

ON THE 'AŞ-ŞULB AND 'AT-TARĀ'IB: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE(*)

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ABSTRACT

Allah Almighty says in verses (Q. 86:5-7) that the human being is created from 'gushing water' that emanates from between 'aş-şulb and 'at-tarā'ib. These two terms have been associated with different body parts in the traditional interpretations and modern translations of the Holy Qur'ān, as well as in some of the contemporary investigations into the issue of human procreation. This paper surveys these views, and cites two modern views on this issue, one is anatomical and the other is cosmological. Besides, it shows that language can provide yet another understanding, one according to which 'aş-şulb may refer to the 'tailbone', and 'at-tarā'ib may be interpreted to refer to 'the rest of the human body'.

Keywords: 'Aş-Şulb, 'At-Tarā'ib, Backbone, Tailbone, Chest, Pelvis, Literal Meaning.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Allah Almighty says that He creates the human being from a liquid that He refers to as *mā'in dāfiq* 'gushing water'. This is stated in verses (5-7) of sūrat Al-Ṭāriq (The Nightly Visitor, 86:5-7) in (1), translated in (2).

1. “فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ (5) خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ (6) يُخْرَجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ (7) وَالْتَرَائِبِ (7) ”

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2. “Let man consider what he was created from. He was created from gushing liquid. Issuing from between the backbone and the breastbones.”²

As (Q. 86:5-7) state, the ‘gushing water’ comes from ‘between the ‘aṣ-ṣulb and the ‘at-tarā’ib’. The cited translation interprets ‘aṣ-ṣulb to mean the ‘backbone’ and ‘at-tarā’ib to mean the ‘breastbones’, and this makes the ‘standard’ understanding of the meanings of these two words. Nonetheless, there has been disagreement on the nature of the body parts that these two words refer to in the traditional interpretations as well as in the modern understandings, as revealed by some of the current translations.

Contemporary investigations into the issue are no advancement either with regard to the identity of the body parts referred to by these two terms. For example, Bahrami argues that “the terms ‘aṣ-ṣulb and ‘at-tarā’ib are not related to the specific gender of a woman or a man, but are common to both and are used with each other as a path to form and complete the process of reproduction”. He continues, “in addition to the full role of FUNCTIONAL SPINAL UNIT in the speech of commentators and scholars, in many cases, ‘aṣ-ṣulb has a factor in generation and inheritance transmission and a direct role in fertility”.³ Also, Abū Zayd concludes that ‘aṣ-ṣulb refers to the man’s and woman’s spine, and ‘at-tarā’ib refers to the man’s and woman’s ribs.⁴ Pazouki & Awsat argue that “the meaning of ‘aṣ-ṣulb is the back and the bones of the back and the meaning of ‘at-tarā’ib is the chest and front bones of the breast”. They conclude that “the phrase “مِن بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالرَّأْسِ” implies that the whole body and both man and woman contribute in the formation of the fetus”.⁵ In fact, these conclusions are similar to those reached in traditional interpretations of the Holy Qur’ān, to be introduced in section 2.

Al-Sa’dī brings in a very intriguing dimension into the issue by arguing that ‘aṣ-ṣulb refers to the physical chromosomes in both the male and the female, and

² <https://www.clearquran.com/086.html>

³ Bahrami, M. (2014). Loin (Solb) and Taraeb. *Medical History Quarterly*, 5(16), p.153.

⁴ Abū Zayd, ‘A. A. ‘A. (2008). ‘Awjuh al-’Ijāz al-’Ilāhī fī ‘aṭwār khalq al-’Insān fī ḍaw’ al-Wahy al-’Ilāhī wa al-’Ilm al-Ḥadīth. *Annual of the Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion and Da’wah of Menoufia*, 37(37), 1055–1130.

⁵ Pazouki, A. K., & Awsat, Q. A. (2020). A comparative study of fetal formation from the perspective of interpretation of Quran and science with emphasis on verses 5 to 7 of chapter al-Tariq. *Journal of the Holy Quran and Islamic Texts*, 11(42), p. 149.

that *'at-tarā'ib* refers to the sexual chromosomes in both the male and the female.⁶ In addition, Al-Muntakhab contemporary interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, which states that “*'aṣ-ṣulb* is the area of the spine, and *'at-tarā'ib* are the breast bones”, incorporates modern research findings in its definition of the two terms. According to Al-Muntakhab:

“Recent embryonic studies have shown that the nucleus of the reproductive system, and the urinary system in the fetus, appear between the cartilage cells that make up the bones of the spine, and between the cells that make up the breast bones. The kidneys remain in place and the testicles descend into their normal position in the scrotum at birth. Although the testicles descend downwards, the artery that supplies them with blood throughout their life branches off from the aorta, running next to the renal artery. The nerve that transmits sensation to them and helps them produce sperm and the accompanying fluids is branched from the tenth thoracic nerve, which leaves the spinal cord between the tenth and eleventh ribs. And it is clear from this that the genitals and the nerves and blood vessels that nourish them arise from a place in the body between *'aṣ-ṣulb* and *'at-tarā'ib* “the spine and the ribcage”.”⁷

Despite the fact that this description is both vivid and insightful, it still does not clearly show how the ‘gushing water’ emanates ‘from between *'aṣ-ṣulb* and *'at-tarā'ib*’. This informative account just states where “the nucleus of the reproductive system” emerges and where “the nerves and blood vessels that nourish [the genitals]” branch from, which illustrates the crucial role of the spine and ribcage in the reproduction process, which is undeniable. In other words, this description just illustrates the crucial areas that *help* in forming the genitals and producing sperm, but, crucially, it does *not* say that semen/sperm (or ‘gushing water’) comes from between the spine and ribs, which is necessary to argue that the spine is *'aṣ-ṣulb* and the ribs are *'at-tarā'ib*. Also, this account seems to be based on the assumption that the ‘gushing water’ is semen/sperm, which is not accurate, and which, in turn, makes the assumption that *'aṣ-ṣulb* is the spine and *'at-tarā'ib* are the ribs hard to maintain.

The reviewed studies either agree with the traditional views (on the identity of *'aṣ-ṣulb* and *'at-tarā'ib*), or approach the issue from a purely anatomical

⁶ Al-Sa‘dī, D. S. (1999). *'Asrār khalq al-'insān: al-'ajā'ib fī 'aṣ-ṣulb wa 'at-tarā'ib*. Beirut: Dār al-Ḥarf al-'Arabī for Printing, Publication, and Distribution.

⁷ ACAS. (1995). *Al-Muntakhab contemporary interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān*. Cairo: al-Ahram Press, 18th ed., p. 898.

perspective, which could prove to be a fruitful approach. Nonetheless, such investigations must take into consideration the words used in the relevant verses. Specifically, any account must make reference to *mā'in dāfiq* 'gushing water', *ṣulb* 'a solid piece', and *tarā'ib* 'soil-like or dust-becoming elements'. In other words, the original meanings of the key words in the relevant verses must be thoroughly examined. This means that new research on the identity of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib' should be conducted, especially from the linguistic perspective, which has been largely overlooked. Specifically, we need to consider the literal meanings of these terms and explore possible insights therein, rather than just considering the socially accepted or culturally recognized meanings.

Therefore, the current study aims to provide a linguistic approach to the investigation of the identity of the body parts that the terms 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib refer to. Before that, the paper surveys the various views in 11 of the main traditional interpretations (i.e. exegesis) of the Holy Qur'ān as well as in 31 of the available translations of the Qur'ān. It also discusses two new views on the identity of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib, that is, on the nature of the source of the 'procreation liquid', which implies that new understandings are possible given different scholars' backgrounds.

To account for the different views on the meanings of these two words, the paper suggests that the lack of agreement on the identity of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib in the traditional sources may be attributed to a misunderstanding with regard to the identity of the 'gushing water' itself. Specifically, there are reasons to believe that the 'gushing water', referred to in (Q. 86:6), is not 'semen/sperm', but rather the raw material for semen/sperm.

Since most dictionaries of Arabic were compiled after or around the same time when most traditional interpretations were written, it is very likely that both sources, interpretations and dictionaries, influenced each other with regard to how these two words were interpreted. Therefore, this paper abstracts away from the standard meanings recorded in both sources, and presents a language-based view of the meanings of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib, a view inspired by the literal meanings of these words.

Section 2 presents findings from the traditional interpretations and lists modern translations of the relevant verse. Section 3 presents the anatomical and cosmological views. Section 4 discusses the nature of the 'gushing water'. Section 5 presents the language-based understanding of the meanings of the relevant terminology. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. TRADITIONAL VIEWS

2.1. Survey of traditional interpretations

The surveyed exegesis books say that 'aṣ-ṣulb is either the “(man's) back”,⁸ or the “man's backbones”.⁹ Some interpreters just state 'ṣulb-u r-rajul', assuming that it should be understood to refer to the 'back' or 'backbone'.¹⁰ Other interpreters do not even comment on the word 'aṣ-ṣulb, taking it for granted that it refers to the man's 'back/backbone'.¹¹

With regard to 'at-tarā'ib, Al-Qurṭubī says that it refers to the “(woman's) chest”, and cites the following scholars: Ibn 'Abbās says that 'at-tarā'ib is the “center of the chest (necklace spot)” or “between the breasts”. 'Ikrimah says that it refers to the “chest” or “between the breasts”. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk says that it refers to the “hands, legs and eyes”. Sa'īd bin Jubayr says that it refers to the “neck”. Mujāhid says that 'at-tarā'ib is “between the shoulders and the chest” or the “chest”, or the “breastbones”. Quoting Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Jubayr says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “lower four ribs on both sides”. Al-Zajjāj says that it refers to “four ribs from each side of the chest”.¹² Mu'ammār bin Abī Ḥabībah Al-Madanī says that it is the

⁸ Al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad. (2006). *al-Jāmi' li-'Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 206; Ibn 'Adil, 'Umar. (1998). *al-Lubāb fi 'ulūm al-Kitāb*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 263.

⁹ Quṭb, S. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān Fī ḏilāl al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 34th ed., p. 4544.

¹⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 'I. (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah for Publication and Distribution, p. 375; Al-Baghawī, A. (1989). *Tafsīr al-Baghawī: Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah for Publication and Distribution, p. 394; Al-Sa'dī, 'A. N. (2002). *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-Mannān*. Riyadh: Darussalam for Publication and Distribution, p. 1085; Al-Nisābūrī, N. (1996). *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 480; Al-Khāzin, 'A. (2004). *Lubāb al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah. p. 415; Al-Andalusī, 'A. (2001). *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 465.

¹¹ Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr. (1994). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 501; Al-Samarqandī, N. (1993). *Baḥr al-'Ulūm*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 468; Al-Rāzī, M. (1981). *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr for Printing, Publication, and Distribution, p. 130.

¹² This very early view (i.e. involvement of the lower four ribs from each side) seems to agree with modern research findings (i.e. involvement of the tenth and eleventh ribs), as

“juicy discharge of the heart (from which the baby is formed/conceived)”. Al-Qurṭubī says that, according to the Arabic language, 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “chest and neck bones”.¹³

Moreover, Ibn Kathīr says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “woman's chest”, and cites the following scholars: Sufyān Al-Thawrī says that it refers to “what is above the woman's breasts”. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk says it is “between the breasts, legs and eyes”.¹⁴ Al-Baghawī states that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “chest and neck bones”, and cites the following sources: Qatādah says that it refers to the “neck”, and Ibn Zayd says that it refers to the “chest”.¹⁵ Al-Andalusī states that 'at-tarā'ib is “between the chest bones and the breasts”, and cites Makkī as reporting Ibn 'Abbās that 'at-tarā'ib are the “hands, legs and eyes”.¹⁶

In addition, Al-Sa'dī says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “woman's breasts”.¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī states that it refers to the “necklace spot”, meaning ‘the center of the chest’.¹⁸ Al-Samarqandī also says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “necklace spot”.¹⁹ Ibn 'Adil states that it refers to the “necklace spot in the chest bones”.²⁰ Al-Rāzī says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “woman's chest bones, or necklace spot”.²¹ Al-Nīsābūrī says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the “chest bones”.²² Al-Khāzin says that

revealed by the text quoted from Al-Muntakhab contemporary interpretation in section 1.

¹³ Al-Qurṭubī, M. (2006). *al-Jāmi' li-'Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 206–210.

¹⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 'I. (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah for Publication and Distribution, p. 375.

¹⁵ Al-Baghawī, A. (1989). *Tafsīr al-Baghawī: Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah for Publication and Distribution, p. 394.

¹⁶ Al-Andalusī, 'A. (2001). *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-'Azīz*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 465.

¹⁷ Al-Sa'dī, 'A. N. (2002). *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-Mannān*. Riyadh: Darussalam for Publication and Distribution, p. 1085.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, M. (1994). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 501.

¹⁹ Al-Samarqandī, N. (1993). *Baḥr al-'Ulūm*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 468.

²⁰ Ibn 'Adil, 'U. (1998). *al-Lubāb fī 'ulūm al-Kitāb*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 263.

²¹ Al-Rāzī, M. (1981). *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr for Printing, Publication, and Distribution, p. 130.

²² Al-Nīsābūrī, N. (1996). *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 480.

'at-tarā'ib refers to the "chest and neck bones".²³ Quṭb says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the "woman's upper chest bones".²⁴

As for dictionaries, I will present the meanings available in two dictionaries, one traditional and one contemporary. According to *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ*, 'aṣ-ṣulb means the "bone that stretches from *al-kāhil* to *al-'ajb*"; *al-kāhil* is "between the shoulders" or "where the spine and neck meet" or "top of the back, close to the neck"; *al-'ajb* is the "beginning of the tail" and "the end of everything".²⁵ Thus, according to *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ*, 'aṣ-ṣulb is the 'backbone', since this stretches from between the shoulders to the tail (of the spine). *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasīṭ* says that 'aṣ-ṣulb means the "vertebrae of the back".²⁶

With regard to 'at-tarā'ib, *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* says that it means the "breastbones", or the "part of breastbones that is close to the collarbones", or "what is between the breasts and collarbones", or "four ribs on the right and four ribs on the left of the chest", or the "hands, legs, and eyes", or "the necklace spot (in the chest)".²⁷ *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasīṭ* says that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the "breastbones that are close to the collarbone" or the "necklace spot".²⁸ While the traditional dictionary is consistent with the traditional interpretations, the contemporary one is somewhat innovative as it makes reference to the 'vertebrae of the back'.

The consensus that 'aṣ-ṣulb refers to the man's backbone (or vertebrae) and that 'at-tarā'ib refers to the woman's breast(bones) could be interpreted in at least three ways. First, it could be the case that these two terms had been associated with these two body parts in the speech of Arabs, and so the verse was understood to make reference to those two body parts; but, the exegesis books mention several body parts for the 'at-tarā'ib! Second, this connection may be a result of the general understanding that the man's back and woman's chest produce the raw material for life and sustaining it, semen/sperm and milk, respectively. Third,

²³ Al-Khāzin, 'A. (2004). *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 415–416.

²⁴ Quṭb, S. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 34th ed., p. 4544.

²⁵ Al-Fayrūzabādī, M. (2005). *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 8th ed., p. 105, p. 1055, p. 112.

²⁶ ALAC. (2004). *al-Mu'jam Al-Wasīṭ*. Cairo, International Sunrise Press, 4th ed., p. 519.

²⁷ Al-Fayrūzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, p. 61.

²⁸ ALAC, *al-Mu'jam Al-Wasīṭ*, p. 83.

as Al-Andalusī suggests, it is possible that Allah Almighty chose these terms to avoid details and “that the phrase ‘between the backbone and the ribs [بَيْنَ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ]’ should be interpreted as a euphemism for sexual relations between parents and as an allusion to humanity’s first parents, Adam and Eve”.²⁹ I think that Al-Andalusī’s approach is a tenable one, in the sense that ‘*aṣ-ṣulb* and ‘*at-tarā’ib* do not refer to the actual body parts responsible for reproduction.

2.2. Survey of translations

This section presents 31 translations of verse 7 of sūrat Al-Ṭāriq (The Nightly Visitor, 86:7) with the source of the translation indicated in a footnote, or as a reference; the relevant words are in italics.

3. “Issuing from between the *backbone* and the *breastbones*.”³⁰
4. “Issuing from between the *backbone* and the *breastbones*.”³¹
5. “Which issues from between the *loins* and the *breast-bones*.”³²
6. “Proceeding from between the *backbone* and the *ribs*”³³
7. “That issues from between the *loins* and the *ribs*.”³⁴
8. “Proceeding from between the *backbone* and the *ribs*.”³⁵
9. “Emerging from between the *backbone* and the *ribs*.”³⁶

All the following translations come from one source (website), having the actual source indicated above the respective translation.³⁷

²⁹ Al-Andalusī, A. ‘A. (2020). Between a backbone and ribs: How science obscures the beauty of the Qur’an, p. 2.

³⁰ <https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/86/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-italia/a1/alafasy-64/a2/italia-64/v/7>

³¹ <https://www.clearquran.com/086.html>

³² <https://al-quran.info/#86>

³³ <http://search-the-quran.com/search/Surah+Fatir/8>

³⁴ <http://www.e-quran.com/language/english/english4/default.html>

³⁵ <http://www.surah.my/4?l=en>

³⁶ <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/translations/english/591.html?a=5932>

³⁷ <https://www.alquranenglish.com/quran-surah-at-tariq-7-qs-86-7-in-arabic-and-english-translation>

Sahih International

10. “Emerging from between the *backbone* and the *ribs*.”

Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan

11. “Proceeding from between the *back-bone* and the *ribs*”

Mohammed Marmaduke William Pickthall

12. “That issued from between the *loins* and *ribs*.”

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

13. “Proceeding from between the *backbone* and the *ribs*”

Mohammad Habib Shakir

14. “Coming from between the *back* and the *ribs*.”

Dr. Ghali

15. “Going out between the *loins* (Or: *backbone*) and the *breastbones*.”

Ali Unal

16. “It proceeds (as a result of incitement) between the (*lumbar zone in the vertebra*) and the *ribs*.”

Amatul Rahman Omar

17. “Which issues forth from between the *loins* and the *breast-bones*.”

Literal

18. “It emerges/appears from between the *spine* and the *rib bones*.”

Ahmed Ali

19. “Issuing from (the pelvis) between the *backbone* and the *ribs*.”

A. J. Arberry

20. “Issuing between the *loins* and the *breast-bones*.”

Abdul Majid Daryabadi

21. “That issueth from between the *loins* and the *breast-bones*.”

Maulana Mohammad Ali

22. “Coming from between the *back* and the *ribs*.”

Muhammad Sarwar

23. “Which comes out of the *loins* and *ribs*.”

Hamid Abdul Aziz

24. “Which comes out from between the *loins* and the *breast bones*.”

Faridul Haque

25. “That is issued from between the *backs* and the *ribs*.”

Talal Itani

26. “Issuing from between the *backbone* and the *breastbones*.”

Ahmed Raza Khan

27. “That is issued from between the *backs* and the *ribs*.”

Wahiduddin Khan

28. “Issuing from between the *backbone* and the *breastbone*.”

Safi-ur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri

29. “Proceeding from between the *backbone* and the *ribs*.”

Ali Quli Qarai

30. “Which issues from between the *loins* and the *breast-bones*.”

Hasan Al-Fatih Qaribullah and Ahmad Darwish

31. “That issues from between the *loins* and the *ribs*.”

The translations in (32-33) are from the sources indicated above them.

Abdullah Nooruddeen Durkee

32. “Issuing from between the loins [of man] and the pelvic arch [of woman].”³⁸

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

33. “Issuing from between the loins and the pelvic arch.”³⁹

According to these translations, 'aṣ-ṣulb refers to either the 'backbone', or the 'loins (of a man)', or the 'back', or the '(lumbar zone in the) vertebra', or the 'spine'. According to the same translations, 'at-tarā'ib refers to either the 'breastbones' or the 'ribs' or the 'pelvic arch (of a woman)'. Talk of the man's loins and the woman's pelvic arch makes reference to the male and female reproductive organs, a possibility that is related to the anatomical view, to be discussed in section 3.1. Compared to the traditional interpretations, the translations seem to have gone one step further by considering the '(lumbar zone in the) vertebra' and the 'pelvic arch (of a woman)', maybe as a result of incorporating notions related to reproduction.

3. MODERN VIEWS

3.1. Anatomical understanding

The disagreement between the various exegesis books and translations on the identity of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib' raises the question of where exactly the 'gushing water' comes from. This disagreement indicates that either they are all right or that none of them is right. I believe that they are all likely to be right, but *not* with regard to the identity of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib', but rather with

³⁸ Durkee, 'A. N. (2000). *The Tajwīdī Qur'ān*. Charlottesville, Virginia: An-Noor Educational Foundation.

³⁹ Nasr, S. H. (2015). *The study Quran, a new translation and commentary*. San Francisco: HarperOne.

regard to where the 'gushing water', which is the raw material for semen/sperm, comes from.

I, of course, agree with the Qur'ānic verse that the 'gushing water' emanates from 'between the 'aṣ-ṣulb and the 'at-tarā'ib'. As I argue in section 5, 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib are very likely to refer to body parts that are not among those mentioned in the traditional interpretations and modern translations. Nonetheless, the many body parts mentioned in those exegesis books and translations provide insight as to where in the body the 'gushing water', not semen/sperm, comes from. Therefore, the scholars' understanding of the terms 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib seems to have been confused with their previous (or general) knowledge of the body parts involved in producing semen/sperm.

This section shows that the raw material from which semen/sperm is made, which is water, is combined with hormones that come from three locations along the center/spine, though this water is likely to come from all parts of the human body (which might explain hereditary diseases). Specifically, I will show that the hormones added to the raw material for semen/sperm come from "between the breasts, legs and eyes", but that manufacturing this material into semen/sperm takes place in the testicles, since their temperature affects its making and maybe quality.

The higher of these three locations, i.e. between the eyes, is the pituitary gland, which is deep inside the brain, in the part that is between the eyes. The involvement of the brain in the procreation process is evidenced by the hormones released by the pituitary gland in the brainstem (top of the backbone); this gland is in the center 'behind the two eyes', halfway between them. Some of the relevant hormones released from the pituitary gland in the brain are in (34-35):⁴⁰

34. The Luteinizing Hormone, which stimulates male and female gonads to release testosterone in the testicle (male) and estrogens & progesterone in the ovary (female).

⁴⁰ Veldhuis, J. D., Carlson, M. L., & Johnson, M. L. (1987). The pituitary gland secretes in bursts: appraising the nature of glandular secretory impulses by simultaneous multiple-parameter deconvolution of plasma hormone concentrations. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 84(21), 7686–7690.

35. The Follicle-Stimulating Hormone, which promotes the production of male gametes (sperm) and female gametes (ova).⁴¹

The lower of these three locations is the pelvic arch, which is 'between the legs'. The involvement of the pelvic arch is manifested in the production of the hormones in (36-38):⁴²

36. The Testosterone Hormone, which is produced in the testicles and is a key factor in the development of male sex organs and the production of sperm.

37. The Estrogens Hormone, which is responsible for female sex organs and characteristics development.

38. The Progesterone Hormone, which prepares the uterus for conception.⁴³

The middle of these three locations is the spinal cord, which is 'between the hands'. The involvement of the spinal cord is manifested in the connection that it establishes between the relevant brain and pelvic area parts, whereby the nervous tissue of the cord transmits the hormones coming from the brain to the pelvic area. This allows semen/sperm to be manufactured in the testicles, and the ova to be developed in the ovary. The close relationship between spinal health and reproduction is confirmed by the finding that "sexual and reproductive dysfunction can occur due to numerous etiological factors associated with spinal pathology".⁴⁴ The various locations mentioned in the traditional exegesis books indicate that the interpreters are talking about where the raw material for semen/sperm, which is the 'gushing water', comes from, not about what the 'aṣ-ṣulb and the 'at-tarā'ib' are.

⁴¹ The definitions of these two hormones are taken from this website. <https://www.thoughtco.com/pituitary-gland-anatomy-373226>

⁴² Srinivasan, G., Campbell, E., & Bashirelahi, N. (1995). Androgen, estrogen, and progesterone receptors in normal and aging prostates. *Microscopy research and technique*, 30(4), 293–304.

⁴³ The definitions of these three hormones are taken from this website. <https://www.thoughtco.com/gonads-373484>

⁴⁴ Albright, T. H., Grabel, Z., DePasse, J. M., Palumbo, M. A., & Daniels, A. H. (2015). Sexual and reproductive function in spinal cord injury and spinal surgery patients. *Orthopedic reviews*, 7(3), p. 74.

The involvement of these three points along the center of the trunk was claimed in some of the traditional interpretations. Al-Rāzī states that “most of the parts of semen are grown (i.e. formed) in the brain, and the evidence for this is that it [semen] looks like the brain, and which is why those who have sex a lot first experience weakness in their eyesight”.⁴⁵ Al-Nīsābūrī states that “the man’s water is formed from marrow and comes from the brain”.⁴⁶ Al-Khāzin states that “semen comes from all the body parts, especially/mostly from the brain, then goes to a vessel in the man’s back”.⁴⁷ Al-Qurṭubī cites an anonymous source that says that “the man’s water comes from the brain and goes to the testicles”.⁴⁸ The connection of the legs and eyes to semen/sperm production is asserted in the following statement by Anas bin Mālik, a companion of prophet Muḥammad (pbuh). He was asked about sexual intercourse, and recommended being economical by saying: “It is the light of your eyes and the marrow of your legs, so decide how much of it you want”.⁴⁹

3.2. Cosmological understanding

Despite these traditional and anatomical interpretations, further exploration of the meanings of Qur’ānic words and their possible intended connections with modern scientific investigation suggest another plausible interpretation. According to one presentation, *'aṣ-ṣulb*, in its basic (i.e. literal) meaning of ‘solid’, is interpreted to mean the “iron center of stars”, and *'at-tarā'ib* is interpreted to mean “the soils/dust discharged from the explosion of stars”.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Al-Rāzī, M. (1981). *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr for Printing, Publication, and Distribution, p. 130.

⁴⁶ Al-Nīsābūrī, N. (1996). *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 480.

⁴⁷ Al-Khāzin, 'A. (2004). *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 415-416.

⁴⁸ Al-Qurṭubī, M. (2006). *al-Jāmi' li-'Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 209.

⁴⁹ Ibn Al-Jawzī, 'A. (12th century). *Luqāṭu al-Manāfi'*. Damascus: al-Zāhiriyyah Library.

⁵⁰ <https://csmarket.info/bil/dm-lm/rpKSbHrbcSRRnYw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ13BxAa7iY>

This presentation discusses several relevant issues; I thought it would be redundant to summarize the content of the video. I, however, need to clarify that the citation of this source and its insights is not to advocate any specific philosophy of life or view of creation or religion or to promote its agenda, if any. It is purely for the possibility that the word ‘mā’ in (Q. 86:5-7) could in principle be interpreted to refer to ‘water/H₂O’, rather than

According to this new cosmological understanding of this Qur'ānic passage, the 'gushing water' (that we are created from) is not semen/sperm, but rather H₂O, which is composed of Hydrogen and Oxygen combined in outer space (as a result of chemical transformations in high-temperature star explosions). That water is the substance from which all living things are created is confirmed by verse 30 of sūrat Al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets, 21:30) in (39), translated in (40).

39. “وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ (30)”

40. “And We made from water every living thing.”⁵¹

This approach is supported by the fact that the earlier clause in the same verse discusses the process of separating planet earth from the heavens, a process that is very likely to have the same effect of generating Hydrogen and Oxygen (as that of star explosions). This clause of the verse is in (41), translated in (42).

41. “أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا”

42. “Do the disbelievers not see that the heavens and the earth were one mass, and We tore them apart?”⁵²

The concept that 'water' (*mā'*) came to our planet from 'above', which could mean from outer space, is shown by verse 18 of sūrat Al-Mu'minūn (The Believers, 23:18) in (43), translated in (44).

to 'semen/sperm', and also because of the scientific fact that 'water' is a result of combining Oxygen and Hydrogen, which is very likely to have occurred in the outer space. Also, if Allah Almighty wanted to restrict the understanding of this verse to sperm/semen, He would have mentioned the Arabic word *sā'il*, the English equivalent of which, which is 'liquid' or 'fluid', appears in some translations, since 'semen/sperm' does not look like water, except in being a liquid. I also believe the presentation makes a mistake about the creation of Adam. For one thing, the presentation contradicts itself, since it says human beings are created from dust (and water) but denies that Adam was created from clay. Also, it contradicts the following Qur'ānic verse, (Q. 3:59) “Indeed the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was”. Basically, any account involving the Qur'ān cannot both advocate and contradict it!

⁵¹ <https://www.clearquran.com/021.html>

⁵² <https://www.clearquran.com/021.html>

43. “ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَّاهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَفَادُونَ ”
(18)”

44. “We sent down water from the sky in a measured manner, and We lodged it within the ground, and We are indeed able to take it away.”⁵³

Though the word 'as-samā' is translated here as 'the sky', it actually means 'the ceiling of everything', basically 'what is above us'.⁵⁴ The new interpretation is not unreasonable from a linguistic perspective, since 'aṣ-ṣulb in Arabic also means 'iron+carbon' (carbon combined with iron as a result of star explosions), and because 'at-tarā'ib is a possible plural alternative of *turāb*, which means 'soil/dust'.

The difference between the 'traditional' and 'modern' interpretations of these verses, (Q. 86:5-7), is reflected in the different translations (or rather understandings) of the name of the surah, Al-Ṭāriq. While the traditional interpretation leads to a literal meaning (The Nightly Visitor, including stars that appear at night and disappear during the day), the modern one prompts a scientific one (The Pulsar), as revealed by the referenced video; *ṭaraqa* means 'to knock on some surface or to hammer or to visit at night'.⁵⁵ This understanding accounts for why the Pulsar, defined by the sūrah as the "piercing star", and the heavens are mentioned right before the discussion of how the human being is created, that is, in verses (1-3) of sūrat Al-Ṭāriq (Q. 86:1-3), in (45), translated in (46); *al-thāqib* (الثَّاقِبُ) also means 'shining'.⁵⁶

45. “ وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ (1) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ (2) النَّجْمِ الثَّاقِبِ (3) ”

46. “By the sky and at-Tariq (1) But what will let you know what at-Tariq is (2) The Piercing Star (3).”⁵⁷

4. WHAT THE 'GUSHING WATER' IS

⁵³ <https://al-quran.info/#23>

⁵⁴ Al-Fayrūzabādī, M. (2005). *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 8th ed., p. 1296.

⁵⁵ Al-Fayrūzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, p. 903.

⁵⁶ Al-Fayrūzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, p. 63.

⁵⁷ <https://www.clearquran.com/086.html>

Assuming a euphemistic approach to this description of the procreation/reproduction process, I think that the 'gushing water', mentioned in verse (Q. 86:6), is not semen/sperm, but rather the raw material for it. After the 'gushing water', which comes from almost everywhere in the human body (hence the various locations in the interpretations), reaches the testicles, it is combined with the relevant hormones (from the brain, ribcage, spine, pelvis, etc...) and further manufactured into semen/sperm.

For one thing, semen/sperm is not "mā", since it does not resemble water in any way, except in being in the fluid state. The word mā' is used in the Holy Qur'an to refer to water or rain, as well as to the procreation liquid. This latter denotation is present in verse 20 of sūrat Al-Mursalāt (The Unleashed, 77:20) in (47), translated in (48), and in verse 8 of sūrat Al-Sajda (The Prostration, 32:8) in (49), translated in (50).

47. "أَمْ خُلِقْتُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ (20)"

48. "Did We not create you from a liquid disdained?"⁵⁸

49. "ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ (8)"

50. "Then He made his posterity out of the extract of a liquid disdained."⁵⁹

Nonetheless, I believe that the word mā' in these two verses is used to refer to the raw material for semen/sperm, which is water, not to semen/sperm itself. This mā' in *dāfiq* is a weaker variety of water, hence the word *mahīn*, which means 'weak', in its resemblance to water, or in its being a 'very small amount'. Al-Ṭabarī states that *mahīn* means *da'if* 'weak' in these two verses.⁶⁰

This is because reference to semen in the Holy Qur'an is made using the word *maniyy*, as revealed by verse 37 of sūrat Al-Qiyāmah (Resurrection, 75:37) in (51), translated in (52). The same verse also shows that reference to sperm is

⁵⁸ <https://quran.com/77/20>

⁵⁹ <https://quran.com/32/8>

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, M. (1994). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 432 and p. 143.

made using the word *nutfah*. Thus, 'water' in 'gushing water' should refer to somethings else.

51. “أَلَمْ يَكُ نُطْفَةً مِّن مَّيِّ مُعْتَىٰ (37)”

52. “Had he [human being] not been a sperm from semen emitted?”⁶¹

Also, reference to the 'ejaculation of semen/sperm' is made using the passive verb *yumnā*, as revealed by the same verse, (Q. 75:37). The same passive verb is also used in verse 46 of sūrat Al-Najm (The Star, 53:45-46), in (53), translated in (54), but in its feminine form, *tumnā*, referring to the feminine noun *nutfah*.

53. “وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ (45) مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ إِذَا تُمْتَىٰ (46)”

54. “And that He creates the two mates - the male and female. From a sperm-drop when it is emitted.”⁶²

The same verb appears in verse 58 of sūrat Al-Wāqī'a (The Inevitable, 56:58) in (55), translated in (56), but in its second person plural form, *tumnūn*, making reference to the subject, which is people. The relevant verb here, *yumnā/tumnā/tumnūn*, is derived from the same root, m-n-y, as does the word for semen, *maniyy*.⁶³

55. “أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تُمْنُونَ (58)”

56. “Have you seen what you ejaculate?”⁶⁴

Another reason to think that the 'gushing water' is the raw material for semen/sperm is that it 'gushes' to the testicles (or pelvic area) all the time, not just during intercourse, which is why people feel the need/desire for the intimacy even before the actual intercourse. That this 'gushing' happens continuously or regularly is indicated by the choice of an active participle, *dāfiq*; that is, had Allah

⁶¹ <https://quran.com/75/37>

⁶² <https://quran.com/53/45>

<https://quran.com/53/46>

⁶³ Al-Fayrūzabādī, M. (2005). *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 8th ed., p. 1336.

⁶⁴ <https://www.clearquran.com/056.html>

Almighty wanted to describe a process that occurs at certain/specific times, He would have chosen a regular present tense verb, *yadfiq* 'يدفق'. Unlike verbs, whose temporal denotation is restricted to a specific time (since they have the category 'tense' in their inflection), participles are not temporally restricted, which allows for the description of a process that happens all the time, i.e. whenever there is raw material (weaker/little amount of water), it just gushes to the testicles. Holes states that "[Standard Arabic] participles have no fixed time reference – this has to be interpreted from the context".⁶⁵ Several authors have argued that Arabic active participles are not verbs, but rather adjectives, hence lack the category 'tense'.⁶⁶ This continuously 'gushing water', is likely to be water atoms/particles from the food (which is also created from water) that human beings eat; this could support the view that the kind of food does not affect the gender of the baby. This water gushes from the whole body to a point 'between 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib', i.e. between the tailbone and the fleshes around it, where it 'emanates' heading to the testicles, where it is further manufactured into semen/sperm.

Finally, as verse 30 of sūrat Al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets, 21:30) repeated in (57) states, 'all living creatures were created from water'. The word 'water' in this verse cannot be construed to mean semen/sperm, since Adam and Eve, peace be upon them, were not created from semen/sperm, but rather from 'water'. Also, for this verse to remain true of all living creatures, including human beings, 'water' must be the raw material for their reproduction.

57. “وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ (30)“

Thus, if the 'gushing water' is not semen/sperm, then 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib are not the 'backbone' and 'breastbones' either, hence the view presented in the next section.

5. A LANGUAGE-BASED VIEW

⁶⁵ Holes, C. (1995). *Modern Arabic: Structures, functions and varieties*. London: Longman, p. 122.

⁶⁶ Fassi Fehri, A. (1993). *Issues in the structure of Arabic clauses and words*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, p. 182; Hallman, P. (2017). Participles in Syrian Arabic. In H. Ouali (Ed.), *Perspectives on Arabic linguistics XXIX* (153–180). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company; Al-Balushi, R. (2019). Subject licensing in non-verbal clauses in Arabic. *Brill's Journal of Afroasiatic Languages and Linguistics* 11(2), 249–282.

The discussion in the previous sections shows that *'aṣ-ṣulb* may be interpreted as 'the man's backbone', 'the loins [of a man]', 'the man's back', 'the (lumbar zone in the) vertebra', and 'the spine'. The surveyed exegesis books also say that *'at-tarā'ib* refers to a variety of upper trunk bones and flesh pieces, starting from the neck bones to the chest to the lower ribs of a woman. Besides the upper trunk, Ibn 'Abbās and Al-Ḍaḥḥāk say that it refers to 'the hands (or 'between the breasts'), legs and eyes', and Mu'ammār bin Abī Ḥabībah Al-Madanī says that it is 'the juicy discharge of the heart'. The surveyed translations say that *'at-tarā'ib* may be understood to mean 'the breastbones', 'the ribs', and 'the woman's pelvis'.

One reason for this lack of consensus on the identity of these body parts is the lack of consensus on the meanings of the relevant terminology. Given the fact that most dictionaries were written after the Qur'ān interpretations were produced, I believe more insight into the denotation of these two words might be gained if we consulted their literal meanings (rather than the Qur'ān interpretation-triggered ones).⁶⁷ The following two subsections address the two words.

5.1. 'Aṣ-ṣulb

⁶⁷ For example, *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* was completed around 813 Hijri, whereas the consulted interpretations were completed as follows:

Al-Ṭabarī: 270 Hijri

Ibn Kathīr: 759

Al-Qurṭubī: before 671 Hijri

Al-Baghawī: before 510 Hijri

Al-Khāzin: before 725 Hijri

Al-Andalusī: before 541 Hijri

Al-Samarqandī: before 373 Hijri

Al-Rāzī: before 606 Hijri

The following 4 interpretations were written after *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ*, and so they are likely to have incorporated some of the meanings of *'aṣ-ṣulb* and *'at-tarā'ib* which *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* had taken from the earlier interpretations.

Al-Nisābūrī: 828 Hijri

Ibn 'Adil: before 880 Hijri

Al-Sa'dī: 1344 Hijri

Quṭb: before 1966 A.D.

According to *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ*, 'aṣ-ṣulb literally means 'solid', or 'hard', or 'strong'.⁶⁸ Appealing to the literal meaning of 'aṣ-ṣulb, it becomes clear that 'aṣ-ṣulb may *not* refer to what is properly called the 'backbone'. This is because the 'backbone' (i.e. spine) is not a single solid unit. Rather, it is composed of a string of solid interlocking bones, but flexible in its totality. Thus, 'aṣ-ṣulb should refer to a 'solid' piece. Therefore, I believe that 'aṣ-ṣulb refers to another bone which is located in the back region of the human body, namely, the sacrum and coccyx (i.e. the tailbone), at the lowest end of the spine (where it is surrounded in, and protected by, the pelvis). Unlike the rest of the backbone, the tailbone does not decay after death, hence is 'solid' (forever). In confirmation of this modern discovery, prophet Muḥammad (p̄buh) spoke the Ḥadīth in (58), translated in (59).

58. “كُلُّ ابْنِ آدَمَ يَأْكُلُهُ التُّرَابُ إِلَّا عَجَبَ الذَّنْبِ مِنْهُ خُلِقَ وَفِيهِ يُرَكَّبُ.”⁶⁹

59. “The earth ('at-turāb) would consume all of the son of Adam except his tailbone ('ajb). From it he was created, and from it he will be recreated (on the Day of Resurrection).”⁷⁰

Also, the Ḥadīth in (60), translated in (61), confirms that the offspring come from the tailbones, referred to here as 'aṣlābi-him (plural of ṣulb). The allusion in the translation to the 'loins' area reflects knowledge about the hormones secreted there.

60. “بَلْ أَرْجُو أَنْ يُخْرِجَ اللَّهُ مِنْ أَصْلَابِهِمْ مَنْ يَعْْبُدُ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ، لَا يُشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئًا.”⁷¹

61. “No, but I hope that Allah will let them bring forth from *the loins of their backs* ('aṣlābi-him) children who will worship Allah Alone, and will worship none besides Him.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Al-Fayrūzabādī, M. (2005). *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 8th ed., p. 105.

⁶⁹ Muslim, A. (1991). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, p. 2271.

⁷⁰ <https://sunnah.com/muslim/54/178>

⁷¹ Al-Bukhārī, M. (1980). *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ lil-Bukhārī*. Cairo: al-Maṭb'ah al-Salafiya, p. 428–429.

⁷² <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/59/42>

This is supported by verse 172 of sūrat Al-A'raf (The Elevations, 7:172) in (62), translated in (63), where Allah states that the descendants of the children of Adam are in (or come from) their *zuhūr*, which is the plural of *zahr*, which means the 'back' area. I think that mentioning the 'back' here makes reference to the loins area, the part of the back surrounding the 'aṣ-ṣulb; *zahr* may not refer to the backbone since this would contradict the Ḥadīths cited in (58) and (60). Accordingly, 'aṣ-ṣulb is the 'tailbone', the lowest end of the spine.

62. “وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۗ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۗ شَهِدْنَا

63. “When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins (*zuhūr*), their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [He said to them,] ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes indeed [you are]! We bear witness.”⁷³

5.2. 'At-Tarā'ib

Although the pelvis, as a possible meaning for 'at-tarā'ib, is only mentioned in the translations, verse 223 of sūrat Al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:223) in (64), translated in (65-66), points out that the pelvic area is involved in the reproduction process. Allah Almighty uses the word *ḥarth*, which means 'cultivation' or 'tillage', to refer to the process of begetting children (like cultivating land, which produces crops). This human begetting process requires the analogue of 'soil', which indicates that 'at-tarā'ib might refer to the female reproductive function. Commenting on the term *ḥarth* in this verse, Ibn 'Abbās says “al-ḥarth-u mawḍi'u l-walad”, that is, 'tillage is the child's place', making reference to the 'womb', which is very close to the tailbone.⁷⁴ This leads to an understanding of 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib as referring to the 'tailbone' and the 'pelvis', respectively.

64. “نِسَاؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَّكُمْ فَأَتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنَّىٰ شِئْتُمْ (223)”

⁷³ <https://al-quran.info/#7>

⁷⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 'I. (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah for Publication and Distribution, p. 588.

65. (Translation no. 1): “Your women are cultivation (ḥarth) for you; so approach your cultivation whenever you like.”⁷⁵

66. (Translation no. 2): “Your women are a tillage (ḥarth) for you, so come to your tillage whenever you like.”⁷⁶

Nonetheless, as *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* and the traditional exegesis books state, the term 'at-tarā'ib also refers to “the hands, legs, and eyes” as well as various upper trunk bones and fleshes.⁷⁷ This means that 'at-tarā'ib could refer to a variety of body parts, not just the pelvis, despite the direct involvement of the pelvis in the reproduction process. This leads to an interpretation that is inspired by the literal meaning of 'at-tarā'ib.

Basically, the ‘gushing water’, which is the raw material for semen/sperm, issues from between 'aṣ-ṣulb, which is the ‘tailbone’, or the ‘solid piece’, which does not decay (i.e. does not turn into turāb ‘soil/dust’), and 'at-tarā'ib, which could refer to all the other mentioned body parts and more. This is because, unlike the tailbone, all the parts of the human body decay, that is, turn into “turāb” or ‘soil/dust’, hence called “'at-tarā'ib”. Then, this “liquid” goes to the testicles where it is manufactured into semen/sperm. This is because a possible literal meaning of 'at-tarā'ib is ‘soils’, being a possible plural form of 'at-turāb, which means ‘soil/dust’.

The singular form of 'at-tarā'ib in most traditional dictionaries is 'at-tarībah, when interpreted to refer to a body part, like upper trunk bones and flesh. Another possible singular form of 'at-tarā'ib is 'at-turābah, as stated in other dictionaries. Wright states that the broken plural template fa'ā'il is the plural template of singular forms like ṣaḥīfah ‘newspaper’ (pl. ṣaḥā'if), saḥābah ‘cloud’ (pl. saḥā'ib), risālah ‘letter’ (pl. rasā'il) and 'ajūz ‘old woman’ (pl. 'ajā'iz), as well as dhu'ābah ‘lock of hair’ (pl. dhawā'ib).⁷⁸ These data show that the fa'ā'il template may be the plural form of many singular forms, not just that of fa'īlah,

⁷⁵ <https://www.quranwow.com/#/ch/2/t1/ar-allah/t2/en-italia/a1/alafasy-64/a2/italia-64/v/223>

⁷⁶ <https://al-quran.info/#2>

⁷⁷ Al-Fayrūzabādī, M. (2005). *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 8th ed., p. 61.

⁷⁸ Wright, W. 1896. *A grammar of the Arabic language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 215.

which is the template for *tarābah*. Also, the template of the last singular form, *dhu'ābah*, is that of *turābah*, which is assumed here to be pluralized as *tarā'ib*.

Also, according to *lisānu l-'Arab*, 'at-turābah is 'any kind of soil' and 'a grain of soil'.⁷⁹ Besides, *Mu'jam Al-Rā'id* states that 'at-turābah is "a kind of soil that is chemically cooked, mixed with water, lime, sand, and stones/gravel, and which becomes stone-solid when dries".⁸⁰ This thus shows that the word 'at-tarā'ib is closely related to soil or clay, the substance from which we are created and into which we are going to transform after death, except for 'aṣ-ṣulb.

Another derivative of the root 't-r-b' is 'atrāb, and it means 'people of the same age', that is 'people at the same distance from the clay/soil (or creation) stage'.⁸¹ Also, the Zofārī dialect of Arabic, spoken in southern Oman, features the word *trābah*, which means 'young/little children', that is, 'people very close to the clay/soil stage'. Standard Arabic also features the word *tarbiyah*, which is conventionally used to mean 'upbringing' as well as 'education', both referring to the process of 'transforming the clay/soil into a social, learning creature'.

This understanding of the word 'at-tarā'ib as 'the human body except the tailbone' indicates that the raw material for making semen/sperm is likely to be secreted from all the decaying parts. This understanding of the 'gushing water' as coming from the whole body led one of the interpreters to propose that it is the reason why the child looks like its parents and also why the whole body must be washed during *ghusl*.⁸² In fact, it makes sense that the whole body takes part in the production of the 'liquid of life' if a complete production (of a physically perfect child) is to take place. While some scholars say that the 'gushing water' comes out of the 'aṣ-ṣulb of the man and 'at-tarā'ib of the woman,⁸³ Al-Ḥasan says that it comes from the 'aṣ-ṣulb and 'at-tarā'ib of the man and the 'aṣ-ṣulb

⁷⁹ Ibn Manẓūr, J. (2008). *Lisānu al-'Arab*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir Publishers, p. 227.

⁸⁰ Mas'ūd, J. (1992). *Mu'jam al-Rā'id: A contemporary linguistic dictionary*. Beirut: Dār al-'ilm li-l-malāyīn Publishers, 7th ed., p. 204.

⁸¹ Al-Fayrūzabādī, M. (2005). *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 8th ed., p. 61–62.

⁸² Al-Qurṭubī, M. (2006). *al-Jāmi' li-'Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, p. 210.

⁸³ Ibn Kathīr, 'I. (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*. Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah for Publication and Distribution, p. 375.

and 'at-tarā'ib of the woman, in agreement with modern views.⁸⁴ The latter view seems more plausible since children may look like either or both parents, and also because the overall health of both parents is a determining factor in fertility and pregnancy.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding sections have argued that 'aṣ-ṣulb is the 'tailbone' and that 'at-tarā'ib are 'all the other body parts'. It has also been shown that the 'gushing water' in (Q. 86:5-7) is not semen/sperm, but rather the raw material for it, always gushing to a point close to the tailbone. The 'gushing water' seems to be contributed by the whole of the human body, and emanates from between 'aṣ-ṣulb, the piece that does not decay, and 'at-tarā'ib, the pieces that decay.

If this is the case, a question arises about why Allah Almighty made a contrast between a small piece, 'aṣ-ṣulb (tailbone), and the rest of the body, 'at-tarā'ib. I think it is because He wants to draw our attention to the special nature of the tailbone. Specifically, we should not fail to realize that we are resurrected from a small piece of bone that spent millennia in graves, which should lead us, among many other things, to realize that creating us is a very easy task for Him.

Another insight provided by the proposed meaning of 'at-tarā'ib, 'pieces that turn into soil/dust', is to link the human being's initial phase to its end state in this world. In this regard, Allah Almighty says verse 55 of sūrat Ṭā-Hā (Q. 20:55) in (67), translated in (68), making reference to the soil/dust (of the earth). And this link is actually expressed in the following verses of sūrat Al-Ṭāriq, that is (Q. 86: 8-9), in (69), translated in (70).

67. “مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَىٰ (55)”

68. “From it We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will bring you out another time (55)”.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-'Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, p. 210; Bahrami, M. (2014). Loin (Solb) and Taraeb. *Medical History Quarterly*, 5(16), p.153; Abū Zayd, 'A. A. 'A. (2008). 'Awjuh al-'I'jāz al-'Ilāhī fi 'aṭwār khalq al-'Insān fi ḍaw' al-Waḥy al-'Ilāhī wa al-'Ilm al-Ḥadīth. *Annual of the Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion and Da'wah of Menoufia*, 37(37), 1055–1130.

⁸⁵ <https://www.clearquran.com/020.html>

69. “إِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ (8) يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ (9)”

70. “He is certainly able to return him (8) On the Day when the secrets are disclosed (9)”.⁸⁶

One more insight related to the fact that a tiny part of the human being's body remains while most of it decays is that the human being himself/herself is going to stay in this life for a very short period. In other words, the human being's life compared to the length of life in this world is similar to the size of the tailbone compared to the rest of the body.

The different understandings of these terms in these two Qur'ānic verses, (Q. 86:6-7), based on one's background knowledge (or scholarly expertise), reflect the power of the Holy Qur'ān. This is because it shows that Qur'ānic verses can always have truthfulness for whoever puts enough thinking and contemplation of their possible meanings. This, of course, should not include erroneous or misleading interpretations of the Qur'ān, that is, ones which contradict other Qur'ānic verses or Authentic Sunnah.

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⁸⁶ <https://www.clearquran.com/086.html>

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