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Al-Ghazālī, Bar Hebraeus, and the “Good Wife”

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This article compares the sections on the qualities desirable in a wife in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* and Bar Hebraeus’s *Ethicon*, which the West Syrian writer modeled on al-Ghazālī’s work. The article first establishes that al-Ghazālī based his profile of the ideal wife on a jurisprudential discussion of the topic by his teacher, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, expanding it, however, by adding anecdotes from Sufi literature and reasoned arguments on how “the good wife” will best facilitate her husband’s devotion to God. The article then moves to consider how Bar Hebraeus appropriates, reconfigures, and reframes as Christian teaching al-Ghazālī’s discussion. Finally, the article argues that the similarity between the two texts demonstrates that both carve out a particular notion of male piety intelligible and resonant in their different religious traditions and in the broader monotheistic culture of the premodern Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* has long been recognized as a landmark work in Islamic intellectual history. Weaving together disparate Islamic disciplines—legal, theological, Sufi, and others—into a kind of practical guidebook to Muslim piety, the *Iḥyā’* is highly regarded by Muslims and scholars of Islam for its incisive spiritual guidance and its influence on later developments in Sunni Islamic tradition. In the medieval Middle East its impact extended across religious boundaries as well. This is evident most tellingly in the work of the West Syrian polymath Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), who took the *Iḥyā’* as a blueprint for his *Ethicon*, a Syriac treatise for a Christian audience on the practices of the pious life.

The *Ethicon*’s dependence on the *Iḥyā’* has been noted by scholars since the early twentieth century at least.¹ In a vein similar to several studies published in recent years,² this

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1. To my knowledge, the dependence of the *Ethicon* on the *Iḥyā’* was first discussed in *Bar Hebraeus’s Book of the Dove Together with Some Chapters from His Ethicon*, ed. and tr. A. J. Wensinck (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919), xvii–xix (cited in the introduction to Herman G. B. Teule’s translation of the *Ethicon*’s first treatise: *Ethicon: Mēmṛā I, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 534–35 [Louvain: Peeters, 1993], 2: xxxi). Also worth noting here is that Bar Hebraeus drew heavily on al-Ghazālī in the composition of several of his other works, especially his systematic legal treatise the *Nomocanon*. See Carlo Alfonso Nallino, “Il diritto musulmano nel Nomocanone siriano cristiano di Barhebreo,” in *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Maria Nallino, vol. 4 (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1942), 214–300 (published originally in *Rivista degli studi orientali* 9 [1921–23]: 512–80); and Hanna Khadra, *Le Nomocanon de Bar Hebraeus: Son importance juridique entre les sources chrétiennes et les sources musulmanes* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 2005), esp. 197–202 and 249–59.

2. See the following studies by Herman Teule: “An Important Concept in Muslim and Christian Mysticism: The Remembrance of God, *dhikr Allah - ‘uhdōnō d-Alōhō*,” in *Gotteserlebnis und Gotteslehre: Christliche und islamische Mystik im Orient*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 11–23; “La vie dans le monde: Perspectives chrétiennes et influences musulmanes. Une étude de Memrō II de l’*Ethicon* de Grégoire Abū l-Farāğ Barhebraeus,” *Parole de l’Orient* 33 (2008): 115–28; “A Christian-Muslim Discussion: The Importance of Bodily and Spiritual Purity. A Chapter from the Second Mēmṛō of Barhebraeus’ *Ethicon* on ‘The Right Conduct Regarding

article will undertake a close comparative analysis of a parallel chapter in each of the two texts. The chapters in question take as their subject the qualities most desirable in a wife, and my interest in them will be twofold.

First, my point of general interest will be to examine the textual strategies by which Bar Hebraeus appropriates this section of the *Ihyā'*, formulated in an Islamic idiom, and incorporates it into his own Christian tradition. I will investigate not only the *Ethicon's* dependence on the *Ihyā'*, but al-Ghazālī's own sources as well. In doing so I will argue that al-Ghazālī built his textual profile of the "good wife" on a Muslim jurisprudential one framed with reference to the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad, but that he added reasoned arguments tying the desirable wifely qualities to spiritual and social benefits. It was precisely these reasoned arguments that positioned al-Ghazālī's text as a useful model for emulation for other religious traditions, and so we find that Bar Hebraeus largely reproduced its list of qualities in the *Ethicon*. Bar Hebraeus, however, illustrated these qualities with proof texts drawn from biblical wisdom literature, thus constructing the *Ihyā'*'s image of the good wife as authoritative for his Christian audience.

Second, I will consider the significance of the fact that this particular profile of the good wife circulated among multiple scholarly religious traditions in the pre-Ottoman Middle East. What kind of cultural work does this image do?³ What can the fact of its basic intelligibility across religious boundaries tell us about the scholarly cultures of the premodern period and their normative notions of gender difference? I will argue that by offering congruent profiles of an ideal feminine type, the *Ihyā'* and the *Ethicon* in fact propagate a broader, gendered category of male piety resonant in the general confessional milieu of the medieval Middle East.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND BAR HEBRAEUS: AN OVERVIEW

One of the most significant and influential Sunni Muslim scholars of the premodern period, al-Ghazālī was born near the city of Ṭūs in Khurāsān.⁴ He achieved initial fame as a teacher and scholar of the Shāfi'ī legal tradition and Ash'arī theological school at the Nizāmiyya *madrasa* in Saljūq-ruled Baghdad. It was during his subsequent "spiritual crisis" and withdrawal from public life, however, that al-Ghazālī wrote the spiritually investigatory works for which he remains most renowned. Though he composed in a wide variety of genres over the course of his life, much of his prominence rests on the *Ihyā'*. A rich and wide-ranging work, the *Ihyā'* is divided into four treatises of ten books each that integrate the various streams of Islamic tradition into a program for disciplining the self into the most pious, God-oriented life possible.⁵

the Sustainance of the Body',” in *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. Wout Jac. Van Bekkum et al. (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 193–203; “‘La critique du prince’: Quelques aspects d’une philosophie politique dans l’œuvre de Barhebraeus,” in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 287–94; “Barhebraeus’ *Ethicon*, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā,” *Islamochristiana* 18 (1992): 73–86; and Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 600–603.

3. In this regard this article is following partly in the analytical footsteps of Nadia Maria El Cheikh’s study of images of the good wife in medieval *adab*, and heeding its encouragement to scholars of Islamic history to examine normative notions of gender difference in non-legal sources. See “In Search for the Ideal Spouse,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 45.2 (2002): 179–96.

4. For a recent and eminently accessible introduction to al-Ghazālī’s life and work, see Eric Ormsby, *Ghazali: The Revival of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

5. Editions, translations, and studies of the *Ihyā'* abound. For an introduction and general orientation, see *ibid.*, 111–38, 145–46. The edition cited in this study will be *Ihyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Muʿassasat al-Ḥalabī, 1967–68).

This program consists of a wide range of practices covering all aspects of daily life that, over time, inculcate an enduring, truly submissive disposition toward God.⁶ Within this program, the proper conduct of (men’s) married life receives a book of its own.⁷ In *Kitāb Ādāb al-nikāh* (Book of the Etiquette of Marriage) al-Ghazālī covers a series of topics: whom marriage is recommended for, the benefits and harm it does to a man’s devotion to God, the proper method of contracting a marriage, the qualities desirable in a bride (my focus in this article), and the rights and duties of husbands and wives. All the book’s admonitions concerning these themes seek to facilitate marital harmony, the ultimate aim of which is a peace of heart and mind conducive to worship of God.⁸

Some century and a half after al-Ghazālī, Gregorios Bar ʿEbrāyā, known in Arabic as Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-ʿIbrī and in Latinized form as Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), was on his way to achieving a status within West Syrian Christianity that exceeds in many respects al-Ghazālī’s posthumous reputation in Sunni Islam.⁹ Born in Melitene in the frontier region of northern Mesopotamia, Bar Hebraeus spent his life traversing the shifting political boundaries of the thirteenth-century Middle East, living at various times under the Saljūqs of Rūm, Crusaders, Ayyūbids, and finally the Mongols. He was ordained a bishop in 1246 and from 1264 until his death became the West Syrian maphrian in which capacity he was the chief prelate of his church’s eastern dioceses, with jurisdiction principally over territories in the Jazīra, Iraq, and Persia.

The breadth of Bar Hebraeus’s scholarly output accounts for much of his high standing in West Syrian tradition. Literate, by all accounts, in Syriac, Arabic, and Persian, he studied and composed in the theological, poetic, and exegetical genres of his own Syriac Christian tradition; in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophical traditions so integral to the educational and scholarly cultures of the premodern Islamic Middle East; and in various other genres including law and historiography.¹⁰ Many of his works remain important intellectual touchstones for present-day Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic Christians.

Bar Hebraeus’s *Ethicon* (Syr. *Ītīqōn*) was likely written in 1279.¹¹ In broadest strokes, it is a guide, modeled on the *Ihyāʾ*, to the practical knowledge necessary for Christians—including socially embedded laymen as well as monks and clergy—to live piously in all

6. For a comprehensive study of and rumination on the *Ihyāʾ*’s program of inculcating piety through practice, see Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005).

7. Although this book addresses husbands’ obligations to wives and briefly sketches the qualities desirable in a husband, it is otherwise wholly directed toward men.

8. The *Kitāb Ādāb al-nikāh* has been translated into English and German. See *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: A Translation of al-Ghazālī’s Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the Ihyāʾ*, tr. Madelain Farah (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1984); and *Von der Ehe: Das 12. Buch von al-Ghazālī’s Hauptwerk übersetzt und erläutert*, tr. Hans Bauer (Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1917). I know of only two studies of the *Ihyāʾ*’s book of marriage, both of which focus only on its first section, the question of the permissibility of continence in Islam, and the influence of Sufi ascetic thought on al-Ghazālī. See Yunersy Legorburo Ibarra, “Al-Ghazālī y la controversia matrimonio versus celibato,” *Estudios de Asia y Africa* 41.1 (2006): 111–26; and Kaoru Aoyagi, “Al-Ghazālī and Marriage from the Viewpoint of Sufism,” *Orient: Reports of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 40 (2005): 124–39.

9. The now standard introductory work on Bar Hebraeus is Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005).

10. For a definitive list of Bar Hebraeus’s writings and discussion of his linguistic skills and education, see *ibid.*, 15–18, 27–35, 57–63.

11. The standard complete edition of the work remains *Ethicon, seu Moralia/Ktābā d-ītīqōn*, ed. Paulus Bedjan (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1898). Another edition based on Bedjan’s text has been published as *Ethicon: Christian Ethics (Morals) by the Great Syrian Philosopher and Author of Several Christian Works, Mar Gregorius Barhebraeus Catholicos of the East (1226–1286)* (Lossler, The Netherlands: St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery, 1985). In recent years Teule has been preparing new critical editions and English translations of the *Ethicon*’s four treatises, of which the first has appeared (*Ethicon: Mēmṛā I, CSCO* 534–35 *supra*, n. 1). As the *Ethicon*’s book on marriage is found in the text’s second treatise, references in this article will be to Bedjan’s edition.

domains of life.¹² The *Ethicon* appropriates the overall structure of al-Ghazālī's work: a division into four treatises that address, in order, matters of worship, social interactions and customs, human characteristics destructive to the pious self, and good qualities that aid the soul in securing salvation.¹³ Its basic dependence on the *Ihyā'* is further evident within each treatise, where Bar Hebraeus often follows closely the *Ihyā'*'s chapter layout and even appropriates its basic categorical breakdowns of the material at hand. As one of numerous examples, the *Ethicon*'s chapter on bodily purity follows al-Ghazālī's on ritual purity in dividing the subject into four "degrees of purification: of the body, from dirt; of the organs, from sin; of the soul, from wicked thoughts; again of the soul, from any worldly concerns."¹⁴

The *Ethicon*, however, is not simply a Syriac translation of the *Ihyā'*. Significant differences between the texts remain, and Bar Hebraeus musters much from biblical, patristic, and monastic sources of West Syrian Christianity to support and illustrate his points. The particular interest of the *Ethicon* lies therefore in how it appropriates the material laid out by al-Ghazālī and either alters it or filters it through Christian sources to claim it as authoritative within a Christian tradition.¹⁵

TWO SCHOLARS, TWO RELIGIONS, ONE IDEAL WIFE

In both the *Ihyā'* and the *Ethicon* the second book of the second treatise is devoted to marriage (*ādāb al-nikāḥ*, "the etiquette of marriage," in the *Ihyā'*, and *šawtāpūtā nāmōsāytā*, "lawful marriage," in the *Ethicon*). Each includes a section on the qualities desirable in a bride, the basic substance of which is mostly congruent. Al-Ghazālī lists eight such characteristics, which he explains will be conducive to a harmonious marriage and "facilitate the continuation of the [marriage] bond and the fulfillment of its aims." These qualities are piety (*dhāt al-dīn*), good character (*ḥusn al-khuluq*), beauty of the face (*ḥusn al-wajh*), a small marriage payment (*khiffat al-mahr*), fertility (*wilāda*), virginity (*bakāra*), good lineage (*nasab*), and absence of close consanguinity to the groom (*an lā takūn qarāba qarība*).¹⁶ Though Bar Hebraeus alters one quality and adds another, the *Ethicon*'s list is largely similar: piety (*deḥlat Alāhā*), gentleness (*tammimtā wa-bhiltā*) and diligence (*kašširtā*), physical beauty (*šuprā*), an inexpensive marriage payment (*lā yaqqirtā d-šadkē*), fertility (*men gensā d-yallādātā*), virginity (*btūlūtā*), good lineage (*tohmā ṭbibā*), absence of close consanguinity (*lā [tehwē] ba(r)t gensā qarribā*), and common creed (*men ḥrānyay šubḥā lā tehwē*).¹⁷

12. On the *Ethicon*'s intended audience, see Teule's introduction to *Mēmrā I*, 2: xxx.

13. For a basic overview of the *Ethicon*, see *ibid.*, ix–xxxvi. Teule's discussion of the text's indebtedness to the *Ihyā'* is at pp. xxx–xxxii. A comprehensive study of the textual relationship between the *Ihyā'* and the *Ethicon* is yet to be written.

14. Teule, "Bodily and Spiritual Purity" (supra, n. 2), 198.

15. It is worth noting here that Bar Hebraeus drew on the writings of a number of other Muslim figures, among whom Ibn Sīnā and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, in several of his other works. One such work, *Ḥewāt ḥekmā* (Cream of Wisdom), also includes a discussion of the ideal wife. This is a compendium of Aristotelian philosophy, and its book of economics, in which is found the section "On the manner of dealing with a wife," is modeled very closely on Naṣīr al-Dīn's *Akhlāq-i nāṣirī* (as are the books of ethics and politics, though much of the rest of the work relies on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifā'*). Though there are definite parallels between the al-Ghazālī/*Ethicon* and Naṣīr al-Dīn/*Ḥewāt* treatments of the subject, the two profiles of the ideal wife in Bar Hebraeus's corpus were drawn from two different traditions and do not appear to be related textually. For this and for reasons of space, this article will not take up *Ḥewāt ḥekmā* in detail. For an overview of the text and the section pertinent to the ideal wife, see *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy: Barhebraeus (13th c.)*, Butyrum sapientiae, *Books of Ethics, Economy and Politics*, ed. and tr. N. Peter Joosse (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1–12, 102–9.

16. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 2: 48–53.

17. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 146–49.

THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND TO AL-GHAZĀLĪ’S PROFILE OF THE GOOD WIFE

As noted, the *Ethicon* is largely modeled on the *Ihyāʾ* and the profile of the good wife that both texts offer is no exception. Before examining in detail the relationship between these texts, however, we need to consider al-Ghazālī’s own Islamic sources. At stake is not simply a general background to al-Ghazālī’s thought but a more precise understanding of how Bar Hebraeus rendered particular elements and strands of Islamic thought intelligible within his own Christian tradition. Examining how such strands were drawn, in turn, through al-Ghazālī’s and Bar Hebraeus’s conceptual filters will reveal a broader contextual picture of how their image of the ideal wife acquired its particularly compelling, trans-religious resonance.

Unsurprisingly, many of the bride’s desirable qualities articulated in the *Ihyāʾ* reflect sentiments expressed elsewhere in Islamic tradition; as with much of the *Ihyāʾ*, al-Ghazālī’s originality in this section lies largely in his compilation and exploration of these varied attitudes. Collections of Prophetic tradition, for example, abound with morally exhortative sayings that offer normative standards for how a Muslim wife is supposed to act. Indeed, the compilers of the canonical *ḥadīth* collections already recognized certain characteristics of the ideal wife as a common theme in the Prophet’s sayings. The full extent of Prophetic *ḥadīth* that convey some kind of wisdom on the qualities of a good wife is far too broad to be surveyed here, but important to note is that a few clusters of traditions feature prominently in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections and were often grouped together and given section titles noting the wifely quality that the traditions highlight.¹⁸

The qualities delineated by the arrangement and categorization of *ḥadīth* in the canonical collections defined, in turn, the scope of the rather limited discussions given to the “good wife” in Muslim jurisprudential literature (*fiqh*) leading up to al-Ghazālī. Being more concerned with specifically legal issues such as the contracting of a valid marriage and the obligations it effects, *fiqh* works tend to deal less with the kind of ethical ideal of the good wife that concerns al-Ghazālī. As scholars have long noted, however, Islamic legal traditions do treat of considerations moral and ethical beyond stark prohibitions and enjoinders, hence the graded system that evaluates even lawful but non-obligatory practices as recommended (*muṣtaḥabb*), permitted but with no particular moral import (*mubāḥ*), or reprehensible (*makrūh*).¹⁹ It is within this framework that we find limited discussions of the good bride in the literature of the Shāfiʿī school of *fiqh* to which al-Ghazālī adhered. Basing their discussions partly on the Prophetic example, a few Shāfiʿī jurists included in *fiqh* works subsections on the recommended or preferable qualities that men should seek in brides.

Of the few such examples the most important for our purposes is that in the major *fiqh* compendium *Nihāyat al-maṭlab fī dirāyat al-madḥhab* of al-Ghazālī’s eminent teacher Imām

18. The qualities that feature most prominently in this regard include piety, virginity, and fertility. See, for example, sections on marrying virgins in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī bi-sharḥ al-Kirmānī* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Bahīyya al-Miṣriyya, 1933–39), 19: 62–63; the pious and virgins in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1955–56), 2: 1086–90; the pious, virgins, and the fertile in Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1952), 1: 597–99; the pious, virgins, and the fertile in Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Muṣtafā Muḥammad, 1935), 2: 219–20; and virgins in al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan al-Nasāʾī* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Miṣriyya bi-l-Azhar, 1930), 6: 6.

19. For a coherent summary of this topic, see Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1998), 18–21.

al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085).²⁰ Al-Juwaynī gives five qualities to be sought in a bride, each of which he supports with reference to *ḥadīth*:²¹ that she be pious, of good lineage, a virgin, fertile, and not of close relation to the groom.²² All five of these characteristics, as well as their supporting traditions, feature in al-Ghazālī's list, which is no coincidence since the *Iḥyā'* takes al-Juwaynī's short passage on the qualities desirable in a bride as the basic infrastructure undergirding its more extensive discussion.²³

Al-Ghazālī's vision of the good bride in the *Iḥyā'*, then, is not the first formal rumination on the subject in Islamic literature, but builds upon the jurisprudential perspective of his teacher al-Juwaynī.²⁴ We will now turn to the *Iḥyā'* and the *Ethicon* to examine how al-Ghazālī built on this framework, how Bar Hebraeus reworked it for his own Christian audience, and what the two texts tell us about common notions of gender and the pious life in their respective milieus.

20. For a basic overview of his life and works, see his entry (C. Brockelmann) in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004; henceforth, *EI2*), 2: 605–6. The *Nihāya* is an extensive commentary on al-Muzani's *Mukhtaṣar*, the most important foundational *fiqh* text of the Shāfi'ī tradition alongside al-Shāfi'ī's *al-Umm* (the *Mukhtaṣar* is an abridgment of the *Umm* with some commentary).

21. Notably, several of these Prophetic traditions do not meet the standards of authenticity of the medieval *ḥadīth* experts, which is perhaps not as pressing an issue when the ruling at hand is only one of preferability and not obligation or prohibition. Comments on these traditions are included in the footnotes to each section below.

22. Al-Juwaynī, *Nihāyat al-maṭlab fī dirāyat al-madhhab*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīm Maḥmūd al-Dīb (Jidda: Dār al-Minhāj li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīc, 2007), 12: 27–28.

23. Beyond the correspondence between their lists and the fact that al-Ghazālī quotes the same *ḥadīth* that al-Juwaynī offers as proof texts, al-Ghazālī's indebtedness to al-Juwaynī is evidenced by several other points. In general terms, al-Ghazālī was a student of al-Juwaynī's and knew the *Nihāya* well: he wrote a *mukhtaṣar* of it, *al-Basīṭ*, and two more abridgments of that, *al-Wasīṭ* and *al-Wajīz*. More specifically, al-Ghazālī's reliance on the conceptual organization of the *Nihāya* is immediately evident. The opening chapter of the *Iḥyā'*'s book of marriage tackles the fundamental question of the relative merits of “desire for and turning away from marriage” (*al-tarḡīb fī l-nikāḥ wa-l-tarḡīb 'anhu*), a play on and expansion of the second chapter in the *Nihāya*'s book of marriage on desire for marriage (*mā jā'a fī l-tarḡīb fī l-nikāḥ*). The rest of al-Ghazālī's chapter, though longer and more detailed, follows the same structure as al-Juwaynī's, giving evidence in support of the institution of marriage from the Quran, then Sunna, then the traditions of the Companions, and closing with traditions that express a much warier attitude to marriage as a distraction from worship due to God. Though the title and basic subject of the chapter derives ultimately from al-Muzani's *Mukhtaṣar*, neither that text nor any of its other commentaries that I have examined exhibits the close parallels to the *Iḥyā'* that the *Nihāya* does. These structural similarities between the *Iḥyā'* and the *Nihāya* are thus sufficient to demonstrate al-Ghazālī's reliance on the latter text in the composition of the *Iḥyā'* and its list of the good wife's traits.

24. I have not been able to find a source on which al-Juwaynī might have drawn for his particular list of good wifely qualities; in fact, I found only one comparable list in a *fiqh* text from al-Juwaynī's time or earlier. This is in the *Muhadhdhab* of al-Juwaynī's contemporary and fellow-Shāfi'ī Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083). In a short section on choosing a wife in the *Muhadhdhab*'s book of marriage, al-Shīrāzī lists three preferred qualities in a bride: that she be pious (*dhāt al-dīn*), of sound mind (*dhāt 'aql*), and that the prospective groom find her pleasing or beautiful (*yastaḥsinuhā*). Al-Shīrāzī bases the first quality on the same well-known tradition that informs al-Juwaynī's discussion of piety; the second on the fact that the aims of marriage (*al-qaṣd bi-l-nikāḥ*), which al-Shīrāzī asserts are “companionship and pleasant living” (*al-'ishra wa-tīb al-'aysh*), can only be secured with a woman of sound mind; and the third on a Prophetic tradition stating that “Women are play things (*lu'ab*), so when one of you takes a play thing, he should like it (or find it beautiful, *fa-l-yastaḥsinhā*).” Al-Juwaynī's list is different enough, especially in terms of the latter Prophetic tradition it adduces, that the two do not appear to be textually related. See Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, *al-Muhadhdhab fī fiqh al-imām al-Shāfi'ī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zuhaylī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1996), 4: 113–14.

QUALITIES DESIRABLE IN A BRIDE

1. Piety

The first, and arguably most important, quality that all three feature—al-Juwaynī, *dhāt al-dīn*; al-Ghazālī, *dhāt al-dīn*; Bar Hebraeus, *dehlat Alāhā*—is what I have translated as “piety.” In the Muslim scholars’ Arabic, a more literal translation would be something along the lines of “having [good] religion.” In al-Juwaynī’s text the desirableness of piety is asserted strictly with reference to the advice of the Prophet, “A woman may be married for four [things]: her property, lineage, beauty, or piety (*dīn*), so get a pious one (*fa-zfar bi-dhāt al-dīn*) [or] may your hands be sullied.”²⁵

In the text of the *Ihyā’* the Prophetic example is not the primary basis on which the argument is made. Instead al-Ghazālī begins from the premise that an impious woman will not observe proper sexual modesty, and that this will sully her husband’s honor and adversely affect his devotional disposition toward God: “If [a woman] is weak in her religion in the way of safeguarding her person and her sexuality, she brings shame (*azrat*) to her husband, blackens his face among the community (*sawwadat bayna l-nās wajhahu*), scrambles his heart with jealousy (*shawwashat bi-l-ghayra qalbahu*), and spoils his life.”²⁶ The third consequence is the most important to note here. In its grand scheme the *Ihyā’* is meant to offer a model of practice that will inculcate in the (male) Muslim an unadulterated devotion to God. In al-Ghazālī’s Sufi-inspired anthropology, the heart is the human faculty in which that disposition is formed and experienced.²⁷ An impious wife, then, causes her husband social anxiety, the truly deleterious effect of which is to distract him from full devotion to God.²⁸

Only after making this argument does al-Ghazālī illustrate his point by citing al-Juwaynī’s *hadīth*, as well as several others that express a similar sentiment. Notable throughout this passage is that al-Ghazālī offers an essentially negative definition of female piety: he tells us what it is not (sexual immodesty as well as wasting money, which gets a very brief mention), but not what it is. This instrumental discussion of the pious woman thus has little to do with the practices through which women might orient themselves to God or the dispositions of female piety as such. Rather the text’s main concern is to establish that a good woman does not distract her husband from his faith; her recognition and facilitation of his pious obligations demonstrate piety on her own part.

Bar Hebraeus follows al-Ghazālī’s discussion of female piety closely. The *Ethicon* translates al-Ghazālī’s statement that a bride “have [good] religion” with a common Syriac idiom: “The fear of God should be in her” (*dehlat Alāhā tehwe bāh*).²⁹ The fear of God is a rich

25. Versions of this Prophetic tradition are found in all the canonical Sunni *hadīth* books, as well as several of the other early *hadīth* collections; some mention three and some four qualities for which a woman might be married. In the six books, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 19: 72, §4770; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2: 1086–87, §53–54; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, 1: 597, §1858; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 2: 219, §2047; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Ḥimṣ: Maṭba‘at al-Andalus, 1965–69), 4: 43, §1086; and al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, 6: 65, 68. The precise meaning of *taribat yadāka*, “may your hands be sullied,” is disputed; see the discussion in Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf Sa‘d and Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Hawārī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1978), 19: 162–63.

26. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, 2: 48.

27. See the discussion in Ormsby, *Ghazali* (supra, n. 4), 126–29.

28. Indeed the fundamental problem with marriage that al-Ghazālī discusses at the outset of his book of marriage is the potential for marriage, family, and attendant social responsibilities to distract men from God. See the discussions in Ibarra, “Controversia matrimonio,” and Aoyagi, “Al-Ghazālī and Marriage” (supra, n. 8).

29. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 146.

and multivalent phrase in Syriac literature, being something of a shorthand for “religion” or “faith,” but also denoting a more specific notion of piety as a cultivated, affective disposition of awe evoked by and exhibited toward the divine. Much like Arabic *dīn* it functions as a kind of general term for religion, so it is not uncommon in Syriac literature to find references to people of other “fears,” meaning non-Christians.³⁰ It is thus a close idiomatic parallel to al-Ghazālī’s notion of piety.

Following al-Ghazālī further, Bar Hebraeus does not concern himself with expounding on what exactly constitutes women’s piety. He notes only that a God-fearing woman is a “good woman”—*a(n)ttā ṭābtā*—which allows him to offer two verses from Ben Sira in support of marrying such good women: “A good wife is a blessing to her husband because the days of his life will be doubled” (26:1a–b), but “an evil wife makes her husband’s face leaden” (25:[17a]).³¹ The latter is a well-chosen biblical parallel to al-Ghazālī’s phrase “blackens his face”—though Bar Hebraeus does not specifically mention an impious wife’s sexual immodesty, he uses this particular verse of Ben Sira to convey the Ghazālian point that such a wife brings her husband dishonor. Also notable here is that Bar Hebraeus adduces no proof texts, biblical or otherwise, for the fear of God as such as a desirable quality in a bride. Rather he equates it with the new keyword “goodness” (from the Syriac root *ṭ-w-b*), usages of which in biblical wisdom literature function as evocative and authoritative scriptural citations.

In sum, wifely piety in al-Ghazālī’s text has more to do with facilitating men’s pious obligations than with women’s own devotional practices. Bar Hebraeus evokes the sense of but does not specifically reproduce al-Ghazālī’s argument for how a pious wife might avoid causing her husband worry and distraction; and like al-Ghazālī he has little to say about what actually constitutes female piety. Instead the *Ethicon* translates al-Ghazālī’s quality of piety into an equivalent Syriac idiom and illustrates it with citations from Ben Sira.

2. Good Character

Al-Ghazālī’s second quality desirable in a wife is “good character” (*ḥusn al-khuluq*).³² Much as in the case of piety al-Ghazālī offers a generally negative definition of female good character, focusing on what it is not. And again, he does not begin with a jurisprudential argument from authoritative texts for the desirableness of good character, but makes a reasoned argument that an uncultivated wife, much like an impious one, will cause her husband anxiety and distract him from worship of God, illustrating this with what we might call “Islamic wisdom literature” drawn from the chapter on marriage in the influential Sufi treatise *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/998).

It is worth considering exactly what al-Ghazālī means by “good character” in this instance. The Arabic word *khuluq*, pl. *akhlāq*, in Islamic tradition and Arabic writing connotes, in the broadest sense, morals or ethics. Indeed all kinds of Islamic literary genres, ranging from Prophetic *ḥadīth* to poetry to mirrors for princes and on, touch on morals/ethics/good char-

30. For an extensive discussion of fear in the Syriac literature of late antiquity and its use as a general term for different “religions” in a pre-secular age, see Adam H. Becker, “Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and ‘Fear’ as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire: The Case of the *Martyrdom of Gregory* and the *Martyrdom of Yazdpaneh*,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2.2 (2009): 300–36.

31. The textual variants of Ben Sira are many. All translations in this paper are of the verses as given in Bedjan’s *Ethicon*; verse numberings are those of Michael M. Winter, *A Concordance to the Peshitta Version of Ben Sira* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976).

32. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, 2: 49–50. The second, third, and fourth qualities are the *Iḥyā’*’s additions to al-Juwaynī’s list (qualities five through eight pick up al-Juwaynī again).

acter in terms of *akhlāq*.³³ As a more precise estimation of al-Ghazālī’s usage we can take *akhlāq* to denote human beings’ character traits or behavioral dispositions, all of which have differing moral value (generosity is good and miserliness usually bad, for example). These dispositions are states or functions of the aspects of the soul (*nafs*), and can be alternately cultivated or disciplined by the individual.³⁴

Al-Ghazālī gives a few examples of behavioral dispositions characteristic of a bride of poor character: she might be talkative (*salīṭa*), foul-mouthed (*badhīʿat al-lisān*), or ungrateful for God’s boons for which she should be thankful (*kāfirat li-l-niʿam*). He then cites quotations of Arabic wisdom, tales of the prophets, and a tradition attributed to the fourth caliph ‘Alī, all drawn from al-Makkī’s Sufi treatise, as illustration. According to al-Makkī’s Arab sage, there are six types of women a man should avoid: one who is selfish (*annāna*), one who constantly calls attention to all the good she has done for her husband (*mannāna*), one who pines for her former husband and children from other men (*ḥannāna*), one who is covetous and spends her husband’s money indiscriminately (*ḥaddāqa*), one who is vain (*barrāqa*), and one who is too talkative (*shaddāqa*). The prophet Ilyās adds another four types: a woman who constantly asks for divorce (*mukhtaliʿa*), is prideful (*mubāhiya*), is debauched (*ʿāhira*), or is rebellious (*nāshiz*).³⁵

The material taken from *Qūt al-qulūb* ends with a tradition attributed to ‘Alī that does in fact describe some good moral dispositions that a woman can have. According to the caliph, these are stinginess (*bukhl*), haughtiness (*zahw*), and cowardliness (*jubn*), qualities detestable in a man. A stingy wife is good because she will not dispose of her or her husband’s property indiscriminately. A haughty wife will refrain from idle talk with random people. And a cowardly wife will be scared to leave her house lest she be met with an accusation that will anger her husband.³⁶ A wife of good morals thus looks out for her husband’s assets, both material and cultural: she guards his honor by avoiding social contact outside her household and does not cost him much money. All told, the benefit of a wife of good character in al-Ghazālī’s

33. H. A. R. Gibb and R. Walzer, “Akhlāk,” in *EI2*, 1: 325–29.

34. I am paraphrasing al-Ghazālī’s definition in the *Ihyāʿ*’s *Kitāb Riyādat al-nafs* (Book on Disciplining the Soul), which states that *khuluq* is “a firmly established condition (*ḥayʿa*) of the soul, from which actions proceed easily without any need for thinking or forethought. If this condition is disposed towards the production of beautiful and praiseworthy deeds, as these are acknowledged by the Law (*al-sharʿ*) and the intellect, it is termed a ‘good character trait’; if, however, ugly acts proceed from it, the condition is known as a ‘bad character trait’.” See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyāʿ*, 3: 68; the translation is from *On Disciplining the Soul and On Breaking the Two Desires*, tr. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 17. Al-Ghazālī goes on to discuss how different character traits lie in and are related to the three faculties (rational, irascible, and appetitive) of the soul, as well as the human capacity to discipline those traits. In his conceptions of character traits, soul, and their relationship to one another, al-Ghazālī is drawing on a very long tradition of Platonic and Aristotelian ethical thought as transmitted and synthesized in Arabic philosophical writing. From this tradition al-Ghazālī’s main source is Miskawayh’s (d. 431/1020) treatise *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, among the most influential Arabic philosophical works on practical ethics; compare the latter’s definition of “character [as] a state of the soul which causes it to perform its actions without thought or deliberation” (*al-khuluq ḥāl li-l-nafs dāʿiya lahā ilā aqʿālīhā min ghayr fikr wa-lā rawiyya*). See Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, ed. Constantine Zurayq (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1966), 31; the English translation is Zurayq’s *The Refinement of Character* (Beirut: American Univ. of Beirut, 1968), 29. On al-Ghazālī’s dependence on Miskawayh, see Winter’s introduction to *Disciplining the Soul*, lv–lx. On al-Ghazālī’s ethical thought more broadly, see George F. Hourani, “Ghazālī on the Ethics of Action,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96.1 (1976): 69–88; and Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazali’s Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1975).

35. The Arab sage and Ilyās passages that al-Ghazālī has drawn from al-Makkī can be found in *Qūt al-qulūb fī muʿāmalat al-maḥbūb wa-waṣf ʿariq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1961), 2: 521–22.

36. See al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 2: 522.

discourse is much like that of a pious one: she does not cause her husband undue anxiety or distraction.

“Good character” is the only quality on al-Ghazālī’s list that Bar Hebraeus does not replicate explicitly. Rather than a general discussion of good character, he gives two somewhat more specific characteristics as numbers two and three on his list: “upright and gentle” (*tammimtā wa-bhiltā*) and “not lazy, but vigorous and diligent” (*lā tehwe ma’intā baṭṭāltā ellā gabrānītā w-kašširtā*).³⁷ These qualities are not specifically mentioned in the text of the *Iḥyā’* and are the only two in the *Ethicon*’s list whose terminology correlates more directly to scriptural proof texts.

The disobedient, obstinate wife is a theme that Bar Hebraeus finds in biblical literature and borrows to suggest its opposite as desirable quality stand-ins for al-Ghazālī’s good character. A wife’s uprightness and gentleness indicate, for example, that she will not fight with her husband, which is the lesson to be drawn from the biblical wisdom literature that Bar Hebraeus quotes: “Like rain that drips on a rainy day: this is a quarrelsome (*naṣṣāytā*) wife” (Prov 17:15). “It is better to sit on the tip of a roof than to sit with a quarrelsome wife” (Prov 21:9). “An obstinate (*qahlānītā*) wife is like a horn arousing to battle” (Ben Sira 26:27b). The quality of diligence as opposed to laziness is even more explicitly grounded in proof texts. The two terms that Bar Hebraeus uses, *gabrānītā* (“vigorous”) and *kašširtā* (“diligent”), are taken directly from two verses of Proverbs: “A vigorous wife is her husband’s crown” (12:4) and “Who can find a diligent wife? For she is rarer (*yaqqirā*) than jewels (*kēpē ṭābātā*) that have no likeness” (31:10).³⁸ Bar Hebraeus thus transmutes al-Ghazālī’s quality of good character into the more specific characteristics of obedience and a good work ethic, as suggested by biblical wisdom literature. But as in al-Ghazālī’s passage, the overall implied sense, especially in the case of obedience, is of a wife who will not cause her husband undue worry.

3. Beauty

As with the first two qualities al-Ghazālī bases the quality of beauty on his own considerations of what makes a marriage good and subsequently illustrates it with various traditions, but he does not frame the terminology or claim to derive the quality from an authoritative source in the first place. According to al-Ghazālī, it is desirable that a wife have a beautiful face (*ḥusn al-wajh*) because this will ensure that her husband remains chaste (*bihi yaḥṣul al-taḥaṣṣun*) and does not commit sexual transgressions outside his marriage, an eminent possibility since male nature is usually unsatisfied with an ugly woman (*damīma*). Additionally, physical beauty is desirable because it is often accompanied by good character. Al-Ghazālī does, however, have to qualify his earlier discussion of piety to note that just because a certain Prophetic tradition (mentioned above) says that a woman should be married for her piety over her beauty, this does not mean that a man should not seek beauty at all; the important point is that a man should not marry only for physical beauty (*li-ajl al-jamāl al-maḥḍ ma’ a l-fasād fī l-dīn*).³⁹

37. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 147.

38. Bar Hebraeus throws in another Proverb, 14:1, for good measure: “A wise woman builds a household, and a foolish one demolishes it with her own hands.”

39. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, 2: 50. Al-Ghazālī’s discussion of beauty, the longest of his list, covers more topics as well. After reconsidering the connection between piety and beauty, al-Ghazālī states and discusses the Shāfi’ī position that it is preferable (*ustuḥibba*) for a suitor to see his prospective bride’s face before marriage. The fact that the Prophet encouraged this practice, which can only ascertain a woman’s beauty and nothing else about her character, further supports al-Ghazālī’s notion that beauty is a desirable quality in a wife. Then al-Ghazālī notes that deception

Beauty (*šuprā*) is Bar Hebraeus’s fourth quality desirable in a bride. His primary explanation is that a bride’s physical ugliness (*sanyūtā*) will “lead the groom’s eyes to stray to an alien beauty” (*‘aynaw(hy) da-mkīrā b-šuprā nukrāyā maphyā*),⁴⁰ thus seconding al-Ghazālī’s concern that men unsatisfied with unattractive wives might commit sexual offenses. However, we might take Bar Hebraeus’s explicit reference to the danger of other women (which al-Ghazālī does not make) as a subtle Christian underscoring of the importance of monogamy, since his theological and legal traditions—unlike Islamic law—did not allow men to take multiple wives or concubines if they were unhappy with their first.⁴¹ Following al-Ghazālī again, Bar Hebraeus adds that beauty is desirable alongside, but not in the absence of, piety, a qualification made necessary by juxtaposing two pieces of wisdom from Ben Sira and Proverbs. One lauds a wife’s beauty as being comparable to “the sun that rises in the sky’s firmament” (Ben Sira 26:16a), but the other cautions that “Beauty is deceitful and vain, while a wife who fears the Lord (*dāhlā men māryā*) should be praised” (Prov 31:30).

The *Ethicon* then reassures the reader that “most of the time, inner beauty accompanies outer beauty”;⁴² finding a bride who is both physically attractive and pious should thus not be too difficult. As noted above, the *Ihyā’* affirms briefly this notion that physical traits correspond to moral dispositions in human beings. But Bar Hebraeus goes further by supporting it with a verse excerpt that he attributes to “the great one among our teachers” (*rabbā b-mallpānayn*) and that evokes the classical philosophical tradition of physiognomy:

Whatever is in the nature of the soul / the body can teach you.
If there is desire in its nature / the body can reveal [it] to you.
And if there is pride in it / the body can uncover [it].⁴³

(*ghurūr*) concerning a woman’s character and beauty often occurs when trying to make a match; he prefers that this be avoided by a suitor asking a trustworthy person about her character (*istišāf*) in addition to seeing her. Finally, al-Ghazālī notes that anyone who inclines toward withdrawal from worldly matters and marries only to follow Prophetic tradition, to seek offspring, or to put his household in order has no need to be concerned with his wife’s beauty, because calming his sexual desires in order to clear his heart for worship of God is not at issue. This point is supported with Quranic verses and more traditions culled from *Qūt al-qulūb*.

40. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 147.

41. For a mention of the unlawfulness of polygamy in Bar Hebraeus’s legal compendium, see *Nomocanon/Kṭābā d-huddāyā*, ed. Paulus Bedjan (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1898), 134.

42. *Ak da-b-sōgā l-šuprā gawwāyā šuprā nāqep barrāyā*. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 147.

43. *Ibid.* Bar Hebraeus attributes the general notion that outer and inner beauty go hand in hand to “wise men outside [of the church]” (*ḥakkīmē da-l-bar*). Here Bar Hebraeus is most likely referring to Greek philosophers. That people’s physical characteristics could be studied to determine their moral ones was the basic premise of the classical discipline of physiognomy, which was transmitted to the medieval traditions of Arabic and Syriac philosophy primarily through translations of the ancient Greek philosopher Polemon, as well as the Aristotelian *On Physiognomy* (likely pseudepigraphic). Bar Hebraeus knew both Polemon’s and pseudo-Aristotle’s book of physiognomy; he references and abridges the former in *Hewāt ḥekmtā* and quotes from the latter in *Tunnāyē mḡaḥkānē* (Laughable Stories). For a comprehensive overview of medieval physiognomy and editions of the Arabic text of Polemon’s *Physiognomy* (the only language in which it survives in its entirety), see *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon’s Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007). On Bar Hebraeus’s citation of Polemon in *Hewāt ḥekmtā*, see Swain, “Polemon’s *Physiognomy*,” in *Seeing the Face*, 177–78. For the section on physiognomy in *Hewāt ḥekmtā*, see Joosse, *Syriac Encyclopaedia*, 118–31. For Bar Hebraeus’s quotation of pseudo-Aristotle’s *On Physiognomy*, see *The Laughable Stories*, ed. and tr. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Luzac and Co., 1897), 182–85 (English), 155–56 (Syriac). Regarding Bar Hebraeus’s verse quotation in the *Ethicon*, I have been unable to identify its exact source, but because it is in a seven/seven syllabic meter (the two hemistiches of the first line, for example, are *mōn ū ba-kyānā d-napšā l pagrā meškaḥ mallep lāk*), Bar Hebraeus’s “great one among our teachers” is possibly a reference to Ephrem, the fourth-century Syrian Church Father. Ephrem’s name was closely associated with this particular metrical pattern, and a whole host of Syriac hymns and homilies in it exist under his name (many are actually pseudepigraphic). I thus surmise that Bar Hebraeus

Bar Hebraeus thus largely adopts al-Ghazālī's argument that beauty is a desirable wifely quality because it will ensure a husband's sexual satisfaction and keep him within the bounds of lawful sexuality. Bar Hebraeus also reproduces al-Ghazālī's affirmation that physical beauty is usually an indicator of good character, but conforming to his usual practice he replaces al-Ghazālī's Islamic proof texts with others (evoking, in this case, classical physiognomy).

4. Inexpensive Marriage Payment

Al-Ghazālī's fourth quality desirable in a bride, and the last that he adds to al-Juwaynī's list, is that she not demand an expensive marriage payment (that she be *khafīfat al-mahr*).⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī's discussion again relies much on material taken from *Qūt al-qulūb*, which thus seems likely to be the inspiration for the inclusion of the low marriage payment in the *Ihyā'*'s list. Unlike the previous qualities, al-Ghazālī grounds this one primarily with reference to Prophetic *ḥadīth*: "The best wives are those with the prettiest faces and the least expensive marriage gifts."⁴⁵ He further notes that the Prophet "has forbidden excessiveness in marriage gifts," and goes on to list the many humble sums that the Prophet gave to his various wives.⁴⁶ However, later in the section al-Ghazālī calls extravagant marriage gifts only reprehensible, not forbidden; the subtle contradiction between this and his earlier statement of prohibition exemplifies the *Ihyā'*'s general tendency to use Prophetic tradition as admonitory support for its points but not as the basis of hard jurisprudential rulings. Finally, al-Ghazālī affirms that just as it is reprehensible for prospective brides to demand large marriage gifts, so is it for men to marry brides solely for their wealth. According to Sufyān al-Thawrī, "If a man marries and says, 'What does the woman have?', know that he is a thief."⁴⁷

Bar Hebraeus's fifth quality is that a bride "not place upon [her] husband a burdensome marriage gift" (*lā tsīm 'al gabrā mawblā yaqqīrtā d-šadkē*); like al-Ghazālī he evinces a wariness of the difficulties a man may face if he has to pay too large a sum in order to marry.⁴⁸ Picking up on another of al-Ghazālī's specific points, the *Ethicon* argues that just

has drawn this verse quotation from a work attributed to Ephrem. On Ephrem and the seven/seven syllabic meter, see Sebastian Brock, *An Introduction to Syriac Studies* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 9.

44. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 2: 51–52. Standard in all Islamic legal traditions, the marriage payment (*mahr*, *ṣadāq*) is owed by a husband to his wife as an effect of the contracting of a valid marriage. For a basic orientation, see Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 46–50.

45. *Khayr al-nisā' aḥsanuhunna wujūhan wa-arkhaṣuhunna muhūran*. I have been unable to locate this tradition in any of the canonical or other major collections; nor is it found in *Qūt al-qulūb*, a usual source for al-Ghazālī's more suspect *ḥadīth* and one from which he draws other traditions that encourage low marriage gifts. The sentiment that giving less expensive marriage gifts is pious practice is found in several other traditions in the canonical collections, however. See, for example, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's admonition against giving expensive marriage gifts (*lā tuḡhālū bi-ṣudq al-nisā'*) because the Prophet did not: Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 2: 235, §2106; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 4: 73, §1114; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, 1: 607, §1887.

46. Many of these are taken from Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, as noted. Compare al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 2: 51–52, and al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 2: 513.

47. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 2: 52. This, too, is drawn from al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 2: 513. Al-Ghazālī also includes in this section an expanded version of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's discussion of gift giving between bride and groom.

48. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 148. West Syrian legal tradition, like Muslim, Jewish, and other legal systems, stipulated that a groom owed his wife a marriage payment when contracting the marriage. See, for example, canon §33 of the synod of 794 of the West Syrian Patriarch Kyriakos, which sets guidelines for the amount of the marriage gift; Arthur Vööbus, ed. and tr., *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, CSCO 367–68, 375–76 (Louvain: Secretariat du CSCO, 1975–76), 2:14. Although we have essentially no evidence for actual practice in West Syrian communities, the marriage payment was (and remains) such a widespread custom in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean that we can assume it to have been so among West Syrians in Bar Hebraeus's time. Interestingly, the term that Bar Hebraeus uses for marriage gift in the *Ethicon*—*šadkē*—is defined somewhat differently in his legal

as a woman should not expect an extravagant marriage gift, so a man should not seek to marry a bride for her wealth. For this notion, however, Bar Hebraeus offers no proof texts or instruction from Christian tradition. Instead he translates Sufyān al-Thawrī’s statement directly from the *Iḥyā’*: “Whoever asks what the woman owns when he gets engaged is a thief (*gannābā*).” Bar Hebraeus ascribes this sound opinion to “a virtuous man” (*myattrā nāṣ*), conveniently eliding its Muslim source.⁴⁹ This is exemplary of what we might call the far end of the *Ethicon*’s editorial strategy: Bar Hebraeus appropriates not only al-Ghazālī’s argument, but also a proof text attributed to a Muslim authority. Stripped of that attribution, however, the proof text serves as a perfectly innocuous piece of wisdom in a work framed mostly with reference to Christian authorities.

5. Fertility

With his fifth quality (*wilāda*) al-Ghazālī returns to his textual model, al-Juwaynī’s list. Both scholars assert the desirability of fertility with reference to a well-known Prophetic *ḥadīth* that tells the audience to marry “a fertile, devoted woman” (*al-walūd al-wadūd*).⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī therefore affirms that a man should not marry a woman known to be infertile;⁵¹ if her condition is unknown, he should seek someone young and in good health, who will usually be fertile. This, notably, is the only quality in the *Iḥyā’*’s list other than the low marriage gift for which al-Ghazālī gives only a Prophetic tradition and does not offer any reasoned argument of his own for its desirability.

Fertility (or, more literally, being “from a line of fertile women,” *men gensā d-yallādātā*) is Bar Hebraeus’s sixth quality for a bride.⁵² The *Ethicon* again follows al-Ghazālī’s list here, of course, but it is worth noting that this is a particularly old and established notion in Syriac Christian theologies of marriage, which often present childbearing as the primary aim for which God created the institution of worldly marriage.⁵³ Bar Hebraeus, however, does not go deeply into theological argumentation, nor does he offer a reasoned argument to make

compendium *Nomocanon*. There *šadke* is the “unofficial” gift(s) that a groom gives to his bride, while the marriage payment as stipulated in the betrothal contract is called *dōrā* (also, and more commonly, known as *mahrā*). Like the *Ethicon*, the *Nomocanon* affirms that a less valuable marriage gift is preferable to an extravagant one; it cites amounts specified by several sources, including Patriarch Kyriakos, the East Syrian Patriarchs Timothy I and Išo’barnūn, and the Syro-Roman Law Book, but endorses no specific amount itself. See Bar Hebraeus, *Nomocanon*, 134–36.

49. This practice of quoting Muslim authorities from the *Iḥyā’* as anonymous wise men is not at all uncommon in the *Ethicon*. Herman Teule’s well-annotated edition of the *Ethicon*’s first treatise includes no fewer than four examples of Bar Hebraeus directly quoting al-Ghazālī, al-Shāfi’ī, and Ibn Sinā variously as “an excellent teacher,” “a wise man,” “teachers,” and “wise men.” See Bar Hebraeus, *Mēmra I*, 2: 37, 44, 74, 90.

50. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, 2: 52; al-Juwaynī, *Nihāya*, 12: 28. Neither scholar gives the exact wording of this *ḥadīth* as commonly found in the major collections. See al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, 6: 65–66; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 2: 220, §2050.

51. To my knowledge, the question of the permissibility (as opposed to preferability) of marrying a woman known to be infertile is not widely debated in medieval *fiqh*.

52. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 148.

53. Although detailed theological discussions of lay marriage are not particularly common in Syriac Christian literatures, a number of West and East Syrian sources affirm that God created the institution of marriage in order to facilitate the orderly reproduction of the species and distinguish rational humans from animals. Among the East Syrians, see the sixth-century patriarch Mār Abā’s synodal letter in *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, ed. and tr. J. B. Chabot (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 82; and the introduction to the ninth-century patriarch Išo’barnūn’s law book in Joseph-Marie Sauget, “Décisions canoniques du patriarche Išo’barnūn encore inédites,” *Apollinaris* 35 (1962): facsimile f. 1. Among the West Syrians, see an unpublished letter of the mid-seventh-century bishop Yōnān, *Eggartā d-ḥasyā Mār Yōnān lwāt Te’ōdōrā sā’ōrā*, MS Cambridge Additional 2023, f. 254b.

up for al-Ghazālī's lack of one. Instead he cites another simple, instructive piece of wisdom from Ben Sira: "A fertile woman is to the joy of her people" (41:9a).

6. *Virginity*

Virginity (*bakāra*) is al-Ghazālī's sixth quality, al-Juwaynī's third (*bikr*). Al-Juwaynī draws this from a well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet suggests to the Anṣārī Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh after he has married a non-virgin, "Would you not play with a virgin (*bikr*), and she play with you?"⁵⁴ Al-Ghazālī also begins his discussion with reference to this *ḥadīth*. He then notes three reasons for a virgin bride being more conducive to conjugal harmony than a non-virgin. First, a non-virgin might have become accustomed to some qualities in her former husband and therefore detest her current one ("[human] natures are disposed toward intimacy with that with which they first become familiar"). Second, the nature of men is such that they recoil from someone whom another man has touched. Third, a virgin will not feel affection for a previous husband, an important point since "the surest love is usually that for a first beloved."⁵⁵

Bar Hebraeus again follows al-Ghazālī's argumentation closely, affirming that virginity (*btūlūtā*) "more than anything is a cause for the husband's love to increase, inasmuch as experience [of something] demonstrates that the mind is bound to that [which it experiences] first": women will be more attached to their first husbands.⁵⁶ A woman who has experience with many men, however, "will not be at peace from murmurings of her past misery." Therefore Bar Hebraeus encourages his reader to "Rejoice in the wife of your youth/A doe of love, a mountain goat of love" (Prov 5:18–19). Bar Hebraeus thus adopts the *Iḥyā'*'s general notion that conjugal harmony as a result of a wife's strong attachment to her husband, and his reciprocal affection for her, is best achieved with a virgin wife, but again he cites biblical wisdom and not Muḥammad.

7. *Good Lineage*

I have translated as "good lineage" al-Ghazālī's seventh (*nasab*)⁵⁷ and al-Juwaynī's second quality (*ḥasiba*). The different but complementary terminology for this concept has great resonance in the Arabic language and Islamic tradition. Al-Juwaynī explains *ḥasiba* with reference to a Prophetic *ḥadīth* that admonishes the audience, "Beware of a green among ruins," which the Prophet then glosses as "A good woman in a wicked garden."⁵⁸ Al-Juwaynī's text offers a second Prophetic saying as well: "Choose well for your sperm; do not place it in unsuitable matches."⁵⁹

54. Al-Juwaynī, *Nihāya*, 12: 28. Many variants of this tradition are to be found in the canonical collections. For the exact wording given by al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 19: 174, §4917; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, 6: 61.

55. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 2: 52–53.

56. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 148.

57. Al-Ghazālī has both *nasab* (*Iḥyā'*, 2: 48) and *an takūn nasiba* (*Iḥyā'*, 2: 53).

58. *Iyyākum wa-khaḍrā' al-dīman*, or *al-mar'a al-ḥasnā' fi manbit al-sū'*. Al-Juwaynī, *Nihāya*, 12: 28. This tradition is not found in any of the canonical collections, and seems to be included more often in *amthāl* and *adab* literature. For a version with an *isnād*, see §608 in Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* (Hyderabad: Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1942), 4: 139. The medieval *ḥadīth* experts found this tradition suspect; see the discussion in Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Talkhīṣ al-ḥabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Thānī ibn 'Umar ibn Mūsā (Riyadh: Dār Aḍwā' al-Salaf, 2007), 5: 2239–40. Ibn Ḥajar quotes al-Dāraquṭnī as calling the tradition "entirely unsound" (*lā yaṣīḥ min wajh*).

59. *Takhayyārū li-nuṭāfikum lā taḍā'uhā fi ḡhayr al-akfā'*. Al-Juwaynī, *Nihāya* 12: 28. For a nearly identical version, see §198 in al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan al-Dāraquṭnī*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Ḥāshim Yamānī al-Madanī (Medina: Sharikat al-Ṭibā'a al-Fanniyya al-Muttaḥida, 1966), 3: 299.

Al-Ghazālī cites the same two traditions⁶⁰ but uses *nasība*, which, according to the *Ihyāʾ*, means that she will be “from a pious household and will therefore raise her daughters and sons well.”⁶¹ In medieval Arabic literature the two qualities from which the adjectives *ḥasība* and *nasība* derive—*ḥasab* and *nasab*—are often spoken of in tandem, and are important in judging anyone’s character. *Nasab* refers specifically to lineage and biological (usually patrilineal) descent; *ḥasab* denotes “honor acquired through deeds,” but this was often estimated in terms of the honor accrued by lineage or family. The point to take away is that both al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī marshal this resonant Arabic concept to assert that a good bride should be from a pious family or lineage of good repute.⁶²

Good lineage is Bar Hebraeus’s eighth quality. His discussion is brief, stating only that a bride should be from a respected family (*tohmā ʾibībā*) and illustrating it with a Gospel quotation: “A good tree cannot bear wicked fruit” (Mt 7:18 and Lk 6:43).⁶³ The *Ethicon* does not reproduce al-Ghazālī’s argument that a woman of good lineage will raise her children well.

8. *Absence of Consanguinity*

Al-Ghazālī and al-Juwaynī’s final quality is that a wife not be of close relation (*qarāba qarība*) to her husband. Neither al-Ghazālī nor al-Juwaynī specifies which relations in particular he has in mind. A host of kin prohibitions were well established in Islamic tradition going back to Quran 4:23, which prohibits marriage between Muslim men and their mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, and nieces, as well as their wet nurses and the latter’s daughters, stepdaughters, and daughters-in-law. Jurists further extended kinship bars to marriage in ascending, descending, and lateral lines (for example, the prohibition on mothers was extended to grandmothers, daughters to granddaughters, etc.).⁶⁴

Neither al-Juwaynī nor al-Ghazālī, however, bases this quality on the Quranic prohibitions. Al-Juwaynī says only that it is preferable that a man not marry a close relation because a child born of such a union might come out weak and slight, basing this on a Prophetic tradition, “Marry those not of close relation lest you weaken your offspring.”⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī inverts the argument somewhat, stating initially that to marry a close relation lessens desire, which in turn results in the creation of weak offspring; only then does he quote a Prophetic tradition prohibiting the marriage of a close relation because of frail offspring.⁶⁶ Desire is

60. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyāʾ*, 2: 53. Al-Ghazālī’s text actually includes a slight variant of the *takhayyarū* tradition, the exact wording of which I have not found elsewhere.

61. It is also possible that both the *Ihyāʾ* and the *Nihāya* originally used the same term and that scribal error somewhere in the manuscript tradition changed one of them.

62. For an informative discussion of the sense and import of *ḥasab* and *nasab* in medieval Islamic societies, see Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, rev. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 98–104 (quote on p. 100).

63. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 148.

64. Stephen D. Ricks, “Kinship Bars to Marriage in Jewish and Islamic Law,” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, ed. William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 131–33.

65. *Aghribū wa-lā taḍwū*. Al-Juwaynī, *Nihāya*, 12: 28. My more expansive translation of this terse statement is based on the glosses that often accompany it in other sources. How this saying ended up as a Prophetic tradition in al-Juwaynī’s text is a bit of a mystery; it is found in quite a number of works of *adab*, lexicography, and grammar as an anonymous proverb (with the first word being *ighṭarībū*, not *aghribū*). See, for example, Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1925–30), 2: 67. The only attribution of this statement to the Prophet prior to al-Juwaynī that I have found is al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā wa-l-dīn*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1973), 160.

66. The tradition that al-Ghazālī attributes to the Prophet (*lā tankihū l-qarāba al-qarība fa-inna l-walad yukhlaq ḍāwīyan*) is nearly identical to al-Juwaynī’s sentence *wa-yustahabb allā yankih al-qarāba al-qarība fa-inna l-walad yukhlaq ḍāwīyan* in the *Nihāya*. The *ḥadīth* experts considered this statement baseless as a Prophetic tradition (see

greater, al-Ghazālī explains, for something new and unfamiliar; a close relation, who is neither, does not stir up desire in her husband, which results in the production of weak offspring.

That a bride not be of close relation (*lā tehwe ba(r)t gensā qarrībā*) to the groom is Bar Hebraeus's ninth desirable quality. The *Ethicon* gives two arguments in favor of this position, one of which is drawn from al-Ghazālī and one, notably, that is not. The text's original point is that marriage between unrelated folk is generally socially beneficial "because through the mixing of unrelated peoples (*rahḥiqē*), strangers become fellow householders, and hateful ones kin."⁶⁷ The second, Ghazālīan argument is that the human sense of pleasure will be less potent between relatives who are familiar with each other, that they will experience "the weakening of love" (*pakkīhūt reḥmtā*), and that this will negatively impact their offspring. As an example Bar Hebraeus offers the children of Zoroastrians, infamous in Syriac tradition for close-kin marriages.⁶⁸ Such children, according to the *Ethicon*, come out in "perverted forms" (*blīlay eskēmē*) and with "disconnected limbs" (*lā mlammday haddāmē*).⁶⁹ In this section, then, Bar Hebraeus again adopts a reasoned argument from the text of the *Ihyā'* but adds a bit more illustration familiar from Syriac Christian tradition. He does not offer any scriptural proof texts.

9. Common Creed

The *Ethicon* discusses one quality beyond al-Ghazālī's list, which is that a man find a bride of the same confession, "because opposition of creed (*tawdūtā*) is a cause of discord."⁷⁰ This formulation excludes not only non-Christian brides but also women from Christian sects other than the miaphysite West Syrians;⁷¹ this latter point, in fact, was probably much more relevant in Bar Hebraeus's milieu. All Islamic legal traditions strictly prohibit marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, and though we have little evidence for prac-

Ibn Ḥajar, *Talkhīs*, 5: 2241); its ascription to the Prophet in the *Ihyā'* thus seems possibly to be the result of a misreading of the *Nihāya*.

67. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 148–49.

68. Prohibitions of typically Zoroastrian practices of close-kin marriage figure prominently in the writings of several East Syrian ecclesiastics of the late antique and early Islamic periods, especially the catholicos Mār Abā (r. 540–552) and bishop ʿĪṣōḃōkt of Fārs (fl. late eighth century). See Richard E. Payne, "Christianity and Iranian Society in Late Antiquity, ca. 500–700 CE," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Univ. 2010, 145–240; Manfred Hutter, "Mār Abā and the Impact of Zoroastrianism on Christianity in the 6th Century," in *Religious Themes and Texts of Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, ed. Carlo G. Cereti et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2003), 167–73.

69. It is worth noting here that Bar Hebraeus's brief mention of Zoroastrian close-kin marriage exhibits similarities to passages in ʿĪṣōḃōkt's law book, which argues that marriage of unrelated peoples is beneficial because it brings enemies together and also describes the children of close-kin marriages as being born with "crippled limbs and eyes" (*ḥgīrūtā d-haddāmayhōn wa-d-ʿaynayhōn*). However, ʿĪṣōḃōkt's language is not close enough to that of Bar Hebraeus to conclude that the latter used the former as a source text. See *Corpus juris des persischen Erzbischofs Jesubocht*, in *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, ed. and tr. Eduard Sachau, vol. 3 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1914), 30, 36. Whether Bar Hebraeus had direct knowledge of East Syrian texts like ʿĪṣōḃōkt's, or whether he had any actual contact with Zoroastrians, he at least seems to have been familiar in a general sense with traditions of Syriac polemic against Zoroastrian marital practices.

70. Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 149.

71. The Christological differences between the various Christian groups of the Middle East are complex and have a long history going back to the ecumenical councils of the Roman empire at Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451. In briefest terms, the miaphysite creed recognized by the West Syrians, Copts, and Armenians stressed the unity of Christ's human and divine natures, while the East Syrians' and Melkites' creeds put greater emphasis on the distinctness of those natures (though neither East Syrians nor Melkites recognized the other's doctrine as sound). The literature on the history of Christological dispute is enormous; for a helpful overview of the different positions and how they relate to the doctrinal identities of the Middle Eastern churches, see Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 129–40.

tice in the pre-Ottoman period it is unlikely that such unions were particularly common.⁷² As such, Bar Hebraeus was likely much more concerned with attending to the boundaries that separated his flock from other Christian groups, especially since he held ecclesiastical office in Iraqi and Iranian regions in which West Syrians were outnumbered by diophysite East Syrians.⁷³

It is difficult to say how such theological sectarian divisions mattered to lay people in their personal dealings, but they often mattered very much to bishops like Bar Hebraeus.⁷⁴ Though the *Ethicon* gives no justification for its position against intermarriage other than the possibility of conjugal discord, we can easily imagine from Bar Hebraeus’s perspective how intermarriage might threaten the spiritual, human, and material resources of the West Syrian church. A wife committed to false beliefs might pass those on to her children, in which case not only would their souls be in jeopardy but their believing father’s property might move outside the purview of West Syrian communities as it devolved across the generations.⁷⁵ In fact, Bar Hebraeus is concerned enough to avoid mixed marriages that he finds himself having to explain away Paul’s statement that “An unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband” (1 Cor 7:14). This, he maintains, only obtained in the earliest days of Christianity when there were very few believers available for marriage (where believers, for Bar Hebraeus, means only those Christians who espouse a doctrinally correct creed). While similar concerns over sectarian intermarriage are conceivable for a Sunni Muslim such as al-Ghazālī, they were pointed enough for a Christian bishop in Bar Hebraeus’s position to make this wifely quality an important addition in the *Ethicon*.

EXCURSUS: WHAT ABOUT THE GOOD HUSBAND?

After his discussion of the qualities of the ideal wife, al-Ghazālī devotes a short notice to the characteristics of a good husband. Parallel sections are not found in al-Juwaynī’s *Nihāya* nor in the *Ethicon*; a short passage conveying similar sentiments in *Qūt al-qulūb* suggests that al-Ghazālī may have drawn his inspiration from that text.⁷⁶ As we have seen, much of al-Ghazālī’s discussion of the good wife centers on characteristics that facilitate conjugal harmony and men’s pious devotions; and rather than doing the converse here, he continues to focus mainly on men, specifically brides’ male guardians (sg. *walī*). This is unsurprising, since Shāfi‘ī *fiqh* does not allow a woman to contract a marriage without a guardian’s

72. On interfaith marriages in Islamic law, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 160–93.

73. This reading is further supported by the *Nomocanon*, in which Bar Hebraeus states that laymen cannot marry Christian women who do not recognize the miaphysite doctrine of the unity of Christ’s nature and substance, nor may they marry laywomen off to Christian men of these other sects. These prohibitions do not apply, however, to Copts, Ethiopians, Nubians, and Armenians, who differ from the West Syrians in customs (*ṣādē*) but not in Christology. See *Nomocanon*, 132–33.

74. It is worth noting as a caveat here that elsewhere in his writings Bar Hebraeus is sometimes fairly “ecumenical” in outlook and accords recognition to other Christian confessions; see Takahashi, *Bio-Bibliography* (supra, n. 9), 47–53. In the *Ethicon* and the *Nomocanon*, however, confessional difference between Christian groups is clearly of import and, in Bar Hebraeus’s view, impedes marital harmony.

75. Thanks are due to Thomas Carlson for bringing my attention to this last possibility. On the major role played by mothers in acculturating children to specific religio-ethnic identities, see Tamer el-Leithy, “Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293–1524 A.D.,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Univ. 2005, 258–64.

76. Compare al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, 2: 53 and al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 2: 513. Though the *Ethicon* does not discuss the qualities of a good husband, it is worth noting that its book on lawful marriage does include a section on husbands’ duties toward their wives (modeled, again, on a parallel section of the *Ihyā’*).

approval,⁷⁷ and we can surmise it to have been a fairly common cultural assumption in al-Ghazālī's milieu that the men of a young woman's household would usually play some role in arranging her marriage. According to al-Ghazālī, guardians should diligently examine the qualities of prospective grooms. A good husband should not be "of ugly appearance, of bad character, of weak religion, or skimp on carrying out [his] obligations to [his bride]."⁷⁸ This is so because, as the Prophet has said, "Marriage is bondage (*riqq*), so each one of you should [carefully] examine where he places his precious one (*ayna yaḍa' karīmatahu*, i.e. his daughter or charge)."⁷⁹ Drawing here on a common analogy from *fiqh*, al-Ghazālī explains that a married woman is like a slave (*raqīqa*) because her husband is empowered to divorce her at his discretion.⁸⁰ A male guardian who marries his charges to an unjust man, therefore, does not properly carry out his duty, and so acts impiously and "commits offense against his religion" (*janā 'alā dīnih*).

All told, al-Ghazālī is mainly concerned in this section to establish how the male guardians involved in contracting marriages for their female charges might do so in an upright, and religiously laudable, manner. He is less interested in considering how good husbands might offer their wives conjugal harmony and the chance to live a pious life; the issues at stake remain the pious practices of men.

TRANSLATING THE IMAGE OF THE GOOD WIFE

Although Bar Hebraeus chooses to leave aside any consideration of the qualities of good husbands, we have seen above that the overall profile of the good wife as presented in his *Ethicon* is largely congruent with that in al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā'*: the West Syrian adopts seven of al-Ghazālī's characteristics outright (piety, beauty, a low marriage payment, fertility, virginity, good lineage, and absence of consanguinity), splits one general one into two more specific ones (good character into gentleness and diligence), and adds one of his own (common confession). The textual pathways through which this image traveled from a work of Islamic jurisprudence to one of Christian practical ethics, however, are worth dwelling on and bringing to the fore. In its initial iteration this profile of the good wife was conceived within the boundaries of Islamic jurisprudential logic in al-Juwaynī's *Nihāyat al-maḥlab*. Al-Juwaynī defined it in terms of five qualities—piety, good lineage, virginity, fertility, and the absence of consanguinity—which, in the language of *fiqh*, were preferable or recommended for a groom to seek in a bride. Al-Juwaynī made each such ruling with reference to Prophetic *ḥadīth*, sufficient as proof text for the *fiqh* genre in which he wrote.

77. See Susan A. Spector, *Women in Classical Islamic Law: A Survey of the Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 70–71, 148–51.

78. *Mimman sā'a khalquhu aw khuluquhu aw ḍa'ufa dīnuhu aw qaṣṣara 'an al-qiyām bi-haqqihā*. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 2: 53.

79. This tradition is not found attributed to the Prophet in any of the major collections. Very similar versions turn up in earlier works attributed to either Asmā' or 'Ā'isha, daughters of Abū Bakr. See, respectively, §118 in Ibn Abī Dunyā al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-'Iyāl*, ed. Najm 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf (Mansoura: Dār al-Wafā', 1997), 149; and Ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn et al. (Cairo: Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1949–65), 6: 82. Al-Makkī attributes another similar version to "one of the pious predecessors"; see *Qūt al-qulūb*, 2: 513. Al-Ghazālī's exact tradition, with a Prophetic attribution and lacking an *isnād*, does show up in the *Mabsūṭ*, the major Ḥanafī *fiqh* compendium of al-Sarakhsī (fl. fifth/eleventh century). See *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ*, ed. Muḥammad Rāḍī al-Ḥanafī ([Cairo]: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1906–13), 5: 23.

80. For an overview of the relationship between marriage and slavery in Muslim jurisprudence, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), 6–27.

Al-Ghazālī takes up the profile first articulated by his teacher, expands it by adding three more qualities (good character, beauty, and an inexpensive marriage gift), and pushes it beyond the generic conventions of jurisprudential literature by incorporating excerpts from Sufi writings and his own reflections in order to harmonize the image of the good wife with the overall aims of the *Ihyāʾ*. The most notable result of al-Ghazālī’s reconfiguration is a new foregrounding of arguments for the spiritual, domestic, and social benefit of finding the ideal wife, as opposed to deriving the ideal wife’s characteristics from Prophetic pronouncements alone. In the cases of piety, good character, and beauty, for example, al-Ghazālī posits that a wife possessing these qualities will best facilitate her husband’s full-hearted devotion to God before he makes any reference to the traditions of Islamic authorities, be they Quranic, Prophetic, or other. Similarly, a wife of good lineage is desirable because she will raise and instruct her children well. In the cases of virginity and the absence of consanguinity, al-Ghazālī makes initial reference to the Prophetic traditions offered by al-Juwaynī, but then moves on to explain the natural social reasons for these qualities’ desirability: marriage to a virgin ensures greater conjugal intimacy and passion, while marriage to a relative lessens these and produces weak children. Only in the cases of the inexpensive marriage gift and fertility does al-Ghazālī refer solely to the Prophetic example and omit a reasoned discussion of the social and domestic benefits that these qualities might provide. Additionally, though al-Ghazālī speaks most plainly in the language of *fiqh* in the discussion of the marriage gift, the text does not actually offer an unambiguous ruling: al-Ghazālī first asserts that the Prophet prohibited extravagant marriage gifts, but later calls them only reprehensible.

If al-Ghazālī does not always present the Prophetic example as the singular or primary rationale for his arguments, this does not make them any “less Islamic” overall. The *Ihyāʾ* as a whole is fundamentally concerned with the method of crafting a faithful life, and that faith is, of course, faith in God and the message of His Prophet. Al-Ghazālī’s discussions remain chock full of reference to a whole host of Islamic authorities, even when he foregrounds his own explanations of social and spiritual utility. Al-Ghazālī’s shift away from al-Juwaynī’s jurisprudential framework is not, therefore, about making the image of the ideal wife less exemplary in Islamic terms, but rather about using different textual strategies of exhortation for the *Ihyāʾ*’s male audience that embed that ideal image in the practices and experiences of social life.

It is precisely al-Ghazālī’s generic blurring and appeals beyond jurisprudence that make the *Ihyāʾ* particularly suitable to reinterpretation in other traditions and facilitated Bar Hebraeus’s use of it in his own exploration of the pious life. Concern for the social factors that distract a man from his pious obligations and single-hearted devotion to God is likely common to all spiritual literatures; al-Ghazālī’s profile of the ideal wife was presented in those terms and was thus intelligible to a Christian reader. Though it had its origins in the *ḥadīth*-focused framework of Islamic jurisprudence, Bar Hebraeus was able to render this material part of his own Christian tradition by adducing proof texts from scripture and a few other sources, making slight modifications accordingly (essentially, changing al-Ghazālī’s “good character” into the gentleness and diligence suggested by Proverbs and Ben Sira), and incorporating a few extra concerns from his own milieu (discouraging marriage across confessional boundaries and subtly underscoring the importance of monogamy). Through these discursive strategies, Bar Hebraeus effectively appropriated and authorized the *Ihyāʾ*’s insights as a model for a Christian audience.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: THE GOOD WIFE
AND MALE PIETY IN THE MEDIEVAL MIDDLE EAST

The methods by which Bar Hebraeus's *Ethicon* Christianizes al-Ghazālī's image of the good wife and the stylistic aspects of the *Ihyā'* that facilitate this appropriation are not necessarily unique to these sections of the two works. As noted earlier, it is not uncommon for the *Ethicon* to adopt much of the basic material from its model text. What, then, is particularly compelling or important about the fact that Bar Hebraeus follows al-Ghazālī so closely in this section? What can the fact that this stereotyped checklist-image of the good wife was so readily attractive to adherents of two very different religious traditions tell us about ideas of gender normativity in their respective scholarly cultures?

An answer, I would like to suggest, is that al-Ghazālī's and Bar Hebraeus's congruent imagining of the good wife is both indicative of and propagates a conception of the particular requisites of male piety intelligible in the general confessional milieu of the medieval Middle East. The *Ihyā'* and the *Ethicon* are making use of a common literary strategy that one scholar has called men "thinking with women." That is, when these kinds of texts describe and discuss women, they are actually more about men: working through the tensions of male sexuality and sociability, and defining normative notions of masculinity in particular cultural formations.⁸¹

Thinking with women to admonish and exhort men is the *modus operandi* of our chapters of interest in the *Ihyā'* and the *Ethicon*, and its effect is to carve out a general notion of the proper ordering of household life that facilitates the devotional disposition of socially embedded males. Al-Ghazālī and Bar Hebraeus were paragons of different traditions with their own, very distinct understandings of the relationships between women, men, and God. An enduring foundation of Bar Hebraeus's Christian tradition was its encouragement of celibacy over married life (Bar Hebraeus was a celibate bishop) as the surest path to spiritual perfection. Most strands of Islamic thought, on the other hand, esteemed marriage and procreation (although the *Ihyā'* is notable for the degree to which it grapples with the relative merits of married and celibate life).⁸² Yet insofar as al-Ghazālī's and Bar Hebraeus's texts are directed to householders, we find that the same profile of the good wife, her characteristics, and how they affect men's social experiences and, therefore, spiritual dispositions—the fundamental concern of both the *Ihyā'* and the *Ethicon*—is basically intelligible to both of them. By exhorting their male audiences to seek largely congruent images of the good wife, their texts foster normative ideas of a particularly male piety and the wife that it requires: humble and obedient so that her husband is unworried that she might transgress and offend his honor, a beautiful virgin so that their passion for each other is fulfilling and neither has a desire to stray, fertile so that he may fulfill God's program for the propagation of the species, and so on. Minimizing the social anxieties that attend the head of a household in order to allow a continuous and clear-hearted devotion toward God: this is the aim and prerogative

81. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 77–78, discussing the work of Karen L. King. Though males may be the real subject of such texts, we should not forget the disciplining effect that images of the ideal feminine can have on women: they propagate norms of behavior and comportment, even if the ideals themselves may be male "cultural fantasies."

82. For passages in each text that consider celibate versus married life, see al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 2: 28–46 and Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, 138–46. Though the *Ihyā'*'s somewhat ambivalent attitude to married life is partly attributable to the fact that al-Ghazālī wrote the work during a period of withdrawal from most aspects of social life, the notion that celibacy is preferable under certain conditions had already been established in Shāfi'ī *fiqh* in the work of the school's eponym. See al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm*, ed. Rif'at Fawzi 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Mansoura: Dār al-Wafā', 2008), 6: 373–77.

of the pious male householder, Muslim or Christian, in al-Ghazālī’s and Bar Hebraeus’s discourse.

This particular exercise of imagining the kind of wife that best facilitates men’s realization of piety and ideal masculinity has a particularly long history in the literatures of the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East; al-Ghazālī and Bar Hebraeus are not exactly revolutionary in this respect. From the analogies of husband to head and wife to obedient body in Ephesians 5 to the Talmudic story of a wife’s “self-abnegation” that allows her rabbi husband to pursue Torah study, the examples we might adduce are diffuse and many.⁸³ From this angle the *Ihyā’* and the *Ethicon* are carrying on an older trend of delimiting the realm of male piety for audiences of householders. But in the context of the broader monotheistic cultures of the medieval Middle East, al-Ghazālī’s and Bar Hebraeus’s Muslim-Christian discourse demonstrates that this gendered and generalized conception of piety resonated and proved translatable beyond the boundaries of a single religious tradition.

83. On the story of Rabbi Akiva’s wife and its cultural influence in Rabbinic Judaism, see Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* (supra, n. 81), 150–56.