ARTÍCULOS

Early and Medieval Islamic Views on Maternal Authority in Circumstances of Religious Differences*

Visiones islámicas tempranas y medievales acerca de la autoridad materna en circunstancias de diferencia religiosa

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Abstract

Whereas from an Islamic perspective it was God and His message to which Muslims were to offer primary allegiance, kinship ties could potentially challenge that commitment. Islamic ideals, articulated through a variety of literary genres, reflect this tension, presenting a prioritization of religious community over family. At the same time, however, kinship sentiments were often used in order to instill religious ideals and identity among communal members. The point is effectively illustrated in early and medieval Islamic perceptions of maternal authority, wherein Muslim mothers are depicted as having a crucial role in nurturing their children's Islamic identity. In contrasting circumstances, however, when non-Muslim maternal authority was present in Islamic-dominated family settings, an adaptation of norms and regulations became necessary. In this essay, I examine a range of Islamic positions concerning instances when mothers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, could impact the religious inclinations of their children during interreligious conflicts or differences. These positions shed light on an additional facet of Islamic efforts to preserve the religious integrity of Muslim believers, particularly young Muslim children, within a socially diverse religious context. They feature in a variety of literary genres with normative agendas, including the Qurʾān, Qurʾānic exegesis, prophetic traditions, legal compendia, biographies of the early Muslims (ṣaḥāba), and etiquette literature (adab), ranging from the first/seventh to the seventh/thirteenth centuries.

Keywords: Maternity; non-Muslims; children; religiously-mixed families; medieval Islam; normative literature.

Resumen

Mientras que desde una perspectiva islámica los musulmanes debían ofrecer lealtad primordial a Dios y a Su mensaje, los lazos de parentesco podían poner en tela de juicio ese compromiso. Los ideales islámicos, articulados a través de diversos géneros literarios, reflejan esta tensión, presentando una priorización de la comunidad religiosa sobre la familia. Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, los sentimientos de parentesco se utilizaban a menudo para inculcar ideales religiosos e identidad entre los miembros de la comunidad. La percepción islámica primitiva y medieval de la autoridad materna ilustra bien este punto, ya que las madres musulmanas desempeñan un papel crucial en la formación de la identidad islámica de sus hijos. Sin embargo, en circunstancias opuestas, cuando la autoridad materna no musulmana estaba presente en entornos familiares dominados por el islam, se hacía necesaria una adaptación de las normas y reglamentos. En este ensayo, examino una serie de posturas islámicas relativas a los casos en que las madres, tanto musulmanas como no musulmanas, podían influir en las inclinaciones religiosas de sus hijos durante conflictos o diferencias interreligiosas. Estas posturas arrojan luz sobre una faceta adicional de los esfuerzos islámicos por preservar la integridad religiosa de los creyentes musulmanes, en particular de los niños musulmanes pequeños, dentro de un contexto religioso socialmente diverso. Aparecen en diversos géneros literarios con programas normativos, como el Corán, la exégesis coránica, las tradiciones proféticas, los compendios jurídicos, las biografías de los primeros musulmanes (ṣaḥāba), y literatura sobre etiqueta social (adab), que abarca desde el siglo I/VII al VII/XIII.

Palabras clave: maternidad; no-musulmanes; niños; familias de religión mixta; islam medieval; literatura normativa.

The period between the first/seventh – seventh/thirteenth centuries is one of massive conversions to Islam, and consequently religiously-mixed family ties.[1] This should come with little surprise, as conversion to Islam was often the result of Muslim men taking non-Muslim women as wives, or the conversion of one of the non-Muslim spouses after being already in wedlock.[2] Under such circumstances, Muslim mothers are prominently portrayed in diverse literary sources as religious gatekeepers, tasked with the responsibility of safeguarding the religious identity of their children. Conversely, non-Muslim mothers are depicted as women in a unique position, serving as mediators of non-Islamic religious ideas, norms, practices, and artifacts across religious boundaries.[3] While pre-modern Islamic notions of maternity have received notable attention in modern scholarship, their application in circumstances of religious diversity remain a scholarly lacuna.[4] The available literary evidence suggests that the challenges that emerged within religiously-mixed family settings and the roles women played within those settings were not confined to a specific time or location.[5] Surprisingly, however, these dynamics are not consistently and systematically addressed in the extant sources. Instead, they are often indirectly discussed within broader themes, such as marriage and divorce, child custody, parent-child relations, education, and the position of non-Muslims in Muslim society. It is for this reason that I approach the question of maternal authority in religiously-mixed circumstances from the standpoint of different Islamic normativizing literary genres. These include the Qurʾān, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *ṭab-*

aqāt, *maṭālib*, and *adab*.[6] They speak of occasions when mothers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, were able to influence the religious leanings of their offspring. However, rather than considering these cases as factual historical events, I interpret them as reflections of historical concerns, viewed through the lens of the norms, ideals, and principles that different authors aimed to promote. As such, they were not solely formulated in response to a specific historical phenomenon, but also contributed to establishing a normative framework. The literary passages presented in this discussion, albeit of diverse literary genres, are treated here as testimonies to the conceptual world of early and medieval Muslim writers and their audiences.[7] As such, I argue, they allow us to extract some of the prevailing notions and ideals, as well as plausible social scenarios within the framework of contemporary social arrangements. These were predominantly patriarchal, dictating a male-dominated public sphere, yet considerable female agency within the domicile. They feature in texts that had a normativizing objective to prioritize Islamic ideals over non-Islamic ones by imbuing various figures — biblical, historical, hypothetical, or invented — with a symbolic significance.[8]

I should note, however, that my treatment of the various literary genres in this essay is neither systematic nor comprehensive. Instead, I wish

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[1]   The multifaceted phenomenon of conversion to Islam in diverse literary genres from the premodern Islamic period has been recently demonstrated in a collection of more than 50 primary texts of diverse linguistic and religious provenances; Hurvitz et al., *Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age*. On the material expressions of conversion to Islam, see Carlson, "Contours of conversion".

[2]   On the phenomenon of intermarriage and its role in prompting conversion to Islam in the period under discussion, see for example, Shatzmiller, "Marriage, family, and the faith"; Safran, "Identity and differentiation"; Friedmann, *Tolerance*, ch. 5; Zorgati, *Pluralism in the Middle Ages*; Simonsohn, "Conversion to Islam", p. 653; Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph*, ch. 8; Sahner, "Zoroastrian law and the spread of Islam".

[3]   Simonsohn, "Women at the crossroads".

[4]   On maternity in medieval Islamic literature, see Giladi, "Gender differences in child rearing and education"; Schleifer, *Motherhood in Islam*; Toral-Niehoff, "Paradise is at the feet of the mothers"; Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*; Verskin, *Barren Women*.

[5]   See Simonsohn, *Female Power and Religious Change*, ch. 3.

[6]   The sources examined here by genre are: *tafsīr* - Ibn Kaṯīr, *Tafsīr*; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Ǧāmiʿ*; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*; *ḥadīth* - ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*; Abū Dāʾūd, *Sunan*; Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*; Ibn Abī Šayba, *Muṣannaf*; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*; Muslim b. al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*; al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*; al-Ṭayālisī, *Musnad*; *fiqh* - al-Ḫallāl, *Ahl al-milal*; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Muġnī*, al-Marġīnānī, *al-Hidāya*; al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī*; al-Saraḫsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*; al-Šaybānī, *Kitāb al-siyar*; al-Šīrāzī, *al-Muhaḏḏab*; Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana*; al-Wanšarīsī, *al-Miʿyār*; *ṭabaqāt* - Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*; Ibn al-Aṯīr, *Usd al-ġaba*; Ibn Ḥaǧar, *al-Iṣāba*; idem, *Tahḏīb*; Ibn Manda, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*; Ibn Saʿd, *al-ṭabaqāt*; al-Iṣbahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aḫbār al-nisāʾ*; al-Mizzī, *Tahḏīb*; al-Rāzī, *al-ǧarḥ*; al-Ṣafadī, *al-wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*; *maṭālib* - Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-muḥabbar*; Ibn al-Kalbī, *maṭālib*; Ibn Rusta, *al-Muġallad al-sābiʿ*; *adab* - al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahḏīb*; Ibn Qayyim, *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd*.

[7]   Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 112; Stowasser, *Women in the Qurʾan*, p. 104; Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*; Robinson, "The ideological uses of early Islam"; Renard, *Crossing Confessional Boundaries*, p. 11; Abou-Taleb, "Constructing the image of the model Muslim woman", p. 180

[8]   On the utility of stories about saints, martyrs, and exceptional figures in advancing notions of communal affiliation and boundaries, see Sizgorich, "Narrative and community in Islamic late antiquity"; Butts & Gross, *The history of the 'Slave of Christ'*, pp. 2-3.

to offer literary soundbites that draw attention to instances of conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims in the context of maternal authority. These recordings, I argue, speak of some of the prevailing assumptions regarding the role of Muslim mothers as communal gatekeepers and the subversive positions of non-Muslim mothers in Muslim-dominated households. I begin with an outline of Islamic principles regarding the role of the mother within the family, specifically her relationship with her children in the early phases of their upbringing. These were crucial moments for the formation of the child's character and the forging of its bond with its mother. It was a bond that would remain effective far beyond the intimacy that characterized the early years of mother-child relationship. The enduring significance of this relationship took on special relevance in instances of religious difference between mothers and children. Such differences constitute the setting for the Islamic perceptions of maternal authority which I consider in the second part of this article. References to these differences in Islamic literature are treated here not only as indications of actual families, but rather of the concerns and dilemmas which religiously-mixed families generated among Muslim religious scholars. The final two parts of this essay are concerned with Muslim attempts to regulate, if not curb potential negative effects a non-Muslim mother could have on her children's religious faith.

Islamic perceptions of maternal didactic roles

In what follows I tease out some of the main ideas regarding the didactic and supervisory roles of the mother. Muḥammad al-Ġazālī's (d. 505/1111) observation regarding the sojourn of the fetus in the womb, constituting the first phase of its mental formation, is useful for thinking about maternal agency.[9] According to al-Ġazālī, in these formative moments in an embryo's life the mother possesses a crucial role as its bearer, birth-giver, nourisher, nurturer, and, perhaps most importantly, the figure at the center of kinship ties.[10] Al-Ġazālī presents the maternal womb as the embodiment of the biological connection, a mediating link between the head of the family, i.e. the father and his descendants, hence the Arabic term for "kinship" ṣilat al-raḥim, the "link of the

womb."[11] Later, over the course of its early years, the child is under the direct care of its mother, in what has been aptly described as "the kingdom of the mothers" — a space restricted by maternal authority within the household.[12] It is here where the mother has full custody (ḥiḍāna/ḥaḍāna) over her child, initially during the first two years of breastfeeding (riḍāʿ; riḍāʿa), and later its years of primary upbringing.[13] Those early years of maternal rearing were decisive in the formation of the child's character and its connection with its mother. In those years of mother-child intimacy the mother enjoyed a unique ability to educate her child through a disciplining instruction that included instilling in it a firm sense of good and evil. Accordingly, a key sunni principle is that the mother should have precedence over the father when it comes to the question of custody over the child in its formative years.[14]

At the same time, there is clear indication that medieval Muslim scholars sought to regulate maternal roles through male supervision.[15] Thus, while the mother was the primary provider of care and nourishment to the fetus, and later the growing child, her husband was to supervise her actions.[16] One example of the supervisory roles that were attributed to the husband/father figure in the family can be found in the following ḥadīth: "Each of you is a guardian and is responsible for his ward. The ruler is a guardian, and the man is a guardian of the members of his household; and the woman is a guardian and is responsible for her husband's house and his offspring; and so each of you is a guardian and is responsible for his ward".[17]

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[9] al-Ġazālī, Iḥyāʾ, 4, kitāb al-ṣabr wa-l-shukr, bayān haqīqat al-ṣabr wa-maʿnāhi, p. 65.

[10] Giladi, Muslim Midwives, p. 24; Kueny, "The birth of Cain", p. 121; Kueny, Conceiving Identities, p. 4.

[11] Giladi, Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses, p. 21; Benkheira et al., La famille en Islam, p. 52.

[12] Bouhdiba, Sexuality in Islam, ch. 13.

[13] Bouhdiba, Sexuality in Islam, p. 215; Giladi, Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses, p. 2; O'Roark, "Parenthood in Late Antiquity", p. 78; Chodorow, "Family structure and feminine personality", p. 46; Kueny, "The birth of Cain", p. 121; Prescendi, "Children and the transmission of religious knowledge", p. 76; Kueny, Conceiving Identities, p. 82; Giladi, Muslim Midwives, p. 48; Giladi, "Sex, marriage and the family", p. 173.

[14] Linant De Bellefonds, "Ḥaḍāna"; Spectorsky, Women in Classical Islamic Law, pp. 188-189; Prescendi, "Children and the transmission of religious knowledge", p. 76; Giladi, Muslim Midwives, p. 44.

[15] Kueny, Conceiving Identities, p. 4.

[16] Kueny, Conceiving Identities, pp. 48, 81-2, 118-20; Giladi, Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses, p. 19; Benkheira, "Introduction", p. 21.

[17] Buḫārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-nikāḥ, bāb ṣawm al-marʾa b-iḏn zawjihā taṭawwuʾan, p. 1326 (no. 5200); cited also in Ibn Abī Dunyā, al-ʿIyāl, 1, p. 491.

The notion of the husband/father as the guardian of the domestic realm was anything but an Islamic innovation. It was already articulated in the first-century CE Greco-Roman work *The Management of the Estate* by an anonymous author, known later among in Arabic-speaking circles as Bryson Arabus. Originally written in Classical Greek, the work was recovered by modern scholars thanks to its Arabic translation.[18] It is in the framework of this hierarchy of gender that the anonymous author assigns the management of the household (Gr. *oikonomia*; Ar. *tadbīr al-manzil*) to the mother. Her ability to fulfill this role is attributed here to a set of unique mental qualities such as intelligence, kindness, patience, and tolerance:

> Can there then be management without someone of intelligence and knowledge? Can there be rule without someone of kindness and consideration, together with severity when severity is in place? Can there be benefit without control and custody? Can there be proper execution without acumen and skill? … How can one preserve on the road if one has no patience? How can one have the patience to provide for the children's upbringing and for supporting their needs and to serve the husband unless one has tolerance? Will one give them priority over oneself unless one has the strength and the courage in oneself to make this easy? … For nobody can say that the woman is concordant in her relationship with her husband and her children unless she prefers their wrongdoing of her to her wrongdoing of them and tolerates their anger and sullen looks and violence at times when they are vexed or afflicted by illness, and, further, shows them that the fault in all of this lies with her and not with them, and finally, bears them no grudge for it and shows no trace of this in her soul. … For when these qualities are united in the woman, then she is blest in herself, her husband and her children are blest on her account, her family is held in honor because of her, and she becomes an example to women.[19]

It is thanks to her unique spousal and maternal qualities that the wife and mother assumes authority over the domicile. According to the passage above, a primary attribute among those is a perseverance that allows the woman to tolerate instances of misbehavior on the part of her spouse and children. It is this perseverance that facilitates her didactic and managerial roles within the family.

The Management of the estate came into Islam via an Arabic translation around the year 287/900. The work had a profound impact on Muslim thinkers who articulated ideas regarding the household in later centuries. An explicit testimony to its influence can be found in the *Tahḏīb al-aḫlāq* ("The Refinement of Character") of the Persian philosopher and historian Aḥmad b. Miskawayh (d. 421/1030). He chose to copy a large chunk of Bryson's section on the child in "A chapter on educating the young ones and especially the boys, most of which has been passed on from Bryson's book".[20] The ideas found in *The Management of the Estate* speak of the domestic space as a maternal domain, in which the crucial phases of the child's mental development are entrusted to the hands of its mother.

The relationship between a mother and her children rendered a mother's place highly instrumental from an Islamic communal perspective. Thus, a *ḥadīth* calls upon mothers to "Pronounce as the first words to your children, 'there is no God but Allah,' and recite to them at death, 'There is no God but Allah.'"[21] It was perhaps this didactic aspect in the maternal office that constituted the background to a fourth/tenth-century narrative presenting the Arabian poetess al-Ḫansāʾ (d. c. 23/644), inscribing religious devotion in the hearts of her sons just before they set out to the battle of Qādisiyya in 15/636: "My sons, you have embraced Islam being obedient and have migrated [from Mecca to Yaṯrib/al-Madīna (?)] out of choice. ... You may know what Allah has promised to the Muslims regarding the great reward [awaiting them] on account of combatting the infidels."[22] What seems to stand in contrast to a basic motherly instinct, namely

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[18]   An Arabic translation of the work has been recently edited and translated into English by Simon Swain: Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam*. Bryson's principles should be read within their Greco-Roman context; see Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 2, pp. 143-165.

[19]   Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam*, pp. 473, 475, §100-103.

[20]   Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahḏīb*, p. 66. On the reception of the *Management of the Estate* in Islamic literature, see Plessner, *Der OIKONOMIKOC des Neupythagoreers 'Bryson'*; Giladi, *Children of Islam*, pp. 49-50; Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam*, pp. 352-363. On maternal childbearing and education in medieval Muslim societies, see Giladi, "Concepts of childhood"; Giladi, "Gender differences in child rearing and education", p. 291; Adang, "Women's access to public space", p. 75.

[21]   Ibn al-Qayyim al-Ǧawziyya, *Tuḥfat al-mawdūd*, p. 329.

[22]   al-Iṣfahānī, *Aḫbār al-nisāʾ*, pp. 110-112. See also Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 4, pp. 1827-1829 (no. 3317); Ibn al-Aṯīr, *Usd al-ġāba*, 7, p. 90 (no. 6876); al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafayāt*, 10, p. 240 (no. 2544); al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1, p. 260; Ibn Ḥaǧar, *al-Iṣāba*, 8, p. 109 (no. 11112).

sending children to combat, is presented here as an expression of ideal motherhood. Al-Ḫansāʾ chooses to sacrifice the lives of her sons for the sake of her religious community, signalling the significance of her maternal office in a moment of interreligious conflict. A similar didactic example of a mother who puts her own wellbeing secondary to a greater communal agenda in a moment of religious difference features in the biography of Umm Sulaym bt. Milḥān al-Anṣāriyya (d. c. 30/650). The early convert to Islam, mother of Anas b. Mālik (d. 90-92/709-711), and famous Companion of the Prophet is said to have begun instructing her son Anas to make the proclamation of faith, the *šahāda*, during his infancy, disobeying her pagan husband's demand that she refrain from corrupting the child's mind against him (*lā tufsidī ʿalayya ibnī*).[23]

Religiously-mixed families in the early and medieval Islamic periods

The significance of the incident reported in Umm Sulaym's biography goes beyond the mere question of maternal instruction. The incident takes place in a religiously-mixed household setting, where the child's parents are of different religions, Muslim and non-Muslim. Read in conjunction with the story about al-Ḫansāʾ and her sons, it offers a display of motherly roles in moments of interreligious contention — one on the battlefield and the other within the household. Indeed, Islamic sources present Muslim mothers as having the capacity to imbue their offspring with the necessary Islamic ideals. At the same time, those same features of maternal agency were also presented as a source of danger when it came to non-Muslim mothers. A review of Qurʾānic verses reveals a recurring call upon children to offer respect and obedience to their parents so long as such respect and obedience do not come at the expense of their Islamic belief.[24] The Qurʾān pays special attention to instances in which Muslim believers find themselves in opposition to their non-Muslim parents. It advises Muslims to be kind to their parents, even if they are non-Muslims, with the qualification that "if they strive with thee to make thee associate with Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge, then do not obey them" (Q 29:8).[25] And,

> We have charged man concerning his parents — his mother bore him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning was in two years — Be thankful to Me, and to thy parents; to Me is the homecoming. But if they strive with thee to make thee associate with Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge, then do not obey them. Keep them company honourable in this world; but follow the way of him who turns to Me (Q 31:14-15).

In both cases, the Qurʾān anticipates that Muslim children of non-Muslim parents might face a conflict between their commitment to their parents on the one hand, and to their religion on the other. A similar reasoning persisted in Qurʾānic exegesis. Thus, for example, according to Ismāʿīl b. Kaṯīr (d. 774/1373), the parallel drawn between submission to Allah and to one's parents (*birr al-walidayn*) in Q 6:151 applies to non-Muslim parents as well, so long as such parents do not lead the child astray: "Allah commanded man to be good to his parents, even if they were polytheists in their minds. At the same time, however, Allah said in this regard, as well as in others, 'You shall not serve any save God.'"[26]

Religiously-mixed families were a common feature throughout Islamic history and have recently received considerable treatment in modern scholarship.[27] Marriages between Muslim men and non-Muslim women, or the conversion to Islam of a non-Muslim family member, resulted in religiously-mixed family ties. Yet despite the pervasiveness of the phenomenon, it is rather marginally recorded in early and medieval historiography. Instead, it is only by reading into the literary attempts of religious authorities to advance various norms that we are able to reconstruct some of the features of religiously-mixed family arrangements. Take for example the question of

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[23] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 10, p. 396 (no. 5400). See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 6, p. 179 (no. 10417); al-Ṭayālisī, *Musnad*, 3, p. 533-534 (no. 2168); al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 5, p. 215 (no. 5478); Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 2, pp. 584-585 (no. 3573); Ibn al-Aṯīr, *Usd al-ġāba*, 7, p. 345 (7471); Ibn al-Mustawfī, *Tārīḫ*, 2, p. 246 (no. 85); Ibn Ḥaǧar, *al-Iṣāba* (1995), 8, pp. 408-411 (no. 12077); Ibn Ḥaǧar, *Tahḏīb*, 12, pp. 471-472 (no. 2954).

[24] Giladi, "Family", 175; Giladi, "Parents", 20; Asad, "Kinship", 99.

[25] All translations are from Arberry, *The Holy Koran*.

[26] Ibn Kaṯīr, *Tafsīr*, 3, pp. 359-361. See also below al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 18, p. 552 in reference to Q 31:15.

[27] Ruggles, "Mothers of a hybrid dynasty"; el-Leithy, "Coptic Culture and Conversion"; Dursteler, *Renegade Women*; Zorgati, *Pluralism in the Middle Ages*; Simonsohn, "The legal and social bonds"; Simonsohn, "Communal membership despite religious exogamy"; Weitz, *Between Christ and Caliph*; Bosanquet, "The kitābī wife's conversion to Islam"; Sahner, "Zoroastrian law and the spread of Islam"; Yagur, "Religiously mixed families in the Mediterranean society".

the religious identity of a child whose parents adhered to different religions. By the third/ninth century, marital partnerships of this kind were sanctioned by Islamic law so long as the husband was a Muslim and the wife was a member of a scriptural religion (*ahl al-kitāb*).[28] In most cases, the uncertainties regarding the religious identity of children resulting from these marriages emerged when the religious difference between the spouses was a result of the conversion of one partner to Islam. Instances of this sort receive extensive treatment in Islamic legal works, allowing us to envisage scenarios of non-Muslim mothers of Muslim children and of Muslim fathers or mothers to mature non-Muslim children (i.e., when the parent converted after their children reached the age of maturity).[29]

In addition to the different kinds of social scenarios that can be reconstructed through legal regulations, we are occasionally also given access to the historical circumstances that prompted them. For example, early Islamic legal deliberations address the question of the religious identity of children following the conversion to Islam of their father in the context of the early Islamic conquests. A case in point is a regulation in Muḥammad al-Šaybānī's (d. 187/803 or 189/805) *Kitāb al-siyar* ("book on the laws of war") referring to a man who converted to Islam prior to the arrival of the Muslims, whereupon the question of the status of his property and dependents arises:

> A man from the People of War, if he embraces Islam in the Abode of War, after which the Muslims show up in that Abode, what should they leave him from his property and children? … And what is your opinion with regard to his wife, who is an infidel, being pregnant? He (Abū Ḥanīfa, d. 150/767) said: "She and that which is in her womb are considered booty (*fayʾ*) for the Muslims." I (Abū Yūsuf, d. 182/798) said: "And that which is in her womb is of her status?" He said: "Yes. I said: And why, while his father is not an infidel?" He said: "Since his mother is an infidel and she and her child that is in her womb have become of her status."[30]

Although the question posed here to Abū Ḥanīfa refers most likely to a scenario that preceded his time, namely the period of the early conquests,

the endurance of marital bonds between converts to Islam and non-Muslim women was not limited to a particular period. Likewise, the uncertainties regarding the legal status of this children resulting from such unions continued to preoccupy both Muslim and non-Muslim legal authorities.[31]

This was a matter that was not only of common concern to Muslim and non-Muslim leaders, but also notably pervasive in society at large.[32] At the same time, if we read these texts against the historiography of the time, we come to realize that despite formal regulation, uncertainties continued to persist. A question regarding the enduring Christian identity of an Egyptian child whose mother converted to Islam illustrates this point.[33] The incident is recorded in Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kindī's (d. 350/961) *Kitāb al-wulāt wa-l-quḍāt fī Miṣr* ("the book on the governors and judges in Egypt"). It tells about a case that was brought to the discretion of the Mālikī *qāḍī* Abū al-Ṭāhir al-Ḏuhlī (d. 367/978), who ruled that the son of a Christian mother who converted to Islam and a Christian father shall remain Christian.[34] According to al-Kindī, the Muslim crowd protested the ruling rather vehemently: "… the people rejected this and made a tumult (*ḍağğū*) and it was said: 'according to the doctrine (*maḏhab*) of the House of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) he is to become a Muslim, and this is (also) what al-Shāfiʿī says, whereupon (the *qāḍī*) ruled that the child was a Muslim.'" It is unclear what caused the Muslim judge to reverse his decision, whether the assertive objection of the crowd, or the legal argument, according to which both shiʿī and Shāfiʿī doctrines offered alternative opinions to that of the Mālikīs.

Likewise in a third/ninth-century case that was brought before the jurist Abū Ibrāhīm Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm (d. 354/965) from Cordoba further illustrates some of the legal complications that could arise under such circumstances:

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[28] Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans*, pp. 129-136; Friedmann, *Tolerance*, ch. 5; Tsafrir, "The attitude of Sunnī Islam toward Jews and Christians".

[29] These instances are treated respectively in al-Ḥallal, *Ahl al-milal*, p. 26, ch. 10 (no. 60); p. 40, ch. 17 (nos. 91-2); pp. 228-231, ch. 121 (nos. 649-58).

[30] al-Šaybānī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, p. 139 (no. 121).

[31] For the treatment of such question in non-Islamic sources, see, for example, a regulation in the law-book of Catholicos Timothy I (fl. 163/780-207/823) that warns against the marriage of Christian with a non-Christian, as this would lead to the apostasy of the Christian spouse and the couple's children: Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 2, p. 75 (reg. 27). For rabbinic opinions regarding the Jewish identity of a newborn whose father was an apostate, most likely a convert to Islam, and whose mother was Jewish, see Lewin, *Otsar ha-geʾonim*, Shabbat, p. 130 (no. 398); Yevamot, p. 196 (no. 474).

[32] See Simonsohn, "Are gaonic responsa a reliable source?"; Simonsohn, "Women at the crossroads".

[33] al-Kindī, *al-Wulāt*, p. 586.

[34] On the Mālikī position regarding the religious identity of a child of Muslim and non-Muslim parenthood, see below.

Abū Ibrāhīm was asked regarding a Christian girl. [The matter has been] raised before the *qāḍī* that her father was a Muslim, whereupon he died and left her under the protection of her Christian mother who was married by a Christian and gave birth [to additional children]. Twenty years or more have passed since then and the *qāḍī* inquired into her matter. She (the girl) then noted that her father was a Christian who converted to Islam while she [has already] perceived her religion (i.e., was in the age of maturity) and held on to her Christianity till her father died while she remained with her mother.[35]

The legal question concerns a Christian girl who insisted on her Christian identity, despite her father's conversion to Islam. Her principal argument was that her father converted to Islam when she was already at the age of maturity, hence her decision to remain Christian should be legally endorsed. These few examples of legal debates capture the social setting which promoted them, namely religiously-mixed families, while drawing attention to the attempts of different legal authorities to contain the uncertainties resulting from them.

Muslim concerns with non-Muslim maternal agency

At the heart of Muslim legal positions on the matter of children of mixed marriages lay the principle of *fiṭra*, whereby the newborn in its natural disposition is Muslim, yet its identity is contingent upon that of its parents: "Every newborn is born in the natural condition; its parents transform it into a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian" (*mā min mawlūdin illā yūladu ʿalā al-fiṭra fa-abawāhu yuhawwidānihi aw yunaṣṣirānihi aw yumaǧǧisānihi*).[36] Thus, it was commonly asserted in Islamic jurisprudence that a child who has not reached the age of maturity is considered Muslim if either one of its parents converted to Islam.[37] An exception to this rule was articulated by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), according to whom the rule applies only in case it was the father who had converted to Islam.[38] The

reasoning at the base of the Mālikī position was later explicated by the Ḥanbalī jurist ʿAbdallāh b. Qudāma (d. 620/1223): "[T]he child is highborn thanks to its father's nobility and is related to his (father's) tribe, not to its mother's tribe, it therefore follows its father in his religion, whatever it may be."[39] Ibn Qudāma, later argued, however, in line with the Ḥanbalī position, according to which the child's Islamic identity is determined by either one of his Muslim parents. If anything, he argued, the mother's identity carried even greater weight, "… [f]or she (the mother) is more related to him (*aḫaṣṣ bihi*), since he is created from her in reality and she has a right over him by bearing him and nursing him…"[40]

Ibn Qudāma's position resonates with medieval Islamic perceptions of maternal roles and their impact on the character of the offspring. The same perceptions appear to have underpinned Islamic historians' accounts of non-Muslim mothers of prominent Muslim figures in the early and medieval Islamic periods. Thus, we find a separate category for non-Muslim mothers within the *maṯālib* — a distinct Islamic literature that was composed as means of tainting the reputations of Muslim figures on account of their genealogical backgrounds.[41] The assertion that these figures had Christian or Jewish mothers, and that their character was therefore blemished, emerged from a worldview that ascribed key importance to maternal upbringing.[42] In the early Islamic period, such concerns could have been prompted by the legal institution of *umm walad* – a slave concubine who bore a child to her Muslim master.[43] These *umm walads* are often

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referred to in Islamic historiography in relation to the wives and mothers of Muslim leaders during the first three centuries following the Islamic conquests.[44] Such accounts betray a recognition that non-Muslim women were in a position to undermine the Muslim identity of their male kin by introducing external cultic and cultural practices into the household or retaining ties with their non-Muslim families.[45] A famous example, is that of the Umayyad governor of Iraq Ḫālid al-Qasrī (r. 105-120/724-38), often called Ibn al-Naṣrāniyya ("son of the Christian woman"), who was criticized for his favorable leaning towards Christians and Christianity on account of his Christian mother.[46] These charges, it has been argued, were fueled by the presence of non-Muslim officials in Kūfa during that time.[47] In other instances, non-Muslim women may have been fully converted to Islam and even arabized, yet were suspected of remaining attached to their non-Muslim backgrounds.[48] Suspicions of this nature speak of a reasoning which allowed the attribution of considerable religious power to maternal figures.

Anticipations of maternal agency in circumstances of religiously-mixed families

Narratives about prominent Muslim figures of the first Islamic century conform to ideals that feature in medieval *adab* texts and sunni legal compendia regarding the decisive role played by mothers in the formation of their children's character and identity. These narratives, predominantly situated in the polytheistic backdrop of seventh-century Arabia, played a significant role in promoting a worldview that retained its relevance centuries beyond the events they claimed to document. While they feature in different literary genres (i.e. *Sīra*, *ḥadīth*, *ṭabaqāt*, and *tafsīr*), they were all rooted in a past that was integral to Islamic historical memory.[49] Accordingly, the sayings and conduct of the protagonists of these narratives offer us a sense of the notions that were held not only by their authors, but also by their transmitters.[50] They confirm that maternal figures were at the center of Muslim concerns in situations of religiously-mixed family ties. The place of Muslim mothers, as in the example of Umm Sulaym bt. Milḥān noted above, is seen crucial for safeguarding the proper upbringing of their children given the potential negative impact of their non-Muslim fathers. More importantly, however, as opposite scenarios were bound to have been more numerous, the presence of non-Muslim mothers in Muslim-dominated households was for the very same reasons to be carefully monitored and regulated.

The concerns and the normative ideals that came in response to them feature in a host of early and medieval Islamic literary sources of diverse genres. Their underlying assumption was of enduring ties between mothers and their children on account of the emotional bond forged between them during the formative years of childhood. As noted earlier, this was first and foremost a bond that endowed the mother with considerable agency vis-à-vis her offspring. A non-Muslim mother could employ that agency under circumstances of conflicting religious commitments. Thus, al-Ṭabarī writes in his exegetical treatment of Q 31:15: "But if they strive with thee to make thee associate with Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge, then do not obey them. …" According to al-Ṭabarī, the verse applied to instances such as the one related in a *ḥadīth* about the Companion and general Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d. 54/674), whose polytheist mother made blunt attempts to dissuade him from embracing Islam:

> Narrated Muṣʿab b. Saʿd: "The mother of Saʿd (b. Abī Waqqāṣ) swore that she would not eat or drink

for bringing these passages to my attention.

[44]   Lammens, "Études sur le règne du calife Omaiyade Moʿawiya Iᵉʳ", p. 157; Canard, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes", p. 45; Kallfelz, *Nichtmuslimische Untertanen im Islam*, p. 91; Tahar Mansouri, "Les femmes d'origine byzantine/les roummiyyat sous les Abbassides"; Bray, "Men, women and slaves in Abbasid society", pp. 133-135; Ruggles, "Mothers of a hybrid dynasty"; Barton, "Marriage across frontiers"; Krönung, "The employment of Christian mediators by Muslim rulers", pp. 73-77.

[45]   For Andalusī cases, see Ruggles, "Mothers of a hybrid dynasty", p. 66; cf. Barton, "Marriage across frontiers", p. 8. An apocalyptic account recorded in Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād's (d. 228/843) *Kitāb al-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* ("Book of trials and fierce battles") refers to the suspicion of children of Christian slave concubines retaining ties with the Byzantines; Nuʿaym b. Hammād, *Kitāb al-fitan*, pp. 274-275; cited and discussed in Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam*, p. 122.

[46]   See Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, p. 81; Hawting, "Khālid al-Ḳasrī". See also the accusatory words of the poet al-Farazdaq (d. c. 109-112/728-30), quoted in al-Balāḏurī, *Ansāb* 7, p. 382; al-Balāḏurī, *Ǧumal*, 9, p. 36; Ibn Ḫallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, 2, pp. 228-229; discussed in Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, p. 450; Yarbrough, *Friends of the Emir*, p. 59.

[47]   Yarbrough, *Friends of the Emir*, p. 59.

[48]   Ruggles, "Mothers of a hybrid dynasty", p. 76.

[49]   Spectorsky, *Women in Classical Islamic Law*, p. 9; Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*, p. 15.

[50]   Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 112; Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory*; Robinson, "The ideological uses of early Islam."

until Saʿd renounced his [new] religion. He said: 'But I refused her, and this continued until she fainted.' He [Muṣʿab] said: 'And then, her sons came to her and gave her drink.' He [Muṣʿab] said: 'And when she regained consciousness, she cursed him; then, this verse was revealed.'"[51]

Saʿd's achievement is made evident in this case thanks to his ability to overcome the emotional manipulations of his mother. Such manipulations were bound to have been instrumental in the context of the bond between mothers and their children. They remind us once again of the dilemmas Muslim were bound to face vis-à-vis their non-Muslim parents, specifically mothers, and the didactic value of their narrative portrayals. Thus, again, in a *ḥadīth* attributed to Asmāʾ bt. Abī Bakr (d. 73/693), the daughter of the first sunni caliph notes that the Prophet instructed her to treat her mother with kindness despite her polytheist identity:

> My mother came to me being a polytheist when he (Muḥammad) made a treaty with Qurayš, at which point I inquired of the Messenger of God, and said: 'O Messenger of God, my mother came to me and she is desiring (i.e., a mother's desire towards her daughter?), shall I show her affection?' He said: 'Yes, treat your mother kindly.'[52]

Further references to religious differences between non-Muslim mothers and their Muslim children and the manner in which the latter were to treat the former resurface in early Islamic jurisprudence. A notable example concerns the question of a Muslim son's conduct following the death of his non-Muslim mother. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās (d. 68/687) is quoted in later legal works instructing a Muslim whose Christian mother died to "wash her, shroud her, and bury her," basing himself on the precedent of al-Ḥāriṯ b. Abī Rabīʿa who paid his final respects to his non-Muslim mother by following her funeral procession.[53] A similar tone emerges from traditions instructing Muslims to pay their last respects to their deceased non-Muslim parents.[54] And, with regard to the question whether Muslims may ask for forgiveness for their non-Muslim parents, the Muslim exegete Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī (d. 669/1271) argued that it is forbidden, basing himself on a tradition in which Allah is said to have allowed the Prophet to visit his mother's tomb, but not to ask for forgiveness for her.[55]

These examples serve to highlight the durability of mother-child sentiments well beyond the early phases of childhood. They refer to different gestures Muslim offspring continued to offer to their non-Muslim mothers, despite religious differences, yet at the same time stay within the limitations of what was sanctioned as permissible from an Islamic perspective. Yet, whereas adult children may have been able to operate within these limitations, Islamic tradition speaks of an awareness of the lack of similar abilities among young children. A recurring trope in early Islamic traditions suggests that Muslim children retained various levels of attachment to their non-Muslim mothers in a manner that could undermine their Muslim identity. Of particular interest in this context are traditions portraying the Prophet directing infants to follow their Muslim fathers rather than their non-Muslim mothers. While these passages speak of the natural inclinations of children towards their mothers, they also point to the manner in which Muslim authorities tried to resolve the conflict, suggesting that family ruptures were justified under these circumstances. A case in point is an account about the Companion Rafīʿ b. Sinān who embraced Islam while his wife remained non-Muslim.[56] The couple litigated before the Prophet, each claiming separate custody of their joint daughter. A principal claim in the mother's line of argument was that she had been nursing the girl: "This is my daughter, and she is weaned or almost so." The Prophet had the parents sit on each side of him and placed the girl between them, whereupon he asked both of them to call her. In response, the girl turned in the direction of her mother, thus signaling her immediate inclination

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[51] al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 18, p. 552.

[52] Muslim b. al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1, *kitāb al-zakāt*, p. 447 (no. 50).

[53] al-Saraḫsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, 2, p. 55. See Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, pp. 260-261; Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 446-447. Questions as to whether a Muslim son may participate in the funeral procession of his Christian mother, and the responsibility of Muslim children to take care of their needy non-Muslim parents, are yet further indications of an endeavor to introduce normative order to a religiously-mixed family setting; see for example, al-Ḫallāl, *Ahl al-milal*, pp. 217-218, ch. 112 (nos. 619-28); Ibn Abī Šayba, *Muṣannaf*, 3, pp. 32-33 (nos. 11844, 11945, 11895); Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana*, 3, pp. 267, 365.

[54] Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, pp. 446-447.

[55] al-Qurṭubī, *al-Ǧāmiʿ*, 13, p. 61 (Q 17:23-24). See also Benkheira et al., "Introduction", p. 22.

[56] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 39, p. 168 (no. 23757); Abū Dāʾūd, *Sunan*, 3, p. 94 (no. 2237); Ibn al-Aṯīr, *Usd al-ġāba*, 7, p. 206, no. 7144; al-Iṣbahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, 2, p. 264 (no. 2677); Ibn Ḥaǧar, *al-Iṣāba*, 2, p. 365 (no. 2538).

towards her. This, however, called for Allah's intervention, and Muḥammad proclaimed, "May Allah guide her," whereupon the girl turned in the direction of her Muslim father.

Similar accounts occur with regard to additional figures from the time of the Prophet. One of them is Abū Salāma al-Anṣārī.[57] His story was later incorporated in Abū Isḥāq al-Šīrāzī 's (d. 476/1083) Šāfiʿī legal collection in order to argue that child custody (ḥaḍāna) over a Muslim child cannot be assigned to an unbeliever:

> … [Child custody] over a Muslim [child] cannot be assigned to an unbeliever. [However,] Abū Saʿīd al-Istaḫrī said: "[Child custody] can be assigned to the unbeliever over a Muslim, according to what has been transmitted by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Salāma on behalf of his father, who said: 'My father embraced Islam and my mother refused to hand me over [to him] while I was still young. They therefore appealed to the Prophet, who said: "O boy, go over to whichever one of them you wish; if you wish, [go] to your father, and if you wish, [go] to your mother." I turned to my mother, but when the Prophet saw me I heard him say, "May God guide him," whereupon I turned to my father and sat in his bosom.'" The first guiding principle is since child custody was made for the benefit of the child and there is no benefit for the Muslim child who is under the custody of an unbeliever, since he will entice him away from his religion and this is the greatest harm, …[58]

Al-Šīrāzī's legal formulation attempts to decide between two principal objectives of parenthood, namely responding to the child's needs in the early stages of its life, and instilling in it an Islamic identity. The legal resolution indicates an Islamic prioritization of the child's Islamic identity over what was likely its natural upbringing by its mother.

The problem addressed in al-Šīrāzī's legal compilation features also in the Mālikī manual of Saḥnūn (d. 241/856), the Mudawwana, through a question posed by either Asad b. al-Furāt (213/828) or Saḥnūn to Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/806), Mālik b. Anas's disciple.[59] Here, the

problem of a non-Muslim mother's custody over a Muslim child introduces us to the nature of Muslim concerns, although the proposed solution is markedly different:

> Regarding the mother's custody of the child, I said: "In your opinion, if her husband divorced her, when he is Muslim and she is Christian or Jewish, and she has small children, who has more right over her children?" He said: "She has more right over her children and she is considered a Muslim woman with regard to her children, unless he (the husband) fears concerning her (the mother) that a young female among them (the children) has reached the age of maturity, that they (the children) will be unprotected (by the father's guardianship)."
> I said: "This one (i.e., the mother) will have them drink wine and feed them pork, why then do you put her with regard to her children in the status of a Muslim woman?"
> He said: "She was already with him before he divorced her, and she could have fed them pork and wine if she wanted to. Yet if she wanted to do something like this, she should be prevented from it, but the children should not be separated from her. If there is concern that she will do [so after her divorce], she should be attached to people from among the Muslims, lest she do so."
> I said: "What is your opinion if she was a Zoroastrian whose husband embraced Islam, and she has small children and she refuses to embrace Islam, so that consequently the two were separated; who has greater right over the children?"
> He said: "The mother has a greater right. Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian women are all the same in this, like a Muslim woman."[60]

According to the case presented in the Mudawwana the principle of ḥaḍāna takes precedence over the ideal of Islamic upbringing, thus providing grounds for favoring non-Muslim maternity over Muslim paternity in cases of divorce. The concern over the non-Muslim mother's potentially negative impact on her child is made evident both through the argument made against the rule and the solution proposed in response. Muslim boys were to remain with their non-Muslim mother in the event of divorce until the age of 7 and girls until the age of 9. At the same time, their rearing should be supervised by Muslim relatives.

In contrast to the cases from biographic literature presented above that speak in favor of Muslim paternal custody over a premature child whose mother is non-Muslim, the Mālikī position offers a markedly different position. A plausible

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[57]   Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, 39, pp. 166 (no. 23755), 167 (no. 23756); al-Rāzī, al-Ǧarḥ, 6, pp. 11-12 (no. 46/9296); al-Iṣbahānī, Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba, 2, p. 473 (no. 3421). See also on Ḥawṭ al-Anṣārī in Ibn Manda, Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba, p. 540 (no. 334); al-Iṣbahānī, Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba, p. 1006 (no. 871); Ibn al-Aṯīr, Usd al-ġāba, 2, p. 437 (no. 2191).
[58]   al-Šīrāzī, al-Muhaḏḏab, 2, p. 216.
[59]   Saḥnūn, al-Mudawwana, 2, p. 300; discussed in Safran, "Identity and differentiation", pp. 583-84.

[60]   Saḥnūn, al-Mudawwana, 2, p. 359.

explanation to this difference is the different religious affiliation of the mother in each set of cases. Whereas in the former, the mothers referred to are polytheists, in the latter they are members of protected religions, i.e. *ḏimmī*s. Yet this does not appear to resolve the reference to Zoroastrian mothers in the *Mudawwana*. Although Zoroastrians enjoyed legal protection according to most jurists, theologically, they often considered them *kitābiyyīn* (People of the Book) and therefore unlawful kin to Muslims.[61] It is perhaps in this context that we should understand the reference to the *ḏimmī* status of the mother in the Ḥanafī position found in ʿAlī al-Marġīnānī's (d. 593/1197) *Hidāya*:

> A woman of protected status (*ḏimmiyya*) has greater right [of custody] over her Muslim child so long it (the child) does not dislike the religions (one of which his mother is an adherent) and so long there is no concern that (on account of its sojourn with its non-Muslim mother) it will be made accustomed to infidelity. This should be examined (*li-l-naẓar*) beforehand (before the child is handed over to its mother) as well as the possible harm that may be caused to it (the child) afterwards (i.e. following being next to its mother).[62]

According to the Ḥanafī position here *ḏimmī* status endows a non-Muslim mother with maternal custody. More importantly, however, it resonates a concern that runs through various Islamic literary genres of a normativizing objective, namely the negative impact a non-Muslim mother may have on its Muslim child. A highly plausible scenario at the background of this concerns is portrayed in a series of questions that were presented to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). The questions all pertained to the spiritual freedoms of a Christian woman married to a Muslim man. Ibn Ḥanbal was asked whether a Muslim man should forbid his Christian wife to consume wine, go out to church, bring a cross into the house, take part in Christian festivals and gatherings, or perform pilgrimage to holy sites. One possible consideration behind these questions may have been the negative impact such practices could have on other members of the family, particularly children, who would be exposed to non-Islamic rituals.[63] Since Ibn Ḥanbal remained within the limitations of Islamic law, he would not disallow these practices. It is only on account of the husband's right to restrict his wife's

movement outside the house that he could prevent her from attending public worship. Regardless of Ibn Ḥanbal's position, however, it appears to have been made in response to conceivable instances of non-Muslim women were introducing non-Islamic practices and ritual objects into the daily routines in Muslim households.

Conclusions

Whether founded on biological, emotional, economic, or religious ties, the family household was governed, according to classical, late antique, and medieval thinkers, through a spousal arrangement. In accordance with this theoretical arrangement, the female spouse held considerable authority over matters pertaining to the internal parts of the household. It was in the internal setting of the home that women were to assume their kinship position as wives and mothers, and the task of household administration (*tadbīr al-manzil*). Within this broad scope of responsibilities, mothers had a crucial impact on their children, particularly in their early formative years and, ultimately, on their emotional, ethical, social — and thus also spiritual — dispositions. One of the primary sources of maternal power derived from a sense of obligation, whereby the offspring was both physically and emotionally indebted to its mother. Maternal authority stemmed also from a view of loyalty and obedience to parents as acts of piety, signaling submission to the guardianship of God. Normative Islamic texts convey these ideals, calling upon mothers to assume their domestic responsibilities, to bring up their children as good Muslims, and upon children to offer respect, submission, and care for their mothers. Under circumstances of religious tensions, or differences, namely, when mothers and children were of different religions or faced the religious other, the possibility of questions of competing loyalties arising, seems to have been anticipated. And although Muslim children were expected to respect their non-Muslim mothers, they were in most cases guided to prefer their religious and communal commitments over their kinship sentiments.

In the early centuries, before Muslims became not only the politically but also the numerically dominant section of society, instances of religiously-mixed households were frequent and religiously-mixed kinship ties necessitated careful monitoring and supervision on the part of the Muslim community. This came in the form of legal regulations and a rich literature of narratives

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[61]   Friedmann, *Tolerance*, pp. 72-76.
[62]   al-Marġīnānī, *al-Hidāya*, 2, p. 640.
[63]   al-Ḥallāl, *Ahl al-milal*, pp. 354-355, ch. 184 (no. 994).

that would offer Muslims ideals, guidelines, and models of conduct. Under such circumstances non-Muslim mothers could potentially endanger the Muslim identity of their children, and even draw them to their non-Islamic faiths. The absence of a comprehensive treatise on the theme of non-Muslim maternity is evident. Yet the fact that a rich diversity of Islamic sources refers to this theme should not escape our attention. It serves to highlight the challenges that were posed by the presence of non-Muslim mothers in Muslim families and the relevance of these challenges to a host of social settings. The resulting measures are no less instructive. They speak about the formation of Islam as a religion and a civilization, as well as about women and their agency as they suggest some of the channels through which cultural commodities were transferred across religious lines. As such they add another piece to the puzzle of women's history in Islamic dominated societies.

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