

The Human Face According to Islamic Sources¹

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Abstract

This article describes the differing depictions of the human face contained in the Qur'an and Hadith in its various dimensions: physical, aesthetic, ethical, and considers them in the context of modern debates about the 'veiling' of human face, particularly those of Muslim women.

The starting point for this article is the description of man in Islamic sources as being beautiful, and the Qur'anic depiction of man's beauty. In many passages, the Qur'an points to the human body as an "ornament". The author examines 'the idea of the beautiful / beauty' in Islamic sources and questions the status attributed to 'masks' in Islam, claiming that the use of a 'mask' is unheard of in autochthonous Islamic cultures and micro-cultures. He also addresses the question of *tasattur* or of the veiling of human faces. In this regard, he keeps in mind the modern European debates about 'Muslim' and 'Islamic' dress, especially legal regulation (or prohibition) of dress code which covers the human face.

Keywords: Human face, face, *waġh*, woman / women, veil, Qur'an, Hadith, unveiled faces, visible, uncovered human faces, uncovered hands, radiant faces, Qur'anic 'worlds of the beautiful', Qur'anic eschatology, aesthetic beauty of human faces, *hijab*, *burqa*, *niqab*, *ḥumūr*, *zar*, *feredža*.

Introduction

In both the West and the Muslim world, the so-called "veiling of Muslim women", i.e. the type of dress Muslim women should wear, is being discussed on an increasingly frequent basis. Particularly acrimonious discussions revolve around the question about whether women's faces should be covered in public. In short, among the most prominent issues to figure in the media is the question as to whether Muslim women should or indeed must wear this 'female dress'. In this context, a large body of literature can be examined on the "question of women" in general (often under the stereotypical title: "the position of women in Islam" – *waq'u l-mar'ati fi l-islām*), as if women were mere things or items in Islam, which are somehow subjected to men and whose place is to be determined by men. The issue was addressed by Muslims and non-Muslim writers alike (mainly men) in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The literature written by Muslim authors, for its part, attempts to show and demonstrate, mostly in an apologetic way, two main things. Firstly, it seeks to prove that while Islam is great in its attitude towards women (mothers, daughters, sisters, spouses, aunts, etc.), Muslim men have betrayed and abandoned the 'true Islam', and thus the 'true atti-

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tude' towards women. Secondly, this literature attempts to demonstrate that Muslim men have abandoned the 'true Islam' due to their blind imitation of former authorities or *taqlīd*, a pattern which was manifested particularly during colonialism. In other words, Muslims were conquered first by *taqlīd*, and only then by Western colonisers.

These two arguments are always mentioned first, before Muslim writers (men, in fact 'macho men') subsequently provide detailed recipes on how to return to that 'original' and 'true', 'genuine' age of Islam, on how to uncover paragons and models of that 'exemplary age' for the emancipation or 'liberation' of Muslim women (*tahrīru l-mar'ati fī l-islām*).

However, the real questions are the following:

- a) When did Muslim men, in their search for the 'true Islam', first allow Muslim women to become their collocutors and consider them intellectual partners who should be dealt with on an equal footing?
- b) Who enslaved Muslim women? There is only one answer: Muslim men. (As Muslim men were conquered by colonial powers, they were only able to rule over Muslim women.) The circle of decadence had to be closed in this way, and Muslim women, as its weakest link, had to be made subject to even greater repression.
- c) This leads to a further question: When did the age arrive, and when did the days begin, when Muslim men came to think of themselves as owners of their womenfolk, masters of their daughters, co-owners of their sisters?

What is the remedy for such an attitude towards Muslim women? Can this attitude be changed? – Of course it can. It is necessary for Muslim women to start talking about themselves, to interpret their religion, to interpret themselves in their religion of Islam. There is a need for a Muslim female elite that would address its position and become ready for its world of fatwas, so to speak. And to do away with man (macho man!) as its spokesperson.

However, the writer of these lines is a pessimist in this regard, and at the end of this introduction one can say this, too: For many years and centuries one has played witness to an 'Islam of macho men' – as if Muslim women did not constitute half of the Muslim population, and as if dear God did not reveal Himself through the gifts of Qur'anic message to that section of humankind as well.

This text, which – as previously mentioned – focuses on the status of the human face in Islamic religious sources, is the author's modest attempt to assist Muslim women and others, especially Muslim 'macho men', to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the so hotly debated topics of *hijab*, *burqa*, *niqab*, *zar*, and *feredža*.²

1. Words for *Face* and Their Meanings

In the Qur'an, the word *wağh* carries the following meanings:

- a) *Wağh* in the sense of *face*. For example, *wağhu 'llāh* or *God's face* as in the passage: "To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of

² *Zar* and *feredža* are head-to-toe black covers similar to burqas. They were common in Bosnia before the establishment of the Communist regime in the country in 1945, when their use was outlawed.

God.”³ *Human face*, for example, is mentioned in the following verse: “Set thy face to the religion [*aqim wağhaka li-d-dīni*]!”⁴

- b) *Wağh* in the sense of the **beginning** of something, such as, for instance, *wağhu nahār* which means “the beginning of day”: “There is a party of the People of the Book who say, ‘Believe in what has been sent down upon those who believe at the beginning of the day [...]’.”⁵
- c) *Wağh* as **affection, love** (for example, that of a father towards his children): *wağhu abikum* means “your father’s affection”.⁶
- d) *Wağh* as **God’s pleasure / favour**. In some specific passages, the word *wajh* often signifies *God’s pleasure* with man, i.e. human beings, their good deeds and actions. One can cite several, most remarkable examples. Thus, the Qur’anic expression *li-wağhi ‘llāh*. *Li-wağhi ‘llāh* literally means “for God’s pleasure”, as in the following passage: “We feed you [the poor] only for the sake of God (*li-wağhi ‘llāh*)!”⁷ Variations of this or similar meanings are to be found in the Qur’anic expressions *yurūdūna wağha ‘llāh* (“those who desire God’s favour”)⁸ and *ibtigā’a wağhi rabbihi l-a’lā* (“only seeking the pleasure of his Lord the Most High”)⁹.

Whenever the word *wağh* is mentioned in the Qur’an in its literal meaning of *face*, it signifies either the face of God (*wağhu ‘llāh*), or that of humans (for instance, *wağhuk*), i.e. people’s faces (*wuğūhakum*).

In other words, there is not a single place in the Qur’an in which the word *wağh* (in the sense of *face*) is used to denote, for example, the face or faces of animals and such like.

2. The ‘Aesthetics’ of the Human Face in the Qur’an

There are several ‘worlds of the beautiful’ (i.e. worlds of beauty) in the Qur’an:

- a) the world of the universe,
- b) the world of nature,
- c) the world of eschatology,
- d) the world of man, etc.

The wonderful world of man is described in the pages of the Qur’an as a magnificent copiousness of beauty, as a grand treasure of harmony.

The Qur’an also stresses this when speaking of man in this world. In addition, the Qur’an also emphasises the wonderful world of man when describing grand eschatological scenes, which on various occasions depict man on the Day of Judgment, and then subsequently in Paradise (*al-ğanna*) or Hellfire (*ğahannam*).

³ Qur’an, 2/115. The English translation is taken from A. J. Arberry (ed.), *The Koran Interpreted. A Translation*, London: Allen & Unwin 1955. Changes are made where necessary to reflect the line of argument, and the departure from Arberry’s rendition is indicated in the relevant footnotes.

⁴ Qur’an, 10/105.

⁵ Qur’an, 3/72.

⁶ Qur’an, 12/9. Arberry translates this more literally as meaning “your father’s face”.

⁷ Qur’an, 76/9. Again, Arberry’s translation is more literal: “We feed you only for the Face of God.”

⁸ Qur’an, 30/38. Here, again Arberry’s translation is more literal: “[...] those who desire God’s Face.”

⁹ Qur’an, 92/20. Arberry’s translation is as follows: “[...] only seeking the Face of his Lord the Most High.”

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As this part of the essay limits itself to examining the theme of the human face in this world, it should be added that the Qur'an frequently refers not merely to the human face as a whole, but also to its constituent parts: its ears, eyes, mouth, etc. This can be seen in the following sentence: "Have We not appointed to him [man] two eyes (*'aynayn*), and a tongue (*lisān*) and two lips (*šafatayn*)?"¹⁰ Qur'anic commentators hold the view that these verses point to *visible* phenomena, ornaments and signs (*āyāt*) of God's creation that can be found in man.¹¹

The motif of 'joyous eye' or 'an eye which is joyful', that is to say 'a bright eye', is first mentioned in relation to Maryam (the Virgin Mary): "And be of happy eye (*qarrī 'aynā*)!"¹² – the angel tells Maryam. The context in which this sentence is embedded in the Qur'an makes it clear that the angel is saying these words with the aim of prompting Maryam to *show* the joy of her face to the people she is about to meet, the people who doubted her chastity. So, Maryam does not wear a niqab, burqa or a feredža: She goes out with a joyful and beaming face carrying her son Īsā (Jesus), peace be upon him, in her arms.

The phenomenon of 'open' and 'loud laughter' is mentioned with reference to the prophet Sulaymān, p.b.u.h., who "smiled, laughing (*fa-tabassama dāhikan*) [...]"¹³ Of course, laughter comes from an unveiled face, where personal movements of the face partake in all its brightness the act of joy, accompanying the human (and only the human) act of laughter. Animals cannot laugh, they cannot be said to have faces in the same way that humans do.

Another famous laugh mentioned in the Qur'an is that of Sarah (*fa-dāhikat*),¹⁴ wife of Ibrāhīm (Abraham), messenger of God, p.b.u.h., when she was given good tidings (*fa-baššarnāhā*) that, despite being advanced of age, she was to bear the son Iṣḥāq (Isaac).¹⁵ This is also one of the places in the Qur'an where the phenomenon of joy is linked to the unveiled human face and its smile.

It is highly significant that in the Qur'an, people (both men and women) are called to turn their faces to the Holy Sanctuary: "Turn your faces towards it" (*fa-wallū wuḡūhakum šaṭrah*).¹⁶ We can see the striking quality of this Qur'anic requirement today during the pilgrimage to Mecca, when men and women, their *faces unveiled*, turn towards the ka'ba! Also, the Qur'an proclaims that the joy of piety leaves traces on human faces, and those traces are visible on the *visible, uncovered* human faces ("Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration"; *simāhum fī – wuḡūhihim min aṭari s-suḡūd*¹⁷).

In the Qur'an human faces are also described as places or islands of sadness in this world, as places of dejection and frowning expression. On one occasion the Messenger of God Muhammad, p.b.u.h., is said to have frowned (*'abasa*).¹⁸ Motifs of sadness (*al-ḥuzn*) are mentioned as the *visible phenomena* on human faces in some 30 places in the Qur'an.

¹⁰ Qur'an, 90/8-9.

¹¹ See: Toshihiko Izutsu, „Komunikativni odnos između čovjeka i Boga“, in: Enes Karić, *Semantika Kur'ana*, Sarajevo: Bemust 1998, from p. 227 onwards.

¹² Qur'an, 19/26. In Arberry's translation: "[...] and be comforted."

¹³ Qur'an, 26/19.

¹⁴ Qur'an, 11/71.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Qur'an, 2/144.

¹⁷ Qur'an, 48/29.

¹⁸ Qur'an, 80/1.

Sadness is also often linked with piety. There is a clear emphasis on “eyes overflowing with tears of sorrow” (*wa-a ‘yunuhum tafīdu mina d-dam ‘i ḥazanan*)¹⁹; the motif is used with regard to poor, but at the same time pious people. All these passages are comprehensible only if we consider an *uncovered human face*, i.e. a face which is *not veiled*.

3. Qur’anic Eschatology: Joyful Faces as Opposed to Sad Faces

In the case of the inhabitants of Paradise (*ḡanna*), the phenomena of joy emanating from the ‘aesthetic’ nature of *uncovered human faces* in their radiance and brightness is described even more intensely. A few words should be said on this issue.

The Day of Judgment is depicted as “the day when some faces are blackened, and some faces whitened.”²⁰ The motif of whiteness (...*tabyaḍḍu*) in this place designates radiance, rejoicing to Paradise. There is nothing here to be understood in racial categories, as an allusion to white people. On the other hand, the motif of blackness (...*taswaddu*) designates dejection, sadness and fear of Hell. (Again, the blackness here does not refer to black people.) Radiance and joy, as well as sorrow and sadness, are visible only in *unveiled faces of humans*, men and women alike. In these passages, the Qur’an speaks quite clearly about unveiled faces.

The aforementioned sentences demonstrate that a wide spectrum of Qur’anic terms exist for describing joy or sorrow on human faces on Judgement Day and during other eschatological events. In each case, human faces, of which the Qur’an speaks so movingly, are uncovered. Some of these facial expressions are briefly mentioned in the next few lines.

A good example of a facial expression depicted in the Qur’an can be found in the magnificent scene relating to the Judgement Day, where the Qur’an speaks of “radiant faces” (*wuḡūhun nāḍiratun*), when good people will behold their Lord. In this scene, we thus find the motif of “human faces gazing upon their Lord” (*ilā rabbihā nāḍiratun*).²¹ In addition, the Qur’an employs especially moving words to describe the theme of the “scowling faces” (*wuḡūhun baṣīratun*), which people adopt because they are awaiting a great calamity (*fāqiratun*) and horrors of *ḡahannam* (Hell).²² It is significant that the Qur’an also refers to “shining faces” (*wuḡūhun musfiratun*), as well as “laughing faces” (*wuḡūhun ḍāḥikatun*), and “joyous faces” (*wuḡūhun mustabṣiratun*).²³ Further to this, one should stress the exalted moral and great aesthetic beauty of the women as Paradise dwellers. The descriptions of their faces are astonishingly powerful and impressive. Thus, the “restraining glances” (*qāṣirātu ṭ-ṭarf*) adopted by women are mentioned, and it is also emphasised that they (the women) are “wide-eyed” (*‘ayn*).²⁴ These beauties’ temperament is wonderful (*ḥayrātun ḥisānun*).²⁵ It would be meaningless to describe these beautiful Paradise dwellers if their faces were disguised in any way or form.

¹⁹ Qur’an, 9/92.

²⁰ Qur’an, 3/106.

²¹ Qur’an, 75/22-23.

²² Qur’an, 75/24.

²³ Qur’an, 80/38-39.

²⁴ Qur’an, 37/48.

²⁵ Qur’an, 55/70. Arberry translates this as: “Maidens good and comely”.

As regards descriptions of eschatological events, one has to emphasise the negative context in which the Qur'an mentions that "some faces on that day shall be dusty" (*wawuġūhun yawma idin 'alayhā ġabarātun*), and that such faces will be "overspread with darkness" (*qaṭārāṭun*).²⁶ The Qur'an's negative view on faces covered in this way can be well seen from these descriptions.

There is a Qur'anic image in which God threatens that He can "erase features of human faces" (*naṭmisa wuġūhan*). Moreover, the Qur'an also depicts God as saying that He can "turn them upon their backs" (*naruddahā 'alā adbārihā*).²⁷ Of course, since God is merciful, He will not do it, but this is an affirmation of individuality of each face, its autonomy and inviolability.

The Qur'an and the Hadith contain bright scenes revealing the joy of people at the knowledge that there is a God Who is merciful because He unfolds hope and grace towards His creatures. At this point a Hadith is to be briefly recounted. It relates to the conversation between God and man, the last man who will enter Paradise (at the same time, this man could also be 'the last to leave Hellfire' because God had forgiven him). This tradition is significant because it refers to "God who laughs" (*fa-ḍaḥika 'llāhu*).

The tradition speaks of the man's joy when he sees the marvels of Paradise. God then asks that last man to enter Paradise: "If I bestow on you this and this from Paradise, aren't you going to ask for something else?" "No, I won't!" – the man continually replies. But, alas, man always wants something better, something more beautiful. As the man gets one place in Paradise, he asks to see other places, all of which seem to him more beautiful. Then, God laughed at the man's wishes (*fa-ḍaḥika 'llāhu*).²⁸

Based on what has been said until now, it can be seen that the Qur'an and the Hadith make several overt references to the human face:

- 1) A prevailing impression given by both the Qur'an and Hadith is that they have come to this world to give good news to humankind. That exalted joy should be visible on human faces. Moreover, the Qur'an contains an eschatological scene relating that "every soul shall come before God" and "with it a driver and a witness". It will be said: "We have now removed from thee thy covering (*fa-kaṣāfnā 'anka ġiṭā'aka*) and so thy sight today is piercing."²⁹ There is no doubt that the Qur'an here speaks of *uncovering of human faces* in an exceptionally positive context.
- 2) According to the Qur'an, both in this and in the next world, the human face is without zar, burqa, niqab. It is aesthetically elevated and as such uncovered, because the most important 'communicative' senses are to be found in the face: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, etc.
- 3) The human face is mentioned in the Qur'an in a 'moral' and 'emotional' context as an exceptionally spiritual part of human body (we cannot laugh or frown with our back nor can we do it with our stomach, chest or backside). The face is the only part of the human body in which markedly visible joy, radiance, brightness, and also sorrow, distress, dejection, melancholy and grief can be shown. The Qur'an, therefore, places a

²⁶ Qur'an, 80/40-41.

²⁷ Qur'an, 4/47. In Arberry: "Before we obliterate faces".

²⁸ See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. I, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' at-turāṭ al-'arabī (year of publication unknown), p. 163.

²⁹ Qur'an, 50/20-23.

strong emphasis on the communicative role of human face. When, for example, we read in the sūrat *an-Nūr*: “And say [Muhammad] to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes!”³⁰ – it is quite clear that such a command can, meaningfully and logically, be issued about the glances which come from *uncovered faces*, by also regarding those glances that are directed at uncovered faces.

- 4) The Qur’an emphasises the ‘ritual role’ of the human face, the fact that face confronts the Holy Sanctuary in its uncovered form. Besides, the most sublime act of Islamic prayer (*namāz*, *ṣalāh*), known as *sağda* (touching the ground with face), is performed with an uncovered face. In this act, in the position of prostration, the praying persons acquire ‘marks of piety’ on their faces. The Qur’an speaks of these marks with enthusiasm, saying that they are *visible* on the faces of good people.
- 5) No Semitic religion, nor any other religion for that matter, contains the notion of nakedness of the human face. Neither the Qur’an nor the Hadith contain a single passage in which the human face is considered part of a naked body.

4. Qur’anic Commentaries about the Uncovered Face

The Qur’an addresses the importance of dress and mentions some of its aspects. However, in the Qur’an (or in the Hadith) we do not get a full picture of the specific and strict forms or rules of dress in Islam, neither for men nor for women.³¹ What is evident in both the Qur’an and the Hadith is a strict demand for decency (*taqwā*) in the way in which human beings dress.

According to the Qur’an, *libās* means dress in general, but also (moral) protection in metaphorical sense. For example, wives are, according to the Qur’an “a garment”³² (*libās*) for you [their husbands], and you are a garment (*libās*) for them” (*hunnā libāsun lakum wa-antum libāsun lahunna*).³³ *Tīyāb* means dress in the widest sense, for example, the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h, is commanded: “thy robes purify!” (*wa-tīyābaka fa-tahhir!*).³⁴ Decorative dress (*zīnatun*) or ornaments are mentioned in the sūrat *al-A’rāf* as being something which is not prohibited, in the same way as good foods are not prohibited either.³⁵

Ornaments (*hilyatun*), e.g. pearls taken out of the sea, are mentioned in the sūrat *an-Nahl*.³⁶ The word, which figures in the Qur’an only once, also means ornamental dress or simply adornment.³⁷

Men’s shirts are mentioned in the Qur’an as *sarābīl* (“shirts to protect you from the heat”³⁸), but the word also denotes coats of armour (“to protect you from your own violence”³⁹). Another, more frequent and finer term for the shirt in Arabic, also found in the

³⁰ Qur’an, 24/31.

³¹ For more on this see: Shawkat M. Toorawa, “Clothing”, in: Jane Dammen McAullife (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, Vol. A-D, Leiden: Brill 2001, pp. 346f.

³² Arberry translates the term as meaning “vestment”.

³³ Qur’an, 2/187.

³⁴ Qur’an, 74/4.

³⁵ Qur’an, 7/32.

³⁶ Qur’an, 16/14.

³⁷ Qur’an, 7/26.

³⁸ Qur’an, 16/81.

³⁹ Ibid.

Qur'an, is *qamīṣ*. In the sūrat *Yūsuf*, the term always refers to Yūsuf's (Joseph's), p.b.u.h., shirt. A particularly remarkable mention of the shirt can be seen in the description of Yūsuf's seductress tearing his shirt from his "back".⁴⁰ The term *ġalābīb* (plural from *ġilbāb*) is also mentioned in the sense of women's clothes. The Prophet Muhammad is commanded to tell his "wives and daughters and the believing women, that they draw their veils close to them" (*yudnīna 'alayhinna min ġalābībihinna*), so as to cover themselves.⁴¹ With regard to *ġalābīb* (or women's dress), one should also mention the word *ḥumūr* (women's gowns, robes, long veils). The only mention of the word in the Qur'an can be found in the following passage: "And let them cast their veils [*ḥumurihunna*] over their bosoms."⁴²

The term *hijab*, a word frequently mentioned in the media, does not figure at all in the Qur'an in the sense of a cover for women's hair, but as designation for *screen, shelter, refuge, wall*, etc. The term can only be found in one passage referring to the Prophet's wives. In surat *al-Aḥzāb*, the following reference to a kind of 'protocol' or procedure concerning entering Prophet Muhammad's, p.b.u.h., home can be found: "And when you ask his [Prophet's] wives for any object, ask them from behind a curtain (*min warā' i ḥiġābin*)."⁴³ This is moral advice for all those entering the house of the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h., not to violate the privacy of his family.

Based on the above quoted Qur'anic passages concerning dress, it is not possible to conclude that there is an obligation to cover human face, male or female. It is under no circumstances possible to conclude that *niqab (burqa, zar, feredža)* is a central issue in Islam, around which everything in the Islamic faith, culture and civilization supposedly revolves.

At this point it is quite pertinent to stress the Qur'anic expression *libāsu t-taqwā* meaning "the garment of godfearing" – *wa-libāsu t-taqwā dālika ḥayr* – "And the garment of godfearing – that is better."⁴⁴ It is this dress of piety (*libāsu t-taqwā*), and not some other, which Iblīs (Satan) first ripped off the bodies of Adam and Eve (Ādam and Ḥawwa) in Paradise. Afterwards, it was easy to pull off other clothes. Following this, they were expelled from Paradise.

The surat *an-Nūr* (24/31) contains an important exemption to covering the female body in the form of the expression *illā mā zahara minhā* which literally means that they should not reveal it (i.e. their adornment): "[...] save such as is outward". What does it mean: "save such as is outward"? In classical works of Islamic thought, which may be placed within the broad field of 'anthropology of Islam', such as the writings of Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), all explanations of nakedness (*'awra*) or genitals (*saw'āt*) are linked, in most interpretations, merely to human beings' private parts and to the bodily opening for excretion. These parts of the body are distant from the head and the face, both in the case of human being, and also among all mammals.

The celebrated Qur'an commentator az-Zamaḥṣarī (dec. 1144 CE) does not relate the notion of nakedness to the human face in any way. In his interpretation of sūrat *al-A'rāf*

⁴⁰ Qur'an, 12/26-28.

⁴¹ Qur'an, 33/59.

⁴² Qur'an, 24/31.

⁴³ Qur'an, 33/53.

⁴⁴ Qur'an, 7/26.

(7/22-23), he understands the term *sawo'āt* (private parts, genitals) as being synonymous with the word nakedness *'awra*. He literally interprets the Qur'anic expression *badat lahumā saw'ātuhumā* with the words *fa-zaharat lahumā 'awrātuhumā* ("their private parts / genitals became manifest to them").⁴⁵

The Qu'ran contains an additional piece of evidence that neither women's nor men's faces are regarded as being an additional *'awra*. Thus, Ādam and Ḥawwa merely covered their private parts (*'alā 'awrātihimā li-yastatirā bihā*),⁴⁶ and not their faces, with Paradise leaves. There are simply no traditions to that effect.

5. Uncovered Face and Uncovered Hands

Therefore, if we try to discover what the passage "such as is outward", which is mentioned in the Qur'an (24/31), refers to in the human body, we can say that there is a general consensus among Qur'an commentators that it includes the face, the hands up to wrists and the feet up to ankles. The absolute majority of Qur'an commentators consider that the human face has no dress. The great commentator aṭ-Ṭabarī (dec. 923 C.E.) asserts that the ritual ceremony of ḥaḡḡ (the pilgrimage) is the greatest proof that neither the face nor the hands of men and women should be covered or veiled. According to him, the Qur'anic phrase "save such as is outward" includes the face and hands,⁴⁷ and thus aṭ-Ṭabarī occasionally mentions female hands and the female face (*kaffān wa-waḡh*) as being things which fall under the category "such as is outward".

Az-Zamaḡṣarī mentions, for example, the importance of not covering women's hands (*lā-taḡidu buddan min muzāwalati l-ašyā'i bi-yadayhā*) and face (*wa-min al-ḥāḡati ilā kašfi waḡhihā*) in a veil.⁴⁸

In his Qur'an commentary, Ibn Kaṭīr (dec. 1373 CE) cites a tradition in which the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h., gives advice to Asmā', the daughter of Abū Bakr, to the effect that the girl out of age should leave her face and hands up to the wrists unveiled.⁴⁹

In conclusion (and in the context of stormy debates about *burqa*, *niqab* and *feredža* in Europe and the Muslim world) it is necessary to briefly state the following points:

- The human face is exceptionally appreciated in Islamic sources, the Qur'an and Hadith.
- Not a single piece of Islamic source material makes reference to the use of a mask.
- In the dialogues recorded in Hadith collections, one can observe men and women of the early generations of Islam engaged in conversation. They call each other by their first names. They would have been unable to have done this if their faces had been covered, as they simply would not have been able to recognise each other.

⁴⁵ Abū l-Qāsim Maḡmūd bin 'Umar az-Zamaḡṣarī, *al-Kaššāf*, Vol. II, Beirut: Dār l-ḡayā' at-turāt al-'arabī 2001, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁷ Ibn ḡarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr ḡāmio' al-bayān*, Vol. V, Beirut 1984, p. 419.

⁴⁸ Az-Zamaḡṣarī, *al-Kaššāf*, Vol. III, Beirut: Dār l-ḡayā' at-turāt al-'arabī 1421/2001, p. 236.

⁴⁹ Ibn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, Vol. III, Cairo (year of publication unknown), p. 28.

Enes Karić: The Human Face According to Islamic Sources

- “If we accept that the Qur’an plays a central part in the modern day Islamic world and in today’s Islamic culture and civilisation, then the single common denominator in the clothing worn by Muslim women is the headscarf.” In the Near and Middle East the headscarf is also the general sign of cultural recognition for Christian women, too. The headscarf only covers the hair, and not the face.

Great travellers of Islam, such as Ibn Ğubayr and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, spent time both in Mecca and also in many other traditional cities of Islam. They noted that an absolute majority of Muslims lived and performed their rituals with unveiled faces. Of course, human rights mean that people who wish to go around with covered faces are perfectly entitled to do so. We must not call for legal or other restrictions to be imposed against women who want to wear a *niqab*. The single intention of this essay was to demonstrate that the custom of covering the human face cannot be justified by making reference to the sources of Islam, the Qur’an and Hadith.