HĀJAR IN THE QUR’ĀN AND ITS EARLY COMMENTARIES

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Although by far not as well known as her son Ismā‘īl, Hájar or Ājar as she also sometimes is called is certainly not unfamiliar to most Muslims. After all, wasn’t it her desperate search for water for her thirsty son which made her run seven times the approximately 350 meters from the top of the little hillock al-Ṣafā to that of al-Marwa to look for water or for people who might bring it? Isn’t it exactly that which is commemorated during the *hajj* with the *sa’y*, the ritual run, from al-Ṣafā to al-Marwa? And wasn’t it the famous Zamzam well which sprang up to save her and her son?

One only has to look up the lemma “Abraham” in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* to find out what part Hājar plays in the narrative cycle of Ibrāhīm which is largely in accordance with Jewish tradition as Paret already remarked in the lemma “Ismā‘īl” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. The modifications are that Ibrāhīm, of course, does not just send away Hājar and Ismā‘īl, but accompanies them until they arrive in the valley where Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl later will build the Ka‘ba. There Ibrāhīm leaves them to God’s care and goes back to Syria/Palestine.

So far so good. There are, however a few problems with the Hájar parts of this narrative. The first is that Hājar does not occur in the Qur’ān, not even unnamed as, e.g., the mother of Ismā‘īl, in a similar way as Sāra is mentioned as Ibrāhīm’s wife in Sūrat Hūd (11:71) and by implication as Ishāq’s mother. It is true that probably the offspring in Ibrāhīm’s words in Sūrat Ibrāhīm (14):37 refers to Ismā‘īl where Ibrāhīm says: “O Our Lord, I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation by thy Sacred House, that they may establish regular prayer ….” And maybe by implication these words then also refer to his mother who had brought him there.

And, if one starts to think about it, it is also quite strange that the single reference in the Qur’ān to the circumambulation of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa as part of the *hajj* rites in Sūrat al-Baqara (2):158 does not refer to Hájar or Ismā‘īl at all. The verse goes as follows: “Surely, al-Ṣafā

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and al-Marwa are among the rites of God. Whoever, then, makes a pilgrimage to the House, or pays a visit to it, will not be committing sin if he circumambulates both.” It is striking, that the verse uses the verb *tawwafa* (“to circumambulate”) and not *sa`a* (“to run”). It is the same root which is used in connection with the rite of circumambulating the Ka`ba and it gives at least the suggestion that the rite may have been different from what is the standard rite: walking briskly from al-Ṣafā to al-Marwa seven times.

Indeed, in three early commentaries on the *Qur`ān* of Warqā’s (160/776) version of Mujāhid,3 Sufyān al-Thawrī4 (d. 161/777) and Muqāṭil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767),5 this verse is commented upon as being sent down, because early Muslims considered the rite to be pagan and thus felt uneasy about their circumambulation as part of the pilgrimage rites. Muqāṭil is the most specific in that he mentions that for the Ḥums, the tribal association of Quraysh, Kinānana, Khuzā`a and ʿĀmir b. Ṣa`ṣa`a which observed very strict rites and taboos in connection with the pre-Islamic pilgrimage, they did not form part of the pilgrimage rites and that these two hills had idols on them in pagan times, Nā`ila on al-Ṣafā and Isāf or Yasāf on al-Marwa.

Actually, Mujāhid explains the verse as intending that who does not circumambulate them does not do wrong, in fact making their circumambulation facultative. Sufyān simply mentions that Ibn ʿAbbās read the verse as follows: “Whoever, then, makes a pilgrimage to the House, or pays a visit to it, will not be committing sin if he does not circumambulate both.” And indeed from al-Farrāʾ6 (d. 207/822) we learn that it was a well-known reading, which he discusses seriously. Also al-Ṭabarī7 (d. 310/923) mentions this reading as a variant reading of Ibn Mas`ūd’s. From the *Encyclopaedia of Koranic Readings* that was published in 2002

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