

Discussing *Ghayra* in Abbasid Literature: Jealousy as a Manly Virtue or Sign of Mutual Affection

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Abstract

Jealousy is a thriving theme in Abbasid poetry and narratives, but it is not confined to the realm of storytelling and poetic motifs; its meaning and boundaries are discussed from various points of view of Abbasid scholarship. In this article, explanations and definitions of *ghayra* as an emotion as well as cultural practice are investigated on the basis of a selection of Classical Arabic literary sources. It is a study of attitudes towards jealousy in literature that is predominantly normative, and hence excluding subjective experiences as they are expressed in poetry and anecdotal literature.

Keywords

Adab – Classical Arabic literature – *ḥadīth* – emotions – virtuous behavior

Introduction

Jealousy is a thriving theme in Abbasid poetry and narratives, just as in many other literary heritages. It is not, however, confined to the realm of storytelling and poetic motifs; its meaning and boundaries are discussed from various perspectives within Abbasid scholarship. The common term for romantic and sexual jealousy is *ghayra*, a word whose meaning is obscured by being used to endorse jealousy as a manly virtue and at once to denote a familiar and

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rudimentary emotion not bound by gender. According to *Lisān al-ʿArab*, *ghayra* designates disdain and anger (*anaʿfa* and *ḥamīyya*) and seems to be caused not by love but by possessiveness and a sense of justice.¹ It is an emotion as well as a code of conduct for men, in the sense of “a man’s dislike of another’s participating in that which is his right,” “care of what is sacred, or inviolable, to avoid suspicion,” and “anger at the conduct, or action, of a wife.”² Yet, medieval lexicons acknowledge that *ghayra* is felt by women as well. It occurs between wives in polygynous marriages and there is even a specific form of the verb, *aghāra ahlahu*, “to make one’s wife jealous,” for a man who takes a second wife.³

Abbasid treatises discuss a variety of explanations and definitions of *ghayra* as an emotion and a cultural practice, in which the difference between women’s and men’s *ghayra* is frequently a crucial issue. Some *ḥadīth* collections of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries set apart a section on *ghayra* in the chapter on marriage, sometimes with a specific subdivision devoted to women’s *ghayra* — apparently to provide normative representations of gender roles based on *sunna*. The earliest book on love, *Iʿtilāl al-qulūb* by the theologian Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Kharāʾīṭī (d. 327/938), originates from *ḥadīth* and has a separate section on *ghayra* as well.⁴ Characteristically, it combines the example of the prophet Muḥammad and his wives and companions with poetry by Abū Nuwās, among others.⁵ Jealousy is certainly a common motif in love poetry and stories.⁶ We find stories about the idealized *ghayra* of the pre-Islamic and early-Islamic heroes in *khavar* literature, for example the stories about the Persian and pre-Islamic Arabian kings in *al-Maḥāsīn wa-l-aḍḍād*.⁷ Attempts to explain *ghayra* are also found in philosophical and scientific

1 Ibn Manẓūr, (d. 711/1311-12), *Lisān, gh-y-r*.

2 Lane, *Lexicon*, II, 2316.

3 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān, gh-y-r*; Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415), *Qāmūs, gh-y-r*; cf. Lane, *Lexicon*, II, 2316.

4 See Gharīd al-Shaykh’s introduction to Kharāʾīṭī, *Iʿtilāl*, 6-7, for biographical notes on the author, who was born in Samarra, moved to live in Syria and died in Jaffa or Asqalan.

5 See Gruendler, A Theologian’s Endorsement, for al-Kharāʾīṭī’s relatively forgiving attitude towards passionate love. Gruendler’s fundamental study includes translated *akhbār* and poems on “love martyrs” which are especially interesting.

6 See, for example, the poetry in Ibn Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-zahra*, 82-90.

7 Ps.-Jāhīz, *Maḥāsīn*, 272-301. In these stories, men are easily seduced — favoring obscure promises of sexual satisfaction over loyalty to the king — and therefore punished. Or, they act unmanly, with little jealousy, and let their women fall into misery. The book was attributed to Jāhīz early on, but this attribution is definitely refuted, see Pellat, *Nouvel essai*, 147. Parts of the book rely on *al-Maḥāsīn wa-l-masāwī* by al-Bayhaqī (third/ninth-fourth/tenth century); see Gériès, *Maḥāsīn*, and Gériès, *Bayhaqī*.

works like, for instance, *al-Hawāmil wa-l-shawāmil* written by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (ca. 310/922-414/1023). This work contains discussions between al-Tawḥīdī and his fellow philosopher Abū 'Alī Miskawayh (ca. 320/932-421/1030) on various philosophical and scientific issues. One discussion is exclusively devoted to *ghayra* and it incorporates norms reminiscent of those found in *ḥadīth* literature into an ethical system built on empirical observation.⁸ An even more empirical and less normative stance is taken by the hitherto obscure writer of the earliest extant Arabic erotic work entitled *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*. The author is 'Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib, according to Ibn al-Nadīm most probably the secretary with the same name who died in 377/987.⁹ The bulk of his chapter on *ghayra* consists of a medical explanation of the causes of jealousy, its benefits, and the cure of its harms.

In this article, I will discuss the attitudes towards jealousy in *I'tilāl al-qulūb* by al-Kharā'itī and some main *ḥadīth* collections, Sunni as well as Shiite, from the third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries.¹⁰ I will then compare the *ḥadīth* attitudes towards jealousy with the slightly later "scientific" attitudes in al-Tawḥīdī's *Hawāmil* and Ibn Naṣr's *Jawāmi'*. Inasmuch as this is a study of attitudes towards jealousy as expressed in literary works that explicitly deal with the topic, i.e., that include chapters or subchapters specifically devoted to *ghayra*, I have not considered subjective experiences. Hence, I have excluded poetry and anecdotal literature that might have contradicted the sources described here, most of which emphasize that jealousy occurs in marriage.¹¹

8 See Gharaozlou and Negahban, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Rowson, al-Tawḥīdī, 760-761.

9 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 287. I am most grateful to Everett Rowson for sharing his knowledge about this book. He concludes that it was written not later than the middle of the fifth/eleventh century. See his excellent overview in *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature: Arabic: Middle Ages to Nineteenth Century*. For the chapter on *ghayra*, I rely on two mss; Aya Sofya 3837 (634 AH) and Fatih 3729 (582 AH).

10 The Sunni sources used include collections such as Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*; and Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*; the Shiite *ḥadīth* compilation that I use, *al-Kāfī* by Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940-41), is a little later, but contemporary with al-Kharā'itī.

11 Additionally, I do not discuss whether jealousy, or any emotion, is innate or socially constructed; it would be fruitful, though, to discuss the theoretical approaches of research devoted to the history of emotions in pre-modern Europe (such as Rosenwein, *Worrying about Emotions*) and Classical Antiquity (e.g., Konstant and Rutter *Envy, Spite and Jealousy*) in relation to Islamic history.

Al-Kharāʾiṭī and the Boundaries of Tolerance

The attitude toward love in *Iʿtilāl al-qulūb* by al-Kharāʾiṭī may be characterized as ambiguous, perhaps because it reflects several literary traditions included in the book: *ḥadīth*, poetry and stories (*akhbār*). For instance, an early chapter consisting mainly of *ḥadīths* is labeled “Condemnation of love” (*dhamm al-hawā*), whereas the author elsewhere shows tolerance towards love and lovers — or rather, so do the protagonists in the narratives he quotes. In general, the author himself offers few direct comments and it is therefore all the more remarkable when al-Kharāʾiṭī makes a resolute objection to one of the *ḥadīths* he is quoting, a *ḥadīth* that seems to have caused debate among the *muḥaddithūn*. It occurs in a chapter named “Enduring disagreeable things obeying love” (*bāb iḥtimāl al-makrūh fī ṭāʿat al-hawā*); the *ḥadīth* is as follows:

A man said: Messenger of God, I have a wife, and I love her, but she does not stop anybody touching her with his hand (*lā tamnaʿ yad lāmis*). The Prophet said: Divorce her. He said: But I cannot bear being without her. The Prophet said: Then keep her.¹²

One interpretation of the *ḥadīth* is that the *lāmis*, the “toucher,” successfully convinces the woman to have sexual relations with him; the expression *lā tarudd/tamnaʿ yad lāmis* may refer to an unfaithful wife.¹³ The outcome of this interpretation, however, was a challenge for many *muḥaddithūn* as it meant

12 Kharāʾiṭī, *Iʿtilāl*, 306. There are a few variants to this *ḥadīth*, e.g., *lā tarudd* instead of *lā tamnaʿ*, and “enjoy her”, instead of “keep her”; cf. Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ Sunan al-Nisāʾī*, 67-68. The *ḥadīth* is found in Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 545; Shāfiʿī, *Umm*, 37. The different versions, opinions and arguments around its interpretation are summarized by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who argues that *yad lāmis* must indicate *zinā*, and that the husband suspects that his wife would be able to commit an adulterous act, but that he has no evidence. I found al-ʿAsqalānī’s text, where the *ḥadīth* is debated, online in a transcript of a short Azhar MS entitled *Risāla fī ḥadīth lā tarudd yad lāmis li-bn Ḥajar*, <http://www.ahlalhdeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=87233>.

13 *Lamasa l-marʾa wa-lāmasahā* is, according to al-Zamakhsharī (*Asās al-balāgha*, II, 180) the same as *jāmaʿahā* (having sexual intercourse with her), and a woman who *lā tarudd yad lāmis* is a *fājira* (prostitute, adulteress). See also Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, *r-m-z* and *kh-r-ʿ*, where a *rammāza* is explained as a *fājira* who *lā tarudd yad lāmis*. In an anecdote related in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Iqd*, III, 415, a man is asked why he keeps a wife who *lā tarudd yad lāmis*; the man answers that she is beautiful and the mother of sons, or the mother of the household. The story does not tell what the wife has done, but since it is also included in the section on *zinā* in Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn*, IV, 103, we may deduce that she has been adulterous.

that the Prophet advised the husband to accept (and forgive) a wife who had committed *zināʾ*. Al-Kharāʾiṭī relates that some among *ahl al-ʿilm* supported this interpretation on the basis of the Qurʾan, where *lāmastum al-nisāʾ* signifies having sexual intercourse (Q 4:43). The Prophet's advice could be interpreted meaning that the man should keep his wife if he fears that he otherwise will commit *zināʾ* by having sexual intercourse with her after their divorce. In that case, it would be better to remain married to a sinful woman and have legal sex with her. Al-Kharāʾiṭī, however, doubts that the Prophet would advise a man to keep his wife in spite of her *zināʾ*, and argues quite animatedly against it: how could anyone believe that the Messenger of God would command a husband to keep an unfaithful wife "inflicting on him someone who is not his, but who would inherit what is his and look at his wives' private parts (*ʿawrāt*)."¹⁴ Instead, he suggests that the *lāmis* from the *ḥadīth* report was someone who came to the wife of an absent man, asking her for her husband's belongings, a request that she did not reject. In this line of argument, al-Kharāʾiṭī appeals to the readers' piety and reason; even though the Qurʾan does equate *lams* with *jimāʿ*, believers are urged to choose the most pious interpretation of the *ḥadīth*. Moreover, al-Kharāʾiṭī argues:

We have never seen a man who loves a woman and tolerates seeing her with another man or knowing that she is unfaithful. So, how could it be possible to hear of such an incident involving one of the Prophet's Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and interpret it in this way? Reason cannot accept this in light of what is narrated about the Prophet and his Companions concerning *ghayra*, which will be mentioned later. They beat their wives for less serious motives, so how could this man have tolerated that his wife did not refuse others?¹⁵

According to al-Kharāʾiṭī, the limit of men's tolerance towards their wives is their *ghayra*, a very manly virtue on account of the Companions of the Prophet. In his chapter on *ghayra*, al-Kharāʾiṭī elaborates on his interpretation of the above-mentioned *ḥadīth* in order to prove that *ghayra* would have prevented any of the Companions from tolerating a cheating wife. Some of his examples are gruesome: ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar (d. 73/693), son of caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and one of the most prominent amongst the Companions, brutally beat his wife for having talked to a man from the other side of the wall. The man was actually her relative, so she was allowed to talk to him, but Ibn ʿUmar's fierce

14 Kharāʾiṭī, *Iʿtilāl*, 306.

15 Ibid.

jealousy made him hit before asking. Likewise, Companion and commander Mu‘adh b. Jabal (d. 18/639) beat his wife severely when she presented the apple she was eating to one of her male slaves.¹⁶ With these violent stories in mind, al-Kharā’iṭī elaborates on the issue of wife beating in more general terms, reporting that the Prophet first disapproved of it, but after the revelation of Q 4:34, he endorsed it under the circumstances mentioned there. Overall, al-Kharā’iṭī depicts a prophet who is unenthusiastic about violence towards those who are to be protected; still he is reported to have said, “Never ask a man why he beats his wife.”¹⁷ Wife beating as a result of manly *ghayra* is an entirely private matter, although divinely approved.

The Companions’ Example and *Ghayra* in *Ḥadīth*

According to al-Kharā’iṭī, the jealousy of the *ṣaḥāba* was distinctive and could be violent, but the Prophet’s own example is less fierce. Al-Kharā’iṭī relates about an incident involving a concubine of the Prophet, Māriya the Copt, who was pregnant with his son. Once, when the Prophet visited her, he found one of her male relatives in her company whereupon he was overwhelmed with doubt about the paternity of the child.¹⁸ The Prophet was able to keep his doubts to himself, until ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb saw his troubled countenance. After hearing about the Prophet’s suspicion, he betook himself to the dwelling of Māriya, with his sword ready to kill the possible offender. He was just about to strike him, when the relative uncovered his private parts, revealing that he had been deprived of his reproductive organs, and hence was acquitted. In this account, ‘Umar is quite aggressive in his protection of the Prophet, whereas the Prophet himself keeps silent and avoids violence. Other *ḥadīth* scholars, however, portray a less sensitive Prophet who reminds the believers that he himself is even more jealous than Sa’d b. ‘Ubāda, a prominent *anṣārī* and leader of the Khazraj tribe in Medina, who had such fierce *ghayra* that it made him swear to kill any rival with his sword.¹⁹

Not only is *ghayra* a characteristic of the *ṣaḥāba*, and thus commendable, it is encouraged and even commanded by God. In an oft-quoted *ḥadīth* with some variants, the Prophet exhorts the (male) believers to cherish their *ghayra*,

16 Kharā’iṭī, *I’tilāl*, 312; also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā’*, 275.

17 Kharā’iṭī, *I’tilāl*, 312.

18 Kharā’iṭī, *I’tilāl*, 310–311.

19 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, 2002; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, IV, 54; in Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā’*, 276, Sa’d swears to kill his wife, not his rival.

since God is jealous (*yaghār/ghayūr*) as well,²⁰ especially when the believers do something he has forbidden.²¹ In fact, God is the most jealous and for this reason, he has forbidden adultery (or abominable crimes, *fawāḥish*).²² In this context, *ghayra* means caring for what is sacred, notably marriage,²³ and ensuring that it is not violated. There are two forms of *ghayra*, however, one that God loves and one that he hates. Good *ghayra* is directed against disobedience to God and violation of what he has made sacred (*maḥārimuhu*), whereas bad *ghayra* is unwarranted jealousy. If used correctly, a man's *ghayra* will make him take good care of his family (*yusliḥ bihā l-raḥul ahlahu*) and is, accordingly, beneficial for the whole community. Unwarranted jealousy, on the other hand, can negatively affect good women.²⁴

Some scholars take this reasoning a step further and censure or even condemn men who do not possess *ghayra*. The Iraqi *ḥadīth* scholar and historian Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) and the Shiite *ḥadīth* scholar al-Kulaynī both report that the Prophet said, "All men are jealous, except those with twisted hearts."²⁵ According to another *ḥadīth*, quoted by al-Kulaynī on the authority of imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), God will remind a man who has reason to feel *ghayra* but does not, by sending a bird called al-Qafandar (*tā'iran yuqālu lahu l-qafandar*) that repeatedly will tell the man to be jealous, saying: "God is jealous (*ghayūr*) and loves those who are jealous."²⁶ If the man persists and will not show *ghayra*, he is considered to be a *dayyūth*, a man who knows

20 *Inna Allāha 'azza wa-jalla yaghāru fa-l-yaghar aḥadukum*: Kharā'itī, *I'tilāl*, 309, 310; Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, 2002; Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, III, 467; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, IV, 54; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā'*, 276-277; Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, V, 535 (stating that the protagonist of this tradition is imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca 116/734)).

21 *Ghayrat Allāh an ya'ti l-mu'min mā ḥarrama 'alayhi*: Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, III, 467; Kharā'itī, *I'tilāl*, 309.

22 *Laysa aḥadun aghyara min Allāhi ta'ālā min ajli dhālika ḥarrama l-fawāḥisha*; Kharā'itī, *I'tilāl*, 309. In Muḥammad al-Bāqir's version of the tradition it is rendered: *inna Allāha tabāraka wa-ta'ālā ghayūrun yuḥibbu kulla ghayūrin wa-li-ghayratihi ḥarrama l-fawāḥisha zāhirahā wa-bāṭinahā*; cf. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 323.

23 Or rather, *milk al-nikāḥ* (marriage) and *milk al-yamīn* (concubinage), which both ensure the husband's control over his wives'/concubines' sexual and reproductive capacity; cf. Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*.

24 Kharā'itī, *I'tilāl*, 310. According to Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, V, 537, it could "make the healthy among them sick." See also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā'*, 276.

25 Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, IV, 54, and al-Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, V, 536. For a different *ḥadīth* with the same meaning, see Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā'*, 275.

26 Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, V, 536. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is together with his father, the aforementioned Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the "first outstanding leaders" of Imāmī/ Ja'farī Shia; both are important authorities in al-Kulaynī's *Kitāb al-kāfī* (see Kohlberg, *Shī'ī Ḥadīth*). According

of his wife's infidelity and tolerates it; consequently, the angels will despise him and God will take away his spirit of faith (*rūḥ al-īmān*).²⁷ The austerity regarding this issue which al-Kulaynī refers to, is also found in the position of another "hardliner", the Andalusian Mālikī scholar 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/853): the *dayyūth* is an entirely faulty creature who will be condemned and deprived of Paradise. On the Day of Resurrection, God will not speak with the *dayyūth* who will, instead, be painfully punished (*'adhāb alīm*).²⁸ Apparently, the man who does not take his responsibility for maintaining the social order built on gender segregation and hierarchy, is one of the worst threats against this order.

Additionally, as al-Kulaynī and others point out, causes for *ghayra* are not confined to infidelity. It is bad enough that women walk on the road and visit the market, thus mingling amongst men; they should preferably not leave the house at all. In this respect, Ibn Abī Shayba quotes a saying by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb exhorting men to keep their women "naked" (*ista'īnū 'alā l-nisā' bi-l-ury*), that is, stripped from adornment, because "if a woman has many garments and beautiful finery, she is bound to go out."²⁹

Women and *Ghayra*

If *ghayra* can be identified as a manly virtue, it would be reasonable for women to prefer jealous men. And some of them did, with excellent results. Muḥammad b. Sa'd (d. 230/845), compiler of *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* and main biographer of the female companions of the Prophet (*ṣāḥibāt*), transmits an anecdote about the marriage of the parents of caliph Mu'āwīya, Hind bt. 'Utba, daughter of 'Utba b. Rabī'a, and Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, all from the Quraysh aristocracy in Mecca and initially hostile towards Muḥammad. Hind had insisted in choosing herself a husband, so her father singled out two men for her to choose between. The first man would be a tolerant husband letting his wife govern, whereas the other would demand absolute obedience, being "fiercely jealous" (*shadīd*

to a subsequent *ḥadīth*, al-Qafandar is a *shayṭān*; the same *ḥadīth* is also quoted in ps.-Jāḥiẓ, *Maḥāsīn*, 272, where the bird is called al-Qarqafanna (?).

27 Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, V, 537.

28 Ibid.; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā'*, 275.

29 Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 54; also in Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn*, IV, 77, where 'Umar advises: "Do not let your women stay in the upper rooms and do not teach them the Scripture. Take help from nakedness against them. Say 'no' to them frequently, as a 'yes' would urge them to continue asking." This *khabar* is elaborated in ps.-Jāḥiẓ, *Maḥāsīn*, 274-275. Ibn Qutayba and ps. Jāḥiẓ also provide a variant attributed to 'Aqil b. 'Ullafa; *Uyūn*, IV, 77; *Maḥāsīn*, 273.

al-ghayra), quick in suspicion and insisting on rigorous seclusion.”³⁰ Hind decided that the latter, who turned out to be Abū Sufyān, would befit a noble, free woman and predicted that their son-to-be would become a “worthy protector of the clan’s women, defender of its troops, preserver of its rights, adorning them with grounds of respect.” Indeed, their son Mu‘āwiya became the first Umayyad caliph. Although this narrative is about pre-Islamic codes of behavior, the outcome of the marriage was an Islamic leader, indicating that manly *ghayra* was well worth keeping.³¹

Some scholars take this idea a step further and quote a *ḥadīth* asserting that enduring *ghayra* is women’s jihad.³² If women endure their husbands’ *ghayra*, and whatever suffering it may cause, such as restrictions and violence, they will be rewarded in the hereafter. In a Shiite *ḥadīth* attributed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and quoted by al-Kulaynī, Ja‘far advises a man who praises his wife to test her by behaving jealous for her, which probably would involve a certain amount of violence.³³ If she is able to endure his *ghayra* and remains virtuous, she is really worthy of his praise.

Women’s *ghayra* seems to be wholly fruitless and for some *ḥadīth* scholars it is even hard to believe that women would be capable of real *ghayra*. Others, like al-Kharā‘īṭī and Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (194/810-256/870), have no doubt whatsoever: there are too many stories about the jealousy of the Prophet’s wives to think otherwise. They refer to *ḥadīths* in which the Prophet’s response to jealousy is usually considerate, even compassionate. In one such *ḥadīth*, an unnamed wife offers the Prophet a pot of food while he is in another wife’s house. The wife in whose house he is becomes instantly jealous and throws the pot on the floor. The Prophet quietly picks up the food saying to the people present: “Eat, your mother is jealous (*ghārat*),” so as to excuse her behavior.³⁴ In yet another *ḥadīth*, ‘Ā’isha is jealous of her new co-wife, Ṣafiyya; when the Prophet notices this, he embraces her.³⁵ Moreover, the Prophet wants to protect his own daughter from rival wives when he refuses Banū

30 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VIII, 170-171.

31 There are examples from later eras as well of women preferring jealous men, like the woman who complains to Salm b. Qutayba, son of the Umayyad governor of Khurasān, about her husband having “little *ghayra*”; cf. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Iqd.* VI, 115.

32 Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, V, 9, 507; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā’*, 277.

33 Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, V, 505.

34 Kharā‘īṭī, *I’tilāl*, 311; Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, 2003. The wives of the Prophet were given the honorific title *ummahāt al-mu‘minīn*, “Mothers of the believers,” in Q 33:6; see Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*.

35 Kharā‘īṭī, *I’tilāl*, 311.

Hishām b. al-Mughīra to give their daughter in marriage to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who at the time had Fāṭima as his sole wife.³⁶

Jealousy even caused the Prophet’s wives to take recourse to trickery and quarrels, as Ibn Sa’d reports. Although he tends to portray ‘Ā’isha as a pious example,³⁷ she seems to have been particularly prone to intriguing because of her jealousy toward (potential) co-wives whose beauty attracted the attention of the Prophet.³⁸ This motif generates a number of lively and entertaining narratives, of which the story of the honey stands out. When one of the wives thinks of giving her husband honey to make him stay longer with her than with the other wives, ‘Ā’isha becomes jealous and — depending on which story one follows — she conspires with either Ḥafṣa or Ḥafṣa and Salwā in order to prevent the Prophet from eating the honey. In at least one variant of the story her tricks are successful.³⁹ Al-Bukhārī even elevates ‘Ā’isha’s *ghayra* to a higher level by mentioning that the wife she is most jealous of is Khadija, because the Prophet used to praise her and it was revealed that she had been given a palace in Paradise.⁴⁰

‘Ā’isha is not the only jealous wife of the Prophet, as is evidenced by Umm Salama who objects to the Prophet’s marriage proposal saying that she is “fiercely jealous” (*shadīd al-ghayra*) and as such unsuitable as a wife since he already had several wives.⁴¹ The Prophet’s answer, that God will remove her jealousy, positions women’s *ghayra* opposite men’s in the divine order, but, significantly, it did not hinder him from marrying a jealous woman to begin with and it did not diminish her standing with him either. Moreover, Umm Salama was not ashamed of admitting that she was a jealous woman. At yet another occasion, related by Ibn Ḥabīb, the Prophet forgives a jealous woman who

36 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, 2004; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, II, 553-554.

37 Cf. the *tarjama* of ‘Ā’isha in Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VIII, 39-54.

38 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VIII: ‘Ā’isha is jealous (*ghayrā*) of Umm Salama when she sees her beauty (66). She is jealous of Māriya the Copt, because of her husband’s attraction to her and her beauty (153). She dislikes Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh and Juwayriya, whom she fears to be rivals due to their standing (72-73) and beauty (83). She also dislikes Ṣafiyya (90-91). She successfully plots to prevent Muḥammad from marrying Mulayka bt. Ka’b (106), and perhaps Asmā bt. al-Nu’mān as well (103).

39 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VIII 59, 79, 122-123; the narratives additionally give Ibn Sa’d the opportunity to emphasize the Prophet’s tolerance for his wives’ flaws.

40 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, 2004.

41 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VIII, 63 (a variant of the story on p. 62). Umm Salama becomes jealous (*ghārat*) when Muḥammad (unintentionally) talks to Ṣafiyya on Umm Salama’s day. She accuses her husband for this, slandering Ṣafiyya, but asks him later for forgiveness because she was driven by *ghayra* (ibid., 67).

behaves inappropriately, as “a jealous woman (*ghayrā*)” cannot tell the difference between the top of the valley and the bottom.”⁴²

A different stance is taken by al-Kulaynī, who, as a Shiite, would not feel obliged to take *akhbār* about the Prophet’s wives into consideration. Instead, he condemns women who have *ghayra* as much as he censures men who have not. The emotion of *ghayra*, he asserts, is for men; women’s jealousy is *hasad*, “envy,” a word with negative connotations.⁴³ God gave *ghayra* to men, since he allows them four wives and as many concubines as they want, whereas women can only have one husband.⁴⁴

Jealousy According to al-Tawḥīdī and Miskawayh

Al-Hawāmil wa-l-shawāmil consists of 175 discussions between Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh on philosophical as well as scientific subjects; number 95 is on *ghayra*. The book was written when the two philosophers were at the court of the Būyid vizier Ibn al-‘Amīd in Rayy, probably between 358/969 and 360/971.⁴⁵ Al-Tawḥīdī attempted to obtain a position at court, but to no avail; Miskawayh was in charge of Ibn al-‘Amīd’s library.⁴⁶ Al-Tawḥīdī was a respected Shāfi‘ī jurist and most likely aware of the general interpretation amongst *ḥadīth* scholars of *ghayra* as a manly virtue.⁴⁷ All the same, he seems to approach the topic without prejudices. According to Gharaozlou and Negahban, he is one of those philosophers “who employed an unfettered intellect to find answers to their problems” and at the same time able to bring “philosophy down to the level of his readers’ understanding.”⁴⁸ Miskawayh was an established historian and philosopher, especially influential in the field of philosophical ethics.⁴⁹ When exchanging questions and answers in *Hawāmil*, the two scholars use “autonomous reason” as

42 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Adab al-nisā*, 277; the expression is also found in Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 505.

43 The word *hasad* is used a few times in the Qur’an with negative connotations; see Khan, *Envy*.

44 Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 505. Al-Nasā‘ī (Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ sunan al-Nasā‘ī*, 69) claims that the Prophet advised the Muslims not to marry jealous women (i.e. from the Anṣār).

45 Gharaozlou and Negahban, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī; Rowson, al-Tawḥīdī, 760-761.

46 Gharaozlou and Negahban, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī; see also Emami and Umar, Abū ‘Alī Miskawayh.

47 Gharaozlou and Negahban, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī.

48 Ibid.

49 Emami and Umar, Abū ‘Alī.

contrasted to “religious reason,” as Arkoun puts it.⁵⁰ It is therefore all the more interesting to compare their discussion of *ghayra* with the *ḥadīth* scholars’ stance on the topic as we have just seen.

Al-Tawḥīdī directly addresses the issue posing questions like why women’s *ghayra* is fiercer than that of men. Just like in the *ḥadīth* reports, the gendered qualities of *ghayra* are immediately put to the fore. The question, which may be derived from al-Tawḥīdī’s own observation, is promptly refuted by Miskawayh. Al-Tawḥīdī furthermore displays a very negative view on jealousy as “damaging the souls,” apparently without separating women’s jealousy from men’s in this regard, a view that is again rebutted by Miskawayh.⁵¹ Moreover, al-Tawḥīdī asks about the essence (*ḥaqīqa*) of *ghayra*, its origin and distinct features, and whether it is to be considered as praiseworthy or reprehensible.

As just mentioned, Miskawayh does not agree that women’s *ghayra* is fiercer than that of men; on the contrary, men may sometimes have stronger *ghayra* than women.⁵² Nevertheless, both its manifestation and ethical value is gendered, according to Miskawayh, taking his cue from *ḥadīth* scholars without, however, referring to a divine order. The essence of *ghayra* is guarding the women in the household (*manʿ al-ḥarīm*) and protecting one’s possessions (*ḥimāyat al-ḥawza*) in order to preserve the progeny and lineage.⁵³ Accordingly, Miskawayh’s philosophical reasoning ends up at the same position as that of the *ḥadīth* scholars: he identifies a good and bad type of jealousy and echoes those who maintain that it is neither commendable to be jealous when it is not appropriate, nor to desist when there are obvious signs of misconduct. Whereas good *ghayra* is there to secure the patrilineal society, bad *ghayra* emanates from erotic desire (*shahwa*) and the wish to have exclusive possession of a person — legally or illegally — rather than from a man’s wish to secure his lineage. And just like male virtue, good *ghayra* can only be possessed by men.

Miskawayh diverts, however, from the *ḥadīth* discourses on jealousy in seeking evidence from nature and psychology. Jealousy is a natural and innate disposition (*khuluq ṭabīʿī*) of people and animals alike, and it is praiseworthy as long as it is neither exaggerated nor understated, in the same way as the other

⁵⁰ Arkoun, Miskawayh, 143.

⁵¹ Tawḥīdī, *Hawāmīl*, 235.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 237.

⁵³ That is, woman’s sexual and reproductive capacity which is the man’s possession in marriage (*mulk al-nikāḥ*) and concubinage (*mulk al-yamīn*) needs to be protected; see Lane, *Lexicon*, ḥ-w-z. The property is the woman’s vulva (*farj*), “which is the property of her husband by the marriage-contract,” cf. al-Azhārī (d. 380/980), *Tahdhīb al-lughā*.

akhlāq.⁵⁴ Yet, jealousy is more relevant for males than for females because males are entitled to protect, and for that they need anger and courage which are its ingredients. Miskawayh ends his discussion with some ethical conclusions based on humans' view on animals.⁵⁵ Animals with little *ghayra* and whose males abstain from guarding the females, like dogs (*kalb*) and goats (*tays*), are despised by humans, whereas animals whose males jealously guard the females, like sheep (*kabsh*), are praised. Once again, *ghayra* is defined as a manly virtue, although with a more empirical set of arguments.

Jawāmi' al-Ladhdha: A Medical/Psychological Treatise on Ghayra

A less normative attitude is found in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* whose author, 'Alī b. Naṣr, apparently subscribes to the opinion that men's and women's *ghayra* are different, reporting that some (including himself?) believe that "men's jealousy is a sharpness of temper (*hidda*), whereas women's is a surplus of sexual desire (*shahwa*)."⁵⁶ These two kinds of *ghayra* might be compared with the good and bad jealousy as formulated by Miskawayh, but Ibn Naṣr does not provide any moral judgment of jealousy as to its causes and manifestations, only to its effects on the partner.

The chapter on *ghayra* in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* begins focusing on women's *ghayra*. "Women's pleasure," Ibn Naṣr states, "equals their desire and their jealousy equals their pleasure."⁵⁷ Excessive jealousy in a woman is a sign of excessive sexual appetite." He then relates that a scholar in the field of *'ilm al-bāh* ("sexology") had raised objections against what seems to be his own opinion, namely that women are more jealous than men. In this sexologist's view, men find it harder than women to endure rivals, because women are forced to tolerate living with co-wives and concubines in accordance with the *sharī'a*.⁵⁸ He furthermore argues that women's *ghayra* does not always stem from a surplus of sexual desire — for some women its reason is pride and for others possessiveness. Just like Miskawayh, this particular scholar refers to animals as an example, stating that females among animals like horses, camels and donkeys,

54 Tawhīdī, *Hawāmil*, 236.

55 Ibid., 237.

56 Ibn Naṣr, Aya Sofya 127a, Fatih 195b.

57 Ibn Naṣr, Aya Sofya 127a. In Fatih: "their jealousy equals their love," 195b.

58 For *'ilm al-bāh* (the science of coitus), see Franke, Before Scientia Sexualis in Islamic Culture. Franke gives an apt description of the medical *bāh*-tradition, even though I do not agree with his conclusions.

never seem to mind a new female in their flock, while males do not accept new males. These observations make him infer that *ghayra* is for males (*al-ghayra li-l-dhukūra*).⁵⁹

Although it is not always easy to distinguish between Ibn Naṣr's own views on the one hand and quotations on the other, the outcome is equally fascinating. One of the great merits of the book is the plurality of opinions — philosophical, medical, psychological — expressed through poetry, anecdotes and literary debates, and illustrated by numerous quotations from Greek, Indian, Persian and Arabic literature. In the chapter on *ghayra*, for example, Ibn Naṣr relies in part on an ancient Greek physician, probably Aretaeus of Cappadocia (fl. first century CE?), citing a text that does not seem to have survived elsewhere.⁶⁰ Jealousy is explained by Aretaeus from a perspective that is at variance with all other attitudes thus far described: in his view, jealousy is a sign of mutual love. To be sure, just like several other scholars mentioned earlier, he warns against excessive jealousy, since it violates the partner. Unlike the others, however, he recommends medicine to cure the root of jealousy, which he sees in the partner's attraction to someone else:

Aretaeus [Arṭiyās] al-Rūmī wrote:⁶¹ The reasons of *ghayra* are various. Among them are possessiveness (*naḡāsa*); a man being greedy for a woman, wanting her for himself, and a woman wanting a man for herself.⁶² Whenever their jealousy grows stronger, it is one of the signs of affection between them and of their desire to be together. It is necessary, however, to restrain excessive [jealousy] because it stops being praiseworthy and enters the realm of evil thoughts. In this state, one is no longer concerned about the partner or the distress and ruin [the humiliation

59 Ibn Naṣr, Aya Sofya 127b. These two words are missing in Fatih 196a.

60 I am not able to evaluate the authenticity of this text. The Arabic rendering of Aretaeus' name is Arṭiyās al-Rūmī; I am most grateful to Professor Lena Ambjörn for helping me and suggesting this name. Aretaeus/Aretaïos was a Greek Hippocratic physician (see Nutton, Aretaeus); according to Ullmann (*Islamic Medicine*, 15), Aretaeus' main work, *De causis et signis morborum acutorum et chronicorum*, was not translated into Arabic and not well-known at the time.

61 Ibn Naṣr, AS 3837 129a, Fatih 196b. In a previous chapter, Ibn Naṣr cites a book, attributed to "Arṭiyās al-Rūmī" on female and male ejaculation, among other things; Fatih 191a; in AS 3837 116b: Arštās (?).

62 The word used for "greedy" is *ḡann*, stinginess. The caliph al-Ma'mūn is said to have expressed something similar: "Jealousy is brutishness (*bahimīyya*)... [and] a type of greed (*bukhl*); Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn*, IV, 78.

and harm]⁶³ one inflicts upon the other. At that moment jealousy increases.⁶⁴ It may be cured by mixing the brain (*dimāgh*) of a female rabbit (*arnab unthā*) with a beverage [or something else]⁶⁵ without the woman knowing; or by mixing millstone dust from barley flour (*ghubār daqīq shaʿīr al-raḥā*) with rain water and letting her drink this; or mixing the gall of a wolf (*marārat al-dhiʿb*) with honey and letting her drink this. [...] He wrote: If you are content with a woman and so is she with you, if you are pleased with her and so is she with you, and you do not want anyone else to have a relation with her, then use what we have mentioned. Beware of using it if you eventually want to separate from her or sell her if she is a slave; likewise, do not give it to a woman with whom you want to have pleasure and then dismiss, because if you give this treatment to such women, you are committing a sin.⁶⁶

The quotation addresses men, but the Aya Sofya manuscript adds that women often treat men with these same remedies. Nonetheless, in this context, the harm caused by *ghayra* is entirely between two individuals and has nothing to do with male virtue or the man's wish to secure his lineage. Excessive jealousy hurts a relationship bound by affection and damages beloved ones. Here, *ghayra* is a psychological emotion more than a cultural practice. The remedy will eventually make the woman be attracted to the man so that she stays faithful to him. In this fashion, the man eliminates the sources for his jealousy, namely his beloved's attraction to his rivals.

Ibn Naṣr also presents medical formulas for improving the pleasure of sexual intercourse with the same effect. The man can cover his penis with, for instance, good oil, blood from the crest of a rooster, or blood from a billy goat, and then have sexual intercourse with the woman of his choice. Ibn Naṣr informs us about antidotes to these treatments as well, should the man change his mind about the woman. Finally, Ibn Naṣr presents recipes for "the magic properties" (*al-khawāṣṣ*) that make a woman refuse other men, or even all men.⁶⁷ The recipes call for ingredients associated with potency, such as

63 Omitted in Fatih.

64 Fatih: *takthur*; AS 3837: *taḥduth*.

65 Omitted in Fatih.

66 Ibn Naṣr, AS 3837 129a-129b, Fatih 196b-197a.

67 Ibn Naṣr, AS 3837, 130a-131a. For *khawāṣṣ*, see Ullmann, Khāṣṣa. Ibn Naṣr's formulas are not exactly erotic spells, although they sometimes come very close. Erotic spells in Greek magic often targeted women; see Faraone, *Love Magic*, 43, n. 9. Faraone counted up to

testicles and penises of hyenas, wolves, oxen, and other animals. These may be mixed with diverse substances and ingested or rubbed on the penis before intercourse. Whether these remedies or their antidotes were actually ever applied remains uncertain; the odd ingredients might have been readily available at the market, but the procedure of rubbing a penis with the gall of a wolf does seem rather insurmountable.⁶⁸

The mere attempt to find a medical solution, instead of violence and segregation, is in line with the philosophy of *Jawāmiʿ*. Unlike al-Kharāʾiṭī and some other *ḥadīth* scholars, Ibn Naṣr never suggests violence or threat of violence as an acceptable manly behavior. It is not sophisticated for a *ẓarīf*, a “man of the world,” to behave in such a manner; a man is either beloved by women, or uses his knowledge to become so.⁶⁹ He may treat his woman behind her back and experiment with her desire, but in the end he does not force her; after his treatment, she simply will desire him. The only time Ibn Naṣr dwells upon a violent manly *ghayra* is to warn against it: men who take protected women as mistresses are bound to face it sooner or later.⁷⁰

Concluding Remarks

In *ḥadīth* literature, to possess manly *ghayra* means both to feel jealousy and to act upon it, i.e., to operate in keeping with the code of honorable conduct associated with *ghayra*. In practice, this means protecting the women of the household and preventing them from associating with men who are not immediate relatives. This definition of *ghayra* has not much to do with romantic jealousy. Moreover, it is more of a cultural practice than an innate emotion. Men’s jealous behavior is self-centered, urging them to protect their property from intruders, and at the same time self-sacrificing, regarded as beneficial for the community. In this context, women’s *ghayra* is out of place. It is not beneficial, since the woman has no one to defend, and it would thus be only selfish.

69 spells targeting women out of 81 published erotic spells, while nine targeting men, one of these homoerotic.

68 For odd ingredients in magical remedies, see LiDonnici, Beans, 362f.

69 *Ẓarf*, refinement and elegance, was highly esteemed in literary Abbasid culture. For an excellent and concise overview of the concept *ẓarīf*, the person endowed with *ẓarf*, see Montgomery, *Ẓarīf*, and the literature recommended there. For Ibn Naṣr, sexual refinement is important for the *ẓarīf*— he promises in the introduction to *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* that it will provide the *ẓarīf* with what he needs to know about sex; AS 3836 2a.

70 Ibn Naṣr, AS 3836 fol. 58bff.

Women may be jealous, but they should preferably try to dispense with this emotion; they should not let jealousy influence their behavior. If they do, however, several *ḥadīth* scholars urge men to show compassion.

As to philosophical and medical/psychological attitudes towards jealousy, both al-Tawḥīdī and Ibn Naṣr seem to have observed that women are more jealous than men. For al-Tawḥīdī, it is a hypothesis — or a personal preoccupation derived from his own observations — which is at once dismissed by Miskawayh, who is the authority in *al-Hawāmil*. Perhaps, the actual question here is: Why is it that women are jealous when jealousy is regarded as a property of men and a manly virtue? Miskawayh's answer is brief; he is not really interested in women's jealousy. Men's *ghayra*, on the other hand, has a natural purpose and an ethical dimension. It is there to defend the family and secure the patrilineal society. He attempts to prove this with observations on animals (some animals possess *ghayra*, some do not) combined with morals (we praise the animals that possess *ghayra* and despise those which do not). He seems to target scholars such as Ibn Naṣr when he criticizes the association of jealousy with sexual desire.

Ibn Naṣr, on the other hand, provides the only view that considers the love relationship, regardless of its legal status, and the effects jealousy has on it. He seems to adhere to the understanding of jealousy as a subjective emotion. Whereas *ḥadīth* scholars may urge men to carry out their *ghayra* so as to provide good examples, Ibn Naṣr advises men to secretly give their loved ones potions to satisfy their own selfish desire. Nevertheless, he is not devoid of an ethical standpoint, men are for example advised not to give their treatments to women who will eventually suffer from it. His ethics operate on an individual level. Moreover, women may give these remedies to men as well. Ibn Naṣr provides one psychological explanation as to how women's *ghayra* differs from men's — women's jealousy stems from sexual desire, that of men stems from temper — and one sociological — women possess less jealousy than men from being forced to live with co-wives. Finally, Miskawayh's view on *ghayra* has much in common with those of the *ḥadīth* scholars, while Ibn Naṣr's explanation is radically different, illustrating the exceptionally vibrant intellectual climate of the time.

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