

Humour in the Ḥadīth

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as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Studies

November 2020

Volume One of Two

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Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Y. Amin', written over a horizontal line.

.....

Abstract

This study aims to answer research questions about prophetic humour in Sunni and Shi'ite *Hadīth*, specifically, with whom the Prophet laughed, about what and how. The study demonstrates that the sources showed that the Prophet laughed with the entire community and did so indiscriminately and equally, often and in various ways, ranging between mere smiles to hearty laughs. His laughter was recorded as inclusive of individuals across distinctions of class, gender, social status, relationships and religions. This study shows eight different intents/reasons for the Prophet's, and by extension, the Imams' laughter in the sources: 1) mercy, leniency, forgiveness, and compassion, signalling tolerance, ease and comfort; 2) laughter and jokes instead of reprimands, to define boundaries of actions; 3) laughter with the whole community, particularly the weak and vulnerable, intending to unite members, helping them to transcend their differences and build an identity; 4) laughter and jokes to educate and entertain at the same time, as gentle lightness reaches people easier than solemn, self-righteous moralising; 5) the Prophet gave in to his jovial nature, and laughed with his community about their idiosyncrasies; 6) creating joy and alleviating sadness; 7) taking the edge off a situation and dispelling fear, especially during conflicts, battles and sieges to assuage the fear of death; 8) spiritual laughter as thanksgiving, sometimes as a prelude or as a sequel to prayer, as well as laughing with celestial beings. The study uses a multi-methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. This work makes an original contribution to the field of Humour Research by proposing a new humour theory, and especially to knowledge in the field of prophetic humour in *Hadīth* without undermining the prophetic gravitas. The study restores the Prophet's humanity, bringing him closer to Muslims who seek to emulate his behaviour. Finally, this study shows more commonalities than differences between Sunni and Shi'ite sources and scholarship, including *aḥādīth*, *tafsīr* and some of the applications of the prophetic traditions in terms of *fiqh* rulings. While the details of narrations differ, the core message is the same, which can possibly bridge some of the conflict areas and narrow the gap in perception between the two main Muslim branches.

Dedication

To laughter and humour:

for all the world's children and their children and all the children still inside all adults, may they find good natured humour and laughter in all that they do,

for all academics, present and future, may there be more laughter in academia, God knows it's needed.

Acknowledgments - The *Ṣaḥīḥa* of Yasmin bint Amin

[14:7] ... *If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more, and if you are ungrateful, My chastisement is truly severe.*"

...

First and foremost I would like to take Aḥmad Shawqī's advice, which I translated freely hereunder, and bow in reverence to my supervisor Dr. Ian Netton. Shawqī said:

"Bow in reverence to your honourable teacher - for a teacher is second only to a prophet

There is none more honourable than he, who fashions souls, intellects and minds¹"

Dr. Netton retired during the last month of writing this dissertation, after spending almost a decade unwaveringly, through sickness and in health, generously giving me excellent scholarly guidance and advice. I am deeply grateful that he remained available to me, even after retiring, to see me complete this work. His sense of humour was a great asset throughout this study and joking always helped in seeing the funny side of any and all obstacles. His vast knowledge and long years of experience are unsurpassed and I benefitted immensely from him. I am especially grateful for his subtle 'un-invasive' style of supervision, calling his suggestions *mandūb* and not *farḍ* and for treating me like a fellow scholar, not the student I am. There are no words to accurately describe my gratitude; the closest that comes to mind is the German word "*Studienvater*" so I thank him for adopting me intellectually.

Mullah Nasruddin was asked: "What do they do with the old full moons?" He replied: "They cut them up into small pieces and make stars." I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the stars of my supervisory team: Dr. Sajjad Rizvi, my first supervisor, Dr. Emily Selove, my second supervisor and Dr. Claire Beaugrand, my Pastoral Tutor for their support, encouragement, and all their help. Dr. Rizvi stepped in after Dr. Netton's retirement and provided much needed help. I thank Dr. Selove for the humorous discussions, about *Ḥikāyat Abī-l-Qāsim al-Baghdādī*, and the *tufaylī* party-crashers.

It is on the authority of an obscure jokester that he asked a translator on a sinking ship: "Can you swim?" "No" came the reply, "but I can shout for help in nine languages." I can shout for help in only four languages, but I did, loudly and often. I have benefited from the help of more individuals than I can name, who after learning of my research constantly brought publications, academic articles, popular and scholarly books dealing with humour, to my attention, I thank them all for that and for sharing an endless supply of jokes.

Another jester narrated on the authority of librarians, that they love a good joke, as they always get the reference. I benefitted from the knowledge and generosity of Dr. Walid Ghali and his amazing library skills and always knowing at least three references for what I was looking for. I thank the librarians at Exeter University and at SOAS and the team at the Exeter document delivery desk for managing to source all the weird and wonderful materials I asked for. Special appreciation goes to the librarians at the AKU and the British Library, to whom I am deeply indebted for their patience, generous advice and for providing a beautiful space to study. After all it has been said that "In God we trust; but all others must bring data," so my heartfelt thanks to them for increasing my data.

The Useless Dictionary of Silly Meanings preserves the definition of the word "misinterpret" as being "a female translator."² I thank my cousin Nesrin Amin for helping me so generously when I was stuck translating ambiguous, difficult texts and for always teasing out the right nuances and never misinterpreting them.

¹ From the *qaṣīda* titled *'uyūn al-shī'r* written in 1932

² Ibn Buffoon, Joker. Forthcoming. *The Useless Dictionary of Silly Meanings*. Cairo: Dār al-Hazl wa-l-Tahrīj.

It was reported with a *ḍaʿīf isnād* that writers always feel cold, because they are surrounded by drafts. I am profoundly thankful that I always felt warm, owing to all the kind souls who read drafts and parts of chapters of this work, discussed chapters while they were in progress and provided constructive criticism. Although I have not always accepted their advice I benefited enormously from it, as it helped me see different perspectives and prepare arguments and evidence to forestall prospective criticism. I thank Dr. Devin Stewart, Dr. Amina Inloes, Dr. Shehnaz Haqqani, Dr. Omaima Abou Bakr, Dr. Alia Soliman, Dr. Walid Ghali, Dr. Arshia Anwer and most of all Dr. Serag.

A *mutawātir* report narrated by the honourable Mark Twain, who wrongly attributed the *matn* to Benjamin Disraeli, making this a *ḍaʿīf isnād* and with an alternative *ḍaʿīf isnād* version, as it quotes Sir Charles Dilke, who narrates the same from a *majhūl* narrator. The strongest *isnād* is by *The Quote Verifier* on the authority of Ralph Keyes, who quotes Arthur Balfour, who heard it from Leonard Courtney that he said: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics."³ I am indebted to my cousin Dr. Zeinab Amin for her help with my statistical lies and magically turning them into mathematical facts and for answering all my questions with regards to pivot tables, deviation, correlation and data significance.

As quoted in *al-Islam* on the authority of Kamāl al-Dīn Khwājah (d. 1351/1932) who quoted from Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* on the authority of Abū Hurayra, who reported that Prophet Muḥammad said: "Kindness is a mark of faith, and whoever has no kindness has not faith."⁴ I am profoundly grateful for the faith my mentors, colleagues and friends had in me and for their infinite kindness in acting as sounding boards, sharing their forthcoming publications, trusting me with their as yet unpublished work, discussing my half-baked ideas and saving me from having egg on my face. I thank Dr. Serag, Dr. Devin Stewart, Dr. Belal Abu Alabbas, Dr. Omar Anchassi, Dr. Samer El-Karanshaw, Dr. Nehal ElNaggar and Dr. Amina Inloes *ad infinitum*.

It has been narrated by the *thiqāt* that the French came up with a more efficient way of sharing files electronically through a Pierre-to-Pierre network. I am grateful to Dr. Wafeya Hamouda for her excellent network, all her Pierres in Mozambique and Mauritania, and for sharing so many electronic materials with me during the hardship of library closure for Covid19.

It has been alleged that "pro-caffeinating" is the tendency to not start anything until after having a coffee. I thank all my men (husband Haytham, sons Youssef & Ali and grandson HRH Hasan) and my new daughter Nadine, for putting up with all my states of being under-, over- or not caffeinated, for helping me regain my sense of humour, for their understanding, cheerfulness, putting up with my long cranky hours, for giving me space to work and most of all for their endless encouragement.

On the authority of Jianzhi Sengcan, also known as the 'Third Chinese Patriarch of Chán' who is reported to have said: "Return to the root and you will find the meaning," I have to acknowledge my roots and my debt to my grandfather, for being the first; to my Uncle Hussein, for carrying the torch and to my late parents, for being who they were, peerless role models throughout my life, giving me meaning and whose memory kept me going when I had doubts and for always being proud of me. I hope I am making you proud.

³ Keyes, Ralph. 2013. *The Quote Verifier : Who said what, Where, and When*. NY: St. Martin's Press , 124.

⁴ Khwājah, Kamāl al-Dīn. 1926. *al-Islam*. Woking: Basheer Muslim Library, 47.

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Introduction - The Beginning of Laughter

In a lecture titled *An Exploration of Muslim Humour*,⁵ given at Boston University, Professor Ulrich Marzolph says that despite the abundance of literary proof of the existence of an Arab or Muslim sense of humour and wit, the western perception of Muslim humour remains stereo-typical and simplistic. The common perception ranges between two extremes, the worst being that Muslims are terrorists, while the best is that Muslims simply lack a sense of humour. Possible reasons for that view could lie in the reactions to several incidents that happened in Europe which could easily be called an overreaction. With the concept of freedom of speech and belief mirrored in the words of Evelyn Beatrice Hall: "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it" that was wrongly ascribed to Voltaire,⁶ some of these events were indeed baffling to Europeans.

For example in 1987 the Dutch Comedian, Rudi Carrell, appeared on German television in his *Rudis Tagesshow*, a parody on the daily news program *Tagesschau* on the eighth anniversary of the Iranian revolution's and aired a photograph manufactured in the studio of veiled Iranian women throwing various pieces of their lingerie at Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. Carrell added a caption: "*Iranian public celebrates Khomeini and heaps gifts on him.*" This episode resulted in a diplomatic incident, the closure of the Goethe Institute in Teheran and huge demonstrations in front of the German embassy. The German government had to issue a public apology that: "it regretted the television satire that showed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini being showered with women's underwear."⁷ Rudi Carrell had to apologize to the Iranian Ambassador to Bonn. The press had endless fun phrasing the catchy titles of the articles covering this episode. The titles ranged from *Iran chokes on German joke lingerie heaped on Khomeini*

⁵ Marzolph, Ulrich. 2009. "Boston University." *youtube*. 16 November. Accessed March 11, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqLhsxNeEWg>.

⁶ George, Paul F. Boller and John. 1989. *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, and Misleading Attributions*. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 124-125.

⁷ Associated Press. 1987. *Envoy Demands Kohl Apology for TV Show Mocking Khomeini*. Newspaper. Los Angeles Times. Bonn, 21 February. http://articles.latimes.com/1987-02-21/news/mn-4824_1_iranians.

in the New York Times⁸ to *Carell's German-Iranian Underwear fight. Do not mess with Mullahs!* in a German paper.⁹

The following year, 1988, Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* was published causing a *fatwā* by Ayatollah Khomeini to kill Rushdie. Muslim communities organised book-burnings of the novel in Britain. Various bookstores were burnt or bombed in a number of places, including two in Berkeley, California. The 'Rushdie Affair,' as it was called then, generated an enormous amount of publicity, scholarly articles, books and studies in many languages for many years.¹⁰

The Satanic Verses were used to inspire the next media campaign when a dress was called the 'Satanic dress' in 1993. Claudia Schiffer modelled a creation by the German Parisian fashion designer, Karl Lagerfeld, in a fashion-show. The Irish Independent newspaper from Dublin titled their article '*Claudia Schiffer and the Satanic Breasts*.'¹¹ The dress was embroidered with Arabic writing and, according to Marzolph, was "perceived as an emulation of Qur'anic verses."¹² Lagerfeld apologised and withdrew the dress after he was accused of religious insensibility.

In 2001 the leftist Berlin newspaper *faz* provoked Muslim protests for quoting a rhyme corrupted from a traditional German children's folktale to feature an appearance of the word Allah in a disrespectful

⁸ Markham, James M. 1987. *Iran chokes on German joke: Lingerie heaped on Khomeini*. Newspaper. Prod. New York Times. New York, 19 February. Accessed November 3, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/19/world/iran-chokes-on-german-joke-lingerie-heaped-on-khomeini.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm>.

⁹ Rothenberg, Christian. 1987. *Carrells deutsch-iranischer Schlüpfertreit - Leg' dich nicht mit Mullahs an*. Berlin. Accessed November 3, 2013. <http://www.n-tv.de/politik/Leg-dich-nicht-mit-Mullahs-an-article5471441.html>.

¹⁰ See for example: Akhtar, Shabbir. 1989. *Be careful with Muhammad! The Salman Rushdie affair*. London: Bellew; Barrett, S. 1994. *Islam, Blasphemie und freie Meinungsäußerung: was hat Salman Rushdie getan?* Hildesheim: Internationales Kulturwerk; Clément, J-F. 1990. "L'affaire Rushdie." *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* 27:255-279; Cohn-Sherbok, D., ed. 1990. *The Salman Rushdie controversy in interreligious perspective*. Lewiston: Mellen; Deedat, Ahmed. 1990. *Can you stomach the best of Rushdie?* Islamic Propagation Centre; Levy, L. W. 1993. *Blasphemy: verbal offense against the sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie*. New York: Knopf; Malik, Kenan. 2009. *From Fatwa to Jihad: the Rushdie Affair and its Legacy*. London: Atlantic Books; Mamdani, Mahmood. 2008. "On blasphemy, bigotry, and the politics of culture talk." In *Waiting for the barbarians: a tribute to Edward Said*, edited by Müge Gürsoy Sökmen and Başak Ertür, 176-183. London: Verso; Ruthven, M. A. 1990. *Satanic affair: Salman Rushdie and the rage of Islam*. London: Chatto & Windus; Sardar, Ziauddin. 1990. *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair*. London: Grey Seal and Vogel, G. 1998. *Blasphemie: die Affäre Rushdie in religionswissenschaftlicher Sicht. Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Begriff der Religion*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.

¹¹ O'Shea, Joe. 2013. *Claudia Schiffer and the Satanic Breasts*. Irish Independent. Dublin, 3 October. <https://www.independent.ie/style/fashion/claudia-schiffer-and-the-satanic-breasts-29630821.html>.

¹² Marzolph, Ulrich. 2011. "The Muslim Sense of Humour." In *Humor and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, edited by Hans Geybels and Walter van Herck, 169-190. London: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 172.

manner.¹³ In November 2004, Dutch film director Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam by a fanatic Muslim for projecting Qur'anic verses onto Somali-Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali's naked skin in his movie *Submission*, which they called 'a passionate plea against the maltreatment of women in the Muslim world.'¹⁴

Like the 'Rushdie Affair' another incident dubbed the 'Cartoon Crisis' also generated a huge amount of publicity, articles, books and studies for many years.¹⁵ The publication of twelve cartoons, sketched by professional Danish cartoonists, depicting Prophet Muḥammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* in 2005 triggered numerous protests all over the world some of which were violent demonstrations, resulting in several deaths. In many countries, Danish embassies became the target of massive protests. The crisis deepened when a number of Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Yemen and Iran, boycotted Danish goods, which, according to the BBC, led to a 15.5% drop in total Danish exports in the first five months, which cost Danish businesses around 134 million Euros.¹⁶ The editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, Flemming Rose, and its cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard, repeatedly received death-threats.

In 2007, a British teacher, Gillian Gibbons, was sentenced to fifteen days in prison and was subsequently deported from Sudan, for allowing her primary school class to name a teddy bear Muḥammad. That teddy bear was renamed 'The Blasphemous Teddy Bear' in the media.¹⁷ The German

¹³ taz Redaktion. 2001. *taz beleidigt Allah - 240000 Berliner Moslems empört*. Newspaper. Berliner Zeitung. Berlin, 2 March. Accessed November 3, 2013. <http://www.bz-berlin.de/archiv/taz-beleidigt-allah-article1889.html>.

¹⁴ Marzolph. 2011. "The Muslim Sense of Humour", 172.

¹⁵ See for example Cohen, Nick. 2012. *You Can't Read This Book: Censorship in an Age of Freedom*. London: Fourth Estate - Harper Collins; Mehmeti, Jeton. 2011. *Tensions between freedom of expression and religious sensitivity: What is wrong with the Danish Cartoons?*. Düsseldorf: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller; Peetush, Ashwani K. 2009. "Caricaturizing freedom: Islam, offence, and the Danish cartoon controversy." *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* 1 (i): 173 -188; Schneiders, Thorsten Gerald, ed. 2009. *Islamfeindlichkeit: wenn die Grenzen der Kritik verschwimmen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften; Sturges, Paul. 2006. "Limits to freedom of expression? Considerations arising from the Danish cartoons affair." *IFLA Journal*/32 (iii): 181 - 188;262;264;266-277;268-269; Tayob, Abdulkader. 2006. "Caricatures of the Prophet: European integration." *ISIM Review* 17: 5 and Veninga, Jennifer Elisa. 2014. *Secularism, Theology and Islam: The Danish Social Imaginary and the Cartoon Crisis of 2005 - 2006*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

¹⁶ BBC. 2006. *Cartoons row hits Danish exports*. Prod. BBC. London, 9 September. Accessed November 3, 2013. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/5329642.stm>.

¹⁷ Crilly, Rob. 2007. "The Blasphemous Teddy Bear ." *Time Magazine*. 26 November. Accessed November 3, 2013. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1687755,00.html>.

newspaper *taz*, mentioned above, published an article in 2012 about an idea under discussion about teaching classes on Islam in schools in Nordrhein-Westfalen (North Rhine-Westphalia). While there was neither a set curriculum nor any assigned qualified personnel as yet, the article was titled *Allah wird endlich eingeschult* (Allah will finally start school).¹⁸

These incidents and others like them, according to Marzolph,¹⁹ lead to the assumption taking root and turning into a belief that Muslims have no sense of humour, neither understand a joke nor can take one. This stereotypical supposition needs to be examined and either accepted or challenged. What better way to do that, than to look at whether or not the role model for Muslims and the man in whose name all these abovementioned protests took place had a sense of humour himself? This research will aim to answer the following research questions: Did the Prophet laugh? Did he enjoy a good joke or did he play any pranks? If he did indeed laugh, what did he laugh about and with whom? How did he laugh? A shy fleeting smile or a roaring laughter?

However, before the sense of humour of Prophet Muḥammad can be studied, humour as such has to be defined and the ways to study humour have to be identified.

A. Definitions

i) Humour

Humour is probably one of the most difficult words to define and subjects to study, based on the extensive literature on humour that all repeatedly emphasize the difficulty in defining the concept. Linguistically, the noun 'humour' is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as, "the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech and also as a mood or state of mind."²⁰ The *Cambridge Dictionary* adds to that, "the ability to find things funny, or the way in which people see some things as funny."²¹ *Collins Dictionary* defines it as, "a quality in something that makes you laugh, for

¹⁸ Beucker, Pascal. 2012. "Allah wird endlich eingeschult." *taz*. Newspaper. Berlin, 21 August. Accessed November 3, 2013. <http://www.taz.de/!100103/>.

¹⁹ Marzolph. 2011. "The Muslim Sense of Humour.", 172.

²⁰ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/humor>.

²¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humour>.

example in a situation, in someone's words or actions", and refers the reader also to 'sense of humour.'²²

And finally *Merriam Webster's* definition adds, "that quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous."²³

The term humour is derived from Latin *humor* (moisture). In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance it was used to represent the four humours of the body that depended on the four bodily fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The mixture or combination of these determined a person's nature, character, and temperament.²⁴ This survives today in expressions such as: 'ill-humoured,' 'good-humoured,' 'black with rage,' 'in a black mood,' 'yellow with jealousy,' 'green with envy,' 'yellow-livered,' 'red with remorse,' and so on.²⁵

According to Morreall, the modern word 'humour' has occasionally been applied, by literary critics and others, in a narrowed sense, to mean the type of humour that involves a friendly, sociable, considerate, non-sarcastic view of human faults or shortcomings.²⁶ However, contemporary philosophers use the word 'humour' in its widest sense, because they are searching for a general account of humour. Therefore, they tend to disregard the literary distinctions between, for example, farce, parody, satire, buffoonery and burlesque.²⁷ However, one problem with defining humour remains, namely whether to consider it a stimulus, a response or a disposition. The *Penguin English Dictionary* allows all three.²⁸

Ritchie starts his book *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes* with three observations. First, that the use of humour is a complex, puzzling, and an idiosyncratically human form of behaviour. Second, that there is currently no theory of how humour works. Third, one useful step towards a theory of humour is to analyse humorous items in precise detail, in order to understand their mechanisms.²⁹

²² <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/humor>.

²³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor?src=search-dict-box>.

²⁴ Preston, J. A. Cuddon and Claire. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 343.

²⁵ Ibid, 344.

²⁶ Morreall, John, ed. 1987. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 5.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Foot, Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. 2017. *Humor and Laughter : Theory, Research, and Applications*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 3.

²⁹ Ritchie, Graeme Donald. 2004. *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes*. London: Routledge, 1-6.

Berger argues that there are a relatively limited number of techniques, forty-five in total, which humourists employ. Berger groups each technique into four basic categories: humour involving identity such as burlesque, caricature, mimicry, and stereotype; humour involving logic such as analogy, comparison, and reversal; humour involving language such as puns, wordplay, sarcasm, and satire; and finally, slapstick, and speed, or humour involving action.³⁰

Humour generally denotes the humoristic way of dealing with things. In Arabic literature the concept of humour applies mostly to *nawādir* (jocular tales) or anecdotes including some amount of satirical or ridiculing qualities. Arabic literature in its classical period combines the jocular element (*hazl*) with seriousness (*jidd*), so as to avoid the suspicion voiced by traditional circles towards purely entertaining activities without any apparent moral values.³¹ *Jidd wa hazl*, at least up to the seventh/thirteenth century, formed a vital constituent of literature, and aimed at instructing while entertaining and was dubbed *hazl yurād bihi jidd* (humour intended as seriousness). Instructive passages were lightened by interspersed jocular anecdotes. "While this concept was more or less invented and perfected by al-Jāḥiz, it probably became flexible soon after."³² Humorous Arabic literature largely concentrated on a number of well-known characters, some of which are still popular, like Ash'ab, the stereotype greedy and stingy person, Bunān the sponger, Qarāqūsh the absurd judge, or Buhlūl the wise fool. The most prominent of all is Juḥā, whose repertoire enlarged in Arabic tradition over the centuries until it mingled in the nineteenth century with that of the Turkish Mulla Nasreddin.³³ "Arabic literature contains the largest medieval body of humorous narratives in any Mediterranean culture and, besides Chinese, in any known world culture."³⁴

³⁰ Berger, Arthur Asa. 2017. *The Art of Comedy Writing*. London: Taylor and Francis.

³¹ Meisami, Julie Scott, and Paul Starkey, . 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. London: Routledge, 294.

³² Ibid, 281.

³³ Ibid, 295.

³⁴ Ibid, 295.

ii) Laughter and Smiles

Humour and laughter have often been used as synonyms, especially in the discussion of theories.³⁵

Laughter is defined as an emotional response usually to a humorous situation normally expressing joy; as a movement (usually involuntary) of the facial muscles indicating merriment, satisfaction or derision and is accompanied by an interrupted expulsion of air from the lungs. However non-humorous situations can also cause laughter. Laughter has been attributed to a myriad of reasons such as triumph, relief, agreement, sudden comprehension, embarrassment, scorn, nervousness, social ignorance, anxiety, apology, in response to tickling, derision, joy, happiness, seeing someone else laugh and many more.³⁶ A smile, on the other hand is defined as an upward stretching of the mouth occurring without sound, but possibly accompanied by loud exhalations of breath.³⁷ Bergler, however, draws up a list of fifty-six different types of smiles.³⁸ In the data, there are at least three words denoting different smiles: *ibtasama*, *basama*, *tabassama*, which will be explained and analysed in chapters 4 and 5.

Laughter is a simple term that denotes a combination of bodily events, including “the spasmodic expulsion of air from the lungs, accompanying sounds, characteristic facial distortions, and in heavy laughter the shaking of the whole body. Except in pathological cases and cases where laughing is performed as an action, laughter is an involuntary or semi-voluntary response to a stimulus. The simplest such stimuli are merely sensory, as in laughter at being tickled, or the baby’s laughter at being tossed into the air and caught. In such cases it is important to note, there need be nothing humorous, causing the laughter.”³⁹

iii) Wit

There are several definitions of wit, though they primarily emphasize its cognitive element. Jean Paul (born Johann Paul Richter, d. 1825) defines wit as the combination of ideas with surprising quickness saying: “Freedom begets wit and wit begets freedom, wit is nothing but a free play of ideas. Since time

³⁵ Foot and Hugh. 2017. *Humor and Laughter*, 3.

³⁶ Ibid, 2-4.

³⁷ Ibid, 158.

³⁸ Bergler, Edmund. 1956. *Laughter and the Sense of Humor*. New York: Intercontinental Medical Book.

³⁹ Morreall. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 4.

immemorial, a favourite definition of wit has been the ability to discover similarities in dissimilarities or to find the hidden similarities."⁴⁰ The English philosopher John Locke (d. 1704) speaks of putting ideas together with quickness and variety. Two factors are necessary in wit, suddenness and a light touch. The Oxford dictionary defines wit as "that quality of speech or writing that consists in the apt association of thought and expression calculated to cause surprise and delight by its unexpectedness."⁴¹ It has also been defined as the capacity for inventive thought and quick understanding; keen intelligence or a natural aptitude for using words and ideas in a quick and inventive way to create humour. According to the German philosopher Theodor Lipps (d. 1914) wit is essentially the subjective side of the comic, the part of the comic which we ourselves create and which colours our conduct.⁴² German philosopher Kuno Fischer (d. 1907) states that wit is playful judgement.⁴³

The largest group displaying the techniques of wit are those jokes which are commonly called puns, generally counted as the lowest form of wit, as they can be formed with the least effort.⁴⁴ The word has acquired a number of layers in meaning since the Middle Ages, and has changed greatly in critical and general use. Wit formerly meant 'sense,' thus common sense. During the Renaissance period it meant 'intelligence' or 'wisdom'; thus denoting intellectual capacity; even, perhaps, 'genius', associating quick wit with intellectual liveliness. For the most part wit now suggests intellectual brilliance, ingenuity and verbal skill. Wit is commonly verbal, while humour need not be.⁴⁵ There is no separate word for wit in Arabic, though *zarf* is used to denote wit, even if it was used to also denote 'elegance, charm, gracefulness, and wittiness.'⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Freud, Sigmund. 2012. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Edited by A. A. Brill. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 678.

⁴¹ Oxford English Dictionary Online

⁴² Freud. 2012. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, 677.

⁴³ Ibid, 678.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 700.

⁴⁵ Preston and Cuddon. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 773.

⁴⁶ Meisami and Starkey. 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 821.

iv) Jokes

Salvatore Attardo defines a joke as “a short narrative text which is funny,” cautioning that not all humour is narrative.⁴⁷ According to Ritchie, jokes are verbally expressed humour, or humour conveyed in language.⁴⁸ There are minimal elements in jokes, they are either actions undertaken or things said by individuals. The joke establishes relationships or makes references to the experiences of the listeners. A joke typically generates a story or a narrative that ends in a punch-line, where either the expectation is established or violated in some surprising way.⁴⁹ The response of telling the joke is usually laughter. However, the codes upon which jokes are based must be known and explicit. In some cultures certain topics are not accepted as the proper subject of jokes.⁵⁰ There may be a content or structure which is crucial to the text being a joke, but it is not obvious which factors define a unique identity for that joke.⁵¹ There are several ways in which jokes are constructed: (1) Condensation of words, (2) Dividing up words, (3) Multiple use of words (4) Double meaning.⁵² It is noteworthy that jokes normally appear involuntarily, they 'occur' to one as one speaks.⁵³ Some jokes lead the audience to expect a particular ending, yet the punch-line differs from that, which also creates humour.⁵⁴

The Arabic terminology of humorous literature is admittedly vague: *nādira* denotes a short, witty, subtle and amusing anecdote; *laṭīfa* a pointed anecdote; *mullḥa* a pleasant, witty anecdote; *fukāha* (funny, humorous anecdote or joke) and *muḍḥika* (joke or anecdote resulting in laughter).⁵⁵

v) Parody

Parody is mainly viewed negatively and is mostly regarded as a critical and aggressive way of ridiculing the original as a form of lowly comic entertainment without an artistic value of its own, hence, it is viewed

⁴⁷ Attardo, Salvatore. 2001. *Humorous Texts : A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, vii.

⁴⁸ Ritchie, Graeme Donald. 2004. *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes*. London: Routledge, 2.

⁴⁹ Berger. 1993. *An Anatomy of Humor*, 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 83.

⁵² Foot and Hugh. 1977. *It's a Funny Thing, Humour*, 7.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Berger. 1993. *An Anatomy of Humor*, 180.

⁵⁵ Meisami and Starkey. 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 293.

as a suspect and at best mediocre literary form.⁵⁶ Antoon says that parody is writing against the tradition. The parodist's target texts are usually the tradition's icons and its most famous and revered texts. In the Arabic tradition, aside from the Qur'an, the pre-Islamic poems or odes (*mu'allaqāt*) always had that unparalleled iconic status as cultural and linguistic yardsticks, language's aesthetic perfection, and were regarded as encapsulating the cultural values and spirit.⁵⁷ Many of these were parodied in form of *sukhf*, which Geert van Gelder defines as foolishness, obscene, or nonsensical poetry.⁵⁸ Parody can also be defined as the "conscious ironic or sardonic evocation of another artistic model."⁵⁹ The general consensus is still that "parody does more than merely reiterate other texts; its textual or contextual difference from the original is reinforced by a generally ironic and mocking tone."⁶⁰ Parody is also defined as the imitative use of the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous, achieved by exaggerating certain traits, using more or less the same technique as the cartoon caricaturist. As a branch of satire its purpose may be corrective as well as derisive.⁶¹

vi) Satire

The history of satire begins with the early Greek and Roman literature.⁶² Satire was a favoured mode of expression in the eighteenth century, requiring a polished, cultivated and somewhat formal language; and was regarded as the style and diction of a gentleman.⁶³ The satirist is a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, and ideals; of moral as well as aesthetic values; he is a man (women satirists have been very rare) who takes it upon himself to correct and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Müller, Beate. 1997. *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives*. Amsterdam ; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 127.

⁵⁷ Antoon, Sinan. 2014. *The Poetics of the Obscene in Premodern Arabic Poetry: Ibn al-Hajjāj and Sukhf*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 45.

⁵⁸ van Gelder, Geert Jan. 1999. "Some Brave Attempts at Generic Classification in Premodern Arabic." In *Aspects of Genre and Type in Pre-Modern Literary Cultures*, edited by Bert Roest and Herman Vanstiphout, 15–31. Groningen: Styx Publications, 27.

⁵⁹ Antoon. 2014. *The Poetics of the Obscene*, 46.

⁶⁰ Preston and Cuddon. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 135.

⁶¹ Ibid, 514.

⁶² Ibid, 632.

⁶³ Ibid, 543.

⁶⁴ Preston and Cuddon. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 632.

There is no exact equivalent in Arabic for 'satire'. Therefore, speaking of satire in Arabic literature is to impose a Western concept on a tradition that had its own system of modes and genres. *Hijā'* is often translated as 'satire', though this is not really appropriate, as it is better rendered as 'invective.' Moreover, it is restricted to poetry.⁶⁵ The *maqāma*, also poetry, was a vehicle of satire and irony, as well as verbal display offering specific knowledge, particularly, the *maqāmāt* of Badī al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 395/1007), where parody and irony bring about a most attractive kind of satire.⁶⁶

The most characteristic form of Arabic satire is short verse or a brief prose anecdote (*nādira*).⁶⁷ Throughout history, classical Arabic literature showed an abundance of *nawādir* that make fun of misers, spongers, schoolteachers, *Ḥadīth* and other scholars, *qāḍīs*, physicians, Bedouins, non-Arabs, poets, philologists, women, singing girls, simpletons, homosexuals, effeminate men and many others, which will be discussed in the Literature Review. The anecdotes pretend to be based on fact, but are often fictional and, like most jokes, anonymous. They are often collected in anthologies or monographs such as *al-Bukhalā'* (The Misers) by al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/868-869), *al-Taṭfīl* (Sponging) by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), or *Akḥbār al-ḥamqā wa-al-mughaffalīn* (Fools and Simpletons) by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). Several of al-Jāḥiz's works have satirical elements.⁶⁸

vii) Irony

Irony is a widespread phenomenon and plays a part in everyday living. However irony is culturally dependent, though it is to be found in many cultures in different forms, ranging from the subtle to the obvious.⁶⁹ Irony was first recorded in Plato's *Republic*, where it has the meaning of 'a glib and underhand way of taking people in'. Verbal irony was identified and named in Aristotle's times, though it was used earlier, like for example in Homer's *Odyssey*. Situational irony was also used in Homer's *Odyssey*, yet it was only identified in the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ It was not until 1502 that the first mention

⁶⁵ Meisami and Starkey. 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 693.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 193.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 694.

⁶⁸ Meisami and Starkey. 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 694.

⁶⁹ Muecke, D. C. 2018. *Irony and the Ironic*. London; New York: Routledge, 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 15.

of irony in English as “yronye – of grammare, by whiche a man sayth one and gyveth to understand the contrarye” occurs.⁷¹ Nevertheless English was rich in irony, which might be regarded as forerunners of formal irony such as gibe, jeer, mock, scoff, scorn and taunt.⁷²

The concept of irony inspired some careful thinking in Germany, where F. Schlegel, Tieck and Karl Solger all addressed themselves to the extremely difficult task of understanding this subtlest of manifestations of the comic spirit.⁷³ Irony was a way of treating one's opponent in an argument by saying the contrary of what one means or saying one thing but meaning another, for example praising instead of blaming or the reverse.⁷⁴ Two further commonly used categories of irony are verbal irony and irony of situation. At its simplest, verbal irony involves saying what one does not mean. Johnson defined it as a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words.⁷⁵ At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, irony took on new meanings, though the old ones were not lost. A new form of disparaging satiric irony developed which is regarded as cheap and vulgar, as well as a sceptical irony which is viewed as cruel, corrosive and diabolic. This led to thinking of irony not in terms of being ironical, but the attention shifted to the victim of irony.⁷⁶

Irony and parody are among the more common techniques employed in satire. There are no exact equivalents in Arabic literary terminology though *tahakkum* or *sukhriyya* (mockery, derision) could be the nearest terms for 'irony'.⁷⁷

B. Humour Theories

There are a number of theories attempting to explain what humour is, how it functions, what triggers it, its implications, be they societal, psychological or otherwise. Humour theories evolved through the ages and were refined, changed, criticised, discredited, reformulated and expanded upon. As can be

⁷¹ Preston and Cuddon. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 372.

⁷² Muecke. 2018. *Irony and the Ironic*, 16.

⁷³ Preston and Cuddon. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 371.

⁷⁴ Muecke. 2018. *Irony and the Ironic*, 17.

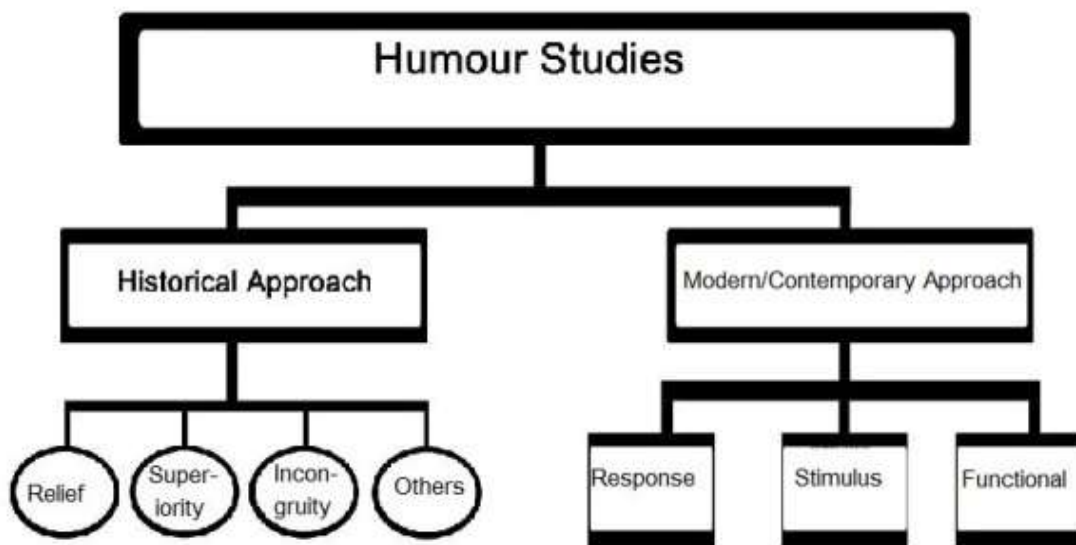
⁷⁵ Preston and Cuddon. 2013. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 372.

⁷⁶ Muecke. 2018. *Irony and the Ironic*, 18-19.

⁷⁷ Meisami and Starkey. 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 713.

seen in figure (1) below, there were two different approaches to studying humour, which resulted in a number of different theories. The historical approach produced three distinct and well known theories which were discussed in great detail in academic literature, the Relief Theory, the Superiority Theory, and the Incongruity Theory. In addition there are a number of other classical yet not as famous humour theories. Modern and contemporary approaches also produced a number of theories, the most famous of which are the Response Theories, the Stimulus Theories and the Functional Theories.

Figure (1)



1.) Historical Approach:

a) Relief theory:

This theory argues that laughter reduces psychological tension built up through fear, social inhibitions, suppressed desires and strict rules imposed by authoritative power. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the English philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist, applied Darwin's theory of evolution to psychology, sociology, ethics, politics and education. Spencer, who was strongly influenced by the 'hydraulic' theory of nervous energy, in which nervous energy builds up within the bodies and necessitates a release through muscular movement, looked at the phenomenon of laughter as being a specialized channel of

such release.⁷⁸ This Relief Theory of laughter was later further developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and it has also influenced many others. Like Spencer, Freud saw laughter as an outlet for psychic or nervous energy. However, Freud's theory is more complicated than the previous Relief Theories. In his early book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud distinguished three kinds of laughter situations: joking or wit (*Witz*), the comic and humour. In each of these situations, there is some psychic energy summoned for a particular task, but is then not needed for that particular purpose. This superfluous energy has to be discharged and that happens through the muscular movements of laughter. In joking, Freud claimed, the energy saved is that which would ordinarily be used to repress hostile or sexual feelings and thoughts. Joking (like dreaming) serves as a safety valve for forbidden feelings and thoughts and in the expression of that which is usually inhibited, the energy of repression is released in laughter. In the comic, the energy saved is the energy of thought. The cognitive processing requires energy and the surplus of that energy is released in laughter. In humour, the energy saved is the energy of emotion, be it fear, pity, or some other negative emotion; but upon the realization that these emotions are not needed, the energy summoned for that emotion becomes superfluous and is discharged in laughter. Freud's use of the term 'humour' is narrower than the contemporary term, which includes joking and the comic.⁷⁹

b) Superiority Theory

It argues that laughter is generated by a feeling of *Schadenfreude* which is translated as laughter about misfortunes or the inferiority of others, be it intellectually, physically or otherwise; or laughter about own former positions held, which have been proven wrong or have been superseded. While this theory does seem to cover many cases of laughter and humour, there are some counterexamples.

According to Plato (428-348 B.C.), people laugh about vice, mainly self-ignorance, particularly at people who are powerless. Plato opines that amusement is an emotion in which people tend to lose rational control of themselves. In his *Republic*, Plato set up rules for educating the young guardians of

⁷⁸ Spencer, Herbert. 1860. *The Physiology of Laughter*. n.p.: Macmillan.

⁷⁹ Freud, Sigmund. 1963. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: Norton.

the ideal state, singling out laughter as something to be avoided. The guardians “must not be prone to laughter, for usually when we abandon ourselves to violent laughter our condition provokes a violent reaction.”⁸⁰ To avoid giving bad role models to the young guardians, Plato suggested censoring literature to eliminate all references to gods or heroes having been overcome with laughter.⁸¹ Though Aristotle (348-322 BC) agreed with Plato that laughter is principally derisive and that amusement comes mainly from finding a person or his actions inferior in some way, he was against suppressing laughter, even if he thought that most people overdo the joking and laughing. In his perspective, the moral ideal is to avoid both extremes, that of becoming a humourless boor as well as the ‘anything to laugh’ buffoon. The ideal is to be ready-witted but tactful. However, despite his view on laughter as derision, Aristotle hinted at the later theory that laughter is also a reaction to many varieties of incongruity, and not just human shortcomings. In his *Rhetoric* he mentions that a speaker can generate laughter by setting up certain expectations in the audience, and then shocking them with something unexpected. His example is from an unknown comedy: “As he walked, beneath his feet were – blisters.”⁸² Jokes can work in this same way too, he states, consider those that involve word play or a change of spelling.⁸³ This observation that surprise can make us laugh was not developed by Aristotle or his followers like Cicero (106-43 BC). It was not until Kant and Schopenhauer that the Incongruity Theory of laughter was worked out in detail.⁸⁴

In *On the Orator*, Cicero examines the use of humour in public speaking. He discusses the use of exaggeration, sarcasm and puns, as well as philosophical topics as the nature of humour and the ethics of its use. He mostly follows Aristotle’s views, but adds one new important idea, namely the

⁸⁰ Plato. 2000. *The Republic*. Edited by G. R. F. Ferrari. Translated by Tom Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press - 388 e, 75.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Aristotle. 2007. *On Rhetoric - A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by George A. Kennedy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 233.

⁸³ Ibid, 234.

⁸⁴ Morreall. 1987. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 14.

distinction between humour in the content and humour arising from the language used.⁸⁵ Cicero writes: "There are two kinds of jokes, one of which is based on things, the other on words."⁸⁶

Hobbes (1588-1679) put 'The Superiority Theory of Laughter' started by Plato and Aristotle, then refined by Cicero into a stronger form. According to Hobbes, human beings are in continuous struggle with one another for power and its consequences. He opines that humans translate the failure of competitors as equalling own success, hence he sees a constant search for signs of superiority or being at an advantage. Hobbes sees laughter as nothing but an expression of sudden glory at the realization of superiority in some way.⁸⁷

Descartes (1596-1650) goes beyond Hobbes's account of laughter by acknowledging that there are other causes of laughter besides hatred. He offers a physiological explanation of laughter and considers the place of laughter in ridicule, yet he does not mention humour and amusement. According to Descartes, there are only six basic emotions – wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. For Descartes, laughter accompanies three of these, namely wonder, mild hatred and joy.⁸⁸

c) Incongruity Theory:

It argues that laughter is generated through the realization of ridiculousness or absurdity of a situation where a certain concept and the object represented by the concept or situation result in nonsensicality.

Hutcheson (1694-1746) first pointed out in replying to Hobbes, that laughter is not always the response when seeing the failure of others or own success; and hence, much of the amusement does not seem to involve feelings of superiority.⁸⁹ Hutcheson provides many counterexamples to show that essentially there is no connection between having feelings of superiority and laughing or being amused.

⁸⁵ Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1948. *On the Orator, Books I-II*. Translated by H. Rackham E. W. Sutton. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 407.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hobbes, Thomas. 1928. *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*. Edited by Ferdinand Tonnies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ch, 9 § 13.

⁸⁸ Descartes, René. 1911. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*. Translated by Elizabeth Haldane and G. Ross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, § 124-127, 178-180.

⁸⁹ Hutcheson, Francis. 1973. *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*. Edited by Peter Kivy. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 109.

Hutcheson then offers his own theory of humour, based on the association of ideas, that genius in serious literature consists in the ability to trigger ideas of greatness, novelty and beauty in the reader through the use of apt metaphors and similes. Comic genius, he states, is largely the ability to use somewhat inappropriate metaphors and similes to trigger ideas that clash with each other, which essentially is the beginning of the Incongruity Theory. Hutcheson also discusses some of the values of humour, particularly the pleasure it brings, its role as 'social lubricant' and its ability to stimulate mental flexibility.⁹⁰

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (1724-1804) proposes a theory of jokes which can be considered a general theory of humour. Although Kant emphasizes the physical side of amusement rather than the mental one, it is a kind of an Incongruity Theory. According to him, the pleasure found in humour is not as high as the delight in beauty or in moral goodness, which brings an even higher satisfaction. Even though amusement is caused by the play of ideas, it is a type of sensory gratification based on feelings of wellbeing, especially of health. Kant writes that listening to a joke, people develop a certain expectation as to how it will end, but the expectation vanishes at the punch-line. This sudden mental movement is not enjoyed by reason, because the desire to understand is frustrated. However, the mental gymnastics at the punch-line go with an animation of the intestines and internal organs. This bodily motion produces a feeling of health. The incongruity we experience in humour "gives a wholesome shock to the body".⁹¹

While Kant located the essence of humour in the evaporation of expectation, Schopenhauer (1788-1860) sees it in a mismatch between the sensory knowledge of things and abstract knowledge of those same things. The perceptions through the senses, according to him, are individual things with many characteristics. However, when these sense perceptions are organised under abstract concepts, the focus is only on a few characteristics of any individual thing, hence very different things are included in that same concept and are referred to by the same word albeit being different. Schopenhauer's

⁹⁰ Morreall. 1987. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 26.

⁹¹ Kant, Immanuel. 1892. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by J. H. Bernard. London: Macmillan, 54.

discussion of humour shows a negative attitude towards abstract rational knowledge when it is used and remains uncorrected by worldly experience.⁹²

Hazlitt's (1778-1830) theory of humour goes significantly beyond the Incongruity Theories of Kant and Schopenhauer. However, he agrees with them on the intellectual processes at work in the creation and appreciation of humour. He also agrees about the relation between the response to incongruity in amusement and the response to it in emotions like fear and sadness. Hazlitt (1778-1830) offers other interesting observations on the idea that ridicule is a test of truth and on the ethics of humour.⁹³

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) analyses humour in terms of 'the comical' and believes that the main element in the comical is 'contradiction.' Kierkegaard's examples make it clear that he means something weaker than a logical or formal contradiction, namely incongruity. Kierkegaard is interested in humour and irony, for their relation to the 'three spheres of existence,' or the three existential stages of life – the aesthetic sphere, the ethical sphere and the religious sphere. He claims that irony marks the boundary between the aesthetic and ethical sphere, while humour marks the boundary between the ethical and religious spheres. "Humour is the last stage of existential awareness before faith."⁹⁴ Kierkegaard also believes in a strong connection between having a religious view of life and having a sense of humour. In his *Journals and Papers* he wrote that "the humorous is present throughout Christianity," that Christianity is the most humorous view of life in world history.⁹⁵

Although David Hartley's (1705 – 1757) observations on laughter and humour do not establish a new theory, they are interesting because they bring elements of the three traditional theories together. Hartley observed that people often laugh at the mistakes of children, peasants or foreigners. Followers of the Incongruity Theory would believe Hartley to be agreeing with them while he discusses surprise,

⁹² Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1964. *The World as Will and Idea*. Translated by Viscount R. B. Haldane Haldane and John Kemp. London: Routledge & K. Paul, Book 1, § 13,

⁹³ Hazlitt, William. 1885. *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*. London: G. Bell, Lecture 1

⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, Søren. 1941. *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Entries 448-259.

⁹⁵ Ibid, Entries 1681-1682.

inconsistencies, and improprieties as causes of laughter. Followers of the Relief Theory could take Hartley as a forerunner when he states that laughter occasionally results from the sudden dissipation of fear or other negative emotions. The most interesting idea developed by Hartley is that there is an element of irrationality to humour and that people who are always looking for the humorous aspects of their experience thereby limit the search for truth.⁹⁶

d) Others:

i) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH):

The GTVH was proposed by Victor Raskin and Salvatore Attardo in an article titled "*Script theory revis(it)ed: joke similarity and joke representation model.*"⁹⁷ It proposes a general theory based on verbal humour, focusing on verbal jokes as its most representative subset. The proposed theory suggests a hierarchical model of joke representation consisting of six levels.⁹⁸ Each level in this hierarchical model corresponds to and is also determined by what they call a knowledge resource. The six knowledge resources are (1) Script Opposition SO, which include real, unreal, normal, possible and its opposites. (2) Logical Mechanisms LM, like verbal techniques such as puns to faulty logic and false analogies. (3) Situation S, which can include objects, activities and instruments to tell the joke. (4) Target T, who is the 'butt' of the joke. (5) Narrative Strategy NS, which can be a story, a dialogue, a riddle or a simple narrative. And finally (6) Language L, which covers all the information needed to verbalise a text.⁹⁹ According to Attardo, the most common misconception was that the GTVH presented a final say on the matter it covered, however, nothing could have been further from the authors' intentions, who saw their

⁹⁶ Hartley, David. 2013. *Observations On Man : His Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 5, § 1.

⁹⁷ Attardo, Salvatore and Victor Raskin. 1991. "Script theory revis(it)ed: joke similarity and joke representation model." *Humor* 4 (3-4): 293–347.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 293

⁹⁹ Ibid, 294.

work as “staking out a research space, and openly called for research from various disciplines to explore these.”¹⁰⁰ Criticism levelled at the GTVH, said it was not formal enough, and too complex.¹⁰¹

ii) Computational-Neural Theory of Humour:

This is a development of the Incongruity Theory adding the role played by timing without distinguishing between verbal, visual or physical humour, as in tickling for example. It is a computer model of a ‘sense of humour’ as proposed by Suslov in 1992. He interprets the humorous effect as a specific malfunction in the course of information processing, due to the need for the rapid deletion of the false version transmitted into consciousness. It corresponds to the Incongruity Theory. The theory treats the humorous effect created by linguistic means (verbal humour), as well as created visually (caricature, clown performance) or by tickling in the same way without distinction. However, Suslov adds an essentially new factor, namely the role of timing and the role of ambiguity. According to Suslov, in biological systems, a sense of humour inevitably develops in the course of evolution, because its biological function consists in quickening the transmission of the processed information into consciousness and in a more effective use of brain resources. A translation of this algorithm in neural networks vindicates Spencer’s hypothesis on the mechanism of laughter. According to this theory, humour has a pure biological origin, while its social functions came much later.¹⁰²

iii) Ontic-Epistemic Theory of Humour (OETC):

Peter Marteinson elaborated the OETC in 2006. He asserts that laughter is a reaction to a cognitive impasse or a momentary epistemological difficulty where the subject appears to be no longer real in any normative sense. This means that normal human cognition is subjective and anthropomorphic, that people see the world not through ‘rose-coloured glasses’ but through multi-coloured and ever changing lenses of which they are always not aware.¹⁰³ Therefore the selection of facts they perceive in external

¹⁰⁰ Attardo, Salvatore. 2017. “The General Theory of Verbal Humour.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor*, edited by Salvatore Attardo, 126-142. London: Routledge, 126

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 136

¹⁰² Nilsen, Alleen Pace, and Don Lee Fred Nilsen. 2019. *The Language of Humor - An Introduction*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 255.

¹⁰³ Marteinson, Peter G. 2006. *On the Problem of the Comic : A Philosophical Study on the Origins of Laughter*. New York ; Ottawa: Legas, 10.

situations and states is limited by different forms of filtering, selections and simplifications.¹⁰⁴ For Marteinson, the comic which causes laughter is the perception that the criteria for truth in the social universe are temporarily inadequate and the social being passed from a state of epistemological acceptance to a state of cognitive rejection, therefore, laughter for him is an "unravelling at the seams". Laughter, according to Marteinson, serves to reset and re-boot the faculty of social perception, which has been rendered non-functional by the comic situation.¹⁰⁵ It echoes Bergson that human beings accept social identity as being real and the comic results from discovering it is not. Laughter, according to Marteinson, serves to reset and re-boot the faculty of social perception, which has been rendered non-functional by the comic situation.

iv) Sexual Selection Theory (SST):

Geoffrey Miller, an evolutionary psychologist, argues that, from an evolutionary perspective, humour had no survival value to early humans. From a pragmatic biological viewpoint, art, music and humour seem pointless, and wasting energy. Human morality and humour seem irrelevant to finding food and avoiding predators. Moreover, if human intelligence and creativity were so useful, it is puzzling to him, that apes did not evolve them too.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, he argues that nobody has been able to suggest any plausible survival benefits for most of the things that human minds are uniquely good at, such as humour, storytelling, conversation, art, music, self-consciousness, ornate language, imaginative ideologies, religion, and morality.¹⁰⁷ He proposes that human characteristics like humour evolved by sexual selection, arguing that humour emerged as an indicator of other traits that were of survival value, such as human intelligence. Yet he also argues that both genders evolved many ways of displaying creative intelligence, humour being one, as the appreciation of the human mind's charms, whether in ordinary conversation or otherwise, therefore increasing the probability of being chosen. The SST increases the confidence that people can be chosen, unmediated by their ability to work, save, shop, and spend.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Miller, Geoffrey. 2001. *The Mating Mind : How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*. London: Vintage, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 429-430.

v) **Detection of Mistaken Reasoning Theory:**

This is an elaboration of the previous SST, taking the importance of humour one step further arguing that humour is not only an important survival trait, but that the human brain requires humour to master practical problem solving as it improved the neural circuits essential for survival. Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett, and Reginald Adams offer an evolutionary and cognitive perspective. They propose, that humour evolved out of a computational problem as human's ancestors were furnished with open-ended thinking. Nature or natural selection, cannot just order the brain to find and fix all mistakes, but has to bribe the brain with pleasure, and humour is funny and addictive.¹⁰⁹

vi) **Misattribution Theory:**

This theory is built on Sigmund Freud's works and deals with instances where a certain audience cannot identify the reasons why they laugh or why they perceive a joke to be funny.¹¹⁰

vii) **Benign Violation Theory (BVT):**

The BVT was developed by Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren and tries to integrate some of the abovementioned theories by positing that humour happens only when three conditions are fulfilled. First that something appears to be threatening. Second that the threat appears to be harmless, and finally a person can see both these versions simultaneously.¹¹¹

2. **Modern / Contemporary Theories**

The modern approach used all the abovementioned theories by applying different methodologies from various disciplines to expand and build on them, working towards a more unified or universal theory which still remains to be formulated. However, the modern approach provided the following theories:

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett, and Reginald Adams. 2011. *Inside Jokes - Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*. Cambridge, (Massachusetts): MIT Press.

¹¹⁰ Zillmann, Dolf, and Jennings Bryant. 1980. "Misattribution Theory of Tendentious Humor." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 16 (2): 146-160.

¹¹¹ Warren, A. Peter McGraw and Caleb. 2010. "Benign Violations Making Immoral Behavior Funny." *Psychological Science* 21 (8): 1141-1149. doi:10.1177/0956797610376073.

i) Response Theories:

These focus on the recipient of humour looking at underlying causes of why the recipient is amused.

These theories build on the Superiority Theory and consider it a response theory.

ii) Stimulus Theories:

They focus on the objects of humour. They build on the Incongruity Theory as well as on linguistic verbal theories attempting to describe what is and is not funny.

iii) Functional Theories:

These study the purpose or function of humour, examining the effects of laughter, its context, and habits around it.

The above presents a short overview of the research conducted to define, explain, categorise, qualify, and rationalise humour. None of these theories, however, would make any sense to someone lacking a sense of humour in the first place. Furthermore none of these theories are actually able to differentiate between the types of response or quantify it. Nor can any of these theories transcend cultural and local parts of humour. Therefore, this study aims to propose a new humour theory, grounded in the data, after analysing and quantifying it, to detect the reasons why the Prophet and by extension the early Muslim community laughed and what they laughed about.

The study will analyse the different reports in both Sunni and Shi'ite *ḥadīth* corpora, to determine the depiction of the Prophet's, and by extension the Shi'ite imam's, laughter and its manipulation across the ages, from the Prophet's time until the late Safavid Dynasty. Though the data shows a steady rise in the period 1250/1834-1351/1932, there are numerous details that need to be included, which exceeds the scope of this research and warrant a separate study. To summarise, the rise of Wahhabism founded by Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1115/1703-1206/1792) and its continued proliferation after the pact with 'Abd al 'Azīz b. Muḥammad Āl Su'ūd (1132/1720–1218/1803) and the subsequent oil discoveries and boom facilitating further propagation all over the Islamic world paid for by petrodollars, the profits

from oil,¹¹² affected the depiction of the Prophet's laughter. The puritanical ultra-conservative creed of Wahhabism adhered to particular strict modes and practices based on the strict and literalist Hanbali School, which had also affected the historical development of humour and laughter in the Ḥadīth as will be demonstrated in the fifth chapter.¹¹³

Much has been written about the Wahhabi theology and tenets, such as its anti-rationalism, its hostility to mysticism, its reliance on isolated *ḥadīth* reports to formulate laws, and the prohibition of smoking, music and dancing, loud laughter as well as demonstrative weeping at funerals,¹¹⁴ its misogyny, contempt for non-Muslims and prejudice against non-Wahhabis and its emphasis on ritualism at the expense of spirituality and how it became widespread in the Muslim world.¹¹⁵ Khaled Abou El Fadl notes that it "is truly astounding how in just the past few decades, distinctively Wahhabi positions have spread to every corner of the Islamic world and have become a part of what the average Muslim identifies as genuinely Islamic."¹¹⁶ Thousands of students from all over the world received Wahhabi education at the Islamic University of Medina, founded in 1961.¹¹⁷ This university was, according to Farquhar, a part of the Saudi state efforts to mould religious belief and practice far beyond the kingdom's borders.¹¹⁸ Saudi petrodollars undeniably played a role in the rise of Salafism in the Muslim world.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Saudi, lacking a skilled domestic workforce, relied heavily on expatriates, who returned to their home countries with their Wahhabi tainted beliefs.¹²⁰ According to Abou El Fadl, Wahhabism sought to replace the enormously rich and diverse ways various Muslim cultures expressed themselves, by

¹¹² Valentine, Simon Ross. 2015. *Force and Fanaticism : Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond*. London: Hurst & Company, 97.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 211.

¹¹⁴ Aarts, Paul, and Gerd Nonneman. 2005. *Saudi Arabia in the Balance : Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press

¹¹⁵ Abou El Fadl, Khaled. 2014. *Reasoning with God : Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 216-217.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*. 217.

¹¹⁷ Farquhar, Michael. 2016. *Circuits of Faith : Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 67.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 188.

¹²⁰ Farquhar, Michael. 2015. "Saudi Petrodollars, Spiritual Capital, and the Islamic University of Medina: A Wahhabi Missionary Project in Transnational Perspective." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (4): 701–721, 702.

replacing these cultural expressions with text-based instructions and constructions of life and a puritanical, idealised, and methodically mythologised view of the past, including the heritage sources.¹²¹

The Wahhabi influence on modern Ḥadīth usage becomes apparent in an Arabic-English bilingual edition titled *This Beloved [PBUH] Smiling*, authored by Muḥammad ‘Alī ‘Uthmān Āl-Mujāhid.¹²² This book is one in a series of books by the same author, based mainly on *Ḥadīth*.¹²³ Interestingly, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) convincingly argued for the necessity of studying *Ḥadīth*, extending the literal understanding of it to the discernment of the legal or theological principles embodied in them, which could then be generalised to other materials or situations.¹²⁴ Many of Āl-Mujāhid’s books were published in Arabic-English bilingual editions, hinting at a consciously political religious enterprise aimed at non-Arabic speakers/readers.

This Beloved [PBUH] Smiling is deliberately not included in the second chapter as it was deemed more of a ‘propaganda’ publication than of academic value. It includes 68 reports, each of which depict the Prophet laughing or smiling, yet the author glosses over the lexical difference between *ḍahika* (laugh), occurring in the majority of reports and *basama* or *tabassama* (smile), explaining that the word *ḍahika* acquires the special meaning of ‘smile’ in context of Muḥammad, although the physical impossibility of a ‘smile showing back teeth’ is completely ignored. This makes it clear that laughter contradicts what the author deems as ‘proper normative behaviour’ and should be completely disregarded as constituting behaviour worthy of emulation by later generations of Muslims. Therefore, Āl-Mujāhid’s enterprise should be seen as being linked to an explicitly political agenda, propagating Wahhabi views and interpretations, more so that he is affiliated to government-linked sponsorship. The

¹²¹ Abou El Fadl. *Reasoning with God*, 217.

¹²² Āl-Mujāhid, Muḥammad ‘Alī ‘Uthmān. 2009. *This Beloved [PBUH] Smiling*. Edited by Reima Y. Shakeir. Translated by Muḥammad M. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ. al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Manāra.

¹²³ See for example *al-Zād fī aḥādīth al-jihād* (Sustenance in the Prophet’s Reports about Jihād); *Hā’ulā’ da’ā lahūm al-rasūl* (Those Whom the Prophet Made Supplications for); *‘Indama ghadiba al-rasūl*, (When the Prophet was angry); *Mā’at da’wa mujāba min al-du’ā’ al-mustajāb* (A hundred of the Prophet’s accepted supplications), *Mā’at mawqif ma’a al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā* (A hundred situations [of the Prophet] with Jews and Christians); *‘Indama bakā ṣaḥābī: mawāqif bakā fihā ‘uzamā’ al-rijāl* (When a Companion cried: Situations that made great men weep); *Mā’at ḥadīth ‘alayha madār al-Islām* (a Hundred Reports central to Islam).

¹²⁴ DeLong-Bas, Natana J. 2004. *Wahhabi Islam : From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. New York: Oxford University Press, 46.

author is a prolific contributor to various online outlets such as *Shabakat al-Alūka*,¹²⁵ *Ṣayd al-Fawā'id*,¹²⁶ *Wuthqa*¹²⁷ and a few others, which are linked to Saudi financing. Such websites, were studied and termed as 'Cyber Islamic Environments.' They describe a variety of contexts, perspectives and applications by those who define themselves as Muslims, illustrating the Salafist scene.¹²⁸ Additionally, most of the Arabic editions of Āl-Mujāhid's works are published by al-ʿUbaykān, which, according to their website,¹²⁹ is one of the main printing outlets of the Saudi government, printing materials for The Ministry of Higher Education, as well as the Ministry of Culture, amongst other governmental institutions. This censorship of laughter in general and the Prophet's in particular underscores the Wahhabi rhetoric and its explicitly political motivation and can be seen as an example of hijacking authoritative texts and changing their original message to suit the Wahhabi agenda. However, there are more details that render the analysis complex and deserve a separate study. Therefore, the time period for this study was chosen to end with the late Safavid Dynasty and the Wahhabi influence on the development of the depiction of the Prophet's laughter is an avenue for further reseach.

¹²⁵ <https://www.alukah.net/> <https://www.alukah.net/>.

¹²⁶ <http://saaid.net/>.

¹²⁷ <https://wuthqa.net/>.

¹²⁸ Nahouza, Namira. 2019. *Wahhabism and the Rise of the New Salafists : Theology, Power and Sunni Islam*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 148.

¹²⁹ <https://www.obeikan.com.sa/obeikan-publishing/>.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Introduction

Muslims are nowadays being viewed or stereotyped as terrorist. The word terrorist revolves around religious extremists taking Jihad into their own hands and adopting drastic actions with a blatant disregard for human life. Ultra-orthodox Muslim men with grim faces, bushy eyebrows, wild unkempt beards and women covered from head to toe in black garb have also become a part of the collective media picture. Pictures of a young man, named 'the Islamic Rage Boy,' were distributed in the media worldwide. His bearded visage, the wide open bellowing mouth, big fuming eyes and clenched fists have become an icon in 'cyberspace' and have now even developed into the subject of an academic study.¹³⁰ The image of Imam Khomeini with his black turban and blazing eyes, published in the context of the 'Rushdie Affair,' became iconic. Images of burning flags and besieged embassies during the 'Cartoon Crisis' in 2005 and later the Curtis Culwell Centre attack and Charlie Hebdo massacre, both in 2015, were printed over and over again to emphasize the grim humourless aspect. Anyone using the search engine 'google' to look for 'angry Muslim' will get many results and even a number of 'blogs'¹³¹ named as such,

Consequently, it has increasingly become thought of that an entire civilization and culture is devoid of humour and the light touch of laughter and can simply be summarized by those blazing eyes of the fundamentalists, the merciless harshness and the inarticulate quality of their ideology. However, it is an unreal image clashing with the humanity of the Muslim people and much evidence of humour in Arab and Islamic countries for many centuries. Evidence that not only proves that Muslims have a sense of humour, but that they were not afraid to use their own religious scriptures to generate laughs. Some of these jokes are borderline blasphemous, but they were found in the heritage and primary source books;

¹³⁰ Morey, Amina Yaqin and Peter. 2011. *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

¹³¹ personal website or web page on which an individual records opinions, links to other sites, etc. on a regular basis. See for example 'The Angry Arab' at <http://angryarab.blogspot.com/>.

written when religion was solid and people were comfortable with the scriptures and strong in their beliefs, that they did not shy away from using them in numerous ways in their daily lives.

Humour is an intelligent way of looking at life. It starts from and returns to the brain to tickle it into creating a laugh. It is also often used to invade taboo areas, but most certainly does not limit itself to that. Its goal is to expose the paradoxical aspects of life such as hypocrisy, contradictions, lies and stupidity. Humour enables people to see a fault and also to avoid it; to notice virtue and emphasize it. Laughter also highlights examples for avoiding bad behaviour.¹³² Since medieval times, like any other community, the Arabs and Muslims have laughed and laughed very hard, at their conditions, their rulers and even their religious scholars and their rulings. What exactly is the 'Muslim sense of humour'? Does it exist in Muslim religious texts? A review of the existing literature will attempt to answer these questions.

Ulrich Marzolph suggests looking at the role of humour in Islam using two perspectives.¹³³ Hence, this literature review will be structured using these two aspects, as well as adding other sections, namely a review of the literature covering the definitions as well as applications of humour in Arabic.

A. Definitions of humour and laughter

While Ulrich Marzolph states that: "since classical Arabic does not possess a word for humour, the discussion in traditional Arabic sources focuses on the position of laughter,"¹³⁴ however, there is a word for it, namely *fakih*. In the classical Arabic dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab*, the word *fakih* is defined as: "*fakaha*, from the root *f-k-h*, *fakih* is an adjective denoting the friendly disposition of a man, joking, jesting and playfulness."¹³⁵ The entry continues with a reminder of an example from *Hadīth*, quoting Anas saying that the Prophet was one of the most humorous people (*afkah*), pointing to a tradition about a little boy calling him *al-fākih*, *al-māziḥ* and quoting Zayd b. Thābit affirming that the Prophet was most witty and mentioning another prophetic tradition excluding humour from being considered as backbiting (*ghaybah*). In addition the dictionary also lists variants of the word and its various usages and related

¹³² Buckley, F. 2005. *The Morality of Laughter*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 34.

¹³³ Marzolph, U. 2011. The Muslim Sense of Humour. In H. G. Herck (Ed.), *Humour and Religion - Challenges and Ambiguity* (pp. 169-187). New York: Continuum Religious Studies, 170

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 173

¹³⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad b. Mukarram. 1955. *Lisān al-'Arab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 13:523-525.

words. Furthermore, the same dictionary also defines the word *hazl* as the opposite of seriousness and includes its definition as humorous talk.¹³⁶

As laughter is closely linked to humour and a manifestation in either sound and/or facial expressions usually suggestive of happiness, a look at the word laughter shows that scholars were interested in explaining and classifying it. In his book, *Fiqh al-lughā*,¹³⁷ al-Tha'ālibī-al-Naysabūrī (d. 429/1038), classified words according to different categories. However, the defined words all have a Qur'anic origin. According to him, the word laughter in its various forms derived from *ḍ-ḥ-k* occurs seventeen times,¹³⁸ where once out of these it conveys harmless amusement¹³⁹ and twice joy.¹⁴⁰ Nowhere in the Qur'an is laughter condemned. One verse in particular, namely [53:43] acknowledges laughter and weeping as human emotions caused by Allah (*aḍḥaka wa-abkā*), and "it is in the context of God's primordial and eschatological roles of creator and terminator that God is credited with causing woman and man to laugh and to weep."¹⁴¹

a) Al-Tha'ālibī

Al-Tha'ālibī devoted a whole section to the classification of laughter and its – according to him – ten different types ranging from smiling to trying to suppress laughter over chuckles, chortles, giggles, cackles, to roaring laughter all the way to falling about laughing. Al-Tha'ālibī himself was a prolific writer and Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) attributes eighty-six works to him.¹⁴² Al-Tha'ālibī's compositions include a number of works that touch upon humour and include *nawādir* (witty anecdotes), miscellaneous information, collections of proverbial expressions, phrases and clichés, linguistics, verses of poetry such as *Thimār al-qulūb fi'l-muḍāf wa'l-mansūb* which is a work of literature, written upon the request of Abū-l-Faḍl al-Mīkālī, a member of the Mīkālīs, the most prominent family in Nīshāpūr at that

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ al-Tha'ālibī, A. M. 1885. *Fiqh al-lughā*. Beirut: Matba'it al Abā' al Yasū'iyyīn., p. 128.

¹³⁸ See verses: [9:82], [11:38], [11:71], [23:110], [27:19], [39:56], [43:47],[49:11],[53:43], [53:60], [80:39], [83:29], [83:34]

¹³⁹ [27:19]

¹⁴⁰ [9:82], [80:39]

¹⁴¹ Rowson, E.K.. " al-Tha'ālibī." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2012. Reference. American University in Cairo. 21 October 2012 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-thaaliabi-SIM_7504>

¹⁴² Ṣafadī, K. I. (1931). *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt*. Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, in Kommission bei F.A. Brockhaus. Vol XIX, pp. 194-9.

time. The book was written over several years and consists of sixty-one chapters named after things that have a relationship with others or are added to them. Al-Tha'ālibī offers his definitions, adds Qur'anic verses or Prophetic traditions as well as proverbs, poetry and witty anecdotes to expand on each term. This book shows the extensive knowledge of its author and can be considered a literary encyclopaedia.

An anecdote from the book that gives the example of the relationship between Allah and Ibrāhīm¹⁴³ is one narrated by al-Aṣma'ī (d. 213/828): "one of al-Aṣma'ī's best friends wanted to borrow some money and he said: "yes with generosity, but to set my heart at ease you need to provide a collateral equal to double of what you asked for. His friend answered: "Oh Abū Sa'īd, do you not trust me?" He replied: "I do but Allah's *khalīl* trusted Allah also when he said:¹⁴⁴ "My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead." God said: "What! And do you not believe?" Ibrāhīm replied: "Yes, but that my heart may be at ease."¹⁴⁵

Another book in the same genre is *Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsīn ahl al-'aṣr*, an anthology of poetry and prose in four volumes, and is the best known of his work along with its supplement *Tatimmat al-yatīma*. *Yatīmat al-dahr*'s four volumes are divided as follows: the first volume covers the poets of al-Shām (the Levant) and its environs; the second deals with the Buwayhid or Būyid poets; the third with the poets of the mountains of Persia, Gurgān and Ṭabaristān; and finally the fourth covers the poets of Khurāsān and Transoxania. Each volume is divided into sections covering over four hundred and seventy poets and writers. Some sections include the selected authors' biographical information, yet the majority of the sections list al-Tha'ālibī's selections of their work in poetry and prose. The supplement, *Tatimmat al-yatīma*, is in two volumes and was written almost twenty years later using the same arrangement and covers al-Tha'ālibī's contemporary poets.

He also wrote *Aḥsan mā sami' tu*, which includes the best of what al-Tha'ālibī heard of poetry about God, the Prophet, kings, rulers, literature, *khamriyyāt* (Bacchic, wine poems), spring, summer, autumn, winter, women, *ghazal* (love-song), youth, ageing, morals, *hijā'* (invective in prose or verse) as

¹⁴³ Allah called Ibrāhīm His *khalīl* (friend)

¹⁴⁴ Using a verse from the Qur'an, namely [2:260].

¹⁴⁵ al-Tha'ālibī, a.-M. 1908. *Kitāb Thimār al-qulūb : fī al-mudāf wa-al-mansūb*. Cairo: Matba'at al-Zāhir, 5.

well as its opposite *madīḥ* (panegyric poetry), elegies, and condolences. An example of an anecdote in poetry is: “narrated by Abū'l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-‘Alawī al-Ḥusaynī al-Hamdānī al-Waṣī:

I was standing in Samatīn in the presence of Sayf al-Dawla (d. 356/967), *amīr* of Aleppo, himself a poet, while some poets were reciting their poetry to him. A Bedouin in shabby clothes came up to him and asked permission to recite. He was granted permission and chanted:

You [rule] over me and this [is] Aleppo ~ the sustenance has run out and demands have ended

This makes the country proud and with its Prince ~ the Arabs boast across the nations

Your servant eternity has harmed us ~ and to you we [come] seeking refuge from your servant's injustice

Sayf al-Dawla said: "By God, Well done, you!", and ordered two hundred Dinars be given to him.”¹⁴⁶

In addition he also wrote *Man ghāba ‘anhu al-muṭrib* intending the title to say that he who misses the singer or cannot hear the songs should make use of this book which includes lyrics and selections of eloquent prose to induce intoxication without drinks and delights without music, as he states in his introduction.

In *Khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*, which has seven chapters, al-Tha‘ālibī selects eloquent words from among Qur’anic verses, *Ḥadīth*, proverbs and poems. The book has the same approach like his other books, except for the third Chapter which includes a short treatise about preference.

In *al-Mubhij*, al-Tha‘ālibī uses prose and poetry selections to emphasize his thoughts on morality, religion, literature, politics and history. He educates and motivates the readers to trust in God, read the Qur’an and avoid bad deeds and immoral company. He lists conversational topics to avoid such as talking about money or losses, friends with bad influence and promotes good traits such as generosity, friendship, energy, integrity, good manners and keeping to the strait path.

In his book *al-Ḍarā‘if wa-l-laṭā‘if* which is identical to *al-Yawāqīt fī ba‘ḍ al-mawāqīt*, he writes an anecdote about the first Caliph saying: Abū Bakr (d. 13/634) saw a man holding a garment and asked him if it was for sale. The man replied: "No blessings for you by God". Abū Bakr told him: “Could you

¹⁴⁶ al-Tha‘ālibī, A. M. 1956. *Yatīmat al-dahr fī mahāṣīn ah! al-‘asr*. Cairo: Matḥa‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 5.

please instead say: No and blessings for you by God so that there is a difference between blessing and cursing me.”¹⁴⁷

In *al-Ijāz wa-l-ijāz*, which follows his usual style, he writes as narrated by Jāhza al-Barmakī who was asked about an event he was invited to attend and replied: “Everything was cold except for the water.”¹⁴⁸

In *Tahsīn al-qabīḥ wa-taqbīḥ al-ḥasan*, al-Tha‘ālibī divides the book into two parts, one dealing with the virtuous¹⁴⁹ and the other with the vile.¹⁵⁰ In departure from this genre, where advantages and disadvantages of the same thing were discussed, al-Tha‘ālibī instead highlights the beauty inherent within the ugly, and vice versa. He discusses the advantages of what everybody else termed as vile, such as lies, insolence, debt, poverty, stinginess, greed and envy. In the second part he highlights the disadvantages of what people generally view as virtues, such as intellect, science, literature, patience, forbearance, modesty, youth, flowers and so on. Perhaps he intended to highlight the controls people place on themselves to avoid vices so as to improve their manners and behaviour. By emphasizing the beauty inherent within the ugly, al-Tha‘ālibī perhaps intended to urge the reader to think about the duality intrinsic in all things and that there are no absolutes. As for highlighting the ugly within the agreed upon virtuous, perhaps he intended to remind his reader not to indulge in the beauties, but to balance his thoughts to reach the *yaqīn* (certainty).¹⁵¹ An example of beautifying the bad habit of *al-taḥfīl* (party-crashing or self-invited guests), which was often the topic of amusing anecdotes and verses is:

The *ḥufaylī* has a sanctity ~ more than the sanctity of my regret

Because he came when I did not invite him ~ he started with kindness

Welcome to him, whom I forget not out of *qalyī*¹⁵² ~ and he obliges and does not forget me

¹⁴⁷ Tha‘ālibī, a.-M. 1835. *al-Mukhtār min kitāb laṭā’if al-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābi‘īn*. (T. Roorda, Ed.) Lugduni Batavorum (Leiden): Academiae Typographos, 2.

¹⁴⁸ al-Tha‘ālibī, a.-M. 1897. *al-Ijāz wa-l-ijāz*. Damascus: al-Matḥa‘a al-‘Umūmiyah, 40.

¹⁴⁹ Tha‘ālibī, a.-M. 1981. *Tahsīn al-qabīḥ wa-taqbīḥ al-ḥasan*. Baghdad: Wizārat al-awqāf wa-sl-sshu‘ūn ad-dīniya, 31-75.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 77-122.

¹⁵¹ In Islamic belief *yaqīn* refers to the ultimate truth, meaning belief in Allah without any doubts.

¹⁵² Pun or word play as the word has two meanings, one of fried food and the other is hatred

My table is set for the people ~ let them attend from near and far.¹⁵³

Al-Tha'ālibī also collected anecdotes in *Laṭā'if al-zurafā' min ṭabaqāt al-fuḍalā'* (also called *Laṭā'if al-luṭf*) which is a collection of entertaining *nawādir* collected purely for their entertainment value. The book is divided into sixteen chapters based on different professions such as kings, princes, viziers, authors, jurists, judges, scholars, philosophers, physicians, slave girls, singers, poets and the *zurafā'*.¹⁵⁴ One anecdote about jurists is as follows: Abū Muḥammad al-Sarkhasī who was among the *zurafā'* of Baghdād's jurists was on a ship one day, travelling in the company of some rich Christians. As one of them set a table to eat, he asked al-Sarkhasī to help him and when they finished eating the Christian brought out drinks called 'the rooster's eye'¹⁵⁵ and the 'musk's mouse'.¹⁵⁶ Al-Sarkhasī wanted to find an excuse to drink, so he asked: "what is this?" His Christian host replied: "this is wine which one of my servants bought from a Jew." Al-Sarkhasī said: "we, the *ahl al-Hadīth*,¹⁵⁷ call Sufyān b. 'Uyayna¹⁵⁸ and Yazīd b. Hārūn¹⁵⁹ liars so now we are asked to believe a Christian on the authority of his servant on the authority of a Jew? By Allah, I will drink that only due to the weakness of its *isnād* (chain of narration)." He then extended his hand to the wine glass, filled it with wine and drank it.¹⁶⁰

b) Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) also offers an explanation and definition of causes of laughter by devoting a short chapter to laughter in his *al-Muqābasāt*,¹⁶¹ which is a collection of over one hundred conversations on different philosophical subjects. He classifies laughter as the result of contradictory emotions produced after a person searches for an explanation and ends up being amazed at his findings.

¹⁵³ Tha'ālibī. *Tahsīn al-qabīh*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ In mediaeval Islamic literature *zurafā'* meant men of the world, or refined people, i.e. person endowed with elegance, refinement, also sometimes translatable as humourists.

¹⁵⁵ To denote its clarity

¹⁵⁶ To denote that it smells nice

¹⁵⁷ The folks, or the partisans of traditions.

¹⁵⁸ Sufyān b. 'Uyayna b. Maymūn al-Hilālī, a scholar and famous *muḥaddith* (traditionist) (107-196/725-811)

¹⁵⁹ Abū Khālīd who is Yazīd b. Hārūn Rādhān b. Thābit al-Wāsiṭī, a famous trustworthy *muḥaddith* (traditionist) (d. 206/821)

¹⁶⁰ al-Tha'ālibī, A. M. 1999. *Laṭā'if al-zurafā' min ṭabaqāt al-fuḍalā'*. Beirut: al-Dār al-'Arabiyah lil-Mawsū'āt., 11.

¹⁶¹ al-Tawḥīdī, A. Ḥ. 1929. *al-Muqābasāt*. Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyah al-Kubrā.

In his ten volume work *al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-dhakhā'ir* he advises the reader not to refrain from hearing *hazl* (joking), even if it borders on the absurd, because avoiding that would lead to reduced understanding and insensitivity of character - as laughter is a reaction combining intellect and instinct. According to him, laughter is a state of amazement.¹⁶²

Another book, *al-Imtā' wa-l-mu'ānasa* (Book of Enjoyment and Good Company, also translated as Book of Delightful and Intimate Conversations),¹⁶³ written upon the request by of Abu 'l-Wafā', the mathematician, describes meetings at the court, where various topics were discussed such as philology, philosophy, literature, as well as court- and literary gossip and includes a number of humorous anecdotes to amuse and entertain, compiled as a record of thirty-seven of these nightly sessions. They include anecdotes, witticisms, intellectual encounters collected as *samar* (nightly entertainment) for Ibn Sa'dān the vizier. One of the anecdotes mentioned in this work is about one of the Prophet's Companions, Ṣuhayb, who visited the Prophet in Qaba',¹⁶⁴ who was in the company of Abū Bakr and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. They were all eating ripe dates, gifted to them by Kulthūm b. al-Hadm. On his way there Ṣuhayb became afflicted with the eye disease Conjunctivitis.¹⁶⁵ As he was very hungry he started devouring the dates. 'Umar told the Prophet: "Look at Ṣuhayb eating *al-raṭīb* while he is [has] *ramad*." The Prophet asked Ṣuhayb: "Are you eating *al-raṭīb* while you are [have] *ramad*?"¹⁶⁶ Ṣuhayb replied: "I am eating it using my healthy eye," upon which the Prophet smiled.¹⁶⁷

B. *Nawādir* (witty anecdotes)

The abovementioned biographer, al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), in addition to his biographical dictionary *Kitāb al-wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, wrote works on various entertaining subjects such as riddles, the numeral seven (70, 700, etc.), titled *Ṭard al-sab' 'an sard al-sab'*, as well as a biographical dictionary

¹⁶² Ibid, 11.

¹⁶³ al-Tawḥīdī, A. Ḥ. 1939. *al-Imtā' wa-al-mu'ānasah* (ed. Ahmad Amin & Ahmad al-Zayn). Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr.

¹⁶⁴ A village in the now al-Madīna Province.

¹⁶⁵ Also called pink eye or madras eye.

¹⁶⁶ This is a pun, as *raṭīb* also means damp or wet, while *ramad* also means burnt to ashes.

¹⁶⁷ al-Tawḥīdī. *al-Imtā' wa-al-mu'ānasah*, 137.

dedicated to the blind and the one-eyed titled *Nakt al-himyān fī nukat al-‘umyān* and the later and shorter *al-Shu‘ūr bi-l-‘ūr* that both include numerous *nawādir* and anecdotes.

According to Pellat, “*nawādir* (singular *nādira*) literally mean a rare thing, a rarity and denote “a pleasing anecdote containing wit, humour, jocularity and lively repartee,¹⁶⁸ of the type which has never ceased to be an integral feature of all social gatherings, whether intimate or official.”¹⁶⁹ He further opines that the appreciation and collection of this oral, as well as literary, genre apparently started in the first/seventh century, especially in Medina and seems to have developed more under the ‘Abbāsids, especially in Baṣra. Pellat further states that caliphs, aristocrats and wealthy merchants employed professional entertainers to distract them from current affairs and rewarded them generously. Some entertainers became famous and wealthy from narrating anecdotes at court or in wealthy homes, such as al-Aṣma‘ī, to whom the following admission is attributed: “through knowledge, I have received gifts, and through pleasantries (*mulaḥ*) I have attained riches.”¹⁷⁰

One of the anecdotes about al-Aṣma‘ī, mentioned in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar* on the authority of al-Jāhiz, who heard it from someone who had heard Anas b. Abī al-Shaykh says: One day Ja‘far b. Yaḥyā ordered his servant to take one thousand Dinars and accompany him on his ride, where he would visit al-Aṣma‘ī. He instructed him further that he should give that amount to al-Aṣma‘ī if the latter succeeded in making him laugh. During that visit al-Aṣma‘ī tried his best and recounted every joke, anecdote or funny story he knew, but Ja‘far never laughed. As they left Anas asked: I am surprised, as you had instructed me to carry the thousand Dirhams along and it is not your habit to return any amount to the treasury once taken out? Ja‘far replies: “Woe is you! By now al-Aṣma‘ī received a total of one hundred thousand Dirhams from us so far. I have seen in his house broken containers, covered with a torn and ragged garment. He was sitting on a filthy chair and everything around him was shabby and worn out. I believe that the tongue of wealth and grace is more eloquent

¹⁶⁸ *Nukta*, pl. *nukat*; *mulḥa*, pl. *mulaḥ*; *fukāha*, etc.

¹⁶⁹ Pellat, Ch. “*Nādira*.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2012. Brill Online. American University in Cairo. 05 January 2012
<http://www.brillonline.nl.library.aucegypt.edu:2048/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-5715>

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

than his. I also believe that displaying the effects of an honorarium or charity are more insulting than his *hijā'* or more glorifying than his *madh/madīh*. On what grounds should I give him generously if the effects do not show and wealth does not speak in gratitude on his behalf?"¹⁷¹

The *nawādir* genre was later subsumed into the *adab* genre and the same *nawādir*, anecdotes and amusing stories were reused in different parts of the Muslim world, even with different protagonists, as can be seen when comparing the *nawādir* of the popular figures Juḥā and Naṣr al-Dīn also known as Naṣr al-Dīn Khoja or Mulla Naṣr al-Dīn. Marzolph devoted a comparative study to this theme.¹⁷² Pellat points out that the popular *nawādir* were translated into Turkish, where they were adapted to the culture there, enlarged, and then in turn translated back into Arabic. He also states that Juḥā's *nawādir* could have also been translated from Persian, as they had a similar protagonist with comparable anecdotes.¹⁷³ But these were not the only figures to feature in *nawādir*. Others include Ash'ab (who is said to have survived until 154 /771), Muzabbid al-Madanī, Abū 'I-Ḥārith Jummayn and al-Jammāz, a satirical poet and humourist who lived in Baṣra in the second-third/eighth-ninth centuries, to name but a few.

a) Franz Rosenthal

Rosenthal published an annotated translation of an Arabic text about Ash'ab, a Medinese singer or comedian, who lived in the second/eighth century.¹⁷⁴ Ash'ab is the protagonist of many anecdotes, highlighting his greed and simple-mindedness jokingly and presenting many anecdotes he told, mainly sourced from *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.¹⁷⁵ One of the most famous of these would be the amusing caricature of the shortcomings of *ḥadīth* transmitters where *Ash'ab* imitates them and their ways, citing an *isnād* featuring 'Ikrima (a well-known transmitter) saying that he heard that the Prophet mentioned two qualities characterising the true believer. When he was asked to enumerate them, *Ash'ab* answered that 'Ikrima had forgotten one, and he the other.

¹⁷¹ al-Mas'ūdī, A. Ḥ. 2005. *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir. vol. 3, p. 157

¹⁷² Marzolph, *Zur Überlieferung der Nasreddin Hoca-Schwänke außerhalb des türkischen Sprachraumes*, in *Türkische Sprachen und Literaturen*, edd. I. Baldauf-K. Kreiser-S. Tezcan, Wiesbaden 1991, 275-85

¹⁷³ Pellat, Ch.. "Djuḥā."

¹⁷⁴ Rosenthal, F. 1956. *Humor in Early Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁷⁵ al-Iṣbahānī, A. F. 2010. *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma lil Kitāb.

Preceding Rosenthal's translation are chapters on the textual sources and a study of both, the real historical as well as the legendary Ash'ab. Rosenthal starts with a chapter defining humour as well as the texts, literary sources and materials used, stating that there is a rich heritage of anecdotal material in vast collections.¹⁷⁶ At the end of the book is an appendix with a short essay giving an overview of the historical sources on laughter as a phenomenon. He concludes that most deal with the origins of laughter and its physiological if not psychological causes other than attributing excessive laughter to insanity. However, in later centuries psychological causes were mentioned, including amazement, rational power and happiness. Though Rosenthal states: "Prophet Muḥammad himself possessed much cheerful humanity and his followers through centuries have always preserved a good-natured love of jokes and pranks,"¹⁷⁷ he does not pursue this any further in the book.

In the first chapter, Rosenthal also mentions later restrictions on laughter by some jurists and how authors, such as Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) still produced collections of jokes arguing that the stories of fools will move intelligent people to thank God they were not made that way, that people will learn to be aware of foolishness and that humour is a necessary natural release and relaxation.¹⁷⁸ Despite his effort in collecting and translating the material in his book, Rosenthal doubts whether or not the jokes will make modern readers laugh or appreciate the nuances of humour in them.¹⁷⁹ Strangely enough in his review of Rosenthal's *Humor in Early Islam*, Gibb notes that Rosenthal's "purpose in this work is not to study Islamic humour (if such a term may be admitted, but its roots in the first two or three centuries."¹⁸⁰

Unfortunately the book reads more like a list of disjointed anecdotes without living up to the title. Apart from a thorough record of the historical personality of Ash'ab and a comprehensive tracing of the legend around him, Rosenthal does not engage with the various anecdotes, which he painstakingly collected, recorded and included.

¹⁷⁶ Rosenthal. *Humor in Early Islam*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁸⁰ Gibb, H. A. 1957. Review of *Humor in Early Islam* by Franz Rosenthal. *Speculum*, 32 (3), pp. 610-611.

b) Paolo Branca

A recent book in Italian titled *Il sorriso della mezzaluna. Umorismo, ironia e satira nella cultura araba* (The smile of the crescent - Humor, irony and satire in Arab cultures)¹⁸¹ attempts to fight the stereotype of the grim faced Arab, brandishing a scimitar as part of European collective imagination. It also aims at combating the cliché, where the East becomes synonymous with beaches, and exotic vacations, alongside the public opinion that an entire civilization is incapable of lightness and irony by bringing to light a trait common to all mankind, namely irony as a form of resistance and survival as evident in anecdotes culled from Arab literature past and modern.

C. *Nawādir* about specific groups of people

Some authors created anecdote collections focusing on special groups of people, such as Bedouins or *al-Bukhalā'* (misers) (al-Jāhiz's and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī); women (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Akhhbār al-Nisā'*); fools or simple minded people (Ibn al-Jawzī's *Akhhbār al-ḥamqā wa 'l-mughaffalīn*) and clumsy blunderers (Ibn al-Ṣābi's *Ghars al-Ni'ma*) to name a few. Two other collections by al-Jāhiz which border on indecency are *Kitāb mufākharat al-jawārī wa 'l-ghilmān* (The Treatise on the Vaunting Contest of Slave-girls and Slave-boys) and *Kitāb al-qiyān* (The Treatise on slave-girl singers). However, despite the dubious moral practice, this had seemingly become an obsession among Iraqi nobility at that time, hence, al-Jāhiz uses satire to analyse the relationship between *'aql* (reasoning intellect) and *'ishq* (carnal lust), since obsession with and devotion to the company of singing-girls indicates the victory of lust over intellect. Both books seem to promote or defend this social custom, however, they are written ironically and in jest. In his translation of the *Kitāb al-qiyān* Beeston concludes that "the Epistle is in fact an exercise in veiled satire: it really condemns what it seems to advocate."¹⁸² In addition, al-Jāhiz also wrote treatises on physical deformities like *Kitāb al-burṣān wa-l-'urjān wa-l-'umyān wa-l-ḥulān* (The Treatise on the Leprous, the Halting, the Blind and the Squinty) and one on black and white people *Kitāb fakhr al-sawdān*

¹⁸¹ Paolo Branca, Barbara De Poli & Patrizia Zanelli. *Il sorriso della mezzaluna. Umorismo, ironia e satira nella cultura araba*. Rome: Carocci, 2011.

¹⁸² Beeston, A. F. 1980. *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jāhiz*. Warminster, Wilts, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 3.

‘alā al-bīdān (Treatise on the Vaunting of Blacks over Whites also translated as The Glory of the Black Race).

Ibn al-Marzubān (d. 309/921), an Iraqi philologist, authored a book of *mulaḥ* (anecdotes) titled *Kitāb tafḍīl al-kilāb ‘alā kathīr min-man labisa-l-thiyāb*, (The Book of the Superiority of Dogs Over Many of Those Who Wear Clothes),¹⁸³ which contrasts the loyalty and faithfulness of dogs to the treachery and inconsistency of humans and includes a collection of stories and verses of poetry with many humorous touches. The translators, in the humorous spirit of the author, gave titles to the sections such as 'Man has gone to the dogs' or 'Man's best friends'. Ibn al-Marzubān also authored another collection of anecdotes criticising the dull *Dhamm al-thuqalā’*.¹⁸⁴

Ibn Abī ‘Awn (d. 322/933) authored a collection titled *Lubb al-ādāb fī radd jawāb dhawi ‘l-albāb* also called as *Kitāb al-ajwibā al-muskīta*. In a study of this book by May Yousef, in which she restored the full Arabic text, she notes that the work is mostly a compilation of material collected and recorded previously by other authors,¹⁸⁵ such as Abū ‘l-‘Anbas al-Ṣaymarī (d. 275/888), with some new material and that some of the anecdotes and jokes are surprisingly timeless, though some of the material includes frequent obscenities and is near-blasphemous in its use of Qur’an in its wordplay and repartee. Abū ‘l-‘Anbas al-Ṣaymarī, himself a famous joker of the ‘Abbāsīd court, seems to be if not the creator, at least a major representative of a literary type which was to culminate in the *maqāma* and then in a burlesque or obscene type of *adab* later.¹⁸⁶

Pellat writes that Abū ‘l-‘Anbas did not differ much from other humorous authors, who collected and compiled collections of stories and anecdotes, however, he is to be distinguished from them due to some works having burlesque titles, such as *Nawādir al-qawwāda* (Remarkable Stories about Pimps),

¹⁸³ Ibn al-Marzubān, M. 1978. *Faḍl al-kilāb ‘alā kathīr mimman labisa al-thiyāb - The book of the superiority of dogs over many of those who wear clothes*. (G. R. Haleem, Trans.) Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips ITD.

¹⁸⁴ Ibn al-Marzubān, M. 1999. *Dhamm al-thuqalā’*. Cologne: Manshūrāt al-Jamal.

¹⁸⁵ Yousef, M. A. 1988. *Das Buch der schlagfertigen Antworten von Ibn Abī ‘Awn*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag.

¹⁸⁶ Pellat, Ch.. " Abu ‘l-‘Anbas al-Ṣaymarī." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Brill Online , 2012. Reference. American University in Cairo. 5 November 2012 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abu-l-anbas-al-saymari-SIM_8236>

which Pellat believes is almost pornographic.¹⁸⁷ Other works of his were probably purely humorous, such as *Kitāb faḍl al-sullam 'alā-l-daraj* (Superiority of the Ladder over the Staircase).

D. *Adab*

Adab collections and their humorous content were studied extensively over the years. Despite Mubeen writing that: "the famous orientalist Margoliouth (1858-1940) and Arab writer Muḥammad Khalaf Ahmad are of the view that humour is not found in classic Arabic literature,"¹⁸⁸ Margoliouth was among the earliest authors writing about wit and humour in Arabic literature as early as 1927.¹⁸⁹

a) David Samuel Margoliouth

Margoliouth not only mentions the professional entertainers and court-jesters, but also public entertainers and storytellers. He starts by defining humour and wit, concluding that they are difficult to define, yet quoting Macaulay's definition as "the power of perceiving analogies between things which appear to have nothing in common."¹⁹⁰ Despite stating that there are no Arabic words for the idea, he shows examples of that very same concept from al-Jāhiz and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī whose wit demonstrates intelligence. He also points to *Kitāb al-aghānī* and mentions Abū 'l-'Aynā', who was renowned for his linguistic accomplishments, as well as his quickness at repartee. Ibn Abī Ṭāhir collected anecdotes of which he was the protagonist in a work titled *Akḥbār Abi 'l-'Aynā'*, of which many are collected in *Kitāb al-aghānī*. Margoliouth also reproduces an anecdote about al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf, the most famous, able, ruthless and bloodthirsty Umayyad governor and points out that satire was written to amuse.¹⁹¹ He gives examples of satires found in al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt*, as well as examples of what he terms as the nearest genre to comedy found in Arab literature such as *The table-talk of a Mesopotamian judge* which is the first part of the *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍarah*, or *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* of Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī and which he himself translated from the original Arabic.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Mubeen, H. 2008. Humour and Comedy in Arabic Literature (From the Birth of Islam to the Ottoman Period. *Al-Hikmat*, 28, pp. 13-30, 13

¹⁸⁹ Margoliouth, D. S. 1927. Wit and Humour in Arabic Literature. *Islamic Culture*, 1, 522-534.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 522.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 527.

Al-Tanūkhī, a littérateur, judge and secretary in Mesopotamia and Western Persia, authored three or four transmitted works, all of which are compilations of anecdotes, namely *al-Faraj ba'd al-shidda*, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa-akhbār al-mudhākara*, *al-Mustajād min fa'alāt al-ajwād*, and probably also *Unwān al-ḥikma*. In addition Margoliouth also gives the example of 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Jawbarī, a, dervish and alchemist who travelled extensively and wrote *al-Mukhtār fī kashf al-asrār* (Select Book for the Revelation of Mysteries), which contains explanations of sleight-of-hand tricks and prestidigitation. Margoliouth refers to misers and gives some examples of anecdotes from Ibn Qutayba's *Uyūn al-akhbār* and goes on to mention the genre of parody, and ends by giving an example about a Bedouin woman who only spoke in Qur'anic verses for forty years from one of the books on *adab*, the *Rawḍat al-'uqalā' wa-nuzhat al-fuḍalā'*, by the *muḥaddith* (traditionist) Ibn Ḥibbān.

b) Charles Pellat

Following Rosenthal's monograph *Humour in Early Islam*, in 1963 Pellat wrote about *Seriousness and Humor in Early Islam*.¹⁹² Pellat notes that seriousness and humour played a very important role in Islamic civilization, yet this role was not noticed, even by Muslim thinkers.¹⁹³ He then moves to study whether Islam allows or forbids joking and recommends or promotes seriousness. He juxtaposes the terms Islam to Jāhiliyya, *ḥilm* (self-control or serenity) to *jahl* (ignorance), *jidd* (earnestness) to *hazl* (jesting), analysing various synonyms of *hazl*, such as *muzāh* and forms of it, sarcasm and mockery and presents supporting verses from the Qur'an.¹⁹⁴ He believes that these verses led Muslims to believe that they need to apply *ḥilm* in their lives, including seriousness, self-control and to avoid laughter and frivolity. He mentions the *bakkā'ūn* (weepers), who were pious *ṣūfiyya* or *mutaṣawwifa* (ascetics) who cried and wept during their devotional rituals. Pellat notes that many early works emphasize Islam's dignity and quoted *aḥādīth* (prophetic traditions), both genuine and fabricated, to promote seriousness and discourage frivolity, idle talk and light banter, citing the examples of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (pious predecessors), who were quoted as objecting to and disapproving of this.¹⁹⁵ He quotes

¹⁹² Pellat, C. 1963. Seriousness and Humor in Early Islam. *Islamic Studies*, 2 (3), pp.353-362.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 353.

¹⁹⁴ See for example [49:11], [52:44], [11:83-84], [23:112], [43:46-47], [53:60], and [83:29].

¹⁹⁵ Pellat. 1963. Seriousness and Humor, 355.

from al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) that joking is *ḥarām* (forbidden) and only permitted if it is not in excess and remains moderate. Pellat mentions in this context that: "the Prophet himself is said to have laughed and joked on several occasions."¹⁹⁶ He reports that a number of Medinese *fuqahā'* (jurists) set examples of not taking this too seriously and mentions the numerous poems which were entertaining, erotic, sometimes obscene, and full of ridicule and mockery, which sometimes extended into prose and anecdotes told by the early humourists, entertainers, singers and musicians in Medina of which there exists a long list. He mentions among them *Abū 'l-'Anbas al-Ṣaymarī* (mentioned above), Ibn Abī 'Atīq, the great-grandson of Caliph Abū Bakr, Ash'ab (subject of Rosenthal's monograph mentioned above), Muzabbid al-Madanī, Abū-l-Ḥārith Jummayn, al-Jammāz and Abū-l-'Aynā', who is said to have authored more than forty works ranging from burlesque to lewd anecdotes as well as works on morals. Pellat observes that this would make Abū-l-'Aynā' the symbol for "balanced admixture of seriousness and joking."¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Pellat remarks that Ibn al-Nadīm's well-known *Fihrist* lists numerous anecdote collections and droll stories of both real and imaginary persons, which were very popular, though many are no longer extant and attributes their disappearance to a puritanical reaction, leading the copyists and scribes to cease copying them as they no longer were profitable. Finally, Pellat mentions both Juḥā as an eternal hero of many folkloric tales, as well as Mulla Naṣr al-Dīn who surpassed him in fame. Naturally al-Jāḥiẓ cannot be forgotten when talking about humour and Pellat acknowledges his superb powers of observation of human nature and his superior portrayal and ridicule of irritating habits in his work. Furthermore Pellat notes that al-Jāḥiẓ also collected funny and queer stories and anecdotes and incorporated them into his works to liven up a dull text and allow the reader to refresh his mind. Pellat highlights al-Jāḥiẓ's repeated persistence on justifying laughter and joking, and attributes this persistence in being the catalyst for him to study that. Al-Jāḥiẓ and his works take up the remainder of the essay and Pellat concludes that between the two extremes of forbidding laughter and indulging in it excessively, moderate laughter and joking seems to be the agreed upon balance and equilibrium.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 356.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 358.

E. Arab, Persian and Turkish humorous *adab*

A collection of articles dealing with the humorous from Arab, Persian and Turkish literature has recently been published.¹⁹⁸ The eight articles are introduced by the editor, who includes them all under the umbrella of humour in Islamic contexts, focusing on texts which include jocular elements be they anecdotes, nonsensical texts, parodies, satire or poetry, with a heavy slant towards the Persian setting. Of particular interest in this collection is Persian humour, since so little academic studies have been devoted to it. This book includes contributions by authors specialising in humour amongst other interest and were mentioned before like Ulrich Marzolph, who contributes an article titled *Persian humour in the International context* in which he compares Persian folk narrative and jokes found in other Asian and European cultures. Another article by the editor Dominic Brookshaw, titled *Have you heard the one about the man from Qazvin?* deals with two collections of *laṭā'if*¹⁹⁹ making fun of Qazvinis. The third article in the Persian tradition is titled *Bawdy Anecdotes in Religious Settings: Examples from Medieval Persian Literature* by Olga Davidson in which she looks at vulgar and rude anecdotes set in a religious context, which according to her serve to reinforce the values of Islamic society. The anecdotes, culled from *Laṭā'if al-ṭavā'if* include anecdotes about kings, 'ulamā', religious scholars, viziers, concubines and soldiers making fun of the ways they exercise their powers. *Playful Figures of Script in Persian and Chinese* is the title of a contribution by Paul Sprachmann, who looks at obscene puns which are also written in beautiful calligraphy to convey both the obscenity and the picturesque. The final three contributions also deal with Persian humour manifesting in puppet theatre plays, Iranian modern satirical newspapers and Iranian satirical theatre. Though not particularly Shi'ite nor culled from Shi'ite *Hadīth* or other religious texts, which would have been beneficial to this study, it still is evidence of the appreciation of humour and an indication that despite the stereotype of almost constant mourning, Shi'ites also have a distinct sense of humour.

¹⁹⁸ Brookshaw, Dominic Parivz, ed. 2012. *Ruse and Wit, The Humorous in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish Narrative*. Boston: Ilex Foundation.

¹⁹⁹ Singl. *laṭā'if* meaning humorous anecdotes and equivalent to the Arabic *nawādir*.

F. Misers and *ṭufayfī* anecdotes

Of the various genres of medieval Arabic literature, *adab* is probably the one most attractive to modern readers today, which might explain the numerous scholarly articles and studies dealing with various aspects of it, including its sub-genre of *nawādir*.

a) Fedwa Malti-Douglas

In 1979, Fedwa Malti-Douglas published an essay about a manuscript dealing with a favourite group of people for anecdotes, the misers, titled *Wuqū‘ al-balā’ bi-l-bukhl wa-l-bukhalā’* by Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 909/1503).²⁰⁰ In this essay she presents the origin and history of his name followed by a short biography. The author, also known as Ibn al-Mibrad, according to her, could trace his lineage back to Sālīm b. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and came from a family of scholars. His grandfather was a *muḥaddith*, his father a judge, his brother a jurist, *muḥaddith* and *adīb* (litterateur), while he himself was a Ḥanbalī jurist, scholar, author and an advocate of a revival of *ḥadīth* studies. Malti-Douglas lists his illustrious and famous teachers, among whom were three female *muḥaddithāt*. She mentions his studies of the Qur’an, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and grammar, as well as his numerous *ijāzas*.²⁰¹ She adds his interest in mysticism, *tafsīr* (exegesis), rhetoric and medical problems. Ibn al-Mibrad is said to have produced over four hundred works of which over fifty are in manuscript form in the Zāhiriyya Library in Damascus, including a *fihrist* (bibliography) of his own library (over six hundred titles). The manuscript has eighty seven extremely short chapters and Malti-Douglas concludes that it is mainly a compilation from other sources with an original division and some original chapter titles which include *aḥādīth*, anecdotes and poetry using an *isnād*, sometimes to the original source. The three main sources of the material which Multi-Douglas identified are *Kitāb al-bukhalā’* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, the most important source, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd* (The Unique Necklace) by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih,²⁰² containing materials from other older works such as by al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Qutayba, and others who had compiled various and numerous anecdotes from Arab culture about all sorts of knowledge necessary for a cultured person and finally *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* by Muḥammad

²⁰⁰ Malti-Douglas, F. 1979. Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī and His Autograph of the Wuqū‘ al- Balā’ bil- Bukhl wa-l-Bukhalā’. *Bulletin d’Etudes Orientales*, 31, pp. 17-50.

²⁰¹ Authorization or licence to transmit a text or to teach.

²⁰² Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, Andalusian writer and poet, born in 246/860 and died in 328/940.

b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī.²⁰³ The essay concludes with a part about the organization and composition of the manuscript and how Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Hādī arranged the chosen material from sacred to profane separating *ḥadīth*, anecdote and verse.

Malti-Douglas stays with the Misers in her next work, published in 1980, where she looks at the humour and structure of two *Bukhalā'* anecdotes by al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī.²⁰⁴ She starts her analysis by saying that “up to the present time, humour, and particularly humour-generating techniques in Medieval Islamic literature have received little serious attention.”²⁰⁵ Though she cites the abovementioned studies by Margoliouth, Rosenthal and Pellat, she states that they are mainly restricted to “descriptive and historical discussions”²⁰⁶ with Margoliouth largely commenting on a collection of anecdotes that he lists, Rosenthal presenting a literary history and translation of the Ash'ab corpus supplemented with a survey of writings on humour by selected medieval Muslim theorists and Pellat providing a survey of Muslim attitudes to seriousness and jest which is more or less an expansion of his article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* titled “*al-Jidd wa 'l-Hazl*” (seriousness and joking).²⁰⁷

Malti-Douglas asks about the elements of the anecdotal narrative which make us laugh and asks why we do so?²⁰⁸ Through a detailed investigation of two *bukhalā'* anecdotes, one from the well-known *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* by al-Jāḥiẓ, and the other from the less famous work with the same title by the renowned *muḥaddith*, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, she attempts to answer these questions. She starts by stating that “there exists no generally accepted universal and comprehensive theory of humour explaining all the techniques of humour and why they are funny.”²⁰⁹ However, she mentions that Henri Bergson has written that the greatest thinkers since Aristotle have addressed this problem and also

²⁰³ Famous *muḥaddith* (traditionist) and author of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* considered to be the most important book after the Qur'ān. Al-Bukhārī was born 194/810 in Bukhāra and died 256/870 in Khartank, near Samarqand.

²⁰⁴ Malti-Douglas, F. 1980. Humor and Structure in Two “Bukhalā'” Anecdotes: al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Arabica*, 27(3), pp. 300-323.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 300.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Pellat, Ch.. “al-Djidd wa 'l-Hazl.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2013. Reference. American University in Cairo. 19 February 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-djidd-wa-l-hazl-SIM_2071>

²⁰⁸ Malti-Douglas. Humor and Structure, 300.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 301.

states that there were numerous works that endeavoured to theorize humour, listing numerous authors and thinkers such as Keith-Spiegel, J. H. Goldstein, P. E. McGhee, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Koestler, Elder Olson, Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, some of whom were discussed in the previous chapter.²¹⁰

Malti-Douglas distinguishes between verbal wit, literary humour, comedy and the attempted integration of all of these along with particular conclusions about humour-generating techniques, or the nature of humour in general, into a comprehensive general theory and concludes that there is a “fundamental problem which confronts all these theories [that] either they explain too little or they explain too much.”²¹¹ She states that as humour is a complex issue, produced by the interaction of various different influences which cannot be condensed into a small set of characteristics, she will attempt to create a working model “which integrates observed humour-generating tendencies sufficiently well ... to explore the question of what makes an anecdote funny.”²¹² Furthermore she observes that there appears to be a national or cultural sense of humour,²¹³ where obviously, specific topics which might be humorous in one culture would not be considered amusing in another.²¹⁴

Malti-Douglas coins the phrase ‘*bukhalā*’ anecdote’ and defines it as a “self-contained narrative unit containing an action or event showing that a person, persons, or group or class of people possess the characteristic of *bukhl*”²¹⁵ to enable her to separate the anecdotal from the non-anecdotal material from the *bukhalā*’ anecdotes of al-Jāhiz comprising approximately two-hundred-and-fifty, and for al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī of approximately two-hundred-and-fifteen anecdotes. She then sets out to study the - what she calls - ‘humour-generating tendencies’, developing directly or indirectly from the narratives, distinguishing between certain aspects such as hospitality, where humour is derived from the stratagem of the *bakhīl* (miser) to escape from being discovered as one by not being hospitable enough. Some of the stratagems in al-Jāhiz’s anecdotes focus on solving that problem, while others build a certain

²¹⁰ Some of these will be mentioned in the introduction of my dissertation.

²¹¹ Malti-Douglas. *Humor and Structure*, 303

²¹² *Ibid*, 305.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 308.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 307.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 309.

suspense and yet others present the *bakhīl* as a victim of his own vice thereby generating *Schadenfreude* in the reader.²¹⁶ In her opinion al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's anecdotes show an almost morbid fascination with eating, which has a comic result for a variety of reasons.²¹⁷ She compares what she terms as the Jāhīzian anecdote to the Khaṭībīan one and points out the differences, concluding that the integration of the different 'humour-generating' techniques into two different organizationally and thematically sophisticated narratives demanding a high degree of rhetorical finesse, is what raises these anecdotal-units from jokes to literature.²¹⁸

In her next study, published in 1981, Fedwa Malti-Douglas remains close to the same topic and analyses *al-taṭfīl* in a work by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, titled *Al-taṭfīl wa-hikāyāt al-ṭufayliyyīn wa-akhbiruhum wa-nawādir kalāmihim wa-ash'āruhum*.²¹⁹ In this study of the organization and structure of this work she defines the *ṭufaylī* anecdote similar to her previous work "as a self-contained narrative unit which demonstrates that a person, persons, group, or class of people illustrate the characteristic of *taṭfīl*."²²⁰ *Ṭufaylī* is a *nisba* (nomenclature) deriving from *Ṭufayl*, a Kūfan man, who attended receptions, feasts or any *walīma* (banquet) without an invitation. She notes that: "interestingly enough, there is a distinction made, at least in the philological tradition, between one who comes in uninvited while people are eating, a *wārish*, and one who comes in uninvited while people are drinking, a *wāghil*."²²¹ However, she also notes that this difference is not used in the anecdotal material, where only the generic term *ṭufaylī* is used throughout and where it generally means that these *ṭufaylīs* harm people, as nobody knows who invited him/them or how he/they crashed the event.²²²

According to Malti-Douglas, the first two chapters of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's book contain anecdotes showing that sometimes the Prophet himself brought someone along who had not been invited, including

²¹⁶ Ibid, 311-312.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 320.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 323.

²¹⁹ Malti-Douglas, F. 1981. Structure and Organization in a Monographic Adab Work: Al-taṭfīl of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 40 (3 - Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Nabia Abbott), pp. 227-245.

²²⁰ Ibid, 228.

²²¹ Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. "Ṭufaylī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2013. Reference. American University in Cairo. 19 February 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/tufayli-SIM_7604>

²²² Malti-Douglas. Structure and Organization, 229.

‘Ā’ chapters of al-Khaṭīb *Sunna* seems to allow this type of behaviour.²²³ Though in principle, these are *aḥādīth*, according to the author “their narrative nature makes them also anecdotes, and, if another personage had been substituted for the Prophet, one would not hesitate to classify them as morally excused *ṭufaylī* anecdotes.”²²⁴ Following these two chapters is another list of *aḥādīth* calling a person who enters without an invitation a thief and defining the person eating food to which he was not invited as eating something that is unlawful. This arrangement is similar to another one of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s works, namely *Kitāb al-bukhalā’*, which also starts with a list of *aḥādīth* that either condemn *bukhl* directly, or place it among the vices. Malti-Douglas states that these *aḥādīth* function as a normative introduction and set the moral tone for the work and are followed by the anecdotal sections. Similar to her previous work on *bukhl*, where the misers used stratagems to avoid being exposed, the *ṭufaylīs* also use stratagems, mainly to gain entry to the feasts or banquets so they can eat and she classifies those as ‘Entry anecdotes.’²²⁵ Other anecdotes show a *ṭufaylī* replying with amusing lines of poetry after being asked to leave, as a result of which the host decides to let him stay and participate in the festivities, since he was so witty (*zarīf*).²²⁶

Malti-Douglas examines the anecdotes and finds that the most numerous category, namely forty-six anecdotes or 35.7 percent of the corpus, involves the problem of entry for the *ṭufaylī* (uninvited crasher),²²⁷ while twenty-five anecdotes or 19.4 percent of the corpus deal with what happens once the *ṭufaylī* has gained entry which she calls ‘Inside anecdotes.’²²⁸ The ‘Overstaying-Welcome category is small at two anecdotes, or 1.6 percent of the corpus,²²⁹ while the anecdotes where the *ṭufaylī* becomes a victim comprise ten or 7.8 percent of the corpus.²³⁰ Anecdotes showing the *ṭufaylī* engaging in *taḥḥil* are termed ‘Attachment anecdotes’ and constitute thirty-four or 26.4 percent of the corpus,²³¹ while the last

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid, 230.

²²⁵ Ibid, 234.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid, 232

²²⁸ Ibid, 235.

²²⁹ Ibid, 237

²³⁰ Ibid, 238.

²³¹ Ibid, 240.

type where the *ṭufaylī* defends the practice of *taṭfīl* or preaches it to others are termed as 'Preaching anecdotes' and amount to twelve anecdotes, or 9.3 percent of the corpus.²³² The percentages, however, add up to 100.2 percent. Be that as it may, most of the anecdotes show the *ṭufaylī* as witty and clever and therefore present him as a kind of hero. Malti-Douglas states that *ṭufaylīs* are "not unlike perhaps the heroes of the maqāmat: independent and resourceful men, who survive by their cleverness and not without deception,"²³³ which might lead the reader to admire them.

Malti-Douglas remains with the topic of *bukhl* and in 1985 publishes her fourth work in this series, titled *Structures of Avarice: The Bukhalā' in Medieval Arabic Literature*.²³⁴ In this work she examines two works on avarice: the *Kitāb al-bukhalā'* by al-Jāhīz and the lesser known *al-Bukhalā'* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī which were both discussed in her previous works.

The book omits al-Madā'inī's *Kitāb al-bukhl*,²³⁵ as it is not well known and the extant copies are incomplete and also Sahl b. Hārūn b. Rāhawayh's²³⁶ famous encomium on avarice, *Risāla fi-l-bukhl*, as its authenticity is sometimes questioned, and is said to form the beginning of al-Jāhīz's *Kitāb al-bukhalā'*, and is also thought to be incorporated into Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's work. Another book, namely *lthāf al-nubalā' bi-akhbār al-kuramā' wa-l-bukhalā'* by Yūsuf b. 'Abd al-Hādī, also known as Ibn al-Mibrad, and author of *Kitāb wuqū' al-balā' bi-l-bukhl wa-l-bukhalā'*, which was the subject matter of her earlier work²³⁷ discussed above, was also omitted. There are several other works by Ibn Qutayba and al-Ibshīhī for example which also include substantial amounts of anecdotes dealing with avarice, or with misers, reappearing in different works, with or without mentioning the original source.

This book builds on the author's previous work titled *Humor and Structure in Two "Bukhalā' Anecdotes: al-Jāhīz and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī* discussed above and focuses on narrative constructions,

²³² Ibid, 241.

²³³ Ibid, 244.

²³⁴ Malti-Douglas, F. 1985. *Structures of Avarice: The Bukhalā' in Medieval Arabic Literature*. Leiden: Brill.

²³⁵ 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Sayf al-Madā'inī, the date of his death in Baghdād varies between 215/830, 224/839, 225/840 and 228/843 while his *Kitāb al Bukhl* is mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*.

²³⁶ Sahl b. Hārūn b. Rāhawayh d. 215 AH/830 AD a renowned Persian author, translator and a poet who worked as the secretary of Hārūn al-Rashīd's vizier Yaḥyā b. Khālīd al-Barmakī (170-87/786-803) and later as *ṣāhib al-dawāwīn* of Harūn al-Rashīd. Under al-Ma'mūn he was the chief director of the *bayt al-ḥikma* (House of Wisdom)

²³⁷ Malti-Douglas. Yūsuf ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, 17-50.

provides a text-oriented literary analysis and comparison, an analysis of the anecdotes as well as a narratological study, focusing on structures and patterns in the two texts and the formal qualities of narration. The author reveals an internal structure of *bukhl*/literature and surprisingly shows that al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī does not copy or imitate al-Jāhīz, his famous predecessor but has his own style, using *isnād* in many passages, reflecting his training as a theologian and making the Prophet a major source for content, anecdotes and prophetic traditions on *bukhl* in general. Another difference in al-Baghdadī's work is the higher content of scatological humour. The author mentions that sexually obscene elements are featured prominently in both works and that "there is a pronounced tendency in both al-Jāhīz and al-Baghdadī to exploit or sharpen the inherently obscene or disgusting qualities of certain activities by combining these activities with references to food or eating."²³⁸ An important observation the author makes, is to emphasize the importance of interpreting the texts as well as placing them in their social and historical context, in addition to looking at the complete texts and not permitting parts of the text or aspects of the content to influence the reading and understanding of the whole.

The most interesting part of the book for this study is the sixth Chapter, where the author suggests a new theory of humour. After briefly engaging with the theories of Bergson, Freud, Arthur Koestler and Rosenthal's observations on Arab humour, she elaborates on her previous work,²³⁹ suggesting that humour is created by the interaction of essentially two different types of influences, namely 'mechanical' and 'psychological' which could be represented in a graph by horizontal and vertical axes which she illustrates.²⁴⁰ In her opinion, the 'mechanical' includes bisociation, condensation and surprise, while the 'psychological' influences include *Schadenfreude*, obscenity and absence of sympathy. The author opines that: "These two types are always present in any humorous situation, but they must be present in a 'critical mass' before real laughter is produced; otherwise, since the incident is only mildly amusing, a smile may be the only result."²⁴¹ The remaining parts of Chapter 6 analyse the

²³⁸ Ibid, 123.

²³⁹ Malti-Douglas. *Humor and Structure*, 300-323.

²⁴⁰ Malti-Douglas. *Structures of Avarice*, 115.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 116.

humour and 'humour-generating' techniques evident in the *bukhalā*' collections of al-Jāhiz and al-Baghdādī.

b) Emily Selove

Emily Selove devotes two books to the *ṭufaylīs* (party-crashers). In her first book, she translates selections from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463 /1071) book titled *al-Taṭfīl wa-ḥikāyāt al-ṭufaylīyīn wa-akbhārihim wa-nawādir kalāmihim wa-ash'ārihim* (Party-Crashing and stories of the party-crashers, their tales, anecdotes, speeches and poems).²⁴² She starts the book with al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's biography, pointing out that he was a *muḥaddith* (traditionist), and that he started his book listing *aḥādīth* about the Prophet's leniency to uninvited guests.²⁴³ Moreover, she shows how al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī subtly presents the party-crashers as Muḥammad's allies and how the Prophet helped uninvited people get into parties by asking the host outright to invite them. The party crashers engage in some light-hearted blasphemy, much drinking and many jokes that are instructive and entertaining, a theme that is recurrent in anecdotal collections.²⁴⁴ Selove omits a number of repeated anecdotes as well as some anecdotes in verse, though she translates many into rhymed verse and includes the chains of narration, provided by the original author. She explains that the *ṭufaylīs* were named after a real person from Kūfa, Ṭufayl of the Nabū Ghatafān, who crashed banquets uninvited.²⁴⁵ Though this book is completely different from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's usual religious and theological themes, it is in the *prodesse et delectare* (instruct and delight) tradition of the *nawādir* genre. Selove not only translates the book, but also illustrates it.

In the second book, titled *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qaṣīm: a literary banquet*, Selove also translates selections of the original text and compares them to other banquet, eloquent tricksters and *ṭufaylī* texts, providing context and also describing the *mujūn* genre through this book.²⁴⁶ The book was also

²⁴² al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Khaṭīb. 2012. *Selections from the Art of Party-crashing in Medieval Iraq*. Translated by Emily Selove. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, ix.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, x.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁴⁶ al-Azdī, Muḥammad Ibn-Aḥmad. 2016. *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qaṣīm: A Literary Banquet*. Translated by Emily Selove. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

translated and analysed by Adam Mez in 1902, which Selove engages in her analysis.²⁴⁷ The text describes a party in Isfahan lasting for a whole day and well into the night. The book is named after its protagonist Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Tamīmī al-Baghdādī, who dominates the conversation and provides a microcosm of his contemporary Baghdad with an overabundance of obscenities, describing his city. Despite the aggressive obscenity and blasphemy, the text is considered as a unique innovation in Arabic literature, though it includes a collection of quotations from other works, with an added and very unusual innovation, seemingly attempting to include everything and its opposite in one day's conversation, also offering glimpses of the world of satire and *mujūn*.²⁴⁸ Selove argues that the tensions between Persian and Arabic-speakers, and between Sunnis and Shi'ites, resulting from the Buyid dynasty,²⁴⁹ can also be felt in the book. ²⁵⁰ One of these tensions is the name of the protagonist. The *kunya* Abū-l-Qāsim is also Muḥammad's and the name Aḥmad for the Prophet originates in a Qur'anic prophecy attributed to Jesus in verse [61:6] and also shares the same root *ḥ-m-d* as Muḥammad, Maḥmūd, Ḥāmid and Ḥamīd. Incidentally, the twelfth Imam, Ḥujjat Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, who is also called al-Ghā'ib (The Hidden), al-Mahdī (The Guided) and al-Qā'im (The Riser) also shares the same *kunya* Abū-l-Qāsim. Selove argues that the protagonist seems to be a parody of the Prophet, suggesting the distance between the ideal of the Muslim *umma* (community) as embodied in Muḥammad's person, and Baghdadi discourse tending towards decadent worldliness. Selove adds that using names associated with Muḥammad to designate a man of Abū al-Qāsim's qualities "may at first strike readers as inappropriate, but closer examination shows that the Prophet and Abū al-Qāsim share more than a name; both are at once real human beings, and 'the cosmic individual in whom all [the Islamic Community's] faculties are realized.'"²⁵¹ One of the protagonist's sayings remind readers of verse [62:5], the Qur'an's comparison of people who preserved God's holy books without understanding them, to

²⁴⁷ al-Azdī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Abi l-Muṭahhar. 1902. *Ḥikāyat Abī-l-Qāsim al-Baghdādī*. Translated by Adam Mez. Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitaetsbuchhandlung.

²⁴⁸ al-Azdī. *Ḥikāyat Abī-l-Qāsim : A Literary Banquet*, 3.

²⁴⁹ The Buyid dynasty lasted from mid-fourth/tenth until early fifth/eleventh century. They were Persian and Shi'ite and yet recognised the authority of the Sunni figurehead Abbasid caliphs.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 135.

donkeys carrying heavy tomes on their back: "What God gave me of intellect is lost on donkey, sheep, and cow. ~ They cannot hear me call, nor would they understand me anyhow."²⁵²

Selove mentions two points that are also reflected in the data, the first being that some Muslim mystics rejected worldly things, refused gainful employment and lived off hand-outs, which will be discussed in chapter 5,²⁵³ and the second that in some *aḥādīth*, Satan is described as an unwanted guest, sharing one's meal when the name of God is not invoked over the food which is also found in the data of this study.²⁵⁴

G. Qur'an

Having looked at humour in *adab*, it is important to note that humour was not only restricted to joke or anecdote collections in Arabic Islamic literature. The Qur'an, having been regarded as a literary and linguistic masterpiece and miracle,²⁵⁵ has also been subjected to thorough analysis. According to Mir, the Qur'an "contains figures of speech, satire, and irony; employs a variety of narrative and dramatic techniques; and presents characters that, in spite of the sparse personal detail provided about them, come across as vivid figures."²⁵⁶

There are two perspectives of research with regard to the relationship between humour and the Qur'an. The first perspective is to look at humorous content in the Qur'an itself, while the second perspective is to research the use of the Qur'an in form of Qur'anic quotations in *adab*, particularly in the *nawādir* or jocular literature.

²⁵² Ibid, 147.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 150.

²⁵⁵ See for example Vasalou, S. 2002. The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur'an: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 4 (2), 23-53, as well as Larkin, M. 1988. The Inimitability of the Qur'an: Two Perspectives. *Religion & Literature*, 20 (No. 1, The Literature of Islam), 31-47 and Rahman, Y. 1996. The Miraculous Nature Of Muslim Scripture: A Study of 'Abd al-Jabbār's "I'jāz al-Qur'ān". *Islamic Studies*, 35(4), 409-424

²⁵⁶ Mir, M. 1988. The Qur'an As Literature. *Religion & Literature*, 20 (1 - The Literature of Islam), 49-64, p. 52

a. Humour in the Qur'an

i) Mustansir Mir

Mir pioneered the concept of looking at the humorous content in the Qur'an itself, in a study titled *Humor in the Qur'an*, where he attempts to highlight the rare and therefore precious instances of humour.²⁵⁷ He introduces his study by explaining that scripture handles and also mirrors human situations and therefore must include an element of humour. He then identifies the instances of humour such as in [20:18], which Mir interprets as "not unlike a child who, having been asked by an engineer to identify the toy in his hand, launches into a serious disquisition on the various and possible uses of the toy."²⁵⁸ Another instance, according to Mir, which he names 'the young man and the diving fish' is found in [18:60-64] and Mir interprets it as an anxious effort from the young man to vindicate his own position, rather than explaining what really occurred, which results in an evidently and purposefully humorous situation.²⁵⁹ Mir identifies another eight instances,²⁶⁰ which he views as humorous. However, despite trying, it is very difficult and at times impossible to identify humour in these verses. Mir then proceeds to analyse the technique used. First he states that Qur'anic humour is either one of situation or that of the characters depicted in the verses, how they behave or what they say. He classifies the main tool used as irony, which he defines as "the perception of a clash between appearance and reality, between seems and is, or between ought and is."²⁶¹ He goes back to each example, identifying the irony and leaves it up to the reader to agree or disagree with him. He also defines four other devices besides irony, namely the use of anti-climax, circumlocution, caricature and rhythm, which he also identifies in the examples he cites. Mir describes the function of humour in each of his chosen instances and ascribes characterization as their purpose, meaning that they highlight certain characteristics in the person or protagonist of the verses at hand. Mir ends with a section on translating the Qur'an and demonstrates how humour can be lost between languages and translations.

²⁵⁷ Mir, M. 1991. Humor in the Qur'an. *The Muslim World*, 81 (3-4), 179-193.

²⁵⁸ Mir. *Humor in the Qur'an*, 183.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 184.

²⁶⁰ See verses [16:65-82], [7:43], [74:18-25], [33:20], [47:20], [19:3-9], [6:75-83] and finally [37:91-92].

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 187.

Even if it is challenging - using Mir's argumentation, analysis and definitions and extending it further - one could see some of the same type of humour, as pointed out by Mir, in the parts of Chapter Eighteen of the Qur'an detailing Mūsā's journey with al-Khiḍr [18:65-82] who asks Mūsā not to question him about anything until he explains it and Mūsā promises to be patient and obedient, yet repeatedly fails to do so. Mūsā constantly fails to be patient and keeps asking for explanations. Al-Khiḍr reminds him that he warned him at the onset of the journey that he will not be able to exert patience. Again using Mir's logic, analysis and arguments, Mūsā is depicted not unlike a child who, having been asked to be patient and failed, presents a list of excuses such as forgetting, feeling constrained, promising repeatedly to do better and observe patience and failing again resulting finally in a parting of ways.²⁶²

It is difficult at best to see the humour in some of the examples Mir cites in this essay. Ze'ev Maghen calls Mir's efforts to find humour in the Qur'an 'quixotic', because in his view "the Qur'an represents Muḥammad's (purportedly passive) communion with God, and as such ... naturally contains no humor."²⁶³ But then it is very difficult to judge humour as such, as there is no firm agreed upon definition and no scale to measure it. Matters are aggravated also by the fact that the original text needs to be translated and furthermore that the language is difficult in and of itself and contains numerous metaphors, allegories and imagery, which also adds to the difficulty of translation. Culture is another reason why some of the jokes fail to be funny when taken to another culture, which misses the culture specific nuances. However, Mir being the pioneer in this field deserves credit.

Mir continues in another article, where he looks closely at the irony in Yūsuf's Qur'anic story.²⁶⁴ Mir starts by looking at the 'theologisation' of the Qur'anic literary aspect and states that this had two major unfavourable effects, namely first that it resulted in making it difficult to appreciate the literary aspect without the underlying dogma and secondly it concealed the Qur'an's beauty. Mir chooses to focus on one literary component, namely irony, which according to him is found in abundance in this

²⁶² For more on this see Netton, I. R. (2000). Towards a Modern Tafsir of Sūrat al-Kahf: Structure and Semiotics. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 2 (1), 67-87.

²⁶³ Maghen, Z. 2007. 'The Merry Men of Medina: Comedy and Humanity in the early days of Islam'. *Der Islam*, 83 (2), 280.

²⁶⁴ Mir, M. 2000. Irony in the Qur'an: A Study of the Story of Joseph. In I. J. Boullata (Ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (pp. 173-187). Richmond, Surrey, U.K: Curzon Press.

particular Qur'anic chapter and divides his essay into five parts. Though irony is different from humour as such,²⁶⁵ it can be considered as a tool of humour as discussed in the first chapter. Mir's first part looks at the Qur'anic story as presented in that chapter and summarizes it, while the second part looks at *tafsīr* (commentary) which mention the irony. The third part analyses the story, while the fourth part compares the Qur'anic story to the biblical one in terms of irony. The final part presents the conclusion. It is to be noted that the only *tafsīr*²⁶⁶ mentioned is al-Qurṭubī's.²⁶⁷ Mir acknowledges it as an isolated example in *tafsīr* literature and that irony in that particular exegetical work stems more from what he terms as 'extra-Qur'anic' accompanying text, rather than from the Qur'an itself as these textual additions are not found in the Qur'an.²⁶⁸

He divides irony into two parts, irony of the event and that of speech and proceeds to analyse them and define their functions as being an emphasis, a moral and lesson. The lesson is that "God does not abandon those who resolutely place their trust in him [and that] He gives those who have committed wrongs an opportunity to correct their mistakes."²⁶⁹ In the comparison with the biblical story section, Mir states that the biblical story "is very rich in irony," more than the Qur'anic one.²⁷⁰ In the conclusion, Mir asks whether or not one can infer from the existence of irony in this chapter that there is more of it in other chapters and whether or not irony has a methodical significance. He also concludes that the irony found in the twelfth chapter of the Qur'an is of a rather subtle nature, which is the reason, according to him, that it was missed. Yet Mir also argues that understanding the theology of this chapter cannot be fully achieved without including these literary elements.

²⁶⁵ According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, irony is a language device, in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meanings of the words. Humour on the other hand, can be simply defined as a type of stimulation that tends to elicit the laughter reflex. See also the first chapter of this study.

²⁶⁶ *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an wa 'l-mubayyin li-mā taḍammāna min al-sunna wa-āyāt al-furqān*

²⁶⁷ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr b. Faraj al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī, Mālikī scholar, *muḥaddith* and Qur'an exegete (d. 671/1272).

²⁶⁸ Mir. Irony in the Qur'an, 175.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 177.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 182.

ii) **Georges Tamer**

Tamer continues Mir's work with a study of the Qur'an and humour.²⁷¹ In the introduction Tamer elaborates on why Religion, a serious subject indeed, and by extension religious texts, are commonly viewed as being devoid of humour or are considered humourless. Most scriptures, especially the monotheistic ones, speak of a relationship between God and humans, which must then include elements and components of human nature, of which humour is one. He then proceeds to cite examples of mockery and ridicule in the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels. Referencing Mir's works mentioned above, Tamer disagrees with some of the examples Mir cited and argues that they completely lack humour, though he strongly agrees with the premise that humour does exist in the Qur'an.²⁷² Tamer then proceeds to discuss, what he considers, humorous accounts in the Qur'an including *sukhriya* (mockery), ridicule, as well as the physical manifestations of humour, namely smiles and laughter, which God has created as per verse [53:43]. Tamer lists all the occurrences of laughter in the Qur'an whether it is laughter of superiority as in [83:29-36] or *Schadenfreude* as in [44:43-50] or mockery as in [34:7], [34:8], [45:8-10], [42:18], [6:32] and [62:11]. Tamer then moves on to list and analyse the humour expressed against God's prophets and messengers, which he terms as 'Satanic humour' as in [17:61] or [15:33]. From Satan, Tamer goes to Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and confirms the humour already discussed by Mir in his dealing with the idols, mocking them, ridiculing them and exposing them as powerless. In the next section Tamer looks at women and humour in the Qur'an, and analyses Sarah's laugh as in verse [11:71-72], which also occurs in the Bible and has been the subject of a number of previous studies.²⁷³ Another woman in the Qur'an brings another agreement with Mir's examples, as it deals with the episode of Yūsuf's attempted seduction by Potiphar's²⁷⁴ wife and the resulting trick she employs as per verse

²⁷¹ Tamer, G. 2009. The Qur'an and Humor. In G. Tamer (Ed.), *Humor in Der Arabischen Kultur / Humor in Arabic Culture* (pp. 3-28). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

²⁷² Ibid, 5.

²⁷³ See for example Propp, K. 1999. Sarah's Laugh: How Infertile Women Deal. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 7 (13), 39-42. And see also : Stetkevych, S. P. 1996. Sarah and the Hyena: Laughter, Menstruation, and the Genesis of a Double Entendre. *History of Religions*, 36 (1), 13-41 and Adelman, R. 2004. Wise Women on Laughter and Re-Membering. *A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, 8 (Multiculturalism and Migration in Israel), 230-244.

²⁷⁴ Or as he is known in the Arabic exegesis of Sūrat Yūsuf: Qiṭfir, Iṭfir, Qūṭifar, Qiṭṭin

[12:31]. From women Tamer shifts to insects citing the example of the ant that caused Solomon to smile at her comment in [27:17-19].

After these sections Tamer deals with theological humour, namely the episode of the so-called 'Satanic verses' [53:19] which "plays with conventions and manipulates their application in a way that creates shock and laughter"²⁷⁵ which is an aspect of humour. In these verses, the Qur'an marvels ironically at how its challengers and adversaries could attribute to God what they rejected for themselves, in this case here, daughters, which has been the subject of other verses as in [16:57-59]. Tamer then looks at God's mockery first in support of the Prophet, who was being mocked by the non-believers in Mecca as in [15:95-96] and then later in Medina, where Muḥammad and the first Muslims gained more power as in [2:14]. Subsequently Tamer looks at some parables which he believes show some humour. The first parable in [2:16] comes from trade, where the non-believers made a bad deal, which induces *Schadenfreude*. In the next parable as in [2:17-18], the "external light of fire and the internal darkness of blindness" are juxtaposed resulting in a humorous metaphor.²⁷⁶ The third parable, mentioned by Tamer, deals with those who pretend to believe yet do not and therefore resemble those described in verses [2:19-20]. According to Tamer, the scene includes a number of humorous elements, like for example closing their ears to avoid the thunder does not help in avoiding the deathly lightening, which is their only way to find their way in the darkness. All this leads to a paradoxical situation which, according to Tamer, is humorous.

Finally, Tamer reaches the last category in the first part of his essay, namely anti-Jewish humour. He shows the example of verse [62:5], where some Jews who fail to observe the teachings of the Torah are compared to a donkey carrying a load of books he cannot read, resulting in a humorous image, as nothing is more ignorant as a donkey carrying knowledge while not being able to identify the load's worth. Before the second part of his essay, Tamer adds that though the Qur'an mentions God's mockery of the hypocrites, it presses upon the believers to evade meetings where God or his signs are

²⁷⁵ Tamer. *The Qur'an and Humor*, 15.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

mocked, so as not to be tempted to do the same as in verse [4:140].²⁷⁷ The believers are also enjoined not to indulge in mocking other believers as in [49:11], which ensures mutual respect in the community. Tamer then sums up and concludes that humour present in the Qur'an is linked to power or superiority and can be related to sarcasm, which is the reason why the believers are instructed to avoid using it with each another.²⁷⁸

In the second part of his essay, Tamer looks at the Qur'an in jocular literature, similar to Marzolph's article mentioned below.²⁷⁹ Tamer points out that the Qur'an's extensive existence in the life of Muslims, in addition to the social, religious and moral restrictions associated with its respected and honoured status lead to the development of a particular type of religious jocular literature unique to the Islamic world. Tamer presents some examples of jokes which include Qur'anic quotations, such as the one Malti-Douglas discussed in her article mentioned above about the *tufaylī* reciting verses for additional sweets²⁸⁰ and the one discussed by Marzolph about the simpleton reciting a verse instead of feeding his donkey.²⁸¹ In addition Tamer also cites some jokes about careless handling of Qur'anic texts, by mixing up verses from different chapters together or replacing words within a verse to create an amusing situation. In addition he also reproduces some jokes where Qur'anic verses are applied improperly such as the one about the man who was advised to recite verse [55:33] to protect himself from dogs, but is also told to take a cane along because not all dogs are familiar with the Qur'an.²⁸² Tamer concludes saying that the examples presented show that the Qur'an was integrated into jokes as well as added to the construction of a humorous situation which would not have been funny without the Qur'anic quotations. Tamer adds that neither the central characters in the anecdotes nor their compilers felt any constraints using the Qur'an. Tamer points out that this type of jocular literature is particular to the Muslim world and can hence be called Islamic humour. He notes, however, that "these anecdotes do

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 21.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 23.

²⁷⁹ Marzolph, U. 2000. The Qoran and Jocular Literature. *Arabica*, 47(3, Les usages du Coran), 478-487.

²⁸⁰ Malti-Douglas, F. 1997. Playing with the Sacred: Religious Intertext in Adab Discourse. In A. A. Zahniser (Ed.), *Humanism, Culture and Language in the Near East* (pp. 51-59). Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, p. 52

²⁸¹ Marzolph. The Qoran and Jocular Literature, 479.

²⁸² Tamer. The Qur'an and Humor, 27.

not include anything against the Qur'an, its divine origin and the prophet who proclaimed it. Qur'anic verses could be used for humorous purposes, and for that reason they were altered or parodied. The Qur'an can shape humour, but it is not allowed to be made an object of humour."²⁸³ Tamer ends with listing the topics which are taboo for humourists, namely making fun of God, Muḥammad and all other prophets.

As with Mir's attempt to find humour in the Qur'an, Tamer's examples also feel slightly forced. Even if the image of a donkey carrying books appears to be funny on the surface, it is only a fleeting image and the same applies to the image of the polytheists fighting their way through the thunderstorm, which is more of a frightening image than a humorous one. However, the attempt to add to Mir's pioneering work also deserve acknowledgement.

b. Sarcasm in the Qur'an

Similar to Tamer's study mentioned above, this book –almost two decades earlier - looks at sarcasm in the Qur'an, using many of the same examples already cited by Tamer.²⁸⁴ While sarcasm is not humour, it is essentially a tool to convey it through a subtle cutting, often ironic remark, intended to wound, ridicule or to make its victim the 'butt' of contempt, using words to deliver a meaning that is opposite to its literal meaning. However, understanding the subtlety of sarcasm requires an interpretation of the intent of the speaker or writer and a good knowledge of language to be able to detect the witty play on words or images at times.

According to Brant, sarcasm is: "(a) form of expression of language often including the assertion of a statement that is disbelieved by the expresser, although the intended meaning is different from the sentence meaning... Sarcasm involves the expression of an insulting remark that requires the interpreter to understand the negative emotional connotation of the expresser within the context of the situation at hand."²⁸⁵ Sarcasm and satire are used in literature with the intent of exposing, denouncing, or

²⁸³ Ibid, 28.

²⁸⁴ Ḥifnī, ʿ. a.-Ḥ. 1992. *al-Taṣwīr al-sākhīr fī-l Qurʾān al-karīm*. Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-miṣriya al-ʿamma li-l kitāb.

²⁸⁵ Brant, W. 2012. *Critique of Sarcastic Reason: The Epistemology of the Cognitive Neurological Ability Called "Theory-of-Mind" and Deceptive Reasoning*. Saarbrücken: Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulschriften, pp. 145-146.

deriding a certain vice or folly; shaming individuals, at best into some form of change of the depicted behaviour towards an improvement.

‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥifnī devotes his book to the sarcastic images in the Qur’an. The book is divided into twelve chapters. In the Introduction, the author admits to not being surprised if readers object to the word ‘sarcasm’ in relation to the Qur’an, evoking the words of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) in his Qur’an commentary *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl* of [2:67] because it is not permitted to ridicule God or his words which is tantamount to ignorance. The author however disagrees with al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation as the Qur’an uses these words itself in [2:14-15] and in [9:79]. He notes a lack of study of this topic, except another book also authored by him about sarcastic style employed in the Qur’an, titled *Islūb al-sukhriya fī-l-Qur’an*. The author believes that using sarcasm in the Qur’an has many aims:

1. Inserting some humour into the narrative to avoid boredom as per the *ḥadīth* saying: “comfort the heart hour after hour, because the hearts are blinded by boredom.”
2. Using different styles to present the same meaning and content such as narrative, dialogue, metaphor, promise, reward or punishment, again to avoid boredom and repetition.
3. Sarcasm is a powerful weapon, mostly used in defence of the religion against disbelief.
4. Qur’an uses sarcasm without insults or obscenities.
5. Reduction of verbosity, as a picture conveys meaning without the use of numerous words as in for example [31:18].

The first chapter is titled *Sarcasm as a weapon* and the author proceeds to explain that it is mainly a weapon of psychological warfare, aimed at the person who is being ridiculed. In the case of the Qur’an, it is aimed at its enemies. He sees it as an important weapon, even if it is mainly implicit and not apparent, but remains a powerful defence, coming from a position of power, combining religion and daily life. Sarcasm is also used through imagery as in [68:16], where branding was used as a treatment for various diseases, yet the nose was also a symbol of arrogance, superiority and conceit, so carrying a sign on the nose was akin to a huge punishment.

Aims of Sarcasm is the title of the second chapter and it explains sarcasm as lowering the status of the enemy by demeaning and humiliating him/them. At the same time it raises the status of the

believers, as sarcasm comes from a position of power as in [47:35]. According to the author, power comes from the knowledge that Allah supports them, that they are right, following the right path as per [20:46]. Furthermore, sarcasm changes habits, as it has a great psychological and social influence on the people.

The third chapter *Scope of Sarcasm* states that sarcasm is an expression of dissatisfaction or displeasure phrased in a humorous way. In addition there are no linguistic rules to govern it or set the strength denoting displeasure or amount of humour, yet it is clearly identifiable.

Sarcasm of the enemies of God is the subject of the fourth chapter. It shows how the polytheists mocked the Prophet, Muslims and Islam; and the Prophet, being human, was affected as in [15:95-97]. The author interprets this as that Allah's power is needed to ward off the effects of scoffing on the Prophet and his community, as it was very powerful and that the Prophet tired of it. Yet the unbelievers mock Allah in many instances which the Qur'an records.²⁸⁶ Yet mocking the Prophet was not a novel practice as per [36:30] and [43:7]. Moreover, the Qur'an, according to the author, has warned the believers to avoid partaking in discussions mocking the Qur'an such as in [4:140], due to its powerful effects.

The Qur'an's sarcasm is shown in the fifth chapter. The Qur'an makes it clear, as demonstrated by the author in the previous chapter, that it is usually the unbelievers who start with the scoffing, mocking and the sarcastic comments due to their intolerance and their rejection of the new religion and their preference to continue with their ancestors' religion. Again the author lists various verses from the Qur'an to support his argument such as [5:104] or [7:28] and [11:87]. The author numerates various means used in the Qur'an to call for the new religion such as examples, wisdom and good advice or counsel as in [16:125]. Yet despite including some defensive verses it also uses powerful sarcasm, in retaliation to that used by the unbelievers.

The sixth chapter is titled '*Qur'an and creed's sarcasm*'. The creed mentioned in the title is that of *Tawhīd*,²⁸⁷ the unity of one God, which has been severely attacked by the unbelievers as in [38:5].

²⁸⁶ See for example [25:60] or [9:65] or [18:56] [30:10] and [53:59-60], amongst others.

²⁸⁷ Monotheism, the belief and affirmation that God is *wāḥid* (one)

The polytheists believed in numerous deities. According to the author, the Qur'an repeatedly encourages rational thinking and use of the intellect and hence, one of its weapons is ridiculing the disbelievers for not being sensible nor rational, as in [29:63] or [59:14] and [5:58].

Qur'an's sarcasm and hypocrisy is the subject of the seventh chapter. It shows how the hypocrites were the most dangerous enemies of the new religion. According to the author, they pretended to believe, yet did not and mocked Islam's rituals, rules and components. Sarcasm was employed to ridicule and shame them as in [33:19].

In the eighth chapter *Qur'an's sarcasm and polytheism*, the Qur'an is shown to employ sarcasm against the polytheists and their various deities, such as in [22:73]. It also shows their ideology or belief to be flimsy, as their deities are incapable of any creation, protection or independent action. The author uses the Qur'an to draw a picture of this fragility comparing it to a spider's web as in [29:41]. In spite of the religion being rational and logical as explained in the sixth chapter, they are portrayed as scared of it as in [74:49-51].

Qur'an's sarcasm and the elite is the title of the ninth chapter. It deals with the elite, leaders; upper class and aristocracy who were unaccepting of Islam. The author argues that their refusal stemmed from Islam being egalitarian and just, where differences between people were only to be measured by strength of belief and piety rather than social position, wealth, ethnicity, age or gender as per [49:13]. The Qur'an's sarcasm is directed at them to break their arrogance as in [68:13-16]. The author goes into great detail to explain the use of the word *kharṭūm* (literally hose or elephant's trunk) for nose. The choice of elephant for its size and physical power is also used to increase the sarcasm in the image, when such a great beast is branded on the most visible part of its body.

In the tenth chapter titled *Sarcasm of the enemies of the Prophet* deals with the personal enemies of the Prophet, especially those who bore him personal grudges from his own tribe or relatives. The Qur'an ridicules these people, such as for example Abū Jahl²⁸⁸ in [108:3] or Abū Lahab²⁸⁹ and his wife in [111:1-5].

²⁸⁸ Abu 'l-Ḥakam 'Amr b. Hishām b. al-Mughīra of the Banū Makhzūm of Quraysh, also named Ibn al-Ḥanzaliyya

²⁸⁹ Son of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and half-brother of Muḥammad's father.

Sarcastic negated Imagery is the title of the eleventh chapter that shows how the Qur'an uses some sarcastic imagery which is negated to emphasize the point being made, such as in [44:29] or [51:52-53], where the word *atwaṣalū bihi* indicates an agreement with all the people who came before, which did not happen in reality.

The final chapter is titled *Qur'an's sarcasm and the images of punishment*. The author argues that when the Qur'an mentions images of punishments to be meted out to the disbelievers it does not only provide descriptions of physical punishments, but also psychological ones. One such example is in [36:8], where a raised head is usually a sign of pride. Another image would be found in [44:49] ridiculing them by calling them mighty and honourable when they are retched and in hell.

In total the book quotes many verses and explains what the author considers as sarcasm or sarcastic pictures. Many of the quotes are repeated in the various chapters and explained from a different perspective to fit with the chapter's header. Unlike Mir and Tamer's attempts, the sarcasm in the Qur'an is easily recognisable, even if the images and metaphors are culturally related, but can also be understood in translation to other cultures. According to a recent article which summarised the findings of three separate experiments researching whether pride has a distinct, recognizable expression, it was confirmed that it does.²⁹⁰ Furthermore this study also showed that observers could reliably distinguish pride from other related expressions such as happiness. A raised head is one of the signs of pride, along with a small smile, a head slightly tilted back, an expanded posture, or arms raised above the head or hands on hips.²⁹¹ As sarcasm is one of the tools of humour, as shown in the first chapter of this work, Mir and Tamer's conclusion that there is humour in the Qur'an can be supported, even if not directly through the examples they cited, which were discussed above.

²⁹⁰ Robins, J. L. 2004. Show Your Pride - Evidence for a Discrete Emotion Expression. *Psychological Science*, 15(3), 194-197.

²⁹¹ For more corroborating evidence, see also Robins, J. L. (2007). The Prototypical Pride Expression: Development of a Nonverbal Behavior. *Emotions*, 7(4), 789-801.

c. Using the Qur'an in Adab

The main works to be surveyed in this section are various works by Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Ulrich Marzolph and Geert van Gelder, who have all devoted a number of book chapters or articles to the use of the Qur'an in jocular literature. Tamer's work discussed above cites some of these works.

i) Fedwa Malti-Douglas

Fedwa Malti-Douglas tries to understand *adab* discourse by analysing the permutations of religious material in *adab* works in an article titled *Playing with the Sacred: Religious Intertext in Adab Discourse*.²⁹² Her analysis starts with the premise that *adab* works form a "worldly counterpart to the otherworldly focus of the religious sciences."²⁹³ She notes that there is a significant use of quotations from the Qur'an and *Hadīth* and that in most of the cases where a quotation was inserted into the work, it was used to mean the same as in its original source. She uses a summarised version of an anecdote extracted from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *al-Taṭfīl wa-ḥikāyāt al-ṭufayliyyīn*, mentioned above, about such guest being asked by the host to give his opinion about certain sweets, to which he replies that he cannot judge anything that is absent. The host then calls for an almond pastry to be given to the guest, who then proceeds to recite a verse from the Qur'an featuring the number two to get a second sample. His tactic succeeds and he repeats it with all numbers up to twenty, upon which the host loses patience and gives him the whole bowl.²⁹⁴ Her analysis of this particular joke explains that the *ṭufayli* would go to

²⁹² Malti-Douglas, F. 1997. "Playing with the Sacred: Religious Intertext in Adab Discourse." In A. A. Zahniser (Ed.), *Humanism, Culture and Language in the Near East* (pp. 51-59). Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 52.

²⁹⁴ The full version is found on page 40 al-Baghdādī, A. B.-K. (1983). *Al-taṭfīl wa ḥikāyāt al-ṭufayliyyīn wa akhbarihim wa nawāirhim wa ash'arihim*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Quds and reads as follows: Al-Ḥasan b. al Sabbāḥ al-Nasāī said: I visited Ja'far b. Muḥammad who asked me how I liked sweets, so I replied to him that I would not judge something that was missing. He then offered me a sweet made with almonds, honey, sugar and rose water so I recited [Q [2.163] And your God is one God!] so he offered me another one after which I recited [Q [36.14] When We sent to them two, they rejected both of them.] whereupon he offered me a third. I then recited [Q [36.14] We strengthened (them) with a third.]. He then offered me another after which I recited [Q [2.260] He said: Then take four of the birds.]. I then recited [Q 58:7] and he offered me another one. I recited [Q [18.22] and (others) say: Five, the sixth of them being their dog] and got another one. I then recited [Q [67.3] Who created the seven heavens one above another;] and received another one after which I recited [Q [6.143] Eight in pairs]. After I got yet another one I recited [Q [27.48] And there were in the city nine persons who made mischief in the land and did not act aright.] and got another one. I then recited [Q [2.196] these (make) ten (days) complete;] and got another one after which I recited [Q [12.4] When Yusuf said to his father: O my father! surely I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon] and after receiving one more I went on to recite [Q [9.36] Surely the number of months with Allah is twelve months in Allah's ordinance since the day when He created the heavens and the earth,] and received one more. Then I recited [Q [8.65] O Prophet! urge the believers to war; if there are twenty patient ones of you they shall

any length to ensure receiving food, even if he has to abuse the Qur'an, as he was using the verses out of their context to merely achieve his own goals. Malti-Douglas however, sees another facet which she believes helps to explain the usage of the Qur'anic verses, namely what she terms as 'the orality' factor.²⁹⁵ Her explanation sees the quotation of these verses as something originating from the mouth to result in something else being inserted into it and she supports this opinion by arguing at length that there was an entire introduction prior to the Qur'anic recitation describing the pastry, its appearance, the sounds of pulling it apart and then eating it. However, the original anecdote does not seem to enumerate these descriptions.

Her next example from another work by the same author, namely *al-Bukhalā'*, features a Bedouin visiting a miser who quickly covers a plate of figs in front of him with his clothing. The Bedouin notices, and proceeds to ask the guest to recite what he knows from the Qur'an upon which the Bedouin recites "By the olive and Mount Sinai."²⁹⁶ The miser asks where the figs are and receives the answer that they are under his clothing.²⁹⁷ This time, however, the Bedouin is not invited to sample the figs. She then proceeds to analyse the anecdote and implies a sexual inference. Her other examples are also analysed in the same fashion with more theories being introduced about the motives such as insinuations to homosexuality, a veiled sexual discourse, reversing the power within a sexually charged situation, and reversing gender domination. She concludes that it is the authoritative and influential nature of these religious texts that is the fundament of their usage in power plays in these jokes, which must be studied further with regard to understanding *adab* and the means with which these quotations or fragments are "presented, exploited or manipulated."²⁹⁸ This reasoning with regard to the perceived interpretation of the usage of the quotations in the examples cited is questionable. The argument that there is an implicit

overcome two hundred, and if there are a hundred of you they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they are a people who do not understand.] so he handed over the whole plate to me and said: eat, you son of a glutton upon which I told him that if he hadn't given me the whole plate I would have next recited [Q [37.147] And We sent him to a hundred thousand, rather they exceeded.]

²⁹⁵ Malti-Douglas. *Playing with the Sacred*, 54.

²⁹⁶ The correct verses should read: [95.1] I swear by the fig and the olive, [95.2] And Mount Sinai.

²⁹⁷ Malti-Douglas. *Playing with the Sacred*, 55.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 59.

sexual motivation in the fig anecdote can be countered with another interpretation that it was simply an attempt at sharing the fruits which did not materialise, more so that all the anecdotes in this work deal with misers countering uninvited guests or greedy gluttons wanting to keep their own food without sharing it. The inflation and broadening of the motivation for humour here does not serve to clarify but rather to obfuscate, which also holds true for the other examples. These innuendoes and attributions of sexually charged motivations of homosexuality interpreted into the anecdotes also seem to be a rather modern construct. Homosexuality was quite evident and rather tolerated in society or accepted without raising eyebrows, while it was prohibited by Islam.²⁹⁹

Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) the famous polymath and theologian, writing a century and a half before al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, from whose work Malti-Douglas extracts most of the examples presented in the study, introduces his classic *Uyūn al-akhbār* by declaring that there is no harm in mentioning sexual organs or sexual acts to comfort the reader. He adds that “real harm is in cheating and lying.”³⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that Islam recognises sexual desires of both men and women, does not call for suppression of this desire, and that society in Umayyad and Abbasid times was rather open with regard to such issues as evidenced by the numerous literary works dealing with sexuality and homosexuality; such as the treatises by al-Jāhīz titled *Kitāb mufākharat al-jawārī wa 'l-ghilmān* and *Kitāb al-qiyān* mentioned above. Hence, there would be no need to use concealed innuendoes or implicit references.

Sexually explicit jokes were often found in anecdote collections. One such example as found in al-Tha'ālibī's *Laṭā'if al-zurafā' min ṭabaqāt al-fuḍalā'* says: “A man was offered a beautiful black slave girl on the market. As she appealed to him, he asked her name. She replied: “my name is Mecca.” The man shouted: “*Allāhu Akbar*” (God is great) and asked the girl if she would permit him to kiss the ‘black stone’. She told him that every pilgrimage starts with seven circumambulations and involves much effort.”³⁰¹ This is one example of many, which shows that rather obvious *double entendre* and sexually

²⁹⁹ See for example El-Rouayheb, K. 2006. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

³⁰⁰ Ibn Qutayba, A. M.-D. 1996. *Uyūn al-akhbār*. Cairo: Dar al-Kuttub al-Masriyya, 1.

³⁰¹ al-Tha'ālibī, A. M. 1999. *Laṭā'if al-zurafā' min ṭabaqāt al-fuḍalā'*. Beirut: al-Dār al-Arabiyya li-l-Mawsu'āt, 129.

suggestive phrases were used and that there was no need to read too much into a simple joke about trying to eat some gratuitous figs.

ii) **Ulrich Marzolph**

Marzolph also studies the use of the Qur'an in jocular literature in his article with the same title.³⁰² He wonders whether this type of jokes ridicules the Qur'an, lowers its status, or amounts to blasphemy and apostasy, invoking the satirical portrayal of the Prophet and his wives in Salman Rushdie's infamous novel *The Satanic Verses*. Marzolph's first example is a joke originating from Ibn al-Jawzī's³⁰³ (d. 597/1200) *Akhhbār al-ḥamqā wa 'l-mughaffalīn* (*Anecdotes about the Stupid and Scatterbrained*). Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasīb, who was an *aḥmaq* (stupid, simpleton) owned a donkey and instead of feeding him, he would recite a verse³⁰⁴ over the animal's nosebag. Eventually the animal died, upon which he wonders if the verse killed the donkey and concludes that it would surely be even more dangerous to humans and hence vowed never to recite it again. Marzolph emphasizes that this particular anecdote does not really mock the Qur'an, even though the punch-line seems to be "discrediting the Muslim scripture," but rather uses the stupidity of the protagonist to expose his ignorance of how to sustain and nourish an animal in an amusing setting.³⁰⁵ Marzolph continues his analysis of this particular anecdote highlighting the two conflicts areas in this anecdote which result in the final relief in laughter. The first conflict being the behaviour of the protagonist, which defies both intelligence and common sense and practice, while the second conflict is in the fact that this foolish protagonist seems to think that "oral recitations [of the Qur'an] possess a nutritional quality."³⁰⁶ Marzolph gives other examples and attributes the usage of Qur'an quotations to the fact that the Qur'an has a very pronounced, continual and obvious presence in the daily life of Muslim communities, as well as being the source of rulings touching on all aspects of daily life. He argues that the usage of the Qur'an within

³⁰² Marzolph. *The Quran and Jocular Literature*, 478-487.

³⁰³ famous Ḥanbalī jurist, traditionist, historian and very prolific writer.

³⁰⁴ [112.1] Say: He, Allah, is One.

³⁰⁵ Marzolph. *The Quran and Jocular Literature*, 479.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 480.

humorous works seems to be permissible³⁰⁷ and that there are no dogmatic restrictions to the usage of such Qur'anic quotations "in a humorous context even at the risk of the Qoran itself becoming the target of jocular distortion."³⁰⁸ This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next section in an essay by Geert Jan van Gelder.³⁰⁹

Marzolph then proceeds to look at humour in the Qur'an and whether or not God has a sense of humour. He mentions Mir's work,³¹⁰ discussed above, yet opines that the "topic of humor in the Qoran is not a particularly promising area of research."³¹¹ Marzolph states that to understand the jokes utilizing Qur'anic quotations, one must know the Qur'an closely and thoroughly, yet also concedes that the knowledge of the Qur'an is an essential requirement of any good Muslim and the exhibition of this knowledge, as well as the ability to recite the Qur'an, would raise the standing of the person and add to his repute, showing his devoutness. Marzolph also mentions that less than three percent (one-hundred-and-fifty items) of a researched body of fifty-six-thousand jokes and anecdotes use the Qur'an.³¹² However, Marzolph points out that within this body of collected anecdotes, a major portion is about issues that go against the basic beliefs and principles of Islam, such as drinking, consuming wine or other alcoholic beverages, prohibited sexual activities, as well as making fun of certain rituals or dogmas. He concludes that this is a sign of a liberal and open-minded Islamic society, which existed in medieval times. His final conclusion is that "the social and moral restraints connected with the omnipresence of the Qoran did not prevent the scripture from extending into the jocular sphere, but rather contributed to generating a jocular outlet of which literature has preserved but a comparatively small quantity."³¹³ Marzolph makes some valuable and interesting points with regard to the nature and

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 481.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 482.

³⁰⁹ Van Gelder, G. J. 2002-2003. Forbidden Firebrands: Frivolous "iqtibās" (Quotation From The Qur'ān) According To Medieval Arab Critics. *Quaderni di Studi Arabi Publication Info*, 20/21, 3-16.

³¹⁰ Mir. Humor in the Qur'ān, 179-193.

³¹¹ Marzolph. The Qoran and Jocular Literature, 482.

³¹² Ibid, 486.

³¹³ Ibid, 487.

content of the jokes, yet the motivation for the usage of Qur'anic quotations in jokes remains largely unstudied.

iii) **Geert Jan van Gelder**

Geert Jan van Gelder looks at the *iqtibās* (the practice of citing from the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*) and explains the etymology of the word as coming from the word *qabas* which literally means a live coal, ember or a light from another's fire as it appears in verses [20:10], [27:7] and [57:13]. He states that this was largely considered a positive practice, as the original metaphor denotes receiving warmth or light from another source, yet fire also has damaging characteristics and could cause harm to the person handling the firebrand.³¹⁴ Van Gelder inserts a disclaimer in his introduction explaining that he will be using some quotations which might be hurtful to some readers, assuring them that parody does not always entail ridicule and proceeds to summarise the debate about this issue, ranging from a complete condemnation to full approval of this practice based on the historical information that the Prophet and some of his most respected *ṣaḥāba* (Companions) had used Qur'anic citations in their speech. He continues by giving the legal opinions of a number of scholars and jurists, starting with al-Tha'ālibī who devoted an entire book to the subject titled *al-Iqtibās min al-Qur'an al-karīm* and probably coined the technical term. Al-Tha'ālibī found most Qur'anic borrowing either permissible or commendable and only two pages out of his book (of six hundred pages) list the instances of *iqtibās makrūh* (condemned borrowing) in prose and poetry. Van Gelder presents examples quoted by al-Tha'ālibī from the poetry of Abū Nuwās,³¹⁵ who bragged about having indulged in everything that displeases God, except polytheism, and having mocked all Islamic institutions, though only due to his love of pleasure rather than due to any intellectual principle.³¹⁶ He also analyses quotes from al-Khansā's³¹⁷ poetry, as well as poetry by Abū Tammām³¹⁸ displaying frivolous quotations from the Qur'an. Van Gelder then discusses

³¹⁴ van Gelder. *Forbidden Firebrands*, 3.

³¹⁵ Abū Nuwās, perhaps the most famous poet of the 'Abbāsīd period (d. between 198-200/813-815)

³¹⁶ Wagner, E.. "Abū Nuwās." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2013. Reference. American University in Cairo. 02 April 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abu-nuwas-SIM_0241>

³¹⁷ Tumāḍīr bint 'Amr (b. ~ 575 AD – 44/634 or in a different version 80/661), poetess of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic time.

³¹⁸ Ḥabīb b. Aws, Arabic poet and anthologist (188-231/804-845)

Ibn al-Athīr's³¹⁹ *al-Washy al-marqūm*, where he briefly critiques the usage of Qur'anic quotations in poetry. He then moves to raunchy and sexually explicit examples quoting a short anecdote extracted from al-Abīy's³²⁰ *Nathr al-durr*, where Abū 'Alī al-Baṣīr³²¹ gives Abū-l-'Aynā'³²² some dildos inscribed with the words '*udkhillūha bi salāmin āminīn*' (let them enter in peace and security). Without any diacritical signs, the first word can also be read as *adkhillūha* (insert it) contrary to the Qur'anic verse 15:46.³²³ These are then returned to Abū 'Alī al-Baṣīr with an inscription saying "we have returned it/him to his mother so that she might be comforted" as in verse [28:13]. Van Gelder then points to other less offensive examples, and continues by tracing the further development of *iqtibās* by looking at books of *balāgha* (eloquence), as well as books on the Qur'an, such as al-Suyūṭī's³²⁴ *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* and al-Zarkashī's³²⁵ *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*.³²⁶ He presents more examples of quotations of favourable as well as condemned *iqtibās*, highlighting al-Tanasī's³²⁷ position. Al-Tanasī, a Mālikī, approved of the concept, unlike other Mālikī jurists, who condemned it completely or in certain cases permitted it only in prose. The Shāfi'ites on the other hand allowed it. Some scholars such as Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī³²⁸ and Ibn Ḥijja³²⁹ differentiate between three categories of *iqtibās*, namely *ḥasan* (praiseworthy), *jā'iz* (permissible), and *mardūd* (objectionable). The *mardūd* category is further subdivided into two sub-categories, namely the use of Qur'anic passages in which Allāh refers to Himself and the use of the Qur'an in frivolous verse, whereby *ghazal* (elegy of love) is not considered *mardūd*.³³⁰ Hence, most of these scholars did not discourage mixing the sacred with the profane, yet regulated its usage. Van

³¹⁹ Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Abu 'l-Faṭḥ Naṣr Allāh (d. 589/1193)

³²⁰ Abū Sa'd Manṣūr al-Ḥusayn (d. 421/1030)

³²¹ Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. Ja'far b. al-Faḍl b. Yūnus al-Anbārī al-Nakhaī al-Kātib, poet and letter-writer (d. between 256-279/870-892)

³²² Muḥammad b. al-Kāsim b. hallād b. Yāsir b. Sulaimān al-Hāshihī, an Arabian littérateur and poet (d. 283/896).

³²³ [15.46] Enter them in peace, secure.

³²⁴ Abu 'l-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khuḍayrī, very prolific Egyptian scholar (d. 911/1505).

³²⁵ Abū 'Abd Allāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Bahādūr (d. 794/1392).

³²⁶ Van Gelder. *Forbidden Firebrands*, 8.

³²⁷ Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Jalīl Abū 'Abd Allāh, Maghribī scholar (d. 899/1494).

³²⁸ Ṣafī al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Sarāyā al-Ḥillī famous poet (d. 749/1348).

³²⁹ Abū Bakr (or Abū'l-Maḥāsīn) Taqī 'l-Dīn b. 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamawī al-Kādirī al-Ḥanafī al-Azrārī, famous poet and prose-writers of the Mamlūk period (d. 837/1434)

³³⁰ MacDonald, D.B.; Bonebakker, S.A.. "Iqtiḅās." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, 2013. Reference. American University in Cairo. 13 April 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/iktibas-SIM_3523>

Gelder concludes that the Qur'an has a unique status as God's word, yet its words are also part of the Arabic language as such and therefore, tolerance is sorely needed³³¹ when poets are being frivolous; shock their audience, achieving "an effect that is most easily achieved when the quotations are readily recognized, blatant and unobtrusive."³³²

H. *Fiqh* and Humour

i) Ḥasan 'Abd-al-Ghanī Abū-Ghudda

Abū Ghudda's seminal work thoroughly treats the legal reasoning behind the *fiqhī* rulings about humour.³³³ The lengthy article starts with a linguistic definition of humour and the actions meant by the various words. It then traces legal opinions of various jurists, their rulings and discusses these legal opinions. The article concludes that there are two types of humour, permitted and forbidden, which is divided into and *ḥarām* (prohibited) and *makrūh* (reprehensible, disapproved of). Furthermore, the article presents the effects and consequences of laughter and joking in matters such as divorce, marriage contracts, commercial contracts, financial transactions, judicial proceedings and apostasy as offensive. The last section of the article is devoted to anecdotes showing humorous incidents between the Prophet and his companions. The article aims at explaining the views regarding humour and, as the author declares in his introduction, to show Islam's tolerance and moderation in social behaviour with others, as long as it promotes happiness and joy to hearts and souls while pleasing God.³³⁴

In the section dealing with linguistic definitions of all words associated with humour, like *muzāḥ* (joking), *mudā'aba* (pleasant banter), *du'āba* (prank), *inbisāt* (enjoyment), *dihk* (laughter), *ṭurfa* (anecdote), *fukāha* (jesting), *marah* (fun), *hazl* (jocularity) and *mulā'aba* (playfulness), the author provides a thorough definition of each and goes into the minute linguistic differences between them. In the second section, Abū Ghudda, starts with the premise that the original position is that allowed humour is *mandūb* (meritorious and recommended), provided it is not excessive and does not lead to any hurtful results nor prevents the person from performing his rituals. He starts with legal opinions by al-

³³¹ van Gelder. *Forbidden Firebrands*, 14.

³³² *Ibid*, 4.

³³³ Abū Ghudda, Ḥ. '.-G. (2005). *al-Muzāḥ fī-l Islām. Majallit al-sharī'a wa-l dirasāt al-Islamiyya*, 20(61), 197-273

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 197.

Nawawī³³⁵ and al-Ghazzī,³³⁶ discussed below, who were both Shāfiī jurists and defended this position. He then goes on to provide evidence from the Qur'an and *Sunna*, with several anecdotes and poetry verses to support this position.

In the following section the author deals with the conditions that govern and regulate the allowed humour which include that jokes need to be truthful, should not be excessive, should avoid incitement, scaring the listener and leading to something unlawful. According to the legal reasoning cited, ideally joking and humour should strengthen social bonds, invigorate the listeners by providing a welcome break, lift barriers between people by breaking the ice, alleviate boredom, spread smiles and tickle the intellect through engaging it in witticisms and word play that stimulates thinking. Abū Ghudda then divides humour into verbal and action oriented humour. He further divides verbal humour into obvious and veiled humorous instances and provides examples from the Prophet's behaviour for each.

The author then moves to the forbidden types of humour and starts with that which jurists considered *ḥarām*, namely that which included lies, scares people, prevents them from performing their ritual prayers, is hurtful, xenophobic, makes fun of ethnic groups or deformities or humiliates, as well as promotes unlawful interactions between males and females. He then presents the legal evidence extracted from the Qur'an and *Sunna*, with several anecdotes, poetry verses to support this position. Moving on from there, he does the same with humour that is considered *makrūh*, which includes joking with someone who does not like jokes, jokes with unacceptable content like sexually explicit subjects, or diminishing someone's prestige or social standing, deriding people or cracking jokes in serious situations like during court cases. Like in the other sections, he presents the legal evidence extracted from the Qur'an and *Sunna*, supported by various *aḥādīth*.

In the fifth section Abū Ghudda shows the negative effects of jokes or engaging in humorous exchanges during serious situations like divorce, contracting a marriage, financial dealings, commercial deals, court and apostasy cases.

³³⁵ Shāfiī jurist, (631-676/1233-1277).

³³⁶ Shāfiī jurist, scholar of *Ḥadīth* and *Tafsīr*, (904/1497-984/1577).

In the final section he narrates anecdotes and *ahādīth* that show the Prophet and his Companions laughing and engaging in harmless pranks, as well as anecdotes from later times found in the afore mentioned *nawādir* collections, which he considers *ḥalāl*.

The interesting part of this collection of anecdotes is the final section where he gives examples of humorous anecdotes of esteemed jurists such as Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfiī, thereby implicitly strengthening the permissibility of humour. If even the eponyms of the legal schools were joking and laughing, then other Muslims can follow their example.

This article is very thorough and will be used in the final chapter. The author uses mainly Shāfiī positions without listing other opinions of the remaining schools of *fiqh*, though he presents anecdotes about their eponyms. The article is objective, as the author's own opinion does not come through.

ii) Yūsuf Al-Qarāḍāwī³³⁷

The subject of recreation, amusement, entertainment and fun is very important. It affects all ages, all peoples, individually or in groups, intellectually stimulating or plain pleasurable, educational, popular or official, meaning sanctioned by an authority or in an international competition. Entertainment can be visual, audible, readable or physical. Hence, it is important for the pious practicing Muslim, to learn how Islam views these different activities and which *fiqhī* rules are to be applied.

Al-Qarāḍāwī devotes his book *Fiqh al-lahw wa-l tarwīḥ* (The Jurisprudence of Fun and Entertainment) to the legal views regarding entertainment.³³⁸ The author opines that the initial position is that it is allowed as per [62:11].³³⁹ The author cites examples from the Prophet's life, where Muḥammad allowed a delegation from Abyssinia to dance with their lances in his mosque and permitted 'Ā'isha to watch them, hanging on to his arm.³⁴⁰ He also allowed two female slaves to dance and play the tambourine in 'Ā'isha's quarters during a religious feast saying: "let Jews know that our religion allows

³³⁷ (Born 1926), well known Egyptian theologian, best known for his television programme, *al-Sharī'a wa al-Ḥayāh* (Sharia and Life) aired on Al-Jazeera News Network. He is considered to be a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, though he has no official role or office in the organization. He is also known for having some controversial views and was refused entry to the United Kingdom in 2008 and France in 2012.

³³⁸ al-Qarāḍāwī, Y. 2005. *Fiqh al-lahw wa-l tarwīḥ*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahba

³³⁹ Note: the original Arabic word is *lahw* which is amusement, fun, entertainment or play.

³⁴⁰ al-Qarāḍāwī. *Fiqh al-lahw wa-l tarwīḥ*, 9.

recreation, I was sent to spread a *ḥanīf*³⁴¹ religion.³⁴² The author also states that the Prophet liked merriment and happiness saying: “Allah, I seek refuge with you from worry and sadness.”³⁴³

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first is titled *Entertainment and recreation using humour, fun and laughter* and is perhaps the one most relevant to this study. The chapter starts with analysing whether laughter is permissible or not, as many people are under the impression that religion and laughter cannot be combined. Some believe that laughter is *ḥarām* (prohibited) or at best *makrūh* (detestable), which is reinforced by the images of preachers with sullen, frowning faces, using loud voices and angry demeanour. Some preachers promote the idea that the Prophet was continuously grieving.³⁴⁴ The author disagrees and shows that laughter is a very human action. He further elaborates that Islam is a religion which corresponds to human nature and hence, would not prohibit such a natural human action in any way. He uses verse [31:6] to argue that *lahw* (entertainment, merriment) is not condemned in and of itself, but what is condemned is when it leads the person astray or when it is used for hurtful mockery. In addition he cites verse [62:11], where *lahw* is coupled with trading, which is an approved and sanctioned activity.³⁴⁵ The author further explains that the Prophet was a role model for recommended behaviour and lists many anecdotes, where the Prophet is shown to be laughing or sharing and interacting in different forms of *lahw* with his wives, grandsons, Companions as well as other believers asking his advice.

One such example, also found in the data-set, is the anecdote about al-Daḥḥāk b. Sufyān al-Kilābī, who was said to have been a very ugly man. In this anecdote al-Daḥḥāk visits the Prophet to offer

³⁴¹ *Ḥanīf* is an Arabic word referring to the original monotheistic beliefs of Ibrāhīm. In early Islamic thought, this particular term referred to those people who rejected idolatry and retained some of what was perceived as being tenets of Ibrāhīm’s religion of during Jahiliyya and submitted to God.

³⁴² According to the author this *ḥadīth* is listed in the *musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal under numbers 24855 and 25962 and it is found in the data set of this study.

³⁴³ According to the author this saying was recorded by al-Bukhārī in his book on supplications under number 6376 on the authority of Anas b. Mālik, one of the most prolific traditionists.

³⁴⁴ According to the author this was recorded in *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* by Ibn Sa’d, (vol 1, p. 422), al-Ṭabarānī’s *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr* (vol 2, 155), al-Bayhaqī’s *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa* (vol 1, 285).

³⁴⁵ It is interesting to note here that Yusuf Ali translates *lahw* as sports. An article was recently published about the position of sports in Islamic law. See: Winter, Ofir and Uriya Shavit (2011). Sports in Contemporary Islamic Law. *Islamic Law and Society*, 18, 250-280.

his *bay'a* (pledge) and when the Prophet accepts, he offers to give up one of his two wives, divorce her and gift her to the Prophet, stating that both were better than this Ḥumayrā'.³⁴⁶ 'Ā'isha Bint Abī Bakr who was sitting there was quick to retort: Is any of them better than you? Al-Daḥḥāk replied: I am better and more generous, upon which the Prophet laughed.³⁴⁷ The author also gives examples about how the Companions used to recite poetry, sing, and generally entertain themselves. The last part of the chapter is devoted to explain and refute some *ḥadīth* narrations and Qur'anic verses that appear to discourage fun, laughter and merriment. In the author's opinion these texts have been misinterpreted. One of the examples cited is verse [28:76] arguing that it is not the joy or happiness that is forbidden as per another verse, namely [10:58]. The author elaborates that happiness and joy are permissible, but that it was the element of gloating, boasting or arrogance accompanying it at times, which are disliked. Furthermore, the author shows that sadness, sorrow, grief and unhappiness are nothing to look forward to, but rather something to avoid. The author tries to bolster this argument by quoting several verses.³⁴⁸ Furthermore he quotes Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 751/1350),³⁴⁹ extensive argumentation about sadness and grief being almost *makrūh* (literally detestable), disliked or considered an offensive act, centring his discussion on verse [35:34] that the believers who will be rewarded with entrance to paradise will never feel any grief. The author concludes this chapter noting how Arabs in general perfected jokes as an art: telling, writing and collecting them. He specifically mentions political jokes and *nawādir* (anecdotes) and briefly mentions many popular humorous characters such as Ash'ab and Juḥā.

In the second chapter, titled *Horsemanship*, al-Qaraḍāwī deals with fun and merriment through equestrian entertainment. He starts by defining the natural human need to play and to have breaks between serious activities or work and then presents a long list of games; individual ones as well as group or team games, which according to him are permissible such as equestrian games, the subject

³⁴⁶ A nickname given to 'Ā'isha Bint Abī Bakr by the Prophet, meaning the little red one, which was referring either to her reddish hair or her fair complexion which would redden according to her temperament.

³⁴⁷ The author cites this anecdote based on two citations by al-Ḥāfiẓ al-'Irāqī and al-Dāraquṭnī who both commented that this must have taken place before imposition of the veil and seclusion on the wives of the Prophet (as per verses [33: 53] and [33:32])

³⁴⁸ See for example such as [3:139], [16:127], [27:70], [9:40] and [2:38].

³⁴⁹ Syrian Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist.

matter of the chapter's title. He presents textual evidence from the *ḥadīth* encouraging horseback-riding and horsemanship. He also discusses the prohibited games such as those used for gambling, betting or involving any risks to life and limbs. The author presents examples from the life of the Companions and textual evidence from the *ḥadīth* corpus, which encourage and allow horse racing, arrow-shooting, wrestling, competing against one another with lances, spears and slingshots.

The third chapter titled *Sports* follows the same structure like the preceding chapter. He starts by showing how sport is important to good health and boosts endurance and stamina. He lists different sportive activities such as swimming, running, jumping, ball-games, yoga, gymnastics, and points to the different disciplines in the Olympic Games. He states that the standard Islamic position is that all these activities are permissible. He then proceeds to present examples from various schools of jurisprudence supporting his claims.³⁵⁰

In the fourth chapter, titled *Intellectual Games*, the author lists a number of board games, puzzles and games using dice, in addition to card-games, dominoes as well as modern computer games. He then proceeds to argue whether or not they are permissible. A large portion of the chapter is devoted to the discussion of the permissibility of playing chess quoting different jurists and discussing a number of *aḥādīth* that appear to use some of the terminology used while playing chess and debates whether historically chess was already known to the Prophet and his Companions. He then shows the position of all four schools of jurisprudence regarding chess, yet does not present his own opinion.

The fifth chapter deals with dancing and clapping in which he distinguishes between permissible and prohibited dancing. The permissible type includes men dancing in celebrations, such as the dance mentioned before by the Abyssinians in the Prophet's mosque during a religious festival. He also mentions girls dancing only in the company of other females and presents a precedent from 'Ā'isha's house, which he already mentioned before. Examples of prohibited dancing, according to the author, is that which arouses desire or is performed by females in the company of males unlawful to them, such as belly-dancing or ballroom dancing, as it encourages mingling between genders and can lead to *fāḥisha*

³⁵⁰ See: Winter, Ofir and Uriya Shavit 2011. Sports in Contemporary Islamic Law. *Islamic Law and Society*, 18, 250-280.

(sin). He devotes a section to ballet, concluding that it is also prohibited due to the scant and revealing clothing worn by the dancers, which reveal too much of the dancers' bodies. The next section deals with clapping as a form of encouragement, rhythm, attracting attention or showing appreciation which are all permitted. The final section deals with Ṣūfī singing and dancing. While most jurists throughout the centuries wrote against dancing, al-Qaraḏāwī quotes from *Qawā'id al-aḥkām fī maṣāliḥ al-anām* by 'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262),³⁵¹ where listening to music and chants, as well as some dancing with moderation, were permitted. Again he does not present his own opinion.

The following three chapters follow the same structure and are devoted to the discussion of entertainment found through 'hunting and fishing', watching 'drama productions' as in films, plays and television series and finally in the last chapter the entertainment value of 'competitions'.

In general, the book presents both sides, allowing entertainment, fun and merriment in various forms, as well as prohibiting some forms and branding them as a waste of valuable time which could be spent in prayer, Qur'an recitation or religious rituals. In most cases discussed in the first three chapters, the author leans to permissibility, yet in other cases, starting from the fourth chapter onwards, he adopts a conservative perspective, especially where certain Ṣūfī rituals are concerned.

iii) Birgit Krawietz

Birgit Krawietz asks about the ability to take a joke in her essay about the legal reasoning about joking.³⁵² She starts by citing Henryk M. Broder's work, where the title can be translated as: *Hurray, we capitulate: About the pleasure of buckling*.³⁵³ Krawietz uses a quote from his book, "One and a half billion Muslims in the world, who have the chronic tendency to sulk and are prone to unpredictable reactions," in addition to another quote by Hans M. Enzenberger who "diagnoses among Arab Muslims a widespread narcissistic [inclination towards] injury" as starting points for her chapter.³⁵⁴ She remarks

³⁵¹ Famous Shāfi'ī jurist and Ash'arī theologian, who was called Sulṭān al-'Ulamā' and who attended sessions of *samā'* (literally hearing) organised by Ṣūfīs and was said to have taken a keen interest in Ṣūfism.

³⁵² Krawietz, B. 2010. Verstehen Sie Spaß? Zur schariatrechtlichen Erörterung des Scherzens. In G. Tamer (Ed.), *Humor in der Arabischen Kultur* (pp. 29-47). Berlin: de Gruyter.

³⁵³ Broder, H. M. 2007. *Hurra, wir kapitulieren!: Von der Lust am Einknicken*. München : Pantheon Verlag.

³⁵⁴ Enzenberger, H. M. 2006. *Schreckens Männer: Versuch über den radikalen Verlierer*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

that the media has created a *homo islamicus* (Muslim man), who cannot understand nor take jokes. The aim of her chapter, as she states in the introduction, is to find examples for and the background to the very rich Arabic and Islamic humorous culture, to refute the accusation of the lack of a sense of humour in Muslims or an Islamic hostility towards humour. In the first section, she looks at what she terms as “attempts of cultural behavioural control in Arabic-Islamic literature.”³⁵⁵ She states that the seminal work to use is Ammann’s study, mentioned in detail below. She summarises the study and concludes that Ammann determined that moderation in laughing and joking was to be viewed as a part of a broader pattern of behaviour, best described by the term ‘dignity.’ She notes that Ammann used *ḥadīth* and works of *adab*, but that he omitted using *fiqh* works in wise foresight. Then she explains that *fiqh* does not operate in a binary fashion and that next to *ḥalāl* (permissible) and *ḥarām* (prohibited), there are also *wājib* (obligatory), *mandūb* (meritorious and recommended), *mubāḥ* (indifferent leaning to sanctioned) and *makrūh* (reprehensible or disapproved of). In the next five sections, she summarises Abū Ghudda’s seminal work discussed above, pointing out the permitted and encouraged joking and offsetting that to the reprehensible type. She notes, however, that the suppression of blasphemy in the otherwise very thorough article by Abū Ghudda most probably relates to the fact that blasphemy as well as the degree of individual amusement, is not included within the legal reasoning. She erroneously states that humour has been understudied and under-presented within *fiqh* studies and that not enough in-depth studies have dealt with the legal reasoning about humour.

The article is rather shallow and reads more like a summarised selective translation of Abū Ghudda’s contribution. Furthermore she quotes Ammann as saying that the ‘antagonism’ towards humour is based on its contradiction with the concept of ‘dignity’, which she vastly underplays.³⁵⁶ Focusing, in the last section, on the aspect of how laughter invalidates rituals and worship and how it is ‘undignified’ to laugh is reducing the issue to a rather superficial analysis. Her conclusion, that there is no specific legal *fiqhī* prohibition against humour and joking in general and that the stereotypical view that

³⁵⁵ Krawietz. *Verstehen Sie Spaß?*, 31.

³⁵⁶ For a thorough treatment of the concept of ‘dignity’ see Kamali, M. H. (2002). *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective (Fundamental Rights and Liberties in Islam Series)*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.

Muslims do not have a sense of humour which emerged after the problem with the Danish cartoons is welcome, yet is stating the obvious. The article only repeats the views of the authors she cites without an original contribution, other than adding the rather islamophobic quotes in the introduction and using them as her starting point. Not much can be gained from this contribution.

I. Ḥadīth and Sunna

Perhaps Goldziher was the first to combine entertainment and *ḥadīth* in the same chapter title: *The Ḥadīth as a means of edification and entertainment*.³⁵⁷ The chapter starts with a summary of the phenomenon of *ḥadīth* fabrication, and how some of the traditions were not judged as strictly. The distinction between legal traditions, dogmatic or edifying ones, educational truisms or pious tales was made and the latter were allowed to pass without much scrutiny. The argument being, that fabrication of traditions for a good cause was not condemned. The point relevant to this study is Goldziher's argument that this sincere or devout motivation did not prevail and "edification was joined by a psychologically related element: entertainment, intellectual enjoyment. Then it was not for long that one distinguished between various grades of it. Edifying tales slowly developed into entertaining ones and one soon arrived at farce, all within the framework of the tradition of the Prophet. It was possible, as early as the third century and perhaps even before, to exclaim in the name of the Prophet: "Woe to him who spreads false *aḥādīth* to entertain the people, woe to him woe."³⁵⁸ Naturally the main culprits of such fabrications were the *quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers) and their anecdotes or stories revolved around pious people, saints or the Prophet and his Companions, unlike the *littérateurs* of later periods. Unsurprisingly such tales were more entertaining and amusing to the masses and preferable to the difficult and often dry and complex sermons of the professional preachers and theologians. The fabrication/manipulation of *aḥādīth* is important to this study as will be explained in the fifth chapter. In addition, the fabrication of traditions necessitated the creation of standards for sifting the sound from the spurious ones. This is also important for this study, as some of these standards extended to a later editing, reworking, 'correcting'

³⁵⁷ Goldziher, I. 1967. *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien)*. (S. Miklos, Ed., & C. R. Miklos, Trans.) London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 145-163.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 150.

and editing some of the *aḥādīth* that already existed in the older collections, as will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

i) **Badr al-Dīn al-Ghazzī**

The work titled *al-Murāḥ fī al-muzāḥ* by al-Ghazzī,³⁵⁹ is a small collection of anecdotes culled from the Prophet's life and that of the companions.³⁶⁰ In the short introduction, the author, true to his legal background, discusses humour from a *fiqhī* perspective and explains that it is *mandūb* between friends, siblings and family members, yet *makrūh* when in excess, or when ridiculing people or some of their characteristics, causes grudges, and is narrated by fools. He urges his readers to keep in mind that humour needs to be based on truth as per a *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayra,³⁶¹ who said: They [companions] asked: "O Messenger of Allah, you are teasing us! He replied: "I do not say, but the truth." In another version of the same tradition, the Prophet is to have answered saying: "I do not tease, I only say the truth."³⁶²

The collection of anecdotes includes a number of women-unfriendly *aḥādīth*,³⁶³ which surprisingly the author includes in his book as humorous anecdotes, thereby negating their gender bias and obvious gender based discrimination. One such example is: 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr³⁶⁴ narrated that 'Ā'isha asked about what would hinder prayers. We answered her; "a woman and a donkey." 'Ā'isha retorted: "woman is one of the worst rides; you have seen me between the hands of the Prophet during his prayers, obstructing them like a funeral."³⁶⁵ The book serves as a documentation or compilation of available anecdotes, rather than an in-depth examination or analysis of these materials from a *fiqhī* point of view.

³⁵⁹ Shāfi'ī jurist, scholar of Ḥadīth and Tafsīr, (d. 984/1577).

³⁶⁰ al-Ghazzī, B. 1930. *al-Murāḥ fī al-muzāḥ*. Dimashq: al-Maktabah al-'Arabīyah.

³⁶¹ Prolific narrator of traditions from the Prophet

³⁶² al-Ghazzī. *al-Murāḥ fī al-muzāḥ*, 12.

³⁶³ For more on women-unfriendly traditions see: Juynboll, G. 1989. Some isnād-analytical methods illustrated on the basis of several women-demeaning sayings from hadith literature. *al-Qantara*, 10, 343-384.

³⁶⁴ Eminent traditionist, one of the Seven Jurists of Medina (d. 93 or 94/711, 712 or 713).

³⁶⁵ al-Ghazzī. *al-Murāḥ fī al-muzāḥ*, 17.

ii) **Rudolf Sellheim**

Rudolf Sellheim's article ties in nicely to Goldziher's points mentioned above.³⁶⁶ The article starts with an observation made by Frants Buhl that the Prophet's looks and appearance were transmitted.³⁶⁷ Buhl was quoting Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833 or 213/828),³⁶⁸ who was quoting older sources, same like Ibn Sa'd (d. 230 /845),³⁶⁹ who also included a description of the Prophet based on earlier sources in his *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*. Both included a description of the Prophet's smile, to which Sellheim devotes this article, as he noticed the recurrence of a certain phrase: *dāhika ḥatta badat nawājidhuhu* (he laughed until his molar teeth were exposed) in the descriptions. Sellheim consults Wensinck to discover more than twenty instances under the keyword *ḍ-ḥ-k* and attests to finding more using different forms such as *dāhika* and *anyābuhu* (the canine teeth) instead of *nawājidhuhu*.³⁷⁰ Sellheim dedicates several pages to analysing different dictionary definitions of *nawājidh* and quotes later Muslim scholars,³⁷¹ who thought that an open-mouthed audible laugh was unseemly and inappropriate for a prophet. It seems that Sellheim agrees with them, as such a laugh does not seem dignified, so he readily accepts the lengthy detailed discussions of the aforementioned scholars to read *dāhika* as 'smiled' which actually does have an Arabic word *ibtasama*, *bassama* or *tabassama*. However, it seems that as a philologist he cannot accept that *nawājidh* could possibly mean canines and not molars. To reconcile both, Sellheim suggests – based on a number of descriptions that the Prophet was *ḍalī' al-fam* (wide mouthed) – that this wide mouth would show his back teeth when he smiled. Therefore, based on this, Sellheim translates *dāhika rasūl Allah ḥatta badat nawājidhuhu* as the Messenger of God smiled [so widely] that

³⁶⁶ Sellheim, R. 1964. Das Lächeln des Propheten. In E. Haberland, E. Haberland, & M. S. Straube (Eds.), *Festschrift für Adolf E. Jensen* (pp. 621–630). München : Klaus Renner Verlag.

³⁶⁷ Buhl, F. 1930. *Das Leben Muhammads*. Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 364.

³⁶⁸ Best known for his biography of Muḥammad.

³⁶⁹ Best known for his biographical dictionary *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*.

³⁷⁰ Wensinck, A. J. 1969. *Concordance et indices de la Tradition Musulmane - Al-Mu'djam al-mufahras li-alfāz al- ḥadīth al-nabawī (8 vols)*. Leiden: Brill.

³⁷¹ Sellheim mentions al-Nuwayrī, Egyptian encyclopaedist and historian (d. 733/1333); al-Maydānī, Arab philologist, (d. 518/1124); al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) prominent scholars of the linguistic sciences (grammar, philology and lexicography) in addition to theology, exegesis, ḥadīth and *adab* and Ibn al-Athīr, famous scholar of philology, religious studies and historiography (d. 606/1210).

his molars became visible and even provides a sketch for that to enable an easier visualisation of what he means.

Despite Sellheim's efforts, a more logical explanation can be found by relating Goldziher's argument above about the fabrication of traditions and assuming that the Prophet's laughter was edited out later to redraw a more dignified image of him, where he appears to be barely smiling without making any sound at all or perhaps even grinning, as will be discussed in the fifth chapter. However, several *ahādīth* show conclusively that this was not the case, amongst them a report narrated by his wife 'Ā'isha, who reports that a man once came to see Muḥammad while she was with him in the house, but not in the same room. The Prophet complained to her before joining his guest that he was one of the worst of his clan (*bi's ibn al-'ashīra*) yet he gave his permission for the man to visit. 'Ā'isha tells that she heard Muḥammad's smiling with him and asked him after the man left why he was joking with him after what he said about him. The Prophet replies to her saying: "Among evil sorts, there are those of whom people should be wary because of their evil."³⁷² Naturally if 'Ā'isha was in a different room, she could not have been aware of any smiles, as smiles cannot be heard, and the editor, who removed the sound of laughter, did a very bad editing job.

iii) Zāhir Abū Dāwūd

The book starts with a linguistic analysis and definitions of twenty-one words denoting a smile all the way to words meaning physical clowning around and their derivatives. Then the author presents all Qur'anic verses that mention laughter and other related words. Abū Dāwūd lists forty-nine verses which all include the words and synonyms for laughter, happiness, joy, entertainment, fun, pleasure and amusement. He then presents some examples which depict the Prophet laughing. One example, also in the data of this study, is a report by Abū Hurayra who narrated that a man went to the Prophet and said: "I am ruined, O Messenger of God!" "And what is it that has ruined you?" asked the Prophet. The man answered: "I had intercourse with my wife during [the fast of] Ramadan." "Are you able to free a slave in

³⁷² Mālik, M. b. (n. d.). *al-Muwatta'*. Cairo: Dar Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiya, # 903 (*Kitāb ḥusn al-khuluq, Bāb mā jā'a fī ḥusn al-khuluq*, 1: 4).

*kaffāra?*³⁷³ asked Muḥammad. “No,” the man answered. “How about feeding sixty poor people?” the Prophet suggests. Again the man’s answer is: “No.” The Prophet sent someone who returned with a basket of dates. “Take these and distribute them in charity,” he said to the man. “To poorer people than ourselves?” asked the man, and continued: “There is no household between the two plains [of Medina] more in need of it than us!” The Prophet laughed until you could see his canine teeth, and said: “Go and feed your family with it.”

In the next section Abū Dāwūd presents some legal rulings about the permissibility of laughter, however he mainly concentrates on permissible non-excessive laughter as defined in al-Ghazzālī’s *lḥyā’ ʿulūm al-dīn*, which is a bit of a hard-line view and does not allow for the numerous evidence from the *Sunna* to contrary practical practices. An example of how he phrases and promotes the stricter view is his explanation to a question “when asked by someone who says: but the Prophet and the companions laughed, I reply to them that if you can do like they did and laugh without excess and only say the truth, never make a fool out of yourself or anyone else and take the Prophet and his companions as a role model then you can joke like them.”³⁷⁴

The bulk of the book is devoted to anecdotes about the companions, from historical sources promoting good behaviour, such as anecdotes about ablutions, fasting, charity, apologies, honesty, humility, patience, condolences, justice, reliability and good manners. In the second part of his compilations he concentrates on fighting bad habits and traits by selecting jokes which expose liars, greed, *tatfīl*, hatred, envy, boasting, mockery, adultery, gambling and theft.

Surprisingly he includes an anecdote about Ash‘ab, who was visiting some folks who only fed him bread and pickles at every meal. One day they asked him to lead the morning prayers. During the first *rak‘a*,³⁷⁵ he recited the following: “oh you who believe, fear God and feed your *Imām* meat, and if you fail to provide meat then feed him grease and if you fail to find any, then feed him eggs or fish and in

³⁷³ *Kaffāra* an expiatory and propitiatory act which grants remission for faults or grave sins.

³⁷⁴ Abū Dāwūd, Z. 1991. *al-Fukāḥa al-hādīfah fī al-Islām*. Dimashq: Maktabat Dār al-Maḥabbah, 73.

³⁷⁵ Literally “the act of bowing or bending”, which denote a unit or one of the repeated actions performed during *ṣalāt* (prayer), which include the *takbīr* and recitation of the *Fātiḥa* (opening chapter of the Qur’an) followed by a number of verses, then the *rukū’* (bending of the body from an upright position) and then two *sujūd* (prostrations)

case that you fail to find any, give him milk and whoever does not obey this commandment, will be in deep *ḍalāl* (error of ways).” In the second *rak‘a* he recited: “oh you, who believe, cook your food properly and do not find it sufficient to only pickle it. Whoever persists in this has committed a grave sin.” When he finished prayers, his hosts crowded around him, to show their sorrow and regret and they promised to do better as they had not known that there were verses revealed about him and his situation. When they asked him in which chapter of the Qur’an those verses were from, he replied: “They are from the fifth chapter titled *The Dinner Table*.³⁷⁶

Though lacking an in-depth analysis of the jokes and sounding more like preaching in the commentary preceding and following the collected anecdotes, it is still a valuable resource due to the sheer number of the different *nawādir* amassed in this volume, even if they are not restricted to the Prophet and his companions.

iv) Josef van Ess

Josef van Ess devotes two short articles to the analysis of *Laughter from below and laughter from above* in which he discusses God’s laughter and human humour in Islam. In the first article he clarifies that in Islam God may laugh about humans, but man cannot laugh about God.³⁷⁷ The dilemma of a laughing God confronted the jurists and theologians and posed problems, because a laughing God would most certainly need other human characteristics and require human form or body-parts. However, van Ess assures the readers that in early Islam anthropomorphism was not an issue and that this image came from several *ahādīth* that mentioned Allah laughing. Later theologians had to deal with the repercussions to reconcile the emerging dogma with past traditions. According to van Ess, Allah’s laughter is triggered by human shortcomings as He is about to pass judgment on their deeds. Allah also laughs in happiness when pleased that the believers perform their religious duties and strive hard to please Him. Allah also laughs in astonishment and wonder that man has despaired and given up on His mercy and forgiveness. Allah laughs as a kind of solace to comfort the believers in a hopeless situation.

³⁷⁶ Abū Dāwūd. *al-Fukāha al-hādīfah fi al-Islām*, 150.

³⁷⁷ Van Ess, J. al-Ghazzī. 2005. Lachen von oben und Lachen von unten; Das Lachen Gottes in der Witz des Menschen im Islam, Teil 1. *Religionen unterwegs*, 4, 14-16.

Regrettably, van Ess does not quote the *aḥādīth* nor provides them in translation or transliteration and merely summarizes their content, pointing to a collection by Gimaret.³⁷⁸ In conclusion, Allah's laughter is one from above, a laughter of contentment and satisfaction. In contrast humans laugh for a variety of reasons. Sometimes laughter is due to the smug superiority of knowledge. Yet in Islamic theology only the Prophet is allowed to know more than others, yet his knowledge was also unlike Allah's all-knowing omnipotence. The author points to a vast number of *aḥādīth* that describe Muḥammad's laughter yet does not quote them, pointing out that in the New Testament, Jesus was never mentioned as laughing. In those *aḥādīth* the Prophet's laughter is described as benevolent, gracious, showing friendliness and never *Schadenfreude*.

The second article of the same title starts with looking at jokes in general and concluding that they are not timeless and are generally not known for their longevity, yet the meticulous compilation and collection of anecdotes can reveal when, where and why these jokes were recorded.³⁷⁹ Van Ess then proceeds to share some of these recorded jokes, especially ones dealing with people of other faiths. One example is from a remote small village where no suitable muezzin could be found. After a long search, one day a Jew climbs up the minaret and starts calling for prayer. However, being a Jew, he modifies the *adhān* slightly calling out: "I testify that there is no god besides Allah and the people down there testify that Muḥammed is Allah's messenger."³⁸⁰

The next part deals with a summary of how the relationship between Muslims and Christians, as well as that between Muslims and Jews developed in Islam and how it suffered at times, yet was mostly amicable. Islam after all – according to van Ess – is a rational religion and hence its followers were supposed to be enlightened. The author elaborates in the next section on the rational outlook especially of the Mu'tazila. He mentioned that it was on Islamic soil that the first mention of three conmen (imposters), who misled humanity, took place, identifying them as Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad.³⁸¹ In

³⁷⁸ Gimaret, D. 1997. *Dieu à l'image de l'homme : les anthropomorphismes de la sunna et leur interprétation par les théologiens*. Paris: Cerf.

³⁷⁹ Van Ess. Lachen von oben, 17-23.

³⁸⁰ Van Ess. Lachen von oben, 17.

³⁸¹ Ibid, 19.

spite of that, false prophets were a subject to which Muslims reacted sensitively. These imposters were either executed or declared insane and making jokes about such people was very popular. The author proceeds to list a few jokes of this genre such as: A man claiming to be a prophet is asked by a large group of people crowding around him for a miracle. He agrees willingly and suggests cutting off the head of someone from the crowd and then performing the miracle of affixing it back onto his body again and reviving that person. The people naturally decline his offer.³⁸² Van Ess enumerates some jokes, which had the purpose of ridiculing the learned, especially theologians and *fuqahā'* (jurists) in particular, for pedantically recording every smallest detail for any possible or impossible contingency.³⁸³ One popular technique was to create a nonsensical legal ruling using *termini technici* (technical terms) of jurisprudence such as the ruling "that it is not important whether one walks in a *janāzah* (funeral procession) in front of or behind the coffin, as long as one was not inside it."³⁸⁴ The author concludes that ridiculing these scholars was not so much laughing from below as much as it was worldly wisdom including portions of self-mockery, as these learned scholars are role models and educators. However, in van Ess's opinion, all this mockery is meted out with caution as a form of social control, where laughter becomes a release from too much social distance. Living without humour is a sign of fanaticism and van Ess points to *Wahhābism*, which derides laughter and joking.

v) Akram Kassāb

The first chapter of this book is devoted to the linguistics surrounding the word 'laughter' as well as similar words. It is followed by a section where fourteen stages of laughter are ranked according to the types of laughter, from a soundless smile to bending over with the entire body shaking in loud roaring laughter, or guffaw. This is followed by another section which presents the occurrences of the word 'laughter' in the Qur'an, followed by a section on laughter in the *ḥadīth*. From the linguistics Kassāb then shows how Arabs loved to laugh, so much that they created a name from the word, to name their

³⁸² Van Ess quotes this joke from Marzolph. *Arabia ridens*, 2: 177, joke 750.

³⁸³ More such jokes particularly about *naḥwīyyūn* (grammarians), *fuqahā'* (jurists), *muḥaddithūn* (traditionists) are listed and analyzed in : Szombathy, Z. 2004. Ridiculing The Learned: Jokes About The Scholarly Class in Mediaeval Arabic Literature. *Al-Qantara*, 25 (1), 93-117.

³⁸⁴ Van Ess quotes this joke from Marzolph. *Arabia ridens*, 2:246, joke 1132.

children *daḥḥāk* (he who makes others laugh). Many Companions were named al-Ḍaḥḥāq such as al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. Ḥāritha b. Zayd al-Anṣārī, al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. Khalīfa b. Tha‘alaba al-Anṣārī, al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. Sufyān b. al-Ḥārith, al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. ‘Abd ‘Amr b. Mas‘ūd al-Anṣārī, al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. Ḳays al-Fihri, al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. al-Nu‘mān b. Sa‘d and al-Ḍaḥḥāq b. Sufyān b. ‘Awf.

The next part explains the reasons for laughter and attributes it to amazement, wonder, joy, happiness, helplessness or embarrassment. The author then does the same for the word ‘smiles’, listing the various types of smiles caused by anger, mockery, or happiness and defines it as the state immediately before laughter. In the next section Kassāb informs the reader about the benefits of smiles as recorded in theological books. According to him, smiling in the face of other people is comforting and considered charity, warranting a reward. In evidence of that he quotes a *ḥadīth* by Abū Dharr who narrates that the Prophet said: Do not belittle *ma‘rūf*,³⁸⁵ even if it is just to greet your brother with a smiling face.”³⁸⁶ Then the author differentiates between sanctioned and forbidden laughter and bases that on Qur’anic verses such as [83:29]. The final section of the chapter aims at answering the questions about whether laughter invalidates ablutions and prayers? Kassāb traces the answers from *fiqhī* books and concludes that loud audible laughter invalidates prayers and requires a renewal of one’s ablution.

In the second chapter Kassāb argues that laughing is *Sunna*, and that a smile is to be taken as a mandatory recommendation based on verse [3:159]. He then shows evidence from medicine that laughter is necessary for good health, reduces stress, improves immunity, and that helium was named as laughing gas and finally that laughter exercises the diaphragm to benefit breathing. Like previous books he also explores the conditions for laughter, and recommends not to laugh in serious situations or grave matters as recommended in verse [53:59-61]. He also recommends a reasonable amount of laughing, jesting and merriment that is not excessive and does not include mockery.

³⁸⁵ Arabic word which means “well-known” The Qur’an uses this word in the meaning of “Right” from the verse [3:104] And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful. Hence, *ma‘rūf* refers to what is known to be good and is also used to denote charitable acts and good deeds.

³⁸⁶ Kassāb. *Ma‘a al-muṣṭafā fī daḥīkihi*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 19.

In the third chapter he revisits the now familiar premise that God also laughs and quotes from ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī’s³⁸⁷ *al-Muṣannaf* that Ismā‘īl b. Umayya narrated that the Prophet said: “God laughs about you for two lifetimes because of your proximity to salvation.” A man from Bahlā asked: “O Messenger of God, does God really laugh?” Muḥammad affirmed. The man then exclaimed: “By God! We will never cease to receive goodness from a laughing God.”³⁸⁸

Angels also laugh, as do Prophets, Kassāb shows in the fourth chapter and provides evidence from the Qur’an that Sulaymān [27:18-19] laughed. Just as prophets laugh, Muḥammad’s companions also laugh, which becomes evident through the anecdotes shared in this chapter, showing them having a melon fight and enjoying a fun moment. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is quoted as giving the following advice: “gladden the hearts by seeking wise anecdotes (or humorous wisdom), as hearts tend to get as bored as the body does.”³⁸⁹ More anecdotes are listed, where Nu‘aymān is telling jokes and playing pranks on other companions, while they all are laughing and enjoying the merriment. The chapter ends showing that the believers in heaven all laugh at the end which is supported by yet another verse [83:34].

In the fifth chapter, the Prophet is depicted as laughing with his Companions and generally with men. Jokes and jesting between the Prophet and some Bedouins and nomads is the next topic and many *nawādir* are quoted. A man comes to the Prophet and requests that he provide him with a mount. “Very well,” Muḥammad replies, “we shall provide you with the offspring of a she-camel.” “What will I do with the offspring of a she-camel?” asks the man. “I need a full-grown camel!” The Prophet smiles broadly: “Is there a full-grown camel that is not the offspring of a she-camel?” More anecdotes depicting how the Prophet laughed with women form the next section of the chapter, starting with the lengthy Prophetic tradition known by its principal character as ‘Ḥadīth Umm Zar’.³⁹⁰ This particular tradition describes in delightful literary terms and artful language how eleven women praised or criticized their

³⁸⁷ (d. 211/827), Yemeni scholar and traditionist.

³⁸⁸ Kassāb. *Ma‘a al-muṣṭafā fi daḥikihī*, 53.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 77 quoting al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s *al-Jāmi‘ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi‘*

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 100.

respective husbands.³⁹¹ The final part of the chapter shows how the Prophet laughed with children and how playful he was with his grandchildren as well as other children around him. In his playful way Anas was addressed by the diminutive 'Unays' and often greeted as " *Ya dha-l-udhunayn*," (Oh you with Two Ears).³⁹²

Kassāb discloses in the beginning of the sixth chapter that the Prophet was called *al-ḍaḥūk al-qattāl* (the cheerful fighter), because he was cheerful with the believers and a formidable fighter with his enemies.³⁹³ The reader is further told that even in the toughest and darkest moments, the Prophet would sprout a smile. He supports this claim with an example of when once on the battle field during the Battle of Badr, the Prophet fell asleep and woke up smiling. He was asked what he was smiling about and informed the companions that he had just received glad tidings from Jibrīl in form of the revelation of verse [54:45] to predict victory as mentioned by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) in his *tafsīr* of the verse.³⁹⁴

In the seventh chapter, Kassāb narrates anecdotes from the Prophet's household, featuring the Mothers of the Believers, particularly 'Ā'isha and Sawda. Some anecdotes are about his daughter Fāṭima and Umm Salama. According to one narrative, while the Prophet was sleeping in Umm Salama's house she awoke during the night and felt that her menses had started. She got up from under the covers and went to check. Her suspicions were confirmed and she cleaned herself, used the appropriate bindings and returned to the room, yet was afraid to go back to bed in case she would sully the Prophet. The Prophet asked her if she had started menstruating and she confirmed that. He lifted the covers and invited her back to bed smiling, saying that this was the normal way with all the daughters of Adam.³⁹⁵

Chapter eight focuses on anecdotes about the Prophet's interaction with children, yet in more detail than in the fifth chapter. Anas b. Mālik features prominently as the main character in a number of anecdotes. The next two chapters include anecdotes about the men and women who made the Prophet

³⁹¹ For an extensive study of that tradition see Rosenthal, Franz. "Muslim Social Values and Literary Criticism: Reflections on the Ḥadīth of Umm Zar'." *Oriens* 34 (1994): 31-56.

³⁹² Kassāb. *Ma'a al-muṣṭafā fi ḍaḥikihī*, 104.

³⁹³ *Ibid*, 112.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 117.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 129.

laugh. Umm Saḫīm, mother of Anas, saw the Prophet sweat profusely during a nap. When he woke up she took the sheet and wrung it out, collecting the results in a *qanīna* (small glass bottle). When the Prophet came in and saw her, he asked what she was doing. She told him that she was collecting his sweat to use it instead of perfume. He laughed, forgiving the improper act done foolishly out of love for him.³⁹⁶

The eleventh chapter is devoted to anecdotes about Bedouins. The author quotes verse [9:97] and provides an explanation that not all Bedouins addressed in that verse were hypocrites or unbelievers and that the Prophet had many a laugh with some of them. Polytheists and Jews are the subject of the twelfth chapter. In the three remaining chapters, the author lists anecdotes where the Prophet laughed during his travels and about other matters, quoting many traditions. The book is an extensive collection of anecdotes culled from the *Sīra* and *Sunna* and is a very useful resource for this study. However, all the anecdotes and traditions are exclusively from Sunni collections and not a single one comes from Shi'ite works or even has a Shiite subject. The compilation includes traditions, not only from the *ṣiḥāḥ*, but many are culled from different collections, *Sīra* works and other literature. The book shows a great effort in collecting and arranging the traditions and anecdotes, even if the sections are repeated in numerous chapters, however, the traditions are not. Perhaps the author did not want the chapters to be huge in size and therefore opted for a repetition of the chapter titles and classifications.

vi) Ludwig Ammann

Vorbild und Vernunft, Die Regelung von Lachen und Scherzen im mittelalterlichen Islam (Model and Reason, the Regulation of Laughing and Joking in Medieval Islam) is a thorough and detailed study of medieval Islamic discussions on the permissibility and manners of humorous behaviour, concentrating on *Hadīth* and its interpretation for *Vorbild* (role model) but also considering anecdotes and other additions from various genres within the literary traditions for the *Vernunft* (reason) part of the book.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 209.

³⁹⁷ Ammann, L. 1993. *Vorbild und Vernunft: Die Regelung von Lachen und Scherzen im mittelalterlichen Islam*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag.

The book starts with verses [53:42-44], which is also written in calligraphy on the front of the book and is divided into five chapters.

In the first chapter titled *Prologue* Ammann discusses the linguistics of the word 'laughter' in Arabic, much like the medieval Muslim scholars before him. He then argues in support of Rudolf Sellheim's thesis that the Prophet's laugh was actually just a smile, by presenting more evidence that the Arabic root *ḍ-ḥ-k* is more of a visual phenomenon and not an audial one, placing the word *ḍaḥīk* between *tabassum* (faint smile) and *qahqaha* (loud laugh). In addition Ammann quotes verse [27:19], arguing that *ḍaḥīk/ḍaḥak* should be understood as meaning more of a feeling rather than a visible action.³⁹⁸ Despite this unintended support of Sellheim's thesis, discussed above, Ammann concludes that Muḥammad's laugh was actually a real laugh because of the word *ḍawāḥīk* (the shining whiteness of the exposed front teeth) in addition to the phrase *inbisāṭat al-wajh wa-takassur al-asnān* (broadening and teeth appearing/gleaming).³⁹⁹ In addition, a logical as well as an *isnād* analysis of a seeming contradiction between *mā kāna ḍaḥīk rasūl Allāh illa tabassuman* (the Prophet's laugh was but a smile), leads to the conclusion that a later discomfort with the Prophet's laugh caused this contradiction. Ammann opines: "At this point, one must ask how likely it is for a man who was not averse to jokes, as based on traditions handed down by most trustworthy transmitters always only smiled? An in-depth study of the traditions indicates that the tempered intensity of the prophetic laughter is not credible."⁴⁰⁰ Ammann then shows theories about laughter from a medical, philosophical, and historical viewpoint and discusses instances of laughter in the Qur'an, such as Sarah's laugh, as well as Allah's laugh, both discussed above. Ammann places a lot of weight on *'ajab* (astonishment) being the main cause of laughter.

In the next section, Ammann discusses regulations of laughter and presents the Prophet as a role model, showing his laughter as leniency, restrained, rare, invalidating prayer, reducing piety. The Prophet dislikes inappropriate joking and mockery. Furthermore, Ammann spends considerable time

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 9-10.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, 58-99.

discussing the element of truth in a joke, based on the Prophet's tradition, mentioned above, that he said: "I joke and say only the truth."⁴⁰¹ Then Ammann points to inconsistencies in the *Hadith* corpus between traditions that claim the Prophet jested; that he denounced jesting; that he laughed heartily, that he barely smiled and that only occasionally, explaining that these were later attempts which were influenced by non-Islamic cultural norms, Christian asceticism, as well as some Persian and Greek roots and pre-Islamic Arab traditions, that all urge a restraint in laughter. Though the pre-Islamic Arab traditions quoted mainly praise women's reserved restrained laughter, Ammann does not engage with the possibly interesting questions of gender distinction. Furthermore, the pre- and early Islamic traditions cited, understand laughter mainly as a danger to personal dignity and a possible source of social disagreements. However, Ammann also distinguishes between the theological, legal ideal and the practical social reality, concluding that it would be laughable to believe that regulations urging restraint were actually followed to the letter. It is also foolish to assume that they did not influence behaviour in any way. What Ammann manages to successfully show is that rules and regulations go through a process, with different stages that are changed and influenced by new ideas, which Ammann demonstrates by placing the seemingly contradicting traditions supporting these various derived rules into what he perceives as the proper chronological order.

Ammann's study is very thorough, but unlike Maghen, discussed below, who retells anecdote after anecdote, interspersed with jokes, Ammann does not include half as much in his book. Ammann echoes Sellheim and the medieval Muslim scholars who censored away Muḥammad's laughter, turning it into a faint smile and attributing his very rare laughter to either astonishment or happiness, but not humour or comedy.⁴⁰² While there are some anecdotes in which this is likely, there are numerous other cases where the Prophet laughs because he had a sense of humour. Another recurrent topic is the censorship of laughter due to the loss of dignity, which Ammann discusses numerous times,⁴⁰³ though there are many more serious moments lacking any kind of laughter or humour recorded in the Prophet's

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 159 -165.

⁴⁰² Ibid, 28–30.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 105, 170, 177.

biographies that can be interpreted as undignified. The book is a valuable contribution to the study of laughter and humour in Islamic civilization in general and in the life of the Prophet in particular.

vii) **Livnat Holtzman**

Continuing with van Ess's concept of laughter from above, Livnat Holtzman looks at appropriate and inappropriate descriptions of God in Islamic traditionalist theology by analysing *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrah* (The Leader of the Souls to the Land of Joy) by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,⁴⁰⁴ describing Heaven and the qualities of its inhabitants based on the Qur'an and the *Ḥadīth*.⁴⁰⁵ This is one of the rare studies dealing exclusively with *ḥadīth*, as most studies mentioned in this section pertain to the *Sunna*. Holtzman finds many references to laughter, in spite of the dramatic topic of the book aiming to prepare the believers for the horrors expected on *yawm al-qiyāma* (Day of Resurrection). The author counts thirty occurrences of the verb *daḥika* (laugh) and its variations and different conjugations, which are mostly related to the Prophet, while some are also attributed to God. The main aim of this analysis is to find the reasons for God's laughter. An interesting observation is that the *aḥādīth* were not only transmitted as text, but also included commentary within the *matn*,⁴⁰⁶ expressing gesticulation, tone of voice or similar information while narrating the *ḥadīth*. Holtzman poses a number of questions related to that, such as whether the Prophet or the *muḥaddithūn* narrating this tradition were laughing while recounting God's laughter? Can divine and human laughter be compared? Holtzman concludes that this has not been discussed in modern research so far.⁴⁰⁷ Eschatological texts include references to laughter, yet this poses a problem when literal reading methods of the text are employed, because the Qur'an portrays Allah as incomparable, for example in [42:11]. As mentioned before in the section about laughter in the Qur'an, believers get to laugh at the unbelievers when they have been rewarded with heaven [83:29-36], which in this case denotes a laughter of *Schadenfreude*. Holtzman references

⁴⁰⁴ Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist, (d. 751/1350).

⁴⁰⁵ Holtzman, L. 2010. Does God really Laugh? Appropriate and Inappropriate Descriptions of God in Islamic Traditionalist Theology. In A. Classen (Ed.), *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences* (pp. 165-200). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.

⁴⁰⁶ the content or text of the *ḥadīth* itself

⁴⁰⁷ Holtzman. Does God really Laugh?, 170.

Tamer's study mentioned above, pointing out that the unbelievers' laugh is sinful, while that of the believers denotes triumph.⁴⁰⁸ Holtzman draws parallels to this triumph, extending it to feelings of 'superiority, haughtiness and gloat' in the laughter of the believers after judgement on *yawm al-qiyāma* and Allah's laughter.⁴⁰⁹ The author presents a number of *aḥādīth* showing the variety of Allah's laughter – laughter of mockery, triumph, as a reward to the believers, good-natured, loving and as a blessing.⁴¹⁰ In the next section, Holtzman shows that laughter is an illustration, as the *aḥādīth* maintained their trait of essentially being an oral literature and transmission even after their collection into books. This oral aspect is what led to using many rhetorical devices to enrich and boost the messages of the *aḥādīth*.⁴¹¹ Holtzman makes a note that she will not deal with the *aḥādīth* that mention the Prophet's laughter and references Ammann's work discussed above and after citing examples for each, concludes that the Prophet's laughter serves to illustrate God's laughter, which is a sign of His satisfaction, mercy, astonishment, or grace.⁴¹² Holtzman reminds the readers, that laughter was considered problematic, as it was seen as an undignified loss of control, which did not properly fit with piety and poise. Hence, the *muḥaddithūn* needed to rationalise the Prophet's laughter or reduce it to a smile in the body of texts collected in *ḥadīth* collections, which is in line with the findings of this study. Holtzman also points to discussions on the merits of smiling over laughing. In the concluding part of her study, she shows the hermeneutical approaches to God's laughter, citing both, Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī⁴¹³ and Ibn Taymiyya's⁴¹⁴ explanations regarding God's laughter and how laughter is an attribute of perfection when ascribed to God.⁴¹⁵ Holtzman concludes that God's laughter was an important part of the religious dogma since the third/ninth century, where laughter was explained away figuratively at times and at others accepted literally without comparing it in any way to human laughter.

⁴⁰⁸ Tamer. *The Qur'ān and Humor*, 9.

⁴⁰⁹ Holtzman. *Does God really Laugh?*, 171.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid*, 171-172.

⁴¹¹ See Günther, S. (1998). Fictional narration and imagination within an authoritative framework: Towards a new understanding of Ḥadīth. In S. Leder (Ed.), *Story-telling in the framework of non-fictional Arabic literature* (pp. 433-471). Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz.

⁴¹² Holtzman. *Does God really Laugh?*, 182-186.

⁴¹³ Shāfi'ī traditionist and poet, (d. 386/996 or 388/998).

⁴¹⁴ Prominent Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist (d. 728/1328).

⁴¹⁵ Holtzman. *Does God really Laugh?*, 198.

Holtzman's chapter is an important contribution focusing on a specific theme in the study of the *mutūn* of *ḥadīth*. It is particularly useful in chapter three of this study, which will be building on Holtzman's work and investigating other authors who have also listed these traditions in their collections or theologians who engaged with them.

viii) **Ze'ev Maghen**

Ze'ev Maghen provides a pioneering work,⁴¹⁶ in which he paints a picture of the early Muslim community where the Prophet and his companions were "relaxed, cheerful, jocular, even feisty and frolicsome ... and enjoyed the good things in life and never took themselves too seriously."⁴¹⁷ Maghen starts by providing a review of the works in English, that studied humour in Islam and notices that most of these studies do not investigate the Prophet's laughter, though some mention fleetingly that the Prophet was regarded as *min afkah al-nās* (among the wittiest of people). Maghen finds this surprising, as this is the "most unique and fascinating characteristic of Muḥammad's personality, a feature that sets him apart in the most radical fashion from all other founders of the world's major religions."⁴¹⁸ Maghen notes that in contrast, German scholarship has contributed to the subject, namely the works of Sellheim and Ammann, discussed above. After the introduction,⁴¹⁹ Maghen divides his lengthy article into five parts, whereby the fourth part is itself divided into four parts. In the first part,⁴²⁰ he discusses the background to jesting and mirth from *fiqh* and points out the different rulings. In the second part he engages with Sellheim's article, mentioned above, and disagrees with his conclusion. Maghen's conclusion is that "both the textual and etymological evidence disprove the position of Sellheim."⁴²¹ He goes a step further and supports his claim from Ammann's extensive study, mentioned above saying: "Ammann himself cannot abide the idea that *mā kāna daḥīk rasūl Allāh illā tabassuman* (the Prophet's laughter was but a smile) and spends a considerable amount of time examining the transmission chains

⁴¹⁶ Maghen, Z. (2008). The Merry Men of Medina: Comedy and Humanity in the early days of Islam. *Der Islam*, 83, pp. 298-313.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, 278.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, 282.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, 277-286

⁴²⁰ *Ibid*, 286-298.

⁴²¹ *Ibid*, 312.

reinforcing this and similar statements in order to show that they represent a chronologically secondary layer, and that the earliest traditions evinces no such discomfort with the image of a laughing prophet.”⁴²²

In the third section,⁴²³ Maghen gives anecdotal evidence of the Prophet laughing. He divides this material into five sections. The first of these he terms as ‘kosher material,’ in which he lists statements and incidents that do not offend any religious sensibilities, like for example when, during the raid on Tabūk, the Prophet invited Mālik al-Ashjaī to enter his *qubba min adam* (goat-skin tent). Malik asked: “*a-kulli?* (All of me),” “All of you,” was the Prophet’s answer.⁴²⁴ The next section he titles as ‘childish things’ which contains anecdotes about the Prophet’s interaction with children and childish nicknames he bestowed on some of his companions.⁴²⁵ The third section is called ‘fun and games,’ and includes household pranks and clowning around with the companions. One such anecdote tells of a time when the Prophet was angry with al-Muhājir b. ‘Abd Allāh, Umm Salama’s brother. She let him into her room where he hid till the Prophet came and then he snuck up on the Prophet from behind and grabbed him by the waist. The Prophet laughed, and al-Muhājir was forgiven.⁴²⁶ The fourth section, ‘laughter and leniency,’ includes anecdotes that show the Prophet’s leniency and mercy as shown in a *ḥadīth* narrated by ‘A’isha about Sahla bint Suhayl coming in and complaining that her husband, Abū Ḥudhayfa, disapproved of the way their grown up foster-son, Salim freely stays in her company. The prophet advised her to nurse him to make him a milk-relative. When Sahla protested that he was a grown man, the Prophet laughed and said: “Don’t you think I know that he’s a grown man?” Sahla went home to tell her husband about the suggested solution and returned saying: “Abū Ḥudhayfa no longer objects.”⁴²⁷

Finally in the last section he mentions ‘spicy and irreverent material’ where he extracts *ḥadīth* narrations dealing with scatological material or sexual innuendoes. One example would be the incident when Umm

⁴²² Ibid, 313.

⁴²³ Ibid, 313-338.

⁴²⁴ Quoted by Maghen as being extracted from Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Adab, Bāb Mā Jā’a fi al-Muzāh*, 35: 92 (5000).

⁴²⁵ Quoted by Maghen as being extracted from Sir William Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, revised edition by T. H. Weir (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1923), 208

⁴²⁶ Quoted by Maghen as being extracted from Muḥammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *History of al-Tabari* (XXXIX, trans. Ella Landau-Tasseron [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998]), 80.

⁴²⁷ Quoted by Maghen as being extracted from Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad, Baqi Musnad al-Ansar, Hadith al-Sayyida ‘A’isha*, 22979.

Ayman, the Prophet's *mawla*, got up during the night and drank the content of an earthenware pot in which, unbeknown to her, the Prophet had urinated earlier. In the morning the Prophet asked her to pour away the pot's contents, and she confessed to having drunk it during the night. The Prophet laughed until his molars showed, and told her that she will never again have a stomach ache.⁴²⁸ The conclusion⁴²⁹ completes the presentation saying: "The Prophet and his Companions are shown to be a vivacious, buoyant, rollick-some bunch who could crack jokes and play tricks at the same time as they prepared the ground for one of the most momentous social and spiritual revolutions of human history."⁴³⁰

This article is very comprehensive, even if its scope does not permit a full listing of all the material found in the *ḥadīth* collections. Unlike this study, Maghen does not focus solely on *ḥadīth*, but collects anecdotes from *sīra*, *tafsīr*, *maghāzī*, etc. Furthermore, he does not engage with any deep analysis of the anecdotes he lists, due to the nature of the study, being an article and not a book. However, this study is perhaps one of the most useful ones for this research, as it will be building on it by expanding on and adding to the anecdotes catalogue, even if it will not extend to non-*ḥadīth* materials.

What sets Maghen's study apart from the others is not only that it fills a research gap, but also that it is written in a very humorous style befitting the topic. Maghen had aptly inserted a footnote in which he wrote: "This is the place to note, as well, that there is another institution that has traditionally been perceived as the antithesis of humor: academic writing. Just as scholarly analyses of exciting historical events are seldom exciting themselves (especially in the last several decades, since historians decided they were practitioners of a science, not an art) so scholarly analyses of humorous phenomena are rarely humorous: thus does the discipline of history commonly fail to convey the genuine mood and authentic atmosphere infusing its subjects, distorting rather than elucidating – and burying rather than enlivening – the past."⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Quoted by Maghen as being extracted from Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *History of al-Tabarī* (XXXIX, trans. Ella Landau-Tasseron [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998]), 199.

⁴²⁹ Maghen. *The Merry Men of Medina*, 338-340.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, 338.

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, 285.

ix) **Leyla al-'Ubaydī**

In the introduction al-'Ubaydī outlines the reasons for embarking on this research.⁴³² She was interested in the binary representation of all things, like darkness and light, justice and injustice, *jidd* and *hazl* as it is what adds dimension to what makes humans able to appreciate and revel in those that they consider good (light, justice, fun). She quotes al-Jāhīz saying: "Laughter has its [due] place and measure, as does jesting. When one overdoes either, or does not allow them full play, much of it turns into garrulousness, and cutting it short ends in frustration. People find fault with the extent of laughter and jesting, but when some advantage is desired by jesting, and by laughter the object for which it was roused, then jesting becomes earnest and laughter turns to seriousness."⁴³³ Yet, she states that though al-Jāhīz tried and succeeded in raising the status of humour, he failed to raise it to be at par with earnestness. Her choice to work on this topic is an attempt on her part to highlight this side of Islamic culture, which has not received sufficient attention. Her choice to focus on humour rather than *hazl* is to exceed mere laughter and entertainment, and look at its meanings, human nature, behavioural patterns and language mastery. Laughter in itself is a manifestation of humour and its consequence.⁴³⁴ She further explains her choice of working on *ḥadīth* as an investigation into the truth of the quote found in many heritage books of the Islamic culture and civilisation that "the Prophet was among *afkah al-nās*."⁴³⁵ Her thesis is that if the research reveals that *ḥadīth* does indeed contain humour, jokes and jesting, then this would confirm that Islam is not just about intimidation, coercion, rigidity and continuous rituals and worship, but that there was also some space reserved for recreation, fun, entertainment and laughter. It would also prove that humour was not the opposite or the antonym to the sacred nor that it was prohibited or rejected, but that it was often in the service of it, if not one of its components, as the Prophet's Sunna is almost equal in recognition to the Qur'an.⁴³⁶

⁴³² al-'Ubaydī, L. 2010. *Al-Fakh fi-l Islam*. Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī.

⁴³³ al-Jāhīz, A. 1997. *The Book of Misers*. (R. B. Serjeant, Trans.) Reading: Garnet Publishing, 6.

⁴³⁴ al-'Ubaydī. *Al-Fakh fi-l Islam*, 17.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

The book is divided into six chapters, where the first one looks at humour. The author starts with Greek humour, considering it a start to the articulation of thoughts on humour. Then she looks at how the Church regarded humour as profane and opposing its teachings, as demonstrated in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, a historical murder mystery set in an Italian isolated abbey in 1327, where a nonconformist friar investigates the deaths of several friars and monks who die under mysterious circumstances. It is revealed that they die because another monk poisons the only surviving manuscript of Aristotle's book containing his theory of comedy and laughter, because he wants to stop the circulation of that manuscript at all cost due to the subversive power of laughter. She then moves to human nature and how it necessitates laughter.

In the following section, she presents a summary of humour within Muslim culture with long detailed sections on the main writers, thinkers and scholars advocating the use of humour and using it in their work, such as al-Jāhiz⁴³⁷ and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī,⁴³⁸ giving a brief overview of their works. She continues with Abū Ishāq al-Ḥuṣrī⁴³⁹ and the beginnings of humour censorship, which he did in his own work *Jam' al-jawāhir fi-l-mulaḥ wa-l-nawādir*.⁴⁴⁰ Censorship turns to prohibition of humour in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's⁴⁴¹ book titled *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*.⁴⁴² Ibn al-Jawzī⁴⁴³ then restores humour in his book *Akhbār al-ḥamqā wa-l-mughaffalīn*, followed by al-Tifāshī,⁴⁴⁴ and his famous *Nuzhat al-albāb fī mā lā yūjad fī kitāb*. She ends with al-Ibshīhī⁴⁴⁵ and his famous anthology *Al-mustaṭraf fī kull fannin mustaṭraf*.⁴⁴⁶

In the second Chapter titled 'in God's humour' al-'Ubaydī touches upon the Prophet's narrations where he laughs and talks about Allah's laughter, as discussed above by Holtzman. In addition she

⁴³⁷ Famous Arab writer and Mu'tazilī theologian (d. 255/869)

⁴³⁸ Author of several *adab* works and philosopher of the fourth/tenth century (d. 414/1023).

⁴³⁹ Famous poet and man of letters, (d. 413/1022).

⁴⁴⁰ al-'Ubaydī. *Al-fakh fi-l-Islam*, 49.

⁴⁴¹ Theologian, jurist, thinker, mystic and religious reformer, (d. 505/1111)

⁴⁴² al-'Ubaydī. *Al-fakh fi-l-Islam*,. 51.

⁴⁴³ Famous Ḥanbalī jurist, traditionist, historian, preacher, one of the most prolific writers of Arabic literature (d. 597/1200).

⁴⁴⁴ Egyptian scholar and writer (d. 651/1253).

⁴⁴⁵ Egyptian writer (d. after 850/1446).

⁴⁴⁶ al-'Ubaydī. *Al-fakh fi-l-Islam*, 59.

points out passages in the Qur'an which allude to laughter and happiness as being a reward for the believers in heaven.

In the third chapter, titled 'Humour, and the Religion of *yusr* (ease)', the author lists and engages with the narrations which show and reiterate the principles of ease, taking Allah's and the Prophet's mercy, leniency and compassion as a role model. The example is when 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb came knocking at the door of the Prophet, while he was sitting with a group of excited Qurashī women, loudly chatting with him, which is also discussed in this study. When they heard 'Umar's voice asking permission to enter, the women immediately fell silent, and adjusted their veils. 'Umar found Muḥammad laughing. "May God make your teeth laugh!" 'Umar greeted him. [Muḥammad explained:] "I am laughing at these women here, when they heard your voice at the door, they rushed to cover up." "But it is **you** they should fear," 'Umar protested, "not me." "O enemies of yourselves," 'Umar continued, "will you fear me and not the Messenger of God?" "Yes," they replied. "You are *afazz wa-aghlaḥ* (rougher and harsher) than him." Muḥammad echoed their opinion: "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, by Him in whose hands is my life! Were the devil himself to run into you on the street, he would cross to the other side!"⁴⁴⁷ Al-'Ubaydī opines that this shows the leniency of the Prophet and his casual attitude to a slip of female modesty, as he essentially laughs it off, as Maghen phrased it in his study mentioned above.⁴⁴⁸

In the fourth chapter, which she titles 'humour within the household' she discusses traditions that show humorous interactions between the Prophet and his wives, his grandchildren, his daughter Fāṭima, and other Muslims from the community, humour relating to Judgement Day and the afterlife in Heaven, even humour extending to rituals and worship. And example would be how the Prophet would kiss one of his wives,⁴⁴⁹ while he was fasting or how he would kiss one of his wives and not renew his ablutions afterwards. 'Ā'isha narrates both instances and laughs, to show the normality of such an act and that it is devoid of desire but a sign of love and mercy.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ al-'Ubaydī. *Al-Fakh fi-l Islam*, 101, quoting Bukhari, *ḥadīth* #5621, 3051, 3407.

⁴⁴⁸ Maghen. *The Merry Men of Medina*, 328.

⁴⁴⁹ In this case here 'Ā'isha Bint Abī Bakr

⁴⁵⁰ al-'Ubaydī. *Al-fakh fi-l Islam*, 128.

In the fifth chapter, titled 'humour and play' al-'Ubaydī shows various instances of the Prophet playing with children, joking with Bedouins, nomads and the elderly, concluding that laughter is contagious, spreading from a laughing God to His Prophet and from there to the companions, who are the subject matter of the sixth chapter. She divides the chapter into general humour with the companions, humour on the way to a *ghazwa* (raid or battle), humour about *zawāj al-mut'a* (temporary marriage, literally marriage of pleasure),⁴⁵¹ humour about having doubts and humorous poetry.

In the conclusion, al-'Ubaydī qualifies her thesis statements by adding that the book not only serves to show that the Prophet and the companions knew how to laugh and engaged in humorous activities and playful exchanges, but that those pious role models prove through their behaviour that humour does not contradict the sacred, does not oppose religion in any way, but on the contrary serves to bring the believers closer to each other and to God. The book ends with two indices listing the Qur'anic verses and *ahādīth* used.

This study is the first in Arabic language focusing only on prophetic traditions, culled from the nine *Ṣiḥāḥ* collections (al-Bukhārī, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, al-Dārimī, Ibn Māja, Ibn Ḥanbal and Mālik b. Anas), without including any anecdotes from *Sīra* works (Prophet's biographies), *maghāzī* works,⁴⁵² historical annals and chronicles or *manāqib* and *faḍā'il* works (hagiographies) or other literary works, like for example in Maghen's article. Al-'Ubaydī's book, like most works discussed in this literature review, uses only Sunni Ḥadīth collections. Furthermore, though a groundbreaking work, it does not present the different versions of each tradition, does not follow the evolution of the traditions and ignores the manipulations of the various traditions to remove/dilute the Prophet's laugh and turn it into barely a smile, like discussed by Sellheim and mentioned by Maghen for example.⁴⁵³ Though al-'Ubaydī discusses the role of humour within the broader Islamic heritage works in her first chapter, she does not follow the legal reasoning regarding humour or its evolution, though she

⁴⁵¹ Legally, it is a contract between a man and an unmarried woman permitting sexual relations between them for a fixed amount of time in exchange for a fixed amount of money, or bride-price, which is to be given to the temporary wife as a compensation.

⁴⁵² Works written about the expeditions and raids organised by the Prophet.

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 185-199.

briefly mentions the almost prohibition of humour in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*.⁴⁵⁴ Nevertheless, al-'Ubaydī's book will be taken as a starting point for this study to build upon, expand and develop further.

J) Concluding remarks

As mentioned, most of the available academic works and studies mainly deal with humour from a Sunni perspective, be it an analysis of *Ḥadīth* collections, *fiqhī* discussions or *nawādir* collections. The Shi'ite perspective is academically under-represented. There are no academic works dealing with humour culled from Shi'a Ḥadīth collections, *fiqhī* discussions. Though some works are devoted to distinctly Shi'ite *nawādir* collections.

One anecdote that has a distinctly Shi'ite flavour makes a rare appearance in *al-Murāḥ fī al-muzāḥ*, discussed above, where 'Abd Allāh Kathīr b. Ja'far narrated that the *ghilmān*⁴⁵⁵ in 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās's household fought with those in 'Ā'isha's household. She decided to go to mediate between them in a *hawdaj* (palanquin) placed on a mule. On her way she met Ibn Abī 'Atīq, who asked her: "Mother, where are you going?" She replied that she heard of the fight between the *ghilmān* and was going to mediate between them so they would make peace. He retorted: "He would rather manumit all those he owns if you returned home [instead]." She asks him: "What makes you say this?" He answers her: "'The day of the Camel' has just passed and now you want to start with the 'Day of the Mule'?"⁴⁵⁶ 'The Day of the Camel' obviously refers to the famous battle (36/656) between 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and 'Ā'isha, along with with the Companions Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Taymī and the Prophet's cousin al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām.

As mentioned, the prevailing stereotype is that Shi'ites indulge in *ta'ziyah* (mourning) and crying rather than humour. The rich tradition of Shi'ite *ta'ziyah* rituals and stories of al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom have formed the subject of many studies. One of the most comprehensive books on the subject which discusses this native Iranian form of theatrical expression is by Peter Chelkowski.⁴⁵⁷ Much has been

⁴⁵⁴ al-'Ubaydī. *Al-Fakh fī-l Islam*, 51.

⁴⁵⁵ Literally young man or boy used to mean a slave, a servant, a bodyguard or freedman, bound to his former master by personal ties.

⁴⁵⁶ al-Ghazzī. *al-Murāḥ fī al-muzāḥ*, 31-32.

⁴⁵⁷ Chelkowski, Peter J., ed. *Ta'ziyah: Ritual and Drama in Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1979.

written about mourning rituals and a Shi'ite penchant for weeping, which has been viewed as fitting with a minority community, discriminated against or the perpetual underdog who believe themselves to be the chosen people.⁴⁵⁸ With all those tears and mourning, a sense of humour is certainly not seen as one of the pronounced features of Shiites, yet this study aims at showing the opposite and that both the Shi'ite and Sunni corpora are replete with anecdotal, humorous and jocular instances.

K) Shi'ite and Persian anecdote collections

Recent works have started looking at Shi'ite anecdote collections. In her two volume book "*Verachtet das Scherzen nicht!*", Susanne Kurz translates and analyses the anecdotes found in a collection written by the satirist 'Ubayd Zākānī (d. 772/1371).⁴⁵⁹ The title derives from advice, given in the book to not despise joking (*hazl*) and not to regard jokesters (*hazliyān*) with disdain.⁴⁶⁰ The original collection is divided into two parts containing Arabic anecdotes, followed by their translation into Persian, as well as original Persian anecdotes. She also identifies that the Arabic humorous short prose was not only translated into Persian, but that there was also a creative and own reproductive phase as of the eighth/fourteenth century, characterized by constructive materials, additions to the jokes to give them a Persian context and flavour.

Kurz returns to Zākānī in another book chapter titled "*Witze sind auch ein ernstes Geschäft*" (Jokes are also a Serious Business) where she compares some of the anecdotes from his collection titled "*Resāla-ye delgošā*" (The Cheer-inducing Treatise) to similar jokes culled from Fakhr al-Dīn 'Alī-ye al-Ṣāfi's (d. 939/1533) collection titled *Laṭā'if al-ṭavā'if* (The Delightful of the Sects). This chapter focuses on jokes about homosexuals, where Kurz argues that most are unoriginal, meaning they were culled from older Arabic *nawādir* collections.⁴⁶¹ She compares them stating that while these types

⁴⁵⁸ See for example Aghaie, Kamran Scot. 2005. "The Origins of the Sunnite–Shi'ite Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'ziyeh Tradition." *TDR (The Drama Review)* 49.No. 4, Special Issue on Ta'ziyeh: 42-47.

⁴⁵⁹ See Haidari, A. A. 1986. "A Medieval Persian Satirist." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49 (1): 117-127, where Haidari argues on p. 124, that Zākānī was a Sunni and that the existing enmity between Sunnis and Shi'ites was one of the main targets of his ridicule.

⁴⁶⁰ Kurz, Susanne. 2009. "*Verachtet das Scherzen nicht!*" : *die kulturhistorische Aussagekraft von persischen Sammlungen humoristischer Kurzprosa*. 2 vols. Dortmund: Verlag für Orientkunde.

⁴⁶¹ Kurz, Susanne. 2009. "Witze sind auch ein ernstes Geschäft." In *XXX. Deutscher Orientalistentag, Freiburg, 24.-28. September 2007. Ausgewählte Vorträge*, edited by Jens Peter Laut und Maurus.

of jokes constitute 11-13% of Zākānī's collection they only amount to 1% of Šāfi's work. The jokes in *Zākānī's* collection cover various homosexual relationships, such as pederasty, homoerotic jokes, and anecdotes about the sexual attraction between men, while the jokes in Šāfi's work are not as obscene and only cover homoerotic anecdotes that are much milder than Zākānī's. One example is about Sultan Maḥmūd of Gazna, who was in a *majlis* with some preachers, one of whom said that on Judgement Day anyone who was guilty of pederasty would have to carry the abused youth on his shoulders across the Širāṭ. The Sultan started to cry, so the preacher pacified him by saying: don't cry, as you also will not have to walk across it.⁴⁶²

In another book chapter, Kurz looks at jokes from Persian anecdotes about Sufis.⁴⁶³ She looks at Zākānī's collection of anecdotes *Maktūb-e qalandarān* (The Letter of the Antinomian Dervishes), focusing on his humorous criticism of Sufis, heaping his sarcasm on superstitions, *baraka* and *karāmāt*. For example: A dervish came to a village and saw a group of village elders sitting there. He asked: "Give me something! Otherwise, by God, I'm doing to this village exactly what I did to the last village." They were afraid he was a magician (*sāḥir*) or a 'Friend of God' (*valī*) who could damage their village and gave him what he wanted. Then they asked him: "What did you do with the other village?" He replied: "There I also asked for something, but I was not given anything. Then I came here, and if you hadn't given me anything either, I would have left and gone to another village."⁴⁶⁴

As most of the works studied were authored by 'Ubayd Zākānī, he should be introduced. Nizām al-Dīn 'Ubayd-Allāh al-Zākānī (d. 772/1371) is better known as 'Ubayd Zākānī. He was a well-known Persian poet and satirist and the main 'butt' of his satire was what he considered as the 'new ethics' including politics, tyranny and injustice by those in power, as well as moral decay and malice in

⁴⁶² Ibid, 4.

⁴⁶³ Kurz, Susanne. 2008. "Verehrt und verlacht: Sufis und ihre Gnadengaben (karāmāt) in persischen Witzen und Anekdoten ." In *Das Charisma - Funktionen und symbolische Repräsentationen : Historische, philosophische, islamwissenschaftliche, soziologische und theologische Perspektiven*, edited by Pavlína Rychterová, Stefan Seit and Raphaela Veit, 375-382. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 387.

society.⁴⁶⁵ His style is provocative and obscene, mixing verse and prose, which caused his works to be neglected for a long time by traditional compilers of anecdote collections as well as modern literary critics.⁴⁶⁶ It is fairly recently that his work has finally received attention, with a number of studies devoted to his works, as well as critical editions, and numerous translations.⁴⁶⁷ He was the subject of two doctoral dissertations, one in Italian⁴⁶⁸ and the second one in German.⁴⁶⁹

This concludes the Literature Review. The form of it is slightly unusual, though this was necessitated by the topic of this study falling in an intersection between four distinct areas. To analyse humour one has to define it first, which requires looking at dictionaries, lexica and linguistic works. As most of the studies dealing with humour focus on literary anecdote and joke collections this formed the second criterion discussed. Very few studies focused on humour in religious texts, the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth*, which is the third element taken into consideration. Finally, as the Qur'an prohibits mockery, this necessitated looking at the *fiqhi* rulings regulating humour. Moreover, within these four distinct themes, there were authors who contributed more than one work, therefore instead of opting for the customary chronological order, works by the same author were grouped together.

The Literature Review showed research gaps in humour studies in *ḥadīth* generally and particularly in Shi'ite *ḥadīth*, as well as an omission in studying the reasons for diluting or editing out the Prophet's laughter, which this study aims to fill. Moreover, the few studies that use *ḥadīth* deal with one version only, disregarding other versions found in different collections from different times, that can shed

⁴⁶⁵ Daniela Meneghini, "OBAYD ZĀKĀNĪ," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2008, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/obayd-zakani> (accessed on 30 September 2020).

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ See for example Sprachman, Paul. 2012. *Licensed Fool: The Damnable, Foul-mouthed Obeyd-e Zākānī*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda; Zākānī, Nizām ad-Dīn 'Obeyd-é. 2005. *Traité de la joie de coeur: contes, définitions et maximes*. Translated by Jalal Alavinia. Paris: Lettres persanes; Zākānī, Nizām al-Dīn 'Ubayd. 1971. *A Tale of Cats and Mice: of Obeyd of Zākānī*. Translated by Mehdi Khan Nakosteen. Boulder: Colorado Typographic Society; Zākānī, Nizām al-Dīn 'Ubayd. 1969. *Rats Against Cats*. Translated by Masud e Faraad. London: Priory Press; Zākānī, Nizām al-Dīn 'Ubayd. 1985. *The Ethics of the Aristocrats and Other Satirical Works*. Translated by Hasan Javadi. Piedmont, Calif.: Jahan Books; Brookshaw, Dominic Parviz. 2009. "To be Feared and Desired: Turks in the Collected Works of 'Ubayd-i Zākānī." *Iranian Studies* 42 (5): 725-744, 733, and Zākānī, 'Ubaid. 1986. *Mäuse gegen Katzen: und andere Texte*. Edited by Wolfgang Simon. Translated by Cyrus Atabay. Düsseldorf: Eremiten-Press.

⁴⁶⁸ d'Erme, Giovanni M. "Racconti e satire dalla Shirāz del Trecento". Unpublished thesis type. Sapienza University of Rome. 2005.

⁴⁶⁹ Azari, Parviz Motamedi. "Ubaid und seine Qasiden: eine Gattungs-, Motiv- und Stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung. Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. 1986.

light on the development of the *matn* and how it was changed and why, thereby contributing to the field of *ḥadīth* studies as well as humour studies. This study is the first one to solely focus on *ḥadīth* without consulting other heritage texts such as *Sīra* works, or *maghāzī* literature. It is also the first study to use *ḥadīth* from works of both Sunni and Shi'ite authors and collectors, subjecting them to the same methodological process and statistical analysis to arrive at a more comprehensive picture of humour in early Islam. The statistical analysis of the data can be useful for the discipline of digital humanities as such. In the digital humanities field, when studying *ḥadīth*, the focus is mostly on the *isnād*, concentrating on the narrators, the frequency of their narrations, their geographical locations and the networks they form, as well as automated *isnād* tree visualisations. Therefore, this study is among the first to focus on the *matn* rather than the *isnād*.⁴⁷⁰ Finally, the study offers a new theory of humour, which is grounded in the data, to counter the western-centric as well as modern bias inherent in the existing humour theories.

⁴⁷⁰ Maroussia Bednarkiewicz, at University of Tübingen, Germany, is currently mapping the use and adaptations of *ḥadīth* narratives to study regional and general patterns within the *ḥadīth* literature as a whole to illustrate the diversity of Muslim societies and the Islamic specificities that unite them. See also Bednarkiewicz, Maroussia. 2020. "The History of the Adhān: a View from the Hadith Literature." In *Modern Hadith Studies : Continuing Debates and New Approaches*, edited by Michael Dann and Christopher Melchert Belal Abo-Alabbas, 27-48. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Methodology

As seen from the overview of the research conducted to define, explain, categorise, qualify, and rationalise humour, its nature and significance, there is very little or no consensus about what actually constitutes humour and there is no unified theory of humour.

In spite of the many theories developed over time, and discussed in the first chapter, none of these theories are actually able to differentiate between the types of response or quantify it; neither can any of these theories transcend cultural and local aspects of humour. Jokes lose something when they are translated or explained. Some of the jokes can be shared across the centuries, or even across cultures, but others are dependent on the company and the time in which the jokes were narrated.⁴⁷¹ Although the study of laughter and the study of jokes often go together, most laughter in most cultures has nothing to do with jokes at all.⁴⁷² In her seminal study about "*Laughter in Ancient Rome*," Mary Beard asks: "How comprehensible, in any terms, can Roman laughter now be? How can we understand what made the Romans laugh, without falling into the trap of turning them into a version of ourselves?"⁴⁷³ These are very important questions and can be extended to and applied perfectly to the subject of this study. How can we comprehend the laughter of the Prophet, his companions, the members of his household and community today and how can we understand what made them laugh, without back-projecting modern western values and theories onto them? Mary Beard wrote that "whatever the physiological universals that may be involved, people in different communities, or parts of the world, learn to laugh at different things on different occasions and in different contexts."⁴⁷⁴ Hence, the analysis needs to be as objective as possible and focused on the particularities of the Prophet's community,

⁴⁷¹ Beard, Mary. 2015. *Laughter in Ancient Rome: on Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up*. Berkley: University of California Press, 27.

⁴⁷² *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, 18.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 44.

taking the specific contexts of the time, locality and culture into consideration to avoid any western-centric and modern sensibilities.

As demonstrated, most humour theories, apart from the Classical Theory, were formulated in modern times and are very difficult – if not impossible – to be back-projected and applied to the people and classical material from seventh century Arabia. To simplify, the Classical Theory, which has become associated with Aristotle, is not very helpful in analysing the different types of humorous characteristic of the Prophet's traditions as it mainly argues that humour and laughter are inherently human emotions, which does not allow for any in depth analysis and would render the research mainly descriptive, as was the case with Franz Rosenthal's ground-breaking book *Humor in Early Islam*, first published in 1956.⁴⁷⁵ Descriptive studies play an important role in research, yet they only describe situations without determining any relationships, such as for example cause and effect and it is almost impossible to draw conclusions from the data about the relationship between the individual items, in this case the *āḥādīth* and their versions, recording the Prophet's laughter. Descriptive studies do not answer questions about how, when and why these instances occurred, focusing mainly on the anecdotes themselves. Hence, descriptive research cannot be used to determine a causal relationship, or to determine how one variable affects another and in which way.

People laugh at different things, or at the same things for different reasons and some would not have laughed at all.⁴⁷⁶ If all humour theories are not helpful in answering the research questions and in analysing the reasons of why the Prophet laughed, how, with whom, when and about what, nor can they shed any light about the degree of the response, then how can the instances of the Prophet's laughter be studied? There are four different methodologies that will be implemented in this research:

1. Framework

The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a study that explains why the research problem under study exists and why it needs to be addressed. It introduces and describes the theory and is mainly used to limit the scope of the relevant data by focusing on specific

⁴⁷⁵ Rosenthal, Franz. 1956. *Humor in early Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁴⁷⁶ Beard. *Laughter in Ancient Rome*, 15.

variables and defining the specific point of view taken in analysing and interpreting the data. In addition, it facilitates the understanding of concepts and variables according to given definitions and validates or challenges certain theoretical assumptions under study.

The theoretical framework will be used in the fifth and sixth chapter of this study to explain the differences between the various *ḥadīth* collections, which are replete with narrations about the Prophet laughing out loud until his back teeth became visible, or laughing and clapping on his thighs, and other collections which have edited out most of the laughter and leave the Prophet barely smiling. Many collections include statements such as “*ma kana daḥik rasūl Allah illa tabassuman*” (the Prophet's laugh was but a smile”).⁴⁷⁷

The framework chosen consists of four segments. In the first segment it will show how the Qur'an views laughter as a legitimate human emotion as in verse [53:43]⁴⁷⁸ and how it further depicted the Prophet as human. For example verses [18:110]⁴⁷⁹ and [41:6]⁴⁸⁰ enjoins the Prophet to tell the people that he is human and mortal like them. Not only is Muḥammad a mortal human, but so are all other Prophets before him, like in verse [21:7]⁴⁸¹ and [14:11].⁴⁸² It will also look at the development of *Sīra* works (biographies) and how the Prophet was portrayed across the centuries, changing his image from a mere mortal human to an infallible flawless and faultless superhuman or demigod.

In the second segment an explanation will be sought to rationalise why the humanity of the Prophet was censored and then curtailed, why his laughter was edited out of the *ḥadīth* collections and why he was turned into a superhuman, who no longer laughs, because it is undignified and only barely smiles.

⁴⁷⁷ Tirmidhi, *Kitāb al-Manāqib 'an Rasūl Allah, Bāb Ft Bashashat al-Nabi*, (3651)

⁴⁷⁸ [53.43] And that He it is Who makes (men) laugh and makes (them) weep;

⁴⁷⁹ [18.110] Say: I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your god is one God, therefore whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not join anyone in the service of his Lord.

⁴⁸⁰ [41.6] Say: I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your God is one God, therefore follow the right way to Him and ask His forgiveness; and woe to the polytheists;

⁴⁸¹ [21.7] And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation, so ask the followers of the reminder if you do not

⁴⁸² [14.11] Their apostles said to them: We are nothing but mortals like yourselves, but Allah bestows (His) favours on whom He pleases of His servants, and it is not for us that we should bring you an authority except by Allah's permission; and on Allah should the believers rely.

Al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* writes that excessive laughter hardens the hearts, and that too much laughter kills the hearts. He is quoting a *ḥadīth* from Ibn Ḥanbal's *musnad* "Do not laugh too much, for verily excessive laughter kills the heart."⁴⁸³ The death of the heart refers to its spiritual corruption. Al-Ghazālī judges laughter as being undignified, that too much of it wastes time, and that jokes still have to adhere to the truth. He cites examples of people who did not laugh for over thirty or forty years such as al-Ḥasan, the Prophet's grandson, and 'Aṭā' al-Sulamī. He concludes that smiles are allowed, as long as they cannot be heard and remain only a visual, not an audial, phenomenon.⁴⁸⁴

So why then did al-Ghazālī, among others, restrict laughter in such a way when the Qur'an acknowledges it as a legitimate emotion, given to humanity by God? Was al-Ghazālī the first to do so or was he a link in a chain that started before him? If so who started it, when and why?

A comparison between the various *Ḥadīth* versions from different collections, as well as between the Sunni and Shī'ite corpus will then be possible. The comparison is important not only to reclaim the humanity of the Prophet, but also to restore the balance between *jadd* (earnest) and *hazl* (jocularity) and fits nicely with the first segment of the framework, dealing with the Qur'anic image of the Prophet and his *Sīra*. The differences will be analysed and explained in the third segment of the framework by looking at the theories of Ibn Khaldūn, who argued that dynasties have a lifespan just like humans and at the time of the decline of these dynasties, politics enter into the *madhāhib* (schools of thought). When this happens, jurists became more restrictive and forbidding. They issue fatwas to sustain a livelihood and please political powers, thereby restricting the early tolerance and freedoms.⁴⁸⁵ Ibn Khaldūn gives an example from the last period of Prince Hishām al-Raḍī's, (d. 179/795), rule when the Māliki *madhhab* entered al-Andalus, spread and then prevailed, turning al-Andalus into a mono-*madhhab* society. The consequence of having only one *madhhab* was restrictive and resulted in intolerance in religious matters and was then followed by a complete power grab by the jurists, first on the general public, which was

⁴⁸³ Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad. 1995. *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*. Edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr. 8 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 8 #8081.

⁴⁸⁴ al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. 2004. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 3:164-170.

⁴⁸⁵ al-Qasimī, Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn. 1986. *Al-fatwa fi-l-Islām*. Edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Qādī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 170.

later extended to the ruling class.⁴⁸⁶ The final segment of the framework aims at restoring the Prophet's humanity by reinstating and explaining the instances and reasons of his laughter depicted in the sources.

2. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis is an analysis of the available data, in this case, the *aḥādīth* (narrations) from the *ḥadīth* corpus, through mathematical and statistical modelling. Quantitative analysis has been used in the analysis of behaviour to arrive at theoretical meanings of the data through describing and interpreting the results statistically.

This method will be used in the third, fourth and fifth chapter respectively and starts with a descriptive statistical analysis, which is then followed by a closer analysis to determine classification, causality, and correlation. This type of data analysis can be of great value to draw meaningful results from a large body of textual data, in this case 882 versions of 208 narrations. One of the main benefits is that it provides the means to separate out the large number of factors that often obscure the main findings and allows for summarising common features. Characteristics can be extracted to form categories, which then facilitate the study of these attributes to determine the various reasons why the Prophet laughed, with whom, about what and how. The quantitative analysis will categorize *aḥādīth* (narrations) into distinct groups to determine the instances and their frequency. Although quantitative analysis is a powerful tool for evaluating data, it rarely tells a complete story without the help of its opposite - qualitative analysis.

3. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative Analysis is a systematic approach to large bodies of text to interpret, contextualise and identify the different elements and groups present in the data. Furthermore, this type of analysis offers an inquiry into the reasoning behind and an in-depth understanding of human behaviour as it examines the why and how more closely. In addition, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the data.

⁴⁸⁶ Farrūkh, 'Umar. 1983. *Tārīkh al-fīkr al-'Arabī ilā ayyām Ibn Khaldūn*. Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyin, 586.

Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the value and behaviour, as well as the social context of particular data items. This method will eliminate the problems faced when dealing with humour theories discussed in the first chapter, which are modern and western-centric, as this type of analysis deals with intangible matters that belong to the social and communal realm, rather than the mathematical one. This contributes to addressing the specific research questions and provides an extensive understanding of the Prophet's and the companions' lives and constraints. Mary Beard opines that the "ambiguity of laughter, between nature and culture, has a tremendous impact on our attempts to understand how laughter in general operates in human society" and more specifically how far it is under our conscious control, and whether or not it could be held back or released more or less to order?⁴⁸⁷

Using both quantitative and qualitative analysis will also enable the identification of instances of laughter that were either misunderstood or misused later on. Mary Beard asks: How can laughter be misunderstood or mistaken? Is a person who laughs potentially as vulnerable to the power of laughter as a person who is laughed at?⁴⁸⁸ The Laughter – and its different interpretations and misinterpretations (as will be demonstrated in chapters three to six), uses and misuses within these scenes – is part of the joke.⁴⁸⁹

One of the instances of such misunderstandings is the often discussed *ḥadīth* about women being *naqiṣāt aqlin wa dīn* (deficient in intellect and religion) which is found in numerous collections in different versions. Humour can also be produced by misusing pragmatic knowledge in various ways. Even as early as the third/ninth century, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 254/868) saw both women and men as subject to the same environmental forces (cultural, social and physiological). He boldly proclaimed: "A woman is of sound religion, sexual honour and heart unless motivated by scruples or lust."⁴⁹⁰ In his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* titled *Fatḥ al-bārī fī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) argues

⁴⁸⁷ Beard. *Laughter in Ancient Rome*, 43.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

⁴⁹⁰ al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr. 1938-45. *Al-Ḥayawān*. Edited by 'Abd al-Salām Harūn. Cairo: al-Ḥalabī, 3:291.

that the Prophet's comment was meant as a *mulāṭafa* (nice comment) and that he avoided to rebuke or blame them.⁴⁹¹ The word *mulāṭafa* can also imply a *du'āba* (joke or a humorous statement).

Muslim feminists have argued that this particular *ḥadīth* was said at a specific time and situation, addressing a specific group of women and it was not meant to be a blanket statement to be generalised, affecting all Muslim women until this day. They have further argued that the Prophet was joking and that he knew these women very well, and as he passed them, he joked with them in a light-hearted gathering before ʿĪd prayers.⁴⁹² Ruqayyah Maqsood developed the theory that Muḥammad could have been joking, and translates the *ḥadīth* in a way that does indeed make it sound funny: "The women were outraged, and one of them instantly stood up boldly and demanded to know why that was so. 'Because,' he replied, 'you women grumble so much, and show ingratitude to your husbands! Even if the poor fellows spent all their lives doing good things for you, you have only to be upset at the least thing and you will say, 'I have never received any good from you!'⁴⁹³ Such instances of misuse or misunderstanding will be explained in detail using qualitative and quantitative analysis.

4. Formulating a new theory of humour

Finally in the sixth and final chapter and after the implementation of the first three methods, a new theory of humour will be formulated, using the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis, taking the theoretical framework into consideration.

Mary Beard argues that as a general rule, the more features and varieties of laughter that a theory sets out to explain, the less plausible it will be.⁴⁹⁴ Hence, the quantitative and qualitative analysis, determining the categories and the frequencies of their occurrence, will facilitate the formulation of the new theory based on data evidence.

⁴⁹¹ *Bāb Tark al-ḥāʾid al-sawm* (298)

⁴⁹² For a thorough discussion of this *ḥadīth* see for example Mitter, Ulrike. 2011. "The Majority Of The Dwellers Of Hellfire Are Women - A Short Analysis Of A Much." In *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam - Essays in Honor of Harold Motzki*, edited by Kees Versteegh and Joas Wagemakers Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, 443-473. Leiden: Brill; Bauer, Karen. 2010. "Debates on Women's Status as Judges and Witnesses in Post-Formative Islamic Law." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (1): 1-21; and Bauer, Karen. 2015. *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'an: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, particularly 37-41.

⁴⁹³ Mitter. The Majority Of The Dwellers Of Hellfire Are Women, 476.

⁴⁹⁴ Beard. *Laughter in Ancient Rome*, 39.

Moreover, the Qur'an advocated the principle of moderation - the middle path - and avoiding extremes.⁴⁹⁵ The middle path image is also echoed by Ibn Khaldūn, who suggested that quoting poetry in governmental correspondence admits *lūdhī'a* (wittiness), however, the mixing of humour with seriousness (*khalf al-jadd bi-l-hazl*), adding long descriptions (*itnāb fi-l-awṣāf*), and frequent similes and metaphoric expressions (*kathrat al-tashbīhāt wa-l-isti'ārāt*) are counterproductive.⁴⁹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn introduced what he described as one of the best methods of education, which was suggested by Caliph al-Rashīd to Khalaf b. Aḥmar, his son's teacher. Among the important points made by the Caliph were to teach his son to read the Qur'an, to instruct him in history, the memorisation of poems and to teach him the Prophet's *Sunna* as well as the art of speaking. "Other points were to forbid him from trivial laughing except at appropriate times"⁴⁹⁷ and to accustom him to honour dignitaries and military leaders. "Do not waste time without teaching him something useful. Do not sadden (*tuḥzin*) him, thus killing the student's mind. Do not be too lenient, the student will get to like leisure and become used to it. Correct him kindly and gently (*al-qurb wa-l-mulāyana*), and only if he disobeys use severity and harshness."⁴⁹⁸

Simon Critchley argued that "the tiny explosions of humour that we call jokes return us to a common, familiar world of shared practices, the background meanings implicit in a culture; and indicate how those practices might be transformed or perfected, how things might be otherwise. Humour both reveals the situation, and indicates how that situation might be changed. That is to say, laughter has a certain redemptive or messianic power."⁴⁹⁹ By looking at the reasons and way the Prophet's laughter is depicted, and the people he laughed with, about what and how, a deeper understanding of the early days of Islam can be learned. As the Qur'an repeats that the Prophet was only human, then he and his community are allowed to engage in laughter like everyone else. Simon Critchley further argues that if laughter allows us to see the irrationality of the world in order to imagine a better world in its place, and

⁴⁹⁵ [2:143] We have made you (true Muslims) a moderate nation so that you could be an example for all people and the Prophet an example for you...

⁴⁹⁶ Ahmad, Zaid. 2003. *The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldūn*. London: Routledge, 148, quoting Muqaddima Ibn Khaldūn (Arabic text), ed. E.M.Quatremère (3 vols) Q.III:324, R The Muqaddimah (English translation), tr. F. Rosenthal (3 vols) R.3:370.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Critchley, Simon. 2002. *On humour*. Routledge: London, 16.

to change the situation in which we find ourselves, then there is no objection to the religious interpretation of humour. He further opines that then, “true jokes would therefore be like shared prayers”⁵⁰⁰ and hence looking at them and the laughter they induce become fitting for a Prophet.

5. Ḥadīth

The authenticity or veracity of the individual *aḥādīth* are not the focus of this study, as - owing to the nature and numerical size of the material - it would be impossible to verify each single version before using it, especially as the criteria are not agreed upon. In this research, the methodological approach used by Barbara Stowasser in her article *The Mothers of the Believers in Ḥadīth* will be adopted.⁵⁰¹

Stowasser analysed narrations by and about women to show their ‘symbolic function’ within Sunni Muslim reasoning and chose to take the validity of the narrations at face value, without delving into the authenticity issue. She argued that the very existence of these accounts shows that they must have been “accepted by at least a segment of the community of the faithful” and are thus a valuable source of information.⁵⁰²

Therefore, the *aḥādīth* used in this study will not be analysed for their authenticity nor veracity and will be taken at face value, using Stowasser’s argument, that as they were included in the *Ḥadīth* collections, they were accepted by at least a section of the community and therefore can be used for analysis to extract the information they portray.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research will employ a multi-methodological approach, combining quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis and a framework, aiming to formulate a new humour theory that is not western-centric and modern, but is suitable to be implemented on an ancient society, taking the *aḥādīth* at face value.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁰¹ Stowasser, Barbara. 1992. “The Mothers of the Believers in Ḥadīth.” *The Muslim World* 82 (1-2): 1-36.

⁵⁰² Ibid, 5.

Chapter 3 - A laughing God between Sunni acceptance and Shi'ite rejection

As mentioned in the second chapter, Holtzman looked at appropriate and inappropriate descriptions of God in Islamic traditionalist theology by analysing *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrah* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, describing Heaven and the qualities of its inhabitants based on the Qur'an and the *Ḥadīth*.⁵⁰³ Though God's laughter is not mentioned in the Qur'an, there are several books devoted to discussing the attribution of laughter to God as found in various *aḥādīth*, which are considered authentic and posit that God indeed laughs, for example *Kitāb al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*, by al-Bayhaqī, Ibn al-Jawzī's *Akhbār al-ṣifāt* and Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitāb al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*, as well as others that devote a chapter or more to God's laughter like *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ila bilād al-afrah* and al-Ājurri's *Kitāb al-taṣdīq bi-l-nazar ila Allāhi ta'alā fi-l-ākhirah* just to name a few.

Despite the dramatic topic of the last two books aiming to prepare the believers for the horrors expected on Judgement Day, and the fact that the horrifying events that will occur on that day cannot be funny by any means, the *Ḥadīth* corpus is the only source for the few accounts describing God's laughter (see Annex 1). It is perhaps the juxtaposition of the sacred and horrifying with the comic that also produces humour and implicitly addresses the notion of whether God Himself has a sense of humour. Considering God's omnipotence and perfectness, His ability to experience and/or express humour becomes rather irrelevant, as denying Him these abilities would violate the concept of His perfection and would render Him lacking. Anthropomorphic imagery in the *Ḥadīth* corpus, as will be demonstrated, developed this trait of God without any strict dogmatic restraints.

Though the topic of God's laughter seemingly deviates from the research questions about whether or not the Prophet laughed, with whom, about what and how, it does show the Prophet laughing as well when he narrates the instances about God's laughter. Therefore, looking at this group of narrations partially answers the research question. Holtzman argues that the Prophet's laughter in these

⁵⁰³ Holtzman, L. (2010). Does God really Laugh? Appropriate and Inappropriate Descriptions of God in Islamic Traditionalist Theology. In A. Classen (Ed.), *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences* (pp. 165-200). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.

texts serves as an illustration of God's laughter and that the Prophet actually demonstrates the way God laughs,⁵⁰⁴ which would answer the research question partly, namely the one about what the Prophet laughed about and how he laughed, by providing one reason for the Prophet's laughter.

In the Sunni *Hadith* collections termed as '*al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta*' (The Authentic Six), namely *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, *Jāmi al-Tirmidhī* and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, as well as in other collections, a number of distinctive narrations describe the Prophet laughing, while telling his community about various instances when God himself laughs. The reasons for God's laughter vary according to the different narrations. Some of these narrations are very long and tell a complex story, while many are just selected portions of these long narrations and yet others are very short. However, all these traditions implicitly pose the question whether divine and human laughter can be compared? They also add an implicit question of whether divine laughter can be compared to the Prophet's laughter, him being one of the chosen humans to deliver the divine message.

Reasons for God's laughter

In the commentaries to the *Hadith* collections, several explanations are given to clarify the reasons for God's laughter as stated in these traditions. Logically these reasons can be extended to the Prophet, as he is said to illustrate God's laughter. One of the main recurrent reasons for God's laughter is His satisfaction and pleasure, which is brought about by certain deeds that human beings do, like for example their disregard for their own life during battle and fighting for Allah's sake and preferring martyrdom (see for example in Annex 1, narrations 1-8). To extend that to the Prophet it would be satisfaction and pleasure that his community are eager to please God and fulfil His demands and wishes which he, as His Messenger, transmitted to them.

Another reason for God's laughter is His amusement when a human asks Him whether or not He was mocking him (Annex 1, narrations 9-19). Amusement has also been attributed to the Prophet. Anas b. Mālik called him *afkah al-nās*.⁵⁰⁵ Altruism and charity, especially when the giver in question has little of his own and preferred a stranger over himself and his family is another reason that makes God laugh

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 182.

⁵⁰⁵ al-Ṭabarānī, Abū-l-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad. 1995. *al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 6:263.

and again it is a laughter of satisfaction and pleasure. (Annex 1, narrations 21-23). When humans despair of His mercy, God laughs to reassure the believers and give them hope that they will indeed be the recipients of His mercy (Annex 1, narrations 24-27). Pride in His servant's obedience and their fulfilment of the rituals and going beyond the required rituals to perform voluntary night prayers, as well as fighting for His sake and for martyrdom are other reasons for God's laughter (Annex 1, narrations 28-34), which can also be extended to the Prophet, feeling pride at the obedience of his community to God. Mercy for those who leave their homes to provide for their own and battle the sea is another reason (Annex 1, narration 35). God also laughs in amazement marvelling at human's recognition that it is He who enables everything and it is a laughter of gratification and pleasure. (Annex 1, narrations 36-51).

Though some of these *aḥādīth* (narrations 43-51) feature 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the *matn*, they are rejected in the Shi'ite corpus as will be demonstrated. In one *ḥadīth* (narration 52), God laughs in gratification because his servants remember him in the markets, when they are busy with their various transactions. In a few narrations (53-60) no explicit reason is given for God's laughter, however, these *aḥādīth* just state that God laughs, for example in a discussion about the best of martyrs (narration 53) or upon the death of Ṭalḥa b. al-Barrā' or Sa'd b. Mu'ādh (narration 56 and 57 respectively). Ṭalḥa accepted Islam at a young age and offered to kill his polytheists parents, yet the Prophet reprimanded him and told him to observe *ṣilat al-rahim* (literally ties of the womb, meaning family relationships) and from that day forward he was good to his parents despite them being polytheists, demonstrating mercy, which is, as shown, one of the main reasons for God's laughter. When Ṭalḥa fell ill, he requested not to inform the Prophet, so it would not inconvenience him and asked to be buried quickly. When the Prophet heard about his death he made supplications to God asking Him to receive him laughing, as a sign of His mercy.⁵⁰⁶ Sa'd b. Mu'ādh on the other hand was the chief of the Aws tribe who sentenced the Banū Qurayza and died shortly after from the wounds he received in the Battle of the Trench.⁵⁰⁷

In three of the *aḥādīth* (narration 54 and in 59-60 respectively) God's laughter is said to manifest in the clouds and as thunder and lightning. Though most of these *aḥādīth* are rejected in the Shi'ite

⁵⁰⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, Shihāb al-Dīn Abī-l-Faḍl Aḥmad. 2002. *al-Iṣābah fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥābah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 3:288-289.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibn Sa'd, Muḥammad. 1957. *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 3:328-329.

corpus as will be demonstrated, there are two traditions ascribed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (narrations 61-62) who attributed a laughter of pleasure and satisfaction to God, when a human protects his own in battle or protects them from lions or thieves on one hand and because of His servants going beyond their duty in performing the night prayer in the mosque, or their purity wash from melted snow due to lack of water and succumbing to martyrdom. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is himself no stranger to laughter and is quoted as giving the following advice: “gladden the hearts by seeking *ṭarā’if al-ḥikma* (wise anecdotes or humorous wisdom), as hearts tend to get bored and tire as the body does.”⁵⁰⁸

One of the main recurrent themes in all these traditions come from one *ḥādīth* (see Annex 1, narration 58), namely that the Prophet said before he himself laughed: On Judgement Day God manifests Himself to us laughing.⁵⁰⁹ This manifestation of a laughing God is repeated in several long and detailed narrations about Judgement Day (narrations 11-12), or parts of it about the last man to be permitted into Paradise (narrations 9-10 and 14-17). With a laughing God, it is a corroboration that the humans He created can also laugh, and among them the Prophet as a human, which affirms the research question about whether or not the Prophet laughs. This particular *ḥādīth* comes in many different versions; some omit the introduction about all the nations being gathered and start with the journey on the *Ṣirāṭ*, while other versions start directly with the last man being allowed to enter Paradise. Yet other versions embellish his story even more and add several other favours that he asks from God, like being allowed to sit in the shadow of a tree to rest for a while or to drink some water to increase the number of favours that he asks of God’s mercy. However, all of the different versions end with God laughing when the man accuses Him of making fun of him.

The *aḥādīth* that tell the story of all the nations on the Day of Judgement and how they will be judged, focus on the Muslim believers’ ability to see God and further describe how the believers will cross the *Ṣirāṭ* in accordance to their deeds in this world. The description is rather humorous and depicts how some will cross it as fast as the wind, while other will be as quick as lightning. Some of them will be

⁵⁰⁸ Kassāb. *Ma’a al-muṣṭafā fi daḥikihī*, 77, quoting al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s *al-Jāmi’ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi’*.

⁵⁰⁹ al-Ājurī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn. 1995. *Kitāb al-Sharī’a*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, *Bāb al-Imān bi anna Allahu yaḍḥak* #640.

as fast as horses and others will crawl or drag themselves forward on their bottoms. This funny description reaches its peak when an unreasonable and unfortunate Muslim, the comic hero so to speak, who dragged himself on his bottom across the *Ṣirāṭ*, finally arrives at the gates of Heaven and is the last person allowed into Paradise. The ongoing interchange between the serious situation and the playful chaos on the *Ṣirāṭ* produces humour and laughter and might be meant to alleviate the horror of the gravity of judgement. The Prophet's laughter (narrations 9-13) serves to illustrate God's laughter, which is a sign of His satisfaction, astonishment, pleasure, pride or His mercy and grace.

The common theme with the majority of these traditions is that they are mostly used to reassure the believers that there is nothing to fear from a 'Laughing God.' Laughter is generally interpreted in the commentaries to mean mercy and benevolence. It is noteworthy that two of these narrations (in several versions, namely 21-23 and 36-50 respectively) are cited as reasons for a revelation of verses, namely verse [59:9]⁵¹⁰ and [43:13-14]⁵¹¹ respectively.

Shi'ite Rejection

In spite of several different versions of two Sunni traditions (36-50) involving 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who features in the *matn* reported in both, they are not preserved in the Shi'ite *Ḥadīth* corpus, except to challenge their veracity along with the authenticity of all the other traditions that mention a Laughing God or God's laughter in no uncertain terms. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Najmī, a contemporary Shi'ite scholar, for example asks with indignation in his book *Aḍwā' 'alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn* more of a rhetorical question which he answers sarcastically: "Does God laugh? The God of the *ṣaḥīḥayn* laughs!!" He then proceeds to record all the various traditions and comments on them asking: "What can we learn from these traditions?" And before he answers he hastens to add: "It is apparent that they are all forged and fabricated."⁵¹² He then proceeds to explain that one tradition shows God laughing and exclaiming in amazement and wonder

⁵¹⁰ [59.9] And those who made their abode in the city and in the faith before them love those who have fled to them, and do not find in their hearts a need of what they are given, and prefer (them) before themselves though poverty may afflict them, and whoever is preserved from the niggardliness of his soul, these it is that are the successful ones.

⁵¹¹ [43.13] That you may firmly sit on their backs, then remember the favor of your Lord when you are firmly seated thereon, and say: Glory be to Him Who made this subservient to us and we were not able to do it [43.14] And surely to our Lord we must return.

⁵¹² Najmī, Muḥammad Ṣādiq. 1426. *Aḍwā' 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Qum: Mu'assasat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyah, 161.

just as the sons of Adam, while others show that if God wants to grant a favour to one of his believers in the afterlife he asks him to make a difficult oath, which He surely knows in advance that the believer will break, and this not only happens once, but does so repeatedly. “How can Allah be fooled and deceived by one of His creations?” he asks.⁵¹³ “God described himself as merciful and forgiving, he continues, “then why would he prevent his creations from asking him for favours? What does breaking the promise mean?”⁵¹⁴ However, from the context and language of that particular *ḥadīth*, in all its different versions, it is obvious that God’s laughter is a positive expression. God is pleased that the sinner finally recognized His omnipotence by calling Him “The Glorious God.” God, the merciful forgives the sinner and then laughs as a sign of His satisfaction, as Holtzman concludes in her analysis.⁵¹⁵

However, Najmī continues to argue that the believer who will potentially be forgiven and saved from Hell is portrayed as being filled with vanity, and dares to attribute mockery and ridicule - qualities of the ignorant - to God! The man dares to say to God: are you making fun of me when you are the Lord of the worlds?⁵¹⁶ Najmī concludes saying: “We seek refuge with Allah from these topics, superstitions and fabricated sayings and from all those who say them, and we ask forgiveness.”⁵¹⁷

He then bolsters his argument by quoting verses [33.70-71].⁵¹⁸

All the reasons which Najmī states do not really determine why all these traditions were so firmly rejected in the Shi’ite *Ḥadīth* corpus and considered a sin for which forgiveness must be asked. This firm rejection remains unexplained and no research as yet has tried to analyse the reasons for this rejection. The explanation given does not go beyond rational questions and logical arguments, reminiscent of the Mu’tazali arguments against the Ḥanbalites, who believed God’s attributes in the literal sense, regarding the verses in the Qur’an as well as other *aḥādīth* with anthropomorphic content.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Holtzman. Does God really Laugh?, 182.

⁵¹⁶ Najmī *Adwā’ alá al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 163

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ [33.70] O you who believe! be careful of(your duty to) Allah and speak the right word, [33.71] He will put your deeds into a right state for you, and forgive you your faults; and whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, he indeed achieves a mighty success.

Other Shi'ite scholars revive the Mu'tazali arguments, while adding that they do not dispute the fact that God laughs, because to deny Him laughter would be to imply that God is missing a quality or an attribute and God is *kāmil* (perfectly complete). For example al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī (d. 1033/1624) in his *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, said: Laughter here is a metaphor, to mean that God is pleased by this man's deed, loved his deed and him, rewarding him for it, and this is also known for other charitable acts or altruisms.⁵¹⁹ In his book *Mir'āt al-'uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār al-rasūl* al-Allāma al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) agrees and writes: Laughter is a metaphor for rewards and kindness. If God laughs to a man, he loves him and is kind and merciful to him. He also explains the motive for the inclusion of the *ḥadīth* (narration 61) as recording the praise for warding off the danger or evil that could have befallen the Muslim group from the lion or the thief, so they can pass in safety.⁵²⁰

There are also two traditions (narrations 61-62) attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the Shi'ite corpus that are at odds with the common and universal Shi'ite rejection of God's laughter found in the Sunni corpus. Al-Jāḥiz recognized that there was a strand of anthropomorphism within early Shi'ism, and as Heck notes, he classified the Shi'ites among the groups who earlier held anthropomorphist beliefs. However, when al-Jāḥiz speaks of the Rāfiḍa, he does not always mean Shi'ites. In another work, he associates the Rāfiḍa with a group known as the Nābita, which can be translated as "the weeds," a label he used for the followers of Ibn Ḥanbal.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan. 1383-1389. *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah ilá taḥṣīl masā'il al-sharī'a*. Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyah, 15:142.

⁵²⁰ al-Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī. 1367. *Mir'āt al-'uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār Āl al-Rasūl*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 18:398.

⁵²¹ Heck, Paul L. 2014. *Skepticism in Classical Islam : Moments of Confusion*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 40.

Historical development

Having shown the conflict between the Sunni acceptance and Shi'ite rejection of the anthropomorphic expressions about God's laughter in the *ahādīth*, the historical development of anthropomorphism should be discussed.

Earlier scholars understood these reports to mean *targhīb* (encouragement) to do the various deeds that result in God's laughter, which was considered a blessing. They did not waste their time in interpreting His laughter or how it happens. The Prophet's laughter as an illustration sufficed for them. They also believed that God does not have orifices and therefore should not be described as open mouthed with his teeth showing like humans. Fazlur Rahman argues that the God of Islam is uncompromisingly transcendent and that this is shown by the tremendous emphasis on *tawhīd* (unity).⁵²² *Tawhīd*, meaning the oneness of God, and is the indivisible oneness concept of monotheism in Islam. It is the religion's most fundamental concept and holds that God is One (*al-'Aḥad*) and Single (*al-Wāḥid*).⁵²³

The Qur'an uses some anthropomorphic expressions when talking about God. However, there are other verses that assert that He has no like, as in verses [112:4] and [42:11], and therefore a likenesses to Allah should not be indulged in, in accordance with verse [16:74]. Then how is this imagery to be understood? Literally or metaphorically? These questions at times occupied the centre stage of the theological debates and naturally, this led to a conflict and resulted in the subject of anthropomorphism being hotly debated in early Islam. The problem being how to affirm God's attributes and transcendence without falling into anthropomorphism, on one hand and without emptying God's attributes of concrete meaning on the other.⁵²⁴

Anthropomorphism derives from the Greek *anthropos* (human being) and *morphe* (form). Shah opines that: "used in its religious sense, the term denotes a universal human tendency to experience,

⁵²² Rahman, Fazlur. 1967. "The Qur'anic Concept of God, the Universe and Man." *Islamic Studies* 6 (1): 1-19, 2

⁵²³ Najmī. *Aḍwā' 'alá al-Sahīḥayn*, 160

⁵²⁴ Jackson, Sherman. 2005. *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*. Oxford University Press, New York, 180-181.

express and appeal to the divine in human shapes or categories.”⁵²⁵ However, the term has been used in a wider sense to include attribution of any kind of human characteristics, activities, emotions or feelings to God.

Those who likened God to His creatures were called *al-Mushabbihā*, from the word *tashbīh*. *Shabah* literally means likeness or resemblance and *tashbīh* literally means making similar, however Williams argues that the term *tashbīh* is vague and nuanced enough as to preclude translating it as anthropomorphism.⁵²⁶ He opines that Muslim Theologians of all eras and persuasions unanimously condemned *tashbīh* (likening God to creation).⁵²⁷ Even Ibn Ḥanbal, who was a true anthropomorphist, denied *tashbīh* in no uncertain terms quoting [42:11].⁵²⁸

Why did Shi'ites reject anthropomorphism?

The Shi'ite arguments against accepting the *aḥādīth* about God's laughter are more in accordance with the Ash'arite concept of *bilā kayfa* than with the Mu'tazalites. The *bilā kayfa* concept is a theological principle of not questioning revelation when it may perplex or defy human understanding. Al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936) invoked the notion of *bilā kayfa wa lā tashbīh* (without asking how or comparing), most notably with respect to the anthropomorphizing expressions in the Qur'an that speak of God's attributes such as His hands, face or being seated on a throne. For example in verse 2:115 “And Allah's is the East and the West, therefore, whither you turn, there is Allah's face...” These expressions have been interpreted figuratively to mean God's power. The *bilā kayfa* concept was used as a device reflecting the need felt by the theologians to reconcile the fact that if the Qur'an has symbolic meanings, they must at first be accepted as true in the literal sense. Or as Ibn Taymiyya, (d. 728/1328) one of the most influential and controversial medieval scholars, says: “The knowledge of hidden things is attained through the existent

⁵²⁵Shah, Zulfiqar Ali. 2012. *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God : the Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions : Representing the Unrepresentable*. London ; Washington: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 24.

⁵²⁶ Williams, Wesley. 2009. “A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129 (1): 19-44, 31.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 31.

things. One cannot know what is power, knowledge or speech unless one knows these things through one's own experience."⁵²⁹

Shi'ites reject all the narrations found in the Sunni *Ḥadīth* collections, which portray God's laughter or others that depict putting His foot on the doors of hellfire or that He descends into lower heaven or is seen on the Day of Resurrection. All these and similar texts, according to them lead to *tashbīh* and *tajsīm*, even if they are viewed as authentic by the Sunnis. The term 'anthropomorphism' is used as a rough equivalent of the terms *tashbīh* and *tajsīm*. Shi'ites tend to interpret the texts related to the names and attributes of God. They interpret the hand of God in the verses to mean power, God's throne to mean control, His face to mean Him and His laughter to mean mercy. They also do the same with all the verses that relate to names and attributes.⁵³⁰

Though the discourse about the anthropomorphic verses and prophetic traditions raged in the Muslim intellectual sphere for a long time, simply attributing the Shi'ite rejection of these traditions to their incorporation of Mu'tazili rational thought or Ash'arite influences is too simplistic. Then why did Shi'ites reject all these traditions, especially the ones featuring Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and why do they assert that these traditions are forged and fabricated, if not only due to the rational arguments which they preserved from the Mu'tazili thought? There is no research as yet answering this question, however, even if Shi'ite sources do not explicitly make the link to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, but the first sermon of *Nahj al-balāgha* titled "*The creation of Earth and Sky and the creation of Adam*" preserves the following statement:

"The foremost in religion is the acknowledgement of Him, the perfection of acknowledging Him is to testify, the perfection of testifying is to believe in His One-ness, the perfection of believing in His One-ness is to regard Him Pure, and the perfection of His purity is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute. Thus whoever attaches

⁵²⁹ Abrahamov, Binyamin. 1995. "The "Bi-lā Kayfa" Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology." *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 42 (3): 365-379, 374.

⁵³⁰ al-Wardānī, Ṣalīḥ. 1993. *Al-Shī'a fī miṣr min al-Imam 'Alī ḥata al-Imam al-Khumaynī*. Cairo: Maṭābī' star press li-l-ṭibā'a wa-l-nashr, 18-19.

*attributes to Allah recognises His like, and whoever recognises His like regards Him as two; and whoever regards Him as two recognises parts for Him; and whoever recognises parts for Him mistook Him; and whoever mistook Him pointed at Him; and whoever pointed at Him admitted limitations for Him; and whoever admitted limitations for Him numbered Him. Whoever said: 'In what is He?' held that He is contained; and whoever said: 'On what is He?', held that He is not on something else.'*⁵³¹

This sermon shows that Alī b. Abī Ṭālib rejected the attachment of attributes to God and therefore was against anthropomorphism. In his view, attaching attributes to God, would be akin to creating another image of God, as there is no likeness to him, which would amount to *shirk* (idolatry, polytheism). Moreover, it goes against the concept of *tawḥīd*.

Nahj al-balāgha was collected by Abū-l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī known as al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (359-406/969-1015) and includes sermons, letters, interpretations and narrations attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Though its authenticity is not questioned in Shi’ite literature and accepted as ‘Alī’s words, in Sunni literature this was not always the case. Ibn Khallikān (d.681/1282) for example says: “People differed about the book titled *Nahj al-balāgha*, collected from the words of Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and whether it was his words or those of the collector al-Sharīf al-Raḍī or of his brother al-Murtaḍā.⁵³² Many followed Ibn Khallikān’s claim, such as al-Dhahabī (d.748/1348) in *Mizān al-‘tidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*,⁵³³ al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 768/1367) in *Mir’āt al-jinān wa-‘ibrat al-yaqzān*,⁵³⁴ Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) in *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*,⁵³⁵ and Ibn Ḥajar (d.852 AH) in *Lisān al-mizān*.⁵³⁶

⁵³¹ Ibn Abī Ṭālib, ‘Alī. 1990. *Nahjul Balagha - Peak of Eloquence*. Translated by Sayed Ali Reza. Kerala: Islamic Foundation Press, 91.

⁵³² Ibn Khallikān, Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad. 1990-1994. *Wafiyāt al-a’yān wa anbā’ abnā’ al-zamān*. 7 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādi , 3:416.

⁵³³ al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. 1962. *Mizān al-‘tidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifā, 3:124.

⁵³⁴ al-Yāfi‘ī, ‘Abd Allāh b. As‘ad. 1997. *Mir’āt al-jinān wa-‘ibrat al-yaqzān : fī ma’rifat mā yu‘tabaru min ḥawādīth al-zamān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 3:55.

⁵³⁵ Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar. 1988. *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*. Edited by ‘Alī Shīrī. 15 vols. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 12:3; 53.

⁵³⁶ Ibn Ḥajar, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-‘Asqalānī. 1971. *Lisān al-mizān*. 7 vols. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-‘Alami li-l-maṭbu‘āt, 4:223.

The Indian Sunni scholar Imtiyaz Ali Arshi, (d. 1981), succeeded in tracing much of the contents of the book to earlier sources. He verified 106 sermons, 37 letters and 79 of the sayings attributed to ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib in his book *Istinād-e nahj al-balāgha*, translated into Arabic as *Istinād nahj al-balāgha*.⁵³⁷ Al-Ṭabāṭabāṭī praises him as a virtuous scholar, knowledgeable in several languages: Arabic, Persian, English and Indian languages. He also praises the book, writing that it is distinguished by being thorough, its good coordination and abundance of material.⁵³⁸

Ibn Abū-l-Ḥadīd (586-656/1190-1258), a late Sunni Mu‘tazilite from the late Abbasid period, explains this sermon saying: "This is a statement of the unity of God, *tawḥīd* that the Mu‘tazila believe." He adds that this means that the denial of the attributes was known long before the Mu‘tazila.⁵³⁹ The collection date of *Nahj al-Balāgha* coincides with al-Mufīd’s rational move to purge the Shi‘ite collections of ‘irrational’ and fantastic traditions that permeated the corpus. Historically this period can be said to have been characterized by rational and logical thinking, which was naturally reflected on the literary output. Therefore, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s sermon “*The creation of Earth and Sky and the creation of Adam*” can be taken as a reflection of his opinion in that matter.

Not only did the Shi‘ite sources reject the traditions, but they also caricaturized the Sunni belief in this corporeal deity. Al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), for example, writes: the Ash‘arites opined that God can be seen with the naked eye even if He is devoid of directionality, but God has said in verse [6.103] “(*la tudrikuhu al absār*) that vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (all) vision;” which is a clear violation of the verse. This then could be extended to having mountains in all shapes and sizes on earth which we cannot see, and loud noises which we cannot hear.⁵⁴⁰

In conclusion, the traditions mentioning God’s laughter and likening it to human laughter, especially those that mention ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib were not rejected by Shi‘ites due to their being influenced

⁵³⁷ al-‘Arshī, Imtiyāz ‘Alī. 1979. *Istinād Nahj al-balāgha*. Qumm: Maktabat al-Thaqalayn.

⁵³⁸ al-Ṭabāṭabāṭī, Al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. n.d. *Ahl al-Bayt ‘alayhim al-Salām fī al-Maktaba al-‘Arabiyya*. Qum: Mu‘assat Āl al-bayt ‘alayhim al-Salām li Ihya’ al-Turāth, 39-40.

⁵³⁹ Ibn Abī-l-Ḥadīd al-Mu‘tazilī, ‘Izz al-Dīn Abū Ḥamīd ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Hibat-Allah. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*. Cairo: Dār Ihyā’ al-kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1959, vol 1, p. 75.

⁵⁴⁰ al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. al-Muṭaḥhar. *Minhāj al-karāma fī ma‘rifat al-Imama*. Qum: Maṭba‘at al-Ḥādī, 1379, p.

by Mu'tazalite rationalism or Ash'arite influences, but because of 'Alī's rejection of attaching attributes to God. The sources mention, as demonstrated, that this was a common practice with the Companions and *al-tābi'īn* (followers). The Ash'arite theologian al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) states that the Prophet's companions and their followers neither interpreted anthropomorphic expressions nor did they deal with figurative interpretation.⁵⁴¹ Hence the two traditions included in the Shi'ite sources and attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Annex 1, narrations 61-62) contradict both, the common view during the early days of Islam, as well as 'Alī's sermon from *Nahj al-balāgha* and are probably remnants of the early anthropomorphic Shi'ite tendencies that were in the sources before *Nahj al-balāgha* was collected and widely disseminated and the sources were purged at al-Mufīd's time. However what these traditions show is that laughter and sadness are all a part of the blessings that God provides to humans as per verse [53:43].⁵⁴²

Anthropomorphism revisited

The *aḥādīth* depicting God's laughter are found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the various Musnad and Sunnan collections. They are regarded as authentic by Sunnis. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, the Ḥanbalī scholar, writes in their defence: "they have been well received and accepted. They gladden the hearts. They were not distorted or misrepresented, nor were they forged. Anyone who does not believe in them will not be included in the community who will see God's face in heaven and will be included in the community who will be prevented from seeing Him."⁵⁴³ But what is the way to have God laugh to humans? These *aḥādīth* gave various reasons for God's laughter, namely martyrdom, altruism, avoiding hopelessness and despair of God's mercy, unity of men especially in war or sea voyages, voluntary night prayer whether at home or in the mosque, fighting the enemy and performing charity silently and in secret and remembering God at all times, even in the markets. The virtues of jihad and of a loyal servant performing voluntary prayers at night, only wanting to please God, are the best of deeds these traditions emphasize. They all reiterate God's mercy, just like in the Qur'an, which states in numerous verses that

⁵⁴¹ Abrahamov. The "Bi-lā Kayfa" Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology, 372.

⁵⁴² [53:43] And that He it is Who makes (men) laugh and makes (them) weep;

⁵⁴³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Ayūb. 1428. *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ila bilād al-Afrāḥ* (ed. Za'īd b. Aḥmad al-Nashīrī). 2 vols. Jeddah: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, 625.

He is near, changing situations by merely using one word "be and it is", so how then can people despair or lose hope?⁵⁴⁴

Why did Sunni scholars want God to laugh at humans? In a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet is said to have asserted that if God laughs to one of his servants in this world there will be no judgement for him. This is mainly based on the very long tradition about the last man to enter Paradise, mentioned above, who continued to *yad'ū* (say prayers appealing to God) until God laughed at him and allowed him to enter Paradise. This led the scholars to conclude that he, to whom God laughs, will neither be punished nor judged. Humans do not want to be made accountable and want to get into Heaven, without being subjected to torture or Hellfire and for this they want God to laugh at them. Moreover, shared divine and human laughter can also be an embodiment of divine favour, however temporary it may be.

Ibn Ḥanbal writes: "these *aḥādīth* are sound and have been preserved. We submit to them even if we do not know their interpretation. We do not discuss them or argue about them and we do not interpret them, but we narrate them as they have come to us. We believe in them and know that they are true, as the Messenger of God said. We accept them and do not reject them."⁵⁴⁵

Abū Ya'īla wrote a long explanation saying: "If it was said that He laughs at certain times and not at others, or that He is constantly laughing, or if one attributes laughter to certain conditions only then it makes it the object of specific incidents, and if one says He is constantly laughing, then one is adding a reprehensible attribute to Him. Excessive laughter is undignified. We say the same to excessive anger, dissatisfaction and hatred, with a possible division of the phrases. It is not inconceivable that this attribute only appears at certain times and not at others, but that does not mean it is excessive laughter, because some who laugh excessively have been named as evil and accused of denying God's gifts, which is impossible as an attribute for God Himself. Furthermore, the phrase "We have nothing to fear from a God who laughs," shows that this laughter is one of benevolence, showing His mercy, forgiveness and pardon."⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ See for example [2:117], [3:47], [3:59],[6:73], [16:40], [19:35], [36:82],[40:68].

⁵⁴⁵ Watt, W. M. 1994. *Islamic Creeds – A Selection*. Translated by W. M. Watt. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 30.

⁵⁴⁶ Abū Ya'īla, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf b. al-Farrā'. n.d. *Ibtāl al-ta'wīlāt li-akhbār al-ṣifāt*. Kuwait: Dār Ilāf al-Dawliya, 1:218-220.

In al-Jāhiz's view, among others, the masses were beleaguered by obscure beliefs that resulted in the impression that certainty about God was elusive to the more perceptive and intelligent minds. While *takhayyul* (imagination) creates a *taṣawwur* (mental image), the language of the *ḥadīth* is mostly simple to enable the masses to grasp the message communicated to them, which explains why God is frequently described as a corporal being with a face, eyes, hands, and ears. This is for the benefit of ordinary human beings, using a language to accommodate the needs of ordinary uneducated beings, argues Swartz.⁵⁴⁷ However, due limits must be maintained between what is human and what is divine. Blurring the demarcation lines between humanity and divinity will confuse the nature, significance, and essence of the divine thereby degrading the Deity.

Can divine and human laughter be compared? This comparison poses a real problem when literal readings of the text are employed because the Qur'an portrays Allah as incomparable.⁵⁴⁸ The *aḥādīth* describing God's laughter are accepted as a part of the Sunni Islamic creed, even if the various approaches towards them shifted in the mainstream view. They moved from a total acceptance to admitting their problematics and again to accepting them with qualifications, such as for example *bilā kayfa*. Holtzman concluded that "the various hermeneutical approaches of the traditionalists to these texts begin with a literal reading and end with a figurative reading. There was also an attempt to read these texts literally, without getting caught in the dangerous pitfall of comparing God to man."⁵⁴⁹

Therefore the attitude adopted by the Qur'an is an excellent way out. On one hand, human intellect feels helpless to comprehend the anthropomorphic verses, while on the other, the human urge and human nature to have a concrete vision is sincere. Sweetman defined the principle of *mukhālafa*,⁵⁵⁰ to which "the majority (of Muslims) adhered," as "all that is said of God is said with a difference and it

⁵⁴⁷ Swartz, Merlin. 2002. *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism – Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār al-Sifāt*. Leiden: Brill, 54.

⁵⁴⁸ See for example [42:11], [112:4].

⁵⁴⁹ Holtzman. Does God really Laugh?, 170.

⁵⁵⁰ *Maḥmūd al-mukhālafa* (contrary implication) started as an interpretive technique that was used to determine that a conditional permission implies the prohibition of its opposite, even if the statement does not explicitly say that. It was used among other things to interpret verse [4:101]. It was also referred to as *dalīl al-khiṭāb* (that which is indicated by speech). The doctrine of *mukhālafa* (difference) was later elaborated by the traditionalists to mean that everything in Allah is different from the similarly named things in human beings or in God's creations. It was later called *tanzīh* (removing Allah from any confusion or association with human beings or His creations).

has become proverbial that nothing the mind can devise can convey anything about Allah [. . .] there can be no doubt that the rejection of the corporality of God is essential."⁵⁵¹

Hanif and Singh argue that if transcendentalism was wholly accepted, it would end in negation. If the attributes are affirmed, anthropomorphism will be the result.⁵⁵² The Qur'an therefore neither totally confirms transcendentalism, nor affirms God's attributes anthropomorphically. The Qur'anic concept of Unity is definite and has both a positive and a negative side to it. The positive side is that God is one and only one. The negative side is that there is none like Him. Hence, whatever attributes assigned to God cannot be attributed to any other being at the same time.⁵⁵³

Hadīth Criticism

Though the analysis of the authenticity of all the cited traditions is not the aim of this study, as defined in the methodology section, the following section will deal with some of the criticism that could be levelled against these traditions.

Shi'ite *ḥadīth* tradition differs from the Sunni one and the collections started later, around the end of the second/eighth century.⁵⁵⁴ Twelver Shi'ite *ḥadīth* criticism also started later than its Sunni counterpart, as any problems of authentication and reliability of transmission did not arise until 260/873, the time of the occultation of the last Imam. While the infallible Imams were alive, there was no need to worry about authenticity issues or forgeries.⁵⁵⁵ Like their Sunni counterparts, Shi'ite *ḥadīth* scholars distinguish between *mutawātir* (widely transmitted) and *aḥād* (transmitted by a single narrator) reports. The majority of the *aḥādīth*, however, are *aḥād*.⁵⁵⁶ As mentioned, most of the traditions citing God's laughter are mainly *aḥād* traditions which did not provide certainty. The problem of authenticity is only of minor importance for Shi'ite scholars as the reports going back to the Imams do not need to be

⁵⁵¹ Sweetman, J. Windrow. 1947. *Islam and Christian Theology : A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1:34 and 36.

⁵⁵² Hanif, N. and Nagendra Singh. 1996. *God in Indian Islamic theology*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 216.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Kohlberg, Etan. 1983. *Shī'ī Ḥadīth*. Vols. Vol. 1, Arabic Literature until the End of the Umayyad Period, in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, edited by A. F. L. Beeston, 299–307. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 299.

⁵⁵⁵ Mishkini, Ali. 1997. "Sunnah, from Shī'ī and Sunnī viewpoints." *Al-Tawhid* 14 (2): 17-25, 21.

⁵⁵⁶ Ahmad, Saiyad Nizamuddin. 2002. "Twelver Shi'i Hadith: From Tradition to Contemporary Evaluations." *Oriente Modern* 82 (1): 125–145, 138.

authenticated.⁵⁵⁷ For the Sunni scholars it was very important that the *isnād* between each of the narrators was clear, uninterrupted and connected all the way to the Prophet. In Shi'ite *ḥadīth* scholarship, however, it did not matter whether the *isnād* between an Imam and the Prophet was complete, as the Imams were considered infallible and had inherited the Prophet's authority.⁵⁵⁸

The first eight narrations (1-8) are all on the authority of Abū Hurayra. While in the Sunni corpus he is accepted mostly as a trustworthy narrator, in the Shi'ite corpus he is not. Al- Majlisī records a tradition in his *Biḥār al-anwār* attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Imam, saying: "three people falsely attributed narrations to the Prophet and his family: Abū Hurayra, Anas b. Mālik and the woman."⁵⁵⁹ In another version the woman is identified as 'Ā'isha. This aversion towards reports narrated by Abū Hurayra, though not explicitly stated in the Shi'ite arguments levelled against the traditions about God's laughter, could still be one of the implicit reasons for this rejection.

The second group of traditions, (9-19) are all very long and many other traditions in this set cite portions of these long traditions, which are narrated on the authority of 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ūd, Abū Razīn al-'Uqayly, Abū Mūsa al-Ash'arī and Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī. However, the length of this group of traditions is very problematic, as the Prophet has been known to phrase his sayings with brevity. *Khayru-l-kalām mā qalla wa dalla* (the best of speech is succinct yet effectively conveys the meaning) has been attributed to the Prophet as well as to 'Alī and his son al-Ḥasan. Be that as it may, 'Ā'isha is reported to have narrated: "The Prophet used to narrate a *ḥadīth*, and if someone would count its words he would be able to on his hands." She is also reported to have said: "The Prophet did not narrate *ḥadīth* like you do."⁵⁶⁰ In his *Fatḥ al-bārī fī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ibn Ḥajar explains both narrations in one section saying that the Prophet's preferred manner of speech was the brief one and that he was known for his

⁵⁵⁷ Brunner, Rainer. 2005. "The Role of Hadith as Cultural Memory in Shi'i history." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30: 318–360, 330.

⁵⁵⁸ al-Ṭabātabā'ī, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn. 1982. *A Shi'ite Antology*. Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 15.

⁵⁵⁹ al-Majlisī, Muḥamed Bāqir. 1403. *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Beirut: Dār lhyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2:363.

⁵⁶⁰ Both traditions are mentioned in Ibn Ḥajar, Shihāb al-Dīn Abī-l-Faḍl Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Asqalānī. n.d. *Fatḥ al-bārī fī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Tunis: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 6:578, citing tradition (3568) in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, and tradition (2496) in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

verbal economy. Hence, such long traditions with so many details and descriptions are completely out of character and therefore their authenticity becomes suspect.⁵⁶¹

Narrations (21-23) are again all on the authority of Abū Hurayra, hence the same analysis would apply like of the first group (1-8). The next group of narrations (24-27) about not despairing of God's mercy are on the authority of several Companions, most notably 'Ā'isha in (24). However the others in that group are suspect, for example (25) is narrated on the authority of an unnamed and unknown man from the Banū Fazāra tribe, which considerably weakens the report. Reports 26-27 are narrated on the authority of Abū Razīn, who has narrated many anthropomorphic traditions about the creation of the world, the clouds and bodies of water.

Narrations (28-34) are mainly narrated by 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ūd who was respected by both Shi'ites and Sunnis. The Shi'ites considered him trustworthy due to his reports concerning the virtues of *ahl al-bayt*. The last two reports are narrated by Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī and Abū-I-Dardā'. Though Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī is commended by Shi'ite *rijāl* sources that include him among the intimate Companions of Imam 'Alī,⁵⁶² his narrations are still rejected when it comes to God's laughter.

The next group of reports (36-51) is mainly narrated on the authority of 'Alī b. Rabī'a, who was known to narrate from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Nevertheless all these narrations are still rejected in the Shi'ite corpus, same as the next group of narrations (43-51) that feature 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the *matn* of the report. In the following group of narrations (52-60) no explicit reason is given for God's laughter, and they are narrated by various people, such as Sufyān b. 'Uyayna, who is considered one of the main transmitters of al-Zuhrī's *aḥādīth* and has been accused of *tadlīs* (to conceal a fault). Narrations (56-57) are narrated on the authority of Asmā' b. Yazīd b. Sakan, an Anṣārī woman and mother of Mu'ādh b. Jabal. The remaining reports are narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayra, Abū Mūsa al-Ash'arī and an unknown unnamed man of the Banū Ghaffār tribe. The final two reports (60-61) are from the Shi'ite corpus and narrated on the authority of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 6:579.

⁵⁶² Rad, Hussein Ansari and Gholami, Rahim, "Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī", in: Encyclopaedia Islamica, Editors-in-Chief: Wilferd Madelung and, Farhad Daftary. Consulted online on 26 July 2017 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_SIM_0203>

To conclude one can say that most of these traditions are narrated by the narrators known as al-*mukthirūn*, which is a term in *Ḥadīth* science referring to the seven Companions of who narrated between seven hundred to one thousand or more traditions. There is a common feature among the *mukthirūn*, namely their young age and short Companionship. Those among the seven who are narrators of the reports featured in this chapter are Abū Hurayra, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, ʿAbd Allah b. Masʿūd, ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAmr and Abū-l-Dardā, which casts considerable doubts on the veracity of these traditions in spite of their inclusion in the Sunni *Ḥadīth* collections termed as '*al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta*' (The Authentic Six).

Conclusion

In spite of the inclusion of these tradition about God's laughter in the Sunni '*al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta*', a closer look at the narrators reveals that they are mainly *aḥād* transmissions. Furthermore, the narrators are mostly from among the *mukthirūn* and some were accused of or known to have engaged in *tadlīs*, casting considerable doubts on the veracity of these traditions. Moreover, the characteristics of the reports and their verbosity and length, also raises suspicions about their authenticity. This could also be the reason why later Ḥanbalīs, for example Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Furak and al-Bayhaqī heavily criticised these reports and tried to move away from a literal reading of the anthropomorphic elements. However, none of them considered them weak or inauthentic. Building on Livnat Holtzman's work, the Prophet's laughter mentioned in these traditions is used as an illustration of God's laughter and therefore the subject matter of these reports promotes God's laughter as a blessing and mercy and encourages the believers to hope for God's rewards. ʿAlī's rejection of attaching attributes to God and his aversion along with the other Companions and the followers, *al-tābiʿīn* to interpret anthropomorphic expressions or to deal with figurative interpretations of the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an lead to the Shi'ite rejection of the entire genre of traditions depicting God's laughter, which makes more sense than considering them authentic and defending their authenticity.

Chapter Four - The Laughing Prophet

The third chapter looked at the instances in *Ḥadīth* where the Prophet laughed, demonstrating how God laughs. This chapter looks at how the Prophet himself is depicted laughing, with whom and about what or when he is said to have made someone else laugh. It also explores what such narrations are trying to convey.

Pickering and Lockyer argued that humour is one of the most prevalent elements of public culture and is a central aspect of everyday life and day to day relationships. They further pointed out that humour is not confined to any particular genre or form of narrative, nor is it by any means exclusive to conventional occasions or locations and permeates every area of social life and interaction, and is present in situations where it is not normally regarded as appropriate.⁵⁶³ Generally, humour is acknowledged to be something good and possessing a sense of humour is regarded as an obviously desirable virtue.⁵⁶⁴

The *Ḥadīth* compendia record numerous instances where the Prophet is said to have laughed or made someone else laugh, however, it is well known that verbal humour travels badly, especially from culture to culture.⁵⁶⁵ Chiaro opined that as humour crosses geographic boundaries, it must adjust linguistic and cultural elements, which are often only typical of the source culture from which it was produced, thereby losing its power to be funny elsewhere.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, judging what is funny or not is subjective. The word humour itself is problematic in that often when writers call a joke humorous or

⁵⁶³ Pickering, Michael and Sharon Lockyer. 2005. "Introduction: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humour and Comedy." In *Beyond a Joke : The Limits of Humour*, edited by Michael and Sharon Lockyer Pickering, 1-24. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁴ Billig, Michael. 2005. "Comic Racism and Violence." In *Beyond a Joke : The Limits of Humour*, edited by Michael and Sharon Lockyer Pickering, 25-44. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 25.

⁵⁶⁵ Harrison, Charles. 2012. *Difficulties of translating humour : From English into Spanish using the subtitled British comedy sketch show ""Little Britain"" as a case study*. Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 39.

⁵⁶⁶ Chiaro, Delia, ed. 2010. *Translation, Humour and Literature*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, p. 1.

classify it as an example of humour, they are indicating their own stance towards the funniness of the material.⁵⁶⁷

Additionally, considering the amount of *aḥādīth*, this chapter will restrict their number by looking only at the traditions that include a word explicitly denoting laughter or an activity causing someone to laugh, like a joke, witticism or a prank. Johnson opines that “laughter is an arbitrary individual physiological reaction, at most a side effect of the perceived joke in its social setting.”⁵⁶⁸ Therefore, the words chosen are the derivatives of the two roots *ḍ-ḥ-k* (*ḍaḥaka*, laugh) and *b-s-m* (*bassama*, smile). This is not only to restrict the scope, but also because laughter and smiles are universal and are also the two physiological functions inextricably linked to humour. Furthermore, the best-known humour theorists (Freud, Hobbes, Eastman, Bergson, et al)⁵⁶⁹ consistent with each other, and with most laymen, equate humour with laughter.⁵⁷⁰

The *aḥādīth* were sourced using two software programs of digitised heritage texts, one for Sunni⁵⁷¹ and another for Shi'ite⁵⁷² sources. About half of the *aḥādīth* were randomly selected and checked in print editions to verify the accuracy of digitisation. Only seven *aḥādīth* were found to have a slight difference in wording and were corrected based on the print editions.

As mentioned, the *aḥādīth* were selected based on words denoting humorous content by explicitly mentioning the derivatives of laughter and smile, and the words denoting jokes, pranks, or teases. Additionally, to the Prophet joking or laughing, this was extended to ‘Alī in particular, considering that Shi'ite *ḥadīth* collections also include reports by the twelve Imams and Fāṭima. *Aḥādīth* by the Prophet reporting other prophets, as well as angels and Ibīs laughing were also included. Moreover, some *aḥādīth* without the explicit phrases or words mentioned above were included when they were

⁵⁶⁷ Billig, Michael. 2005. “Comic Racism and Violence.” In *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*, edited by Michael and Sharon Lockyer Pickering, 25-44. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 27.

⁵⁶⁸ Johnson, R. “Jokes, Theories, Anthropology.” *Semiotica* 22, no. 3-4 (1978): 309-334, p. 310.

⁵⁶⁹ See Chapter 1 on humour theories

⁵⁷⁰ La Fave, Lawrence, Jay Haddad and William A. Maesen. 1996. “Superiority, Enhanced Self-Esteem, and Perceived Incongruity Humour Theory.” In *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*, edited by Antony J. and Hugh C. Foot Chapman, 63-92. London: Transaction Publishers, 79.

⁵⁷¹ Shamela, version 3.64 2020, <http://www.shamela.ws/>

⁵⁷² Ahl al-Bayt, version 2.0. 2012, <https://www.yahosein.com/vb/node/173444>

found in the collections in a chapter titled with one of these words or phrases. Some of the commentary was also included and marked as 'description' when it described the Prophet laughing or smiling.

One downside of this methodological approach is that this eliminated some of the obvious jokes that did not have the explicit word chosen or were not found in the chapter listing jokes or teases, such as the *ḥadīth* attributed to Abū Yūsuf, that Bilāl sacrificed a rooster and the Prophet told him: "A muezzin sacrificing a muezzin."⁵⁷³

Once the *aḥādīth* were selected, they were classified to enable their analysis. This posed the first problem. The classification of knowledge is a recurring theme in Islamic scholarship. Muslim scholars, from al-Kindī (d. 256/873),⁵⁷⁴ over al-Fārābī (d. 339/950),⁵⁷⁵ Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 384/1047),⁵⁷⁶ al-Khawārizmī (d. 387/997),⁵⁷⁷ Ibn Sīna (d. 427/1037),⁵⁷⁸ al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)⁵⁷⁹ and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406)⁵⁸⁰ to Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (d. 1703)⁵⁸¹ have all devoted considerable efforts to the exposition of this theme.⁵⁸²

Research on wit and humour is generally approached as if humour can be reliably measured externally and is readily available for a clear classification.⁵⁸³ There are several ways and methods to classify *aḥādīth*. Muslim scholars classified their *Ḥadīth* compendia either based on the tradent, in case of the *Musnad* or based on the content or theme as in the *Muṣannaf* or based on their veracity as in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

⁵⁷³ Abū Yūsuf is Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (d. 181/798), a student of the jurist Abū Ḥanīfa.

⁵⁷⁴ al-Kindī, Ya'qūb b. Ishāq. 1953. *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, especially the fifth epistle titled 'Fi kamiyyat kutub Aristū.'

⁵⁷⁵ al-Fārābī, Abū-Naṣr Muḥammad Ibn-Muḥammad. 1968. *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū I-Miṣriya .

⁵⁷⁶ Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Ishāq. 2014. *The fihrist of al-Nadīm (Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq) : a critical edition*. London: al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation.

⁵⁷⁷ Al-Khuwārizmī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. 1991. *Mafātiḥ al-'ulūm*. Beirut: Dār al-Manāhil.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibn Sīnā, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allāh. 1989. *Tis' rasāyil fi al-ḥikmah wa-al-ṭabī'iyāt*. Cairo: Dār al-'Arab, especially the Epistle titled 'Fi aqsām al-'ulūm al-'aqliyah'

⁵⁷⁹ al-Ghazzālī, Abū-Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad. 1957. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīya.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad. 2015. *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*. Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyah.

⁵⁸¹ al-Dihlawī, Walī Allāh. 1996. *The conclusive argument from God : Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*. Translated by Marcia K. Hermansen. Leiden: Brill.

⁵⁸² See for example Bakar, Osman.1998. *Classification of knowledge in Islam : a Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science*.

Cambridge: Cambridge Islamic Texts Society and Iqbal, Muzaffar. 2007. *Science and Islam*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

⁵⁸³ O'Connell, Walter E. 1996. "Freudian Humour: The Eupsychia of Everyday Life." In *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*, edited by Anthony J. and Hugh C. Foot Chapman, 313-341. London: Transaction Publishers, 315.

Modern scholars analysing traditions also used different methods. For example, al-'Ubaydī chose a method close to the *Musnad* type, classifying the *aḥādīth* based on the company the Prophet kept when he laughed.⁵⁸⁴ She divides the narrations into chapters, with titles starting with “Laughter with” and includes laughter with the Mothers of the Believers, children, Bedouins, the believers, and the companions. Morreall stated that humour is a social phenomenon, as people laugh more when in groups than when they are alone.⁵⁸⁵ Foot and Chapman argued that laughter is a social activity and that social laughter integrates the individual within a particular social group. Typically, they state, “It is a means of gaining social approval, bolstering group cohesiveness and signalling affiliative motives and is also used for maintaining the flow of interaction in daily encounters, such as filling in pauses in conversations, or maintaining the interest and attention of conversational partners.”⁵⁸⁶ Hence, this method is valid and useful.

Maghen, on the other hand, and line with the *Ṣaḥīḥ* or *Muṣannaf* compendia, classifies the *aḥādīth* into groups based on the content or theme of the traditions.⁵⁸⁷ He uses five groups based on the content. The first group includes what he terms as ‘kosher’ material, which lists statements and incidents that oppose the image of a ‘stern and stately’ prophet, yet do not offend common perceptions of piety. The second group includes what he labels as ‘childish things’, which are ‘silly’ moments spent with children. The third group Maghen calls ‘fun and games,’ which include household pranks and ‘slapstick’ scenes, while the fourth group ‘laughter and leniency’ includes anecdotes which highlight the ability to be funny and flexible. Finally, the last group Maghen labels as “spicy and irreverent material”, where he collects what he says is “humour that many – Muslims and non-Muslims – would have a hard time associating with a man of God and his flock.”⁵⁸⁸ This thematic approach is also useful and has many

⁵⁸⁴ al-'Ubaydī. *al-Fakah fī al-Islām*.

⁵⁸⁵ Morreall, John. 2005. “Humour and the Conduct of Politics.” In *Beyond a Joke : The Limits of Humour*, edited by Michael and Sharon Lockyer Pickering, 63-78. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 67.

⁵⁸⁶ Foot, Hugh C. and Anthony J. Chapman.1996. "The Social Responsiveness of Young Children in Humorous Situations." In *Humor and Laughter : Theory, Research and Applications*, edited by Antony J. and Hugh C. Foot Chapman, 187-214. London: Transaction Publishers, 188.

⁵⁸⁷ Maghen. *The Merry Men of Medina*.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 313-314.

benefits, like for example connecting the material together and integrating the data within a theme, allowing it to be less fragmented. It links the vocabulary used, permitting the recording of patterns within the data and facilitates its examination.

While both methods have merits, they also have drawbacks. Taking the first method into consideration, it implicitly confines the Prophet's laughter to certain people or groups, thus rendering it company specific and implies a certain mind-frame of the Prophet at that time. This could lead to the assumption that in the company of his wives, close Companions or children, for example, he would feel most relaxed and thus would laugh more readily than at other times. However, the data depicts him as even laughing during battles and sieges, a stressful time, thus it conveys that he laughed readily, irrespective of who he was with. Hence, using this method would be restricting the reading, analysis and interpretation of the material. The second method also has a downside, as some of the contents overlap, on one hand, and some of the *ahādīth* might have several topics included at once. Ideally, categories should be mutually exclusive to facilitate the drawing of objective conclusions.

The classification of jokes has warranted numerous studies.⁵⁸⁹ Generally, people expect laughter to be spontaneous, however it will almost always happen based on a reason or motivation that is revealed at some point in the content. It is generally regarded as beneficial to laugh about things including one's self, to see the funny side of life.⁵⁹⁰ Howitt and Owusu-Bempah advise that jokes should be signalled as jokes using a standard format, formula or introduction. Furthermore, they should be responded to appropriately by the audience with a smile, laugh or groan, as a means for the listener to indicate that they understood the joke. Finally, jokers should not be held responsible for the joke's context, because both, joker and listener, have active roles in making the joke work.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ See for example Attardo, Salvatore and Jean Charles Chabanne. 1992. "Jokes as a Text Type." *International Journal of Humor Research* 5 (1-2): 165-176 and Chiaro, Delia. 1992. *The Language of Jokes: Analysing Verbal Play*. London: Routledge and Röhrich, Lutz. 1980. *Der Witz. Seine Formen und Funktionen*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

⁵⁹⁰ Pickering, Michael and Sharon Lockyer. Introduction, 4.

⁵⁹¹ Howitt, Dennis and Kwame Owusu-Bempah. 2005. "Race and Ethnicity in Popular Humour." In *Beyond a Joke : The Limits of Humour*, edited by Michael and Sharon Lockyer Pickering, 45-62. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 47

For Johnson a joke is the result of the interplay of different variables. He constructs a model of the 'joking frame', distinguishing between six variables: 1) the object of the joke, 2) the person telling it, who will be named the joker for a lack of a better term, 3) the audience, 4) the context, 5) shared knowledge between the joker and his audience if any and finally 6) the joke itself.⁵⁹²

However, laughing is not based on jokes alone as Foot and Chapman have identified other types of laughter. While they regard the 'humorous laughter' as a result of being amused by a joke or a funny incident, they add 'ignorance laughter' which is a result of not getting the joke but laughing anyway to disguise the inability to comprehend the funny side of the incident played out. They also include 'derision laughter,' which is a form of scapegoating or laughing at someone.⁵⁹³ This, however, directly contradicts verse [49:11].⁵⁹⁴

For Foot and Chapman 'anxiety laughter' is in line with the Relief Theory discussed in the first Chapter and is a consequence of a stressful experience. 'Apologetic laughter' excuses a lack of action or indecision, while 'embarrassment laughter' is a form of rescue from embarrassment in social encounters. Finally, 'joyful laughter' indicates a certain cheerfulness or light-heartedness, generally a *joie de vivre*.⁵⁹⁵

Taking all these different methods and classifications into consideration, from the Islamic heritage as well as from modern humour studies, this chapter therefore, proposes a new method. This method incorporates both methodologies used by al-'Ubaydī and Maghen, as well as Johnson's model, adding a variable, namely the 'intent as revealed by the content.'

Therefore, the traditions will be analysed according to five of the six variables proposed by Johnson. The joke itself will not be listed, as it is in the *matn* of the tradition. The object of the joke will be determined from the content, as will be the joker. The audience will mostly will be the company that the Prophet keeps during the humorous incident or the 'joke' that leads to his or the audience's laughter,

⁵⁹² Johnson. Jokes, Theories, Anthropology, 310.

⁵⁹³ Foot, Hugh C. and Anthony J. Chapman. The Social Responsiveness of Young Children in Humorous Situations, 188.

⁵⁹⁴ [49:11] O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the wrongdoers.

⁵⁹⁵ Foot, Hugh C. and Anthony J. Chapman. The Social Responsiveness of Young Children in Humorous Situations, 189.

other than that, the audience will be the believers who will listen or read the report in one of the compendia. The shared knowledge between the joker and the audience will also be determined from the content and will reveal the intent by looking at the text of the tradition, or the commentary accompanying it. By drawing this model for each and every tradition selected, the intent as revealed by the content can be determined and then correlated with the others to draw conclusions and to answer the research questions about how the Prophet laughed, with whom about what.

By applying this model on all traditions as a standard, the subjectivity is removed and determining the intent becomes less speculative. To give an example of the method, the model will be applied to a well-known tradition.⁵⁹⁶ According to this tradition, some Qurayshī women were visiting the Prophet, talking to him animatedly, posing questions and asking for clarification. They raised their voices and their veils slipped off. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, knocked on the door, asking for permission to enter. As soon as the women heard ‘Umar’s voice, they quickly adjusted their veils putting them back on properly. ‘Umar entered while the Prophet was laughing. ‘Umar said: “May God always cause your teeth to laugh.”⁵⁹⁷ The Prophet replied: "I was wondering about these women, for as soon as they heard your voice, they quickly put on their veils." ‘Umar said, "O Prophet of God! You should rightfully be feared by them more than I." Then ‘Umar addressed the women: "O enemies of yourselves! You fear me more than you fear Allah's Messenger?" The women replied: "yes, for you are harsher and sterner than him." The Prophet then said: "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, By Him in Whose Hands my life is, if Iblīs (Satan) finds you going one way, he would take another."

The object of the joke is ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, while the narrator is Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ and in some versions Abū Hurayra. The joker in this case is the Prophet. The audience are the women present and by extension the believers who will hear or read this report later. The context has been given as one of the sessions where the Prophet met with the women to discuss religious matters. There are several traditions in many *Hadith* compendia showing that women demanded to be religiously educated

⁵⁹⁶ The tradition is found in a number of collections, like *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, al-Ṭabarānī’s *al-Mu’jam al-Awsaṭ*, Ibn Hajar’s *Fath a-Bārī*, *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shayba*.

⁵⁹⁷ This is a figure of speech used to mean: "may God always keep you laughing" and is an implicit question about why the Prophet was laughing.

like men and that the Prophet granted their request. The shared knowledge here is reflected in the women's answer, namely that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was known to have been harsher and sterner than the Prophet, who was more lenient and complaisant. The joke itself is that Iblīs would change his route to avoid 'Umar.

From all of these variables, the intent as reflected by the content is leniency. The Prophet neither insisted on the women observing utmost modesty in his presence, nor did he silence them, but allowed them to ask and raise their voices, even over his own as mentioned in some of the versions. The women's answer highlighting the contrast between the lenient Prophet and the harsh, stern 'Umar is another pointer towards leniency. The joke itself that even Iblīs would avoid 'Umar drives the point home, that 'Umar should not be as harsh or stern.

All other collected traditions in the data set will be treated in the same way and the model will be applied to all, after which the results will be analysed according to qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Data set

The data set consists of 207 individual narrations that have a total of 882 versions from Sunni and Shi'ite collections.

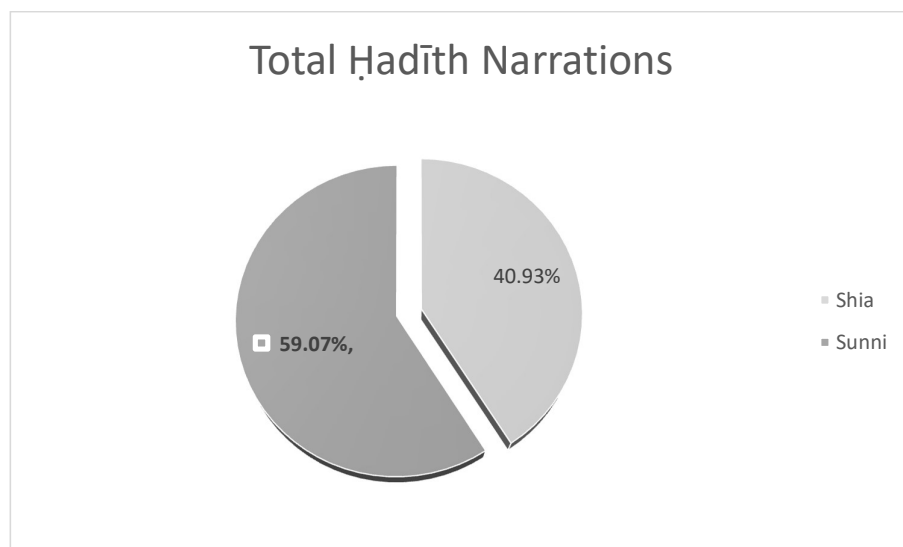


Figure 1 - Total Ḥadīth Narrations

As Figure (1) shows, the 207 *aḥādīth* are divided into 40.93% Shi'ite narrations (361 individual versions) and 59.07% Sunni narrations (521 individual versions). The *aḥādīth* were sourced from 77 different Shi'ite sources and 167 Sunni sources (A comprehensive list is in Annex 2). In the interest of legibility and accessibility only the top six sources will be listed for each corpus.

In the Shi'ite corpus:

- *Wasā'il al-shī'a* by al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) 47 individual versions,
- *Bihār al-anwār* by Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), 47 versions,
- *Jāmi' aḥādīth al-Shī'a* by Sayyid Ḥusayn Burūjardī (d. 1380/1960) 43 versions,
- *Sharḥ uṣūl al-Kāfī* by Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Mazandarānī (d. 1081 or 6/1670 or 1675) 38 versions,
- *Mustadrak al-wasā'il* by Mīrzā Ḥusain ʿAlī Nūrī (d. 1320/1892) 33 versions and finally
- *al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) with 21 versions.

These add up to 229 versions, about 63% of all Shi'ite versions of the data set.

From the Sunni corpus:

- *al-Sunnan al-kubrā* by al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) supplied 33 versions,
- *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) with 23 versions,
- *Musnad Aḥmad* by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/885) with 22 versions,
- *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* by Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875), with 14 versions
- *Sunnan Abū Dāwūd* by Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889) with 13 versions
- *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān* by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) with 13 versions.

These add up to 118 versions, 22% of the total number of Sunni reports in this data set.

The veracity and authenticity of each narration is not the focus of this study, which as mentioned in the methodology section, will adopt the methodological approach used by Barbara Stowasser in her article "*The Mothers of the Believers in Ḥadīth*."⁵⁹⁸ Stowasser chose to take the validity of the narrations

⁵⁹⁸ Stowasser. *The Mothers of the Believers in Ḥadīth*.

at face value, without delving into the authenticity issue, arguing that the very existence of these accounts shows that they must have been “accepted by at least a segment of the community of the faithful” and are thus a valuable source of information.⁵⁹⁹ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that many of these traditions were sourced from the canonical collections.

In the Shi'ite case, there are four canonical collections termed as *al-kutub al-arba'a* (the four books). This data set does not have any reports from two collections, namely *Kitāb tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*, both by al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), however *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu 'l-faqīh* by Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) and *al-Kāfī fī 'ilm al-dīn* by al-Kulaynī, as well as the two secondary sources used besides these four books, namely *Biḥār al-anwār* by al-Majlisī and al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī's *Wasā'il al-shī'a* provide 116 individual narrations of this set, amounting to 32% of the total Shi'ite narrations.

As for the Sunni canonical collections termed as *al-Kutub al-sitta* or *al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta*, namely *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, by Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj the *Sunan* of Ibn Māja (d. 275/889), Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), and al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915) provide 59 narrations amounting to 11.3% of the total Sunni narrations. However, the *Sunan* of 'Abd Allāh al-Dārimī (d. 255/868), *Muwatta'* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796), and *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal are also considered canonical, and sometimes included with the above six, collectively termed *al-kutub al-tis'ah* (the nine books). They provide 32 narrations, amounting to 6.1%, making the total of reports sourced from canonical collections 91 amounting to 17.4%. While the canonical books are officially accepted as authentic, secondary collections tend to reflect the collective cultural memory more.

Authors

a) Shi'ite

There are a total of 64 authors contributing to this dataset. The oldest report comes from a book attributed to Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī al-Kūfī (d. 76/695), a staunch supporter of 'Alī. According to Shi'ite tradition, he entrusted his book *Kitāb al-aṣl*, containing traditions concerning 'Alī and his descendants to Abān b. Abī 'Ayyāsh (d. 138/755). Though Ibn al-Nadīm mentions him in his *Fihrist*, Djebli, warns that his

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 5.

very existence is debatable. Djebli mentions that Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd (d. 598/1201), openly questioned Sulaym's existence in his famous *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, noting that he heard people say that "this man was nothing but pure invention of the imagination, no such writer having had any earthly existence and his alleged book being nothing but the apocryphal work of a forger."⁶⁰⁰ Nevertheless, *Kitāb Sulaym* is still being published as one of the earliest *Ḥadīth* collections.⁶⁰¹ The second oldest narration is a report ascribed to Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 122/740), al-Ḥusayn's grandson and the leader of a revolt that gave rise to the Zaydiyya. Zayd was given the honorary title *ḥalīf al-Qur'an* (ally of the *Qur'an*).⁶⁰² The tradition comes from a book ascribed to him titled *Musnad al-imām Zayd*.⁶⁰³

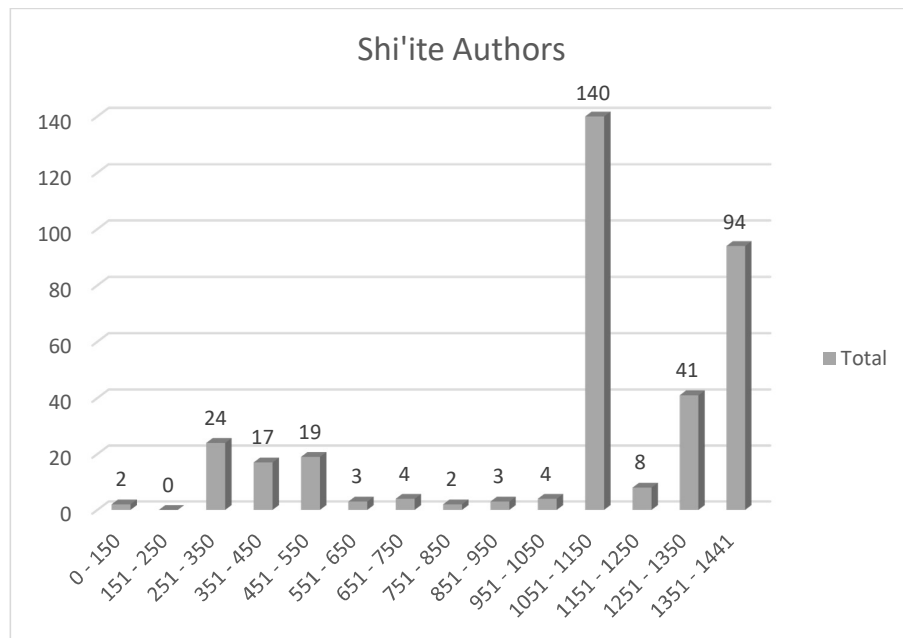


Figure 2 - Shi'ite Authors

⁶⁰⁰ Djebli, Moktar, "Sulaym b. Kaṣy", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 13 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7152>

⁶⁰¹ al-Hilālī, Sulaym ibn Qays. 1995. *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī*. Edited by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Anṣārī. 3 vols. Qum: Nashr al-Hādī.

⁶⁰² Madelung, W., "Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 13 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8137>

⁶⁰³ Ibn 'Alī, Zayd. 1981. *Musnad al-Imām Zayd b. 'Alī*. Edited by 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Ishāq. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya.

The frequency of the narrations according to author were plotted using the author's death year. As it is difficult to determine when exactly these narrations were put into circulation, the author's date of death was chosen, supposing that the traditions were in circulation when the authors collected them and included them in their compilations. The distribution shows several peaks that actually coincide with the historical development of collecting *ḥadīth*. Early collectors such as al-Kulaynī (d. 328/929), Muḥammad b. Bābawayh (d. 381/991), al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044, and al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), are followed by a period with very little activity, showing no or single narrations. Then a peak in the period between 1051/1641 -1150/1737, mostly due to the conflict between the *Akhbāriyya* and *Uṣūliyya* schools, sometimes described as 'traditionist' and 'rationalist' schools, which was most intense between the eleventh/seventeenth century and the early thirteenth/nineteenth century.⁶⁰⁴ Works included in this period are by Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Mazandarānī, al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, and Allāma al-Majlisī. This is followed by another century of minimal reports and the last peak is the contemporary period starting in 1251/1935 continuing the upward trend.

b) Sunni

There are 132 Sunni authors. The oldest report included is by Muqātil b. Sulaymān (150/767) who was known for his exegetical work. As a traditionist, he was considered untrustworthy for not being accurate with the *isnād*. He was also associated with sectarian leanings and was accused of extreme anthropomorphism.⁶⁰⁵ The second oldest is attributed to Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Kathīr al-Anṣārī, (d. 180/796), a *qāriʿ* (reciter) and traditionist, who narrated from Hishām b. ʿUrwa, and was classified as a

⁶⁰⁴ Gleave, Robert M., "Akhbāriyya and Uṣūliyya", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 14 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0029>

⁶⁰⁵ Plessner, M. and Rippin, A., "Muqātil b. Sulaymān", in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 13 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5461>

trustworthy narrator. One of his teachers was Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.⁶⁰⁶The report comes from a book ascribed to him titled *Aḥādīth Ismā'īl b. Ja'far*.⁶⁰⁷

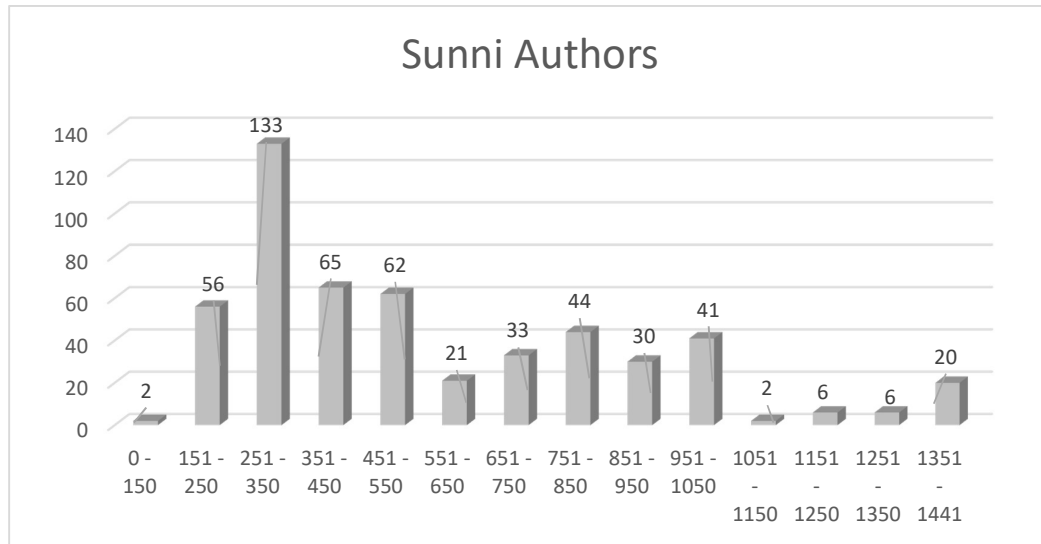


Figure 3 - Sunni Authors

The distribution of the frequency of the narrations according to author's death date also shows several peaks that again coincide with the historical development of the Sunni collection of *ḥadīth*. There is a rise in the number of narrations in the period (151/768-350/961) followed by a decrease, yet with a steady reasonable amount in the period (351/962 -550/1155). These two periods cover two actual developments in the history of collecting *Ḥadīth*. The first one comes as a result of al-Shāfi'i's (d. 204/820) restriction of reports to the Prophet only and the recognition of *Ḥadīth* as a foundation of Islamic Law, second only to the Qur'an.⁶⁰⁸ This resulted in more organized collections, replacing the *ṣahīfa* (page or leaf) used by some Companions to write down traditions. The new form was called

⁶⁰⁶ al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad. 2004. *Siyar a'lam al-nubalā'*. Edited by Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 8:229.

⁶⁰⁷ al-Anṣārī, Ismā'īl b. Ja'far b. Abī Kathīr. 1998. *Aḥādīth Ismā'īl b. Ja'far*. Edited by 'Umar b. Rufayd al-Sufyānī. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rashīd lil-Nashr wa-l-tawzī.

⁶⁰⁸ Robson, J., "Ḥadīth", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0248>

musnad, which organized the traditions according to the narrator. The *muṣannaf* (classified) works were compiled next, where the traditions were recorded according to subject rather than narrator. Early collectors include Ibn Abī Shayba (235/ 849), Ibn Rāhwayh (238/853), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, Abū Ya'īla al-Mawṣilī (307/940), Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Ṭabarānī (360/971), al-Bayhaqī (458/1066), and 'Abd al-Barr (463/1070).

The next phase reflects the development around the time of Ibn al-Ṣalāh al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) which revived the interest in *uṣūl al-ḥadīth*.⁶⁰⁹ The renewed activity is also echoed in the chart, as one can see another rise in the period after 650/1252. This period saw the production of commentaries on or selections from older collections.⁶¹⁰ They include works by al-Zayla'ī (762/1361), al-Ṣafadī (765/1363), Ibn Kathīr (774/1373), al-Haythamī (807/1405), Abū Muḥammad al-'Aynī (855/1451), Ibn Ḥajar (852/1449), al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (975/1567), and al-Ḥalabī (1044/1635). This lasted until 1050/1640, the start of a turbulent time in the history of many Muslim countries, with the Ottoman military campaigns and conquests, followed by the period of colonialism. The chart shows a rise again in the period starting (1351/1935) with many countries being granted independence and the formation of postcolonial nation-states.

c) Shi'ite and Sunni

The next analysis carried out is to compare the Sunni and the Shi'ite authors, by placing them together to see if any observations can be made.

⁶⁰⁹ Dickinson, E., "Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7762>

⁶¹⁰ Robson, J., "Ḥadīth", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0248>

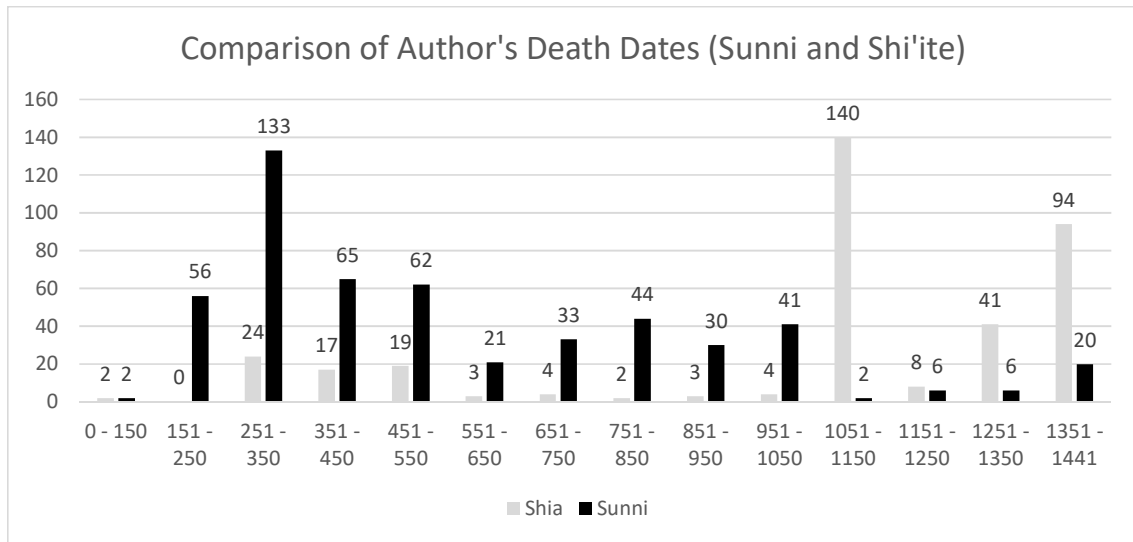


Figure 4 - Comparison of Author's Death Dates (Sunni and Shi'ite)

From this chart one can infer some information about the collection of *ḥadīth* as such, as one can see the confirmation of the later start of the Shi'ite's *ḥadīth* collection. The Shi'ite *ḥadīth* tradition differs from the Sunni one and the collections started later, around the end of the second/eighth century.⁶¹¹ Understandably, because as long as there was an Imam available for consultation, there was no urgency in writing down or collecting reports.

The occultation of the Imam happened in two phases. The first phase *al-ghaybah al-suḡhrā* (minor occultation) or *al-ghaybah al-'ūlā* (first occultation) from 260/874 to 329/941. Muḥammad b. al-Hasan al-'Askarī, the twelfth Imam, was hidden from the 'Abbāsīd caliphs after his father's death. According to Shi'ite belief, his location was only disclosed to a small number of his followers. Four of his father's close associates became successive ambassadors (*sufarā'*, singular *safīr*) between the Imam and his followers until 329/941. The last *safīr* announced on his death-bed that the twelfth Imam had decided not to appoint another *safīr* and had entered into total occultation, *al-ghaybah al-kubrā* (major occultation), which continues until the present time.⁶¹² Hence, Shi'ite collections were only needed after

⁶¹¹ Kohlberg. *Shī'ī Ḥadīth*, 229.

⁶¹² Klemm, Verena. 2003. "The Four Sufara' of the Twelfth Imam: On the Formative Period of the Twelver Shi'a." In *Shi'ism*, edited by Etan Kohlberg, 135-152. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 4-10.

the Imam's *ghaybah al-kubrā*. The Sunni distribution is in line with the development in the collection and sciences of *Ḥadīth* as detailed above. It is also interesting to note that after the period (1051/1640-1150/1737) the Shi'ite collection activities exceed the Sunni ones by far. This could be explained by the emergence of a new strong leader, Nadir Shah, who after a period of chaos, invasions and wars restored order again.⁶¹³ In addition, his attempts of a rapprochement between Shi'ites and Sunnis failed, among other reasons because Shi'ite scholars rejected his idea for Twelver Shi'ism to be considered as an additional *madhhab*, or law school as Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Sixth Imam held a much higher and noble status than any founder of a law school like Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī or Ibn Ḥanbal.⁶¹⁴ The attempt though could have been the catalyst for a renewed scholarly activity.

Type of Laughter

The first criterion extracted from the *aḥādīth* is the type of laugh, smile, joke or prank or their derivatives and synonyms. The list of words resulted in forty-six different words. Using forty-six words makes it difficult to carry out reasonable graphical or textual analysis. Therefore, some of the words were grouped together. For example, abundant laughter, guffaw, indulged in laughter, laughed like never before, laughed till teeth showed (meaning molars, canines, last tooth, etc.) were all consolidated under the label 'excessive laughter.' Also all descriptions with a slightly negative connotation were grouped together, like angry smile and hollow laughter. This was done with all the words resulting in thirteen umbrella labels, which is more conducive to being plotted in a chart. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used will be listed hereunder in Table (1).

Chart (5) shows the different types of laughter for both Sunni and Shi'ite narrations.

⁶¹³ McHugo, John. 2017. *A Concise History of Sunnis & Shi'is*. London: Saqi Books, 144.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, 145.

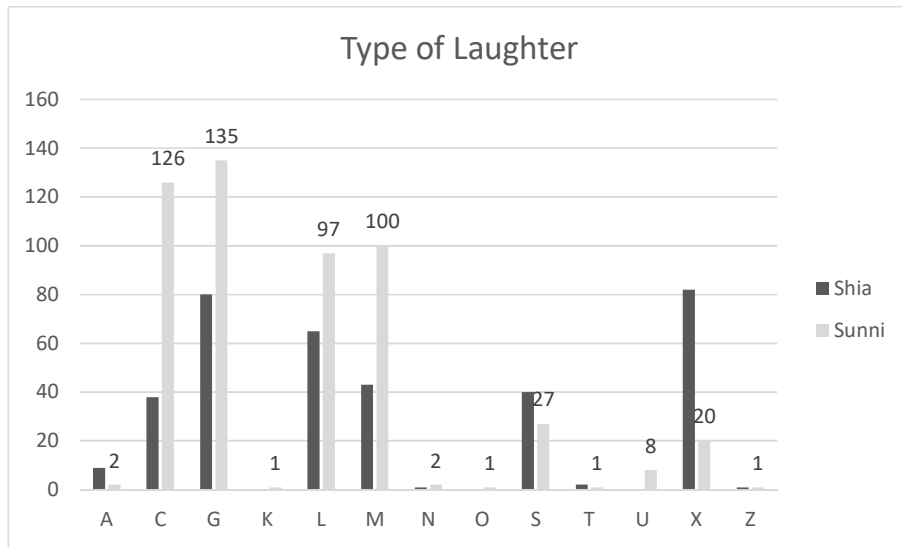


Figure 5 - Type of Laughter

Table (1) explains the labels and lists all the words describing the types of laughter that were used in each label.

Table 1 - Types of Laughter

Types of laughter	
Label	Words included in the label
A	amazed, laughed till surprised, laughed wondering
C	mercy chapter, joking chapter, chapter
G	laugh, laughed, the smile of the knowing
K	2 Types of laughter
L	but a smile, laughed a little, little laughter, mostly smiled, only smiled, smile, smiled
M	abundant laughter, guffaw, indulged in laughter, laugh like never before, laugh showing back teeth, laughed showing canines, laughed till fell on back, laughed till he covered his mouth, laughed showing last tooth, laughed showing molars, laughing and smiling happily,

	most smiles, smiled then laughed, showing back teeth, may your teeth laugh, the laughing man
N	angry smile, hollow laughter, did not laugh
O	laugh not cry
S	fun, happiness, joke, joking
T	laughing angels
U	laugh or smile maybe smiled, when he laughed
X	None, no laughter
Z	did not joke

The chart shows that there are differences between the frequency of the different categories between the Sunni and the Shi'ite data. While the Sunni reports shows the highest incidents of C (Chapter headings) and G (general laughter and smiles), the Shi'ite narrations shows the highest incidents of X (None) followed by G at a much lower frequency than the Sunni counterpart. K (kinds, types) and U (undecided) are missing altogether from the Shi'ite traditions. M (much) and S (situations) are almost equal in the Shi'ite part. While S and M are almost equal in the Sunni one, in the Shi'ite data the frequency is much lower in all three with L (little) having a higher frequency than M and S. A (amazement) is higher in the Shi'ite part than in the Sunni one.

Analysis: The high frequency of A (amazement) denoting wonder, indicates that in Shi'ite narrations laughter needs to be coupled with surprise, requiring a reason for the laughter that is not just a reaction to a situation, witticism or a joke. The very low N (negative connotations) in both parts indicates that laughter with a negative connotation, be it anger or a hollow laugh is almost negligible. The high X (None) and Z (zero) in the Shi'ite sect compared to its much lower frequency in the Sunni traditions indicates that incidents that have no laughter or are explicitly stated as zero laughter show that the Shi'ite collective memory tends to record less incidents of laughter and more incidents towards the image of a serious Prophet or Imams. The incidents of M (abundant laughter or excessive laughter) are

much higher in the Sunni data, more than double the Shi'ite one, indicating that the Prophet laughing with gay abandon was more acceptable to Sunnis than to Shi'ites, which corroborates the results of the preference of seriousness resulting from labels X and Z.

In conclusion, the Sunni image of the Prophet's laughter is more relaxed and less restricted or controlled than the Shi'ite one, though both share an aversion to negative connotations of laughter. This is also supported by the labels O (laugh not cry) and K (kinds) which are completely missing from the Shi'ite data. In addition, this category offered insight as to how the Prophet's laugh was depicted, counting the different words used, whether or not they denoted excessive laughter as in guffaw, laughing showing teeth, be they molars, canines or others or whether they denoted limited laughter, barely a smile or even no laughter at all.

Object

The second criterion extracted from the *aḥādīth* is the object of the joke as determined from the content of the tradition. This was more challenging than the previous category as it resulted in 132 different labels, which were also grouped into umbrella labels. For example *ḥajj*, last prayer, *nawāfil* (supererogatory or extra prayers), ablution and any other words denoting rituals were grouped together. All Companions like Jaṛīr, Anas, Bilāl, Abū Hurayra and others were grouped together. This resulted in 15 umbrella labels which was more manageable for depiction in a chart. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used are explained below in Table (2).

Chart (6) shows the different object counts for both Sunni and Shi'ite narrations.

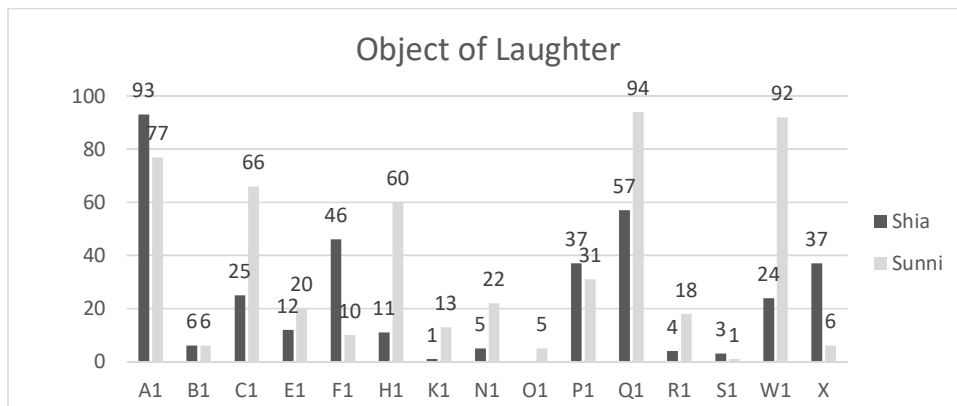


Figure 6 - Object of Laughter

Table 2 - Object of Laughter

Object of laughter	
Label	Words included in the label
A1	advice, description, kiss, knowledge, news, question, tribal pride, wealth victory, wonder
B1	palm, horses, camel
C1	Abū Hurayra, ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, Anas, Anas b. Mālik, Bilāl, Companions, Ḥimār, Jarīr, Khawāt, Nu‘aymān, Saīf, Suwaybat, ‘Umar, Usayd b. Huḍayr, Zāhir b. Ḥirām
E1	food, food & water, grain, melons, pomegranate, spirit (as in alcoholic beverages), tharīd, water
F1	Abū Ṭālib, al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī, family, Fāṭima, grandsons
H1	‘Ajam, Anṣārī man , Bedouin, blind man, boy, Jew, Jews, man, young men
K1	2nd marriage, domestic problems
N1	adversity, conjunctivitis, death, disappointment, embarrassment, grievances, hypocrisy, poverty, uvula, yawning
O1	Chamber-pot, toys
P1	achievement, allegiance, beauty, entertainment, fearlessness, fun, guffaw, joke, jokes, joking, joy, justice, laughter, prank, preference, privilege, responsibility, smile
Q1	angels, Day of Resurrection, evil, faith, forgiven sins, future glad tidings, God, God's promise, Gog & Magog, hellfire, Iblīs, Jibrīl, martyrs, mercy, Mikhāṭīl, miracle, omen, prediction, prophecy, Prophet, prophets
R1	ablution, hajj, ḥalāl, last prayer, Nawāfil
S1	Serious, seriousness
W1	‘Ā’isha, Umm Salīm's dagger, Ḥafṣa, Hind bint ‘Utbah, old lady, orphan girl, Ṣafiyya, Umm Hānī, wife, woman, women
X	None

The chart shows differences in the frequency of the various categories between the Sunni and Shi'ite data. While the Sunni data shows the highest incidents of Q1 (religious topics) and W1 (women), the Shi'ite set shows the highest incidents of A1 (abstract values) followed by Q1 at a much lower frequency than its Sunni counterpart. O1 (objects) is completely missing from Shi'ite narrations, while K1 (kin) is negligible. B1 (animals and plants) is equal in both, while C1 (companions) and F1 (Prophet's family) also differ extensively, with F1 (Prophet's family) being much higher in the Shi'ite set, while C1 is much higher in the Sunni one. This is understandable, due to the importance of the *ahl-al-bayt* (Prophet's family), in general and the *ahl al-kisā'* (people of the mantle/cloak) in particular in Shi'ite traditions and the development of the concepts of infallibility of the Imams in Shi'ite ideology, as opposed to the development of the concept of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba* (probity of the Companions) in Sunni traditions.⁶¹⁵

E1 (edibles) is slightly higher in the Sunni traditions. H1 (unidentified humans) in the Sunni reports is almost six times as much as in the Shi'ite data. P1 (positive values) on the other hand is only slightly higher in the Shi'ite reports. R1 (rituals) and S1 (seriousness) are almost equal in the Shi'ite tradition, while R1 is double as much in the Sunni one, and S1 is almost non-existent. X indicating no explicitly mentioned object is almost four times as much in Shi'ite versions than in the Sunni ones. W1 (women) is also very different, with the Shi'ite reports being only a quarter of the Sunni ones.

Analysis: The frequency of Q1 (religious topics) is slightly less than double in the Sunni data, indicating that religious topics including Day of Resurrection, evil, faith, forgiven sins, future glad tidings, Gog & Magog, etc., was of more concern to the Sunnis, which is surprising, as generally in the Shi'ite compendia, a favourite topic is angels, predictions and martyrs. A comparison of the individual objects showed in addition to the shared ones, that the Sunnis also had reports about miracles, Mikhāl, Jibrīl, Gog & Magog, martyrs, future, prediction, omens, hellfire, Day of Resurrection that were missing from the Shi'ite list of topics, whereas God's promise as a topic was missing from the Sunni traditions. W1

⁶¹⁵ For more on the development of the term *ahl-al-bayt*, in Sunni and Shi'ite traditions, see Amin, Yasmin. 2020. "Umm Salamah: A Female Authority Legitimizing the Authorities." In *Female Religious Authority in Shi'i Islam: Past and Present*, edited by Mirjam Künkler and Devin Stewart, 47-77. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 48-57

(women), is almost four times as much in the Sunni data than in the Shi'ite one. Both share traditions about Hind bint 'Utbah, believing women and believers' wives, however, the Shi'ite data has a tradition about Umm Hānī which is not in the Sunni data, while the Sunni data includes many traditions about some of the Prophet's wives, 'Ā'isha, Ṣafīyya, Ḥafṣa and also about Umm Salīm (her orphan girl and her dagger). It is understandable to have Umm Hānī represented in the Shi'ite set, being 'Alī's sister. It is also understandable that traditions about the Prophet's wives, especially 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa, who were not among the favourite topics in Shi'ite literature, should only be represented in the Sunni set. The Shi'ite view of 'Ā'isha is a negative one, which is mainly due to her role in the *fitna* and her participation in the 'Battle of the Camel' (36/656), which is taken as contempt for *ahl-al-bayt* in general and animosity towards 'Alī in particular.⁶¹⁶ 'Ā'isha is also portrayed as a key player in the rebellion against 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān, naming 'Uthmān a *na'thal* (old fool), who should be killed.⁶¹⁷ Her motive was alleged to be establishing Ṭalḥa b. Ubayd Allāh as 'Uthmān's successor, and only when the tides turned and 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib was chosen as caliph did she change her attitude and fought 'Alī to demand *qisās* (retaliation) for 'Uthmān's murder.⁶¹⁸ The Shi'ite view of Ḥafṣa is like 'Ā'isha, generally negative. She is criticized in unflattering portraits, which probably relates to her being 'Umar's daughter rather than any particular characteristic of her own.⁶¹⁹ Ṣafīyya is defended in Shi'ite sources, as she received unfair treatment by 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa in form of derogatory remarks about her Jewish heritage.⁶²⁰ Therefore, it is surprising that Ṣafīyya and Umm Salīm were not included in the Shi'ite set, as they are both regarded favourably in Shi'ite tradition.

The second highest two labels for the Sunni data are C1 (Companions) and H1 (humans), which are both almost just a third of the Shi'ite set. The first one is understandable, as it deals with the Prophet's Companions, who are not necessarily regarded with the same favour in Shi'ite sources,

⁶¹⁶ Veccia Vaglieri, L. "al- D̲Jamal." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2009. Brill Online. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO. 17 April 2020 <http://0-www.brillonline.nl.lib.ucegypt.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-1962>

⁶¹⁷ Ibn Qutaybah, Abī Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim. 2006. *al-Imamah wa-al-siyāsah*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1:52.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Dakake, Maria Massi. 2007. *The Charismatic Community - Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam*. Albany: State University of New, 216.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 217.

depending on their support for ‘Alī or whether or not they were favourably disposed to the ‘Alid cause. H1 (humans) includes narrations that are common between both data-sets, however, in the Sunni part there are additional reports about an Anṣārī man, an unnamed man, a Bedouin and some ‘Ajam that are not present in the Shi’ite sect. K1 (kin) is also different in both data sets. While Shi’ites only record one tradition, the Sunnis have thirteen. These deal with domestic disputes in the Prophet’s household, involving ‘Ā’isha, Ḥafṣa, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and other Companions, namely Jābir and Ibn ‘Abbās. It is surprising though that they were not recorded in the Shi’ite data, as they involve the *asbāb al-nuzūl* of verses [33:28-29], and would have been an opportunity to chastise the wives, particularly ‘Ā’isha and Ḥafṣa. The only wife portrayed favourably in one of these reports (#61, version 9) is Umm Salama, who is well regarded in Shi’ite sources as a strong supporter of ‘Alī, as well as her positive role in the First Civil War, as she reportedly tried to defuse the tension by attempting to discourage both ‘Ā’isha and al-Zubayr from challenging ‘Alī’s authority, warning ‘Ā’isha against going to war, setting an example by remaining at home instead of joining the fight and sending her son instead.⁶²¹ Dakake mentions that she was made “something of an honorary member of the *ahl al-bayt*- a term usually reserved for the Prophet’s blood relations.”⁶²²

Moving from the *ahl al-bayt* to Label F1 (Prophet’s family), which in the Sunni part is almost just a quarter of the Shi’ite data. The common traditions in both data sets are about al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, Abū Ṭālib, and ‘Alī, however the Shi’ite data includes more traditions about ‘Alī (#13, 14, 15,16,17,19, 24), as well as traditions about Fāṭima and ‘Alī and Fāṭima’s offspring, which is not surprising.

As for B1 and E1, both labels deal with plants, animals and edibles, and have minimal traditions in both branches’ collections. Label O1, involves objects, which are not found in the Shi’ite data at all. As for the rituals, covered in R1, the Sunni reports are almost four times the Shi’ite ones, which deal with the Prophet’s last prayer, ablutions and what is *ḥalāl*. Apart from the last category, all these are also covered by the Sunnis, in addition to the *nawāfil* and *hajj*.

⁶²¹ Ibid, 216.

⁶²² Ibid.

It is surprising that *nawāfil* are missing from the Shi'ite data, as they are encouraged. *Wasā'il al-shī'a* records many traditions ascribed to the Prophet,⁶²³ Ja'far al-Şādiq,⁶²⁴ and Muḥammad al-Bāqir⁶²⁵ encouraging *nawāfil*. Al-Sistānī has a whole section on his website devoted to the *nawāfil* titled *al-Nawāfil al-Yawmiyya* (the daily supererogatory prayers).⁶²⁶

Label S1 (Seriousness) in both sects warns against excessive joking. In the Sunni data it is only one report (# 158) using verse [57:16] to remind believers that their hearts should be humbly submissive at the remembrance of God, while in the Shi'ite data there are more traditions warning that excessive laughter causes the loss of one's face and jolts the faith (# 169, 176).

The last label N1 (negative values) has two unique Shi'ite traditions about adversity (# 11) and hypocrisy (# 23), and shares one tradition with the Sunnis about Şuhayb eating dates while suffering from conjunctivitis (#55). The Sunni data has additional reports about death (#153), disappointment (#80), embarrassment (#81), grievances (#34), poverty (#55), the Prophet's uvula (#60) and yawning (#208), yet all do not have more than a few solitary versions.

To sum up, the Shi'ite and Sunni parts display more communalities and only slight predictable and unsurprising differences with regard to the object of laughter, be it abstract concepts, positive or negative values, animals, food or people, regardless of their relationship to the Prophet.

Joker

The third criterion extracted from the *aḥādīth* is the joker or the one playing the pranks as determined from the content of the tradition. This time, the categories were not as challenging as the previous ones, as a large number of traditions did not have an explicit designated or named joker. Nevertheless, the different Companions were added together under one umbrella label (C3). There are 8

⁶²³ al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan. 1383-1389. *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah ilā taḥṣīl masā'il al-sharī'a*. Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyah, 4:74.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, 4:44.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, 4:72.

⁶²⁶ <https://www.sistani.org/arabic/qa/0736/#6904>.

labels for the joker category. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used will be explained hereunder in Table (3). Chart (7) shows the different joker counts for both Sunni and Shi'ite narrations.

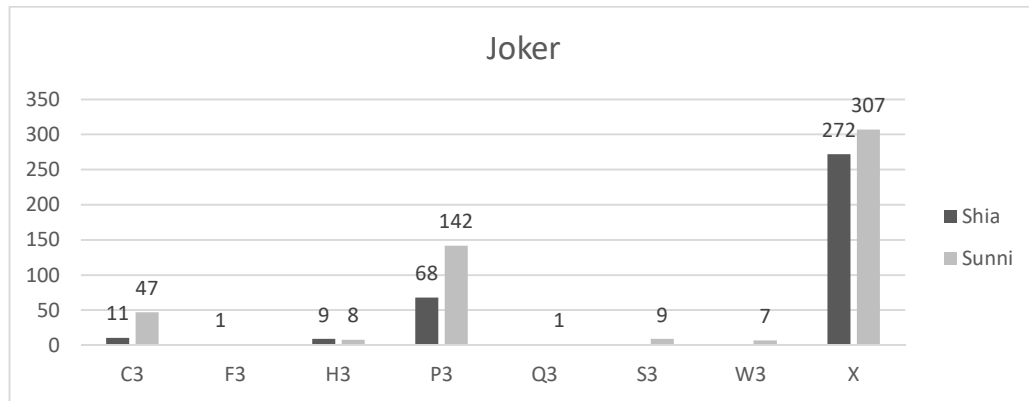


Figure 7 - Joker

Table 3 - Joker

Joker	
Label	Words included in the label
C3	Companions, Abd Allah b. Ḥudhāfa b. Qays al-Sahmī, Abd Allah b. Rawāḥa, Abū Hurayra, Abū Sufyān, al-Daḥḥāk b. Sufyān al-Kilābī, ‘Awf, Nu‘aymān, Sa‘d, Suwaybaṭ
F3	‘Alī, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī
H3	Bedouin, human, unnamed man
P3	Prophet Muḥammad
Q3	Jinn
S3	Situation
W3	‘Ā’isha
X	None

The highest number of traditions does not have a designated joker, in both sets. The second highest number of jokes was ascribed to the Prophet himself in both sets, but Shi'ites only have about half as much as Sunnis. This is in line with the Shi'ite preference for a more serious image of the

Prophet. Again when the Companions joke, the number is higher in the Sunni data, while Shi'ites only record a third of those. As mentioned earlier Shi'ites are selective about which Companions to record and Abū Sufyān is not among the favoured.

H3 (unnamed humans) is almost the same in both, recording a Bedouin and an unnamed man joking with the Prophet.

The last three labels Q3, S3 and W3 are missing from the Shi'ite data, which is not surprising for W3, as in this case the joker is 'Ā'isha, who, as mentioned, was not a favourite in Shi'ites sources.

However, it is surprising when it concerns Q3, as the joker here is a female Jinn and the Shi'ite *ḥadīth* corpus is replete with reports using the marvellous and magical themes characteristic of popular Persian tales and folk legends, as well as fantastic imagery following the example of Persian literary heritage of the old masters as described by Nicholson.⁶²⁷ The *matn* sounds more Shi'ite than Sunni and more along the lines of many *aḥādīth* found particularly in *Biḥār al-anwār*. The report narrates that a jinn woman used to visit the Prophet in human form, but did not visit for some time. When she returns, the Prophet asks about the reason for her long absence? She explains: "one of ours died in the far away land of India, I went to comfort them." She tells him about the amazing things she saw and among them was seeing Iblīs standing upright and praying on a rock. She asked Iblīs if it was indeed him. He affirmed. Then she asked him about what had made him mislead Adam and do all what he did and now he is praying? He replied: "Yes, 'Fāri'a bint al-'Abd al-Ṣāliḥ, I am praying to God to honour his oath and forgive me." This caused the Prophet to laugh like never before.

The commonalities in this category are more than the differences. The differences arise mainly on account of sectarian ideological dissimilarities. The Prophet has the highest number of incidents than others. In the Sunni data, women joke more frequently than in the Shi'ite set, as do unnamed persons and Companions.

Dakake pointed out that clearly fewer women are found as transmitters of Shi'ite reports than in the Sunni tradition. She adds that many of the female transmitters are 'Alid women - daughters, sisters,

⁶²⁷ Nicholson, R. A. 2004. *Literary History of the Arabs*. London: Routledge, 394.

wives, or servants of the Imams.⁶²⁸ Dakake further states: “Shi’ite ḥadīth literature is somewhat mixed on the issue of women. It sometimes expresses a rather pessimistic view of women’s moral and religious character, and of their significance within the Shi’ite community, while in other places it praises the character of women and their sympathy with the Shi’ite cause. The most obvious characteristic of women in Shi’ite canonical and non-canonical ḥadīth sources, however, is their scarcity.”⁶²⁹ Dakake explains why women are relatively scarce in the content of the traditions by arguing that many, if not most, Shi’ite traditions are narrated from the Imams (rather than from the Prophet) and usually are in form of questions posed to them, either in public teaching circles or in private or semi-private audiences, where women had no access.⁶³⁰ This can explain why the category of W3 is missing from the Shi’ite set.

Audience

The fourth criterion extracted is the audience present at the time of the joke or in some cases when there was no explicit audience mentioned, the believers who will listen to the report or read it in one of the compendia. There were twenty-one categories that were added together under seven umbrella labels. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used is explained in Table (4).

Chart (8) shows the different object counts for both Sunni and Shi’ite narrations.

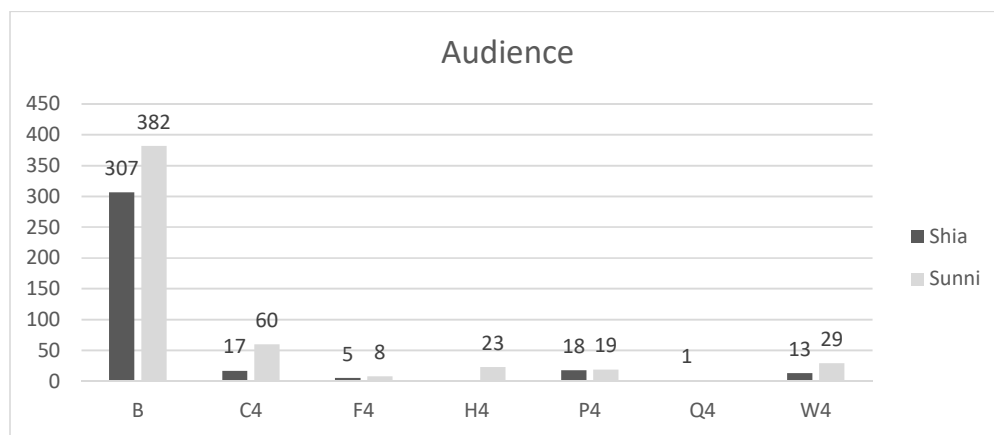


Figure 8 - Audience

Table 4 - Audience

⁶²⁸ Dakake. *The Charismatic Community*, 213.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*, 223.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid*, 224.

Audience	
Label	Words included in the label
B	Believers
C4	Abū Bakr, Abū Khālid al-Kābilī, Anas, Anas's family, Anjasha, Bilāl, some Companions, 'Umar, 'Umar & Abū Bakr
F4	'Alī, 'Alī & Umm Hānī, grandsons
H4	army, boys, pilgrims
P4	Prophet Muḥammad
Q4	Adam
W4	'Ā'isha, Prophet's household, Umm Salama, women

The highest category in both sets is B, the 'believers' as audience. The second largest category is the label C4, which includes the audience from among the Companions, either in groups, in pairs or one alone. The Shi'ite traditions are about a third of the Sunni ones. The Companions mentioned in the Shi'ite data as audience are Anas, Anas's family and Bilāl and these are also found in the Sunni set. Interestingly, the reports about Bilāl are slightly different. In the Sunni set the Prophet passed a sleeping Bilāl, tapped him with his foot jokingly asking: "Is Umm 'Amr asleep?" Bilāl woke up terrified, and reached out his hand to check his manhood, afraid he had become a woman. The Sunni report ends that the Prophet did not joke after that. Though the essence is the same, in the Shi'ite report the Prophet jokingly calls Bilāl, who had developed a belly as 'Umm Ḥabbayn' (mother of two grains) a name used for a chameleon. One of the traditions (#21) unique to the Shi'ite data is a report with Abū Bakr as audience. Abū Bakr was with the Prophet when the fort gate of Khaybar was ripped out. He saw the Prophet laughing until his front teeth showed, then crying until he wet his beard. He asked: "Oh Messenger of God, laughing and crying all at once?" The Prophet affirmed and explained that he laughed out of happiness the fort gate was ripped out, yet cried about 'Alī, as he ripped it out while he had been fasting for three days, except for consuming some water. The Prophet adds that if 'Alī had not

been fasting, he would have even obliterated it from behind the fence. Though Abū Bakr is generally not one of the favourite Companions to be mentioned, in this case the report is using him to show ‘Alī’s strength and piety and the Prophet’s pride in his achievements and that Abū Bakr witnessed both.

Interestingly, another rather lengthy report unique to the Sunni set, yet with a distinctly Shi’ite flavour, narrates that Anas served the Prophet a grilled bird. The Prophet invoked God’s name, took a bite and said: “Oh God, send me the most beloved of Your creations.” ‘Alī came knocking and Anas sent him away claiming the Prophet was busy. This is repeated thrice more. After the fourth time, the Prophet orders Anas to open the door. When ‘Alī came in, the Prophet smiled and said: “Thank God it is you.” He tells ‘Alī that he was asking God with each bite to send him the most beloved of His creations. ‘Alī explains that he came knocking thrice, only to be refused by Anas. The report was collected by the Iraqi traditionist Ibn al-Maghāzilī al-Shāfiī (d. 483/1090 or 534/1139).

It is worth noting that Juynboll contests Anas having been a servant to the Prophet at all. Assessing the historicity of most reports about Anas’ life, Juynboll notes that the report about his mother offering him to serve the Prophet is neither found in the earliest collections nor in Ibn Ishāq’s (d. 151/768) *Sīra* or al-Wāqidī’s (d. 207/822) *Kitāb al-maghāzī*. Moreover, Anas is visibly absent from the list of Muḥammad’s servants in Muqātil’s *Tafsīr*, as well as in Ibn Sa’d’s *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. Juynboll estimates Anas to have been born around twenty years after Muḥammad’s death, offering a number of arguments to support his claim, among them the convincing argument that should Anas really have died in (93/712) aged 103, then it is unfathomable that he did not develop into Islam’s earliest and best-attested common link.⁶³¹

In the third highest category F4 (family), there is only one report (#31) unique to the Shi’ite data, while the other reports are all shared with the Sunni one. This solitary report has the Prophet smiling at ‘Alī and his sister Umm Hānī, and fulfilling her wish of granting amnesty to her husband Hubayra b. Abū Wahb al-Makhzūmī, whom the Prophet had decided not to spare after conquering Mecca, along with

⁶³¹ Juynboll, G. H. A., “Anas b. Mālik”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 18 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23088>

another man from the tribe of Banū Makhzūm. The other reports common to both sets see the Prophet playing and joking with his grandsons and the other one has Abū Sufyān and the Prophet joking in Umm Ḥabība's house. It is rather surprising to see this report in the Shi'ite set as Umm Ḥabība is generally portrayed negatively in Shi'ite sources, not only for being the daughter of one of the Prophet's staunchest enemies, but also for playing a role in instigating the First Civil war, by sending 'Uthmān's blood-soaked shirt to her brother Mu'āwiya, which he used to stir the rebellion against 'Alī. As Dakake mentions "In Shi'ite tradition, the negative aspects of Umm Ḥabība's character are directly connected to the fact that she was sired, as one tradition states, from 'an accursed tree."⁶³²

H4 (humans) is missing from the Shi'ite data. The Sunni counterpart has four reports with 18 versions. One report (# 78) has a distinctly Shi'ite flavour, though it does not occur in the Shi'ite data, and is about a miracle. The Prophet feeds the entire army before battle, the army being the audience.

Miracles are a universal *topos* within many of the major world religions.⁶³³ Weddle states: "the story of miracles begins with the miracle of story: the power of narrative to draw readers into alternative views of reality."⁶³⁴ However, there are some challenges with miracles. Weddle identifies one as being the apparent impossibility of integrating miracles into the modern scientific account of reality that does not acknowledge their possibility.⁶³⁵ In addition, Netton identifies the definition of miracles as another challenge.⁶³⁶ Many miracles are found in the Qur'an, with many prophets and messengers. Noah [11:40; 23:27], Ṣāliḥ [7:73; 11:64; 54:27-9; 91:11-5], Sulaymān [27:16-17], Ayyūb [38:42-4], and Ibrāhīm who had several miracles [21:69], [37:107], as did Mūsā [20:37-41; 28:7-13], [20:77-8; 26:60-8] and 'Īsā [19:29-30],[3:49], [5:110] and [4:158].⁶³⁷ However it is not only prophets and messengers who have miracles, but also others, like the unnamed man identified in extra-Qur'anic literature as al-Khiḍr [18:60-

⁶³² Dakake. *The Charismatic Community*, 216.

⁶³³ Netton, Ian Richard. 2019. *Islam, Christianity and the Realms of the Miraculous : A Comparative Exploration*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 25

⁶³⁴ Weddle, David L. 2010. *Miracles : Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*. New York: New York University Press, xi.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*, xii.

⁶³⁶ Netton. *Islam, Christianity and the Realms of the Miraculous*, 1.

⁶³⁷ Gril, Denis, "Miracles", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 21 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00122>

82] and the youths in the cave [18:9, 17]. Certain themes and motifs are repeated in different narratives.⁶³⁸ Interestingly, Muḥammad was not granted any miracles, even if he repeatedly asked God for a sign to convince his people as in [6:7-8], [6:36], [17:90-3], yet angels intervene to help him and the believers at the Battles of Badr and Ḥunayn [3:124-6; 8:9-13; 9:25-6].⁶³⁹ However Muḥammad performs many miracles in the *Sīra* and *Ḥadīth* literature. The early *Sīra* works by ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr b. al-Awwām (d. 93/712), Ābān b. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 104/723) and Mūsa b. ‘Uqba al-Asadī (d. 141/758), which are not extant except for some quotations in the works of Ibn Ishāq (d.150/768), al-Wāqidī (d. 207 /822), Ibn Sa‘d (d 230/845) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) had very few accounts of miracles.⁶⁴⁰ The miracles were added to the *Sīra*, according to Amin, with the Islamic conquests, and the efforts to spread Islam in the conquered territories, leading to religious polemics between the conquerors and the natives who defended the superiority of their religion, by pointing out the supernatural abilities and miracles of the prophets of the Old Testament, or Christ, which is when Muslims responded by ascribing an increasing number of miracles to the Prophet, similar to or different from the miracles of Christ and other prophets.⁶⁴¹ Miracles relating to Zoroaster and his family were recorded in the Pahlavi religious literature. One of Zoroaster's miracles is dividing the water for him and his Companions to cross, and is reminiscent of Moses' crossing of the Red Sea.⁶⁴² Slowly but surely, the human prophet of flesh and blood diminished in the books, making way for myths and miracles, which will be discussed in the following chapter. It is noteworthy to add that neither the Prophet nor his Companions attributed such miracles to him, nor were they mentioned in the Qur'an.⁶⁴³ In addition miracles or *karāmāt* (extraordinary deeds and abilities), were attributed to the *awliyā'*, some of which were even more spectacular than the Prophet's. Naturally, this posed a problem as he should always rise above them, and therefore hundreds

⁶³⁸ Netton. *Islam, Christianity and the Realms of the Miraculous*, 26.

⁶³⁹ Gril, Denis, "Miracles", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

⁶⁴⁰ Amin, Husayn Ahmad. 2018. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*. Translated by Yasmin Amin and Nesrin Amin. Edinburgh ; London: Edinburgh University Press in association with the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, 43.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid, 44.

⁶⁴² Philippe Gignoux, "MIRACLES i. In Ancient Iranian Tradition," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2015, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/miracles-01-ancient-iran> (accessed on 20 April 2020).

⁶⁴³ Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*, 48

of miracles were attributed to him.⁶⁴⁴ Some of them are found in this data, like the description of how he fed an entire army from one basket of dates, similar to the miracle of feeding the five thousand performed by Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels.⁶⁴⁵

The second report (# 27) has ‘Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr and ‘Abd Allah b. Ja‘far as audience, when they pledged allegiance to the Prophet. Understandably this would not be included in Shi‘ite collections as al-Zubayr d. (36/656), ‘Abd Allah’s father, along with ‘Ā’isha (d. 58/678) and Ṭalḥa (d. 36/656) led ‘The Battle of the Camel’ (36/656) against ‘Alī. However, ‘Abd Allah b. Ja‘far tried to dissuade al-Ḥusayn from going to Kūfa, albeit, unsuccessfully.⁶⁴⁶ Another report not in the Shi‘ite data is (# 90) where the Prophet smiles at Abū Bakr, who had lost his temper while in the state of *iḥrām* (temporary consecration), to remind him to calm down, the audience being the other pilgrims.

As for Q4 (religious themes), it has one report unique to the Shi‘ite data where Adam is the audience, laughing in response to a message brought to him by Jibra‘īl. It is worth noting that Jibra‘īl is the preferred name in the Shi‘ite traditions, as opposed to Jibrīl in the Sunni reports.

This could be due to what Modarressi names as ‘bipolar narrator’. Modarressi opines that before the two branches consolidated their final positions on various topics, there was a group of *muḥaddithūn* (narrators), whom he terms ‘bipolar,’ who used to narrate from and to both branches.⁶⁴⁷ Modarressi further argues that these *muḥaddithūn* were engaging in unintentional *tadlīs* (confusing parts of the *matn*, *isnād* or both), but with their activity helped to, what he terms as, ‘naturalize’ portions of one branch’s *aḥādīth* into the others’.⁶⁴⁸ Modarressi states that “many of the ideas that were later labelled as Sunnite, Shi‘ite, or the like, were originally held by a different group or, at least in the early period before the sects took on their final shape, were shared by various mainstream elements of Islamic society.”⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁴ Amin, Husayn Ahmad. 2018. *The Sorrowful Muslim’s Guide*, 131.

⁶⁴⁵ Netton. *Islam, Christianity and the Realms of the Miraculous*, 31.

⁶⁴⁶ Zetterstéen, K.V., “‘Abd Allāh b. Dja‘far”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0043>

⁶⁴⁷ Modarressi, Hossein. 1993. “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur’an: A Brief Survey.” *Studia Islamica* 77: 5-39, 5-6.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶⁴⁹ Modarressi, Hossein. 1993. “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur’an: A Brief Survey.” *Studia Islamica* 77: 5-39, 5-6.

P4 (Prophet) is almost equal for both sets and covers the Prophet as audience. There are two reports common between both. Report (#14) has a distinctly Shi'ite flavour, detailing how 'Alī prayed with the Prophet for seven years before anyone else prayed at all and how Abū Ṭālib once found them and refused their invitation to Islam because he objected to having his backside tower above him while prostrating. The other report (#33) describes the Prophet's ascent to the lower heaven, meeting the angel in charge of hellfire. The remaining reports focus on 'Alī, with the Prophet as audience; there are three reports with several version (#15, 16, 17). The first one (#15) describes a nightly adventure where the Prophet and 'Alī go to the Ka'ba to destroy an idol and how Jibra'īl brings 'Alī back down after climbing on its roof. The second (#16) described 'Alī's charity in a lengthy story involving a Bedouin, Fāṭima, al-Ḥusayn, and a number of unnamed men in the market place. The story ends with Jibra'īl again coming to 'Alī's rescue. (#17) seems to be a shorter version of the same story with some different details.

As for the Sunni data, it has four reports, the first (#144) narrates a conversation between 'Ā'isha and the Prophet about her toys and dolls, among them a winged horse. The second (# 98) has 'Ā'isha questioning the Prophet about the ugly disliked visitor. The next (#37) features an unnamed man being taught a lesson about not abusing authority, while the last one (# 38) describes a joke between the Prophet and 'Awf b. Mālik al-Ashjaī.

Finally in W4 (women), the Sunni data is almost double that of the Shi'ite data. There are shared tradition in both sets, mainly (# 205) mentioned above about the women reacting to 'Umar's entrance to their session with the Prophet, as well as (# 199) with Umm Salama asking the Prophet about whether or not women experience a 'wet-dream' like men. This was in response to Umm Saīm's question whether women needed to perform a *ghusl* (full-body ritual purification) like men, after experiencing a 'wet-dream.' Another shared report has Umm Salama as audience is (# 8) the report about Abū Lubāba being forgiven and her asking if she may convey these glad tidings to him. Report (#74) is also shared, and concerns Fāṭima crying then laughing at something the Prophet whispered to her during his last illness. The scarcity of women in Shi'ite traditions has been discussed above.

The Shi'ite data records one tradition not recorded in the Sunni collections about 'Alī receiving pomegranates from the Prophet, gifted to them by Jibrā'īl. He takes some for his wife and sons and Abū Bakr cannot see them when they meet him accidentally, because - as the Prophet explains to 'Alī - the fruits of heaven cannot be consumed on earth except by prophets, legates and their children.

The Babylonians regarded pomegranate seeds as an agent of resurrection, the Persians as conferring invincibility on the battlefield.⁶⁵⁰ Pomegranates are a recurrent motif in Persian mythology. Isfandiyar ate a pomegranate and became invincible.⁶⁵¹ According to a Persian legend, the first pomegranate tree sprang from the haft of the axe with which Farhad slew himself.⁶⁵² The pomegranate probably originated in Iran and Afghanistan and was used in many Zoroastrian rituals and celebrations.⁶⁵³ Zoroastrians used pomegranate branches as a protection from evil spirits.⁶⁵⁴ Pomegranates are also a recurrent motif in Shi'ite *aḥādīth*, for example al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–1) reports Jibrā'īl giving the Prophet two pomegranates, of which he ate one (representing Prophethood) and split the second one, representing knowledge, giving half to 'Alī.⁶⁵⁵ Legend holds that each pomegranate contains one seed that has come down from paradise.⁶⁵⁶ Pomegranates occur in the Qur'an three times, in verses [6:99], [6:141] and [55:68].⁶⁵⁷ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), notes that the reference to fruits and specifically to pomegranates and dates in verse [55:68] indicates that these two were superior in rank to all other fruits.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁰ Seeram, Navindra P., Risa N. Schulman, and David Heber. 2006. *Pomegranates : Ancient Roots to Modern Medicine*. Boca Raton: Taylor & Francis, 168.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid, 199.

⁶⁵² Porteous, Alexander. 2012. *Forest in Folklore and Mythology*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 298

⁶⁵³ Langley, Patricia. 2000. "Why a pomegranate?" *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* 321 (7269): 1153–1154, 1154.

⁶⁵⁴ Bardis, Panos D. 1988. "Heavenly Hera Heralds Heroines: Peace Through Crosscultural Feminist Symbols and Myths." *International Journal on World Peace* 5 (4): 89-111, 91.

⁶⁵⁵ Reynolds, Gabriel Said, "Gabriel", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 18 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27359>

⁶⁵⁶ Langley, Patricia. 2000. "Why a pomegranate?" *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* 321 (7269): 1153–1154, 1154.

⁶⁵⁷ Badawi, Elsaid M. and Abdel Haleem, Muḥammad, "رْمَلْجُ r-m-m", in: *Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, Edited by: Elsaid M. Badawi, Muḥammad Abdel Haleem. Consulted online on 18 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1875-3922_dqu_SIM_000708>

⁶⁵⁸ Waines, David, "Food and Drink", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 18 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00067>

The Sunni data also shows unique reports, one of them (# 64) about a man telling the Prophet of his dream, which was interpreted differently in the two versions, with ‘Ā’isha as audience. ‘Ā’isha features as audience in another report (#7) about an ugly unpopular man visiting the Prophet who laughs with him. The last unique report (#146) refers to Umm Ayman mistakenly drinking the chamber-pot’s content thinking it was water and the Prophet joking with her, the audience being the Prophet’s household.

To sum up, there are again many commonalities between Sunni and Shi’ite reports and many shared reports, however, there are also differences, some of which are due to sectarian influences and ideological understanding that colour the portrayal. ‘Alī’s almost superhuman strength, receiving heavenly gifts from angels and his repeated rescue by Jibrā’īl are examples for the sectarian influences. Moreover, cultural and historical contexts, like for example certain popular folkloric themes or the historical literary heritage of geographical areas, also give rise to such differences. It would be interesting to look at the geographic location of the narrators to see if there are any patterns or particular favourite topics that occur in certain areas, however, this is beyond the scope of this study and can be an avenue for further research. The believers are the most important audience, as many reports do not specify an audience. The Companions and women have more incidents as audience in the Sunni set, whereas *ahl al-bayt* are a favourite audience in the Shi’ite data. Unnamed people as an audience are only found in the Sunni data.

Context

The fifth criterion is the context of the joke. The topics amount to 120, which necessitated them to be added together under umbrella labels, resulting in 18 such labels. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used will be explained hereunder in Table (5).

Chart (9) shows the different object counts for both Sunni and Shi’ite narrations.

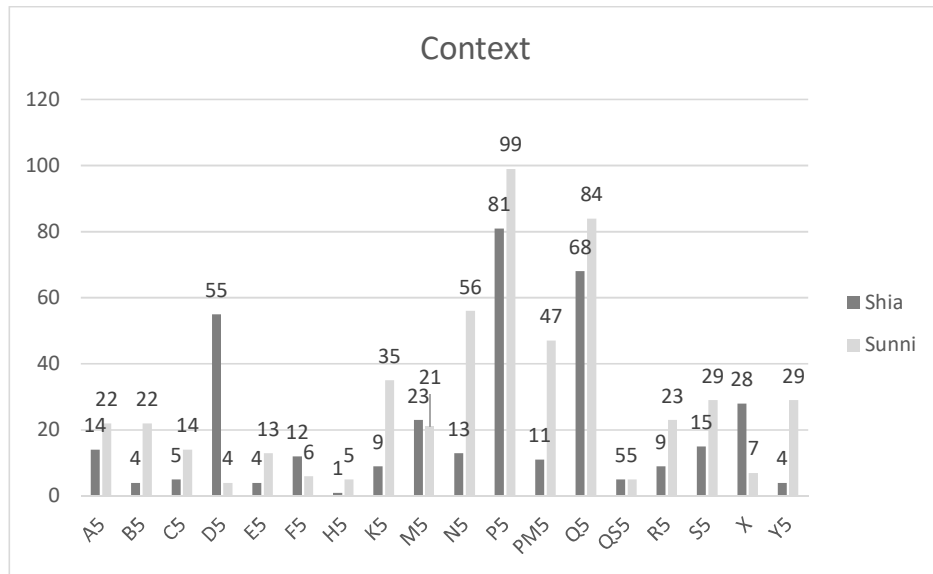


Figure 9 - Context

Table 5 - Context

Context	
Label	Words included in the label
A5	advice, description, dream interpretation, knowledge, language, lessons
B5	Bird
C5	community, Companions, Companionship, councils of the Arabs, market, mundane activity, sociability, 'Umar
D5	Seriousness
E5	eating, famine, food, food fight
F5	'Alī, family, Prophet's family
H5	Bedouin
K5	marital dispute, marriage, wife maintenance
M5	conduct, manners, truthfulness
N5	betrayal, curse, disobedience, dispute, drought, hypocrisy, jealousy, lies, misdeed, oppression, over-zeal, worry

P5	allegiance, amnesty, balance, blessings, charity, conversion, duties, earning, favour, forgiveness, fun, joking, kindness, laughter, merits, permissibility of fun, prank, protection, return from Bahrain
PM5	night, Prophet, Prophethood, Prophet's character
Q5	Afterlife, angels, anthropomorphism, belief, Exegesis of [37:10] and [43:77], Exegesis of Q [102.8], Exegesis of Q [83:29-35], faith, fate, fiqh, God's blessings, hellfire, idol, judgement, mercy, middle path, miracle, Mu'tah, mosque, Paradise, prediction, prophecy, revelation, Sin, sinning
QS5	dissimulation, Ghadīr Khumm, sectarian, Yawm al-Ghadīr
R5	ḥajj, impurity, prayer, purity wash, Ramadan, ritual
S5	anger, choice, errand, finder's fee, flirting, old age, promotion, travel
X	None
Y5	Battle, Battle of Khaybar, Battle of Tabūk, Dhū Qarad, Ḥudaybiyya, Ḥunayn, siege, Ṭā'if

The behaviour of the context in both branches is closer than in any other category. The two highest labels in both are P5 (positive contexts) and Q5 (religious topics). Also looking at the individual reports in P5, there are 14 reports in common, while the Shi'ite data has an additional 14 and the Sunni has 15 unique ones, in several versions.

One common report with a distinctly Shi'ite flavour in spite of it being narrated by Abū Hurayra and ʿĀ'isha reports that a Bedouin came to the Prophet with a *ḡabb* (lizard) declaring that he will not become Muslim until the lizard does. The Prophet speaks with the lizard, who then professes to Muḥammad: "You are the Prophet of God, King of the worlds and you are the best of the creations on judgement day, the commander of the glorious, those who believe in you succeed and are joyful," after which the Bedouin converts to Islam, returns to his tribe and converts them all, becoming their leader.

Speaking animals feature in the Qur'an. Three animals speak in the presence of Sulaymān, who understands their language: an ant [27:18], birds [27:22-26] and a hoopoe [27:28].⁶⁵⁹ The fourth speaking animal is the *dābba min al-arḍ* (beast coming out of earth) [27:82].⁶⁶⁰ Ibn al-Nadīm writes in the *Fihrist* "that the ancient Persians were the first to compile *asmār wa khurāfāt* (entertaining fabulous stories), which they kept in their treasuries. In some of these stories, he adds, animals were the *dramatis personae* (main characters)."⁶⁶¹ Tales featuring talking animals were found in pre-Islamic and early Islamic literature, but the specific form of the moral animal fable came with the translation of *Kalīla wa-Dimnā*.⁶⁶² Brockelmann mentions a poetic version of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* titled *Durrat al-ḥikam fī amthāl al-hunūd wa 'l-ʿajam* by ʿAbd al-Muʿmin b. Ḥasan al-Ṣaghānī.⁶⁶³ Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (The Brethren of Purity) also have an epistle, which is the longest and perhaps the best known of their *Rasāʾil* (Epistles) featuring animals filing a lawsuit against humans. "Once given words, the animals have much to say, both about their own plight and about the human condition. They present themselves not as mere objects of study but as subjects with an outlook and interests of their own."⁶⁶⁴

Report (#187), unique to the Shi'ite data, shows the Prophet forbidding Abū Hurayra from playing pranks on Bedouins, then he plays one on the Prophet by stealing his slippers, pawning them to buy dates. When the Prophet asks him what he is eating, he replies that he is eating his slippers. Others, like (#181) promote balance and moderation. Report (#16) features ʿAlī and his good deeds, another (#57) reminds the believers of death to reduce their laughter. Several reports with numerous versions (#114, 112, 109) assert that there is no believer who does not have humour in him, remind that God has

⁶⁵⁹ Tlili, Sarra. 2015. *Animals in the Qur'an*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 177.

⁶⁶⁰ Eisenstein, Herbert, "Animal Life", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 19 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00011>

⁶⁶¹ Mahmoud and Teresa P. Omidasalar, "Fable," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, IX/2, pp. 137-138; an updated version is available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fable> (accessed on 20 April 2020).

⁶⁶² Allen, Roger M A, and Donald Sidney Richards, . 2006. *Arabic Literature in the Post-classical Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 249.

⁶⁶³ Brockelmann, Carl. 2017. *History of the Arabic Written Tradition Supplement Volume 1*. Translated by Joep Lameer. Leiden: Brill, 232.

⁶⁶⁴ Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, wa-Khillān al-Wafāʾ. 2012. *The Case of Animal versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*. Translated by L.E., McGregor, R. Goodman. New York: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

bestowed a great sense of humour on the Prophet who would make his Companions happy if he saw them sad by joking with them, but would only say the truth. Very interestingly one version (#112, version 16z) has a commentary to the report stating "However, it seems that the Prophet's joking was deliberately removed." This will be studied in detail in Chapter 5.

As for the Sunni data, some of the unique reports are (# 196) about Anas and how the Prophet used to call him 'you with two ears,' and another (# 207) encourages smiling by retelling a conversation between two prophets, Yaḥya and ʿĪsā, ending that God inspired them that He loves the easy going one, who smiles, for he thinks the best of Him.

Regarding Q5 (religious topics), there are 7 reports shared between the two sets, while the Sunnis have an additional 21 reports and the Shi'ites have 12 unique ones. Common ones have themes about God's mercy, like (# 28) God wanting the best for humans, (# 126) God's mercy on Judgement Day, (#33) an account of the Prophet visiting heaven with an addition in the Shi'ite data in the form of an added exegesis of [37:10] and [43:77]. Report (#149) sees the Prophet upset after the congregation laughed about a mishap of a blind man, and their laughter invalidated their *wuḍū'* (ablutions). Remarkably, two reports (# 152 and 156) narrate about 'Alī who took a group to see the Prophet. In the first one (#152) the Prophet smiled at them, knowing they came to ask about a certain matter and he advised them to increase their supplications. In the second (# 156) the hypocrites of Quraysh are juxtaposed to 'Alī and his Companions. (# 194) narrates about a Bedouin afraid of the Anti-Christ and his distribution of *tharīd* (stew). The last one (# 104) is a report with anthropomorphism about God's hand, in a story told by a Jewish Rabbi. It is interesting to note that in (v 13) of the Shi'ite set there is an added critical commentary saying: "The Imam of the Wahhabis accepted anthropomorphic reports." Chapter 3 discussed anthropomorphism in the *aḥādīth* in detail and the Shi'ite position in particular.

The rest of the reports in the Shi'ite data have a report (# 29) similar to (# 28), but with regard to sickness rather than fate in general and a report (# 6) arguing that it is not permitted to marry a second Christian wife when the first one is Muslim. Dakake mentioned that: "*though Shi'ite traditions regarding intermarriage either within the Muslim community, or among Jewish and Christian communities, tended to be conservative and insular in nature - far more so than Sunni tradition, this attitude may have served*

to consolidate and strengthen the Shi'ite community; a community that Shi'ites considered to be the sacred vessel of Islam in its purest and truest form."⁶⁶⁵

Report (# 42) compares between Yahya b. Zakariyya who used to cry and not laugh and 'Isa b. Maryam, who used to laugh and cry, concluding that 'Isa's way was better than Yahya's, for being balanced. Another report (#58) advises not to laugh at funerals or graves. Report (#117) narrates that God creates an angel from any believer's deeds that make others happy, who will intercede on his behalf on judgement day. Two reports mentioned above, one (# 15) with Jibra'il saving 'Ali, at the Ka'ba, and (#148) with the pomegranate. Three other reports elevate 'Ali and his family, for example (#72) states that there are seven people chosen from Banu Hashim: Muhammad, God's Messenger, 'Ali, his legate, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, Hamza, master of all martyrs, and Ja'far, who will be flying with the angels, and finally al-Qa'im, from 'Ali and Fatima's offspring, specifically of al-Husayn's offspring. Report (#76) provides exegesis for verse [76.13] explaining that this pertains to 'Ali and Fatima laughing, causing Paradise to become brighter. Finally report (#173) where Muhammad declares that God made him, his legates and guardians of his children and their followers hate six qualities, among them laughter at gravesites.

As for the Sunni data, report (#101) is very similar to the Shi'ite one (#72) discussed above, but singles out Ja'far b. Abi Talib, portraying him as an angel with two wings, covered in blood, dyeing his feet, avoiding to name the first three and the final Imam, thereby eliminating the sectarian part. Another report (#50) shows Jibril guiding the Prophet's camel. Another two reports feature Jibril. *Hadith* (#125) sees the Prophet being shown the matters of this life and the next and Jibril telling him about his intercession ability, while in (#127) the Prophet asks Jibril why Mikail does not laugh?

The inclusion of angels, especially Jibril (Jibra'il) and Mikail in the *matn* of some of the versions is not surprising, as angels have interested Muslim scholars throughout. Al-Tabari, for example has quoted many traditions involving angels in relation to Qur'anic verses in addition to other references to angels. Early Sufis and late Muslim philosophers also made frequent references to angels, as well as

⁶⁶⁵ Dakake. *The Charismatic Community*, 235.

angels being frequently used in popular traditions, literature and myths, hence it is not surprising to find them also being used by traditionists.⁶⁶⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), founder of a philosophical school named “*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*” (the Philosophy of Illumination), made use of Zoroastrian angelology in a very complex scheme, yet Muslim cosmology and the angelology to which it is closely related are derived for the most part directly from the Qur’an.⁶⁶⁷ Other Muslim scholars also devoted books to angelology like for example al-Qazwīnī’s *Kitāb ‘ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*,⁶⁶⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*,⁶⁶⁹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī’s *Mujlī mir’āt al-munjī fī al-kalām wa-al-ḥikmatayn wa-al-taṣawwuf*⁶⁷⁰ among others, pointing to the existence of a developed genre of angelology. Henry Corbin maintains that without angelology monotheism is incapable of affirming God’s existence.⁶⁷¹

While Shi’ite report (# 6) prohibits marrying a second Christian wife, Sunni report (#1) speaks of a third divorce, covering the same topic though from different angles. Tradition (#48) tells of a couple fearing for their marriage after a woman claims to have breastfed them both. Report (#12) shows the Prophet amazed as some folks are being dragged to Paradise in chains, unwillingly and explains that they are foreigners (*‘Ajām*) whom the *Muhājirūn* (immigrants) enslaved and force-converted. Report (#34) is very similar to the shared report (#126) about God’s mercy. Report (#41) is in essence similar to shared report (#104), however it is supplemented with an additional story about the ox Balām and Nūn. Two reports (#78) and (#83) are about the Prophet’s miracle in feeding the entire army, and about Gog and Magog, respectively. Regarding (#78) which is found with eight versions in the Sunni collection, but

⁶⁶⁶ Reynolds, Gabriel Said, “Angels”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 20 April 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23204>

⁶⁶⁷ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. 1996. *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 26

⁶⁶⁸ al-Qazwīnī, Zakariyyā’ b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Abū Yaḥyā. 1994. *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*. Edited by Ferdinand Wüstenfeld. Frankfurt: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft - Ma’had Tārīkh al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabīyah wa-al-Islāmīyah fī iṭār Jāmi’at Frānkfurt.

⁶⁶⁹ al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī-Bakr. 2007. *al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*. Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azharīyah lil-Turāth.

⁶⁷⁰ al-Aḥsā’ī, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn Abī Jumhūr. 2013. *Mujlī mir’āt al-munjī fī al-kalām wa-al-ḥikmatayn wa-al-taṣawwuf*. Beirut: Jam’iyat Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī li-l-ḥyā’ al-Turāth.

⁶⁷¹ Corbin, Henry. 1981. “Nécessité de l’angéologie.” In *Le Paradoxe du monothéisme*, by Henry Corbin, 81-173. Paris: L’Herne, 83.

none in the Shi'ite one, supports Modaressi's argument about the 'bipolar' traditions and invites a closer look at the *ahādīth* displaying characteristics or peculiarities of one branch which are found in the other branch's corpus. This could pave the way for understanding more about the criteria and patterns of *tadlīs* or the tools used to enhance forged *ahādīth* rendering them slightly more supportive of controversial sectarian viewpoints. Another four reports (#94, 139, 143 and 207) feature a man called Ḥimār, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, a Bedouin and a man named Salmān, respectively and deal with forgiveness, good omens, Paradise and *wuḍū'* that when performed before prayer washes off all sins. Two reports (# 52, 155) prefer weeping over laughing. In the first, the Prophet says to the believers that if they knew what he knows they would laugh a little and weep much, while the second one (# 155) quotes verse [53:59-60], asserting that once it was revealed the Prophet no longer laughed, but only smiled.

Another grouping of reports deals with various accounts of dreams. In (#63) Jibrīl visits Muḥammad in a dream telling him that God has granted him his entire community on Judgement Day. The dream happens when the Prophet falls asleep in Umm Hānī, 'Alī's sister's, house. So it is rather surprising that it is not in the Shi'ite data as well. In (#198) the dream takes place in Umm Ḥirām bint Milhān's house. At the end of a long story she is granted her wish of being among those who travel the seas in conquest for God's cause and the report ends with the reader being informed that during Mu'āwiya's rule she travelled the sea and died when she fell off her mount coming out of the sea. In (#65), the dream is in the abode of an unnamed wife of the Prophet and has the Prophet waking up amazed at/impressed by some people of his community riding the sea, in horror of the enemy, yet fighting for God's cause.

There are several words for dream, the Qur'an uses the word *ru'yā* (vision) six times. The word can be found in verses [12:5], [12:43], [12:100], [17:60], [37:105] and [48:27]. In addition, the word *manām* appears four times, twice of them meaning dream in ([8:43] and [37:102]); *bushrā*, (good tidings), is interpreted once to mean a dream in verse [10:64]. Of all these dream references it is only in Chapter 12 (*Sūrat Yūsuf*) that the actual subject matter of the dream is mentioned. In all other instances the dream's content is not explicitly revealed. According to Leah Kinberg "the examination of dreams in the exegetical literature reflects the concerns of later times, when dreams had already gained a special

status in Islam.”⁶⁷² She argues that the usage of dreams, established in the *ḥadīth*, was set to justify the special role dreams began to play in the nascent Islamic community that had lost its Prophet when prophecy came to an end.⁶⁷³ In his *Muʿjam tafsīr al-aḥlām*, Ibn Sīrīn quotes the Prophet saying: after my Prophethood only glad tidings are left. When he was asked what those mean, he replied *ruʾyā ṣāliḥa* (pious visions).⁶⁷⁴ Ibn Sīrīn further links dreams and visions to prophets and Prophethood by listing all the prophets who had visions or dreams starting with the first dream of humankind, dreamt by Adam, then Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf and his list continues.⁶⁷⁵

The dream theme is a recurrent topic in literature, especially in the Prophet's wives' biographies. Khadīja, Sawda, Ṣafīyya and Umm Ḥabība all had dreams before they married him and ʿĀʾisha was shown to him in a dream. All dreams were interpreted to mean that they were divinely chosen to marry him. People experiencing such dreams, much like *baraka* (blessings), appear to be blessed with a special gift, allowing them an inexplicable sense or knowledge of the future. The belief that dreams could have predictive value was a universally accepted concept in ancient and medieval cultures in the Mediterranean.⁶⁷⁶ *Baraka*, is a blessing from above; unexplained tidings and events that seem to reflect a special connection to the divine. Associating prominent men and women with *baraka* sets them apart as 'chosen' or divinely ordained to hold such a privileged status, which consequently adds to their credibility as role-models and elevates their status to be emulated by the community. The sources preserved numerous dreams of the Prophet, which foretold great events such as the *isrā* and the *miʾrāj* (night journey and ascent to heaven).⁶⁷⁷ According to al-Zamakhsharī, the first way God gives someone inspiration (*ilhām*) is by putting something in his heart or showing it in a dream.⁶⁷⁸ Dream interpretation is

⁶⁷² Kinberg, Leah, "Dreams and Sleep", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 21 April 2020.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibn Sīrīn, Muḥammad. 2008. *Muʿjam tafsīr al-aḥlām*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī. Abu Dhabi: Maktabat al-Ṣafāʾ, 25.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, 27.

⁶⁷⁶ See Lutfi, H., 2005. The Construction of Gender Symbolism in Ibn Sīrīn's and Ibn Shāhin's Medieval Arabic Dream Texts. *Mamluk Studies Review*, 9(1), pp. 123-161, 127.

⁶⁷⁷ Fahd, T., "Foretelling in the Qurʾān", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 21 April 2020.

⁶⁷⁸ al-Zamakhsharī, 1935. *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-tawīl*. Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tigariyya al-Kubra, 4:226-7.

the only type of prediction condoned in the Qur'an. Using the example of Yūsuf, who predicted the future using Pharaoh's dream, predictions of the future by means of interpreting dreams were thought of as legitimate. *Hadīth* literature also reports that the Prophet and some of the Companions shared and interpreted their dreams and even took actions based on them, the *adhān* (call for prayers) is a case in point.⁶⁷⁹ Dreams became a part of the literature, such as the distinctive compilation, *Kitāb al-manām* by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894), is an example of collected dream narratives drawing on earlier sources. The rationale behind collecting these dream narratives was to teach and educate the readers by means of arriving at a certain moral.⁶⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that before the eleventh century sixty-three manuals on the interpretation of dreams, to discover the future, were written.⁶⁸¹

To sum up, both categories P5 (positive values) and Q5 (religious topics) show many commonalities with regard to both the context and the frequency. The commonalities are due to many shared beliefs by both branches, like *tawhīd*, that there is only one all-powerful God, one holy book, the Qur'an, the Five Pillars, the devil, angels, and demons and that Muḥammad is the last prophet. Apart from slight differences due to sectarian ideologies, the context is very close to being identical and the topics display the interests of the time, including the development of various genres such as dream interpretation and angelology. Moreover, these two labels are mainly positive and as shown in the first category (types of laughter) both Sunnis and Shi'ites seem to prefer that over negative connotations.

As for the next highest categories, there are three, namely N5 (negative traits) where there are 56 Sunni reports versus 13 Shi'ite reports, PM5 (Prophet Muḥammad) has 47 Sunni reports, while there are 11 Shi'ite reports and finally D5 (Serious) shows the reverse with 55 Shi'ite reports and only 4 Sunni ones.

As for N5, there are 6 reports in common with one additional Shi'ite one versus 8 Sunni ones. However, these negative traits dealt with, such as human fickleness, stereotyping or marital disputes always offer a positive way out. The context of the common ones for (#8) is Abū Lubāba's betrayal and

⁶⁷⁹ al-Harawī, 2001. *Mirqāt al-mafātīḥ : sharḥ mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 2:311.

⁶⁸⁰ Mavroudi, Maria, "Representations: Dream Literature: Overview", in: *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, General Editor Suad Joseph. Consulted online on 21 April 2020 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1872-5309_ewic_EWICCOM_0622.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

him being forgiven. Report (#71) is a joke where a worried woman asks about her husband's wellbeing and Muḥammad asks if he was the one with whiteness in his eyes because all humans have that. Report (#195) gives a ruling by 'Alī in a dispute about a boy being claimed by three fathers. The next common one is (#74) about Fāṭima crying then laughing, mentioned above. Report (#122) asserts that lying is prohibited, even in humour or jokes. Finally, the last common report (#160) narrates how the Prophet prayed for rain and miraculously it rained generously after a long drought. It rained so much that the people asked him to ask God to make it stop out of fear that everything would be washed away. Miracles as a favourite *topos* in religious literature was explained above.

The additional report unique to the Shi'ite data is (# 119) about a misdeed, when Khālid al-Qaṣrī's grandfather kissed a woman, who complained to the Prophet. As for the complaints, some of the Sunni reports also collect them, like (# 99) where an overzealous wife complains about her husband not letting her fast, pray or recite the Qur'an, which is solved by the Prophet. In tradition (#140) Umm Sa'īm complains to the Prophet for cursing her orphan girl, who then explains that he has a covenant with God that if he curses anyone of his community this would turn into closeness to God on Judgement Day. In report (#89) the Prophet does not complain about Ḥafṣa's disobedience, but asks al-Shifā' bint Abd Allah to teach her an incantation called *ruqyat al-namla*, used by Arab women at weddings, which ends with the words: the bride does everything except disobey her man. This is an allusion to Ḥafṣa disobeying the Prophet and revealing his secret. Interestingly there is no version of that in the Shi'ite data though it would have been an opportunity to chastise Ḥafṣa for her disobedience. Report (#186) is about a husband trying to save his life threatened by his jealous wife after sleeping with his slave girl by pretending to recite the Qur'an and then confessing to the Prophet who forgives him. Tradition (#105) points out the hypocrisy of some people selling prohibited items, while their proceeds are also prohibited. Another report (#151) deals with hypocrisy, when some people were testing the Prophet about his knowledge of the unknown, to find fault with him. Oppression is the topic of (# 118) with Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib telling the Prophet about Abyssinia, who then asks "How can God bless a nation that does not take the rights of its weak from its strong, when that right is unshakable?"

Label PM5 (Prophet Muḥammad) includes traditions relating mainly to the Prophet and has 47 Sunni versions versus 11 Shi'ite ones. There are 4 common reports, the first one (#9) about Abū Sufyān joking with the Prophet in Umm Ḥabība's house. The second report (#121) is about the Prophet's last prayer. The third report (#10) describes Adam, when the Prophet visited heaven and the fourth one (#59) also has a description, but this time of the Prophet's smile. Interestingly in one of the Shi'ite versions (v. 33) there is an additional commentary stating that there are many reports in Sunni and Shi'ite traditions about predictions the Prophet made about events happening after his death listing the reports about 'Ā'isha and the dogs of Ḥaw'ab barking at her on her way to 'The Battle of the Camel,' reports that the misled party will kill 'Ammār [b. Yāsir] during Mu'āwiya's rule, reports about the murder of al-Ḥusayn, reports that Ibn 'Abbās will lose his eyesight in his old age and Zayd b. Arqam saying that there will be a man called al-Walīd who will be the worst evil for the community, all reports with sectarian motifs. There are two additional unique reports in the Shi'ite data, namely (#11) that has the Prophet asserting that he jokes, but only says the truth. In report (#69) an explanation of the figure of speech "may your teeth laugh" is given, namely that this denotes a smile, which is commendable. However when smiling, usually teeth are not seen, but this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The Sunni data of label PM5 (Prophet Muḥammad) has four reports missing from the Shi'ite set. The first two contradict one another, as report (#110) proclaims that the Prophet had a sense of humour, yet report (#184) proclaims that his silences lasted the longest and he would just smile when Companions chatted much, which will also be explained in the following chapter. Report (#146) tells of Umm Ayman mistakenly drinking the content of the chamber-pot and the final report in this label (#128) refers to the angel Mikhāl passing the Prophet with dust on his wings, laughing to him and the Prophet smiling back. This report directly contradicts report (#127), mentioned above, where the Prophet asked Jibrīl why Mikhāl never laughs, receiving the answer that Mikhāl has not laughed since hell was created. However, as mentioned above, the veracity of each report is not the subject of this study, and neither is resolving this contradiction, which could be an avenue for future research.

The next category is D5 (Seriousness). The Shi'ite set has 55 versions of 15 individual reports, versus 4 versions of 2 Sunni reports. There is only one report in common, namely (# 176) stating that a

lot of laughter kills the heart and that the Prophet's laughter was but a smile. As mentioned this will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. The remaining Sunni report (# 93) features Jibrīl taking the words of report (#127) out of Mikhā'il's mouth that he has not laughed since Hell was created.

There are 15 distinct Shi'ite *ahādīth* with a number of versions in D5. Report (#109) proclaims that all believers have humour in them. All other reports have a common theme, that laughter, especially excessive one, is not recommended at best and despicable at worst. Report (#30) states that laughing without wonder is ignorance. (#111) declares that excessive laughter dissolves religion like water dissolves salt. (#112) advises believers not to joke for it will reduce their brilliance. (#164) recommends that if one loves a man neither to joke nor to argue with him. (# 166) states that joking is the lesser insult. (#167) instructs that when one laughs out loudly one should say: "Oh God do not despise me." (#168) recommends not to joke for it will allow liberties to be taken and (#169) reports that excessive joking makes one lose face and excessive laughter jolts the faith. The scholar is singled out in (#170) and is told that he should laugh a little and cry much and never joke. Report (#172) concludes that a man does not joke without losing a bit of his mind. God's preference is known as (#174) states that God detests three things, among them laughter without wonder. The devil is the one who causes people to laugh loudly as per (#175). In (#176) two previous ones are combined, stating that excessive laughter kills the heart and dissolves religion like water dissolves salt. Finally in (#180) an example is given by narrating that there was a buffoon in Medina who made people laugh and that he had a hard time making 'Alī b. al-Husayn laugh.

This category shows that 'excessive laughter kills or hardens the hearts,' is common between Sunnis and Shi'ites, even if it is minimal in the Sunni data, nevertheless the numerous and different variations that depict Shi'ites as sad, maudlin people who barely laugh, is apparent. This point will be discussed in the coming chapter.

The next two highest labels are Y5 (battles & sieges) and S5 (Situations). In the Sunni data, there are 29 versions for the first, versus 4 Shi'ite ones, while in the second there are also 29 Sunni versions versus 15 Shi'ite ones. In Y5, for the first time, there are no common narrations at all. The four Shi'ite reports all focus on 'Alī. Report (# 47) includes sectarian polemics with 'Alī being very critical of

the three caliphs before him, listing their flaws as opposed to his merits and his military achievements. Narration (# 69) is about ‘Alī ripping out the fort door at Khaybar and report (# 73) is at the day of al-Khandaq with the Prophet calling for ‘Alī. The final one (#276) attributes a warning to ‘Alī that whoever laughs in the face of an enemy of ours such as the Nawāṣib (haters of *ahl al-bayt*), the Mu‘tazila, the Kharijites, the Qadarites and those who oppose the Ja‘farī doctrine, God will not accept their obedience for forty years. Obviously this is a fabricated report as there were neither Mu‘tazila, nor Qadarites, even if we accept that the Kharijites existed in ‘Alī’s times, as they emerged following the murder of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān, in 35/656 and following the proposal presented to ‘Alī by Mu‘āwiya during the Battle of Ṣiffīn (37/ 657) to settle their differences by referring it to two referees who would pronounce judgment “according to the Qur’an.”⁶⁸² Most importantly there was no Ja‘farī doctrine as yet that ‘Alī could be defending.

As for the 8 Sunni reports, there are two that deal with miracles, discussed above, and both have a water theme, during battle or siege. Water is very important, more so in a desert environment and the Qur’an highlights it as life-giving, because everything was created by God from water [21:30; 24:45]. In report (#50) Rifā‘a al-Anṣārī and his brother Khallād have a camel that is barely able to carry them to Badr. The Prophet helps. He asks for water, performs his ablutions and spits into the remaining water. The camel is given this water and they all reach Badr safely. In report (#97) 114 men and fifty sheep reach Ḥudaybiyya with the Prophet, but are without water. The Prophet sat by the well and either made supplications or spat into it, after which it overflowed and everyone drank, including the sheep. Two reports deal with sieges, (#182) portrays Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān being sent out for news and in (#183) the Prophet declares a cease in fighting during the siege Ṭā‘if. Two traditions deal with women on the battle-field. In (#81) Umm Ayman is embarrassed by Ḥabbāb and the Prophet asks Sa‘d to aim an arrow at him. He is hit, falls down exposing himself and Umm Ayman is avenged. In (#200) Umm Sa‘īm has a dagger and is ready to use it during the Battle of Ḥunayn. Finally, in (#38) ‘Awf b. Mālik al-Ashjaī

⁶⁸² Levi Della Vida, G., “Khārijites”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 25 April 2020
<http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0497>

visits the Prophet during the Battle of Tabūk and in (#201) the Prophet instructs Ibn al-Akwa‘ to be kind and merciful after gaining victory.

Three categories are almost equal in the Sunni data and have less reports in the Shi‘ite data, namely R5 (rituals) with 23 Sunni versions and 9 Shi‘ite ones; B5 (beasts, animals) with 22 Sunni versions and only four Shi‘ite ones and A5 (abstract concepts) also with 22 Sunni ones and 14 Shi‘ite versions.

As for the rituals in R5, there are three shared reports. In report (#5) ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān asks for water to perform his ablutions in front of a group of people. In the Sunni version there is an added comment that when God’s servant performs his ablutions perfectly, starts and finishes his prayer, sins fall off him as if he just left his mother’s womb. The next two reports deal with *ghusl* after a wet dream. While report (#193) speaks of ‘Ammār who wallowed in the sand thinking he could extend the *tayammum* (dry ablution) to a dry *ghusl*, in (#199) Umm Salama asks about *ghusl* after a wet dream for women. The only additional report unique to the Shi‘ite data is contrary to all the serious ones condemning laughter is (#161) about the month of Ramaḍān, when bad deeds are forgiven, reciting a verse from God’s book is like reading the entire holy book in any other month and the believer who laughs in his brother’s face will be received by laughter on Judgement Day. It is not an open invitation to laugh, as it is limited to one month in the year.

There are three additional reports in the Sunni data, (#73) tells of a Bedouin who had intercourse with his wife while fasting and asks the Prophet about how to deal with this huge sin. In report (#90) Abū Bakr almost loses his temper while in the state of *iḥrām* and finally in (#131) a man prayed the Morning Prayer with the Prophet and when they finished, he got up and prayed another two *rak‘as* in *nawāfil*.

While the Sunni data has more and different rituals, the common reports also have more than one ritual being discussed. The opportunity to criticize ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān in the ablution report is bypassed in the Shi‘ite versions.

The next two categories (C5 and E5) are almost equal in the Sunni data with 14 and 13 versions each respectively, versus 4 and 5 versions respectively in the Shi‘ite date, followed by the third label (F5) with 12 Shi‘ite versions versus only 6 Sunni ones. C5 (Companions) has 14 Sunni reports while there

are 5 Shi'ite ones, with one report in common (#55) about Ṣuhayb eating dates when he had conjunctivitis. The two Shi'ite reports are (#70) proclaiming that to alleviate hardship, the Prophet used to sit with people for Companionship and (#150) highlighting tribal pride at the councils of Arabs.

Sunni report (#96) mentions the Prophet smiling at Abū Bakr while women were dusting off horses with their veils. Report (#142) redeems laughter by introducing Nu'aymān who laughed a lot and is criticized to the Prophet who says that he will go to Paradise laughing. In (#147) the Prophet poked Usayd b. Ḥuḍayr's waist with a stick in a prank ending with them hugging. In (#204) 'Ā'isha was with a woman reciting [or singing] to her when the Prophet came in followed by 'Umar. The woman stops, due to 'Umar's reputation, but he insists he will not leave until he listens to her. She resumes after the Prophet asks her to.

In E5 (Edibles or food related items) there are 13 Sunni versions and 4 Shi'ite ones with one common report (# 18) of 'Alī being sent away by Anas so as not to share the grilled duck.

In the Shi'ite data, report (#22) has Abū Hurayra praising 'Alī for feeding him during the famine in Medina after Abū Bakr and 'Umar did not. Report (#56) has the Prophet eating dates with 'Alī and joking about being a glutton. Report (#136) asserts that the Prophet used to joke but only say the truth. As for the Sunni narrations, in (#79) 'Ā'isha and Sawda have a food fight and in (#103) 'Ā'isha's jealousy is made fun of over a broken bowl. This entire label shows little commonalities and more differences. Again the differences focus on sectarian leanings, like praising 'Alī's charity in comparison to Abū Bakr and 'Umar who show no compassion to Abū Hurayra.

The next label F5 (Prophet's family) has more Shi'ite narrations, namely 12 versus 6 Sunni versions with only one in common, namely (#86) about the Prophet playing with al-Ḥusayn. The Shi'ite data has 5 reports, two of which are similar, with the Prophet playing with al-Ḥusayn in (#87) and in (#88) with both al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. In (#123), another distinctly Shi'ite report, 'Alī is told that he was created forty thousand years before Adam. In (#129) there is a miracle in Fāṭima's house with a cauldron boiling without fire while she was asleep. Report (#179) explains that Muḥammad al-Bāqir used to say: "Oh God do not despise me" when he laughed.

There are 2 reports in the Sunni data, with *ḥadīth* (#85) reporting the Prophet playing with al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn. In (#108) ‘Ā’isha jokes with the Prophet, with her mother disapproving and the Prophet defending her.

The only similarities here are with regard to the Prophet’s grandsons, and the fact that he was known to have played and joked with them. The differences are again due to the sectarian colouring of the narrations.

In label H5 (humans) there is only one Shi’ite version versus five Sunni ones of the same report, (#185) where the Prophet attempts to sell a slave, meaning he is one of God’s slaves [believers]. In several Sunni versions the Bedouin is named as Zāhir b. Ḥarām, Ḥizām or Ḥirām.

To sum up, angels, miracles, dreams and speaking animals are shared topoi, showing the concerns of the time and the developments in various genres and ideologies. The individual reports have much in common in terms of both the contexts and their frequency. Apart from slight differences due to sectarian ideologies, the context is very close to being identical except for the category D5 (Seriousness), that suggests that Shi’ites are against laughter in general, not just excessive laughter. This will be analysed in the next chapter. Positive values form the highest frequency for both sects, while battles, wars and sieges are more frequent in the Sunni data. *Ahl al-bayt* are unsurprisingly a favourite in the Shi’ite data.

Shared Knowledge

The sixth criterion is the ‘shared knowledge’ needed to understand the joke or get the punch-line. There were 88 topics, which necessitated them to be added together under umbrella labels, resulting in 14 such labels. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used is explained below in Table (6).

Chart (10) shows the different object counts for both Sunni and Shi’ite narrations.

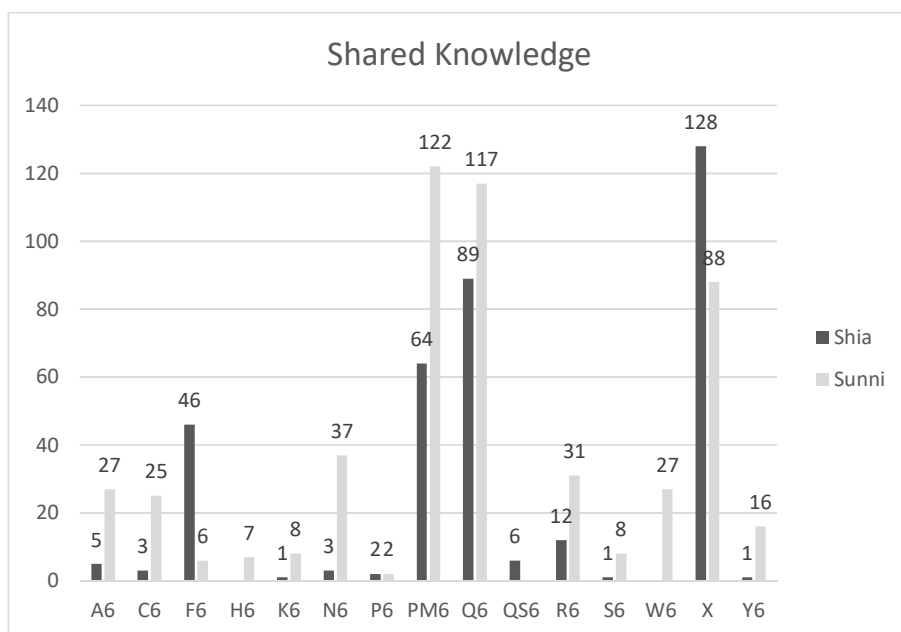


Figure 10 - Shared Knowledge

Table 6 - Shared Knowledge

Shared Knowledge	
Label	Words included in the label
A6	Arabic, human nature, man's description, nature
C6	Anas's age, Jarīr, shared fate
F6	‘Alī’s charity, ‘Alī’s piety, ‘Alī’s skills, family relation, Fāṭima & ‘Alī’s piety, Prophet’s family
H6	slave owner
K6	divorce rules, marriage rules
N6	drunkard, <i>ḥijāma</i> , human fickleness, malice, stereotype, worldly greed
P6	permissibility, pledge, promise, respect
PM6	Prophet’s character, Sīra
Q6	angels, Anti-Christ, battle, eschatology, faith, Iblīs, Jibra’īl, Jinn, judgement, Judgement Day, martyrdom, miracle, monotheism, God's Omnipotence, prohibitions, prophets, Qur'an, verse [2:255], ch. 113 & 114, Verse [27:19], verse [33:56], verse [39:67], verse [5:45], verse

	[53:43], verse [66:3], verse [8:1], verse [83:29-35], verse [9:102], Verses [22.1-2], verses [33:28-29], verses [53:59-60], verses [56:35-37], verses [9:80] & [9:84]
QS6	haters of <i>ahl al-bayt</i> , infallibility of Imams, Karbala, sectarian
R6	ablution, additional prayers, fasting rules, iḥrām rules, prayer, prayer rules, purity rules, rituals
S6	Court case
W6	‘Ā’isha’s alleged age at marriage, ‘Ā’isha’s jealousy, Prophet’s wives, Umm Salama’s assertiveness
X	None
Y6	battle, Mecca conquest, military defeat, Trench, war

The variable X will be ignored as it has no shared knowledge. It is worth noting though that it is the highest category in Shi’ite data and third highest in the Sunni one.

The two highest labels in both Sunni and Shi’ite data are PM6 (Prophet) Q6 (religious topics). PM6 is highest with 122 versions in the Sunni data and 64 in the Shi’ite data, followed by Q6 with 117 Sunni versions and 89 Shi’ite ones. PM6 has 8 common reports in various versions, three of which are based on insights about the Prophet’s character and how he behaved in certain situations, like reports (#32, 49, 147, 205). They all show he had a sense of humour and resorted to joking instead of reprimand like in (#32) when Anas, while running an errand, got side-tracked with playing boys, while (#49) has the Prophet gifting a wide garment to one of his wives and (#147) is about playing a prank on Usayd b. Huḍayr that all show Muḥammad’s playful side. Report (#46) shows the Prophet playing a prank on Bilāl and in the Sunni version only, regretting it. Report (#205) juxtaposes the Prophet’s character to that of the harsher ‘Umar. The other four reports (#59, 86, 112, 121) are descriptions of the Prophet, how he played with his grandchildren, joked but only said the truth and describes the last prayer before he died, and therefore fall into the realm of Sīra.

The Sunni data has another fourteen reports which are divided into three subcategories. (#53) shares information about ‘Ā’isha watching the Abyssinians play at the mosque. The shared knowledge here is ‘Ā’isha’s alleged young age at marriage.

New research is questioning the authenticity of a report found in many *Ḥadīth* collections,⁶⁸³ including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, which is described as the most authentic book after the Qur’an,⁶⁸⁴ stating that ‘Ā’isha was six at the time of her marriage and nine years old when the marriage was consummated.⁶⁸⁵ Syrian *ḥadīth* scholar, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Idlibī, determined that the *ḥadīth* was *shādhdh* (discrepant) and *ma’ūl* (defective) based on numerous arguments which collectively suggest that ‘Ā’isha was born in *Jahiliyya*, about four years before the start of the Prophetic mission, and consummated the marriage one year after the migration to Medina at the age of about eighteen.⁶⁸⁶

Five of these additional reports highlight the Prophet’s character as shared knowledge, namely (#2, 3, 46, 60, 77). In two reports (#2, 3) a dispute occurs between the Prophet and ‘Ā’isha and he handles the situation with humour. Also in report (#77) instead of reprimanding Khawāt b. Jubyar al-Anṣārī for flirting with Meccan women on the streets, he resorts to humour. In (#60) ‘Ā’isha asserts that she never saw the Prophet’s uvula and that he just smiled. Though this could easily have been classified as *Sīra*, it shows his character more, namely the moderation, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The next nine reports have incidents from the Prophet’s life as shared knowledge and hence were classified as *Sīra*. In (#74) he whispers something to Fāṭima that leaves her crying, then laughing. In (#80) Ka’b b. Mālīk is forgiven for lagging behind the Prophet in the Battle of Tabūk, which will be discussed in the sixth chapter. In (#85) his playful side with al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn is shown, as in

⁶⁸³ For example it is found in the six canonical books of *ḥadīth*: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* as well as in other major collections such as *Sunan ad-Dārimī*, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, *Musannaf ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī*, *Musnad al-Shāfi‘ī* and others

⁶⁸⁴ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. 1989. *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*. Edited by ‘Ā’isha Abd al-Raḥmān. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 160-169.

⁶⁸⁵ See Amin, Yasmin. 2020. “Revisiting the Issue of Minor Marriages: Multidisciplinary Ijtihād on Contemporary Ethical Problems.” In *Islamic Interpretive Tradition and Gender Justice - Processes of Canonization, Subversion, and Change*, edited by Nevin Reda and Yasmin Amin, 314-363. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press

⁶⁸⁶ See Mol, A. Y. 2018. *Aisha (ra): The Case for an Older Age in Sunni Hadith Scholarship*. Retrieved January 29, 2019, from Yaqaen Institute For Islamic Research: <https://yaqaeninstitute.org/arnold-yasin-mol/aisha-ra-the-case-for-an-older-age-in-sunni-hadith-scholarship/#.XcxhWVczblU>.

(#108) when he jokes with ʿĀʾisha in spite of her mother’s disapproval. (#184) speaks of his long silences, while (#110) asserts he has a sense of humour, which is corroborated by (#162) for allowing Ḥudhāfa b. Qays al-Qurashi, a prankster, to loosen the saddle on his mount during his travels. Finally in (#163) an episode is described when he married Ṣafīyya and Abū Ayyūb spent the night guarding the entrance to the tent because he did not trust her.

There are fifteen additional Shiʿite reports, three of which also show the Prophet’s character, namely (#35, 45, 92). In (#35) he jokes with the old Ashjaʿiyya woman that old ladies do not go to paradise, in (#45) he asks about the Bedouin who played pranks on him, wishing he would come. Hence, both affirm a sense of humour as part of his character and finally in (#92) he jokes about a camel carrying grains. The rest of the reports share knowledge of his life. Two of these reports have a distinctly Shiʿite theme, in (#82) Ghadīr Khumm is celebrated and the shared knowledge is the Prophet’s statement in ʿAlī’s favour, which is used in Shiʿite discourses to support ʿAlī’s right to succession after the Prophet.⁶⁸⁷ Report (#141) is also distinctly Shiʿite, not only due to the talking date palms, but because of what these palms say in terms of Muḥammad being chosen and ʿAlī being the ‘attainer of God’s pleasure,’ both of them being like Mūsā and Hārūn, the seal of the prophets and the seal of the trustees.

The remaining reports describe the Prophet’s jokes and laughter, like (#11) only saying the truth even while joking, (#109 and 115) making his Companions happy by joking with them, (#40) that he laughed until his back teeth showed, however he was not loud, which contradicts (#69) that his laughter was but a smile, in line with (#70) that he laughed rarely, just to make people feel at ease and (#114) that his mercy was displayed by joking with his community. In two reports (#87, 88) his playful side with his grandsons is shown.

The shared knowledge factor behaves similarly in both sets, even if the reported incidents differ, which is mainly based on sectarian preferences, meaning, that in the Shiʿite data, ʿAlī and his sons are favoured, as well as incidents that fit with Shiʿite beliefs, such as Ghadīr Khumm or ʿAlī being the legate,

⁶⁸⁷ Veccia Vaglieri, L., “Ghadīr Khumm”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 25 April 2020 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2439.

the trustee and the designated heir, while in the Sunni data 'Ā'isha features prominently in many episodes described or is quoted when it comes to describing the Prophet. Therefore, the commonalities outweigh the differences in this label.

As for Q6 (religious topics) there are 117 Sunni versions and 89 Shi'ite ones. There are eight common reports covering four topics in shared knowledge. In (#107) it is angels, as Jibrīl (Jibra'īl) passes by the Prophet and laughs at/with him. In (#10, 126, 100) it is eschatology and Judgement day. The remaining two topics are in (#194) the Anti-Christ, and in (#8, 104, 138) different verses such as verse [9:102], verses [56:35-37] and verse [39:67], respectively.

The Sunni data has an additional 33 reports, two of which (#127, 128) deal with angels, one (#208) with Iblīs, one (#207) with previous prophets, all part of the *'aqīda* (creed), as well as one (#143) dealing with Paradise. Eleven reports deal with eschatology and judgement, (#12, 34, 41, 52, 63, 65, 125, 140, 151, 197, 206), most asserting God's mercy and fairness. Three reports (50, 78, 33) deal with miracles, be they healing an almost dying camel, feeding an entire army or visiting heaven. God's Omnipotence is the shared knowledge of one (#28), and the Qur'an is the shared knowledge in report (#44). Eleven reports (#61, 62, 68, 83, 89, 106, 153, 154, 155, 157, 203) have individual verses or a group of verses as a shared knowledge, namely [33:28-29], [27:19], [22.1-2], [66:3], [33:56], [9:80] & [9:84], [53:43], [53:59-60], and [2:255] respectively. It is worth noting that in report (#106) Jibrīl is called Jibra'īl, which is the usual Shi'ite name rather than the Sunni Jibrīl and could be explained by the 'bipolar narrators,' mentioned above. However, looking at the individual narrators, though rewarding, goes beyond the scope of this research and can be an avenue for further research. Report (#198) has martyrdom and its rewards as shared knowledge.

The Shi'ite data has twenty additional reports, three of which (#22, 117, 129) have angels and one (#175) has Iblīs as a shared knowledge. Two reports deal with faith and the belief in God's mercy. Four reports (#57, 58, 161, 181) refer to Judgement Day, be it to promise mercy, glad tidings, resurrection or fair judgement based on one's deeds. One report (#23) has the Qur'an as a topic and five reports (72, 156, 35, 119, 191) deal with individual verses: [102.8], [83:29-35], [56:35-37], and [5:45]. God's Omnipotence is the knowledge shared in two reports (#28, 29).

Label Q6 sees a very similar distribution of topics with regard to eschatology, angels, the Qur'an and individual verses, even if different verses are used in both sets. The Shi'ite reports provide exegesis to the verses that are sectarian in nature, raising 'Alī's status, or mentioning distinctly Shi'ite concepts such as *taqiyya* (dissimulation). The Sunnis have Paradise and previous prophets as topics, which are missing in the Shi'ite data, as well as martyrdom which is surprising, since martyrdom is a central concept in Shi'ism. Most of the twelve Imams were martyred and there is a group of scholars collective called the five martyrs,⁶⁸⁸ who were executed for their beliefs by different regimes in history, and most importantly the martyrs of Karbala.

Label F6 (Prophet's family) is the next highest in the Shi'ite data with 46 versions versus 6 Sunni ones. There are three common reports. Two of them (#4, 18) have the family relation between the Prophet and 'Alī or 'Abbās as a topic, while the third one (#24) highlights 'Alī's piety. There are no other reports in the Sunni data, however there are 14 other Shi'ite reports. Two reports (#13, 25) speak about 'Alī's skills, whether military or otherwise. One (#76) highlights Fāṭima and 'Alī's piety, while four reports (#15, 21, 74, 75) show 'Alī's piety. Two reports (#16, 17) praise 'Alī's charity. The family relationship is the subject of five reports (47, 56, 72, 123, 148) with all of them having sectarian flavours, like God boasting using the Prophet, 'Alī and al-'Abbās, seven being chosen from Banū Hāshim above all others, the Prophet and 'Alī being created forty thousand years before Adam and the pomegranate from heaven being designated exclusively for 'Alī's family.

This label is very different, as it is very Shi'ite-centric. Even the reports in the Sunni data, are not only common to the Shi'ite data, but also have the same shared knowledge about the Prophet's family and 'Alī's piety.

A6 (abstract terms) und C6 (Companions) are almost equal in the Sunni data at 27 and 25 respectively, while there are only 5 and 3 versions respectively in the Shi'ite set. In A6, there is one common report (#39) which has Arabic language as shared knowledge. In the Shi'ite data there is one

⁶⁸⁸ Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Makkī al-'Āmilī al-Jizzīnī (d. 786/1385), known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal, Zayn al-Dīn al-Jubā'ī al-'Āmilī (d. 965/1558) known as al-Shahīd al-Thani, Qāḍī Nūr Allah al-Shustarī (d. 1019/1610/11) known as al-Shahīd al-Thālīth, Mirza Muḥammad Kāmil al-Dehlawī (d. 1235/1820) known as al-Shahīd al-Rābi' and Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (d. 1400/1980) known as al-Shahīd al-Khāmis.

additional report (#51) speaking about human nature with a Bedouin asking the Prophet to give him some of God's money. In the Sunni data, there are five additional reports. Another report (#145) about Arabic language, explaining the expression "May God make your teeth laugh." Two reports (#81, 137) about human nature. The first (#81) about the Prophet seeking revenge for Umm Ayman's indecent exposure and the second (# 137) has 'Ā'isha's oath changing, depending on whether or not she was on good terms with Muḥammad. Nature is the topic of one report (146) while a man's description is the shared knowledge in the final one, as it was common knowledge al-Daḥḥāk b. Sufyān b. Awf al-Kilābī was ugly.

As for C6 (Companions), there are three versions in the Shi'ite data and 25 Sunni ones. Two reports (#102, 196) are in common about the two Companions Jarīr and Anas. There is only one additional Sunni report in multiple versions, namely (#61) about the domestic dispute in the Prophet's house with the shared knowledge being the shared fate, because like the Prophet, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb also had issues with his wives.

The next two labels H6 (humans) and W6 (Women) have no Shi'ite versions at all. There is only one report for H6 in the Sunni data, and the shared knowledge here is that Abd Allah b. Rawāḥa owned a slave-girl. As for W6, the Sunni data has six reports. One report (#159) has the Prophet's wives as a topic, while four reports are about 'Ā'isha, with two reports (# 53, 144) about her alleged age at marriage, hence playing with dolls or watching the Abyssinian dancers. Two reports (#79, 103) deal with her jealousy describing a fight between her and another unnamed wife about a bowl of *tharīd* and another food-fight between her and Sawda. The final report (#61) uses Umm Salama's assertiveness that was common knowledge, describing her reprimanding 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb for meddling in the Prophet's household.

The differences in this label are understandable, for the reasons already mentioned above, that 'Ā'isha is not a favourite topic in Shi'ite reports, while Umm Salama is, which makes it surprising that this report is not found in the Shi'ite set.

Label K6 (Kin) has 8 Sunni versions of two reports and one Shi'ite report, yet none in common. The Shi'ite report (#6) has marriage rules as a topic, prohibiting marriage to a second Christian wife,

when the first wife is Muslim, as discussed above. The two Sunni reports (#1, 48) also deal with marriage and divorce rules, namely the rules governing a third divorce of a married couple and the rules governing the marriage of a couple who were breastfed by the same woman. Therefore it can be said that this label is more similar than different as it covers the same concerns even if using different details.

Label P6 (positive values) has two reports each for each set, however, there are no common reports. In the Shi'ite data, report (#173) deals with respect, while (#31) with a promise Umm Hānī made. There are two Sunni reports, with one (#204) about the permissibility of women reciting or singing and one (#97) about the pledge of Ḥudaybiyya. This label shows differences in one Shi'ite report, though the shared knowledge is respect of prayers, fasting, gravesites and purity, it singles out *ahl al-bayt* with the Prophet saying that God made him, his legates, the guardians of his children and their followers after him hate six qualities. Therefore the differences are understandable.

As for S6 (Situation) the shared knowledge is a court case, which is reported in (#195) common to both sets. The case is interesting and was judged by 'Alī when the Prophet sent him to Yemen. There is nothing much to say about this label, as it only has this one shared report.

Regarding label Y6 (wars and battles) there are 16 Sunni versions and only one Shi'ite one which is from a common report (#95) about the conquest of Mecca and Hind bint 'Utba. The Sunni data has five additional reports, two (#200, 201) about battles, two (#182, 183) about sieges and finally one (#101) about the military defeat at Mu'tah. It seems that the Shi'ite collectors were not concerned with battles and sieges, as much as their Sunni counterparts. Though there are some reports mentioning battles, they focus more on 'Alī's achievements, like him ripping out the gate at Khaybar in spite of fasting for three days, rather than military defeats or victories.

The final label QS6 (sectarian themes) has no Sunni reports and only six Shi'ite ones that all deal with sectarian topics. (#116) has Abū Ja'far, Imam al-Bāqir saying: "whoever brings joy to one of our Shī'a has brought joy to the Prophet and Imams, and the same with sadness." In report (#72) the massacre at Karbala is predicted by Jibra'īl, who also predicts that whoever visits their graves will receive the rewards of a thousand pilgrimages and a thousand *umra* (small pilgrimage) combined. In report (#67) 'Alī claims that God will not accept the obedience of certain people, namely the Nawāṣib,

Mu'tazila, Kharijites, Qadarites and the opponents of the Ja'fari doctrine, for forty years. The final report (#66) shares the knowledge about the Imams' infallibility. Therefore it is not surprising that there are no Sunni reports in this label.

To sum up, there are many common reports with the Prophet, his nature and episodes from his life forming the largest portion of the shared knowledge. Information pertaining to *ahl al-bayt* are common between both sets, even if more frequent in the Shi'ite data. Information about women is missing from the Shi'ite data, as discussed above, while other religious knowledge, be it exegesis, regulations or rituals are shared, even if the exegesis or interpretations of some verses is utilised to convey different messages for the same verse or incident described.

Intent

The final criterion is the 'intent' as extracted from the *matn* (text) of each *hadith*. There are 46 topics, which necessitated them to be added together under umbrella labels, resulting in 10 labels. The entire list of words and the umbrella labels used is explained below in Table (7).

Chart (11) shows the different object counts for both Sunni and Shi'ite narrations.

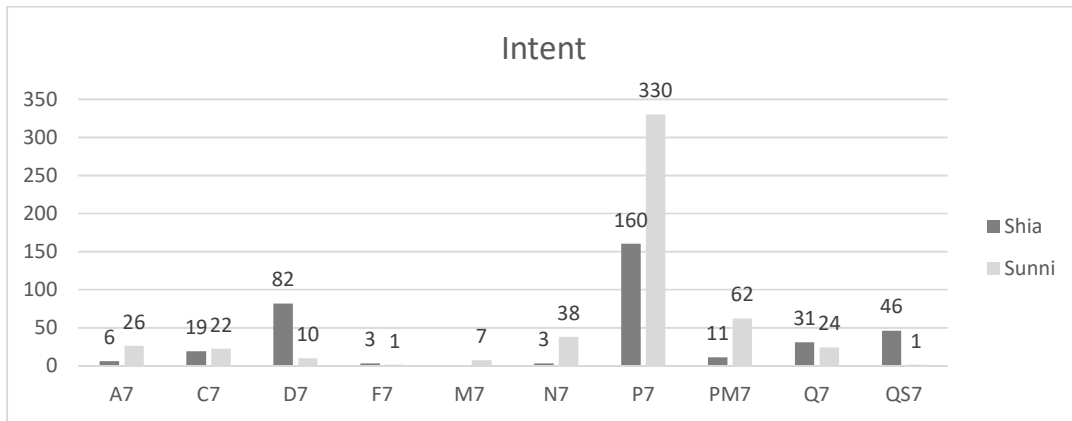


Figure 11 - Intent

Table 7 - Intent

Intent	
Label	Words included in the label

A7	explanation, human nature, hope, power, respect
C7	Community
D7	discourage excessive laughter
F7	family, family-trust
M7	Manners
N7	fear, fear (death), no mocking, reprimand, retaliation, tricks/ <i>ḥiyal</i>
P7	approval, balance, certainty, comfort, compassion, contentment, ease, encouragement, Joking, joy, justice, laughter, leniency, moderation, permissibility of joking, playful, protection, relief, reward, truth
PM7	Prophethood, Prophet's nature, Sīra
Q7	faith, fear (hell), God's omnipotence, hierarchy of religions, mercy, redemption
QS7	Sectarian

The highest frequency in both data sets is P7 (positive values) with 330 Sunni and 159 Shi'ite versions. There are 26 common reports distributed over a number of sub-labels. In report (#195) about the paternity case with three fathers it was to signal approval. In (#10) it was certainty. The next four reports (#4, 32, 185, 196) were to comfort 'Abbās, Anas and a slave, Zāhir b. Ḥarām and again Anas. Showing contentment at Jibrīl's visit was the intent in (#107). The next three reports intended to show ease in some difficult situations, in (#14) Abū Ṭālib was made to feel at ease after refusing to join in prayer, in (#55) eating dates while being afflicted with conjunctivitis and in (#71) a worried woman was made to feel at ease. In two reports (#102, 103) the intent was encouragement, first encouraging Jarīr for converting and encouraging the community during the last prayer. The next five reports intended joy, in (#132) Nu'aymān plays a prank on Suwaybaṭ, Abū Bakr and the whole caravan; in (#135) again Nu'aymān plays a prank on the Prophet to create joy, while in (#136) the Prophet asks about a boy's Nughayr (bird), to alleviate his sadness. In (#138) the Prophet jokes with an old lady about going to Paradise and in (#194) the fear of the Anti-Christ is replaced by joy by cracking a joke about his

distribution of *ṭharīd* and finally in (#51) an uncouth Bedouin is made happy by receiving charity. The next two reports intend leniency; in (#193) ‘Ammār b. Yāsir solves his impurity problem wrongly, but the Prophet deals with it with leniency, which is also apparent in report (#205) when the women are in the Prophet’s house and ‘Umar joins them, to juxtapose his harshness to the Prophet’s leniency and kindness. Mercy is the next intent in three reports, (#100, 126) the first dealing with a distraught Iblīs, because God responded to the Prophet’s supplications for his community and in the second, God is merciful to a man who admits on Judgement Day that he forgot some of his sins and in (#160) God hears the Prophet’s supplication for rain to ease the drought. In (#49) the permissibility of joking and playing pranks is the intent, when the Prophet gifts one of his wives with a dress that is much too big for her. The last three reports have different intents, in (#86) being playful is intended, by showing the Prophet’s playful side with al-Ḥusayn; in (#8) the intent is relief, for Abū Lubāba being pardoned and finally in (#122) truthfulness is the intent which is apparent in the warning promising woe to those who lie to make others laugh.

There are twenty-eight reports unique to the Shi’ite set. In report (#36) the intent is balance and it is recommended to be hospitable to strangers and homeless persons, feeding them or offering water or even just laughing. Comfort is the intent in (#11), by explaining that comforting people through joking is allowed, but it should be truthful. Leniency is the intent in (#109) recommending good behaviour and bringing pleasure to the community and also in (#45), where the Prophet misses a Bedouin who used to play pranks on him. Joking for the sake of joking is the intent in (#39), where a baby camel is the topic. Joy is the intent in three reports, namely (#35, 187, 191) where the Prophet jokes with an old Ashja’iyya woman to make her happy, Abū Hurayra is forbidden from playing pranks on Bedouins and jokes with the Prophet afterwards and finally where the Prophet jokes with an old toothless woman also to make her happy. In (#156) the intent is justice, comparing changing cycles by comparing/contrasting a group from Quraysh to the Prophet’s Companions in this life and the next. Mercy is the intent in several reports: in (#31) it is about amnesty of two men, Hubayra b. Abū Wahb al-Makhzūmī and another man from the tribe of Banū Makhzūm; in (#91) all things *ḥalāl* are celebrated, yet mercy is in the declaration that seventy *ḥalāl* are better than seven hundred *ḥarām* coins, in (#119) Khālid al-Qaṣrī’s grandfather is

forgiven after a woman complained about him kissing her, and in (#161) mercy is shown by bad deeds being forgiven in Ramadan. The next ten reports have moderation as an intent. In (#26) ‘Alī advises scholars to be moderate, in (#42) Yahya b. Zakariyya is compared to ‘Īsā b. Maryam, whose way was better, because he laughed and cried. In (#57) contemplating graves after laughing with gay abandon shows moderation, as does (#58) by reminding believers that whoever wishes mercy for the dead will escape hellfire. Moderation is also intended in (#175, 179) by criticizing guffaw as being from the devil and when laughing too much to ask that God does not despise them. Report (#181) reminds that those who laugh excessively will cry on Judgement Day, while many of those who cry excessively will be laughing. The next three reports, (#188, 189, 190), are similar they encourage smiling over laughter and inspire believers to laugh in their brothers’ faces, promising them Paradise, as does the last report, promising rewards to all who smile in their brothers’ faces. Demonstrating the permissibility of joking is the intent in the next two reports (#46, 92) where the Prophet jokes with Bilāl and with an unnamed man. The next two reports (#87, 88) show the Prophet’s playful side with his grandsons. The final report (#84) intends the promise of rewards in the afterlife for good behaviour in this one.

The Sunni set has 57 additional reports, with the first fourteen having comfort as an intent. In (#27) two young boys are comforted after pledging their allegiance to the Prophet. In (#37) an unnamed man feels that authority is a curse and the Prophet comforts him. In (#41) the Prophet comforts the Rabbi who narrates the Jewish version of Judgement Day and in (#44) a Bedouin is comforted after asking the Prophet too many questions. In two reports (#50, 96) the community is comforted with glad tidings and in two reports (#53, 137) ‘Ā’isha is comforted after being upset with the Prophet. A Bedouin is being made comfortable in (#143) for concluding that the man insisting on planting in paradise must surely either be a Qurayshī or an Anṣārī. Umm Ayman is comforted in (#146) for mistakenly drinking the contents of a chamber-pot, and in (#154) the community is comforted after the Prophet admits to have been hasty in reprimanding them for laughing after the revelation of verse [53:43]. The community is again comforted in (#157) by being told that several verses are a beneficial tool to use against magic. In (#182) Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān is comforted during the siege and finally in (#185) the Prophet jokes with Zāhir b. Ḥarām to make him comfortable. Contentment is the intent of two reports: (#128) because

Mikhāṭīl laughed at the Prophet and (#131) because a man performed his *nawāfil* prayers. In (#1) compassion is the intent, when a thrice divorced woman complains about her new husband and the Prophet realises she wants to remarry her first husband. In (#98) ease is the intent, putting the ugly man at ease. In (#163) a man who spent the entire night guarding the Prophet's tent with Ṣafīyya is encouraged. In report (#54) the Prophet jokes with a man to take the edge off a situation. The next category is joy and this includes five reports: (#97) intends to bring joy to Salama during the pledge of Ḥudaybiyya, while in (#133) Nu'aymān brings joy with gifts even if he does not pay for them. In (#134) Nu'aymān plays a prank to bring joy to the community, while in (#144) 'Ā'isha has toys that bring her joy. In report (#198) Umm Ḥirām receives joy by God granting her wish. Laughter for the sake of laughter is the intent in (#162) when Ibn Ḥudhāfa b. Qays al-Qurashī unfastened the Prophet's saddle to make him laugh. Leniency is the next intent in three reports (#90) where the Prophet jokes with Abū Bakr who was about to lose his temper, while in the state of *iḥrām* and in (#94) when people insult the drunkard Ḥimār and the Prophet defends him and finally in (#99) when an overzealous wife complains about her husband to the Prophet and he mediates. The next intent is mercy and this includes thirteen reports. In (#34) men arguing on Judgement Day forgive one another, going to Paradise together, while in (#63) Jibrīl tells the Prophet that God has granted him his entire community on Judgement Day. In (#65) God has mercy on those riding the sea, in horror of the enemy, yet fighting for God's cause. A Bedouin is the subject of mercy when he cannot make amends for sleeping with his wife during Ramadan's fast in (#73). Report (#101) has Ja'far feeling God's mercy after being martyred, as do other Muslims who feel God's mercy by being forgiven some of their sins in (#125). In (#106) God will pray ten times for whoever prays for the Prophet and in (#140) the orphan girl will feel God's mercy, based on a covenant with God that turns curses into closeness to Him on Judgement Day. The Prophet's wives, likened to fragile glass vessels, receive mercy in (#159) from being handled without care. In (#183) the inhabitants of Ṭā'if feel the mercy of an armistice, while in (#186) Abd Allah b. Rawāḥa is on the receiving end of mercy rather than reprimand, after deceiving his wife. Mercy is also the intent of the next two reports, in (#201) the Prophet advises that after having been victorious, one needs to be kind and merciful, while in (#206) *wuḍū'* is declared a mercy when performed right, leading to prayer and therefore washing away sins.

The next label has five reports intending moderation. In (#52) excessive laughter is to be avoided, while in (#124) the Companions would at times throw melons at each other, but when time demanded they were 'men.' The Prophet is the subject of (#184) interspersing his long silences with chats and smiles. In (#202) moderation between this world and the next is advised, and finally in (#207) moderation is again advised using Yahya's example. The permissibility of joking is the intent of two reports; (#108) has 'Ā'isha joking with the Prophet in spite of her mother's disapproval, while in (#142) Nu'aymān, known for his jokes and pranks, receives a prediction from the Prophet that he will enter Paradise laughing. The intent of (#85) is to show the Prophet's playful side with his grandchildren. The last report (#7) intends protection of people's feelings, showing the Prophet laughing with a man despite him being one of the worst of people.

This label shows many commonalities in the breakdown of the individual sub-labels demonstrating more agreement between the two data sets than differences. The large volume of reports (330 Sunni versions out of a total of 582, meaning 63% and 160 versions out of a total of 361 Shi'ite versions, meaning 44%) shows that these positive values and intents for laughter, jokes and smiles were the most concern to both Sunnis and Shi'ites.

The next highest label is D7 (discourage excessive laughter) has 82 versions in the Shi'ite data versus only 10 Sunni ones. There are five common reports, (#120, 158, 171, 172, 176) proclaiming that laughing will cause the loss of knowledge, joking will bring ugliness and grudges, joking will diminish a believer's brilliance, will jolt or kill believers' hearts. In the Sunni data there is only one additional report discouraging excessive laughter as it hardens hearts and leads to poverty. The Shi'ite set has an additional fifteen reports discouraging excessive laughter (#30, 69, 111, 112, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 174, 175, 177, 178) because laughter without wonder is frowned upon, nothing is a good enough reason to laugh, laughter kills the heart, reduces brilliance, makes men lose face and dignity, leads to arguments, is the lesser insult, erases faith, invites hatred, encourages malevolence, will allow liberties to be taken, scholars should laugh a little, laughter reduces the light of faith and chivalry, results in the loss of knowledge, guffaw is from the devil, laughter destroys the heart, and finally leaves a man poor on Resurrection Day.

In this category the difference is very apparent, even if some reports are shared, however the number of Shi'ite versions is much higher at 22,7% of all versions versus a negligible 1.9% for Sunni versions. This seems to reinforce the Shi'ite preference for a more serious image of the Prophet and the Imams over a more joyful and relaxed Sunni image.

In the next category of intent, PM7 (Prophet Muḥammad) there are 62 Sunni versions versus 11 Shi'ite ones, with only two reports in common, namely (#59) intending to supplement the Sīra by describing the Prophet's laughter. This report has a total of 33 versions, with 26 Sunni and 7 Shi'ite versions and the individual descriptions differ. While in the Sunni versions the Prophet's laughter is described as almost sparkling and reflecting on the walls, and that nobody smiled more than him, in the Shi'ite versions he only smiles without laughing, his laughter is but a smile, he was never seen to guffaw and his smile is likened to dispersing clouds. Surprisingly there is a commentary in (#59 v. 26) that one of the Prophet's names was *al-ḍaḥūk*, meaning good-humoured or merry and a mention that sometimes his back teeth showed. The second common report is (#152) intending to give proof of Muḥammad's Prophethood.

There are two additional Shi'ite reports, (#40) describing the Prophet's nature and (#56) again intending to supplement the Sīra, by reporting a joke with 'Alī. In the Sunni data, there are ten additional reports; four also have Sīra as intent, (#60) has 'Ā'isha claiming that the Prophet never laughed so that his uvula showed, while (#68) asserts that he laughed until his back teeth showed, yet with an added commentary that this is an exaggeration. In (#155) the revelation of verses [53:59-60] revealed caused a cessation of his laughter and finally (#203) shows how he dealt with the revelation of verses [33:28-29], giving his wives the choice of staying married or getting divorced. The next four reports intend to show the Prophet's nature. (#61, 62) report how Muḥammad handled marital disputes and in (#64) his nature is revealed in the way he handled a dream predicting his death. Finally (#110) shows the Prophet's nature asserting his sense of humour. The last two reports intend to prove his Prophethood, in (#78) he performs a food miracle, while in (#151) he knew that those questioning him were only trying to find fault with him.

To summarize, in this category there are again many commonalities, like supplementing the Sīra, providing proof for Muḥammad's Prophethood, describing his nature, his laugh, the difference is in the details, as mentioned, in general and in spite of the solitary Shi'ite commentary in (#59 v. 26) and the solitary Sunni comment in (#68), the Sunni image is of a joyful, merry, laughing Prophet, while the Shi'ite image prefers him serious and solemn.

As for A7 (abstract values) as intent, there are six Shi'ite versions and 26 Sunni ones with four reports in common. In (#199) the intent is an explanation about women also having 'wet dreams' and purification rules. As for (#9) the intent is to show power abuses. Interestingly there is an added note in Shi'ite report (#9 v. 1) saying: "only the jokester, jester and the drunkard will tell the truth. However, if Abū Sufyān was a true believer he would have known the truth of the Prophet's message and would not have joked with him this way." The next two reports (#95, 74) intend to highlight human nature. In the first, Hind bint 'Utba, covers her face in fear of retaliation for Ḥamza. Though in the beginning she complies and pledges everything that is asked of her, even admitting to having taken Abū Sufyān's money without permission, at the end she cannot help herself and snaps at the Prophet when he asks her to pledge not to kill her children and replies: "We have raised them when they were young and you have killed them at Badr when they had grown up, so you know best." In (#74) it is Fāṭima laughing and crying after the news she received.

In addition there is a unique Shi'ite report with three versions, (#58) highlighting respect due at funerals and gravesites. As for the traditions unique to the Sunni set, there are four, one (#5) about ablutions actually has a Shi'ite version, however, the intent differs. While the Sunni versions have hope as an intent, in the Shi'ite tradition takes a sectarian meaning as the *matn* is truncated to make way for a sectarian interpretation, as the one performing the ablution is 'Uthmān. The next two reports also highlight human nature, namely (#48) about the couple breastfed by the same woman, fearing for the validity of their marriage and (#79) about the Prophet's wives having a food-fight, because of 'Ā'isha's jealousy. Finally (#145) is an explanation of the phrase 'may God make your teeth laugh.'

This label has common concerns between both sets, human nature and clarifications, yet some differences are also noted, namely the Shi'ite concern for power abuse, which is not surprising as the

Imams were persecuted and politically powerless. The additional difference is using ablutions, a daily ritual, to ridicule ‘Uthmān.

As for C7 (community) there are 22 Sunni versions and 19 Shi’ite ones with 2 in common, namely (#147) about the Prophet poking Usayd b. Ḥuḍayr and (#112) the assertion that the Prophet joked with believers. There are three additional unique Sunni reports. In the first (#113) the Prophet advises on sexual ethics, saying that a man should not have intercourse with his wife without sending a messenger first in form of joking and kissing, for he should not fall upon his wife like cattle on cattle. In (#197) laughing in the face of one’s brothers and making them know how eager one is to see them is advised and finally (#204) is about the singing/reciting woman. All of them promote community cohesiveness through friendliness and good manners.

There are also six Shi’ite reports, in the first (#40) the same advice is given by the Prophet and the guided Imams to be friendly with one’s Companions, to strengthen their hearts. In (#70) the advice is to make people feel at ease and feel Companionship, which is termed as the preferred *Sunna*. Report (#114) explains that Muḥammad was compassionate and merciful, which was displayed by joking with his community, so he would not become too grand and alienate people, which echoes verse [3:159].⁶⁸⁹ While (#115) reminds to joke but only to say the truth, in (#116) those who bring joy to a believer bring joy to the Prophet and by extension to God and finally (#117) every believer who has brought joy to the Prophet’s people will be rewarded by God. Therefore, this section has no differences, but using the same themes arrives at the same intent, namely communal peace and cohesion.

The next label N7 (negative values) has five Shi’ite versions and 42 Sunni ones, with only one report (#149) in common, which is very critical of the congregation laughing and mocking a blind man. The only Shi’ite report is (#57) asking believers to contemplate graves. There are eight Sunni traditions with various themes. In (#127) fear is the intent, as even Mikhāṭīl has not laughed since hell was created. Report (#81) intends to show retaliation, for Umm Ayman’s indecent exposure. The next four reports show reprimands that are meted out with laughter to take the edge off the situation. In (#77) a man is

⁶⁸⁹ [3:159] “... Thus it is due to mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hard hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you.”

reprimanded for flirting with the women in the streets, while in (#80) Ka'b b. Mālik is reprimanded for lagging behind the Prophet in the Battle of Tabūk. In (#89) Ḥafṣa is reprimanded for not keeping the Prophet's secret and finally in (#103) 'Ā'isha is reprimanded for her jealousy and the resulting broken bowl. What all these have in common is that the reprimand is accompanied by laughter or smiles, to 'sugar-coat' the rebuke. The final two reports (#104, 192) are critical of *hiyal* (tricks) to circumvent prohibitions, whether it is lard or spirits.

In this label, the Shi'ite concerns are different from Sunni ones, while they both share the critical view of people mocking others seen in the Qur'anic injunction in verse [49:11],⁶⁹⁰ the other concern is of a sad nature. The Sunni concerns on the other hand are mainly with how to present a reprimand or rebuke in a nice way so as not to hurt the feelings of the culprit, even if he/she committed a mistake, which can be extended to the tricks played to evade prohibitions.

As for label Q7 (religious topics) there are 32 Shi'ite and 24 Sunni reports, with three reports in common. Two of them (#28, 33) deal with faith and the third (#104) with God's omnipotence. The Sunni data has five additional reports, two (#50, 83) also deal with faith, while the other two (118, 139) also deal with God's omnipotence. The final one (#12) deals with redemption. The intent reflecting faith is apparent in the reports about angels, Gog & Magog and miracles. The Shi'ite data has six additional reports, four of which (#15, 16, 17, 29) reflect faith concerns, one (#130) God's omnipotence and the additional one (#6) the hierarchy of religions, with Islam being on top. The commonalities here are very apparent and there are only very slight differences in the additional concern about hierarchy or redemption.

Label M7 (manners) has no Shi'ite reports and four Sunni ones. In (#43) uttering the *Basmala* before eating is considered part of food etiquette, (#46) after scaring Bilāl, the Prophet reconsidered and decided to stop playing pranks on people, (#153) shows 'Umar b. al Khaṭṭāb regretting his audacity at questioning the Prophet and finally in (#208) yawning in public is frowned upon. This is not to say that there is no concern for manners in Shi'ism, because the compendia are replete with reports by the

⁶⁹⁰ [49:11] "O you who believe! let not (one) people laugh at (another) people perchance they may be better than they ..."

Imams telling believers how to behave and setting an example of good behaviour, but what can be concluded is that there is no concern with manners when laughter is also an issue, and this has been shown by the numerous reports condemning excessive laughter and warnings of indulging in it and considering it the lesser insult.

Label F7 (family) has very few reports. There is one report in common between both sets, which is (#18) about Anas sending ‘Alī away when he cooked the bird. There are no further Sunni reports, but two more (#13, 25) Shi’ite ones that both intend to highlight the family-trust, meaning the trust the Prophet has in ‘Alī, who always has the Prophet’s back, which is why he cried out for ‘Alī during battle. There is nothing much to add, as ‘Alī is the common subject, yet the Shi’ite veneration of ‘Alī, as the first of the twelve Imams far exceeds the Sunni reverence of the Prophet’s cousin, son-in-law and fourth caliph.

The last label in the intent category is QS7 (sectarian concerns) and unsurprisingly most reports are Shi’ite with only one common report and no other Sunni reports. The common report (#24) concerns Ghadr Khumm and the Prophet saying that whoever takes him as his *mawlā*, ‘Alī is his *mawlā*, followed by a supplication to God to protect those who take him as their *mawlā* and for God to be an enemy to those who are ‘Alī’s enemies. The Shi’ite data has an additional twenty reports, the first of which is (#5) which is very similar to one of the Sunni reports in a previous label, about ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān’s ablutions without the Sunni ending of the *matn*, as mentioned. All other reports share this sectarian highlight. For example (#21) has Abū Bakr praising ‘Alī’s military skills at Khaybar. (#22) reports that on the third day of a famine ‘Alī feeds Abū Hurayra after Abū Bakr and ‘Umar failed to do so in the first two days. In (#23) ‘Alī praises the righteousness, honesty, trustworthiness of his brothers, who are no hypocrites and do not practice *taqiyya*. After Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, *taqiyya* became an integral feature of Shi’ism.⁶⁹¹ In (#47) Jibra’īl reports that God boasted using the Prophet, al-‘Abbās, and ‘Alī to various celestial beings. In (#66) the infallibility and knowledge of the Imams is highlighted with Ja’far al-Ṣādiq being the example. In (#67) all enemies are named, such as the Nawāṣib (haters of *ahl al-bayt*), the Mu’tazila, the Kharijites, the

⁶⁹¹ McHugo, John. 2017. *A Concise History of Sunnis & Shi’is*. London: Saqi Books, 96.

Qadarites and those opposing the Ja'farī doctrine. Report (#72) raises the status of seven of Banū Hāshim: Muḥammad, 'Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, Ḥamza, Ja'far and al-Qā'im, from among 'Alī and Fāṭima's offspring, particularly of the offspring of al-Ḥusayn. Two reports (#74, 75) deal with Fāṭima's marriage to 'Alī, the first asserts that God has designated them for one another, while the second has Jibra'īl telling Muḥammad to marry them as God approves. 'Alī and Fāṭima are the subject of (#76) with their laughter lighting up Paradise. 'Yawm al-Ghadīr' is the subject matter of (#82), while four miraculous events are described in (#123, 129, 141 and 148) 'Alī and Muḥammad being created before Adam, Fāṭima's cauldron boiling without fire, date-palms praising Muḥammad and 'Alī and the pomegranate from heaven that becomes invisible for Abū Bakr. In (#150) Abū Bakr is called as one of the contemptible of Quraysh. In (#156) a sectarian exegesis of verses [83.34-35] is presented and in (#173) six qualities distinguish between Muḥammad, his legates and guardians of his children and their followers from all others and finally in (#180) 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Imam al-Sajjād, is portrayed as very serious and disinclined to laughter.

This last label is exclusively Shi'ite as can be evidenced by the different *mutūn* of the reports. However, the whole category of intent, and in spite of the last sub-label, shows more commonalities than the previous categories and it becomes apparent that the intent does not vary much between both sets. It shows positive values such as mercy, leniency, rewards and communal cohesiveness as the most important concern in both sets, having the largest frequency. Seriousness, discouraging excessive laughter and limiting laughter for scholars is a concern most important to the Shi'ite set, with limited Sunni versions promoting the same. The promotion of good manners is more pronounced in the Sunni data. Therefore it can be used to arrive at a new humour theory, using the various reasons that made the Prophet laugh, which will be elaborated in the final chapter.

Conclusion

As the previous detailed analysis of all categories showed, there were many common reports found in both sets, therefore the last chart in this chapter will show the narrations that are recorded in both corpora as well as those that are exclusive to either the Sunni or the Shi'ite corpus. This means the data will be split into three groups, the first one including only those with exclusively Sunni versions, the

second one with exclusively Shi'ite versions and the third and last group with versions that were common to both Sunni and Shi'ite compendia. Chart (12) shows the distribution of the versions.

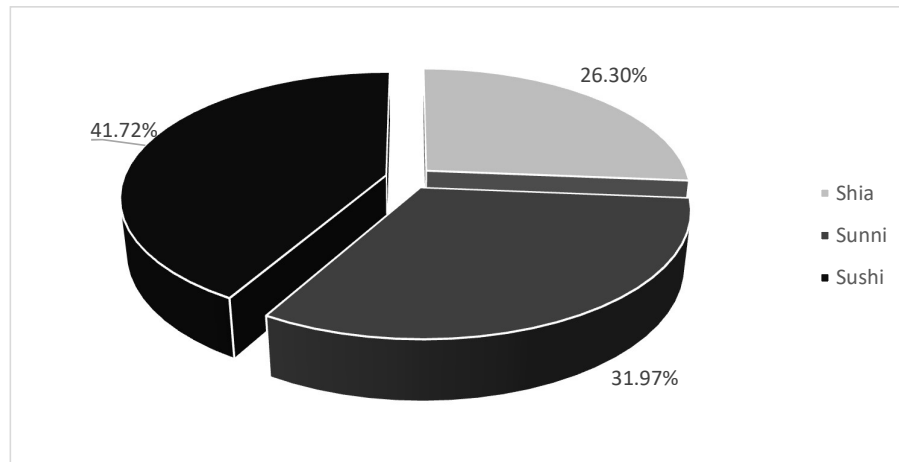


Figure 12 - Distribution of Versions

As Chart (12) shows, there are 87 *ahādīth* with 282 versions (31.97%) that are exclusively Sunni and 70 *ahādīth* with 232 versions (26.30 %) that are exclusively Shi'ite and finally there are 50 *ahādīth*(41.72 %) in 368 versions that are common to both, called SuShi, combining Sunni and Shi'ite in one word for easier reference. The common group is the largest and therefore generalisations can be made, after having considered the individual differences above. Looking at each single variable again to fine-tune the findings further and tease out the different nuances would be bigger than the scope of this research permits, but might be an avenue for future research. However, with this distribution it shows that the commonalities are more than the differences that – as shown - are mainly due to sectarian interpretations, preferences, and practices, as well as the competing contexts surrounding the collectors which differ across the centuries and locations. The various contexts, be they ideological, geographical, historical or intellectual, as was described, with the influence of particular genres, such as angelology or dream interpretations, heritage literary texts affecting the *mutūn* of the reports, as did the ideologies of the collectors and their financial dependence or independence, meaning whether or not they were paid to produce particular scholarship for the ruling elite or whether they wrote for the sake of knowledge and might have paid for that with their lives, like the scholars collectively called the 'five martyrs,' mentioned above.

This chapter examined how the Prophet laughed and partly answered the research question: did the Prophet laugh, with whom, about what and how. The first category looked at the 'type of laughter', which showed that the Prophet did indeed laugh, sometimes with gay abandon showing various teeth (canine, molar, last tooth), and at others barely smiled, and many variations between these two, but he did laugh. It also answered the question with whom, covered by the category 'audience' and revealed that he laughed and joked with various people, be they family members, grandsons, wives, servants, children or Companions. He also laughed as easily with complete strangers, unnamed Bedouins, unnamed Rabbis, as well as minority groups such as orphans, slaves and people related to those already mentioned, such as members of a Companion's family or their protégés and men in the market place, as well as people the community disliked. The question about what he laughed about was also answered in the category 'object' aided by the category 'context' and further detailed in the category 'shared knowledge. It showed that he laughed about mistakes instead of reprimanding wrongdoers, laughed about human nature, fickleness, trickery, jealousy and people's idiosyncrasies, moods and temper-tantrums, as well as certain achievements with pride. He also laughed with angels in contentment about glad tidings they brought or simply for passing by and greeting him. It also showed that he was often the instigator of jokes and pranks.

The next chapter will first look at the types of laughter and its distribution over history, to determine whether or not the depiction of the Prophet's laughter changed over time and if so, why it changed. This will serve to answer the research question about how the Prophet laughed in more detail and what exactly these narrations are conveying about his manner of laughter.

Chapter Five - Degrees of Censorship/Separation

The fourth chapter looked at how the Prophet laughed. It partly answered the research question, showing that the Prophet did indeed laugh. His laughter ranged between gay abandon showing various teeth, and at other times barely a smile, with many types in between. It also revealed that he laughed and joked with various people, male and female Companions, children, and strangers, servants, as well as the marginalised in the community, slaves, orphans and the poor. Moreover, it demonstrated that he laughed about mistakes and used jokes instead of reprimanding wrongdoers, laughed about human nature, its fickleness, trickery, jealousy and people's idiosyncrasies, moods and temper-tantrums, as well as certain achievements. He not only laughed with humans, but also with angels in contentment about glad tidings they brought or simply for passing by. He often instigated jokes and pranks. Though the following report does not have an explicit word denoting laughter, as other examples mentioned in the data-set, it still shows that he himself played pranks. Al-Marzubānī narrated from 'Uthmān b. Abī 'Aṭā', from his father, who said that the Prophet was sleeping in 'Ā'isha's chamber. He woke up before her and he took her braid and tied it to the bedpost. Then he called out to her and she awoke with a startle.⁶⁹²

This chapter will start by taking a closer look at the types of laughter and their distribution over history, to determine whether or not the image of the Prophet's laughter changed over time. The aim is to refine the answer of the research question about how the Prophet laughed and what these narrations are conveying and to resolve the contradiction between laughing with gay abandon and barely smiling.

The Prophet's Laughter

Analysing the various report versions in the data-set, three aspects become apparent. The first aspect is a noticeable change in wording between different versions of the same report over time. The second is an added 'disclaimer' to the *matn* that dilutes or excuses the laughter and the third aspect is an added commentary by the collector explaining the report or an addition conveying a certain message.

⁶⁹² al-Maḡdīsī, Zayn al-Dīn Mar'ī b. Yūsuf. 1997. *Ghidhā' al-arwāḥ bi-l-muḥādatha wa-l-muzāḥ*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 35.

In many narrations with different versions the word denoting laughter is changed to dilute the laughter, either changing it to a smile or editing it out altogether.

1) Examples for the first aspect (change in wording):

In the fourth report (#4) about the Prophet smiling at al-‘Abbās, who asked what made him smile, the Prophet answered that he liked his uncle’s beauty. In the four Sunni versions the reaction changes and only one version depicts the Prophet laughing at/with al-‘Abbās. In the twelfth report (#12) about the ‘Ajam who were being dragged unwillingly to Paradise in chains, only one of the four Sunni versions shows the Prophet indulging in laughter, while the others depict him laughing or temper the laughter with surprise. Report (#78) with eight Sunni versions ranges from laughing till his back teeth show to no laughter at all, while the extent of the food miracle increases. This happens with many other reports, like for example reports number 9, 46, 48, 54, 55, 59, 62, 73, 99, 100, 102, 132, 137, 160, 183, 194 and 200.

2) Examples for the second aspect (added disclaimer):

Report (#9) with six Sunni versions and one Shi’ite version states in the only Shi’ite version that only a jester or a drunkard would tell the truth while joking. It adds that if Abū Sufyān was a true believer, he would have known the truth of the Prophet’s message and would not have joked with him this way. In report (#39), the disclaimer states that this is a *ṣaḥīḥ gharīb* (authentic strange) report. In report (#81) of seven Sunni versions, one (#1) asks what did the Prophet laugh about? It answers: about what was done to the man. In the fourth version the disclaimer adds that the Prophet said that Sa’d avenged Umm Ayman and vindicated her. In the seventh version it adds that God heard Sa’d’s call and in the second version some context is added. The many disclaimers and explanations show the discomfort of the collectors at having the Prophet laugh at one of the polytheists, whose genitals were exposed in an awkward fall after being hit by Sa’d’s arrow. This also is a frequent topic in Qur’an commentaries, which will be discussed in the next chapter.⁶⁹³ In report (#104) about the Rabbi there are thirteen versions, three of them Shi’ite, which incidentally and uncharacteristically, as described in chapter 4, show the

⁶⁹³⁶⁹³ See for example al-Qurṭubī, M. b. A., 1964. *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’an*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya 1962, 13:175

Prophet laughing till his back teeth show. The ten Sunni versions have different words that range from laughed, to laughed until his back teeth showed, and laughed wondering. However in six versions (#1, 3, 5, 8, 10, and 11) there is an added disclaimer that he laughed in agreement with the Rabbi. Additionally, two Shi'ite versions (#12 and 13) critique the anthropomorphism in the report by sarcastically asking how many fingers God has, presenting portions of the same report in other collections showing the discrepancy in the number of fingers. The Shi'ite rejection of anthropomorphism was discussed in chapter 3. In report (#112) there are seventeen versions, seven of them Shi'ite. These reports explain that the Prophet used to joke with the believers, but only told the truth. A few versions emphasize that in spite of him joking, he did not laugh and just barely smiled. While in the fifth version, incidentally a Sunni one, the added disclaimer states that not every situation lends itself to joking. In report (#140) the first version has an added disclaimer stating that the permissibility of joking is only for those who are secure in their faith.

3) Examples for the third aspect (added commentary):

In the first report (#1) about a divorcee complaining to the Prophet that she married 'Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Zubayr after Rafā'a al-Qarazī divorced her thrice, only to discover that her second husband “only has a fringe like that of a garment.” The Prophet smiled at her statement, yet the commentator adds: “the *‘ulamā'* opined that he smiled because she was too forward, openly stating what women usually shy away from discussing and because she admitted preferring her first husband over the second, but God knows best.” Report (#40) with three versions with different wording, changing from laughter while showing back teeth to a commentary stating that this was friendliness towards Companions, cordiality for the hearts, which is close to laughter. In report (#51) the addition says: “this statement shows the Prophet's leniency and patience. He is more prepared to accept harm to himself, his money and unfairness, than to be harsh to people he wants to invite to Islam. He is also setting an example for those after him on how to govern with good manners, forgiveness, and virtue. Report (#89) has additions stating that these are merely a play on words (versions 8, 9, 11) and the tenth version states that this shows the permissibility of teaching women to write. In report (#93) about Jibrīl not laughing since Hellfire was created, one version states that the Prophet covered his mouth to hide his

laughter. Report (#205), has twenty-one versions, nine Shi'ite, of which two have an added commentary. In version (#19) there is a comment reflecting indignation at Iblīs changing his path to avoid 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, arguing at length that he is but human and asking why would Iblīs want to avoid him, while in (#21) a long commentary agrees that 'Umar's behaviour is aggressive and harsh, listing other reports to underscore this roughness. The seven Sunni versions of report (#159) have a comment in two versions (4, 6) that the word *qawārīr* (glass bottles) for women is unusual and that if others used it, people would find fault with it. In report (#186) in the third version of seven instead of laughing, the Prophet tells the slave owner that the poetry he recited to his wife instead of the Qur'an was dissenting speech.

These changes in the *matn* of the reports suggest that the Prophet's laughter was manipulated by various collectors over time. Therefore a chart plotting the types of laughter against the death date of the collectors might be useful to detect if there are any particular trends or developments that caused this change and whether there was indeed a manipulation.

Figure (13) shows the different laughter type counts for both Sunni and Shi'ite narrations.

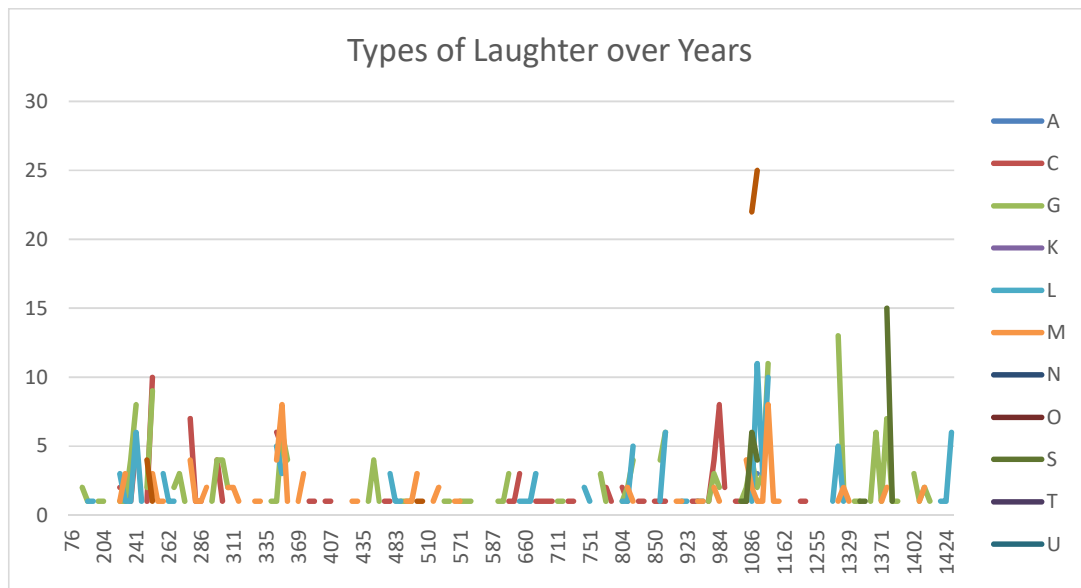


Figure 13 - Types of Laughter over Years

Plotting all the different types of laughter A (amazed, laughed till surprised, laughed wondering) C (mercy chapter, joking chapter, chapter) G (laugh, laughed, the smile of the knowing) K (2 Types of

laughter), L (but a smile, laughed a little, little laughter, mostly smiled, only smiled, smile, smiled), M (abundant laughter, guffaw, indulged in laughter, laugh like never before, laugh showing back teeth, laughed showing canines, laughed till fell on back, laughed till he covered his mouth, laughed showing last tooth, laughed showing molars, laughing and smiling happily, most smiles, smiled then laughed, showing back teeth, may your teeth laugh, the laughing man), N (angry smile, hollow laughter, did not laugh), O (laugh not cry), S (fun, happiness, joke, joking), T (laughing angels), U (laugh or smile maybe smiled, when he laughed), X (None, no laughter) and Z (did not joke) resulted in an unclear confusing chart that is difficult to interpret and it is impossible to find a clear trend. Therefore some of the types were eliminated, as they were minimal in quantity and only four types were selected to be plotted, namely the general laughter G, the lessor laughter L, the much laughter M and no laughter Z (did not joke). The results were plotted in Figure (14)

Figure (14) shows selected laughter type counts for both Sunni and Shi'ite narrations.

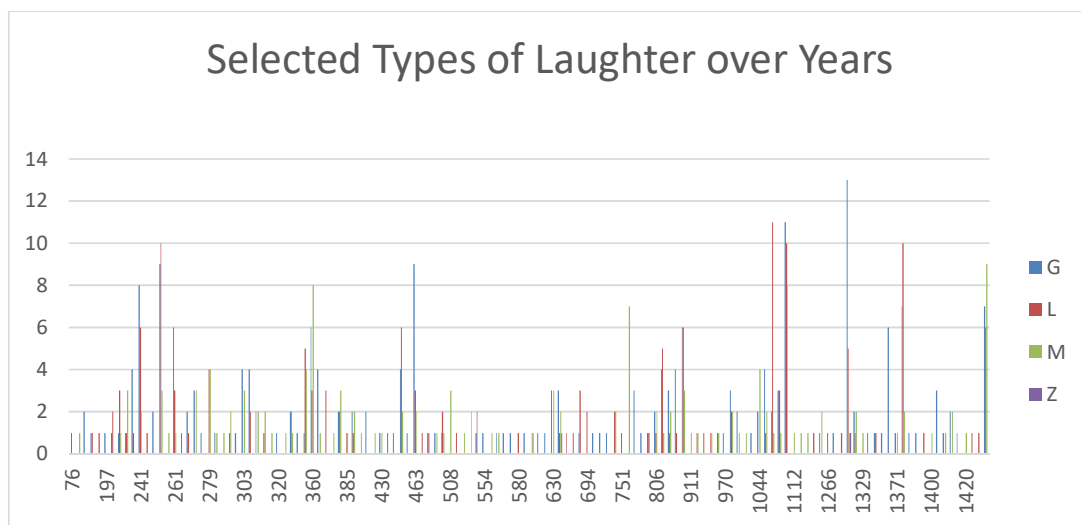


Figure 14 - Selected Types of Laughter over Years

Again the chart includes too many variables and is unclear and difficult to interpret. Therefore the similar types of laughter were added together to form two groups M (much) and L (less). For the first group M, the counts of A, G and M were added together, as they all show laughter, whether it is

abundant, amazed, showing various teeth or without an additional adjective. As for the second group L, the counts of L, N and Z were added together as they all show the opposite of the first group, namely reduced laughter as in barely a smile or no joking. The remaining types O (laugh not cry), S (fun, happiness, joke, joking), T (laughing angels), U (laugh or smile maybe smiled, when he laughed) and X (None) were not included as they are very low in numbers, as shown in the previous chapter. Moreover, the death dates of the authors were grouped in buckets of a hundred years for clarity. The results were plotted in Figure (15).

Figure (15) shows combined laughter type counts for Sushi (both Sunni and Shi'ite) narrations.

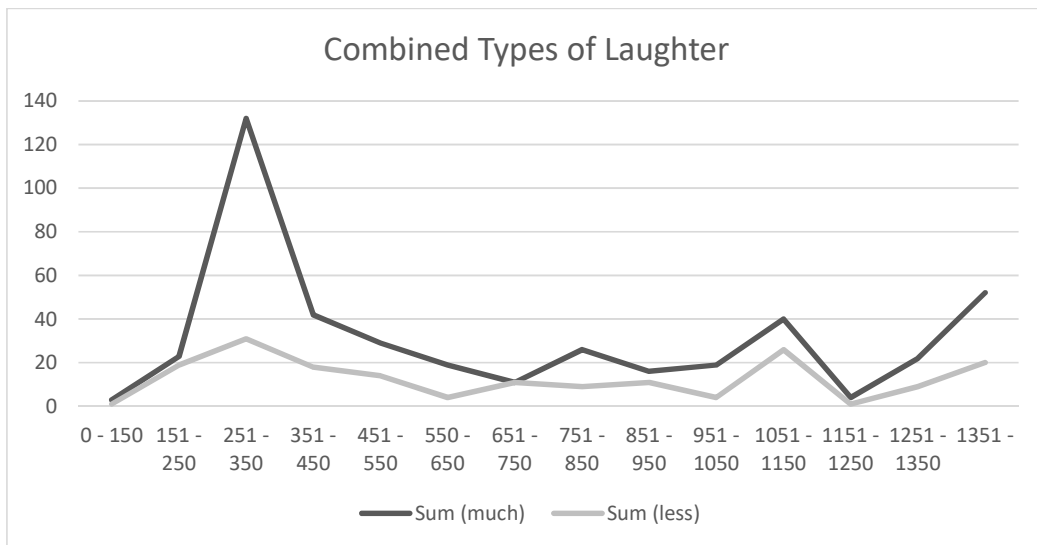


Figure 15 - Combined Types of Laughter

The Chart shows a steady rise in the depiction of various forms of laughter until 251/865, which is then followed by a sharp decrease until 651/1253. The depictions of seriousness or advice not to laugh also rises, but at a much slower pace. It remains below 20 throughout except on two occasions, namely 251/865 and 1051/1641.

Factors affecting the depiction of the Prophet's laughter

There are several factors that affect the depiction of laughter and seriousness and even weeping in the *aḥādīth* collections to varying degrees, before and during (251/865 to 651/1253), the period in question. These factors are the Prophet's biographies, the political context, and ascetic Sufism.

1) Prophet's Biographies

An important factor in the reduction of laughter in the *aḥādīth* is the change in the Prophet's image and his elevation from the Qur'anic human to a superhuman being or even a demigod as depicted in the *Sīra*. Though the Qur'an says in verse [22:75] that Allah chooses messengers from among angels and from among people, many other verses emphasize Muḥammad's humanity. The Qur'an repeatedly commands Muḥammad to tell people that he is human, a man like them.⁶⁹⁴ People in his community frequently asked him to provide signs from heaven, or miracles sent from God.⁶⁹⁵ However, his human nature prevented him from performing such miracles in the Qur'an. When he is asked yet again, he is commanded to say that *ghayb* (the unseen) belongs to God alone.⁶⁹⁶ However, that did not stop biographers from ascribing numerous miracles to Muḥammad.

This change in the Prophet's image in the *Sīra*, dealing with his biography and *maghāzī* (military expeditions) received scholarly attention and perhaps the most comprehensive study is Tarif Khalidi's book *Images of Muḥammad : Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries*.⁶⁹⁷ It illustrates how the Prophet's biography was constructed, reconstructed, changed, supplemented and used in Muslim cultures and branches during different eras. Khalidi's concern is not the historical Muḥammad of first/seventh-century Arabia, but the Muḥammad described in the *Sīra* works throughout Muslim history and how the different authors applied the information they inherited, as well as how and why they made the Prophet a part of their own perceptions, thus changing his depiction.

⁶⁹⁴ See for example verses [14:11], [17:93], [18:110] and [41:6].

⁶⁹⁵ See for example verses [6:8-9], [7:203], [11:12], [13:7, 27], [17:90-3] and [25:7-8].

⁶⁹⁶ See for example verses [10:20] and [27:65].

⁶⁹⁷ Khalidi, Tarif. 2009. *Images of Muḥammad : Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries*. New York: Doubleday.

Khalidi starts by exploring the tension between the human Muḥammad and the one performing miracles, predicting future events, and conversing with angels.⁶⁹⁸ He shows that in the beginning, the biographers used many elements in Muḥammad's traditional life, to bring him nearer to Muslims by picturing him as an ordinary, frail, and fallible human being, like them; thus making him easily followed and imitated.⁶⁹⁹ However, as time progressed “*Muḥammad's superhuman qualities - his pre-eternity, miraculous powers, and sinlessness - are asserted in order to fortify the faith of his followers.*”⁷⁰⁰ Yet the Qur'an does not ascribe any of these qualities to him and asserts in verse [48:2] that Allah may forgive him all his sins, those of the past and those to follow, denying him infallibility. Muḥammad's *iṣma* (immunity from sin), being completely sinless and immune from both *kabā'ir* (major sins) and *saghā'ir* (minor sins) is a recurrent subject in the *Sīra*.⁷⁰¹ However, there are several verses that are critical of Muḥammad's behaviour. They are collectively called as *ayāt al-ʾitāb* (verses of reproach), demonstrating his humanity and fallibility.⁷⁰² Al-Zurqānī devotes a whole chapter to *ayāt al-ʾitāb*.⁷⁰³ Nagel adds verse [53:43] to them, arguing that the reminder that it is God who makes men laugh and weep, was also intended as a reprimand.⁷⁰⁴

The *Hadīth* also records an image of Muḥammad as one who predicts the future, performs miracles, and contacts the supernatural world and the unseen,⁷⁰⁵ as discussed in the previous chapter. This happens regardless of the Qur'an asserting in verse [3:144] that Muḥammad is but a messenger, following other messengers before him. Khalidi points out that all messengers, while enjoying an elevated status, were in fact “*intensely, painfully human, prone to the doubts and crises and misfortunes that befall the rest of us.*”⁷⁰⁶

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, viii.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid, 210.

⁷⁰² See for example verses [4:105-107], [7:1-2], [8:67], [9:43], [9:80], [9:113], [10:94], [11:12], [15:97], [17:73-75], [18:6-7], [18:24], [26:3], [27:70], [28:56], [35:8], [39:36], [52:48], [66:1-2], [68:48-50], [80:1-11].

⁷⁰³ al-Zurqānī, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīm. n.d. *Manāhil al-ʾirfān fī ʾulūm al-Qurʾān*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʾĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa shurakāh, 2: 392-398

⁷⁰⁴ Nagel, Tilman. 2008. *Mohammed Leben und Legende*. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag. 122.

⁷⁰⁵ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 44.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, 31.

While Muḥammad was a visionary and a moral model, “he was utterly human; a man who repeatedly emphasizes his human limitations, his non-miraculous powers and inability to compete with Moses and Jesus in this field, and his constant embarrassments, irritations, frustrations, and fears.”⁷⁰⁷ Khalidi is tempted to conclude, that *Sīra* writers “may well have scooped up what they found in a large pool of Middle Eastern miracle stories and adapted them to Muḥammad.”⁷⁰⁸ The insertion of miracles into his biographies also received scholarly attention. Amin agrees with Khalidi that the human prophet was replaced with a protagonist featuring in irrational myths and miraculous stories, and as mentioned in chapter four, neither Muḥammad nor his Companions, in adherence to the Qur’an, attributed any miracles to him.⁷⁰⁹ Rubin also agrees with this assessment.⁷¹⁰ Sellheim’s systematic literary study of one of Muḥammad’s early biographies, much like Amin, concludes that Ibn Ishāq was thorough and clearly distinguished between real and fabricated.⁷¹¹ Sellheim points to three stages in the literary development of the *Sīra*, that he calls *Schichten* (layers).⁷¹² He argues that the *Grundschicht* (ground layer) is the most authentic, containing traditions of actual events in Muḥammad’s homeland (Mecca and Medina).⁷¹³ In the first layer Muḥammad’s legendary image emerges, reflecting, much like Amin argued, the inclusion of non-Arab material from Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Persian origins. Horovitz also argues that the new prophet had to inherit his predecessors and had to wear their saints’ clothing,⁷¹⁴ which includes their miracles. Sellheim’s final layer includes textual manipulations to embed political interests of various Islamic groups.⁷¹⁵ Schöller states that Islamic culture is very text-centric.⁷¹⁶ He essentially agrees with Sellheim, by stating that while the religious aspect of the *Sīra* tradition is apparent, it should not be

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid, 32.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid, 67.

⁷⁰⁹ Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim’s Guide*, 48.

⁷¹⁰ Rubin, Uri. 1995. *The Eye of the Beholder the Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims : A Textual Analysis*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 2.

⁷¹¹ Sellheim, Rudolf. 1965/1966. “Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte. Die Muhammed-Biographie des Ibn Ishāq.” *Oriens* 18/19: 33-91, 35.

⁷¹² Ibid, 45.

⁷¹³ Ibid, 48.

⁷¹⁴ Horovitz, Josef. 1914. “Zur Muḥammadlegende.” *Der Islam* 5 (1): 41–61, 42.

⁷¹⁵ Sellheim. Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte, 45.

⁷¹⁶ Schöller, Marco. 1998. *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie : eine quellenkritische Analyse der Sīra-Überlieferung zu Muḥammads Konflikt mit den Juden*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 7.

forgotten that the *Sīra* is subject to both a literary and a political impetus and that the political aspect is understandable when one considers that for example Ibn Ishāq's work was commissioned by the Abbasid court.⁷¹⁷ Schöller also shows that information about Muḥammad's life and achievements served particular individuals or families well, in that it helped emphasize and highlight their ancestors' roles in the Prophet's environment, and on the other hand, it also served to consolidate (certain social or religious) group identities.⁷¹⁸

Khalidi and Amin agree that the *Sīra* was essentially fixed by certain authors. While Amin mentions Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī, Ibn Sa'd and al-Ṭabarī,⁷¹⁹ Khalidi also adds Ibn Hishām, and al-Balādhurī.⁷²⁰

It can be argued, that by the period in question (251/865 to 651/1253), the *Sīra*'s content was canonized to a great extent and the image of the Prophet had greatly changed, establishing him as superhuman or as a demigod. Rahman attributes the Prophet's greatness to the fact that he was a human being like other humans, and argues that it is an injustice to him to depict him as superhuman possessing supernatural powers.⁷²¹ Mirbagheri also agrees that the classical religious biographies overlook Muḥammad's very humanity, "*his experiences, his rationality, his brinksmanship, his taste, his courage, his free choice, his likes and dislikes, his input and ultimately his character as a human being*" and laments the near-complete disregard of Muḥammad's human nature."⁷²²

It is precisely this human nature that allows Muḥammad to laugh with his community, to cry over his son's death, and to feel anger, doubts or frustrations. Yet, the more superhuman he becomes, the more he loses his human characteristics, which is also reflected in the *aḥādīth*. It was argued that men are restricted by human limitations and are influenced by human passions, yet demigods are not, as they

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁷¹⁹ Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*, 43

⁷²⁰ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 57.

⁷²¹ Rahman, Afzalur. 1992. *Muḥammad, Encyclopaedia of Seerah*. Vols. 8 'Man of Sublime Character, Graceful Conduct and Charming Manners'. 8 vols. London: Muslim Schools Trust, 344.

⁷²² Mirbagheri, S. M. Farid. 2012. *War and Peace in Islam : A Critique of Islamicist political Discourses*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 123.

are stripped of human characteristics.⁷²³ While this applies to some demigods, with super-humans, their human characteristics are enhanced and they are endowed with additional powers or superpowers.⁷²⁴ With Muḥammad, it was a mixture of both. While he was stripped of some of the human characteristics, like laughter, sadness, fragility and frustration, he became endowed with superpowers to affect miracles, know the future, vanquish his enemies receive help from angels, feed an entire army with scraps and cause water to gush forth from a dry well, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

The relationship between *Sīra* and *ḥadīth* is very close, which is why these developments in the *Sīra* also influenced the *Ḥadīth* or vice versa. Khalidi points out that in the *aḥādīth*, Muḥammad is also “seen to be exposing the supernatural order that lies just above the natural order and thereby taking on a role hitherto largely the preserve of God in the *Qur’an*.”⁷²⁵ Therefore, Muḥammad is not just God’s messenger, but also God’s active instrument, possessing complete access to the world above and beyond this world, and a number of superhuman attributes that allow him to unlock the secrets of nature.⁷²⁶ While Douglas argues that *Sīra* is both an antecedent and counter-genre to the *ḥadīth*,⁷²⁷ Schöller opines that the *Sīra* must be seen in the context of the development of the *ḥadīth* tradition, and can be interpreted as the desire for the constant presence of the state of salvation.⁷²⁸ Görke points out that while some scholars argued that the biographical material is fundamentally *ḥadīth* material arranged chronologically, others have argued the opposite, namely that *ḥadīth* material originally consists of narrative reports about Muḥammad’s life, which were later stripped of their historical context to produce normative texts.⁷²⁹ Görke argues that both views are flawed and both genres emerged as separate

⁷²³ Jewett, Sarah Orne, ed. 1897. “Editor’s Table - The Demigods of Greek Mythology.” *The New England Magazine* 16: 124-128, 126.

⁷²⁴ Possamai, Adam. 2006. “Superheroes and the Development of Latent Abilities: A Hyper-real Re-enchantment?” In *Popular Spiritualities : the Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*, edited by Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips, 53-62. Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 54.

⁷²⁵ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 46.

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Young, Douglas C. 2004. *Rogues and Genres : Heneric Transformation in the Spanish Picaresque and Arabic Maqāma*. Newark, Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta, 46.

⁷²⁸ Schöller. *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie*, 27.

⁷²⁹ Görke, Andreas. 2011. “The Relationship between Maghāzī and Ḥadīth in early Islamic Scholarship.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74 (2): 171-185.

fields; yet influenced one another while preserving their distinctive features. Shaping and transferring traditions from one field to the other was common, but mainly without any deliberate changes to the text.⁷³⁰ Khalidi shows that in the *Ḥadīth*, miracles are usually collected in a separate chapter or section, while in the *Sīra* these miracles are included in the narrative.⁷³¹ Khalidi also states that the *Ḥadīth* is under the direct control of its collector/transmitter at all times.⁷³² Nagel observes in the *Ḥadīth* literature an aim to eliminate historical contexts and instead create timeless, universally valid statements.⁷³³ Berg remarks that it is possible to trace a theme "from the *Sīra*-maghāzī literature, where this was historically articulated, to the sunna-ḥadīth literature, where it was idealized and hence shorn of its historical dimension".⁷³⁴

Another point to consider with regard to the influence of *Sīra* on *Ḥadīth* or vice versa, as well as the inclusion of myths, legends and material from Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Persian origins is the fact mentioned by Motzki, that about three quarters of the non-Arab legal scholars had an eastern background and came from the regions of the former Sassanid Empire; with only a few scholars having Christian or Jewish roots.⁷³⁵ Motzki sees this as an explanation for the numerous instances of borrowing from Roman, Persian civilization, Christianity and Judaism.⁷³⁶ Kister concludes that the transmission of *Ḥadīth*, edifying stories, stories of the prophets and saints, were widely disseminated by a new generations of scholars from the beginning of the second/eighth century onwards, among whom the *mawālī* (converts of non-Arab origin) probably formed the majority.⁷³⁷ Ibn Khaldūn already opined that: "it is a remarkable fact that, with few exceptions, most Muslim scholars both in the religious and in the

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 76.

⁷³² Ibid, 50.

⁷³³ Nagel, Tilman: *Hadith – oder: Die Vernichtung der Geschichte*, in: *XXV. Deutscher Orientalistentag*, Vorträge, ZDMG Supplementa 10. Stuttgart 1994, S. 118-128.

⁷³⁴ Berg, Herbert. 2009. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam : The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*. London: Routledge, 174.

⁷³⁵ Motzki, Harald. 1999. "The Role of Non-Arab Converts in the Development of Early Islamic Law." *Islamic Law and Society* 6 (3): 293-317, 293.

⁷³⁶ Ibid, 296.

⁷³⁷ Kister, M. J. 1998. "...Lā taqra'ū l-qur'āna 'alā l-mušāfiyyīn wa-lā taḥmilū l-'ilma 'ani l-ṣāḥāfiyyīn...: Some Notes on the Transmission of Ḥadīth." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 22: 127-162, 162.

intellectual sciences have been non-Arabs.”⁷³⁸ He further writes that most *ḥadīth* scholars were Persians and that all the scholars working in the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) were Persians, which also applies to speculative theologians and to most Qur’an commentators, concluding that “only the Persians engaged in the task of preserving knowledge and writing systematic scholarly works.”⁷³⁹ Amin also mentions areas in which Persian domination was clearly visible, like narrative and wisdom literature and scholarship in numerous religious disciplines.⁷⁴⁰ Six canonical Sunni *Ḥadīth* collectors were of Persian origins: al-Bukhārī (Bukhara), Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (Nishapur), Ibn Māja (Qazwin), Abū Dāwūd (Sijistan), al-Tirmidhī (Termez) and al-Nasāī (Nasa),⁷⁴¹ in addition to al-Ṭabarī (Tabaristan), author of one of the canonical *Sīra* works.

We can conclude, that regardless of whether the *Sīra-maghāzī* literature influenced the *Ḥadīth* or vice versa, the fact remains that the human Prophet was turned into a superhuman being with enhanced powers, less human limitations, no sins, and reduced influence of human passions and emotions. Therefore, the manipulation of the *aḥādīth* texts to reduce the laughter in accordance with his elevation to the status of a superhuman being is not only likely but also very plausible.

2) Political Context

The period in question falls within the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty lasting from 132/750 to 656/1258. Looking at the political context, right before 251/865 and after, there were two main factors which directly or indirectly led to the censorship of laughter, the disintegration of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire and the *Miḥna*.

After the Golden Age of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170/786-193/809) the dynasty started to show signs of disintegration. After al-Rashīd’s death, a civil war broke out between his sons, al-Amīn and al-Ma‘mūn. This was considered by some scholars as a continuation of the social struggles of the preceding period, like for example the revolts by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother Ibrāhīm, in

⁷³⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad. 1978. *The Muqaddimah*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge & Kegan, 735.

⁷³⁹ Ibid, 736.

⁷⁴⁰ Amin, Ahmad. 1933. *Ḍuḥā al-Islām*. 3 vols. Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Miṣriyya, 1:179-181.

⁷⁴¹ Hovannisian, Richard G, and Georges Sabagh, . 1998. *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 93.

Medina and Basra, during the reign of al-Manṣūr (r. 136/754-158/775).⁷⁴² This war expanded to engulf the entire territory, hence it was named the 'Fourth *Fitna*, 'lasting from (186/811-203/819).⁷⁴³ Al-Ma'mūn (r. 197/813-218/833) was followed by al-Mu'taṣim (r. 218/833—227/842) then by al-Wāthiq (r. 227/842-262/847). Both let their private Turkish bodyguards extend their influence over the court.⁷⁴⁴ Al-Mu'taṣim introduced non-Muslim Berber, Slav, and especially Turkish mercenary forces into his personal army, who eventually became so powerful that they did not hesitate to assassinate any caliph who opposed their demands. By favouring the Turks and suppressing the Arab element, al-Mu'taṣim hastened the decline of the 'Abbāsīd Empire.⁷⁴⁵ Al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861) was assassinated as part of a coup instigated by the Turks, thus sealing the fate of the 'Abbāsīd Empire.

The revolt of the *Zanj* and the periodic raids by the Qarāmiṭa show the political, religious and social instability of the caliphate.⁷⁴⁶ Madelung argues that the Ismā'īlī missionary activity of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (d. 291/904), leader of the Qarāmiṭa, probably commenced long before the year 261/874-5.⁷⁴⁷ Ḥamdān revolted against the 'Abbāsīds in 286/899 and occupied parts of Syria and was executed in Baghdād. The Qarāmiṭa continued after him and in 317/930, viciously slaughtered the pilgrims and Meccans, plundered and desecrated Mecca and stole the Black Stone of the Ka'ba.⁷⁴⁸ After twenty-two years, in 339/950, the Black Stone was returned in exchange for a large ransom paid from the 'Abbāsīd treasury.⁷⁴⁹ Additionally, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Zanjī (d. 270/ 883), led the rebellion of black slaves (*Zanj*),

⁷⁴² Zaman, Muḥammad Qasim. 1997. *Religion and Politics Under the Early Abbasids - The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite*. Leiden: Brill, 71.

⁷⁴³ Lewis, B., "Abbāsīds", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 08 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0002>

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Zetterstéén, K. V., "al-Mu'taṣim", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition (1913-1936), Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 12 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_4947>

⁷⁴⁶ Miquel, A., Brice, W.C., Sourdel, D., Aubin, J., Holt, P.M., Kelidar, A., Blanc, H., MacKenzie, D.N., Pellat, Ch., Laoust, H. et al., "Irāq", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 03 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0376>

⁷⁴⁷ Madelung, W., "Qarmaṭī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 06 June 2020 Khal<http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0451>

⁷⁴⁸ Daftary, Farhad. 1990. *The Isma'īlis : Their History and Doctrines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 162.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, 164.

imported in large numbers into 'Abbāsīd Iraq, disrupting the region for fifteen years (255/869 - 270/883), causing immense damage and killing thousands of people.⁷⁵⁰

The 'Abbāsīd state became weak and the distant provinces no longer respected its authority. There are many reasons for this, most notably the emergence of *shu'ūbiyya*.⁷⁵¹ This tendency appeared in the 'Abbāsīd state for many reasons, most importantly the ethnic diversity and appointment of non-Arabs as state officials and administrators by 'Abbāsīd caliphs. After the social inequalities against non-Arabs in the former Umayyad Empire, the 'Abbāsīds relied mainly on Persians, who resented the Umayyads.⁷⁵² The influence of the Turks in the 'Abbāsīd state also increased until they controlled the state, all its provinces, appointed officials and dominated the caliphate after the end of al-Wāthiq's reign.⁷⁵³ The provincial officials sought power, hence they seized the opportunity of the central authority's weakening to govern independently.⁷⁵⁴ One of the factors that encouraged the spread of separatist movements was the expansion of the 'Abbāsīd state, until it became a huge empire extending from the borders of China to the Central Maghreb in North Africa. However, this expansion of territory, instead of being a strength turned into a weakness and eventually caused its fragmentation and disintegration, because of the distance between the various parts of the state and its capital. It also allowed the governors in remote provinces to exceed their powers, become independent, and handle their territories' affairs without fear of the armies coming from the capital to put down their separatist movements.⁷⁵⁵

The separatist movements and territories that became independent were many. The Aghlabids, a Muslim dynasty that first held Ifrīqiya in the name of the 'Abbāsīds, became autonomous, ruling from

⁷⁵⁰ Popovic, Alexandre, "Alī b. Muḥammad al-Zanjī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 03 June 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23102>

⁷⁵¹ Movement favoring non-Arab over Arabs.

⁷⁵² Juḥā, Shafīq, Bahj 'Uthmān, and Munīr al-Ba'labakī. 1999. *al-Muṣawwar fī al-tārīkh*. Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 5-6.

⁷⁵³ al-Ya'qūbī, Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb b. Ja'far b. Wahb b. Wāḍiḥ al-ma'rūf bi. 1993. *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*. Edited by 'Abd al-Amīr 'Alī Muhannā. Beirut: Manshūrāt Mu'assasat al-A'lamī lil-Maṭbū'āt, 441.

⁷⁵⁴ Ṭaqqūsh, Muḥammad Suhayl. 2008. *Tārīkh al-Ṭūlūniyyīn wa-al-Akshshidiyyīn wa-al-Ḥamdāniyyīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 29.

⁷⁵⁵ Juḥā, Shafīq, Bahj 'Uthmān, and Munīr al-Ba'labakī. *al-Muṣawwar fī al-tārīkh*, 8-10.

184/800 at al-Qayrawān.⁷⁵⁶ The dynasty fell 287/900 to the Fāṭimids.⁷⁵⁷ The Ikhshīdids, a Muslim Turkish dynasty, ruled Egypt and Syria from 323/935-358/969. The founder, Muḥammad b. Ṭughj, was appointed governor of Egypt by al-Rādī (d. 329/940) and later became autonomous.⁷⁵⁸ Egypt also became autonomous under Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (c. 254/868-292/905), originally, like his father, a member of the Central Asian/Turkic slave military created in Baghdad, later governor of ‘Abbāsīd Egypt before he became autonomous, establishing the Ṭūlūnid dynasty.⁷⁵⁹

The first four Fāṭimid caliphs lived in North Africa until, in 362/973. Al-Mu‘izz then left for Egypt, which was conquered, by his general Jawhar al-Ṣiqillī, with scarcely any bloodshed in 358/969. The Fāṭimid armies repeatedly occupied Damascus but could not hold it, until, in 364/975 a Turkish former general of the Būyids, Alptekin, seized the city.⁷⁶⁰ The Būyids or Buwayhids ruled in Iraq from 334/945 to 447/1055. Prior to the invasion of the Saljūq Turks, they were the most influential dynasty in the Middle East, but gradually fell to the Ghaznavid and Saljūq Turks.⁷⁶¹

The Saljūqs, a Turkish dynasty, ruled from (429/1038-590/1194) and the Saljūqs of Asia Minor, ruled from (469/1077—702/1302).⁷⁶² Moreover, there were other smaller dynasties like the Ṭāhirids,

⁷⁵⁶ Marçais, G. and Schacht, J., “Aghlabids or Banu ‘l-Aghlab”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0024>

⁷⁵⁷ Monés, Hussain, “Djawhar al-Ṣiqillī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0024>

⁷⁵⁸ Becker, C. H., “Ikhshīdids”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition (1913-1936), Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_3142>

⁷⁵⁹ Gordon, Matthew S., “Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_THREE_0024>

⁷⁶⁰ Halm, Heinz, “Fāṭimids”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_THREE_0024>

⁷⁶¹ Cahen, Cl., “Buwayhids or Būyids”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1569>

⁷⁶² “Seldjuqs”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition (1913-1936), Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 12 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_5227>

Ghaznavids, Shīr Daylamīs, Ṣaffārids, Samanids, Simjurids, Ghūrīds (or Shansabānīs), the Khwarazmian dynasty, the Delhi Sultanate, most of whom were swept away by the Mongols.⁷⁶³

This fragmentation of the ‘Abbāsīd state illustrates Ibn Khaldūn’s point that dynasties have a natural life span just as individuals do, even if their durations differs.⁷⁶⁴ According to him, no dynasty lasts beyond the life (span) of three generations, where the first generation is brave and retains toughness and savagery, traits of desert nomads, causing people to fear them and to submit. The second generation, influenced by royal authority and wealth changes to sedentary culture and luxury, breaking group feeling.⁷⁶⁵ The third generation, reaching the peak of luxury, become dependent and need to be defended (by someone else), with the group feeling disappearing completely. Needing others forces them to take many clients and followers until they are finally destroyed in the fourth generation to begin a new cycle.⁷⁶⁶

The most important event leading to the censorship of laughter, is the *Miḥna*, called ‘the Mu‘tazilite inquisition’ (218/833 -234/848) instigated by al-Ma‘mūn (r. 198/813-218/833) to test the *qāḍīs*, jurists, *muḥaddithūn* and scholars regarding God’s creation of the Qur’an. It is the most important event because, among other reasons, it propelled Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal into the position of public hero *par excellence* and allowed him great influence, which will be explained in more detail in the next section of *zuhd*.

Many yielded to the caliphal orders, but Ibn Ḥanbal did not, despite being imprisoned and tortured or flogged.⁷⁶⁷ Ibn Ḥanbal was released after al-Ma‘mūn’s death and became even more popular than before. The *Miḥna* was stopped under al-Mu‘taṣim, but was resurrected under al-Wāthiq (r.

⁷⁶³ Bosworth, C.E., Hillenbrand, R., Rogers, J.M., Blois, F.C. de and Darley-Doran, R.E., “Saldjūqids”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 09 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0984>

⁷⁶⁴ Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muḥaddimah*, 227.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 228.

⁷⁶⁷ Hinds, M., “Miḥna”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 08 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0732>

227/842-232/847) although in a more restrained form.⁷⁶⁸ Ibn Ḥanbal became a popular teacher, yet refrained from teaching to avoid being incarcerated again. The *Miḥna* continued during the first years of the reign of al-Mutawakkil (232/847-247/861), but in 234/849 al-Mutawakkil stopped its application and forbade the profession of the 'createdness' of the Qur'an.⁷⁶⁹ Zaman argues that the *Miḥna* was the most dramatic form in which al-Ma'mūn tried to challenge the authority of the '*ulamā*' (scholars).⁷⁷⁰ In addition to challenging and bringing down their 'orthodoxy' it served to show the caliph as more 'orthodox' than anyone else, and therefore being more worthy of being the guardian and defender of that 'orthodoxy,' while undermining the authority and social standing of the '*ulamā*'.⁷⁷¹

The jurists and the caliphs both saw themselves as representatives of God's law, and after the *Miḥna* this rivalry ended with the jurists winning, however the authority was essentially shared, with the jurists becoming the representatives of the divine law and the caliphs its executors.⁷⁷² The jurists imposed the duty of complete obedience to the ruler, interpreting the law in conformity with the existing form of government.⁷⁷³ Though the 'Abbāsids relied on jurists to enhance their own legitimacy, they enforced an extensive system of patronage to reward the jurists for their cooperation.⁷⁷⁴ It is undeniable that many religious scholars opposed the 'Abbāsids and that some were also persecuted.⁷⁷⁵ Several scholars sided with the 'Abbāsids against the Umayyads, supporting their claim and once in power, the 'Abbāsids kept these scholars close to the court, raised their status, and appointed some as judges, until all judges in the state were from among them.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁶⁸ Wensinck, A. J., "Miḥna", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition (1913-1936), Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 06 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.ueoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_4660>

⁷⁶⁹ Wensinck, A. J., "Miḥna", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition (1913-1936), Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 06 June 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.ueoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_4660>

⁷⁷⁰ Zaman. *Religion and Politics Under the Early Abbasids*, 106.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, 107-108.

⁷⁷² Abou El Fadl, Khaled. 2006. *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 93.

⁷⁷³ Tibi, Bassam. 2005. *Islam between Culture and Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK Imprint : Palgrave Macmillan, 86.

⁷⁷⁴ Abou El Fadl. *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, 94.

⁷⁷⁵ Zaman. *Religion and Politics Under the Early Abbasids*, 70.

⁷⁷⁶ Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*, 162.

Though Ibn Ḥanbal refused to obey the caliph's orders on the creation of the Qur'an, he also rejected any rebellion.⁷⁷⁷ According to Abou El Fadl, "*Islamic juristic culture, both Sunni and Shi'ite, produced many traditions counselling against fitna and advocating law and order, as Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shi'ī Imam (d. 148/765), also rejected the use of force and armed rebellion against those in power.*"⁷⁷⁸

Ibn Ḥanbal strongly supported the doctrines of 'quietism,' demanding a stop to all bloodshed, rebellion, and civil unrest as being unsafe for the people. He argued that patience and submission to rulers was better for one's religion and security.⁷⁷⁹ He based his opinion on prophetic traditions, such as "Listen and obey, even if your ruler is a black slave" and "Listen to your rulers and obey them, as long as they perform prayers"⁷⁸⁰ and "If the ruler beats you, you should remain patient; if he deprives you, you should remain patient"⁷⁸¹

The fragmentation of the 'Abbāsīd state and the various rebellions, separatist movements led the jurists to apply stricter interpretations and rulings to try and limit rebellion. Stricter interpretation of Islamic rule and punishments for those who strayed from the straight path tend to follow periods of civil unrest.⁷⁸² The interpretation resulted in renewing old rulings in stricter form and issuing new rulings to diminish laughter. For example, Muḥammad al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090) opined that guffawing, necessitates performing a new *wuḍū'* (ablutions)⁷⁸³ Maḥmūd al-Marghīnānī; (d. 616/1219) stated that if an Imam laughs and the congregation follows him, the Imam has to renew his *wuḍū'* and that guffawing while prostrating *sujūd al-sahw*⁷⁸⁴ necessitates a renewal of *wuḍū'*.⁷⁸⁵ Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) quotes

⁷⁷⁷ Abou El Fadl. *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, 96.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid, 98.

⁷⁷⁹ al-Sarhan, Saud. 2020. "Patience in Our Situation is Better than Sedition": The Shift to Political Quietism in the Sunnī Tradition." In *Political Quietism in Islam - Sunni and Shi'ite Practice and Thought*, edited by Saud al-Sarhan, 81-98. London: I. B. Tauris, 82.

⁷⁸⁰ al-Sarhan. Patience in Our Situation is Better than Sedition, 83.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid, 84.

⁷⁸² Kagay, Donald J. 2007. *War, Government, and Society in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 150.

⁷⁸³ al-Sarakhsī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. 1993. *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ*. 30 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1:328.

⁷⁸⁴ Prostration for a mistake in ritual prayer.

⁷⁸⁵ al-Marghīnānī, Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad. 2019. *al-Dhakhīrah al-burhānīyah al-musammāh Dhakhīrat al-fatāwā fi al-fiqh 'alā al-madhab al-Ḥanafī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2:131.

Abū Ḥanīfā as requiring the renewal of *wuḍūʿ* if one laughed during prayer.⁷⁸⁶ Ibn al-Humām goes even further by rejecting a witness's testimony if the witness is a jokester or someone known to lie to make people laugh.⁷⁸⁷

We can conclude that the stricter interpretation of what constitutes a right path, also played a role in the manipulation of the *aḥādīth* texts, not only to forbid rebellion, but also to reduce laughter. Restricting the populace's behaviour takes many forms. The manipulation of the reports is not only likely but very plausible.

3) Ascetic Sufism

Long before 251/865 a form of Sufism appeared, which focused on the cultivation of internal spiritual life and an outwardly *zuhd* (ascetism). This renunciatory form of piety is characterised by abstinence from worldly pleasures.⁷⁸⁸ Donner argues that the idea of the impending Last Day is mentioned explicitly in several Qur'anic verses, including [33:63], [78:40], [7:187].⁷⁸⁹ He opines that this reflects the believers' conviction that the 'Hour' was imminent, and motivated them to focus on piety and on living righteously.⁷⁹⁰ According to Karamustafa, renunciation was a widespread form of piety in Muslim communities during the first century of 'Abbāsīd rule, though the renunciants (*zuhhād*) and pietists (*'ubbād*, *nussāk*) had not yet organised into a homogeneous movement.⁷⁹¹

However, *zuhd* was already practiced during the Prophet's lifetime. Some of the *Ṣaḥāba* (Companions) sought a close spiritual relationship with God, hence, they multiplied their acts of worship and religious rituals, and practiced seclusion, choosing asceticism, refraining from worldly pleasures, and imposing restrictions on themselves and on their desires, not imposed by Islam. The Prophet criticised this trend to his Companions, advising them not to neglect their families nor ignore their rights

⁷⁸⁶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. 2013. *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtaṣid*. Edited by 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwad and 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjud. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1:44.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibn al-Humām, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid. 1938. *Sharḥ faṭḥ al-qadīr*. 10 vols. Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyah al-Kubrā, 6:40.

⁷⁸⁸ Yazaki, Saeko. 2014. "Morality in Early Sufi Literature." In *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, edited by Lloyd Ridgeon, 73-97. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 77.

⁷⁸⁹ Donner, Fred McGraw. 2010. *Muḥammad and the Believers : at the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 78.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid, 79.

⁷⁹¹ Karamustafa, Ahmet T. 2007. *Sufism - The Formative Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1.

and that sexual intercourse with one's wife was a form of charity favoured over abstinence.⁷⁹² Amin argues that many devout Muslims pursued this route, due to the excessive worldly indulgence of the Umayyads, along with the long arguments about the minute details of Sharī'a, rituals, and worship from jurists in the 'Abbāsīd era.⁷⁹³ Amin adds that Sufism was partly, a strong reaction "on the part of gentle, sensitive and transparent souls to the excessive concern of the schools of jurisprudence with the superficial behaviour of the individual and an affirmation of the fact that the apparent manifestations of the law are not what Islam is all about, and that the jurists' logic is not a sincere expression of this religion."⁷⁹⁴ Moreover, Sufis viewed the unreasonable, excessive indulgence in matters as completely unrelated to the pure spiritual relationship between humans and God. The *Miḥna* contributed to the spread of the movement while the quality of political life deteriorated due to the arrival of the Turkish soldiers as mentioned above.⁷⁹⁵

The word Sufi was used as early as the second/eighth century to refer to some renunciants and pietists wearing wool to distinguish themselves from other renunciants wearing linen and cotton.⁷⁹⁶ According to Karamustafa, "the 'wool-wearers,' were social activists associated with the practice of *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong).⁷⁹⁷

The *nussāk* were sometimes regarded as the *ruhbān* (monks) of Islam. They displayed austere penance, humility, contrition and incessant mourning and were also sometimes called "weepers" (*bakkā'ūn*) for making the ritualized expression of sorrow part of their rituals.⁷⁹⁸ Jones argues that: "the Qur'an encourages individual prayer 'in secret,'⁷⁹⁹ yet the Prophet said: "the believer weeps in his heart,

⁷⁹² Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*, 99.

⁷⁹³ Ibid, 102.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, 103

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid, 102.

⁷⁹⁶ Karamustafa, Ahmet T. 2007. *Sufism - The Formative Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 6.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid, 1.

⁷⁹⁸ Cornell, Rkia Elaroui. 2019. *Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth: The Many Faces of Islam's Most Famous Woman Saint, Rabi'a al-Adawiyya*. London: Oneworld Publications, 112.

⁷⁹⁹ See for example verse [7:55]

the hypocrite in his skull;” therefore some jurists criticised public weeping as an unseemly spectacle manifesting the ostentatious and hypocritical piety of the preacher and the audience.”⁸⁰⁰

A famous Sufi of the *bakkā’ūn* is Ḥasan al- Baṣrī (d. 110/728) who was known as the ‘weeping Sufi.’⁸⁰¹ He, like Rābi’a, rejected worldly goods and status.⁸⁰² Ascetic weeping was a widespread practice in Rābi’a’s time, so that Mālik b. Anas, founder of the Mālikī *madhhab* (d. 179/796), devoted an entire chapter of *al-Muwatta’* to “The Excellence of Weeping out of Fear of God.”⁸⁰³

Rābi’a was not the only Sufi woman known for weeping, for Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), the Ṣūfī hagiographer and Qur’an exegete, mentions in his *Dhikr al-niswah al-muta’abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt* many Sufi women of the *bākiyāt* (weepers) such as Ghufayra al-‘Ābida, who wept until she became blind,⁸⁰⁴ Sha’wāna, is another of the *bākiyāt* and also of *al-mubkiyāt* (those who induced others to weep),⁸⁰⁵ ‘Athāma bint Bilāl b. Abī-l-Dardā’, also became blind,⁸⁰⁶ Um Sa’īd bint ‘Alqama al-Nakh’iyya⁸⁰⁷ and ‘Ā’isha, wife of Abū Ḥafṣ were all from among the weepers.⁸⁰⁸ Perhaps the most important one is Mu’ādha al-‘Adawiyya (d. 83/702),⁸⁰⁹ who founded a school of women’s asceticism in Basra. ⁸¹⁰ Mu’ādha was ‘Ā’isha’s servant, Companion and also a *Ḥadīth* transmitter.⁸¹¹ She reports that ‘Ā’isha wore patched clothes and sometimes reprimanded the Prophet’s Companions for their extravagance. Moreover, she reported ‘Ā’isha’s “tearful readings of the Qur’an and long periods of fasting and prayers.”⁸¹² However, according to Cornell: “the question left unanswered by such accounts

⁸⁰⁰ Jones, Linda G. 2013. ““He Cried and Made Others Cry”: Crying as a Sign of Pietistic Authenticity or Deception in Medieval Islamic Preaching.” In *Crying in the Middle Ages : Tears of History*, edited by Elina Gertsman, 102-135. New York ; London: Routledge, 104.

⁸⁰¹ Jackson, Roy. 2006. *Fifty Key Figures in Islam*. London: Routledge, 36.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Cornell. *Rabi’a From Narrative to Myth*, 129.

⁸⁰⁴ al-Sulamī, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn. 1993. *Dhikr al-niswah al-muta’abbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 39.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid, 47.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid, 70.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid, 35.

⁸¹⁰ Cornell. *Rabi’a From Narrative to Myth*, 51.

⁸¹¹ Ibid, 122.

⁸¹² Ibid, 124.

is whether the asceticism that ʿĀʿisha practiced at the end of her life was a consequence of her remorse for causing the disaster of the Battle of the Camel or whether she advocated asceticism as part of a new approach to spirituality. Ibn Ḥanbal lends support to the remorse hypothesis by quoting ʿĀʿisha as saying after the battle, “I wish that I were a barren tree and had never been born!”⁸¹³

ʿĀʿisha’s remorse and self-blame is also reflected in the ideas of the *malāmatiyya* (self-blamers).⁸¹⁴ Their distinguishing feature was continuous and relentless suspicion against the *nafs* (self), avoiding all public displays of piety and praiseworthy acts, while subjecting the *nafs* to constant blame (*malāma*) and self-censure, a constant struggle against desire for divine reward and also for human approval, therefore only showing one’s bad qualities.⁸¹⁵ The *malāmatiyya* refused to wear distinctive clothing, earned their own living, and had no distinct public rituals; performing *dhikr*⁸¹⁶ silently without holding any *samāʿ* (spiritual oratorio accompanying *dhikr*) sessions.⁸¹⁷

It was in the second/eighth-third/ninth century that the conception of *zuhd*, deepened and became fixed. Renunciation was not only of dress, accommodation, and good food; but also of women. Then introspective analysis progressed where emphasis was on inner and subjective asceticism, the renunciation of intentions and desires, leading to the concept of *tawakkul*.⁸¹⁸

Geneviève Gobillot analyses titles of works of that period, stating that the word *zuhd* appears forty-five times along with *taṣawwuf*, considered a synonym of *zuhd*, including *bukāʿ* (weeping), *dhamm al-dunyā* (contempt for this world), *waraʿ* (religious scruple) and *raqāʿiq* (actions that elevate man).⁸¹⁹ The earliest works, such as those of Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), describe the Prophet as the epitome of the ‘renouncer,’ and the renunciation ascribed to the Prophet and his Companions suggests a preoccupation

⁸¹³ Ibid.

⁸¹⁴ A movement of mystical tradition of piety that developed in Khurasan during the late third/ninth century. For more on the *Malāmatiyya* and their doctrine see al-Sulamī, Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn. 1942. *Risālat al-Malāmatiyya*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʿlīf wa-l-Tarjamah wa-l-Nashr.

⁸¹⁵ Karamustafa. *Sufism - The Formative Period*, 48.

⁸¹⁶ Remembering God, reciting God’s names.

⁸¹⁷ Karamustafa. *Sufism - The Formative Period*, 49.

⁸¹⁸ *Tawakkul*, literally reliance on God or trusting in His plan, also translated as God-consciousness.

⁸¹⁹ Geneviève Gobillot, “Zuhd”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 06 June 2020 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/10.1163)>

with the next world rather than the present one.⁸²⁰ According to Gobillot, Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) adds eleven other renouncers including Adam, Jesus, and the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99/717 to 101/720).⁸²¹ As of the fourth/tenth century this genre of literature includes mystics of the two preceding centuries.⁸²²

The later renunciator tradition is generally critical of laughter, partly because the Qur’an relates it to *istihzā’* (mockery) and *sukhriya* (derision) and ties it to how the unbelievers deal with the believers like in verse [53:59-60].⁸²³ While the Qur’an states that weeping is an appropriate attribute of believers in this world, it also attributes laughter to them in the hereafter as in verse [83:34].⁸²⁴ Chittick notes that al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) has no separate discussion of weeping in his *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*.⁸²⁵ Al-Ghazālī is the scholar most commonly associated with integrating Sufism into mainstream Islam.⁸²⁶ Yet al-Ghazālī has a chapter on laughter calling laughter and joking as destructive evils, falling under the section of his work on harms of the tongue, are not commendable, but when practiced within limits are not harmful.⁸²⁷

Al-Dawsarī devotes the second chapter of his book to objections about al-Ghazālī’s section of the evils of tongue. He mentions his objections, including censoring laughter and humour. The author aims to rectify the dogmatic faults and doctrinal shortcomings, accusing al-Ghazālī of considering laughter as a disobedience to God and an imperfection in character, despite the importance of verse [53:43]. He argues that this comes from the renunciator tradition and asceticism, as the *nussāk* and *zuhhād* refrained from laughter and indulged in weeping. In his opinion this is an almost prohibition

⁸²⁰ Cooperson, Michael. 2000. *Classical Arabic Biography - The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 116-117.

⁸²¹ Geneviève Gobillot, “Zuhd”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 06 June 2020 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/10.1163>>

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Chittick, William. 2005. “Weeping in Classical Sufism.” In *Holy Tears : Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, edited by Kimberley C Patton and John Stratton Hawley, 132-144. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 133.

⁸²⁴ Ibid, 134

⁸²⁵ Ibid, 135

⁸²⁶ Sonn, Tamara. 2010. *Islam : a Brief History*. Somerset: Wiley-Blackwell, 66.

⁸²⁷ al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad. 1984. *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifa. 3:127-132.

which would alienate non-Muslims giving them the impression that Islam is a religion that prohibits laughter.⁸²⁸

After establishing himself as the leading Sunni theologian and jurist of his times, al-Ghazālī abandoned his career in 488/1095, withdrew from public life and adopted an ascetic lifestyle. Knysh states that al-Ghazālī "*wanted his *Iḥyā'* to serve as a comprehensive guide for the devout Muslim to every aspect of religious life from daily worship to the purification of the heart and advancement along the personal path to God.*"⁸²⁹

Al-Ghazālī was not the only jurist/Sufi hostile to laughter. Melchert points out that early ascetics cultivated sadness over past sins and fear of judgement to come, both associated with sleeplessness and weeping.⁸³⁰ In his recent book *Before Sufism - Early Islamic Renunciant Piety*, he also includes a chapter titled '*Against Laughter*,' pointing out the renunciants' hostility to laughter, explaining it as the most important factor in alienating them from normal society.⁸³¹ Melchert quotes examples, sayings and advice to avoid or limit laughter that circulated in renunciants' circles or were reported in *zuhd* literature. For example, al-Khaḍīr instructed Moses to 'avoid disputatiousness, not to walk without a need, not to laugh except in wonder...'; 'Īsā reproached his disciples for 'laughter for other than wonder and awakening without having stayed up; Adam is said not to have laughed for a hundred years after one of his sons killed the other, and many other examples.⁸³² Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is said to have not laughed for thirty years nor joked for forty, not knowing whether or not God will accept his works?'⁸³³ Ibn Sīrīn is said to have laughed by day but wept all night.⁸³⁴ Melchert also points out that the formulation 'so and so was not seen to laugh for so many years' became a motif and included numerous renunciants.⁸³⁵

⁸²⁸ al-Dawsarī, Fāliḥ b. Muflīḥ b. Khalaf. 2015. *al-Ma'ākhidh al-'aḡā'idīyya 'alā kitāb iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn li-l-Ghazālī - rub' al-muḥlikāt*. 2 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Hudā al-Nabawī, 1:255-258.

⁸²⁹ Knysh, Alexander D. 2017. *Islam in Historical Perspective*. London ; New York: Routledge, 229.

⁸³⁰ Melchert, Christopher. 2020. *Before Sufism - Early Islamic Renunciant Piety*. Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 46.

⁸³¹ *Ibid*, 58-62.

⁸³² *Ibid*, 58.

⁸³³ *Ibid*, 60.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid*, 60.

Additionally, the renunciants justified their aversion to laughter despite the reports that the Prophet and his Companions laughed, ascribing strength to their faith. They quote Ibn ‘Umar who was asked if the Prophet’s Companions used to laugh and replied: ‘Yes, the faith in their hearts was greater than the mountains,’ thereby making it safe for them to indulge in laughter, although the same was doubtful for people in the decadent age that followed. Al-Ḥārith b. Jarīr is said to have characterised his favourite *qurrā’* (Qur’an reciters), as those who smile and laugh much. As for the one who ‘meets your cheer with a scowl and makes you feel inferior, may God not multiply his like among the Muslims.’⁸³⁶

The censorship of laughter was not only a topic for renunciants. The jurist Abū al-Qāsim al-Lālakāī (d. 418/1027) defined laughter as an act, that if one wishes happens, and if one wishes not to laugh, it also happens, because it is deliberate. He also mentions God’s laughter, discussed in the third chapter, that is unlike human laughter and explains that humans laugh differently, some smile in a dignified way, some laugh with an open mouth and others have other ways. Hearing is one way to prove laughter happened even if it is not seen.⁸³⁷ Others also mentioned this self-censorship of laughter. Mūsā b. A‘yun quotes al-Awzāī (d. 157/774) the Syrian jurisprudent saying: “we used to laugh and joke, but when we became role models we were afraid they would not follow us.” Shakīb Arslān⁸³⁸ lists several versions of al-Awzāī statement to the same effect, but with different wordings: now that our example is being followed I don’t think we may even smile, or when we became imams, we had to be restrained or circumspect.⁸³⁹ Ibn al-Jawzī attributes the same statement once to the *salaf* (forefathers),⁸⁴⁰ and another time to al-Sha‘bī, a *tābi‘ī* (follower) who was both a traditionist and jurist, (d. 103/723) that he narrated: We used to laugh and joke, but when we became role models, we could only smile.⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁶ Ibid, 159.

⁸³⁷ al-Lālakāī, Abū al-Qāsim Hibat Allāh b. al-Ḥasan b. Maṣūūr al-Ṭabaī. 2003. *Sharḥ uṣūl i’tiqād ahl al-sunnah wa-al-jamā‘ah min al-kitāb wa-al-sunnah wa-ijmā‘ al-ṣaḥābah*. 9 vols. Riyadh: Dār Ṭība, 2:13.

⁸³⁸ Lebanese politician, writer, poet and historian, also known as Amir al-Bayān (Prince of Eloquence) (d. 1946).

⁸³⁹ Arslān, Shakīb. 1933. *Maḥāsīn al-masāīl fī manāqib al-Imam Abī ‘Amr al-Awzāī*. Cairo: Maṭba‘at ‘Īsā al-Bābī wa Shurakah, 83-84.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī. 2014. *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 230.

⁸⁴¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī. 1988. *al-Quṣṣāṣ wa-l-Mudhakirīn*. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 359.

Despite the praise of tears throughout the renunciant literature, the *aḥādīth*, as demonstrated in chapter 4, attribute laughter to the Prophet far more often than weeping. Chittick makes an interesting observation “given that both laughter and weeping derive from God, and that He laughs, is the cause of laughter and weeping, we might derive three divine names, though they are not mentioned in the standard lists: *al-Daḥūk* (He who laughs) *al-Mudḥik* (the Bestower of Laughter) and *al-Mubkī* (the Bestower of Weeping).”⁸⁴²

Later Sufis appreciated humour. Frager argues that Sufi humour juxtaposes two views of life; the conventional acceptable way and one he describes as “out on the side sometimes upside down way.”⁸⁴³ He explains that humour aids better understanding, more than any other teaching method and can therefore be used as a tool to highlight faults or deteriorating relationships.⁸⁴⁴ He argues that Sufis understood that most religious teachings agree that the human heart can be opened through prayer, suffering, wisdom or love, yet humour as a catalyst to spiritual awareness is less well understood. Sufi teachers, however, knew this and used humour’s power to spontaneity and laughter, as a vital and powerful technique.⁸⁴⁵ They included endless funny stories about Sufis laughing at their own faults, as laughing at the faults is the first step in being able to release them.⁸⁴⁶ He concludes that “*learning through humour offers a great bonus, as one has a good time and the lessons penetrate subtly.*”⁸⁴⁷ Moreover the comical adventures of *Mullah Nasruddin*, said to be a beloved *Sufi* character and folk hero, were used by *Sufi* masters for centuries to illustrate profound spiritual teachings. Sufis who believe that deep intuition is the only real guide to knowledge, use these stories like exercises to effect a breakthrough into a higher wisdom.⁸⁴⁸

As demonstrated above, the biographies of the Prophet were manipulated by the biographers, but Sufis also portrayed the Prophet in a certain way, depicting him as the model Sufi to claim that they

⁸⁴² Chittick. *Weeping in Classical Sufism*, 138.

⁸⁴³ Frager, James Fadiman & Robert, ed. 1998. *Essential Sufism*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books. 161.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁶ See for example Marzolph, Ulrich. 2006. *666 wahre Geschichten* (Nasreddin Hodscha). 4th. Munich: C.H.Beck Verlag.

⁸⁴⁷ Frager. *Essential Sufism*, 162.

⁸⁴⁸ Shah, Idries. 1983. *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*. London: Octagon, 1.

were in fact the closest of Muslims to Muḥammad.⁸⁴⁹ The inclusion of miracles in Muḥammad's biographies also served the Sufis, as they then could include *karāmāt*⁸⁵⁰ (charisms, miracles) of their *awliyā'* (Friends of God).⁸⁵¹ The theologians suspected these *karāmāt* as they seemed to compete with the prophets' miracles that aimed to establish the truthfulness of their prophecy.⁸⁵² Mu'tazilite theologians in particular rejected Sufi *karāmāt* as denigrating the miracles of prophets and argued that God would not violate the laws of nature in favour of an endless line of holy men.⁸⁵³ Amin asks: "How can the common people attribute miracles to the *awliyā'* or extraordinary deeds and abilities, the likes of which the Prophet never possessed or performed?"⁸⁵⁴ He answers saying that "the easiest way to overcome this obstacle was to attribute hundreds of miracles to the Prophet."⁸⁵⁵ Some of these were described in chapter 4, like how he fed an entire army with few leftovers and a handful of dates, or how he caused water to spring up in the desert.

Berg argues that every direction and counter-direction of Islamic thought found its expression in the form of a *ḥadīth*, without any difference between the various contrasting opinions or disciplines.⁸⁵⁶ This is because religion is a combination of a sacred text and its different interpretations. While the text is from God and is therefore constant and unchanging, the interpretations are man-made and therefore varied, depending on individuals, societies and eras.⁸⁵⁷ In a previous section it was demonstrated that Muḥammad of the *Sīra* is different from Muḥammad of the Qur'an. The Sufi Muḥammad is also different from the Muḥammad of the Qur'an. Nagel goes further by stating that Muḥammad of the *Ḥadīth* is also different, standing for a religion and a society that is not that of the Qur'an and therefore not that of the

⁸⁴⁹ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 156.

⁸⁵⁰ *Karāmāt* can be defined as God-given spiritual or physical powers, granted to affirm their sanctity.

⁸⁵¹ *Awliyā'* is an Arabic word with numerous and varied meanings, including custodian, supporter, guardian, ally, protector, helper or friend. In Sufism, it denotes someone who is 'a friend of Allah' as Sufis call it. It developed later towards the English meaning of saint, though there is no sanctity in Islam, especially for humans, and some fundamentalist regard that as *shirk* (heresy).

⁸⁵² Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 164.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁴ Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*, 129-130.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸⁵⁶ Berg. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, 12.

⁸⁵⁷ Amin. *The Sorrowful Muslim's Guide*, 125

historical Muḥammad.⁸⁵⁸ In the two previous sections, it was argued that some *aḥādīth* were manipulated to incorporate certain developments in the Sīra genre and also to reflect political developments in form of restrictions on the populace by using particular narrations attributed to the Prophet to discourage rebellions, if not to prohibit them, and to encourage patience and obedience to the rulers. The *Ḥadīth* also incorporated *zuhd* trends and the sorrow of the weepers and self-blamers.

Many of the renunciants were originally *muḥaddithūn* (traditionists), yet scholars who became renunciants gave up scholarship and isolated themselves from social life to cultivate their inner life.⁸⁵⁹ In the third/ninth century renunciation became extreme and many of the renunciants left *Ḥadīth* transmission, as they found it difficult to pursue their devotional activities and *Ḥadīth* scholarship at the same time.⁸⁶⁰ Even more Sufis left *Ḥadīth* transmission, especially in the fourth/tenth century.⁸⁶¹ One of the main reasons was that *rijāl* criticism looked like *ghaybah*, insulting absent Muslims.⁸⁶² Moreover, the renunciants were offended by the *Ḥadīth* transmitters' self-importance. Melchert argues that this was probably the reason why Bishr al-Ḥāfī prayed God to forgive every step he had taken in the quest of *Ḥadīth*.⁸⁶³ Additionally, the *mudhākara* (memory contest) was probably offensive to them as it was an occasion for boasting. Renunciants were also troubled by *Ḥadīth* transmitters' failing to practice what they preached.⁸⁶⁴ Melchert states that: "in Ibn Ḥanbal's day, the spectrum of Islamic opinion on the significance of the ḥadīth ran, almost as in ours, from those who thought that the ḥadīth were an indispensable, even supremely important indicator of God's will (that is, the law), to those who thought that Muslims could work out how to lead God-pleasing lives without them. Ibn Ḥanbal lay at the Sunni extreme in favour of *ḥadīth*."⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁵⁸ Nagel. *Mohammed Leben und Legende*, 719.

⁸⁵⁹ Karamustafa. *Sufism - The Formative Period*, 2.

⁸⁶⁰ Melchert, Christopher. 2015. "Early Renunciants as Ḥadīth Transmitters." In *Ḥadīth, Piety, and Law: Selected Studies*, by Christopher Melchert, 139-150. Bristol, CT ; Exeter: Lockwood Press, 146.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid, 142.

⁸⁶² Ibid, 148.

⁸⁶³ Ibid, 148.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Melchert, Christopher. 2006. *Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 22,

Before the *Mihna* many regarded Bishr al-Ḥāfi, by virtue of his *waraʿ* (piety) and *zuhd*, as superior to Ibn Ḥanbal. However, and as mentioned above, during the *Mihna*, Ibn Ḥanbal, honoured and glorified, emerged as the upholder of the Sunni faith and came to be perceived as the standard bearer of Sunni doctrine.⁸⁶⁶ Bishr himself characterised Ibn Ḥanbal as a man in whom all aspects of *futuwwa* (chivalry) were united. He was elevated to being one of the guardian saints of Baghdad.⁸⁶⁷ As demonstrated in the previous section, Ibn Ḥanbal emerged from the *Mihna* even more popular than he already was. Sufis transmitted his statements about *zuhd*, his attitudes towards poverty and *tawakkul*.⁸⁶⁸ Ibn Ḥanbal is also said to have renounced the comforts of this world in favour of orienting himself towards God and the after-life.⁸⁶⁹ He derived much of his authority from living a conspicuously austere life.⁸⁷⁰ His unease with Sufism came from the renunciants setting too high a standard for the great majority to follow and thereby affecting the unity and equality of the community.⁸⁷¹ He himself advocated a moderate life style. Melchert describes it as “a Sunni style of renunciation, compatible with rearing a family and pursuing a trade,⁸⁷² even if he himself was a melancholy figure.⁸⁷³ He discouraged laughter and encouraged weeping, even if he was not counted among the weepers.⁸⁷⁴ His *Musnad* includes twenty-three versions with different *isnāds* of the *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet: “if only you knew what I know, you would laugh little and weep much”,⁸⁷⁵ which is also found in the data set discussed in chapter 4.

Ibn Ḥanbal has 22 narrations in the data set discussed in chapter 4, amounting to 2% of the total data set. Most of the narrations reflect his propensity to discourage laughter and encourage weeping. Out of these narrations only seven (31%) depict the Prophet ‘smiling’. Three of these depict others

⁸⁶⁶ Sobieroi, Florian. 1999. “The Muʿtazila and Sufism.” In *Islamic Mysticism Contested - Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, edited by Fredrick De Jong & Berned Radtke, 68-92. Leiden: Brill, 73.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 73-75.

⁸⁶⁹ Melchert. *Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, viii.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 103

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

laughing, like Adam, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān, and Umm Salama. In four reports, the Prophet only smiles or is said to have not laughed and only smiled or he might have smiled while his Companions laughed. Almost half of his narrations underscore that Muḥammad did not laugh. Even narrations that are recorded in other collections stating that the Prophet laughed, are narrated in the *Musnad* without the laughter, like for example report 89 (version 3) about not reprimanding Ḥafṣa, but having al-Shifā’ teach her *ruqyat al-namla*.

In conclusion, the renunciants, some of whom were traditionists before abandoning their scholarship, affected the number of narrations highlighting sadness, encouraging weeping and discouraging laughter or reducing it to mere smiles keeping with their aversion to laughter. Perhaps the greatest influence on the narrations came from Ibn Ḥanbal and later Ḥanbalīs, as well as al-Ghazālī, who stopped short of declaring laughter as *ḥarām*.

The Prophet’s biographies, the political context and ascetic Sufism, all combined to affect the depiction of laughter in the *aḥādīth* collections to varying degrees, before and during (251/865 to 651/1253). By turning the Prophet to a superhuman or a demigod, he was stripped of his human emotions, and the renunciant tradition ascribed more weeping to him than laughter, fashioning him in their image. These two combined with the political strife, where jurists were restricting the populace to control them and suppress any rebellions all affected Muḥammad’s image in the *ḥadīth*, by censoring his laughter.

Sunni reports

To glean more insights, a closer look at the data suggests splitting up the Sunni and Shi’ite narrations. Chart (16) shows combined laughter type counts for Sunni narrations only.

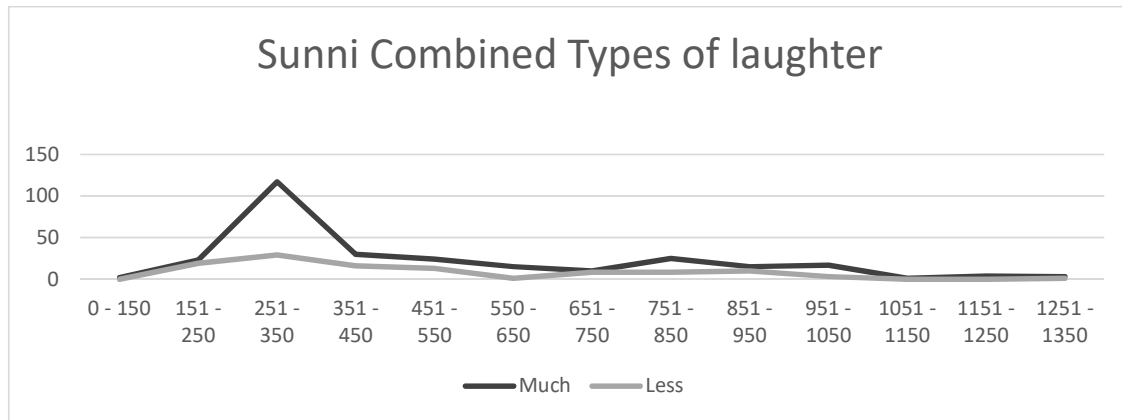


Figure 16 - Sunni Combined Types of laughter

As can be seen from the combined laughter type counts for Sunni narrations, it reacts in almost the same way as the chart for both branches of Islam combined. This chart also shows a steady rise in the depiction of various forms of laughter until 251/865 which is then followed by a sharp decrease until 651/1253 to rise again at a reduced rate, falling slightly around 951/1544 then falling sharply to remain negligible. The depictions of seriousness or advice not to laugh also rises, however at a much slower pace remaining below 20 throughout, except on one occasion, namely 251/865, unlike the two occasions of the SuShi set. Another difference from the SuShi chart occurs after the period 851/1447. Whereas in the SuShi chart both types of laughter (more and less) rose and fell periodically, in the Sunni chart they almost remain within the same limits, not exceeding 20 until modern times.

The factors affecting the depiction of laughter in the *ahādīth* collections to varying degrees, before and during (251/865 to 651/1253), were discussed at length above and the same applies for the Sunni only narrations. The *Sīra-maghāzī* most likely had an influence on the *Hadīth* reducing Muḥammad's human passions and emotions as he was transformed into a superhuman being. Moreover, the stricter interpretation forbidding rebellions, restricting the populace's behaviour and reducing laughter to counter the political issues at the time also point to a manipulation of the reports. Finally, the renunciants' encouragement of sadness and weeping and their discouragement of laughter or encouragement of its reduction also affected the reports with the greatest influence coming from the Ḥanbalīs, as well as al-Ghazālī, who also lived during turbulent times, and hence fits with the reasoning

of restrictions placed on the populace. Therefore it is interesting to look at the Shi'ite narrations on their own to see if they also display the same behaviour.

Shi'ite reports

Chart (17) shows combined laughter type counts for only Shi'ite narrations.

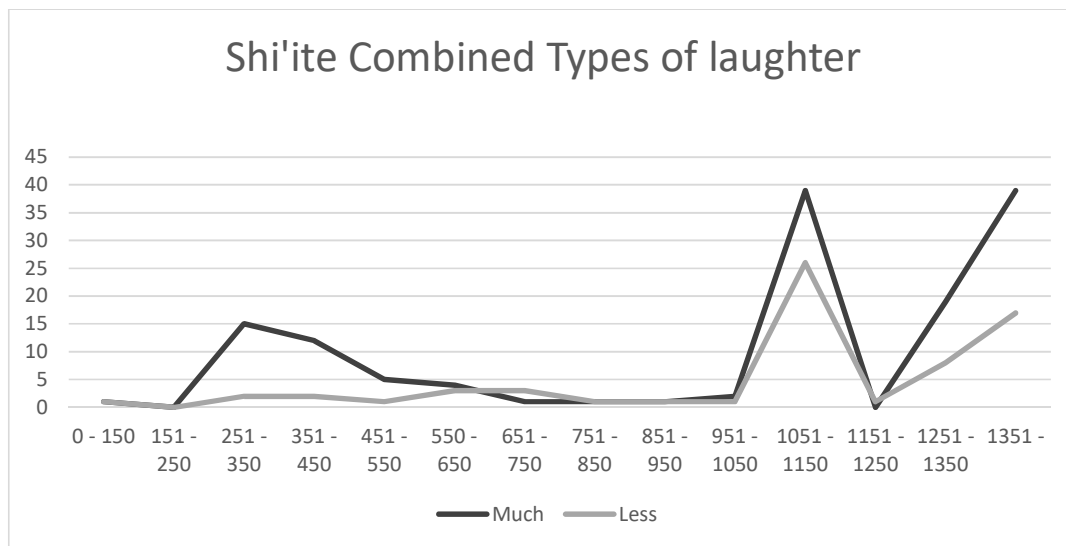


Figure 17 - Shi'ite Combined Types of laughter

As can be seen from the combined laughter type counts for Shi'ite narrations, they reacts in almost the same way as the chart for both branches of Islam combined in the beginning up to 451/1059, but then changes drastically. The depictions of seriousness, weeping or advice not to laugh remains quite low until 951/1544 where it rises sharply, like the depiction of laughter unlike the two previous charts for the Sunni and Sushi depictions.

Factors affecting the Shi'ite depiction of the Prophet's laughter

The factors affecting the depiction of laughter in the *ahādīth* collections to varying degrees, before and after (251/865 to 651/1253), were discussed at length above. The same applies for the Shi'ite

only narrations. However, in Shi'ite literature a bias towards seriousness was always present, as Shi'ites were a persecuted minority.

Moojan argues that the 'Abbasids were more brutal in their persecution than the Umayyads.⁸⁷⁶ The more politically active Shi'ite groups, not absorbed into the 'Abbasid state, were fiercely hounded and their leaders were executed. Moojan argues that "paradoxically then, because the 'Abbasids drained away many from the political wing of Shi'i Islam, and because they persecuted groups such as the Zaydis, the rise of the 'Abbasids may have resulted in a relative strengthening in the position of the Twelver line of Imams within Shi'i Islam."⁸⁷⁷ Though the Imams were mostly apolitical, persecution was ongoing and there were only few sporadic peaceful periods, like during the Buyids (r. 320/932–454/1062). Though the Buyids were Shi'ites, they did not impose Shi'ism on the population, nor did they oppose Sunni Islam and kept the Sunni 'Abbasid caliph as a figurehead.⁸⁷⁸ The Seljuks, however, started by being violently anti-Shi'ite and viciously persecuted them to the extent that they also damaged al-Husayn's shrine in Karbala.⁸⁷⁹ However, after the powerful anti-Shi'ite minister Nizām al-Mulk was assassinated in 485/1092, the Seljuks moderated their position and even placed some Shi'ite officials in governmental positions.⁸⁸⁰ With all of this, the themes of persecution, victimization, martyrdom and patient suffering became very strong in Shi'ite narratives, which is not unexpected for a minority that was targeted and harassed for much of its existence.

After 951/1544, we see a sharp increase in both laughter and seriousness in the chart. The laughter exceeds the seriousness, which is surprising, as Shi'ites are commonly stereotyped as maudlin people with a penchant for sadness and grief. This increase happens because of two reasons, namely the political context and the resulting extensive literary productions. The political context is the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Iran. As for literary productions, this includes increased literary

⁸⁷⁶ Momen, Moojan. 2016. *Shi'i Islam : A Beginner's Guide*. London: Oneworld Publications, 57.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

productions and an explosion in *Ḥadīth* works, as well as numerous anecdote collections during Safavid times, which will be discussed in the following section.

1) Political Context

This time period follows the establishment of one of the most significant ruling dynasties, the Safavids, which lasted from 907/1501 to 1148/1736.⁸⁸¹ It was founded by Ismā'īl I (d. 930/1524), and for the first time since the Arab conquest in the first/seventh century, Iran became a national state. In 907/1501, the fourteen-year-old Ismā'īl conquered Tabriz with only seven thousand men and was crowned shah.⁸⁸² Ismā'īl instructed that the *khutba* (Friday sermon) be read on behalf of the twelve Imams, declaring Shi'ism to be the official religion of his newly founded Safavid dynasty.⁸⁸³ According to Brunner, "the pronouncement of Shi'ism as the official creed of the state marked a decisive date in the history of the Islamic world, probably the most important single date in pre-modern times since the end of the 'Abbasid caliphate and the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 656/1258."⁸⁸⁴ The Islamic world witnessed two major periods of Shi'ite political expansion, one in the fourth-fifth/tenth-eleventh centuries by the Buyids in Iran and Iraq, the Fatimids in North Africa, Egypt, and Syria and one in the tenth-eleventh/sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, the Qutbshahis in southern India, the Safavids in Iran, and other dynasties who left lasting effects on the political, religious, intellectual, and literary history of the Islamic world. Under Safavid rule, most of the Iranian population converted to Shi'ism, so that Iranian culture and Twelver Shi'ism became inseparably intertwined.⁸⁸⁵ However, turning Iran completely Shi'ite was a slow process.⁸⁸⁶ According to Newman, it was the Zaydis who were the first organised Shi'ite

⁸⁸¹ Savory, R.M. and Gandjei, T., "Ismā'īl I", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 20 July 2020
<http://dx.doi.org.uoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0389>

⁸⁸² Brunner, Rainer. 2005. "The Role of Hadith as Cultural Memory in Shi'i History." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30: 318-360, 318.

⁸⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid, 319.

⁸⁸⁵ Stewart, Devin. forthcoming. "The Akhbārī Movement, Ḥadīth Criticism, and Literary Production in Safavid Iran." In *The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam in the 15th-17th Centuries*, edited by Janis Esots.

⁸⁸⁶ Brunner. The Role of Hadith as Cultural Memory in Shi'i History, 320.

group in Iran. Large numbers of Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid *sādāt*⁸⁸⁷ migrated to Iran after the numerous failed Zaydī uprisings against the ‘Abbasids, which contributed to the general spread of Shi’ism in Iran.⁸⁸⁸

Shah Ismā’īl, was born of a Ṣūfī lineage and himself a Sufi master. However, he exceeded the *Shaykh*’s ordinary role, acting as an intermediary with God, placing himself closer to God than anyone else. According to Amoretti: “*in this sense he was the long-awaited leader and his military successes were regarded as proofs of the superhuman nature of his task. His aspirations were identical with those of all the other ‘Messiahs’ of the time, namely the creation of a State in which religious ideology would be identified with political necessity.*”⁸⁸⁹ His superhuman abilities echo the superhuman elements in Muḥammad’s biographies discussed above. Ismā’īl’s reign also witnessed efforts to reconstruct his lineage as a ‘Alid, claiming descent from the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799).⁸⁹⁰ According to Newman, Ismā’īl’s profession of Shi’ism was not resulting from the study of Twelver Shi’ite doctrines and practices but rather the “*culmination of the messianic radicalism [...] encouraging and cementing the profound sense of separation from, and hostility to [...] the existing socio-economic and political structure as dominated by Sunni Muslims.*”⁸⁹¹ The first leaders of the Safavid Empire transformed their rule from a communally practiced Shi’ism to a state-operated one, and hired the ‘Āmilī scholars, originally from Lebanon, to affect this change. They helped the Safavid rulers in shaping their authority after entering Iranian society as a new social group, the *mujtahids*.⁸⁹²

Scholars have debated whether or not such large numbers of Shi’ite ‘*ulamā*’ migrated to Iran in the early Safavid period. Newman argues against this, stating that scholars rejected Safavid extremism, Ismā’īl’s abrupt conversion, the Safavids’s lack of interest in the doctrines and practices and most of all the uncertainty of the Safavid future. He adds that the ‘*ulamā*’ were not suffering nor were they so

⁸⁸⁷ *Sādāt*, *singl. Sayyid* is a honorific title denoting people accepted as descendants of the Prophet.

⁸⁸⁸ Newman, Andrew J. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi’ism : Ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad*. Richmond (Surrey): Curzon, 2000, 34.

⁸⁸⁹ Amoretti, B. S. 1986. “Religion in the Timurid & Safavid Periods.” In *The Cambridge History of Iran - The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, edited by Peter Jackson & Laurence Lockhart, 610-655. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 634.

⁸⁹⁰ Newman, Andrew J. 1993. “The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safavid Iran: Arab Shiite Opposition to ‘Alī al-Karakī and Safavid Shi’ism.” *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1): 66-112, 72.

⁸⁹¹ Newman. The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safavid Iran, 70.

⁸⁹² Abisaab, Rula Jurdi. 2004. *Converting Persia - Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*. London: I. B. Tauris, 51.

repressed to necessitate migration.⁸⁹³ Abisaab argues that many Shi'ite inhabitants of Jabal 'Āmil were forced to leave their homeland to escape Ottoman discrimination and therefore welcomed Ismā'īl's and Ṭahmāsb's (r. 930-984/1524-1576) offers to migrate to Iran.⁸⁹⁴ Ja'fariyān adds that migration also happened from the three Arab Shi'i centres in the Islamic world at that time, namely Iraq, nearest to Iran and an important base for Shi'i scholars; Bahrain, and Jabal 'Āmil, in addition to the import of many Shi'i works that were scattered in these regions and were brought to Iran mainly by migrating scholars.⁸⁹⁵

Stewart also disagrees with Newman and argues that there are sufficient numbers of 'Āmilī scholars mentioned in the sources, showing that they studied, taught, and settled in Iran during the early Safavid period. The sources highlight their official positions and their political, religious, and intellectual activities, which he deems as convincing proof of such migration.⁸⁹⁶ Moreover, he disagrees with Newman's argument, showing several forms of danger, persecution, and discrimination in Ottoman territories that these scholars faced and that influenced them to migrate, seeking better conditions in Iran, lured by the increasing stability of the Safavids, especially during Ṭahmāsb's long reign.⁸⁹⁷ Most of the pioneers, like Roger Savory and Albert Hourani, along with younger scholars like Rula Abisaab, supported the migration theory, while others agreed with Newman's opinion, diminishing the importance of the migration.

It seems that the opposition results from the distinctive frameworks of their studies. While Newman considered the issue in an '*Uṣūli-Akhhārī*' framework, Abisaab uses the same information available in a 'Safavid-Ottoman' framework. Dezfouli compares, contrasts, and finally assimilates both opinions in an article, but does not offer a conclusive opinion.⁸⁹⁸ The discussion is ongoing and will only

⁸⁹³ Newman. *The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safavid Iran*, 94.

⁸⁹⁴ Abisaab, Rula Jurdi. 1994. "The Ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1501-1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change." *Iranian Studies* 27 (1/4): 103-122, 104.

⁸⁹⁵ Ja'fariyān, Rasūl. 2003. "The Immigrant Manuscripts: A Study of the Migration of Shī'ī Works From Arab Regions to Iran in the Early Safavid Era." In *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*, edited by Andrew J. Newman, 351-370. Leiden: Brill, 355-356.

⁸⁹⁶ Stewart, Devin J. 1996. "Notes on the Migration of 'Āmilī Scholars to Safavid Iran." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 55 (2): 81-103, 102.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 103.

⁸⁹⁸ Dezfouli, Fahimeh Mokhber. 2014. "The Scholars of Oriental Studies and the Immigration of 'Amili 'Ulama to Safavid Iran." *Tarikh Wa Tamaddun-i Islami* 10 (19): 189-201, 200-201.

be settled once more sources become available. In addition to the migration of scholars, Shi'ite manuscripts from all over the Islamic world also travelled to Iran, which scholars have only recently begun to investigate.⁸⁹⁹ Additionally, on many occasions, pilgrims to the holy shrines would buy manuscripts and bring them to Iran, as is evident from marks and inscriptions indicating ownership of the manuscripts.⁹⁰⁰ Regardless, research on the Safavids is increasing, and several historical and literary texts, and many collections of documentary materials are being published.⁹⁰¹

2) Literary Production

Irrespective of a massive migration or a limited one, the scholars needed comprehensive works for believers to consult and for the rulers to use in formulating their decrees. It is reminiscent of the same need that arose in the mid-third/ninth century and the same urgency that developed with the occultation of the twelfth Imam. It is after the Imam's disappearance that Shi'ite scholars devoted themselves to developing distinctive genres of religious literature to compete with Sunni theological and legal schools and to set up their own.⁹⁰² In the tenth-eleventh/sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, Shi'ite scholars from Jabal 'Āmil played crucial roles in establishing the legitimacy of the Safavid state, bolstering ideological opposition to the Ottomans and developed substantial Shi'ite literature in both Arabic and Persian.⁹⁰³ During 'Abbās II's reign (r. 1052–77/1642–66) new Persian translations of older works, such as al-Kulaynī's *Uṣūl al-kāfī fī 'ilm al-dīn*, were undertaken.⁹⁰⁴ Famous works were translated to Persian and new ones were written in both Persian and Arabic. The patronage of the Safavid court established and supported centres that became a focus for works on Twelver doctrine and practice in Iran. Newman argues that "scholars from these centres became close associates of the court."⁹⁰⁵

⁸⁹⁹ Stewart. The Akhbārī Movement, Ḥadīth Criticism, and Literary Production in Safavid Iran.

⁹⁰⁰ Ja'fariyān. The Immigrant Manuscripts, 352.

⁹⁰¹ Afshar, Iraj. 2003. "Maktūb and Majmū'a: Essential Sources for Safavid Research." In *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*, edited by Andrew J Newman, 51-62. Leiden: Brill, 51.

⁹⁰² Gleave, Robert. 2007. *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School*. Leiden: Brill, 5.

⁹⁰³ Stewart, Devin J. 2006. "An Episode in the 'Āmili Migration to Safavid Iran: Husayn b. 'Abd al-Samad al-'Āmili's Travel Account." *Iranian Studies* 39 (4): 481-508, 481.

⁹⁰⁴ Roemer, H. R. 1986. "The Safavid Period." In *The Cambridge History of Iran - The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, edited by Peter Jackson & Laurence Lockhart, 198-350. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 291.

⁹⁰⁵ Newman. The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safavid Iran, 111.

The *Akhbārī-Uṣūlī* controversy is not the subject of this analysis and goes beyond the scope of this research, but it is important because the *Akhbārīs* played a major role in the intellectual history of Safavid Iran. *Uṣūlism* is generally characterized as a rationalist, analytical and *ijtihād*-oriented method, while *Akhbārism* has mainly been portrayed negatively, forbidding speculative reasoning in favour of *taqlīd* and emphasizing the sole reliance on the Qur'an and the Sunna, especially the *akhbār* of the twelve Imams and to some extent of Fāṭima.⁹⁰⁶

Gleave elaborates that the “central Sunni uṣūl concepts, such as *ijtihād*, as well as the division between religious matters known with certainty (‘ilm, qaṭ‘) and those which are open to informed dispute (*ẓann*), were incorporated into Shi'ite uṣūl from at least the time of the great Shi'ite jurist al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325).”⁹⁰⁷ The *akhbār*, collected in the canonised ‘Four Books’ of Twelver Shi'ite *Ḥadīth*, were regarded as insufficient in offering answers to all issues within a comprehensive legal system.⁹⁰⁸ Gleave states that opposition to al-Ḥillī's theory of *ijtihād*, the division of knowledge into *‘ilm* and *ẓann* emerged, three hundred years later, in the *Akhbārī* movement.

The first scholar claiming to be an *Akhbārī* was the Iranian scholar, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623–4 or 1036/1627), who proposed a different methodology to derive religious knowledge.⁹⁰⁹ Al-Astarābādī perceived an epistemological threat to the Shiite *Ḥadīth* corpus. He rejected applying *Ḥadīth* criticism to the Imams' reports, as their *akhbār* represented the surest and even the only means of access to their guidance and knowledge. Therefore, the authenticity of the Shi'ite *Ḥadīth* corpus had to be upheld, as the only authentic extension of the authority of the Imams.⁹¹⁰ Stewart argues that a major factor in the creation of the *Akhbārī* movement is the scholarship of Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī, also known as al-Shahīd al-Thānī, on the science of *Ḥadīth* criticism in the mid-tenth/sixteenth century.⁹¹¹ Zayn al-Dīn started to face troubles with Sunni authorities in 956/1549 that lasted until

⁹⁰⁶ Newman, Andrew J. 1992. “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafavid Iran. Part 1: ‘Abdallāh al- Samāhijī’s “Munyat al-Mumārīsīn.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55 (1): 22-51, 22.

⁹⁰⁷ Gleave. *Scripturalist Islam*, xviii.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, xvii.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁹¹⁰ Stewart. The Akhbārī Movement, Ḥadīth Criticism, and Literary Production in Safavid Iran.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid*.

964/1557, when he went on pilgrimage and was arrested, taken to Istanbul, and executed in 965/1558.⁹¹² Another scholar involved in teaching Shi'ite *Ḥadīth* criticism was 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Tustarī [or al-Shūshtarī] (d. 1021/1612), who came to Isfahan during the reign of Shah 'Abbās, who built a *madrasah* for him, where he taught hundreds of students, training many scholars of the next generations in *Ḥadīth* sciences, including his son Ḥasan 'Alī.⁹¹³ Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) wrote that when al-Tustarī first arrived in Isfahan, there were no more than fifty students, but by the time he died, there were over one thousand. Together with Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad, he is responsible for a surge in interest in *ḥadīth* scholarship, prior to the *Akḥbārī* movement.⁹¹⁴ Gleave discussed al-Tustarī's teaching of *Ḥadīth* and *Ḥadīth*-based elaboration of the law, referring to his "proto-*Akḥbārī madrasah*" in Isfahan.⁹¹⁵

As mentioned, the *Akḥbārī* movement played a crucial role in shaping Safavid literary production, particularly about Shi'ite Islam. There was a marked eruption of works as part of the Safavids' policy of promoting Twelver Shi'ism as the empire's religion. A main focus was *Ḥadīth*, for the abovementioned reasons. Numerous commentaries on the canonical *ḥadīth* works were produced such as seven commentaries on *al-Kāfī*, eight commentaries on *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, seven commentaries on *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, by Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, nine commentaries on *al-Istibṣār*, by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī and fifteen commentaries on *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, by al-Ṭūsī.⁹¹⁶

Perhaps the most remarkable outcome was the production of extremely large works that reframed the entire Shi'ite *Ḥadīth* corpus.⁹¹⁷ Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1104/1693) completed his massive work *Tafṣīl wasā'il al-shī'ah ilā taḥṣīl masā'il al-sharī'ah*, generally known as *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, which has thirty volumes in modern editions, in 1082/1671.⁹¹⁸ The largest of such works was *Biḥār al-anwār*, by al-Majlisī. Kohlberg explains that "most of this material consists of traditions from the Prophet and the

⁹¹² Stewart, Devin J. 2008. "The Ottoman Execution of Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī." *Die Welt des Islams* 48 (3/4): 289-347, 293.

⁹¹³ Stewart. The Akḥbārī Movement, Ḥadīth Criticism, and Literary Production in Safavid Iran.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.

⁹¹⁵ Gleave. *Scripturalist*, 163-165, 238-239.

⁹¹⁶ Stewart. The Akḥbārī Movement, Ḥadīth Criticism, and Literary Production in Safavid Iran.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

Imams, the significance of which was greatly enhanced by the growing influence of the Akhbārīs [...]; and Majlesī, though not a declared Akhbārī, was in sympathy with their belief that ḥadīth is the repository of all religious knowledge.”⁹¹⁹ Al-Majlisī’s methodology was thoroughly *Akhbārī*, not only focusing on *Ḥadīth*, but also arguing that the *Ḥadīth* constituted the main basis of Shi’ite doctrine, whether theology or law.

Gleave notes, however, that al-Majlisī argued for the religious authority of the scholars on this basis, and that he had close ties to the Safavid court and accepted royal patronage.⁹²⁰ Other Shi’ite *Ḥadīth* compilations appeared during the thirty-six years that it took al-Majlisī to write his, including *al-Wāfi* by Mulla Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), and *Wasā’il al-shī’a* by al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1104/1693). Work on *Biḥār al-anwār* began in the reign of Sulaymān I (r. 1077–1105/1666–1694) and ended during the reign of his successor Ḥusayn I (r. 1105–1135/1694–1722). In 1089/1678, al-Majlisī was made Shaykh al-Islām and retained this position until his death.⁹²¹

Other works using *Ḥadīth* were also written, such as Qur’anic exegesis, biographies of the Imams, historical, theological, legal, and polemical works. Another distinctive aspect of literary production is that of *Ḥadīth* based *Tafsīr*, which Todd Lawson addressed in a thorough study.⁹²² According to Shi’ite belief, the Qur’an is best understood through the interpretation of the Imams, and as their teachings are embodied in their reports, it follows that commentaries on the Qur’an were mostly based on *Ḥadīth/akhbār*.⁹²³ Moreover, biographical dictionaries and works on *Ḥadīth* transmitters and their autobiographies were written. This productivity also resulted in the revival of the *Akhbārī* School, which accorded the authoritative character of the entire *Ḥadīth* corpus far more weight than it was

⁹¹⁹ Etan Kohlberg, “Behār al-Anwār,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, IV, pp. 90-93; available online at <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/beh-ar-al-anwar> (accessed online at 17 July 2020)..

⁹²⁰ Robert Gleave, “Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī and Safavid Shi’ism: Akhbarism and Anti-Sunni Polemic During the Reigns of Shah ‘Abbas the Great and Shah Safi,” *Iran* 55.1 (2017): 24-34.

⁹²¹ Muti, Mahdi and Negahban, Farzin, “Biḥār al-Anwār,” in: *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, Editors-in-Chief: Wilferd Madelung and, Farhad Daftary. Consulted online on 05 August 2020 <http://dx.doi.org.ueoelibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_COM_000000127>

⁹²² B. Todd Lawson, “Akhbārī Shī’ī Approaches to Tafsīr” pp. 173-210 in G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur’ān* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 176.

granted by the *Uṣūlīs*, and therefore had the greatest interest in the academic careers of transmitters.⁹²⁴ Competition among the scholars was widespread and strong, as the lucrative posts and resources were limited. The competition increased even more after the spread of endowed institutions such as the *madrasa* or college of law with their associated stipends.⁹²⁵

Safavid's political stability, the enforcement of Shi'ism, end of persecution of Shi'ites and the increased literary output, particularly in *Ḥadīth* collections, and especially the massive collections is reflected in this great spike in the chart. The more reports are available the more instances of laughter and weeping are recorded, and mirrored in the data set. The penchant for seriousness and weeping, as well as the large number of records for laughter and humour, will be discussed in the next section.

The sharp decline in the period between 1151-1250/1738-1834 can be explained by the instability of the Safavids and their disintegration and replacement by the Afshārids (r. 1149–1210/1736–96) founded by Nādir Shāh Afshār.⁹²⁶ They were replaced by the Zand, an Iranian tribe of the eastern central Zagros, who ruled western Iran in the period 1164-1209/1751-94.⁹²⁷ The period was marked by many hostilities, internal revolts and wars with the Ottomans and Russians, like the three Russo-Persian wars (1722-1723), (1804-1813) and (1826-1828).⁹²⁸ Finally, Āghā Muḥammad Khān (Shāh) Qājār (r. 1203–1211/1789–1797) founded the Qājār dynasty, restoring stability to Iran after half a century of instability. The political instability and wars affected literary production and scholarship, which explains the drop in the chart.

⁹²⁴ Brunner, Rainer. 2002. ""Siehe, was mich an Unglück und Schrecken traf!" - schiitische Autobiographien." In *Islamstudien ohne Ende : Festschrift für Werner Ende zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Rainer Brunner, 59-68. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 61.

⁹²⁵ Stewart, Devin J. 2009. "Polemics and Patronage in Safavid Iran: The debate on Friday Prayer during the Reign of Shah Tahmasb." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (3): 425-457, 427.

⁹²⁶ Tucker, Ernest, "Afshārids", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 02 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23659>

⁹²⁷ J.R. Perry, "Zand", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 02 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8116>

⁹²⁸ Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville, ed. 2008. *The Cambridge History of Iran - From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*. Vol. 7. 7 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 7: 297-373.

a) Weeping

The Prophet's biographies were discussed earlier in this chapter, however when it comes to the *Sīra* genre in Shi'ite narrative, there are some noticeable changes. Khalidi argues that Twelver Shi'ite scholars did not produce many *Sīra* accounts, preferring to focus their attention on 'Alī and his descendants. Two works are embedded in general history works like those by al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897) and al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956), the exception being by the famous exegete al-Ṭabarsī's (d. 548/1153-4) *I'lām al-warā bi a'lām al-hudā*. Moreover, at some point a royal Muḥammad emerged in the *Sīra*.⁹²⁹ This new aspect also added a new element, namely that of the 'Holy Family'. "A semi-divine halo was rapidly drawn around various figures of this 'Holy Family,' a phrase nearest in meaning to ahl al-bayt in Shi'ite sensibility."⁹³⁰ Bernheimer states that "within the hierarchy of Islamic society, the 'Alids were 'a blood aristocracy without peer'. There is no doubt that Muḥammad's family (Āl Muḥammad) has a right on the Muslim society (umma) that no other people share and that they are entitled to an added love and affection to which no other branches of Quraysh are entitled."⁹³¹

Khalidi explains that the "nexus of Shi'ite sensibility was a widespread devotion to 'Alī, cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, that was further deepened by the tragic death of several of his descendants."⁹³² This grief is different from the Sufi weeping, mentioned above and relates to the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom, the suffering and *ẓulm* (injustice) experienced by 'Alī's descendants, many of whom were imprisoned or murdered.

The lives of the *ahl al-bayt* were depicted as lives of sorrow in Shi'ite narrative.⁹³³ These lives of sorrow are a pivotal element in all Shi'ite historiography of Muḥammad and his descendants.⁹³⁴ Fāṭima, and to some extent also 'Alī, epitomise patient suffering and the theme is also personified in the lives of the Imams, summed up in the word *mazlumiyyāt*.⁹³⁵ According to Flaskerud, most Imams were

⁹²⁹ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 85.

⁹³⁰ Ibid, 125.

⁹³¹ Bernheimer, Teresa. 2013. *The Alids: The first family of Islam, 750–1200*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1.

⁹³² Ibid, 124.

⁹³³ Flaskerud, Ingvild. 2010. *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism*. London ; New York: Continuum, 80.

⁹³⁴ Khalidi. *Images of Muḥammad*, 129.

⁹³⁵ This word sums up patient endurance of the suffering caused by the tyrannical act of those who have power over you.

commended for their patient suffering, whereas al-Ḥusayn was applauded for not submitting to tyranny, for fighting, even in the face of overwhelming odds and the certainty of martyrdom.⁹³⁶ Dabashi elaborates on the *mazlumiyyāt*, arguing that it includes an embedded conception of innocence, meaning that the wronged person is helpless, hopeless, and innocent, living a predestined fate of suffering injustice. Thus, an element of fatality is also embedded in *mazlumiyyāt*.⁹³⁷ The *mazlumiyyāt* of *ahl al-bayt*, also reflect the 'House of Sorrows' image. Fāṭima epitomises the quiet suffering of a pious, weak woman in Shi'ite piety and is considered the mistress *par excellence* of the 'House of Sorrows,' as she endured the greatest sufferings on earth, and will therefore enjoy great rewards and total vindication in Paradise.⁹³⁸ In line with Dabashi's argument about predestination and fate, Ayoub states that the 'House of Sorrows' "is older than creation itself, and it shall remain until the last day when all sorrow and suffering shall be no more and the soul that was content during its sojourn in this vale of tears will enter into final bliss in the paradise of God."⁹³⁹

Though the fate of *ahl al-bayt* and the tragedies they endured were indeed grave, it is Karbala that came to epitomize this grief more than any other event. The Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq was asked: 'How come the day of 'Āshūrā' became a day of the greatest affliction, grief and tears rather than the day the Prophet died, the day Fāṭima died, the day the Commander of the Believers 'Alī died and the day Imam al-Ḥasan was poisoned?' Al-Ṣādiq replied: "The day of al-Ḥusayn's death is an affliction far greater than that of any other of the *ahl al-kisā'*,⁹⁴⁰ who were the dearest of God's creation to Him. When al-Ḥusayn was killed none of them was left on the face of the earth. His death was like the death of all of them all over again. This day became the day of the greatest grief."⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁶ Flakerud. *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism*, 80.

⁹³⁷ Dabashi, Hamid. 2011. *Shi'ism : A Religion of Protest*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 80.

⁹³⁸ Ayoub, Mahmoud. 1978. *Redemptive Suffering in Islām : A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Āshūrā' in Twelver Shi'ism*. The Hague, The Netherlands: De Gruyter Mouton, 24.

⁹³⁹ Ibid, 26.

⁹⁴⁰ They are the five people wrapped in Muḥammad's cloak, as described in the famous *Ḥadīth al-kisā'*, namely the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima, her husband 'Alī, and their two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, for whom part of verse 33:33 is said to have been revealed purifying them from all sins.

⁹⁴¹ Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn. 2007. *Wasā'il al-Shī'a ilā Taḥṣīl Masā'il al-Sharī'a*. 9 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-al-Maṭbū'āt, 5:394.

Weeping and grief became part of Shi'ite practice that united the minority community. Ameer argues that: "the life, progress, and glory of any community depends upon a passion for unity among its members and their wise organization. The stronger the passion for unity and the wiser the organization the more progressive and glorious will be the community. What sows the seed of passion for unity and organization in the community and helps it to germinate and develop is this very practice of weeping and wailing which has earned for us the nickname 'the Community of Weepers'." ⁹⁴² He also states that weeping and wailing for Ḥusayn is of utmost importance for Allah, because He made all His creatures weep according to their own ways and nature. ⁹⁴³ Ameer cites traditions to the effect that the entire cosmos participated in wailing over al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom: "the sky shed tears of blood for forty days; wild beasts roamed the jungles in agitation; genies recited poems of lamentation; seventy thousand angels descended to Husain's grave to weep; the earth emitted blood in grief." ⁹⁴⁴ The Sixth Imam said: "When al-Ḥusayn was killed the skies wept blood for forty days. The earth wept for forty days as it was covered in black, mourning; the sun similarly wept for forty days with eclipses and redness. The mountains were torn apart and scattered, and the seas burst." ⁹⁴⁵ In another tradition also attributed to him, he said: "the seven heavens and the seven earths wept together with all creation. Those in hell and paradise alike, and what could be seen and what could not be seen, all wept for him." ⁹⁴⁶ The universe may have grieved for al-Ḥusayn, however, it was the Imams who made grief a definitive feature of the Twelver creed, both by showing the anguish they themselves suffered, and by commanding their followers to share this sorrow. ⁹⁴⁷

There are numerous traditions in various Twelver *Ḥadīth* collections that emphasize the great reward for weeping. ⁹⁴⁸ The Fourth Imam, al-Sajjād, reportedly said: "Any believer whose eyes shed

⁹⁴² Ameer, Syed Mohammed. 1974. *The Importance of Weeping and Wailing*. Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 77-76.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid*, 7-10.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibn Qūlawīyah, Abū-l-Qāsim Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Mūsā al-Qummī ., 1997. *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*. Beirut: Dār al-Surūr, 167-168.

⁹⁴⁶ Al-Kulaynī, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Rāzī. 1969. *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*. 6 vols. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 4:575.

⁹⁴⁷ Samer El-Karanshawy, „ The Day the Imam was Killed: Mourning Sermons, Politics, History and the Struggle for Lebanese Shi'ism," PhD diss., (University of Oxford, 2012), 79.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 82.

even one tear for al-Ḥusayn, God will reward him by rooms in paradise. Any believer who sheds tears over the harms that afflicted us, God will grant him a place of truth in Paradise.”⁹⁴⁹ Incidentally, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, al-Sajjād, (d. 94/712 or 95/713) was one of the famous *bakkā’ūn*, discussed above, as he wept for years for his father and the martyrs of Karbalā’. The Sixth Imam, al-Ṣādiq states: “Whoever sheds a tear when we are mentioned, God will forgive all his sins.”⁹⁵⁰ The Eighth Imam, al-Riḍā (d. 202/818), is also quoted saying: “Whoever sheds tears for our afflictions and causes the tears of others to flow, his eyes will not shed a tear on the day all eyes weep.”⁹⁵¹ Therefore, anyone who cries for al-Ḥusayn or causes someone else to cry for him shall go directly to Paradise.⁹⁵² Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq is quoted in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi, kitāb al-du‘ā* as saying: “If you are not weeping, pretend to weep.”⁹⁵³ To this day, weeping is a prominent feature of Shi‘ite devotion, which caused them to be stereotyped as a maudlin weepy community.

In Shi‘ite literature, Paradise is promised to anyone who visits the shrines of the imams.⁹⁵⁴ Al-Ṣādiq said: “The reward of visiting each of the imams equals the reward for visiting the Prophet.”⁹⁵⁵ Al-Kāzim said: “Whoever visits her [Fāṭima] will go to Paradise.”⁹⁵⁶ Al-Riḍā said: “Whoever visits me at my shrine, I will come to him on the Day of Resurrection in three places, so that he will be saved from its dire: when the books fly right and left, at the *Sirāṭ* and during judgement.”⁹⁵⁷ Al-Ṣādiq also said: “Anyone walking to visit the Commander of the Believers [‘Alī], Allah will give him the reward of performing one Ḥajj and one *‘umra* (lesser pilgrimage) for every footstep he takes.”⁹⁵⁸ By joining in the grief and sorrow of

⁹⁴⁹ Shams al-Dīn, Ayotallah Muḥammad Maḥdī. n.d. *Wāqī‘at Karbalā’ fi-l-Wajdān al-Sha‘bī*. Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-Dawliyya li-al-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nash, 235.

⁹⁵⁰ Al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī. *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, 5:392.

⁹⁵¹ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh. 1994. *Man la yaḥḍurhu al-faqīh*. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Ta‘āruf li-l-Maṭbū‘āt, 1: 392.

⁹⁵² Calmard, Jean. 1979. “Le Patronage des Ta’ziyeh Elements pour une étude globale.” In *Ta’ziyeh, ritual and drama in Iran*, edited by Peter J. Chelkowski, 121-123. New York: New York University Press, 122

⁹⁵³ Melchert, Christopher. 2015. “Renunciation (zuhd) in the Early Shi‘i Tradition.” In *Ḥadīth, Piety, and Law: Selected Studies*, by Christopher Melchert, 209-233. Bristol, CT ; Exeter: Lockwood Press, 214.

⁹⁵⁴ Takim, Liyakat. 2004. “Charismatic appeal or communitas? Visitation to the shrines of the Imams.” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18 (2): 106–120. 107.

⁹⁵⁵ al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī. *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, 10:452.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 10:45.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 14:551.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibn Qūlawiyah, Ja‘far b. Muḥammad. 1937. *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*. Najaf: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Murtaḍawīyah, 1:10-11.

the *ahl al-bayt*, the sins of the faithful are eliminated. The importance of weeping during the *ziyāra* can also be seen from the belief that weeping re-enacts the cosmic drama in addition to washing away the sins.⁹⁵⁹ In addition, Shi'ite Ḥadīth collections such as *al-Kāfi*, *Man la yaḥḍarahu al-faqīh* or *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* all include sections about *faḍā'il al-ziyāra*.⁹⁶⁰ The *aḥādīth* in these chapters say that visiting the graves of the Imams will result in the visitor going to heaven in the afterlife and that asking for intercession of the Imams at their graves guarantees their intercession.

Table (8) shows all the dates of death of the fourteen infallibles and the causes, according to Shi'ite sources.⁹⁶¹ As the *ziyāra* is rewarded, especially if it coincides with the Imam's date of birth or death, this means that weeping will happen all year round. In addition to the fifty day⁹⁶² mourning for al-Ḥusayn.⁹⁶³

Table 8 - The fourteen Infallibles Causes and Dates of Death

Infallible's Name	Cause of Death according to Shi'ite Sources	Date of Death
Prophet Muḥammad	Fell ill and suffered for several days with fever, head pain, and weakness	12 Rabī Awwal 11/8 June 632
Fāṭima	Her death was the result of injuries sustained after the raid of her house by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and a miscarriage	3 Jumāda II 11/26 August 632
'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib	Assassinated in Kūfa by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muljam, a Kharijite, who struck him with a poisoned sword while he was in prostration on the Night of Qadr in Ramaḍān	21 Ramaḍān 40/28 January 661

⁹⁵⁹ Takim. Charismatic appeal or communitas?, 110.

⁹⁶⁰ *Faḍā'il al-ziyāra* means merits of visiting the graves of the Imams.

⁹⁶¹ Mainly collected from al-Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī. 2008. *Biḥār al-anwār al-jāmi'ah li-durar akhbār al-a'imma al-aṭṭār*. Edited by Maḥmūd Duryāb Najafī and Jalāl al-Dīn 'Alī Ṣaghīr. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-a'lamī lil-maṭbū'āt.

⁹⁶² Fifty days are the ten days leading to 'Ashūra' and the forty days after to the Arba'in.

⁹⁶³ Arba'in (literally forty) and denotes the forty days of mourning after death, which is observed in many Muslim countries. It is also one of the largest gatherings or pilgrimage where mourners walk to Karbala.

al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī	Poisoned by his wife in Medina on the orders of Caliph Mu‘āwiyā	28 Ṣafar 50/27 March 670
al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī	Killed and beheaded at the Battle of Karbala.	10 Muḥarram 61/10 January 680
‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn	Poisoned on the order of Caliph al-Walīd I in Medina	25 Muḥarram 95/20 October 713
Muḥammad b. ‘Alī	Poisoned by Ibrāhīm b. Walīd b. ‘Abd Allah in Medina on the order of Caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik	7 Dhū-l-Ḥijja 114/28 January 733
Ja‘far b. Muḥammad	Poisoned in Medina on the order of Caliph al-Manṣūr.	25 Shawwāl 148/8 December 765
Mūsā b. Ja‘far	Imprisoned and poisoned in Baghdad, on the order of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.	25 Rajab 183/1 September 799
‘Alī b. Mūsā	Poisoned in Mashad on the order of Caliph al-Ma‘mūn.	29 or 30 Safar 203/5 or 6 September 818
Muḥammad b. ‘Alī	Poisoned by his wife, al-Ma‘mūn’s daughter, in Baghdad, on the order of Caliph al-Mu‘taṣim.	30 Dhū-l-Qa‘da 220/25 November 835
‘Alī b. Muḥammad	Poisoned in Samarra, Iraq on the order of Caliph al-Mu‘tazz	3 Rajab 254/2 July 868
al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī	Poisoned on the order of Caliph al-Mu‘tamīd in Samarra	8 Rabī‘ I 260/1 January 874
Ḥujjat Allah b. al-Ḥasan	According to Twelver Shia doctrine, he has been living in the Occultation since 872, and will continue as long as God wills	Present

As discussed, weeping is a favourite motif in Shi‘ite literature. For example, Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said: The Weepers are five: Adam, Ya‘qūb, Yūsuf, Fāṭima bint Muḥammad and ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn. Imam

al- Ṣādiq explained their weeping saying: “As for Adam, he wept over his expulsion from paradise until there were two valleys on his cheeks. As for Ya‘qūb he wept over Yūsuf until he became blind and he was told: [12:85]” ... you will not cease to remember Yusuf until you are a prey to constant disease or (until) you are of those who perish.” As for Yūsuf, he wept for Ya‘qūb until the prisoners became angry and told him: “either you weep at night and remain quiet during the day or you weep during the day and keep quiet at night.” He agreed with them on one of the two. As for Fāṭima bint Muḥammad, she wept mourning her father until the people of Medina complained and told her: “you are hurting us with all your weeping.” She then went out to the graves and wept by the graves of the martyrs until she had enough and then would go back. As for ‘Alī b al-Ḥusayn, he wept for al-Ḥusayn for twenty (in another version for forty) years. He never attempted to eat without weeping until one of his servants said: May I be sacrificed for you, I fear you will perish. He replied citing verse [12:86]⁹⁶⁴ and added: “I do not remember the death of Fāṭima's children without being choked by tears.”⁹⁶⁵ Yet another version states that at the head of the weepers are eight: Adam, Nūḥ, Ya‘qūb, Yūsuf, Shu‘ayb, Dawūd, Fāṭima and Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.⁹⁶⁶

Therefore it is not surprising to find this large volume of reports discouraging laughter and encouraging weeping throughout the Shi‘ite corpus. The prolific production of *Ḥadīth* collections in Safavid times means more availability of such reports which explains the spike in the chart.

b) Humour

Just as the numbers of the depiction of seriousness increased, so did the numbers of the depiction of laughter. Rizvi mentions that there was no need for dissimulation in the Safavid period, as there was no persecution of Shi‘ites and discrimination against them unlike during other historical

⁹⁶⁴ [12.86] He said: I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allah, and I know from Allah what you do not know.

⁹⁶⁵ ‘Atrīsī, Ja‘far Ḥasan, and Aḥmad Qablān. 2010. *Jāmi‘ al-akhbār al-Fāṭimīyah : abḥāth wa-taḥqīqāt mu‘ammaqah fī bayān faḍā’il wa-manzilat al-Sayyidah Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ fī al-Islām : bi-riwāyat al-Sunnah wa-al-Shī‘ah*. Beirut: Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā’ : Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyah li-Fiqh Ahl al-Bayt, 4:361

⁹⁶⁶ al-Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī. 2008. *Biḥār al-anwār al-jāmi‘ah li-durar akhbār al-a‘immah al-aṭḥār*. Edited by Maḥmūd Duryāb Najafī and Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Alī Ṣaghīr. Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-a‘lamī lil-maṭbū‘āt, 43:35.

periods and Shi'ites were no longer a minority in Iran.⁹⁶⁷ However, there were still clashes with the Ottoman Sunni orthodoxy. Yürekli argues that such clashes gave rise to witticisms known as 'Bektashi jokes' narrating humorous encounters between the quick-witted Bektashi (follower of the Bektashi Sufi order), who drinks wine and does not fast and therefore incurs the wrath of intolerant scholars and dogmatists who look down on him.⁹⁶⁸ But these were not the only humorous anecdotes circulating.

Rizvi discusses several collections that include jokes and anecdotes, namely *al-Kashkūl* by the Shaykh al-Islam of Isfahan Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī (d. 1030/1621) and another titled *Anīs al-musāfir wa-jalīs al-ḥādīr* by Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772), a prominent Akhbārī thinker.⁹⁶⁹ The purpose of such collections, much like the Arabic *nawādir* genre, is to "provide sustenance for souls and stories and morsels of knowledge that will move the soul to joy and self-realisation: ultimately, it is a collection both edifying and entertaining."⁹⁷⁰ Jokes and anecdotes are distributed among the complicated theological and philosophical arguments to edify, educate and entertain.⁹⁷¹

Rizvi states that these Safavid anthologies "presented and fostered the formation of a Shi'i character inclined to knowledge and witticisms, often at the expense of Sufis and Sunnis, and promoted a Shi'i Islam that was lighter and more accessible, akin to the ritual and pageant of public and popular life, than the heavy tomes of theology and jurisprudence produced by elite scholars."⁹⁷² Additionally, Rizvi also mentions *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* by Sayyid Ni'mat Allah al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701), a leading *Ḥadīth* scholar, who was also known as al-Muḥaddith al-Jazā'irī.⁹⁷³ He wrote a number of commentaries on major *ḥadīth* collections such as *Ghāyat al-marām fī sharḥ tahdhīb al-aḥkām* by al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), *Anīs al-waḥīd fī sharḥ al-tawḥīd* by al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* also by al-Ṣadūq, a commentary on the *Rawḍa* section of *al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), *Jawāhir al-ghawālī fī*

⁹⁶⁷ Rizvi, Sajjad H. 2010. "Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī and his Anthologies: Anti-Sufism, Shi'ism and Jokes in the Safavid World." *Die Welt des Islams* 50 (2): 224-242, 241.

⁹⁶⁸ Yürekli, Zeynep. 2012. *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire - The Politics of Bektashi Shrines in the Classical Age*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 155.

⁹⁶⁹ Rizvi. Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī and his Anthologies, 225.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 226.

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 241.

⁹⁷² *Ibid*, 227.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid*, 228.

sharḥ ʿawālī al-laʿālī by Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʿī (d. after 907/1501) and *Kashf al-asrār fī sharḥ al-Istibṣār* by al-Ṭūsī.⁹⁷⁴ His shorter collection *Zahr al-rabīʿ* is full of short jokes and anecdotes, while the longer *al-Anwār al-nuʿmāniyya* includes extensive discussions of love, poverty, and jokes.⁹⁷⁵

Al-Anwār al-nuʿmaniyyah includes a section devoted to jokes, humorous anecdotes, and clever retorts that Niʿmat Allah introduces by stating that Islam allows humour. He reports that the Prophet and the Imams occasionally joked, citing that the Prophet used to sneak up on his Companions from behind, cover their eyes until they guessed who it was. He quotes another *ḥadīth* (#56 in this study) showing the Prophet and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib joking with each other as they were eating dates. Muḥammad put the pits from his share in front of ʿAlī and when they finished, he commented on the large pile of date pits in front of ʿAlī saying: “ʿAlī, all the date pits are in front of you. You are indeed a glutton!” ʿAlī replied, “Oh Prophet of God, the glutton is he who eats the pits along with the dates!” In another passage, Niʿmat Allah argues that religious law recommends using humour to some extent in certain circumstances.⁹⁷⁶ He argues that humour has a particularly important place in students’ and scholars’ daily lives and education. He elaborates on this topic in his treatise on education, also included in *al-Anwār al-nuʿmāniyya*, opining that the teacher should avoid joking and laughing too much, as this takes away from his dignity, but that some joking and laughing during lessons is not only acceptable but commendable to relieve boredom. For him, learning is a pleasure, but like good food, one can tire of it if one consumes a copious amount, therefore, the teacher must stimulate the students to renew their interest and energy with either eloquent sayings and scholarly aphorisms, or humour.⁹⁷⁷ Niʿmat Allah’s teacher, al-Majlisī, whom he admired, also joked with him while he was assisting in the compilation of his monumental work, *Biḥār al-anwār*, so that he would not become bored with his work.⁹⁷⁸ Many texts in Arabic and Persian also use the comic and highly personal style found in Niʿmat Allah’s work. For example, al-Tunkābunī (d. 1320/1902), the author

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid, 230.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid, 232.

⁹⁷⁶ Stewart, Devin J. 1989. “The Humor of the Scholars: The Autobiography of Niʿmat Allāh al-Jazāʿirī (d.)” *Iranian Studies* (22): 47-81, 53.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid, 53-54.

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid.

of *Qīṣaṣ al-ʿulamāʾ*, points out that Niʿmat Allah was only one in a long line of Shiʿite scholars with a tendency for humour, including the renowned scholar Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿAmilī (d. 1030/1621) and Niʿmat Allah's own mentor, al-Majlisī.⁹⁷⁹

Rizvi shows some of the usual jokes and anecdotes in such collections that were written to achieve a “balance between high intellectual pursuits that feed and sustain the rational soul and lighter material for everyday life from which the spirit takes pleasure.”⁹⁸⁰ A favourite target of jokes is ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, along with enemies of *ahl al-bayt* and of Shiʿites. Many jokes retell discussions between Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), founder of the Ḥanafī School dominant in the Ottoman Empire, and Abū-I-Qāsim Muḥammad al-Aḥwal (d. 160/776-777 or after 180/796), the Companion of Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq or play on stereotypes.⁹⁸¹ Stereotypes included people from Rasht being portrayed as stupid; Isfahanis as stingy and prone to cheating outsiders, Shirazis as smart and sophisticated, and Qazvinis as homosexuals. The Turkish-speaking inhabitants of Iran were portrayed as unintelligent, Arabs as stupid, coarse, violent, and oversexed, Turks as stubborn and dumb; while Afghans were shown as the worst of all, primitive, ignorant, and prone to stealing.⁹⁸²

In addition to anecdote collections, there were satires in both prose and poetry. A famous poet and satirist is ʿUbayd Zākānī's (d. 773/1371) mentioned in the Literature Review. In his *Akhlāq al-ashrāf* (Ethics of the Nobles), he portrays Arab ethnic minorities as cuckolds, fools, and religious hypocrites.⁹⁸³ He singles out Turks for their violence, homosexuality, and lying,⁹⁸⁴ and the Qazvinis, a group to which he himself belongs, for their stupidity and lack of judgment.⁹⁸⁵ Zākānī is considered the leading satirist and social critic of medieval Iran. A prolific writer of both poetry and prose, he authored many works, such as *Risāla-yi dilgushā* (Exhilarating Treatise) which is a collection of about eighty-four Arabic

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid, 54.

⁹⁸⁰ Rizvi. Sayyid Niʿmat Allāh al-Jazāʿirī and his Anthologies, 239.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid.

⁹⁸² Matthee, Rudi. 1998. “Between Aloofness and Fascination: Safavid Views of the West.” *Iranian Studies* 1 (2): 219-246, 222.

⁹⁸³ Zekavat, Massih. 2017. *Satire, Humor and the Construction of Identities*. Amsterdam ; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 88-90.

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid, 90-91.

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid, 91-93.

anecdotes (with Persian translations), and 139 witty Persian anecdotes of an explicit nature; the *Maktūb-i qalandarān*, a compilation of 106 Persian anecdotes, the highly entertaining *Risāla-yi dah fasl* (Treatise of Ten Chapters), which is a list of *risqué* satirical definitions and the *Rīsh-nāma* (Book of the Beard), a work of prose and verse on the beard, the destroyer of youthful beauty.⁹⁸⁶ In Zākānī's Persian anecdotes, the jokes pit Islam against Christianity, Islam against Zoroastrianism, and other religions.⁹⁸⁷ Anecdotes are also about intra-religious oppositions within Islam (true believers versus unbelievers, Shi'ites versus Sunnis, Sufi practices versus their espoused beliefs).⁹⁸⁸ The stereotypes and their portrayal was a result of Iran's tribal, ethnic and regional diversity, and Iran's troubled historical relations with most of its neighbours.

Interestingly, de Bruijn notes that the terminology of humour consists largely of Arabic loanwords. The most comprehensive terms are *mizāḥ* and *hazl*. *Hazl* was extended "into the generic appellation *hazliyyāt*, which is used in particular for all sorts of light verse and occurs among the section headings in *divāns*."⁹⁸⁹ Funny stories and short poems were deemed suitable for use in conversation "to make the buds of the lips laugh and bring the blossom of the hearts into flower."⁹⁹⁰

Rizvi argues that the formation of a Safavid Shi'i cultural identity was reactive and anti-Sunni, articulated through jokes and light-hearted anecdotes.⁹⁹¹ One such anecdote is as follows: One day a preacher was on the pulpit delivering a sermon to an audience consisting of both Shi'ites and Sunnis who wanted to know to which branch he belonged. They asked him: "Who is the noblest of men next to the Prophet?" He gave them a vague answer "*man bintuhu fī baytiḥi*", which can mean either 'he whose daughter is in his house', thereby alluding to Abū Bakr whose daughter was married to the Prophet; or it may mean 'he in whose house his daughter is' thereby alluding to 'Alī who was married to the Prophet's

⁹⁸⁶ Brookshaw, Dominic Parviz. 2009. "To be Feared and Desired: Turks in the Collected Works of 'Ubayd-i Zākānī." *Iranian Studies* 42 (5): 725-744, 733.

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁹ J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Humor," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XII/6, pp. 562-566; available online at <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/humor> (accessed online at 22 June 2020).

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹¹ Rizvi. Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī and his Anthologies, 224.

daughter. So he was asked again: "How many persons do you regard as the true successors of the Prophet?" He replied: "Four, four, four." The audience was unable to understand whether he meant four successors, whom the Sunnis call the Rightfully Guided Caliphs, or the (three times four) twelve Imams.⁹⁹²

Another interesting anecdote mixed grieving in mourning for al-Ḥusayn with laughing: A Muḥarram procession is taking place, and two foreigners are caught unaware. They watch the hysterical weeping and men beating themselves with chains and knives with great interest and alarm. They ask someone on the street: "What happened? Why are they so upset?!" "One of their great leaders was killed, almost fourteen centuries ago now," came the reply. The foreigners asked in even greater perplexity: "And they just found out about it now?"⁹⁹³

To conclude, contrary to the stereotypical image of grieving, weeping Shi'ites, there was also much humour to be found, not only in scholarly works, but also in daily lives of Shi'ites, creating a well-rounded literature and a balance between sorrow and joy. The factors affecting the depiction of laughter in the *aḥādīth* collections to varying degrees, before and during (251/865 to 651/1253), were discussed at length above and the same factors apply for the Shi'ite only narrations, with some added factors related to the developing ideology. The period before 951/1544 saw the establishment of a stable Shi'ite dynasty, the Safavids, with an increased Shi'ite literary output, especially in *Ḥadīth* collections. The end of persecution allowed for normalcy, resulting in the emergence of a humorous genre like the Arabic *nawādir* genre. Some of the jokes also ridiculed the manipulation of the historical material and *ḥadīth* forgeries. For example: Mulla Nasruddin was praying in the mosque, when his shirt came untucked and exposed his back in an unseemly fashion. Trying to be of help, the man behind him pulled on it to lower it. Immediately the Mulla pulled on the shirt of the man in front of him, and this began a chain reaction that became a tradition during public prayer. Absurdly, at some point a cleric felt the need for

⁹⁹² Kuka, Mehrijibhai Noshewanji. 1894. *The Wit and Humour of the Persians*. Bombay: The Education Society's Steam Press, 170-171.

⁹⁹³ Bard, Amy C. 2010. "Turning Karbala Inside Out: Humor and Ritual Critique in South Asian Muharram Rites ." In *Sacred Play : Ritual Levity and Humor in South Asian Religions*, edited by Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey, 161-183. Albany: State University Of New York Press, 175.

authorization of this 'time-honoured' practice, and in due course an appropriate *ḥadīth* was fabricated.⁹⁹⁴ Finally, the prolific *Ḥadīth* collections with numerous reports both encouraging sadness, weeping, and discouraging laughter, but also showing the Prophet and the Imams laughing and joking, and recounted many jokes and humorous anecdotes encourage the indulgence in laughter, thereby diminishing the common stereotype of Shi'ites as perpetually weeping and grieving. The political instability and wars affected the literary productions and scholarship, which explains the drop in the chart that is followed with another increase that continue to modern times.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the types of laughter and its distribution over history and in both branches of Islam. From the above analysis, it was shown that the depiction of the Prophet's laughter changed over time and also changed in the two branches of Islam and also in the combined set of the two (SuShi). Moreover, the chapter also determined that laughing and joking as such were not only accepted, but also actively encouraged in different time periods. Additionally, the Prophet's laughter was manipulated and edited, diluted, enhanced or eliminated depending on the context, be it ideological, political, historical, intellectual or literary. The examples for such contextual editing and manipulations included turning the human Prophet into a superhuman being, thereby reducing his human passions and emotions in the *Sīra* genre or shifting the focus from him to 'Alī and his descendants and their tragic sufferings in Shi'ite biographies, or stressing Muḥammad's *zuhd* in Sufi biographies. Other manipulations, such as by Sufi ascetics (al-Bakkā'ūn and al-Malāmatiyya), many of whom were *muḥaddithūn*, and Shi'ite authors include ascribing more weeping to him than laughter, and thereby fashioning him in their image or colouring his image with their respective ideologies. The various periods of political strife and instability led jurists to attempt to control populations by regulating laughter and suppressing it along with the suppression of possible rebellions that also affected literary production. The encouragement of sadness and weeping, as well as the discouragement of laughter waxed and waned in different periods, as did the encouragement of laughter and joking in reports conveying that the

⁹⁹⁴ Rahman, Jamal. 2014. *Sacred Laughter of the Sufis : Awakening the Soul with the Mulla's Comic Teaching Stories & Other Islamic Wisdom*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 83.

Prophet did indeed laugh, and his laughter varied from discreet smiles to laughing with gay abandon, showing his teeth and all degrees in between.

The next chapter will first look at the reasons why the Prophet laughed in more detail and then combine these reasons into a new theory of humour that is grounded in the data and is neither western-centric nor modern, but reflects the actual findings.

Chapter Six - The Last Laugh: Towards a New Theory of Prophetic Humour

The previous chapter examined the types of laughter, their distribution in Sunni and Shi'ite history and the reasons why the quantities rose and fell at different times. In this chapter, the category of 'intent' will be analysed further and will be tied to the other categories (object, joker, audience, context, and shared knowledge), to use the findings to formulate a new theory of humour based on the data. As mentioned in the first chapter, humour theories are western-centric, mostly with a modern focus. The proposed humour theory aims to offer a new and more universal theory that does not back-project modern sensibilities and western-centric ideas on ancient times and other communities.

The "intent" category aimed at extracting the intent of the jokes and anecdotes, intent itself is very important. *Niyya* (intention/intent) plays a critical role in determining the legal aspect of the action undertaken. It is therefore not surprising to see al-Bukhāri start his *Ṣaḥīḥ* by quoting 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb say: "I heard the Prophet say: "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended.'" This *ḥadīth* occurs frequently in canonical collections, and has several longer versions. It appears at least seven other times in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁹⁹⁵ The moral significance of intention and *ikhlas* (sincerity) are recognised. Even virtue is judged in light of the intention behind it. Powers argues that Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī's (d. 684/1285) treatise on *niyya* is quite explicit in this regard: "The rationale for the requirement of *niyya* is *tamyīz* (distinguishing) the acts of worship from ordinary actions (*al-'ādāt*) and distinguishing among the levels of acts of worship, for example required prayers from supererogatory prayers."⁹⁹⁶ All jurists include *niyya* among the required elements of *'ibādāt* (acts of worship). *Niyya* as a declaration can be pronounced audibly or remain

⁹⁹⁵ Zayd, Nasr Hamid Abu, "Intention", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 08 May 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00225>

⁹⁹⁶ Powers, Paul R. 2014. "Finding God and Humanity in Language: Islamic Legal Assessments as the Meeting Point of the Divine and Human." In *Islamic law in theory: Studies on Jurisprudence in Honor of Bernard Weiss*, edited by A. Kevin Reinhart and Robert Gleave, 197–230. Leiden: Brill, 219.

mental, but without it, the act would be *bāṭil* (invalid).⁹⁹⁷ Elsewhere the Prophet said: “Do not belittle *al-maʿrūf* (charity, good deeds) even if it is only meeting your brother with a joyful face – and when you make soup, increase the water so you can offer some to your neighbours.”⁹⁹⁸ This means that a joyful face, or a smile is charity and a good deed and is a deliberately choice. He also advised: “Ask your needs from those with beautiful faces, if they fulfil them, they will do so with joyful faces and if they decline, they will also do it with joyful faces.”⁹⁹⁹

The numerous reports from the data, showing that the Prophet laughed and joked on many occasions with different people, for different reasons support the argument that his laughter was not just a reaction, but that it was intentional, deliberate and purposeful. This will be discussed in the section titled ‘function’, after two other sections discussing the permissibility of laughter, as well as the structure of the reports. All sections will use the findings from all categories discussed in the fourth chapter.

1) Affirmation

This section will analyse the Qur’anic passages dealing with laughter, as well as the *fiqh* rulings attempting to qualify and restrict laughter. Examples from the data will be used to check whether these restrictions indeed stem from the Prophet’s Sunna, to determine whether the permissibility of laughter should be unconditional or restricted.

a) Qur’an

In the Qur’an, words of the root *ḍ-ḥ-k* (laugh) occur ten times in several forms addressing several people. In verse [11:71]¹⁰⁰⁰ Sarah laughs. Much has been written about Sarah’s laugh, with her laughter being attributed to joy at the visit of the angels, astonishment at being given the news about a son, to

⁹⁹⁷ “niyya”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Glossary and Index of Terms, Edited by: P.J. Bearman, Th. Banquis, C.E. Bowworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs Bowworth. Consulted online on 08 May 2020

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei2glos_SIM_gi_03698>

⁹⁹⁸ Ibn Ḥibbān, Muḥammad. 1993. *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*. Edited by Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūt. 18 vols. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 2:282.

⁹⁹⁹ al-Ṭabarānī, Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. Ayyūb al-Lakhmī. 2000. *Juzʾ fihi mā intaqā Ibn Mardaway ʿalā al-Ṭabarānī*. Edited by Badr b. ʿAbd Allah al-Badr. Cairo: Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf, 1:348.

¹⁰⁰⁰ [11:71] And his wife was standing (by), so she laughed, then We gave her the good news of Ishāq and after Ishāq of (a son's son) Yaʿqūb.

denying her laughter and explaining it away as another word for menstruation.¹⁰⁰¹ Interestingly, in the entry about laughter in *Lisān al-'Arab* this is disputed. Ibn Manzūr records that *ḍaḥikat* was used in the *tafsīr* to mean *ḥaḍat* (menstruated) but this was not transmitted by any trustworthy source (*lam asma'ahu min thiqa*). I heard Abū Mūsa ask al-'Abbās about it, who replied that it was recorded in the *tafsīr*, though he has not heard that before and it was not from the known speech of Arabs, but what it really means is that she laughed in amazement and happiness.¹⁰⁰²

In verse [27:19]¹⁰⁰³ it is Sulaymān who laughs at the ant's words, which will be discussed in detail in the final section 'function'. As for verses [23:110], [43:47] and [83:29], they show the disbelievers laughing at the believers for believing, while verses [80:39] and [83:34] show the believers being vindicated and laughing in heaven at the disbelievers.

As for verse [9:82],¹⁰⁰⁴ al-Qurṭubī divides it into two parts writing that 'let them laugh a little' is a threat and is not an order to laugh. He quotes al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, one of the weepers as discussed in the previous chapter, saying: "Let them laugh a little in this world and cry a lot in Hell."¹⁰⁰⁵ Al-Qurṭubī continues: "among the people were some who did not laugh, caring about not corrupting themselves, being fearful, even if they were righteous believers." He then quotes the Prophet saying: "By God, if you knew what I know, you would laugh a little and weep much." He again mentions al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, describing him as one of those who had grief overtake him and who did not laugh, juxtaposing him Ibn

¹⁰⁰¹ See for example Firestone, Reuven. 1990. *Journeys in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 52-59; Lowin, Shari L. 2011. "Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegesis." *Religion Compass* 5 (6): 224–235. doi:10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00274.x; Reynolds, Gabriel Said. 2009. "Reading The Qur'an As Homily: The Case Of Sarah's Laughter." In *The Qur'ān in Context - Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, edited by Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx Angelika Neuwirth, 585–592 . Leiden: Brill; Reynolds, Gabriel Said. 2006. "The Qur'anic Sarah As Prototype Of Mary." In *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, edited by David Thomas, 193–206 . Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers; Roded, Ruth. 2012. "Islamic and Jewish Religious Feminism: Similarities, Parallels and Interactions." *Religion Compass* 6 (4): 213-224. doi:10.1111/j.1749-8171.2012.00346.x and Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. 1996. "Sarah and the Hyena: Laughter, Menstruation, and the Genesis of a Double Entendre." *History of Religions* 36 (1): 13-41. doi:10.2307/3176471.

¹⁰⁰² Ibn Manzūr, Muḥammad b. Mukarram. n.d. *Lisān al-'Arab*. Beirut: Lisān al-'Arab, 10:460.

¹⁰⁰³ [27:19] So he smiled, wondering at her word, and said: My Lord! grant me that I should be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I should do good such as Thou art pleased with, and make me enter, by Thy mercy, into Thy servants, the good ones.

¹⁰⁰⁴ [9:82] Therefore they shall laugh little and weep much as a recompense for what they earned.

¹⁰⁰⁵ al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. 1964. *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*. Edited by Aḥmad al-Bardūnī & Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh. 20 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya 1962, 8:216.

Sirīn, who laughed and opposed al-Baṣrī's attitude by quoting verse [53:43], that it is God who makes men laugh and weep. Al-Qurṭubī asserts that the Companions laughed, adding that excessive and prolonged laughter is blameworthy, prohibited and foolish. He then quotes the report that abundant laughter hardening the hearts, but weeping in fear of God and God's punishment is commended. He quotes reports that praise weeping, yet he does not provide any context, which comes from the previous verse [9:81] about those who failed to join the Prophet in fighting, and felt happily safe, far away from the battlefield. These are the ones who should laugh a little and weep much in fear of their punishment, hence it should not be generalised.¹⁰⁰⁶

Al-Ṭabarī on the other hand links both verses [9:81-82] in one and describes "the joy of those who missed the battle with Muḥammad for remaining in their homes." Al-Ṭabarī continues that they will be punished for rejecting jihad and disobeying the Prophet, hence the second verse addresses them, to let them laugh a little in this mortal world, for they will weep for a long time in Hell."¹⁰⁰⁷ Therefore it can be argued that this qualification of laughter is not aimed at all Muslims, but directed at a specific group.

The same argument applies to verse [53:60], which follows many verses [53:50-59] reminding listeners/readers of the misdeeds of the people of 'Ād, Thamūd, Nūḥ and Lūṭ and all those given to inequity and transgression, as a warning to the disbelievers and a reminder that the 'Hour' is near, which only God can stop. The last two verses ask rhetorical questions: "Do you then wonder at this announcement? And will you laugh and not weep?" In various exegetical works, the context is not mentioned and as with verse [9:82] al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is quoted, as well as the *ḥadīth* about "if you know what I know..." Al-Ṭabarī on the other hand, again reads it in context, arguing that these examples were already mentioned in *Ṣuhuf* (books/scrolls) of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā and the warnings are directed at the disbelievers, not at all people. He further adds that *hadhā al-ḥadīth* (this announcement) in verse [53:59] signifies the whole teaching that is presented in the Qur'an, meaning all to which Muḥammad is inviting, writing: "It is the same that you have already heard before. Now, this is the very thing at which you

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid, 8:217.

¹⁰⁰⁷ al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. 2001. *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'an*. 26 vols. Giza: Dār Hajr li-l-ṭibā'a wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī, 14:401.

marvel and feel alarmed, and express wonder as if it were something very strange and novel that is presented before you.”¹⁰⁰⁸ Therefore the question in verse [53:60] is addressed at those who disbelieved and did not heed the warning.

The final verse [53:43] was interpreted in almost all exegetical works to mean that it is God who provides the means for both joy and for grief. Taken together with the following verses [53:44-49], which state that it is God who causes death and gives life, creates pairs, male and female from the small seed and that He will bring humankind forth a second time; and that it is He who enriches and is the Lord of the Sirius, most interpretations say that no one else in the universe may control the making or marring of destinies.

Ibrāhīm argues that some of the characteristics that distinguish the Qur’anic style include severe abbreviation yet adhere to a complete fulfilment of the meaning. An example is the expression ‘laugh’ and ‘cry’ in verse [53:43]. With the deletion of the object, the words include every being in every time and place.¹⁰⁰⁹ Tying it to verse [53:44] it causes a ‘mental’ movement as a result of the opposites of meanings and images. This has a significance, argues Ibrāhīm, namely adding that these words together, even if they are general, produce a value.¹⁰¹⁰ The verse, according to him, shows two pairs of opposites consecutively, laughing and crying, giving life and taking it through death, laughter includes amazement and weeping shows sensitivity of the heart, life is tied to nature and death is inevitable.¹⁰¹¹ Even if tying laughter to life and weeping to death, by inverting the sequence of the position in the verse, might be a big leap, laughing and weeping, giving life and ending it through death cannot be changed, are inescapable and are signs from God.¹⁰¹² Ammann argues that “the exact wording conspicuously reverses the internal sequence of the two pairs: laugh — weep, die — live,” which is not just for the formal necessity of *saj’* (rhymed prose), but to end on a hopeful note with the final word *aḥyā* (gives life)

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid, 22:557.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibrāhīm, Kamāl ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz. 2011. *Uslūb al-muqābala fī-l-Qur’ān al-karīm : dirāsa fannīya balāghīyya muqārana*. Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiya li-l-Nashr, 43.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹¹ al-Naysabūrī, Niẓām al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qummī. 1996. *Tafsīr gharā’ib al-Qur’ān wa ragḥā’ib al-furqān*. Edited by Zakariyya ‘Umayrāt. 6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 6:211.

¹⁰¹² Ibid, 2:258.

saying that God causes people to live in this world and revives them in the hereafter, raising them from the dead, which implies that the believers have more reason to laugh than to weep, and “it certainly invalidates the maximalist reading of the end of [53:60-2] (mentioned above), which would like to rule out laughter completely.”¹⁰¹³

Chittick agrees writing: “Given the dialectical structure of Qur’anic rhetoric and Islamic thinking in general, one can hardly speak of weeping without mentioning laughter. The Qur’an suggests that the two need to be understood as one of the many cosmic pairs: [53:43-45].”¹⁰¹⁴ He concludes that despite the praise of tears throughout the literature, the *aḥādīth* attribute far more laughter to the Prophet than weeping,¹⁰¹⁵ which is confirmed by the data which shows less than 0.5% praising weeping, as opposed to 55% showing the Prophet laughing.

All verses in the Qur’an mentioning laughter therefore, as demonstrated, have no qualifiers or restrictions. The Qur’an never categorically condemns laughter as such. The only verse restricting ‘humorous’ interaction is verse [49:11], urging believers not to ridicule or mock others. The demand is repeated twice, once addressing men and the second time addressing women, for emphasis. It cautions against finding fault with people, calling them nicknames and classifying this as evil and unjust. Therefore, this is not a qualifier, nor a prohibition against laughter, but a statement against deriding, taunting, making fun of, showing contempt, mocking or ridiculing others, and giving them offensive nicknames.

Yet, nicknames as such are not prohibited. The Prophet gave ‘Alī the nickname Abū Turāb (dust). When ‘Alī used to get angry with Fāṭima, he would leave the house instead of fighting with her, and would put dust on his head to cool off. When the Prophet saw him, he gave him this nickname.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹³ Ammann, Ludwig, “Laughter”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 18 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uoielibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00257>

¹⁰¹⁴ Chittick, William C. 2012. *In Search of the Lost Heart : Explorations in Islamic Thought*. Edited by Atif Khalil, Kazuyo Murata and Mohammed Rustom. Albany: SUNY Press, 50.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁶ al-Khāzin, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad. 2015. *al-Rawḍ wa-al-ḥadā’iq fī tahdhīb sīrat khayr al-khalā’iq*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah, 2:197.

Shi'ite literature provides another reason for that name, namely that during the Battle of al-'Ashīra, 'Alī and 'Ammār b. Yāsīr were very tired and fell asleep under some palm trees. The Prophet woke them up later and they were both full of dust, as if they had wallowed in it. He addressed 'Alī saying: "Get up, O Abā Turāb," and he pulled his beard.¹⁰¹⁷ The Prophet also gave Abū Hurayra (kitten) this nickname, because he found an abandoned kitten and carried her around in his sleeve.¹⁰¹⁸

b) Fiqh and Ḥadīth

In *fiqh* works, as discussed in the second chapter, it was shown that laughter was regulated to a great extent. Legal opinions of various jurists and their rulings showed that humour was divided into two types, permitted and forbidden, which was further divided into *ḥarām* (prohibited) and *makrūh* (reprehensible). Restrictions were also placed on jokes. Jokes needed to be truthful, not excessive, and should avoid incitement, scaring the listener or leading to unlawful action. Ideally, *the fuqahā'* envisioned that permissible joking should strengthen social bonds, invigorate the listeners by providing welcome breaks, break the ice with strangers, alleviate boredom, spread smiles and entertain through witticisms and word play that stimulate thinking and yet remain truthful.¹⁰¹⁹

Though forbidden types of humour, which the jurists considered *ḥarām* or *makrūh*, include sexually explicit jokes or cracking jokes in serious situations like during court cases, marriage, divorce, or battles, the data shows the Prophet laughing about such issues as well. Some notable examples are report (#1), where a woman complains about her second husband, stating that he only has "this small fringe, like she has on her garment." The Prophet laughed, asking her if she would like to remarry her first husband "to taste his honey and have him taste" hers. The discomfort with such a report is apparent, as in the second version there is an addition to the *matn* stating that others were present and Khālid asked Abū Bakr: "are you not going to admonish this woman for saying what she did to the Prophet?" In the third version another addition states that "the *'ulamā'* opined that he 'smiled' at her being so forward,

¹⁰¹⁷ Yūsuf, Aḥmad al-Sayyid Ya'qūb al-Sayyid. 1999. *Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib min al-mīlād ilā al-istishhād*. n.p.: Dār al-Faḍīla, 89.

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-'Asqalānī. 1994. *al-Iṣāba fī tamayyiz al-Ṣaḥāba*. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 7:349.

¹⁰¹⁹ Abū Ghudda, Ḥ. 2005. al-Muzāḥ fī-l Islām. *Majallit al-Sharī'a wa-l dirasāt al-Islamiyya*, 20(61), 197-273.

openly stating what women shy away from and because she preferred her first husband, but God knows best.” Yet the Prophet neither felt embarrassed, nor offended, but smiled ‘knowingly’ understanding human nature, asking about her preference, acknowledging her right to pleasure. The *‘ulamā’*s interpretation is at variance with other reports showing Muḥammad smiling at other instances of human nature, fickleness, jealousy and other idiosyncrasies. Moreover, other reports (not in the data) show his understanding of human attraction. For example Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) the Yemeni Zaydi jurist and *muḥaddith* reports that a man came to the Prophet and said: “My wife does not reject any *lāmis*’s (meaning she allows to be touched by anyone’s) hand.” The Prophet told him: “Divorce her.” He said: “*uḥibbuhā* (I love her).” He said: “So *tamatta’a bihā* (enjoy her).”¹⁰²⁰ In another version he said: “I am afraid my soul will follow her.”¹⁰²¹ The Prophet neither condemned the man, nor his wife, nor commented on indecent behaviour. Therefore, the *‘ulamā’*s interpretation contradicts the evidence.

Regarding the other restriction about laughing during court cases, there is the example about the court case in Yemen in report (#195). Though the Prophet was not present during the proceedings, he still laughed about its outcome when ‘Alī reported about the three men who fought over a boy, each one claiming to be his father as they all had intercourse with the same woman within the same ‘purity period.’ ‘Alī, to the Prophet’s amusement, ruled after drawing lots between them, letting God decide who was the right one. The ‘winner’ was to pay two thirds of the boy’s *diyya* to the other two who would give him up and he would be dead to them. The Prophet’s reaction was to laugh until his teeth or molars showed.

In report (#85) Sa’d aimed a blunt arrow at one of the polytheists, who fell over exposing his genitals, and the Prophet laughed until his back teeth showed. This report also has numerous additions to the different versions, showing the discomfort of the scholars with his reaction. In some additions, a backstory is presented to dilute the reaction, namely that Ḥayyān b. al-‘Arqa had previously shot an arrow at Umm Ayman’s hem and that this was in retaliation therefor. In another addition, the story is embellished, adding that Umm Ayman had fallen over once the arrow hit her and exposed herself. The

¹⁰²⁰ Ibn al-Wazīr, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Qāsimī. 1994. *Al-‘Awāsīm wa-l-qawāsīm fī al-dhabb ‘an sunnat Abī-l-Qāsim*. Edited by Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūṭ. 9 vols. Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī’, 8:123.

¹⁰²¹ Āl Shaykh, Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. 2011. *Itḥāf al-sā’il bima fī al-Ṭaḥāwīyya min masā’il also known as Sharḥ al-Ṭaḥāwīyya*. Mansoura: Dār al-Mawadda li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī’, 1:472.

discomfort even spilled into the *tafsīr* works, so that al-Qurṭubī found it necessary in his exegesis of verse [27:19] to attribute that laughter to happiness that he was hit and to emphasize that it was not because the man's genitals were exposed, adding that the Prophet is above feelings of pettiness and *Schadenfreude*.¹⁰²²

Other reports show him joking and laughing in very serious situations like during battle or when under siege, like reports (#182 and 183). Additionally, report (#80) reminds of verses [9:81-82] discussed above and in it, the Prophet smiled, albeit an angry smile, at Ka'b b. Mālik after lagging behind in the Battle of Tabūk, along with the eighty men who lagged behind, when they went to apologise and pledge allegiance. The Prophet accepted their apology and allegiance and asked God for forgiveness on their behalf. It seems that the conditions and qualifiers set by the jurists were not all derived from the Prophet's *Sunna*, nor the Qur'an, but from the jurists' personal preferences, coloured by the contexts of their times, as discussed in the previous chapter.

However, the jurists themselves were not averse to humour. In the fifth chapter, al-Ghazālī's condemnation of laughter and joking was discussed. Ormsby points out one passage where al-Ghazālī asks, "Why is joking called *muzāḥa*?" He replies, with word-play on the verb *azāḥa* meaning both 'to jest' and 'to drive away': "because it pulls the man who laughs away from the Truth."¹⁰²³ Al-Ghazālī sets six criteria for the permissible joke: 1) it must be truthful, 2) it should neither be exaggerated nor long-drawn-out, 3) it must not cause bad feelings, enmity or anger, 4) it must neither intimidate nor frighten, 5) it must avoid all bawdiness and finally 6) it should be expressed in fine friendly words and well-meaning expressions.¹⁰²⁴ These restrictions were repeated in varying degrees in many *fiqh* manuals dealing with humour and laughter. Ormsby writes that for philosophers and theologians, humour is no laughing matter, that laughter is a serious subject and yet, though they analyse and theorise humour, they seldomly incorporate it into their arguments. They also omit acknowledging it as a useful device, even

¹⁰²² al-Qurṭubī. *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*, 13:176.

¹⁰²³ al-Ghazālī. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 3:128.

¹⁰²⁴ Ormsby, Eric. 2015. *The Comedy of Reason Strategies of Humour in al-Ghazālī*. Vol. 1, in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī - Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, edited by Georges Tamer, 121- 138. Leiden: Brill, 126-127.

though humour stimulates reflection.¹⁰²⁵ Nevertheless, some philosophers as well as theologians use irony and mockery in their works and caricature opposing views.

Ormsby defends al-Ghazālī's sense of humour, arguing that al-Ghazālī "avails himself of the devices of humour in many of his works and that he does so strategically, using humour quite consciously in several of his works. ... Sometimes this is humour of a conventional sort but at others, his humour is broader, subtler and infused with a rare geniality."¹⁰²⁶ According to Ormsby, al-Ghazālī uses anecdotes that illustrate the characteristic Sufi humour, "which is hard to define but unmistakable; at once amusing and paradoxical, and one that stimulates reflection, to establish a certain distance from the self and is part of a discipline of detachment."¹⁰²⁷ Ormsby argues that al-Ghazālī's use of humour, sprinkled throughout the *Iḥyā'*, is "one facet of the profound humanity of his work, and of the *Iḥyā'* 'ulūm al-dīn in particular."¹⁰²⁸ For Ormsby, al-Ghazālī's sense of humour "exemplifies that gaiety, that geniality, that inbisāt, so fundamental to certain Sufis, but the humour which he deploys has deeper roots as well as a profounder purpose. For laughter – truthful laughter, as it were – presages the ultimate joy of paradise."¹⁰²⁹ This same concept is echoed by Nāṣir Khusraw, who states that "laughter is a manifestation of joyousness; it too is a foretaste, as well as a promise, of paradise. For in the end, joy is the very substance of the intellect."¹⁰³⁰

A particular genre can differ quite significantly from another in how the subject matter, here humour and laughter, is treated and to what end. Even as different genres discuss the same subjects, sometimes using similar materials, the end result is different. According to Zaman, this is "a realization that has been slow in coming to many areas of Islamic Studies. Without such a recognition, however, interpreting the meaning and significance of particular texts, their relationship to works of the same or

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid, 121.

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid, 122.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid, 129.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid, 135.

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid, 136.

¹⁰³⁰ Khusraw, Nāṣir-i. 2012. *Between Reason and Revelation : Twin Wisdoms Reconciled : An Annotated English Translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Kitāb-i Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*. Translated by Eric L. Ormsby. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 112.

other genres, and judgments about their place in Islamic historiography or intellectual history ... may often prove to be quite misleading.”¹⁰³¹

Hallaq states: “the four sources of Islamic law are said to be the Qur’an, the Prophet’s Sunna, *ijmā’* (consensus) and *qiyās* (legal reasoning).”¹⁰³² As demonstrated above, the Qur’an does not prohibit laughter nor does it qualify or temper it in any way, though attempts were made to generalise from verse [9:82], as demonstrated above. Using the statement in verse [9:82] for everyone is a reading that does the opposite of both *takhṣiṣ al-‘ām*¹⁰³³ and *taqyīd al-muṭlaq*,¹⁰³⁴ thereby generalising to the whole Muslim community something which was intended only for a particular group, those who did not join the battle. Exegetes used these two interpretive tools to provide a particular reading and interpretation, emphasizing certain perspectives and excluding others. The Prophet’s *Sunna* does indeed advise moderation and qualifies laughter by commanding that it be truthful. As Mary Beard summarizes: “To be witty is a desirable characteristic; too much joking is the mark of a buffoon, too little the mark of a boor, both are to be avoided.”¹⁰³⁵ However, Muḥammad does not qualify or restrict laughter. With regard to *ijmā’*; ironically there has been no consensus as to its constituents. Mālik, for example intended it to be consensus of the people of Medina; al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) strongly argued against a geographically localised *ijmā’*, opting for the more inclusive, universal consensus of the people (‘*awām*).¹⁰³⁶ Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1063) proposed a consensus of scholars.¹⁰³⁷ Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327) criticized Ibn Ḥazm’s work and demonstrated the impossibility of collecting all scholarly opinions in given cases, except for, perhaps, the first two or three generations of Muslims. Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism argues for the impossibility of knowing the positions of all later authorities on any given issue, listing divergent scholarly

¹⁰³¹ Zaman, Muḥammad Qasim. 1996. “Maghazi and the Muhaddithun: Reconsidering the Treatment of “Historical” Materials in Early Collections of Hadith.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1): 1-18, 2.

¹⁰³² Hallaq, Wael B. 2009. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 16- 22.

¹⁰³³ *Takhṣiṣ al-‘ām* (assigning particular specifications to generic groups).

¹⁰³⁴ *Taqyīd al-muṭlaq* (restriction of the totality of persons).

¹⁰³⁵ Beard. *Laughter in Ancient Rome*, 32.

¹⁰³⁶ al-Shāfi‘ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs. 1940. *al-Risāla*. Edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 471-476, 533-555.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, ‘Alī b. Aḥmad and Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyya. 1983. *Marātib al-ijmā’ w ayalih naqd marātib al-ijmā’*. Cairo: Dār Zāhid al-Qudṣī

positions with regard to several of Ibn Ḥazm's examples.¹⁰³⁸ Twelver Shi'i legal theorists theorise an *ijmā'* of the Imams.¹⁰³⁹ Therefore, there is no consensus at all. There is no *ijmā'* on the definition of *ijmā'* itself, whose it is, whether it is one of the entire community or its *'ulamā'* only, the competence of the constituent members, the period covered, the scope of its subject matters, the source of its authority, whether matters of creed and dogma fall within its scope, whether it has to be on the basis of positive expression or can be based on the silence of some, and finally, once a so-called consensus is reached, whether or not it can be modified or changed in the future based on new evidence.¹⁰⁴⁰

Interestingly, the Qur'anic occurrences of this term suggest it as a tool used by a powerful entity or majority to suppress the truth in dissenting voices, usually a minority. For example Nūḥ's people came to a consensus against him in verse [10:71],¹⁰⁴¹ Yūsuf's brothers agreed to throw him into the well in verse [12:15]¹⁰⁴² and [12: 102]¹⁰⁴³ and Pharaoh's magicians opposed Mūsā in verse [20:64].¹⁰⁴⁴ The term does not have a single positive occurrence in the Qur'an, which makes its usage difficult on the part of believers, theologically speaking, especially since this is reinforced by the oppressive discourses to silence those fighting for justice, reform or against dogmatic blindness.

Therefore, since there is no consensus, a *qiyās* that seems to be *aḥwaṭ* (erring on the side of caution) rather than *aysar* (easier) and as the Qur'an permits laughter without any qualifiers and the Prophet's *Sunna* permits laughter in general, preferably in moderation and using only the truth, humour, joking and laughing are not only allowed, but regarded as a gift from God. The jurists were the ones restraining laughter or as Birgit Krawietz writes attempted "cultural behavioural control."¹⁰⁴⁵

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid, 285-308.

¹⁰³⁹ Hallaq, Wael B. 2005. *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 118-120.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Farooq, Mohammad Omar. 2011. *Toward our Reformation : From Legalism to Value-Oriented Islamic Law and Jurisprudence*. London ; Washington [D.C.]: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 160.

¹⁰⁴¹ [10:71] And recite to them the story of Nuh when he said to his people: O my people! if my stay and my reminding (you) by the communications of Allah is hard on you-- yet on Allah do I rely-- then resolve upon your affair and (gather) your associates, then let not your affair remain dubious to you, then have it executed against me and give me no respite:

¹⁰⁴² [12:15] So when they had gone off with him and agreed that they should put him down at the bottom of the pit, and We revealed to him: You will most certainly inform them of this their affair while they do not perceive.

¹⁰⁴³ [12:102] This is of the announcements relating to the unseen (which) We reveal to you, and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans.

¹⁰⁴⁴ [20:64] Therefore settle your plan, then come standing in ranks and he will prosper indeed this day who overcomes.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Krawietz. Verstehen Sie Spaß?, 31.

Ammann argues that the censorship of laughter was due to the perceived loss of dignity, and later influences by non-Islamic cultural norms, Christian asceticism, some Persian and Greek ideas, and pre-Islamic Arab traditions, all urging restraint of laughter. However, he states that it was not censored by the Prophet.¹⁰⁴⁶ Therefore, the jurists developed a kind of general rule that one should never laugh except for a good reason, mainly joy or wonder and remain truthful. Ammann argues that this 'rule' dates to the beginning of the third/ninth century at the latest, the time when the *ahl al-Hadīth* folk emerged from the larger movement of the 'Sharī'a minded.'¹⁰⁴⁷ With regard to smiling rather than laughing, Ammann concludes that Muḥammad's laugh was actually a real laugh not merely a smile. He bases this on the recurrent word *dawāḥik* (the shining whiteness of the exposed front teeth) in addition to the phrase *inbisāṭat al-wajh wa-takassur al-asnān* (broadening and teeth appearing/gleaming).¹⁰⁴⁸

The scope of this study does not permit a thorough *isnād-cum-matn* analysis of all the reports, especially the contradiction between the *aḥādīth* asserting that the Prophet's laugh was but a smile and the reports mentioning his laughter showing various teeth to date them and determine their authenticity to conclusively assess whether the Prophet laughed heartily or barely smiled. Furthermore, such an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis should also be performed on the report quoted above and attributed to the Prophet that says: "If you knew what I know you would laugh a little and weep much" to date it. It is highly conceivable that this was a later fabrication in line with the exegeses of verse [9:82], that ignore its context. This is an avenue for future research. However, the tentative conclusion, until such an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis is performed, is in line with Ammann's opinion that a later discomfort with the Prophet's laughter caused this contradiction, as it is in agreement with the findings from the fifth chapter. Ammann opines: "At this point, one must ask how likely it is for a man who was not averse to jokes, as based on traditions handed down by most trustworthy transmitters always only smiled? An in-depth study of the traditions indicates that the tempered intensity of the prophetic laughter is not credible."¹⁰⁴⁹ It is to be noted though, that Ammann used *ḥadīth* and *adab* works, but did not use any *fiqh* works in his

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ammann. *Vorbild und Vernunft*, 105, 170, 177.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 81-84.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 58-99.

study. Nevertheless, it is not logical to have the Prophet joking, playing pranks, denouncing jokes, laughing heartily, barely smiling and that only occasionally and all that at the same time.

Of all creations (human and animal) only man possesses a rational soul, and partakes in laughter.¹⁰⁵⁰ The philosophers and sages advanced one definition of man as a 'living-laughing' creature and that laughing is a manifestation of happiness. This particular human trait – laughter - stands as proof that ultimate bliss is proper to the intellect.¹⁰⁵¹ Not all jurists though were against allowing laughter unconditionally.

Al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) for example divides causes, as well as all condition-related rulings (*aḥkām waḍ'īyya* and *taklīfiyya*) into two, first those which are within human control and capability, and second those which are not, because they are *jibilla* (human nature, instinct), or in his words 'God given'.¹⁰⁵² Therefore, if the individual were obliged to cease all such activities, this would lead to restrictions, constraints and hardship. He argues that the Law rests upon the Prophet's words: "If I give you a command, obey it to the best of your ability." He elaborates: It has been established in the discipline of *uṣūl* that the conditions of *taklīf* (obligation) and its causes should be within the power and ability of the subject. Thus, an act for which the subject does not have ability is not valid as an obligation, even if it is rationally possible.¹⁰⁵³ If this is established, then the traits with which humans were created, like desiring food and drink, should not be required to be removed, nor should the traits that are embedded in their instincts be eliminated. Doing so would amount to an obligation to perform the impossible, like the requirement to do away with physical defects that mar their bodies, as this is not within the ability of humans. The Lawgiver does not intend such requirements. He requires coercing the self not to commit sins to avoid what is unlawful, and to find a balance in acquiring what is lawful.¹⁰⁵⁴

¹⁰⁵⁰ Amīn, Aḥmad. 1950. *Fayḍ al-khāṭir : wa-huwa majmū' maqālāt adabīyah wa-ijtimā'īyah*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, 1:91-95.

¹⁰⁵¹ Khusraw. *Between Reason and Revelation*, 112-113.

¹⁰⁵² al-Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā. 1997. *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'a*. 7 vols. al-Khobar: Dār Ibn 'Affān, 2:159.

¹⁰⁵³ *Ibid*, 2:171.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2:175.

Considering that laughing is God given as indicated in verse [53:43], and, according to al-Shāṭibī, part of *jibilla*, and hence beyond the control of humans, restrictions and constraints would lead to hardship. Therefore, the permissibility of humour and laughter should be granted without other restrictions than moderation and truth while avoiding insults and mockery.

2) Structure

This section will look at the structure and form of the *aḥādīth* to determine whether there is a specific structure or not and why. Marston argues that in a sense, all *aḥādīth* are narratives, as they convey information and reports about events and sayings of the Prophet and the early Muslims.¹⁰⁵⁵ Narratives are a common feature in Shi'ite and Sunni historical and literary sources, as well as in various theological works, which is not surprising as the Qur'an also uses narratives and stories.

The Qur'an has numerous stories characterised as 'narratives' and their proportion in the Qur'an is large, at almost 23%, amounting to 1453 verses.¹⁰⁵⁶ One of the chapters is also named after stories, *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (Chapter 28). These stories sometimes answer questions or give advice and recommendations and at times warn, threaten or illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, comfort and console, or explain by way of an example. Fables is another word used in the Qur'an to denote stories. *Uṣṭūra* (fable) is mentioned nine times and always in the plural and always coupled with *al-awwālīn* (ancients),¹⁰⁵⁷ like in verse [6:25] *asāfīr al-awwālīn*, albeit with a negative connotation, implying irrelevant stories. However, these fables offer profound guidance for those willing to heed them.¹⁰⁵⁸ The stories underscore the spiritual aspects in the stories of the prophets.¹⁰⁵⁹ Collectively, they serve to illustrate "*the reliability of God's promises to his prophets and their followers and the way He punishes those who*

¹⁰⁵⁵ Speight, R. Marston. 2000. "Narrative Structures in the Hadīth." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 59 (4): 265-271, 265.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Gilliot, Claude, "Narratives", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 10 September 2020. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00132>

¹⁰⁵⁷ See verses [6:25], [8:31], [16:24], [23:83], [25:5], [27:68], [46:17], [68:15], and [83:13].

¹⁰⁵⁸ Yazicioglu, Isra. 2013. *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Wheeler, Brannon M. 2002. *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*. London: Continuum, 367.

mock them,”¹⁰⁶⁰ yet there are also concrete reasons for each story to reinforce a specific message. The stories of the prophets endorse Muḥammad’s message in terms of continuity, demonstrating that it is neither new nor strange, but is a part of a continuing series, ending with him. Simultaneously, they remind of the persecution and maltreatment of earlier prophets and humans’ unwillingness and opposition throughout history to face the truth and trust in God.¹⁰⁶¹ Moreover, the stories warn of God’s punishment if humans do not repent and accept the message. Marshall argues that the Meccan chapters include most of the stories, but that after the *hijra* (emigration), the context changed and therefore “these stories had in a sense been outgrown.”¹⁰⁶² Wheeler states that these stories are closely associated with sermons and popular Qur’anic interpretation, and that the earliest interpretations likely originated from stories, like those attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih, Ka’b al-Aḥbār, Ibn ‘Abbās.¹⁰⁶³

Perhaps the earliest form of narrative was the stories of the *quṣṣās* (storytellers). Tamīm al-Dārī is said to have been the first to tell stories in the Prophet’s mosque at Medina. He later asked ‘Umar’s permission who refused and ‘Uthmān later granted him permission to tell stories twice a month on a Friday.¹⁰⁶⁴ The *quṣṣās* were accused of inventing many traditions with ostensibly perfect *isnāds*. Ibn Taymiyya devotes an entire epistle to the *quṣṣās* in which he lists seventy-nine traditions that he believes were forged by them.¹⁰⁶⁵

In his ground-breaking study *The Quṣṣās of Early Islam* Armstrong demonstrates that the *quṣṣās* engaged in a number of religious disciplines such as Qur’an commentary, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh*.¹⁰⁶⁶ The perception of the *quṣṣās ḥadīth* transmitters as disreputable is not entirely wrong, according to Armstrong, though that image emerged in later sources, that were antagonistic towards them. Armstrong evaluates the reputations of the 108 *quṣṣās* he studies and divides them into four categories: 1) those

¹⁰⁶⁰ Segovia, Carlos A. 2017. *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 63.

¹⁰⁶¹ Eaton, Charles Le Gai. 1985. *Islam and the Destiny of Man*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 84.

¹⁰⁶² Marshall, David, “Punishment Stories”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 17 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00162>

¹⁰⁶³ Wheeler. *Prophets in the Quran*, 7.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Amin, Ahmad. 1969. *Fajr al-Islām*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 158.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm. 1993. *Aḥādīth al-quṣṣās*. Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣrīyah.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Armstrong, Lyall R. *The Quṣṣās of Early Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

who are generally reputable; 2) those who are generally weak; 3) those who have mixed reputations; and 4) those whose reputations in *ḥadīth* were indeterminate due to limited biographical information. He concludes that slightly over two-thirds, or 68.5%, were considered trustworthy, and only 14% were considered weak transmitters. In his conclusion, Armstrong corrects misconceptions about the *quṣṣās*, acknowledging their role and knowledge, restoring their reputation, making the point that they were not unreliable fabricators of *aḥādīth* nor were they responsible for the *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, but that nearly 70% of them were respectable religious scholars praised for their Qurʾan recitations, commentary, *ḥadīth* transmission, and/or legal knowledge. Furthermore, their target audience was not the uneducated populace; but they held sessions for a variety of audiences in numerous venues.¹⁰⁶⁷

Therefore, studying the *Ḥadīth* as narrative is beneficial, yet literary analysis in the field of *Ḥadīth* studies is still minimal and remains underdeveloped.¹⁰⁶⁸ Leder, analyses the narrative components of early Arabic historical works and provides detailed case studies that demonstrate the reshaping of narrations during the process of transmission and the problems that this raises for the authorship of these accounts, concluding that some legendary material was transformed into seemingly objective 'historical' reports, which echoes the discussion of the transformation of the human Prophet to the superhuman being in the *Sīra* genre, discussed in the previous chapter. Leder also discusses the relationship between transmitting, editing, and compiling seemingly unrelated *akhbār*, *qiṣṣaṣ*, and

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid, 75-152.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See for example, Beaumont, Daniel. 1996. "Hard-Boiled: Narrative Discourse in Early Muslim Traditions." *Studia Islamica* 83: 5-31; El Calamawy, Sahair. 1983. "Narrative Elements in the Ḥadīth Literature." In *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, edited by T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, G. R. Smith, Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Michael Sells A. F. L. Beeston, 308-316. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Günther, Sebastian. 1998. "Fictional Narration and Imagination within an Authoritative Framework – towards a new Understanding of Ḥadīth." In *Story-telling in the Framework of non-fictional Arabic Literature*, edited by Stefan Leder, 433-471. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz; Günther, Sebastian. 2000. "Modern Literary Theory Applied to Classical Arabic Texts: Ḥadīth Revisited." In *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures: A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Beatrice Gruendler & Verena Klemm, 171-176. Wiesbaden: Reichert; Leder, Stefan. 1999. "The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing." In *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East. 1, Problems in the literary source material : papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, edited by Averil Cameron, Geoffrey Robert Derek King, Lawrence I. Conrad and John Haldon, 277-316. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press and Speight, R. Marston. 2000. "Narrative Structures in the Ḥadīth." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 59 (4): 265-271.

ḥadīth.¹⁰⁶⁹ He argues that *khābar* constitutes a self-contained narrative unit depicting an incident, a limited sequence of occurrences or conveys certain sayings, and that in most cases it does not reference the historical situation, or context in which the incident took place.¹⁰⁷⁰ According to him, *akhbār* literature is made up of compilations that collect and organise reports according to different, yet specific, concepts.¹⁰⁷¹ Beaumont in contrast states that the brevity of a *khābar* narrative is one of its most characteristic features and is a result of their oral transmission.¹⁰⁷²

Since every *ḥadīth* narration has its own style in conveying a prophetic saying or event, seeing the whole picture requires a consideration of all versions of a *ḥadīth* together,¹⁰⁷³ which was attempted in this study. Different versions say different things as they accommodate the context of the collectors' time and his understanding, as discussed in chapter five. Speight states that the "dramatic action and conversational exchanges in *ḥadīth* narratives are not always considered necessary for the conveyance of the meaning of the prophetic pronouncement. This is apparent in the fact that a longer anecdote may have other variant versions omitting the dramatic action. But when the longer dramatic versions of the texts were retained, the elaboration of the dramatic interaction served to enhance the rhetorical force of the prophetic pronouncement."¹⁰⁷⁴ Moreover, Motzki states that "in cases of traditions transmitted in variant versions, literary analysis may help to trace the stages of the transmission process."¹⁰⁷⁵ As mentioned in the preceeding chapter, some of the reports in the data show a manipulation and an editing process. However, a detailed *isnād-cum-matn* analysis goes beyond the scope of this study, and is an avenue for future research to determine the extent of the manipulation of some reports, the time it happened and to determine which of the conflicting reports are authentic and which were fabricated, as

¹⁰⁶⁹ Leder, Stefan. 1999. "The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing." In *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East. 1, Problems in the literary source material : papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, edited by Averil Cameron, Geoffrey Robert Derek King, Lawrence I. Conrad and John Haldon, 277-316. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibid, 279.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid, 279-280.

¹⁰⁷² Beaumont, Daniel. 1996. "Hard-Boiled: Narrative Discourse in Early Muslim Traditions." *Studia Islamica* 83: 5-31, 6.

¹⁰⁷³ Çamur, Fatma Yksel. 2019. "Rethinking Ḥadīth (Prophetic Traditions) as 'Natural' Narrative: In the Framework of Fludernik's 'Natural' Narratology." *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 60 (2): 281-305, 282.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Speight. Narrative Structures in the Ḥadīth, 270.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Motzki, Harald. 2004. "Introduction." In *Ḥadīth: Origins and Developments*, edited by Harald Motzki, xiii–lxiii. Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, li.

some manipulations put quite vivid and fantastic tales into the Prophet's mouth. Motzki opines that this was to either make an ethical point or to lend authority to a statement of some didactic merit.¹⁰⁷⁶

As El Calamawy states, a *ḥadīth* that reports an event or a series of events can be defined as a story; the *aḥādīth* fit the definition of 'narrative', because they essentially tell a story or report a statement.¹⁰⁷⁷ Holtzman writes that some are relatively brief, and their language is loaded with "symbols and codes that were known to the original audience to which these texts were orally transmitted. As we continue the reading process, we soon realise that these simple – if not simplistic – texts are complicated and raise many questions. For instance, we assume sub silentio that each singular text has its audience, when in fact there are several audiences for each text; sometimes these audiences are mentioned in the text, and at other times they are omitted."¹⁰⁷⁸

All *aḥādīth* have a story to tell, which is based on a plot and might be composed of diverse narrative components and sequences with certain characteristics. Günther, defines the characteristics as 1) story, and 2) narrative constituents in combination with 3) fictional elements and adds that these are essential features for a text's oral communication. In his words: "It is the text's *Erzählbarkeit* (tell-ability) that promotes an environment in which events can be narrated to an audience and, at times, be understood differently by its members."¹⁰⁷⁹

Formally the *aḥādīth* can be split into three groups:

- a) Short *aḥādīth* of up to two lines with an eye-witnesses or listener narrating one of the Prophet's statements without any comment or the Prophet is asked a simple question that he answers. Particularly in the Shi'ite corpus, some of the short reports are actually a concise summary of longer ones.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid, xix.

¹⁰⁷⁷ El Calamawy, Sahair. 1983. "Narrative Elements in the Ḥadīth Literature." In *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, edited by T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, G. R. Smith, Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Michael Sells A. F. L. Beeston, 308–316. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 309.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Holtzman, Livnat. 2018. *Anthropomorphism in Islam - The Challenge of Traditionalism (700-1350)*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 24.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Günther, Sebastian. 2000. "Modern Literary Theory Applied to Classical Arabic Texts: Ḥadīth Revisited." In *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures: A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Beatrice Gruendler & Verena Klemm, 171–176. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 174.

- b) Medium *aḥādīth* of a few lines (six to eight) where an event or statement is narrated and sometimes a comment or explanation is offered, as well as questions directed at the Prophet with a narrative giving context to the question or its answer.
- c) Long *aḥādīth* of over ten lines that frequently include the Prophet's sayings or conversations between him and different persons, partially in reported speech, and sometimes in direct or quoted speech or report an anecdote from the Prophet's life.

In the data of this study, all three groups are represented and the commonalities between the Shi'ite and Sunni corpus are significant. The first group of short reports, comprises 61% of the data, meaning 545 individual reports, of which 264 are in form of a brief statement (156 Shi'ite and 108 Sunni reports), 241 have the form of a narrative (83 Shi'ite and 158 Sunni reports). Out of these 241 narratives, nineteen are a summarized version of a longer report (eleven Shi'ite and eight Sunni reports). There are 29 reports in form of a question and answer (fourteen of them are Shi'ite and fifteen are Sunni) and finally eleven are in form of a question and narrative (only one Shi'ite and ten Sunni ones).

The second group of medium reports amounts to 28% with 250 individual reports. 247 of these are in narrative form (seventy Shi'ite reports and 177 Sunni ones). Only three medium reports are in form of a statement and all three are Shi'ite reports.

The last group of long reports is only 7% of the data with 68 reports, out of which 65 are in narrative form (22 Shi'ite and 43 Sunni reports). There is only one Sunni report in form of a question and a long narrative and two Shi'ite reports are long statements.

The remaining 4% are mainly definitions of figures of speech used repeatedly in the reports, or a description of the Prophet, whether his person or his laughter and are therefore statements and not reports.

El Calamawy identified that the sayings of the Prophet are required to be illustrations of his humane and lovable personality and the narrators used a common device of bringing someone before the Prophet to ask him a question and to show him answering amiably and convincingly. Moreover,

regardless of whether the questioner is a family-member, a passer-by or even an infidel, the question is always serious and the Prophet never tires of answering, no matter what.¹⁰⁸⁰

As discussed in the fourth chapter, some reports include a substantial number of miraculous events. Leder states that such illustrations and also the glorification of certain persons is folkloric in nature and appears to originate from the style of the popular *quṣṣās*.¹⁰⁸¹ The storytellers were motivated by pious concerns, to spread edifying stories about Muḥammad's life and his *faḍā'il* (virtues) and later those about the first Muslims.¹⁰⁸² Leder argues that "legendary embellishment, which is characterized by plainly hyperbolic descriptions, can easily be singled out as a fictitious element. The extensive use of miraculous and fantastic tales, especially in the military expeditions, constitute a literature sui generis."¹⁰⁸³ There is a noticeable difference between the *aḥādīth* which deal with real people and their attributes, like the Prophet's family members, members of his household, his Companions, and the Anṣār for example and those that deal with the supernatural or miraculous. El Calamawy states that "the first type include little narrative, whereas the second are the richest source of narrative in the whole corpus."¹⁰⁸⁴ This is corroborated by the data of this study.

From the analysis above and the data of this study we can conclude that the anecdotes were emulating the Qur'anic style of narrative form. The same purpose of the Qur'anic story is also aimed for in the *ḥadīth*, to educate, set examples, offer a moral and also entertain. Preaching, giving advice about morality and good behaviour including too much self-righteousness is stifling. Good advice is different from *maw'īza* (sermoning) and nobody likes a solemn self-righteous *wā'iz* (moraliser). Even the Qur'an advises gentle lightness as in verse [3:159]. The *ḥadīth* story is an extension of, and sometimes explanation of the Qur'anic stories, because Muḥammad was the first to follow the path set by the Qur'an, taking the story as one of the means of education, guidance and depicting principles in a vivid and interesting way. The *ḥadīth* stories, much like the Qur'anic stories, answer questions, give advice

¹⁰⁸⁰ El Calamawy. Narrative Elements in the Ḥadīth Literature, 311.

¹⁰⁸¹ Leder. The Literary Use of the Khabar, 311.

¹⁰⁸² Motzki. Introduction, xxvi.

¹⁰⁸³ Leder. The Literary Use of the Khabar, 312.

¹⁰⁸⁴ El Calamawy. Narrative Elements in the Ḥadīth Literature, 314.

and recommendations and at times warn and threaten or illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. They also explain by way of an example, as well as comfort and positively reinforce God's benevolence and future rewards for the present good deeds.

3) Function

Günther writes: "What makes Ḥadīth so fascinating is the interrelation between 'function' and 'form,' i.e., providing information together with the fine shape of its presentation and attractive manner of its realization."¹⁰⁸⁵ In the previous section the form was identified as a narrative, mirroring the function of the Qur'anic stories. The fourth chapter analysed each of the categories (object, joker, audience, context, shared knowledge and intent) separately. It also analysed their frequency and distribution in the data. In this section the function of laughter in these reports will be examined with an emphasis on intent as tied to the other factors to articulate the proposed new humour theory. The study of the intent and the other categories revealed eight major concerns which will be discussed below.

a) Mercy, forgiveness, compassion, leniency

The highest 'Intent' label in both Sunni and Shi'ite reports is P7 (positive values) comprising 55.44% (330 Sunni and 159 Shi'ite reports). The positive values include numerous reports signalling approval, comfort, God's mercy, compassion, justice, balance, moderation, and leniency. Moreover, the commonalities in the breakdown of the individual sub-labels show more agreement between Sunni and Shi'ite reports than differences. The large volume of reports (330 Sunni versions out of a total of 582, meaning 63% and 160 versions out of a total of 361 Shi'ite versions, meaning 44%) shows that these positive values and intent for laughter, jokes and smiles are the highest concern to both Sunnis and Shi'ites. Moreover, P5 (positive contexts) in the contexts of the reports was also the highest figure in both Sunni and Shi'ite reports corroborating its importance.

The term *rahma* (mercy) with its cognates, derivatives and synonyms, is omnipresent in the Qur'an and is one of the main and most repeated attributes of God.¹⁰⁸⁶ Every chapter, except the ninth,

¹⁰⁸⁵ Günther. *Modern Literary Theory Applied to Classical Arabic Texts*, 176.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Peterson, Daniel C., "Mercy", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 18 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/uoeilibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00120>

opens with the *Basmala*, an invocation of God as *al-raḥmān* (Merciful) *al-raḥīm* (Compassionate). The *Basmala* is recited before every chapter except the ninth, and also occurs in verse [27:30] at the beginning of Sulaymān's letter to the Queen of Sheba. Additionally the phrase occurs, along with several variants within the text itself. Furthermore, pairs are perceived as a structural element in the composition of the Qur'an, especially double divine appellations, such as the double epithet *al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* and synonyms thereof such as *ghafūr raḥīm*, *al-ghafūr dhū l-raḥma*, *ghafūr ḥalīm*, *al-ghafūr al-wadūd*, *ʿafuww ghafūr*, *tawwāb raḥīm*, *raʿūf raḥīm*, *raḥīm wadūd*.¹⁰⁸⁷ The Qur'an is replete with the theme of divine forgiveness. However, mercy is not only from God, as the Prophet is also described in verse [9:128] as *raʿūf* and *raḥīm*. Numerous verses encourage Muslims to show mercy and kindness in their daily lives.¹⁰⁸⁸ Overwhelmingly, though, the Qur'an focuses on mercy as an attribute of God.¹⁰⁸⁹ In fact, humans are exhorted to be *merciful* precisely because they hope for God's mercy. Two chapters of the Qur'an are titled with this description, Chapter 40 (*al-Ghāfir*) and Chapter 55 (*al-Raḥmān*). This shows the importance and significance of these values and therefore it is not surprising to find the same importance attached to them in the *aḥādīth*.

Additionally, leniency is also another term that is important and ties in with mercy and forgiveness. In verse [2:185] God affirms that He desires ease for humankind and not difficulty. In verse [22:78] the affirmation extends God's choice of ease to religion by asserting that He has not laid hardship in religion on humankind. Even if there should be any difficulty, God promises a balance in verses [94:5-6] repeating the promise twice that "Surely with difficulty is ease."

The Prophet also shows leniency, for example in report (#45) when a Bedouin pulls him forcefully by his mantle, leaving marks on his neck, the Prophet turns to him and laughs and asks that he be given something in charity. The commentaries to this report add that "this statement shows the

¹⁰⁸⁷ Schmidtke, Sabine, "Pairs and Pairing", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 18 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00142>

¹⁰⁸⁸ See for example [7:199], [15:85], [17:23-4], [24:22], [42:43], [64:14] and [90:17].

¹⁰⁸⁹ Peterson, Daniel C., "Mercy", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 18 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00120>

Prophet's lenience and his patience. He is more ready to accept harm and unfairness than to be harsh to people whom he wants to invite to Islam. He is also setting an example for leaders after him on how to lead with good manners, forgiveness, and that which is best.”

In report (#94) the Prophet defends a drunkard who used to make him laugh and cautions people not to curse him because he loves God and His Prophet. His leniency is juxtaposed to ‘Umar’s harshness in report (#205). The Prophet also shows leniency regarding religious injunctions and performing rituals, for example in report (#73) the man who had intercourse with his wife during fasting hours in Ramadan is presented with several solutions like manumitting a slave, fasting for two consecutive months, or feeding sixty people. When the man affirms that he cannot do any of these and that he can barely feed his household, the Prophet gives him fifteen measures of dates to distribute to the poor. The Prophet laughs when the man claims that his household is the poorest of the poor and allows him to take the dates home, without insisting on any atonement for breaking his fast or any other penance.

In report (#195) in the court case ‘Alī judged about the three men claiming the boy born to a woman with whom they all had intercourse within the same ‘purity period,’ the Prophet laughs about ‘Alī’s verdict and approves of it. He neither points out the fact that this was unlawful, *zīna* (adultery) that should be punished, nor any other issue. Both his and ‘Alī’s concern was to provide the boy with a stable home. Also in (#193) when ‘Ammār b. Yāsir was in a state of *janāba* (impurity) and wallowed in the sand like cattle, the Prophet laughed and did not insist on his performing *ghusl* despite the availability of water.

Another example is (#186) when Abd Allah b. Rawāḥa had intercourse with one of his slave girls, and his wife threatened his life with a blade. He denied it happened, despite her catching them in the act. To convince her of his innocence, she demanded he recite some Qur’anic verses to demonstrate his purity or else she would disembowel him. Confronted with a jealous woman holding a blade and ready to use it, he needed to save himself, but could not bring himself to recite the Qur’an while impure, so he recited some poetry instead, which, being ignorant of the Qur’an, convinced her. The Prophet receives the man who confesses all and repents. Muḥammad laughs till he covered his mouth.

Finally, (#114) shows Muḥammad to be compassionate and merciful, displayed by him joking with his community, echoing verse [3:159].

The reports display mercy, forgiveness, compassion and leniency, which is the most important function with the highest frequency. Muḥammad not only transmits the message entrusted to him, but actively lives it, setting an example to his community and followers.

b) Reprimand

Mercy, forgiveness, compassion and leniency can also be applied when reprimanding someone.

Muḥammad himself was reprimanded in the Qur'an, most notably in verses [80:1-7] for frowning at Ibn Umm Maktūm, the blind man, who could not see him frown. Haykal describes this incident in his *Life of Muḥammad* saying that the Prophet was a modest man, who loved his community, and was anxious to do good and guide them in the true path. He adds that Muḥammad was both strongly self-critical and fearful of bringing the least harm to the weak or oppressed. In suffering injuries and injustices inflicted upon him, he forgave the perpetrators and found peace and tranquillity in that. This, according to Haykal, becomes evident in this situation. Ibn Umm Maktūm stopped by and asked Muḥammad to recite some Qur'anic verses for him. He kept insisting, because he was ignored, much to Muḥammad's annoyance, abruptly ending the conversation Muḥammad was having with al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra, whom Muḥammad was hoping to convert. The Prophet frowned, gave him an angry look and moved on without addressing his request. Haykal defends Muḥammad saying: "When he came to himself, he began to criticise himself for this maltreatment of the blind man, and soon" verses [80:1-7] were revealed.¹⁰⁹⁰

Having been reprimand by God in the Qur'an for all to see eternally, Muḥammad perhaps decided not to embarrass other people. Laude argues that vices can be pointed out and corrected through laughter, thereby contributing to the moral health of the individual and the community, and genuine humour is, in that sense, a purification through comical objectification.¹⁰⁹¹ Wehrli explains that all religious scenes with humorous elements are not directed against God; on the contrary, they invite

¹⁰⁹⁰ Haykal, Muḥammad Husayn. 2005. *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*. Translated by Isma'il R Al-Faruqi. Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 140.

¹⁰⁹¹ Laude, Patrick. 2005. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter, and Spiritual Understanding*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 120.

the divine element to enter the human sphere through laughter; “a world identified by its corporeality and sinfulness, hence a world where laughter is the appropriate response to transgression and failure, providing freedom from physical constraints.”¹⁰⁹² This is reflected in (#77), where Khawāt b. Jubyar is reprimanded for flirting with some women in the streets by turning the excuse he gave about asking them to braid a rope for his bolting camel into a joke. The Prophet asks him about his fugitive camel rather than lecturing him about decency and good behaviour towards women in the public space or reminding him of averting his gaze as enjoined by verses [24:30-31].

Niebuhr states that laughter is a sane and healthy response to the innocent foibles of men; and even to some which are not so innocent, as all men betray moods and affectations, conceits and idiosyncrasies, which could become the source of great annoyance if they were taken too seriously, therefore it is better to laugh at them.¹⁰⁹³ In report (#90) Abū Bakr and his household accompany the Prophet on the *Ḥajj* when a mount started limping. They dismount and wait for the boy in charge of the mounts who returns without it. Abū Bakr becomes angry and is about to hit him for losing the camel and the Prophet jokes telling the group to “look at this man who is in the state of *iḥrām* and at what he is doing!” So instead of interfering or stepping between them, or reprimanding him for fighting while in the state of *iḥrām* the incident is turned into a joke. This is also in line with Winkler’s argument that an audience, or an individual, is invited to laugh because the transgression has not caused serious damage to the norms in ethical, religious, social, aesthetic or sensitive terms. Moreover, laughter signals that harmony can be restored without much effort.¹⁰⁹⁴

Pigg argues that laughter is a human expression intended to define the boundaries of actions.¹⁰⁹⁵ This is shown in (#89) where Ḥafṣa instead of being reprimand for not keeping the Prophet’s

¹⁰⁹² Wehrli, Max. 1984. *Eine poetologische Einführung*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 173.

¹⁰⁹³ Niebuhr, R. (1969). Humour and Faith. In M. C. Hyers (Ed.), *Holy Laughter - Essays on Religion in The Comic Perspective* (pp. 134-149). New York: The Seabury Press, 137.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Winkler, Markus. 1998. “Komik, das Komische: Zur Vorgeschichte des neuzeitlichen Begriffs.” In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, edited by Gert Ueding, 1166-1168. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 4:1166.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Pigg, D. F. (2010). Laughter in Beowulf: Ambiguity, Ambivalence and Group Identity Formation. In A. Classen (Ed.), *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times - Epistemology of Fundamental Human Behavior, its Meaning and Consequences* (pp. 201-214). Berlin: De Gruyter, 203.

secret, is taught an ancient wedding song about what all a bride can do, ending with the last line that she can do everything except disobey her man. The Prophet suppresses his anger at her betrayal and sends al-Shifā' bint 'Abd Allāh instead to teach her a song, using its last line as a subtle message. In (#103) instead of reprimanding 'Ā'isha for her jealousy and the resulting broken bowl and spilled food of her co-wife, the Prophet jokes with all of them about her jealousy.

Humour intended to correct deviant behaviour is an art, and according to Tael, can be seen as a specific complement of the classic virtue of practical wisdom.¹⁰⁹⁶ Classen agrees stating that “*undoubtedly, laughter also aims to criticise moral failure to correct certain types of behaviour.*”¹⁰⁹⁷ Morreall states that a sense of humour makes people not only more tolerant of other people's differences, but also more gracious; and graciousness is kindness allowing the other person, even someone who is morally blameworthy, to relax and not feel threatened. A person who is corrected with kindness is more likely to listen to the message and act on it, which shows another application of the principle that humour makes criticism nonthreatening.¹⁰⁹⁸ This can also be seen in a number of reports dealing with good manners, like for example (#43) encouraging uttering the *Basmala* before eating or (#208) about not yawning in public.

Tael argues that humour shows a realism without illusions, yet is still hopeful, as it makes it possible to deal with moral failure without succumbing to it.¹⁰⁹⁹ This is reflected in the final two reports (#104, 192) that are critical of *hijal* (tricks/ruses) attempting to circumvent prohibitions, like the sale of lard or alcoholic drinks. Classen argues that “laughing is not only an act of natural, profane relaxation and liberation (which does not necessarily have to be meaningless or sinful); the destruction of false

¹⁰⁹⁶ Tael, Johan. 2011. “Humour as Practical Wisdom.” In *Humour and Religion : Challenges and Ambiguities*, edited by Hans Geybels & Walter Van Herck, 22-34. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 26.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Classen, A. (2010). Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: Literary, Historical, Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Reflections. Also an Introduction . In A. Classen (Ed.), *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times - Epistemology of Fundamental Human Behavior, its Meaning and Consequences* (pp. 1-140). Berlin: De Gruyter, 45.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Morreall, John. 2009. *Comic Relief : A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 117.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Tael. Humour as Practical Wisdom, 31.

claims, which is brought about by laughter, can possibly also open a path toward salvation.”¹¹⁰⁰

Therefore, sometimes the best way to achieve justice is to facilitate healing through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Furthermore, the Prophet embodies the message he is proclaiming by being forgiving, merciful and kind. Using laughter and jokes instead of harsh words or sharp reprimands is conducive in creating a cohesive peaceful community, which was very important, especially in the early days of the Prophet's message.

c) Community coherence and unity

Laughter is the product of the community and can highlight elements and taboos that cannot be openly discussed. Holt states that laughing has physical, psychological, spiritual, and relational benefits.¹¹⁰¹

According to Morreall, humour has three main benefits.¹¹⁰² First, as was demonstrated above is its critical function, focusing attention on what was wrong and either stimulating resistance to it or laughing it off. Second is its unifying function in creating solidarity in those laughing together. And third is its coping function in helping the oppressed get through their suffering.¹¹⁰³ The second benefit of humour, its unifying function, was one of the tools used in the Qur'an, by drawing a line between the 'in-group' (believers) and the 'out-group' (disbelievers). The out-group was the target, even though, or because, they mocked and ridiculed the believers. This is mirrored in verse [3:103] urging unity. Laughter connects people, establishes a community and expresses respect and happiness.¹¹⁰⁴

This can be seen in the numerous reports where the Prophet laughs with minorities, the marginalized and ostracized. There are two reports where Muḥammad laughs with a Jew and a Rabbi. In (#41) the Jew came to tell him about the people on the Day of Resurrection and in (#104) a Rabbi came to tell him about how God will hold the world and all creations on Judgement Day on his fingers. He laughs with both and the commentators add that his laughter signalled agreement with them. As for

¹¹⁰⁰ Classen. *Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature*, 42.

¹¹⁰¹ Holt, Phillip Glenn and Elizabeth. 2013. "Introduction." In *Studies of Laughter in Interaction*, edited by Phillip J. Glenn and Elizabeth Holt, 1-22. London: Bloomsbury Academic, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2.

¹¹⁰² Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 119.

¹¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁴ Classen. *Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature*, 62.

the marginalized and ostracized, an example is (# 98) where 'Ā'isha questions the Prophet about the ugly short visitor the Prophet received and joked with. In (#7) Muḥammad allows the most miserable of the tribe to visit and also laughs with him.

In (#120) smiling at strangers to make them feel welcome is enjoined. Bedouins, who are usually the target of jokes, especially in the *nawādir* literature along with the *bukhalā'* (misers) and *ṭufaylīs* (social parasites, spongers, party crashers) , as mentioned in chapter two, are also welcomed and the Prophet laughs with them, like in (# 44, 45, 73 and 185). Bilāl, the slave, is also the recipient of the Prophet's humour in (# 35 and 46).

During the *Jahiliyya*, Arab society was divided into three classes according to economic circumstances and social status, with each class further divided into sub-classes. The lowest class comprised of the slaves, serfs, widows, orphans, the poor and elderly. Even before Prophethood, Muḥammad leant towards them, forming a kind of alliance, known as *Hilf al-Fuḍūl* (Alliance of the Virtuous), with a group of like-minded young men, to help those who needed it.¹¹⁰⁵ Classen writes that laughter undermines power structures and hierarchies by challenging traditions, norms and standards and implicitly questioning assumptions, ideologies, values and artificial power structures. Those who laugh often reveal the constructive character of human society.¹¹⁰⁶ Douglas adds that laughing uncovers power structures and aims at their destruction: "the joke merely affords opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering or experience may be arbitrary and subjective."¹¹⁰⁷ Goldsmith points out that given the increasing wealth of literature on laughter, it is perhaps surprising how little attention has been paid to its role in the construction of identities.¹¹⁰⁸ The inclusion of minorities, the marginalized and ostracized also includes

¹¹⁰⁵ Afsaruddin, Asma. 2008. *The First Muslims: History and Memory*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2.

¹¹⁰⁶ Classen. *Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature*, 81.

¹¹⁰⁷ Douglas, Mary. 2003. *Implicit Meanings*. London: Routledge, 96.

¹¹⁰⁸ Dailey-O'Cain, Grit Liebscher and Jennifer. 2013. "Constructing Identities Through Laughter." In *Studies of Laughter in Interaction*, edited by Phillip J. Glenn and Elizabeth Holt, 237-254. London: Bloomsbury Academic, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 237.

them in the community, thereby helping them to belong and to form an identity within the community and shatters previous practices.

Other reports show the Prophet laughing with an old Ashja'iyya woman (# 35), another old woman (#138), an orphan (#140) and little Anas (#196). The largest audience for the Prophet's jokes was his Companions, either in groups, in pairs or one alone. Muḥammad was at ease and laughed with everyone. He embodied the words from his last sermon that "there is no preference for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab, neither is there one for a white man over a black man, nor is a black man superior over a white man, except through piety."¹¹⁰⁹ His behaviour embodied his message, as already seen in the subsection of mercy. Here too he embodies verse [49.13] ... and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honourable of you with Allah is the one among you most mindful (of his duty)..." as well as verse [4:1] to the same effect.

As for the rest of the community, as shown in the label 'audience' discussed in chapter four, the Prophet also joked with his Companions, the believers and others, enjoining the community in (#197) to laugh in the face of one's brothers and letting them know how eager one is to see them. There are twenty-two Sunni versions and nineteen Shi'ite ones that all promote community cohesiveness through friendliness and good manners. In (#40) the same advice is given by the Prophet and the Imams to be friendly with one's Companions to strengthen their hearts. In (#70) people are enjoined to make others feel at ease and feel Companionship.

In the 'intent' section, label N7 (negative values) also promotes community cohesion and inclusion. For example in (#149) the Prophet is very critical of the congregation laughing and mocking a blind man, which is perhaps the only report that echoes the superiority theory of humour on part of the congregation, much to the Prophet's annoyance. Laude points out that the social priority in dealing with humour and laughter is to draw limits and promote a sense of moderation and propriety.¹¹¹⁰ Holt argues that "laughter shows up time and time again in two kinds of environments: celebrations and trouble. In

¹¹⁰⁹ Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī gathered many versions of this sermon. See Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allah Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī, *Ḥajjat al-Muṣṭafā*, edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qāḍī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988).

¹¹¹⁰ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 120.

moments of celebration, it allows people to laugh together, appreciate, connect, belong, and even claim a kind of intimacy. In moments of trouble, it provides a resource for supporting, modifying actions, and mitigating meanings.¹¹¹¹ Corroborating this, in report (#53) the Prophet took ‘Ā’isha to watch the Abyssinian dancers on the day of ‘Ashūra and told them to make an effort, so that Jews and Christians know that there is fun in our religion. In another version it was narrated that wedding dancers were crowding in front of ‘Ā’isha’s door and she would come out with Muḥammad listening and looking. Morreall states that humour is related to open-mindedness and the willingness to see things in new ways, which encourages more understanding of other people, what they think, and how they act. In that way, humour can reduce social friction.¹¹¹² This shows one important function of the Prophet’s laughter, namely to create communal peace and cohesion and topple *Jahiliyya’s* social structure dividing people, giving the people an identity and the feeling of belonging.

d) Education

Knowledge and learning is very important in the Qur’an. The first verse revealed [96:1] “*iqra*” orders the Prophet to read, or recite and is repeated again in verse [96:2]. Numerous verses are addressed to people who reflect, contemplate and think.¹¹¹³ Moreover, in verse [39:9] those who know and those who do not are declared as being different, ending with “only the men of understanding are mindful.” Mir argues that humour in the Qur’an is used to convey a religious insight or to elucidate a theological teaching and mainly serves the purposes of characterisation and learning.¹¹¹⁴

Ibn Qutayba suggests that knowledge has different facets which share a single underlying purpose. It is “acquired and dispensed for the sake of God”, but there is more than one way to reach Him. His anthology ‘*Uyūn al-akhbār*’ provides “guidance to high morals, restraint from lowliness, proscription of evil and incitement to proper conduct”¹¹¹⁵ and like much of the literature, particularly the

¹¹¹¹ Holt, Phillip Glenn and Elizabeth. Introduction, 2.

¹¹¹² Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 116.

¹¹¹³ See for example [2:266], [3:191] [6:50] [7:176] [7:184], [10:24] and [29:43] among others.

¹¹¹⁴ Mir. Humor in the Qur’an.

¹¹¹⁵ Sperl, Stefan. 2007. “Man’s “Hollow Core”: ethics and aesthetics in Ḥadīth literature and classical Arabic adab.” *Bulletin of SOAS* 70 (3): 459-486, 464.

nawādir, it aims to educate while entertaining. Humour stimulates reflection.¹¹¹⁶ According to Morreall, “the basic value of amusement is that it allows us to transcend narrowly focused, emotional responses to situations, so that we think and act more rationally.”¹¹¹⁷ The commentators' intention was not only to provide a moral for the readership, but also to tell a good story.¹¹¹⁸ Muslim humourists drew on humour for religiously informed ethical instruction, after all, a funny story or a good joke, sticks in the mind.

The role and function of humour in Islam attracted considerable attention in recent years, as van Herck argues, humour aims at alleviating the human condition by putting into practice an Islamic version of the ancient dictum of *prodesse et delectare* (instruct and delight).¹¹¹⁹ Another virtue fostered by humour is divergent or creative thinking.¹¹²⁰ As Edward de Bono commented: “Humour is by far the most significant behaviour of the human brain. ... Humour ... shows how perceptions set up in one way can suddenly be reconfigured in another way. This is the essence of creativity.”¹¹²¹ Secondly, humour is a way of appreciating cognitive shifts. Morreall argues that a humorous frame of mind automatically puts its owner on the lookout for unusual ideas and new ways of merging them.¹¹²² Additionally, when one is in a humorous frame of mind, the likelihood of blindly following leaders, or doing something merely because ‘it has always been done in this way’ decreases drastically.¹¹²³ The theme “Nay, we found our fathers doing so” is sternly and repeatedly criticised in the Qur’an.¹¹²⁴

Long before any theories of humour, or the value of using humour in education, were articulated, the Prophet used humour and jokes in his teachings. A case in point is report (#205) when the women of his community asked for lessons like the men and he granted their request. He joked with ‘Umar after he

¹¹¹⁶ Ormsby. *The Comedy of Reason*, 122.

¹¹¹⁷ Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 112.

¹¹¹⁸ Riddell, Peter G. 1997. “The transmission of Narrative-Based Exegesis in Islam.” In *Islam : Essays on Scripture, Thought, and Society : A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns*, edited by Peter G Riddell, Tony Street and Anthony H Johns, 57-80. Leiden: Brill, 77.

¹¹¹⁹ Van Herck, Hans Geybels & Walter. 2011. “Introduction.” In *Humour and Religion : Challenges and Ambiguities*, edited by Hans Geybels & Walter Van Herck, 1-10. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 5.

¹¹²⁰ Morreall. *Comic*, 113.

¹¹²¹ de Bono, Edward. 1992. *Serious Creativity: Using the Power of Lateral Thinking to Create New Ideas*. New York: HarperCollins, 8.

¹¹²² Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 113.

¹¹²³ *Ibid*, 113.

¹¹²⁴ See for example [2:170], [5:104], [7:28], [10:78], [21:53], [26:74], [31:21], [43:22] and [43:23].

attempted to take over the lesson and ordered the women to observe more modesty. Many other reports show how the Prophet and the Imams joked while educating the community. The first report (#1) about the thrice divorced woman who had a preference for her first husband, drives home the rulings about three divorces and the necessity of a *muḥallil*.¹¹²⁵ In (#5) the sequence and value of ablutions is explained, and in (#6) Imam al-Riḍā discusses taking a second Christian wife, when the first wife is Muslim and how that relates to verses [2.221] and [5.5] and which of them was abrogated. Report (#72) deals with the exegesis of verse [102.8] from a Shi'ite perspective with a sectarian interpretation focusing on *ahl al-bayt*, while in (#156) an exegesis of verses [83:29-35] is offered. In report (#48) the rules of breastfeeding and marriage are discussed, while in (#54) the permissibility or prohibition of payment for *ḥijāma* (bloodletting) is the issue. A wife's maintenance is the topic in (#61). In (#73) the rules of intercourse during the fasting hours of Ramadan are discussed and how to deal with breaking them. In (#91) instructions for setting a finder's fee for lost property and money are established. *Tayammum* (dry ablution) is the subject of (#193), while in (#199) *ghusl* (major ritual purification) for men and women after experiencing a 'wet dream' are discussed. This report is in line with Classen's argument that laughter remedies failed communication and overcomes a person's excessive shyness or inability to establish social contacts.¹¹²⁶

Using humour educates and entertains at the same time. Classen points out that "laughter also erupts many times simply because a speaker has created a brilliant pun, formulated a biting criticism or displayed extraordinary linguistic skills, which then leads to further enlightenment."¹¹²⁷ He adds that "laughter and humour have much, if not virtually everything, to do with communication and the human community, as we have observed many times in ever changing contexts, and cultural or religious circumstances."¹¹²⁸ The Prophet takes his cues from the Qur'an in teaching his community through laughter, that blind following is disapproved in favour of reflection, thinking and contemplating.

¹¹²⁵ Literally, the man who makes something lawful. A real marriage (not in name or on paper only) must take place, followed by a divorce, for a thrice divorced couple to be able to remarry.

¹¹²⁶ Classen. *Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature*, 111.

¹¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 117.

¹¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 97.

e) Human nature

Holt states that laughter is universal; while some cultural variation in its uses cannot be ruled out, it is safe to say that any two persons on earth could/would likely recognize each other's laughter.¹¹²⁹ Knox argues that in the first three months, infants smile. He elaborates that "well before evidencing any of the more imposing and weighty characteristics of humanity, like self-awareness symbolization, speech, reason, abstraction, conscience, responsibility, religious concern, and the like, the infant first of all smiles, and shortly thereafter he learns to laugh which is one of the first manifestations of his humanity."¹¹³⁰

The playfulness of humour is an essential part of the humanity of men and women, without it, they do not mature, but become inhuman.¹¹³¹ As mentioned in the fifth chapter, the human Muḥammad was elevated to a superhuman or demigod level, losing part of his humanity. However, many reports assert that he had a sense of humour, for example (#110) showing his nature. Classen argues that one of the fundamental reasons for humour and laughter is man's central desire to minimize the distance between him/herself and divine figures, drawing strength from the metaphysical domain. Because laughter about or with divine figures in a way pulls them down from their religious pedestal or presents them in humorous light; hence it brings them closer to human existence and makes them more accessible and receptive to human needs and desires.¹¹³² Perhaps this was also a reason for elevating the Prophet high up on a pedestal, when the notion of laughter as being undignified took root in Islamic culture and his *Sīra* was edited, revised and redacted to reflect different contexts, that ended up being counterproductive to the Prophet's original message. By remaining human he can be emulated as a role model, but as a demigod or superhuman this emulation becomes impossible.

¹¹²⁹ Holt, Phillip Glenn and Elizabeth. Introduction, 1.

¹¹³⁰ Knox, I. (1969). The Traditional Roots of Jewish Humour. In M. C. Hyers (Ed.), *Holy Laughter - Essays on Religion in The Comic Perspective* (pp. 150-165). New York: The Seabury Press, 154.

¹¹³¹ Hyers, M. C. (1969). The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic. In M. C. Hyers (Ed.), *Holy Laughter - Essays on Religion in The Comic Perspective* (pp. 208-240). New York: The Seabury Press, New York, 217.

¹¹³² Classen. Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature, 95.

The reports reflect human nature, not only of the Prophet, but also of the various interlocutors in his conversations and discussions. Throughout the twenty-three years of his prophecy, he acted and reacted with the believers and to their attitudes. For example in (#95) human nature is highlighted showing Hind bint ‘Utba expecting the worst, covering her face in fear of retaliation for what she had done to Ḥamza, when she went, after the conquest of Mecca, to pledge her allegiance to the Prophet. She complies and replies to everything that is asked of her, yet at the end she cannot help herself and retorts: “we have raised them when they were young and you have killed them at Badr when they had grown up, so you know best” to the Prophet’s question: “and will you not kill your children?” Hind’s excessive behaviour, moral corruption, savagery, and immorality were repeatedly mentioned in Islamic sources. She is portrayed as vengeful, haughty, proud and strong, and she was not known for mincing her words. Though this vilification might be a later construct, her character is depicted as someone who would neither fear nor comply.¹¹³³ Yet in the beginning of this report she pushes herself to remain amicable and polite, until she cannot control herself and gives in to her nature, eliciting much laughter. In (#74) Fāṭima first laughs then cries after the news she received, the second piece of news is that her father is dying and the first was that she will go to Paradise. In (#79) the Prophet’s wives have a food-fight, due to ‘Ā’isha’s jealous nature, which amuses the Prophet.

Though the classical humour theory, discussed in the first chapter, about laughter being human nature, is not very helpful in analysing laughter, its causes and its purpose, it still makes a valid point that is also reflected in the data. Laughter is part of *jibilla*, instinct, or human nature, both personally and the result of other people’s nature.

f) Creating joy and alleviating sadness

Pleasure, laughter, and humour ‘in moderation,’ were considered beneficial to a man’s soul. Humour is a great alleviator of tension. Scarborough argues that in all ages “people were attuned to the intervention of the divine in everyday human affairs and they also recognised the physical and spiritual benefits of recreation and amusement, embracing the sacred as inherent in everyday existence and also pursuing

¹¹³³ See for example El Cheikh, Nadia Maria. 2015. *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 17-37.

the dual aims of moral benefit and pleasure.”¹¹³⁴ Therefore sometimes laughter simply for the sake of laughter, creating joy and alleviating sadness was the intent in the reports. For example in (#136) the Prophet makes it a point to alleviate a little boy’s sadness over the loss of his *Nughayr* (pet bird). Laughter for the sake of laughter is also intended in (#162) where Ibn Ḥudhāfa b. Qays al-Qurashi, a prankster, loosens the Prophet’s saddle during his travels just to make him laugh. Report (#115) reminds believers to joke, but only to tell the truth, and in (#116) believers are reminded that those who bring joy to others also bring joy to the Prophet and by extension to God and finally in (#117) every believer who has brought joy to the Prophet and *ahl al-bayt*, as well as their people will be rewarded by God. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is quoted as giving the following advice: “gladden the hearts by seeking *ṭarā’if al-ḥikma* (wise anecdotes or humorous wisdom), as hearts tend to get bored and tire as the body does.”¹¹³⁵ Moreover, and as Morreall argues, there will be a reward in the next world for those who bring laughter to others in this world,¹¹³⁶ which is echoed in report (#132) as the Prophet defends Nu’aymān, the jokester, saying that: “He will enter Paradise laughing.”

The Qur’an highlights the Prophet’s own emotions, with chapter portions built around his experiences. Moreover, there are many *aḥādīth* that specify prophetic injunctions related to emotional states, such as those mentioned above promoting kindness and gentleness toward others. Many traditions discourage acting in anger, and warn against the dangers of envy.¹¹³⁷ El Calamawy argues that in the *Ḥadīth* feelings are vividly portrayed.¹¹³⁸ This is supported by the data, as the laughter is mostly described with several adjectives, before the attempts to edit it out. Karen Bauer argues that there are “two aspects of emotion in the Qur’an. First, the Qur’anic message encourages the believers to cultivate specific emotional attachments and understanding, thus, emotional practices are akin to other

¹¹³⁴ Scarborough, C. L. (2010). Laughter and the Comedic in a Religious Text: The Example of the Cantigas de Santa Maria. In A. Classen (Ed.), *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times - Epistemology of Fundamental Human Behavior, its Meaning and Consequences* (pp. 281-294). Berlin: De Gruyter, 282.

¹¹³⁵ Kassāb. *Ma’a al-muṣṭafā fī ḍaḥīkīhi*, 77 quoting al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s *al-Jāmi’ li-akhlāq al-rāwī wa-ādāb al-sāmi’*.

¹¹³⁶ Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 124.

¹¹³⁷ Gade, Anna M. 2016. “Islam.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, edited by John Corrigan, 36–50. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Accessed September 5, 2020.

<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195170214.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195170214-e-3>.

¹¹³⁸ El Calamawy. *Narrative Elements in the Ḥadīth Literature*, 313.

ritualistic practices, such as praying or fasting.”¹¹³⁹ Bauer identifies the roots of words denoting happiness, rejoicing, granting joy, and bringing glad tidings in the Qur’an and finds that they occur 179 times for the root *b-sh-r*, meaning ‘to bring glad tidings,’ seventy times for the root *f-r-h*, meaning ‘rejoicing’, twenty-two times for the root *s-r-r*, meaning ‘happy’, and ten times for the root *ḍ-ḥ-k* (laughter); as opposed to seven times for the root *b-k-y* (weeping).¹¹⁴⁰ However, these numbers differ from Badawi and Abdel Haleem who count *b-sh-r* as occurring 122 times.¹¹⁴¹ Chapter three discussed God's laughter in the *ḥadīth* literature. Chittick draws attention to the fact that nowhere in Islamic literature is it suggested that God weeps.¹¹⁴² Moreover, the data showed a definite disproportion between laughter and weeping. Laude argues: “as with all other human phenomena, and in fact more than most, laughter opens onto the realm of spirituality. When Rabelais reminded his readers that *rire est le propre de l’homme* (laughter is man’s privilege), he was undoubtedly alluding to the potentially divine dimension of human laughter, since no privilege of this kind can presumably be unrelated to what monotheistic religions consider as the theomorphic¹¹⁴³ nature of man.”¹¹⁴⁴ Though laughter is a divine attribute, weeping is not, yet both are attributes of God’s creatures. Chittick argues that “as creaturely attributes, neither of the two is good in itself, but, by and large, weeping is praised and laughter blamed” in the literature,¹¹⁴⁵ especially, as mentioned above in *fiqh* manuals. Joy and worldly pleasures are neither condemned nor forbidden in the Qur’an, but believers are to be mindful about the source of these pleasures. Physical events are also a source of joy as, for example, when the rain falls as in verse [30:48].¹¹⁴⁶ This is echoed in report (#160) when people complained to the Prophet about the drought and he made supplications to God according to verse [40:60] and verse [2:186]. God answered his

¹¹³⁹ Bauer, Karen. 2017. “Emotion in the Qur’an: An Overview.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 19 (2): 1-30, 1.

¹¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

¹¹⁴¹ Badawi, El-Said M., and M. Abdel Haleem. 2008. *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage*. Leiden: Brill, 92-93.

¹¹⁴² Chittick. *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 55.

¹¹⁴³ Having the form or likeness of God.

¹¹⁴⁴ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, , 119-120.

¹¹⁴⁵ Chittick. *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 55.

¹¹⁴⁶ Adams, Charles J., “Joy and Misery”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 18 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00243>

prayers and it rained heavily accompanied by thunder and lightning. Therefore creating joy, alleviating sadness and laughing simply for the sake of laughter are valid functions.

g) Taking the edge off a situation and dispelling fear

Any war era is particularly rich with *Galgenhumor* (gallows humour), as soldiers are known to laugh hysterically when tense right before battle, and to speak flippantly of the possible terrifying fate that might befall them or any man of their battalion.¹¹⁴⁷ Humour can be used to calm angry people and also to get them to look more objectively at a situation. It can also be used to reduce people's fear and anxiety.¹¹⁴⁸ Laughing in tense situations serves to reduce tension and to free participants from their fears.¹¹⁴⁹

Several reports in the data show the Prophet and others laughing during battles and sieges. For example in (#200) during a battle, which is identified in one of the versions as the Battle of Ḥunayn, Umm Saḫīm was carrying a dagger, threatening to disembowel any polytheists or disbelievers who came close, which caused the Prophet and others to laugh. The Prophet told her: "God has been enough and has been good." Though Umm Saḫīm replies that if she kills them they will be defeated and Muḥammad will remain, the Prophet's answer echoes an important concept, that only God is eternal as in verses [55:26-27]. This is another reason for strengthening their will to survive, and infusing their power to resist, to be able to serve God longer and engage in His jihad. Laude describes such a situation saying that "laughter is a positive and affirmative response to the experience of insurmountable limits and unanswerable questions ... and these limits are nothing but the expression of the disproportion between our potential infinitude and our actual finitude."¹¹⁵⁰ Even angels bring smiles to battle in support and hope, like in (#128) when Mikhā'il passes by the Prophet praying with his men during battle making him smile and tell the men of this incident to encourage them.

¹¹⁴⁷ Niebuhr. *Humour and Faith*, 146.

¹¹⁴⁸ Morreall, John. 2008. "Philosophy and Religion." In *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, 211-242. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 240.

¹¹⁴⁹ Classen. *Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature*, 95.

¹¹⁵⁰ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 126.

In report (#81), which was discussed above and is disputed by the jurists because of the embarrassing episode with the exposed genitals, in one of the versions that omits the exposed genitals altogether, there is another backstory offered, namely that the targeted man was boasting with his shield saying: this is how to use the shield, like so and like so. Then he would cover his forehead, bragging about his skills. Sa'd aimed and shot his arrow grazing the man's forehead, causing him to fall with his legs up in the air. In this version the Prophet laughs until his back teeth showed. In a sense, laughter is nothing other than a victory over death and over the fear of death.¹¹⁵¹ Moreover, God in verse [31:18] "... does not love any self-conceited boaster," rendering the entire episode comical.

In two other reports, mercy is the main subject. For example in (#183) during the siege of Ṭā'if, the Prophet ordered them to cease fighting. His Companions did not approve, disappointed at leaving without conquering them. The Prophet laughed at the relief of the people of Ṭā'if. It was not *Schadenfreude* but more in line with the concept of *al-'afw 'ind al-maqdira* (forgiveness or pardon when in a position of power) as echoed in verses [24:22] and [42:40]. This is also mirrored in report (#201) when Salama requested that the cavalry follow those who abandoned the fight when it became apparent that the Muslims would win, the Prophet laughed and reminded him: "if you've been victorious, be kind and merciful."

Kassāb mentions that the Prophet was called *al-ḍaḥūk al-qattāl* (the cheerful fighter), because he was cheerful with the believers and a formidable fighter with his enemies.¹¹⁵² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya lists all the Prophet's names mentioning this one adding: "as for *al-ḍaḥūk al-qattāl*, this is a double name that cannot be divided nor split up, because he always laughed to the Believers, neither frowned nor scowled, and was neither angry nor harsh, yet a warrior when it came to fighting the enemies of God."¹¹⁵³

There are two Shi'ite reports about battle. In the first (#67) 'Alī, Commander of the Believers, prohibits laughing in the face of an enemy, listing a number of enemies such as the Nawāṣib, *ahl al-bayt* haters, the Mu'tazila, the Kharijites, the Qadarites and all those opposing the Ja'farī doctrine. However,

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁵² Kassāb. *Ma'a al-mustafā fi ḍaḥikihī*, 112

¹¹⁵³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr b. Ayūb. n.d. *Zād al-ma'ād fi ḥady khayr al-'ibād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1:60.

as discussed in chapter four, this seems to be a later fabrication because most of those enemies did not exist with these names in his lifetime. In (#21) the Prophet laughs during the battle of Khaybar, as ‘Alī rips out the gate to the fort. The Prophet laughed out of happiness and relief that the fort was now open to the Muslims, meaning an end of the battle. Interestingly, Burayda b. al-Ḥuṣayb, narrated an anecdote about Khaybar saying that when they failed for days under the leadership of Abū Bakr one day, and ‘Umar another, the soldiers became tired and disappointed. That night the Prophet announced that in the morning he would assign leadership to someone loved by him and God, who will be victorious. Burayda volunteered reciting some verses full of *ḥamāsa* (valour).¹¹⁵⁴ Later, when everyone discovered that the Prophet meant ‘Alī, Burayda apologised for the audacity of overreaching to everyone’s amusement.¹¹⁵⁵

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that laughter during battles or sieges was to dispel fear, reduce tension, and also to gain a kind of victory over the fear of death.

h) Spiritual

Following on from the previous section, religions contain (implicit) references to the finitude and relativity of the human condition. In that sense, humour and spirituality fit well together.¹¹⁵⁶ Sometimes laughter is a prayer of thanksgiving for an answered prayer, a prelude to faith and the beginning of prayer itself.¹¹⁵⁷

As mentioned above in the ‘Affirmation’ section, one instance of laughter occurs in verse [27:19] in which Sulaymān laughs at the ant’s words. Al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) is among the first to interpret the phrase to mean that Sulaymān laughed at the ant’s words and also in happiness and appreciation of God’s blessing to him and therefore made his supplication in gratitude.¹¹⁵⁸ Al-Samarqandī makes a direct causal relationship between Sulaymān’s laughter and his following supplication or *du‘ā* (personal prayer).

¹¹⁵⁴ Later it became a genre of Arabic poetry that recounts chivalrous exploits.

¹¹⁵⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, Ezz al-Dīn. 1994. *Uṣd al-Ghāba fī Ma‘rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*. Edited by ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 5:108.

¹¹⁵⁶ Van Herck, Hans Geybels & Walter. Introduction, 1.

¹¹⁵⁷ Niebuhr, Reinhold. 1946. *Discerning the Signs of the Times - Sermons for Today and Tomorrow*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 111.

¹¹⁵⁸ al-Samarqandī, Naṣr b. Muḥammad. n.d. *Baḥr al-‘ulūm*. Edited by Maḥmūd Maṭrajī. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2:575-576.

Later exegetes like al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) take the same approach saying that he was amused by her trust in his and his men's piety and also delighted in God's blessings to him alone, unlike any others that enabled him to understand the whispers of the tiny creatures. Therefore, he started a supplication to thank God for this blessing, showing his gratitude. His realisation would lead to increased good deeds and piety.¹¹⁵⁹

Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) also interprets *tabassama dāhikan* to mean the beginning of laughter that surpasses the smile it started with. He laughed because of two reasons. The first was his admiration for what she said, acknowledging his and his soldiers' compassion, and her affirmation of their piety. The second is his delight in what God has granted him and nobody else, which made him thank God, asking him to always be grateful so as not to lose this ability.¹¹⁶⁰

Al-Naysābūrī (d. after 850/1446) says that he laughed at her words, because she was compassionate, caring about her kind and also in happiness about what God had bestowed on him of awareness and comprehension of her whispers, and also his reputation for caution and piety. Therefore, he offered his supplication, saying: "Lord inspire me to show my gratitude for your grace and make it never leave me so that I am always grateful."¹¹⁶¹

In contrast, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) completely glosses over the issue of Sulaymān's laughter and subsequent supplication, ignores Sulaymān altogether and engages in a long grammatical and linguistic argument denying Muḥammad's laughter. He writes: "in verse [27:19] *fatabassama dāhikan min qawliha* means he smiled, wondering at her words, amused by her speech. Ibn Al-Sumayqī, like Sibawayh, read *dāhikan* as *ḍaḥikan*, thus treating it as a verbal noun which refers to an ellipsed verb (*ḍaḥika*, laughed), which is represented by the verb *tabasama* (smiled), as one would say *ḍaḥika ḍaḥikan* (he laughed heartily, literally: he laughed a laughter). Others believed that it referred to the verb *tabasama*, as it is similar in meaning to *ḍaḥika*, while others read it as *dāhikan*, and so considered it to

¹¹⁵⁹ al-Zamakhsharī, Maḥmūd b. 'Umar Jār Allah. 1986. *Al-Kashāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 3:356.

¹¹⁶⁰ al-Rāzī, Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. al-Ḥasan. 1999. *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. Beirut: Dar Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 24:546-549.

¹¹⁶¹ al-Naysābūrī, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qummī. 1996. *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa ragḥā'ib al-Furqān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 5:296.

be a *ḥāl* (qualifier) which describes the circumstances (quality, state or process) of the smile.

"*Tabassama miqdār al-ḍaḥīk*" means that the smile extended to a laugh, for the laugh absorbs the smile.

The *tabassum* (smile) is less than laughter, and is its beginning. The verb *bassama*, the verb *ibtassama*,

and the verb *tabassama* all mean to smile. *Mabsim* is the mouth, and it has the same pattern as words

like *al-majlis* (assembly, gathering) which derives from the verb *jalasa*, to sit. A man who is *mibsām* or

bassām is one who smiles a lot. *Al-tabassum* (smile) is the beginning of laughter. Laughter starts and

ends, but, laughing involves more than smiling. If it goes too far and the person does not control himself,

he is said to be laughing loudly or guffawing. Most of the time, *tabassum* is the laughter of the prophets.

In the *Ṣaḥīḥ* it was narrated by Jābir b. Samra that he was asked: Did you sit with the Prophet? He

affirmed: Yes, often, he did not rise from his dawn prayer until the sun rose. They were talking about

matters of *Jahiliyya* and they all laughed, while he only smiled. Most of the time, the Prophet smiled

(*tabassama*), but he would also laugh at other times, a laugh that was more than a smile and less than

al-istighrāq (excessive laughter). Only on rare occasions did the Prophet laugh, due to excessive

amazement, until his back teeth showed. Scholars hated for him to overindulge, like Luqmān told his

son: my son, beware of too much laughter for it hardens (literally: kills) the hearts."¹¹⁶² Then al-Qurṭubī,

showing his discomfort with the *ḥadīth* about the man's exposed genitals writes: "It was also narrated in

the *Ṣaḥīḥ* on the authority of Sa'd who said: "one of the polytheists had burnt some Muslims" and the

Prophet said: "aim, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you." He said: "I chose a blunt arrow

without a blade and hit his side. He fell, exposing his genitals and the Prophet laughed until I could see

his back teeth." A *ḥadīth* was narrated by Abū Dharr, and others, elevated to the Prophet, saying that the

Prophet laughed until his back teeth showed, when Sa'd hit the man with his arrow exposing his genitals.

Happiness that he was hit caused the laughter and not that his genitals were exposed, because the

Prophet is above such feelings of pettiness and *Schadenfreude*."¹¹⁶³

¹¹⁶² al-Qurṭubī. *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*, 13:169-175

¹¹⁶³ Ibid.

It has been argued that the political, ideological, and intellectual context of the Almohad territories, where al-Qurṭubī was educated and trained, strongly shaped his life and his works.¹¹⁶⁴ The Almohads (*al-Muwahḥidūn*) were a reformist movement founded by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah b. Tūmart (d. 524/1130). Their principal ideology was *tawḥīd* (divine unity). Ibn Tūmart regarded himself as “the heir of the Prophet, his career as a duplication of the Prophet’s career, and his teaching an effort to restore the Islamic community as it had existed in the Prophet’s lifetime.”¹¹⁶⁵

Ibn Tūmart, according to Bennison developed his doctrine out of the fusion of the religious ideas circulating in al-Andalus, Ifriqiya and al-Mashriq, in contrast to the highly orthodox traditionalist Mālikī *madhhab* (doctrine) of the Almoravids before them, whose dynasty disintegrated as the Almoravid elite became urbanised and corrupt, following the cycle of rise and decline described by Ibn Khaldūn.¹¹⁶⁶ Bennison describes Ibn Tūmart’s doctrine as “a sophisticated hybrid form of Islam that wove together strands from Ḥadīth science, Zāhiriī and Shāfiī fiqh, Ghazālian social action (*ḥisba*), and spiritual engagement with Shīī notions of the imam and mahdī to create what he considered to be much more than the sum of its parts, the ultimate revived monotheistic message – *tawḥīd* – giving his followers the name ‘the advocates of *tawḥīd*’ or ‘the true monotheists’ (*al-muwahḥidūn*).”¹¹⁶⁷ Bennison further argues that “Almohadism, for some, emerges as a radical synthesis of the many trends within eleventh-twelfth-century Islam, for others it was merely a pastiche of elements that, ultimately, did not fuse into a satisfactory, integrated religious system.”¹¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Almohad judicial system was described as literalist, “looking to the letter of the law rather than the deeper intended purpose.”¹¹⁶⁹ Considering al-

¹¹⁶⁴ Delfina Serrano Ruano, “al-Qurṭubī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Consulted online on 22 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_050504>

¹¹⁶⁵ Lapidus, Ira M. 2012. *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century - A Global History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 378.

¹¹⁶⁶ Messier, Ronald A., “Almoravids”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 22 September 2020 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22934>

¹¹⁶⁷ Bennison, Amira K. 2016. *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 246.

¹¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Qurṭubī's training, and the description of the *madhhab* he studied, it is not surprising that he would focus on *Hadīth*, citing the anti-laughter reports based also on al-Ghazālī's influence.

Later exegetes, such as al-Ālūsī (d. 1854), demote the laugh to a mere smile thereby completely ignoring the word *ḍāḥikan* in the verse and leaving the connection to the supplication vague. Al-Ālūsī writes: "Perhaps he smiled gladly at what the ant said about his soldiers' compassion and his and their piety and he rejoiced in what God has bestowed on him in understanding what she had whispered, which remains hidden from mankind. It could also be amazement at her caution, warning, and guiding her kind. It is the *munāsaba* (occasion) for what comes after it, namely the supplication."¹¹⁷⁰ Making the smile the occasion for what follows, excludes it from inclusion in the supplication.

Al-Shawkānī (d. 1839) does not deny the laughter, writing: "*fatabassama ḍāḥikan* shows that laughing is asserted, because it surpassed smiling. It has been said that smiling might be from anger, however laughing qualifies that. It has also been said that the prophets' laughter is but a smile. Sulaymān's laughter is of amazement, marvelling at her words and understanding and how she guided and warned her kind. Sulaymān made supplications to God in gratitude for his blessings, asking God to remain thankful and grateful to Him."¹¹⁷¹ Though al-Shawkānī includes the laughter, it is excluded from the supplication.

In Shi'ite literature laughter is often tied to amazement. For example in al-Ṭabarsī's (d. 548/1154) *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an*, he attributes Sulaymān's laughter to amazement.¹¹⁷² This is also reflected in the data in reports (#29, 30, and 174) where most versions come from the Shi'ite corpus. Moreover, most 'anti-laughter' reports are also from the Shi'ite corpus, such as reports (#165, 166, 168, 169, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, and 181). Al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī (d. 1981) asserts that Sulaymān smiled and did not laugh, adding that all prophets' laughter was but a smile.¹¹⁷³ This is also reflected in the data,

¹¹⁷⁰ al-Ālūsī, Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd. 2007. *Rawḥ al-Ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm wa-l-sab' al-mathānī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 19:179.

¹¹⁷¹ al-Shawkānī, Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad. 1993. *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr*. Damascus : Dār Ibn Kathīr, 4:149-151.

¹¹⁷²¹¹⁷² al-Ṭabarsī, al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan. Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī : Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-'Arabī. *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: 1992, 7:371.

¹¹⁷³ Al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusain. 1973. *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 15:353.

with many reports that have numerous versions arguing the same, like for example (#170, 172, 188, 189, and 190).

In line with these various interpretations of Sulaymān's – and by extension other prophets' laughter or smiles, Laude writes that: 'laughter can be the consequence of a shift of consciousness, in which case it will be conceived as a criterion of illumination, or the hallmark of a higher awareness.'¹¹⁷⁴ He continues: "to the question of knowing whether laughter should be conceived as the cause, the consequence, or the coincidental occurrence of spiritual illumination, it could be answered that all three might be true, depending on the context."¹¹⁷⁵ Sulaymān's spiritual illumination in this verse is understanding and appreciating God's gift of comprehending animal speech that is exclusive to him. His supplication is in line with God's promise in verse [14:7] "...If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more..."

Classen argued that "laughter often signals that a wise person has perceived the whole truth and realized how much everyone has been stuck in an illusion about him/herself and the entire social setting."¹¹⁷⁶ While spiritual tears, as discussed in the previous chapter, have often been compared with a melting of the heart's hardened state by the consuming fire of divine love and mercy, Laude argues that spiritual laughter coincides with an abrupt shift that breaks up the shell of ordinary consciousness.¹¹⁷⁷ This leads to laughing about oneself and to not taking oneself too seriously. Morreall adds that the ability to laugh at oneself not only cultivates several virtues, but is also vital to the development of any moral perspective.¹¹⁷⁸ He continues that moral systems emphasize 'self-control,' meaning the ability to dominate emotions. For that nothing beats humour, especially humour about oneself.¹¹⁷⁹ Laude agrees, adding that "laughter is in itself a spiritual awakening and may be a spiritual door opening onto a level of reality that shatters the illusions of egoic self-importance. The possibility of laughing at oneself and at

¹¹⁷⁴ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 123.

¹¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁶ Classen. *Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature*, 56.

¹¹⁷⁷ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 124-125.

¹¹⁷⁸ Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 115.

¹¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

others is predicated on the ability to transcend oneself, and the latter can, in fact, only be accounted for in terms of the immanence of the Self. In other words, the capacity to be able to laugh at oneself presupposes at least a minimal degree of dissociation from the ego, and this dissociation must presumably involve a self-transcendence of some kind.”¹¹⁸⁰

This self-transcendence is mirrored in the concept of *jihād al-nafs* (jihad against the lower self or ego). Knysh explains that ‘soul purification’ and ‘self-improvement’ or ‘self-transformation’ are the individual Sufi’s internal struggle with his/her restive, instinct-driven *nafs* (ego or self).¹¹⁸¹ The *nafs* is defined by the following appetitive qualities or natural desires to satisfy certain needs such as *takabbur* (pride), *ṭamaʿ* (greed), *ḥasad* (envy), *shahwa* (lust), *ghaybah* (backbiting), *kayd* (guile) and *bukhl* (stinginess). The process of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-transformation) leads from the *nafs al-ammāra* (commanding ego) to the *nafs al-lawwāma* (self-accusing ego) then to the *nafs al-muṭmaʿinna* (satisfied/serene ego).¹¹⁸²

The world-renouncing manners described in the fifth chapter and advocated by the Sufi *zuhhād*, *nussāk* and *awliyāʾ* is achievable by reducing the corruptive drives of the human lower *nafs*, that according to verse [12:53] prompts to evil (*ammāra bil-sū*).¹¹⁸³ The *nafs lawwāma* is mentioned in verse [75:2] and the *Malāmatiyya*, discussed in the previous chapter, derive their name from this self-blame. The *nafs muṭmaʿinna* in verse [89:27] is by its very nature incapable of disobeying its Lord.¹¹⁸⁴ The Sufi path consists of a constant struggle against the *nafs* and has been called by the Sufis ‘the Greater Jihad.’¹¹⁸⁵

Shah describes seven stages of preparation before the *nafs* is ready for its full function and these are degrees in the transformation of the consciousness under the guidance of a practiced teacher. They are first the *nafs ammāra*, second the *nafs lawwāma*, third the *nafs mulhama* (inspired), fourth the

¹¹⁸⁰ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 122.

¹¹⁸¹ Knysh, Alexander. 2017. *Sufism - A New History Of Islamic Mysticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 65.

¹¹⁸² Shah, Idries. 2015. *The Sufis*. London: Idries Shah Foundation Publishing, 316.

¹¹⁸³ Knysh, 88.

¹¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸⁵ Schimmel, Annemarie. 1978. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 112.

nafs muṭma'inna, fifth the *nafs rāḍiya* (fulfilled), sixth the *nafs marḍiyya* (fulfilling) and finally the *nafs ṣāfiyya wa kāmila* (purified and complete).¹¹⁸⁶ The fifth and sixth *nafs* are mentioned in verses [89:27-28] as descriptions of the *nafs al-muṭma'inna*.

Regardless of whether the *nafs* goes through three stages as suggested by the Qur'an or seven as in some Sufi doctrines, according to Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 195/810), one of the founders of the *zuhd* movement, these stages do not have to remain permanently; rather, after reaching their zenith are to be followed by the penultimate stage *al-shawq ilā-l-janna* (longing for Paradise).¹¹⁸⁷ Shaqīq describes the change at this stage as: "The seeker: When you see him, he is always laughing, rejoicing in what he has. He is neither miserable nor bountiful, he is not a slanderer, he does not indulge in fault-finding, and does not speak ill of people. He is al-ṣawwām al-qawwām (constantly fasting, constantly standing up [at night for prayer])."¹¹⁸⁸

This transformation is important in Sufism and is illustrated in a short anecdote about Rābi'a and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who were sitting under a tree on a lake shore just outside a popular bazaar, discussing spiritual matters. When it was time for prayers, Ḥasan unfurled his prayer rug and placed it on the water. Standing miraculously on the floating rug, he invited her to join him. She in turn spread out her rug, perched on it, levitated above him, and invited him to join her. She teased him: "Isn't this what you want, for the people in the bazaar to see us and to be astounded by our magical feat?" She continued, "What you did, a fish can do. What I did, a moth can do. You forget that what we are called to do is more difficult and more important: transforming our beings."¹¹⁸⁹

When reaching the final stage of *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna* that, according to verses [89:27–28] comes to God well-pleased and well-pleasing, this longing for Paradise ceases, because it is assured. The call for self-transcendence is found not just in philosophical moral systems, but also in the ethics of

¹¹⁸⁶ Shah. *The Sufis*, 370.

¹¹⁸⁷ Sviri, Sara. 2020. *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism : the World of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and his Contemporaries*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 45.

¹¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 177.

¹¹⁸⁹ Rahman, Jamal. 2014. *Sacred Laughter of the Sufis : Awakening the Soul with the Mulla's Comic Teaching Stories & Other Islamic Wisdom*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 23.

religions as diverse as Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Humour, at its best, has moral and religious significance, Peter Berger argued, because “it involves this self-transcendence liberating us from the narrow perspective of fight-or-flight emotions and helps us, to see ourselves as other people do.”¹¹⁹⁰

Not much has been written about the Prophet’s self-transformation and the Qur’an attests in verse [68:4] to his sublime morality. As Morreall argues, the basic moral skill is self-transcendence: rising above personal concern to appreciate the interests of others,¹¹⁹¹ which the Prophet did throughout his life. He did not take himself too seriously as evidenced by several reports in the data, for example (#52) when the Bedouin pulled him forcefully by his mantle and (#162) when Ibn Hudhāfa b. Qays al-Qurashi loosened his saddle. His person was not inviolate or untouchable, whether in earnest as in (#52) or in jest as in (#162).

The Prophet embodied human modesty and refused that anyone treat him like an aristocrat or king as Ibn Hajar reports based on an anecdote about an envoy who came to the Prophet, shaking and trembling. The Prophet told him: “Take it easy, I am not a king, I am but the son of a Qurayshī woman who used to eat *al-qadīd* (dried meat).”¹¹⁹² That indicates that the man *hāba*¹¹⁹³ the Prophet, who was very respectable with great prestige, and he comforted him telling him that he was only human like him and asked him not to aggrandise him and *lā tukhrijūnī min bashariyyatī* (not to remove/reduce his humanity). After all, he was only the son of a normal woman like any other, who ate *al-qadīd*.¹¹⁹⁴ The phrase “I am only the son of a woman from Quraysh who ate *al-qadīd*” is quoted frequently to illustrate the Prophet’s modesty and sublime behaviour.¹¹⁹⁵ However, his request to retain his humanity “*lā tukhrijūnī min bashariyyatī*” was not followed, as demonstrated in the fifth chapter with regard to *Sīra*.

¹¹⁹⁰ Berger, Peter. 1997. *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 190-200.

¹¹⁹¹ Morreall. *Comic Relief*, 115.

¹¹⁹² Al-qadīd is salted meat (beef), cut up in strips and sun and air dried.

¹¹⁹³ *Hāba* from *hayba* is respect combined with fear, a feeling of tremendous awe.

¹¹⁹⁴ Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī. 1994. *Ithāf al-mahara bi-l-fawā'id al-mubtakara min aṭrāf al-‘ashara*. Edited by Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir. 19 vols. Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Tiba'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 11:273.

¹¹⁹⁵ For example al-Bayhaqī, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn. 1985. *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah wa-ma'rifat aḥwāl ṣāhib al-sharī'ah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 69 and al-Suhrawardī, ‘Umar b. Muḥammad. 2001. *‘Awārif al-ma'ārif*. Mecca: al-Maktabah al-Makkīyah, 436.

From the discussion above we can conclude that the Prophet's laughter was in part due to the fact that he did not take himself too seriously and allowed his Companions and the members of the community the same. This, in addition to laughter being a beginning or a reason for prayer, renders laughter part of the spiritual experience. This is corroborated by the data, as there are many examples of laughter in spiritual contexts such as meeting angels or ascending to heaven. For example in (#10) when the Prophet ascends to heaven he sees a man who laughs when he looks to his right and cries looking to his left. He was looking at a large group of people on both sides. Jibrīl explains to Muḥammad that this was Adam and the group to his right are designated for heaven and those on the left for hell.

In (#33) the angels welcome Muḥammad to lower heaven, all of them laughing and cheerful apart from one angel. Jibrīl explains that this angel never laughed at anyone before and never will. He reassures Muḥammad that if he would have laughed, he would have laughed at him, but he simply does not laugh at all, as he is in charge of hellfire. In (#106) Jibrīl passes by just to laugh at Muḥammad, and in (#107) Jibra'īl passes by to ascertain that Muḥammad is contented and finally in (#128) Mikhā'īl also passes by to laugh at Muḥammad.

Laude states that "the devil laughs at those whom he misleads, and the saint, too, may laugh in return at the devil's final discomfiture."¹¹⁹⁶ This occurs in (#100) when Muḥammad laughs at Iblīs who falls, wailing about doom, gloom and woe, heaving dust on his head, when he learns that God responded to the Prophet's supplications for his community and has forgiven them. The eighth version of this reports, reflects a discussion among Sufis and also the *mutakallimūn* about Iblīs's sins of pride and disobedience, with some Sufis of extreme tendencies envisaging a pardon of Iblīs.¹¹⁹⁷ In that version a woman from the jinn visits the Prophet and tells him that she saw Iblīs standing upright, praying on a rock. She asked Iblīs about why he mislead Adam, did all that he did and yet prays. He asks her to let this go and not to ask. She insists and he replies: "I am praying to God to honour his oath and to forgive me." The Prophet laughed like never before.

¹¹⁹⁶ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 121-122.

¹¹⁹⁷ Wensinck, A.J. and Gardet, L., "Iblīs", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 23 September 2020
<http://dx.doi.org/uolibrary.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3021>

Whether spiritual laughter is a sign of transcendence, growth, opening the gates of the spiritual realm, the cause, consequence, or a coincidental occurrence of spiritual illumination or a sign of having reached the highest level in the *jihād al-nafs*, the most important issue for Laude, is knowing, in the last analysis, who is laughing, and at what.¹¹⁹⁸ However, it cannot be denied that laughter permeated the Prophet's spiritual life and by extension that of his community and therefore the argument can be made that some form of spiritual laughter does exist.

Conclusion: Presenting the Theory

From the discussion above we can ascertain that laughter, just like anger and sorrow, represents one of the fundamental aspects of human life, revealing essential characteristics when analysed carefully and comprehensively. Tamer phrased this perfectly in his introduction to *Humor in der arabischen Kultur*, noting that the forms of humour vary in different ages and cultures, so that what seems to be a universal quality of humankind reveals itself to be essentially determined by the specific individual and social contexts in which it occurs and ends asserting that "to deal in a scholarly way with humour reveals itself, indeed, to be a humourless business."¹¹⁹⁹

The Qur'an neither restricts nor qualifies laughter, permitting it as a gift from God. The Prophet's Sunna permits laughter provided it is in moderation and in keeping with the truth, while avoiding insults and mockery. The jurists' restrictions and myriad rules to regulate laughter are based on a selective *qiyās*, and a disregard of the Qur'anic universal permissibility and the Prophet's example, therefore, the permissibility of humour and laughter in *fiqh* should be revisited and granted without restrictions on topics or being declared *ḥarām* or *makrūh*, while keeping the elements of moderation and truth.

The anecdotes in the reports copied the Qur'anic style of narrative form, to educate, set examples, offer a moral and also entertain. This is because gentle lightness reaches people easier than solemn, self-righteous moralising and preaching. The narrative form answers questions, offers advice,

¹¹⁹⁸ Laude. *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter*, 122.

¹¹⁹⁹ Tamer, Georges. 2009. "Introduction." In *Humor in der arabischen Kultur/Humor in Arabic Culture*, edited by Georges Tamer, ix-xx. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, ix.

recommends and at times warns, cautions or illustrates a moral or spiritual lesson, as well as comforts and positively reinforces God's benevolence and future rewards for the present good deeds, mercy and kindness.

The reports show much laughter and at times intend a certain irony as a way of exposing the truth, or putting matters right. At other times they extend a partial perspective into a more comprehensive one. The Prophet's message is replete with laughter, but it is never used to degrade or offend others, but is directed against idolatry, polytheism, imbalances and the injustices of pagan society. It aims at lifting up humans, while reminding them of their commitments, decreases negative feelings such as pride, envy and jealousy and negative actions such as social injustice, inequity and discrimination. Laughter moderates controversies between people. The Prophet's laughter, and by extension that of his community is no affront, but a directive to dignify fellow humans and uncover their hidden abilities. The Prophet's laughter in the examples above is another way of telling the truth and propagating his message by embodying and living it, thus closing the gap between the human and divine perspective.

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, most humour theories are western-centric and modern, therefore unsuitable, as they do not take the particularities of the Prophet's community, the specific contexts of the time, locality and culture into consideration. In spite of the many theories developed over time, none of these theories are actually able to transcend cultural and local aspects of humour. Furthermore, most theories seem negative, while laughter is a positive emotion or action. For example the laughter of the Superiority Theory always has a victim, as its laughter is a form of derision or mockery, aggressively asserting superiority over the object of the joke.¹²⁰⁰ The Incongruity Theory's laughter is a reaction to the illogical or unexpected, thereby excluding the laughter of comprehension or belonging. The Relief Theory's laughter is the release of nervous energy or repressed emotion, thereby excluding the laughter of thanksgiving and moderation.¹²⁰¹ However, even failures can be instructive, if they allow for a precise diagnosis and some theoretical improvements. Beard aptly notes that despite

¹²⁰⁰ Beard. *Laughter in Ancient Rome*, 37.

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 39.

some powerful theories to the contrary, laughter is not always 'laughter *at*,¹²⁰² but can also be 'laughter *with*', 'laughter *of*', 'laughter *because*' and simply just 'laughter *is*'.

The laughter and humour found in the *Hadīth*, as demonstrated in chapters three, four and five, covers many aspects. Therefore, an attempt will be made to create a more comprehensive, yet simpler model, integrating some of the main characteristics and functions of the laughter extracted from the data, thereby allowing other reasons for laughter. A model that can also be extended to other historical personas in different cultures and religions.

There are a few risks though. The oversimplification of complicated, nuanced, and not always consistent arguments into a tidy framework is dangerous. Beard argues that "the more ambitious the theories are, the more striking laughter's victory seems to be over those who would control, systematise, and explain it."¹²⁰³ She adds that "as a general rule, the more features and varieties of laughter that a theory sets out to explain, the less plausible it will be. No statement that begins with the words "All laughter ..." is ever likely to be true (or at least if true, too self-evident to be interesting)."¹²⁰⁴ Additionally, a short pithy theory that sounds great, might overlook important components.

Cultural differences are already displayed in the way such theories are formulated. While "brevity is the soul of wit" is the preferred western approach or attitude, the Arab approach prefers verbosity and sees it as rhetorically useful effective communication. This probably has its roots in the Qur'anic devices and tools such as *itnāb*, *ishāb* or *ifāḍa* that are all translated as 'lengthy expositions' and is reflected by sayings such as "Repetition (*al-tikrār*) teaches the free (*al-aḥrār*), guides the good (*al-akhyār*), and reforms the bad (*al-ashrār*)" or "the virtue of repetition can only be appreciated by the righteous (*al-abrār*)."

For a theory to be successful it needs to be (a) substantiated, (b) explanatory, (c) predictive, and (d) testable.¹²⁰⁵ Other added characteristics are (e) useful and (f) logically coherent. This proposed

¹²⁰² Ibid, 7.

¹²⁰³ Ibid, 24.

¹²⁰⁴ Ibid, 39.

¹²⁰⁵ Jonker, J., and B. J. W. Pennink. 2010. *The Essence of Research Methodology : A Concise Guide for Master and PhD Students in Management Science*. Berlin ; London: Springer, 46.

theory is a grounded theory, as it is grounded in the local reality (or in this case historical narrative) of the situation or culture being investigated and derived from the systematically gathered data.¹²⁰⁶ The reports gathered were first arranged thematically to group the various versions of the same report, based on similarity of the *matn* and then arranged chronologically based on the death date of the author of the collection where the report was recorded. The data was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis, based on six labels (object, joker, audience, context, shared knowledge and intent), as described in the fourth chapter. Additionally the word used to denote laughter in the *matn* and the origin of the report (Sunni or Shi'ite) were taken into consideration. The frequency of the occurrences based on the labels determine the function of laughter in all reports, as discussed above in this chapter.

The proposed theory is substantiated by the data, explains the connection between the labels. For it to be predictive and testable, it should be applied on a different historical community, which goes beyond the scope of this study and is an avenue for further research. Alternatively, it can also be tested on the data eliminated for lacking a word denoting laughter to determine whether or not it is humorous. Therefore, and based on the analysis of the data in chapters four, five and six, the proposed theory suggests that there are eight major causes/purposes for the Prophet's humour and laughter in the early Muslim community. The Prophet laughed and joked to express 1) mercy, forgiveness, compassion and leniency, 2) used laughter and jokes instead of reprimands, 3) used laughter with the marginalized, ostracized and minorities to build community coherence and to strengthen the unity of its members helping them to transcend differences, 4) used laughter and jokes to educate and entertain at the same time, 5) gave in to his jovial human nature, 6) laughed and joked to create joy and alleviate sadness, 7) laughed and joked to take the edge off a situation and dispel fear and finally 8) laughed about himself and in thanksgiving as a form of spiritual laughter, at times as a prelude and at others as a sequel to prayer.

Therefore we can formulate the proposed theory as follows:

¹²⁰⁶ Ibid, 84.

Laughter and humour promote mercy, forgiveness, compassion and leniency; facilitate healing when used instead of reprimands; build community coherence, strengthen the unity of its members, transcend differences and facilitate communication; educate and entertain at the same time; are elements of human nature; create joy and alleviate sadness: take the edge off a difficult situation and dispel fear and are a prelude/sequel to prayer.

Conclusion

“I commend mirth”¹²⁰⁷

Previous scholarship on the subject, as was demonstrated in the Literature Review, has mainly focused on literature and *adab al-nawādir* (literary anecdotal collections). This is true for Franz Rosenthal's pioneering work *Humour in Early Islam*, Ulrich Marzolph's *Arabia ridens: Die humoristische Kurzprosa der frühen adab-Literatur im internationalen Traditionsgeflecht* as and many articles, book chapters and translations by Charles Pellat, David Samuel Margoliouth, Geert Jan van Gelder, Fedwa Malti-Douglas and Emily Selove. Humour in the Qur'an was also the focus of a few studies by Mustansir Mir, Ulrich Marzolph and Georges Tamer. Livnat Holtzman studied God's laughter in the *Ḥadīth* through the lens of anthropomorphism. Only very few scholars studied humour in the *Ḥadīth*, they include Rudolf Sellheim, Ludwig Ammann, Ze'ev Maghen and Leyla al-'Ubaydī . All these works studied humour and laughter from a Sunni perspective with some rare exceptions like Susanne Kurz who translated and analysed anecdotes found in a collection written by the Persian satirist 'Ubayd Zākānī and devoted several book chapters to anecdotes from other collections by Zākānī, who was himself a Sunni, but worked in Iran. All these works had some limitations restricting the focus to descriptive and historical discussions or merely presenting a disjointed anecdote collection without much analysis. Other deficiencies included a misplaced support for the later censorship of the Prophet's laughter like for example Sellheim and to some extent Ammann, who recognized the contradiction between the numerous instances in the *Ḥadīth* ascribing laughter to the Prophet and the image of a Prophet who barely smiles, yet ascribed his laughter to either astonishment, happiness or human nature. Other drawbacks relate to the methods used. For example, al-'Ubaydī classifies *aḥādīth* based on the company the Prophet was with when he laughed, while Maghen classifies them into groups based on the content or theme. Both methods, though useful have drawbacks, for the first confines the Prophet's laughter to

¹²⁰⁷ Ecclesiastes 8:15.

certain people or groups, thus rendering it company-specific, while the second method does not make provisions for content overlap or *ahādīth* that take on several topics simultaneously. Ideally, categories should be mutually exclusive to facilitate drawing objective conclusions. Moreover, some of the studies seem to force the material into existing humour theories that are western-centric, modern and culturally insensitive, rendering them unsuitable for a conclusive study of a different culture in a different era. The originality of this study lies in its inclusion of material from both branches of Islam and its multi-methodological approach that avoids the drawbacks of the previous approaches. Furthermore, it took the contradictions found between laughter and seriousness a step further by analysing and contextualizing it and providing reasons for this inconsistency.

This study aims to show that humour and laughter are found in both Sunni and Shi'ite *Hadīth* corpora. It answers the research questions positively that the Prophet, and by extension the Shi'ite Imams, did indeed laugh. Answering the questions, with whom, about what and how they laughed, the study demonstrates that the Prophet laughed with the entire community and did so indiscriminately and equally, often and in various ways, ranging from mere smiles to hearty laughs, showing various teeth.¹²⁰⁸ This partaking in laughter was inclusive in nature, meaning that he laughed with men, women and children, rich and poor, young and old members of the community. He also laughed with those whom he knew intimately, such as family members or servants in his household and strangers whom he had met for the first time to break the ice and to make them comfortable. Additionally, laughter was also exchanged with marginalised and ostracised members of the community, especially those who were disregarded during *Jahiliyya* like the poor, widows, orphans, and slaves. He not only laughed with Muslims, but also with Jews and their Rabbis.¹²⁰⁹

In answer to the last question what the Prophet laughed about, the study shows eight different topics. The first topic, with the most occurrence in the data is mercy, leniency forgiveness, and compassion, signalling tolerance, ease and comfort. Moreover, this mirrored the omnipresent Qur'anic value of *rahma* (mercy). The second is laughter and jokes instead of reprimands, to define the

¹²⁰⁸ See chapters four and six.

¹²⁰⁹ See chapters four and six.

boundaries of actions, restoring harmony to the community after a disagreement, or correcting some deviant behaviour with kindness and a non-threatening and gracious manner. The third topic is laughing with the whole community, particularly the weak and vulnerable, intending to strengthen the unity of its members, helping them to transcend their differences and build an identity, which was very important in the early days of Islam. The fourth topic is using laughter and jokes to educate and entertain at the same time, because gentle lightness reaches people easier than solemn, self-righteous moralising and preaching. The fifth topic of human nature illustrates that the Prophet gave in to his jovial nature, and also laughed about the idiosyncrasies of other community members, such as jealousy or fickleness, which also spills into the sixth topic of creating joy and alleviating sadness. The seventh topic is to take the edge off a situation and dispel fear especially during conflicts, battles and sieges as a kind of victory over the fear of death. Finally the eighth and last area of spiritual laughter shows that he mastered his *nafs* (ego/self) and hence, was able to laugh about himself. Additionally, he laughed in thanksgiving, sometimes as a prelude and at others as a sequel to prayer, as well as laughing with celestial beings.¹²¹⁰

These findings were obtained using a multi-methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as a framework. Quantitative analysis was used in the fourth and fifth chapters, starting with a descriptive statistical analysis, followed by a closer qualitative analysis to determine the different classifications, such as the object of the joke, the joker, the audience, the context, and whether or not any shared knowledge was needed to 'get' the joke, as well as the intent of the joke. Moreover, the qualitative and quantitative analysis determined correlation and causality to enable the drawing of meaningful results from the large body of textual data comprising 882 different narrations, with including multiple versions of 208 individual reports from the Sunni and Shi'ite *Hadith* corpus.¹²¹¹

With regard to classification, the type of laughter, meaning whether the Prophet smiled, laughed heartily or did not laugh, the study concluded that the Sunni image of the Prophet's laughter is more relaxed and less restricted or controlled than the Shi'ite one, though both are critical of negative

¹²¹⁰ See chapter six.

¹²¹¹ See chapter four.

connotations of laughter, like mockery, derision or ridicule, as well as excessive laughter or guffawing. Regarding the object of the jokes and anecdotes, the Shi'ite and Sunni reports display more commonalities with regard to the object of laughter, be it abstract concepts, positive or negative values, animals, food or people, regardless of their relationship to the Prophet. There are only slight predictable differences mainly in sectarian themes or in reports dealing with *ahl al-bayt* (the Prophet's family). The category of 'joker' also shows many commonalities between Sunni and Shi'ite reports and many shared reports. However, there are also differences, some of which are due to sectarian influences that colour the ideological understanding and portrayal, such as 'Alī's almost superhuman strength, receiving heavenly gifts from angels and 'Alī's repeated rescue by Jibrā'īl. Moreover, cultural and historical contexts, such as certain popular folkloric themes from the historical literary heritage of geographical areas, also give rise to such differences.

As for the audience, the research highlights that 'believers' constitute the most important audience, as many reports do not specify a particular audience and are preserved in the collections for them to consult, emulate and learn from. The Prophet's Companions and women have understandably more incidents as audience in the Sunni set, whereas *ahl al-bayt* are a favourite audience in the Shi'ite data. Unnamed random people are only found in the Sunni data. Regarding the 'context', angels, miracles, dreams and speaking animals are shared topoi, showing the concerns of the time and the developments of various literary genres and ideologies. The individual reports have much in common both in terms of the contexts and their frequency. Apart from slight sectarian differences, the contexts are very close to being identical. With regard to the necessary 'shared knowledge,' there are many common reports between the Sunni and Shi'ite data, with the Prophet, his nature, and episodes from his life forming the largest portion of the shared knowledge. Information pertaining to *ahl al-bayt* are common between both sets, even if they occur more frequently in the Shi'ite data. Reports about women are missing from the Shi'ite data, while religious knowledge, be it exegesis, regulations or rituals are found in both, even if the interpretations of some verses is employed to convey different messages for the same verse or incident described. The last category of 'intent' also shows more commonalities than the previous categories and it becomes apparent that the intent does not vary much between both

branches of Islam. It shows positive values such as mercy, leniency, rewards and communal cohesiveness as the most important concern in both branches, as it has the largest frequency of occurrences in the data. Seriousness or discouraging excessive laughter, and censoring laughter for scholars is a concern most important to Shi'ites, with limited Sunni versions promoting the same. The promotion of good manners is more pronounced in the Sunni data.

As mentioned, studies of humour mainly focus on literature, with only very few dealing with humour in the Qur'an and fewer dealing with the *Ḥadīth*. Furthermore, most of the available academic studies deal with humour from a Sunni perspective. The Shi'ite perspective is understudied and very few academic studies deal with anecdotal collections from Safavid times. So far no academic work has addressed humour culled from Shi'ite *Ḥadīth* collections, nor with any comparisons between Sunni and Shi'ite 'religious' humour. This has resulted in a prevailing stereotype that Shi'ites indulge in *ta'ziyah* (mourning) and *bukā'iyāt* (crying or weeping) rather than humour and laughter. With all those tears and mourning, a sense of humour is certainly not seen as one of the pronounced features of Shi'ites, yet this study demonstrates the opposite, that they do indeed enjoy a sense of humour and can laugh heartily and that both the Shi'ite and Sunni corpora are replete with anecdotal, humorous and jocular instances.¹²¹²

The Literature Review also mentioned the understudied theme of God's laughter in the *Ḥadīth*, which was only studied from the Sunni perspective using '*al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta*' (The Authentic Six). This study also contributed to filling the gap in the research by devoting the third chapter to God's laughter in the *Ḥadīth* and why it was rejected by Shi'ite scholars and therefore occurs rarely in the Shi'ite *Ḥadīth* corpus.¹²¹³ Most of the Sunni traditions citing God's laughter are *aḥād* traditions rather than *mutawātir* (widely transmitted) traditions, which does not provide certainty. However, the problem of authenticity is only of minor importance to Shi'ite scholars. The chapter shows that traditions mentioning God's laughter and likening it to human laughter, especially those that mention Alī b. Abū Ṭālib either as narrator or in the *matn* (textual body) were not rejected by Shi'ites because they were influenced by Mu'tazilite

¹²¹² See chapter five.

¹²¹³ See chapter three.

rationalism or Ash'arite influences, but because Alī b. Abū Ṭālib's rejected attaching attributes to God, as found in the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāgha* (The Peak of Eloquence) titled "*The creation of Earth and Sky and the creation of Adam.*"

Another finding of the study is that the *Ḥadīth* displays common features in terms of form. Formally the *aḥādīth* used in this study can be split into three groups of 1) short *aḥādīth* of only a line or two where an eye-witnesses or listener narrates one of the Prophet's statements without any comment or the Prophet is asked a simple question that he answers, 2) medium *aḥādīth* of a few lines (six to eight) where an event or a statement is narrated and sometimes a comment or explanation is offered, as well as questions directed at the Prophet with a narrative giving context to the question or its answer, 3) long *aḥādīth* of over ten lines that frequently include the Prophet's sayings or report conversations with different persons in reported speech, and sometimes in direct or quoted speech.¹²¹⁴

In the data of this study, all three groups are represented and the commonalities between the Shi'ite and Sunni corpus are significant. The first group of short reports, is the largest comprising 61% of the data, while the second group of medium reports amounts to 28% and the last group of long reports is only 7%, while the remaining 4% being statements, descriptions or definitions of figures of speech used repeatedly in the reports. This finding contributes to filling a research gap about the form of *aḥādīth*, which has also been understudied. In addition, another finding of studying the *ḥādīth* as narrative shows the significant use of 'story' as the preferred narrative form, reflecting the Qur'an's use of educational stories.

Studying the depiction of the Prophet's laughter and its types and distribution over time, using different versions of the same report, demonstrates that the depiction of the Prophet's laughter changed over time leading to the conclusion that the *aḥādīth* were manipulated. This corroborates previous research that some form of manipulation, redaction or editing of the *aḥādīth* took place. Study of the time of these changes reveals three different aspects. Firstly, a noticeable change in wording occurred between different versions of the same report over various time periods. Secondly the addition of a

¹²¹⁴ See chapter Six.

'disclaimer' to the *matn* diluting or excusing the laughter. Thirdly a commentary by the collector to convey a certain message, usually critical of laughter was added, sometimes also spilling into Qur'anic exegetical works. In many narrations with different versions the words denoting laughter are changed to dilute the laughter and either change it to a smile or edit out the laughter completely. This editing process happened before and during the period (251/865 to 651/1253), as shown from the data for the Sunni collections, based on several factors that combine to affect the depiction of laughter and seriousness or weeping. These factors are the canonisation of the Prophet's biographies, portraying the Prophet more like a demigod or superhuman thereby robbing him of his humanity, enhancing his powers, eliminating his sins, reducing his human limitations, as well as his human passions and emotions. Other factors include the political context leading to stricter interpretations of what constitutes a right path, not only forbidding rebellion in times of strife, but also reducing laughter and restricting the populace's behaviour in many forms. Additionally, the proliferation of ascetic Sufism, as well as certain Sufi movements such as al-Bakkā'ūn (weepers) and al-Malāmatiyya (Self-Blamers) also played a role. As for the redaction and edits of Shi'ite *ahādīth*, the period differed. The period before (951/1544) witnessed the establishment of a stable Shi'ite dynasty, the Safavids, with an increased literary output, especially of *Hadīth* collections. The end of persecution and discrimination allowed for 'normalcy', resulting in the emergence of a humorous genre like the Arabic *nawādir* genre.¹²¹⁵

These findings also highlight that different genres, in Sunni as well as in Shi'ite literature, discuss the same subjects, using similar materials, yet arrive at different end-results, a phenomenon which is still understudied in Islamic scholarship. Therefore, this contributes to the recent sporadic calls to put different genres of Islamic Studies in conversation with each another to glean better insights about interpreting the meaning and significance of particular texts, their relationship to works of the same or other genres, and conclusions about their place in Islamic historiography and intellectual history.

This study demonstrates that the existing humour theories are western-centric, modern, culturally insensitive, and hence, unsuitable to be implemented on a pre-modern society.¹²¹⁶ The study

¹²¹⁵ See Chapter five.

¹²¹⁶ See chapter one.

therefore proposed a new humour theory grounded in the data. The new proposed humour theory is articulated from the *ahādīth* and is a contribution, not only to Islamic Studies, but also to the field of Humour Research. The proposed new theory states that: “Laughter and humour promote mercy, forgiveness, compassion and leniency; facilitate healing when used instead of reprimands; build community coherence, strengthen the unity of its members, transcend differences and facilitate communication; educate and entertain at the same time; constitute elements of human nature; create joy and alleviate sadness: take the edge off a difficult situation and dispel fear and form a prelude or sequel to prayer.”¹²¹⁷

The study also opens up various avenues for future research. One of the avenues is testing the proposed theory on a different culture and different historical eras, as well as other reports that did not meet the selection criteria of this study. Moreover, owing to the nature and quantity of the material, it was impossible to present a comprehensive detailed exposition of every narration, though it shows the importance of using variant versions of the same tradition. It is hoped that the work on this subject may be of assistance to future scholars, who will succeed in establishing facts in the instances where it has only been possible to theorise, such as for example by performing a thorough *isnād-cum-matn* analysis of all the contradictory reports asserting that the Prophet’s laugh was but a smile and those mentioning his hearty laughter showing various teeth in order to date them and determine their authenticity and extent of the manipulation of some reports, and to determine which of the conflicting reports are authentic and which were fabricated. Another avenue for further research is to examine the geographic location of the narrators to see if there are any patterns or particular favourite topics that occur in certain locations, as theorised in this study.

This study makes an original and substantial contribution to knowledge in the field of prophetic humour in *Hadīth* without undermining the prophetic gravitas. It restores the Prophet’s humanity, removing the pedestal he was placed on, that distanced him from his followers, thereby bringing him closer to Muslims to enable them to emulate his behaviour which actively involved living his message not

¹²¹⁷ See chapter six.

only propagating it. Moreover, the study also challenges the stereotype of Muslims having no sense of humour, neither understanding a joke nor being able to take one by demonstrating that the ultimate role model for Muslims and the man in whose name all these protests and demonstrations took place, leading to this stereotype, actually had a sense of humour and laughed readily and heartily, even about himself. Additionally, the method used can be beneficial for the field of digital humanities. Finally, the study showed more commonalities rather than differences between Sunni and Shi'ite sources and scholarship. While the minute details of a number of narrations differ, the core message is the same. Not only do the *ahādīth* show common narrations, but so does the *tafsīr* and some of the applications of the prophetic traditions in terms of *fiqh* rulings, which can possibly bridge some of the conflict areas and narrow the gap in perception between the two main branches of Islam.

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