

Our Lady of Fatima and the Muslims

“Thou shalt be the most blessed of all women in Paradise, after Mary.”
--Mohammed, on the death of his daughter, Fatima

IT IS A MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE that that Koran, with its alternating tones of condescension and hostility towards Jews and Christians, seeing them sometimes as “People of the Book” and at other times as infidels, nevertheless evidence a simple, unambiguous veneration for a Jewish virgin, Mary, the Mother of Jesus. There are more references to her in the Koran than to any other woman. And it is also a fact that it is not uncommon for Muslims to visit Marian shrines, in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, but most especially in Fatima, Portugal. Why this is so is hidden in the mystery of Divine Providence, but it is a fact that in the Koran, and to many Muslims, Mary occupies a very special place as “the noblest of women.”

Equally mysterious is the fact that Mary appeared to three Portuguese children in a little Portuguese village bearing the name Fatima, the beloved daughter of Mohammed.

The following poem about Our Lady touches on the mystery, as it begins to unfurl in the *Genesis* story of Abraham and his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac (*Gen. 16, 21, 25:7-11*).

Lady of Fatima

B. E. Scott

My father called me Ismail
(Ishmael to you),
a wild ass of a man it was said of me
by the Lord High God Himself.
But my father loved the gift
that brightened his old age
and I would laugh to see him skip stones
into the wadi
like any father with his son.

My mother was a servant girl
privileged for a time
but never meant to last
beyond the joy
she gave her master
for a son.

Her son, too,
with memories of the Nile
awash in Hebrew veins,
unworthy of the true wife,
the one who could be first
in all things save sons.

And how these women fought!
The taunt of one, the other's barb,
the peace these took from father's house
to ever haunt the land.
For this, and rightly so it seems to us,
we keep our women under wrap.

Then little brother came along,
young Ishaq,
promise of angels his kinsmen say.
I wouldn't know,
we romped together as boys
chasing goats for our father
mine and his.

It was the calculation of that woman
not the Most High God
that split two brothers up
and drove the servant with her son
to roam the hills
to watch from afar
the fattening of the flocks.

Still, you see,
when my father Ibrahim went to Paradise
(Abraham, as you are wont to say)
I was there with Ishaq to bury him
in the cave east of Mamre
as was my right
when for one last time
we stood brother to brother in our grief.

Our paths since have traced
two different promises,
mine
a mighty nation
and Ishaq's, well,
a nation in which
all nations will be blessed
the Most High said.
But, if you will hear a plain remark,
we have not found it so.

We have our Prophet too.
He remembers me as first born,
I, proud father of my many sons,
begotten and begetting
father to son
as it was from the very beginning.
All Ibrahim's lineage too.
And don't you think it strange
since Sarai
the Hebrews say the mother is the key
to being one of them?

Oh ancient slight!
Great waters of the Nile, the Euphrates,
the sleepy Jordan,
the wadi of our youth have less delight
because of you.

It is said ours is an unruly world,
a man's world
proud of bow
(yet truth be known,
we are naught without our women:
The mother, Hagar, who bore me
and slaked my thirst by
the holy well of ZamZam,
The daughter, Fatima, who
gladdened a Prophet's heart)
And yes, for all that, a still sundered world
ever more entangled with death.

Nay! The world belongs to God Most High
The Beneficent, The Merciful,
The Lord and Giver of Life.
And I have even heard it said
(if only it be so)
a Lady in Andalusia,
truest mother, dearest daughter, blessed spouse,
kinswoman to us both
awaits her time
to make us think like brothers once again.

(NOTE: (1) This poem first appeared on May 19th, 2005 in the *Wanderer*. It is reproduced here with permission.

(2) For further discussion regarding Mary in relation to the Muslim see Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's fascinating account in his 1952 book, *The World's First Love* (Garden City Books, Garden City, N.Y.)