

cubits, containing images of the prophets. The Amalekites had taken it from them” (Kāzarūnī). Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-ca.922) says that the Children of Isrā‘īl carried the *tābūt* with them and whenever they encountered their enemy they would overcome them because of the blessings of the *tābūt*. It is said to have descended with Ādam, upon him peace (*q.v.*), and it was transferred, generation after generation, to their ancestor, Yā‘qūb, upon him peace (*q.v.*), whose second name is Isrā‘īl (see CHILDREN OF ISRĀ‘ĪL). However, when the Children of Isrā‘īl started to disobey Allah Most High, it disappeared; when they repented, it was returned to them, when they again transgressed, it disappeared and it happened over and over, until it was taken away from them and now it will never return to them (Ṭabarī). Others have said that it was with them from the time of Mūsā and Hārūn, upon them peace, and was taken after their demise due to their disbelief and transgressions, until Allah Most High restored it to them as a sign of the kingship of Ṭālūt (Ṭabarī). This is a proof that transgressions lead to deprivation and disgrace (Qurṭubī).

“It was carried by Angels who could be seen by eyes, between the heavens and the earth. It is said that Ādam came down with the *Tābūt*, but there are different opinions about where it was returned to them. Ibn ‘Abbās and Wahb b. Munabbih (d. ca.109/728) said it was in the hands of the Amalekites who had overpowered Banī Isrā‘īl; whereas according to Qatāda b. Di‘āma al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735), it was buried in the wilderness, where Yūsha‘ b. Nūn had left it” (Māwardī).

Al-Ṭabarī provides a range of opinions about the meaning of *sakīna* (tranquility) in the Chest, including what is reported from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s (13BH-40/609-660), Allah be pleased with him, who said it was a subtle fragrance that appeared in the form of a human face; others said it was like the head of a cat with two wings; still others said it was a golden bowl in which the hearts of the prophets are washed; and still others related that it meant Divine mercy or dignity conferred on them.

Similarly, a range of opinions are found in the exegetical literature with regard to things which were in the Chest which are called the remnant of the family of Mūsā and Hārūn, upon them peace, in the verse. Ibn ‘Abbās (3BH-68/619-688) said it contained pieces of the Tablets (*q.v.*) which had broken when Mūsā threw them down in anger (*cf.* Q 7:150), the Staff of Mūsā (*q.v.*, mentioned in Q 2:60; 7:107, 117, 160; 20:18; 26:32, 45; 27:10; 28:31), and the headdress of Hārūn, upon him peace; others include in the list of items his sandals, clothes, and *Mann*—the heavenly

food that descended for the Children of Isrā‘īl (*cf.* Q 2:57; 7:160; 20:80) (Ṭabarī; Zamakhsharī; Qurṭubī).

The Chest was carried by the angels, “in broad daylight, between the heavens and the earth, until they placed it besides Ṭālūt” as per Ibn ‘Abbās (Ṭabarī). Al-Suddī (d. 127/744) said, “When their Prophet said to them: *‘Allah has chosen him above you, and has granted him abundant knowledge and bodily prowess,’* they said, *‘If you are truthful, then bring us a sign,’* and the Chest came as a sign and it was brought to the house of Ṭālūt and then the accepted his kingship and the prophethood of Sham‘ūn (Ṭabarī).

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See also: CHILDREN OF ISRĀ‘ĪL; DISBELIEVERS; EGYPT; FACE OF ALLAH; FIR‘AWN; HĀRŪN, UPON HIM PEACE; MADYAN; MŪSĀ, UPON HIM PEACE; RIVERS AND SPRINGS; SAKĪNA; SHU‘AYB, UPON HIM PEACE, SPEECH; STAFF OF MŪSĀ; SUPPLICATION AND ANSWER; ṬĀLŪT; YĀ‘QŪB, ON HIM PEACE.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

ṬIFL, ṢABĪ, ṢAGHĪR, FATĀ/T, GHULĀM

This article comprises the following sections: (i) Definitions and usage; (ii) From birth to puberty: *ṣabī* and *ṣaghīr*, and *ṭifl*; (iii) Sexual unawareness as a marker of *ṭufūla*; (iv) Female ornaments that children are allowed to see; (v) Puberty as the onset of adulthood and a suggestive gloss of Q 12:31; (vi) *Fatā/t* as “raw youth;” (vii) *Fatā/t* as “slave” and *fatā* as “selfless;” (viii) *Ghulām* as “male child,” “young adult,” “male,” and “servant/

slave;” (ix) *Ghulām* as a trope for future virility or diehard youth; (x) *Ghulām* as “pre-pubescent youth” throughout the Qur’ān; (xi) *al-Ashudd*, or maturity after childhood (xii) The lingering of youth into a man’s thirties, forties and fifties; (xii) Bibliography.

Definitions and usage

The Qur’ān refers to

- infancy and childhood with the root *t-fl* (infinitive noun *tufula*) in the nominal form *ṭifl* (infant, child) (Q 22:5; 24:31; 40:67) and its plural *aṭfāl* (Q 24:59);
- infancy, childhood and boyhood with the root *ṣ-b-w* (infinitive noun *ṣibā*) in the nominal form *ṣabī* (infant, child, boy) (Q 19:12, 29);
- “young age” with the root *ṣ-gh-r* (infinitive noun *ṣighar*) in the adjectival form *ṣaghīr* (little) (Q 17:24);
- boyhood, girlhood and young adulthood with the root *f-t-w/f-t-y* (infinitive noun *fatāʾ*) in the nominal forms *fatā* (Q 12:30; 18:60, 62; 21:60), *fatayān* (Q 12:36), *fitya* (Q 18:10, 13), *fityān* (Q 12:62), and *fatayāt* (Q 4:25; 24:33);
- “lad” and young adulthood with the root *gh-l-m* (infinitive nouns *ghalam*, *ghulma* and *ghulūma*) in the form of *ghulām* (Q 3:40; 12:19; 15:53; 18:74, 80, 82; 19:7-8, 19-20; 37:101; 51:28) and its pl. *ghilmān* (Q 52:24).

The rest of this article details the lexical and exegetical applications of the above categories.

Of secondary relevance here, as markers of childhood, are the references to children as *wildān* (Q 56:17; 76:19)—a plural denoting the adolescents of Paradise (*q.v.*) synonymously with *ghilmān*, or examples of defenselessness (Q 4:75, 98, 127)—and *yatīm* (Q 6:152; 17:34; 18:82; 76:8; 89:17, etc.), pl. *yatāmā* (Q 2:83, 177, 215, 220; 4:127, etc.), orphans. Both of these categories, along with all the roots and cognates that denote offspring and children in general or specific sub-topics such as pregnancy, embryonic formation and growth, delivery and birth, nursing and sucklings, adoption and infanticide, filial piety etc. (*w-l-d*, *dh-r-r*, *n-s-l*, *b-n-w*, *h-m-l*, *w-d-ṣ*, *r-d-ṣ* etc.) are covered in other articles (see cross-references at the end of entry).

From birth to puberty: *ṣabī*, *ṣaghīr* and *ṭifl*

The root *ṣ-gh-r* in reference to childhood occurs only once in the Qur’ān, as a descriptive denoting generic young age in the verse ... and say: “O my Lord, grant them mercy just as they nurtured me when I was little (*ṣaghīran*)” (Q 17:24). Nurturing (*tarbiya*) is defined as “making something reach its completeness little by little” (Bayḍāwī, *sub* Q 1:2), the *terminus ad quem*

of completeness being puberty and marriage as indicated by the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, in the two hadiths: (i) “Whoso fosters two girls (*ʿāla jāriyatayn*) until they reach puberty shall appear on the Day of Resurrection together with me”—and he joined his two fingers (Muslim, *al-Birr wal-ṣila wal-ādāb*, *faḍl al-iḥsān ilā al-banāt*); (ii) “Whoso fosters three girls (*banāt*), educates them, marries them off, and treats them excellently, earns Paradise (Abū Dāwūd, *Adab*, *faḍl man ʿāla yatīman*; Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 5:90 §4760; cf. Ḥasanī, *Tahdhīb al-akhḫāq*, pp. 83-84 *bāb fī tarbiyat al-awlād*; Suwayd, *Manhaj al-tarbiya*, p. 28).

Ṣabī (boy) occurs twice, in reference to the two Prophets who were first cousins—Yaḥyā (*q.v.*) and ʿĪsā (*q.v.*), upon our Prophet and them blessings and peace—and in the order of their birth: *O Yaḥyā, take hold of the Book with strength. And We brought him wisdom as a boy* (Q 19:12); *Then she pointed to him [ʿĪsā]. They said: How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a baby boy?* (Q 19:29). Lexicons define *ṣibā* generically as “young age” (*ṣighar al-sinn*, Ibn Fāris, 3:331), and more specifically as either pre-pubescent boyhood (*man lam yablugh al-ḥulum*, Rāghib, *sub ṣ-b-w*) or infancy before weaning (*man lam yuṣṭam baʿd*, Fayrūzābādī, *sub ṣ-b-w*).

The gloss of *ṣabī* as “pre-weaning infant” applies in the case of ʿĪsā, who spoke from the time of birth (Q 3:46; 19:24, 29). Its gloss as “pre-pubescent boy” is supported with non-Prophetic exegetical reports about Yaḥyā being given teaching knowledge of the Torah at age three (Muqātil, Māwardī, Samʿānī, *sub* Q 19:12) according to Ibn ʿAbbās (3BH-68/620-688) (Wāḥidī, Kirmānī, *sub* Q 19:12), and replying to little boys who invited him to play: “I was not created for play” (ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 19:12). *And speaking to people from the cradle and as a mature man* (*kahlan*) (Q 3:46), “That is, he spoke in the state of childhood with the speech of sages, not with that of boys; and he spoke in his maturity (*kuhūla*), not with the speech of sages but with that of Prophets” (Tustarī, *Laṭāʾif*, p. 101).

The root *t-fl* occurs four times, always as a noun (Q 22:5; 24:31, 59; 40:67) denoting a specific phase of childhood, from the moment of birth, ... *then We/He brings you out as a child* (*ṭiflan*)... (Q 22:5; 40:67), until puberty (*ḥulum*): *And when the children* (*al-aṭfāl*) *among you reach puberty*... (Q 24:59). “The noun *ṭifl* applies until puberty” (Rāzī, *sub* Q 24:31). Thus *ṣibā*, *ṣighar* and *tufula* are all synonymously defined as the pre-pubescent period from birth to boyhood or girlhood.

Sexual unawareness as a marker of *tufula*

Another verse describes the category of *ṭifl* as those