"Out of Love for You": Orienting Rūs Expressions of Emotion in Arabic Geography

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Abstract

This article approaches gender and power through the study of emotion as a means of refreshing and updating the study of Rūs gender using Arabic geographical sources. Considering Arabic geographical and historical sources on the Rūs that deal with the concept of funerary sacrifice, in particular those that posit the possibility of male as well as female sacrificial victims, I examine the conditions attached to the practice of sacrificing men in these sources. I do so primarily by focusing on the semantic usages of ḥubb *(love) as it relates to the Rūs, exploring the potential for wider emotional exploration within geographical discussions of the Rūs and in the context of their use by researchers today.*

> We do not really know how these values, beliefs, sentiments, emotions and feelings were organized at any given point in time during the Arabo-Islamic past. What, then, are the schemes of emotional organization which obtained in the pre-modern eras? What variations, fluctuations, alterations, and articulations were they subject to by different writers at different times? Are we justified in endeavouring to devise a universalist, transhistorical framework for the study of the emotions? Are we to search for a polarity of pleasantness vs. unpleasantness as a foundational category for emotions in the pre-modern Arabo-Islamic tradition? At all events, how do we proceed to chart variations in the articulations of emotional matrices over time?
>
> — James Montgomery[1]

Drawing on Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān's fourth/tenth-century *Risāla* for his descriptions of the Rūs in the seventh/thirteenth century,[2] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī expresses a sense of wonder that he uses as justification for his comprehensive quotation of Ibn Faḍlān. He writes: "I find his account so astonishing that I quote it as I found it" (*faḥakaytu mā dhakarahu ʿalā wajhihi istiʿjāban bihi*).[3]

1. James E. Montgomery, "Convention as Cognition: On the Cultivation of Emotion," in *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond, 147–78 (Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2008), 171.

2. See Luke Treadwell, "From *Kitab* to *Risala*: The Long Shadow of Yaqut's Version of Ibn Fadlan's Account," in *Muslims on the Volga in the Viking Age: Diplomacy and Islam in the World of Ibn Fadlan*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Luke Treadwell, 41–65 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2023).

Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā 32 (2024): 437-463

Yāqūt's statement helpfully absolves him of responsibility for any potential errors conveyed in his quotation of Ibn Faḍlān's letter and moreover aligns with the views he professes at the outset of his *Muʿjam al-buldān* concerning the alteration and abridgment of the work of others.[4] More importantly still, Yāqūt offers here an acknowledgment by a geographer writing in Arabic of an emotional response to information on the Rūs. We might view this in line with Zayde Antrim's characterization of geographical writings as a form of "textual performance" that can elicit a variety of forms of action and reflection on the part of the texts' audiences, including a desire to alter, edit, or revise.[5] In Yāqūt's case, we see a desire to replicate with a disclaimer.[6]

Yāqūt is not alone in his wonder and astonishment concerning the Rūs, or al-Rūsiyya, a largely mercantile people operating along the river routes of present-day Ukraine and Russia. Across a lengthy and varied application of Arabic geographical writing to the study of the Rūs, accounts of funerary sacrifice, in particular, have drawn the attention, astonishment, and shock not only of geographers composing geographies, encyclopedias, chronicles, and *ʿajāʾib* works but also of early modern and modern scholars and audiences across multiple academic disciplines. Yet despite these layers of emotional reaction to Arabic geographical writings on the Rūs, there has been little consideration of emotion within the texts themselves. With the exception of scholarly treatments of Ibn Faḍlān's *Risāla*, which at times fleetingly refer to the eyewitness observer's shock and horror, the emotional expression of observational subject, observer, geographer, and researcher has so far not been subjected to detailed examination.

The present study addresses some initial emotional possibilities in approaches to Arabic geographical writings on the Rūs, with a focus on the emotions attached to reports of the practice of funerary sacrifice. Descriptions of funerary rituals, often involving human sacrifice, are a well-studied aspect of Arabic writings on the Rūs. Accounts of this pre-Christian practice in fourth/tenth-century geographies and in later works making use of the same material offer a detailed array of information on funerary cremation, inhumation, and sacrificial killing useful not only for the study of the Rūs but also for the study of the Viking world more broadly, the field in which these sources are frequently utilized.[7] Within

3. Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, trans. James E. Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 55. Quoted in Treadwell, "From *Kitab* to *Risala*," 59 n. 93. Treadwell takes this wonder to indicate surprise that the pagan Rūs had become Christian and were thus so vastly different at the time of writing. Treadwell, "From *Kitab* to *Risala*," 59.

4. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *The Introductory Chapters of Yāqūt's "Muʿjam al-Buldān,"* trans. Wadie Jwaideh (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 14.

5. Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

6. For discussion of Yāqūt's broader aims and approaches in this context of geography as textual performance, see Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 145–46.

7. For recent examples of work in this field, see, for instance, Neil Price, "Ibn Fadlan and the Rituals of the Rus: Vikings on the Volga?," in Shepard and Treadwell, *Muslims on the Volga*, 177–97; Declan Taggart, "Bonding over a Death: Signalling in the Funeral Episode of Ibn Faḍlān's *Risala*," *Early Medieval Europe* 30, no. 3 (2022): 437–60; Marianne Moen and Matthew J. Walsh, "Agents of Death: Reassessing Social Agency and Gendered Narratives of Human Sacrifice in the Viking Age," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 31, no. 4 (2021): 597–611.

a field that we might imperfectly abbreviate as Viking-Arabic studies, however, researchers have tended to focus primarily on reports of female sacrificial victims, reflecting their prevalence in the most high-profile and accessibly translated sources on Rūs funerary sacrifice.

On the basis of the written evidence, women do appear more likely than men to have been killed during the funerals of important Rūs men, and this is in itself an important area for analysis.[8] However, Arabic reports of these rituals indicate that sacrifice was not entirely gender-specific or, perhaps, that it varied according to individual gender and emotional preferences. Focusing, then, on discussions of male funerary sacrifice and the emotional caveats attached to the practice, I explore the emotional possibilities of these discussions of the Rūs. I begin with the funerary accounts themselves and then consider the uses and application of *ḥubb* (love) in relation to the Rūs, arguing that reading for emotion—both within the text and in our own responses to this source material—offers helpful depth to the study of gender and power in Rūs funerary sacrifice. In particular, reading for emotion helps call attention to the sacrifice of enslaved men and to the reported emotional connections between enslavers and those they enslaved.

The study of an ʿAbbāsid or Islamicate history of emotion is still, to use Julia Bray's phrasing, embryonic.[9] Although love has fared better than other emotions in this field,[10] theoretical ideas about emotion generally remain relatively Eurocentric.[11] Work has also been undertaken on other emotions, such as grief and jealousy, as well as specifically on slavery and emotion.[12] This scholarship offers useful reflections on various emotions, and

8. Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1991), 118.

9. Julia Bray, "Yaʿqūb b. al-Rabīʿ Read by al-Mutanabbī and al-Mubarrad: A Contribution to an Abbasid History of Emotions," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 1–34, at 3.

10. Bray, "Yaʿqūb b. al-Rabīʿ," 3; see, for instance, Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (London: University of London Press, 1971); William C. Chittick, "Divine and Human Love in Islam," in *Divine Love: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, ed. Jeff Levin and Stephen G. Post, 163–200 (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2010); William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *ʿIshq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 345–85; A. Z. Obiedat, "The Semantic Field of Love in Classical Arabic: Understanding the Subconscious Meaning Preserved in the *Ḥubb* Synonyms and Antonyms through Their Etymologies," in *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures: The Culture of Love and Languishing*, ed. Alireza Korangy, Hanadi Al-Samman, and Michael Beard, 300–323 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017); James E. Montgomery, "For the Love of a Christian Boy: A Song by Abū Nuwās," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 27, no. 2 (1996): 115–24; Khaled El-Rouayheb, "The Love of Boys in Arabic Poetry of the Early Ottoman Period, 1500–1800," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 8, no. 1 (2005): 3–22; Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa, "La négation d'Éros ou le *ʿišq* d'après deux épîtres d'al-Ǧâḥiẓ," *Studia Islamica*, no. 72 (1990): 71–119; Franklin Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation: The Politics of Conversion, Christian-Love and Boy-Love in ʿAttār," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (2009): 693–723; Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār*, ed. Bernd Radtke, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Gadi Algazi, Rina Drory, and Marie-Pierre Gaviano, "L'amour à la cour des Abbassides: Un code de compétence sociale," *Annales* 55, no. 6 (2000): 1255–82; Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945): 208–28.

11. A. S. Lazikani, *Emotion in Christian and Islamic Contemplative Texts, 1100–1250: Cry of the Turtledove* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 37; Bray, "Yaʿqūb b. al-Rabīʿ," 2.

12. Pernilla Myrne, "Discussing *Ghayra* in Abbasid Literature: Jealousy as a Manly Virtue or Sign of Mutual

also on power dynamics,[13] but it does not tend to incorporate geographical writing or the notion of applying emotion to other cultures. In considering the emotions of another culture, then, I attend to my own emotional readings on the Rūs as I work to explore the breadth and relative consistency of the rendering of *ḥubb* in geographical and eyewitness discussions of the Rūs. Through this exploration, I seek to develop a fresh reading of the gendered nature of Rūs funerary sacrifice along emotional lines.

Emotional Approaches to Arabic Writing on Rūs Funerary Sacrifice

Funerary sacrifice is arguably the centerpiece of Arabic geographical writings on the Rūs for many of the researchers working with this vast and not entirely homogeneous body of sources. The eyewitness account of Ibn Faḍlān and a host of geographical writings by the likes of Ibn Rusta, al-Masʿūdī, al-Iṣṭakhrī, Ibn Ḥawqal, and Miskawayh[14] offer a variety of descriptions of funerary burnings, inhumations, and sacrifices that involve the killing of one or more individuals (typically enslaved, and often female) in association with the funerals of dead Rūs men. In a modern academic setting, however, these descriptions of ritual gendered violence and killing should make for uncomfortable reading, and it is therefore helpful to begin by making clear my own emotional approach to this material. Arabic writings on Rūs funerary sacrifice generally describe ritual practices involving assault on and murder of sacrificial victims who are generally enslaved and whose consent, if considered at all in these accounts, is often dubious at best. Although these accounts are not, by the standards of the geographers or the Rūs, descriptions of assault, I follow Rachel Schine's argument for explicit acknowledgment. Discussing the marital rape of Fāṭima Dhāt al-Himma in *Sīrat al-Amīra Dhāt al-Himma*, she writes: "[w]ithin a modern reading practice, I affirm that not calling Fāṭimah's sexual violation a rape is to perpetuate the very rhetoric that has historically precluded the recognition of women as agentive, autonomous, and deserving

Affection," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 46–65; Marion Holmes Katz, "Beyond *Ḥalāl* and *Ḥarām*: *Ghayra* ('Jealousy') as a Masculine Virtue in the Work of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," *Cultural History* 8, no. 2 (2019): 202–25; James E. Montgomery, "Al-Mutanabbī and the Psychology of Grief," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 2 (1995): 285–92; Karen Bauer, "The Emotions of Conversion and Kinship in the Qur'an and the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq," *Cultural History* 8, no. 2 (2019): 137–63; Karen Moukheiber, "Gendering Emotions: *Ṭarab*, Women and Musical Performance in Three Biographical Narratives from 'The Book of Songs,'" *Cultural History* 8, no. 2 (2019): 164–83; Ido Ben-Ami, "Wonder in Early Modern Ottoman Society: A Case Study in the History of Emotions," *History Compass* 17, no. 7 (2019): e12578; Julia Bray, "Codes of Emotion in Ninth- and Tenth-Century Baghdad: Slave Concubines in Literature and Life-Writing," *Cultural History* 8, no. 2 (2019): 184–201; Julia Bray, "Toward an Abbasid History of Emotions: The Case of Slavery," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 1 (2017): 143–47.

13. Bray, for instance, acknowledges the difficult textual balance between romanticized stories of master-slave relations and renderings of the horrific treatment of these slaves. Bray, "Toward an Abbasid History of Emotions," 144.

14. The geographers named here are a selection of high-profile fourth/tenth-century examples; for a more comprehensive overview of Arabic and Persian geographical works that treat Rūs funerary sacrifice, see Tonicha M. Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources: The Transmission of Geographical and Historical Ideas on the North in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish between the Third and Eleventh Centuries AH/Ninth and Seventeenth Centuries AD" (PhD diss., University of Aarhus, 2023), 192–95.

of having their experiences of physical and psychological violation acknowledged."[15] By explicitly recognizing the realities of a ritual structured around violence against an enslaved woman, including by attaching labels that medieval observers and writers would not have employed concerning the sexual abuse of enslaved people, I not only make clear my own horror at what is being described but also emphasize that certain aspects of these accounts must be treated with care.

It is for similar reasons—for the sake of acknowledging and emphasizing the enslaved status of those discussed in this source material—that I frequently leave the terms *jāriya* and *ghulām* untranslated in this article. Best rendered in the context of this source material as "enslaved woman or girl" and "enslaved man or boy," respectively,[16] the nuances of these terms have allowed translations that downplay the inequalities rendered in these accounts, leaving scholars reading these texts in translation to understand the described figures as "maidens" and "servants."[17] Being emphatic about the types of sacrificial victims discussed in this article and offering clarity as to how their identities were understood by those writing about them should make what follows a more lucid exploration of the emotional connections and ideas applied to these accounts of Rūs funerary sacrifice.

Moreover, that this is an emotional analysis of sacrificial accounts dealing with readings of queerness in Rūs funerary sacrifice intensifies the need for careful labeling of what geographers and eyewitnesses are describing. In what follows I discuss instances in which *ḥubb* is presented as an emotional concept between enslaver and enslaved, and I use these instances as a means of introducing ideas of homoerotic or homosexual love into discussions of Rūs funerary rituals. To do so without a proper acknowledgment of the brutal circumstances that occasioned these accounts would be irresponsible. The sources analyzed in this article and the observations they make on Rūs love between enslavers and enslaved should be considered in an ʿAbbāsid cultural context. As Bray notes, heavily romanticized

15. Rachel Schine, "Conceiving the Pre-modern Black-Arab Hero: On the Gendered Production of Racial Difference in *Sīrat al-Amīrah Dhāt al-Himmah*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48, no. 3 (2017): 298–326, at 300 n. 5.

16. On readings of *jāriya* and *ghulām* as indicative of slavery and associated translational issues, see, for instance, Lamia Balafrej, "Instrumental *Jawārī*: On Gender, Slavery, and Technology in Medieval Arabic Sources," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 31 (2023): 96–126, at 96–97; Shawkat M. Toorawa and Ibn al-Sāʿī, "Note on the Translation," in *Consorts of the Caliphs: Women and the Court of Baghdad*, by Ibn al-Sāʿī, ed. Julia Bray, trans. Shawkat M. Toorawa, xxxii–xxxviii (New York: New York University Press, 2017), xxxvi; Julia Bray, "Men, Women and Slaves in Abbasid Society," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubakker and Julia M. H. Smith, 121–46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 136–37; Pernilla Myrne, "Slaves for Pleasure in Arabic Sex and Slave Purchase Manuals from the Tenth to the Twelfth Centuries," *Journal of Global Slavery* 4 (2019): 196–225, especially 206 n. 42 on choices in translation; Pernilla Myrne, "A *Jariya*'s Prospects in Abbasid Baghdad," in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, 52–74 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 66 n. 1; Jelle Bruning, "Slave Trade Dynamics in Abbasid Egypt: The Papyrological Evidence," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 63 (2020): 682–742; Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 13; Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 198–201, 226–30.

17. For further discussion, see Tonicha M. Upham, "Rus Women in Islamicate Geography? Approaching a Study of Gender," in *The Making of the Eastern Vikings: Rus' and Varangians in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sverrir Jakobsson, Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, and Daria Segal, 21–34 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024), 29–31.

forms of ʿAbbāsid enslaver-enslaved love frequently testify to the "brutal, consumerist, and callous" nature of romantic and sexual relationships with enslaved people.[18] Introducing an emotional reading of a troubling topic should not sanitize or dilute our horror.

As I argue in this article, such emotional approaches, which allow space for academic reactions of revulsion and horror, prime us to read not just for the reported emotions of the Rūs, as I do here, but more broadly for the emotions of geographers and informants. This article therefore stands in conversation with and continues growing recognition of the grim nature of this source material. Writing about Ibn Faḍlān's funerary account, which was long characterized by scholars as descriptive of an "orgy,"[19] Thorir Jonsson Hraundal reflects: "There is certainly an alarming discordance between these interpretations and the actual description of the slave girl's death as it appears in Ibn Fadlan's text. How [various scholars] have been able to construe the depiction of multiple rapes and brutal strangulation as an illustration of a happy or peaceful occasion is intriguing."[20]

The epigraph to this article is a reflection by James Montgomery on the difficulty of mapping emotions in the Arabo-Islamic past. In particular, he asks whether emotions might be organized on a "polarity of pleasantness vs unpleasantness."[21] This is, perhaps, an instructive means of reckoning with what follows. In dealing with what is, on the surface, a pleasant emotion (love), the unpleasant ramifications (slavery, assault, violence), held in focus by our own emotional readings as scholars, must be considered in tandem.

"Who will die with him?" Selecting Sacrificial Victims

I provide here treatments of three accounts of Rūs sacrifice that allow for the possibility of the ritual killing of men or boys. I offer no all-encompassing verdict on the prevalence of this practice in the extant geographical material; my readings of these sources are necessarily influenced by editorial choices made in the compilation of sources on the Rūs during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead of relying only on sources available in accessible translations, however, I draw on a slightly wider array of material than is commonly used in the study of Arabic writing on the Rūs. The three exemplars I analyze are not strictly geographical in tenor, though their observations became part of a wider geographical corpus (for instance, through their reuse by the authors of geographical encyclopedias). These texts do not describe a generalized practice, as is often the case with geographers offering broad descriptions of Rūs funerary norms. Instead, they discuss variations on a ritual that was either directly observed by or practiced in close proximity to Arabophone observers.

18. Bray, "Toward an Abbasid History of Emotions," 144.

19. See Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 198–201.

20. Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, "The Rus in Arabic Sources: Cultural Contacts and Identity" (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2013), 114.

21. Montgomery, "Convention as Cognition," 171.

Among these exemplars, the earliest and most widely studied treatment of Rūs sacrifice is the *Risāla* of Ibn Faḍlān, who participated in a caliphal mission dispatched from Baghdad to the Bulghārs of the Volga River. In his epistle, Ibn Faḍlān presents a detailed eyewitness account of a Rūs funeral ceremony that he happened to observe for which a female sacrificial victim was sought from among the enslaved women—the *jawārī*—of the deceased. Although he does not appear to have been present for this part of the ceremony,[22] Ibn Faḍlān sketches the process of procuring a volunteer, as it were, for this ritual. In this instance, only *jawārī* were considered as potential sacrificial victims, but he indicates that male enslaved "volunteers" were also possible:

> When the chieftain dies, the members of his household ask his *jawārī* and *ghilmān*, "Who will die with him?" One answers, "I will." At this point the words become binding. There is no turning back. It is not even an option. It is usually the *jawārī* who offer.
>
> When the man I just mentioned died, they said to his *jawārī*, "Who will die with him?" One said, "I will."[23]

> وإذا مات الرئيس قال أهله لجواريه وغلمانه من منكم يموت معه فيقول بعضهم أنا فإذا قال ذلك فقد وجب لا يستوي له أن يرجع ولو أراد ذلك ما تُرِكَ وأكثر من يفعل الجواري
>
> فلمّا مات ذلك الرجل الذي قدّمت ذكره قالوا لجواريه من يموت معه فقال أحدهنّ أنا

Alongside this allusion to the occasional sacrifice of men by Ibn Faḍlān's itinerant Rūs merchants on the Volga River we can also consider conditional presentations of similar practices, found in accounts of the 332/943 Rūs raid on Bardhaʿa, in what is today the Republic of Azerbaijan but was then called Arrān in Arabic (Caucasian Albania).[24] The yearlong raid and occupation of the city, documented in an array of chronicles and encyclopedias,[25] occasioned discussion of Rūs funerary practices, because as the occupation

22. Ibn Faḍlān explains: "I arrived at the river where [the dead man's] boat was moored on the day the chief and the female slave were set on fire." Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, "Mission to the Volga," in *Two Arabic Travel Books: Accounts of China and India and Mission to the Volga*, by Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī and Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, ed. Tim Mackintosh-Smith and James E. Montgomery, trans. James Montgomery, 163–297 (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 246-247.

23. Ibn Faḍlān, "Mission to the Volga," 246–47.

24. See D. S. Margoliouth, "The Russian Seizure of Bardha'ah in 943 A.D.," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1918): 82–95; Ture J. Arne, "Rus' erövring av Berda'a år 943," *Fornvännen* 27 (1932): 211–19; A. B. Nuriev and Paul Wordsworth, "The Medieval City of Bardha'a," in *From Albania to Arrān: The East Caucasus between the Ancient and Islamic Worlds (ca. 330 BCE–1000 BCE)*, ed. Robert Hoyland, 253–76 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2020).

25. In addition to the chronicles discussed in this article, see, for example, Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, al-ʿAynī's *ʿIqd al-jumān fī tārīkh ahl al-zamān*, and brief comments on the raid and the city's decline in Ibn Ḥawqal's *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, al-Maqdisī's *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa-l-tārīkh*, Yāqūt's *Muʿjam al-buldān*, and the anonymous Persian *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*: Alexander Seippel, *Rerum Normannicarum fontes Arabici: E libris quum typis expressis tum manu scriptis collegit et sumptibus universitatis osloensis edidit* (Oslo: A. W. Brøgger, 1896), 97–100, 112; Abū al-Qāsim b. Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1873), 2:241; Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ibn Ḥawqal's Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ: Opus Geographicum*, ed. J. H. Kramers (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2:239; Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Le livre de la création et de l'histoire de Moṭahhar*

began to fail and the Rūs were attacked by dysentery, growing numbers of dead Rūs men were buried in the city, providing material for chroniclers. Significant among these discussions is a lengthy entry provided by the librarian and philosopher Miskawayh[26] in his 372/982 *Tajārib al-umam*, a chronicle that makes extensive use of various eyewitness and written sources procured via his strong aristocratic networks.[27] Toward the end of his account of the occupation, Miskawayh makes note of Rūs burial practices:

> And when a man among them died, they buried him with his weapons, clothes, and tools, and with his wife or another of his women, and with his *ghulām*, if he loved him, according to their custom. When they finished what they were doing, the Muslims excavated the burial grounds and removed from them swords, which are sought after today for their sharpness and quality.[28]

> فكان إذا مات الرجل منهم دفنوا معه سلاحهُ وثيابه وآلته وزوجته أو غيرها من النساء وغلامه إن كان يحبه على سنة لهم فاستثار المسلمون بعد زوال أمرهم مقابرهم فاستخرجوا منها سيوفاً يتنافس فيها إلى اليوم لمضائها وجودتها

These details are echoed in a similar notice in al-Hamadānī's (d. 521/1127) *Takmilat tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, a continuation of al-Ṭabarī's *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk wa-l-khulafāʾ* that extends al-Ṭabarī's chronicle as far as the year 487/1094. Al-Hamadānī's text is one of several extensions of al-Ṭabarī's work,[29] and it is known from a single manuscript (BnF Arabe 1469), which was presented by Alexander Seippel in his "pioneering"[30] compendium of Arabic sources on the Rūs. Al-Hamadānī's slightly abbreviated account of Rūs burial practices mirrors Miskawayh's fairly closely:

> And when one among them died, he was dressed for the grave with his possessions and weapons, and his wife was buried with him, and his *ghulām* if he loved him. And when they left, the Muslims proceeded to excavate wealth from their graves.[31]

ben Ṭāhir el-Maqdisī, trans. Clément Huart (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1907), 4:62–63; Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Jacut's Geographisches Wörterbuch*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1867), 2:834; *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam: "The Regions of the World"; A Persian Geography 372 A.H.–982 A.D.*, ed. and trans. Vladimir Minorsky (London: Luzac, 1937), 144; Harris Birkeland, *Nordens historie i middelalderen etter arabiske kilder: Oversettelse til norsk av de arabiske kilder med innledning, forfatterbiografier, bibliografi og merknader* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1954), 48–49, 90–92, 130.

26. M. Arkoun, "Miskawayh," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009).

27. See M. S. Khan, *Studies in Miskawayh's Contemporary History (340–369 A.H.)* (Chicago: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1980).

28. My translation. Aḥmad b. Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2018), 5:268.

29. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 1:565.

30. James E. Montgomery, "Arabic Sources on the Vikings," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, 550–61 (London: Routledge, 2008), 550.

31. My translation. Seippel, *Rerum Normannicarum fontes Arabici*, 84.

وكان الواحد منهم اذا مات كُفن بماله وسلاحه ودُفنت زوجته معه وغلامه ان كان يحبّه واخرج المسلمون لما مضوا من قبورهم اموالا

Both Bardhaʿa accounts contain the caveat that male sacrifices occur only *in kāna yuḥibbuhu*, "if he loved him." This imprecise phrase leaves it unclear whether it is the deceased or his *ghulām* who is the intended emotional actor. My own reading is that the text refers to the dead man's love for the *ghulām*, on the basis that it is the deceased who is the cause for the rest of the ritual and thus his emotional state is likely more significant (or at least thought by the chroniclers to be more significant) in directing the funerary sacrifice. This reading is supported in part by similar emotional formulations with regard to female sacrifice, discussed below. That this emotional caveat is applied only to the sacrifice of male victims, however, and not to the plethora of women outlined by Miskawayh, in particular, suggests some form of significance to the sacrifice of male victims, or alternatively some sense on the part of the chroniclers that emotional resonance is worth emphasizing in these cases. It is perhaps an indicator that love for the female victims of these rituals was automatically assumed by chroniclers such as Miskawayh but was deemed worth highlighting in the more unusual cases of male sacrifice.

Whether this is love directed toward the *ghulām* or love directed toward his enslaver, it is prudent to make note of the power dynamics on display in these generalized funerary scenarios. Emotions such as love are complicated by the inequalities entailed by the position occupied by *ghilmān* enslaved by the Rūs: given that one party was enslaved, care must be taken not to romanticize attachment for or on behalf of enslaved men who were, in a sense, quite literally loved to death. That the sacrifice of men required a certain degree of love, however, is clear from both chroniclers here.

Emotional Caveats

The sacrifice of Rūs men has received limited scholarly attention in recent years. James Montgomery offers archaeological parallels for the practice,[32] and elsewhere brief discussions of the possibility of male sacrifice have accompanied adjacent developments in, for instance, emerging discussions about the agency of female sacrificial victims.[33] In treating instances of potential male sacrifice individually here, I aim to draw attention to the practice of male funerary sacrifice to a greater extent than has previously been possible.

32. James E. Montgomery, "Pyrrhic Scepticism and the Conquest of Disorder: Prolegomenon to the Study of Ibn Faḍlān," in *Problems in Arabic Literature*, ed. Miklós Maróth, 43–89 (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2004), 59 n. 11.

33. Moen and Walsh, "Agents of Death," 602; Marianne Moen, "Women and Sacrifice: Roles and Connections," in *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, ed. Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding, and Peter Pentz, 161–69 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2023), 163; Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 229–39; Tonicha M. Upham, "Equal Rites: Parsing Rus' Gender Values Through an Arabic Lens" (MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2019), 22–23; see also Csete Katona, *Vikings of the Steppe: Scandinavians, Rus', and the Turkic World (c. 750–1050)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), 129.

These presentations of possible male sacrifice, from Ibn Faḍlān's partial eyewitness account to the Bardhaʿa chronicle accounts, are more theoretical than are the reports of female sacrifice. Although the possibility of male sacrifice exists, it is tenuous enough that none of the above reporters is able to offer a concrete example of its occurrence. In each case, the writers emphasize that male funerary sacrifice is the exception rather than the norm; even when Ibn Faḍlān concedes that *ghilmān* may be canvassed for volunteers alongside *jawārī*, he emphasizes the greater prevalence of female victims. In none of these examples, moreover, does an eyewitness or geographer present male sacrificial victims as the only option available for the funerary arrangements of dead men.

Although *ghilmān* were, by these reckonings, the victims of funerary sacrifice only irregularly, opportunities for the sacrifice of men among the Rūs and their neighbors did exist. Ibn Rusta (fl. after 290/903) describes Rūs physicians or "medicine men," *aṭibbāʾ*, as capable of compelling the nonfunerary killing of men, women, and horses as a form of offering (*qurbān*).[34] Among the neighboring Ṣaqāliba, funerary rituals described by al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/965) and later geographers writing between the fifth/eleventh and eighth/fourteenth centuries involved the sacrifice of multiple members of the community, including other men.[35] The killing of men in some form of ritual context, whether strictly sacrificial[36] or in order to serve as posthumous attendants of some kind, is well attested within the geographical source material for the Rūs and adjacent areas.

That the Rūs sometimes killed men as funerary sacrifice, then, is not entirely surprising despite the restrictions applied to this practice by Ibn Faḍlān and the Bardhaʿa chroniclers. In an environment populated by free, wealthy men in need of funerals and by people enslaved by these men, the power dynamics alone were no doubt sufficient to occasion the killing of members of the latter group for ritual purposes. We might reach a somewhat more confident assessment of geographers' and chroniclers' implicit understandings of these sacrifices by considering descriptions of Rūs uses for boys.

Within discussions of female funerary sacrifice, scholars have sometimes argued that the victims fulfilled some form of posthumous marital role in Rūs funerals.[37] This interpretation

34. Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. ʿUmar Ibn Rusta, *Ibn Rusta's Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-Nafīsa and Kitāb al-Buldān by al-Yaʿqūbī*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 146; Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 221–24; Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, "New Perspectives on Eastern Vikings/Rus in Arabic Sources," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 10 (2014): 65–97, at 89.

35. Abū al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or: Texte et traduction*, trans. Charles Adrien Barbier de Meynard and Abel Jean Baptiste Marie Michel Pavet de Courteille (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1971), 3:63–64; Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbd Allāh al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. Jamal Tolba (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 1:257; Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 194–95.

36. Some scholars of ritual argue that reports of Rūs funerary killings do not, strictly speaking, depict sacrifice since the deaths do not appear to have occurred as a form of offering to a deity and are instead motivated by a perceived sense that the deceased requires attendants in the afterlife. See Moen and Walsh, "Agents of Death," 599–600.

37. See, for instance, Jens Peter Schjødt, "Ibn Fadlan's Account of a Rus Funeral: To What Degree Does It Reflect Nordic Myths?," in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, 133–48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 138; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 71; Morten Lund Warmind, "Ibn Fadlan in the Context

is facilitated by explicit comments to this effect by al-Masʿūdī, who presents funerary sacrifice as a form of posthumous marriage in the event that a man dies unmarried.[38] Further support for this interpretation comes from Amīn Rāzī's tenth/sixteenth-century Persian adaptation of Ibn Faḍlān and the marital tone he gives to Ibn Faḍlān's funerary account in his *Haft iqlīm*.[39] In extant writings in Arabic about Rūs funerary sacrifice, however, geographers generally do not appear to see posthumous marriage as the reason for the killing of women during Rūs funerals. That the women sacrificed as part of these funerary rituals might have been expected to fulfill some form of postmortem sexual purpose, though, might be understood from Ibn Faḍlān's observations on Rūs *jawārī*, discussed below, and from the above references to wives and other women by Miskawayh and al-Hamadānī.

Unlike Ibn Faḍlān's sacrificial *jāriya*, whose assault (and the emotional justifications for it) is discussed below, the male sacrificial victims discussed above are not presented in sexual terms. We can only speculate as to how, if at all, the funeral observed by Ibn Faḍlān might have differed had the important man's death occasioned the solicitation and death of a sacrificial *ghulām*.[40] In exploring whether the important aspect of the victim's identity was their enslavement rather than their gender, Marianne Moen and Matthew J. Walsh further trouble academic reactions to such a divergent funerary tableau: "Would the ensuing rituals have looked the same or very different, and would the scholarly treatment of the text have been different, had it been a male slave at the end of the knife?"[41]

For an instance in which a sexual context is implied for those trafficked as *ghilmān*, we can look again to Miskawayh's discussion of the Bardhaʿa occupation. In the comparatively early and detailed version of the occupation narrative presented by Miskawayh, the description of the Rūs retreat from the town at the end of the occupation is accompanied by a list of those trafficked by the departing occupiers: "They took the women and children, raped them,[42] and enslaved them" (حازوا النساء والصبيان ففجروا بهنّ وبهم واستعبدهم).[43] Miskawayh later specifies that it was women, boys, *and* girls (النساء والصبايا والصبيان) who were trafficked

of His Age," in *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia: Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 5th–7th May 1994*, ed. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye, 131–37 (Copenhagen: Publications from the National Museum, 1995), 133; Władysław Duczko, *Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 145–46.

38. Al-Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or* (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1914), 2:9.

39. Discussed by Price, "Ibn Fadlan and the Rituals of the Rus," 189–91; Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm: The Geographical and Biographical Encyclopaedia of Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī*, ed. S. B. Samadi (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1972), 5:26–30; H. M. Smyser, "Ibn Faḍlān's Account of the Rūs with Some Commentary and Some Allusions to Beowulf," in *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger and Robert P. Creed, 92–119 (New York: New York University Press, 1965).

40. Upham, "Equal Rites," 22–23.

41. Moen and Walsh, "Agents of Death," 602.

42. In line with my stance on explicitly naming the unsavory aspects of this material, and since this anecdote discusses the enslaving and sexual exploitation of women and children, I find "rape" a more appropriate translation here than "fornicate" or the like.

43. My translation. Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, 5:266.

out of Bardhaʿa.[44] Al-Hamadānī, abbreviating the account slightly, refers to the children only collectively and limits himself to writing that the enslaved women and children were driven to the ships by the retreating Rūs.[45] Later iterations of the occupation narrative are further abbreviated, often noting only that beautiful women were captured and enslaved at Bardhaʿa.[46] In the earlier Bardhaʿa accounts that describe male funerary sacrifice, however, it is noteworthy that the enslaving of the boys who likely became sacrificial *ghilmān* is connected to circumstances that carry implications of sexual assault.

Of course, that *ghilmān* might be subject to sexual uses is entirely unsurprising in an ʿAbbāsid cultural context. None of the sources discussed here offers any explicit sexual commentary that might pertain to the experiences of the sacrificed *ghilmān*. Ibn Faḍlān does not discuss homosexuality among the Rūs, though he does discuss the views of the Ghuzziyya Turks on *liwāṭ* (sodomy) at an earlier point in his *Risāla*.[47] But in the milieus in which many of these observers and geographers were writing, the sexual use of *ghilmān* was widespread. As Everett Rowson writes:

> Just as the notables, bureaucrats, poets, and indeed caliphs bought, sold, and traded slavegirls, and at the same time fell in love with them, made fools of themselves over them, and engaged in friendly and not-so-friendly rivalries in pursuit of them, so did some—or indeed many—of them with slaveboys. There was indeed a "traffic" in boys (by sale and gift) just as there was in women.[48]

That the initial compilers of this type of information on the Rūs—in this case, Ibn Faḍlān and Miskawayh, aided by later transmitters, geographers, and historians—operated in environments in which the sexual use of *ghilmān*, though illegal,[49] was widespread is significant.[50] Read against ʿAbbāsid evidence for the sexual abuse of *ghilmān*, we might wonder whether similar interpretations of the sexual role of a beloved *ghulām* sent to the grave with his enslaver might have come naturally to compiler and reader. Against this background, further elaboration and clarification of the role of these male sacrificial victims who occasionally appear alongside female victims might have been seen as superfluous.

44. Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, 5:268.

45. Seippel, *Rerum Normannicarum fontes Arabici*, 84; Birkeland, *Nordens historie i middelalderen*, 67.

46. Seippel, *Rerum Normannicarum fontes Arabici*, 97–100, 112; Alauddin Ismail Samarrai, "Arabic Sources on the Norse: English Translation and Notes Based on the Texts Edited by Alexander Seippel in Rerum Normannicarum Fontes Arabici" (MS thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1959), 132, 152; Upham, "Equal Rites," 36–37.

47. Ibn Faḍlān, "Mission to the Volga," 206–7.

48. Everett K. Rowson, "The Traffic in Boys: Slavery and Homoerotic Liaisons in Elite ʿAbbāsid Society," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 2 (2008): 193–204, at 195.

49. Some jurists differentiated between enslaver and enslaved in the context of *liwāṭ*; see Sara Omar, "From Semantics to Normative Law: Perceptions of *Liwāt* (Sodomy) and *Sihāq* (Tribadism) in Islamic Jurisprudence (8th–15th Century CE)," *Islamic Law and Society* 19, no. 3 (2012): 222–56, at 251–52.

50. Rowson, "Traffic in Boys," 198–99.

From here, it is helpful to consider the specific emotional caveat offered in the Bardhaʿa accounts: that the sacrifice of men occurred only *in kāna yuḥibbuhu*, if their enslaver loved them. As mentioned earlier, this caveat is exclusive to the male sacrificial victims in these Arabic accounts, and in a Rūs context a similar sense of emotionality is found only in the case of Ibn Rusta's discussion of funerary killing, discussed below. It is worth noting that in these accounts, any potential male sacrificial victim does not appear as the single and exclusive victim. The report offered by Miskawayh and al-Hamadānī allows for a female sacrificial victim—in Miskawayh's case, a choice between types of women perhaps intended to distinguish between free wives and enslaved women—and presents *ghilmān* as an optional extra rather than a clearcut alternative to a female sacrificial victim. Therefore, the understanding conveyed in the Bardhaʿa chronicles appears to be that deceased Rūs soldiers would not go to the grave accompanied only by a male slave they loved but rather would have him included in their burial assemblage alongside a woman of their choice.

The love depicted by the authors of the Bardhaʿa accounts and in the parallel emotional presentations I discuss below is not very complex semantically. Chroniclers and geographers express this emotion in a consistent manner, using the same terminology, without variation in intensity or merit. In light of the variety of meanings conveyed by the various Arabic terms for love, and in view of the impact of conflicting translations of *maḥabba* or *ḥubb* in sources on male sacrifice as "love"[51] and "fondness,"[52] it is worth considering the potential connotations of *ḥ-b-b* and how we might understand geographers' and chroniclers' views on the emotional resonance of Rūs sacrifice and its victims.

Definitions and usage vary and depend on individual understandings of the rendering of different concepts and degrees of love. However, we see one form of love represented by *ḥubb* in a Qurʾānic context (for instance, in Q 3:31 and 20:39), in the sense of "measured affection" or love of God.[53] It is one of two Qurʾānic terms for love and becomes particularly prevalent as a term for divine love in later literature.[54] Referring primarily to a psychological rather than a physical state,[55] *ḥubb* expresses the concept of love but is less intense or passionate than *ʿishq*, which is generally presented as passionate or even erotic outside of its Sufi applications.[56] *ʿIshq* is, generally speaking, a more poetic conceptualization of love than *ḥubb* is.[57] We find one example of its definition in al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 255/868–69) *Risāla fī al-ʿishq wa-l-nisāʾ*, which is frequently quoted in other Arabic lexicographical and philological

51. Samarrai, "Arabic Sources on the Norse," 113.

52. Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 151.

53. M. Arkoun, "ʿIshḳ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009).

54. Chittick, "Divine and Human Love," 170–71. Within Sufism, *ḥubb* was eventually superseded by *ʿishq* as a designation for the love of God. See Arkoun, "ʿIshḳ"; Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *ʿIshq*"; Chittick, "Divine and Human Love."

55. Obiedat, "Semantic Field of Love," 309.

56. See, for instance, Julia Bray's discussion of *adab* and *ʿishq* in Bray, "Yaʿqūb b. al-Rabīʿ," 13; Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *ʿIshq*," 347; Chittick, "Divine and Human Love," 171; Lazikani, *Emotion in Christian and Islamic Contemplative Texts*, 40.

57. Obiedat, "Semantic Field of Love," 309.

works on love: "*ʿIshq* is the name for what exceeds that which is called *ḥubb* and every *ḥubb* is not called *ʿishq*, for *ʿishq* is the name for what exceeds that degree."[58]

A. Z. Obiedat's semantic study of love in classical Arabic situates *ḥubb* relatively low on a scale of love that can be measured both in intensity and in positivity—that is, whether the intensity of love has progressed to an inappropriate, all-consuming level, on the assumption that the most extreme expressions of the concept of love connote bodily harm.[59] *Ḥubb*, then, is not the most intense form of love at the semantic disposal of geographers and chroniclers, nor does it represent uncontrolled passion. It does, however, exceed basic affection.[60] Although sometimes interchangeable with concepts such as *ʿishq* and *walaʿ*, rankings often characterized *ḥubb* as a less extreme form of love with a more general meaning than conveyed by some of the more intense terms.[61]

Looking to Miskawayh's and al-Hamadānī's conditional constructions surrounding *ḥubb*, we gain a sense of what this emotional application might have entailed. It is a significant emotion; it is not simply a form of tolerance but rather indicates something deeper. Obiedat explains the metaphorical usage of *ḥubb* as "a psychological state similar to a hidden seed that grows and proliferates."[62] We might, then, consider these chronicle representations of hypothetical Rūs-*ghulām* relationships, at their most intense, to involve a significant strength of feeling on the part of the enslaver (assuming that grammatical ownership of the emotion is ascribed to the deceased rather than to his *ghulām*). The emotion might have developed over a significant period of time and reflected a particularly special relationship in the eyes of the enslaver.

Emotional Parallels

Having interrogated the *ḥubb* mentioned by Miskawayh and al-Hamadānī in their chronicle accounts of male funerary sacrifice, it is worthwhile to consider other expressions of the same or similar emotions. The *Risāla* is an especially rich emotional source, as Ibn Faḍlān presents multiple instances of the expression of love by Rūs men. Writings on funerary sacrifice and suicide rituals among both the Rūs and the neighboring Ṣaqāliba in broader geographical works also offer opportunities for emotional readings. In these sources, we encounter a complex range of emotions, which allow us to set love alongside the emotions engendered in the observer, the reader, and the scholar at various points between the texts' creation and their present study.

The most immediate parallel to the *ḥubb* associated with the sacrifice of *ghilmān* at Bardhaʿa is a similar construction, albeit without emotional condition, found in Ibn Rusta's early fourth/tenth-century *Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*. In describing the inhumation of dead men, Ibn Rusta depicts the burial assemblage of the deceased and their emotional connections with the women sacrificed alongside them as follows:

58. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 85; ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, "Risāla fī al-ʿishq wa-l-nisāʾ," in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. Ḥasan al-Sandūbī, 266–75 (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Tijāriyya, 1933), 266.

59. Obiedat, "Semantic Field of Love," 312.

60. Obiedat, "Semantic Field of Love," 310.

61. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 96.

62. Obiedat, "Semantic Field of Love," 310.

> And when a man of rank among them dies, they dig for him a grave like a wide house and they place him in it with clothes on his body and the gold bracelets that he used to wear, and lots of food and pitchers of drink and goods, too. And they place with him in the grave his woman, whom he loved, while she is still alive, and they seal the door of the grave so that she dies there.[63]

> واذا مات الجليل منهم حفروا له قبرا مثل بيت واسع جعلوه فيه وأدخلوا معه ثياب بدنه وسواره الذى كان يلبسه من ذهب وطعاما كثيرا واباريق شراب ومالا صامتا ايضا ويجعلون معه فى القبر امرأته التي كان يحبُّها وهى بعدُ حيَّة ويُسَدَّ عليها باب القبر فتموت هناك

Ibn Rusta's account of the live burial of Rūs women serves as a striking emotional parallel to the conditional sacrifice of *ghilmān* at Bardhaʿa. In particular, it emphasizes the emotions of the deceased, leaving open the question whether a woman who was not sufficiently loved by the dead man would be subject to this ritual. This text offers a helpful support for reading the directionality of the conditional love reported at Bardhaʿa: if the emotions of the free, important dead man are prioritized here, a similar hierarchy seems likely in the case of the somewhat more ambiguous statement about conditional love between dead Rūs soldiers and their *ghilmān*. In his quiet comment on emotional significance, Ibn Rusta offers an understated reflection on his understanding of the emotional bonds governing Rūs death rituals and, by extension, relationships among the living. Although the status of the women in question is not made explicit, and neither is the women's consent or own feelings, Ibn Rusta applies an emotional facet to what is otherwise a clinical description of a ritual that entailed women being buried alive.

Elsewhere, Ibn Rusta and other geographers working within the Jayhānī geographical tradition do attribute emotion to women in the context of the deaths of important men. Both Ibn Rusta and the fifth/eleventh-century geographer al-Bakrī in his *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik* reflect on the emotions of the women of the Ṣaqāliba following the deaths of men. In these instances, an equivalent notion of love—*maḥabba*—motivates funerary suicides:

> Ibn Rusta: And if the dead man had three wives and one of them claims she loved him, she props two timbers near her dead and stands them up on the ground and then places another timber across the top of them. And she suspends from the middle of it a rope, the other end tied fast around her neck, while she is standing on a chair. When she has done this, the chair is taken from under her, and she is left hanging until she asphyxiates and dies. And when she is dead, she is cast on the fire and burned.[64]

> واذا كان للميّت ثلاث نسوة وزعمت واحدة منهن انها محبَّة له عمدت عند ميّتها الى خشبتين فاقامتهما في وجه الارض ثم وضعت خشبة اخرى معترضة على رأسهما وعلَّقت من وسطها حبلا شُدَّ احد طرفيه فى عنقها وهى قائمة على كرسيّ فاذا فعلت ذلك أُخذ الكرسيُّ من تحتها فبقيت معلَّقة حتّى تختنق وتموت فاذا ماتت أُلقيت فى النار وأُحرقت

63. My translation. Ibn Rusta, *Ibn Rusta's Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-Nafīsa*, 146–47.

64. My translation. Ibn Rusta, *Ibn Rusta's Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-Nafīsa*, 143–44.

Al-Bakrī: And the wives of the dead cut their hands and faces with knives. And if one of them claims she loved him, she suspends a rope, ascends to it on a chair, and ties it fast around her neck. Then the chair is pulled from under her, and she is left hanging, struggling until she dies. Then she is burned and is joined with her husband.[65]

ونساء الميّت يقطعن أيديهن ووجوههن بالسكاكين وإذا زعمت واحدة منهن أنها مُحِبَّةٌ له عَلَّقت حبلاً وارتقت إليه على كرسى فتشتدُّ به فى عنقها ثم يُجْذَبُ الكرسى من تحتها فتبقى معلقة تضطرب حتى تموت ثم تحرق وتُلْحَق بزوجها

These presentations of female emotion and action in a funerary setting suggest a fruitful line of inquiry as far as female agency in funerary rituals is concerned, with the potential to contribute to emerging discussions surrounding Ibn Faḍlān's sacrificial *jāriya*.[66] They also offer a form of contrast to the emotional caveats governing the sacrifice of men. In these cases, the emotions of those surviving the deceased appear to be understood by geographers as motivation for their action (funerary suicide), in contrast to the motivating role of the emotions of the deceased in the other funerary accounts discussed in this article.

I do not suggest with this reading that Miskawayh compared notes with Ibn Rusta in preparing his chronicle account of the Bardhaʿa raid and sought to emulate the construction used by the latter in his discussions of funerary rituals among the Rūs and Saqāliba. Such a striking level of semantic consistency, however, could reflect correlating understandings of perceived emotional resonances in the funerary ritual across different treatments of funerary sacrifice by geographers and chroniclers.

Moving from precise parallels to the frequency with which *ḥubb* is employed in discussions of Rūs behavior, we return to Ibn Faḍlān. In the *Risāla*, the Rūs also express feelings of love elsewhere in the funerary process. Ibn Faḍlān describes the female sacrificial victim's assault by the surviving Rūs men (to offer my own view on what is described here, in line with Schine's stance on modern readings of this source material), as follows:

Meanwhile, the *jāriya* who had expressed her wish to die came and went, entering one yurt after another. The owner of the yurt would have intercourse with her[67] and say, "Tell your master that I have done this out of love for you."[68]

والجارية التي تريد تُقْتَل ذاهبةٌ وجائية تدخل قبّة قبّة من قبابهم فيجامعها صاحب القبّة ويقول لها قولي لمولاك إنّما فعلت هذا من محبّتك

65. My translation. Al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, 1:257.

66. Moen, "Women and Sacrifice," 163; Moen and Walsh, "Agents of Death," 601.

67. Ibn Faḍlān's approach to discussing sex tends to be very clinical, reflecting both the form of his writing and his own discomfort with the visibility of women and sex during his journey. On language, see Pernilla Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World: Gender and Sex in Arabic Literature* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020), 9; Pernilla Myrne, "Organizing, Presenting, and Reading Sexual Knowledge: The Abbasid Context of *Jawāmiʿ al-Ladhdha*," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 7 (2020): 182–206, at 199.

68. Ibn Faḍlān, "Mission to the Volga," 248–49.

The grammatical gender of the object of love in the quote is unclear, but I follow James McKeithen in understanding it as referring to the deceased and not to the *jāriya* who is told to relay the message.[69] Although this declaration has at times been read by modern scholars as an indicator that the jealousy of the deceased must be assuaged via a profession that the surviving men have engaged in sex out of love for him,[70] a broader consideration of Ibn Faḍlān's presentation of this form of love (and its associated activities) between free Rūs men allows a more expansive interpretation. We might view the imposition of emotional ideas in a geographical or ethnographic context, and particularly the ascription of a certain directionality to these emotional ideas, as a fresh lens for considering Ibn Faḍlān's understanding of how Rūs men related to each other. In this case, for an observer on the sidelines, the reported love between the men undertaking this ritual, on the one hand, and the deceased, on the other, appears to serve as the impetus for this sexual activity. We might thus view the dead man as a greater motivator for these assaults than the *jāriya* herself, at least on the basis of Ibn Faḍlān's testimony. Moreover, the view that the sexual activity reported during the funerary ritual was not a jealousy-inducing endeavor is arguably bolstered by Ibn Faḍlān's comments elsewhere concerning the sexual licentiousness of Rūs in company with each other. He reports encountering them in shared houses, where they engage in sex with the women they are trafficking, and describes the king of the Rūs engaging in public sex.[71] In a culture that appears, in Ibn Faḍlān's wide-eyed account, to be oriented around public sexual activity,[72] it seems somewhat incongruous to read this message of love from the dead man's surviving peers as an apology for their sexual behavior and not as the primary motivation for it. Ibn Faḍlān observes, further, the love between the Rūs and their lord or deity, for love of whom the cremated remains of the funeral pyre are scattered to the wind within an hour of the ritual's end.[73] Across his funerary account, then, there are instances in which love is expressed between men—whether between the living and the deceased, or the living and their spiritual lord.

69. James E. McKeithen, "The Risalah of Ibn Fadlan: An Annotated Translation with Introduction" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 143 n. 474.

70. Timothy Taylor, *The Buried Soul: How Humans Invented Death* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 179. This has alternatively been presented as "friendly obligation" on the basis of additional readings offered in Amīn Rāzī's tenth/sixteenth-century Persian *Haft iqlīm*. Although *dūstī* may well be read as friendly rather than romantic love, it nonetheless conveys an idea of strong emotional connections between free Rūs men. Schjødt, "Ibn Fadlan's Account," 139–40; Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm*, 5:29; William C. Chittick, "Love in Islamic Thought," *Religion Compass* 8, no. 7 (2014): 229–38, at 232; Chittick, *Divine Love*, xxv–xxvi; Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 234–35 n. 982.

71. Ibn Faḍlān, "Mission to the Volga," 242–43, 252–53.

72. See Nizar Hermes on Ibn Faḍlān's at times overactive and over appreciative gaze, and Ruth Mazo Karras on the possibility that Ibn Faḍlān's interest in sex shaped his narrative emphases. Nizar Hermes, *The [European] Other in Medieval Arabic Literature and Culture: Ninth–Twelfth Century AD* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 95; Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia*, 71.

73. Ibn Faḍlān, "Mission to the Volga," 252–53.

Ibn Faḍlān's account of the funerary ritual certainly conveys horror and terror. As the ritual approaches its zenith, he begins to withdraw from active observation and information gathering,[74] and he describes both the screams of the *jāriya* as she is killed and the possibility that the *jawārī* standing on the sidelines might find this frightening enough to discourage them from pursuing a similar sacrificial fate. At the same time, however, he also quietly articulates complex and nuanced ideas about the love that he has been told Rūs men profess to each other or express in relation to their religious beliefs. The multiple emotional professions recorded by Ibn Faḍlān, taken alongside the Bardhaʿa accounts and the relevant Rūs and Ṣaqāliba material discussed above, make the Rūs an emotionally complex geographical and historical subject in these genres of writing. Through this reading of one emotion in a funerary and sacrificial context, we encounter a richness of emotion. Although love is discussed with great semantic consistency—observers, geographers, and chroniclers universally refer to it as *ḥubb*—this targeted study of it across multiple sources testifies to the quiet emotionality of this body of sources on the Rūs, in addition to constituting a helpful point of reference against which ideas about the *ḥubb* of the Bardhaʿa accounts can be read. This small catalog of sources drawing on similar emotional concepts, terminology, and situations offers a body of evidence for the reading of multiple impressions of Rūs *ḥubb*. That we find equivalent expressions of emotion in heterosexual sacrificial relationships and in homosocial and spiritual contexts provides useful context for approaching this material not only in working to interpret the relationship between (deceased) Rūs men and their *ghilmān* but also in considering translational choices and how emotionality might be obscured in these sources.

Emotional Reluctances

In discussing *ḥubb* above, I alluded to issues in translation that have affected engagements with the emotionality of these anecdotes. Whereas al-Hamadānī has not been translated or heavily discussed since he was translated into English in 1959,[75] Miskawayh is a more prominent source in translation, featuring among the Arabic sources that supplement Ibn Faḍlān's *Risāla* in Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone's Penguin Classics translation.[76] In this translation, Miskawayh's emotional construction is rendered in a downplayed manner: "and his slave, if he happened to be fond of him."[77] Though not an unfitting reflection of the level of emotion conveyed by *ḥubb*, this muted relational expression might be seen as paralleling modern translational choices that downplay the unfreedom inherent in terms such as *jāriya* and *ghulām*. That such minimizing occurs in the context of a sacrificial relationship that

74. Tonicha M. Upham, "'Here I Am, in This Far-off Land Where We Are Now': Encountering and Observing Rūs Women in Ibn Faḍlān's *Risala*," in *Medieval Mobilities: Gendered Bodies, Spaces, and Movements in the Middle Ages*, ed. Basil Arnould Price, Jane Bonsall, and Meagan Khoury, 115–38 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 131–35.

75. Samarrai, "Arabic Sources on the Norse."

76. For discussion of this, see Rachel Schine, "Translating Race in the Islamic Studies Classroom," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 30 (2022): 339–46.

77. Ibn Faḍlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness*, 151.

might imply homosexuality—albeit within the framework of a power imbalance and lack of consent—further problematizes the elusive emotionality of Lunde and Stone's translation.

Broadening the net for translations of emotion in order to encompass Ibn Rusta's beloved Rūs women, Lunde and Stone employ a somewhat different emotional sidestep: they present the female sacrificial victims of Ibn Rusta's geographical writing, who are loved in almost exactly the same manner as Miskawayh and al-Hamadānī's *ghilmān*, as "favorite."[78] This translational choice, too, forgoes the potential of emotional analysis, but "favorite" arguably conveys a stronger attachment than does "fondness" in the case of Miskawayh's sacrificed *ghilmān*. Favorite, moreover, implies a plethora of women not explicitly communicated by the text. Perhaps serving as a means of rendering ideas of sexual excess among the Rūs, this translation looks past emotional connection and possibility.

To move beyond the optics of translating these two similar constructions as fondness in what may be an indication of homoerotic feeling in Miskawayh and as a hint at the sexual enjoyment of multiple women in Ibn Rusta, the simple exclusion of basic emotional terminology from these accounts when making them accessible for those relying on translations has significant implications for our ability to access, contend with, and mediate emotional ideas in these geographical and historical works. Much focus rests on Ibn Faḍlān as an observer who comes across as either shocked and unnerved or as neutral and impassive, but what if we were to incorporate the emotions reported across the works of others writing on the Rūs? If we read more deliberately for these allowances of Rūs love and for the idea that love might be reason enough to bring about the death of one's slave or woman (Ibn Rusta's language does not explicitly specify freedom or unfreedom), how does our view of the relationship between geographer or chronicler and unwitting subject change? Do the comparatively bland (relative to Ibn Faḍlān's eyewitness awe) statements of armchair geographers and historians take on additional vibrance when understood to describe, understatedly and intertextually, love in the far north?

Emotional Possibilities

Emotion is arguably central to reading Arabic writings on the Rūs. We saw at the beginning of this article that in the seventh/thirteenth century, Ibn Faḍlān's eyewitness recordings induced wonder and astonishment in Yāqūt, alongside a healthy dose of disbelief. In the nineteenth century, as European orientalists and Scandinavian antiquarians began to work with and translate this material, prudish discomfort led to the expurgation of sexually explicit aspects of the *Risāla*, drastically reducing the visibility of women in this material.[79] Since then, we have moved from voyeuristic pleasure in the "orgy" depicted in the *Risāla* toward reactions of horror and disgust. As Neil Price writes with reference to the Viking world as a whole:

78. Ibn Rusta, *Ibn Rusta's Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-Nafīsa*, 147; Ibn Faḍlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness*, 127.

79. Hilda Lockhart Lorimer, "A Scandinavian Cremation-Ceremony," trans. Charis Waddy, *Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1934): 58–62, at 58; Upham, "Rūs Gender in Islamicate Sources," 132–41.

> I always find it puzzling how anyone could possibly find the Vikings "heroic." . . . We need only look again at Ibn Fadlan and consider what one really thinks of the lethal slavers and rapists he met, with their blood-drenched rituals on the Volga; and these seem to have been only merchants, not primarily a fighting group at all. Vikings of this kind were sometimes heroes in their own minds, and perhaps occasionally in the eyes of people they tried hard to impress—but not in mine.[80]

Perhaps this personal response is something that can and should be utilized. As scholars begin to move toward a sharper awareness of the gravity of what is being rendered (slavery, sexual assault, and violent killings), a possibility emerges for the harnessing of our own emotional reactions in reading and rereading these geographical texts on the north. A greater acknowledgment of our own emotional responses to these texts might lead to a greater sensitivity to and awareness of the place of emotion in the texts themselves and in the writing of these geographers.

If we read the Arabic sources on the Rūs emotionally—that is, if we account for our own emotions as contemporary readers while simultaneously looking for the encroachment of emotional readings and characterizations of the Rūs in the texts themselves—we might encounter an even richer body of sources and find ourselves on the receiving end of these geographical performances, experiencing a holistic as well as analytical relationship with this material. Certainly, these readings can highlight specific experiences in closer detail.

The epigraph to this article presented a challenge from James Montgomery as to what we can know, in emotional terms, about the Arabo-Islamic past and how we might interpret, schematize, and frame various ideas on emotion.[81] The challenge applies doubly when we consider that the forms of love discussed here are the renderings of geographers and chroniclers writing about a people who, Ibn Faḍlān notwithstanding, they had not themselves directly encountered. These geographical understandings of emotion among the Rūs contribute to a generalized understanding of the Rūs as a people, but the emotions reach us via a complicated framework of dissemination. They pass from the Rūs, perhaps via one or more intermediary informants, to geographer or chronicler, to scribe, disseminator, or compiler, to modern scholar, often through at least one translator in the process. Although this process complicates what we can definitively know to be true about the Rūs themselves—that is, our ability to discern exactly how a Rūs man might have felt toward the boys he trafficked, and how this feeling influenced postmortem decisions on the sacrifice of *ghilmān*—an emotional reading brings with it the potential for a greater awareness of how these representations of the Rūs might be understood not only by ourselves as researchers but by the readers and audiences for whom they have been performed from the fourth/tenth century onward, perhaps leading to a shift in our approach to this source material. This manner of reading prioritizes the perception of emotions in the material, establishing this largely geographical corpus of sources as one that can be mined for the study of emotion.

80. Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), 344.

81. Montgomery, "Convention as Cognition," 171.

This research arose out of curiosity as to how "fond," precisely, a dead Rūs man must have been of his *ghulām* in order to bring about the latter's sacrifice. That emotion, clarified via discussion of *ḥubb*, remains subjective; there is no formula outlining precisely how geographers understood Rūs feelings about those they enslaved, or what forms of relationship these feelings might have entailed. However, emotional ideas offer a helpful pathway to reconsider this underdiscussed element of funerary sacrifice. Although infrequently addressed within the Arabic geographical and chronicle sources that discuss the Rūs, the emotion attached to the concept of male funerary sacrifice imbues this practice with a weight and a significance that facilitate a more thorough consideration of the sacrifice of men. By highlighting a different perspective on a fate otherwise considered the domain of women in writings on the Rūs, then, the study of emotion can broaden our view of gendered experiences and, in particular, the sacrificial treatment of enslaved men.

Acknowledgements

The initial research from which this article was developed was variously supported, supervised, discussed, and assessed by Agnes Arnórsdóttir, Richard Cole, Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, Nizar Hermes, Pernilla Myrne, and Pernille Hermann. I also received early support and feedback from the PhD community at the Department of History and Classical Studies, Aarhus University. My thanks go to Zayde Antrim and Alison Vacca for their patience and support as editors, and to the anonymous reviewers for their generous and generative comments.

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