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From Power to Pleasure. Homosexuality in the Arab-Muslim World from Lakhī'a to *al-mukhannathun*

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Abstract: We propose a historical-philological analysis of the attitudes in Islam and Arab culture toward practices of masculine homosexuality (from the pre-Islamic period until end of the first century of Hijra) based on a review of scriptural (Qur'an, Sunnah, fiqh) and literary sources. We hypothesize the existence of a historical dialectic between two ideological models: on the one hand, the heterosexual norm intertwined with patriarchal domination and Islam; on the other, the existence of homosexual love and other forms of sexuality and gender. First we have discovered that the earliest myth concerning sodomy dates back to a much earlier era than has been assumed in modern studies of homosexuality. Then we propose the thesis according to which in pre-Islamic times homosexuality was associated to power relations, but that homosexual imagery and practices linked to pleasure already emerged at the time of the Prophet. In the prophetic era, the visibility of male homosexuality—which we have been able to analyze only indirectly, i.e., through the treatment reserved for the *mukhannathun*—was regulated through a socio-political compromise aimed at mediating between *hadith* of explicit condemnation and tolerance of sexual attitudes and behaviors considered less subversive. Starting from the following era (after Othman's admission of the *mukhannathun* to Medina), homosexual practices would begin to conquer more and more spaces of visibility and freedom.

Keywords: male homosexuality; *liwat*; *majbus*; *mukhannath*; revisionist hermeneutics; Islamic reformism



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This article, based on historical-philological study of sources relating to the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, deals with conceptual categories and practices equivalent or superimposable to Western categories of male homosexuality in the early phases of Arab-Muslim history. Debate regarding the post-colonial nature of the projection and imposition of Western gender categories on local Arab cultures from a theoretical point of view will not be addressed. However, a foregone premise of the authors' approach will be the epistemological reflection which, from M. Foucault (1976) to feminist studies, leads to the critique of heteronormativity (Butler 1990; Massad 2007; Rich 1980; Warner 1991, 1993; Wittig 1992) and to the discovery of culturally determined sexual and gender "forms of life." Of the vast and heterogeneous corpus of gender anthropology studies, only some general texts are recalled (e.g., Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Mathieu 1991; Rebucini 2013a, 2013b; Rubin 1975; Strathern 1988) while are omitted important ethnographic studies.

Research begins with the identification of the first testimony relating to homosexual practices, reaching the era of the Umayyad poet al-Ahwas,¹ who the authors believe expressed the first 'coming out' in the history of Arab literature, starting a new era marked by libertinage.

The thesis is proposed here whereby homosexuality was symbolically conceptualized and practiced in pre-Islamic times as a sign or as an indicator of power relations, but that, in essence, homosexual imagery and practices linked to pleasure emerged already in the time of the Prophet.

In pre-Islamic Arab literature, no trace of themes related to homosexual love has been found by the authors; rather, only rare cases of homosexual practices related to (sexual) pleasure by well-known personalities have been identified. In tribal Bedouin culture, still today, homosexuality is associated to power relations and experienced as a relation of domination and subalternity.

Al-Ahwas opens the doors to the liberal reign of the Umayyad caliph and poet Walid ibn Yazid and to the figures of al-Jahiz (b.776, d. 868) and Abu Nuwas (b.756, d. 814), authors from the Abbasid period (which will not be dealt with here), who, with maximum license, sing the praises of homosexuality.

Subsequently, this liberal perspective with respect to homosexual customs changes according to the historical period, but it could be said that relative tolerance and acceptance of it persist until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the first half of the twentieth century. At that point, there begins a phase of regression with figures such as Rashid Rida (expression of the Nahda) and with the birth of Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood arriving to the extremist positions of groups such as al-Qaida and Isis.

One could perhaps speak of a historical dialectic between two ideological models: on the one hand, the heterosexual norm, intertwined with patriarchal domination, and on the other, homosexual love and other forms of sexuality and gender. How do they intersect in history? Do they coexist in a relationship of incorporation and subordination of one to the other? Are they associated, perhaps, one predominantly with Bedouin culture and the other with urban culture?

It can be hypothesized that the Prophet and some traditionalists and jurists had to deal with these two models and mediate with non-dominant forms of gender and sexuality.

1. Lakhi'a: *Liwat* and Power

The oldest reference to homosexuality in Arab history can be traced back to the legendary figure of Lakhi'a ibn Yanuf, King of Yemen.² It is said that Lakhi'a summoned young sons of kings to his court and led them to an elevated room where he raped them (*lit. liwat*). A boy from the Himyar tribe,³ once raped, could no longer become king. Here, the *liwat* imagery is inextricably linked to power and strength.

"Lakhi'a was an oppressor, an impious (*fasiq*), he behaved like the people of Lut: he summoned to himself the sons of the nobles of the tribe of Himyar. When a boy was raped (*lit. he received liwat*), he was no longer allowed to become king or hold prestigious positions.

At the end of this (ritual of) rape Lakhi'a put a *siwak* in his mouth,⁴ then the guards, understanding that he had finished, cut (symbolically) the lips of the camel and the rope of the boy to signal that he had been raped. Then they shouted: 'Wet or dry?'⁵

One day another boy summoned by Lakhi'a arrives: Dhu Nuwas. He had brought with him a poisoned knife hidden between his foot and shoe. He enters with his camel and makes it kneel down. Upon Lakhi'a's arrival, Dhu Nuwas pretends to stoop, but promptly stabs Lakhi'a, decapitates him and inserts the *siwak* into the mouth of the decapitated head.

The guards yell the usual refrain and Dhu Nuwas from inside replies: 'The guards will know if Dhu Nuwas's ass is wet or dry!' and gets on his camel.

The guards see the dead king and run after Dhu Nuwas: 'You have freed us from this wicked (*fasiq*); now you can become our king!'" (Ibn Munabbih 1979, pp. 311–12).

The legend of Lakhi'a reveals a collective image founded on an evident relationship between sex and power: whoever dominates sexually, dominates the city, and vice versa. In the culture of the kingdom of Himyar, homosexuality is associated with pedophile violence; this imagery leaves its traces to this day in Arab tribal cultures, in which the active homosexual is considered dominant and the passive homosexual is considered to be dishonorable.

2. The Disbelievers of Quraysh: The *majbus* between Power and Pleasure

Consider again the story. The authors did not find data relating to the era between the *jahiliyya* and the advent of Islam, except for rare references to a few characters. In Ibn Durayd's dictionary, "*Jamhara al-Lughā*" (d. 933), it reads: "*Majbus* refers to who voluntarily receives this act."⁶ This is something that was not practiced in *jahiliyya* except by very few people, including: Abu Jahl⁷ (and for this, Utba ibn Rabi'a said to Abu Jahl: "He who dyes his butt with saffron will know who the coward is."⁸), Qabus ibn al-Mundhir (uncle of al-Nu'man ibn al-Mundhir ibn al-Mundhir) nicknamed Jayb al-'Arus (lit. bride's pocket) and Tufayl ibn Malik⁹ (Ibn Duraid 1987, vol. 1, p. 267, lemma *jbs.*).

"والمجوس: الذي يُؤتى طائعا يكنى به عن ذلك الفعل وهذا شيء لم يعرف في الجاهلية إلا في نفي. قال أبو عبيدة: منهم أبو جهل عمرو بن هشام - ولذلك قال له عتبة بن ربيعة: سيعلم المصفر استه من المنتفخ سحره - وقابوس بن المُنذر عم النُعمان بن المُنذر وكان يلقب جيب العروس وطفيل بن مالك".

(Al-Asfahani 1971, vol. 1, p. 189)

This passage speaks freely of Abu Jahl's homosexual tendencies it is interesting to note that texts from a later period try, instead, to mask and deny them in order not to dishonor one of the leaders of Quraysh, albeit disbelievers. In one of these texts, it is even said that Abu Jahl, succumbing to sexual desire, dabbed his ass with hot stones from the desert to quench his cravings, saying: "I swear to God you will never be mounted by a male!"¹⁰

Ibn Durayd was known to be a libertine. The first definition of the term *majbus* is found in his text; this is the first testimony of homosexuality practiced and conceptualized as a pleasure. This passage will be taken up in various subsequent documents.

In the biography of the Prophet by Ibn Hisham, however, there is no mention of Abu Jahl's passive homosexuality. How can one explain the fact that although Abu Jahl was the Prophet's worst enemy, this aspect was not used against him? Here, various hypotheses are possible: the Prophet would never have insulted any of the notables among his relatives; devaluing one's greatest enemy would be equivalent to devaluing oneself; probably, according to the system of values of the time, it was not considered honorable to insult someone for an attitude relating to one's intimacy; the Prophet hoped that he would convert to Islam.

In another dictionary, to the group of three *majbus* is added the name of a certain al-Zibriqan¹¹ ibn Badr (d. 665); he is probably the fourth member of the small group (*nufayr*) mentioned by Ibn Durayd. The character *mukhadram*¹² is of some interest, as he was among the few not belonging to the tribe of Quraysh to maintain his tribal honor and reputation even after converting to Islam. He was chief of the well-known tribe of Tamim, a poet and companion of the Prophet (from whom he was given an assignment and to whom he dedicated a poem). It is said that he had been nicknamed 'the moon of Najd' and entered the city of Mecca with his face covered by a turban. So dazzling was his beauty, he was forced to conceal it, probably due to the superstition of the evil eye or also in order not to disturb and wreak havoc on the men of the city. Here, homosexuality is linked to beauty which, in pre-Islamic times, was considered a value.

Based on another text, it can be hypothesized that dyeing oneself yellow and perfuming the backside with saffron was not only a personal habit of Abu Jahl, but rather, was an established custom among the *majbus* of the era. In fact, one source mentions that the nickname "al-Zibriqan" derives from the fact that he too undertook this practice (Al-Zabidi 1989, vol. 25, entry *z-b-r-q*, p. 389).¹³

In most of the classical written sources, these important historical figures are spoken about extensively; however the testimonies relating to their sexual orientation are omitted. Such testimonies may be found instead mainly in dictionaries. Probably, philologists and grammarians, faithful to the ethical principle of the neutrality of their discipline with respect to dominant ideologies and politics, do not self-censor like historians or jurists.

3. The Qur'an: The People of Lot

One of the most famous passages concerning homosexuality is undoubtedly the Qur'anic passage on the people of Lot.

The piece has been placed at the center of the analysis by many of the exponents of the so-called 'progressive revisionist' current (Esack 1997; Kugle 2010; Habib 2008, 2010; Hendricks 2010; Naraghi 2015; Jahangir and Abdullatif 2016; Siraj 2016, 2018; Zahed 2019; Zaharin 2022). In this article, we will refer only to the study by Scott Kugle (2010) who presents an extensive analysis of the Qur'anic passage and provides arguments which were later taken up by the other exponents of the revisionist current.

Kugle argues that the Qur'an and *hadith* are more ambiguous and equivocal than most believe and that they can accommodate same sex relations in accordance with values "such as gender equity, diversity in humanity, social justice and the Prophetic example" (Zaharin 2022, p. 6). The authors refrain from engaging in diatribe that opposes essentialists to constructivists in gender theories (Halwani 1998; Ball 2001; Alipour 2017), focusing instead on the theoretical implications of purely epistemological and methodological issues, on the basis of which the debate that pits revisionists against conservatives arose (such as Al-Qaradawi 2012, pp. 197–98; Vaid 2017) regarding the issue of the compatibility of homosexuality with Islam.

Conservative scholar Mobeen Vaid (2017) criticized both Kugle's essentialist approach to gender categories (pp. 47–59) and his hermeneutics, demonstrating his "methodological inconsistencies, the misreading and misrepresentation of traditional works, the transposition of modern categories onto the classical sources, (. . .) the use of tendentious sources cited selectively, the omission of relevant material that contradicts his narrative, the use of partial quotations drawn selectively from the most dubitable of sources, the dismissal of the established disciplines of Islamic theology, exegesis and law" (ibid., pp. 45, 77).

What is the authors' position? They too are critical of this current of revisionist contemporary scholars who, in order to legitimize the rights of homosexuals, end up ideologically re-reading history and sources, i.e., they anachronistically reinterpret the Qur'an and the Sunnah, claiming that the original Islam 'was tolerant and gender-inclusive.' The authors share the principles of these well-meaning scholars, but not their theses and methodologies, which subvert historical truth, do not abide by scientific rigor, and do not recognize the validity of classical Islamic sciences.

On the other hand, while it is true that the authors agree with the methodological critique of conservative scholars like Vaid regarding the Qur'anic revisionism of Kugle, they nonetheless recognize and appreciate the attempt of revisionist scholars to construct a theology of liberation for homosexuals.

In ideological/political contrast with conservatives and in methodological/epistemological contrast with the revisionists, and keeping in mind that it cannot be denied that the main Islamic sources have de facto condemned homosexuality, the authors support the need for a historicization and reform of the Islamic religion inspired by the perspectives outlined by Muhammad Shahrur (2019) and Sari Hanafi (2021).

Having clarified these points, the authors now present their historical–philological critique of some crucial points of Kugle's volume (2010) in reference to the story of Lot. Kugle states that the Qur'an mentions homosexuals only obliquely and does not condemn homosexual practices except when they manifest themselves as violent. The forbidden and condemned acts in Lot's story may be understood as rape between males and not as consensual homosexual acts.¹⁴ The later tradition, based on *hadith* and *fiqh*, may have perverted the Quranic message, stigmatizing homosexuals and criminalizing their relationships. (Kugle 2010, p. 2)

In particular, according to Kugle (and others cited above), the sin of Lot's tribe did not consist of sodomy, but rather, of a wide range of punishable attitudes and acts, chief among which was 'infidelity (*kufr*, ibid., p. 50) to the Prophet Lot. According to the author, Islamic traditionalists would later exploit the story of Lot to create the terms and the categories 'sodomy' and 'sodomite' (*liwat, luti*) (ibid., pp. 50–51).

Kugle refers to Ibn Hazm's interpretation, but, in our opinion, distorts it, due to his ideological convictions:

"Ibn Hazm (...) asserted that the tribe of Lot was destroyed for their attitude of infidelity (*kufri*) and their violent rejection of the Prophet sent to them and that this rejection was expressed in their whole range of criminal deeds, only some of which were sexual in nature. (...) Ibn Hazm was no gay activist, but he may have been the first 'sexuality-sensitive' interpreter of the Qur'an". (ibid., pp. 51–52)

Ibn Hazm is not an interpreter of the Qur'an (as Kugle states); he was not an exegete, but a jurist and a man of letters. His writings on the question are unequivocally in line with classical jurisprudence:

"فعل قوم لوط من الكبائر الفواحش المحرمة : كلحم الخنزير والميتة والدم والخمر والزنى وسائر المعاصي. من أحله أو أحل شيئاً مما ذكرنا فهو كافر مشرك حلال الدم والمال. وإنما اختلف الناس في الواجب عليه" (Ibn Hazm 1933, vol. 11, question number 2299, "Fi'l qawm Lut", p. 380)

"The acts of the people of Lot are part of the serious forbidden sins, like consuming the flesh of pork, the meat of dead animals, and alcohol, fornicating, and the remaining disobediences to God. He who considers these acts lawful or considers only one of these things lawful is: an unbeliever suppressible with impunity and his property sequesterable. There are various opinions on the punishment he deserves."

Another excerpt is even clearer in this regard:

"فصح أن الرجم الذي أصابهم لم يكن للفاحشة وحدها لكن للكفر ولها، فلزمهم أن لا يرجموا من فعل فعل قوم لوط إلا أن يكون كافراً"

(ibid., p. 384)

"It has been proven that the stoning of Lot's people was not only because of *al-fahisha*,¹⁵ but because of unbelief and *al-fahisha*."

However, Kugle's observation regarding the *sexually sensitive* tendency of Ibn Hazm, although incorrect from a philological point of view, is not out of place. Considering the complete work of Ibn Hazm, in particular "*Tawq al-hamama*" and his autobiographical notes, a portrait emerges of a sensitive person who is tolerant and attracted to amorous themes, similar to his teacher, Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani (son of the founder of the Zahiri school and linked by a love affair to a young man).

We now return to a critique of Kugle's hermeneutics relating to the story of Lot as interpreted by Ibn Hazm. Subsequently Kugle (2010) also reports the following passages:

"Ibn Hazm also notes that it is impossible that Lot's tribe was destroyed solely or primarily because of male-to-male sex, because Lot's wife was also destroyed along with all the women and children of her tribe. (p. 53) (...) Would anyone believe that a Prophet would offer his daughters to assailants intent on rape, as if their raping women would make the act 'pure'? " (p. 56).

Here, Kugle's biased interpretation of Ibn Hazm consists of an anachronistic perspective. For a biblical scholar, it is normal that the punishments in the Bible fall on everyone (remember Moses, Abraham, the massacre of the innocents, etc.) and that a man offers or sacrifices his daughters or sons in the name of obedience to God. Now, in the authors' opinion, it would be a mistake to interpret a story from the Old Testament taken up in the Qur'an according to the ethical parameters of the 21st century, rather than with the ideological and methodological background which is applied to the Old Testament.

In fact, Ibn Hazm condemns the sin of Lot's tribe, considering it one of the greatest sins, but, in the absence of a Qur'anic *hadd* and *ijma'*, and consistent with his school which denies *qiyas*, he prescribes a *ta'zir*¹⁶ (ibid., pp. 380–86).

In the following pages, Kugle identifies rape as the cause of the condemnation of Lot's people and attributes to al-Tabari the responsibility for the misinterpretation which later became the foundation of the conservative ideology which is dominant in the history of Islam:

"Because al-Tabari is primarily a jurist, he does not pursue a broader reading of the Qur'an's story of Lot to discover its deeper themes or compare the Qur'an's use of the term "immorality" (*fahisha*) here to other uses where it describes actions that are clearly not anal penetration or same-sex acts or even sexual acts at all. (. . .) Suffice it to say here that, most of the classical interpreters, following al-Tabari's example, discussed sex acts with almost exclusive attention to anal sex between man and man. This tradition of interpretation is so prevalent that many translators of the Qur'an's use terms like "homosexuality" or "unnatural sex", or "crime against the laws of nature". (. . .) What is clear is that al-Tabari and other classical interpreters never discussed sexual orientation as an integral aspect of personality, which greatly limits their interpretation. If they had, they would not have read the narrative of Lot and his tribe as addressing homosexual acts in general, but rather, as addressing male rape of men in particular". (Kugle 2010, pp. 53–54)

In his critique of these passages, Vaid highlights Kugle's misleading citation from the Qur'an¹⁷ and the fact that "Tabari's exegetical method is faithful to the Qur'anic text of the Lot narrative, for it contains hardly any of his own commentary" (Vaid 2017, p. 22).

In this regard, it should be remembered that al-Tabari is an exegete of the *al-tafsir bil-matur* school.¹⁸ In it, for fear of making mistakes, the interpretative space is reduced to a minimum and rests substantially on the sayings reported by the first generations of Islam.¹⁹ Specifically, the interpretation of Lot's story, later reported by al-Tabari, was already supported by one of the first Qur'anic exegetes, Muqàtil ibn Sulayman (d. 767), one hundred and sixty lunar years earlier.²⁰

In the following passage, al-Tabari claims to be aware of not driving the text towards a specific interpretation; he claims to adhere to the meaning of the Arabic language philologically, without distorting its meaning.²¹

فالواجب أن تكون معاني كتاب الله المنزل على نبيينا محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم ، لمعاني كلام العرب "موافقة، وظاهره لظاهر كلامها ملائمة"

Furthermore, it is a fact that the Qur'an (2020), in relation to the story of Lot, uses the expression *al-fahisha*, associating it unequivocally with homosexual acts in the following passages: 27: 54–55; 7: 80; 26: 165–66.

4. Lot: Homosexuality between Power and Pleasure

Regarding the interpretation of the violent nature of homosexual acts in Lot's story, it may be recalled that the Qur'an (2020) describes them with the term *shahwa*, or "desire": therefore to be condemned is seemingly not so much the fact of the violence perpetrated by the strongest on the weakest, as the fact that such violence is carried out as a consequence of a specific desire, the homosexual one.

The story of the events of the people of Lot is of great interest, because it reveals to us what, according to our interpretation, constitutes the double Qur'anic representation of homosexuality. It is represented both as the power of one man over another and as mutual pleasure. (Both Kugle and Zahed propose instead a Qur'anic exegesis of the passage on the people of Lot which interprets homosexual practices merely in terms of an imbalance of power.)

Our interpretation of the Qur'anic passage rests on an analysis of its semantic core. The term "*al-munkar*"²² contained in the Qur'anic *aya* "*tat'una fi nadikum al-munkar*" ("in your encounters", Qur'an 2020, 29: 28–29) is interpreted by al-Tabari according to three possible meanings: "1. They pass wind among themselves, 2. They throw stones and

taunt passers-by, 3, Had sex in their meetings (lit.: *kana ya'ti ba'duhum ba'dan al-majalis* and *kana yujami'u ba'duhum ba'dan*).” The first and third meanings describe actions that do not correspond to relations of power but of reciprocity (Al-Tabari 1990, vol. 1, p. 293).

In support of this theory, it might be interesting to consider a philological hypothesis of the name of the Prophet Lut (in Arabic). Arab lexicographers define the term *liwat* with the expression “*hamalu qawmi Lut*” (doing the act of the people of Lut). This suggests that they derive the term *liwat* from the name Lut.

In the authors’ opinion, however, it is probably *Lut* that derives from *liwat* and not the other way around. We will now explore this hypothesis.

First of all, by analyzing the semantics of the root *l-w-t* in various Semitic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Jazi, and Arabic), a common meaning is found: that of two entities that mix, attach, and unite.²³

Furthermore, in Arabic, the term *liwat* (root *l-w-t*, Lane 2003, vol. 7, pp. 2681–82) denotes male homosexuality, while through the root *l-w-th* (phonetic variation of the root *l-w-t*), we find meanings including to bind, to entangle, to mix, to contaminate, to dirty (see Lane 2003, pp. 2677–79).

Finally, in Arabic, *Lut*, the name of the sodomite people’s prophet, is evocative of homosexuality. Since this cannot be by chance, two hypotheses arise. As already noted, according to the first hypothesis, which prevailed among the main Arab lexicographers, the term *liwat* likely came from the biblical character called Lut. However, it is known that the Semitic languages in question are older than the biblical character. This makes the second hypothesis more plausible, i.e., that the name *Lut* was derived from those terms and embodied their meanings.

The fact that Semitic languages have these common roots associated with the specific semantic area leads us to think that the name *Lut* and the corresponding biblical story (later taken from the Qur’an) have been taken as a symbol of male homosexual practices.

5. The Islamic Paradise and *al-wuldān al-mukhalladun*

In support of the authors’ hypothesis, another important fact relating to imagery of the Islamic paradise may be recalled. It represents everything that the pre-Islamic Arabs wanted: pomegranates, grapes, rivers of milk, and fresh water. In addition to these things, the Qur’an (2020) explicitly speaks of the “immortal adolescents” (*al-wuldān al-mukhalladun*) who populate paradise, or the imaginary horizon of desire.²⁴

This situation spurs a question: if in pre-Islamic culture, ‘adolescents’ were considered desirable, why does pre-Islamic literature speak only of heterosexual love (moreover, in an environment where there was no religious censorship) and of adolescent knights who protect the women (see, for example, Rabi’a ibn Mukaddam). Have any significant texts been lost? Or was there self-censorship by pre-Islamic poets regarding homosexual desire and practices? Was the existence of homosexual desire made explicit only later in the time of the Prophet (see Qur’anic paradise)?

In the Islamic paradise, a number of forbidden things are allowed and desired in worldly life: not only homosexuality,²⁵ but also free sex (Boudhiba 2001, pp. 91–107), wine, etc. This paradise would represent, in the authors’ opinion, an explicit admission of the lawfulness of the dimension of desire, but not of related practices, in worldly life.

6. *Al-mukhannathun*

What was the attitude of the Prophet of Islam toward homosexuals? According to Rowson (1991), his condemnation of them is evident in Islamic sources (p. 685); as already seen, Kugle (2010, p. 62) and other revisionists, however, affirm that the Prophet did not condemn homosexuals.

First of all, it is important to state that, contrary to what these authors assert (see Kugle 2010, p. 72; Zaharin 2022), conceptual and terminological categories equivalent to those of “homosexuals” and “homosexuality”, as used in our contemporary culture, existed at the

time of the Prophet: terms like *luti*, *majbus*, *mukhannath*, *halqi* and expressions like “*tatuna al-rijal*” (Qur’an 2020, 7: 81), “*tatuna al-dukran*” (Qur’an 2020, 26: 165) would be the proof.

Vaid (2017) also criticizes Kugle’s theory according to which the terms *liwat* and *luti* “were popularized in later times”, but he erroneously dates the appearance of the term *liwat* to the 13th–14th century; in fact, the term *liwat* appears as early as the 8th century in a poem by Bashar ibn Burd (d. 784 CE)²⁶ and, later, in Abu Nuwas.

The question of the attitude of Islam toward homosexuals can be understood starting from the analysis of some *hadith* on the so-called *mukhannathun* (effeminate).²⁷ However, is it correct to study homosexuality through the category of *mukhannathun*? Were these perhaps homosexuals? Rowson (1991) analyzes the evolution of the image related to the *mukhannathun* from the prophetic to the Abbasid era. In the time of the Prophet and in the Umayyad era, the *mukhannathun* would have been considered “without desire” (*min ghair uli l-irba*, lacking interest in women, p. 674), crossdressers (pp. 686–87), and only sometimes homosexuals (p. 684). In the Abbasid period, they would have been considered passive homosexuals (pp. 685–86). Later, in the time of Abu Nuwas, that association, which had never been made before, between effeminacy and homosexuality would be made (p. 693).

On the basis of classical sources, it can be affirmed that in the pre-Islamic Arab culture, which survives historically today in the Bedouin tribal areas, the distinction between active and passive homosexuality is clear: the passive homosexual is assimilated to the impotent man and, therefore, a dishonorable one. Passive anal intercourse is associated with impotence, not in a physiological sense, but in the sense of a lack of active virility.

Here is a definition that refers to this symbolic association between impotence and passive homosexuality:

“الذي فسد عضوه فانعكس ميل شهوته: الحلقى”.

“He who becomes impotent suffers as a consequence the inversion of his desire (he wishes to be penetrated anally)” (Al-Khafaji 1952, p. 105).

Mukhannathun are not considered homosexual in the broad sense, but, as effeminate and non-virile beings, they are considered passive and/or impotent homosexuals.

We also cite two passages in which the symbolic association between *takhannuth*, passive homosexuality and impotence is evident.

In the first song, the singer Tuways (1st century H.) shamelessly declares himself impotent:

“The saying “*Akhnathu min Tuways*” (more *mukhannath* than Tuways). He was one of the *mukhannathun* of Medina. His name was Taws (peacock), but when he became *mukhannath* (*takhannata*), he called himself Tuways (diminutive). He was the first to sing in Medina after Islam, (...) he made even the woman who lost her son laugh, he was an ironic and shameless libertine; (...) he showed people his flaw without shame, he talked and wrote poetry about it and in this poetry he said: “I am *ha, la, q, i*”. (Al-Asfahani 1971, pp. 185–86)

The second passage, taken from the collection of proverbs of Abu al-Fadl al-Maydani (d. 1124 CE) tells of the indifferent, enthusiastic, and ironic comments of six *mukhannathun* when they were castrated: Nasim al-Sahr exclaims: “Now thanks to castration I have become a true *mukhannath*!”; Nawmat al-Duha replies: “We have become real women!”; Bardu al-Fuad: “We have finally freed ourselves from the burden of the pee tube!”; Dhill al-Shajar: “What is the use of a weapon that is not used?”. In the same text, it is said that Dalal, questioned by the people while throwing saffron sweets to Satan instead of stones during the pilgrimage, replied “Abu Murra (Satan) did me a great favor: he pleased me with *al-ubna*²⁸ (passive penetration).”²⁹

In al-Tabari, the relationship between the three concepts is even more explicit in the passage where he defines the Qur’anic expression “*ghair uli al-irba*” (Qur’an 2020, 24: 31):

“المخنث الذي لا يقوم زبه هو”.

“Defined as *mukhannath* are those for whom the penis does not rise”. (Al-Tabari 2001, vol. 17, p. 270)

Which prescriptions did the Prophet issue to regulate the behavior of this category of men?

Firstly, various versions can be cited of the best known and commented *hadith* about *mukhannathun*, reported in the later and more complete biography of the Prophet: *Insan al-uyun fi sira al-Amin al-Ma'mun* of Ali ibn Ibrahim ibn Ahmad al-Halabi (d. 1635 CE).

1. “The Prophet entered Umm Salama’s tent. With her were her brother Abdullah and a *mukhannath*. He said: “O Abdullah, if tomorrow God will make you conquer al-Taif, take the daughter of Ghailan: when she comes, she comes with four pieces, when she goes away, she goes with eight”. When the prophet heard this, he said, “May he not come in with you!” The *mukhannath* meant with four folds of her belly and with eight as seen from behind.

2. Together with the Prophet was a slave of his aunt, Fakhita bint Amr ibn ‘A’ith. He was called Mati’ and entered the houses of the Prophet because he thought that he did not notice feminine things and had no desire (in Arabic: *‘irba*, see Qur’an 2020, 24: 31). The Prophet heard him as he said to Khalid ibn al-Walid (but some say it was not Khalid, but Abdullah, ‘Umm Salama’s brother) “If the Prophet conquers al-Taif tomorrow, take Badia, bint Ghaylan because she comes with four and comes back with eight. When she gets up, she bends over, when she sits down, she spreads his thighs, and when she speaks, she sings. Between her legs she has something like an overturned container. Her mouth is like a chrysanthemum.” The Prophet said, “I didn’t think this sly man would notice what I’m hearing!”

3. In another version, the Prophet said to him, “By God! You looked pretty closely! I didn’t think this sly man knew anything about female things!”

4. In the book *al-Aghani*, Hit (some say “Hayt” which means “effeminate fool”) said to Abdullah ibn Omayya “If God will make you conquer al-Tayf, ask the Prophet to give you Badya bint Ghaylan because she (...) comes with four and goes away with eight and between her thighs there is something hidden like an overturned container.”

Then the Prophet said, “You looked really deep, you bastard!” Then he sent him into exile from Medina to al-Hima. He said “Don’t go near any of your women!” The Prophet was told “But he will starve!” Then the Prophet allowed him to enter Medina every Friday to ask the people for food.

5. In another version, he sent both Māti and Hit into exile to al-Hima. They complained of hunger. He gave them permission to come every Friday to ask for food and go back outside. When the Prophet died, they attempted to return to Medina, but Abu Bakr drove them out again. When he died, they returned. Omar pushed them back. When he died, they returned.³⁰

6. There were three *mukhannathun* in the time of the Prophet: Hit, Māti’, and Hadhim.³¹ They were nicknamed so because their way of speaking was very sweet and they dyed (their hands and feet) with *henna* like women, but they did not practice the greater sin (*al-fahisha al-kubra*). (. . .)

7. It is probable that Māti ‘and Hit were with the Prophet on the occasion of his *ghazwa* and he was able to hear what precedes:³² the fact that he sent both into exile supports this hypothesis.

8. It is equally probable that there was only one of them with the Prophet, but, as the story was told more than once, the narrators got confused by attributing different names.” (Al-Halabi 2006, vol. 3, pp. 78–80).

According to Rowson (1991), in the time of the Prophet, the *takhannuth* was condemned as being associated with irreligiosity, frivolity (p. 680), music, crossdressing (p. 675), and the marriage brokerage that the *mukhannathun* undertook. In the early days, they were considered impotent and insensitive to female charm (p. 675), and in no source is there any reference to a hypothetical homosexual desire; in later sources (9th century) however, it is assumed that they were “homosexually inclined” (ibid., p. 676).

It can be noted that in the first three versions of the *hadith* just reported, in which the *mukhannath* is nameless or coincides with Mati' (the aunt's slave), the Prophet expresses astonishment and punishes his appreciation of Badya only by forbidding him access to her houses.

In the fourth version, where the *mukhannath* in question is no longer Mati' but Hit, the Prophet punishes him more severely with exile for his shameless comments made in public.

In the fifth version, he punishes two *mukhannathun*: the next two propositions explain why.

According to al-Halabi, the *mukhannathun* of that time were exiled, not because they were considered homosexual ("they did not practice *al-fahisha al-kubra*"), but because they transgressed the confidentiality of the female harem.³³ Rowson adopts the same explanation.

On the contrary, the authors' hypothesis is that Mati' and Hit are exiled for their supposed passive homosexual tendencies. On what basis do we hypothesize this?

The type of punishment that the Prophet prescribes (exile for life) is disproportionate to the crime and not logically consequential of it. Why are Mati' and Hit not punished with a few lashes but with exile? Remember that in Islamic law (in most law schools), the adulterer (not *muhsan*) was punished with a year of exile, in addition to whipping, while in this case, exile for life was ordered.

Having demonstrated the absence of indifference to the dimension of sexuality, the two *mukhannathun* highlight their potential ability to undermine the system, perhaps revealing, in addition to the intimacy of female sexuality, their own passive homosexuality.

Why is Harim, the third *mukhannath*, not exiled, nor is he spoken of? Most likely because he had not caused any public scandal.

Another version of the same *hadith* is eloquent in this regard:

"A *sahabi* entered after this talk between the Prophet and Hit and said, 'O messenger of God, give me permission to cut off his head.' And the Prophet: 'No, we have been ordered not to kill those who pray.'³⁴

Here, it is confirmed that the Prophet, while not applying the death penalty in the name of belonging to the Muslim community, does not deny the gravity of the guilt in his eyes. Evidently, the blame for a death-based punishment cannot be exhausted by the fact that Hit spoke to Abdullah about Badya's intimacy. In the eyes of the Prophet and the *sahabi*, the blame probably lay in Hit's sexual identity. If witnesses had confessed to having seen a homosexual act, the death penalty would have been applied; in the absence of proof, the Prophet prescribed a *ta'zir*.

When a *mukhannath* "talks too much", risking making his own identity public, he is (significantly) exiled, that is, excluded from the Muslim community; if, on the other hand, he conceals his sexual orientation, like Harim, he continues to be tolerated.³⁵ In this sense, exile is configured as a preventive and warning punishment for those with homosexual tendencies. The Prophet, unable to condemn the act, condemns the tendency being made public. The fact that Mati' and Hit showed that women were not in awe of them was implicitly equivalent to a demonstration of homosexuality (a fact still valid today in Middle Eastern Arab societies).

Let us also reflect on this fact: the Prophet condemns Mati' and Hit to permanent exile. Exile (*taghrib*) was part of the punishment for adultery (which included one hundred lashes and one year of exile). The type of punishment imposed upon Mati' and Hit (exile), i.e., that prescribed for a sexual offense (similar to adultery), leads us to think that the crime was similar to adultery, that is, a crime of a sexual nature.³⁶

Therefore, we seek to understand which fault Mati' and Hit were held responsible for. If they had been heterosexual and had committed adultery, the Prophet would have either killed them (if they were married) or whipped them (according to the *hadith* "*Uktulu al-fahl wa al-mafula bihi*").

If they had been homosexuals, he would have had to punish them with capital punishment, as prescribed by the *hadith*. Why did he not kill them? Conversely, if they were not homosexuals, why did he punish them? In this ambiguous and vague case, the legislator finds himself in difficulty.

In our opinion, the Prophet devised a political solution, in accordance with the principle of the *maslaha*. He imagined that the subjects in question may have been homosexuals: as already written, as long as their homosexuality remained “hidden”, it was tolerated, but from the moment they began to show their privileges “as homosexuals” (i.e., they entered in contact with women as eunuchs and saw things that other men should not see), and possibly to flaunt their tendencies as well, he was forced to punish them. Hence, the legal compromise was permanent exile. From then until today, the problem consists of declaring and institutionalizing homosexuality, rather than in the fact (well known) that it is practiced.

Another clue suggests that there is more to this story. In the *Sunnah*, women are forbidden from describing the physical appearance of another woman to their husbands, but, contrary to what is prescribed for the *mukhannathun*, there are no punishments of any kind if they do so:

“المرأة ، فتتعتها لزوجها كأنه ينظر إليها المرأة تباشرا“.

(Al-Bukhari 1993, vol. 5, p. 2007, n. 4942)

The disparity in legal treatment between women and *mukhannathun* could be a sign of a taboo against homosexuality.

The interesting point in al-Halabi’s passages is that in which he declares: “They were called that because they were effeminate and not because they practiced *liwat*.” Now, the fact that this later author (ten centuries later) wants to show that there were no homosexuals among the Prophet’s companions (*sahaba*) is not convincing, but rather, leads us to speculate that things were not exactly like this in the urban society of Medina.

On the other hand, it can be understood why al-Halabi wrote that Mâti was only effeminate and not homosexual: a slave of the Prophet could not have been so, according to the paradigm of the passive, submissive, and dishonored homosexual.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the fact that Mâti and Hit were basically two *sahaba* (lit.: anyone who knew the Prophet is a *sahib*); their homosexual inclination opened up a huge problem in Islam since, in the Sunni doctrine, all *sahaba* are considered imitable and worthy of respect.³⁷

The authors have found that in cases where Mâti, Hit, and Harim are mentioned in classical and modern texts, the formula normally used by Sunnis as an honorific title for the *sahaba* (“*Radiya Allahu ‘anhū*”) is absent, and the term ‘*sahabi*’ is not applied to them in any text, even though they are included in the great classical encyclopedias of the *sahaba* (Al-Asqalani 1995).

Here ends this excursus on the *mukhannathun*, which has provided an overview of the conceptions and treatment of homosexuals at the time of the Prophet. At this point, it would be appropriate to analyze the *Sunnah* on the question, but this is not the place to address the vast gulf of the *hadith* concerning male homosexuality. In this regard, the reader may refer to the authors’ future article and to two works a classic one (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1987) and a modern one (Khidr 1995). Suffice to say, contrary to what the “revisionist progressives” claim (Kugle 2010, pp. 73–127; Zaharin 2022, pp. 8–9), the *hadith* unequivocally condemned male homosexuality.

We conclude by stating a significant fact that has emerged very recently. Globalization and mass media have revealed a phenomenon that was hitherto hidden: the widespread of male homosexual practices in the Arab countries of the Gulf, where sexual segregation is more rigid. From the discovery of the diffusion of these practices, a very lively debate and a new hermeneutic of the *Sunnah* have developed between the *muhaddithun* and jurists.³⁸

7. Conclusions

This article represents only a first survey of a larger research project on the representations and practices relating to male homosexuality in the written sources of Arab-Muslim cultural history, of which only the first centuries have been analyzed here.

In the future, the authors intend to investigate the continuation of this story through the entire corpus of *hadith* and *fiqh*, with its heterogeneous ramifications. It would also be extremely interesting to study Sufi literature, which is characterized by non-heteronormative reflections on amorous relationships.

This paper aimed to trace the symbolic imagery related to various homosexual practices; in it, a dialectical tension is observed between two main paradigms: one of violence, which brings homosexual practices back to the order of hierarchies and powers between people and bodies, and one of homosexual desire, that sees its greatest light in the heyday of Islam, while being hidden, removed, or condemned in subsequent centuries (until today) by both tribal Bedouin and Islamic cultures.

The first evidence that has been found of the legend of the kingdom of Himyar, the *hadith* condemning sodomy and the tribal Bedouin culture (not addressed in this article), can be traced back to stories of violence. Instead, characters of the era from the beginning of the reign of al-Walid ibn Yazid up to the Turkish domination of the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad are associated with a constellation of homosexual desire.

The phase analyzed in this article, through the complex figures of the *majbus* and *mukhannathun*, instead represents, in the authors' opinion, an historical period of transition which is marked by more nuanced and ambiguous sexual and gender attitudes and behaviors. This ambiguity cannot be defined by the limited category of male homosexuality, but reflects a wider range of potential gender identities which can include, even simultaneously in the same character, heterosexual, active or passive homosexual orientations and practices, bisexuality, transvestism, hermaphroditism, sexual impotence, etc. Faced with this identity fluidity, the Prophet was forced to deal with these 'chiaroscuro' and to devise compromise measures.

As is well known, the question of LGBTQ+ rights (like those pertaining to feminism for centuries) is still exploited in an 'orientalistic' way by some "Western" countries in terms of the management of their political-economic relations with Arab-Islamic countries (just think of the controversies that have emerged in recent days during the World Cup in Qatar). A denunciation of homophobia, conducted awkwardly if not even speciously, risks becoming an instrument of renewed Islamophobia and intercultural clashes.

As this brief essay has attempted to demonstrate, Islam has recognized and admitted the dimensions of homosexual desire and pleasure, even though in fact it has condemned and sanctioned such practices.

However, an in-depth scientific reconstruction of the history of Islam may reveal what has been, in a long term sense, a dialectic between law and customs. In the wake of this pragmatic tradition of tolerance and through a through a desirable promotion of reform and historicization of Islam, a real space of freedom and protection of LGBTQ+ rights could be opened up in Arab-Muslim countries.

As a well-known medieval Arab philologist said:

من اتسع في كلام العرب لم يكذب يخطئ أحدا

"Whoever masters the Arabic language will not condemn anyone (that is: he will find a justification for any saying)."

As the present authors say: "Whoever studies Islam will not condemn anyone (that is, a justification will be found for any way of being and living)."

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A.A. and A.P.; investigation, A.A. and A.P.; resources, A.A. and A.P.; data curation, A.A. and A.P.; writing—original draft preparation, A.A. and A.P.; writing—review and editing, A.A. and A.P.; visualization, A.A. and A.P.; supervision, A.A. and A.P.; project administration, A.A. and A.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Notes

- 1 Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī nicknamed al-Aḥwaṣ (pp. 660–724) was an Arab poet of the Umayyad era. Descended from one of the Ansar, he was known for his satirical and amorous poems. Such was the vigor of his satires that he was banished by ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and exiled to the island of Dahlak in the Red Sea. He was recalled by ‘Umar’s successor, Yazid b. ‘Abd al-Malik.
- 2 This story can be found in Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 738 CE.; 1979, pp. 311–12), *Al-Tabari* (1990, vol. 2, pp. 117–19) and Abu al-Faraj *Al-Asfahani* (2008, pp. 223–24): the version of the latter has been chosen as it is more detailed.
- 3 Himyar was a Sabaean kingdom (110 BCE–527 CE).
- 4 “*Siwak*: a tooth-stick; a piece of stick of the kind of tree called *arak* (*salvadora persica*) with which the teeth are rubbed and cleaned, the end being made like a brush” (see *Lane* 2003, vol. 4, p. 1473, lemma *swk*).
- 5 In the Arabic dialect of the Upper Euphrates the expression “*tizuhu ratib/nashif*” is still used today, literally: “his ass is wet/dry.” With the first expression (wet) the person who can be blackmailed is metaphorically designated, with the second expression, the person who cannot be blackmailed. It is said that Marwan Ibn al-Hakam, the Umayyad caliph, had asked his wife’s son with the expression: “*Ya ibn ratibat al-ist*” literally: “O son of she who has a wet anus.” As a result of this she killed him. The derogatory expression ‘wet anus’ refers to a person who has been sodomized repeatedly. This insult aimed at his mother inevitably fell on her son, weakening his candidacy for successor in the office of caliph.
- 6 The term *majbus* can be translated as ‘passive consenting homosexual.’
- 7 Al-Hakam Amr Ibn Isham, a prestigious chief and notable of the Quraysh tribe, died in the Battle of Badr. He was derisively nicknamed by the Prophet “Abu Jahl” (“the ignorant” par excellence, literally “father of ignorance”).
- 8 The passage refers to Abu Jahl’s habit of dyeing his backside with saffron to perfume it. ‘Utba’s derogatory quip to Abu Jahl’s address refers to the events relating to the Battle of Badr. (We find an anecdote relating to al-Ahwas’ use of saffron-dyed perfumes and garments in *Rowson* 1991, p. 687.)
- 9 In *Mu’jam al-Dawha al-tarikhi* (2013) this term, curiously, does not appear. In Arabic the term *al-nafar* indicates a group of three to nine men; here the diminutive *nufayr* (small group) is used: this source wants to testify that before Islam those who practice homosexuality for pleasure are rare. In other texts it is stated that only four people practiced homosexuality for pleasure.
- 10 Given its importance, as a historical/literary testimony, we report the complete passage in Arabic:
«قال البيهقي: والأبيات التي أنشدها الأصفهاني للرجل القرشي الذي لم يحب ذكره تروى لأبي جهل، وهي:
يا جوارى الحي عدننيه ... أخواتي لا تلمننيه
كيف التذ الحياة وقد ... حجبوا عني معلليه
ثم يلحوني على رجل ... لو سقاني سم ساعتيه
لم أقل: إني مللت ولا ... إن من أهواه ملنيه
وقيل: إنه كان إذا هاج عليه ذلك الداء عمد إلى حجارة الرمضاء، فكوى بها دبره وقال: والله لا علاك ذكر! وكان أحول» (*Al-Andalusi* 1982, vol. 1, p. 362).
- 11 *Zibriqan*: literally moon, in a broad sense: “beautiful”; badr: full moon. We report the passage in Arabic—already reported above from another source (a book of proverbs)—as integrative and as it appears in a source (dictionary) considered more authoritative than that:
«وقال ابن دريد: المجبوس: الذي يُؤتى طائعاً، يُكْنى به عن ذلك الفعل، قال: وهذا شيء لم يكن يُعرف في الجاهلية إلا في نُفَيْر، قال أبو عبيدة: منهم أبو جهل بن هشام؛ ولذلك قال له عتبة بن ربيعة - رضي الله عنه - يوم بدر: سيعلمُ المُصَفِّرُ أسنَّه من المُنتَفِخِ سَحْرُه، والرَّزْبِرْقَانُ بن بدر، وطَفِيلُ بن مالك، وقابوس ابن المنذر الملك عمُّ النعمان بن المنذر بن المنذر؛ وكان يُلقَّب جَيْبَ العَرُوسِ» (*Al-Saghani* 1987, p. 64, lemma *jbs*).
- 12 *Mukhadram*: that is, of a person who lived between the era of *jahiliyya* and that of Islam.
- 13 Al-Zabidi (d. 1790) traces this testimony back to a previous source of the grammarian Qutrub (d. 821).
- 14 In the wake of the revisionists, *Zaharin* (2022) interprets the prohibition of those acts as homosexual violence and not as homosexual acts: “This paper also disagrees with the conservative accusation presented by *Vaid* (2017) that claimed revisionist and progressive Muslims Quranic interpretation in demanding that the text needs to be reinterpreted based on sexual modernity.”

- (p. 6) The author tries to overturn the accusation of anachronism, discrediting the classical hermeneutics of those verses, without however providing any historical–philological argument to support her claims.
- 15 In Lane: فَاحِشَةٌ [An excess; an enormity; anything exceeding the bounds of rectitude:] a thing excessively, enormously, or beyond measure, foul, evil, bad, abominable, or unseemly; [gross, immodest, lewd, or obscene:] (Mgh:) or anything not agreeable with truth: (Lth, Mgh:) or a sin, or crime, that is very foul, evil, bad, &c.: or anything forbidden by God: (K:) or any saying, or action, that is foul, evil, bad, &c.: (TA:) and فَحِشَةٌ signifies the same as فَاحِشَةٌ; (S;) or an enormity, or excessive sin, beyond measure foul, evil, bad, &c.; or a thing that reason disapproves, and the law regards as foul, evil, bad, &c.: (Bd in ii. 164:) the pl. of فَاحِشَةٌ is فَوَاحِشٌ. (Msb, TA.) Also, particularly, Adultery, or fornication; (Lane 2003, vol. 6, pp. 2344–45).
- 16 *Taazir*: the *shari'a* refers to the punishment for crimes at the discretion of the judge or the ruler.
- 17 “Straining to decouple these two verses from each other and divorce them from their immediate context, Kugle suggests that “iniquity” could mean any type of indecent or unethical behavior ant that al-Tabari, like the community of Muslim exegetes and jurists for a millennium after him, made the “mistake” of reading these two verses sequentially.” (Vaid 2017, p. 62).
- 18 See in this regard in Subhi al-Salih (d. 1986, eminent Lebanese scholar): «البيان، في تفسير القرآن» ومن خصائصه أنه عرض فيه لأقوال الصحابة والتابعين مع تحرير أسانيدها، وترجيح بعضها على بعض (Al-Salih 1977, p. 291).
- 19 See the exposition of this methodological principle in al-Tabari: «ذكر بعض الأخبار التي رويت بالنهي عن القول في تأويل القرآن بالرأي» (Al-Tabari 2001, vol. 1, pp. 71–73).
- 20 See Muqātil on the interpretation to be given to the term *fahisha* and the Qur’an (2020, 7: 80–84):
 وأرسلنا لوطاً إذ قال لقومي «1» أتأتون الفاحشة يعني المعصية يعني إتيان الرجال وأنتم تبصرون أنها فاحشة ما سبقكم بها من أحد من العالمين. 80- فيما مضى قبلكم إنكم لتأتون الرجال شهوة من دون النساء بل أنتم قوم مسرفون. 81- يعني الذنب العظيم «2» وما كان جواب قومه أي قوم لوط «3» حين نهاهم عن الفاحشة إلا أن قالوا أخرجوهم آل لوط من قريبتكم إنهم أناس يتطهرون. 82- يعني لوطا وحده يعني يتنزهون عن إتيان الرجال فأنجبتاه وأهلته من العذاب إلا امرأته كانت من الغابرين. 83- يعني من الباقين في العذاب وأمطرنا عليهم الحجارة من فوقهم مطراً فساء مطر المُنذرين «1» يعني فيبس مطر الذين أنذروا العذاب فأنظر يا محمد كيف كان عقابته المجرمين. 84- يعني قوم لوط كان عقابتهم الخسف وكان يُلقب جيب الغروس» (Muqātil 2002, vol 2, pp. 47–48).
- 21 Al-Tabari goes on to quote a *hadith* in which the Prophet invites not to express personal opinions on the Qur’an:
 «من قال في القرآن برأيه فأصاب، فقد أخطأ»
 يعني صلى الله عليه وسلم، أنه أخطأ في فعله، بقيله فيه برأيه، وإن وافق قيله ذلك عين الصواب عند الله، لأن قيله فيه برأيه، ليس بقيل عالم أن الذي قال فيه من قول حق وصواب، فهو قائل على الله ما لا يعلم، أتم بفعله ما قد نهى عنه وحظر عليه (Al-Tabari 2001, vol. 1, p. 73).
- 22 *Munkar*: any action disapproved, or disallowed, by sound intellects; or deemed, or declared, thereby, to be bad, evil, hateful, abominable, foul, unseemly, ugly or hideous; (...) or anything pronounced to be bad, evil, hateful, abominable, or foul, and forbidden, and disapproved, disliked, or hated, by the law: a saying, or an action, unapproved, not approved, unaccepted, or not accepted, by God (...)” (Lane 2003, vol. 8, pp. 2849–50).
- 23 See for example Brown et al. (1906): *Lwt*: “wrap closely, tightly, enwrap, envelope (Ar. cleave, stick to a thing; also trans. Make to stick, or adhere) . . . it is wrapped up in a garment (of sword of Goliath); fig. of covering as sign of mourning . . . the surface of covering which covereth over all the peoples... envelope, wrap (p. 532). E dal *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* (Leslau 2006): *Lwt*: ‘give a light blow’, goad, send up the first shot’; *Lwt.*: ‘change, put on clothes’ (perhaps ‘change clothes’); *talawwata*: ‘be transformed’; *lot*: ‘cloak, garment’” (p. 321).
- 24 Qur’an (2020, 76: 19): “And round about them will (serve) boys of everlasting youth. If you see them, you would think them scattered pearls”.
- 25 Muhammad Jalal Kishk, in a text initially censored by an organ of the state police and then approved by the al-Azhar Commission, explicitly states that homosexuality is allowed in paradise (Kishk 1992, pp. 204–5).
- 26 Bashar Ibn Burd: إذا هو لاقى أمه دبّر استها تولى بأير اللواط حَضِبِ (Ibn Burd 1950, p. 367).
- 27 “In Arabic *mukhannath* or *mukhannith*, a man who resembles women in character, speech and gait.” (Juynboll 2007, p. 204)
- 28 In the encyclopedia of al-Tahanawi (who died after 1745) we find the following definition of ‘*ubna*’: “the name of a disease that causes those who have the pleasure of taking it in the anus” (Al-Tahanawi 1996). Here sexual practice is defined as a disease: we are in the second half of the 18th century and the perception of sexual mores has profoundly changed. This is not the place to address the issue of the affirmation of conservative and repressive currents in the sexual sphere.

29 Given its significance, we report the complete passage in Arabic:

فهو أيضاً من مُخَنَّثِي المدينة، واسمه نافذ، وكنيته أبو يزيد، وهو ممن خصاه ابنُ حزم الأنصاري أميرُ المدينة في عهد سليمان بن عبد الملك، وذلك أنه أمر ابن حزم عامله أن أخص لي مخنثي المدينة، فتشظى قلم الكاتب فوَّعت نقطة على ذروة الحاء فصيرتها خاء، فلما ورد الكتاب المدينة تأوله ابن حزم كاتبه فقرأ عليه "الأخص المخنثين" فقال له الأمير: لعله أخص بالحاء، فقال الكاتب: إن على الحاء نقطة مثل تمرة، ويروى مثل سهيل، فتقدم الأمير في إحضارهم، ثم خصاهم، وهم طُوَيْس، ودلال، ونسيم السحر، ونومة الضحى، وبرد الفؤاد، وظل الشجر، فقال كل واحد منهم عند خصائه كلمة سارت عنه، فأما طويس فقال: ما هذا إلا جِثَانُ أعيد علينا، وقال دلال: بل هذا هو الجِثَانُ الأكبر، وقال نسيم السحر: بالخصاء صرتُ مُخَنَّثًا حقاً، وقال نومة الضحى: بل صرنا نساء حقاً، وقال برد الفؤاد: استرخنا من حمْل ميزاب البؤل، وقال ظل الشجر: ما يصنع بسلاح لا يستعمل. ومَرَّ الطبيبُ الذي خصَّاهم بابن أبي عتيق، فقال له: أنتُ خاصي دلال، أما والله إن كان ليجيد:

لمن طَلَّلْ بذاتِ الجز ... ع أمسى دارساً خَلَقًا

ومضى الطبيب، فناداه ابنُ أبي عتيق أن ارجع، فرجع، فقال: إنما عنيتُ خفيفه لا ثقيله.

قالوا: وكان يبلغ من تخنث دلال أنه كان يرمي الجمار في الحح بسكر سليمان من عفرأ مُخَرَّراً بالعود المطري، فقيل له في ذلك، فقال: لأبي مَرَّة (أبو مرة: كنية إبليس) عندي يُدْ فأنأ أكافئه عليها، قيل: وما تلك اليد؟ قال: حَبَّب إلي الأبنة». (Al-Maydani 1955, vol. 1, p. 251).

30 Implied: 'Uthman did not drive them back away.

31 Here Hadhim is erroneously quoted in place of Harim (as in all previous sources): in our opinion it is a printing error in the specific edition.

32 Implied: the compliments about Badiya bint Ghaylan.

33 Rowson: "Sanctions against *mukhannathun* intended to safeguard the privacy of the realm of women" (Rowson 1991, p. 687).

34 See: Al-Maydani:

«مجمع الأمثال» (1/249):

«أَخْنَثُ مِنْ هَيْبِ»

هذا المثل من أمثال أهل المدينة، سار على عهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، وكان حينئذ بالمدينة ثلاثة من المُخَنَّثِينَ: هيب، وهرم، وماتع، فسار المثل من بينهم بهيب وكان المخنثون يدخلون على النساء فلا يُحْجَبُونَ فكان هيب يدخل على أزواج رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم متى أراد، فدخل يوماً دار أم سلمة رضي الله تعالى عنها، ورسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم عندها، فأقبل على أخي أم سلمة عبد الله بن أبي أمية يقول: إن فَتَحَ اللهُ عليكم الطائف، فسئل أن تُنْقَلَ بادية بنت غيلان بن سلمة بن معتب الثقفية فإنها مُبْتَلَةٌ هيفاء، شَمُوعٌ نُجْلَاء، تتأصفت وجهها في القسامة، وتجزأ معتدلاً في الوسامة، إن قامت تَنَثَّثْ، وإن قعدت تَبَنَّتْ، وإن تكلمت تَغَنَّتْ، أعلاها قَضِيب، وأسفلها كَتِيب، إذا أقبلت أقبلت بأربع، وإن أدبرت أدبرت بثمان، مع تُغَرُّ كالأقحوان، وشيء بين فخذيهما كالقعب المكفأ كما قال قيس بن الخطيم:

تَعْتَرِقُ الطَّرْفُ وَهِيَ لَاهِيَةٌ ... كَأَنَّمَا شَفَتْ وَجْهَهَا نَزْفُ

بين سُكُورِ النِّسَاءِ جُلْفَتُهَا ... قَصْدٌ فَلَا جَبَلَةٌ وَلَا قَصْفٌ

فسمع ذلك رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، فقال له: مالك؟ سَبَّكَ اللهُ! ما كنتُ أحسبك إلا من غير أولي الإزبية من الرجال فلذا كنت لا أُحْجَبُكَ عن نسائي، ثم أمره بأن يسير إلى خَاح، ففعل، ودخل في أثر هذا الحديث بعض الصحابة على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، فقال: أتأذن لي يا رسول الله في أن أتبعه فأضرب عنقه؟ فقال: لا، إنأ قد أمرنا أن لا نقتل المُصَلِّين» (1 vol. p. 249).

35 Based on the sources we know that even al-Zibriqan, a man of honor, did not show his sexual tendencies: he behaved publicly as an heterosexual and he was privately reserved.

36 We find a similar reasoning in Jamal (2001) in his 'semantic' analysis (inspired by (Izutsu 1959) hermeneutics) of Lot's story: "Same sex abominations are not an exceptional category of sin. Undeniably the moral terms associated with same sex sexuality in the Qur'an ultimately give it a negative evaluation and deem it to be a sin. However, these same moral terms are often used to evaluate opposite-sex abominations such as adultery, fornication and/or incest, as well as other non-sexual practices." (p. 69)

37 This debate has now become a topic of discussion between Sunnis and Shiites. See the ongoing debate, e.g., in: <https://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=90100> (accessed on 29 April 2022).

38 See: https://www.alukah.net/personal_pages/0/29981/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A1/ (accessed on 23 February 2022).

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