

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

QUR'ANIC STUDIES

Edited by

MUSTAFA SHAH

and

MUHAMMAD ABDEL HALEEM

Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi Kütüphanesi	
Dem. No:	294893
Tas. No:	297.1 OXF.H

2020

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CHAPTER 34

WOMEN AND THE QUR'AN

ASMA AFSARUDDIN

IN roughly the third or fourth year of the Islamic era (corresponding to 625–6 CE), the Medinan woman Companion Umm 'Umāra from the first generation of Muslims is said to have remarked to the Prophet Muḥammad in connection with the Qur'anic revelations he had received up to that point, 'I see that everything pertains to men; I do not see the mention of women.' According to variant accounts, it was Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife, who wondered out loud why the revelation appeared to be primarily concerned with men. Regardless of who the Prophet's interlocutor was, the question posed to him foregrounded the concern that an explicit lack of reference to women believers might lead to the assumption that only men had a role to play in human soteriology and only their good deeds would earn fulsome rewards in the hereafter. Were women believers not to be recognized as equal participants in the grand unfolding drama of human agency, fulfilment, and salvation?

Our sources refer to this event as the 'occasion of revelation' for the following critical Qur'anic verse:

Those who have surrendered to God among males and females; those who believe among males and females; those who are sincere among males and females; those who are truthful among males and females; those who are patient among males and females; those who fear God among males and females; those who give in charity among males and females; those who fast among males and females; those who remember God often among males and females—God has prepared for them forgiveness and great reward. (Q. 33:35)

In response to the female Companion's anxious query, this Qur'anic verse took an unequivocal position: women and men have equal moral and spiritual agency in their quest for the good and righteous life in this world for which they reap identical rewards in the afterlife. The other-worldly salvific efficacy offered by the Qur'an through its prescription for the well-ordered moral existence on earth was not inflected by gender. Muslim feminist scholars frequently point to this verse to underscore what they understand to be the uncompromising gender egalitarianism inherent in the Qur'an.

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VOLUME II
On Women

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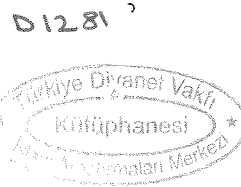
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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
in association with
THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES
LONDON
2021

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01 Haziran 2022

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PETER WEBB*

Protection Granted by Women

Between Law and Literature

* ABSTRACT

Grants of protection in pre-Islamic Arabia were often connected to expressions of status and power. This paper evaluates the gendered aspects of protection to explore how Arabic literature viewed grants of protection by women. The issue was recorded in various guises: jurists debated the issue on a theoretical level, historians included relevant stories in the Prophet's biography, and literature preserves other episodes from pre- and early-Islamic-era Arabia. While jurists generally permitted women to grant protection, literary works took an opposite track, and employed the trope of women's acts of protecting to denigrate male characters. A cross-genre analysis of women protectors reveals intriguing aspects about the status of women and the nature of fact and fiction in Arabic literature about the Arabian past.

Keywords: Arab History, Islamic law, outlaw literature, pre-Islamic Arabia, women in Arabic Literature

* RÉSUMÉ

La protection accordée par les femmes : entre loi et littérature

Accorder une protection dans l'Arabie préislamique était souvent lié à l'expression du statut et du pouvoir. Cet article évalue les aspects genrés de la protection afin d'explorer la manière dont la littérature arabe considère l'octroi de protection par des femmes. Cette question a été

2.31-56

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