

THE INNER-QUR'ĀNIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN PARADISE: FROM THE *HŪR ʿĪN* TO BELIEVING WOMEN*

ANA DAVITASHVILI
University of Tübingen, Germany

Abstract

This article explores the inner-qur'ānic development of the images of women in the qur'ānic Paradise and explains the possible reasons for this development via a consideration of qur'ānic images of women more broadly. Women appear in the qur'ānic Paradise as “houris” (*hūr ʿīn*), “spouses” (*azwāj*), “spouses who acted righteously” (*wa-man ṣalaḥa min ... azwājihim*), “pure spouses” (*azwāj muṭahharah*), and “believing women” (*mu'mināt*). Such references to women in Paradise correspond to the inner-qur'ānic development of the female image. The “houris” are mentioned only in the Meccan period, while references to “pure spouses” and “believing women” occur exclusively in the Medinan period. Furthermore, after the believing men are rewarded with the houris in earlier Meccan verses, later Meccan verses discuss earthly spouses. In these later Meccan verses, as earthly women gradually rise in station as the spouses of believing men in Paradise, the houris seemingly disappear. In parallel with this development in the qur'ānic account of women in Paradise, the early Meccan *sūrah*s do not explicitly describe women as “believing women,” thus putting forward no explicit rules of good conduct for earthly spouses. Finally, it is not until the Medinan verses that women are treated as moral agents.

Women scarcely appear in the qur'ānic Paradise. Yet, in the few verses in which they are described as entering or inhabiting Paradise, women are imbued a variety of designations that shift throughout the course of the qur'ānic revelation. Female dwellers of Paradise are first mentioned in the Meccan period. These women are described, as *hūr ʿīn*, usually anglicized as “houris.” Still, from some point in the Meccan period onwards, houris

* This study is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement ID: 866043).

are no longer discussed (Q 44:54; 52:20; 55:72; 56:22). The Qur'ān instead begins to speak of the spouses (*azwāj*) of believing men, women who, at first glance, gain entrance to Paradise only by virtue of their husbands' faith (Q 36:56; 43:70). Yet, by the later Meccan period, earthly spouses enter Paradise as a result of their own righteousness (Q 13:23; 40:8–9). In the Medinan period, the male believers in Paradise are promised "pure spouses" (*azwāj muṭahharah* in Q 2:25; 3:15; 4:57), and the female inhabitants of Paradise are referred to as "believing women" (*mu'mināt* in e.g., Q 9:72; 48:5). Thus, while Medinan *sūrah*s initially portray earthly women in Paradise as mere spouses, later verses bestow these spouses the designation of believers and subjects with moral agency.

The development of the portrayal of women in the qur'ānic Paradise described above prompts several questions: Why are women in Paradise depicted as *ḥūr 'in*, "spouses," "spouses who acted righteously," "pure spouses," and "believing women"? Why are the *ḥūr 'in* not explicitly mentioned after the Meccan period and can we assume that the notion of the *ḥūr 'in* continued to be current among the qur'ānic addressees after this period? Are the *houris* and/or earthly wives of the Meccan period influential on the concept of "pure spouses" in the Medinan period? The present study focuses on answering these questions, taking into account the broader development of the qur'ānic portrayal of women, with a special attention paid to the issue of women's personal responsibility.

In order to track the inner-qur'ānic development of the representation of women in Paradise, the first part of this article reviews the qur'ānic narratives of Adam and his spouse, the first human beings, which are set in Paradise. The story of Adam and his spouse is told three times across the Meccan and Medinan periods (Q 2:35–39; 7:19–25; 20:117–124). Across these three retellings, two features of the depiction of Adam's spouse remain constant: the Qur'ān never names her, and God never speaks to her individually. Yet her characterization does evolve: although initially passive, Adam's wife is later (Q 7:19–25) endowed with greater agency – she receives both a direct address from God and is depicted as acting on her own volition. Crucially though, her action always comes in tandem with Adam, as part of the human couple. This evolution of the depiction of Adam's wife from passivity to greater personal empowerment, coincides with the inner-qur'ānic development of the representation of women in Paradise, as between the Meccan and Medinan periods women are gradually portrayed explicitly as "the righteous" or "believers." Yet, as is the case with Adam's wife, this evolution of inner-qur'ānic descriptions of women does not occur independently of

men. Women continue to be represented as the spouses of male believers or as believing women alongside believing male companions.

Previous research, such as Neal Robinson's, has addressed various identities of the female companions of the believing men in the hereafter, against the background of a diachronic distinction between Meccan and Medinan *sūrah*s.¹ However, Robinson does not explain the reasons for the development of these occurrences from the houris to pure spouses and believing women. Amina Wadud, too, mentions the Qur'ān's shift from references to "white women with large eyes"² to the "universal *azwaj* as companions described in the Madinan verses,"³ yet her observations are not completely accurate. The "pure spouses" (*azwāj muṭahharah*) in Q Āl 'Imrān 3:15, designates clearly only female spouses.⁴ Furthermore, the term *zawj* appears not only in the Medinan period but also in Meccan verses. In contrast to Wadud, I argue below that Qur'ānic references to "spouses" or *azwāj* can be equated with the houris.⁵ While I agree with Wadud that the depictions of the *ḥūr 'īn* reflect "the dreams and desires of those Arabs,"⁶ I will show that the image of beautiful heavenly women continues to be presupposed after the *hijrah*. Most recently, Celene Ibrahim has suggested that the *ḥūr 'īn* are not necessarily women and that they may rather be "the resurrected humans

1. All translations of the Qur'ān are taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) but are occasionally modified. All translations of Syriac passages are my own. My gratitude to Nicolai Sinai for sending me the draft entry for *muṭahhar* (state of research: February 2020) in *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023) and commenting on an earlier draft of this article. I would also like to thank Karen Bauer, Nora K. Schmid, Holger Zellentin, and the peer-reviewers for their valuable comments on the article. Of course, they should not be held responsible for any errors remaining.

Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 88–89.

2. Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55.

3. *Ibid.*, 59.

4. As Amina Wadud writes, "after Madinah, it describes the companions of Paradise in generic terms: 'For those who keep from evil, with their Lord are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, and pure *azwaj*, and contentment from Allah.' (3:15). Keeping in mind my arguments about the generic use of certain terms, 'believers' here are either male or female, especially since *azwaj* is used for both in the Qur'an" (*ibid.*, 55, 57).

5. *Ibid.*, 55, 57.

6. *Ibid.*, 54.

themselves in a newly created state.”⁷ In fact, Ibrahim posits that the Qur’ān does not promise believers sexual intercourse as a reward in Paradise.⁸ In the present study, however, I cite pre-Islamic poetry to demonstrate that the *ḥūr ʿīn* should, contrary to Ibrahim’s belief, be understood as beautiful females. For instance, the terms *kawāʿib* (“full-breasted,” Q 78:33) and *abkār* (“virgins,” Q 56:36), which are alternative descriptions for the male believers’ female companions in Paradise, have sexual connotations as well.

Seeking to explain *how* and *why* the identity of women in Paradise evolves over the course of the revelation and what this development means for the concept of the houris, this article in part combines a diachronic reading of the occurrences of females in Paradise with a synchronic analysis of the broader role of women in each period of revelation. The periodization scheme draws on the relative chronology proposed by Gustav Weil and Theodor Nöldeke. Yet, as the general structure of Weil and Nöldeke’s as well as Angelika Neuwirth’s chronologies is largely consistent with more recent refinements, modeling Nicolai Sinai, I will employ the terms “early Meccan,” “later Meccan,” and “Medinan.”⁹ I will also refer to mean verse length in transcription letters while reconstructing the gradual change in the designations of the female image in qur’ānic Paradise.

My study proceeds in two parts with the second part split into three sections. First, I examine the relevant qur’ānic passages concerning Adam’s unnamed spouse, the first woman in Paradise. Next, I consider images of women in Paradise beyond Adam’s wife, analyzing (1) occurrences of the *ḥūr ʿīn*, (2) descriptions of earthly women in Paradise, and finally (3) the concept of “pure spouses.” Given the central position of men in the Meccan qur’ānic Paradise, the early phases of the qur’ānic proclamation describe the male believers as being rewarded with the company of the ideally beautiful houris, whose attributes are familiar from pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. I then turn to Q al-Ṭūr 52:21, which immediately follows a reference to the *ḥūr ʿīn* in the Meccan verse Q 52:20 and has commonly been understood to be a later addition to the early Meccan Sūrat al-Ṭūr. I argue that Q 52:21

7. Celene Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 41–43. Celene Ibrahim relates *-hunna*, the feminine pronoun in the plural to the individual souls (*nufūs* or *anfūs*). She writes: “If the feminine pronoun used here is seen as referring to the souls, this would be consistent with the sentiments of the remainder of the verse, since ‘companions of the right’ is not a term that is generally restricted to men” (ibid., 60).

8. Ibid., 46.

9. Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur’an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 111–130.

was an insertion, probably from the Medinan period, intended to reaffirm the presence of the houris in Paradise. Lastly, I conclude by examining the Medinan phrase “pure spouses,” assessing to what extent these pure spouses were understood to be identical with either the earthly spouses of male believers or with the early Meccan houris. I also investigate how the concept of purity and the root *t-h-r* relates to earthly spouses and the houris.

Despite the inner-qur’ānic development of the presentation of women in Paradise, the original concept of the houris persists due to the central position of men among the Qur’ān’s assumed audience. Yet, while there may be no diachronic development with respect to the concept of the houris, the *ḥūr ʿīn* cease to be explicitly mentioned in the later Meccan period. Moreover, the image of earthly women in the Qur’ān evolves; as the Qur’ān gradually endows women greater responsibility for their actions, these women appear as “believing women” in Paradise. Thus, my analysis of the references to women in the qur’ānic Paradise prompts similar conclusions to those offered by Karen Bauer on the question of gender egalitarianism in the Qur’ān.¹⁰ I strengthen Bauer’s existing hypothesis noting the following: (1) the Qur’ān treats women and men equally – obligating them, for example, to pray (Q 9:71; 74:36–48), and (2) the Qur’ān assumes that women enter Paradise due to their earthly deeds throughout all of its periods of genesis. However, I underscore that regarding eschatological rewards, while men are recompensed with houris in Paradise, women receive no such reward.

Part I: Adam’s Spouse, the First Woman, in Paradise

The first woman in the qur’ānic Paradise (*al-jannah*) is Adam’s unnamed spouse (*zawj*).¹¹ The Qur’ān employs *al-jannah* in the singular to mean the

10. See Karen Bauer, “The Male is not Like the Female (Q 3:36): The Question of Gender Egalitarianism in the Qur’ān,” *RC* 3 (2009): 637–654, 651.

11. *Zawj* in the singular can denote “kind” or “type,” but *azwāj* in the plural as well as in the dual can also mean “the second halves of pairs,” not only “kinds” or “types.” The meaning of “the second halves of pairs” is reflected in the early Meccan verses (Q 53:45; 75:39; 78:8), where the pairs (*azwāj*) or two mates or two kinds of humans (*zawjayni*) are defined in terms of male and female. The word mostly relates to the female second half of a pair up to the Medinan period. *Zawj* exclusively refers to male spouses only in three Medinan verses, Q 2:230, 232 and 58:1. The plural *azwāj* as spouses never relates to both men and women together, as the Qur’ān either speaks to men and their (female) spouses or women and their (male) spouses. On the usage of the term *zawj* throughout the Qur’ān, see also Ibrahim, *Women and Gender*, 20–25, 27–28 and Michael Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of ‘The Poets’ and the Qur’ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority,” in James L. Kugel (ed.), *Poet-*

dwelling place of the first woman and man as well as of the believers and their spouses in Q 43:70.¹² Created in Paradise and allowed to live there before the fall of humanity, she and Adam are the primordial woman and man. The qur'ānic accounts of the first woman undergo development, allowing her greater prominence in some versions of the expulsion story. Still, while God addresses Adam as an individual, God never speaks to the first woman alone.¹³ As she remains unnamed throughout the Qur'an, she never possesses the same importance as her husband.

Three qur'ānic passages recount the banishment of the first couple: Q 2:35–39 (137.19 transcription letters), 7:19–25 (104.27 transcription letters), and 20:117–124 (61.04 transcription letters). Based on average mean verse length (see also appendix 1), the chronologically earliest of these accounts is Q 20:117–123, a Meccan passage. In v. 117, the primordial female is passive. In this verse, God first addresses Adam, only indirectly including Adam's wife later in Q 20:117. God says to Adam that Satan is an enemy of both Adam and his wife and that Satan may not remove the first humans from Paradise (*fa-qulnā yā-ādamu inna hādhā 'aduwwun laka wa-li-zawjika fa-lā yukhrijannakumā mina 'l-jannati*). While in Genesis God makes the

ry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 95–96. I am indebted to Nora K. Schmid for the reference to Zwettler's article.

12. The Arabic word *al-jannah* in the singular is used as a reference to the dwelling place of Adam and his wife before the fall of humankind in Q 2:35; 7:19, 22, and 27; 20:117, 121. In several verses *al-jannah* is the posthumous abode of the righteous (e.g., Q 19:60, 63; 26:90). The singular form of "the garden" seems interchangeable with "the garden of eternity" (Q 25:15), "the gardens" (*jannāt*) (Q 3:15; 4:57; and 25:10); "the gardens of Eden" (*jannāt 'adn*) (Q 9:72; 38:50; 40:8); and "two gardens" (*al-jannatāni*) (Q 55:54). The singular designation "the Garden of Eden" does not occur in the Qur'an at all. Moreover, while the next-worldly Paradise is depicted as a place where believers can eat and drink abundantly (e.g., Q 52:19, 22–23), Adam and his spouse also do not have to be hungry, thirsty, or unclothed in Paradise according to Q 2:35 and 20:118–119. Thus, the dwelling place of Adam and his spouse and the next-worldly Paradise seem to be very similar, if not the one and the same place.

13. On a similar view of the role of Eve, see also Denise Spellberg, "Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood," *IJMES* 28 (1996): 305–324, 307. Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad analyze the relevant qur'ānic verses in a manner analogous to Spellberg; see Smith and Haddad, "Eve: Islamic Image of Woman," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5 (1982): 135–144. In contrast to them, Barbara Stowasser considers Adam's wife and Adam to be "free and equal agents called upon to wage the battle of righteousness against Satan." See Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27.

serpent, Eve, and the serpent's and Eve's offspring, enemies to each other after the fall of humanity (Gen 3:15), Q 20:117 depicts Satan as an enemy both to Adam and his wife prior to the fall. Satan may cause Adam to be wretched (*fa-tashqā*; v. 117), but in Paradise Adam will not suffer hunger and thirst or be naked (*lā ta'rā*; v. 118). In Q 20:117–119, God directly speaks to Adam rather than to him and his spouse, and likewise Satan solely addresses Adam in Q 20:120.

In contrast to the biblical story of the serpent's temptation of Eve (Gen 3:1–6), Satan does not tempt Adam's wife in the Qur'an, nor does Adam's wife subsequently tempt Adam. It is only Adam to whom Satan speaks in Q 20:120: "But Satan whispered to Adam, saying, 'Adam, shall I direct you the tree of eternity and dominion that never decays'" (*fa-waswasa ilayhi 'l-shayṭānu qāla yā-ādamu hal adulluka 'alā shajarati 'l-khuldi wa-mulkin lā yablā*).¹⁴ Adam and his wife eat from the tree and jointly become aware of their nakedness. Adam disobeys his Lord (*rabbahu*) and goes astray (v. 121). But his Lord turns to him, forgives him, and guides him (v. 122; cf. the similar declaration in Q 2:37): *thumma 'jtābāhu rabbuhu fa-tāba 'alayhi wa-hadā*. Still, God banishes them both from Paradise (v. 123). Through this series of events, Adam is the narrative focus, and his wife plays only a subsidiary role.

In the subsequent Meccan qur'ānic account of the first couple in Paradise, Q 7:19–24, Adam's wife adopts a more active narrative role via the passage's employment of the dual. In Q 7:19, God speaks to both Adam and his spouse: "Adam! Inhabit the garden, you and your wife, and eat [dual] ..." (*yā-ādamu 'skun anta wa-zawjuka 'l-jannata fa-kulā*). God's prohibition for Adam and his spouse is phrased in the dual in Q 7:19 as well: "... Do not approach this tree, lest you be among wrongdoers" (*wa-lā taqrabā hādhihi 'l-shajarata fa-takūnā mina 'l-ẓālimīn*). Later, in Q 7:20–21, Satan also addresses both Adam and his wife, convincing them to eat from the forbidden tree. Both are tempted, and as in Q 20:121, in Q 7:22 Adam and his wife become aware of their nakedness. In the latter version, The Lord of both of them (*rabbuhumā*) reminds the first couple that they had been warned not to eat from the tree. Hence, Adam and his spouse jointly ask God for forgiveness (v. 23). God proceeds to force Adam, his spouse, and Satan to descend from Paradise (v. 24). Notably, throughout Q 7's account, Adam's wife

14. The qur'ānic account resembles the image of Adam found in 4 Ezra where Adam is the sole focus of the fall of humankind, "And You laid upon him one commandment of Yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately You appointed death for him and for his descendants" (4 Ezra 3:7; cf. 2 Baruch 17:2–3, 23:4; Apoc. Sedr. 4:5).

has greater prominence than in Q 20, as the use of the dual form ensures she is more explicitly involved with each element of the narrative.

In Q 2:35–38, God once again commands Adam and his wife to dwell in Paradise. God prohibits them only from eating from the tree (*wa-qulnā yā-ādamu 'skun anta wa-zawjuka 'l-jannata wa-kulā minhā raghadan haythu shi'tumā wa-lā taqrabā hādhihi 'l-shajarata fa-takūnā mina 'l-zālimīn*; v. 35). Subsequently, as in the version of the story described in Q 7:22, Satan tempts Adam and his wife, and they are expelled from Paradise. God makes them leave heaven and stresses that Adam, his wife, and Satan are enemies of each other (v. 36). Adam is spoken to by his Lord (*min rabbihi*), and his Lord turns mercifully to him (*fa-tāba 'alayhi*, v. 37), even though He forces all of them descend from Paradise (v. 36 and 38). Both Adam and his wife are addressed in Q 2:35–38 and Q 7:19–24, still, in the Medinan verse, Q 2:37, God speaks and offers forgiveness solely to Adam. In Q 2:37, as in Q 20:122, God is framed explicitly as “Adam’s Lord,” and not the Lord of both Adam and his wife, as God was in Q 7:22. This distinction is presumably due to Adam’s status as God’s “chosen one” (Q 3:33, “God chose Adam,” *inna 'llāha 'ṣṭafā ādama*), so that, similar to the Meccan narrative Q 20:117–123, God turns mercifully only towards Adam, not Adam and his wife.¹⁵ Although Adam is the center of God’s attention in each of the qur’ānic narratives described above, in each account, Adam simultaneously functions as a representative of his wife, because they transgress the commandment given to them as a couple, and there are no passages indicating that Adam’s spouse might not be forgiven.

Ultimately, whereas God never explicitly shows mercy to or guides Adam’s wife, as He does Adam in Q 20:122, she is responsible for her actions in all the qur’ānic narratives of the fall. Hence, while the earliest account

15. The focus on Adam in this qur’ānic account of God’s forgiveness and mercy is quite close to the narration in the *Cave of Treasures* (*M'arrat gazzē*). In this early Christian text, composed immediately prior to the rise of Islam, God address and forgives only Adam and, strikingly, grants him forgiveness right after the Fall, “At the ninth hour their expulsion from Paradise took place. And as they were going forth sorrowfully, God spoke to Adam, heartened him, and said to him, ‘Do not be sorrowful, O Adam, for I will restore to you this inheritance. Behold, see how greatly I have loved you.’... And when Adam and Eve had gone forth from Paradise, the door of Paradise was shut, and a cherub bearing a two-edged sword stood by it.” *La Caverne des Trésors: Les Deux Recensions Syriacques*, ed. Su-Min Ri (Leuven: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1987), 36–37. Sergey Minov, “Date and Provenance of the Syriac Cave of Treasures: A Reappraisal,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 20.1 (2017): 129–229; idem, *Memory and Identity in the Syriac Cave of Treasures: Rewriting the Bible in Sasanian Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 37.

of the expulsion of the primordial humans from paradise (Q 20:117–123) barely mentions Adam's spouse, the consequences of the transgression fall equally on both (v. 121). Moreover, Q 2:35–38 and 7:19–24 present Adam's wife as playing an explicitly active role, as she receives commands by God and is tempted by Satan alongside Adam. As the next section will show, this development in the first woman's agency reflects the broader development of the images of women in the qur'anic Paradise.

Part II: From the *ḥūr ʿīn* to Pure Spouses and Believing Women

The *ḥūr ʿīn* in the Qur'anic Paradise

Per *sūrah*-chronology, houris are the first women to appear in qur'anic depictions of Paradise (see appendix 2). The role and nature of the houris in Paradise is defined entirely in terms of their relation to men.¹⁶ In Q al-Dukhān 44:54 (*wa-zawwajnāhum bi-ḥūrin ʿīn*) and 52:20 (*wa-zawwajnāhum bi-ḥūrin ʿīn*), believing men are paired with, or married to, the houris.¹⁷ The relationship between the houris and the inhabitants of Paradise is described by the verb *zawwaja* ("to pair, to marry, to give as spouses"), and the houris are, thus, *azwāj* of the righteous men. The significance of this will become clearer when we consider how the identity of the believing men's *azwāj* evolves in the later period of revelation. Q al-Shu'arā' 26:166 (36.71 transcription letters per verse), which is from approximately the same period as Q 44:54 (36.61 in transcription letters) and 52:20 (38.35 transcription letters excl. v. 21), mentions the spouses (*azwāj*) of Lot's people. Q 26:166 provides additional justification for understanding *zawwaja* in Q 44:54 and 52:20 as "marry" or "give as spouses," and for concluding that the houris are the spouses of believing men.

16. More recently, the concept of the houris in the Qur'an and early Islamic exegesis is extensively analyzed in my dissertation, Ana Davitashvili, "Die *ḥūr ʿīn* im Koran und in der frühislamischen Exegese," PhD diss. (University of Bamberg, 2021). On the *ḥūr ʿīn* see also Maher Jarrar, "Houris," *EQ*, s.v. (2002).

17. 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd and Ibn Khuthaym, one of his students, recited *amdadnāhum* ("we provide/provided them") instead of *zawwajnāhum* as a variant reading in Q 44:54 (there is no variant reading for *zawwajnāhum* in Q 52:20). *Amdadnāhum* also occurs in Q 52:22 (*wa-amdadnāhum bi-fākihatin wa-laḥmin mim mā yashtahūn*). Furthermore, in other Meccan verses (Q 17:6, 23:55, 26:132–134, 27:36, and 71:12), the believers are provided by God with sons, wealth, livestock, gardens, and rivers, where again the verb for provision is *amadda*. See *al-Muṣḥaf wa-qirā'ātuḥu*, ed. 'Abd al-Majīd al-Sharafī (4 vols., Rabat: Mu'minūn bi-lā Ḥudūd, 2016), 3.517 *ad* Q 52:20 and 4.80 *ad* Q 44:54.

The *ḥūr ʿīn* feature in the Qurʾānic conception of Paradise not only as *azwāj* but also as a “reward” for the male believer in Q al-Wāqīʿah 56:22–24 (“As reward for what they used to do,” v. 24). These houris are described as being perfectly beautiful in a way reflective of the ideals of beauty in pre-Islamic poetry.¹⁸ The houris are explicitly mentioned as *ḥūr ʿīn* in Q 44:54, 52:20, and 56:22. Based on the evidence of pre-Islamic poetry and early Arabic dictionaries, *ḥūr ʿīn* seem to mean white, large-eyed [women].¹⁹ The houris are depicted as full-breasted (*kawāʿib* in Q al-Nabāʾ 78:33), virgins (*abkār* in Q 56:36), passionate lovers (*ʿurub* in Q 56:37), of equal age (*atrāb* in Q 38:52, 56:37, 78:33), good (*khayrāt* in Q al-Raḥmān 55:70), fair (*hisān* in Q 55:70), limiting their glances (*qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* in Q 37:48, 38:52, 55:56), and reserved in pavilions (*maqṣūrāt fi ʿl-khiyām* in Q 55:72). Moreover, the houris are compared to well-protected eggs and pearls (*bayḍ maknūn* in Q 37:49 and *luʿluʿ al-maknūn* in Q 56:23) as well as corundum and coral (*al-yāqūt waʿl-marjān* in Q 55:58). Almost all of these descriptors of female beauty occur in pre-Islamic poems, and are therefore consistent with ideals of female beauty in pre-Islamic poetry.²⁰ For instance, the Bishr b. Abi Khāzim (from

18. Horovitz and Neuwirth have already indicated some attributes (*ḥūr, kawāʿib*) in Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran: Frühmekkanische Suren: Bd. 1 Poetische Prophetie* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011), 604–605 and Josef Horovitz, “Das koranische Paradies,” in R. Paret (ed.), *Der Koran* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 67–69.

19. For occurrences of *ḥūr* and *ʿīn* in pre-Islamic poetry see my dissertation, “Die *ḥūr ʿīn* im Koran,” 53, 58–59. The singular of *ḥūr, ḥawrāʾ*, refers to a fair woman having intense whiteness of the sclera and intense blackness of the pupil according to al-Khalil b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (100/718–178/791), *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamid al-Hindāwī (4 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2003), 1.371 and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Azharī (d. 370/980), *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Darwīsh (15 vols., Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah, 1967–1975), 5.229. Notably, the white color maintains its validity in the Medinan verses where the faces of the inhabitants of Paradise turn white at the Day of Judgement. The Qurʾān expresses this idea in Q 3:106–107: “On the Day some faces will turn white and some faces will turn black. As for those whose faces turn black, ‘Did you disbelieve after your belief?’ Then taste the punishment for what you used to reject.” But as for those whose faces will turn white (*ibyaḍḍat*), they will be within the mercy of God. They will abide therein eternally.” It seems that white color is of paramount importance in regard with the depictions of the dwellers of Paradise and is connotated positively. On the whiteness and blackness of faces see more Christian Lange, “On That Day When Faces Will Be White or Black” (Q3:106): Towards a Semiology of the Face in the Arabo-Islamic Tradition.” *JAOS* 127 (2007): 429–445.

20. On the issue of methodology and determining the authenticity of pre-Islamic

the second half of the sixth century) refers to full-breasted, white women in the palace of the king ʿAmr b. Ḥārith al-Kindī:

The one who gives [himself] to white full-breasted women like sculptures,
white ones, playing tambourines in their hands.
al-wāhibu al-bīḍa ʿl-kawāʿiba kaʿl-dumā
*ḥūran bi-aydihā ʿl-mazāhiru taʿzifu*²¹

Kawāʿib and *abkār* appear together in a poem by ʿAbid b. al-Abraṣ, who lived in the first half of the sixth century. The pre-Islamic poet boasts about his conquests of women, describing them as follows:

And riding on the light-colored camels are girls with swelling breasts,
Slender of waist, virgins, friendly in their manners, white,
Yea, many the tent of maidens who toss the curtain to and fro have I entered,
When within was a woman unwed and sick with love.
wa-fawqa ʿl-jimāli ʿl-nāʿijāti kawāʿibu
makhāmiṣu abkārūn awānisu bīḍu
wa-bayta ʿadhārā yartamīna bi-khidrihi
*dakhaltu wa-fihī ʿānisun wa-marīḍu*²²

Another attribute, *atrāb*, relates to women of equal age in ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAjlān al-Nahdī’s (d. 574) poetry. The poet speaks to his former wife, Hind, who is married to another man from a rival tribe and her companions, other women of the same age:

I recalled there [at the abode] Hind and women equal of her age,
where the slanderer lies and the chief [of the tribe] is disobeyed.
dhakartu bihā Hindan wa-atrābahā ʿl-ūlā
*bihā yakdhibu ʿl-washiyu wa-yuʿṣā amīruhā*²³

Further references to *ḥūr*, *ḥūr al-ʿuyūn*, *ʿin*, *kawāʿib*, *atrāb*, *abkār*, *ḥisān*, *ʿarūb*, *bayḍah*, and *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* in pre-Islamic poetry clearly overlap with the Qurʾānic attributes of the *ḥūr ʿin*.²⁴ Yet, the depictions of the houris be-

Arabic verses, see Nicolai Sinai, *Rain-Giver, Bone-Breaker, Score-Settler: Allāh in Pre-Qurʾānic Poetry* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2019), 19–26.

21. Bishr b. Abī Khāzim al-Asadī, *al-Dīwān*, ed. Majīd Ṭarrād (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1994), 110.

22. Charles Lyall (ed. and trans.), *The Dīwāns of ʿAbid ibn al-Abraṣ of Asad and ʿĀmir ibn aṭ-Ṭufail of ʿĀmir ibn Ṣaʿsaʿah*, (Leiden: Brill, 1913), 32 and 323.

23. Abū ʿl-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās et al. (25 vols., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2008), 22.168.

24. On the description of the *ḥūr ʿin* in pre-qurʾānic poetry and the Qurʾān, see Da-

gins to disappear in the later Meccan period. Q 38:52 (51.98 transcription letters) includes the final reference to the houris.

As Medinan *sūrahs* no longer mention the houris explicitly and, instead, turn their focus on earthly women whom they describe as believers and independent members of the community, one might argue that the concept of houris lost its significance over the course of the Medinan revelations. Contrary to this view, I will show that Q 52:21 is a Medinan insertion in an early Meccan *sūrah*, placed immediately after a verse which is clearly part of the early Meccan discourse in which houris are given as spouses to the believing men. This Medinan expansion indicates the continuing relevance of the concept of houris even in the Medinan period of revelation. Together, Q 52:20–21 reads:

They will be reclining on thrones lined up, and We will marry them to the houris (*wa-zawwajnāhum bi-ḥūrin ʾin*).

And those who believed and whose descendants followed them in faith (*waʾl-ladhīna āmanū waʾttabaʾathum dhurriyyatuhum bi-īmān*) – We will join with them their descendants, and We will not deprive them of anything of their deeds. Every person/man is in pledge for his own deeds.

Although Q 52:21 is not overtly about the houris, and only refers to the reunion of believing men and their offspring who followed their fathers in faith, analyzing the diction and the content of the parallel verses strongly suggests the relevance of the houris to Q 52:21.

Because the believing men, the houris as spouses, and the offspring of the believing men appear together, Q 52:20–21 reminds one of Q 13:23 and 40:8, where believing men are mentioned along with their parents, earthly spouses, and offspring: *wa-man ṣalaḥa min abāʾihim wa-azwājihim wa-dhurriyyātihim* (“whoever were righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their descendants”). Yet the occurrence of houris as spouses alone is not sufficient proof to support the reinterpretation of the houris as earthly spouses. If the reinterpretation had been the goal of the insertion, it would have evoked *man ṣalaḥa*, a phrase along the lines of **wa-man ṣalaḥa min dhurriyyatihim*, an unmistakable indication for the reinterpretation. By contrast, the subject of the insertion is the future fate of the progeny, the insertion is long and stresses the faith of the descendants alongside the faith of their fathers (*allādhīna amanū waʾttabaʾathum dhurriyyatuhum bi-īmān*). This emphasis is especially striking because the revelation of the Meccan

verses, Q 13:23 and 40:8, clarified that offspring would only enter Paradise if they were believers themselves.

Moreover, the insertion uses two phrases *mā alatināhum min ʿamalihin min shayʿ* (“We will not deprive them of anything of their deeds”) and *kullu ʿmriʿin bi-mā kasaba rahīn* (“every person/man is in pledge for his own deeds”) that throughout the entire Qurʿān solely appear in two other verses, the Medinan Q al-Ḥujurāt 49:14 (*lā yalitikum min aʿmālikum shayʿā*)²⁵ and the early Meccan Q 74:38 (*kullu nafsin bi-mā kasabat rahīnah*), respectively. These peculiarities in the wording, suggest that the similarities of Q 52:21 to other verses should be considered more closely. Thus, the phrases *kullu ʿmriʿin bi-mā kasaba rahīn* and *lā yalitikum min aʿmālikum shayʿā* serve as a starting point of the investigation.

The early Meccan verse, Q 74:38, “every soul is in pledge for its deeds” (*kullu nafsin bi-mā kasabat rahīnah*),²⁶ stresses personal responsibility and the issue of “preceding” or “staying behind” in the faith. Notably, only Q 52:21 and 74:38 use *rahīn* and *rahīnah*. In the final clause of Q 52:21, similar wording to that of the early Meccan verse Q 74:38 is employed, rather than similar wording to the late Meccan Q 40:17 (*al-yawma tujzā kullu nafsin bi-mā kasabat*), an interesting distinction because Q 52:21 and 40:17 reflect the same ideas about personal responsibility. This may have been informed by the verse that precedes Q 74:38 and the statement in Q 52:21. Q 74:37 mentions those who want to “precede” or “stay behind” (in the faith): *li-man shāʿa minkum an yataqaddama aw yataʿakhhhar* and Q 52:21 also explores the idea of personal responsibility as a means to “precede” in the faith or “stay behind.” In the case of Q 52:21, offspring can only gain admission to Paradise by adopting the faith of their believing fathers.

25. Neuwirth (*Frühmekkanische Suren*, 698) has already mentioned that there is a similarity in wording between Q 49:14 and 52:21 given the use of *lā yalitikum min aʿmālikum shayʿan*. It is noteworthy that there are no further derivatives of *l-y-t* in the Qurʿān.

26. According to Neuwirth (*Frühmekkanische Suren*, 698, 708), the whole part of the verse before “every soul is in pledge for his own deeds” is a late-Meccan or Medinan adjustment. The fact that the *sūrah* was extended proves its continuing relevance in later times, too. Apparently, this Qurʿānic passage was important enough to attract the insertion of Q 52:21. Yet, there was presumably a good reason why *sūrah* 52, and more specifically Q 52:20, was extended by the insertion of Q 52:21. There are other early Meccan passages that depict Paradise and its inhabitants, and those *sūrahs* presumably lost none of their importance in the later recitation of the Qurʿān, for instance *sūrah* 36 or *sūrah* 56, but, remarkably, the verse was not inserted in those passages.

The notion of delayed arrival to faith also appears in Q 49:14. The verse criticizes the Bedouins for not being true believers (*qul lam tu'minū*). According to these verses, while faith has not yet entered their hearts, if they obey God and His messenger, He will not deprive them of any rewards for their deeds: *wa-lākin qūlū aslamnā wa-lammā yadkhuli 'l-īmānu fī qulū-bikum wa-in tuṭī'u 'llāha wa-rasūlahu lā yalītkum min a'mālikum shay'an inna 'llāha ghafūrun raḥīm*. Strikingly, the insertion, Q 52:21, repeats a phrase that occurs only in one other Medinan verse, Q 49:14, which states that God will not diminish any of their deeds (*lā yalītkum min a'mālikum shay'ā*). Q 52:21 is reminiscent of Q 49:14 despite the fact that other phrases with similar meaning such as “He will never waste their deeds” (Q Muḥammad 47:4: *fa-lan yuḍilla a'mālahum*) or “God does not allow the reward of believers to be lost” (Q 3:171: *wa-anna 'llāha lā yuḍī'u ajra 'l-mu'minīn*, also e.g., in Q 7:170 and 11:115) are frequently mentioned in the Qur'ān.

Comparing the statements of Q 49:14 and 74:37 with 52:21, one finds that Q 52:21 speaks about the still disbelieving offspring of the believing men and confirms that when the descendants become believers, God will not diminish any of their deeds, as evidenced by the case of the Bedouins. Both Q 49:14 and 52:21 mention “faith” multiple times, three times (*āmannā, lam tu'minū, wa-lammā yadkhuli 'l-īmānu fī qulūbikum*) and twice (*āmanū, bi-īmānin*) respectively. Furthermore, Q 49:15 offers a definition of who the real believers are and thus explains what is expected of the still disbelieving Bedouins: “The believers (*al-mu'minūn*) are only the ones who have believed in God and His Messenger and then doubt not but strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of God (*wa-jāhadū bi-amwālihim wa-anfusihim fī sabīli 'llāh*). It is those who are the truthful (*ulā'ika humu 'l-ṣādiqūn*).” This definition of true believers can be applied to the context of Q 52:21 and the understanding of *wa'lladhīna āmanū wa'ttaba'athum dhurriyyatuhum bi-īmānin* as well.

The similarities of the wording of Q 52:21 to that of other Medinan verses support the understanding that the descendants of believers will enter Paradise as their believing fathers before them did, if they believe in God and His Messenger and strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of God. The phrase *alḥaqnā bihim*²⁷ and its parallel phrase in Q 3:170, *yalḥaqū bihim*

27. The wording is similar to that of the Medinan verses Q 3:170 and 62:3, as both use the derivatives of *l-h-q*, but in the Meccan Q Yūsuf 12:101 (late Meccan, 99.42 transcription letters per verse) and Q 26:83 (early Meccan), the verb *alḥaqā* is also used to express the pleas of Joseph and Abraham to be considered among the righteous after death (*wa-alḥiqnī bi'l-ṣāliḥīn*). To better gauge the approximate period of insertion, the derivatives of *t-b-* and *l-y-t* should be dealt with. The Qur'ān employs

min khalfihim, evokes the same idea of preceding and following in Paradise. Q 3:170 mentions those who have been killed in the cause of God (*fī sabīli 'llāh*). They rejoice to see those who will follow and join them in Paradise (*bi'lladhīna lam yalḥaqū bihim min khalfihim*). In the verses, Q 3:166–169, which come before Q 3:170, God might expose the believers (*al-mu'minūn*) and the hypocrites, who do not follow the believers and fight in the way of God (*qātilū fī sabīli 'llāh*). While the hypocrites tell their brothers (*li-ikhwānīhim*) that if they had stayed at home, they would not have been killed, God mocks them: “Then prevent death from yourselves, if you should be truthful (*in kuntum ṣādiqīn*). And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of God as dead (*allādhīna qūtilū fī sabīli 'llāhi amwātan*). Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision.”

The idea of preceding and following and the phrase near the beginning of verse Q 52:21, *wa'ttaba'athum dhurriyyatum bi-īmān*, has its parallel verses in the Medinan Q al-Tawbah 9:100, *ittaba'athum bi-iḥsān*, and Q al-Ḥaṣhr 59:10 *sabaqūnā bi'l-īmān*. The contents of Q 9:100 and 59:10 are also connected to each other, creating a network of Medinan phraseology across the various verses. Q 9:100 mentions the forerunners (in the faith, *al-sābiqūn*²⁸), who are identified as the first *muhājirūn* and *aṣṣār*, as well as those who will follow them with good conduct: “God will be well pleased with the first *muhājirūn* and *aṣṣār* and those who followed them in good deeds, and they will be pleased with Him: He has prepared gardens ...” (*wa'l-sābiqūna 'l-awwalūna mina 'l-muhājirīna wa'l-aṣṣārī wa'lladhīna 'ttaba'ūhum bi-iḥsānin raḍīya 'llāhu 'anhum wa-raḍū 'anhu wa-a'adda lahum jannātin ...*).

In Q 59:10, the later *muhājirūn* speak about the brothers who preceded them in the faith: *wa'lladhīna jā'ū min ba'dihim yaqūlūna rabbanā 'ghfir*

the derivatives of *t-b-* 172 times, and only Q 9:100 appears to be a parallel verse of Q 52:21 when one analyzes the context in which the verb *ittaba'a* occur.

28. The word *al-sābiqūn* occurs from the early Meccan through to the Medinan period in the Qur'ān. The forerunners are described in the early Meccan Q 56:10 as those who are “brought near to God” and to whom a large company of the *awwalūn* and a small company of *ākhirūn* belong. In the late Meccan verses, Q al-Mu'minūn 23:57–61 (56.86 transcription letters per verse) and Q Fāṭir 35:32 (108.96 transcription letters per verse), further details regarding the identity of the forerunners are mentioned: “Indeed, they who are apprehensive from fear of their Lord and they who believe in the signs of their Lord and they who do not associate anything with their Lord and they who give what they give while their hearts are fearful because they will be returning to their Lord – it is those who hasten to good deeds, and they outstrip [others] therein (*wa-hum laḥā sābiqūn*).” Eventually, in the Medinan verses Q 9:100 and 59:10, the first *muhājirūn* and *aṣṣār* are identified as *al-sābiqūn*.

The proposed insertion shares significant lexical overlaps with Medinan verses, which is evidence of contemporaneity and suggests that the insertion occurred in the Medinan period of revelation. More importantly, the content of the Medinan verses references contemporaries of the Prophet, possibly following the preceding believers in the faith, and develops a definition of faith that prescribes fighting in the cause of God with one's souls and with one's properties. This idea is reflected in the insertion of Q 52:21, where the still disbelieving offspring can and will become believers and join their believing fathers, and God will not diminish their deeds. The notion of fighting in the "way of God," and the occurrence of the fathers along with the houris in Q 52:20, strongly indicate that *dhurriyyah* relates in Q 52:21 to male offspring, who will receive the same reward as their fathers if their descendants follow them in faith, as depicted in Q 49:15. Yet, in contrast to these Medinan verses which distinguish the fate of believers between early and late adopters of the faith, the inserted verse in Q 52 discusses the fate of the believers' descendants, by stressing that the offspring of believing men must follow their fathers in faith in order to join their parents in Paradise and receive its rewards, including the houris. Even though similar "delights of Paradise" are depicted in several other *sūrah*s (e.g., Q al-Insān 76:5–22), and the houris are mentioned within some of these descriptions, viz. Q 37:41–51, 44:51–57, and 56:10–26, the insertion in Q 52 serves a meaningful purpose.

In contrast to Q 52:17–25, depictions of the delights of Paradise including the houris in verses such as Q 44:51–57 and 78:31–36 are brief. On the contrary, Q 37:41–51 and 56:10–26 portray Paradise in more detail. Still, these passages do not include the bestowal of houris as spouses (*wazawajnāhum*). Moreover, it appears that the insertion, Q 52:21, was not intended to be connected to the conception of the *awwalūn* and *āakhirūn*, as extensively presented in Q 37, which can be understood as referring to earlier and later generations. Q 37 narrates several stories of the early prophets, although emphasis is placed on how the majority of earlier generations went astray, becoming cautionary tales for later generations: "Most of the former generations strayed before them" (*wa-la-qad ḍalla qablahum aktharu 'l-awwalīn*) (Q 37:71). The later generations are presented as having seen their forefathers go astray, yet continuing to follow them nonetheless: "Indeed they found their forefathers astray, and rushed to follow in their footsteps" (*innahum alfaḥābūn 'alā āthārihim yuhra'ūn*) (Q 37:69–70). Only a few chosen servants of God, e.g., the prophets of earlier generations, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Aaron, and Elias, provide a morally positive example for the later generations (Q 37:78–79, 108–109,

119–120, 128–130): “And We left for him/them [favorable mention] among later generations” (*wa-taraknā ‘alayhi/alayhimā fi l-ākhirīn*). Thus, the content of the insertion Q 52:21, which mentions the believing fathers and their offspring who will follow their fathers in the faith and will be reunited with them in Paradise, is not consistent with the sentiment of *sūrah* 37, where the majority of earlier and later generations forsake the path of God.

The insertion in Q 56:10–26 could also have prompted the identification of the believing men and their offspring with the forerunners (*al-sābiqūn*) or, more likely, with the earlier (*awwalūn*) and later (*ākhirūn*) individuals to come to faith. In Q 56, the forerunners are considered a group of believers who are on a higher level than the “people of the right” (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*).³⁰ There are more among the *sābiqūn* from the earlier than later peoples: “Many from the past and a few from later generations” (*thullatun mina l-awwalīn wa-qalilun mina l-ākhirīn*) (Q 56:13–14). This identification with *awwalūn* and *ākhirūn* was not the goal of the insertion, as if this were the case, the insertion would have suggested that only a small number of the offspring would follow their believing fathers. As such, it is logical that Q 52 describes Paradise very similarly to Q 37 and 56, but does not mention the *awwalūn* and *ākhirūn*. It is not only the forerunners and the chosen servants of God who may expect the delights of Paradise, but also the offspring of the believing men, who had followed their fathers in the faith.

Earthly Women in the Qur’ānic Paradise

This section examines mentions of earthly women in Paradise in the Meccan and Medinan periods (see appendix 2). The Meccan *sūrahs* which contain less than 61.78 transcription letters per verse depict earthly women as spouses (*azwāj*) of the believers. Where these verses employ the phrases “you and your spouses” and “they and their spouses,” I understand them as pertaining to male believers and their wives.³¹ The term “spouses” thus refer

30. Both groups, i.e., forerunners and people of the right, consist of the earlier and later human beings. To the people of the right belong many from the past (*thullatun mina l-awwalīn*) and many from later generations (*thullatun mina l-ākhirīn*) in Q 56:39–40. The delights of Paradise assigned to the forerunners are only slightly different from the delights for the people of the right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*, *aṣḥāb al-maymanah*) or, in general, from the delights for the God-fearing people. See and cf. Q 37:40–49, 43:68–73, 55:46–76. The term “the people of the right” is only used in early Mecca, in Q 56:8, 27, 38, and 90–1, Q 74:39, and Q al-Balad 90:18. In contrast to *al-sābiqūn*, the concept of *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* seems to have lost its importance.

31. Angelika Neuwirth and Dirk Hartwig also translate parts of Q 36:56 and Q 43:70 as “they and their wives” and “you and your wives.” See Neuwirth and Hartwig, *Der*

to earthly women in Paradise and is the first explicit reference to this category of women. This understanding of “spouses” is derived from various Qur’ānic verses which indicate that the primary addressees of these verses were male heads of household:³² several Meccan verses on the houris (e.g., Q 44:51–54; 56:35–38; and 78:31–33) mention “god-fearing persons” (*mut-taqūn*) and “companions of the right-hand” (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) as receiving houris. In these verses, these designations refer to men insofar God pairs them to feminine companions. Q 70:11–14 also describes the guilty man (*mujrim*) who wishes to be ransomed from the punishment by his children, his consort (*ṣāhibatihi*), and his brother. Q 80:35–37 likewise focuses on the man (*al-marʿ*) who flees from his brother, mother, father, consort (*ṣāhibatihi*), and children on the Day of Judgement.³³ Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57 are Medinan verses that exhibit continuity with the Meccan verses just discussed. Verses Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57 speak of believing men as having “pure female spouses” (*azwāj muṭahharah*) and depict male believers as “those who believe and do good works” (*wa’lladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāti*) and “those who fear God” (*alladhīna ’ttaqaw*).

The earthly spouses of the believing men enter Paradise for the first time at approximately the same period of revelation, when paradisiacal spouses, houris, appear for the last time in Q 38 (51.98 transcription letters). Q 43:70 (61.78 transcription letters) explicitly refers to these earthly spouses, “Enter Paradise, you and your spouses (*udkhulū l-jannata antum wa-azwājukum*): you will be filled with joy.” Although in this verse “spouses” can be understood as “earthly wives,” because these women “enter” Paradise with the men, elsewhere the identity of the “spouses” is more ambiguous. For example, Q 36:56 (55.01 transcription letters) mentions, “They and their spouses (*hum wa-azwājuhum*) seated on couches in the shade,” but whether the verse is describing houris or earthly spouses is unclear. Yet, due to the similarity in wording between Q 36:56 and 43:70—*hum wa-azwājuhum* and *antum wa-azwājukum*, respectively—*azwājuhum* in Q 36:56 can be understood as earthly wives and not houris. Despite implying the presence of earthly women in Paradise, these two verses do not specify whether these women entered Paradise by their own merits. In contrast, men in these verses are portrayed as having reached Paradise as a result of their own actions, called

Koran: Spätmittelmekkanische Suren: Bd. 2/2 Von Mekka nach Jerusalem: der spirituelle Weg der Gemeinde heraus aus säkularer Indifferenz und apokalyptischem Pessimismus (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2021), 223, 251, 273, and 303.

32. Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza, *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries, vol. II: On Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 37–38, 45.

33. On Q 70:11–14 and 80:35–37, see Bauer and Hamza, *On Women*, 44 as well.

“people of Paradise” (*aṣḥāb al-jannah*) in Q 36:55 and “those who believed in our signs and were in submission” (*alladhīna āmanū bi-āyātīnā wa-kānū muslimīn*) in Q 43:69. Nevertheless, Q 36:54 subtly implies that the women enter Paradise on account of their own actions, as it notes that every soul (*nafs*), a statement which indicates inclusion of both men and women, will be recompensed for its deeds: *fa'l-yawma lā tuzlamu nafsun shay'an wa-lā tujzawna illā mā kuntum ta'malūn*.

Though these Meccan verses never explicitly stress the righteousness of the female spouses in Paradise and do not single out women as pious, God-fearing, or believing, these Meccan verses do still imply that the female spouses are liable for their actions. Several early Meccan verses emphasize the personal responsibility of human beings (*insān*, *bashar*) or every soul (*nafs*) and thus, there are commandments and rules of conduct formulated in gender-neutral language that, if followed, ensure admission to Paradise. In Q 81:10, the actions of humanity are kept in records and, “When the scrolls are distributed” human beings (*insān*) or souls (*nafs*) will be informed on the Day of Judgment of what they “sent ahead” or “kept back” according to Q 75:13 and 82:4–5. They are also responsible for their actions, “Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds” (*kullu nafsin bi-mā kasabat rahīnah*) (Q 74:38). Human beings are warned against coveting wealth (Q 92:3–11; 100:8) and are told to feed the poor and orphans (Q 90:4–16), to believe in the Day of Judgment (Q 82:6–9), and to pray (Q 74:36–48; 87:14–15). Such proscriptions are relevant to both men and woman as in Q 75:36–39, where the Qur'ān explicitly states that a woman is indeed a human being, “Does human being (*insān*) think he will be left alone? Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm, which became a clinging form, which God shaped in due proportion, fashioning from it the two sexes, male and female (*fa-ja'ala minhu 'l-zawjayni 'l-dhakara wa'l-unthā*)?”. She is thus clearly responsible for her actions and faces consequences in the hereafter. As these early Meccan verses show women to be responsible for their actions, the references to the believing men and their spouses in Q 36:56 and 43:70 might indicate that the female spouses were admitted into Paradise on the basis of their actions and decisions as well. That said, the fact that the women attain the same eschatological outcome as their spouses may also simply be a reflection of the social reality of the Prophet's contemporaries, whereby a wife usually followed her husband's religious views.

More explicit references to the faith of women in Paradise first appear in the later Meccan period. These *sūrahs* depict righteous wives entering Paradise and being followed by the righteous fathers and offspring of the believing men. Q 13:23 (126.16 transcription letters) and 40:8–9 (89.20 tran-

scription letters) emphasize the necessity of the moral righteousness of a male believer's spouses, forebears, and offspring in order to enter Paradise. These verses are a doublet, both stating that the believers "will enter perpetual gardens, along with those who are righteous of their forefathers, spouses, and descendants" (*wa-man ṣalaḥa min ābā'ihim wa-azwājihim wa-dhurriyātihim*). Q 13:23 and 40:8–9 thus extend the circle of people who enter Paradise to include the believers' parents and offspring, in addition to their wives, provided that they conform to certain ethico-religious expectations.³⁴

These *sūrahs* reflect larger changes in circumstances for the qur'ānic community at the time of revelation: first, a gradual increase in the number of Muḥammad's followers and, second, the fact that not every wife of the men who followed the Prophet decided to become a follower of Muḥammad. The transition from a presumably small number of righteous men and their righteous wives in Q 36:56 and 43:70 to the larger number of righteous men and their spouses, who were not necessarily all equally receptive to the message of the Qur'ān, might have necessitated the qualification *man ṣalaḥa*, "those who are righteous," in verses Q 13:23 and 40:8–9. Moreover, not only do the righteous spouses of the believing men enter Paradise in verses Q 13:23 and 40:8–9, but these verses also feature the entrance of the mothers and female descendants, as indicated by the use of the words "forefathers" (*ābā'*) and "offspring" (*dhurriyyah*). Chronologically, these are the earliest verses in which forefathers are mentioned in Paradise, despite this being a period of revelation in which the notion of "ancestors" carried negative connotations.³⁵

Remarkably, the ancestors of the pre-Islamic Arabs are not mentioned in the polemics against the unbelievers in Q 13 and 40. Given the evolving historical realities, the earliest converts' parents may have become "righteous" and adopted the new, Islamic faith later in life. As such, it would have been necessary to include these "ancestors" among the dwellers of Paradise, while simultaneously omitting any criticism of pre-Islamic ancestral prac-

34. The parents and descendants are already mentioned on the Day of Judgement in some early Meccan verses, Q 70:11–14 and 80:34–37, yet a man takes center stage in them as shown above. Thus, as the parents and descendants of a man, and his attitude towards them, are already mentioned at this early stage, the references to the parents and descendants in Paradise and their righteousness cannot be connected to the literary development of the verses gradually getting longer and more complex.

35. Q 43:26–28 and especially 26 express the very same idea: "And, when Abraham said to his father and his people (*li-abīhi wa-qawmihi*), 'Indeed, I am disassociated from that which you worship.'" Cf. also further relevant verses about Abraham, Q 19:41–49 (62.42 transcription letters per verse), and 37:83–99.

tice. The female and male offspring of believing men are also included for the first time in the list of dwellers in Paradise. The increasing number of believers meant that some had offspring who were righteous themselves. Meanwhile, the sisters and brothers of the believing men are not mentioned at all. A possible explanation for this is that every brother counted as an independent subject of agency and was therefore considered the same generation as other believing men. By contrast, every woman was a wife or a daughter of a believing man.³⁶ The fathers might represent the older generation, while the believing men, their spouses, and their offspring represent the contemporary and future generations of believers.

As the righteousness of the women of Paradise with whom the male believers will be reunited, i.e., mothers, wives, and female offspring, is emphasized for the first time in Q 13:23 and 40:8–9, the gender-neutral concept of the personal moral responsibility of every human being is now reflected more directly in reference to women. The later Meccan Q 13:33 and 40:17 articulate once again that every soul is responsible for its actions: “Today each soul will be rewarded for whatever it has done (*al-yawma tujzā kullu nafsin bi-mā kasabat*); today no injustice will be done. God is swift in reckoning.” Yet in Q 40:40 and another later Meccan verse, Q al-Nahl 16:97 (93.41 transcription letters per verse), the male or female gender of the believers is specifically discounted as contributing to their eschatological salvation: “whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith” (*wa-man ‘amila ṣāliḥan min dhakarīn aw unthā wa-huwa mu’min*). The family ties of the women and men dwelling in Paradise are not specified in the Medinan verses Q 3:195 and 4:124. In Q 3:195 and 4:124, anyone, whether male or female (*min dhakarīn aw unthā*), who performs righteous deeds and is a believer, gains admission to Paradise.

The Medinan period goes beyond these generalizations by explicitly discussing believing women in Paradise. Q 9:72 says, “God has promised the believers, both men and women (*wa’ada llāhu l-mu’minīna wa’l-mu’mināt*), gardens graced with flowing streams where they will remain; good, peaceful homes in gardens of lasting bliss; and—greatest of all—God’s good pleasure. That is the supreme triumph.” In Q 33:35, 48:5, and 57:12–13, believing men and believing women again appear together entering Paradise. There are some instances in which believing women even contradict the views of their unbelieving husbands, although these women are still always positioned in relation to their spouses. For example, in Q 66:11, the wife

36. Other Meccan verses never refer to sisters as well, though they differentiate among relatives and mention brothers, for instance in Q 70:11–14 and 80:34–37.

of Pharaoh is mentioned as a believer in contrast to her spouse: “God has also given examples of believers: Pharaoh’s wife (*imraʿat firʿawn*), who said, ‘Lord, build me a house near You in the garden. Save me from Pharaoh and his actions; save me from the evildoers.’” These occurrences of believing women in Paradise correspond with other Qurʾānic verses from the Medinan period, which directly mention women and discuss the conditions that they must fulfill in order to gain admission to Paradise (e.g., Q 9:71, 24:31, and 33:32–33). The increasingly explicit references to women can be understood via the lens of changing historical circumstances, namely the establishment of the Muslim community in Medina. Yet, although these verses explicitly stress female piety, and portray women as the subjects of moral agency, they continue to depict women relationally to men.

The Medinan “Pure Spouses” (*azwāj muṭahharah*) – The *ḥūr ʿin* and Earthly Spouses?

In three Medinan verses, Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57, God grants “pure spouses” (*azwāj muṭahharah*)³⁷ to male believers entering Paradise. Yet, the full identity of these “pure women” is obscure. The following investigation of the “pure spouses” in Paradise asks whether the women referenced are earthly wives, the houris, or both. I translate *azwāj muṭahharah* as “pure spouses” to indicate that the women are in a pure state, i.e., “pure in presence of God,” although *muṭahhar* can also mean “purified.” To determine the identity of “pure spouses,” I will further explore the meaning of *muṭahharah*. Combining the results of an analysis of the root *t-h-r* in the Qurʾān with the portrayals of women in Paradise, I argue that the pure spouses in the Medinan verses refer to the houris as well as to believing, earthly wives.

Analyzing the concept of purity in the Qurʾān, I follow Holger Zellentin and classify impurity as either “prohibited” or “regulated.” “Prohibited” impurity largely corresponds to acts related to moral purity such as idolatry, bloodshed, and sexual transgression (e.g., Q 2:125; 22:26). “Regulated” impurity coincides with ritual, i.e., non-ethical, physical impurity (e.g., Q 5:6). For example, after an act resulting in ritual impurity such as sexual intercourse,

37. There are variant readings in the feminine plural and in the fifth form, thus promoting the understanding of *azwāj* being women who purify or keep themselves pure. The variant reading *azwāj muṭahharāt* is attributed to Zayd b. ʿAlī (d. 122/740). The reading *azwāj muṭṭahhirah* is narrated under the authority of the Meccan scholar and preacher ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr al-Laythī (d. 73/692–693). See *al-Muṣḥaf wa-qirāʾātuḥu*, 1.32 ad Q 2:25.

one can remove this kind of impurity by ritual washing.³⁸ While exploring the occurrences of *t-h-r* via an understanding of prohibited and regulated impurities, I will demonstrate that *t-h-r* refers predominantly to the removal of prohibited impurity and sin, although there are occasions when the Qur'ānic usage of the *t-h-r* root is ambiguous.

In these three Medinan verses (Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57), God rewards the male believers in Paradise with pure spouses, along with other delights. Q 2:25 addresses the Prophet:

Give those who believe and do good the news (*wa-bashshiri 'lladhīna āmanū wa-'amilū l-ṣāliḥāti*) that they will have gardens graced with flowing streams. Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these gardens, they will say, 'We have been given this before,' because they were provided with something like it.³⁹ They will have pure spouses and there they will stay (*wa-lahum fihā azwājun muṭahharatun wa-hum fihā khālidūn*).

In Q 3:15, God commands Muḥammad to speak to the believers:

Say, 'Would you like me to tell you of things that are better than all of these? For those who are mindful (of God) are (*li'ldhīna 'ttagaw*), with their Lord (*'inda rabbihim*), gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay with pure spouses (*wa-azwājun muṭahharatun*) and God's good pleasure (*wa-riḍwānun mina 'llāhi*)⁴⁰ – God is fully aware of His servants.'

In Q 4:57, God says:

As for those who believe and do good deeds (*wa'ldhīna āmanū wa-'amilū l-ṣāliḥāti*), We shall admit them into gardens (*sa-nudkhilluhum jannātin*) graced with flowing streams and there they will remain forever. They will

38. For more on these terms, see Holger Zellentin, *Law beyond Israel: From the Bible to the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 12–13.

39. The fruits in Q 2:25 seem to evoke early and later Meccan verses (e.g., 36:57, 43:73, 56:32, and 77:42): "And there is abundant fruit in it for you to eat" (*lakum fihā fākihātun kathīratun minhā ta'kulūn*) (43:73) and "any fruit they desire" (*wa-fawākīha mimmā yashthūn*) (77:42). The fruits of Paradise are complemented with the new information that the fruits have similarities with those previously given to the believers.

40. *Riḍwān mina 'llāh* in Q 3:15 repeats 9:72, where rather than believing men and their pure spouses, the Qur'ān mentions believing men and women. Furthermore, Q 9:72 complements the verses pertaining to *azwāj muṭahharah* by means of "pleasant dwellings" (*masākina ṭayyibah*). Q 3:15 is probably connected to 9:72 and indicates that pure spouses refer to believing women.

have pure spouses there (*lahum fihā azwājūn muṭahharatun*), and We shall admit them into cool refreshing shade.⁴¹

All these verses repeatedly emphasize that “they will have pure spouses,” or “they will stay with pure spouses.” The verses therefore strongly suggest that just as *all* believing men will receive gardens, pleasant dwellings, fruits, and shade in Paradise, *all* believing men in Paradise will also receive pure spouses.⁴² The “pure spouses,” may be the houris, who were already described in the early Meccan verses, and given to the believing men as spouses well before any mention of earthly spouses entering Paradise. Yet, as discussed above, the righteousness of earthly spouses features several times in the Meccan period, and believing women are explicitly referenced in the Medinan period. As earthly spouses are also *azwāj*, they might be included in the concept of *azwāj muṭahharah*.

To prove this possibility, I will examine the meaning of *muṭahharah* and the qurʾānic usage of *t-h-r*. The derivatives of *t-h-r* are used thirty-one times altogether in the Qurʾān, but *t-h-r* occurs only 9 times in the Meccan period. In Q 74:4, a verse from the early Meccan period, God commands the Prophet to “purify his clothes” (*wa-thiyābaka fa-ṭahhir*). Although one cannot completely dismiss the literal meaning of cleansing the clothes here, in which case the *t-h-r* root would refer to regulated purity, it is more plausible to understand the purifying of clothes as a reference to the absence of sin, a concept seen in Syriac Christian and Jewish images.⁴³ In other words, this verse is a command to behave righteously, an interpretation that fits within the context of the *sūrah* as a whole: the *sūrah* addresses the Prophet, the cloaked one (*al-muddaththir*), who should arise and warn, glorify God, “purify his clothing,” avoid prohibited impurity, and not confer favor to acquire more.

41. Q 4:57 evokes the earlier verses (13:15 [late Meccan], 36:56, 56:30 = 76:14, 77:41) by mentioning shade in Paradise and does not provide any new information: e.g., “But those who took heed of God will enjoy cool shade, springs, and any fruit they desire” (*inna l-muttaqīna fī zilālin wa-ʿuyūn*) (77:41). Notably, both Medinan verses—Q 2:25 with *azwāj* and fruits and 4:57 with *azwāj* and shade—are reminiscent of 36:56–57, where all three words occur together: “They and their spouses – seated on couches in the shade. There they have fruit and whatever they ask for” (*hum wa-azwājuhūm fī zilālin ʿalā l-arāʾiki muttakiʿūn lahum fihā fākihatun wa-lahum mā yaddaʿūn*).

42. Sinai, *Key Terms*, 495–99.

43. On the analysis of Q 74:4–5 and references to similar Jewish and Christian images see Zellentin, *Law beyond Israel*, 289–291.

Further occurrences of *t-h-r* more unequivocally underscore the avoidance of prohibited impurity in the Meccan period. Lot and his family are described as morally pure, as they do not engage in same-sex sexual intercourse.⁴⁴ All three passages relating to Lot in which the derivatives of *t-h-r* occur—Q 7:82 (*yataṭahharūna*), Q Hūd 11:78 (*hunna aṭharu lakum*), and Q 27:56 (*yataṭahharūna*)—relate to the attribute of moral “purity,” where Lot and his family (*ahluhu, āl lūt*) stand in contrast to Lot’s people (*qawmuhu*). In Q 27:53–58, Lot and his family are depicted as those who believe and fear God: Q 27:53, “but We saved those who believed and were mindful of God,” (*wa-anjaynā ’lādhiṇa āmanū wa-kānū yattaqūn*); and Q 27:57, “We saved him and his family – except for his wife: We made her stay behind,” (*fa-anjaynāhu wa-ahlahu illā ’mra’atahu qaddarnāhā mina ’l-ghābirīn*). In contrast, the people of Lot—specifically, the male members of the community—are said to commit immoral acts (*fāḥishah*), because they choose to have sexual intercourse with men instead of women (Q 27:54), and despite receiving warnings (stressed in Q 27:58), do not fear God. Consequently, Lot’s people (perhaps sardonically) repudiate him and his family (here, *āl lūt*) by labeling them “people who keep themselves pure” (*innahum unāsun yataṭahharūn*).

In another passage, Q 11:77–83, Lot’s people are presented as those who did evil deeds (*kānū ya’malūna ’l-sayyi’āti* in Q 11:78) and who continue to disgrace Lot by refusing to fear God (*fa’ttaqū ’llāha*) and to accept the fact that Lot’s daughters are purer for them (*banātī hunna aṭharu lakum*) than men. Eventually, Lot’s people are punished for being wrongdoers (*mina ’l-zālimīna*), while Lot’s family is saved. Q 7:80–84 captures this narrative. The immorality of Lot’s people is referenced in Q 7:80 as well, and, in Q 7:84, even stronger language is used as Lot’s people are described as criminals (*mujrimūna*). In Q 7:82, Lot’s people once again mock Lot and his family as “people who keep themselves pure.” Here, references to purity via the root *t-h-r* denote lack of intercourse with the same sex and is closely related to the belief and fear of God. Thus, according to these verses, homosexual intimate relations indicate immorality and makes people “wrongdoers” and “criminals.”

In the Medinan period, Mary and Jesus are also depicted as morally pure. The moral purity of Mary mentioned in Q 3:42 (“He [God] purified you,” *wa-ṭahharaki*), evidently a reference to her God-fearing and her chastity, is

44. On Lot and his people see also Holger Zellentin, “The Synchronic and the Diachronic Qur’ān: Sūrat Yā Sīn, Lot’s People, and the Rabbis,” in S. R. Burge und Asma Hilali (eds.), *Making of Religious Texts in Islam: The Fragment and the Whole* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2019), 111–174.

the reason God chooses her to give birth to Jesus. Jesus too is depicted in Q 3:55 as someone who is elevated (*rāfi'uka*) and purified (*muṭahhiruka*) by God. By purifying oneself, one becomes “agreeable and acceptable to God,”⁴⁵ a precondition to be brought into His proximity.

Outside of these episodes describing the purity of individuals, other verses from the Medinan period which use the root *t-h-r* detail means for achieving moral purity. According to these verses, believing men and women can become morally pure by purifying their hearts, believing in God and His Prophet, and following the rules of God. It is the combination of each of these acts that qualifies believers for entrance to Paradise. In Q 2:125 and 22:26, God commands Abraham and Ishmael to purify His house (*ṭahhirā baytiya*), i.e., the Ka'bah. The purification implies not associating anything with God (*lā tushrik bī shay'an*) in Q 22:26, avoiding the uncleanness of idols (*fa'jtanibū 'l-rijsa mina 'l-awthāni*) in Q 22:30, and ensuring they and their descendants submit to God (*wa'ja'alnā muslimayni laka wa-min dhurriyyatinā ummatan muslimatan laka*) in Q 2:128.⁴⁶ Further rules of moral purity include giving alms (9:103, 58:12), fearing God (9:108), praying (33:32–33), and submitting to God and His Messenger (33:33).⁴⁷

Q 33:32–33 features rules which specifically apply to women. These verses instruct the wives of the Prophet (*nisā' al-nabi*) to stay in their houses, to not display themselves, and to not be “soft in speech” in a way which would invite the desires of men. In Q 33:53, God commands men that if they must ask the wives of the Prophet for anything, to do so from behind a screen, because it is purer for the hearts of the male believers and the spouses of the Prophet: *dhālikum aṭharu li-qulūbikum wa-qulūbihinna*. In another Medinan verse, Q 5:41, God threatens those who do not purify their hearts (*yuṭahhira qulūbahum*) with disgrace in this world and a great punishment in the hereafter. Q 24:28–31 gives commandments similar to those found in Q 33:32–33 and 33:53. Specifically, these verses direct believing men and women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. In Q 24:28–31, derivatives of *t-h-r* are eschewed in favor of a near synonym, and the verses say that compliance with the laws is *azkā lahum* (“purer for them”).⁴⁸

45. Sinai, *Key Terms*, 495–99.

46. On the analysis of Q 2:125 and 22:26 as referring to prohibited impurity see also Zellentin, *Law beyond Israel*, 287 and Nicolai Sinai, *Key Terms*, 488–95.

47. On these verses see more Holger Zellentin, *Law beyond Israel*, 298–299.

48. The qur'ānic usage of the root *z-k-w/y* indicates moral purity: being mindful of God (80:3–7, 87:14–17); being God-fearing (35:18, 53:32, 79:25, 87:14–17, and 91:7–10); studying and accepting “the Book and wisdom” (2:129, 151, 174; 3:164; 62:2); doing righteous deeds (20:75–76); giving wealth (92:18); and giving alms and praying

Additionally, the verses dictate that believing men should not enter houses until permission is granted to them. Believing women are requested to not expose their “adornment” (*zīnah*) and to not stamp their feet “to draw attention to any hidden charms.” Notably, “staying in the houses” and “not to be soft in speech to men” in Q 24:30–31 and 33:32–33 evoke the descriptions of houris “reserved in pavilions” and “limiting their glances” (Q 37:48; 55:56; 55:72). These parallels in phrasing demonstrate continuity in the imagery of pure women depicted by the Qurʾān. Q 24:30–31 and 33:32–33 apply some of the same attributes used earlier to characterize the houris to all believing women. As all the aforementioned verses refer to moral purity, it is reasonable to conclude that the “pure spouses” of Paradise are women who are morally pure and thus worthy of proximity to God.

Moreover, the root *ṭ-h-r* refers not only to moral purity, but also to “presence in heaven” or “heavenly origin.” In some Meccan verses, objects, angels, and even believers⁴⁹ are described as pure based on their presence in

in 35:18, 87:14–17, etc. “The best or purest of food” (*azkā ṭaʿāmā*) in Q 18:19 alludes to purity from religious deviation, according to Zellentin (*Law beyond Israel*, ch. 2). *Z-k-w/y* is used fifty-nine times in the Qurʾān. It refers to the obligatory giving of alms to the poor (*zakāh*) twenty-nine times. The root denotes “pure,” “purify,” or “purify oneself” almost as frequently as *ṭ-h-r*.

49. *Muṭahharūna* is interpreted as “angels” or “angels and the prophets” in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī. See Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (26 vols., Cairo: Dār Hajr, 2001), 22.364–366 *ad* Q 56:79. Other Qurʾānic verses do not confirm this interpretation. The angels are never explicitly described as pure or purified. Apparently, early exegetes logically concluded that it makes sense for angels and the prophets to touch the heavenly codex. Neuwirth does not comment on *muṭahharūn*. The relevant verses that mention angels or “noble scribes in heaven” can be summarized as follows: Q 56:78–79 (*innahu la-qurʾānun karīm fī kitābin maktūn*) seem to be connected with 80:13 (*fī ṣuḥufin mukarramah*) and 85:22 (*fī lawḥin mahfūz*). If the verses Q 80:11–16 refer to the Qurʾānic revelations and not the register of deeds, the “noble scribes” (*kirāman kātibīn*) in Q 82:10–12 can be identified as keeping and recording angels who write down good and bad deeds of human beings. Consequently, *muṭahharūn* is better interpreted as keeper-angels or “heavenly policemen.” The keeper-angels seemingly have another duty that is not explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the Qurʾān: to write down the revelations or keep them in their hand (*bi-aydī safarah*). Only at a later stage, in the later revelations Q 2:97, 16:102, and 26:193, the *rūḥ al-qudus*, Gabriel, and the *rūḥ amīn* are mentioned as those who have brought the Qurʾān down upon the heart of the Prophet. It is only possible to conclude indirectly that the pure ones, i.e., Gabriel, the *rūḥ amīn*, and *rūḥ al-qudus*, touch the well-protected book in Q 56:79. By contrast, Q 56 describes solely the Day of Judgement, the life of ones who are brought near God in Paradise, and ones

heaven. The early Meccan verse Q 56:79 discusses angels or believers who are allowed to touch the well-protected script (*kitāb makhnūn*): *lā yamassuhu illā 'l-muṭahharūn*. The heavenly codex is depicted in another early Meccan verse, Q 80:13–14, as being elevated and pure: *fī ṣuḥufin mukarramatin marfū'atin muṭahharah*. Q al-Bayyinah 98:2⁵⁰ confirms that the heavenly codex is indeed pure: *rasūlun mina 'llāhi yatlū ṣuḥufan muṭahharah*. The drinks in Paradise are later described as pure in the later Meccan verse Q 76:21: “Their Lord will give them a pure drink” (*wa-saqāhum rabbuhum sharāban ṭahūrā*). This same attribute is also applied to rainwater from heaven: Q al-Anfāl 8:11 reads, “Remember when He gave you sleep as a reassurance from Him, and sent down water from the sky to purify you (*yunazzilu 'alaykum mina 'l-samā'i mā'an li-yuṭahhirakum bihi*), to remove Satan's pollution from you, to make your hearts strong and your feet firm”; Q al-Furqān 25:48 says, “It is He who sends the winds as heralds of good news before His mercy. We send down pure water from the sky (*anzalnā mina 'l-samā'i mā'an ṭahūrā*), so that We can revive a dead land with it, and We give it as a drink to many animals and people We have created.” In both verses, the rainwater is deemed pure due to its heavenly origin too. In summary, the pure spouses are pure based either on their presence in Paradise or heavenly origin, which could in turn be taken as supporting evidence for concluding that the houris, the earthly wives, or both should be considered *azwāj muṭahharah*.

Besides referring to objects or persons in heaven or of heavenly origin, in two Medinan verses, the derivatives of *ṭ-h-r* also relate to ritual purity or the removal of regulated impurity. Q 2:222 and 5:6 are the only verses in which the root *ṭ-h-r* denotes ritual purity and by extension the absence of regulated impurity that the believers must cleanse themselves of. Q 5:6 refers to obtaining ritual purity as follows:

You who believe, when you are about to pray, wash your faces and your hands and arms up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles. If you are *junub*, purify yourselves (*fa'ṭṭahharū*). If any of you is sick

who dwell in hell. In this regard, it fits better with the context that *muṭahharūn* are *muqarrabūn*. Those who are brought near to God are mentioned in Q al-Muṭaffifin 83:20–21 (*yashhaduhu 'l-muqarrabūn*) and allowed to look at an inscribed register (*kitāb marqūm*). In Q 17:71 (later Meccan), the believers are given their record of deeds in their right hand. Ibn Mardawayh (d. 410/1020) also comments on *muṭahharūn* in the same way in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī 'l-tafsīr bīl-mā'thūr*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (15 vols., Cairo: Markaz Hajr, 2003), 14.222 *ad* Q 56:79.

50. On dating of Q 98 as Meccan or Medinan see Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 130–132.

or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and can find no water, then take some clean soil and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you; He only wishes to purify you (*ḡurīdu li-yuṭahhirakum*) and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful.

Q 2:222 deems menstruating women impure, and forbids men from having sexual intercourse with them during this period:⁵¹

They ask you [Prophet] about menstruation. Say, ‘Menstruation is a harm, so keep away from women during it. Do not approach them until they are purified (*ḡattā yaṭhurna*); when they are purified (*fa-idhā taṭahharna*), you may approach them as God has directed you. God loves those who turn to Him, and He loves those who keep themselves pure (*wa-yuḡibbu l-muṭaṭahhirin*).

Given the Qur’ān’s seeming presentation of human resurrection as bodily (e.g., Q 70:43; 81:7; 82:4), *azwāj muṭahharah* might also mean that the women will be purified of the bodily sources of impurity, i.e., menstruation, lochia, feces, urine, etc., as stressed by some early Muslim exegetes.⁵² Still,

51. According to Holger Zellentín, the qur’ānic usage of *t-h-r* is “a full cognate to Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac *t-h-r*, as well as conceptually akin to Greek καθαρός.” Furthermore, “the Qur’an’s prohibition in Q 2:222, ‘do not approach (pl.) them,’ *taqrabūhunna* (i.e. one’s wives during the menses), is verbally reminiscent of the biblical prohibition ‘do not approach (sg.),’ *l’ tqr̄b* (i.e. a woman during her menses) (Lev. 18:19, equally preserved in the Aramaic renderings of the law such as *l’ ttqr̄b*, in the Peshitta, or in the rendering of Ezekiel 18:18 such as *l’ ntqr̄b* in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.” See Zellentín, “Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur’an: the Case of Sexual Purity and Illicit Intercourse,” in H. Zellentín (ed.), *The Qur’an’s Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 167–168. Zellentín demonstrates that a link exists between Lev 17–26 and the early Christian purity regulations. These regulations were followed throughout Late Antiquity and continue to exist in the Qur’ān too. See Christian and Jewish perceptions of menstruation and differences to Islam in more detail also in Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” in S. Pomeroy (ed.), *Women’s History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 273–299; David M. Freidenreich, “Holiness and Impurity in the Torah and the Quran: Differences within a Common Typology,” *CIS* (2010): 5–22; S. R. Burge, “Impurity/Danger!” *ILS* (2010): 320–349; Haggai Mazuz, “Menstruation and Differentiation: How Muslims Differentiated Themselves from Jews regarding the Laws of Menstruation,” *Der Islam* 87 (2012): 204–223; idem, “Midrashic Influence on Islamic Folklore: The Case of Menstruation,” *SlS* 108 (2013): 189–201; William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19 (1980): 298–303.

52. I examined the ideas of early Muslim exegetes in my dissertation, *Die ḡūr ʿin*

while menstruation is particular to women, defecation and urination are not. Therefore, if this discussion is intended to emphasize that women are purified of all bodily sources of impurity, the same depictions would apply to believing men. Strikingly, there are neither parallel verses in the Qurʾān (except perhaps Q 56:79) nor early qurʾānic commentaries (ritual purity is not stressed at all in Q 56:79 or anywhere else) that use the root *t-h-r* to describe men in Paradise as being pure or purified of bodily impurities. Women are exclusively described as such. Additionally, the women cannot be purified only of menstruation because, for instance, defecation explicitly causes ritual impurity in Q 5:6. It would be illogical to purify women of one impurity, “menstruation,” and not to purify them of others. Although it is plausible that all dwellers of Paradise—women and men—are purified of impure bodily fluids, the removal of such physical impurities is not the Qurʾān’s central focus when referring to *muṭahharah*. As shown above, the derivatives of *t-h-r* rather underscore moral purity.

Thus, as *muṭahharah* predominantly denotes sinlessness and the absence of prohibited impurity via adherence to the commandments of God, and earthly spouses are already referred to as righteous in the Medinan period, these earthly spouses could be identified as the “pure spouses.” Yet, while *all* believing men appear to receive “pure spouses,” it is not that case that *all* earthly spouses will gain admission to Paradise together with their husbands. Furthermore, considering that purity indicates a heavenly origin and that the believing men are given the houris in the early Meccan *surāhs*, i.e., before we are told that their earthly spouses enter Paradise with them, the houris are likely included in the concept of “pure spouses.” In sum, the

im Koran; see also Marion Holmes Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002); Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1.419–422 *ad* Q 2:25. The purification of the *azwāj muṭahharah* of the bodily sources of impurity is stressed above all in early literature. See Hannād b. al-Sarī al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Faryawāʾī (Kuwait: Dār al-Khulafāʾ, 1406/1985), 60, nos. 27–29; Mujāhid b. Jabr, *al-Tafsīr*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Ḥadīthah, 1410/1989), 198 *ad* Q 2:25; Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *al-Baʿth waʾl-nushūr*, ed. ʿAmir Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Markaz al-Khidamāt waʾl-Abḥāth al-Thaqāfiyyah 1406/1986), 220–221, no. 360; ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad ʿAbdah (3 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1999), 1.262 *ad* Q 2:25; Muqātil b. Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *al-Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihātah (5 vols., Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Taʾrīkh al-ʿArabī, 1423/2002), 1.94, 1.266, 1.381 *ad* Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57; Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, ed. Bālhāj b. Saʿīd Sharīfī (4 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 1.90, 1.272, 1.391 *ad* Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57.

pure spouses of the male believers can be understood as both the houris and believing wives,⁵³ thereby confirming that matrimony persists in the Medinan conception of Paradise and that the believing men will dwell there together with their spouses, similarly to Adam and his spouse (cf. Q 2:35, 7:19, and 20:117).

Conclusion

The images of women in the qur'ānic Paradise shift from the houris—heavily spouses—in the early Meccan period to pious women in the Medinan period. Female figures occur exclusively as spouses (*azwāj*), either houris or earthly spouses, in the Meccan period of revelation until the qur'ānic proclamations reach 61.78 transcription letters per verse. At this stage of revelation, women in Paradise are passive figures and their righteousness is not explicitly mentioned. In the later Meccan period, after the occurrence of the first account of Adam's spouse, women continue to be portrayed as the wives of believing men, however, for the first time they are also referred to as parents and the offspring of male believers entering Paradise. Simultaneously, in these verses, general statements regarding individuals gaining admission to Paradise, “male or female,” begin to occur. This development coincides with the second Meccan retelling of the story of the first couple in which Adam's wife takes on a more significant role. The social status of women from the later Meccan period onwards is thus no longer confined to a role as the spouses of the believing men. In the Medinan period, women are characterized in terms of their own belief, alongside believing men.

Although the Meccan period first does not explicitly underscore the righteousness of women, at all stages of the inner-qur'ānic development women enter Paradise and hell in accordance with their decisions and actions and appear to be liable for their deeds. Regarding the occurrences of women in Paradise in Q 36 and 43, women share the fate of their spouses because these Meccan references reflect the social circumstances of the believers, where a wife shared the worldview of her believing husband. However, although Muḥammad's Meccan ministry was not as successful as his Medinan one, the number of believers most likely increased at least slightly over the years. Subsequently, not every female believer was married to an

53. The Qur'ān does not address explicitly the fate of the women without the social status of “wife,” in Paradise—i.e., unmarried women, concubines, and slaves—at any point. They might be included among *mu'mināt* (believing women) and the verses pertaining to them.

other believer. This new social reality is stressed by the references to women's righteousness in the later Meccan period.

Gradually, in parallel with the shifting historical circumstances inherent to the Medinan period of revelation, the Qur'ān addresses women not only as pure spouses, but also as believing women. Yet, given the central role of believing men throughout the Qur'ān, men in the Medinan period are still rewarded with heavenly spouses in Paradise. Even though the Medinan period does not mention the houris explicitly, the concept the houris seems to have been assimilated into the concept of the *azwāj muṭahharah*. The insertion of Q 52:21 emphasizes the validity of the idea. In sum, the houris and earthly spouses dwell together in Paradise at all stages of qur'ānic revelation, while earthly women gradually play a more prominent role and are explicitly referred to in the later Meccan and Medinan periods as an active part of the qur'ānic community.

APPENDIX 1: A Note on the Relative Chronology of Q 2:35–39, 7:19–25, and 20:117–124

Scholars of the Qur'ān who have investigated the relative chronology of Q 2:35–39, 7:19–25, and 20:117–124 acknowledge that 2:35–39 is the chronologically latest revelation in the group, but they are not in agreement over whether 7:19–25 or 20:117–124 was revealed first. Neuwirth states that Q 20:117–124 is an earlier variant of the Adam story than 7:19–25. Recently, Joseph Witztum has analyzed the relevant passages and, following Edmund Beck, argues for a later dating of Q 20:117–124 relative to 7:19–25.

Witztum compares Q 7:20, "...Your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals" (*mā nahākuma rabbukumā 'an hādhihi 'l-shajaratī illā an takūnā malakayni aw takūnā minā 'l-khālīdīn*), with Q 20:120, "...But Satan whispered to Adam, saying, 'Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and dominion that never decays?'" He emphasizes in particular the words *mulk* ("kingship, dominion, sovereignty") and *malakayni* ("angels") in the two passages. According to Witztum, while one can understand *malakayni* via Gen 3:5 and postbiblical sources, one cannot explain the use of *mulk* via the Bible or later Jewish or Christian sources. Witztum thus proposes that the usage of *mulk* presupposes the usage of *malakayni*. He suggests that *mulk* may have resulted from "a misreading of MLKYN as *malikayni* for *malakayni*. This type of mistake could indicate that whoever composed or redacted Q 20 was working with Q 7,⁵⁴ or, "one

54. Joseph Witztum, "Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology, and the Study of In-

could also argue that Q 20:120 is a playful adaptation of Q 7:20, using the same consonants to create a new meaning.⁵⁵

Yet the relevant passage in Q 20:117–124 is similar to the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, where the idea of sovereignty already occurs, and thus there is no need to posit a development of the Q 20 account from the Q 7 account. In the *Cave of Treasures*, God creates Adam as a king (*malkā*)⁵⁶ and arrays him in the garment of sovereignty (in Syriac *lbīš-wā lbūšā d-malkūtā*).⁵⁷ The Lord gives Adam dominion over all things and creatures, and the angels bow the knee and worship him.⁵⁸ Strikingly, the angels' prostration before Adam is also a part of the qur'ānic narrative in Q 7:11 and 20:116. Given this imagery, *mulk* in Q 20:120 might indicate Adam's kingship or dominion over all creatures. In other words, the angels' prostration implies Adam's superiority over the angels, a fact which the usage of *mulk* explicitly confirms.

But the Qur'ān amends the Syriac conception of Adam's dominion,⁵⁹ as Adam is never referred to as *malik*. On the contrary, only God is called *al-malik al-ḥaqq*, "the true king," in Q 20:114. Furthermore, the Syriac concept of sovereignty is later modified in Q 2:30, where God appoints Adam as His viceroy (*khalifah*) on earth, yet simultaneously underscores Adam's superiority over the angels by describing Adam's knowledge of names in Q 2:31–33. Ultimately though, in contrast to angels and God, Adam is mortal. In Q 20:120, Satan promises Adam not only sovereignty, but rather eternal dominion (*mulk lā yablā*). We see that Q 7:20 also stresses immortality, as the first couple can become angels (who are immortal)⁶⁰ or achieve im-

tra-Quranic Parallels," in Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, Robert G. Hoyland, and Adam Silverstein (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 25–26.

55. *Ibid.*, 26.

56. *Caverne des Trésors*, 207, 19.

57. *Ibid.*, 18.

58. *Caverne des Trésors*, 18–21.

59. In this regard, it seems to be similar to the issue of Adam's prophethood. Zellentín points out that the Qur'ān "by using the verb *nabaʿa* in Q 2:31 and 33 – a cognate to Syriac *nby* – concurs with part of the Christian tradition in addition to offering its corrections to it." Zellentín assumes that the Qur'ān partially agrees with the *Cave of Treasures* when it comes to prophethood, although he stresses that Adam is never explicitly mentioned as *nabī*, possibly due to his sin – eating from the forbidden tree. H. Zellentín, "Triological Anthropology: The Qur'ān on Adam and Iblis in View of Rabbinic and Christian Discourse," in Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin Çiçek (eds.), *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur'ānic Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 124–127.

60. Witztum, "Variant Traditions," 25.

mortal status in some other unspecified manner. Thus, the discourse of the Qurʾān argues a different point than the *Cave of Treasures* and underlines that while Adam might acquire immortality and possess dominion, God is the only true sovereign, and Adam remains a subordinate. This being the case, Q 20:117–124 does not necessarily have to be later than 7:19–25, and *mulk* certainly does not derive from *malakayni*.

APPENDIX 2:
The Inner-qurʾānic Development of the Female Image

Early Meccan period					
<p>Q 78:33: “full-breasted” <i>ka wā’ib</i></p> <p>“of equal age” <i>atrāb</i></p> <p>(23.36 transcription letters)</p>	<p>Q 56:22–23, 35–37: “white, large-eyed women” <i>hūr ʿin</i></p> <p>“well-protected pearls” <i>lu’lu’ mahnūn</i></p> <p>“We have specially created” <i>innā ansha ʾnāhunna inshā’ā</i></p> <p>“virgins” <i>abkār</i></p> <p>“passionate lovers” <i>ʾurub</i></p> <p>“of equal age” <i>atrāb</i></p> <p>(26.78 transcription letters)</p>	<p>Q 37:48–49: <i>qāsirāt al-ʾarf</i></p> <p>“large-eyed” <i>ʿin</i></p> <p>“well-protected eggs” <i>bayḍ mahnūn</i></p> <p>(31.2 transcription letters)</p>	<p>Q 55:56, 58, 70, 72, 74: <i>qāsirāt al-ʾarf</i></p> <p>“untouched before by man or jinn” <i>lam yaʾmithhunna insun qablalum wa-lā jān</i></p> <p>“corundum and coral” <i>al-ʾyāqūt wa-l-marjān</i></p> <p>“good” <i>khayrāt</i></p> <p>“fair” <i>hisān</i></p> <p>“white women” <i>hūr</i></p> <p>“reserved in pavilions” <i>maqṣūrāt fi l-khiyām</i></p> <p>(32.97 transcription letters)</p>	<p>Q 44:54: “and we married them to the white, large-eyed women” <i>wa-zawwajnāhum bi-hūrīn ʿin</i></p> <p>(36.61 transcription letters)</p>	<p>Q 52:20: “and we married them to white, large-eyed women” <i>wa-zawwajnāhum bi-hūrīn ʿin</i></p> <p>(38.35 transcription letters)</p>

Later Meccan period	
Q 38:52: "limiting their glances, of equal age" <i>qāshirāt al-ṭarf atrāb</i>	Q 7:19–25: Adam and his spouse (<i>zawī</i>) (104.27 transcription letters)
Q 36:56: "they and their spouses" <i>hum wa-azwājūhum</i>	Q 40:40: "whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith" <i>wa-man 'amila ṣāliḥan min dhakarīn aw unthā wa-huwa mu'min</i> (89.20 transcription letters) and Q 16:97 (93.41 transcription letters)
Q 20:117–124: Adam and his spouse (<i>zawī</i>) (61.04 transcription letters)	Q 40:8–9: "those who are righteous of their forefathers, spouses, and descendants" <i>wa-man ṣalaḥa min ābā'ihim wa-azwājihim wa-dhurriyātihim</i> (89.20 transcription letters) and Q 13:23 (126.16 transcription letters)
Q 36:56: "they and their spouses" <i>hum wa-azwājūhum</i>	Q 43:70: "you and your spouses" <i>antum wa-azwājukum</i> (61.78 transcription letters)
Q 36:56: "they and their spouses" <i>hum wa-azwājūhum</i>	
Q 38:52: "limiting their glances, of equal age" <i>qāshirāt al-ṭarf atrāb</i>	

Medinan period without referring to transcription letters per verse				
<p>Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57: "pure spouses" <i>azwāj muṭahharah</i></p>	<p>Q 3:195: "I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female" <i>lā uḏf'u 'amala 'āmilin minkum min dhakarīn aw unthā</i></p> <p>Q 4:124: "whoever, male or female, will do good deeds and has faith" <i>wa-nnan ya'mal minā l-ṣāliḥāti min dhakarīn aw unthā wa-huwa mu'min</i></p>	<p>Q 2:35–39: Adam and his spouse (<i>zawj</i>)</p>	<p>Q 9:72: "the believers, both men and women" <i>al-mu'minīna wa'l-mu'mināt</i></p> <p>and Q 33:35, 48:5, and 57:12–13</p>	<p>Q 66:11: the wife of Pharaoh <i>imra'at fir'awn</i></p>