'isha that retell or make reference to the story, al-Bukhārī positions his hermeneutical approach as emphatically proto-Sunni by implying that it is due to events such as the accusation against 'Ā'isha that she is an invaluable source of information relevant to a number of quranic verses. It should be borne in mind that in contradistinction to the proto-Sunnis, Shi'i exegetes during the formative period generally identified Māriya the Copt as the slandered woman referred to in Q 24:11, and 'Ā'isha as the one who had falsely accused her.⁹¹

While the story of the accusation against 'Ā'isha is not given the same centrality in the *tafsīr* chapters of al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī, both follow al-Bukhārī's lead, though in different ways. Al-Tirmidhī cites a lengthy version of the story on the authority of 'Ā'isha, which he grades as *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb*,⁹² and the existence of an alternate version, also credited to her, that he regards as more authentic is also noted.⁹³ He also includes a tradition transmitted by

87 Al-Bukhārī vi, 258 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); similarly, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 117–18; Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2548; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 360.

88 Al-Bukhārī vi, 260–1 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 24:17–18. Similarly, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 103–5; Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2545; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 358–9.

89 Al-Bukhārī vi, 338–9 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Al-Tha'labī has a variant of this (*al-Kashf* v, 457); Ibn Abī Ḥātim cited a version of it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vii, 444–5).

90 For example, Denise Spellberg argues that the story of the accusation of adultery is primarily a story about male honour that reduces 'Ā'isha to passivity, because her words in her own defense carry no weight (*Politics* 62ff). However, Ashley Manjarrez Walker and Michael Sells give a very different interpretation, asserting that the story presents 'Ā'isha as achieving "a role that has been difficult in all the major religious traditions: a woman who can control and master language and signs in the religious sphere and at the same time be a fully sexual being"; see their article: *The wives of women* 55–77.

91 Spellberg, *Politics* 81; al-Qummī ii, 100. However, as Spellberg notes, Twelver Shi'i exegetes in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries concurred with their Sunni counterparts that 'Ā'isha is the slandered woman referred to in Q 24:11, and that God had revealed her innocence (*Politics* 82); see: al-Ṭūsī vii, 415; Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* vii, 204–6.

92 I.e. that he regards it as authentic though not well attested, as at some point in the *isnāds* it is related by only one person.

93 Al-Tirmidhī 720–2 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

‘Amra from ‘Ā’isha, recounting that Muḥammad commanded that those who had slandered her be flogged after the quranic verses stating how such offences are to be punished (Q 24:4–5) were revealed.⁹⁴ For his part, al-Nasā’ī cites the story of the accusation made against ‘Ā’isha on her authority as commentary on Q 24:11,⁹⁵ as well as a shortened version of this tradition under Q 12:18,⁹⁶ as al-Bukhārī does.

By contrast, al-Ḥākim does not cite any traditions retelling the story of the accusation in his discussion of Sūrat al-Nūr, whether on the authority of ‘Ā’isha or anyone else. This departure from the precedent set by al-Bukhārī may mirror the continued ambivalence about the story’s place in *tafsīr* texts, even in some Sunni circles. While some Quran commentators of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha’labī, do recount the story in detail on the authority of ‘Ā’isha, al-Māturīdī apparently sees this as an unnecessary digression.⁹⁷ The only voice that she is granted in his exegesis of the verses relating to the accusation against her is the variant reading of Q 24:15, and a brief ḥadīth in which she states that when her innocence had been divinely made known to Muḥammad, he recited the newly revealed quranic verses from the pulpit, and ordered the flogging of those who had spread the rumour.⁹⁸

While al-Bukhārī’s construction of ‘Ā’isha as *the* preeminent female source of ḥadīths relevant to quranic exegesis was unequalled by those traditionists who followed in his footsteps in compiling *tafsīr* chapters, it should be noted that none of them intended their audiences/readers to perceive her as merely an ordinary woman. Their ḥadīth collections contain chapters on the “merits of the Companions” (*faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba*), and these single out ‘Ā’isha as one of the particularly praiseworthy women of the Companion generation.⁹⁹ This construction of ‘Ā’isha as a prolific source of exegetical ḥadīths is by its very nature beyond replication by any woman in a subsequent historical period.

It is noteworthy that these traditionists’ concern with complete *isnāds* did not result in the inclusion of a significant proportion of ḥadīths transmitted by

94 Al-Tirmidhī 722 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). Al-Tirmidhī grades it as *ḥasan-gharīb*. As we have seen, ‘Abd al-Razzāq has a version of this tradition, though its wording differs significantly from al-Tirmidhī’s; see: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 432.

95 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 112–118.

96 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* i, 599–602.

97 As he states, “*wa qiṣṣat ‘Ā’isha ṭawūla la-kunnā nadhkur mā kāna bi-nā ilā dhālika ḥāja*” (al-Māturīdī vii, 530).

98 Al-Māturīdī vii, 532–3.

99 Al-Bukhārī v, 75–8 (*Faḍā’il aṣḥāb al-nabī*); al-Tirmidhī 875–7 (*Abwāb al-Manāqib*); Aḥmad b. Shu‘ayb al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan al-kubrā* ii, 1302 (*K. al-Manāqib*); al-Ḥākim vii, 2392–2405 (*K. Ma’rifat al-ṣaḥāba*).

female Successors in their *tafsīr* chapters. While some of the female Successors who appear in the *isnāds* of these ḥadīths have already been encountered in the *tafsīr* works discussed in Chapters Two and Three, others have not. But whichever the case, most can be categorized along several different lines: women who are memorialised elsewhere as female ascetics, or as sources of legal rulings, or women who are virtually unknown.

Two female figures who appear in a few of these *isnāds*—a dually signifying figure, Umm al-Dardā', as well as a female Successor, Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn—are said to have had extensive knowledge of quranic recitation, as we have seen. In his recounting of a ḥadīth from 'Ā'isha on the authority of Mu'ādha al-'Adawiyya, which he cites as commentary on Q 33:51, al-Bukhārī presents yet another female ascetic¹⁰⁰ as a transmitter of one tradition that he deems relevant to exegesis. However, Mu'ādha does not seem to have been memorialized as someone who was particularly knowledgeable about the Quran or aspects of its recitation or interpretation.¹⁰¹ While Bukhārī is willing to quote a few female ascetics, in his view, they merit entry into the exegetical discourse due to their reputations as reliable sources of ḥadīths,¹⁰² not as interpreters of the quranic text in their own right. As such, they form a telling contrast to Fāṭima al-Naysābūriyya (d. 223/838), a female Sufi closer in time to al-Bukhārī, who is said to have expounded upon the meaning of the Quran to the mystic Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), who was her student.¹⁰³

'Amra bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān is primarily presented elsewhere as a source of legal rulings, as has already been noted.¹⁰⁴ But most of the remaining female Successors who appear in the *isnāds* of these ḥadīths seem to have been remembered for little more than the transmission of one or two traditions;

100 For depictions of Mu'ādha as an ascetic figure, see: Cornell, *Early Sufi women* 88–9; Ibn al-Jawzī *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iv, 19–20. Cornell points to evidence that Mu'ādha was the founder of a circle of female ascetics in Baṣra a century before the famous female Baṣran ascetic, Rābī'a al-'Adawiyya (Introduction, *Early Sufi women* 61–2).

101 While Ibn al-Jawzī's biographical notice for her contains one brief mention of her recitation of the Quran during her nightly devotions (*Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iv, 19), this is a pietistic depiction. It does not suggest that she was regarded as notably familiar with the technical details of quranic recitation. For an overview of representations of formative period ascetics as ḥadīth transmitters, see: Melchert, *Early renunciants* 407–17.

102 For Mu'ādha as a source of ḥadīths from 'Ā'isha, see for example: al-Ṭayālīsī iii, 149–51. All of these ḥadīths address details of ritual practice.

103 Cornell, *Early Sufi women* 144–5.

104 However, Makram and 'Umar draw attention to one variant reading (of Q 24:11) which is attributed to 'Amra (*Mu'jam* iv, 239).

there is no suggestion in the sources that they might have had any particular interest in or knowledge about the interpretation of the Quran.

The ḥadīth that is related on the authority of Umayya from ‘Ā’isha by al-Tirmidhī appears at first glance to be a possible exception: Umayya asks ‘Ā’isha about Q 2:284—“... whether you reveal or conceal your thoughts, God will call you to account for them...”—as well as Q 4:123—“... anyone who does wrong will be requited for it. . . .” ‘Ā’isha responds that she had asked the prophet about the meaning of these verses, and he had replied:

This is God’s reprimand of his slave, in that he is stricken with fever and misfortune, right down to the item that he puts in his shirt-sleeve which he loses and is alarmed about—until the slave is separated from his sins, just as the red ore issues forth from the bellows.¹⁰⁵

In this ḥadīth, a female figure seems to show independent interest in the meaning of two quranic verses that raise some complex theological-exegetical questions. For, if these verses are taken to mean that human beings will be called to account for every single thought on the Day of Judgment and punished accordingly, then this would seem to make entry into paradise virtually impossible. However, ‘Ā’isha’s response locates the accounting and requital which these verses speak of in this world; through enduring mundane difficulties, such as illness and loss, believers are purified of their sins.

“Umayya,” however, proves to be elusive. The *isnād* of this ḥadīth given by al-Tirmidhī is: ‘Abd b. Ḥamīd—al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā and Rawḥ b. ‘Ubāda—Ḥammād b. Salama—‘Alī b. Zayd—Umayya—‘Ā’isha. Tirmidhī grades this ḥadīth as *ḥasan gharīb*, and says he does not know of it except through Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783).¹⁰⁶ As this ḥadīth appears in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, one *isnād* has ‘Alī b. Zayd relating it from Umayya,¹⁰⁷ but according to another, he relates it from “his mother” (*ummihī*).¹⁰⁸ In addition, al-Ṭabarī relates this ḥadīth from “Āmina” in his *History*.¹⁰⁹

105 “*hādhihi mu’ātabat Allāh al-‘abd fī-mā yuṣībuhu min al-ḥummā wa-l-nakba ḥattā al-biḍā’a yaḍa’uhā fī yad qamiṣihī fa-yafqīduhā fa-yafza’u lahā ḥattā inna l-‘abd la-yakhruju min dhunūbihī kamā yakhruju l-tibr al-aḥmar min al-kūr*”; al-Tirmidhī 673 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

106 Al-Tirmidhī 673 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). For this ḥadīth, see also: al-Ṭayālīsī iii, 160; Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 244.

107 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* v, 362, *sub.* Q 4:123.

108 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* iii, 183-4, *sub.* Q 2:284.

109 Landau-Tasserón, *The history of al-Ṭabarī* xxxix, 280.

Whatever her (?) name might have been, this obscura seems to have been unknown to medieval biographers, except as the transmitter of this one ḥadīth.¹¹⁰ Al-Mizzī states that those who identify her as ‘Alī b. Zayd’s mother are mistaken, but that some say she was his step-mother Umayna, otherwise known as Umm Muḥammad.¹¹¹ Moreover, ‘Alī b. Zayd b. Jud‘ān (d. ca. 131/748) was widely held to have been a notably weak transmitter, with a poor memory.¹¹² It is likely impossible to determine whether “Umayya” was “originally” a historical person, a transmitter’s or copyist’s error, or an attempt at *isnād* extension or repair. Nonetheless, she gains a limited textual existence through her mention in the *isnād* of this ḥadīth in a few Quran commentaries. For instance, Ibn al-Mundhir has this ḥadīth on the authority of Umayya, as commentary on Q 2:284, as does Ibn Abī Ḥātim.¹¹³ However, many other Quran commentators opt to recount this ḥadīth without including the *isnād*, or specifying who it was who asked ‘Ā’isha about this verse.¹¹⁴

2.1 Women as Sources of Ḥadīths on Theological-Exegetical Topics

One theological-exegetical question that was seemingly associated with ‘Ā’isha early on is the interpretation of Q 3:7, as we have seen. The *tafsīr* chapters of al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī recount a ḥadīth attributed to her in which Muḥammad warns believers to beware of those who “eagerly pursue the ambiguities of it” (i.e. of the Quran).¹¹⁵

Ḥadīths attributed to ‘Ā’isha are cited in order to interpret several quranic verses that refer to Muḥammad’s revelatory experiences. Al-Bukhārī quotes no less than four versions of a tradition credited to her that recounts Muḥammad’s first revelatory experience as commentary on the first four verses of Sūrat

110 It is possible that this transmitter was not female. Ibn Sa’d has a brief entry for an Umayya b. ‘Abdallāh b. Khālid b. Usayd, a Meccan who is said to have recounted a few ḥadīths (*Ṭabaqāt* v, 567).

111 Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 132–133. Ibn Ḥajar identifies her as ‘Alī b. Zayd’s step-mother (*Tahdhīb* xii, 353).

112 While al-Tirmidhī reportedly classified ‘Alī b. Zayd as *ṣadūq* (sincere)—i.e. that his ḥadīths cannot be used as legal proofs unless they are corroborated—most traditionists and tradition critics seem to have regarded even this as overly favourable. Al-Nasā’ī for instance held that he is *ḍa’if* (weak); see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* v, 206–8; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, years 121–40 AH, 498–500.

113 Ibn al-Mundhir i, 95; Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 574.

114 E.g. al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashfī*, 483; similarly: al-Baghawī i, 207.

115 Al-Bukhārī vi, 53–4 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Tirmidhī 673 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

al-‘Alaḡ (S. 96, “The Clinging Form”).¹¹⁶ Al-Nasā’ī relates a ḥadīth ascribed to ‘Ā’isha in which the prophet describes his experience of revelation, “sometimes like the ringing of a bell . . . and sometimes as an angel in the form of a man, and he speaks to me, and I understand what he says.”¹¹⁷ Through a hierarchization tradition, ‘Ā’isha is also made to weigh in on the debate as to whether Muḥammad’s vision described in Q 53:11,18 involved a vision of God.¹¹⁸ While the version of this tradition cited by al-Tirmidhī is very similar to that quoted in the *Tafsīr ‘Abd al-Razzāq* discussed earlier,¹¹⁹ it lacks Ma‘mar’s concluding assertion that Ibn ‘Abbās knows more about this issue than ‘Ā’isha. Thus, it grants her the last word.¹²⁰

Al-Bukhārī quotes no less than three traditions on the controversy surrounding the interpretation of Q 12:110. One is similar in form and wording to the controversy tradition on this verse that appears in Ibn Wahb’s *Jāmi‘*; however, in the version recounted by al-Bukhārī, ‘Ā’isha champions the reading of “*kudhhibū*” and objects to “*kudhibū*,” the recitation proposed by ‘Urwa (and also the reading of Ḥaḡḡ).¹²¹ The same point about the verse’s recitation is made in a much briefer tradition, in which ‘Urwa relates that ‘Ā’isha sought refuge in God when he suggested that “perhaps they were misled.”¹²² In addition, a hierarchization tradition about Q 12:110 related on the authority of Ibn Abī Mulaika recounts that Ibn ‘Abbās justified his recitation of “*kudhibū*” by referring to Q 2:214.¹²³ But when Ibn Abī Mulaika related this to ‘Urwa, the latter reportedly responded by quoting ‘Ā’isha’s view of the question.¹²⁴ In a similar vein, al-Nasā’ī relates several traditions attributed to her denying that prophets doubt, or that Q 12:110 is open to such a reading,¹²⁵ and al-Ḥākim also cites one.¹²⁶

116 Al-Bukhārī vi, 450–5 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Versions of these traditions appear in al-Ṭabarī (*Jāmi‘* xxx, 276–7), and al-Tha‘labī (*al-Kashf* vi, 496–7).

117 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* i, 412, *sub.* Q 4:163—“We have sent revelation to you as We did to Noah and the prophets after him. . . .”

118 Al-Bukhārī vi, 359–60 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

119 See Chapter Three.

120 Al-Tirmidhī 745 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

121 Al-Bukhārī vi, 179–80 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); similarly, Ibn Abī Ḥātim vii, 2211.

122 “*la‘allahā kudhibū mukhaffafa*”; al-Bukhārī vi, 180 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

123 “. . . they were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, and they were so shaken that even [their] Messenger and the believers with him cried, ‘When will God’s help arrive? Truly God’s help is near’ (Q 2:214).

124 Al-Bukhārī vi, 37–8 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xiii, 99.

125 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* i, 606–7.

126 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1251 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 12:110.

A few other theological-exegetical ḥadīths are attributed to ʿĀʾisha on several topics, including the veracity of the controversial doctrine of the torture of the grave, a question linked in al-Ḥākim's *tafsīr* chapter to Q 20:124.¹²⁷ The question of whether virtuous pagans might achieve salvation is taken up in a ḥadīth cited by al-Ḥākim as commentary on Q 26:224ff.¹²⁸

By the time that al-Bukhārī composed his *tafsīr* chapter, ʿĀʾisha had already been associated with a small number of theological-exegetical questions—the interpretation of Q 3:7, Muḥammad's revelatory experiences and visions, whether prophets doubt—in both exegetical and ḥadīth discourses. Al-Bukhārī, and those who followed in his footsteps by compiling similar chapters, typically limited themselves to providing what they saw as more reliable versions of these well-known ḥadīths. However, they rarely made much attempt to highlight the existence of more ḥadīths ascribed to her on theological issues.

2.2 Women as Sources of Narrative

As has been observed in previous chapters, exegetical works conventionally dated to the formative period from the *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān* onward often contain significant amounts of narrative material intended to further elaborate upon the stories of prophets and other figures from sacred history. When the source of such materials is named, it is rarely attributed to any female authority. While it is possible that this simply reflects a lack of interest in such quranic stories on the part of early Muslim women, this seems unlikely. For example, some traditions present ʿĀʾisha and Ḥaḥṣa as having had knowledge of the story of Joseph, which for Ḥaḥṣa reportedly extended to an interest in a written retelling of the tale that she had obtained from one of the “People of the Book.”¹²⁹

But whatever the case, such interests rarely left any impression on formative period quranic exegesis, and this picture does not change appreciably in the *tafsīr* chapters under discussion here. In one periphrastic tradition, Umm al-Dardāʾ transmits from her husband that the prophet said that the “treasure” buried under the wall referred to in Q 18:82 was gold and silver.¹³⁰ Al-Ḥākim quotes very brief ḥadīths attributed to ʿĀʾisha and Umm Salama on the identity of persons mentioned in two different quranic verses,¹³¹ and one credited

127 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1292 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

128 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1322–3 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

129 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaḥ* xi, 110 (*K. al-Jāmiʿ*).

130 Al-Tirmidhī 713 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Ḥākim iv, 1276 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). It is found in al-Thaʿlabī (ve 132, fol. 877a).

131 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1379, 1398 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 44:37 and Q 50:12–13 respectively.

to Umm Hānī' on the "abomination" that Lot's people committed in their meetings.¹³²

As these examples illustrate, early Muslim women are seldom credited with narratives intended to expand upon quranic stories of the prophets *per se*. More typically, women are cited as sources of narratives that serve to connect quranic stories to events in the life of Muḥammad or his community. The retellings of the story of the accusation against 'Ā'isha, in which she references the story of Joseph, equating her patience in the face of adversity with that of Jacob, and those who doubted her with Jacob's perfidious sons¹³³ are a well-known example of this type of narrative. A ḥadīth attributed to her that recounts an incident in which Muḥammad overpowered the devil, and would have tied him up so that people might look at him had it not been for Solomon's prayer that God grant him powers that no one else has ever possessed (Q 38:35), is another.¹³⁴ The focus of narratives of this type is not on the interpretation of the quranic stories of the prophets *per se*, but on how they serve to prefigure, legitimate, or serve as models of conduct for Muḥammad and his followers.

Several events from the life of Muḥammad that are mentioned in the Quran receive further elaboration through ḥadīths ascribed to 'Ā'isha. In one tradition, she identifies the person that Muḥammad "frowned and turned away" from (Q 80:1–2) as the Companion, Ibn Umm Maktūm, and provides the background of the incident.¹³⁵ In another, she recounts how Muḥammad's followers attacked and were victorious over one of the Medinan Jewish tribes, the Banū Naḍīr.¹³⁶ In yet another, she identifies the battle referred to in Q 33:10—"When they came from above you and below you . . ."—as the Battle of the Ditch (5/627).¹³⁷ And in one ḥadīth, Asmā' bt. Abī Bakr describes Umm Jamīl's irate response to the revelation of Sūrat al-Masad (S. 111, "Palm Fibre"), due to its satirizing of Abū Lahab, the latter's husband.¹³⁸

Versions of most of these stories and anecdotes were evidently already in circulation among exegetes, but these were not being recounted on the authority of 'Ā'isha or other early Muslim women. That al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and

132 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1328 (*K. al-Taḥfīr*), *sub.* Q 29:29. Similarly, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xx, 157; Ibn Abī Ḥātim ix, 3054.

133 Al-Bukhārī vi, 177 (*K. al-Taḥfīr*), *sub.* Q 12:18. This tradition is related on the authority of her mother, Umm Rūmān.

134 Al-Nasā'ī, *Taḥfīr* ii, 220.

135 Al-Tirmidhī 760 (*Abwāb Taḥfīr*); al-Ḥākim iv, 1459 (*K. al-Taḥfīr*). Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxx, 56.

136 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1421 (*K. al-Taḥfīr*), *sub.* Q 59:1–2.

137 Al-Nasā'ī, *Taḥfīr* ii, 163. Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxi, 138.

138 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1267 (*K. al-Taḥfīr*), *sub.* Q 17:45.

al-Ḥākim called attention to the existence of versions attributed to women appears to be primarily due to their focus on *isnāds* that did not stop at the Successor stage. Nonetheless, their overall lack of interest in relating stories on women's authority mirrors that of the Quran commentators of the time. The main exception is stories told about several incidents referred to in various quranic verses that involve Muḥammad's wives.

2.3 Women as Sources of Theo-Political Traditions

Al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter contains a number of traditions with theo-political themes. 'Ā'isha is credited with some theo-political traditions, a couple of which cast the family of Abū Bakr in a favourable light: one describes Abū Bakr's pious apprehension about making oaths,¹³⁹ while another (also recounted by al-Nasā'ī) which recounts Muḥammad's final words, places her at his side during his last moments on earth.¹⁴⁰

The *tafsīr* chapters of al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim respectively present and evaluate a number of theo-political exegetical traditions, including a small number that are credited to women. A tersely worded ḥadīth attributed to 'Ā'isha which depicts Muḥammad in a hut, apparently protected by bodyguards, at the revelation of Q 5:67—"God will protect you from the people"—is classified as *gharīb* (i.e. that there is only one transmitter at some stage in the *isnād*) by al-Tirmidhī.¹⁴¹ However, al-Ḥākim presents a version of its *isnād* (that also goes back to 'Ā'isha) which he grades as *ṣaḥīḥ*.¹⁴² This is one of the quranic verses that became a well-known locus for theo-political exegesis. Shi'ī exegetes in the formative period interpreted Q 5:67 as referring to Muḥammad's obligation to publicly proclaim that 'Alī will succeed him.¹⁴³

The sole ḥadīth that al-Ḥākim elects to cite for Sūra Quraysh (S. 106) recounts on the authority of Umm Hānī' that Muḥammad listed seven ways that God had favoured the Quraysh over all others.¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, in another ḥadīth, the audience/reader is reminded that not all members of Muḥammad's

139 Al-Bukhārī vi, 109–10 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Similarly, Ibn Abī Ḥātim iv, 190.

140 Al-Bukhārī vi, 90–1 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 392. Similarly, Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 997. For the various political uses to which this tradition has been put, see: Spellberg, *Politics* 38–9.

141 Al-Tirmidhī 686 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); Ibn Abī Ḥātim iv, 1173–4. Al-Ṭabarī has this tradition, with the same *isnād*, except for the most recent guarantor (*Jāmi'* vi, 379). Al-Tha'labī has a version (*al-Kashf* ii, 477), and al-Māturīdī has yet another (*Ta'wīlāt* iii, 558).

142 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1206 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

143 Al-Qummī i, 199ff; Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd b. Ayyāsh al-Sulamī al-Samarqandī al-ma'rūf bi-l-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* i, 360–3.

144 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1487 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 106. Similarly, al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 554.

clan had been quick to accept his message. Umm Hānīṣ recounts that the permission given to Muḥammad in Q 33:50 to marry his female cousins who had made the *hijra* did not make marriage to her permissible for him, as she was among the *ṭulaqāʾ*, i.e. those Meccans who had converted only after the conquest of their city. While al-Ḥākim deems its *isnād ṣaḥīḥ*,¹⁴⁵ al-Tirmidhī classifies this tradition as *ḥasan*.¹⁴⁶ In explanation of Q 26:214—“Warn your nearest kinsfolk”—both al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasāʾī quote a tradition attributed to ʿĀʾisha, which relates that Muḥammad publicly proclaimed that he has no power to protect his clan from divine wrath, not even his daughter Fāṭima.¹⁴⁷

Al-Ḥākim includes a ḥadīth in praise of the Companions, as a comment on Q 48:29—“... that he may enrage the disbelievers at the sight of them...” ʿĀʾisha identifies the believers spoken of in this verse as the Companions, and laments that some curse them.¹⁴⁸ He also includes a tradition praising Abū Bakr and al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām, also attributed to ʿĀʾisha.¹⁴⁹ Only al-Ḥākim sees fit to include a version of the widely circulated ḥadīth attributed to Umm Salama identifying the “People of the House” (*aḥl al-bayt*) mentioned in Q 33:33—“God wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, People of the House”—as ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. This ḥadīth recounts that Q 33:33 was revealed to the prophet in her dwelling, and that he summoned these four persons, and then supplicated, “O God, these are the people of my house!” But when she inquired if she too is not among the People of the House, he responded that she is not, although she is among the people of goodness.¹⁵⁰

As this latter ḥadīth indicates, the question of what religious status Muḥammad’s wives held, and how this related to the theological position

145 Al-Ḥākim 1341–2 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

146 Al-Tirmidhī 730 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). Al-Ṭabarī has this tradition (*Jāmiʿ* xxii, 24). It is also cited by al-Thaʿlabī (*al-Kashf* v, 121), and reportedly, by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 628).

147 Al-Tirmidhī 723 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasāʾī, *Tafsīr* ii, 137. Al-Ṭabarī quotes a version of it (*Jāmiʿ* xix, 126).

148 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1394 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). The ritual cursing of various Companions was not only practiced by Shīʿis, but also to some extent by the Umayyads, who cursed ʿAlī.

149 Al-Ḥākim iii, 1186 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 3:172. Similarly, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* iv, 215; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 190.

150 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1336 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). While al-Tirmidhī does note the existence of a tradition in the same vein that is attributed to Umm Salama, the focus of his comments on such traditions in the context of *tafsīr* is to highlight the dubious authenticity of some of them; see: al-Tirmidhī 728 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). Al-Ṭabarī has a tradition similar to that found in al-Ḥākim, on the authority of Umm Salama (*Jāmiʿ* xx, 10); for yet more versions, see: al-Māturīdī viii, 382; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 108–9. Ibn Abī Ḥātim is said to have related a version (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 603).

(and hence, political claims) attributed by some to the *ahl al-bayt* was a contentious theo-political issue. Moreover, certain quranic verses that discuss Muḥammad's wives also became the focus of sectarian or theological disputes. The *tafsīr* chapters of al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, and al-Nasā'ī (though not al-Ḥākim) cite a number of ḥadīths attributed to 'Ā'isha in explanation of several quranic verses pertaining directly to these women: the Verse of the Choice (Q 33:28–29),¹⁵¹ the verse discussing his controversial marriage to Zaynab bt. Jahsh (Q 33:37),¹⁵² verses listing the categories of women that Muḥammad is permitted to marry (Q 33:50, 52),¹⁵³ as well as one transmitted from 'Ā'isha by Mu'ādh al-Adawīyya regarding his allocation of time to his wives (Q 33:51),¹⁵⁴ the directive that male visitors to the prophet address his wives from behind a screen (Q 33:53),¹⁵⁵ and a reference to a conflict between Muḥammad and two of his wives (Q 66:1).¹⁵⁶

It is interesting that in these three *tafsīr* chapters, as in Sunni Quran commentaries of the time, it is 'Ā'isha alone of all of the Mothers of the Believers who is given a voice on these matters, even though one would presume that many if not most of Muḥammad's other wives would have been just as capable of recounting the circumstances surrounding the revelation of these verses. Some of these ḥadīths have the effect of enhancing 'Ā'isha's image as an authoritative and insightful source, particularly those in which she connects the controversy over the prophet's marriage to Zaynab to the theological question of whether he would have concealed any part of the revelation. The intended

151 Al-Bukhārī vi, 292–4 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Tirmidhī 728 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxi, 170; al-Māturīdī viii, 375; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 104.

152 Al-Tirmidhī 728–9 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). This tradition is also cited in: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxii, 17; al-Māturīdī viii, 392; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 115. Al-Nasā'ī quotes a different tradition on 'Ā'isha's authority for this verse (*Tafsīr* ii, 175–7). Q 33:37 declares that Muḥammad is now married to the ex-wife of Zayd b. Ḥāritha, who was his adopted son. This marriage caused a great deal of controversy; see: Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an* 87–9.

153 Al-Tirmidhī 730 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 183. This tradition is cited in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxii, 36; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 125. Al-Māturīdī quotes this tradition as evidence against a Mu'tazilī interpretation of Q 66:5 (*Ta'wīlāt* x, 85).

154 Al-Bukhārī vi, 295–6 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 182. This tradition is cited in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxii, 29; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 123. Ibn Abī Ḥātim reportedly cited it (Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 634).

155 Al-Bukhārī vi, 300–1 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). This tradition is cited by al-Ṭabarī (*Jāmi'* xxii, 44–5) and al-Tha'labī (*al-Kashf* v, 128). Al-Nasā'ī relates a different tradition (also on 'Ā'isha's authority) for this verse (*Tafsīr* ii, 188–9); Ibn Abī Ḥātim is also said to have related it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 640–1).

156 Al-Bukhārī vi, 404–5 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

target appears to be Shi'ī claims that esoteric knowledge was transmitted from Muḥammad to a chosen few among his relatives.

However, the tradition related by al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā'ī in which 'Ā'isha recounts that when Q 33:51 was revealed, she said, "O Messenger of God, I see that your Lord hastens to fulfill your desire" appears to convey a more ambiguous message. While this tradition seems to have been well known in third/ninth and fourth/tenth century exegetical circles (and widely cited in the course of exegeses of this verse), ḥadīths with the theme of 'Ā'isha's "jealousy" of her co-wives was used by some Shi'ī exegetes to condemn her as impious.¹⁵⁷ This tradition also belongs to a subset of traditions circulated by proto-Sunnis that present Muḥammad's wives as "jealous" and engaged in petty rivalries as part of a larger admonitory discourse on the supposedly flawed "nature" of womankind in general.¹⁵⁸

2.4 *Women as Sources of Legal Materials*

The ḥadīths adduced by al-Bukhārī that deal with legal issues and are attributed to or transmitted by women take the form of occasion-of-revelation traditions, as well as short accounts of the first generation's responses to various quranic directives, and brief explanations of the practical meaning of several legal verses. To a significant extent, this is also true of the *tafsīr* chapter of al-Nasā'ī. However, al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim evidently did not opt to follow al-Bukhārī's example in this respect, as their *tafsīr* chapters do not contain many ḥadīths credited to women on legal matters.

In al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter (and following him, that of al-Nasā'ī), 'Ā'isha is presented as an authoritative source of knowledge on the "historical" background and correct practice of several rituals mentioned in the Quran. She recounts traditions about the fast of 'Āshūrā',¹⁵⁹ raising one's voice during supplications (*du'ā'*),¹⁶⁰ the revelation of the purificatory practice of *tayammum* (Q 4:43, 5:6),¹⁶¹ the building of the Ka'ba (Q 2:127),¹⁶² as well as the *Ḥajj* rite

157 E.g. al-Qummī ii, 195.

158 For a discussion of this feature of the ḥadīth literature, see: Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 108ff.

159 Al-Bukhārī vi, 24–25 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 215–16. Both al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā'ī give two versions of this tradition.

160 Al-Bukhārī vi, 208 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 672. See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xv, 203–4. For a different interpretation, also attributed to 'Ā'isha, see: al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 89.

161 Al-Bukhārī vi, 88–9, 103–5 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 385–386. Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 136–8; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 293.

162 Al-Bukhārī vi, 12–13 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 186.

of the pilgrims' standing at Mount 'Arafa (Q 2:199).¹⁶³ The "historical" backdrop that these traditions sketch functions primarily as salvation history; they recount the divine guidance received by the fledgling community of believers, and its gradual differentiation in ritual terms from the practices of the Arab pagans.

Al-Bukhārī's repetition of several of these traditions highlights this. For Q 2:183—"You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God"—he adduces four traditions, two of which are credited to 'Ā'isha, that relate that the fast originally observed by the community was on the day of 'Āshūrā'.¹⁶⁴ While two of these traditions leave the question of where the practice of fasting on 'Āshūrā' originated unclear,¹⁶⁵ the first and the last attribute it to Arab pagan custom. The penultimate tradition is particularly emphatic: 'Ā'isha relates that the Quraysh used to fast on that day, and Muḥammad did so as well, so when he came to Medina, he instructed the community to do likewise. However, once the verses regarding the fast of Ramaḍān were revealed, the fast of 'Āshūrā' became supererogatory. Through this citation of traditions, the command to fast Ramaḍān in Q 2:183 also becomes a reminder of the divine guidance that the community has been favoured with.

Significantly, all four *tafsīr* chapters include a version of the well-known tradition attributed to 'Ā'isha on the controversy about the status of one of the rites of the Ḥajj—the pilgrims' running between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa (the *sa'y*), mentioned in Q 2:158.¹⁶⁶ The versions given in al-Bukhārī, al-Nasā'ī and al-Tirmidhī¹⁶⁷ take the form of hierarchization traditions: on the basis of Q 2:158, 'Ā'isha's nephew 'Urwa argues that pilgrims are not obligated to

163 Al-Bukhārī vi, 35 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 246–7. Similarly: al-Māturīdī ii, 95; Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 354.

164 Al-Bukhārī vi, 24–25 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

165 The context suggests that "those before you" refers to Jews and Christians. Al-Ṭabarī relates this interpretation (*Jāmi'* ii, 159). 'Āshūrā', now regarded by Sunnis as a voluntary fast day observed on the 10th day of Muḥarram in the Muslim *hijrī* calendar, has its origins in the Jewish fast on the Day of Atonement; see: Goitein, *Studies in Islamic* 94ff.

166 "Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God, so for those who make major or minor pilgrimage to the House [i.e. the Ka'ba], it is no offence to circulate between the two."

167 Al-Bukhārī vi, 19–20 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 199; al-Tirmidhī 667 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). Al-Bukhārī has another version of this tradition as well, cited as commentary under Q 53:20; see: al-Bukhārī vi, 362–3 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). For al-Ḥākim's version, see: *al-Mustadrak* iii, 1151 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). For other versions, see: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 63–4; Ibn Abī Ḥātim i, 266–7; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* i, 222–3. Al-Māturīdī notes that 'Ā'isha is credited with this view (*Ta'wīlāt* i, 606).

perform the *sa'y*. However, arguing on the basis of the linguistic structure of the verse, as well as its occasion-of-revelation, 'Ā'isha demonstrates that his view is mistaken. In this way, she is presented as a ritual and exegetical authority.

A couple of traditions in the *tafsīr* chapters of al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā'ī address economic issues. For Q 4:6, a verse that regulates a guardian's management of an orphan's inheritance, al-Bukhārī quotes a tradition credited to 'Ā'isha.¹⁶⁸ No less than four versions of the same tradition attributed to 'Ā'isha are cited by al-Bukhārī in explanation of Q 2:275–6, 2:279–80 (al-Nasā'ī limits himself to only two).¹⁶⁹ These verses prohibit usury (*ribā*), and Q 2:275 emphasizes its forbidden nature, in contrast to trade. The tradition ascribed to 'Ā'isha, however, asserts that when these verses were revealed, Muḥammad recited them publicly and announced a ban on trading in wine. By deploying traditions in this way, the legal material in the quranic text is extended to cover an increasing number of legal problems.¹⁷⁰ Another legal issue, what constitutes the “unintentional oaths” referred to in Q 5:89, is addressed in a tradition credited to 'Ā'isha by both al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā'ī.¹⁷¹

A number of traditions attributed to women in al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter address various overtly gendered legal-exegetical issues, some of which have already been seen in exegetical works conventionally dated to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries surveyed in Chapter Two. Some of these traditions address various aspects of marriage and divorce. Al-Bukhārī, along with al-Nasā'ī, includes an occasion-of-revelation tradition attributed to 'Ā'isha for Q 4:127 (a verse referring to the marriage of female orphans),¹⁷² as well as for Q 4:128—“If a wife fears highhandedness or alienation from her husband. . . .” According to this tradition credited to 'Ā'isha, this latter verse pertains to a situation in which a woman has been married to a man for a long time, and in order to dissuade her husband from his intention to divorce her,

168 Al-Bukhārī vi, 81 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Al-Ṭabarī has a version of this (*Jāmi'* iv, 315); see also: Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 867; similarly, al-Māturīdī iii, 26–7. Al-Tha'labī refers to her ruling on this, without citing any tradition (*al-Kashf* ii, 239).

169 Al-Bukhārī vi, 49–50 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 288–9.

170 While the Quran bans wine drinking (i.e. Q 5:90–1), it says nothing about buying or selling it. However, this issue is taken up in detail in the ḥadīth literature; see: Kueny, *The rhetoric of sobriety* 25ff.

171 Al-Bukhārī vi, 109 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 444. Similarly: al-Māturīdī iii, 580; Ibn Abī Ḥātim iv, 1189. Al-Ṭabarī has a few related traditions credited to her on this issue (*Jāmi'* ix, 19).

172 Al-Bukhārī vi, 79–80, 98–9 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 407. Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 369; al-Māturīdī iii, 375; Ibn Abī Ḥātim iv, 1077.

she offers to waive the rights due to her as a wife.¹⁷³ Umm Salama is referred to as the final authority in a conflict arbitration tradition¹⁷⁴ about the duration of the *’idda* for a pregnant widow,¹⁷⁵ while al-Nasā’ī relates a ḥadīth from al-Furay’a bt. Mālīk about where a widow spends her *’idda*.¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, in al-Ḥākim’s *tafsīr* chapter the ḥadīths credited to women on marriage and divorce address a different set of topics: fixed-term (*mut’a*) marriage,¹⁷⁷ and the occasion-of-revelation of Q 58:1–4, which bans the pre-Islamic practice of *ẓihār*.¹⁷⁸ A legal dictum stating that “no divorce is possible before marriage and no freeing a slave before purchase” is related by several Companions, including ‘Ā’isha, who transmit it from Muḥammad.¹⁷⁹

A tradition related by Ṣafīyya bt. Shayba in which ‘Ā’isha praises early Muslim women for their prompt response to the revelation of Q 24:31—they tore their wraps (*izārs*) and veiled themselves with them¹⁸⁰—is cited by al-Bukhārī, al-Nasā’ī and al-Ḥākim.¹⁸¹ Further augmenting ‘Ā’isha’s image as a source of

173 Al-Bukhārī vi, 99 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā’ī i, 408–9. Several versions are found in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* v, 375–6; see also: al-Māturīdī iii, 377; Ibn Abī Ḥātim iv, 1079.

174 In this category of traditions, two or more men, typically male Companions or Successors, differ about an issue (often a legal point), and cannot agree. Finally, the matter is referred to a woman (most often, to ‘Ā’isha or Umm Salama, or sometimes both), and she/they decisively resolve(s) it.

175 Al-Bukhārī vi, 402–3 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 65:4

176 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* i, 262–3, *sub.* Q 2:234

177 Al-Ḥākim iii, 1196; iv, 1308 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 4:24. *Mut’a* (lit. “pleasure”) is a practice of pre-Islamic origin in which a man marries a woman for a specified period of time for the purpose of sexual pleasure, in exchange for a previously agreed-upon sum or item of value. For an overview of Twelver Shi’i ḥadīth as well as legal and exegetical discourses on *mut’a*, see: Gribetz, *Strange bedfellows*, esp. 48–60; 78–105; 130–46. It should be noted that in practice, fixed-term marriage has taken a variety of forms and served a range of purposes, not all of them sexual; see: Haeri, *Law of desire*, esp. 78ff.

178 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1418–9 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxviii, 8–9.

179 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1340 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 33:49.

180 Al-Bukhārī recounts two versions of this tradition; the first (which is not transmitted through Ṣafīyya) relates that the women tore their “shawls” (*murūt*). The wording of these traditions is rather obscure; for a late medieval attempt to explain how tearing garments would result in more complete coverage, see: Clarke, *Ḥijāb* 228.

181 Al-Bukhārī vi, 267 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 121; al-Ḥākim iv, 1313 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xviii, 143–4; al-Māturīdī vii, 549; al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 367–8. For other versions, see: Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2575.

information related to free women's "modest" comportment, al-Bukhārī also includes a ḥadīth credited to her about allowing a male milk-relative to visit.¹⁸²

Al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim cite ḥadīths attributed to several different women—‘Ā’isha,¹⁸³ Umm ‘Aṭīyya,¹⁸⁴ Umm Salama al-Anṣāriyya,¹⁸⁵ and Fāṭima bt. ‘Utba¹⁸⁶ as commentary on Q 60:12, which discusses the pledge of allegiance (*bay‘a*) given by women who migrated to Medina. These ḥadīths illustrate the widespread tendency to employ the topic of women's *bay‘a* as an occasion to define the "acceptable" parameters of (free) women's conduct ever more narrowly.¹⁸⁷ The tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha asserts that when women gave allegiance, Muḥammad's hand never touched theirs—although it also implies that a handshake was the generally accepted way of sealing such a pledge.¹⁸⁸ The tradition credited to Umm ‘Aṭīyya and Umm Salama al-Anṣāriyya recount that the stipulation in Q 60:12 that Muḥammad is to be obeyed in "what is generally accepted as reasonable (*bi l-ma‘rūf*)" means that women are not to take part in the traditional lamentations for the dead.¹⁸⁹ The tradition ascribed to Fāṭima clarifies that the reference in the pledge to not stealing does not forbid a wife from taking perishable foods from her husband's stores as needed.

Finally, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā’ī and al-Ḥākim relate similar occasion-of-revelation traditions for Q 33:35. Al-Tirmidhī recounts that Umm ‘Umāra al-Anṣāriyya

182 Al-Bukhārī vi, 301–2 (*K. al-Taḥṣīn*), sub. Q 33:54–5. In Q 4:23, a man is forbidden to marry any woman who has breastfed him, or any daughter of hers. Ḥadīths such as this one further elaborate upon the scope and implications of this prohibition.

183 Al-Bukhārī vi, 385–6 (*K. al-Taḥṣīn*); al-Tirmidhī 752 (*Abwāb Taḥṣīn*). Similarly: al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 173

184 Al-Bukhārī vi, 386–7 (*K. al-Taḥṣīn*). Al-Ṭabarī has it (*Jāmi‘* xxviii, 89)

185 Al-Tirmidhī 752 (*Abwāb Taḥṣīn*). Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xxviii, 89; Ibn Abī Ḥatīm cited it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* viii, 141).

186 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1424 (*K. al-Taḥṣīn*)

187 Traditions about early Muslim women giving *bay‘a* often specify that they accepted additional strictures above and beyond those given in Q 60:12, such as not traveling without a male escort, avoiding being alone with a man who is not a close relative, and especially, not lamenting their dead; see: Stowasser, *The status of women* 34; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 5–9; al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* viii, 139–44.

188 Al-Bukhārī's version has ‘Ā’isha herself state this, while in al-Tirmidhī, it is an addition made by the sub-narrator, Ma‘mar b. Rāshid. It is noteworthy that handshakes between male and female ascetics were also a matter of controversy for some late antique Christian leaders, who directed them to wrap their hands in their cloaks first; see: Salisburly, *Church Fathers* 16. In a similar vein, it is related that "[w]hen the prophet received the women's allegiance, a garment covered his hand" (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 3).

189 Al-Bukhārī vi, 386–7 (*K. al-Taḥṣīn*); al-Tirmidhī 752 (*Abwāb Taḥṣīn*).

said to Muḥammad, “I see that everything is for the men, and I don’t see the women mentioned in anything.”¹⁹⁰ Then, Q 33:35—“For men and women who are devoted to God, for believing men and women . . .” was revealed. However, another tradition that he cites quotes Mujāhid as stating that Q 33:35 was revealed about Muḥammad’s wife Umm Salama.¹⁹¹ For their part, al-Nasā’ī and al-Ḥākim relate that the descent of this verse followed a query posed to Muḥammad by Umm Salama, who asked him why men are mentioned in the Quran while women are not.¹⁹² Interestingly, al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim also quote noticeably similar occasion-of-revelation traditions for Q 3:195 as well as for Q 4:32, which are also said to have been revealed to Muḥammad after Umm Salama posed similar questions.¹⁹³ Al-Ḥākim grades these three traditions that he cites as *ṣaḥīḥ*, although he expresses some reservation in the case of the occasion-of-revelation tradition for Q 4:32.¹⁹⁴ Al-Tirmidhī seems dubious about the reliability of any of these traditions. He grades the Umm ‘Umāra tradition as *ḥasan-gharīb*, and notes the similarity between the occasion-of-revelation traditions about Q 4:32 and 3:195, stating that the latter tradition is *mursal*.¹⁹⁵ This is a particularly fascinating example of the quotation of traditions by ḥadīth compilers in their *tafsīr* chapters in response to their already-established presence in Quran commentaries. These traditions raise complex historical and interpretive questions.¹⁹⁶

Many of these ḥadīths attributed to women on legal-exegetical issues were also being cited in third/ninth and fourth/tenth century exegetical discourses. The ḥadīth about the *sa’y* credited to ‘Ā’isha is a good example of a tradition that is well known to jurists—the version given in al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā’ī is related on the authority of Mālik¹⁹⁷—as well as to traditionists and exegetes. Widely circulated ḥadīths such as this seem to have gained entry to exegetical discourses fairly early on, in part because they were already a fixture in legal discourses.

190 “*mā arā kulla shay’in illā li-l-rijāl wa-mā arā l-nisā’ yudhkarna bi-shay’*”.

191 Al-Tirmidhī 729, 679 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

192 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 169, 173; al-Ḥākim iv, 1336 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

193 Al-Tirmidhī 679–80 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Ḥākim iii, 1197, 1189 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

194 Al-Ḥākim iii, 1189, 1197; iv, 1336–7 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

195 Al-Tirmidhī 729, 679–80 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*).

196 See Chapter Five for more on this issue.

197 This tradition appears in Mālik’s *Muwatta’*; see: *Muwatta’* 351–2 (*K. al-Ḥajj*).

2.5 *Women as Sources of Eschatological and Pietistic Traditions*

The coming resurrection and Day of Judgment are among the major themes of the Quran, and some of its most vivid imagery is used to describe them. In Quran commentaries from the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century that cite ḥadīths in significant numbers, as well as in these four *tafsīr* chapters, these events are not only presented as one of a number of theological tenets that a Muslim must assent to, but also as part of an admonitory discourse that is intended to appeal to the emotions of believers.

A ḥadīth related on the authority of Umm Ḥabība from Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh recounts that Muḥammad woke up from sleep and warned that the coming of Gog and Magog is imminent.¹⁹⁸ The horrors of the end of the world and the Day of Judgment are described in several ḥadīths. The Quran speaks of the end of the world as that day when “the earth is turned into another earth” (Q 14:48) and “the whole earth will be in [God’s] grip” (Q 39:67). ‘Ā’isha relates that when she asked the prophet where humans will be at that time, he answered that they will be on the bridge over hell.¹⁹⁹ Human beings will be resurrected barefoot, naked and uncircumcised; when ‘Ā’isha (or according to al-Ḥākīm’s version, Sawda) asks if men and women won’t be looking at one another, Muḥammad responds that people will be far too preoccupied for that.²⁰⁰ According to another ḥadīth already discussed in Chapter Two, the “easy reckoning” of deeds mentioned in Q 84:8 will nonetheless lead to the damnation of anyone whose record God examines.²⁰¹ On that day, one’s lineage will not count, as God will only look at the individual’s piety, as a ḥadīth transmitted by Umm Salama bt. al-‘Alā’ asserts.²⁰²

A number of these as well as other traditions attributed to women on eschatological topics are to be found in some third/ninth and fourth/tenth century Quran commentaries. Some, such as the one in which ‘Ā’isha questions the prophet about the “easy reckoning,” are well-known and widely circulated ḥadīths. In some instances, women’s appearance as transmitters of these ḥadīths appears to be the result of *isnād* extension or repair, such as the ḥadīth in which ‘Ā’isha relates Muḥammad’s response to her asking where human beings will be when “the whole earth will be in [God’s] grip” (Q 39:67). While

198 Al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 23–4 (*sub.* Q 17:95) and 72 (*sub.* Q 21:96).

199 Al-Ḥākīm iv, 1256, 1361 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 240. Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xxiv, 32.

200 al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 6 (*sub.* 18:47); Al-Ḥākīm iv, 1460 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 80:34–7.

201 Al-Bukhārī vi, 435 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Tirmidhī 761 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasā’ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 461–2, 507.

202 Al-Ḥākīm iv, 1397 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 49:11.

al-Ṭabarī and others (as well as al-Nasā'ī and al-Ḥākim) related this ḥadīth on her authority, some versions recount that she asked the prophet this question, but their *isnāds* do not extend back to her.²⁰³

A few traditions offer the audience/reader glimpses of Paradise and Hell. In one ḥadīth, 'Ā'isha describes the punishments in Hell undergone by 'Amr b. Luḥayy, who had reportedly instituted the custom of dedicating domestic animals to pagan Arabian deities and then letting them go free.²⁰⁴ Another interprets the "*kawthar*" (Q 108:1) that is promised to Muḥammad as a river in Paradise.²⁰⁵ A ḥadīth attributed to Umm al-'Alā' al-Anṣāriyya about the death of a Companion well known for his piety stresses the impossibility of knowing what any person's destination in the Afterlife will be.²⁰⁶ This point is also made in a ḥadīth credited to Umm Mubashshir, which recounts that the prophet said that "God willing," those Companions who pledged allegiance under the tree (i.e. at Hudaybiyya) will not enter Hell.²⁰⁷ This attitude that believers should adopt in the face of such uncertainty is summed up on a ḥadīth attributed to 'Ā'isha, in which she relates that she asked the prophet if the people referred to in Q 23:60—"Those who give what they give with fearful hearts . . ."—are those who commit sins, such as theft and wine drinking. He responded that this verse is speaking of those who fast, pray and give in charity, while fearing that God might not accept such acts of worship.²⁰⁸ As we saw in previous chapters, a variant reading of Q 23:60 credited to 'Ā'isha is in circulation by the end of the second/eighth century; third/ninth and fourth/tenth century exegetes often continue to quote either a variant reading attributed to her, a version of this ḥadīth, or sometimes both when discussing this verse.

203 E.g. al-Tirmidhī 705 (*Abwāb Tafṣīr*). Al-Tirmidhī does note the existence of other "complete" *isnāds* that go back to 'Ā'isha. This tradition also is found in Ibn Wahb, see: *al-Ġāmi'* (1993), fol. 5b, 23–4, fol. 6a, 1–6. The lower part of the *isnād* in Ibn Wahb's version of this ḥadīth is missing due to manuscript damage, making it impossible to tell if it is in fact related on 'Ā'isha's authority. While Murānyi has vocalized *s't* as *sa'altu* (I asked), thus presenting 'Ā'isha as the putative narrator, *sa'alat* (she asked) would better accord with the third-person pronouns used throughout the remainder of this ḥadīth.

204 Al-Bukhārī vi, 116 (*K. al-Tafṣīr*).

205 Al-Bukhārī vi, 462 (*K. al-Tafṣīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafṣīr* ii, 558–9.

206 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1385–6 (*K. al-Tafṣīr*), *sub.* Q 46:9. Similarly: al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 451–2.

207 Al-Nasā'ī, *Tafṣīr* ii, 36, *sub.* Q 19:72. This is also a theo-political ḥadīth, as it implies praise for a number of prominent Companions.

208 Al-Tirmidhī 718–19 (*Abwāb Tafṣīr*); al-Ḥākim iv, 1308 (*K. al-Tafṣīr*). Similarly: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 40; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 329. Ibn Abī Ḥātim reportedly cited it (al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 105).

These chapters also contain a small number of pietistic ḥadīths attributed to early Muslim women. According to a periphrastic tradition credited to ʿĀ'isha already encountered in Chapter Two that comments on Q 2:204, Muḥammad said that the person most disliked by God is he who is most quarrelsome.²⁰⁹ However, the focus of most ḥadīths with pietistic themes ascribed to women is on the prophet as an exemplar. His exalted character, his night prayers,²¹⁰ his pious apprehension during unsettled weather,²¹¹ his preference for the Hereafter over this world,²¹² and his supplications during *ṣalāt*²¹³ are all linked to various quranic verses.

Some traditions of this type connect short, well-known quranic sūras with the portrayal of Muḥammad as a model of devotion to be emulated by believers through the act of supplication. In a tradition ascribed to ʿĀ'isha, Muḥammad looks at the moon and says, “O ʿĀ'isha, seek refuge in God from the evil of this; surely this is *the harm in the night when darkness gathers*” (*al-ghāsiqⁱⁿ idhā waqab*—Q 113:3).²¹⁴ And in another, quoted by al-Nasā'ī as commentary on Sūrat al-Qadr (S. 97, “The Night of Glory”), he gives her a supplication to recite on Laylat al-Qadr.²¹⁵ Versions of these and other ḥadīths attributed to early Muslim women with pietistic themes appear in some third/ninth and fourth/tenth century *tafsīr* works.

2.6 Women as Sources of Variant Readings

The *tafsīr* chapters of al-Bukhārī, al-Nasā'ī and al-Tirmidhī contain a few variant readings attributed to women, many of which are already familiar to us from Chapters Two and Three. Al-Bukhārī credits ʿĀ'isha with a variant reading of Q 24:15, and (along with al-Nasā'ī) of Q 12:110.²¹⁶ Al-Tirmidhī credits a variant reading of Q 39:53 to Asmā' bt. Yazīd.²¹⁷

209 Al-Bukhārī vi, 37 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Tirmidhī 669 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 251.

210 Al-Bukhārī vi, 344–5 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 48:2. See also: al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 471 (*sub.* Q 73:2), and al-Ḥākim iv, 1447 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 73:1.

211 Al-Bukhārī vi, 339–40 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Tirmidhī 741 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 292–3; al-Ḥākim iv, 1387 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 46:24.

212 Al-Bukhārī vi, 90–1 (*K. al-Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 4:69.

213 Al-Bukhārī vi, 464 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 564–5 (*sub.* Q 110:3). See also: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxx, 378.

214 Al-Tirmidhī 768 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*), *sub.* Q 113:3. Al-Ṭabarī cites it (*Jāmi'* xxx, 398). Al-Tha'labī has a version of it (*al-Kashf* vi, 602–3).

215 Al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* ii, 538–9. Similarly, al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 508; note also the saying he attributes to ʿĀ'isha immediately following this ḥadīth.

216 Al-Bukhārī vi, 179–80 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 606.

217 Al-Tirmidhī 736 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*). Similarly: al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* v, 312.

An interesting development in a couple of these *tafsīr* chapters is the appearance of a few traditions about variant readings that are said to have been written in a codex belonging to a woman. Both al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī include a tradition relating that 'Ā'isha instructed a man who was copying a *muṣḥaf* for her to write in a variant version of Q 2:238 that departs from the consonantal skeleton of the 'Uthmānic recension with its addition of a few words that were apparently intended to “clarify” the meaning of the verse:

... Mālik—Zayd b. Aslam—al-Qa'qā' b. Ḥakīm, from Abū Yūnus, a client of 'Ā'isha, (who) said, “'Ā'isha instructed me to write a *muṣḥaf* for her. She said, ‘When you reach this verse, *Take care to do your prayers, including the middle prayer* . . . (Q 2:238), inform me.’ So when I reached it, I informed her, and she dictated to me, ‘*Take care to do your prayers, including the middle prayer, and the 'aṣr prayer, and stand before God in devotion.*’ And she said, ‘I heard this from the Messenger of God.’²¹⁸

Which prayer is meant by the phrase “the middle prayer” is unclear, and its identity is much debated in legal²¹⁹ as well as exegetical works from the formative period. In this tradition about 'Ā'isha's codex, the addition of the words, “and the 'aṣr prayer” (*wa-ṣalāt al-'aṣr*) eliminate the 'aṣr (mid-afternoon) prayer as a possible contender.

Al-Ṭabarī's Quran commentary indicates that by the third/ninth century, there were a considerable number of traditions in circulation identifying “the middle prayer” as the *ṣubḥ* (dawn) prayer, the *zuhr* (noon) prayer, the 'aṣr prayer, and the *maghrib* (evening) prayer—in addition to those asserting that its identity is unknown.²²⁰ Among those he cites are no less than fourteen traditions purporting to recount how Q 2:238 was written in the codices of Ḥafṣa, 'Ā'isha, or Umm Salama respectively—and they do not agree as to its wording.²²¹ By including this codex tradition which he grades as *ḥasan-ṣaḥīḥ* in his *tafsīr* chapter (as well as noting the existence of a similar tradition about Ḥafṣa's codex), al-Tirmidhī apparently sought to highlight what he deemed to be a

218 Al-Tirmidhī 671 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasā'ī, *Tafsīr* i, 269–70.

219 E.g. Mālik, *Muwattā'* 140–1 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*); al-Shaybānī, *Muwattā'* 424–5 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* i, 578–9 (*K. al-Ṣalāt*).

220 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 679ff.

221 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 681–2, 690–2. Al-Tha'labī quotes a couple of these traditions in his discussion of this verse (*al-Kashf* i, 384).

fairly reliable version of traditions of this type, in contrast to many of those in circulation among exegetes.²²²

It should be noted that both al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim devote separate sections to variant readings and that these contain several more ḥadīths giving readings attributed to early female figures. It is apparent that none of these four *tafsīr* chapters present any woman as a major source of variant readings—and in this, they appear to largely be in accord with most Quran commentaries of the time.²²³ Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that in the case of al-Ḥākim's *Mustadrak*, it is more than twice as likely that a woman would be credited with a variant reading than be quoted as a source of traditions that he deems relevant to *tafsīr*.

2.7 Women as Sources of merit-of-sūra Traditions

As we saw in the previous chapter, a gendered separation takes place in the formative period between the notion of Quran recitation as a specialized discipline and as a devotional activity. While the former type of quranic recitation increasingly became the domain of (male) specialists and was regarded as part of the training necessary for those who would interpret the sacred text, quranic recitation as a devotional activity came to be seen as a ritual that could be performed by all believers, including women and children. While it was regarded as meritorious, devotional quranic recitation in and of itself was not intended to grant the average, unlearned believer access to interpretive authority—and at times it arguably did the opposite.

Merit-of-sūra (*faḍā'il al-suwar*) traditions played a noteworthy role in naturalizing this momentous development. A significant number of such traditions appear to have been put into circulation by the late second/eighth century.²²⁴ They were controversial, in part because their authenticity was generally suspect.²²⁵ Traditionists such as al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and al-Ḥākim undertook to varying degrees to separate out traditions of this type that they judged to have some claim to authenticity from those that did not, and

222 Women's codex traditions in and of themselves (as well as their textual functions in classical Quran commentaries) are a complex historical phenomenon. I am presently preparing a study of this issue.

223 This observation is chiefly based on Makram and 'Umar's *Muḥjam al-qirā'āt*, which is based on several classical Quran commentaries, including al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi'*.

224 See for example: Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* 216–79 (*Jamā' abwāb suwar al-Qur'ān wa-āyātuḥu wa-mā fihā min al-faḍā'il*).

225 For a survey of such traditions and a discussion of them from the perspective of traditional ḥadīth criticism, see: Ibrāhīm 'Alī al-Sayyid 'Alī 'Īsā, *Al-Aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*.

included the former in the chapters on “the merits of the Quran” (*faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*) in their ḥadīth compilations.

Moreover, al-Bukhārī elects to include a select few in his *tafsīr* chapter (and al-Nasāʾī, following in his footsteps, does likewise). Whether in so doing al-Bukhārī was attempting to introduce traditions of this type into quranic exegesis, or responding to their already widespread use in commentarial or quasi-commentarial works or discourses, is difficult to say, though the latter appears more likely. What we do know is that by al-Ḥākim’s time, some Sunni as well as Twelver Shiʿi exegetes included merit-of-sūra traditions in their *tafsīr* works to varying degrees, as the Quran commentaries of both al-Samarqandī as well as al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 320/932) illustrate.²²⁶ Al-Ḥākim, by introducing a little more than half of the sūras of the Quran with one or two merit-of-sūra traditions in his *tafsīr* chapter, is thus promoting while also critically assessing a practice that already exists in Sunni and Twelver Shiʿi exegesis. His student al-Thaʿlabī proceeded to further refine this practice in his Quran commentary, by including at least one merit-of-sūra tradition at the beginning of his discussion of each quranic sūra.²²⁷

While the great majority of the merit-of-sūra traditions found in medieval Sunni Quran commentaries are ascribed to male Companions famed for their expertise in quranic recitation, such as Ubayy b. Kaʿb or Ibn Masʿūd, a small number are attributed to women. Examining those credited to female figures and presented in the *tafsīr* chapters compiled by traditionists provides a good illustration of the legitimating function of gendered constructions of the sacred past in this process of bifurcation between authoritative and devotional Quran recitation.

In order for any ḥadīths to be deemed authentic according to the standards of the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement, they had to extend back to the prophet. What merit-of-sūra traditions would be more believable than those that not only had complete *isnāds*, but also contained purported eye witness testimony about Muḥammad’s own personal practice? And who better than the prophet’s wives to relate ḥadīths about how his daily life was punctuated by his recitation of

226 Of the *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, only the commentary on sūras 1–18 has survived. In most cases, one or more merit-of-sūra traditions are quoted at the beginning of each sūra in this *tafsīr*. Al-Samarqandī places one or two merit-of-sūra traditions at the end of approximately half of the 114 sūras that he discusses in his Quran commentary. As al-Samarqandī’s *tafsīr* is intended to summarize existing Sunni exegetical perspectives, it seems unlikely that his inclusion of such traditions in a semi-systematic fashion was unprecedented among Sunnis.

227 For a detailed discussion of this type of tradition and their textual functions in al-Thaʿlabī’s Quran commentary, see: Saleh, *Formation* 103–8.

the Quran? Thus, Umm Salama (via her daughter Zaynab) recounts how she heard Muḥammad reciting Sūrat al-Ṭūr (S. 52, “The Mountain”) as he circumambulated the Ka’ba,²²⁸ and ‘Ā’isha relates that every night, he would recite Sūrat Banī Isrā’īl (S. 17, “The Children of Israel”) and Sūrat al-Zumar (S. 39, “The Throngs”).²²⁹ Thus, the Quran supplies Muḥammad’s idiom of worship—and by extension, that of believers in general.

As the latter tradition also illustrates, the recitation of the Quran has the potential to connect the believer to Muḥammad, through reciting certain passages or sūras in accordance with Muḥammad’s example. ‘Ā’isha (via ‘Amra) recounts that Muḥammad used to recite Sūrat al-A’lā (S. 87, “The Most High”) in the first *rak’ā* of his *witr* prayer, Sūrat al-Kāfirūn (S. 109, “The Disbelievers”) in the second, and Sūras al-Ikhlāṣ (S. 112, “Purity [of Faith]”), Falaq (S. 113, “Daybreak”) and al-Nās (S. 114, “People”) in the third.²³⁰ This tradition provides believers with a model of ritual practice that can be easily imitated. Moreover, such a connection between the believer and Muḥammad can even be fostered through listening to another person recite certain sūras or verses. Thus Umm al-Faḍl reportedly said when she heard Ibn ‘Abbās recite Sūrat al-Mursalāt (S. 77, “[Winds] Sent Forth”) that his recitation reminded her of hearing the prophet recite this sūra in the *maghrib* prayer.²³¹

Nonetheless, the notion that average believers should make quranic recitation a regular part of their devotions raised some practical difficulties. Who better than a woman to transmit a saying of Muḥammad assuring believers that a lack of learning or literacy, or even limited fluency in Arabic is not a barrier to engaging in devotional quranic recitation? The report credited to a female Companion, Umm Hishām bt. Ḥāritha, that she memorized Sūra Qāf (S. 50) by hearing the prophet recite it when he would lead the congregation in the dawn prayer models an approach to learning quranic passages that would be accessible to the average, unlettered believer.²³² A tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha relates that Muḥammad stated that those who recite the Quran from memory will be with “the noble, righteous scribes” (*al-safara al-kirām al-barara*), while those who recite it with difficulty will have double reward.²³³

228 Al-Bukhārī vi, 357 (*K. al-Taḥsīn*); al-Nasā’ī, *Taḥsīn* ii, 335, *sub.* S. 52.

229 Al-Nasā’ī, *Taḥsīn* ii, 227–8; al-Ḥākim iv, 1359 (*K. al-Taḥsīn*). See also: al-Tirmidhī 656 (*Abwāb Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*). Al-Tha’labī cites it at the beginning of Sūrat al-Zumar (*al-Kashf* v, 288).

230 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1467 (*K. al-Taḥsīn*). Al-Ḥākim cites this tradition at the beginning of the commentary on Sūrat al-A’lā.

231 Al-Nasā’ī, *Taḥsīn* ii, 486.

232 Al-Nasā’ī, *Taḥsīn* ii, 326.

233 Al-Bukhārī vi, 431–2 (*K. al-Taḥsīn*). This is the only tradition of any type that al-Bukhārī cites for Sūrat ‘Abasa (S. 80, “He Frowned”), and its only connection to this sūra is that it evokes verses 15–16: “by the hands of noble and virtuous scribes” (*bi-aydi safara kirām*)ⁿ

Nonetheless, such efforts to include every believer were not designed to relativise social hierarchies. The second merit-of-sūra tradition quoted by al-Ḥākim at the beginning of Sūrat al-Nūr (S. 24, “The Light”) relates on the authority of none other than ʿĀ'isha that Muḥammad said, “Do not house women in upper rooms, nor teach them to write. [Rather], teach them spinning, and Sūrat al-Nūr.”²³⁴ This tradition presents the relationship between scripture and the believer in strongly gendered terms: While for some males, learning to memorize, recite and read the Quran can serve as a gateway to more advanced instruction in various subjects, including writing, education given to females is to have a primarily moralizing orientation, and even their learning of the Quran is to be tailored accordingly.

3 *Tafsīr* as ḥadīth Narration?

The question of how ḥadīth has been related to the genre of Quran commentary historically is a complex one, in part because discussion of the relationship between the two emergent disciplines of quranic exegesis and ḥadīth has often been theologically charged. *Tafsīr* and the study of ḥadīth developed in the formative period along significantly different methodological lines. This difference is reflected in the literary form of most of the traditions found in exegetical works conventionally dated to the formative period, as well as in their *isnāds*, which are often deficient from the perspective of the traditionists.

Nonetheless, historically, the boundaries between Quran exegesis and a number of other medieval disciplines, including the study of ḥadīth have been porous,²³⁵ and historically, there has been a marginal current of radically ḥadīth-based Sunni approaches to *tafsīr*. This current has chiefly flourished in two periods: the third/ninth to fourth/tenth centuries, and the thirteenth/nineteenth until the present.²³⁶

barara). Al-Nasā'ī also has this ḥadīth (*Tafsīr* ii, 492). See also: al-Tirmidhī 652–3 (*Abwāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*).

234 “*lā tunzilūhunna l-ghuraf wa lā tu'allimūhunna l-kitāba—ya'nī al-nisā'*—*wa'allimūhunna l-miḡzal wa-Sūrat al-Nūr*”; al-Ḥākim iv, 131i (*K. al-Tafsīr*). This tradition is quoted in a number of medieval Quran commentaries and has a complex reception history; for more on this, see Chapter Six.

235 It has been pointed out that medieval quranic exegesis was not limited to Quran commentaries, but was found in works from a range of disciplines; see: McAuliffe, *The genre* 445–61.

236 Saleh, *Preliminary remarks* 27–30, 32–4.

Can any of the *tafsīr* chapters of al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʿī or al-Ḥākim be classified as part of this ḥadīth-based hermeneutical approach? For reasons already discussed, it is highly doubtful that any of these four traditionists regarded themselves as “doing *tafsīr*” when compiling these chapters. But more tellingly, even key advocates of approaches to *tafsīr* that were squarely based on narrating ḥadīths do not appear to have classified these chapters as such. Ibn Taymiyya famously argued that the way to carry out exegesis is to first refer to other, related quranic verses, and then to refer to interpretations reliably transmitted from the prophet, the Companions, or the Successors (in that order).²³⁷ Yet, while he lists the eminent traditionists Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ibn Māja among those who authored ḥadīth-based Quran commentaries,²³⁸ he does not include al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʿī or al-Ḥākim, although he certainly knew of their *tafsīr* chapters. Nor does al-Dāwūdī (d. 945/1538) provide biographical notices for al-Tirmidhī or al-Ḥākim in his *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*.²³⁹ Rather, al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʿī and al-Ḥākim were apparently regarded as having provided useful raw materials for exegetes to use at their discretion, in the form of ḥadīths that were accessible, and also often graded according to their soundness.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim—who was primarily a ḥadīth scholar rather than an exegete—seems to have been the earliest representative of the ḥadīth-based hermeneutical trend whose Quran commentary has (partially) survived to the present day.²⁴⁰ It reads much like a compilation of traditions, and it is the narration of these which largely comprises its exegesis. In this, it differs significantly from the Sunni exegetical mainstream, which did not give ḥadīths definitional control over the meaning of the Quran, and incorporates other types of exegetical materials as well.²⁴¹ With Ibn Abī Ḥātim, the two communities

237 For a study of Ibn Taymiyya’s hermeneutical theory, see: Saleh, Ibn Taymiyya esp. 144–7.

238 Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima* 79–80. While Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have authored a Quran commentary (al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 54), which does not appear to have come down to us, it is not clear what the historical basis of his inclusion of Ibn Māja might be. Ibn Māja does not seem to have been credited with authoring any exegetical work, and at least in the form that we now have it, his *Sunan* does not contain a *tafsīr* chapter.

239 While he does include a biographical notice for al-Bukhārī, this appears to be due to reports that attribute a Quran commentary to him; see: al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 370–3. It does not seem that merely having authored a *tafsīr* chapter in a ḥadīth compilation was sufficient to be classed among the exegetes in al-Dāwūdī’s view.

240 For the parts of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s commentary that have survived, see the Introduction.

241 E.g. for al-Thaʿlabī’s rejection of ḥadīth narration in and of itself as a valid approach to *tafsīr*, see: Saleh, *Formation* 81–2.

that Sunni Quran commentators typically bring into being in their works—the community of Muḥammad’s followers and the transhistorical community of exegetes—come closest to being presented as one.²⁴² As we have seen,²⁴³ Ibn Abī Ḥātim includes a small number of early Muslim women in the transhistorical community of exegetes that he constructs, in their capacities as sources or transmitters of ḥadīths.

The third/ninth century traditionists’ assessments of the ḥadīths often in use in exegetical circles do not appear to have had a direct impact on the genre of *tafsīr* until the fifth/eleventh century, when al-Wāḥidī quotes ḥadīths directly from al-Bukhārī and Muslim as well as from al-Ḥākim in his second Quran commentary, *Al-Wasīṭ*. As the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* had achieved canonical status for the Shāfi‘īs and Ḥanbalīs by this time,²⁴⁴ al-Bukhārī was an increasingly unavoidable reference point for adherents of those schools in particular. A number of later medieval Sunni exegetes include ḥadīths from the compilations discussed above (including ḥadīths attributed to women, most often to ‘Ā’isha) in their Quran commentaries. For instance, Ibn ‘Aṭīyya quotes ḥadīths from al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā’ī, while al-Qurṭubī quotes from al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī, among others.²⁴⁵ In works such as these, ḥadīths are but one of a number of interpretive tools brought to bear on the quranic text, and although they form a noticeable part of the exegetical discourse, they do not by any means dominate it, nor are they accorded veto power over its conclusions.

4 Afterword: Ḥadīth as *Tafsīr*’s Shadow

The ḥadīth literature and quranic exegesis have historically been intertwined in ways that are not part of the *tafsīr* genre *per se*. This interrelationship has resulted in some fascinating literary trajectories, which span the gamut between high literary productions that would have been written for a scholarly, specialist audience, and works intended for lay consumption. Examples

242 For a discussion of these two communities, see Chapter Two.

243 I.e. in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Two.

244 Brown, *Canonization* 206.

245 When these works (and others) quote from the ḥadīth compilations of al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, and so on, they do not limit themselves to quoting from their *tafsīr* chapters; rather, the entire compilation is seen as potentially providing ḥadīths that can be used exegetically.

of the former appear in commentaries (*sharḥ*)²⁴⁶ on those ḥadīth compilations containing a *tafsīr* chapter, such as *Fath al-bārī*, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's monumental commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.²⁴⁷ In the portion of it that discusses al-Bukhārī's *tafsīr* chapter, Ibn Ḥajar incorporates the views of some exegetes, including al-Zajjāj and Ibn Mardawayh. An example of the latter is ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm al-Mundhirī's (d. 656/1258) *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Intended to make the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* be more accessible to laypersons, it reorganizes and significantly augments its *tafsīr* chapter.

During the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* received increased commentarial attention, which included its *tafsīr* chapter. As noted above, the *tafsīr* chapter found today in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is quite short, and its structure does not appear to have any readily discernible organizing principle. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's *Ikmāl al-muʿlim* and al-Nawawī's *Al-Minhāj* provide brief commentary on the ḥadīths that it contains, discussing various grammatical and legal issues that they raise. They appear to be commenting upon an already existing and seemingly stable text. However, in the commentary *Al-Mufḥim li-mā ashkala min talkhīṣ kitāb Muslim*,²⁴⁸ written by Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. Ibrāhīm al-Qurṭubī (d. 656/1258), the ḥadīths in the *tafsīr* chapter are arranged so that they follow the canonical order of the quranic verses upon which they comment. In addition, while the repetitions found in the "original" have been removed, the number of ḥadīths that it contains has also been significantly augmented, so that a total of 40 sūras receive at least one ḥadīth as commentary. Of the resulting total of 83 traditions, 13, or 15.6 percent, are attributed to ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr, who is the only female figure cited. Moreover, he provides a fairly detailed commentary for ḥadīths in this chapter, which addresses linguistic issues (beginning with meaning of the word "*tafsīr*") as well as legal, "historical", theological and other questions, and quotes an array of authorities, including early jurists, grammarians and exegetes.

While Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Qurṭubī's commentary is apparently intended for a scholarly audience, Zakī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm al-Mundhirī's summarized

246 It is unfortunate that although the classical genre of ḥadīth commentary is both immense and comprises an important part of the textual evidence we have for the reception history of the ḥadīth literature by Muslims, it has barely been researched to date. A groundbreaking article on this genre is: Tokatly, *The Aʿlām al-ḥadīth* 53–91. For the related textual genre of *ḥāshiya* (gloss) in Islamic law and quranic exegesis respectively, see: El Shamsy, "The *ḥāshiya* in Islamic 289–315; Saleh, *The gloss* 217–59.

247 For this work, see: Brown, *Canonization* 295–7; Blecher, *Ḥadīth* commentary 261–87.

248 Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. Ibrāhīm al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Mufḥim li-mā ashkala min talkhīṣ Kitāb Muslim* vii, 314–438.

version (*mukhtaṣar*), which was designed to be easier to memorize and more user-friendly than the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, aimed to edify laypersons.²⁴⁹ It too presents a significantly augmented *tafsīr* chapter, containing 57 ḥadīths altogether as commentary on 37 sūras. Of these ḥadīths, 10 (or 17.5 percent) are credited to ‘Ā’isha, who is again the only female source quoted. As with Abū l-‘Abbās’ commentary, these “extra” ḥadīths are well-known and commonly found in early medieval *tafsīr* works; many have already been discussed above.

Yet another example of a work based on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* with an expanded *tafsīr* chapter is ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ishbīlī’s (d. 582/1186) *Al-Jam‘ bayn al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, which is composed of the ḥadīths that both al-Bukhārī and Muslim classified as authentic.²⁵⁰ Using the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* as the basis, al-Ishbīlī inserts ḥadīths from the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* into the text where he deems it appropriate. The *tafsīr* chapter thus follows the “original” order now found in Muslim, with some of the repetitions eliminated, while ḥadīths from al-Bukhārī are included as well. It contains a total of 79 ḥadīths; nine of these (or 11.39 percent) are attributed to ‘Ā’isha.

These works indicate that for some late medieval ḥadīth scholars, representations of ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr relating ḥadīths regarded as having relevance to the interpretation of the Quran apparently continued to merit citation, as well as augmentation and interpretation. Moreover, in al-Mundhirī’s view, some such representations ought to be made more accessible to laypersons. What the reasons for this renewed interest in ḥadīths of this type at that historical point in time might be are as of yet unclear.²⁵¹ However, it could be theorized that the reappearance of noteworthy female ḥadīth transmitters in the fourth/tenth century and later²⁵² might have contributed to the evident interest on the part of some sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth century male ḥadīth scholars in incorporating additional exegetical traditions credited to ‘Ā’isha in their commentaries or abridgements of the *tafsīr* chapter found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. That they would choose ḥadīths traced back to her in particular is likely due in the main to her reputation among ḥadīth critics as a prolific and highly reliable transmitter.

249 ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Mundhirī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim li-Imām Abī l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī al-Nisābūrī li-l-Ḥāfiẓ Zakī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīm b. ‘Abd al-Qawī b. Salama al-Mundhirī al-Dimashqī*, 564–81.

250 Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ishbīlī, *Al-Jam‘ bayn al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* iv, 361–96.

251 These commentaries and other works on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* have attracted little sustained scholarly attention to date. In the absence of detailed historical and literary studies on these works, it is unfortunately not possible to say much about their *tafsīr* chapters.

252 For a discussion of this, see Chapter Six.

Constructing the Abode of the Mothers of the Believers: Gendered Exegetical Gazes

[God's] saying: {*Tell believing men to lower their gazes*}, meaning that they should avert their gazes from all that is sinful; {*min*} here [acts as] a connecting particle,¹ according to the *tafsīr* of al-Suddī. Qatāda said, "They are to lower their gazes from what is not lawful for them to look at." Hammād b. Salama reported on the authority of Yūnus b. 'Ubayd, on the authority of Abū Zur'a b. 'Amr b. Jarīr al-Balkhī, on the authority of his father, (who) said, "I asked the Messenger of God about the sudden glance, and he answered, 'Avert your gaze.'" Al-Rabī' b. Ṣabīḥ related on the authority of al-Ḥasan (that) the Messenger of God said, "Son of Adam, for you is the first glance, what is the need for the second?"

[God's] saying: {*and guard their private parts*}; Sa'īd related on the authority of Qatāda, (that) he said, "From what is not legally permissible to them." This is concerning free men and male slaves. {*That is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do*}.

His saying: {*And tell believing women to lower their gazes*}; meaning that they should lower their gazes; {*min*} here [acts as] a connecting particle,² according to the *tafsīr* of al-Suddī. Sa'īd related on the authority of Qatāda (that) he said, "From what is not lawful for them to look at." {*And guard their private parts*} from what is not lawful for them, and this is concerning the free woman and the female slave.

And [God's] saying, {*and not display their adornment except what appears of it*}; this is concerning free women.

Shurayk and Sufyān and Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq reported on the authority of his father, on the authority of Abū l-Aḥwaṣ, on the authority of 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd (that) he said, "{*except what appears of it*} (means) the clothing."

Al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār reported that al-Ḥasan (said) much the same.

1 I.e. in the verse itself: "*qul li-l-mu'minīn yagħuḍḍū min absārihim*" (Q 24:30a).

2 I.e. in the verse itself: "*wa-qul li-l-mu'mināt yagħḍuḍna min absārihinna*" (Q 24:31a).

Al-Ma'lā b. Hilāl related on the authority of Muslim, on the authority of Sa'īd b. Jubayr, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās (that) he said, “{*except what appears of it*} (means) the kohl and the ring.”

Al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār related that Qatāda said much the same.

Al-Suddī said, “{*except what appears of it*}, meaning except what appears of the face and the palms.” And Ḥammād b. Salama reported on the authority of Umm Shabīb on the authority of 'Ā'isha, that she was asked about the apparent adornment (*al-zīna al-zāhira*),³ and she replied, “The bracelets and the *fatkha*.” Ḥammād said, “Meaning, the ring.” And [Umm Shabīb] said, “She gathered the cloth of her garment, and then she pulled it tight.”⁴

Yaḥyā said, “This verse is about free women. As for female slaves, Sa'īd related on the authority of Qatāda, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb saw a female slave wearing a veil, and he hit her with a whip—according to Sa'īd's ḥadīth. 'Uthmān recounted, “He struck her with a whip, and said, ‘Uncover your head!’ Sa'īd related [that 'Umar said], ‘And do not imitate free women.’”⁵

This passage from the *Tafsīr of Yaḥyā b. Sallām* which explicates Q 24:30–1 provides an apt illustration of what I term “the primary exegetical gaze” at work: here, the exegete gazes—literally, as well as in a more figurative sense—at the body of scriptural text, in addition to other materials that he deems relevant to the task of interpretation. The exegete's gaze is moreover directed towards the Muslim communal body as a whole, which he genders and hierarchically organizes through his interpretation of these quranic verses. Significantly, the exegete takes on the role of intermediary between God and the community being addressed, as he determines whether each verse or portion of a verse is directed towards all of its members, or only its free men (or free women) or slaves (male or female). Here, the practice of exegesis is constructed as a discourse of power. As such, it affirms and reinforces social hierarchies, especially when it is undertaken by free elite males.

In this passage, a transhistorical community of exegetes is brought into being, through Yaḥyā's quotations of oral and (apparently) written exegetical sources, at his discretion. This transhistorical community contains several

3 I.e. the adornment referred to in the phrase, “except what appears of it” (*illā mā zahara minhā*) in Q 24:31.

4 “*bi-thawbihā 'alā thawbihā fa-shaddathu*.” The text may have been corrupted here; for more on this, see below.

5 Yaḥyā i, 440–1.

male Companions, a greater number of male Successors, and also male figures who lived after them. By contrast, only two female figures are included by Yaḥyā in this transhistorical community of exegetes: ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr, and secondarily Umm Shabīb, an obscura who was apparently a female Successor from Baṣra.⁶ During the second/eighth century, quoting traditions attributed to ‘Ā’isha (and less often, to another wife of the prophet, Umm Salama) as part of the interpretation of quranic verses discussing free women’s veiling and seclusion is in the process of becoming conventional in proto-Sunni exegesis. The inclusion of ‘Ā’isha and Umm Shabīb within Yaḥyā’s transhistorical community of exegetes, then, likely reflects larger developments within contemporary *tafsīr* discourses rather than simply an individual’s interpretive choice.

In this passage, Yaḥyā grants these male and female figures what I term a “secondary exegetical gaze”—meaning, an exegetical gaze that is textually constructed as subsidiary to the primary exegetical gaze, and is therefore limited in its scope as well as in its interpretive authority. Unlike the primary exegetical gaze, the secondary exegetical gaze can be wielded by females as well as males. Yet, it is instructive to note the ways that the secondary exegetical gazes held by these male and female figures are presented as similar and yet different.

In this passage, we see that while Companions and Successors cited as sources of materials relevant to exegesis can be (free) female as well as (free) male, nonetheless, (free) male voices are overwhelmingly dominant, not only through sheer force of numbers, but also in terms of the range and depth of authority attributed to them. Most of these figures are presented here as handing down valued information deemed relevant to exegesis through all-male transmission networks that extended well beyond the era of the Successors. While the secondary exegetical gazes imputed to these male figures are by definition subsidiary to the primary exegetical gaze of the author and ultimately dependent on the latter’s willingness to include them, some of them nonetheless are depicted as wielding a noteworthy level of interpretive authority. Al-Suddī (d. 127/745), a male Successor, seems to be presented here as the author of a written *tafsīr*, which Yaḥyā in turn quotes from. In this way, the secondary exegetical gaze assigned to al-Suddī appears more concrete and less ephemeral than the other orally transmitted interpretations that Yaḥyā cites in this passage.

6 The very brief entry given by Ibn Sa’d states that Umm Shabīb al-‘Abdiyya was one of the people of Baṣra, and that she related traditions from ‘Ā’isha. An example is given of such a tradition, and it is transmitted by Ḥammād b. Salama (*Ṭabaqāt* viii, 530). She does not appear to have been a well-known transmitter; neither al-Mizzī nor Ibn Ḥajar (in his *Tahdhīb*) have a notice for her.

The secondary exegetical gaze imputed to ‘Umar is also rendered more concrete, though in his case through violence. ‘Umar, presumably when he was caliph, sees a veiled female slave, and strikes her. In one version of the incident, the reason for this action of his is clarified with his reported command that she not imitate free women. While neither ‘Umar nor the slave woman (nor for that matter any of the transmitters) quotes or alludes to any quranic verse, by citing retellings of this incident as part of his commentary on Q 24:31, Yaḥyā frames ‘Umar’s gaze at her and his subsequent use of force against her as relevant to exegesis, if not interpretive. By contrast, although the enslaved woman presumably sees ‘Umar, her gaze is not acknowledged, nor is it presented as in any way exegetically consequential. Her subjectivity is ignored and thus erased. Whether or not her choice of attire could be taken to reflect her own understanding of Q 24:31 is therefore not considered here, while her body is appropriated and depicted as a canvas upon which ‘Umar violently enacts his hierarchical vision of social order.⁷

While ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr (unlike the unnamed slave woman) is given a secondary exegetical gaze in this passage, its range and scale do not approach that imputed to some of the male figures just discussed. ‘Ā’isha provides an interpretation for a short phrase in the quranic text. In so doing, her exegetical gaze surveys the bodies of other adult females in the community (subject here to Yaḥyā’s stipulation that these are only free women’s bodies), and determines what types of adornment they are permitted to display, according to her understanding of Q 24:31.⁸ In contrast to the slave woman, ‘Ā’isha’s own veiling practices—which she is given the privilege of enacting upon her own body, seemingly of her own volition—are presented as both interpretive and authoritative for how the community is to understand this portion of the quranic verse in question.

At the same time, the (male) exegete as the possessor of the primary exegetical gaze—and through him, the audience/reader—is granted a carefully delimited vision of an ostensibly secluded wife of the prophet not only

7 Traditions depicting ‘Umar or other male Companions hitting their wives or other women have attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention, though unfortunately little in the way of sustained analysis. For a survey of a number of such traditions, see: Marín, *Disciplining wives* 12–17. For the use of traditions about ‘Umar’s often violent policing of enslaved women’s garb in some legal constructions of *ṣalāt* as a gendered hierarchical performance, see: Geissinger, *Umm al-Dardā’* 312–17. For a discussion of some of the textual functions of gendered violence in *tafsīr* works, see Chapter One (above).

8 I.e. when they are in the presence of free men to whom they are neither married nor so closely related to that marriage to them would be forbidden. For views attributed to ‘Ā’isha as to how such rules relate to slave men, see below.

responding to a question about a particular phrase in this quranic verse, but physically enacting its meaning. In this particular case, this vision has become rather blurry, seemingly as a result of the vagaries of transmission: ‘Ā’isha interprets the meaning of “the apparent adornment” in Q 24:31 as bracelets and rings. The rest of what she says is rather obscure; she seems to be specifying how garments are to be wrapped in order to supply adequate coverage, and demonstrates how this is to be done by pulling the leading edge of a garment tightly so that it stays in place. The version given in Hūd’s Quran commentary appears to have been intended to “clarify” the wording of this tradition; it relates that ‘Ā’isha stipulated that a woman’s wristbone is to be concealed, and then showed how this is to be done by covering her own wrist.⁹ Hūd’s version could be said to make more sense in the context of this passage, and therefore may be the “original” reading, while that presently found in the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* is the result of scribal error. However, it is also possible that it represents a commentarial emendation intended to make this tradition speak more clearly to a particular aspect of the legal discourse on the scope of a free woman’s bodily covering: while the mention of bracelets in the first part of this tradition could be read as implying that therefore a woman’s wrists do not have to be concealed, the second part of it as it appears in Hūd’s *tafsīr* seems to have been designed to unambiguously eliminate this possibility.¹⁰

Whatever the case, the quotation of this tradition within the exegesis of Q 24:31 in the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* provides a particularly illustrative example of how the abode of the wives of the prophet is constructed by Quran commentators as an imagined space within which exegetical questions can be authoritatively resolved. Such issues often involve boundaries of one sort or another—whether these are the delineation of gendered social-hierarchical distinctions, as in this case, or the negotiation of issues with direct implications for ongoing theological or sectarian debates.

This chapter examines the ways that exegetes construct and invoke the abode of the Mothers of the Believers as an idealized space for the negotiation and resolution of several different types of exegetical questions. As the portrayal of the unnamed slave woman indicates, the textual construction of this abode was not a straightforward reflection of the early historical situation. Rather, it was the outcome of a number of interpretive determinations on the

9 “*wa-qālat bi-thawbihā ‘alā kū’ihā fa-starathu*”; Hūd iii, 174.

10 The editor notes one manuscript of Hūd’s *tafsīr* has “*fa-shaddathu*” [i.e. as it is in the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām*] rather than “*fa-starathu*” (*Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz* iii, 174, n. 1). A version quoted by al-Suyūṭī states that ‘Ā’isha “grasped the edge of her sleeve” (*wa-ḍammat ṭarafa kummihā*); see: al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 180.

part of exegetes, who decide which voices to quote or ignore, and who elect to construct the abode of Muḥammad's wives as what Michel Foucault terms a heterotopia on the pages of their Quran commentaries. In these *tafsīr* works, this abode is constructed so as to transcend place and time.

Moreover, the abode of the wives of Muḥammad continues to be invoked and elaborated upon to varying degrees by a number of Quran commentators throughout the medieval period. Centuries after the passing of the wives of the prophet as well as of those women and men who met them and reportedly transmitted traditions from them, their long-vanished and now idealized abode remained in demand as a space within which complex and controversial questions could be authoritatively resolved. Such questions range from pietistic matters with implications for the construction of communal identity to highly charged legal issues related to intra-communal boundaries as well as to the maintenance of social-hierarchical order.

The following discussion is based on a number of *tafsīr* works belonging to several different sub-genres: these include encyclopedic Quran commentaries from the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries (those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Māturīdī, and al-Thaʿlabī), along with the *madrassa*-style commentary of al-Samarqandī, the linguistically-focused works of al-Zajjāj and al-Naḥḥās, and the *aḥkām al-Qurʿān* of al-Jaṣṣāṣ. Also, several medieval Quran commentaries which depend to varying extents on al-Ṭabarī (al-Māwardī), al-Thaʿlabī (al-Wāḥidī's *al-Wasīṭ*, as well as the *tafsīrs* of al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Qurṭubī)¹¹ or both (Ibn ʿAṭiyya) have been utilized. For comparative purposes, a Quran commentary authored by an ʿIbādī (Hūd), as well as of two Twelver Shiʿi commentaries (al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī) are also referred to where this is deemed necessary. Such a wide range of sources has been consulted in order to allow us to chart the development and elaboration of the textual phenomenon with which this chapter is concerned over time. As the genre of medieval Quran commentary is “genealogical,”¹² exegetes' constructions of the abode of the wives of the prophet as a space where exegetical questions could be authoritatively resolved, as well as their citations of individual traditions ascribed to any of these women, are embedded within wider, ongoing interpretive discourses. These discourses would have been well known to both the authors of classical *tafsīr* works as well as to their audiences/readers. While anything approaching a complete picture of this web of associations will likely continue to elude us, some sense of its scope can be had

11 Though, it should be kept in mind that al-Qurṭubī also quotes from al-Ṭabarī at times.

12 Saleh, *Formation* 14–15. For a discussion of this issue, see the Introduction (above).

by consulting such a selection of Quran commentaries as have been referred to here.

1 From House-Mosque to Heterotopia: The Abode of the Mothers of the Believers

Exegetes from the formative and classical periods, particularly those who are proto-Sunni or Sunni, often present the abode of the Mothers of the Believers as an imagined space within which social, legal, theological and other boundaries are negotiated, contested and constructed; a few examples of this have already been discussed in Chapter Three. Moreover, their Quran commentaries typically do so in a matter-of-fact way, as though this were a “natural” and uncontroversial practice (at least among Sunnis) that existed from the beginning. However, such a presentation has the effect of eliding the complexities of the historical process of the transformation of the rooms of Muḥammad’s house-mosque inhabited by his wives into a mythologized and idealized space of this type.

The quranic text polemically constitutes Muḥammad’s wives’ abode as a site where divinely ordained mores are to be exemplified, both in contradistinction to the practices of the Arab pagans,¹³ and in accordance with the “original” monotheistic message of previous prophets that Muḥammad is to revivify.¹⁴ Also, it refers to these women as “mothers” of the believers, which appears to be an honorific title denoting a degree of religious authority in the community, and instructs them to preserve Muḥammad’s revelations and teachings.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the quranic text typically speaks of these women as a group, and nowhere suggests that any one of them is a more reliable source of knowledge than the others.

The quranic text does not record any of Muḥammad’s wives’ responses to these directives. Therefore, the only available sources that provide any indication as to what their response(s) might have been are tradition-based works that were not written down until well after all of these women had passed away. It should be borne in mind that even the physical traces of the rooms in which they had lived did not survive for long. ‘Ā’isha’s room famously became

13 “Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other woman . . . stay at home, and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past, keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger . . .” (Q 33:32)

14 See for example: Q 33:37 and 66:1–12.

15 See Chapter One.

the place of burial for Muḥammad, and after him, for Abū Bakr and then ‘Umar.¹⁶ The rooms that had belonged to the rest of the prophet’s wives were reportedly demolished by the end of the first century *hijrī* during the reign of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, in order to allow for the (re)construction of the prophet’s mosque.¹⁷ Therefore, the earliest sources that we have which present the abode of the Mothers of the Believers as a normative space within which social, legal, theological, and sectarian boundaries can be negotiated are depicting a site that was no longer visible; it had been transmuted into if not engulfed by an elaborate shrine.¹⁸ Not only the women who had inhabited it, but also its original dimensions, architectural features, furnishings, and precise relationship to the spaces surrounding it continued to exist only in memory, through the oral transmission of ḥadīths and *āthār* and their eventual preservation in writing.

The Ḥadīth literature presents several of the prophet’s wives in particular as answering questions about religious matters posed to them by various inhabitants of Medina, as well as by visiting pilgrims. Ibn Sa’d singles out ‘Ā’isha and Umm Salama in this regard: “. . . The wives of the prophet preserved many sayings of the prophet, but none like ‘Ā’isha and Umm Salama. ‘Ā’isha used to give religious rulings during the reigns of ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, [and continued to do so] until she died. . . .”¹⁹ In a similar vein, proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes construct the abode of the wives of the prophet as a space where Meccan, aristocratic voices appear to predominate through their focus on traditions attributed to ‘Ā’isha—and much less frequently, to Umm Salama, occasionally to Ḥafṣa bt. al-Khaṭṭāb, and rarely, to other wives.

Yet, Muḥammad’s wives’ abode was not the only imagined space where exegetical debates could be authoritatively resolved that was available for invocation by Quran commentators. A few other imagined sites have also apparently been memorialized for such a purpose. Chief among these was the dwelling of the prophet’s youngest daughter, Fāṭima, which Sunni exegetes at times invoke as an exemplary space within which the “proper” gendered social order obtained.²⁰ Perhaps more surprisingly, even the Damascene

16 Al-Bukhārī v, 39–40 (*Bāb Faḍā’il aṣḥāb al-nabī*).

17 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 191–3.

18 See for example the descriptions of the colourful quranic inscriptions on the mosque’s walls as a result of al-Walīd’s (re)constructions in: Whelan, *Forgotten witness* 8–9.

19 “. . . kāna azwāj al-nabī yaḥfazna min ḥadīth al-nabī kathīr^{an} wa lā mithl^{an} li-‘Ā’isha wa Umm Salama wa kānat ‘Ā’isha taftā fi ‘ahd ‘Umar wa ‘Uthmān ilā an mātat . . .” (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 522).

20 E.g.: al-Jaṣṣāṣ iii, 317; al-Māwardī iv, 91; al-Baghawī iii, 288, *sub*. Q 24:31. The home of ‘Alī and Fāṭima was close to Muḥammad’s house-mosque; e.g. al-Bukhārī iv, 45 (*K. Faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba*).

palace of Mu'āwiya, the first of the Umayyad caliphs is very occasionally referred to in this light.²¹ The textual salience of the abode of the Mothers of the Believers in Sunni Quran commentaries thus reflects a selective process of memorialization.

In the Sunni *tafsīr* works under discussion here, the abode of the Mothers of the Believers becomes a Foucauldian heterotopia—a constructed “other space” which represents, contests and also inverts existing sites found within the places and times of their authors.²² It is not necessarily a geographically fixed space. While the *tafsīr* works under discussion here most typically present their abode in Medina immediately adjacent to the prophet’s mosque or imply that it is there, it is also potentially portable. If these secluded women went on pilgrimage, it could be located there. In addition, the abode of the prophet’s wives can be and often is metonymically represented by only one of these women.

These constructed features enable the abode of the wives of the prophet to transcend space and time. In the tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is unclear whether we are to understand that this interchange about Q 24:31 took place in her room in Medina or while she was in Baṣra.²³ But in either case, both her explanation as well as her bodily demonstration of the verse’s meaning are presumed to faithfully communicate what she learned from the prophet about it—and moreover, it is presented as authoritative over the lives of free women not only in Medina but far beyond, in the newly conquered territories.

2 Constructing the Primary Exegetical Gaze

In these texts, the primary exegetical gaze plays a key role in the construction of the abode of the Mothers of the Believers as a heterotopia. Not only does the exegete’s analytical gaze take in the quranic text, but also human bodies. The bodies of the many different social categories of persons who make up the

21 E.g., al-Zamakhsharī iv, 292, *sub.* Q 24:31

22 For heterotopias, see: Foucault, *Of other spaces* 22–7.

23 It is unclear under what circumstances the transmitter Umm Shabīb is supposed to have been able to hear traditions from ‘Ā’isha, as she was from Baṣra. While it is possible that Umm Shabīb is presumed to have met her in Medina or Mecca (perhaps when traveling for pilgrimage?), some Baṣran women are also memorialized as having learned traditions from ‘Ā’isha when she stayed in their town following the Battle of the Camel; see for example: al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 209.

umma and empire, as well as the spaces that they inhabit and move within—whether the street, the public baths, or the confines of their own homes—are encompassed by an exegetical gaze that is regulatory.²⁴

This exegetical-textual dynamic constructs a “scopic regime”—meaning, it constructs a way of seeing that has been molded by human beings, and has changed and developed through time.²⁵ The scope of the primary exegetical gaze parallels, reflects and reinforces to a significant extent the (free) man’s societal and familial position of overlord and guardian that Quran commentators of the formative and classical periods outlined in their exegeses of quranic verses such as Q 4:34.²⁶ Thus, it is an exercise of power.²⁷ In this way, the act of *tafsīr* itself is constructed as emblematically “masculine.”

Among the sites that the primary exegetical gaze is represented as surveying is the abode of the Mothers of the Believers. Given that an aspect of men’s gazing which the quranic text famously attempts to regulate is their ability to see the wives of Muḥammad or have visual access to their rooms (Q 33:53, 55), it is rather paradoxical that Quran commentators so often render these women and this space textually visible. While commentators utilize Muḥammad’s wives and their rooms as models of the “proper” practice of veiling and seclusion of (free) elite women, at the same time, they do not depict their abode as a “private” space off limits to the male exegetical gaze—nor by extension, to the gazes of the presumably largely male readers/audiences of these *tafsīr* works.

2.1 *Q 33:53 in Sunni Exegesis: Transparent Seclusion?*

A particularly apt illustration of the construction of Muḥammad’s wives’ abode as a paradoxical embodiment of elite female seclusion coupled with a textual hyper-visibility is found in some classical Sunnī exegetical discourses associated with Q 33:53—“...When you ask his [Muḥammad’s] wives for

24 For the public bath (*ḥammām*) as a site requiring regulation, see e.g.: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xviii, 145.

25 This analysis of the workings of what I term the primary exegetical gaze in classical quranic exegesis owes its genesis to Fedwa Malti-Douglas’ discussion of the male gaze in medieval Arabic literature; see: Malti-Douglas, *Woman’s body* 29–53, as well as to her application of the concept of “scopic regime” to modern Arabic women’s literature in her monograph, *Men, women, and god(s)*, esp. 205–6; 242, n. 5. She borrows the concept of “scopic regime” from Martin Jay’s Scopic regimes 3. Jay in turn derives it from the French film critic, Christian Metz. However, it should be noted that in the texts I am discussing here, there is no unitary “male gaze” *per se*. As we will see, the gazes of males are regulated differently depending on social and especially free/slave status.

26 For a discussion of this, see Chapter One.

27 For vision as a form of power, see: Ruggles, *Vision and power* 7.

something, do so from behind a screen. . . .” As Barbara Stowasser notes, not only are Muḥammad’s wives thereby presented as having had an important role in “the Qur’an-as-process,” but “[t]heir reception of specific divine guidance, occasioned by their proximity to the Prophet, endows them with special dignity.”²⁸ The *tafsīr* works referred to in this chapter acknowledge and discuss these women’s roles in the Quran-as-process to varying extents. Nonetheless, they typically give little explicit attention to the fact that Muḥammad’s wives are directly addressed in several verses, despite the unusual nature of this pattern of address in the quranic text.²⁹

Significantly, some Sunni Quran commentaries utilize Q 33:53 as a vehicle for the affirmation of the religious authority of the second caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. When exegetes commented on the political-sectarian controversies about the question of leadership in the early Muslim community, they faced a notable hurdle: the Quran says little about either the prophet’s relatives or the Companions. Neither does it single out the figures who would later loom so large in communal memory—Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Alī, or their respective partisans—for honourable mention, nor even for admonition. Such references had to be brought into being for their readers/audiences through the citation of occasion-of-revelation traditions, which variously underlined these men’s political legitimacy by linking them to particular verses.³⁰

A number of Sunni exegetes quote occasion-of-revelation traditions that belong to the genre referred to by classical authorities as the *muwāfaqāt ‘Umar*—literally, “the agreements of ‘Umar” (i.e. with God). These traditions recount instances when ‘Umar makes a comment, or advises the prophet to take a certain course of action, and Muḥammad subsequently receives a revelation that echoes ‘Umar’s words, or confirms that his advice is in accordance with God’s will.³¹ Instances include ‘Umar’s expressed wish that Muḥammad

28 Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an* 85.

29 For an exception to this, see Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī’s discussion of Q 33:32 (*Baḥr al-muḥīṭ* vii, 300). He remarks on its direct address of the prophet’s wives; in his view, it instructs them to be mindful that they are being spoken to (*li-yaq’alna bālahunna mimma yukhāṭibna bihi*).

30 Some Shi’i traditions assert that a number of quranic verses had also originally contained specific references to the *aḥl al-bayt*; for such variant readings, see: Modarressi, *Early debates* 25–6.

31 For a survey of such traditions, see: Hakim, *Context: ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb* 205–20. Al-Suyūṭī cites a number of these in his chapter on instances when “revelation descended upon the tongue of a Companion”; see his *Al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* i, 110–12. However, the notion that anyone other than Muḥammad played an active role in the revelatory process was also regarded by some early Muslims as theologically problematic: see for example

take the “station of Abraham” as a place of prayer (followed by the revelation of Q 2:125—“... take the spot where Abraham stood as your place of prayer ...”),³² as well as his view that the captives from the Battle of Badr be executed rather than ransomed (echoed in Q 8:67—“It is not right for a prophet to take captives before he has conquered the battlefield ...”).³³ Such traditions are probably directed in part against Shi‘i rejections of the legitimacy of ‘Umar’s caliphate, though they could also have been intended to counter proto-Sunni ambivalence about his legendary sternness,³⁴ as well as to help legitimate some of the controversial rulings credited to him.³⁵

Fascinatingly, in several traditions of this type, the place within which ‘Umar’s preeminence is so dramatically made visible is none other than the abode of Muḥammad’s wives. For example, among the occasion-of-revelation traditions for Q 33:53 recounted by al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha‘labī (and others) is the following:

... ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb related, “I said, ‘Messenger of God, both good and bad (people) visit your wives. If only you would instruct them to [observe] seclusion.’ Then, the Verse of the *Hijāb* [i.e. Q 33:53] was revealed.”³⁶

This “bare bones” version of the tradition not only associates ‘Umar with the revelation of a particular quranic verse, but presents his divinely approved concern with upholding the moral and social order as unfolding within the very abode of the prophet’s wives.

This basic tradition has a number of variants. According to one (which is ascribed to ‘Ā’isha), ‘Umar urges Muḥammad to instruct his wives to seclude themselves. When his advice is not taken, he verbally harasses Sawda when the women go out at night to relieve themselves, hoping that a divine revelation

how the story of ‘Umar “completing” Q 23:14 (Muqātil ii, 360) is linked by some exegetes discussing Q 6:93 to the story of ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Sarḥ, the scribe who independently suggested an ending for a verse he was transcribing; shocked when Muḥammad agreed with him, he is said to have declared his prophecy a fraud (al-Farrā’ i, 344; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 556).

32 E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* i, 679; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* i, 188; al-Māturīdī i, 561.

33 E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* x, 52; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* iii, 155–6; al-Māturīdī v, 261.

34 For ḥadīths in Sunni compilations that express ambivalence about ‘Umar, see: Lazarus-Yafeh, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb—Paul of Islam? 8.

35 For a discussion of a few of these, see: Hakim, *Conflicting images* 159–77.

36 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xxii, 44 (see also page 42 for a similar version); al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* v, 128. Following al-Tha‘labī, see: al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iii, 480; similarly, al-Zamakhsharī v, 89. See also: Hūd iii, 379, who seems to be quoting the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* (Yahyā ii, 733).

will come to the prophet about the issue of seclusion—and the Verse of the *Hijāb* is revealed.³⁷ Fascinatingly, this latter version implies that ‘Umar is in fact more attuned to how God wishes affairs in the prophet’s wives’ abode to be ordered than even Muḥammad himself.

In yet another version, ‘Umar himself takes the initiative to order the wives of Muḥammad to seclude themselves. Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh objects, “O son of al-Khaṭṭāb, you would jealously guard us, while the revelation descends in our houses?!”³⁸ Then, the Verse of the *Hijāb* is revealed to Muḥammad.³⁹ This tradition no sooner acknowledges that the wives of the prophet could plausibly be regarded as being more attuned to the divine will than anyone else (except Muḥammad himself) due to their unparalleled proximity to the revelatory process, then it rejects any such notion. The revelation of Q 33:53 tells the reader/audience that in fact, it is ‘Umar rather than any of the prophet’s wives who is cognizant of God’s intent, to the degree that in his instruction to them, he unknowingly anticipates the revelation. This tradition inserts ‘Umar into the communicative process depicted by the Quran between the prophet and his wives—and, even more audaciously, between them and God. It has the effect of overshadowing the quranic portrayal of divine address of these women, which after all can hardly compare to ‘Umar’s ability to anticipate divine revelations word for word.

Some ḥadīths in circulation even combine several instances in which ‘Umar’s advice turns out to be in accordance with divine revelation into one tradition, and traditions of this type were sometimes incorporated into later classical *tafsīr* works. For example, the following ḥadīth is recounted by al-Baghawī in his discussion of Q 33:53:

... ‘Umar said, “My Lord agreed with me in three things:

I said, ‘Messenger of God, if only you would take the station of Abraham as a place of prayer.’ (Q 2:125) I also said, ‘Messenger of God, good and bad persons visit you. If only you would order the Mothers of the Believers to [observe] seclusion!’ So God sent down the Verse of the *Hijāb*. I heard about some of the Messenger of God’s troubles with his wives, so I visited

37 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xxii, 44–5; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* v, 128; see also: al-Māwardī iv, 419; al-Baghawī iii, 466; Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib b. ‘Aṭīyya al-Andalūsī, *Al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fi Tafsīr al-kitāb al-‘azīz* xii, 102.

38 “*yā Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb innaka la-taghār ‘alaynā wa-l-wahy yanzil fi baytinā*”

39 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* xxii, 43, 45; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* v, 128; see also: al-Māwardī iv, 419; al-Zamakhsharī v, 90; Ibn ‘Aṭīyya xii, 102.

them and sat with them one by one, and I said, ‘If you don’t cease, God will give him better wives than you.’ Until I came to Zaynab, and she said, “Umar, is the Messenger of God unable to advise his wives, that *you* advise them?” Then I left, and God sent down, ‘His Lord may well replace you with better wives if the prophet decides to divorce any of you . . . (Q 66:5).’⁴⁰

In this rhetorically crafted text, ‘Umar’s attunement to the divine purpose is clearly stated, and in such a way that the audience/reader can hardly miss the point. In two out of three instances, this ability of ‘Umar’s is demonstrated within the space of the prophet’s wives’ abode, where he upholds the divinely intended gendered social order. Significantly, this gendered social order combines elite female seclusion with textually constructed hyper-visibility: despite his concern about limiting these women’s interactions with unrelated males, ‘Umar nonetheless rather ironically takes it upon himself to pay each one a visit in order to admonish her. Moreover, when recounting this tale, he makes visible a particularly charged incident within this supposedly secluded abode.

3 Constructing the Secondary Exegetical Gaze

The dynamics of the primary exegetical gaze and its relationship to the abode of the wives of the prophet in these *tafsīr* works typically operate in accordance with the “ideal” social order envisioned by their authors. The exegetical gaze surveys everything, and in so doing mirrors the social and religious authority that free male Muslims “should” possess. Even the ostensibly secluded abode of the wives of the prophet lies within its purview.

Nonetheless, these *tafsīr* texts concede a measure of interpretive authority to the gazes of a few of these women—to ‘Ā’isha in the main, but also at times to Umm Salama, and occasionally to other wives—at other persons within their abode, or even at persons in the community beyond its walls. In what follows, we examine several pietistic as well as legal-exegetical traditions in order to analyze the dynamics and scope of this “secondary exegetical gaze,” largely within classical Sunni Quran commentaries.

3.1 *Pietistic Traditions: Mediating Muḥammad*

As is well known, classical Muslim texts vividly present Muḥammad’s legacy as an ethical and spiritual exemplar. Although the Quran itself provides very few

40 Al-Baghawī iii, 466. This ḥadīth appears in summarized form in Ibn ‘Aṭīyya (*al-Muḥarrar* xii, 103). Al-Tha’labī also has a version (*al-Kashfī*, 188, *sub.* Q 2:125).

specifics about Muḥammad's daily life or personality, exegetes soon found ways to enable the text to present him as a model for emulation by the faithful. While some recent studies of *tafsīr* works have drawn attention to this process,⁴¹ the role played in this by traditions attributed to a small number of early Muslim women has been passed over in silence. The following examples illustrate that traditions of this type often foster an affective piety by transporting believers of later generations back in time to the very domicile of Muḥammad, where they encounter him through the medium of words attributed to ʿĀ'isha.

A vivid example of this process can be seen in a ḥadīth attributed to ʿĀ'isha quoted by al-Samarqandī as part of his commentary on Q 46:24—“When they [the people of ʿĀd] saw a cloud approaching their valley, they said, ‘This cloud will give us rain!’ ‘No indeed! It is what you wanted to hasten: a storm wind bearing a painful punishment.” This ḥadīth vividly conveys Muḥammad's pious fear during unsettled weather. ʿĀ'isha relates that whenever he saw a cloud, the colour of his face would change, and he would pace uneasily, because it reminded him of God's destruction of the sinful people of ʿĀd.⁴² In this commentary on Q 46:24, al-Thaʿlabī quotes a version of this ḥadīth attributed to ʿĀ'isha which also recounts the words of the supplication that Muḥammad would recite in such situations.⁴³

There is nothing in the wording of Q 46:24, a verse that discusses the destruction of the long dead people of ʿĀd, that mentions or even alludes to Muḥammad's response to unsettled weather. Muqātil b. Sulaymān and al-Ṭabarī (as well as al-Māturīdī) explain this verse without making any reference to this. Various versions of this tradition credited to ʿĀ'isha seem to have initially been associated with Q 46:24 in traditionist rather than exegetical circles,⁴⁴ and the purpose of this linkage is primarily pietistic.

The citation of traditions of this type is one way that exegetes both locate Muḥammad within sacred history and affirm the completeness of his mission. His God-fearing response collapses the centuries that presumably lie between the people of ʿĀd and himself. It also has the effect of symbolically providing

41 Saleh, *Formation* 115–18; Lane, *A Traditional Muʿtazilite* 149ff.

42 Al-Samarqandī iii, 235.

43 Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 462. Al-Zamakhsharī has this tradition with virtually the same wording, but it is not attributed to anyone (*al-Kashshāf* v, 506). Al-Baghawī has a version of this tradition, though without the supplication (*Maʿālim* iv, 154).

44 Al-Bukhārī vi, 339–40 (*K. al-Tafsīr*); al-Tirmidhī 741 (*Abwāb Tafsīr*); al-Nasāʿī, *Tafsīr* ii, 292–3; al-Ḥākim iv, 1387 (*K. al-Tafsīr*). A version of this ḥadīth (as well as a ḥadīth recounting a supplication made by Muḥammad in heavy rain) also appears in the *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, though under Q 15:22; see: ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii, 254; also his *Muḥannaḥ* xi, 88 (*K. al-Jāmiʿ*).

closure to their story; while they did not heed the warnings of the prophet sent to them, many generations later, an Arabian prophet (and by extension, his community) would do so. For the medieval audience/reader, well aware of the many ḥadīths that purport to recount the wording of the supplications recited by Muḥammad in various situations and circumstances including inclement weather, this tradition also presents him as a model of ritual action. Traditions on this latter theme begin to appear in Quran commentaries as early as the second/eighth century.

In this type of pietistic tradition, a female narrator often has the effect of strengthening its apparent authority, as well as enhancing its emotional impact. Who better to testify to Muḥammad's uprightness—particularly as his character is reflected in mundane activities that would often take place in the domestic sphere—than a woman, especially if she is widely believed to be his most beloved wife? Through these traditions credited to 'Ā'isha, believers can gain intimate knowledge of Muḥammad's personality, along with the possibility of an affective bond with him.⁴⁵ In traditions such as these, 'Ā'isha both recognizes Muḥammad's actions as exemplary, and by describing them to others, makes the emulation of his practice possible for later generations. In addition, through her embodiment of the reverent attitude that any believer should have toward Muḥammad's *sunna*, she is an exemplar in her own right.

Yet, by contrast, in some pietistic traditions she serves as a foil against which the positive qualities of Muḥammad are all the more evident. The story of Muḥammad and the hostile Jewish visitors, recounted by al-Ṭabarī as commentary on Q 58:8—“... when they come to you, they greet you with words God has never used to greet you...” —is a telling example:

... Masrūq, on the authority of 'Ā'isha (who) said: “Some Jews came to visit the Prophet, and they said, ‘*Al-sām 'alayk* [death be upon you], Abū l-Qāsim.’ So I responded, ‘And death be upon you, and may God do such-and-such to you!’

The Prophet said, ‘‘Ā'isha, God does not like immoderate language.’

I said, ‘Messenger of God, didn't you hear what they said?!’

He replied, ‘Didn't *you* hear how I returned their saying to them? I said, [And] upon you.’

Regarding this, the following verse was revealed: ... *when they come to you, they greet you with words God has never used to greet you, and they say*

45 Women's involvement in the development of the affective dimensions of religious traditions is fairly common cross-culturally. For examples of this from medieval European Christianity, see: Bynum, *Holy fast and holy feast*.

*inwardly, 'Why does God not punish us for what we say?' Hell will be punishment enough for them: they will burn there—an evil destination. (Q 58:8)*⁴⁶

While Q 58:8 does not specify who exactly it is referring to among Muḥammad's contemporaries, the context seems to indicate that this verse is aimed at malcontents among his own followers. This verse (as well as the quranic passage that it is part of) seems to depict a community that is internally divided, with some factions giving little if any recognition to Muḥammad as a leader. Such a picture could raise theological questions about Muḥammad's ability to exercise prophetic authority, as well as about the uprightness of the Companions as a group. Al-Samarqandī notes the existence of different opinions as to who this verse refers to: pagan Arabs in Mecca, or the Medinan "Hypocrites" and Jews.⁴⁷ One of the exegetical purposes of this ḥadīth is to settle this difference of opinion in favour of identifying those accused of conspiring against Muḥammad in Q 58:8 as Jews, as is apparent from Muqātil b. Sulaymān, who recounts this anecdote, with 'Ā'isha appearing as a character, though not as its source.⁴⁸ The version of the ḥadīth from al-Ṭabarī quoted above cements this identification by couching this story in the form of an occasion-of-revelation tradition.⁴⁹

But 'Ā'isha's presence in the story even as a character was not always regarded as necessary for it to serve its theological-exegetical purpose. According to al-Māturīdī (whose brief retelling of this anecdote neither includes 'Ā'isha in the story, nor names her as its source), this incident testifies to the truth of Muḥammad's prophethood, because God protected him from his opponents' harm and revealed to him their secret thoughts.⁵⁰ In this way, a verse with the potential to raise theologically troubling questions is transformed into a proof of faith.

In the version of this tradition from al-Ṭabarī that is quoted above, however, this story also encapsulates a pietistic message. The Jewish visitors turn the traditional Muslim greeting, *al-salām 'alayk* (peace be upon you)—which the

46 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xxviii, 17. It is taken up in by al-Māwardī (*al-Nukat* v, 491), and a version appears in Ibn 'Atīyya, though no source for it is mentioned (*al-Muḥarrar* xiv, 345). For other, similar versions see: al-Samarqandī iii, 335; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 130; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iv, 264; al-Baghawī iv, 281. Al-Ṭūsī alludes to this story, giving 'Ā'isha as its source (*al-Tibyān* ix, 549).

47 Al-Samarqandī iii, 335.

48 Muqātil iii, 332.

49 Al-Ṭabarī quotes no less than three versions of this tradition credited to 'Ā'isha in his discussion of Q 58:8, and the first two are structured as occasion-of-revelation traditions (*Jāmi'* xviii, 17–18).

50 Al-Māturīdī ix, 568.

Quran presents as the greeting that the righteous will receive as they enter Paradise⁵¹—into a curse: “death be upon you.” Moreover, they pronounce this curse almost surreptitiously, appearing to give the expected greeting. ‘Ā’isha’s angry interjection draws the attention of the audience/reader to this perfidious act.

Thus far, the Muslim audience/reader is likely to sympathize and identify with ‘Ā’isha’s indignant response. Yet, ‘Ā’isha as narrator almost immediately disrupts this identification by recounting Muḥammad’s calm reproof of her. In dramatic contrast to her invective, his response is measured and restrained, an example of *ḥilm* (forbearance).⁵² In this story, her chief role is to serve as a foil, against which Muḥammad’s status as an exemplar appears all the more clearly. As his reputedly favourite wife, she is particularly well suited to fulfill this literary function.

These two traditions discussed thus far, different as they are, reflect ‘Ā’isha’s complex position as a source of ḥadīths with pietistic themes. The complexity of the roles that she plays in these texts is particularly evident in the interpretive history of Q 68:4—“you [Muḥammad] have a strong character (*wa-innaka la’alā khuluqⁱⁿ ‘aẓīm*”).” In the *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, “*khuluqⁱⁿ ‘aẓīm*” receives nothing more than a gloss noting that it means “the religion of Islam.”⁵³ Similarly, al-Farrā’ glosses it as “a mighty religion.”⁵⁴ As a major theme of Sūrat al-Qalam (Q 68, “The Pen”) is the defence of Muḥammad from his opponents’ claims that he is mad or deluded, these glosses fit the context reasonably well.⁵⁵

However, in the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Wahb*, it is related that when ‘Ā’isha was asked about the meaning of the phrase “*khuluqⁱⁿ ‘aẓīm*,” she responded, “His character (*khuluq*) was the Quran, and action according to what it contains.”⁵⁶ While this tradition depicts ‘Ā’isha as someone who is consulted as to the meanings of unusual expressions in the quranic text, significantly, many versions of it present her rather as a source of information on Muḥammad’s conduct and personality. This is true of the several versions that are quoted in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*. For example, Sa’d b. Hishām recounts:

51 I.e. Q 36:58; 56:91.

52 *Ḥilm* was seen as a virtue by pagan Arabs as well as by medieval Muslims; see: Izutsu, *Ethico-religious concepts* 30–1.

53 Muqātil iii, 386.

54 “*Dīn^{un} aẓīm*” (al-Farrā’ iii, 173).

55 Given the commentators’ benefit of hindsight, because they knew that Muḥammad’s pagan opponents would soon be politically and religiously marginalised.

56 Ibn Wahb, *al-Ġāmi‘* (1993), fol. 25a, 12–13.

I went to ‘Ā’isha, Mother of the Believers, and said, “Tell me about the character of the Messenger of God.”

She responded, “His character was the Quran. Haven’t you read, ‘You have a strong character’ (Q 68:4)?”⁵⁷

When answering this question, rather than listing several of Muḥammad’s character traits, or relating anecdotes about his life, ‘Ā’isha directs Sa’d to the Quran.

This laconic response attributed to her had the effect of opening the verse to ever more elaborate interpretation. Given that everyone knows that the Quran gives few concrete details about Muḥammad’s life or personality, what does it mean to say that his character was the Quran? Al-Ṭabarī, who attempts to harmonize ‘Ā’isha’s reported reply with the interpretation of “*khuluqⁱⁿ ‘aẓīm*” as “the religion of Islam,” states that Q 68:4 means that Muḥammad’s conduct was exalted; God had taught him refinement through the Quran, i.e. Islam and its laws.⁵⁸ For al-Naḥḥās, who cites a periphrastic tradition attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās stating that “*khuluqⁱⁿ ‘aẓīm*” means “in accordance with [true] religion (*‘alā dīn*)” as well as another tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha that simply defines it as “the Quran,” Muḥammad’s possession of true guidance is inextricably tied to his exemplary conduct, i.e. his meeting people with a smiling face, his quickness to help others, his generosity and mercy. Did not he himself say, “The believer who has the most perfect faith [is] the best of them in character?”⁵⁹ Here, al-Naḥḥās is making explicit what the tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha has already evoked for his (and al-Ṭabarī’s) audiences/readers: the large numbers of traditions in circulation on the subject of Muḥammad’s exemplary conduct. As we have already seen, a noticeable number of traditions on this topic are attributed to women, especially to ‘Ā’isha.

Al-Tha’labī’s *tafsīr* provides an interesting illustration of the incorporation of such traditions into the exegetical discourse on Q 68:4.⁶⁰ He begins his discussion of this verse by citing several periphrastic interpretations of it that he attributes to Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid and al-Ḥasan. Then, he quotes the first tradition ascribed to ‘Ā’isha: “‘Ā’isha was asked about the character of the

57 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxix, 20. While the edition that I am using has “Sa’īd b. Hishām” as the questioner, this appears to be a mistake. For Sa’d and his questioning of ‘Ā’isha about the prophet’s prayers at night, see Chapter Four.

58 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxix, 20.

59 Al-Naḥḥās v, 5.

60 For an analytical discussion of al-Tha’labī’s treatment of Q 68:4 within the context of his hermeneutics, see: Saleh, *Formation* 115–18.

Messenger of God, and she replied, ‘His character was the Quran.’⁶¹ Thus, ‘Ā’isha is positioned as belonging to the earliest layer of interpretation, yet also as a link between this, and later pietistic elaborations of this verse that celebrate the prophet as a uniquely righteous and exalted figure. An explanation of her statement that is attributed to Qatāda immediately follows: it means that Muḥammad carried out what God ordered him, and abstained from what God prohibited. Next, al-Tha’labī quotes a couple of sayings credited to Sufi figures, to the effect that Muḥammad’s character is exalted because of his unswerving dedication to God.

Al-Tha’labī then shifts the focus from Muḥammad’s character to that of the believer. Not only did Muḥammad possess all noble traits of character (*makārim al-akhlāq*), but (as a ḥadīth attributed to Abū Hurayra states) he was sent to inculcate this in others. Al-Tha’labī further supports this contention with a ḥadīth credited to ‘Ā’isha, who relates that Muḥammad said that through good character, the believer can attain the rank of one who stands in prayer at night and fasts by day. For the reader/audience familiar with many of the various widely known ḥadīths attributed her in which she describes seeing the prophet praying at night and engaging in supererogatory fasting, this statement has the effect of evoking ‘Ā’isha’s abode, where she witnesses Muḥammad’s acts of worship—as do later generations, through her transmission of ḥadīths on this topic.

At this point, al-Tha’labī recounts a ḥadīth transmitted by Umm al-Dardā’ from her husband, Abū l-Dardā’, from Muḥammad, who is reported to have said, “Nothing weighs more heavily in the balance [of deeds] than good conduct.”⁶² Finally, two more ḥadīths (related by ‘Alī and Abū Hurayra respectively) also underline the importance of having good character.

In this interpretive trajectory of al-Tha’labī’s, a quranic verse which affirms Muḥammad’s worthiness in the face of pagan insults becomes not only a testimony to Muḥammad’s peerlessness as a human being, but also an exhortation to his community in general to develop good character and in this way, to follow his example.⁶³ The ḥadīths attributed to ‘Ā’isha play an important role in

61 Al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 249.

62 Al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf* vi, 250. It is interesting that this ḥadīth is an aphoristic statement about virtue, rather than one relating how the prophet conducted himself in a particular situation. Generally, the latter type of ḥadīth is much more commonly attributed to (or transmitted by) women.

63 Al-Tha’labī’s practice of taking quranic verses addressed to Muḥammad and applying them to believers in general is a feature of his hermeneutics; for a detailed discussion of this, see: Saleh, *Formation* 108ff.

making this fourth/tenth century pietistic development in *tafsīr* seem to issue forth from the abode of the prophet's wives. For Sunnis at least, this appears to have been an effective way to legitimate such an approach. Quran commentators who rely to various degrees on al-Tha'labī's *al-Kashf* elect to continue this evocation of this sacred space in their discussions of Q 68:4, by relating ḥadīths attributed to 'Ā'isha. For instance, al-Wāḥidī (in his *Wasīṭ*) quotes her twice as responding to those asking about Muḥammad's character that it was the Quran.⁶⁴ For his part, al-Baghawī not only includes both of the ḥadīths credited to 'Ā'isha (as well as the one transmitted by Umm al-Dardā) that are cited by al-Tha'labī, but he incorporates yet another well-known ḥadīth, in which 'Ā'isha states, "The Messenger of God never struck anything with his hand, except when he was fighting in the way of God. He did not strike any servant (*khādīm*) or woman."⁶⁵ Here again, through 'Ā'isha, the reader/audience is shown Muḥammad at home, in his wives' abode.

The appeal of traditions attributed to 'Ā'isha in exegeses of Q 68:4 was not always limited to Sunni-authored *tafsīr* works. For instance, Hūd attempts to reconcile the "mighty religion" and "Quran" glosses by citing a version of 'Ā'isha's tradition in which she explains, "The character of the Messenger of God was the Quran. And, the Quran contains the religion."⁶⁶ In his explanation of this verse, al-Ṭūsī includes the following tradition attributed to her: "The character of the Prophet was [in accordance with] what is contained in the first ten [verses] of Sūrat al-Mu'minūn."⁶⁷ (The irony—or boldness—of his inclusion of this particular tradition will become evident below.)

Nonetheless, the citation of traditions ascribed to 'Ā'isha or to other wives of Muḥammad in order to foster an emotional bond between the prophet and believers of later generations was neither a straightforward nor an unproblematic venture for all Sunni exegetes. In his discussion of Q 68:4, al-Māturidī mentions the interpretation of this verse as a reference to the Quran and its teachings, but does not acknowledge 'Ā'isha as its source. Moreover, he

64 Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iv, 334.

65 Al-Baghawī iv, 346–7.

66 "kāna khuluq Rasūl Allāh al-Qur'ān wa-l-Qur'ān fihi l-dīn" (Hūd iv, 394).

67 Al-Ṭūsī x, 75; see also: al-Ṭabrisī x, 500. The first ten verses of Sūrat al-Mu'minūn (S. 23, "The Believers") list a number of qualities which believers should possess: constancy in prayer, avoidance of frivolity, willingness to pay alms, abstention from sexual "immorality", and adherence to promises and contracts. The presence of ḥadīths credited to 'Ā'isha in the Quran commentaries of al-Ṭūsī as well as al-Ṭabrisī have been briefly noted by several scholars, and explained as a by-product of their quotation of Sunni sources (e.g. Lawson, Akhbārī Shi'i approaches to *tafsīr* 175). A detailed discussion of this interesting phenomenon is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

pointedly remarks that Muḥammad was not only sent to interact with the enemies of God and the saints, the small and the great, the knowledgeable and the ignorant—but also with his wives. As (he says) no one can relate successfully with such an array of persons without possessing a sublime character, God provided Muḥammad with this, as well as with constant guidance. Among the quranic verses that al-Māturīdī quotes in order to illustrate such divine direction is Q 66:1—“Prophet, why do you prohibit what God has made lawful to you in your desire to please your wives?”⁶⁸

Through their inclusion of such traditions in their Quran commentaries, these exegetes in effect position ‘Ā’isha to varying extents as a mediator of the relationship between Muḥammad and later generations of believers. This is a potentially powerful rank, not least because what constitutes the prophetic *sunna* was a contested issue on several levels. Some exegeses of Q 68:4 appear to present her performance of such a role as straightforwardly stemming from ‘Ā’isha’s proximity to the prophet. The late medieval exegete al-Biqā’ī (d. 885/1480) emphatically declares in his discussion of the verse: “. . . [Muḥammad’s] character—according to the witness of the most knowing of all people about it, his wife, the Mother of the Believers, the Truthful, ‘Ā’isha, daughter of the Abū Bakr the Truthful—[was] the Quran.”⁶⁹ However, al-Māturīdī’s exegesis of the verse reminds us that in actuality, the emergence of ‘Ā’isha as an oft-cited authority on these matters even in Sunni Quran commentaries is the result of multiple acts of interpretation. Moreover, as we have seen, some non-Sunni exegetes, such as Hūd and al-Ṭūsī, were nonetheless at times willing to concede this status of intermediary to her.

Al-Māturīdī’s pointed quotation of Q 66:1 in his discussion of Q 68:4 illustrates the fact that the symbolic authority attributed to ‘Ā’isha as a ḥadīth transmitter was far from being unproblematic even for Sunnis. Weighty considerations of social hierarchy are at stake in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis of the latter verse, as the power to define norms of behaviour was most often deemed a (free) male prerogative, with women typically represented as recipients rather than originators of discourses about social and ethical norms and ideals.

68 Al-Māturīdī x, 136–7. The wives said to have taken the leading role in provoking the crisis referred to in Q 66:1 are generally identified as Ḥafṣa and ‘Ā’isha; see: Muqātil iii, 376; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* xxviii, 175–7. For more on this, see below.

69 Burhān al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Biqā’ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* viii, 98.

3.2 *Legal-Exegetical Traditions: Negotiating Gender and Communal Identity*

In their interpretations of quranic verses which were regarded as having legal implications, Quran commentators often utilize traditions. A noticeable number of these are attributed to women, particularly to the wives of the prophet. In this way, the abode of the Mothers of the Believers often becomes a key site where legal issues are negotiated.

A significant if apparently paradoxical aspect of the traditions on this topic that are quoted in medieval *tafsīr* works is the way that they render the secluded abode of the prophet's wives forever audible and visible. Their abode is neither imagined as marginal to nor apart from community happenings. On the contrary, the community seldom seems to be unaware of the day-to-day doings of these ostensibly secluded women. A number of traditions depict the wives of Muḥammad, both during his lifetime and after, as able to hear what was going on in the apartments of their co-wives and in the mosque⁷⁰—and also present this as a fact that was well known to the community at large.⁷¹ Later generations' juridically driven need to know the details of how the prophet's wives comported themselves in all circumstances⁷² likely played an important role in preserving if not originating such representations.⁷³

While the role played by both traditions attributed to the wives of the prophet as well as their reported attire, conduct and manner of life in the formulation of legal rulings that are often highly restrictive of (free) women has often been noted, the legal significance of such texts extends to much more than this. The veiling and seclusion that Muḥammad's wives are commanded to observe (Q 33:33, 53–5) marks their status as free, elite women. It also has the effect of gendering and hierarchically ordering the entire community in a strikingly visual way: who can have access to them as a group with or without the intervening curtain? As influential women whose domicile is in the prophet's house-mosque, which Muslim sources present as the centre of communal life in first/seventh century Yathrib, the question of who can freely speak to or otherwise interact with them is depicted as a matter of decisive importance. For classical exegetes, this remains a salient question in their own contexts. Thus, even though the women in question are long since deceased, their

70 E.g., al-Bukhārī iii, 2–3 (*Abwāb al-'Umra*), also: iv, 217–218 (*K. Farḍ al-khums*); Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 330, 334, 338.

71 Al-Bukhārī iv, 494 (*Bāb al-Manāqib*).

72 Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an* 105–6.

73 It is important to recall that the conceptions of domestic privacy found in medieval Muslim texts developed through time; see: Alshech, 'Do not enter houses' 291–332.

curtain is made to extend down through the centuries—in order to seclude free, often elite women in various communities from public view, but even more importantly, to gender and hierarchically order the entire body of believers.

3.2.1 Negotiating Gender: Veiling and Seclusion

Such (re)negotiations of gender are evident in Quran commentators' deliberations over the meaning of Q 24:31—"And tell the believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms. . . ." The classical exegetes interpret this verse as mandating the veiling of free women, thus creating a clear visual distinction between free and unfree females, as well as between free women and all men, particularly in areas of common access such as the street and the market.

Traditions attributed to 'Ā'isha specifying the precise body parts or jewellery that a free woman may reveal routinely appear in Sunni classical *tafsīr* works as part of the interpretive discourse on this verse, as we have seen. She is variously reported to have said that a woman may show "the face and the hands"⁷⁴ or "bracelets and a ring."⁷⁵ In this way, the wives of Muḥammad—here represented by 'Ā'isha—delineate how the gendered categories into which society "should" be organized are to be marked through dress and behaviour.

This role is often explicitly played out within their abode. For instance, in his discussion of the ambiguous quranic directive that women "not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal," al-Ṭabarī relates a ḥadīth on the authority of Ibn Jurayj, in which 'Ā'isha recounts that on one occasion, her niece came to visit her. When Muḥammad came in, he turned away, and when 'Ā'isha asked why he had done so, he responded that once a female has menstruated, no part of her body aside from her face should be seen—and then he grasped his own forearm in order to indicate how much of the wrist can be left visible (along with the hand).⁷⁶ Here, in 'Ā'isha's room, the prophet utilizes his own body in order to concretely demonstrate the minimum extent of "proper" covering for free adult females in situations when the gaze of a free male who is not closely related to them could fall upon them. In so doing, he restores order within the space itself, and presents this order as a pattern for his community to follow. In a similar vein, a ḥadīth in al-Māturīdī's discussion of this verse relates on the authority of 'Ā'isha that when her sister Asmā'

74 E.g., al-Samarqandī ii, 437.

75 E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 142; al-Māturīdī vii, 544.

76 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 142; a shorter version on the authority of 'Ā'isha is related by al-Tha'labī (*al-Kashf* iv, 367).

came to visit her clothed in garments made of thin Syrian fabric, the prophet reproved her.⁷⁷ This ḥadīth depicts an incident that is said to have happened within Muḥammad's wives' abode and during his lifetime. Yet, at the same time, it also transcends its walls, addressing an aspect of the social impact of the conquests, which became an issue of concern after his death.

The secluded domain of the prophet's wives is also represented in *tafsīr* texts as a site where gendered distinctions (and with them, social order) are authoritatively clarified, even in notoriously unclear situations. In the Ghaylān's daughter tradition discussed in Chapter One, the *mukhannath* who used to visit the wives of the prophet scandalously blurs gendered categories. This tradition dramatises the scandal inherent in his transgression of gender boundaries: momentarily, a not-male person appears to arrogate to himself the rank and power of the free, elite male warrior who apportions the spoils of war, which includes the bodies of the captured women.⁷⁸ By so doing, he verbally blurs a key component that differentiates the gender performance of the free male from those of others. In the end, it is the curtain secluding the wives of the prophet that represents the reimposition of order. The *mukhannath* quickly finds himself on the other side of it, barred from visiting them in future.

Al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha'labī evidently understand this ḥadīth to mean that only *mukhannaths* who are impotent may visit secluded women,⁷⁹ and thus employ the curtain as a means through which gender categories are ever (re) negotiated. This dynamic is also evident in the citation by other exegetes of legal views ascribed to a few of the wives of Muḥammad on allied controversial topics, such as the question of whether a woman must conceal her hair in front of her adult male slave,⁸⁰ or if eunuchs are included in the quranic permission for "such men as attend them who have no sexual desire" (Q 24:31) to see a (free) woman's adornments.⁸¹ At issue in these situations is where the boundaries of free adult manhood lie.

77 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt* vii, 546.

78 E.g., in the version cited by al-Māturīdī (credited to Umm Salama) the *mukhannath* says, "If God enables you to conquer al-Ṭā'if tomorrow, I will lead you to the daughter of Ghaylān..." (*Ta'wīlāt* vii, 552).

79 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* xviii, 148; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 368.

80 According to Umm Salama and 'Ā'isha, a male slave may see his mistress' hair (al-Jaṣṣās iii, 318); see also: al-Māwardī iv, 94; al-Baghawī iii, 288; al-Zamakhsharī iv, 292; Ibn 'Aṭīyya x, 491.

81 E.g.: "...Ā'isha was asked, 'Can a eunuch (*khaṣī*) see a woman's beauty?' She replied, 'No!... Is he not a man?'" (al-Samarqandī ii, 438). This view attributed to her has been a minority opinion historically; see: Ayalon, On the eunuchs 67–124.

3.2.2 Negotiating Communal Identity: Sexual Acts

Gender categories are also forever (re)negotiated in exegetical works in the interpretive discourses regarding permitted and unlawful sexual relationships and acts. The wives of Muḥammad—typically, through traditions ascribed to ʿĀ'isha—are invoked by exegetes when discussing verses relating to marriage as well as to divorce. The Quran presents some aspects of Muḥammad's marriages as containing legal precedents for his community (Q 33:37, 66:2), but others as particular to himself (Q 33:50, 52). Further elaborating on the former theme, proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes present the curtain secluding the wives of the prophet as also demarcating a domain of normative, exemplary marital and sexual practices. And, who better to transmit traditions about such matters than his wives?

Yet, the presence of some degree of ambiguity as to whether certain actions reported of Muḥammad are permitted only for him or can also be imitated by others meant that the precise contours of such an exemplary domain could never be entirely fixed. Also, the references in the Quran to conflicts associated with Muḥammad's marriages, both in terms of the community's critical reactions to them (Q 33:36–40, 50) and in his apparently often tumultuous relationships with his wives (Q 33:28–34, 51; 66:1–5) were well-known. These factors helped to ensure that the abode of the wives of the prophet would remain associated with controversy for medieval Quran commentators and their readers/audiences and the location of the normative boundaries that it was believed to represent open to contestation. As such, exegetes metaphorically extend this curtained space down to their own times, so that several of the wives of the prophet come to be called upon to pronounce on controversial marriage, divorce and sexual practices hotly debated by later generations. The workings of this dynamic, as well as the larger issues at stake, are particularly visible in the exegetical controversies regarding the reference to *mut'a* in Q 4:24, and the description of women in Q 2:223 as men's "fields" (*ḥarth*).

Al-Ṭabarī presents two possible interpretations of Q 4:24—"... if you wish to enjoy them, give them their recompense..." (*fa-mā stamta'tum bihi minhunna fa-tūhunna ujūrahunna*): first, that it discusses marriage as generally understood, along with the payment of the bride-gift (*mahr* or *ṣadāq*), and second, that it refers to *mut'a*. The second interpretation is variously credited to early authorities such as al-Suddī, Mujāhid and Ibn ʿAbbās; the latter's personal copy of the Quran is said to have rendered Q 4:24 as: "... if you wish to enjoy them for a specified period of time, give them their recompense..."⁸² The latter reading

82 *"fa-mā stamta'tum bihi minhunna ilā ajalⁱⁿ musammā fa-tūhunna ujūrahunna"* (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 17; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 264–5; see also: al-Ṭūsī iii, 166.

is clearly aimed at undercutting any attempt to argue that the verse does not in fact refer to *mut'a*. Al-Ṭabarī finally sides with the first interpretation, matter-of-factly dismissing the traditions on variant readings as unacceptable due to their divergence from the canonical quranic text.⁸³

While al-Ṭabarī might give the impression that in the third/ninth century, this was simply a rather arcane disagreement about the interpretation of a few words, his contemporary al-Zajjāj makes the sectarian significance of this debate clear. How (he rhetorically asks) can anyone maintain that the verse refers to *mut'a* when the jurists have agreed that the practice is forbidden? While he attempts to make a philological argument in favour of interpreting the phrase as a reference to marriage, his discussion leaves little doubt that his underlying concern has less to do with linguistics than with determining intra-communal boundaries. For al-Zajjāj, the “correct” interpretation of this phrase is a litmus test that differentiates those in accord with “community” consensus and those whom he regards as being in grave error, such as the *mut'a*-practicing Rāfiḍiyya (i.e. Shi'is).⁸⁴ It would seem that his vehemence is a reaction to those who suggested a less uncompromising position on the matter.⁸⁵

In al-Māturīdī's Quran commentary, the abode of the prophet's wives is invoked in his discussion of this verse, with a tradition attributed to 'Ā'isha. Al-Māturīdī relates that when 'Ā'isha was asked about *mut'a*, she responded that she saw no mention of any permissible sexual relationship in the Quran aside from marriage and concubinage, quoting Q 23:5–7 as proof of this assertion: “. . . who guard their chastity except with their spouses or their slaves—with these they are not to blame, but anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits.”⁸⁶

As is evident from this tradition, one of the chief concerns animating the controversy over *mut'a* was its implications for the distinction between marriage and concubinage. In theory at least, a wife's main responsibility was to produce “legitimate” offspring for her husband, while a concubine was property intended to provide sexual pleasure; not coincidentally, concubines were

83 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 18.

84 Al-Zajjāj ii, 23. For early Twelver Shi'i interpretations of Q 4:24 as a reference to *mut'a*; see: al-Qummī i, 164; al-'Ayyāshī i, 259–60.

85 The argument was reportedly made by some early Muslims that *mut'a* is permissible in cases of urgent necessity, but prohibited otherwise (al-Jaṣṣāṣ ii, 147; al-Māturīdī iii, 116). For the question of whether Sunnis ever permitted it, see: Gribetz, *Strange bedfellows* 18–21.

86 Al-Māturīdī iii, 118. Al-Tha'labī cites a version of this tradition, as well as another saying of 'Ā'isha maintaining that the Quran does not mention *mut'a* (*al-Kaṣhfi* ii, 266); see also: Ibn 'Aṭīyya iv, 9–10.

always slave rather than free women.⁸⁷ However, with *mut'a* one had the legally recognized possibility of a free woman who was ostensibly married, yet whose husband had no financial obligations to her beyond the agreed-upon fee tendered in exchange for her sexual availability—and who, like a concubine, was not counted among the maximum four wives that a man could have at a time.⁸⁸ In the course of his emphatic defense of *mut'a*, Al-Ṭūsī indirectly acknowledges the import of the problem this could pose for the construction and maintenance of the gender hierarchy by discussing this same tradition attributed to ʿĀ'isha, though without mentioning her name.⁸⁹ Addressing the question of how to categorize the woman involved in such a relationship, he asserts that she is in fact a wife.⁹⁰

It is indubitable that this debate is about intra-communal self-definition at least as much as it is about the question of which sexual relationships are permitted by the quranic text. The former concern has played a powerful role in shaping the exegetical discourse on Q 4:24.⁹¹ The inclusion of this tradition attributed to ʿĀ'isha by some Sunni exegetes is in part an attempt to counter-balance the reported views of some men closely related to Muḥammad, particularly Ibn ʿAbbās, asserting that *mut'a* is licit. While classical Sunni Quran commentaries also cite counter-traditions ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿAlī that

87 However, any offspring fathered by the owner of a concubine was also considered “legitimate.”

88 I.e. there was no legal limit to the number of *mut'a* wives that a man could have at any given time; see: al-ʿAyyāshī i, 159–60.

89 Al-Ṭūsī clearly knows that this tradition is ascribed to ʿĀ'isha, as he credits it to her in his exegesis of Q 68:4, as we saw above.

90 Neither party in a *mut'a* relationship inherits from the other, and the relationship is automatically dissolved at the end of the stipulated period. While critics of the practice objected that a valid marriage necessarily creates inheritance rights, and can only be terminated by following a recognized legal procedure, al-Ṭūsī points out that these general rules have some well-known exceptions even according to Sunnis (*al-Tibyān* iii, 165–6).

91 See for example al-Wāḥidī's discussion of the issue in his otherwise philologically-oriented commentary, *al-Basīṭ*. He begins with the claim that all scholars agree that this phrase refers to ordinary marriage, and uncritically quotes part of al-Zajjāj's attempt to linguistically explain away the word “*istamta'tum*.” Then, he launches into a vivid description of the practice of *mut'a* during Muḥammad's time, thus indirectly acknowledging that the verse does in fact refer to it. However, he goes on to make the “orthodox” Sunni argument that this initial permission for *mut'a* was abrogated, and most uncharacteristically relies on the multiple citation of traditions—including the one attributed to ʿĀ'isha—in order to make this assertion (Nurosmāniye 236, fols. 509a–9b).

explicitly deny the continued permissibility of *mut'ā*,⁹² the opinions credited to these men in its favour were too well known for this strategy to be very convincing. Even more problematic was the fact that 'Umar's reputed ban of the practice had spawned a biting rejoinder early on: "If 'Umar had not banned *mut'ā*, none but a scoundrel would have committed *zinā*."⁹³ As for the traditions recounting that the prophet himself had alternately forbidden, permitted and then finally prohibited it for all time, al-Tha'labī concedes that they are quite extraordinary.⁹⁴ By contrast, the abode of the wives of the prophet could be claimed by the Sunnis as an authoritative space where this issue could be adjudicated.

From early on in Muslim history, similar ostensibly legal debates have functioned as venues for sectarian boundary drawing.⁹⁵ The question of what constitutes a valid marriage or other licit sexual relationship is intimately bound up in the matter of communal self-definition, as these are the means through which the community aspired to perpetuate itself: literally, through the reproduction of children, and at the social, legal and ideational levels, by constantly (re)producing its patriarchal structures through the regulation of sexuality.

The exegetical debate regarding Q 2:223—"Your women are your fields (*ḥarth*), so go into your fields whichever way you like . . ."—is a particularly illuminating illustration of this dynamic. Although the preceding verse, Q 2:222, restricts men's sexual access to women during menstruation, the description of women as men's fields is seemingly open-ended. In relation to such restrictions coupled with what is apparently a wide arena for men's assumed right to determine the contours of their sexual relationships with their wives or concubines, questions arose regarding the legal status of two non-procreative practices: withdrawal (*'azl*)⁹⁶ and anal intercourse.

92 E.g., al-Jaṣṣāṣ ii, 148; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 266. A particularly pointed tradition of this type has 'Alī passing by Ibn 'Abbās, who is in the act of giving a ruling declaring that *mut'ā* is permissible, and 'Alī himself corrects him (al-Wāḥidī, *al-Basīṭ*, Nurosmāniye 236, fol. 509b).

93 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 17; al-Māturīdī iii, 116; al-Jaṣṣāṣ ii, 147; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 265; al-Ṭūsī iii, 167). For 'Umar and *mut'ā*, see: Hakim, *Conflicting images* 163ff.

94 Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 266.

95 For instance, the Khārijīs famously debated the issue of whether a "believing" (i.e. Khārijī) female slave could be sold to an "unbelieving" (i.e. non-Khārijī) man; see: Montgomery Watt, *Islamic philosophy* 11.

96 For interpretations of Q 2:223 as giving men permission to practice *'azl*, see: al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* i, 350; al-Māwardī i, 284. Al-Māturīdī disapproves of *'azl* with a free woman, as in his view the main purpose of sex with such women is reproduction (*Ta'wīlāt* ii, 137–8).

In the formative period, the permissibility of anal intercourse with women was a debated issue. Early Shi'i authorities reportedly differed on the matter,⁹⁷ as did proto-Sunnis; several early figures, such as the Companion Ibn 'Umar and Imam Mālik, are said to have regarded it as licit.⁹⁸ The question of whether Q 2:223 permits it is addressed in a number of occasion-of revelation traditions. According to one such widely cited tradition, some Jews told the Muslims that intercourse with a woman from behind is sinful (or, in other versions, that any resulting child would be deformed); this verse was then sent down.⁹⁹

This tradition can be read as expressing a supercessionist claim—that Muḥammad's receipt of revelation endows him rather than the rabbis with the authority to determine what is "sinful"—or alternatively, that it provides him with esoteric knowledge of the mysteries of human generation.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, it stakes out an ostensibly distinctive place for Muḥammad's followers¹⁰¹ in the acrimonious debate about the body and sexuality that had been going on between Jews and Christians for several centuries.¹⁰²

Quran commentators ensured that the Muslims also would use debates about sexual practices as vehicles for the delineation of boundaries between themselves and "others"—particularly "intimate others," i.e. rival legal schools and sects. Al-Zajjāj, for instance, emphatically argues that Q 2:223 clearly prohibits anal intercourse with women. Unwilling to countenance what he regards as an insufficiently literal interpretation of the verse, he also condemns Mālik's reported view on the subject because it is at variance with what he terms the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the Muslims.¹⁰³ Here, the alleged "consensus" on this issue becomes a determinant of communal belonging. Hence, Mālik's stance troubled Sunni Quran commentators, who attacked the authenticity of a well-known tradition (transmitted by Nāfi' from Ibn 'Umar) which Mālik is said to have adduced as proof that anal intercourse with women is permitted.¹⁰⁴

97 For varying Shi'i opinions, see: al-'Ayyāshī i, 130–1; al-Qummī i, 100.

98 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 484–5; al-Zajjāj i, 234; al-Jaṣṣāṣ i, 351–2; 'Imād al-Dīn b. Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī al-ma'rūf bi-ll-Kiyyā al-Harrāsī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* i, 140–2.

99 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 483; al-Samarqandī i, 205; al-Jaṣṣāṣ i, 353; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kaṣhfi*, 349.

100 The legality of anal intercourse as well as of different sexual positions is discussed and debated in the Talmud; see: Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 109ff.

101 Although in actual fact, Sunni classical exegesis of Q 2:223 and Jewish legal discourses on sexual positions and acts are intertwined historically; see: Maghen, *Turning the tables* 161–209.

102 For this debate, see: Brown, *The body and society*; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 5–10.

103 Al-Zajjāj i, 234.

104 E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 484; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kaṣhfi* i, 351; similarly, Ibn al-'Arabī i, 174. Remarkably, while this tradition appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, a crucial word is missing, so

In time, some Sunni Quran commentators would declare Mālik innocent of ever having made such a statement.¹⁰⁵ How could such a respected early authority be imagined to have not been accord with the “consensus” on such a charged issue? By contrast, the Twelver Shi‘i exegete al-Ṭūsī invokes Mālik and Ibn ‘Umar in support of his view that anal sex with women is in fact permissible. Energetically pressing home his point, he refutes the counter-arguments based on linguistics, beliefs about the divinely ordained *telos* of sex, purity laws, and an occasion-of-revelation tradition.¹⁰⁶ Through this deployment of such a range of fields of inquiry, al-Ṭūsī confidently asserts Shi‘i exegetical definitional control over this verse and contests that of his Sunni opponents.

As these examples illustrate, this particular exegetical debate is complex and multi-faceted. Quran commentators were engaged with several intertwined and thorny boundary-related issues—not only the legal problem of determining what is lawful or prohibited but with communal self-definition, social order¹⁰⁷ and the (re)production of gender categories, as well as with even more abstract questions. Significantly, as with the vexed question of *mut‘a*, a number of exegetes invoke the abode of Muḥammad’s wives as a realm within which such conflicting interests and concerns can be mediated:

... Ḥafṣa bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr—Umm Salama, wife of the Prophet, (who) said: “A man married a woman, and he wanted to have intercourse with her from behind. She refused this, and said, ‘Not until I ask the Messenger of God.’”

Umm Salama said, “She told this to me.”

And Umm Salama told this to the Messenger of God, and he said, ‘Send for her!’ When the woman came, the Messenger of God recited to her: ‘Your women are your fields, so go into your fields whichever way you like’ (Q 2:223)—one orifice, one orifice.”¹⁰⁸

that Ibn ‘Umar’s stance on the issue becomes unknown. Ibn Ḥajar reports that this word is missing in all copies of the work (!); see: *Fath al-bārī* viii, 37 (*K. al-Taḥṣūr*).

105 E.g., al-Qurṭubī iii, 94.

106 Al-Ṭūsī ii, 223–4.

107 The issue at stake was not only whether the practice was lawful or prohibited in itself, but that it could be used to evade the ban on intercourse during menses (Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 405), or perhaps to avoid detection of premarital sex.

108 Al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi‘* ii, 487. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ has a shortened version (*Aḥkām* i, 353); for a similar ḥadīth, see: Ibn ‘Aṭīyya ii, 255.

While the exegetical discourse on this verse outlined above largely features (free) male voices¹⁰⁹ employing the imagined bodies of anonymous women as a backdrop to their debates, this tradition momentarily acknowledges one such woman as a subject. Due to both classical Islamic law and traditional custom, non-procreative sexual acts increasingly became flash-points for conflicts of interest between men and women,¹¹⁰ particularly for concubines.¹¹¹ Moreover, in the context of the legal emphasis on a wife's sexual obedience as a key "right" of her husband upon her, a ban on anal intercourse would at least in theory somewhat broaden women's legal grounds for resisting men's sexual control.¹¹²

Yet, the focus of the tradition does not remain on the female questioner for long. Not only is her reaction to the prophet's response not recorded, but the closing phrase of the tradition effectively directs the attention of the audience/reader away from her concerns or desires to those of her husband.¹¹³ This tradition envisions male-female sexual relationships as venues of gender performance *par excellence*, with men playing the active role and enacting it upon female bodies; as with the exegetical discourse on Q 2:223 in general, it is concerned first and foremost with regulating and directing the performance of male desire.

The concern is palpable among Sunni exegetes that the performance might go awry, that men might enter the "wrong" orifice and thereby commit what exegetes variously term "minor sodomy" (*al-lūṭiyya al-ṣuḡhrā*),¹¹⁴ or "the act of

109 Notably, attacks on the Ibn 'Umar tradition at times highlight the slave status of the transmitter, Nāfi'.

110 Ahmed, Arab culture 52–3.

111 Al-Māturīdī notes that while a free woman's permission is necessary for 'azl, a concubine's is not, as no man is legally obliged to "spoil" his property (*Ta'wilāt* ii, 139). As a concubine who bore a child for her master could not be sold and was to be freed upon his death, her pregnancy could represent a significant financial loss to her owner or his heirs. Significantly, some of the traditions opposing anal intercourse with women are framed as men discussing whether it is licit with slave-girls (e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 485), likely because it was a much surer way to avoid pregnancy than 'azl.

112 Al-Qurṭubī draws attention to this aspect of the question when he asserts that the control of the wife's person that a husband acquires in marriage is limited to the vagina, i.e. that it does not extend to the anus (*fa-ghayr mawḍi' l-nasl lā yanāluhu milk al-nikāḥ*); see: *al-Jāmi' li-l-ahkām* iii, 94. For a detailed discussion of medieval jurists' conceptions of sexual rights in marriage, see: Ali, *Sexual ethics* 6–13.

113 This is the case even in more detailed versions of this tradition; e.g.: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* ii, 487–8; Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 404.

114 E.g., al-Jaṣṣāṣ i, 352; al-Māturīdī ii, 137.

the people of Lot.”¹¹⁵ That the spectre of Lot’s people is seldom absent from this exegetical debate illustrates that what is at stake here is the reproduction of the social order itself on the ideational as well as the physical level. There was always the risk that men might pursue sexual pleasure for its own sake to an “immoderate” degree,¹¹⁶ which could include turning their penetrative sexual attentions to males.

The anxiety that the latter prospect produced is apparent in these texts. Exegetes, whether Sunni or otherwise, faced the challenge of upholding male prerogatives such that these would strengthen rather than pose a threat to social and communal hierarchies. The recourse by some exegetes to the imagined abode of the wives of the prophet in their interpretations of Q 2:223 serves to hold fears of social chaos at bay, so that they could be discussed through the screen of Umm Salama’s reporting about a nameless female questioner.

4 The Secondary Exegetical Gaze, Autonomy, and Authority

Thus far, we have examined some of the ways in which a number of mostly Sunni Quran commentators from the formative period until the sixth/twelfth century construct and invoke the abode of the Mothers of the Believers as a space within which several exegetical issues involving varying degrees of controversy can be addressed and resolved. In the examples discussed above, two female figures in particular—Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr and Umm Salama—were granted a degree of interpretive authority. It remains to consider the implications of such constructions of interpretive authority and gendered constructions of autonomy and authority in a broader sense. In order to do this, we will examine a cluster of occasion-of-revelation traditions for Q 3:195, 4:32 and 33:35 that were briefly mentioned in Chapter Four.

4.1 “... Why are we not mentioned in the recitation as men are mentioned?”

In the course of his exegesis of Q 33:35—“For men and women who are devoted to God, believing men and women . . .”¹¹⁷—al-Ṭabarī recounts several occasion-of-revelation traditions. The final tradition states:

115 E.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* ii, 482.

116 Al-Māturīdī iv, 487–8 (*sub.* Q 7:80).

117 The entire verse reads: “For men and women who are devoted to God: believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste

... I heard Umm Salama, the wife of the prophet saying: “I said to the prophet, ‘Messenger of God, why are we not mentioned in the recitation (*fī l-qurʿān*) as men are?’”

She went on: “And nothing silenced me until that day at noon when he called from the pulpit,¹¹⁸ while I was doing my hair. So I twisted up my hair, and then went out to another of [the women’s] rooms. I pressed my ear against the [wall of] palm stalks,¹¹⁹ and then he recited on the pulpit—‘O people, God says in His book, *For men and women who are devoted to God, believing men and women* [inna l-muslimīna wa-l-muslimāti wa-l-muʿminīna wa-l-muʿmināt]. . . .’”¹²⁰

At first glance, Umm Salama’s question is rather puzzling. It is true that while the masculine plural form of “*muslim*” (*muslimūn* or *muslimīn*) is found in numerous verses in the Quran, the feminine plural form (*muslimāt*) very rarely appears,¹²¹ and only in Q 33:35 is it used alongside the masculine plural form. Nonetheless, the expression “believing men and women” (*al-muʿminīn wa-l-muʿmināt*) appears in two quranic verses which are traditionally held to have been revealed well before the *hijra*,¹²² as does at least one verse asserting that whoever does good and is a believer, “whether male or female” (*min dhakarⁱⁿ aw unthā*) will be rewarded by God.¹²³ While such linguistic constructions making positive mention of male and female believers in tandem cannot be described as a common feature of quranic style prior to the *hijra*, they nonetheless would seem to have been present well before Umm Salama is said to have asked this question—which according to this tradition was in the abode of the prophet’s wives in Medina.

That different versions of the question said to have been posed by Umm Salama (and according to some traditions, by the female Companion Nusaybat. Kaʿb¹²⁴ along with her), or by other women are quoted by exegetes suggest

men and women, men and women who remember God often—God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward.”

118 “*fa-lam yaraʿnī dhāt yawm zuhr^{an} illā nidāʾahu ‘alā l-minbar.*” I would like to thank Walid Saleh for his assistance in translating this sentence.

119 I.e. presumably palm stalks and clay; see: Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 191.

120 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xxii, 14; also: al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 112.

121 It is only found in Q 33:35 and 66:5.

122 Q 85:10 and 71:28.

123 Q 40:40; see also Q 16:97.

124 Ibn Saʿd relates that she took part in several battles—Uḥud, Khaybar, Ḥunayn and Yamāma (633–4), where her hand was cut off—that she gave allegiance at the Second ʿAqaba, and was present at al-Ḥudaybiyya (*Ṭabaqāt* viii, 450–4).

that attempts were made to “clarify” the meaning of the incident.¹²⁵ This tradition should probably be understood as an attempt to account for why several sūras traditionally dated to the late Medinan period—Sūrat al-Tawba (S. 9, “Repentance”),¹²⁶ Sūrat al-Nūr, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, Sūrat al-Faḥ (S. 48, “Victory”) and Sūrat al-Ḥadīd (S. 57, “Iron”)—stand out among other quranic sūras for the number of references that they contain to male and female believers and male and female doers of righteous deeds.¹²⁷ It is noteworthy that these sūras also speak repeatedly of male and female polytheists, male and female “Hypocrites” and males and females who behave “sinfully.”¹²⁸ However, this tradition has the effect of marginalising references of the latter types by highlighting the references to male and female believers.

Significantly, similar occasion-of-revelation traditions are provided by al-Ṭabarī for Q 3:195 and Q 4:32. Umm Salama is reported to have said to Muḥammad, “I do not hear God mentioning women in the *hijra* at all.” Then, Q 3:195 was revealed:

Their Lord has answered them: ‘I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female; you come from each other. I will certainly wipe out the bad deeds of those who emigrated and were driven out of their homes, who suffered harm for My cause, who fought and were killed. I will certainly admit them to gardens graced with flowing streams, as a reward from God: the best reward is with God.’¹²⁹

Similarly, Umm Salama is related to have said, “Messenger of God, we do not inherit, nor do we go on raids or fight in the path of God.” This statement of hers was followed by the revelation of Q 4:32:

Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others—men have the portion they have earned and women the portion they have earned—you should rather ask God for some of His bounty: He has full knowledge of everything.¹³⁰

125 See for example: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* xxii, 13–14; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* v, 111–12.

126 S. 9 is also known as Sūrat al-Barāʾa, “Immunity.”

127 See: Q 9:71–2; 24:12, 26, 30–1; 33:35, 36, 58, 73; 48:5, 25; 57:12 and 18.

128 See: Q 9:67–8; 24:2, 3, 26; 33:73; 48:6 and 57:13.

129 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* iv, 259. Similarly: al-Thaʿabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 216; Ibn al-Mundhir ii, 538–9; al-Samarqandī i, 324; al-Māwardī i, 443; al-Baghawī i, 305; Ibn ʿAṭiyya iii, 467; al-Ṭūsī iii, 89.

130 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* v, 60; similarly: al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 276; Ibn al-Mundhir ii, 676–7; al-Māturīdī iii, 148; al-Zajjāj ii, 27; al-Samarqandī i, 350; al-Māwardī i, 477; al-Baghawī i, 334; Ibn ʿAṭiyya iv, 34–5; al-Ṭūsī iii, 184.

These noticeably similar occasion-of-revelation traditions seem to be variant versions of what was “originally” one tradition. These variants apparently came to be linked to several different quranic verses fairly early on. While this is not the place to delve into their historical origins or redaction histories, it should be noted that a number of versions of this tradition attribute the question to an anonymous group of women, or to the wives of the prophet in general, or to particular female Companions, rather than (or in addition to) Umm Salama. But while the anecdote may not have “originally” have involved her at all, by quoting versions that portray Umm Salama as the questioner (and in some cases, as the transmitter of this tradition as well), a significant number of exegetes elect to negotiate the issues that one, two, or all three of these quranic verses raise within the abode of the Mothers of the Believers.

It is apparent that on a literary-textual plane, these traditions implicitly create a link among these three verses—Q 33:35, 3:95 and 4:32—in the mind of the audience/reader of al-Ṭabarī’s Quran commentary, as well as of other *tafsīr* works that quote versions of this tradition in their exegeses of these verses. Such an implied connection among these three verses is already present in the *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*.¹³¹ That this is not merely coincidental is indicated in one of the variant versions of this tradition cited by al-Ṭabarī on the authority of Mujāhid *via* Sufyān al-Thawrī for Q 4:32, which recounts that after Umm Salama objected, “Men fight and we don’t, but we (only) receive half-shares of inheritance!?” both 4:32 and 33:35 were revealed.¹³² Moreover, a tradition quoted by Ibn al-Mundhir on the authority of Mujāhid *via* Sufyān al-Thawrī connects 4:32 and 3:195, both of which are said to have been revealed following Umm Salama’s complaint that women neither fight nor inherit,¹³³ and yet another referred to by Muqātil links the revelation of both Q 3:195 and 33:35 to her asking why women are not mentioned.¹³⁴

But why would exegetes opt to connect these three verses in such ways?¹³⁵ One possible answer is that all three verses present what some exegetes regarded as linguistic anomalies by their references to female as well as male

131 Muqātil i, 210, 226; iii, 46.

132 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ* v, 60; see also: al-Jaṣṣāṣ ii, 182; Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 935.

133 Ibn al-Mundhir ii, 676; similarly: Ibn Abī Ḥātim iii, 935.

134 Muqātil i, 210; similarly, al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* ii, 276, *sub.* Q 4:32.

135 That there are some exceptions in the sources utilized for this study (e.g. an attempt to link the revelation of Q 40:40—“whoever does good whether male or female and is a believer . . .”—with the revelation of Q 3:195 and 33:35 following Umm Salama’s question; see: Muqātil iii, 46) suggests that there was no consensus regarding which verse(s) the anecdote pertains to.

believers, as in Arabic, the masculine plural form can refer to a group composed of both males and females, as well as a group containing only males. With regard to Q 33:35, it is stated in al-Farrā's *Ma'ānī* that:

The questioner asks, "How is it that male and female believers are mentioned [here], when [mentioning] the first is sufficient?"¹³⁶ It is because a woman said, 'Messenger of God, what good is there for anyone except the men? They are the ones who are commanded and forbidden.' And in addition to that, she mentioned the Ḥajj and *jihād*. So, God mentioned [women] on account of that [question of hers].¹³⁷

This occasion-of-revelation tradition is thus quoted here in order to account for the presence of what could otherwise be classified as redundancy in the quranic text. But while Q 33:35 is a particularly striking example of such a linguistic construction, containing as it does no less than ten paired nouns with masculine and feminine plural suffixes respectively, the same cannot be said of either Q 3:195 or 4:32.

One important motivation for linking these three quranic verses was to "control" the meaning of Q 3:195 in particular, in order to occlude its reference to women's fighting on the battlefield. Ibn al-Mundhir's discussion of Q 3:195 makes this aim particularly apparent: he begins by quoting Abū 'Ubayda regarding its opening phrase, "And their Lord answered them." Then, he addresses the next part of the verse, "I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost . . . in my way" by quoting a ḥadīth ascribed to Umm Salama, who recounts:

I said, "Messenger of God, I do not hear God mention women with regard to the *hijra*."¹³⁸ So God sent down, *And your Lord answered them: I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female*.¹³⁹

Next, he relates a tradition on the authority of Sufyān, who states that

A woman—or women—said, "We made the *hijra*, and the *hijra* and the *jihād* are not mentioned, except about *you* (men)?"!¹⁴⁰ So, God sent down:

136 "wa-yaqūl al-qā'il: kayfa dhukira l-muslimīna wa-l-muslimāt wa-l-ma'nā bi-aḥadihimā kāf".

137 Al-Farrā' ii, 343, sub. Q 33:35.

138 "yā Rasūl Allāh lā asma' Allāh jalla wa-'azza dhakara al-nisā' fi l-hijra bi-shay".

139 Ibn al-Mundhir ii, 538.

140 "qālat imra'a aw niswa hājarnā wa lā tudhkaru l-hijra wa-l-jihād illā fikum".

I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost . . . you come from each other.

Sufyān commented, “And in this is the ruination of the Khārijīs.”¹⁴¹

The tradition quoted by Sufyān al-Thawrī as well as his reported comment makes it clear that the issue in need of explanation—or more accurately, of explaining away—in Q 3:195 is its inclusion of female believers among those whose bad deeds will be erased because they “fought and were killed” in God’s way. The Khārijīs held that *jihād* is an obligation for women as well as men, and some women fought in the raids carried out by the Khārijīs against other Muslims.¹⁴² Umm Salama’s tradition asserting that this verse was revealed after she had asked why women’s participation in the *hijra* is not mentioned in the revelation¹⁴³ function in this context as an exegetical smokescreen, diverting the attention of the audience/reader from the verse’s reference to women’s fighting on the battlefield. Moreover, by suggesting that the verse as it pertains to female believers is to be understood primarily as a reference to the participation of a number of female Companions in the *hijra*, its meaning is safely limited to an event from the ever more distant hallowed past.

Also attesting to the perceived need to eliminate the possibility that Q 3:195 could be read as permitting women to fight on the battlefield is Hūd’s claim that while the first part of this verse refers to men and women alike, the latter part of it—“I will certainly wipe out the bad deeds of those who emigrated and were driven out of their homes, who suffered harm for My cause, who fought and were killed . . .”—speaks about men only.¹⁴⁴ The only evidence offered for this assertion is a ḥadīth recounting that ‘Ā’isha asked the prophet if *jihād* is an obligation on women, only to be told, “Yes, a *jihād* with no fighting in it—Ḥajj and *umra*.”¹⁴⁵

The decision to quote this particular ḥadīth in this exegetical context is rather ironic given ‘Ā’isha’s leading role in the Battle of the Camel. However, it nicely illustrates how exegetes at times fairly strain to find ways to invoke the abode of the Mothers of the Believers as a space within which controversial issues could be authoritatively negotiated. The fact that Ibn Abī Zamanīn provides the same interpretation of Q 3:195 strongly suggests that it likely

141 “*wa fihi yahlaku l-Khawārij*”; Ibn al-Mundhir ii, 539.

142 Ahmed, *Women and gender* 70–1. A well-known example of such a woman is Ghazāla, the wife of the Khārijī leader Shabīb b. Yazīd (d. ca. 77/697); see: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* iv, 147–9.

143 Or, the various traditions reporting that Umm Salama had asked such a question.

144 “*hādhihi li-l-rijāl dūna l-nisā*”.

145 Hūd i, 342. For a discussion of this ḥadīth, see: Geissinger, *The portrayal* 173.

originated with Yahyā b. Sallām rather than with Hūd himself.¹⁴⁶ But regardless of its origins, opposition to the idea that women could legitimately aspire to fight in the *jihād* is far from being uncommon in the Quran commentaries used in this study, though these exegetes typically express this in their discussions of Q 4:32.¹⁴⁷

There seem to have been several issues at stake in such opposition: one was evidently a concern with the negotiation of sectarian boundaries. In contradistinction to Khārījī (and especially, Azraqī) Others, proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes would construct fighting on the battlefield as an emblematically male act.¹⁴⁸ The main focus was not so much on preventing actual women from fighting¹⁴⁹ as it was upholding an idealized gendered hierarchical social order as divinely ordained. Al-Ṭabarī summarizes the traditions in which Umm Salama or a group of unnamed women ask why they are not permitted to fight (and also in some versions, why they only receive half of the inheritance shares that males are entitled to) as “women desiring the rank of men”¹⁵⁰—a desire which he states that God forbids.¹⁵¹ According to al-Māturīdī, as it is a divinely given blessing that the burden of fighting in the *jihād* is not laid upon women, if women object to this then they are guilty of sinful ingratitude (*kufrān*).¹⁵²

Finally, the traditions and exegeses that link Q 4:32 and 33:35 imply a careful delimitation of any social ramifications that the latter verse might be thought to have. The emphatic description of the male and female believers who possess the same positive character traits and perform the same key rituals in Q 33:35 thus could not be interpreted so as to relativise or call into question

146 Ibn Abī Zamanīn i, 141.

147 While a number of traditions quoted by al-Ṭabarī and others in their exegeses of Q 4:32 are occasion-of-revelation traditions about Umm Salama or a group of women objecting to their exclusion from fighting and inheriting on par with males, these Quran commentators also indicate that some early authorities interpreted this verse as a general prohibition of envy—especially, of *men's* envy of other men's possessions or wives or servants; e.g.: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 61; al-Māturīdī iii, 149; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* ii, 277.

148 For Ibn Sa'd's ambivalent presentation of the small number of female Companions who fought or reportedly wished to fight in Muḥammad's time, see: Roded, *Women in Islamic* 34–6. Centuries later, Ibn Ḥajar at times redacted biographical information about such female Companions (Afsaruddin, *The first Muslims* 161–3).

149 Ruth Roded notes that the socio-economic factors that had enabled some early Muslim women to fight on the battlefield did not last long after the conquests (Roded, *Women in Islamic* 47–8).

150 “*nisā' tamannīna manāzil al-rijāl*”.

151 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* v, 60, *sub.* Q 4:32.

152 Al-Māturīdī iii, 149.

(free) women's legally subordinate position in relation to (free) men in the hierarchical social order. Moreover, a noteworthy number of such traditions present this message as having been made clear in the very abode of the wives of the prophet.

Concluding Remarks

As this chapter demonstrates, proto-Sunni Quran commentators of the formative period as well as classical Sunni exegetes construct two modes of exegetical gaze: primary and secondary. The primary exegetical gaze surveys bodies of text as well as human bodies (both past and present), and regulates human bodies and the spaces which they inhabit or move through by applying selections of the text to them. The primary exegetical gaze mirrors and (re)affirms the socially dominant position that legal discourses of the time bestow upon free, elite Muslim males; as such, it is constructed as both central to the exegetical process and emblematically masculine.

The secondary exegetical gaze, which can be conceded to female as well as to male figures in certain circumstances, also gazes at bodies of text as well as human bodies. However, it is constructed as partial and limited rather than all-encompassing, and also as subsidiary to and dependent upon the primary exegetical gaze; therefore it cannot and does not stand alone in these *tafsīr* works.

Among the sites that the primary exegetical gaze surveys is the imagined abode of the Mothers of the Believers. Exegetes do not conceptualize this space as either a "private" or a marginal realm. On the contrary, classical *tafsīr* works construct it as a site within which social, legal, theological and other boundaries are negotiated, contested and authoritatively delineated. In medieval exegesis, it often functions as a terrain for the negotiation and assertion of "orthodoxy." Proto-Sunni and Sunni exegetes invoke the abode of the Mothers of the Believers—as a physical space bounded by the *ḥijāb*, and also as represented by particular wives, most notably ʿĀ'isha and at times Umm Salama—as a site of affective piety, as well as in legal-exegetical debates regarding marital and sexual practices. These debates are not only intended to address particular legal issues, but function as a means to negotiate intra-communal boundaries among legal schools and sects.

In the process, a secondary exegetical gaze is conceded to the Mothers of the Believers (most often as represented by ʿĀ'isha, and to a much lesser extent by Umm Salama). While some Sunni Quran commentaries construct and promote this exegetical development, others treat it ambivalently. But in all cases, these exegetes' discourses on gender hierarchy not only generally identify

both religiously legitimated authority and intellectual ability with (free) masculinity, but attempt to mark the boundaries of maleness by defining it over against femaleness. As such, the primary exegetical gaze is both constructed as emblematically masculine, and presented as far more exegetically consequential than the secondary exegetical gaze.

The quotation of traditions ascribed to ʿĀʾisha and Umm Salama on pietistic matters as well as on hotly debated legal questions in the *tafsīr* works under discussion here is an example of the exegetical authority that could at times be attributed to female figures constructed as possessors of a secondary exegetical gaze. However, the exegetical discourses surrounding Q 33:35, 3:195 and 4:32 provide particularly pointed illustrations of the gendered limitations placed upon such an exegetical gaze. Whatever the “original” shape and meaning(s) of the traditions about women’s questions might have been or what quranic verse(s) it/they might have “initially” been linked to, exegetes utilize such traditions at their discretion in order to (re)affirm gendered hierarchical constructions as divinely ordained. Moreover, some of the versions of these traditions imply that it is sinful even to question the justice of gendered social hierarchies that are presented as divinely given.

It is not Umm Salama or ʿĀʾisha, but rather the exegetes—the possessors of the primary exegetical gaze—who are given the power to survey the body of text in its entirety as well as human bodies and the spaces that these bodies occupy, including the imagined abode of the Mothers of the Believers, and thus it is exegetes who hold interpretive control over all three realms. But for Quran commentators from the formative and medieval period, the main issue at stake even in these particular examples was not “the place of (free) women” *per se*, nor even the question of whether or to what extent any woman might be able to interpret the Quran authoritatively. Rather, their chief concern was the construction and maintenance of a gendered social hierarchy, which included the gendering of religious and interpretive authority as emblematically “masculine” as a matter of course.

(Re)constructions of the Sacred Past, Gender, and Exegesis: Some Medieval Trajectories

Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Fanjawayh—‘Ubaydallāh b. Muḥammad b. Shayba—Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Karābīsī—Sulaymān b. Tawba Abū Dāwūd al-Anṣārī—Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shāmī—Shu‘ayb b. Ishāq—Hishām b. ‘Urwa—his father—‘Ā’isha, (who) said, “The Messenger of God said, ‘Do not house women in upper rooms, nor teach them to write. [Rather], teach them spinning, and Sūrat al-Nūr.’”¹

...and he [al-Zamakhsharī] gave al-Silafī² and Zaynab al-Sha‘riyya licenses to transmit [his works].³

The first of these quotations is a merit-of-sūra tradition which al-Tha‘labī cites in the preamble to his exegesis of Sūrat al-Nūr in his Quran commentary. The second is from the entry for al-Zamakhsharī in al-Dāwūdī’s tenth/sixteenth century biographical work on Quran commentators. In different ways, these two quotations illustrate Jan Assmann’s contention that human beings generate the past by relating to it.⁴ They also highlight the gendered nature of human (re)constructions of the past in the medieval *tafsīr* genre.

Al-Tha‘labī elects to quote a tradition ascribed to ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr (henceforth, “the spinning tradition”) which he had obtained from one of his teachers, Ibn Fanjawayh (d. 414/1023). While as we will see, its ties to ‘Ā’isha are very dubious at best, this is beside the point for al-Tha‘labī. Here, he exercises his power as an exegete to (re)construct and (re)present an idealised vision of the sacred past at his discretion, in order to address concerns current in his own historical context.

In his *Ṭabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*, a well-known biographical dictionary of exegetes, al-Dāwūdī elects to make a very brief mention of a woman who had died some three centuries earlier, in his entry for al-Zamakhsharī. Umm Mu‘ayyad

1 Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf*, 342. For the appearance of this tradition in other exegetical works, see below.

2 Abū l-Ṭāhir Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī of Alexandria (d. 576/1180); for him, see: Lane, *A traditional Mu‘tazilite* 57–8.

3 “*wa ajāza li-l-Silafī wa Zaynab al-Sha‘riyya*” (al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt* 511).

4 Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* 31.

Zaynab bt. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sha‘rī of Naysābūr (d. 615/1218) had received a general license (*ijāza ‘amma*) from al-Zamakhsharī to transmit all of his works, which included his Quran commentary, and her name appears in one of the chains of transmission of the *Kashshāf*.⁵ In this entry, she is a footnote in what is otherwise a man’s story.

This chapter examines the (re)construction of memory in some medieval Quran commentaries as a gendered process through the lens of one interpretive trajectory—the continued citation of exegetical materials ascribed to women who are for the most part Companions or (much less often) Successors. To varying extents, a number of medieval exegetes followed their predecessors such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha‘labī and others in citing such exegetical materials. The spinning tradition illustrates an important means—the *isnād*—through which exegetical materials of this type continue to be incorporated into some medieval Quran commentaries. At the same time, this tradition also raises some complex historical questions about portrayals of wittingness, processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the implications of (re)constructions of idealised visions of the sacred past in a number of early and later medieval Sunni Quran commentaries for the gendering of exegetical authority.⁶ Beginning with a discussion of the spinning tradition’s implications for some exegetes’ (re)constructions of exegetical authority, this chapter then focuses on some of the considerations involved in select Quran commentators’ decisions to include or exclude exegetical materials ascribed to female figures, to the extent that this can be reconstructed. While such decisions were apparently shaped by the interaction of a number of factors, ultimately it was the individual (male) exegete who enjoyed the authority to select from the past and the present in the course of the interpretive process.

As the brief mention of Zaynab al-Sha‘riyya in al-Dāwūdī’s biographical entry for al-Zamakhsharī illustrates, regardless of what al-Tha‘labī’s choice to quote the spinning tradition in his Quran commentary might lead us to assume, available evidence indicates that a few women from scholarly families apparently participated in certain ways on the margins of the *tafsīr* tradition. It seems that this was possible because rather paradoxically, the persistent

5 Lane, *A traditional Mu‘tazilite* 57. For more on Zaynab, see below.

6 The great majority of Quran commentaries discussed in any detail in this chapter are Sunni, with the significant exception of al-Zamakhsharī. His commentary is included here for three main reasons: (1) it provides evidence for the impact of al-Tha‘labī’s commentary on the pre-modern *tafsīr* genre, (2) its widespread influence on late medieval Sunnī quranic exegesis, and (3) the evidence its transmission history provides for female involvement on the margins of *tafsīr*.

association of women in exegetical texts with transmission opened up a conditional and limited space for a few medieval women to transmit a small number of works associated with the study of the Quran and its interpretation. At this point we do not possess anything like a full picture of this history. Nonetheless, such participation forms part of the historical context within which medieval exegetes negotiated and (re)constructed interpretive authority on the pages of their Quran commentaries, and chose to include or exclude exegetical materials attributed to women. Therefore, any discussion of medieval exegetical trajectories and gender needs to take its existence into account.

1 “... [N]or teach them to write . . .”: Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion

The free woman keeping busy with her spinning is an ancient image that appears in Greco-Roman as well as in rabbinic texts, where it represents female chastity and propriety, and a vision of the world in which gender roles are distinct and “properly” ordered.⁷ The spinning tradition takes this ancient image and links it to *Sūrat al-Nūr*, and also to the abode of the wives of the prophet through its *isnād*, which presents ‘Ā’isha as having transmitted it from Muḥammad.

As is well known, a prominent theme of *Sūrat al-Nūr* is the regulation of sexual behaviour. This *sūra* addresses several topics related to this issue, reproaching those who spread slanderous rumours (Q 24:11–25), and laying down regulations for dealing with accusations of *zinā* (Q 24:2–9), as well as outlining standards of “modest” attire and conduct (Q 24:30–1, 58–60). This tradition thus associates women’s learning to spin as well as their instruction in *Sūrat al-Nūr* with female modesty and sexual restraint, while implying that housing women in upper rooms or teaching them to write poses a threat to their chastity.⁸ Significantly, it was in ‘Ā’isha’s apartment that the verses of *Sūrat al-Nūr* which are held to have established her innocence were reportedly revealed.⁹ The spinning tradition thus both implicitly evokes the memory of the

7 For a detailed examination of the figure of the spinner in rabbinic texts, see: Peskowitz, *Spinning fantasies*.

8 Presumably, this is because if women are housed in upper rooms they could more easily see the surrounding neighbourhood and perhaps be glimpsed by others, while the ability to write would enable communication with people beyond the walls of their domicile.

9 For different Sunni and Shi’i retellings and interpretations of the “tale of the slander” during the formative period and later, see Chapter Four.

scandal that threatened to tear Muḥammad's community apart, as well as its resolution—which required nothing short of divine intervention.

This tradition suggests that in order to uphold quranic moral directives, girls' and women's access to space as well as to instruction requires careful regulation by their male guardians,¹⁰ while also insinuating that the absence of such control poses a threat to the social order. Al-Tha'labī's citation of the spinning tradition at the beginning of his exegesis of Sūrat al-Nūr makes these notions appear to issue forth from the quranic text itself.

The historical origins of the spinning tradition are murky. To date, I have not been able to find any evidence that it was cited in any exegetical work or ḥadīth collection prior to the fourth/tenth century. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the *Faḍā'il* of Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224/837) contains several traditions about the merits of Sūrat al-Nūr which contain some of the themes found in the spinning tradition in embryonic form: the first relates that 'Umar sent a letter (presumably, when he was caliph) instructing that men teach their women this sūra. The second tradition, which is related on the authority of Ṣafiyya bt. Shayba, recounts that 'Ā'isha spoke well of the women of Medina and praised them, saying that when Sūrat al-Nūr was revealed, at once they tore their wraps in order to fashion veils for themselves.¹¹ Al-Samarqandī recounts at the end of his exegesis of Sūrat al-Nūr that 'Umar commanded that the men learn Sūrat Barā'ā,¹² and teach their women Sūrat al-Nūr.¹³ It can be observed that traditions of this type imply a strongly gender-differentiated vision of the scope and purpose of quranic study, and construct female participation in it as circumscribed by male supervision, as well as marginal to wider communal interpretive discourses.

Reservations about women's education and their authorship of books, as well as limitations on their access to scriptures and their ability to interpret these, have been present at various points in the history of a number of religious traditions.¹⁴ Nonetheless, neither the biographical works nor the compilations of traditions conventionally dated to the second/eighth or third/ninth

10 The verbs in this tradition are in the masculine plural. See: Chapter Four, n. 234.

11 Abū 'Ubayd 250 (*Jamā'a abwāb suwar al-Qur'ān wa-āyātihi wa-mā fihā min al-faḍā'il*). For the second tradition, see also: Bukhārī vi, 267 (*K. al-Tafsīr*) and Abū Dāwūd iv, 28 (*K. al-Libās*), as well as Chapter Four and the Conclusion of this study.

12 I.e. S. 9, "Immunity," also known as Sūrat al-Tawba ("Repentance").

13 Al-Samarqandī ii, 451; Abū 'Ubayd 241 (*Jamā'a abwāb suwar al-Qur'ān wa-āyātihi wa-mā fihā min al-faḍā'il*).

14 Franzmann, *Women and religion* 74. For differing interpretations of the well-known rabbinic debate on female access to Torah (or possibly, Talmudic) study, see: Wegner, *Chattel or person?* 161–2; Boyarin, *Unheroic conduct* 152–3. For a late antique debate in a Christian

centuries used in this study appear to suggest that women's ability to communicate in writing is or ought to be an issue of concern.

Interestingly, some of these sources matter-of-factly depict the abode of the wives of the prophet as a site within which some free elite women have access to writing. Several traditions present 'Ā'isha and Umm Salama writing letters to various persons, although it is not clear whether the actual writing is being done by the women themselves, or if they are dictating to scribes.¹⁵ The codex traditions discussed above in Chapter Four present 'Ā'isha, Umm Salama and Ḥafṣa employing the services of scribes to have copies of the *muṣḥaf* made for them after Muḥammad's death. According to al-Balādhurī, these three wives of Muḥammad could read, and Ḥafṣa was also able to write.¹⁶ A widely cited ḥadīth presents Muḥammad himself approvingly mentioning that Ḥafṣa had been taught how to write by a female Companion al-Shifā' bt. 'Abdallāh (20/640).¹⁷ While sources of this type give little reason to suppose that partial or complete literacy was very common among women in Arabia at that time, they do present it as a specialized accomplishment of a few Qurayshi female aristocrats.¹⁸

Nonetheless, the question of whether women should learn how to write apparently came to be seen a controversial question by the fourth/tenth century in some quarters at least, as al-Ḥākim's inclusion of the spinning tradition in his chapter on *tafsīr* illustrates. Why this would become an issue of concern

community as to whether it is permitted for women to author books in their own names, see: Jensen, *God's self-confident daughters* 171.

- 15 E.g.: al-Ḥumaydī i, 292; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 106; Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 340; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 451 (*K. al-Jāmi'*).
- 16 Frolov, *The spread of literacy* 136. Several traditions depict 'Ā'isha reading from a codex; e.g.: Ibn Wahb, *Koranwissenschaften*, fol. 23b, 20–24a, 1; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, 192 (*Wa-qaḍ rakhaṣa fī l-imāma fī l-muṣḥaf*); Abū 'Ubayd, 186 (*Bāb al-Qār' yuḥāfiḥ 'alā juz'ihī wa-waradahu min al-Qur'ān bi l-layl wa-l-nahār fī ṣalāt aw ghayr ṣalāt*).
- 17 E.g. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 16 (*K. al-Jāmi'*); Ibn Ḥanbal vi, 403; Abū Dāwūd iii, 393 (*K. al-Ṭibb*). Interestingly, al-Ḥākim also has this ḥadīth about al-Shifā' teaching Ḥafṣa to write, which he grades as *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the standards of al-Bukhārī and Muslim; al-Dhahabī concurs with this assessment of his; see: al-Ḥākim vii, 246z (*K. Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*). Its placement in his chapter on the Companions suggests that al-Ḥākim understood this ḥadīth as a reflection of al-Shifā's distinctive merits rather than as an endorsement of women's writing in general. For al-Shifā', see: Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb* iv, 423–4; he notes that some say that "al-Shifā'" was a nickname, and that Laylā was her actual name (see also Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 435). She had reportedly been literate long before her (early) conversion to Islam.
- 18 For the concentration of literacy in a few elite Meccan families, see: Frolov, *The spread of literacy* 136–7.

to some religious scholars at this particular historical juncture to the extent that a ḥadīth would be circulated about it is unclear. It is possible that there is a connection between such apprehensions and the institutionalisation of advanced religious education at this time, as exemplified by the development of *madrasas*. It could be inferred that such institutionalisation, coupled with the increase in female participation in the study and transmission of ḥadīth taking place at that time¹⁹ might have intensified disquiet about the relationship of religious authority to social hierarchies. Gendering access to and the production of written texts can be read as an expression of such concerns. However, this complex question requires more research.

Al-Ḥākim classifies the spinning tradition as *ṣaḥīḥ*.²⁰ Nonetheless, its authenticity was disputed by medieval ḥadīth scholars. His student al-Bayḥaqī (d. 458/ 1066) includes it in his collection of traditions, *Shu'ab al-īmān*, but states that both of the *isnāds* that he gives for it are unsound.²¹ Several centuries later, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) graded it as “forged” (*mawḍūʿ*).²²

Notwithstanding such debates, a number of classical exegetes quote the spinning tradition in their Quran commentaries. The now-lost ḥadīth-based Quran commentary of Ibn Mardawayh reportedly contained it.²³ Several exegetes whose Quran commentaries depend to varying extents on al-Thaʿlabī's *Kashf* include it: al-Thaʿlabī's student al-Wāḥidī (in his *Al-Wasīṭ*), al-Baghawī, and al-Qurṭubī.²⁴ Following al-Baghawī, al-Khāzin's *tafsīr* also includes it.²⁵ Other exegetes who quote it are: Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Suyūṭī (in his *Durr*), al-Khaṭīb al-Sharbīnī (d. 977/1569), and al-Shawkānī.²⁶ Its appeal also transcended sectarian differences, with al-Ṭabrisī and Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī quoting it—though the latter attributes it to the sixth imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/ 765) rather than to ʿĀ'isha.²⁷ Also, both al-Ṭabrisī and al-Kāshānī cite a variant

19 For more on this, see below.

20 Al-Ḥākim iv, 1311 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

21 Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayḥaqī, *Shu'ab al-īmān* ii, 477–8. The first of the *isnāds* he cites is the same as that given by al-Ḥākim.

22 Al-Dhahabī states that one of the transmitters is regarded as a liar; see: al-Ḥākim iv, 1311 (*K. al-Tafsīr*).

23 Al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 124; al-Shawkānī, 1203.

24 Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iii, 302; al-Baghawī iii, 305; al-Qurṭubī xii, 158.

25 ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Baghdādī al-Khāzin, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin al-musammā Lubāb al-taʿwīl fī maʿānī l-tanzīl* iii, 307.

26 Abū l-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr* vi, 3; al-Suyūṭī, *Durr* vi, 124; al-Shawkānī 1203; Al-Khaṭīb al-Sharbīnī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm al-musammā Al-Sirāj al-munīr* iv, 436.

27 Al-Ṭabrisī vii, 194; Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī iii, 452.

version of the spinning tradition that forbids the teaching of Sūrat Yūsuf (S. 12, “Joseph”) to women.²⁸

Both al-Ḥākim and his student al-Thaʿlabī²⁹ evidently played a part in its introduction into exegetical discourses as well as its continued citation. Al-Ḥākim’s assessment of this tradition as reliable seems to have played some part in its continued use by exegetes. Nonetheless, several Quran commentators who quote it acknowledge that its reliability is in question.³⁰

It is noteworthy that the attitude to women’s access to writing expressed in the spinning tradition was not congruent with the lived realities of the times of the exegetes who elected to include it in their Quran commentaries. Available evidence indicates that some elite medieval women could and did communicate in writing for a range of purposes, whether by writing themselves, or through scribes.³¹ Nor does it seem that a Quran commentator’s inclusion of this tradition in his commentary necessarily signaled complete opposition to women writing.³²

Rather, it appears that the continued citation of the spinning tradition by a number of medieval Quran commentators was primarily due to its pithy encapsulation of an idealized hierarchical social order. This tradition, in its gendering of access to the quranic text as well as of attaining complete literacy, upholds interpretive authority as emblematically masculine. The spinning

28 According to this version of the tradition, women are not to be housed in upper rooms, or taught writing or Sūrat Yūsuf, but should be taught spinning and Sūrat al-Nūr (al-Ṭabrisī v, 315; Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī iii, 55). Al-Ṭabrisī credits this latter version of it to the imāms rather than to ʿĀ’isha, however.

29 Although as we have seen, al-Thaʿlabī quotes Ibn Fanjawayh, another teacher of his, as his source for it. For Ibn Fanjawayh, see: Saleh, *Formation* 75.

30 Al-Khāzin follows his citation of this ḥadīth with the statement that God knows best (*Tafsīr al-Khāzin* iii, 307), while al-Suyūṭī and al-Shawkānī state that it is *marfūʿ* (*Durr* vi, 124; *Faḥḥ* 1203). Ibn al-Jawzī reportedly held that it is not authentic (ʿĪsā, *Al-Aḥādīth wa-l-āthār al-wārīda fī faḍāʾil al-suwar* 466), and also faults al-Thaʿlabī for including merit-of-sūra traditions in his Quran commentary at all (Saleh, *Formation* 39), but he nonetheless includes this tradition in his own *tafsīr*.

31 Meisami, *Writing medieval women* 58, 79, n. 76. For a brief survey of references to female scribes and calligraphers (many of whom were slaves, and some also owned by women) in classical works, see: al-Munajjid, *Women’s roles* 144–7. Several studies have drawn attention to entries in medieval biographical dictionaries which credit some female scholars with the ability to write; see for example: Bulliet, *Elite women* 71; Lutfī, *Al-Sakhāwī’s Kitāb al-nisāʾ* 119–20.

32 E.g. Ibn al-Jawzī was a student of Shuhda bt. Abī Naṣr, known as “*al-kātiba*” (the writer), and he reportedly praised her skills in calligraphy (al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* xx, 543). For more on her, see below.

tradition implies that women should be taught the Quran primarily in order to admonish them, and that their access to instruction of any type needs to be supervised and controlled by their (male) guardians. In this way, women's full participation in certain types of scholarly pursuits or venues is rendered forever open to pious debate and at least theoretically, to potential objection on putatively moral grounds. The result is that in contrast to their female counterparts, free Muslim men are constructed as the unmarked category of persons whose untrammelled access to the full range of available intellectual undertakings and expressions is simply assumed.³³

Here again, a gendered vision of participation in the generation and transmission of knowledge, and hence of access to religious authority, is apparent. This tradition locates this construction of religious authority within the exemplary abode of the wives of the prophet (or, alternatively for al-Ṭabrisī and Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, that of the *ahl al-bayt* as represented by the twelve imams), while its quotation in a number of Quran commentaries reinforces its putative connection to the quranic text itself.

2 Early Muslim Female Figures, *Isnāds*, and Medieval *Tafsīr* Works

The spinning tradition is a particularly striking instance of a ḥadīth that is constructed around a seeming paradox—the religious authority of a female figure is expressed through her endorsement of restrictions on other women that would severely limit if not preclude their exercise of any comparable degree of power or influence. Several historians have observed that idealised depictions of female figures in classical texts which impute high levels of learning, piety and/or religious authority to them often construct them as exceptions to the rule that such pursuits or roles are not appropriate for the overwhelming majority of women. This is because portrayals of this type are based on the presumption that women are typically incapable of such achievements. In this way, they construct and (re)affirm the “naturalness” of societal and institutional barriers, which make it significantly more difficult for most females

33 The reception history of the spinning tradition, as well as its historical impact on the lives of real people in various contexts, is a complex topic that remains to be fully researched. For its presence in a Mamluk manual for market inspectors, see: Berkey, *The transmission* 161. For a nineteenth century treatise written by a ḥadīth scholar in India, Shams al-Ḥaqq al-ʿAẓīmābādī, arguing against the view that women should not learn to write (and asserting that the spinning tradition is inauthentic), see: Sayeed, *Muslim women's religious* 3–4.

than for males of equivalent social status to pursue advanced levels of study or to wield religious authority.³⁴

ʿĀ'isha's overt contribution to quranic exegesis as represented in the spinning tradition is depicted as tangential (merit-of-sūra traditions are not directly interpretive), and as having taken place through oral transmission. Here, her participation in the exegetical process is inextricably bound to the *isnād*. In previous chapters, we have seen a number of examples of the important, even central role that *isnāds* have often played in some Quran commentators' incorporation of female figures into the transhistorical exegetical communities which they construct in their *tafsīr* works.

A number of medieval exegetes whose works belong to the Sunni "mainstream" incorporate *āthār* and ḥadīths ascribed to or said to have been transmitted by female Companions and (much less frequently) female Successors. As we have seen, this practice seemingly dates back to the formative period. Yet, it should be noted that those medieval Quran commentators who quote materials of this type not only elected to continue this exegetical convention from the past, but often also to further elaborate upon it.

The following general observations can be made about the *tafsīr* works conventionally dated to the formative period surveyed in Chapter Two, as well as the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century encyclopedic commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī and al-Tha'labī,³⁵ and the *madrasa* commentary of al-Samarqandī:

- (1) Putative female sources of exegetical materials are usually Companions
- (2) Among such female Companions, ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr is by far the most oft-cited source
- (3) Female Successors³⁶ appear as sources or transmitters far less often than female Companions, while the obverse is the case for exegetical materials attributed to male Successors.

To varying extents, these observations also hold true for a number of medieval commentaries utilized in this study. However, it should be recognized that while past practice played an important role due to the genealogical nature of

34 For this dynamic as it pertains to ʿĀ'isha as well as to the famous ascetic, Rābi'a of Baṣra (d. 185/801), see: Spellberg, *Politics* 58–9. As it relates to pious or Sufi women, see: Cornell, Introduction 17–19; Silvers, Early pious, mystic, and Sufi women.

35 What survives of Ibn al-Mundhir's commentary suggests that these observations are also applicable to it.

36 This is also true for female dually signifying figures.

the classical *tafsīr* genre, medieval Quran commentators were not mechanically copying their predecessors when they quoted *āthār*, ḥadīths or other exegetical materials ascribed to female Companions and Successors. Rather, in his construction of a transhistorical community of exegete on the pages of his Quran commentary, each was engaged in the negotiation and (re)construction of the sacred past as part and parcel of the exegetical process. Moreover, a number of factors were operative in the decision to incorporate such materials (or not).

ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr remained the most commonly cited female figure by far in Sunni classical *tafsīr* works, and exegetes persisted in utilizing the abode of the wives of the prophet as a space within which controversial issues could be negotiated. Yet, it is noteworthy that a number of classical Quran commentators continued to incorporate traditions ascribed to or transmitted by other less well known female Companions as well as some female Successors. This often seems to have occurred because a woman's name happened to be in the *isnād* of a tradition that a given exegete had elected to include.

Practices regarding the inclusion (or not) of *isnāds* thus had an impact on the inclusion of female Successors in the transhistorical communities of exegetes constructed on the pages of Quran commentaries. Such approaches to citation have varied over time for a number of historical and methodological reasons. Some *tafsīr* works conventionally dated to the formative period, such as the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām*, make use of *isnāds* to a degree, but the bulk of the exegetical material it contains is not furnished with them. If anything, this has the effect of highlighting the role attributed to a number of male Successors as sources of exegesis, as when interpretations are ascribed to them in this work, their names stand out rather than seeming to blend into a sea of *isnāds*. But since female dually signifying figures and female Successors are usually quoted as transmitters rather than as independent sources of exegetical materials, the appearance of a couple of the names of the former and none of the latter is a corollary of the inclusion of few *isnāds* in this work.

By contrast, al-Ṭabarī provides *isnāds* for most of the traditions that he quotes, as does Ibn al-Mundhir. This method of citation had the potential to result in the incorporation of more female dually signifying figures and Successors in the transhistorical community of exegetes in a given *tafsīr* work, depending on which traditions are selected for inclusion. Nonetheless, this approach to citation was not universally popular even in al-Ṭabarī's time,³⁷ in part because it was unwieldy and stood to become only more so as time went

37 Al-Māturīdī for instance sometimes gives the name of the Companion or Successor to whom a particular tradition is attributed, but he does not cite *isnāds*.

on and *isnāds* would necessarily become longer. Al-Tha‘labī therefore opted to place the *isnāds* for information that he had obtained from written sources in the introduction to his commentary, and only included the *isnāds* for traditions that he had obtained through oral transmission in the body of the work.³⁸

As we have seen, this method of citation could also result in the incorporation of the names of some early Muslim women who were not Companions. However, this did not necessarily assure these female figures an enduring foothold in exegetical discourses. Later Quran commentators utilizing an earlier *tafsīr* work might seek to replace traditions of doubtful authenticity with better attested versions (which might or might not contain any female names in their *isnāds*). Epitomisers typically aimed for brevity, pruning materials they deemed unnecessary for their purposes—which might well be such “doubtful” traditions and/or their *isnāds*.

Moreover, as some ḥadīths became increasingly widely known to educated audiences/readers due to their use as proof-texts in legal or theological debates, and certain ḥadīth collections came to be recognized by Sunnis as canonical, *isnāds* could be shortened or eliminated in Quran commentaries. Well-known ḥadīths could also be alluded to rather than incorporated word for word. Also, while a particular tradition attributed to or said to have been transmitted by an early Muslim woman might be utilized as a theological or legal proof-text and as a result come to be quoted by some exegetes at a certain juncture, the way that the debate unfolded over time could play a role in the frequency of its citation in future.

The interplay of such complex factors can be seen in exegetical discourses over time regarding the description of faithful believers in Q 2:177—“. . . who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars. . . .” Of the traditions cited by al-Ṭabarī in his interpretation of this part of the verse, several are attributed to a female Companion, Fāṭima bt. Qays. The first of these traditions recounts that al-Sha‘bī (d. 103–10/721–8) was asked if it suffices for a person to pay the *zakāt* on his wealth, given that Q 2:177 not only speaks of paying the *zakāt* but also of giving away some of one’s goods. Al-Sha‘bī answers by quoting a ḥadīth that he says was related to him by Fāṭima bt. Qays, that when she asked the prophet what she should do with 70 *mithqāls* of gold that she had, he told her to spend it on her close relations.³⁹ In the second ḥadīth, Fāṭima relates that

38 Saleh, *Formation* 68–74.

39 Al-Ṭabarī ii, *Jāmi‘* ii, 118. Al-Suyūṭī states that Ibn al-Mundhir cited a version of this ḥadīth (*Durr* i, 415), although it is unclear whether this was in the latter’s Quran commentary or in another work of his.

he⁴⁰ said, “Surely there is a claim on wealth in addition to the *zakāt*.”⁴¹ Another version of this tradition (henceforth, “the claim over wealth tradition”) which is also attributed to her clearly ascribes these words to the prophet and also has him recite Q 2:177 in order to underline the point.⁴² Of these three traditions, it is only this latter one that could be described as directly interpretive. However, as we have seen, al-Ṭabarī also quotes a version which does not include this quranic verse. Moreover, he includes yet another version in which it is al-Sha‘bī rather than Muḥammad who answers this question about wealth and recites Q 2:177.⁴³ This suggests that Fāṭima bt. Qays was subsequently added to the “original” *isnād* in order to retroject it from al-Sha‘bī back to the prophet.⁴⁴

In his discussion of this quranic verse, al-Tha‘labī elects to quote several traditions attributed to women. According to the first tradition, Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn related from another female Successor, Umm Rā‘ih,⁴⁵ who reported from the Companion Sulaymān b. ‘Āmir that the prophet said that charitable giving to relatives is rewarded doubly (henceforth, “the rewarded doubly tradition”). The second tradition has the Companion Umm Kulthūm bt. ‘Uqba recount that Muḥammad said that the most praiseworthy type of charitable giving is to a close relative who is one’s enemy (henceforth, “the close relative tradition”). In the third tradition, one of the prophet’s wives, Maymūna, relates that when she freed a female slave of hers, Muḥammad remarked that if she had instead given the slave to her maternal uncles then her reward from God would have been greater. Finally, the fourth tradition quotes a Successor, Fāṭima bt. al-Ḥusayn,⁴⁶ as reporting that the prophet instructed that the beggar has a

40 It appears that al-Ṭabarī assumes that the “he” refers to Muḥammad here, but given the different versions of this tradition as well as the questions about its *isnāds*, this is unclear.

41 “inna fī l-māl la-ḥaqq^{an} siwā l-zakāt”.

42 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* ii, 118.

43 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘* ii, 117–18. This version is also quoted by al-Suyūṭī, who ascribes it to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (*Durr* i, 416).

44 For more on this, see below. But notwithstanding the issues with its *isnād*, the directly interpretive version of the claim over wealth tradition ascribed to Fāṭima bt. Qays was reportedly cited by Ibn al-Mundhir, as well as by Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh (*al-Suyūṭī*, *Durr* i, 416).

45 The manuscript renders her name as Umm Rā‘ih bt. Ḍalī‘ (al-Tha‘labī, M 99, fol. 2a, *sub.* 2:177). However, biographical dictionaries give her name as Umm al-Rā‘ih al-Ḍabiyya al-Baṣriyya, otherwise known as al-Rabāb bt. Ṣulay‘ (al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 171–2; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* xii, 368).

46 Fāṭima bt. al-Ḥusayn is the granddaughter of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and the sister of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, the fourth imam of the Twelver Shi‘is. Ibn Ḥibbān graded her as a reliable

right to charity even if he arrives on horseback (henceforth, “the beggar on horseback tradition”).⁴⁷

Aside from the ḥadīth credited to Umm Kulthūm (which also appears in al-Ṭabarī’s discussion of Q 2:177, but is not attributed by him to anyone),⁴⁸ it would seem that this particular selection of traditions may owe more to al-Tha’labī’s individual preferences than to any existing exegetical convention.⁴⁹ It is also apparent that none of the traditions attributed to women which al-Tha’labī quotes here can be characterised as directly interpretive. Rather, while they deal tangentially with ritual-legal issues, they function in al-Tha’labī’s commentary on this verse as adjacent interpretation, underlining the meritorious nature of charitable giving and thus conveying an admonitory message.

Among the legal-exegetical issues raised by Q 2:177 was the question as to whether paying the *zakāt* on wealth was sufficient to discharge one’s legal obligations. The claim over wealth tradition was a well known proof-text utilized by those who argued that *zakāt* by itself did not suffice. However, this view did not achieve acceptance by the majority of jurists. As a result, while al-Ṭabarī relates several versions of the claim over wealth tradition, it—and consequently, its portrayal of Fāṭima bt. Qays as a participant in this legal-exegetical debate—is treated by a number of later exegetes as a somewhat troublesome detail that needs to be briefly dealt with but is otherwise incidental to the discussion.

Following al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī quotes the claim over wealth tradition (and states that al-Sha’bī related it from Fāṭima bt. Qays). He also opts to include a version of the close relative tradition, which he ascribes to Muḥammad. However, he quickly informs the reader that the generality of jurists do not hold that there is a claim over wealth beyond paying the *zakāt*.⁵⁰

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, writing from a Ḥanafī legal perspective, devotes a short section to the question of whether there is a claim on wealth in addition to the *zakāt*. Quoting this tradition, he rejects the notion that there is an additional legal obligation on wealth. Nonetheless, he is seemingly reluctant to dismiss this

transmitter (Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 517; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb* xxxv, 254–5). As she was born after Muḥammad’s death, she cannot have transmitted directly from him.

47 Al-Tha’labī, M 99 fols. 2a–2b, *sub.* 2:177. At issue here is that anyone who has a horse would not appear to be in need of charity.

48 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’* ii, 119.

49 Neither al-Māturīdī nor al-Samarqandī cite any traditions credited to women at this juncture. Al-Suyūṭī (in his *Durr*) suggests that Ibn al-Mundhir included two ḥadīths attributed to Fāṭima bt. Qays as noted above, but not any of those credited to women which al-Tha’labī quotes for Q 2:177.

50 Al-Māwardī i, 225–6.

ḥadīth of Fāṭima out of hand, and suggests that it could refer to an anomalous situation, such as a person possessing wealth who has a needy relative unable to earn on their own behalf.⁵¹ Ibn al-ʿArabī, taking a Mālikī view of the question, rejects the opinion that paying *zakāt* alone on wealth is insufficient as well as this ḥadīth, which he states has a faulty *isnād*.⁵² While Ibn ʿAṭīyya alludes to the claim over wealth tradition, he does not quote it.⁵³ However, al-Qurṭubī (also a Mālikī) elects to further expand on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s point, noting that although the ḥadīth critic al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) had accepted this tradition and al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Māja had included it in their respective ḥadīth collections, al-Tirmidhī had indicated that there are problems with its *isnād*. Al-Qurṭubī adds that it has also been reported as al-Shaʿbī’s own saying, which is more accurate.⁵⁴

Following al-Thaʿlabī, al-Baghawī chooses to quote the doubly rewarded tradition. Although he does not include the other three traditions attributed to women found in al-Thaʿlabī’s discussion of Q 2:177, when commenting on the word “beggars” he incorporates two versions of a well-known ḥadīth in which a Companion, Umm Bujayd, relates that the prophet said that one should give to a beggar even if all that one can offer is a burnt hoof.⁵⁵ In his epitome of al-Baghawī’s Quran commentary, the only tradition attributed by name to a woman which al-Khāzin opts to include in his discussion of Q 2:177 is the ḥadīth of Umm Bujayd, which he notes is found in Mālik’s *Muwattaʿ* and was also related by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī. Interestingly, he (unlike al-Baghawī) also cites two versions of the beggar on horseback tradition which al-Thaʿlabī had quoted, but without *isnāds*; one version is attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the other to another male Companion, Zayd b. Aslam.⁵⁶ As a result of his concern with duly authenticated ḥadīths coupled with his omission of their *isnāds*, Fāṭima bt. al-Ḥusayn’s name does not appear.⁵⁷

For his part, al-Zamakhsharī elects to quote a version of the rewarded doubly tradition as well as a version of the close relative tradition in his exegesis

51 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ i, 131–2.

52 Ibn al-ʿArabī i, 59.

53 Ibn ʿAṭīyya ii, 80.

54 Al-Qurṭubī ii, 241–2. See: al-Tirmidhī 169 (*Abwāb al-Zakāt*).

55 Al-Baghawī i, 100–1. For Umm Bujayd, see: Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* viii, 502.

56 Al-Khāzin i, 106. This suggests that he referred back to al-Thaʿlabī’s Quran commentary here.

57 As noted above, the *isnād* given by al-Thaʿlabī is technically defective, as it lacks a Companion. Therefore, al-Khāzin uses a version of this ḥadīth that is said to have been related from a Companion—ʿAlī. The rest of the *isnād* (which has been omitted) likely passes through Fāṭima bt. al-Ḥusayn; see for example Abū Dāwūd ii, 49 (*K. al-Zakāt*).

of Q 2:177, but does not provide *isnāds* or attribute them to anyone. Also, he credits the beggar on horseback tradition to Muḥammad and the claim over wealth tradition to al-Shaʿbī.⁵⁸

This brief overview of exegetical discourses on part of Q 2:177 from the third/ninth to the eighth/fourteenth centuries is a good illustration of the interactions of some of the factors at play in exegetes' decisions regarding the citation of traditions ascribed to early Muslim women. Most of the Quran commentaries discussed above are genealogically interlinked in one way or another: al-Māwardī's *tafsīr* is an epitome of al-Ṭabarī's. Al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qurṭubī rely to varying extents on al-Thaʿlabī, and al-Khāzin is an epitome of al-Baghawī's commentary. Al-Qurṭubī evidently has a complex relationship to many of these works; throughout his entire Quran commentary, he quotes from Ibn al-ʿArabī and Ibn ʿAṭīyya, but also at times refers to al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī.

In the example just discussed, the influences of such genealogical relations can be discerned. Individual factors shaping these various exegetes' choices evidently include their methodological approach (e.g. encyclopedic, summative, legally-oriented), as well as the interpretive concerns that they bring to this verse (e.g. legal, grammatical, admonitory). Among the external factors influencing their selections of traditions ascribed to women are legal debates, Sunni ḥadīth critics' discourses, and the emergence of a Sunni ḥadīth canon. As has already been noted, the practices of shortening or altogether omitting *isnāds*, as well as of summarising or alluding to a ḥadīth rather than quoting it in full could significantly reduce the presence of female names in the transhistorical exegetical communities constructed on the pages of *tafsīr* works.

While factors such as these provide the beginnings of an explanatory framework for examining the citation of exegetical materials attributed to female figures in some medieval Quran commentaries belonging to the Sunni exegetical "mainstream," they do not enable us to predict what role(s) exegetical materials of this type might play in a given *tafsīr* work. One can never quite be sure what one might find. Medieval Quran commentators had a wide array of written works as well as orally transmitted materials to draw upon, which ranged from collections of variant quranic readings to pietistic or Sufi stories about virtuous people.

For example, in Chapter Three we saw that several texts conventionally dated to the formative period appear to suggest that Umm al-Dardā' had

58 Al-Zamakhsharī i, 364–7. For a detailed overview of the textual functions of ḥadīths in the *Kashshāf*, see: Lane, *A traditional Mu'tazilite* 149–80.

extensive knowledge of the written quranic text, and also that “she”⁵⁹ is included in Ibn al-Jazarī’s late medieval biographical work on Quran reciters. However, of the eight *tafsīr* works discussed in Chapters Two and Three (at least, in the often incomplete form that they have come down to us), only the *Tafsīr Yahyā b. Sallām* presents “her” as a source of any type of exegetical material—i.e. of one pietistic tradition. None of them quotes Umm al-Dardā’ as a source of quranic recitations.

Nonetheless, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn ‘Aṭīyya between them did opt to include a few variant readings attributed to Umm al-Dardā’.⁶⁰ These particular readings do not appear in the *tafsīr* works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Tha’labī, or al-Samarqandī. As available evidence does not seem to suggest that they were already a widely established part of the exegetical discourse on these two verses, it is unclear why al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn ‘Aṭīyya would decide to quote them some five centuries after “her” death. The various manuscripts of Ibn ‘Aṭīyya’s *tafsīr* hint that scribal errors may possibly have played a role in creating, suppressing, or perhaps even “reviving” at least one of these readings.⁶¹ But whatever the case, the influence of al-Zamakhsharī’s and Ibn ‘Aṭīyya’s respective decisions is apparent in the Quran commentary of Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, who cites both of these readings.⁶²

Another example of the unexpected appears in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *tafsīr*, at the end of his interpretation of the latter part of Q 2:228:

59 As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a debate as to whether the *kunya* “Umm al-Dardā” refers to one person or two. Therefore, “she” is in quotation marks here.

60 Al-Zamakhsharī iii, 126; Ibn ‘Aṭīyya vii, 128 (*sub.* Q 10:22); Ibn ‘Aṭīyya x, 414 (*sub.* Q 24:1).

61 Some of the manuscripts attribute the variant reading of Q 24:1 to Abū l-Dardā’ (Ibn ‘Aṭīyya x, 414, n. 1). Given that Abū l-Dardā’ was apparently much better known as a putative source of variant readings, it could be hypothesised that this reading was “originally” attributed to him, but that a scribal error resulted in its ascription to Umm al-Dardā’. However, it could be argued that in this case, the ascription to Umm al-Dardā’ is the *lector difficilior*. This question requires further research before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

62 Al-Gharnāṭī v, 184 (*sub.* Q 10:22); vi, 521 (*sub.* Q 24:1). Abū Ḥayyān refers repeatedly in his commentary to al-Zamakhsharī as well as to Ibn ‘Aṭīyya. One of these readings is also cited by Abū Ḥayyān’s student, al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, in his commentary; see: Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-‘Abbās b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, *Al-Durr al-maṣūn fī ‘ulūm al-kitāb al-maknūn* iv, 17 (*sub.* Q 10:22). The latter makes frequent reference to al-Gharnāṭī, as well as to al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn ‘Aṭīyya. For Abū Ḥayyān’s and al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī’s respective receptions of al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīr*, see: Saleh, The gloss 233–4.

... The saying of the Almighty {*and the men have a degree over them*}. Ibn ‘Abbās said: by means of what they give to them of the *mahr*, and spend on them of wealth. Mujāhid said, “Through *jihād* and inheritance.” Abū l-Mālik said, “He can divorce her, and she cannot do anything about it.” Al-Zajjāj said: “She obtains pleasure from him as he obtains it from her, and for him is the excellence [over her] due to his provision [for her].” And it is related from Abū Hurayra on the authority of the Prophet, that he said, “If I were to command any one of you to prostrate before any person, I would order the woman to prostrate before her husband.” And the daughter of Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab said, “We did not used to speak to our husbands except [in the way that] you would speak to your leaders.”⁶³

This passage quotes well-known and oft-cited exegeses of this portion of the verse which appear in a number of Quran commentaries—with the exception of the saying attributed to the unnamed daughter of Sa‘īd. It is very rare for any post-Successor female figure to be quoted as a source of exegetical materials in the *tafsīr* works utilized in this study, although anecdotes about anonymous pious or Sufi women deemed to be in some way interpretive do occasionally make an appearance.⁶⁴ Moreover, available evidence does not suggest that Ibn al-Jawzī is following exegetical convention here.⁶⁵ His choice to incorporate it into what is otherwise a summary of typical opinions is all the more interesting, given that his commentary belongs to the *madrasa*-style genre and was expressly intended to be brief and to the point.⁶⁶ It is possible that his inclusion of these words attributed to her might stem from his concern (as expressed in the introduction of his biographical work, the *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*) that pious women in history not be entirely overlooked.⁶⁷

Sa‘īd is said to have had four daughters,⁶⁸ and it is unclear which one of them is meant here. It is said that he unceremoniously married an unnamed daughter to a student of his, Kathīr b. al-Muṭṭalib b. Abī Wadā’a; the latter

63 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād* i, 261–2.

64 E.g. al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 144 (*sub.* Q 18:82); Ibn al-‘Arabī iii, 1366 (*sub.* Q 24:30).

65 None of the other *tafsīr* works utilized in this study quote the daughter of Sa‘īd in their discussions of the latter part of Q 2:228 (nor do they cite any traditions attributed to any other female figure, for that matter).

66 See the Introduction (above).

67 He famously takes Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038–39) to task for barely mentioning pious women in his *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* (Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat* i, 12; Cornell, *Early Sufi women* 46–7).

68 Their names were: Fākhita, Umm ‘Uthmān, Umm ‘Amr, and Maryam (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* v, 140).

reportedly described her as “among the most conversant with the Book of God, and the most knowledgeable of the *sunna* of the Messenger of God, and the most cognizant of a husband’s rights.”⁶⁹ It is possible that this daughter is the one who is the putative source of Ibn al-Jawzī’s quotation—or that he has no particular girl in mind, but is referencing a mythical construction: the anonyma who might or might not be a historical figure, but whose very anonymity in the stories told about her signifies her self-effacing (and therefore exemplary) female piety.⁷⁰

This passage is a particularly pointed example of a representation of a female figure who is granted a degree of authority within the text, yet at the same time her inclusion emphatically (re)affirms the gendered hierarchies of social and interpretive authority constructed in the work overall. There is no indication that this statement attributed to Sa’īd’s daughter was “originally” intended to interpret the Quran, much less this particular verse. Nonetheless, her words are deemed worth quoting by Ibn al-Jawzī, who exercises his discretionary power as an exegete and gives her the last word in his interpretation of Q 2:228. Her (limited) textual authority and the larger gendered hierarchies of societal and exegetical authority (re)constructed and (re)affirmed in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *tafsīr* are inextricably intertwined. This is because it is through this hierarchy that certain female personas—here, the anonymous, self-abnegating daughter and wife—historically came to be validated and idealised as “proper” modes of female piety. Therefore, they could be deemed worthy of memorialisation in positive terms,⁷¹ and occasionally granted a voice, at the discretion of (male) religious authorities.⁷²

While exegetes made deliberate choices as to what they would or would not incorporate, the level of intentionality that they assumed the putative female sources or transmitters of *āthār* and ḥadīths to possess is unclear for several reasons. As we have seen, in many if not most cases the female figure

69 “*aḥfaẓ al-nās li-kitāb Allāh wa a’lamihim bi-sunnat Rasūl Allāh wa-a’rafihim bi-ḥaqq zawj*” (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 234). Al-Tha’labī relates that Sa’īd married off an unnamed daughter for two *dīrhams* (*al-Kashf* ii, 258); it is unclear if this is a reference to the same story.

70 Whether or not this is the case, it can be surmised that the reader is likely to connect this quotation with the story of the marriage of the unnamed daughter of Sa’īd, due to the lack of names. The question of the historicity of such stories will not be taken up here. Ibn al-Jawzī’s fondness for anecdotes about unnamed pious women is illustrated in his *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, which contains a number of them.

71 For a critical discussion of the ways that accounts of women’s piety in classical Muslim sources have been idealised, see: Silvers, Early pious, mystic and Sufi women.

72 To date, we have very little information as to what any pre-modern Muslim women thought about such idealised models of female piety.

in question does not appear to be depicted as intending to directly interpret the Quran, much less as having anticipated that her words would be utilized by others in order to do so. Moreover, the female Companions and Successors were not regarded as exegetes in their own right by “mainstream” Sunni Quran commentators. While they spoke of female Companions with reverence as a matter of theological principle, simply being a source or transmitter of traditions deemed relevant to the interpretation of the Quran was not regarded as actually doing *tafsīr* by exegetes from the Sunni “mainstream,” as we have seen.⁷³ At most, these women were seen as having provided raw materials of varying degrees of usefulness to exegetes.

While it might be assumed that ḥadīths credited to early Muslim women and deemed authentic could be expected to play a more centrally interpretive role in ḥadīth-based commentaries, and that as a result such women would be presented as participants in the exegetical process in these works, neither is the case. One reason for this is that even in the Quran commentary of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, a distinction is made between merely transmitting traditions and engaging in exegesis.

For instance, both a legal opinion and a tradition about the quranic statement that “God will not call you to account for what is *laghw* in your oaths” (Q 2:225, 5:89) are linked to ‘Ā’isha bt. Abī Bakr in texts conventionally dated to the second/eighth century, as we have seen.⁷⁴ In his discussion of what constitutes *laghw*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim first quotes a tradition on the question, in which ‘Urwa relates that ‘Ā’isha said that it is “a man’s saying, ‘No, by God’ and ‘Yes, by God.’” Then, he cites another, more detailed tradition, also attributed to her, in which she expands upon this explanation, stating that there is no legally proscribed expiation (*kaffāra*) for oaths (such as ‘No, by God’) conventionally used in casual conversation; expiation applies to oaths that a person swears intentionally. Then, after listing early several male authorities who concur with this view attributed to her, Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates yet another version of this tradition:

... on the authority of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, on the authority of ‘Ā’isha, that she interpreted [God’s] saying—‘God will not call you to account for what is *laghw* in your oaths.’ She said, “It is the thing that one of you swears by, not intending anything by it except the truth. There is no obligation upon him for other than [intentional] oaths.”⁷⁵

73 For a discussion of this, see Chapter Four.

74 See Chapter Two.

75 “... ‘an ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr ‘an ‘Ā’isha, annahā kānat tata’awwal hādhihi l-āya ya’nī qawlahu lā yu’ākhidhukum Allāh bi-l-laghw fī aymānikum wa taqūl huwa l-shay’ yuhlif ‘alayh

While ʿĀʾisha is presented as the source of the first two versions of this tradition, it is not clear from where her understanding of the verse is derived—though the reader/audience would likely infer that she learned it from the prophet. But in the latter version, the act of interpretation is imputed to ʿĀʾisha herself. In view of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s concern with avoiding redundancy in his commentary by quoting only the exegetical traditions from the most knowledgeable Companions that have the soundest *isnāds*,⁷⁶ this indicates his esteem for her as a source and an authority, as well as her status in the text as an extraordinary female figure. While in this particular example she is portrayed as engaging in exegesis, this is strikingly atypical.

As there are a significant number of ḥadīths credited to a small number of early Muslim women found in the ḥadīth works regarded by medieval Sunnis as most reliable, a noticeable number of such ḥadīths came to be incorporated into ḥadīth-based Quran commentaries. However, no particular desire on the part of exegetes authoring commentaries of this type to foreground these is in evidence. In the course of his hermeneutical theorizing, neither Ibn Taymiyya—nor, following him, Ibn Kathīr—expresses any particular interest in the ḥadīths credited to any female Companion, not even to ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr. Rather, in their discussions of Companions and Successors famed for their trustworthy transmission of ḥadīths and/or knowledge of the Quran’s interpretation, female figures are notably absent.⁷⁷ The inclusion of a significant number of ḥadīths attributed to ʿĀʾisha in particular (and to a lesser extent, some other female Companions and Successors) in late medieval ḥadīth-based Quran commentaries is evidently a methodological byproduct rather than the result of an intentional focus.

3 By and through the *Isnād*: Women on the Margins of *Tafsīr*

To this point, our focus has been on Quran commentators’ quotations of exegetical materials attributed to or reportedly transmitted by women. Nonetheless, several of the sources used for this study also provide a few glimpses of a small number of scholarly women prior to the late nineteenth century CE on what can be termed the margins of *tafsīr*.

aḥadukum lā yurīd minhu illā l-ṣīd q fayakūna ʿalayya ghayr mā ḥalafa ʿalayh” (Ibn Abī Ḥātim ii, 408, iv, 1190).

76 See the Introduction (above).

77 See for example: Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima* 64; Ibn Kathīr i, 13. The last two chapters of Ibn Taymiyya’s *Muqaddima* are quoted verbatim in Ibn Kathīr’s introduction to his Quran commentary; see: Saleh, Ibn Taymiyya 124.

Women's involvement with the study of the Quran's interpretation appears to have been mainly through the transmission of texts. This seems to have been a side-effect of a larger phenomenon—the reappearance of prominent female ḥadīth transmitters in the sources in the late fourth/tenth century.⁷⁸ They transmitted ḥadīth compilations (including those such as al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* which contain a *tafsīr* chapter),⁷⁹ as well as other works, many of which appear to have been mainly composed of ḥadīths on various topics.⁸⁰ Some of these ḥadīth-based texts included *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* works and works relevant to other aspects of the study of the Quran, as well as in a few cases to its interpretation.

As Asma Sayeed has shown, this reemergence of female ḥadīth transmitters was made possible by a number of intertwined factors: (1) with the canonisation of Sunni ḥadīth works, transmitters were held to less exacting standards; (2) by the fourth/tenth century, written transmission of ḥadīths predominated over oral, so it was deemed less essential for transmitters to have advanced training or noteworthy powers of memory, or to travel in search of knowledge; (3) by the late third/ninth century, traditionalism had become Sunni “orthodox;” one result of this was the promotion and idealization of learning and transmitting ḥadīth as a pious act, even for some urban tradesmen or small businessmen who were not religious scholars as well as women belonging to scholarly families; (4) the preference for short “elevated” (*ālī*) chains of transmission, which were valued as a conduit of blessings (*baraka*), for individual ḥadīths as well as books; (5) the increase in demand for traditionalist books such as ḥadīth collections, which had to have sound *isnāds*. Taken together, these developments tended to foster an atmosphere that was significantly less at odds with the social and legal constraints that theoretically at least were expected to govern the lives of (free) women from Sunni “orthodox” scholarly families. In fact, they could even be said to promote such women's transmission activities in certain ways.⁸¹

The *ijāza* system as it had developed by the fifth/eleventh century allowed even small children to be brought into the presence of a teacher to “hear”

78 For the decline of female involvement in ḥadīth transmission in the second/eighth century, see Chapter Three.

79 For example, Karīma bt. Aḥmad al-Marwaziyya (d. 463/1070) was a well-known transmitter of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*; for her, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xviii, 233–5. For her career, see: Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 226–30.

80 There is a growing body of scholarship on medieval women ḥadīth transmitters; see for example: Roded, *Women in Islamic* 63–89; Berkey, *Transmission of knowledge* 161–81; Sayeed, *Women and ḥadīth* 71–94.

81 Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 223–6.

ḥadīths or books (which they would then be expected to learn when they were older), so that they could receive the teacher's *ijāza* (certification) to transmit this material later. *Ijāzas* could also be obtained without having had direct contact with the teacher. Therefore, a girl from a scholarly family, whose relatives facilitated her attendance at the classes of a noteworthy ḥadīth scholar while she was small (or obtained *ijāzas* on her behalf) and who moreover had the necessary motivation later on to learn the material could become a renowned transmitter decades later, especially if she also acquired a reputation for piety and lived to an advanced age.⁸² In this way, possible conflicts between her involvement in ḥadīth transmission and ideals of gender segregation and seclusion for free women as well as (early) marriage and childbearing would be at least theoretically kept to a minimum. It is interesting to note that such a trajectory also parallels the life-pattern of 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr as it is presented in classical biographies of her to some extent. The foundation for 'Ā'isha's reputation as an important source of knowledge was established before her widowhood at the age of eighteen, but her transmission of Muḥammad's teachings is said to have chiefly occurred during the last few decades of her life, before her death at age sixty-six.

That these factors also appear to have enabled and promoted such involvement on what could be termed the fringes of quranic exegesis is apparent in the outlines of the life of Zaynab bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sha'irī presented in medieval biographical dictionaries. As we have seen, she received a general license from al-Zamakhsharī to transmit all of his works, and her name appears in one of the chains of transmission of his Quran commentary. The daughter of a religious scholar, she was born in 524/1129. As al-Zamakhsharī died in 538/1144, she must have been less than fourteen years of age when she received this *ijāza*. It is unlikely that she studied the *Kashshāf* with al-Zamakhsharī,⁸³ although she presumably learned it when she was older. Neither do *tafsīr* works appear to have been the focus of her studies and teaching. Zaynab also heard the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from several teachers, and later taught ḥadīth herself. She was famed for the shortness of her *isnāds*, which was made possible not only by

82 This trajectory can be seen in the life of the seventh-eighth/thirteenth-fourteenth century ḥadīth transmitter Zaynab bt. al-Kamāl; see: Sayeed, *Women and ḥadīth* 75–82. For more on her, see below.

83 Aside from the fact that she was fairly young when she received the *ijāza*—which was in any case a general one—Lane notes that available sources specifically name only one (male) student of al-Zamakhsharī's who studied his Quran commentary with him (*A traditional Mu'tazilite* 55).

her having begun her studies at an early age, but by the fact that she lived until age 91.⁸⁴

Another example of women on *tafsīr*'s margins is found in the *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*. As it has come down to us, the text contains the records of the sessions for the reading aloud (*qirā'a*) of its eight constituent parts. At these assemblies, one part of the text would be read out, and its transmitter would verify the accuracy of the students' written copies. These records list one girl or woman (or at times two) as having been present for several of these sessions in the month of Shawwāl in 482/1089. Both are related to the transmitter of the text, Abū l-Faḍl Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Khayrūn of Baghdad (d. 488/1095)⁸⁵—Kāmila is his daughter, while Sitt al-Ḥasan is the sister of his grand-nephew.⁸⁶ Being present at such gatherings was regarded as a religiously meritorious act. However, it is unclear whether either of them played any active role in the further transmission of this text.

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's *Muḥjam al-mufahras*, which gives the *isnāds* of the books that he studied, includes *isnāds* for a number of works on the Quran and its interpretation. Of the *isnāds* for works of this type which contain the names of female scholars, nearly all of the books in question appear to have been composed of traditions. Moreover, most deal with aspects of the recitation or study of the Quran, but are not directly exegetical. For example, the well-known Damascene ḥadīth transmitter, Zaynab bt. al-Kamāl (d. 740/1339) is credited with having transmitted a *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* work, and a work on abrogating and abrogated verses (*nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*), as well as one about Meccan and Medinan verses.⁸⁷ On the few occasions when a woman who transmitted an exegetical work is mentioned, the work in question most often seems to have been ḥadīth-based. For instance, Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad b. al-Munajjā reportedly transmitted the *Tafsīr* of Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (as well as a couple of *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* works).⁸⁸ Only once is this not the case: Shuhda bt.

84 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* 239–40, years 611–20. Al-Dhahabī describes her as a righteous woman, long-lived, famous, and with an elevated *isnād*, which was brought to an end by her death: "*wa-kānat shaykha ṣāliha 'āliyat al-isnād mu'ammara mashhūra inqāṭa'a bi-mawtihā isnād 'ālin*."

85 For Abū l-Faḍl Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Khayrūn, see: al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 231–3, years 481–90 AH.

86 Mujāhid 431, 499, 562, 629–30, 697.

87 Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Al-Muḥjam al-Mufahras aw tajrīd asānīd al-kutub al-mashhūra wa-l-ajzā' l-manthūra* 107, 109, 111. For Zaynab's career as a ḥadīth transmitter, see: Sayeed, Women and *ḥadīth* 75–82.

88 Ibn Ḥajar, *Muḥjam* 107, 109, 111. Fāṭima lived during the eighth-ninth/fourteenth-fifteenth centuries. The *tafsīr* of Sufyān b. 'Uyayna is apparently lost; see: Gilliot, Beginnings 16.

Abī Naṣr Aḥmad b. al-Faraj al-Dīnawārī (d. 574/1178), who is celebrated in classical biographical works for her transmission of ḥadīths and various books as well as for her skills as a calligrapher, is not only credited with having transmitted a *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* work, but also the linguistically-focused *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān* of al-Zajjāj.⁸⁹

While these examples are suggestive, they are too few in number as well as too disparate in geographical region and time to serve as a basis for more than some tentative observations. These women typically belong to scholarly families. We have two instances, both in the sixth/twelfth century, of women transmitting an exegetical work with a linguistic focus. However, the remaining examples are of women attending the reading of portions of a tradition-based exegetical work (in the fifth/eleventh century) and transmitting tradition-based texts related to the study of the Quran or in several cases to its exegesis, in sixth/twelfth, eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. There is little or nothing to suggest that most of these women would have had advanced knowledge of quranic exegesis, or even a particular interest in transmitting books connected with it. Rather, in the case of those who were transmitters, their main focus appears to have been the ḥadīth, and their transmission of some works related to the study of the Quran and/or its exegesis seems to have been an extension of that for the most part.

These women were transmitters/"editors"⁹⁰ of these books; their role was to ensure that the text was copied and passed down accurately. The gatherings at which the transmission of these books took place had a practical function—that of providing a means for these texts to be accurately preserved and passed on—as well as what can be termed the ritual function of (re)affirming the links between the participants and the books to the sacred past, through the *isnād*. In these examples considered here, the female transmitters' role was to pass on works authored by others. In this process, they served as conduits for *baraka* as well as of duly legitimated access to some of the authentically transmitted books which were part of the educational formation of religious scholars. Such religious authority as these women themselves

Two other apparently tradition-based exegetical works with a female transmitter in their *isnāds* are also listed (*Mu'jam* 109, 110).

89 Ibn Ḥajar, *Mu'jam* 107, 115. For Shuhda, see: al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* xx, 542–3; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* 145–7, years 571–80 AH. For her scholarly career, see: Sayeed, Muslim women's religious education 98–100.

90 Asma Sayeed characterises the role played by medieval female transmitters of ḥadīth compilations as that of "editors" (Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 236). My thinking about medieval women on the margins of *tafsīr* owes much to her ground-breaking research.

had can be characterised as mediatory rather than as interpretive or generative; they do not appear to have written *tafsīr* texts themselves.

The question of whether the classical *tafsīr* genre had any room for female authors of exegetical works is difficult to answer, given the present state of research. The only example of a text pertaining to the Quran written by a woman prior to the late nineteenth century CE of which I am aware is the *Tabshīr al-ikhwān bi-tawassul bi-suwar al-Qurʾān ʿinda l-Khāliq al-mannān* (Announcing [good news] to the brothers through petitioning the generous Creator by means of quranic sūras).⁹¹ This work, written by Asmāʿu the daughter of Shehu Usmān dan Fodio in the Sokoto caliphate in west Africa,⁹² is made up of ḥadīths, mostly of the merit-of-sūra type, which instruct the reader/audience to recite particular sūras (or utilize a written copy as an amulet) in order to obtain a variety of benefits. These range from spiritual rewards, such as forgiveness of sins or a vision of the prophet, to mundane concerns, including healing from ailments and protection from various kinds of harm. Most of its contents are arranged in the order of the sūras discussed, beginning with Sūrat al-Dukhān (S. 44, “Smoke”) and concluding with Sūrat al-Kawthar, with some sūras omitted.

This work is not exegetical. And, while it indicates that Asmāʿu was quite familiar with merit-of-sūra traditions as well as how they might be applied to issues of identity construction within her community, it does not demonstrate originality.⁹³ It could be argued that authoring such a work does not differ greatly from the practice of transmission of works related to the Quran which had been authored by others. It also fits the pattern found in the few surviving compilations of ḥadīths written by a couple of medieval female ḥadīth transmitters, which demonstrate technical knowledge of ḥadīth transmission but not authorial ingenuity.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, as a text written to promote the following of the prophetic *sunna* over against local pagan practices, the *Tabshīr al-ikhwān* was clearly intended to present a (re)imagined sacred past for pious

91 For a reproduction of the Arabic manuscript as well as an English translation, see: Boyd and Mack, *The collected works* 60–71, 364–83. Asmāʿu also wrote a short poem intended to help people to memorize the names of the sūras of the Quran; for this work, see: *The collected works* 23–6, 382–9.

92 For a biography of Asmāʿu (1793–1865 CE), see: Boyd, *The caliph's sister*.

93 As the editors note, it belongs to the “medicine of the prophet” genre. For a brief overview of this work as a representative of this genre within its literary, geographical and historical context, see: Boyd and Mack, *The collected works* 57–60.

94 For Shuhda's compilation of 115 ḥadīths with “elevated” *isnāds*, see: Sayeed, *Shifting fortunes* 277. Sayeed notes that while this work evidences Shuhda's knowledge of *isnāds*, it does not demonstrate “legal acumen or creativity.”

emulation, so any expectation that it would take an innovative approach to its subject matter is perhaps misplaced.

One could tentatively hypothesise that if any pre-modern woman (or women) wrote an exegetical work which remains to be discovered, it would likely have similar characteristics, in being more akin to transmission than authorial creation, quite short, and also ḥadīth-based. Nonetheless, a book on the stages of the mystical path written by the Qādīrī Sufi scholar, ʿĀ'isha al-Bā'ūniyya (d. 922/1516) includes some quotations from the Quran commentary of the Sufi master and exegete al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072),⁹⁵ which could raise the question of whether a medieval woman might not have authored a *tafsīr* work that engaged overtly with the interpretations of other exegetes. The present state of research does not provide an answer to this question, though what limited information we have suggests that any space for a women to author a *tafsīr* text prior to the late nineteenth century CE might possibly be found in the sub-genre of medieval short tradition-based works.

Concluding Remarks

Following the precedents set by their various exegetical predecessors, a number of medieval Quran commentators such as al-Māwardī, al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn ʿAṭiyya, Ibn al-Jawzī, and al-Qurṭubī continue to incorporate exegetical materials attributed to women in their commentaries. In the process, they bring into being highly gendered visions of interpretive authority. These exegetes actively (re)construct the sacred past as well as their various presents on the pages of their commentaries, appropriating anything from the past or present, including exegetical materials attributed to women, and repurposing it at their discretion. Such undertakings are always selective, by necessity and by design, as well as ultimately unpredictable due to the many variables involved, which include the exegete's individual judgment. As such, they are enactments of the interpretive process that (re)construct it as emblematically masculine.

By contrast, the female figures whose purported words these exegetes quote belong to the ever more distant sacred past—most often, to the time of the Companions or the Successors. Moreover, these female figures' mode of participation is through transmission. But transmitting ḥadīths was not regarded in and of itself as interpreting the Quran by the Sunni exegetical "mainstream" (and even Ibn Abī Ḥātim drew a distinction between an early

95 Homerin, *Living love* 232–33. Originally from Syria, she spent much of her career in Cairo.

figure who transmitted and one who interpreted), so the effect of tying female participation to transmission was to render it marginal and subsidiary within transhistorical exegetical communities, as well as to associate it with passivity.

Nonetheless, one rather paradoxical result of this persistent linkage between transmission and female figures was that it also opened up possibilities for limited involvement on the margins of the medieval *tafsīr* tradition for a small number of women from scholarly families. At this point, it is difficult to say much about this interesting phenomenon, which remains to be researched. One can however observe that it highlights the fact that the primary exegetical gaze discussed in Chapter Five is a theological construction, which should not be mistaken for an accurate description of lived realities.

Conclusion

We began this study by posing several interrelated questions. What is the historical place and significance of the several different types of exegetical materials—*ḥadīths*, *āthār*, legal opinions, variant readings, lines of poetry and stereotyped female speech—quoted in many classical Quran commentaries and ascribed to female figures, within the history of this textual genre? When attempting to map a history of the pre-modern *tafsīr* genre, what does employing gender as an analytical category enable us to perceive? What cultural labour does gender perform in the development of this genre of Muslim literature?

As gender categories are social constructs that change over time, it cannot simply be assumed that widespread contemporary “commonsensical” binary notions of gender will suffice for our understanding of *tafsīr* texts from the formative and medieval periods. Therefore, this study began by examining how exegetes from the second/eighth century onward depict and (re)construct gender in their Quran commentaries, with a particular focus on the implications of such constructions for the gendering of interpretive authority. The critical academic study of gender constructions in pre-modern Arabic texts in general and in classical Quran commentaries in particular is in its initial stages, and there has been no systematic engagement among those who study pre-modern *tafsīr* works with gender theory to date. This study lays the foundations for a historical and analytical reading of gender constructions in pre-modern *tafsīr* texts.

The Quran commentaries examined in the first chapter not only present socio-political as well as more specifically “religious” authority as emblematically masculine, but construct such masculine visions of authority in contradistinction to femaleness, which is linked in these works to intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical deficiency. Such constructions of authority appear to *a priori* exclude the possibility that any woman could be regarded as having the ability to interpret the Quran, as well as to deny legitimacy to any interpretations attributed to a woman. Nonetheless, these *tafsīr* works do concede limited degrees of interpretive authority to some early Muslim female figures, particularly to a few of the wives of the prophet.

The remainder of this study examines both the scope of such limited interpretive authority as it developed during the formative and early medieval periods, and the ways that interpretive authority comes to be constructed as emblematically masculine. This study breaks new ground by providing a detailed survey of exegetical materials attributed to women in a number of

tafsīr texts conventionally dated from the second/eighth to fourth/tenth centuries, that places materials of this type within their respective historical and textual contexts. It also pioneers an approach to assessing the historical significance of such materials within the pre-modern *tafsīr* genre.

A number of the extant *tafsīr* works conventionally dated to the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries contain very small percentages of exegetical materials ascribed to female figures. While debate continues with regard to the dating and redaction history of these texts, they would appear to contain some of the earliest surviving examples of materials of this type being utilized in order to interpret the Quran. Significantly, there is no evidence in these seemingly early *tafsīr* works that a discrete body of exegetical materials credited to any woman was in circulation at this time, whether in written or oral form. What we see is the ostensible beginnings of a process of linkage between a small selection of materials of various types ascribed to several female figures—a few lines of poetry, a variant reading, several ḥadīths on different topics, a legal opinion—and the exegesis of certain quranic verses.

At this historical point in time, there seems to be little agreement as to which female figures could be or ought to be quoted as sources of exegetical materials. Moreover, hermeneutical considerations decisively shape these texts' various and varying presentations of female figures as possible sources of exegetical materials. Significantly, 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr is variously quoted as a source of ḥadīths and legal opinions in some apparently early *tafsīr* works, and primarily as a source of linguistic information in others. Such differences highlight the constructed nature of representations of this type.

By the third/ninth century, it would seem that quotations of or at least allusions to certain exegetical materials ascribed to female figures (most often, to 'Ā'isha) become increasingly *de rigueur* in the case of a small but apparently growing selection of quranic verses in proto-Sunni *tafsīr*, for exegetes whose hermeneutical approach included the citation of traditions. These exegetical materials, whether *āthār* or ḥadīths—or much less commonly, variant readings, legal opinions or lines of poetry—had become or were in the process of becoming part of the interpretive discourses and debates associated with particular verses and exegetical topics. In this way, 'Ā'isha, Umm Salama, and occasionally a few other female Companions and Successors came to be presented as part of the transhistorical communities of exegetes constructed by the likes of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Mundhir, and al-Māturīdī,¹ as well as by al-Tha'labī in the century following. A sense of the impact that such exegetical materials had on the Sunni *tafsīr* genre in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries can be

1 At least, in the *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunna* as it has come down to us.

had from such encyclopedic Quran commentaries, as well as from the *madrasa* Quran commentary of al-Samarqandī.

With the rise of the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement in the third/ninth century, several ḥadīth scholars attempted to intervene in the ongoing interpretive discourses on the Quran. Their chief concern appears to have been that a number of Quran commentators were making exegetical use of traditions. In al-Bukhārī's view, it was discerning ḥadīth scholars such as himself who could authoritatively distinguish between reliable and unreliable ḥadīths, while the exegetes lacked the requisite knowledge to be able to do so. By including a *tafsīr* chapter in his well-known compilation of ḥadīths that he judged to be *ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhārī seems to have intended to make available to non-specialists reliable versions of ḥadīths that were often already being used exegetically. Al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī (and in the century following, al-Ḥākim) followed suit, with each incorporating a *tafsīr* chapter into a ḥadīth compilation of theirs.

One result of these ḥadīth compilers' focus on complete *isnāds* that extend back to the prophet whenever possible is that these *tafsīr* chapters inadvertently highlight the existence of ḥadīths credited to female figures (in particular, to 'Ā'isha) that could be deemed to have some bearing on various exegetical questions. These *tafsīr* chapters provide a window into the types of ḥadīths ascribed to early Muslim women that were being used exegetically at that time. It is noteworthy that these chapters had a limited impact on several medieval *tafsīr* works from the fifth/eleventh century and later, which quote some ḥadīths from them.

Nonetheless, the entry of ḥadīths into *tafsīr* works predated the compilation of any of these *tafsīr* chapters, and unfolded quite independently of them. This process of entry seems to have begun in a very limited way in the second/eighth century, and continued to expand in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, as can be seen from the encyclopedic Quran commentaries penned during this time. The influence of al-Ṭabarī and especially al-Tha'labī on a number of other later Quran commentators is at times reflected in quotations of traditions attributed to a female figure that had come to be associated with a particular quranic verse. Such influence is apparent in classical Quran commentaries such as those of al-Māwardī, al-Wāḥidī (in his *Waṣīf*), al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn 'Aṭīyya for example. Of these commentaries, the latter three in particular had a significant impact on late medieval Sunni Quran commentary.² A number of late medieval exegetes evidently continued to

2 For al-Baghawī's popularity in the late medieval period, see the Introduction. From the seventh/thirteenth century onward, the Quran commentary of al-Zamakhsharī, as well as those of al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī respectively, were central to the study and teaching of quranic

quote traditions in their Quran commentaries, typically including some ascribed to early Muslim women. Nonetheless, in “mainstream” Sunni exegesis, the citation of traditions is but one hermeneutical tool among many, and ḥadīths are not given the final interpretive verdict.

There were several Sunni Quran commentators in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, as well as a few late medieval exegetes who argued that *tafsīr* ought to be based on ḥadīths that can be traced back to the prophet, or to the Companions or the Successors (and in that order). Ibn Abī Ḥātim, as well as Ibn Kathīr, al-Suyūṭī (in his *Durr*) and al-Shawkānī attempted to put this ḥadīth-based hermeneutic into practice. Over 2,000 ḥadīths attributed to ‘Ā’isha were in circulation, along with much smaller numbers of ḥadīths that were ascribed to several other wives of Muḥammad and various female Companions, and some of these had been incorporated into the six ḥadīth collections that came to be regarded as canonical by Sunnis. Given this, it is not unexpected that a noticeable number of ḥadīths ascribed to or reportedly transmitted by early Muslim women would come to be quoted in this type of ḥadīth-based Quran commentary.

However, it is apparent that this is a by-product of their hermeneutical approach, not an indication that their constructions of interpretive authority were in any way less emblematically “masculine” than those of Quran commentators from the Sunni exegetical “mainstream.” Ibn Kathīr likewise presents rationality, intellect, and linguistic prowess as emblematically masculine, over/against what he regards as quintessentially “feminine” weakness and deficiency in logic and linguistic expression. In any case, the ḥadīth-based interpretive approach had little if any influence on medieval “mainstream” Sunni hermeneutics.

While proportionately, the percentages of exegetical materials attributed to female figures quoted in *tafsīr* works are variable but consistently small, materials of this type had an impact on the genre well beyond what their numbers might suggest. This is in part because they served as a vehicle for the gendering of interpretive authority. In the *tafsīr* works utilized in this study, interpretive authority is gendered masculine in several ways:

The exegetical gaze—and through it, interpretive authority—is textually constructed in what I have termed “primary” and “secondary” modes. The primary exegetical gaze encompasses the body of scriptural text, materials (written and oral) that it judges relevant to the task of quranic interpretation, and the Muslim communal body as a whole. This exegetical gaze genders and

exegesis in Sunni *madrasas* (Saleh, Preliminary remarks 10–11; Saleh, Marginalia 302–9). Ibn ‘Aṭīyya is often quoted by al-Qurṭubī in his Quran commentary, as we have seen.

hierarchically organizes the Muslim communal body through the interpretation of the Quran, regulating every body and encompassing every space, even the imagined abode of the wives of the prophet. As such, the primary exegetical gaze mirrors as well as reinforces the dominant position of free elite males in medieval jurists' theoretical conceptions of a "rightly-guided" societal order, and is thus textually constructed as emblematically "masculine."

The secondary exegetical gaze is textually constructed so that it is both secondary to and dependent upon the primary exegetical gaze. It is limited in scope, as well as in the degree of interpretive authority that is granted to it. While the great majority of those to whom a secondary exegetical gaze is imputed in the *tafsīr* works under discussion here are male, a small number are female figures from early Muslim history.

Exegetical materials attributed to female figures are far less commonly cited than those attributed to male figures. Moreover, while these sources present a picture of generations of men down to the author's own time playing active roles in the interpretation of the quranic text, the comparatively few female figures cited as sources of exegetical materials are chiefly Companions, and among these women, ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr is by far the most oft-quoted. This pattern of citation implicitly links women's participation in *tafsīr* to an idealized and ever more distant past, and primarily to one exceptional woman. The paucity of quotations of exegetical materials from female Successors, even from those few who are said to have possessed expert knowledge of quranic recitation, further reinforces this impression in its evident contrast with the abundance of names of male Successors who are presented as sources of exegetical materials in many *tafsīr* works.

Female figures are at times represented in Quran commentaries as clearly intending to comment on the meaning of a particular quranic word, phrase or verse, often in periphrastic traditions or variant readings, and occasionally as engaged in community debates about interpretive questions. A very small number of rhetorically crafted controversy traditions, hierarchization traditions, and conflict arbitration traditions vividly portray ʿĀ'isha (and much less commonly, Umm Salama or rarely another female Companion) playing such active and intentional exegetical roles. However, with most exegetical materials attributed to female figures that are cited in *tafsīr* works, it is unclear at best as to whether these women are to be understood as having "originally" intended to comment on the meaning of the Quran, much less as anticipating that their words would be quoted by others. In some cases, such as where exegetes quote lines of poetry credited to the pre-Islamic poet al-Khirqi or stereotyped women's speech, it is apparent that the "original" female speakers could not have had any such interpretive intention. Overall, female figures are

not very commonly portrayed as speaking with the express intention of interpreting the quranic text for the community.

Exegetical materials belonging to several different literary genres and deemed to pertain to a wide range of exegetical topics are ascribed to female figures. However, women are most commonly quoted as sources of exegetical materials on legal, eschatological, and pietistic topics. Female figures are rarely presented as sources of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* or other narratives, unless these pertain to events during Muḥammad's lifetime. Nor are women often quoted as pronouncing on theological-exegetical matters, and only a small number of variant or other quranic readings are attributed to them.

The literary features of these representations of female figures as sources of exegetical materials contributed to the gendering of exegetical authority in these *tafsīr* works in several intertwined ways. Not only do many of these depictions present the scope and scale of women's putative exegetical involvement as typically limited in comparison to men's, but the textual roles that these portrayals play within the *tafsīr* works that quote them are not usually exegetically definitive. Finally, these representations have historically been heard, read, and quoted against a wider backdrop of legal theoretical structures and pietistic ideals linked by exegetes to the quranic text itself, that construct free males (in contradistinction to females) as an unmarked category of persons whose access to the highest levels of learning and interpretive authority is assumed. Even regular and direct access to the quranic text itself is legally constructed as an emblematically "masculine" ability.

Given this backdrop, those few early Muslim women who have been memorialized as having contributed to the exegetical process appear as all the more exceptional. The exegetical salience of the abode of the wives of the prophet for Sunni exegetes in particular, as well as the genealogical nature of the classical *tafsīr* genre, are important factors that encouraged the continued quotation of exegetical materials ascribed to women—particularly to 'Ā'isha and a few other wives of Muḥammad—even into the late medieval period. At the same time, these factors did not tend to promote the inclusion of later generations of women within the transhistorical exegetical communities that Quran commentators construct in their works. Within the classical Sunni *tafsīr* genre, a variety of materials ascribed to female figures and deemed to be relevant to quranic exegesis in some way were in circulation, and were selectively utilized. Nonetheless, this was done in ways that ensured that the interpretive enterprise was continuously (re)constructed and (re)affirmed as emblematically "masculine."

Finally, on a more general note, the research findings presented in this study open up a number of fascinating avenues for future exploration.

The results of this study highlight the different productive possibilities which become apparent when classical Islamic texts are read using a variety of literary approaches, as well as taking into account recent developments in the fields of Gender and Queer Studies. In so doing, it should become possible for scholarship in Muslim pre-modern intellectual history to decisively move beyond the tendency to unwittingly reproduce ahistorical conceptions of gender, and instead to focus on critical analyses of the cultural labour performed by texts such as ḥadīths attributed to women. Moreover, it is to be hoped that a theoretical reorientation of this type will help to foster a wider recognition of gender as a topic, which is integral to any incisive study of the genre of classical Quran commentary in particular, as well as of Muslim intellectual history in general.

As was pointed out earlier, to date, there has been little systematic engagement on the part of those who research gender in pre-modern Quran commentaries with the findings of scholars in Rabbinic Studies or Early Christian Studies. This study thus seeks to make a contribution towards filling this gap, and to bring the research generated by these various fields into conversation, with particular attention to the work of those who employ gender theory. Such cross-disciplinary engagement is demonstrably fruitful. Not only does it foster opportunities to approach old material from unaccustomed directions, but it suggests new questions to ask when carrying out research.

The disciplines of *tafsīr* and ḥadīth have been historically interrelated in complex ways, and this interrelationship has at times played a role in shaping literary genres that are not part of the *tafsīr* genre per se. Among these is the medieval genre of ḥadīth commentary (*sharḥ*), particularly when it involves commentary on the *tafsīr* chapters found in several ḥadīth compilations that contain *tafsīr* chapters. As of yet, we know very little about the extent to which the various medieval scholars who wrote commentaries on such ḥadīth compilations might have made use of classical *tafsīr* works, much less whether their efforts in turn influenced medieval Quran exegetes. Interestingly, when explicating the chapter on *tafsīr* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al, Bukhārī* in his *Fath al-bārī*, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī quotes from several exegetical works. These include not only the ḥadīth-based commentary of Ibn Mardawayh (as might be expected), but al-Zajjāj, whose approach was philological. While this is a particularly striking example of the continued cross-fertilization of the disciplines of ḥadīth and quranic exegesis, no detailed critical study on this phenomenon has yet been carried out.

As was noted in Chapter Four, the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* appears to have received a noteworthy degree of attention during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries from ḥadīth commentators; in addition, it was summarized

in order to be more accessible to laypersons. While the historical origins of this ḥadīth collection's brief *tafsīr* chapter are unclear at present, it is apparent that some commentators (as well as its summarizer al-Mundhirī) felt the need to rearrange and augment it. In the process of so doing, they incorporated more ḥadīths ascribed to ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr. This literary-historical phenomenon is fascinating in its own right. It indicates that late medieval ḥadīth scholars did not necessarily pass on representations of ʿĀ'isha relating ḥadīths thought to be relevant in some way to the interpretation of the Quran simply because older texts contained them. Rather, some such scholars were apparently actively interested in citing or even popularizing such representations. Even more interestingly, the reception history of some of these texts continues to unfold. For instance, as Jonathan Brown notes, al-Mundhirī's *mukhtaṣar* was published in 1969 by the well-known Salafī scholar Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 CE), as part of the latter's efforts to make classical ḥadīth works that he regarded as containing only reliable ḥadīths more accessible to Muslim laypersons.³ More recently, an Arabic-English edition of this work has been published in Saudi Arabia.⁴ Its circulation (and with it, the circulation of the augmented *tafsīr* chapter that it contains) has thus been broadened beyond what al-Mundhirī or even al-Albānī likely envisioned. Given that the notion that quranic exegesis is best carried out through ḥadīth narration has also recently become popularized, it may well be received in some quarters at least as yet more evidence of ʿĀ'isha's involvement in *tafsīr*.

Finally, while it might be assumed that because classical exegetes within the Sunni "mainstream" construct interpretive authority as emblematically masculine, medieval women must have been excluded from playing any role in the advanced study or interpretation of the Quran, this would appear to be an oversimplification. As we have seen, small numbers of late medieval female scholars are reported to have been involved in the transmission of texts related to various aspects of the quranic text, even including a few *tafsīr* works. Given the present lack of detailed research on this phenomenon, it is difficult to say much about its precise historical significance. However, it does indicate that the relationship between theoretical constructions of exegetical authority and lived realities is complex, and reminds us that in the absence of further information, theoretical ideals cannot be assumed to reflect actual historical developments.

Moreover, this study has chiefly examined Sunni *tafsīr* works. To what extent these findings might be applicable to pre-modern Shi'i, Khārijī, or Sufi Quran

3 Brown, *Canonization* 326.

4 Zakiuddin Abdul-Azim al-Mundhiri, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

commentaries has not been considered in any detail here. More research is needed on this question. There are some indications that the education of a few medieval Sufi women included the study of some *tafsīr* works, whether Sufi or otherwise, as the example of the Qādirī Sufi scholar, ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya demonstrates.⁵ It is evident that much remains to be done before we will be in the position to offer even a rudimentary chronological outline of women's involvement in medieval exegesis or in the study of the quranic text more broadly.

Afterword

The quotation of exegetical materials ascribed to a few female figures said to have lived about 1400 years ago in pre-modern *tafsīr* works is a historical textual phenomenon. However, it is not only confined to the past. The reception of such quotations in contemporary Muslim communities is a complex and continually unfolding story.

Beginning in the twentieth century CE, a concerted effort has been underway to make particular *tafsīr* works available in printed editions.⁶ These editions are typically designed in ways that make them user-friendly for educated Muslim laypersons who can read classical Arabic,⁷ with indices and headings that enable the reader to easily look up the exegesis of a particular verse. Some also contain detailed footnotes that give the sources of quotations of exegetical materials such as lines of poetry and ḥadīths found in the work. Information of this type significantly assists those readers who lack a background in the advanced study of such classical texts in making sense of the commentary. With the twenty-first century, efforts to make classical Quran commentaries more accessible to laypersons now include making versions available electronically, on CDs and also online—primarily in Arabic, but at times in translation—that are designed to be used primarily as reference tools.⁸ This

5 For her book containing quotations from al-Qushayrī's Quran commentary, see Chapter Six.

6 For a number of the political and sectarian factors involved in the production of such printed editions, see: Saleh, Preliminary remarks 14–16; Saleh, *Formation* 229.

7 Some efforts have also been made to translate (and sometimes also to abridge) certain pre-modern Quran commentaries into other languages, in order to make them accessible to Muslims who do not read Arabic.

8 As at www.altafsir.com, a site which was established in 2001 by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan. While the overwhelming majority of Quran commentaries available on this site are in Arabic, English translations are also provided for a few short classical *tafsīr* works.

is a very significant departure from the ways that Quran commentaries were formerly studied and utilized.⁹

Yet another important modern development pertains to hermeneutics. While the ḥadīth-based hermeneutical approach put into practice by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and several centuries later, by Ibn Kathīr remained marginal within the genre of Sunni *tafsīr* throughout the medieval period, it would achieve an unprecedented degree of attention in the twentieth century. Salafi scholars and thinkers energetically promoted Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima* as the correct method to adopt when interpreting the Quran. One result of this is that among Sunnis, the most popular Quran commentary today is arguably Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*.¹⁰

These developments raise a number of complex questions as to what they might portend for contemporary Muslim debates about gender roles, as well as whether pre-modern constructions of interpretive authority as emblematically “masculine” might be significantly modified as a result. Historically unprecedented lay access to pre-modern Quran commentaries carries with it the possibility that highly restrictive and even abusive interpretations of certain verses—as well as some ḥadīths often quoted in these works—that pose controversial questions for modern audiences may in this way become popularized.¹¹ That some editors are concerned about this issue is made evident by their provision of detailed footnotes refuting exegeses that they regard as particularly egregious,¹² or noting that ḥadīths which they view as problematic were deemed weak or forged by some traditional ḥadīth critics.¹³ At the same time, increased access to pre-modern quranic commentary can have the effect of opening it up for lay questioning, critique, and even subversion.

9 The work of Nimat Hafez Barazangi (discussed below) is an interesting illustration of the possibilities afforded by electronic access to classical Quran commentaries. She reports that in her research, she found electronic versions of the *tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr and the *Tafsīr al-Jalalayn* significantly facilitated comparing underlying concepts in their interpretations of particular verses; see: Barazangi, *Woman's identity* 58.

10 Saleh, Preliminary remarks 10–11, 15.

11 For the emergence and development of contemporary Muslim debates about the authenticity and relevance of the ḥadīth literature, see: Brown, *Rethinking tradition*.

12 Fatima Mernissi draws attention to this phenomenon in her discussion of al-Ṭabarī's exegesis of Q 4:34 and the editor's comments on it (in the Shakir edition); see: Mernissi, *The veil* 159.

13 For example, the spinning tradition continues to attract such editorial comment; see for example: al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* iii, 302, n. 3, 5. Some editors even offer detailed religious refutations of the notion that women should not learn to write; see for example: al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf* iv, 342, n. 1; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād* vi, 3–4, n. 2.

Interestingly, a by-product of the popularization of the notion that ḥadīths are or ought to be the central content of *tafsīr* is that traditions attributed to certain women have recently achieved greater visibility, both in terms of their presence in Quran commentaries, and as possible raw materials for contemporary quranic exegesis. As this study has demonstrated, the surviving body of ḥadīths and other exegetical materials ascribed to female figures and quoted in pre-modern *tafsīr* works is fairly diverse in terms of literary genre as well as the exegetical topics addressed. This body of materials comprises a complex and multi-layered historical legacy. What it might be thought to “say” about either contemporary Muslim discourses on gender roles or interpretive authority therefore depends on which of these materials are selected for particular attention, as well as how they are interpreted—and whose interpretations are deemed authoritative within a given community.

As has already been mentioned, the 1990's saw the publication of two selections of traditions attributed to ʿĀ'isha bt. Abī Bakr that their compilers regarded as relevant to quranic exegesis.¹⁴ While this is an interesting development, it does not appear to have had much of an impact on confessional Muslim discourses on interpretive authority to date. Nonetheless, a recent book on female scholars in Muslim history written from a neo-traditionalist perspective and addressed to a mainly English-speaking Muslim audience calls attention to one of these compilations, presenting it as a source for examples of “her [i.e. ʿĀ'isha's] *tafsīr*” as quoted in classical Quran commentaries.¹⁵ This book's primary purpose is to provide contemporary Muslims with evidence that women as well as men played important roles in the development and preservation of the classical “mainstream” Sunni scholarly tradition, which includes the recitation, study and understanding of the Quran. This is a fascinating example of an attempt to both (re)write sacred history, complete with models of female scholarly piety for contemporary Muslim women to emulate, while also offering a rejoinder to Muslim feminist critiques of the androcentric nature of classical scholarly traditions.

A far more long-standing and widespread contemporary tendency is the popularisation of certain ḥadīths discussed in this study, often by conservative Muslim scholars as part of their elaboration of their vision of an ideal Islamic society. An interesting example which has implications for the gendering of interpretive authority can be seen in Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī's well-known book, *The lawful and the prohibited in Islam*. In his conclusion, he presents two incidents from the early Muslim community that he says exemplify how

14 See the Introduction, above.

15 Nadwi, *Al-Muḥaddithāt* 277.

true believers respond to divine commands. The first recounts that as soon as some male Companions who were drinking wine heard that Q 5:90–1 had been revealed, they immediately poured their drinks onto the ground.¹⁶ The second is presented in the form of occasion-of-revelation traditions for Q 24:31 attributed to ʿĀ'isha that are related by Ibn Kathīr in his Quran commentary, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim. The latter of these traditions praises the women of the Anṣār as unmatched in their level of faith, because as soon as their male relatives informed them that this verse had been revealed to Muḥammad, they covered themselves with their wraps, and the next morning went out thus attired to perform the dawn prayer. Al-Qaradāwī states that it is such an unhesitating response to divine commands that befits believing women.¹⁷

While it is apparent that of these two examples of praiseworthy obedience, the one provided for women to emulate involves a significantly more far-reaching change of lifestyle,¹⁸ what is particularly noteworthy is how the latter ḥadīth genders the diffusion of knowledge of the revelation in the early Muslim community, as well as its subsequent interpretation. It states that once this verse was revealed, “their men returned (home) to them [i.e. the women], and recited to them what God had sent down to them about them. A man would recite (it) to his wife, his daughter, his sister, and to every female relative of his.”¹⁹

Here, ʿĀ'isha herself is credited with having related this ḥadīth, and she is also depicted as an omniscient narrator, having seemingly witnessed the revelation of Q 24:31, as well as what subsequently transpired in every Medinese household. But the women that al-Qaradāwī presents as exemplars for contemporary female believers through his quotation of this ḥadīth are the women of the Anṣār. Unlike ʿĀ'isha, they are not present when Q 24:31 is revealed, and therefore only learn of it later through their male relatives. Of all (free) members of the community, their access to knowledge of the revelation is seemingly the most indirect, even when its content directly pertains to them. There is no suggestion in this ḥadīth that any of these women attempted to verify the

16 Al-Qaradawi, *The lawful* 350.

17 Al-Qaradawi, *The lawful* 351–2.

18 Clearly, the adoption of “modest” attire (and the “modest” behaviour that al-Qaradāwī holds should accompany it) would typically have a much greater impact on daily life than abstaining from alcohol—which is in any case a restriction that falls upon women as well as men.

19 “*inḡalaba ilayhinna rijāluhunna yatlūna ʿalayhinna mā unzila ilayhim fī-hā wa-yatlū l-rajul ʿalā mraʿatīhi wa-bnatīhi wa-ukhtīhi wa ʿalā kullī dhī qirābatīhi.*” I am translating directly from Ibn Kathīr (*Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* v, 320); similarly, see: Ibn Abī Ḥātim viii, 2575.

accuracy of what they had been told, or raised questions about its meaning—rather, they simply put it into practice.

While this depiction evidently accords with Salafi representations of the Quran and the *sunna* as sources of relatively straightforward guidance that usually require minimal interpretation, its gendered dimensions are also apparent. In this idealized picture of knowledge transmission, it is men who typically possess the greatest degree of knowledge of the revelation, and their conveyance of it to their female relatives is generally an enactment of a patriarchal social structure that in theory places every girl or woman under the tutelage of a male. Here, as female acquisition of knowledge is usually embedded within such a patriarchal paradigm and is an expression of it, even when women in turn transmit such knowledge it usually reinforces this pattern rather than calling this paradigm into question.

Some Muslim feminist authors have elected to popularize their own selections of ḥadīths quoted in classical Quran commentaries, which in their view imply a critique of androcentric interpretations, or even invalidate them. A particularly well-known example is Fatima Mernissi's discussion of the occasion-of-revelation tradition quoted by al-Ṭabarī (and others) in which Umm Salama recounts that after she asked the prophet why women are not mentioned in the revelation, Q 33:35 was revealed.²⁰ However, some female scholars who are involved in contemporary social justice-oriented interpretations of the Quran maintain that pre-modern Muslim women were never involved in quranic exegesis. In the early 1990's, Amina Wadud asserted that as classical Quran commentaries have always been written by men, they overlook or exclude women's experiences and viewpoints, or present these from an androcentric perspective.²¹ More recently, Nimat Hafez Barazangi declares

20 Mernissi, *The veil* 118–19. For a more recent invocation of this story in order to legitimate modern Muslim women's reinterpretations of the Quran, see: Barlas, *Women's readings* 255–6. While Mernissi reads this tradition as an indication that some female Companions vigorously resisted patriarchal control, contemporary conservative Muslim scholars and writers typically read it as an exemplary instance of a wife of the prophet seeking to know how to better obey God (e.g. Nadwi, *al-Muḥaddithāt* 4–5). Q 33:35 itself has come to be commonly quoted even by very conservative authors as proof of women's "spiritual equality" in Islam (Ali, *Sexual ethics* 114–15)—but they do not understand such spiritual equality as implying or supporting social-legal equality.

21 Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and woman* 2. Wadud is an African American Muslim. For an overview of her interpretive approach, see for example: Barlas, *Amina Wadud's hermeneutics* 97–123; Hammer, *Identity, authority, and activism* 443–64. *Qur'an and woman* was reprinted by Oxford University Press in 1999, and it has been translated into a number of different languages, including Arabic, Bahasa Indonesian, Persian and Turkish.

that despite the presence of ḥadīths attributed to some early Muslim women in classical Quran commentaries, women have historically been barred from participating in the production of Islamic knowledge, including *tafsīr*.²²

While Wadud utilizes al-Zamakhsharī's *tafsīr* in her book, *Qur'an and woman*, she does not elect to discuss the presence of ḥadīths ascribed to women that are quoted in it or in other classical Quran commentaries. However, Barazangi draws attention to the problems presented by some of these ḥadīths for modern Muslims who read the Quran as upholding and promoting justice, and regard women as possessing ethical agency on par with men.

For example, she critically discusses an occasion-of-revelation tradition for Q 4:128²³ in which 'Ā'isha relates that Sawda feared that Muḥammad would divorce her; in an effort to avert this, Sawda waived her right that he regularly spend time with her as he did with his other wives, and permitted him to use "her" time to be with 'Ā'isha instead. Barazangi finds the reported behaviour of Muḥammad and Sawda as well as 'Ā'isha in this story to be in violation of quranic ideas of justice. Therefore, she asks how it is possible for Muslims to accept this ḥadīth in the form that it has come down to us as a credible interpretation of Q 4:128. While Barazangi expresses doubts about the reliability of these ḥadīths, she also muses that if this incident did take place as they describe then this might indicate that the prophet's wives did not fully implement or perhaps even understand quranic teachings on individual ethical responsibility.²⁴

As this brief and necessarily incomplete survey makes apparent, ḥadīths or other exegetical materials attributed to early Muslim women and cited in pre-modern *tafsīr* texts continue to be quoted, studied and otherwise referenced by contemporary Muslim scholars and authors writing from a wide variety of confessional perspectives, and with diverse aims in mind. Ḥadīths of this type function as part of the classical exegesis of particular quranic verses; they can also be quoted in contexts that are not primarily exegetical, in order to serve as means of admonition, inspiration, and ethical reflection. This ongoing circulation and reception of exegetical materials credited to early female figures is yet another complex and fascinating phenomenon that remains to be researched.

22 Barazangi, *Woman's identity* 2, 50, 82. Barazangi is a Syrian-American Muslim. For her interpretive approach, see: Hammer, Identity, authority, and activism.

23 "If a wife fears high-handedness or alienation from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they come to a peaceful settlement, for peace is best. Although human souls are prone to selfishness, if you do good and are mindful of God, He is well aware of all that you do."

24 Barazangi, *Woman's identity* 128–33.

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