

from other things which the law permits; he also forbade drinking of wine completely.¹³⁴

Yet John's ascription of the injunction to Muhammad specifically is significant. By doing so he became one of only two Christian authors from Islam's early period to mention female circumcision as something prescribed by Muhammad for the benefit of his followers.¹³⁵ The only other source to do so is the Leo-Umar correspondence which, as we have seen, is unlikely to have been a source for John's work, in that it probably post-dates John, and appears to represent somewhat different traditions. Other Christian sources mention circumcision in connection with the Arabs who had recently conquered them, and their witness does not preclude the possibility that they were referring to circumcision of both men and women.¹³⁶ But as it is clear that at least some of those Christians associated the practice with Judaism, it seems unlikely that they had women in mind when writing.¹³⁷ Thus, John's work appears to be a rarity among Christian works written in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic in presenting us with this tradition as coming from Muhammad. Given these circumstances we might question whether the practice's inclusion in John's treatise is indicative of a poorly informed source.

That circumcision was a part of early Islam, at least for men, is well established. The practice of circumcision in Arabia in the pre-Islamic period is attested to in Arabic poetry, and in authors such as Epiphanius of Salamis and Josephus.¹³⁸ It is not addressed in the Qur'an itself, and for this reason it is sometimes argued that it was not instituted by Muhammad, but was rather a carry over of a pre-Islamic practice that was adopted as part of the faith.¹³⁹

134 Kötter, *Die Schriften* vol. IV, p. 67, ln. 153–56.

135 Later Christians would sometimes copy John's text and include it in their own description of Islam. See for example, Euthymius Zigabenus, who, repeating John of Damascus, has it that Muhammad instituted female circumcision. (PG 130.1352D). As far as I know the Leo-Umar correspondence is the only other independent Christian source for this tradition, whether in Syriac, Arabic, or Greek.

136 See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, p. 470 for examples.

137 See A.-M. Saadi, 'Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources', in G. S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 217–22 for the view that the conquering Arabs were largely seen as monotheists with a Jewish precedent sent to punish the Christians for their sins.

138 See A. J. Wensinck, 'Khitān', *ET* vol. 5, p. 20. For Epiphanius, see Holl (ed.), *Epiphanius II: Panarion haer. 34–64*, pp. 379–80; Williams (trans.), *The Panarion I*, p. 150.

139 Sometimes Sura 2:124 is adduced as a justification for circumcision, as one of God's commandments to Abraham was circumcision of males. See Rubin, 'Hanifiyya and Ka'ba' and

Circumcision was required in Judaism, which it has been argued exerted significant influence over Islam, but it remains difficult to argue that female circumcision among Muslims is a product of that influence.¹⁴⁰ Under the Judaic covenant, only men are circumcised, and in that faith it does not appear to have been practiced among women.¹⁴¹ In the Old Testament, God commands all those born of the seed of Abraham to be circumcised, as well as those men or boys who are bought with money but are not of the seed of Abraham. God instructs Abraham that any male child whose foreskin is not circumcised shall be cut off from his people, as having broken God's covenant.¹⁴² No provision is made for female circumcision. Further, argument has been had over whether circumcision in either gender was adopted by the early Islamic community as a result of, or in spite of its relationship to Judaism, and whether that adoption came early or late in the Islamic tradition. Kister and Rubin have argued that circumcision became a part of early Islamic practice as it was a part of what was perceived as the right practice of Abraham or *sunan Ibrāhīm*.¹⁴³ Against this view, Kathryn Kueny has argued that whether or not later Islamic jurists (on whom Kister and Rubin base themselves) linked the practice of circumcision to Abrahamic commandments, circumcision in the Islamic tradition

M. J. Kister, "... and he was born circumcised ...": some notes on circumcision in hadith', *Oriens* 34 (1994), pp. 10–30 for two examples of where circumcision is simply an example of a practice deemed by the Islamic community to have been a part of the *sunan Ibrāhīm* that existed prior to Muhammad's coming.

140 For example, see Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 11–12. Crone and Cook claim that circumcision, together with sacrifice, became two pillars of Islam, although they do not appear to address the specific issue of female circumcision and it is not clear if they understand female circumcision to fall under the general use of the term.

141 Genesis 17:10–14. For female circumcision and Judaism, see M. Carol, 'Clitoridectomy', *ER* 3 (2005), pp. 1824–26 and J. Seidel, J. Baskin, and L. Snowman, 'Circumcision', *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 4 (2007), pp. 730–35. Al-Jahiz (781–c. 868), an early Muslim scholar, comments that the practice of both sexes being circumcised was continuous from the time of Abraham and Hagar to his time. See M. J. Kister, "... and he was born circumcised ...", p. 18 and Rubin, 'Hanifiyya and Ka'ba', pp. 99–100. For obvious reasons, data is difficult to collect on whether Jews in Arabia, possibly under the influence of the 'Ishmaelites', may also have practiced circumcision. Sources referring to circumcision are generally gender neutral or masculine, and this would lead one to incline toward the view that only the men practiced circumcision in accordance with Jewish practice. Al-Jahiz would have been referring to those whom he saw as being in tradition with Abraham, while the traditional Jewish sources testify to practices sanctioned by the Jewish scholars and Rabbis.

142 Genesis 17:14.

143 See Kister, "... and he was born circumcised ..." and Rubin, 'Hanifiyya and Ka'ba'.

4.3.2 *The Trustworthiness of the sunna*

However much the Quran was pushed back in the theologians' actual argumentation, it remained the uncontested authority to all of them. When it came to hadith, on the other hand, their attitude was ambivalent; we have already pointed out scripturalist tendencies.¹ The reason was that prophetic tradition developed gradually, and in rather chaotic fashion at first, with divergent local traditions; as soon as one looked beyond one's own environment the discrepancies were impossible to overlook. In addition those who held and preserved the traditions did not always come from the same social strata as the theologians; they were merchants or small-scale craftsmen, while the Mu'tazilites and those close to them might be officials or courtiers. Credibility, the main issue with oral transmission, thus became easily a question of social prestige.² When it came to the law, however, it was well-nigh impossible to proceed without hadith; consequently even Shimmazī, 'Amr b. 'Ubayd's pupil, knew a number of them by heart.³ In fact 'Amr b. 'Ubayd and Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' had not been against prophetic tradition as a whole; they had merely sifted it most thoroughly.

Wāṣil was also said to have developed a criterion of authenticity which was rather like what would later come to be called *tawātur*, but he referred the rule he had formulated to statements of all kinds; consequently he spoke of *khavar* rather than *ḥadīth*. He was not aware of the dimension of historical depth, either; *isnāds* were not yet the universal custom in his day. He explored how a fact could be reported reliably at the same time by different people without them agreeing on it, but not how it could be transmitted through the generations without wear.⁴ He was not interested in hadiths but in *ἔνδοξα*;⁵ *khavar* and *ḥadīth* were interchangeable in general at the time.⁶ We are familiar with the question in the context of Hellenistic philosophy: how can we know that the city of Alexandria or the island of Crete exist if everyone says so but we have not been there ourselves?⁷ Muqammiṣ went on to apply this to the knowledge we have of a prophet, as did the Christian theologians writing

1 Regarding Dirār b. 'Amr see vol. 111 56ff. above; regarding the Khārijites vol. 11 652, 669 and 695.

2 The aristocrat's and intellectual's disdain for the gossip of the common people breaks out into the open in Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Al-adab al-kabīr* 94, 9ff.; one should not believe reports even when someone states that this was how he heard them (pu. ff.).

3 See vol. 11 367 above.

4 Vol. 11 318 above. Regarding the text discussed there see also R. al-Sayyid in: *Al-Ijtihād* 2/1990, no. 8/65ff.

5 Cf. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation* 128.

6 Thus also on the field of Islamic law; cf. Ansari in: *Arabica* 19/1972/256ff.

7 Vol. 11 319 above; also *Erkenntnislehre* 412. Cf. the discussion of the issue in Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughni* xv 368ff.