THE GENDERING OF «DEATH»
IN KITĀB AL-'IQD AL-FARĪD*

EL GÉNERO DE LA «MUERTE»
EN EL KITĀB AL-'IQD AL-FARĪD

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This article studies a subsection of the *adab* compilation of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, namely "The Book of Lamentations, Condolences, and Elegies". The article analyzes *al-'Iqd*'s ideological function, specifically, the way gender is organized through the occasion of death. It locates what seems to be «repressed» in the text attempting to determine what material was ignored, buried, end edited, and how priorities were arranged. It is the contention of this article that *al-'Iqd*, as an exemplary text, not only reflects a dominant ideology, but contributes towards the dominant discourse by shaping mental and social life.

Key words: Islam; Death; Gender; Mourning; *al-'Iqd al-farīd*.

Este artículo estudia la sección de la recopilación de *adab* del *'Iqd al-farīd* de Ibn 'Abd Rabbih llamada "El Libro de Lamentaciones, Condolencias y Elegías". Se analiza la función ideológica del *'Iqd*, concretamente la manera en que se organiza el género con ocasión de la muerte. Localiza lo que parece haberse «reprimido» en el texto en un intento por determinar el material que fue pasado por alto, enterrado o alterado, y estudia la organización de sus prioridades. El artículo sostiene que el *'Iqd*, en su función de texto ejemplar, no se limita a reflejar una ideología dominante sino que hace una contribución al discurso dominante por su manera de dar forma a la vida intelectual y social.

Palabras clave: islam; muerte; género; luto; *al-'Iqd al-farīd*.

Women's Roles in «Death»

A subsection in the fourth/tenth century *adab* anthology *al-'Iqd al-farīd* (the Unique Necklace) entitled "Concerning the love of children", includes an anecdote in praise of girls: 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ

visited Muʿāwiya who was with his daughter ʿĀʾisha. «He asked: who is she, Commander of the Faithful?» He answered: «this is the apple of my eye. ʿAmr said: turn away from her, for by God, they beget enemies, welcome your opponents and bequeath hatred. Muʿāwiya said: Do not say such things, O ʿAmr, for by God, it is women who nurse the sick, lament the dead and relieve sadness».[1] In this anecdote, women's role in lamenting the dead is brought to the fore. Women mourn the dead, providing relief and sustaining the memory of the deceased.

It has been argued that the gendered division of labor extends into the sphere of emotions so that in many societies, the greater grief expressed by women suggests not just that they feel more, but that they are required to mourn on behalf of men, ritually expressing men's grief as well as their own. «The custom of mourning presses far more heavily on women than on men […] they (men) positively manage to mourn by proxy […]».[2] Women's particular role in death is similarly underlined in the following anecdote in the compilation of the philologist al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) where the main protagonist, a woman who has eight brothers, is warned that she will have to play the quintessential role of mourning:

> My mother told me: An old woman called Bādiya visited us. The saddles of my eight brothers were next to the house. She asked: To whom do these saddles belong? Do you have guests tonight? I said: these are the saddles of my brothers. She said: By giving birth to your eight brothers, your mother left you with a long strand of mourning. [My mother said]: and yes, Bādiya was right for I cried my soul piecemeal over them.[3]

That responses to death were gendered in Islam is reflected in *iḥdād*, mourning practices allowable for, or incumbent upon women (only); *niyāḥa* (lamentation), and *marāthī* (poetic elegies). The law of mourning is based primarily on the following *ḥadīth*: «It is not permitted for a woman who believes in God and the last day to be in mourning more than three days except for her husband, whom she mourns for four months and ten days». Ibn al-Jawzī explains

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[1] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, A. Amīn, A. al-Zayn and I. al-Abyārī (eds.), Cairo, 1940-1949, II, 438.

[2] Hockey, J., "Women in Grief: Cultural Representation and Social Practice", in *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*, D. Field *et al.* (eds.), London, 1997, 89-107.

[3] Al-Mubarrad, M., *Kitāb al-taʿāzī wa-l-marāthī*, M. al-Dibājī (ed.), Beirut, 1992, 238.

iḥdād as refraining from adornment, and generally from anything that may lead to sexual intercourse such as wearing jewelry, the use of perfumes, dye, henna, black kohl, colored cloths such as red, yellow, green and blue.[4] Islam assigned a place to the feminine element in the management of mourning; at the same time it tried to contain it.

Women were also heavily implicated in *niyāḥa*, lamentation, which was primarily a female occupation. In his medieval dictionary, Ibn Manẓūr describes *al-nawāʾiḥ* as the women who gather in a *manāḥa*, a gathering of women for the express purpose of grieving. In this dictionary *niyāḥa* is a specifically female activity. It is significant to point, however, that the most important *ḥadīth* compilations include traditions which condemn crying over the dead and extravagant shows of grief. The practice of *niyāḥa* was considered to be a legacy of paganism. Both the *Musnad* and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* include a tradition that states that «bewailing torments the dead in his tomb».[5] In Abū Dāwūd one tradition states that God's curse is on the *nāʾiḥa* and the listener, *al-mustamiʿa* (in the feminine form).[6] Two concerns preoccupied traditionists and jurisprudents: «the ideal ritual order» and «the role of women in society». Nevertheless, wailers continued their practice and the «Muslim tradition came to represent the rite of wailing not as a custom transformed or eradicated by Islam but as a pre-Islamic institution that had persisted stubbornly despite Islam».[7]

Women's role in death is similarly underlined in poetic elegies. The poetic genre of *marāthī*/elegies subsumes the overwhelming majority of women's compositions preserved in the classical canon of Arabic literary heritage.[8] The *rithāʾ* was in pre-Islamic Arabia re-

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[4] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb aḥkām al-nisāʾ*, Z. Ḥamdān (ed.), Beirut, 1989, 209.

[5] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, A.M. Shākir (ed.), Cairo, 1404, I # 180 and # 247, and al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Beirut, 1992, II, # 1286.

[6] Al-Khazrajī, Abū Yaḥyā, *Fatḥ al-ʿallām fī sharḥ al-islām bi aḥādith al-aḥkām*, A.ʿAwaḍ and A.ʿAbd al-Majīd (eds.), Beirut, 2000, 315. For further discussion on traditions relating to the female wailer see El Cheikh, N.M., "Mourning and the Role of the Nāʾiḥa", in *Identidades Marginales*, C. de la Puente (ed.), Madrid, 2003, 395-412.

[7] Halevi has shown that the struggle against wailing varied. Kufan and Medinan traditions, as well as Sunnī and Shīʿī ones, reveal divergent approaches, with the campaign against wailing being most intense in Kufa. In Halevi, L., "Wailing for the Dead: the Role of Women in Early Islamic Funerals", *Past and Present*, 183 (2004), 3-39.

[8] Burt, C.C., "al-Khansāʾ", in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 311: Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, M. Cooperson and S. Toorawa (eds.), Detroit, 2005, 256-261.

served for warriors killed in battle. Often composed by women, these poems immortalized the fallen hero, calling for vengeance as an act of purification to cleanse the tribe of disgrace and revitalize its kin by shedding enemy blood. Of the seventy known *jāhilī* poetesses, the vast majority wrote elegiac verse for those slain in battle.[9] According to Suzanne Stetkevych, women's restricted poetic domains reflects «the limited occasions upon which "free" women of the warrior class were allowed or required a public voice: the *niyāḥa*, lament for their adult menfolk, and *taḥrīḍ*, inciting their menfolk to battle».[10] Arabic poetry changed considerably after the rise of Islam, however, to reflect Islamic and individualistic interests.

Indeed, lamenting and grieving loss share an uneasy relationship with Islamic piety. Strong emotional reaction to death was condemned from the religious point of view since it implied a skeptical attitude toward the divine promise of eternal life and a preference for earthly values.[11] Instead, a Muslim's reaction to death should reflect steadfastness, *ṣabr*, and contentment with the divine decree. This change of conception was visible in the elegies of the early Islamic period. Reassurance for the fate of the eulogized and acceptance of God's decree took the place of anguish (*jazaʿ*) and wails (*walwala*).[12]

In what follows I wish to analyze a subsection of the *adab* compilation of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's (d. 328/940), *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, namely The *Kitāb al-durra fī l-nawādib wa-l-taʿāzī wa-l-marāthī*, "the Book

According to A. Jones, there were many women who turned to poetry to express their feelings at the death of a loved one although they had never ventured to try to compose poetry before, (Jones, A., *Early Arabic Poetry*, Oxford, 1992-6, I, 51).

[9] Homerin, Th.E., "A Bird Ascends the Night: Elegy and Immortality in Islam", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 58 (1990), 541-573. See also al-Sinjilāwī, I., *The Aṭlāl-Nasīb in Early Arabic Poetry*, Irbid, University of Yarmouk, 1999, 31-3.

[10] Stetkevych, S.P., "The Generous Eye/I and the Poetics of Redemption. An Elegy by al-Fāriʿah b. Shaddād al-Murriyah", in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James Bellamy*, M. Mir (ed.), Princeton, 1993, 85-105. In a footnote, Stetkevych suggests that the attribution of *rithāʾ* and *taḥrīḍ* to women may be a literary conceit, much of it having been composed by men.

[11] This is also reflected in the Christian position which upholds that a true Christian's grief should be measured and moderate. See Groeneveld, L., "Mourning, Heresy and Resurrection in the York Corpus Christi Cycle", *Response to Death, the Literary Work of Mourning*, C. Riegel (ed.), Edmonton, 2005, 1-21.

[12] Al-Niʿma, M., *al-Marāthī al-shiʿriyya fī ṣadr al-islām*, Beirut, 1997, 30. See also Welch, A.T., "Death and Dying in the Qurʾan", in *Religious Encounters with Death*, F.E. Reynolds and E.H. Waugh (eds.), London, 1973, 183-199.

of Lamentations, Condolences, and Elegies" (henceforth *Kitāb al-durra*). I am interested in *al-ʿIqd's* ideological function, specifically, the way gender is organized and represented in *Kitāb al-durra*. Texts such as *al-ʿIqd* frame paradigms which assist in defining values. Studying *al-ʿIqd* helps trace attitudes towards gender through the occasion of death and more specifically maps out some of the strategies that this text employs to signify gender difference and gender relations. Highlighting mourning and lamentation as one of the few places where women acquire a voice in the sources is one of the main aims of this article.[13]

Al-ʿIqd is one of several anthologies to include a substantial section on lamentation, condolences and elegies. Other *adab* texts incorporate such portions, most notably, al-Mubarrad's *Kitāb al-taʿāzī wa-l-marāthī*. A comparative approach between these texts would undoubtedly be most enriching in bringing in the widest possible material in circulation in this genre. However, in this article the focus is on *al-ʿIqd*, first, in order to bring out its richness and the many possible angles one can approach such texts; second, so that one may see the ways one compilation uses and re-uses material. The omissions and inclusions, the forms, connotations and silences of the text, can be used to discover how experience was formulated and how priorities were arranged. I approach this text with an eye to its participation in the period's gendered culture of grief asking the following questions: What sort of thinking does the text want to produce in order to establish or maintain certain authorities and structures? What possibilities of thinking are excluded from this text? What does it keep from sight? How are the teachings of Islam on the nature and ways of grieving reflected in *Kitāb al-durra*? And how is this material gendered given the religious and cultural restraints that surrounded the emotional work around death, be it grieving, lamenting, or the reciting of elegies?[14]

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[13] Lila Abu Lughod has pointed that while lamentation and mourning by women is common in the Muslim world, the genre has received scarce attention both in medieval and modern studies, (Abu Lughod, L., "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death", *IJMES*, 25 (1993), 187-205.

[14] For such an approach see Fonrobert, C.E., *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender*, Stanford, 2000, 8.

Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd

Al-ʿIqd al-farīd is a comprehensive *adab* work. In the words of
one scholar, it is «perhaps the best compendium of *adab* ever writ-
ten»;[15] another scholar talks about it as a «quasi-canonical» compi-
lation.[16] Although the composer/compiler was born in Cordova, the
anthology is based on Eastern sources, notably, the works of Ibn al-
Muqaffaʿ, al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Qutayba, al-Mubarrad, and others. Indeed,
this encyclopedia contains practically no tradition of Andalusian or-
igin.[17] As El-Eryan notes, the *ʿIqd* does not respond to a concrete
epoch or geographical zone, but is tributary of oriental motifs.[18]
Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih informs his readers that «these are entertaining
stories, pieces of wisdom and anecdotes…»[19] that relate to a whole
variety of subjects. This famous anthology, like other similar *adab*
works, purports to include the «best» of what had been said in the
form of verse, prose, aphorism and anecdotes on every conceivable
subject which an educated man, an *adīb* was expected to know. Like
similar *adab* anthologies, it is an intertextually rich anecdotal litera-
ture, designed to be didactic and entertaining.[20]

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[15] A. Chejne also says that Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih brought together the choicest of materi-
als from the leading works of his predecessors, adding to it an excellent organization and
a coherent treatment (Chejne, A., *Muslim Spain: its History and Culture*, Minneapolis,
1974, 202-3 and 208-9).

[16] Al-Azmeh, A., *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and
Pagan Politics*, London, 1997, 93.

[17] See Jabbūr, J., *Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih wa ʿIqduh*, Beirut, 1979. According to P. Heath,
since the fund of knowledge was mostly obtained from the East, *al-ʿIqd* did not enjoy
the prestige and sense of authenticity among Andalusis (Heath, P., "Knowledge", *The
Literature of al-Andalus*, M.R. Menocal *et al.* (eds.), Cambridge, 2000, 109). However,
there is Andalusi material in this compilation, most notably, the more than one thousand
verses composed by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, verses by other Andalusi poets, in addition to
the compiler's carefully written introductions to each one of the books that constitute
al-ʿIqd.

[18] El-Eryan, H.M., "Las mujeres y el matrimonio en *el Kitāb al-ʿiqd al-farīd* de Ibn
ʿAbd Rabbihi al-Andalusī", *Sharq al-Andalus*, 10-11 (1993-4), 313-323.

[19] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, I, 4.

[20] See Gabrieli, F., "Adab", *EI²*, Leiden, Brill, 1960, 1, 176-7; Bonebakker, S.A.,
"Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres", in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Litera-
ture: Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, J. Ashtiani *et al.* (eds.), Cambridge, 1990, 16-30; F. Malti-
Douglas has stated that the term *adab* has caused «more ink to be spilled than perhaps
any other word in the history of Arabic literary criticism» (Malti-Douglas, F., "Playing
with the Sacred: Religious Intertext in *Adab* Discourse", in *Power, Marginality, and the
Body in Medieval Islam*, Aldershot, 2001, XIII).

Organized into books and chapters, the material deals with a wide range of problems of language, literature, and ethical and practical behavior. For each subject, the compiler collected a number of anecdotes and extracts of poetry or proverbs encompassing basic cultural knowledge. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih ordered his 25 chapters by theme, and within each, placed the selected passages in «a descending epistemological hierarchy of Koranic verses, traditions, philosophers' sayings, historical *akhbār*, and poetic quotes…»[21] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih chose what to include, with great care, selecting elements out of accounts, models and traditions.

Adab texts have generally been presented as a written reconstruction of a pre-existing oral construct. Moreover, this literature is seen as a literature of repetition and compilation, one that lacks originality and where the personality, inventiveness and subjectivity of the author are absent. While it is true that *adab* attempts to reconstruct values, the originality of a particular text exists precisely in the choice of the reproduced passages, in their arrangement, their nuanced re-writing and in the new contexts where they are inserted.[22] Composed mostly of reported discourse, the artistic responsibility of the author/compiler centers on the selection, presentation, and arrangement of the material.[23] The act of compiling was itself an act of composition, which while disclaiming originality, nevertheless bears the mark of the compiler's shaping hand.[24] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih operated with a set of religious, theological and philosophical assumptions and a literary tradition from which he drew his understanding and which directed his inquiry and molded his views. He selected and/or summarized anecdotes, maxims, proverbs and verses that relate to a whole variety of subjects. This was no easy task as he himself submits that «selecting the texts is more difficult

[21] Gruendler, B., "Pardon those who Love Passionately: A Theologian's Endorsement of Shahādāt al-ʿIshq", in *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, F. Pannewick (ed.), Wiesbaden, 2004, 189-236.

[22] Cheikh-Moussa, A., Toelle, H. and Zacharia, K., "Pour une relecture des textes littéraires arabes: éléments de réflexion", *Arabica*, 46 (1999), 523-540.

[23] Malti-Douglas, F., *Structure of Avarice: the Bukhalāʾ in Medieval Arabic Literature*, Leiden, 1985, 16.

[24] Summit, J., "Women and Authorship", in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, C. Dinshaw and D. Wallace (eds.), Cambridge, 2003, 91-108.

than composing them».[25] He does not include chains of authorities, thus transforming the texts into timeless sayings suitable for usage in different contexts and circumstances.[26]

Kitāb al-durra fi l-nawādib wa-l-taʿāzī wa-l-marāthī

This article uses the edition of the *ʾIqd* by Amīn, al-Zayn and al-Abyārī. *Kitāb al-durra* is included in volume three (pages 228 to 311). It runs into two major sections as follows:

I.1. Introduction (p. 228)
I.2. Last words (pp. 228-233)
I.3. Apprehension at the moment of death (pp. 233-234)
I.4. Crying over the dead (pp. 234-236)
I.5. Utterances by the grave (pp. 236-237)
I.6. Standing by the graves and praising the deceased (pp. 237-244)
II. Elegiac poetry
II.1. Self-lament and those who described their grave, and wrote their own epitaph (pp. 244-250)
II.2. Lament of one's son (pp. 250-262)
II.3. Lament of one's brother (pp. 262-277)
II.4. Lament of one's husband (pp. 277-278)
II.5. Lament of one's slave-girl (pp. 279-282)
II.6. Lament of one's daughter (pp. 282-284)
II.7. Lament of nobles (pp. 284-303)
II.8. Condolences (pp. 303-307)
II.9. Royal condolences (pp. 307-311)

The introductory paragraph of *Kitāb al-durra* delineates the task at hand: the compiler wishes to include the most eloquent utterances concerning lamentations, poetic elegies, and consolations.[27] In this passage, mourning death appears to be a specifically female occupa-

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[25] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʾIqd*, I, 3.
[26] ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, K., *Fī tashrīḥ uṣūl al-istibdād: qirāʾa fī niẓām al-istibdād*, Beirut, 1999, 97. See also Khalidi, T., *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge, 1996, 100.
[27] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʾIqd*, III, 228.

tion as Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih mentions two main types of female mourners (*nawādib*): One (*nādiba*) is able to instill sadness and to provoke strong emotions. The effect is heart rending. The other type is the one who muffles her sobs calling for patience and resignation. He goes on to distinguish between a truly bereaved person and a hired *nāʾiḥa* (professional mourner). This is underlined in an anecdote involving ʿUmar b. al-Dharr who asked his father: «What is it with people that whenever you preach they cry, and when others preach they don't cry?» The father answered: «the bereaved *nāʾiḥa* is not like the hired *nāʾiḥa*».[28]

The subsections I.2, I.4, I.6 are dotted with female figures by the deathbeds of the dying, crying over the dead, standing by their graves, and praising them. The presence of women in subsection I.2 on «Last words» is connected to their presence in intimate proximity to the event of death and it is that proximity which partly explains their presence in this and other sections of *Kitāb al-durra*. This subsection includes an anecdote about Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, by her dying father. ʿĀʾisha, wife of the Prophet, reports that Fāṭima visited her dying father who

> whispered to her, so she cried; he whispered to her again, and she laughed; so I [ʿĀʾisha] said to myself : I used to think that Fāṭima has precedence over women but she revealed herself to be one of them, since she cries while she laughs. When the Prophet died I asked her [about her behavior] and she answered: He whispered to me that he is dying, so I cried; and then he whispered to me that I am the first of his house to follow him, and so I laughed.[29]

This anecdote is immediately followed by two anecdotes which involve ʿĀʾisha and her dying father, Caliph Abū Bakr. She hears his last words and last wishes.[30] These women's proximity to the dying allowed them to communicate the dying men's last words, affording these women a measure of power as the holders of private information which they could disclose in ways that may have important effects on the family and the community. Women could also manipulate the information about the gravity of the dying man's condition. The most famous Islamic example is precisely that of ʿĀʾisha, in whose room the Prophet chose to spend his last hours.

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[28] *Ibid.*, III, 228.
[29] *Ibid.*, III, 231.
[30] *Ibid.*, III, 231-2.

The political implications of her proximity to the dying Prophet has been noted as having had bearings on the matter of succession, and more specifically on the nomination of her father Abū Bakr as the first caliph.[31]

Subsection I.4 entitled "Crying over the dead" includes three traditions relating to the Prophet Muḥammad. In the first tradition, he is seen crying over his dead son Ibrāhīm and is asked about his crying. The prophet answered: «The eyes become tearful and the heart is saddened but we say only what is agreeable to God».[32] The next tradition has the Companion ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb rebuking women of the Anṣār for crying over a dead man. The Prophet told him: «Leave them O, ʿUmar, the soul is stricken and the eye is tearful, and the fulfillment of the promise is close at hand».[33] The last tradition in this series takes place following the battle of Uḥud, when the Prophet heard the sound of weeping and wailing over the dead. The Prophet said: «but there are no women weeping for Ḥamza! […] The people of Madīna heard that and from then on, no funeral ceremony took place which did not begin with the women weeping for Ḥamza».[34] The inherent tension between the need to mourn and lament the dead, on the one hand, and the proper Islamic attitude towards death, on the other, is reflected in these traditions. The Prophet makes a distinction between weeping and lamenting, *bukāʾ* and *niyāḥa*. Grief and sorrow for the loss of a relative can be expressed as the Prophet himself did when his son Ibrāhīm died. The early *Musnad* of Abū Dawūd includes the following tradition which distinguishes between *niyāḥa* and *bukāʾ*: «He [the Prophet] permitted singing during weddings and also weeping (*bukāʾ*) over the dead without lamenting (*niyāḥa*)».[35]

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[31] Spellberg, D.A., *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ʾAʾisha bint Abi Bakr*, New York, 1994, 38-9.

[32] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 234; also in al-Mubarrad, *al-Taʿāzī*, 11.

[33] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 234-235.

[34] *Ibid.*, III, 234-5. The seeming contradiction between the Prophet's personal demand to lament Ḥamza and his general injunctions against lamentations produced the following *ḥadīth*: «Every *nāʾiḥa* is in hell except for the *nāʾiḥa* of Ḥamza». Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Madkhal*, Beirut, 1972, III, 245.

[35] Abū Dawūd, *Musnad*, Haydarabad, 1321, 169, 1221. Fedwa Malti-Douglas has pointed to the consistent presence in *adab* works of religious materials, which in the majority of cases, are presented in a manner consistent with the way they would be used in religious works. This is clearly the case here (Malti-Douglas, "Playing with the Sacred").

In either case, whether lamenting or weeping, it is women who are in charge of performing the acts of grief. Mourning is mostly women's work and female lamentation a group activity in which a community of women join together to mourn. As such, it is a discursive community whose characteristic ways of mourning are specific to the sex of its members and to their task.[36] By inserting these traditions in *Kitāb al-durra*, the text was fulfilling an instructive function about who and how was one to mourn for the dead. The material warns of the dangers of excessive grief and of the importance of learning and applying the proper ways of carrying out the work of mourning. The work of mourning is, indeed, connected with the proper expression and understanding of faith.

Subsection I.6 entitled "Standing by the graves and praising the deceased" is a relatively long section. The second anecdote refers to Fāṭima standing by the grave of her father the Prophet and uttering the following verses: «Our loss is like the earth's loss of its rain; since you left we have been deprived of revelation and books».[37] The real loss was the loss of revelation. The pious Muslim had nothing to fear from death. Without wishing for it, it was his or her duty to accept death with serenity as a prelude to a new life.[38] Fāṭima is said to have asked Anas b. Mālik after the burial of the Prophet:

> How did you have it in you to throw sand over the face of the messenger of God! She then cried and called out: Oh father, he answered his Lord's call! Oh father, how close to his Lord he is! Of father, he is one whose Lord called him! Oh father, to Gabriel, we bewail him! Oh father, paradise is his abode! Then she fell silent.[39]

This section also includes a reference to the wife of the Prophet's grandson, Ḥasan b. ʿAlī who pitched a tent by the grave of her husband and stayed on for a while.[40] Another anecdote concerns

[36] Phillippy, P., "Introduction", *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England*, Cambridge, 2002, 15.

[37] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 238.

[38] Abdesselem, M., *Le thème de la mort dans la poésie arabe des origines à la fin du IIIème/IXème siècle*, Tunis, 1977, 164. This was emphasized also by Asmā' bint ʿUmays who stated: «We are neither crying over the Messenger of God nor are we shrieking over him but for the termination of revelation» (al-Mubarrad, *al-Taʿāzī*, 10).

[39] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 238.

[40] It seems to have been customary in pre-Islamic and very early Islamic era to erect a tent over the grave and spend some time there to show how difficult the leave-taking from

Nā'ila, wife of caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān. Fearing that her sorrow would fade away, Nā'ila broke her jaw in order to prevent herself from marrying another.[41] This subsection also includes an anecdote about two unnamed women by the grave of their respective fathers and another woman by the grave of her son.[42]

An exception contained in this section are two verses that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib recited by the grave of his wife Fāṭima. This is a unique occurrence in *Kitāb al-durra* as it constitutes the only occasion where a man is elegizing his wife, as will be discussed further below. Of course, the elegized wife is none other than Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet. But it is worth noting that of the other women attached to the sacred history of Islam, Fāṭima is the only one who benefits from any elegiac verses in *Kitāb al-durra*.

Subsections I.3 and I.5 entitled respectively "Apprehension at the Moment of Death" and "Utterances by the Grave" do not include any anecdotes featuring women. These are very short sections and the material includes men only, both as speakers and as subjects of mourning. Does this mean that men and women performed different roles in grief and mourning rituals? The other sections all include several anecdotes featuring women, both as speakers and/or as subjects, in addition to ample material featuring men in the same capacities. It is especially significant that subsection I.4 entitled "Crying over the dead" includes more anecdotes featuring women than men. The fact that women outnumber men in this particular section highlights crying for the dead as a female occupation. Since jurisprudents deemed wailing offensive as it comprised an act of complaining against the judgment of God and rebelling against His decree, where does this gender specific activity place women?[43]

the dead was for the survivors. Goldziher, I., "On the Veneration of the Dead in Paganism and Islam", *Muslim Studies*, S.M. Stern (ed.), New Brunswick, 2006, 209-238.
   [41] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 241-2.
   [42] *Ibid.*, III, 242-3.
   [43] Halevi, L., *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*, New York, 2007, 114-142.

Marāthī

The longest subsection in *Kitāb al-durra* is that on *marāthī*. Here, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih includes specimen of poetry in a descending order in terms of the deceased importance and consequence, starting with sons, and almost ending with daughters. This subsection on *marāthī* contains a relatively large number of elegiac verses by women. Indeed, medieval scholars identified *rithāʾ* as the principal domain for female poetic expression. There appears to have been a general belief that the *marāthī* of women poets displayed more intense feelings than those of their male counterparts. For the critic Ibn Rāshiq (d. 465/1064) women suffer painful emotions so much more quickly than men that they are «the most feeling creatures when tragedy strikes, in all matters of the heart;» and this is a good thing in literature because elegies are «only composed on the basis of deeply felt pain».[44] Another argument why *rithāʾ* dominates women's poetic experience in the *jāhiliyya* «explains the association as a discursive reflection of a social division of labor;» yet another suggestion is that women composed elegies because elsewhere they were silenced.[45]

The *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām confirms women's primary role in composing elegies in a story related about ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib —the paternal grandfather of the Prophet. Knowing that death was at hand, he summoned his six daughters and asked them to «compose elegies over me so that I may hear, prior to my death, what you are going to say».[46] In the chapter on condolences and consolation in his *Kitāb al-taʿāzī wa-l-marāthī*, al-Mubarrad declares his intention to select the gems of the *marāthī* poetry and begins his selection with verses composed by Layla al-Akhyaliyya, to her beloved Tawba b. al-Ḥumayyir. Layla transgressed poetical forms by mourning her lover, killed during one of his raids, in a number of elegies. Her transgression of composing love poetry in the guise of elegy reflects

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[44] Smoor, P., "Death, The Elusive Thief: The Classical Arabic Elegy", in *Hidden Futures*, J.M. Bremer *et al.* (eds.), Amsterdam, 1994, 151-176; Ibn Rāshiq, *al-ʿUmda*, M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamid (ed.), Cairo, 1964, II, 153.

[45] Hammond, M.L., *The Poetics of S/Exclusion: Women, Gender and the Classical Arabic Canon*, Ph. D. thesis, Columbia University, 2003, 93.

[46] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, M. al-Saqqā *et al.* (eds.), Beirut, n.d., I, 169-71.

the possibilities that the elegy could give women a subversive voice through which to evoke a whole range of feelings, authorizing and empowering women's speech.[47]

In her reading of female elegies in early modern Europe, Danielle Clark has pointed out that the recalling of a loved one, especially a son or a brother, «could provide an occasion for the female speaker to suggest her own agency.» However, because of its intrinsic formal and public nature, the elegy cannot be read as inscribing the «personal» feeling of a given person towards another, but rather reflects more complex perceptions of social and ideological roles. Indeed it is necessary to acknowledge the adherence to conventions found in such writing.[48]

Kitāb al-durra's section on *marāthī* includes many verses recited by women lamenting brothers, sons, and husbands. The women express their sorrow in words, praising the deceased, but most often focusing on the intolerability of separation. The grief of some is excessive as in the case of a woman from Hudhayl, who, having experienced at a young age the loss of her brothers and uncles in a plague, could not bear the death of her son, and died of grief. Another woman of the Banū Shaybān lost her son, father, husband, mother, paternal aunt and maternal aunt. The authenticity of her grief was such that she never again smiled or laughed.[49]

A significant number of the poems included in *al-ʿIqd's* chapter are *marāthī* lamenting lost sons. The section starts with a large number of verses (forty-seven) by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih himself lamenting the passing away of one of his sons.[50] Of the 28 authors of verses in this section, six are women, unnamed in every instance and referred to either as an *aʿrābiyya* (a bedouin woman), or, as «a woman belonging to the tribe so and so…» The only named woman

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[47] Al-Sajdi, D., "Trespassing the Male Domain: The Qaṣīdah of Layla al- Akhyaliyyah", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 31 (2000), 146. According to Kate Lilley, elegy is a mobile genre, «which upsets the putative divisions between high and low culture, literary and non-literary women, private and public, occasional and non-occasional writing» (Lilley, K., "True State Within: Women's Elegy 1640-1700", in *Women, Writing, History, 1640-1740*, Athens, Georgia, 1992, 72-92).

[48] Clarke, D., *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing*, Edinburgh, 2001, 167, 171-2.

[49] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 260.

[50] *Ibid.*, III, 250-3. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih has another set of verses lamenting another child: *al-ʿIqd*, III, 258.

is the Abbasid queen-mother Zubayda, who upon the death of her son, Caliph al-Amīn, at the hands of his half-brother, al-Maʾmūn, asked the poet Abū l-ʿAtāhiya to compose verses on her behalf for al-Maʾmūn.[51]

The verses voiced by women express the agony of separation, such as in the following lines by a mother upon the loss of her son:

> […] Wish your mother never conceived and never gave birth
> When I saw you inserted into the shroud
> […] I realized that after you I am not staying
> And how can a forearm that has been severed from the upper arm remain![52]

M. Abdesselem has pointed that the lamenting verses pertaining to sons have a lyrical tonality that distinctly marks them off from the rest of the lamentations, the loss of a son being more deeply felt than any other loss.[53]

While a very large number of elegiac verses, voiced by both fathers and mothers, lament sons, the subsection entitled "Lament of one's daughter" includes only one poem by the celebrated Abbasid poet al-Buḥturī concerning the deceased daughter of a member of the Banū Ḥumayd. Far from being a eulogy, al-Buḥturī's verses reject grieving over women because they are not useful in war. He quotes the verse of the Qurʾān: «Wealth and sons are the adornment of the present world»,[54] and stresses that girls are hence excluded from providing any adornment to this life. Al-Buḥturī reminds the father of the deceased that it was Eve who was responsible for the downfall of Adam. He goes on to deride the lamenting of daughters: «Upon my life! weakness is nothing but men crying over women».[55] As Shawqī Ḍayf has remarked, this poem's object does not seem to have been one of condolence as much as *hijāʾ* (satire) against women.[56]

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[51] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 261.
[52] *Ibid.*, III, 259.
[53] Abdesselem, *Le thème de la mort*, 233.
[54] *Qurʾān*, XVIII: 46.
[55] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 277-284. On Eve in the Qurʾān, see Smith, J. and Haddad, Y., "Eve, Islamic Image of Women", *Women and Islam*, A. al-Hibri (ed.), Oxford, 1982, 135-144; and Spellberg, D.A., "Writing the Unwritten Life of Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood", *IJMES*, 28 (1996), 305-324.
[56] Shawqī Ḍayf has also pointed concerning the Qurʾanic reference in this poem that this is a mistake on the part of al-Buḥturī since the plural masculine noun encompasses both masculine and feminine (Ḍayf, S., *al-Rithāʾ*, Cairo,1955, 92-4).

The rare appearance of daughters in classical and medieval Arabic poetry has to do with daughters being the bearers of a family's honor and shame. The idea of death as the only honorable fate for a woman is a time-honored theme in Arabic poetry.[57] Indeed, the concept of women as the fragile repositories of family honor underlies many elegies in which the grieving father consoles himself with the thought that the death of his daughter has put an end to a delicate problem. Isḥāq b. Khalaf, a third ninth century Abbasid poet, recited a morose poem concerning his niece's uncertain fate. In order to spare her pain and disgrace, the poet longs for the young girl's death.[58]

The subsection entitled "lament of one's brother" includes verses by three women, al- Khansā', Qutayla, and Layla bint Ṭarīf. A relatively large number of verses, thirst-six, are by al-Khansā', the most famous of all the lamenting poets, and the best known female poet in all of the classical Arabic poetic tradition.[59] This perhaps reflects the fact that some of the most important poetry in the genre of *rithā*' was composed by sisters on behalf of their fallen brothers. Indeed, it was upon the death in battle of her two brothers that al-Khansā's poetic potentialities burst forth in a never-ending strain of lament. Her hero, her obsession, was her brother Ṣakhr.[60]

This subsection in *Kitāb al-durra* includes post-conversion stories that reflect the embarrassment of al-Khansā's newly converted kinsmen to her continued mourning, both in the guise of elegies as well as in her wearing of the pre-Islamic mourning garb. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih includes an anecdote in which al-Khansā' revealed the reason of her deep grief to ʿĀ'isha, wife of the Prophet, when she asked her about the hair shirt she was wearing: «What is this

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[57] According to Leila Ahmed, the literature expresses the dread with which men contemplated the possible fate of their daughters and female relatives (Ahmed, L., *Women and Gender in Islam*, New Haven, 1991, 85). Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's *Muḥaḍarāt al-udabā'* (Beirut, 1961, IV, 530), includes a subsection entitled: "The one deploring the death of sons and the survival of daughters". An example from this section is Abū l-Ghamr who, having lost five sons while his five daughters survived, recited: «The five who made my face radiate passed away, leaving behind five who darken by smile».

[58] Homerin also includes Ibn Khalaf's elegy on Umayma (Homerin, "A Bird Ascends the Night").

[59] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 267-270.

[60] Fariq, K.A., "Al-Khansā' and her Poetry", *Islamic Culture*, 37 (1957), 209-219.

Khansā'? The Prophet, may God's mercy be upon him, died and I did not wear it for him!» Al-Khansā' answered by relating the ungrudging support that Ṣakhr had provided her in all moments of distress in her life. Three times she approached him in dire need and he gave her half of his wealth. When she came a fourth time, his wife tried to persuade Ṣakhr not to give her anything but he rejected this counsel reciting: «Were death to destroy me, I am sure she would tear off her head-gear and put on a camel-hair bodice».[61] Another anecdote has 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb remind al-Khansā' that the brothers she is mourning and for whom she is composing elegies are in hell since they died before Islam. Her answer was that this is all the more reason for her distress. These stories provide substantiation for the disapproval in which pre-Islamic mourning institutions were held after the rise of Islam. However, at the same time, these anecdotes emphasize al-Khansā's strength of will in maintaining her mourning and expressions of grief, even in the face of societal disapproval. Clarissa Burt has pointed, moreover, that through elegies, al-Khansā' managed to incorporate social messages, employing the genre to chastise those who forgot the needs of widows, calling the community to responsibility, boasting of the bravery of her family, invoking vengeance, or accepting fate.[62]

This section also includes verses by Qutayla elegizing her brother [sic] al-Naḍr, who was killed by the Prophet Muḥammad. This is one of the most frequently cited poems in the ḥamāsāt,[63] anthologies, and histories. When the Prophet heard Qutayla's verses, he is said to have stated that he would have exonerated al-Naḍr had he heard them before.[64] Qutayla's poem reflects the new Islamic ethos conveying the dramatic tension of a particular moment in Islamic religious history. She does not call for vengeance but for a modification of behavior, a kind retroactive display of restraint and forbearance.[65]

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[61] Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, al-'Iqd, III, 266-267.
[62] Burt, "al-Khansā'".
[63] A ḥamāsa is a poetic anthology consisting of brief extracts selected for their literary value and classified in a specific order according to theme or genre.
[64] Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, al-'Iqd, III, 265. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih wrongly identifies al-Naḍr as the brother of Qutayla, rather than her father.
[65] Hammond, The Poetics of S/Exclusion, 185-6.

The last female composer of verses in this section is Layla bint
Ṭarīf. In a widely celebrated poem, she elegizes her brother Walīd
b. Ṭarīf, a prominent Kharijite whose assassination was ordered by
Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. Layla's verses talk about his generosity,
grace, and strength: «His loss is the loss of spring —if only we had
ransomed him with thousands of our best men».[66]

Verses from brothers on behalf of their deceased sisters are a
very rare occurrence; and in any event, *Kitāb al-durra* does not in-
clude a section entitled "lament of one's sister." The following sec-
tion entitled "lament of one's husband" includes Asmā' bint Abī
Bakr's elegy of her husband al-Zubayr, who was killed in connec-
tion with the Battle of the Camel; and Lubāna bint ʿAlī's elegy to
her husband the Abbasid caliph al-Amīn. The section also includes
an anecdote reported by the philologist al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/828) who
saw in the bedouin cemetery a woman wearing her jewelry and em-
bellishments and crying her heart out. Asked about the discrepancy
between her pain and her attire, she answered in verses expressing
her wish to visit her deceased husband, showing herself up in the
ways that were familiar to him.[67]

The subsequent section is not, as one would expect, "lament of
one's wife," but rather "lament of one's *jāriya*." All of the verses,
are, naturally, composed by men. The section opens with Muʿalla
al-Ṭā'ī and his slave-girl Waṣf who is described as an *adība* and
poet. When Muʿalla sold her for four thousand dīnar, she told him:
«If I owned of you what you own of me, I would not have sold you
for the world.» He returned the money but she died eight days later
and he elegized her in a long poem.[68] This section also includes
verses by the great poets Abū Nuwās and Abū Tammām for their
respective slave-girls, and by Maḥmūd al-Warrāq for his slave-girl
Nashū.[69] The disappearance of free women from poems and their

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[66] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 269. Verse translated in Hammond, *The Poetics of
S/Exclusion*, 187.
[67] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 277-278. This section also includes verses by a
bedouin for her deceased husband and another report by al-Aṣmaʿī.
[68] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 279-80. *Akhbār* preserved the verses of those poets
whose *dīwāns* had been lost or never compiled. See Gruendler, B., "Verse and Taxes:
the Function of Poetry in Selected Literary *Akhbār* of the Third/Ninth Century", in *On
Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, P. Kennedy (ed.), Wiesbaden, 2005,
85-124.
[69] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 280-2.

replacement by slave-girls has been highlighted by some scholars as evidence that slave-girls became a main source of literary inspiration from the beginning of the third ninth century. Slave girls were prominent in male society from which free women had virtually disappeared.[70]

Suzanne Stetkevych has pointed that the *rithāʾ* verses in the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry are almost exclusively for the male warrior. Mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, sons not yet old enough to fight, were not commemorated in the elegies that the tradition has preserved.[71] Such elegies began to crop up after the coming of Islam, especially in the early Umayyad period. The great Umayyad poet Jarīr broke away from the tradition, not without opposition, when he devoted a few verses to his wife Khālida.[72] Poets followed suit in elegizing their wives, even though an elegy for a woman would have been inconceivable, a few decades earlier.[73] Elegy for one's wife came to form a distinct subgenre in which grief for a spouse led the poet to meditate on his own grim future as is the case of the elegy of Muwaylik al-Mazmūn for his wife.[74] These elegies were nevertheless characterized by reserve, the poets taking refuge in general considerations in order to avoid precise evocations. This was probably due to the social condition of the free wife whose life was surrounded by a respectful discretion. Such constraints were not applicable in the case of slave-girls; this explains why the elegies written for them were more spontaneous;[75] this also partially explains the presence of a selection of poems for the *jāriya* and the absence of poems for the free wife in *Kitāb al-durra*.

[70] Garulo, T., "Women in Medieval Classical Arabic Poetry", in M. Marín and R. Deguilhem (eds.), *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources*, London and New York, 2002, 25-40.

[71] Stetkevych states that women's mourning must be understood above all as an obligatory public lamentation that was ritually prescribed and women's *marāthī* must be examined as the performance of a ritual obligation (Stetkevych, S.P., "The Obligations and Poetics of Gender: Women's Elegy and Blood Vengeance", in *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetics and the Poetics of Ritual*, Ithaca and London, 1993, 161-205).

[72] Jumʿa, H., *al-Rithāʾ fī l-jāhiliyya wa-l-islām*, Damascus, 1991, 79-80.

[73] Abdesselem talks about this particular poem by Jarīr as marking the birth of a new genre of *marāthī*, one reflecting a more authentic lyricism (Abdesselem, *Le thème de la mort*, 227-8).

[74] On these verses, see Homerin, "A Bird Ascends the Night".

[75] Abdesselem, *Le thème de la mort*, 345.

To draw attention to a deceased free female member of the household would have constituted some kind of a transgression of Islamic bereavement rules. Nevertheless, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih could have included, had he chosen to, verses on husbands elegizing their wives in his section on *marāthī*. Such verses existed and he consciously chose to exclude them. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih limited his choice of verses elegizing women to the section entitled "Whoever elegized his *jāriya*" —in addition to the lone poem by al-Buḥturī on the occasion of the death of a daughter, mentioned above.

The last section on *marāthī*, "Elegies for the Illustrious", includes elegies for the prophet Muḥammad, the caliphs Abū Bakr, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, al-Mutawwakil, the martyrs of the battle of Badr, and others. There is not a single verse elegizing an illustrious woman.[76] This may have to do with the constraints imposed on the poet considering the limited possibilities open to him.[77] Indeed, detailed descriptions of a woman in a poem could cause difficulties. The famous fourth/tenth century poet al-Mutanabbī, for instance, was criticized for composing an elegy upon the death of the sister of Sayf al-Dawla, the Ḥamdānid prince of Aleppo. The verses he composed upon the death of Khawla aroused the rage of medieval critics who were guided by a strict, over-refined, sense of propriety. A court poet was not expected to address a deceased princess personally as al-Mutanabbī had done.[78] It was essential to ensure that the woman in the elegy does not become the center of scandal simply by having her name on the lips of the public. This argument had already been put forward much earlier on by the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq when he criticized Jarīr for composing an elegy on the death of his wife.

If propriety was the reason behind the absence of elegies for free women on the part of the male poets, what about the female poets themselves? How can one account for the almost complete absence of verses by a mother lamenting her deceased daughter or a daughter elegizing her deceased mother? This absence is all the more surprising given that elegy is the one poetic domain in which women

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[76] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 284-303.

[77] Ibn Rāshiq, *al-ʿUmda*, II, 154.

[78] Al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr*, M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (ed.), Cairo, 1947, 167-8. See also Winter, M., "Content and Form in the Elegies of al-Mutanabbī", *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, 327-345.

were present, as the *'Iqd*'s section under study clearly confirms. How do we account for the surprising presence of women as producers of elegies and yet the quasi-total absence of women as subjects of elegies?

As Jum'a has noted, there are many verses by women for their departed fathers but very rarely verses elegizing departed mothers. He wonders about the absence of verses by both daughters and sons for their mothers. Pellat, similarly, states that «[…] the affirmation of the sincerity and poignancy of the feelings of the poets, both male and female, does not explain the fact […] that these poets refrained from expressing their sorrow at the death of a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister.» Smoor has also pointed that the sensitivity and emotionality which Ibn al-Rūmī displayed in the elegy on his middle son is missing in the elegy on his mother.[79] Thus, while one finds a large number of poems by mothers elegizing their sons, sisters elegizing their brothers, and daughters elegizing their fathers, one finds only rarely verses by brothers elegizing the passing of their sisters, sons the passing of their mothers and fathers the passing of their daughters. Moreover, one does not find verses of sisters elegizing the passing of a sister, a daughter the passing of a mother, or a mother elegizing the passing of a daughter. In fact, in *Kitāb al-durra*, they do not appear at all.[80] Although the poetic genre may explain in some large part this gender discrepancy, a uniquely literary explanation, remains, I believe unsatisfactory. As Spiegel states, it is important «to apprehend the constitutive silences and self-generated divisions and undoings that medieval texts engage in».[81] Indeed, «where there is collective memory, there is also organized forgetting».[82]

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[79] Jum'a, *al-Rithā'*, 68-9; Pellat, C., "Marthiya", *EI²*, VI, 602-8; Smoor, P., "Elegies and Other Poems on Death by Ibn al-Rumī", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 27 (1996), 49-85.

[80] Luce Irigary's theoretical accounts that address maternity and mother-daughter intersubjectivity, have focused on the absence under patriarchy of an acknowledged order of mother-daughter relations. The bond between mother and daughter is devalued by virtue of the over-evaluation of the male subject (Irigary, L., *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 1993, 108). Marianne Hirsh talks about the necessity of placing at the center of inquiry mothers and daughters, «the female figures neglected by psychoanalytic theories and submerged in traditional plot structures» (Hirsh, M., *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Bloomington, 1989, 3-4).

[81] Spiegel, G.M., *The Past as Text: the Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*, Baltimore, 1997, XVII.

[82] Flower, B., "Mapping the Obituary: Notes towards a Bourdieusian Interpretation", in L. Adkins and B. Skeggs (eds.), *Feminism after Bourdieu*, Oxford, 2004, 148-171.

The last two sections in *Kitāb al-durra*, entitled, "Condolences," and "Royal Condolences," include a total of three anecdotes which feature women. In the section on "Condolences," the Caliph al-Ma'mūn goes to the mother of his deceased vizier, Umm al-Faḍl b. Sahl, in order to console her. He tells her: «O mother, you have only lost the sight of him; now I am your son, in his place.» Umm al-Faḍl responded: «O Commander of the Faithful, a man whose death has availed me with a son like you, is surely worthy of being regretted».[83] In the section on "Royal condolences," one anecdote involves Alexander the Great and his mother. The other anecdote concerns the death of a sister of the pious Umayyad caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. As people came to present their condolences, the Caliph ignored them. When people saw that, they desisted. So the caliph told them that he was accustomed to people not expressing sympathy for the death of a woman, unless it is a mother.[84]

Gendering Death?

According to F. Malti-Douglas, *adab* must be understood in terms of the specific ways in which the various materials included in it are presented, exploited and manipulated.[85] In the words of Beatrice Gruendler, «a collection as a whole conveys its compiler's message, which differs from any pre-existing messages of its constituent parts».[86] Julia Bray talks about the *adīb* as a mythographer, an intentional producer of meaning.[87] The oral canon was open and «with conscious *ikhtiyār* (selection/choice) the agency of the selector/editor acquired added and canonizing importance».[88] In the

    [83] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd*, III, 309.
    [84] *Ibid.*, III, 310. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz is said to have behaved during his brief reign with exemplary simplicity and humility, remaining an ideal and pious ruler. See Barthold, W.W., "Caliph ʿUmar II and the Conflicting Reports on his Personality", *Islamic Quarterly*, 15 (1971), 69-95.
    [85] Malti-Douglas, "Playing with the Sacred".
    [86] Gruendler, B., "Meeting the Patron: An *Akhbār* Type and Its Implications for *Muḥdath* Poetry", in S. Gunther (ed.), *Ideas, Images and Methods of Portrayal*, Leiden, 2005, 59-88.
    [87] Bray, J., "Abbasid Myth and Human Act: Ibn 'Abd Rabbih and Others", in P. Kennedy (ed.), *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, Wiesbaden, 2005, 1-54.
    [88] Toorawa, S., *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth Century Bookman in Baghdad*, London, 2005, 17-18.

specific case of *al-ʿIqd*, a significant amount of material was obtained by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih from discussion sessions and study-circles, and not only from written sources.[89]

Al-ʿIqd, as an exemplary text, not only reflects a dominant ideology, but contributes towards the dominant discourse by shaping, selecting, and confirming cultural constructs governing mental and social life. Indeed, «*Adab* fostered the sense of cultural unity based on the cultivation of a common repertoire of sentiments, values and refinements,» and in a more general way a common cultural identity.[90] An *Adab* anthology such as *al-ʿIqd*, in conjunction with other *adab* and poetry anthologies, played a pivotal role in implicating women in the works of death and in «the solidification of the cultural association between women and *rithā*'».[91]

The textual examples show the extent to which gender shapes representations of grief. The anecdotes are populated by female characters who are actors in the great drama of death. They are found by deathbeds, they are standing by the graves, and they mourn their brothers and sons in versified lament. *Al-ʿIqd* gives a central place to the figure of the mourning woman, underscoring the degree to which the performance of gender is always in play. The demarcation of women's grief as a volatile emotional site in effect licenses women' works of mourning and authorizes female speech.

The large number of verses, authored by women bespeaks women's widely-perceived intimacy with death as well as the license to say poetry afforded to women in proximity to death. Women's important cultural work in grief and lamentation registers as a textual activity. The text under study suggests the cultural power of elegy voiced by a female. However, it is important to take note of Shawkat Toorawa's remark that the «use of the classical language was gender-linked: it was a language written and spoken primarily by males, and by women prepared for and inducted into the male environment of the classical language, principally women scholars, singing girls and poetesses.» He singles out the early poetesses al-

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[89] Werkmeister, W., *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-Farīd des Andalusiers b. ʿAbdrabbih (246/860-328/940): ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin, 1983.

[90] Al-Azmeh, A., "Barbarians in Arab Eyes", *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), 3-18.

[91] Hammond, *The Poetics of S/Exclusion*, 153.

Khansā' and Layla Akhyaliyya as early instances of women's elo-
quence but argues that whenever women used the classical language,
they did so «in a way dictated by an already male-empowered dis-
course».[92] While critics will still need to analyze fully what these
poems and the text in which they are inscribed might teach us about
the cultural work performed by the gendering of loss, the verses
identified as female «authored» or female «voiced», raise questions
about female agency.[93] It is, indeed, reasonable to surmise that
women had their own traditional poems and songs, which would
have been quite distinct from the male *qaṣīda* tradition, that never
made their way into the classical canon.[94]

Kitāb al-durra includes anecdotes about women. But these anec-
dotes are not necessarily about real women and their conduct. It is,
moreover, difficult to tell if some of the passages and verses in
Kitāb al-durra were composed by women, or merely purported to
be produced by them. Women's participation in creating the dis-
course is unclear. Determining whether the gender of the author or
of the speaker are the same represents a serious challenge. While it
would be risky to maintain that poetry voiced as feminine is in fact
by women, it would be equally rash to imply that all the verses
were created by men.[95] In any event, female expressions captured
in male literature reach us «already muffled by filters of male think-
ing and male wording.» These female voices are determined by the
authors' androcentric positions. Forged to fit the male author's ends,
it is necessary to ask whether they represent possible women's re-
sponses or whether they constitute what men imagined to be wom-

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[92] Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr*, 12-17. Feminist theory has challenged «the
prospect of women producing a language that would free them from imitating the phal-
locentric discourse of their masculine counterparts». Many theorists in fact question
whether women can «inscribe themselves into a language that they have not created,
one that in fact excludes them, and fails to communicate fully their experience». See
Gregg, M.E., "Women's Poetry of Grief and Mourning; the Languages of Lament in
Sixteenth Century French Lyric", in Ch. Riegel (ed.), *Response to Death, the Literary
Work of Mourning*, Edmonton, 2005, 55-73.
[93] For the distinction between female «voiced» or «authored», see Ingham, P.C.,
"From Kinship to Kingship: Mourning, Gender and Anglo-Saxon Community", in J.C.
Vaught (ed.), *Grief and Gender, 700-1700*, New York, 2003, 17-31.
[94] Stetkevych, "The Generous Eye/I".
[95] S. McNamer points that the dominant forms of continental female-voiced lyrics
in the Middle Ages were produced primarily by men (McNamer, S., "Lyrics and Ro-
mances", in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, 195-209).

en's conceivable response.[96] Even if the female speaker is invented by the male author, «a man's words spoken through a woman's body, however fictive and fabricated, are not perceived or received by the reader as thoroughly male; their valence changes in accordance with the gender of the speaker articulating them».[97] It is hence necessary to trace «the movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out, or more pointedly, makes unrepresentable».[98]

This paper has tried to interrogate *Kitāb al-durra* with respect to traces of possible choices not made. It has attempted to locate what seems to be «repressed» in the text by pointing to «the positions and positioning of female figures and female voices within the patterns of male discourse and procedures of signification».[99] In attempting to determine what material was ignored, buried, and edited, and how priorities were arranged, the experience we are engaged in understanding becomes «thicker, less rarefied, more nuanced and multi-dimensional».[100]

Although this paper has focused on the deployment of women in *Kitāb al-durra*, it is important to mention that the text includes substantial material on men as mourners. However, men's authorial voice being generally dominant in the early Islamic texts, this article has focused on highlighting women's presence in a cultural and literary tradition in which women's voices and roles are curtailed. That men mourned does not preclude the «fact» that mourning was essentially women's work.

Some anecdotes in *Kitāb al-durra* do not convey a sense of real time and place, individual persons or concrete events; nevertheless, these fictions of gender participated in replicating the existing order. The text assimilates the religious ideology presenting and exploiting specific materials in ways that reproduce the ideology on mourning

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[96] Rosen, T., *Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature*, Philadelphia, 2003, 139-40.
[97] Burns, E.J., *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*, Philadelphia, 1993, 16.
[98] De Laurentis, T., *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*, Bloomington, 1987, 10-11, 26.
[99] Rosen, *Unveiling Eve*, 27.
[100] Stein, R., "Literary Criticism and the Evidence for History", in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History*, London, 2005, 67-87.

and women's place in it. Women's intense involvement with death, notably in mourning and lamenting, may suggest, even if obliquely, the weakness of their faith. However, the presence in the text of major figures from Islam's sacred history, notably Fāṭima and ʿĀ'isha, allow us to gain some understanding of what was considered to be acceptable in terms of femininity and female expression. Multiple notions of women's roles around death help us resist proposing that there was one singular hegemonic gender culture and to suggest, instead, a contested knowledge about women's roles in the performance of death.

In analyzing *al-ʿIqd*, we are not only interested in the ideological formulations it represents for the fourth/tenth-century Islamic context alone, for this text, like other texts in the Islamic tradition, persists in its contemporary relevance. It continues to be published and sold to the mainstream reading public. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask how far *al-ʿIqd* is still partaking in forming and promoting a particular ideology of gender. Indeed, different generations of historians bring different questions and interests to the same, well-known texts. Asking different questions of a familiar body of material is one of the ways in which «the dialogue between modern scholars and their medieval documents is repeatedly reframed».[101] Historians have underlined the various ways in which meaning sustains power relations between groups. By selecting and by censoring, as well as by determining the order and manner in which ideas and events will be presented,[102] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih reveals how ideologies can be maintained through discourse. Paying attention to the ways in which a compilation such as *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* constructs women through the discursive occasion of death, enlarges our historical perspective by helping us trace some of the strategies that this, and other similar texts employ to highlight the cultural, textual, and rhetorical constructedness of gender.

[101] Smith, J.M.H., "Introduction: Regarding Medievalists: Contexts and Approaches", in M. Bentley (ed.), *Companion to Historiography*, London, 1997, 106-116.
[102] Roberts, N.N., "Voice and Gender in Classical Arabic *Adab:* Three Passages from Aḥmad Ṭayfūr's *'Instances of the Eloquence of Women'*", Al-ʿArabiyya, 25 (1992), 51-72.