

The Islamic Hadiths on Female Circumcision and the Symbolism of Solomon's Temple

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Abstract—Female ‘circumcision’ (FGC/FGM) in Islam is based primarily upon the ‘hadiths,’ which are the sayings of Muhammad. While it is usual to attack such hadiths in order to stop female ‘circumcision,’ yet those practicing female ‘circumcision’ merely react against such an attack. However, there is a new approach, called ‘Temple Theology,’ which reads religious stories in the light of how the rituals and politics of Solomon’s temple were encoded in those stories. For example, one hadith tells us not to cut severely in circumcising a woman. However, the Menorah lampstand was symbolized as a woman, and so ‘circumcising’ a woman could be re-interpreted as merely referring to trimming the wicks of the lamps. Similarly, another hadith mentions that when a man is within the four parts of a woman (her arms and legs) that the couple should bathe because their circumcised parts have met (implying that the woman was circumcised). However, the bronze ‘Sea’ basin of Solomon’s temple, used for immersion (‘bathing’), had four sides, implying that the circumcised parts relate to temple symbolism. The hadiths relating to the fitra – Islamic practices which include circumcision – and to Hagar being circumcised by Sarah are likewise interpreted. This approach implies that the hadiths can be respected without giving them a literal interpretation. In this way, it is hoped that those devout Muslims who defend female ‘circumcision’ can re-evaluate their position in a positive way from within their own tradition, as opposed to being seemingly hounded by non-Muslims.

Keywords—Female circumcision, Fitra, Hadith, Temple theology.

I. INTRODUCTION

FEMALE ‘circumcision’ (or Female Genital Cutting or Mutilation, FGC/FGM) is most frequently associated with Islam, although other religions do practice it, especially around Islamic areas. However, one big difference is that certain Islamic ‘schools of law’ have pronounced female ‘circumcision’ as being either obligatory or a noble deed [1]. Such opinions are based on the *hadiths*, namely the records of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. These records were passed down orally from generation to generation before being written down some three hundred years later.

Muslims do try to have a critical mind regarding the hadiths, though, by trying to distinguish between those hadiths which appear to be authentic, and those which might not be so trustworthy. This is done by examining the chain of narrators (‘isnad’). For example, let us suppose that a certain hadith was recorded by Person A, who heard it from Person B, who heard it from Person C, who was the one who heard it from Muhammad. If it was known that one of these people had a suspected faulty memory then the hadith would be not be classed as authentic, but it could perhaps be considered as being

possibly true. If the same or similar hadith was also recorded but with a different chain of narrators then this helps the hadith to be trusted. Other considerations are that the list of narrators might have some missing names, or even that a narrator had a bad reputation or was even accused of inventing hadiths. As can be seen, there is plenty of scope to debate over whether a hadith should be classed as authentic. Shia and Sunni have differing sets of hadith based on whom they consider trustworthy, for example. So, one way to counter female ‘circumcision’ is to attack the chain of narrators for the related hadiths, which some have done, concluding that “Those who consider it [FGM] obligatory or permissible or a source of respect have used extremely weak and spurious reports of the Prophet in support of their view” [1, p.5]. Of course, those who consider such hadiths as authentic are against those who attack the hadiths, “The calls which urge the banning of female circumcision are call [sic] that go against Islam, because there is no clear text in the Qur’aan or Sunnah [life and sayings of Muhammad] and there is no opinion of the fuqaha’ [legal scholars] that says that female circumcision is haram [forbidden]. Female circumcision is either obligatory or recommended” [3]. It is like trying to convince a ‘Bible Basher’ that the earth is millions of years old as opposed to the 6,000 years or so that the Bible appears to teach. Pointing out that modern scholarship has shown that the Bible is a collection of stories collated hundreds of years after Moses is said to have lived will fall on deaf ears to those who do not trust modern scholars.

Another approach is to point out that there are Muslim groups who reject the entire corpus of the hadith:

“Finally, the Turkish author, Edip Yuksel, the representative of a Muslim group in the United States founded by the Egyptian Rashad Khalifa, who rejects all reference to the traditional teachings (Hadith) of Muhammad, said in a release on the Internet: ‘One must ask how a merciful God could command such pain and injustice to children... For all true savants of the Qur’an, the answer is clear. God, in his infinite mercy, cannot accept such a cruel ritual. This act is not mentioned at all in the Qur’an. It is only in recent inventions (hadith), human work, that one can find such laws and cruel rituals... Let us put an end to this old crime against our children dating back many centuries.’” [2]

This approach, however, also seriously backfires, so to speak. Rashad Khalifa claimed to be a messenger from God, but traditional Islam considers Muhammad to be the last messenger; Khalifa was assassinated by traditionalist Muslims

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who opposed him for going against this core Islamic belief. Therefore, stating that Khalifa was against female 'circumcision' could in fact further enrage traditionalist Muslims to the extent of not wanting to listen to any debates about the legitimacy of female 'circumcision.' To make a parallel, it is well known that the official position of the Roman Catholic Church is against contraception. However, the Jehovah's Witnesses, who are classed as Christians also, permit contraception [4]. Yet given that Jehovah's Witnesses deny a core belief of traditional Christianity, that of the deity of Christ, a Roman Catholic bishop could quite easily take offence if presented with the view that he should take their view as authoritative, and so cease all further discussion on contraception. However, recent scholarship, as described in the next section, has discovered that traditional religious stories can be esoteric ways of describing the rituals and politics of various temples. The key is that this means that the hadiths can be treated with full reverence and accepted as authentic, but revealing a hidden meaning in them which negates a literal interpretation. Hopefully, this will help traditionalist Muslims to listen to this approach.

II. THE SYMBOLISM OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

It is well known that Jesus spoke in parables. For example, he once gave a parable about a sower sowing seed, some of which fell on the pathway, some on stony ground, some among weeds, but some fell on good ground (Mark 4:1-9). The meaning of this parable was not given openly:

"[There was a] widely held belief that Jesus gave secret teaching to his disciples; the Gospels record that he sometimes spoke to crowds of people but also gave additional teaching to his disciples in private. The Gospels do not say what this teaching was, but it concerned the true meaning of the parables which most people would not understand. 'And when he was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables.'" (Mark 4.10-11)" [5]

While the gospel does then proceed to explain the parable (that the seed is the teaching, Mark 4:13-20), yet it is clear that there was an even more 'secret secret' which was never written down:

"Clement of Alexandria wrote at the end of the second century CE that Jesus taught 'knowledge of the past, present and future' (*Misc.* 6.7). He knew of mysteries concealed in the Hebrew scriptures, handed down by oral tradition but revealed by Jesus to his closest disciples (*Misc.* 5.10). He does not reveal how Jesus learned these secrets. 'The knowledge itself is that which has descended by transmission to a few, having been imparted unwritten by the apostles' (*Misc.* 6.7) ... The secret things, then, concerned past, present and future and were encoded in the Hebrew Scriptures." [5]

An example of this 'secret secret' tradition can be seen in the traditional nativity scene of Jesus, where an ox and an ass overlook the Christ in a manger. This has been linked to the

ancient passage which says, "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know" (Isaiah 1:3 RSV). However, the "Hebrew word for manger [crib], *'ebus*, is almost the same as the ancient name for Jerusalem, *y^ebus*" and so has been linked to the arrival of the new King. Additionally, the word for the "ox, *šor*, ... is very similar to [a word for] prince, *šar*, ... and the ass, *hamor*, is very like a word for priest, *komer*." In other words, "The humble animals recognize their master but the rulers of Jerusalem have not understood." Additionally, these two animals have been identified with the two cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, between which the Lord would appear (Exodus 25:22) [6]. In eastern art Jesus is born, not in a stable, but in a cave, and the cave is a symbol for the Holy of Holies, wherein there was no light [6, p.145]. However, the Quran gives a different setting for the birth of Jesus.

"Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them: then We sent to her Our angel and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. ... And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: she cried (in her anguish): 'Ah! would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!' But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree): 'Grieve not! for thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee'" (Quran 19:16-17, 23-24, Yusuf Ali) [7]

Since this is very different from the biblical story, it has been assumed that either the Bible has been corrupted, or that Muhammad was ignorant. However, Mary going behind a screen is like God's glory behind the veil of the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was. This glory was represented by female symbols, like Shekinah in Hebrew (cf. Sakina coming with the Ark in the Quran in 2:248, though often translated as 'security' or 'tranquillity'), and Mary is a female. Another female symbol for the glory was Wisdom, one of whose symbols "was a fragrant tree, the tree of life which was represented in the temple by the original menorah [lampstand]" [6, p.138]. This would be the palm tree before which the female Mary goes into labour. The rivulet running underneath would be the little trickle of a spring which originated within the Holy of Holies and ran along the south side of the temple [8], which is where the Menorah lampstand was situated (Exodus 26:35). As such, there is no actual contradiction between the Bible and the Quran. Which story is purely symbolic, and which is historical representing a fulfilment of temple rituals, could be a matter of personal opinion. It should also be pointed out that even though the ancient term 'Arabia,' whose capital was Petra, did not correspond to the peninsula we know, yet "Jewish tradition, recorded in the fourth century CE, but presumably not invented at that time, knew that *many priests of the first temple* [i.e., Solomon's] had settled in 'Arabia' after Josiah's temple purges in the late seventh century BCE ... This implies that descendants of the older priesthood were still in 'Arabia' " [6, p.120-121]. This explains why knowledge of the secrets of Solomon's temple could have been found amongst some of the Arabs. If the Quran is not of divine origin, then at least it can be

said that Muhammad knew of the temple secrets. And the hadiths about female ‘circumcision’ can be explained in the same manner.

III. HADITH: ‘DO NOT CUT SEVERELY’

One often quoted hadith in favour of female circumcision is the following:

“Narrated Umm Atiyyah al-Ansariyyah:

“ ‘A woman used to perform circumcision in Medina. The Prophet said to her: Do not cut severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband.’

“Abu Dawud said: It has been transmitted by ‘Ubaid Allah b. ‘Amr from ‘Abd al-Malik to the same effect through a different chain.

“Abu Dawud said: It is not a strong tradition. It has been transmitted in mursal form (missing the link of the Companions)

“Abu Dawud said: Muhammad b. Hasan is obscure, and this tradition is weak.” [9]

Here Muhammad tells a female circumciser not to “cut severely,” hence he did approve some sort of female ‘circumcision.’ However, as can be seen from the subsequent comments, the chain of narrators has problems, with the collator (Abu Dawud) saying that it is not a strong tradition and that the tradition is weak (Da’f). Al-Sabbagh comments, “This shows that Abu Dawud mentions the hadith only to point out its weakness. It is quoted with several chains of transmission, all of which are poor in authenticity” [10]¹. However, the hadith scholar Al-Albani (died 1999CE) certified it as being ‘Sahih,’ authentic. Without specifically mentioning his name, Al-Sabbagh merely states that it is “better to pay no attention to later scholars who sought to classify it as authentic” [10, p.19]. Ignoring such scholars may be helpful to appeal to wavering Muslims or to placate an outraged West, but these are the same scholars who are usually followed by those in favour of female circumcision.

Yet another (Shia) form of this hadith is as follows:

“It is mentioned in authentic traditions that when women migrated and came to the Prophet one of them was Umm Habib, who performed circumcision on females. The Prophet asked her if she still practiced that; she replied in the affirmative, but that she would abandon it if he so commanded. He told her to continue the rite. Come, I will teach what you should do.

When you circumcise the females you must not cut deep, just make a small incision which makes the face illuminated² and the complexion becomes clear; and the woman becomes dear to her husband.” [11]

Here we have that the woman’s face becomes ‘illuminated’ by being circumcised. This has been interpreted from an Islamic viewpoint as referring to the effects of removing the hood/prepuce of the clitoris, to enhance female sexuality and “to expose the clitoris for greater sexual pleasure ... [the illuminated face] is to be understood to mean a face suffused

with pleasure, in other words, the joyous countenance of a woman, arising out of her being sexually satisfied by her husband” [12]. (It appears that the author has confounded a *medical procedure* to remove the hood in cases of “decreased sexual sensitivity” [13] with a religious ritual performed on female children who would not know if their hood would have such an effect; this is Type 1a FGC. The hood itself has medical benefits, “to protect this sensitive tissue [the clitoris] from excessive stimulation and external irritants” [13]. Just because removing someone’s appendix can have medical benefits does not imply that everyone should have their appendix removed.) However, the lamps of Solomon’s temple represented women. For example, an ancient work states the following about the female Wisdom figure, who represents the glory of God, “Like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord, so is the beauty of a good wife in her well-ordered home. Like the shining lamp on the holy lampstand, so is a beautiful face on a stately figure. Like golden pillars on silver bases, so are shapely legs and steadfast feet” (Sirach 26:16-18 NRSV) [14]. So the “good wife” is the “holy lampstand” implying that her “well-ordered home” is in fact the temple itself. For example, Jesus spoke a parable about the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish:

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out’ ” (Matthew 25:1-8 NKJV).

Yet in the main area of Solomon’s temple there were ten lampstands, “five on the right side and five on the left” (1 Kings 7:49 NKJV). The oil for these lamps was made from the “first drop” of oil extracted from olives [15], in other words it was ‘virginal,’ making the lampstands symbolize the virgins in the parable. Now trimming the wicks involves making a tiny cut in the wicks, and it is this which symbolizes female ‘circumcision,’ being a relatively tiny cut on a female. The lamps would then have burnt brighter, hence the hadith saying that female ‘circumcision’ “makes the face illuminated.” The husband for which such a ‘female circumcision’ was “more desirable” would be the high priest.

A. A Curious Hadith about Tardiness

The concept of female ‘circumcision’ being a symbol for trimming a wick might possibly be behind this curious hadith (no reference is given other than it is “unverified”):

“A woman servant of Fatima’s (the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter) ran an errand, but she dallied and upon her return the Prophet said: ‘We must remove part of her to always remind her to obey and not tarry.’ So they removed that part that is to this day excised from all

¹ In note 28, in [10] and the next, the various forms of this hadith are discussed.

² Other translations of a form of this hadith have ‘beautiful’ instead, but the Arabic word more properly means “brightness or radiance” [12].

women.” [26]

Certainly, many would consider this drastic punishment as being extreme. (And it is this type of hadith which could cause non-Muslims to curse Muhammad for being cruel and unjust.) Yet it is this feeling that it cannot really be true that can lead us to look for some temple symbolism. Presumably, it is a reference to the lamps needing to be relit. Certainly, in the evening the lamps of the Menorah were trimmed and relit, thereby making the ‘tardiness’ being the necessary delay in trimming and relighting the lamps, symbolized by female ‘circumcision.’

IV. HADITH: ‘CIRCUMCISED PARTS MEET’

Another favoured (and authenticated) hadith is the following:

“It was narrated that 'Aishah the wife of the Prophet said: ‘When the two circumcised parts meet, then bath is obligatory. The Messenger of Allah and I did that, and we bathed.’” [16]

This has been ‘explained away’ as follows, because the expression “the two circumcised parts” “does not, as some people claim, stand as evidence that female circumcision is obligatory, because it is an Arabic usage of the dual form of one of two words, denoting two items to refer to both of them, for example, ‘the two fathers’, referring to the father and mother; ‘the two moons’, referring to the sun and moon; ‘the two Marwahs’, referring to the two hills of As-Safa and al-Marwah. Arabic linguists sometimes call such a usage ‘dual case extension.’” [10, p.11 note 2] In other words, “the two circumcised parts” only refers to the male being circumcised. However, there is a similar authentic hadith, as follows:

(‘Aishah was asked about bathing after sexual intercourse, and said,) “When anyone sits amidst four parts (of the woman) and the circumcised parts touch each other a bath becomes obligatory.” [17]

Yet a more accurate translation would be, “If he sat between her four parts and the circumcision touched the circumcision (*wamassa al-khitānu al-khitāna*), then ghusl [bath] would be mandatory” [18]. Due to the clear mention of ‘circumcision’ twice, these hadiths can only be referring to the existence of female circumcision.

More interestingly, the “four parts” are interpreted as referring to the woman’s arms and legs, the man being between them during sexual intercourse. The word translated as ‘parts’ is *shueabiha*, whose root *shīn ‘ayn bā* can have many meanings linked to the idea of branching. Here it is interpreted to mean the four limbs, being two arms and two legs. In the Quran 49:13 it is translated as ‘nations’ being “the broadest category of lineage” [19], and in 77:30 it is translated as ‘columns’ [20]. However, the related word *shuebha* (consonantly the same but without the final *alif*) means a “small water-course, or channel in which water flows” [21]. Given the Hebrew origins of Solomon’s temple symbolism it could be significant that there

is a related Hebrew word, *sha'ab* (with an *aleph* in place of the *‘ayin*), which either means to draw water or means a (female) person who draws up water [22]. Yet king Solomon made a huge bronze water basin called the ‘Sea’ which was used for immersion [23] and the bronze ‘Sea’ basin “stood on twelve oxen: three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east; the Sea was set upon them, and all their back parts pointed inward” (2 Chronicles 4:4 NKJV). In other words, the base of the bronze ‘Sea’ basin had four sides, with each side having three oxen. And it is these four sides to which the “four parts” in the hadith relate. Presumably water came out of the mouths of the oxen, like the lions in the Alhambra [24], making them like small water-courses. The high priest would have had his outer garments removed, so have been symbolically circumcised, especially in the removal of his turban (see the section ‘Abraham and the Fitra’ below). He could have sat on its rim before getting in the water, hence “sitting” between the four parts. The circumcised female could then be a lamp with its wick having been previously trimmed so its light would shine on (“meet”) the high priest³. Light shining from a lamp was also taken to symbolize sexual intercourse in Gnostic works [25], implying that the high priest immersing himself in the bronze ‘Sea’ basin is then symbolised as the required bathing mentioned in the hadith after sexual intercourse.

V. FITRA: THE ‘LAWS OF NATURE’

There is an authentic hadith which states the following:

“Narrated Abu Huraira: I heard the Prophet saying. ‘Five practices are characteristics of the Fitra: circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, cutting the moustaches short, clipping the nails, and depilating the hair of the armpits.’” [27]

As is to be expected, “Proponents of male and female circumcision hold that circumcision in these narratives concerns both women and men. Opponents to female circumcision say that circumcision, as well as clipping the moustache, concerns only men” [28]. However, as a mere facile technicality, because Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and South Asian women can have noticeable hair growth [29], for example, on the upper lip, it could be argued that “cutting the moustaches” does indeed apply to women as well, and hence also circumcision. However, we also read that, “The Messenger of Allah fixed forty days to shave the pubes, paring the nails, clipping the moustaches, and plucking the hair under the armpit” [30]⁴. Yet forty days can be linked to walking in and out of the temple as follows: as mentioned previously, either side of Solomon’s temple were five lampstands (1 Kings 7:49), each of which had seven lamps [31]. With the seven-branched Menorah lampstand, this means that along one side there were six times seven lamps, making 42 lamps. A lamp can represent the light of the sun, thereby symbolizing 42 days, or just 40 days

³ The hadith, “Circumcision is a *sunna* [religious law] for men and a sign of respect for women” [10, p.19] could be interpreted in relation to this symbolism. The high priest must have his outer garments removed, but the wick of the lamp might not need trimming.

⁴ The hadith continues: Abu Dawud said: Ja'far b. Sulaiman transmitted it from Abu 'Imran on the authority of Anas. In this version he did not mention the Prophet. He said: Forty days were fixed for us. This is a more correct version.

for simplicity⁵. This implies that the fitra – including circumcision – symbolize temple rituals.

A. Abraham and the Fitra

What Ibn-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah (died 1351CE) wrote on these five fitra practices is instructive:

“What is more beautiful than to cut what is too long and exceeds the limits in the foreskin, the pubis, the armpit, and moustache and the fingernails? ... This is the reason why God tested Abraham with eliminating these things, and he fulfilled them. Then God appointed him a leader for mankind because the face becomes more beautiful and more illuminating by doing so, and ashamed if they are left” [32].

We know that Abraham was the first to circumcise himself and the males of his household, according to the Bible (Genesis 17:10-13). However, it could be asked how could he have been tested with cutting his fingernails or his moustache? This would presume that everyone before him had long – and broken – nails, and that all the men had hair overgrowing their lips. Such things are quite inconvenient. Yet the reference to the face being illuminated is similar to female circumcision making the woman’s face illuminated, as mentioned in the section ‘Do Not Cut Severely’ above. Therefore, we can suspect that temple symbolism is behind certain fitra practices.

Abraham being the first to perform certain duties is mentioned in this hadith also:

“Ibrahim, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was the first to give hospitality to the guest and the first person to be circumcised and the first person to trim the moustache and the first person to see grey hair. He said, ‘O Lord! What is this?’ Allah the Blessed, the Exalted, said, ‘It is dignity, Ibrahim.’ He said, ‘Lord, increase me in dignity!’” [33]

Along with being the first to trim his moustache, we might also consider it strange that no one before Abraham was hospitable, and – without wishing to deny the possibility that the Almighty could have caused grey hairs to appear first with Abraham – it does sound incredible to believe it. However, the variant details of Abraham’s famous hospitality of the angels clarify the temple link.

The Bible says that Abraham was met by three angels (Genesis 18:2), whereas Islamic traditions are less specific, mentioning twelve, ten, or three angels [34]. Some could theorise that perhaps this is an Islamic anti-Christian polemic, because the three angels are taken to symbolize the Trinity. Or perhaps others could say that the uncertainty of the number of angels implies that the Islamic traditions are not trustworthy.

⁵ Additionally, because the Day of Atonement occurred once a year then a lamp could represent a year also, hence “a day for each year” (Ezekiel 4:6). This is probably why the Greek Bible in one place mentions that the Israelites wandered in the desert for “forty two years” (Joshua 5:6, LXX) instead of 40 years.

⁶ al-Majlisi [35] quotes one tradition in which four angels were sent, which might refer to the four faces of the cherubim.

⁷ The hadith continues: “(Abu 'Eisa said:) This Hadith is Hasan Sahih Gharib. As for Haiwah bin Shuraih, (the remainder of his name is) Ibn Yazid Al-Himisi”.

However, a look at a plan of Solomon’s temple in Fig. 1 clarifies these issues.

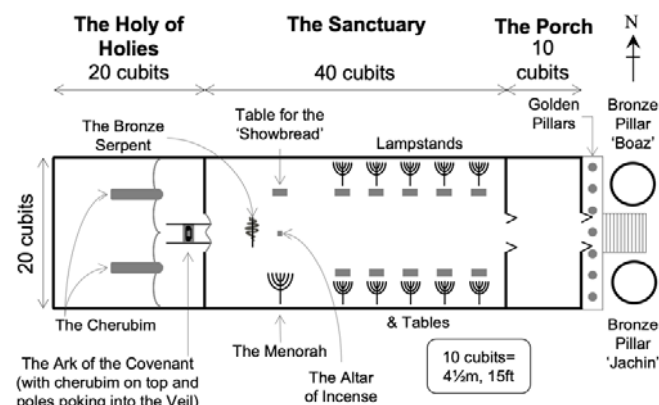


Fig. 1 Plan of Solomon's Temple (see the appendix for details); the bronze ‘Sea’ basin is not shown here, but was to the right

The three angels are the two cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (“two angels,” Genesis 19:1), and the third represents the Lord who would appear between them (Exodus 25:22; “Abraham still stood before the LORD,” Genesis 18:22). However, in the main sanctuary area of Solomon’s temple there were ten lampstands. This is the source of the number of ten angels. The number twelve is derived from these ten lampstands with the Menorah lampstand and the ‘Bronze Serpent’ added. As such, the differing number of angels is not randomly invented, but merely points to the temple being the source of the symbolism of the story⁶. Finally, Abraham “hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf” (Quran 11:69, Yusuf Ali). Yet in the Day of Atonement ritual when the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, he brought with him the blood of a young bull during the second entrance (Leviticus 16:3,14). It could be suggested that this is the source of the calf symbolism.

Abraham being the first to have grey hair is also temple symbolism. There is a hadith which states that “the Messenger of Allah said: ‘Whoever develops some gray hair in the cause of Allah, it shall be a light for him in the Day of Judgement.’”⁷ [36]. In other words, grey (i.e. white) hair symbolizes the glory of God shining. However, there could be another symbolism regarding hair.

The Bible talks about the strong man Samson who lost his supernatural strength when his hair was shaved (Judges 16:17)⁸. Furthermore, according to Jewish tradition, when the “spirit [i.e. glory] of God was poured out over him ... it was indicated by his hair. It began to move and emit a bell-like sound, which could be heard far off” [31, p.878]. The mention of bells gives

⁸ However, according to Islamic tradition he was conquered when his hands were tied to his neck using the hair from his own head [41]. It is not clear what the temple source of this story might be, although there were two stones on the shoulders of the high priest with “two chains of pure gold like braided cords” (Exodus 28:14 NKJV) joined to them. Perhaps the stones symbolized the high priest’s hands, with the chains representing his hair, since hair can also be braided.

us the meaning because the hem of the high priest's colourful robe was "fringed with small golden bells alternating with pomegranate tassels" [42], hence bells and hair. In other words, the vestments of the high priest represented his hair. So, Samson losing his strength when his hair was shaved refers to the high priest removing his colourful outer garment. And when the high priest removed his colourful garments, it was then that his white garments underneath would be seen, hence Abraham's hair changing into white.

While it is piously believed that Abraham was literally the first to introduce male circumcision, yet following the symbolism of the previous two 'firsts' of Abraham we can see that stories of his circumcision could also be temple rituals. Another hadith states that Abraham "was circumcised with an axe (qadam)" [37]. It could be doubted that any man would want to be circumcised by such a heavy implement⁹, but temple symbolism gives us its meaning. There was a metal plate attached to the turban of the high priest. It was made of gold and covered his forehead and had the name of the Lord written on it (Exodus 28:36-38). Therefore, it would be appropriate that the removal of his turban symbolized circumcision, as this is a covering being removed from his head like the covering of the foreskin being removed from the head of the penis. The large metal blade of an axe was symbolized by the golden metal plate on the turban.¹⁰

If the hospitality, circumcision, and grey hair of Abraham can be part of temple symbolism, then we could ask if trimming his moustache is also part of temple symbolism? We need to look at Fig. 1 from a different angle: we turn the plan of the temple so that the right-hand entrance (east) is at the bottom, as in Fig. 2.

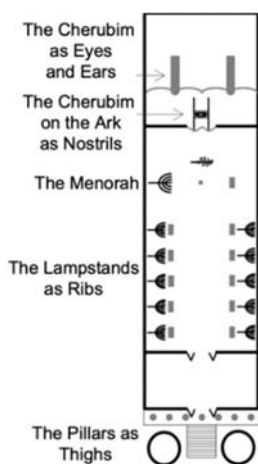


Fig. 2 Plan of Solomon's Temple as a Human Body

The cherubim statues in the Holy of Holies could be eyes,

⁹ The meaning of 'qadam' is, however, controversial, "it means either that Abraham was circumcised 'in Al-Qaddum' (name of a place) or 'by a pick-axe'" [32, p.141].

¹⁰ Of course, it could be deduced from this that male circumcision was never intended to be practiced, just as the point here is that female 'circumcision' really should never have been practiced. However, male circumcision could be given a practical symbolic meaning. If speculation may be permitted, then the reasoning is thus: the penis is used fundamentally for two purposes, urination

and procreation. Urination is not interesting, but procreation is central to humanity. It could be suggested that removing the foreskin therefore symbolizes that there was to be a procreation without the use of a man's penis. (Quran 19:20; Luke 1:34) As such, the virgin birth of Christ is the fulfillment of Abraham's circumcision, and so since that time it has become superfluous, although the (gentile) churches permit male circumcision as a continuation of a historical custom for various groups (compare Quran 3:50 and Acts 15:23-29).

B. The Fitra Practices Explained

In some hadiths there are a total of ten practices mentioned:

"It was narrated that Talq bin Habib said: Ten things are from the Sunnah: Using the Siwak [stick for cleaning the teeth], trimming the mustache, rinsing the mouth, rinsing the nose, letting the beard grow, trimming the nails, plucking the armpit hairs, circumcision, shaving the pubes and washing one's backside." [38]

This is the only hadith which mentions the fitra practices in this order (compare with [39] for example, where also "circumcision" has been removed and "washing the finger joints" inserted). However, the fitra practices mentioned in this order do seem to follow the rituals of the Day of Atonement when the temple is viewed as symbolizing a human body (see Fig. 2).

Using the Siwak [stick for cleaning the teeth]: If the Ark of the Covenant represented a nose, then its poles, which poked into the veil of the Holy of Holies, could represent the teeth. Yet the high priest carried incense into the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:12) in a vessel which had a "long handle" [40]. As the poles poked into the veil, then this long handled vessel could represent first cleaning the teeth with a stick.

Trimming the moustache: The high priest would need to open the veil of the Holy of Holies to enter in, and the veil is approximately where a moustache would be under the 'nose' of the Ark.

Rinsing the mouth: The high priest entered the Holy of Holies a second time with the blood of a young bull, to sprinkle it before the Ark (Leviticus 16:14). As a mouth is under a nose, this could symbolize cleansing the 'mouth' which was under the 'nose' of the Ark.

Rinsing the nose: The high priest entered the Holy of Holies a third time with the blood of a goat, again sprinkling it before the Ark (Leviticus 16:15). As the cherubim on the Ark represent nostrils, then this would be rinsing the nose.

Letting the beard grow: The high priest then took the blood out of the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the altar of incense (Leviticus 16:18), which was centrally placed somewhere before the Holy of Holies. As a beard grows down from the face, itself represented by the Holy of Holies, then it might be possible that this could represent trimming the beard.

Trimming the nails: While in Fig. 1 there is nothing specifically to represent the hands or fingers, yet there is a Jewish tradition that “Adam brought down the light by means of his finger-nails” [31, p.86 note 104]. And the high priest attended to the Menorah lampstand at the end of the Day of Atonement rituals as part of the daily rituals [40, p.82]. As this would have meant the lamps burning brighter (or being relit for some) then this could be symbolized as Adam bringing down fire by his fingernails, because Adam symbolized the high priest (“the splendid figure who walked in the garden of God was the high priest” [5, p.291]).

Regarding “washing the finger joints” [39], if the fingernails are the wicks, then the joints should be the holders of the lamps, “One aspect of the daily service of the menorah required the priests to clean the seven individual cups. A special vessel which included tongs and a brush was utilized for this task” [44].

Plucking the armpit hairs: The Menorah lampstand is possibly referenced again. In Fig. 1 it stands in the place where an armpit would be if the temple were considered to be a symbolic body. Hence this is also attending to the lamps of the Menorah as referenced for trimming the nails. (When trimming the wick of an oil lamp, the wick is pulled out, cut, and then replaced.)

Circumcision: Finally, the high priest changed out of his colourful outer garments [40, p.82]. This would have meant removing his turban, which action symbolized circumcision as mentioned in the section ‘Abraham and the Fitra’ above.

Shaving the pubes: Again, in the above section ‘Abraham and the Fitra,’ we had that the colourful garments of the high priest represented his hair. Now he also wore a girdle, which was tied at the breast and hung down to the ankles [43]. As this hung in front of his private parts, and could be included in the hair symbolism, it could be suggested that its removal represented the shaving of the pubes.

Another hadith adds “parting of the hair” [45] as part of the fitra. In which case, this could then be removing the colourful outer robe of the high priest because it symbolized his hair. In this case, we have what would naturally have been the order in which his outer garments were removed, first his turban, then his girdle, then his robe.

Washing one’s backside: Other hadiths clarify that ‘washing one’s backside’ meant washing with water [39], and after he had finished the daily rituals, he washed his hands and his feet [40, p.82]. As such, it is not clear what ‘washing one’s backside’ might directly refer to. However, after performing the morning daily rituals, which were the same as the afternoon ones, he did immerse himself in water [40, p.27-28], which would of course have water touching his private parts.

As such, it is clear that the fitra practices are little re-enactments of the Day of Atonement rituals. Therefore, they are symbolically most beautiful. However, while there was a court for the Jewish women near the temple, the “Temple proper might be entered by men only” [46]. It could then be implied

that the imitation of the temple rituals was to be performed primarily by men, and only in a secondary sense by women (if at all). This could easily imply that circumcision (with trimming the moustache) would not have been thought of as being necessary for women. Additionally, in the source temple symbolism of the fitra practices described here, while the turban could represent the head of the penis, the hood/prepuce of the clitoris cannot represent the head of the clitoris, so the removal of the turban would not bring to mind any ‘female ‘circumcision.’

VI. SARAH AND HAGAR

According to tradition, Hagar, the concubine of Abraham and the mother of Ishmael and of the Arabs, was circumcised by Sarah, and this is the reason that female ‘circumcision’ exists today:

“When Isaac grew up, he and Ishmael fought. Sarah became angry and jealous toward Ishmael’s mother and sent her away. Then she called her back and took her in. But later she became angry and sent her away again, and brought her back yet again. She swore to cut something off of her, and said to herself, ‘I shall cut off her nose, I shall cut off her ear – but no, that would deform her. I will circumcise her instead.’ So, she did that, and Hagar took a piece of cloth to wipe the blood away. For that reason, women have been circumcised and have taken pieces of cloth down to today.” [47]

“He was called Ashmuil [Ishmael] in Hebrew, but his name was, after being much used, turned into Esma’il. Ebrahim [Abraham] loved him much, and kept him nearly always in his arms or on his back. Sarah became on account of this circumstance so jealous of Hagar that she swore she would cut off three of Hagar’s limbs. When the latter became aware of this intention, she girded her loins for flight and absconded. Ebrahim then interceded for her with Sarah, whom he requested to pierce her ears, and to cut off a piece from her concealed member, so that the oath might not be broken. Sarah agreed to this proposal, and after Hagar had been produced, she acted according to Ebrahim’s advice, and for this reason the piercing of the ears of females and circumcision have become a law.” [48]

There are some minor differences between the accounts, but they are all agreed that Sarah circumcised Hagar¹¹. However, it is stated elsewhere that “Sarah had circumcised Hagar to create a defect in her. But she became all the more beautiful for it. The practice of female circumcision thus came into being” [35, p. 224]. The mention of Hagar becoming more beautiful by being circumcised should remind us again of temple symbolism in trimming the wicks of the lampstand. Yet due to various parts of the story, it could be suggested that a slightly different interpretation would be more appropriate for the versions quoted above.

Regarding the first story, “Sarah became angry and jealous toward Ishmael’s mother and sent her away. Then she called her

¹¹ However, there is one version which mentions only that Sarah had Hagar’s ears pierced, and gives that as the origin of this general practice [47].

back and took her in. But later she became angry and sent her away again, and brought her back yet again.” So Sarah and Hagar were together initially at the start of the story, then separated, then together again, then separated, and then together. The three times they were together probably reflects the three times the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement¹².

During the Day of Atonement rituals, the high priest sprinkled blood twice before the Ark, and then afterwards on the incense altar (Leviticus 16:14-19). It could be suggested that the two sprinklings before the Ark would relate to the two cherubim on the Ark. However, given that both the nose and the ears are mentioned, and both of these were represented by the different pairs of cherubim, cutting or piercing of either of these were represented by the two sprinklings before the cherubim on the Ark. Therefore, desiring to cut off Hagar’s nose would relate to the first sprinkling before the Ark, and cutting off her ear would relate to the second sprinkling. Or, in the second story, her desire to “cut off three of Hagar’s limbs” would relate to the three sprinklings in total. Piercing her two ears would be sprinkling the blood before the cherubim, but this time the two large cherubim statues are intended, as these represent the ears.

Hagar being circumcised would then refer to the blood being sprinkled on the incense altar, it being in the main body of the temple like the clitoris with its hood being on the main body of a woman. In effect, these stories are about the purification of the temple, Hagar representing the temple and Sarah representing the high priest, so that the glory of God can once again dwell in the temple, symbolizing Hagar being made “more beautiful.” In effect, ‘no women were harmed in the making of this story.’

VII. CONCLUSION

In the Introduction, a summary was given of how those opposed to female ‘circumcision’ have tried to ‘attack’ the sources relating to female ‘circumcision.’ The intent is to try to eradicate the need female ‘circumcision.’ However, overwhelmingly, ‘traditionalist’ Muslims will not be listening to such a disrespectful treatment of their holy works, and so a certain *impasse* is arrived at. It would appear that all progress at eradicating female ‘circumcision’ currently is based on western supremacy: if it had been the Ottoman empire which covered a quarter of the globe as opposed to the British Empire, if it had been Saudi Arabia which put a man on the moon instead of the USA, if the UN was based in Cairo in place of New York, if the World Bank was based in Libya using a *dinar* replacing the USA and the dollar, if the West could be described with a certain *Trumpian nomenclature* [51] with the Arab world providing us much needed clinics for women’s health, then it could be suggested that no one in the Islamic world listen to us. And this is where ‘temple theology’ can come in. As can be seen, the hadiths have been treated with utmost respect, yet it also has been hopefully shown that a non-literal interpretation is to be favoured regarding female ‘circumcision.’ This can

plausibly move the question of female ‘circumcision’ into the sphere of genuine religious debate, where the desired outcome of ending female ‘circumcision’ could come from within Islam’s own tradition. And it would appear that there are many traditional devout Muslims who are also against the worst forms of female ‘circumcision,’ but feel compelled to defend it in principle because the hadiths say so. As such they try to promote female ‘circumcision’ as being only the removal of the clitoral hood, or even just a pin prick in some cases. Therefore ‘temple theology’ could potentially work with their rejection of the worst forms of female ‘circumcision’ by going further and adhering tenaciously to those same hadiths without needing any female ‘circumcision’ of any kind.

A. An Appeal to ‘Traditionalist’ Muslims

There is one point which does need addressing. Even if Western ‘cultural colonialism’ is removed from the debate over female ‘circumcision,’ yet it does still need observing that to Islam ‘temple theology’ is *bid’a* – and at that coming from non-Muslims who are *kafir*, guilty of *shirk*, and whose scriptures are *tahrif!* (‘Temple theology’ is an *innovation* and non-Muslims are *infidels*, guilty of *idolatry*, and the Bible is considered to be *corrupted*.) As such, it could be advantageous to show briefly how ‘temple theology’ can be used to defend the Quran and hadiths in other ‘polemical battlegrounds.’

The anti-Islamic website ‘Answering Islam’ [52] quotes the following authentic hadith, “Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (pbuh) as saying: Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, created Adam in His image with His length of sixty cubits ... the people who followed him continued to diminish in size up to this day” [53]. The website gives scientific reasons why giants cannot exist, with the implication that Muhammad was clearly using his “imagination” and should not be considered a prophet. However, it was mentioned in the section ‘Abraham and the Fitra’ above that Solomon’s temple was designed to resemble a human body, and its length is given as sixty cubits (1 Kings 6:2). In other words, Muhammad was not deluded at all, but was using the secret ‘temple theology’ approach to describe Solomon’s temple. Humans reducing in size since Adam would refer to the second temple being less tall than Solomon’s temple [54]. The website also claims that Muhammad copied from Jewish traditions, which state, “The dimensions of his body were gigantic, reaching from heaven to earth, or, what amounts to the same, from east to west” [52]. It would be better to state that both sayings are based on ‘temple theology,’ because Solomon’s temple represented not only a human body but also heaven (the Holy of Holies) and the world [55], and it was also orientated from east to west.

The temple symbolizing the world also helps explain a seriously unscientific statement, that the earth is *flat*. The ‘Answering Islam’ [56] website draws our attention to where an Islamic translation of the Quran says “how the earth has been flattened out” (Quran 88:20, T. B. Irving as cited in [56]), with the even more remarkable traditional commentary that reading the word “flattened” with “a literal reading suggests that the

¹² He entered the Holy of Holies a fourth time to collect the shovel and spoon for the incense, but this was after the cleansing rituals had ended [40, p.78], and

so for symbolic purposes he entered the Holy of Holies three times for its cleansing.

earth is flat, which is the opinion of most of the scholars of the [revealed] Law, and not a sphere as astronomers (ahl al-hay'a) have it" [57]. It should be pointed out that the most famous 'flat-earth' was actually a 6th century Christian, Cosmas Indicopleustes. However, his views were widely discredited as almost everyone had accepted that the earth is a sphere, based on ancient Greek philosophers. Yet here we are told that "most of the scholars" of the Law hold that the earth is flat going against astronomers. Yet the 'Answering Islam' website also quotes from another Islamic translation of the Quran where it says, "Have We not made the earth a flat carpet" (Quran 78:6, Aisha Bewley). There are other references to the earth being like a carpet given also, and yet it is the reference to a carpet that gives us its temple meaning. The Tabernacle was a 'temple-tent' used when travelling, yet it has been suggested that the Tabernacle was also modelled on the tents used by the Arabs, with the floor being "covered with a rich carpet" in the case of the later emirs [58]. Of course, the earth is flat like a carpet – when the 'earth' is represented by a carpet in the Tabernacle. The Quran is therefore most accurately defended without needing to 'explain away' or 'translate out' difficult parts (let alone taking it literally [59]), and also showing a knowledge of the secret temple tradition which was jealously guarded. So, while 'temple theology' is indeed a new approach, it must date back millennia. The ancient Essenes in the time of the later second temple swore "not to reveal any of their secrets to others even if compelled under mortal torture to do so" [60]. So, for example, the Gnostics probably did have authentic secret teachings of Jesus and his disciples, but did not understand their hidden meaning, hence their denial of marriage. Yet Muhammad has shown in the Quran and hadith that he did have such knowledge, but such knowledge was kept secret. However, studying the 'Dead Sea Scrolls,' presumed to have belonged to the Essenes, has opened up a whole new world.

APPENDIX: THE PLAN OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE EXPLAINED

The plan of Solomon's Temple is based on the Bible, 1 Kings 6-7 and 2 Chronicles 3-4. The dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant are taken from Exodus 25:10, the table for the showbread from Exodus 25:23, and the altar of incense from Exodus 30:1-2. Additionally, "in the Temple also did the table of Moses retain its ancient significance, for only upon it was the shewbread placed... The candlestick [Menorah] was later set up in the Temple of Solomon ... he set up ten other candlesticks, ... each of these candlesticks had seven lamps, seventy in all, to correspond to the seventy nations ... The candlestick stood toward the south" [31]; it could be presumed also that the Tabernacle's altar of incense was used.

The bronze serpent which Moses set upon a pole (Numbers 21:8) was destroyed in a later temple purge because incense was burnt to it (2 Kings 18:4). This implies that it could have been near the incense altar, which is where it has been placed. Additionally, the 6th century Cosmas Indicopleustes, in the drawings for his 'Christian Topography,' did show the serpent inside the Tabernacle [49]. (Additionally, Moses was told to make this bronze serpent "fiery," Numbers 21:8-9, so it would keep its parallel to the Menorah if it too was a lampstand and

had at least one lamp, probably seven.)

The steps were inspired by the fact that the cherubim are associated with a throne (Ezekiel 10:1) and according to Jewish tradition Solomon's throne had six steps [31, p.968]; presumably his throne imitated the throne of the Lord. Additionally, Ezekiel's vision-temple has steps up to the vestibule (Ezekiel 40:49). Finally, for the Tabernacle at least, "at the front, where the entrance was made, they placed pillars of gold, that stood on bases of brass, in number seven" [50] (Exodus 36:38 mentions five pillars, which could be interpreted as excluding the two end pillars).

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