

How Did Eve Get Married? Two Twelver Shi'i Hadith Reports

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Amina Inloes

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This text explores how accounts of sacred narratives reflect the shifting cultural and religious worldviews of their compilers.

By analyzing two structurally similar but thematically distinct Twelver Shi'i hadith reports concerning the creation and marriage of Adam ('a) and Eve, it highlights conflicting classical expectations regarding gender roles, spousal authority, and female agency.

The discussion moves beyond questions of authenticity to contrast an analytical, legalistic framework from early jurisprudence with an esoteric, cosmological perspective that elevates the marital bond to a spiritual sacrament.

Through this critical comparison, the text demonstrates how theological subtexts within the Shi'i tradition yield profoundly different understandings of authority, gender hierarchy, and the relationship between the human and the divine.

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How Did Eve Get Married? Two Twelver Shi'i Hadith Reports

Amina Inloes

How did Eve and Adam ('a) get married? As is often the case with sacred narrative, accounts of their wedding say more about the world view of the speakers than about Eve and Adam ('a) themselves. This chapter explores two structurally similar but thematically different Twelver Shi'i ahadith telling the story of the marriage of Eve and Adam ('a). Since, unlike the Qur'an, hadith tend to present Eve and Adam ('a)

as archetypes of female and male, these ahadith reflect religious and cultural ideals about the nature and relationship between male and female. While some of these messages are implicit, others are explicit. All in all, these two ahadith convey conflicting expectations about spousal obedience, male guardianship, and female agency; about the relationship between marriage and slavery; and about the inclusion of women in sacred cosmology – all issues that are still relevant today. Quite a heavy burden to put on Eve’s shoulders!

Both ahadith are taken from Twelver Shi’i hadith collections and are attributed to Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (‘a) (d. 148/765). Twelver Shi’is consider Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) to be sixth in the line of Imams, or divinely appointed and divinely guided successors to Prophet Muhammad (S); he is also a prominent figure in many Sufi orders, and he interacted with founding members of the Sunni juristic schools. In the Twelver Shi’i tradition, ahadith from the twelve Imams (‘a) and Fatima al-Zahraؓ (‘a) (d. 11/632), the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (S), are accepted due to the belief that they had a perfect understanding of the Prophetic teachings; thus, the Twelver Shi’i collections include ahadith that emerged over a period of two hundred years after the Prophet’s death (d. 11/632), and in several geographical regions, thereby preserving a variety of snapshots of peoples and cultures across the Muslim empire. (Additionally – as will be seen here – Shi’i ahadith can be quite lengthy.)

For this reason, Twelver Shi’i hadith can be valuable not only to students of Shi’ism but also to those interested in the religious and cultural diversity of the classical Near East. These two particular ahadith were selected not only for the sake of contrast but also because they provide lengthy discussions about Eve’s marriage. The main goal of this chapter is not to examine the authenticity of these ahadith, but rather to explore how they, intentionally or not, through being recorded, canonized conflicting ideals regarding gender roles. However, I would like to note from the outset that, due to the thematic disagreement of the ahadith, at least one of them must be (in whole or in part) inauthentic, since it is unlikely that two such conflicting world views would have issued forth from a single person. Also, while ahadith are traditionally seen as irreconcilable only if they have clashing content, I would like to put forward the methodological suggestion that ahadith should also be seen as irreconcilable if they have clashing subtexts, and that re-evaluating ahadith on the basis of their subtexts can shed new light on ahadith.

Before discussing these two ahadith, a few words on canonization and what it means in the Shi’i tradition are in order. “Canonization” itself as a concept is, of course, situated in the Christian and Latinate tradition and as such may not be a complete match with Islamic texts. Nonetheless, the concept is applied today to Shi’i ahadith as with Sunni ahadith. Unlike in the Sunni tradition, in the Shi’i tradition there was no major trend of compiling “authentic” (sahih) books of ahadith – that is to say, ahadith that meet specific technical standards of authenticity. As a result, there is no Shi’i equivalent of the Sunni “six books.”

Nonetheless, four early Shi’i hadith collections acquired a prominent status and are today referred to as

the “Four Books.” (In fact, they are said to have originally been five books, but one was lost.) The Four Books are al-Kafi (The Sufficient) by Muhammad ibn Ya’qub al-Kulayni (d. 329/940–41), Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih (He Who Lacks a Jurist) by Shaykh al-Saduq (also known as Ibn Babawayh, d. 381/991), and Tahdhib al-ahkam (Refinement of Laws) and al-Istibsar fi ma ikhtulif min al-akhbar (Insight into Differing Reports) by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi (d. 460/1068). The ahadith recorded in these books do not all match the technical criteria for “authentic” or sahih hadith with respect to their chains of narration. They are neither the earliest nor the only books of Shi’i hadith; they simply are given a special position. These books are also selective rather than inclusive, and focus heavily on jurisprudence.

The reasons why these books became prominent, and when, is debated; traditionally trained Shi’i scholars argue that these books gained prominence early on simply due to their style of organization and usefulness, whereas other thinkers have advanced the view that they did not gain this status until the Safavid Empire (1501–1736) and the government sponsorship of Shi’i scholarship. In any case, they are prominent today and can be treated as a sort of “canon,” particularly since part of the impetus behind compiling these books was to sift through a diverse amount of hadith material and codify “orthodox” views, especially regarding theology and jurisprudence.¹

Centuries later, a second significant wave of hadith compilation occurred during the Safavid empire. The Safavid empire is best-known for converting Iran to Shi’ism; as a by-product, the rulers encouraged, sponsored, and provided a safe space for Shi’i scholarship. This resulted in the compilation of mega-collections, the most commonly cited of which is the 110-volume Bihar al-Anwar al-jami’ah li-durar akhbar al-a’imma al-athar (The Oceans of Lights: A Compendium of the Pearls of the Narrations of the Pure Imams), compiled by ‘Allama Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1110/1698). Encyclopaedic in nature, Bihar favours the preservation rather than selective inclusion of ahadith, and features ahadith from known books, including the Four Books, as well as from obscure sources; the compiler himself is said to have tasked himself with finding rare manuscripts at risk of destruction.² As a result, Bihar includes many Twelver Shi’i hadith in existence today and often functions as a de facto reference work, despite not having the quasi-“canonical” status of the Four Books.

While al-Majlisi was, in theory, merely replicating the material of earlier scholars, the compilation of his work in a different milieu from the previous works – namely, Safavid Iran, in which Shi’ism was state-sponsored rather than persecuted – does raise the question of whether his socio-cultural environment affected the final product. With respect to questions regarding women in Shi’ism, on the one hand, women in Iran are generally considered to have had a more active public social role than in Muslim-ruled Iraq; it has also been argued that al-Majlisi sought to codify a more restrictive set of values regarding women on the grounds that it was more “Islamic.”³ On the other hand, he was also compiling it during a time in Islamic history when the mediaeval romance had become a popular genre and when stories of human love had become common metaphors in Islamic mystical circles for divine love; this may have influenced his decision to include elaborate narratives such as those celebrating Zulaykha’s

love for the prophet Yusuf (‘a).

In short, while the Four Books represent selectiveness and differentiation, these later collections represent inclusiveness. Due to their broader span of included material, as well as the later time in which these mega-collections were compiled, they almost certainly contain more spurious material; nonetheless, due to their comprehensiveness and ease of use, these collections are frequently consulted and thus enjoy a quasi-canonical status in practice, even if not in theory.

These two ahadith represent both sets of sources: one is from the Four Books, and one is found only in Bihar. Whether or not one wishes to consider the thematic difference between the ahadith as indicative of thematic differences between the two sets of sources, the thematic difference between these two ahadith is particularly compelling since they share the same story framework. Both describe Eve’s creation and marriage to Adam (‘a). Both versions of the marriage inform the audience how an idealized shari’a marriage should be solemnized. In both accounts, Adam (‘a) seeks Eve’s hand from Allah, who acts as Eve’s male guardian; Allah (SwT) specifies the mahr (bride-price) and performs the marriage. While these facets are not specific to Shi’ism, both ahadith are distinctly Shi’i. The two ahadith do differ on one theological point – that is, whether or not Eve was created from Adam’s (‘a) rib. However, as demonstrated below, this difference is of minimal importance here, since, ironically, the hadith that says that Eve was created from Adam’s (‘a) rib is far more equitable to women than the one that says she wasn’t. This difference shows that the real issue is not whether Eve was created from Adam’s (‘a) rib, but rather what ramifications one assigns to that belief.

[The First Narration: Eve, The Slave Girl](#)

The First Narration: Eve, The Slave Girl⁴

The first hadith is related from Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (‘a) by Zurara ibn A’yan (d. c. 150/767), a prolific Shi’i narrator as well as a jurist, exegete, and theologian, who lived and died in Kufa.⁵ When reading the hadith, two biographical points about Zurara are noteworthy. First, Zurara is said to have been the son of a Byzantine Christian monk (alternatively, a Persian) who was captured, brought to Iraq, and sold as a slave to a member of the Shayban tribe, who taught him the Qur’an.⁶ Zurara himself is identified as a mawla – freed slave or client of the Shayban tribe, meaning that while he enjoyed some social protection, it was as a member of the underclass. Second, while Zurara’s father was the one to convert to Islam, it was Zurara’s sister who first adopted Shi’ism; the rest of the family, including Zurara, followed her.⁷

The hadith itself was recorded by al-Shaykh al-Saduq, in *Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih*, a jurisprudential self-help book. Whether or not the hadith is authentic (i.e., whether or not Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) actually said it, and whether or not Zurara actually transmitted it), given the range of dates, it can be inferred that it reflects the cultural and religious ideals of Arab Muslim Iraq between 767 and 991 CE – that is, between the time Zurara actually lived (if it indeed was transmitted from him and was not merely

attributed to him) and the time it was recorded. This latter point is critical, in so far as it supports the hypothesis, popularized in the past few decades, that restrictive ideals toward women became normalized during the ‘Abbasid era.⁸ Conversely, the canonization of this hadith in such a prominent collection incidentally led to the canonization of its subtexts about gender as “orthodox”; these subtexts still inform Shi’i interpretations of shari’a and portrayals of sacred history.

The first part of the hadith reads as follows:

Abu ‘Abd Allah [Imam al-Sadiq (‘a)] was asked about Eve’s creation. It was said to him, “Some people among us are saying that Allah (SwT) – the Mighty and Glorious – created Eve from Adam’s (‘a) shortest left rib.”

He said, “Glory be to Allah (SwT), and far exalted be He above that! Does the person who says this say that Allah (SwT) – the Blessed and Exalted – did not have the ability to create a wife for Adam from anything other than his rib? He makes a way for a disgraceful theological opponent to argue that one part of Adam (‘a) married another part of himself – if she was created from his rib! What is wrong with them? May Allah (SwT) judge between us and them.”⁹

Here, the main issue at hand is how Eve was created. By arguing that Eve was not created from Adam’s (‘a) rib, the hadith is letting the audience know that Muslims in Kufa tended to believe that Eve was created from Adam’s (‘a) rib and that some were resistant to letting go of this belief. Other Shi’i hadith do not agree on whether Eve was created from Adam’s (‘a) rib: some say she was, and others say she was created independently, although this one treats the matter polemically. The Qur’an itself does not specify how she was created, and the relevant aya (Q. 4:1) can be interpreted to mean that Eve was created from Adam (‘a), or that Eve was created of the same type as Adam (‘a). However, perhaps because of this hadith, the dominant Shi’i view tends to be that Eve was not created from Adam’s (‘a) rib, although al-Majlisi and al-Saduq attempted to reconcile these ahadith by proffering that Eve could have been created from the clay that was left over after Adam (‘a) was created – hardly a flattering view, but one that does solve the technical problem.¹⁰

With its legalistic approach, this theological argument has the distinct flavour of classical Islamic scholarship.¹¹ Theoretical and implausible scenarios are often employed in jurisprudence to define boundaries. Here, the argument is technically correct: Eve could not have been created from Adam (‘a), or else the marriage would have, as a boundary condition (marrying yourself), been haram (impermissible). By extension, the use of a legalistic approach sends the message that jurisprudence and/or dialectic theology should be the central focus of Islam, as well as the central arbiter of Islamic debates. In essence, one could describe this as “left-brained hadith” – one that is analytic, juristic, and rational. Of course, the question of whether or not the Prophet (S) himself intended Islam to be primarily a legalistic tradition is still debated today.

At this point in the hadith, there is a subtle break. In part, this is indicated by the repetition of the speaker

(i.e., it is reintroduced by “then he [al-Sadiq (‘a)] said”). While this, in and of itself, is not unusual, the real difference between the first section and the second section is stylistic. While the first section consists of a question and answer followed by a theological argument, the subsequent section consists of a narrative, with an allusion to Genesis and the conflation of marriage with slavery. Therefore, it is possible that the hadith is actually comprised of material from two separate sources, which were later appended together as one hadith.

In any case, the hadith continues with Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) saying:

When Allah (SwT), the Blessed and Exalted, created Adam (‘a), peace be upon him, from clay, and ordered the angels to prostrate to him, he cast a slumber over him. Then he fashioned Eve for him, and placed her in the small of his back between his hipbones; this was so that the woman would follow the man. So she began to move, and he awoke to her movement. When he awoke, [a voice] called out, “Move away from him!”

When he looked at her, he saw a handsome creation, resembling his own face, except that it was female. He spoke to her, and she spoke back to him in his own language. He asked her, “Who are you?”

She said, “A creation. Allah (SwT) created me as you see.”

The Qurʾān does not say that Allah (SwT) cast a slumber over Adam (‘a) before creating Eve; it also does not draw conclusions about the nature of women or from where and how woman was created. However, Genesis 2/21–4 does. Some Muslims might argue that this poses no theological problem, since the Qurʾān and the Hebrew Bible have many commonalities. However, despite these similarities, the hadith offers its own take on Genesis. While Genesis 2/24 concludes that, because Eve was created from Adam (‘a), “that is why a man leaves his father and mother is united to his wife, and they become one flesh,”¹² here, the conclusion is that the woman follows the man.

In fact, given the prevalence of polygyny among the elite in ‘Abbasid Iraq, it would have been difficult to idealize marriage as the union of “one flesh.” Thus, this comes across more as an example of intertextuality; that is, the back-projection of a pre-existing scripture to fit later beliefs and customs. The text also comes across as confused: while the first part of the hadith ardently refutes that Eve was created from Adam’s (‘a) rib, this second part takes pains to make her creation as close to that as possible.

According to Osman, knowledge is a central component of the position of the human being as the vicegerent of Allah (SwT); therefore, women and men are equally bound by the duty to seek knowledge, in order to reach full personhood. When Adam (‘a) is associated with knowledge, it is because he is symbolic of the human, not specifically the male.¹³ To me, these are signs that this second part of this hadith comes from a different source than the first part of the hadith, although it is enlightening to see how the text attempts to reconcile different types of material under the aegis of “Islamic norms.”

The hadith then launches into an ‘Abbasid–style slave–wife barter, and the divine ordination of a gender hierarchy:

Upon that, Adam (‘a), peace be upon him, said, “O Lord! What is this handsome creation? When I am near it and look upon it, it eases my loneliness.”

Allah (SwT) – the Blessed and Exalted – said, “O Adam! This is my slave–girl, Eve. Do you wish her to be with you, to ease your loneliness and speak to you, and for her to obey your command?”

He said, “Yes! O Lord, praise and thanks be to You as long as I am alive!”

Allah (SwT), the Mighty and Glorious, said, “So seek her hand from me. For she is My slave, and she is also good for you as a wife, because of your desires.” And Allah (SwT), the Mighty and Glorious, cast carnal desires upon him, although He had already taught him knowledge of all things.

He said, “O Lord! I seek her hand in marriage from you. What will be satisfactory to you?” [i.e., as a mahr, or bride–price.]

He, the Mighty and Glorious, said, “I will be satisfied if you teach her knowledge of My religion.”

He said, “Yes, I will do that for You, O Lord, if You will me to.”

He, the Mighty and Glorious, said, “I have willed that. I have now married her to you, so take her to yourself.”

So Adam (‘a), peace be upon him, told her, “Come to me.” She told him, “No, you come to me.”

So Allah (SwT), the Mighty and Glorious, ordered Adam (‘a) to be in charge of her [yaqum]; and, were it not for that, women would go to men and seek their hands in marriage for themselves.

This is the story of Eve, blessings be upon her.

What stands out here is the portrayal of Eve as a slave. While in the classical Islamic tradition, the word “slave” (‘abd) is used as a synonym for “human being” to denote the position of the human being as a slave of Allah (SwT), the dialogue here suggests that the characterization of Eve as Allah’s “slave” is meant in a more earthly sense, particularly since Adam (‘a) is not also referred to as a slave. Allah acts not only as Eve’s male guardian but also as close to being a “merchant,” advertising Eve’s merits, urging Adam (‘a) to “buy” her, and offering him a price. It has been argued that the Islamic jurisprudential paradigm of marriage was heavily influenced by the prevalence of marrying slave–girls in Arab Muslim Iraq, to the degree that wifhood began to be seen as parallel to slavery, and husbandhood as ownership, even though neither of these are indicated by the Qurʾān. [14](#)

For instance, Kecia Ali writes:

But slavery was ... central to the jurists' conceptual world. In particular, it affected how marriage and gender were thought about. There was a vital relationship between enslavement and femaleness as legal disabilities, and between slave ownership and marriage as legal institutions. Slaves and women were over-lapping categories of legally inferior persons constructed against one another and in relation to one another ... Slavery was frequently analogized to marriage: both were forms of control or domination exercised by one person over another. The contracting of marriage was parallel to the purchase of a slave, and divorce parallel to freeing a slave. [15](#)

By treating Eve as a commodity, this hadith idealizes that paradigm on a creational level. Additionally, the portrayal of marriage is overwhelmingly androcentric. The hadith only looks at Adam's ('a) wishes. Eve's preferences are not considered: Eve exists to serve him and has been pre-programmed to obey him. (This also calls to mind I Corinthians 11/8–9: "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man"; however, the evidence of this being an influence seems less strong here.) The marriage is portrayed as a "marriage-for-sex" arrangement – which is also part of the dominant jurisprudential paradigm – and physical desires are ascribed only to the man.

Although, in theory, in Shi'i jurisprudence, a bride must consent to a marriage, not once is Eve asked whether she consents to the marriage or whether she has any opinion about it at all; Adam ('a), however, is extremely enthusiastic. Eve's absence and voicelessness in this hadith gives substance and "canonical" status to a cultural norm of marriage being an arrangement contracted between male actors; even though, again, this is not mandated by Shi'i law, as in Shi'i law, a virgin girl (or, according to some interpretations, an immature or dependent girl) must usually obtain the permission of her father or paternal grandfather – or, lacking that, a jurist – before marriage but may not be married off without being consulted; the involvement of a male guardian is not required for other women, nor are other relatives given any formal role. Of course, theory and practice often differ; this text is pointing to the latter. The astute reader will also notice that this particular marriage does not involve witnesses; according to Shi'i law, witnesses for a marriage are recommended but not required.

The wedding portrayed in the next hadith does include witnesses. That being said, it is particularly curious that the narration concludes with an explanation of why men approach women for marriage, rather than vice versa, given that a number of women offered to marry the Prophet (S) [16](#)

This hadith can also be taken as an implicit exegesis of

"Men are guardians (qawwamun) over women because of how Allah has favoured some over others, and because of what they spend out of their wealth. So the righteous women are humble/obedient [qanitat] ...". (Q. 4:34).

While the word qanitat has been interpreted to mean either "humble toward Allah" or "obedient to a husband," this hadith mandates that it is the latter. [17](#) A broader discussion of whether or not, in the Shi'i

world view, a woman is expected to obey her husband is outside the scope of this chapter. In any case, legalistic discussions centre on a wife's obligation to fulfill her conjugal duties – as, indeed, Eve is expected to do here – as opposed to formally assigning the husband any spiritual or ethical authority.

On a subtler level, this hadith presents Adam (‘a) as the source of knowledge, and Eve as the learner; Eve, here, does not even seem to know her own name. Since Eve – according to this narrative – had just been created, it would be reasonable to assume that Adam (‘a) did in fact know more than her. However, since this narrative presents itself as a paradigm for male–female relations, it conveys the assumption that knowledge is under the control of men. This particular hadith also, incidentally, echoes 1 Corinthians 14/35, which advises women to learn from their husbands. In doing that, it puts forward a psychologically uncomfortable power dynamic whereby a husband controls his wife's awareness of and access to the divine, thereby setting up the man as a sort of demigod. The term “demigod” here is being borrowed from Sa‘diyya Shaikh and Khalid Abou El Fadl, who use it to refer to the tacit assumption that what redeems women is their relationship with their husbands, not with God.¹⁸

The idea that men are the gatekeepers of knowledge recurs in other ahadith, both Sunni and Shi‘i, but differs from what is related about the practice of the Prophet (S) and the tradition of educated women in classical Islamic civilization. For instance, a hadith found in several variants in both Sunni and Shi‘i collections advises men to teach girls Surat al–Nur but not Surat Yusuf, not to teach them to read or write, and to confine them to chambers away from the road in order to protect their chastity. Al–Hakim al–Naysaburi, who relates it from ‘A‘isha, calls this a sahih hadith, although it should be observed that ‘A‘isha was not unlearned, nor did she confine herself to chambers away from the road.¹⁹ It also differs from the belief that Fatima al–Zahra (‘a) had direct access to spiritual knowledge, culminating in her receiving knowledge of the past and future and related subjects from the angels, which was then recorded in Mushaf Fatima or “the scrolls of Fatima.”²⁰

Although the goal of this section is not to compare this hadith with the Qur‘an, it is worth examining how it stands up against the Qur‘an, thematically. While the first part employs Qur‘anic phraseology²¹, the second part diverges from the Qur‘an. One of the most obvious differences is that the Qur‘an does not use Eve or Adam (‘a) to convey archetypal messages about the nature of man or woman, or gender roles. Additionally, there is the possibility of adaptation from Genesis (and, perhaps, I Corinthians). On a theological level, the anthropomorphic approach – especially in how the hadith implicitly genders Allah (SwT) by employing Him as Eve's male guardian – is at odds with the Qur‘anic portrayal of divine transcendence. Furthermore, while here, Adam (‘a) stands between Eve and Allah (SwT), in the Qur‘an (for instance, Q. 4:32 and 33:35), men and women are independently responsible towards Allah (SwT), regardless of the piety (or lack thereof) of their spouse.

In her study on women in Shi‘i hadith and exegesis, Osman also notes three ways in which this hadith diverges from the Qur‘an. First, it presents lust as being introduced to Adam (‘a) first whereas the Qur‘an (Q. 7:22) says that Adam (‘a) and Eve both came to understand their nakedness after they ate

from the forbidden tree. Second, it places Adam (‘a) in the garden first whereas the Qurʾān tells Adam and Eve together to dwell in the garden (Q. 7:19). Third, it conflicts with the interpretation of humanity being created from a “single self” (nafs wahida) in Q. 4:1 in that it sets up a hierarchy and mandates intrinsic differences between Adam (‘a) and Eve.²²

This is apart from the fact that none of the above points – such as Allah (SwT) creating the man to teach the woman, or the woman to follow the man – are indicated by the Qurʾān. With these points in mind, it can be said that the second part of the hadith does not agree with the Qurʾān; and that, by extension, perhaps the cultural norms it is modelling also do not sit well with the Qurʾān, even though they persist today.

In sum, this hadith sends strong messages – both stated and unstated – about the nature and role of women. It sends the messages that (a) women lack agency, (b) men control knowledge, (c) only men experience physical desires, (d) women must obey their husbands, and (e) marriage, for women, is akin to slavery. It also (f) portrays a gender hierarchy, in which man stands between the woman and the divine, and (g) puts divine sanction on a stylized model of courtship consisting of negotiation between male agents.²³ Since the provenance of this hadith situates it in ‘Abbasid Iraq, it most likely records the customs or ideals popular in that era; and, certainly, it supports the thesis that a strong patriarchy and restrictive attitudes toward women were integrated into Islam during that time.

Lastly, it is worth returning to what is recorded about the life of the primary narrator, Zurara. While in theory, a hadith narrator should report what she or he hears verbatim, without subjecting it to her or his personal views, it can be eye-opening to consider how this hadith both fits into and conflicts with his personal circumstances. As a child of a foreign slave, Zurara might have found the paradigm of slavery natural. He and Eve would have shared something in common – being socially marginalized, and having limited personal agency. As the child of a convert, Zurara may have felt an implicit pressure to express distinctly Islamic beliefs – in this case, the belief that Eve was not created from a rib. At the same time, as the child of a former Christian monk, it is likely that he would have been exposed to the subtler aspects of the Christian heritage – as, indeed, other Muslims were in the mediaeval Near East. Thus, the integration of Biblical material might have seemed natural. On the other hand, the idea that it was Zurara’s sister who introduced him and his clan to Shi’ism does not fit with the idea that man instructs woman about religion, or that woman follows the man. None of this, necessarily, has any bearing on the authenticity of the hadith – which may have had nothing at all to do with him – but it does humanize the text.

The Second Narration: Eve as The Bearer of the Prophetic Light

The Second Narration: Eve as The Bearer of the Prophetic Light²⁴

In contrast to the previous hadith, which sets up a creational hierarchy between man and woman, this next hadith portrays Eve and Adam (‘a) on a much more equal level. Like the previous one, this hadith

also comes across as characteristically Shi'i, for it is flooded with Shi'i spiritual cosmology, such as descriptions of pre-creation ('alam al-dharr),²⁵ the Prophetic light (nur Muhammad),²⁶ and the spiritual position of the family of the Prophet (S). However, it reflects more of an esoteric rather than an earthly view; if the previous hadith was "left-brained," this is more "right-brained," in the sense of focusing on the intangible and intuitive or direct knowledge of spiritual realities. It can also be described as Sufi-esque.

This hadith is recorded in al-Majlisi's gargantuan Bihar al-Anwar and was sourced from an earlier book called Kitab al-Anwar, which, in Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo, Boaz Shoshan identifies with the Kitab al-Anwar, which was circulated in Egypt and attributed to a (possibly fictional) compiler named al-Bakri; this adds another interesting regional dimension. Shoshan argues that al-Majlisi endorsed Kitab al-Anwar because of his emphasis on the concept of the Prophetic light, and notes that some have considered Kitab al-Anwar to be the product of a Shi'i.²⁷ While al-Majlisi is less forth-right about the authorship of Kitab al-Anwar, in the first volume of Bihar he indicates that it was approved of by the circle surrounding famous Shi'i scholar al-Shahid al-Thani (Zayn al-Din al-'Amili al-Juba'i, d. 966/1558), a founding father of later Shi'i jurisprudence and hadith studies.²⁸

When introducing this hadith, al-Majlisi reiterates the link to al-Shahid al-Thani and also attributes it to "our shaykhs and forebears." The respect he shows here suggests that, regardless of its authenticity, (a) it was a live tradition, and perhaps one that was circulated as an esoteric tradition among the elite, and (b) it reflected views associated with the jurisprudential elite. This is quite a contrast to the previous hadith, which was narrated by someone who did not enjoy the same social privilege. Since al-Shahid al-Thani lived in the Levant, and 'Allama al-Majlisi lived in Iran, while the hadith itself may have originated in Egypt, this hadith likely reflects a different set of regional views than the above one, which circulated in Iraq. This possibility does not necessitate fabrication; even the mere decision to transcribe one hadith to the exclusion of another implies a tacit judgment that the transcribed text presents the "correct" views. Since the hadith is almost eighty pages long, I will not reproduce it in full here. However, I will include the introductory material to convey the flavour of the text, especially in so far as it differs from the previous hadith:

When Allah (SwT) willed to create Muhammad (S), peace be upon him and his family, He told the angels, "I intend to create a creation which is more excellent and more honourable than all other created things. [I intend] to make him the master of the first and the last, and to grant him the ability to intercede for them on the Day of Judgment. Were it not for him, the gardens of Heaven would not have been bedecked, nor would the fires of Hell have been lit. So know his position. Honour him for the sake of My honour, and venerate him due to My greatness."

The angels said, "Our God and master! Slaves would never remonstrate to their master. We have heard, and we will obey."

Then, Allah (SwT), the Exalted, ordered Jibra'il, the angels of the loftiest level, and the bearers of the

throne (‘arsh) to take a handful of the dust from the tomb of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family. Allah (SwT) decreed to create him from that dust, and to lay him to rest in that dust, and to resurrect him from that dust. So they took a handful of that pure dust, which no sinner had yet stepped upon, and the trustworthy Jibra‘īl carried it up [to the heavens] and dipped it in the fountain of Salsabil, until it shone like a white pearl. Every day, he dipped it into one of the rivers of Paradise and showed it to the angels, its lights shining. The angels would greet it, send salutations upon it, and honour it. Jibra‘īl [also] circled around the rows of angels with it, and whenever they gazed upon it, they said, “Our God and master! If you order us to prostrate [to it], we will prostrate [to it].” The angels had confessed to his [the Prophet’s] excellence and honour even before [the time of] Adam, peace be upon him.

When Allah created Adam, peace be upon him, he heard a twittering in his loins, like the twittering of birds, and [heard] glorification [tasbih] and sanctification [taqdis] [of the divine]. Adam said, “O Lord! What is this?”

He said, “O Adam! This is the glorification [recited by] Muhammad – the Arab, the master of the first and last. Happy be he who follows him, and wretched be he who crosses him! Adam, take a covenant with me, and only entrust him [i.e., his unborn self] to the loins of pure men, and the wombs of pure, good, chaste women.”

Then Adam, peace be upon him, said, “O Lord! With this descendant, you have amplified my honour, light, resplendence, and dignity.”

The light of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, [shone] upon Adam’s face like the sun in the heavenly dome of the sky, or the moon on a dark night. It lit up the heavens and the earth, the heavenly pavilions, the throne [‘arsh], and the divine seat [kursi].

When Adam, peace be upon him, wanted to lay with Eve, he told her to perfume and purify herself; and he told her, “May Allah grant you this light, and favour you with it, for it is Allah’s trust and covenant.” [This was] while the light of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, was still upon his face.

At this point, the hadith breaks off and shifts to a lengthy discussion ascribed to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) about spiritual cosmology (such as the creation of the Tablet, the Pen, the angels, and the throne) and, of course, the creation of the Prophetic light. Here, God creates the otherworldly “infrastructure,” such as Paradise and the Tablet – as well as intangible virtues, such as knowledge and forbearance – from the Prophetic light. It situates the Prophet’s (S) family above the angels, in that the angels pray for, bless, and acknowledge them. It also demonstrates that the relationship between God and the Prophet (S) is one of love and closeness rather than authority and fear, for God speaks to the Prophet (S) intimately, using expressions such as *habibi* (my beloved). In essence, this section elaborates on the Prophet’s (S) authority over and permeation of all creation, as well as the nature of the Prophetic light that is being transmitted through Adam (‘a) and Eve and ultimately to the Prophet (S), Fatima al-Zahra (‘a), and the

Imams (‘a). About five pages later, the hadith returns to Imam al-Sadiq (‘a), and backtracks to retell the same story about Eve, with some twists, and then continues.

Nonetheless, the above still conveys subtexts regarding gender – in particular, sexuality and the sacred. For instance, it presents purity as an ideal for both men and women. According to many Shi’i texts, the prophets and Imams must be born to forefathers and foremothers who are free from blemishes such as idolatry or adultery; purity is both theological and sexual.²⁹ The purity assigned to the dust from which the Prophet is created is also ethical, in that the dust had hitherto not been touched by a sinner. This is in contrast to popular perceptions today, in that purity tends to be seen as a feminine virtue, usually a sexual rather than theological virtue. (To put it another way, Muslim women are judged far more often for how they dress than for what they believe.)

Along the same lines, the latter snippet of this excerpt portrays the conjugal relationship in a different light from the previous hadith.

In the previous hadith, it is treated as an earthly and physical matter; Eve’s job, as a wife, is to satisfy Adam’s (‘a) physical desires. Here, however, rather than being treated as a “money for sex” arrangement – which is often how legalistic discussions of it come across – marriage is elevated to the level of a sacrament; in the next section of the hadith, even the angels hover about while Adam (‘a) is consummating their marriage. Additionally, while in the previous hadith the narrative impetus was on explaining why woman was created to obey man, here the narrative impetus is on portraying Adam (‘a) and Eve’s humility before Allah (SwT) and the Prophet (S); as a result, no gender hierarchy is set up between them. Eve’s job here is not simply to service Adam (‘a), but rather to participate with him in a sacred act of creation. By elevating the sexual to the sacred, the hadith presents man and woman as equals.

Lastly, there is an interesting sub-message in the portion of the hadith attributed to ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) (not quoted here). When the Prophetic light is created, Allah (SwT) veils it with about a page worth of hijabs. It is not unusual for the word hijab to refer to an otherworldly veil – after all, the Qurʾān uses it as such (Q. 7:46) – rather than to a curtain or an item of women’s clothing. Also, spiritual veils recur in Shi’i texts, and Shi’i shrines tend to include a series of veiled inner sanctums. It is my belief that in the historical Shi’i consciousness, the conceptualization of the hijab as a veil to the sacred blended with the conceptualization of the hijab as a garment to protect earthly modesty – even though, today, this usually gets lost in popular discussions about women’s clothing. While this has the unfortunate effect of elevating women’s seclusion to the point of sanctity, it also offers an alternative route to discussing the hijab beyond notions of physical attraction and identity politics.

After the interlude by ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a), the hadith reintroduces Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) as the speaker, and continues:

The ruh [soul, spirit, divine breath] was in Adam’s (‘a) head for a hundred years, and his chest for a

hundred years, and his back for a hundred years, and his thighs for a hundred years, and his shins and feet for a hundred years. When he, peace be upon him, stood upright, Allah (SwT) ordered the angels to prostrate to him; that was after noon on a Friday. They continued prostrating until the afternoon.

Adam (‘a), peace be upon him, heard a twittering in his loins, like the twittering of birds, and [heard] glorification [tasbih] and sanctification [taqdis] [of the divine]. Adam (‘a) said, “O Lord! What is this?”

Allah (SwT) said: “O Adam! This is the glorification [recited by] Muhammad – the Arab, the master of the first and last.”

Then Allah (SwT), the Blessed and Exalted, created Eve from his curved rib, after He – the Exalted – had put him to sleep. When he awoke, he saw her by his head. He said, “Who are you?”

She said, “I am Eve. Allah created me for you.”

He said, “How handsome your form is!”

At this particular juncture, the parallel between this and the previous hadith becomes apparent. As in the previous hadith, Allah (SwT) puts Adam (‘a) to sleep before creating Eve; however, it makes more sense here because Allah (SwT) is going to create Eve from Adam’s (‘a) rib. The creation of Eve from Adam’s (‘a) rib is more in line with Genesis, and also the prominent Sunni hadith that compares women to a bent rib.³⁰ However, unlike the previous hadith, this account does not proceed to draw conclusions about the nature of woman. While Eve does say that she was created for Adam (‘a), she at least is aware of her own name, unlike in the above.

It continues with the wedding:

Allah (SwT) revealed to him, “This is My slave [ammati] Eve, and you are My slave [‘abdi] Adam. I created you two for a realm known as My garden. Hence, both of you, glorify Me and praise Me. O Adam, seek Eve in marriage from me, and give me her mahr [bride-price].”

Adam (‘a) said, “What is her mahr, O Lord?”

He said, “That you send blessings upon My beloved Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, ten times.”

He said, “O Lord, for this, may praise and gratitude be to you, as long as I live!”

So he married her on that [condition]. The judge [qadi] was the Truth [al-haqq, a name of Allah], Jibrāʾīl was the one who tied the knot [al-‘aqid], the bride was Eve, and the witnesses were the angels.

Like the previous hadith, this hadith uses the terminology of slavery. However, unlike the previous hadith, this one portrays slavery in the classical Islamic sense of being slaves of Allah (SwT). Both Eve and Adam (‘a) are referred to as slaves, and here Eve is not treated as a commodity. While this

marriage also involves a mahr to be ceded to Allah (SwT), the mahr here does not present Adam ('a) as the gatekeeper of knowledge or set him up as a "demigod" over Eve. Rather than setting up an authority dynamic of the man being in charge of the woman, it sets up an authority dynamic of the man and woman being under the authority of Allah (SwT) and the Prophet (S). It is true that, as in the above hadith, Eve is also not asked for her consent; however, she at least expresses some inclination toward Adam ('a), and her presence is acknowledged.

Then it continues where the first section ended:

He went unto her, while the angels were hovering behind Adam, peace be upon him. So Adam, peace be upon him, said, "O Lord, why are the angels standing behind me?"

He said, "So they can gaze upon the light of your descendant Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him."

He said, "O Lord, put it [the light] in front of me so that the angels can face me."

So He put it on Adam's ('a) forehead [instead of in his loins], and the angels arrayed themselves in rows in front of him. Then Adam, peace be upon him, asked his Lord to put it somewhere where he could see it, so He put the light of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) on his index finger, the light of 'Ali (peace be upon him) on his middle finger, the light of Fatima (peace be upon her) on the finger next to that, the light of al-Hasan (peace be upon him) on his little finger, and the light of al-Husayn (peace be upon him) on his thumb. Their lights were shining like the sun in the dome of the sky, or like the full moon.

When Adam, peace be upon him, wanted to lay with Eve, he told her to perfume and purify herself; and he told her, "O Eve, may Allah grant you this light, and favour you with it, for it is Allah's trust and covenant." [This was] while the light of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, was still on Adam's face. [This continued] until she conceived Shayth (Seth). Then, the angels came to Eve and congratulated her. When she gave birth, she saw the light of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, shining brilliantly on his forehead, and was delighted.

It is here that the transferral of the Prophetic light reaches fruition. Since Eve now bears the Prophetic light, the angels move from honouring Adam ('a) to honouring Eve, thus showing that their honour is due to their spiritual link with the Prophet, and not their gender. Like Adam ('a), Eve is also spoken to by the angels. Conception and childbirth are also treated with sanctity. Additionally, beauty is linked to the sacred and treated as something positive, rather than as an un-Islamic ideal or a temptation.

Just as the previous hadith came across as an implicit exoteric exegesis of Q. 4:34, this hadith comes across as an implicit esoteric exegesis of

"And when your Lord will have brought forth their descendants, from the loins of the children of

Adam, and made them bear witness against themselves. ‘Am I not your Lord?’” (Q. 7:172).

Whether or not the spiritual cosmology presented in this hadith is seen as being in accordance with the Qurʾān is largely a matter of one’s theological orientation, since Shi’is – like Muslims in general – hold differing viewpoints about what beliefs about pre-creation are “correct” and which ahadith about spiritual realities should be accepted or rejected. However, what can be said is that this hadith is less anthropomorphic. While Allah still takes the role of Eve’s guardian, the hadith has a much stronger emphasis on the loftiness of the divine. Additionally, unlike the previous hadith, this one does not present Eve and Adam as archetypes for male and female; this is closer to the approach of the Qurʾān.

In sum, this hadith also sends messages about the nature and role of women – but the messages are different than in the previous hadith.

- (a) This hadith focuses on the equal position of women and men as servants of Allah.
- (b) There is an essentially equitable relationship between Eve and Adam, with no creational gender hierarchy.
- (c) The woman participates with man in the unfolding of sacred history.
- (d) This hadith does not conflate marriage with slavery and instead treats slavery as a spiritual condition reflecting the relationship of the human with the divine.
- (e) It lacks the institutionalized patriarchy of the previous hadith, and
- (f) it does not assign any gender roles.

Although it respects the formalities of jurisprudence, it hints that the true focus of Islam should be spiritual or otherworldly. This is despite the fact that – all other material aside – the frame story of Eve’s creation and wedding here is essentially the same as in the previous hadith. It is similar in content but quite different in ramifications.

Conclusion

Both ahadith tell of how Eve was created and married to Adam (‘a). However, they convey completely different world views. The first which can be attributed with reasonable confidence to ‘Abbasid Iraq, codified a strong patriarchy in which woman has no voice, no agency, and no role in sacred history. The second, which is attributed to the Levant and migrated to Iran, does not codify patriarchy. Instead, it involves both man and woman in sacred history and elevates sexuality to the level of the sacred.

While the first hadith emphasizes a legalistic perspective – and, in practice, reflects the paradigms and world views that became codified as “orthodox” – the second hadith emphasizes a spiritual perspective. Between the two texts, the first can be considered more “acceptable” in the formal scholarly tradition,

since it is in one of the most prominent Shi'i source books and models the "correct" form of jurisprudential and theological reasoning, as well as "correct" views about the hierarchy between men and women.

Nevertheless, the second text conveys fundamental beliefs about pre-creation, post-creation, and the nature and role of the Prophet, which is the basis for Shi'i beliefs in the spiritual authority, infallibility, and knowledge of the Imams. That is, without this cosmological underpinning, the Imam would not be able to act as an omniscient narrator to tell us what happened in the beforetime. Thus, both approaches – the legalistic and the spiritual – are authentic to the Shi'i tradition; yet they yield completely different world views. Placing the ahadith side by side and examining their subtexts brings these differences to the forefront.

Throughout the Islamic tradition – not just the Shi'i tradition – there has been a tug of war between the legalistic and the esoteric. Here, the competition between these two approaches suggests that Shi'is may have disagreed over whether post-Prophetic religious authority should be legalistic or charismatic. It also suggests that early Shi'is may have disagreed over whose cultural values should be codified as "orthodox." In this case, rather than being the real issue, the question of gender roles would have been a pawn in part of a larger debate, just as, today, the hijab is treated as a pawn in the "clash of civilizations."

Today, within the Twelver Shi'i consciousness, there is an uneasy synthesis between

(a) a patriarchal world view, which idealizes male authority and inherent differences between women and men, and

(b) the belief that some women, such as Fatima al-Zahra[ؓ] ('a), enjoy a spiritual position and spiritual authority beyond that of most men.

Many Twelver Shi'is resolve this apparent conflict by separating the worldly and the otherworldly. On earth, men are in charge; in other realms (such as pre-creation, dreams, and the afterlife), patriarchy disappears. However, this dichotomy leads to unanswered questions, not only about sacred history but also about how religiously committed women should live today.

Must a pious woman situate herself under male authority? Muslim men have never required "permission" from women to exert authority over their faith and decree what God wills from them. So does a woman need "permission" from a man to exert authority over her faith, or is it a God-given right? Reading hadith in this manner – that is, with an intent to unravel their subtexts – and critically comparing them not only to the Qur[ؑ]an but to one another as well, may not answer all the questions, but doing so can at least help us define the questions and carry out more nuanced discussions.

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[1.](#) Al-Fadli, Introduction to Hadith, 68–71; Gleave, “Between Hadith and Fiqh.”

[2.](#) Jafarian, “The Encyclopaedic Aspect.”

[3.](#) Matthee, “From the Battlefield,” 97–98; Babayan, “Safavid Iran.”

[4.](#) Al-Saduq, *Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih*, vol. 3, 380, no. 4336.

[5.](#) Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 404–405.

[6.](#) Al-Tustari, *Qamus al-rijal*, vol. 4, 415–416.

[7.](#) Al-Fadli, Introduction to Hadith, 198.

[8.](#) See, for instance, Leila Ahmed, Amina Wadud, and Kecia Ali argue this in *Women and Gender in Islam*, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, and *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, respectively. See also El Cheikh, *Women, Islam*.

[9.](#) Translations from the Arabic are mine.

[10.](#) See the discussion of Q. 4:1 in al-Tabataba’i, *al-Mizan*; Osman, *Female Personalities*, 17, 27; al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 11, 100, 116, 218; al-Saduq, *Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih*, vol. 3, 381.

[11.](#) Elsewhere, al-Saduq reiterates this argument to emphasize that Eve could not have been created from Adam’s rib; he uses a similar argument to reject the (apparently popular) notion that the date palm was created from Adam, or else Adam would be eating a piece of himself every time he ate a date. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 327.

[12.](#) Biblical translation from the New International Version.

- [13.](#) Osman, *Female Personalities*, 30–32.
- [14.](#) Ali discusses the development of this paradigm in *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, 35–53.
- [15.](#) Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*, 8.
- [16.](#) See Quran, 33:50.
- [17.](#) Sa’diyya Shaikh shows how the exegesis of this verse developed over time in “Exegetical Violence,” 49–73.
- [18.](#) *Ibid.*, 49–73. Gender hierarchy is a central theme of Wadud’s *Inside the Gender Jihad*. El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name*, 210–214, 218–222.
- [19.](#) Al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-sahihayn*, vol. 2, 396; al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 5, 516, no. 2; al-Saduq, *Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih*, vol. 1, 374, no. 1089. This hadith obviously communicates the unspoken assumption that men control knowledge for women. It is also in contrast to what is reported about attitudes towards female literacy in the Prophetic era, in that the Prophet is said to have encouraged his wives, and women in general, to learn to read and write.
- [20.](#) For more on Mushaf Fatima, see Mahdavi-rad, *History of Hadith Compilation*, 347–383. For more on the tradition of female scholars in classical Islam, see Nadwi, *al-Muhaddithat*.
- [21.](#) Such as “Glory be to Allah, and far exalted be He above that [subhana Allahu wa-ta’ala ‘an dhalika ‘uluwwan kabiran]!” cf. Q. 17:43.
- [22.](#) Osman, *Female Personalities*, 22–25.
- [23.](#) For more on the topic of gender hierarchy, one could see Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur’an*.
- [24.](#) Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 15, 26–104, no. 48.
- [25.](#) Amir-Moezzi discusses Shi’i narrations on pre-creation in depth in *The Divine Guide*, 29, 33, 37, 76, 79, 107, 128.
- [26.](#) On questions of prophetic light and its use in the Islamic sources as passed down to Muhammad (S) from the earlier Israelite prophets, see Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light.” While the concept of the prophetic light is not limited to Shi’a, and Catherine Bronson says that this narration appears in a non-canonical Sunni text, it has been argued that this idea originated in Shi’ism. In any case, it is a frequently recurring concept in Shi’i texts. Bronson, *Imagining the Primal Woman*, 219–20, citing ‘Umara ibn Wathima ibn Musa in Khoury, *Légendes Prophétiques*, 346–347.
- [27.](#) Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, 36–38.
- [28.](#) Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 1, p. 41.
- [29.](#) See Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light,” 62–119.
- [30.](#) “A woman is like a rib – if you try to straighten her, you will break her; and if you would benefit from her, benefit from her while she still has crookedness.” See al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, 145; vol. 4, 103.

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