

TASLİB/TASALLUB AS THE MANIFESTATION OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT IN PRE-ISLAMIC AND EARLY ISLAMIC WARFARE

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Abstract

This article argues that the ritual of taslib/tasallub, the mourner's abandonment of adornment and adoption of coarse black garments, was a highly regulated mourning practice. In the warrior's mentality, it was more than a mere expression of grief. It was the visible manifestation of victory and defeat. Through the analysis of information gathered from classical Arabic lexicons, pre-Islamic poetry, historical and early Islamic legal sources, the study reconstructs the material and performative dimensions of the ritual and demonstrates its dual function in tribal warfare. For the victorious warrior, making the enemy women perform this mourning ritual was considered proof of his victory. For the defeated, this condition meant both public humiliation and an inescapable summons to vengeance. The article also examines the new regulations regarding this mourning tradition within the new ethical and social structure that emerged with the advent of Islam. It discusses how Islam dismantled extreme expressions of mourning rituals, such as wailing, self-mutilation, and garment rending, and thereby broke the link between the mourning woman and the cycle of tribal warfare.

Keywords: Islamic History, Taslib, Tasallub, Female Mourning, Warrior Mindset, Lamentation, Pre-Islamic Warfare.

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İslâm Öncesi ve Erken İslâmî Dönem Savaşlarında Zafer ve Yenilginin Göstergesi Olarak Teslîb/Tesellüb

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Makale Bilgisi

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Geniş Özet

Bu makale, İslâm öncesi ve erken İslâmî dönemde Arap toplumunda uygulanan *teslîb/tesellüb* olarak adlandırılan yas tutma ritüelini kişisel bir matem ifadesi olmasının ötesinde oldukça sistemli ve yerleşik kuralları olan ve ayrıca savaşçı zihniyetinde zafer ve yenilginin görünür tezahürü olarak işlev gören bir yas pratiği olduğunu savunmaktadır. Arapça *s-l-b* kökünden türeyen *teslîb* ve *tesellüb* terimleri üzerinden yürütülen filolojik analiz, ritüelin kabile savaşlarındaki çift yönlü işlevini ortaya koymaktadır. Buna göre galip gelen savaşçı için düşman kadınlarını mateme büründürmek zaferin kesin kanıtıyken, mağluplar için kendi kadınlarının matem hâli, yenilginin bir ilanı olmanın yanında hem derin bir utanç hâli hem de kan davalarını körükleyen bir işleve sahipti.

Çalışma, klasik Arapça sözlükler, İslam öncesi ve sonrasındaki erken dönem şiir divanları, hadis, siyer ve tarih kaynakları gibi temel metinlerin konu bağlamında dikkatlice taranması ve incelenmesiyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. İncelenen konu tekil bir tarihsel olay değil, uzun vadeli kültürel bir yapı olan bir ritüel olduğu için, özellikle şiirlerin otantik olarak gerçek şahıslar tarafından yazılıp yazılmadıklarına bakılmaksızın toplumun kültürel hafızasını temsil etmeleri yönünden bilgi edinme aracı olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Çapraz okumaya tabi tutulan eserlerde konunun tutarlı bir şekilde ayrıntılı olarak yer bulduğu ve savaşçı kültüründe ve mantığında neye tekabül ettiği açık bir şekilde görülmektedir ve bu bilgiler çalışmaya kaynaklık etmektedir.

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Makalenin ilk bölümü ritüelin maddi ve eylemsel yönüne yoğunlaşmaktadır. *Silâb* (siyah baş bağı), *miş* (keçi veya deve kılından kaba giysi), *mi' lâh* (yas meclisinde sallanan siyah bez) gibi eşyalar ve *nevî* (ağıt), *hamş* (yüz tırmalama), *halk* (saç kazıma), *şakku'l-cüyûb* (yaka yırtma/soyma) gibi eylemler ritüelin toplumsal olarak görünür yönlerini oluşturmaktadır. Yash kadın *müsellib* olarak klasik sözlükbilimciler tarafından hamilelik veya emzirme gibi kadına özgü hallerde kullanılan eril sıfat kalıbıyla aynı çerçevede değerlendirilerek ayırıcı bir özellikle ritüelin kendi kavram dünyasının bir parçası olan terimle ifade edilmektedir. İslâmî dönemde bu ritüelin aşırı yönleri (feryat, kendine zarar verme, giysi parçalama) sistematik biçimde ortadan kaldırılmaya çalışılmıştır. Ancak kıyafetteki sadelik ve süsten arınma gibi temel noktalar muhafaza edilerek, disiplinli ve hukuken sınırlandırılmış bir matem uygulamasına dönüştürülmüştür.

İkinci bölüm, ritüelin savaşçı zihniyetindeki işlevini tahlil etmektedir. Afveh el-Evdî (ö. y. 560), Lebîd b. Rebîa (ö. 40-41/660-661), Âmir b. et-Tufeyl (ö. 11/632) gibi şairlerin *faḥr* (övünme) şiirleri ve Hind bint Utbe'nin (ö. 18/639) Bedir-Uhud savaşları örnekleri üzerinden gösterildiği üzere, düşman kadınlarının matem durumları zaferin en görünür kanıtı olarak kabul edilmekteydi. Mağlup taraf için ise aynı ritüel, kan davasını tetikleyen bir utanç ve intikam mekanizması işlevi görmektedir. Yas meclisi (*me'tem*), savaş meydanındaki çatışmanın doğal bir uzantısı gibiydi. *Müsellib* kadın, kabilenin askerî durumunun canlı bir göstergesi ve hayatta kalan erkekleri intikam almaya zorlayan bir vazife olarak görülmekteydi. Hind bint Utbe'nin Bedir'de babasının katledilmesi ve kıyafetleri ve savaş aletlerinin soyulmasıyla başlayan ve Uhud'da Hz. Hamza'nın (ö. 3/625) bedenini parçalaması ve onun uzuvlarını takı olarak takmasıyla sonuçlanan eylemleri, bu ritüelin mantığının en somut tarihsel örneğini oluşturmaktadır.

Mevcut literatürde gerek İslâm öncesi şiir geleneği bağlamında kadınların yas geleneği bağlamındaki rolü ve gerekse de yas tutma ritüellerinin farklı yönleri incelenmiş olsa da belirli bir bütünlük içerisinde teslîb/tesellüb geleneği bağlamında toplumsal işleviyle ayrı bir kültürel fenomen olarak savaşçı mantığı bağlamında incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışma ritüeli klasik metinlerdeki ismiyle ve ilişkili terimleri aynı uygulamanın parçaları olarak inceleyerek literatüre özgün bir katkı sunmayı hedeflemiştir. Ayrıca makale İslâm'ın bu ritüeli dönüştürmesi ve belli yönlerini uygun görmeyerek haram kılmasını, kadınların yasını kabile savaşlarının siyasal bir mekanizması olmaktan çıkarmaya yönelik stratejik bir müdahale olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslâm Tarihi, Teslîb, Tesellüb, Kadının Matemî, Savaşçı Zihniyeti, Ağıt, Câhiliye Savaşları.



Introduction

In pre-Islamic Arabia, after battle, a tribe's standing and honor were most clearly manifested in the condition of its women. The local chieftain al-Afwah al-Awdî (d. 560) gives a clear example of this phenomenon in a boast that defines victory through the protection of his own women, their anklets unseen. He frames enemy defeat by the sight of noble widows weeping with black mourning

rags.¹ In the warrior mentality, the mourning of enemy women was a demonstration of the victor's triumph. Conversely, seeing one's own kinswomen in that state was a sign of ultimate failure.

This ritual, called *taslib/tasallub*, derived from the Arabic root *s-l-b*, involved women stripping their normal daily clothing and adopting coarse black garments, abandoning adornments, and performing ritualised acts of mourning. The article treats the terms as functional synonyms for the composite ritual. While *taslib* (Form II) denotes the externally imposed state of deprivation, *tasallub* (Form V) refers to the mourner's agentive performance. *Tasallub* was not confined to wartime losses. It also occurred for natural deaths. Yet the ritual's performance was nearly identical whether the death occurred in battle or by natural causes. Every loss registered as a symbolic breach of the tribe's protective integrity. The mourning women became visible proof of that breach, a sign the victor celebrated as triumph and the vanquished received as a binding summons to vengeance. Hence the study focuses on the ritual's function in tribal warfare.

1576| db

While scholars have long acknowledged the importance of female mourning in tribal society, the specific ritual of *taslib/tasallub* has not been examined as a distinct phenomenon. Suzanne Stetkevych interprets the female elegy (*rithā'*) and its call to arms (*tahrīd*) as a "ritual of redemption," acting as the psychological catalyst for blood vengeance (*tha'r*). In her reading, the elegy is not a passive sentimental expression of the mourner.² Feyza Betül Köse states that in the Arab society of that era, women's mourning was a mandatory social responsibility. According to her, this responsibility provided women with a critical platform to reflect on the power and prestige of the deceased warrior.³ Leor Halevi states that, at later periods, in the newly formed Islamic social structure, the traditionalist male hegemony restricted women's visible ritual performances in the public sphere. According to him, this approach, which forced women mourning their deceased

¹ al-Afwah al-Awdī, *Dīwān al-Afwah al-Awdī*, critical ed. Muḥammad al-Tūnjī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1419/1998), 100–103.

² Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 161–168.

³ Feyza Betül Köse, "Women in Pre-Islamic Arab Society," *Akademik Siyer Dergisi* Cahiliye Özel Sayısı (December 15, 2024), 88.

relatives to prioritize patience, actively suppressed the wailing rituals that were part of the Jāhiliyya mourning practices.⁴ Nadia Maria El Cheikh, complementing Halevi's argument, demonstrates how later texts constructed the wailing woman, epitomized by the historical memory of Hind bint 'Utba (d. 18/639), as a dangerous emotional foil. In her view, the nascent Islamic order had to subdue this figure in order to separate itself from the Jāhiliyya past.⁵ These studies focusing on women's mourning do not argue that it played a dominant role in warfare on its own. They evaluate the mourning tradition in various dimensions and from different perspectives. This article examines the mourning practices of women and the ritual's role as a manifestation of defeat or victory in the warrior's mentality.

The poetic voice and political agency of the female mourner have been extensively analyzed by scholars such as Suzanne Stetkevych, Leor Halevi, and Nadia Maria El Cheikh. However, taslīb/tasallub has not yet received sustained philological scrutiny as a distinct, named ritual with its own technical vocabulary and material apparatus. Scholarship has not yet examined taslīb/tasallub as a distinct ritual with its own material and lexical apparatus. This article addresses that gap by analyzing the ritual's function in the warrior mentality. This study reconstructs the mourning woman as more than a figure of grief. She was the occupant of a ritual status that formed the material and semiotic counterpart to the battlefield stripping of the fallen warrior.

This article argues that the pre-Islamic ritual of taslīb/tasallub functioned as a visible manifestation of victory and defeat in tribal warfare. The *musallib* (the mourning woman), the subject of mourning, made the tribe's military standing publicly legible. Her ritually stripped body, fine garments abandoned and coarse attire adopted, was the living evidence of whether the protective boundary had held or been breached. Accordingly, the warrior acted with a dual obligation. While fighting the enemy, he was

⁴ Leor Halevi, "Wailing for the Dead: The Role of Women in Early Islamic Funerals," *Past & Present* 183 (2004), 31–32; Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (2007; New York: Columbia University Press, no date), 119–120.

⁵ Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* (London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 48, 55–57.

obliged to protect his own female relatives from becoming subjects of this humiliating ritual. Conversely, what demonstrated his victory was the state of mourning into which the enemy women had been forced. Within the framework of this understanding, the mourning assembly of the women was more than the expression of grief occurring as an aftermath of battle. It was the battle's continuation. They were manifestations of victory or defeat.

The article focuses mainly on the pre-Islamic era and the early Islamic period. In the Islamic period, the focus is more on new approaches to this tradition and on applying a new understanding of mourning in accordance with Islamic ethics, by reformulating the old tradition. Mentions in the article of later poetic citations (such as those of al-Farazdaq, d. 114/732) are employed not as objects of period-specific analysis but as evidence for the stability of the ritual's core cultural vocabulary across time. The systematic study of Umayyad and Abbasid transformations of these practices lies beyond the present article's scope.

1578 | db

This study adopts a philological approach that synthesizes evidence from distinct fields of classical Arabic works. It treats these fields not as isolated textual categories but cross-references them to trace how the ritual was practiced before Islam and how it was later regulated. Classical Arabic lexicography supplied the semantic range of the verb root s-l-b and the technical definitions of taslib and tasallub. It also yielded physical descriptions of the material objects that constituted the ritual's visible apparatus. Analyzing the collected poems of warrior-poets and elegists, the work then mapped these definitions onto the pre-Islamic poetic record. This poetic corpus helped gather crucial information showing how these rituals served as visible signs of victory and defeat on the battlefield within the warrior mentality. The analysis in this work does not depend on the authenticity of individual poetic attributions, because here the aim is to reconstruct a shared ritual system rather than chronicle a single historical event. These collections were treated as a shared record of tribal memory. Early Islamic works, such as *ḥadīth* collections, historical chronicles, and early legal treatises were central to the inquiry. Alongside other aspects of the ritual, these sources made it possible to gather evidence of the legislative and social interventions that targeted these rites. An examination of this information revealed that the early Islamic order pro-

hibited the most extreme physical expressions of this mourning ritual.

The article consists of two main sections. The first reconstructs the material and performative components of taslīb/tasallub. It also examines the early Islamic interventions that curtailed this tradition's most extreme expressions. The last section examines the subject within the framework of the warrior's mentality. It demonstrates how it functioned as the most visible manifestation of victory and defeat in the warrior mentality and how the musallib acted as the instrument of blood vengeance.

1. The Material and Performative Anatomy of Taslīb/Tasallub

In this section, we examine the lexical foundations and the garments of taslīb/tasallub. First, the semantic field of the Arabic root s-l-b and the morphological distinction between taslīb and tasallub were established. Later, the section focuses on the mourning women's specific repertoire of garments, textures, and their bodily acts.

db | 1579

1.1. The Ritual Logic of Taslīb and Tasallub

The root s-l-b carries the sense of stripping something away from anything that is covered. But this stripping is a forceful act, after which the object is left without its protective layer. Classical lexicographers identify its foundational meaning as taking something with speed and sudden snatching. In warfare, the verb *salaba* designates the stripping of a defeated adversary. The spoils seized are *salab*. Beyond the battlefield, the same pattern recurs. In botanical usage, *salab* refers to bark peeled from a tree, leaving the trunk bare (*salīb*). In zoological usage, the *salūb* is a she-camel stripped of her offspring.³ The root points to the same logic across different domains, such as the battlefield, the tree stripped of its bark, and the mourner deprived of her adornments.⁶

⁶ al-Farāhīdī al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, critical ed. Maḥdī al-Makhzūmī - Ib-rāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (Beirut: Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1408/1988), "s-l-b," 7/261; Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Fāris al-Qazwīnī Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam maqāyīs al-lughā*, critical ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Damascus: Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-ʿArab, 1423/2002), "s-l-b," 3/70; Abū Naṣr Ismāʿīl b. Ḥammād al-Jawharī al-Fārābī Abū Naṣr al-Jawharī, *Tāj al-lughā wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiya*, critical ed. Aḥmed ʿAbdulḡafūr ʿAṭṭār (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malayīn, 1407/1987), "s-l-b," 1/149; Abū al-Qāsim

Within this unified semantic range, the mourning ritual of taslīb/tasallub can be understood more clearly. The bereaved woman does more than grieve. She physically enacts the logic of s-l-b.

The term taslīb serves as the established definition for the pre-Islamic ritual of mourning. It functions as a material performance of deprivation rather than merely an emotional state, an enactment that grows out of the root's core meaning of stripping. Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791) defines the mourning woman as musallib, noting that “she performed taslīb [*sallabat*] for her husband or another,” and in doing so, she entered a state of mourning. While al-Khalīl linguistically equates this active stripping with the legal status of the *muḥidd* (the woman observing limits after her husband's death),⁷ later philologists distinguish taslīb as a broader tribal institution rooted in specific material culture. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) connects the act to the bereaved woman, stating that she “wore the *silāb*, which is mourning attire, and performed tasallub and *sallabat* over her deceased, so she is [called] a *muslib*.”⁸ He then establishes a definitive legal and linguistic boundary, concluding that “*al-iḥdād* (the legally mandated mourning period for a widow) is for the husband, and *al-taslīb* is general [*‘amm*].” Consequently, while *iḥdād* became the specific legal restriction regarding a spouse, taslīb remained the broader framework applicable to the mourning of any kin.⁸ Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā (d. 209/824 [?]) defined the ritual by a specific visual code that “the wearing of hair-shirts [*lubs al-musūḥ*] and the abandonment of adornment [*tark al-zīnah*].”⁹ Furthermore, Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī (d. 573/1178) highlights the collective character of the ritual, noting that to perform taslīb was to “clothe the wailing women in the *silāb*.”¹⁰

1580| db

Isma‘īl ibn ‘Abbād al-Ṭalaqānī al-Ṣāhib ibn ‘Abbād, *al-Muḥīt fī al-lughā*, critical ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Āl Yāsīn (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1414/1994), “s-l-b,” 8/327.

⁷ al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-‘ayn*, “ḥ-d-d,” 3/20, “s-l-b,” 7/261.

⁸ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās al-balāgha*, critical ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ‘Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1419/1998), “s-l-b,” 1/468.

⁹ Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā al-Taymī al-Baṣrī Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā, *Sharḥ Naqā‘id Jarīr wa-al-Farazdaq*, critical ed. Muḥammed İbrāhīm Hūr - Walīd Maḥmūd Khāliṣ (Abu Dhabi: al-Majma‘ al-Thaqāfi, 1419/1998), 3/810.

¹⁰ Nashwān b. Sa‘īd al-Yamanī Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī, *Shams al-‘ulūm wa-dawā’ kalām al-‘Arab min al-kulūm*, critical ed. Ḥusayn b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Umārī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420/1999), 5/3183.

The lexicographical tradition does not maintain a strict terminological boundary between *taslīb* and *tasallub*. The two nouns are often used for the same ritual state. However, the two forms carry a meaningful distinction. *Taslīb*, from the verb form II *sallaba*, is factitive. It describes an action imposed on the woman from outside. She is stripped of her former condition by the death of her protector and by the social expectation that follows the death. *Tasallub*, from Form V *tasallaba*, is reflexive. It describes an action the woman performs on herself. She strips herself of her former condition, entering deprivation and making it visible through the ritual acts she performs. The two terms thus name two faces of a single ritual. One is an externally imposed status and the other, an internally assumed performance. Classical lexicons record the human subject of this dual process, recording that a woman is called *salūb* and *salīb* when “her husband or close relative dies, and she performs *tasallub* over him.”¹¹ Section 2 below examines these two faces of the ritual through sustained historical and poetic examples, demonstrating *taslīb* as the externally imposed condition of defeat and *tasallub* as the mourner’s agentive performance.

1.2. Musallib

The sources sometimes use the feminine form *musallibah* for the mourning woman. But lexicographers more often categorize her simply as *musallib*, using the masculine participle without the feminine marker. This grammatical pattern suggests that the mourning state was viewed not as a temporary act but as a fixed ritual standing that overtook her former identity. In classical Arabic, this grammatical form is reserved for biological or existential states exclusive to the female, such as *ḥāmil*, meaning pregnant, or *murḍi*, meaning breastfeeding.¹² By categorizing the mourner in this specific form, the sources imply that *taslīb*/*tasallub* was viewed less as a temporary action than as a totalizing transformation of identity. Upon the death of a protector, the woman ceased to be a wife or daughter and became a *musallib*, a subject

¹¹ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Azhārī, *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, critical ed. Muḥammad ‘Awaḍ Mur’ib (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1421/2001), “s-l-b”, 12/301; Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. ‘Alī Jamāl al-Dīn b. Manẓūr al-Ruwayfī ‘I Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1414/1993), “s-l-b,” 1/473.

¹² Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb Jamharat al-lughah*, critical ed. Ramzī Munīr Ba’labakkī (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm lil-Malayīn, 1408/1987), 3/1268.

defined entirely by the state of deprivation. Abū Zubayd al-Ṭā'ī (d. 62/681-82 [?]) makes this point with a striking comparison, likening these women to the *balāyā*, camels ritually tethered to a grave and left to starve.¹³ Like the tethered camel, the musallib was confined, her existence reduced to a testament of the dead man's absence.

In practice, the status of the musallib was governed by a severe set of social and material parameters. Classical lexicons record this fact, anchoring the definition of tasallub in early Islamic historical accounts. Asmā' bint 'Umayy relates that after her husband Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 8/629) was struck down, the Messenger of Allah commanded her, using the Arabic verb *tasallabī*, to observe *tasallub* for three days and to do thereafter whatever she wished. Classical lexicographers gloss this Prophetic command specifically as an instruction to “wear the black mourning clothes” [*ilbasī thiyāb al-ḥidād al-sūd*].¹⁴ Consequently, the very act of performing taslīb/tasallub is defined by the material donning of these dark garments. The historical account of Zaynab bint Abī Salama (d. 73/693) further corroborates this material performance, as she “wept for Ḥamza for three days and performed tasallub.”¹⁵ Expanding this visual and physical state beyond the immediate household, al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) cites the early linguist Al-Liḥyānī (d. 194/809), who defines musallib, salīb, and salūb as the woman whose husband or close relative dies and who performs tasallub over him.¹⁶ The poet Labīd b. Rabī'a (d. 40 or 41/660 or 661) describes these women as a collective force, “performing tasallub in hair-shirts” [*mutasallibāt fī musūḥ*], effectively wearing the texture of penance.¹⁷

¹³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī Ibn Ḥabīb, *Al-Muḥabbar*, critical ed. Ilse Lichtenstadter (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d.), 323; For a detailed analysis of the baliyyah as a poetic symbol for the destitute widow, see Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, 40–41.

¹⁴ al-Azhārī, *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, “s-l-b”, 12/171.

¹⁵ Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Amr al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iq fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, critical ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī - Ibrāhīm Maḥmūd Abū l-Faḍl (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 2/192.

¹⁶ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, critical ed. 'Alī Shīrī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1424/2003), “s-l-b”, 2/83.

¹⁷ Abū 'Aqīl al-'Amirī Labīd b. Rabī'a, *al-Dīwān*, critical ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Kuwait: al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1382/1962), 138.

In the pre-Islamic era, the state of tasallub could be exceptionally prolonged, confining the mourner to total sensory deprivation and social isolation for a full year. When a woman's husband died, she was confined to a cramped, wretched hut, wore her lowest-quality, most degraded rags, and abstained from perfume and all grooming. She endured this total sensory and spatial deprivation until an entire year had passed. The ritual ended only through a demeaning rite of passage. She would wipe her skin against an animal to transfer the accumulated filth of the year and then throw a piece of dried animal dung behind her, signifying that the year of misery was as worthless as the dung she cast away.¹⁸ The Qur'an replaced the year-long confinement with a moderated, dignified waiting period ('iddah) of four months and ten days (*al-Baqara* 2/234). While this established the legal bounds of iḥdād for widows, the Prophet strictly curtailed the broader cultural practice of tasallub for other relatives, such as fathers, brothers, or fallen warriors, to an absolute maximum of three days.¹⁹

1.3. Garments of the Musallib

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The ritual condition of the musallib rested on two requirements. She had to adopt coarse black garments and abandon all adornment. Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā identifies this abandonment as a twin pillar of the custom alongside the wearing of hair-shirts.²⁰ The mourner observed a specific set of prohibitions. She gave up kohl on her eyes, henna on her hands, and all forms of adornment. Perfume and scented oils were also forbidden. The mourner's body was to offer nothing pleasing to the senses. Even the grooming of her hair was prohibited. She could not style her forelock and often left it disheveled.²¹ This situation marked her withdrawal from communal life.

¹⁸ Abū 'Abd Allāh Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwatta'*, critical ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī (Abu Dhabi: Mu'assasat Zāyid b. Sulṭān, 1425/2004), "Ṭalāq," 2217, 4/861; Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, critical ed. 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin 'Abdilmuḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 1422/2001), 4/251; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iq fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 1/304.

¹⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, 4/250-251.

²⁰ Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā, *Sharḥ Naqā'id Jarīr wa-al-Farazdaq*, 3/810.

²¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, 4/253; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iq fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 2/192; al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, "n-ṣ-w", 12/171; 'Alā' al-Dīn Abū Bakr b. Mas'ūd b. Aḥmad al-Ḥanafī al-Kāsānī, *Badā'ī' al-ṣanā'ī' fī tartīb al-sharā'ī'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1406/1986), 3/208.

1.3.1. Silāb

The silāb (pl. *sulub*) was one of the most symbolic features of the mourning tradition. It was defined by the coarseness of its fabric and by its central role in the mourning women's ritual performance. Lexicons recorded it as a black garment with which the mourner covers her head.²² It was further defined as a black rag that anchored the garment directly to the mourning woman.²³ The lexicographers' description of the silāb's material form with black headbands or wraps suggests that the ritual centered on binding the head in blackness.²⁴ The lexicographers add that it was worn at the mourning assembly.²⁵ The silāb was, in effect, a mandatory dress code of the assembly, transforming individual mourning into a collective, synchronized visual performance of the ritual. Labīd b. Rabī'a confirms precisely this collective requirement. When instructing his daughters to mourn his uncle Abū Barā', he commands them to join the assembly of wailing women clad strictly "in the black sulub and in the hair-shirts."²⁶

1584| db

These qualities made the silāb a clear sign of tribal distress and a call to arms. Al-Afwah al-Awdī encapsulates this dynamic when describing his obligation to defend the Banū Sa'd. In his boasting poem, he explains his entry into war by pointing to the silāb on his allies' women. He declared that "Banū Sa'd called us to war with a desperate call." But the call alone was not what moved him. The words that follow make clear that "it was not right to abandon them while they were clad in the silāb."²⁷ It was the sight of their women in mourning dress that showed the real distress and left him no choice but to fight alongside them. In the warrior's eyes, the sight of allied women in these specific mourning garments transforms the abstract duty of alliance into an urgent moral imperative.

²² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, "s-l-b", 1/473.

²³ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Faʿīq fī ghārīb al-ḥadīth*, 2/192; al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās al-balāgha*, "s-l-b", 1/468.

²⁴ al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād, *al-Muḥīṭ fī al-lughā*, "s-l-b", 8/327; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, "s-l-b", 8/327; Abū Zayd Saʿīd b. Aws al-Anṣārī, *al-Nawādir fī al-lughā*, critical ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1401/1981), 148.

²⁵ Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb Jamharat al-lughah*, "s-l-b", 1/340; Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim Ibn al-Anbārī, *Al-Zāhir fī maʿānī kalimāt al-nās*, critical ed. Ḥatīm Ṣāliḥ al-Dāmin (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1412/1992), 1/348.

²⁶ Labīd b. Rabī'a, *al-Dīwān*, 29.

²⁷ al-Afwah al-Awdī, *Dīwān al-Afwah al-Awdī*, 103.

To abandon a people whose women are already “in the silāb” would constitute an indelible stain on honor.

1.3.2. Mish and Hils

The *mish* (pl. *amsāh* or *musūh*) was a coarse garment worn during the mourning period. Lexicographers describe it as a coarse garment made of hair (*thawb min sha'r ghaliz*), woven from goat or camel hair, which contrasted sharply with the soft wool and silk associated with *zīnah* (adornment). As a garment, the *mish* was the very opposite of a tailored one. Al-Azharī (d. 370/980) traces the term to the Persian *bilās*, a coarse sackcloth used not as clothing but as a floor covering spread in the home. Sleeveless, collarless, the *mish* was a raw, untailored expanse of rough fabric.²⁸ Such austerity was deliberate. Al-Zabīdī links the wearing of such black haircloth to the concept of *taqashshuf*, a deliberate embrace of austerity associated with ascetics and the destitute.²⁹ In the same manner, Labīd b. Rabī'a describes mourning women performing tasallub in hairshirts, linking the ritual condition directly to the coarse fabric.³⁰

db | 1585

The mourner also adopted the *hils* (pl. *ahlās*), the thick, coarse blanket placed under a camel's saddle.³¹ The lexicographical sources confirm that the *hils*, like the *mish*, was woven from rough hair, but its specific association with the beast of burden added a layer of semiotic humiliation to the mourner. Al-Zamakhsharī records that the pre-Islamic widow would wrap herself in this animal blanket for the duration of her year-long seclusion, effectively reducing her social status to that of a riding beast. The *hils* was a saddle blanket, made to absorb sweat and dirt. By wearing it, the mourner showed that her dignity had been taken from her along with her protector. She was now bound to the house, like its fixed objects.³² Within the logic of tasallub, the softness of silk and cotton

²⁸ Abū Naṣr al-Jawharī, *Tāj al-lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-'Arabīya*, “m-s-h”, 1/405; Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb Jamharat al-lughah*, “m-s-h”, 1/535; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, “m-s-h”, 2/596; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, “m-s-h”, 4/205.

²⁹ al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, “m-s-h”, 4/205.

³⁰ Labīd b. Rabī'a, *al-Dīwān*, 138.

³¹ Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb Jamharat al-lughah*, “h-l-s”, 1/533; Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim b. Qutayba al-Dīnawarī Ibn Qutayba, *Adab al-kātib*, critical ed. Muḥammad al-Dālī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1402/1981), 207.

³² al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iq fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 1/304; See also the usage of *hils* in mourning contexts in Ibn Ḥabīb, *Al-Muḥabbar*, 323; See defining the idiom “hils of

were the prerogatives of a woman under protection. When that protector fell, the softness was stripped away.

1.3.3. Mi'lāh

The sources define the *mi'lāh* (pl. *ma'ālī*) as a specific black rag held in the hand of the wailing woman or the assistant leader of the assembly of wailing women.³³ Unlike the passive garments worn on the body, the *mi'lāh* functioned as the kinetic instrument of the mourning performance. Lexicographers define it specifically as a rag or strip of leather held in the hand, explicitly stating that the mourner used it to signal or gesture during the wailing.³⁴ Through this gesture, the black cloth moved in rhythm with the wailing, enabling the leading woman to direct the assembly by uniting the visual and auditory dimensions of the lament in a single ritual performance.

The materiality of the *mi'lāh* was characterized by degradation and multifunctionality, reinforcing the stripped status of the mourner. Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) and al-Zamakhsharī record a stark linguistic equivalence between this mourning object and the rag of the menstruating woman (*khirqat al-ḥa'id*), noting that the term *mi'lāh* was used interchangeably for both.³⁵ This association cast the mourning woman into ritual impurity and set her apart from normal social life. The rags she handled in public were a mark of her degradation.³⁶ The *mi'lāh* was also used as an instrument of self-harm. Lexicographers such as Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī and al-Baṭalyawṣī (d. 521/1127) note that women would strike their faces and cheeks with these rags. Al-Āmidī (d. 371/981) adds that wom-

1586| db

his house" as one who does not leave Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb Jamharat al-lughah*, "ḥ-l-s", 1/533.

³³ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iḳ fī ḡharīb al-ḥadīth*, 1/19; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, "'-l-y", 14/44.

³⁴ al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-'ayn*, "'-l-y", 8/557; Abū Muḥammad Qāsim b. Thābit al-'Awfī al-Saraquṣṭī, *al-Dalā'il fī ḡharīb al-ḥadīth*, critical ed. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qannāṣ (Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 1422/2001), 2/920.

³⁵ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Fā'iḳ fī ḡharīb al-ḥadīth*, 1/19; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, "'-l-y", 14/44.

³⁶ Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Sa'ādāt Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fī ḡharīb al-ḥadīth wa-al-athar*, critical ed. Ṭāhir Aḥmed ez-Zāwī - Maḥmūd Muḥammed al-Ṭanāḥī (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, 1399/1979), "m-'-l", 4/290.

en used these rags to strike their chests, as another form of ritual self-harm.³⁷

1.3.4. The Islamic Intervention and the Regulation of İhḍād

With the advent of Islam, the pre-Islamic mourning traditions did not disappear. Islam preserved some elements of them while prohibiting some aspects of the ritual. The early Muslim community kept much of the material code of the tradition intact. Jewelry and bright dyes were still banned. Black and simple garments were still required.³⁸ Yet Islam broke with the extreme aspects of the Jāhiliyya mourning tradition. The filth, the prolonged confinement, and the self-harm were replaced with a modest, legally bounded mourning. The mourner was degraded by the very terms of the ritual before Islam. She was confined to her shabbiest, unwashed rags, forbidden from basic grooming, and kept in deliberate filth.³⁹ But, Islamic regulation transformed the mourner's dress from squalor to modest sobriety. Adornment was forbidden, but basic hygiene was permitted. The mourner could wash and gather her hair with sidr (lote-tree leaves) and unscented oil.⁴⁰ Islam rescued the mourner from the degradation of the pre-Islamic tradition.

db | 1587

1.4. Ritual Acts of Taslīb/Tasallub

1.4.1. Nawḥ

The mourning ritual was performed communally, in a well-organized assembly. Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad defines the assembly (*ma'tam*) not as a funeral inherently, but simply as a gathering. Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933) adds that it was an assembly of women, making clear that this was a women's gathering.⁴¹ When used for mourning, the gathering became a wailing assembly (*manāḥah*), dedicated to *nawḥ*.⁴² In this space, *nawḥ* formed the audible core of the ritual. It was a structured, loud, and rhythmic lamentation. Al-

³⁷ Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Bishr b. Yahyā al-Āmidī, *al-Muwāzana bayna shi'r Abi Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, critical ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr - al-Muḥarib 'Abd Allāh (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1415/1994), 2/30; Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī, *Shams al-'ulūm wa-dawā' kalām al-'Arab min al-kulūm*, 7/4595.

³⁸ Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, "Ṭalāq," 2224, 2225.

³⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, 4/251.

⁴⁰ Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, "Ṭalāq," 2229.

⁴¹ al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-'ayn*, "t-m", 8/141; Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb Jamharat al-lughah*, 2/1032.

⁴² al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-'ayn*, "n-w-ḥ", 3/304-305.

Şāhib ibn ‘Abbād (d. 385/995) notes that *nawḥ* derives from *taqābul*, the concept of facing or being opposite. The women sat facing one another, and the word itself preserves this spatial arrangement. In the assembly, women sat facing each other, forming a circle in which they lamented together. The term *nawḥ* and the concept of opposing winds (*tanāwuḥ*) are both derived from the same Arabic root, *n-w-ḥ*, which also denotes the mournful cooing of pigeons. By sharing this linguistic root, the women’s collective, rhythmic wailing is linked to these natural sounds that resemble the wailing.⁴³ This vocal performance was further intensified by percussive strikes, such as striking the chest and upper arms, which provided the physical beat driving the wailing.⁴⁴ The warrior poet ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād (d. 614) made clear what this wailing meant. For him, to die before he could inflict it on the enemy’s women was to die a lesser death. As he declared, “I used to fear that I would die before the female relatives of ‘Amr stood in the midst of a mourning assembly, stripped [*musallibāt*].”⁴⁵ In the warrior mentality, the auditory performance of the *nawḥ* served as the ultimate, undeniable manifestation of the enemy’s collapse. To hear it was to know defeat.

1588| db

1.4.2. Khamsh and Ḥalq

The practice of *khamsh*, the intentional scratching or lacerating of the cheeks with the fingernails until they bled, was among the most extreme acts of the mourning ritual. Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 224/838) supplies a precise vocabulary for this practice. He defines the deep, self-inflicted scratches (*khumūsh*) and the permanent or semi-permanent scars (*kadūḥ*) they leave on the face. He conveys the severity of these wounds by comparing the mourner’s scarred face to the hide of a wild ass that has been bitten and scarred by other animals.⁴⁶ This physical laceration of the face was often paired with *ḥalq* (shaving or shearing the hair). By deliberately shearing it, the mourner performed the ultimate bodily expression of a woman deprived of her fallen kin. Al-Azharī explains the idiom ‘*aqrā ḥalqā*

⁴³ al-Şāhib ibn ‘Abbād, *al-Muḥīṭ fī al-lughah*, “n-w-ḥ,” 3/217.

⁴⁴ al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, “l-d-m,” 14/95.

⁴⁵ Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā, *Sharḥ Naqā‘id Jarīr wa-al-Farazdaq*, 3/810.

⁴⁶ al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Harawī Abū ‘Ubayd, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, critical ed. Ḥusayn Muḥammad Sharaf (Cairo: al-Hay‘ah al-‘Ammah li-Shu‘ūn al-Maṭābi‘ al-Amīriyah, 1404/1984), 1/240-241.

(wounded and shaven) by pointing to the bereaved woman who lacerates her face and shears her hair.⁴⁷ When the legendary chieftain Kulayb fell, his brother al-Muhalhil gave voice to the catastrophic loss, describing the once-secluded noblewomen emerging bareheaded to scratch at their faces.⁴⁸ Yet, these severe practices were not always accepted by women. For example, al-Khansā' (d. 24/644) stood apart. She refused to degrade herself in this way. While mourning her brother Şakhr, she rejected the self-harm of the Jāhilī tradition. Endurance, she held, preserved her nobility better than degradation. She declared, "But I found patience to be better than the [beating with] sandals and the shaved head."⁴⁹

1.4.3. Shaqq al-Juyūb

The intentional tearing of the garment's collar or chest opening (*shaqq al-juyūb*) was another act of the mourning women. This act was not a spontaneous individual loss of control. It was a traditional practice. The mourner was tearing her own clothing with her hands. Ḥamza b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 3/625) attests to this phenomenon in his boasting poem after the victory at Badr. In his poem, the enemy women mourn after the death of their protectors (*ḥumāt*). In their mourning, they are described as practicing the ritual tearing of their garments' collars among the wailing assembly. In this account, for Ḥamza, the mourning women of the enemy are the direct counterpart of the fallen warriors.⁵⁰ Abū 'Aṭā' al-Sindī (d. 180/796) takes this further. In his verse the mourning assembly itself acts as the agent of this ritual violence, describing how collars and cheeks were methodically split by the hands of an assembly (*bi-aydī ma'tamin*).⁵¹ The mourning described here is not a private practice. It is a ritual performed together. The practice was widely attested in boasting poetry. Al-Farazdaq (d. 114/732), for instance, celebrates the fall of Ibn al-Jawn by describ-

db | 1589

⁴⁷ al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, "ḥ-l-q", 4/38.

⁴⁸ 'Adī ibn Rabī'a al-Taghlibī al-Muhalhil ibn Rabī'a, *Dīwān Muhalhil ibn Rabī'a*, critical ed. Ṭalāl Ḥarb (Beirut: al-Dār al-'Ālamiyya, 1413/1993), 83.

⁴⁹ Tumāḍir bint 'Amr al-Sulamīyya al-Khansā', *al-Dīwān*, critical ed. Ḥamdū Ṭummās (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1425/2004), 87.

⁵⁰ Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik al-Ḥimyarī Ibn Hishām, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, critical ed. Muṣṭafā al-Sakḳā (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1375/1955), 2/8-9.

⁵¹ Ibn al-Anbārī, *Al-Zāhir fī ma'ānī kalimāt al-nās*, 1/163.

ing how the enemy's women were forced to emerge exposing their bodies (*abdayna mijladan*) after tearing their garments in grief.⁵²

Such ritual rending produced highly specialized mourning garments defined entirely by their lack of structural integrity. Abū 'Ubayd identifies the *baqīr* (also known as the *itb*), a mourning garment created by taking a standard woven cloak and slitting it to pass the head through.⁵³ A related mourning dress known as the *ṣadī* directly mirrors this destruction of the tailored garment. Philologists such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/890) explicitly link the two, noting that the *ṣadī* was a raw, split garment distinguished from the *baqīr* precisely because it lacked even the semblance of a tailored collar. Ibn Qutayba defines the *ṣadī* as a rudimentary garment that is split directly down the middle and pulled over the head, deliberately left unrefined and without a tailored collar.⁵⁴ According to al-Zabīdī, the *ṣadī* was worn by the professional wailer. She would split the black outer layer at her chest, revealing a white layer beneath.⁵⁵

1590 | db

1.4.4. The Islamic Prohibition of Ritual Violence

The early Islamic intervention treated wailing, self-mutilation, and the rending of garments as a single forbidden category. All three were prohibited as the physical violence of the Jāhiliyya mourning tradition. The Qur'ānic oath of allegiance grounded this prohibition. *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah* 60/12 made women's allegiance conditional on a pledge not to disobey the Prophet in what is recognized as good (*ma'rūf*). The earliest extant exegesis defines this clause as a prohibition against wailing, pulling the hair, and tearing garments.⁵⁶ The Prophet also categorically dismantled this ritual corpus. He defined it as a transgression that severed the mourner

⁵² Abū Firās Hammām b. Ghālib al-Farazdaq, *al-Dīwān*, critical ed. 'Alī Fā'ūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1407/1987), 225.

⁵³ al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Harawī Abū 'Ubayd, *al-Gharīb al-muṣannaḡ*, critical ed. Ṣafwān 'Adnān Dāwūdī (Medina: Majallat al-Jāmi'at al-Islāmiyya, 1414/1993), 2/413-414.

⁵⁴ Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Muslim b. Qutayba al-Dīnawarī Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Ma'ānī l-kabīr fī abyāt al-ma'ānī*, critical ed. Sālim al-Karnakawī et al. (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1368/1949), 1/193, 2/843.

⁵⁵ al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'arūs min jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, 11/268.

⁵⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Balkhī Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, critical ed. 'Abdullāh Maḥmūd Sheḥātāh (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1423/2002), 4/307; Abū al-Ḥajjāj Mujaḥid b. Jabr al-Qurashī Mujaḥid b. Jabr, *Tafsīr Mujaḥid*, critical ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1410/1989), 1/657.

from the Islamic community.⁵⁷ He declared, “He is not one of us who strikes the cheeks, tears the collars, and calls out with the calls of the Jāhiliyya.”⁵⁸ The decree directly targeted the acts through which the musallib performed the ritual. By explicitly prohibiting the manual destruction of the garment and the physical mutilation of the face and hair, Islam sought to erase this visible ritual corpus. In its place, the faith mandated internal restraint, ensuring that the mourning subject remained visually and physically intact, regardless of the magnitude of the tribal loss.⁵⁹

2. Taslīb/Tasallub as the Manifestation of Victory and Defeat in the Warrior’s Mentality

The previous section reconstructed the material and performative details of taslīb/tasallub. This section turns to what the ritual meant in the warrior’s world. It examines how the mourning practices marked victory and defeat in the warrior mentality.

2.1. Taslīb/Tasallub as the Manifestation of Victory

The boasting poetry (*fakhr*) of the era leaves no doubt about what demonstrated victory. The musallib’s acts were that proof. Poems of the era point to the mourning of enemy women. Above all else, this performance of mourning was the evidence for triumph. The warrior-chieftain ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl (d. 11/632), for instance, concludes a catalog of his raids by stating that his forces left the women of Banū Asad behind as stripped musallib widows (*nisā’ ahumu musallibatin ayāmā*).⁶⁰ By joining widowhood to the mourning garments, ‘Āmir proves his victory. He can impose deprivation on the enemy, and that is the proof.

Similarly, Labīd b. Rabī‘a evaluates the lethality of his weapon not by the wound it inflicts but by the stripped wailing it raises, boasting of delivering spear-thrusts that raise the voices of musal-

db | 1591

⁵⁷ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar*, critical ed. Muḥammed Zühayr b. Naṣr (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, 1422/2001), “Janā‘iz,” 39 (no. 1296).

⁵⁸ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar*, “Janā‘iz,” 40 (no. 1298); Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār al-Muṭṭalibī Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sīra*, critical ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1398/1978), 270–271.

⁵⁹ Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf* (Cairo: Dār al-Ta‘ṣīl, 1435/2015), 3/419 (no. 6793).

⁶⁰ Abū ‘Alī ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl al-‘Āmirī ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl, *al-Dīwān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1399/1979), 109.

lib's wailing (*rafa 'tu bihā aṣwāta nawḥin musallabī*).⁶¹ A successful strike, in his terms, is one that instantly transforms the enemy camp into an audible and visual mourning assembly. Such visual evidence was the legible proof of victory, a stark material contrast between the victorious and the vanquished. Al-Afwah al-Awdī, for instance, celebrates his tribe's dominance by describing enemy widows weeping and waving their black mourning rags against the backdrop of his warriors' broad-bladed swords. The contrast leaves the imbalance of power beyond dispute.⁶²

This proof of victory, the tasallub of enemy women, did not disappear with the coming of Islam. It carried over into the martial poetry of the early Islamic period, most notably after the Meccan defeat at Badr. Ḥamza's Badr poem, discussed earlier, makes the point directly. He boasted that the mourning women tore their collars in grief for the men they had lost. In his eyes, the mourning women were the evidence of his victory.⁶³ 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) reinforces this same logic, describing the women of the fallen Meccan aristocracy directly as *musallabah*, burning with grief.⁶⁴ For these early Muslim warriors, as for their pre-Islamic predecessors, the definitive proof of victory was demonstrated by the condition of the mourning women and used as a theme of boasting.

2.2. Taslīb/Tasallub as the Manifestation of Defeat

Al-Muhalhil b. Rabī'a (d. 525) captures this dynamic with precision in his elegy for his brother Kulayb. The poem opens with the tribe's former protective seclusion. "We used to guard the maidens with such jealousy that you would not see one leaving her homeland" (*kunnā naghāru 'alā al-'awātiqi*). The killing of Kulayb shatters this boundary. The maidens emerge bareheaded and unveiled, certain of their humiliation. Kulayb was left bare, without burial shrouds, and the dishonor of this is central to the elegy. Al-Muhalhil describes the women stripped of their adornments, scratching their bare faces. He calls them *mutasallibāt*, their insides burning with grief. The poem closes with the women's own voice,

⁶¹ Labīd b. Rabī'a, *al-Dīwān*, 10.

⁶² al-Afwah al-Awdī, *Dīwān al-Afwah al-Awdī*, 103.

⁶³ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 2/9.

⁶⁴ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 2/11-12.

demanding the restoration of protection and the reddening of spear tips in vengeance (*man li-khaḍbi 'awālī al-murrān*).⁶⁵ The poem weaves physical exposure, ritual stripping, and the summons to blood into a single sequence. The musallib embodies defeat and the vengeance it requires.

The same logic governed the warrior's understanding of his own potential failure. The warrior 'Ubayd Allāh b. Dhibyān illustrates this inescapable contract after his brother Nābi' was slain by Muṣ'ab b. al-Zubayr (d. 72/691). Swearing a blood oath to kill one hundred men from the Quraysh in retaliation, 'Ubayd Allāh slew eighty, ending with Muṣ'ab himself. For the remaining twenty enemies, he pledged his own life as collateral. But what he feared was not his own death. He feared that the sun would rise over a stripped, wailing assembly at his house. As he put it, "otherwise, there shall be seen over me, at the break of dawn, a stripped wailing assembly."⁶⁶ To the tribal warrior, the ultimate proof of failure to take blood revenge was the haunting knowledge that the sun would rise to reveal the women of his own house clothed in the black rags of musallib.

db | 1593

Al-Khansā', the well-known voice of pre-Islamic elegy, articulates this logic. In her elegies, the severity of mourning mirrors the stature of the lost protector. Addressing herself, she commands that "so weep, and do not weary of lamenting as a musallibah over your brother, lofty of resolve and far-reaching in power."⁶⁷ The severity of the mourning must correspond to the stature of the lost kinsman's nobility. The greater the noble's standing in life, the more severe the tasallub of the women upon his death. The competitive dimension of this logic is captured in a tradition that brings the two most formidable mourning women of the era into direct confrontation. It is related that al-Khansā' and Hind bint 'Utba met at the fair of 'Ukāz, where each claimed to be "the greatest of the Arabs in affliction." Hind challenged al-Khansā' to justify her claim, and al-Khansā' named her father and two brothers. Hind countered with her father 'Utba, her uncle Shayba, and her brother al-Walīd, all

⁶⁵ al-Muhalhil ibn Rabī'a, *Dīwān Muhalhil ibn Rabī'a*, 83.

⁶⁶ Abū al-Faraj al-Mu'āfā b. Zakariyyā al-Nahrawānī al-Mu'āfā b. Zakariyyā, *al-Jalīs al-ṣāliḥ al-kāfi wa-l-anīs al-nāṣiḥ al-shāfi*, critical ed. 'Abd al-Karīm Sāmī al-Jundī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1426/2005), 631–632.

⁶⁷ al-Khansā', *al-Dīwān*, 80.

slain at Badr. Al-Khansā' conceded.⁶⁸ The anecdote, whether historical or literary, captures the principle of mourning tradition. The mourning woman who could claim the greatest loss commanded the greatest moral authority to demand of and incite her kinsmen to blood vengeance.

The mourning women's authority was nowhere more powerfully enacted than in Hind's response to the loss of her close kinsmen at Badr. After losing her father, uncle, and brother, Hind entered the ritual condition of the mourning woman. In her elegy for her father, she declared that she was for him enraged, anguished, and stripped (*innī 'alayhi ḥaribah, malhūfah mustalabah*). The symmetry was exact. Just as 'Utba had been stripped of his armor and weapons, his daughter now stripped herself of her finery and adornment in the ritual practice of tasallub. Yet Hind did not inhabit this condition silently. When the women of Quraysh asked why she did not weep for her slain kinsmen, Hind refused to offer the enemy the satisfaction of her tears. She swore that oil was forbidden to enter her head until they raided Muḥammad. If sorrow could remove what was in her heart, she declared, she would weep. But nothing would remove it except seeing vengeance with her own eyes upon the killers of her loved ones. She touched no oil, and she did not approach the bed of Abū Sufyān (d. 31/651-52) from the day of her oath until the battle of Uḥud (3/625).⁶⁹ By maintaining the strictest material requirements of the mourning rite, Hind became a constant, visceral accusation against the men of Quraysh. Her condition made it socially impossible for them to rest while the humiliation of their mourning women remained unanswered. The following year, the Quraysh marched to Uḥud to avenge their slain men at Badr. During the battle, Waḥshī (d. after 23/644) struck down Ḥamza, and Hind claimed her vengeance. When Waḥshī asked what reward awaited him, Hind answered using the direct terminology of spoliation. Just as her father 'Utba had lost his salab with his killing on the battlefield, Hind now offered her own salab in return. She stripped off her clothes and jewelry and handed them to Waḥshī. She then mutilated Ḥamza's corpse, replacing the jewelry she had sacrificed with ornaments fashioned

1594| db

⁶⁸ al-Khansā', *al-Dīwān*, 40–41.

⁶⁹ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, critical ed. Marsden Jones (Beirut: Dār al-A'lamī, 1409/1989), 1/124.

from his flesh. His ears, nose, and genitals were worn as bracelets, armlets, and anklets.⁷⁰ The stripped mourner was re-adorned in the very body of the slain enemy. Hind's tasallub was not an expression of private sorrow alone. It was a contract, binding men to extract vengeance. The musallib was the instrument that bound the living to restore through blood what the dead had lost.

Conclusion

The evidence assembled in this study demonstrates that the pre-Islamic ritual of taslīb/tasallub was far more than a private expression of grief. It was a highly regulated mourning practice that functioned, in the warrior's mentality, as the most visible manifestation of victory and defeat.

Close philological analysis of classical Arabic lexicons, pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, and early Islamic legal and historical sources reveals that the ritual possessed a coherent material and performative anatomy. The black headwraps of the silāb, the abrasive hairshirts of the mish, the signaling rags of the mi'lāh, and the choreographed acts of wailing, self-mutilation, and garment-rending constituted not spontaneous expressions of sorrow but a legible public code. It was a ritual state that lexicographers classified as a totalizing transformation of identity. The early Islamic intervention dismantled the code's most extreme expressions while preserving its core sartorial and sensory framework. It replaced degradation with disciplined, legally bounded observance.

On the battlefield, the musallib served a dual role within the warrior mentality. For the victor, enemy women reduced to widows in black rags constituted the definitive proof of triumph. For the vanquished, the musallib functioned both as the measure of the fallen protector's stature and as a standing demand for vengeance. The severity of the stripping corresponded to the stature of the dead, and the mourning woman's appearance operated as a living accusation binding their surviving men to restore through blood what had been stripped away.

This study makes two principal contributions. First, by introducing the precise technical vocabulary of taslīb/tasallub into the scholarly conversation, it reconstructs a ritual institution that previ-

⁷⁰ al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, 1/285-286.

ous scholarship analyzed partly through its poetic and political dimensions rather than as a unified mourning tradition grounded in a lexically codified material condition. Second, by subjecting this ritual to analysis through the unified philological lens of the root *s-l-b*, the study demonstrates that the stripping of the mourning woman was the direct counterpart to the spoliation of the fallen warrior, stripped of his belongings and left bare. This material and conceptual symmetry places the mourning woman at the center of the warrior mentality. In documenting this grammar of visible grief as a publicly regulated, politically consequential performance, the study also points toward a broader history of emotions in which mourning was never merely a private interior state.

This study has traced the foundational grammar of a system in which the mourning woman's condition functioned as the most visible manifestation of military standing. The nascent Islamic order recognized this system as both a political force and a creedal concern, and it set about dismantling it. Several questions remain open for future research. The persistence and transformation of these practices in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods awaits systematic study. So too does the regional variation in mourning customs across the Arabian Peninsula. Finally, the fuller integration of the ritual's auditory and kinetic dimensions with its material components remains a rich area for further inquiry.

1596| db

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