

# 11 | Emotion in Early Islamic Social Hierarchies: Affection, Threats, and Appeals to Piety in Official Documents from the Umayyad and Abbasid Periods

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Despite the proliferation of writing in the field of emotions history, emotions have been very little studied in the medieval Arabic and Islamic context, and the study of emotion in medieval politics has been particularly neglected.<sup>1</sup> This paper offers an initial overview of the emotively charged language of affection, threats, and appeals to God and pious behaviour in early Islamic documents that have an official function and some kind of persuasive element: letters to officials, tax demand letters, a caliph's speech at a time of political unrest, and marriage contracts which encourage proper moral behaviour. The documents analysed here have different functions and forms and were written in different periods, but they all represent relationships with a power differential in which one of the parties has power (state official or husband) and the other is subject to their authority (subject of the state, lesser official, employee, or wife). It soon becomes clear that the emotive appeals analysed here work within a specific morality underlying the hierarchical relationship in which that relationship is not only based on raw power and brute force: appeals, whether to or from a person in authority, depend on goodwill, affection, loyalty, and willing compliance. This suggests that such persuasive documents seek to strengthen or to create an affective relationship within social hierarchies that has its own rationale, beyond mere rational arguments or coercive force.

I would like to thank Feras Hamza for his insightful comments on this piece. I would also like to thank Ed Hayes and Petra Sijpesteijn for inviting me to this conference and particularly Petra for her comments on an earlier draft. We first discussed emotion in documents in 2018; it has been a pleasure to have the opportunity to think this through more thoroughly.

<sup>1</sup> For initial work on emotion in Arabic documents, see e.g. Khaled Mohamed Mahmoud Younes, 'Joy and Sorrow in Early Muslim Egypt: Arabic Papyrus Letters, Text and Content' (PhD Dissertation, Leiden University, 2013); Khaled Younes, 'Arabic Letters of Condolence on Papyrus', in *New Frontiers in Arabic Papyrology: Arabic and Multilingual Texts from Early Islam*, ed. Sobhi Bouderbala, Sylvie Denoix, and Matt Malczycki (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 65–100. Also see the work of Petra Sijpesteijn in this volume.

Recent contributions that steer away from purely top-down models of Islamic governance, such as those noted in the introduction to this volume, mark a significant difference from earlier characterisations. Earlier models might be represented by Patricia Crone, who characterised Islamic governance as coercive, based on ‘institutionalised violence ... in accordance with God’s law’. Crone notes that ‘coercive power was wielded only against evildoers. This was the essence of good government.’<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in her conception, the ideal medieval Islamic polity was inherently just, but it was also inherently violent: the threat of force was always present for wrongdoers. Linda Darling nuances the picture of justice by tracing the ‘circle of justice’ through time. In its shorthand form, this circle is: no power without troops, no troops without money, no money without prosperity, no prosperity without justice and good administration. This formulation, which shows that economic and social justice were key to Islamic rule, was present from pre-Islamic times and is cited by influential Islamic sources such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889).<sup>3</sup> The circle of justice ensures that good administration will entail social and economic justice toward the poor and the needy;<sup>4</sup> yet equal weight is given to the power of the state, represented by troops.

There can be no doubt that medieval Islamic governance involved a measure of violence: this can be seen in the threats issued in documents as well as in the descriptions in histories. Yet in some of the documents surveyed here, appeals to affection, loyalty, or piety outweigh threats, while in others it seems well understood that the threats of violence will not be carried out. Threats in such cases seem to be a rhetorical performance of state power, which is deployed along with rhetoric that invokes affection and appeals to ideals of piety, fairness, and morality. Hence it is possible to refine prior models: early Islamic governance was not merely violence tempered by a strictly functional or economic justice, but was also ideally an emotional connection of moral goodness, piety, affection, and loyalty between ruler and ruled.

Historians of emotion have long argued that it is worth paying attention to emotions in political discourse. Nicole Eustace, who specialises in eighteenth-century America, highlights the crossover in the language of love and affection between politics and personal relationships: in colonial America, ceremonial political declarations between king and subjects ‘relied heavily

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 61. The whole book is of great interest for ideas of social justice in the Islamic context.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

on the language of love'. The slippage between personal and political is no accident; she comments on how such language 'helped further the fiction that their interests naturally and entirely coincided ... [and] worked to elide distinctions between self and society, theoretically easing the tensions between communal and individual visions of the self'.<sup>5</sup> Taking a cue from such approaches, this article briefly compares the language used in communications to and from state officials with marriage contracts, and shows that both types of document rely more heavily on notions of piety and loyalty than they do on direct appeals to affection: it is God who is cast as the ultimate arbiter in both marriage contracts and in state communications, with the end result being the very same elision of the personal and political that Eustace notes in more direct expressions of affection. Personal piety becomes a reason for doing the right thing, either politically or within marriage; personal salvation comes to rest on correct actions in the body politic and in the household, and the hierarchical relationship becomes piously and emotionally charged.

Emotive appeals are particularly acute in documents that have a persuasive function such as those analysed here. The authors want something concrete, and in order to get it they seek to invoke a bond beyond the mere utilitarian. Ideally, such affective bonds would already exist; but presumably they were invoked more overtly in moments of tension, when there was a greater need to persuade. The connection between emotion and persuasion, which might be in some senses intuitive, has been subject to modern scientific studies focusing on the role of emotion in decision making,<sup>6</sup> but it is not entirely obvious how one might assess a medieval text's emotiveness. Emotion words might be a part of this effect, or the text might be written to provoke a feeling in its reader without any emotion words at all.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>5</sup> Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 109.

<sup>6</sup> There are many examples of scientific papers on the subjects of emotion and decision making and emotion and persuasion. A few include Jennifer Lerner, Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam, 'Emotion in Decision Making', *Annual Review of Psychology* 66 (2015), 799–823; Maria Micelli and Fiorella de Rosi, 'Emotional and Non-Emotional Persuasion', *Applied Artificial Intelligence* 20 (2006), 849–79; Richard Petty and Pablo Briñol, 'Emotion and Persuasion: Cognitive and Meta-Cognitive Processes Impact Attitudes', *Cognition and Emotion* 29 (2015), 1–26; Edmund T. Rolls, *Emotion and Decision Making Explained* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Few authors have attempted to assess what might be emotive about medieval texts in the Arabic/Islamic context, however. I have attempted to address this scholarly lacuna by focusing on the emotive aspect of texts, as well as their emotion words. See Karen Bauer, 'Emotion in the Qur'an: An Overview', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19 (2017), 1–30; 'Emotive Rhetoric, Plot, and Persuasion in a *Jihād* Sura (Q 8 Al-Anfal)', in *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, ed. Nicolai Sinai (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 480–512.

possibility of invoking emotion beyond emotion words has already been recognised by Willy Clarysse, who states that some of the most emotional letters in the Greek papyrus letters that he studied cannot be found through a word search, and that rather it is the tone that renders the letter emotional.<sup>8</sup> This paper highlights the affective potential of appeals to pious sentiment and goodness. Whether such appeals were believed, or whether they worked, are other questions; in some of the instances cited below, it seems certain that the answer was no.

This article is divided into four parts: (1) affection in greetings and blessings; (2) threats and appeals in the Arabic tax demands from the Umayyad governor of Egypt Qurra b. Sharik (in office 90–96/709–14) to the pagarch Basileios; (3) piety, affection, and loyalty between ruler and ruled, which examines a speech of the caliph al-Mu‘taḍid bi-llāh (r. 279–89/892–902) preserved by al-Ṭabarī; (4) the crossover between the personal and political: marriage contracts, which very briefly summarises the appeals to the husband’s piety and threats against him in marriage contracts, with some cross references to *ḥadīths* and *tafsīr*. All of the parts of the paper show the importance of piety and argue that it represents an emotional connection between both parties in the hierarchical relationship, but the final two sections most clearly demonstrate the slippage between the language of piety and the nature of duty in both personal and political relations.

## Affection in Greetings and Blessings

Most of the emotion in the documentary corpus is stylised: particular formulae were included for both state and private correspondence, and even from an early period there was a scribal culture which affected the writing of both official and private correspondence.<sup>9</sup> Many of the expressions of emotion in the documentary corpus, particularly in letters to or from state officials,

<sup>8</sup> In order to identify emotional content without a word search, Clarisse focuses on the way authors might stress concepts through the repetition of words, accumulating synonyms, polyp-ton (in which the same word is used in different forms), hendiadys (in which two words are connected by ‘and’ when one could be an adverb of another), superlatives and intensifiers (‘always’, ‘never’, etc.), and litotes, which is ironic understatement. Willy Clarisse, ‘Emotions in Greek Private Papyrus Letters’, *Ancient Society* 47 (2017), 63–86.

<sup>9</sup> Petra M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 226; see also Eugenio Garosi, ‘Cross-Cultural Parameters of Scribal Politesse in the Correspondence of Arab-Muslim Officials from Early Islamic Egypt’, in *Living the End of Antiquity: Individual Histories from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt*, edited by Sabine R. Huebner *et al.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 73–94.

therefore, occur in the greetings and blessings that were standard parts of the letter. Yet the formulaic nature of a corpus does not render it meaningless; on the contrary, a standard form makes it easier to recognise deviations from the norm, which might be emotive in character. Historians of emotion have argued that rhetorical and formulaic expressions of emotion are still meaningful: speaking about letters, Barbara Rosenwein even welcomes ‘common-places’ for, in her view, ‘one cannot separate feeling from rhetoric’, and ‘boilerplate has significance.’<sup>10</sup> For Rosenwein, the stylised nature of the emotion terms in greetings (‘Dear’ being her example) is significant in that such greetings delineate group affiliation: any change in the norms for letters and other correspondence can have significance. There is good evidence that the approach of paying attention to the stylised forms will pay off in Islamic studies: Rustow has recently argued that the increasingly stylised Fatimid petition is indicative of an ideology that the caliphs and other functionaries of the state ‘should take their role as patrons and protectors of the weak seriously.’<sup>11</sup> Greetings and blessings, therefore, can indicate something about proper comportment and moral expectations within the norms of just governance.

All of the letters in the documentary corpus contain greetings with some emotive sentiments, and these were a part of the formulae for this type of communication. So, for instance, a third-/ninth-century return by a tax officer from the *kūra* of al-Ushmūnayn to the central tax office includes several blessings and references to God’s help, which could be considered emotive:

2. what, by God’s help, has been done in numbering the asses belonging to the herds of Baḥr b. al-Ḥasan and [...]
3. We have written this, village by village; thus you may – may God strengthen you – order to expose this to Minā and Athantā
4. of your tax-office (*diwān*) ... if God will
5. May God prolong your life and be generous with you, may His grace upon you be complete, and may He increase [His beneficence towards you] (*aṭā-la Allāh baqā’aka wa-akramaka wa-atamma n’imatahu ‘alayka wa-zāda fī i[ḥsānihi ilayka]*)
6. in the name of God the Merciful, Compassionate (*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*).<sup>12</sup>

This letter seems to be typical of one from a subordinate to his superior. Its author asks that God strengthen the recipient, that He prolong his life, be

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 9. See also how she approaches emotion in the highly formulaic genre of martyrdom accounts, *ibid.* 59.

<sup>11</sup> Marina Rustow, ‘The Fatimid Petition’, *Jewish History* 32 (2019), 351–72.

<sup>12</sup> Edited by Adolf Grohmann as *P.Cair.Arab.* IV 261.

generous, and so forth. These pious blessings are emotive because they indicate the sender's goodwill towards the recipient; invoking positive sentiment and God's goodwill is a way of bolstering the request in the letter. We know nothing of how this sender may have actually felt about the recipient of the letter, but it seems that such greetings may have been expected as a part of the proper comportment of a subordinate to his or her social superior. Petra Sijpesteijn shows that, in at least one instance, extensive greetings indicate that the sender is of inferior social status to the recipient; greetings can also differ when the letter's recipient is a Christian rather than a Muslim.<sup>13</sup> She also notes all of the instances in her corpus where the greetings are more extensive and elaborate than normal, and indicates that this usually occurs in private letters.

In some of the letters published by Sijpesteijn, the greetings and emotive appeals seem to occur when making demands of the recipient. For instance, when Jarid b. As'ad writes to 'Abd Allāh b. As'ad requesting that the *jizya* payments only be made after the harvest, he includes the unusual 'may God make me your ransom for all evil in this world and the next', which Sijpesteijn notes is an unusual formulation at that time, though it later became common.<sup>14</sup> He furthermore says that failure in this 'is very harmful for us', thus encouraging his subordinate to make the tax collection properly and thereby co-opting him into the greater moral good. There are particularly extensive greetings in two of Sijpesteijn's published letters, and these are both from people in subordinate positions. In one case, the letter writer, al-Salṭ b. Muhājir, explains that he cannot yet pay back the money that he has been given,<sup>15</sup> and in one case the extensive greetings, which take up most of the preserved part of the papyrus, are a prelude to a request which has been lost with the rest of the papyrus.<sup>16</sup> These variations within what Sijpesteijn calls 'an intentional literary culture'<sup>17</sup> are enough to warrant further investigation into emotively charged language in requests; indeed, both Sijpesteijn and Oded Zinger have noted that the language of loneliness is used in both personal and official correspondence in order to strengthen requests. As in the case of the blessings noted above, this affective language

<sup>13</sup> Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 388–89; on the different greetings for Christians, 223. See also Eva Grob: *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters on Papyrus: Form and Function, Content and Context* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2010), 33ff, on slide-in blessings.

<sup>14</sup> Edited by Petra Sijpesteijn as *P.MuslimState* 22.

<sup>15</sup> *P.MuslimState* 29.

<sup>16</sup> *P.MuslimState* 33.

<sup>17</sup> Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 233.

is tied to piety and to notions of moral goodness which bind personal relationships of patronage and protection as much as state relations.<sup>18</sup>

### Threats and Appeals in Tax Demands from Qurra to Basileios

Among the best-known and earliest-published papyri documents are letters from the governor of Egypt Qurra b. Sharik to Basileios, the Pagarch of Aphroditō. Qurra b. Sharik was the governor of Egypt from 90/709 to 96/714, under the caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Mālik.<sup>19</sup> His letters have been the subject of several studies from the 1930s onward.<sup>20</sup> The significance of these letters has never been doubted, but the import of their content has proven somewhat controversial. As Sijpesteijn has noted, such letters are meant not just to convey information, but to transmit the message of state authority.<sup>21</sup> They have been given as evidence for authoritarian governance of Umayyad rulers; alternatively, Grohmann argued that they show Qurra to have been a fair and clement governor,<sup>22</sup> while Papaconstantinou's view is that the very repetition of threats in these letters indicates Qurra's relative powerlessness. Rather than indicating the absolute power of the state, the correspondence indicates its many weaknesses; thus 'the governor's rhetorical flights should not be taken absolutely literally'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See the contributions of Petra Sijpesteijn and Oded Zinger in this volume, and Oded Zinger, 'The Use of Social Isolation (*inqitāʿ*) by Jewish Women in Medieval Egypt', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 63 (2020): 820–52.

<sup>19</sup> Clifford E. Bosworth, 'Qurra b. Sharik'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition*, ed. Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford E. Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel, and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill). Consulted online on 30 October 2019 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_4548](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4548)>.

<sup>20</sup> Including Nabia Abbott, *The Qurra Papyri in the Oriental Institute* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 15) (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1938); Henri Lammens, 'Un gouverneur omayyade d'Égypte, Qorra ibn Šarik, d'après les papyrus arabes', in *Études sur le siècle des Omayyades* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1930), 305–23; Tonio Sebastian Richter, 'Language Choice in the Qurra Dossier', in *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt from the Ptolemies to the ʿAbbāsids*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 189–220.

<sup>21</sup> Or, as Sijpesteijn puts it, 'Letters issued by government offices, for example, functioned as symbols of sovereignty, transmitting important messages about authority and statehood and projecting images of the state's self-representation' (*Shaping a Muslim State*, 219).

<sup>22</sup> 'The Qurra shown by the papyri is a quite different person. There is no trace at all of any tyrannical or oppressive conduct. Qurra is very anxious to safeguard the people against oppression by his subordinates, tax officials, as well as the headmen of the small villages. . . . He appears as a zealous servant of the Caliph' according to Grohmann, *From the World of Arabic Papyri* (Cairo: al-Maʿārif Press, 1952), 123–24.

<sup>23</sup> Arietta Papaconstantinou, 'The Rhetoric of Power and the Voice of Reason: Tensions between Central and Local in the Correspondence of Qurra ibn Sharik', in *Official Epistolography and the Language(s) of Power: Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Research Network*

Papaconstantinou presents evidence gleaned from the documents that Basileios hid fugitives, that he was dishonest, that he sent adulterated coins in payment, and that he engaged in trafficking.<sup>24</sup> Yet, despite the numerous threats in the Qurra papyri, she shows that there is no sign that any of these were carried out.<sup>25</sup> In the end, she argues that the ‘repeated threats that were never put into practice [show] that this exhibition of power was to some extent a compensation for a fundamental impotence.’<sup>26</sup> Either Basileios would not, or could not, comply with these demands, and there is no evidence that he was made to comply. If these letters were ultimately ineffective, then all parties concerned must have known the limited power of the state. In this regard, it is highly significant that the threats here are often tempered with appeals to Basileios’ better nature and indeed to some kind of positive opinion on Qurra’s part.

A letter from Qurra to Basileios from Shawwāl 91 (August, 710) is a magnificently preserved document which exemplifies such emotive rhetoric. In it, Qurra (through his scribe, ‘Umayr) pressures Basileios to pay the taxes owing. It starts with the promise (1), it moves to an implied threat, which can be averted if the recipient displays the ‘trustworthiness, efficiency, and promptness’ that the author expects (2), and ends with an admonition to follow the good guidance offered in the letter, which will result in fair treatment (3) (numbering and paragraphing are mine):

- [1] Verily if I find with you what I should like to find respecting regular remittance and satisfactory consignment, I shall do good to you, and do you favour, and strengthen for you your business and your administration, and I hope, if God wills, that it may be so.
- [2] But if I find your administration otherwise, then as the man is only rewarded according to his work (*yujzā al-marʿu bi-ʿamalihī*)<sup>27</sup> blame only yourself. Do not remain in arrears [after the date] which I have named, and I do not wish to learn of your insufficiency or unpunctuality nor that you come to me leaving any part of the money behind. For indeed, by God, nobody acts that way without learning when he comes to me that what he has done is wrong, and faulty in the discharge of his official duties. I should not wish that anybody should see in your administration anything of which he disapproves: any insufficiency, withholding or annulling. For when I sent you to your post, it was with the expectation that you would show trustworthiness, efficiency and promptness in thy office.

*Imperium & Officium, Comparative Studies in Ancient Bureaucracy and Officialdom, University of Vienna, 10–12 November 2010*, eds. Stephan Procházka, Lucian Reinfandt, and Sven Tost (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), 267–80, at 268.

<sup>24</sup> Papaconstantinou, ‘The Rhetoric of Power’, 271.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 273.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 277.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Q 7:147, 9:121, 24:38, 27:90 *et passim*.

[3] May you then be near to the good opinion I hold of you (*aḥsan ḡannī bika*). By God, if you act virtuously and are entirely trustworthy (*la-in takūna muḥsinan mujamalan aminan*), then I would prefer that and it would please me more than if it were otherwise (*aḥabbu ilayya wa-aʿjab ʿindī min an takūna ʿalā ghayr dhālika*). Do not burden yourself with ignominy nor corrupt your administration and ask God's aid, for if anyone really cares for the well-being and shows trustworthiness, God will also help him and further his work. Then present yourself to me with an account-book, about which you think I might question you respecting the administrative sphere of your country and its clerks. And hail to him who follows the guidance. And ʿUmayr has written it in Shawwāl of the year 91.<sup>28</sup>

The structure of this letter echoes the structure of what I have called an 'emotional plot' in the Qur'an. In this rhetorical strategy, the audience is faced with a choice: either be humble and obey and be granted ultimate salvation, or arrogantly disobey and face damnation.<sup>29</sup> As in the Qur'an, the threats and promises in this document are emotively couched in heavily moral language: obedience is associated with virtue (*iḥsān*), goodness, trustworthiness, and piety. Qurra assures Basileios that he has a good opinion of him, and that this good opinion merely needs to be fulfilled. The expression of some type of esteem or affection, and appeals to the better nature of the recipient, are a crucial part of the persuasive rhetoric. Here, as in the greetings studied above, notions of piety and moral goodness are integral to persuasiveness.

According to all evidence, it was common for someone in difficult circumstances to invoke God's help, thereby invoking the mercy of the person receiving the request; in some cases, the connection between God's help and the recipient's help is explicit.<sup>30</sup> In the third part of this letter, Basileios is explicitly warned not to invoke God in order to dodge his own responsibilities; he is told that God will help those who are trustworthy. The implication is clear: for Basileios to invoke God's help in such a scenario would be a calculated act of impiety. This assumes that the sender and recipient, though from different religious communities, are bound by the same moral code under God.

The esteem expressed in this initial letter wanes, and threats are more direct, in subsequent communications. In the letter reproduced below, Qurra threatens Basileios with the severest punishment and the heaviest fine if he does not send the full weight and measure of taxes. Despite the threat in

<sup>28</sup> *P.Cair.Arab.* III 146. Translation Grohmann's, with my amendments.

<sup>29</sup> Bauer, 'Emotion in the Qur'an', 1–30.

<sup>30</sup> On this, see the contribution of Sijpesteijn in this volume.

lines 1–3 of the letter, in line 10 Qurra nevertheless assures Basileios of his leniency, should the taxes come to him.

1. this term him I will punish with severest
2. punishment and inflict upon him the heaviest
3. fine. And I do not imagine that this
4. has not come to your knowledge nor
5. that it has come to the knowledge of the people of your district. And
6. upon my life the term is now past by more than
7. two months, and I had written to you before
8. this letter commanding that you send to us with all speed what you
9. have already gathered in,
10. and I would act leniently towards them and treat them with indulgence ...<sup>31</sup>

These letters emphasise Qurra's power over Basileios, but equally they show him as a just ruler, who will not punish without cause. Many of Qurra's letters contain such threats and promises.<sup>32</sup>

A different model of coercion is seen in another letter from Qurra to Basileios, concerning arrears in taxes, from year 90 or 91 (708–10): it is impossible to tell if it is before or after the documents just analysed. In this letter, Qurra tells Basileios to remit the taxes that will be used to pay the troops, 'because the people have been concerned for months'.<sup>33</sup> Qurra here shows himself to be the protector of the army, and to be in a delicate balancing act whereby taxes from one community go to finance another. The mention of the people's concern is a way of imparting urgency to the request, as well as showing Qurra as someone who looks after those people. Even if they were ultimately ineffective, the promises and threats in these letters are not only meant to display the coercive violence of the state, but also the justness of the ruler enacting the law, his ultimate clemency, and his trust in the virtue and better nature of the recipient.

<sup>31</sup> *PCair.Arab.* III 149, 15–19, dated 90–91 AH (708–10).

<sup>32</sup> For instance: 'They have yet three days. So if they bring the money of this tribute but if not then he will beat 2. each one of them every day ten 3. strokes of the whip and he will inflict on him one dinar out of his own means' (*PCair.Arab.* III 170). But also see the numerous examples of threats cited by Papaconstantinou.

<sup>33</sup> 'You know already what I have written to you about gathering in the [tax] money and about that which is pending with respect to allowance to the troops and their families and to the sending off of the men to the campaign. Now when this my letter comes to you, set yourself to collect the money, for indeed the country folk (*ahl al-arḍ*) have been concerned for months (*qad ḥammū mundhu ashhar*). Then hasten to send me what has been gathered in.' (*PCair.Arab.* III 148).

## Piety, Affection, and Loyalty between Ruler and Ruled

This section focuses on a document preserved in a historical source, which demonstrates the response of the Abbasid caliph al-Mu‘taḍid bi-llāh to popular pro-Umayyad sentiment; his response centres on what one might call ‘coercive piety’. Rather than threatening his subjects with any worldly punishment for their lack of loyalty, al-Mu‘taḍid instead invokes God, with the implication that his subjects will be punished in the Hereafter if they do not obey him. The central argument of the speech is that al-Mu‘taḍid has been entrusted by God with the leadership of the community: loyalty, affection, and obedience to God and the Prophet necessarily entail obedience to the Prophet’s family and hence to al-Mu‘taḍid himself. Furthermore, to show any loyalty to, or affection for, Mu‘āwīya (r. 41–60/661–80) and to any of the Umayyads would be to disobey God. The speech is highly emotive, using strong language to denigrate the Umayyads and to paint them as enemies of God and the Prophet, and as unjust rulers. This speech portrays al-Mu‘taḍid as enacting a standard of morality and goodness that involves not straight coercion with threats of violence, but rather affection and loyalty, which is merited because the caliph (unlike his enemies) does not merely use violence to subdue his detractors.

Al-Mu‘taḍid’s lengthy speech is found in the final volume of al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) *History*, a volume that recounts events from within al-Ṭabarī’s own lifetime. The events in question take place in 284/897, when al-Ṭabarī was around 58 years old. At that time, it seems that the Abbasid caliphate was threatened by people who felt loyalty to Mu‘āwīya, even though the events in question took place 217 years after the end of Mu‘āwīya’s reign in 60/680, and 147 years after the end of the Umayyad caliphate. Al-Mu‘taḍid’s plan was to stifle this pro-Umayyad sentiment by cursing Mu‘āwīya from the pulpit. He had a document written up to this effect, drawing on an earlier document from al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218/813–33); but his courtiers convinced him not to have it read aloud, pointing out that it might stoke up pro-‘Alid feeling.<sup>34</sup> The document may well be authentic: Rosenthal points out that al-Ṭabarī went to great pains to collect documents within his lifetime as close to the events as they were happening, and that ‘his

<sup>34</sup> Franz Rosenthal comments on this, saying that ‘in effect, anti-Umayyad feeling went hand in hand with pro-‘Alid sentiments and that the ‘Alid movement was more powerful and dangerous than any pro-Umayyad activities’. *The History of al-Ṭabarī* vol. 38 *The Return of the Caliphate to Baghdad*, translated by Franz Rosenthal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 64 n. 333.

accounts are as authentic as anyone can expect from any pre-modern age.<sup>35</sup> It seems, in any case, unlikely that al-Ṭabarī fabricated this document; many of the Qurʾanic interpretations in it go against al-Ṭabarī's own views in his *tafsīr*. Although the speech was written by al-Muʿtaḍid's scribe Abū al-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sulaymān, for the sake of clarity I will refer to it as Muʿtaḍid's speech throughout.

The speech begins with blessings on God and quotes from the Qurʾan. The theme here is God's knowledge of people's interior and exterior, everything hidden and manifest, and everything that people do: they are then admonished to obey Him, and to be wary of Him.<sup>36</sup> There follow blessings on the Prophet, who is described as coming with the clear message, guiding those who followed him and subduing those who oppose him. The blessings on God and the Prophet act as a precursor to the blessing on the Caliph and his ancestors, with the claim that God has made him and his ancestors the heirs to the Prophet, upholder of the religion, and the one who will 'set straight his believing servants' until 'God gives victory to His religion over all others'. This part, then, seeks to establish the Caliph as a legitimate God-given ruler, with God-granted power over the people; the blessings are specifically targeted to convince people that acting in obedience to their caliph is equivalent to obeying God, with the threat of God watching them.

After the introductory remarks, al-Muʿtaḍid says that he has learned of the disloyalty of some of his subjects. Such disloyalty is framed in terms of doubting their religion and being corrupted in their belief by following their desires (a Qurʾanic trope), following false leaders, and 'manifesting patronage (*muwālā*) for one whom God cut off from patronage, severed from divine protection, drove out of the religious community, and made it necessary to curse',<sup>37</sup> which is to say Muʿāwiya. Here, Qurʾanic quotes are used to back up Muʿtaḍid's argument: he claims, for instance, that the 'accursed tree' of Q 17:60 refers to the Umayyads, and that the verse 'the night of power is better than a thousand months' (Q 97:3) refers to a thousand months of Umayyad rule. Hadiths are also called forth throughout this part of the speech.

Al-Muʿtaḍid says that he feels it is his religious duty to set the people straight. This he does by telling the history of the Prophet's relationship with the Umayyad clan, portrayed as his chief opponents; they were led in every battle by Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb (Muʿāwiya's father) (d. 32/653) 'and his

<sup>35</sup> Rosenthal, *History* vol. 38, xiii. Cf. *ibid.* 47 nn. 238 and 247.

<sup>36</sup> Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk* vol. 10, ed. Muhammad Asūl al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Beirut: Dar Iḥyāʾ li-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2008), 261.

<sup>37</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 10:261; translation is modified from Rosenthal, *History* vol. 38, 50.

Umayyad partisans'.<sup>38</sup> Here, al-Mu'taḍid claims for a second time that the Umayyads are the cursed tree, cursed by God; many examples are given of Abū Sufyān's iniquities and enmity to the Prophet. The Prophet's early struggles are thus semantically linked to the current caliph's struggles with his disloyal subjects. It is clear that the affection and loyalty that the believers feel for the Prophet, and the indignation that they feel towards his enemies, are meant to be transferred to this current situation. Religious affect is invoked repeatedly not only through references to the Prophet, but also the Qur'an itself.

After the polemic against Abū Sufyān, al-Mu'taḍid next targets Abū Sufyān's son Mu'āwiya, who is the object of loyalty among Mu'taḍid's own subjects. Unsurprisingly, Mu'āwiya is portrayed as an unjust and immoral person at every turn: fighting against 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 35–40/656–60) and hence attempting to 'extinguish the light of God' (Q 9:32), and so forth. The speech dwells at length on Mu'āwiya's most controversial move, which was the appointment of his son Yazīd (r. 60–64/680–83) as caliph after him. The Abbasid sources regard this appointment as the height of injustice: Yazīd was not fit for rulership.<sup>39</sup> Mu'taḍid argues that the problem with this appointment is not only that Yazīd is an incompetent; it is also that the manner of this appointment shows that Mu'āwiya himself was the wrong kind of ruler: one who used coercive threats, violence, and terrorizing tactics with no accompanying affection or justice:

Furthermore there is Mu'āwiya's disdainful attitude towards the religion of God, manifested by his calling God's servants to his son Yazīd, that arrogant drunken sot, that owner of cocks, cheetahs, and monkeys. He forced the best of Muslims (*khiyār al-muslimīn*) to give him the oath of allegiance for Yazīd with compulsion (*qahr*), force (*saṭwa*), threats, frightful menace, and terror (*rahba*), while knowing of Yazīd's foolishness.<sup>40</sup>

The emotive language is thick here; it centres on an allegation that the 'best of Muslims' did not pledge their allegiance to Yazīd willingly, but rather because they were forced, threatened, menaced, and terrorized. This, in a

<sup>38</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 10:262; Rosenthal, *History* vol. 38, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Speaking about the appointment in his history of the Umayyad period, al-Ṭabarī says that even Mu'āwiya himself was worried that the people would not accept his appointment of Yazīd, al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* vol. 18 *Between the Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Mu'āwiya* trans. Michael G. Morony (Albany: SUNY press, 1987), 185. Mu'āwiya enlists support for his cause from his advisors. One of these advisors mentions that Yazīd is 'neglectful, given his devotion to hunting', and another says that he will have a quiet word with Yazīd and tell him to change his ways.

<sup>40</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 10:265; tr. modified from Rosenthal, *History* vol. 38, 58.

nutshell, is the difference between good and bad statecraft: whereas al-Mu‘taḍid is encouraging proper loyalty and obedience from his subjects with recourse to religion and, presumably, affection, unjust leaders like Mu‘āwīya must use brute force, terror, and duress.

Al-Ṭabarī himself does not record any such event about the ‘best of Muslims’ being made to give an oath to Yazīd under duress, but it may be possible to fill in this missing detail from elsewhere: such an event is recorded by the earlier Abbasid-era historian Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ (d. c. 240/855). Ibn Khayyāṭ describes how four prominent Muslims opposed the appointment of Yazīd: al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680), who was the Prophet’s grandson; Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692), who was the son of the Prophet’s Companion al-Zubayr (d. 36/656); ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr (d. 675), who was the son of the caliph Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–34); and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73/693), who was the son of the caliph ‘Umar (r. 13–23/634–44).<sup>41</sup> According to this account, Ibn al-Zubayr suggested that Mu‘āwīya could follow the precedent of the Prophet or prior caliphs by letting the community decide the succession, appointing someone only distantly related, or convening a council of Muslims for the task.<sup>42</sup> Mu‘āwīya’s response was to gather these men together and to threaten them directly with violence if they did not comply:

‘Any of you who wanted to do so has been able to come up to me and call me a liar in public, and I have tolerated this of him. I am about to speak. If I speak truly, then my veracity is to my credit. If I speak falsely, then my lies will be held against me. I swear to you by God that if any of you utters one word in reply to me during my speech, he will not receive a word in response before I obtain his head’... then he summoned the captain of his guard and said, ‘station two men from your guard corps to watch every one of these men. If anyone should utter one word in reply to me while I am delivering my speech, truly or falsely, have the two men strike him with their swords.’ Then he went out and they went with him. He mounted the pulpit, praised God, and said, ‘these individuals are the leaders of the Muslims, and the best of the Muslims. We cannot act independently of them, and we cannot carry out any plans except after consulting with them. They have pledged allegiance to Yazīd, the son of the Commander of the Faithful, and have recognised him as heir apparent. So pledge allegiance, in the name of God.’<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The group is described as riding together to Mecca, Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt’s History on the Umayyad Dynasty (660–750)*, translated and introduced by Carl Wurtzel and prepared by Robert Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 69–70. The whole story of this initial opposition to Yazīd’s caliphate spans pp. 67–74.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 71–72.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 72.

The governance displayed by Mu‘āwīya in this account is precisely the opposite of that displayed by al-Mu‘taḍid in his speech. Mu‘āwīya does not call on the piety of the subjects or use any other forms of ‘soft’ emotive persuasion to convince the people that his son Yazīd is actually the rightful leader of the community. Affection and politesse are notably lacking. Rather, Mu‘āwīya uses overtly violent coercion and deception: because justice is not on his side, he resorts to brute force and deceit. His misrepresentation of the dissidents’ position means that the people pledge their allegiance to Yazīd under the false pretence that these prominent dissidents have done the same. Mu‘āwīya is said to have left immediately after the incident, and the people then confronted the dissidents, who said that they had been coerced; but the deed had been done and it seems that all regarded the pledge of allegiance as irreversible.

None of these events transmitted by Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ about the coercion of ‘the best of Muslims’ are in al-Ṭabarī’s own history, which has a much less colourful take on the announcement of the succession. While it is notoriously hard to judge the veracity of Abbasid-era histories of the Umayyads, these particular tales have the air of folklore: it is unclear that a dissident could really have come to the Caliph to tell him how to arrange his succession, without serious reprisal. True or not, al-Mu‘taḍid’s brief reference to the ‘best of Muslims’ being forced to pledge allegiance indicates that this event, or one quite like it, was likely a part of the public memory of Mu‘āwīya; this concrete instance of violent coercion and deceit forms a foil against al-Mu‘taḍid’s own style of governance.

After his brief reference to this incident, al-Mu‘taḍid goes on to talk about Yazīd’s many misdeeds, which are painted in highly emotive language: he speaks about how Yazīd directly commanded unjust bloodshed and the violation of women, which shows that he had no regard for society’s vulnerable members, how he publicly manifested his unbelief, and how he permitted Medina to be plundered for three days, and ‘thereby quenched his raging rancor (*ghalīl*)’.<sup>44</sup> Yazīd is portrayed as someone who is ultimately out of control of his desires and his temper; the opposite of a good Muslim and a good ruler. The speech then cites a poem attributed to Yazīd in which he laments the losses at Badr, the battle which Muḥammad’s army won, and praises the Battle of Uḥud, which Muḥammad’s army lost. These famous early battles, which are told in highly emotive ways in the Prophet’s biographies, were likely to have lived on in popular memory. Such incidents, so deeply ingrained in cultural memory and shared history, become a part of the Caliph’s rhetorical arsenal,

<sup>44</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 10:264; trans. Rosenthal *History* vol. 38, 59.

here deployed to rile people up against the Umayyads. Unsurprisingly, the speech also describes the way that Yazīd ordered the killing of the Prophet's grandson al-Ḥusayn in very emotive terms, saying that it is the worst and grossest deed, and that it was committed out of Yazīd's disdain for the Prophet and his unbelief in the religion. Such stories are intended to stir the current audience and to move them. Though few emotion words are used, such stories are the height of emotive rhetoric. In comparison with rhetoric in other contexts, it is particularly noteworthy that this emotive rhetoric centres on Islamic history and pious sentiments.

Al-Muʿtaḍid concludes by telling his subjects that God has given them rules so that they may be obeyed: 'So cease, O people, from doing that which makes God angry (*s-kh-t*) at you, and return to doing what makes Him happy with you.'<sup>45</sup> Hence the speech does not rely heavily on invocations of direct affection for the ruler himself, but rather on affection for the Prophet and his family, and on making God happy, rather than angry, by being obedient. The root for the term 'anger' (*s-kh-t*) may be a reference to the Qurʾanic verses that use this term. *Sakhṭ* only occurs four times in the Qurʾan, all in Medinan verses that have as their subject those who disobey God's laws. Q 3:162 occurs amid exhortations to the believers and asks the rhetorical question: *Is the one who follows God's pleasure like the one who earns God's anger, and whose refuge is Hell, an evil destination?* Q 5:80 refers to God's anger at those Jews who take deniers (*kāfirūn*) as allies and protectors (*awliyāʾ*). Q 9:58 warns those in the community of believers who become angry at the Prophet when they do not receive a share in the *ṣadaqa*, the charitable contributions of the community. Finally, Q 47:28 alludes to those who were seduced by Satan, who turned their backs on God's guidance and pursued what made God angry, and who will consequently be punished in the Afterlife. In all cases, the term is included in verses that refer to some kind of betrayal of the community of believers, which is a key theme in Medinan suras, and the overarching context of these verses is to encourage the believers to obey God's guidance and to be loyal to the Prophet and the community. In al-Muʿtaḍid's speech, the people are encouraged to 'be pleased with what God has chosen for you', meaning al-Muʿtaḍid himself. The emotive rhetoric here is less about direct affection between the Caliph and his people than it is about obedience to the Caliph assuming the status of a pious act.

The potential for crossover between personal and political language raises the question of whether the Abbasid caliphs' love lives, recorded so

<sup>45</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 10:265.

prominently in the histories and in poetry, assumed a political dimension, encouraging affection and loyalty to them through the stories of the affection of their wives and concubines. The freed concubine Bid‘a, for instance, visited al-Mu‘taḍid after he returned home from a campaign. When she saw that his hair had gone white, she composed some lines to say that this only increased his beauty. The poem is full of well wishes for a long life.<sup>46</sup> Al-Mu‘taḍid rewarded her handsomely for her lines, before sending her home. In this (doubtless carefully constructed) glimpse into his personal life, he is shown to be generous, fair, and affectionate to this clever woman who had shown her affection for him.

### The Crossover between the Personal and Political: Marriage Contracts

The speech of al-Mu‘taḍid relies heavily on the language of piety and the emotional bond that is presumably created between ruler and ruled, by sharing the same norms and teleological view of history. Piety is also used as an inducement to be good in one’s personal life. Preserved marriage contracts from the Abbasid period include admonishments to the husband to ‘be wary of God’ with respect to his wife (as one from 264/878 says: ‘*wa-‘alayhi an yattaqī Allāh fihā*’<sup>47</sup>) and to ‘make companionship with her pleasant (*yuḥsinu ṣuḥbatahā*)’. Contractually, at least, these documents portray marriage as a hierarchical relationship in which a husband’s fair treatment of his wife is an aspect of piety: if he mistreats her, he is being impious. The threat in these cases is not from the ruler of the state but from God Himself. Many contracts have such wording, because it is included in the formula for the contracts;<sup>48</sup> but the wording of these formulations varies slightly from contract to contract. For instance, a contract from 279/892 states:

He should be wary of God alone, He has no companion, and make companionship with her and living with her pleasant, and not harm her, and do as God has ordered (*an yattiqiya Allāh waḥdahu lā sharīk lahu*

<sup>46</sup> Ibn al-Sā‘ī, *Kitāb Jihāt al-a’ima al-khulafā’ min al-ḥarā’ir wa-l-imā’*, translated as *Consorts of the Caliphs: Women and the Court of Baghdad*, ed. Shawkat Toorawa, trans. the editors of the Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 32–35.

<sup>47</sup> This phrase is from a contract dated 264 (878), found in *P.Cair.Arab.* I 39.

<sup>48</sup> Karen Bauer, ‘A Note on the Relationship between *Tafsīr* and Common Understanding, with Reference to Contracts of Marriage’, in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, eds. Asad Ahmed, Robert Hoyland, Behnam Sadeghi, and Adam Silverstein (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 97–111. Similar phrasing is included in documents *P.Cair.Arab.* I 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, and 45.

*wa-yuḥsina ṣuḥbatihā wa-ʿishratihā wa-lā yuḍārra bihā wa-yafʿala mā amarahu Allāh*)<sup>49</sup>

In this contract, the husband's wariness of God entails good treatment of his wife and not harming her. Indeed, it seems that such admonishments are meant to encourage the sort of moral comportment on display in the other contemporary documents: morality and goodness do not consist in brute force, but in maintaining ties of loyalty, duty, and affection. The emotion components of these contracts relate both to *ḥadīth* and to *tafsīr*. The admonishment to live companionably with women is from a *ḥadīth* attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, and the admonishment to 'be wary of God' is from the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage Oration:

Be wary of God with respect to women, for you have only taken them as a trust from God, and coitus with them has become lawful for you by God's word. Your right over them is that they not allow anyone whom you dislike to tread on your beds (*firāsh*), and if they do, then strike them without hurting them severely (*ghayr mubarrīḥ*). Their right over you is to their sustenance and clothing according to customary practice (*bi-l-maʿrūf*). I have left you with something that, if you hold fast to it, you will never err thereafter: the book of God Blessed and Exalted! And you will be asked about it.<sup>50</sup>

This version of the Oration is found in al-Wāqidi's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ḥajj*. This is the explanation of the command to 'be wary of God with respect to women': it describes and circumscribes men's rights over women and women's rights over men. The entire tone reminds men that having power over their wives is a privilege extended to them by God: the clear implication is that they must not overstep their power over their wives, because this relationship is ultimately ruled by God. Men have the right that women must not let anyone whom they dislike in the house (beds here probably meaning sleeping-mats, unrolled for the night on the floor), and if they do so their husbands may strike them; wives have the right to food and clothing. This *ḥadīth* thus clarifies that the husbands do not have unlimited rights over their wives, nor do the wives have them over their husbands. While from today's perspective this text may seem as though it grants permission to the husband to strike his wife, seen in its late-antique context, it was surely a limitation of his right to beat her;

<sup>49</sup> *P.Cair.Arab.* I 41.

<sup>50</sup> Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* ed. Marsden Jones (Oxford University, 1966); translation mine.

this is particularly the case for the phrase *ghayr mubarriḥ*, which I have translated above as ‘without hurting them severely’.<sup>51</sup>

This *ḥadīth* is a brief gloss on Q 4:34, which is the verse that imposes rules for the husband’s chastisement of his wife, by saying that if she rises up against him (or, in an alternative translation, if she abandons him), he may admonish her, abandon her in the bed, and strike her.<sup>52</sup> Other versions of the oration do not include the words ‘fear God with respect to women’; versions on the authority of al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887), and al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), begin ‘treat women well, for they are your captives’; these versions also include a more extensive gloss on Q 4:34. Commentators on the Qur’an (*mufasssīrūn*) used some version of this *ḥadīth* to interpret Q 4:34, for, without exception, they all say that the hitting should be *ghayr mubarriḥ*. Several of the major interpreters whose works are extant from the period of these marriage contracts (viz. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. circa 307/919), al-Ṭabarī, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072)), only cite the phrase *ghayr mubarriḥ*, rather than citing the rest of the *ḥadīth*. Al-Ṭabarī comes closest to the *ḥadīth*, when he gives a warning to men at the end of the verse, the final clause of which reads ‘and if they obey you, seek not a way against them’:

So fear God lest you should be unjust towards them and seek a way against them while they are being obedient to you, for your Lord, who is higher than you and higher than everything, and greater than you and greater than everything, will make them triumph over you.<sup>53</sup>

Here al-Ṭabarī tells men that if they have the proper wariness of God, they will not be unjust towards their wives, because God will ultimately protect women, presumably in the next life rather than in this one. This is a clear statement of the men’s duties to enact the social hierarchy properly, without going beyond the bounds that circumscribe their command over their wives. Mistreatment of their wives is portrayed as a sin that will be punished in the Hereafter. This helps to nuance the sorts of behaviours that were acceptable in the home and the moral language in which the husband

<sup>51</sup> Edward Lane glosses *mubarriḥ* as ‘hurting severely’ in his *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93); Albin de Biberstein Kazimirsky has ‘très-sensible, très pénible, qui cause une douleur violente’ in his *Dictionnaire arabe-français* (Paris: Maissonneuve, 1860).

<sup>52</sup> The literature on this verse is extensive. For further references and primary sources, see Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza, eds., *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries*, Volume II: *On Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2021), 315–459.

<sup>53</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, at Q 4:34.

was admonished. All of these early commentators say that the husband may only expect obedience, not love, from his wife, for love is not in the women's control:

Do not seek out a way to that which is illicit to you of their bodies and their property through pretexts (*'ilal*), and that is that one of you might say to one of them while she is being obedient to him, 'you do not love me and you hate me', and so he would strike her for that or harm her. So God, Exalted be He, says to men, 'if they obey you' that is to say despite their hatred for you, so do not commit an outrage against them, nor should you charge them with love for you, for that is not in their hands. So do not strike them or harm them because of it.<sup>54</sup>

The relationship between emotional control and worldly hierarchy is clear here. The husband's emotional submission to God, through wariness, enables his correct comportment in his role as head of household. He must not act on his anger. Just as the husband must submit emotionally to God, the wife must submit to the husband through her obedience, despite her hatred of him. She, too, must exercise emotional control by not acting on that hatred, and by submitting to his sexual advances despite it. The threat in these sources is not from husband to wife (as it was likely to have been in the lived household experience of many women) but from scholar (representing God) to the husband. While the husband might punish his disobedient wife, God will punish the disobedient husband. As in politics, however, proper rule is not predicated entirely or even mainly on force: rather, the implication is that brute force should not be used; it is overtly mitigated by appeals to piety, leniency, and kindness, the kindness being most apparent in the marriage contracts themselves. While the boundaries of legal behaviour may include the husband's physical chastisement of his wife, the kindness enjoined by the contracts is clearly preferable.

### Conclusion: Emotional Bonds in Hierarchical Relationships

This paper has suggested that there is an emotional connection in medieval Islamic hierarchical relationships that is not merely based on fear of the person lower on the hierarchy for the one in the superior social position. This argument rests partly on the idea that morality and piety are affectively charged: justice is not only an economic matter but involves larger notions

<sup>54</sup> al-Ṭabari, *Jāmi' al-bayān fi ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, at Q 4:34; trans. Bauer and Hamza, *Anthology*.

of goodness, loyalty, and affection, which creates a rhetorical slippage between personal piety and political obedience, between the interior and exterior realms, and between the individual and the community (*umma*); loyalty to and affection for revered figures such as the Prophet can be transferred onto the caliphs. Hence, what is good and pious for oneself as a person becomes what is good for the household and indeed for the larger polity. Persuasive rhetoric regularly invokes such personal–political elisions precisely to convince people that their own best interests are served through their willing obedience to state structures. This ‘affective contract’ goes both ways: the ruler also must show his affection and bond to his people; both the ruler and the ruled are best served by the latter’s willing compliance and affection, not just their fear of reprisals in case of wrongdoing. The real fear should not be of the caliph or the husband in a spousal bond, but of God Himself: He will punish those who go against the propriety enjoined in these documents.

The arguments presented here hinge on the idea that texts can be emotive, which is to say, they can evoke emotion in the recipient, and that this can be considered central to a text’s persuasive power. In this regard, it is important to note that the documents surveyed here are, to us, texts to be read; but their function at the time was primarily as an oral communication: they were dictated to scribes and read out to the recipients. Such documents are perhaps our best examples of persuasive rhetoric from the periods in question. The aim here has not been to discern how the recipient of these communications felt, but rather to highlight the various emotive strategies used to persuade them to comply. Hence a request from someone socially inferior is strengthened by including flattery and extensive affectionate greetings and blessings; a request for taxes from a state official is grounded on threats but is strengthened by pleas to the recipient’s better nature and promises of fair treatment, should the recipient comply. In recognition of the extent of the husband’s rights over his wife, marriage contracts admonish the husband to fear God with respect to his wife, and often include instructions that he should be kind to her. But perhaps the most telling document is the speech of the caliph, which includes no direct threats to his people at all, but instead seeks to create an affective bond between caliph and subject, ruler and ruled that rests on a construction of piety in which all are obedient to God and the subject’s obedience to God entails obedience to the caliph. The caliph’s right to God’s trust is presumably merited by his own just treatment of his subjects, while the enemies are vilified not only for being unjust and poor rulers but also for going against the emotive bonds to the Prophet and his family.

As noted above, it is often impossible to judge the effect of such emotive rhetoric: the intended effect may not have been the actual effect of such communications. Threats might not have induced fear, but rather anger, surprise, or insolence. The result of a threat might not be compliance, but disregard, recalcitrance, or retaliation. Indeed, it seems that the threats from Qurra had no effect on Basileios whatsoever. By the same token, the pleading, flattery, or emotive appeals to the recipient's conscience seen in both personal and political correspondence, rather than provoking mercy or kindness, might be met with indifference, disdain, annoyance, or even anger. The scholars' repeated admonishments to husbands not to overstep the bounds of the marital relationship seem to indicate precisely the great leeway that husbands had over their wives (confirmed in the legal sources), and potentially show the *de facto* propensity for marital violence in these societies.

Emotive appeals can involve a subtle interaction between the parties concerned. They rely on many unspoken elements, such as a shared understanding of facts on the ground, the perception of the sincerity of the person making the appeal, and the merit of the appeal itself and the arguments used to support it. Telling in this regard is the reaction of al-Muʿtaḍid's courtiers to his speech. As mentioned above, although al-Ṭabarī records this lengthy speech, it was never delivered; to explain why, al-Ṭabarī gives us a behind-the-scenes glimpse into court life. After much pleading, the courtiers finally convinced the Caliph not to make the speech for fear that his diatribe would have the opposite of the intended effect: by appealing so strongly to the ties of the Prophet and arguing so vigorously against Yazīd and the Umayyads, this speech was very likely to stir up pro-ʿAlid sentiment, which would in fact have undermined al-Muʿtaḍid's own rule. In seeking to create an affective connection with his people, he was actually invoking a stronger affective connection to someone else; the emotive web of piety that was supposed to bond this caliph and his subjects might actually have had the effect of binding them to someone more deserving.

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