

## BONES

‘IZĀM, TARĀQĪ, ŞULB, TARĀ’IB, SINN, KA‘BAYN

This article comprises the following sections: (i) Definitions and Usage; (ii) Bones as a Trope for the Process of Resurrection in Q 2:259; (iii) The Hadith of the Tailbone-Tip as a Gloss for Q 2:259; (iv) Bones as a Trope for the Deniers of Resurrection; (v) *Ageing Bone* as Qur’ānic Eloquence, Appeal to Mercy, and Paradigm for Supplication; (vi) Bones as a Stage of Human Prenatal Development in Qur’ān and Hadith; (vii) Mentions of Bones in Selected Prophetic Reports; (viii) Bibliography.

### Definitions and Usage

Bones (‘*azm*, plural ‘*izām*) are here defined as “the flesh-covered skeletal parts of a living being” (*al-ladhī ‘alayhī al-laḥm min qaṣab al-ḥayawān*: Ibn Sīda, *Muḥkam*, sub ‘-z-m), “which bone-setters are required to know number 248 bones in a human being (*q.v.*)” (al-Maqdisī, *Badhl al-naṣā’ih*, 2:465-466, al-Ḥisba ‘alā kull wāḥid min kull ḥirfa wa-ṣinā‘a, al-mujbirūn). The Qur’ān mentions bones primarily as a paradigm of Resurrection (*q.v.*), using the nouns ‘*izām* (14 times) and *azm* (once, Q 19:4) respectively in the plural and singular, in addition to five other nouns that refer to specific bones: the plural *tarāqī* (clavicles, Q 75:26), the singular *ṣulb* (spine, Q 4:23, 86:7), the plural *tarā’ib* (sternum, Q 86:7), the dual *ka‘bayn* (ankle-bones, Q 5:6), and the singular *ṣinn* (tooth) in the verse on the talion penalties (see BLOOD-MONEY; LEGAL PUNISHMENTS; RETALIATION) enjoined on the Israelites for homicide and bodily injuries (Q 5:45; see below on *ṣinn*). Two additional body parts that denote both bone and flesh are mentioned: the plural *anāmīl* (fingertips, Q 3:119) and the singular *anf* (nose) in the talion verse just mentioned. The verse also mentions *al-udhun* (the ear) which is equally liable and which comprises three tiny bones, the auditory ossicles (*Gray’s Anatomy*, pp. 631, 635-637); however, lexicons and the Law call them cartilage (*ghudrūf*, plural *ghadārīf*: Jawharī, *Ṣiḥāḥ*, sub *gh-r-d-f*; ‘Askarī, *Talkhīs*, p. 39, Dhikr al-udhunanayn; Kirmānī, *Gharā’ib*; Zamakhsharī; Māwardī, *Hāwī*, 12:183, Qatī, qīṣāṣ, faṣl: an tuqṭa‘ udhumuh; Ibn Nuḡaym, *Baḥr*, 8:345, Jimāyāt, al-qīṣāṣ fīmā dūn al-nafs).

*‘Izām* (sing. ‘*azm*), from the root ‘-z-m which points to “bulk and strength” (*kibar wa-quwwa*), is the name for bones “because of their strength and rigidity” (Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*). “It was originally used to indicate that something became big-boned, then it was borrowed to refer to all things great, whether sensory or

intellective, concrete or abstract” (Rāghib, *Mufradāt*). It has three plural forms: *‘azum*, ‘*izām*, and ‘*izāma* (Fayrūzābādī, 4:79, *baṣīra fī ‘-t-l*, ‘-t-w, ‘-z-m). The Qur’ān uses ‘*azm* and ‘*izām* fifteen times in fourteen verses covering five thematic contexts:

- i. ten times in the plural (Q 17:49, 98; 23:35, 82; 36:78; 37:16, 53; 56:47; 75:3; 79:11) in reference to the unbelievers’ denial of Resurrection *after bones have crumbled to dust*;
- ii. once in the plural in a fundamental verse on Resurrection, creation and time (Q 2:259, see next section);
- iii. once in the singular (Q 19:4) in the supplication (*q.v.*) of the Prophet Zakariyyā, upon him peace (*q.v.*) for an heir (see section further below);
- iv. twice in the plural (Q 23:14 x2) as a stage in the development of the fetus in the womb;
- v. once in the singular (Q 6:146) in reference to a Jewish dietary prohibition, whereby fat of oxen and sheep is forbidden to them except that which is *upon their backs or their entrails or that which is mingled with bone* (see CHILDREN OF ISRĀ’ĪL; FOOD AND DRINK; LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL);

*Tarāqī* (sing. *tarquwa*), from the root *t-r-q*, on the pattern of *fāluwa* (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, qāf, faṣl al-tā), is identified as the two clavicles known as the collarbone, “the bone that connects the suprasternal notch (*thughrat al-naḥr*) to the shoulder (*‘atiq*) on each side” (Farāhīdī, sub *q-t-r*; Jawharī, *Ṣiḥāḥ*; Ibn Sīda, *Muḥkam*; Rāghib, sub *t-r-q*), “the two prominent bones at the top of the chest” (‘Askarī, *Talkhīs*, p. 64, fī dhikr al-ṣadr). The usage of *tarāqī* appears in an evocative description of the departure of the soul of the unbeliever: *Nay, but when it reaches the clavicles and it is said: “Who can cure him?” and he knows for certain that it is parting, and the legs shift one on top of another; to your Lord that Day is the conveyance* (Q 75:26-30). The mention of that particular spot of the body in such a context implies the *gharḡhara* or death rattle that occurs in the respiration of the dying, as confirmed by a similarly-worded verse that mentions the *ḥulqūm* (throat) in lieu of the collarbone, *when the soul reaches the throat* (Q 56:83; Ibn Rajab; Ibn ‘Ajība, *Baḥr*, sub Q 4:17-18; Burūsawī, *Rūḥ*; Athyūbī, sub Q 75:26-27).

*Ṣulb* (plurals *aṣḥub*, *aṣḥāb* and *ṣilba*) is derived from the root *ṣ-l-b*, which signifies hardness (*shidda*) and strength (*quwwa*); “this is why the backbone is called *ṣulb*” (Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs*), namely, “the bone that starts at the atlas (*kāhil*) down to the tailbone (*‘ajb*)”