'NO', SAID THE PROPHET:
SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF A *ḤADĪTH*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article is a part of my Ph.D. project. Its purpose is to find out whether rhetorical analysis could be useful in finding some new aspects or a new reading of an Islamic *ḥadīth*, in this case chosen from the collection of al-Bukhārī.[1] Since I am interested in women's issues and gender studies and my research interest as well as the topic of my dissertation is to find out different images of female in the *ḥadīths* and the ways the concept of female is constituted in the texts, I have chosen the texts to be analysed from *Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, the Book of Marriage. The longest version of the *ḥadīth* in the *Kitāb*, no. 5191[2], can be found in Appendix. The translation is mine.

The *ḥadīth* I have chosen is an account of life in 7th century Medina and of the Prophet and his wives. For purposes of brevity, I call it the *Ḥadīth of Choice* because it is linked with Qur'ānic verses which are often called the *Verses of Choice* (33:28-29). It is a story of a crisis in the Prophet's household. But the narration is not only an account of the Prophet's domestic troubles, it is also a story of the relations between the *muhājirūn*, the Meccan Muslims who migrated to Medina with the Prophet in the year 622, and the *anṣār*, the Medinan Muslims. It is a story

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1   There are several extant collections of Islamic *ḥadīths*. Because *ḥadīths* are not holy texts in the same way as the Qur'ān, none of the collections has an official or exclusive status. *Ḥadīths* have been collected according to two principles, either by the source of information or by subject matter. The collections of al-Bukhārī (d. 870), Muslim (874), Sulaymān Abū Dā'ūd (888), al-Tirmidhī (892), al-Nasā'ī (915) and Ibn Māja (886/7) are considered to be the most important and trustworthy collections of the latter type, so-called *muṣannaf* collections. They are known collectively by the name *al-kutub al-sitta*, the six books. The collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim are the most authoritative ones and they are also known as the 'two authentic ones', *al-ṣaḥīḥān*.

2   I have used the edition of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* by Sharika dār al-arqam ibn abī al-arqam (1995). In this edition both the *bābs* and individual *ḥadīths* are numbered. When I speak of the entire *bāb*, I give only the number of the *bāb* in question, but when I speak of a specific *ḥadīth* I give both the number of the *bāb* and the *ḥadīth*.

of change in the behaviour of the Muslim women in Medina. It is also a story of the concern a father has for the future and the marriage of his daughter. It is a story of problems that a polygamous marriage brings into a household, even the household of the most righteous man among the Muslims. It is a story of the suffering of the Messenger of God and his relative poverty compared to the leaders of other, non-Muslim peoples. It also brings up in a very distinctive way the interaction of the Prophet and the divine revelation. The immediate motive or occasion for telling this *hadīth* is the desire of Ibn ʿAbbās to know who God meant in one of the verses he revealed to the Prophet. Thus, on the one hand, a Qurʾānic verse is the occasion for telling the *hadīth*, but on the other hand, the *hadīth* indicates that the activities of the Prophet and his wives had an impact on the divine revelation, and as a matter of fact, the text might be read as a demonstration of God's eagerness to get involved, even in the domestic life of his Messenger.

The *hadīth* or parts of it, appear in twelve *bābs* or chapters in the *Ṣahīh al-Bukhārī*, five times in *Kitāb al-nikāh*, the Book of Marriage.[3] I will mainly deal with these five in this article. The story is first told in its most complete form in a chapter which al-Bukhārī entitles 'About a man counselling his daughter for [the sake of] her husband'.[4] Then its themes pop up in considerably shorter versions in three other chapters of the same book. A few lines of it are used in a chapter entitled: 'On these words of God: Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over the other, [and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them;] God is All-high, All-great.'[5] The words are from the Qurʾān 4:34, the so-called *Verse of Qiwāma*.

The next chapter consists of two *hadīths* which take up parts of the same narration with a long introduction by al-Bukhārī 'About the separation of the Prophet from his wives. Muʿāwiya ibn Hayda tells us that he meant that he would separate himself from them only in the house. The first version is more authentic.'[6] And finally, one of the themes of the narration is used in a chapter called 'About a preference a man may feel for one of his wives'.[7]

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[3]   The *Ṣahīh al-Bukhārī* is divided into 97 books (*kitāb/kutub*) and 3450 chapters (*bāb/abwāb*). The other *Kitābs* where the motifs of this narration appear are *Kitāb al-ʿilm*, *Kitāb al-mazālim*, *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān* and *Kitāb al-libās*.

[4]   *Bāb* 83/84: *Bāb mawʿizati al-rajuli bnatahu li-hāli zawjihā.*

[5]   *Bāb* 91/92: *Bāb qawli llāhi taʿālā al-rijālu qawwāmūna ʿalā l-nisāʾi bimā faddala llāhu baʿdahum ʿalā baʿdin ilā qawlihi inna llāha kāna ʿaliyyan kabīran.* For the quotations from the Qurʾān I have used the English translation by A. J. Arberry (1980).

[6]   *Bāb* 92/93: *Bāb hijrati l-nabī sallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam nisāʾahu fī ghayri buyūtihinna wa-yudhkaru ʿan Muʿāwiya ibn Hayda rafaʿahu ghayra an lā tuhjara illā fī l-bayti wa-l-awwalu asahhu.*

1.1. Methodology

The most crucial question a researcher has to ask her/himself at the beginning of a research project is what do I have and what do I want to do with it? By means of my long and winding path with Islamic studies, women's studies and text analysis I have developed a method of choosing a text and a way of reading it. But it was only when I explicitly faced the above-mentioned questions that I realised where I had been going to all the time. I had chosen a text, a collection of *ḥadīth*s. But I could not ignore the *ḥadīth* criticism, the discussion of the authenticity of the texts, the historical timing of the texts, *ḥadīth* commentaries or the huge historical and present day literature which had used *ḥadīth* collections as source material. There were texts which had used the *ḥadīth*s **as sources of** Islamic knowledge, and there was a holy book which in many cases had been **the source of** a *ḥadīth* report, namely the Qurʾān.[8]

1.1.1. The question of historicity

Both remembering and forgetting may be interpreted and understood as active processes in history. *Ḥadīth*s form a basis for a common Islamic image of the world, a version of the past which can be agreed on. Therefore, whether a single *ḥadīth* is an historically correct account of what happened or what the Prophet has said, does not interest me in this analysis. Remembering is a process of collective selection, though it is individuals, of course, as group members who remember. In the same way, the principles of accepted behaviour found in the *ḥadīth* reports have become an agreed code of conduct and code of good and bad, regardless of the thoughts that Muslims may have on the authenticity of the reports. Muslims often recite words of a *ḥadīth* without knowing from which collection it comes, what was the historical context of the events and – of course – since the texts and *isnāds* have been written down, nobody even tries to remember the chains of transmitters any more. They have no importance since the *ḥadīth* has become a part of the generally accepted *sunna*.

If remembering and forgetting was an ongoing process in the first Islamic centuries, what happened when the texts were written down? Historical reports describe the shared experiences of a community but are remembered and written down by individuals. As Katherine Lang suggests in her unpublished dissertation on *awāʾil* in early Arabic historiography, it is impossible to separate individual

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7   *Bāb* 105/106: *Bāb ḥubbi l-rajuli baʿda nisāʾihi afḍala min baʿḍin.*

8   One of the most important functions of *ḥadīth*s has been to interpret Qurʾānic verses. A large number of *ḥadīth*s start with a Qurʾānic quotation, which is then explained by a close follower of the Prophet, one of his wives, or the Prophet himself. The *Ḥadīth of Choice* has also been used by al-Bukhārī to interpret three verses of the Qurʾān, namely verses 4:34, 33:28-29, and 66:4.

transmitters and compilers from their interpretative roles. Each transmitter and compiler

> had a point of view that was contingent – in part – upon his or her social context at a specific time and place within the Islamic world and – in part – upon the fact that he or she is a unique individual (Lang 1997: 9).

Lang (1997: 10) writes about allowing 'early Muslims an active role in the construction of their historical tradition.' There is nothing new in admitting that the social milieu and personal circumstances of the transmitters and compilers of the *hadīths* have affected our sources for early Islamic history. But, Lang (1997: 10-11) points out, this does not have to be taken as an apology for error:

> Taken negatively and from a positivistic perspective, this might mean that they made 'mistakes' in recording the historical tradition. However, this interpretation assumes that the tradents and compilers who constructed our sources for early Islamic history all valued the concept of 'objective history' in the same way historians came to value it in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and that they were working with a single historical record.

If we are able to put aside the notion of 'making mistakes' and analyse the transformation of information as an active process of interpretation, we may find a much more fruitful approach to early Islamic history.

My approach to *hadīths* is to consider them as one of the many layers of reality. Because of this approach to the text as a layer of reality which includes different layers in itself, I call my reading 'rhetorical'. It is rhetorical because I regard the text not only as a result of multiple discourses between people in the 7th century but also as a result of multiple discourses between the compiler, al-Bukhārī and the Islamic community of the 9th century. It is rhetorical because I read the text as a part of an ongoing rhetoric. Every piece of information we have is an answer to a need, be it a real need or an imaginary one. There has been a need to know the Prophet's opinion on a certain matter or there has been a need for passing on information of his supposed opinion on a matter, otherwise there would have been no sense in transmitting the information. An answer always presupposes a question, a text is an answer to a need in the community, and that is rhetorical.

I consider all the layers of reality, not only *hadīths* but also other more or less historical knowledge of the first Islamic centuries, as 'stories' in the way that they are contemporary reconstruction of history, not social-scientific objective descriptions of reality. I am not averse to the study of historical facts but in this article the question of historicity is secondary, if not totally irrelevant. I do not, though, agree with scholars who believe that either studying historical facts or that the whole Universe is only 'Brahma's dream' are the only alternative theoretical bases of scientific questioning. The historical situation and events in the 7th century is one dimension of the story which in itself has many different variations according to

whose experience is under discussion. How the events were reported, which events actually were taken into account and which ones were ignored, forgotten or covered up is another dimension of the truth. How the words and the content of what was reported have changed during transmission of the knowledge is the third dimension and the process of writing it down constitutes the fourth. While studying *ḥadīth* literature and a specific compilation of *ḥadīth* reports other questions have to be asked: What did the compiler, in this case al-Bukhārī, do to the text? How did he edit the reports he collected in addition to the processes of modification and selection they already had gone through? And the last question is: How do we, as present-day readers, understand the *ḥadīths*?[9]

1.1.2. The gender dimension

I call my work feminist rhetorical analysis because I look for different representations of female in the text while, at the same time, explicitly keeping in mind the core idea of the best definition of feminism I have read until now, which is the one given by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her *Challenging the Rhetorical Half-Turn* (p. 29, note 3): 'Feminism is the radical notion that women are people!' Women are simply people, nothing more, nothing less. I had just recently read this definition of feminism when I took my son to day-care a little later in the morning than usually and one of the nurses said to him smiling happily: 'How good that you came, there is no-one here yet, just a couple of girls have arrived!'

The feminist approach in my study becomes explicit in the questions I ask: What is the role of women in the story? Do they have a role in their own right, are they partners of men or do they act as a conduit, a channel for the relationships between men? Is this *ḥadīth* a story of men and their relations with their women or is it also a story of women and their lives?

The *ḥadīth* relates the story of a conflict but what is the essential conflict? Is it the power relations between men and women? How is it articulated? What is the narrative force in the *ḥadīth*? The women seem to return to their places as the result of the Prophet's separation from them. What does this mean? Is there a message of meekness for women in the story? The women are active in the decision-making process, they are given a choice but is it a real one? What does the decision they make really mean? What do they choose? Do they have 'free will', the power of a real choice, *ikhtiyār*, or do they perform an act of *bay'a*, recognise their husband's

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9   I am well aware that majority of the *ḥadīths* even in the collection of al-Bukhārī might be invented *ḥadīths*, but this does not really change anything. It is a fact that the *ḥadīths* are there now. This is indication enough that there has been a reason to select them for the collection and that they have been part of some kind of discourse either in the Prophet's lifetime or later during the process of transmission and selection. Individual *ḥadīths*, even if they are invented *ḥadīths*, always reflect matters of concern in the society where they were invented, memorised, written down, and judged authentic.

authority and promise him obedience? What is the rhetorical intention of the *ḥadīth*? How does the speaker want to influence his audience?

2. ANALYSIS: INNER TEXTURE OF THE *ḤADĪTH OF CHOICE* IN *KITĀB AL-NIKĀḤ*

The aim of my analysis is by close reading to first point out who the characters of this narration are, what are their mutual relations and their roles in the narration and secondly, to analyse the structure of the *ḥadīth*. While analysing the inner texture[10] of a text, my aim is to excerpt the text out of its historical, cultural, religious, social and intertextual context. In a written text, such as a *ḥadīth*, the inner text naturally resides in the verbal texture, the words, the language and the structure of the narration itself. It resides in things like repetition of particular words, creation of beginnings and endings, alternation of reported speech, narration and dialogue, the way arguments are presented, reasoned and argued against, the senses, feelings and actions the text describes or evokes, alternation of passivity and activity, references to time.

The main objectives I have while doing close inner text analysis are, first, to get well acquainted with the text but, second, to get a certain distance from the text which becomes quite important when studying religious texts or texts of which we have a certain pre-understanding in our minds. In the case of a *ḥadīth* report, a certain pre-understanding directs not only the reflection of the analyst but it also has directed the pattern of thought of the compiler of the *ḥadīths* and the minds of the Muslims who use the *ḥadīth* to argue their point.

In this article, I will present a brief inner text analysis of each of the variations of the *Ḥadīths of Choice* in *Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, but I will also deal with some intertextual aspects of the texts. Intertextuality in this case means recitation of Qur'ānic verses or parts of them, references or allusions to other *ḥadīths* and references to the social and political life of the time. The *ḥadīths* are presented in their order of appearance in the collection. I will only deal with the *matns* of the *ḥadīths* and not the *isnāds*.[11]

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[10]   I have taken the concept of inner texture from Vernon Robbins' *Exploring the Texture of Texts* (1996) and I have also used some of the basic guidelines of his methodological tools in my analysis.

[11]   A *ḥadīth* is normally composed of an *isnād*, a chain of transmitters, who according to the traditional Islamic view transmitted the knowledge by word of mouth until both the *isnād* and the *matn*, the report itself, was written down and eventually, in the 9th century in the case of al-Bukhārī, it was examined for authenticity and compiled in a collection.

2.1. A father counselling his daughter for the sake of her husband
(*Bāb* 83/84, no. 5191)

2.1.1. The characters

The first version of the *Ḥadīth of Choice* in *Kitāb al-nikāḥ, Bāb mawʿiẓati al-rajuli bnatahu liḥāli zawjihā*, is the longest and the most complete of the versions presented in this *Kitāb*. Nine characters appear in the *matn*, the text of the *ḥadīth*. The first one, ʿAbdallāh Ibn ʿAbbās, is the apparent narrator of the *ḥadīth*, the first one in the chain of transmitters. He begins by telling about his desire to ask a question of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. In another version of the same *ḥadīth* (*Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān: sūrat al-taḥrīm; Bāb* 2, no. 4913) he says that he had been waiting for a whole year before he had a chance to ask the question which intrigued him. The question concerns a Qurʾānic verse: *In tatūbā ilā allāh faqad ṣaghat qulūbukumā* (If you two repent to God, yet your hearts certainly inclined) which is the beginning of 66:4. Ibn ʿAbbās wanted to know who were these two women that should turn to God with repentance. The second speaker in the *matn* of the *ḥadīth* is then God himself. His words are cited directly and his words are, apparently, the original cause of the telling of the whole *ḥadīth*.

Ibn ʿAbbās tells with meticulous care how he found the occasion to ask the question he had in mind, in fact, in all the variations of the *ḥadīth* when the whole story is told, the deviation of ʿUmar from the route and its reason is reported in detail. When Ibn ʿAbbās finally gets a chance to ask the question, ʿUmar's answer is filled with surprise: 'Good heavens, Ibn ʿAbbās, they were ʿĀʾisha and Ḥafṣa!'[12] It seems, in the eyes of a present-day reader, that it must have been general knowledge that it was these two of the Prophet's wives who were the cause of the trouble in his household.

It soon becomes clear that the actual narrator of the *ḥadīth* is not Ibn ʿAbbās but the third person in order of appearance, namely ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: 'Then ʿUmar went on narrating the *ḥadīth* and said...'[13]

At the beginning of the narration, we get acquainted with ʿUmar's neighbour. ʿUmar does not mention his name, nor are his words quoted until later, but he says that they lived among *banī umayyata bni zaydin* in *ʿAwālī al-madīnati*[14]. The neighbour is simply referred to as the *Anṣārī*[15]. It is the *Anṣārī* neighbour of ʿUmar who breaks the news of the repudiation to ʿUmar.

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12   *Wa ʿajaban laka yā ibn ʿAbbās humā ʿĀʾisha wa-Ḥafṣa!*

13   *Thumma staqbala ʿUmar al-ḥadītha yasūquhu qāla...*

14   The area was called ʿAwālī *al-madīna* because it was the highest ground in the immediate vicinity of Medina. Its distance from the centre of Medina and the Prophet's house was about one mile. (*Hadī al-sārī*, p. 89.)

The fourth character in the story in order of appearance is 'Umar's wife. Her name is not mentioned either but her words to 'Umar are quoted directly. The role of 'Umar's wife in the *ḥadīth* seems to be a minor part but it is she who utters some of the most important words. 'Umar is first explaining how the men of Quraysh used to be the masters of their houses and their wives used to obey them without questioning. But when they moved to Medina, Qurayshi women started to adopt the manners of the Medinan women, who criticised their husbands and even acted like their superiors. Once 'Umar yelled at his wife and she answered back. 'Umar did not approve of this kind of conduct and he must have found fault with his wife's misbehaviour because his wife said to him: 'Why do you disapprove of me answering you back? By God, the wives of the Prophet answer him back.'[16]

The other female character in the narration, 'Umar's daughter Ḥafṣa, is the fifth in order of appearance. She also has a surprisingly minor part in the *ḥadīth* although the discussion between her and her father and especially the advice 'Umar gives to her, has been raised to the chapter-heading. Ḥafṣa's words are quoted twice: first she simply answers yes to 'Umar's question as to whether any one of the Prophet's wives argues with him. 'Umar gets very angry, warns his daughter of God's anger for the sake of his Messenger and forbids her to be too demanding, to argue against the Prophet and to leave him alone. 'Umar even advises his daughter to come to him and ask for anything she needs so that the Prophet would not be bothered. And in the end he quite unexpectedly tells Ḥafṣa not to be misled by 'Ā'isha.[17] This could be read as a warning. 'Umar seems to be cautioning Ḥafṣa against joining 'Ā'isha in her tricks and schemes. What seems to be acceptable conduct for 'Ā'isha may not be the same for the other wives because 'Ā'isha was the Prophet's favourite.

On the other hand, al-Bukhārī uses a part of the same *ḥadīth* in a chapter which he entitles 'Chapter about a man's greater love for one of his wives than the others'[18]; where the words of 'Umar almost have a comforting tone: 'My little daughter, don't let yourself be misled by the one whose beauty evokes the love of God's Messenger!'[19]

'Umar uses effectively the contrast of two calamities and, at the same time, gives us a glimpse of the social reality the *ḥadīth* is supposed to refer to, by telling about the fears they had in Medina about the tribe of Ghassān. According to the version in *Kitāb al-libās* (*Bāb* 31, no. 5843), the Ghassānids were the only tribe nearby

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15 Ibn Saʿd gives him the name Aws ibn Khawalī (*Fī al-nisāʾ*, p. 137).

16 *Wa-lima tunkiru an urājiʿaka fa-wa-llāhi inna azwāja al-nabī ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam la-yurājiʿnahu.*

17 *Wa-lā yaghurrannaki an kānat jāratuki awḍaʾa minki wa-aḥabba ilā l-nabī (ṣ).*

18 *Bāb* 105/106, no. 5218: *Bāb ḥubbi l-rajuli baʿda nisāʾihi afḍala min baʿdin.*

19 *Yā bunayyatu, lā yaghurrannaki hādhihi allatī aʿjabahā ḥusnuhā ḥubbu rasūli llāhi (ṣ) iyyāhā.*

which had not surrendered to the Prophet. Yet another version in *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (*Bāb* 2, no. 4913) accentuates the fear of the Medinan Muslims: 'We were told that he [the King of the Ghassānids] intended to attack us and we were absorbed in these thoughts.' Meanwhile, the news of the repudiation of the Prophet's wives gets to 'Umar. It is the *Anṣārī* neighbour, the sixth character in the story, who brings the bad news to him. Because of the fear of the Ghassānids, 'Umar first thinks that it is because of their attack that his neighbour is pounding at his door at night. The *Anṣārī* says that something terrible has happened and 'Umar's guess is that the Ghassānids have attacked. 'No, something more important and more terrible than that', the *Anṣārī* answers.[20] When 'Umar finally understands what has happened he gets angry but is not surprised at all, rather, he seems to think 'I knew this would happen!'

'Umar puts on his clothes and goes to the Prophet's house. But instead of hurrying to meet his daughter, he performs the morning prayer with the Prophet. He does not talk to the Prophet about the news he has heard. The Prophet retires to his room and 'Umar goes on to talk to his daughter. He finds a weeping Ḥafṣa and he asks her if the Prophet has repudiated all of his wives. Ḥafṣa's words are quoted for the second time when she says that she does not know: 'I don't know, there he is alone in his room.'[21]

'Umar goes out and joins a group of people which has gathered in the yard of the Prophet's house. Some of them are weeping. 'Umar probably finds the situation either too depressing or he is too anxious to know what has happened that he can wait no longer: 'I sat with them for a while but could not endure the situation.'[22]

The next, and seventh person with whom 'Umar interacts is the black servant or slave, *ghulām aswad*, of the Prophet. This seems to be an episode independent of the rest of the story. Three times 'Umar asks the servant to announce him to the Prophet and three times the servant speaks to the Prophet, but comes back without permission to enter. When 'Umar is ready to leave, the servant calls him and finally, as the eighth character in the narration, the Prophet receives 'Umar.

Again, it is 'Umar who does most of the talking. The mood of the Prophet gets better while listening to 'Umar. The changes in both the mood of the Prophet and his interlocutor are in a very delicate way described by the movements of their bodily positions. At first, the Prophet is lying down on a hard mat which has left marks on his side. 'Umar greets him and asks, standing, *wa-ana qā'imun*, whether the repudiation has taken place or not. The Prophet looks at 'Umar, answers in negative, and 'Umar exclaims: *Allāhu akbar*! Then he expresses to the Prophet his opinions about the differences between the Quraysh and the *Anṣār* and when he

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20   *Lā, bal a'ẓamu min dhālika wa-ahwalu.*

21   *Lā adrī, hā huwa dhā mu'tazilun fī l-mashrubati.*

22   *Jalastu ma'ahum qalīlan thumma ghalabanī mā ajidu.*

sees the Prophet smiling, he goes on telling him about his earlier meeting with Ḥafṣa and the advice he had given her.[23] The Prophet smiles for a second time and ʿUmar has the courage to sit down. He looks around in the Prophet's house and finds it a very poor household. He advises Muḥammad to ask God for more wealth and compares the economic situation of Muslims to that of the Roman and Persian people. The Prophet sits up and is seemingly annoyed. ʿUmar asks for forgiveness.

As an epilogue, after the episode between ʿUmar and the Prophet, the commentator tells briefly how the crisis ended. He does not tell what happened between the Prophet and his wives, he simply states that the Prophet kept away from his wives for twenty-nine days and that the reason for his separation was a secret or a story (ḥadīth) Ḥafṣa had revealed to ʿĀʾisha.

After the separation, the Prophet goes to meet ʿĀʾisha. Thus, ʿĀʾisha becomes the ninth character of the ḥadīth. The young ʿĀʾisha's character is a very ambiguous one. First, she greets her long absent husband by wondering why he did not do as he had said and stay away from his wives for the whole month, since only twenty-nine days had passed according to her calculation. In all the variations she is quickly silenced by the Prophet while he states that there are twenty-nine days in the month. And the narrator reconfirms: 'And there were twenty-nine days in that month.'[24] Then ʿĀʾisha is presented as being proud of the fact that, of all his wives, the Prophet came to meet her first and the *Verses of Choice* were revealed in her presence and the Prophet asked her to choose first. In another version (*Kitāb maẓālim*: *Bāb al-ghurfati wa-l-ʿulliyyati al-mushrifati wa-ghayri l-mushrifati fī al-suṭūḥi wa-ghayrihā*; *Bāb* 25, no. 2468) a longer version of the conversation between the Prophet and ʿĀʾisha is given. According to this version, the Prophet says to her that he will ask her a question but he is not expecting an answer before she consults her parents. ʿĀʾisha knows that her parents would not advise her to leave the Prophet so she answers: 'Should I consult my parents on that? I choose God and His Messenger and the Hereafter.'[25]

In all, nine characters appear in the *Ḥadīth of Choice* in its most complete form, six men and three women. The interaction between the individual men could be described as mutual help, sympathy, respect and co-operation. The most prominent

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[23]   In another version of the story (*Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān: sūrat al-taḥrīm*, Bāb 2, no. 4913) ʿUmar visits not only Ḥafṣa but another one of the Prophet's wives, too, namely Umm Salama. Umm Salama does not at all accept the interference of ʿUmar in the family life of the Prophet and his wives and she retorts to him: 'Good heavens, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, you interfere in everything! You even want to come between God's Messenger and his wives.' (*ʿAjaban laka yā ibn al-Khaṭṭāb dakhalta fī kulli shayʾin ḥattā tabtaghī an tadkhula bayna rasūli llāhi ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam wa-azwājihi.*) When ʿUmar meets the Prophet and tells him about his meeting with Umm Salama, the Prophet finds this amusing: 'When I came to the incident with Umm Salama, God's Messenger smiled.' (*Fa lammā balaghtu ḥadītha Umm Salama tabassama rasūlu llāhi ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam.*)

[24]   *Wa-kāna dhālika al-shahru tisʿun wa-ʿishrūna!*

[25]   *A-fī hādhā astaʾmiru abawayya? Fa-innī urīdu allāha wa-rasūlahu wa-dāra l-ākhirata.*

feature of the relationship between Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿUmar seems to be respect. They go on a pilgrimage together and Ibn ʿAbbās follows ʿUmar carrying a water container when he feels the need of emptying his bowels. In other versions of the *ḥadīth* in *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān, sūrat al-taḥrīm* (*Bāb* 2, nos. 4913, 4915), the interaction between Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿUmar is explained in more detail. Ibn ʿAbbās says to ʿUmar that he had been waiting for the occasion to ask the question for a year but that he could not do so out of respect. ʿUmar answers that Ibn ʿAbbās should feel free to ask any questions and ʿUmar would be happy to answer if he has the knowledge. In number 4913, there is a more extensive description of ʿUmar's quarrel with his wife, too (see below).

The relation between ʿUmar and his neighbour seems to be one of mutual assistance and co-operation. ʿUmar talks about his *Anṣārī* neighbour with respect and consideration. In another *Kitāb* of the collection, their way of taking turns in transmitting knowledge has been taken up to a chapter-heading by al-Bukhārī. In *Kitāb al-ʿilm: Bāb al-tanāwub fī l-ʿilm* (*Bāb* 27, no. 89), al-Bukhārī repeats the part of the *Ḥadīth of Choice* which tells about the relation of mutual benefit in '*tanāwub fī l-ʿilm*' (alternation in transmitting knowledge) between ʿUmar and his neighbour. If ʿUmar and his neighbour were on such good terms and if they met each other regularly, a present-day reader would expect them to have spoken about the behaviour of women in Medina. Though, relations between husbands and wives may have been considered such a private matter that even close friends did not speak about them openly. On the other hand, one might argue that the role of the neighbour is limited in the story; he acts only as the messenger and all attempts to draw conclusions from the relation between him and ʿUmar are only speculation from the point of view of a present-day reader. However, women seem to have been more open in this regard. If the Meccan women had started to adopt the habits of the Medinan women, they probably had also exchanged opinions and experiences about their respective family lives. In the more complete versions of the *ḥadīth*, ʿUmar says explicitly that the cause of the conflict between Meccan men and women in Medina was the different behaviour of local women and their supremacy over the local men. This makes the fact that nothing is mentioned about ʿUmar or other *muhājirūn* talking to their Medinan friends about the behaviour of the women in Medina, to my mind, even more remarkable.

The interaction between individual men and women is, because of the nature the narration, more discordant. The explicit occasion of the *ḥadīth* was the dis-obedience of one or two of the wives of the Prophet, the reaction of God to this disobedience by revealing a Qurʾānic verse and the desire of Ibn ʿAbbās to know whom the words of God were referring to. But the vital narrative forces in the story are the discussions or quarrels between ʿUmar and his wife and ʿUmar and his daughter Ḥafṣa and the observation of ʿUmar that the women of Quraysh had become more argumentative and less compliant in Medina than they used to be in

Mecca. In *Kitāb al-nikāḥ* number 5191, ʿUmar illustrates the change in his own wife's behaviour simply by telling that he once yelled at his wife and she answered him back, which he disliked, but in another version of the *ḥadīth* in *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān: sūrat al-taḥrīm* (*Bāb* 2, no. 4913) he says: 'Once when I was making a decision on a certain matter, my wife said: "What about doing so-and-so." I said to her: "What's the matter with you? What have you got to do with anything that's my business only?"'

The interaction between ʿUmar and his daughter is told in the same way in all the versions of the *ḥadīth*. ʿUmar asks Ḥafṣa if it is true that the wives of the Prophet answer him back and she answers yes. ʿUmar gets angry and alarmed. He scolds his daughter and warns her to make neither God nor his messenger angry.

The interaction between the groups of people seems to be more varied and many-sided that that between individuals. Several groups of people are mentioned in the *ḥadīth*. The fundamental discord is between husbands and wives but there is also at least an implicit difference in behaviour, and perhaps even a difference in values and norms, between the Meccan and the Medinan Muslims as groups. Nothing is said about the Medinan Muslims disapproving of the behaviour of their wives. ʿUmar states as a matter of fact that in Medina the women are accustomed to have the upper hand over their men: *...al-Anṣār... qawmun taghlibuhum nisāʾuhum*. The situation becomes uncomfortable to the Meccan men only when the Meccan women start to imitate the behaviour of the Medinan women.

Three foreign tribes or people are mentioned in the *ḥadīth*. The tribe of the Ghassān functions as an external threat to the community and the Romans and the Persians are examples of non-Muslim peoples who are rich and powerful in this life but who will not get a reward in the after-life. The Ghassānids, the Romans and the Persians constitute the opposite of the *umma*. Their opposite role is accentuated by the group of Muslims that has gathered in the mosque. They are the core of the early Meccan *umma*, worried about its leader and his family. Some of the people are even said to be weeping. This staging sets the Prophet's wives in opposition to their husband Muḥammad, their families, and, implicitly, the whole *umma*. After all, it is because of them that the whole community is upset. The *ḥadīth* is structured in such a manner that it makes the situation look as if even the *Anṣār* were closer to the Prophet than his own wives, and the reason for this is the adoption by the Meccan women of the *Anṣār* women's behaviour.[26]

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26 Of the Prophet's wives Khadīja – who passed away before *hijra* – ʿĀʾisha, Ḥafṣa, Umm Ḥabība, Umm Salama, and Sawda were of Quraysh origin. Zaynab bint Jaḥsh was a Meccan woman of the Khuzayma tribe (*Fī al-nisāʾ*, p. 72). Zaynab bint Khuzayma and Maymūna were Arab women of the Banū Hilāl, but Zaynab died only after eight months of her marriage to the Prophet (*Fī al-nisāʾ*, pp. 82, 94). Juwayriyya was an Arabian war captive of the Khuzāʿa tribe (*Fī al-nisāʾ*, p. 83), Ṣafiyya and Rayḥāna were Jewish war captives (*Fī al-nisāʾ*, pp. 85, 92).

However, the Prophet's reaction to the words of ʿUmar when he explains his feelings about the change in the women's behaviour to the Prophet is worth noticing. The Prophet does not seem to take this so seriously, he does not say anything about his wives neither about the Meccan or Medinan women in general. The Prophet does not say anything, he simply smiles.

2.1.2. The structure

Although the Prophet is a very marginal figure in the actual story, the structure of the *ḥadīth* presents him as the central figure of the narration. The *ḥadīth* is like a Russian doll: the frame story (Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿUmar on pilgrimage) reveals another frame story (ʿUmar and his neighbour) which reveals a web of episodes (ʿUmar and his wife, ʿUmar and his daughter, the threat of the Ghassānids, ʿUmar and his daughter for the second time, ʿUmar and the Prophet's servant) which are like inserted scenes, little boxes inside a huge box. But all these stories and sub-stories and inserted scenes lead to one tiny box in the centre of everything and that is the box which contains the scene between ʿUmar and Muḥammad. The dramatic effect of the scene is accentuated by ʿUmar's attempts to get an audience with the Prophet which is repeated three times in exactly the same words. ʿUmar is giving up hope and turning away when the Prophet finally gives him permission to enter. And then, as an anticlimax but at the same time a great relief, the Prophet utters one single word: '*Lā*', no.

Although power relations between men and women are a very essential substance of this *ḥadīth*, they are not discussed directly at all. The issue is buried in the structure of the story and although it comes up in the argumentation of ʿUmar and his wife, the Prophet himself does not say anything concerning the power relations between men and women. Power relations between men and women are clearly the narrative force of the *ḥadīth*. Disputes between ʿUmar and his wife and daughter and alleged disputes between the Prophet and his wives are the incidents which bring the narration forward, they act as conductors to other 'boxes' in the narration.

2.2. Men are the managers of the affairs of women
(*Bāb* 91/92, no. 5201)

The second occurrence of the *Ḥadīth of Choice* in *Kitāb al-nikāḥ* is subtitled 'Chapter on these words of God: Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another, until his words God is All-high, All-great'. These words replicate words of the *Verse of Qiwāma* (4:34). The Qurʾānic words al-Bukhārī is quoting in his chapter-heading do not seem to have anything to do with the text he gives in the following *ḥadīth*. The chapter-

heading mentions the *qiwāma* of men over women (*Bāb qawli llāhi taʿlā al-rijālu qawwāmūna ʿalā l-nisāʾ*) and the *ḥadīth* says that

> the Prophet took an oath that he will separate himself from his wives for one month and stay in his *mashruba*, room. On the 29th day he came down and he was told: God's Messenger, you took an oath for a month! He said: There are 29 days in a month.

Interestingly, the discussion between ʿĀʾisha and the Prophet about the length of the month is brought up even in this short version although ʿĀʾisha's name is not mentioned.

The relevance of the substance of the *ḥadīth* to the chapter-heading becomes clear if one reads not only the chapter-heading but the whole Qurʾānic verse of which it is a part and which is, of course, assumed to be known. He says: 'From these words of God... until his words'.[27] What al-Bukhārī omits in his chapter-heading are these words of God: 'Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret of God's guarding.' And as punishment for those wives who do not obey, the continuation of the same verse recommends that the husband should talk to his wives first, then he should abstain from sexual relations with them and as a last resort the disobedient wife may be beaten: 'And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them.' These words are clearly assumed to be known by the listeners and the readers of the text, otherwise there would be no sense in connecting the *Ḥadīth of Choice* to the *Verse of Qiwāma*. As a matter of fact, al-Bukhārī uses the *Ḥadīth of Choice* here to legitimate the separation of the Prophet from his wives. The separation is clearly sanctioned by God in the second part of the *Verse of Qiwāma*. But al-Bukhārī is, here again, using the same text in two contradictory ways. At the end of no. 5191, he says that God disapproved of Muḥammad's separation from his wives: 'He had said: I will not visit them for one month, because of his anger towards them, when God had blamed him.'[28]

In this *ḥadīth* (no. 5201), nothing new is said about the event or the characters in the story, its function seems to be to justify *qiwāma* and to justify the Prophet's separation from his wives. This seems to be contradictory with the words of God to his Messenger in the *Verses of Choice* since in it God says to Muḥammad: 'O Prophet, why forbiddest thou what God has made lawful to thee...' If, indeed, these two Qurʾānic verses are connected and refer to the same incident, the banning in the second verse could be understood as referring to the Prophet's abstention from sexual relations with his wives as a group. The text is usually interpreted as referring to either a trick played by ʿĀʾisha and the Prophet's promise not to drink honey any longer, or to an incident between Ḥafṣa, ʿĀʾisha, Māriyya the Copt and the Prophet

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27   *Qawli llāhi... ilā qawlihi.*

28   *Wa kāna qāla mā anā bidākhilin ʿalayhinna shahran min shiddati mawjidatihi ʿalayhinna ḥīna ʿātabahu llāhu.*

and the promise of the latter to abstain from sexual relations with Māriyya, or the general misbehaviour of the Prophet's wives (see Stowasser 1994: 95-100).

2.3. The separation (*Bāb* 92/93 nos. 5202, 5203)

The third occurrence of the themes of the story is in *Bāb hijrati al-nabī*, which includes two *ḥadīths*. The first one is quite similar to no. 5201. It differs from it by the chapter-heading in which al-Bukhārī quotes the Prophet through Muʿāwiya ibn Ḥayda saying that he would separate from his wives only in the house. It is a good example of one of the ways al-Bukhārī gives meanings to the texts. Here he does so by quoting Muʿāwiya ibn Ḥayda's words which he does not repeat in any of the other occurrences of the *Ḥadīth of Choice*. In no. 5201, almost exactly the same text is used to illustrate the *qiwāma* of men over women but in no. 5202, it is used to say that the separation would not be a final repudiation, but only a separation in the house.

The second *ḥadīth* in the same *bāb* relates the story of the Prophet's separation in a nutshell. The Prophet's wives are weeping and their families have gathered around them. What is interesting in this text compared to the longer version is that Ibn ʿAbbās says that **he** was himself in the mosque when ʿUmar came to see what had happened. The beginning of *ḥadīth* no. 5191 is based on the presupposition that Ibn ʿAbbās would not have been around at all since he was in complete ignorance of what had happened. Again ʿUmar greets the Prophet three times but he does not answer. When ʿUmar finally meets the Prophet and asks whether he has repudiated his wives, the Prophet gives a longer answer than in the first version: 'No, but I have taken an oath not to go to them for one month.'[29]

2.4. A man's greater love for one of his wives
(*Bāb* 105/106, no. 5218)

The last chapter-heading (*Bāb ḥubbi al-rajuli baʿḍa nisāʾihi afḍala min baʿḍin*) which gives parts of the *Ḥadīth of Choice* in *Kitāb al-nikāḥ* is quite different than the others. The chapter deals with the problems of a polygamous marriage, more specifically a man's greater love for one of his wives than the others. According to the text and referring to the words of Ibn ʿAbbās again, ʿUmar went to meet his daughter Ḥafṣa and said to her that she should not let herself be misled by the one whose beauty evokes the love of God's Messenger. It most probably is Ibn ʿAbbās, who adds that ʿUmar means ʿĀʾisha, since the words al-Bukhārī himself has added are usually introduced with: 'Abū ʿAbdallāh says...' ʿUmar adds that he told this to the Prophet and he smiled.

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29   *Lā wa-lākin ālaytu minhunna shahran.*

3. AL-BUKHĀRĪ: AUTHOR AND COMPILER

Barbara Stowasser maintains in her *Gender Issues and Contemporary Quran Interpretation* that the focus of the compilers of the six canonical collections was not so much on the historical authenticity of the texts but the qualification of the *ḥadīths* was 'based on a larger concept of authenticity as "spiritually and morally beneficial to the community"' (Stowasser 1998: 32). Whether the *Ḥadīth of Choice* is an authentic *ḥadīth*, whether it goes back to the seventh century, whether it really describes what actually happened in the Prophet's household or in the early Muslim community, is irrelevant. What is relevant is that al-Bukhārī thought that the *ḥadīth* is worth the label *ṣaḥīḥ*, that he thought that it is beneficial to the Muslim community and that it is now read by Sunni Muslims all over the world in this form.

The consensus principle, as Stowasser calls it, has certainly played a major part in the compilation work of al-Bukhārī. He wrote as if he was writing a law book and consensus was one of the principles by which Islamic law was formed in the 9th century. The consensus principle also explains the existence of contradictory *ḥadīths* in the same collection. Their beneficial nature has probably been agreed upon by a group of people over a period of time. (Stowasser 1998: 31-32.) I think that Katherine Lang points out something very important in her analysis of *awā'il* which can, as well, be applied to the analysis of *ḥadīths* in general. She suggests that keeping in mind that 'commitment to the Prophet Muḥammad was **one** aspect of life and **one** level of loyalty in early Islamic societies allows us to interpret textual inconsistencies and ambiguities in early Arabic historical tradition' as representations of the diversity of life and loyalties at the time (Lang 1997: 14-15).

Indeed, it seems logical that in the 7th and 8th centuries, before the *ḥadīth* was given the status of the second most important basis of Islamic faith and practice after the Qur'ān, there would not have been such eagerness to know whether a particular *ḥadīth* was authentic or not as long as its moral teaching was considered to be beneficial to the community. What the importance that al-Bukhārī himself in the 9th century actually gave to the authenticity and historicity of the texts he included in his *ṣaḥīḥ* and what the meaning of the beneficial nature of the texts is, in my opinion, still not clear.

Since the times of Joseph Schacht, many Western researchers have emphasised the notion that there almost always has been a legal opinion or at least a legal category as a basis and *ḥadīths* confirming and legitimising this opinion or suitable to this category were created later. According to these researchers, seemingly historical information on the Prophet's life has acted as a background for legal doctrines but this information has no independent value. By comparing discussions on the law of war during the second Islamic century, for which the biography of the Prophet was thoroughly searched in quest of precedents, Schacht found out that the material

concerning the Prophet's life had 'grown independently' during most of the century.

> We find new traditions at every successive stage of doctrine... A considerable part of the standard biography of the Prophet in Medina as it appeared in the second half of the second century AH, was of a very recent origin and is therefore without independent historical value. (Schacht 1949: 151.)

The key concepts here seem to be 'independent' and 'historical'. I argue that even though the *ḥadīths* might not have any 'independent historical' value, their value as reflections of the prevalent discourses of the time is undeniable. Although a large part of the *ḥadīth* literature is nothing but decisions of legal problems and pure invention, or ideologically biased editing of what has happened or what has been said, the fact remains that the texts were written down and collected in the 9th century and they were collected, edited and preserved for a reason. Thus, they do have independent value, although perhaps not explicitly historical value if we think in terms of positivistic objective history, but surely they do have great value in terms of history of ideologies, development of early Islam and development of religious rhetoric during the first Islamic centuries.

3.1. The jurisprudence of al-Bukhārī is in his chapter-headings

Goldziher quotes al-Qasṭallānī – one of the great commentators of al-Bukhārī – when he writes that the jurisprudence of al-Bukhārī is in his chapter-headings, *fiqh al-Bukhārī fī tarājimihi*. In fact, it is clear that al-Bukhārī wrote the titles first and then divided his texts into these categories. Instead of taking the texts as his starting point, and creating the chapters according to the subject matter of the texts, which would probably have resulted in a quite different collection, he has taken some pre-existing categories as his starting point and categorised the texts according to them. This has not always been successful. Sometimes the content of the *ḥadīth* does not seem to correspond at all with the title or it seems to have been artificially squeezed into the chapter. At other times it is clear that al-Bukhārī's reading of the text has been influenced by his consciousness of the pre-existing titles and sometimes when the chapter-heading quotes words of the Qurʾān, the connection between the chapter-heading and the text is not clear at all unless the *āya* al-Bukhārī refers to is read in its entirety. This practice did not cause any misunderstandings in al-Bukhā-rī's time since it was a common practice and listeners and readers were supposed to be able to fill in the gaps in their minds. al-Bukhārī's goal seems to have been to prove that every chapter of *fiqh* could be filled with *ḥadīth* material, but, one might ask, why did he match just these specific words of the *matn* to these chapter-headings, and why did he choose just these words of the *āya* and not the more appropriate parts of it, or of the *sūra*, in question?

al-Bukhārī has categorised the *Ḥadīth of Choice* in *Kitāb al-nikāḥ* under four different chapter-headings. First, he takes up the theme of a father giving advice to his daughter, then he uses parts of the same *ḥadīth* to explain the *Verse of Qiwāma* (4:34). He highlights the separation of the Prophet from his wives but adds that he would do it only in the house, and finally he uses the *ḥadīth* to say that a polygamous man may prefer one of his wives to the others. The story seems to fit the first category quite well. ʿUmar gives advice to his daughter and his concern for the marriage of Ḥafṣa is an important part of the story. The second title seems quite incomprehensible to a present-day reader. The *qiwāma* of men over women is a crucial part of the *ḥadīth* in its more complete form, but nothing in the specific words al-Bukhārī uses under the chapter-heading relates to it.

The last heading is a very interesting one: 'Chapter about a man's greater love for one of his wives than the others'.[30] In the text ʿUmar is comforting his daughter and saying to her that she should not let the thought that ʿĀʾisha is more beautiful than she is and that she is the preferred one of the Prophet mislead her. The chapter-heading shifts the emphasis from a father's consolation to his daughter to the husband's greater love for one of his wives. In the more complete version of the *Ḥadīth of Choice*, ʿUmar is much more explicit: *lā yaghurrannaki an kānat jāratuki awḍaʾa minki wa-aḥabba ilā al-nabī (ṣ)*. Why al-Bukhārī chose the less clear words under the chapter-heading about a man's preference for one of his wives, remains a question without an answer. At any rate, this chapter-heading is an another example of the way al-Bukhārī takes up a point in the text and gives it either a new or enhanced meaning by attaching it to a chapter-heading which is clearly meant to guide the readers' understanding of the text.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Could a rhetorical reading be a fruitful approach to *ḥadīth* literature? Reading this *ḥadīth* rhetorically brings up very clearly the dramatic nature of the text. It shows how marginal a figure the Prophet actually is in the narration, he says very little and he says nothing about the central conflict. The structural focus of the *ḥadīth*, in its longest form, is the person of the Prophet who is staying alone in his room, separated from the general stir in and about his house. But the substance of the *ḥadīth* concentrates on ʿUmar and his family and the relations between men and women in Medina.

The rhetorical structure and intertextual references in this *ḥadīth* indicate that it has been used by al-Bukhārī to justify his views about women and their place in Medinan society. al-Bukhārī uses the *Ḥadīth of Choice* to link three Qurʾānic verses: the *Verse of Qiwāma* (4:34), the *Verses of Choice* (33:28-29) and the begin-

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[30]   *Bāb ḥubbi l-rajuli baʿḍa nisāʾihi afḍala min baʿḍin.*

ning of *Sūrat al-taḥrīm* (66:1-4). All these verses seem to contain a warning to the Prophet's wives. They emphasise the duty of the wives to be obedient and all three also prescribe a penalty for disobedience: '...admonish [them] banish them to their couches, and beat them'[31], 'Wives of the Prophet, whosoever among you commits a flagrant indecency, for her the chastisement shall be doubled'[32], and '...but if you support one another against him, God is his Protector, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers; and after that, the angels are his supporters'.[33]

But can the *ḥadīth* be used to argue that the Prophet had a particular opinion on the issue? Women seem to be put back to their places after the crisis, but in the light of this analysis, the message of the text seems to be that it was more or less the will of ʿUmar, al-Bukhārī, and later interpretation to understand the events this way. The Prophet does not seem to be bothered by the behaviour of his wives. Yes, he separated from them for a month, but the reason for the separation is never even referred to by Muḥammad himself. He never criticised his wives' behaviour. Qurʾān 66:3 mentions a secret between the Prophet and one of his wives and his anger towards her when she later divulged the secret. But the only reason for us to assume that the Prophet's wives began answering him back are the words of ʿUmar's wife and Ḥafṣa. Muḥammad himself never complains about the behaviour of his wives. He does not utter a word about the trick of the honey or the incident between himself and Māriyya. An alternative reading could be that the reason God blamed Muḥammad was, on the one hand, his separation from his wives and abstention from sexual pleasure, and on the other hand, his separation from his community and abstention from social life.[34]

One of the teachings that can be derived from the text but which has not been paid any attention to by al-Bukhārī is the meaning of sexuality and its role as a prerequisite for salvation. The *Ḥadīth of Choice* can be interpreted as propagating active sexuality as a prerequisite for acceptance by God but also for a harmonious social and public life. A man should not abstain from sexual relations with his wives, he should not deny himself what God has declared permitted.

The conclusion of Paul Germond, drawn after studying early Christianity and especially apocryphal texts as well as the reaction of modern Christians to the 1980s descriptions of Jesus as a sexual person, is that in Christianity sexuality and salvation are somehow intrinsically incompatible (Germond 1994: 367). This *ḥadīth*, in

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[31] 4:34: *...fa-ʿiẓūhunna wa-ahjurūhunna fī l-maḍājiʿi wa-aḍribūhunna...*

[32] 33:30: *Yā nisāʾa l-nabiyyi man yaʾti minkunna bi-fāḥishatin mubayyinatin yuḍāʿaf lahā l-ʿadhābu ḍiʿfayni...*

[33] 66:4: *...wa-in taẓāharā ʿalayhi fa-inna llāha huwa mawlāhu wa-jibrīlu wa-ṣāliḥu l-muʾminīna wa-l-malāʾikatu baʿda dhālika ẓahīrun.*

[34] The text does not indicate clearly whether Muḥammad got angry with his wives and separated from them first and God blamed him because of this, or, whether God blamed Muḥammad and he got angry with his wives after that and, obviously, partly because of God's reproach.

connection with the Qur'ānic verses that were revealed in conjunction with the crisis, seems to carry the completely opposite message.

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APPENDIX

Translation of the text:

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book of Marriage
Chapter about a man counselling his daughter for [the sake of] of her husband
(Chapter 83/84, no. 5191)

Narrated Ibn ʿAbbās:

I was eager to ask ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb about the two of the Prophet's wives regarding whom God said 'If you two repent to God, yet your hearts certainly inclined' until ʿUmar went on pilgrimage and I went with him. He went aside and I went with him carrying a container. He emptied his bowels, came to me and I poured water over his hands and he performed the ablution. I said to him: 'Chief of the Believers, who were the two of the Prophet's wives regarding whom God said:

"If you two repent to God, yet your hearts certainly inclined."' 'Umar said: 'Good heavens, Ibn 'Abbās, they were 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa.' Then 'Umar went on narrating the *ḥadīth* and said: 'I and an Anṣārī neighbour of mine in Bani Umayya bin Zayd from 'Awālī al-Madīna, used to take turns in visiting the Prophet. He used to go one day and I used to go the other day. When I went, I would bring to my neighbour news of what had happened that day, regarding the revelation and other things, and when he went, he used to do the same for me.'

'We, men of the Quraysh, used to have the upper hand over our wives, but when we came to the Anṣār, we noticed that their women had the upper hand over their men. Our women started to adopt the manners of the Anṣār women. Once I yelled at my wife and she answered back to me and I disapproved of her answering me back. She said to me: "Why do you disapprove of me answering you back? By God, the wives of the Prophet answer him back and some of them may even keep away from him the whole day until the night." That frightened me and I said to her: "Whoever of them does so will be damned!"'

'I put on my clothes and went to meet Ḥafṣa. I said to her: "Ḥafṣa, is anyone of you on bad terms with the Prophet all day until night?" She said: "Yes." I said: "You good-for-nothing, loser! Don't you believe that God will get angry for the anger of God's Messenger and you will perish? Don't ask too much from the Prophet and don't answer him back and don't keep away from him. Ask me whatever you need and do not let the fact that your neighbour is more charming than you and more beloved to the Prophet, mislead you."' He meant 'Ā'isha.'

'Umar said: 'We were assuming that the Ghassānid tribe was planning to attack us. One day when it was his turn, my Anṣārī friend went downtown and came back at night. He knocked violently at my door and asked for me. I got frightened and came out. He said: "An enormous thing has happened today." "What is it?" I asked, "have the Ghassānids attacked?" He said: "No, something more important and more terrible than that: The Prophet has repudiated his wives!" I said "Ḥafṣa is a good-for-nothing loser." I had already thought that this will happen.'

'I put on my clothes and performed the morning prayer with the Prophet and then the Prophet went to his room and stayed there alone.'

'I went to meet Ḥafṣa and found her weeping. I asked: "What are you weeping for? Did I not warn you? Did the Prophet repudiate you all?" She said: "I don't know. There he is alone in his room." I came out and sat near the pulpit and saw a group of people sitting around it and some of them were weeping. I sat with them for a while but could not endure the situation, so I went to the room where the Prophet was and said to his black servant: "Announce 'Umar." The servant went in, talked to the Prophet and returned saying: "I spoke to the Prophet and mentioned you but he kept quiet." I returned and sat with the group of people sitting near the pulpit, but I could not bear the situation and once again I said to the servant: "Announce 'Umar." He went in and returned saying: "I mentioned you to him but

he kept quiet." I returned again and sat with the group of people sitting near the pulpit but I could not bear the situation, so I went to the servant and said: "Announce ʿUmar." He went in and returned to me saying: "I mentioned you to him but he kept quiet."'

'When I was turning away to leave, the servant called me and said: "The Prophet gives you permission." I went to God's Messenger and saw him lying on a mat without a mattress. The stalks left imprints on his side and he was leaning on a leather pillow stuffed with date-palm fibres. I greeted him and while still standing I said: "God's Messenger, did you repudiate your wives?" He looked at me and said: "No." I said: "*Allāhu akbar*!" And then, while still standing I said, getting more familiar: "You know Messenger of God, we, men of Quraysh, used to have the upper hand over our wives, but when we came to Medina we noticed that their women have the upper hand over their men." The Prophet smiled and then I said to him: "You know Messenger of God, I went to meet Ḥafṣa and said to her: "Don't let the fact that your neighbour is more charming than you and more beloved to the Prophet, mislead you."' He meant ʿĀʾisha.

'The Prophet smiled for a second time and I sat down when I saw him smile. I looked around in his house, and by God, I could not see anything of importance in his house except three leather containers, so I said: "Messenger of God, invoke God to make your followers rich, for the Persians and the Romans are rich and they have been given earthly possessions and they do not even worship God." The Prophet sat up as he was leaning on his side and said: "Do you really think so, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb? These people have hastened to get their rewards in this world." I said: "Messenger of God, forgive me."'

'The Prophet kept away from his wives for twenty-nine days because of the story Ḥafṣa had told ʿĀʾisha. He had said: "I will not visit them for one month" because of his anger towards them, when God had blamed him. When twenty-nine days had passed the first one whom the Prophet went to meet was ʿĀʾisha. She said to him: "Messenger of God, didn't you swear that you would not visit us for one month, but now only twenty-nine days have passed, I have been counting them." He said: "There are twenty-nine days in a month." And there were twenty-nine days in that month. ʿĀʾisha said: "Then God revealed the Verses of Choice, and of all his wives he asked me first, and I chose him." Then he let all his other wives choose and they answered the same way as ʿĀʾisha did.'