

Negotiating Shī'ī Identity and Orthodoxy through Canonizing Ideologies about Women in Twelver Shī'ī *Aḥādīth* on Pre-Islamic Sacred History in the Qur'ān

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Abstract

Shī'ī *aḥādīth*, particularly on women, are an immensely understudied area. Studies on Shī'ī *aḥādīth* on women usually centre on Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and little research explores pre-Islamic sacred female figures in Shī'ī *aḥādīth*. At the same time, there is an urgent interest in Shī'ism as well as women in Islam, and a desire for new methods to be applied as well as new questions to be asked. This thesis will analyse Shī'ī *aḥādīth* about women in pre-Islamic sacred history who appear in the Qur'ān (focusing on Eve, Sārah, Hājar, Zulaykhā, Bilqīs, and the Virgin Mary), and apply the methodologies of ideological criticism and feminist hermeneutics (to be explained in Chapter 1) to explore the subtexts about the essential nature and role of women communicated through these narrations. In addition to exploring the roots of these ideas, it will compare them against the contemporary Shī'ī ideology of gender referred to as the 'separate-but-equal' ideology to explore how well this ideology corresponds to Shī'ī narrations. (What constitutes an 'ideology' will be explored in Chapter 1.)

Rather than attempting to derive the 'authentic' teachings of the Prophet or the Imāms, this study will take a stance of *inauthenticity* with respect to narrations and treat narrations as socio-cultural artefacts representing the diversity of views and beliefs of the Shī'ī community. This distinguishes it from other works which either attempt to derive the 'authentic' teachings of the Prophet, or else which presume that all narrations equally reflect what the Prophet and Imāms actually said. This avoids the sticky question of which narrations are actually 'true' and allows them to be treated equally as cultural artifacts in negotiating a Shī'ī ideology of gender. Because this study focuses on sacred female figures shared with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it allows for the exploration of how ideas about women from outside the Islamic tradition were integrated into the Shī'ī corpus through *isrā'īlīyāt*, particularly through the intertextual synthesis of pre-Islamic material (such as the Bible) with post-Prophetic notions (such as normative paradigms of jurisprudential discourse).

Two trends will emerge from these narrations. The first heavily reinforces patriarchal norms, such as women's seclusion, the need for male authority, and male guardianship over women. These narrations reflect jurisprudential

discourse and are largely found in two of the four most prominent books of Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faḡīh*. However, in the second, other narrations form a 'counter-narrative' in which women and men are portrayed as equals; these narrations invoke the imagery of esoteric Shī'ism and focus on the narrative of *wilāyah* (loyalty to and love of the Prophet, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and the Shī'ī Imāms). Since both sets of narrations address uniquely Shī'ī concerns, such as the Imāmate, it can be deduced that these differing portrayals of women reflect competing concerns in the early and mediaeval Shī'ī communities with respect to determining Shī'ī identity and orthodoxy, and may also reflect the spread of and resistance to Arabization. Lastly, because many narrations attributed to Imam 'Alī convey strikingly different views about women, the penultimate chapter will explore whether Imam 'Alī was misogynistic through a comparison of two foundational Shī'ī texts: *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī* (c. 100 AH) and *Nahj al-Balāghah* (c. 400 AH).

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Often, a casual word or idea has a lasting impact. I owe a special debt to Ahab Bdaiwi, who unknowingly directed to me this topic by inviting me to give a short talk on women in Shī‘ī scholarship. At that point, I realized that this topic is of far more contemporary interest than the one that I was bogged down with. I also must thank a certain Shī‘ī scholar residing in California for an offhand remark about Eve and the nature of women which led me to consider how ancient notions of Eve persist in the Shī‘ī scholarly tradition even when the actual *ahādīth* supporting them are not necessarily given credence; this led to the longest chapter.

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I should now offer the standard disclaimer that the views in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the above people, particularly in such a sensitive subject as religious belief and orthodoxy.

Finally, it should be noted that the above list is lacking in females – ironically, since this is a work about women. This is a reflection of the paucity of women in Islamic studies, and especially Shī‘ī studies, in both the academic and seminary environments. Perhaps works like this will encourage there to be more!

Transliteration

The transliteration system of the *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* has been employed here. In contemporary Farsi words and names, ‘o’, ‘e’, and ‘v’ have been used to reflect common spellings. Naturalized words and names, such as ‘Ayatollah’ and ‘Islam’, have been used in their Anglicized form and have not been transliterated.

For the names of sacred figures, the precedent of Barbara Stowasser in *Women in the Qur’an* was used – namely, using the Anglicized form for

common names in English, such as 'Eve' and 'Mary', and the Arabic form for other names, such as 'Bilqīs'. This is, in part, a nod to the interchange between the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions that will be apparent throughout this work. However, in cases where the portrayal of the figure in the Judaeo-Christian tradition strongly differs from the portrayal in the Islamic tradition, the transliterated Arabic name was used.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and literature review

1.1.1 Aims of this work

An unspoken, unquestioned, and yet very powerful ideology of gender underlies Twelver Shī'ī discourse. Not only does this ideology impact daily life – for instance, in discussing whether women should have the right to divorce – but sharing in this ideology makes someone an insider in the Shī'ī community. This ideology includes assumptions about the essential nature and social roles of woman and man, and is reinforced by jurisprudential rulings, quotations attributed to sacred figures, historical portrayals, and sacred narrative. Despite the power of this ideology, little effort has been put into identifying what exactly the Shī'ī ideology of gender is, how it developed, or whether it is the only possible ideology of gender in Shī'ism.

This work will explore what the Shī'ī ideology of gender is, as well as why it is the way it is, in a novel way – that is, through an analysis of the subtext about ancient women in Shī'ī narrations (that is, from Eve to the Virgin Mary). From the outset, it should be noted that an assumption of *inauthenticity* will be assumed for these narrations; that is, these narrations will be treated as artefacts representing the views of the Shī'ī community, rather than as authentic statements from the Prophet or Imāms. (Hence, the term 'narrations' has been preferred over '*aḥādīth*', which carries a stronger connotation of authenticity, although '*ḥadīth*' has been used periodically to reflect a technical connotation.) The goal of this work is not to discern the actual sayings of the Prophet or Imāms, but, rather, to explore the codification of ideologies of gender among Shī'ah. Ideologies derived from these narrations will be compared to the dominant contemporary ideology of gender in Shī'ism – the 'separate-but-equal' ideology – to explore how rooted that ideology actually is in Shī'ī sources, how much it is a product of modernity, and whether there are alternative and equally plausible ideologies of gender in Shī'ī *aḥādīth*.

This is an original work in many ways. A review of the literature found no large-scale study of pre-Islamic Qur'ānic women in Shī'ī narrations (although

Rawand Osman's recent *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna: Examining the Major Sources of Imami Shi'i Islam* is a step towards that), and so the topic itself is unique. Second, the primary methodologies that will be used here are ideological criticism and feminist hermeneutics – methods of examining subtext to explore assumed ideologies and power dynamics, particularly as they relate to gender. While these methodologies have been applied in Biblical studies as well as in some Islamic feminist works implicitly addressing the Sunnī tradition, they have rarely been applied to Shī'ī *aḥādīth*.¹ Therefore, the application of this methodology here is new, and results in some striking observations about the role of gender in defining Shī'ī identity and orthodoxy. Lastly, this work sheds new light on the origins of the separate-but-equal ideology of gender, and at the same time offers a more nuanced view of the treatment of gender in Shī'ī scriptural sources.

While an ideology of gender by nature involves both women and men, this study will focus specifically on views about the nature and social role of women, and will only discuss the nature and roles of men insofar as they relate to women. It will not explore concepts of masculinity, although the texts being analysed here could also be used to deduce Shī'ī ideologies regarding masculinity. Since all of these narrations were transmitted and compiled by men (with a minimal inclusion of women in the chains of narration), it will be presumed that men are acting as the creators, or at least co-creators, of gender in these narrations, in the absence of evidence otherwise. Given that these narrations largely presume a strong binary division of gender corresponding with biological sex, the concept of multiple genders, the difference between gender and sex, or sexual orientation will also not be explored, although a couple narrations in Chapter 2 hint at other approaches to these topics. However, it should be noted that Shī'ī *fiqh* texts do address issues such as gender ambiguity (being a hermaphrodite or asexual) as well as homosexuality. The Shī'ī ideology of manhood is a woefully understudied area, and the

¹ For examples of feminist hermeneutics being applied to biblical studies, see Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Carolyn Osiek, *The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives*, in *Theological Studies*, vol. 53, no. 4 (1997), 956-968 <<http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/1753>>. Accessed 26 February 2016. Ideological criticism will be discussed later in this chapter.

approach and methodology used in this work could be applied to future studies on manhood.²

² For more on the importance of studying Islamic concepts of manhood, see Amanullah De Sony, 'Why masculinity matters in the study of Islam and Muslims', in *A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Work and Life of Amina Wadud*, ed. Kecia Ali, Julianne Hammer, and Laury Silvers ([United States]: 48HrBooks, 2012), pp. 73-76.

1.1.2 Contemporary relevance

One of the most vigorously debated questions today is the question of what should constitute the Islamic view of women. Faced with rapid social change, including the entrance of women into the public sphere, some Muslims emphasize the active participation of women in the Prophetic community and maintain that customs such as female seclusion were not practised during the Prophetic era. At the same time, the subject of women in Islam is deeply politicized, in that promoting women's rights has been seen as a means of facilitating colonialist hegemony over Muslim lands; in response, Muslim women are urged to resist foreign domination through accepting male authority and donning the Islamic modest dress, which has come to be seen as the 'flag' of Islam. Therefore, not only is the subject of women in Islam contentious today, but it is also very socio-politically charged. As one contemporary author says:

The question of the status of women in Islam has been at the forefront of most discussions of that religion in the last decades. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it has become a kind of cultural symbol of the deep civilizational chasm that is deemed by many to have widened between Islam and the West. The pervasive Western perception that Islam condones a social subordination of women, and further legitimizes their overall oppression, is no doubt the primary factor [...] [I]t is upon these grounds that the Western understanding of Islam as a religion incompatible with modern values and as an obsolete witness of archaic stages of development thrives.³

In contrast, a discussion of attitudes about women among Muslims in the mediaeval era – in which Muslims were culturally and politically dominant – is not a dialogue of 'clash of civilizations' but also cannot be separated from the

³ Patrick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guénon, and Schuon* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), p. 103.

sociocultural context of its time, especially the cultural dynamics surrounding Arabization.⁴

Most contemporary discussions about women in Islam, especially among Islamic feminists and Muslim women's rights activists, engage explicitly or implicitly with the Sunnī tradition – for instance, in discussions of misogynistic narrations found in Sunnī books, or through promoting 'Ā'ishah as a role model for educated and emancipated Muslim women.⁵ Even the renewed efforts to uncover the biographies of mediaeval female Islamic scholars have focused almost exclusively on women who carried out their endeavours within the milieu of Sunnī scholarship.⁶ Although academic interest in women in Shī'ism has increased, many studies on women in Shī'ism tend to be anthropological or sociological, rather than theological; for instance, searching “women” and “Shī'ism” on library catalogues results mostly in titles on Shī'ī women in South Asia, Iran, and the Arab world.⁷ Furthermore, Shī'ī *aḥādīth* (narrations) –

⁴ See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 127-168; Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (eds.), *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 1-2.

⁵ For instance, see Fatima Mernissi's discussion of misogynistic Sunnī *ḥadīth* related by Abū Hurayrah, as well as her view that 'Ā'ishah serves as a model of female leadership for her role in the Battle of the Camel in *The Veil and the Male Elite*, trans. Mary Lakeland (New York: Perseus Publishing, 1992), pp. 34-58. Because of her military opposition to 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, 'Ā'ishah is not seen as an exemplar to follow within the Shī'ī tradition. Asma Sayeed makes the same observation in 'Women in Imāmī Biographical Collections', in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁶ For instance, the two most prominent contemporary works on early female Islamic scholars – *al-Muḥaddithāt* and *Muslim Women: A Biographical Dictionary* – only discuss women in the context of the Sunnī tradition. Muḥammad Akram Nadwī, *al-Muḥaddithāt* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007); Aisha Bewley, *Muslim Women: A Biographical Dictionary* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 2004). A couple exceptions will be mentioned subsequently when discussing women in Shī'ī biographical literature; however, they are not on the scale of these larger works, particularly Nadwī's, in that Nadwī, as of 2011, had produced 40 volumes on the subject, and has continued to add to that collection.

⁷ A notable exception is Ziba Mir-Hosseini's *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1999). Although *Islam and Gender* is self-described as an anthropological study, Mir Hosseini studies the different trends in thought among Iranian Shī'ī scholars regarding the subject of women in Islam. That being said, as an anthropologist rather than a theologian, she herself does not directly intervene in the discussion to offer her own authoritative view on women in Islam; rather, she allows the discussion to remain solely within the domain of male scholars. Of course, through selection of which scholarly views to discuss, she does succeed in presenting her own viewpoint. *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, of which Mir-Hosseini is a co-editor, also contains some discussion of Shī'ī scholarly writings on women in Islam; however, most of the book is about

particularly Shī'ī narrations on women – is a largely neglected area of study. While attention has been given narrations on Fāṭimah al-Zahrā',⁸ there has been no large-scale study of Shī'ī narrations on women as a whole; the closest thing to that may be Rawand Osman's recent work, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*. Her work is groundbreaking, but is necessarily limited in its survey of *aḥādīth* given the scope of subjects she covers. Additionally, she confines her discussion to the Four Books (discussed later in this chapter), whereas this thesis will directly explore the question of whether portrayals of women in *aḥādīth* differ between the Four Books and other collections, or between the Four Books themselves. Therefore, that particular work fills a gap in the literature but nonetheless allows for further studies to deepen understanding of women in Shī'ī *aḥādīth*. This work will take a step towards redressing that gap in knowledge by offering a conclusive study of one segment of Shī'ī narrations pertaining to women – namely, narrations about ancient (pre-Islamic) women in sacred history in the Qur'ān. ('Sacred history' here is used to denote portrayals of events on the boundary of historicity – for instance, the creation of Adam and Eve – rather than history as a discipline.) As such, it is an original work, both in terms of the material being studied, as well as the approach that will be taken.

A central goal of this thesis is to discern the ideologies about women that were canonized in these narrations and to compare these views to the dominant contemporary Shī'ī discourse on women, and to provide conclusions about the classical texts that are relevant to the contemporary dialogue about women in Islam.⁹ This will be done via an evaluation of the portrayals of pre-Islamic Qur'ānic women in selected books of Shī'ī narrations. This thesis will adopt an 'insider' approach and examine contemporary questions about women in Islam from within the contemporary Shī'ī scholarly tradition, while at the same time

women within Sunnī scholarship. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, and Christian Moe (eds.), *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

⁸ See sample works addressing this topic in note 11.

⁹ This thesis will focus on Twelver or Imamī Shī'ism, and when 'Shī'ism' is mentioned in a contemporary context, it should be taken to mean 'Twelver Shī'ism'. However, it should be noted that although the books selected are compilations carried out by Twelver Shī'īs, they do contain *aḥādīth* narrated by people, such as Zaydīs and Wāqifīs, who did not affiliate themselves with the Twelver movement.

questioning certain aspects of the contemporary discourse and contemporary notions of orthodoxy. To that end, several basic premises of Shī'ī scholarship will be adopted, and are outlined in a later section. This thesis will focus on the foundational assumptions about the nature of women that have guided the development of Shī'ī thought, including jurisprudence. The goal of this thesis is not to draw conclusions about *sharī'ah* rulings pertaining to women; however, religious law will be discussed in cases where narrations directly connect assumptions about the nature of women to religious law – for instance, regarding inheritance. The goal of this thesis is not to determine which narrations are and are not authentic but rather to examine the spectrum of views presented by these narrations. However, in keeping with a common method in Islamic feminist works as well as a major premise of Shī'ī scholarship,¹⁰ cases where the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* conflict, or where *ḥadīth* conflict with each other, will be noted. However, attention will be given to textual indicators suggesting the introduction of pre-Islamic or post-Prophetic Islamic material – that is, extra-Islamic ideas about women – into the *ḥadīth* corpus. Lastly, it should be emphasised that this thesis is not attempting to draw historical conclusions, either regarding pre-Islamic sacred figures such as the Virgin Mary, or about daily life in the Islamic Empire. Instead, the codification of sacred narratives in these books of narrations will be explored in the light of contemporary theological currents in Twelver Shī'ism; that is, it is a theological rather than historical work. However, where appropriate, secondary literature will be employed to contextualize the compilations of narrations, and the narrations themselves. The penultimate chapter will also explore ways in which the findings of this thesis support conclusions of Islamic feminist secondary literature.

Given the centrality of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (as well as other women who lived in the Islamic era, such as Zaynab bint 'Alī) to the Shī'ī tradition, the reader may wonder why the choice was made to focus on pre-Islamic women in the Qur'ān in lieu of *aḥādīth* about Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'. Part of the reason for this is that because these women are so central to the Shī'ī tradition, they have

¹⁰ Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 3-5, 8-9.

already been extensively discussed; in particular, tremendous attention has been given to portrayals of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'.¹¹ In contrast, very little attention has been given to Shī'ī *aḥādīth* on pre-Islamic women in the Qur'ān, and so there is a genuine gap in knowledge in this subject area. Additionally, it stands to reason that the way that women are actually portrayed when they are being discussed is a more reliable litmus test for assumptions about the nature of women, or what is good and bad for women, than blanket assertions treating women as a monolith, such as 'women are deficient in intellect'. And, of course, since the Qur'ān is of paramount importance in the Shī'ī as well as the Sunnī tradition, discussing Qur'ānic figures is of direct relevance to Shī'ī thought. Lastly, this approach parallels the approach taken by a number of Islamic feminist authors, such as Barbara Stowasser in *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*; Amina Wadud in *Qur'an and Woman*; and Asma Barlas in "*Believing Women*" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, in discussing women in Islam through the lens of portrayals of Qur'ānic women, and so there is a strong precedent for it in contemporary thought; the difference is that this thesis focuses on Shī'ī instead of Sunnī portrayals.

Additionally, it has been suggested that just as the Virgin Mary was elevated beyond relevance to the ordinary woman in the Catholic tradition, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' has been elevated beyond relevance to the ordinary woman in the Shī'ī tradition – that is to say, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is presented as the exception rather than the norm to womanhood.¹² For instance, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is presented as infallible (*ma'ṣūmah*, or protected from sin), whereas

¹¹ For instance, see Mary Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007); C. Clohessy, *Fatima, Daughter of Muhammad* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2009); Denise Louise Soufi, *The Image of Fatima in Classical Muslim Thought* [PhD dissertation], Princeton University, 1997; George Warner, 'Tragedy, History and the Sacred: The *Hujjah* of Fatimat al-Zahra', in *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2011), pp. 147-162; Ruth Rowe, *Lady of the Women of the Worlds: Exploring Shi'i Piety Through a Consideration of Fatimah al-Zahra* [MA dissertation], University of Arizona, 2008. In *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna: Examining the Major Sources of Imami Shi'i Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), Rawand Osman explores women in the Qur'ān and *sunnah*; this thesis will build on and engage with her work.

¹² Mary Thurlkill makes this observation about the two women in the Shī'ī and Catholic traditions throughout *Chosen Among Women: Mary and Fatima in Medieval Christianity and Shī'ite Islam*. Marina Warner discusses this phenomenon with respect to the Virgin Mary in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 2nd revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

ordinary women err;¹³ Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is also said to have been free from menstrual cycles and to have been, in some manner, a perpetual virgin (although she married and bore four surviving children); this is particularly relevant since menstruation is used in some narrations to exclude women from full religious participation.¹⁴ While the question of whether Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is in fact elevated beyond relevance to the ordinary woman can be debated, since some contemporary Shī'ī thinkers such as 'Alī Sharī'atī and Sayyid Faḍlullāh have written books specifically aiming to make Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' relevant to the ordinary woman,¹⁵ the fact remains that women other than Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (and a handful of 'Alid women) are largely neglected in Shī'ī thought, and, therefore, this thesis will not specifically examine *ḥadīth* about her. However, as will be seen, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is mentioned in some of the *aḥādīth* on these other pre-Islamic women, and so she will be discussed in the context of how those women are connected to her.

1.1.3 Women in Shī'ism

To determine what questions about women in Shī'ism are of contemporary importance, it is helpful to engage in a survey of women in studies of Shī'ism. In fact, apart from studies specifically on women, any mention of women in studies on Shī'ism is few and far between; instead, most works on Shī'ism focus almost exclusively on men, as if to suggest that Shī'ism is essentially a male endeavour. For instance, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, one of the few authors to write about modern Shī'ī scholarly discourse about women, observes that two prominent works on Shī'ism – Michael Fisher's *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (first published Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1980) and Roy Mottahedeh's *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Islam* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) mention women only in the context of being female relatives of male Shī'ī clerics, or else with regards to the political discourse about gender, conducted

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Menstruation and virginity are discussed more in Chapter 6.

¹⁵ See 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Fāṭemeh Fāṭemeh Ast* (Tehran: Ḥosaynīyeh Ershād, 1971); Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlullāh, *al-Zahrā' al-Qudwah* (n.p.: n.d.). Available at <http://arabic.bayynat.org.lb/books/alzahraa_index.htm>. Accessed 17 July 2013.

by men about women.¹⁶ Even Hamid Dabashi, in his attempt to provide a counter-narrative to Shī'ī orthodoxy in *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*, formulates his theory of the essence of Shī'ism from a decidedly androcentric perspective, and his discussion of women in Shī'ism is limited to women who only marginally affiliated themselves with Shī'ism as it is commonly understood.¹⁷ With respect to women in Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, Ayatollah al-Khū'ī only mentions a handful of female narrators in his monumental biographical work *Mu'jam al-Rijāl*, with little to no information about them; and, in his bibliographic survey of early Shī'ah entitled *Tradition and Survival*, Hossein Modarressi includes only one.¹⁸ Asma Sayeed uses this paucity of information in the classical sources (as well as a later biographical work which lists only nineteen women) to conclude that while some Shī'ī women during the time of the Imāms learned and transmitted *ahādīth*, *ḥadīth* transmission was not as central to Shī'ī women as it was to Sunnī women; instead, jurisprudence and *tafsīr* were favoured areas for women. She concurs with the view that the paucity of information on early Shī'ah women is due not only to gender segregation but also a desire to avoid publicly identifying them due to the threat of persecution.¹⁹ In contrast, a subsequent – and, notably, female – Iranian scholar provides names and extended biographical information in a much lengthier work on female Shī'ī *ḥadīth* narrators through scouring numerous primary sources other than early biographical dictionaries, thus suggesting it is more of an issue of absence of attention to women, rather than an actual absence of women.²⁰ Therefore, the most basic issue to examine is whether women are genuinely absent from the Shī'ī tradition, or simply are neglected. Since this thesis is about *ḥadīth* on pre-Islamic women, the most reasonable way to explore this is to examine whether, in Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, pre-

¹⁶ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Dabashi's main contention is that the essence of the Shī'ī spirit as a 'son-religion' is a Freudian guilt complex due to 'son-murder'; this approach tacitly excludes women. See Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Khū'ī, *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth wa-Tafsīl Ṭabaqāt al-Ruwāh*, 24 vols. [CD-ROM] (Noorsoft: Dirayat al-Noor); Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī'ite Literature* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

¹⁹ Asma Sayeed, 'Women in Imāmī Biographical Collections'.

²⁰ Nahleh Gharavi Naeeni, *Shī'a Women Transmitters of Ahādīth: A Collection of Biographies of the Women Who Have Transmitted Traditions*, trans. G. Babst (Qum: Ansarian, 2011).

Islamic women are portrayed as part of Shīʿī sacred history and spiritual cosmology, or whether sacred history is portrayed as being the domain of men.

Furthermore, when women are mentioned in academic works on Shīʿism, it is often with the presumption that Shīʿism is repressively patriarchal and that, in Shīʿism, women are expected to enjoy no free agency.²¹ For instance, Moojan Momen's hefty *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* confines its discussion of women to a single page, on which Momen concludes that women in Shīʿism must necessarily be subordinate to men since '[t]here is no mechanism whereby women can act in society independently of men', and women are not 'regarded as worth any substantial education, too emotional to be entrusted with any important decisions, and liable, if unveiled, to lead men astray'.²² Juan Cole, another prominent scholar of Shīʿism, begins a discussion of Shīʿī women in South Asia by explaining that Shīʿism is the 'primary candidate' for one of the 'strongest images [...] of patriarchal authority and repression of women', and that any religious agency that Shīʿī women have must necessarily be tangential.²³ Therefore, this thesis will also explore portrayals of male authority in these *āḥadīth*, to determine whether this is a fixed religious ideal, as well as the question of whether women in these *āḥadīth* are portrayed as having spiritual or personal agency, and whether that is portrayed as a positive or negative thing.

In 1983 and 1985, Adele Ferdows published articles on women in Shīʿism and women in Shīʿī *ḥadīth*, the former of which was co-authored by Amir Ferdows. Adele and Amir Ferdows should be credited with opening the door to inquiries on women in Shīʿism at a time when Shīʿī studies had not yet taken off in the Western academy. These articles are excellent starting points for discussing late twentieth-century perceptions of Shīʿism. However, they are unsuitable as textbook pieces or informational sources due to generalizations

²¹ Of course, this view is not limited to Shīʿism. For instance, Massignon considered Islam to be misogynistic and as a religion which keeps women in a perpetual state of being a minor in the eyes of the law, although the Qurʾān itself emphasizes the equal humanity of men and women. Patrick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam*, p. 104.

²² Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New York: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 245.

²³ Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 138.

and contestible statements. For instance, in her 1985 contribution to *Women in Iran*, Ferdows implies that *Nahj al-Balāghah* is a primary source of Shī'ī law, whereas it is not usually taken as such. She presents it as fact that Imam 'Ali spoke of women's 'deficiencies', whereas a more responsible, scholarly view would be that these words were attributed to Imam 'Ali. (*Nahj al-Balāghah* and the narration on women's 'deficiencies' will be discussed in Chapter 7.) The article relies on secondary sources and translations, and often a single view is cited to prove what Shī'ism 'says', thereby neglecting the diversity and evolution of Shī'ī thought. For instance, a single 1964 *fatwā* is cited to prove that, in Shī'ism, women are not allowed to leave the home; this *fatwā* is described as 'contemporary' despite the fact that women's situations in Iran (and worldwide) changed significantly from 1964 to 1985. Her discussion of Shī'ī views on Eve features a narration from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (quoted from a secondary source) and the view of a Sunnī scholar; the only Shī'ī cited is 'Alī Shari'atī, who mentions Eve only in passing in the book that she cites.²⁴ Therefore, she misses out entirely on the complex nature of Shī'ī portrayals of Eve (to be discussed in Chapter 2 of this work). While Ferdows rightly observes that understandings of women in Shī'ism in the West have been 'stationary', she nonetheless holds that views on women in Shī'ism must necessarily be static because they are based on Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. This is despite the fact that views on women in Shī'ism have evolved considerably over the past century; at the very least, it neglects the possibility of questioning the authenticity of *aḥādīth*. In contrast, in *Islam and Gender*, Mir Hosseini mentions this view – that everything that can be said about women in Islam has already been said – as only one of several possible approaches to women in Shī'ism.²⁵ In any case, the subsequent chapters in this work will demonstrate that even classical works host multiple views about women.

The 1983 article by Ferdows and Ferdows, 'Women in Shi'i *Fiqh*: Images through the *Ḥadīth*', is limited to a discussion of 'Allāmah al-Majlisī's

²⁴ Adele K. Ferdows, 'The Status and Rights of Women in *Ithna'Ashari Shi'i Islam*', in *Women and the Family in Iran*, ed. Asghar Fathi (Leiden: Brill, 1985), pp. 13-36. The *ḥadīth* cited is the one on women being crooked because they are created from a rib; this idea will be explored more in Chapter 2.

²⁵ Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, 26.

seventeenth-century collection *Ḥilyat al-Muttaqīn* in light of some contemporary *fiqh* rulings. Rather than a being manual of *aḥādīth* used in *fiqh* derivation, *Ḥilyat al-Muttaqīn* is a selection of narrations meant as an advice manual for the general public. Like some earlier works, *Ḥilyat al-Muttaqīn* is addressed to a male reader, and treats women in the context of being wives or slave-girls. While the authors do not frame it as such, the main contribution that this article offers is a window into ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī’s own perception of how women fit into the context of Islam. Although Majlisī’s compilation is selective, Ferdows and Ferdows use it to draw sweeping conclusions about Shī‘ism; for instance, a narration on female circumcision is used to demonstrate that female circumcision is prescribed in Shī‘ism, despite the fact that stronger Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* oppose it (see Chapter 3). Admittedly, some narrations from *Ḥilyat al-Muttaqīn* which are mentioned in their article will recur throughout this work, although they will be subject to more critical analysis. Ferdows and Ferdows close their article decrying ‘clergy-made and fabricated rulings’ that ‘keep the Iranian women subservient, ignorant, and exploited’ and do not consider the possibility of reform from within the Shī‘ī scholarly tradition itself. Still, Ferdows and Ferdows should be credited for doing something that others were not, even if the narrations they discuss are only a drop in the ocean.²⁶

One of the few academics to discuss women in Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* and in the early Shī‘ī community is Maria Dakake, who devotes a chapter of *The Charismatic Community* to this subject. Unlike most authors on women in Shī‘ism, who primarily discuss Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and Zaynab bint ‘Alī, she chooses to discuss non-‘Alid women on the grounds that ‘Alid women would have been expected to hold a ‘family loyalty’ to the Shī‘ī cause; a similar approach – namely, focusing on women who are traditionally *less* discussed with respect to Shī‘ism – will also be taken here.²⁷ Dakake’s findings are ambiguous. On the one hand, she feels that early non-‘Alid women were seen as making indispensable efforts to contribute to the survival of the Shī‘ī cause,

²⁶ Adele K. Ferdows and Amir H. Ferdows, ‘Women in Shi‘i *Fiqh*: Images through the *Hadīth*’, in *Women and Revolution in Iran*, ed. Guity Nashat (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), pp. 55-68.

²⁷ Maria Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi‘ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: SUNY, 2008), p. 214.

and she observes that women were sometimes portrayed as being more favourable to the ‘Alid cause than men – for instance, in the case of the wife of Yazīd, who is described as being sympathetic to al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī and his supporters although her husband sent an army against them. Additionally, she notes that *ḥadīth* indicate that women joined the Shī‘ī movement of their own accord, not only at the bequest of their male relatives.²⁸ Additionally, she mentions *ḥadīth* which she feels present women in a positive light – for instance, a *ḥadīth* saying that the most goodness is to be found in women, or *ḥadīth* praising love of women as a characteristic of the prophets.²⁹ Nevertheless, overall, she presents Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* as being unfavourable to women. For instance, she notes *ḥadīth* on the rarity of believing women, and in fact takes her chapter title from a *ḥadīth* saying that believing women are rarer than red sulphur.³⁰

Dakake herself does not embark on the authenticity question; that is, she does not attempt to determine whether these *ḥadīth* were actually said by the Imāms, or only attributed to them. While there is no problem in studying the *ḥadīth* as a corpus, and in fact this approach will be taken here, this approach becomes problematic when *ḥadīth* are treated as historical fact. For instance, she discusses a number of unflattering *ḥadīth* about women attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib – along with a sardonic comment from Annemarie Schimmel that, since he was married to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, he ‘ought to have had a more positive attitude’ towards women³¹ – without questioning whether he actually said these statements; it would be more accurate to say that, by the fourth century *hijrī*, he was envisioned as holding these views. This tension between *ḥadīth* as portrayals versus *ḥadīth* as fact is particularly noticeable with respect to the *ḥadīth* about red sulphur that she names her chapter after, since she herself says that this *ḥadīth* was related through a narrator who, in modern Shī‘ī

²⁸ Ibid., p. 220.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 228-229, citing al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, pp. 320-321.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 204, 229. Amir-Moezzi also briefly discusses this *ḥadīth* as a teaching of the Imāms (rather than as a statement which was attributed to the Imāms) in his overview of esoteric Shī‘ī teachings as part of the idea that the Shī‘ī community is meant to be a small spiritual elite. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismā‘īli Studies, 2011), p. 292.

³¹ Maria Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, p. 204.

scholarship, would be considered suspect on account of belonging to a heterodox (*ghulāt*) sect,³² which leads to the possibility that early Shī'ah of varying theological inclinations, including those termed *ghulāt*, held a diversity of views on the essential nature of women – including views adopted from pre-Islamic or extra-Islamic religious traditions – and that some of these varying views were interpolated into the Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections.

The question of whether Shī'ī *ḥadīth* are essentially negative or positive towards women is also addressed by Rawand Osman in *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunnah: Examining the Major Sources of Imami Shi'i Islam*. Of the works discussed, Osman's is the closest to this one, and so this work builds on hers. Although she discusses Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, her discussion is by necessity limited since she also discusses the Qur'ān and *tafsīr*; additionally, only the first part of her work is about pre-Islamic women in the Qur'ān. Osman concludes that the portrayal of women in the Qur'ān is significantly different from that in Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, and dismisses many *aḥādīth* as being thematically in conflict with the Qur'ān. She gives particular attention to the *ḥadīth* attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib discussed by Dakake which describe women as a necessary evil; as deficient in faith, fortune, and intellect; and as flowers to be secluded; as well as the narration explaining that a woman's *jihād* is to serve her husband. Unlike Dakake, she observes that these *ḥadīth* are not in keeping with the spirit of the Qur'ān or the recorded actions of prominent women in the Shī'ī tradition, thereby implying that these *ḥadīth* are not authentic. Like Dakake, she also mentions a handful of seemingly woman-friendly *aḥādīth*, such as the one that men's love for women increases as their faith increases, but she also observes that these *aḥādīth* still present women in a sexualized or submissive manner, unlike the Qur'ān which portrays women in a human and independent manner. Ultimately she also concludes that the extant Shī'ī *ḥadīth* on the nature of

³² Ibid. It is not clear in the text whether she is referring to the entire genre of narrations on believers being rarer than red sulphur, as opposed to specifically the version about female believers being rarer than red sulphur. However, the version of that narration in *al-Kāfī* (vol. 2, p. 242, no. 1) saying that female believers are rarer than red sulphur is also related through a narrator about whom there is a debate whether or not he was associated with *ghulūw*, Muḥammad ibn Sinān.

women have a negative slant, whereas the Qur'ān treats both women and men as equal in humanity.³³

In summary, an overview of existing literature on women in Shī'ism reveals a gap in the literature on women in Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, as well as the following presumptions: (a) **women are absent from Shī'ism**, (b) **male authority is a necessary part of Shī'ism**, (c) **the absence of female agency is a necessary part of Shī'ism**, and (d) **Shī'ī *ḥadīth* on women mostly present women in a negative light**. Furthermore, an examination of Dakake's study highlights the importance of treating *ḥadīth* as *portrayals* of historical figures, rather than as unquestionable historical fact; additionally, it brings up the possibility that different theological groups in early Shī'ism, including the sects collectively known as the *ghulāt*, held varying ideas on women, which were then passed on in the Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections.

1.1.4 Views on women among contemporary Shī'ī scholars

A separate, albeit related subject is the question of contemporary Shī'ī scholarly views on women. Within the realm of contemporary Shī'ī scholarship, most Shī'ī works on women in Islam typically do not engage deeply or critically with the Shī'ī *ḥadīth* tradition. This could be due to a desire for their work to be accepted outside of the Shī'ī tradition; doubts about the authenticity of many Shī'ī *ḥadīth* about women, including the narrations pre-Islamic women explored here; or an unwillingness to openly criticise popularly circulated *aḥādīth*, even if the textual sources of these *aḥādīth* are questionable.³⁴ More cynically, it has also been suggested that Shī'ī scholars intentionally avoid these *aḥādīth* due to a presupposition that any detailed analysis of Shī'ī *ḥadīth* will result in conclusions about women that are untenable in the modern era. For instance, the contemporary Iranian thinker Abdolkarim Soroush says:

...If we challenge their [the *aḥādīth*'s] authenticity, then our entire [corpus of] sacred sources will come into question. If we

³³ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, pp.152-180.

³⁴ Ayatollah Moṭahharī discusses the pressure that *'ulamā'* feel to conform to popular beliefs in 'The Fundamental Problem of the Clerical Establishment', trans. F. Arshad and H. Dabashi, in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 161-182.

say they're pseudo-universal propositions, then not only women but men and many other rulings based on them will be affected. If we accept them as they are, then we must resolve the consequences of their incongruity with our present society. What we can say is that there's a kind of absolute neglect regarding such *aḥādīth*. They aren't addressed seriously, so no serious solutions are found for them.³⁵

Of course, even from a traditional scholarly perspective, questioning the authenticity of specific *ḥadīth* can be done within the Shī'ī tradition without actually calling the entire corpus of sacred sources into question.

Nonetheless, Shī'ī scholars and thinkers express a range of views on women, from the conservative to the reformist. However, it is possible to identify a dominant ideology about women, which has roots in the classical era but which, in the past century, was phrased as a response to Westernization. This ideology will be referred to as the 'separate-but-equal' view of women and will be used as a baseline for comparison in this work. Although the separate-but-equal ideology has been discussed by Mir Hosseini and others, the premises of the separate-but-equal ideology have not been outlined or analysed in detail. In contemporary Shī'ī discourse, they are typically presumed but un verbalized. Therefore, this section also serves as a contribution to knowledge by outlining this ideology in distinct points which can then be analysed on their own accord.

While he neither constructed nor advocates the separate-but-equal ideology, the reformist scholar Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari (1950-) has helpfully outlined the epistemological assumptions underlying the traditional view of women in Shī'ī (and, for that matter, Sunnī) scholarship. Eshkevari identifies them as: (1) the assumption that men are created superior to women; and that women are evil, possess an evil essence, or can create evil and must therefore be controlled; (2) the assumption that the patriarchal family is the basic unit of society and must be protected for its survival; and (3) an Aristotelian concept of

³⁵ Abdolkarim Soroush, in Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, p. 226. (She is transcribing from an audio recording.) See also Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 181, 223.

justice, in which justice is seen as giving everyone their proper due in order to preserve the social order, rather than equality; it is according to this definition of justice that a ‘separate but equal’ view of women can be presented as just.³⁶ (The strong parallels between the separate-but-equal ideology and Aristotle’s view of woman as intellectually and physiologically deficient and by nature subordinate to men will be explored more in Chapter 7.) Eshkevari then argues against the validity of these propositions, and takes the next step to conclude that *fiqh* rulings which are justified by or which support these propositions should be emended.³⁷ While the question of whether or not *sharī‘ah* rulings should be reformed is outside of the scope of this thesis, Eshkevari’s line of argument demonstrates the relevance of these paradigms to Shī‘ī thought, including but not limited to jurisprudence. Therefore, from Eshkevari’s discussion, the following issues of inquiry emerge: (a) **are men portrayed as creationally superior to women?**, (b) **are women portrayed as being prone to evil?**, and (c) **should men have authority over women in a marriage, or should marriage be a partnership?**

³⁶ The Aristotelian concept of justice is described in Book V of Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham [Greek and English] (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Loeb Classical Library and Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. 252-323. Of particular interest is Aristotle’s differentiation of justice between a master and slave, or between a head of a household and his wife and children (p. 323). Classical Muslim scholars inherited the Aristotelian definition of justice and traditionally defined it as ‘putting things in their proper place’ (instead of as equity). This definition of justice is attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (saying number 437), and is still in use in Shī‘ī theology. For instance, the contemporary Shi‘i exegete ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī says that justice is ‘to strike a balance and equilibrium between things such the each is given its rightful share. Thus, by being placed in their correct positions, they are all equal.’ al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, 21 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-‘Ālamī li al-Maṭbū‘āt, 1997), vol. 12, p. 331. However, Ali Paya, argues that the meaning of justice in *ḥadīth* attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is more in line with modern definitions of justice, which focus on human equality, rather than the ancient view. See Ali Paya, ‘Imam ‘Alī’s Theory of Justice Revisited’, in *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 5-30. For more on the traditional Shī‘ī scholarly view of justice, see M. Ali Lakhani (ed.), *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam: The Teachings of ‘Alī ibn Abi Talib* (Bloomington, Indiana and Vancouver: World Wisdom and Sacred Web Publishing, 2006), especially page 27 on which it is defined; Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, *The Justice of God* (Dar es Salaam: Bilal Muslim Mission, 1992).

³⁷ Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, ‘Rethinking Men’s Authority Over Women: *Qiwāma*, *Wilāya* and their Underlying Assumptions’, in Ziba Mir-Hosseini et al. (eds.), *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, 191-193. One point to note is that the reason for legislation (Islamic or otherwise) often differs from the common justification, and justifications evolve over time. See Behnam Sadeghi, *The Logic of Law Making in Islam: Women and Prayer in the Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 147, 154.

In the above, Eshkevari is criticizing the dominant views held by Shī'ī scholars. In contrast, the contemporary Shī'ī scholar who is credited with outlining and popularizing the separate-but-equal ideology of women is Ayatollah Morteza Moṭahharī (1920-1979).³⁸ Ayatollah Moṭahharī was a forward-thinking cleric who did not hesitate to engage with subjects such as Western philosophy that were traditionally ignored or even proscribed by Shī'ī scholars, nor did he shy away from calling for reform in Shī'ī scholarship.³⁹ He was not unaware of the need to redress the traditional exclusion of women from Shī'ism.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is ironic that his views on the separate-but-equal nature of women come across as Victorian; as Ziba Mir-Hosseini wryly observes, Moṭahharī's arguments are 'the most eloquent and refined among those that hold gender equality to be contradictory to the shari'a'.⁴¹ Rather than being

³⁸ The 'separate but equal' ideology has been outlined as such: 'A majority of such limitations [on female authority] were put in place at the time of the drafting of the 1979 Iranian Constitution, which not only declared maleness as a prerequisite for various religious and political leadership positions (at times overtly), but also emphasized women's private roles as mothers and wives through adopting a notion of complementarity in gender rights and duties. The discourse of complementarity between men and women was championed by Ayatollah Morteza Mutahhari, a key formulator of the Islamic regime's gender discourse. According to this view, women's and men's gender roles and duties are different (but complementary) as prescribed by 'nature'. Woman's primary role is to satisfy her domestic duties for which she is psychologically and physically built, while man's is to protect his family and society due to his rationality and strength. Furthermore, threatening this balance of complementarity among sexes leads to chaos in the Islamic society. For instance, pressuring or encouraging women to enter the public sphere without first satisfying their divine duties of motherhood and wifehood, threatens the institution of family, and therefore the Islamic society as a whole, since the family is its basic unit. Hence, other rulings of the Islamic regime that barred women's participation included limiting women's employment, and adopting policies of veiling and gender segregation within the public sphere.' Mona Tajali, 'Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi'i Thought', *Religions*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2011), pp. 449-468. <<http://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/2/3/449>>. Accessed 29 July 2013.

Another prominent book by a Shī'ī scholar which supports the same ideals for male-female interactions and justifications for perceived differences between the roles of and religious legislation pertaining to men and women (such as the physical 'challenge' of menstruation for women or why women should not be granted the right to divorce) is Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini, *Woman's Rights in Islam*, trans. Syed A. Rizvi (Tehran: Naba Cultural Organization, 2006).

Adele Ferdows also treats the premises of the separate-but-equal ideology in Mutahhari's work as the absolute view on women in Shī'ism. See Adele K. Ferdows, 'The Status and Rights of Women in *Ithna'Ashari Shi'i Islam*'.

³⁹ For instance, see Ayatollah Moṭahharī [Moṭahharī], 'The Fundamental Problem of the Clerical Establishment'.

⁴⁰ Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 205. As an example, Ayatollah Moṭahharī explains why the injunction in *ḥadīth* to seek learning should not be seen as applying only to men. Murtada Mutahhari, *Training and Education in Islam*, trans. M. Limba (n.p.: IHCS, 2011), p. 27.

⁴¹ Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, p. 25.

absolute, his views should be taken as a product of his time: Moṭahharī formulated his ideas before the mass entry of women into the university, government, and workplace in Iran – and when the West was on the cusp of those changes as well. Given his forward-thinking nature and fearlessness in challenging the establishment, it is likely that, were he alive today, he would have revised his beliefs on the nature of women.

While Moṭahharī presents his interpretation of the Islamic view of women in many of his works, his most influential book on this subject is his 1974 book *Neẓām-e Hoqūq-e Zanān (The System of Women's Rights)*.⁴² In this book, for the most part, Moṭahharī is not presenting a view of women that is either distinctly Shī'ī or distinctly new. (An exception is his discussion on temporary marriage, which is distinctly Shī'ī although not distinctly new.) Indeed, the ideas about women that Moṭahharī defends have tentatively been shown by Amineh Mahallati to trace back to the fourth century *hijrī*. (In fact, Mahallati maintains that these ideas trace back to the second century *hijrī*, and while that is plausible, the text that she cites was not recorded until the fourth century *hijrī*, and she does not address the question of the authenticity of the text. Therefore, the latter date is a more cautious estimate.)⁴³ Moṭahharī also adopted many

⁴² Ziba Mir Hosseini, Amineh Mahallati, and Adele Ferdowsi identify this book as the *de facto* statement on women in Islam in Shī'ī scholarly circles as well as the source of the ideology on gender that was officially adopted by the post-Revolutionary Iranian government. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, 23-24, 50, 83; Amineh Mahallati, 'Women in traditional Sharī'a: a list of differences between men and women in Islamic tradition', in *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, vol. 12 (2010), pp. 1-9; Adele Ferdowsi, 'Women in *Ithna'Ashari* Shi'ism'. Bruce Lawrence also mentions the importance of this work, as well as Moṭahharī's other discussions of women, with respect to the dominant views on women among Shī'ī clerics in *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 15-16. See also Mona Tajali, 'Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi'i Thought'. *Niẓām-e Hoqūq-e Zanān* has also been released in two different English translations.

⁴³ Amineh Mahallati traces this 'separate but equal' gender philosophy back to the 4th century *hijrī* by comparing Moṭahharī's book with a two-page *ḥadīth* which outlines the differences between men and women. She actually asserts that the *ḥadīth* goes back to the 8th century (2nd century *hijrī*) on the basis that it is attributed to that era, but since she does not address the authenticity question, it seems more reasonable to situate it in the era when it was recorded (namely, by Ibn Bābāwayh, d. 991/381). In summary, the *ḥadīth* says that a woman's primary concern is her husband and her place is the home, which she should leave as little as possible, and that women should not be involved in politics, the judiciary, or public prayers (including funeral rites). As she herself observes, parallel ideas and narrations are also found in Sunnīsm. Mahallati does not speculate on the authenticity of the *ḥadīth*, which bears several hallmarks of inauthenticity and is not, in its entirety, in any of the primary Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections, although snippets of it are. Therefore, while she successfully traces the idea of 'separate-but-equal' to the period of formative Shi'ism, she does not demonstrate that it actually comes from the Shī'ī Imāms or from the primary narrator, Jābir al-Ju'fī. The article is also quite

ideas from the famous exegete ‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1904-1981), who expresses some of his views on women in his exegesis *Tafsīr al-Mizān*.⁴⁴ Since Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s writing is often philosophical and complex, as well as heavily reliant on specialist scholarly jargon, Moṭahharī is credited with simplifying and popularizing Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s views for the general public.⁴⁵ However, what *is* new in *Nezām-e Huqūq-e Zanān* is the way that Moṭahharī frames his views in the light of the clash of civilizations – Islam versus the West. He justifies his views through pseudo-scientific discourse, focusing on proposed physiological differences between men and women that go beyond the obvious. However, his selection of thinkers is eclectic, and he does not give convincing reasons for why the people he cites should be considered representative of views in the West.⁴⁶ Additionally, the ‘scientific’ research that he cites is largely unsubstantiated and outdated, hence the term ‘pseudo-scientific’. As an example, Moṭahharī quotes two Western psychologists who present ‘findings’ from their ‘research’ which substantiate his views. The first – identified only as ‘Professor Reek’, says:

The world of man is totally different from that of woman. If woman cannot think or act like man, it is because they belong to two different worlds. [...] They [men and women] never have the same feelings and never show the same reactions to various incidents and actions. They are like two planets moving in two different orbits.⁴⁷

Professor ‘Reek’s’ observation much more strongly complies with a worldview in which there is a separate social sphere for men and women. (The question of whether society should be inherently gendered arises in Chapter 2 on the narrations on Eve.) The second, an unnamed female psychologist, says:

short, and so it is a first step but not a final chapter in exploring the roots of the separate-but-equal ideology. Amineh Mahallati, ‘Women in traditional Sharī’a: a list of differences between men and women in Islamic tradition’.

⁴⁴ An example is Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s *tafsīr* on the *ḍaraba* verse (Qur’ān 4:34); his *tafsīr* will be quoted subsequently. This verse is explained more in a footnote in Section 1.2.2 of this chapter.

⁴⁵ Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁶ For instance, he mentions a ‘Mrs. Macdaniel’ and a ‘G. Irvin’ on page 8.

⁴⁷ Translation taken from Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, *Woman and Her Rights in Islam* [a translation of *Nezām-e Huqūq-e Zanān*], trans. M. A. Ansari (n.p.: Islamic Seminary Publications, [1982]), p. 57.

For a woman it is as easy to change her religion and nationality for the sake of the man she likes as to change her family name following the marriage.⁴⁸ [...]

All women are interested in working under the supervision of someone else. They like to work as a subordinate rather than a boss. [...] I believe that these two spiritual requirements of women proceed from the fact that women are led by emotions and men by reason. [...] The superiority of the spirit of men to that of women is a thing which has been designed by nature itself. Whatever women may do to counter this fact will be of no avail. [...] All jobs which require constant thinking are boring to her.⁴⁹

Most pertinently, Moṭahharī does not actually consider the meat of the discourse on Western feminism, the social concerns that led to the feminist movement, or whether some of the concerns of Western feminists might be shared by Muslim women as well.

The essence of the separate-but-equal ideology is that men and women are complementary, rather than identical. As Moṭahharī asserts:

In actual fact, the wonderful scientific progress of the 20th century has clearly proved the existence of disparities between man and women. Their existence is not a malicious misrepresentation but a scientific truth, based on observation and experiment. Anyhow, these differences have nothing to do with the superiority or inferiority of either sex. The law of

⁴⁸ The selection of this quotation is interesting in light of preferred conversion narratives to Islam and Shī'ism. While there is a presumption that women who convert to Shī'ism (particularly Western women) do so under the auspices of a Muslim male partner, converts to Shī'ism also experience pressure to produce conversion narratives focusing on their independent intra-faith research; actually admitting that one converted due to the influence of a significant other is looked down upon. See Amina Inloes and Liyakat Takim, 'Conversion to Twelver Shi'ism Among North American Women', in *Studies in Religion*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2014).

⁴⁹ Of course, this is ironic because the female psychologist probably had to do a fair amount of thinking to obtain her qualification. Translation taken from Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, *Woman and Her Rights in Islam*, pp. 57-58, 60. While the translation leaves some things to be desired, it has been used as an artefact of today's discourse.

creation has ordained them simply to make the bond of conjugal relations firmer [...]. Nature wanted to distribute family rights and obligations between them with its own hands. The law of creation has made the disparities between man and women similar to the difference between the various organs of a body. [...] [I]t does not mean that it is has been unjust or has made any discrimination against any of them.⁵⁰

This complementarity was subsequently elevated to a theological level by Ayatollah Javādī Āmolī, who theorized that masculinity and femininity are expressions of opposing sets of attributes of Allah, with names such as ‘the avenger’ applying to men, and ‘the nurturing’ applying to women.⁵¹ The main difference between men and women is that men are logical, whereas women are emotional (and, logic is superior to emotions). Moṭahharī paints a very Victorianesque picture of the nature of the fairer sex:

The feelings of woman are aroused quicker than a man’s. Her sentiments are excited sooner than those of man; that is, a woman, in matters with which she is involved or of which she is afraid, reacts sooner and with more acuteness just as she feels, while a man is more cool headed [...]. In activities based on reasoning, and in abstruse intellectual problems, woman cannot equal man, but in literature, painting and all matters that are related to aesthetics, she is not behind man. Man has more ability to keep a secret than woman, and he keeps unpleasant private matters to himself better than a woman [...]. Woman is more soft-

⁵⁰ Translation taken from Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, *Woman and Her Rights in Islam*, p. 54.

⁵¹ The theory is explicated in Ayatollah Javādī Āmolī’s book *Zan dar Āyīneh-ye Jalāl va Jamāl* (Women in the Mirror of Majesty and Beauty) and is discussed in Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, pp. 83-84; Mir-Hosseini considers it to be a direct outgrowth of Moṭahharī’s views. Also see Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 69.

hearted, and instantly resorts to weeping, and occasionally to fainting.⁵²

Therefore, women should not enjoy certain rights, such as the unilateral right to divorce (which is granted only to men), because they are liable to make emotional decisions that would harm themselves or their families.⁵³ Female physiology, such as hormones during monthly cycles, is cited as a further reason why women are emotionally unstable and require the guardianship of men: 'Their [women's] menstrual cycles, hardships of pregnancies, pains of childbirth and the nursing of children place them in a position in which they require men's protection.'⁵⁴ Therefore, the following issues of inquiry emerge from the 'separate but equal' ideology: (a) **men are logical and women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion**; (b) **women in the public sphere**; and (c) **menstruation**.

The natural consequence of the perceived innate differences between women and men is that men must be in authority over women in both the public and private spheres.⁵⁵ 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī makes the necessary connection here in his exegesis of Qur'ān 4:34:

Men have much greater judicious prudence than women, and consequently they are much stronger and braver and more capable of performing strenuous tasks requiring intrepidity and

⁵² English translation from the 1980 edition used here (Part 7, online edition) < <http://www.al-islam.org/rights-women-islam-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/part-seven-differences-between-woman-and-man>>. Accessed 9 March 2016.

⁵³ In discussing the amendments to Iranian family law after the Revolution, it has been suggested that women were not given the right to divorce at will on the grounds that it would lead to financial loss to the man. This is because the man is expected to provide a dowry upon marriage and financial maintenance. It has also been suggested that if women had the right to divorce they would then use frequently marriage and divorce as a means of enriching themselves. Of course, Shi'ī divorce law predates the Revolution; and, in practice, dowries are not always paid in full prior to marriage. Louise Halper, 'Law and Women's Agency in Post-Revolutionary Iran', in *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*, vol. 28 (Winter 2005), 85-142. Anecdotal, I was once told by an alarmed Shi'ī man that women cannot have the right to divorce, or else they would all leave their husbands.

⁵⁴ Ayatollah Motahhari, *Woman and Her Rights in Islam*, 7. He gives a pseudo-scientific explanation of why female hormones – which, in the view of the Western scientist he cites, are secreted by the ovaries – result in the discrepancies between men and women on pages 52-53.

⁵⁵ The view that the public sphere is for men and that women belong in the private sphere is mentioned by Mona Tajali as the dominant view among Shi'ī scholars historically in 'Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi'i Thought'.

forbearance, while women's life is dominated by feelings [...]. 'Men are the maintainers of women' is not confined to husbands [...]; rather, it gives authority to the men, as a group, over the whole group of women, in the common affairs which affect lives of both sexes on the whole. The general social aspects which are related to man's excellence as, for example, rulership and judiciary, are the things on which a society depends for its continuance. It is because of the prudence and judiciousness which are found in men in a higher degree than in women. Likewise, fighting and defence depend on strength and far-reaching strategic planning. In such affairs men have authority over women.

Consequently, the order *men are the maintainers of women* [Qur'ān 4:34] is totally unrestricted and comprehensive [...]. As far as the broad issues and general social aspects – like rulership, judiciary and war – are concerned, they have to be controlled by intellect, free from the influence of emotions and feelings. Thus they have to be entrusted not to women but to men who are governed more by intellectual power than emotional feelings.⁵⁶

Similarly, a communique reported to have been issued in the name of Ayatollah al-Khū'ī reads:

[As for woman] because of her lack of rationality and her deficiency in organization and her inability to get to the level of men, by-and-large Islam does not allow her to be appointed as a judge or to give her the guardianship over her children even in case of the death of the father. So, how can it be possible for her

⁵⁶ This translation was quoted from the exegesis of verse 4:34 in 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān: An Exegesis of the Qur'an*, trans. S. A. Rizvi (Tehran: WOFIS, 1983); however, it has been lightly edited for grammar.

to be allowed to guard the interests of the *umma* and whatever is related to such an overwhelming task?⁵⁷

While these passages offer a blanket endorsement for male authority in general, it is worth noting that they do not specify whether women can hold religious authority; perhaps the question did not occur to the authors at that time. However, today, the question of whether, in Shī'ism, women can hold religious authority is a growing question, and is relevant to this investigation. The question of what constitutes religious authority in Shī'ism is in and of itself a question; however, typically, the *marja'iyah* is seen as the highest level of religious authority, and the dominant view among contemporary Shī'ī scholars is that a woman may become a *mujtahid*, but not a *marja'*.⁵⁸ That is, she may reach the level whereby she is no longer required to follow a man's *fiqh* deductions and may follow her own; however, others may not follow her views. Additionally, she may not give Friday sermons or lead ritual prayers for men; however, this holds less significance than it does in the Sunnī context because, in the absence of the twelfth Imām, Shī'ī scholars disagree about whether Friday (*jum'ah*) prayers are required or even permissible, and other religious gatherings are often, in practice, more emphasised.⁵⁹ It should be noted that

⁵⁷ Talib Aziz quoting Ayatollah al-Khū'ī in 'Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marja'iyah' in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 208-209. Because of the halo of mystery surrounding the *marja'iyah* and the tendency to avoid issuing clear-cut statements, it can be difficult to trace the views of many *marāji'* (or Shī'ī scholars in general) without resorting to first-hand or second-hand private conversations. However, this excerpt reminded me of a conversation I once had with a Shī'ī activist who said that he and some of his associates had approached Ayatollah al-Khū'ī and asked whether unmarried women could travel to study on the condition that they protected their chastity. According to him, Ayatollah al-Khu'i dismissed the idea by saying, 'But how could they protect their chastity?'

⁵⁸ Moojan Momen claims the reverse – that most Shī'ī scholars do not permit a woman to be a *mujtahid*. However, this has not been the common view historically, and some Shī'ī women throughout history have been considered *mujtahids*. Moojan Momen, 'Women in Shī'ism', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2012. <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/women-shiism>> Accessed 29 July 2013; Joyce Wiley, 'Alima Bint al-Huda, Women's Advocate', in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 152.

⁵⁹ A brief discussion of Shī'ī scholarly views on the necessity or legitimacy of the Friday prayers is found in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi'a*, pp. 8, 35-37. For a discussion of the *fiqh* reasoning behind those views, see Bāqir Irwānī, *Durūs Tamhīdiyyah fī al-Fiqh al-Istidlālī*, 4 vols. (Qum: Markaz-e Jahānī-ye 'Ulūm-e Islāmī, 1377 AH (solar)), vol. 1, pp. 174-176. Liyakatali Takim mentions this latter point in 'Foreign Influences on American Shiism', in *Muslim World*, vol. 90, no. 3-4 (September 2000), pp. 459-478.

these are dominant but not unilateral views.⁶⁰ Even Moṭahharī observed that, theoretically, there is no *sharī'ah* problem with a woman being a *marja'*; however, he argued that this is a man's job because Islam 'wants' a woman to exert most of her efforts on her family.⁶¹ Thus, the foundational assumptions about the essential inferiority or role of women are used to argue that women should not hold public positions of authority. Therefore, the question of **female authority** will be explored here.

Of course, even within the traditional context of Shī'ism, the question of female religious authority is complex, since Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is seen as a spiritual authority. Additionally, women throughout the centuries have periodically attained the education necessary to become *mujtahids*.⁶² Female-only Shī'ī seminaries are run in countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, and these do facilitate women's participation in traditional scholarship, although women educated at them generally do not take on the same public leadership roles as men, nor are female students encouraged to question dominant ideas (such as the 'separate but equal' ideology).⁶³ For instance, regarding female seminary students in Qom, Iran, Mir-Hosseini writes:

After discussing the matter with male clerics and some female students, I concluded that in order to be accepted within a scholarly tradition as male-dominated and constructed as that of the Qom Houzeh, a woman must first observe its implicit rules. I found the same tendency in Cambridge among Old

⁶⁰ Dissenting views will be discussed subsequently.

⁶¹ Mortaḏā Moṭahharī, 'Zan va Jāme'eh dar Negaresh-e Ostād Moṭahharī: Zan va Marja'īyyat'. Available at <<http://lib.ahlolbait.com/parvan/resource/59927/%D8%B2%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86-DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%8A/preview/28959/%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A/&page=-1%3Bjsessionid=A803605D635AB933D1A793E6CB15B682#page=1>>. Accessed 1 July 2013.

⁶² For instance, see Mirjam Künkler and Roja Fazaeli, 'The Life of Two Mujtahidahs: Female Religious Authority in 20th Century Iran', in *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Contemporary Islamic Authority*, ed. Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 127-160; Joyce Wiley, 'Alima Bint al-Huda: Women's Advocate', in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi'a*, pp. 149-160; Nahleh Gharavi Naeeni, *Shī'a Women Transmitters of Ahādith: A Collection of Biographies of the Women Who Have Transmitted Traditions*.

⁶³ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, pp. 17, 83-84, 113, 162, 207, 277.

Girtonians, women of the first generation of female students in the University of Cambridge, who did not question many of the values of the Cambridge colleges but merely reproduced them in a different form.⁶⁴

Additionally, a common Shī'ī ritual practice is female-only religious ceremonies led by women for other women, which does give women a platform to express themselves among each other. However, because these ceremonies are held privately, the talent, intellectual capacity, and message of women who lead them goes publicly unrecognized. Additionally, women in these positions are not expected to deviate from the views of male scholars.⁶⁵

Finally, in discussions of women which endorse the 'separate but equal' theory, women are usually discussed as wives and mothers, rather than as full human beings. Therefore, this raises the question of whether, in the *ḥadīth*, women are defined through their relationship with men. It has been argued that the contemporary emphasis on the role of women in the family emerged as a response to the perceived attack on Islamic family values through Westernization, but is *not* representative of how women were discussed in classical Islamic texts; rather, pre-modern Islamic texts primarily focused on a woman's sexual obligations instead of activities such as child-rearing or homemaking.⁶⁶ While classical Islamic literature – and, for that matter, Shī'ī *ḥadīth*⁶⁷ – do not treat women as asexual, Moṭahharī upholds the common

⁶⁴ Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, p. 18. With respect to Islamic discourse at large (not just pertaining to Shī'ism), Amina Wadud also makes this observation but also extends it to the view that women seeking to promote a revision of Islamic discourse on women may end up becoming reliant on progressive male scholars for legitimacy, thereby maintaining the status quo of male scholarly privilege, and instead suggests that truly progressive male scholars should encourage women to pursue their own learning. Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, p. 190.

⁶⁵ See Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Azam Turab, *Performing Islam: Gender and Ritual in Islam* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007); Karen Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi'ism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), pp. xv-xvi; Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Islam*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ *Ḥadīth* to the contrary can be found in sections regarding a man's obligation to fulfill the physical needs of his wife, recommendations on how he accomplish that, as well as a *ḥadīth* urging men to groom themselves properly to keep their wives from committing adultery with

adage that ‘man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love’.⁶⁸ In any case, both classical and modern authors typically present marriage as a ‘money for sex’ arrangement.⁶⁹ A corresponding assumption is that women are financially dependent on their husbands or other male relatives. Parallel to this, *ḥijāb* and female chastity are emphasized; however, what is new in the modern discourse is the treatment of the *ḥijāb* as a symbol of opposition to Westernization (for instance, in Moṭahharī’s work and in post-Revolutionary Iranian discourse). Additionally, female beauty is de-emphasized in contrast to a perceived emphasis on female beauty in Western cultures. (In post-Moṭahharī Shī‘ī discourse, there is also uneasiness with male beauty and ‘metrosexuality’ because of the public acceptance of homosexuality in the West.) Although the *ḥijāb* is treated as a means of de-sexualizing a woman, the discussion of a woman primarily in terms of her sexual desirability ends up being an androcentric view of women which takes attention away from her own sense of personhood.⁷⁰ Hence, this brings up the following issues: (a) **women’s independent personhood versus women as family roles**, (b) **marriage as a ‘money for sex’ arrangement in which the man fulfils his physical desires and the woman fulfils her emotional desires** (c) **women as financially disempowered**, (d) *ḥijāb*, and (e) **female beauty**.

The ‘separate but equal’ paradigm is not the only approach to women in contemporary Shī‘ī discourse, only the most prevalent one. Some progressively-minded Shī‘ī scholars and thinkers have questioned some of the above assumptions while, at the same time, remaining with the Shī‘ī tradition. One of the earliest contemporary voices to do this was ‘Alī Sharī‘atī (1933-

more physically appealing men. There is also a book ascribed to Imām al-Ṣādiq which instructs men on the art of pleasing their wives. In general, classical Islamic literature seems to have been fairly open about discussing these topics. Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi lists some of these *ḥadīth* in *Marriage and Morals in Islam* (Ontario, Canada: Islamic Education and Information Centre, n.d.), and Dakake also addresses the subject briefly in *The Charismatic Community*, p. 230. A narration to the contrary will also be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁶⁸ Motahhari, *Woman and Her Rights in Islam*, p. 57. He expands on this in his *Sexual Ethics*. See Murtada Muṭahharī [Moṭahharī], *Sexual Ethics in Islam and in the Western World*, trans. M. Khurshid Ali (London: Islamic Centre of England, 2011).

⁶⁹ Talib Aziz notes that Ayatollah Bāqir al-Ṣadr re-categorized marriage as a personal rather than contractual affair, to avoid marriage being viewed as ‘money for sex’. ‘Baqir al-Sadr’s quest for the Marja’iya’, in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shi’a*, p. 143.

⁷⁰ Bruce Lawrence also makes this observation about Moṭahharī’s approach in *Shattering the Myth*, pp. 115-116.

1977), who, in his famous book, *Fāṭemeh Fāṭemeh Ast* (translated as *Fatima is Fatima*), argues that Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʿ should be seen not just as a wife, daughter, and mother, but rather as a person; and in which he decries the custom of denying women an education and excluding them from religious discourse.⁷¹ (It is somewhat telling that, fifty years later, passages from his book are still starkly relevant.) It can be argued that the Shīʿī scholar who effected the most dramatic change on Shīʿī views about the public role of women is Imām Khomeini (1902-1989): while he espoused a very conservative set of religious values, he nonetheless was the first prominent Shīʿī scholar to encourage women to be publicly active in politics, education, and worship, as opposed to encouraging them to confine their efforts to the domestic sphere.⁷² In Lebanon, Sayyid Faḍlullāh (1935-2010), a *marjaʿ* whose questioning of some tradition views and socially conscious approach lent him some enemies, argued for the necessity of change in social attitudes towards women. Rather than preaching female seclusion, he held that it was Islamically preferable for women to contribute to society, and he felt it was permissible for women to hold positions of political authority.⁷³ Ayatollah Ṣāneʿī (1937-) and Ayatollah Jannāṭī (1933-) - both contemporary jurists in Iran with— have diverged from many classical Shīʿī

⁷¹ ʿAli Shariʿatī, *Fāṭemeh Fāṭemeh Ast* (Tehran: Hosayniyeh Ershad, 1971). For a discussion of the impact of this work, see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, pp. 122-125. In his biography of ʿAli Shariʿatī, Ali Rahnama describes Ali Shariʿatī as ‘eulogizing’ the position of women in Islam since he ‘admitted that Islam did not believe in the equality (*mosavat*) of men and women, but wished to place each in their “natural position”’. (He does not specify what that ‘natural position’ actually is.) While this sentiment is in keeping with the view of women popular among Iranian Islamic scholars at the time, such as Moṭahharī, the idea that he was ‘eulogizing’ a fixed view does not seem to be in keeping with the book, in that the book strongly comes across as a call for social reform, not an admission of defeat or resignation. Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 120-121, 198.

⁷² Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, 7-10; Mona Tajali, ‘Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shiʿi Thought’.

⁷³ Michelle Browsers, ‘Fadlallah and the Passing of Lebanon’s Last Najafi Generation’, in *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies*, vol 5, no. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 25-46; Talib Aziz, ‘Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marjaʿiyya’ in Linda Walbridge (ed.), *The Most Learned of the Shiʿa*, p. 209; Liyakatali Takim, ‘Foreign Influences on American Shiism’. Sayyid Faḍlullāh also questioned the validity of some traditionally accepted accounts of the later part of the life of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʿ, which especially led to a backlash against him by more traditionally-minded scholars; for instance, see Stephan Rosiny, ‘The Tragedy of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʿ in the Debate of Two Shiite Theologians in Lebanon’, in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History*, ed. Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 207, 211, 213-215. The difference in attitudes between Fadlallah and another Lebanese scholar regarding female seclusion – in that the other scholar considers it ideal whereas Fadlallah did not – is also discussed in the same work. *Ibid.*, 216.

views about women – for instance, in allowing women to lead men in ritual prayer, to serve as judges, act as *marja*'s, and to obtain custody of their children after divorce.⁷⁴ Lastly, Ziba Mir Hosseini describes the views of one Sayyed Moḥsen Sa'īdzādeh, a Shī'ī scholar who questions the assumptions behind the separate-but-equal paradigm and is favourable to a more egalitarian view of gender; presumably, because of her work, he has been discussed in subsequent academic writings on women in Shī'ism.⁷⁵

While someone like Sayyid Faḍlullāh still operated within the system of traditional Shī'ī scholarship (even if some Shī'ah excommunicated him), there is also a reformist camp which maintains that the very underpinnings of Shī'ī scholarly thought – such as *uṣūl al-fiqh* – are themselves flawed and need to be revised.⁷⁶ The religious sciences are seen as a product of man rather than as being mandated by God. With regards to women's issues, because women were excluded from the process of deriving *sharī'ah* rulings, Islamic law is seen as having a male bias; therefore, to redress this problem, *fiqh* as well as the entire system of derivation of *fiqh* should be re-evaluated, and women should participate in the re-evaluation process.⁷⁷ Some reformists hold the view, also found among some Sunnī reformists, that the Qur'ānic verses were specific to their own era and were not meant to be taken as absolute for all time; for

⁷⁴ Ayatollah Yūsuf Ṣāne'ī, *A Selection of Islamic Laws*, trans. Muhammad Yasser Kimyaei Far (n.l.: n.p., 2007). Available at <<http://saanei.org/?view=02,01,09,1,0#02,02,09,1,0>>. Accessed 10 June 2013. Ayatollah Jannā'ī should not be confused with Ayatollah Aḥmad Jannā'ī, who holds much more conservative views. See 'Selected Rulings', *The Official Website of Ayatollah Ahozma Jannati*. <<http://www.jannaati.com/eng/index.php?page=6>>. Accessed 16 June 2013. Regarding Ayatollah Ṣāne'ī's view, see also Mona Tajali, 'Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi'i Thought'; Hamid Mavani, *Religious Authority and Political Thought in Twelver Shi'ism: From Ali to Post-Khomeini* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 139.

⁷⁵ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*, 247-272. For more discussion on Sa'īdzādeh, see Shireen T. Hunter, *Reformist Voices of Islam* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 74-75; Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, 'Hujjat Al-Islam Moḥsen Saidzadeh: A Contemporary Iranian Cleric on Fiqh, Women, And Civil Society', in *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, Spring/Summer 2012 <<https://litigation-essentials.lexisnexis.com/webcd/app?action=DocumentDisplay&crawlid=1&doctype=cite&docid=1+UCLA+J.+Islamic+%26+Near+E.L.+229&srctype=smi&srcid=3B15&key=317b49d9faa5d2e60c9c486c791120ce>>. Accessed 27 February 2015.

⁷⁶ Mona Tajali holds that these reformist views are due in large part to the efforts of women themselves to promote reform, particularly through women-centred re-readings of sacred texts. Mona Tajali, 'Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi'i Thought'.

⁷⁷ A. Sachedina, 'Woman Half-the-Man? Crisis of Male Epistemology in Islamic Jurisprudence', in F. Daftary (ed.), *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000); Abdolkarim Soroush, 'Text in Context', in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 244-251.

instance, it is said that the Qur'ānic verse giving different portions of inheritance to men and women was valid for that time but not for today.⁷⁸ This thesis will not consider the social contextualization of jurisprudential rulings, but will consider how these narrations reflect the socio-cultural milieu of their time.

In summary, both from the discussion of women in Shī'ism, as well as the 'separate but equal' paradigm, the following premises regarding women in dominant trends of contemporary Shī'ī thought emerge:

- Women are absent from Shī'ī *ḥadīth* and sacred history.
- Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.
- Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.
- Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.
- Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal.
- Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, and in the family)
- Men are the breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.
- The *ḥijāb* and female chastity are of paramount importance. Female beauty is de-emphasized, and physical desires pertain to men ('man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love').

In the subsequent chapters, the *ḥadīth* on pre-Islamic women will be examined to see what they say on these matters.

1.2 Methodology and key concepts

1.2.1 Ideological criticism

⁷⁸ Hassan Yousefi Eshkevari, 'Rethinking Men's Authority Over Women: *Qiwāma*, *Wilāya* and their Underlying Assumptions', in Ziba Mir-Hosseini et al. (eds.), *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, pp. 191-211.

The primary methodology that will be employed is ideological criticism as outlined by David Clines for use in studying the Bible.⁷⁹ Ideological criticism focuses primarily on power structures and has been applied to explore the dynamics of race, class, and gender in societies in the Bible. Ideological criticism points out the political nature of texts, insofar as they reinforce power structures (for instance, patriarchy).⁸⁰

Two main inquiries of ideological criticism will be used in each chapter: (a) What is the subtext of what is being said in the text, and (b) Whose interests are being served by the text? From the outset, it should be emphasized that the second question lends itself to speculation; after all, parties with vested interests do not shout out how reinforcing the *status quo* keeps them in power. However, it is a thought-provoking question and is rarely (if ever asked) when looking at narrations about women, and leads to some startling insights in the role of these narrations in defining Shī'ī identity and orthodoxy; without this question, this inquiry would not have gone beyond the question of *what* the gender subtexts are (which is typically the limit of most works) to the deeper question of *why* they are the way they are. It asks 'whose voice is privileged and why, what their agendas are, and the influence of these ideas in lived experience.'⁸¹ Additionally, a third question will be added at the end of each chapter – namely, 'What does that mean for Shī'ī discourse today?' This is to keep alive the contemporary relevance of the issues raised in this discussion, and to explore how the subtleties of these texts influence contemporary ideas and ideologies about Shī'ism even though women before the time of Islam are rarely cited as precedents.

⁷⁹ David Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); David J. A. Clines, 'Contemporary Methods in Hebrew Bible Criticism', in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation III/2*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014), pp. 1-24. Ideological criticism, as envisioned by others, has been used as part of Marxist critiques of the Bible; however, I am not aware of work where David Clines himself situates his methodology with respect to Marxism. For further reading, see Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2006.). A discussion of whether and how Marxism relates to Shī'ī ideologies of gender would be interesting, insofar as some 20th century Shī'ī scholars were also busy refuting Marxism (while other thinkers, such as 'Alī Shari'atī, are said to have brought Marxist ideas into Shī'ism), but such a study is outside the scope of this work.

⁸⁰ Johanna Stiebert, *The Exile and the Prophet's Wife: Historic Events and Marginal Perspectives* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), p. 68.

⁸¹ Johanna Stiebert, *The Exile and the Prophet's Wife*, p. 66, citing Tina Pippin, 'Ideology, Ideological Criticism, and the Bible'.

The level of literacy required to produce Biblical texts has been construed to mean that Biblical texts represented the interests of the upper strata of society – who themselves were broken into competing factions – as opposed to the interests of marginalized groups, such as labourers, the displaced, or slaves.⁸² Without delving too deeply into the question of which social classes were most involved in Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* transmission, it can be surmised from works on *rijāl* that most of the people involved were male and Arabic speaking (although not necessarily ethnic Arabs), and some were ‘Alids (that is, members of a social elite). Similarly, it can be presumed that prominent Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* compilers, such as al-Kulaynī and al-Majlisī (to be discussed later in this chapter), represented a learned scholarly elite with the power to define ‘orthodoxy’; al-Majlisī had the actual power of the state behind him. Therefore, in addition to subtexts about gender, subtexts about social class will also be explored where they are apparent.

The role of the text as being both the product of an ideology, as well as the producer of an ideology is paramount when it comes to *aḥādīth*. As a contemporary author on the Bible writes:

The critic’s task is [...] to seek out the sources of [the text’s] conflict of meanings, and to show how this conflict is produced by the work’s relation to ideology. An ideological criticism thus involves an attempt to read the text backwards, so to speak, by examining the nature of its pretextual ‘problems’ in the light of their textual ‘solutions’. Presuming the intrusion of ideology between text and history, one determines inversely from the text both the ideology, which produced the text and which the text reworks, and the sociohistorical circumstances of its production.⁸³

⁸² Johanna Stiebert, *The Exile and the Prophet’s Wife*, p. 70.

⁸³ Gale Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 24-25.

The practical effect that *aḥādīth* have on Muslims' lives – including cultural norms and legislation in some Muslim countries – cannot be overstated.⁸⁴

One immediate question that arises is what actually constitutes an ideology. In *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, David Clines offers several thoughts on what constitutes an ideology:

1. ideas that are shared with others
2. ideas serving the interests of a particular group, especially a dominant group
3. ideas that are wrong passed off as natural, obvious or commonsensical
4. ideas that are assumed rather than argued for
5. ideas that are often unexpressed and unrecognized by those who hold them
6. ideas oriented toward action, ideas controlling or influencing actions
7. a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence
8. false ideas
9. ideas, different from our own, that other people have
10. rationalistic or metaphysical ideas, as distinct from practical politics
11. a romantic view of the world, idealizing the ideal and scorning the actual

⁸⁴ For instance, in order to demonstrate the importance of *ḥadīth* in daily life, Jonathan Brown opens *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) with an anecdote about villagers coming to a *mufti* to ask whether their girls can go to school; the *mufti* answers with a *ḥadīth* which satisfies them.

12. totalitarian attitude

13. a pseudo-scientific attitude to history and social realities ⁸⁵

While Clines feels that the second and third definitions most aptly represent what he means by 'ideology', but that the first six characteristics are useful for discussing Biblical ideologies, many of these characteristics can be found in Shī'ī ideologies of gender. Numerous 'interested parties' were involved in the codification of Shī'ī norms. Assumptions about gender are often treated as natural and obvious, and in the separate-but-equal ideology are identified as such. These assumptions are typically assumed, unexpressed, and unrecognized; and yet exert profound control over people's lives. What constitutes 'false ideas' or 'ideas, different from our own' is, to some extent, a matter of personal judgment; but one can say that the driving force behind questioning Shī'ī gender ideologies is a sense of cognitive dissonance between religious discourse and personal experience – that is, the intuition that at least some received ideas about gender are false or at least irrelevant to lived experience. Practical examples abound: the single mother, the spinster, the female scientist, the female politician, or even the female researcher constructing new knowledge about Shī'ism – none of them quite fit into the received paradigm of women.⁸⁶ Abdolkarim Soroush notes the difference between ideals and reality for women in Iran:

The religious community [...] believes, in other words, that, as far as possible, men shouldn't see women and women shouldn't see men; women shouldn't hear men's voices and men shouldn't hear women's voices; and so on. The clash

⁸⁵ David Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 9-11.

⁸⁶ Amina Wadud mentions this even with respect to the iconic figure of Hājar: 'Islamic personal law is built upon a notion of family that does not include a woman thrown into the desert, forced to construct a healthy, happy life for her child and to fend for herself. Islamic law for family, as constructed and still maintained, is not only premised upon an ideal of an extended family network, it presumes that a woman will never, for any reason, become responsible for providing for and protecting herself and her offspring. Yet this reality happens more and more frequently the world over.' I would gently question the premise that this is solely a modern phenomenon, particularly with respect to female slaves. There is a tendency to idealize the past, and, in any case, literature from earlier Islamic eras often refers to widows and other women who had to fend for themselves and their children. Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, p. 144.

between this value and the lives women lead today, even in the Islamic Republic, is as plain as plain can be. A woman who goes to university, has a job, takes part in mass rallies, and even participates in military and combat activities has, by no means, accepted the value that she should neither see men nor be seen by them. This contradiction has become so obvious that our contemporary theologians don't even suggest as a recommended religious precept that it would be better for the women who have come into the streets, universities and factories to stay at home, and that they should keep out of the public eye to such an extent that they should not see any men nor be seen by them. In the light of this change, our definitions of decency, modesty and all the other things which had extremely mysterious and mythical dimensions in the past have also changed. If a girl spoke to a boy in the past it was seen as shameful and indecent, but this kind of behaviour is considered normal today.⁸⁷

And, as for the thirteenth criterion, pseudo-scientific argumentation appeared in the justification of the separate-but-equal ideology today.

One recurring theme throughout this work is the negotiation of Shi'i orthodoxy; therefore, it is necessary to explain what is actually intended by 'orthodoxy'. Here, a definition by Jacques Berlinerblau will be used: 'that religion within a society that gets to decide what popular religion is [...] [and] which can exert power in its relation with all other religious groups.'⁸⁸ Noting the immense 'power to define' which is held by official religion, Johanna Stiebert observes:

Popular religion is any form of religious practice or belief with which official religion finds fault. The crux of the distinction, then, is power: Official religion has the power to decide what

⁸⁷ Anonymous, 'Contraction and Expansion of Women's Rights: An Interview with Soroush', trans. Nilou Mobasser, in *Zanan* 1378/2000. <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20000200-Contraction_and_Expansion_of_Womens_Rights.html>. Accessed 26 February 2015.

⁸⁸ Johanna Stiebert, *The Exile and the Prophet's Wife*, p. 71.

constitutes popular religion. Official religion defines and manages popular religion.⁸⁹

It should be emphasized that this use of 'orthodoxy' refers to a view of orthodoxy that is socially constructed; that is, here, 'orthodoxy' refers to the dominant *view* of what the Prophet or Imāms intended or taught, and not what the Prophet or Imāms actually intended or taught.

In exploring women in the societies of the Old Testament, Phyllis Bird mentions that, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, male religious practice has been considered 'orthodox' or 'normative', and female religious practice has been considered 'non-normative' or 'popular'. For instance, men have typically carried out formal rites and held priestly positions, whereas women have typically engaged in domestic rituals and even superstitious practices. (The question of whether male 'orthodox' practice should be considered worthier than female 'popular' practice will not be addressed here.) She attributes the differing cultic roles of women and men to the gendered division of labour in pre-industrialized agrarian societies, with women expected to take on child-rearing tasks and related domestic duties which keep them at home. As a result, female devotional differs from male devotional practice:

[W]omen's religious activities – and needs – tend to center in the domestic realm and relate to women's sexually determined work. As a consequence, those institutions and activities which appear from public records or male perspective as central may be viewed quite differently by women, who may see them as inaccessible, restricting, irrelevant, or censuring. Local shrines, saints and spirits, home rituals in the company of other women (often with women ritual leaders), the making and paying of vows (often by holding feasts), life-cycle rites, especially those related to birth and death – these widely attested elements of women's religious practice appear better suited to women's spiritual and emotional needs and the patters of their lives than

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

the rituals of the central sanctuary, the great pilgrimages and assemblies, and the liturgical calendar of the agricultural year. But the public sphere with its male-oriented and male-controlled institutions dominates and governs the domestic sphere, with the result that women's activities and beliefs are often viewed by 'official' opinion as frivolous, superstitious, subversive, or foreign.⁹⁰

Bird identifies three determinants that have affected women's devotional practice, and which recur in the Islamic tradition as well: (1) impurity associated with reproductive physiology; (2) male authority in the family and 'in the public sphere in which the community is represented by its male members'; and (3) a view of woman's 'primary work and social duty as family-centred reproductive work in the role of wife-mother'. She then concludes:

The effect of each of these determinants is to restrict the sphere of women's activities – spatially, temporally, and functionally. Only roles that were compatible with women's primary domestic-reproductive role and could be exercised in periods or situations free from ritual taboo, or from the requirement of ritual purity, were open to women.⁹¹

Although Bird is speaking about the Old Testament era, these observations should trigger a sense of recognition for anyone familiar with Shī'ī practice and discourse.⁹² Mostly, men carry out 'orthodox' activities, such as giving Friday sermons and giving *fatwās*, and women carry out 'popular' activities such as reciting religious eulogies (for other women) and preparing ritual food. Ritual impurity due to menstruation is an underlying tension in women's ritual participation. While it is questionable whether, in the classical

⁹⁰ Phyllis Bird, 'The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus', in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁹² Diane D'Souza explores this question with respect to the Shī'ī tradition in *Partners of Zaynab: A Gendered Perspective of Shia Muslim Faith* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2014).

Islamic tradition, a woman's primary role was seen as motherhood,⁹³ there is definitely the notion that the ideal place for women is the home. 'Vows', 'house rituals', 'feasts', and 'local shrines' all feature heavily in traditional female Shī'ī devotional practice.⁹⁴ 'Inaccessible', 'restricting', 'irrelevant', and 'censuring' all reflect sentiments expressed by Muslim women today in concerns about the inclusion of women in mosques (which in 2015 led to the establishment of a women's-only mosque in Los Angeles).⁹⁵ The only difference is that many Shī'ah today no longer live in pre-industrialized agrarian societies. While traditional female devotional activities, such as women's *majālis*, are central to Shī'ī female devotional experience, what is pertinent here is that non-orthodox religion – that is, women's activities – is under the management of (male) orthodox religion. These leads to two questions: first, whether there must necessarily be a male-female divide between orthodox and popular practice (for instance, whether women are included in 'orthodox' religious practice or authority); and, second, whether what is 'orthodox' must reflect the male experience, or whether it can also include female-specific experiences such as childbirth.⁹⁶

1.2.2 Feminist hermeneutics

Ideological criticism is itself a form of feminist hermeneutics. Feminist hermeneutics has been defined in many ways, ranging from the attempt to

⁹³ Amina Wadud questions what the role of a mother was actually expected to be in the Prophetic and classical Islamic eras. She notes the custom of giving infants to wet-nurses as well as the perception that the child belonged to its father's tribe, not the mother. Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, pp. 133-134. See also Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam*, pp. xv-xvi.

⁹⁴ An interesting article on the role of visiting shrines in female Shī'ī practice is Donna Honarparisheh, 'Women in Pilgrimage: Senses, Places, Embodiment, and Agency. Experiencing *Ziyarat* in Shiraz' in *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Autumn 2013), pp. 383-410.

⁹⁵ For instance, see Asra Nomani, *Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006); Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*. A major aspect of the 'Unmosqued' documentary and movement is the way in which many women feel disenfranchised in Islamic ritual spaces. More information about the female-only mosque in Los Angeles can be found in articles such as Nick Street, 'First all-female mosque opens in Los Angeles', in *AlJazeera*, 3 February 2015 < <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/2/3/first-all-female-mosque-opens-in-los-angeles.html>>. Accessed 2 March 2016. And, of course, more information can be found on the mosque's website itself (womensmosque.com).

⁹⁶ In *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Amina Wadud observes that a woman who simply repeats male normative views, instead of offering a feminine perspective, simply mimics the role of a man in Islamic discourse and is not truly offering a woman's contribution. Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Ch. 5.

forcibly derive conclusions concordant with a modern feminist ideology from a text, to simply reading a text which is traditionally read from a male perspective from a female perspective to generate new insights. It has been said that ‘the one point of common agreement [between varying definitions of feminist hermeneutics] is that ‘man’ is not in himself equivalent to the whole of humanity’, and this observation is perhaps most applicable to the work being done here.⁹⁷ Although feminist hermeneutics was initially used as a means of interpreting Biblical texts, it has been applied to Islamic texts; for instance, by Amina Wadud.⁹⁸ Sa’diyyah Shaykh takes this approach to feminist hermeneutics in ‘Exegetical Violence’, in which she traces the development of *tafsīr* of the *ḍaraba* verse (Qur’ān 4:34)⁹⁹ over the first few centuries *hijrī*:

⁹⁷ Anthony Thistleton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), pp. 279-305 (quotation from p. 279).

⁹⁸ See Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, pp. 187-198; Asma Barlas, ‘Amina Wadud’s hermeneutics in the Qur’ān: women rereading sacred texts’ in Suha Taji-Farouki (ed.), *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismā’īli Studies, 2006), p. 101. See also Mona Tajali, ‘Notions of Female Authority in Modern Shi’i Thought’ for a discussion of the use of this approach in Iran to promote reform by those who hold the view that a patriarchal interpretation of Islam is a misinterpretation that should be corrected; as well as Franz Valker Greifenagen, ‘Reading the Bible with Islamic Feminists Reading the Qur’an: Comparative Feminist Hermeneutics’, a paper presented at the Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible seminar, Toronto, Canada, 2002, in which the author examines the mutual influence that interpreters of Biblical and Islamic texts have had on each other with respect to feminist hermeneutics.

⁹⁹ Interpretations of this verse vary. A common understanding of this verse is given in the Yusufali translation: ‘Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).’

Some points of disagreement are (a) the meaning of *qawwāmūn* (above, ‘protectors and maintainers’), (b) what it means for ‘some’ to be given more than others (*bi-mā faḍḍala ba’ḍahum ‘alā ba’ḍ*), (c) the meaning of *nushūz* (here, ‘disloyalty and ill-conduct’), (d) whether the woman in the verse is seen as morally responsible to guard herself for Allah or for her husband, and (e) whether or not *ḍaraba* means ‘beat’. Most Muslims take this meaning, albeit *hadīth* are cited to indicate that it means ‘tap lightly’ rather than ‘beat’ in the conventional sense. Sa’diyyah Shaikh demonstrates in ‘Exegetical Violence’ that these understandings evolved chronologically from one where the wife’s responsibility was to Allah to one where the wife’s responsibility was towards the husband. Sa’diyyah Shaykh, ‘Exegetical Violence: *Nushūz* in Qur’ānic Gender Ideology’, in *Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 17 (1997), pp. 49-73 (excerpt taken from pages 54-55). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810302>>. Accessed 29 July 2013.

However, Laleh Bakhtiar argues that *ḍaraba* here really means ‘go away from’ rather than ‘beat’. She argues that when the Prophet became angry with his wives, he slept in a different room rather than beat them; and that *ḍaraba* is used for many different meanings in the Qur’an. Laleh Bakhtiar’s translation of this verse in *The Sublime Quran* reads: ‘Men are supporters of wives because God gave some of them an advantage over others and because

Feminist hermeneutics is a ‘theory, method or perspective for understanding and interpreting’ which is sensitive to and critical of sexism. I approach the *tafsīr* texts with a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ which is alert to both explicit and implicit patriarchal bias. A hermeneutic of suspicion ‘does not trust or accept interpretive traditions as “truth”,’ but rather adopts a stance of suspicion. The aim is to evaluate critically and expose patriarchal structures, values and male-centred concerns. This approach focuses on the text as an ideological androcentric product. Thus I approach the selected exegetical works as representative of a patriarchal historical cultural milieu. Accordingly I shall excavate from *tafsīr* texts, which are predominantly male records and understandings of reality, the underlying images of the ordinary woman. The aim is to redress the silences on women’s lives, to lift out the marginalized voices, to reconstruct the absent female and to be vigilant of the patriarchal assumptions.¹⁰⁰

These approaches – examining texts with an eye to explicit and implicit subtexts regarding gender, as well as reading behind the text, to explore both the said and the unsaid – are part of ideological criticism as well, and will be adopted here.¹⁰¹ Another similarity that this work has with feminist hermeneutics of the Bible is that there are fewer narrations discussing women, and, therefore, conclusions about women must be drawn from a limited amount of material.¹⁰²

they spent of their wealth. So the females, ones in accord with morality are the females, ones who are morally obligated and the females, ones who guard the unseen of what God kept safe. And those females whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping places and go away from them (f). Then if they (f) obeyed you, then look not for any way against them (f). Truly, God had been Lofty, Great.’ Laleh Bakhtiar, *Concordance of the Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007) via <http://www.altafsir.com/ViewTranslations.asp?Display=yes&SoraNo=4&Ayah=34&toAyah=34&Language=2&LanguageID=2&TranslationBook=18>. Accessed 2 March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Sa’diyyah Shaykh, ‘Exegetical Violence.’

¹⁰¹ See also Gerald West, ‘Silenced Women Speak: Biblical Feminist Hermeneutics,’ in Denise Ackermann et al. (ed.), *Women Hold up Half the Sky* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991), pp. 76-7.

¹⁰² The necessity of relying on a small amount of source material to draw conclusions is similar to the situation faced by Asma Sayeed in ‘Women in Imāmī Biographical Collections’.

In discussing feminist hermeneutics and Islamic texts, Shuruq Naguib, an Egyptian researcher focusing particularly on Qur'anic scripture and women's representation, brings up the issue of identity, which will be a major theme of this work. She cautions against the danger of falling into an either-or binary of modern/feminist/egalitarian versus traditional/male/misogynistic, and maintains that detaching one's self fully from the pre-modern tradition for the sake of gender equity can lead to a loss of identity.¹⁰³ Questioning pillars of communal Shī'ī identity regarding gender could lead to the same result. Similarly, when discussing cultural restrictions on women and their role in identity, Fatima Mernissi observes that '[i]ndividuals die of physical sickness, but societies die of loss of identity', and the 'fundamentalist wave in Muslim societies is a statement about identity'.¹⁰⁴

1.2.3 Islamic feminism?

Is this endeavour situated within the trend of Islamic feminism? A realistic answer is both yes and no. Islamic feminism, in short, is the attempt to re-evaluate or reform Islamic thought about women through critical analysis of Islamic texts or thought from *within* the Islamic tradition. Frequently, although not always, Islamic feminists identify themselves as believers writing for other believers, and thus are given a certain leeway in openly acknowledging that they are writing from a perspective of belief about questions of deep personal relevance.¹⁰⁵ From that angle, this work falls into the genre of Islamic feminism since it critically examines Islamic texts with regards to gender from an insider rather than an outsider position. Furthermore, the use of feminist hermeneutics, or reading the text with an eye to gender bias, will also be applied here.

¹⁰³ Shuruq Naguib, 'Horizons and Limitations of Muslim Feminist Hermeneutics: Reflections on the Menstruation Verse', in *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson (London and New York: Springer, 2010), pp. 33-49.

¹⁰⁴ Fatima Mernissi, 'Muslim Women and Fundamentalism', in *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 206.

¹⁰⁵ For instance, Amina Wadud takes an insider's perspective in *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006) and discusses her personal experience at length as someone to whom these questions are personally relevant. In *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'ān* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), Asma Barlas takes a similar approach. Fatima Mernissi also employs a biographical approach to these questions in *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (New York: Perseus Books, 1995).

Thematic analysis of texts, as well as their comparison with the overarching themes of the Qurʾān, such as social justice, is also a common method employed by Islamic feminists, and will be used here too.¹⁰⁶ The premise – which is not exclusively held by Islamic feminists – that the Qurʾān is essentially a gender-egalitarian text which treats women and men as equals in creation will also be accepted here.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, this work will not begin with the assumption that the Qurʾān – and, by extension, the *aḥādīth* – must be patriarchal; instead, it will treat the question of whether the *aḥādīth* prescribe patriarchy as an open question.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, with respect to the issues, starting point, and some of the methods, this work is similar to some Islamic feminist scholarship.

With respect to specific Islamic feminist works, this thesis bears an obvious similarity to Barbara Stowasser's *Women in the Qurʾān, Tradition, and Interpretation*, both in the subject under discussion – pre-Islamic Qurʾānic women in *ḥadīth* – as well as the attention given to the treatment of gender in these *aḥādīth*, the discussion of topics of contemporary relevance, and consideration of the influence of *isrāʾīliyyāt* on beliefs about women.¹⁰⁹ However, the primary difference is that this work will focus exclusively on Shīʿī *ḥadīth*, whereas *Women in the Qurʾān, Tradition, and Interpretation* mostly discusses Sunnī sources. The subject matter of this work also overlaps with Asma Barlas's *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qurʾān*, in that she also discusses pre-Islamic Qurʾānic women and explores questions such as female authority and patriarchy. There is also some crossover with Amina Wadud's *Qurʾān and Woman*, in that Wadud dedicates a chapter to the story of the creation of Eve, and the ramifications of how Eve was created on notions of womanhood. This is a matter that will also be discussed here; however, again, this work will address the Shīʿī *ḥadīth* tradition, which

¹⁰⁶ Asma Barlas, 'Amina Wadud's hermeneutics in the Qurʾān: women rereading sacred texts', in Suha Taji-Farouki (ed.), *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qurʾān*, pp. 101-105.

¹⁰⁷ See Amina Wadud, *Qurʾān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*.

¹⁰⁸ In *Believing Women in Islam*, Asma Barlas argues that the Qurʾān does not need to be seen as supporting patriarchy. Leila Ahmad argues that it can be seen either way, although it does lend itself to a patriarchal interpretations. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 91-93, 238.

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qurʾān, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 5-9.

Wadud does not discuss at all. With respect to the selection of source material, this effort is similar to Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite*: just as Fatima Mernissi elects to examine *ḥadīth* about women within the six canonical Sunnī books of *ḥadīth* on the basis that these are the most influential books of *ḥadīth* within the Sunnī tradition, I am electing to examine *ḥadīth* about women in the most 'canonical' Shī'ī books of *ḥadīth* on the basis that these are the most influential books of *ḥadīth* within the Shī'ī tradition. Finally, because a large portion of Shī'ī *ḥadīth* are attributed to the Imāms who lived during the 'Abbāsīd era, the work of Leila Ahmed and Kecia Ali in discussing the formation of the paradigms of classical Islamic thought – such as the paradigm of marriage as a master-slave relationship rather than a partnership – as well as the cultural influence of the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires on the development of Islamic thought about gender, will also be pivotal here.

On the other hand, this work diverges from Islamic feminist works in other ways. First, while many Islamic feminists, such as Mernissi, attempt to engage in re-reading of accepted texts, such as *ḥadīth*, I am essentially engaging in a reading, rather than a re-reading of these texts, because this set of *ḥadīth* is largely neglected. Furthermore, while Mernissi takes on the uphill battle of questioning the authenticity of *ḥadīth* which are commonly accepted as canonical within the Sunnī tradition, Shī'ī scholars generally take a much more liberal view towards the authenticity of *ḥadīth*. Therefore, while the *ḥadīth* are considered to be sacred texts, viewing *ḥadīth* in 'canonical' texts with a critical eye is not nearly as iconoclastic within the framework of contemporary Shī'ī scholarship as it is within the framework of Sunnī scholarship.¹¹⁰ Additionally, while most Islamic feminists focus on the Qur'ān, this work will focus on *ḥadīth*. Lastly, the goal of this work differs from the goal of many Islamic feminist works:

¹¹⁰ There is a range of views on *ḥadīth* among Shī'ī scholars about the reliability of *ḥadīth*, and some Akhbārī Shī'ī scholars have taken *ḥadīth* in the Four Books as authentic. In any case, Akhbārism is not a dominant trend in Shī'ī scholarship today. It is perhaps worthy of note that Ayatollah Moṭahharī, whose views were relied on heavily in identifying aspects of the ideology of women under study, was a staunch critic of Akhbārism. Murtada Muṭahharī [Moṭahharī], 'The Principle of *Ijtihad* in Islam', trans. John Cooper, in *Al-Serat*, vol. 10, no. 1. Available at <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/ijtihad.htm>>. Accessed 16 June 2013. Robert Gleave explains the Akhbārī arguments for the authenticity of these (and other) *ḥadīth* as well as the nuances of the Akhbārī positions on this in Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 245-267.

while the goal of Islamic feminist works is frequently to demonstrate that the ‘authentic’ Islamic message is gender egalitarian, and to promote social reform, the goal of this work is not to uncover the ‘authentic’ Shī‘ī message but rather is to simply explore how and why ideologies of gender were codified in Shī‘ī *aḥādīth*, and what that means for Shī‘ī discourse today.

1.2.4 The ‘demi-god’ model and the ‘patriarchal bargain’

Two concepts taken from feminist scholarship will be employed throughout this work, and hence require greater elaboration. They are the ‘demi-god’ model of gender hierarchy, and the ‘patriarchal bargain’. The term ‘demi-god’ has been used by Sa’diyyah Shaikh and Khalid Abou El Fadl, and refers to the tacit assumption that men act as a ‘demi-god’ or intercessor for women to attain divine pleasure.¹¹¹ It derives from the premise that a woman pleases Allah by obeying her husband, and displeases Allah by displeasing her husband; therefore, a woman’s husband is her gatekeeper to Heaven or Hell. As Khaled Abou El Fadl puts it, what redeems women is their relationship with their husbands, not with God; and that *aḥādīth* break from the Qur’ān by putting service to the husband before service to God.¹¹² This arrangement is reflected in the narration that if a woman were ordered to prostrate to any human being, she would have been ordered to prostrate to her husband.¹¹³ In the Shī‘ī tradition, this can be extended to the notion that a woman must obey a male jurist (*marja’*), and is reflected in narrations such as ‘a woman’s *jihad* is to please her husband’ or the view that a woman may not engage in religious practices – such as going to the mosque or performing an optional fast –

¹¹¹ Sa’diyyah Shaikh traces the development in classical Islamic exegesis of how a spiritual hierarchy was set up whereby men were treated as women’s ‘divine intermediaries if not demi-gods, as the objects and instruments of female accountability’, in that a woman’s path to Heaven was portrayed as being through obedience and loyalty to her husband for the sake of her husband, as opposed to obedience and loyalty to God for the sake of God. Sa’diyya Shaikh, ‘Exegetical Violence: *Nushūz* in Qur’ānic Gender Ideology’, in *Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 17 (1997), pp. 49-73. Gender hierarchy is a central theme of Amina Wadud’s *Inside the Gender Jihad*.

¹¹² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), pp. 210-214 and 218-222.

¹¹³ *Law kuntu āmiran li-aḥad an yasjud li-aḥadin la-amartu al-mar’ah an tasjud li-zawjihā*. Khaled Abou Fadl and Rawand Osman both discuss the implications of this narration. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name*, p. 210; Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, p. 179. In Shī‘ī works, it appears in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1367 AH (solar)), vol. 5, pp. 507-8, no. 6.

without her husband's blessing. This hierarchy, as well as an explicit acknowledgment of the lower status it grants women, is exemplified in this narration from *al-Kāfi* which is attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

A woman came to the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, and she said, 'O Messenger of Allah! What is the right of a husband upon a woman?'

So he said to her, 'She should obey him and not disobey him and not give charity from his house except with his permission, and not fast voluntarily except with his permission, and not keep herself from him even if she is on the back of a camel, and she should not leave her house except with his permission. And if she leaves her house without his permission, the angels of the heavens curse her, along with the angels of the earth and the angels of anger and the angels of mercy, until she returns to her house.'

And so she said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Who has the greatest right upon a man?'

He said, 'His mother.'

She said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Who has the greatest right upon a woman?'

He said, 'Her husband.'

She said, 'What sort of right do I have over him that is like his?'

He said, 'None, and not even one hundredth [of a right].'

[...] So she said, 'By the One who has appointed you in truth as a prophet, no man will ever enslave me (lit. 'own my neck')!'¹¹⁴

This idea is built on the presumption that men are in a position of authority over women which is akin to the divine authority that Allah enjoys over

¹¹⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, pp. 506-7, no. 1.

men. That is, instead of women and men having equal standing before Allah, thereby coexisting in a hierarchy of Allah->woman and Allah->man, there is an implied hierarchy of Allah->man->woman. When verbalized, this idea seems counter-Islamic, since one of the main themes of the Qur'ān is that individuals have a direct connection and responsibility to Allah without intercessors, and Khaled Abou El Fadl has been quoted as referring to it as 'idolatry'.¹¹⁵ Rawand Osman concludes that the Qur'ān does not support this idea and, instead, in the Qur'ān and Shī'ī interpretations of the *sunnah*, women are praised for their independent actions.¹¹⁶ However, this model has entered Islamic discourse, and some narrations do imply this gender hierarchy; hence it will be discussed as the 'demi-god' model.

The 'patriarchal bargain', described in detail by Deniz Kandiyoti, refers to the view that, in an oppressively patriarchal society, women internalize the restrictions or injustices meted out to them, and then enforce those restrictions or injustices on other women to increase their own social status at the expense of other women, rather than banding together to fight against social injustice.¹¹⁷ Additionally, women will accept restrictive or inconvenient customs – such as face veiling or foot binding – because they result in higher social status for themselves or for their children, or because abandoning these practices would result in a loss of social status.¹¹⁸ It will be argued in Chapter 3 that Sārah and Hājar in particular as portrayed in the *ḥadīth* (but not the Qur'ān) act as classic examples of the patriarchal bargain.

1.2.5 Intertextuality

Although not related to feminist hermeneutics, there is also one more concept that must be introduced, and that is intertextuality. Throughout this work, it will be apparent that (a) many of these narrations are rooted in Judaeo-

¹¹⁵ Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (New York and Oxon, ON: Routledge, 2008), p. 229.

¹¹⁶ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, pp. 181-2.

¹¹⁷ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', in *Gender and Society*, vol. 2, no. 3 (Sep., 1988), pp. 274-290. <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0891-2432%28198809%292%3A3%3C274%3ABWP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>> Accessed 5 December 2013.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Christian texts (that is, they are *isrā`īlīyāt*), but (b) rather than merely rehashing ancient texts, these narrations recast ancient narratives to promote the cultural values and vested interests of the Arab-Islamic Empire, and also Shī`ism. While orientalist often assumed that Islamic material was simply ‘borrowed’ from Judaism, and any deviance from Judaic sources was due to error or misunderstanding, Reuven Firestone (who has written extensively on Judaic and Islamic texts) proposes that a more authentic way to treat *isrā`īlīyāt* is to see them as a product of intertextuality:

The existence of parallels does not prove direct borrowing [...] The Islamic legends about Abraham are indeed influenced by the Biblicist legends extant in pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islamic society, but they also exhibit influences from indigenous Arabian culture as well as styles, structures, and motifs that are unique to Islam. The legends in Islamic sources are not ‘borrowed,’ but are rather unique creations fully intelligible only when a prior body of discourse – stories, ideas, legends, religious doctrine, and so forth – is taken into consideration along with contemporary Islamic worldviews.¹¹⁹

Marcel Poorthuis, who also has written on Judaic and Islamic texts, also observes that the influence should not be considered to be one-way, but, rather, that later Jewish writings were influenced by the Islamic tradition; he also proposes that Eastern Christianity had a strong influence on Islamic thought.¹²⁰ Firestone notes:

[I]deas do not cross cultural boundaries unless they are congruent with the dominant modes of thought of the recipient culture. For Biblicist legends to have been absorbed into non-Biblicist pre-Islamic Arabian culture, they must either have exhibited enough

¹¹⁹ Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 18-19.

¹²⁰ Poorthuis, Marcel, ‘Hagar’s Wanderings: Between Judaism and Islam’, in *Der Islam*, vol. 90, no. 2 (2013), pp. 220–244.

inherent congruence or must have evolved sufficiently so that they eventually did.¹²¹

With these thoughts in mind, narrations which appear to be rooted in pre-Islamic sources (for instance, narrations sharing narrative elements with Genesis) will not be treated just as an echo of pre-Islamic materials, but rather as uniquely constructed narratives with similar narrative elements but which serve different theological and social purposes.

1.2.6 The insider approach

A few words are in order also with respect to what is meant by taking an 'insider' approach, and what bearing that may have on this work. Traditionally, it is common in ethnographic works for the research to begin by outlining whether she or he is approaching the subject as an insider or an outsider; rather than being a negative point, being an 'insider' can facilitate research.¹²² While this is a theological not ethnographic piece of research, it is worth mentioning particularly because there is a precedent for engaging in this type of discussion in other works on women and Islam. By referring to myself as an 'insider', I am referring firstly to the fact that I am a female practising Shī'ī; as a result, the questions being discussed are not only academic but are issues that I encounter on an everyday basis. Secondly, I also give religious lectures and offer religious guidance within the Shī'ī community. Being an insider in this respect allows me a sense of efficacy that I can participate *in* it (as a theologian and participant in the construction of contemporary discourse) rather than simply making observations *about* it (as a sociologist or an observer).

¹²¹ Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, pp. 37-38.

¹²² N. T. Headland, K. Pike, and M. Harris. (eds.). *Etics and emics: The insider/outsider debate* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1990); T. Brannick and D. Coghlan, 'In defense of being "native": The case for insider academic research', in *Organizational Research Methods*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2007), pp. 59-74; V. K. Kanuha, "'Being" native versus "going native": Conducting social work research as an insider', in *Social Work*, vol. 45, no. 5 (2000), pp. 439-447; B. Mullings, 'Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a crosscultural setting', in *Geoforum*, vol. 30 (1999), pp. 337-350.

1.2.7 The premises of Shī'ī scholarship referenced in this work

As an 'insider' work, this thesis is intended to be meaningful within the context of contemporary Shī'ī discourse. Therefore, the following assumptions which are taken as axiomatic within Shī'ī scholarship will be utilized:

1. Correct *ḥadīth*¹²³ are in mutual agreement with each other, regardless of whether they are related from the Prophet Muḥammad or an Imām. Irreconcilable disagreement of *ḥadīth* without extenuating circumstances (see section on *taqīyyah* below) is a sign that one or more of the *ḥadīth* are incorrect.¹²⁴ Although this thesis will not attempt to answer the question of which specific *ḥadīth* are accurate representations of his words, the presence of conflicting material in the *ḥadīth* collections will be noted as an untenable situation from the perspective of Shī'ī scholarship.¹²⁵
2. Correct *ḥadīth* agree with the Qur'ān. If a *ḥadīth* irrevocably disagrees with the Qur'ān, it is erroneous or has been tampered with. (This is also a major premise in Islamic feminist thought.)¹²⁶

¹²³ That is, the *ḥadīth* accurately recount the words or actions attributed to the speaker. This should not be conflated with the use of *ṣaḥīḥ* as a technical scholarly term referring to a *ḥadīth* with a full, highly graded chain of narration (but which still may or may not be an accurate report of the person's actual words). That is, a *ḥadīth* which has been technically graded *ṣaḥīḥ* could still be a false attribution to the Prophet – although, of course, proving what the Prophet did and did not say is an entirely different matter!

¹²⁴ 'Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, trans. Nazmina Virjee, 2nd ed. (London: ICAS Press, 2012), pp. 16, 218. 'Allāmah al-Majlisī employs this principle in his discussions.

¹²⁵ This is discussed as a premise which itself is narrated in Shī'ī *ḥadīth*. Ḥāmid Bāqerī and Majīd Ma'āref, 'Karkard-hā-ye Naqd-e Matnī-ye Ahadīth Nazd-e Muhaddethān-e Mutaqaqaddam-e Imāmī' in *Pajūhesh-hā-ye Qur'ān va Hadīth*, vol. 45, no. 1 (2012), pp. 7-39.

¹²⁶ 'Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, p. 178-180; Sayyid 'Alī Āqāyī, 'Ḥadīth and the Qur'ān', in *Hadith: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam*, ed. Gholamali Haddad Adel, Mohammad Jafar Elmi, and Hassan Taromi-Rad (London: EWI Press, 2012), 11-13.. This principle is derived from *ḥadīth* attributed to the Imāms; for instance, it is related that the Prophet Muḥammad said, 'Compare my tradition [*ḥadīth*] with the Book of Allah. If it corresponds with it, then it is from me and I have indeed said it', and that Imām al-Ṣādiq said, 'The traditions [*ahādīth*] that do not correspond with the Qur'ān are false. M. Rayshahri (ed.), *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shī'ī Hadīth* [bilingual Arabic and English] (London: ICAS Press, 2009), p. 258. This is also discussed as a premise which itself is narrated in Shī'ī *ḥadīth* in Ḥāmid Bāqerī and Majīd Ma'āref, 'Karkard-hā-ye Naqd-e Matnī-ye Ahadīth Nazd-e Muhaddethān-e Mutaqaqaddam-e Imāmī'.

3. Material of pre-Islamic or post-Prophetic origin is not authoritative within the Islamic thought; the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* had a unique origin and were not merely constructed from pre-existing religious beliefs or scriptures. The Imāms did not preach a set of values different from that of the Prophet. This premise is relevant here inasmuch as material which mimics that which is found in pre-Islamic texts can be seen as possibly originating from those texts (instead of from the Prophet or Imāms) and, hence, not being authoritative within the Islamic tradition.

Several reasons are traditionally given by Shī'ī scholars for the presence of inauthentic material within *ḥadīth* collections, such as human error, or dishonesty on the part of a *ḥadīth* narrator. The reasons which are most pertinent in this work are:

1. *Isrā'īliyyāt*. *Isrā'īliyyāt* are *aḥādīth* which – from the view of Islamic scholarship – erroneously introduce material of Judaeo-Christian origin into the *ḥadīth* corpus.¹²⁷ This material may be of canonical Judaeo-Christian origin, such as excerpts from the Book of Genesis, or may be – as Mary Thurlkill aptly puts it – ‘Jewish haggadah and Christian apocrypha’.¹²⁸ When discussing narratives of women who also appear in the Bible, *isrā'īliyyāt* are to be expected. Paradoxically, while Islamic scholars overtly objected to the use of *isrā'īliyyāt*,¹²⁹ Biblical material was

¹²⁷ ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 154-159, 178-180.

¹²⁸ Mary Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women*, p. 84.

¹²⁹ Roberto Totoli's observation that Muslim attitudes towards *isrā'īliyyāt* changed in the latter half of the twentieth century because of (a) orientalist literature citing extra-canonical traditions on the Biblical prophets, and (b) ‘the birth of the state of Israel which has given rise to a growing suspicion towards the traditions attributed to the converts from Judaism’, such as Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb, does not seem relevant to the Shī'ī tradition in that Shī'ī scholars already rejected *aḥādīth* from these narrators. Additionally, while Totoli seems to imply that the rejection of *isrā'īliyyāt* is due to a Muslim sense of antagonism towards the Biblical text (for instance, the acceptance of *ḥadīth* saying that Isma'īl, not Ishāq, was the son whom Ibrāhīm was commanded to sacrifice), it should be observed that Shī'ī authors do not generally express animosity towards the Bible, and even in the *ḥadīth* surveyed here, al-Majlisī quotes from a copy of the Bible; for instance, an example will be discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, throughout the Shī'ī corpus, there are *aḥādīth* which are said to have been part of the ‘original’ Bible. Roberto Totoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), pp. 182, 186.

Roberto Totoli describes the development of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* in the Sunnī tradition as well as the challenge Sunnī scholars and exegetes faced in deciding whether or not to use extra-Islamic material to explain the Qur'ān. It should be noted that the situation of the early Shī'ah is somewhat different, in that, during this period, they still took *aḥādīth* from their Imāms

sometimes used by classical scholars to defend Islamic beliefs or to ‘fill in the gaps’ with details not mentioned in the Qur’ān or *ḥadīth*.¹³⁰

2. *Ghulūw*. In the view of contemporary Twelver Shī‘ī scholarship, *ghulūw* refers to beliefs circulated among some of the early Shī‘ah which were considered, by the Imāms, to be heterodox – for instance, the deification of the Prophet or Imāms, belief in reincarnation, or the abolition of *shar‘ah*. However, a precise definition of what constitutes *ghulūw* was not agreed upon in the early era and still is not agreed upon today;¹³¹ what is important here is that the debate over *ghulūw* was part of the negotiation of Shī‘ī orthodoxy. Although *ghulūw* is considered heterodox, *ghulāt* narrations and *ḥadīth* appear within Twelver Shī‘ī collections.¹³²

as authoritative and thus, for three centuries, did not have to face the question of whether or not extra-Islamic material should be used to explain the Qur’ān. This is, of course, not to say that material of extra-Islamic origin did not enter into the Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* corpus or other works, but only that the context was different. Roberto Tottoli, ‘Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā’īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature’, in *Arabica*, T. 46, Fasc. 2 (1999), pp. 193-210. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057496>>. Accessed 17 July 2013.

¹³⁰ Etan Kohlberg, ‘From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘ashariyya’, in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 39, no. 3 (1976), pp. 521-534. <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0041-977X%281976%2939%3A3%3C521%3AFIT1%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>> Accessed 29 July 2013.

¹³¹ Hossein Modarressi addresses this question in *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī‘īte Islam: Abū Ja‘far Ibn Qibā Al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shī‘īte Thought* (Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin Press, 1993); whereas Amir-Moezzi maintains that much of what is considered *ghulūw* today, such as belief in the alteration (*tahrīf*) of the Qur’ān, or the belief in the Imām as the *mazhar* (manifestation) of God, was mainstream among the early Shī‘ah. For opposing viewpoints, see, on the one hand, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi in *The Divine Guide in Early Shī‘ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993); M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shī‘i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*. On the other hand, see Ayatollah Ne‘matollah Salehi Najafabadi, *Religious Extremism: Intellectual and Doctrinal Deviance in Islam*, trans. H. Mavani and S. Etehadī (Montreal: Organization for the Advancement of Islamic Knowledge and Humanitarian Services, 2009); and Haydar ‘Alī Qalamdārān (d. 1368 AH (solar)), *Rāh-e Najāt az Sharr-e Ghulāt* [The Path to Salvation from the Evil of the *Ghulāt*] (n.p., n.d.) Accessed via <http://d1.islamhouse.com/data/fa/ih_books/single2/fa_rahe_nejat_as_share_gholat_kamel.pdf>. Accessed 18 July 2013. The contemporary continuation of the historical polemical debate on this topic is also demonstrated in Ayatollah Ja‘far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shī‘i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, trans. Reza Shah Kazemi (New York and London: I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismā‘īli Studies, 2001), pp. 177-178, where he quotes Shaykh al-Mufīd (948-1022) and ‘Allamah al-Majlisī (the compiler of one of the sources under study here) in their condemnation and explanation of what constitutes *ghulūw*.

¹³² Majīd Ma‘āref, *Tarīkh-e ‘Umūmī-ye Ḥadīth* (Tehran: Kavir, 1377 AH (solar)), p. 365 Liyakat Takim, ‘The Origins and Evaluations of Hadith Transmitters in Shī‘i Biographical Literature’, in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 26-49. <http://i-epistemology.net/attachments/922_ajiss24-4-stripped%20-%20Takim%20-%20The%20Origins%20and%20Evaluations%20of%20Hadith%20Transmitters.pdf> Accessed 18 July 2013. See also Wadad al-Qadi, ‘The Development of the Term *Ghulat* in Muslim

Because some *ghulāt* sects developed through the syncretism of Shī'ism with other religious traditions, such as Manichaeism, they also operate as a conduit to introduce extra-Islamic material into the *ḥadīth* corpus.¹³³ In particular, *ghulāt* sects integrated Near Eastern Gnostic ideas.¹³⁴ And since *ghulāt* is an umbrella term for many groups,¹³⁵ it would not be correct to specify one view towards women as the *ghulāt* view. According to Matti Moosa, an author on *ghulāt* Shi'ism and its contemporary offshoots, some *ghulāt* groups held rather liberal views towards women. The late Patricia Crone suggested that, in some of these groups, women enjoyed more social freedom than they did in among more 'mainstream' Muslims, and that this led to allegations of misconduct such as wife-sharing.¹³⁶ However, other *ghulāt* sects held misogynistic views – for instance, the belief that God created disobedient women from the Devil, or that disbelievers would be reincarnated as women as punishment, whereas a believing woman would be reincarnated as a man as a reward. Today, some sects described as *ghulāt* in the Middle East maintain different attitudes towards women than their more mainstream Muslim neighbours.¹³⁷ They also continue to exhibit religious syncretism

Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysaniyya', in Etan Kohlberg, *Shi'ism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 169-193.

¹³³ 'Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 160-168.

¹³⁴ Tamima Bayhom-Daou, 'The Second-Century Šī'ite Ġulāt: Were They Really Gnostic?', in *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, vol. 5 (2003), pp. 13-61. Since one contemporary approach to reform among some Shī'ah has been to try to weed out *ghulūw* from theological beliefs, it stands to reason that this would also be a pertinent route to explore with regards to beliefs about gender, although, to my knowledge, this avenue has not yet been pursued. Haydar 'Alī Qalamdārān (d. 1368 AH (solar)), *Rāh-e Najāt az Sharr-e Ghulāt* [The Path to Salvation from the Evil of the *Ghulāt*].

¹³⁵ Liyakat Takim, 'The Origins and Evaluations of Hadith Transmitters in Shi'i Biographical Literature'. See also Wadad al-Qadi, 'The Development of the Term *Ghulat* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysaniyya', in Etan Kohlberg, *Shi'ism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 169-193.

¹³⁶ These allegations continue even today; for instance, Matti Moosa describes accusations of orgies against several groups in Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), pp. 127, 177, 243.

¹³⁷ For instance, throughout his exposition on the beliefs and practices of various extant *ghulāt* sects, Matti Moosa notes differences in attitudes towards women and gender interactions. On the one hand, some sects termed *ghulāt* are more liberal to women; on the other, some are more restrictive. For instance, he notes that the Kizilbash-Bektashi (in Turkey) 'seem to hold women in great respect, maintaining that, in spirit and love, women are equal to men. They believe in educating their daughters and permitting women to go about with their faces uncovered. Women are also free to become acquainted with men, especially Christian

– particularly, in the integration of beliefs and practices from Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, as well as Near Eastern Gnosticism in general.¹³⁸ Since the possibility of the association of *ghulāt* narrators with misogynistic *ḥadīth* has already arisen, this is one potential influence on ideas about women in *ḥadīth* that will be considered here with respect to *ḥadīth* material that carries *ghulāt* themes.¹³⁹

3. *Taqīyyah*. This concern is specific to Shīʿī *ḥadīth*. Because of the persecution of the Shīʿah, the Imāms would sometimes conceal distinctly Shīʿī beliefs and verbalize popular Sunnī beliefs. *Taqīyyah* is considered to be a reason for the contradiction of *ḥadīth*; it is also the reason why, traditionally, when faced with one view that is indicative of the Sunnī view, and another which diverges, Shīʿī scholars expressed preference

men [...]. Of course, to contextualize his statement, in the pre-modern era, in the Middle East it was common for Muslim women and even women of other faiths to cover their faces; and, female education was still gaining acceptance in the twentieth century, particularly in rural areas where many adherents to *ghulāt* sects live. He also observes that divorce is forbidden in this community and that women and men work together in the fields and performing household chores. That being said, he observes that this community takes the sexual honour of women very seriously and that any woman who engages in a relationship outside of wedlock (regardless of whether she is a young woman or not) may be put to death for destroying her family's honour; of course, he observes that this is not uncommon in the Middle East. He also cites a historical story circulated among the Ahl-e Ḥaqq (in Iran) in which a *murshid* tried to convince Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn (13th century AD), founder of the Ṣafaviyyah order, that the intermingling of men and women in a place of worship is not immoral. Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects*, pp. 147, 218.

¹³⁸ Matti Moosa discusses overt similarities between extant sects identified as *ghulāt* and Christianity – for instance, marking bread with a cross and taking Christian names – and observes that '[t]heir beliefs and practices have led many writers to regard extremist Shiites as crypto-Christian' and that '[s]ome writers have maintained that these extremist Shiites are closer to Christianity than Islam', both theologically – in terms of a theological sort of trinity – 'or viewing Ali as an incarnation of God, and also in terms of practice'. However, he emphasises that they should not be seen as Christian and that when they convert or modify their tenets it is usually to more 'orthodox' forms of Twelver Shīʿism, not Christianity. Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects*, pp. xxii-xxiii, 428.

¹³⁹ Mushegh Asatryan, *Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: The Origins and Evolution of the Mufaddal-Tradition* [PhD thesis], Yale University, 2012, pp. 18, 177, 189. Patricia Crone writes substantially on what she feels are valid claims as well as false allegations of sexual practices considered unorthodox (such as polyandry) among pre-Islamic groups (which – according to the thesis of her book – influenced the development of Islam) in Iran as well as the negative view towards women in some of these groups in Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

for the divergent view.¹⁴⁰ The question of *taqīyyah* will emerge with some of the *ḥadīth* under study here.

The issue of *taqīyyah* leads to the question of the use of *ḥadīth* to establish a distinctly Shīʿī identity. Rainer Brunner proposes that Shīʿī *ḥadīth* – including inauthentic *ḥadīth* – were employed by the early Shīʿah to establish sectarian boundaries between the Shīʿah and other Muslims; many narrations in this study serve precisely that purpose.¹⁴¹ In a study of *ḥadīth* in Kufa, Najam Haider also concludes that fixed ideas in *ḥadīth* demarcated specific sectarian groups; and, in particular, that, by the second century *hijrī* (eighth century AD), Imāmī Shīʿī identity was distinct from both Sunnī and Zaydī Shīʿī identity.¹⁴² Therefore, while Sunnī and Twelver Shīʿī books share some *ḥadīth* texts, it stands to reason that the Shīʿī *ḥadīth* on pre-Islamic women would reflect both (a) a distinctly Shīʿī narrative of this pre-Islamic history, and (b) distinctly Shīʿī views of womanhood.

1.2.8 Which *ḥadīth*?

Two primary sets of *ḥadīth* will be considered here: (a) the ‘Four Books’ (*al-kutub al-arbaʿah*), which are considered to be the most authentic books in Shīʿī discourse, and (b) *Bihār al-Anwār*, an encyclopaedic collection which is the primary reference for contemporary Shīʿī scholars, and which encompasses many early books. Narrations from outside of the Four Books and *Bihār* will be included when they introduce meaningfully different content.

The Four Books. Special attention will be given to *aḥādīth* in the Four Books due to their role in defining contemporary Shīʿī orthodoxy.¹⁴³ (This

¹⁴⁰ Robert Gleave discusses *taqīyyah* as an explanation for conflicting *ḥadīth* in ‘Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The “Canonical” Imāmī Collections of Akhbār’, in *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2001), pp. 350-382; ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, p. 111. The application of this principle among early Shīʿī *ḥadīth* scholars is discussed in Ḥāmid Baqerī and Majīd Maʿāref, ‘Karkard-hā-ye Naqd-e Matnī-ye Ahādīth Nazd-e Muhaddethān-e Mutaqaqaddam-e Imāmī’. Also see E Kohlberg, ‘Some Imāmī views on taqīyyah’, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, no. 95 (1975), pp. 395-402.

¹⁴¹ Rainer Brunner, ‘The Role of Ḥadīth as Cultural Memory in Shīʿī History’, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 318-360.

¹⁴² Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 249-253.

¹⁴³ Robert Gleave, ‘Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The “Canonical” Imāmī Collections of Akhbār’, in *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2001), pp. 350-382. The influence of these

parallels the decision to focus on *al-ṣiḥāḥ al-sittah* in studies of Sunnī *ḥadīth*, on the grounds that they are the most influential books in Sunnī orthodoxy today.)¹⁴⁴ For instance, Rainer Brunner connects the ‘canonization’ of these books in the early era of Shī‘ism with the need of the Imāmī Shī‘ah to establish a strong cultural identity to distinguish themselves from non-Shī‘ah as well as the *ghulāt*; that is, to outline the boundaries of ‘us versus them’.¹⁴⁵ Since exploring the codification of an ‘orthodox’ ideology of gender is a primary concern of this work, particular attention will be given to the question of whether the canonization of these books led to a canonization of a specific ideology of women. This could particularly be a factor with *al-Kāfī*, the earliest extant comprehensively categorized Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* work. Not only is *al-Kāfī* the most revered Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* collection today, but it has also been argued that the intent behind *al-Kāfī* was to establish the ‘normative’ doctrine of Shī‘ism, and to expunge Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* from the influences of the *ghulāt*, Ash‘arites, and pre-destinationists.¹⁴⁶ That is, the compilation of *al-Kāfī* was an intentional exercise in codifying orthodoxy.

The Four Books are *al-Kāfī* by Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329 AH), *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faḥīh* by Muḥammad ibn Bābāwayh (also known as al-Shaykh al-Ṣādūq, d. 381 AH), and *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 AH).¹⁴⁷ Because three of the ‘Four Books’ – *al-Faḥīh*, *al-Tahdhīb*, and *al-Istibṣār* – focus on jurisprudential *ḥadīth*, it may come as a surprise that these books include *ḥadīth* on pre-Islamic

books can be seen in the numbers of commentaries written on them (for a list, see Majīd Ma‘āref, *Tarīkh-e ‘Umūmī-ye Ḥadīth*, p. 422-426). For instance, commentaries on *al-Kāfī* include ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī’s *Mir‘āt al-‘Uqūl*; a commentary by Mulla Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shirāzī) (d. 1050/1640), and one by al-Māzandarānī (d. 1080/1699).

¹⁴⁴ For instance, see ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 68-71; ‘Alī Nāṣirī, *An Introduction to Ḥadīth: History and Sources* (London: MIU Press, 2013), pp. 221-286; Majīd Ma‘āref, *Tarīkh-e ‘Umūmī-ye Ḥadīth*, pp. 348-395; Sayyid Ali al-Shahristani, *The Prohibition of Recording the Ḥadīth: Causes and Effects*, trans. Badr Shahin (Qum: Dar al-Ghadir, 2004), pp. 509-511.

¹⁴⁵ Rainer Brunner, ‘The Role of Ḥadīth as Cultural Memory in Shī‘ī History’, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 318-360.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Gleave, ‘Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh’, p. 382. Robert Gleave adds that, in the Shī‘ī case, this ‘enabled Shī‘ī intellectuals to challenge the emerging (Sunnī) legal orthodoxy on equal terms’.

¹⁴⁷ Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad, ‘Twelver Šī‘ī “Ḥadīth”: From Tradition To Contemporary Evaluations’, in *Oriente Moderno Nuova serie*, Anno 21 (82), Nr. 1 (2002), pp. 125-145. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/25817816.pdf>>. Accessed 8 July 2013.

women. Although not all the *ḥadīth* in them are formally graded as *ṣaḥīḥ*, each of the compilers indicated that he was selecting *ḥadīth* that he felt were authentic, rather than just including all *ḥadīth* which were available at the time;¹⁴⁸ therefore, these *ḥadīth* books represent a selective rather than inclusive collection of *ḥadīth*.^{149,150}

While, today, Shīʿī scholars identify these as the most important pre-Safavid Shīʿī *ḥadīth* collections, the question of when precisely they attained canonical status is not agreed upon. The prominent contemporary author ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadil argues that these books taken as canonical from before the Safavid period and gained prominence early on because they were the only large-scale systematic compilations of *ḥadīth* compiled by Imāmī Shīʿīs before

¹⁴⁸ With respect to *al-Kāfī*, the early Shīʿī scholars Ibn Bābawayh, Shaykh al-Ṣādūq, Shaykh al-Mufīd, Sayyid Murtaḍā, and Shaykh al-Ṭūsī held that the contents of *al-Kāfī* should not be assumed to be authentic. This is also the view of Usūlī Shīʿī scholars. Some Akhbārī Shīʿī scholars, such as Muḥammad Amin al-Astarābādī (d. 1626) held that all of *al-Kāfī* is authentic, whereas other Akhbārī scholars treated the contents of *al-Kāfī* as reliable without necessarily elevating them to the level of authenticity. In any case, as mentioned previously, the majority of contemporary Shīʿī scholars adopt Usūlī views with respect to *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. While al-Kulaynī himself testified to the authenticity of his book, this is, nowadays, taken to mean that while he personally felt that he included only authentic *ahādīth*, the *ahādīth* themselves are still subject to scrutiny with respect to their authenticity. See Abu Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 68-71.

With respect to *al-Faḥrī*, Ibn Babawayh says that he decides to include *ḥadīth* that he feels are sound; however, this is not taken as evidence that the entire book is actually authentic. A similar view is espoused for *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*. Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (al-Shaykh al-Ṣādūq), *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faḥrī*, 4 vols. (Qum: Jamā‘at al-Mudarrisīn fi al-Ḥawzah al-‘Ilmīyyah, n.d.); Robert Gleave, ‘Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The “Canonical” Imāmī Collections of Akhbārī’; ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 68-71.

¹⁴⁹ In the above article, Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad holds that they are analogous to the Sunnī six books; in any case, the most pertinent difference of whether or not they are treated as ‘authentic’ remains. Of course, the Sunnī Six Books are not above criticism even by Sunnī scholars; for instance, see Wael Hallaq’s view that that Orientalist critiques of *ḥadīth* authenticity, particularly that by Ignaz Goldzisher, are in fact unwarranted since Islamic scholarship has evolved on the premise that most *ḥadīth*, with the exception of *mutawātir ḥadīth*, only have a probability of being true and are not taken as absolutely true. Wael Hallaq, ‘The authenticity of Prophetic Hadith: A Pseudo-Problem’, in *Studia Islamica*, 1999, pp. 75-90. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1596086>>. Accessed 29 July 2013.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 68-71. As an example, the prominent sixteenth century Shīʿī scholar al-Shahīd al-Thānī said that *al-Kāfī* – the book that is considered to be the most reliable – contains 9,485 *ḥadīth* graded weak (*ḍa‘īf*), although weakness of the chain of narration is not considered automatic grounds for exclusion of the *ḥadīth*. Majīd Ma‘āref, *Tārīkh-e ‘Umūmī-ye Ḥadīth*, p. 367. As mentioned, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī, himself an Akhbārī, took it upon himself to evaluate the chains of narration in *al-Kāfī* in his work *Mir‘āt al-‘Uqūḥ*; Ali Rahnama considers this to be an expression of a new form of Akhbārism predicated on the need to increase the authority of the ‘*ulamā*’. See Ali Rahema, *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics: From Majlesi to Ahmadinejad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 223-225.

the Safavid period, with the exception of a fifth compilation (*Madīnat al-ʿIlm*), which was also part of this set of books (hence making it known as the Five Books), but which was lost.¹⁵¹ Abdelaziz Sachedina calls al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣādūq the ‘ancient *akhbārī* scholars’.¹⁵² On the other hand, Amir-Moezzi is of the view that these books were not referred to as authoritative sources as the ‘Four Books’ before the Safavid era, while Robert Gleave just says they were not canonized immediately.¹⁵³ The main reason for the canonization of the Four Books is said to be the ease of use of these works, which led to the loss of earlier, less organized manuscripts – both through neglect and destruction; this is not dissimilar to how the major Sunnī compilations became popularized over individual *saḥīfahs*.¹⁵⁴ These collections also became prominent because, after their compilation, there was a hiatus in compiling comprehensive, categorized collections of Shīʿī *ḥadīth* until the Safavid period, instead, scholarly attention was focused more on developing notions of *ijtihād*.¹⁵⁵ In any case, these books are mentioned together in a text attributed to the fourteenth century.¹⁵⁶ Note that the possibility that the Four Books, in fact, do not demonstrate a unified approach to women will also be explored.

Biḥār al-Anwār. The second main source of *ḥadīth* will be the voluminous collection *Biḥār al-Anwār al-Jāmiʿah li-Durar Akhbār al-ʿImmat al-Aṭḥār*, which can be translated as *The Oceans of Lights: A Compendium of the Pearls of the Narrations of the Pure Imāms*. Nothing if not comprehensive, *Biḥār* includes many Shīʿī *ḥadīth* in existence today. Today commonly printed in 110 volumes, ‘Allāmah Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1616-1698), the famous scholar of Safavid Iran, compiled it as an encyclopaedia of *ḥadīth* to prevent their loss as

¹⁵¹ Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 68-71.

¹⁵² Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shiʿite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 8.

¹⁵³ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Hassan Ansari, ‘Muḥammad B. Yaʿqūb Al-Kulaynī (M. 328 Ou 329/939-40 Ou 940-41) Et Son Kitāb *Al-Kāfī*. Une Introduction’, in *Studia Iranica*, vol. 38 (2009), p. 191-247. Robert Gleave, ‘Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The “Canonical” Imāmī Collections of Akhbār’.

¹⁵⁴ Majīd Maʿāref, *Tarīkh-e ʿUmūmī-ye Ḥadīth*, p. 400.

¹⁵⁵ This is also bolstered by Asma Sayeed’s study of women in Shīʿī *ḥadīth* narration, in that she notes that the rare Shīʿī women who did attain a scholarly education were remembered more for reaching the stage of *ijtihād* than for narrating *ḥadīth*. See Asma Sayeed, ‘Women in Imāmī Biographical Collections’.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Allāmah al-Hillī (d. 1325), *Irshād al-Adhhān ilā Aḥkām al-ʿImān*, 2 vols. (Qum: Muʿassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 91.

well as to facilitate scholarship. Majlisī is said to have put considerable effort into locating rare manuscripts of *ḥadīth*. While Majlisī engaged in some selectivity regarding the *ḥadīth* that he included, his goal was to preserve the extant *ḥadīth*, not just the *ḥadīth* that he considered undoubtedly authentic, and one frequent difference between *Bihār* and the Four Books is that the Four Books often contain shorter versions of lengthy narrations which are recorded in *Bihār*. Therefore, while the Four Books represent selectivity of *ḥadīth*, *Bihār al-Anwār* represents inclusiveness of *ḥadīth*.¹⁵⁷

Because of its ease of use as a reference for *ḥadīth*, *Bihār al-Anwār* has become one of the most influential books of *ḥadīth* today. Although it is generally agreed to contain inauthentic material, it has been described as having ‘sacerdotal significance’ among Shī‘ah, and it has even been held that *Bihār* is the reason why Iran stayed a majority Shī‘ī country after the Safavid era.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, unlike the compilers of the Four Books, Majlisī did not focus primarily on jurisprudence (a contemporaneous encyclopaedic collection, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah* by al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, does that), and so much of *Bihār al-Anwār* is about theological, historical, spiritual, cosmological, and other topics. Because of its inclusiveness, *Bihār* also serves as a good (albeit not inexhaustible) survey of the contents of other early *ḥadīth* books, such as *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, which, for that reason, have not been listed separately.¹⁵⁹

Lastly, Chapter 7 will focus on two specific books – *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*; more information about those books will be provided in that chapter.

¹⁵⁷ Rasul Jafarian, ‘The Encyclopaedic Aspect of *Bihar al-Anwar*’, in *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 1-17 and vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 55-69.

¹⁵⁸ Rainer Brunner, ‘The Role of *Ḥadīth* as Cultural Memory in Shī‘ī History’, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 318-360.

¹⁵⁹ Rasul Jafarian, ‘The Encyclopaedic Aspect of *Bihār al-Anwār*’, in *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 1-17 and vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 55-69; ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, pp. 73-75.

1.3 Research questions and chapters

1.3.1 Research questions

The pre-Islamic women mentioned in the Qur'ān about whom there is substantial *ḥadīth* material, and who therefore will be the subject of this study are Eve (Hawwā'), Sārah, Hājar, the Queen of Sheba (Bilqīs), Zulaykhā, and the Virgin Mary (Maryam). (Āsiyah was not given her own chapter due to the limited discussion of her in *aḥādīth*.)¹⁶⁰ This thesis will not delve into the historical/archaeological question of whether these figures – such as the Queen of Sheba – actually existed as historical personalities; what matters here is that they exist in sacred narrative. The questions that will be explored are the following:

1. Are women absent from Shī'ī ḥadīth and sacred history, as is commonly implied or presumed?
2. There is a modern ideology of gender, referred to as the 'separate but equal' view, that traces back to the classical era and was codified by some Shī'ī scholars in the mid-twentieth century. To what extent does the portrayal of pre-Islamic women in these *aḥādīth* agree or disagree with the assumptions about the nature of women described in the 'separate but equal' ideology? In particular, regarding the following premises:
 - a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.
 - b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.

¹⁶⁰ That being said, the main observation that emerged from perusing the narrations including Āsiyah was the attempt to connect her faith with her lineage. There is an emphasis on the view that she was descended from Banī Isrā'īl, and hence was naturally inclined to believe. This emphasis sends two troubling messages. Firstly, it removes independent agency from Āsiyah – and, indeed, negates the entire point of her being praised in the Qur'ān, because one can hardly be credited for a genetic tendency. Secondly, it emphasizes a tribalistic view of religion whereby spiritual status is inherited, which is in contrast to the Qur'ānic message that all people are responsible for their own souls.

- c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.
 - d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.
 - e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal.
 - f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or familial).
 - g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent.
 - h) The *ḥijāb* and female chastity are of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized.
 - i) Physical desires are experienced by men, not women ('Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love').
3. Is 'orthodox' religious practice equivalent to 'male' religious practice, and, if so, can females freely participate in it? Is sacred history discussed in terms of the feminine experience, such as childbirth?
 4. Did the the 'Four Books' preferentially canonize a specific set of ideas about women as 'orthodox'? And, do the Four Books communicate a consistent set of ideas, or is there variance between them?
 5. In what ways have pre-Islamic influences (such as the Bible) and post-Prophetic influences (such as jurisprudential discourse) entered the *ḥadīth* corpus through the portrayals of these women?
 6. How are the portrayals of women used to delineate a distinct Shī'ī identity or identities?
 7. Was Imām 'Alī a misogynist?

The concluding section of each chapter will discuss these questions through the paradigm of the two main inquiries of ideological question: 'What is the subtext?' and 'Whose interests are being served?', with a special focus on whether the subtext of the narrations in that chapter support or oppose the separate-but-equal ideology. A discussion of the third question – 'What does this mean today?' – will complete each chapter.

What is this thesis *not* doing? To clarify, this thesis is *not* trying to determine which narrations are authentic, or distill what the 'real' Prophetic

teachings about women in Islam were. This is a thesis about sacred narrative, *not* history, and how the subtext of sacred narrative fits into contemporary dialogue about women in Shī'ism. Therefore, a discussion of leading or exciting female figures in Islamic history (such as Sayyidah al-Ḥurrah, a 15th-16th century queen and pirate) – while interesting – is outside the scope of this work.¹⁶¹ This thesis will *not* explore topics such as whether or not these stories of ancient sacred women were relevant to the 'ordinary' woman, daily life in the mediaeval Islamic world, or how rural/urban differences affected values in the Islamic world. However, in the penultimate chapter, using secondary literature, the cultural norms endorsed by some (but not all) of these narrations will be compared to cultural norms which were thought to have entered Islamic thought via Islamic Iraq, to postulate that the Shī'ī *aḥādīth* which were canonized as 'orthodox' preferentially selected for restrictive cultural norms about women, and codified them as divinely sanctioned values, some of which which have been integrated into today's separate-but-equal theory.

1.3.2 Chapters

The chapters have been arranged by individual women. This is, firstly, for ease of use for the researcher who is interested in learning more about a specific woman, such as Eve. Secondly, it is because individual figures reflect significantly different cultural/religious influences and concerns, and oftentimes represent a single theme. While this work does not address the question of whether these figures were real human beings in a historical sense, the chapters are arranged chronologically with respect to the chronology they appear in in the *aḥādīth* as well as the views of Biblical scholars about what eras they are thought to have lived in. This is out of human interest and has no bearing on the research itself. Chapter 7 will take a different approach, in that it will examine how the ideas discussed in the previous chapters play out in the portrayals of women in two seminal but chronologically distant Shī'ī texts: *Nahj*

¹⁶¹ A reader who is interested in this subject might consult Fatima Mernissi's *Forgotten Queens of Islam* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997) for an excellent discussion of prominent female leaders in the Islamic world. Regarding Sayyidah al-Ḥurrah, see Farhad Daftary, 'Sayyida Hurra: The Ismā'īlī Sulayhid Queen of Yemen', in Gavin R. G. Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: Macmillan,., 1998), 117-130.

al-Balāghah (c. 400 AH) and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* (the earliest Shīʿī text, compiled c. 100 AH with the possibility of accretions) although these two texts do not discuss pre-Islamic women specifically. Because the narrations in the previous chapters bring up the persistent question of whether Imām ʿAlī was a misogynist, these books will be considered because both focus on Imām ʿAlī.

To summarize, my main arguments throughout this work will be: (a) the portrayal of women in these *aḥādīth* does not support the contemporary separate-but-equal ideology, suggesting that the separate-but-equal ideology – although popular today – is not really grounded in Shīʿī *aḥādīth*; (b) through a process of intertextuality, competing cultural and religious values were integrated into Shīʿī *aḥādīth* through the medium of ancient sacred stories; and (c) the variety of portrayals of women in these *aḥādīth* indicate a struggle for the ownership and negotiation of Shīʿī orthodoxy – that is, which religious/cultural values would be determined as ‘orthodox’; the preferential status eventually given to *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faḡīh* (in particular, as will be shown) resulted in the canonization of a specific set of values about women.

The chapters vary in length due to the number of narrations about each figure. For instance, there are many narrations on Eve, and not so many on Bilqīs. The subsequent chapter will begin with the primal woman who is often considered as the archetype for womanhood – that is, Eve.

Chapter 2: The Shī'ī Selves of Eve

2.1. Introduction¹⁶²

While the Qur'ān does not portray Eve and Adam as archetypes for woman and man, or use them to assign gender roles, many Shī'ī and Sunnī narrations do. Studies on Sunnī narrations about Eve have concluded that the portrayal of Eve is overwhelmingly misogynistic, and the few studies on Shī'ī narrations of Eve have mostly begun with that as an axiom.¹⁶³ This chapter, therefore, offers a unique contribution to knowledge by presenting a more detailed analysis of Shī'ī narrations on women, particularly with respect to the subtexts of the narrations and intertextuality. It also presents a picture of Eve *other* than one which is wholly misogynistic, although misogyny does occur.

In fact, as this chapter will show, the Shī'ī narrations about Eve are diverse, and represent a mixture of pre-Islamic and post-Prophetic influences as

¹⁶² The title of this chapter is taken from the dissertation *Imagining the Primal Woman: Islamic Selves of Eve* by Catherine Bronson.

¹⁶³ For instance, see Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, 'Eve: Islamic Image of Woman', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1982), pp. 135-144; D. A. Spellberg, 'Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood', in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 28 (1996), pp. 305-324; Michael Pregill, 'Isrā'īliyyāt, myth, and pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the fall of Adam and Eve', in *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam*, vol. 34 (2008), pp. 215-284; Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, pp. 28-38; Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 15-35. Brannon Wheeler also suggests that there is a connection between ritual purification laws and the portrayals of Adam and Eve in Sunnī narrations, particularly with respect to views regarding the genitalia. See Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 40-57. Also *Majmā' al-Bayan Ṭabrisī* (or Ṭabarī) did not confine himself to Shī'ī narratives. Anyway, the presence of a *ḥadīth* within a *tafsīr* written by a Shī'ī does not mean that the *ḥadīth* actually exists within the Shī'ī *ḥadīth* corpus, since Shī'ī scholars frequently give Sunnī *aḥādīth* consideration. See Bruce Fudge, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Al-Ṭabrisī and the craft of commentary* (New York: Routledge, 2011) (phrase borrowed from page 7).

This view, no doubt, influenced Karen Ruffle when she published her recent article maintaining that the Shī'ī Eve is guilty of violating the purity of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' by 'making the tree bleed' – even though the article is primarily based on ideas in Sunnī narrations which do not have a counterpart in Shī'ī narrations. However, it is possible that Ruffle took this idea from Mary Thurlkill. See Section 2.3.2 for a more detailed discussion of her argument. Karen Ruffle, 'An Even Better Creation: The Role of Adam and Eve in Shi'i Narratives about Fatimah al-Zahra', in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 81, no. 3 (September 2013), pp. 791-819. <<http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/content/81/3/791.full.pdf+html>>. Accessed 10 October 2013. A contrasting Shī'ī narration which does not describe pregnancy as a curse can be found in *Bihār* (citing *al-Khiṣāl*, compiled by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq), which reads: 'Indeed, Allah, the Blessed and High, gave the woman the patience of ten men; and when she is pregnant, he increases it with the power of ten other men.' Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār al-Jāmi'ah li-Durar Akhbār al-A'immat al-Athār*, 110 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Wafā', 1983), vol. 100, p. 241, no. 2-4.

well as beliefs about the nature of women. Unsurprisingly, there are frequent allusions to Genesis. The diversity of and contradictions between these narrations indicates that these narrations came from different sources and represented different interests; that is, they cannot all be traced to the same source, and hence cannot all be considered authentic. Additionally, because the Middle East was particularly rich with pre-Islamic beliefs about Eve, many of these narrations serve as a vehicle to introduce a variety of pre-Islamic (and post-Prophetic) assumptions about Eve, the nature of woman, and gender roles into the Shīʿī corpus; this is of interest both with respect to studies of Shīʿism as well as the Middle East itself.

These narrations easily fall into two categories: those which are portray women as subservient, weaker, or lesser; and those which portray women and men on an equal footing. (In contrast, as will be seen, in most of the other chapters, the narrations fit into one or the other categories, but are not split between both.) The first category, which is titled here, ‘Canonizing patriarchy’, emphasises harsh and restrictive patriarchal norms. These are the narrations that promote an essential hierarchy between woman and man, and justify the need for male authority and male guardianship. While these narrations were not intentionally selected for these criteria, these narrations are the ones that support the separate-but-equal ideology, and are also the ones which are most represented in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh*. Some of these narrations could be construed as misogynistic. The next two categories are described as ‘counter-narratives’; in these narrations, Eve and Adam are presented as partners who are equally involved in sacred history. These narrations are not misogynistic. The first counter-narrative consists of narrations with uniquely Shīʿī themes, such as *wilāyah*, while the second counter-narrative consists of narrations which allude to ancient beliefs (such as the ritual significance of the Persian calendar) but which do not support uniquely Shīʿī themes. Lastly, the uniquely Islamic set of narrations on the first *hajj* will be discussed on its own because the portrayals of the first *hajj* represent both the patriarchal and equitable approach. Given the diversity of portrayals of the nature and role of women, one question they introduce is why one set of presumptions about women was

accepted over the other; this question will be explored in the conclusion under ‘whose interests do these narrations serve?’

2.1.2 Overview of the narrations about Eve

Among the Four Books, there are approximately sixteen distinct narrations with substantial narrative content about Eve; these narrations are found in *al-Kāfī* (8 narrations), *Man Lā Yahḍuruhu al-Faqīh* (7 narrations), and *Tahdhīb al-Ahkām* (1 narration). Since the focus of *al-Faqīh* is on jurisprudence, the number of narrations on Eve is surprising, and this foreshadows the employment of Eve in jurisprudential arguments. In contrast, *Biḥār al-Anwār* contains about 50 narrations with substantial narrative content on Eve (including the *wilāyah* and anti-*wilāyah* narrations). *Biḥār* contains several themes not found in the Four Books such as lengthy etymologies and a discussion of the Persian calendar. It also contains lengthier versions of narrations in the Four Books. There are also a number of narrations topics of human interest, such as the height of Adam and Eve,¹⁶⁴ what Adam and Eve wore,¹⁶⁵ or how their children – being brothers and sisters – procreated;¹⁶⁶ this type of narration is also found in Sunnī collections, although some of details are different. However, because these narrations in do not convey value judgments about the nature of women, they will not be discussed here.

2.1.3 Creation from-a-rib?

Within the canonical Sunnī six books (*al-ṣiḥaḥ al-sittah*), there are two narrations of particular significance about Eve. One describes women as essentially ‘crooked’ or ‘bent’, the implication being that this is because Eve was created from a rib (‘A woman is like a rib – if you try to straighten her, you will break her; and if you would benefit from her, benefit from her while she still has

¹⁶⁴ For instance, this is discussed in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 324; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 24.

¹⁶⁵ For instance, it is mentioned that Eve was clad in her hair (al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 9, p. 335). It would not have occurred to me that this might be relevant, had I not once heard a popular Shī‘ī preacher insist that Eve wore *ḥijāb*, because the grandmother of the prophets would not have done otherwise. This view reflects the focus on the *ḥijāb* in the separate-but-equal ideology but not what is actually found in Shī‘ī narrations.

¹⁶⁶ See al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, pp. 225 & 462 for conflicting views on this topic.

crookedness').¹⁶⁷ The other says that, were it not for Eve, women would not betray their husbands; presumably, this is an allusion to the belief that Eve disobeyed her husband in eating from the tree ('Were it not for Banī Isrā'īl, meat would not spoil; and were it not for Eve, no woman would betray her husband').¹⁶⁸ On account of their chains of narration, these two particular narrations can be dismissed in the Shī'ī tradition as *isrā'iliyāt*.¹⁶⁹ These ideas are also challenged within the contemporary Sunnī tradition on the grounds that they thematically differ from the Qur'ānic account of creation.¹⁷⁰ The narration about women betraying their husbands does not appear here at all; in the Shī'ī tradition, the possibility of uxorial infidelity of the mothers of the prophets is not considered. However, the narration that a woman is 'crooked' is attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq through a different chain of narration in *al-Kāfi*, and periodic allusions to the 'crookedness' of women persist.¹⁷¹ (Interestingly, in the version

¹⁶⁷ Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9 vols. (n.p.: Dar al-Fikr li-al-Tabā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawḍī', 1981/1401 AH), vol. 6, p. 145.

¹⁶⁸ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, p. 103.

¹⁶⁹ 'Abd al-Hadl al-Fadli dismisses Abū Hurayrah as a fabricator of *ḥadīth*; today he is seen as a major source of *isrā'iliyāt*. Of course, not all versions of this *ḥadīth* in Sunnī sources are from him, but he is primary narrator of them in the major sources. 'Abd al-Hadl al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadīth*, pp. 156-159. Fatima Mernissi also suggests that Abū Hurayrah is a source of spurious, misogynistic *ḥadīth*, and critiques him for narrating too many *ḥadīth*, for which he was reportedly criticized by 'Umar. However, some of her critiques of him are uniquely her own. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, pp. 71-73 & 79-81. 'Alī Shari'atī argues that the belief that woman was created from a rib is due to a mistranslation into Persian of the word 'rib' in Arabic which also means 'nature' or 'disposition'; however, it is hard to see how such an explanation would account for the presence of such narrations in Arabic-language collections. (It is also not clear which word Shari'atī has in mind since these narrations literally speak of physical ribs.) Ali Shariati, *Man in Islam*, trans. F. Marjani (North Haledon, N. J.: Islamic Publications International, 2005), pp. 4-5.

¹⁷⁰ That is to say, the Qur'ānic verse is more similar to Genesis 1:27, which speaks of the creation of the male and the female, than Genesis 2:19-25, which speaks of the creation of the female *from* the male, and is often (although not always) interpreted to mean the creation of the female *for* the male. Translating the Qur'ānic verse about the creation of Adam and Eve is, however, an exercise in interpretation itself, since the pronoun *min* in it can be interpreted to mean that Eve was created 'of the same kind' as Adam or that Eve was created 'from' Adam. A literal translation would be: 'O people! Fear your Lord who created you (all) from one soul, and created of the same kind/from it its mate; and spread from those two many men and women...' (Qur'ān 4:1).

¹⁷¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 513, no. 1. It is also related that Abraham complained to Allah about Sārah's bad temper, so Allah revealed to him that a woman is like a bent rib, and if he tries to straighten it [the rib], he will break it; but if he lets it be, he will benefit from it; and to be patient over her. This is the same wording that Abū Hurayrah uses, except that the pronoun is masculine and refers to the rib (instead of being feminine and referring to the woman), and it is in a different context. This will be discussed more in Chapter 3. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 513, no. 2. Allusions to the bent rib are also found in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 513; al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḥrī*, vol. 3, p. 440; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 97, no. 6 (citing *Tafsīr al-Qummi*).

in *al-Faḡīh*, the narrator doubts whether the Prophet really said this.)¹⁷² This is one of several examples throughout this work where Sunnī narrations that are apparently *isrāʿīlyāt* and which are related from transmitters deemed unacceptable in the Shīʿī tradition are nonetheless ascribed to the Imāms through different chains of narration.

The significance of these *aḥādīth* is explained well by Hibba Abugideiri, author of ‘Hagar: A Historical Model for “Gender Jihad”’:

Indeed, the ‘crooked bone’ *ḥadīth*, found in the authentic collection of Bukhārī, raises a sensitive and even controversial question about those *aḥādīth* deemed ‘genuine; that clearly contradict the Qurʾanic intent of gender equality. Thus, instead of starting with a flawed female prototype, humanity descends from a Qurʾanically vindicated Eve who is Adam’s gender equal by virtue of a gender-neutral soul that God breathes into all humanity equally. Eve is thus physically and spiritually perfected, like Adam, to become God’s vicegerent.¹⁷³

This leads to the question of whether the idea that Eve was created from Adam’s rib is supported by Shīʿī narrations. This question ties directly into the question of whether God has established a gender hierarchy in creation; as a Pakistani-American Islamic theologian, Riffat Hassan, says:

There is also a *ḥadīth* in *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 4, p. 332 in which the *shayṭān* approaches Eve while she is expecting and warns her that if she does not name the child ‘Abd al-Ḥārith, it will die. In the variant in *Tirmidhī*, Adam and Eve do this, and the child lives; in the variant in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 242, they do not this, and the child dies. Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* 13 vols. (n.p.: n.d.), vol. 4, p. 332. Apart from calling upon the human fear of losing a child, the import of this *ḥadīth* is not clear, although Spellberg suggests the name ‘Abd al-Ḥārith’ had some mediaeval significance. Denise Spellberg, ‘The Role of Medieval Islamic Religio-Political Sources in Shaping the Modern Debate on Gender’ in *Beyond the Exotic: Women’s Histories in Islamic Societies*, ed. Amira El Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), pp. 3-14.

¹⁷² al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḡīh*, vol. 3, p. 440, no. 4527, which reads: ‘Indeed, Ibrāhīm, the Friend of the Merciful, peace be upon him, complained to Allah, the Exalted and Mighty, about the behaviour (*khulq*) of Sārah. So Allah, the Exalted and Mighty, revealed to him that the example of a woman is like the example of a rib – if you straighten it you will break it, and if you leave it you will enjoy it. I [the speaker] said, “Who said this?” And so he [the Imām] grew angry; then he said: “These are, by Allah, the words of the Messenger of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family.”’

¹⁷³ Hibba Abugideiri, ‘Hagar: A Historical Model for “Gender Jihad”’, in *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, John L. Esposito (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 91.

If man and woman have been created equal by God, who is believed to be the ultimate arbiter of value, then they cannot become unequal, essentially, at a subsequent time [...]. On the other hand, if man and woman have been created unequal by God, then they cannot become equal, essentially, at a subsequent time.¹⁷⁴

As it happens, however, this situation is more complicated here, since the view that Eve was *not* created from Adam's rib is still used to place woman in a lesser creational position. In any case, the Shī'ī narrations both support and oppose the idea that Eve was created from Adam's rib. While the majority of these narrations refer to Eve's creation from Adam's rib, the presence of a strong counter-narration in *al-Faqīh* introduces the possibility that the narrations about Eve's creation from a rib are inauthentic or were said under *taqīyyah*. Both al-Ṣadūq and al-Majlisī synthesise these two sets of narrations to suggest that Eve could have been created from the clay that was leftover from the creation of Adam's rib – an interpretation which carries the same implications of Eve's creation from Adam's rib, but which solves the technical problem.¹⁷⁵ It should be noted, however, that there is a common view that the creation-from-a-rib narrations are inauthentic and not to be given priority.¹⁷⁶

The decision of what creation story to accept hinges on the interpretation of Qur'ān 4:1, possible translations of which are:

O people! Be conscious of your Lord, who created you from a single soul (*nafs*); and created of the same kind its mate (*zawjahā*); and scattered from them many men and women [...].

¹⁷⁴ Riffat Hassan, *Equal before Allah? Woman-man equality in the Islamic tradition*, in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, vol. 17, no. 2 (January-May 1987)

<http://globalwebpost.com/farooqm/study_res/islam/gender/equal_riffat.html>, pp. 6-7. Accessed 20 July 2015.

¹⁷⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, pp. 100, 116, 218; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 381.

¹⁷⁶ Osman notes that the classical commentator Ḥuwayzī (11th-12th century) mentions that narrations saying Eve was created from a rib are weak, and tends to be rejected by commentators of modern Shī'ī *ḥadīth* compilations. She also suggests that his commentary contains more rib narrations than that of 'Ayyāshī (10th century) because it was compiled at a later date (that is, after more spurious narrations had developed). Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunnah*, pp. 17, 27.

O people! Be conscious of your Lord, who created you from a single person (*nafs*); and created from that person that person's mate (*zawjahā*); and scattered from them many men and women [...].

Neither *nafs* nor *zawj* specifies 'male' or 'female'; however, *zawj* is generally assumed to refer to the creation of the female, and *nafs* the male. Common interpretations are that Allah created Adam and Eve of the same type, or that Allah created Eve from Adam's rib. The difference between interpretations rests on the viewing *min* as an indicator of type, or literally meaning 'from'.¹⁷⁷

Lastly, it should be noted that this chapter will call on several concepts outlined in the previous chapter – such as the concept of the man as 'demigod', the patriarchal bargain, what is meant by an ideology, and what is meant by orthodoxy – and the reader is encouraged to refer back to that section as necessary. This chapter will also presume that the reader is familiar with the Qur'ānic account of Eve and Adam, which largely addresses Eve and Adam simultaneously (using the dual pronoun), and does not present Eve as the one who was deceived by the *shaytān*, as being more gullible than Adam, or as having any greater responsibility than Adam for the Fall. Hence, in the Qur'ān, women are not cursed through having to endure pain in childbirth or being subjected to the authority of a husband. Additionally, the Shī'ī belief that the foremothers *and* forefathers of the Imāms must be 'purified' limits the amount of negativity that can be directed towards Eve.

2.2 Canonizing patriarchy

This section will explore the narrations that present a creational gender hierarchy between woman and man, and present the woman as absent or inferior. These narrations largely communicate the assumptions about women

¹⁷⁷ Amina Wadud has a detailed explanation of this in *Quran and Woman*, pp. 15-28. See also Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, pp. 16-22. The modern exegete 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī favours the view that they are 'of the same type'; see *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, verse 4:1. Because of the canonical narrations in the Sunnī tradition indicating that Eve was created from Adam's rib, this has been the dominant view in the Sunnī tradition, although nowadays some thinkers have questioned this view. See Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing and Valarie H. Ziegler (eds.), *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 371-482.

that have been adopted by the separate-but-equal ideology and jurisprudential discourse.

2.2.1 Creation not-from-a-rib

The most 'normative' narrative of Eve's creation is the one which says she was not created from Adam's rib. This is because of its inclusion in *al-Faqīh* as well as its overt rejection of the Sunnī view, thereby delineating Shī'ī belief and identity in a cosmopolitan environment. One might expect this narration to be more favourable to women than the narrations saying that Eve was created from a rib; however, instead, this narration presents man as the sole actor.

This narration warrants closer scrutiny for additional reasons. First, it is the only narration in the Four Books to directly oppose the view that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Additionally, it suggests the nature of both inter-faith and intra-faith debates in the classical era. Since this particular narration both rejects the idea that Eve was created from Adam's rib, and says that it was a commonly held view among Muslims, it suggests a strong influence of this idea among Muslims. Finally, although diverging from the Judaeo-Christian (and Sunnī) tradition, it nonetheless integrates a perception of equivalency between marriage and slavery for women in the canon.

The narration begins with Zurārah, a prominent companion of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, asking al-Ṣādiq how Eve was created. Zurārah relates:

It was said to him [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: 'People among us [i.e. the Shī'ah] are saying, "Indeed, Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, created Eve from Adam's shortest left rib."'

So he [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: 'May Allah be glorified and exalted above that enormous claim! Does the one who says this say that Allah, the Blessed and High, did not have the capability to create a wife for Adam in any way other than from his rib? They are making a way for the disgraceful theological debater to

argue [against us] theologically by saying, “Indeed, Adam married part of himself” – if she were created from his rib [...].¹⁷⁸

With its legalistic approach, the theological argument here has a distinctly Islamic flavour. Theoretical and implausible scenarios are often used in jurisprudence to define the boundaries of a subject. Here, the argument is technically correct: Eve could not have been created from Adam, or else the marriage would have, as a boundary condition (marrying yourself), been *ḥarām*; however, what is of more pertinence is that a legalistic approach is used to answer a theological question.¹⁷⁹

The narration then continues by saying that when Allah willed to create Eve, He first cast sleep over Adam; this is also found in the second Genesis but not the Qur’ānic account. Then, He created Eve in a hollow between Adam’s haunches so that woman would follow man;¹⁸⁰ the implications here are not any different than from Eve being created from Adam’s rib, although the *sharī‘ah* objection is resolved. Amazed, Adam asks Allah what this wondrous creation is, and Allah replies, ‘This is my slave (*amatī*), Eve. Do you wish her to be with you, to keep you company, to speak with you, and to follow your command?’

Then, the narration departs from the Genesis narrative by re-enacting what amounts to an ‘Abbāsīd-style slave-wife barter; this sudden shift introduces the possibility of an interpolation of material from different sources.¹⁸¹ While, in classic Islamic literature, the word ‘slave’ (*‘abd*) is used for ‘human’ to denote the human’s position as a slave of Allah, the dialogue here suggests that the characterization of Eve as ‘Allah’s slave’ is meant in a more earthly sense. At this point, the narration tends towards anthropomorphism. Allah hints to Adam that he should seek Eve’s hand in marriage because she is good for him,

¹⁷⁸ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 379, no. 4336.

¹⁷⁹ Elsewhere in *Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh*, al-Ṣādūq reiterates this argument to emphasise that Eve could not have been created from Adam’s rib; he also uses a similar argument to reject the (apparently popular) notion that the date palm was created from Adam, or else Adam would be eating a piece of himself every time he ate a date. al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 327.

¹⁸⁰ This seems to be in opposition to Genesis 2:24 (‘That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh’).

¹⁸¹ Kecia Ali discusses the development of this paradigm in *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Ḥadīth and Jurisprudence*, pp. 35-53.

and so that she can fulfil his desires; the focus is only on Adam's desires, and what Adam would like. Adam then asks Allah for permission to marry Eve, and Adam and Allah negotiate the bride-price (*mahr*). Allah agrees to marry Eve to Adam on the condition that Adam teach her about the faith. Eve obediently becomes Adam's wife, and the narration concludes with an explanation of why men approach women for marriage, rather than vice versa – a curious generalization, given that the Prophet's first wife proposed to him.

This narration looks only at Adam's wishes. Eve's preferences are not considered: Eve exists to serve him, and has been pre-programmed to obey him. It calls to mind I Corinthians 11:8-9: 'For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man' (I Corinthians 11:8-9). Not once is Eve asked whether she consents to the marriage, or whether she has any opinion about it at all; Adam, however, is extremely enthusiastic. This androcentric approach towards marriage is consistent with the treatment of the male as normative in classical Islamic discourse, wherein marriage is outlined as a contract which is of personal benefit to the male; in return, the woman gives up freedoms and receives financial compensation.¹⁸² In sum, the narration strongly supports the view that women are extensions of their male relatives rather than independent agents; it also portrays Adam as the only one with physical desires.

Another important point in this narration is that Adam is presented as the source of knowledge, and Eve as the learner. Since the Qur'ān says that Adam was taught the Names,¹⁸³ and Eve – in this narration – had just been created, it would be reasonable to presume that Adam did in fact have more knowledge than Eve. However, since this narrative presents itself as a paradigm for male-female relations (for instance, the woman being created to follow the man), it reinforces the assumption that knowledge is under the control of men, who may choose whether or not women should be educated. (This assumption is reiterated in Chapter 4 in the discussion on whether or not men should teach

¹⁸² Of course, other Islamic sources, including the Qur'ān, discuss marriage as more than a contract; however, this is the *fiqh* approach.

¹⁸³ This is in contrast to the Genesis narrative where Adam formulates the names himself rather than being taught them.

their womenfolk to read.) It also puts forward a power dynamic whereby the man teaches his wife; this calls to mind 1 Corinthians 14:35 which advises women to learn from their husbands. The idea that men are the gatekeepers of knowledge, which they can provide or restrict, is definitely found in contemporaneous material,¹⁸⁴ but differs from what is thought to be true about the practice of the Prophet and the tradition of educated women in classical Islamic civilization (including notable women in the Shī'ī tradition).¹⁸⁵

In her study on women in the Shī'ī view of the Qur'ān and *sunnah*, Rawand Osman explains two additional ways in which this narration diverges from the Qur'ān. First, it presents Iust as being introduced to Adam first, whereas the Qur'ān says that Adam and Eve came to understand their nakedness together after they ate from the forbidden tree. Second, it places Adam in the garden first, whereas the Qur'ān tells Adam and Eve to enter the garden together. She also notes that it conflicts with the interpretation of '*nafsin wāḥidatin*' in Qur'ān 4:1 (mentioned in Section 2.1.3) referring to the creation of two spouses 'of the same type' because it sets up a hierarchy and intrinsic differences between Adam and Eve.

In sum, in its sharp rejection of the Sunnī tradition and delineation of Shī'ī identity, this narration sends strong, unstated messages about the nature and role of women. This narration also reinforces several premises of the 'separate-but-equal' ideology, such as (a) lack of female agency (Eve's passivity), (b) the intellectual superiority of men (Adam's knowledge), (c) the absence of female desires (desires are given to Adam), and (d) male authority is necessary in a marriage (Eve is created to obey Adam). It strongly reflects the 'demigod' hierarchy. It also puts divine sanction on a stylized model of

¹⁸⁴ For instance, a *ḥadīth* found in a number of variants in both Sunnī and Shī'ī books, advises men to teach girls Sūrat al-Nūr but not Sūrat Yūsuf, not to teach them to read or write, and to confine them to chambers away from the road in order to protect their chastity. al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, who relates it from 'Ā'ishah, calls this a *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*, although it should be observed that 'Ā'ishah was neither unlearned nor confined herself to chambers away from the road. al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 396; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 516, no. 2; al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḥḥ*, vol. 1, p. 374, no. 1089; et al. This *ḥadīth* obviously communicates the unspoken assumption that men control knowledge for women. It is also in contrast to what is reported about attitudes about female literacy in the Prophetic era, in that the Prophet is said to have encouraged his wives, and women in general, to learn to read and write. It will be discussed more in Chapter 4.

¹⁸⁵ See A. Nadwī, *Muḥaddithāt: The Women Scholars in Islam*.

courtship consisting of negotiation between men which is reflective of Arab custom but is by no means the only way that two people may come to marry. While Osman notes subtle contradictions with the Qur'ān, and there are some inconsistencies in the chain of narration, it is nonetheless strongly representative of a view of women that has been canonized in Shī'ism, and persists until today.¹⁸⁶

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Eve was not created from Adam's rib
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Faqīh</i> 3:380, no. 4336
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theological debates • Genesis • A custom of slave-marriage • Courtship as an arrangement between men
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Strongly reinforces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are intellectually superior to women on a creational level. • Male authority is natural in a marriage; • 'Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love'
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man is the actor and woman is passive • 'Demi-god' hierarchy with man as the interlocutor for woman before God • Man has knowledge and may teach or not teach a woman • Woman is created to keep man company and to obey him • A stylized model of courtship whereby the groom-to-be approaches the woman's guardian and negotiates with her for her hand while the woman is not involved or consulted
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagrees with Qur'ānic chronology of Eve and Adam entering the Garden • Disagrees with the interpretation of Qur'ān 4:1 as referring to the creation of two souls of the same type

¹⁸⁶ The narration in *al-Faqīh* does not have a full chain of narration (as is not uncommon), and it is simply attributed to Zurārah; however, al-Ṣādūq also relates it in *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi*, where he gives a full chain; according to ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, the commentator on this work, one of the narrators (Ibn Nawbah), who relates it from Zurārah, is unknown (i.e. unmentioned in the biographical works). al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 379, fn. 2.

2.2.2 Woman's zeal is for man

A narration strand saying that 'woman's zeal is for man' has three variants in *al-Kāfī* and is found in other sources as well. Unlike the above, however, it implies that Eve was created from Adam's rib.

Its main premise is that, because Adam was created from the land, man's zeal (*himmah*)¹⁸⁷ is for the land (such as in farming or kingship); whereas because Eve was created from Adam, woman's zeal is for man. A variant attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq reads:¹⁸⁸

Allah created Adam from water and clay, so the zeal of Adam is in water and clay; and He created Eve from Adam, so the zeal of women is for men – so protect them in the houses.¹⁸⁹

A second, harsher variant, attributed to Imām 'Alī, reads:

Man was created from the earth, and his zeal is for the land.
Woman was created from man, and her zeal is for men – imprison your women, O men.¹⁹⁰

The ascription of the more severe version of this narration to Imām 'Alī is in keeping with the ascription of misogynistic and restrictive statements about women towards him; ironically, this is a more positive alternative reading of a sermon in *Nahj al-Balāghah* on women (see Chapter 7).¹⁹¹ Notably, a variant of

¹⁸⁷ A cognate word for *himmah* ('desire', 'zeal') is used in the Qur'ān for Zulaykhā desiring Yūsuf (*laqad hammat bihi, wa hamma bihā law lā ra'ā burhān rabbīhi*, Qur'ān 12:24), and both the context and the word suggest that it is referring primarily to physical desires, although it would not necessarily exclude psychological or emotional desires. A corresponding discussion of 'desires' in Genesis is taken to mean different types of desires by different interpreters can be found in 'Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered', Irvin A. Busenitz, *Grace Theological Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1986), pp. 203-12.

¹⁸⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 337, no. 3, 4 & 6; there are a couple variants but a full variant is '*inna Allāha khalaqa Ādam min al-mā' wa al-ṭīn fa-himmatu ibn Ādam fī al-mā' wa al-ṭīn wa khalaqa Hawwā' min Ādam fa-himmat al-nisā' fī al-rijāl faḥbisūhunna fī al-buyūl*'. The fabricating of Adam from water and clay is mentioned in the Qur'ān as well as other narrations, although in the Qur'ān it presented as the fabricating of the human form in general and not specifically Adam as opposed to Eve.

¹⁸⁹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 337, no. 4.

¹⁹⁰ '*Ḥbisū nisā'akum ya ma'āshir al-rijāl*'. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 337, no. 6. Shaykh al-Ṣādūq also mentions the narration on 'imprisoning' women in '*Ilal al-Sharā'i*'.

¹⁹¹ al-Sharīf al-Rādī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), sermon no. 153: *inna al-nisā' himmahumma zinat al-hayāt al-dunyā wa al-fasādu fihā*.

this narration in *Biḥār* passed on by a 12th century scholar from Kāshān (Iran) *omits* the instruction to confine women, and simply states women’s interest in men and men’s interest in the land as a fact.¹⁹²

From the outset, it should be noted that this narration does not stand up to the test of common sense. The idea that only women are interested in men, and not vice versa, is absurd (although the idea that women who are dependent on men for their survival may take more interest in retaining their menfolk is not farfetched). When discussing this narration, Rawand Osman notes the extensive role of women in agricultural societies, and that the Qur’ān mentions the mutual bond that spouses have rather than mentioning one gender only.¹⁹³ This is, of course, leaving aside the question of whether the idea of Eve being created from a rib should be accepted in the first place.

The association of woman with man, and man with the land, is also found in Genesis – specifically:

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

[...] Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you.”

¹⁷ To Adam he said...

“Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat food from it

all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow

¹⁹² This narration is in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 113, no. 35 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī).

¹⁹³ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunnah*, pp. 28-29.

you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:16-19, NIV).¹⁹⁴

However, rather than merely repeating the messages about gender found in Genesis, this short narration uses that frame to codify different cultural norms. First, it presents the male as normative and the female as the exception by excluding Eve from the process of creation mentioned in the Qur’ān: while the Qur’ān says that ‘human beings’ (*insān*) were created from clay,¹⁹⁵ here, that is restricted to ‘mankind’. It assumes that men have ownership rights over women, and can and should control them, to the degree that ‘imprisoning’ them is acceptable; this is similar to the narration advising men not to allow their women to become literate (see Chapter 4). Obviously, this narration promotes women’s seclusion. Since al-Kulaynī included this narration in the chapter on encouraging women to be married as soon as they reach physical maturity,¹⁹⁶ he apparently took ‘homes’ to mean ‘husbands’, and therefore this narration connects marriage with restrictions on women’s movement. According to this view, marriage ‘protects’ a woman by physically restraining her; this is in

¹⁹⁴ Some might argue that this is consistent with the Qur’ān, since in the Qur’ān, in telling Adam to stay away from the forbidden tree, Allah tells Adam that in the Garden, ‘There is [enough] that you would not feel hunger, nor be naked; that you would not thirst in it, nor feel the sun’ (20:118-119), with the implication that he would suffer from working the land if he leaves the Garden. However, firstly, the Qur’ānic description is not gendered; and, second and more important here, it does not pinpoint Eve as being the one whose desire will be for her husband, nor does it present that as a curse; instead, the Qur’ān mentions the mutual ‘love and mercy’ between spouses as one of the signs of the divine. Additionally, the end of this passage is more positive, concluding ‘Go down from it [the Garden]...and whoever follows My guidance will neither stray nor suffer’ (20:123).

¹⁹⁵ For instance, in Qur’ān 55:14, *khalāqa al-insān min ṣaḥālin ka al-fakhkhār*.

¹⁹⁶ As an interesting personal anecdote, I was once interviewed for a popular religious magazine in Iraq, and apparently the interviewer was unsatisfied with my answers, because when he printed the interview, he quoted me as saying that, in Islam, women are more respected than in the West, because Islam protects women by keeping them inside their husbands’ homes. (In fact, I had said nothing about women in Islam or the West at all.)

contrast to the common view that a married man or woman can be ‘protected’ (*muḥṣin, muḥṣinah*) from sin due to having access to a spouse.¹⁹⁷

This narration reflects a cultural belief that women will not control themselves, and so men must enforce their chastity. (The same idea is implied in narrations on *ghīrah* in Chapter 3.) It agrees with a sentiment found in a lengthy (and deeply questionable) narration relating a conversation between Imām ‘Alī and a Syrian man (identified as the ‘Shāmī’), in which they discuss many creational issues, including Eve; in the relevant part, the Shāmī asks, ‘What four things never get satiated?’, and the Imām replies, ‘The earth from water, the female from the male, the eye from looking, and the knowledgeable from knowledge.’¹⁹⁸ It also accords with other Shī‘ī narrations about women’s desires, as well as the famous ‘nine parts of desire’ narration.¹⁹⁹ Hence, it challenges the portrayal of woman as disinterested found in the creation-from-a-rib narration and the separate-but-equal ideology.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Woman’s zeal is for man
Source(s)	• <i>al-Kāfī</i> 5:337, no. 3, 4, and 6

¹⁹⁷ *Muḥṣinah* has symbolic and also *sharī‘ah* implications, in that it is the word used when discussing punishment for adultery, the idea being that a *muḥṣin* or a *muḥṣinah* has less of an excuse for adultery and so is subject to a more severe punishment. As a side note, there is a *ḥadīth* in *Bihār* where someone asks whether a man in a temporary marriage is considered a *muḥṣin*, and the answer is no. *Bihār* vol. 76, p. 41, no. 21.

¹⁹⁸ *Bihār* vol. 10, p. 80. The content of the narration is an amalgamation of Judaic materials (including Genesis), jurisprudential rulings, and material found in *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* literature. It has a number of peculiarities, including but not limited to the assigning of creational consequences to people other than Eve and Adam; and it is reasonable to question its authenticity because its approach fits into the genre of *isrā’īliyyāt*. It should be noted that the narration also contains material that seems questionable from a Qur’ānic perspective. First, the narration describes Wednesday as a day of ill omen, whereas the Qur’ān opposes assigning superstitions to days (although al-Majlisī includes a number of narrations that do that). Second, it describes Adam’s descent to the ‘*wādī*’ of Sarandib (in Sri Lanka); apart from the fact that this conflicts with the other narrations that describe Adam’s descent to Mecca, Sarandib is a mountain, not a *wādī*. This is the only narration in this section to attribute creational consequences to people after Adam and Eve. The *ḥadīth* largely discusses aspects of the creation which the questioner deems essential and inalterable, including but, by far, not limited to his inquiries about gender and sexuality (including homosexuality and circumcision, the latter which will be discussed with reference to this narration in Chapter 3).

¹⁹⁹ It is related that Imām ‘Alī said: ‘Allah created ten parts of desire, and put nine parts in women and one part in men. If he had not put as much shyness in them as he did desire, each man would have had nine women hanging from him.’ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 338, no. 1. Dakake discusses narrations which say that, among the Shi’a, the ‘nine parts of desire’ were given to men instead of women (that is, that Shī‘ī women are naturally more inclined to be chaste), thereby delineating Shī‘ī identity on creational grounds. Maria Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, p. 230.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:116 no. 45 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah</i> 14:40 (citing al-Ṣādūq’s <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> and <i>‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i>) • Alternate version (without the instruction to confine women): <i>Biḥār</i> 11:113 no. 35 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbīyā’</i>)
Cultural/religious reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis • Arab/Semitic culture
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal • Female chastity is of paramount importance. <p>Conflicts with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bondmaids of love’
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are normative in creation and religious discourse • Men have ownership rights over women
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts with the metaphorical use of <i>muḥṣin/muḥṣinah</i> to refer to a person protected from sin by having access to a spouse

2.2.3 Jurisprudential differences between women and men

The next narration strand differs from the above in that, firstly, it is not found in the Four Books; and, secondly, it appears to be part of the genre of narrations which attribute jurisprudential rulings thought to be codified by later scholars back to the Prophet or other figures. It shows how some Muslims then – as today – saw jurisprudential rulings as absolute expressions of the divine will (as opposed to human efforts to arrive at the divine will), and built an ideology of gender overtop them.²⁰⁰

Proponents of the separate-but-equal ideology argue that differences between women and men in the *sharī‘ah* do not mean that a woman has

²⁰⁰ For instance, some lay Shi‘a will argue that because there is a ruling that a woman cannot be a *marja’*, this is proof that God wills for women not to be in authority positions (rather than looking at the source or backdrop of the ruling that woman cannot be a *marja’*).

intrinsically lower worth, or that these differences are unfair to women. This narration takes the opposite view and attributes them to an innate difference between Eve and Adam.²⁰¹ However, this narration is a travesty to polemicists and apologeticists. Recorded in *Bihār* in two different forms, it explains why women get the raw deal in some common *sharī'ah* rulings. It takes the form of a frame story where a man asks the Prophet questions, the Prophet replies, and the man responds with, 'You have spoken the truth, O Muḥammad (*ṣadaqta yā Muḥammad*)'. Both versions of this narration contain signs of integration of extra-Islamic material – one contains etymologies similar to other Hebraic-oriented narrations, and the other mentions that Iblīs was sent to Iṣfahān, suggesting regional tensions.²⁰² In some ways, the format and content of this type of frame story reflect the ancient Mesopotamia genre of disputations (discussions between two beings - animate or inanimate - about cosmogony or the world, in which the winner is declared at the end), and this is a possible parallel which could be explored in further works.²⁰³ Additionally, the speaker in the first narration is a Jew from Khaybar, while the speaker in the second is Yazīd ibn Salām (which may be an erroneous reference to 'Abdullah ibn Yazīd ibn Salām, a convert to Islam who was known for introducing *isrā'īliyyāt* into the tradition).²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Despite the tendency to prioritize rational argument over historical argument, beliefs about Eve still occasionally go beyond being an unspoken backdrop. For instance, in a lengthy contemporary Shī'ī explanation of why women should not hold political power, a lengthy *ḥadīth* similar to the one mentioned below is cited to argue that women should not hold political power because of how Eve was created from some of Adam (and hence women are deficient compared to men). He also cites a number of other narrations, including exclusively Sunnī narrations, which present Eve in an unfavourable light. See Ḥusayn al-Muntazirī, *Dirasat fī Wilayat al-Faqīh wa Fiqh al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah* (Qum: Markaz al-'Ālami li-al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyyah, 1408 AH), vol. 1, pp. 353-362.

²⁰² Stowasser mentions this in Sunnī narrations in *Woman in the Qur'an, Tradition, and Interpretation*, p. 34. The unjustified demonization of certain regions – here, Isfahan, by associating it with the Devil – is generally taken as a sign of inauthenticity of a *ḥadīth* and as part of Arab versus non-Arab polemics.

²⁰³ For a description of this Mesopotamian genre, see Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 2011), pp. 93-94.

²⁰⁴ Yazīd ibn Salām is identified as *mawlā rasūl Allāh*, and this narration is related also through 'Abdullāh ibn Yazīd ibn Salām. This may be the same as 'Abdullāh ibn Salām, a Jewish convert to whom *isrā'īliyyāt* are attributed; Pregill attributes many *isrā'īliyyāt* on Eve to him. (Michael Pregill, 'Isrā'īliyyāt, myth, and pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the fall of Adam and Eve'.) The chains of narration in the source text [*Ilal al-Sharā'i*] is given as: al-Ḥusayn [alt: al-Ḥasan] bin Yaḥyā ibn Dāris al-Bajalī → his father → Abū Ja'fār 'Amārah al-Sukūnī al-Siryānī → Ibrāhīm ibn 'Āsim in Qazwīn → 'Abd Allāh ibn Hārūn al-

The relevant portions of the two narrations are similar, although the preceding material differs; here, the version attributed to Yazīd ibn Salām will be given. After asking the Prophet numerous questions about the nature of the world, including essential aspects of creation,²⁰⁵ he continues:

He [Yazīd ibn Salām] said: ‘So tell me about Adam – was he created from Eve, or was Eve created from Adam?’

He [the Prophet] said: ‘Nay, Eve was created from Adam, and had Adam been created from Eve, divorce would have been in the hands of women, and it would not have been in the hands of men.’

He said: ‘Was she created from all of him or part of him?’

He said: ‘Nay, from part of him. And had she been created from all of him, *qiṣāṣ* would have been permissible for women as it is permissible for men.’

He said: ‘From his outside or his inside?’

He said: ‘Nay, from his inside. And had she been created from his outside, women would have been visible like men are visible. And so for that reason, women are covered (*mustatirāt*).’

He said: ‘From his right side or his left side?’

He said: ‘Nay, from his left side. And had she been created from his right side, women would have had the same share of inheritance as men. And for that reason, women received one

Karkhī → Abū Ja‘fār Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh bin Yazīd ibn Salām ibn ‘Abd Allāh, the *mawlā* of the Messenger of Allah → Abī ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yazīd → Yazīd ibn Salām → the Prophet. Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābāwayh al-Qummī (al-Ṣādūq, al-Shaykh), *Ilal al-Sharā‘i*, 2 vols. (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīyyah, 1966), vol. 2, p. 470.

²⁰⁵ This is similar in structure to an etymological narration related from a Jew where the Shāmī asks questions from Amir al-Mu‘minin, as well as a narration where a Jew from Khaybar asks questions from the Prophet. The *ḥadīth* opens with inquiries about essential aspects of the creation, such as the sun and the moon. His question ‘What ails the sun and the moon that they do not shine equally?’ foreshadows the unequal treatment of gender later by presenting pairs as asymmetric.

share, and men received two shares; and the witnessing of two women is like the witnessing of one man.'

He said: 'From where was she created?'

He said: 'From the clay which was leftover from his left rib.'

He said: 'You have spoken the truth, O Muḥammad.'²⁰⁶

The narration then moves on to other matters. A similar narration in *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il* adds that, because of how Eve was created, women can be neither prophets nor religious judges.²⁰⁷

This narration conveys complex assumptions about the nature of creation. First, there is a shared assumption between Yazīd ibn Salām and the Prophet that these jurisprudential rulings and customs about women are essential aspects of the natural order, stemming from the way that the female was created. In the case of the Jew, that is curious, since a person who is not Muslim would not be expected to share the belief that rulings in Islamic law reflect absolute features of the cosmos. On the other hand, the narration also hints at the question of 'what if?', suggesting that these restrictions are accidental rather than intrinsic, since, if females had been created differently, they would have enjoyed the same rights as males. The suggestion that the nature of woman and man *could* have been the same is not found in the separate-but-equal ideology, which treats differences between women and men as inherent, unchangeable aspects of the human being.

These assumptions themselves suggest that the narration emerged *after* the Prophetic era, since, during the Prophetic era, these jurisprudential rulings had not yet been codified. Additionally, it is hard to imagine someone living in the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula describing the essential nature of women as 'covered', since there are a number of accounts of women in the Arabian

²⁰⁶ This selection is from al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, pp. 304-307. The other narration involving the Jew from Khaybar is in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, pp. 335-344, no. 2; the relevant section is on page 343. The relevant section from Ibn Salām about women's different rights is reiterated in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 11, p. 101, no. 6.

²⁰⁷ al-Ḥaj Mirzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 1320 AH), *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, 18 vols. (n.l.: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1977/1409 AH), vol. 17, p. 241.

Peninsula going out and doing a great many things that can be described as anything but ‘covered’ – for instance, riding out onto the battlefield to encourage the men; the *ḥijāb* itself was not mandated until after the *hijrah*. The version involving the Jew from Khaybar also seems self-contradictory since it says that Adam was clothed in leaves from the Garden, whereas Eve was clad in her hair, which reached the earth.²⁰⁸ However, the assumption that women are intrinsically covered would seem reasonable in Iraq or the Byzantine regions, which had a history of women’s seclusion and veiling. While, today, Muslims often present *ḥijāb* as something which is advantageous to women – for instance, in discouraging objectification of women – this narration treats covering (*sitr*) in line with other disadvantages experienced by women.

Beyond that, the implications of the narration regarding the nature of women do not require exposition. The narration speaks for itself: whether intrinsic or accidental, the end result is that they women receive short shrift for no reason other than how they were created, and there is an established gender hierarchy with men in authority. While there are many angles through which one could question the validity of this narration, it nonetheless expresses jurisprudential views and assumptions about women which continue to be commonplace in Shī‘ī discourse.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Women in <i>sharī‘ah</i>
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 9:304-307, no. 8 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Biḥār</i> 9:335-344, no. 20 (citing <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:101, no. 6 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’). • <i>Mustadrak al-Wasā‘il</i> 17:241, no. 1 (citing <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i>) (includes why a woman may not be a judge or a prophet)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurisprudence • Judaic tradition
Separate-but-equal ideology	Reinforces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level • The <i>ḥijāb</i> is of paramount importance
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covering (<i>sitr</i>, <i>ḥijāb</i>) is a disadvantage

²⁰⁸ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 9, pp. 335-344, no. 20 (citing *al-Ikhtisāṣ*).

2.2.4 Male superiority

The view of women as lesser is taken to the extreme in this narration about male superiority. Here, a Jew comes to the Prophet and asks him to explain why men are superior to women; the Prophet, who does not question the basic premise, explains why; and the Jew asserts that the Prophet has spoken the truth. This frame story is similar to the one in the above set of narrations.

Like the previous narration, this narration synthesises pre-Islamic with Islamic material – in this case, an exposition on beginning of the *ḍaraba* verse, which says *al-rijāl qawwāmūn ‘alā al-nisā’ bi-ma faḍḍala ba‘duhum ‘alā ba‘d* (‘Men are responsible for women because of what [God] has granted some of them over some’). The meaning of this sentence – and, indeed, the entire *āyah* – has been the subject of intense debate; here, it is taken as a blanket statement that men are better than women.²⁰⁹

The narration reads:

One of the Jews came to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, and asked him questions, and among what he asked was: ‘Tell me what is the excellence (*faḍl*) of men over women?’

The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, said: ‘Like the excellence (*faḍl*) of the heavens over the earth, or like the excellence of water over the earth. Because with water, the land is enlivened; and, through men, women are enlivened (*fa bi-al-mā’ taḥyā al-arḍ wa bi al-rijāl taḥyā al-nisā’*). Were it not for men, women would not have been created, as [in] the Word

²⁰⁹ There is also debate over the meaning of *qawwāmūn*, with some saying that it refers to a man’s obligation to provide for his family, and others saying that it is an injunction for men to take on all authority roles, public and private, over women. Through a chronological analysis of *tafsīr*, Sa’diyya Shaikh has argued that the view that this verse referred to all sorts of authority developed in the ‘Abbāsīd era, perhaps due to the socio-cultural environment of *mufasssīrīn* at that time; this suggests that the narration is dated to a later period than the Prophet or al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī (who died in 50 AH, and who it is said to be related from). Sa’diyyah Shaikh, ‘Exegetical Violence: *Nushūz* in Qur’ānic Gender Ideology’.

of Allah, the Mighty and Glorious: “Men are *qawwāmūn* over women, by the excellence that Allah has granted some of them over others.”²¹⁰

The Jew said: ‘What thing made it like this?’

The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, said: ‘Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, created Adam from clay, and from his leftovers (*faḍlihi*) and his remnants (*baqiyyatihī*) [i.e. the remaining clay after his creation], Eve was created. And the first to obey women was Adam, and so Allah sent him down from the garden, and the excellence of men over women was made clear in the world. Do you not see how women menstruate and cannot worship because of the filth? And men are not afflicted with a thing like filthiness.’

The Jew said: ‘You have spoken the truth, O Muḥammad.’²¹¹

This narration differs from other Shī‘ī narrations on Eve. It integrates elements of Genesis not commonly found in Shī‘ī narrations – that Eve was responsible for the Fall, and that menstruation is a curse. That being said, in treating menstruation as a defect, and as one of the reasons why men must have authority over women, it is line with the separate-but-equal theory. (Menstruation will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 in more detail.)

Beyond that, this narration needs no exposition. It clearly describes women as a ‘leftover’. The idea that women are ‘enlivened’ by men – which, here, appears to be meant literally – is reminiscent of the narration that says that men have a zeal for land and water, but women have a zeal for men; however, even that narration does not contain the blatantly misogynistic

²¹⁰ I have left *qawwām* untranslated because of the variety of interpretations ranging from ‘protectors’ and ‘maintainers’ to ‘in authority over’.

²¹¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 100, pp. 240-241 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i*’ and *Amālī al-Ṣadūq*). The chain of narration reads: Majilwayh, from his paternal uncle, from al-Barqī, from ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Barqī, from ‘Abdullāh ibn Jabalah, from Mu‘āwiyah ibn ‘Ammār, from al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abdullāh, from his father, from his grandfather al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, peace be upon them both.

overtones of this one. The level of negativity in it towards women makes it an outlier.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Men are superior to women
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 100: 240-241, no. 1 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>’ and <i>Amālī al-Ṣadūq</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis • <i>Tafsīr</i>
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Women are inferior because they menstruate.

2.2.5 Eve’s first daughter – the failed prototype

The next narration is also an outlier in that it addresses a primal fear of women – a fear which, by nature, implies that a woman has power. While no discussion of Eve would be complete without a discussion of evil, the presence of these narrations within the Four Books is unusual since Shī‘ī theology does not admit to evil as a distinct entity. Instead, these narrations reflect an insecurity more ancient; as has been said, ‘Prototypal woman’s penchant for evil and desire to inveigle man is by no means uniquely Islamic or biblical. Instead, they [are] the monotheistic incarnates of a timeless tale of human limitation, tragedy, and hope’.²¹² (A further discussion of woman and evil will take place in Chapter 7 since some passages of *Nahj al-Balāghah* describe women as evil.) It should be noted that while these narrations call upon ancient imagery of woman and evil, they shy away from attributing it to Eve herself; this could be due to an unwillingness to associate one of the foremothers of the *ma’sūmīn* with evil.

The most colourful representation of evil is in accounts of Eve’s first daughter, named ‘Anāq; these are found in *al-Kāfī* and *Biḥār*. In both cases, the narrations focus on *baghy*; while *baghy* can be used for generic corruption as well as indecency, for women, it generally connotes prostitution or loose

²¹² Catherine Bronson, *Imagining the Primal Woman: Islamic Selves of Eve* [Phd dissertation] (University of Chicago: 2010), p. 23, drawing on a number of works that compare the Bible to ancient Mesopotamian stories.

behaviour. This narration strand bluntly reflects the Middle Eastern tradition of personifying a fear of women through female demons, temptresses, and succubi – something which is otherwise rare in the Shī‘ī tradition. The classic example of the female succubus is Lilith, Adam’s first wife who snatches babies and spawns demons from helpless sleeping men. Lilith herself does not appear in the Shī‘ī tradition; however, ‘Anāq appears instead.²¹³

The narration in *al-Kāfi* is attributed to Imām ‘Alī and reads:

O people! Corruption (*baghy*) leads its perpetrator to the Fire. The first to commit [the crime of] corruption against Allah was ‘Anāq, the daughter of Adam. She was the first person whom Allah killed, and she used to inhabit a place made of earth. She had twenty fingers; on each finger were two claws like two sickles. So Allah set upon her a vulture like a mule, and it overpowered her like a lion overpowers an elephant, or a wolf overpowers a camel. So We killed her, and thus Allah has killed the tyrants when they were in their best condition and secure in their positions.²¹⁴

Given that, at this time in the account, there were only three people on earth (Adam, Eve, and ‘Anāq),²¹⁵ one does wonder who she would have been engaging in ‘corrupt’ behaviour with, and what that could have been (tax evasion, perhaps?). While the narration overtly charges her with ‘corruption’, the text itself implies that Allah punished her for being a monstrosity – which would be the work of the deity, and no fault of her own. The name ‘*Anāq*, although used as a proper name, may also allude to the cognate word ‘*ināq* (‘embrace’)

²¹³ As Lassner observes, ‘There is [...] reason to believe that that demonic creatures disturbed the imaginations of biblical men and women, as indeed they frightened others’; even in today’s feminist era, the image of the powerful female as a demonic temptress persists in Western fiction. Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 33. He also traces the origin of Jewish Lilith to Mesopotamian and Caananite mythology. (Ibid.)

²¹⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 327, no. 4. In his famous commentary on *al-Kāfi*, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī declares it ‘*ḥasan*, like it is *ṣaḥīḥ*. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-‘Uqūl fī Sharḥ Akhbār Āl al-Rasūl*, 28 vols. (Tehran: Dar al-Kitāb al-Islāmīyyah, 1404 AH), vol. 10, p. 284.

²¹⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 227 says that Cain and Abel were born after ‘Anāq was killed.

or *‘anāq* meaning ‘misfortune’ or ‘calamity’. The severity of the punishment meted out to her makes Cain’s punishment look light. This sends several uncomfortable messages: first, that a woman who commits a crime should be punished more severely than a man; and, second, that indecency for a woman is worse than murder. Like the narration on woman’s ‘zeal’, it sends the subtle message that an independent woman is a recipe for disaster since *‘Anāq* lies in wait alone in her woman-cave. Because the primal daughter is a failure, it also reinforces the cultural belief – opposed by the Qur’ān – that it is safer or preferable to bear sons.

Theologically, by using ‘We’, the narration conflates Imām ‘Alī and the deity, which suggests the influence of *ghulūw*. Additionally, the idea that the first human child was a mutant implies a lack of power or foresight on the part of the deity, and is incompatible with the perception of the deity in Shī‘ī theology.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Of course, one might argue the same with respect to Cain and Abel, or the flood; however, at least these are stories of human failings.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Eve's first child
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 2:327, no. 4 (transmitted from 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī) • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:226 no. 6 (citing <i>Kitāb al-Mukhtaṣir li al-Hasan bin Sulaymān</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:237 no. 21 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient mythology • <i>Ghulūw</i>
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male authority is necessary. • Female chastity is of paramount importance.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The worst possible crime is indecent behaviour by a woman. • Demonic imagery of women • Sons are safer than daughters. • Allah failed in producing the first generation from Eve and Adam. • Interchanging Imām 'Alī and Allah

2.2.6 Wine and woman

Although lacking demonic imagery, another narration in *al-Kāfi* is unique in that it synthesizes Christian apocrypha with Islamic mores to present woman as the source of evil through disobedience to her husband. As such, it is atypical; in fact, the creation-not-from-a-rib narration seems to rule out the possibility of uxorial disobedience entirely. The ascetic Assyrian bishop Ishāq al-Naynawī (Isaac of Nineveh, d. *circa* 700 AD) is said to have held that 'wine, women, and bodily health' are the main causes of evil;²¹⁷ this narration covers the first two. While this narration reflects the Genesis account of the Fall, it takes place after the first Fall and tells a second account of eating from the forbidden tree, with the result that Eve is blamed for the destructive effects of alcohol.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Michael Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton, 1984), p. 459.

²¹⁸ In some Sunnī narrations, it is said that Adam ate from the tree because he was intoxicated; while this idea would be unacceptable from a Shī'ī theological view, it may be thematically related. Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, p. 29.

This narration relates that Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said that Allah sent Adam to earth and ordered him to farm. To facilitate that, Allah gives him the date palm, the grape vine, the olive tree, and the pomegranate, all of which he duly plants. Then, Satan approaches Adam, tells Adam he has never seen trees like these before, and asks Adam to let him eat from them. Adam refuses, saying that Allah has ordered him not to let him eat from these ‘trees’ (or, as one would say in English, ‘vines’). Undeterred, Satan goes to Eve and tries again, playing on her sympathies by telling her how hungry he is. At first, Eve refuses, saying that Adam had made her promise not to let Satan eat any of the fruits. However, sensing that Eve is more vulnerable, Satan asks Eve just to squeeze some grape juice into his hand, since technically that is not eating. Eve complies, and then Allah reveals to Adam that the juice of the grape will be forever forbidden and an intoxicant because it touched the hand of His enemy.²¹⁹ The story is repeated for dates, which were popularly fermented into alcoholic beverages in Iraq during the early Islamic era.²²⁰

It is difficult to read this narrative and not see the story of the Fall – indeed, in a reverse manner, in that Satan approaches the ‘forbidden tree’ himself and asks to eat from it himself rather than tempting Adam or Eve to do so.²²¹ The presence of Satan as himself (rather than in the guise of a serpent) is also in concordance with the Qur’ānic narrative of the Fall,²²² and the specification of the ‘forbidden tree’ as a grape vine is also in agreement with other Shī‘ī narrations that describe the forbidden tree as a grape ‘tree’

²¹⁹ While ‘juice of the grape’ is commonly used to refer to wine, these words may also have been chosen specifically to refer to the Twelver prohibition on drinking boiled grape juice unless it has been reduced to one-third its original amount.

²²⁰ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 393, no. 2. Najam Haider discusses the early Muslim debates in Kufa over the permissibility of a variety of intoxicating drinks other than wine, including fermented beverages made from dried dates or raisins, as well as related matters such as the religious permissibility of drinking boiled grape juice; presumably, these are some of the popular beverages being alluded to in this *ḥadīth*. Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shī‘a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 138-170.

²²¹ While the ‘Fall’ is very Christian terminology, it nonetheless seems appropriate here, both as a means of communicating a shared idea – the expulsion from Paradise – as well as, perhaps, some of the overtones of the Biblical story as well which seem to have been integrated into these *ḥadīth*.

²²² In some Sunnī *ḥadīth*, both Satan and the serpent appear in the story of the Fall. Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, pp. 28-38.

(*shajarah*).²²³ The prototype of this story is likely to have been in circulation in the Near East prior to Islam since one apocryphal book of the Bible, penned in Latin, tells of a second episode of Eve being deceived by Satan, only this time on earth, with Adam asking her, ‘How is it that you have been again ensnared by our adversary?’²²⁴ However, the story also comes across as a synthesis between Qur’ānic and Biblical material: since Satan, according to the Qur’ān, does not tempt Eve directly in the Qur’ānic narrative – and in fact appears to tempt Adam first (Qur’ān 20:120) – he instead returns to her after they come to Earth so he can play on her sympathies there; and, since Eve cannot be responsible for original sin, since original sin is rejected in Islamic theology, she is responsible for alcohol. Other aspects of the story, however, do appear to refer directly to the second Genesis narrative. Like in Genesis 2:15, Adam is sent down – along with the trees – and instructed to work the land; it simply occurs after the first Fall.²²⁵ Eve’s susceptibility to being deceived – here, due to her innocence or emotional weakness – and the long-term effects on humanity are also more akin to the second Genesis narrative.

This narration also portrays Adam as the primary actor, with the male perspective as normative, and implies a power hierarchy whereby Adam is under the control of Allah, and Eve is under the control of Adam (Allah→Adam→Eve), as opposed to the Qur’ānic portrayal of Adam and Eve, whereby both Adam and Eve are under the control of Allah (Allah→Adam and Allah→Eve). (That is, it supports the ‘demi-god’ ideology as defined in Chapter 1.) Unlike in the Qur’ān, in which ‘you two’ (Adam and Eve) are commanded to descend to earth (Qur’ān 7:24), here, only *Adam* is sent to earth and instructed

²²³ Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* give several explanations for what type of fruit the forbidden tree bore, suggesting that there were numerous stories in circulation; some are synthesized in a *ḥadīth* which says the tree was not like a worldly tree which can bear only one type of fruit, and so it is correct to say that it was a grape ‘tree’, a wheat ‘tree’, and a tree of jealousy. (Note that ‘apple tree’ is not present in this list.) Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mājlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 164, no. 8 (citing ‘*Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*’).

²²⁴ H. F. D. Sparks (ed.), *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 149.

²²⁵ In keeping with the general parallel of this story with the Biblical story of Adam and Eve eating from the tree in the Garden of Eden, this wording seems to mimic Genesis 2:15 which reads ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it’, particularly because narrations about Adam do not generally present him as a farmer.

to farm.²²⁶ While, in the Qur'ān, Allah tells both Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree, when Satan approaches Eve here, Eve expresses no awareness that keeping Satan away from the tree was a divine command; she simply says that her husband made her promise this. And, when Eve disobeys Adam, Allah censures Adam rather than Eve for her disobedience in the same way that a parent might be held responsible for a child's actions. This, in fact, is even a departure from the Genesis narrative wherein Eve acknowledges that God ordered them not to eat from the tree (Genesis 3:2-3). Eve herself is presented as being someone who, on account of her emotions, is more easily and more liable to be tricked since Satan, knowing her weaknesses, tries harder to manipulate her. Thematically, this is another departure from the Qur'ānic narrative, in which Adam and Eve are equally warned against Satan (and Satan does not seem to favour one over the other) (Qur'ān 7:22 and 7:27). However, the social message is clear. First, men are in a position of authority over women which is akin to the divine authority that Allah enjoys over men. Second, men function as 'spiritual intermediaries' between their wives and Allah, and women are not spiritually responsible for themselves; after all, Allah blamed Adam, not Eve, for Eve's error. And, third, this must be natural order of things, because women are clearly not competent enough to exert authority for themselves. They also reflect the attitude towards women in the separate-but-equal ideology, in that women are portrayed as extensions of male relatives; and women are portrayed as intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally inferior to men.

²²⁶ It is possible that the exclusion of Eve here may also be an indication that this narrative was inspired by the above verse in Genesis, since, at that time in Genesis, Eve has not yet been created.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Wine and woman
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 6:393, no. 2
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian apocrypha
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • Male authority is necessary.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Demi-god’ gender hierarchy

2.3 Esoteric Shī‘ism – the first counter-narrative

2.3.1 Eve, the bearer of the Prophetic light

In contrast to the narrations in the previous section, which present a decidedly negative or restrictive view of women, the narrations in the ‘counter-narrative’ portray woman and man as partners; these narrations are also characterized by esoteric Shī‘ī imagery. Like the creation not-from-a-rib narration, the first narration describes Eve’s creation and marriage to Adam, and contains distinctly Shī‘ī content, and presents Eve as the bearer of the Prophetic light (*nūr-i Muḥammadi*).²²⁷ While it is also reminiscent of Genesis, and says that Eve was created from Adam’s rib, it does not draw gendered conclusions from that. Instead, it presents a dramatically different picture of gender roles from the above narration; this will be the first of several narrations throughout this work pertaining to the overarching narrative of *wilāyah* that present women in an inclusive, equitable, and positive light. As such, it has been labelled as part of the ‘counter-narrative’.

²²⁷ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 15, pp. 33-34, no. 48 (citing *Kitāb al-Anwār*). While the concept of the Prophetic light is not limited to Shī‘ah, and in fact Catherine Bronson says that this narration appears in a non-canonical Sunnī text, it has been argued that this idea originated from Shī‘ism; in any case, it a frequently recurring concept in Shī‘ism. Catherine Bronson, *Imagining the Primal Woman*, pp. 219-220, citing ‘Umārah b. Wathīmah b. Mūsā , in R.G. Houry, *Les légendes prophétiques dans l’Islam depuis le Ier jusqu’au IIIe siècle de l’hégire d’après le manuscrit d’Abū Rifā‘a ‘Umāra b. Wathīma b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt al-Fārisī al-Fasawī, Kitāb bad’ al-khalq wa-Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1978), pp. 346-47.

It should be noted that this narration, which is attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq, is *not* found in the major or early sources. It is recorded in *Biḥār* and is attributed to a teacher of the famous scholar al-Shahīd al-Thāni named Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bakrī in a book called *Kitāb al-Anwār* and is part of a gargantuan passage about pre-existence and the creation of the Prophet. However, because it is replete with distinctly Shī'ī imagery and offers a different narrative of Eve's creation, it will be mentioned here. Given the obscurity of the source, it is possible that narrations such as this were part of an esoteric tradition of 'secret' narrations that were transmitted among an elite.

It begins with Imām al-Ṣādiq discussing the lengthy pre-existence of Adam's soul before his creation in the realm known as *'alam al-dharr*.²²⁸ The nascent forms of the Prophet and *ahl al-bayt* are placed in his loins, to be passed on from generation to generation.²²⁹ Then, Allah casts sleep over Adam (a possible carryover from Genesis) and creates Eve from his rib. Allah wakes Adam up; seeing Eve, Adam asks, 'Who is this?' Eve replies, 'I am Eve; Allah created me for you.'²³⁰ After Adam exclaims, 'How excellent is your creation!', Allah reveals to Adam, 'This is My female slave (*ammaṭī*) Eve, and you are My male slave (*'abdī*) Adam. I have created you two for My world called Paradise, so glorify and praise [Me].' These few lines depart from the creation not-from-a-rib narration, in that, here, both Eve and Adam are described as Allah's slaves; whereas, in the creation not-from-a-rib narration, Eve acts as the slave while Adam acts as the buyer.

²²⁸ Amir-Moezzi discusses Shī'ī narrations on pre-creation in depth in *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, pp. 29, 33, 37, 76, 79, 107, 128. Qur'ān 7:172 is often interpreted to support belief in the pre-existence of souls before their entrance into the earthly realm.

²²⁹ In contrast, Stowasser mentions that when Rāzī encounters a doctrinal problem in God's command to the angels to 'prostrate themselves before Adam,' a mere mortal, Rāzī has recourse to the Prophetic *ḥadīth*: 'If I were to order anyone to prostrate himself before another but God, I would command the woman to prostrate herself before her husband because of the magnitude of his rights over her.' Obviously, this doctrinal problem does not arise here. See Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 32 (citing *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*, vol. 2, p. 213). On questions of prophetic light and its use in the Islamic sources as passed down to Muḥammad from the earlier Israelite prophets, see Uri Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad,' *Israel Oriental Studies*, vol. 5 (1975), pp. 62-119.

²³⁰ While, here, Eve is defining her existence in terms of Adam, at least Eve knows her own name. Adam naming Eve could be taken to indicate his authority over her, particularly given the cross-cultural symbolism of the power of the name.

Then, Allah marries Eve to Adam. The marriage has a legalistic flavour with several parties involved: ‘the *qāḍī* was *al-ḥaqq* (Allah, the Truth)’, ‘the one who “tied the knot” (*al-‘āqid*) was Jibrā’īl’, ‘the wife was Eve’ (obviously), and ‘the witnesses were the angels’. Allah orders Adam to pay Eve her *mahr* (dowry), but, unlike in the creation not-from-a-rib narration, where the *mahr* was for Adam to teach Eve, thereby setting up an inherent authority dynamic, here, Allah decrees that the *mahr* is for Adam to send ten *ṣalawāts* upon Allah’s beloved (*ḥabībī*), Muḥammad. This *mahr* presents a more equal authority dynamic between Eve and Adam, and puts both of them beneath the authority of the Prophet, whose light Adam is carrying. The two are united, and then the angels gather around Adam to behold in awe the *nūr-i Muḥammadī* that he is still carrying.

The narration then shifts to Eve’s conception of Shīth, the successor of Adam and the second in the line of the sacred chain of male inheritance. This part of the narration is reminiscent of accounts of the conception of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ with respect to the sanctity associated with conception. The narration relates that when Adam wanted to ‘cover’ Eve, he ordered her to perfume and purify herself (both customs associated with prayer), and then told her, ‘O Eve, Allah is granting you the sustenance of this light and making it especially for you. It is something entrusted from Allah, and [is] His covenant (*mīthāq*).’ After the Prophetic light is transferred from Adam to Eve, the angels marvel at the light of the Prophet which is emanating from her in the same way that they had marvelled at Adam before. Then, when she gives birth to Shīth, the Prophetic light moves on to him, and, seeing between his eyes the Prophetic light, she is overjoyed.²³¹

While this narration bears similarities to the creation not-from-a-rib narration, it diverges by presenting Eve as a participant in sacred history. Rather than Eve being subservient to Adam, both of them are subservient to Allah. Although Eve is created for Adam, she is not portrayed as inferior. Both Eve and her pregnancy are portrayed in a very positive light. Unlike the creation not-from-a-rib narration, it does not present women as passive and silent. Its

²³¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 15, p. 34, no. 48 (citing *Kitāb al-Anwār*), in a long narration.

Şūfī flavour, particularly in the reference to Allah as *al-ḥaqq*, and – particularly given its absence from earlier sources – may reflect a regionally, theologically, or chronologically divergent view of Shī‘ism from the above.²³²

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Eve as the bearer of the Prophetic light; Eve’s creation and marriage to Adam
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bihār</i> 15:33-34, no. 48 (citing an obscure book called <i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Shī‘ī content • Genesis • Şūfism
Separate-but-equal ideology	Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are superior to women
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive view of pregnancy • Eve is part of sacred history

2.3.2 The tree of anti-*wilāyah*

Esoteric Shī‘ī imagery also features prominently in the set of narrations saying that the forbidden tree was a tree of envy towards *ahl al-bayt* – or, one can say, a tree of anti-*wilāyah*. While that may sound negative, what is important here is that Eve and Adam share equally in their anti-*wilāyah*, and that these narrations do not set up any essential differences between Eve and Adam. From that angle, this section politely challenges the view, expressed by Karen Ruffle and Mary Thurlkill, that the narrations about the ‘tree of envy’ send negative messages about Eve. They write:

Shī‘ite tradition expanded Hawwa’s (and sometimes even Adam’s) sin of disobedience and betrayal of Allah to include the betrayal of the *ahl al-bayt* as well. To define Eve as a failed woman and enemy of the family, hagiographers juxtaposed her to the feminine archetype of Fatima. [...] Eve ultimately opposed the Mistress of the Women of the World, Fatima.

²³² al-Shahīd al-Thānī came from Lebanon, and al-Majlisī from Iran. It is possible there was (or even today still is) a regional influence in what narrations were deemed acceptable or preferable. Some of these ideas may be seen by some to tend towards *ghulūw*, and so it is possible there is the influence of Shī‘a who would today be seen as ‘non-normative’ on them. There is also a subtle Şūfī-esque flavour to the narration, which of course is not unusual given the occasional crossover between Shī‘ī and Şūfī material.

Muhammad's daughter [...] served to amend Hawwa's mistakes and provide the idealized feminine figure [...]. Fatima resided in paradise – part of the tree [...]. Eve remained alienated from all such grace; she was forbidden the tree and only a pretender to the rank of heaven's Mistress.²³³

Fatimah's transcendence is explained through Eve's abjection, who sinned not only by eating from the Tree of Eternal Life and making it bleed but also more importantly for her envy of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter and his household, the *ahl-e bait*.²³⁴

²³³ Mary Thurkill, *Chosen Among Women*, pp. 84-86.

²³⁴ Karen Ruffle, 'An Even More Perfect Creation'. Karen Ruffle argues that the *aḥādīth* about the tree of *wilāyah* are manifestations of *isrā'īliyyāt* culminating in the view that Eve committed the greatest possible sin by 'making the tree bleed' by eating from it; since the tree was not just an ordinary tree but the tree of *ahl al-bayt*, she therefore subjected Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' – who is described in some *aḥādīth* as not experiencing menses – to that ritual pollution. The problem is the *ḥadīth* about 'making the tree bleed' is not found in Shī'ī *ḥadīth*. Unfortunately, Ruffle cites Smith and Haddad (1982) as saying that this *ḥadīth* ('*yā Hawwā' fa-kamā dammayti al-shajarah tudammīna kulla shahr'*) appears in *Majma' al-Bayān* by Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī). However, this appears to be a typographical error in Smith and Haddad's article since the *ḥadīth* appears in the *tafsīr* by Ṭabarī (the famous Sunnī scholar), not Ṭabrisī (the famous Shī'ī scholar). (See Muḥammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 15 vols. (n.l.: Dār al-Fikr, 1995/1410 AH), vol. 8, p. 189.) While understandable, the switch of names has immense ramifications for the argument at hand, and is an excellent reminder to always check primary sources. Even if Ṭabrisī had cited that particular non-canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* in his *tafsīr*, it still is not sourced to a Shī'ī *ḥadīth* compilation, and Ṭabrisī also mentions Sunnī accounts. Ruffle's entire argument about 'polluting' rests on non-canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* as well as a Chistī text. Therefore, these materials cannot be used to derive a theological conclusion about Shī'ism itself.

Ruffle also brings up some delicate subjects regarding Fāṭimah's purity, and makes some assertions that are not representative of common Shī'ī understandings. For instance, she asserts that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' did not deliver her children through a vaginal birth or engage in physical coitus during their conception, an idea that probably comes from an obscure text called *al-Haft wa al-Azillah* which is attributed to a *ghulāt* sect and contains any number of peculiar statements. See 'Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Hadith*, 2nd ed., pp. 190-191 for a discussion of this narration and this book. As for the latter, it reflects a misunderstanding of the Shī'ī appellation of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' as a 'virgin'; the idea that she was celibate and the locus of five immaculate conceptions is politely refuted in some other *aḥādīth* alluding to her marital life – for instance, the oft-cited narration in which Imām al-Riḍā advises a woman not to embrace celibacy as a means of spiritual purification, because if that had been preferable, Fāṭimah would have lived that way (al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 103, p. 219). The question of what 'virginity' might mean with respect to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is revisited in Chapter 6.

Lastly, the *wilāyah* and *anti-wilāyah aḥādīth* are neither symbolically nor thematically representative of Judaic or Christian texts, and therefore cannot truly be classified as *isrā'īliyyāt*. The one angle that these *aḥādīth* could be seen to be reflective of Judaeo-Christian currents is in the identification of the tree as the 'tree of knowledge of *ahl al-bayt*'; and, by eating from it, they would become 'like God' (cf. Genesis 3:5) – an interpretation which would admittedly blur

This latter assertion is built on the unfortunate error in mistakenly attributing a narration from al-Ṭabarī – the Sunnī scholar – to al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), the Shīʿī scholar. Shīʿī narrations do not say that Eve made the tree bleed. (Ruffle’s argument also hinges on other misconceptions about the Shīʿī tradition; see the above footnote for more details.) While they are correct that, in a narration, Eve looks at Fatima with the ‘eye of jealousy’, these narrations treat envy as a joint act carried out by Eve and Adam, with the ultimate goal to reinforce the superiority of *ahl al-bayt*, whom they later seek forgiveness through, rather than sending messages about bleeding or womanhood. (Menstruation is used to lower other female figures in Shīʿī narrations, but generally not Eve.)

The ‘tree of envy’ is elaborated on in a lengthy narration in *Bihār* (citing ‘*Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* and *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*). Abū Ṣalt comes to Imām Riḍā and asks about the forbidden tree, saying that people disagree over what kind of tree it was – whether it was a wheat tree, a grape tree, or a tree of jealousy. This question indicates that there were competing versions of the story of Eve and Adam present among Muslims (and probably others as well), and, the answer indicates that some of the Shīʿah espoused their own views. Imām Riḍā replies by saying that all of the interpretations are correct since the tree of Paradise is not like a worldly tree, and therefore it was capable of bearing all of those different fruits simultaneously. However, his subsequent explanation portrays the tree as a tree of jealousy, in that, in the beforetime, Adam beheld the names of the Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn inscribed upon the throne of Allah with appellations of praise.²³⁵ Not recognizing them, Adam asks about them, and Allah informs him that these five people are Adam’s descendants who are superior to him as well as to all of creation. Then Allah warns Adam not to look at them with the ‘eye of jealousy’ (*ʿayn al-ḥasad*) lest he be expelled from proximity to Allah. But Adam gazes upon them with the ‘eye of jealousy’ and longs for their status, so Satan gains power over Adam and deceives him into eating from the tree of jealousy. Then, Satan gains power

the lines between the *panjtan* (the five sacred personalities) and the deity. However, this could easily be a reflection of Gnostic ideas as well.

²³⁵ In the explanation of the narration given by Majlisī, he notes that this narration serves to combine the different interpretations, and Majlisī also mentions other produce that the tree was said to bear.

over Eve, causing her to look towards Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' with the 'eye of jealousy', and so she eats from the tree too. Then, Allah expels both of them to earth.²³⁶

This story is elaborated on in some other lengthy narrations in *Biḥār*. In one narration, Adam is specifically said to have seen and disliked *wilāyah* itself, and so the garden attacked him with its leaves.²³⁷ Still another narration offers an esoterically Shī'ī view of the account in the Book of Genesis – that the tree was the tree of knowledge (*shajarat al-'ilm*); specifically, knowledge of Muḥammad and *Āl-i Muḥammad* which was reserved specifically for *ahl al-bayt*. As such, this tree offers knowledge of the unseen, and the 'beginnings and ends of things', and so Satan urges them to eat from the tree, telling them that if they eat from the tree, they will be able to carry out the miraculous acts that those who are specially chosen by Allah can perform. This reinforces the idea addressed in the chapter on Bilqīs that spiritual knowledge enables the performance of supernatural acts. Hence, this tree was forbidden to Eve and Adam – who ate from it to try to attain the position of *ahl al-bayt*.²³⁸

In addition to describing the tree as the tree of knowledge of *ahl al-bayt*, this latter narration also offers a line-by-line *tafsīr* (or, rather, *ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ānic story of Eve and Adam. For instance, when Allah tells Eve and Adam not to eat from the tree lest they be among the wrongdoers (*ẓālimīn*), this is explained as challenging the position of *ahl al-bayt* (as opposed to wrongdoing in a generic sense). Like the Qur'ān, this narrative speaks of Eve and Adam as equal participants in becoming jealous of *ahl al-bayt* and seeking their special knowledge from the tree; this is in contrast to the narrations which do not ascribe any sort of agency to Eve. Only towards the end of the narration, where it departs from *tafsīr*, does the focus return to Adam, and he seeks forgiveness from Allah through Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.

Another narration ascribes creational significance to their eating from the tree, in that, after looking upon the *ahl al-bayt* with the 'eye of envy', they ate

²³⁶ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 11, p. 164, no. 9 (citing *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār* and *'Uyūn Akḥbār al-Riḍā*); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 16, p. 362, no. 62 (citing *'Uyūn Akḥbār al-Riḍā*).

²³⁷ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 186, no. 39 (citing *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*).

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 190-193, no. 47 (citing *Tafsīr al-Imām al-'Askarī*).

from the tree, and what they ate transmuted into barley, whereas what they did not eat transmuted into wheat (wheat was considered superior to barley).²³⁹ And, of course, the greatest significance in creation would be that, because of this jealousy towards *ahl al-bayt*, Eve and Adam left the Garden and human beings began to populate the earth.

Despite the negativity towards Eve and Adam in this particular narrative, the approach towards Eve as a woman differs from other narrations discussing the story of Eve and Adam. True, a womanly sort of rivalry is attributed to Eve, in that she is jealous of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', whereas Adam is jealous of all five of them. However, both Eve and Adam suffer from this sort of jealousy; Eve is not the one who is deceived by Satan or the one who leads Adam to the tree. In addition, as the narration providing *ta`wīl* demonstrates, Eve is described as a person in her own right, not just as an extension of Adam.²⁴⁰ Additionally, in contrast to the separate-but-equal ideology, Eve is not portrayed as more emotional than Adam; instead, they both experience envy.

Finally, it should be said that while the narrative is unflattering to both Eve and Adam, it too serves the ultimate purpose of emphasizing the incomparable status of *ahl al-bayt*, and this conclusion is reinforced when Adam attains forgiveness by praying to Allah through the names of the five sacred personalities (Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn).²⁴¹ Thus, from a Shī'ī perspective, the end result is positive, even if it is at the expense of two sacred figures and is in contrast to more positive portrayals of Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	The tree of envy
Source(s)	• <i>Bihār</i> , 11:164, no. 9 (citing <i>Ma`ānī al-Akḥbār</i> and

²³⁹ Ibid., *Bihār* vol. 11, p. 174, no. 19 (citing *Ma`ānī al-Akḥbār*, by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq). Note that Majlisī again exonerates Adam from committing a sin by arguing that Adam was not actually challenging the position of *ahl al-bayt* and hence did not deserve to be sent to the hellfire.

²⁴⁰ Jealousy in the form of *ghīrah* is praised as a desirable quality for men in other *ḥadīth*; however, this form of jealousy would not be included under that rubric. *Ghīrah* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

²⁴¹ Ruffle also observes that 'Eve's transgressive act is the vehicle by which Fatimah's exceptional self can be manifested in the earthly world.' See Karen Ruffle, 'An Even Better Creation.'

	<p>‘<i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bihār</i> 16: 362, no. 62 (citing ‘<i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, 11: 186, no. 39 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, 11: 189-193, no. 47 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-Imām al-‘Askarī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, 11:174, no. 19 (citing <i>Ma‘ānī al-Akhbār</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Shī‘ī content • Debates among Muslims (over the nature of the tree)
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.

2.3.3 Eve as the grandmother in the chain of sacred inheritance

The concept of *waṣīyyah*, or the inheritance of divine authority, such as the prophethood or the Imāmate, is a major aspect of the narrative of *wilāyah*. This inheritance often but not always occurs between father and son. Some Shī‘ī narrations trace this male chain of inheritance all the way back to Adam in a generation-by-generation account of the *waṣī*. The spiritual implications and symbolism involved in this male chain of inheritance have been explored at length in other works. However, the possibility that there could be a corresponding female chain of sacred inheritance, or that women could be part of the male chain – apart from the limited inclusion of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and Mary as conduits for passing on the *waṣīyyah* – is new.²⁴²

In fact, some narrations do point to an analogous concept of a female chain of sacred inheritance, although not to the degree that it is discussed regarding men. Just as the male chain of inheritance begins with Adam and culminates in its perfection with the Prophet and Imāms, the female chain of inheritance begins with Eve and reaches its pinnacle in Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. Like the narrations about men, these narrations treat women in sacred history as contemporaneous, existing together and interacting with each other. In other

²⁴² In *The Charismatic Community*, Dakake mentions a mother-daughter chain of transmission of religious knowledge among the Alids that might be seen as in some way analogous, but this is referring to the earthly transmission of narrations and not an esoteric or spiritual link.

narrations, notable women are included in the male chains of inheritance as 'honorary men'.

One evocative narration which discusses this takes the form of a conversation between the Prophet and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and it is attributed to Imām 'Alī. The woman-centric focus here diverges from the narrations which attribute a restrictive and misogynistic view of women to Imām 'Alī:

One day, the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, came to Fāṭimah, peace be upon her, and she was sad, and so he said to her, 'What has made you sad, O my daughter?'

She said, 'O my father, I have remembered the plains of resurrection, and people standing naked on the Day of Resurrection.'

And so he said, 'O my daughter, this is indeed a tremendous day, but Jibrā'īl has informed me that Allah, the Glorious and Mighty, says [that] the first for whom the earth will split open on the Day of Resurrection is me, then my father Ibrāhīm, then your husband 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Then Allah will send Jibrā'īl to you with seventy thousand angels, and they will build seven domes of light upon your grave. Then Isrāfīl will come to you with three garments (*ḥulal*) of light, and he will stop before your head and call to you: "O Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad, stand for the Resurrection," so you will stand, safe from your fear, with a covered 'awrah (private parts); and Isrā'īl will present (*yunāwilukī*) the garments to you, and you will wear them. Rūfā'īl will accompany you with a highbred female camel (*najībah*) of light – its halter of pearl, with a litter of gold atop it. And you will ride it, and Rūfā'īl will lead it by its halter; and with you will be seventy thousand angels with banners of glorification (*tasbīḥ*) in their hands.

'And when the caravan hurries along with you, seventy thousand *ḥūrīs* (maidens of Paradise) will receive you, rejoicing

at seeing you; in each of their hands will be a brazier of light, from which the scent of perfume (*'ūd*) will radiate without any fire. Upon them will be crowns of jewels inlaid with emeralds, and they will hasten to your right side.

'And when they reach your grave, Maryam bint 'Imrān will meet you with *ḥūrīs* similar to what is with you, and she will greet you; and she and those with her will travel on your left side.

'Then, your mother Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, the first of the female believers in Allah and His Messenger, will meet you; and with her will be seventy thousand angels; in their hands will be flags of *takbīr* (magnifying Allah). And when they are near to meeting, Eve will meet you with seventy thousand *ḥūrīs*, and with her will be Āsiyah bint Muzāhim, and they and those with them will accompany you.

'And when you have reached the middle of the gathering [...] a voice will sound saying "Lower your gaze so Fāṭimah the daughter of Muḥammad, peace be upon him and his family, may pass."

'And no one will look at you on that day except Ibrāhīm, the Friend of the Merciful, and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. And Adam will seek Eve and see her with your mother Khadījah in front of her; then you will be given a *minbar* of light. And the closest of women to you on your left will be Eve and Āsiyah. And when you climb the *minbar*, Jibrā'īl will come to you and say, 'O Fāṭimah, ask your request (*ḥājah*),' and you will say, 'O Lord, show me Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.'

'And they will come to you, and blood will be gushing forth from Ḥusayn's veins, and he will say "O Lord, grant me today my right against the one who oppressed me." The Almighty will become angry at that, and at his anger, Hellfire and all the angels all will become angry [...]. The killers of Ḥusayn – and

their sons and grandsons – will be engulfed in flames, and they will say, “O Lord, we were not present with Ḥusayn,” and Allah will say to the tongues of Hell, ‘Take them with your flames with the blue-eyed and blackened faces, and take the *nawāṣib* [enemies of *ahl al-bayt*] and throw them in the deepest pit of Hell, because they were harsher upon the supporters (*awliyāʾ*) of Ḥusayn than their fathers who fought Ḥusayn and killed him.’

Then Jibrāʾīl will say, “O Fāṭimah, ask your request (*ḥājah*),” so she will say, “O Lord, my followers.”

‘So Allah will say, “They have been forgiven,” and you will say, “O Lord, the followers of my two sons,” and Allah will say they have been forgiven, and you will say, “O Lord, the Shīʿah of my Shīʿah (the followers of my followers) [...]” At that point the creation will wish they were followers of Fāṭimah (*fāṭimiyyīn*) with you, their *ʿawrahs* covered, the difficulties gone from them, the entry [into Paradise] eased for them [...].’²⁴³

Significantly, here, adherents to *ahl al-bayt* are described as ‘followers of Fāṭimah’ (*fāṭimiyyīn*) rather than as ‘followers of ‘Alī’. This indicates the centrality of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ to the Shīʿī tradition. Second, Fāṭimah is given the authority to send people to Heaven or Hell; in contrast, usually ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is presented as the ‘one who divides between Heaven and Hell’ (*qasīm al-jannah wa al-nār*).²⁴⁴ (The portrayal of Fāṭimah here could also be seen as mimicking the Christian portrayal of the Virgin Mary as the intercessor in the next world.)²⁴⁵ While the patriarchal set of narrations portray Adam as being superior to Eve, here, Eve is in the superior position, and Adam must seek her out. Symbolically, Eve enjoys the highest honour, since she is physically closest to Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ. Lastly, the portrayal of the *ḥūrīs* here as servants of

²⁴³ Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 8, p. 53, no. 62 (citing *Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm*, a 9th-10th century *tafsīr*).

²⁴⁴ Such as in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, p. 570 (no number).

²⁴⁵ Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, pp. 55, 108; Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, chapter 21.

sacred women differs from the usual portrayal of the *ḥūrīs* as beings whose sole purpose is to provide companionship to men.

The narration itself alludes both to male and female chains of inheritance, and connects them, while emphasising the female. The male chain of inheritance is represented by Adam, Ibrāhīm, the Prophet, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. The women are represented by Eve, Āsiyah, Mary, and Khadījah. Their inclusion also connects pre-Islamic sacred history with a major theme of Shī‘ī history – seeking vengeance against the killers of al-Ḥusayn – and bridges the creational with the apocalyptic. (This theme and the connection of Mary with the Karbalā’ narrative will be explored more in Chapter 6.)

Another narration which centres on maternal inheritance, and which also links ancient women to the Karbalā’ narrative, is a narration about a dream by Sukaynah, the daughter of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, who was taken prisoner after the Battle of Karbalā’. Like the above, this dream begins by invoking the male chain of inheritance, and also connects Sukaynah to it, in that she complains to Adam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, and Mūsā about what happened. A page who is guiding her through the other world then tells her to lower her voice because she is making the Prophet cry; this is one of the many examples of male prophets and Imāms shedding tears, in contrast to the view in the separate-but-equal ideology that emotions are womanly.²⁴⁶ Then, attention shifts to the women:

[Sukaynah said:] Then the page took my hand and brought me into a palace with five women in it. Allah had created them in a great form and increased their light, and between them was a woman of great stature, unravelling her hair, and upon her were

²⁴⁶ Men crying will be discussed more in Chapter 4. The beginning of the narration says: ‘[...] a pearl-skinned man with a red face approached me [Sukaynah], sad of heart, and I said to the page (*waṣīf*), ‘Who is this?’ And he said, ‘Your grandfather, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family’. So I approached him and said to him, O grandfather, Our men have been killed, by Allah, and our blood has been shed, and our *ḥarīm* has been dishonoured, and we have been carried on [camels] without saddles, brought to Yazīd, so he took me to him and embraced me to his chest. Then Adam and Nūḥ and Ibrāhīm and Mūsā approached me, and he said to them, do you see what my *ummah* has done to my children after me? Then the page said: O Sukaynah, lower your voice, because you have made the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, cry.’

black garments and a shirt stained with blood. When she stood, they stood; and when she sat, they sat, so I said to the page, 'Who are these women whom Allah has created in a great form?'

He said, 'O Sukaynah, this is Eve, the mother of humankind. And this is Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, and this is Khadījah, the daughter of Khuwaylid, and this is Hājar, and this is Sārah. And this one in whose hand is the stained shirt, and when she stands they stand, and when she sits they sit, is your grandmother Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'.'

And so I approached her and called out to her, 'O my grandmother! My father, by Allah, has been killed, and I have been taken captive at a young age.' And she held me to her chest and cried greatly, and the women cried with her, and they said to her, 'O Fāṭimah! May Allah judge between you and between Yazīd on the Day of Judgment.'

[The narrator said:] Then Yazīd left her alone and did not take her to account for what she was saying.²⁴⁷

As in the above, this narration takes place in an otherworldly realm – here, the dream world – to facilitate the interaction of historical disparate figures. Not only does it include Hājar as a supporter of *wilāyah*, but it presents Hājar and Sārah as equals and as friends rather than portraying Sārah as a jealous rival and Hājar as the victim, which is common in other narrations (see Chapter 3).

This narration contains a broad range of symbolism. The unravelling of hair is a classical gesture of mourning in the Mediterranean and Middle East going back to antiquity (albeit one that appears in other Shī'ī texts),²⁴⁸ and black

²⁴⁷ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 45, p. 194, no. 36 (citing 'some compilations from our companions without full chains of narration'; the narration begins on page 189).

²⁴⁸ Such as in *Ziyārat al-Nāḥiyah al-Muqaddasah*, a lengthy text commemorating the events in Karbalā', in which the female survivors are described as 'dishevelled their hair' (*nāshirāt al-shu'ūr*) as a sign of grief.

clothes as a sign of mourning seems anachronistic. The imagery of retinues and golden litters in the narration about Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is also reminiscent of ancient royalty.²⁴⁹ The rather dubious sourcing of this narration – which Majlisī describes as being from ‘some compilations of some of our companions without full chains of narration’ – as well as its absence from earlier accounts of the Karbalā' narrative – suggest that this narration originated after the time of Sukaynah bint al-Ḥusayn. However, the employment of these symbols in a sacred context reflects their inclusion in and concordance with conceptions of Shī'ī identity. It also shows the cultural acceptability of including Sukaynah in both a female and male chain of inheritance.

The next narration is another example of how, occasionally, women in sacred history are treated as ‘honorary men’ and are joined in the line of the male prophetic lineage. (This occurs more with Bilqīs who will be discussed in Chapter 5.) This narration contains an invocation and set of ritual acts known as the prayer of Umm Dāwūd, said to have been taught to her by Imām al-Ṣādiq to seek the release of her son from prison. In it, blessings are sent upon generations of men in the prophetic lineage as a means of seeking mercy from Allah. In that regard, it differs from the narrations focus on critical points in the life of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' or on the Karbalā' narrative, although it does still offer a female-centric perspective – namely, a mother's. However, Eve is the only woman to be included in this chain. Perhaps this is because Eve is the mother of humanity. After blessings are sent upon the angels, it continues:

O Lord of Majesty and Grace! O Allah! Bestow your blessings on our father Adam, Your novel creation whom You did honour with the prostration of Your angels and make Your Paradise lawful to Him.

²⁴⁹ In his famous speeches on the fabrication of narrations about Karbalā' published as *Ḥamāseh-ye Ḥosaynī*, Ayatollah Moṭahharī decries the use of narrations which present the womenfolk of the family of the Prophet, such as Zaynab bint 'Alī, as princesses, and leaving their hometown of Medina in decorated litters and with royal trappings, on the grounds that such portrayals go against the Prophetic ethos of humility and simplicity. Of course, one might expect a difference between portrayals in this world and portrayals in the afterlife.

O Allah! Bestow your blessing on our mother Eve – purified from uncleanness, free from impurities distinguished among humankind and moving about in the godly atmosphere.²⁵⁰

The prayer then sends blessings on the men who come after Eve, generation after generation – namely, Hābīl, Shīth, Idrīs, Nūḥ, Hud, Salīh, Ibrāhīm, Ishāq, Ya‘qūb, Yūsuf, and on; a total of forty-five individual men are mentioned, plus several groups of men. However, no women are mentioned, not even Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ or the Virgin Mary, although the male disciples of Jesus are mentioned. This makes Eve’s position unique. Being mentioned soon after the angels also elevates her. The phrase ‘purified from uncleanness’ is a reference to the Qur’ānic verse of *taṭhīr* (Qur’ān 33:33) commonly used when referring to *ahl al-bayt* and the foremothers of *ahl al-bayt*, since it is held that the *ma‘sumīn* could not have been born from women with ‘polluted’ wombs.²⁵¹ It reinforces the need to portray Eve as a ‘pure’ woman, in contrast to how ‘Anāq represents the archetypally ‘impure’. The inclusion of this prayer as a prescription for Shī‘ī devotional practice contributes to the transmission of unspoken assumptions about gender norms.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 8:53, no. 62 (citing <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 45:194, no. 36 (citing ‘some compilations from our companions without full chains of narration’; the narration begins on page 189). • <i>Biḥār</i>, vol. 95, p. 401 (citing <i>Iqbāl al-A‘māl</i>).
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolism of antiquity • Uniquely Shī‘ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents • Women should not hold religious authority
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are included in the chain of sacred inheritance • The female view and experience, particularly motherhood, are also normative.

²⁵⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 95, p. 401 (citing *Iqbāl al-A‘māl*).

²⁵¹ For instance, this concept is conveyed in the *ziyārat* commonly recited for Imam al-Ḥusayn.

2.3.4 The exclusion of Eve from the chain of sacred inheritance

Despite the exalted position of Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance, suspicion about Eve also is communicated in narrations which *exclude* Eve from the maternal chain of inheritance. For instance, a narration about Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' in Paradise which strongly parallels the previous one in that it describes how Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' – but not other women – will be hidden from sight on the Day of Judgment names Khadījah, Mary, Āsiyah, and Umm Kulthūm, the mother of Yaḥyā, with Fāṭimah (again, a group of four) but omits Eve.²⁵² Since Umm Kulthūm the mother of Yaḥyā is not commonly mentioned, it is possible that this she was substituted for Eve because Eve was perceived negatively.²⁵³

Another narration where Eve is substituted out is a narration regarding the birth of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'.²⁵⁴ In it, Khadījah is about to give birth to Fāṭimah

²⁵² Abū Ja'fār [Imām al-Bāqir] was asked, 'Tell me a *ḥadīth* on the merit (*faḍl*) of your grandmother Fāṭimah that, if I tell it to your Shi'a, they will rejoice in it'. So Abū Ja'fār, peace be upon him, said, '[...] from the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, on the Day of Judgment, the prophets and messengers will be on *minbars* of light, and my *minbar* will be higher than their *minbars*. Then Allah will say, "O Muḥammad, speak." So I will give a speech (*khuṭbah*) that the prophets and messengers have not heard the like of. [The same with 'Alī, then the same thing with the children of the prophets, and this will happen with al Ḥasan and al Ḥusayn. Fāṭimah is skipped up until this point.]

'Then a caller will call out – and it is Jibrā'īl, peace be upon him – "Where is Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad? Where is Khadījah bint Khuwaylid? Where is Maryam bint 'Imrān? Where is Āsiyah bint Muzāhim? Where is Umm Kulthūm the mother of Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā?"

'So they will stand and Allah, the Blessed and High, will say, "O gathered peoples, to whom is the honour today?" Then Muḥammad and 'Alī and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will say, "To Allah, the One, the Mighty." Then Allah will say, "O gathered peoples, I gave given honour to Muḥammad and 'Alī and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and Fāṭimah; O gathered peoples, bow your heads and lower your eyes, because indeed Fāṭimah is going to Paradise." [She then enters Paradise with her entourage and stops that the gate.] al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 8, p. 52, no. 59 (citing *Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm*).

²⁵³ It is also possible that the mother of Yaḥyā is mentioned because al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī is sometimes compared in *ḥadīth* to Yaḥyā, in that both of them were killed and beheaded unjustly, and thus all four women had one thing in common – that their children, who were chosen by Allah, were murdered (or, in the case of the Islamic belief regarding 'Īsā, the people thought they killed him) unjustly. See Chapter 6.

²⁵⁴ Although the narration of the four women coming to assist Khadījah in her birth is popularly related in Shī'ī devotional settings, M. S. Bahmanpour in *The Blessed Tree* gives a good argument, based on discussions of the year of birth of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' and contemporaneous events, for why this narration is historically inaccurate. M. S. Bahmanpour, *The Blessed Tree*, trans. Abbas Jaffer (London: Muhammadi Trust, 2010), pp. 26-29. Marion Katz feels that this type of *ḥadīth* was a prototype for a similar *ḥadīth* circulated about the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, whereby women from sacred history came to assist Āminah in the

al-Zahrā', but the women of her tribe scorn her for marrying the Prophet and abandon her. And so, Allah sends four renowned women from throughout sacred history to assist her in delivering this blessed child.²⁵⁵ Variants on this narration replace Eve with either Kulthūm the sister of Mūsā or Ṣafrā' the daughter of Shu'ayb.²⁵⁶

Unlike the first narration, which discusses a general human experience, this narration focuses on an iconic female experience – childbirth. The wording of this narration supports this common experience, for the women identify themselves not just by their names but by designations of female kinship. In a common variant, Eve comes to Khadījah and assures her, 'I am your mother Eve'; the other three – Āsiyah, Kulthūm, and Mary – identify themselves as the sisters and daughters of respected figures in sacred history; then they say, 'We have come to take charge of you in your [time of] need.'²⁵⁷ Thus, although Khadījah is spurned by her tribeswomen, she can rely upon this greater chain of sacred female kinship.

Were this the only variant of this narration, this narration would be a great honour for Eve, for – like the previous narration – it connects her with respected female figures who had pivotal roles in sacred history.²⁵⁸ Unlike in the narrations where all of these women are presented as handmaidens of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', in this narration, Eve retains a grandmotherly sort of authority over both Khadījah and the as yet unborn Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'; she is the only one who

birth, and points out that it is never cited with sources such as a source book or an *isnād*. Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, pp. 37-38. See also Denise Soufi, *The Image of Fatima in Classical Muslim Thought*.

²⁵⁵ However, Majlisī includes a different *ḥadīth*, which describes four women coming to assist the mother of Imām 'Alī with the birth and names them as Eve, Asiyah, Maryam, and the mother of Mūsā. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 35, p. 15, no. 12 (citing *Rawḍat al-Wā'izīn*); also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 35, p. 99, no. 33 (citing *al-Fadā'il*, with variations). Katz holds that this is another variation on the same theme of four historical women coming to assist with a pivotal birth. Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 37-38.

²⁵⁶ The narration including Kulthūm is in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 43, p. 3, no. 1 (citing *Amāli al-Ṣādūq*); the narration including Ṣafrā' is in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 16, p. 80, no. 20 (source unspecified).

²⁵⁷ Clohessey discusses the sources of these *ḥadīth* in *Fatimah: Daughter of Muhammad*, pp. 83-84

²⁵⁸ The sister of Mūsā, for example, is said in the Qur'ān to have been the one who convinced the Pharaoh to let Mūsā' mother suckle him, thus reuniting mother and son.

is also directly connected to Khadījah through lineage. This would thus provide a distinct contrast to the narrations which present Eve in a less favourable light.

However, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī elects to include a different variant of the narration. While the story in the narration is essentially the same, the women are not: Eve and Kulthūm are excluded, and instead the four women are Sārah, Āsiyah, Mary, and Şafrā’; note the preference for Sārah over Hājar, despite Hājar’s role in the Islamic consciousness as the maternal ancestor of the Prophet.²⁵⁹ Other than the change in names, the essence of the narration is identical – sacred women supporting a sacred woman during childbirth – although the sense of matriarchal lineage linking back to the creational and the archetypal is lost with the exclusion of Eve.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Exclusion of Eve from the sacred chain of inheritance
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 8: 52, no. 59 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 16:80, no. 20 (source unspecified) • <i>Biḥār</i> 43:3, no. 1 (citing <i>Amāli al-Şādūq</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative view towards Eve in the Judaeo-Christian tradition • Uniquely Shī‘ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not reinforce the premises of the separate-but-equal ideology since Eve is replaced by other women in sacred history.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are included in the chain of sacred inheritance • The female experience is normative.

2.4 The second counter-narrative – a divergent set of pre-Islamic influences

2.4.1 The case of the missing rib

This next three narrations also present a counter-narrative to the patriarchal, restrictive view of women, or the idea of inherent gender differences; but, in these cases, it is done without involving the narrative of *wilāyah*, distinctively Shī‘ī content, or the same patriarchal values.

The first narration to be discussed is found in two of the Four Books – *al-Tahdhīb* and *al-Faḳīh*. However, unlike some other narrations, this one blurs the

²⁵⁹ The preference for Sārah here also reflects a general preference for Sārah over Hājar in Shī‘ī ḥadīth; see the section on Sārah and Hājar in Chapter 5.

line between females and males, and strips away essential characteristics or roles ascribed to either gender. This narration is also ascribed to Imām ‘Alī, and hence offers a different view of gender roles than the other narrations ascribed to him.

In this narration, a hermaphrodite is brought to Shurayḥ al-Qāḍī (a 1st century AH judge) to resolve a dispute over whether the hermaphrodite should receive a male or female portion of inheritance. Citing a precedent from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Shurayḥ al-Qāḍī tells the story of a hermaphrodite who bore and sired children with a husband and slave-girl, respectively. This very ambiguous hermaphrodite was brought before ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to rule on his/her gender. When other methods of determining the hermaphrodite’s gender failed, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ordered that the hermaphrodite’s ribs be counted, and the hermaphrodite was adjudged – to the dismay of the hermaphrodite’s husband – to be a man on the grounds that men have one less rib than women because Eve was created from a rib. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib then ordered that the hermaphrodite be clad in clothing fit for males and sent everyone on their way.²⁶⁰

The narration, of course, is incredible: men do not have fewer ribs than women, and it is hard to believe that the hermaphrodite would be conveniently lacking a rib. It is even harder to believe that the hermaphrodite successfully became both a father and a mother. However, thematically, in contrast to the narrations about Eve which outline a clear, essential distinction between men and women, in this narration, the hermaphrodite easily switches between male and female while maintaining his or her essential character; the only way the hermaphrodite’s maleness is expressed is thorough being symbolically dressed in male clothing. Indeed, the involvement of a hermaphrodite in the narration functions as a ‘boundary condition’ to explore the delineation between masculine and feminine. From that angle, it dismisses the idea of creational differences between male and female with respect to their nature, agency, and social roles. It can, however, be seen as part of a social attempt to enforce the

²⁶⁰ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Ahkām* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1365 AH (solar)), vol. 9, pp. 354-56, no. 1271; al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 327, no. 5702 & 5704. A shortened version is in al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 327.

Semitic norm of an inherently gendered society, because the hermaphrodite is not left alone but instead is brought to the judge to have his/her gender ruled upon.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Hermaphrodite
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Faqīh</i> 4:327, nos. 5702 and 5704 • <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> 9:354-6, no. 1271 •
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian legend
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not support the idea of inherent differences between women and men.

2.4.2 The grain motif

Along the same lines of the above narration, which does not uphold the idea of significant creational differences between Eve and Adam, there is a set of narrations explaining why women receive less inheritance than men. Unlike the narration from *Biḥār* discussed previously, which attributed women's lesser inheritance to the inferiority of Eve, these curious narrations found in *al-Faqīh* and *Biḥār* say that women receive half the inheritance of men because, in Paradise, Eve ate half as many kernels from an ear of grain than Adam.²⁶¹ The version in *al-Faqīh* gives the numbers of kernels as 6 and 12, respectively; variations in *Biḥār* give other numbers.²⁶² It is also part of the *ḥadīth* about the Shāmī (mentioned above in the section on woman's zeal).²⁶³ (The idea that Eve and Adam's actions had permanent consequences on *sharī'ah* is found throughout narrations on Eve and Adam, and not only with respect to gender-based differences; for instance, several narrations indicate that the timings of the *ṣalāt* are due to their actions.)²⁶⁴ To resolve the apparent conflict between the different narrations indicating different numbers of kernels, 'Allāmah al-Majlisī suggests that the narrations refer to an ear of grain, which was then split

²⁶¹ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 351.

²⁶² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 10, pp. 75-83; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 167, no. 13 and 14 (both citing '*Ilal al-Sharā'ī*')

²⁶³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 10, pp. 75-83, no. 8 (citing '*Ilal al-Sharā'ī*').

²⁶⁴ For instance, al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 211, no. 643; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 9, p. 294, no. 5; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 196, no. 52.

into smaller kernels; Majlisī's effort to reconcile the narrations suggests a certain level of credence in them.²⁶⁵

No value judgment is assigned to Eve eating less, nor are Adam and Eve portrayed as male and female archetypes (apart from the implication that men, by nature, eat more). It also does not prescribe gender roles, in contrast to the narration preceding it in *al-Faqīh* which offers a more conventional explanation that women less receive less inheritance because they are not supposed to be have to pay for 'āqilah,²⁶⁶ provide for the family, engage in jihad, or do 'many other things'.²⁶⁷ Hence, it is a departure from the explanations of why men and women are treated differently in the *sharī'ah* that are expressed through the separate-but-equal ideology, and, with respect to the research questions, it is *not* connected to any intrinsic, creational difference between men and women.

Since Shī'ī narrations about pre-creation generally focus on spiritual entities, such as angels and lights, and do not take on a pastoral theme, the symbolism of the grain is not clear.²⁶⁸ It might relate to the Tammuz tradition, particularly since, even as late as the 10th-11th centuries, there were still reports of Tammuz festivals being celebrated in Mesopotamia and the Levant – for instance, through abstaining from ground foods and bewailing the dead god (in the same way that was condemned, centuries earlier, in Ezekiel 8:14-15). Whether or not the symbolism is linked in whole or in part to the Tammuz tradition, it is a reminder of the continued pervasiveness of ancient symbolism during the Islamic era.²⁶⁹

Possibly, the mention of grain relates to the view that the tree in heaven was a grain 'tree' (as opposed to an olive tree, a grape 'tree', a fig tree, or a tree of eternal life), although a literal interpretation of the tree as a grain 'tree'

²⁶⁵ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 11, p. 164.

²⁶⁶ A customary tribal agreement wherein members of a tribe would share the responsibility of paying blood-money.

²⁶⁷ al-Şādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 351, no. 5757.

²⁶⁸ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi discusses the Shī'ī *ḥadīth* on pre-creation in *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. D. Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 29-43.

²⁶⁹ For further discussion of the Tammuz tradition, see Thorkild Jacobsen *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

diverges from the description of the tree as a tree of envy of *ahl al-bayt*.²⁷⁰ This can be seen as either reflecting positively or negatively on Adam: while, on the one hand, it would make sense for Adam to gain more advantages by eating from a powerful 'fruit', he should be punished, not rewarded, for his transgression. The idea that Adam was able to outsmart the deity chips away at the absoluteness of Allah emphasized in Shī'ī narrations.

In any case, this portrayal of the tree places Eve less at fault, and she is not cursed. With its legalistic approach, it also integrates pre-Islamic ideas with the Islamic tradition to communicate an originally Islamic view of gender.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Why women receive less inheritance – the grain motif
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Faqīh</i> 4:351, no. 5758 • <i>Bihār</i> vol. 10, pp. 75-83, no. 8 (citing '<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>') • <i>Bihār</i> 11:167, no. 13 & 14 (both citing '<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>')
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agrarian mythos
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not support the idea of intrinsic differences between men and women.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurisprudential differences between women and men are not due to an intrinsic difference. • Eve and Adam's actions had permanent consequences on religious law

2.4.3 Etymologies

A number of narrations on Eve feature Hebraic etymologies, and many of these narrations synthesize Islamic with Judaic material. Because Arabic and Hebrew are cognate languages, and some of the names and places used in sacred history are shared, the Hebrew etymologies actually work in Arabic. As Jewish sources do with Hebrew, these narrations carry the assumption that classical Arabic is a primal, unchanged language and is the language of the divine; and that the Arabic names of objects and places reflect their true nature.²⁷¹ Thus, the etymologies are explained in the context of being divinely

²⁷⁰ This view was circulated among both Sunnīs and Shī'ī s. For the Sunnī narrations on the types of tree, see Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 29.

²⁷¹ It is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir that Ismā'īl was the instantiator of Arabic. al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 82. One of the narrations discussed in Chapter 5 indicates that Sulaymān spoke Arabic (as well as a number of other languages); this is based on a literal reading of

ordained, essential, and fixed aspects of the cosmos, on par with the creation of day and night. However, while these narrations portray Adam and Eve as male and female archetypes, they do not convey the view of women as passive, invisible, or restricted. Instead, most of the etymological narrations, while reflecting pre-Islamic influence, portray women as individuals and not as spiritually, ethically, or intellectually inferior.

The most common etymologies are of ‘Adam’ and ‘Eve’. These vary slightly from the Hebrew, in that, in Arabic, Adam is said to be called Adam because he is made of dust (*adīm*), whereas, in Hebrew, the relationship between Adam and *adīm* is said to be more of a play on words than an actual etymology. Similarly, Eve is said to be called *Hawwā*’ because she was created from a living thing (*ḥayy*), as opposed to the explanation in Genesis 3:20 that she is called Eve because she is the mother of all living things.²⁷² Some mention that women are called *nisā*’ because Eve was Adam’s *anīs* (‘companion’), although one distinctly Shī’ī narration says that the angels (not Eve) were Adam’s *anīs*. (This is, at any rate, a refutation of the misconception circulated today that women, in Arabic, are called *nisā*’ because they are forgetful (*nasiya*.) Other etymologies include *ākhīrah*, *dinār*, *dirham*, daytime (*nahār*), night-time (*layl*), and the world (*dunyā*).²⁷³ It is also related that woman (singular) is called *al-mar’ah* because Eve was created from *al-mar*’ (man, singular); this seems to be a borrowing of the Hebrew *ishah* and *ish* in Genesis. While these etymologies communicate the implication that Eve was created from Adam, they do not present Eve and Adam as unequal.

One of the more unusual etymologies is the origin of the expression used to urge on a donkey (*ḥimār*).²⁷⁴ Narrations in *Bihār* relate that people say *ḥurr* to a donkey because Eve was the first person to ride a donkey (in one place, it

Sūrat al-Naml in which Sulaymān writes a letter to Bilqīs beginning with the *basmalah*; the longer version of the grain *ḥadīth* in *Bihār* also identifies Arabic as the language of Paradise.

²⁷² Both etymologies are found in Sunnī sources; for instance, see al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma’ al-Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 187; Ismā’īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 141.

²⁷³ The etymology for nighttime seems significant, because it is said that night was called ‘*layl*’ because man ‘*yulaylil*’ regarding woman. Unfortunately, it is not possible to deduce exactly what is being expressed here, because, by the time of ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī, the precise meaning of *yulayil* as a verb was no longer available, although al-Majlisī speculates about what it could mean.

²⁷⁴ This is mentioned in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 10, p. 13 and vol. 11, p. 225.

specifies that it was a female donkey) to the grave of her son, and she used to say *wā ḥurrā* to it.²⁷⁵ Lastly, one narration in *Biḥār* references the Jewish/Babylonian calendar –something which, needless to say, is atypical. (The narration is taken from *Kitāb Sa‘d al-Sa‘ūd* by Ibn Ṭāwūs.) This narration also tells the story of the establishment of *ṣalāt al-‘aṣr*, *ṣalāt al-maghrib*, and *ṣalāt al-‘ishā’*, something found in other narrations, and is another example of synthesis of Judaic and Islamic themes. However, this narration differs from similar narrations on two counts. First, it concludes by saying that all of this happened on the first day of Nīsān – the first month of the Jewish calendar, in which some Jews maintain that the world was created.²⁷⁶ Also, Adam and Eve are brought into Garden on a litter (*kursī*) of light, and Allah attributes the timings of the *ṣalāts* to what they both (dual pronoun) did.²⁷⁷

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Etymologies, Jewish calendar
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 9:306, no.8 (<i>furqān</i>, <i>layl</i>, <i>dunyā</i>, citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Biḥār</i> 10:13, no.8 (<i>samā’</i>, <i>dunyā</i>, <i>ākhirah</i>, Ādam, <i>Hawwā’</i>, <i>dirham</i>, <i>ḥimār</i>, citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:109, no. 19 (<i>mar‘ah</i>, citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:109, no. 20 (<i>nisā’</i>, citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Biḥār</i> 11:196-197, no. 52 (Jewish calendar, citing <i>Kitāb Sa‘d al-Sa‘ūd</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hebrew
Separate-but-equal ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not support the separate-but-equal ideology.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women may travel and visit graves.

2.4.4 The Persian calendar

Just as with the Jewish calendar, the regional aspect may be at play in a mention of Eve’s creation in a lengthy *ḥadīth* in *Biḥār* providing the date of Eve’s creation on the Persian calendar.²⁷⁸ It is part of the genre of narrations talking about important events happening on a day of sacred significance, such as ‘Āshūrā’ or Friday. It is, of course, debatable whether a narration expounding

²⁷⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 10, p. 13.

²⁷⁶ Roger Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian: Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 132.

²⁷⁷ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, pp. 196-197.

²⁷⁸ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 56, pp. 91-100, no. 1 (citing ‘some books worthy of consideration’; Eve is on page 93).

upon the sacred significance of the Persian calendar should be given any credence at all from the angle of authenticity.²⁷⁹ Al-Majlisī himself expresses doubt over the narration, in that he simply says that he saw it in ‘some books worthy of consideration’ (*ba‘d al-kutub al-mu‘tabirah*) rather than giving the actual pedigree of the narration.²⁸⁰ The narration itself also discusses omens for various days, which are discussed in other narrations about Eve, but seems to be at odds with the Qur’ānic injunction against calendar-related superstitions.

The narration begins with al-Mu‘allā ibn Khanīs,²⁸¹ a companion of Imām al-Ṣādiq, visiting him on Nawrūz, and proceeds to an explanation of the creational and sacred significance of Nawrūz with respect to events both before and after the advent of Islam, and then embarks upon a description of the merits of each of the thirty days of the Persian month. The second day, *bahman-rūz*, is when it says Eve was created from one of Adam’s ribs. The Imām says that *bahman-rūz* is a blessed day, named after one of the angels which guards the divine veils shielding Allah’s holiness (*ḥujub al-quds wa al-karāmah*), and he recommends that people marry, travel, and engage in commerce on this day (presumably, with marriage recommended because of Eve’s creation).²⁸²

Although this narration does not say much of substance about Eve, two things can be taken from it: (a) a favourable outlook towards Eve and marriage in general, and (b) the inclusion of multiple cultural/religious influences. Here Eve is mentioned in the light of sacred history and good omens. This favourable approach here may reflect the culture of ancient Iran, in that, in general, women

²⁷⁹ Within the Shī‘ī books, there are narrations both encouraging and taking a more disinterested approach to the celebration of Nawrūz (the Persian New Year, which is the largest holiday of the year in Iran and has Zoroastrian roots) as an Islamic holiday. M. Rayshahri (ed.), *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shī‘ī Ḥadīth*, pp. 815-816. Apart from the obvious interest that al-Majlisī, as an Iranian, may have had in the Persian calendar, these may also be present in *Bihār* because *Bihār* contains a unique section on narrations relating to astronomical and geographical matters, which is not traditionally found in *ḥadīth* texts. See Rasul Jafarian, ‘The Encyclopaedic Aspect of *Bihār al-Anwar*’.

²⁸⁰ The *sanad* is also interesting, insofar that it is related through a fourteenth-generation descendant of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (all of whose forefathers are named, making it for a very long name), from a number of others – including, not surprisingly, a Qummī – from Imām al-Ṣādiq.

²⁸¹ Also written ‘Khunays’; see Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, p. 326.

²⁸² The concept of veiling the divine will be discussed more in Chapter 6.

in ancient Iran enjoyed a higher status than in Greece or Mesopotamia.²⁸³ Thus, this Persian content does *not* portray woman as inferior or irrelevant, in contrast to the characteristically patriarchal material.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Persian calendar
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 56:91-100, no. 1 (citing 'some books worthy of consideration').
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoroastrianism
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not support the separate-but-equal ideology.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive view of marriage

2.5 Uniquely Islamic content – the first hajj

Most of the above narrations contain identifiably extra-Islamic material. However, there is one narration strand in *al-Kāfī* which does not overtly reflect extra-Islamic material, or thematically contradict the Qur'ān; and, hence, this narration can be classified as 'uniquely Islamic'. This is the account of the descent of Adam and Eve to Ṣafā and Marwah, respectively, and their performance of the first hajj.

To make the situation more complicated, however, this narration exists in two forms in *al-Kāfī*. In terms of content, the narrations do not conflict. However, they differ in terms of their treatment of gender. One of the narrations treats Eve and Adam as equals, and shows them as both having an equal role in originating a fundamental rite of Islamic identity, the hajj. The other presents Adam as the primary actor and as the primary interlocutor with God. Nonetheless, they both have a positive view of Eve.

(a) *Eve the invisible*. This story is related through two narrations, which are being treated together because they are essentially the same, with only

²⁸³ The Sunnī *ḥadīth* warning against female rulers – 'A people who appoint a woman as their leader will never succeed' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, p. 97) – is said to have been related when a lady was appointed as the leader of the Persians, before their fall – thus indicating that Persians had female rulers then. Fatima Mernissi argues that this *ḥadīth* is fabricated. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, pp. 49-61. This specific *ḥadīth* itself is not found in the classical books of the Shī'ī corpus, although it is listed a few times in the modern work *Mustadrak Saḥīḥ al-Biḥār*, and a similar sentiment is found in some Shī'ī narrations. 'Alī Namāzī al-Shāhrūdī (d. 1405 AH), *Mustadrak Saḥīḥ al-Biḥār*, ed. Hasan al-Namāzī, 10 vols. (Qum: Jamā'at al-Mudarrisīn, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 255; vol. 5, p.99; and vol. 10, p. 47.

minor variants (and no difference in how they portray Eve).²⁸⁴ By the time this narrative begins, Adam and Eve have already eaten from the tree, and have been sent down to earth on the mountains of Şafā and Marwah, respectively. The narration notes that Şafā is called 'Şafā' because Adam the Chosen One (*al-muṣṭafā*) descended upon it, whereas Marwah is called 'Marwah' because a woman (*al-mar'ah*) descended upon it; the *āyah* 'Allah has chosen Adam and Noah (*'inna Allāh iṣṭafā Ādam wa Nūh*)...' (Qur'ān 3:33) is cited as evidence of the former point. This distinctly Islamic etymology is also a break with the narrations which provide Hebrew etymologies, and further suggest that this narration is offering a uniquely Islamic viewpoint.

The story then continues from the perspective of Adam, who is quoted as saying (to whom, one wonders) that when he and Eve were sent down, they were not lawful to each other as man and wife; otherwise, they would have been sent down to the same mountain. Adam is dreadfully lonely, particularly since Allah has halted His revelation to him. So, every day, he goes to visit Eve on Marwah and speaks with her. Then, he returns home to Şafā by nightfall lest his 'self get the better of him' (by now, Adam is no longer the speaker), and goes to sleep by himself. For this reason, the narration says, woman was named *nisā'*, since Eve was Adam's companion (*anīs*).

At this point, Eve drops out of the story. Allah decides to forgive Adam, so He sends down the angel Jibrā'īl to inform Adam of His forgiveness and to show him the rites (*manāsik*, the same word used in the Qur'ān and in jurisprudence for the rites of hajj) to perform to purify himself of his error. So, through Jibrā'īl's guidance, key stations of the hajj – such as the Black Stone and Muzdalifah – are established, and Adam performs a lengthy hajj. After concluding with *ṭawāf al-nisā'* – which, in Shī'ī *fiqh*, is the final *ṭawāf* of hajj, after which the restriction on cohabiting with one's spouse is lifted – the angel

²⁸⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, pp. 190-1, no. 1 and vol. 4, pp. 191-194, no. 2. It may be notable that the second of the two is related through Sahl ibn Ziyad, from whom issue many narrations unfavourable to women, as will emerge throughout this work. However, this observation should be tempered with the fact that a great number of narrations are attributed to him. One also notes the presence of 'Alī ibn Abī Hamzah, who split off from Twelver Shī'ism and is known as the founder of Wāqifism, in the first *sanad*. Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, pp. 183-187.

Jibrā'īl informs Adam that Allah has forgiven him, and that his wife is now lawful to him.

Unlike other patriarchal-oriented narrations, this account is neither misogynistic nor negative towards Eve; certainly, Adam seems happy with her. The idea that a feature of the sacred land – Marwah – was named after Eve also reflects positively on her, particularly since Şafā and Marwah are described as equals. However, it does not actually say anything about Eve at all. Eve is passive and invisible, and the narration does not suggest whether Eve might have felt frightened or alone as she sat atop her mountain in a strange new world waiting for Adam to complete his protracted hajj. Adam is also the only one with motive force; Eve never leaves her mountain. And while the hajj is prescribed for both males and females, only Adam performs the hajj. Thus, this narration portrays women as not having independent agency, and also adds a tentative 'no' to the question of whether women are portrayed as having physical desires.

The focus on Adam as normative is characteristic of classical jurisprudential texts, which are written under the assumption that the reader is a man. The separation of Adam and Eve at the beginning seems symbolic of the conditions of *iḥrām* for hajj (in that, after entering the state of *iḥrām*, a husband and wife are no longer lawful to each other) – or perhaps an implied explanation for the origin of the conditions of *iḥrām* – rather than an explanation of what happened in the Garden. This, combined with the rather prescriptive description of the rites of hajj, suggests that this narration reflects post-Prophetic developments in jurisprudence; however, the departure of the narration from the 'official' codification of the rites of hajj in Shī'ī jurisprudence with respect to minor points suggests it originated before Shī'ī jurisprudence was fully codified.²⁸⁵ The distinctly Shī'ī inclusion of *ṭawāf al-nisā'* (which is not performed by Sunnīs) also gives it a characteristically Shī'ī flavour and, along with the creation not-from-a-rib narration, suggests that exclusion of women from religious discourse was absorbed as part of Shī'ī identity.

²⁸⁵ The interested reader can consult the footnotes in this edition of *al-Kāfi* on this *ḥadīth* which provide commentary on how this it compares with common formulations of Shī'ī jurisprudence regarding hajj.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	The first <i>hajj</i> – exclusion of Eve
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 4:190-1, no. 1 and 4:191-194, no. 2.
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Islamic content • Jurisprudential discourse
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports the premise that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bondmaids of love’
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eve is uninvolved in the story. • Eve does not participate in the first hajj. • Allah speaks to Adam only.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differs slightly from codified Shī‘ī rites of hajj.

(b) *Eve the equal*. This narration, which also describes the descent of Adam and Eve to Ṣafā and Marwah, takes a different approach. It is a *ḥadīth qudsī* (i.e. from the perspective of Allah). It begins with Allah saying ‘I am the Merciful, the Compassionate’ – *al-rahmān, al-rahīm*, the signature Islamic formula – and then describes how Allah expressed His mercy upon Adam and Eve when they complained to Him by uniting them in an elaborate, gigantic, shining, bejewelled, and extensively described tent sent from the Garden and spread across the precincts of the Sacred House; this was to comfort them for their expulsion from the Garden. (In the previous account, the sacred land was covered by a cloud instead of a tent.) Then, Allah sends angels to Adam to be his *anīs*; unlike the above narration, this narration does not describe the sole purpose of Eve’s existence as being Adam’s *anīs*.

Then, Allah sends the angel Jibrā‘īl to both Adam and Eve to speak to them; Eve is mentioned by name. (This again adds Eve to the list of women who receive divine revelation.) Eventually, Adam and Eve are put on Ṣafā and Marwah, respectively; Adam asks the angel Jibrā‘īl whether this is a punishment from Allah, and Jibrā‘īl says that it is not, but ‘Allah is not asked about what he does’; the separation of Adam and Eve here seems more symbolic of the splitting of humankind into male and female. In any case, unlike in the previous narration, Adam is not lonely since he has 70,000 angels to keep him company. The narration concludes with both Adam and Eve beholding the 70,000 angels; they are so moved by this sight that they perform seven

rounds of *ṭawāf*, and then they leave the Sacred House together to embark on the age-old quest of humanity – namely, the quest for something to eat.²⁸⁶

This narration is more similar to the Qur’ānic account of Adam and Eve in that Adam and Eve are referred to in the dual form; according to this narration, Allah took mercy upon *both* of them because of *their twain* crying and *their twain* loneliness, and so *they two* reunited in the tent. Unlike most of the other narrations, this narration also does not portray Adam and Eve as archetypal males and females, or as having distinctly defined gender roles; the full inclusion of Eve in the hajj is also reflective of the expectation that both women and men will perform the hajj. It is also devoid of any idea of Eve being cursed or put in a subordinate position. Thus, in contrast to the above narration about the descent to Ṣafā and Marwah, this narration *does* portray women as humans in their own right, rather than as extensions of male relatives. Lastly, it should be noted that while this narration does not contain identifiably esoteric Shī‘ī content, the imagery of the angels and gemstones is similar to imagery employed in esoteric Shī‘ī narrations, and thus this narration is more in line with the esoteric Shī‘ī narrations promoting an equitable view of gender.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	The first <i>hajj</i> – inclusion of Eve
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 4:195-197, no. 2.
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Islamic
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not support the idea of intrinsic differences between women and men.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eve is an equal participant. • Allah speaks to both Eve and Adam.

2.6 Conclusions

The narrations on Eve reflect a vast variety of pre-Islamic and post-Prophetic influences, particularly but not limited to Genesis; some are also uniquely Shī‘ī, although that does not discount the possibility of syncretism. The implications about the nature of and role woman in these narrations conflict each other, as well as largely conflict with the Qur’ānic portrayal of Eve and

²⁸⁶ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, pp. 195-197, no. 2.

Adam,. Nonetheless, some of the ideas about women here have been canonized as norms in jurisprudential discourse, or as part of the separate-but-equal ideology.

What is the subtext? The ‘patriarchal’ set of narrations supports Mahallati’s view (see Chapter 1) that aspects of the separate-but-equal ideology date back to the classical era of Shī‘ism, in that these narrations reinforce the separate-but-equal ideology (research question 2, separate-but-equal ideology). These narrations describe an inherent gender hierarchy with man as a ‘demi-god’ and interlocutor for woman before Allah. They present man as normative in creation and sacred history (research question 3, male normativeness). They present male ownership and control (*qiwāmah* and *wilāyah*), and mostly present woman as passive, silent, and absent. They canonize the paradigm of marriage as being one of ownership (the ‘slave-marriage’ model) and a model of courtship whereby marriage is a negotiation between men which benefits men. Some narrations explain differences in *sharī‘ah* between women and men on the basis that Eve is inferior because she was created from Adam or from his ‘leftovers’. It has been said that the Sunnī narrations demonize menstruation, pregnancy, and female sexuality;²⁸⁷ instead of demonizing female sexuality, these narrations aim to control it. The narrations in the Four Books mostly fall into this category, which suggests that either (a) these books selectively included the patriarchal and restrictive narrations about women because, by that time, these values were considered normative and ‘orthodox’; or (b) the selection of these books as the ‘orthodox’ books of Shī‘ism led to the canonization of a heavily patriarchal and restrictive view of women as ‘orthodox’.

The only aspect of the separate-but-equal ideology which was treated in a contradictory manner in the ‘patriarchal’ narrations was the assumption that ‘man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love.’ The creation-from-a-rib narration presents woman as inherently asexual, and as a bond-maid (although not of love), while the narrations on ‘women’s zeal for men’ (which is so intense that it requires ‘imprisoning’ them) send the opposite message.

²⁸⁷ See the first footnote of this chapter.

However, since both narration sets call for male control and authority over women, it is possible that this was not seen as a conflict.

Do these narrations support the separate-but-equal ideology? (Narrations with an asterisk are in the Four Books.)		
Premise	Yes	No
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.	Creation not-from-a-rib* Woman's zeal is for man* Wine and woman*	Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance Hermaphrodite* Eve and the Prophetic light Etymologies
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.	Creation not-from-a-rib* Woman's zeal is for man* Women in <i>shari'ah</i> Men are superior to women Wine and woman*	Eve as the bearer of the Prophetic light The tree of envy Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance Hermaphrodite* The grain motif* Etymologies
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.	Wine and woman*	The tree of envy Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.	Men are superior to women	
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal.	Woman's zeal is for man*	
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).	Creation not-from-a-rib* Eve's first child* Wine and woman*	Woman's zeal is for man (alternative narration)
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.		
h) Female chastity is of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized.	Creation not-from-a-rib* Women in <i>shari'ah</i> Eve's first child* Woman's zeal	Woman's zeal is for man (alternative narration) Eve was clad in her hair (see footnotes in sections 2.1.2 and 2.2.3).
i) 'Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love'	Creation not-from-a-rib* The first hajj no. 1*	Woman's zeal is for man*

In addition to reinforcing ideas about women identified in the literature review, the 'patriarchal' set of narrations also included some surprises. One was the primordial association of woman with evil (a subject which will be revisited in Chapter 7) The other was the presumption that men are the gatekeepers of knowledge, and can deny women access to it. This will be discussed more in Chapter 4 (Zulaykhā) due to the narration advising men not to teach their womenfolk how to read. Lastly, although the Qur'ān condemns the cultural belief that a male child is superior to a female child, this stigma has persisted in the Middle East (and other regions). While this stigma can be explained as being both socio-economic (in that a man is seen as a producer) as well as reproductive (a woman is in danger of having a child out of wedlock or shaming the family), the narration about Eve's first daughter 'Anāq reinforces the idea that it is safer to have a son because women might fall into indecency. This narration also communicates the cultural view that the worst possible crime – punishable by severe divine retribution – is for a woman to act indecently; this is ironic given that her brother Cain committed fratricide but was not as severely condemned.

On the other hand, the narrations in the two counter-narratives – Eve in the narrative of *wilāyah*, and narrations invoking ancient imagery – present Eve and Adam on equal footing, and do not reflect the notion that woman is creationally inferior. In fact, they do not support the idea of essential or creational differences between woman and man at all, particularly the 'hermaphrodite' narration. Therefore, they do not support the separate-but-equal theory (research question 2, separate-but-equal ideology). They present marriage as a partnership rather than as a hierarchical relationship, and do not support the 'demi-god' model. While these narrations also engage with jurisprudential discourse, they do not explain differences in *sharī'ah* between women and men as being due to an intrinsic difference between woman and man. Women are equally included in sacred history, and the narrations about Eve as the bearer of the Muhammadan light as well as Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance involve the uniquely female experience of childbirth as part of sacred narrative (research question 3, male normativeness and the female experience). Even the apparently negative portrayal of Eve with respect to the

'tree of envy' and the narrations with exclude Eve from the chain of sacred inheritance do not present women in a negative light because (in contrast to the conclusions of Ruffle and Thurlkill) Eve and Adam eat from the tree simultaneously, and other women in sacred history are substituted for Eve.

Theologically, the inclusion of Eve in the chain of male sacred inheritance as well as the parallel female chain of sacred inheritance is of particular interest. The inclusion of women in these chains questions the common assumption that the chain of sacred inheritance (*waṣīyyah*) is only for men. The presence of these chains, firstly, presents the female experience as normative; and, secondly, implies that religious authority is not limited to men. Women in the chain of sacred inheritance will be discussed more with respect to Bilqīs (Chapter 5) and the Virgin Mary (Chapter 6).

While these narrations do not involve Imām 'Alī significantly, the attribution of the exhortation to 'imprison' women to Imām 'Alī strongly supports the portrayal of Imām 'Alī as a misogynist (research question 7, Imām 'Alī and misogyny). On the other hand, the attribution of the 'hermaphrodite' narration to him, which blurs the distinctions between female and male, challenges that portrayal. Thematically, the 'hermaphrodite' narration comes across as being more reflective of less restrictive attitudes towards women. Since, textually, it is also situated in the early Islamic era; this suggests that the portrayal of Imām 'Alī as a misogynist could have developed later, perhaps concurrent with the expansion of the 'Abbāsīd Empire. A possible chronological difference between portrayals of Imām 'Alī with respect to his view of women will be explored more deeply in Chapter 7, which compares portrayals of Imām 'Alī in texts attributed to different eras.

Whose interests are being served? The patriarchal narrations. On the surface, when looking at the patriarchal narrations, one might answer 'men's', since these narrations protect the best interests of men – for instance, in protecting them from demonic or voracious females, and in institutionalizing male authority. However, this answer is simplistic because all of the narrations in this chapter were narrated by men for men who were living in patriarchal societies that were not in danger of being overtaken by Amazon women.

A deeper answer is that, by reinforcing the main presumptions behind jurisprudential discourse, the ‘patriarchal’ narrations serve the best interests of (male) jurists by presenting their views as the will of God and as part of the essential nature of creation. Questioning this arrangement – for instance, questioning whether it was really divinely ordained for men to have authority over women – would result in questioning the entire edifice of orthodoxy; for this reason, questioning the jurisprudential paradigm of women is often taboo today. These narrations put the divine stamp of approval on this set of social mores, and hence serve the interests of people who held them, regardless of whether or not these narrations are actually authentic.

Whose interests are being served? The counter-narratives. In contrast, these counter-narratives act as a form of cultural opposition (possibly to Arabization). The diversity of cultural influences on the narrations in the counter-narratives – for instance, Jewish and Persian – indicates that these narrations serve the interests of different cultural groups. This idea is not farfetched, since tension between the ‘*arab* and ‘*ajam* was common in the Islamic Empire, and other narrations – such as the *Shahrbānū* and *Salmān al-Fārsī* genres – are thought to have emerged to promote Persian identity.²⁸⁸ Additionally, the reference to *Iṣfahān* (in section 2.2.3) is part of a long-standing rivalry where some narrations elevate *Iṣfahān* (or other Persian cities) and others demonize it.

Second, the preference for esoteric imagery over a legalistic or theological discourse in the counter-narrative involving Eve in the narrative of *wilāyah* implies a tacit opposition to the assumption that Shī‘ī orthodoxy must be legalistic. At the same time, these narrations are unequivocally Shī‘ī: it is hard to get *more* Shī‘ī than *wilāyah*, particularly since the normative paradigm of jurisprudence was shared with Sunnīs. This may be reflective of the split between early Shī‘ah which came to be understood as the split between

²⁸⁸ See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ‘*Shahrbānū, Lady of the Land of Iran and Mother of the Imams: Between Pre-Islamic Iran and Imami Shi‘ism*’, in *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismā‘īlī Studies, 2011), pp. 45-100; Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

'normative' and '*ghulāt*' (extremist, heretic) Shī'ism; in fact, some of the narrations about Eve in the narrative of *wilāyah* could be viewed as *ghulūw*. These narrations may also reflect the division between legalistic and mystical (Ṣūfī, '*irfānī*') approaches towards Shī'ism, particularly given the crossover between Shī'ism and Ṣūfism, and, in practice, competing forms of Shī'ī orthodoxy such as Shī'ī Ṣūfī leaders. Some mediaeval Shī'ah may have preferred to adopt a mystical or spiritual understanding of Shī'ism in lieu of the drier (and more patriarchal) 'orthodoxy'. They may simply have felt that orthodoxy was geographically or culturally out of touch. Lastly, the inclusion of some of these narrations in obscure books may support the idea that esoteric narrations were circulated among the elite while a legalistic version of Shī'ism was presented to the masses.

Are women's interests being served? While, on the surface, the counter-narratives serve the best interests of women, it is unlikely that this was actually a factor since all of these texts recount discussions *about* women, transmitted from men to men, who eventually recorded them. (This, incidentally, calls to mind the question of where the *muḥaddithāt* disappeared to after the first century of Shī'ism.) That is, the counter-narratives are not the product of a mediaeval feminist movement. Perhaps some men were uncomfortable with the harsh views towards women in the 'patriarchal' narrations and preferred these instead. Some women might also argue that, in keeping with the patriarchal bargain, their interests are best served by the first set of narrations – that is, they are receiving care, protection, and social status, as well as removing the threat of female rivals, in exchange for giving up their agency.

People other than Muslims? Given the heavy inclusion of identifiably pre-Islamic motifs in these narrations, one possibility that cannot be neglected is that, in addition to serving the needs of various groups of Shī'ah (males, jurists, heretics), these narrations also served the needs of non-Shī'ah – particularly but not limited to Jews and Christians – by encoding their sacred texts as well as beliefs about the essential nature or role of woman at a time when Islam was gaining ascendancy. Some of these narrations may also have served the needs of former Jews and Christians who converted to Islam but who wished to retain their previous heritage and worldview. This would be the case for the narrations

both for and against the patriarchal customs and would account for the heavy diversity in this collection. The narrations in the second counter-narrative – those with ancient imagery that present an equitable view of female and male, and in which marriage is a partnership instead of a hierarchy – suggest the inclusion of cultural values of people in the Middle East who had less restrictive values towards women. They are a reminder of the cultural and religious diversity of the Middle East both in the time of Islam as well as before.

How does this relate to the canonization of Shī‘ī identity? The uniquely Shī‘ī narrations reflect the assimilation of contradictory ideas about the nature and role of women in the construction of Shī‘ī identity (research question 6 – Shī‘ī identity). (Ideologies do not always make sense!) In practice, this seeming schizophrenia has been resolved through a dual view of the nature and role of women. On an earthly level, ‘patriarchal’ norms are idealized – for instance male authority, male guardianship, the ‘ownership’ paradigm of marriage, and women’s seclusion. While these ideas are shared with mediaeval Sunnī thought, the heavy emphasis on them in Shī‘ī traditions instils them more strongly and makes them harder to contest. However, at the same time, in Shī‘ī thought, the female has a spiritual position, potential, and role which is arguably unparalleled in Sunnī narrations; this is represented by the narrations about the narrative of *wilāyah*, particularly those involving Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. In short, a woman can have spiritual equity and otherworldly authority, but on an earthly level, there is a gender hierarchy. This dichotomy between the earthly and the otherworldly is particularly pronounced in the narrations on the Virgin Mary (see Chapter 6). The section on the Virgin Mary will also demonstrate a crossover between these two sets of ideas, whereby earthly customs such as seclusion take on an esoteric significance.

What does this mean today? The main contribution that an examination of the narration about Eve provides is that it identifies and problematizes many unspoken assumptions about the essential nature and role of women. It also brings up the question of why the patriarchal view was adopted as ‘orthodox’ in lieu of the equitable view. Today there is a general understanding that various cultural views influenced the development of Islamic discourse; there is also a general understanding that there ought to be difference between ‘culture’ and

‘religion.’ (By that, what is meant is ‘cultural expectations or restrictions not intended by the Prophet.’) Actually seeing *how* various cultural values were introduced into Shī‘ī thought places those inquiries in a new light, and is a reminder that the debate over ‘culture versus religion’ does not only refer to modern cultural practices but rather stretches back to the formative period of Shī‘ism. Additionally, the conflicts between these narrations bring up the overarching question of whether these assumptions about gender and gender roles (which, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, Leila Ahmed and Kecia Ali argue stem from ‘Abbāsīd Iraq) should continue to be an indelible facet of normative Shī‘ī discourse and devotional expression. Here, it is as if some of the narrations are trying to say ‘no’ by providing a counter-narrative which is still couched in the language of Shī‘ism.

The conflicting messages in these narrations about the paradigm of marriage – whether marriage should be a master-slave relationship or a partnership – tie in to the contemporary debate over what the Islamic paradigm of marriage should truly be. Parallel to that is the question of whether Islam must prescribe gender roles – that is, that is, whether the idea that women and men can perform the same tasks in society is inherently heretical and a danger to Islam. The inclusion of women in the chain of sacred inheritance challenges the notion that religious authority must be held by men.

Lastly, there is the sensitive subject of jurisprudence. In this thesis, a subject other than jurisprudence was chosen to avoid inflaming sensibilities (and also because the heavy focus on jurisprudence leads to a neglect of other areas). However, the narrations on ancient women not only make it impossible to avoid jurisprudence, but bring up some of the most contentious questions about women in *sharī‘ah*. They prove that questions about the differences between women and men in *sharī‘ah* are not only a modern phenomenon (and part of the tension between Islam and the West) but were asked in the classical era of Islam. While this set of narrations does not offer much in the way of derivation (or re-evaluation) of religious law, it does point out fallacious understandings about the nature of woman that have underscored some people’s perceptions of *sharī‘ah* – for instance, the blunt view that woman is creationally inferior because Eve was a ‘leftover’ – and this can pave the way

for discussions that are founded on more balanced and nuanced understandings of the nature of woman and man.

3.1 Introduction

While the narrations about Eve presented diverse beliefs about the nature of woman, one absence from the Shī'ī narrations on Eve was the criticism of Eve through aspects of reproductive physiology; perhaps there was an unwillingness to criticise Eve as the ancestress of the Imāms. Instead, the negativity towards Eve found outside the Shī'ī tradition is transferred to Sārah, who is also described as poorly behaved because she was created from a rib. This results in Sārah being treated as a stand-in for Eve, and also reinforces the underlying message that because Hājar is superior to Sārah, Arabs are superior to Jews.

As in the narrations about Eve, some of the material about Sārah is found in the Bible and Haggadah, which implies the possibility of these narrations being *isrā'īliyyāt*, particularly since corresponding Sunnī versions of these narrations come from narrators who are thought to have introduced *isrā'īliyyāt* into the Islamic tradition, such as Abū Hurayrah, Ka'b al-Aḥbār,²⁸⁹ and Wahb ibn Munabbih.²⁹⁰ However, as Glick and Firestone argue,²⁹¹ even apparent *isrā'īliyyāt* are not mere borrowings; while many details are similar or even identical to older sources, the Islamic narratives fulfil different functions, and convey Arabo-Islamic values which would be deemed acceptable to the audience. In contrast, the treatment of Hājar reflects the cultural norms the 'patriarchal' set of narrations on Eve – one in which women are passive and silent.

A main concern – shared with Sunnism – is reinforcing the identity and superiority of Arabs (as the putative children of Ismā'īl) over the Jews (as the

²⁸⁹ Interestingly, 1906 *The Jewish Encyclopedia* contains an entry on Ka'b al-Aḥbār and describes him as 'one of those who introduced into this branch of Arab literature the method as well as many details of the Jewish Haggadah'. 'KA'B AL-AḤBAR', in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906) [online edition]. <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9105-ka-b-al-ahbar>>. Accessed 31 December 2013.

²⁹⁰ This is discussed with respect to Wahb ibn Munabbih in Michael Pregill, 'Isrā'īliyyāt, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 34 (2008), pp. 215-284.

²⁹¹ See Section 1.2.5.

putative children of Iṣḥāq) by presenting Sārah as inferior to Hājar. While the narrations about Eve merely implied identity politics, these narrations practically shout out 'identity politics'. While it has been suggested that the Arabs only began to identify themselves as the children of Ismā'īl after the Prophetic era, what is important here is that these narrations take that as a fact;²⁹² additionally, the Semitic sibling rivalry between Jews and Arabs, and its manifestation in the Jewish preference to uplift Sārah at the expense of Hājar predates Islam. Because Sārah is also a revered figure in the Qur'ān, however, the denigration of Sārah is relatively mild and is 'excused' due to her womanly nature; this apparent resolution to conflicting interests results in the accidental communication of unflattering ideas about women.

However, unlike Sunnī narrations, these narrations also delineate a specific Twelver Shī'ī identity through perceptions of purity and the body, and reinforce the belief in the purity (here, in the physical sense) of the female and male forebears of the *awṣiyā'*. (This obviously presupposes that Ismā'īl is the forefather of the Prophet and the Imāms.) Additionally, the different expectations for Sārah – who is described as a propertied and pedigreed woman – as opposed to Hājar, a slave – reinforce class differences and the ability of women of standing to claim social advantage through the 'patriarchal bargain' by adopting customs of seclusion. Lastly, the counterpoint between Hājar and Sārah mimics the dichotomy between Shī'ī portrayals of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' and 'Ā'ishah. Because Sārah is portrayed as the 'bad wife' (or, at least,

²⁹² While Reuven Firestone holds that, among the Arabs, ascribing their genealogy to Ismā'īl and distinguishing themselves from the descendants of Iṣḥāq became a concern in the early centuries of Islam after the Prophetic era, attempts to differentiate Arabs and Jews, who both shared a Semitic culture and who are linked by kinship in the Bible, traces back to ancient times: 'The ancient Israelites were keenly aware of their geographic, linguistic, and cultural kinship with Arab peoples, and they set forth a fascinating accounting for that affinity in the genealogical tables of the tenth chapter of Genesis...The striking biblical consciousness of affinity between Israelites and Arabs is tempered, however, by its attempt to maintain a separation....Concern for genealogical purity among the writers of later Islamicate works describing the tribal and social make-up of pre-Islamic Arabia tends to obscure the true heterogeneous nature of that society.' Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, pp. 3-5. Marcel Poorthuis also notes the same: 'The negative attitude to Ishmael in Rabbinic literature may be related to a contemporary negative attitude towards the non-Jewish world. The portrayal of Ishmael apparently reflects Jewish perspectives of Arab people. This holds good only when we realize that the view of Ishmael as non-Jewish is essentially a Rabbinic perspective, as the Bible offers no information on the matter.' Marcel Poorthuis, 'Hagar's Wanderings: Between Judaism and Islam', p. 225.

the ‘less good wife’), this reinforces the message that, in Shī‘ism, the ‘bad wife’ is visible, vocal, and looks after her own best interests, whereas the ‘good wife’ is absent, passive, and suffering.

3.2 Canonizing *ghīrah* and women’s seclusion

3.2.1 Sārah and the box

One of the stories about Sārah that appears in the narrations but not in the Qur’ān is the story commonly referred to as ‘Sārah and the tyrant’ and, here, referred to as ‘Sārah and the box’ to reflect its unique treatment in Shī‘ī narrations. The story of Sārah and the tyrant (or ‘Sārah and the box’) occurs twice in Genesis, as well as in the Haggadah. It is also heavily narrated in the Sunnī tradition (at least 28 narrations, including in *Bukhārī*), with 16 narrations attributed to Abū Hurayrah, as well as others from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih²⁹³ – that is, narrators known for *isrā’īlīyāt*. In the Shī‘ī collections, it occurs once in *al-Kāfī*, and in another version in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, which is cited in *Bihār* (the references will appear at the end of this section).²⁹⁴ While sharing key narrative elements, the Biblical, Sunnī, and Shī‘ī versions convey different ideals about women and men, and address different civilizational and theological concerns; this is in keeping with Jon Levenson’s view that, while sharing Abraham as a common spiritual ancestor, the ‘Abrahamic faiths’ have profoundly different understandings of Abraham as well as his family.²⁹⁵

Although not all accounts share all of the following details, the basic narrative is as follows. Ibrāhīm (Abram, Abraham) is travelling with Sārah (Sarai).²⁹⁶ Sārah is very beautiful. They are stopped by the forces of a ruler,²⁹⁷

²⁹³ The same motif recurs again in Genesis with Isaac and Rebecca, but that narrative is not being discussed here because it does not involve Abraham and Sārah.

²⁹⁴ It is not clear whether the text in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* is an actual *ḥadīth*, or rather is ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm’s personal synopsis; however, because it is catalogued in *Bihār* as a narration, it will be treated as one.

²⁹⁵ Jon Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁹⁶ The accounts differ on where they are travelling and what ruler they encounter.

²⁹⁷ Identities given for the ruler include ‘Pharaoh’, Abimelech, *al-jabbār*, *al-malik*, and Nimrud.

and Ibrāhīm says that Sārah is his sister.²⁹⁸ Sārah is sent to the ruler, who wishes to possess her. After divine intervention (a curse, an affliction, or a dream), the tyrant releases Sārah, and Ibrāhīm receives gifts from the tyrant. Hājar (Hagar) is also gifted to Sārah.²⁹⁹ Ibrāhīm and Sārah then continue their journey.

It is worthwhile to note some of the differences between the Genesis accounts in order to compare them more closely to the *ḥadīth*. In the first account (Genesis 12:10-20), Abram tells Sarai to say she is his sister so ‘he will be dealt well with’; that is to say, the fabrication appears to be for his own sake. Additionally, the text itself leaves open the possibility that Sarai had an illegitimate relationship with the tyrant, although later religious tradition clarifies this was not the case;³⁰⁰ as J. Cheryl Exum wryly observes, ‘what did or did not happen to Sārah in the royal harem receives more attention from scholars than it does from Abraham.’³⁰¹ In the second account (Genesis 20), Abraham is not portrayed as acting out of self-interest, and the text specifies that the tyrant did not have a relationship with Sārah. According to Jon Levenson, this is to avoid suspicion that the miraculous child given to Sārah, Isaac, is actually the son of the king – something that would be untenable from the perspective of Jewish identity.³⁰² Lastly, the second account clarifies that Abraham was not actually lying, because he says that Sārah really is his half-sister. This, however, raises the problem of incest³⁰³ and still comes across as a lie by omission.³⁰⁴ Sārah

²⁹⁸ The *al-Kāfi* version says that Sārah and Ibrāhīm are cousins. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 370, no. 560.

²⁹⁹ Hājar is not mentioned by name in Genesis. In al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 370, no. 560, Hājar is gifted to Ibrāhīm, who then gifts her to Sārah.

³⁰⁰ Reuven Firestone, ‘Prophethood, Marriageable Consanguinity, and Text: The Problem of Abraham and Sarah’s Kinship Relationship and the Response of Jewish and Islamic Exegesis’, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 83, no. 3/4 (Jan. - Apr. 1993), pp. 331-347. <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-6682%28199301%2F04%292%3A83%3A3%2F4%3C331%3APMCATT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-4>>. Accessed 5 December 2013. For instance, the Haggadah version emphasizes that Sārah’s chastity was protected by divine miracles, including but not limited to the Pharaoh being afflicted with impotence.

³⁰¹ J. Cheryl Exum, ‘Who’s Afraid of “The Endangered Ancestress”?’, in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 142.

³⁰² Jon Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham*, p. 64.

³⁰³ Like Muslim scholars, Jewish scholars felt that Abraham should have followed the religious law regardless of whether it was set before or after him, and it was not simply a case of marriage between half-siblings being prohibited after his time. Reuven Firestone, ‘Prophethood, Marriageable Consanguinity, and Text’, p. 336.

does not actually do much in the Genesis accounts; as Exum notes, ‘neither is there any evidence that the *matriarch* thinks she is in danger. In fact, we do not know what she thinks about *anything*, which is a very good indication that the story is not really about the matriarch at all. She neither acts nor speaks in any of the versions, though in the second version speech is indirectly attributed to her [...] the matriarch can hardly be said to become a narrative presence in any real sense. She is merely the object in a story about male relations [...].’³⁰⁵

According to Firestone, both Jewish and Islamic exegetes found four things problematic: Abraham lying, Abraham acting out of self-interest or self-preservation, Sārah being touched by another man, and incest. Some of these problems are resolved in the Islamic accounts: for instance, in the Islamic accounts, it is clarified that the tyrant is unable to touch Sārah; and, in the Shī‘ī accounts, Ibrāhīm is not portrayed as acting out of self-interest. The question of incest is more complex, since the Sunnī *ḥadīth* disagree about Sārah’s precise relationship to Ibrāhīm. Firestone notes that both Jewish and Islamic exegetes considered similar solutions to ensure that Ibrāhīm and Sārah were not too close to marry under Jewish or Islamic law, respectively;³⁰⁶ as for the Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*, one says that Sārah was Ibrāhīm’s cousin, and the other indicates that by ‘sister’, Ibrāhīm meant that Sārah was his ‘sister in faith’.³⁰⁷ (While not a major theme of Shī‘ī narrations, uneasiness about incest taboos does surface

³⁰⁴ Jon Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham*, p. 64.

³⁰⁵ J. Cheryl Exum, ‘Who’s Afraid of “The Endangered Ancestress”’, p. 143.

³⁰⁶ Firestone notes that ‘A finding of anecdotal interest suggests that one solution to the problem of Abraham and Sārah’s kinship and marital relationship, which originated in a Jewish context but was subsequently lost, turns up as a popular tradition in Islamic exegesis on the subject.’ Reuven Firestone, ‘Prophethood, Marriageable Consanguinity, and Text.’

³⁰⁷ The Sunnī narrations, as a whole, disagree over what family relationship Ibrāhīm and Sārah had. The first Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* (in *al-Kāfi*) appears to say that Sārah was Ibrāhīm’s aunt (*ibnat Lahij*, or ‘daughter of Lahij’, who is identified as Ibrāhīm’s maternal grandfather), but then it continues to say that she was his daughter of his maternal aunt; a footnote suggests that *ibnat ibnat* was reacted into *ibnat* for reasons of eloquence, and that *ibnat* is to be taken metaphorically to mean that she is of Lahij’s progeny. The second (in *Biḥār* from *Tafsīr al-Qummī* – see reference later in this section) does not bring up the issue. Jewish exegesis takes similar approaches: while Sārah’s immediate family is given slightly differently (as indeed in the case with Sunnī *aḥādīth*), the view ‘daughter’ should be read as ‘daughter of daughter’ is also brought up, only in this case to show that Sārah was Abraham’s niece, not sister, which would have been a permissible marriage relationship, because ‘[t]he children’s children are also referred to as children’ – a virtually identical explanation to that given in the footnotes of *al-Kāfi*; and also to show that Abraham was not lying when he said that Sārah was his sister. However, due to a projection of Sārah’s age when she married based on the Biblical genealogy, this view was dismissed by Jewish exegetes. Reuven Firestone, ‘Abraham and Sarah’, pp. 337-8.

from time to time.)³⁰⁸ The question of Ibrāhīm lying, however, is the main theological issue of divergence between the Sunnī and Shī‘ī narrations. A narration in *Bukhārī*, addresses this directly, beginning with the trope that Ibrāhīm only lied three times in his life – once when he smashed the idols, once when he said he was ill, and here.³⁰⁹ However, the Shī‘ī versions do not call it ‘lying’; instead, in the *ḥadīth* in *al-Kāfi*, Ibrāhīm says that Sārah is his cousin, thereby sidestepping the question of him lying at all; whereas, in the account in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, a gloss clarifies that by ‘sister’, Ibrāhīm meant ‘sister in faith’; his words can also be taken as evidence of the permissibility of *taqīyyah*, or protective dissimulation, which would be seen as different from lying.

Since there are so many Sunnī narrations of this story, it is not feasible to discuss each of them in detail; rather, there are four recurring points which differ from Genesis as well as the Shī‘ī narrations that are pertinent here:³¹⁰ first, the

³⁰⁸ There is also a possible allusion to and resolution to the question of incest in a *ḥadīth* in *al-Kāfi* which says that the descendants of Ismā‘īl had many traits of the *ḥanafīs* (monotheists) except for allowing a man to marry his sister’s daughter, or two sisters at once. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, pp. 210-11, no. 17.

³⁰⁹ al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, book 55 no. 578.

³¹⁰ It is helpful to employ the categorization of these Sunnī *aḥādīth* by Firestone. By identifying the key motifs of the Sunnī *aḥādīth*, he divides the *aḥādīth* into two discrete versions. Version 1, or the Abū Hurayrah version, consists of the narrations attributed to Abū Hurayrah. Version 2, or the non-Abū Hurayrah version, consists of a synopsis of the narrations attributed to people other than Abū Hurayrah. A modified version of Firestone’s summary of both versions follows:

Version 1 (Abū Hurayrah)

1. Abraham told only three lies: one which can be found in Qur’ān 37:89, one in Qur’ān 21:63, and his statement to the tyrant when he told him that Sārah was his sister.

2. The tyrant (*jabbār*) or king of a town through which Abraham passes is told that Abraham is with a beautiful woman. The tyrant/king sends a message to Abraham asking who she is. Abraham tells him that she is his sister.

4. Abraham then speaks with Sārah and tells her not to contradict him, for she is indeed his sister ‘to God’ or they are the only believers or Muslims on earth or both.

5. Sārah is brought to the tyrant and begins to pray, affirming to God that she is a true believer and that she has remained chaste to everyone aside from her husband. She requests that God prevent the infidel from touching her.

6. The tyrant/king reaches out to her and is stricken with a seizure, or his hand is stricken.

7. Sārah prays to God to release him, or the tyrant/king tells her to pray to God to release him, for he says that he will not do it again.

8. A gloss is inserted here on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that Sārah said: ‘O God, if he dies, they will say that I killed him!’

9. When the tyrant is released from his seizure, he reaches for her a second time, or a total of three or more times.

trope 'Ibrāhīm only lied three times'; second, Ibrāhīm ordering Sārah not to contradict him; third, Sārah is responsible for her own self-defence, and invokes her chastity as a means of seeking Allah's aid (*tawassul*); and, fourth, Sārah is compared to a devil. Lastly, the Abū Hurayrah version reinforces the foundational myth of the Arabs as descendants of Ibrāhīm and Hājar.

There are two versions of the Shī'ī *aḥādīth*. The first appears in *al-Kāfir*.³¹¹ It is attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq through a chain of narrators including Sahl ibn Ziyād – whose name has already arisen in a number of *aḥādīth* unfavourable to women – and which concludes with 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, the compiler of *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. This is significant because the second version is from *Tafsīr al-Qummī*; however, 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm chose to give a different

10. Foiled, he calls for his chamberlains and says that he was not sent a human but rather a devil.

11. He gives Hājar to Sārah.

12. Sārah returns to Abraham, who has been praying all this time.

13. When he senses her presence, he asks her what happened.

14. She tells him that God foiled the plot of the infidel and gave her Hājar (or, a maidservant).

15. A final comment is interjected here, stating that Abī Hurayra used to say: 'This is your mother, O People of the Water of Heaven [*ya banī mā' al-samā'*]'.

Version 2 (non-Abū Hurayrah)

1. Abraham only told three lies: one in Qur'ān 37:89, one in Qur'ān 21:63, and his statement to the tyrant when he told him that Sārah was his sister.

2. Sārah is an exceptional woman and would never disobey her husband.

3. Pharaoh of Egypt, King Nimrod, or King Zadok in Jordan is the person who takes Sārah from Abraham after he is told of her beauty. Pharaoh sends a message to Abraham asking who Sārah is. Abraham tells him that she is his sister, fearing that the ruler would take her and kill him if he said she was his wife.

4. Pharaoh tells Abraham to adorn her and send her to him, which he does.

5. Abraham then speaks with Sārah and tells her not to contradict him, for she is indeed his sister in religion (5/8), or they are the only believers or Muslims on earth.

6. When Pharaoh reaches out to touch her, his hand or arm is stricken.

Pharaoh asks her to pray to God to release him. She asks God to release Pharaoh only if his claim that he will not do it again is honest, or God says that he will release him only if King Zadok gives his entire kingdom in Jordan to Abraham, which he does.

7. Pharaoh reaches for her three times.

8. Foiled, he calls for his chamberlains and says that he was not sent a human but rather a devil.

9. He gives Hājar to Sārah.

10. Sārah returns to Abraham, who has been praying all this time.. When he senses her presence, he asks her what happened by using the enigmatic word, *mahyam*.

11. She tells him that God foiled the plot of the infidel and gave her Hājar.

12. God raised up the veil that was between Abraham and Sārah so that Abraham would be assured of Sārah's chastity even in the face of such a trial (reproduced from Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands* pp. 31-34, with modifications).

³¹¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfir*, vol. 8, pp. 370-373, no. 560. Some readers may be interested to know that 'Allāmah al-Majlisī considers it *ḍa'īf* (weak). al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'Uqūl*, vol. 26, p. 559.

account in his *tafsīr*, which will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.³¹² In addition to differing over the details, the two versions differ significantly in their portrayal of Sārah; in particular, the *al-Kāfī* version uses the story to emphasize the Arab value of *ghīrah* (a man's protective jealousy over his womenfolk that would lead him to protect them and to keep other men from seeing them), and to elevate it to a trait of the prophets as well as a divine value. In some ways, this is similar to the Biblical narratives, where, as J. C. Exum observes, 'It is not the woman's honor so much as the husband's property rights that are at stake' and that it reflects 'the biblical understanding of adultery as less a matter of sex than a violation of another man's property rights'. That is to say, these accounts reinforce the value that only one man may have proprietary rights over a woman, making this a story which is man-to-man.³¹³ Unlike in the Sunnī narrations and the narration in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Sārah is almost fully uninvolved in the *al-Kāfī* account.

The *al-Kāfī* narration, which is rather lengthy, begins when Ibrāhīm and Lūṭ are expelled. The *ḥadīth* mentions that Ibrāhīm brought his livestock, his property, and Sārah in a box (*tābūt*).³¹⁴ Because of his immense *ghīrah* over Sārah, Ibrāhīm made this box for her and then firmly locked her in it (*shadda 'alayhā al-aghlāq*, with the emphasis on her (-*hā*) being locked in it). They proceed until they reach an Egyptian tither. The tither collects a tenth of Ibrāhīm's property, until he reaches the box. He asks Ibrāhīm to open the box, but Ibrāhīm refuses, and tells him instead to assign to it whatever value in gold or silver that he wishes, but that he will not open it. The tither's interest is piqued, and he forces Ibrāhīm to open the box, whereupon the beautiful Sārah

³¹² It should be noted that it is not clear that 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm's words in *Tafsīr al-Qummī/Bihār* are meant as a word-for-word narration of a *ḥadīth* or merely as a synopsis of *aḥādīth*; however, since his *tafsīr* is based on narrations and since it appears in *Bihār* in the manner of a *ḥadīth*, it will be treated as one, particularly given the differences between his version and the *al-Kāfī* version.

³¹³ J. Cheryl Exum, 'Who's Afraid of "The Endangered Ancestress"', p. 150.

³¹⁴ In the *al-Kāfī* narration, the box itself is referred to as a *tābūt*, a Qur'ānic word referring to the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem, as well as the chest that Mūsā was set adrift into the Nile in; whereas, in the *Tafsīr al-Qummī* account, it is just referred to as a *ṣundūq* (a box). *Tābūt* is said to be a borrowed Semitic word, from Aramaic, Ethiopian, or Hebrew, although some have attempted to derive it from the Arabic roots *tbt* and *tbh*, and it occurs twice in the Quran. Elsaid Baidawi and Muhammad Abdulhaleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 127.

is revealed. When the tither asks what relation she is to him, Ibrāhīm replies, ‘She is my *ḥurmah* and the daughter of my aunt’ – *ḥurmah* being a word used to refer to a man’s womenfolk, with the implication that there is a sacred duty to protect them, and they are off limits.³¹⁵ Intrigued, the tither asks Ibrāhīm why he put her in the box, implying that what he did was unknown to the people of his era, and Ibrāhīm explains that it was out of *ghīrah* for her so that no one would see her (*al-ghīratu ‘alayhā an yarāhā aḥad*). The tither wants to send the box to the king; however, Ibrāhīm swears that he will not part with the box until his soul parts with his body. Rather than slay Ibrāhīm, the tither sends Ibrāhīm and the box to the king. When the king tells Ibrāhīm to open the box, Ibrāhīm pleads with him, saying that his *ḥurmah* is in the box. Eventually, the king forces Ibrāhīm to open the box.

Ghīrah then becomes the full focus of the *ḥadīth*. When the king sees Sārah, he reaches out to touch her. Ibrāhīm then steps in and turns his head away from her, as well as her head away from him. Then he prays against the king, saying, ‘O Allah, take his hand away from my *ḥurmah* and the daughter of my maternal aunt,’ and the king’s hand freezes in mid-air. Then, the topic of Allah’s *ghīrah* is brought in. The king asks Ibrāhīm whether his god has done this, and Ibrāhīm says, ‘Yes, my Lord is *ghuyūr*, and detests the forbidden (*ḥarām*), and He is the one who has intervened between you and the forbidden (*ḥarām*) [act] that you intended.’ These phrases elevate Ibrāhīm’s actions to the divine level. First, the concept of Ibrāhīm having *ghīrah* and protecting his *ḥurmah* is an obvious parallel to Allah being *ghuyūr* and preventing the *ḥarām*, and implies that *ghīrah* is about protecting sacred boundaries. The king promises to desist, so Ibrāhīm prays that the king’s hand be restored, saying, ‘O Lord, return his hand so that he may keep it away from my *ḥurmah*.’ The king reaches out again, and this situation is repeated, whereupon the king admits, ‘Indeed, your god is *ghuyūr*, and you are also *ghuyūr*.’ In the end, the king’s hand is restored, and he desists. The discussion of *ghīrah* concludes with the narrator saying, ‘And when the king saw the *ghīrah* that he saw, and the

³¹⁵ For instance, *ḥarām* is used for the forbidden, whereas *ḥaram* is used for a holy site, and the sacred mosque in Mecca is referred to as Masjid al-Haraam. *Ḥurmah* is still used in colloquial Iraqi Arabic today to mean ‘woman’.

[miraculous] sign on his hand, he exalted Ibrāhīm and feared him and honoured him and was wary of him.’ The king then lets Ibrāhīm go and gives him a number of gifts, including Hājar, whom he begs him to accept. Ibrāhīm graciously allows the king to give him Hājar, and then gifts Hājar to Sārah.³¹⁶ The narration then continues on with other matters; at the end, Ibrāhīm purchases Hājar from Sārah and sires Ismā‘īl from her.

Compared to the other versions of this story, this narration is heavily male-centred, in that Sārah does virtually nothing. However, the description of Sārah’s origin adds a layer of complexity, in that she is independently wealthy before marriage and, upon marriage, gifts her property to Ibrāhīm, at which time ‘his condition improved’. This scenario, although not unrealistic, contradicts the assumption that women are expected to be financially dependent on men, and, in particular, a wife on a husband. Of course, Sārah does give her wealth to Ibrāhīm, thereby putting her in her ‘proper’ place. While the comparison is not implied in the text, Stowasser sees this as reminiscent of Khadījah, the first wife of the Prophet, in that she too had immense wealth and granted it to the Prophet; Stowasser adds that ‘contemporary inspirational women’s literature emphasises Sārah as Abraham’s first follower and first believer in his mission like Khadījah’.³¹⁷ Having two male figures who are central to Islamic identity be financially reliant on their brides does not bode well for the paradigm insisting that women are financially dependent. In contrast to Sārah, Hājar is treated with no *ghīrah* whatsoever (she is simply dropped off in the desert with her child), and so the subtext is that an upper-class woman should be treated with *ghīrah* and secluded, while a slave woman is out in the open; or, alternatively, that a woman who allows herself to be visible to public society is behaving in a lowbrow manner. In fact, this juxtaposition of exposed lower-class women versus secluded elite women predates the Islamic era in Iraq.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Namely, the king tells Ibrāhīm, ‘I have a request from you.’ Ibrāhīm asks what it is, and the king says, ‘I would like you to allow me to put into your service an Egyptian (*qibṭīyyah*) lady whom I own – she is beautiful and intelligent – so that she may be your servant.’

³¹⁷ Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, 46.

³¹⁸ See, in particular, the discussion in Section 6.3.2.

In comparison, the *Tafsīr al-Qummī* version of the story is more truncated, and lacks the emphasis on *ghīrah* or *ḥurmah*; it only mentions once that Ibrāhīm put Sārah in a box (*ṣundūq*) because of his *ghīrah* over her. The attribution of *ghīrah* to Allah is also absent. In this version, Sārah stands up for herself against the king, and herself is given Hājar as a reward. Unlike in the Abū Hurayrah version, Sārah does not implore Allah's aid through her chastity; rather, she simply implores Allah's aid. In the *Tafsīr al-Qummī* version, she exhibits good judgment, wisdom, good ethics, and spirituality; whereas, in the *al-Kāfī* version, little can be said about her because she does not do anything.³¹⁹ This version is also different from the Biblical accounts, in that, in those, Sārah does not act. It may not be coincidental that 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī was Iranian, given the greater social participation of women in Iran compared to Arab cultures, and that his version is the version without the characteristically Arab value of *ghīrah*.³²⁰

Clearly, the civilizational concerns of the Genesis, Sunnī, and Shī'ī accounts differ. The main civilizational concern of the Genesis accounts is the taboo against encroaching upon another man's wife, even unknowingly. The tyrant and his household are cursed not because the tyrant has taken a woman, but because the woman is married. However, the Sunnī versions are concerned with spousal obedience and marital fidelity, and not with the behaviour of the tyrant. The non-Abū Hurayrah version describes Sārah as an exceptional woman who would never disobey her husband, whereas, in the Abū Hurayrah version, Ibrāhīm tells Sārah not to disobey him. In the Abū Hurayrah version, Sārah emphasizes her marital fidelity. That is to say, Sārah is seen as being responsible for being obedient and loyal. In contrast, the Shī'ī versions focus on Ibrāhīm's role in protecting Sārah's chastity, and spousal obedience is presumed. While the non-Abū Hurayrah Sunnī version mentions that Ibrāhīm was ordered to adorn Sārah, in the Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, Ibrāhīm would rather die than have anyone look at Sārah. The difference between the Sunnī and Shī'ī

³¹⁹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, pp. 153-160 no. 8 (citing *Tafsīr al-Qummī*).

³²⁰ 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī is an early Shī'ī Qur'ānic commentator. He is said to have lived in the time of Imām Ḥasan al-'Askarī. He transmitted *aḥādīth* to al-Kulaynī, as is apparent from the above narration. Me'ir Mikha'el Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shi'ism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 33-34.

versions here is reminiscent of the difference between the Sunnī and Shīʿī *ḥadīth* on Eve, in that a Sunnī *ḥadīth* from Abū Hurayrah alludes to women betraying their husbands ('Were it not for Eve, no woman would have ever betrayed her husband'), whereas the Shīʿī *ḥadīth* on Eve's creation-not-from-a-rib does not even admit the possibility of uxorial infidelity.³²¹ Although employing the same story, the different views about Sārah between the Sunnī and Shīʿī texts probably reflect different viewpoints about women in the eras they are attributed to, with the Shīʿī texts providing a greater emphasis on women's seclusion and passivity.

One detail which distinguishes the Shīʿī accounts from the Sunnī and Genesis accounts is the box (*tābūt*, *ṣundūq*). However, the box appears in the Haggadah.³²² This led Firestone to maintain that 'Shi'ites have been associated with borrowing more freely from Jewish legends than Sunnis, which may explain the single occurrence of this motif in this work.'³²³ Apart from the fact that this assertion is highly contestable, however, there are substantial thematic differences between the way the box is treated in the Shīʿī *aḥādīth* and the Haggadah. In the Haggadah, Abraham puts Sārah in the box to protect himself; in the Shīʿī version, it is out of his *ghīrah*. Not unsurprisingly, the version from the Haggadah does not expound upon the merits of *ghīrah* in the same way that the *al-Kāfi ḥadīth* does. A more plausible explanation for the inclusion of the box in the Shīʿī narration is that it emerged in an era when women's seclusion and

³²¹ See Section 2.2.1.

³²² That narrative reads: 'Wherefore he spoke to her thus, "The Egyptians are very sensual, and I will put thee in a casket that no harm befall me on account of thee." At the Egyptian boundary, the tax collectors asked him about the contents of the casket, and Abraham told them he had barley in it. "No," they said, "it contains wheat." "Very well," replied Abraham, "I am prepared to pay the tax on wheat." The officers then hazarded the guess, "It contains pepper!" Abraham agreed to pay the tax on pepper, and when they charged him with concealing gold in the casket, he did not refuse to pay the tax on gold, and finally on precious stones. Seeing that he demurred to no charge, however high, the tax collectors, made thoroughly suspicious, insisted upon his unfastening the casket and letting them examine the contents. When it was forced open, the whole of Egypt was resplendent with the beauty of Sarah.' Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America 1909-38), 1909. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/loj/loj107.htm>>; see also Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 95-97.

³²³ Reuven Firestone, 'Difficulties in Keeping a Beautiful Wife: The Legend of Abraham and Sarah in Jewish and Islamic Tradition', in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, no. 42, p. 211. He cites as proof Uri Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi'a Tradition', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), pp. 51, 55, although it could be argued that Rubin fails to prove this hypothesis in that article.

absence from the public sphere had become norms, whereas, in the Prophetic era, these are not considered to have been norms. The shared mention of the box may also simply reflect the harshness of the desert environment that led Semitic peoples to adopt similar solutions. Following on Glick's view, these details were accepted because they matched the cultural expectations of the audience.³²⁴

A similar argument can be made for the inclusion of *ghīrah* in the Shī'ī narrations but not in the Sunnī or Judaic accounts. *Ghīrah* is extolled in Shī'ī narrations – especially in *al-Kāfī* – in a way that it is not in Sunnī narrations, thereby leading to the religious sanctification of an Arab tribal value. For instance, *al-Kāfī* has a particularly lengthy chapter on *ghīrah*. There, it is reiterated that Allah is *ghuyūr* and loves *ghīrah*, and the Prophet is quoted as saying: 'Ibrāhīm was *ghuyūr*, and I have more *ghīrah* than him.'³²⁵ Since Ibrāhīm does not come across as particularly *ghuyūr* towards Hājar, this reference to Ibrāhīm's *ghīrah* might not make sense without an awareness of the Shī'ī version of the 'box' narration. Some narrations in *al-Kāfī* describe the divine punishment that will befall a man with no *ghīrah*, and others allude to bizarre domestic circumstances implying that if a man is not watchful, his house could become a brothel. These narrations communicate an extreme – that a man who does not espouse *ghīrah* must necessarily be a *dayyūth* (a cuckold or pimp) – and do not admit to the possibility that women might be responsible for their own morality or fidelity, or that women themselves might prevent immoral behaviour from taking place in their households. (This tension between a man being responsible for a woman's chastity, and a woman being responsible for her own chastity, is explored more in Chapter 6 with respect to the verse that Mary 'guarded her [own] chastity'.) Like in the narration on 'imprisoning women' in Chapter 2, these narrations present it as the man's duty to enforce chastity on his womenfolk.

Parallel to that is the discussion of women's *ghīrah*. According to *Nahj al-Balāghah* and most of the narrations about *ghīrah* in *al-Kāfī*, *ghīrah* (often

³²⁴ See Section 1.2.5.

³²⁵ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 536, no. 4.

translated as ‘jealousy’) is considered a despicable trait for women, tantamount to disbelief (*kufri*), on the grounds that Allah has permitted men to marry more than one wife; this sets up the expectation that a woman should tolerate her husband’s attention being elsewhere but not vice versa.³²⁶ Only one narration in *al-Kāfi* gives an opposing view and says that a woman’s *ghīrah* is due to love.³²⁷

This is not the only narration to mention Ibrāhīm’s *ghīrah*; in another narration, Ibrāhīm locks Sārah in the house while he is away, and gets angry at the Angel of Death for entering it when he was away.³²⁸ Not only does Ibrāhīm demonstrate *ghīrah*, thereby indicating that it is part of the behaviour of the prophets to be emulated by the (male) believers, but his prayer seeking Allah’s aid through his *ghīrah* conveys the view that *ghīrah* is of immense value before the divine; indeed, as he says later, Allah Himself has *ghīrah*. This can be seen in contrast to Sārah’s prayer in the Abū Hurayrah version, where she seeks Allah’s aid through her fidelity (which she herself controls). It also fits in with the main difference between the two *aḥādīth* – namely, Sārah is an actor in the Abū Hurayrah version, and seeks Allah’s aid on the basis of her actions; whereas, in the *al-Kāfi* version, Sārah is passive, and Ibrāhīm seeks Allah’s aid on the basis of his divinely ordained responsibility to keep her away from men.

While divine jealousy also appears in the Old Testament, here, Allah’s *ghīrah* is described as being over doing forbidden or indecent acts rather than polytheism – that is, encroaching on the jurisprudential ‘*ḥurmah*’ of Allah rather

³²⁶ ‘*Ghayrat al-mar’ah kufri wa ghayrat al-rajul imān.*’ al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī (ed.), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying 124. Men’s *ghīrah* is discussed in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, pp. 535-7 and women’s *ghīrah* in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, pp. 504-6. Additionally, ‘the father of *ghīrah*’ is a popular attribute given to al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Alī, and research has shown how portrayals of him in the Karbalā’ narrative reinforces the religious sanctification of cultural values such as *ghīrah*. For instance, Yitzhak Nakash found that, in Iraq, ‘The Arab tribal value system of Shiite society was encapsulated by Shiite religion, not permeated by it...The poetry used in the recitations reflected the moral values and ethnic attributes of the various Shiite communities...The attributes of ideal manhood of the Arabs (*muruwwa*)...played a dominant role in shaping their moral values and world view. The strong Arab tribal character of Shiite society in Iraq was evident in two major genres in Iraqi colloquial poetry.’ Yitzhak Nakash, ‘The Muharram Rituals and the Cult of the Saints among Iraqi Shiites’, in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, ed. A. Monsuitti, S. Naef, F. Sabahi (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 115 & 117.

³²⁷ The narration about *ghīrah* being due to love is al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 506, no. 6.

³²⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 392, no. 589; also al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 5, no. 11 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i*’). al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 392, no. 590 tells the same story only without the emphasis on *ghīrah* or locking Sārah inside, emphasizing that locking Sārah inside in the previous narration was due to *ghīrah* and not just a security precaution.

than the *ḥurmah* of His oneness. Allah guards his *ḥurmah* just as a man would guard his *ḥurmah* (womenfolk). Of course, Shī‘ah are not the only ones to have projected their cultural norms onto the deity by attributing this type of jealousy to Him. In fact, David Clines argues that the Biblical portrayal of the deity ascribes to the deity a concept of honour which is exclusively for males; as he puts it, women can be a site of shame but not honour. However, while this sense of honour involves a sense of *machismo*, it does not focus on women’s seclusion as a marker of male honour.³²⁹ The idea of divine honour or jealousy also arises in the letter of Jerome to Eustochium (4th century), directed at girls in a nunnery: ‘Jesus is jealous: He does not wish others to see your face. You may excuse yourself and say “I have drawn my veil [...]”’ While this shared view probably reflects shared regional values rather than actual borrowing, it is strikingly similar to account of ‘Sārah and the box’ in that it involves both jealousy and the invisibility of the female, and again is a reminder of how some outlooks that are today associated with Islam are found elsewhere in the Abrahamic tradition.³³⁰

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Sārah and the box – <i>al-Kāfi</i> version – and Ibrāhīm’s <i>ghīrah</i>
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 8:370-373, no. 560 (Sārah and the box) • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 5:536, no. 4 (Ibrāhīm’s <i>ghīrah</i>) • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 8:392, no. 589 (Ibrāhīm’s <i>ghīrah</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 12:5, no. 11 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) (Ibrāhīm’s <i>ghīrah</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis • The Haggadah • Cultural values promoting women’s seclusion
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal. • Chastity is of paramount importance. <p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are financially dependent on men
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ghīrah</i> is a divine value and is scripturally sanctioned

³²⁹ David J. A. Clines, ‘The Most High Male: Divine Masculinity in the Bible’, in Paper in the Feminist Interpretations section of the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, Buenos Aires, 22 July 2015.
https://www.academia.edu/14079928/The_Most_High_Male_Divine_Masculinity_in_the_Bible
 Accessed 7 August 2015.

³³⁰ J. Ferrante (ed. and trans.), ‘A Letter from Jerome’, in *Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Latin Letters* [online collection]. <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/447.html>. Accessed 21 February 2015.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s seclusion • Lack of female agency • Men are responsible for enforcing female chastity
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Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Sārah and the box – <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> version
Source(s)	<i>Biḥār</i> 12:44-48, no. 38 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis • The Haggadah • cultural values promoting women’s seclusion
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal. • Chastity is of paramount importance. Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s seclusion • Sārah acts on her own behalf and is portrayed as intelligent, moral, and capable.

3.2.2 Seclusion and Ismā‘īl’s wife

In the story of Sārah and the box, Ibrāhīm enforces Sārah’s seclusion. However, in an account of Ismā‘īl’s wife, Ismā‘īl’s wife herself is a pioneer of women’s seclusion, although Ibrāhīm approves of her act. This narration also discusses the covering of the Ka‘bah, and so the concept of covering and the hidden are elevated to sacred virtues. The portrayal of Ismā‘īl in this narration diverges from the high standards expected of prophets in the Shī‘ī tradition, and this suggests that it represents concerns outside of Shī‘ism. Indeed, the narration might seem to have no apparent purpose at all were it not for the overarching concern of connecting the Arab tribes to Ismā‘īl as well as establishing the importance of the Ka‘bah in pre-Islamic history.

The narration itself begins with Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl performing the hajj, and then Ismāʿīl and Hājar are left alone.³³¹ After that, it jumps to when Ismāʿīl is mature (that is, after the incident regarding the sacrifice). One day, a beautiful lady comes to Mecca with the tribespeople. (There is no lack of beautiful women in these accounts!) Entranced by her beauty, Ismāʿīl prays to Allah to marry her. There is a slight problem, in that the lady is already married; however, Ismāʿīl's prayer is accepted, and the lady's husband dies. She settles in Mecca out of grief, and Allah eases the memory of her loss for her, and then Ismāʿīl marries her. All of this is atypical, since desiring another man's wife is not consistent with the Qur'ānic the prophetic ethos – let alone endorsing the killing of the husband so that Ismāʿīl could marry her. This sets it apart from the narrations promoting *ghīrah* and the *ḥurmah* of another man's womenfolk as a prophetic value: while Ismāʿīl exhibits *ghīrah* over his wife, one would expect him to uphold the same standards for other men.

In any case, they marry. One day, Ismāʿīl goes off to Ṭāʿif (near Mecca) in search of food, and a dishevelled old man comes to visit her; he does not identify himself. After asking her how they are doing, he gives her a letter for her husband. Then, Ismāʿīl comes back, and she gives him the letter, at which time Ismāʿīl tells her that the man was actually Ibrāhīm, her father-in-law.

Ismāʿīl's concern, however, is whether Ibrāhīm saw how beautiful she was; he asks, 'Did he not look at your beauty?' While jealousy may be human, it is not clear why it is appearing here, given that, under Islamic law, a father-in-law is permitted to see his daughter-in-law without *ḥijāb*. The idea that prophets would have a father-son rivalry and be jealous and suspicious of each other is also at odds with the Shīʿī view of the inerrancy of the prophets. She replies that no, Ibrāhīm did not see her, but she had feared that he would. Since she is (according to the narrator) 'intelligent', she brought two cloths (*sitr*s) to hang as partitions, and she and Ibrāhīm hung them together so they could speak without seeing each other, 'and they were pleased with that.' As with the *ḥadīth* about the box, a *sitr* is presented as something new in their era – a step forward.

³³¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, p. 202, no. 3.

The concept of covering is then elevated to a spiritual level when Ismā‘īl’s wife and her tribeswomen begin weaving cloths to cover the Ka‘bah, and there is an explanation of how the Ka‘bah was clothed. (The theme of covering the sacred will be explored more in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3) This image may be taken from Exodus 35:25-26, where women are called upon to weave cloth for the tabernacle. It may also have been taken from the same source as used in the *Protovangelium of James*, an apocryphal gospel thought to date to the 2nd century AD, since the *Protovangelium* describes girls who wove curtains for the temple in Jerusalem.³³² As in the previous *ḥadīth*, where Ibrāhīm’s *ghīrah* is connected to Allah’s *ghīrah*, here, the concept of the *sitr* is also extended to the divine (an idea common in Islamic spirituality). The value of covering is thus given a strong spiritual component, as is the concept of the *ḥijāb* and modesty in general as in the text discussed in Chapter 2, which employed the spiritualization of modesty as a distinctively Shī‘ī value, and one that goes beyond the mundane view of covering for the sake of chastity.

Just as with Sārah, the possibility of Ismā‘īl’s wife veiling herself (that is, wearing the *ḥijāb*) does not occur. Instead, this text focuses on a woman’s actual seclusion. However, what is different here is that partition is a mutual act carried out by Ismā‘īl’s wife and Ibrāhīm – that is, the seclusion is neither conceived of nor imposed by the man, although Ismā‘īl supports it. Not only does this create a different situation than the ones where men are expected to ‘enforce’ female chastity, but it also places Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl’s wife on par with each other. While Ismā‘īl is presented as having *ghīrah*, and thus it is a prophetic value, his *ghīrah* is not divinely sanctioned; additionally, he exhibits a disturbing lack of *ghīrah* in wanting to marry a married woman. Thus, this narration does not promote *ghīrah* as an essential value of Shī‘ism the same way as the previous one does.

Lastly, through their connection to the Ka‘bah, the *ḥadīth* directly links women with sacred history, and, in fact, the portrayal of women making contributions to religion through domestic avenues, such as weaving or cooking,

³³² Megan Nutzman, ‘Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*: A Jewish Woman in the Temple?’, in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 53 (2013), pp. 551–578.

is consistent with Phyllis Bird's view of what women's religious contributions might have been in the Old Testament.³³³ This portrays women as being industrious, in contrast to the separate-but-equal ideology in which women are portrayed as dependents rather than as producers.

1.2.1. ³³³ Phyllis Bird, 'The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus'. See discussion in Section

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Ismā'īl's wife and weaving the cloth of the Ka'bah
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 4:202, no. 3
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exodus • Christian apocrypha
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's seclusion is ideal. Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women should not be present in the public sphere. • Female beauty is de-emphasized • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Men are the producers.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity of the Arabs as descendants of Ismā'īl
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not concord with Shī'ī beliefs in the inerrancy of the prophets

3.3 Circumcision and menstruation

3.3.1 Male circumcision and aposthia

The next topic to be explored is uniquely Shī'ī material about circumcision. (The curious reader wondering why an intrinsically male subject is being discussed in a work on women need only wait a few paragraphs.) While male circumcision is not mentioned in the Qur'ān,³³⁴ it is strongly supported in Sunnī and Shī'ī narrations and is considered in the Sunnī tradition to be the *sunnah* of Ibrāhīm since Sunnī narrations say that Ibrāhīm was the first person to circumcise himself, and that he did it at the order of God.³³⁵ Hence,

³³⁴ According to Gabriel Reynolds, some Sunnī scholars hold that *kalimāt* in verse 2:124 'and when his Lord tried Ibrāhīm with certain words (*kalimāt*), and he fulfilled them' includes the command to circumcise himself. Circumcision is also thought to have a metaphorical meaning in 'our hearts are uncircumcised (*ghulf*)' in Qur'ān 4:155. See Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext* (Abington, Oxon, Canada and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 147-155. In contrast, the modern Shī'ī exegete 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī focuses on the concept of imamate in verse 2:124, and the literal meaning of 'covered' for *ghulf*. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, 2:214 and 4:155.

³³⁵ M. J. Kister, '...And He Was Born Circumcised...: Some Notes on Circumcision in Ḥadīth', in *Oriens*, vol. 34 (1994), pp. 10-30. A narration related by Abū Hurayrah in *Bukhārī* indicates that Ibrāhīm circumcised himself with an axe: 'Ibrāhīm, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was circumcised when he was eighty years old. He was circumcised with an axe (*qadum*)' and that circumcision is part of the *fiṭrah* (natural, normal state) of a human being: 'Five practices are characteristics of the *fiṭrah*: circumcision, shaving the pubic region, clipping the nails and cutting the moustaches short.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, p. 74, no. 313; vol. 7, p. 72, no. 777 & 779.) Kister notes that other Sunnī texts give different ages for when Ibrāhīm

circumcision with that understanding reinforces the sense of an ancestral as well as spiritual link to Ibrāhīm.³³⁶

In contrast, a narration in *al-Kāfi* (reinforced in *Biḥār* citing *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi*) argues that Ibrāhīm did *not* circumcise himself; instead, his foreskin fell off miraculously seven days after his birth. As with the narration refuting the idea that Eve was created from a rib, these narrations are also framed as rejections of the Sunnī view that Ibrāhīm circumcised himself,³³⁷ thereby

circumcised himself, and also suggest motivations other than fulfilling a covenant – for instance, one text suggests that Ibrāhīm had himself and his soldiers circumcised so he could identify their bodies on the battlefield.

³³⁶ In his work on the history of circumcision, Gollaher maintains that that circumcision in the Arabian Peninsula traces back to 4000 BC, was mythologically associated with Ibrāhīm, and probably ‘symbolized the individual’s detachment from the mass of humanity and his permanent inclusion in a distinct tribal community’. David Gollaher, *Circumcision: A History of the World’s Most Controversial Surgery* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 57. Both Sunnī and Shīʿī *ḥadīth* works also provide evidence that both male and female circumcision was practiced in the eras of the formulation of these *aḥādīth*; *Bukhārī* is replete with references to the practice of both male and female circumcision in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era, albeit there is reference to the practice of circumcising boys at puberty instead of in infancy (*Bukhārī* vol. 8, p. 74, no. 313). *Bukhārī* also contains a curious dialogue between Heraclius and a messenger from the Ghassānids on the topic of circumcision practices; among other things, it transpires that ‘Arabs circumcise themselves too’, and a narration indicating that uncircumcised male converts must be circumcised regardless of their age suggests that the practise was not universal. (The conversation with Heraclius is in *Bukhārī* vol. 1, p. 1, no. 6. A narration says that people will be gathered on the Day of Judgment ‘barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised’ (vol. 4, p. 55, no. 568); a lady named Umm Anmar is taunted on the basis of her profession – namely, being a circumciser of females (vol. 5, p. 59, no. 399).

While male circumcision figures prominently in the Jewish, Sunnī, and Shīʿī consciousness, there are significant differences in how circumcision is perceived. In the Jewish context, circumcision is heavily associated with identity, and is a symbol of Abraham’s covenant with God, wherein God promises to multiply Abraham’s descendants, and to give him the promised land – so ‘shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant’ (Genesis 17:13). The locus of circumcision on the genital organ can also be taken as symbolic of the fact that this is the part of the body involved in actualizing God’s promise of Abraham siring a great nation, whereas, in the Islamic context, the multiplying of the Israelites does not figure into the understanding of circumcision. Instead, the Qur’ānic mention of covenant refers to the building of the Sacred House and hence the hajj: “When we made the House a place of resort unto men, and a sanctuary”, and said: “Take the station of Abraham [Maqām Ibrāhīm] for a place of prayer; and convenanted (‘*aḥidnā*) with Abraham and Ishmael saying: ‘Do ye two purify my House for those who made the circuit, for those who pay devotions there, for those who bow down, and for those who adore!’” (Qur’ān 2:125)

However, in the Islamic tradition, Arabs are perceived to be descendants of Ismāʿīl, and so, by extension, there is an assumption that the practise of circumcision should also apply to them. Traditionally, both Sunnī and Shīʿī scholars have held that circumcision is mandatory for men, although, today, there is a minority movement (as among Jews) in opposition to male circumcision on the grounds that it is not in the Qur’ān and contradicts the belief that God created people in a ‘perfect form’. However, as Gollaher notes, ‘Within the world of Islam, the consensus is overwhelming that an uncut man is a second-class citizen.’ David Gollaher, *Circumcision*, p. 46.

³³⁷ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 35, no. 4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 101, no. 2 (citing *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi*); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 101, p. 113, no. 26 (citing *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi*).

establishing a distinctly Shī'ī view. These narrations are also of interest here because they involve Sārah. In this narration, a speaker says to Imām al-Şādiq that some people are saying that Ibrāhīm circumcised himself with an axe. The Imām replies, 'Glory be to Allah! It is not as they say. They have lied about Ibrāhīm.' (This wording is, incidentally, similar to the wording attributed to him in the narration rejecting the idea that Eve was created from Adam's rib; see Chapter 2). Then he explains that, seven days after their birth, the prophets' foreskins and umbilical cords fall off naturally – or, at least, that they did until Işhāq was born:

[W]hen Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, sired a child from Hājar, Sārah mocked Hājar the way that bondmaids are mocked,³³⁸ and Hājar cried, and that weighed heavily on her. And when Ismā'īl saw her crying, he cried at her crying, and Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, came and said, 'What has made you cry, O Ismā'īl?'

He said, 'Sārah called my mother this-and-that, and she cried, and I cried at her crying.'

So Ibrāhīm stood in his *muşallah* and spoke in it to his Lord and asked him to remove that [difficulty] from Hājar, so Allah removed it from her. And when Sārah gave birth to Işhāq – and it was the seventh day – Işhāq's umbilical cord fell off, but his foreskin did not. So Sārah was nervous about that, and when Ibrāhīm came to her, she said, 'O Ibrāhīm, what is this happening that has happened in the family of Ibrāhīm and the children of the prophets? This is your son Işhāq; his umbilical cord has fallen from him but not his foreskin.'

³³⁸ 'Allāmah al-Majlisī suggests that this could mean that Sārah made fun of Hājar for being uncircumcised, since, according to him, slave-girls were not circumcised. 'Allāmah al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'Uqūl*, vol. 21, p. 65. Adele and Amir Ferdows observe that the inclusion of a narration on female circumcision in al-Majlisī's *Ḥilyat al-Muttaqīn* suggests that this practice was done in Iran at that time. Adele and Amir Ferdows, 'Women in Shi'i *Fiqh*: Images through the *Hadith*.'

So Ibrāhīm stood in his *muṣallah* and communed with his Lord and said, ‘O Lord, what is this that has happened in the family of Ibrāhīm and the children of the prophets? This is my son Iṣḥāq – his umbilical cord has fallen from him but not his foreskin?’

So Allah the Exalted revealed to him, ‘O Ibrāhīm, this is because of how Sārah abused Hājar. So I swore that I would not make any of them [foreskins] fall from any of the children of the prophets because of Sārah’s abuse of Hājar.’ So Iṣḥāq was circumcised with iron, and he was made to taste the heat of iron.

He [al-Ṣādiq] said, ‘So Ibrāhīm circumcised him with iron, and this became the *sunnah* of circumcision in the children of Iṣḥāq after that.’

Sārah’s portrayal here is not dissimilar to the portrayal of Eve in non-canonical Sunnī narrations in that her acts have creational consequences pertaining to reproductive physiology – except, here, the locus is the male rather than the female. This narration also implies that the reproductive system is impure or imperfect in its natural state, and requires circumcision to become pure or perfected. A thematic connection between circumcision and menstruation has been observed, particularly in the case of Judaic as well as Islamic law, where menstruation is treated as a form of ritual impurity.³³⁹ Both menstruation and uncircumcision result in restrictions in ritual law, and Shīʿī narrations on male circumcision emphasize the aspect of purity – for instance, a narration in *al-Kāfī* says that the earth recoils at the urine of an uncircumcised man.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Shaye Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Also see David Gollaher, *Circumcision*.

³⁴⁰ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, pp. 34-37. On the other hand, Gollaher cites an eighteenth century European author as saying that (presumably, only some) Persian women ate their son’s foreskins believing it would bring them fertility. While this may just be a fanciful Orientalist claim aimed at exoticizing the ‘East’, the idea itself reinforces the difference between a male-legalistic

This narration also uses reproductive physiology to deliver strong messages about identity as well as Arabo-Islamic superiority over Judaism. Perhaps this is due to an intuitive connection between the reproductive organ and the transmission of tribal identity. In any case, it conveys the tacit assumption that tribalism and patrilineality are essential aspects of the Islamic worldview; particularly with respect to patrilineality since, in these narrations, the superiority of Hājar over Sārah is emphasized by the bodily superiority of Ismāʿīl over Ishāq. While acknowledging the Jewish custom of circumcision as well as the virtue of circumcision, the narrations turn that around to argue that Ismāʿīl and his descendants are superior to Ishāq and his descendants since, here, Ishāq's circumcision is a form of divine punishment. This narration also situates the Prophet – who is believed to be in the line of Ismāʿīl – in the perfected lineage, and offers a simple explanation for why the Prophet would be born perfected, rather than being born with an imperfection requiring circumcision; it also resolves the question of whether the prophets before Ibrāhīm were uncircumcised, something which apparently was troubling to some Jewish exegetes.

Because the narration is so strongly pro-Arab-Islamic, one might not think that it would be rooted in the Judaic tradition. However, the concept of being 'born circumcised' is found in Jewish texts; for instance, it is said that Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Job were born circumcised.³⁴¹ In fact, the narration may simply be a reversal of a Jewish tradition that Yaʿqūb was born circumcised, to indicate that this merit was destined for the children of Ismāʿīl not Ishāq.³⁴² Being born circumcised (aposthia) was a sign that a child would be destined for some sort of greatness.³⁴³ The idea of being born circumcised is also thought to have roots in pre-Islamic Arab culture, in which there was a belief that some boys would be

religion and female-folk religion. Of course, eating parts of the human body is proscribed in Shīʿī ritual law. David Gollaher, *Circumcision*, p. 66.

³⁴¹ Issac Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy* (The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2002), pp. 61-72.

³⁴² 'Jacob', in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8381-jacob>>. Accessed 1 August 2015. There is also an account that Jacob's son was born circumcised. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*.

³⁴³ Issac Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, pp. 61-72.

born circumcised because of the light of the moon.³⁴⁴ While Sunnī texts do not say that Ibrāhīm was ‘born circumcised’, there are non-canonical Sunnī *aḥādīth* saying that some other pre-Islamic prophets were born circumcised, and there historically has been debate among Sunnī scholars over whether the Prophet required circumcision or not. With that in mind, the possibility arises that this was an ancient Semitic notion, and not something unique to Shī‘ī thought, even though this narration is phrased as a refutation of a Sunnī idea, and serves the purpose of delineating Shī‘ī belief and identity.

Lastly, this narration continues the trend of presenting Ibrāhīm as the interlocutor before Allah for Sārah, so it supports the ‘demi-god’ hierarchy. Of course, one could argue that, as a prophet, Ibrāhīm would be expected to receive instructions from Allah; however, Ibrāhīm here is portrayed as intervening with Allah to fix Sārah’s mistakes. In this way, it differs from the Qur’ānic portrayal of Sārah where she is addressed by the angels.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Ishāq and his descendants must be circumcised because Sārah mistreated Hājar.
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 6:35, no. 4 • <i>Bihār</i> 12:101, no. 2 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>’) • <i>Bihār</i> 101:113, no. 26 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>’)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judaic tradition • Pre-Islamic Arab belief
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The line of Ismā‘īl is bodily superior to that of Ishāq. • Sārah’s ill-mannered behaviour had permanent consequences on her descendants. • Reinforces tribalism and patrilineality

3.3.2 Female circumcision

Just as Sārah is connected to the origin of male circumcision through Ishāq, she is also connected to the origin of female circumcision through Hājar.

³⁴⁴ M. J. Kister, ‘...And he was born circumcised’.

In addition to serving as a foundational myth, this story legitimizes female circumcision by tying it to the Abrahamic tradition while, at the same time, explaining why Jews focus on male circumcision instead. As with men, it allows a way for women to be marked as members of the tribe of Ismāʿīl and ‘purified’ (female circumcision is still referred to as ‘purification’ in some regions); this is similar to how female circumcision is used as an identity marker in some cultures today.³⁴⁵ These narrations, as well as others on female circumcision, reinforce the view that female circumcision was a common pre-Islamic practice in the Arabian Peninsula as well as Iraq; here, as Stowasser observes, these narrations give religious legitimacy to a cultural practice.³⁴⁶ However, these narrations also betray a conflict between Shīʿah, in that, in other narrations, the Imāms reject female circumcision while the people speaking to the Imāms presume that it is a norm.

Mostly, the account of Hājar’s circumcision is found in non-canonical Sunnī texts. The basic story is that, after Hājar conceived Ismāʿīl, Sārah became jealous of her and vowed to cut off three of Hājar’s limbs. Therefore, Ibrāhīm had her pierce Hājar’s ears and circumcise Hājar, at which time this became a *sunnah* that was passed on to Hājar’s female descendants (the children of Ismāʿīl), just as, after Ibrāhīm, it became the *sunnah* for his male descendants to be circumcised.³⁴⁷ Hājar fled from Sārah into the wilderness, letting her dress drag on the ground, whereupon an angel spoke to her, and she returned.

The Sunnī account is alluded to in this brief section of a lengthy *ḥadīth* in *Biḥār* (taken from ‘*Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*’).³⁴⁸ In this narration, which came up

³⁴⁵ While female circumcision is viewed in a negative light in much of the world today, Shaye Cohen brings up the question of whether being uncircumcised denies Jewish women the ability to participate in the covenant alongside men and renders them second-class citizens. He traces polemics surrounding this question to some early Christian anti-Jewish literature, which maintained that Jewish women were not truly Jews because they were not circumcised. Shaye Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised?*

³⁴⁶ Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 147, note 55.

³⁴⁷ Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 47; M. J. Kister, ‘...And he was born circumcised’.

³⁴⁸ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 10, p. 79, no. 1 (narration begins on page 75, citing ‘*Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*’).

briefly in Chapter 2 regarding Eve, a questioner – most likely Jewish – is asking Imām al-Riḍā many questions:

He [the questioner] asked, ‘Who was the first man who was commanded to be circumcised?’

He [the Imām] said, ‘Ibrāhīm.’

He [the questioner] asked, ‘Who was the first woman to have been circumcised?’

He [the Imām] said, ‘Hājar, the mother of Ismā‘īl. Sārah circumcised her to remove her from her servitude.’

And he [the questioner] asked about the first woman to have dragged her dress on the ground.

He [the Imām] said, ‘Hājar, when she was fleeing Sārah.’³⁴⁹

As in the Sunnī sources, another narration says that this then became a custom (*sunnah*) – presumably, of the Arabs.³⁵⁰ The narration is sympathetic about this, in that it quotes Sārah as saying, ‘O Allah, do not take me to account for what I have done to Hājar.’³⁵¹

This is just an excerpt from a longer narration (discussed also in Chapter 2) which contains heavily anthropomorphic and incredible material. Additionally, it conflicts with the Shī‘ī view that Ibrāhīm did *not* circumcise himself. Most pertinently, the narration conflicts with other Shī‘ī narrations which specify that circumcision is *sunnah* for males but not for females³⁵² – in other words, that while it may be a *sunnah* of the Arabs, it should not be a *sunnah* for the Shī‘ah. This reflects an identity tension between cultural practice versus confessional

³⁴⁹ This is also mentioned in what is thought to be the earliest extant Sunnī written version of this story, in which Hājar wipes out her tracks on the ground with her girdle so that Sārah cannot follow her as well as the same notion about the dress. Poorthius examines this motif in more detail in the Jewish sources, and the meaning behind the various things Hājar is related to have been dragging as being representative of her position as a bondsmaid. ‘Hajar’s Wanderings’, Marcel Poorthius.

³⁵⁰ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 101, p. 113, no. 26 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā‘i*’).

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² Such as in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, pp. 37-38.

identity, and an unwillingness among some to give up the former to meet the demands of the latter.³⁵³ While, on the surface, this might suggest a conflict between Arabs and non-Arabs, as in the case of narrations on Eve, these narrations are situated in the context of Arab society and Arab identity, and reflect intra-Arab discussions.

This narration does bring up the question of why it is assumed that Hājar must be circumcised in order to no longer be a slave, especially if she is the first female to be circumcised. Clearly, such a condition is not part of Islamic law. One can conclude that, despite the fact that female circumcision is discouraged in Shīʿī texts, it must have been considered preferable for women of status, such as Sārah, and hence part of the patriarchal bargain; and the absence of being circumcised was seen as a marker of low status or slavery.³⁵⁴ That is to say, just as with men, being uncircumcised was perceived as a form of impurity or imperfection. The inclusion of this detail in this account may reflect the greater prevalence of slaves of foreign origin – who may not have been circumcised – after the Islamic conquests.

Mercifully, the question of a man ordering his wife to circumcise herself does not appear in these texts. While Ibrāhīm is involved, it is really a negotiation between women, with Hājar paying a price to Sārah in exchange for a higher social status. Today, female circumcision is rarely practiced among Twelver Shīʿah (with the exception of Twelver Shīʿah where this is a cultural norm), and it is generally considered permissible but not religiously recommended. While most Shīʿī jurists will not rule that it is forbidden because *ḥadīth* texts do not unambiguously proscribe it, Ayatollah Sīstāni

³⁵³ The narration is also somewhat curious since Hājar is said in *ḥadīth* to have been Egyptian, and female circumcision is thought to have originated in Egypt. It has been speculated that the Sunnī *ḥadīth* connects Hājar to circumcision primarily because of the relationship between female circumcision and Egypt; however, in both the Sunnī *ḥadīth* and in this case, she is being circumcised once she is outside Egypt and will no longer return. Texts in the early Christian era confirm an awareness among Greco-Romans of this practice in Egypt, and there is no particular reason to think that others in the Near East were not aware of it too.

Stowasser says, 'Here it may also be significant that female circumcision is said to have begun with the Egyptian woman Hagar, since this custom is mainly prevalent in the Nile regions.' Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 147, note 55.

³⁵⁴ This is reminiscent of the pre-Islamic custom in Iraq of veiling noblewomen but requiring slave women to go bare-headed (see further discussion in Chapter 6).

released a *fatwā* emphasising that it is not recommended in *sharī‘ah*, and adding that it is a crime against girls and there is no reason to do it, perhaps because it is still practiced among Iraqi Kurds.³⁵⁵ However, in a (hopefully theoretical) *fatwā*, a different prominent contemporary Shī‘ī scholar was asked what a woman’s religious obligation is if her husband orders her to be circumcised; the response was that, insofar as it does not harm the woman, it is obligatory for her to obey her husband. Of course, how circumcising a grown woman could be construed as ‘not harmful’ is left to the imagination, and such ‘loopholes’ allow a jurist to, practically, rule something as impermissible even if theoretically they should be permissible (or even required) based on textual evidence. The fact that one would need a ‘loophole’, however, and that in principle it would be considered a religious requirement for the woman to comply, reflects, firstly, how the traditional, procedural model of deriving *fatwās* can break down and result in seemingly unethical rulings; and, secondly, a disturbing perception of a man’s right over his wife in normative contemporary Shī‘ī discourse, since the implication behind ‘obligatory’ (*wājib*) is that if the wife does not do it, she is liable to be punished in Hell. There is also no reverse ruling whereby, if a woman asks her uncircumcised husband to be circumcised, it is obligatory for him to comply, even though male circumcision is religiously recommended. This recasts female circumcision in the light of the ‘demi-god’ model – which is not even found in these narrations about female circumcision – whereby the husband is the stand-in for the divine in ordering the female to be circumcised, and also brings up serious questions about the notion and extent of spousal obedience.³⁵⁶

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Sārah circumcised Hājar to free her from slavery, and female circumcision became a <i>Sunnah</i> .
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i>, vol. 10, p. 79, no. 1 (citing ‘<i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Islamic notions of female circumcision • Sunnī narrations

³⁵⁵ Ayatollah Sīstānī’s *fatwā* is available (in Persian) at his official site at <<http://www.sistani.org/persian/qa/0896/>>.

³⁵⁶ The *fatwā* is from Sayyid Khāmene‘ī and is listed (in Persian) on a website considered to be a reliable source of his religious rulings (<<http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=78685&consultationid=139888>>).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others parts of this narration can be classified as <i>isrā'īyāt</i>
Separate-but-equal ideology	n/a
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legitimizes pre-Islamic practice • Demarcating Arab-Abrahamic identity but not Shī'ī identity • Female circumcision and nobility • The patriarchal bargain

3.3.3 'And she menstruated...'

In addition to circumcision, menstruation is also discussed with respect to Sārah; as discussed above, menstruation and circumcision have been seen as concordant. The discussion of menstruation begins with the *tafsīr* of *fa-ḍaḥakat* in Qur'ān 11:71, one of the three Qur'ānic passages mentioning the story of Ibrāhīm, Sārah, and the angelic guests.³⁵⁷ This section of the Qur'ān tells the account of angels coming to visit Ibrāhīm and wife in the guise of humans. Ibrāhīm offers them roasted meat, but they decline, and he fears them. They tell him not to fear because they have come with the good news that Ibrāhīm and Sārah will soon have a child, even though they are both elderly, and that the sinful people of Lūṭ will soon be destroyed.

Qur'ān 11:71 reads 'And his wife was standing, and she laughed/menstruated (*ḍaḥakat*). But We gave her glad tidings of Iṣḥāq, and after him, of Ya'qūb.' Traditionally, Sunnī scholars have taken *ḍaḥakat* to mean 'she laughed', as in Genesis. 'Laughed' is a common meaning of *ḍaḥaka*, and this parallels the Jewish tradition, in that the Hebrew word for 'laughter' is similar to the word 'Iṣḥāq', although the same wordplay does not occur in Arabic.³⁵⁸ However, interpreting *ḍaḥakat* as 'she laughed' raises the question of why Sārah would laugh *before* receiving the news of Iṣḥāq. In Genesis, Sārah laughs after she receives news that she will have a son, so that interpretation is plausible there (Genesis 18:12-15). Here, however, *ḍaḥakat* comes before the

³⁵⁷ The story of Ibrāhīm, Sārah, and the guests is mentioned in the Qur'ān three times: at greatest length, in 11:61-72; in 51:24-34; and in 15:51-60.

³⁵⁸ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 93-96.

announcement of the child; therefore, Sunnī scholars have taken pains to explain what she was laughing about – for instance, the arrival of the angels.³⁵⁹

On the other hand, a narration from *Bihār* (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*) gives both meanings. The first, attributed to Imām al-Bāqir, is that *ḍaḥakat* means ‘she laughed’, and that she laughed out of delight over what the angels said. The second, attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq, is that *ḍaḥakat* means ‘she menstruated’,³⁶⁰ and al-Majlisī presents this as preferred meaning in *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb*.³⁶¹ According to this meaning, after the angels arrived, Sārah began to miraculously experience her cycle despite her old age, and then the angels gave her the glad tidings that she would give birth.

Linguistically, either meaning is possible. While ‘laughed’ is a reasonable interpretation, and, in her discussion of these narrations, Rawand Osman feels it is more substantiated,³⁶² in the pre-Islamic era, *ḍaḥakat* also connoted ‘menstruation’, and was a symbolic or euphemistic means of phrasing the matter; for instance, it was used metaphorically (and rather graphically) in that way by the pre-Islamic poet Ta‘abbaṭa Sharran.³⁶³ While Sunnī scholars were aware of this meaning, they exerted considerable effort in refuting it. Thus, it

³⁵⁹ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur‘ān and its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 87-97. He is of the view that, due to a perceived parallelism between Sārah and Mary in the Biblical tradition as well as (in his view) in the Qur‘ān, *ḍaḥakat* should be interpreted as ‘she laughed’, and Sārah’s laughter is a prelude for the annunciation of Mary/Maryam. However, it should be noted that his argument rests on (a) parallelism in phrasing between accounts of Sārah and Maryam, whereas this type of parallelism occurs between many figures in the Qur‘ān, not just these two; and (b) Christian understandings of Sārah’s laughter as referring to the annunciation.

³⁶⁰ Other Shī‘ī *tafsīr* that give this view include Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ud al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, ed. S. al-Maḥālātī (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmīyyah al-Islamīyyah, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 152, no. 54; al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-Bayān* (Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-A‘lami li-al-Maṭbu‘āt, 1995), vol. 5, p. 307. See also al-Majlisī, *Bihār* vol. 12, p. 170, no. 32 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

³⁶¹ *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb (Tarīkh-e Payāambarān)* is a compendium of narrations about the prophets written in Farsi. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb (Tarīkh-e Payāambarān)*, 3 vols. (Tehran: n.p., 1260 AH (solar)), vol. 1, book 7, section 3.

³⁶² Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur‘ān and Sunna*, pp. 47-48.

³⁶³ Ta‘abbaṭa Sharran, the famous pre-Islamic poet, describes a hyena as laughing or menstruating over the corpses of Banu Hudhayl; Suzanne Stetkevych argues why this should be taken to mean ‘menstruation’. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, ‘Sarah and the Hyena: Laughter, Menstruation, and the Genesis of a Double Entendre’, in *History of Religions*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Aug., 1996), pp. 13-41 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176471>>. Accessed 5 December 2013. Stetkevych makes a strong case based on the pre-Islamic word usage for ‘menstruated’. See also Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur‘ān and its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 87-97.

seems that the battle over the meaning of *ḍaḥakat* became a minor sectarian skirmish.

Accepting the meaning of *ḍaḥakat* as ‘she menstruated’ would itself be a very positive portrayal of menstruation, since it would present menstruation as divine miracle brought by the angels and mentioned in the Qur’ān. While few Shī‘ī *aḥādīth* present menstruation as punishment for Eve’s disobedience, other Shī‘ī *aḥādīth* present menstruation as a form of imperfection – for instance, in the saying in *Nahj al-Balāghah* linking menstruation to lesser faith (see Chapter 7), or the view that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ did not experience female cycles. (Since menstruation recurs in narrations about the Virgin Mary, it will be discussed more in Chapter 6.) From that angle, this interpretation would offer a counter-narrative. It is also worth noting that, of all the narrations about Sārah in this chapter, this is the only narration to discuss something which is actually in the Qur’ān.

However, another Shī‘ī narration about Sārah negates the idea that Sārah’s menstruation could have been a gift. In *Biḥār* (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i*’), a narration ascribed to Imām al-Bāqir says: ‘The daughters of the prophets, peace be upon them, do not menstruate. Indeed, menstruation is a punishment, and the first to menstruate was Sārah.’³⁶⁴ Even though this interpretation goes against the Qur’ānic portrayal, it seems that this narration is acknowledging the *tafsīr* of *fa-ḍaḥakat* as ‘she bled’ as well as presuming Sārah was being punished for ill conduct. It also demonizes menstruation in general, and reiterates the view in Genesis that menstruation is a punishment. More broadly, however, like the narrations on male and female circumcision, this narration is arguing for the bodily superiority of Ismā‘īl and his descendants over Ishāq and his descendants, as a means of arguing for the superiority of the Arabs or the Prophet over the Jews. The implied comparison is between Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and Sārah (this narration is in fact found in *Biḥār* among *aḥādīth* on Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’), and the subtext is that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, a descendant of Ismā‘īl, did not menstruate, whereas Sārah, the mother of Ishāq, did; and that menstruation

³⁶⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 43, p. 25, no. 21 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i*’); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12 p. 107, no. 22 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i*’).

is a divine punishment. Therefore, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' is superior to Sārah, and, by extension, Arabs (descendants of Ismā'īl) are superior to Jews (descendants of Ishāq). Of course, the entire debate over *ḍaḥakat* reflects a disproportionate focus on menstruation in lieu of more meaningful aspects of Sārah; once again, reproductive physiology and notions of purity are used to reinforce communal identity, and to evaluate a woman's worth.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	<i>Tafsīr</i> of <i>ḍaḥakat</i> as 'she menstruated' instead of 'she laughed'
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:170, no. 32 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i>). • See also <i>Majma' al-Bayān</i> 5:307
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferentially Shī'ī view
Separate-but-equal ideology	Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are inferior because they menstruate

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	'The daughters of the prophets do not menstruate...'
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 43:25, no. 21 (citing '<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>') • <i>Biḥār</i> 12: 107, no. 22 (citing '<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>')
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are inferior because they menstruate.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implied superiority of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' over Sārah

3.4 Hājar's absence

3.4.1 Sārah's presence versus Hājar's absence

Compared to Hājar, the most distinguishing feature of Sārah is that she has an identity, is present, and influences the world around her. In the Qur'ānic story of the angels visiting her and Ibrāhīm, she is even more present than she is in the Bible, where the angels speak only to Ibrāhīm.³⁶⁵ Narrations also

³⁶⁵ This has led to the observation: 'Sarah's function in this context is no different from that of Abraham's servant who is enjoined to prepare a calf for the meal [...] The text repeats the fact that Sarah remains inside the tent [...] it emphasizes Sarah's absence from this fateful scene and by contrast, Abraham's central role in it. Instead of becoming actively involved in the conversation Sarah eavesdrops on her husband and guests 'at the end door behind him' [...] Once again, although Sarah is the subject of YHWH's address, she is referred to in the third person while her husband functions as the actual addressee [...].' Esther Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 129.

describe Sārah's ancestry, independent wealth, and beauty; and she is respected for being from a family of prophets as well as for being Ibrāhīm's kinswoman (tacitly reinforcing tribalism).

Rather than maintaining a subservient role in their marriage, Sārah gives Ibrāhīm orders – including unreasonable orders – which he obeys unquestioningly, although not always uncomplainingly. In fact, a narration in *Biḥār* says that, when she married Ibrāhīm, she placed made a condition that he should not 'refuse her lawful requests' or disobey her.³⁶⁶ The text implies that Sārah can make this request because she is a daughter of the prophets; that is, her better position in the marriage is due to her social status and is not something ordinary women can expect to enjoy. This condition justifies Ibrāhīm's later obedience, which might otherwise seem unmanly. It is also in opposition to the perception of women as inherently obedient in the creation not-from-a-rib narration.³⁶⁷

Examples of Sārah's requests abound. One narration says that Sārah grew so jealous of Hājar that she ordered Ibrāhīm not only to remove them but to remove them to a barren land with no water and no people; Ibrāhīm complies, although he cries after doing so. Hājar's perspective, as usual, is absent.³⁶⁸ This narration diverges from the Qur'ān and other narrations which say that Ibrāhīm was ordered by Allah (not Sārah) to move Hājar and Ismā'īl to a barren land; as well as a narration which says that Allah sent the winged horse known as the Burāq as well as the angel Jibrā'īl to guide Ibrāhīm and Hājar to Hājar's new home.³⁶⁹ Later, Sārah permits Ibrāhīm to visit Hājar and Ismā'īl – but only if he comes and goes within a day, and promises not to dismount his riding animal. Ibrāhīm accedes to her request, and the narration ends up being a foil for proving the possibility of *ṭayy al-arḍ*, the 'folding of the earth' or instantaneous travel, which is said to have been a miraculous skill possessed by some prophets and the Imāms – hence giving this narration a

³⁶⁶ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 112, no. 38 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī).

³⁶⁷ See Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1

³⁶⁸ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 114, no. 45 (citing *al-Maḥāsin*).

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 12, p. 97, no. 6 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 96, p. 37, no. 15 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

Shī'ī polemical use.³⁷⁰ Ibrāhīm's portrayal in these cases conflicts the overarching Shī'ī belief in the justice of the prophets, since these demands are not only unreasonable but are unjust to Ismā'īl and Hājar.

When Ibrāhīm complains about Sārah, he receives divine revelation telling him that woman is like a bent rib, and if he straightens her he will break her.³⁷¹ Despite Sārah's difficult behaviour, Ibrāhīm receives divine assistance in providing for Sārah, becoming the 'first man for whom sand turned into flour'.³⁷² (This also challenges the notion that Ibrāhīm was providing for Sārah – that is, the man financially provides for the woman – since here, Allah is providing for Sārah.) The characterization of Sārah as difficult is so pronounced that 'Allāmah al-Majlisī appends Ibrāhīm's patience with Sārah's bickering to an explanation of Qur'an 2:124 ('And when his Lord tried Ibrāhīm with certain words, he fulfilled them') to a narration from Shaykh al-Şādūq which only identifies the 'words' are the names of the *panjtan* and the Imāms.³⁷³ Ibrāhīm also proudly announces to Sārah that he has been appointed the 'friend of Allah'.³⁷⁴ In the interactions between Sārah and Hājar, Sārah is also the primary actor – for instance, Sārah circumcises Hājar. In short, Sārah is simply more visible than Hājar.

In contrast, Hājar's defining characteristic is her absence. While sacred miracles appear around Hājar, she is not presented as a person who acts under her own volition. She is not presented as choosing her own faith, or in fact choosing anything at all; she is absent and silent. In the rare cases where she does speak, it is from a perspective of passivity and victimization. This is also in

³⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 12, p. 112, no. 39 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī); the same is implied but not specified in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 112, no. 38 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī). *Ṭayy al-arḍ* is discussed in the Shī'ī context to justify the possibility of the Imāms having this power. This will be discussed more with respect to narrations on Bilqīs and the Virgin Mary.

³⁷¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 513, no. 2; al-Şādūq, *al-Faḳīh*, vol. 3, p. 440, no. 4527. See discussion in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3.

³⁷² al-Majlisī, *Bihār* vol 12 p 5 no 13 (citing *Tasir 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

³⁷³ al-Majlisī, *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb (Tarīkh-e Payāambarān)*, vol. 1, book 7, section 2. 'Allāmah al-Majlisī adds twenty possible explanations for this verse.

³⁷⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 392, no. 589 & 590. (589 contains references to Ibrāhīm's *ghīrah*; 590 does not.)

contrast to Genesis, where she exhibits feelings and actions – for instance, despising her mistress (Genesis 16:1), and fleeing (Genesis 16:6-12).³⁷⁵

The account of ‘Sārah and the box’ integrates the Arab value of *ghīrah* into the corpus of narrations as a religious ideal. However, despite his characterization as the founding father of *ghīrah*, Ibrāhīm does not demonstrate any *ghīrah* towards Hājar; as wryly observed in a discussion of Genesis, ‘there is [not] much concern for Hagar’s honor – a fact that indicates ‘honor’ is not only a male construct but also a class construct’ – and that Hājar, as a slave-woman, has no honour to lose.³⁷⁶ However, in these narrations, Hājar compensates for this by situating herself within the structure of patriarchy, using it to protect herself although Ibrāhīm is not actively protecting her. For instance, while Ibrāhīm imposes seclusion on Sārah (putting her in the box, locking her in the house), he does not impose it on Hājar. Instead, Hājar imposes it on herself: though alone and essentially abandoned, she identifies herself to the people and to the angel Jibrā’īl as the *umm walad* of Ibrāhīm and refuses to interact with the tribespeople until Ibrāhīm returns and permits her to; this narration is in *al-Kāfi*.³⁷⁷ Her situating herself within the patriarchal structure is her own means of negotiating for her own honour by downplaying her own agency, and it also conveys the message that a woman is neither socially independent nor makes her own choices; instead, she is always under the guardianship of a man, even if that guardianship is only nominal.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Sārah’s presence and Hājar’s absence
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 8:392, no. 589-90 • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:5, no. 13 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:97, no. 6 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:112, no. 38-39 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:114, no. 45 (citing <i>al-Maḥāsin</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 96: 37, no. 15 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish tradition synthesised with a view of women as passive and silent
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior

³⁷⁵ This story is actually quoted from the Old Testament in *Biḥār* but is not presented as an actual *ḥadīth*; it will be discussed in a later section in this chapter.

³⁷⁶ Esther Fuchs, ‘Sexual Politics’, p. 143.

³⁷⁷ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, p. 201, no. 2.

	<p>to women on a creational level.</p> <p>Does not support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • Male authority is necessary.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'bad wife' is vocal, present, and stands up for her own best interest.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Hājar identifying herself as the <i>umm walad</i> of Ibrāhīm and waiting for him to return and permit her to speak with the people
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 4:201, no. 2.
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradigm of slave-marriage
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male authority is necessary.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'good wife' is passive, silent, and suffering. • Fictional male guardianship

3.4.2 Critical moments in the story of Hājar

There are three critical moments in the story of Hājar where her responses would appear to be particularly important, even if only for dramatic or narrative purposes: when she and her son are first left in the desert, when her son almost dies of thirst, and when her son is taken to be sacrificed. (These would also be ideal places to introduce the theme of motherhood, were it to be developed, although that doesn't happen.) Hence, these are also the places where Hājar's absence is most pronounced, and emphasise the preference for male normativeness in the narrations on Hājar.

In several narrations (see chart at end of section), when Hājar is left alone, she asks Ibrāhīm and/or the angel Jibrā'īl whom they are entrusting her to, and the reply is that they are entrusting her to Allah. For instance, Hājar asks Ibrāhīm, 'O Ibrāhīm, to whom are you leaving us?', and he replies, 'I leave you two to the Lord of this building.'³⁷⁸ Hājar's question serves several functions. One is theological – that is, contrasting their dire situation with Ibrāhīm's trust in

³⁷⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, p. 201, no. 1. 'Building' (*bunyah*) seems anachronistic; presumably it is referring to the future rebuilding of the Ka'bah by Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl.

Allah, and sending the message that those who trust in Allah will prevail. It also highlights the miraculous – that ordinary people could not have survived such circumstances, but because Ismā‘īl was destined to be the forebear of the Prophet in the Arabian Peninsula, divine intervention enabled them to survive otherwise impossible circumstances. The question also functions as a narrative device to bring about a sense of pathos.

This question, however, leads to other implications. One is that it reinforces the patriarchal worldview wherein a female is always under the guardianship of a male; it does not occur to Hājar that she could take care of herself, although practically that is what happens. The other more disturbing implication is that it suggests a lack of faith on Hājar’s part, and reinforces the notion that women are weaker in faith. This particular account of Hājar’s journey emphasizes the weakness of women:

When Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, settled Ismā‘īl and Hājar in Mecca and left them there, the two of them cried. So Ibrāhīm said to them, ‘What makes you cry? For I have left you two in the most beloved of lands to Allah the Exalted, and in the sanctuary (*ḥaram*) of Allah.’

And so Hājar said to him, ‘O Ibrāhīm, I have not seen that a prophet like you does what you did.’

He said, ‘And what have I done?’

And she said, ‘You have left a weak woman and a weak boy with no way out, and no companion from among human beings, and no apparent water, and no plants growing, and no animals for milking.’

[...] Ibrāhīm left, and his eyes watered when he heard this from her.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, pp. 114-15, no. 47 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*). The phrase ‘he said’, referring to the narrator, has been omitted at the ellipsis for ease of reading.

These narrations reinforce the social and religious norm that a man should be responsible to his dependents; however, in removing the possibility of Hājar's independent survival, they negate the possibility that women can take care of themselves (even if men *should* take care of them). Ironically, this situation should allow Hājar to escape from the patriarchal bargain: because Hājar becomes reliant on Allah instead of on a man, her relationship with Sārah no longer needs to be of any concern. Additionally, now that Hājar is directly endorsed by the divine, she has no more need of earthly social status. However, Hājar does not realize that and still views herself as part of the patriarchal structure.

One of the fundamental connections between Hājar and Islamic rite is the story of Hājar running between Ṣafā and Marwah in search of water for Ismā'īl. This leads to the miraculous appearance of the spring of Zamzam – which, as Osman notes, is not a small miracle: not only does this water ensure the survival of Ismā'īl and his lineage, but it brings settlers to the precincts of Mecca and results in its establishment (or re-establishment) as a sacred site. Additionally, running between Ṣafā and Marwah is re-enacted by Muslims as a rite of hajj today.³⁸⁰ However, these narrations remove Hājar from the picture. In one set of narrations, Ibrāhīm himself, not Ismā'īl, causes Zamzam to flow, thereby making Hājar redundant.³⁸¹ In another, Hājar converses with the angel Jibrā'īl while going between Ṣafā and Marwah,³⁸² and the appearance of Zamzam is associated with Ismā'īl rather than with her efforts. This reinforces the idea that the narrative is really about the male line of succession, and Hājar is an ancillary character. The idea that Muslims perform the *sa'ī* in imitation of Hājar's actions is neglected, apart from one narration that mentions in passing that Hājar did this and Allah made it a *sunnah*.³⁸³

Hājar's connection with the *sa'ī* also brings up a notable omission –that is, while Hājar is seen as being fundamental to the rites of the hajj, she never

³⁸⁰ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, 35-36.

³⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 12, p. 111, no. 37 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī); see also al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, p. 201, no. 1.

³⁸² Ibid., *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 113, no. 43 (citing *al-Maḥāsin*).

³⁸³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, p. 201, no. 2.

actually performs the hajj; instead, the hajj is only done by Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl. This is despite the fact that the hajj is seen as necessary for both women and men; and even Eve herself is portrayed as performing the hajj (see Chapter 2). This could be a continuation of the patriarchal focus of this set of narrations, whereby the story is really about Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl; or it could be that Hājar was presumed to have been deceased or otherwise absent at that time.³⁸⁴

This leads to the third critical moment – when Ismāʿīl is taken to be sacrificed. No reaction at all is ascribed to Hājar in these texts, which also leads to the speculation that she was not there when this happened. However, there is a narration in which Sārah reacts to the sacrifice. This is one of the narrations which identify the sacrificial victim as Ishāq rather than Ismāʿīl. While these narrations are generally dismissed as *isrāʾīlyāt*, what is notable is Sārah's active inclusion in the story, compared to Hājar's absence. After Satan comes to Ibrāhīm and fails to tempt him, he then comes to tempt Sārah, thereby testing her faith. Although Sārah stands firm in front of Satan, when she sees knife marks on the neck of her son, she loses control and becomes so upset that she falls ill and dies; this is also found in Jewish accounts although not actually the Old Testament.³⁸⁵ Thus, as before, even though this narration does not fit into the context of narrations which are generally accepted as authentic, Sārah is portrayed as taking an active role in the story – while in similar narrations, Hājar is just missing.

While a woman might be used as an emotional compasses to express feelings such as helplessness and sadness which would be seen as unmanly, here, Ibrāhīm is the emotional compass in the story. Rather than portraying women as weeping or emotional, the narrations focus on Ibrāhīm's distress and

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 202, no.3.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 207, no. 10. See Tamar Kadari, 'Sarah: Midrash and Aggadah', in *Jewish Women's Archive Encyclopedia*. <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sarah-midrash-and-aggadah>> Accessed 21 February 2015. Phyllis Trible feels that the absence of mention of Sarah's later life and death in the Old Testament indicates that after Sārah has served her purpose, 'patriarchy dismisses Sarah. It has no further need of her, and so it writes a lean obituary.' Phyllis Trible, 'Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah', in *Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narratives*, ed. Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 192.

Ibrāhīm’s tears.³⁸⁶ Ultimately Ibrāhīm’s tears and distress are what evoke a response from the divine. For instance, in one account of how Ibrāhīm left Hājar and Ismā‘īl in the desert, Hājar cries first, at which time Ibrāhīm cries; and when Ibrāhīm starts crying, then Allah reveals to Ibrāhīm that he should call people to the hajj.³⁸⁷ This hierarchy – the woman cries, so the man cries, so Allah responds – also matches the model of the man functioning as a ‘demi-god’ reinforced in some narrations about Eve. Additionally, although contrary to the contemporary view of women as emotional and tearful, this portrayal of Ibrāhīm as shedding tears is consistent with the portrayal of other men throughout this work who are also portrayed as shedding tears more often than women. It also does not stigmatise emotion the same way that the separate-but-equal ideology does.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Hājar’s absence
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 4:201-2, no. 1-3 • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:114-15, no. 47 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:111, no. 37 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbīyā</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:113, no. 43 (citing <i>al-Maḥāsin</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:114, no. 45 (citing <i>al-Maḥāsin</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ‘demi-god’ model
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. <p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hājar’s role in sacred history is diminished. • Hājar is absent; Sārah is present.

3.4.3 Hājar and the angels

Neither the Four Books nor *Biḥār* mention the story of the angels speaking to Hājar in Genesis 16:7-14, where Hājar flees Sārah and is met by an angel in the desert who tells her to go back, and that her descendants will multiply ‘so much that they will be too numerous to count’, although this story is

³⁸⁶ For instance al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 113, no. 43 (citing *al-Maḥāsin*), al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 114, no. 45 (citing *al-Maḥāsin*).

³⁸⁷ This is in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 114, no. 47 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*). The other narration is al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 35, no. 4 where Hājar cries because Sārah abuses her, and so Ismā‘īl cries at her crying; this, in turn, distresses Ibrāhīm.

found in non-canonical Sunnī narrations.³⁸⁸ However, a curious artefact in *Biḥār* is ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī’s inclusion of this story from a translation of the Old Testament recorded by Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664 AH). This is atypical since the Bible is not accepted as a formal source of *ḥadīth* (which are, by definition, narrations from the Prophet, his Companions, or, in the Shī‘ī case, the Imāms).³⁸⁹

Leaving aside others issues of general interest, such as which Arabic translation of the Torah Ibn Ṭāwūs had,³⁹⁰ the practical result is that it levels the playing field between Hājar and Sārah; were Sārah to enjoy a merit not shared by Hājar, this might hint at the ancestral superiority of the Jews. In the Qur’ān, Sārah is spoken to by the angels; and now, here, Hājar is also spoken to by the angels. Additionally, some narrations about Hājar’s arrival to the Arabian Peninsula also say that she spoke with the angel Jibrā’īl.³⁹¹ Therefore, these narrations assign Hājar the trait of *al-muḥaddathah* (‘one who is spoken to by angels’), which is one of the attributes of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, and reinforces the thematic link between her and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. However, unlike other instances where the portrayal of a woman as a *muḥaddathah* presents her as an active participant in sacred history, these narrations do not ascribe independent agency to Hājar, and so are ambiguous with respect to their implications for the separate-but-equal theory.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Hājar and the angels
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:118-19, no. 58 (citing the Old Testament) • <i>Biḥār</i>, vol. 12, p. 112, no. 38 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i>).
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly, the Bible • Uniquely Islamic content
Separate-but-equal	Ambiguous – Hājar is a <i>muḥaddathah</i> but is still in a

³⁸⁸ For instance, see Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Wāḥid (n.p.: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1968), vol. 1, p. 200. (Note that al-Majlisī is citing al-Rāwandī’s *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’*, not Ibn Kathīr’s.

³⁸⁹ This narration is *Biḥār*, vol. 12, pp. 118-19, no. 58 (citing Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs’s transcription of a translation of the Bible).

³⁹⁰ Sidney H. Griffith’s 2013 book *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* might be of interest here.

³⁹¹ *Biḥār*, vol 12, p. 112, no. 38 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī).

ideology	subordinate role
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hājar is not inferior to Sārah

3.4.4 The ‘black, fertile woman’

Lastly, there is a narration which does not mention Hājar directly, but nonetheless alludes to her in advising men on whom to marry. This narration expresses a preference for Hājar over Sārah by allusion, albeit in a backhanded manner. It is related from a book of rare *ḥadīth* (*nawādir*):

The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, said, ‘Marry the black, affectionate, fertile women, and do not marry the handsome, beautiful, barren women, because I will boast about you to the nations on the Day of Judgment. Do not know that the children [will be] beneath the throne of the Merciful, seeking forgiveness for their fathers, and Ibrāhīm will be caring for them, and Sārah will be raising them (may Allah’s blessings be upon both of them) on a mountain of musk and ambergris and saffron?’³⁹²

Thematically, this narration ties into a narration alluding to Zulaykhā (which will be discussed near the end of Chapter 4) which says to marry ugly, fertile women instead of beautiful, infertile women. While none of the texts here actually specify Hājar’s ethnic origin, she is generally considered to have been black. Therefore, this narration carries implied racial stereotyping – Hājar was fertile, black, and not difficult (as well as enslaved); whereas Sārah was infertile, beautiful, and jealous (as well as free).³⁹³ Not only is ‘beautiful’ treated as an implied antonym to ‘black’, but it hints that black women should be treated

³⁹² al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 100, p. 237, no. 33 (citing *Nawādir al-Rāwandī*); al-Majlisī, *Bihār* vol. 5 p. 294, no. 16. (citing *Nawādir al-Rāwandī*); also al-Majlisī, *Bihār* vol. 12, p. 14, no. 43 (citing *Nawādir al-Rāwandī*). (Included multiple times.) Chain of narration is listed as ‘from his [al-Rāwandī’s] *isnād* from Mūsā ibn Ja’far from his fathers’.

³⁹³ This may also be a reference to the mother of Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm – since the narration is attributed to Imām a-Kāzīm – since the case can be made that she was from East Africa. Her name, Ḥamīdah al-Barbarīyyah, literally means ‘Berber’, but it has been argued that she came from East Africa rather than North Africa. See discussion in Amina Inloes, ‘Racial “Othering” in Shi’i Sacred History: Jawn ibn Huwayy the “African Slave”, and the Ethnicities of the Twelve Imams’, in *Journal of Shi’a Islamic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Autumn 2014), pp. 411-439.

differently than Semitic women. Additionally, Sārah is still treated as Ibrāhīm’s ‘real wife’ in the next world.

There is also the question of whether valuing a woman for her fertility is really an Islamic recommendation. Apart from the fact that the Prophet never bore children with most of his wives, and many women in the Qur’ān also did not bear children, one does wonder how a prospective groom would know whether his young bride was fertile or not. This narration may simply reflect a perception that a woman is considered successful in life if she bears children. Since fertility is demonstrated by childbearing, this narration also indicates a greater social acceptance for remarriage of women in the early period of Islam compared to today in many Muslim regions.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Marry the black, fertile woman and not the beautiful barren, woman.
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 100:237, no. 33 (citing <i>Nawādir al-Rāwandī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 5:294, no 16 (citing <i>Nawādir al-Rāwandī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12: 14, no. 43 (citing <i>Nawādir al-Rāwandī</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semitic focus on childbearing
Separate-but-equal ideology	n/a
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implied racial stereotyping

3.5 Conclusions

What is the subtext? The narrations on Sārah and Hājar largely contain material and subtexts that are not found in the Qur’ān. While some of these narrations may appear grounded in the Judaic tradition, they do not merely reiterate but rather use it to support the view that the Arabs, as the children of Ismā’īl, are superior to Jews, the children of Ishāq, due to Hājar’s superiority over Sārah. While this concern is shared with Sunnism, many of these narrations also have a distinctly Shī’ī approach and therefore also delineate Shī’ī identity (research question 6 – Shī’ī identity). Compared to Sunnī narrations, the Shī’ī narrations more strongly promote customs such as women’s seclusion and absence, thereby continuing the codification of such ideals for women in the Shī’ī canon (research question 5 – pre-Islamic and post-Prophetic influences).

Just as these narrations define and support the notion of Arab identity, they also integrate a range of social values, (presumably reflecting the chronological evolution of Arab values after the Prophetic era), as religious ideals. The story of ‘Sārah and the box’ and the account of Ismā‘īl’s wife lend religious support to women’s seclusion and *ghīrah*, and promote the idea that a man must control the chastity of his womenfolk. However, there is also a class dynamic, in that Sārah – the upper-class woman – is the one who is secluded and protected, whereas Hājar is left out in the open and on her own. Narrations about female and male circumcision are used to distinguish Arab from Jewish identity, and to promote the superiority of Ismā‘īl (who is born circumcised) over Ishāq (who is not); however, the portrayal of female circumcision as a marker of social standing clashes with other Shī‘ī narrations saying that circumcision is only for men. This suggests cultural conflicts at the time of the codification of these narrations. Lastly, underlying these narrations is the tacit assumption that one can promote one’s superiority by arguing for the nobility of one’s male ancestors, no matter how distant; that is, these narrations codify tribalism as well as patrilineality as essential aspects of the Islamic worldview.

Sārah is present and an actor in the narrations, which counters the notion that women are absent from sacred history (research question 1 – inclusion of women). However, Sārah is also portrayed as having ill conduct – which, in the ‘a woman is like a rib’ narration, is connected to the intrinsic nature of woman. Rather than being obedient, she gives Ibrāhīm commands. In contrast, Hājar is passive, silent, and absent. The implied message is that a woman who is vocal, present, and assertive is worse than a woman who is docile, uncomplaining, and obedient, even if she is left to die. While these narrations could have explored the female perspective, particularly in the crucial moments of birth and the sacrifice of Ismā‘īl, they do not. However, Sārah does express some sympathy towards Hājar for having to undergo circumcision by her hand (research question 3 – inclusion of the female perspective). Hājar’s personal endorsement of the patriarchal system as well as her absence from religious rite support the absence of women in the codification of Shī‘ī norms and the view of the man as normative. By placing Hājar under nominal male guardianship, they remove the exception that an unattached woman poses to

the jurisprudential axiom that all women are under male guardianship; they also promote these ideals as the unspoken ideals for the ‘good woman’ in Shī‘ism.

This dichotomy between Sārah and Hājar mimics the Shī‘ī portrayals of another pair of opposite women: ‘Ā’ishah and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. Like Sārah, ‘Ā’ishah exerts agency in the Battle of the Camel and is thus blameworthy. (The implications behind the way in which ‘Ā’ishah is condemned will be explored more in Chapter 7.) ‘Ā’ishah is portrayed as being vocal and as being jealous of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. These are presented as critiques of her in Shī‘ī discourse, while in non-Shī‘ī Islamic feminist discourse, ‘Ā’ishah is praised for being her own person, having her own voice, and making her own decisions. Similarly, Sārah has a voice and is able to influence her husband, but her requests are unreasonable and show how obeying a woman is folly. ‘Ā’ishah is also said to have emphasized her youthful beauty, and this may also be alluded to in the narration advising men not to marry the ‘beautiful, barren woman’. Additionally, they are linked by menstruation: while Sārah was the first woman to menstruate, ‘Ā’ishah’s menstruation is also presented as proof that she was less than Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ (see Chapter 6). In contrast, Fāṭimah is often portrayed as silent, weak, victimized, passive, and as a locus of miracles. Fāṭimah is also *al-muḥaddathah*, the one spoken to by angels; and the above narrations also add Hājar to that category so that she does not lack this merit that Sārah has. Just as there is substantial focus on Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ posthumously – her martyrdom and the question of where she was buried – the burial place of Hājar (the *hijr*) is one of the main things mentioned about Hājar in *al-Kāfi*.³⁹⁴ These portrayals – whether of ‘Ā’ishah and Fāṭimah, or of Sārah and Hājar – communicate a Shī‘ī ‘cultural’ value of a good woman being silent, obedient, passive, and lacking agency; and a ‘bad’ (or ‘less ideal’) woman enjoying her own personhood and having authority over her self, with ill results for the family or society. This is similar to the Sunnī *ḥadīth* saying that a nation

³⁹⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, p. 210, nos. 14-16. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, p. 210, no. 16 says that Ismā‘īl had 3 virgin daughters who were also married there; this could be taken to support the emphasis on the Arabs being patrilineally descended from Ismā‘īl, since his daughters would have had to marry outside of his line to procreate. Incidentally, this narration omits Hājar. Narration number 15 is rather sweet and says that Ismā‘īl built the *hijr* to keep people from stepping on his mother’s grave.

led by a woman will fail. These ideas will be revisited in the discussion of women's 'deficiencies' in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Chapter 7).

Unlike the material in other chapters, the narrations on Sārah do not clearly reinforce or oppose the separate-but-equal ideology. While they reinforce a patriarchal worldview, it is not the same patriarchal worldview as the one which is outlined in the separate-but-equal ideology. Through portraying Sārah as ethically inferior, and invoking the precedent of Eve's creation from Adam's rib, these narrations support the notion that men are superior to women and should be in charge; however, the notion of women's deficiencies does not appear. Additionally, while the narrations support the idea of women's seclusion, the portrayal of women's seclusion ranges from Ibrāhīm putting Sārah in the box to Ismā'īl's wife and Ibrāhīm jointly agreeing to hang a partition. The narrations on Hājar, however, do support the separate-but-equal ideology; if the cultural values about Hājar here are taken as reflecting a later era, this would reinforce the notion that the premises of the separate-but-equal ideology were also developed later.

In two areas, these narrations challenge the separate-but-equal ideology. One is the idea that men are logical and women are emotional, since Ibrāhīm is repeatedly moved to tears, which then influence the divine. A more apt conclusion from these narrations is that while men's emotions are noble, women's emotions are spiteful (in the case of Sārah) or fearful (in the case of Hājar), not that men are unemotional. The portrayal of Sārah's wealth being used to 'enrich' Ibrāhīm also challenges the notion that women must be financially dependent on men. Lastly, the references to Sārah's as well as Ismā'īl's wife's beauty challenges the idea that female beauty should be de-emphasized (research question 2 – separate-but-equal ideology).

While Sārah is portrayed both as an independent actor (such as in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*) as well as a non-participant (as in *al-Kāfi*), Hājar is absent, including in narrative segments where she would be expected to be involved, if only for the sake of telling a good story. Hājar is also a contradiction: after being passed around from slave-master to slave-master, she ends up on her own in the desert with a child, and is face-to-face with strange tribespeople; flourishing

despite this suggests strength of character. However, she is also portrayed as being weak, helpless, and clinging to the patriarchal norm. It is as if the narrations about Hājar are attempting to force her into the mould of patriarchal norms, while at the same time her entire scenario belies that (research question 2 – separate-but-equal ideology).

How well do these narrations fit the separate-but-equal ideology? (Narrations with an asterisk are in the Four Books)		
Premise	Supports	Does not support
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.	Sārah and the Box* Hājar's absence*	Sārah's presence Sārah and the Box (<i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> version)
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.	Ishāq must be circumcised* Sārah's presence	Ismā'īl's wife*
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.		Sārah's presence Hājar's absence*
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.		Tafsīr of <i>ḍaḥakat</i>
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal.	Sārah and the Box* Ismā'īl's wife* (with respect to seclusion)	Ismā'īl's wife* (with respect to having a role in the public sphere)
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).		Sārah's presence Hājar as the <i>um walad</i> *
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.		Ismā'īl's wife*
h) Female chastity is of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized.		Ismā'īl's wife* (female beauty) Sārah and the box*
i) 'Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love'		

The astute reader may have noticed that the portrayals of Hājar here differ significantly from contemporary portrayals of Hājar. Today, Hājar has been reborn (particularly among feminists, Islamic and otherwise) as a symbol of women's strength and inclusion in sacred history, particularly for single

mothers.³⁹⁵ Therefore, one might ask whether the narrations on Sārah and Hājar must necessarily be this way – that is, must they necessarily be so mired in identity and class concerns (especially those that restrict women) that they neglect themes of broader import such as lessening the class divide and Abrahamic unity – arguably both teachings of the Imāms? Could not these narrations have explored the spirituality of motherhood while, at the same time, acknowledging that a woman’s worth does not relate to whether or not she bears children? Could they not have portrayed Sārah and Hājar as strong, independent, faithful, and even agreeable women who were active participants in a foundational chapter of Islamic sacred history? And could they not have refrained from associating people’s worth with the status and functioning of their reproductive organs?

Judging by the Qur’ān, the answer appears to be ‘yes’, since most of the narrative content of these narrations is absent from the Qur’ān. In the Qur’ān, Sārah is one of the women who receives divine revelation (through an angel), and is the locus of a miracle – namely, the conception of Ishāq. The Qur’ān says nothing about a jealous rivalry between Sārah and Hājar, nor is Ibrāhīm’s family portrayed as ‘dysfunctional’;³⁹⁶ this led one Shī‘ī scholar to suggest in private conversation that all of these narrations about Sārah and Hājar’s rivalry should be discarded. Rather than citing jealousy as the reason why Hājar and Ismā‘īl are compelled to leave, it situates their journey in the narrative of the

³⁹⁵ Islamic feminists have adopted Hājar as a symbol for the strong single mother, to the point where Asra Nomani considers her an inspiration for the single mother who chooses to conceive an illegitimate child – the latter which does seem difficult to justify here. ‘Aishah ‘Abd al-Rahman considers her a symbol of true motherhood and female leadership; she has also been adopted as a symbol of the displaced Palestinian people and as the silent victim of patriarchal and ethnic violence in feminist and Christian liberation theology. Asra Nomani, *Standing Alone: An American Woman’s Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), p. 290 et al. Robert Crotty, ‘Hagar/Hajar, Muslim Women and Islam: Reflections on the Historical and Theological Ramifications of the Story of Ishmael’s Mother’, in *Women in Islam: Reflections on Historical and Contemporary Research* by Terence Lovat (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), pp. 166-167. See also Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, Ch. 4, for an attempt to rehabilitate understandings of Hājar.

³⁹⁶ The unease with this portrayal of the family of Abraham in the Hebrew Bible is expressed well by Marcel Poorthuis, who says: ‘The story of Abraham’s bondwoman Hagar and how she was expelled several times, both without child (Gen. 16:1-15) and together with child (21:8-21), has not failed to baffle the reader of the Bible. Sarah’s cruel behavior toward Hagar, and Abraham’s tacit compliance with it, posed serious moral and even theological questions. Is this the way salvation history unfolds itself?’ Marcel Poorthuis, ‘Hagar’s Wanderings: Between Judaism and Islam’.

ultimate establishment of monotheism in the Arabian Peninsula. The Qur'ān politely keeps the discussion of sacred figures above the belt, and focuses on neither bleeding nor chopping. And, neither gender roles nor identity politics are themes of the Qur'ānic narratives. In fact, the Qur'ān does not even specify the identity of the child that Ibrāhīm was ordered to sacrifice, and instead focuses on the themes of obedience to and trust in Allah.³⁹⁷ In light of the principle that authentic narrations should agree with the Qur'ān, all of this could be taken as evidence that these narrations could be considered inauthentic.

Whose interests are being served? Primarily, these narrations serve the interests of Arabs (and, by extension, the Arabized Muslim consciousness) by distinguishing them from the Jews while at the same time linking them to the Abrahamic tradition. By canonizing cultural values such as *ghīrah*, the paradigm of slave-marriage, and female circumcision, these narrations also serve the interest those who held those worldviews and practices (which are associated with Arabness). . The opposite motivation can be seen by the absence of *ghīrah* in the narration of 'Sārah and the box' given by 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, a non-Arab. Some of the narrations also serve the purpose of distinguishing Shī'ī identity and belief through discussions on circumcision and the *tafsīr* of *ḍahakat* as 'menstruation'; however, the lines become muddled in the narrations on female circumcision, since apparently this was an Arab value but not one officially preferred in the Shī'ī tradition. These narrations therefore serve competing interests (research question 6 – Shī'ī identity).

The official 'stamp of approval' given to Sārah's participation in the patriarchal bargain as an upper-class woman serves the interests of the elite, even elite women insofar as it grants them a social advantage.³⁹⁸ Conversely, the negative racial implications in 'marry the black, fertile woman' which, while appearing to be favourable towards black women, presents them as baby machines at the service of the established classes, indicate that this is serving the interest of slave-owners in the Arab-Muslim empire. That is, gender, racial, and class concerns collide.

³⁹⁷ While Muslims today hold that this was Ismā'īl, , one narration here identifies the child as Ishāq.

³⁹⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy', in *Gender and Society*.

Why does it matter today? Belief in Sārah and Hājar’s rivalry, and that Hājar was forced to leave due to Sārah’s jealousy, is so entrenched that it is rarely questioned, even though it is not found in the Qur’ān. This, in turn, leads to negative portrayals of women being jealous and petty, and reinforces the idea that men need to be in control because women act like children. Questioning how these ideas were integrated into the Islamic tradition can lead to questioning the assumptions about the nature and role of women that they convey. Discussing Sārah and Hājar in the light of the Qur’ānic paradigm – that is, as actors in the story of monotheism rather than as jealous co-wives – allows for the expression of a nobler view of women and their inclusion in sacred history.

While an inherent part of contemporary Shī’ī discourse is the belief that social justice is an inherent part of Shī’ism, in practice, the way that cultural assumptions about women play out differently for members of different social classes and races – and even reinforce social *injustice* – is rarely acknowledged. The patriarchal bargain is still alive and well today, including in Shī’ī societies, where women can be some of the strictest enforcers of restrictions on other women. The question of whether women’s seclusion should be an ideal in Islam continues to be an emotionally charged debate.³⁹⁹ Openly discussing the dynamics of class and race in these narrations can lead to a broader discussion of class and race concerns in the Shī’ī world, particularly in light of the abstract belief in the need for social justice. It can also be used to highlight the worth of women’s cooperation instead of women’s competition.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Adele Ferdows takes it as beyond question that women’s seclusion is ideal in Shī’ism and cites a 1964 *fatwā* from a book of religious rulings by an Iranian ayatollah saying that it is impermissible for a woman to leave her home except in an emergency. Adele K. Ferdows, ‘The Status and Rights of Women in *Ithna’Ashari Shi’i Islam*’.

⁴⁰⁰ In ‘The Water of Hajar’, Mohja Kahf suggests that Sārah and Hājar could have worked together to circumvent the patriarchal bargain:

Dear Sarah, life made us enemies
But it doesn’t have to be that way
What if we both ditched the old man? He could have visitation rights with the boys [...] Anyway, you and I, we’d set up house, raise the kids, start a catering business, maybe. You have brains. So do I. We could travel [...].

Lastly, these narrations demonstrate how values such as *ghīrah* and tribalism (and, one might postulate, women’s seclusion) were codified into Shī‘ī narrations and the Shī‘ī worldview at large; these values are not limited to Sārah and Hājar but rather inform portrayals of Shī‘ī sacred history such as the Karbalā’ narrative or arguments for the spiritual authority of *ahl al-bayt*. Questioning the roots of these ideas in the Shī‘ī tradition can (again) open the door to exploring the broader question of whether these cultural values must be central to Shī‘ī identity – and whether one can still be considered authentically Shī‘ī if one does not accept *ghīrah*, tribalism, and women’s seclusion as divinely endorsed norms (research question 6 – Shī‘ī identity).

4.1. Introduction

The last two chapters explored narrations that were deeply rooted in Judaic and other ancient traditions, and whose primary effect was to legitimize layers of cultural values and identity as part of Shīʿī orthodoxy. This was done through codifying restrictive and heavily patriarchal norms for women as part of Shīʿī identity and orthodoxy; all of the narrations on Sārah and Hājar fell into this category. In contrast, a set of narrations about Eve referred to as the ‘counter-narrative’ was at odds with these portrayals and values; in these narrations, female and male were portrayed as creational equals. In this chapter and the next, the majority of the narrations reflect the ‘counter-narrative’, reinforcing the role of women in the sacred narrative of *wilāyah*, and opposing the separate-but-equal ideology, with only a handful of narrations (from the Four Books) communicating restrictive patriarchal norms.

This chapter will examine narrations on Zulaykhā. Since Zulaykhā’s primary narrative role in the Qurʾān is as a seductress, one might expect that the narrations about her would reinforce the cultural value – found in the narrations on Eve and Sārah – that a man needs to enforce chastity on his womenfolk and seclude them from other men. Surprisingly, however, this is not the case; instead, Zulaykhā is exonerated and ultimately joins in the narrative of *wilāyah*. These narrations also feature a strong role reversal with respect to what is ‘expected’ today in Shīʿī discourse on women and men, and focus more on men than women in their discussion of chastity, modesty, love, emotion, and beauty. That is, they form a counter-narrative to the inclusion of restrictive values towards women as norms of Shīʿism. As such, they also form a counter-narrative to the assumptions about women and men found in the separate-but-equal ideology. However, a subset of narrations alluding to Zulaykhā – while not providing narrative content about her – promotes restrictive values for women; this is the primary material about her found in the Four Books, and supports the finding that a restrictive, patriarchal, and Arab value system was selectively codified in the Four Books as the ‘orthodox’ norm for women in Shīʿism.

4.1.1 Contemporary relevance

Because clothing, appearance, and chastity are such politically charged values for Muslim women today, it is worth taking a moment to outline the complexities surrounding these values in the present era, particularly given their impact on the separate-but-equal ideology.⁴⁰¹ While, historically, Muslim societies have hosted varying views on love, beauty, modesty, and chastity, in the past century, Muslim leaders have accused ‘the West’ of attacking Islam through women by encouraging Muslim women to shed the *ḥijāb*, engage in free relationships, and be independent. Therefore, in defence, Muslim women must don the *ḥijāb*, maintain segregation from unrelated men, and accept male dominance not only as religious ideals but as a form of cultural resistance.⁴⁰² Meanwhile, the clothing choices of Muslim women continue to be a highly politicized subject, as the ban on face-covering in France shows, and the stereotype continues to circulate that Muslim women are subjugated when they are covered, and liberated when they are uncovered.

While the politicization of love, beauty, modesty, and chastity affects both Sunnī and Shī‘ī women, among Shī‘ah, these issues became especially politicized when they became part of the Iranian revolutionary ideology. Before the 1979 Revolution, Imām Khomeini, ‘Alī Sharī‘atī, and others accused the West of trying to economically dominate Iran by encouraging Iranian women to purchase imported cosmetics and fashions.⁴⁰³ In response, they urged women to eschew Western beauty products as a means of resisting Western economic dominance, and emphasised simplicity as a teaching of Islam. To try to reverse

⁴⁰¹ The politicization of the *ḥijāb* and its role as an anti-colonialist symbol among Muslims is discussed at length in Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 144-168.

⁴⁰² This discourse, of course, is accompanied with a fair amount of schizophrenia, in that women in several Muslim countries face pressure to undergo plastic surgery – often in order to look more Western. See, for example, Frances Harrison, ‘Wealthy Iranians embrace plastic surgery’ in *BBC News*, 1 October 2006; Olivia Alabaster, ‘Lebanon’s love affair with plastic embellishment’, in *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), 31 June 2012; ‘Nip’n’tuck loans offer in Lebanon’, in *BBC News*, 20 April 2007
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6577497.stm>.

⁴⁰³ ‘Alī Sharī‘atī explains this view at length in *Fāṭemeh Fāṭemeh Ast*. See also The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s works, *The Position of Women from the Viepoint of Imam Khomeini* (Tehran: The Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, n.d.); Murtada Mutahhari, *Sexual Ethics in Islam and in the Western World*. See also Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*.

the country's Westernization, gender segregation and women's modest dress were legally enforced in Iran after the Revolution, and the black chador became a symbol of the revolutionary ideology, not just a sign of traditional values. Additionally, despite the classical Islamic view that masculinity and femininity should be expressed in visibly different ways, as well as the idealization of feminine beauty in traditional Persian art and literature, the revolutionary ideology – not unlike other contemporary revolutionary ideologies – promoted an almost masculine image of womanhood; for instance, in the 'uniform' of drab jackets and trousers that became popularized after the Revolution, or the images of women in chadors as soldiers.⁴⁰⁴ Meanwhile, in post-Saddam Iraq, head-covering has received renewed attention as part of the Shī'ī revival, and the use of headscarf styles to denote one's religious and ideological affiliation is well known among the Shī'ah in South Lebanon.⁴⁰⁵ This is the backdrop against which many Shī'ī readers will look at Zulaykhā today, and in which the separate-but-equal ideology formed.

4.2 Love and the 'best of stories' – Zulaykhā in the Qur'ān and narrations

Described by the Qur'ān as the 'best of stories', the story of Yūsuf (Joseph) is a story of many types of love.⁴⁰⁶ The Qur'ānic story includes fatherly

⁴⁰⁴ Janet Afary discusses briefly the concerns over men appearing as women in 'Shī'ī Narratives of Karbalā' and Christian Rites of Penance: Michel Foucault and the Culture of the Iranian Revolution, 1978-1979' in *Radical History Review*, no. 86 (Spring 2003), pp. 7-35. Femininity and the Iranian Revolution is explored in Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005). Also see Toni El-Hage, 'Religio-patriarchy and the gendered risk: the regulation of Iranian femininity in public spaces through the veil', MA Thesis (UBC, 2002).

⁴⁰⁵ Linda Walbridge explains the meanings of several Lebanese *hijāb* styles as well as the importance of the *hijāb* to some Lebanese women and concludes that, in her view, "the scarf in this community has very little to do with men and their sexual urges. A woman wears a scarf as a statement [...] announcing her total commitment either to following the Shari'a or to following a political movement." Linda Walbridge, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shī'ism in America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 177-180. The pressure on women to wear the headscarf for their own physical security in post-Saddam Iraq has been the subject of many news reports, including Zainab Mineeia, 'Me Without My Hijab' in *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 2008; Dina al-Shibeeb 'Iraq's Unveiled Women Face Rising Crackdown' in *Al Arabiya*, 22 November 2012; and Dalya Hassan, 'One Woman's Account of Having to Wear a Hijab in Iraq', *Washington Post*, 4 January 2010. See also Frances Harrison, 'Iran police move into fashion business', in BBC News, 2 January 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6213854.stm>.

⁴⁰⁶ The story of Yūsuf is related in Qur'ān 12:1-101 with the remainder of the sūrah (12:102-111) providing thematic closure to the story, making Sūrah 12 (Sūrat Yūsuf) the only one of the lengthy *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān to focus on a single narrative.

love, brotherly love, romantic love, and jealousy; the Shī'ī narrations add divine love and maternal love (the latter through Yūsuf's aunt, who, smitten by Yūsuf's beauty, plots to acquire him to raise as her own son).⁴⁰⁷ One of the central figures in this story is Zulaykhā, referred to in the Qur'ān as 'the wife of al-'Azīz' (*imra'at al-'Azīz*); Sunnī and Shī'ī *hadīth* give her name as Zulaykhā, although some Shī'ī and Sunnī *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* literature employ the Biblical appellation 'the wife of Potiphar (Qaṭfir)'.⁴⁰⁸ Zulaykhā is the antithesis of the ideal woman in the separate-but-equal ideology: while women are encouraged to espouse chastity, modesty, and segregation from men, Zulaykhā attempts to force Yūsuf into adultery, falsely accuses him, conspires with the women of her city to entrap him, and causes him to go to prison; only after many years does she admit that she lied. In contrast to the narrations in *al-Kāfi* emphasizing *ghīrah* for men under the threat of divine punishment (see Chapter 3), her husband's reaction is rather mild; rather than condemning her or divorcing her, he simply censures her and the deviousness of women in general, and advises her to seek forgiveness (Qur'ān 12:28-29).⁴⁰⁹ While her husband's comment on women's 'plots' could be construed as a criticism of women, Osman observes that since the phrase is attributed to Zulaykhā's husband, rather than to the divine, the Qur'ān is presenting it as part of the story and not as an axiom.⁴¹⁰ Additionally, in her confession (Qur'ān 12:53), Zulaykhā refers to the tendency of the human soul to urge a person towards evil (*inna al-nafs la-ammāratun bi-al-sū'*) rather than treating it as a tendency specific to women.

⁴⁰⁷ The story of Yūsuf's aunt is outlined in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 291, no. 86 and is also referred to in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 245-6, no. 12. Yūsuf's aunt is identified as Sārah, the granddaughter of Sārah, the wife of Ibrāhīm; as such, she serves as a link between the two stories.

⁴⁰⁸ Qaṭfir as well as Iṭfir are used for Potiphar. *Qaṭfir* occurs in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 282, no. 60 (second entry – citing Ṭabrisī's *tafsīr* rather than a *hadīth*); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 68, p. 71, citing Tha'labī. Instances of Iṭfir occur in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 225 (footnote citing Ṭabrisī); Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī (d. 427 AH), *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān [Tafsīr al-Tha'labī]*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2002), vol. 5, p. 206. The Dekhoda dictionary (*Loghat-nāmeḥ Dekhodā*) mentions that Iṣfir (which differs from Iṭfir only by a dot) was also used for 'Potiphar' but that this was done in error.

⁴⁰⁹ Her husband's comment about the plots of women can be taken many ways. One possible interpretation is that it is a general statement about women. Another possible interpretation is that was addressed to women in general, rather than Zulaykhā herself, out of politeness, in the same way that it is said that, during the Battle of the Camel, Imām 'Alī critiqued women, rather than 'Ā'ishah herself, out of respect for her position as a wife of the Prophet.

⁴¹⁰ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qu'ran and Sunnah*, pp. 52-3.

4.2.1 The happy ending

No more is said about Zulaykhā in the Qur'ān. It might be expected that the narrations on Zulaykhā would condemn her immodesty and sinfulness – or, at least, blame her since she was clearly in the wrong. However, her portrayal in Shī'ī narrations is extremely sympathetic. The *hadīth* do not condemn her personally (although, as will be discussed later in this chapter, there is the infamous *hadīth* advising men not to teach their daughters Sūrat Yūsuf or to read in order to protect their chastity). Instead, both Shī'ī and Sunnī narrations present a happy ending to her story.⁴¹¹ The Shī'ī *hadīth* about this happy ending can be synthesised to say that, in old age, Zulaykhā falls into poverty. Penitent, she praises Allah for lowering kings for their sins and uplifting slaves – like Yūsuf – for their obedience.⁴¹² After she falls to begging, the people advise her to ask Yūsuf for help, but she is too embarrassed to do that because of what she did to him before. Eventually, the people convince her to do this, so she approaches Yūsuf and asks him for help. (In another version, Yūsuf finds her on the road sitting in a heap of rubbish and takes pity on her.) Touched by her repentance, he gives her money and marries her. Two narrations specify that he marries her at the command of Allah – perhaps to remove any criticism of why he would marry a woman of questionable character.⁴¹³ Zulaykhā asks Yūsuf to pray for her youth to be returned to her; he complies; she becomes young again, and the audience is left with the impression that they live happily ever after. In mediaeval times, her love and their eventual marriage became proverbial and resulted in a great outpouring of romantic literature, which – as in

⁴¹¹ For the Sunnī version of this happy ending, see Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*, p. 138.

⁴¹² Zulaykhā expresses this sentiment in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 251-2, no. 17 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*; vol. 12, p. 254-5, no. 18 (citing *Amāli al-Ṣādūq*); vol. 12, p. 268-9, no. 42 (citing *Amāli al-Ṭūsī*); vol. 12, p. 270, no. 46 (citing *Amāli al-Ṭūsī*); vol. 12, p. 281-2, no. 60 (citing *'Ilal al-Sharā'ī*); vol. 12, p. 296, no. 80 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*); and also vol. 75, p. 457 (citing *Kanz al-Karājiki*).

⁴¹³ The narrations which specify that Allah ordered Yūsuf to marry Zulaykhā are al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 270, no. 46 (citing *Amāli al-Ṭūsī*) and vol. 12, pp. 281-2, no. 60 (citing *'Ilal al-Sharā'ī*).

much Islamic mystical literature – also likened Zulaykhā’s love for Yūsuf to love for the divine.⁴¹⁴

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	The happy ending
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:251, no. 17 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:254-5, no. 18 (citing <i>Amālī al-Ṣādūq</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:268-9, no. 42 (citing <i>Amālī al-Ṭūsī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:270, no. 46 (citing <i>Amālī al-Ṭūsī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:281-2, no. 60 (citing <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:296, no. 80 (citing <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i>, with the chain of narration to Shaykh al-Ṣādūq) • <i>Biḥār</i> 75:457 (citing <i>Kanz al-Karājīkī</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ṣūfism • Uniquely Shī’ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>ḥijāb</i> and chastity are of paramount importance, and female beauty is de-emphasized. • Women do not experience physical desires. (‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love.’)

⁴¹⁴ The story of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā was retold by several 15th century poets in Iran and the Indian Subcontinent, including Jāmī and Shāh Muḥammad Sagīr; one long poem is also attributed to Firdawsī (d. 1020). Jami’s popular poem tells the story of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā as an allegory for the soul’s longing for God; in this version, Zulaykhā can be seen as someone who is redeemed because she repents and recognises the *walī Allāh* (Yūsuf). This, however, is not found in the Qur’ānic story or the *ḥadīth* about her, except possibly with regards to the *ḥadīth* in which Zulaykhā acknowledges the beauty of the Prophet Muḥammad (*Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 281, no. 60).

4.2.2 Zulaykhā's excuses

In several narrations, Zulaykhā presents excuses to Yūsuf for her advances to him while she was a married woman.⁴¹⁵ While the precise excuses vary from *hadīth* to *hadīth*, what is notable is that the excuses are presented uncritically, with neither Yūsuf nor the narrator censuring her or rejecting them. One excuse is that she was in love. The second excuse is that Yūsuf was exceedingly handsome, something that again is not a valid excuse from a *sharī'ah* perspective but points to the view that while, nowadays, female beauty is viewed as a temptation, in the past, male beauty was also viewed as a temptation, as well as an aspect of manliness. The third is that *she* was exceedingly beautiful – 'I was the most beautiful woman of Egypt'. Here, instead of treating female beauty as a temptation to men, it treats her beauty as a temptation to her own self. In that regard, it calls to mind another Shī'ī *hadīth* advising men not to marry a lady for her beauty lest her beauty lead her to impiety; these two *hadīth* might suggest that beauty itself is only associated with impiety. However, her beauty is restored to her at the end of the story as a

⁴¹⁵ Zulaykhā's excuses are as follows:

- (a) Love of Yūsuf, 'Allah did not create a partner for you [Yūsuf] in the world' (meaning, either, that he was single or else that Yūsuf was peerless', and 'there was no woman in Egypt more beautiful or wealthier than me'. This *hadīth* does not say that Zulaykhā's husband was impotent, although it does say at the end that when she married Yūsuf she was a virgin (whether that is meant to be for natural or miraculous reasons is not specified). al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 251-252, no. 17 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*)
- (b) Zulaykhā was the most beautiful woman, Yūsuf was the most handsome man, Zulaykhā was a virgin, and her husband was impotent. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 268-9, no. 42 (citing *Amāli al-Ṭūsī*)
- (c) Yūsuf's handsomeness. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 281, no. 60 (citing ' *Ilal al-Sharā'ī*).
- (d) Zulaykhā's youth, Zulaykhā's wealth, and (in her words), 'I did not have a husband'. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 296, no. 79 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī)

Other *hadīth* which discuss what happens to Zulaykhā later in life are:

- (a) al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 254-255, no. 18 (citing *Amāli al-Ṣādūq*). Here, Zulaykhā is regretful for her misconduct but does not offer excuses.
- (b) al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 296, no. 78 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī). In this *hadīth*, Yūsuf feels sorry for Zulaykhā and gives her money, but it does not mention that he marries her.
- (c) al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 296, no. 80 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī). Zulaykhā repents, and she and Yūsuf marry.
- (d) al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 75, p. 457 (no source) which alludes to Zulaykhā's repentance but is about someone by the name of *al-mutma'inah* bint al-Nu'mān ibn al-Mundhar.

symbol of her piety.⁴¹⁶ She also cites her wealth – which may be taken as being synonymous with her social position – as something which led her astray, and turns away from her previous social standing by praising Allah for lowering kings.

However, the excuse which receives the most emphasis is that her husband was impotent, and so she was a virgin until she married Yūsuf. It is a reminder that, in the pre-modern era, women were not expected to remain indefinitely chaste. (In contrast, in many Muslim societies today, there is a social expectation that unmarried women – especially widowed or divorced women – will remain indefinitely and contentedly single, and that this would only be a hardship for men.) This insistence on Zulaykhā being a virgin when she marries Yūsuf may also be an attempt to salvage her. While the emphasis on virginity as being a requirement for marriageability for women seems to be fairly modern, in that the rate of divorce and remarriage seems to have been fairly high in the pre-modern era in a number of Muslim regions, some people may have felt it would have been beneath Yūsuf's status to marry a non-virgin.⁴¹⁷

There is something ironic about Zulaykhā being a virgin, in that the *hadīth* telling men not to teach their daughters Sūrat Yūsuf make it clear that this is for the sake of preserving their chastity. While Zulaykhā can enjoy her wealth and status, grow old, and then be turned back to a beautiful maiden, at which time she will marry another rich and famous man, obviously, the ordinary woman cannot expect this. In that regard, it brings up another Shī'ī *hadīth*, which is circulated in the present era, advising men to marry virgin women.⁴¹⁸ Of course, this *hadīth* does not reflect the actual practise of the Prophet, in that he married many women who were widowed, and *hadīth* texts indicate that in the Prophetic era, women remarried fairly often after their husbands were killed in wars or raids, or just divorced them. (This is, of course, not even taking into

⁴¹⁶ Her beauty is restored to her in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, pp. 251-2, no. 17 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*) and is a common part of *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* literature.

⁴¹⁷ Yossef Rapoport maintains that, contrary to popular assumptions among Muslims today, high rates of divorce were common in mediaeval Islamic societies. Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴¹⁸ This type of *hadīth*, albeit in slightly more descriptive terms, is also present in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (the book of marriage, no. 4791-2). It will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

account the more liberal marriage arrangements that were socially accepted in the Arabian Peninsula until the advent of Islam.) Additionally, this *hadīth* is ascribed to the Imām by one Sahl ibn Ziyād, whose name recurs in the chains of narration of several of the misogynistic *hadīths* discussed in this thesis, and who has already been discussed as a narrator of *hadīth* on women’s deficiencies. Sahl ibn Ziyād is also said to have been affiliated with heterodox (*ghulāt*) movements, and this suggests that he may have been introducing extra-Islamic views on women into the Islamic corpus, particularly since some *ghulāt* groups were known for misogynistic views.⁴¹⁹

In any case, the subject of virginity does not come up regarding any of these other women, except for the Virgin Mary. However, the absence of discussion in itself is significant, and this might be expected to be a considerably relevant subject to Hājar, since she was the one from whose womb issued forth the Prophetic line. The absence of emphasis on virginity in these others stories may suggest either that it was not so important to the listeners, or else different layers on influence on the corpus of narrations regarding these women reflecting a broader spectrum of social values and expectations.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Zulaykhā’s excuses
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bihār</i> 12:251-2, no. 17 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, vol. 12:268-9, 42 (citing <i>Amālī al-Ṭūsī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 12:281, no. 60 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>’) • <i>Bihār</i>, vol. 12:296, no. 79 (citing <i>Amālī al-Ṭūsī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, vol. 12: 254-255, no. 18 (citing <i>Amālī al-Ṣādūq</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> vol. 12, p. 296, no. 79 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, vol. 12, p. 296, no. 80 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i>) • <i>Bihār</i>, vol. 75, p. 457 (citing <i>Kanz al-Karājiki</i>)

⁴¹⁹ Mushegh Asatryan mentions that some heterodox (*ghulāt*) sects associated disobedience of women with the rebellion of Satan, believed that – as a punishment – disbelievers would be reincarnated as women, and that women are ‘worse than men’ and the ‘essence of all evil’; he also mentions a narration saying that women lack beards as a sign of obedience. Mushegh Asatryan, *Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: The Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-Tradition*, 188-9, 267. Ḥaydar ‘Alī Qalamdārān is quite negative about the contributions of Sahl ibn Ziyād in his work against *ghulūw*. Ḥaydar ‘Alī Qalamdārān, *Rāh-e Najāt az Sharr-e Ghulāt*, pp. 17, 45, 137, 138. I had the privilege of asking Ayatollah Sīstānī his view on Sahl ibn Ziyād in 2014, but unfortunately I did not have the privilege of hearing the full response since his personal guard escorted me outside mid-answer. In 2016, I asked Ayatollah Fayyād (also in Najaf) about his view regarding Sahl ibn Ziyād, and he said that his narrations – which would, presumably, include these – should not be accepted.

Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Şūfism • Uniquely Shī'ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>ḥijāb</i> and chastity are of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized, and women do not experience physical desires.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A female virgin is superior to a non-virgin.

4.3 Is love good or bad?

While many Qur'ānic stories include love, whether that be spousal love, parental love, or some other form of love, the Qur'ān says little directly on the topic of human love. It says that Allah places love and mercy between the hearts of spouses (30:21); regarding infatuation, it also tells men and women not to marry polytheists even if they are taken with them (2:221). There is a presumption that love is normal and expected in a marital context. Love in the context of faith is discussed more extensively: the Qur'ān says who and what Allah does not love, and says that Allah inclines the hearts of the believers towards each other.

Love is discussed more in Shī'ī *hadīth*. As in the Qur'ān, love in the context of faith is given the most attention – for instance, in the *hadīth* asking 'Is religion anything but love and hate?'⁴²⁰ Love is central to the Shī'ī view of *wilāyah*, and love of *ahl al-bayt* is described as meritorious and salvific. Adherents to *ahl al-bayt* are expected to have a strong love for each other arising from their *wilāyah*. This type of love is different from romantic love, but it is worth mentioning inasmuch as it reinforces the role of love in Shī'ism.

Regarding human love, there are two strains of thought in Shī'ī *hadīth*. One is that love is natural and, under the right circumstances, desirable; this approach is similar to the Qur'ānic verses mentioned above. For instance, the Shī'ī tradition praises the marriage of Imām 'Alī and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' as the ideal relationship between two loving spouses, as do the *hadīth* that speak of

⁴²⁰ For a discussion of this *hadīth*, see Sayyid Muhammad Rida Hijaz, 'The Concept of Love in the Shī'ī Creed', in *Al-Tawhid*, vol. XI, no. 1 and 2. <<http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/conceptoflove.htm>>

the grief of Imām ‘Alī after losing Fāṭimah.⁴²¹ Stories of the Prophet’s interactions with his own wives, in particular his first wife Khadījah, also reinforce this. A commonly cited *hadīth* says that the more a man’s faith increases, the more his love for women increases; and, another *hadīth* says that love for women is a characteristic of the prophets.⁴²² Similarly, many stories related about *ahl al-bayt* and their families – for instance, the retellings of the events during the Battle of Karbalā’ – express a deep human love that is not portrayed as being incompatible with their spiritual status.

There is, however, another approach to love in Shī‘ī thought. This approach, which is particularly common in mystical discourse, is suspicious of earthly love and treats it as a trial or deception of this world. True love and happiness should be in the Hereafter; people should not become too attached to this world, including their spouses or children, who are but ‘ornaments of the life of this world’ (Qur’ān 18:46). While men should marry (usually, the presumed addressee is male), earthly love should be eschewed in favour of divine love, which is eternal and will never fail. This idea has entered contemporary Shī‘ī discourse largely through Iranian scholars – who, in turn, have integrated it into the separate-but-equal theory.⁴²³

⁴²¹ A Sunnī *hadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* says that Fāṭimah was angry at ‘Alī for wanting to take another wife, so the Prophet gave a public speech telling ‘Alī that he had to divorce Fāṭimah if he wanted to marry another wife, and that ‘whoever angers Fāṭimah angers me.’ While Shī‘ī *hadīth* also relate that the Prophet said ‘whoever angers Fāṭimah angers me’, this is taken to refer to Fāṭimah’s displeasure at Abū Bakr and ‘Umar at the end of her life, the Sunnī version of the story is taken as an attempt to depoliticize the statement and deflect attention from the first two caliphs. Another *hadīth* in the Sunnī tradition explains that ‘Alī was called ‘Abū Turab’ (lit. ‘the Father of Dust’) because, due to a marital dispute with Fāṭimah, he was sleeping outside the house (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 73, no. 223; book 74, *hadīth* 301); this is also rejected as an attempt to malign ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who is held to have been called Abū Turāb because of his humility, not because he was expelled from his house. Instead, Shī‘ah emphasise a *hadīth* attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib after Fāṭimah’s death wherein he says ‘I never made her [Fāṭimah] angry, nor did she ever make me angry.’ See Denise L. Soufi, *The Image of Fatima in Classical Muslim Thought*, pp. 51-52; Clohessy, *Fatima, Daughter of Muhammad*, pp. 40-46.

⁴²² M. Rayshahri, *The Scale of Wisdom*, p. 990 (no. 5748-5750).

⁴²³ Fayd Kashani discusses love of wives in the context of love of this world, occasionally citing *ahādīth*, in Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani, *Spiritual Mysteries and Ethical Secrets: A Translation of al-Haqa’iq fi Makarim al-Akhlaq*, pp. 202-203. However, he does cite a *hadīth* with a slightly different view which speaks of the world as being either blameworthy or a place to grow in through experience. Another example of this view would be the *hadīth* in which Jesus is said to liken the world to a beautiful woman who deceives and kills her husbands. *Ibid.*, p. 210. Mulla Sadra is also known to have viewed women with some suspicion and to have likened women to animals that were created beautiful so that men would mate with them

The above *hadīth* about Zulaykhā are sympathetic to and uncritical of human love – for instance, the many *hadīth* in which she proffers her excuses to Yūsuf. However, there is one *hadīth* that stands out as being suspicious of human love and reflects the latter view. This *hadīth* is also notable in that it treats all forms of human love as more or less the same; romantic love is not given any preference or stigma, nor are males and females discussed differently. Instead, Yūsuf just sums up his view that all his problems are due to the fact that people love him too much! This is not an unusual view of Yūsuf; another narration says that ‘no woman would look at Yūsuf, but she desired him; and no man would look at Yūsuf, but he would love him’.⁴²⁴ However, this narration is different because it treats love as a curse. It is narrated from Imām Riḍā:

The prison guard said to Yūsuf, ‘Indeed, I love you.’

And so Yūsuf said, ‘All that has befallen me is due to love. My aunt (mother’s sister) loved me, and she kidnapped me.⁴²⁵ My father loved me, and my brothers envied me. The wife of ‘Azīz loved me, and she imprisoned me.’

[...] And Yūsuf complained in the prison to Allah, and so he said, ‘O Lord, what have I done to deserve prison?’

And so Allah revealed to him, ‘You chose it yourself when you said, “O Lord, prison is more beloved to me than what they call me to.” Why did you not say, “Safety is more beloved to me than what they call me to?”’⁴²⁶

The critical moment of this narration is in the latter paragraph, when Allah chides Yūsuf for turning to someone other than Him. In Shī‘ī thought, where the

(*al-Asfār al-Arba‘ah* quoted in Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason Freedom and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 223.

⁴²⁴ For instance, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol 12, p 225, no. 3 (citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

⁴²⁵ See al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 268, no. 12, citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm* and 298-299, no. 86 (citing *al-Kharā‘ij*).

⁴²⁶ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol 12, p. 246, no. 12, second *hadīth* listed under this entry, citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm* and *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*). The phrase ‘he said’ referring to Imām Riḍā has been omitted at the ellipsis for ease of reading.

prophets are held to be sinless, this is referred to as the ‘sin of the prophets’ – momentarily forgetting Allah or lessening their absolute dependence on Him. Theologically, it is referred to as *tark al-awlā*, or leaving aside what is best.⁴²⁷ Here, it also effectively places the blame on Yūsuf instead of Zulaykhā for putting himself in prison.

This type of intimate conversation between Yūsuf and Allah is referred to as a type of ‘indulgence’.⁴²⁸ Since only those who are close to Allah are permitted to converse like this with Him, it signifies Yūsuf’s status before Allah. This type of dialogue between Yūsuf and Allah recurs in this *hadīth qudsī* blaming Yūsuf for his imprisonment with different implications about love:

[...] And so Allah revealed to him [Yūsuf], ‘Who showed you the dreams that you have dreamt?’

Yūsuf said, ‘You, O Lord.’

He [Allah] said, ‘Who made your father love you?’

He [Yūsuf] said, ‘You, O Lord.’

He said, ‘And so who turned the caravan towards you, which you saw?’

He said, ‘You, O Lord.’

He said, ‘Who taught you the prayer that you prayed, so that you were granted release from the well?’

He said, ‘You, O Lord.’

He said, ‘And who made the tongue of that boy speak to excuse you [from Zulaykhā’s accusations]?’

He said, ‘You, O Lord.’

⁴²⁷ This is also used to explain the ‘sin’ of Adam, in that it is said that Allah recommended that he not eat from the tree, and so Adam left aside what was better rather than actually disobeying Allah and committing a sin.

⁴²⁸ Kashani, *Spiritual Mysteries*, pp. 366-8.

He said, 'And who inspired in you the interpretation of dreams?'

He said, 'You, O Lord.'

He said, 'And so how did you seek aid in someone other than Me, and you did not seek aid in Me? And you put your hope in one of My slaves to remember you to one of my creatures, while he is under My control, and you did not seek refuge in Me?'

And so he lingered in the prison some more years [...].⁴²⁹

Here, love is treated as something which comes from the divine, not the human. That is, Allah made Ya'qūb love Yūsuf. (This does echo the Qur'ānic verse about Allah placing love between the hearts of spouses.) However, the main difference between this and the above narration is that while Ya'qūb's love is portrayed positively, the love of the women is portrayed negatively; that is, Allah's gift to Yūsuf is to save him from womanly love. This is a significant thematic difference from the above narration. Still, the narration contradicts itself towards the end, in that it switches to an implied criticism of Ya'qūb's love:

[Allah said to Yūsuf:] I granted him [Ya'qūb] twelve sons, and one of them [Yūsuf] disappeared from him, and he did not stop crying until his sight disappeared, and he sat in the street complaining about Me to My creation. So what right do your fathers have upon Me?⁴³⁰

This part of the *hadīth* reiterates the view that love is suspect – although the first part of the *hadīth* says that Allah was the one who made Ya'qūb love Yūsuf in the first place. It also should be observed that the Qur'ān does not condemn Ya'qūb for crying until he goes blind, but rather treats his grief sympathetically; similarly, in the Shī'ī tradition, Ya'qūb's grief over Yūsuf is viewed positively and

⁴²⁹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, pp. 246-7, no. 12 (first *hadīth*). This type of conversation between Yūsuf and Allah is also found in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, pp. Zulaykhā section, p. 301 (no. 100) and p. 302 (no. 102).

⁴³⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, no. 12 (first *hadīth*).

cited in polemical arguments – for instance, in a narration attributed to Imām al-Sajjad – to prove the desirability of mourning over al-Ḥusayn.⁴³¹

Nonetheless, in *Biḥār*, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī takes the dangers of love one step further by linking Yūsuf to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. He reasons that, just as Yūsuf’s brothers betrayed him out of jealousy, the Prophet declared ‘Alī his brother and the people betrayed him out of jealousy. Furthermore, just as Yūsuf attracted the love of the people, ‘Alī also attracted the love of other people, and this led the heterodox extremists (*ghulāt*) to deify him.⁴³² Therefore, in both cases, love is dangerous to faith. Al-Majlisī’s unease with love may reflect a strain of Ṣūfī thought which formed the backdrop of the Safavid era, only here, the aspersions on are cast in theological rather than gender-related terms.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Human love is dangerous
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 12: 12 (first ḥadīth, citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>’) • <i>Biḥār</i>, 12: 246-7, no. 12 (first ḥadīth, citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 12:247-7, no. 12 (second ḥadīth, citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> and <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 39:57 (no source given)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ṣūfism
Separate-but-equal ideology	Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • ‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bondmaids of love.’
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human love is a source of problems, and divine love is preferred.

4.4 Reversing the gender binary: male chastity, modesty, and beauty

The above narration in which Yūsuf is held responsible for his own imprisonment reflects a trend in the *hadīth* about Yūsuf where Yūsuf embodies traits and expectations that are commonly associated with females today – in particular, chastity, modesty, and beauty. Of course, this outlook does not contradict the Qur’ān, which tells both genders to be chaste; however, it departs from the ‘common wisdom’ about women that is circulated today.

⁴³¹ Ibid., vol. 46, p. 108, no. 1 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*).

⁴³² Ibid., vol. 39, p 57 (no source given).

Even before Yūsuf is sent to prison, the following narrations make clear that Yūsuf is responsible for his chastity and modesty. For instance, in *al-Faqīh*, Ya‘qūb advises Yūsuf, ‘O my dear son, do not commit adultery, for if a bird commits adultery, its feathers will fall.’⁴³³ While it would be expected that Ya‘qūb, a prophet, would advise his son to eschew sins, it is notable that this advice is being given in a man-to-man context (and without any mention of the wiles of women). The feathers are analogous to Yūsuf’s beauty; Yūsuf’s beauty comes from his piety, and should he become impious, his beauty will wane. In another narration, an apparition of Ya‘qūb appears to Yūsuf when Zulaykhā locks him in the room and says to him, ‘Yūsuf, you are in the sky written among the prophets, and you want to be written in the earth as an adulterer?’⁴³⁴ These narrations do not warn Yūsuf of the social havoc that adultery wreaks, or the divine punishment for sinning; instead, they speak to him at a higher level.

Yūsuf’s responsibility for maintaining his own chastity is echoed in a *hadīth* in praise of Imām al-Ḥasan. As was the case with *hadīth* about Bilqīs, this *hadīth* connects Imām al-Ḥasan to Yūsuf in the thread of sacred history; as such, it is one of the many *hadīth* citing sacred history to elevate the status of *ahl al-bayt* and to portray *ahl al-bayt* in as part of the history of the prophets. The *hadīth* begins with a beautiful Bedouin woman coming to Imām al-Ḥasan and seeking his ‘assistance’ on the grounds that she is without a husband. Imām al-Ḥasan tells her, ‘Begone! Do not burn myself and yourself in the Fire.’ Ignoring him, she tries to seduce him; the narration alludes to the story of Zulaykhā by using the same wording as the Qur’ān. At this point, Imām al-Ḥasan begins to cry and repeats, ‘Woe be upon you, begone from me,’ and, at the severity of his crying, the woman also begins to cry. Then, Imām al-Ḥusayn arrives, and, seeing them crying, begins to cry too. More people arrive and, seeing them cry, being to cry, until the entire area is wracked with tears, and the

⁴³³ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 31 and *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 266, no 32.

⁴³⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol 12, pp. 227-228, no. 3 (citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*). Note that the idea that Yūsuf was actually tempted to do wrong, or that he actually saw Ya‘qūb at that time, is argued against by Shī‘ī scholars; other *hadīth* listed in this section (under number 3) also give explanations for what Yūsuf saw that do not involve an apparition of Ya‘qūb.

Bedouins (including the lady) break camp and leave. However, Imām al-Ḥusayn does not ask Imām al-Ḥasan what happened out of respect.⁴³⁵

This part of the narration is sufficient to demonstrate Imām al-Ḥasan's chastity and the importance of this value for men; however, the narration continues by linking it to the story of Zulaykhā:

That night, al-Ḥasan was asleep when he awoke and he was crying. So al-Ḥusayn said to him, 'What happened to you?'

He [al-Ḥasan] said, 'I dreamt a dream this night.'

He [al-Ḥusayn] said, 'And what is it?'

He [al-Ḥasan] said, 'Do not tell anyone as long as I am alive.'

He [al-Ḥusayn] said, 'Yes.'

He [al-Ḥasan] said, 'I saw Yūsuf, and I came and looked to him to be graced by seeing him, and when I saw his beauty, I cried, and he looked at me among the people and said, "By my father and mother, what makes you cry, O my brother?"

'And so I said, "I remembered Yūsuf and the wife of al-ʿAzīz, and what you were tried with from her command, and how you stayed in the prison, and the burning of the elderly Yaʿqūb. And so I cried from that, and I was amazed at it."

'And so Yūsuf said, "Are you not astonished with what the Bedouin woman did?"'⁴³⁶

Here, Imām al-Ḥasan's chastity directly ties him to Yūsuf. The theme of men publicly crying (which occurs in excess here, in that they cry so much that they drive away the Bedouins) is another example of men displaying a behaviour which is today associated with women.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., vol. 43, p. 340, no. 14 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*).

⁴³⁶ Ibid., vol. 43, p. 340, no. 14 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*).

In addition to chastity, the narrations about Yūsuf emphasise male modesty, even in front of other men, and even between father and son. Like chastity and beauty, male modesty is also linked to piety. Here, the connection between modesty and spiritual status is emphasised, in that Imām al-Şādiq is quoted as saying that he and his forebears were even more modest than Yūsuf:

[...] Indeed, when his trousers were untied, Yūsuf saw an apparition of Ya‘qūb pointing with his finger, and he was saying to him, ‘Yūsuf!’ [...] And so he fled. [...] But I, by Allah, never saw the private parts (‘*awrah*) of my father [Imām al-Bāqir] ever, and my father never saw the private parts of my grandfather [Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn] ever, and my grandfather never saw the private parts of his father [Imām al-Ḥusayn] ever....⁴³⁷

Here, the portrayal of modesty reinforces the Shī‘ī view that the Imāms enjoyed a higher status than the prophets (except for the Prophet Muḥammad). It should be noted that the editor adds a footnote saying that this *hadīth* was said under *taqīyyah* (that is, it is not to be taken as a correct *hadīth*) because it contradicts the Imāmī belief in the sinlessness of Yūsuf, and it also contradicts other *hadīth* about what happened when Yūsuf was confronted with Zulaykhā (namely, explanations of what the ‘sign of his Lord’ (*burhān-i rabbihī*) was). Nonetheless, it emphasises the importance of modesty between men, even father and son, among earlier Shī‘ah, and communicates the association between male modesty and spiritual status.

A thematically similar narration – which, incidentally, seems to contradict the above narration, in that it does not show this Yūsuf as someone who would be exposed before Ya‘qūb – emphasises the attitudes towards modesty held by Ya‘qūb and Yūsuf:

[...] And Ya‘qūb said to his son, ‘O my son, tell me, what did your brothers do to you when they took you from me?’

⁴³⁷ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 301, no. 96 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*). The ellipses here have removed comments from the narrator such as ‘he [Imām al-Şādiq] said’ to maintain the flow of the narrative.

He [Yūsuf] said, ‘O my father, excuse me from that.’

He [Ya‘qūb] said, ‘Tell me about some of it.’

He [Yūsuf] said, ‘O my father when they lowered me into the well, they said, “Take his shirt.” And so I told them, “O my brothers, fear Allah and do not expose me.” And they unsheathed upon me a knife. And they said, “If you do not remove [it], we will slaughter you.” And so I removed the shirt, and they threw me in the well naked.’

[...] And so Ya‘qūb sighed and was overwhelmed with grief, and when he recovered, he said, ‘O my son, tell me.’

And so he [Yūsuf] said, ‘O my father, I ask you by the God of Ibrāhīm and Ishāq and Ya‘qūb that you excuse me from that.’

So he excused him from that.⁴³⁸

While some people might argue that the distress here was due to the loss of Yūsuf’s namesake shirt, the choice of words – ‘expose’, ‘naked’ – indicates that Yūsuf’s distress was over being de-clothed in front of his brothers. Even decades later, the mere retelling of this is enough for Ya‘qūb to swoon from grief – despite the fact that Yūsuf went through severer challenges, such as being sold into slavery. As such, it strongly reinforces the value of male modesty.

In addition to modesty, in the sense of being clothed, the narration also emphasise that Yūsuf never looked at Zulaykhā, who was said to be the most beautiful woman in Egypt. This is how he is portrayed as protecting his chastity, and echoes the Qur’ānic verse enjoining male and female believers to lower their gaze (24:30-31). Here, lowering the gaze is portrayed from a spiritual angle, in that it is described as a way that Yūsuf came to his Lord; this theme is

⁴³⁸ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 12, p. 251 no. 17 (citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*). The phrase ‘he said’ referring to the narrator has been omitted at the second ellipsis for ease of reading.

also echoed in other Shī'ī *hadīth*, such as the *hadīth* saying 'lower your gaze and you will see wonders'.⁴³⁹

Yūsuf, peace be upon him, remained in the house of the king and Zulaykhā for three years. Then, she fell in love with him and tried to seduce him. And so it has reached us – and Allah knows best – that she waited seven years [...] and he was bowing his head to the ground. He would not raise his gaze up to her out of fear of his Lord.

And so she said one day, 'Raise your gaze and look at me.'

He said, 'I fear blindness in my eyes.'

She said, 'How beautiful are your eyes!'

He said, 'They are the first to sink into my cheeks in my grave.'

She said, 'How fragrant is your scent!'

He said, 'If you caught a whiff of my fragrance three days after my death, you would flee from me.'

She said, 'Why don't you come near me?'

He said, 'I seek through that, nearness to my Lord.'

She said, 'My bedding is silken, so get up and fulfil my need.'

He said, 'I fear that my fate would no longer be Paradise.'

She said, 'I will leave you to the torturers [in the prison].'

He said, 'In that case, my Lord will suffice me.'⁴⁴⁰

There are a few other things of note in this *hadīth*. One is that it is ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās, a companion in the Prophetic period who is said to have

⁴³⁹ For instance, this *hadīth* and the connection between lowering the gaze from the forbidden and seeing Allah's majesty in the heart is discussed in [pseudo] Ja'far al-Şādiq, *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'ah*, section 3.

⁴⁴⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 12 p. 270, no. 45 (citing *Da'awāt al-Rāwandī*).

been an expert in *hadīth*. If it truly does go back to Ibn ʿAbbās, it may be indicative of a set of cultural expectations from the Prophetic era; both this narration and the one about the Bedouin woman are ascribed to a time closer to the Prophetic period and feature particularly aggressive women, in comparison to the narration about Eve which presents women as passive and disinterested in men. Another detail is that Ibn ʿAbbās refers to the house as belonging to both Zulaykhā and the king; while this is a small point, it nonetheless differs from the classical paradigm of the husband owning the house, and the wife simply inhabiting it. The discussion here is slightly different than in the narration where Yūsuf is blamed for his imprisonment, since in this case he is remembering his Lord throughout and does not make the fatal mistake of saying ‘*Prison is more beloved to me*’. Finally, this narration also is reflective of the view that love is dangerous, in that the temporality of human infatuation is contrasted with the eternity of death and the eternity of God.

Parallel to the concept of male modesty is the concept of male beauty. Here, his face is described as being ‘like a full moon’,⁴⁴¹ which is similar to the descriptions used for ʿAlī al-Akbar ibn al-Ḥusayn and al-Qāsim ibn al-Ḥasan, young men who were martyred in Karbalāʾ. These descriptions reinforce the view that (a) beauty is an inherited trait along the line of the prophets and Imāms, and (b) beauty is proportional to faith and/or *wilāyah*. (The relationship between beauty and *wilāyah* will be explored more in Chapter 6.)

But although Yūsuf’s beauty is proverbial, is Yūsuf the epitome of male beauty? Shīʿī *hadīth* remind the audience that the most beautiful of Allah’s creatures was the Prophet Muḥammad. This is part of the Shīʿī emphasis on the Prophet being superior in all things, including handsomeness.⁴⁴² Uri Rubin notes how sources say that holding the seed of a prophetic forebear in his loins would make a man irresistible to women, but once the seed had passed on to a

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 12 p. 225 no. 3 (citing *Tafsīr ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm*)

⁴⁴² Of course, the view that the Prophet is the most beautiful is not entirely limited to Shīʿah and is found among some Sunnīs, particularly Ṣūfīs, although Katz suggests that this view may have originated among Shīʿah. Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*. In contrast, Ibn Kathīr maintains that, as the creation of Allah, Adam was the most beautiful person to have existed; and Yūsuf had half of his beauty. Brannon Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qurʾan*, p. 135.

lady, the man would lose that charisma.⁴⁴³ (This concept also appears in Section 2.3.1 in a narration about Eve.) One thing to note is that this is all presented as positive and directly related to spiritual status, even though it might presumably be seen to be something that could lead to temptation.

This belief in the Prophetic beauty comes up in a dialogue between Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, which acts as yet another *hadīth* linking the story of Yūsuf to that of the Prophet. Zulaykhā is apologizing to Yūsuf for her actions and excusing herself on the grounds that Yūsuf is so handsome. At this time, Yūsuf asks her would she would do if she saw the Prophet, who, by implication, is even more handsome:

He [Yūsuf] said, ‘And what if you saw a prophet called Muḥammad, may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him and his family, who will be at the end of time, who will be more beautiful than me in face and more beautiful than me in form, and more generous and forgiving (*asmaḥ minnī kaffan*) than me?’

She [Zulaykhā] said, ‘You spoke the truth.’

He said, ‘And how do you know I spoke the truth?’

She said, ‘Because when you mentioned him, love for him fell into my heart.’

And Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, revealed to Yūsuf that she had told the truth. And indeed he loved her for the love of Muḥammad, may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him and his family, and Allah ordered him to marry her.⁴⁴⁴

This narration reinforces belief in the Prophetic beauty as a sign of the Prophet’s overall superiority over the other prophets. Additionally, it sends the message that acknowledging the Prophetic beauty has a salvific function for

⁴⁴³ Uri Rubin, ‘Pre-Existence and Light—Aspects of the Concept of *Nur Muhammad*, pp. 62-119’; Uri Rubin, ‘Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī‘a Tradition’, pp. 41-65.

⁴⁴⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 12, p. 281, no. 60 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā‘i*’).

Zulaykhā. Because her heart is open to perceiving the Prophetic beauty – which, by extension, must be an ever-present part of reality in order for her to perceive it even in ancient times – she is redeemed before Allah, to the degree that Allah sends divine revelation to Yūsuf to let Yūsuf know that Zulaykhā truly loves the Prophet. Zulaykhā’s love for the Prophet also effects a major change in her life and acts as a form of intercession, in that, after she genuinely loves the Prophet, Allah orders Yūsuf to marry her. And, last but not least, at this point in the ‘happy ending’ narratives, Zulaykhā’s beauty is restored to her; in other words, although it led her to temptation before, her beauty is now being restored to her as a positive thing in reward for her *wilāyah* and acknowledgment of the Prophetic beauty.⁴⁴⁵

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Male chastity, modesty, and beauty
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Faqīh</i> 4:31 • <i>Bihār</i> 12:225-228 no. 3 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 12:251 no. 17 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 12:270, no. 45 (citing <i>Da‘awāt al-Rāwandī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 12:281, no. 60 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Bihār</i> 12:301, no. 96 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 16:193, no. 30 (citing ‘<i>Ilal al-Sharā‘i</i>’) • <i>Bihār</i> 43:340 no. 14 (citing <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Tālib</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Šūfism • Uniquely Shī‘ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>hijāb</i> and chastity [for women] are of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized, and women do not experience physical desires. (‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love.’) • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male beauty and chastity are traits of the Imāms and pertain to <i>wilāyah</i>.

4.5 Female beauty

A discussion of male beauty leads to a discussion of female beauty. As has been seen above, Zulaykhā’s beauty is both positive and negative; while, in the beginning, it leads her to sin, in the end, it is a reflection of her piety. However, she is never condemned for being beautiful (or for not concealing her beauty, as might be expected). Yūsuf’s beauty is treated positively as well and

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., *Bihār*, vol. 12, pp. 281-2, no. 60 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā‘i*’); vol. 16, p. 193, no. 3 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā‘i*’).

as a reflection of his piety, although it leads women to temptation, except in the *hadīth* where he complains that people love him too much. Zulaykhā is the only woman in this work about whom there is a focus on physical beauty for its own sake; however, narrations connect spirituality and physical beauty (with the idea that the greater a spiritual status someone has, the more beautiful they will appear), and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.6 Zulaykhā's legacy – 'Do not teach girls Sūrat Yūsuf' and marrying ugly, fertile women

One *hadīth*, which occurs in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faqīh* in four different forms, indirectly provides commentary on the story of Zulaykhā by advising men not to teach girls Sūrat Yūsuf and instead to teach them Sūrat al-Nūr, which emphasises chastity; one *hadīth* specifies that this is because Sūrat Yūsuf contains temptation (*fitan*), and Sūrat Nūr contains cautionary advice (*mawā'iz*). Most versions of this *hadīth* also include the advice to confine girls to chambers away from the road, and not to teach them to read or write.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁶ This *hadīth* is cited as modern-day advice for parents because 'Sūrat al-Nur discusses the concept of chastity, which suits the nature of a female, while Sūrat Yūsuf mentions a sexually driven situation Prophet Yūsuf (peace be upon him) was placed in, which does not befit the nature of young girls'. Adil Miyanji Musabji, *The Human Cycle: Eighteen Lessons with Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Jalali*, lesson 8 <<http://www.al-islam.org/the-human-cycle-eighteen-lessons-with-sayyid-muhammad-husayn-jalali/>>.

The variants of the *hadīth* in these sources are:

- (a) *'Iddatun min ashābina*, from Sahl ibn Ziyād, from 'Alī ibn Asbāṭ, from his paternal uncle Ya'qūb ibn Sālim, attributed back (*rafa'ahu*) to the Commander of the Faithful [Imām 'Alī] [who] said: 'Do not teach your women Sūrat Yūsuf and do not read it to them, because in it are temptations (*fitan*), and teach them Sūrat Nūr because in it is cautionary advice (*mawā'iz*).' (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 516, no. 2)
- (b) 'Alī ibn Muḥammad from Ibn Jumhūr from his father from Faḍālah ibn Ayyūb from al-Sukūnī: 'I entered the presence of Abū 'Abd Allāh [al- Ṣādiq], peace be upon him, and I was sad and afflicted. He said to me, "O Sukūnī, what has made you sad?" So I said, "I have had a daughter." He said, "O Sukūnī, her weight is upon the earth and her sustenance is upon Allah; she will live not lessen your allotted lifespan, and she will eat from other than your [divinely allotted] sustenance, so be happy." So, by Allah, [my sadness] was removed.

'And so he said to me: "What have you called her?" I said: "Fāṭimah." He said: "Ah, ah." Then he placed his hand upon his [cheek] and said: "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said: 'The right of a child upon its parent is that if it is male to respect his mother and give him a good name, and make him busy with the book of Allah and to purify him, and to teach him swimming, and if it is

Because of the far-reaching implications of this *hadīth*, as well as its presence in two of the Four Books, this *hadīth* deserves slightly more examination than the above *hadīth* on Zulaykhā. Logically, the connection with Zulaykhā does not make sense, since Zulaykhā fell into temptation in her own house, and reading and writing were not involved. (Zulaykhā's meeting with the women of her city, however, may be one reason that a mediaeval scholar who discusses this *hadīth* also recommends that women abstain from gatherings of women).⁴⁴⁷ Additionally, this is the only *hadīth* to allude to Zulaykhā in the Four Books; the other *hadīth* about the story of Yūsuf do not discuss her at all, although several *hadīth* in the Four Books use the story of Yūsuf for polemical Shī'ī discussions. This suggests that the *hadīth* could have been selected to reflect the dominant values and concerns at the time in the region.

With respect to the chain of narration, one thing that is notable is that the first appearance of this *hadīth* in *al-Kāfi* contains Sahl ibn Ziyād, the narrator mentioned before who related that men should only marry virgin women. This particular version of the *hadīth* is *marfū'*, meaning it is attributed to the Prophet

a girl, then to respect her mother and give her a good name, and to teach her Sūrat al-Nur, and not to teach her Sūrat Yūsuf, and do not send her from the rooms, and to hasten her to her husband's house, and if you have called her Fāṭimah, then do not curse her or harm her."⁴⁴⁷ (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 49, no. 6; al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faṣīḥ*, vol. 8, p. 112, no. 387)

- (c) [no *isnād*] Abū 'Abd Allāh, peace be upon him, said: 'Do not send out women from the rooms, and do not teach them writing, and do not teach them Sūrat Yūsuf, and teach them weaving and Sūrat Nur.' (al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faṣīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 374, no. 1089)
- (d) Ismā'īl ibn Abī Ziyād related from Ja'far ibn Muḥammad from his father, peace be upon him, that his fathers, peace be upon them, said that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said: 'Do not send your women out from the rooms, and do not teach them writing, and do not teach them Sūrat Yūsuf, and teach them weaving and Sūrat al-Nur.' (al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faṣīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 443, no. 4535)

A longer version of this *hadīth* provided by Shaykh al-Ṣādūq (the compiler of *al-Faṣīḥ*) is examined in Amineh Mahallati, 'Women in traditional Sharī'a: a list of differences between men and women in Islamic tradition'.

Shaykh al-Mufīd interprets this narration to mean that it is disliked (although not forbidden) to settle women in rooms facing the street, and to teach them reading and writing, and it is not appropriate to teach them Sūrat Yūsuf specifically but not the other parts of the Qur'ān, and they should be taught Sūrat Nur. He also recommends that women be taught what they need to know of the Qur'ān for their ritual prayers, such as the short chapters of al-Fāṭihah and al-Iklās, but not to teach them poetry; although 'there is no problem to teach them religious rulings, cautionary advice, and *akhbār* (*hadīth*) which are useful for the rulings of Islam'. (Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Aḥkām al-Nisā'*, p. 56)

⁴⁴⁷ al-Mufīd, *Aḥkām al-Nisā'*, p. 56.

without a direct chain of narration, and, hence, is technically considered weak (although not automatically inauthentic). The other narrations about this in *al-Faqīh* that are attributed to the Prophet also do not have chains of narration. The only *hadīth* that has a full chain is the one related from Imām al-Şādiq; this *hadīth* comes across as being piecemeal, in that the advice given not to hit a child named Fāṭimah is related in the same way elsewhere.

One particular oddity about this *hadīth* is that it also appears in a Sunnī source but is attributed to ‘Ā’ishah.⁴⁴⁸ It would have been unusual for her to say this, since she from society, and, in the Sunnī tradition, is held up as an example of one of the most learned women. The association with ‘Ā’ishah and the implication that knowledge leads to temptation (*fitan*) for women may relate to the *hadīth* of *ifk* (slander), which describes an incident where ‘Ā’ishah is accused of impropriety; in another gender role reversal, the language that ‘Ā’ishah uses directly invokes the story of Yūsuf to link herself with the falsely accused Yūsuf. Additionally, in the Shī’ah tradition, ‘Ā’ishah has been condemned for *not* keeping herself to her chambers (that is, for starting the Battle of the Camel) although the Qur’ān advises the wives of the Prophet to remain at home (see Chapter 7), and this is portrayed as a form of immodesty which could be seen as being parallel to Zulaykhā’s.

There are numerous counter-examples supporting female literacy in the Shī’ī tradition; for instance, the Shī’ī *hadīth* which says ‘seeking knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female’,⁴⁴⁹ and the Shī’ī tradition also praises women such as Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and Fatima al-Ma’şūmah who were both learned. Shī’ah scholars today do not encourage women to be illiterate..⁴⁵⁰ However, judging by *Aḥkām al-Nisa’*, it seems to have been taken seriously in the 4th century AH by Shaykh al-Mufīd, and, in some areas, in the pre-modern era, girls were not sent to school in order to protect their chastity (for instance, to prevent them from writing love letters).⁴⁵¹ It goes without saying that this

⁴⁴⁸ al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, vol. 2, p. 396.

⁴⁴⁹ al-Muhaddīth al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 17, p. 249, no. 17.

⁴⁵⁰ One of my teachers at the *ḥawzah* referred to this narration as *matrūk* (‘abandoned’).

⁴⁵¹ For instance, for an observer’s description of Iranian customs of the day, and, in particular, attitudes towards female literacy see Mary Bird, *Persian Women and their Creed* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1908), p. 38. While such works should be taken with a

narration also assumes that men are sources of knowledge (as opposed to, say, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'), in that it portrays men as controlling whether or not women learn, rather than vice versa; while this was probably a reasonable assumption for laypeople in 4th century AH Iraq, it does neglect the legacy of female Islamic scholarship which was present throughout the mediaeval Islamic empire.⁴⁵²

grain of salt, interestingly, she says that it is a prophetic teaching. I have also heard this anecdotally from the older generation in Lebanon. On the other hand, one of the reforms that the Ottoman Empire made was providing public education to both boys and girls.

⁴⁵² About legacy of female Islamic scholars, see Muḥammad Akram Nadwī, *Al-Muḥaddithāt: The Women Scholars in Islam*; and Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa'd to Who's Who* (London: Lynne Rienne Publishers, 1994) Elsewhere, James Lindsay concludes that 'six percent' of Ibn 'Asakir's teachers were female. *Daily Life in the Mediaeval Islamic World*, p. 196. While mentioning that many women in that era were highly educated, he also mentions the objections among some mediaeval Islamic (Sunnī) male scholars towards this tradition of female education as a potential source of moral corruption (pp. 197-198).

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Do not teach women to read or Sūrat Yūsuf.
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfī</i>, 5:516, no. 2 • <i>al-Kāfī</i>, 6:49, no. 6 • <i>al-Faḡīh</i> 8:112, no. 387 • <i>al-Faḡīh</i>, 1: 374, no. 1089 • <i>al-Faḡīh</i>, 3:443, no. 4535
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cultural norm in which women are disempowered and absent • Sunnī narrations
Separate-but-equal ideology	Reinforces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal. • Male authority is necessary in society. • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Female chastity is of paramount importance
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is the purview of men. • Men are normative in religious discourse. • Women should not learn to read or write.

Another theme is connected to the story of Yūsuf is advice on which women to marry. In addition to Sahl ibn Ziyād’s *hadīth* advising men only to marry virgin women, in one of the *hadīth* telling men not to teach their daughters Sūrat Yūsuf, the Imām advises the man to send his daughter to her husband’s house as quickly as possible, presumably – given the context of the *hadīth* – to protect her chastity.⁴⁵³

Additionally, there is another set of *hadīth* (see chart below) which is connected to the story of Yūsuf and advises men to marry ugly, fertile women in lieu of beautiful, infertile women so they can sire more children; this presupposes that the women are neither virgins nor young at the time of marriage, since it would be difficult to ascertain whether a virgin young girl is fertile or not. This is similar to the narration on not marrying barren, beautiful women that came up in the discussion of Sārah (Chapter 3). While only one of these narrations actually mentions Yūsuf, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī includes both in

⁴⁵³ Al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, p. 49; also al-Ṣadūq, *al-Faḡīh*, vol. 8, p. 112, no. 387.

the section on Yūsuf, thus making an implied connection. The version of the narration that ties these seemingly disparate themes together is from, once again, Sahl ibn Ziyād. He relates that, later in life, Yūsuf was talking to his brother and asking him how he could marry women after him; apparently, his grief over Yūsuf was expected to have been stronger than that. His brother replies that Ya‘qūb ordered him to do it to make the earth ‘heavy’ with offspring who would praise Allah.⁴⁵⁴ This reinforces the value of fraternal love as more binding than love for females, and a sense that marriage should be for childbearing rather than companionship. It is worthy of note that other *hadīth* describe Yūsuf’s marriage while he is in Egypt (before he marries Zulaykhā); apparently, Yūsuf was not so overwhelmed with grief that he could not marry.⁴⁵⁵

Then, he continues that a man came to the Prophet and said that he wanted to marry his beautiful female cousin who was barren, but that the Prophet told him not to marry her and instead to marry an ugly fertile women to increase the population of the *ummah* on the Day of Resurrection.⁴⁵⁶ This comes across as unfair to the barren female cousin, and also to the man who wants to marry her. It may be that the narration is an implied commentary on Zulaykhā’s beauty, and the dangers thereof, in that she may be being invoked as an example of an unsuitable wife. However, like the above narration about Sūrah Yūsuf, the message contradicts the other narrations about Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, in that, when she is said to have married Yūsuf, Zulaykhā was both childless (something which is, admittedly, explained away) and beautiful.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Do not marry the beautiful, barren woman
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 5:329, no. 4 • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 5:333, no. 1
Reflects	
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female beauty is de-emphasized.

⁴⁵⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 329, no. 4; vol. 5, p. 333, no. 1; see also vol. 6, p. 3, no. 4.

⁴⁵⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 12, p. 301, no. 98 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

⁴⁵⁶ The word for ‘ugly’ here is *saw‘ā*; other renditions of this *hadīth* give this a racial slant and say *sawdā*’ (black), and advise men to marry fertile black women instead of infertile beautiful women, although this variant could have emerged from an orthographic error or even simply mishearing.

Additional messages

- A woman's worth is based on bearing children.

4.7 Conclusions

Only two of the Four Books (*al-Kāfī* and *al-Faqīh*) discuss Zulaykhā, and that only tangentially through alluding to her in narrations advising men not to teach their daughters to read for the sake of their chastity, and in narrations advising men to marry fertile, ugly virgins. Narrations in the Four Books on the story of Yūsuf also serve polemical purposes – for instance, to ‘prove’ that the Mahdī can remain young over centuries, or to critique the Muslim masses.⁴⁵⁷ While this is in keeping with the finding in the previous two chapters that the Four Books contain materials which are more restrictive to women than other books, it should be noted that the narrations about Zulaykhā appear in contemporaneous works, including works by Shaykh al-Ṣādūq (the compiler of *al-Faqīh*).⁴⁵⁸ That is, despite the popularity of mystical literature on Zulaykhā in later centuries, there is no evidence to suggest that the more mystically oriented narrations do not date back to the same time period as the Four Books.

What is the subtext? The portrayal of Zulaykhā in *Bihār* differs from modern discourse on love, beauty, modesty, and chastity, in that, in the narrations on Zulaykhā in *Bihār*, the topics of love and beauty are discussed openly as part of the ordinary human experience. Despite Zulaykhā’s misdeeds, she is treated compassionately and allowed to give excuses for her errors. Rather than emphasising them for women, the narrations about the story of Yūsuf emphasise beauty, chastity, and modesty for Yūsuf as well as for the Prophet and Imāms as part of their spiritual status. The Four Books and *Bihār* also display a clear difference in the type of material they discuss regarding Zulaykhā which may be representative of different cultural viewpoints during the compilation of those works.

Whose interests are being served? The narrations outside of the Four Books serve the interest of those who would prefer a less rigid, harsh, and legalistic view of faith and instead prefer a faith which focuses on love, beauty,

⁴⁵⁷ For instance, a *hadīth* in *al-Kāfī* compares the *ummah* to pigs and to the brothers of Yūsuf who betrayed him. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 336-7, no. 4.

⁴⁵⁸ James Lindsay discusses the well-known custom of seclusion of women in homes in *Daily Life in the Mediaeval Islamic World*, p. 126. He also mentions that, in later years (that is to say, the 14th century), mixing between men and women was found in mosques (p. 198).

forgiveness, and happiness. Like the 'counter-narrative' in the chapter on Eve, they oppose a rigid and patriarchal 'orthodoxy' through mystical teachings which are particularly representative of the Ṣūfī tradition (especially an Iranian Ṣūfī tradition), and may represent an ethnic or religious opposition to the codification of restrictive patriarchal values. They serve the interest of mystics who saw human love as a metaphor for divine love. The focus on male beauty, chastity, and modesty fits into the tradition of *muruwwah* and chivalrous ideas for manhood as part of an initiatory tradition, and one which, although not heterodox, has its own authority structure and is not reliant on the authority structure of the jurists (research question 6 – Shī'ī identity). The inclusion of Zulaykhā and her perspective in these narrations indicates that male normativeness is not being communicated (research question 1 – absence of women)

As with the narrations on Sārah, the 'happy ending' narrations also serves the interests of career storytellers. The happy ending plays into common fantasies of retrieving lost love and youth, and the desire to be redeemable; it sends the unrealistic message that, eventually, people will get what they want. In that regard, it is not dissimilar to today's Disney films. A story about the elite would have made for a better story than a story about paupers. However, unlike the narrations about Sārah, which reinforce restrictions on upper-class women as part of the patriarchal bargain, this story sends the message that restrictions on women are not that important for the elite. Zulaykhā's privilege in being married to a powerful man, being able to act indecently towards Yūsuf, and then at the end being able to claim virginity sends the message that women of means can get away with things that other women cannot.

The separate-but-equal ideology. Mostly, these narrations are in opposition to the separate-but-equal ideology. Rather than promoting the *hijāb* and female modesty, and presenting women as dangers to men, they promote modesty and chastity for men, and present men as a temptation for women. Rather than being condemned, love and beauty – both female and male – are celebrated, and the 'happy ending' for Zulaykhā, in particular, runs counter to the presumptions about women in this ideology. Emotions are not described as womanly. Neither are emotions condemned, nor are they portrayed as un-

prophetic; to the contrary, Yūsuf as well as the Imāms shed copious tears, and are expected to behave emotionally – for instance, Yūsuf’s expectation that his brother should eschew marriage out of grief.

The exception to the above is in the narrations in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faḡīh* – namely ‘do not teach women Sūrat Yūsuf, do not teach women to read, and keep them inside away from the road’ as well as ‘do not marry the barren, beautiful woman’ which promote restrictions on women and de-emphasise female beauty. This is in keeping with the greater representation of narrations supporting the separate-but-equal ideology in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faḡīh*, and the correspondence between narrations which codify values about women and narrations which support the separate-but-equal ideology. That being said, none of these narrations allude to an essential difference in the nature between woman and man (for instance, ‘do not teach women to read because they are deficient in intellect’), but instead emphasise controlling women’s chastity.

How well do these narrations fit the separate-but-equal ideology? (Narrations with an asterisk are in the Four Books.)		
Premise	Supports	Does not support
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.	Do not teach women Sūrat Yūsuf*	
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.		
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.		Male chastity, modesty, and beauty Human love is dangerous
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.		
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal.	Do not teach women Sūrat Yūsuf*	
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).	Do not teach women Sūrat Yūsuf*	
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.		
h) Female chastity is of paramount importance; female beauty is de-	Do not marry the beautiful, barren woman*	The happy ending Zulaykhā’s excuses

emphasized.		Male chastity, modesty, and beauty*
i) 'Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love'		Human love is dangerous Male chastity, modesty, and beauty

Why does it matter today? A distrust of love and beauty characterises 'orthodox' Islamic discourse today, Sunnī and Shī'ī. It is not uncommon to hear people describing love as religiously forbidden (*ḥarām*), and beautification being looked down upon as being shallow or Westernized. These narrations are a reminder that, in the classical Islamic tradition, love and beauty were celebrated for both women and men – as a perusal of illustrated pre-modern Islamic manuscripts indicates.

In many Islamic cultures today, there is a double standard in social expectations for men and women, and there are heavy restrictions on women's behaviour. Concepts of shame and honour are still strongly associated with women in many places. These narrations give a different view – one in which a youthful error does not need to ruin one's reputation or life. The narrations saying to marry an ugly, fertile woman instead of a beautiful, barren women raise serious questions about valuing women based on how well they are able to procreate; however, at least, they also point to an era where there was less stigma for women with children to remarry (since how would one know a woman is fertile unless she has already borne children). This is in contrast to the view in many Islamic countries today that a divorced, widowed, or otherwise non-virginal woman is an undesirable partner. However, the insistence on Zulaykhā's virginity does reinforce the idea that a man should marry a virgin.

The overwhelming majority of Shī'ah do not actually act upon the narration saying not to teach women to read. However, questions about this narration do come up, particularly with respect to the assumption that surely it must be a good thing to recite all of the Qur'ān, and not to leave out a *sūrah*. While questioning the authenticity of this narration can be uncomfortable in some circles due to its presence in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faḥḥ*, its alternate sourcing

via 'Ā'ishah could be used to argue that this narration was really not a product of the Imāms.

5.1 Introduction⁴⁵⁹

Three things make the narrations on the Queen of Sheba, also known as Bilqīs, stand out in comparison to the others being discussed in this work. First, with one exception, the content of these narrations is uniquely Shī'ī, and does not thematically conflict the treatment of Bilqīs in the Qur'ān. This is in contrast to the narrations on Sārah and Eve, which reflected numerous pre-Islamic influences and do not represent the Qur'ānic portrayal of Sārah and Eve in the Qur'ān. Second, with one exception, they do not support the patriarchal norms or separate-but-equal ideology found in some other narrations. Instead, they place Bilqīs in the narrative of *wilāyah* as an 'honorary man'. And, lastly, there are few narrations; and, of the narrations which actually purport to be about her, most are too focused on polemical concerns like the *ism al-a'zam* to glean much about the treatment of gender. Still, it is possible to derive messages from these narrations particularly through noting tacit agreement (a principle used in deriving religious law from *ḥadīth*), whereby the absence of objection to something is treated as acceptance; the absence of more narrations on a notable figure in the Qur'ān also sends its own message.

5.1.1 The Queen of Sheba in scripture

The story of the Queen of Sheba – referred to in Sunnī and Shī'ī *ḥadīth* as 'Bilqīs' – and Sulaymān is one of the lengthier narratives in the Qur'ān, spanning 27:15 to 27:44. A separate *sūrah*, Sūrah Saba' (Sūrah 34), whose name literally means 'Sheba', continues this narrative by relating the death of Sulaymān and the return of the people of Sheba to polytheism – presumably, after the time of Bilqīs, who embraced monotheism – and their subsequent destruction. It is the only Qur'ānic mention of a female head of state, and is also the only Qur'ānic narrative to explore methods of governance. Pre-Islamic Near Eastern and African historical sources, religious texts, and legends also speak of her; in fact, since the Qur'ān does not provide any introductory information

⁴⁵⁹ An earlier version of this chapter was published as Amina Inloes, 'The Queen of Sheba in Shi'a *Hadīth*', in the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4 (Autumn 2012), pp. 423-440.

about who the Queen of Sheba is and jumps directly to her story, it can be deduced that the audience of the Qur'ān was already familiar with her.⁴⁶⁰

The story of Bilqīs had already permeated the Near East prior to Islam, and Jewish portrayals in particular appear to have influenced Sunnī *ḥadīth* but only one Shī'ī *ḥadīth* being examined here. The Old Testament⁴⁶¹ offers a brief account of her visit to Solomon's kingdom in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9. In this narrative, her visit is described as a diplomatic mission, from one head of state to another. The narrative focuses on her immense wealth and her rich gifts to Solomon; unlike in the Qur'ān, Solomon accepts her gifts but does not ask her to accept monotheism. There is also no mention of any romantic relationship between them.⁴⁶² Thus, the Old Testament presents her as an independent agent and public figure and does not offer commentary regarding the ramifications of her being a woman.

However, later Jewish sources include more extensive accounts of the Queen of Sheba. These highlight her gender and the perceived threat to the natural order presented by an independent, powerful woman. This is explored through tropes involving gender confusion, such as Solomon asking the Queen of Sheba to distinguish between identically dressed boys and girls. The Queen of Sheba is portrayed as symbolically masculine by virtue of excessive body hair, and becomes symbolically feminine when – at Solomon's bequest – her body hair is removed, Solomon lies with her, and she loses her power and independence, thus falling under his dominance and restoring the natural order of things. In some accounts, she then bears a child – Nebuchadnezzar – who

⁴⁶⁰ Jacob Lassner remarks on this point as well as the need to try to understand the narrative that was known to the Qur'ānic audience. *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁶¹ Like the Qur'ān, the Old Testament does not provide her personal name.

⁴⁶² 1 Kings 10:2 is sometimes taken to imply a relationship. The relevant portion of this verse reads in the King James version of the Bible as 'when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart', whereas in the New International Version of the Bible, it reads as '...she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind'. The question, therefore, is whether the final word – Hebrew '*lev*' – refers to the emotions (heart) of the Queen of Sheba, or her intellectual inquiry (mind); the word itself can mean either. In that regard, it is similar in implication to the Arabic *qalb*, which literally means 'heart' but is also used in the classical tradition to refer to the seat of the intellect. However, it should be noted that, generally, these verses are not interpreted to mean that the Queen of Sheba engaged in a romantic relationship with Solomon.

destroys the temple in Jerusalem and sends the Jews into exile.⁴⁶³ Thus, in contrast to the Old Testament story of the Queen of Sheba, these stories present the natural role for a woman as being submissive and reinforce the danger of breaking from socially accepted gender roles.⁴⁶⁴

In the Qur'ānic account, Bilqīs's gender does not go unnoticed; when Sulaymān's scout, the hoopoe, discovers her, he remarks on the unusualness of discovering such a powerful woman (Qur'ān 27:22). However, the Qur'ān does not portray Bilqīs as an aberration or a threat to the natural order due to her gender; instead, the main critique levied at her is that she was a sun-worshipper. Faith, not gender, is the primary concern. This is in contrast to the Sunnī narration cautioning against female rulers, and also the negativity towards female leadership in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (see Chapter 7). Second, like the Old Testament, the Qur'ān does not allude to her sexuality or embark on any discussion of gender roles. Perhaps of most relevance to the modern Islamic discourse on women is that that Qur'ān neither explicitly nor even implicitly condemns Bilqīs, a woman, for taking on a position of political leadership.

However, this should not be taken to suggest that the Qur'ān treats Bilqīs like a man. Although Amina Wadud chooses to refer to Bilqīs's style of rule as 'peaceful politics' rather than 'womanly politics',⁴⁶⁵ Rawand Osman argues that Bilqīs's model of leadership could most aptly be termed feminine – for instance, her preference for diplomacy over war – even if men might also apply some of the same strategies.⁴⁶⁶ 'Feminine' here is not a criticism since her rule is effective since she has been 'given of every thing' (*uṭṭiyat min kulli shay'*, Qur'ān 27:23). In fact, in a prior verse (Qur'ān 27:16), before learning of Bilqīs, Sulaymān uses the same expression to describe himself; thus, the narrative implies equity and even rivalry between them. Bilqīs is hence

⁴⁶³ See Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, p. 23. Note that this story of Nebuchadnezzar's parentage is not derived from the Old Testament account.

⁴⁶⁴ Jacob Lassner explores this issue in depth in *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*.

⁴⁶⁵ For discussion of the story of the Queen of Sheba in the Qur'ān and its ramifications on the Qur'ānic views of women see Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 40-42.

⁴⁶⁶ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunnah*, pp. 70-72.

described in a gloss in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* (by Ibn Shahrāshūb, d. 1192) as having intellect (*‘aql*) – in contrast to passage about women’s intellectual deficiencies in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.⁴⁶⁷ Although a powerful monarch, Bilqīs prefers diplomacy to warfare and consultation to autocratic rule – unlike Sulaymān, who threatens to kill the hoopoe for its tardiness (Qur’ān 27:20-21). Thematically, the narrative contrasts her feminine style of rule to Sulaymān’s masculine approach; for instance, in the prelude to the story, the ants are afraid that Sulaymān’s armies will destroy them (Qur’ān, 27:18), whereas Bilqīs reminds her chieftains of the destructiveness of warfare (Qur’ān, 27:34). When faced with the letter from Sulaymān, Bilqīs gives her chieftains the opportunity to express their views before coming to a decision; and although her chieftains are capable warriors, they defer to her judgment (Qur’ān 27:32-33).

Like the Old Testament, the Qur’ān does not speak of Bilqīs marrying or having any sort of romantic relationship with Sulaymān. The main difference between the Biblical and Qur’ānic accounts is thematic: while the Old Testament focuses on political diplomacy, the Qur’ānic focuses on religious diplomacy and Sulaymān’s efforts to convert her to monotheism. In the Qur’ān, although Sulaymān invites her to worship the one God, Bilqīs does not accept his invitation immediately; instead, she tests him through sending him gifts and speaking with him. When she sees that he is not interested in her wealth and witnesses the miracle of her throne being transported to Sulaymān’s palace, she is convinced that he is a prophet. Thus, she submits to Allah *with* Sulaymān (Qur’ān 27:44). ‘With’ (*ma‘a*) is worthy of emphasis; by saying ‘I submit *with* Sulaymān’ instead of ‘I submit *to* Sulaymān’, Bilqīs retains her independence; rather than submitting to a man because that is the natural order of things, she acknowledges the supremacy of God as an independent monarch and as Sulaymān’s peer. Nonetheless, ‘with’ can easily be transmuted into a preposition of subservience, and Bilqīs is portrayed as submitting *to* Sulaymān – as a man – rather than *with* him.⁴⁶⁸ Similarly, Sunnī accounts of her marriage

⁴⁶⁷ Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, 3 vols. (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīyyah, 1956), vol. 3, p. 102. Rawand Osman also notes the association of Bilqīs with the *‘aql*. Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunnah*, pp. 66-72.

⁴⁶⁸ For instance, ‘*Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī* takes this approach in his discussion of her in *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*; he says, ‘What she said in the previous verse—that we were *submissive* (27:42)

to him are used to demonstrate her eventual subservience to Sulaymān and the restoration of the socially expected gender hierarchy.⁴⁶⁹ Hence, it has been suggested that transfer of the throne from Bilqīs to Sulaymān symbolizes the transfer of power from female to male as the moral of the story; however, as will be seen, that symbolism is not supported in the narrations here about the throne.⁴⁷⁰

5.1.2 The Queen of Sheba in the Sunnī and Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections

Although Sunnī *qiṣaṣ al-anbīyā'* literature discusses Bilqīs, the actual Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections are largely silent regarding Bilqīs, and what is said can essentially be classified as minutiae – for instance, the question of whether Saba' (Sheba) was the name of a person or a region.⁴⁷¹ One exception is a narration related by Abū Hurayrah asserting that Bilqīs was born from a jinn.⁴⁷² This narration is incorporated into some of the Sunnī prophetic narratives and thus serves to remove the challenge that Bilqīs, as an independent woman, presents to the 'natural' social order:⁴⁷³ once she has been stripped of her humanity, she no longer provides a precedent for other, fully human women to follow in her stead and exert their own independence or authority.⁴⁷⁴ However, 'Allāmah al-Majlisī rejects the notion of Bilqīs being of jinn-parentage as an 'incredible' story and part of the *isrā'īliyyāt*.⁴⁷⁵ This is in contrast to some other narrations attributed to Abū Hurayrah, such as the story of 'Sārah and the box'

pertains to her submission and obedience to Sulaymān'. ('Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, in his exegesis of 27:43).

⁴⁶⁹ Jacob Lassner explores this theme in depth throughout Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*.

⁴⁷⁰ Rawand Osman cites that view in *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, p. 69.

⁴⁷¹ Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 5 vols. (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr li al-Tibā'ah wa al-Nashr, 1990), vol. 2, p. 246; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Ṣadir, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 216.

⁴⁷² 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Asākir, *Tarīkh Madīnat Dimashq* (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr li al-Nashr wa al-Tibā'ah, 1998), vol. 69, p. 67; al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, 18 vols. (n.p.: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1979), vol. 2, p. 9.

⁴⁷³ See Tha'labī cited in Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 269; Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, pp. 77, 87.

⁴⁷⁴ 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the 20th century Shī'ī scholar and exegete, rejects the notion that Bilqīs was born from a jinn as an 'incredible' narration that is among the *isrā'īliyyāt*. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 20 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Ālamī li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1997), vol. 15 pp. 370-371.

⁴⁷⁵ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 40, p. 313.

or the description of a woman as ‘crooked’, which nonetheless found their way into Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* books. While Bilqīs, as a queen, is arguably not an ‘ordinary’ woman, from a theological perspective, she is fallible (as opposed to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, who is considered infallible), and so the discussion of Bilqīs is particularly relevant to the way that she is treated in her full humanity, including her potential for error.

The Four Books only contain two distinct narrations about Bilqīs (and these are mentioned in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faḳīh*).⁴⁷⁶ *Biḥār al-Anwār* catalogues fourteen narrations which purport to be about Bilqīs.⁴⁷⁷ However, only one of these narrations is about her personally. Of the remainder, eleven are about the greatest name of Allah and the miraculous transport of her throne, one is about Sulaymān, and one is about hair removal. Three additional narrations in other volumes of *Biḥār* mention her; all of these narrations are about the merits of Imām ‘Alī, and the latter one (in volume 89) is also attributed to Imām ‘Alī.⁴⁷⁸ Other references to her in *Biḥār* are not of any substantive significance. Due to this paucity of narrations, narrations on Bilqīs in other Shī‘ī collections were examined in more detail, although little else emerged of significance.

5.3 The Queen of Sheba and Imām ‘Alī

Despite the immense negativity towards female leadership (and females in general) attributed to Imām ‘Alī in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the narrations about Bilqīs implicitly connect not only Bilqīs and the cause of *ahl al-bayt*, but specifically Bilqīs and Imām ‘Alī: several narrations about her are used to support his position as the inheritor (*waṣī*) of the Prophet, and some are also attributed to him personally. Like the material in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* (which will be discussed in Chapter 7 along with *Nahj al-Balāghah*), this challenges the view that Imām ‘Alī should be portrayed as a misogynist. Indeed, the only narration in the Four Books which actually mentions Bilqīs herself, as opposed

⁴⁷⁶ The first is in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 83, no. 3; al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḳīh*, vol. 3, p. 165, no. 3609; and al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḳīh*, vol. 4, p. 399, no. 5854. The second is al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 230, no. 1.

⁴⁷⁷ This section spans al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, pp. 109-130.

⁴⁷⁸ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 42, p. 58, no. 1 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*); vol. 71, p. 60 no. 14 (citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*); and vol. 89, p. 228 no. 5 (citing *Amālī al-Ṣādūq*).

to her throne, is attributed to Imām ‘Alī.⁴⁷⁹ In this narration, which is in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh*, Imām ‘Alī says that people should place more hope in Allah for the things which are beyond their hopes,⁴⁸⁰ for Moses went out to find fire for his family and returned as a prophet, the Queen of Sheba went out and submitted (to Allah) with (*ma‘a*) Sulaymān, and Pharaoh’s magicians went out seeking honour for Pharaoh and returned as believers. It should be noted that Bilqīs is referred to as ‘*malakat Saba*’ (the Queen of Sheba) rather than by proper name, thereby emphasising her role as head of state.

Despite the brevity of the mention of Bilqīs, certain subtexts can be deduced. First and foremost, the narration is favourable to Bilqīs, since it places her on par with other significant figures and events in sacred history; that is, it is including women in sacred narrative. Second, the positive outlook towards Bilqīs’s ‘going out’ should not be overlooked given the emphasis on women’s seclusion mentioned with respect to Eve, Sārah, and the Virgin Mary as well as in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.⁴⁸¹ Apparently, here, Imām ‘Alī did not find Bilqīs’s ‘going out’ problematic, even though he is portrayed elsewhere as condemning ‘Ā’ishah for leaving her home to join the Battle of the Camel; that is, his critique is gendered and focuses more on her leaving her home as a woman than her actual sedition.⁴⁸² Third, this narration maintains the spirit of the Qur’ānic narrative by saying that Bilqīs submitted *with* Sulaymān – that is to say, as peers submitting together to Allah – as opposed to other Middle Eastern retellings which portray Bilqīs as submitting *to* Sulaymān, in the sense of a woman submitting to a man. Finally, al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣādūq both categorize this *ḥadīth* in sections on earning a living; apparently, they felt this advice was particularly appropriate when going in search of a livelihood, and this too is

⁴⁷⁹ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 165 & vol. 4, p. 399; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 83, no. 3.

⁴⁸⁰ The theme of hoping for more than one’s hopes from Allah is found in a number of Shī‘ī prayers and *ḥadīth*; for instance, in the well-known Shī‘ī prayer called *Du‘a al-Ifṭitāh*, or narrations about *ḥusn al-zann* (having a hopeful opinion of Allah), such as in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 61.

⁴⁸¹ For instance, according to some Sunnī *fuqahā’*, it is not permissible for a woman to travel without a male relative (*maḥram*). In both Sunnī and Shī‘ī *fiqh*, the traditional view is that it is not permissible for a wife to leave her house without her husband’s permission; of course, it could be argued that this was not the case with Bilqīs since she was not thought to be married at the time when she travelled to visit Sulaymān.

⁴⁸² This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7.

noteworthy, given that earning an income is, *sharī‘ah*-wise, seen as a man’s responsibility.⁴⁸³ Therefore, in contrast to what is usually attributed to Imām ‘Alī, this narration from Imām ‘Alī offers a positive view of women acting in the public sphere, as well as of Bilqīs in general. And, lastly, the positive mention of Bilqīs as the ‘Queen of Sheba’ offers tacit approval of (and even praise for) her role as head of state. Several other narrations about Bilqīs are also attributed to Imām ‘Alī; they will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Hoping for more than what one hopes for
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Faqīh</i> 3:165, no. 3609 • <i>al-Faqīh</i> 4:399, no. 5854 • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 5: 83, no. 3
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Islamic content
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal. • Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family). • Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men. (Due to placement in <i>al-Kāfī</i> and <i>al-Faqīh</i>)
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are involved in sacred narrative.

5.4 The Queen of Sheba and the prophetic inheritance

Bilqīs’s place in the narrative of *wilāyah* is elevated in an unusual narration found in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, and copied into the section on the merits of Imām ‘Alī in *Bihār*, in which Bilqīs becomes part of the chain of

⁴⁸³ The traditional view in Sunnī and Shī‘ī jurisprudence is that it is a father’s responsibility to financially provide for his children, including his adult unmarried daughters and it is a husband’s responsibility to provide for his wife (that is, a woman should not have to earn an income). The traditional explanation in jurisprudence is that marriage is a practical contract in which the man provides financial maintenance to the woman, and the woman provides spousal rights to her husband. The case of an unmarried adult woman without a husband or male breadwinners to provide for her is generally neglected. The nuances and origins of this view are explored by Kecia Ali in *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), pp. 1-26.

prophetic inheritance by temporarily possessing the famous sword of Imām ‘Alī, Dhū al-Faḡār.⁴⁸⁴ This narration says that Dhū al-Faḡār descended from heaven at the time of Adam, and it was passed on from prophet to prophet until it – somehow – came into the possession of Bilqīs, who presented it to Sulaymān as one of her famed gifts. While, in the Qur’ānic story, Sulaymān refuses Bilqīs’s gifts because he is seeking her conversion, not her wealth, in this narration, Sulaymān presumably accepts this gift, because it is then passed on to Imām ‘Alī.⁴⁸⁵

Although they mention the narration, both Ibn Shahrāshūb and ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī imply doubt about it – Ibn Shahrāshūb, by using the phrase ‘*qīla*’ (i.e. ‘it is said’), and al-Majlisī, by keeping this narration out of the section on Bilqīs. One wonders if the discomfort here is due to the elevation of Bilqīs to the position of an ‘honorary’ man in this narrative. Of course, there could be other reasons. The inclusion of Bilqīs here is atypical not only because she is a non-infallible, but also because, at the time, she was not even a monotheist (Qur’ān 27:24). The inheritance of sacred objects, including Dhū al-Faḡār, is considered to be one of the proofs of the Imāmate, in that one way the Imām demonstrates his legitimacy is by possessing certain sacred items.⁴⁸⁶ Since Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and, to a lesser extent, the Virgin Mary are portrayed as possessing sacred, inherited items,⁴⁸⁷ there is a precedent for a woman possessing them; however, both Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and Mary are portrayed as being spiritually extraordinary – and hence different from the ‘ordinary’ woman – in a way that Bilqīs is not. Therefore, Bilqīs’s inclusion here is an unprecedented honour, and this narration presents her in a particularly respectful light, since she is the one who returns Dhū al-Faḡār to the prophetic line.

⁴⁸⁴ For a discussion of the importance of the chain of prophetic inheritance – of which the Imāms are a part – in the Shī‘ī tradition, and, in particular, the Dhū al-Faḡār as part of this chain of inheritance, see Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism*, pp. 73-75, 129-130; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam*, pp. 177, 310, 360.

⁴⁸⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 42, p. 58, no. 1 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*).

⁴⁸⁶ Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism*, pp. 73-75, 129-130; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam*, pp. 177, 310, 360.

⁴⁸⁷ Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism*, pp. 72-75, 119; Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, pp. 17-21. With respect to the Virgin Mary, see Chapter 6.

By implication, from a Shī'ī perspective, any mention of Sulaymān is polemically charged because Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' cited the precedent of Sulaymān's inheritance in the sermon of Fadak,⁴⁸⁸ which is seen in the Shī'ī tradition not just as a property dispute but rather as being symbolic of who had the right to succeed the Prophet.⁴⁸⁹ Since the verse 'And Sulaymān was David's heir' (Qur'ān, 27:16) is used to support Fāṭimah al-Zahrā''s right to Fadak – and thus Imām 'Alī's right to the caliphate – it is natural that the Qur'ānic story of Sulaymān and Bilqīs would be cited to argue that Imām 'Alī is the *waṣī* of the Prophet. This narration emphasises the connection between Sulaymān and Imām 'Alī's role as the *waṣī*:

... I [Abū Ibrāhīm] said to him [Imām 'Alī], 'May I be your ransom, tell me, was the Prophet the heir all of the prophets?'

He [Imām 'Alī] said, 'Yes.'

I said, 'From Adam until it [prophethood] ended with himself?'

He said, 'Allah did not appoint a prophet except that Muḥammad was more knowledgeable than him.'

I said, 'Indeed, 'Īsā ibn Maryam used to revive the dead with the permission of Allah.'

He said, 'You speak the truth, and Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd used to understand the speech of birds, and the Messenger of Allah was able to do these things [...]'.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ Referred to in al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 15, p. 371. Sources for this are also listed in Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, p. 102. Fadak was an income-producing property that the Prophet Muḥammad gifted to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' during his lifetime; however, upon his death, Abū Bakr seized it on the grounds that prophets do not leave material inheritance to their children. In response, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' gave her famous speech in defence of her right to Fadak and cited the Qur'ānic precedent 'and Sulaymān was David's heir' (Qur'ān, 27:16) as proof that she had the right to inherit from the Prophet Muḥammad.

⁴⁸⁹ See Shaheen Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, *Fadak in History*, trans. A. al-Shaheen, ed. A. Sharara (Qum: Ansariyan, 2006); Jean Calmard, 'FĀṬEMA, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1999), vol. 9, pp. 400-404. <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fatema>>. Accessed 26 September 2012.

⁴⁹⁰ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 112. This *ḥadīth* also occurs in *al-Kāfī* (al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* I, p 262) but since al-Kulaynī does not attempt to connect it to Bilqīs, it was not mentioned above. However, since in *Bihār* it is categorized under the section of 'His [Sulaymān's], Peace

Imām ‘Alī continues by describing Sulaymān’s immense powers and explaining how the Prophet and his *waṣṭ* (that is, Imām ‘Alī) inherited all of those powers and more, for while Sulaymān needed the hoopoe to find water, the Prophet and his *waṣṭ* could do that through the Qur’ān – presumably, referring to an esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān, although the exoteric verses about Sulaymān are woven throughout the explanation.

The relationship of inheritance between Sulaymān and the Prophet is emphasised in another narration in which Imām ‘Alī says that Allah honoured the Prophet with Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, except that He gave the *basmalah* to Sulaymān as well; but whoever recites Sūrat al-Fatiḥah while believing in the divinely appointed authority (*wilāyah*) of Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad (*Āl-i Muḥammad*) will receive a divine reward (*ḥasanah*) for each letter.⁴⁹¹ This explains the use of *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* in Sulaymān’s letter to Bilqīs (Qur’ān 27:30).⁴⁹² The end result is to strengthen the notion of divine inheritance, which, in the narration on Dhū al-Faqār, Bilqīs is portrayed as participating in uniquely.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Bilqīs and Dhū al-Faqār
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār al-Anwār</i>, vol. 42, p. 58, no. 1 (citing <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i>)

Be Upon Him, Story with Bilqīs’, it is included here as being relevant to Bilqīs even though it does not mention her directly. The same use of categorization to convey the implications of a *ḥadīth* about this story recurs in *Biḥār* wherein a *ḥadīth* about Sulaymān’s caliphate over the jinn in a section entitled ‘Imām ‘Alī’s *khilafah* over the jinn’, thus implying that Sulaymān’s rule of the jinn proves Imām ‘Alī’s merit. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 70, p. 60. In both cases it is inclusion of the *ḥadīth* under a specific chapter heading which makes it more relevant.

⁴⁹¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 89, p. 228, no. 5 (citing *Amāli al-Ṣādūq*).

⁴⁹² This literal understanding which presumes that Sulaymān started his letter with the exact words *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* (as opposed to something with essentially that meaning) also brings up the question of what language Sulaymān would have written to Bilqīs in, since he could not have written the exact words *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm* in a language other than Arabic. Sulaymān’s language of choice is actually addressed in a Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* which says that Sulaymān knew all languages (it is also generally held in the Shī‘ī tradition that the Prophet Muḥammad and the twelve Imāms also knew all languages), but at times of war, Sulaymān spoke Farsi; when speaking with his workers and people in his kingdom, he spoke the ‘Roman language’; when he was with his women, he spoke Syriac and Nabataean; when he stood in his *miḥrāb* to pray, he spoke Arabic; and when he sat with delegations and with his enemies, he spoke Hebrew. The implications of this *ḥadīth* with regards to racial and historical views are, of course, complicated. However, since the Queen of Sheba is seen in the Islamic tradition to have been living in Yemen, the choice to pen a letter to her in Arabic would make sense, although Yemen has also historically been home to other languages as well. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 14, pp. 110-111, no. 3 (citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See also <i>al-Kāfi</i> 1:262
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Shī'ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in the sacred chain of inheritance

5.5 The throne of the Queen of Sheba

Another polemical theme that emerges in the *ḥadīth* on Bilqīs is the instantaneous transportation of her throne to Sulaymān's palace in 'a blink of an eye' (Qur'ān 27:39-40); these two verses are typically cited to prove the possibility of the Imāms possessing miraculous powers, for if a mere servant of Sulaymān could transport the throne, the divinely appointed Imām should have even greater powers.⁴⁹³ While the transportation of the throne is cited to support the miraculous powers of all the Imāms, again, here, it is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq with reference to Imām 'Alī:

O Ābān, how do people object to what the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, said when he said: 'If I willed, I would have raised this leg of mine and, with it, struck the chest of Ibn Abī Sufyān [Mu'āwiyah] in Syria and toppled him from his throne' – but they do not object to Āsif, the waṣī [inheritor] of Sulaymān, transporting the throne of Bilqīs and bringing it to Sulaymān in the blink of an eye? Is not our Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, the most excellent of prophets, and his waṣī the most excellent of awṣiyā'? Did he not make him [Imām 'Alī] like the waṣī of Sulaymān, peace be upon him? May Allah judge between us and those who deny our right and hate our merits.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ For instance, in the Shī'ī tradition, it is said that by using these supernatural abilities, the Imāms travelled across vast distances or emerged from prison in order to bury his father, for an imām only buries another imām. For more information on this belief, see Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), pp. 86, 89, & 210, note 36.

⁴⁹⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, pp. 115-116, no. 12 (citing *al-Ikhtisās*).

The *ḥadīth* explaining the implications of the transport of the throne are important to the *tafsīr* of verses 27:29-39, which read:

Said an *'ifrit*⁴⁹⁵ of the jinn, 'I will bring it [Bilqīs's throne] to you before you rise from your council; indeed, I have full strength for the purpose, and may be trusted.'

Said one who had knowledge of the Book, 'I will bring it to you in the blink of an eye.'

Then when he [Sulaymān] saw it placed firmly before him, he said, 'This is by the grace of my Lord, to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful; and if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is for his own soul; but if any is ungrateful, truly my Lord is free of all need, supreme in honour.' (Qur'ān 29:39-40)

Taken on their own, these verses raise more questions than they answer – such as why it would be necessary for someone to transport the throne in the blink of an eye, or what 'knowledge of the Book' is. Since the Qur'ān tends to be sparse on narrative detail, it is not clear why the miraculous transport of the throne would be mentioned at all. These narrations give a reason for its mention in the Qur'ān. By citing the throne of Bilqīs as an argument for the spiritual powers of *ahl al-bayt*, these narrations tacitly indicate approval of Bilqīs's role as the possessor of the throne – that is, as head of state – and integrate her in the narrative of *wilāyah* favourably. Another account in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* (although not in *Biḥār*) reinforces the perceived association between Bilqīs, Sulaymān, Imām 'Alī, and *ṭayy al-arḍ* ('folding the earth', i.e. instantaneously travelling from one part of the earth to another) in poetry praising Imām 'Alī in an account of how Imām 'Alī used *ṭayy al-arḍ* to go to Madā'in to do the ritual washing of Salman al-Farsi's body after he died. This account is more telling about the popular association between these personalities since the poem is not by one of the Imāms.⁴⁹⁶ However, the extensive focus on the throne of

⁴⁹⁵ An *'ifrit* is a type of jinn. The Qur'ān says that the jinn were put in the service of Sulaymān (Qur'ān 27:17).

⁴⁹⁶ Muḥammad ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, p. 132. The poem is attributed to Abū Faḍl al-Tamīmī. The relevant section of the poem reads:

Bilqīs – both in these narrations as well as in Shī‘ī discourse – leads to the question of why these subjects are mentioned to the exclusion of a discussion of Bilqīs herself.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	The throne of Bilqīs
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 14:115-116, no. 12 (citing <i>al-Ikhtisās</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Shī‘ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Implied opposition to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men must be in authority
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are involved in sacred narrative

5.6 Bilqīs the woman

Implicitly or explicitly, most of the above narrations mentioning Bilqīs use her precedent to prove the merits of *ahl al-bayt*. However, in the section on Bilqīs in *Biḥār*, there is one narration that is actually about her. This narration is an outlier, since it is neither uniquely Shī‘ī, nor does it connect Bilqīs to *ahl al-bayt*; instead, it attempts to resituate her into her expected social role as a woman under male guardianship. It mimics Jewish and Sunnī retellings of the story in its focus on her femininity and her subordination to Sulaymān as a man (rather than as a prophet). It presents the man as normative and the female as deficient by clarifying that the Qur’ān was being metaphorical by saying that Bilqīs was ‘given of every thing’ (Qur’ān, 27:23), since Bilqīs could not have not actually had ‘every thing’ since she lacked ‘a male organ and a beard’. (It is hard to imagine a similar statement being made about Sulaymān lacking mammarys and a womb!) This observation reiterates the notion of the female as deficient presented in *Nahj al-Balāghah* as well as the notion that the female

Did you know? On the night that the *waṣī* went to the land of Madā‘īn
And laid the pure Sulaymān to rest, and returned to the courtyards of Madīnah, near
morning,
Like Āsif before he returned in a flash from Saba’ with the throne of Bilqīs, fulfilling his
vow, piercing the veils.
About Āsif, you wouldn’t say this [is *ghulūw*] – but about me,
I am a *ghāli* towards Ḥaydar and am reckoned a liar?

The gracious assistance of Shaikh Qasim al-Assady in translating difficult sections of this poem must be acknowledged.

is incomplete compared to the male with respect to her reproductive physiology (see Chapter 7). Like Lassner mentions about non-scriptural Jewish and Islamic renditions, there is disproportionate focus on Bilqīs's unsightly body hair. Sulaymān orders the *shayāṭīn* to 'do something about it', and so they prepare baths and a hair remover for her, at which time he marries her, and she dissolves into her proper submissive, feminine role. Sulaymān's dominance over the *shayāṭīn* indicates his authority, while the removal of Bilqīs's body hair is said to symbolize her transformation from masculinity and dominance to femininity and submission.⁴⁹⁷ This narration is also included in *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, although al-Muḥaddith al-Nūrī notes that it is obscure (i.e. among the *nawādir*).⁴⁹⁸

This one *ḥadīth* which is about Bilqīs herself is in contrast with the other Shī'ī *ḥadīth* mentioning her. Thematically, it is also in contrast with the Qur'ānic narrative (as well as the Old Testament). Instead, it resembles the later Jewish retellings. Still, Majlisī himself not only mentions it but even reinforces it, for in the section on the story of Sulaymān and Bilqīs, he includes another *ḥadīth* that has absolutely nothing to do with Bilqīs; namely, a *ḥadīth* on hair remover (*nūrah*) – specifically, how to avoid getting burned when using hair remover by saying 'may the peace of Allah be upon Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd, as he ordered us to use hair remover'.⁴⁹⁹ This narration is from *al-Kāfī* but, rather than being in a section on Bilqīs there, it is in a section on removing hair. Its placement in *al-Kāfī* implies that al-Kulaynī did not connect it with Bilqīs removing her hair, since it is included among narrations addressing men (who are advised to remove unwanted hair). (It does, incidentally, also bespeak of the long-standing Middle Eastern aversion to hairiness, which might be of anthropological interest, and as well as the observation that hair removal then and now can be a painful endeavour.)

⁴⁹⁷ J. Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, pp. 20, 23. Of course, there is no reason why the marriage had to result in her submission and could not have been a marriage of two powerful equals, but that is not how it is portrayed.

⁴⁹⁸ Mirzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 437, no. 1105 (11).

⁴⁹⁹ al-Majlisī, *Bihār* vol. 14, p. 109, no. 10 (citing *al-Kāfī*). The narration in *al-Kāfī* is in vol. 6, p. 506, no. 13.

This biographical narration from *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm* is the only detailed narration in *Biḥār* to assert that Sulaymān married (or had a relationship with) Bilqīs, a belief which – according to Lassner – is common throughout the Near East but found neither in the Old Testament nor the Qur’ān. However, another mention in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* (and quoted in *Biḥār*) supports the story of Sulaymān marrying Bilqīs and reinforces the trope of Sulaymān’s dominance by engaging in a comparison between Sulaymān and Imām ‘Alī – or, rather, Bilqīs and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ – by saying that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ was married to Imām ‘Alī by choice, whereas Bilqīs was married to Sulaymān by force (*‘unf*), something that is not at all implied in the Qur’ān.⁵⁰⁰ In doing so, this narration continues the trend of calling upon Bilqīs to demonstrate the superiority of Imām ‘Alī – but in, doing so, removes personal agency from Bilqīs.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	‘Do something about that hair!’
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 14: 109, no. 3 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish/Middle Eastern legends
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male authority is necessary • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level Opposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female beauty is de-emphasized.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Al-Kāfī</i> directs this narration at males, while <i>Biḥār</i> connects it with Bilqīs.

5.7 Conclusions

What is the subtext? The narrations referring to Bilqīs take a uniquely Shī‘ī approach by using her story to demonstrate the supremacy of *ahl al-bayt*, in particular, Imām ‘Alī, and are largely devoid of obvious extra-Islamic influences. For whatever reason, pre-Islamic legends and scriptural stories about Bilqīs were, for the most part, not integrated into the Shī‘ī corpus of

⁵⁰⁰ The premise that Sulaymān married Bilqīs by force would seem to contradict the Shī‘ī view that all prophets were infallible, since such an action would be sinful. However, this is not explored in the text here which simply presents it as a merit for Imām ‘Alī. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 39, p. 71; Muḥammad ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 51.

narrations the same way that they were with respect to Eve, Sārah, and Hājar. This makes the narrations about Bilqīs stand out from many of the others, and suggests that these notions about Bilqīs were part of a unique construction of Shīʿī identity (research question 6 – Shīʿī identity). Rather than symbolising the transfer of power from the female to the male, the miraculous transport of Bilqīs’s throne to Sulaymān’s palace is cited in support of the miraculous powers of the Imāms. Explicit comparisons are also made between Sulaymān and Imām ʿAlī. In addition, Bilqīs is included in the chain of prophetic history. Throughout most of the *ḥadīth*, Bilqīs herself is portrayed in a respectful manner and there is tacit approval of her as an independent woman acting in the public sphere. The tacit approval of Bilqīs’s role as a head of state as well as the associations between Bilqīs and Imām ʿAlī challenge the notion that Imām ʿAlī was a misogynist (research question 7 – was Imām ʿAlī a misogynist). Most of the *ḥadīth* do not engage in any discussion of her gender, and, atypically, the narrations mentioning her in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh* do not reinforce patriarchal norms. Therefore, unlike narrations in some other chapters, these narrations oppose the idea of male normativeness and the absence of women of sacred history; however, it should be said that Bilqīs is treated like an ‘honorary male’, in that there is nothing particularly feminine about how she is described (research questions 1 and 3 – male normativeness and the inclusion of the female experience). The exception is one narration which is clearly grounded in pre-Islamic material.

While these portrayals are generally positive, they do reflect an obvious gap in the Shīʿī (and Sunnī) *ḥadīth* literature on Bilqīs: a discussion of the actual biography of Bilqīs. Given that governance, warfare, and diplomacy are primary themes in the Qurʾānic narrative of Bilqīs, one would also expect them to be discussed in the *ḥadīth* on Bilqīs. However, *ḥadīth* on these subjects are absent. If these type of *ḥadīth* did once exist, they have not been passed down; and, in the absence of any evidence, it is not possible to speculate whether this discussion was omitted because she was a woman, or because polemical concerns were more immediate, or for some other reason.

Separate but equal ideology. These narrations go against the separate-but-equal ideology in that they do not ascribe any sort of differences between

woman and man in their essential nature or social role (research question 2 – separate-but-equal ideology). Not only does Bilqīs wield earthly power, but she is also inducted into the chain of *wilāyah* on par with men, and has the honour of possessing Imām ‘Alī’s sacred sword. Therefore, these narrations serve as a counter-example to the idea that the separate-but-equal ideology is represented in Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*. The exception is the narration on hair remover, which is grounded in the pre-Islamic Middle Eastern legends which Lassner describes which remove Bilqīs’s autonomy from her and put her under the guardianship of Sulaymān; however, even that narration conflicts the premise that female beauty should be de-emphasized.

How well do these narrations fit the separate-but-equal ideology? (Narrations with an asterisk are in the Four Books.)		
Premise	Supports	Does not support
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.		Hoping for more than one hopes* Bilqīs and Dhū al-Faqār
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.	Hair remover	Hoping for more than one hopes*
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.		
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.		
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal.		Hoping for more than one hopes*
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).	Hair remover	Hoping for more than one hopes* Throne of Bilqīs
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.		Hoping for more than one hopes*
h) Female chastity is of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized.		Hair remover (female beauty)
i) ‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love.’		

Whose interests are being served? The distinctly Shīʿī as well as polemical character of these narrations indicates that they are primarily serving the interests of identity delineation of Twelver Shīʿah. While, in the narrations on Sārah and Eve, this was done through canonizing cultural values about women, here, it is done through polemical arguments (such as *ṭayy al-arḍ*) and esoteric aspects of *wilāyah* in a manner which is not gendered. Like the ‘counter-narrative’ in the previous sections, these narrations – while not against ‘orthodoxy’ – serve the purpose of those who view Shīʿism as an esoteric spiritual tradition as opposed to focusing on the legalistic or dogmatic aspects. In this case, the implied messages about women are at odds with the dominant paradigm of male authority in jurisprudential discourse (research question 6-Shīʿī identity).

Why does this matter today? In recent years, the Qurʾānic story of Bilqīs has been revisited as a model for women’s participation in matters of state. This is directly relevant to many majority Muslim societies given the tension between the perceived stigma of women participating in the public sphere and the negativity about female leadership in both the Shīʿī and Sunnī tradition with the practical reality that, even in conservative societies such as Iraq and Pakistan, women are participating in the government – and, as Fatima Mernissi demonstrates in *Forgotten Queens*, women have taken positions of power throughout history in the Islamic world, even if it is not commonly acknowledged. The Qurʾānic story of Bilqīs, and the positive portrayal of her here, challenges the belief that females should stay in their homes and not take on positions of responsibility or leadership.

It also brings up the broader question of how religious narrative should be treated. While there is nothing in the Qurʾān that indicates that Bilqīs should only be discussed in a polemical manner, or with respect to her throne, the absence of other material on Bilqīs indicates either a lack of interest or an avoidance of material which was actually about her. While it is not possible to go back in time and record other material about Bilqīs as a human, it is possible to adjust the religious narrative today to include more discussion of Bilqīs as a

person – insofar as she is discussed in the Qur’ān – rather than focusing on the less iconoclastic subject of her throne.

Chapter 6: The Virgin Mary: The Female is Not Like the Male?

6.1 Introduction

In the past few chapters, two trends emerged in how female figures were treated in Shī'ī narrations. In one set of narrations – particularly regarding Eve, Sārah, and Hājar – narrations about female figures reinforce heavily patriarchal norms, such as male ownership and guardianship over women, female seclusion, and the absence of women from sacred history. While narrations about Hājar primarily conveyed the absence of women from sacred history, narrations about Eve and Sārah attributed the need for male authority to a woman's essential nature. This type of narration was most common in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh*. However, another set of narrations – particularly featuring Zulaykhā and Bilqīs, but also including some narrations about Eve – presented a counter-narrative in which women were equally included in sacred history; these narrations invoked esoteric Shī'ī imagery and focused on the narrative of *wilāyah*.

Both trends appear in the narrations about Mary. Some narrations betray a clear discomfort with Mary's presence in the context of male orthodoxy – represented here by the temple in Jerusalem – and her independence. Hence, these narrations resituate her into her 'correct' social place as a woman by diminishing her importance in sacred history, emphasizing Zakariyā's guardianship over her, and deliberating over the tension between religious participation and ritual impurity associated with menstruation. (These mimic the concerns about women's religious participation in male orthodox practice in the Old Testament identified by Bird in Chapter 1.) This is similar to how some Middle Eastern legends about Bilqīs attempted to put her back in the 'proper' position of a woman by putting her under Sulaymān's authority and removing her independent personhood.⁵⁰¹ Like in the previous chapters, these are the narrations that reinforce the values of the separate-but-equal ideology. Thematically, these narrations are at odds with the Qur'ān, which present Mary in opposition to the patriarchal norms of her society. These narrations can be seen as referring to the earthly aspect of Mary.

⁵⁰¹ See Chapter 5.

However, a second set of narrations links Mary to the Imāms, particularly Imām al-Ḥusayn, as part of the narrative of *wilāyah*. Rather than excluding her from sacred history, or removing her agency, they give her a greater role than the Qur’ān. These narrations do not promote patriarchal customs such as male ownership or women’s seclusion. They suggest the spiritual aspect of Mary, and reflect the counter-narrative. This is similar to the narrations in Chapter 2 which included Mary and Eve in the chain of sacred inheritance (*waṣīyyah*).

A great deal of things are *not* said in these narrations about Mary. To someone from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the Islamic Mary can come across as ‘both familiar and strange’.⁵⁰² This Mary is not used to delineate boundaries between Christians and Jews (although she does delineate boundaries between Shī‘īs and Sunnīs).⁵⁰³ This Mary is not the Mother of God. She is not a mysterious figure who figures prominently into theology, worship, or ideals of virginity, purity, and chastity.⁵⁰⁴ While the physiological meaning of Mary’s virginity is never questioned, the definition of ‘virginity’ is expanded to include Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, and virginity itself is not celebrated, such as being a ‘closed gate’, a spring shut up’, or a ‘fountain sealed’.⁵⁰⁵

Instead, the treatment of Mary reflects the Islamic attitude towards marital relations, whereby they are celebrated instead of feared, and early marriage, seclusion, and fidelity are idealized for women instead of virginity.

⁵⁰² Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 85. Perhaps this is why she does not devote much attention in her book to Islamic portrayals of the Virgin Mary.

⁵⁰³ For some reason, Miri Rubin seems to think that the Qur’ānic portrayal of Jesus not being crucified is negative towards Jews, although one might advance the opposite view, since it absolves the Jews of the sin of crucifying Jesus. The Qur’ān is condemning Jews for *saying* that they killed Jesus, not for actually doing it. (Qur’ān 4:153-5) Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, 86.

⁵⁰⁴ This is in contrast to how Marina Warner describes that, in Catholicism, ‘The cult of Mary is inextricably interwoven with Christian ideas about the dangers of the flesh and their special connection with women.’ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, p. 69.

⁵⁰⁵ Marina Warner, *Alone Among Her Sex*, 64; Mary Thurkill, *Chosen Among Women*, p. 50. While some modern observers may read this symbolism in the Shī‘ī portrayal of Mary, the narrations do not lead the reader this way, as will be seen in this chapter. The absence of a focus on the symbolism of the Virgin Mary as a mother results in messages very different from the ones explored in Tina Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women’s Salvation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).

Virginity not treated as powerful or mysterious, or even as preferable.⁵⁰⁶ While these narrations graciously avoid the inherent contradiction here, in that the Virgin Mary and Jesus are both presumed to have been celibate, the narrations still put Mary under male guardianship as if she were a married woman. Lastly, while Miri Rubin provides a fascinating outline of the Christian cult of Mary in pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as the Levant, the customs that she describes are not at all reflected in these narrations, which do not describe a cult of Mary at all.⁵⁰⁷

While there are Muslims who have taken her as an esoteric figure who is central to their belief,⁵⁰⁸ and Mary figures into folk practice in the Middle East, the first set of narrations treats her as an ordinary woman, with a particular focus on ritual impurity. While the second set of narrations does not limit her in the same way, her role in these narrations is to elevate the status of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ; these narrations simultaneously expand her role in sacred history while diminishing her uniqueness.

6.1.1 Mary in the Qurʾān

Because the first set of narrations – the one attempting to restore Mary to her proper position in a patriarchal society – clashes with the thematic treatment of Mary in the Quran, it is useful to begin with an overview of the Qurʾānic discussion of Mary with respect to the treatment of gender, particularly because many narrations centre on Qurʾānic verses about her.

⁵⁰⁶ In Shīʿī law, virginity comes up in a pragmatic sense as a commodity – in that, customarily, a higher bride-price (*mahr*) might be paid to a virgin – and in the dialogue on male guardianship, in that a virgin girl should not marry without the permission of a male guardian (her father, her paternal grandfather, or the *ḥākim sharʿī*); these perceptions of virginity reflect the concerns of a heavily patriarchal society in which marriage was perceived as a sort of ownership.

⁵⁰⁷ For instance, they ‘For certain women decorate a barber’s chair or square seat, spread a cloth on it, set out bread and offer it in Mary’s name on a certain day of the year, and all partake of the bread.’ This is reminiscent of the Iranian-Islamic custom of offering a *sufrah* but does not appear to have parallels in *hadīth*. Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 20-21, 34-39.

⁵⁰⁸ Allāmah al-Majlisī mentions a sect called the ‘Maryamīyyah’ who worshipped her (*Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 237), not to be confused with the twentieth century Ṣūfī group by the same name.

The story of Mary is situated in the broader story of the family of Zakariyā (who, in *ḥadīth*, is identified as Mary's uncle), also known as the 'family of 'Imrān (*Āl-i 'Imrān*)'. After beginning with the letters '*kāf hā yā 'ayn ṣād*',⁵⁰⁹ *Sūrah Maryam* begins with 'A remembrance of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zakariyā' and then continues with Zakariyā's prayer to have a child to carry on his service to Allah despite his old age, and Allah's granting of that prayer. Thus, the narrative begins with the theme of miraculous birth. Zakariyā's desire, as a male, for an heir could be viewed sceptically as a reflection of the view that, in the ancient Semitic world, motherhood was 'a powerful patriarchal mechanism' to insure the continuity of the man's name and wealth, and as a 'patriarchal institution, not as personal tendency of woman.'⁵¹⁰ However, its placement at the beginning of this *sūrah*, as well as in *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān* after Zakariyā sees miracles surrounding Mary, suggests that this request is not to serve the purposes of the patriarchal institution, but rather is an expression of how the creational miracle transcends gender boundaries and is of divine importance, especially since it occurs at the beginning of the *sūrah*. It can also be looked at simply as a human sentiment. In contrast, however, the narrations to be discussed in this chapter do not reinforce the idea that Zakariyā himself wanted a child.⁵¹¹ This is similar to how narrations attribute Ibrāhīm's desire for a child to Sārah. Perhaps, expressing such a desire would have come across as unmanly.

It then shifts to a discussion of Mary, who is discussed in other *sūrahs* as well, particularly *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān*, which provides an earlier part of the story and explains how Mary's mother, Hannah,⁵¹² expecting a boy, dedicates her unborn child to the service of Allah. Mary is born instead, and Hannah says, 'The male is not like the female (*laysa al-dhakar ka-al-unthā*)' (*Qur'ān* 3:36) – a phrase which is frequently referred to in these narrations. Hannah then dedicates her child to the service of Allah, which explained in the *ḥadīth* in *Biḥar*

⁵⁰⁹ The significance of these letters will be discussed in Section 6.3.1.

⁵¹⁰ Esther Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, p. 134.

⁵¹¹ In the Sunnī tradition, the desire to have a child is also attributed to Hannah. Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 73.

⁵¹² While Mary's mother is generally said to have been named Hannah, her name is said to have been Marthā or Wahībah in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 479, no. 4.

(discussed in this chapter) that she was consecrated to serve in the temple (*bayt al-maqdis*) in Jerusalem, which was a job for men. While some Biblical scholars argue that there was an order of pre-pubescent virgins at the temple, what is important here is that these narrations (which will be discussed) treat the temple as a male environment, and present Mary as an exception due to her gender – and hence, treat her presence as a problem.⁵¹³

The next *āyah* says that Allah accepted Mary and made her grow in purity and beauty (Qurʾān 3:37). This suggests that the vow of Mary's mother was fulfilled in Mary, rather than deferred to Mary's son, which is the view given in the narrations. Zakariyā is chosen by lot to care for Mary as she grows up (Qurʾān 3:37, 3:44); that is, the Qurʾān presents him as the guardian of a young child, and not the guardian of a woman (as he is presented in these narrations). Whenever he enters her prayer chamber (*miḥrāb*), he sees that she is receiving sustenance (*rizq*) and asks where it is from; she says it is from Allah, and that Allah grants sustenance to whomever He wills without limit (3:37). Narrations interpret this literally – for instance, as 'summer fruit in winter' and 'winter fruit in summer'.⁵¹⁴ Inspired, Zakariyā prays to Allah to grant him a child (Qurʾān 3:38), and this is where Sūrah Maryam begins (Qurʾān 19:3-6).

Then, angels visit Mary and inform her that her Lord has purified her and chosen her (*iṣṭafāki wa ṭahharaki wa iṣṭafāki ʿalā nisāʾ al-ʿālamīn*) (Qurʾān 3:42), and tell her to worship, prostrate, and bow with the worshippers (Qurʾān 3:48). This adds Mary to the list of women in the Qurʾān who receive divine revelation, and brings up the question of whether Mary should be considered a prophet. She then withdraws from her people (*ahl*) to an 'Eastern place' (Qurʾān 19:16) and 'takes a *ḥijāb*', and an angel appears to her in the form of a man

⁵¹³ Megan Nutzman cites some of the debate on this subject and argues that there were three groups of women who had formal roles in the temple: accused adulteresses, girls who wove the temple curtains, and female Nazirites. Thus, Mary's presence would have had some backing in orthodoxy. She argues this based on the representation of Jewish practice in an apocryphal gospel, the *Protovangelium of James*, thought to date to the 2nd century AD. Megan Nutzman, 'Mary in the *Protovangelium of James*: A Jewish Woman in the Temple?'. See also Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 11.

⁵¹⁴ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 199, no. 8 (citing *Tafsīr ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm*); vol. 14, p. 203, no. 17 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī); vol. 14, p. 204, no. 18 (citing *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*); and vol. 14, p. 204, no. 20 (citing *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*). ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī cites the view of an exegete (whom he does not agree with) saying that these narrations are *isrāʾīliyyāt*. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, under verse 3:37.

telling her she will miraculously conceive a child. The divine spirit is breathed into her, and she conceives (Qur'ān 19:16-22, 3:45-3:47, 21:91). These aspects of the Qur'ānic story are interpreted in various ways in the narrations.

She then withdraws to a remote place, apparently alone, and gives birth next to a palm tree – a scenario obviously different from the New Testament; Shī'ī narrations (to be discussed in the second half of this chapter) also place Mary in Karbalā' instead of Bethlehem.⁵¹⁵ In contrast to the view advanced among some Christians that Mary experienced no pain during childbirth, in the Qur'ān, she is in severe pain, and says that she wishes that she had died (Qur'ān 19:23).⁵¹⁶ To comfort her, she is given dates, and a spring is made to flow by her; thematically, this can be seen to relate to the appearance of Zamzam. (Qur'ān 19:22-25, 23:50) She is then told to take a fast of silence (Qur'ān 19:26), whereupon she returns to her people, who accuse her of indecent behaviour. In response, Jesus speaks from her arms and exonerates her (Qur'ān 19:27-33), something not found in the New Testament but present in an apocryphal gospel.⁵¹⁷

A final mention of Mary is made: 'And Mary the daughter of 'Imrān, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants).' (Qur'ān 66:12, 21:91) Here, what is important is that 'guarding her chastity' is an act that Mary does herself, and which increases her spiritual status; whereas, in the narrations, Zakariyā guards her

⁵¹⁵ This does not mean that Bethlehem is completely excluded from discussion; for instance, al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 14, p. 208, no. 4 says that the Prophet prayed in Bethlehem during his *mī'raj*. An apocryphal gospel places the birth in a cave; however, Joseph is with her, and it is not the desert. Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 29.

⁵¹⁶ In *Qur'an and Woman*, Amina Wadud observes: 'When the time for delivery comes, the Qur'an describes her pains of labour and her statement: "Would that I had died before this time and been long forgotten (rather than to feel such pains)" (19:23). She is like every other woman who bears a child. Despite the centrality of Jesus to Christianity, no similar affirmation of the unique experience of childbirth is given such detailed consideration in any Christian theological work - not even the Bible.' Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, pp. 39-40.

⁵¹⁷ The Arabic Infancy Gospel, thought to date to the fifth-sixth century AD. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M. R. James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). This is also discussed in depth in Husn Abboud, 'Qur'anic Mary's Story and the Motif of Palm Tree and the Rivulet', in *Parole de l'Orient: revue semestrielle des études syriaques et arabes chrétiennes: recherches orientales: revue d'études et de recherches sur les églises de langue syriaque*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 261-280.

chastity for her by secluding her, hence reinforcing the view that a man must enforce a woman's chastity.⁵¹⁸

Throughout the Qur'ānic story, Mary is a central figure – that is, it is about her personal connection with Allah, the angels, and her son. Although Zakariyā is mentioned, he is not portrayed as an authority figure over her; instead, the miracles surrounding her inspire him to pray for his own child. Mary's independence is highlighted by the fact that, in the Islamic tradition, she is neither betrothed nor married, and she is on her own during the traumatic event of childbirth and when facing her people.⁵¹⁹ (One apocryphal gospel – the *Gospel According to the Pseudo-Matthew* – says that Mary refused to be married on the grounds that she had vowed to be a virgin, but that portrayal is different in tone in the Qur'ān and Shīrī narrations, which do not even suggest that she might have married.)⁵²⁰ Thematically, the story of Mary may also relate to the story of the *mubāhilah* (3:61),⁵²¹ which is in the same *sūrah*, and which is often cited as a precedent for women being involved in the socio-political affairs of the community;⁵²² the *mubāhilah* will be discussed more in Chapter 7 in the section on the portrayal of women in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*.

In examining the treatment of gender in the story of Mary in the Qur'ān, Loren Lybarger and Angelika Neuwirth observe that the Qur'ānic norm upsets the patriarchal norms of a Semitic society; Neuwirth theorizes that the Qur'ānic portrayal of Mary as overturning Jewish patriarchy is intentionally intended to upset Jewish sensitivities in order to distinguish Islam from Judaism.⁵²³ Mary's

⁵¹⁸ See discussion of this concept in narrations on Eve and Sārah in Chapters 2 and 3.

⁵¹⁹ As will be discussed in section 6.2.1, one narration says that Zakariyā was with her, and another says that Joseph was with her, but these are outliers.

⁵²⁰ Discussed in Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 27.

⁵²¹ A major premise of *Tafsīr al-Mizān* is that individual *sūrahs* contain thematically related concerns.

⁵²² The *mubāhilah* was an event whereby a dispute between the nascent Muslim community and a group of Christians was resolved by gathering together and praying for Allah to curse the ones who were untruthful; the Prophet brought 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, and the opponents backed down. The *āyah* says: 'Then whoever argues with you about it after [this] knowledge has come to you - say, "Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate earnestly [together] and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars [among us]."'

⁵²³ Angelika Neuwirth, 'Mary and Jesus, Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs', in *Parole de l'Orient revue semestrielle des études syriaques et arabes chrétiennes: recherches*

entire story is one of the male being ‘not like the female’, culminating in a role that would be impossible for a male to fulfil. Not only is Mary dedicated to the temple by her mother – a male space and a male position, but she is commanded by Allah to join the ritual worship that was reserved for male orthodoxy. Then, she has a child without a husband. While she is not guilty of committing a moral sin, she is still violating a social norm of men controlling women’s reproduction which emerges in the narrations on Sārah (Chapters 2 and 3). Hence, she is an aberration. Perhaps, these breaks with normalcy are intended to emphasize the revolution that her son would bring to humankind.⁵²⁴

As a woman who directly receives revelation, Mary challenges the ‘demi-god’ hierarchy (described in Chapter 1) of Allah->man->woman, which is nonetheless reinforced by the narrations emphasizing Zakariyā’s authority over her. This leads to the question of whether Mary should be considered a prophet. This is important in contemporary discourse because a frequent argument is that Allah intended men to be in positions of social and religious authority since all the prophets were male. While the Qur’ān leaves this question open, the general view among Shī’īs and Sunnīs has been that she is not because prophets are male (a tautological argument); however, a minority of Sunnī scholars have held that she was a prophet.⁵²⁵ In his literary survey of the

orientales: revue d'études et de recherches sur les églises de langue syriaque, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 231-260.

⁵²⁴ Loren Lybarger, ‘Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur’ānic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach’, in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 80, no. 2 (April 2000), pp. 240-270. Strangely, Asma Barlas does not discuss Mary significantly in *Believing Women*, which seems odd given Mary’s prominence.

⁵²⁵ Stowasser notes that the Zāhirite school – in particular, Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba – held that that Mary was a prophet, but that most Sunnī scholars rejected the idea of Mary being a Prophet. Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, 77. Sachiko Murata says that Ibn ‘Arabī is ‘apparently’ attributing prophethood to Mary (although there is also debate over whether Ibn ‘Arabī considered Mary a prophet). She also notes that al-Qurṭubī held this view. Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 345. Rawand Osman suggests exegetical mechanisms which suggest that Mary should be considered as being in the line of prophets. Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, 81-83. Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad discuss this question in ‘The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary’, in *The Muslim World*, vol. 79, no. 3-4 (July/October 1989), pp. 161-187. Rawand Osman notes exegetical interpretations whereby Mary can be seen as part of the line of Abrahamic prophets, and she notes that Mary’s presence in Qur’ānic lists of the prophets mimics Fāṭimah’s inclusion in the verse of the *mubāhilah*. For instance, in Qur’ān 21:71-92 and Sūrah Maryam, Mary is mentioned along with a long list of Abrahamic prophets. She cites Hamza Yusuf as noting that Jesus is mentioned as the son of Mary, but Mary is never mentioned as the mother of Jesus (*Umm ‘Īsā*), with the implication that it is Jesus’s honour to be the son of Mary. Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, pp. 79-81.

Qur'anic story of Mary, Husn Abboud suggests there was geographic (i.e. cultural) variance, with Andalusian scholars divided over the question, and Eastern scholars rejecting the idea that she was a prophet. He considers the question of whether Mary should be considered a prophet to have contemporary significance since it reveals the androcentric views of exegetes who argued that she could not have been a prophet, and 'gives Muslim women confidence to claim more authority and space, which is in harmony with Islam's gender equality inherent in its ethical and spiritual vision of its original message, the Qur'an.'⁵²⁶

Here, however, several narrations emphasise that Mary was not a prophet because she is female; this is in keeping with the narration from *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il* (discussed in Chapter 2) explaining that women cannot be prophets or religious judges because Eve was created from Adam's leftovers.⁵²⁷ These narrations codify the normative view that religious authority should be in the hands of men.

Like many Shī'ī narrations, some narrations on the Virgin Mary serve the ultimate purpose of reinforcing the superiority of *ahl al-bayt*; this is particularly pronounced in the narrations implicitly or explicitly comparing Mary with Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (see section 6.3.3). Although Shī'ī narrations indicate that the angels dictated a book to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā',⁵²⁸ and that Fāṭimah was an authoritative source of religious knowledge, Fāṭimah is not viewed as a prophet. Perhaps, for that reason, considering any other woman before her as a prophet would be theologically problematic, since Fāṭimah is supposed to be superior to all other women, including the Virgin Mary. This narration, which relates a polemical discussion rather than being attributed to one of the Imāms, suggests how that might have played out:

⁵²⁶ Husn Abboud, *Mary in the Qur'an: A literary reading* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 130. He also has a good survey of classical and modern scholars' views on why Mary was not a prophet, including Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's, and he observes that Shaykh al-Ṭūsī seemed more interested in questions such as the nature of the *rūḥ*; this is in keeping with the general disinterest in female figures themselves in favour of how they relate to polemical questions found throughout this work. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-144. My own view is that whether or not she should be considered a prophet is a matter of semantics.

⁵²⁷ Mirzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 17, p. 241.

⁵²⁸ *Muṣḥaf Fāṭimah*, said to have been dictated to her by the angel Jibrā'il after her father passed away.

It is narrated that Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr recited ‘*wa mā arsalnā min qablīka min rasūlin wa lā nabiyy* (and We have not sent before you a prophet or a messenger), and no one spoken to by angels (*muḥaddath*).’

I said, ‘And do the angels speak to anyone other than the prophets?’

He said, ‘Maryam was not a prophetess. And Sārah the wife of Ibrāhīm saw the angels and they gave her good news of Iṣḥāq, and after Iṣḥāq Ya‘qūb, and she was not a prophetess. And Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, was spoken to by angels (*a muḥaddathah*), and she was not a prophetess.’⁵²⁹

However, this narration does not categorically reject the idea that there were female prophets. A similar narration in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* adds that the Imāms were spoken to by angels but were not prophets, thereby emphasizing the polemical relevance of this view to belief in the superiority *ahl al-bayt*.⁵³⁰ However, the Qur’ān does describe Mary as a *ṣiddīqah* (lit. ‘honest’, Qur’ān 5:75), and from Qur’ān 4:69, it can be deduced that the *ṣiddīqīn* are an exalted spiritual category, and not just honest folk.⁵³¹ However, what it means for Mary to be a *ṣiddīqah* is not addressed in these narrations.

In sum, the main messages of the Qur’ānic story are that one should have faith in the divine plan – beginning with the conception of Mary as a female; faith in the creative power of God (‘Be and it is’); the inclusion of women in sacred history and spiritual cosmology; divine communication with women as well as men; standing up for faith against social censure; and the continuity of

⁵²⁹ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 43, p. 55 (al-Majlisī does not mention the source). The narration in *Bihār* simply mentions Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr without any mention of Sulaym ibn Qays.

⁵³⁰ Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. M. Bāqir al-Anṣārī al-Zanjānī, 3 vols. (Qum: Nashr al-Hādī, 1415 AH), no. 30. (For ease of reading, narrations in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* have been identified by number rather than page number since the book is not comprised of too many narrations.)

⁵³¹ ‘All who obey Allah and the apostle are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah – of the prophets, the truthful (*ṣiddīqīn*), the witnesses (or martyrs – *shuhadā*), and the righteous. What a beautiful fellowship!’

the prophetic message and prophetic line as a single message. In contrast, the patriarchal narrations on Mary (to be discussed) centre on minor details at the expense of the broader themes – for instance, Mary’s menstrual cycle, who washed her body when she passed away, how long her pregnancy was, and genealogical details. They are devoid of any sense of the spirituality of motherhood as a reflection of the divine creative act. For one seeking to learn more about Mary herself, they come across as dry and disinteresting. In essence, these narrations come across as ‘not seeing the forest for the trees’.

Main themes		
Qur’ān	Patriarchal narrations	The ‘counter-narrative’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of a child as a divine miracle • The male is ‘not like the female’ (3:36) • Mary’s unique role • Divine communication with Mary • Miracles surrounding Mary • Mary as independent • Mary in opposition to patriarchal norms of her society • Mary preserving her chastity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary had a lesser role in the temple • Menstruation excludes women from male religious space • Females are not prophets. • Zakariyā guards Mary’s chastity • Shī’ī polemical arguments which diminish the importance of Mary • Minutiae, such as what type of palm tree was there, or the name of Mary’s mother • Who washed the body of Mary after she passed away • How she conceived, when she conceived, how long the pregnancy was, and when Jesus was born • ‘The male is not like the female’ means that females are less than males 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary in heaven with other women in sacred history • Mary and Karbalā’ • Mary and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ • Mary was beautiful but chaste

6.2 Returning Mary to her expected position in a patriarchal society

Of the narrations which effectively return Mary to her expected place as a woman in a patriarchal society, three narrative strands do it via overtly

gendered concerns, whereas two do it accidentally through the use of Mary and Jesus in Shī'ī polemical arguments. Thematically, in their treatment of gender, many of these narrations conflict with the Qur'ānic story of Mary, although they address specific aspects of the Qur'ānic story. The first three themes to be discussed are those which address gendered concerns: male guardianship, menstruation, and the gendered division of labour.

6.2.1 Zakariyā's role as Mary's caretaker

In the Qur'ān, Zakariyā is portrayed as the caretaker of Mary as a child, rather than the caretaker of Mary as a woman. That is, he is a stand-in for a parent and does not exert ownership or control over Mary as a woman through *qiwāmah* and *wilāyah*.⁵³² In fact, the Qur'ān does not portray Zakariyā as an authority figure over Mary at all; instead, Zakariyā is amazed by Mary's spiritual stature and inspired by her example. The only entities in the Qur'ān who command Mary are angels.

However, the narrations reflect the cultural assumption that an adult woman must have a male guardian, and present Zakariyā in this role. One narration describes Zakariyā as being 'the caretaker (*kafīl*) of [Jesus's] mother' – that is, the guardian of an adult woman – and being 'in the position of Jesus's father' (which has a disturbingly incestuous feel).⁵³³ While it is conceivable that in a society focused on patrilineage, there would be a subconscious desire to find a human father figure for Jesus, giving Jesus a father figure takes away the entire point of the virgin birth, and goes against the Qur'ānic emphasis of Jesus being the son of *Mary*. Placing the adult Mary under Zakariyā's guardianship also takes away the spirit of her independent action which led her to attain to her spiritual status.

Zakariyā is also portrayed as enforcing Mary's chastity; this is in contrast to the verse that says that Mary guarded her own chastity, or that she – herself, under her own volition – 'took a *ḥijāb*'. While the meaning of 'take a *ḥijāb*' is not clear from the text, in two narrations, Zakariyā orders Mary to 'take a *ḥijāb* away from the (male) worshippers' – that is, to seclude herself.⁵³⁴ Additionally, a *tafsīr* narration explains that 'guarded her chastity' means that 'she was not seen', thereby changing it from an active to a passive act.⁵³⁵ While the Qur'ān implies

⁵³² See Chapter 1 for a discussion of these concepts.

⁵³³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 137, no. 103.

⁵³⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 203, no. 17 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī); vol. 14, p. 204, no. 20 (citing *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*). It should be noted that one of these narrations promoting women's seclusion in the name of Mary is quite odd – for one thing, it says that Mary lived for more than a thousand years – and can be dismissed based on its content. (It will be discussed in section 6.2.3.)

⁵³⁵ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 206, no. 1 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

that Mary is alone when giving birth, in one narration, Zakariyā follows her; in another, Joseph accompanies her.⁵³⁶ All of these narrations place Mary back under male guardianship, and reinforce the belief that it is the man's responsibility to enforce the chastity of his womenfolk by controlling their movements; it also promotes women's seclusion as the Islamic norm. These portrayals go against the contemporary view of Islamic feminists that *ḥijāb* can be a woman's independent choice in controlling access to her body. It should be noted that this portrayal is not limited to Islam; that is, early and mediaeval Christian scholars also promoted Mary as 'the perfect model for all young virgins to imitate: be chaste and stay at home';⁵³⁷ this is a reminder that values that have become associated with Islam today were not limited to Muslims.

Additionally, Zakariyā is portrayed as the first person to criticize Mary for bringing back a child without a husband. This is in contrast to the Qur'ān, where Mary's people as a whole criticize her. In explaining the *āyah*, a narration says:

[Zakariyā said:] 'O Maryam, you have brought something amazing. O sister of Hārūn, your father was not a bad man, nor your mother unchaste.' And the meaning of that is, 'O sister of Hārūn, if Hārūn was a corrupt adulterer, you too would be like him. From where have you brought this disaster and shame which you brought to the Children of Isrā'īl?'⁵³⁸

This narration abounds with cultural assumptions. First, Zakariyā – the male guardian whose job is to enforce her chastity – is the one who is most concerned about her child, even though he should have been the last person to

⁵³⁶ There is one exception which mentions Joseph and does not fit with the Qur'ānic narrative, in that it describes Mary as being with Joseph instead of being alone, and eating walnuts instead of dates. It is, however, interesting in that it suggests popular Christian practice and belief at that time. al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 212, no. 9 (citing 'Ilal al-Sharā'ī'). The narration reads: 'When Maryam, peace be upon her, took refuge from childbirth in the trunk of the palm tree, the cold grew intense for her, so Yūsuf the carpenter went out for wood and made something like a fence around her. Then he set it on fire, and the heat from its burning fell on her from all sides until she was warm. And he broke apart seven walnuts for her which he found outside and fed her, and for that reason Christians light fires and play with walnuts on Christmas Eve.' However, in the Shī'ī and Sunnī traditions, it is generally presumed that she never married.

⁵³⁷ Mary Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women*, p. 5.

⁵³⁸ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 209, no. 6 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

accuse her of misconduct. He might at least have considered the possibility that she did not wilfully engage in relations out of wedlock;⁵³⁹ hence, this reaction would come across as blaming the victim – an issue of concern in contemporary Islamic discourse about women. Next, there is the assumption that sexual morality runs in the family; while the people in the Qur’ān cite both the father and mother in that regard, the narration itself mentions only a male relative (Hārūn). Additionally, this *tafsīr* sends the message that a woman’s unchastity is a source of communal and familial shame – something not found in the Qur’ān but present in the Middle Eastern heritage. These ideas are implied in a narration that says that Mary’s longing for death is due to shame over having a child without a husband – that is, when Mary said in the Qur’ān ‘Would I had died before this and were a thing forgotten’, she meant: ‘What will I tell my uncle [Zakariyā]? What will I tell the Children of Isrā’īl?’⁵⁴⁰ This is opposed to the more immediate implication in the text that her distress was due to the pain and the difficult circumstances of the birth. In short, this narration and the previous ones convey some of the most ardent stereotypes about women in Islam that many of today’s Muslims exert their efforts to refute.

There is one irony in these narrations, however, and that is that the example of Mary is brought up in a set of narrations about the *fiqh* question about what should be done if a woman who is travelling without a male *maḥram* or female companions passes away – that is, who should wash the body?⁵⁴¹ The narration then explains that just as Jesus washed Mary’s body after she died, Imām ‘Alī washed the body of Fāṭimah. This is one of the more frequent narrations about Mary; perhaps one reason is that washing bodies fits into Shī‘ī jurisprudence, whereas an independent (and, as will be seen, menstruating) Mary in the temple does not. This narration can also be seen in the context of a Ḥanafī view that a man should not wash the body of his deceased wife; given

⁵³⁹ Lesley Hazelton considers the scenario that rather being a miraculous birth, the birth of Jesus was due to assault, and ‘virgin’ was simply used to mean ‘young woman’, at length in *Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography*. Of course, the Qur’ān insists otherwise.

⁵⁴⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, pp. 208-9, no. 6 (citing *Tafsīr al-Ayyāshī*).

⁵⁴¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 459, no.3; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 440, no. 67 (1422); al-Majlisī, *al-Kāfī* vol. 3, p. 159, no. 13; Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Istibṣār fī mā Ikhtalafa min al-Akhhbār*, ed. al-Sayyid Ḥasan al-Khursān, 3 vols. (Tehran: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1390 AH), vol. 1, p. 200, no. 703 (15).

the discomfort expressed with this by the narrators in the *aḥādīth*, this suggests a cultural taboo on that as well. This usage calls attention to the dichotomy here: while, culturally, these narrations about Mary convey the belief that a woman should be under male guardianship, in practice, this was codified in Shī‘ī *fiqh* in a much more limited fashion than in Sunnī *fiqh*; for instance, there is no formal stricture that a woman must travel with a *maḥram*. This is another example of how ideologies do not always make sense, especially when they are deconstructed.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Zakariyā’s role as Mary’s caretaker
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 8:137, no. 103 (narration begins on page 131). • <i>Bihār</i> 14:203, no. 17 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbīyā</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 14: 204, no. 20 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 14:206, no. 1 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 14:209, no 6 (citing <i>Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural values where women are disempowered
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal. • Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family). • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Female chastity is of paramount importance
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing Mary’s importance in sacred history by giving Jesus a human father figure • Male guardianship of women • Men enforce women’s chastity.

6.2.2 Menstruation

Many of the narrations emphasizing Zakariyā’s role as Mary’s guardian also discuss Mary’s menstruation. While menstruation is also discussed with respect to Eve and Sārah, the focus on Mary’s menstruation seems excessive, particularly since it is not mentioned in the Qur’ān. Perhaps some people felt a sense of conflict between the verse saying that Mary was ‘chosen and purified and selected above all women’ (*iṣṭafāki wa ṭahharaki wa iṣṭafāki ‘alā nisā’ al-‘alamīn*, Qur’ān 3:42), and the idea that Mary menstruated, since, according to Islamic law, menstruation is a source of ritual impurity. While ‘purified’ can easily be interpreted in a metaphorical sense, these narrations focus on

physical impurity.⁵⁴² These concerns are not limited to Islam; with respect to Judaism, it has been noted that the ban on female ordination was due to the ‘ancient fear of menstruation’s power to pollute’, and some churches maintained a taboo on menstruating women entering.⁵⁴³

This leads to the question of whether or not she actually menstruated, particularly in light of the narration (discussed in Chapter 3) that the daughters of the prophets do not menstruate. For instance, Ṭabrisī theorizes that *ṭahhāraki* could refer to the removal of her monthly cycle,⁵⁴⁴ particularly due to the belief that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ did not menstruate. However, these narrations insist that Mary menstruated, thereby – in the view of those who considered menstruation to be a defect – reinforcing the superiority of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’.⁵⁴⁵ For instance, in one narration, it is asked, ‘Was [Mary] afflicted with what women are afflicted with in their bleeding?’ The response is, ‘Yes, she was a woman among women.’ This wording conveys a negative view of menstruation.⁵⁴⁶ This narration also explains ‘purified’ as meaning that her forefathers and foremothers were ‘purified’ from unchaste behaviour – something considered to be a prerequisite for the forebears of the Imāms, but which also negates Qur’ānic implication that Mary’s purification is due to her own spirituality, not her ancestry. On the other hand, by maintaining that she menstruated, these narrations do situate Mary in a position of relevance to the ‘ordinary woman’, as opposed to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, who does not menstruate.

Mary’s menstruation introduces problems with respect to Islamic law which were, apparently, deeply perplexing. (They are less perplexing if one considers that Islamic law is supposed to be the will of God, and Mary was simply obeying God.) First, Mary was dedicated to living in the temple full time and was not allowed to leave; otherwise, she would have broken her vow. However, it is unlawful for a woman to be inside a mosque during her monthly

⁵⁴² For a discussion of Sunnī head-scratching on this, see Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁴³ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 78, citing Joan Morris.

⁵⁴⁴ Cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 14, p. 192.

⁵⁴⁵ Karen Ruffle, ‘An Even More Perfect Creation’.

⁵⁴⁶ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 14, p. 192, no. 2 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

cycle.⁵⁴⁷ Second, Mary was commanded to perform ritual worship; however, it is incorrect for a woman to perform the *ṣalāt* during her monthly cycle. And, third, Mary would have no opportunity to ‘make up’ her missed worship since she was committing to worshipping perpetually. Atypically, these narrations bring up the paradox but do not present a resolution,⁵⁴⁸ suggesting that some Shī‘ah felt a tension between female religious participation and menstruation. The discomfort here is ironic given that a narration in *Kitāb Sulaym* says that the Prophet said that no one in a state of ritual impurity could enter the Prophetic mosque *except* for his daughter or his wives; and yet, that apparent conflict goes unnoticed.⁵⁴⁹

Some narrations also explain the phrase ‘the male is not like the female’ to mean that females menstruate. Textually, the expression ‘the male is not like the female’ favours women, since a lesser thing is compared to a greater thing, rather than the other way around. For instance, one would say ‘failing is not like passing’ to indicate that passing is better than failure, not vice versa.⁵⁵⁰ However, narrations take this phrase to mean the opposite – namely, that ‘the female is not like the male’ (hence, the title of this chapter). Some narrations say that the female is not like the male because a female menstruates, and so this is why Mary’s presence in the temple presented a problem.⁵⁵¹ Another interpretation is that the female is not like the male because females are not messengers, and so Mary could not fulfil the prophecy (mentioned in *al-Kāfi*) that her mother would give birth to a prophet.⁵⁵²

The real issue here is not the intricacies of ritual law, but rather why there is such discomfort with Mary’s menstruation. Building on Mary Douglas’s view in

⁵⁴⁷ This is discussed in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 202, no. 13; for a discussion of the associated Islamic laws, see al-Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, *Islamic Laws According to the Fatwas of His Eminence a-Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani*, trans. Mohammad Ali Ismail (London: World Federation of KSIMC, 2015), 79-80, 99.

⁵⁴⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* vol. 3, p. 105, no. 4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 192, no. 2 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 201, no. 12 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā‘i*’), al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 204, no. 19 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

⁵⁴⁹ Sulaym ibn Qays, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*, *ḥadīth* 51.

⁵⁵⁰ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, under verse 3:37.

⁵⁵¹ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol 14:192, no. 2 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*); vol. 14, p. 201, no. 12 (citing ‘*Ilal al-Sharā‘i*’); *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 204, no. 19 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*). For instance, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 204, no. 19 says specifically: ‘She said: “O Lord! I have given birth to a female and the female is not like the male.” The female menstruates and is taken from the mosque, and the one in service never leaves the mosque.’

⁵⁵² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 535, no. 1.

Purity and Danger that the Jews preoccupied themselves with ritual impurity as a psychological reaction to being a minority, Mary Thurlkill and Hamid Dabashi imply that the early Shī‘ah were meticulous about ritual purity as a means of reinforcing communal boundaries and to cope with being a threatened community.⁵⁵³ However, this neglects the discomfort with menstruation in Sunnī *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* texts, particularly the narrations on Eve’s menstruation.⁵⁵⁴ Sachedina argues that the excessive focus on menstruation in Shī‘ī ritual law (simply the definition of what constitutes menstruation is complicated) is due to the exclusion of women from the formative era of law-making and an awkwardness among men in trying to canonize, and perhaps control, female physiology.⁵⁵⁵

These narrations also demonstrate how religious law pertaining to menstruation excludes women from religious space and religious authority, and implies that religious authority must be in the hands of men. It also supports Bird’s view (see Chapter 1) that ancient Jewish women favoured devotional practices where ritual purity was not a concern. It has been observed that in a society which is male-dominated but in which women have access to some kinds of power, the ‘common fact of menstruation among all women challenges the social order of a male-dominated society and defines and bounds a female subgroup within the society, thereby creating a new separate and dangerous order [...] it in such societies that [a] strong concept of menstrual pollution will arise, signalling the contradiction.’⁵⁵⁶ This observation fits the phenomenon here, as well as the exclusion of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ from menstruation (discussed subsequently on the section on virginity), which removes her from that dynamic and makes her less of a threat. It makes little difference to the devotional life of the average laywoman if, while menstruating, she cannot enter

⁵⁵³ Mary Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women*, pp. 41-42; Hamid Dabashi, *Shi‘ism: A Religion of Protest*, p. 82.

⁵⁵⁴ See discussion and citations in Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, p. 30.

⁵⁵⁵ A. Sachedina, ‘Woman Half-the-Man? Crisis of Male Epistemology in Islamic Jurisprudence’.

⁵⁵⁶ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, p. 117, citing T. Buckley and A. Gottlieb (eds.), *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Mestruation*.

a mosque, say ritual prayers, or recite certain parts of the Qur'ān.⁵⁵⁷ It particularly makes little difference in a society where women are discouraged from attending mosques anyway.

However, it does make a difference when a woman takes tentative steps towards religious authority. First, in my experience, menstruation is cited as one reason why women are unsuited for positions of religious authority. Second, classes at religious seminaries are often held at mosques, and even if a woman were permitted to attend, she would be unable to attend all the sessions. Lastly, this can be deeply awkward; for instance, sometimes men will schedule speeches for women to present in spaces requiring religious purity, such as mosques, or assume they will be able to provide religious guidance to visitors in mosques without considering that this may pose an embarrassing problem.

In sum, the discomfort surrounding Mary's menstruation reinforces the view that the male is normative and the female is the exception. Religious orthodoxy is for men, and women cannot participate fully because they menstruate; the fact that God Himself ordered Mary do to so creates an unsolvable problem. These narrations also convey an inherent discomfort with female reproductive physiology and the sense that it needs to be controlled. At the same time, however, they make Mary more relevant to the ordinary woman precisely because she does menstruate, whereas Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' does not. This is in contrast to a second set of narrations (discussed in section 6.3.3) which says that Mary did not menstruate.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	The menstruation paradox
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 3:105, no. 4 • <i>Bihār</i> 14:192, no. 2 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>). • <i>Bihār</i> 14:201, no. 12 (citing <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i</i>)

⁵⁵⁷ Generally, jurists limit the restriction to four verses which require prostration; however, some jurist extends that prohibition to the recitation of each chapter that those verse are in. Because a verse from one of those chapters is in the famous Shī'ī text *Du'a Kumayl*, which is traditionally recited on Thursday nights, following that jurisprudential view would disqualify a woman from reciting it regularly. Thus, it is clear how seemingly simple legislation about menstruation has far-reaching implications. For a discussion of the associated Islamic laws, see al-Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, *Islamic Laws According to the Fatwas of His Eminence a-Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani*, trans. Mohammad Ali Ismail (London: World Federation of KSIMC, 2015), 79-80, 99.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 14:204, no. 19 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurisprudence
Separate-but-equal ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male authority is necessary. • Women are inferior because they menstruate.

6.2.3 Mary, the domestic servant

Lastly, there is the assertion – albeit less frequent – that Mary’s job at the temple was to serve the worshippers (possibly, food).⁵⁵⁸ This puts Mary in a characteristically female role – domestic servant – and continues the trend of making her an exception to men, thereby continuing to return her to her correct position with respect to patriarchal social and religious norms. Both narrations that mention this also cite the verse ‘the male is not like the female’; while one connects this to menstruation, the other specifically says ‘the male is not like the female in service’. Essentially, ‘the male is not like the female’ is taken to refer to the gendered division of labour. This narration also says that Mary only continued her service role until puberty, at which time Zakariyā ordered her to separate herself (‘take a *hijāb*’) from the worshippers; that is, a female may only be present in male or orthodox religious space in childhood. In contrast, in the Qur’ān, Mary’s role increases rather than decreases after she reaches childbearing age.

It should be noted that one of these narrations is extremely odd, to the degree that ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī – who usually tries to integrate unusual narrations – comments on its peculiarity. For one thing, it says that Mary was born 500 years before Jesus and lived 500 years after ‘Imrān; during all this time, she guarded her chastity (which does, at least, place that feat in a new light).⁵⁵⁹ The phraseology of this narration also has Christian connotations, in that the word used for ‘serving’ (*tanāwiluhum*) also means ‘to give communion’, and the word ‘*kanīсах*’ (which also means ‘church’) is used for the temple. Therefore, it is hard to give this narration credence. However, on a practical level, it reflects a desire for Mary to be re-integrated into a paradigm of socially acceptable gender roles; the use of Christian phraseology may also suggest an extra-Islamic influence; given the prominence of Christianity in the Middle East, one would expect that to be more prominent in these narrations.

⁵⁵⁸ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 203, no. 17 (citing *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*’ by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī); *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 204, no. 20 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

⁵⁵⁹ It is possible that this narration could have emerged in part from a conflation of the Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist with Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, mentioned in the Bible as a prophet in Jerusalem and who would have lived around 520 BC (Ezra 5:1; Matthew 23:35).

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Mary's job at the temple was to serve the worshippers
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biḥār</i> 14:203, no. 17 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i>, with the chain of narration to Shaykh al-Ṣādūq; this is the narration with the Christian wording and which says she lived a thousand years) • <i>Biḥār</i> 14:204, no. 20 (citing <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christianity (<i>Biḥār</i> 14:203) • Division of labour in Semitic societies
Separate-but-equal ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal. • Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gendered labour: Mary's job was to serve the worshippers • Male guardianship • Women's seclusion
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary lived for a thousand years

Apart from these two narrations, little is mentioned about women's domestic activities; this is in keeping with the general absence of discussion about this in other chapters, and reinforces the theory that the contemporary emphasis on a woman's domestic role is a reaction to modernity. Only in one narration is Mary's weaving alluded to:

'Īsā was raised [to the heavens] in a wool garment from the weaving of Mary, and the fabric of Maryam, and the sewing of Maryam. And when he arrived in the heavens, it was called out: 'O 'Īsā, cast off from yourself the adornment of this world.'⁵⁶⁰

The image of a caring mother weaving clothing for her child fits in with what one would expect; the garment may have been of sentimental value too since some narrations say that Mary died before Jesus.⁵⁶¹ However, what is notable here is that Mary's weaving is treated as superfluous and as against the *zuhd* (asceticism) that Jesus is associated with in the Shī'ī tradition, which emphasises that he slept on the bare earth and ate only wild plants – that is, he

⁵⁶⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 338, no. 9 (citing *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*).

⁵⁶¹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* vol. 1, p. 459, no.3; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 440, no. 67 (1422); al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 159, no. 13; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Istibṣār*, vol. 1, p. 200, no. 703 (15).

had neither a worldly home nor worldly possessions. It is possible that this narration represents the Ṣūfī-esque strand of thought focusing on spirituality instead of earthly gender roles.⁵⁶² As such, it sends a different message about woman's work than the narration about Ismā'īl's wife (see Chapter 3) in which she and the other women weave a covering for the Ka'bah.⁵⁶³

6.2.4 'I and my father are one thing'

While Stowasser notes some of the above gendered concerns in the Sunnī tradition, one of the distinctly Shī'ī trends of thought in these narrations is how Mary is used to defend Shī'ī beliefs. This is particularly apparent in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faqīh*, and may reflect a greater need by al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣādūq to defend Shī'īsm. However, a side effect of the way Mary is discussed is that her importance in sacred history is diminished in favour of a custom of patrilineage.

One of the more surprising areas where Mary occurs is with respect to the succession of the Imāmate, as well as the characteristically Shī'ī belief in *badā'*. (*Badā'* is belief in Allah's capacity to change what He has destined.)⁵⁶⁴ This occurs twice in *al-Kāfī* and once in *al-Faqīh*; as well as in *Bihār* from other sources.⁵⁶⁵ The gist of these narrations is that Mary's mother received a prophecy that her son would be a great messenger of the Children of Isrā'īl. (The specifics of this prophecy are not mentioned in the Qur'ān.) Therefore, she dedicated her unborn child to the temple. However, the child turned out to be a girl – Mary – and it would be Mary's son who would fulfil the prophecy; therefore, the prophecy skipped a generation. This is then applied to the

⁵⁶² For a helpful compilation of Jesus in Shī'ī narrations showing his association with *zuhd*, see Mahdi Muntazar Qaim, *Jesus through Shi'ite Narrations* (Elmhurst, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an 2005). Most of the narrations he cites are from *Bihār*. Of course, one can simply read the relevant section of *Bihār* as well.

⁵⁶³ al-Majlisī, *Bihār* 14:273, no. 9 (citing *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*).

⁵⁶⁴ See Afzal Sumar, 'Bada: Change in Divine Destiny and Decree', in *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), pp. 33-42; Reza Berenjkari, 'In Defence of Bada', in *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Autumn 2013), pp. 323-336.

⁵⁶⁵ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 535; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, p. 195; al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 155, no. 3564; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 199, no. 7 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 200, no. 8 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*); and, according to 'Allāmah al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 203 no. 16 and 17 (both citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī). Additionally, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 14, p. 205 uses the example of Mary and Jesus to give a similar message only with respect to the *amr* (presumably, the Mahdī) being a descendant of one of the Imāms.

Imāmate, where the Imām says that just as Jesus and Mary were ‘one thing’, ‘I and my father are one thing.’ For instance, in a narration in *al-Kāfi*, a Wāqifi (i.e. one of the Shī‘ah who believed that the Imāmate stopped at Imām al-Kāzīm, the seventh Imām) says to Imām Riḍā, ‘May Allah grant you the fate to claim for yourself what your father [Imām al-Kāzīm] claimed for himself.’ Imām Riḍā replies:

‘Īsā is from Maryam and Maryam is from ‘Īsā, and Maryam and ‘Īsā are one thing, and I am from my father and my father is from me, and I and my father are one thing.⁵⁶⁶

The attribution to Imām al-Riḍā is more pertinent because of the context of the Wāqifs.

The idea that the Imām and his father are ‘one thing’ is a standard expression of Shī‘ī theology, in that all of the Imāms are seen as expressions of the same light and bearers of the same message. A commonly cited narration that is: ‘The first of us is Muḥammad, the middle of us is Muḥammad, and the last of us is Muḥammad.’⁵⁶⁷ The inclusion of Mary in that context, however, is atypical. On the one hand, it implies that Mary is elevated to the same level of importance as men in the sacred chain of inheritance of *waṣīyyah*. The idea that Mary is used to support the cause of the Imāmate also reflects positively on her importance in the Shī‘ī worldview. However, the idea that Mary herself did not fulfil the prophecy, and that the prophecy merely skipped a generation, reduces her importance in the sacred narrative; one of these narrations also emphasizes that Mary could not have fulfilled the prophecy because females cannot be messengers.⁵⁶⁸ Additionally, while the Qur’ān portrays her as a sacred figure with a unique role, the perception of her and Jesus being ‘one thing’ also removes her unique importance.

⁵⁶⁶ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* 6:195, no. 6. The speaker is Ibn Abī Sa‘īd al-Makārī. The Imām curses him, and the narration concludes by saying that Ibn Abī Sa‘īd fell into poverty afterwards and died while homeless.

⁵⁶⁷ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 25, p. 363, no. 23 (citing a *Kitāb al-Mukhtasar*).

⁵⁶⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 535, no. 1.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I and my father are one thing'
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 1:535, no. 1 • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 6:195, no. 6 • <i>al-Faḡīh</i> 3:155 no. 3564 • <i>Biḥār</i> 14:199, no. 7 (citing <i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Biḥār</i> 14:200, no. 8 (citing <i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • According to 'Allāmah al-Majlisī, also <i>Biḥār</i> 14:203 no. 16 and 17 (both citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Shī'ī content (<i>badā'</i>, Imāmate)
Separate-but-equal ideology	n/a
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both inclusion and exclusion of Mary from sacred history

6.2.5 Matrilineage

The other polemical use of Mary ends up promoting matrilineality. It takes the form of a discussion between Imām al-Bāqir and Abū al-Jārūd (a famous Zaydī, i.e. not a follower of Imām al-Bāqir).⁵⁶⁹ They are debating which branch of the Prophet's descendants are more closely related to him – a debate that would have been particularly relevant in the 'Abbāsīd era due to the 'Abbāsīds' claim that they had a greater claim to kinship to the Prophet because they were related to the Prophet through his male kin, although they were not direct descendants of the Prophet. However, Imām al-Bāqir argues that direct descent from the Prophet through a woman (Fāṭimah al-Zahrā') is a closer genealogical connection since, in the Qur'ān, Jesus is described as being related to the line of Abrahamic prophets, and yet his only genealogical connection to them is through Mary. Of course, the underlying presumption in this narration that the man who has closer kin ties to the Prophet should hold religious authority is neither acknowledged nor addressed, but it should be noted that such presumptions contribute to the canonization of a tribalistic worldview as well as the assumption that religious authority must be held by men.

⁵⁶⁹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 317, no. 501.

This defence of matrilineage is ironic since most Shī‘ī scholars adopted the view that lineage is patrilineal – for instance, in deciding who is a *sayyid* for the purpose of *khums* – and treat Fā‘imah al-Zahrā’ an exception, although there is a minority view that a child should be considered *sayyid* if his or her mother or father is.⁵⁷⁰ It has been suggested that matrilineage held more import in the Prophetic and Umayyad eras; whereas, in the ‘Abbāsīd era, there was a shift away from the importance of matrilineage parallel to the increasing exclusion of women from Islamic society,⁵⁷¹ and this narration is attributed to the cusp of that transitional period. While narrations such as this could have set a precedent for the scholarly recognition of matrilineage, they did not. Perhaps, as Marina Warner suggests, matrilineage was considered threatening in a patriarchal world since ‘[m]atriliny greatly diminishes the social disruptiveness of a wife’s adultery, while patriliny requires first and foremost the chastity of a wife’, although of course the Qur’ān condemns adultery for both men and women.⁵⁷² Matrilineage may have been more relevant before the time of the Prophet, due to the social acceptability of some more colourful marriage arrangements including polyandry which, as Joseph Schacht put it, made it ‘difficult to distinguish between marriage and prostitution.’⁵⁷³

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Matrilineage
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 8: 317, no. 501
Reflects	
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male authority is necessary in society and in a family.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity of matrilineage • Religious authority is held by the man who is more closely related to the Prophet.

6.3 The counter-narrative: Mary and *wilāyah*

⁵⁷⁰ For instance, with respect to eligibility for *khums* or *zakāt*. Bāqir Sharif al-Irwani, *Durūs Tamhīdiyyah fī al-Fiqh al-Istidlālī*, vol. 1, p. 218, citing *al-Hadā‘iq al-Nādhirah*, vol. 12, p. 396.

⁵⁷¹ Teresa Bernheimer, *The ‘Alids: The First Family of Islam, 750-1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 37. This shift may be reflected in the rapidly diminishing amount of information available about the mothers of the Imāms in the ‘Abbāsīd era, to the point where their names and ethnic origins are not agreed upon.

⁵⁷² Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 144.

⁵⁷³ Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton, 1981), p. 7.

Intentionally or accidentally, the above narrations reinforce the patriarchal norms of a Semitic society. They reduce Mary's importance in sacred history, treat orthodox religion and religious authority as male, and promote cultural norms pertaining to male guardianship and women's seclusion. In contrast, this next set of narrations, which consists of uniquely Shī'ī material and addresses specifically Shī'ī concerns, situates Mary in the narrative of *wilāyah* with other sacred figures, regardless of gender. These narrations are thematically most similar to the narrations about Bilqīs, and convey a different set of assumptions about the nature and role of women. Unlike the above set, these narrations also largely do not reinforce premises of the separate-but-equal ideology.

6.3.1 Mary and Karbalā': Bridging the creational and apocalyptic

One of the unique features of Shī'ī narrations about Mary is the strong association between Mary and Karbalā'. This is particularly apparent in the early Shī'ī compilation of narrations known as *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, which discusses the merits of sacred sites, but also appears in the narrations discussed here, including the Four Books.

This connection begins with the letters 'kāf hā' yā' 'ayn ṣād' which are at the beginning of Sūrah Maryam. A narration relates that these letters refer to Karbalā' – specifically, the *kāf* stands for 'Karbalā'', the *hā'* stands for '*halāk al-ītrah al-ṭāhirah*' (the destruction of the purified progeny, i.e. of the Prophet); the *yā'* stands for Yazīd (who sent the army against Imām al-Ḥusayn); the 'ayn stands for '*atash*, or the thirst of al-Ḥusayn in Karbalā'; and the *ṣād* stands for *ṣabr*, or the patience of al-Ḥusayn (and his survivors, such as Zaynab bint 'Alī). The narration relates that this explanation was given to Zakariyā when he asked Allah to teach him about the five names (Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn), and he wondered why he shed tears when he heard the fifth name.⁵⁷⁴ Elsewhere in the Shī'ī tradition, Imām al-Ḥusayn is compared to Yaḥyā, the son

⁵⁷⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 178, no. 14 (citing *al-Ihtijāj*).

of Zakariyā.⁵⁷⁵ Placing Karbalā' in the context of Sūrah al-Maryam reinforces the link between the story of Mary and Imām al-Ḥusayn, as well as the sense that sacred figures shared in a united narrative of *wilāyah* transcending time. This explanation of *kāf hā' yā' ayn ṣād* is also mentioned in another narration – albeit one with dubious sourcing – which says that Imām 'Alī told it to his daughter Zaynab while she was teaching in her home, thus making this one of the few narrations to actually include women in the actual narration (as opposed to being narrations in which men talk about women without women actually being present). The idea of Zaynab teaching also stands in opposition to the narration about Eve treating men as gatekeepers of knowledge.⁵⁷⁶

A recurring connection is that Mary gave birth in Karbalā'. One narration in *al-Tahdhīb* says:

She left Damascus until she came to Karbalā' and gave birth to him in a corner of the grave of al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, and then she returned that night.⁵⁷⁷

Since travelling from Karbalā' to Damascus in one night would have been unfeasible, this narration implies the use of *ṭayy al-arḍ*, and hence – like the narrations on the throne of Bilqīs – serves the polemical cause of proving that *ṭayy al-arḍ* was possible for sacred figures. This narration also presupposes that Mary was no longer in Jerusalem – perhaps, having left the temple due to puberty (in contrast with the narrations that talk about her menstruating while assigned to the temple). A narration in *al-Kāfī* says that the river flowing by her was the Euphrates,⁵⁷⁸ and another narration says that Mary and Jesus prayed together at Masjid Burāthā, which is today a minor pilgrimage site associated

⁵⁷⁵ See Chapter 25 and Chapter 29 of Ibn Qūlawayh's *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* for narrations connecting them. Ja'far ibn Muḥammad Ibn Qūlawayh, (d. 368 AH), *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* (n.p.: Nashr al-Fiqāhah, 1417 AH).

⁵⁷⁶ It is cited from 'some books' (not a strong indicator of the provenance of the narration) in *al-Khaṣā'is al-Zaynabiyyah* by al-Sayyid Nūr al-Dīn al-Jazā'irī (d. 1384 AH). The narration about Eve is in al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḡīh*, vol. 3, p. 379, no. 4336.

⁵⁷⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb* vol. 6, p. 73, no. 8 (139).

⁵⁷⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 479, no. 4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 216, no. 17 (citing *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 217, no. 19 (citing *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 237, no. 19 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

with Imām ‘Alī in Baghdad.⁵⁷⁹ (The mention of the narration about the Euphrates in *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt* is significant in that *Baṣā’ir* predates the Four Books by a century.) Some narrations also say that no one was born after a six-month pregnancy except for ‘Īsā ibn Maryam and al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, thereby reinforcing the link between them.⁵⁸⁰

Situating Mary in Karbalā’ has a dual function. Because of her prominence in the Qur’ān (as well as the Near Eastern Christian tradition), it reinforces the centrality of Karbalā’ as a sacred site throughout all time, not only after the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn. It reinforces the perception that the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn was not just a skirmish over leadership, but rather was pre-destined and had cosmic significance. Simultaneously, because Karbalā’ is already described in narrations as having creational significance, and as having a sanctity rivalling that of Mecca,⁵⁸¹ it connects her to creational motifs. Even outside the Shī’ī tradition, the Euphrates evokes images of the cradle of civilization. Some narrations say that Adam was created from the clay

⁵⁷⁹ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faḳīh*, vol. 1, p. 233, no. 698. The Burāthā mosque is said to have been a monastery whose sole inhabitant converted to Islam after seeing Imām ‘Alī miraculously strike water there while he was passing by with his troops after the Battle of Nahrawān. Today, people there say that the site had sanctity to Christians before Islam. See al-Sayyid Qāsim al-Hussaynī al-Jalālī and al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, *Kāmil Mazārāt Ahl al-Bayt fī al-‘Irāq* (Qum: Dār al-Ma’rūf, 1435 AH), p. 518.

⁵⁸⁰ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 465, no. 4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 206, no. 3 (citing *‘Ilal al-Sharā’i*). Note that other narrations say that Jesus was born after a nine-hour pregnancy, with each hour representing a month.

⁵⁸¹ A narration in *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* recounts a conversation between the Ka’bah and Karbalā’, wherein the Ka’bah was bragging about its superiority and Allah tells it: ‘Refrain from speaking. I swear by My Glory and My Magnificence that your honor compared to the honor that I bestowed upon the land of Karbalā’ is like the drop of water upon a needle that was dipped into the sea. If it were not for the dust of Karbalā’, I would not have honored you. If it were not for that which is buried within the land of Karbalā’, I would not have created you nor would I have created the House about which you have boasted. Now compose yourself and be humble in front of the land of Karbalā’. Do not be proud or arrogant in front of it, or I shall throw you into the fires of Hell.’ Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, 389, no. 2. Other narrations say that Karbalā’ was created 24,000 years before the Ka’bah and that the angels began to visit Karbalā’ one thousand years before al-Ḥusayn was killed. Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, pp. 389-393. As was observed in Section 2.2.3 regarding a different narration, this particular narration seems to fit into the ancient Mesopotamian genre of disputations, in this case between inanimate objects. See Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, pp. 93-94.

or water of the Euphrates and connect it to other aspects of sacred history, perhaps because of its significance in the Karbalā' narrative.⁵⁸²

Narrations also specify that the palm tree that Mary gave birth next to was the 'ijwah tree.⁵⁸³ This might seem perplexingly insignificant were it not for the explanation that the 'ijwah was the primal palm tree sent down from heaven at the time of Adam; one narration in *al-Kāfī* says that from the 'ijwah came all other types of date palms; this vision of it as a 'mother tree' reinforces Mary's role as a mother.⁵⁸⁴ A narration in *al-Kāfī* also says that Mary's 'ijwah was sent down to her when she was giving birth, thus mimicking the creational account.⁵⁸⁵ A further *ta'wīl* explains that the 'ijwah is a metaphor for the family of the Prophet, used for the sake of *taqīyyah*;⁵⁸⁶ this explanation reinforces the idea that the narration of *wilāyah* stretches back to creation (or, rather, pre-creation), and further situates her within the narrative of *wilāyah*.

In an exploration of the motifs of the Qur'ānic story of Mary, Husn Abboud observes that the 'image of the female, the tree, and the rivulet makes up one of the oldest images of fertility.'⁵⁸⁷ Abboud situates this in the context of ancient mythologies as well as an apocryphal gospel (the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*) in which Jesus tells the palm tree to bend over for his mother.⁵⁸⁸ Here, the emphasis on the tree suggests an understanding of the tree as a symbol of creation and fertility, and one that transcends the Abrahamic tradition, or at least was common in the Near East. By employing the common symbol of the primal palm tree, it integrates Mary, Jesus, and Imām al-Ḥusayn into those themes.

⁵⁸² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* vol. 11, p. 105, no. 10 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, p. 333, no. 56 (citing *Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*). Chapter 16 of *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* contains narrations on the religious merits of the Euphrates.

⁵⁸³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 400, no. 6; vol. 6, p. 347, no. 12.

⁵⁸⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* vol. 6, p. 347, no. 12.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 400, no. 6.

⁵⁸⁶ See al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 214; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 400, no. 6.

⁵⁸⁷ Husn Abboud, 'Qur'anic Mary's Story and the Motif of Palm Tree and the Rivulet', 266

⁵⁸⁸ The curious reader may peruse the "The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew", trans. Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, Arthur Cleveland Coxe (1886), in *The Gnostic Society Library: Christian Apocrypha and Early Christian Literature* <<http://gnosis.org/library/psudomat.htm>>. Accessed 8 March 2016.

Loren Lybarger, who – like Abboud – examines the Qur’ānic account of Mary, concludes that Mary serves as a link between the creational and the apocalyptic. She says:

Maryam’s experience of giving birth links prophecy to themes of primeval creation and apocalypse, thereby causing prophetic assertions to reverberate on a cosmic level [...]. The main ones include the yoking of the birthing experience, primal creative power, and apocalyptic authority to the establishing of a Qur’ānic prophet and his claim [...] through a gynocentric subtext which projects the womb as metaphor and matrix of prophetic power.⁵⁸⁹

Karen Ruffle, on the other hand, sees Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ as the link between the creational and apocalyptic in the Shī’ī tradition.⁵⁹⁰ However, since Shī’ī narrations strongly link Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and Mary (see section 6.3.3), it is reasonable to say that both of them are portrayed as women who link the creational and apocalyptic, in part through their role in the genesis of sacred figures.

With respect to the apocalyptic, the following narrations also connect Mary to the Mahdī. While *aḥādīth* clearly prophesize that Jesus will return with the Mahdī at the end of time, Mary’s link to the Mahdī is more subtle, and usually undiscussed. In one narration, the example of Mary and Jesus being ‘one thing’ (see section 6.2.4) is used to prove that the Mahdī could emerge from any generation of the Imāms (as opposed to immediately).⁵⁹¹ Another narration says that the food that was sent to Mary from heaven was sent to her in a bowl that is used by the Mahdī.⁵⁹² (This narration diverges by describing the miraculous food as bread and meat, whereas others describe it as fruit.) The possession of sacred, inherited objects is considered symbolic in the chain of sacred inheritance (*waṣīyyah*), and so Mary’s possession of this bowl grants her

⁵⁸⁹ Loren Lybarger, ‘Gender and Prophetic Authority in the Qur’ānic Story of Maryam: A Literary Approach.’

⁵⁹⁰ Karen Ruffle, ‘An Even Better Creation’, pp. 791-819.

⁵⁹¹ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 205, no. 21 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, vol. 14, p. 197, no. 4 (citing *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*).

inclusion in this chain just as Bilqīs's possession of the Dhū al-Faqār also grants her inclusion in this chain. Additionally, there is a narration saying that Jesus was born on 'Āshūrā', and that on this day the Mahdī will reappear.⁵⁹³ Mary also appears in the popularly accepted narration about Narjis, the mother of the Mahdī.⁵⁹⁴ These narrations reinforce Mary's role as a link between the creational and the apocalyptic.

In fact, narrations indicate that important events in prophetic or creational history, not only the birth of Jesus, took place on 'Āshūrā'.⁵⁹⁵ At first glance, this content may appear to be distinctly Shī'ī; however, this is common in Sunnī narrations as well.⁵⁹⁶ Hence, a common view among Shī'ah is that narrations about the pre-Islamic significance of 'Āshūrā' were forged by the Umayyads to make 'Āshūrā' a day of celebration instead of a day of mourning; for that reason, fasting is considered to be reprehensible on 'Āshūrā'. An opposing narration in *al-Faqīh* says that 'Īsā was born on 25 Dhū al-Qa'dah, and al-Majlisī maintains that this is the correct date, and that 'Āshūrā' was mentioned due to *taqīyyah*; this is in keeping with the general criterion that uniquely Shī'ī narrations should be given precedence over material shared with Sunnīsm.⁵⁹⁷ Nevertheless, regardless of whether the idea that Jesus was born on 'Āshūrā'

⁵⁹³ al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, vol 4, p. 300, no.14 (908), which reads: 'On the day of 'Āshūrā', the ark [i.e. Noah's ark] came to rest on Mount Jūdī, Allah forgave Adam and Eve, Mūsā overcame Fir'awn, Ibrāhīm was born, Yunus turned back to Allah, and 'Īsā ibn Maryam was born, and it is the day on which the Qā'im will rise.'

⁵⁹⁴ This narration which says that Narjis was a Byzantine princess who was a descendent of one of Jesus's disciples, and who had a dream that the Virgin Mary introduced her to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' and told her she would marry Imām Ḥasan al-'Askari; thus, Narjis allowed herself to be captured by Muslim invaders until she was sold as a slave to the tenth Imām, Imām 'Alī al-Naqī, who gifted her to his son. It is found in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 51, p. 5, no. 10 (citing *Ikmāl al-Dīn*). (This narration does not have a chain of narration.) While this narration is fixed in the popular imagination, other Shī'ī narrations, including in *al-Kāfi*, say that the mother of the Mahdī, came from Africa instead. The latter set of narrations seems more credible, particularly since 'Narjis' (which literally refers to a white flower) was often a pet name given to African slaves to offset their blackness. See Amina Inloes, 'Racial 'Othering' in Shi'i Sacred History: Jawn ibn Huwayy the "African Slave", and the Ethnicities of the Twelve Imams'.

⁵⁹⁵ For instance, see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A'māl* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1988), vol. 2, p. 558; Ibn Ḥayyūn, *Da'ā'im al-Islām* (Qum: Āl al-Bayt Institute, 1965), vol. 1, p. 284.

⁵⁹⁶ For instance, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book 26, no. 662; book 31, no. 117, 219-220; book 58, no. 172; book 60, no. 29, 31. Also see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, book 6, no. s 2499-2503.

⁵⁹⁷ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh* 2:89. An interesting exercise is to calculate which day this would have corresponded with on the solar calendar – using the estimate that Jesus was born in 1-5 BC, this comes up as being in the summer.

is taken to be of Sunnī or Shīʿī origin, it does place Mary on the same level as other sacred figures in pre-Islamic history.

Implicit in the association between Mary and Karbalāʾ is the association between the persecution and suffering of Jesus, and the persecution and suffering of al-Ḥusayn. While Shīʿism and Christianity are distinctly different entities, this overlap in understanding may reflect the influence of the Christian legacy in the Middle East. Husn Abboud also notes that Mary’s words when she is giving birth (‘Would that I had died before this and had become a thing forgotten’) evoke an ancient tradition of the expression of grief from female poets; this also calls to mind the portrayal of Mary as being in grief over her son.⁵⁹⁸ Granted, the Shīʿī narrations (discussed above) about Jesus washing the body of Mary indicate that Mary predeceased Jesus, and the Qurʾān says that Jesus was not crucified.⁵⁹⁹ However, the association of grief with Mary is paralleled in the portrayal of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ as being in perpetual grief over her son, al-Ḥusayn;⁶⁰⁰ thus, there is a thematic link. This distinguishes the portrayal of Mary from that of the previous women from the perspective of intertextuality; while much of the material about previous women was heavily influenced by Judaism, this suggests a synthesis of Christian and ancient influences leading to a uniquely Shīʿī narrative.

Unlike the previous set of narrations, the narrations situating Mary in Karbalāʾ do not promote patriarchal norms, or the separate-but-equal ideology. Mary is not under male guardianship, nor is she inferior as a woman. While the first set of narrations reduces her role in sacred history, these narrations increase her role and give her eschatological significance. However, it should be noted that while, through lowering Mary, the patriarchal narrations link Mary to the ‘ordinary woman’, these narrations have the reverse effect of making her less relevant. The ordinary woman will not miraculously travel to Karbalāʾ and have a primal date palm sent down, nor will the ordinary woman experience a

⁵⁹⁸Husn Abboud, ‘Qurʾanic Mary’s Story and the Motif of Palm Tree and the Rivulet’.

⁵⁹⁹ ‘And they did not kill him [Jesus] or crucify him, but it was made to look like that.’ (Qurʾān 4:157)

⁶⁰⁰ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 459, no.3; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 440, no. 67 (1422); al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 159, no. 13; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Istibṣār*, vol. 1, p. 200, no. 703 (15).

six-month or nine-hour pregnancy. (Of course, ordinary women also do not experience virgin births or have babies that speak in the cradle, but nonetheless the Qur'ānic narrative also includes themes which ordinary women can relate to, such as pain and social stigma.) While these narrations give Mary an important role in sacred history, they do not present Mary as doing anything which other women (or men) can emulate, thereby defeating the purpose of the Qur'ānic expression 'And Allah sets down as an example for those who believe [...] Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān' (66:11-12). A similar phenomenon can be seen in other eschatological narrations, such as those about Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', which give women a tremendously high status in spiritual cosmology, but do not say much about who they were or what they did that could be emulated practically.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Mary and Karbalā'
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfī</i> 1:479, no. 4 • <i>al-Faṣīḥ</i> 1: 233, no. 698 • <i>al-Taḥdhīb</i> 6:73, no. 8 (139) • <i>Bihār</i> 14: 216, no. 17 (citing <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 14:217, no. 19 (citing <i>Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 14:237, no. 19 (citing <i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i>)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Shī'ī content • Possibly Christianity • Ancient imagery
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not reinforce the separate-but-equal ideology.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary is a link between the creational and the apocalyptic.

6.3.2 *Wilāyah*, the *ḥijāb*, and beauty

A subtle but consistent theme throughout this work is a Shī'ī conception of beauty, male and female, which encompasses both physical and spiritual beauty, the latter connected to *wilāyah*. In contrast to the separate-but-equal ideology, in which physical beauty for women is viewed askance as being Western and un-Islamic,⁶⁰¹ Sārah, Zulaykhā, and Mary are all described as

⁶⁰¹ Anecdotally, I was once asked to give a talk about modesty at a Shī'ī programme for women. Feeling that the topic was rather over-emphasized, I adjusted the topic slightly and

exceedingly beautiful. Other narrations also say that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' and Zaynab bint 'Alī were very beautiful, and a narration (to be discussed below) also portrays Āsiyah and Eve as beautiful on the Day of Resurrection. Men, like Yūsuf, are also beautiful, with the Prophet and the Imāms being the most beautiful,⁶⁰² and narrations in the Shī'ī corpus encourage beautification for both women and men.⁶⁰³ This different from, say, the view in the New Testament which encourages women to eschew adornments as a sign of piety. The Shī'ī narrations can best be seen as a continuity of the Semitic celebration of marital relations and reproduction, in contrast idealizing celibacy and simplicity as hallmarks of piety.⁶⁰⁴

Beauty is one of the traits which the Qur'ān assigns to Mary, in that it says that Allah made Mary grow 'a beautiful growth' (*nabātan ḥasanan*) (3:37). This makes beauty a desirable trait of divine origin, as in the well-known narration, 'Allah is beautiful and loves beauty.'⁶⁰⁵ One narration specifies that Mary was the most beautiful of women, and that the *miḥrāb* used to shine with her light, thereby connecting spirituality with physical beauty.⁶⁰⁶ Physical beauty is addressed directly in this narration attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

A beautiful woman (*al-mar'ah al-hasnā'*) will come on the Day of Resurrection and she will have been tested by her beauty. So she will say, 'O Lord, You made me beautiful until what befell me befell me.' Then He will bring forth Maryam, peace be

instead discussed Shī'ī narrations on beauty for women. While it seems that, in general, the audience appreciated it, one person became very angry at me and unknowingly outlined via the premises of separate-but-equal ideology why my focus was deviant and un-Islamic. Another person, also unknowingly citing premises of the separate-but-equal ideology, suggested that what I really meant was that women should be clean and tidy, rather than actually beautiful, because focusing on beauty would surely be a vain and vacuous concern.

⁶⁰² David Clines, in his analysis of ideological criticism to the account of Solomon in the Old Testament, notes that beauty seems to have a trait of manliness in that society and not to have been something exclusively feminine. David Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 212-241.

⁶⁰³ For instance, narrations in *al-Kāfi* encourage women to grow their nails as a sign of beauty, and say that women should be ornamented. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, pp. 490-1; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 508; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 103, p. 235. Men are also encouraged to look after themselves so that their wives do not develop wandering eyes. See M. Rayshahri, *The Scale of Wisdom: A Compendium of Shī'ī Hadith*, pp. 204-206.

⁶⁰⁴ For instance, Ezekiel 23:24, Isaiah 61:8, Jeremiah 2:30 versus 1 Peter 3:1, 1 Timothy 2:8, and Revelations 17:2.

⁶⁰⁵ This narration is related in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 6, p. 438, no. 1, and is also popular in the Sunnī tradition.

⁶⁰⁶ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, p. 204, no. 18 (citing *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*).

upon her, and it will be said, 'Are you more beautiful or this one? We made her beautiful but she was not tempted by it.'⁶⁰⁷

The narration continues with a similar conversation about a handsome man (*al-rajul al-hasan*) and Yūsuf, thus reinforcing that the idea that beauty is not limited from women. This narration diverges from the presumption in section 6.2.1 as well as the narrations about Sārah and Hājar saying that women need to be controlled by their menfolk to preserve their chastity. Instead, it reinforces the Qur'ānic portrayal of Mary guarding her own chastity, as well as the expectation that other women can and should do the same. Second, instead of assigning moral blame to beauty, it describes it as the characteristic of a spiritually exalted woman (or man). It also gives more context to what might be meant by Mary 'guarding her chastity' since, on the surface, guarding one's chastity does not seem overly difficult, particularly for a young woman in a society where unchastity could lead to ostracization or worse. This narration can also be contrasted with Zulaykhā's excuse that she could not resist Yūsuf because she was the most beautiful woman in Egypt.

In addition to the positive attitude towards physical beauty, there are more complex aspects to the Shī'ī conception of beauty. One is the link between beauty and *wilāyah*. Rather than being solely a matter of physical appearance, beauty is a manifestation of the Muḥammadan light, enjoyed by proxy through *wilāyah*. For instance, after love for the Prophet enters her heart, Zulaykhā's beauty is returned to her.

Because this beauty is associated with spiritual mystery, and a spiritual mystery should not be profaned by being exposed to the common person, this beauty must necessarily be hidden – whether by physical or symbolic seclusion, or perhaps – as some would say – in a womb.⁶⁰⁸ For instance, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', the highest of women, is also portrayed as being the most hidden. Not

⁶⁰⁷ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 228, no. 291.

⁶⁰⁸ Thurlkill, Clohessy, and Murata all explore the sacred significance of the womb in this regard.

only is she envisioned as being fully covered and physically secluded,⁶⁰⁹ but a narration also says that she was named 'Fāṭimah' because the creation was kept from knowing her (*fuṭīma al-khalq 'an ma'rifatihā*), and that she is the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) – a night of tremendous spiritual significance but which is unknown.⁶¹⁰ That is, the covering of Fāṭimah is not so much about covering in a mundane sense but rather is about covering spirituality in an esoteric sense. This is similar to the idea of how the divine reality must necessarily be hidden – for instance, through veils⁶¹¹ – and is reflected in the architecture of Shī'ī sacred sites, which often contain an inner sanctum concealed by drapes or gates. This modesty and covering is not just for women; narrations discussed in the context of Yūsuf made it clear that covering the body (even between father and son) was both a trait of the Imāms as well as an expression of their spiritual status (see Chapter 4). Thus, there is a threefold conception of the Shī'ī ideal of beauty consisting of physical beauty, spirituality or *wilāyah*, and being hidden.

This spiritual and even esoteric approach to beauty, as well as the notion that true beauty is hidden, and the interplay between exposure and modesty, is expressed in this narration involving both Mary and Fāṭimah on the Day of Resurrection. This narration was discussed in Chapter 2 with respect to its notably woman-centric focus, but it is being reproduced here for the sake of convenience. It is attributed to Imām 'Alī:

One day, the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, came to Fāṭimah, peace be upon her, and she was sad, and so he said to her, 'What has made you sad, O my daughter?'

She said, 'O my father, I have remembered the plains of resurrection, and people standing naked on the Day of Resurrection.'

⁶⁰⁹ For instance, in the narration attributed to her (which continues to be prominent despite its dubious textual authenticity), 'The best thing for a woman is not to be seen by a man.'

⁶¹⁰ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 43, p. 65, no. 58 (citing *Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm*).

⁶¹¹ For instance, the *Munājāt Sha'bāniyyah* describes Allah as shielded by 'veils of light and darkness'. *Ḥadīth* 46 in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* describes Imām 'Alī as the veil between creation and Allah.

And so he said, ‘O my daughter, this is indeed a tremendous day, but Jibrā’īl has informed me that Allah, the Glorious and Mighty, says [that] the first for whom the earth will split open on the Day of Resurrection is me, then my father Ibrāhīm, then your husband ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Then Allah will send Jibrā’īl to you with seventy thousand angels, and they will build seven domes of light upon your grave. Then Isrāfīl will come to you with three garments (*ḥulal*) of light, and he will stop before your head and call to you: “O Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad, stand for the Resurrection,” so you will stand, safe from your fear, with a covered ‘*awrah* (private parts); and Isrā’īl will present (*yunāwilukī*) the garments to you, and you will wear them. Rūfā’īl will accompany you with a highbred female camel (*najībah*) of light – its halter of pearl, with a litter of gold atop it. And you will ride it, and Rūfā’īl will lead it by its halter; and with you will be seventy thousand angels with banners of glorification (*tasbīḥ*) in their hands.

‘And when the caravan hurries along with you, seventy thousand *ḥūrīs* (maidens of Paradise) will receive you, rejoicing at seeing you; in each of their hands will be a brazier of light, from which the scent of perfume (*‘ūd*) will radiate without any fire. Upon them will be crowns of jewels inlaid with emeralds, and they will hasten to your right side.

‘And when they reach your grave, Maryam bint ‘Imrān will meet you with *ḥūrīs* similar to what is with you, and she will greet you; and she and those with her will travel on your left side.

‘Then, your mother Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, the first of the female believers in Allah and His Messenger, will meet you; and with her will be seventy thousand angels; in their hands will be flags of *takbīr* (magnifying Allah). And when they are near to meeting, Eve will meet you with seventy thousand *ḥūrīs*, and

with her will be Āsiyah bint Muzāhim, and they and those with them will accompany you.

‘And when you have reached the middle of the gathering [...] a voice will sound saying “Lower your gaze so Fāṭimah the daughter of Muḥammad, peace be upon him and his family, may pass.”

‘And no one will look at you on that day except Ibrāhīm, the Friend of the Merciful, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. And Adam will seek Eve and see her with your mother Khadījah in front of her; then you will be given a *minbar* of light. And the closest of women to you on your left will be Eve and Āsiyah. And when you climb the *minbar*, Jibrā’īl will come to you and say, ‘O Fāṭimah, ask your request (*ḥājah*),’ and you will say, ‘O Lord, show me Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.’

‘And they will come to you, and blood will be gushing forth from Ḥusayn’s veins, and he will say “O Lord, grant me today my right against the one who oppressed me.” The Almighty will become angry at that, and at his anger, Hellfire and all the angels all will become angry [...]. The killers of Ḥusayn – and their sons and grandsons – will be engulfed in flames, and they will say, “O Lord, we were not present with Ḥusayn,” and Allah will say to the tongues of Hell, ‘Take them with your flames with the blue-eyed and blackened faces, and take the *nawāṣib* [enemies of *ahl al-bayt*] and throw them in the deepest pit of Hell, because they were harsher upon the supporters (*awliyā’*) of Ḥusayn than their fathers who fought Ḥusayn and killed him.’

Then Jibrā’īl will say, “O Fāṭimah, ask your request (*ḥājah*),” so she will say, “O Lord, my followers.”

‘So Allah will say, “They have been forgiven,” and you will say, “O Lord, the followers of my two sons,” and Allah will say they have been forgiven, and you will say, “O Lord, the Shī‘ah of my

Shī‘ah (the followers of my followers) [...]” At that point the creation will wish they were followers of Fāṭimah (*fāṭimiyyīn*) with you, their ‘*awrahs* covered, the difficulties gone from them, the entry [into Paradise] eased for them [...].’⁶¹²

Here, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, the spiritually highest of women, is the most hidden, to the degree that special dispensations will be made so that she is not seen. This modesty is for the elite, not the layperson; even other lofty women, such as Āsiyah and Maryam, shield Fāṭimah from view rather than being shielded themselves. In this regard, Majlisī cites another *ḥadīth* – although not without scepticism regarding its authenticity – saying that Āsiyah and Maryam will be *ḥijābs* for Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ in Paradise.⁶¹³ Since this section is on Mary, it should be noted that, here, Fāṭimah takes on a mediating role for the deceased that is also assigned to Mary in the Catholic tradition.

One aspect of *wilāyah* is the belief that adhering to *ahl al-bayt* causes the adherent to enjoy some of the traits of *ahl al-bayt* by proxy. Here, loyalty to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ will allow her followers to enjoy some of her modesty and hiddenness, whereas her enemies will be exposed. ‘Wishing their ‘*awrahs* were covered’ can be metaphorically to refer to the hiding of sinful and humiliating deeds on the Day of Judgment; or, literally, to refer to being clothed, as it is used in the beginning of the *ḥadīth*. This phrase refers to men and women alike, and thus is a reminder of the connection between spiritual status, *wilāyah*, and modesty for men as well as women in Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*.

In discussing the implicit association between beauty and covering, there is one other aspect that must be discussed: social class. The approach towards beauty and hiddenness reflects the belief, which traces back to antiquity and persisted in post-Islamic Iraq, that covering and seclusion were associated with social status. For instance, under Assyrian law, slave-girls and prostitutes were subjected to severe punishment if they covered their heads, whereas

⁶¹² al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 8, p. 53, no. 62 (citing *Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm*).

⁶¹³ Majlisī himself appears to have been doubtful about the veracity of this narration since he simply says ‘and it is in a narration’ without any further references. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 43, p. 37.

noblewomen were expected to cover their heads; it has been suggested that this was enacted to distinguish between ‘respectable’ and ‘unrespectable’ women. In the Islamic era, ‘Umar is said to have punished a slave-woman for covering her head.⁶¹⁴ According to Shī‘ī narrations, a slave-woman does not have to cover her head while praying, unlike a free woman.⁶¹⁵ Presumably, there was a practical aspect to this, in that a noblewoman who did not need to work in the fields and who was taken care of would not need to leave her house (that is, she could be secluded), and she could also don cumbersome garments such as a face veil. In short, upper class women could adopt more restrictive customs as a sign of status as discussed in the concept of the patriarchal bargain (see Chapter 1). This narration fits into that paradigm – Fāṭimah bears all the hallmarks of a queen of antiquity: she is secluded and veiled, borne on a litter, followed by an entourage, and is covered in jewels. It does, however, disagree with the historical picture of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ – in that, in her worldly life, she is portrayed as hardworking, with bleeding and blistered hands; this is the Fāṭimah who asks her father for a maidservant and is told to seek strength through prayer instead. Nevertheless, here, she and other sacred women are portrayed in the imagery of royalty, and this portrayal subtly combines the classical paradigms of modesty and social nobility. This portrayal presents women’s seclusion as a sign of nobility (or, rather, women’s visibility as a sign of indignity) in an earthly sense, thus adding a class dimension to the threefold

⁶¹⁴ Leila Ahmed discusses the customs of ancient Mesopotamia, including ancient Assyrian law, in depth and how they were later integrated into Islamic cultures in *Women and Gender: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. *Covering the Moon: An Introduction to Middle Eastern Face Veils* discusses the custom of face veiling in the ancient Middle East as well as ‘Umar’s sensitivity on this point. Regardless of whether the account about ‘Umar is actually true, it is indicative of social attitudes sometime in the early Islamic Empire. Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood and Willem Vogelsang, *Covering the Moon: An Introduction to Middle Eastern Face Veils* (Leuven and Dudley, Massachusetts: Peeters, 2008).

⁶¹⁵ See Al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, vol. 4, pp. 409-412. In private conversation, an Iranian reformist scholar suggested that the view that a slave-woman does not have to cover her head casts doubt on the importance of head-covering for women, although he added that he thinks *hijāb* is a good thing. On his personal website, Abdolkarim Soroush connects *hijāb* with a cultural perception that women are essentially mysterious: ‘The fact that women had to be covered up and kept away from the hustle and bustle of social activity suggested the establishment of a special kind of relationship with them, in which they were depicted as something mysterious and laden with mythical secrets.’ <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20000200-Contraction_and_Expansion_of_Womens_Rights.html>.

definition of the Shī‘ī concept of beauty as comprising of physical beauty, *wilāyah*, and hiddenness.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Wilāyah, the <i>ḥijāb</i> , and beauty
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>al-Kāfi</i> 8:228, no. 291 • <i>Bihār</i> 8:53, no. 62 (citing <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i>) • <i>Bihār</i> 43:37 (no source mentioned)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiquity
Separate-but-equal ideology	<p>Supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman’s seclusion is ideal <p>Opposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female beauty is de-emphasized. • Male authority is necessary • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.

6.3.3 Redefining virginity

The above narration brings up the theme of links between Mary and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’. Numerous implicit and explicit links between Mary and Fāṭimah have been noted, and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ is sometimes referred to as ‘Maryam al-Kubrā’ (Mary the Greater).⁶¹⁶ Essentially, any characteristic that Mary has, Fāṭimah enjoys in a more pronounced sense. For instance, just as Mary receives miraculous food, Fāṭimah receives miraculous food; just as Mary is spoken to by the angels, Fāṭimah is spoken to by the angels. This reinforces the superiority of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’; as a narration says, explaining the Qur’ānic verse about Mary being chosen, ‘Maryam was the chief of women of her time, and Fāṭimah is the chief of women of all time.’⁶¹⁷

One curious parallel is virginity. Both Mary and Fāṭimah are referred to as *al-batūl* and *al-adhrā’*, which both literally mean ‘virgin’. In an analysis of the etymological origins of these words in Semitic languages, and pre-Islamic usages of these words, Rezvan Massah Bavani suggests that *adhrā’* did not originally mean ‘virgin’, but, rather, took on that meaning in the first few centuries of Islam due to the Virgin Mary being referred to as *adhrā’*. However,

⁶¹⁶ Such as in Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 341.

⁶¹⁷ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 29, p. 345, no. 19 (narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās).

he notes that even in ancient Hebrew, *batūl* meant ‘virgin’.⁶¹⁸ In any case, Shī‘ī narrations use *adhrā*’ to mean ‘virgin’.⁶¹⁹ Throughout *al-Kāfī* and other texts, ‘Ibn al-Batūl’ is used to refer to Jesus, and *al-batūl* and *al-adhrā*’ were traditional names for the Virgin Mary.

What ‘virginity’ means for Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ – who was married and four children – is more perplexing. While Karen Ruffle argues that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ was considered to be a virgin in the physiological sense (neither conceiving nor giving birth to children through the normal route), this view does not concord with mainstream Shī‘ī narrations or belief.⁶²⁰ Instead, some narrations attempt to explain the application of these titles to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ by redefining them. For instance, *al-batūl* is redefined in a narration attributed to the Prophet:

Maryam was *batūl*, and Fāṭimah is *batūl*. *Al-Batūl* is one who does not see redness ever – that is, she does not menstruate, for menstruation is disliked (*makrūh*) among the daughters of the prophets.⁶²¹

This redefinition of *batūl* as ‘one who does not menstruate’ conveys a negative view of menstruation, in that it is not suitable for the daughters of the prophets; it calls to mind the narration (discussed in Chapter 3) saying that none of the daughters of the prophets menstruated before Sārah, who received a female cycle as punishment for her ill conduct. This definition, incidentally, conflicts with the *aḥādīth* discussed in section 6.2.2 which insist that Maryam did menstruate. A subsequent narration adds a sectarian implication by repeating the above definition, and then adding that the Prophet said to ‘Ā’ishah: ‘O ‘Ā’ishah, O Hamrā’ [‘the red’, a nickname of ‘Ā’ishah which is being used in a derogatory sense here],⁶²² Fāṭimah is not like human women –

⁶¹⁸ Rezvan Massah Bavani, *Historical Semantics of the Word ‘Aḡrā*’, in *Arabica*, vol. 61 (2014), pp. 760-768.

⁶¹⁹ For instance, in a narration in *al-Faqīh* saying that a virgin girl should not engage in a temporary marriage without her father’s permission. al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 461, no. 4593.

⁶²⁰ Ruffle’s view was politely refuted in in Chapter 2 in the section on ‘the tree of envy’; additionally, Clohessy and Thurlkill treat Fāṭimah’s virginity as metaphorical. Karen Ruffle, ‘An Even Better Creation’, pp. 791-819.

⁶²¹ al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 43, p. 15, no. 13 (citing *Ma‘ānī al-Akḥbār*).

⁶²² While ‘Ḥumayrā’ is generally understood to be a nickname of ‘Ā’ishah which meant that she had rosy cheeks, Yassir Ḥabīb – who is known for his inflammatory attacks on ‘Ā’ishah

she does not get ill as they get ill.’ That is, Fāṭimah is better than ‘Ā’ishah.⁶²³ Another definition proposed for *al-batūl* is ‘separation’ – that is, Maryam was *al-batūl* because she was ‘separated’ from men, and Fāṭimah is *al-batūl* because she is ‘separated’ (by her superiority) from women; this definition reinforces the connection between spiritual stature and hiddenness discussed in the previous section.⁶²⁴ (The idea that Fāṭimah did not menstruate is mentioned in Sunnī *aḥādīth* too and so is not a distinctly Shī‘ī idea.)⁶²⁵

Marina Warner notes that the concept of virgin birth dates back to antiquity, and that ‘the doctrine of the virgin birth was attacked far more frequently because it was common in pagan belief than because it was unlikely in nature.’⁶²⁶ She observes that ancient Mediterranean myth boasted several virgins – such as Venus, Ishtar, Astarte, and Artemis – who were not celibate; this use of the term ‘virgin’ was used to refer to their youth and unmarried status, and hence their freedom from patriarchal control. Warner notes, ‘In Christian times, however, virginity only rarely preserved the notion of female independence’;⁶²⁷ the same can be said of the portrayal of virginity in these traditions, which still emphasise male authority and guardianship. This re-definition takes the concept of virgin birth further from those pagan ideals in lieu

– argues that ‘Ḥumayrā’ refers to a woman who menstruates a lot that her face becomes sallow or her legs become stained. This argument, thereby, continues the same habit of using an aspect of women’s reproductive physiology that they have no control over to discredit them. He also notes the view, attributed to Ibn Qayyim, that any narration in which ‘Ā’ishah is referred to as ‘Ḥumayrā’ is inauthentic. Official site of Yassir al-Ḥabīb, ‘Did the Prophet Call Aisha Humaira Because She Had Rosy Cheeks?’ <<http://www.alqatrah.net/en/question/index.php?id=59>>. Accessed 16 February 2015.

⁶²³ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 43, p. 16, no. 14 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*).

⁶²⁴ al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, pp. 299-300, citing Fayrūzābādī (a 15th century author of a dictionary). The portrayal of both Maryam and Fāṭimah as virgins – in one manner or another – has led to musing about the concept of the womb as sacred space. In both Mary’s and Fāṭimah’s case, their wombs ‘advertise the salvific powers of the church and Shi’ite Imāms, their holy families, to their respective communities’ Clohessy also notes that ‘the virgin’s physical chastity ultimately led to spiritual fertility. Hagiographers revealed such dynamism by describing the virginal body and womb as a container, at once sealed from worldly contamination while prolific in spiritual works...As the innermost female space, the womb pollutes through menstrual contamination, yet can mediate sacrality as the inner santcum of a cultic shrine (as in Christianity) or a domestic sphere (as in Islam).’ Christopher Clohessy, *Fatima, Daughter of Muhammad*, pp. 43 & 65.

⁶²⁵ For instance, in al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*, vol. 12, p. 109, no. 34226; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tarīkh Baghdād*, 18 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah, 1997), vol. 12, p. 328, no. 6772.

⁶²⁶ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 36.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

of the Biblical usage of ‘virgin’ to mean ‘young woman’.⁶²⁸ However, it should be emphasized that this re-definition of virginity as a concept does *not* mean that Mary’s physical virginity is being called into question, only that the importance of the physiological aspect of virginity is diminished in favour of a figurative and more inclusive definition representing the Islamic ideals of sexuality and emphasising the status of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’.

While these and other titles given to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ may be treated as absolute in popular Shī‘ī discourse with no differentiation between the textual validity of Fāṭimah being referred to as ‘al-Zahrā’ (an appellation which is heavily reinforced textually) or being referred to as *al-batūl* or as *al-adhrā’*.⁶²⁹ However, an examination of how frequently *al-batūl* and *al-adhrā’* are actually applied to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ in *aḥādīth* shows a relative paucity of their usage in the actual source texts. In his work comparing Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ and the Virgin Mary, Christopher Clohessy notes that the names *al-adhrā’* and *al-batūl* are missing from a prominent narration ascribed to Imām al-Ṣādiq which lists the titles of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’, although he does not doubt that, in some sense, Fāṭimah was understood to be a virgin.⁶³⁰ Osman too notes that the appearance of Fatimah as *batūl* occurs in ‘later’ Shī‘ī texts.⁶³¹ Apart from the above narrations defining these words, there are only a couple narrations in *Bihār* from *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* as well as a supplication of questionable origin which employ these names.⁶³² When they are used, it is often in a rhyming context – that is, to rhyme ‘*batūl*’ with ‘*rasūl*’ or ‘‘*adhrā’*” with ‘*Zahrā’*’. This suggests that the attribution of virginity to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ may have occurred after her lifetime, and may have emerged from a desire to preserve the superiority of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ over Mary by not granting Mary a quality that Fāṭimah does not enjoy.

⁶²⁸ The idea that Mary was a virgin in the sense of being a ‘young woman’ as opposed to an actual virgin is a major premise of Lesley Hazelton’s *Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography*; see also Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 9.

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⁶³⁰ Christopher Clohessy, *Fatima: Daughter of Muhammad*, p. 87.

⁶³¹ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, p. 118.

⁶³² al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 46, p. 259, no. 60 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*); vol. 43, p. 17, no. 5 (citing *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*); vol. 92, p. 384, no. 270 (citing *Maḥajj al-Da‘awāt*, which ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī mentions is from one of his friends).

Oddly, this re-definition is implied in a narration in *al-Faqīh* saying that the Prophet told his wife Khadījah (the mother of Fāṭimah) on her deathbed that her co-wives (*dharā'ir*) in Paradise would be Mary the daughter of 'Imrān, Kulthūm the sister of Mūsā, and Āsiyah the wife of Fir'awn. Rather than being distressed at having co-wives (since, during her lifetime, the Prophet never married any other women), Khadījah replies with the standard wedding greeting of 'with felicitations (*bi al-rifā'*), O Messenger of Allah.'⁶³³ The idea of Khadījah, Mary, Kulthūm, and Āsiyah all being married to the Prophet at once evokes a sense of discomfort similar to that evoked in the narration about Zakariyā being a father figure for Jesus. However, this narration is void of the associated implications about virginity or purity, and has a decidedly non-esoteric feel; Khadījah's reaction makes it sound like an earthly social contract. Like the 'redefinition' of virginity for Fāṭimah, this narration sends the message that Khadījah is on par with other women in sacred history, and being the first wife gives her some seniority. Expressing this through marriage sends the message that a woman's status comes from her husband and family. In literally creating a happy Abrahamic family of spiritual elite, the narration offers a harmonious picture of marriage and family life; unlike other narrations, it does not treat marriage as restrictive for women or emphasize male authority. However, this narration also resituates Mary into her expected norm – as a wife – in contrast to how she goes against her expected role in her earthly experience.

Regardless of when the idea of Fāṭimah's 'virginity' emerged, however, the clear subtext is that a virgin is superior to a non-virgin; this is similar to how the narration from Sahl ibn Ziyād (discussed in Chapter 4) emphasizes that men should marry virgin women, and how narrations emphasize that Zulaykhā was a virgin before she married Yūsuf. Second, the 'alternative' definition of virginity as the absence of menstruation continues the trend of treating menstruation as a defect. The narration about 'Ā'ishah also shows how issues of feminine physiology can be employed as part of polemical rhetoric – in this case, that Fāṭimah was better than 'Ā'ishah because Fāṭimah did not menstruate. This alternative definition of virginity also diminishes the uniqueness of the divine

⁶³³ al-Ṣādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 139, no. 383.

miracle of the conception of Jesus, thereby reducing Mary's stature. Ultimately, the subtext is that the worth and spiritual status of a woman is intimately tied to her reproductive organs – as opposed to her spirituality or her character. In that sense, it still is a sexualisation of a woman's worth. The difference between these narrations and the narrations about Mary's menstruation, however, is that, in these narrations, menstruation is viewed as a defect but is not used to exclude women from male space or religious participation.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Redefining virginity
Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bihār</i> 43:15, no. 13 (citing <i>Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār</i>). • <i>Bihār</i> 43:16, no. 14 (citing <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i>).
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniquely Islamic content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Reinforces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are inferior because they menstruate.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fāṭimah is better than 'Ā'ishah

6.4 Conclusions

What is the subtext? According to a Japanese proverb, the nail that sticks out is struck down. In the first set of narrations – the ones reinforcing patriarchal norms – Mary's uniqueness and independence are uncomfortable and threatening. Hence, Mary is put back under male authority and secluded. Not only is her independent agency removed, but her uniqueness is attributed to Jesus, since she and Jesus are 'one thing'. By the end, there is little left of Mary herself to comment on in order to explain how she herself is 'an example to the believers' (Qur'ān 66:11-12). As in other chapters, the narrations from *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faqīh* most strongly reinforce patriarchal norms.

These narrations which reinforce patriarchal norms portray religious orthodoxy and authority, and religious space, as belonging to men (research question 3 – male normativeness). By definition, Mary cannot be a prophet because she is female. These narrations convey a discomfort with the inclusion of women; this is expressed through the focus on menstruation. The portrayal of Mary here presents the male experience and viewpoint as normative. Since giving birth is the most feminine experience possible, and Sūrah Maryam centres on the theme of miraculous birth, the story of Maryam would have been

an ideal place to explore the feminine perspective, particularly the spirituality of the creational act of motherhood. However, these narrations gloss over that in favour of technical aspects of her conception, such as the length of the pregnancy.

Like with other narrations which reinforce patriarchal norms, this set of narrations reinforces key points of the separate-but-equal theory (research question 2): namely, the need for male authority, the need for male guardianship, the inferiority of women due to menstruation, the desirability of women's seclusion, and the importance of women's (as opposed to men's) chastity. It also continues the view of Shī'ism as being male normative.

However, the second set of narrations – those that situate Mary within the narrative of *wilāyah* – do not reinforce these patriarchal norms, or the separate-but-equal ideology. These narrations do not put Mary under the authority or guardianship of a man, or present religious orthodoxy as belonging to males. Instead, these narrations focus on the link between Mary and the Imāms, especially Imām al-Ḥusayn. This is done through linking Mary with Karbalā' – for instance, in the narrations saying that she gave birth to Jesus in Karbalā', and in the explanation of *kāf hā' yā' 'ayn ṣād* – and thereby makes her a bridge between the creational and apocalyptic.

One of the traits of Mary is her beauty. In contrast to the separate-but-equal ideology, beauty is described as a positive characteristic of both women and men, and is associated with spirituality. Unlike in the first set of narrations, which emphasize a man's role in guarding a woman's chastity, a narration on Mary's beauty indicates that women can and should be responsible for their own chastity. The narrations on beauty suggest a uniquely Shī'ī conception of beauty – one combining physical beauty, spirituality or *wilāyah*, and an esoteric understanding of being hidden. However, these narrations also implicitly embrace the value of women's seclusion or covering as being customs of the elite, thereby including a class dynamic and integrating women's seclusion or covering as part of the patriarchal bargain, accessible only to privileged women.

Lastly, the revisionist definition of virginity in order to attribute it to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' has the ultimate effect of reducing Mary's unique position in

sacred history. In this way, it is similar to the polemical narrations about *badā'* and matrilineage which, by employing Mary for Shī'ī polemics, inadvertently sideline her. These narrations also imply that women are inferior because they menstruate – a characteristic of the separate-but-equal ideology. However, unlike in the previous set of narrations, these narrations do not use menstruation as a means of excluding women from religious authority or participation.

How well do these narrations fit the separate-but-equal ideology? (Narrations with an asterisk are in the Four Books.)		
Premise	Supports	Does not support
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.	Zakariyā as Mary's caretaker*	Mary and Karbalā'*
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.		Mary and Karbalā'*
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.		
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.	Menstruation paradox* Redefining virginity	
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal.	Zakariyā as Mary's caretaker* Mary as the domestic servant Wilāyah, the <i>hijāb</i> , and beauty (narration in <i>Bihār</i>)	Mary and Karbalā'*
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).	Zakariyā as Mary's caretaker* Menstruation paradox* Mary as the domestic servant Matrilineage*	Mary and Karbalā'*
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.		
h) Female chastity is of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized.	Zakariyā as Mary's caretaker*	Wilāyah, the <i>hijāb</i> , and beauty (<i>al-Kāfi</i>)*

i) 'Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love'		
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Whose interests are being served? The first set of narrations – the ones that codify patriarchal norms – serves the interests of an orthodoxy consisting of male jurists. In these narrations, jurisprudential rules are taken as axioms, resulting in the menstruation paradox. Like in the narrations about Eve and Sārah, these narrations support the interest of those who held these cultural values by codifying them as religious norms. They also support a tribal view whereby kin relations are the source of religious authority. Even the narration which supports matrilineage still sends the message that religious authority must be held by men. Mary's presence upsets orthodoxy and Arab cultural values, and must be minimized and controlled. Ironically, this scenario mimics the situation being portrayed at the temple in Jerusalem – the orthodoxy that Jesus and Mary upset.⁶³⁴

In the second set of narrations, the answer to that question is more complex. This set of narrations primarily serves the interest of Shī'ī communal identity by reinforcing the centrality of the Karbalā' narrative and Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' in the Shī'ī consciousness, as well as by outlining distinctly Shī'ī concepts of beauty and virginity (research question 6 – Shī'ī identity). On one hand, these narrations subvert the patriarchal order described in the first group; as with the non-patriarchal narrations on Eve, this suggests that, at least in some cases, some Shī'ah preferred an alternative view of Shī'ism – a counter-narrative – that was centred not on an Arab culture or on jurisprudence, but which was rather focused on esoteric and spiritual teachings.

⁶³⁴ The combination of cultural and class concerns bring to mind Marina Warner's observation on how Mary was used to legitimize political power: 'It would be difficult to concoct a greater perversion of the Sermon on the Mount than the sovereignty of Mary and its cult, which has been used over the centuries by different princes to stake out their spheres of influence in the temporal realm, to fly a flag for their ambitions like any Maoist poster or party political broadcast,; and equally different to imagine a greater distortion of Christ's idealism than this identification of the rich and powerful with the good.' Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 120.

However, the narrations on beauty are more complex. On one hand, they express a preference for esotericism as a defining quality of Shī'ism. On the other hand, they not only reinforce a cultural value of associating women's seclusion and covering with nobility and also promote a class divide, thereby serving the interests of the upper class as well as those women benefitting from the patriarchal bargain. They also conflate spiritual status with the trappings of earthly royalty. As with some of the narrations in previous chapters, this may have best served the interests of career storytellers, in that a story about queens, gems, and wealth was more likely to attract an audience than a story about humbleness and deprivation.

In the end, as with the narrations on Eve, the seeming conflict between the subtexts of these two sets of narrations – the patriarchal and 'counter-narrative' – has, in practice, been resolved by differentiating between the earthly and spiritual nature of sacred women. While, on an earthly level, a woman is perceived as being under male guardianship and control, and there is a gender hierarchy, in the otherworldly realm (as well as the narrative of *wilāyah* which is situated across time), women such as Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' or Mary enjoy autonomy and spiritual authority (research question 1 – inclusion of women in sacred history).

Why does this matter today? As in the chapter on Eve, analysing these narrations makes it easier to verbalize and hence problematize assumptions about women. As presented in the Qur'ān, Mary is a powerful figure for female spirituality and even female religious authority. However, many of these narrations remove that agency from her and return her to her expected social role as a woman. These social roles, although not necessarily mandated by formal jurisprudence, are frequently unquestioned. Therefore, this brings up the question of whether social expectations for Shī'ī women need to be the way they are. For instance, is male guardianship a religious necessity? Must religious authority be in the hands of men? Do women not belong in the public sphere? Why is a woman who receives divine revelation not considered a prophet, and what does that mean for gender-based conceptions of authority? Analysing the portrayal of Mary in these narrations can help identify some of the

sources of cognitive dissonance between received paradigm and everyday experience.

One aspect of the separate-but-equal ideology which is absent here is the *ḥijāb* in the sense of clothing. While women's seclusion is emphasized, and being unseen is promoted on an esoteric level, women's actual clothing is ignored; perhaps, being fully clothed was seen as insufficient with respect to guarding a woman's chastity. The one narration to actually discuss clothing treats it as an adornment of the life of this world. This absence is in contrast to the extreme emphasis in contemporary Islamic discourse and identity politics on the *ḥijāb*. While a frequent argument among Muslims today is that the West sexualizes women, these narrations also sexualize women by focusing on menstruation and seclusion. Considering the historical relationship between covering and seclusion or social status can also shed light on similar phenomena today in the Islamic community, whereby there is a tacit assumption that certain classes of women (for instance, women from scholarly families) should be more covered and less publicly visible than other women. Recognizing this can lead to the question of whether or not it might be better to discuss women as human and spiritual beings, instead of focusing on their clothing and reproductive systems.

Chapter 7: Was Imām ‘Alī a Misogynist? The Portrayal of Women in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, we saw how various ideas about women reflecting various pre-Islamic and post-Prophetic influences were represented in Shī‘ī narrations about ancient women. Many of these narrations reinforced a heavily patriarchal view of society, which necessitates male control and guardianship over women; while others, particularly those focusing on *wilāyah* or with esoteric and uniquely Shī‘ī content, portrayed a more inclusive and equitable picture of women.

This section will depart from what was done previously – namely, the exploration of narrations about pre-Islamic women in sacred history – and instead examine how the ideas about the nature and role of women derived from these narrations are represented in two significant texts: *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*. These books are particularly relevant because both focus on Imām ‘Alī, and one persistent question arising in the previous sections is whether or not Imām ‘Alī actually advocated an unfavourable and restrictive view towards women. *Nahj al-Balāghah* was selected firstly because of its prominence in Shī‘ī thought, and, secondly, because of its infamous sermons about the defects of women. Because of the sensitivity and importance of these sermons in contemporary Shī‘ī discourse, a more involved discussion of the textual sourcing of this material will be included. *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* was selected because of its unique position as the earliest extant text; because it centres on Imām ‘Alī, it offers another window into portrayals of Imām ‘Alī with respect to how he viewed women. Lastly, while both books contain content attributed to Imām ‘Alī, *Nahj al-Balāghah* was compiled more than two centuries after *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*. (The question of when *Kitāb Sulaym* was compiled is complex and will be dealt with in the section on that work.) This leads to the hypothesis that if the portrayal of women is significantly different between these two books, the differences might be due to the attribution of extra-Islamic material to Imām ‘Alī as occurred in some of the narrations discussed earlier;

that is, some of the material in *Nahj al-Balāghah* may not really trace back to him.

Nahj al-Balāghah (compiled 1009-1010 CE/400 AH – that is, slightly after *al-Kāfi* and *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*) consists of sermons, letters, and sayings attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and was compiled by al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī (d. 1015 CE), a prominent Shī‘ī scholar. This was roughly three centuries after ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and well after the ‘orthodox’ norms of thought regarding women reflected in the other chapters were established. His aim in the compilation was not to present a book of *ḥadīth*, history, or jurisprudence, but rather to demonstrate the literary style and eloquence of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Because of this, he did not include chains of narration or indicate of where he took his material from. As a result, a discussion of the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is complex. The idea that al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī himself wrote it has been dismissed due to the presence of portions of *Nahj al-Balāghah* in contemporaneous sources, and an identifiably different writing style in his own works. However, because he did not include chains of narration – traditionally, the first means of authenticating a *ḥadīth* – the passages in *Nahj al-Balāghah* are not admissible within Shī‘ī scholarship as a source for deriving jurisprudence.

However, within the Shī‘ī tradition, the work has gained such prominence that ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, the famous scholar of the past century, said, ‘For us, whoever wrote *Nahj al-Balāghah* is ‘Alī, even if he lived a century ago’.⁶³⁵ This was in response to the assertion that Western scholars claim that the material in *Nahj al-Balāghah* does not actually trace back to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Therefore, in addition to demonstrating a genuine reverence for the book, this response may have been politicized; such ideological concerns often make it difficult to raise genuine questions – particularly about gender or the authenticity of texts – in contemporary Shī‘ī discourse. Reza Shah-Kazemi notes that, ‘over the

⁶³⁵ Allamah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn at-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *A Shiite Anthology*, trans. W. Chittick (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: 2013) (first published 1980 by Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain) 5-6 (discussion with Henri Corbin). Also see Reza Shah Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Ali*. (I. B. Tauris and Company), 3; he also cites the same exchange between Corbin and Ṭabāṭabā‘ī on page 4. See also M. Motahhari, *Selection [sic] from Glimpses of Nahj al-Balāghah* [a translation of portions of *Sayrī dar Nahj al-Balāghah*], trans. anonymous (n.p.: n.l., 1975).

centuries, Shī‘ī scholars have assiduously rebutted the charges against the authenticity of *Nahj*, although he cites the more tempered opinion that ‘a large portion’ of *Nahj al-Balāghah* can be reliably traced to Imām ‘Alī rather than every single word. (Shah-Kazemi, incidentally, does not delve into the sermons on women, even though his book explores justice and the intellect in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.) However, Hossein Modarressi observes that, late in the third century *hijrī*, 400 sermons were ascribed to Imām ‘Alī; while, half a century later, that number had grown to 480.⁶³⁶ Today, openly questioning the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is rarely done by Shī‘ī scholars, although it is sometimes done privately. A reasonable approach to the authenticity of the contents of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, however, is to treat it like any other book of *ḥadīth* – that is to say, to discuss the authenticity of each passage individually, rather than evaluating the book as a whole, particularly since al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī collected the contents from different manuscripts and sources.⁶³⁷ One method of exploring the authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is to look for other sources which contain the same passages; another approach is to compare the passages to the Qur’ān. Both approaches will be used here, along with the method of inquiry of ideological criticism.

In short, three new contributions to knowledge regarding the sermons about women in *Nahj al-Balāghah* will be made. First, there will be a closer evaluation of the alternative sources; frequently, alternative sources are listed uncritically without an examination of how strongly they actually reinforce the actual text of the sermons, particularly with respect to portrayals of women. Second, the ideological implications of these texts regarding women will be examined in more detail, and compared against other ideas about women emerging from narrations bearing signs that they are rooted in pre-Islamic or post-Prophetic notions. Lastly, this chapter will take the original approach of providing a thematic comparison between *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym*

⁶³⁶ Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, p. 14.

⁶³⁷ The late Sayyid Faḍlallāh also mentions on his official website that not everything in *Nahj al-Balāghah* can be ascribed to Imām ‘Alī and that each passage should be evaluated individually; he also rejects the idea that al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī wrote it himself. *Bayyinat*, ‘FAQ – Authenticity of *Nahj Al-Balagha*’ < http://english.bayyinat.org/FAQ/FAQ_NahjAl-Balagha.htm>. Accessed 18 August 2014.

ibn Qays, the latter which is rarely discussed with respect to its portrayals of gender.

7.2 Women in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

7.2.1 Women are deficient in intellect

One of the most controversial passages in *Nahj al-Balāghah* today is the sermon on the deficiencies of women.⁶³⁸ Presented as '[An excerpt] from his speech after the Battle of the Camel, in condemnation of women', it reads:

O people! Women are deficient in faith, deficient in shares [of inheritance], and deficient in intellect. As for their deficiency in faith, it is their sitting back from ritual prayers and fasting in the days of their menstruation. As for their deficiency in shares, it is because their inheritance is half that of men. And as for their deficiency in intellect, it is because the testimony of two women is like the testimony of one man. So beware the evils of women. Be on guard against the good ones among them and do not obey them in good so that they do not desire evil.⁶³⁹

Reactions among Shī'ī scholars with respect to this sermon have been multifold. Historically, there was a trend for commentators to accept these views as fact about the nature of women,⁶⁴⁰ as did the prominent Sunnī reformer,

⁶³⁸ This sermon is frequently numbered as Sermon 80, although differences in numbering appear in different editions.

⁶³⁹ My translation, aimed at a literal rendition of the passage. The sermon begins: *Ma'āshir al-nās, inna al-nisā' nawāqīṣ al-īmān nawāqīṣ al-ḥuḏūḏ nawāqīṣ al-'uqūl.*

⁶⁴⁰ In *Ṣūrat al-Mar'ah fi al-Tūrāth al-Shī'ī*, Muḥammad al-Khabbāz cites the following examples: 'Alī ibn Zayd al-Bayḥaqī Farīd al-Khurasānī says in *Ma'ārij Nahj al-Balāghah*, 'The intellects of women are intellects which are overcome by greed, desire, and fear'; al-Shaykh al-Mirzā Ḥabīb al-Hāshimī al-Khu'ī says in his *Manhij al-Barā'ah fi Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* 'As for categorizing their intellects with 'the intellects of women', it is because they have the shared qualities of shortcoming and deficiency, and a paucity of understanding regarding the commonweal specifically with respect to civil administration and warfare'; al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Shirāzī says in *Tawḏīḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* 'The weakness of the intellectual faculties of women established in 'ilm al-ḥadīth; and she is emotional and cannot be depended on for important/great matters...Allah the Exalted has created the woman for domestic asks...and therefore he has placed in her strong emotions so that she will care for her house

Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), who wrote that ‘it is a thing corroborated by the experience of centuries!’ His description of the aptness of the sermon regarding the nature of women on the grounds that women’s mental capacities are geared towards their primary responsibilities in child-rearing and domestic duties is a reminder that this way of thinking is not limited to Shī‘ism.⁶⁴¹

A common view is that these words were actually directed at ‘Ā’ishah bint Abī Bakr, the instigator of the Battle of the Camel – which was the first major civil war among Muslims and resulted in tremendous loss of life – but out of respect for the fact that ‘Ā’ishah was a widow of the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib spoke to her in the plural (‘women’) rather than to her directly (‘you’). This view is expressed in *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 1258), who does take the statements about women’s deficiencies at face value but then explains that it they are directed at ‘Ā’ishah who erred in what she did (at the Battle of the Camel).⁶⁴² This view is reinforced by one of the alternative sources, *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ* (a 13th century Sunnī text), which says that the speech was directed at ‘Ā’ishah. (Of course, that still leaves the question of whether *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ* should be accepted as a reliable source.) This view, espoused by Nāṣer Makārem Shīrāzī, sidesteps the issue – that is, it neither necessitates rejecting the authenticity of the passage, nor does it necessitate that these statements about women be taken as truth. However, the fact remains that even if the quotation is addressed to ‘Ā’ishah alone, it still reflects a very negative view of women; if a similar statement were addressed to men, it would not be accepted.⁶⁴³

and her children, and with this, her intellectual power decreases’. Muḥammad Khabbāz, *Ṣūrat al-Mar’ah fi al-Tūrāth al-Shī‘ī* (Beirut: al-Intishār al-‘Arabī, 2009), pp. 79-100.

⁶⁴¹ Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 129.

⁶⁴² Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, 20 vols. (n.p.: Dar al-Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyah, n.d.), vol. 6, p. 214.

⁶⁴³ Osman notes the scholarly view that says it was aimed at ‘Ā’ishah, and suggests that it was part of a time that had ‘anti-woman sentiments’ since Sunnī narrations condemning women’s political leadership also emerged at a similar time, although that presupposes that the passage in *Nahj* actually dates to the era of Imām ‘Alī. Fatima Mernissi suggests that the source of the Sunnī narration may be due to the fact that from 629-632, there were various claimants to the Sassānid throne, including two women. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p. 50, Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, pp. 157-158.

Additionally, even if these criticisms were only directed at ‘Ā’ishah, that would still set a precedent of demonizing ‘Ā’ishah for her gender. That is to say, rather than being criticised for leading a rebellion, she is being criticised for stepping out of her place as a woman, with the implication that other women should stay in line lest they end up like ‘Ā’ishah. This is not dissimilar to the narration which denigrates ‘Ā’ishah on the grounds that she menstruated (an attack which is both figuratively and literally ‘below the belt’); that is, it attacks her via her femininity, a common tactic for intimidating women into leaving male space.⁶⁴⁴ This brings up the greater issue of historical narrative – how history is told, and what morals are presented from the story. Traditionally, the main critique of ‘Ā’ishah is that she disobeyed the Qur’ānic verse telling the wives of the Prophet to stay in their homes (Qur’ān 33:32-33). However, firstly, this verse is directed solely at the wives of the Prophet and not women in general; in fact, women such as Zaynab bint ‘Alī or Nusaybah are praised for their public stance during times of conflict. Secondly, an entire army of men joined ‘Ā’ishah in the campaign, hence violating the Qur’ānic commandments not to engage in sedition or killing, but similar criticisms are not levied against them. The real issue is not that ‘Ā’ishah left her home but, rather, what she did. Nonetheless, in Shī‘ī historical narrative, it is common to hear ‘Ā’ishah condemned for leaving her home. For this reason, it will be particularly interesting to see how ‘Ā’ishah’s rebellion is portrayed in *Kitāb Sulaym*, and whether or not, in that work, Imām ‘Alī condemns her as a woman, or as a rebel.

This historical narrative, combined with this sermon, is what the contemporary scholar Nāṣer Makārem Shīrāzī uses to justify the ‘separate-but-equal’ ideology:

Imām ‘Alī wished to speak of her and her actions in an indirect manner to open the eyes of the people and therefore the method which he chose was to explain the religious rulings which are specific to women, and the rulings highlighting the ‘limitations’ and ‘restrictions’ in the rights and privileges of women and men, and to show us that they are not equal – in all

⁶⁴⁴ See Section 6.3.3 of this work.

areas of life – and that this too is for a reason. Through this, he wanted to show the people that ‘Ā’ishah is the same as other women in these certain issues and to make them question themselves as to why they should have followed her and listened to her advice (over that of Allah and the Noble Prophet).⁶⁴⁵

While he mentions the ‘limitations’ and ‘restrictions’ of both women and men, no limitations or restrictions for men are outlined in this sermon; therefore, ‘equal’ is a euphemism. Ironically, the points that Makārem Shīrāzī brings up here are in opposition to the efforts of contemporary Shī’ah apologists to ‘prove’ that Islam is not unfair or oppressive to women; for instance, today, it is common to argue that the differences between men and women in giving testimony or receiving inheritance are not due to any innate difference in worth between men and women. Even more ironically, Makārem Shīrāzī begins his discussion with the insistence that these words apply only to ‘Ā’ishah, but he concludes by explaining that they really should apply to all women because all women suffer from these deficiencies!

The remaining view is that these sermons are inauthentic on the basis that they conflict with the Qur’ānic treatment of women. Ayatollah Ishāq Fayyād (a marja’ living in al-Najaf al-Ashraf) and Ayatollah Faḍlullāh have expressed this view.⁶⁴⁶ Despite his adoption of a view of strongly inherent differences

⁶⁴⁵ Nāṣir Makārem Shīrāzī, *The “Deficiencies” of Women* (a partial translation of his extensive commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*), trans. S. Bhimji ([Canada]: Islamic Publishing House, 2012), p. 3. Apart from the discussion of women, one of the deeply regrettable parts of this selection is the shallow discussion on women in the Old and New Testament as well as in ‘capitalism’. As will be discussed subsequently, the list of texts which he presents to reinforce the view that women are ‘deficient’ is also misleading and leads one to think that perhaps the author did not actually check to see what was in these references before citing them. Such oversights from a high-ranking Shī’ī scholar are inexcusable and reflect a lack of attention to diligence and standards in contemporary Shī’ī apologetic literature which serves an ideological or politicized cause.

⁶⁴⁶ Ayatollah Fayyād expressed this view privately in a discussion with a Shī’ī scholar in London on the grounds that this statement contradicts the Qur’ān. In 2016, I had the opportunity to meet him, and was surprised to hear that he specifically mentioned that men and women are equal. For Ayatollah Faḍlullāh’s view, see Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlullah, ‘Equality between men and women in theory and practice (part 2)’, trans. Bayynat editor, in Bayynat [Ayatollah Faḍlullah’s official website] <http://english.bayynat.org/Women/Women_EqualityMenWomen_1.htm>. Accessed 9 March 2016. I have often heard it attributed to Ayatollah Ṣāne’ī, and it would be in keeping with his

between the female and male, Ayatollah Javādī Āmolī also implies this view by saying that these words are beneath Imam ‘Alī – even if they were only directed at one woman – and that the best thing to say about the authenticity of the sermon is ‘I don’t know’.⁶⁴⁷ It has also been suggested that this sermon was fabricated to defame Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ (the wife of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib) in order to reduce her claim to Fadak, a conflict which is seen as symbolizing whether Abū Bakr or ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib had the right to succeed the Prophet as caliph. This view is not without merit since the sermon itself refers to a woman’s lesser standing in receiving inheritance and offering testimony, both of which were pivotal issues regarding Fadak, in that Abū Bakr claimed that prophets did not leave inheritance, and that one female witness (namely, Umm Ayman) was insufficient because the Qur’ān requires one male or two female witnesses.⁶⁴⁸ Mahdī Mehrīzī, an Iranian scholar who has written extensively on the subject of women and Shī‘ī *aḥādīth*, also argues for this view on the basis that this narration conflicts with the Qur’ān and with other *aḥādīth*, including *aḥādīth* which refer to the ‘*aql*’ of women.⁶⁴⁹ Lastly, in her book on the view of women in Shī‘ī sources, Rawand Osman also concludes that these sections of *Nahj al-Balāghah* conflict with the Qur’ān and are hence invalid.⁶⁵⁰

Five alternative texts are identified in *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah wa Asānīduhu* (a comprehensive inquiry into the sources of *Nahj al-Balāghah*) as verifying this sermon:

1. *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ* by Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1256/1257 CE, Ḥanafī)
2. *Qūt al-Qulūb* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996 CE, Ṣūfī Shafī‘ī)
3. *al-Kāfī* by Shaykh al-Kulaynī (d. 941 CE, Shī‘ī)

general approach to the equality of men and women, but I did not find an official source in which he formally states this view.

⁶⁴⁷ ‘Abd Allāh Javādī Āmolī, *Tafsīr-e Tasnīm*, 34 vol. (Tehran: Asrā’, 2014), vol. 11, pp 294-5. Special thanks to Shaikh Mohammed Ali Ismail for pointing this out.

⁶⁴⁸ See discussion of this in Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, Karim Douglas Crow, *Facing One Qiblah: Legal and Doctrinal Aspects of Sunnī and Shi‘ah Muslims* (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 2005), p. 47. Abū Bakr also rejected Imām ‘Alī as a witness on the grounds that he was married to Fāṭimah.

⁶⁴⁹ Mahdī Mehrīzī, ‘Ta‘ammolī dar Aḥādīth-e Nuqṣān-e ‘Aql-e Zanān’, in ‘*Ulūm-e Ḥadīth*, vol. 81, pp. 81-99.

⁶⁵⁰ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur’an and Sunna*, 158-162. An Iranian of the older generation told me that Ayatollah Moṭahharī held this view and expressed it in *Sayrī dar Nahj al-Balāghah*, but that this was posthumously removed from the work.

4. *al-Amālī* by Shaykh al-Şādūq (d. 991 CE, Shī‘ī)
5. *al-Ikhtisāş* by Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022 CE, Shī‘ī)⁶⁵¹

Of these works, the strongest – according to modern Shī‘ī scholarship – would be *al-Kāfī*; not only is it the most highly regarded *ḥadīth* collection, but it is also the earliest source listed. The next strongest sources would be *al-Amālī* and *al-Ikhtisāş*, both of which are *ḥadīth* collections by well-known Shī‘ī scholars in roughly the same era. The least reliable would be *Qūt al-Qulūb* and *Tadhkirat al-Khawāşş*, since – like *Nahj al-Balāghah* – they do not include chains of narration or sources, and are not by Shī‘ī scholars; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāşş* is particularly weak, given the centuries elapsed between it and *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

Al-Kāfī, therefore, is the most logical source to start with. However, an investigation of *al-Kāfī* reveals only the last sentence of the sermon:

From a group of our companions, from Aḥmad ibn Abī ‘Abd Allāh, from whoever related it, from al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Mukhtār, from Abī ‘Abd Allāh, peace be upon him:

The Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, said, ‘Beware the evils of women, and be on guard from them. And if they command you to good, then oppose them, so that they may not desire evil from you.’⁶⁵²

While this sentence is, admittedly, not the most favourable towards women, it does not explicate the intellectual and spiritual deficiencies of women in the same way that the sermon does. This narration is also questionable from

⁶⁵¹ ‘Abd al-Zahrā’ al-Khaṭīb, *Maşādir Nahj al-Balāghah wa Asānīduhu*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā’, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 86-97. Al-Khaṭīb’s work is considered one of the standard works today for sourcing *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Additionally, Makārem Shīrāzī lists several others, but the texts he lists do not contain any of the passages from the actual sermon and only contain supplementary material, such as a letter from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to ‘Ā’ishah asking her why she performed *jihād* as a woman.

⁶⁵² al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 517, no. 5.

a *rijālī* (biographical) standpoint, in that it has a gap in its chain of narration. Therefore, to say this sermon is substantiated by *al-Kāfī* is misleading.⁶⁵³

The next two sources, *al-Amālī* and *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, contain essentially identical texts, with slightly different chains of narration. However, the context of this narration is different. In this narration, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is giving ethical advice, such as not being suspicious of others, and there is no indication that it is connected with the Battle of the Camel. This, therefore, raises a question as to whether the sentiments in the sermon can really be said to have been directed at ‘Ā’ishah at the Battle of the Camel. The narration concludes with him saying:

[...] And it is upon you to [associate with] sincere brothers, and increase your benefit from them, for they are a resource in ease and a shield in misfortune. And, in your speech, consult those who fear Allah, and love your brothers according to their amount of piety, and beware of the evils of women, and be on guard from the good among them. If they command you to good, then disobey them so that they may not make you desire evil.⁶⁵⁴

Like in *al-Kāfī*, only the last sentence of the sermon is mentioned. Of note, also, is the way in which ‘brothers’ are discussed as a group separate from ‘women’. While the Qur’ān does not separate female from male believers, and instead frequently refers to them together (for instance, as *al-mu’minūn wa al-mu’mināt*), this separation implies that Islam is a man’s religion – that men are normative, and women are exclusions. As in *al-Kāfī*, there are gaps in the chain of narration in both of these sources; additionally, two of the narrators are considered questionable. One is Abū Jārūd, the founder of Zaydī-Jārūdī Shī’ism – that is to say, someone who defected from the Imāms and hence might be considered suspect from a Twelver Shī’ī view, albeit his narrations are not necessarily rejected.⁶⁵⁵ The other is Muḥammad ibn Sinān, considered by some

⁶⁵³ ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-‘Uqūl*, vol. 20, p. 334, no. 5.

⁶⁵⁴ Shaykh al-Ṣādūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 380, no 8; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, p. 226.

⁶⁵⁵ Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 121-125.

to be among the *ghulāt* (extremists); this would be in line with the association noticed between misogynistic narrations and some narrators described as *ghulāt*.⁶⁵⁶ In any case, given its different context, this narration is insufficient to reinforce the sermon in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.⁶⁵⁷

This exhausts the Shī'ī sources (*Biḥār* is being omitted since it just takes the saying from *Nahj al-Balāghah*), and leads to the Sunnī sources. While Sunnī sources can be admissible as a valid source of narrations in Shī'ī scholarship, the fact remains that Sunnī and Shī'ī scholars have different standards for the acceptability of narrators, and many Sunnī narrators are not accepted in the Shī'ī tradition, and vice versa. Additionally, the possibility that this sermon may have been fabricated for polemical reasons also makes a non-Shī'ī transmission of this sermon insufficient.

In any case, the first Sunnī source is *Qūt al-Qulūb*, which contains a number of misogynistic and gynophobic statements (including an exegesis equating 'fools' (*sufahā'*) with 'women and children'.⁶⁵⁸ (The equation of 'fools' with 'women' is also mentioned in *al-Faqīh*, a point which will be revisited later.)⁶⁵⁹ With respect to this sermon, it contains this passage:

And in the advice of Luqmān to his son: 'O my son, beware the evil woman, for she will make you old before you grow old; and

⁶⁵⁶ al-Tustari cites al-Ṭūsī as saying that his narrations are confused and contain *ghulūw*.. However, the tendency in modern scholarship is to accept his narrations. Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustari, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, 12 vols. (Qum: Jamā'at al-Mudarrisīn, 1419 AH), vol. 9, no. 306 (entry 6807). He is also described as 'very weak' in Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-Ruwwāt*, 2 vols. (Qum: Maktabat Ayatullāh al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī, 1403 AH), vol. 2, p. 124.

⁶⁵⁷ The chain of narration is: *al-Amāli* (50th session): [From unspecified] from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī al-Khattab, from Muḥammad ibn Sinan, from Abū al-Jārūd, from Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir, from his father, from his grandfather, peace be upon him, that the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, said; *al-Ikhtisāṣ*: The same text, with the chain of narration as Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, from Muḥammad ibn Sinan, from some men (*ba'd rijālhi*), from Abū Jārūd, narrating without links (*yarfa'uhu*) from the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him. Muḥammad ibn Nu'mān al-'Akbarī al-Baghdādī al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Qum: Jamā'at al-Mudarrisīn, n.d.).

⁶⁵⁸ Abū Ṭālib al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), vol. 2, p. 424.

⁶⁵⁹ *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 226, no. 5534.

beware the evils of women, for they do not call to good,' and he was on guard from the good ones among them.⁶⁶⁰

Clearly, this passage is even less substantial in its support for the sermon. Firstly, it also only contains the last sentence; secondly, it also does not appear in the context of the Battle of the Camel; and, lastly, it is not even attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib! In fact, the mention of *Qūt al-Qulūb* as a supporting reference for the sermon is quite a stretch (albeit one which is only discovered when one actually opens up *Qūt al-Qulūb* to see what it says). Additionally, this statement contains neither a source nor a chain of narration – particularly important since it is a non-Shī'ī text – and so it can be set aside.

The final source is *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*. Unlike the previous four sources, this work actually does contain the full text of the sermon (with some slight differences in wording), and is attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib at the Battle of the Camel. However, accepting *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ* as a supporting source is also problematic since, like the above, it contains neither sources nor a chain of narration; the excerpt is simply introduced by 'biographical scholars have said (*qāla 'ulamā' al-siyar*)', and *sīrah* is a known area of *ḥadīth* fabrication. Additionally, because it was compiled roughly three centuries after *Nahj al-Balāghah* (and six centuries after 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib), it cannot verify whether this sermon was present in earlier sources.

In short, while five sources are traditionally listed as supporting this sermon, a deeper examination of these sources shows that they do not actually lend credence to the authenticity of the sermon or locate it at the Battle of the Camel. None are considered authentic via the methodology of traditional *ḥadīth* analysis, and only one actually contains the 'meat' of the sermon which is the discussion of the deficiencies of women. Although, as Makārem-Shīrāzī mentions, it is not outside the realm of possibility for 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to have said the same thing more than once, that still then makes it difficult to argue that these words were addressed specifically to 'Ā'ishah.

⁶⁶⁰ Abū Ṭālib al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, p. 400.

There is, however, one source that is *not* traditionally mentioned, and that is *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, in which essentially the same statement is ascribed to the Prophet:

Once Allah's Apostle, peace and blessings be upon him, went out to the *muṣallā* (to offer the prayer) or 'Īd al-Aḍḥā or 'Īd al-Fiṭr prayer. Then he passed by the women and said, 'O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire are you (women).'

They asked, 'Why is it so, O Allah's Apostle?'

He replied, 'You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.'

The women asked, 'O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?'

He said, 'Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?' They replied in the affirmative.

He said, 'This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Is it not true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?'
The women replied in the affirmative.

He said, 'This is the deficiency in her religion.'⁶⁶¹

Since *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* is not considered a source of Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, there is no need to consider whether or not this narration should be taken as authentic within the Shī'ī tradition. At first glance, the attribution of an essentially identical statement to the Prophet, albeit in a different circumstances, would seem to bolster the possibility of the authenticity of the sermon. However, it also raises a

⁶⁶¹ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 2, book 24, no. 541. This idea recurs in other parts of Bukhārī as well. Interesting but unpublished research shared with me by Mohsan Mear, a graduate student in Islamic studies in the UK, argues that in all of the Sunnī rescensions of this narration, the narrators should be considered as inauthentic as per Sunnī *rijāl* works.

new problem: since it is not attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, this suggests that these words might have originated from someone other than the Prophet or ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, in the same way that the narration in which men are instructed not to let their daughters learn how to read (see Chapter 4) was attributed to ‘Ā’ishah as well as the Imāms.

The Aristotelian connection

This leads to a deeper examination of the text of the tradition, and a surprising and almost entirely neglected concordance between this (and other) selections of *Nahj al-Balāghah* with quotations from Aristotle, to the degree that if one were to publish the quotations from Aristotle and put the name of Imam ‘Alī or an Islamic scholar on them, they would probably be accepted at first glance.⁶⁶² The first idea that emerges is the concept of the ‘deficiency’ of women (*nawāqīṣ* literally meaning ‘deficient’). The idea that a woman is deficient, or is an incomplete man, traces back to ancient Greece, in that Aristotle held that women were incomplete copies of men and were deficient in two main ways: their reproductive physiology intellectual faculty. Aristotle’s view of the female as a ‘mutilated male’ parallels the description of Bilqīs found in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, saying that Bilqīs could not have been given ‘of every thing’ because she lacked a male organ and a beard.⁶⁶³ (This identification of women

⁶⁶² This link is not farfetched, since numerous Greek texts were formally considered by Arab/Islamic scholars during the translation movement. See Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/5th-10th c.)* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein (New York: Routledge, 1994). Rosenthal notes similar ideas attributed to Plutarch (d. 120 CE) and Ammonius (d. 240 CE) (pages 123 and 147).

⁶⁶³ ‘The female is, as it were, a mutilated male’. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck [Greek and English] (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Loeb Classical Library and Harvard University Press, 1942), 175 (Book II, section 3). This translation uses the phrase ‘deformed male’, although ‘mutilated male’ is commonly used in literature debating the ideological ramifications of this sentence. Aristotle’s erroneous descriptions of the physical inferiority of women (such as women possessing fewer teeth or a smaller brain) are taken in conjunction with the rest of his worldview to imply that he was attempting to provide a biological basis for male domination – as, indeed, is done in the separate-but-equal ideology. Paul Schollmeier offers a defence of Aristotle’s view, and suggests that some of Aristotle’s views could be construed as ‘revolutionary’ or gender egalitarian, albeit, at the same time, he concedes that ‘Aristotle does argue that men and women by nature have different psychologies, and even that men are psychologically superior to women’. Paul Schollmeier, ‘Aristotle and Women: Household and Political Roles’, in *Polis*, vol. 20 (2003), no. 1-2, pp. 22-42.

with eunuchs and pre-pubescent boys, and the implication that women, eunuchs, and pre-pubescent boys are inferior to men and hence should not be given authority, is also found in another saying in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.)⁶⁶⁴ Hence, women are closer to animals, a comparison that will directly emerge in the sermons examined in the subsequent sections which categorize women along with ‘beasts’ and ‘carnivores’. Aristotle maintained that because men are naturally superior to women in terms of intellect, men are the rulers and women are the ruled.⁶⁶⁵ He elaborates on this in his *Politics*:

Hence there are by nature various classes of rulers and ruled. For the free rules the slave, the male the female, and the man the child in a different way. And all possess the various parts of the soul, but possess them in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and the female has it, but without full authority, while the child has it, but in an undeveloped form. [...] [T]he temperance of a woman and that of a man are not the same, nor are their courage and justice, as Socrates thought, but the one is the courage of

However, in this case, the use of it in the narration is similar to that by Aristotle – that is, the female is reproductively imperfect compared to the male. The narration about Bilqīs is in al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 110, no. 3 (citing *Tafsīr ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm*).

⁶⁶⁴ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying number 102: ‘Shortly a time will come for people when high positions will be given only to those who defame others, when vicious people will be regarded as witty and the just will be regarded as weak. People will regard charity as a loss, consideration for kinship as an obligation, and worship grounds for claiming greatness among others. At this time, authority will be exercised through the counsel of women, the posting of young boys in high positions and the running of the administration by eunuchs.’ This prediction may have post-dated Imam ‘Alī and could refer to the harem culture of the ‘Abassids, with some women exerting authority in a behind-the-scenes manner and the employment of eunuchs. Otherwise, even today, neither the counsel of women nor eunuchs is politically prevalent in the Muslim world, although dire predictions such as this are sometimes used in sermons about the evils of the end of time to indicate why women should not have authority.

⁶⁶⁵ In discussing Aristotle’s work, Nicholas Smith specifically notes Aristotle’s description of women as ‘alogical’ and as inherently psychologically different from men due to their different role (that is, separate-but-equal). In his discussion of Aristotle, he mentions that women are seen as having deliberative intellect over household and procreative matters but not political matters; this is also similar to the view taken in the separate-but-equal theory whereby women are understood to have been granted by nature the intellectual capacity necessary to carry out domestic tasks. ‘Plato and Aristotle on the Nature of Women’, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 4 (October 1983), pp. 467-478. Maryanne Cline Horowitz holds that Aristotle’s view of the inferiority of female human nature caused many of the standard Western views of the inferiority of womankind and the subordination of women to men. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, ‘Aristotle and Woman’, in *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Fall 1976), pp. 183-213.

command, and the other that of subordination, and the case is similar with the other virtues. [...] [A]s the poet said of woman: 'Silence gives grace to woman' – though that is not the case likewise with a man.⁶⁶⁶

The tacit comparison between women and slaves here resembles the equivalency between marriage and slavery noted in previous chapters. In this quotation, it is also of note that Aristotle treats the woman as an exception to the human norm rather than as part of the human norm (a trend continued in classical and even most contemporary Islamic literature), and the mention of woman's 'courage' calls to mind a statement in *Nahj al-Balāghah* that courage is a virtue for men and a defect for women.⁶⁶⁷

Aristotle's description of women strongly resembles the descriptions of women in *Nezām-e Huqūq-e Zanān* and *al-Mizān* (see Chapter 1) – even in translation – in both tone and content as an explanation of why women are 'separate-but-equal':

For man's nature is the most complete, so that these dispositions too are more evident in humans. Hence a wife is more compassionate than a husband and more given to tears, but also more jealous and complaining and more apt to scold and fight. The female is also more dispirited and despondent than the male, more shameless and lying, is readier to deceive and has a longer memory; furthermore she is more wakeful, more afraid of action, and in general is less inclined to move than the male, and takes less nourishment. The male on the

⁶⁶⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham [Greek and English] (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Loeb Classical Library and Harvard University Press, 1932), pp. 63-65.

⁶⁶⁷ 'The best traits of women are those which are the worst traits of men, namely: vanity, cowardice and miserliness. Thus, since the woman is vain, she will not allow anyone access to herself; since she is miserly, she will preserve her and her husband's property; and since she is weak-hearted, she will be frightened by everything that befalls her.' *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying number 234.

other hand, as we have said, is a readier ally and is braver than the female [...].⁶⁶⁸

This quotations indicates that at least the idea that women are 'weak-hearted' also predates Imam 'Ali; Aristotle, in his case, extends it to animals as well as humans – for instance, calling upon the precedent of female and male cuttlefish.⁶⁶⁹

Of course, such a definition does not take into account the strict social restrictions on women that kept them cloistered inside, and socially and financially dependent, giving the average woman no recourse for survival but jealousy, scolding, and tears. Since ancient Greek thought heavily influenced the development of the first few centuries of Islamic thought, and *Nahj al-Balāghah* was not compiled until the 10th century CE, it is entirely possible that beliefs of ancient Greek origin could have been ascribed to the Prophet or 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. The fact that, as will be seen, comparable ideas are not found in the earlier text, *Kitāb Sulaym*, lends credence to this idea.⁶⁷⁰

In discussing Aristotle's view of women, Lynda Lange cites a 17th century Frenchman who says:

Aristotle [...] pretends that women are but monsters [...]. If a woman (how learned soever she might be) had wrote as much of men, she would have lost all her credit; and men would have imagined it sufficient to have refuted such a foppery by answering that it must be a woman, or a fool, that had said so.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁸ Aristotle, *History of Animals, Books 7-10*, ed. and trans. D. M. Balme [Greek and English] (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Loeb Classical Library and Harvard University Press, 1991), 219.

⁶⁶⁹ Aristotle, *History of Animals, Books 7-10*, 219-220.

⁶⁷⁰ Muḥammad al-Khabāz briefly mentions the similarities between the portrayal of women between Aristotle and *Nahj al-Balāghah* in *Ṣūrat al-Mar'ah fi al-Turāth al-Shī'ī*; however, he does not develop the idea.

⁶⁷¹ Lynda Lange, 'Woman is not a Rational Animal', in *Discovering Reality*, vol. 161 (1983), pp. 1-15. <http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/0-306-48017-4_1>. Accessed 27 February 2015. Citing François Poulain de la Barre.

Although dealing with an entirely different tradition (ancient Greek and Christian European), this view reflects the entire problem of saying the sermon is directed to ‘Ā’ishah, as well as the platitudes of the separate-but-equal ideology: if such things were said about men, they would never be accepted.

Textual analysis continued: menstruation and evil

The second issue of note is the negativity associated with menstruation. While the Shī’ī *tafsīr* of *ḍaḥakat* in the story of Sārah (see Chapter 3) presents menstruation as a miracle, most of the narrations about menstruation treat it as a defect, particularly regarding Mary. There is also a logical problem, in that menstruating women do not actually fast less since they are expected to make up missed fasts during the year. Menstruation as a ‘biological’ and ‘scientific’ reason for the need for male authority in the separate-but-equal ideology was already outlined in Chapter 1; however, it is worth noting that, in his commentary on his sermon, Makārem-Shīrāzī drives this point home by explaining that ‘during the time of their menstruation, they enter into an almost-ill period in which they require rest and are not in a position to engage in acts of worship.’⁶⁷²

Lastly, there is the characterization of women as evil, which recurs three other times in *Nahj al-Balāghah* – once in another sermon (to be discussed in the next section), and in the sayings ‘a woman is a scorpion whose grip is sweet’ and ‘a woman is evil (*sharr*) entirely, and the worst evil in her is that one cannot do without her.’⁶⁷³ The narrations equating woman with evil are inconsistent with another saying in *Nahj al-Balāghah* which says that ‘the doer of evil is worse than evil itself’ (saying 32), which separates the person from evil. The portrayal of woman as evil is not found in the Qur’ān, and Sayyid Faḍlullāh politely says that this narration is irreconcilable with the Qur’ān unless

⁶⁷² Nāṣir Makārem Shīrāzī, *The “Deficiencies” of Women*, p. 13.

⁶⁷³ The quotation in *Nahj al-Balāghah* saying that a woman’s *ghīrah* is jealousy, as well as the opposing *ḥadīth* in *al-Kāfī*, has been discussed in Chapter 3. Regarding the comparison between a woman and a scorpion, there is nothing substantive regarding alternative sourcing in *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah* (see volume 4, page 52); one alternative source (*Ghurur al-Hikam*) is given for the saying equating woman with evil (*Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah*, volume 4, page 185).

another meaning is intended.⁶⁷⁴ The perception of woman as evil dates back to antiquity, including perceptions of Eve. In fact, the association of woman with evil, or the treatment of evil is strange since evil is not admitted to as a separate entity within Islamic thought, and expressions such as '*sharr al-nās*' can be understood to mean things such as 'the worst of people', and not necessarily 'evil personified'. Of course, the personification of evil may simply be a literary device. While it is implied in the narration about women and wine, and in the narrations excluding Eve from the chain of narration of *wilāyah* (see Chapter 2), there is still a hesitance to connect the foremothers of the prophets or Imāms – who must necessarily be 'purified' – with evil, and so the most negative portrayal is that of Sārah being ill-mannered. The image of woman as a devourer of man also plays on a primal (male) fear, and in fact is represented in the narrations on 'Anāq (the monster-daughter of Eve who is struck down by Allah). The imagery of a scorpion-goddess also dates back to ancient mythologies, as does indeed the perception of a woman being both evil and a necessity; whether or not Imām 'Alī actually said these things, he did not invent them. It would seem unlikely that these statements would issue forth from Imām 'Alī given the favourable reports of domestic harmony in his marriage to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'. While one could maintain that Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' was an exception to womanhood, and that that these statements apply to 'ordinary' women (perhaps, those who menstruate), Mahdī Mehrīzī notes that the Qur'ān itself presents the Virgin Mary and Āsiyah as 'examples for the believers' and not as 'exceptions'.⁶⁷⁵

This sermon can be read in tandem with the notion of 'womanly views'; unlike the above, here, the textual evidence supports the notion that it is directed at 'Ā'ishah.

As regards a certain woman ['Ā'ishah], she is in the grip of womanly views, and malice is boiling in her bosom like the furnace of the blacksmith. If she were called upon to deal with others as she is dealing with me she would not have done it.

⁶⁷⁴ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunnah*, 155, citing Sayyid Faḍlullāh.

⁶⁷⁵ Mahdī Mehrīzī, 'Ta'ammolī dar Aḥādīth-e Nuḡṣān-e 'Aql-e Zanān'.

Even hereafter she will be allowed her original respect, while [her] reckoning is an obligation on Allah....⁶⁷⁶

As above, directing these insults to ‘Ā’ishah does not change the fact that they are demeaning to other women, and are along the same lines as an ethnic slur. While women may suffer particularly from the stereotype of harbouring malice, ‘Ā’ishah is hardly the only person to have rode out to war harbouring malice. The alternative sources in this case neither provide additional information nor pre-date *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and in fact some are taken from *Nahj al-Balāghah* itself; therefore, they cannot lend support to the presence of this text in earlier sources.⁶⁷⁷

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Women are deficient in intellect; women are evil
Source(s)	<i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i> , Sermons 80 and 156
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ancient Greek thought • jurisprudential discourse
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior.

⁶⁷⁶ Sermon 156.

⁶⁷⁷ The alternative sources are listed as (1) al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), *Talkhīs al-Shāfi*; (2) al-Ḥillī (16th century), *Mukhtaṣar Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt*; (3) al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*; (beginning of the sixth century *hijrī*); (4) al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (d. 1567), *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*; (5) al-Majlisī (d. 1698), *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Of these, I was only able to find the exact text in the latter two, although this could be an issue of manuscripts. *Kanz al-‘Ummāl* lists it in vol. 16, p. 186, no. 44216 (; however, the chain of narration is simply given as ‘Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Ḥasan, from his father’, with no indication of how it reached al-Muttaqī al-Hindī many centuries later. While some people would argue that its presence in a Sunnī work lends credence to its authenticity, since a Sunnī author would not want to quote passages which are unfavourable to revered figures in Sunnīsm, *Kanz al-‘Ummāl* contains many narrations which are cited by Shi’a to support Shi’a polemical concerns. ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-‘Ummāl*, 18 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1979).

There are some other problems with the chain of narration. First, while most *rijālī* scholars consider Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan to be unknown (*majhūl*), he should really be seen as ‘condemned’ in the Twelver tradition because he writes a letter accusing Imām al-Kāzīm and Imām al-Ṣādiq of falsely claiming the Imamate. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* I, pp. 366-7, no. 19. Additionally, the sermon is narrated from Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abd Allāh by Wakī’ ibn al-Jarrāḥ, who used to contradict Imam ‘Alī on *fiqh* by fasting continuously (i.e. without breaking his fast) and was known for drinking *nabīdh* [an alcoholic beverage made from dried fruits such as dates]. In this regard, an account in *Tarīkh Baghdād* says: ‘Wakī’ ibn al-Jarrāḥ came to us and settled himself in the mosque on the Euphrates. I used to come to him to hear *hadīth* from him. So he asked me for *nabīdh*. So I brought it to him at night in a wineskin, and I met with him to read *hadīth* with him while he was drinking. And when he exhausted what I had brought him, he put out the light, and I said to him, “What is this?” And so he said, “If you had given us more, we would have given you more.” al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tarīkh Baghdād* XIII (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997), 477. See also Muḥammad Taqī Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl* X, 437. (Shaykh Yahya Seymour, who studies at the Karbala seminary, is to be credited for these insights.)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • Women are inferior because they menstruate. • Male authority is necessary.
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are evil • Men are normative

7.2.2 Women and beasts

The next selection to be discussed is a ‘description of the misguided’ (*ṣifāt al-dāl*), the relevant portion of which reads:

Beasts are concerned with their bellies. Carnivores are concerned with assaulting others. Women are concerned with the adornments of this ignoble life and the creation of mischief herein. Believers are humble, believers are admonishers, and believers are afraid [of Allah].⁶⁷⁸

As with the above, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd asserts that this sermon was delivered about ‘Ā’ishah, while Imām ‘Alī was marching towards Basra. However, the same concerns about applying it solely to ‘Ā’ishah remain – namely, that it would still be condemning her on account of her gender, and that there is no textual evidence that it is truly directed at ‘Ā’ishah. Additionally, as a wife of the Prophet, ‘Ā’ishah lived a simple life without ‘adornments’, and so this makes it less likely that these words were directed at her.⁶⁷⁹ There also remains the question of whether these words would apply to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ or other revered women.

The separation of ‘believer’ from ‘woman’ is itself discomfiting, because it implies that men are believers, and women are threats; additionally, it implies that men are normative in Islam. The classification of women with ‘beasts’ and ‘carnivores’ goes against the essential humanity of women in the Qur’ān, as well as the classical definition of the human as a ‘rational animal’. However, the idea that the woman is a creature of passion but not intellect is central to the argument of the separate-but-equal theory.

⁶⁷⁸ Sermon 153.

⁶⁷⁹ Qur’ān 33:28-29.

As before, the most immediate way to explore the textual authenticity of the selection is to examine alternative sources. Three are mentioned:

1. Ibn Shu‘bah al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*, p. 108 (d. 380/990) (Shī‘ī)
2. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 82 (Shī‘ī)
3. al-Warrām, *al-Majmū‘ah*, p. 77. (d. 650/1252) (Shī‘ī)⁶⁸⁰

Of them, again, *al-Kāfī* is one with the strongest strong weight in the Shī‘ī tradition. However, the relevant excerpt in *al-Kāfī* reads differently:

The Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, used to often say [...]: ‘O people, the concern of carnivores is attacking,⁶⁸¹ and the concern of beasts is their bellies, and the concern of women is men. And indeed the believers are empathetic, fearing, cautious – may Allah make us and you from among them.’⁶⁸²

Like the passage from *Nahj al-Balāghah*, this excerpt still juxtaposes women and believers; however, the object of women’s interest is considerably different! This version is more textually supported since it reflects the narrations saying that, because Eve was created from Adam, women are concerned with men (although rejecting the view that Eve was created from Adam would necessitate rejecting that narration).⁶⁸³ Here and above, the classification of women with ‘beasts’ and ‘carnivores’ portrays women both as consumers, and as actively malicious – again, evoking an image of ‘Anāq – as opposed to the narrations about Eve which portray woman as passive and obedient. The idea that Imām

⁶⁸⁰ ‘Abd al-Zahrā’ al-Khaṭīb, *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 354-359.

⁶⁸¹ An alternate version says ‘eating’, which is orthographically similar to ‘attacking’ (*ta‘addī* versus *taghaddī*).

⁶⁸² ‘Ayyuhā al nās, inna al ṣīb’ himmatuhā al-ta‘addī [alternate: *taghaddī*] wa inna al bahā’im himmatuhā butūnuhā wa inna al nisā’ himmatuhunna al rijāl wa inna al mu‘minūn mushfiqūn khā’ifūn wājiūn, ja‘alanā allāh wa iyyākum minhum.’ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 82, no 9.

⁶⁸³ See section 2.2.2.

‘Alī ‘often’ said this also further discredits the argument that this was directed at ‘Ā’ishah. Additionally, the chain of narration is incomplete.⁶⁸⁴

This leads to the second Shī‘ī source, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl* by al-Ḥarrānī, a Shī‘ī scholar whose birth and death dates are not known but who was quoted by Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022 CE). *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl* does contain the operative phrase ‘the zeal of women is for this world, and mischief in it.’⁶⁸⁵ However, again, the context is different, in that it is part of a lengthy ethical exhortation attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the context does not give any indication that this was delivered with respect to the Battle of the Camel. There is, again, the problem of lack of sourcing in that the book does not provide chains of narration; that is to say, it suffers from the same problem as *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

The last source is *al-Majmū‘ah* from al-Warrām. Since it post-dates *Nahj al-Balāghah* by three centuries, and also does not have sources or chains of narration, it cannot be used to validate its presence in earlier sources.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Women and beasts
Source(s)	Nahj al-Balāghah, sermon 153
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judaeo-Christian perceptions of woman as evil • Ancient mythological perception of woman as evil or bestial
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • Men are the producers
Additional messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are evil • Women are bestial • Men are normative

7.2.3 Women’s seclusion

These sermons can be viewed in tandem with a letter from *Nahj al-Balāghah*, in which Imām ‘Alī advises his son:

⁶⁸⁴ The narration is *marfū‘*, meaning that the narrator did not take it directly from the Imām but does not indicate who passed it on to him.

⁶⁸⁵ ‘*Inna al-nisā hammuhunna zīnat al-dunyā wal-fasādu fihā*’, in al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Qum: Jamā‘at al-Mudarrisīn, 1404 AH), p. 156.

Do not consult women because their view is weak and their determination unstable. Cover their eyes by keeping them under the veil because strictness of veiling keeps them for long. Their coming out is not worse than your allowing an unreliable man to visit them. If you can manage that they should not know anyone other than you, do so. Do not allow a woman matters other than those about herself, because a woman is a flower not an administrator. Do not pay her regard beyond herself. Do not encourage her to intercede for others. Do not show suspicion out of place, because this leads a correct woman to evil and a chaste woman to deflection.⁶⁸⁶

Women's intellectual and ethical deficiencies, and why women should not be in positions of authority, have already been discussed extensively above. The idea that women are mentally weak and should not be concerned with matters beyond themselves goes against the portrayal of Khadījah, the wife of the Prophet, as well as other women in the households of the Imāms who were encouraged to pursue and teach Islamic knowledge.⁶⁸⁷

Unlike some of the other sermons, the operative points of this text are reproduced in *al-Kāfī* as being part of a letter from Imām 'Alī to his son. However, the chain of narration in *al-Kāfī* is missing a narrator. The inclusion of this text in these books could be seen as support for the authenticity of this letter, or it could— more sceptically – be seen as a continuation of the trend of these texts selectively including material presenting a restrictive view of women (as noted in the previous chapters).⁶⁸⁸ The most accurate conclusion that can be deduced by the inclusion of this content in these two books is that the portrayal of Imām 'Alī as being restrictive towards women, and the exclusion of

⁶⁸⁶ Letter 31.

⁶⁸⁷ In addition to the financial support that Khadījah, the first wife of the Prophet, gave her husband, regarding the wives of the Imāms, one can consider the role of the wives and female relatives of Imām al-Ḥusayn in publicizing on his message after he was killed; the mother of Imām al-Kāẓim, who is said to have been appointed by her husband to teach women; and Fāṭimah al-Ma'sumah.

⁶⁸⁸ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 510, no. 3

women from the public sphere, was considered normative by this era, and hence did not raise any proverbial eyebrows.

The main contribution that this section brings to the discussion is the exhortation for women's seclusion – in parallel to the sentiment attributed to Imām 'Alī in Chapter 2, the precedent regarding Sārah in Chapter 3, and the seclusion of Mary in Chapter 6. It goes without saying that the focus on woman as a sexual being – in terms of seclusion, keeping her away from men, chastity, and jealousy – is male normative, and also diverges from the Qur'ānic portrayal of women as complete beings in favour of the Aristotelian view of women as imperfect beings.⁶⁸⁹ Rawand Osman cites Muḥammad Maḥdī Shams al-Dīn, who wrote extensively on Islamic law pertaining to women, as describing this view as problematic since Shī'ī jurisprudence prescribes Islamic modest dress for women but does not prohibit seclusion or 'decent mixing between men and women'.⁶⁹⁰ She also notes a narration from Imām al-Ṣādiq condemning a man who preferred to stay in his home on the grounds that he would not be able to learn about his religion there; the same could be said for women.⁶⁹¹ She observes that the Qur'an prescribes women's seclusion as a *punishment* for illicit conduct rather than as a norm.⁶⁹² Lastly, she also notes that the text is self-contradictory because 'if not allowing a woman to know any man is not jealousy out of place, then what is?'⁶⁹³ It should be noted that, like the ancient Greek views of woman, this passage acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy: if a woman is kept inside of her home, discouraged from considering anything but herself, treated primarily as a sexual being, and perpetually treated with distrust, then how could she be expected to be anything but an intellectually deficient flower?

⁶⁸⁹ The implication that women are imperfect beings can be found in the predominantly Sunnī recension of the narration which says that there are four women to have 'reached perfection': Āsiyah, Maryam, Khadijah, and Fāṭimah – which is often considered to be favourable to women, but which implies that all other women are imperfect. In contrast, this narration usually appears in Shī'ī sources as 'the four women to have been selected [by Allah]'.
⁶⁹⁰ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, pp. 165-166.
⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166, note 101, citing al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 31.
⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 106.
⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Unlike the material in the previous chapters, however, this focuses on actual veiling instead of mere seclusion. Interestingly, here, the veil and seclusion are presented as being for the benefit of the woman – along the lines of the portrayal of woman’s desires in Chapter 2 – instead of being for the sake of preserving men from women’s temptations, which is how the *ḥijāb* is discussed today in the separate-but-equal ideology. The observation that a strict *ḥijāb* ‘preserves’ women could also refer to the simple truth that, in a harsh desert, being fully covered preserves a woman’s appearance. Regardless of whether or not these words truly trace back to Imām ‘Alī, they represent the cultural norm in the 10th century CE whereby women were not expected to be present in the public sphere.

A word is in order on the contemporary ramifications of such beliefs. Most Muslim societies have been known for the custom of women’s seclusion; however, what is pertinent is not just local custom, but how the presumption that women’s seclusion is Islamic affects Shī‘ī scholarship. It is as if there is a feedback loop – an otherwise inauthenticable text promoting women’s seclusion (such as this) is accepted on the grounds that it agrees with preconceived ideas about what is Islamic, and then it is used to reinforce the view that women’s seclusion is Islamic. This view, in turn, is used to draw greater conclusions about what women cannot or should not do in society.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Women's seclusion
Source(s)	<i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i> , letter 31
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural values where women's seclusion is the norm
Separate-but-equal ideology	Supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women's seclusion is ideal. • Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family). • Female chastity is of paramount importance.

7.3. The portrayal of women in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*

The portrayal of women in *Nahj al-Balāghah* is, simply put, dismal, and sends a death-knell to anyone arguing that Imām 'Alī viewed women in an equitable light – if, of course, the narrations are taken as authentically reflecting his views. Could *Nahj al-Balāghah* be representing the inclusion of cultural values that entered into Islamic thought after the time of the Prophet?

To shed more light on the question of Imām 'Alī's views of women, it is now time to examine *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*. Since *Kitāb Sulaym* is considered to be the earliest extant Shī'ī text, it deserves special attention. Whether or not *Kitāb Sulaym* is authentic in whole, in part, or even not at all; and whether or not *Kitāb Sulaym* actually traces all the way back to the first century *hijrī* (when it is said to have been compiled), *Kitāb Sulaym*, at the very least, reflects an earlier the social mores, and therefore stands in contrast to the other works being considered in these chapters – including *Nahj al-Balāghah* and the Four Books.

Kitāb Sulaym consists of narrations attributed to or about 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib passed on through a disciple of his named Sulaym ibn Qays, said to have died while al-Hajjāj (d. 95) was in power. While there is disagreement over whether Sulaym ibn Qays was the compiler's real name or a pseudonym, the content indicates the compiler was aligned with the Shī'ī cause, was against the

Umayyads, and was situated in the early period of Islam. The question of the authenticity of *Kitāb Sulaym* is complex, with the possibility that different narrations (or even portions of single narrations) date to different eras. Hossein Modarressi feels that the core of *Kitāb Sulaym* traces back to the early Umayyad era, with later insertions, revisions, and accretions; he is optimistic that the original text can be identified and recovered. Specifically, he notes that a good portion of the book can be established to date to the reign of Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105-125 AH).⁶⁹⁴ He feels that the content itself is reflective of popular Shī‘ism in the Umayyad period; as he puts it, ‘It is a display of primitive, unsophisticated beliefs among the rank and file of the Shī‘ites of Kūfa during the late Umayyad period with clear residues of the usual Kaysānī exaggerations on the virtues of the House of the Prophet. It also refers to the Umayyad positions on some of the matters discussed’, and that that ‘[m]any such popular, unsophisticated Shī‘ite lines of interpretation and belief were later transformed and developed by the Shī‘ite rationalists of the fourth and fifth centuries.’⁶⁹⁵ Amir-Moezzi, on the other hand, favours the idea that *Kitāb Sulaym* is essentially authentic, but that it is impossible to discern the original manuscript from the revisions and accretions.⁶⁹⁶

Robert Gleave, Patricia Crone, and Tamima Bayhom-Daou have each approached the question of the authenticity of *Kitāb Sulaym* by analysing individual narrations; in fact, Robert Gleave suggests the evaluation of the entire book in said manner as a future project for the willing. Gleave argues that a narration in *Kitāb Sulaym* which addresses *ḥadīth* narration dates to the late 8th century/early 9th century (and perhaps could have been taken from al-Shafī‘ī),⁶⁹⁷ while Crone holds that a narration on Mu‘āwiyah’s efforts to spread false narrations dates between 762 and 780 – or, more specifically, to the time when the Shī‘ah were optimistic about the ‘Abbāsīd revolution and before they

⁶⁹⁴ Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, pp. 83-36.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶⁹⁶ Robert Gleave, citing Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, ‘Note bibliographique sur le Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays, le plus ancien ouvrage shī‘ite existant’, in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, M.M. Bar-Asher and S. Hopkins (eds), *Le shī‘isme Imāmīte quarante ans après. Hommages à Etan Kohlberg* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 33-48.

⁶⁹⁷ Robert Gleave, ‘Early Shiite hermeneutics and the dating of *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*’, in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 78, no. 1 (2015), pp. 83–103.

had realized that it would make their situation worse.⁶⁹⁸ Bayhom-Daou examines the same narration as Gleave and identifies it as pre-classical; she notes that the narration dates to a time when the Imām himself was seen as an answer to the problem between conflicting narrations, whereas by the time the Four Books were compiled, Shīʿī scholars were dealing with the different problem of having conflicting narrations attributed to the Imāms themselves.⁶⁹⁹

Regardless of precisely when the material in *Kitāb Sulaym* originated, its earlier provenance is evident in tone of the book with respect to the discussion of women. In this regard, it is distinctly different from in *Nahj al-Balāghah* as well as most of the material considered in the previous chapters, and is more similar to that of narrations attributed to the Prophetic era. This is despite the fact that *Kitāb Sulaym* addresses some of the same issues as *Nahj*, such as the tension between Imām ʿAlī and ʿĀʾishah. Like many of the narrations discussed in previous chapters, it also contains material that is distinctly and unequivocally Shīʿī, and therefore contributes to the delineation of a unique Shīʿī identity, including a uniquely Shīʿī conception of gender. Primary themes in the book include the Saqīfah (where Abū Bakr was selected as the first caliph), the killing of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar; the usurpation of Fadak from Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, and the opposition of the companions – including Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿĀʾishah, and Ḥaḥṣah – to Imām ʿAlī. A narration attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq indicates that *Kitāb Sulaym* also became understood to be a text that demarcated Shīʿī identity.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁸ Crone holds that this narration is obviously a piece of ‘political satire’, although it seems unlikely that it would have been perceived as such by classical Shīʿa scholars given the sanctity associated with the transmission of *ḥadīth*. Patricia Crone, ‘Mawālī and the Prophet’s family: an early Shīʿite view’, in M. Bernards and J. Nawas (eds.), *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 167-94.

⁶⁹⁹ Tamima Bayhoum-Dou, ‘*Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* revisited’, in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol 78, no. 1 (February 2015), pp. 105-119.

⁷⁰⁰ ‘If any of our Shīʿah or those who love us do not have *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*, then they do not have anything of our matter [i.e. *wilāyah*], and they do not know anything of our ways. It is the alphabet of the Shīʿah, and a secret of the secrets of the family of Muhammad (S).’ al-Mīrẓā al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasāʾil*, vol. 17, p. 298, no. 42 (21397). The late provenance of the narration makes it difficult to discern whether it really traces back to Imam al-Sadiq, but it does indicate that, at some point, this conception of *Kitāb Sulaym* as definitively Shīʿī was in circulation. In any case, the book situates itself against the Umayyads as well.

With respect to the portrayal of women in *Kitāb Sulaym*, one of the main features that stands out is inclusion. Both women and men are summoned for important discussions: the Prophet summons both the women and men of the tribe of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib to hear his bequest (*ḥadīth* 61);⁷⁰¹ Imām al-Ḥusayn specifically asks both women and men to oppose Mu‘āwiyah (*ḥadīth* 26); and Mu‘āwiyah orders that false *aḥādīth* against Imām ‘Alī be taught to women and children (*ḥadīth* 26). Nowhere is it suggested that women should remain in the house or be uneducated. When Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ dies, women cry copiously; no one suggests that their voices are shameful and should be silenced.⁷⁰² Fāṭimah and ‘Ā’ishah are both in the vicinity during the Prophet’s funeral prayers, although ‘Ā’ishah does not participate due to divine intervention (*ḥadīth* 4). Imām ‘Alī is described as the Imām of every male and female believer (*mu’min* and *mu’minah*), whereas the sermons in *Nahj al-Balāghah* distinguish between women from believers. Umm Ayman argues publicly with Abū Bakr in the mosque; this is in contrast to the exhortation that women’s views are weak, and that women should not leave the house. There is also an emphasis on the inclusion of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ in sacred narrative – such as in the story of the *mubāhilah* (*ḥadīth* 11, 26) and *ḥadīth al-kisā’* (*ḥadīth* 11) – and the wives of the Prophet are included in and aware of contemporaneous events as opposed to being silent, hidden, or invisible. Ṣafīyah marries the Prophet of her own accord; ironically, her marriage is portrayed as one that frees her, instead of as a form of ownership, since her dowry was her freedom (*ḥadīth* 55). This is in contrast to the wives of the later Imāms, who are rarely mentioned, as well as

⁷⁰¹ Because *Kitāb Sulaym* is relatively short, narrations are given by number. Taken from Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali*, ed. M. Bāqir al-Ansari al-Zanjani, 3 vols. (Qum: Nashr al-Hādī, 1415 AH).

⁷⁰² In contrast to the description of women mourning publicly here, as well as in the account of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ mourning publicly and audibly for her father, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Muqarram, a contemporary scholar who wrote a commonly referenced work on the Karbalā’ narrative, refutes narrations saying that Um al-Banīn, the mother of ‘Abbās ibn ‘Alī, publicly mourned her sons as well as al-Ḥusayn at the Baqī’ cemetery on the grounds that, due to her stature and her position as a wife of Imām ‘Alī: ‘She could not have said anything contradictory to the canon of the *sharī‘ah* which prohibits a woman from being exposed in any way to strangers either through prohibition or as a precaution so long as there was no extreme necessity for it. It goes without saying that when a woman mourns someone she has lost, she ought to sit in her house and fortify herself against being seen by strangers or her voice being heard by them as long as there was no urgency for it.’ ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-, *Maqatal al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 1979). This is an example of projecting contemporary assumptions about ideals for women onto primary sources.

the narrations likening marriage to slavery. While it is not the most flattering form of inclusion, the legitimacy of matrilineage is also alluded to in the frequent mention of ‘Umar’s ignoble grandmother (*ḥadīth* 4, 48); this is in keeping with Bernheimer’s observation that matrilineage was considered of more import in the Prophet era and is in stark contrast to the narration (discussed in Chapter 6) in which Imām al-Bāqir is questioned about how he can claim to be related to the Prophet through a woman.⁷⁰³

Despite a narration presenting Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ as someone who neither saw nor seen by men,⁷⁰⁴ several narrations set the scene whereby Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ is in the same room as male companions, and some narrations about her are related by men, thus implying that they saw and heard her (*ḥadīth* 1, 21, 48, 49, 61). Several narrations also speak of when she went on a mule with Imām ‘Alī to visit the houses of the companions to remind them of their allegiance to ‘Alī (*ḥadīth* 4, 12). Rather than sending her husband to speak on her behalf, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ speaks up about Fadak and argues intelligently and convincingly with Abū Bakr and ‘Umar (*ḥadīth* 14, 48); there is no question of her having ‘womanly views’.⁷⁰⁵ Perhaps due to the early provenance of the text, there is less of an emphasis on *ḥijāb* as the defining value for a woman. For instance, it is related that when Abū Bakr and ‘Umar burst into Fāṭimah’s house and attacked her, she was not wearing a *khimār* (a face veil is not mentioned, suggesting that this would not have been expected); while she could hardly be blamed for such a thing, describing Fāṭimah al-Zahrā’ in such a manner could cause deep discomfort today in some regions due to the common association of her sanctity with being unseen (*ḥadīth* 4). (However, in some circles, this narration is recited ritually in ceremonies to evoke tears.) Additionally, a narration specifically mentions the time before the wives of the Prophet (not women in general) were told to take on the *ḥijāb*; this narration has the Prophet, ‘Ā’ishah, and Imām ‘Alī sleeping in one room and, out of need, sharing one blanket (with the Prophet in the middle) (*ḥadīth* 36, 60).

⁷⁰³ Theresa Bernheimer, *The ‘Alids*, p. 37. (See discussion in Section 6.2.4.)

⁷⁰⁴ al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī’ah*, vol. 20, p. 67, no. 7.

⁷⁰⁵ Fadak as a model for female activism is discussed in Rachel Kantz Feder, ‘Fatima’s Revolutionary Image in *Fadak fi al-Ta’rikh* (1955): The Inception of Muhammad Bāqir al-Sadr’s Activism’, in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2014), pp. 79-96.

A crucial barometer for the treatment of women in *Kitāb Sulaym* is the portrayal of the animosity between ‘Alī and ‘Ā’ishah. In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, ‘Ā’ishah is criticized through her femininity – through deficiencies in her essential nature and intellect, and because she left the house; while, at the same time, the other perpetrators of the civil war are not criticized for violating the Qur’ān. Here, the portrayal is the opposite: Ṭalḥā and Zubayr are criticized for encouraging ‘Ā’ishah to leave her house and thereby to violate the Qur’ān (*ḥadīth* 29). On the one hand, this removes a sense of agency from ‘Ā’ishah, since it implies she would not have gone without their urging; but on the other hand, it removes the gendered aspect of the condemnation of her and also holds the male perpetrators responsible. Additionally, this passage specifies that the command to stay at home applied only to the wives of the Prophet, whereas the passage in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and other narrations discussed in this work apply it to all women.

This is in keeping with an absence of gendered critiques in *Kitāb Sulaym*. ‘Ā’ishah and Ḥafṣah are criticized for their actions, but not for being deficient in intellect or menstruating. In fact, the only mention of menstruation is to say that people in a state of ritual impurity (*janābah*) or who are menstruating may not enter the Prophet’s mosque – except for the Prophet’s womenfolk (*ḥadīth* 51). This portrayal differs from the discomfort mentioned in Chapter 6 surrounding the possibility of a menstruating woman being in sacred space, even if it is by divine or Prophetic command. While the narration from *Bukhārī* asserts that the majority of the dwellers in Hell are women, the description of the dwellers of Hell here (*ḥadīth* 7) is ungendered – and, given the number of male villains in the text, one gets the feeling that more men than women may be on their way to Hell.

Instead, an unusual feature of the portrayal of Imām ‘Alī in *Kitāb Sulaym* is his use of childbirth as a metaphor. This adds legitimacy to (and sympathy for) the female experience in a way that many of these narrations – with the exception of those presenting a sacred chain of inheritance of women (see Chapter 2) – do not. Even the narrations about the Virgin Mary giving birth discussed in Chapter 6 come across as male normative. In one of these narrations, Imām ‘Alī gives the example of a woman wanting to give birth

quickly; he says: ‘You have broken away from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib like the breaking away of the head which parts from the body, like a woman giving birth who wants the child to leave her sooner and does not prevent a hand from touching it’ (*ḥadīth* 12). This example combines both the male and female experience (warfare and childbirth) as normative, and shows some empathy for the condition of women during childbirth. In the other, provides a *du‘ā* to make childbirth go faster; this is done in the name of Maryam and is one of the few places where she is actually invoked in an archetypal sense as a mother (*ḥadīth* 88). Additionally, one of the presuppositions by Aristotle as well as commentators on the sermon on women’s deficiencies is that a woman is intellectually deficient so she will focus more on housework, which is her natural role;⁷⁰⁶ however, in *Kitāb Sulaym* describes Imām ‘Alī coming outside covered in flour because he was grinding flour at home (*ḥadīth* 55).

The only misogyny in *Kitāb Sulaym* is attributed not to Imām ‘Alī but rather to his opponents. For instance, ‘Umar is cited as saying ‘what do we have to do with the opinions of women’ after he attacks the house of Fāṭimah (*ḥadīth* 4). It also says that Mu‘āwiyah ordered the Arabs to marry non-Arab women, but not to let Arab women to marry non-Arabs; and to disallow inheritance from leaving the Arabs, and not to give non-Arab women property or gifts. This is to keep money in the hands of the Arab tribes (*ḥadīth* 23). While the intent may not have been to marginalize or restrict women, it nonetheless does that; and the idea that a woman should not marry outside of her culture is still prevalent today. It should be noted that Mu‘āwiyah is often considered to be someone who introduced the cultural norms of other regions into the Islamic tradition. Ironically, although the inclusion of Mu‘āwiyah’s directive is intended to discredit him, a narration is included in *al-Faqīh* equating ‘women’ with ‘fools’ and explaining that the point of that is to indicate that it is abhorrent (*makrūh*) to leave inheritance to women.⁷⁰⁷

In sum, the treatment of women in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* is vastly different from that in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, even though both books are centred on

⁷⁰⁶ See footnote 5 (above).

⁷⁰⁷ al-Şādūq, *al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 226, no. 5534.

Imām ‘Alī and discuss similar themes. Both books are also internally self-consistent in how they portray women, which suggests that the material about women in each book comes from a specific era. The portrayal of women in *Kitāb Sulaym* is much closer to how the Prophetic era is envisioned – with women attending the Prophetic mosque with men, and without a stigma attached to women appearing in public. Unlike many of the narrations discussed in these chapters, there are no gendered attacks criticising women for being female or on the basis of their reproductive systems; instead, people, male and female, are criticized for going against the *ahl al-bayt*. While there is no guarantee that the content of *Kitāb Sulaym* is authentic, because it traces to an earlier era, it should be seen as more reflective of the cultural norms of the Prophetic era, and reinforces the idea that more restrictive or misogynistic narrations are products of a later era. Although *Nahj al-Balāghah* is considered to be a seminal Shī‘ī text, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* fits the pattern of narrations with unique Shī‘ī content – such as those focusing on the narrative of *wilāyah* – which provide a much more equitable and inclusive portrayal of women.

Summary of narration(s)	
Topic	Women in <i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
Source(s)	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i> (passim)
Reflects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural norms of Prophetic era in the Arabian Peninsula • Uniquely Shī‘ī content
Separate-but-equal ideology	Does not support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents. • Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level. • Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion. • Women are inferior because they menstruate. • Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal. • Female chastity is of paramount importance

7.4 Conclusions

What is the subtext? Although both claiming to represent Imām ‘Alī, the material attributed to and about Imām ‘Alī in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* portray women in vastly different ways. In keeping with the

patriarchal sets of narrations identified in the previous chapters, the selections from *Nahj al-Balāghah* portray Islam as male-normative, and women as exceptions; ‘Ā’ishah is encouraged to stay out of the public sphere by being attacked due to her femininity and by the implication that she stepped out of the proper role for a woman (research question 1 – male normativeness). Women are inferior to men in their essential nature, and should be kept out of the public sphere, strictly covered, and secluded. Unlike most of the other narrations, women are likened to animals (beasts, carnivores, and scorpions).

Although the value system presented in *Nahj al-Balāghah* is considered to be distinctly Islamic, in fact it strongly mimics Aristotle’s views of women, and there is a strong chance that the emergence of these ideas was due to the importation of ancient Greek ideas into Islamic thought – something that had not yet happened at the time of Sulaym ibn Qays (research question 5 – pre-Islamic influences). This would support the general interest of the dominant culture, due to the cultural influence of ancient Greek ideas tracing back centuries; as well as the interests of the (male) scholarly class who formally introduced ancient Greek philosophy into Islamic society. It should be emphasized that, in either case, these phenomena are not uniquely Shī‘ī. The strong concordance between ideas about women in classical Islamic thought and Aristotle’s writings, however, does leave open the question of why Aristotle was the influential ancient Greek thinker – as opposed to, say, Plato, who expressed much more gender-egalitarian views; perhaps the answer lies in the harmony between Aristotle’s views and the cultural reality of the ancient Greek and ancient-mediaeval Mesopotamian world.

In contrast, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* presents an equitable view of women and men – one in which both women and men are involved in the public sphere, the affairs of the religious community, and sacred narrative. No creational differences between women and men are implied. *Hijāb* is discussed only with respect to the Prophet’s wives, who are nonetheless not invisible and both aware of and involved in the society around them – for better or for worse. ‘Ā’ishah is criticized for her actions, but not less so than the other men who were involved in the Battle of the Camel, nor are the critiques gendered. In short, *Nahj al-Balāghah* carries the same subtexts as the ‘narrative’ identified in

the previous chapters, and reinforces the separate-but-equal ideology; and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* carries the same subtext as the ‘counter-narrative’, and opposes the separate-but-equal ideology (research question 2 – separate-but-equal ideology).

How well do these narrations fit the separate-but-equal ideology? (All but <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> are in <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i> .)		
Premise	Supports	Does not support
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.	Women’s seclusion	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.	Women are deficient in intellect; women are evil Women and beasts Women’s seclusion	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.	Women are deficient in intellect; women are evil Women and beasts Women’s seclusion	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.	Women are deficient in intellect; women are evil	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal.	Women’s seclusion	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family).	Women are deficient in intellect; women are evil Women’s seclusion	
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.	Women and beasts	
h) Female chastity is of paramount importance; female beauty is de-emphasized.	Women’s seclusion	<i>Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays</i>
i) ‘Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love’		

Whose interests is it serving? While both *Nahj al-Balāghah* and *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* are associated with Shī‘ism, *Kitāb Sulaym* is more concerned with constructing a Shī‘ī identity. Despite the centrality of *Nahj al-Balāghah* in

the Shī'ī heritage, these passages from *Nahj al-Balāghah* recur in Sunnī works, and reflect the normative Sunnī view on women in the classical era as well. These passages serve the purpose of reinforcing the authority of those espousing the orthodox and normative classical paradigm of gender (that is, classical jurists, both Shī'ī and Sunnī).

In contrast, *Kitāb Sulaym* truly has the tone of a counter-narrative – a counter-narrative to the first three *khalīfahs* and the Umayyads. However, one of the ways that it establishes its alternative view is by going against the 'orthodoxy' of misogyny established by 'Umar and Mu'āwiyah in favour of the equal inclusion of women and the spiritual position of Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'. That is, it delineates Shī'ī identity as one which is non-misogynistic (research question 6 – Shī'ī identity).

Why is this relevant today? The content of *Nahj al-Balāghah* pertaining to women is a contentious issue in modern-day Shī'ism. Simply saying that these sermons were addressed to 'Ā'ishah is insufficient, and still presents problems regarding portrayal of women as well as the treatment of women in historical narrative. While questioning the authenticity of these sermons can be taboo, an examination of their textual sources indicates that they are not substantiated, and so one may accept or reject them just like any other narration. Exploring their authenticity in depth allows for these sermons, and the ideas contained in them, to be questioned in an objective manner. Additionally, since the subtext of historical narrative generally goes unchallenged, calling attention to the way in which 'Ā'ishah is criticized as a woman (instead of as a human) can lead to a greater recognition of the unspoken power of narrative subtext, and replacing a historical narrative which demonizes women with one that treats women as human beings.

The selections from *Nahj al-Balāghah* strongly support the separate-but-equal ideology (and, indeed, can be considered sources for it). However, the selections from *Nahj al-Balāghah* also overtly call to mind Aristotle's views on the deficiency, inferiority, and subordination of women. The link between the separate-but-equal ideology and Aristotle has not yet been fully explored, so this correspondence here could lead to a greater examination of how ancient

Greek ideas about women influenced the development of Islamic thought and even jurisprudence.

Nahj al-Balāghah is far more prominent than *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*. By presenting the alternative picture of women in *Kitāb Sulaym*, it is possible to challenge the portrayal of Imām ‘Alī as restrictive towards women, misogynistic, and heavily patriarchal; and to present a notion of the distinctly Shī‘ī view of women as being one of equity and inclusiveness (research question 7 – was Imām ‘Alī a misogynist?).

Chapter 8: The ‘Abbāsīd Connection?

The preceding chapters show that conflicting sets of values about women were integrated into Shī‘ī narrations about pre-Islamic sacred women. One set of values – particularly expressed through the stories about Eve, Hājar, and the Virgin Mary – promotes women’s absence from society, women’s passivity, women’s seclusion, male guardianship and control over women. These values were also attributed to Imam ‘Alī in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, but not in *Kitāb Sulaym*, suggesting that this set of values may reflect a later (post-Prophetic) set of values that were integrated into the Islamic norm. Notably, these values were preferred in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faḡīh* (two of the Four Books). This set of values is also most in line with – although not entirely in agreement with – the premises and underpinnings of the contemporary separate-but-equal ideology (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Summarising the results of the previous chapters, this strand of cultural values includes the notions that:

- (a) Man is the actor and women are passive, silent, or absent (Eve, Sarah/Hājar, the Virgin Mary);
- (b) Men exert ownership of women and control their access to knowledge, their bodies, and/or their chastity (Eve, Sarah, the Virgin Mary);
- (c) Man functions as a ‘demi-god’ through whom women earn divine pleasure or wrath (Eve); and
- (d) Ḥijāb, women’s seclusion and/or female circumcision are associated with being a part of a spiritual or social elite (Sarah/Hājar, the Virgin Mary).

Additional ideas include:

- (e) A stylized model of courtship whereby the groom-to-be approaches the woman’s guardian and negotiates with her for her hand while the woman is not involved or consulted (Eve);
- (f) An association between marriage for women and slavery (Eve, Hājar)
- (g) *Ghīrah* (male protective jealousy) as a scripturally sanctioned value (Sarah and Hājar);

- (h) Women participate in the patriarchal bargain (as defined in Chapter 1) (Sarah/Hājar);
- (i) Implied racial stereotyping against African features (Sarah/Hājar);
- (j) Female virgins are superior to non-virgins (Zulaykhā);
- (k) A woman's worth is based on bearing children (Zulaykhā); and
- (l) Women are evil or bestial (*Nahj al-Balāghah*).

It should be apparent that the majority of the above is not derived from the Qur'ān. (For instance, the Qur'ān does not prescribe *ghīrah*, female circumcision, or racial stereotyping, or tell men not to allow their womenfolk to learn to read.)

Where could these values have come from? Contemporary Islamic feminists argue that these values were integrated into Islamic thought due to the expansion of Islam into Iraq, where aspects of the culture dating back to ancient times were absorbed into Islamic thought. This would be particularly reasonable given that many Shī'ī are thought to have emerged in this region due to the large numbers of Shī'īs living there, Baghdad and Kufa. (There was, of course, a scholarly current in Qum, which could account for some of the discrepancies in the preferred cultural values expressed in some of these narrations – for instance, the preference not to discuss women's seclusion by al-Qummī in 'Sarah and the box' (see Chapter 3)).⁷⁰⁸

In Iraq, (ʿAbbāsīd and pre-ʿAbbāsīd) – as in other parts of the world – it is held that restrictions on women were idealized as attributes of the nobility, although, what women actually did in their daily lives would be expected to have varied, especially due to differences in social class, religion, ethnicity, rura/urban status, and the like. These idealized values, however, later obtained an Islamic backing in Islamic (and, here, Shī'ī) thought. Overall, however, it is thought that the customs of face veiling, female seclusion, and the removal of women from the public sphere – in both Sunnī and Shī'ī thought – entered Islam due to the influence of pre-Islamic customs in Iraq and were not present in the Prophetic community – for instance, where women and men worshipped together in

⁷⁰⁸ While there were other currents of *ḥadīth* activity elsewhere, Iraq did serve as the main centre of Shī'ī scholarship. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Hassan Ansari, 'Muḥammad B. Ya'Qūb Al-Kulaynī (M. 328 Ou329/939-40 Ou 940-41) Et Son Kitāb *Al-Kāfī*. Une Introduction'.

the same mosque, and women participated in the battles.⁷⁰⁹ A particular cultural value that recurred in the narrations studied here is the cultural identification of marriage for women with slavery (*milk al-nikāh*), a view which is also said to have entered Islamic thought from region and which was not present during the Prophetic era, and which permeates *aḥādīth* and jurisprudential literature on marriage. As Kecia Ali observes:

But slavery was [...] central to the jurists' conceptual world. In particular, it affected how marriage and gender were thought about. There was a vital relationship between enslavement and femaleness as legal disabilities, and between slave ownership and marriage as legal institutions. Slaves and women were overlapping categories of legally inferior persons constructed against one another and in relation to one another [...] .Slavery was frequently analogized to marriage: both were forms of control or domination exercised by one person over another. The contracting of marriage was parallel to the purchase of a slave, and divorce parallel to freeing a slave.⁷¹⁰

Kecia Ali argues that perhaps because the purchase of slave-wives was so common in 'Abbāsīd Iraq, early jurists began using an 'ownership' model (*milk al-nikāh*) to discuss marriage in a similar manner to how they discussed slavery (*milk al-yamīn*); this paradigm is reflected the narration where Adam negotiates for Eve's purchase (see Chapter 2).⁷¹¹ While Shī'ī law requires that a bride give her consent before marriage, among some Muslims, in practice, there has been a cultural presumption that a girl's male relatives can arrange a marriage on her behalf without consulting her. The synthesis of a jurisprudential approach with distinctly Shī'ī content as well as 'Abbāsīd-era values results

⁷⁰⁹ These are major premises of Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*; Fatima Mernissi also maintains these ideas in *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Kecia Ali discusses the effect of 'Abbāsīd customs, particularly the custom of marriage to slave women, as resulting in marriage being viewed as a parallel to slavery to women. See Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics & Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and Jurisprudence*. In *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, Ziba Mir-Hosseini expresses this view succinctly through a quotation from a classical Muslim author: 'The wife is her husband's prisoner, a prisoner being akin to a slave. The Prophet directed men to support their wives by feeding them with their own food and clothing them with their own clothes; he said the same about maintaining a slave.' Ziba Mir-Hosseini et al. (ed.), *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, p. 7. Adele and Amir Ferdowsi also note the identification of wifhood with slavery in *Ḥilyat al-Qulūb* in 'Women in Shi'i Fiqh: Images through the *Hadith*.'

⁷¹⁰ Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Islam*, p. 8.

⁷¹¹ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, pp. 35-53.

in a further integration of ‘Abbāsīd male normativeness and female passiveness into texts which delineate a Shī‘ī identity.

Amina Wadud ties together the influence of ‘Abbāsīd culture on classical Islamic thought and its relevance to contemporary Muslims succinctly:

During the Abbasid period, when Islam’s foundations were developed, leading scholars and thinkers were exclusively male. They had no experience of Revelation first hand, had not known the Prophet directly, and were sometimes influenced by intellectual and moral cultures antithetical to Islam.

In particular, they move away from the Qur’an’s ethical codes for female autonomy to advocate instead women’s subservience, silence, and seclusion. If women’s agency was taken into consideration it was with regard to service to men, family, and community. Women came to be discussed in law in the same terms as material objects and possessions. (This is today reflected in Pakistan’s rape laws, which treat the offense as one of theft of male private property with no consideration for the woman’s rights.)

Not until the post-colonial twentieth century would Muslim women re-emerge as active participants in all areas of Islamic public, political, economic, intellectual, social, cultural, and spiritual affairs.⁷¹²

Surprisingly, the integration of these values into the extant Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* corpus, especially today’s ‘orthodox’ books, suggests that these narrations served as a means to negotiate cultural conflicts between early Shī‘a in favour of the codification of values popularized during the ‘Abbāsīd era, such that they persist today in ‘orthodox’ Shī‘ism as assumptions about what is ‘Islamic’.⁷¹³ While this thesis does not definitively prove that these ideas

⁷¹² Amina Wadud, ‘Aishah’s Legacy: The Struggle for Women’s Rights within Islam’, in *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 201-204.

⁷¹³ The idea that the early *ḥadīth* compilers did, in fact, engage in textual criticism of *ḥadīth* through selective inclusion is bolstered by the findings of Jonathan Brown, who demonstrates that – despite the claim that they adhered to a rigorous, *isnād*-based methodology – the Sunnī compilers did in fact engage in textual

emerged from pre-Islamic Iraq, it does come to the same conclusion as Amina Wadud, Kecia Ali, and Leila Ahmed, and provides a new avenue through which their work can be explored.

One might ask why this set of values became dominant, since there were other pre-modern centres of Shī'ism; for instance, Qum was also a centre of *hadīth* transmission. In fact, Andrew Newman maintains that *al-Kāfī* offers a 'Qummī riposte to the rationalist, hierarchical, and accomodationalist discourse on theology and practice prevalent among Twelver Shī'a in Baghdad'.⁷¹⁴ Furthermore, one reason why al-Ṭūsī was able to work in relative peace was because of the (Shī'ī) Būyid dynasty which ruled from Iran.⁷¹⁵ That being said, while the experiences of Shī'a in Qum and Baghdād necessarily differed, it is quite possible that when discussing religious ideals pertaining to women, both Qummīs and Baghdādīs selected in favour of the dominant cultural values of the Arab Muslims as being more 'orthodox', even if they differed on other issues. For instance, when it came to women, even the highly rational Shaykh al-Mufīd (who, admittedly, spent much of his life in Baghdād but nonetheless presents a more critical view of theology and hagiography than some of his predecessors) prescribes a heavily restrictive set of recommendations. For instance, he advises men to only teach women the amount of the Qur'ān they need to say their daily prayers – again, implying that men control knowledge – and advising women not to uncover themselves in the presence of unrelated women, or to dress up in front of other women at weddings. Since the latter restrictions are mentioned in the context of not

criticism; a process of textual criticism has also been described with respect to the early Shī'ī *hadīth* compilers. Jonathan A.C. Brown, 'How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics Did *Matn* Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find', in *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 15 (2008), pp. 143-184; Ḥāmid Baqerī and Ma'āref Majīd, 'Karkard-hā-ye Naqd-e Matnī-ye Aḥādīth Nazd-e Muḥaddethān-e Mutaqaqaddam-e Imāmī' in *Pajūhesh-hā-ye Qur'ān va Hadīth*, vol. 45, no. 1 (2012), pp. 7-39. S. R. Burge argues that *hadīth* compilers did in fact use the selection, arrangement, and classification of material, as well as the presentation of *hadīth* out of their original contexts, to convey specific ideas. See S. R. Burge, 'Myth, Meaning, and the Order of Words: Reading Hadīth Collections with Northrop Frye and the Development of Compilation Criticism', in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2016), pp. 213-228 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09596410.2016.1150041>>. Accessed 17 March 2016

⁷¹⁴ Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism: Hadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), p. 160.

⁷¹⁵ For a contextualized discussion of al-Ṭūsī during the Būyids, see Muhammad Ismā'īl Marcinkowski, 'Rapprochement and Fealty during the Būyids and Early Saljūqs: The Life and Times of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī', in *Islamic Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 273-296. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837098>>. Accessed 12 July 2013.

sleeping under the same blanket with other women, these restrictions come across as stemming from a latent fear of lesbianism.⁷¹⁶

In contrast, *Biḥār* might be expected to codify a Persian set of cultural norms – and, to some degree, in the narrations above, it does; for instance, in the inclusion of the Persian calendar (see Chapter 2). However, the way in which it codifies religious norms about women through the selection, arrangement, and classification of material is more complex.⁷¹⁷ Rainer Brunner holds that ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī was directly trying to cement a pro-Shī‘ī, anti-Sunnī cultural identity both inside and outside Safavid Iran through his compilation of *aḥādīth*.⁷¹⁸ It has been argued that, due to the Central Asian/Turkic influence, women – particularly upper-class women – in early Safavid Iran enjoyed a certain amount of influence and public participation which was not typical in the Arab regions.⁷¹⁹ For instance, Rudi Matthee mentions accounts of women participating in battle, and being landowners and village *khāns*. However, Matthee also feels that women gradually became more restricted during the Safavid period, and he cites Nikki Keddie as saying that veiling and women’s seclusion were not common customs in the early Safavid period but became commonplace during the late Safavid era.⁷²⁰ That being said, Rudi Matthee pinpoints ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī as one of the proponents of patriarchal authority and restricting female agency in the name of religion; Adele and Amir Ferdows imply the same thing in their article on Majlisī’s *Hilyat al-Muttaqīn*, and emphasize the role of the ‘*ulamā* in

⁷¹⁶ al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (932-1022), *Aḥkām al-Nisā* [CD-ROM, Ahlulbayt Library 1.0], pp. 56-58.

⁷¹⁷ The role of the *hadīth* compiler in using the act of selection, arrangement, and classification of texts to express certain ideas is explored well in S. R. Burge, ‘Myth, Meaning, and the Order of Words: Reading Hadīth Collections with Northrop Frye and the Development of Compilation Criticism’.

⁷¹⁸ Rainer Brunner, ‘The Role of *Ḥadīth* as Cultural Memory in Shī‘ī History’, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 318-360.

⁷¹⁹ One way this is visibly manifested is in traditional Persian artistic renditions of sacred women and men; see Appendix C for some sample pictures. An interesting topic for future study would be a detailed analysis of the visual portrayals of gender in artwork depicting Islamic sacred history from different eras and regions.

⁷²⁰ Rudi Matthee, ‘From the Battlefield to the Harem: Did women’s seclusion increase from early to late Safavid times?’ in *New Perspectives of Safavid Iran: Empire and society* (New York: Routledge, 2011), ed. Colin P. Mitchell, pp. 97-98; Kathryn Babayan, ‘Safavid Iran: 16th to Mid-18th Century’, in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, ed. Suad Joseph. Brill Online, 2013. <http://brillonline.nl/entries/encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures/safavid-iran-16th-to-mid-18th-century-COM_0012> Accessed 6 June 2013. It has also been observed that, Safavid-era paintings picture women in attendance at religious or other gatherings, although the women are seated separately from the men, thus suggesting women’s public participation as well.

shaping more restrictive attitudes towards women in Iran.⁷²¹ In sum, the treatment of women in *Biḥār* shows that, when it comes to ideas about women, a scholar may or may not choose to codify values about women considered to be dominant in his own region. Similarly, just because al-Kulaynī was born in Rayy does not preclude the possibility that he chose to encode Baghdādī cultural values towards women on the grounds that he saw them as ‘more orthodox’.

All in all, the variety of values found in the narrations explored in the preceding chapters suggest that a heavily restrictive set of values which emphasises male normativeness and restrictions on women is not the only ‘correct’ or ‘orthodox’ interpretation of Shī‘ism. Instead, these values should be seen as a subset of the ‘genuine’ or ‘original’ Shī‘ism. With respect to the development of the Sunnī tradition, the Islamic feminist authors mentioned above hold that these values entered Islamic thought after the Prophet due to the cultural influence of Islamic Iraq. The findings here could be integrated into their work to support their ideas, and the role of Islamic Iraq in determining Shī‘ī orthodoxy is a recommended area for future research.

⁷²¹ Rudi Matthee, ‘From the Battlefield to the Harem: Did women’s seclusion increase from early to late Safavid times?’; Adele Ferdows and Amir Ferdows, ‘Women in Shi‘i *Fiqh*: Images through the *Hadith*’.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

9.1 The split between the ‘patriarchal’ and ‘equitable’ narrations

Due to the paucity of secondary literature on these narrations, it was not clear from the outset what an examination of these narrations would produce. Some reinforced Abdolkarim Soroush’s proposition⁷²² that narrations about women are intentionally neglected because they reinforce the most ardent stereotypes about women in Islam (such as keeping women imprisoned and illiterate). These narrations were identified as the ‘patriarchal’ narrations and supported the inherent authority of men over women, the inferiority of women, and male normativeness in religious discourse. They brought to the forefront some of the most contentious questions about women in Islam today, including jurisprudential questions, and the most basic question of all: whether it is truly un-Islamic to assert that women and men are equal.

At the same time, a vibrant and uniquely Shī‘ī trend of narrations belied these restrictive stereotypes. These narrations portrayed Eve and Adam as equals; forgave Zulaykhā for her indiscretion; induced Bilqīs into the chain of sacred inheritance; and brought Mary forward into the saga of Karbalā’. While Thurlkill and Ruffle point out unfavourable ways in which Eve is presented in Shī‘ī sacred history (see Chapter 2), this study came to a new conclusion: that Eve is not demonized in the narrative of *wilāyah*. The most striking finding was the integration of women into the chain of sacred inheritance (*waṣīyyah*) – which is typically described as only consisting of men – and a parallel female chain of sacred inheritance. This inclusion of women in one of the fundamental concepts of Shī‘ī spirituality as well as the expression of a characteristically female experience contradicts the idea that women are absent from Shī‘ī spirituality and sacred narrative, and is a genuinely new finding. The assumptions about the nature and role of women – and, in particular, whether there should be an inherent gender hierarchy – were completely different in these narrations. In short, the first set was patriarchal; this second set was equitable. Hence, this second set was identified as the ‘counter-narrative’.

⁷²² Quoted in Section 1.1.4.

The patriarchal narrations were most heavily grounded in the Jewish tradition. However, rather than simply reiterating Jewish material, such as stories from the Old Testament or the Haggadah, these narratives were reborn in the light of the customs of 'Abbāsīd Iraq, as outlined by Leila Ahmed, and exemplified intertextuality as described by Firestone. These narrations promote male guardianship, women's seclusion, male normativeness, male authority, *ghīrah*, the absence of women from the public sphere, and even illiteracy for women. Men were presented as the gatekeepers of knowledge. These narrations were most commonly in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faqīh* (two of the Four Books).

In contrast, the most uniquely and characteristically Shī'ī narrations treated women equitably; these narrations invoked the narrative of *wilāyah* and esoteric Shī'ī imagery, and served the ultimate purpose of demonstrating the superiority of *ahl al-bayt*. The tension between these two sets of narrations indicates a conflict in the definition of what it meant to be Shī'ī. Today, this conflict has more or less been resolved by the adoption of the Four Books as the main books of orthodoxy: since these books contain the restrictive and misogynistic narrations, it is assumed that Shī'ī jurisprudence and discourse should be grounded in an innate gender hierarchy, with men in power. However, this selection neglects the more esoteric narrations which do not treat women in a lesser manner. In fact, this same tension can be seen today, in that some Shī'ah prefer to adopt a mystical or esoteric brand of Shī'ism, with a less restrictive view towards women, rather than adopting the paradigms of jurisprudential orthodoxy.

This brings up the question of *ghulūw*, in that *ghulāt* (heterodox) Shī'ah favoured esoteric imagery and concepts; if these narrations reflect *ghulāt* groups, then this suggests that some of them had a more equitable view of women. Interestingly, this finding is in line with one of the views of Marshall Hodgson in his 1955 article 'Why did the early Shias become sectarian', in that he feels that the *ghulāt* carried out the function of addressing questions that (in his view) were largely neglected by the Islamic 'orthodoxy', particularly regarding the spirituality of the soul, and that these concerns were later taken over by the Ṣūfīs.⁷²³ An exception is Sahl ibn Ziyād, who is sometimes associated with *ghulūw* but to whom narrations that are restrictive or unfair towards women are attributed – for instance,

⁷²³ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, 'How Did the Early Shī'a Become Sectarian', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 75, no. 1 (Jan. - Mar. 1955), pp. 1-13.

the narrative praising Ibrāhīm's *ghīrah* for putting Sārah in a box; the narration saying it is preferable to marry virgin women; the narration saying to marry fertile, ugly women instead of beautiful, barren women; and the narration telling men not to teach their daughters Sūrah Yūsuf or to write. These two conclusions are not contradictory since *ghulāt* is an umbrella term used to describe a diversity of heterodox groups with a diversity of views. This would be a fruitful area for further research.

9.2 Authenticity: the elephant in the room

Although the main concern of this inquiry was not authenticity, the cacophony of clashing voices, ideas, concerns, subtexts, and interests in these narrations leads to the conclusion that these narrations cannot all be authentic. That is, such divergent narrations could not have issued forth from one person (or even a small group of people). While the questioning of the authenticity of narrations – particularly, non-jurisprudential narrations – in revered books such as *al-Kāfī* or *Nahj al-Balāghah* is technically allowed, it is not always done, and so recognizing that a chunk of narrations must be inauthentic is liberating, since it allows for a greater evaluation of the origins of these narrations as well as the assumptions behind them. On the other hand, it stands to reason that narrations which have uniquely Islamic or uniquely Shī'ī content – such as the narrations about the throne of the Queen of Sheba, or Eve and Adam's first hajj – have a greater possibility of being authentic.

It goes without saying that the subtexts about women in the patriarchal narrations contradict the Qur'ānic portrayal of gender, in that the Qur'ān does not use female figures to assign gender roles or promote a gender hierarchy, even with foundational figures such as Eve and Adam. This is similar to what Rawand Osman concludes in her study on female personalities in the Shī'ism:

Many of the female personalities of the Qur'ān and *sunna* may be seen to be in diametric opposition to what *ḥadīths* [sic] demand and expect of women. Most of these women, if not all, acted completely independently of men in general and their husbands in particular [...]. This is unlike the *ḥadīth* which tends to either subjugate or elevate women as a group, and attempts to project a monolithic personality on women.

Therefore, women are not normally defined by men, as traditions would have us believe [...]. Decisions taken by women independently were the ones deemed worthy of comment by the Qur'an and Sunnah [...]. Where the *ḥadīth* teaches that women are fragile and therefore must not be given any responsibility, the female personalities of the Quran and *sunna* carry their own vicegerency as their own responsibility.⁷²⁴

However, the narrations in the counter-narrative reflect independence and agency for women, and do not conflict thematically with the Qur'ān.

9.3 Summary of answers to research questions

To summarise the findings with respect to the remaining research questions concisely:

1. *Are women absent from Shī'ī ḥadīth and sacred history, as is commonly implied or presumed?* No. Although ancient sacred history in Islam is generally viewed as a history of men, with women only playing the parts of wives and daughters, women were present in the narrative. However, while the patriarchal narrative emphasised the normativeness of the male viewpoint and the notion that religious space and religious orthodoxy is for men, the counter-narrative assigned women positions of unique significance in the chain of sacred inheritance and the narrative of *wilāyah*.

2. *There is a modern ideology of gender, referred to as the 'separate but equal' view, that traces back to the classical era and was codified by some Shī'ī scholars in the mid-twentieth century. To what extent does the portrayal of pre-Islamic women in these aḥādīth agree or disagree with the assumptions about the nature of women described in the 'separate but equal' ideology?*

It was found that the premises of this theory were almost unilaterally supported by the patriarchal narrations, and were almost unilaterally rejected by the equitable narrations. (A chart of the correspondence of narration strands and sources with the separate-but-equal theory is in Appendix A.) This could either be construed to mean that

⁷²⁴ Rawand Osman, *Female Personalities in the Qur'an and Sunna*, pp. 181-2.

(a) because they are in the most 'orthodox' books, the narrations supporting the separate-but-equal theory are the most correct, and should be adopted as the stance of the Imāms; or, more sceptically, (b) these narrations were selected for in lieu of the 'equitable' narrations because they agreed with a notion of orthodoxy steeped in the patriarchal customs of 'Abbāsīd Iraq, and hence the culture of 'Abbāsīd Iraq became codified as the Shī'ī view.

In short, the sceptical view supports the premise that classical assumptions about women in Islam were socially contextualized (as opposed to being divinely ordained and atemporal). While social contextualization is mostly rejected in mainstream Islamic discourse (Sunnī and Shī'ī), contemporary reformists have argued that Islamic laws – such as punishment by stoning – were socially contextualized rather than meant to be eternal. Abdolkarim Soroush, a proponent of social contextualization, says:

Any definition we come up with for the sphere of manhood or womanhood or the nature of men and women will, undoubtedly, be influenced by our knowledge and perception of the world at any given time and our cultural perspective. In other words there is no definition independent of the cultural circumstances. [...] It would seem that the social commands stipulated in religious law are temporary in nature unless proven otherwise. Of course, our jurists disagree and believe that everything in Islamic law is permanent and eternal unless proven otherwise. But historical studies regarding the formation and formulation of Islam and *fiqh* paint a different picture. That is to say, the Prophet basically endorsed the rules and commands current at the time in Arab society and they became the measures of justice in their own day. And there is no reason why we should consider the regulations current at that time in Arab society as the best possible regulations for all times.⁷²⁵

Here, this inquiry centres not on questions of jurisprudence or Qur'ān, but rather to the larger question of whether these cultural norms regarding women which have been

⁷²⁵ Anonymous, 'Contraction and Expansion of Women's Rights: An Interview with Dr. Soroush'.

absorbed in narrations and in Shī'ī discourse must continue to be essential aspects of Shī'ī discourse and identity.

Menstruation, in particular, was largely presented as a defect, a sign of inferiority, and a reason why women should be excluded from religious space. Some narrations about Mary turned around the Qur'ānic verse 'the male is not like the female' (which – with apologies! – implies that males are inferior) to express the view that the female is inferior because females menstruate. While non-canonical Sunnī narrations largely treat Eve's menstruation in a negative manner, here, that trend instead occurs with Sārah, who was punished by becoming the first daughter of the prophets to menstruate. Sārah was also held responsible for the need to circumcise boys since, due to her ill conduct, her son Iṣḥāq was the first child of a prophet to be born with a foreskin. The narrations about Sārah dredged up a cultural conflict about female circumcision, in that they implied it was a practice of the elite, whereas other narrations specified it should not be a Shī'ī practice. While one narration celebrated virginity, another promoted fertility in a prospective wife; and the entire definition of virginity was reworked to mean 'the absence of menstruation' to encompass Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', under the tacit assumption that virginity is superior to non-virginity. While the idea of Fāṭimah's virginity inspired some thought-provoking observations on the nature of virginity and sacred space by Thurlkill and Clohessy, the paucity of textual support for describing her as a 'virgin' suggests this view may not have traced back to the early Shī'ah at all, although it is taken as axiomatic in today's Shī'ī hagiography. In any case, all of these views had one commonality: the valuing of women (and men) on the basis of their reproductive organs. Recognizing this can, hopefully, lead to higher-level discussions about women, and men as well.

The areas where the narrations departed from the separate-but-equal theory were with respect to female beauty, the *hijāb*, and female desires. Since these three are discussed together in contemporary discourse, they were grouped into one research question. However, in the end, it was necessary to separate them into separate issues. Rather than condemning beauty, these narrations portrayed sacred figures, female and male, as beautiful; and a uniquely Shī'ī ideal of beauty emerged synthesising physical beauty, spirituality, *wilāyah*, and hiddenness; this concept is also grounded in the pre-Islamic Mesopotamian notion that elite women should be secluded and covered, and

hence serves a dual purpose of separating the social elite (who, in these narrations, are conflated with the spiritual elite) from the masses. While women's seclusion was encouraged in the patriarchal narrations, the *ḥijāb* itself (in the sense of clothing) was barely discussed. This can be attributed the fact that, in the pre-modern era, *ḥijāb* was not used as a pawn in identity politics; additionally, women's seclusion and male control over women was favoured over the *ḥijāb*, suggesting that *ḥijāb* itself was seen as insufficient to preserve women's chastity. Perhaps, due to climate, covering the head and body was so customary in the Middle East for both men and women that it seemed unremarkable. The only narration to mention the *ḥijāb* outright ('male superiority', Section 2.2.3) treated the *ḥijāb* as a disadvantage to women. While the authenticity of this narration is deeply questionable, this suggests that the modern notion that the *ḥijāb* empowers women is not historically rooted. Lastly, while a distinctly Shī'ī narration (the creation not-from-a-rib narration about Eve, Section 2.2.1) indicated that physical desires are a male purview, most of the narrations treated women as having physical desires, hence the need for men to enforce women's chastity by secluding them.

One notable omission was any focus on women's roles as mothers or on domestic duties. While motherhood and housewifeliness are emphasized today (after all, Heaven is under the feet of mothers), with little attention to what the roles of unmarried or childless women might be, these narrations said very little about that. While figures such as Eve, Sārah, Hājar, and Mary would have been ideal opportunities to explore the notion of motherhood, this did not happen. Additionally, Zulaykhā and Bilqīs are not described as having children; the idea that Bilqīs married Sulaymān is only mentioned once; and the Virgin Mary is considered to have not married at all. This reinforces Kecia Ali's assertion that the emphasis on women's domestic duties is a modern Islamic response to Westernization, and that, in classical Islamic thought, a woman's primary role was seen as being sexually available to her husband (or slave-master, as the case may be). The portrayal of women as sexualized beings, as opposed to asexualized mother figures and maids, is evident in the many narrations emphasising male control over female sexuality and *ghīrah*. Still, both portrayals – the pre-modern and the modern – are two-dimensional, and neither admits to the complexity of women as human beings and the diversity of women's life circumstances and experiences.

The other assumption about women in contemporary discourse – that men are financially empowered and women are financial dependents – was not borne out by these narrations, particularly by the description of Sārah as enriching Ibrāhīm. However, these narrations did reinforce Kecia Ali's observation that the normative Islamic paradigm of marriage was heavily influenced by the ownership paradigm of slave-marriage. This was particularly evident in the narrations on Hājar (who literally was a slave) as well as the narration in which Adam bargains with Allah for Eve (Section 2.2.1).

Additionally, the assumption that men are logical and women are emotional, and that logic is superior to emotion – which is fundamental to the separate-but-equal theory – was not demonstrated in these narrations. While some of the narrations on Sārah and Eve hinted at this, by and large, men were portrayed as emotional. Emotion was also not portrayed in a negative light. Instead, Bilqīs and Ismā'īl's wife were praised for their intelligence. However, this assumption was conveyed in the sermon on women's intellectual deficiency in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Additionally, the exhortation to keep women illiterate and the presumption that knowledge belongs to men suggest social mechanisms which intentionally stunted women's intellectual growth – that is, the idea that women's are deficient in intellect should be seen as socially contextualized rather than as axiomatic.

3. *Is 'orthodox' religious practice equivalent to 'male' religious practice, and, if so, can females freely participate in it? Is sacred history discussed in terms of the feminine experience, such as childbirth?* Different narrations expressed competing views on this. The patriarchal narrations on the Virgin Mary most strongly conveyed the idea that religious orthodoxy and space is for men, and women should not be involved in it because they menstruate; this harkens back to Bird's findings regarding women in ancient Judaism. However, the notion of orthodoxy itself was not consistent throughout the narrations, suggesting a tension in negotiating what orthodoxy was. While the patriarchal narrations expressed the male view as normative, some of the narrations in the counter-narrative were sympathetic to female views and discussed characteristically female experiences, such as childbirth. One area where both views appeared was in the discussion of Eve and Adam's first hajj, in that one version of this narration portrayed Adam as doing the hajj and had a male-centred perspective, whereas another version portrayed Eve and Adam as doing the hajj together.

4. *Did the canonization of the ‘Four Books’ result in a specific set of ideas about women being canonized as ‘orthodox’?* Answering this question requires treating the Four Books separately. Among the Four Books, *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faḳīh* were a major source of patriarchal narrations supporting restrictions for women and a gender hierarchy with men in authority. From that angle, they selectively supported notions such as women’s seclusion, male authority, and male guardianship. *Al-Kāfī* also particularly supported the codification of *ghīrah* as a religious value. Several misogynistic or restrictive narrations, such as the instruction to avoid teaching women to read, were found also in Sunnī books but attributed to others, suggesting an origin other than the Imāms. Sahl ibn Ziyād also recurred as a narrator of misogynistic or restrictive hadith, and this could be grounds for a further study. That being said, a number of narrations in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faḳīh* also did not support a notion of a gender hierarchy, or the separate-but-equal ideology.

However, *al-Tahdhīb* contributed only two narrations to this entire inquiry – that of the very ambiguous hermaphrodite (Section 2.4.1) and that of Mary miraculously travelling to Karbalā’ to give birth (Section 6.3.1), while *al-Istibṣār* contributed only one (on Jesus washing the body of Mary; see Section 6.2.1). Three narrations are not sufficient to draw conclusions about the approach to gender in these works; however, it is worth observing that those narrations do not support the idea of inherent spiritual or ethical differences between men or women, or the separate-but-equal ideology; therefore, a further comparison on the treatment of gender in each of the Four Books would be an interesting research project.

Lastly, many of the narrations in the ‘counter-narrative’ were not in *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faḳīh*. Some of the narrations that were most distant from the separate-but-equal ideology came from more obscure or esoteric books, such as *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt* and the uncommon books cited by al-Majlisī. (See Appendix B.) Given these findings, an excellent topic for future research would be to explore further the subtexts about women (and men) in other, less common Shī’ī books of narrations, particularly other early collections.

5. *In what ways have pre-Islamic influences (such as the Bible) and post-Prophetic influences (such as jurisprudential discourse) entered the ḥadīth corpus through the portrayals of these women?*

One of the most notable findings was the correspondence in the narrations between the types of pre-Islamic and post-Prophetic allusions and imagery and the messages being sent. (See chart in Appendix B.) The most striking pattern was that narrations with uniquely Shīʿī content (a) opposed the separate-but-equal theory and the notion of essential differences in worth or role between woman and man, (b) included the female experience and perspective as normative, and (c) included women in sacred history, particularly in the narrative of *wilāyah*. The exception is with respect to menstruation, in that menstruation was used to prove the superiority of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ and the inferiority of ʿĀʾishah. In contrast, most of the narrations in support of the separate-but-equal theory integrated the Old Testament or other Jewish content (although Judaic material could have been transmitted through Christianity as well). Distinctively Christian influences were minimal.

There were also hints of ancient non-Abrahamic traditions such as pagan traditions and Zoroastrianism. Given the perceived association of *ghulāt* Shīʿism with Gnosticism and Manicheanism, one might expect to find more of those influences; however, it is possible that the fact that the women discussed here are important in the Judaeo-Christian tradition diminished the likelihood of that influence. Only in the chapter on Sārah were pre-Islamic customs of the Arabian Peninsula noticeably represented; this is probably due to the role of Ismāʿīl and Isḥāq – and hence, Hājar and Sārah – as the perceived forebears of the Arabs and Jews. With respect to post-Prophetic influences, the most common influences were jurisprudential paradigms and rulings (that is, presenting a jurisprudential ruling in the guise of a narration instead of using a narration to derive a ruling) and the customs of ʿAbbāsīd Iraq

The breakthrough in understanding the roots of the separate-but-equal theory came in the discussion of the sermon on women’s deficiencies in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. This sermon, as well as other negative and restrictive material about women attributed to Imām ʿAlī in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, not only strongly reflected the customs of ʿAbbāsīd Iraq – which had, hitherto, been the main focus – but also resonated with Aristotle’s view that women are physiologically and logically deficient – imperfect men, as it were. Given the importation of Greek philosophy into the early Islamic Empire, it stands to reason that classical ideas about women, and the demi-god theory whereby the man stands as an

interlocutor and intercessor for the woman before Allah and directs the woman to either Heaven or Hell, emerged not only from the customs of pre-Islamic Mesopotamia, but also from the importation of Greek thought, including although not necessarily limited to Aristotle. This would be an ideal subject to pursue in future research. In retrospect, this was foreshadowed by Eshkevari (Section 1.1.4) in his observation that, in the separate-but-equal theory, Muslims have adopted an Aristotelian concept of justice rather than the modern understanding of justice meaning equity.

6. *How are the portrayals of women used to delineate a distinct Shīʿī identity or identities?* These narrations reflect competing ‘interested parties’ (as Clines would call them) in the canonization of what it means to be Shīʿī, and the codification of Shīʿī identity. The patriarchal narrations send the message that to be Shīʿī is, more or less, to accept the pre-Islamic value system regarding women of Arab-ruled ‘Abbāsīd Iraq, including male guardianship and women’s seclusion. However, the equitable narrations belie that view, suggesting that they served the interests of Shīʿī of other ethnic or cultural groups who did not share the view towards women popularized in Arab ‘Abbāsīd Iraq. That is, they appear to reflect a tension surrounding Arabization, which was a cultural conflict in the early Islamic Empire (as, indeed, some Muslims still feel it is today). In addition, despite the emphasis on social justice as a key principle of Shīʿism in contemporary Shīʿī discourse, the ideas in some of these narrations reflect class concerns and encourage social stratification.

Ultimately, these polarized views have been reconciled in contemporary Shīʿī discourse by a divergent view of the role of woman in the earthly and the otherworldly spheres. In the earthly sphere, there is a gender hierarchy, the husband acts as a demi-god, and men are in authority – judges, prophets, jurists, and the like. However, in the spiritual realm, women can attain heights which are arguably not admitted to within the Sunnī tradition, as epitomized by the enormous sanctity granted to Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, by joining in the narrative of *wilāyah* as part of the ‘charismatic community’ (to allude to Dakake).

7. *Was Imām ‘Alī a misogynist?* Based on these narrations as a whole, it could be argued either way. Definitely, the material attributed to him in *Nahj al-Balāghah* as well as his exhortation to ‘imprison’ women in their homes presents him that way. However, the

favourable portrayal of Bilqīs attributed to him as well as the portrayal of women in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* paint an opposite picture of him – a counter-narrative – in which he respected women as equals and did not try to remove women from the public sphere or remove personal agency from women. The sermons in *Nahj al-Balāghah* which are negative towards women had problems with their textual sourcing and appear grounded in Aristotle. This, at least, is a response to Annemarie Schimmel's wry comment that Imām 'Alī had ought to have had a more positive view of women given that he was married to Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (see Section 1.1.3).

However, the overarching point here is not whether Imām 'Alī really was or was not a misogynist, but rather that portrayals of Imām 'Alī are constructed from certain narrations in lieu of others, and that a common portrayal today is heavily grounded in the cultural norms of 'Abbāsīd Iraq. The idea that Imām 'Alī, upon emigrating to Iraq (where he had a less than ideal sojourn, including civil wars and culminating in his assassination), would choose to codify the cultural norms of 'Abbāsīd Iraq as the *de facto* Islamic view is rarely if ever problematized – but should be.

As for the remaining question that was brought up in each chapter – 'Why does this matter?' – this inquiry, firstly, clarified ideologies that are assumed and transmitted, and which are extremely powerful, but which are rarely verbalized. It problematized cardinal assumptions of contemporary Shī'ī discourse regarding women, especially the integration of cultural norms of Arab 'Abbāsīd Iraq in Shī'ī identity. Surprisingly, it brought up sensitive jurisprudential issues, such as women's inheritance or the right to divorce, as well as larger questions such as female religious authority and whether women could have been considered prophets. And, it brought up to the more discomfiting question of what should constitute orthodoxy itself. These are all pivotal questions in Shī'ī discourse today, and further, more focussed studies may offer more answers.

9.4 Closing remarks

Today, there is a strong resistance in normative Islamic discourse (Sunnī and Shī'ī) to questioning dominant views about the 'Islamic' view of the nature and role of women. Questioning popular beliefs can lead to hostility as well as the accusation one is attempting to impose Western domination on the Islamic world through promoting the

equality of women and men. Frequently, anyone who suggests that women and men *might* be equal is accused of being a feminist – which is treated as a synonym for ‘worse than demon-spawn with a special pit in hell’ – and attacking Muslim women by calling them ‘feminists’ is a common means of shutting down real discussion about social injustice towards women, or inequities towards women in Islamic discourse.

The root cause is not that there is a resistance to questioning gender paradigms for their own sake; but rather, it is like a house of cards – if ‘orthodox’ views of gender roles are questioned, then what is to stop the rest of the edifice of orthodoxy from tumbling down? And, if one cannot fight Westernization through women’s subordination, then what weapon is left? The underlying issue – today as well in the time of the narrations – is the negotiation of cultural identity and orthodoxy, not the negotiation of the social role of women. After all, then as in now, religious discourse is largely conducted by men for men, and men are hardly at risk of losing social privileges if women are found to have functioning intellects.

At the same time, given how understudied Shī‘ī narrations on women are, and how important the subject of Islam and women is today, there has been an immense amount of interest in this type of inquiry. Many dedicated Shī‘īs have been eager to hear about the ‘real’ teachings of the Imāms – that is to say, they have faith that the Imāms taught a Shī‘ism which is equitable to and inclusive of both women and men, and they are waiting for someone to uncover it. As it happens, this did and did not happen here. The ‘uniquely Shī‘ī’ narrations did bear out that view, and can be the subject of further investigations with respect to uniquely Shī‘ī narrations on other topics. However, the findings were more complex. Instead of discerning a straightforward set of narrations outlining the ‘real’ Shī‘ism, there were competing views about what the ‘real’ Shī‘ism is. Hopefully some of the insights gleaned here will be useful in breaking down the giant iceberg which is the question of the ideology of gender in Shī‘ism and how it relates to Shī‘ī identity.

Appendix A: Subtexts of Narrations and their Sources

Narrations from the Four Books are in **boldface**. Narrations in *Bihār al-Anwār* but without other sources are listed as '*Bihār*'. The narrations are identified by theme, and the letter preceding them indicates which woman they are about (for instance, 'E' is used for 'Eve', 'H' for 'Hājar', and so on).

Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā refers to *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* by Quṭb al-Ḍīn al-Rāwandī.

How well do these narrations fit the separate-but-equal ideology?

Premise	Supports	Does not support
a) Women are extensions of male relatives rather than independent agents.	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-zeal) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (S- <i>ghīrah</i>) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-box) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-zeal) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S- <i>ghīrah</i>) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)	<i>al-Mahāsīn</i> (S-presence) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-presence) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (B-Dhū al-Faqār) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā</i> (S-presence) <i>Bihār</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (H-absence) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-box-alternate) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence) <i>Tafsīr Furāt</i> (E-chain of inheritance)
b) Men are intellectually, spiritually, or ethically superior to women on a creational level.	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-male superiority) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-zeal) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (S-male circumcision) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-zeal) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-presence) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-male circumcision) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-wine) <i>al-Mahāsīn</i> (S-presence) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā</i> (S-presence) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (B-hair) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence) ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)	<i>Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Bihār</i> (M-beauty) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-grain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalā') ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-grain) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-Ismā'īl's wife) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-beauty) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-presence) <i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light) <i>Ma'ānī al-Akhbār</i> (tree-envy) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā</i> (S-presence) <i>Tafsīr al-'Askarī</i> (E-tree-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-tree-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-beauty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-Sārah presence) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalā') ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-tree-envy)

Premise	Supports	Does not support
c) Men are logical, women are emotional, and logic is superior to emotion.	<p><i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (E-<i>sharī’ah</i>) <i>al-Ikhtiṣāṣ</i> (E-<i>sharī’ah</i>) al-Kāfi (E-wine)</p>	<p><i>Biḥār</i> (love-dangerous) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (tree-envy) <i>Da‘awāt al-Rāwandī</i> (Z-male modesty) al-Faqīh (Z-male modesty) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (love-dangerous) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Ma‘ānī al-Akhbār</i> (E-tree-envy) <i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (H -absence) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i> (Hājar-absence) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Askari</i> (E-tree-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (H-absence) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (Z-love-dangerous) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (Z-,ale modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-love-dangerous) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-tree-envy)</p>
d) Women are inferior because they menstruate.	<p><i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-male superiority) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (M-menstruation) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (E-Sārah-first-menstruate) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> al Shari (E-male superiority) al-Kāfi (M-menstruation) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (M-menstruation)</p>	<p><i>Ma‘ānī al-Akhbār</i> (M-redifining) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (M-redefining) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (S-<i>ḍaḥakat</i> tafsīr)</p>
e) Women do not belong in the public sphere; women’s seclusion is ideal.	<p>al-Faqīh (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (S-<i>ghīrah</i>) <i>‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’</i> (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (S-box) al-Kāfi (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (S-<i>ghīrah</i>) al-Kāfi (S-<i>ghīrah</i>) al-Kāfi (S-Ismā‘īl’s wife - seclusion) al-Kāfi (M-caretaker) al-Kāfi (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i> (M-job) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (M-job) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-box alternate) <i>‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)</p>	<p><i>Biḥār</i> (M-beauty) al-Faqīh (B-hope) al-Kāfi (B-hope) al-Kāfi (Ismā‘īl’s wife - public) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’</i> (Eve zeal alternate) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-beauty)</p>

Premise	Supports	Does not support
f) Male authority is necessary (social, religious, political, or in the family)	<p><i>al-Faqīh</i> (Eve-not-rib) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (Sūrat Yūsuf) ‘<i>llal al-Sharā`i</i>’ (M-menstration) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-‘Anāq) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-caretaker) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-matrilineage) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-menstruation) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-wine) <i>Kitāb al Mukhtaṣir</i> (E-‘Anāq) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (M-job) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (M-job) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (M-menstruation) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-‘Anāq) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (B-hair) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-caretaker)</p>	<p><i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>Bihār</i> (M-beauty) <i>Bihār</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>Bihār</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>al-Ikhtiṣāṣ</i> (B-throne) <i>Iqbāl al-A`māl</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-beauty) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-presence) <i>al-Mahāsīn</i> (S-presence) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (S-presence) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-beauty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr Furāt</i> ibn Ibrāhīm (E-chain of inheritance)</p>
g) Men are the producers and breadwinners, and women are financially dependent on men.		<p><i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-Ismā`īl’s wife) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-box)</p>
h) The <i>ḥijāb</i> and female chastity are of paramount importance.	<p><i>al-Ikhtiṣāṣ</i> (E-<i>sharī`ah</i>) ‘<i>llal al-Sharā`i</i>’ (E-<i>sharī`ah</i>) ‘<i>llal al-Sharā`i</i>’ (S-<i>ghīrah</i>) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-‘Anāq) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-box) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-<i>ghīrah</i>) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-<i>ghīrah</i>) <i>Kitāb al Mukhtaṣir</i> (E-‘Anāq) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-‘Anāq) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-box alternate)</p>	<p><i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Da`awāt al-Rāwandī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (Z-male modesty) ‘<i>llal al-Sharā`i</i>’ (Z-male modesty) ‘<i>llal al-Sharā`i</i>’ (Z-happy ending) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-happy ending)</p>
Female beauty is de-emphasized		<p><i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-happy ending) ‘<i>llal al-Sharā`i</i>’ (Z-happy ending) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (Ismā`īl’s wife) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (B-hair) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-happy ending)</p>

Premise	Supports	Does not support
i) 'Man is the slave of his desires; women are the bond-maids of love.'	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib) al-Kāfī (E-hajj-exclusion)	<i>Amāli al-Şādūq</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Amāli al-Şādūq</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Bihār</i> (love-dangerous) <i>Da'awāt al-Rāwandī</i> (Z-male modesty) al-Faqīh (Z-male modesty) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (E-zeal) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-love-dangerous) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-excuses) al-Kāfī (Eve-zeal) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Eve-zeal) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (love-dangerous) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (love-dangerous) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-happy ending) <i>'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)

What other messages are conveyed by these narrations?

'Patriarchal' ideas	Supported by
Man as 'demi-god'	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib) al-Kāfi (E-wine) al-Kāfi (S-male circumcision) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (S-male circumcision) al-Kāfi (H-Hājar's absence) <i>al-Maḥāsin</i> (H-Hājar's absence) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (H-Hājar's absence) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (H-Hājar's absence)
Knowledge belongs to men	al-Faqīh (Eve-not-rib) al-Faqīh (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) al-Kāfi (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf)
Woman is created obedient	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)
Men have ownership over women and/or should enforce women's chastity	al-Faqīh (Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (S- <i>ghīrah</i>) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (S-box) al-Kāfi (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (S- <i>ghīrah</i>) al-Kāfi (S- <i>ghīrah</i>) al-Kāfi (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (M-caretaker) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-caretaker) <i>'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)
Demonic imagery of women	al-Kāfi (E-'Anāq) <i>Kitāb al Mukhtaṣir</i> (E-'Anāq) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-'Anāq)
Sons are safer or better than daughters	<i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (M-menstruation) <i>Kitāb al Mukhtaṣir</i> (E-'Anāq) al-Kāfi (E-'Anāq) al-Kāfi (M-menturation) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (M-menstruation) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-'Anāq)
Marry the black or ugly, fertile woman, not the barren beautiful one	al-Kāfi (S-beautiful-barren) <i>Nawādir al-Rāwandī</i> (H-fertile)

The 'counter-narrative'	Supported by
Women in the chain of spiritual inheritance	<i>Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Biḥār</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (B-Dhū al-Faqār) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Tafsīr Furāt</i> (E-chain of inheritance) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalā')
No obvious differences between nature and role of women and men	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z-ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Biḥār</i> (E-chain) <i>Biḥār</i> (E-Persian calendar) <i>Biḥār</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-grain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-grain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-etymologies) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-grain) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (Z-ending) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-hajj-inclusion) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light) <i>Kitāb Sa'd al-Sa'ūd</i> (E-etymologies) <i>Kitāb Sa'd al-Sa'ūd</i> (E-Jewish cal.) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār</i> (E-tree-envy) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (B-Dhū al-Faqār) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-ending) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Tafsīr al-'Askarī</i> (E-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Tafsīr Furāt Ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalā') <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalā')
Matrilineage	<i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-matrilineage)

Appendix B: Pre-Islamic and Post-Prophetic Imagery and Subtexts

One narration strand may exhibit multiple correspondences, and are hence be listed multiple times. Multiple narrations with the same theme in the same book are only listed once, even if the narrations are not identical. Narration strands which do not obviously fall into any categories are not listed. *Biḥār* is listed as the source text for narrations in *Biḥār* whose sources are not given.

(The table begins on the next page.)

	Supports: Women are extensions of men	Supports: Men are superior intellectually, ethically, or spiritually	Supports: Men are logical, women are emotional	Supports: Women are inferior because they menstruate	Supports: Women's exclusion	Supports: Male authority	Supports: Women are financially dependent	Supports: Importance of female chastity	Supports: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love'	Supports: Female beauty is de-emphasized
Jewish tradition or Old Testament	<p>al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (E-zeal)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (S-ghīrah)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (E-zeal)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-box)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-ghīrah)</p> <p><i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (E-zeal-alt)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (B-hair)</p> <p>'<i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)</p>	<p>al-Mahasin (S-presence)</p> <p><i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-superior)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal)</p> <p>al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)</p> <p>al-Ikhtiṣāṣ (E-sharī'ah)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (E-sharī'ah)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (E-superior)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (E-zeal)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (S-male circumcision)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (E-zeal)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-male circumcision)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-presence)</p> <p>al-Mahasin (S-presence)</p> <p><i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (S-presence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (B-hair)</p>		<p><i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-superior)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (E-superior)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (S-daughters-menstruate)</p>	<p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (E-zeal)</p> <p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (S-ghīrah)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (E-zeal)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-box)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-ghīrah)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-Islmā'ī's wife)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-box)</p> <p>'<i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)</p>	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)		<p>'<i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i>' (S-ghīrah)</p> <p>Ikhtiṣāṣ (E-sharī'ah)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-box)</p> <p>al-Kāfi (S-ghīrah)</p>	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)	

	Supports: Women are extensions of men	Supports: Men are superior intellectually, ethically, or spiritually	Supports: Men are logical, women are emotional	Supports: Women are inferior because they menstruate	Supports: Women's exclusion	Supports: Male authority	Supports: Women are financially dependent	Supports: Importance of female chastity	Supports: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love'	Supports: Female beauty is de-emphasized
		Qummī (S-presence) Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm (S-presence) 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (E-zeal)								
New Testament, or Christian apocrypha	<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-wine)	<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-wine)	<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-wine)		<i>al-Kāfī</i> (S-Ismā'īl's wife) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (M-job)	<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-wine) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (M-job)				
Jurisprudence or theological argumentation	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-sharī'ah) <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i> (E-sharī'ah)	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-superior) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i> (E-sharī'ah) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-superior) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-sharī'ah)		<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-superior) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-superior) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (M-menstr.) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (M-menstr.) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (M-menstr.)		<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-sharī'ah) <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i> (E-sharī'ah) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (M-menstr.) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (H-um walad) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (M-menstr.) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (M-menstr.)		' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'ī'</i> (E-sharī'ah) <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i> (E-sharī'ah)	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib)	

	Supports: Women are extensions of men	Supports: Men are superior intellectually, ethically, or spiritually	Supports: Men are logical, women are emotional	Supports: Women are inferior because they menstruate	Supports: Women's exclusion	Supports: Male authority	Supports: Women are financially dependent	Supports: Importance of female chastity	Supports: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love'	Supports: Female beauty is de-emphasized
Pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula	' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (E-zeal) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)	' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-zeal) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (S-male circumcision) al-Kāfi (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (S-male circumcision) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (E-zeal-alt) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)			' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (E-zeal) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (E-zeal-alt) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)				' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (E-zeal) al-Kāfi (E-zeal) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (E-zeal-alt) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal) ' <i>Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-zeal)	
'Abbāsid Arab	al-Faqīh (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) al-Faqīh (E-not-rib) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (S-ghīrah) al-Kāfi (S-box) al-Kāfi (S-ghīrah) al-Kāfi (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf)	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)			al-Faqīh (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (S-ghīrah) al-Kāfi (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) al-Kāfi (S-box) al-Kāfi (S-ghīrah)	al-Faqīh (E-not-rib) al-Faqīh (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (S-ghīrah) al-Kāfi (Z-Sūrat Yūsuf) al-Kāfi (H-um walad) al-Kāfi (S-box) al-Kāfi (S-ghīrah)			al-Faqīh (E-not-rib)	

	Supports: Women are extensions of men	Supports: Men are superior intellectually, ethically, or spiritually	Supports: Men are logical, women are emotional	Supports: Women are inferior because they menstruate	Supports: Women's exclusion	Supports: Male authority	Supports: Women are financially dependent	Supports: Importance of female chastity	Supports: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love'	Supports: Female beauty is de-emphasized
Uniquely Shī'ī	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>	<i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>	<i>Ma'ānī al-Akhhbār</i> (M- virginity) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (M- virginity) <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>	<i>Tafsīr al-Furāt</i> (M-beauty) <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (M-matrilineage) <i>Nahj al-Balāghah</i>			<i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-not-rib) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-hajj-exclusion)	
<i>Ghulūw</i>						<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-child) <i>Kitāb Ḥasan b S.</i> (E-child) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-child)		<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-child) <i>Kitāb Ḥasan b S.</i> (E-child) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-child)		
Other non-Abrahamic						<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-child) <i>Kitāb Ḥasan b S.</i> (E-child) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-child)		<i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-child) <i>Kitāb Ḥasan b S.</i> (E-child) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (E-child)		

	Opposes: Women are extensions of men	Opposes: Men are superior	Opposes: Men are logical	Opposes: Menstruation as a defect	Opposes: Women's seclusion	Opposes: Male authority	Opposes: Women as financially dependent	Opposes: Importance of <i>ḥijāb</i> and female chastity	Opposes: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love.'	Opposes: Female beauty is de- emphasized
Jewish tradition or Old Testament	<p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (S-presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-box)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence/H- absence)</p>	<p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- Ismā'īl's wife)</p> <p><i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light)</p>	<p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (S-presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence/H- absence)</p>			<p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Qiṣaṣ al- Anbiyā'</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al- Qummī</i> (S- presence/H- absence)</p>	<p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S-box)</p> <p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- <i>ghīrah</i>)</p> <p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- Ismā'īl's wife)</p>		<p><i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (E- zeal)</p> <p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (E-zeal)</p> <p><i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (E-zeal-alt)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (E-zeal)</p> <p><i>'Uyūn Akhbār al- Ridā</i> (E-zeal)</p>	<p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S- Ismā'īl's wife)</p> <p><i>al-Kāfī</i> (S-box)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (B-hair)</p>

	Opposes: Women are extensions of men	Opposes: Men are superior	Opposes: Men are logical	Opposes: Menstruation as a defect	Opposes: Women's seclusion	Opposes: Male authority	Opposes: Women as financially dependent	Opposes: Importance of <i>ḥijāb</i> and female chastity	Opposes: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love.'	Opposes: Female beauty is de- emphasized
'Abbāsīd Arab	<i>al-Kāfi</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (S-presence/H- absence) <i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence/H- absence)		<i>al-Kāfi</i> (S- presence) <i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (S- presence) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (S-presence) <i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (S- presence) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (S-presence)			<i>al-Kāfi</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>al-Maḥāsīn</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>Qiṣaṣ al- Anbiyā'</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>Tafsīr 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (S- presence/H- absence) <i>Tafsīr al- Qummī</i> (S- presence/H- absence)	<i>al-Kāfi</i> (S-box) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (S- <i>ghīrah</i>)			
Uniquely Shī'ī	<i>Bihār</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B- hope) <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-Dhū al- Faqār) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E- chain)	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (B- hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B- hope) Kitāb al-Anwār (E-light) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Ma'ānī al- Akhbār</i> (E- envy) <i>Tafsīr al- 'Ayyāshī</i> (E- envy) <i>Tafsīr al- 'Askarī</i> (E-	<i>Da'awāt al- Rāwandī</i> (Z- male modesty) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (Z- male modesty) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Ma'ānī al- Akhbār</i> (E-envy) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-'Askarī</i> (E-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-</i>	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (B- hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B- hope) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Tafsīr al- 'Ayyāshī</i> (S- <i>ḍahakat</i>)	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (B- hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B- hope) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim)	<i>Bihār</i> (E- chain) <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Ikhtisāṣ</i> (B- throne) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E- chain)	<i>al-Faqīh</i> (B- hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B- hope)	<i>Amāli al- Ṣādūq</i> (Z- ending) <i>Amāli al- Ṭūsī</i> (Z- ending) <i>'Ilal al- Sharā'ī</i> (Z- ending) <i>Kanz al- Karājikī</i> (Z- ending) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-</i>	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z- ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z- ending) <i>Da'awāt al- Rāwandī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z- male modesty) <i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z- ending) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i> (Z-ending)	<i>al-Kāfi</i> (M- beauty)

	Opposes: Women are extensions of men	Opposes: Men are superior	Opposes: Men are logical	Opposes: Menstruation as a defect	Opposes: Women's seclusion	Opposes: Male authority	Opposes: Women as financially dependent	Opposes: Importance of <i>ḥijāb</i> and female chastity	Opposes: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love.'	Opposes: Female beauty is de- emphasized
		envy) 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (E- envy)	'Ayyāshī (Z- male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al- 'Ayyāshī</i> (E- envy) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty) 'Uyūn Akhbār al- Riḍā (E-envy)					<i>Anbiyā'</i> (Z- ending) <i>Tafsīr al- Qummī</i> (Z- ending)	<i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-ending) <i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Z-male modesty) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty)	
Other ancient	<i>Bihār</i> (E-chain) <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E- chain)					<i>Bihār</i> (E- chain) <i>Iqbāl al-A'māl</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E- chain)				
Crossover with Ṣūfism		<i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light)	<i>Bihār</i> (Z-love- dangerous) <i>Da'awāt al- Rāwandī</i> (Z- male modesty) al-Faqīh (Z- male modesty) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (Z-male modesty) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (Z-love-					<i>Amāli al- Ṣādūq</i> (Z- ending) <i>Amāli al- Ṭūsī</i> (Z- ending) <i>Da'awāt al- Rāwandī</i> (Z- male modesty) al-Faqīh (Z- male	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z- ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z- ending) <i>Bihār</i> (Z-love- dangerous) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (Z- ending) ' <i>Ilal al-Sharā'i</i> ' (Z- love-dangerous) <i>Kanz al-Karājikī</i>	

	Opposes: Women are extensions of men	Opposes: Men are superior	Opposes: Men are logical	Opposes: Menstruation as a defect	Opposes: Women's seclusion	Opposes: Male authority	Opposes: Women as financially dependent	Opposes: Importance of <i>ḥijāb</i> and female chastity	Opposes: 'Man is the slave of his desires, woman is the bond-maid of love.'	Opposes: Female beauty is de- emphasized
			<p>dangerous)</p> <p><i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Z-love-dangerous)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-love-dangerous)</p>					<p>modesty)</p> <p><i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-ending)</p> <p><i>'Ilal al-Sharā'ī</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p>Kanz al-Karājikī (Z-ending)</p> <p><i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p><i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-ending)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-male modesty)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-ending)</p>	<p>(Z-ending)</p> <p><i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-ending)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī</i> (Z-love-dangerous)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-love-dangerous)</p> <p><i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-ending)</p>	

	Women are in chain of sacred inheritance or the narrative of <i>wilāyah</i>	The female experience is represented	Does not support essential differences between men and women or the separate but equal ideology (may not address specific points above)
Jewish tradition or Old Testament		<i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light)	<i>ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi</i> (E-etymologies) <i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light) <i>Kitāb Saʿd al-Saʿūd</i> (E-Jewish cal.)
New Testament or Christian apocrypha	<i>Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalāʾ)		<i>Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (E-hermaphrodite) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalāʾ)
Persian			<i>Bihār</i> (E-Persian calendar)
Uniquely Shīʿī	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Bihār</i> -unsourced (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Bihār</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) Furāt (E-chain) <i>Ikhtīṣāṣ</i> (B-throne) Iqbal (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (B-Dhū al-Faqār) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalāʾ)	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Bihār</i> -unsourced (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Bihār</i> (E-chain) Furāt (E-chain) Iqbal (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-hajj-inclusion) <i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim)	<i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z-ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṣādūq</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Amāli al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī</i> (E-envy) <i>Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī</i> (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Bihār</i> -unsourced (E-exclusion-chain) <i>Bihār</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi</i> (Z-ending) <i>ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Iqbāl al-Aʾmāl</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (B-hope) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (E-hajj-inclusion) <i>al-Kāfi</i> (M-Karbalāʾ) <i>Kanz al-Karājiki</i> (Z-ending) <i>Kanz al-Karājiki</i> (Z-excuses)

	Women are in chain of sacred inheritance or the narrative of <i>wilāyah</i>	The female experience is represented	Does not support essential differences between men and women or the separate but equal ideology (may not address specific points above)
			<i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light) <i>Kitāb Sulaym</i> (passim) <i>Ma`ānī al-Akḥbār</i> (E-envy) <i>Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib</i> (B-Dhū al-Faqār) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (Z-ending) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Tafsīr al-`Askarī</i> (E-envy) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Uyūn Akḥbār al-Riḍā</i> (E-envy)
Other non-Abrahamic or ancient	<i>Baṣā`ir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Biḥār</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Iqbāl al-A`māl</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalā`)	<i>Biḥār</i> (E-chain) <i>Iqbāl al-A`māl</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E-chain)	<i>Baṣā`ir al-Darajāt</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Biḥār</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (E-grain) <i>al-Faqīh</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Ilal al-Sharā`i`</i> (E-grain) <i>Iqbāl al-A`māl</i> (E-chain) <i>al-Kāfī</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā`</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>Tafsīr Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm</i> (E-chain) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (M-Karbalā`) <i>al-Tahdhīb</i> (M-Karbalā`)
Crossover with Šūfism		<i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light)	<i>Amālī al-Šādūq</i> (Z-ending) <i>Amālī al-Šādūq</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Amālī al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Amālī al-Ṭūsī</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Ilal al-Sharā`i`</i> (Z-ending) <i>Ilal al-Sharā`i`</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Kanz al-Karājiki</i> (Z-ending) <i>Kanz al-Karājiki</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Kitāb al-Anwār</i> (E-light)

	Women are in chain of sacred inheritance or the narrative of <i>wilāyah</i>	The female experience is represented	Does not support essential differences between men and women or the separate but equal ideology (may not address specific points above)
			<i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-ending) <i>Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'</i> (Z-excuses) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-ending) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i> (Z-excuses)

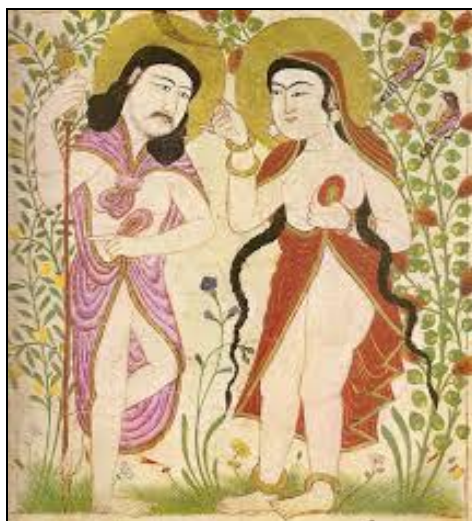
Appendix C: Sacred Figures in Traditional Artwork

This appendix is included to supplement the text. It is comprised of illustrations of women in a sacred context. It can be thought-provoking to compare the implied messages behind the portrayals of these women in these pictures with the subtexts of the narrations and the assumptions about women in Islam in the separate-but-equal ideology today. It shows visually how people tend to cast sacred figures in the light of their own ethnicity and cultural norms just as the narrations do verbally.



Eve and Adam standing with dignity and respect in front of their descendants, who were created as equal pairs of females and males.⁷²⁶

⁷²⁶ 'Adam and Eve. Miniature by Ottoman Historiographer Seyyid Loqman Ashuri, from the *Zubdat-al Tawarikh*, dedicated to Sultan Murad III in 1583. 16th century at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, Turkey' in *Getty Images* <<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/illustration/adam-and-eve-miniature-by-ottoman-historiographer-seyyid-stock-graphic/112189648>>. Accessed 5 August 2015.



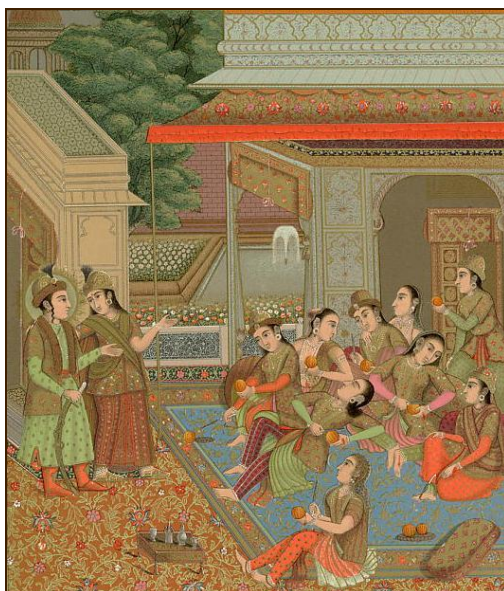
Eve and Adam content in the Garden. Including this picture in an Islamic text today could be considered inappropriate due to the absence of clothing.⁷²⁷



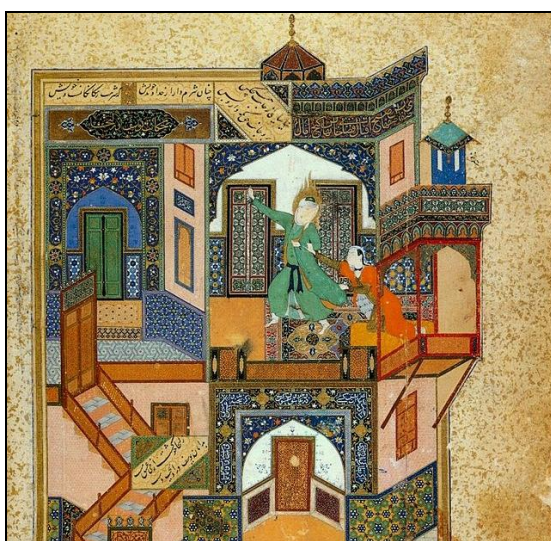
A beautiful (as opposed to 'fertile and ugly'), Persianate Hajar. Here, Hajar has agency and does not need an interlocutor before Allah.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁷ Adam and Eve, from *Manāfi' al-Ḥayawān*, Iran, c. 1300, in Ernst Grube, *Islamisk Kunst* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1971).

⁷²⁸ Image taken from a website featuring sacred Persian art <<http://eternalpainting.blogfa.com/category/13>>. Accessed 26 August 2015.



Illustrations of the story of Zulaykhā abound. Here, the women cut their hands when they see Yūsuf's beauty. Just as the narrations reverse expected gender roles for females and males, Zulaykhā here seems a bit mannish, whereas Yūsuf's beauty seems girlish. Zulaykhā's girth probably reflects her social status.⁷²⁹



⁷²⁹ Moghul painting reproduced in 'Joseph, son of Jacob', in the *New World Encyclopedia* <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Joseph,_son_of_Jacob>. Accessed 27 August 2015.

Yūsuf leaps to freedom as Zulaykhā chases after him. The sense that he is flying may represent his spirituality and capacity for miraculous powers.⁷³⁰



The happy ending – Zulaykhā and Yūsuf married. The symmetry of the picture suggests partnership rather than hierarchy.⁷³¹



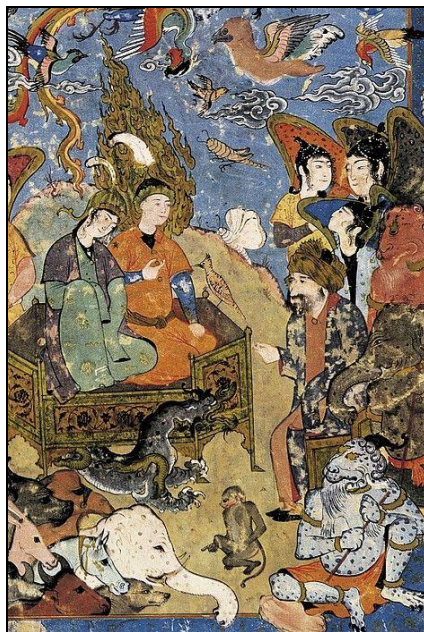
Bilqīs, on her own, enjoying the fruits of royalty. Like in other images, there does not seem to be a concern with fully concealing their hair.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ Iranian painting, 15th-16th century, held at the Museum National Library and Archives of Egypt, Cairo <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.eg/>>. Accessed 26 August 2015.

⁷³¹ From a manuscript of Jāmī, 16th century, held at the the University of Oxford. Wesley College Society for the Arts <<http://www.wesleycollege.net/sitecore/content/Home/Events/2012/03/15/Society-for-the-Arts-Launch.aspx>>. Accessed 5 August 2015.



Bilqīs, with her attendants surrounding her. She has no challenge to her authority.



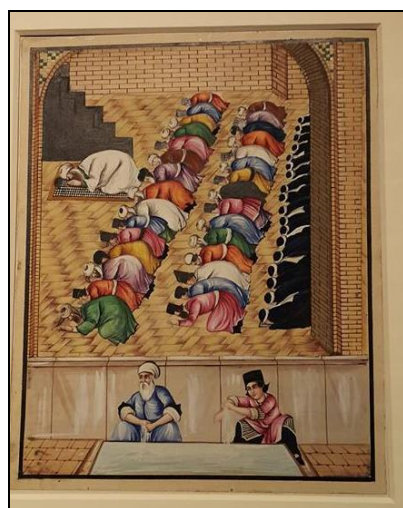
Bilqis and Sulayman in the seat of power together.⁷³³

⁷³² Safavid-era painting from Qazvin (Iran) at the British Museum
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/t/queen_of_sheba,_drawing.aspx>. Accessed 26 August 2015.

⁷³³ Safavid-era (Iranian) miniature. AISA/Everett Collection
<<http://fineartamerica.com/featured/king-solomon-and-the-queen-of-sheba-everett.html>>. Accessed 26 August 2015.



The Virgin Mary, with her child (who has taken on the posture of a knowledgeable *qāḍī*). Perhaps she has gone home since she is no longer in the desert; however, the tree is still there. In this picture, she does not have the flames over her head marking her as a sacred figure. Given contemporary sensitivities on Muslim women and hair, it is worth noting that the artist did not object to including a bit of hair in the portrayal of a sacred female figure, while nonetheless including a traditional and modest although colourful veil.⁷³⁴



Men and women praying in a mosque in Qajar-era Iran, demonstrating the public participation of women in religious activities.⁷³⁵

⁷³⁴ Persian miniature featured in *Enzyklopadie des Islam* <<http://www.eslam.de/begriffe/m/maria.htm>>. Accessed 26 August 2015.

⁷³⁵ Personal photo by Z. H. Awan (2015) from the Islamic Art Museum in Qatar.

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