Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood

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D. A. Spellberg

WRITING THE UNWRITTEN LIFE OF THE ISLAMIC EVE: MENSTRUATION AND THE DEMONIZATION OF MOTHERHOOD

Western scholars have long studied Jewish and Christian influence in shaping early Islamic tradition, but almost none of them has considered Eve's transformation as a critical part of the “genesis” of an Islamic historical framework and the evolution of its gender categories.¹ I trace the transformation of the wife of Adam from the revelation contained in the Qur'anic and note the abrupt and distinct changes wrought upon this Qur'anic persona in post-Qur'anic sources in the matters of menstruation and motherhood. The figure of Satan plays a pivotal role in both of these biological aspects of Eve's biography. Her function as the first woman serves to explain not just the physiology of all women, but also the essential aspects of character that allegedly make all females different from the normative male in biology and behavior. As a wife, Eve is tested and fails, but as a mother, she both fails and passes the test of satanic temptation. I argue that in her role as wife, she is depicted in post-Qur'anic sources in accordance with pre-Islamic monotheist precedent. However, in Eve's role as mother—especially as the mother of the prophetic patriline that culminates in Muhammad—Muslim scholars distinguished the meaning and implications of her temptation as distinctly Islamic. Eve embodied a fusion of traditions, a continuity of monotheistic meanings about the feminine in the Middle East, as well as an identity that distinguished her as the first woman of a new, emerging Islamic faith.

The focus on these details delineates the formation of Islamic narrative as a cultural process and outlines the earliest applications of gender definitions in a new faith. At the core of the construction of the Islamic Eve into a figure remarkably like the first woman in Jewish and Christian traditions are issues of oral and written evidence and cultural continuity in the meaning of shared symbols. What did the earliest Islamic written sources accept and reject, and why? Distinctions between 9th-century sources of Sunni hadith, or prophetic traditions, biographical dictionaries, and an early 10th-century history suggest that while borrowing from Jewish and Christian sources may have been officially rejected, assumptions about these materials continued to influence early Islamic written interpretations. The attempt to locate continuity with pre-existing traditions in the explication of the Qur'anic also allows for


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greater clarity in understanding the boundaries of Muslim acceptance and rejection of these materials. Inspired and provoked by previous monotheistic interpretations, male Muslim scholars forged a new identity for themselves through their commentaries on Eve.

The Islamic Eve’s legacy as written in post-Qur’anic sources is not her life as revealed in the Qur’an. This disjunction has been admirably demonstrated by Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad in their analysis of Eve’s role in the creation and the fall. Yet their work is not concerned with the earliest hadith collections and biographical dictionaries; nor does it analyze the internal cultural dynamic that led to critical scholarly choices and contradictions in the depiction of Eve’s female biology. Muslims drew upon pre-existing narrative patterns, oral and written, to detail Qur’anic revelation. I argue that Muslims were active in the selection and synthesis of Jewish and Christian materials within their own emerging Islamic religious tradition. These borrowings were effectively shaped by Muslim scholars in their inexorable march to manufacture meaning from archetypal sacred figures and events. In the Islamic case, however, the emergence of a distinctively Muslim written tradition involved the fusion of two critical elements: the Qur’an and the life of Muhammad. Muslim notions of history as a sacred continuum of prophecy that begins with Adam and culminates with Muhammad’s revelation of the Qur’an would form the foundation of both a link to and a break from Jewish and Christian tradition. Such an impetus would also be revealed in the evolution of Eve’s sacred biography.

THE QUR’AN

The internal evidence of the Qur’an establishes its place in the broader scheme of monotheistic revelations in the Middle East. Muhammad was, according to the Qur’an, not the first prophet to receive a divine directive. No prophet documented in the Qur’an ever avoided a parallel female presence or entanglement:

We sent messengers before you and We gave them wives and children. . . . (Qur’an 13:38)

Twenty-four prophets are named in the Qur’an as Muhammad’s predecessors in the prophetic continuum. Muhammad, as the seal of them all, brings the final and only perfect revelation of Allah as a corrective to the acknowledged but flawed Torah and Gospel. All of the prophets in the Qur’an are male. Adam is, in Islamic tradition, not just the first of Allah’s human creations, but also the first prophet. Adam’s depiction in the Qur’an is not given as a continuous narrative. References to him are scattered throughout. We are told that he was “taught all the names” by Allah (2:31), but one omission from this list, apparently, was the name of his wife. The wife of Adam remains nameless throughout; she is referred to only as the zawj—the mate or spouse—of Adam, a term that in Arabic connotes half of a pair. Both Adam and his wife were created by Allah from one soul (4:1; 39:6), with the male preceding the female into creation “so that he might dwell with her” (7:189).

It is Adam to whom God speaks directly in the Qur’an; his wife’s presence is noted only incidentally:

O Adam! Dwell you and your mate [zawjuka] in the Garden and eat freely of whatever you wish, but do not come near this tree lest [the two of you] become wrongdoers. (2:35; 7:19)
The Qur’an refers to the wife of Adam consistently as part of a couple who are addressed by Allah in the dual form. Together, husband and wife are warned about the tree. Together, they are approached by Satan, who “whispers” to them in the dual and the plural “with guile” (7:20–22), despite Allah’s warning that Satan is an enemy to them both (20:117). Adam is approached directly by Satan once in the Qur’an:

But Satan whispered to him, “O Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that does not waste away?” (20:120)

Both Adam and his nameless wife eat of the forbidden tree, and both recognize “their shame” together (20:121; 7:22), a shame that implies their joint nakedness (sexuality) and forces the hasty fabrication of leaf garments. Together they share blame, repent, and are expelled from paradise (7:23–27). However, in the critical issue of Qur’anic culpability for the fall of humanity, Adam is twice singled out for censure:

And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray. (20:121)

We made a covenant with Adam, but he forgot, and We found no constancy in him. (20:115)

Three things are critical at this juncture in the life of the nameless wife of the prophet Adam. First, the first female is approached by Satan while she is with her husband; she is never approached as Satan’s singular target in the Qur’an. Only Adam is marked, once, as his object. Second, she errs as part of a pair. Third, she repents and is punished within the coupled framework. Nowhere is she defined as an active player in her dealings with the divine or Satan. Her voice and actions are subsumed into a dual or plural grammatical framework throughout. Rather, it is the prophet Adam whose trials are individualized. He alone is directly addressed and named by Allah, just as he is approached directly by Satan about the delights of the tree. Finally, Adam is twice addressed by his creator as the prime transgressor in the Qur’anic account of humanity’s fall. Yet despite the internal evidence of the Qur’anic documentation of Adam’s wife, her depiction changes drastically in post-Qur’anic written materials.

**HADITH IN THE TRANSITION FROM AN ORAL TO A WRITTEN LIFE**

Islam, as a fledgling faith, was not alone in the Arabian peninsula or the Middle East in the 7th century, the first Muslim century. Jewish and Christian communities existed in Arabia, notably in Medina and Yemen, and throughout the Byzantine and Sasanian empires. Outside the Arabian peninsula, in the 2nd and 3rd Islamic centuries, the meaning of the Qur’an and Islamic history would be shaped by Muslim believers who were a conquering minority among a Christian and Zoroastrian Middle Eastern majority. There is no question that the Jewish community in Arabia, in particular, was a source of much oral and written material that was eventually absorbed into Islamic written works. We can see this most clearly in the *insnads*, or chains of oral authorities, which precede every discrete account found in collections of hadith, biographical dictionaries, and histories.
Western scholars still debate the authenticity of these chains of authority; their reliability and their potential polemical fabrication remain key points of disagreement. The more optimistic suggest that most are reliable. Some go so far as to say that written Islamic transmission occurred much earlier than we suppose, but was suppressed for fear that the emerging body of hadith would overwhelm the Qurʾān as a source of authority for Muslims.\(^6\) Ironically, in the case of the Islamic Eve, that appears to be exactly the case. The quest for authenticity in an early written corpus of presumably oral transmission also prompts certain scholars to dismiss all hadith as devoid of fact and treacherously misleading, particularly if one is concerned with the actual words and deeds of the first Islamic community.\(^7\) However, if one takes the isnāds as significant tags of attribution in specific cases, together with their content and positioning in the written corpus, it is possible to analyze the process of Muslim selection and adoption of circulating ideas. Although women were allowed to relate hadith, and many of their names appear in isnāds, none of the reports about Eve appears to have been transmitted by women. The final collection and selection of the materials that would form hadith and history, the stuff of Eve’s written life, were penned exclusively by men.

Tracing ideas that move and change, as in the case of the Islamic Eve, allows scholars to posit a trajectory of mental attitudes that may have been shaped by hadith but also by less formal narrative techniques. We know that the Muslim ḥāšt (storyteller) entertained audiences with moral tales based on the lives of the prophets such as Adam from the beginning of the faith.\(^8\) The object was to elaborate, even embroider, the Qurʾān and its prophets for didactic and entertainment ends. These stories, which drew critical details from Jewish and Christian patterns, paralleled the growing body of hadith. The key difference between the two types of information was that hadith could, ideally, be linked to the Prophet or his Companions, while the storyteller’s scenarios had no need of a chain of authorities to disrupt the flow of the moral lesson.

Al-Tabari (d. 923), as historian and exegete, set down in writing a vast series of ḥikhbār, or reports transmitted by a chain of authorities that do not hark back to the Prophet. Unlike the collectors of prophetic hadith, al-Tabari also relied on ḥikhbār in his history and Qurʾānic commentary. His chief job as author was to collect, select, and organize his information thematically and chronologically in his history. The narrative element in Islamic chronicle has been considered by some Western historians to be atomistic because of its format; the narrative is not continuous, but repeated and broken throughout as the reader absorbs a listing of traditions that focus on a unifying theme. Each of al-Tabari’s ḥikhbār about Eve is set out in a hadith-like format. The content, or matn, of some of these key traditions that al-Tabari chose to include are prefaced by an isnād that also offers explicit evidence about the channels of oral transmission that fed al-Tabari’s formulation of Eve’s life. For example, in one case he cites that he heard the account he wrote from: Ibn Humayd—Salma—whose source was (Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad) Ibn Ishaq (d. 767).

Ibn Ishaq wrote one of the first and most famous accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Originally, Ibn Ishaq’s work was a triad, with the first third devoted to the lives of the prophets mentioned in the Qurʾān who preceded Muhammad. This first volume, now lost, is the Kitāb al-Mubtada\(^8\) (The Book of Be-
ginnings). Gordon Newby has reconstructed this work exclusively by means of the numerous *isnāds* in al-Tabari’s history that cite Ibn Ishaq as a source. Ibn Ishaq’s inclusion of *Isrā‘iliyyāt*, materials collected from Jews and Christians, in his work was well known, but not unique. Many of the Prophet’s Companions were enjoined, at their leader’s request, to have collected these materials. Even Abu Bakr and ʿUmar, the first two caliphs of the Islamic community, visited the Bet Midrash in Medina. Still others, such as Zayd ibn Thabit, the main collector of the ʿUthmanic recension of the Qur’an, “learned Judeo–Arabic in order to read Jewish material to Muhammad.”

Early Jewish converts to Islam, particularly those from the Yemen, also disseminated these materials into the Islamic oral repertoire. Thus, it would appear perfectly plausible for al-Tabari to record that part of the content of one of his *akhbār* came to him from the *Ahl al-Tawrā* (the People of the Torah), the Jews who together with Christians are classed as People of the Book. Muslims recognize both groups as the recipients of divine directives, revealed as books or scripture. Al-Tabari’s other sources for some of the Eve selections are, he states, not just the Jews, but “Others among the [Muslim] learned, on the authority of ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbas and others.” Al-Tabari thus combines the traditions of the Jews with those of the Muslim Companions of the Prophet quite conspicuously in his history. The *isnād* cited offers the following content, which fuses together Genesis 2:21–23 and an echo of Qur’an 7:189, in italics:

*Then he took one of his ribs from his left side and replaced it with flesh while Adam continued to sleep . . . until Allah had created from his rib that spouse of his, Hawwā [Eve], as a woman that he might dwell with her. . . . Then Adam awoke and saw her at his side and said: . . . “Allah knows best . . . my flesh and my blood and my spouse; and he dwelled with her.”*14

Along with Ibn Ishaq, al-Tabari’s most frequently cited source for his history and exegesis is ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbas ibn ʿAbd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, featured in the above *isnād* as Ibn ʿAbbas (d. 687–88). Ibn ʿAbbas was the Prophet Muhammad’s nephew, the son of his paternal uncle whose descendants would later found the Abbasid empire in which al-Tabari lived and wrote. Ibn ʿAbbas’ aunt Maymunah was one of the Prophet’s wives. Renowned for his knowledge of the Qur’ān and its interpretation, Ibn ʿAbbas figured among the Companions of the Prophet who actively sought out an understanding of Jewish and Christian tradition.15

Despite al-Tabari’s inclusion via Ibn Ishaq and Ibn ʿAbbas of *Isrā‘iliyyāt* in his depiction of Eve, some scholars have argued that his work is an exception to increasing Muslim exclusion of these materials. As Nabia Abbott theorized:

The early Muslims’ preoccupation with non-Islamic thought and literature was reflected in the subsequent negative approach to such questions as whether it was possible for Muslims to read such books and to transmit *akhbār* and *hadith* from the “people of the Book.” . . . The comparatively tolerant attitude that characterized the first century yielded—for all but a few liberals—first to caution, then to avoidance, and finally, about the middle of the second century, to all but complete prohibition.16

The middle of the second Islamic century, circa 767, marked the end of the life of Ibn Ishaq and the first seventeen years of the Iraq-centered Abbasid empire in which most of our earliest Arabic materials were written. Newby suggests that Muslims
increasingly saw Jewish and Christian materials as tainted at about the same time their own identity and scholarly tradition were emerging as distinct from those they ruled.\(^{17}\) He argues that the Isrā'\(\text{iiyyāt}\) were purged from Muslim sources in light of the need to exalt Muhammad and Islam as the paramount and perfect faith of the Middle East. However, the very sources that were deemed corrupt in the 8th century appear fixed in al-Tabari's depiction of Eve almost two centuries later.

Separate from al-Tabari, but slightly earlier or, in some cases, contemporary with him in the 9th century, Sunni Muslim scholars were becoming increasingly sophisticated about the science of isnād and the collection of hadith. Their intent was to document the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and to valorize his example for all Muslims in every aspect of existence. The concern in the development of collecting and writing the first collections of hadith was not with the content of these traditions, but rather focused on the reliability of the oral authority of individuals in the chain, assessing them in terms of memory, character, and chronology. Each author developed his own conditions for the inclusion of certain hadith and the exclusion of others, but these are not made explicit in any of the collections. Only by comparison of similar materials can we hope to ascertain the patterns of their selection. Indeed, we find in this early Sunni corpus of hadith very few references to Eve, as compared with the plethora in the slightly later history of al-Tabari. Yet it is only with reference to al-Tabari's work that we can understand the selection of these early hadith and their authorial and communal implications.

**FEMALE CREATION AND CHARACTER FROM HADITH TO HISTORY**

My investigation focuses primarily on the six Sunni hadith collections that by the 10th century had come to be recognized as the orthodox repository of prophetic tradition. Although there are other earlier collections, this analysis proposes to trace only a controlled sample of the hadith deemed most genuine by the majority of medieval Sunni Muslims. Although not an encyclopedic sample, these works establish a significant contrast to the more expansive treatment of Eve found in the genres of history, Qur'ānic commentary, and biography. Only three references to Eve have been uncovered in the six Sunni hadith works. A fourth contemporary tradition may be found outside these six works in the 9th-century collection of Ibn Hanbal. In contrast, Adam is featured in more than 180 hadiths, not including those that refer to him as the Father of Humanity and Creation.\(^{18}\) Considering that each of these works contains multiple volumes, this is a surprising and suggestive development, for it would appear that Muslim scholars of prophetic tradition were highly selective in accepting material about Eve. The identification of each of the hadiths in which Eve is featured reveals much about the knowledge of the codifiers and their acceptance of Jewish and Christian materials.

The themes that feature Eve in these earliest hadith collections reveal aspects of her depiction that are not present in the Qur'ān. They include her name, the precedent she set in spousal deceit, her creation from a rib, ritual purity, and motherhood. Al-Bukhari (d. 870) entitled his collection of hadith sahih (sound), the highest order of prestige for the isnāds and their collective relaters. Al-Bukhari divided his
multivolume collection topically. In his section entitled *al-anbiyāʾ* (the prophets), he makes his one direct reference to Eve:

Were it not for *Hawwāʾ* (Eve), the female would not deceive her husband.¹⁹

The negative equation of Eve with all women as wives is here affirmed in the words of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet where in the Qurʾān did Eve deceive Adam? Indeed, where in the Qurʾān is she named *Hawwāʾ*/Eve at all? Implicit in this account is an already assimilated biography of the first woman. Both of the oral relaters, the codifier, and the reader assumedly already knew that Adam’s wife was named Eve, and that she was the first transgressor in the Fall, a clear borrowing from pre-Islamic materials, specifically Genesis 3:20 and 3:13, now cast in the Prophet’s words. The alleged originator of this hadith is Abu Hurayra (d. 678), a Companion of the Prophet who had attested interests in the Torah and the Christian Bible.²⁰

Al-Bukhari also includes an implicit reference to Eve’s Genesis-based origins in another hadith that originates with Abu Hurayra, in which the Prophet cautioned:

Treat women with care, for woman was created from a rib, the most crooked part of which is the highest. If you try to straighten it [the rib], you break it and if you leave it, it remains crooked. So treat women carefully.²¹

Yet Eve in the Qurʾān is not created from Adam’s rib, but from one soul (Qurʾān 4:1; 39:6). It is clear that the rib symbol’s real referent is not simply Eve, who remains unnamed, and her peculiar creation but, once again, the character of all women. Indeed, the archetypal first female is here used as a lesson, presumably for men, about the defects not of ribs but of women, who are, in a new Islamic twist, “crooked” by nature. The explanation of Eve’s birth from a rib allows the simultaneous association of her entire gender with innate duplicitous qualities of character. That this lesson was directed with admonitory intent by men toward real women may be seen in the use of a variant of this hadith by the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi (d. 785) about his wife Khayzuran.²²

How then did this assumption about Eve’s creation from a rib, found in Genesis 2:22, become implicitly accepted in 9th-century hadith? Textual answers to this question may be found in the work of the 10th-century historian and exegete al-Tabari. His multivolume *Taʾrīkh al-Rusul waʾl-Mulāk* (History of the Prophets and Kings) featured many more reports (akhbār) on Eve than were admitted into what appear to be more stringent, earlier Sunni hadith collections such as that of al-Bukhari. Al-Tabari’s world history provides a glimpse into the wide range and detail of circulating reports about Eve in the late 9th and early 10th centuries. These aspects of Eve’s persona were surely known by many Muslims, although al-Bukhari chose not to include them in his collection of sound traditions. Yet, it is clear that even if their chains of authority did not pass al-Bukhari’s standards, he and his audience already knew enough of the necessary background details about Eve to make their content comprehensible.

If we turn to al-Tabari, we learn that the Islamic understanding of Eve’s life embodied far more Jewish and Christian details than could be gleaned from Sunni hadith collections alone. For example, we learn that Adam’s wife was not created from one soul but, more specifically, from Adam’s rib.²³ Her name is now *Hawwāʾ*, “Eve,”
because she “was created from a living (hayy) thing.”24 This is a clear paraphrase of the creation story in Genesis 3:20 and the naming of Adam’s wife therein:

The man named his wife Eve [Hawwah] because she was the mother of all the living.25

Genesis 2:23 also resounds in al-Tabari’s section on the first couple. Eve is again created from Adam’s rib while he sleeps, but this time he calls her Atha, which, according to al-Tabari, means “woman” in Nabatean, or Aramaic.26 Indeed, this word is probably a reference to Genesis 2:23:

Then the man said,
“This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman (’ishshah),
For from man (’ish) was she taken.”27

We learn from al-Tabari that Adam refuses to eat of the tree that Allah had forbidden them, but his resolve is weakened by his wife. At the moment she is written into the text with a name, Eve also becomes the primary player in post-Qur’anic narratives of the drama of the Fall, which feature new explanations of the Qur’anic verses in italics:

Adam did not eat . . . , but Hawwā’ went forward and ate. Then she said, “O Adam, eat! I have eaten and I am unhurt.” When Adam ate, . . . they tasted of the tree, their shame was manifest to them and they began to hide by heaping leaves from the Garden on themselves.28

Hawwā’s determination to eat of the tree is, in al-Tabari, a direct result of her dealing with Iblis, the fallen angel whose sin of pride conveys on him the alias al-Shaytān (Satan). Eve cannot take an active role in the human expulsion from paradise without linkage to Satan. Thus, both the first woman and Satan work together to influence Adam, who, increasingly, demonstrates marked passivity before the suggestions of his mate. Iblis entered into the belly of the snake, the only animal who would allow herself to be used as a disguise for Satan’s re-entry into the Garden. The post-Qur’anic assumption of a new duo, Hawwā’ and Iblis, finds a new accomplice in the snake who, though present in Genesis 3:1–15, is nowhere to be found in the Qur’ān.29 Al-Tabari also includes a truly Middle Eastern biography of the snake, stating that before the serpent’s complicity with Iblis the creature had had four feet and resembled the most beautiful of animals: a camel.30 Once inside his snake accomplice and the Garden, Iblis picks the fruit of the forbidden tree. Then he describes the delights of the fruit to Hawwā’. Whereupon, “Eve took and ate some of it. Then she went with it to Adam.”31 Hawwā’s words to Adam mimic those of Iblis to her. Adam takes the fruit from his mate and eats.32 The snake/Satan–woman–man trajectory of Genesis 3:4–733 is here entered into the Islamic account of the Fall, despite the Qur’anic approach of Satan to Adam alone on this issue. The trajectory of blame in Genesis 3:12–14, implicitly alluded to in al-Bukhari’s 9th-century hadith, is here both affixed and detailed within Islamic history:

The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.”34
MENSTRUATION

Ibn Maja (d. 888), in his collection of hadith, makes a single mention of Eve in his chapter on al-tahāra, or ritual purity, related on the authority of ʿAlī ibn Abī Talib, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law and the fourth caliph of the Islamic community. In a section on the care of urinating male and female infants, the Prophet is reported to have said that the male child should be wet and the female cleansed. The figure of Eve is not technically part of the hadith. She is not mentioned by Muhammad. However, Ibn Maja notes that certain of the Muslim learned asked the famed jurist al-Shafīʿī (d. 820) about the meaning of this utterance. Al-Shafīʿī’s reply serves as a gloss on the hadith and explains its rationale. The legal scholar explains that male infants are composed of water and mud or clay, but their female equivalents are composed of laḥm (flesh), and dam (blood). Al-Shafīʿī’s interlocutors remained confused until the jurist responded with the final detail that places definitions of male and female in relation to their Qur’anic progenitors:

When Allah created Adam, Eve was created from his short rib.

Al-Shafīʿī then explains the link between Adam and Eve and Islamic notions of ritual purity: Just as Adam was made of clay and water, so, too, female infants descend from his wife in their composition of flesh and blood. Finally, the questioners understand the tie between prophetic injunction concerning ritual purity and the primal couple. Although not technically part of the hadith, the gloss of al-Shafīʿī is particularly interesting because of its Qur’anic and post-Qur’anic assumptions. In the Qur’an, Adam is indeed created of clay or mud (15:26; 15:33; 38:71), but his wife is described as created from one soul along with her husband. The details of the rib, Genesis-inspired flesh and bone, are not part of the Qur’an. The Islamic addition found neither in Genesis nor in the Qur’an is that of blood, a key factor in rendering a female ritually impure in Islamic society. Eve’s placement in a section dedicated to ritual purity seems to signal implicitly that women are born ritually unclean and that they are made of different substances than men. Blood may also signal menses, which will indeed eventually render the female infant ritually impure in Islamic practice on a monthly basis and link her to the physiological punishments meted out to Eve in post-Qur’anic sources. Once again, Eve provides the impetus for the leap from the specific to the general indictment of all women, enforcing key differences in biology and gender definition.

Al-Tabari’s account explains the origin of menstruation in terms of sacred biology as a divine punishment meted out to Eve for her role in the corruption of Adam. The expulsion from paradise serves to define and condemn female biology forever after. The Islamic Eve is condemned by Allah “to bleed once every month—as she caused this tree to bleed.” The Qur’an (2:222) describes menstruation as ʿadhan (harm) and enjoins men not to have intercourse with women during this time. Ritual purity for male and female are central in Islamic society as they were in al-Tabari’s time for Jewish and Zoroastrian religious practice in the Middle East.

Eve’s physical functions are not alone in their description as divine punishment. Allah also diminishes her mental capacity and character because of her role in the Fall. He makes her “foolish,” even though the creator admits: “I had [originally]
created her [with] prudence."42 Divine condemnation of Eve leads ineluctably to the characterization and punishment of all women:

If it were not for the misfortune which befell Eve, women on Earth would not menstruate and they would be good-natured and would have easy pregnancies and births.43

These divine punishments suggest Eve's powerful capacity to be the true and singular progenitor of women only, because men are immune to both feminine biological experience and, presumably, innate character defects.

**FEMALE SEXUALITY**

At issue in these texts is the transformation of procreation from a divinely controlled process to one in which the female role in human biology is condemned even as it is explained.44 In the Islamic context, as in Genesis, sacred biology is at odds with the more mundane earthly forms of human reproduction in which the female presence cannot be absent.45 In al-Tabari, Hawwâ personifies mere mortal creation through the female as a form of divine punishment:

Then He [Allah] said: “O Hawwâ', you are the one who beguiled My slave [Adam]. You shall not have a single pregnancy that will not be difficult. When you desire to give birth to what is in your womb, you will quite often be on the verge of death.”46

Here again, there are clear echoes of Genesis 3:16:

And to the woman, He said,  
“I will make most severe  
Your pangs in childbearing;  
In pain you shall bear children.”

It is perhaps revealing that al-Tabari's sacred history, read as commentary on the Qur'ân, reflects and paraphrases Genesis so closely for Eve's depiction, but omits a key part of the punishment meted out to women through Eve in Genesis, which follows close on the pain of childbirth:

In pain shall you bear children;  
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,  
And he shall rule over you.47

Muslims did not need to turn to Genesis or Jewish and Christian tradition to document male superiority as divinely ordained; they had the Qur'ân to express a similar gender-power relationship:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah made one of them to excel the other. (4:34)

**THE DEMONIZATION OF MOTHERHOOD**

In the final two 9th-century hadiths in which Eve is mentioned by name, we are offered the same account and chain of authority, with two critical variations in the content recorded. The first occurs in the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), who orga-
nized his collection by the originator of the chain of transmission rather than by topic. In Ibn Hanbal, Eve is presented in the role of mother:

When Eve became pregnant, Iblis appeared to her and did not let any child of hers live. He [Satan] said, “Name him ‘Abd al-Harith so that he will live.” Then they named him ‘Abd al-Harith and he lived. And that was because of the inspiration of Satan and his command.48

In the collection of al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) we find exactly the same originator, Samura ibn Jundab, the same chain of authority, and very similar content. However, al-Tirmidhi situates this hadith in his section on Qur'anic commentary that concerns Chapter 7, “The Heights.” There are two critical differences in the content. First, al-Tirmidhi does not explain Iblis’s naming suggestion as part of the life-giving bargain for Eve’s child. He simply states that Satan said, “Name him ‘Abd al-Harith.”49 Further, unlike Ibn Hanbal, al-Tirmidhi does not say “they” named the child, but “she” (Eve) named it.50

Why the differences between Ibn Hanbal and al-Tirmidhi? In the science of hadith, it is possible to have different content as long as the chain of oral authorities holds up. The focus of the hadith collector is not on what is transmitted, but by whom it is preserved. Scrutiny of individual hadith-transmitters provides insight into how specific material was preserved after uttered or enacted by the Prophet Muhammad. This is a far different emphasis than is displayed in the more fluid and numerous reports that are included by al-Tabari and defined as akhbār due to their non-prophetic origins.

Ibn Hanbal’s hadith assumes a high degree of knowledge from the reader. In his tradition, the assumption that the Qur'anic is the key to the tradition is implicit, but it is confirmed in al-Tirmidhi, who lists this same tradition in his commentary section on Chapter 7. But to which verses does it refer, and how does it explain them? Moreover, why is the name ‘Abd al-Harith so important? These questions may be answered with reference to a source from outside the hadith collections, a text that predates them and eventually links up again in terms of content and transmission. Clearly more material about Eve was in circulation than was accepted in the canonical collections of Sunni hadith.

Al-Tirmidhi’s hadith is situated as Qur’anic commentary on Chapter 7, but never specifies which verses it describes. We find a variant of this hadith in al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā of Ibn Sa’d (d. 845). Ibn Sa’d’s biographical dictionary was designed to record the lives of those very men and women close to Prophet who were involved in his life and, thus, the oral transmission of his word and deed, the stuff of hadith. Ibn Sa’d’s work begins with an account of creation and the lives of Adam and Eve as literal if distant ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad himself. His work, in its introductory phase, thus combines the sacred continuum involving Adam in Muhammad’s prophetic genealogy with Qur’anic injunctions. It also contains a very different and much more detailed version of the hadith involving Eve and Satan.

Once again, the account raises the question: What’s in a name? In Ibn Sa’d’s account, Satan comes to Eve after she has had children, including Seth, whose name is given in Arabic, Syriac, and Hebrew.51 In Qur’an 7:189, Eve’s pregnancy is mentioned. It is this citation which introduces the exchange in Ibn Sa’d between Eve and Satan, who comes to her in disguise.52 Satan asks Eve what is in her womb and
plants the notion in her mind that it may be a monster. As she draws near the time for delivery, he reappears, suggesting that he will “pray to Allah that he make a being resembling you [Eve] and Adam—if you name him [the child] after me.”\textsuperscript{53} She agrees but tells Adam, and both are troubled. They beseech Allah using the last lines of Qur\textsuperscript{2}an 7:189:

They cried unto Allah, their Lord, saying: “If you help us, we shall be among the grateful.”

Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d describes this event in his work and says what the Qur\textsuperscript{2}an and the hadith of Ibn Hanbal and al-Tirmidhi do not: that after Adam and Eve prayed to Allah, “a perfect boy was born to them.”\textsuperscript{54} But Satan returned to Eve and said, “Aren’t you going to name him after me, as you promised?” To which she replied, “What is your name?” Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d records that “His name was ‘Azazil,” but Satan feared that Eve would recognize who he was, so to dupe her he said, “My name is al-Harith.”\textsuperscript{55} What the audience must know to appreciate Satan’s dealings with Eve is that he has two aliases: ‘Azazil and al-Harith.\textsuperscript{56} ‘Azazil is a name that can be traced to the pre-Islamic book of Enoch, but in Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d is described as a dead giveaway—hence the Arabic nomenclature al-Harith, Satan’s new, fully Islamic alias. What Satan is asking of Eve, in exchange for his promise of a normal child, is that she give her offspring an ism, a proper name, which will honor Satan and link him, at least onomastically, to the unborn child. The form ‘\textit{Abd} (slave/servant) is often used with Allah in Islamic naming practice. In this case, to combine ‘\textit{Abd} with Satan’s alias makes a striking inversion of divine order. Yet Eve, unwittingly, follows the satanic suggestion:

So she called him [the child] ‘\textit{Abd} al-Harith and he died.\textsuperscript{57}

Yet, in the hadith in Ibn Hanbal and al-Tirmidhi, the child named at Satan’s suggestion lived. How can these two traditions involving Eve and Satan end so differently? Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d’s extraordinarily detailed account appears to suit its genre and suggests in its moral outcome the influence of the oral phenomenon of storytelling. The isn\textit{ād} for this part of Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d, attributed to Ibn ‘Abbas, does not immediately precede the content, but instead prefaces a whole narrative section of several pages that melds together in a seamless way. This section of Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d reads, as it may originally have been heard, as a story, not as a series of hadith. Moreover, the end of Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d’s account, the death of the child, suits its context as a moral outcome. It explains the ingratitude of Eve and Adam and functions as a narrative surrounding to the Qur\textsuperscript{2}anic verse 7:190:

But when He gave unto them aright, they ascribed to Him partners in respect of that which He had given them. He is exalted, high above all that they associate [with Him].

These verses serve as a clear condemnation of Eve’s act of naming the child after Satan and explain the death of the infant as a breach of human belief in the supreme and sole deity of Allah. There are no partners or associates in an unrelenting monotheism: Allah alone has the power of life and death over Eve’s child and all procreation. If Ibn Sa\textsuperscript{c}d reversed the ending of the account found in al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hanbal, he may also have done so to suit the genealogical necessity of his work. How could the offspring of the prophet Adam, named after Satan, live and presum-
ably be at some remove related to the Prophet Muhammad himself? The association of Eve with Satan and her attribution of power to him is bad enough, but far worse might be the genealogical implications of linking the ultimate Prophet Muhammad with Satan. It would not be possible for Muhammad to be descended from such a child.

Ibn Sa’id’s account is important because it makes human procreation essential in the lives of Adam and Eve as a prelude to Muhammad’s mission. The first couple are parents to all of humanity and thus to all of the prophets who will descend from them. Once again, Eve’s life is subsumed into the overarching significance of the male prophetic continuum that is and will be the core of Islamic sacred history. For Eve to be active in procreation, the plot reintroduces her link to the demonic: As it was in paradise with her problems as wife, so it will be on Earth in her role as mother. The link of the female with Satan in the Islamic explanation of the Fall places humans on Earth and emphasizes the problems of human birth through women. Once on Earth, Eve is again the object of demonic intent in the matter of Islamic procreation.

Eve's Islamic life as a mother is captured in al-Tabari in five distinct reports, three more than are found in the earlier Sunni hadith collections, which suggests that his selection of circulating oral material allowed for a much higher degree of inclusion in the written record. In al-Tabari we begin to see the confluence of accounts that, in their depiction of the primal couple's role in procreation, find an Islamic direction and explanation for Eve’s motherhood in contrast to the Jewish- and Christian-influenced interpretation of her origin and role in the expulsion from paradise. These materials suggest that there may be a disjunction between the sources that Muslims utilized in the Islamic Eve's depiction as wife and in her role as mother.

Al-Tabari’s first account has the same isnâd and nearly the same content as that of Ibn Hanbal and al-Tirmidhi. The selection is terse and says only that Eve named her child ʿAbd al-Harith and that it lived at the inspiration of Satan. The second report, related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbas, the same originator as in Ibn Sa’id but with different content, offers more detail about the naming patterns of the primal couple. We are told that two children were first dedicated to Allah, and that both parents named them ʿAbd Allah and ʿUbayd Allah. But these children died despite the fact that their parents gave them the name slave or servant of Allah. At this juncture, Satan approaches the parents, telling them to name the child Eve is currently carrying something different “so that he [the new child] will live.” Eve delivers a boy, and the parents call him ʿAbd al-Harith. The hadith ends with Qurʾan 7:189, then says that this and the next verse, 7:190, are about the attribution of shurakāʾ (partners) to Allah. The account is thus not about Eve or Satan so much as it is about betraying the monotheism revealed to Muhammad by Allah. The explication of Eve’s actions and those of her husband are here fully defined in terms of the central Islamic theological tenet of Qur’anic monotheism.

The third and fourth references to Eve’s maternity are narrated on the authority of Saʿid ibn Jubayr, but they differ in content. The third introduces Qurʾanic verse 7:189 as the time when Eve “was pregnant with her first child.” Iblis asks not only what is in Eve’s womb, but how it is going to find an exit from her body. He suggests her nose, eye, or ear as potential points of egress. Such details confirm Eve’s maternal naïveté and explain her willingness to listen to Iblis so that the child will be
delivered safely. It is in this context that the naming issue arises and “al-Harith” is explicitly identified as the alias of Satan. Adam warns Eve about this enemy who caused their expulsion from the Garden. Yet when the child was safely delivered, Eve still named him ‘Abd al-Harith. The hadith concludes with the revelation of the verses 7:189 that the parents were among the grateful. The named child’s fate is not detailed further.

The fourth report describes Eve’s despair and fear about the mechanics of childbirth, echoing the preceding account in al-Tabari, but adding that Satan threatened the child’s life if he was not named ‘Abd al-Harith. Eve complies, but the hadith concludes with the comment that naming the child after Satan was shirk, the association with Allah of another power as supreme, the greatest Islamic deviation from the central belief in the unity of the divine. However, in somewhat contradictory fashion the entire tradition is introduced by the admission that Adam set up associates with Allah. The fifth and final selection also links Eve’s actions to the sin of shirk. We are told that Eve gave birth to a boy, and Satan threatened him with death if the child was not named “my slave”—that is, ‘Abd al-Harith. Adam blames Satan for their expulsion from paradise, and the two parents defiantly name their child Salih, but Satan kills him. It is at this juncture that Satan offers the name ‘Abd al-Harith for Eve’s next baby, which, the hadith adds, occurred when Allah revealed the verses about partners with Allah being unacceptable (7:190). We do not learn the fate of the child.

The selections that feature Eve as mother possess points of unity and disunity in content. In all accounts, the children are male, although there is dispute about whether the child is Eve’s first or not. All the children are named ‘Abd al-Harith after Satan. Only Ibn Sa’id’s tale definitively ends with the death of the child who is so named. All relate to two verses of the Qur’an and feature Eve as the object of demonic interference. With only one exception, she takes the initiative in naming the child. As a mother, Eve helps to exemplify the problems of human procreation even as she becomes part of the first instance of the Islamic sin of polytheism. Once again, her development as a mother is dependent on her dealings with Iblis/Satan, who as al-Harith is assuming his own indigenously Islamic definition. Their linkage must be complete to lend problematic impetus to her life with the first prophet Adam. Whether in paradise as wife or on Earth as mother, the Islamic Eve’s record of deceit and error would not be possible without the parallel development of Satan.

Al-Tabari’s history is notable for its inclusion of numerous hadiths and akhbār about the Islamic Eve that were apparently rejected by those compiling the first canonical Sunni collections for the edification of the Muslim community. Whether the canonical collectors rejected available material about Eve as tainted by association with non-Muslims is unclear, but possible. What is demonstrable, even from the few hadiths in these collections, is that the meaning of Eve’s life in the Islamic written record had already been orally and communally defined. Reference to Eve’s deceit, her creation from a rib, and her composition as flesh and blood by the mid-9th century did not need explanation among the emerging class of Muslim male religious learned. Eve’s post-Qur’ānic interpretation was already part of their internalized understanding of her meaning for the Islamic community.

The disjunction in the Islamic Eve’s life between what would become canonical Sunni hadith collections and the more numerous traditions in al-Tabari also suggests
that emerging Muslim genres may have utilized oral materials with different intent, depending on the conditions of the works in which they were featured. We have every reason to believe that variations in the akhbār recorded by al-Tabari are reflections of the great variety and creativity of a fluid oral tradition. However, these accounts also demonstrate the potential for Muslims to make these details part of the written record as long as they fit overarching symbolic continuity and narrative constructs. Each report suggests not only a kernel of content, but also an oral frame for circulated realities in which the end might change to suit circumstance in emerging Islamic genres of history, commentary, and prophetic biography. We will never know what was not preserved in the earliest written sources, but through comparisons of content and their variations, we may deduce the development of a nuanced, highly selective portrayal of Eve, one that accepted and rejected Jewish and Christian precedent and forged new interpretations of an Islamic female figure.

The development of more detail from less also suggests a natural oral narrative development. If, parallel to hadith, with their collectors’ increasing insistence on a verifiable chain of authorities, there were also akhbār and other stories related by Islamic storytellers, then the pattern of Eve’s life from al-Tabari into the later specialized genre of Qisas al-Anbiyāʾ (Tales of the Prophets) makes sense as a passage from unwritten to written narrative. Roughly a century after al-Tabari’s death, this genre of prophetic stories, as a form of Islamic belles-lettres, effectively severed itself from the isnād but persisted in its didactic and moralistic intent. Much of the work contained in these prophetic tales may be traced back to al-Tabari, although later authors continued to manufacture wittier and more detailed narratives, all of which contain critical implications for gender and the evolution of the life of the Islamic Eve.69

THE WRITTEN LIFE OF THE ISLAMIC EVE

No historian should ever underestimate the power of certain narratives to prevail, or, as Paul Ricoeur more elegantly phrased the phenomenon:

As soon as a story is well known—and such is the case with most traditional and popular narratives as well as with the national chronicles of the founding events of a given community—retelling takes the place of telling.70

In al-Tabari’s written record, Ḥawwāʾ is named and blamed, constructed in her post-Qurʾānic life as the Islamic Eve to resemble her Jewish and Christian prototypical parallels. The very absence of detail about her Qurʾānic persona left much room for the addition of key tags: Name and origin are cases in point. Yet, although exegetically based history may overwrite lacunae, how can it, seemingly, contradict the revealed text? The process of enfleshing Adam’s wife of the Qurʾān appears to work within certain established parameters set by the Qurʾān: The primal pair of male and female exists, errs, and is expelled from paradise. Throughout this scenario, Satan is their enemy. Key to the later interpretation of Eve’s life from the Qurʾānic verses is the elaboration of more meaning from less. Paralleling this process is the effective selective emphasis placed on the cause of the Fall. Adam still errs, but now, thanks to post-Qurʾānic interpretation, we find out why: His wife made him do it. Adam may still have a covenant with God as a prophet, and he may have disobeyed, but
there remains latitude to explain his behavior. The trickiest part, the most difficult to reconcile with the Qur’anic text, is the role of Satan in the life of Eve. The route that Islamic authors took neglects Satan’s approach to Adam singly, choosing instead to emphasize the pair, and particularly Eve, as his target. In short, the Islamic process of writing Eve’s life in post-Qur’anic sources suggests more eisegesis, reading into the text, than exegesis, reading out of it. Muslims had a revealed corpus that featured the story of Adam and his wife. They wanted to know more and explain more, and found close at hand in the Middle East a series of harmonious Jewish and Christian narrative patterns. No other structures of interpretation were then available with which Muslims might compare the story of their prophet Adam and his nameless wife. Indeed, the Muslim adoption of selective Jewish and Christian traditions forged shared symbolic links between the two pre-existing Middle Eastern monotheisms and Islam.

Yet Muslim scholars also established critical differences concerning Eve and her maternity. Only in her depiction as the mother of males and, presumably, future prophets did her portrayal become more definitively Islamic in inspiration. In her role as mother she played a pivotal part in the Islamic continuum and finite end of the prophetic line culminating in Muhammad. Her maternity was demonized as a biological punishment in post-Qur’anic sources, a vehicle for Satan to lure the first human male and female from monotheism into idolatry. In this act of temptation Eve functions as an Islamic lightning rod. She demonstrates the demonization of motherhood along with the sin ofpolytheism. Fused together, the centrality of female biology and satanic temptation clarify the production of all humans, including future prophets, as a divine project. Based on Eve’s precedent and example, future Muslim mothers could be warned that reliance on any inspiration but that of Allah imperils human procreation. Eve’s biology, even as it reflects a human reality, is ultimately depicted as the result of a series of divine determinations. In menstruation as in motherhood, Eve’s example explained female biology as a sacred punishment for all women, a definition that concurred with the other two Middle Eastern monotheisms’ evaluation of Adam’s wife. However, Muslim scholars proved that their distinct notion of history and the Prophet Muhammad’s crucial role as the final prophet forced both the inclusion and reinterpretation of Eve for Islamic objectives. In a monotheistic milieu in which the image of the divine being is male and the demonic is viewed as working through the female, Muslim scholars created nuances in Eve’s maternal depiction and demonic temptation to demonstrate their unique, emerging communal identity. This new Islamic focus, embodied in the interpretation of Eve, valorized both the Prophet’s genealogy as part of sacred history and the threat of polytheism to Islam as the newest Middle Eastern monotheism.

NOTES

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2Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, “Eve: Islamic Image of Woman,” Women’s Studies International Forum 5, 2 (1982), 135–44. See also Barbara Freyer Stowasser, Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25–38. Stowasser’s emphasis on interpretation includes al-Tabari’s vision of Eve, but does not attempt to explain the differences between his larger body of references and those in earlier canonical hadith collections.

3Peter J. Awn, Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Su’fi Psychology (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), 19: “[T]he name Ash-Shaytan, Satan, appears more than fifty times in the text of the Qur’an. The titles are virtually interchangeable, with the name Iblis being used in the context of man’s creation and the Devil’s fall, while the title Ash-Shaytan is reserved for the enticement of Adam and Eve.” The names, however, do seem to be interchangeable in the post-Qur’ānic materials.

4Ibid., 41.


6Abbott, Studies, 2:10. Abbott also links the issue of early written materials to the literacy of the Islamic community, most specifically that of the Prophet and his Companions. As she argues for a greater amount of early written work, so too, she supports greater literacy among early Muslims in Arabia (2:6–10).


9Newby, Last Prophet, 1–33.

10Abbott, Studies, 2.8.

11Newby, Last Prophet, 10.


13Al-Tabari, Ta’rikh.


16Ibid., 2:9–10.


18A. J. Wensinck, ed., Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane, 8 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 8:68 (Hawwâ’) and 8:6 (Adam). The six books include al-Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875), Abu Dawud (d. 888), al-Tirmidhi (d. 892), al-Nasa’î (d. 915), and Ibn Maja (d. 886).


20Abbott, Studies, 2-9. Many of the hadith attributed to him are spurious. For details of his anti-female feelings and preoccupation with matters of ritual purity, see Fatima Mernissi, The Veil and the Male Elite:


24 Ibid.

25 All translations of Genesis are taken from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988). Both Hebrew and Arabic are Semitic languages; thus, the names for Eve in both are nearly identical: in Arabic, *Hawwa* or *Hawwah*, in Hebrew, *Hawwak* or *Havvah*. The root in Arabic and Hebrew from which the name is derived is also the same. In Arabic, *ḥayy*, and in Hebrew, *hay*, for “life/living.”


28 Al-Ṭabari, *Ṭaʾrīkh*, 1:105. The italicized part of the citation indicates Qurʾan 7:22. See also Wansbrough, *Qurʾanic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 2, who describes Muhammad’s biography as constructed so that scripture “provided the framework for the extended narratio” or the “narratio was itself the framework for frequent if not continuous allusion to scripture.” He terms these two types of narrative techniques “exegetical” and “parabolic,” respectively. One can see something of the same tendency in al-Ṭabari’s work.

29 Al-Ṭabari, *Ṭaʾrīkh*, 1:106, “jawf al-ḥayyat.” Perhaps the pull is in the pun where all Semitic sorts may laugh as one. The word for snake/serpent, *al-ḥayya*, from the same root as *ḥayy/hay,* “life,” and hence *Hawwa/Hawwah, “Eve,” in Arabic and Hebrew. The word for snake in both languages, not surprisingly, is feminine and gives the wordplay proper gendered bite. The Christian Gnostic community also indulged itself in this rabbinic wordplay. See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 36, in which still another pun prevails between “serpent” (*hewya*) and the verb “to instruct” (*hawa*), both linked to Eve. In this version, Eve’s knowledge, however, has positive implications for Adam and humanity. See also John A. Philips, *Eve: The History of an Idea* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 166, in which he links this Gnostic account to the Qurʾan and falsely claims, “it is to this tradition that the Quran appears to be indebted: In sura 7, the Satan–snake offers himself as a ‘sincere adviser.’” Philips, who has clearly never read the Qurʾan, apparently refers to sura 7:21, in which Satan, nowhere a snake, says he is among the “faithful advisers”; the Arabic for the term “advisers,” however, is not the *ḥyū* root that allowed the Gnostics to grammatically and semantically link the demonic force to Eve.

30 Al-Ṭabari, *Ṭaʾrīkh*, 1:106. See also *The Book of Adam and Eve*, trans, and ed. S. C. Malan (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 19, in which the serpent is described as “the most beautiful of all beasts.” This Christian work of the 5th–6th centuries preserved in an Ethiopic text an earlier Arabic original.

31 Al-Ṭabari, *Ṭaʾrīkh*, 1:106.

32 Ibid.

33 In Genesis 3:4–6: “And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.’ . . . She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened.” Compare the approach of Satan to Adam in the Qurʾan (20:120), in which Satan contacts only Adam with an offer of “immortality and power.”


36 Ibid., 1:175.
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37Ibid.
40Ibid., 1:109. See also the characterization of menstruation in Midrash on Genesis in Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols., trans. H. Szold et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909–38, reprinted 1937–66), 1:101, n. 85: “In all the sources menstruation is regarded as a penalty for Eve’s sin, and since sexual desire is considered as the result of the eating of the forbidden fruit, the Gnostics, as well as the Kabbalists, maintain that menstruation came to Eve with the enjoyment of the fruit.” In this sense, the mention of the tree in al-Ṭabarī that has bled as Eve will bleed monthly may be derivative. For the modern importance of menstruation in the life of the Islamic Eve as it affects modern Muslim women, see Carol Delaney, “Mortal Flow: Menstruation in Turkish Village Society,” in Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation, ed. T. Buckley and A. Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 78–93; and Leila Abu Lughod, Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in Bedouin Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 130.
42Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, 1:109. The words safīha and ḥalima are clearly key in this passage. Franz Rosenthal gives them a different dichotomous meaning, juxtaposing the words “stupid” for safīha and “intelligent” for ḥalima. I am indebted to R. Stephen Humphreys for a more apt pairing: “foolish” and “prudent.” See Al-Ṭabarī, From the Creation to the Flood, 280. However, I think the combination of these two words suggests less about intellectual acumen than about self-control, an issue linked to female behavior and sexuality rather than strict intelligence. See E. W. Lane, Arabic–English Lexicon, 8 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), 4:1377, in which safīha indicates particularly women and young children and denotes weakness of intellect, lack of rectitude; and 2:80, in which ḥalima indicates the possession of forbearance, calm.
43Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, 1:109; also exactly the same hadith in his tafsīr, 1:529. For a striking parallel, see Ginzing, Legends, 1:78: “The Verdict against Eve also consisted of 10 curses, the effect of which is noticeable to this day in the physical, spiritual, and social state of woman.”
44Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “Eve,” in which Fishbane suggests: “This mythic image of a male as the source of all human life (Gn. 2:21–22) reflects a male fantasy of self-sufficiency.”
46Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, 1:106.
47Genesis 3:16.
48ʿAbd ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, 6 vols. (Cairo: n.p., 1895), 5:11.
50Ibid. He rates this hadith as ḥasan gharib.
52Ibid.
53Ibid., 1:38.
54Ibid.
55Ibid.
56The name ʿAbd al-Harīth was prominent among the pre-Islamic Christian tribes of the Kinda and Banu Ghassan. For its origins, see Awn, Satan’s Tragedy, 25, n. 26 on Leviticus, and the Book of Enoch for the name ʿAzazīl. See also Neil Forsyth, The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 163, 174–75.
58Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 1:149.
60Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 1:149.
61Ibid.
62Ibid., 1:150.
63Ibid.
64Ibid.
65Ibid.
66Ibid.
67Ibid.
68Ibid., 1:151.