

AL-GHAZALI'S INTERPRETATION OF MUSLIM MEN AND MENSTRUATION IN THE  
11TH CENTURY

Holland Schmitz

HIST208O: Historical Research and Methods Seminar; Women and Gender in the Middle East

May 11, 2022

*Al-Ghazali's Interpretation of Muslim Men and Menstruation in the 11th Century*

Menstruation occurs once a month from when a woman hits puberty until she reaches the start of menopause. The uterus sheds its lining, causing a woman to discharge blood and other materials, and it is a part of the uterine cycle which also includes the follicular phase, ovulation and the luteal phase. Menstruation has been stigmatized in health, and has caused women to be looked down upon in western societies, whereas eastern cultures typically tolerated menstruation through a less biased lens.<sup>1</sup> Menstruation is a vital part of a woman's health, and was used to measure if a woman was fertile or not. In the medieval Middle East, where Islam was the main religion, menstruation was seen as dirty. Blood, vomit, pus, urination, and defecation were all considered impure and required certain forms of cleansing for one to be recovered from these.<sup>2</sup> Men were taught all of the ways to pray and cleanse, among other information for surviving and being respectful in their religion, and they were expected to teach their wives these same values since they could not go and learn the information for themselves. Medieval Muslim women required their husbands' and fathers' guidance to practice Islam and live their lives.

Islam is the religion of Muslims, who follow the Qur'an and the monotheistic god Allah's guidance as a crucial part of their lives. Islam was founded by Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century, after he received a revelation from the angel Gabriel in 610 CE. Gabriel continuously revealed information to Muhammad from Allah, which led to the creation of the Qur'an. Muhammad formed Islam from Allah's word, having transcribers write as he spoke to distribute information and gain followers. Though these events occurred long before the primary source for this paper was written, it is important to know the background of the religious sources they are

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Secret History of Menstruation," Jstor Daily, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-secret-history-of-menstruation/>.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, "Cancelers of Wudu" and the Boundaries of the Body,' in *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 135-140.

based on. Muhammad had distinct views on menstruation and every part of a woman or a man's life, and taught his followers how to care for themselves as proper Muslims through the Qur'an and other experiences which would be recorded in hadiths. Prophet Muhammad believed all people were equal in the eyes of God, and this idea encouraged his acceptance of women and their menstruation.<sup>3</sup>

The main focus of this paper is analyzing the primary source document: *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: a Translation of al-Ghazali's Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the Ihya* by Madelain Farah, who translated and edited al-Ghazali's work to English. This text was originally written in Arabic between 1058-1111, al-Ghazali's lifetime. The *Ihya*, or Revival of the Religious Sciences is divided into four parts, with ten books each. The four parts are *Acts of worship (Rub' al-'ibadāt)*, *Norms of Daily Life (Rub' al-'adat)*, *The Ways to Perdition (Rub' al-muhlikat)*, and *The Ways to Salvation (Rub' al-munjiyat)*. The book is based on Islam and the Qur'an, and is considered a great work in Muslim literature. The *Ihya* is said to be the most popular text in the Muslim world, behind only the Qur'an, thanks to its extensive information on how to be a proper Muslim.<sup>4</sup> The portion of the text being used to analyze al-Ghazali's thoughts on medieval menstruation in a Muslim marriage is from the second part, *Norms of Daily Life*, book two from this section (book twelve out of the forty), titled: *On the Etiquette of Marriage*. In this book is a small, five paragraph description of men's responsibilities regarding their wives' menstruation, titled: "Instruction Concerning Menstruation." Al-Ghazali's views on menstruation were strict for both men and women, emphasizing their sins if his direction was not followed. Al-Ghazali's message in *On The Etiquette of Marriage* contrasts with other Muslim thought,

---

<sup>3</sup> Lesley Hazelton, "Muhammad," in *After the Prophet*, (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 7-66.

<sup>4</sup> "Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn," ghazali: a virtual online library, accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www.ghazali.org/rrs-ovr/>.

including Muhammad's expression towards menstruation, creating a debatable discourse on how menstruation should have been handled in the medieval Middle East.

First, a review of what historians have written, said, and done in the past is crucial for understanding medieval menstruation in Islam, and also Christianity and Judaism, and how that information fits into a modern day context of women's health and religion. Sharon Faye Koren's *Forsaken: the Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* covers medieval menstruation in three religions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, which makes it an insightful source for comparing how the three interpreted the meaning and care of a woman's monthly cycle. The main chapter being used to dissect al-Ghazali's work is, "Menstrual Impurity and Sufism." Koren discusses the Qur'an and its text on impurity, Muhammad's leniency towards menstruants, including his wives, and how some women would deprive their bodies to rid themselves of their menstrual cycles. Koren explains they were "women as men," and by eliminating menstruation they were eliminating what made themselves inferior to men.<sup>5</sup> This book is one in a large series on Jewish women, working to cover the intersection between Judaism and Women and Gender studies. The source contributes to understanding al-Ghazali's and others' opinions on menstruation, because it provides information on Muhammad, who al-Ghazali found inspiration from for his works, and explains views from other religions.

The second source covering medieval menstruation in Islam is *Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood* by D. A. Spellberg. In this text, Spellberg argues that Islam blends Christian and Jewish traditions to create their own, provides an analysis of religions' treatment of Eve, and describes the ways in which

---

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Faye Koren, "Menstrual Impurity and Sufism," in *Forsaken: the Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 127-143.

menstruation is a punishment onto women because of Eve's actions.<sup>6</sup> Spellberg writes how blood symbolized the impurity of women in medieval Islamic societies, because they are born of blood and flesh, not water and mud like men are; and then women grow up to experience menses, meaning blood continues to dirty their bodies and lives forever.<sup>7</sup> The source contributes to understanding al-Ghazali's and other medieval muslim male scholars' opinions on menstruation because the text covers Eve, a woman prominent in today's religions, and how she was not widely understood in the medieval time period but was to blame for much of what was wrong with women in the eyes of religion.

A third source that contains information about medieval menstruation is titled *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* by Marion Holmes Katz. This book covers the Qur'an, Islamic Laws regarding food and body, and differences in purity depending upon gender. Katz mentions it is accepted that female sexuality is destructive to the "fundamentally male holy order."<sup>8</sup> Since menstruation is essential in sex and producing offspring, destructive female sexuality could not be possible without a woman menstruating once a month. This book provides further understanding of how gender plays a role in purity standards, because men are impure in separate ways. Both sexes must eat and use the restroom, and both have the possibility of becoming injured or sick, which could produce blood or vomit. These factors can cause both sexes to be impure, so women are not inherently problematic due to their menstrual cycles. This also meant that while menstruation was impure, Islam still allowed women to be pure again after cleansing, like any other impurity. This text contributes to the main

---

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Spellberg, "Writing the Unwritten Life of Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 3 (1996): 305-324.

<sup>7</sup> Spellberg, "Writing the Unwritten Life of Islamic Eve," 313.

<sup>8</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 188.

argument that al-Ghazali's research differed from others because it supports some of his claims, and stands ground against other scholar's claims.

Another source involved in this topic is *Barren Women: Religion and Medicine in the Medieval Middle East*, written by Sara Verskin. The chapter being referenced is "Law and Biology: Menstruation, Amenorrhea, and Legal Recognition of Reproductive Status." This book utilizes data and descriptions from court records and legal documents in the medieval Middle East to analyze how their systems for marriage and divorce viewed beginning menstruation, lapse in menstruation, and termination of menstruation in a woman's lifetime. The court documents are captivating to read because they directly show what men of the time period thought of women, how women were treated and/or punished, and how laws were interpreted to interact with society. Verskin describes menarche, adolescent development, and teen marriage to support her study of laws in medieval Middle Eastern courts. One of the most prominent parts of her information is how the *idda* played a role in the case studies. Idda period was the time necessary between the termination of one marriage and the beginning of another, and the minimum was three menstrual periods. This was essential to prove the woman was not pregnant with the previous husband.<sup>9</sup> The work done to analyze the court system to prove menstruation was not always viewed poorly is valuable for this paper's research because it contrasts al-Ghazali's strict interpretation, and shows women experiencing menstruation had some small advantages.

The last source relating to medieval menstruation being used to dissect al-Ghazali's writing is a journal article titled: *Menstruation and Differentiation: How Muslims Differentiated Themselves from Jews regarding the Laws of Menstruation* by Haggai Mazuz. The argument in

---

<sup>9</sup> Sara Verskin, "Law and Biology: Menstruation, Amenorrhea, and Legal Recognition of Reproductive Status," in *Barren Women: Religion and Medicine in the Medieval Middle East* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020), 57-92.

this article explains how Muslims wanted to differentiate from the Jews in their stance on menstruation. Muslims sought to make laws regarding menstruation more lenient than Judaism's, and it was noted that Allah requested a balance between Christian and Jewish strictness on menstrual beliefs should be followed.<sup>10</sup> This is important because though al-Ghazali and the medieval Muslim men following his teachings may have had a male-centered and harsh on their wives approach, they were still supposedly taking less control of women's bodies than Jewish laws were.

Al-Ghazali was born in 1058, and had an extensive education where he gained respect from teachers and peers, which allowed him to go on and contribute one of the most influential pieces of Muslim literature, the *Ihya*, or *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.<sup>11</sup> He was a professor at a madrasa, an Islamic religion school, that he co-founded, lectured to hundreds of students, and studied philosophy extensively.<sup>12</sup> He briefly retired from teaching to live as a poor sufi, meditating alone and performing other religious practices; this was the time he wrote the *Ihya*.<sup>13</sup> This time alone allowed al-Ghazali to discover himself and write about the proper approach Muslims should take to live their lives. He became convinced he was capable of being the 'reviver of religion.'<sup>14</sup> This mentality leads historians to view al-Ghazali as overly righteous in his writings and teachings of Islam, creating a higher standard. This background information is significant to show that the source comes from a well-respected scholar. Al-Ghazali had a following, and wrote and taught impressive lectures in his lifetime, leading to him being researched and discussed by numerous historians hundreds of years later. The *Ihya* is not by a

---

<sup>10</sup> Haggai Mazuz. "Menstruation and Differentiation: How Muslims Differentiated Themselves from Jews regarding the Laws of Menstruation," *Der Islam* 87, no. 1-2 (2012): 204-223.

<sup>11</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, "al-Ghazali," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, (2012), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0233](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0233).

<sup>12</sup> Watt, "al-Ghazali."

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

poor or uneducated man, meaning al-Ghazali can only propose what an experienced, well-traveled Muslim thought about menstruation.

Another drawback to this source worth noting, is that it is not extensive compared to the rest of his literature. The portion titled “Instruction Regarding Menstruation” in Madelain Farah’s translation originally by al-Ghazali is a mere five paragraphs long. This leaves so much open to interpretation, and a historian can draw his words in many different directions. The lack of information from al-Ghazali could also propose that menstruation was not as important as other aspects of marriage and life in an Islamic world. Numerous modern books and articles have been written about medieval menstruation based on court records, hadiths, and other accounts, but perhaps the topic simply was not as important as historians may want it to be now. Additionally, no sources could be found directly citing “Instruction Concerning Menstruation” to support this paper’s research, making it difficult to compare these arguments with other scholars’. The primary documents containing menstruation from the medieval time period do not answer all of the questions historians have currently, so many concepts must be inferred from limited information.

Al-Ghazali firmly believed he might be going to Hell,<sup>15</sup> so it justifies his belief that husbands need to teach their wives about menstruation and force them to be religious if they do not take their practices seriously, because it will keep them safe from Hell. Al-Ghazali outlines which prayers were allowed and when, which depended upon when the woman’s bleeding stopped. Finally, al-Ghazali outlines how women will be informed of their menstrual cycles: either from their husbands or if their husband does not teach them, they must go out and ask a Mufti, a Muslim legal expert who could provide information on religious matters, which their

---

<sup>15</sup> Watt, “al-Ghazali.”

husbands could not deny them permission.<sup>16</sup> Women could not do anything without the consent of their husbands, and learning about their own menstrual cycles was included, making the Muslim beliefs on menstruation strict. Al-Ghazali encouraged this strictness, and goes as far to say when husbands fail to teach their wives about menstruation: “he, too, becomes her partner in sin.”<sup>17</sup> This statement implied that women were already sinning due to the blood flow, even though it is a natural occurrence they could not prevent.

Al-Ghazali being an educator, philosopher, and traveler made his work mostly accessible to other scholars or students, and of course literate Muslims. An analysis of his audience is described by Ibn Ṭufayl, which says al-Ghazali wrote differently for the common Muslim men’s consumption than for the elite Muslim men’s consumption.<sup>18</sup> Watt continues with this thought by suggesting that all of al-Ghazali’s work might not be authentic, because his writings for the common man might contradict his writings for the elite. Would what al-Ghazali taught to the common man about Muslim menstruation be equal to what he taught the elite? Were Muslim wives of scholarly men held to a different standard in caring for their menstruation? Would their husbands teach them different rituals? Or, as previously questioned, did menstruation not actually matter that much, and the brief overview in the *Ihya* was all al-Ghazali believed needed to be taught to the Muslim public?

Muhammad reportedly treated menstruating women, including his wives and daughters, equally when it came to sin involving issues of bodily fluids. Koren says Muhammad saw menstruants as no different than him because menstruation made them impure, but ejaculation

---

<sup>16</sup> Madelain Farah, *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: a Translation of al-Ghazali’s Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the Ihya* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1984), 102-103, <https://archive.org/details/marriagesexualit0000ghaz/page/102/mode/2up>.

<sup>17</sup> al-Ghazali, *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Watt, “al-Ghazali.”

would also make him impure in Islamic practices.<sup>19</sup> Muhammad made no special oppressive acts against menstruants, only acknowledged the biological processes needed for a woman to become fertile. This differs from al-Ghazali's opinion in "Instruction Regarding Menstruation," because his thought was so negative against menstruants, seeing women as inherently sinful beings because of their cycles, instead of beings capable of reproduction. Muhammad was even so lenient as to still allow other forms of connection between husband and menstruating wife, while the Qur'an forbade intercourse.<sup>20</sup> Koren references one of Muhammad's wives, A'isha, describing an *izar*, an outer garment worn by a menstruant so she may still be near and involved with her husband, she would wear so Muhammad could still "fondle" her and the other wives while they were experiencing menses. Muhammad allowed for his menstruating wives to be around him when he prayed, and to gather items for him as a service, still treating them as he would if they were not menstruating.<sup>21</sup> Muhammad continuously wanted to spend time with his wives and have them perform tasks for him as if they were not menstruating, proving he did not put a large emphasis on the natural monthly occurrence.

Muhammad did not believe Eve was to blame for menstruation. Muhammad saw menstruation as "something God decreed for the daughters of Adam,"<sup>22</sup> and not as something that was to punish Eve for her sins. This directly contrasts with Al-Tabari's accounts described in *Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve*, which says he believed menstruation originated from Eve's course of action that corrupted Adam.<sup>23</sup> It is unclear which of these al-Ghazali truly believed in, but considering his thought process that women are inherently sinful due to their menstruation, it can be inferred that he would side with al-Tabari. Menstruation was still sinful

---

<sup>19</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 130.

<sup>20</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 130.

<sup>21</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Spellberg, "Writing the Unwritten Life of Islamic Eve," 313.

and impure through the eyes of Muhammad and al-Ghazali; but al-Ghazali's recommendations for how Muslim women live as menstruants appears stricter due to less information about menstrual life and laws provided compared to Muhammad's extensive available hadiths and stories about how he treated his menstruating female counterparts.

Menstruation was not always as terrible as al-Ghazali implies. Yes, husbands had a huge responsibility to teach their wives when to pray and how to cleanse themselves of sin, but wives could also use menstruation to rid themselves of these husbands. A girl's first menstrual period officially made her a woman, a legal adult in the eyes of the courts.<sup>24</sup> This had both pros and cons for the woman in question. If her menstrual cycle was not immediately regular, i.e. coming at the same time every month, her husband and/or medical examiners might see her as infertile, and would perform many harmful practices against her body, damaging her sexual organs that could actually make her infertile.<sup>25</sup> Another complication with irregular menstrual cycles is its ability to impact a woman's chances of remarriage. Idda, the mandatory period of time that must be taken between a marriage ending and a new one beginning,<sup>26</sup> lasted three menstrual cycles, to ensure the woman could not be pregnant from her previous marriage. If a woman was old enough and her body had gotten used to menstruation, three regular menstrual cycles was easy to have, and a woman could move onto a new marriage easily. But adolescents' bodies, though "legal" in Muslim courts and law, often had not regulated their menstruation yet, and this made it difficult to remarry. If a marriage was unhappy, the husband did not provide proper care or funds for his wife, or perhaps the husband did not teach her about her menstrual cycles, wives had a way to

---

<sup>24</sup> Verskin, *Barren Women*, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Verskin, *Barren Women*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> Verskin, *Barren Women*, 67.

prove she was childless and find a new partner. This holds significance because the courts allowed menstruation to work in favor of women, even though it was sinful and impure.<sup>27</sup>

Wudu is an Islamic cleansing ritual with four parts: wash your face, wash your hands and arms up to the elbows, wipe your head, and wash your feet.<sup>28</sup> Performing wudu is required for excreting bodily fluids, such as urination, blood, vomiting, and pus.<sup>29</sup> There had been debate on whether wudu was required for fluids coming out of the nose or mouth too, or just from genitals. Al-Shafi argued not requiring wudu for nose and mouth fluids meant not requiring its performance for nosebleeds, which leads into the conversation on cleansing the impurity of blood.<sup>30</sup> Katz explains that early scholars' consensus reached that "shedding of blood does not rapture a person's state of purity," and therefore does not require wudu.<sup>31</sup> The part of Katz's information that defies their findings on when to perform wudu, and defies al-Ghazali's emphasis on the importance of prayer times and cleansing comes from Hisham ibn Urwa. Hisham ibn Urwa was the son of Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, and this scenario was written about in *Musannaf* by Abd al-Razzaq.<sup>32</sup> He had some boils that were chronically bleeding, but his father informed him to perform wudu and pray whether they stopped bleeding or not.<sup>33</sup> Katz then compares this to a menstrual cycle, using the word *mustahada*, which means "women with an issue of blood,"<sup>34</sup> Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, Hisham ibn Urwa's father, provided advice that directly contradicts with al-Ghazali, and the eight legal scholars Katz references as believing wudu is required for chronic bleeding, and that prayer must be discontinued until blood concludes its flow. Whether Urwa ibn

---

<sup>27</sup> Verskin, *Barren Women*, 92.

<sup>28</sup> John Burton, "The Qur'an and the Islamic Practice of Wudu'," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51, no. 1 (1988): 21-58.

<sup>29</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 135.

<sup>30</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 136.

<sup>31</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 137.

<sup>32</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 138.

<sup>33</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 138.

<sup>34</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 138.

al-Zubayr's word was proper is unclear, but it serves as evidence used for debates on blood flow and impurity in historical research. This story is worth noting because not everyone had strict views of blood's impurity compared to al-Ghazali and other elite Muslim scholars.

The final points to be made in comparison with al-Ghazali's "Instruction Regarding Menstruation" are on the differences between how medieval Islam, Christianity, and Judaism viewed menstruation. In medieval Judaism, being ritually pure meant being closer to God while on Earth.<sup>35</sup> In Judaism, and some other cultures, menstrual blood is seen as a risk to living women because it signifies the passing of a potential life. Loss of semen in men also represented death, but because women were less valued than men, this was not as big of a deal.<sup>36</sup> Leviticus states that a woman with discharge (the *niddah*) was impure for seven days, and having additional vaginal problems required waiting another seven days before becoming pure again.<sup>37</sup> Rabbis of the mishnaic period, The Tannaim, allotted an eighteen day period for women to be considered impure due to chance of additional discharge or irregular blood flow.<sup>38</sup> These medieval Jewish practices were harsh, considering women as dirty for such a large portion of the month, every month, from the first menses until they reached the age of menopause. The way medieval Jewish male scholars defined menstrual impurity was stricter than in Islam, where women were deemed impure for only seven days and then could cleanse themselves to be pure again. This goes to show that by Islamic standards, al-Ghazali was less lenient than Muhammad, but the religion as a whole was kinder to menstruants than in Judaism.

As for medieval Christianity, their practices were much more relaxed, as husbands did not have as much input and provided options to their wives. The men in medieval Christianity

---

<sup>35</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 7.

were so accepting of menstruation to the point that they disliked when women distanced themselves from the church on their period. Koren mentions an anonymous third-century Syrian manual that writes against women who would not pray, study, or use Eucharist during their menstrual cycle.<sup>39</sup> A few other sources include Byzantine churches separating menstruating women from pure men in church settings, and Roman Catholic customs forbidding menstruants and ejaculants from entering a church or taking communion.<sup>40</sup> Both of these are outright working against menstruating women, but the Byzantines were still allowing women in the church, and the Roman Catholics were distancing both men and women. So while they were discriminating against people for their sins, they were quite accepting of people compared to Islam and Judaism. The anonymous Syrian manual is interesting to consider because it acknowledges that some men were accepting and did not put much weight onto menstruation. Instead, caring that women still pray and serve their respects to the church. Allah commanded that Muslims follow a “middle path” between Jews and Christians in terms of caring about menstruation, where Jews cared too much and Christians cared too little.<sup>41</sup> The sources by Koren and Mazuz support this, and demonstrate that Muslims did an excellent job of differentiating themselves between the two religions, while still taking a stance against the sinful act of menstruation.

Muhammad was kind to menstruants, and Muslims following his hadiths from his lifetime in the 7th century were likely kind as well, still allowing their wives to perform tasks for them and cuddling with them as usual, just with a covering on. Muslims following al-Ghazali’s *Ihya* for all aspects of their lives, including teaching their wives about menstruation, likely followed Islam much stricter than others. Al-Ghazali laid out a beautifully written manual for how to live a Muslim life with minimal sin. He shamed husbands who did not teach their wives

---

<sup>39</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 147.

<sup>41</sup> Mazuz, “Menstruation and Differentiation,” 206.

about menstruation, being sure to scare them of sin if they did not perform their required duties. Menstruation could complicate women remarrying, but the men of medieval Muslim courts worked with women, believing them about their periods and allowing divorces where they deemed necessary. The Qur'an laws define menstruation as harmful, and directly speaks to men about how to care for it, rather than speak to the women who experience it.<sup>42</sup> Though this was because only men could read, and even then it was men with access to education. Other medieval Muslims learned about the Qur'an and their faith through verbal instruction in church settings. Menstruation being claimed as harmful may seem rude in a modern stance, but in medieval times menstruants were shamed because all blood was impure, no matter who it was flowing out of. Menstruation just happened to only concern women.

The most significant aspect of the accounts from the medieval period is that they were written by elite, educated men. This means their words can only be interpreted from the male point of view, as the Qur'an only informed men of how to care for menstruation, and depended upon men to teach their wives. Al-Ghazali in "Instruction Concerning Menstruation" knew the Qur'an instructed men, and continued this pattern by recommending Muslim men to continue this in their own homes. Everything written about in this paper is from the male perspective. Only the accounts researched referencing Muhammad's wives are female, but even then they were talking about how Muhammad treated them and taught them to act during their menstrual cycles.

Further questions and places this research could lead to include attempting to find the missing female perspective, and discovering additional sources to explain small offshoot questions. Of course, wondering how women felt about these laws and religions is vital, but there are so few accounts from women, especially from the medieval time period. Historians have to

---

<sup>42</sup> Koren, *Forsaken*, 128.

acknowledge that mostly everything they know about women from the past will be through the eyes of men: court records, travel accounts, religious literature, and perhaps letters. Another place curiosity follows is how well did women follow these rules and regulations? Everything was enforced strictly, but were there any cases of defiance? Also, how often did men not teach their wives about menstruation that al-Ghazali had to specifically mention women could go learn elsewhere? Why would husbands not just teach their wives because they already knew it was expected of them? Menstruation has been covered extensively in the research community both from a medical lens and historical and religious lenses, making the topic a prominent part of women's studies. Much more research will continue to come out about the topic, and perhaps all of these questions will be answered. Finally, medieval Muslim men's accounts prove they viewed menstruation as dirty, impure, and sinful, though they respected their wives and allowed them to recover and be involved in society the rest of the month. I have demonstrated that al-Ghazali's text, "Instruction Concerning Menstruation" from the *Ihya* was a strict and male-centered interpretation of menstruation that other accounts such as Muhammad's and medieval court records prove not all medieval men had as harsh of a view against menstruants.

## Bibliography

- Farah, Madelain. *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: a Translation of al-Ghazali's Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the Ihya*. Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1984.
- Hazelton, Lesley. "Muhammad." In *After the Prophet*, 7-66. New York: Doubleday, 2009.
- "Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn," ghazali: a virtual online library, accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www.ghazali.org/rrs-ovr/>.
- Jstor Daily. "The Secret History of Menstruation." Accessed May 9, 2022, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-secret-history-of-menstruation/>.
- Katz, Marion Holmes. "'Cancelers of Wudu' and the Boundaries of the Body." In *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity*, 135-140. New York: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Koren, Sharon. "Menstrual Impurity and Sufism." In *Forsaken: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, 127-143. New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2011.
- Mazuz, Haggai. "Menstruation and Differentiation: How Muslims Differentiated Themselves from Jews regarding the Laws of Menstruation." *Der Islam* 87, no. 1-2 (2012): 204-223.
- Spellberg, D. A. "Writing the Unwritten Life of the Islamic Eve: Menstruation and the Demonization of Motherhood." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 3 (1996): 305-24. doi:10.1017/S0020743800063479.
- Verskin, Sara. "Law and Biology: Menstruation, Amenorrhea, and Legal Recognition of Reproductive Status." In *Barren Women: Religion and Medicine in the Medieval Middle East*, 57-92. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020.
- Watt, W. Montgomery. "al-Ghazali." *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, (2012): <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0233](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0233)>.