

amy/endogamy better but now have confidence in our methodological tools and source material.

Before we do this however, we will continue our discussion of the concubine. The prosopographical study above has indicated that there was a massive increase in the number of children born to foreign slave women that coincided with the arrival of Islam. This may appear to require no further comment; the arrival of Islam led to the Arab conquests which gave the Quraysh access to large numbers of slave women. This translated into the practice of concubinage which would go on to become a common form of marriage for Muslim elites throughout the world until relatively recently. But when we look more closely at Near Eastern marriage practice in Late Antiquity, we realise that this transition raises far more questions than we would have first assumed.

01 Ekim 2023

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7 Origins of Islamic concubinage

7.1 Introduction

The quantitative analysis of the marriage data preserved in the *Nasab Quraysh* has provided us with a much more detailed picture of how concubinage spread amongst the Muslim elites.¹ The study showed that large numbers of men were taking concubines from the early Umayyad period onwards, and this change in marriage practice may even have begun during the time of the Rashīdūn caliphs. The study also suggested that there is little evidence that the majority of Muslims in the Umayyad era treated concubines and their progeny any differently to Muslims of later eras.

But there is a problem with this alternative narrative because it does not explain why the Arab conquerors changed their marriage practices so quickly and in such a widespread fashion. Ruptures in social practice – especially in matters as sensitive as marriage and legitimacy – do not happen in a vacuum. There must have been some outside impetus and in this chapter we will suggest what forms this impetus could and could not have taken.

We will begin by considering the obvious sources of changes in marriage behaviour, namely precedent. We have already shown in our graphs and tables above that concubinage was not widely practiced amongst the pre-Islamic Quraysh; here it will be shown that concubinage of the normative Islamic type was not a practice known to other peoples of the Late Antique Near East either. Having exhausted the possibility that the behaviour was borrowed we will turn to another seemingly obvious source of change in marriage behaviour – the Qur'ān and Prophetic practice. Here too we will find no obvious parallels between revelation and normative Islamic concubinage.

Instead, it will be suggested that the emergence of Islamic concubinage was a result of the unique set of circumstances faced by the Muslims of the Umayyad era. Chief amongst these was that the tribal environment creates an enormous amount of pressure to produce sons and not only could concubines satisfy this need, they could do it without the split-loyalties and expense associated

¹ While it is true that this research currently can only tell us about one tribe, it would be surprising if similar results were not found amongst other tribal groups; although not particularly numerous, the Quraysh were undeniably influential so while it is possible to consider them some sort of outlying vanguard that the rest of the Muslim community belatedly emulated, this position seems unlikely.

eration) in order to demonstrate how the geographic origins of brides changed as a result of the revelation of Islam. Finally, in Chapter Ten, we will analyse the marriages of a third cohort – the Umayyad caliphs and their sons. This will show that despite theoretically having access to any woman they wanted within the Islamic world the Umayyad caliphs and their sons were surprisingly limited in terms of their marriage choices. This behaviour will be explained in terms of the context in which they were living and also in terms of the concubinage data discussed in Chapters Six and Seven; in so doing it ties together the prosopographical strands that run throughout this book.

01 Ekim 2020

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6 Statistical analysis of concubinage

6.1 Introduction

The first subject of our quantitative analysis is concubinage as recorded in the *Nasab Quraysh*. This is for a number of reasons. As with many other practices rooted in the first Islamic century, attempts to explain the origins of concubinage are poorly served by primary sources and if quantitative approaches can help illuminate the subject of slave marriage then they are serving a useful purpose. Our analysis will show that this is indeed the case; prosopography allows us to obtain a surprisingly detailed narrative of the emergence and evolution of concubinage in this period.

The study of concubinage is also important for methodological reasons. Without accounting for marriages between Qurashī men and foreign slave women (who represent the most exogamous marriages possible) we cannot adequately discuss exogamy or endogamy between Qurashī men and named Arab women. Additionally, the investigation is useful as it allows us to trial some of our methodological tools on a relatively simple type of relationship before moving on to more complicated types of marriage.

After a discussion on terminology and some minor methodological issues, this chapter will show that the quantitative analysis of the *Nasab Quraysh* provides us with a narrative of the evolution of concubinage superior to those narratives derived solely from the traditional historical sources. It will be shown that as far as the Quraysh are concerned, concubinage as a practice was enthusiastically adopted as soon as foreign slave women became available. It will also be suggested that there are few grounds for believing that the children of concubines were widely discriminated against. This goes against the findings of a number of other scholars who have relied solely on the anecdotal traditions.

6.2 Definitions

The suitability of the word ‘concubine’ in discussing these slave mothers is questionable; the word is derived from the Roman institution of *concubinatus* which they understood as being “a long-lasting, monogamous union, an alternative to marriage employed by those for whom legitimate marriage was legally impossi-

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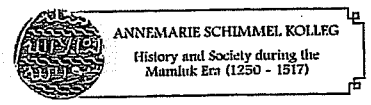
Volume 21

**Domestic Slavery in Syria and Egypt,
1200–1500**

01 Ekim 2020

Edited by Stephan Conermann and Bethany J. Walker

With 12 figures



Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi Kütüphanesi	
Dem. No:	281501
Tas. No:	326 HAG-D

Editorial Board: Thomas Bauer (Münster, Germany), Albrecht Fuess (Marburg, Germany), Thomas Herzog (Bern, Switzerland), Konrad Hirschler (Berlin, Germany), Anna Paulina Lewicka (Warsaw, Poland), Linda Northrup (Toronto, Canada), Jo Van Steenberghe (Gent, Belgium)

V&R unipress

Bonn University Press

2020