9 Beauty

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Islamic thought understands modesty as, although not only as, concealing women's physical beauty: the Qur'ānic precept contained in the sura 'The Light' in fact calls on women to conceal their adornment, or embellishment (*zīna* زينة), because their display may lead to disobedience to God in the particular form of fornication (*zinā*). As we have read:

> Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to cover their bosoms with their veils. (Qur'ān XXIV,31)

In contrast to what a superficial reading might suggest, women's adornment is understood by commentators not necessarily as physical beauty, but in the sense of clothing, and also of anklets, bracelets, earrings and necklaces, as opposed to rings and beads that are instead considered decent and therefore 'seeable'. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr, and also the modern scholar Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, among others, take this line in their great exegetical works.

Regardless of whether the context is a female one, the idea that 'embellishment' or *zīna*, be it artefact and therefore the work of man or natural and therefore more directly the work of God, can turn out to be a temptation to evil, or at least a deception to the eyes and heart, runs through the Qur'ān. It is found, for example, in the sura *al-Kahf* 'The Cave', where God comforts the Prophet thus:

> Will you destroy yourself out of grief because they disbelieve this Book? That which is on earth we have made but as an embellishment, in order

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> that We may test them, as to which of them are best in conduct. And We shall surely make all that is on it barren dust. (Qur'ān XVIII, 6-8)

We find it too in the sura *fāṭir* 'The Originator', this time referring to human behaviour:

> As for one whose evil deeds have been made attractive [by God, *zuyyina*] so he considers them good, God guides or causes to go astray whomever He wants. [Muḥammad], do not be grieved because of their disbelief. God knows well whatever they do. (Qur'ān XXXV,8; cf. XLVII,14)

Nonetheless, this distrust of beauty, as an evil enchantment or a sterile delight, is matched in the Qur'ān itself by statements to the contrary, which instead praise 'embellishment' as a gift coming from divine Wisdom and Mercy. The apparent contradiction is readily explained: 'beauty' (*jamāl* جمال),[1] as seen in the Qur'ān, is subject to moral judgement in the light of religion. That is to say, the beautiful is recognised in itself and as such, but it does not necessarily coincide or merge with the good; and that, in the case of human beings, beauty, whether innate in them or produced by them, can be virtuous and good just as it can be vicious and perverse.[2] When Islamic thought has produced aesthetic theories rooted in its own cultural foundations, the intersection between the beautiful and the good has resulted in a critique of the arts, visual and otherwise, together with their purposes – a critique that has included the ethical-legal element: every work of art is first and foremost a *work*, that is, an artefact produced by human action (*'amal* عمل), and must therefore be judged according to the normative criteria of human behaviour, the five normative qualifications (*al-aḥkām al*-khamsa), from the forbidden to the obligatory.

9.1 The First Work of Art

An important examination of aesthetics in relation to morality is offered by the Palestinian American Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī (d. 1986). His essay *Al-tawḥīd wa-l-fann. Naẓariyyat al-fann al-islāmī* or 'Monotheism and Art. A Theory of Islamic Art',[3] is – perhaps for the first time – an attempt to understand and systematise Islamic art from its own point of view, i.e. from the perspective of the historical and philosophical thought that Islam itself has produced. From this perspective, which insists on the relationship between faith and art, the discourse cannot but start from the dogma of the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān* إعجاز القرآن), the incontrovertible assumption that the incomparability, the miraculous nature of the Holy Book rests not only in the definitive truths it contains, but also in its formal beauty.

The Qur'ān is the first Islamic work of art – al-Fārūqī insists – and in order to grasp its exceptional nature, man clearly needs an aesthetic sensibility,

1 Or, also from the Qur'ān, *ḥilya* حلية, *zukhruf* زخرف, *qurrat 'ayn* قرّة عين or *bahīj* بهيج.

2 A modern example of the overlapping of beauty and goodness, the latter in a religious sense, is the way female beauty contests are judged in the Islamic world: for instance, 'The World Muslimah Award', a competition inaugurated in Jakarta (Indonesia) in 2011, rewards physical beauty, intellectual ability and religious piety together.

3 al-Fārūqī 1999.

a fundamental divine gift without which no believer could appreciate the Book's exquisite eloquence. He then goes on to review Islamic production in the field of figurative arts over the course of history, and homes in on calligraphy, the art form primarily tasked with expressing the transcendent divine Reality. Throughout, he emphasises the spiritual basis of Islamic art and also its essentially Arab flavour, which is hardly separable from Islam.

Along the same lines, and with a comparable sensitivity, another example of contemporary reflection is *Al-Islām wa-l-funūn al-jamīla* or 'Islam and the Fine Arts'[4] by the Egyptian Muḥammad 'Imāra (d. 2020), a member of the al-Azhar Academy of Islamic Studies, who was especially concerned with the global dimension of Islam and its attendant pressures. In this widely read work, 'Imāra analyses the visual arts and the musical arts, in particular recitations of the Qur'ān, and explains from the outset that he wants to respond to the long-standing and still ongoing controversy between supporters of the fine arts and those who, viewing them with suspicion or claiming their incompatibility with the faith, only provide ammunition for those who believe that Islam is inimical to beauty.[5] His defence of the arts, rigorously conducted on the basis of the Qur'ān and the Sunni Tradition, results in an ethical-aesthetic theory: artistic embellishment is permissible or recommended, and in some cases even obligatory, when it is intended to 'build this earth' (*'imārat al-arḍ* عمارة الأرض) and enhance its beauty as a sign of gratitude for the beauty that God Himself has scattered throughout the world, a manifestation of divine creativity offered to the believer so that he may materially benefit from it, but also so that he may reflect on it and cultivate the pious desire to embellish the world in his turn. Art, on the other hand, is rightly forbidden if it spreads wickedness and perversion.

The author repeatedly emphasises that the fine arts can truly be considered such only when they contain a message in line with the world of Islamic values. In this way, belonging to Islam and the good practice of religion help to discriminate between those who employ beauty to encourage praiseworthy character traits, whether their own or those of others, and those who do the opposite.

9.2 Beauty and Morality

In *Islam and the Fine Arts*, Muḥammad 'Imāra devotes ample space to his particular take on visual aesthetics.[6] Like the Palestinian al-Fārūqī, this author insists on the miraculousness of the Qur'ān, a work of art that stands at the head of a world religion, and observes that among the incomparable merits of the Book is its ability to express thoughts and concepts through images, to the extent that, when reading or reciting the Qur'ān, one continually has the impression of being confronted with vivid pen portraits and illustrations. Echoing the association between the divine Figure and the

4 'Imāra 1411/1991.

5 On the sometimes bitter disputes between supporters and detractors of the fine arts, from the reforms of the nineteenth century to the rigid convictions of reformist movements, I refer the reader to Naef (2015), where the author summarises the positions of various modern and contemporary Muslim intellectuals of differing tendencies, including the generally more relaxed Shiite view (cf. 65-113).

6 'Imāra 1411/1991, 109-43

figurative artist, typical of Islamic philosophy of Platonic tendency and not a million miles from the thought of the great al Ghazālī,[7] the author observes that the skilful Qur'ānic similes – the 'heaviness' in the ears of the unbelievers (Qur'ān XLI,44), or the flock of sheep who perceive nothing except a distant shouting (II, 171), and so on – "flesh out thoughts, sketch out reasoning and render concepts pictures that talk, can be seen with the eyes, and take shape in the imagination".[8]

'Imāra is well aware that much of the material that led to the prohibition of images is not to be found in the Qur'ān but in the Prophetic Tradition; among the best known sayings, "on the Day of Judgement, God will punish anyone who has forged an image until he has breathed spirit into it, which he will not be able to do".[9] But even in his interpretation of the Sunna, the author opposes extreme positions on rational grounds, and firmly upholds the relativity of the legal status of art: the various forms of representation, part of man's legitimate aesthetic activity, are attributed ethical-juridical connotations according to their motivation, wisdom, purpose, and also the benefit they bring to the community; it is only after taking into consideration all these elements that one can declare the lawfulness or even necessity of a given work, or on the contrary its reprehensibility, and perhaps its prohibition if it lends itself to idolatrous behaviour. For Muḥammad 'Imāra, as for Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, the arts are only beautiful when they are both beautiful and good, that is, moral according to Islam. This is obviously a position far removed from the 'art for art's sake' that western aesthetic thought has adopted, and certainly closer to the classical ideal of καλοκάγαθία; but equally, it can only produce a knee-jerk aversion to works of non-Islamic inspiration in those who subscribe to it with unthinking fanaticism.[10]

Islam and the Fine Arts contains many examples of visual art from the annals of Islamic civilisation and records the divergent opinions of theologians and jurists on the issue. Among these features, another Egyptian, the modernist theologian Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1323/1905), whose thought 'Imāra certainly follows here as elsewhere. 'Abduh, a great lover of Arabic poetry of all periods and a student of the artistic heritage of peoples, had posed himself the question of the relationship between Islam and art during a trip to Sicily, where he had admired the many works that adorn churches and burial places there.[11] He concluded that images are permissible which do not undermine faith, and compared "drawing to a poem that can be seen and not heard, and poetry to a drawing that can be heard and not seen".[12]

Finally, Muḥammad 'Imāra teaches that the production of beauty and the related refinement of our aesthetic sense are part of the prime duty

7 Cf. Hillenbrand 1994, 249-65.

8 'Imāra 1411/1991, 117.

9 E.g. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb al-libās wa-l-zīna*, no. 3953.

10 In other words, a belief in the necessary overlap of beauty and goodness (the latter in an Islamic reading) cannot justify acts of vandalism such as those perpetrated in Palmyra, Mosul, Nineveh or Nimrud by the so-called Islamic State, or earlier by the Taliban in Afghanistan; actions which, on closer inspection, have less to do with a lack of appreciation for works of art than with a desire to airbrush the historical epochs in which those works saw the light of day. For further reading, cf. De Cesari 2015, 22-6.

11 As he wrote to a friend, the well-known Salafi scholar Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935); 'Imāra 1411/1991, 138.

12 'Imāra 1411/1991, 136-7.

of gratitude (*shukr*) to God, a duty that concerns all mankind and not only Muslims, since the love for what is beautiful is quite simply inherent in human nature (*fiṭra* فطرة). He cites the Qur'ān in support, in particular the sura 'The Heights', in which all the sons of Adam are called upon to beautify themselves when they go to a place of worship (VII,31-3). He then deals specifically with those who adhere to Islam:

> The Muslim, by virtue of his faith and religion, is called upon to conform to the qualities of God himself […]; and he must endeavour to make the import of the Beautiful Names his own, to the extent of his ability, while remaining aware of the gulf separating the absolute from the relative. The Messenger of God taught us that among those divine Names is 'the Beautiful' [*al-jamīl* الجميل]; indeed, there is a saying of the Prophet that "God is Beautiful and loves beauty". So, the Muslim is required to distinguish himself by beauty, which means both ostensible beauty and goodness – in his actions, therefore, and inwardly – and to develop his ability to perceive the beauty that God has delivered to the world, which is both the beauty of images and the beauty of concepts. In this, for man, there lies perfection and also happiness.[13]

9.3 God Is Beautiful and Loves Beauty

> The Prophet said: – No one will enter paradise who has the smallest hint of pride [*kibr* كبر] in his heart.
>
> Someone objected: – But a man likes to have beautiful clothing and beautiful footwear.
>
> The Prophet replied: – God is Beautiful and loves beauty, pride means denying the truth and despising the people.[14]

In this and other Prophetic sayings, and also in contemporary aesthetic reflection, visible beauty, loved and sought after by men, is not the mere 'ornament' or *zīna*, which the Qur'ān condemns when it speaks of women (Qur'ān XXIV,31; cf. XXIV,60), but the stronger and more complex *jamāl*, which includes both physical and moral connotations: as the lexicographers of the past teach, *jamāl* embraces the propriety and pleasantness of physical features, mind, character, and general behaviour; thus, beauty and goodness and also what is appropriate.[15] *Jamāl* also contains an idea of grouping, aggregation, sum of the parts, and unity: one thinks of *jumla* جملة, a related term, employed by Arab grammarians to mean the completed sentence, noun and predicate or verb and subject; from here to the idea of beauty as the happy copresence of necessary parts, and thus as perfection and completeness, is a short enough step.

The Prophet's saying about God's beauty and God's love for beauty in the world is often taken up by pastorally inclined contemporary authors. As one, they teach that the beauty man likes and seeks, divine in its principle,

13 'Imāra 1411/1991, 20-1.

14 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb al-īmān*, *bāb taḥrīm al-kibr wa-bayāni-hi*, no. 134.

15 Lane 1968, root j-m-l.

is consonant with the good life, conducive, even, to self-improvement. Analogously to pride, beauty can expose one, however, to the risk of ingratitude to God when it is not recognized as His gift, when its true nature is denied – for those who do not recognize divine authority over the beauty they possess may think they are superior to others.

We looked above at the opinion of the Egyptian Muḥammad ʿImāra on the Muslim's duty to produce beauty in the world in imitation of the Creator, and on the permissibility of figurative arts that meet the requirements of morality. The Syrian intellectual Muḥammad Rātib al-Nābulusī, too, in his *Encyclopaedia of the Beautiful Names of God*, repeatedly returns to the Muslim's ethical self-refinement through the imitation of divine attributes; and the Name 'The Beautiful' is no exception. When discussing this,[16] al-Nābulusī emphasises in his turn the love of beauty (*jamāl*) that is necessarily at the head of the Islamic religion in the form of the Qurʾān, a beautiful Book whose truthfulness is confirmed from the outset by human aesthetic judgement; and he maintains that it is the Qurʾān itself that promotes a refinement of the aesthetic sense in the believer. Unlike other writers, however, the author shines a particular light on the beauty of human creatures, in both their physical traits and their moral characteristics. For there is also such a thing as a beauty of behaviour; history, says al-Nābulusī, has left us with the record of beautiful deeds even if those who performed them were far from beautiful themselves: a well-known case is that of the wise and magnanimous al-Aḥnaf Ibn Qays (d. 69/688) who encouraged his great tribe to convert to Islam, but whose physical ugliness was unparalleled.

In the midst of his many digressions, al-Nābulusī quotes a prayer of the Prophet's that plays on the necessary overlap of beauty and goodness: "My Lord, You who have made my appearance handsome, make also my character good"; and then goes on to mention the beauty of patience, and that of forgiveness, and also the beauty of eloquence versus coarseness. But since beauty must coincide with obedience to God, al-Nābulusī repeatedly warns his brothers against the bedazzlement of material, finite and perishable beauty, whereas God's beauty is infinite, absolute and perfect. But once the good beauty that is a source of happiness has been distinguished from the illicit beauty that only brings sadness, the author strongly recommends his brothers to seek the aesthetic dimension in everyday life, everywhere, in the home, in the workplace, in the clothes he wears, and to invoke God with the Name *al-jamīl*, 'The Beautiful', to receive from Him in return some reflection of His beauty.

9.4 Beauty and the Image

The Saudi Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid – chiefly known for the multilingual question and answer website IslamQA on which he provides answers to the many questions of the faithful – also thinks, like al-Nābulusī, that God loves beauty in the sense that He loves to see in man the sign, the result, the material trace of the grace He Himself has bestowed upon him. The Prophet said that "God loves to see in His servants the effect of His

16 Al-Nābulusī 2002b, *Ism Allāh al-jamīl*, lesson 010, 2018. https://nabulsi.com/web/article/784.

grace",[17] he reminds us, and this means that the Muslim is obliged to take care of his own appearance, in clothes and other objects of personal adornment, without skimping. Al-Munajjid too insists on the moral and spiritual dimension, on the inner facet of human beauty that is gratitude to God for benefits received, together with the fear of God (*taqwā*) that gratitude entails, because the fear of God is also an embellishment, albeit a hidden rather than overt one.[18]

Al-Munajjid holds, as do others, that God loves in man the beauty of faith, words and deeds, clothes and general appearance, just as He hates ugliness in many other things. But all this is well known, he goes on to say; what needs to be considered carefully is that in assessing beauty, many Muslims fall into error either by excess or by deficiency, especially when it comes to images. On the one side are those who affirm that God loves everything He has created, and hates nothing, because everything He has created is necessarily beautiful (*jamīl*): they are wrong, because in their depravity they come to venerate the beauty of men and women, in the conviction that this is permissible. On the opposite side stand those who say that God condemns the beauty of images in every form and everywhere.

Al-Munajjid is a staunch advocate of the *via media* (*wasaṭiyya*) as a criterion of life, believing that the correct path is usually the one that lies in the middle, and he evaluates the beauty of images on a case-by-case basis, according to the differing circumstances in which they are offered to our view, and according to the different legal status they merit: they are praiseworthy when consistent with obedience to God, with the acceptance of His word and the triumph of His religion, and they are conversely reprehensible or illicit when they promote the life of this world and the supremacy of the individual. Consistently with the ethical-legal framework of his reasoning, al-Munajjid adds that an image can also be 'indifferent' (*mubāḥ* مباح), deserving of neither praise nor condemnation.

9.5 Beauty and Pride

Evaluations of beauty in the context of Islamic culture are clearly not unanimous and can vary in line with the doctrinal affiliations of the authors concerned. As we have seen, there are those who view physical and material beauty unconcernedly or even with admiration, focusing on its gratifying aspect, and those who observe it more guardedly on a case-by-case basis, coming up with different evaluations. Regarding the beauty produced by man, of himself and in the world, the general assumption is that it is permissible according to religion – or even called for – as long as it coincides with an interior beauty, that is to say, provided it emanates from a desire to please the Creator and give thanks to the Beautiful One *par excellence*, the source of all beauty, and from a pious desire to conform to Him by refining one's own qualities; and that it is illicit otherwise.

Among the plethora of perspectives, there are also those who definitively reduce beauty to the decorum of our world down here, an opinion that is some way from the previous ones in terms of inspiration and doctrinal

17 Cf. al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, *kitāb al-adab*, no. 2764

18 Al-Munajjid 1997-2019, question no. 6652, 3 November 1999.

school, but for all that quite widespread. Such is the case of the Saudi ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Ḥumūd al-Farīḥ,[19] preacher, and author of *Ibhāj al-muslim bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* or 'The Muslim's Delight in the Explanation of Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*', a learned commentary on the great Tradition work by Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj.[20]

In this work al-Farīḥ glosses, among many others, the saying about beauty being distinguished from pride,[21] although in so doing he deals almost exclusively with pride. It is a grave sin, he explains, and then goes on to review its various categories: against God, against the Prophet, against one's neighbour; its causes: arrogance, resentment, envy, hypocrisy; its consequences: refusal to obey God, rejection of His revelation and other divine gifts, eschatological damnation; and finally its worldly effects on the sinner himself: inability to accept the truth, contempt for others and a poor relationship with one's neighbour, squandering the goods of others, conceit, prevarication.

Turning to the prescriptive aspect, al-Farīḥ teaches how one can cure oneself, God willing, of pride, which is a disease: one must call to mind the grace already received, conform to the example of the Prophet, the model of humility, think about hell and its denizens, read the biographies of the great and the wise, and finally meditate on the poverty of man's origins and condition, remembering that many have gone before us, perhaps better than we are.

Only at this point does the author address the subject of beauty, both in God and in the things of this world. Of the Name *al-jamīl* 'The Beautiful', he explains that this is an attribute of the divine Essence and that, despite what speculative theologians have thought, belief in its reality is obligatory; he adds that, of course, God's primordial, absolute beauty has no likeness or equal in creation. He then turns to the beauty that God loves in man: it is not at all the beauty of the body, which is not man's responsibility, as he has no control over it, but its embellishment. He consults the Sunna of the Prophet on the matter, citing the various references to beauty in clothing, and concludes that God loves beautiful attire and by extension anything that beautifies.

Al-Farīḥ does not forget another well-known Prophetic saying, taken by many as an admonition against avarice and sterile accumulation: "God loves to see in His servants the effect of His grace". And he wonders if there is not a contradiction here with another comment of Muḥammad's, according to which "untidiness [*badhādha* بذاذة] is part of faith",[22] a degree of scruffiness being a form of humility. The answer he offers is as follows: the approved embellishment, a manifestation of Grace, is that which is devoid of excess, without self-importance, dictated only by gratitude to the Creator and the desire for His pleasure; as for the Prophet's praise of humility in dress, it means that the Muslim should not throw himself headlong into the beauties of this world, nor flaunt his means.

It should be noted that in this author's take on the issue, the aesthetic element endorsed by religion touches only tangentially on the qualities of the soul and goodness of behaviour, and is confined to external embellishment, to the 'ornamentation' (*zīna*) that man may deck himself out with; and that, here too, the aesthetic experience soon turns morbid and vicious when it is

19 I was unable to ascertain the author's date of birth.

20 Al-Farīḥ 1436/2015.

21 Al-Farīḥ 1436/2015, 132-8.

22 For example, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *kitāb al-tarajjul*, *bāb al-nahy ʿan kathīr min al-irfāh*, no. 3632.

accompanied by haughtiness, which impinges on the rights of God and on those of one's brother.

9.6 Beauty and Perfume

Finally, a few words on the relationship between beauty and fragrance, mostly based on a fairly recent publication, *Al-hadī al-nabawī fī l-ṭīb* or 'The Prophetic Guidance on Perfume', by Islām Yāsīn and Rūḥayzān Bārū, researchers at Al-Sulṭān Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Islamic University in Malaysia.[23]

The authors begin by noting that "Islam is the religion of beauty in all its aspects, both material and moral" and that "it exhorts the Muslim to smell good in every situation and continuously". They review the meaning of *ṭīb* طيب 'perfume' according to some of the main classical dictionaries (Ibn Manẓūr, Ibn Fāris), *ṭīb* being the most common term for perfume in the early sources. They then highlight the importance of the spice and perfume trade to and from the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam, before proceeding to focus, as their title indicates, on the Prophetic example, which is to say, on the stories contained in the Sunna.

First of all, the authors claim perfume as a natural attribute of Muḥammad. Among the many sayings in support of this, there is one from the Companion Anas Ibn Mālik: "I have never smelled amber or musk or anything else more fragrant than the Prophet's odour". A later scholar, the Egyptian judge and historian Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), explains in a commentary that Muḥammad was the most perfect of human creatures in every attribute, physical as well as moral.[24] Again on fragrance as a physical quality of the Prophet: one of his wives, Umm Sulaym, apparently used to collect his sweat to perfume the people of her house. When he went to her quarters for a nap, she would lay out a leather rug for him to sleep on; then she collected his sweat, mixed it with her own perfume and kept it in a glass container.[25] Also from Anas Ibn Mālik: "I have never touched a silk or a brocade softer than the palm of the Prophet's hand, nor have I ever smelled an odour sweeter than the Prophet's".[26]

Obviously, the Prophet cannot be emulated in that peculiarity, which was the natural personal scent emanating from his body; however, Muslims are encouraged to use perfume and make themselves pleasant to others, a habit the Prophet himself loved as much as he hated bad smells: famous is his recommendation to the faithful not to eat onion or garlic when they had to go to the mosque; "whoever has eaten onion or garlic", he declared, "stay away from us and our mosque".[27]

In so far as imitating the Prophet has to do with the Law, using perfume has to do with the Law too.

As we know, from a juridical perspective, actions are divided into five legal categories from obligatory to prohibited. According to the Tradition,

23 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017. Worth mentioning another recent study, which is broader but more 'secular' in orientation, al-Jannābī 2015. Worthwhile too is Bursi 2020.

24 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 135; the story is on the authority of Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj.

25 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 136; again on the authority of Muslim.

26 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 135 (from al-Bukhārī).

27 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 136 (from Muslim).

perfuming oneself is not obligatory, and the reason is clear: one of the main principles of Islamic Law is not to impose a greater burden than any person can bear, and perfume, being an expensive accessory, cannot be imposed on those who cannot afford it. Perfume is therefore mostly considered 'recommended', in particular in the following cases: in the times and places where people gather, that is on Fridays and on the main feasts of the Islamic calendar; before lovemaking, a recommendation that applies to both spouses; before entering the 'state of purity' (*iḥrām* إحرام) needed to perform the Pilgrimage; and during the ritual washing of corpses. Perfume is also recommended to women at the end of their menstrual period.[28] In certain cases, perfume is instead forbidden and subject to strict proscription: during the 'state of purity', applying to men and women alike; for the woman after the death of her husband, in the required waiting period before remarriage; for the woman who leaves home alone. A last prohibition is the following: a man must not use the perfumes for women, nor a woman perfumes for men, part of a more general interdiction, that of gender confusion in behaviour.[29]

The two Malaysian authors' informative work also contains an interesting overview of the fragrances used in Muḥammad's day – musk, sorghum, amber, camphor, incense etc. – as recorded in the main collections of Prophetic Tradition.[30]

28 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 140-2.

29 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 142-6.

30 Yāsīn, Bārū 2017, 138-40.