AFTER THE PROPHET’S DEATH: CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM POLEMIC AND THE
LITERARY IMAGES OF MUHAMMAD

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Abstract

The central thesis of this dissertation is that the anti-Islamic literature of Christians living under Muslim rule generally drew on the contemporaneous Muslim Tradition and seldom stemmed, contrary to what has often been claimed, from their ignorance or misunderstanding of Islam. The first chapter demonstrates the validity of this thesis when applied to Christian narratives of Muhammad’s death recorded in the ninth century—narratives that scholars have for centuries regarded as examples of the malicious inventiveness of Christian polemicists.

The next two chapters discuss questions arising from the thesis: If Christian authors merely retold Muslim material, how did it function as polemic? And why do we find only faint traces of it in the Muslim Tradition today? In answer to the first question, the second chapter scrutinizes how the narratives were likely to have been understood by their medieval Christian readers and argues that for Christians they amounted not only to an unfavorable comparison of Muhammad with Christ and late antique holy men, but also to an implicit denial of his future bodily resurrection. The answer to the second question lies in the formative influence of Christian critique on the Muslim Tradition. The relentless Christian polemic in the first two centuries of Islam made Muslims adapt, among other things, their narratives of Muhammad’s death to the religious world of Christianity. The third chapter examines the vestiges that the conflicts surrounding this makeover left in Muslim literature.

The last chapter takes a birds’ eye view of the reception of the Christian narratives of Muhammad’s death. It explains their disappearance from medieval eastern Christian writings after the ninth century, tracks the new lease of life they received in western Christendom in the twelfth century, and clarifies the circumstances of their eventual rejection by early modern Orientalists in favor of the classical Muslim hagiography of Muhammad. The dissertation concludes with the outline of a new paradigm for the interpretation of medieval non-Muslim literary images of Islam that reflects their roots in the Christianity of the Islamic world.
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Three other people read my dissertation from beginning to end: Professor John Tolan, Professor Bernard Haykel, and Professor Emmanuel Papoutsakis. I am truly grateful to them for agreeing to serve on the dissertation committee and providing generous and insightful feedback.

Many others read or heard parts of this dissertation. I am indebted for a detailed set of comments on the first chapter to Professor Patricia Crone—these will keep me busy thinking even as I revise it for publication. Gregor Schwarb and Eduard Iricinschi also read and critiqued the first chapter. Emmanuel Papoutsakis, Joseph Witztum, and Eduard Iricinschi did the same with the third chapter. I presented these two chapters in the dissertation reading seminar of Michael Cook where other Ph.D. students commented on them. The participants in the Religion and Culture seminar of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University read and critiqued the same two chapters. I am grateful to them all for their judicious comments.

I presented parts of my dissertation at several scholarly gatherings. I spoke about the findings of the first chapter at the 219th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, held in Albuquerque, N.M., March 13-16, 2009. I presented the third chapter at two conferences, the Dorushe Annual Graduate Student Conference on Syriac Studies, held at Yale University, New Haven, Conn., March 29, 2009, and the Eleventh International Conference “From Jahiliyya to Islam,” held at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, July 5-10, 2009. Three additional presentations were based on material from more than one chapter: the first at the workshop entitled “Immortal Bodies,” held at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, Germany, January 13-15, 2011; the second at the seminar programme of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Nottingham, U.K., June 6, 2012; and the third at the International Medieval Congress, held at the University of Leeds, U.K., July 9-12, 2012. I am grateful to the organizers for inviting me to speak at these events and the participants for their valuable insights.
An earlier version of the first chapter has appeared as “A Prophet like Jesus? The First Christian Polemical Narratives of Muhammad’s Death and Their Muslim Sources” in the Moshe Perlmann memorial volume of the Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 36 (2009), pp. 131-171. One bonus of the publication was to receive two sets of comments from the journal’s anonymous reviewers.

I published the first chapter of my dissertation in 2009, but finished the last one only by the end of 2013. I am grateful to the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University for accepting the dissertation to be submitted despite the long break I have taken from writing it. I would also like to thank Trinity College of the University of Cambridge for providing me the space and means to complete it.

Before writing the dissertation I had to acquire the skills that enabled me to do it at all and I would like to mention the people and the institutions instrumental on this journey. If this dissertation has value, it is also thanks to them.

I began my undergraduate education at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest as a student of mathematics, but was soon seduced by the Department of Assyriology and Hebrew. With excellent and devoted teachers and genuinely interested students, the Department had a unique atmosphere which made studying pure joy. Professor Géza Komoróczy, its long-term chair, held that students should gain familiarity with every language with bearing on premodern Jewish history, from Akkadian and Aramaic to Greek and Latin. At the time I took the seemingly irrelevant Latin course with reluctance, but it was these classes that later furnished the linguistic foundation necessary to write the last chapter of my dissertation.

I decided to drop mathematics and pair Hebraistics with a matching specialization—I chose Arabic Studies because I thought that, as a language related to Hebrew, Arabic should be easy to learn. I was wrong, but the courses at the Department of Semitic Philology and Arabic proved rewarding enough to persevere. If my translations of the Arabic passages are mostly correct, it is due in great part to the uncompromising teaching of Arabic there.

The requirement of an exam in Modern Hebrew for a degree in Hebraistics brought me to Jerusalem for a six-week summer language course which eventually stretched to a four-year stay. During these years, as an M.A. student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I was fortunate to have Professor Sarah Stroumsa as my adviser. Naturally, I very much benefited from her scholarship, and the lessons she gave me through her patient guidance and generous support were just as important.
Jerusalem was a magnificent place to study the medieval Islamic world. I remember with gratitude the wonderful classes with, among others, Professor Yohanan Friedmann, Professor Menahem Ben-Sasson, and Dr Miriam Frenkel, as well as the exhilarating adventure of deciphering half-legible genizah fragments at the Centre for the Research of Judaeo-Arabic Culture and Literature of the Ben-Zvi Institute and discussing them with Dr David Sklare, Professor Sarah Stroumsa, Professor Haggai Ben-Shammai, and my co-workers.

I owe the idea of applying to study at the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University to Sarah Stroumsa—and what a wonderful idea it proved to be! It was a truly great privilege to study there. Many classes are unforgettable: those with Professors Michael Cook, Patricia Crone, András Hámori, Mark Cohen, Emmanuel Papoutsakis, and John Haldon were all immensely helpful. At the time many students at Princeton wrote their dissertation about the late antique or medieval Middle East; their presence made the years there yet more stimulating.

Of those closest to me outside academia, I would first of all like to thank my parents. They have always supported me in my academic endeavors, yet in return had to endure my long stay in Israel at a time when others were leaving it. I hope that completing my dissertation provides some consolation for my long absences.

It was my good fortune to meet Emmanuel soon after I moved to Cambridge. He has been a source of inspiring conversations, thoughtful advice, and constant encouragement ever since. Without his support, I might still be thinking, as I have done for years, that the next month will be the ideal time to finally finish the last chapter of my dissertation.

Last but most certainly not least, I also owe completing this dissertation to Kincse, my greatest treasure, who ensures that I take regular breaks from work. Her one little smile makes every effort worthwhile.
Transcriptions and Dates

I fully transcribed many of the passages cited in the dissertation (mostly Arabic with a few in other languages) for two reasons. First, it allows access to the originals for all readers: texts central to my dissertation are often missing from even large research libraries, so without transcriptions many of those wishing to verify my understanding of them would have difficulty to do so. Second, I wanted to account for my translations as transparently as possible. Full transcription, with the *i'rab* written out everywhere except at the end of sentences, achieves this goal best. In the case of individual words and bibliographical references, I dispensed with the *i'rab*. My system follows that of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with the usual exception of using *q* and not *k* for qāf.

Dates are kept simple. When speaking about Christians and other non-Muslims or referring to centuries, not years, I use only Gregorian dates. When speaking about Muslims, I give first the *hijrī*, then the Gregorian date: e.g. Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 148/765f.). A single equivalent Gregorian year indicates that the Muslim Tradition preserves a precise enough date to know the Gregorian year on which it falls: e.g. Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778)—Sufyān al-Thawrī died in Sha‘bān 161 which falls in 778. In the bibliography, when a publisher gives both the *hijrī* and the Gregorian year of publication, I provide both of the years following the publisher (e.g. Tehran, 1417/1997). When the publisher gives only *hijrī* date only, I add its converted Gregorian equivalent which is of course often a double year (e.g. Qom, 1415/1994f.).
The Apology of al-Kindī, a Christian Arabic polemical treatise against Islam written in Iraq in the ninth century, sketches the end of Muhammad’s life as follows:¹

Furthermore, yet more monstrous than this and more repugnant is that he used to say in his life and enjoined them [that] when he died they should not bury him, because he would be raised to heaven as Christ, the Lord of the World, was raised, and that he was so precious to God that He would not leave him on the earth for more than three days. This remained firmly set in their minds, and when he died on Monday, on the twelfth of Rabī’ al-Awwal, aged sixty-three, after having been ill for fourteen days, they left him unburied believing that he would be raised to heaven according to his claim. But when three days had passed, his smell had changed, their hope in his ascension had died away, they had despaired of his vain promises and they had uncovered his lie, they interred him on Wednesday.

One of them said that he was ill for seven days with pleurisy and that he was wandering in his mind. ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib was angered by this and frowned on it. When he recovered, they informed him about what had happened and he said: “No one should stay in the house except al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.” When the seventh day of his illness arrived, he died, and his belly swelled up and his left finger—that is, the little finger—turned backwards.

After these lines the author cites two brief Muslim traditions on Muhammad’s burial clothes and remarks on the apostasy of many following his death, and with them ends his biography of Muhammad.

True to its genre, the Apology is outspokenly polemical when recounting the life of Muhammad, but up to the account of his death any reader of Muslim biographies of

¹ For the Arabic text, see Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tartar), pp. 92-93.
Muhammad readily recognizes each of the episodes. The passages on his death are the only ones in the biographical part of the *Apology* that stray from their counterparts in the classical Muslim Tradition, best known from the pen of ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833 or 213/828).²

According to the traditions recorded by Ibn Hishām, Muhammad fell fatally ill by the end of Ṣafar or the beginning of Rabī‘ al-Awwal and died in the late morning on an unspecified Monday in Rabī‘ al-Awwal in the house of his wife, ‘Ā‘isha.³ After his death, says Ibn Hishām, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb addressed the Muslims in a speech denying that the Prophet had died. He accused of hypocrisy those who believed that Muhammad was dead and raised the specter of severe punishment after his return. He compared the circumstances to the story of Moses, and asserted that Muhammad “has gone to his Lord as Mūsā b. ‘Imrān had gone and been hidden from his people for forty days, returning to them after it was said that he had died. By God, the apostle will return as Mūsā returned…” While ‘Umar was speaking, Abū Bakr arrived and immediately proceeded to the house of ‘Ā‘isha to see Muhammad with his own eyes. After ascertaining that the Prophet was dead, he tried to draw ‘Umar aside, but the latter refused to listen. Abū Bakr then addressed the Muslims himself. The Muslims, says Ibn Hishām, immediately came to listen to his speech: “People! If anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead, but if anyone worships God, God is alive—He does not die.”⁴ He then recited a verse from

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³ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra l-nabawiyya*, vol. 2, p. 539 and p. 548 (the dates are no further specified).
the Qur’ān, “Muhammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? If any man should turn about on his heels, he will not harm God in any way. God will recompense the thankful.”⁵ According to Ibn Hishām, the Muslims felt as if they had never heard this verse before.

After recounting the conflict over the succession between the muhādjirūn and the anṣār that ensued after Muhammad’s death, Ibn Hishām turns to the preparation of Muhammad’s body for the funeral. It started on Tuesday, after the election of Abū Bakr for the caliphate, he says. The body was first washed. ‘Abbās b. ‘Abbās, ‘Abd al-Muţţalib, and his two sons, al-Faḑl and Qutham, were holding the body, Usāma b. Zayd, the son of Muhammad’s adopted son, and Shuqrān, Muhammad’s freed servant, were pouring the water on it, and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was washing it. Ibn Hishām quotes ‘Alī saying, “You are dearer to me than my father and my mother! How fragrant you are alive and dead.” The episode ends with the words, “Nothing was observed on the Messenger of God of what is (usually) observed on the dead.”⁶ According to the next tradition, they were uncertain whether to strip Muhammad’s body while washing it, following the usual custom, or to leave it dressed. God sent them into a slumber, and while asleep, they heard a voice instructing them not to undress the body.

Ibn Hishām then specifies the three shrouds Muhammad was wrapped in and relates that Abū Ṭalḥa Zayd b. Sahl dug the tomb according to the custom of Medina. The

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⁵ Āl ‘Imrān 144 (Arberry’s translation).
Muslims had disagreed about its location and decided, guided by a saying of Muhammad that Abū Bakr told them, to dig it where Muhammad died, under his bed in the house of ‘Ā’isha. When the preparations were completed on Tuesday, Muhammad was laid out, and the Muslims came in small groups to pray over him. Muhammad was buried “in the middle of the night of Wednesday” (wasāṭa l-layli laylata l-arbi‘ā or djawfa l-layli min laylati l-arbi‘ā),⁷ that is, on Tuesday night, according to our definitions of the days of the week. The list of those who buried him overlaps with the list of those who washed him: ‘Alī, al-Faḍl, Qutham, and Shuqrān. With this list ends Muhammad’s biography by Ibn Hishām.

Although most of Ibn Hishām’s biography is based on the earlier one of Muḥammad Ibn Isḥaq (d. 150/767), it represents the Muslim literary image of Muhammad in the early ninth century rather than in the middle of the eighth: Ibn Hishām inserted some traditions into the text of Ibn Isḥaq and discarded others from it.⁸ As scant information is available about the traditions that Ibn Hishām judged too unseemly to include or even how many he omitted, we are left in the dark about the complete version of events according to Ibn Isḥaq. Indeed, we are left in the dark about the version of events in the eighth century altogether, since no biography of Muhammad written then has survived without the intervention of later redactors.

The Apology’s version of the events deviates from that of Ibn Hishām most conspicuously, in addition to the relative lack of detail, on two points. One concerns the

hopes of the Muslims: according to the Christian text, they had expected Muhammad’s ascension to heaven, while according to the Muslim text, they expected nothing of the sort—even ‘Umar’s expectations did not go beyond Muhammad’s return to them. The other detail concerns the state of Muhammad’s corpse by the time of the burial: the Christian author asserts that by then the body had decayed, while the Muslim text declares that it proved to be incorruptible.

Why the differences? Are the deviant details in the Apology due to the inventiveness of Christian polemicists as every scholar of Islam in the last few hundred years has thought? Or could these passages too have been borrowed from the Muslim Tradition, but, unlike the rest of the Apology’s material on Muhammad, from less obvious corners of it? Did they perhaps form part of Ibn Ishāq’s or some other eighth-century author’s version of the events and fall victim to later redactors’ pious urge to purge? I began studying the stories about Muhammad’s death in order to find answers to these questions. Locating some parallels to the account of the Apology in the Muslim Tradition, first in the Biḥār al-anwār of al-Madjisī (1037-1110/1627-1698), then in earlier works too, and reflecting on their implications eventually led to this dissertation.

Chapter by chapter

Narratives of Muhammad’s death akin to the Apology’s account are preserved in other writings too. Most of these texts are Christian polemical treatises against Islam and the

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oldest among them date to the early ninth century. By that time the stories of Muhammad’s death they present were known to Christians throughout the Muslim world: they appear in Syriac, Arabic, and Latin polemical texts from Baghdad to Córdoba. This wide distribution alone would indicate that alternative takes on Muhammad’s death date back to at least the eighth century and one recorded discussion from the eighth century indeed confirms this. Most versions claim, just like that of the Apology, that Muhammad foretold that he would be resurrected three days after his death, yet while his followers delayed the burial in anticipation of his ascension, his corpse started to exhibit signs of decay. Some versions append an ending in which dogs find and mangle the cadaver; in others wild animals exhume it.

Scholars commonly accept that most representations of Muhammad’s life in medieval Christian polemical writings stem from the authors’ ignorance, misinterpretation, even deliberate distortion of the Muslim Tradition. Since the eighteenth century scholars have regarded the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death too as a brainchild of malevolent polemicists. A careful examination of the Muslim Tradition, however, suggests otherwise. In the first chapter of my dissertation I show that, despite the fundamental divergence of the story from the classical Islamic narrative of the Prophet’s death, each of its motifs save one (the animals’ desecration of the corpse) appears in Muslim traditions ascribed to early Muslims. The motifs usually occur independently but sometimes also in combination with each other, suggesting that Christians might have borrowed most of the narrative directly from the Islamic tradition. I conclude that Christian polemicists were not ignorant of the Muslim Tradition—on the
contrary, they had a sufficiently deep knowledge of it to construct their own narratives of Muhammad based on a selection of hadiths.

The connection between death and holiness that characterized, among other belief systems, the Mediterranean religions of late antiquity turned Muhammad’s death into a significant locus of polemic between Christianity and Islam. The first retellings of this event appeared in a Near East demographically dominated by Christians who believed that bodies of holy men resisted decay, emitted sweet fragrance, performed miracles, and were occasionally transported to heaven. In the second chapter, I demonstrate how notions of this kind infused the motif of the decay of Muhammad’s corpse in the Christian story with precise meanings that created deep contrast between Muhammad and various Christian religious figures. If we reconstruct how eastern Christians in the early Islamic period were likely to read the polemical narrative, it becomes clear that the Christian polemicists, when shaping their story of Muhammad’s death, selected hadiths from the Muslim Tradition with their eyes on the Christian audience they intended to inform with their texts. The more the hadiths diverged from their religious worldview the better suited they were for polemical purposes: the polemicists’ emphasis on the divergence of Islamic ideals and morals from those of Christianity helped to discourage Christians from converting to Islam.

The other motifs of the narrative, the failed resurrection and the desecration by animals, also encapsulate a range of polemical claims. Evidently, for Christians, who regarded the New Testament story of Christ’s resurrection and ascension to heaven as central to their religion, Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead carried the message of
his inferiority to Christ. Less obvious are the meanings of the animal motif. I argue that it condensed three possible polemical messages into a few short words. It contrasted Muhammad with Christian holy men whose lives abound in stories about wild beasts never harming them. It portrayed him as akin to those on the fringes of society, such as convicted criminals whose corpses were often abandoned for feral dogs or wild animals to consume. Most importantly, based on popular medieval beliefs in the necessity of retaining the intact body for burial, I argue that the motif negated the possibility of his bodily resurrection even at the end of times.

In the early Caliphate, with Christians converting to Islam and Muslim men marrying Christian women, the attitudes of eastern Christians towards death, in particular towards Muhammad’s, did not long leave Muslim notions untouched. In the third chapter I trace how the Christian polemical story molded the classical Islamic narratives of Muhammad’s death. I argue not only that Christians were aware of Muslim narratives but also that Muslims knew of the Christian polemical story, and that this familiarity prompted Muslims to thrust aside their own old traditions about the deterioration of Muhammad’s corpse and to adapt some Christian hagiographical motifs instead. Such alterations probably occurred only in the early Islamic period, up to the ninth century, at a time when no fixed consensus had yet developed among Muslims with regard to correct doctrines, practices, and thus historical precedents, and when Christian culture was still vigorous and influential in Muslim society. In this case the transformation of Muhammad’s image can be documented: a scandal caused by a hadith transmitted in the year 800 in Mecca shows that older views about the decay of Muhammad’s corpse were
becoming controversial by then. In this process, while the contours of the Prophet’s biography were redrawn, its core never changed. His corpse came to be described, Christian-style, as fragrant and incorruptible, yet he was never portrayed leading the life of a solitary ascetic.

By the tenth century, times were slowly changing. As the Christians’ numbers and influence dwindled in the Islamic world, their elite continued to write profusely in defense of Christian doctrines, but penned fewer and fewer treatises openly critiquing Islam. Due to the Crusades, however, anti-Islamic polemic was soon to receive a new lease of life in Europe. In the fourth and last chapter of the dissertation, I track the reception history of the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death from the tenth century against this shifting backdrop. East and West stand in sharp contrast in this regard. The story rarely crops up in the writings of eastern Christians produced after the ninth century, but some indications, such as variant readings in manuscripts and testimonies of European travelers, betray its uninterrupted oral transmission among them. By contrast, texts written in Latin Christendom contain countless and often elaborate and lurid versions of the story, from the writings of the first Crusaders returning home to early modern works. In this chapter I argue that the loss of polemical utility was the primary reason for the disappearance of the narrative from eastern Christian writings. As Muhammad’s death came to be depicted in the classical Muslim Tradition similarly to that of Christian holy men, the Christian narrative lost its polemical edge. The educated Christian elite realized this and stopped penning the story, while their illiterate and less well-informed coreligionists insisted on telling the story. In the absence of Muslims to
contradict the Christian polemicists’ claims in Europe, by contrast, the shift in the Muslim Tradition barely dented the popularity of the story there. It therefore continued to circulate widely in the West until early modern Orientalists relegated it to the rubbish dump of historiography, replacing it with the classical Islamic account of Muhammad’s death as they found it in manuscripts of Muslim works then newly available in Europe. In doing so, they enthusiastically followed the classical Muslim Tradition. Contrary to what is often claimed, they avoided transmitting medieval polemical notions about Islam, regarding them as incorrect and actively arguing against them. Little did they know that in the process they could have been abandoning history for hagiography, and that what they judged as authoritative history was in fact the story of Muhammad’s death reshaped in response to earlier versions of the Christian polemical narrative they had just rejected.

My overall aim in the dissertation is to demonstrate that in the early Islamic world Christians and Muslims were familiar with each other’s religious narratives and that this familiarity profoundly influenced them in shaping their stories of Muhammad—Christians polemicized against Islam with the help of stories appropriated from the Muslim Tradition and Muslims revised their own early narratives in response to the challenge of Christian polemic. This dynamic waned after the ninth century, leading to a widening gap between Christian polemic and the Muslim Tradition. This is most salient at the peak of western Christian polemic against Islam, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: western polemicists often received narratives from their eastern counterparts in distorted form as a result of their prolonged oral transmission and were rarely capable of
making independent use of the Muslim Tradition for their purposes. Without considering the history of their formation, they appear as no more than wild flights of fancy.

My dissertation constitutes a departure from previous studies of Christian-Muslim religious debates in several respects. It makes clear that most polemical narratives, today best known from their European versions, originated in the Muslim world, in eighth- and ninth-century Iraq and Syria. The forging of the medieval European image of Islam was, therefore, begun by eastern Christians subjugated by Muslims, and not in the context of military confrontation between western Christendom and the Islamic world, as it is often claimed. My dissertation also pays close attention to the Muslim religious context of Christian polemical narratives and finds it indispensable for their interpretation. Examination of the Muslim tradition has enabled me to unravel the origins of these narratives, and awareness of their widespread circulation in the Muslim world has revealed that Muslims knew them and responded to them, and that, in the final analysis, Christian polemic contributed substantially to the formation of the classical Islamic literary image of Muhammad, which in turn does much to determine his portrait in contemporary Islam.
Chapter One

A Very Ordinary Death: The First Christian Polemical Narratives of Muhammad’s Death and Their Muslim Sources

Scholars commonly accept that medieval Christian polemicists based much of their representation of Muhammad’s life on ignorance and misunderstanding, even willful distortion of the Muslim Tradition. This has also become the standard interpretation of the legend of Muhammad’s death that circulated among the Christians of the Islamic world. As John Tolan, a scholar of medieval Latin Christendom, expresses it, in this legend “Muhammad’s death is described in a manner that has nothing to do with Muslim tradition.”

A careful examination of the Muslim Tradition, however, suggests otherwise. The purpose of this chapter is to show that, although the full story fundamentally differs from the classical Muslim narrative of the Prophet’s death, each of its motifs save one appears in Muslim literature. Often they occur independently but sometimes also in combination with each other, revealing that Christians borrowed most of the narrative directly from the Muslim Tradition. I therefore argue that, rather than being ignorant, some Christians had sufficiently deep knowledge of the Muslim Tradition to make a sophisticated selection of hadiths that were suitable for their polemical purposes. The first part of the chapter surveys and analyzes the surviving versions of the Christian legend, while the next two examine their Muslim sources. The fourth part puts the agreement between the

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10 Tolan, Saracens, p. 92.
Christian and Muslim narratives of Muhammad’s death in the broader context of the polemical milieu of the eighth century.

**Muhammad’s death according to the Christians**

The oldest versions of the narrative appear in nine texts, six of which are ninth-century Christian, one tenth-century Christian, one tenth-century Jewish, and one twelfth-century Muslim. Their authors lived in widely separated parts of the Islamic world and spoke different languages.

The simplest versions of the narrative appear in the two Syriac recensions of the *Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, a pseudonymous Christian polemical treatise probably written by an Iraqi monk in the 810s. The West-Syrian recension of the *Legend* is the earlier of the two; it was probably redacted in the ninth century.

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He [Ka‘b al-Aḥbār] said to them, “… There will be a sign for you: When Muhammad dies he will ascend to heaven like ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, and will be resurrected after three days.”

It happened that when Muhammad died his kinsmen assembled, embalmed him, and laid him in a house with great reverence. They sealed the door on him to see what would become of him. Three days later they opened the door, but nobody could enter the house because of the stench of Muhammad’s body. No one needs to investigate what happened to it.

The East-Syrian redactor of the Legend, probably active in the tenth century, did not substantially modify it:13

Further, the affair of Muḥammad’s death: If a person asks some of them about his grave they do not know it… […]

When Muḥammad died he was highly esteemed in the eyes of all of his people. They embalmed him with myrrh and aloe and they put him on a bier and brought him to a big house and closed the door. And they sealed the door of that house, saying that on the third day he would go up to heaven, to Christ, who sent him. And after three days they all came together and opened the door of the house to see what had happened to the Prophet of God, and they could not enter due to the smell of the body of the Prophet. And it is not necessary to explain anything about his grave that the listeners do not comprehend. […]

The redactors of the Arabic and Latin recensions omitted the narrative of Muhammad’s death.

A close reading of the Syriac recensions reveals that the narrative of Muhammad’s death did not originally form part of the Legend, but was added to it early in its development. In the later East-Syrian version it is appended to the end of the main story and retains its separate heading (“The affair of Muhammad’s death”), while in the

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earlier West-Syrian one it is fully, if not seamlessly, incorporated into the Legend. The manuscripts are all late. The earliest extant manuscript of the Legend is a Judaeo-Arabic genizah fragment dated to the twelfth or the thirteenth century, but it is a copy of an Arabic recension which lacks the narrative. The earliest copies of the Syriac recensions that include it are a West-Syrian manuscript, dated by one scholar to the fourteenth or fifteenth century and by another to the late seventeenth century, and an East-Syrian one estimated to have been copied around 1600. Yet the lateness of these copies says more about the history of Syriac manuscript collections than about the date of the narrative: these two copies are in fact the oldest extant manuscripts of the Syriac recensions of the Legend—the remaining six date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{14} And since it is the later, East-Syrian, recension that does not incorporate the narrative into its main text, whereas the earlier, West-Syrian, one does so, it is likely that the narrative of Muhammad’s death, despite its late physical attestation, circulated in Iraq in the ninth century at the latest as an independent unit.

A third version of the narrative comes from the Apology of al-Kindī, a pseudonymous Christian Arabic polemical treatise against Islam written in Iraq, probably in Baghdad in the 820s. Its author claims to be a courtier of al-Ma’mūn (813-833),

bearing the name al-Kindī. Its date is disputed: some scholars date it, in accordance with the author’s claims, to the early ninth century; others argue that it was written in the tenth century. I regard it as a product of the early ninth century, for two reasons. First, it refers to some historical figures and events of that period, all tangential to the purpose of the text itself, as contemporary. Second, after comparing some of the hadīths the author cites with variants attested in Muslim Arabic literature, I found that they closely resemble variants attested in Baghdad in the early ninth century, while deviating from others. A critical edition would certainly help resolve this question—although the Apology was printed several times in the nineteenth century and also translated into several languages, a critical edition has yet to be prepared.16

The Apology includes a version of the narrative in its extensive biography of Muhammad.17

15 The editio princeps of the Apology, Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tien), first published in 1880, is based on two manuscripts. This edition has since been printed several times. Another edition, based on four manuscripts, is the 1977 dissertation of Georges Tartar, Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tartar). Although this is the more useful of the two editions, it has never appeared in print. No critical edition of the treatise has ever been published. The Apology has been translated into several European languages: Apology of al-Kindī (trans. Tartar) is a French translation of Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tartar); Apology of al-Kindī (trans. Bottini) is an Italian translation of the same; Apology of al-Kindī (trans. Muir) is a selective English translation of Tien, Risāla; and Newman, The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue, pp. 382-516 is a full English translation of the same. For an up-to-date bibliography on the Apology, see Bottini, “The Apology of al-Kindī,” CMR 1: 585-594.

16 For example, the author refers to Timothy I, catholicos of the Church of the East from 780 to 823, and the revolt of Bābak al-Khurramī (from 816 or 817 to 837) as contemporary. He also states that little more than 200 years (nayỳf wa-mi’atā sana) has passed since the time of Muhammad (200 AH = 815f. AD). For these references, see Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tartar), p. 9, p. 68, and p. 84.

17 For the Arabic text, see Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tartar), pp. 92-93. The translation is mine. For the story in Tien’s edition, see Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tien), pp. 109-110. For the same in translations into European languages, see Apology of al-Kindī (trans. Tartar), pp. 166-167;
Furthermore, yet more monstrous than this and more repugnant is that he used to say in his life and enjoined them [that] when he died they should not bury him, because he would be raised to heaven as Christ, the Lord of the World, was raised, and that he was so precious to God that He would not leave him on the earth for more than three days. This remained firmly set in their minds, and when he died on Monday, on the twelfth of Rabī’ al-Awwal, aged sixty-three, after having been ill for fourteen days, they left him unburied believing that he would be raised to heaven according to his claim. But when three days had passed, his smell had changed, their hope in his ascension had died away, they had despaired of his vain promises and they had uncovered his lie, they interred him on Wednesday.

One of them said that he was ill for seven days with pleurisy and that he was wandering in his mind. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was angered by this and frowned on it. When he recovered, they informed him about what had happened and he said: “No one should stay in the house except al-ʿAbbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.” When the seventh day of his illness arrived, he died, and his belly swelled up and his left finger, that is the little finger, turned backwards.

Ḥumrān⁵⁸ said that a red cloth was under him during his illness. He died on it and was wrapped in it after his death. He was interred without washing or burial clothes.

ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn al-Khuzaʾī¹⁹ narrated that he was washed and was wrapped in three saḥūlī (that is, Yemeni white) clothes. It was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and al-Faḍl b. al-ʿAbbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, his uncle,²⁰ who undertook this for him.

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¹⁸ Tartar’s edition has Ḍ-mrān, but this name is attested only for dogs (see Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿarab, by the end of root d-m-r). Variants in manuscripts include Ḥ-mzān (in four manuscripts) and Ḥamza (in one manuscript). Ḥumrān—an attested name graphically identical with most variants surveyed—is a possible solution. Another possibility is that the name is a corruption of Shuqrān, Muhammad’s freed slave. About Shuqrān, see Mizzī, Tahdhib al-kamāl, vol. 12, pp. 544-546.

¹⁹ Tartar’s edition has ‘Imrān b. Khudayr al-Khuzaʾī. It should be corrected to ‘Imrān b. Ḥuṣayn al-Khuzaʾī, an attested transmitter whose name is graphically almost identical with the one in Tartar’s text. Abū Naḍjīd ‘Imrān b. (al-)Ḥuṣayn al-Khuzaʾī was a Companion, later qāḍī in Baṣrā, and died in 52/672f. About ‘Imrān, see Mizzī, Tahdhib al-kamāl, vol. 22, pp. 319-321.

²⁰ Al-Faḍl b. al-ʿAbbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was, of course, not Muhammad’s uncle, but his cousin. Given the general accuracy of the Apology on such minutiae of Muhammad’s life, the
The author fleshes out his version of the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death, substantially the same as in the Legend, with details borrowed from the Muslim Tradition. There is no clear indication in the story itself that it is a later insertion into the Apology. The author appends to the Christian story a Muslim tradition that refers to the decay of Muhammad’s body and wraps up the section on Muhammad’s death with two contradictory hadīths about his burial clothes. While the author tells the Christian story without attribution, he ascribes the first Muslim tradition to an unnamed Muslim (“and one of them said,” wa-hakā ba’duhum) and names the earliest transmitters of the second and the third.

Judging from the popularity of the Apology, its version of the legend must have become widely known. The Apology was translated into Latin in 1142 in Toledo and the earliest extant manuscript of this translation, copied in the twelfth century, is the earliest physical attestation of the text.\(^21\) The earliest surviving copy of the Arabic original was probably produced in the thirteenth or fourteenth century,\(^22\) but the Apology was known

\(^{21}\) The *editio princeps* of the Latin Apology was published by Bibliander, *Machometis uitae ac doctrina* in 1543 (see vol. 2, pp. 1-20). A critical edition was published only recently, with a Spanish translation, in *Apology of al-Kindī* (ed. González Muñoz); the story of Muḥammad’s death appears on pp. 60-61 (Latin) and p. 207 (Spanish translation). For up-to-date bibliographical information on the Latin translation, see Bottini, “The Apology of al-Kindī,” CMR 1: 585-594 and González Muñoz, “Peter of Toledo,” CMR 3: 478-482. This translation might sometimes reflect an earlier stage of the text than the published Arabic versions, based on manuscripts copied in the seventeenth century or later, but such variants can rarely be distinguished from those resulting from the translator’s revision of the text to suit his Catholicism. In any case, the Latin rendering of the story of Muḥammad’s death does not significantly deviate from the Arabic text. The earliest copy of the text is MS Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 1162; see González Muñoz, “Peter of Toledo,” CMR 3: 480.

\(^{22}\) The earliest Arabic manuscript of the text is MS Coptic Museum 132, dated by William Macomber to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. On this manuscript, not listed in any of the
in the Muslim east before that: al-Bīrūnī refers to it around 1000 and ʿAbdallāh b. Faḍl of Antioch quotes it in the eleventh century. By the late eleventh century, its Arabic version had reached the Muslim West: Petrus Alfonsi was familiar with it. This broad dissemination by the eleventh century—from Central Asia to Syria to the Iberian Peninsula—shows how popular the text soon became and so does the high number of extant manuscripts: over a thousand European manuscripts contain a summary of the Latin translation and excerpts from it, and about thirty copied in the Ottoman period include the Arabic original.

A more elaborate version comes from a lesser known anonymous text, the *Qashun Document*. The *Document* is an account of Muhammad’s life and some Muslim rituals, especially the *ḥadīdj*. The author inserted the story of Muhammad’s death into the middle of the text.

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23 For al-Bīrūnī’s reference to the *Apology*, see his *Kitāb al-āthār*, p. 205. ʿAbdallāh b. al-Faḍl cites the *Apology* in chapter 64 of his *Kitāb al-manfa’a l-kabīr*. I am grateful to Sasha Treiger for informing me about the latter’s use of the *Apology*. On Petrus Alfonsi’s familiarity with the text, see Tolan, “Les récits de la vie de Mahomet,” p. 165 and Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, p. 28.

24 Of these Latin manuscripts, only eleven contain the entire *Apology*, but the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais includes an extensive summary (book 23, chapters 39-67) and is preserved in more than a thousand manuscripts. Most medieval European readers knew the *Apology* through this summary. On the manuscripts, see González Muñoz, “Peter of Toledo,” CMR 3: 480-481. For a complete list of references to inventories of the Arabic manuscripts, see Bottini, “The Apology of al-Kindī,” CMR 1: 590. More manuscripts survive than the number mentioned there—I have so far counted thirty extant and several more lost ones.

25 The *Document* has been translated into English in Thomson, “Muhammad,” pp. 846-853; the story of Muhammad’s death is told on p. 850, to be read with notes y-z. Since I do not read Armenian, I have no access to the original and rely entirely on Thomson’s translation. On the background of the *Document*, see Macler, “L’Islam dans la littérature arménienne,” p. 494 and p. 522; and Thomson, “Muhammad,” pp. 844-845. On its dating and provenance, see Appendix One. The title *Qashun Document* comes from the manuscript (see Macler, “L’Islam dans la
But we shall narrate another tale, truly worthy of derision: For when Mahmet
died, they wrapped him and placed him in his garden; they did not bury him
saying that on the third day he would rise, like Christ. And when the drowsy
disciples were asleep, dogs entered and ate the face of the corpse. Consequently it
was prescribed by his disciples to kill dogs in that month. Observing this custom
up to the present day, they kill dogs in that month.

Although the *Document* is extant only in Armenian translation and its earliest manuscript
was copied in 1273, based on its contents I suspect that it was written in the late eighth or
the early ninth century, in Syria or Iraq, in Syriac or Arabic.²⁷ It claims to be based on the
account of a Muslim who converted to Christianity and the accuracy of many details
lends some credence to this claim. A similar Armenian recension must have existed in the
twelfth century at the latest: Mxit’ar of Ani, an Armenian historian active at the turn of
the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, incorporated into his work a text near-identical with
this one. In the thirteenth century Vardan Arevelci, another Armenian historian, also
used the *Document*, so despite its meager attestation in the manuscript record (only two
manuscripts of it are known) it must have been fairly well known among Armenians. It
was published already in 1930, but has barely been studied.²⁸ The narrative of
Muhammad’s death is seamlessly woven into the text, as one would expect from a
composition that claims to derive from the oral narration of an informant.

²⁶ Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 850 (read with notes x, y, z).
²⁷ See Appendix One.
translated the relevant section of Vardan’s chronicle into English in his “Muhammad,” pp. 854-
856. In addition to the thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Document*, Thomson mentions only
an eighteenth-century one and it is unclear from his discussion whether any more survived.
Two other versions of the story, the closest of all to that preserved in the Document, come from another fringe of the Islamic world. The text containing one of them, entitled Istoria de Mahomet, was found by Eulogius of Córdoba (d. 859), learned priest, supporter of the Córdoban martyrs, and eventually one of them, during his travels in the northern part of the Iberian Peninsula in 849-50 in the Monastery of Leyre near Pamplona. Eulogius incorporated it into his Liber apologeticus martyrum (wr. 857-859). The Istoria was later inserted into the Asturian Prophetic Chronicle (wr. 883) too.

A brief version of the narrative appears in the Adnotatio Mammetis, an appendix to a letter of John of Seville to Paulus Alvarus (wr. 848-851). A unique ninth-century

29 The editio princeps of the Liber apologeticus is Eulogius of Córdoba, Opera, pp. 76v-85v (the Istoria is on pp. 80v-81r), published in 1574. Its modern editions are Eulogius of Córdoba, Obras completas, pp. 355-403 (with Spanish translation; the Istoria is on pp. 378-83) and Gil, Corpus scriptorum muzarabícorum, vol. 2, pp. 475-495 (the Istoria is on pp. 483-486). It has been translated into Spanish twice recently, first in Eulogius of Córdoba, Obras completas, pp. 191-210 (the Istoria is on pp. 199-200), then in Eulogius of Córdoba, Obras, pp. 191-214 (the Istoria is on pp. 203-204). The Liber apologeticus has not been translated into English in its entirety, but the Istoria has: in Colbert, The Martyrs of Córdoba, pp. 336-338 (based on Eulogius of Córdoba, Obras completas); in Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives,” pp. 97-99 (translation of Wolf’s transcription of the Latin text from the eleventh-century Codex of Roda), reprinted in Constable, Medieval Iberia, pp. 48-50. For an up-to-date introduction and bibliography on Eulogius and the Liber apologeticus, see Tolan, “Eulogius of Cordova,” CMR 1: 679-683. On Eulogius’ discovery of the text, see below. The title Istoria de Mahomet does not appear in the text or the sixteenth-century edition; it probably comes from a modern editor’s pen.

30 In its turn, the Prophetic Chronicle became part of the Chronicle of Albeida (wr. 883)—like the Istoria, it does not survive independently. The editio princeps of the Chronicle of Albeida is Flórez, España sagrada, vol. 13, pp. 433-464 (incomplete; the Istoria is not published in it), published in the eighteenth century. The only other modern edition that contains the Istoria is Bonnaz, Chroniques asturiennes, pp. 2-30 (the Istoria is on pp. 5-6, with French translation). For an up-to-date introduction and bibliography, see Deswarte, “The Chronicle of Albeida and The Prophetic Chronicle,” CMR 1: 810-815.

31 The editio princeps of the correspondence of Paul Alvarus is Flórez, España sagrada, vol. 11, pp. 81-218 (the Adnotatio is on pp. 145-146), published in the eighteenth century. Its best modern edition is Gil, Corpus scriptorum muzarabícorum, vol. 1, pp. 144-270 (the Adnotatio appears on pp. 200-201). The earlier edition, in Paul Alvarus, Epistolario, pp. 89-281 (the Adnotatio is on pp. 170-171) that relies on only one manuscript is extensively annotated. The letter is the sixth of the twenty letters and bears the heading Item epistola Ioannis Spalensis Albaro directa. The correspondence of Alvarus has been translated into Spanish in Paul Alvarus, Epistolario
manuscript of the *Liber apologeticus* was discovered in the sixteenth century; it was published soon after, but has since been lost. As part of the *Prophetic Chronicle*, the *Istoria* is preserved in four medieval manuscripts, two from the tenth and one each from the eleventh and the twelfth century, in addition to several later copies. The *Adnotatio* is attested in the two extant tenth-century codices of the correspondence of Alvarus. John probably wrote the letter before 851. Both the *Istoria* and the *Adnotatio* have been (Spanish), pp. 31-173 (the *Adnotatio* is on pp. 93-94). It has not been translated into English, but the *Adnotatio* has, in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 513. For an up-to-date introduction and bibliography on Paul Alvarus, see Wolf, “Paul Alvarus,” CMR 1: 646-648. To the studies of Alvarus’ life that Wolf lists, Cabaniss, “Paulus Alvarus” should be added. On the date of the letter, see Paul Alvarus, *Epistolario* (Spanish), p. 9.

32 On the manuscript and its discovery, see Colbert, *The Martyrs of Córdoba*, pp. 435-453. According to Ponce de León, the manuscript was in bad condition, “of parchment, very old, apparently contemporary with Eulogius, and in Visigothic script.” He discovered it in Oviedo and thought that it was taken there with the relics of Eulogius in 884; it is documented that it was not yet there in 882. Morales emended the bad Latin and the orthography, but probably made no major changes. (The quotation is from p. 450.)

33 For a list of the medieval manuscripts, see Díaz y Díaz, “Los textos antimahometanos,” pp. 149-64, and (presumably following him) Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives,” p. 89, n. 2. For more information on the medieval copies, see Bonnaz, *Chroniques asturienennes*, pp. viii-ix, xxx-xxxi, and xxxvii, and Gil Fernández et al., *Crónicas asturianas*, pp. 54-56 and 81-82. According to Deswarte, “The Chronicle of Albelda and The Prophetic Chronicle,” CMR 1: 812, the *Chronicle of Albelda* (and thus presumably the *Prophetic Chronicle* too) “is extant in ten medieval and ten modern manuscripts,” but he does not list these. In addition to the four medieval copies mentioned by Díaz y Díaz, I found references to two modern copies, one from the eighteenth and another from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century (Bonnaz, *Chroniques asturienennes*, pp. ix-x) and to “muchas copias modernas,” followed by a list of four examples without dates (see Gil Fernández et al., *Crónicas asturianas*, p. 81). Since none of the scholars who edited these chronicles devoted much attention to the *Istoria* (Gil Fernández did not even include it in his edition of the *Prophetic Chronicle*), they rarely make it explicit whether or not a manuscript contains it—there might exist many more late medieval and modern copies.

34 See Gil, *Corpus scriptorum muzarabico-rum*, vol. 1, pp. 143-144.

published in critical editions and received considerable attention from scholars.\textsuperscript{36} There is no good reason to question the authenticity of the texts in which they appear—their circulation in the middle of the ninth century on the Iberian Peninsula, in both its Muslim south and its Christian north, is not in doubt.

The \textit{Istoria} ends with the Christian legend of Muhammad’s death, its longest extant version:\textsuperscript{37}

Sensing his imminent destruction and knowing that he would in no way be resurrected on his own merit, he predicted that he would be revived on the third day by the angel Gabriel, who was in the habit of appearing to him in the guise of a vulture, as Muḥammad himself said. When he gave up his soul to hell, they ordered his body to be guarded with an arduous vigil, anxious about the miracle which he had promised them.

When on the third day they saw that he was rotting, and determined that he would not by any means be rising, they said the angels did not come because they were frightened by their presence. Having found sound advice—or so they thought—they left his body unguarded, and immediately instead of angels, dogs followed his stench and devoured his flank. Learning of the deed, they surrendered the rest of his body to the soil.

\textsuperscript{36} The best editions of the \textit{Istoria} are Díaz y Díaz, “Los textos antimahometanos,” pp. 157-159, and Gil, \textit{Corpus scriptorum muzarabicorum}, vol. 2, pp. 483-486. While the \textit{Istoria} has been edited both as part of the \textit{Liber apologeticus} and as part of the \textit{Prophetic Chronicle} elsewhere too, these are the only publications that use all the extant medieval witnesses for the text. No edition uses later copies of the text. The best edition of the \textit{Adnotatio} is Gil, \textit{Corpus scriptorum muzarabicorum}, vol. 1, pp. 200-201, using both of the extant tenth-century copies of the text (Díaz y Díaz used only one of them). For a brief bibliography to the \textit{Istoria} see Tolan, “\textit{Istoria de Mahomet},” CMR 1: 721-722. Useful recent studies of the \textit{Istoria} and the \textit{Adnotatio} include Wasilewski, “The ‘Life of Muhammad’,” pp. 333-353; and Christys, \textit{Christians in al-Andalus}, pp. 62-68.

And in vindication of this injury, they ordered dogs to be slaughtered every year so that they, who on his behalf deserved a worthy martyrdom here, might share in his merit there. It was appropriate that a prophet of this kind fill the stomachs of dogs, a prophet who committed not only his own soul, but those of many, to hell.

John of Seville was familiar with the story in a shortened form or chose to only summarize it in his letter: 38

When death was approaching, he promised to rise up on the third day, but by the negligence of the guards he was discovered [to have been] devoured by dogs.

From the headings and prefaces the Istoria and the Adnotatio received from the authors who incorporated them into their writings, it seems that the two texts existed as independent written compositions and that their contents were known popularly too.

Eulogius prefices his copy of the Istoria with the following words: 39

_Cum essem olim in Pampilonensi oppido positus et apud Legerense coenobium demorarer cunctaque uolumina quae ibi erant gratia dignoscendi incomperta revoluerem, subito in quadam parte cuiusdam opusculi hanc de nefando uate historiolam absque auctoris nomine repperi._

[W]hen I found myself in the past in the town of Pamplona and detained at the monastery of Leire, leafing through all the manuscripts there, incompletely known, which were worthy of reading, I suddenly discovered part of a certain work containing this anonymous little history concerning the impious prophet.

The _Prophetic Chronicle_ is a compilation of several similar independent units; like the rest of its building blocks, the _Istoria_ always gets a separate heading in its copies. The _Adnotatio_, as its title shows, must have existed as a written composition too, and from

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38 Hoyland, _Seeing Islam_, p. 513.

39 For the Arabic text, see Gil, _Corpus scriptorum muzarabincorum_, vol. 1, p. 483; for the translation, see Christys, _Christians in al-Andalus_, p. 62.
John of Seville’s introductory words we also learn that its contents were popularly known.\footnote{See Gil, \textit{Corpus scriptorum muzarabicorum}, vol. 1, p. 200.}

Comparison of the \textit{Istoria} and the \textit{Adnotatio} reveals that they go back to a common Latin version. The source of the Latin version must ultimately have originated in the Muslim east and, since it refers to Damascus as the capital of the Arabs, it was written probably in Greek before the fall of the Umayyads. After the Greek text reached the Iberian Peninsula, it was revised in the southern part of the Peninsula, as the references of the opening lines of the \textit{Istoria} to local personages show. Its redactors might have modified some of its elements and incorporated additional details based on local sources. Eulogius probably revised the version he found in the Monastery of Leyre too, at least stylistically.\footnote{For discussions of the origins of the text, see Hoyland, \textit{Seeing Islam}, pp. 514-515 (“an adaptation of a late Umayyad Greek tract, hence the mention of Damascus as the Arab capital”); Deswarte, \textit{The Chronicle of Albelda and The Prophetic Chronicle,}, p. 812 (“composed on the basis of Eastern Christian sources by a Mozarab in the mid-8th century”); and Christys, \textit{Christians in al-Andalus}, pp. 65-66. Wasilewski, “The ‘Life of Muhammad’ in Eulogius of Córdoba” convincingly argues that Eulogius revised the text he found in Leyre.}

Yet another reference to the story appears in Muslim literature. The earliest ones to cite it are three eleventh- and twelfth-century Mālikī works from the Muslim West: al-Bādjī (d. 474/1081), Ibn Rushd \textit{al-djadd} (d. 520/1126),\footnote{I owe my knowledge of the story’s occurrence in the two earlier sources, by al-Bādjī and Ibn Rushd \textit{al-djadd}, to Professor Michael Cook.} and al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d. 544/1149).
Their version is related to those attested in the Document, the Istoria, and the Adnotatio.

The following is the variant in the Shifā’ of al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ.

qāla bnu l-qāsim sa’alnā mālikan ‘an naṣrāniyyin bi-miṣra shuhida ‘alayhi annahu qāla miskīnun muḥammadun yuḥbirukum annahu fī l-djanna māluhu [or mā lahu] lam yanfa’ nafsahu idh kānati l-kilābu ta’kulu sāqayhi law qatalīhu starāha minhu l-nās qāla mālikun arā an tuḍraba ‘unuquhu

Ibn al-Qāsim said, “We asked Mālik [b. Anas] about a Christian in Egypt against whom there was testimony that he said, ‘‘Poor Muhammad! He is telling you that he is in Paradise [but] his wealth did not benefit his soul when dogs were eating (ta’kulu) his legs.” Were he to be killed, the people would find rest from him.’ Mālik answered, ‘I think he should be executed.’”

In response to further inquiry from Ibn al-Qāsim as to whether the corpse of the executed Christian should be burned, Mālik agreed that it should, and the sentence, al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ continues to quote his source, was duly carried out.

While al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ is silent about his direct source for Ibn al-Qāsim’s account, both al-Bāḍjī and Ibn Rushd cite ninth-century authorities for it. Al-Bāḍjī says: “Ibn al-Qāsim relates [this] in the Mawwāziyya and other works (rawā bnu l-qāsimi fī l-mawwāziyyati wa-ghayrihā).”

‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/806) was the most

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43 I did not find it in the Muwaṭṭa’ or the Mudawwana as transmitted by Ibn al-Qāsim, nor in the only other published work ascribed to him, Madjlīlis Ibn al-Qāsim. Another early Maliki work which might refer to this incident, but which I could not as yet access, is Ibn Abī Zayd’s al-Nawādir wa-al-ziyādāt. I owe the reference to this work to Professor Michael Cook. Several editions of the Shifā’ have been published; the editio princeps of the Shifā’ as an independent work, it seems, was published in Istanbul by the Maṭba’at Khāfīl, in 1290/1872f. With commentary it had been printed even earlier; see, for example, Khafājī, Sharḥ al-Shifā’, appeared in 1267/1851f. Since then it has been published many times. For the most up-to-date bibliography on al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, see Serrano Ruano, “Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ,” CMR 3: 542-548. For the story in the Shifā’, see al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, Shifā’, vol. 2, pp. 1037-1039, quotation from pp. 1037-1038. Safran, “Identity and Differentiation,” p. 589 cites the incident.

44 I could not locate it in the only edition of the Muntaqā accessible to me, so I cite the text as sent me by Professor Cook. The full quotation reads: wa-law qāla nabaṭiyyun miskīmun muḥammadun
prominent disciple of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), studied with him for twenty years in Medina, then settled in Egypt and died there. The Mawwāziyya is the work of the Mālikī faqīh Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ziyād al-Iskandarānī, known as Ibn al-Mawwāz (d. 269/882f.). He studied with several Mālikī scholars from the generation after Ibn al-Qāsim and as a child possibly with Ibn al-Qāsim himself. Ibn Rushd gives the account in his al-Bayān wa-l-taḥṣīl, a commentary on the Mustakhradja min al-asmiʿa of al-ʿUtbī (d. 254/868 or the next year), with the additional detail that Ibn al-Qāsim was staying in Medina when received a letter from Egypt on this matter. The Mustakhradja is preserved in its entirety only as part of Ibn Rushd’s commentary; the story of the Egyptian Christian belongs to the text quoted from al-ʿUtbī, not the comments of Ibn Rushd.

The only later author to add more details is the Egyptian Ibn Ḥadjar al-ʿAsqalānī (773-852/1372-1449). He identifies his source as al-Ḥārith b. Miskīn, a ninth-century Mālikī qāḍī of Egypt (d. 250/864) who in turn quotes it from Ibn al-Qāsim, his teacher. Ibn Ḥadjar furthermore names the qāḍī who carried out the punishment as al-Mufaqḍāl b.

45 On Ibn al-Mawwāz, see Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, vol. 51, pp. 197-198. The Mawwāziyya, if preserved, has not been published yet.

46 For the story as given by Ibn Rushd, see al-Bayān wa-l-taḥṣīl, vol. 16, p. 397 (qāla bnu l-qāsimī wa-la-qad saʿan nafsihi haythu kānati l-kilābu taʾkulū sāqayhi rawā bnu l-qāsim... yūkhirukum annakum fi l-djannati fa-huwa al-āna fi l-djannati fa-mā lahu lam yughniʿan nafsihi Ḥaythu kānati l-kilābu taʾkulū sāqayhi rawā bnu l-qāsim...)

EI² 10: 945.
Faḍāla (d. 181/797), a contemporary of Mālik. Other Mālikī sources give nothing beyond the material of the *Shifāʾ*; indeed, they often identify their source as the *Shifāʾ*. Some curtail even the terse version of the *Shifāʾ*, citing only the Egyptian Christian’s words and Mālik’s decision as part of a long series of slanders of the Prophet and their recommended punishment collected for the edification of future generations.

The references to three different ninth-century sources by al-Bādji, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Ḥadjar are sufficient proof that this account was related by Ibn al-Qāsim and written down by his disciples or the disciples of his disciples by the middle of the ninth century. The reference to contemporary locals in Ibn Ḥadjar’s version further establishes that the incident did take place in the second half of the eighth century in Egypt. Indeed, it hard to imagine that a Muslim would have invented this lurid story. The version of the Christian story of Muhammad’s death found in the Muslim sources therefore constitute its only attestation in Egypt and its only datable attestation before the ninth century, before it first appears in Christian sources, making the Muslim documentation of the story at the same time the earliest and the latest. Yet we cannot be certain about the exact contents of the Egyptian Christian’s story of Muhammad’s death. Even the Muslim who asked for Ibn al-Qasim’s opinion surely mentioned only its most damning parts; the authors of the earliest and now untraceable Muslim texts that reported about Malik’s decision were unlikely to know it in any more detail than we do today.

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48 These Mālikī sources include, for example, Qarāfī, *Dhakhīra*, vol. 12, p. 20; Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā*, vol. 12, p. 34; Ḥāshiyat al-Dasūqī, vol. 2, p. 205; and Wansharīsī, *Miʿār*, vol. 2, p. 345.
All three texts, the *Muntaqā*, *al-Bayān wa-l-taḥṣīl*, and the *Shifā*, were influential. The *Shifā* was in particular much read: it survives in thousands of manuscripts and the first commentary on it was written only two hundred years after the death of the author. The enormous popularity of this work alone would have ensured that many Muslim readers came across the capsule version of *al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ*. Unfortunately their reactions remained unrecorded.

The version of the story in the West-Syrian *Legend* attributes the prophecy of Muhammad’s resurrection from the dead to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. No other version does so. The East-Syrian recension of the *Legend* leaves the prophecy’s origin unspecified, and the rest ascribe it to Muhammad himself. Both the Syriac recensions of the *Legend* and the *Apology* speak of an expectation of ascension; the other Christian texts mention resurrection instead. The version of the *Istoria*, the most elaborate one, includes the unique detail that the Muslims expected “the angel Gabriel” (later in the text “angels”) to come and revive Muhammad. The anticipated resurrection is explicitly compared to Christ’s story in all versions, with the exception of the two Latin texts. His followers secure Muhammad’s corpse in a locked house in both Syriac recensions of the *Legend*, and lay it out in his garden in the *Document*. The remaining versions do not specify a place. Guards watch over the body according to the two Latin versions; “disciples” do the same according to the *Document*. In both Syriac recensions of the *Legend* and the

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50 The resurrection, since it is referred to only after the ascension, appears to be secondary in the West-Syrian recension.
Apology, the Muslims realize the futility of their expectation on the third day when they notice that the decomposition of the corpse had already started. In the other texts, their hopes come to an end when dogs devour the decaying cadaver. A yearly massacre of dogs was instituted according to the Istoria and the Document; according to the latter, it is observed “up to the present day.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The title of the text, its language, its provenance…</th>
<th><em>and its shortened title</em></th>
<th>The date of the text…</th>
<th><em>and of its source</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, West-Syrian recension</em> (Syriac, Iraq)</td>
<td>West-Syrian Legend</td>
<td>9th c.</td>
<td>810s</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, East-Syrian recension</em> (Syriac, Iraq)</td>
<td>East-Syrian Legend</td>
<td>10th c.?</td>
<td>810s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Apology of al-Kindī</em> (Arabic, Iraq)</td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>820s</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Qashun Document</em> (Armenian, Jerusalem or Armenia)</td>
<td>Document</td>
<td>late 8th or early 9th c.?</td>
<td>mid-7th c.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Istoria de Mahomet in the Liber apologeticus of Eulogius of Córdoba</em> (Latin, northern Iberian Peninsula)</td>
<td>Istoria</td>
<td>mid-9th c.</td>
<td>early 8th c.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Adnotatio Mammetis</em> in the correspondence of Paulus Alvarus (Latin, southern Iberian Peninsula)</td>
<td>Adnotatio</td>
<td>mid-9th c.</td>
<td>early 8th c.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>works of Mālikī fiqh</em> (Arabic, Muslim West)</td>
<td>Mālikī fiqh</td>
<td>11th c.</td>
<td>late 8th c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Book of the Rolls</em> (Arabic, Syria?)</td>
<td>Rolls</td>
<td>9th c.?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yefet ben ‘Eli, Commentary on Isaiah</em> (Arabic and Hebrew, Palestine)</td>
<td>Yefet’s Commentary</td>
<td>10th c.</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This comparison of motifs shows that the five early Christian versions of the legend fall into two subgroups. The first includes the versions that appear in the two Syriac recensions of the Legend and in the Apology, the former two being more closely related to each other than to the latter. The second comprises the two Latin texts and the
Document. The former two of this group are also more similar to each other than to the latter.

The wide dissemination of the Christian story by the middle of the ninth century indicates an older origin and the texts of the second subgroup show roots earlier than the ninth century. There is reason to believe that the legend circulated already in the first half of the eighth century. As mentioned earlier, the Document, although attested only in later Armenian versions, is likely to go back to a Syriac or Arabic text on the origins of Islam compiled in Iraq during the first decade of the ninth century at the latest. Its author probably relied on several written and oral sources of various ages and provenances, and one of his written sources might have been produced as early as the seventh century. It is not possible, however, to establish the origin of the individual parts of the text with certainty. The two Latin texts, the Istoría and the Adnotatio, are more helpful in this respect. Their comparison shows that both drew on the same Latin source written in Spain. Their Latin source, in turn, is probably based on an eastern one. In view of the remarks of the Istoría and the Adnotatio related to Byzantium, the eastern source seems to have been of Melkite provenance. Since the Istoría refers to Damascus as the capital of the Arabs, either its Spanish Latin source or the Melkite source of the latter was written before the end of the Umayyad caliphate. Also, the Spanish Latin source dates the appearance of Muhammad to the seventh year of the reign of Heraclius (610-641), like the Hispanic chronicles of 741 and 754, which again points to its origin in the first half of

51 See Appendix One.
the eighth century. We can thus conclude that the Christian story of Muhammad’s death was, in all probability, known among Christians in the Near East during the first half of the eighth century.

In addition to these seven versions, two rather different ones circulated in the Middle East too. They contain no reference to promised resurrection or ascension or decaying corpse. Instead they focus on the violation of Muhammad’s body: after his burial wild animal(s) exhume his corpse and desecrate it. One of these versions comes from the Book of the Rolls (also known as the Apocalypse of Peter), a Christian Arabic apocalypse from the early ‘Abbāsid period. As usual with apocalypses, it is an anonymous text—its revelations are ascribed to Jesus who gives them to Simon Peter who in turn transmits them to Clement. The Rolls, although it enjoyed great popularity among Christians in the medieval and early modern Islamic world, has been studied very little. It was probably written in the ninth century—it purports to foretell Islamic history until the late ninth century and the earliest extant copy (which, however, is lacunose when it comes to the history of Islam) dates from the late ninth or tenth century. The text

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53 A partial edition of the Book of the Rolls was published by Margaret Gibson in 1901 in Book of the Rolls (ed. Gibson), pp. 1-38, based on a ninth-century manuscript (MS Sinai Arabic 508); reprinted and translated into Italian in Cave of Treasures (ed. Battista and Bagatti). The copy Gibson used does not contain the full text of the apocalypse. Alphonse Mingana published the continuation in Book of the Rolls (ed. Mingana), pp. 100-449, in 1931 (for Muhammad’s death, see p. 323 in the Karshūn text and p. 254 in the English translation). Mingana’s publication consists of the facsimile of MS Mingana Syriac 70, from the eighteenth century, and an English translation, but he omitted more than half of the text found in the manuscript he used. For the date of this manuscript, see GCAL 1: 290 and Mingana, Catalogue, vol. 1, cols. 178-180. For a discussion of the editions, see Roggema, “Apocalypse of Peter—The Book of the Rolls,” p. 135.
seems to have originated in a Miaphysite milieu, according to the earlier scholarly consensus among Copts. Barbara Roggema, however, recently pointed to several features of the text that make a West-Syrian provenance more likely.\textsuperscript{54} Another argument against a Coptic provenance should be added to hers: the \textit{Rolls} is too early to be a Copto-Arabic composition—the next earliest Copto-Arabic text was written in the late tenth century.\textsuperscript{55} These considerations notwithstanding, as the text has never even been published in its entirety and the little research done on it has already shown its transmission history to be fairly tortuous, a critical edition might radically change conclusions about it. Not counting fragments, twenty-three manuscripts are extant, at least nine of them pre-Ottoman.\textsuperscript{56}

I had access to two variants of the passage about the desecration of Muhammad’s corpse, in the only edition of the \textit{Rolls}, that of Alphonse Mingana based on a single manuscript copied in the eighteenth century, and in the earliest manuscript of the text that contains the story (MS Cambridge Add. 306), copied in the thirteenth century. The

\textsuperscript{54} The most useful current discussion of the text is Roggema, \textit{“Apocalypse of Peter–The Book of the Rolls,”} pp. 131-150. She discusses its provenance on pp. 136-137 and its date on pp. 138-139. Alphonse Mingana thought it was written by Copts, and the Karshûn manuscripts represent a West-Syrian redaction; see \textit{Book of the Rolls} (ed. Mingana), pp. 94-95. One recent study also considers the text of Coptic provenance; see Grypeou, \textit{“The Re-Written Bible in Arabic,”} pp. 114-115.

\textsuperscript{55} On the literary use of Arabic among Copts, see Rubenson, \textit{“Translating the Tradition,”} pp. 4-14. Rubenson’s article is about translations, but its general conclusions are no less true of original compositions; see Heijer, \textit{“Copto-Arabic Studies (1992-1996),”} pp. 52-53; and Swanson, \textit{“Copto-Arabic Studies, 1996-2000,”} p. 244.

\textsuperscript{56} Based on the list of Roggema, \textit{“Apocalypse of Peter–The Book of the Rolls,”} p. 134, n. 11. For the dating of the manuscripts, see GCAL 1: 289-292.
variations do not affect the foretold event itself. The following excerpt comes from the thirteenth-century manuscript:\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{quote}
wa-'lam yā Buṭrus annahu idhā tuwufiya Imām al-Halāk arsaltu l-ḥayawān al-samdj ḥattā yanbushahu min qabrihi wa-yaʿkula laḥmahu
\end{quote}

Know, Peter, that when the Leader of Perdition dies I will send the foul animal to exhume him from his grave and eat his flesh.

The text was very popular, as the high number of extant manuscripts suggests, which would have ensured a fairly wide dissemination of this particular version of the Christian legend of Muhammad’s death.

The only known Jewish version of the story is the closest one to that in the \textit{Book of the Rolls}. It comes from the pen of Yefet ben ‘Eli, a Karaite biblical exegete who lived in Jerusalem in the tenth century. He included it in his commentary on the Book of Isaiah. Yefet was a major Karaite scholar, but this commentary of his survives in only four manuscripts. The earliest was copied in the early eleventh century, relatively soon after Yefet’s death. This manuscript, however, lacks the relevant part of the commentary; the only copy to include the story is, it seems, later.\textsuperscript{58} But it seems likely that it was an

\textsuperscript{57} For the passage, see MS Cambridge Add. 306, f. 72r. On the manuscript and its date see Browne, \textit{Hand-List}, pp. 172-173. It has tawaffā which I have corrected to tuwufiya. Mingana’s edition of the \textit{Rolls} has “Know, Peter, that when the Leader of Perdition dies I will send the foul animal to exhume him from his grave and eat his flesh” (\textit{ḥaqqaq aqūlu laka yā Fatrūs innaḥu idhā tuwufiya bnu l-halāki ursiluhu l-ḥayawāna l-samdjā ḥattā yanbushahu min qabrihi wa-yaʿ kula laḥmahu). Only the underlined words deviate from the manuscript’s—the differences are insignificant. For the passage in the edition, see \textit{Book of the Rolls} (ed. Mingana), p. 323 (for the English translation, see p. 254). Mingana Syr. 70, the manuscript that Mingana used for his edition, was copied in the eighteenth century (cf. p. 31, n. 53). On the differences between the Cambridge and the Mingana manuscripts of the text, see \textit{Cave of Treasures} (ed. Battista and Bagatti).

integral part of the commentary, because Yefet’s retelling of it is too literary to be simply
the recording of a popular tale—he wrote it in Hebrew, not in Arabic as the rest of the
commentary.

In Yefet’s commentary to Isaiah 14:19 we read:59

But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet.

He interpreted it as the man of the spirit and claimed that they removed him from his grave, and the lions ate him. Nothing remained from him save his heel. They took it and buried it, and said, “This is the grave of the man of the spirit.” Others say that it was done by one of the princes. They cast him out onto the field and he became like an abominable branch and as a carcase trodden under feet.

The “man of the spirit” (ish ha-ruaḥ, from Hosea 9:7) was a common reference to

Muhammad in medieval Jewish polemic against Islam.60 The most probable explanation
gives no dates for them. The only copy to contain the relevant part of the commentary, according to Alobaidi, is from the Firkovich Collection, RNL Yevr. I: 569. For the date of the earliest manuscript (British Library Or. 2548, probably copied in 395 AH = 1004f. AD), see Margoliouth, Catalogue, part I, p. 208. For the date of another copy (British Library Or. 2505), see ibid., vol. 1, pp. 210-211. Alobaidi’s fourth manuscript is a small genizah fragment; he describes as belonging to the Taylor-Schechter Collection 1b, fragment 65—based on this description, I could not identify it. An earlier edition of part of Yefet’s commentary on Isaiah is Neubauer, The Fifty-Third Chapter, published in 1876-1877.

59 See Vajda, “Un vestige oriental,” pp. 177-179 (Vajda’s French translation is on p. 178 and a transcription of the Hebrew original on p. 178-179, n. 5). According to Vajda, this manuscript is not MS RNL Yevr. I: 569, but 568, and he copies from p. 308, ll. 2-7 according to his own pagination. I had no access to the manuscript, so I could not verify which number is correct, but since both Alobaidi and Neubauer refer to it with the number 569, it is more likely to be the correct classmark. Yefet’s commentary on Isaiah remains unedited; the passage in question (part of his exegesis of Isaiah 14:19) is transcribed ibid., p. 178, n. 5.
for the similarity between Yefet’s version and the Rolls’ version is that the legend was part of both Christian and Jewish lore about the rise of Islam in the medieval Islamic milieu.

Whichever version one is acquainted with, the Christian story of Muhammad’s death at first seems but a malicious slander invented by Christians. Most writings that contain it are polemical and their tone is often acrid and scathing. The legend reads as the inversion of the Christian story of Christ’s resurrection. It appears to have been assembled from literary topoi, suitable for the polemical purposes of the Christian authors. It comes as no surprise that all scholars discussing the story have dismissed it in its entirety as a malignant Christian fantasy.\(^6^1\)

Yet however preposterous the Christian legend of Muhammad’s death may appear, the Christians did not invent it: they borrowed almost all of its motifs from the early Muslim Tradition. In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss each motif separately, and show that three out of the four main ones (the expectation of Muhammad’s resurrection or ascension to heaven after his death; the three-day delay in his burial; the


putrefaction of his corpse; and the desecration of his corpse by animals) were known to Muslims in the middle of the eighth century, the probable terminus ad quem of the formation of the Christian narrative.

I will begin by discussing hadīths about Muhammad’s resurrection and ascension to heaven after his death, and continue with the debate among early Muslims about the time elapsed between Muhammad’s death and burial as well as the state of his corpse by the time of his burial. Of the four motifs of the Christian legend, only the desecration of Muhammad’s corpse appears to be unattested in the early Muslim Tradition.

Muhammad’s ascension after his death in the Muslim Tradition

The origins of the first motif of the story, Muhammad’s foretelling of his own resurrection, are beyond doubt: Christian polemicists borrowed it from the Muslim Tradition. A comparison of two texts will show this. The first is Christian: “Furthermore, even more hideous and revolting than this was that he (Muhammad) used to say to them in his life and enjoined them [that] when he died they should not bury him because he would ascend to heaven as Christ, Lord of the World, ascended, and that he was so precious to God that He would not leave him on the earth for more than three days” (wa-annahu akramu ‘alā llāhi min an yatrukahu ‘alā l-ardi akthara min thalāthati ayyām), so begins the story in the Apology of al-Kindī. The second text is Muslim: “I am so precious to God that He will not leave me in the earth after three (days)” (anā akramu

‘alā llāhi min an yatrukanī fī l-ardī ba’da thalāth), said Muhammad according to a rare hadīth. Although the Christian and the Muslim traditions differ in the timing of the anticipated ascension, the former putting it before the burial (“on the earth”), and the latter after it (“in the earth”), such a close correspondence in both content and wording can hardly be accidental. The author of the Apology clearly refers to a version of this hadīth.

It would be interesting to trace the transmission history of the hadīth in order to learn when and where it circulated, and thus to gain a better understanding of its relationship with the Apology, but I was unable to recover it. The hadīth is attested only in a few relatively late writings; none of them quotes it with an isnād. The oldest surviving works which mention it were written by the Imām al-Karādji (d. 449/1057), and two Sunnis, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Duwaynī (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). Al-Duwaynī ascribes it to Abū ‘Alī al-Sindjī, a scholar of the previous generation, and says that it was related also with the phrase “more than two days (akthara min yawmayn).” Al-Rāfi‘ī (d. 623/1226) also cites the hadīth in his al-Sharḥ al-

63 See Karādji, Kanz al-fawā‘id, vol. 2, p. 140; Djuwaynī, Nihāyat al-matlab, vol. 3, p. 66; Ghazālī, al-Durra l-fākhira, p. 42. The tradition is attested in several variants, without significantly changing the meaning: sometimes ‘inda (“in the eyes of”) is read instead of ‘alā, rabbī (“my Lord”) instead of allāh, yada’anī (“leaves me”) instead of yatrukanī, and qabrī (“my tomb”) instead of al-ard. Al-Ghazālī’s interpretation of ba’da thalāth as “after three decades” is clearly secondary. As other related traditions, quoted below, explicitly refer to days—two days, forty days, and half a day—there is no reason to look for other meanings. Moreover, ba’da thalāth is attested in the sense of “after three days” in another context (see below).

64 See previous note.

65 He died in the 430s (1038 AD or later); see, for example, Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt, vol. 2, p. 115.
The authors of later compilations about the traditions in *al-Sharḥ al-kabīr*, al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401) and Ibn Ḥadjar (d. 852/1449), unsuccessfully tried to trace its *isnād*. They could only refer to the ḥadīth in older works; the earliest scholar named in this connection is al-Aẓrāqī, possibly Aḥmad b. Muḥḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Aẓrāqī (d. 222/837) who is best known as the main source of his grandson’s *Akhbār Makka*. All we can conclude from the information they give is that the tradition once circulated in at least two versions, and was possibly known in the early ninth century.

There are further ḥadīths (I will call them “ascension traditions”) that corroborate an early Muslim belief in Muhammad’s ascension to heaven after his death and show that it existed already in the mid-eighth century. They clearly express the same belief as the

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67 See Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *al-Badr al-munīr*, vol. 5, pp. 283-292; and Ibn Ḥadjar, *Talkhīs al-ḥabīr*, vol. 2, p. 293-294. The work of al-Zarkashī is lost or has not been printed yet, but his remarks on the ḥadīth are quoted in Suṣūṭī, *al-Laʾālī l-maṣnūʿa*, vol. 1, p. 285. Ibn al-Mulaqqin refers, without name, to a fourteenth century author of a work on the prophets’ lives in their graves as mentioning the ḥadīth, also without an isnād (wa-dhakarahu baʾdu man ad raknahu... fa-lam yaʿzuhu); see *al-Badr al-munīr*, vol. 5, p. 283. Even later authors, such as al-Suṣūṭī or al-Zurqīnī, refer to the ḥadīth, but they merely reiterate what the earlier ones said.


69 Two more traditions, expressed in words very similar to this, but related to eschatology also occur: “I am so precious to God that He will not leave me in the earth for a thousand years” (*anā ʿakramu ʿalā ʿllāhi min an yatrukanī fī l-turābi ʿām*), and “I am so precious to God that He will not leave me under the earth for two hundred years” (*anā ʿakramu ʿalā ʿllāhi min an yadaʿanī tahта l-ardī miʿatay ʿām*) (see Ṣaghānī, *Mawdūʿ āt*, p. 44; ‘Adjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʿ*, vol. 1, p. 161 and p. 231; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, vol. 5, p. 66). Both are rejected as forgeries.
anā akram tradition, but differ in significant details. All of them refer to the ascension of
prophets in general to heaven, not specifically to Muhammad’s. It is, however, likely that
early Muslims circulated these ḥadīths out of interest in Muhammad’s, and not an earlier
prophet’s, postmortem fate. On the one hand, the contexts in which some of the ascension
traditions are quoted directly connect them to Muhammad’s destiny; on the other hand,
many other ḥadīths that make general statements about prophets are clearly intended to
say something primarily about Muhammad.\(^70\) Their wording shows less resemblance to
the Christian texts. Not all of them speak about ascension to heaven three days after
death: according to some of them, the ascension took place after forty days (one variant
does not specify the time the prophets remain in the grave). Instead of having
Muhammad speak in the first person, they are ascribed to later generations of Muslims.
But the ascension traditions are somewhat better documented than the anā akram
tradition, insofar as they are at least quoted with isnāds. Although all except one are
attested with a single isnād which limits the extent to which their transmission history can
be reconstructed, some of it can be traced with certainty.

“It is well-known,” says Ibn al-Mulaqqin in his discussion of the anā akram
tradition in al-Badr al-munīr, “that the wall of the Prophet's tomb collapsed during the
caliphate of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān and the governorship of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd
al-‘Azīz over Medina, [and] a foot appeared to them. They dreaded that it might be the

\(^70\) Compare, for example, the following ḥadīths, “Each and every prophet tended sheep” (mā min
nabiyyin illā qad ra‘ā l-ghanam), “No prophet dies until he is given the choice [between this
world and the hereafter]” (mā min nabiyyin yamūtu hattā yakhayyar), and “No prophet is buried
except where he dies” (mā iwayfā l-lāhu nabiyyan qaṭṭu illā dafīna ḥaythu tuqbaḍu rūḥu) in
Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 1/1, pp. 79-80; vol. 2/2, pp. 28, and 71.
foot of the Messenger of God. Its matter appalled them, and they were overcome with fear, until Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab related to them, ‘The corpses of the prophets, may God bless them, do not remain in the earth more than forty days, then they ascend.’ Sālim b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb also came, and recognized in it the foot of his grandfather, ‘Umar.’ As far as I know, this is the only version of the story about Muhammad’s collapsed tomb interwoven with an ascension tradition; it is clearly a composite of the two different stories. It is not the only version of ascension traditions connected to Muhammad’s presence in his grave, however. Two further variants are attributed to Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab who utters them, disapprovingly, when he observes people visiting Muhammad’s tomb. “Prophets possessing fortitude do not stay [in the earth] beyond forty days before they ascend [to heaven]; the Prophet of God did not stay in the earth longer than forty days before he ascended,” said Sa‘īd according to one of these. “No prophet remains in the earth for more than forty days,” he said according to the other. A very similar variant of the last one appears, without connection to

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73 I found the only reference to this one in Samhūdī (d. 911/1506), Khulāṣat al-wafāʾ, vol. 1, pp. 115-116 (innahu lā yabqā nabiyyun min ulī l-ʿazmi fawqa arbaʿīna laylatan hattā yurfaʾ inna nabiyya llāhi lam yabqa fī l-arḍī fawqa arbaʿīna laylatan hattā rūfīʿa). The expression “possessing fortitude” is borrowed from Qur’ān 46:35. This tradition thus restricts the number of prophets who ascended to heaven forty days after their death. Opinions vary how many and which prophets were “possessing fortitude,” ranging from all of them to only a handful, but the lists always end with Muhammad. See, for example, Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, vol. 26, p. 37; Thaʿlabī, Tafsīr, vol. 9, pp. 24-26. I am grateful for the Qur’ānic reference to Professor Michael Cook.

74 The earliest quotation of this one is ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), Muṣannaf, vol. 3, p. 383 (mā makatha nabiyyun fī l-arḍī akthara min arbaʿīna yawman).
Muhammad’s grave or the pilgrimage to it, in al-Bayhaqi’s (d. 458/1066) Kitāb mā warada fī ḥayāt al-anbiyā’ ba’da wafātihim. All four versions are associated with Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab, a famous Medinan scholar of the late seventh and early eighth century.

If we trusted the attribution of these sayings to Saʿīd, possibly their only common link, we could conclude with certainty that in the late seventh or early eighth century some Muslims, at least in Medina, believed that Muhammad had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. We should not, however, rush to ascribe this opinion to Saʿīd, since elsewhere he is said to have held that Muhammad lives not in heaven, but in his grave.

Even if the attribution of the ascension ḥadīths to Saʿīd is apocryphal, their circulation can still be dated as early as the mid-eighth century because al-Bayhaqi says that his version was included in the Djāmiʿ of Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778). Whichever of Sufyān’s Djāmiʿs al-Bayhaqi meant (he wrote a large and a small one), it is lost today, but there is no reason to doubt al-Bayhaqi’s statement. As Sufyān al-Thawrī was a Kūfan scholar, the ḥadīth must have circulated in Kūfa. Its association with the town is strengthened by the two traditionists mentioned in the isnād of other versions as

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75 Bayhaqi, Hayāt al-anbiyāʾ (1990 ed.), pp. 29-30; idem, Ḥayāt al-anbiyāʾ (1993 ed.), pp. 76-77 (“No prophet remains in his grave for more than forty days before he ascends,” mā makatha nabiyyun fī qabrihi akthara min arbaʿīna laylatan ḥattā yurfaʾ). The earlier edition’s fī qabr instead of fī qabrihi must be a typographical error.

76 The isnād of the first is Sufyān al-Thawrī, an unnamed shaykh, and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab; of the second, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Abū l-Miqdām, and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab. Al-Samhūdī does not give the full isnād, but attributes his account to al-Minhāl b. ‘Amr (“From al-Minhāl b. ‘Amr [who said], ‘I was beside Umm Salama’s room with Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab… Saʿīd said…’”). Ibn al-Mulaqīn does not name any transmitters.

77 It is related that Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab heard the adhān, or the noise of somebody praying, or mumbling (hamhama) inside Muhammad’s tomb during the battle of the Ḥarra (63/683); see Dārimī, Sunan, vol. 1, pp 227-228; Abū Nuʿaym, Dalāʾīl al-nubuwwa, p. 496; and Ibn Saʿd, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 5, pp. 97-98.

transmitting from Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, Abū l-Miqdām and al-Minhāl b. ‘Amr. Both of them were Kūfans.79

As we saw, the earliest transmitter mentioned in connection with these four ascension traditions is Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, a Successor, although their attribution to him is dubious. I found only one Sunnī hadīth expressing the same idea with a fuller isnād. “The prophets are not left in their graves after forty nights, but are praying before God, may He be exalted and glorified, until the horn is blown,” said Muhammad according to a tradition quoted in al-Bayhaqī’s tract.80 Its first transmitter is said to have been Anas b. Mālik, Muhammad’s servant, who later settled in Baṣra, the second Thābit al-Bunānī (Baṣran, d. 120s/740s), and the third Ibn Abī Laylā (Kūfan, d. 148/765f.).81 Since this is the only known isnād of the tradition,82 its origins cannot be identified with any certainty.83 Still, Ibn Abī Laylā belonged to the same generation of Kūfan scholars as

79 On Abū l-Miqdām al-Ḥaddād, Thābit b. Hurmuz, Kūfan as Sufyān (dates unknown), and on al-Minhāl b. ‘Amr al-Asadī, also a Kūfan (dates are also unknown), see Mizzī, Tahdīh al-kamāl, vol. 4, pp. 380-381, and vol. 28, pp. 568-572.

80 See Bayhaqī, Ḥayāt al-anbiyāʾ (1990 ed.), p. 29 (al-anbiyāʾu lā yutrakāna fi qubūrihim ba’da arbaʿina laylatan wa-lākinnahum yuṣṣallīna bayna yadayi ilāhi ‘azza wa-djalla ḥattā yunfaḵhu fī l-sūr).

81 For Ibn Abī Laylā see p. 37, n. 68; for Thābit b. Aslam al-Bunānī, Abū Muḥammad al-Baṣrī, see Mizzī, Tahdīh al-kamāl, vol. 4, pp. 342-349. The identity of the fourth transmitter, Ismā’il b. Ṭalḥa b. Yazīd, might also be relevant, but I was unable to identify him.

82 The only author who may have quoted the hadīth independently from al-Bayhaqī is al-Daylamī (see Firdaws, vol. 1, p. 222), but he ascribes it only to Anas b. Mālik, omitting the full isnād. Later authors always quote the hadīth from al-Bayhaqī.

83 Another similar tradition, “No prophet dies and remains in his tomb except for forty days” (mā min nabiyyin yamūtu fa-yuṣṣīmu fi qabrihi illā arbaʿina šabāhan), is attested in a tenth-century and an eleventh-century work, but the latter adds, “until his spirit is returned to him” (ḥattā yuraddu ilayhi rūḥuhu), fundamentally changing the meaning. Since the early transmitters in the isnād are identical in both cases, it is impossible to decide which version is the original. For this hadīth, see Abū Nu‘aym, Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ (with typographical errors), vol. 8, p. 333; and Ibn Ḥībān, Kitāb al-madjrūḥīn, vol. 1, p. 285.
Sufyān al-Thawrī which supports the link of the ascension traditions to eighth century Kūfa.

Since only four additional ascension traditions are attested, two Sunnī and two Imāmī ones, it is worth quoting all of them here. One of them is connected to Kūfa, like the previously cited ones, while the transmission history of the rest cannot be reconstructed. One of the two Sunnī ascension traditions is a variant of Anas b. Mālik’s hadīth which extends the privilege of early ascension to heaven to more groups of people and leaves the number of days to be spent in the grave unspecified. It is quoted in Daylamī’s Firdaws: “Ten [groups of people] are not left in their graves, but are praying before God, may He be exalted and glorified, until the horn is blown: the prophets, the martyrs, those who call to prayer, those who obey [the call to prayer], the one who dies on the way to Mecca, the woman who dies in childbirth, those who repent their sins, the one who serves the Muslims in obedience to God, may He be exalted and glorified, those who pray at night while people are asleep, and those who have mercy on the poor of my community.” Its transmission history cannot be reconstructed. The other Sunnī saying, “God does not leave a prophet in his grave for more than half a day” was cited by the


85 The hadīth is ascribed to ‘Abdallāh b. Dja’far (b. Abī Ṭālib); according to the footnote, another manuscript attributes it to ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Dja’far (ibid.). None of this helps to trace the origins of the tradition.
Hanbalî Abû 'l-Hasan Ibn al-Zâghûnî (d. 527/1132), but I was unable to trace further information about it. Al-Shawkânî (d. 1255/1839) might have been familiar with other variants of the ascension traditions too; he refers to them in one of his works, and his wording is different from other authors. Perhaps further Sunnî traditions of this kind also circulated once, but were subsequently forgotten.

An Imâmî hadîth, “No prophet or legatee remains in the earth for more than three days before he ascends to heaven in his spirit, his bones and his flesh…,” ascribed to the sixth imâm, Dja’far al-Šâdiq (d. 148/765), appears in four late ninth- and tenth-century writings, with identical isnâds. The two earliest transmitters, Ziyâd b. Abî l-Ḫalâl and ‘Alî b. al-Ḥakam, were both Kûfâns, providing further support for the circulation of the hadîth in Kûfa in the late eighth and early ninth century. Another Imâmî hadîth, also attributed to Dja’far al-Šâdiq, claims that “the corpse of a prophet or of a prophet’s

86 So it is said in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hâdî, al-Šârim al-munkû, p. 273, and in Suyûṭî, al-La‘âli’i l-masnû’a, vol 1, p. 285 (inna ilaâha lâ yatruku nabiyyan fi qabrîhi akthara min nisîf yawmîn). Ibn al-Zâghûnî’s İdâh (apparently his only work published so far) does not contain the tradition.

87 Shawkânî, Nayl al-awtâr, vol. 5, p. 178 (“… it has come down that the prophets are not left in their graves beyond three [days], and it was also related [with the wording] beyond forty [days]”) (qad warada anna l-anbiyâ’â lâ yutrakûna fi qubûrihûna fawqa thalâthin wa-ruwiya fawqa arba’în). Only al-Samhûdî quotes an ascension tradition with fawqa arba’îna instead of the usual ba’darba’îna (see above); the phrase fawqa thalâthin does not occur elsewhere.

legatee does not remain in the earth for more than forty days.” The information I found about its early transmitters is insufficient and cannot support any conclusions about its circulation.

Although only a small corpus, the ascension traditions indicate a belief in Muhammad’s ascension to heaven after his death in some circles in pre-classical Islam. The isnāds point to Kūfa as a place where this belief might have been more widely accepted than elsewhere, but the available information is too scarce to associate it exclusively with this city. The bulk of all recorded Muslim traditions are of Kūfan, Baṣran and Medinan provenance. Therefore, while the isnād pattern of the ascension traditions might be understood as evidence that the belief in Muhammad’s ascension to heaven was held by more Muslims in Kūfa than in Baṣra or in Medina, it does not say anything about its diffusion in other regions of the Islamic world. The dating of the ascension traditions is similarly problematic. On the basis of the isnāds, we can be fairly certain that such a belief was held in the middle of the eighth century, but it is hardly possible to trace when it first appeared, or how long it continued to be accepted, and just how popular it was at any time. With so many eighth-century works lost today, it could have been more widespread than it now seems to us.

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89 See Ṭūsī, *Tahdhib al-ahkām*, vol. 6, p. 118 (lā tamkuthu djuthhatu nabiyyin wa-lā waṣṭyyi nabiyyin fī l-arḍi akthara min arba’īna yawm).

90 The first transmitter, ‘Aṭiyya l-Abzārī, is listed among the disciples of Dja’far al-Ṣādiq (see Ṭūsī, *Ridjāl*, p. 260). I was unable to trace any information about ‘Amr b. Ziyād, the second transmitter. The third is referred to as al-‘Alā’ b. Yahyā, brother of Mughallis; he is Kūfan, if he is identical with al-‘Alā b. Yahyā l-Makfūf in Nadjāshī, *Ridjāl*, vol. 2, p. 154.

91 The terror that seized ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz when he thought that he saw Muhammad’s foot behind the collapsed wall of his grave might also be related to this belief. Even though only one
The ideas expressed in the ascension traditions resemble the Christian stories about Muhammad’s expected resurrection and ascension to heaven. The anā akram tradition was directly quoted by the author of the Apology of al-Kindī. There is, however, a crucial difference: according to the Muslim traditions the resurrection and the ascension were supposed to happen after burial, while according to the Christian stories they were meant to take place without burial and eventually failed to do so. Were it only for the ascension traditions it could be argued that the Christian legend of Muhammad’s death originated as the rejection of the eighth-century Muslim belief, a Christian attempt to show that Jesus was superior to Muhammad. There circulated, however, further hadīths that the Christians drew on when constructing their account of Muhammad’s death.

Muhammad’s belated burial in the Muslim Tradition

According to Ibn Hishām, Muhammad died in the late morning of a Monday in Rabī‘ al-Awwal, and was buried “in the middle of the night of Wednesday,”92 that is, on Tuesday night, according to our reckoning of time. Muslim Tradition, both Sunnī and Imāmī, agrees about the day of the week of Muhammad’s death, but is divided over the day of his burial. Some Sunnī hadīths claim that Muhammad was interred yawma l-thulāthā’ (between the sunsets of Monday and Tuesday), while other Sunnī and apparently all Shī‘ī hadīths maintain that it happened yawma l-arbi‘ā’ (between the sunsets of Tuesday and Wednesday).

version connects Muhammad’s ascension to the story, the question remains as to why ‘Umar would be awed to see Muhammad’s foot, but calm down when told it was ‘Umar’s, unless the former was not supposed to be in the grave at all.

92 Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra l-nabawiyya, vol. 1/2, pp. 1009-1011, p. 1020 (wasāṭa l-layli laylata l-arbi‘ā’ or djawfa l-layli min laylati l-arbi‘ā’).
There circulated at least one tradition placing Muhammad’s burial *yawma l-khamīs* (between the sunsets of Wednesday and Thursday). Traditions further vary with regard to the time of the day when Muhammad was interred.

The first two opinions are both attested in the middle of the eighth century; although the *yawma l-arbi‘ār* tradition seems to have gained wider currency by that time, the other one was also known. Muhammad b. Ishāq (d. ca. 150/767) is a firmly supported common link in the isnāds of the *yawma l-arbi‘ār* tradition; several traditionists transmitted it from him. An older common link, Makhlūl al-Shāmī (d. 112-118/730-737), supported by two transmitters from him, makes it likely that the *yawma l-arbi‘ār* tradition circulated in Syria already in the first decades of the eighth century or earlier. I did not find a similarly old common link for the *yawma l-thulāthār* tradition.

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94 Al-Diyārbakrī, the only biographer of Muhammad who mentions the tradition, quotes it from the *Tafsīr al-Zāhidī* and the *Kanz al-‘ibād*, two thirteenth-century works (see Diyārbakrī, *Ta’rīkh al-khamīs*, vol. 2, p. 172), if indeed the author of the first is Mukhtār b. Maḥmūd al-Ghażmīnī l-Zāhidī (d. 658/1259). I did not find any *tafsīr* attributed to him.

95 See the remarks of Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, vol. 5, pp. 205-206. In addition to Ibn Ishāq, he refers to Sulaymān al-Taymī, Dja’far al-Sa’dīq and Mūsā b. Uṣba by name as deciding for *yawma l-arbi‘ār*, and mentions al-Awzā’ī and Sufyān al-Thawrī as holding the other opinion.

96 Most versions mention Ibn Ishāq as their transmitter. For these, see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra l-nabawīyya*, vol. 1/2, p. 1020; Balādāhrī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (1877), vol. 1, p. 657, pp. 661-662; Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 1/4, pp. 1832-1833, p. 1837; and elsewhere.

97 Abū ‘Abdallāh Makhlūl al-Shāmī, a Damascene transmitter who died three or four decades earlier than Ibn Ishāq (ca. 112-118/730-737). Ibn Kathīr and al-Balādāhrī give two *yawma l-arbi‘ār* traditions. Makhlūl is their oldest transmitter and their only common link. For the first
but it cannot be excluded that it was disseminated just as early as its rival. I could not trace the origins of the *yawma l-khamīs* tradition.

A small group of Iraqi traditions claiming that Muhammad was interred only when the decomposition of his corpse became visible appears to correspond to a later day of burial. According to a Kūfan *ḥadīth*, by the time Muhammad’s body was committed to earth, its color had changed. According to another Kūfan tradition, Muhammad was interred only when “death was apparent on him,” and his fingernails turned greenish. Still another Kūfan tradition claims that by the time of Muhammad’s burial his corpse was bloated and his little finger bent. A Baṣran *ḥadīth* similarly mentions the commencement of bloating before burial. Finally, a Kūfan *ḥadīth* begins as follows, “when the Prophet died, Abū Bakr was absent, and he came after three (days). No one

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98 See Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (1987), vol. 1, p. 568 (dusīna *yawma l-thulāthā’i ħīna zāghati l-shamsu wa-taghayyara lawnuhū). On its sole recorded transmitter, Abū Mikhnaf (d. 154/774), see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (4).” Not all editions of the *Ansāb al-ashrāf* contain the last phrase. In the one published in Damascus in 1996, the words are missing from the main text, and the editor explains in the footnote that the phrase is effaced in the manuscript “because nobody transmitted that” (see Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* [1996], vol. 1, p. 657, n. 4).


100 See Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 58-59 (turīka rasūlu llāhi ba’dā wasfātihi yawman wa-laylatan ḥattā rabā qamīṣuḥu wa-ru’iya fi khinṣirihi nthinā’). For the transmitters see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (1).”

101 See Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 56-57 (lammā qubiḍa rasūlu llāhi ’tamara ashābuhu fa-qālū tarabbāṣī bi-nabīyyikum la’allahu ‘uridja bihi [qāla] fa-tarabbāṣī bihi ḥattā rabā baṭnuḥu). For the transmitters see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (2).”
dared to uncover his face until his abdomen became ashen-colored. Abū Bakr uncovered his face…”

The oldest transmitter named in the isnāds of the foregoing traditions is ʿAbdallāh al-Bahī who probably died in the late seventh or the early eighth century. The earliest transmitters mentioned in three others died in the early eighth century: Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʾī (d. ca. 96/714), al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad (a grandson of Abū Bakr; d. ca. 101-112/719-731), and al-Ḥasan al-บาșرī (d. 110/728). The fifth tradition is ascribed solely to Abū Mikhnaf (d. 154/774). That none of the isnāds goes back to a supposed eyewitness is trust-inspiring. The earliest traditionists mentioned, or at least most of them, probably indeed transmitted these ḥadīths, thus indicating a circulation of these narratives in Iraq by the beginning of the eighth century or earlier.

The contents of these Muslim traditions resemble the Christian legend of Muhammad’s death. Both mention that Muhammad’s burial took place on the third day following his death, and that during this time his followers were anxiously waiting for

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102 See Ṭabarī, Taʿrīkh, vol. 1/4, p. 1817 (lammā qubiḍa l-nabiyyu kāna abū bakrin ghāʾib iḥran fa-djāʾa baʾda thalāthīnu wa-lam yadjarīʾaḥadun an yakshīfaʾan wadḥīhi ḥattā rbadda baṭnuhu fa-kashaṭaʿan wadḥihi). I am not sure why Ṭabarī, History (trans. Poonawala), p. 185 translates ʾbaṭn as “exterior,” and interprets baʾda thalāth as referring to hours. In view of the context and the ḥadīths quoted above, it seems more likely that the expression refers to days. See also Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd who had no doubt that al-Ṭabarī’s baʾda thalāth here means “after three days” (see his Sharḥ, vol. 13, pp. 35-37). For the transmitters see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (3).”

103 For the details, see For the transmitters see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions.”

104 For references and the rest of the traditionists, see above.

105 Al-Ṭabarī, when summarizing the two opinions about the day of Muhammad’s burial, contrasts the view that he was buried yawma l-thulāthāʾ with the one that “he was buried three days after his death” (dufīna baʾda wafāṭīhi bi-thalāṭīthi ayyām), clearly referring to the yawma l-arbiʿāʾ tradition (Taʿrīkh, vol. 1/4, p. 1830). Al-Fasawī also quotes a tradition according to
something to happen. Both claim that when Muhammad was finally interred, his body was in the process of decomposition. The Christian legend therefore did not invent, but borrowed from a Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death both the outline of events (the delayed burial and the putrefied corpse) and part of the explanation for it (from the *anā akram* tradition). These *ḥadīths*, however, each contain only one motif of the Christian narrative. Another Muslim tradition, a version of the story about ‘Umar’s denial of Muhammad’s death, presupposes a conjunction of several elements that also occur in the Christian legend.

After Muhammad’s death, says Ibn Hishām, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb addressed the Muslims and denied Muhammad’s death. He accused of hypocrisy those who claimed that Muhammad had died, and threatened them with severe punishment after Muhammad would return. He compared the situation to the story of Exodus 32, and asserted that Muhammad “has gone to his Lord as Mūsā b. ‘Imrān went and was hidden from his people for forty days, returning to them after it was said that he had died. By God, the apostle will return as Moses returned…” While ‘Umar was speaking, Abū Bakr arrived and immediately proceeded to the house of ‘Ā’isha to ascertain whether Muhammad had died. He then tried to draw ‘Umar aside, but the latter would not listen to him. Abū Bakr nevertheless commenced his own speech. The Muslims, says Ibn Hishām, immediately came to listen to him, “People! If anyone worshiped Muhammad, Muhammad is dead; if

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which Muhammad “remained for three days without burial” (*makatha thalāthata ayyāmin lā yudfan*) (*Ma’rifa*, vol. 3, pp. 289-290). Some did not agree with calculating the period from *yawma l-ihnayn* to *yawma l-arbi’ā’* as three days. Ibn Kathīr rejected this part of the tradition with indignation, adding that the right expression is that “he remained [unburied] for the rest of *yawma l-ithnayn*, the entire *yawma l-thulāthā’,* and was buried on the night of *yawma l-arbi’ā’.*"
anyone worshiped God, God is alive, does not die.” He then recited a passage from the Qur’an, “Muhammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? If any man should turn about on his heels, he will not harm God in any way; and God will recompense the thankful.” According to Ibn Hishām, the Muslims reacted as if they had never before heard this passage.

Several versions of the ‘Umar story appear in biographies of Muhammad and ḥadīth collections. The protagonists of most versions are ‘Umar and Abū Bakr. The speech of both men is heavily couched in Qur’ānic idioms, and Abū Bakr quotes Qur’ānic passages to prove that Muhammad had to die like any other man. The story, as told by Ibn Hishām, creates the impression that ‘Umar alone believed that Muhammad did not die, and that his attempt to convince other Muslims about this was nipped in the bud by Abū Bakr who arrived at an opportune moment. Most versions paint a similar picture; at least one version, however, presents the events differently. In it, ‘Umar does not act alone, but rather with many Muslims sharing his opinion.

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106 Qur’ān 3:144 (Arberry’s translation).

107 Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra l-nabawiyya, vol. 1/2, pp. 1012-1013 (dḥahaba ilā rabbihī kāmā dḥahaba mūsā bnu ‘imrān fa-qad ghāba ‘an qawmihī arba ḫiṣnayyīn lā thumma radja’a ilayhim ba’dā an qīla qad māta wa-wa-lāhī la-yardji’anna rasūlu llāhī kāmā radja’a mūsā, and ayyuhā l-nās innahu man kāna ya’budu muḥammadan fa-inna muḥammadan qad māta wa-man kāna ya’budu llāhī fa-inna llāhī hayyīn lā yamūt); translations from Guillaume, The Life of Muḥammad, pp. 682-683 (modified).


In this version of the story, it is ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib who opposes ‘Umar. His speech differs strikingly from that of Abū Bakr. It alludes to a prolonged disagreement over the burial of Muhammad, the distressing physical symptom of his death, and the expectation of Muhammad’s resurrection among the Muslims. ‘Abbās says, arguing against ‘Umar,\(^{110}\)

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inna rasūla llāhi qad māta wa-īnahu la-bashar wa-īnahu ya’sinu kamā ya’sinu l-bashar ay qawmu fa-’dfinū šāhibakum fa-īnahu akramu ‘alā llāhi min an yumītahu imātattayn a-yumītuhu aḥadakum imātatan wa-yumītuhu in yatayn huwa akramu ‘alā llāhi min dhālika ay qawmu fa-’dfinū šāhibakum fa-in yaku kamā taqtilūna fa-laysya yu’dhabu ‘alā llāhi an yandjutha ’anhu l-tarāb inna rasūla llāhi wa-lāhi mā māta ḥattā ṭaraq l-sabīla nadjhan wādiḥan fa-aḥalla l-hālāla wa-harrama l-ḥarāma wa-wakha ṭaṣṣaqa wa-hāraba wa-sālama... ay qawmu fa-’dfinū šāhibakum
\]

The Messenger of God has died. He is a mortal, and, as it is with mortals, his odor changes. People, bury your Master. He is so precious to God that He will not let him die twice. Would He let you die once, him twice? He is too precious to God for that. People, bury your Master. If it is indeed as you say nothing can prevent God from digging him up from the earth. By God, the Messenger of God did not die until he left the path plain and clear, allowed the lawful and prohibited the unlawful, married and divorced, warred and made peace. . . People, bury your Master.

On the basis of its isnāds, the ḥadīth probably circulated in Baṣra, in the middle of the eighth century at the latest.\(^{111}\) ‘Abbās’s speech in this ḥadīth assumes an expectation of

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\(^{110}\) Ibn Manzūr, Mukhtasar, vol. 2, pp. 385-386. The sections on Muhammad’s death are missing from Shīrī’s edition of Ibn ‘Asākir’s Ta’rīkh madinat Dimashq (since they are missing from all the extant manuscripts; see vol. 4, p. 394). For other variants of the ḥadīth, see ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Muṣannaf, vol. 5, pp. 300-301; Ibn Sa’d, Taḥaqāt, vol. 2/2, pp. 53-54; Dārīmī, Sunan, vol. 1, pp. 220-222; and Balāḏurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf (1996), vol. 1, p. 567; ibid. (1987), vol. 1, pp. 655-656 (this edition replaces al-‘Abbās with Ibn ‘Abbās). Although much later than the others, I chose to translate Ibn Manzūr’s text, because it contains the same ideas as other longer versions of the ḥadīth, and presents them in a more logical order.

\(^{111}\) Ibn Manzūr does not give a full isnād, only attributes the ḥadīth to the Medinan ‘Ikrima (d. ca. 105/723f.). ‘Abd al-Razzāq has Abū Bakr Ayyūb b. Abī Tamīma l-Sakhtiyānī (Baṣran, d.
Muhammad’s resurrection on the part of ‘Umar and other Muslims instead of a mere denial of Muhammad’s death. If it assumed only Muhammad’s death it would not argue that God would not allow his Prophet die twice.

A few unique traditions similarly hint that disbelief in Muhammad’s death was rampant in the Muslim community. A Medinan tradition depicts the Muslim community as divided into two parties over the question whether Muhammad had died or not.\footnote{Ibn Sa’d, \textit{Ṭabaqāt}, vol. 2/2, p. 57 (akhbaranā muhammadu bnu ‘umar haddathani l-qāsimu bnu ishāqa ‘an ummihi ‘an abihi l-qāsimi bni muhammadā bni abi bakrīn aw ‘an ummi mu‘āwiya annahu lammā shukka fi mawti l-nabīyyî qa‘la ba‘duhum màta wa-qāla ba‘duhum lam yamut...). The only Umm Mu‘āwiya I found is Hind b. ‘Utba b. Rabī‘a who would be a rather unlikely transmitter in this isnād. The other first transmitter is al-Qāsim b. Muhammad b. Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddiq al-Qurashi l-Taymī, Abū Muḥammad (Medinan, d. ca. 10117/719-736), followed by his daughter, Umm Ḥakīm; then by her son, al-Qāsim b. Ishaq b. ‘Abdallāh b. Dja‘far b. Abī Tālib; and finally by al-Waqīdī. About Hind, see Fr. Buhl, “Hind bint ‘Utba,” \textit{EI} 3: 455; and about al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad and al-Waqīdī, see above. I found Umm Ḥakīm bt. al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and his son mentioned in Ibn Qutayba, \textit{Ma‘arif}, p. 208. He does not give any date or place. Ṭūṣī, \textit{Ridjāl}, p. 271 lists al-Qāsim b. Ishaq as a Medinan disciple of Dja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765).}

According to a Baṣran hadīth, when Muhammad died, his Companions (aṣḥābuhu) assembled and decided to wait with the burial because “perhaps he ascended” (\textit{la’allahu

\textit{al-ḥaqq al-ṣīnānī}) as the third transmitter instead of Ma‘mar, and after Hammād they ascribe the transmission to three different traditionists, respectively: Abū l-Nu‘mān Muḥammad (‘Ārim) b. al-Faḍl al-Sadūsī (Baṣran, d. 223-224/837-839); Abū Ayyūb Sulaymān b. Ḥarb al-Azḍī l-Wāshiḥī (Baṣran, d. ca. 223-227/837-842); and a certain Zayd b. Yahyā l-Annāʾī. Al-Balādhurī has Abū Zayd ‘Umar b. Shabba l-Numayrī (Baṣran, d. 262/876) as the last transmitter, and inserts Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687f.) as the first transmitter before ‘Ikrima, surely an instance of the backward growth of isnāds. For ‘Ikrima and Ibn ‘Abbās, see J. Schacht, “Ikrima,” and L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās,” \textit{EI} 3: 1081-1082 and vol. 1, pp. 40-41. For the other transmitters, see Mizzi, \textit{Tahdīḥ al-kamāl}, vol. 3, pp. 457-464 (Ayyūb); vol. 27, pp. 303-312 (Ma‘mar); vol. 7, pp. 239-252 (Hammād); vol. 26, pp. 287-292 (Muhammad); vol. 11, pp. 384-393 (Sulaymān); and vol. 21, pp. 386-390 (‘Umar). I did not find any biography of Zayd b. Yahyā l-Annāʾī, but he is listed in Mizzi’s biography of ‘Umar b. Shabba as one of the traditionists from whom the latter transmitted (see ibid., vol. 21, p. 387).
According to another tradition, ‘Uthmān also asserted that Muhammad did not die. Unlike ‘Umar, however, ‘Uthmān claimed that Muhammad had ascended to heaven just as Jesus did (*rufi‘a kamā rufi‘a ‘Īsā bnu Maryam)*. According to still another (possibly Medinan) ḥadīth, “the people” (*al-nās*) denied that Muhammad died, and they believed that he temporarily ascended to heaven like Jesus (*rufi‘a kamā rufi‘a ‘Īsā bnu Maryam*). These people, claims the tradition, threatened those who claimed that Muhammad had died, and demanded that Muhammad not be buried.

### Conclusion

Demonstrating that the Christian narratives about Muhammad’s death, which deviate from the classical Muslim Tradition, originated in the preclassical phase of Islam is fairly novel in the study of Christian polemic against Islam. Scholars have for centuries considered the Christian stories of Muhammad’s death malicious inventions, with no basis in the Muslim Tradition. Similar opinions were expressed about other polemical

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113 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 57; for the full text see above. The Companions presumably believed that Muhammad might have ascended to heaven in spirit.

114 Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf* (1987), vol. 1, p. 655. The ḥadīth is ascribed to al-Wāqidī (*warawā l-wāqidīyyu fi isnādin lahu*). I did not find it with a more detailed isnād. ‘Uthmān, like the Companions of the previous tradition, must also have believed that the ascension took place in spirit.

115 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 57. The first transmitter is Abū Salama b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf al-Qurashī l-Zuhrī (Medinan, d. ca. 94-104/712-723); followed by Zayd b. Abī ‘Attāb (n.d.); then the unknown Maslama b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr; and al-Wāqidī. For the first two transmitters, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 33, pp. 370-376; vol. 10, pp. 85-89; for Maslama, see Ibn Ḥadjar, *Lisān al-mīzān*, vol. 6, p. 715; and for al-Wāqidī, see above.
narratives that contradicted the Muslim Tradition as we know it from classical Muslim writings. Edward Gibbon, for instance, called one “an absurd calumny of the Greeks.”

Despite such a deep and long-held mistrust of Christian polemical texts, we can conclude on the basis of the previous pages that the Christians did not invent most motifs of the Christian legend of Muhammad’s death—they were present in the Muslim Tradition in the early eighth century. The creativity required of the Christians in developing the story amounted to hardly more than connecting the available motifs to each other. Even this might not have been necessary; countless hadīths, once well known, must be lost today, and among them might have been a story more similar to the Christian legend. Indeed, most of the relevant Muslim traditions are poorly attested and were it not for the extensive collection of hadīths about Muhammad’s death in Ibn Sa‘d’s Ṭabaqāt, most traditions describing its widespread denial in the Muslim community and the state of the corpse when committed to the earth would not have survived.

Not only were the motifs used in the legend present in the Muslim Tradition, they were also available at the right time and place. While the yawma l-arbiʿā’ traditions and the hadīths about the early Muslims’ widespread reluctance to admit Muhammad’s death apparently circulated in the entire Caliphate from the early eighth century onwards, the hadīths about the decaying corpse of Muhammad at the time of the burial are attested by the turn of the seventh and eighth century in Kūfa and Baṣra, and the ascension traditions by the middle of the eighth century only in Kūfa. In view of the small number of extant

116 See Gibbon, Decline and Fall, vol. 9, p. 316 (about the epileptic fits ascribed to Muhammad in Byzantine polemic).
traditions we cannot exclude the possibility that the latter traditions circulated earlier and elsewhere too, but it is significant that they did circulate in the same region, in Iraq, where most versions of the Christian legend were recorded, and at the time, during the early eighth century, to which its earliest traceable version can be dated.

Christians strove to preserve the account of Muhammad’s ordinary death just as eagerly as Muslims wanted to forget it. The various versions of the Christian legend in fact imply more contact with the eighth-century Muslim Tradition than would seem at first sight. It seems that they did not develop from a single original Christian legend; some of them seem to be related to different hadīths independently from the others. The story of Muhammad’s death in the Apology is the richest of them. It includes four accounts, all based on Muslim traditions. According to the Document, the Istoria, and the Adnotatio, the “disciples” were guarding Muhammad’s corpse to see what happened to it. This echoes the hadīth about the Companions lying in wait (tarabbaṣū) to see what happened to the body. The different versions of the Christian legend locate the events in two places; some in a closed room, others in Muhammad’s garden. The former parallels the usual scene of Muhammad’s death and funeral in the Muslim Tradition, the room of ‘Ā’isha; “The Messenger of God was in his house, his matter not completed yet. His family closed the door on him,” as Ibn Hishām tells us, in the first episode of yawm al-
sábado. The latter echoes a rare tradition according to which the Muslim community prayed over Muhammad’s body in “the garden” (bi-wasaṭi l-rawḍa).

Origins in the preclassical Muslim Tradition have been suggested only for one further infamous item in the armory of Christian polemic and for that only very recently: for the Byzantine interpretation of the qur’ānic word ṣamad (Sūrat al-Ikhlaṣ 2) as holosphyros. The word holosphyros comes from the Greek version of the Qur’ān prepared by an anonymous translator who worked in the ninth century or earlier. Theodore Abū Qurra (d. after 816) also rendered Sūrat al-Ikhlaṣ into Greek in one of his opuscula; he translates ṣamad with the word sphyropēktos. Holosphyros and sphyropēktos are synonyms and best rendered as Friedrich Sylburg, the first editor and Latin translator of one of the relevant texts, did in the sixteenth century: solidus—that

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118 Al-Samhūdī, Khulāṣat al-wafā’, vol. 1, p. 236. Al-Samhūdī does not name his source, and I was unable to trace it. Elsewhere the Muslims pray over the body in ‘Ā’isha’s room where Muhammad died and was buried.

119 This translation is cited in two works, in the refutation of the Qur’ān by Nicetas of Byzantium and in the anonymous Ritual of abjuration—although the translation is occasionally ascribed to Nicetas, probably both he and the author of the Ritual drew on the same early Greek version of the Qur’ān whose translator is unknown today. For the Greek texts, see Förstel, Niketas von Byzanz, p. 44; and Montet, “Un rituel d’abjuration,” p. 155. For a recent bibliography on Nicetas, see the entry on him by Antonio Rigo in CMR 1: 751-756; on the Ritual of abjuration, see ibid., pp. 821-824 (also by Rigo).

120 For the Greek text of Opusculum 20, see John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra, Schriften zum Islam, p. 98; for an English translation, see Lamoreaux (trans.), Theodore Abū Qurrah, p. 224. For a recent discussion of Theodore Abū Qurra and his writings, see the entry of Lamoreaux on him in CMR 1: 439-491.

121 See his Saracenica sive Moamethica, p. 87 (anathematizo Deum Moamedis, de quo dicit eum esse unum Deum solidum). I do not find the usual etymological translations, such as “beaten solid into a ball” or “made of solid, hammer-beaten metal,” useful, especially in the case of holosphyros which is attested in a few other texts too, clearly meaning simply “solid, massive” (these attestations can easily be traced through the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae). But
is, the Greek translators understood \textit{allāhu l-ṣamad} as “the solid God.” But since everybody knows that Muslims believe in an incorporeal God, it follows that the Greek renderings of \textit{ṣamad} were invented by ignorant and malicious Byzantine polemicists whose sole aim was to slander Islam—such at least was the opinion of scholars of Byzantine Christianity who had studied these translations.\footnote{122}

Yet it is dangerous to equate classical with preclassical Islam: in the more familiar, classical phase of Islam most Muslims indeed thought of God as immaterial and incorporeal, but no such consensus existed earlier. Josef van Ess discussed corporealism in early Muslim theology in a small book published in 1989. The religious world he describes is so unlike anything in classical Islam that the reader would barely recognize it as Muslim had the author not said so. And the Greek translations of \textit{ṣamad} fit this world so seamlessly that van Ess deemed them suitable evidence for the early Muslim understanding of the word.\footnote{123}

What interests me is merely the question of how the word was understood in the first half of the second Islamic century (and probably even before). Here the answer is simple: it was understood as meaning “massive, compact.” [...] The best testimony, however, comes from outside Islam: Theodore Abū Qurra, bishop

\textit{sphyropēktos} is a \textit{hapax legomenon} in Greek, as \textit{ṣamad} is in the Qur’ān, so etymological interpretations might be admissible for it.

\footnote{122} See, for example, Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views,” p. 122; Khoury, \textit{Polémique byzantine}, pp. 338-341; Sahas, “‘Holophyros?’” pp. 109-125; and Hanson, “The ‘God of Muhammad’,” pp. 55-82. One of the most recent discussions comes in a footnote of Lamoreaux (idem [trans.], \textit{Theodore Abū Qurrah}, p. 224, n. 80) who says “The term ‘barren-built’ seems to be either a deliberate mistranslation or a misunderstanding of the Qur’ānic term \textit{ṣamad} (usually translated as ‘eternal’ or ‘absolute’).”

\footnote{123} See his \textit{The Youthful God} (quotation from pp. 4-5). More recently, two other scholars have touched on the topic: Barbara Roggema in the context of Christian polemic, in her “Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters,” pp. 11-13; and Wesley Williams in the context of early Muslim theology, “A Body unlike Bodies,” pp. 36-38.
of Ḥarrān in Upper Mesopotamia (ca. 750-825), translated *samad* into Greek by *sphuropēktos*, a quite unusual word meaning something like “hammered together, closely united.” Nicetas of Byzantium later on used *holosphuros* instead, “entirely chased in metal.”

For two more decades, scholars of Byzantine Christianity, unaware of van Ess’ study, saw the Greek renderings through the prism of classical Islam. Only the most recent study, published by Christos Simelidis in 2011, is better informed. Yet the lack of trust in the reliability of Christian polemical literature vis-à-vis Islam is so strong that even scholars familiar with Muslim material corroborating the Greek renderings failed to entertain the possibility that the Byzantine translator might after all not have misunderstood the text.

The relationship between early eastern Christian polemical literature and the Muslim Tradition has not yet been studied much. The cases of Muhammad’s death and the Byzantine translations of *al-samad*, however, indicate that one should keep a more open mind regarding the Christian polemical claims about Islam—there may be more in these claims than meets the eye. When examined closely, elements of Christian polemic can exhibit intimate knowledge of the Muslim Tradition, not ignorance of it, as is usually supposed. The Christians, instead of inventing their alternative representation of facets of Islam, borrowed them from early Muslims, and tenaciously preserved them despite subsequent changes in the Muslim Tradition. Instead of misrepresenting Islam at will or out of ignorance, the Christians selected from the wealth of *ḥadīths* those that made it

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125 See Roggema, “Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters,” pp. 11-13; and Lamoreaux (trans.), *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, p. 224, n. 80.
least desirable for their coreligionists to convert to Islam. Of course, they did tell stories with no historical basis about Islam. One can hardly imagine, for example, any foundation for the episode appended to some versions of the legend in which dogs devour Muhammad’s corpse. But such inventiveness was rarer than appears at first sight. It was not necessary. There were enough differences between the religious worldviews of Christianity and Islam to make some Muslim narratives and doctrines function in the eyes of Christians as polemic without the need to modify them. What the one saw as praiseworthy, the other regarded as despicable. What the one held acceptable, the other thought of as shameful. The story of Muhammad’s ordinary mortality is an example of such a narrative.
Chapter Two

Making Him More Dead:* Eastern Christians Reading the Story of Muhammad’s Death

“Poor Muhammad! He promised Paradise to you, but even he himself did not get there. What did his wealth avail him when the dogs were eating him?”¹²⁶ This outburst, ascribed to an eighth-century Egyptian Christian¹²⁷ in Muslim sources, sounds cryptic. Its reference to Muhammad’s wealth must be related to the accusation common in medieval Christian polemic against Islam that he claimed prophethood merely as a ruse, to enable him to accumulate as many earthly possessions as possible. But the relationship of other parts of the statement to each other is less evident. Most medieval Christians naturally doubted that an unbeliever like Muhammad would have a share in Paradise, but from the above quotation it seems that this Egyptian Christian, strangely enough, regarded it as impossible for the reason that dogs had mangled Muhammad (presumably his corpse, as other Christian stories of his death claim). What made him think so?

The Christian story of Muhammad’s death alone fails to answer this question. No extant early version spells out the meaning of the legend, unmistakable as it must have been for the medieval audience; only much later and very different European variants do

* Adapted from an inscription of Aššurbanipal quoted in Richardson, “Death and Dismemberment,” p. 198.

¹²⁶ On this passage, see Chapter One.

¹²⁷ The Muslim authors quoting the incident ascribe the outburst to “a Christian in Egypt” (naṣrānīyyun bi-miṣr). Given the religious demographics of Egypt, he was more likely a Copt than a Melkite but the sources never clarify his ecclesiastic affiliation.
so occasionally. Reading the story today, one immediately senses that it presents Muhammad in bad light and all versions are indeed explicit in their unfavorable comparison of the death of Muhammad to that of Jesus. But it is unlikely that the full polemical agenda of the legend was exhausted in generally darkening Muhammad’s image. On closer inspection, when reading the story against the backdrop of the religious world of late antique Christianity, the polemical agenda of the legend emerges as much richer and more diverse than it seems at first sight and explains its popularity and long-lasting resonance among eastern Christians. In this chapter, I attempt to recover this composite polemical agenda as fully as possible and to develop the initial vaguely negative impression into a detailed portrait of Muhammad as probably seen by medieval eastern Christian readers of the story, including the significance behind the inclusion of the dog episode in it.

In this attempt, two major preoccupations of late antique Christianity should be remembered. The first is well known. Christianity has from its inception been unique in the significance it attaches to the death and resurrection of its putative founder. No other religion, certainly none of those widely practiced in the early Muslim Mediterranean, developed a similar foundational narrative. Christians ever since the first century AD regarded the New Testament story of Jesus’ death and resurrection as the pivotal event in salvation history, of utmost importance for the church, its individual members, and the world as a whole. Christian authors, from the apostle Paul to John of Damascus, considered the combination of Jesus’ human nature with his death and resurrection the principal guarantee for his followers’ restoration to life at the end of times. In early
Islamic times, this theological outlook naturally made the Christians’ interested in the
death and postmortem fate of Muhammad, for them the Muslim counterpart of Christ,
turning it into an important locus of polemic. Discussions of Jesus’ resurrection therefore
provide important material for understanding the significance of the lack of one in the
story of Muhammad’s death.

Second, late antique Christians regarded the manner of one’s death as revelatory.
In death, they saw a snapshot of the person’s life and afterlife. Of course, death was
usually interpreted to confirm existing opinions about the deceased, but could sometimes
also divulge secrets: nobody otherwise might have known who that person had truly been
in his life and what fate awaited him in the hereafter. Hagiographers never fail to stress
the miracles associated with the death of saints and authors of martyrologies spare no
effort in conveying all the gruesome details of the martyrs’ execution. Christian writers
often emphasized, with palpable pleasure, the painful and humiliating deaths of enemies
of Christianity. The Christian authors of the early Islamic period, when relating the
narrative of Muhammad’s death, were firmly rooted in this tradition. It is because of the
significance they attached to the manner of one’s dying that their story, brief as it is,
reveals more about the eastern Christians’ estimation of Muhammad than many of their
longer polemical legends.

Existing detailed discussions of the legend are based on versions written in the
twelfth century or later in western Christendom and scholars have interpreted them with
their medieval western Christian audience in mind.\textsuperscript{128} With the exception of some recent

\textsuperscript{128} For these discussions see below, Chapter Four.
brief and tangential remarks, no attempt has been made to place the narrative in the context of Christian culture in the Islamic world, although all the scholars in question were aware of its origins in the East. Thanks to the many similarities between eastern and western Christian thought, some conclusions nevertheless remain valid in the eastern context as well. Others need modification and still others, unnoticed or unnoticeable on the basis of western European versions, appear when we focus on their early history in eastern Christianity.

In what follows, I move the analysis of the narrative from the western European context to that of Christianity in the Islamic world. Against this background, I examine the portrait of Muhammad that comes into view when we situate the various motifs of the story in terms of the theological concerns of the day, and ask how these motifs came to be used in other Christian polemical writings. In the first two sections, I discuss the shorter version of the story, which lacks the dog episode, and in the latter two sections I concentrate on the significance of the dog motif. I argue that each motif carried distinct and specific, sometimes multiple, meanings for the Christian audience of the story, and that the narrative encapsulates a surprisingly comprehensive statement about Muhammad, expressing who he truly was in his life, what would become of him in the hereafter, and what the implications of all of this were for his followers. This emerges when reading the story together with other contemporary eastern Christian (and sometimes non-Christian) writings. Yet in the absence of any discussion of the meaning of the story by an eastern Christian author, much of the following analysis must naturally remain speculative.

Christ, prophets, holy men, and Muhammad

The shorter version of the story encapsulates a comprehensive, if predictable, evaluation of Muhammad, reinforcing the Christians’ rejection of all his possible claims to divine authority. His death accentuates the contrast between him and Christ, and it shows that he could not have been a prophet and that, unlike holy men, contemporary embodiments of ideal Christian life, he utterly lacked sanctity.

Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead and ascend to heaven expressed his inferiority to Jesus, as several scholars have noted, and indeed, it is made explicit in most versions of the narrative. The contrast with Jesus’ story in the New Testament is salient in particular because of the three-day interval involved, the guards ordered to watch the corpse, as well as Christ’s prophecy of his own resurrection, each having parallels in one or more versions of the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death. But contrasting the dead Muhammad and the resurrected Christ was not limited to this story; by the early ninth century, it had been firmly incorporated into the Christian apologists’ repertoire of arguments, indeed so firmly that mere hints of it were judged intelligible.

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131 The examples I have noted so far come from five texts: the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* (ninth century, see *Mudjādalat al-Rāhib Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī*), the *Disputation of Abū Qurra* (ninth century, see *Mudjādalat Abī Qurra*), *Min al-malik al-ṭuhr al-masīḥi risāla* (a polemical poem from the tenth century, cf. Grünebaum, “Eine poetische Polemik”), the *Sea of Precious Virtues* (a twelfth-century Muslim text written in Persian, citing Christian polemical arguments, see *Sea of Precious Virtues*), and the *Disputation of George the Monk* (thirteenth century, see *Mudjādalat al-anbā Djirdjī*). I owe my knowledge of the passage in the polemical poem to Professor Yohanan Friedmann, and the one in the *Sea of Precious Virtues* to Professor Michael Cook. For a possible author of the *Sea of Precious Virtues*, see Cook, *Commanding Right*, p. 457, n. 213.
The ninth-century *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* contains one of the evocations of this theme. The monk Abraham explains in front of the emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Malik al-Hāshimi,\textsuperscript{132}

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qāla l-rāhibu [...] fa-lammā zahara wa-azhara l-āyātī wa-tammat [sic] kutubu l-anbiyāʾi wa-ḥaqqaqa qawlahum kafartum antum bihi wa-lam tarḍaw ḥantā tuqāwimū djamīʾa l-muʾminīn bihi wa-tazʿamīna anna muḥammadan aʿazzu wa-akramu ʿalā llāhi minhu
\]

\[
qāla l-amīrū wayhaka yā rāhiba a-wa-mā taʾlamu anna muḥammadan aʿazzu wa-akramu ʿalā llāhi mina l-masīḥi wa-min ādama wa-dhurriyyatihi kullihā
\]

\[
qāla l-rāhibu lā wa-llāhi mā aʾlamu dhālika wa-lākinnī aʾlamu anna l-samāʾa ashrafū wa-akramu ʿinda llāhi mina l-arḍī wa-sukkāna l-samāʾi ashrafū wa-akramu ʿinda llāhi mina l-ādamiyyīn wa-aʾlamu anna l-masīḥa fī l-samāʾi l-ʿulūyā wa-muḥammadan da-djamīʾa l-anbiyāʾi taʾṣṣālū ṭaḥṭa l-tharā wa-anna l-samāʾa kursiyyyu llāhi wa-arshuhu wa-anna l-masīḥa djālisun ʿalā kursiyyyī l-ʿizzati ʿan yāmīni l-abi fawqa l-malāʾ ikāti wa-l-ʿibād fā-kayfa yakīnu man taḥṭa l-tharā ʿakramu ʿalā llāhi minman huwa fī l-samāʾi ʿalā kursiyyyī l-ʿizz
\]

The monk said, “And when He (Christ) appeared, showed the signs, the Books of the Prophets were fulfilled, and He confirmed what they said, you did not believe in Him, and were not content until you argued with all the believers in Him, and claimed that Muhammad is more distinguished and more precious (aʿazzu wa-akramu) to God than Him.”

The emir answered him, “Woe unto you, monk! Do you not know that Muhammad is more distinguished and more precious (aʿazzu wa-akramu) to God than Christ, Adam and all his offspring?”

The monk said, “No, by God, I do not know that. But I know that heaven is more exalted and more precious (ashrafū wa-akramu) to God than the earth, and that the inhabitants of heaven are more exalted and more precious (ashrafū wa-akramu) to God than humankind. And I know that Christ is in

\textsuperscript{132}See *Mudjādalat al-Rāhib Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī*, pp. 402-407 (Arabic text and French translation), versets 306-310. Note that taḥṭa l-tharā, used by the anonymous authors of this work and the *Disputation of George the Monk*, is a qurʾānic expression.
the highest heaven, but Muhammad and all the prophets are beneath the earth, (I know) that heaven is the seat and throne of God, and that Christ is seated on the throne on the right hand of the Father, above the angels and mankind. How could someone beneath the earth be more precious to God than someone in the heaven on the throne?"

Although the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death is not told here, the adjective used in contrasting the postmortem fates of Muhammad and of Christ, “more precious” (akramu), is the one that occurs in its single extant Arabic version in the Apology of al-Kindī, and it is therefore possible that the author of the disputation intended to allude to the story, assuming its knowledge among his readers.

The five texts that cite this argument were written between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, and all of them come, probably just coincidentally, from Syria and mostly from Melkite circles.¹³³ The Christian disputants sometimes point out, more uncharitably than the monk Abraham, not only the fact of Muhammad’s death, but also what became of his body in the grave. According to the anonymous Christian author of a polemical poem written at the height of Nikephoros II Phokas’ (rg. 963-69) conquests of Muslim lands, “And Jesus, his throne is elevated above the heavens, and whoever has befriended Him will gain victory on the day of strife. / But your master is in the earth, the moist soil has destroyed him, and he has turned into crumbling bones among those

¹³³ They are all Melkite with the exception of the Sea of Precious Virtues (a Muslim text) and the Jacobite versions of the Disputation of Abū Qurra (which are derived from and very much resemble the Melkite ones). In addition to the four texts quoted in these two paragraphs, the Sea of Precious Virtues briefly cites the argument as “another error” of the Christians: “Jesus lives, while Muhammad is dead, and the living has a better claim than the dead” (Sea of Precious Virtues, p. 234).
In the *Disputation of the Monk George*, an extraordinarily popular thirteenth-century Christian Arabic treatise, the monk asks, “Do you not acknowledge that he died and his bones and limbs disintegrated under the earth (fa-layṣa tuqirru annahu māta wa-talāshat ‘izāmuhu wa-a’dā’uḥu taḥta l-tharā’)?” As one would expect in a Christian polemical treatise, the Muslim interlocutor accedes, without any counterargument at all. What’s more, in the ninth-century *Disputation of Abū Qurra*, some Muslims in the audience are so ashamed when the bishop’s discussant is forced to admit that Jesus is in heaven instead of the earth or the grave that they exclaim, “By God, you are right, by God, (the disgrace of) our Master has been exposed (ṣadaqa wa-llāhi la-qad wa-llāhi ftaḍaḥa šāḥihunā).” The text does not elaborate on the “disgrace of our Master,” but since it comes soon after Theodore Abū Qurra reproaches the Muslims for preferring someone “who had decayed and died to someone who will not die and will not decay, and He is in heaven as you yourselves say (man qad baliya wa-māta ‘alā man lā yamūtu wa-lā yablā wa-huwa fī l-samawāti kamā taqūlūna antum),” it is best

134 Grünebaum, “Eine poetische Polemik,” p. 50 (Arabic text) and 58-59 (German translation), ll. 52-53 (fa-‘isā ‘alā fawqa l-samawāti ‘arshahu fa-fa’iza l-ladhī wālāhu yawma l-takhāṣumi / wa-ṣāḥibukum fī l-turbi awdā bihi l-tharā’ fa-ṣāra rufātan bayna tilka l-ramā ‘imi). I am not sure about the meaning of the second hemistich of the first verse; for comparison see l. 55 and l. 90 (pp. 50-51) in the retort of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī. The strife and the expected victory could refer to Nikephoros’ wars against the Arabs, to the war of words between him (the poem presents him as the author) and the Muslims, or even to the Day of Judgement.


136 Mudjādalat Abī Qurra, p. 85.

137 Mudjādalat Abī Qurra, pp. 80-81. The two passages referring to Muhammad’s death in this discussion read more fully, “The most amazing thing is that you deride us because we follow Christ whom you yourselves acknowledge to be the Spirit of God and his Word, and you accept the talk of someone who has decayed and died in preference to someone who will not die and will not decay, and is in heaven, as you yourselves say. […] You declare his teaching false and oppose
interpreted as referring to Muhammad’s sad state compared to Jesus’ heavenly glory. In any other context a Muslim admission that Jesus is in heaven would hardly be significant; after all, the Qur’an (al-Nisā’ 158) declares that “God raised him to Himself” (rafa‘ahu llāhu ilayhi).\textsuperscript{138}

Contrasting the dead Muhammad with the resurrected Christ was natural for Christians, who, for polemical purposes, treated Muhammad as Jesus’ counterpart in Islam, often belittling other virtues of his too by juxtaposing them to Jesus’. Judging from the broader context in which references to Muhammad’s death sometimes appear, the Muslim criticism of the doctrine of the Incarnation must have encouraged and may have triggered their use in religious debates. This Muslim polemical theme, already in the

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{138} See also Āl ‘Imrān 55 where the same verb is used in the same context.
\end{footnotesize}
Qur’ān, is omnipresent both in Muslim writings against Christianity and in Christian apologiae responding to them. The string of Muslim arguments against the Incarnation, as presented in Christian works, often culminates in the mockery of Jesus’ gruesome death on the cross, to which the Christian authors reply with their discussion of Muhammad’s death and decay. It is unclear how such a response contributed to their argument for Jesus as God incarnate, but some Christian polemicists certainly thought it did. Perhaps we had better not look at it as a theological argument but as a retort. Since reducing the opponent to silence and reinforcing the conviction of one’s own coreligionists present at the debate (or reading his works) were no less important goals of a religious controversialist than proving the right doctrine, as long as the opponent and the audience did not notice the flimsiness of the argument, a reference to Muhammad’s death, the ultimate sign of his mortality, striking as it is, could be useful in practice.

Second, Muhammad’s failed resurrection supported the Christians’ rejection of his prophethood. In three out of the six extant versions of the story of Muhammad’s death, it is Muhammad who foretells that he will rise from the dead, and his failure to

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139 As, for example, in the Disputation of Abū Qurra (Mudjādalat Abī Qurra, p. 107); and the Disputation of the Monk George (Mudjādalat al-anbā Djirdjī [ed. Carali], pp. 58-59, and Mudjādalat al-anbā Djirdjī, pp. 32-33; a very brief discussion of the Incarnation following the monk’s reference to Muhammad’s death). Muslim texts rarely cite the Christian argument from Muhammad’s death. The Sea of Precious Virtues and the retort of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī to the anonymous Christian are rare exceptions in this regard. The latter follows up the argument with his own mockery of the Christian story of Jesus’ death (see Grünebaum, “Eine poetische Polemik,” p. 52 (Arabic text) and p. 62 (German translation), ll. 98-101.

140 It is Muhammad who foretells his own resurrection in the Istoria, in the Adnotatio, and in the Apology of al-Kindī (the words used are, respectively, praedixit [“foretold”], polliceretur [“promised”], and kāna yaqūlu fi ḥayātihi wa-yūṣī ilayhim [“used to tell in his life and enjoin them”]). In the West Syrian recension of the Legend of Sergius Bahīrā Ka’b al-ʿĀlḥār predicts this; the East-Syrian recension of the same hints at a similar role of Ka’b al-ʿĀlḥār but does not make it explicit; the Qashun Document leaves the foreteller unidentified. (For references to the
fulfill his prediction must have amounted to solid proof against his prophethood in the eyes of the Christian audience. The occurrence of events they foretold has been the main litmus test of true prophets in the Near East ever since they first appeared in the literary record, and lack of success in this regard has regularly led to their dismissal as false prophets. This is also the Deuteronomic criterion of true prophets, the most explicit in the Hebrew Bible (18.21-22). The Christian polemicists of the Islamic world were firmly rooted in this ancient tradition when they used the argument based on the lack of fulfilled prophecies on Muhammad’s part to deny his prophethood.

The longest Christian discussion of Muhammad’s lack of fulfilled prophecies, in the Apology of al-Kindī, begins with a definition of the prophet in this tradition: “The [word] ‘prophet’ (al-nabī) is a noun denoting the idea of ‘the one who informs’ (al-munabbi’), that is, ‘the one who notifies’ (al-mukhabbir) about a thing that was not known or notifies about something that has not been but will be.” This remark is followed by a long list of fulfilled prophecies of biblical prophets, and a few pages later, the author concludes in his customary self-assured style by saying of Muhammad, “You yourself know that he did not bring anything of the kind, nor did he say a single word about it, nor did he utter a single sound about it.”

It is true that, despite the feasibility of this story in editions and translations of these texts, see Chapter One.) Of the two later Armenian retellings of the Document’s story, Mxit’ar of Ani identifies the predictor as Muhammad (Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 850), while Vardan leaves him unidentified (ibid., p. 855).

141 Apology of al-Kindī (ed. Tartar), p. 78, and pp. 84-85 (inna l-nabīyya ismun dāllun ‘alā ma’nā l-munabbi’i ayy al-mukhabbiri bi-l-amrī l-ladhī lam ya’raf aw yakhbīrī [sic] bi-amrīn lam yakun fa-yakūn; wa-antā ta’lamu annahu lam ya’ni fī hādīhī l-bābi bi-shay in wa-lā naṭaqa fihi bi-kalimatin wāḥidatin wa-lā tajwīwaha fihi bi-harfin wāḥid). This is part of the Apology’s extensive comparison of Muhammad to biblical prophets in general (pp. 60-92). The discussion of predictions begins on p. 78. The derivation of nabī from the root n-b- ’ was not as evident for medieval Muslim lexicographers as it was for the author of the Apology. Many thought that the
argument, few other Christian controversialists whose works survive employed it. Those who did not fully shun the topic of Muhammad’s prophethood preferred instead to gleefully allude to his lack of miracles.\[142\] We get a similar picture in Muslim apologiae for Muhammad’s prophethood: discussions of his prophecies, fulfilled ones of course, are a standard theme, but always much less prominent than his miracles. The only exception appears to be the Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla, which its author, ‘Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (fl. ca. 850), a prominent Nestorian convert to Islam, explicitly addressed to Christians. It has two chapters on Muhammad’s prophecies: one of these lists prophecies fulfilled in Muhammad’s lifetime, the other those fulfilled after his death. The chapter on word was related instead to the root \(n-b-w\) (\(nabā, yanbū, nabāwa\)) that they glossed with \(irtifā’\) (\(mina l-ard\)), thus taking \(nabī\) to refer to the elevated rank of a prophet. Nevertheless, some early lexicographers, al-Khalīl b. Ahmad (Kitāb al-‘ayn, p. 933), al-Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād (al-Muḥīt, vol. 10, p. 404), and al-Djawhartī (al-Ṣihāb, vol. 1, p. 111), subscribed to the former opinion. Ibn Durayd, in contrast, lists \(nabī\) under \(n-b-w\), and asserts that the derivation from \(n-b-\)' is wrong (Djamharat al-lugha, vol. 3, p. 394). Al-Baghdādī (to quote also a non-lexicographer) first relates \(nabī\) to \(naba’\) but does not elaborate on it; then he connects it to \(nabā, nabāwa\), and explains that \(nabī\) refers to the elevated rank of the Prophet (\(Uṣūl al-dīn\, pp. 153-154). See also the list of varying opinions in Azharī, Tahdhīb al-lugha, vol. 15, pp. 486-487 (under \(n-b-w\)).

\[142\] I have so far found only one additional Christian polemical text in which the need for a fulfilled prediction is possibly attested. The long Arabic recension of the Legend contains a story about the revelation of the Qur’ān (Roggema, The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, pp. 486-497), the circumstances of which the monk Bahīrā foretells to Muhammad so that he can tell his people who had been demanding a sign that he is a prophet. The foretelling of the circumstances seems to have a special signification in the story but it is equally possible that the book itself was meant to be the sign. On the other hand, references to Muhammad’s lack of miracles occur more frequently. The Apology follows its discussion of the lack of fulfilled prophecies with the lack of miracles (Apology of al-Kindī [ed. Tartar], pp. 85-92), and the topic is briefly mentioned in Opusculum 19 of Theodore Abū Qurra (John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra, Schriften zum Islam, pp. 94-97), and in “Timothy’s Apology,” p. 110 (Syriac text), pp. 36-37 (English translation).
Muhammad’s miracles precedes these two but it is much shorter than the ones on his prophecies.\(^{143}\)

The failure of Muhammad’s foretelling of his own resurrection is never quoted outside of the Christian narrative of his death, but in view of the vigorous debate concerning his prophethood in early Christian-Muslim polemic in general and the presence of the argument from fulfilled and unfulfilled predictions in the Muslim and Christian polemical armory (whatever its relative prominence might have been) in particular, the story without doubt evoked this association as well. The ending of a version that credits Ka‘b al-Aḥbār with foretelling Muhammad’s resurrection illustrates the implications in the context of this story: “When Kleb (i.e. Ka‘b) died, he was buried

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\(^{143}\) ‘Alī b. Rabban, \textit{Kitāb al-دل wa-l-dawl}, pp. 76-97; his discussion of Muhammad’s miracles is on pp. 65-75. Most ninth-century Muslim works on proofs of prophethood have not survived but when their later medieval Muslim readers give more than their titles, it appears that they focused on Muhammad’s miracles. ‘Alī b. Rabban, for example, devotes a section of his \textit{Kitāb al-ён wa-l-dawl} to the refutation of a work of his uncle, Abū Zakkār Yahyā b. Nu‘mān (d. ca. 830), who argued that nobody converted to Islam due to witnessing a miracle (see ‘Alī b. Rabban, \textit{Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawl}, pp. 189-195; David Thomas, “Abū Zakkār Yahyā ibn Nu‘mān,” \textit{CMR} 1: 565-566). In his own contribution to the genre, the Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Djabbār (d. 415/1025) describes the works on prophecy of Abū l-Hudhayl (ninth century) and Ibn Shabīb (ninth century) as “their books which they composed about (Muhammad’s) prophethood concerning miracles which are not in the Qur‘ān” (\textit{fī kutubihim allatī ṣanāfūhā fī l-nubuwwati fī l-nubuwwati fī l-qur‘āni}, see \textit{Tathbīt}, p. 511). Although ‘Abd al-Djabbār’s own criteria of prophethood might have led him to overemphasize the topic of miracles in these works, his remarks mesh with what we find in extant Muslim discussions of Muhammad’s prophethood. The \textit{Dalā’il al-nubuwwa} of al-Firyābī “Iḥāṣīr” (d. 300/913) is only about miracles, and only about two kinds of them: feeding many people with little food, Jesus-style, and making water to flow when needed, Moses-style. A century later, miracles dominate the works of al-Bayḥaqī (d. 458/1066) and Abū Nu‘aym (d. 430/1038), both entitled \textit{Dalā’il al-nubuwwa}. Although they include sections on fulfilled prophecies of Muhammad, the stories of miracles dwarf them (see Bayhaqī, \textit{Dalā’il al-nubuwwa}, pp. 312-552; Abū Nu‘aym, \textit{Dalā’il al-nubuwwa}, pp. 469-488). Al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) fails to mention any predictions in his two chapters on prophethood; virtually his only topic is miracles (see \textit{Uṣūl al-ён}, pp. 153-185). On the emergence of the genre see the first chapter of Stroumsa, \textit{Freethinkers}, pp. 21-36 = eadem, “Signs of Prophecy,” pp. 101-114 (an earlier version of the same study). The miraculous signs of prophecy dominate her discussion, reflecting her sources; the problem of prophets’ foreknowledge of events never appears in it.
like a donkey because his prophecy had not been fulfilled and he was found to be a false prophet.”

Muhammad’s unfulfilled prediction of his resurrection in other versions was no doubt also regarded as a proof that he was a false prophet. In other contexts, Muhammad is explicitly called a false prophet: John of Damascus does so in the eighth century, as well as Theodore Abū Qurra in his Greek writings, and the twelfth-century long Arabic version of the *Legend of Sergius Bahīrā* alludes to it.

Third, the story would have invited the readers to contrast Muhammad with Christian holy men, reinforcing their opinion that Muhammad compared poorly to them too. Indeed, Norman Daniel already remarked on this message of the story, describing it as inversion of hagiography. Two motifs, the stench of Muhammad’s corpse and the dogs’ devouring of it, suggest this contrast. The incorruption of the holy man’s body after death is a common motif in late antique Christian hagiography. The best known sign of incorruption, observable immediately upon death, is fragrance wafting around the corpse (two others, lack of stiffness and of decomposition, can be discerned only days or weeks after death). This fragrance is the sweet scent of heaven that slips into this world with the

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144 In the West-Syrian version of the *Legend*; see Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, pp. 334-335 (Syriac text and English translation; *w-kad mit kleb etqbar ak ḥmoro ’al d-lo eshtamlyat nbiyuteh w-eshtkah nbiyo daggolo*). I translated the sentence following a manuscript copied ca. 1600 (MS Mingana Syriac 71, sigl. E in Roggema’s edition) which exhibits a number of interesting variants throughout the text. Roggema’s *n-b-’ daggolo* (p. 334, n. 51) must be a typographic error. The other four manuscripts replace *nbiyo daggolo* with *kaddobo w-daggolo* (both words mean “liar”). E is the earliest manuscript used for the edition of the West-Syrian recension; Roggema’s *manuscrit de base* was copied ca. 1800.


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two (or more) angels descending to fetch the soul of the deceased saint. Incorruption, in all its manifestations, is the foretaste of the eternal life that awaits the believers upon resurrection, for their dead bodies will be “raised in incorruption” (1 Corinthians 15.42). Such a foretaste of heaven is an appropriate reward for the saint: decay comes on the heels of death for all mortals as a result of their fallen state, but holiness marks the saint apart from the rest of sinful humanity, and mitigates the effects on him of the universal punishment for original sin, bringing him close to the lost paradisiacal state.\textsuperscript{147}

The protection of the holy man from the beasts of the desert, most often lions, is another frequent hagiographical motif. Thanks to the holy man’s prayers, the lion peacefully watches him and his disciple pass nearby. The lion, tamed by his holiness, sometimes provides useful services, brings him food, warms him during the cold nights of the desert and protects him from bandits. It occasionally even buries the deceased holy man. In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, lions most frequently appear in sinister prophecies as God’s tools, attacking humans with frightful roars and bringing inescapable destruction to them. But in a few passages, promising a new world to come, the Bible depicts lions living peacefully with people and animals; at the same time, they

\textsuperscript{147} On the odour of sanctity in late antique Christianity, see Harvey, \textit{Scenting Salvation}, especially pp. 186-200. For examples of fragrance wafting around the corpse in late antique Christian hagiography, see below, Chapter Three. For the fragrance from heaven and the angels arriving to fetch the soul of the saint, see Cyril of Scythopolis, \textit{Lives}, p. 234; \textit{Life of St. John the Little}, pp. 119-120 (Arabic text), pp. 179-180 (English translation); “The Life of Timothy of Kâkhustâ,” pp. 496-497, pp. 566-567 (Arabic text and English translation). The angelic fragrance also appears, without connection to death, in Anastasius of Sinai, \textit{Collection} I.1 (in the English translation in Caner, \textit{History and Hagiography}, p. 174); \textit{Life of St. John the Little}, p. 60 (Arabic text), p. 144 (English translation). For a contemporary monk’s discussion of ways of incorruption, see Dalrymple, \textit{From the Holy Mountain}, p. 306.
evoke the lost Eden where Adam was granted authority over all creatures. The obedience of lions and of other wild beasts to the holy man recalls the vanished primeval world just as it gives a foretaste of the expected new one where all will obey God. “If we kept the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ… these animals would fear us. But because of our sins we have become slaves and it is rather we who fear them,” a holy man living in a lion’s den says to his brethren, with two lion-cubs wrapped in his clothes. “This [took place] because it is the will of God […] to show how the beasts were in subjection to Adam before he disobeyed the commandment and fell from the comfort of paradise,” so John Moschus concludes the story of Jordanes, as the lion that faithfully served Abba Gerasimos was called. Lions, by no means as common animals in the late antique Near East as would appear from Christian hagiography, symbolized the submission of the entire animal world to the holy man, an authority and security the people of late antiquity lacked and desired. In power over nature, just as in incorruption, God gave to the holy man what man had no hope of achieving on his own in this world.

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148 For lions and other animals in the Bible, see, for example, Jeremiah 5.6, 7.33-34, 15.3, Hoseah 5.14, 13.7-8 (prophecies), and Isaiah 11.6-9, 65.25 (the new world).
149 John Moschus, Pratum spirituale, p. 13 (no. 18).
150 Ibid., p. 88 (no. 107).
151 For the tamed lion with the name Jordanes serving the monks until its death, see ibid., pp. 86-88 (no. 107). For the lion warming the holy man during the cold night in the desert, see ibid., p. 137 (no. 167). For the lion bringing food for the holy man, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, History, p. 66 (6.9-10). For the lion widening the narrow path for the holy man, see John Moshus, Pratum spirituale, pp. 150-151 (no. 181). For the holy man feeding lions, see ibid., p. 5 (no. 2). For the holy man giving food to the lion that lets him pass as a result, see ibid., p. 102 (no. 125). For the holy man regularly feeding the lion so that it would not harm people and animals, see ibid., p. 134 (no. 163). For the holy man sending lions as guides for the road, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, History, pp. 63-64 (6.2). For the monk living in a lion’s den, see John Moschus, Pratum
In contrast to the holy man, God did not deem Muhammad worthy of incorruption, or of protection from the harm of wild beasts. In his case, the olfactory signs of decay arrive soon after death, just as they do for ordinary sinful mortals. In two Iraqi versions, the stench appears despite the embalming of his corpse with myrrh and aloe.\(^{152}\) Feral dogs, the only animals likely to live in a human settlement in Arabia that eat human flesh, devour his corpse when they find it, just as they would do with any abandoned cadaver. In the ninth-century *Apocalypse of Peter*, the “loathsome beast” (\(\textit{al}-\textit{hayawân \textit{al}-\textit{samdj}}\)) digs up and eats Muhammad’s interred corpse, in sharp contrast to the stories about the monk-burying lions of the desert. Making the contrast yet more striking, in the tenth-century Jewish version of the story, in the commentary of Yefet ben ‘Eli on Isaiah 14.19, it is lions that disinter and devour the corpse. Neither the biblical verse nor

\[\textit{spirituale}, \text{p. 13 (no. 18). For the monk ordering a lion that “appeared in the area and destroyed many people” to settle elsewhere, see ibid., pp. 45-46 (no. 58). For a holy man chasing two lions away from his swine herd, see ibid., p. 74 (no. 92). For similar stories about snakes, see Anastasius of Sinai, \textit{Collection I.22 (in the English translation in Caner, \textit{History and Hagiography}, p. 186). For holy men killing a snake with the sign of cross, see Theodoret of Cyrillus, \textit{History}, pp. 26-27, 40 (2.6, 3.7). For similar stories about leopards, see Anastasius of Sinai, \textit{Collection I.21 (in the English translation in Caner, \textit{History and Hagiography}, pp. 185-186), and John Climacus, \textit{Ladder}, p. 121 (7.50b: “And some, as before the Lord, told me that he even fed a leopard from his hand in the desert”). For stories about rabbits, see Anastasius of Sinai, \textit{Collection I.23 (in the English translation in Caner, \textit{History and Historiography}, pp. 186-187). For a deer that shows the monks the resting place of an anchorite, see John Moschus, \textit{Pratum spirituale}, pp. 67-68 (no. 84). For a bird killing a Saracen for his murder of an anchorite, see ibid., p. 15 (no. 21). For a little dog that shows the way to a monk, see ibid., p. 130 (no. 157). For a donkey bringing vegetables from the garden six miles away from the monastery, see ibid., p. 131 (no. 158). For dogs and camels obeying the monk’s orders, see ibid., pp. 201-202 (no. 225, supplementary tales). That lions were less common animals in Syria than would appear from the literary record is mentioned in Collins (ed.), \textit{A History of the Animal World}, p. 223 (in connection with ancient Syrian art).}\]

\(^{152}\) In the East-Syrian and West-Syrian recensions of the *Legend*; see Roggema, \textit{The Legend of Sergius Bahîrâ}, pp. 302-303, pp. 334-335 (Syriac text and English translation). The latter mentions only the embalming (\(\textit{hanţuhi}\)), and only the former refers to the substances used (\(\textit{hanţuhi b-muro w-`alway}\)).
its context makes any reference to animals, let alone to lions. Muhammad’s death, unlike that of the holy men, is accompanied by no miracles; in some versions, his postmortem fate is instead unnaturally bad. Unlike the holy men, he grants his followers no anticipation of the fragrance of heaven; despite the embalming and the guards set to watch over him, his corpse perishes fast, accentuating his sinfulness.

It should be noted, however, that Christian polemicists never explicitly compared Muhammad to saints. On the one hand, much as Muhammad for Muslims, holy men were models of the perfect life, loci of wisdom and blessings, and respected channels of divine authority for late antique Christians. Therefore, Christians instinctively expected that Muhammad should have lived according to the same standards in every aspect of his life. On the other hand, holy men did not play the main roles of Muhammad in Islam: they did not bring new revelations or new laws, so they were not fully comparable. Any structured comparison of Muhammad and the saints would also have run into the problem that, in contrast to the Catholic Church, incorruption has never become a required sign of holiness in eastern Christian churches. As illustrated most eloquently by the death of Father Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov, the premature decay of the corpse, while raising bad feelings in pious onlookers, strictly speaking means nothing.

An implicit contrast of Muhammad with the holy men nevertheless seems to have been understood, as appears from some texts. It is even possible that a Jacobite

\footnote{153 For references to these two versions of the story, see Chapter One.}

\footnote{154 For another example, see Pseudo-Nilus, Narrations VI.10 about the corpses of martyred Sinai monks that neither putrefied nor were mangled by animals even five days after their deaths (in the English translation in Caner, History and Hagiography, pp. 120-121).}
hagiographer once wrote in acute awareness of the Christian story of Muhammad’s death: the end of the brief martyrology of a Christian Taghlibi chief is its precise inversion, and it is a rare martyrological account that combines the two motifs of the smell and of the animals. According to this account, during the reign of al-Walid b. ‘Abd al-Malik (rg. 705-15), a Muslim general (rish ḥaylo d-tayyoye) called Muḥammad in Mesopotamia (betnahrin, probably Muḥammad b. Marwân), tried to convert Mu‘ādh, chief of Banū Taghlīb, to Islam. When neither persuasion nor torture succeeded, Muḥammad ordered his execution and forbade burying him. According to Michael the Syrian, “this saint remained on the dunghill for many days, without putrefying or being eaten by animals.” Eustatius of Dara then fetched the cadaver of Mu‘ādh and built a monastery over his tomb.155

It should be noted that the three categories of comparison (Christ, the prophets and the holy men) I applied above and their correlation each with a single motif in the story of Muhammad’s death are too schematic for us to assume that the audience would have done the same. While Christ would most readily have been associated with the resurrection motif, Muhammad’s failed foretelling of his resurrection would also have evoked Jesus prophesying regarding his own resurrection three days after his death (John

155 For this story, see Michael the Syrian, Chronicle, vol. 2, pp. 480-481 (French translation), and vol. 4, p. 451 (Syriac text). The quotation is from vol. 2, p. 481 (French) and vol. 4, p. 451 (Syriac: yawmoto saggiye shore hwo ‘al qitalto w-lo sri haw qaddisho w-lo men ḥaywoto ete’kel). I did not find the account in other texts but Michael probably cites it from an earlier source. The lack of putrefaction is a common motif in stories of the death of saints, although usually signaled by sweet fragrance. Reference to protection from wild beasts is rare in this context. It seems that Eustatius of Dara is known only from this story; see the index of the Chronicle in vol. 1, p. *28. Muḥammad b. Marwân was governor of al-Djazīra from 66 to 91 AH (ca. 685 to 710 AD); see K. V. Zetterstéen, “Muḥammad b. Marwân b. al-Ḥakam,” EI² 7: 408. Elsewhere Michael the Syrian refers to him as the amīr of al-Djazīra (amiro d-gaziro); the different terminology here probably reflects a different source.
2.18-22). Old Testament prophets were regarded as no lesser saints than contemporary ones; St. Moses, St. Aaron, St. Elijah, and others are all commemorated on their feast days in the eastern churches. The miraculous preservation of corpses had not yet become a standard literary motif when the books of the Old Testament were written, but in one case a lion stands beside the body of “the man of God” (ish ha-elohim) that it has killed and, to the astonishment of the onlookers, does not eat it (1Kings 13.24-28). Saints, the late antique men of God, could easily be evoked in comparison to Muhammad, also in comparison with his death, since they did everything he failed to do in the story: not only were their cadavers kept fragrant and whole but they were given prophetic foreknowledge and, in some seventh-century hagiographical accounts, their bodies were even taken up to heaven, “to the land of the living,” after their death. The possibilities are many; no two readers would have reacted to the story in exactly the same way.

**Muhammad and the Muslim Paradise**

The first motif of the story, Muhammad’s failed resurrection, not only implied for its Christian audience that Muhammad was inferior to Jesus but also that his followers, unlike those of Jesus, were at a disadvantage because of it. Since Christians, following Paul (1 Corinthians 15), regarded Christ’s resurrection as the guarantee *par excellence* for

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their own, they thought that Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead meant for Muslims that they could not be certain of their own resurrection: while Jesus had demonstrated his power over death, Muhammad had not, and his promises of resurrection for his followers had been merely empty words. Arabophone Christian polemicists picked up the topic in the ninth century, and for a while it became part of their standard repertoire.

Explicit comparison of Jesus and Muhammad in this regard occurs in two ninth-century Syrian Melkite polemical treatises. In the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias*, the monk Abraham is made to respond to his Muslim interlocutor,\(^\text{157}\)

\[
\text{wayḥaka yā rāhiba mā a'ẓama kufraka innakum lā tu'minūna bi-l-qiyāmati wa-lā l-ba‘th}
\]

\[
\text{qāla l-rāhibu naḥnu min amri l-qiyāmati wa-l-ba‘thi ‘alā l-ḥaqqi wa-l-yaqīni li-annā qad ra‘ayān l-qiyāmata wa-l-ba‘tha ‘iyānan wa-ammā antum wa-l-yahūdu min amri l-qiyāmati wa-l-ba‘thi ‘alā l-radjā‘}
\]

\[
\text{qāla l-baṣrīyyu wa-kayfa dhālika}
\]

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\]

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\(^{157}\) *Mudjādalat al-Rāhib Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī*, pp. 513–515 (versets 535-545). The expression *man fī l-qubūr* is qur’ānic (twice, in *al-Hadjdj* 7, and *Fātir* 22) but could also be the translation of *hoi en tois mnēmeiois* (John 5.28; the qur’ānic phrase could in some way derive from the New Testament expression, since not only the context of both verses is the same as in the Gospel but each also contains an additional phrase with a parallel in John 5.28).
Al-Baṣrī said, “Woe unto you, o monk, how great your disbelief is! You do not believe in the resurrection.”

The monk replied, “Concerning the matter of resurrection, we are in certainty and conviction because we witnessed the resurrection with our own eyes. But you and the Jews have (only) hope concerning the matter of resurrection.”

Al-Baṣrī asked, “What do you mean?”

The monk replied, “Moses came to the Children of Israel and said to them, ‘O Children of Israel, the resurrection will happen and God will revive those in the tombs.’ But Moses died, and he was not resurrected. Muhammad came to you and said, ‘O Muslims, the resurrection will happen and God will revive those in the tombs.’ But Muhammad died and was not resurrected. Christ came to us and said, ‘O people! The resurrection will happen through us and God will revive those in the tombs.’ Then he died, was buried, then he was resurrected, ascended to heaven, and will come back for the second time. Therefore, our Master corroborated (this matter) for us, but your Master (only) gave you hope.”

Another discussion of the resurrection contains a reference to Muhammad, though without naming him. In the Disputation of Abū Qurra the bishop explains to his Muslim disputant,158

\[
\text{fa-qāla abū qurra... kamā annahu law qadima hāwī [sic] aw ṭabībun ilā baldatin fa-qāla inna dawāya [for dawā’ī] hādīh bālighun nāfī ‘un djiddan fa-ankara l-nāsu dhālika ’alayhi fā-aqbal [for fā-law aqbala?] l-hāwī yaldughu nafsahu ṭaw’an minhu li-adjli thiqatihi bi-dawāhi a-laysa kāna l-nāsu taqbalu dhālika minhu wa-taqbalu qawlahu wa-tamtathilu ilayhi}
\]

\[
gāla l-fārisī na’am
\]

158 Mudjādalat Abī Qurra, p. 88. For another English translation, see Nasry, The Caliph and the Bishop, p. 217. While the discussion preceding this passage (even the first part of Abū Qurra’s answer that I do not quote above) does not seem related to the problem of resurrection, the topic comes up again in its continuation. On the next page, Abū Qurra again asserts, “Had the Word of God, which is Christ, not been crucified, we would not have believed in Him and would not have deemed credible that there is resurrection after death” (law lam yuṣlab kalimatu llāhi llañī hiya l-masīhu la-nā’īlammā bihi wa-lā šaddaqnā anna ba’da l-mawti takūnu qiyāma). For another English translation, see Nasry, The Caliph and the Bishop, p. 218.

Abū Qurra said, “… This is similar to the following. Had a snake-charmer or a doctor come to a town and said, ‘This medicine of mine is effective and very useful,’ the people would have denied that to him. But had the snake-charmer had himself bitten voluntarily because of his trust in his medicine would the people not have accepted that from him and accepted his teaching and obeyed him?”

The Persian said, “Yes.”

Abū Qurra said, “Our Lord Christ, our God, acted this way because the people did not believe that they would be resurrected after death until they witnessed that and saw Him in his body with their own eyes, in his breaking of the doors of Hell, in his resurrection alive from the dead, in his slaying of death, and in his ascension to heaven after that.”

Abū Qurra does not make it explicit but the description of the first snake-charmer who claims that his medicine is effective but does not prove it on himself clearly refers to Muhammad. Jesus was often represented as a healer in late antique Christian texts.

In addition to the anonymous authors of these two disputations, other Christian apologists in the Islamic world also assert, often repeatedly, that Jesus’ resurrection is the essential proof for the general resurrection, and that without his resurrection nobody would credit the doctrine of general resurrection. That these apologists should have discussed the topic is not surprising: as mentioned above, it appears in the earliest writings of the New Testament and in many later Christian works. But the frequency of its occurrence in the Christian writings of the Islamic world is nevertheless striking;
Christian authors whose theology had been shaped by the apologetical requirements of the Muslim world cite it more often than their late antique predecessors.

John of Damascus, writing in Greek only a century after the Arab conquests, refers to Jesus’ resurrection as proof for the general resurrection only tangentially; his emphasis, like that of earlier late antique theologians, is on the corporeality of the resurrection. He was to be the last Christian theologian of the Islamic world for whom the resurrection of the flesh was of primary concern. By contrast, the Nestorian ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, writing a century later in Arabic, pays much attention to the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for the general resurrection. ‘Ammār mentions this idea in seven out of the fifty exchanges in his Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-adjwiba, and repeatedly discusses it in his Kitāb al-burḥān. Various aspects of the doctrine of the Incarnation and Christian rituals give him the opportunity to at least briefly remark on it; meanwhile, he wastes no words on the corporeality of the resurrection. His approach was extreme: no other Christian apologist in the Islamic world saw each and every topic as related to the

159 See his discussion in John of Damascus, Writings, pp. 401-406 (English translation of De fide orthodeoxa).
160 See ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, Kitāb al-burḥān, pp. 80-88 (sections 8-11, on the crucifixion, on baptism, on the Eucharist, and on the cross). That the comparison with Muhammad’s death should not be made explicit is understandable: judging from the opening section, it seems that the treatise was written as much for Muslim readers as for Christian ones; that naturally made the author more cautious than the authors of the Disputation of Abū Qurra or the Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias who, on the one hand, wrote for a Christian audience, and on the other, remained anonymous. For the topic in ‘Ammār’s Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-adjwiba, see p. 228 (no. 32), p. 230 (no. 33), p. 233 (no. 34), p. 234 (no. 35), p. 235 (no. 36), pp. 235-237 (no. 37), and especially p. 237 (no. 38).
doctrine of resurrection. In the ninth century many of them, however, discuss it, and they
definitely do so more frequently than late antique theologians.161

This shift of emphasis was clearly caused by the change in the religious
environment. The Christian theologians’ quarrel in late antiquity was with those,
Christians and non-Christians, who denied the resurrection of the body, and even in the
discussions where they invoke Christ’s resurrection as proof, they put its bodily nature in
high relief. But Christian apologists vis-à-vis Islam did not need to prove the resurrection
of the body; Muslims agreed with them on this question. Indeed, in Christian eyes,
Muslims took the corporeality of the resurrection too far. The Qur’ān is similarly
unequivocal on the doctrine of general resurrection. The only issue that could be debated
was a minor one: What constitutes sufficient proof for the general resurrection? The
Christians claimed that Jesus’ resurrection was its preeminent proof, and that the
Muslims, who denied it, had nothing satisfactory to offer in its stead.

As Mark Swanson has pointed out, the explicit contrast that the author of the
Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias made between Jesus’ resurrection and
Muhammad’s lack of it clarifies the apologetic logic of the emphasis that other
Arabophone Christian apologists placed on the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for the
doctrine of general resurrection in the ninth century. With the exception of the

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161 Swanson drew attention to the apologetic logic of these passages, in his entry on the
Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias in CMR 1: 879 (in addition to the Disputation of
the Monk Abraham of Tiberias and ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, here he mentions Abū Rā’īta; elsewhere, he
also refers to the Triune Nature of God, Patriarch Timothy, the Djāmi’ wudjūh al-īmān, the Kitāb
al-burhān of Peter of Bayt Ra’s, and a short anonymous polemical treatise).
Disputation of Abū Qurra, they make no references, overt or obscure, to Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead; nevertheless, many or all of them probably had it in mind.

The arguments based on creatio ex nihilo and on contemporary physics for the possibility of general resurrection ensured that this topic would not remain in focus for a long time. It only filled a small and temporary niche in early Christian-Muslim polemic. It was nevertheless prominent for a while, and it may well have been among the implications of the first motif of the narrative, Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead, for its Christian audience. Many of those familiar with the basics of apologetics, when listening to the story that Muhammad promised to be resurrected as Christ did but failed to deliver on his promise, would have felt nothing but schadenfreude when thinking of the Muslims’ hopes for resurrection.

The jaws and teeth of wild beasts

The motif of corpse-devouring dogs was probably part of the most ancient versions of the Christian story of Muhammad’s death. Three early sources attesting it survive from the pens of the Christians of the Islamic world: the motif appears in the Qashun Document (probably written in Iraq at the very beginning of the ninth century), and in the two versions of the story from the Iberian Peninsula. As discussed in the first chapter, there are good reasons to suspect that these texts are based on yet older sources, and that one of these was probably written in Syria as early as the beginning of the eighth century. The

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162 The expression is from Lucretius, On the Nature of Things, 3.888.
oldest securely datable reference to the dog motif, however, comes from Egypt in the second half of the eighth century in the ruling of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) against the Egyptian Christian whose outburst is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. As mentioned earlier, the motif continued to circulate and to mutate in the Islamic world: an undefined animal digs up and mauls Muhammad’s corpse in the Book of Rolls, written in the latter half of the ninth century, and lions do the same in the tenth-century Jewish version of Yefet ben ‘Eli.

Today the dog motif is best known from medieval European versions of the narrative: in Latin writings it appears first in the twelfth century, and later in dozens of European texts, in Latin and in vernacular languages, until the sixteenth century. The earliest variant occurs in a twelfth-century Latin text written by a certain Adelphus, a former crusader, who attributes it to an Antiochene Greek (possibly a ‘Greek’ Orthodox Arab) he met on his way to Jerusalem, and there are reasons to believe this ascription. In Adelphus’ version (followed by many European writers), dogs metamorphose into pigs and, instead of mangling the dead Muhammad, they tear him apart alive.

Because of the popularity of the dog motif in the medieval West, several scholars have attempted to unravel its significance on the basis of medieval European versions. In most cases, they tried to do so by juxtaposing it with similar motifs in other narratives. Scholars have long ago suggested that the dog episode in the Song of Roland may allude

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163 For the Latin text, see Bischoff, “Ein Leben Mohammeds (Adelphus?).” For a discussion of Adelphus’ version and its eastern origins, see Chapter Four.
to the biblical story of Jezebel.\(^{164}\) Gerard Brault, also discussing the motif in the *Song of Roland*, related it in addition to the killing of Discord/Heresy (*Discordia/Heresis*) in the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius (d. after 405): after being torn apart, the body of Discord is scattered and fed to dogs and other animals.\(^{165}\) But since Prudentius wrote in Latin and lived in the Iberian Peninsula, it is unlikely that his work was known, let alone influential, in the East; therefore, this parallel is meaningful only for the European versions of the story. For John Tolan, Muhammad’s fate in various European versions of the story likewise evokes that of Jezebel, “adept of Baal and enemy of God, whose ‘whoredoms’ and ‘witchcraft’ finally receive proper punishment when she is pushed from a window and her cadaver is trampled by horses and eaten by dogs.”\(^{166}\) Etan Kohlberg compares the episode to the death of the second-century Greek satirical writer Lucian of Samosata, who was, according to the *Suda*, the tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia, devoured alive by dogs as a punishment for mocking Christianity.\(^{167}\) But this story is in all likelihood later than the story of Muhammad’s death: Barry Baldwin showed that Lucian’s image as anti-Christ originated in the ninth century and not, as many other

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\(^{164}\) See Brault, *The Song of Roland*, vol. 1, pp. 270, 452 (n. 20). I could not ascertain who before Brault suggested this parallel (as he says), but it is too evident to have been missed by anyone familiar with the biblical story. For the episode in the *Song of Roland*, see the edition and translation of Brault, vol. 2, pp. 158-159 (ll. 2590-2591): “Throw the idol of Mohammed into a ditch, / And pigs and dogs bite and trample it” (E Mahumet enz en un fosset butent / E porc e chen le mordent e defulent). For Jezebel’s death, cf. 1 Kings 21.23-24, 2 Kings 9.30-37.


\(^{166}\) Tolan, *Saracens*, p. 93.

biographies in the *Suda*, before the coming of Islam.\textsuperscript{168} Alberto Ferreiro relates the dogs of the Muhammad legend, whose mauling of the corpse exposes the falsehood of the Saracen prophet, to the representations of dogs in patristic writings as guardians of the right faith and loyal servants of the Church.\textsuperscript{169} Ferreiro’s analysis hardly applies to eastern Christian versions of the story: all his sources are Latin texts, and dogs, as far as I know, do not have a similar image in eastern sources. Therefore, while these parallels could well have influenced the reception of the narrative by medieval western Europeans, the only ones that predate the formation of the story in the East and were well known there are the biblical narratives.

Although a genealogical relationship between the narrative of Muhammad’s death and the biblical stories is unlikely (and none of the scholars quoted above has suggested it), it is interesting to note that Jezebel was destroyed the way she was as a punishment for her sins, and that those sins were directly related to her religious cult. As the Christians’ fundamental grudge against Muhammad concerned the faults of his religion, this may easily have been the reason why he was represented with dogs devouring his corpse. We should test this understanding of the dog motif by exploring its cultural background, with special attention to the treatment of the dead in the late antique eastern Mediterranean, and by examining additional related episodes, especially in Christian literature written prior to or during the eighth century AD. In the rest of this chapter I will try to show that the dog motif, besides supporting the Christian view that Muhammad compared unfavorably with holy men, has two major implications for his image: his

\textsuperscript{168} Baldwin, *Lucian*, pp. 7-9.

\textsuperscript{169} Ferreiro, *Simon Magus*, pp. 147-200, esp. pp. 170-173 (chapter 9).
mauling by dogs was indeed seen as punishment for his sins against God, ultimately for
being an enemy of God, and it negated, at least in the eyes of some, the possibility of
resurrection for him. I will argue that both of these implications were rooted in ancient
anxieties originally developed on the basis of beliefs long obsolete by the early Islamic
period. In fact, the Christianization of the eastern Roman Empire had already rendered
them archaic, but the Syriac and Christian Arabic literature of the Islamic world provides
evidence for their survival in certain layers of society at least up to the tenth century.

Let us first consider the treatment of corpses. In the eastern Mediterranean it has
never in historical times been a respectable mode of disposing of the dead to abandon
them to animals. Burial has long been the most prevalent mortuary practice throughout
the region, although its specifics varied. The bodies of the elite could be laid to rest in
carefully built intra- or extramural tombs with lavish grave goods, while the less
privileged often ended up in simple pits dug in the earth with a few pieces of pottery
buried with them. Massive aboveground tombs of the rich and influential dotted the
landscape from Iraq to Anatolia and from Syria to South Arabia, the pyramids of Egypt
being the most famous of them. Unlike the inhabitants of Mesopotamia and Egypt, those
of the Levant and Asia Minor as well as the Greeks and Romans for many centuries
cremated their dead but also practiced burial in the ground, sometimes simultaneously
with cremation. But after 200 AD, burial rapidly supplanted cremation throughout the
Roman Empire. The spread of Christianity and later Islam, both of which espoused
burial, ensured that this mortuary practice, in graves dug in the ground or in purpose-built

170 See Morris, Death-Ritual, pp. 31-69.
vaults, eventually supplanted all others in the region. Most important for our purposes, despite all the variation in the specifics of burial, the corpse of an honorable man or woman was never left for animals to take care of its disposal. Exposure, the kind of disposal long favored by Zoroastrians (depositing the corpses in the “silent towers”) and Tibetan Buddhists (“sky burial”), has not been practiced west of Iran since recorded history began in the region.

By the eighth century, therefore, burial had long been regarded in the Near East as a basic service for the dead. Providing for a decent burial was primarily the responsibility of the family of the deceased. Only the bodies of those temporarily or permanently on the fringes of society could be exposed to preying animals: such a fate could easily befall the outcast and the poor, especially those without family, but it affected those of higher status only in exceptional circumstances. Ancient travelers could also end up dying while in transit and being eaten by wild beasts in the desert or the fish at sea; this was a major hazard of travel. The problem of burying everybody was acute during epidemics when people died in great numbers, and many lost all their kin. The account of the last phase of the pandemic of 541-750 in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* evokes scenes fit for a

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171 A story in Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *History*, pp. 15-16 (1.8) illustrates how difficult it was for the poor to provide suitable burial for their loved ones. Theodoret relates that some people displayed one of their own as if dead and asked for money for grave-clothes from a monk passing nearby. Had the poor not experienced problems with providing for burial, they would not have employed this ruse. For an example of the fact that children were considered crucial as a guarantee of one’s burial, even for the well-to-do, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Religious History*, pp. 201-202 (epilogue, 17, on Abraham’s deliberations before the sacrifice of Isaac).

172 As happened to the emperor Valens who “persisted in raging against the Only-begotten until he became a casualty of fire lit by barbarians and did not even receive a burial like servants or beggars” (see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *History*, 8.12, p. 78). For earlier descriptions of Valens’ death, see Rolfe (trans.), *Ammianus Marcellinus*, XXXI.13.12-16 (pp. 478-481); and Philostratus and Eunapius, *Lives*. 

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horror film. The phrase “no one to bury them” recurs throughout these pages as a refrain: “the stinking corpses that burst open in the streets, everywhere—their pus running down like water into the streets and there was no one to bury them,” or “discarded in the street, being devoured by dogs, with none to bury them.” However inclined the author may have been to dramatization, this description is probably not exaggerated: a large proportion of the population perished in this epidemic. But the burial of the poor was also a problem in more settled times, and since antiquity societies had made efforts to ensure that unburied corpses did not remain lying in the streets. In Christianity, it became a religious virtue to inter the unburied or to contribute to the cost of a decent burial. “If ever he found a corpse on the road, he said the appointed prayers over it and gave it burial,” a monk of the Judean desert is praised in the early seventh century. A recurrent motif in martyrologies from the earliest extant texts to the Islamic period is the great pains Christians took to retrieve the remnants of martyrs. The most common remark on

173 Chronicle of Zuqnīn, pp. 168-173 (year 743f.). See also ibid., p. 207 (year 766f.) where so many people died of diseases that “wherever they settled or fled, unburied corpses of people could be seen alongside roads and high places and valleys, discarded and being devoured by animals.” It is a recurrent motif in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, in the author’s other descriptions of great calamities, that there were not enough people to bury the dead (see also p. 148 [year 704f.], p. 305, 311-313 [years 772-773f.]). The chronicler was inspired to use it by its parallels in the Books of the Prophets that he frequently quotes (which is not to say, of course, that unburied corpses were a rare sight in times of epidemics or famine). For the description of the first phase of the pandemic (the plague of Justinian) that the chronicler took over from John of Ephesus, see pp. 94-113 (year 543f.). The description of the chronicler of Zuqnīn is clearly influenced by John’s but the latter lacks the repeated references to the problems of burying the victims, despite the hundreds of thousands of victims he says died in the plague.

174 For the Romans and the Byzantines, see Rebillard, “Les formes de l’assistance funéraire.”

175 John Moschus, Pratum spirituale, p. 16 (no. 24).
the retrieval of the corpses is the necessity of giving them decent burial; this appears to
have overtaken the quest for relics in significance.\textsuperscript{176}

Deliberately abandoning a corpse unburied constituted harsh punishment. Dead
warriors of the defeated enemy were often left strewn on the battlefield, for scavenging
animals to feast on. The earliest famous incident indicating that corpses of enemy hosts
were treated in this way is perhaps the \textit{Iliad}'s story of Hector's death (books XXII,
XXIV).\textsuperscript{177} Although its frequency is unclear, the practice continued in late antiquity and
later.\textsuperscript{178} A more significant practice, which also continued without interruption from
antiquity into the Islamic period, was that corpses of executed criminals were sometimes
left without burial and exposed to wild animals. In one hagiographical story from the
early Islamic period, a Jewish character is punished with the “death of evil-doers” which
meant “to be beheaded outside the village in a desert place <and to be left there> as food
for carnivorous beasts.”\textsuperscript{179} The indignity associated with the lack of burial led to the

\textsuperscript{176} See, for example, the collection of martyrlogies in Brock and Harvey (trans.), \textit{Holy Women}.

\textsuperscript{177} On this episode, see Vernant, “La belle mort et le cadavre outragé,” pp. 68-71.

\textsuperscript{178} According to the \textit{Chronicle of Zuqnîn}, Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik, during his campaign against
the Khazars, “filled the birds of the sky and the beasts of the steppe with their flesh” (p. 160, year
731-732). According to the same author, after Hishâm’s death the Arabs “saturated the ground
with their blood, and birds and animals, including dogs, fed themselves with their flesh” (p. 167,
year 743-744). Also, following the battle on the Sinai Peninsula between the Ishmaelites of
Pharan and the attacking Blemmyes, the former emerge victorious, and bury their own dead but
leave the cadavers of their enemies “food for birds, beasts, and winged things of the air” (see
Ammonius Report 36, in the English translation of the Greek version in Caner, \textit{History and
Hagiography}, p. 168, and of the CPA version, Lewis (ed.), \textit{The Forty Martyrs}, p. 13, for the CPA
text, see ibid., p. 46*). For a somewhat earlier example, see Lactantius, \textit{De mortibus
persecutorum}, pp. 8-9, where he describes the death of the emperor Decius in a similar way: “…
[he] was immediately surrounded by the barbarians and killed along with the greater part of his
army; he could not even be honoured with burial, but, as was right for an enemy of God (\textit{ut
hostem dei oportebat}), he lay stripped and naked, food for wild beasts and birds.”

\textsuperscript{179} The story is found in the \textit{Pratum Spirituale} (no. 227, supplementary tales, p. 209), but was
certainly not written by John Moschus, since an emir appears in it several times. Note also the
exhumation of enemies. For example, according to the *Chronicle of Zuqnîn*, Marwân “exhumed Yazîd (II) from the grave and crucified him, head down, on a stake.” The same *Chronicle* also describes at length how people resorted to digging up graves in order to use the goods they found in them to pay their taxes. The author abhorred the digging up of ancient graves (“those who were buried and were resting in graves since before the advent of Christ”), and even more cases in which the freshly interred were disturbed. In his repeated and lengthy treatments of these incidents, he hardly wastes words on the pillaging itself; what troubles him is the “scattering of the bones” or the abandonment of the corpses that have not yet decomposed. The danger of being abandoned after death and ending as prey to wild animals continued to be present long after late antiquity, and was always seen as dishonorable and opprobrious. Horror of it was accordingly deeply engrained.

In a world in which people from time to time saw someone whom this fate had befallen, in which town-dwellers saw vultures preying on corpses of executed criminals, in which travelers came upon the skeletal remains of those who had perished on the road, a body undamaged by animals despite abandonment was nothing short of miraculous. It revealed divine protection, recognition of virtue and piety, and is mentioned with due amazement in late antique texts. Such a story is related about Muʿādh, the chief of the lack of burial of Patriarch Isaac (of Antioch) who lost favor with the caliph al-Manṣūr and was executed by him (*Chronicle of Zuqnîn*, p. 192, year 754-755).

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180 *Chronicle of Zuqnîn*, p. 175 (year 745-746).

181 *Chronicle of Zuqnîn*, p. 242, pp. 277-278, pp. 286-287, p. 294, pp. 309-310 (years 768f., 772-773f.). For two other examples of exhumation, see ibid., p. 38 (year 488f.; Byzantines “dug into the ground and exhumed all the bones of their dead that were around their synagogue, and set them on fire”), and p. 79 (year 534f., from the letter of Simon of Beth Arsham: the Jewish king of Yemen exhumes the bones of a bishop of Nadjrân, and burns them).
Banū Taghlib, prompting the ecclesiastical authorities recognize his sanctity. Another example is the corpse of John the Humble, preserved for seven years in a cave on a mountain abundant in wild animals; the men who found his body regarded him as a great saint. By contrast, a corpse mangled by beasts or birds against the intentions of those taking care of it signaled the worst, divine displeasure and condemnation; it meant that God himself regarded the person’s sins as so grave as to overrule his escape from human justice. That Muhammad’s corpse, despite his followers’ intention to honor him, was gruesomely mauled illustrated for Christian readers God’s disapproval of him.

One might assume that the rich martyrological literature generated by early Roman persecutions of Christians, full of accounts of martyrs thrown to wild beasts in the circuses, their willingness to embrace this fate and the droves of volunteers seeking it, should have changed the meaning of such death. These martyrs were, after all, examples to be emulated, or at least admired, and the authors of martyrologies described their deaths as ultimate triumph. However, no such change in meaning took place. Perhaps because the practice of exposure of executed criminals by the authorities did not cease (and was, despite the impression readers of Christian historiography might have, even during the few pre-Constantinian persecutions a more common sight than similar deaths of Christian martyrs), being devoured by animals continued to be associated with crimes and sins, even in the monastic context: in some seventh-century accounts, monks ask not to be buried in expiation of their sins. Most strikingly, John Climacus writes about an enclosure called ‘The Prison’ set aside for penitent monks in a monastery he visited:

182 John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, p. 70 (no. 87).
“When one of these good inhabitants of the land of repentance was about to go to God and stand before the impartial tribunal, then as soon as he saw that his end was at hand, he would beg the great abbot through the superior set over them with adjurations not to give him human burial, but to fling him, like an irrational animal, into a river bed or to give him up to wild beasts in the fields. And this was often done by that lamp of discernment who would order the dead to be carried out without any psalmody or honour.” These penitents, John says, addressed each other, at their last hour as “brother and fellow criminal.”

On the basis of the European versions, John Tolan, following earlier scholars and relating Muhammad’s death to the deaths of Arius and Nestorius, suggested that the story

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183 John Climacus, *Ladder*, pp. 99-107 (5.3-27); quotations from pp. 103-104 (5.21-22). Several additional texts underline the continuity of this interpretation for the abandonment of corpses among Christians in the early Islamic period. Anastasius of Sinai tells of an anchorite who asked another to throw his corpse “in the desert that it might be eaten by beasts and birds because it sinned much against God and is not worthy to be buried.” On the third day after fulfilling his request, the anchorite appeared to him in his sleep, and told him: “God has done me a great mercy. Since my body remained unburied He said to me, ‘See, through your great humility you are chosen with Antony.’” (For this story, see “Patristic Texts” on www.monachos.net, Anastasius of Sinai, *Concerning the Holy Fathers in Sinai*, supplement 2. It is not included in the English translation of Anastasius’ *Collections in Caner, History and Hagiography.* Another monk foretells that he will be devoured by wild beasts in retribution because he once let a stranger be devoured by his dogs when, a long time ago, he had been a shepherd (see John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, p. 137, no. 167). In yet another story from the *Pratum spirituale*, a monk whose mule killed a child accidentally tries to atone for it by letting himself be killed by a lion. “There was a lion nearby and, each day, Abba Paul would go into its den, teasing and provoking it to jump up and devour him—but the lion did no harm whatsoever.” Then he lay down on the lion’s path, and “as though it were a human, it very carefully stepped over the elder without even touching him. Then the elder knew that God had forgiven him his sin” (see ibid., p. 81, no. 101). Note also the following remark of a sixth-century monk about the martyrs of old: “We will ever wonder at the endurance of those whose remembrances have been preserved from time past… How some were torn apart by carnivorous beasts like criminals…” (in John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, p. 51; no. 69, quoting Abba Palladios).
portrays him as a heresiarch.\textsuperscript{184} Late antique Christian tradition attributed gruesome end to the two eastern heresiarchs: both are said to have died a painful and humiliating death in a latrine.\textsuperscript{185} But it is unlikely that either the older eastern versions of the story or the ones first attested in Adelphus (or their original authors, if they indeed originated in the East) represent Muhammad as heresiarch because, for one thing, he was never explicitly described as such by eastern Christians.\textsuperscript{186} (Western Europeans, on the other hand, could have understood the story in this way—in western writings Muhammad was often described as a heresiarch.) Also, the stories of his death and those of the two heresiarchs are too dissimilar to suggest any direct relationship. In fact, death in a latrine might have become a standard literary motif for heretics in the East: in the seventh century, John Moschus attributes such a death to Thalilaios, an archbishop of Thessalonica.\textsuperscript{187} All these


\textsuperscript{185} For Arius’ death, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, \textit{History}, pp. 17-18 (1.10). For Nestorius’, John Moschus, \textit{Pratum spirituale}, pp. 197-198 [supplementary tales]. These stories might be modeled on the death of King Jeroham who died in a similar way, although, unlike the stories of Arius and Nestorius, after an illness of two years (2 Chronicles 21.11-19).

\textsuperscript{186} The assertion that eastern Christians regarded him as such often occurs in secondary literature, based on the inclusion of Islam in John of Damascus’ \textit{De Haeresibus}. But heresy is an unusually broad concept in this work: it includes also various non-Christian religions and philosophical schools (Judaism, Samaritanism, Platonism, etc.). On this question, see Crone, \textit{Slaves on Horses}, p. 213, n. 97. Differently from eastern Christians, medieval European Christians regarded him, among other things, as a heresiarch, and one of his twelfth-century biographers did compare his death to that of Arius (Gerald of Wales; see Tolan, \textit{Saracens}, p. 168).

\textsuperscript{187} Such a story is in John Moschus, \textit{Pratum spirituale}, pp. 33-34 (no. 43), entitled “The horrible death of Thalilaios, the impious archbishop of Thessalonica.” He turned, John says, “to the worship of idols,” and for this he was expelled “by a canonical vote” (apparently from the priesthood). Thalilaios later bribed his way back to his diocese but when he was about to regain it, he went to the privy, and “[t]hey found him with his head down in the drain of the privy and his feet up in the air. He had gained for himself an equally well-matched eternal death as that which bore off Arius, the sacrilegious enemy of God… When <Thalilaios> hoped to continue the evil he had previously committed by the unjust intervention of those in authority, the angel who governed the Thessalonian church set out together with the great martyr Demetrios. And in the very place where he used to associate with the impure demon which provoked him and to
stories, of Muhammad and the heresiarchs, seem to belong to a much broader category of
eastern Mediterranean legends, those about hideous deaths of enemies of Christ, and
before Christianity, enemies of religion (of a god, gods, or God). These legends are best
known from classical Greek literature, as stories about deaths of *theomakhoi* (“those
fighting against god[s]”), but are also attested in other literatures of the ancient eastern
Mediterranean: in the Hebrew Bible, Hellenistic Jewish writings, and late antique
Christian literature. 188 Theodore Abū Qurra, one of the most prolific Christian apologists
of the early Islamic world, while never calling Muhammad a heresiarch, does refer to him
as “the enemy of God” (*ekhthros... tou theou*). 189

Many stories about deaths of people readily fitting the category of *theomakhoi*,
from antiquity to early Islamic times, resemble Adelphus’ version of the narrative of
Muhammad’s death more than those of Arius and Nestorius. According to Ibn Abî l-
Dunyâ, Herodias died, shortly after viewing the severed head of John the Baptist, in an
ironic turn of fate, torn to pieces by her own dogs that she used to feed with human
flesh. 190 According to Thomas of Marga, Rostam, usurper of a metropolitan see, was
attacked by dogs that “worried him and bit him, and brought him unto death, like that

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188 About legends of the deaths of *theomakhoi*, see Nestle, “Die Legende vom Tode;” and
Moreau’s introduction to his edition and French translation of Lactantius’ *De mortibus
persecutorum* (on pp. 60-64).

189 John of Damascus and Theodore Abû Qurra, *Schriften zum Islam*, pp. 98-99 (opusculum 20,
Greek text and German translation).

190 Ibn Abî l-Dunyâ, *Man ʿāsha*, pp. 88-89 (no. 45; without naming Herodias). There may have
been Christian precedents to this story, perhaps in Syria where the first transmitter lived (see p.
88, n. 4) but I could not find them.
wicked woman Jezebel.” According to Lactantius, the emperor Decius, whom he calls “an enemy of God” (*hostem dei*), died on the battlefield, and was left as prey for animals. Nothing but animosity to the true religion of the time was common to Herodias, Rostam, Decius, and Muhammad. At the same time, many other *theomakhoi* died different, if no less painful and humiliating deaths. The dog motif in the story of Muhammad’s death, in any of its versions, does not imply an image of Muhammad specifically as a heresiarch; it merely places him in the broader category of the enemies of faith, of which heresiarchs are a subgroup.

The species of the animals, dogs, seems not to be of much significance. The impurity of dogs for Muslims certainly aggravated the offensiveness of the story, but it was not the primary concern of the Christians of the early Islamic period who constructed and circulated it. Had they wanted to choose an impure animal, pigs would have served the purpose better. It is only in the European versions that the impurity of the animals often comes into focus, and in them, dogs indeed turn into pigs, and the story is told with the explicit purpose of explaining why pigs are impure for Muslims: because they killed their prophet. Nothing suggests a similar reason behind the selection of dogs by eastern

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192 Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, pp. 8-9.

193 For example, note the variety of deaths that persecutors of Christians die in Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, and see the examples adduced by Nestle, “Die Legende vom Tode,” and in Moreau’s introduction.

194 Most recently, Alexandra Cuffel discussed the story in the context of the role of impurity in medieval interreligious polemic; see her *Gendering Disgust*, *passim*.
narrators of the story. They chose dogs because caliphs ordered the killing of dogs from time to time until at least the late Umayyad period and it lent a degree of verisimilitude to their story. Later eastern narrators continued to refer to dogs instead of pigs even after the periodic killing of dogs ceased because, as narrators of legends as a rule do, they preferred the historically most plausible detail for their story. Dogs are known to eat human flesh; dogs eating corpses are a commonplace in accounts of abandonments of the dead; they are also likely to have lived in a human habitat in the Arabian Peninsula.

Whoever changed the dogs to pigs in the version known to Adelphus, be it a Levantine, a Byzantine, or a European, was less aware than the Christians of the Islamic world before him had been of the kinds of animals adapted to the climate in the Ḥidjāz. He picked pigs, another domesticated animal that eats human flesh kept in his town. Had the earlier eastern versions of the story been set in the desert, the species that deprived Muhammad of burial would probably have been jackals, hyenas, or vultures.

The manner of death ascribed to Muhammad does not seem to have influenced the interpretation: whether he was devoured by dogs alive or dead, the episode suggested criminal character and animosity to God. The reason for its modification, from mauling after death to tearing apart alive, seems to be the same as that behind the popularity of other legends about cruel deaths of theomakhoi: to satisfy the yearning of the audience for tangible justice. The wicked has to pay for his wickedness in the here and now. The religions of the ancient eastern Mediterranean attributed a similar postmortem fate to all mortals: survival as disembodied spirits in a dark, distant, and dismal location. There were hardly any ways to reward the extraordinarily virtuous in the hereafter (apart from
rare exceptions, as Elijah in the Bible and the heroes in Elysium in Greek mythology), or
to punish the extraordinarily evil after death (the few imprisoned in Tartarus are again
exceptions). To make sure that everybody got what he deserved, reward, as the classic
case of Job illustrates, and retribution had to happen in this life. The espousal of bodily
resurrection by Near eastern religions, by Hellenistic Judaism and later by Christianity
and Islam, made it possible to postpone both reward and punishment to the hereafter, and
thus mitigated the need for punishment in this life. If the *theomakhos* will be restored to
his corporeality and not be limited to an existence as a disembodied spirit, let alone cease
to exist entirely, then reprisal after death should be just as effective as in this life. But
regardless of this development, the human desire to witness the punishment of the wicked
never abated. Horrid deaths continued to be ascribed to and sought for whoever was
thought to deserve them. More than a millennium after the changes in the eastern
Mediterranean conception of the afterlife took place, Muhammad was made to die torn
apart by dogs or pigs in response to this archaic yet persisting desire.

**Will the sea disgorge its dead?**

A close look at the story in the context of eastern Mediterranean religious beliefs thus
reveals a powerful portrayal of Muhammad not only as inferior to Christ and the saints, a
false prophet, but also as ultimately an enemy of God who deserved no dignity in death.
These characterizations mesh with Christian polemical claims against Islam as known
from the Christian Arabic and Syriac literature of the Islamic world. But many people,
from antiquity until at least as late as the tenth century AD, regarded the fate of a corpse
devoured by wild beasts as worse than humiliation: it raised doubts about the resurrection of the deceased in the hereafter.

On the face of it, the major religions in the early Islamic Near East espoused similar doctrines about the postmortem fate of humans: Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews alike professed to believe in the bodily resurrection of all at the end of days. By the eighth century, the region had been moving towards the adoption of belief in the corporeality and generality of resurrection for more than a millennium. Earlier, in most religions of the ancient eastern Mediterranean, the spirits of the dead were believed to lead a disembodied existence around human settlements or in a vaguely defined distant location. A major exception in this respect was Zoroastrianism which, thanks to Cyrus’ conquest of the Near East in the sixth century BC, bequeathed the belief in bodily resurrection to Judaism, whence Christianity adapted it, followed by Islam. After Achaemenid rule, the sacred texts of eastern Mediterranean religions expressed the doctrine of bodily and general resurrection in more and more unambiguous terms. It is hard work to prove the doctrine from the Hebrew Bible (and very much so from its earlier books); much easier, although not without problems, from the New Testament; and straightforward from the Qur’ān. Most Christian theologians of course managed to explain away the few troubling passages of the New Testament, but these still left sufficient space for dissent on the matter, as illustrated by the peculiar beliefs of various Gnostic sects; the Qur’ān left no such space. For all the ink Christians spilled on criticizing Muslim doctrines, they never accused Muslims of denying the corporeality and the generality of the resurrection. Rather, they thought Muslims took its physicality too
far: in the absence of anything similar to Paul’s *sōma pneumatikon* (“spiritual body”) in the Qur’ān, nothing stopped Muslim theologians from positing a fully physical body for the resurrected and from interpreting the heavenly rewards promised in the Qur’ān in a far more corporeal way than was palatable to their Christian colleagues.\(^{195}\)

This broad and long-standing espousal of the doctrine of general and bodily resurrection notwithstanding, exceptions remained. Medieval heresiographers in the Islamic world describe a number of deviations. Some people, they report, denied either the corporeality or the generality of the resurrection, while others favored such conceptions about postmortem fate as reincarnation or metempsychosis. Among those who rejected the resurrection of the body and believed instead in the immortality of the soul, some *falāsifa* are the most famous. Some Jewish and Samaritan sects denied the generality of the resurrection, understandably in view of the scarcity of sacred texts in the Hebrew Bible that could be invoked in support of the doctrine. Some *ghulāt* and Jewish fringe groups adopted belief in reincarnation and metempsychosis.

In addition to these deviant notions of the afterlife, recorded because sizable sects or prominent thinkers embraced them, popular doubts about the feasibility of general bodily resurrection continued to linger also among adherents of those religions that otherwise followed the tide. These doubts never became part of any major theological

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\(^{195}\) On the history of the doctrine of resurrection from the ancient Near East to its adoption in Christianity and beyond, see Segal, *Life after Death*. For a fascinating discussion of the Christian-Muslim debate on the afterlife, see Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahirā*, pp. 121-128 (“The Physics of Heaven”). Works that could be added to those discussed by Roggema include John of Dara (ninth century), *On Resurrection* (MS Mingana Syr. 56, ff. 51r-93v; memras 7, 8, 9); a letter of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (letter no. 14; *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae*, vol. 30, pp. 108-119, and vol. 31, pp. 72-78); and the fourteenth-century theological compendium traditionally attributed to Ibn al-Makīn (see Ps.-Ibn al-Makīn, *Ḫāwī*, vol. 2, pp. 299-323).
system, so heresiographers ignored them. Instead, they were preserved for posterity in questions prefacing religious scholars’ rebuttals of them. For example, John of Dara, the ninth-century Jacobite author of the bulky treatise entitled *On the Resurrection of Human Bodies* (’*al qyomto d-pagre noshoye*), responded to a number of these. Two questions occur more than once in the treatise; one of them concerns the feasibility of resurrection for those eaten by animals, and another for those destroyed by fire.\(^{196}\)

The dog episode in the Christian story of Muhammad’s death (in those versions where his corpse is fully destroyed) seems related to the most recurrent of these doubts: Will God be able to raise the dead devoured by animals? The problem is most forcefully set forth in an apology for Christianity that Ḥūsain b. Zur‘a, a prominent disciple of Yahyā b. Ḥūṣain (both of them Jacobite philosophers), wrote in 387 AH (997 AD) to Bishr b. Finḥās, a Jewish friend of his. The main topics of this apology are such central issues of Jewish-Christian polemic as the abrogation of the Mosaic law and the Trinity, but Ibn Zur‘a appends to it his answer to an objection to general resurrection (’*umūm al-qiyāma*), posed by another Jewish friend of his, Abū l-Khayr Dāwūd b. Mūsad.\(^{197}\) Abū l-Khayr argued for the restriction of the resurrection (’*khūṣūs al-qiyāma* to certain individuals:\(^{198}\)

\[qāla lī a-laysa l-qiyāmatu ‘indakum ‘āmmatun li-sā’iri l-nās\]

\[qultu balā\]

\(^{196}\) For the first question see MS Mingana Syr. 56, ff. 53r, 58v, 60r; for the second ff. 53r, 59v. On John of Dara (and additional manuscripts of this treatise), see Vööbus, “Important Manuscript Discoveries.”

\(^{197}\) For the Arabic text of the treatise, see Sbath (ed.), *Vingt traités*, pp. 19-52. About Ibn Zur‘a, see Haddad, ‘*Isa ibn Zur‘a*. Haddad gives an almost complete translation of the debate on pp. 313-316. About Abū l-Khayr, see Goldziher, “Le moutakallim juif Abou-l-Kheyr.”

\(^{198}\) Sbath (ed.), *Vingt traités*, pp. 47-49 (the translated passage is from pp. 47-48).
qāla a-wa-laysa kullun minhum yanba’ithu bi-badanihi

fa-adjabtu bi-balā

fa-‘taradānī ‘inda dhālika fa-qāla fa-idhā kāna l-amrū kadhdālika wa-kāna l-
sab’u qad akala khamsata anfusin mina l-nāsi wa-ghtadhā bihim fa-qad šārū
djuz’an min djuthhatihi

qultu wa-la- ‘amrī inna dhālika kadhdālika

qāla thumma inna l-sab’a šādahu ba’du l-nāsi fa-akalahu fa-šāra djuz’an
min djuthhati l-sā’idi lahu wa-l-akhirī laḥma’hu

fa-qultu l-amrū kadhdālika

qāla fa-in u’rdat djuththata ākili l-sab’i lam yūdjad al-khamsatu l-nafrū l-
ladhīna akalahum al-sab’u wa-in wudjdīa l-khamsatu l-nafrū lam yūdjad
badanu l-akhirī li-l-sab’ fa-qad da’ati l-ḍarūratu ilā an yufqada ba’du l-nāsi fi
l-qiyāmati wa-ta’dama ta’ifatun minhum wa-idhā kāna l-amrū kadhdālika fa-
laysa mā tadda’ī min ‘umūmih li-sā’iri l-bashari ḥaqqān ba’l-qawlu
za’mu qawlinā fi anna l-qiyāmatā la’ ta’ummū sā’iri l-nāsi bal innamā tūdjad
li-ba’ḍihim lā ghanīr

He (Abū l-Khayr) said to me, “The resurrection is general, for all mankind, in
your opinion, is it not?”

I answered, “Of course it is.”

He said, “Each one of them will be resurrected in his body, will they not?”

I answered, “Of course they will.”

Then he objected, saying, “And (what do you say) if the matter was like this:
an animal ate five people, was nourished by them, and they had become part
of its body?

I answered, “By my life, it is so (as I said).”

He said, “(And what do you say if) afterward somebody hunted the animal,
ate it, and the animal became part of the body of the hunter and eater of the
meat?

I answered, “It is so.”
He said, “But if the body of the eater of the animal was restored, the five people whom the animal ate are lost, and if the five people are restored, the eater of the animal is lost. Therefore, it is inevitable that some people would be lost at the resurrection and some of them would be lacking. If the matter was so, your claim about the generality of resurrection is untrue, and the (true) opinion is the one which we hold that the resurrection is not general to all people, but it exists only for some of them, no more.”

Predictably enough, the account of this conversation continues with the refutation of Ibn Zur‘a. In his opinion, bodies consist of the four elements (al-ṭuqussāt al-arba‘a), and it is the difference in the proportion of these elements that makes each body individual. Since God remembers this unique proportion for each person, at the resurrection He will be able to reconstitute everyone by combining the four elements according to exactly the same proportion, obviating the need to preserve the material (mādda) of the individual body itself after death. Abū l-Khayr, claims Ibn Zur‘a, acceded to the validity of his counterargument.

The objection of Abū l-Khayr to general resurrection was neither unique to him nor restricted to Jews. Pagan critics of the Christian doctrine of resurrection put similar questions to their interlocutors already in the second century AD.\footnote{See Chadwick, “The Resurrection of the Body,” pp. 89-90. Pines suggested that pre-Islamic pagan authors used this criticism of the Christian doctrine of general resurrection (“La loi naturelle,” p. 156, n. 10, referring to Chadwick, “The Resurrection of the Body”). The target of the pagan attack was, however, the corporeality of the resurrection, not its generality as in the case of Abū l-Khayr.} Two significant assumptions underlie the objection of Abū l-Khayr, as they usually do that of the pagan polemicists. First, he assumes that to bring about the resurrection, God will need the very material of the human body. Second, he supposes that through digestion, the four elements that make up the body are transformed into each other. Ibn Zur‘a disagreed with
the first assumption of Abū l-Khayr. In his opinion, God will make do without the material of the body when raising people from the dead. Saadyah Gaon, an older contemporary of Ibn Zur‘a and Abū l-Khayr, argued against the second assumption. Citing an objection similar to that of Abū l-Khayr, he takes great pains to explain that the general resurrection is feasible despite the necessity of preserving all the material of each body; in his opinion, the material making up all human bodies will be preserved until the resurrection.\footnote{200 See Saadyah, \textit{Kitāb al-amānāt}, pp. 220-223. His hypothetical question is the following: How does God resurrect a man who was eaten by a lion that then drowned and was eaten by fish that was in turn eaten by another man who was then burned (p. 221)? He never actually says what made him explain this matter at such length but it was probably the doubts some Jews expressed about the general resurrection in his time that made him to do so. That both Saadyah and al-Qirqisānī discuss the afterlife at great length and refute various opinions concerning it shows that this question was hotly debated among tenth-century Jews (see Saadyah, \textit{Kitāb al-amānāt}, pp. 188-229; Qirqisānī, \textit{Kitāb al-anwār}, vol. 3, pp. 222-284).}

Similar concerns were voiced and answered by Christians too, as we saw above in the quotations from John of Dara’s treatise.\footnote{201 In the objection as put by the discussants of Ibn Zur‘a, Saadyah, and many of the pagan polemicists before them, the main problem seems to be that consumption by animals ultimately leads to cannibalism. This is distinct from the views most often refuted by the Christian theologians, who seem to have mostly responded to questions referring only to consumption by animals or by fire. Fully analyzing the two kinds of objections would be necessary, but only the second, simpler form is relevant for the story of Muhammad’s death.} Among them, these doubts seem to have been held only by uneducated laymen. For theologians, it was unthinkable to curtail God’s powers in this way. Indeed, the answer was so evident for them that it rarely approaches the sophistication of Ibn Zur‘a; they merely point to the creation as proof of God’s infinite power with a rhetorical question: If God could create the universe how could He not recreate anybody who perished from it?\footnote{202 A similar argument from creation to the feasibility of resurrection was used also in Zoroastrianism and Hellenistic Judaism (see Segal, \textit{Life after Death}, p. 190).} All medieval Christian
theologians dutifully asserted the doctrine of general resurrection, but it took them a very long time to fully succeed in convincing their faithful about all the minutiae of it, if indeed they were ever successful. It was deemed necessary to dispel doubts regarding this problem as late as the thirteenth century. The Copt al-Mu’taman b. al-‘Assāl (fl. 1230-1260) still thought it expedient to quote the exchange about resurrection between Abū l-Khayr and Ibn Zur‘a in his monumental Madjmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn.203 In addition to the loquacious treatment of the topic by the Jacobite John of Dara quoted above, the Melkite Paul of Antioch (bishop of Sidon, fl. probably in the twelfth century)204 and the Nestorian Isho‘yahb bar Malkon (d. before 1233) wrote their own shorter responses to similar questions.205 During all these centuries it did not seem to bother any of these theologians that their staple response flatly contradicts the teaching of the New Testament and of the earliest Christian thinkers: none of the oldest authorities taught that God would create another body following the same model, but rather that the very same material that the body consisted of would be gathered together again and reunited with the soul, as indeed is assumed by Abū l-Khayr, Saadyah, and the lay Christian doubters.206

I would like to suggest that the doubters’ differentiation between the two fates of bodies, between the natural process of decomposition and their consumption by animals, was rooted in ancient beliefs concerning the afterlife. In the ancient Near East, abnormal

206 See Bynum, The Resurrection of the Body, pp. 1-114 (chapters 1 and 2).
death—destruction by animals and by fire—and the resulting lack of burial created an anxiety about the spirits of the dead threatening the living, not being able to enter the netherworld. Similarly, ancient Greeks and Romans believed that without proper burial the soul would be prevented from entering the other world. It was such beliefs, and not merely the indignity, that made the exposure of criminals after their execution an especially brutal punishment, from the Sumerians to the Romans.\textsuperscript{207}

Mainstream Christianity and Islam were latecomers in the eastern Mediterranean. Despite their seemingly complete triumph, various groups continued for a long time to adhere to their pre-Islamic, even pre-Christian religions, and others were only superficially Islamized and Christianized.\textsuperscript{208} Therefore, traces of ancient beliefs must have remained, among them probably the anxiety about ending up in the jaws of wild animals, whether by dying that way or after death. I do not suggest that they were widely, let alone universally, held or that most people who had such doubts would have been able to give an explicit explanation for it. And, to be sure, my only evidence for them is indirect, the relative frequency with which this concern appears in questions posed to

\textsuperscript{207} See, for example, Penglase, “Some Concepts of Afterlife,” p. 193 (ancient Near East); Sourvinou-Inwood, “To Die and Enter the House of Hades,” pp. 31-32 (the Homeric period); Endsjø, \textit{Greek Resurrection Beliefs}, pp. 29-35 (later Greek beliefs); and Hope, “Contempt and Respect,” p. 119 (the Romans). For a comparison of ancient Near Eastern and ancient Greek ideas on afterlife, see Penglase, “Some Concepts of Afterlife.” Similar problems arose with other ways of destroying the body, such as the burning of the corpse (except when part of the funerary ritual, as in certain periods among Greeks and Romans) or throwing it into the sea or a river. About related beliefs among pre-Islamic Arabs, see Stetkevych, \textit{The Mute Immortals Speak}, p. 69, and Homerin, “Echoes of a Thirsty Owl,” \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{208} On the dominance of paganism in the sixth century in regions that were soon to come under Muslim rule, see Bowersock, \textit{Hellenism in Late Antiquity}. 

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theologians. This frequency, however, seems to make better sense if we assume a faint survival of ancient beliefs behind it.

The dog episode of the Christian story of Muhammad’s death might have been meaningful for more Jews than its other motifs; this may explain (if a single instance can be explained at all) why only that one episode is attested in eastern Jewish polemic against Islam. While other motifs of the story, in particular the failed resurrection and ascension of Muhammad and to some extent also the corruption of his corpse, would have been largely devoid of meaning for a Jewish audience, the dog episode probably resonated with many Jews, Rabbanites and Karaites alike. By the time of Yefet ben ‘Eli, Jews of most stripes had long joined the Mediterranean orthodoxy regarding the doctrine of resurrection, but the ambiguity of Jewish scriptural prooftexts, talmudic as well as biblical, left more room for dissent than the New Testament and Qur’ân did for Christians or Muslims. Rabbanites and Karaites had substantial subgroups who believed in restricted resurrection and, as we saw in the argument of Abū l-Khayr, some of them argued against the technical possibility of general resurrection, employing the case of those eaten by animals. Their sophistication, the fact that they were part of a religious elite, not of the uneducated masses, and that they incorporated their arguments into a broader theological system distinguishes these advocates of restricted resurrection from the Christians quoted in the work of John of Dara and elsewhere. In the Jewish case the same basic concern was provided with the luster of philosophy.

For some people in the early medieval Near East, therefore, indignity was not the only concern that arose from the danger of being devoured by animals, be they lions,
hyenas, dogs, pigs, vultures or fish. It touched upon the afterlife too. For them, Christians and non-Christians alike, some versions of the story of Muhammad’s death had a powerful message. The versions where he is devoured by animals, whether entirely (those attested in Latin sources, by Adelphus and others) or almost entirely (the one given by Yefet ben ‘Eli where only his heels remain), imply that there will be no resurrection for him. Not only was his body putrefied, signaling his ungodliness, but it cannot ever be restored to life. His end could not be more final, he could not be more dead.

This interpretation of the story can, of course, be only very tentative. There is no textual evidence that gives explicit support to it: the Egyptian Christian’s version of the story, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, signals at most a vague connection between the treatment of Muhammad’s corpse and his fate in the afterlife. The Egyptian Christian could equally have meant that it is because Muhammad was an impostor that he has no place in Paradise, with or without dogs devouring him. Even the evidence that some medieval Christians as late as the Islamic period linked the treatment of the dead to their afterlife fate is indirect. None of them left behind a text espousing such views, and no extant text explicitly attributes such a belief to a Christian. One can merely speculate that it did exist because of the theologians’ repeated refutations of it, and because the assumptions behind the questions they refuted mesh with beliefs known from the ancient Near East and from Greek and Roman religion. After several recent studies devoted to the survival of certain elements of ancient Near Eastern lore, belief systems and law into
the Islamic period, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest that such obsolete doubts regarding the afterlife might have survived from antiquity into the Middle Ages.\(^{209}\)

**Conclusion: polemical narratives and religious worlds**

Scholars often assert that anti-Islamic polemical narratives were told in order to denigrate Islam, or to prove that Christianity is superior to it, that Muhammad was a false prophet, and the like. Such remarks are made in connection to this story too. While these interpretations are true as far as they go, they are too general. In addition to general ideas about Islam and Muhammad, we should look for more specific messages that the stories might contain. Also, the phrasing of many of these scholarly interpretations is misleading. Legends as a rule do not attempt to prove anything, they do not argue for or against anything; they reinforce values and ideas widely accepted in society. They rarely impart new message to the audience; they support, strengthen, and highlight its traditional beliefs. Christians did not circulate the story of Muhammad’s death to prove that Muhammad was less than Christ or that he was not a saint; with or without the story, few medieval Christians would have doubted this much. What we have to look for are specific messages in full agreement with traditional beliefs.

The brevity and simplicity of the Christian story of Muhammad’s death is deceptive: it encapsulates a range of medieval eastern Christian views of Muhammad in interconnected layers of meaning, vividly portraying to its audience who he truly was in his life, what would become of him in the hereafter, and what his death implied for his followers. Muhammad’s unfulfilled prediction of his resurrection and ascension to heaven supported the standard Christian view that he was a false prophet, and the failure of his resurrection reinforced his inferiority to Christ. The putrefaction of his corpse and its violation by animals underlined the contrast between him and Christian saints, and associated him with condemned criminals whose bodies were often abandoned unburied. The mauling of his corpse, by raising doubts whether he would ever be resurrected and take part in any kind of afterlife, illustrated the finality of his death. Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead, reinforced by the doubts of his resurrection ever happening in the future, led to questions about the hopes of his followers for their own resurrection.

As it might appear from the discussion of the previous pages, these meanings would not have been uniformly significant for any single reader or listener of the story. The importance of each meaning and whether there was any at all varied according to the intellectual, social, even geographical background of each Christian familiar with the story. For example, to argue from Muhammad’s failure to rise from the dead that Muslims themselves have little hope of being resurrected seems to have filled a temporary niche in Christian-Muslim polemic. This argument, as discussed above, probably developed in the late eighth century, was popular with some ninth-century Christian polemicists, and may have remained restricted to their arsenal. Christ’s
resurrection was used already in the New Testament as proof for the possibility of the
general resurrection and thus was no doubt widely known. The novel application of this
idea against the Muslims’ expectation of general resurrection probably got them easy
scores with their Christian audiences and must at first have taken their Muslim
interlocutors by surprise. But its success was ephemeral; it disappears from the polemical
record after the ninth century. No theologian would have denied the validity of other
arguments for the possibility of general resurrection that Muslims could employ just as
well as Christians, most importantly the oft-repeated one based on *creatio ex nihilo*. Only
some uneducated Christians and some non-Christians would ever have interpreted the
mangling of Muhammad’s corpse as a proof that he would never rise from the dead.
Theologians had been fighting against the principle underlying this interpretation for
centuries and by the ninth century their efforts probably ensured that no Christian with a
basic doctrinal understanding would have approved of it. These Christians would have
found Muhammad’s resurrection on the Day of Judgment, followed by a suitable
Dantesque fate closer to the truth. The dogs’ mauling of the corpse probably did not lead
audiences in the eastern parts of the Caliphate, formerly part of the Sassanian Empire,
with Zoroastrianism as its main religion, to associate Muhammad with outlaws or
convicts as easily as it did in the western parts. In a milieu where exposure (albeit
admittedly in rather different circumstances) was a legitimate way to dispose of a corpse,
the damage inflicted by scavenging animals on Muhammad’s could hardly carry too
grave connotations.
Although the story was not understood in the same way by all Christians everywhere, it was clearly designed by Christians for Christians. The story in its entirety could be meaningful only for them. The prediction of Muhammad’s resurrection on the third day after his death, the expectation of his ascension to heaven, and the guards ordered to keep watch over his body would have instantly reminded a Christian of the story of Christ. By contrast, it would not have evoked the same reaction so naturally in a non-Christian. Only certain motifs of the narrative (the putrefaction of the corpse, the delayed burial, and the dogs’ mangling of the body) were more broadly understood in the Muslim Mediterranean; probably this common understanding brought forth the single known Jewish adaptation of the narrative from the Muslim world.

The ultimate roots of its individual motifs in the Muslim Tradition should not therefore obscure the fact that the narrative as a whole was aimed first and foremost at a Christian audience. Even a brief glance at the list of the surviving works which included it suggests this. Apart from the Apology, allegedly written in response to a Muslim’s letter, none of the works that include the story claim to be addressed to Muslims. The Apology is also the only one written in a language intelligible for most Muslims; the others were written in Latin or Syriac. Also, none of the extant Christian accounts of religious debates, from the ninth century or later, tell the story; they only allude to it, occasionally. Although these accounts are more literary constructs than reports of actual disputations, even their authors found it inconceivable that the story would have been brought up in a public debate in the presence of a caliph or other high-ranking Muslim.
authority. If we consider the story of the eighth-century Egyptian Christian whose execution Mālik b. Anas advised for telling it they were certainly right to think so.

The story nevertheless proved to be remarkably popular with the audience it targeted. As discussed in the previous chapter, it originated no later and possibly earlier than the first half of the eighth century, and by the middle of the ninth it circulated wherever Christians predominated in the vast expanse of the Muslim world, from Iraq to Egypt, from Syria to the Iberian Peninsula. The texts that cite it come from most of the major Christian churches of the time: Nestorians, Jacobites, Latins, and probably Copts. Only one polemical narrative about the rise of Islam, the story of Muhammad’s instruction by Christians and Jews, is attested more frequently in the Christian writings of the Islamic world.

The original unknown Christian polemicist/storyteller borrowed almost all the pieces of the story from the Muslim Tradition in the eighth century, if not earlier, and might even have known a similar Muslim story, but he shaped the Christian narrative as he did for the benefit of his coreligionists, in consideration of their religious worldview, their beliefs and concerns. He weighed the hadīths about Muhammad’s death familiar to him on the scales of contemporary Christian religiosity and selected the ones that illustrated Muslim values and assumptions most divergent from those of Christianity. These were useful for his purposes. Even if hadīths about the sweet fragrance of Muhammad’s corpse, discussed in the next chapter, already circulated among Muslims at the time when he was active, it would have been counterproductive for him to choose any
of these. He aimed to show that Muhammad was less than Christ and the saints, not that he was similar to them.
Chapter Three

The Arabian Saint: Christian Polemic and the Incorruptibility of Muhammad’s Body in Islam

In this chapter I examine a shift in the Muslim literary image of Muhammad that occurred during the eighth and ninth centuries, as a result of the inclusion of two Christian hagiographical motifs in Muhammad’s biography. I show that in the eighth century at least two opposing views were current among Muslims about Muhammad’s death: some Muslims held that Muhammad’s life ended as any other man’s does, his body disintegrating in the earth, while other Muslims circulated a narrative that adorned his death, asserting that Muhammad’s corpse remained fragrant and incorrupt. During the ninth century the narrative of Muhammad’s ordinary death was almost entirely supplanted by its embellished competitor, which went on to enjoy great success in the Muslim Tradition. I argue that the motifs of fragrance and incorruptibility entered the Muslim Tradition in the seventh or at the latest in the early eighth century from strands of Christian hagiography in which they were well-established in the centuries prior to the rise of Islam, as a result of increased contacts between the Arab conquerors and the Christians of the Fertile Crescent. These contacts led to slight changes in the Muslim religious worldview, including their image of Muhammad. This metamorphosis was at least partly prompted by Christian polemic about Muhammad’s death.

My attempt to parse how Christian polemic shaped nascent Islam boasts a distinguished pedigree: during the last century several scholars pointed to it as a factor in
the formation of the Muslim Tradition. Carl C. Becker suggested in an article published in 1911 that Muslims shaped some of their doctrines in reaction to Christian polemic. His discussion encompasses four main examples: the debates over free will and the createdness of the Qurʾān, the doctrine of divine attributes, and the hostility towards images. In the second and the third cases, according to Becker, the Muslims essentially adapted Christian solutions to their theological problems, while in the first and the last cases Christian polemicists “prompt[ed] the proponents of Orthodoxy [in Islam] to insist more fiercely on their stance,” thus rejecting the doctrine of free will and prohibiting figural representation. Richard Bell declared in *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*, a book published in 1926, “It is as certain as anything in his life can be, that Muhammad did not claim the power of working miracles,” and suggested that the proliferation of later Muslim literature on Muhammad’s thaumaturgic abilities was a Muslim attempt to respond to Christian polemic against Muhammad. Daniel J. Sahas attempted to substantiate this suggestion several decades later, in an article published in 1982. Sahas argues that the Muslims’ ascription of miracles to Muhammad evolved in response to Byzantine polemicists’ taunts that he lacked them, whereby Muslims

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210 See Becker, “Christliche Polemik,” pp. 175-195; translated into English as “Christian Polemic,” pp. 241-257. Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 207-212 remarks on the possibility of a similar Christian influence, with reference to two of the debates Becker discussed, on free will and the createdness of the Qurʾān. As Bell’s book is not fully annotated (see p. vi), I assume that he relied on Becker’s article, although he makes no reference to it.

211 For the quotations, see Becker, “Christian Polemic,” p. 242 and p. 247.


213 Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 211. On pp. 197-200 Bell discusses the influence of Christianity on the ascription of miracles to Muhammad in general, without connection to the Christian polemical challenge to Islam.

attempted to raise his status to equal that of Jesus. Finally, Sarah Stroumsa proposed in a study first published three years after Sahas’ that Christianity and Islam mutually shaped each other’s understanding of prophethood, In her words, “Muḥammad’s claim for prophecy triggered a Jewish and Christian attack on his prophetic qualifications, which in its turn forced the Muslims to establish a system of vindication of Muḥammad’s prophecy. The existence of this system obliged the Christians to respond… this response in its turn influenced later Muslim depictions of Muḥammad…”  

In the following I will attempt to demonstrate that the Christian story of Muhammad’s death influenced the development of its Muslim counterpart in a way similar to the Christian miracle stories and prophethood discussions.

**The ordeal of Wakī’ b. al-Djarrāḥ**

Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī (d. 277/890f.) relates the following incident in his *Maʿrifa*, in the entry for year 184 AH (800f. AD).

In this year or in year five, Wākī’ b. al-Djarrāḥ transmitted in Mecca from Ismāʿīl b. Abī Khālid [from ‘Abdallāh] al-Bahī that when the Messenger

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215 See Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, pp. 21-36 = “The Signs of Prophecy,” pp. 101-114 (the book chapter is a revised version of the article). The quotation is from *Freethinkers*, p. 35.

216 Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān al-Fārisī l-Fasawī; on him, see Mizzī, *Tahdhib al-kamāl*, vol. 32, pp. 324-335.


218 That is, in 184 or 185 (800f. or 801f.).
of God died he was not buried until his abdomen became bloated\(^{221}\) and his little finger bent (\(\textit{rasūlu llāhi lammā māta lam yudfan ḥattā wadja’ a baṣnuhu wa-nthanā khinsirhu}\)).\(^{222}\) He mentioned other hadīths too. This was reported to al-‘Uthmānī.\(^{223}\) He sent for Wakī’, imprisoned him, and decided to execute him and expose his body (‘\(\textit{azama ‘alā qatlihi wa-ṣalbihi}\)),\(^{224}\) ordering that a pale be erected outside the sanctuary. Wakī’ heard about this in the prison.

Al-Ḥārith b. al-Ṣiddīq\(^{225}\) said, “I visited Wakī’ when I heard [about what happened], but the news\(^{226}\) preceded me.” He said, “Wakī’ and Sufyān\(^{227}\) were estranged from each other at the time, but Wakī’ said, ‘As far as I can see, we are compelled to turn to this man (\(\textit{mā arānā illā fa-qad uḍṭurirnā ilā}\)).

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\(^{221}\) The two words are missing from al-Fasawi’s text, but not from other versions.

\(^{220}\) For the transmitters, all eighth-century Kūfans, see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (1).”

\(^{221}\) Read \(\textit{rabā}\) for \(\textit{wadja’a}\), as all other versions do. For \(\textit{wadja’a}\), a transitive verb, meaning “\(\textit{He beat, or struck, or smote, a person with his hand}\),” see Lane, \(\textit{Lexicon}\), p. 2921.

\(^{222}\) This hadīth is quoted only twice outside of the context of Wakī’’s story. It appears in Ibn Sa’d, \(\textit{Ṭabaqāt}\), vol. 2/2, pp. 58-59, with the same transmitters, but a variant text, clearly a euphemism: “after his death, the Messenger of God was left [unburied] a day and a night, until his shirt expanded and bending appeared in his little finger” (\(\textit{turika rasūlu llāhi ba’da wafātihi yawman wa-laylatan ḥattā rabā qamīṣuhu wa-ru’iya fi khinsirihu inthinā’}\)). A more distant variant is cited in the \(\textit{Apology of al-Kindī\textendash} a Christian polemical treatise against Islam written in the early ninth century; see \(\textit{Apology of al-Kindī\textendash}\textendash (ed. Tartar)\), p. 93. There it appears without isnād, “his abdomen became bloated, and his left finger, that is the little finger, turned back” (\(\textit{fa-rabā baṣnuhu wa-n’akasat isba’u hu al-yusrā wa-hiya l-khinsir}\)). Some minor variants are attested in the context of Wakī’’s story. Al-Fasawi’s version is the most common one, but all other texts have \(\textit{rabā}\) instead of \(\textit{wadja’a}\), and \(\textit{khinsiruhi}\) is often put in the dual, \(\textit{khinsirāhu}\). Some versions indicate how long Muhammad remained unburied: either, similarly to Ibn Sa’d’s version, as “he was left [unburied] for a day and a night” (\(\textit{turika yawman wa-layla}\)) in four cases (Ibn ‘Asākir, \(\textit{Dimashq}\), vol. 63, p. 101; Ibn Manzūr, \(\textit{Mukhtaṣar}\), vol. 8, p. 71; Dhahabī, \(\textit{Ta’rikh}\), vol. 13, p. 451; and idem, \(\textit{Siyar}\), vol. 9, p. 160), or as “he remained [unburied] for three days” (\(\textit{baqiya thalāthata ayyām}\)) in one case (Ibn ‘Asākir, \(\textit{Dimashq}\), vol. 63, p. 102).

\(^{223}\) Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Uthmānī was the governor of Mecca for some time in the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170-193/786-809); see, for example, Fasawi, \(\textit{Marifā}\), vol. 1, p. 175 and p. 178; and Ṭabarī, \(\textit{Ta’rikh}\), vol. 3/2, p. 740.

\(^{224}\) The punishment referred to here is execution by the sword followed by the exposure of the corpse on a pale; see F. E. Vogel, “\(\textit{Ṣalb}\)” \(\textit{EI}\) 8: 935; and below.

\(^{225}\) I found al-Ḥārith b. (al-)Ṣiddīq mentioned only as a narrator of this story.

\(^{226}\) Read al-khabar, following other versions, instead of al-khayr, as printed.

\(^{227}\) Abū Muḥammad Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna l-Hilālī (Kūfan, moved to Mecca, and died there in 198/814); see Mizzī, \(\textit{Tahdhib al-kamāl}\), vol. 11, pp. 177-196, and Susan A. Spectorsky, “Sufyān b. ‘Uyayna,” \(\textit{EI}\) 9: 772.
“...I heard him, ‘Abū Sufyān, leave this matter. Unless he obtains you, you are killed.’” He said, “Wakī sent to Sufyān, and asked for his help. Sufyān went to see al-‘Uthmānī, and talked to him about Wakī, but al-‘Uthmānī rejected his request. ‘Listen to my advice,’ Sufyān said to him, ‘This man is a scholar (min ahlī l-‘ilmī), and he has a [large] tribe (wa-lahu ‘ashīratun). If you attack him the least you can expect is for his tribe to turn against you. His son is at the court of the Commander of the Faithful (waladuhu bi-bābi amīri l-mu’mīna), and he will cause you to go to be investigated by them.’” He said, “He followed Sufyān’s advice, and ordered Wakī’s release from prison.” Al-Ḥārith b. al-Ṣiddīq said, “I returned to him, and told him the news. Then the guards came, and led him out of the prison. He mounted a donkey, we loaded his belongings, and he left.”

Al-Ḥārith said, “Next day I went to see al-‘Uthmānī, and said to him, ‘Praise be to God whom you did not afflict with this man (al-hamdu li-llāhi llaḏī l-am tabtali bi-hāḏhā l-radjuli)! May God, exalted and glorified He be, protect you.’ Al-‘Uthmānī said, ‘Oh Ḥārith! I do not regret my plan. My regret is due to what occurred to me tonight, the ḥadīth of Dābir b. Abdallāh, ‘My father and the martyrs were transferred after forty years, and we found them fresh and flexible (riṭāban yanṭhanūna). Nothing had changed on them.’”

I heard Sa‘īd b. Mansūr saying, “We were in Medina, and the Meccans wrote to the Medinans about the incident of Wakī, Ibn Uyayna and al-‘Uthmānī. They said, ‘When he arrives to Medina, do not rely on the governor, but stone him to death.’ They decided to do so. We heard about

228 Abū Sufyān is the kunya of Wakī b. al-Djarrāh.

229 I am not sure about the exact meaning of the last sentence. Al-Fasawī has ḥa-innu ḫu in lam yudrikka f-q-d (qāla fa-arsala ilayhi...), as do most other authors quoting his version of the story; I prefer al-Dhahabī’s fa-in lam yudrikka qutitā.

230 This is a reference to a ḥadīth attributed to the Companions Abū ‘Abdallāh Dābir b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amr al-Anṣārī l-Khazzadīj l-Salmī l-Madānī (d. 68/687-698) about the transfer of the martyrs of Uḥud forty years after their death to another site. According to the story, when the Medinans exhumed the martyrs, they found their bodies fresh, as if they had died the day before, so much so that the foot of Ḥamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib bled when the shovel accidentally hit it. The story is attested in different versions; see, for example, al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī, Nawādir, vol. 2, p. 307; Ibn al-Djawzī, Munṭażam, vol. 3, p. 183; and Ibn al-Athīr, Usd al-ghāba, vol. 2, p. 71. Quotations of related ḥadīths attested earlier than al-Fasawī are ascribed to others, not to Dābir; see, for example, Mālik, Muwaṭṭa’, vol. 2, p. 470; and ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Muṣannaf, vol. 4, p. 216.

231 Abū ‘Uthmān Sa‘īd b. Mansūr al-Khurāsānī (originally from Marw, but settled in Mecca, and died there ca. 226-229/840-844); see Mīzī, Tahdhib al-kamāl, vol. 11, pp. 77-82.
their intention, and sent a messenger (barīd) to Wākī’ [telling him] not to come to Medina, but to depart by way of al-Rabadha. He had already passed the junction of the two roads to Medina, but when the messenger reached him he returned to al-Rabadha and went to Kūfa.”

The ḥadīth that endangered Wākī’’s life in Mecca might represent the earliest Muslim take on Muhammad’s death. The passing of the Prophet is depicted, without the least unease, as the death of any other man: his body, left unburied in the heat of Medina for a day and a night, or for three days, depending on the variant of the tradition, starts to show signs of decay.

Four other extant traditions, discussed in the first chapter, express a similar view of Muhammad’s death. According to the one closest to Wākī’’s, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, “When the Messenger of God died, his Companions deliberated and said, ‘Watch your Prophet! Perhaps he ascended [to heaven].’” Al-Ḥasan continued, “And they watched him until his abdomen became bloated.”233 A ḥadīth ascribed to Ibrāhīm al-Nakha’ī (d. ca. 96/714-5) describes another visual aspect of the deterioration, “When the Prophet died, Abū Bakr was absent, and he came after three [days]. No one dared to

232 The town of al-Rabadha was an important station on the Darb Zubayda, the pilgrimage route from Iraq in the ‘Abbāṣid period, leading from Baghdad through Kūfa to Mecca and Medina. Traveling from Mecca, as Wākī’ did, one could take either the road to Medina at the junction at al-Rabadha, or the one to Iraq. For the Darb Zubayda and al-Rabadha, see the entries of Saad A. al-Rashid and M. J. L. Young, and S. ‘A.’ A. al-Rashid in EI2 8: 349, and vol. 12, p. 198. According to the entry on the Darb al-Zubayda here, the junction was at Ma’din al-Naqira, but Kennedy, Historical Atlas, p. 19a, locates it at al-Rabadha, which seems also to be the case in al-Fasawi’s text.

233 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, pp. 56-57 (lammā qubiḍa rasūlu llāhi ‘tamara aṣḥābahu fa-qālū tarabbaṣū bi-nabiyyikum la’allahu ‘uridja bihi [qāla] fa-tarabbaṣū bihi hattā rabā baṭnahu). The tradition continues in a way familiar from the standard Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death, “… and Abū Bakr said, ‘If anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. If anyone worships God, God does not die’” (fa-qāla abū bakrin man kāna ya’budu muḥammadan fa-inna muḥammadan qad māta wa-man kāna ya’budu llāha fa-inna llāha lā yamītu). For the transmitters, all Baṣrān, see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (2).”
uncover his face until his abdomen became ashen-colored. Abū Bakr uncovered his face...”\(^\text{234}\) Another tradition, ascribed to Abū Mikhnaf (d. 154/774), merely points out, “He was buried after noon on Tuesday, and his color had changed.”\(^\text{235}\) Finally, according to a tradition attributed to a grandson of Abū Bakr, al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad (d. ca. 101-112/719-731), “The Messenger of God was not interred until death was apparent on him [and] his fingernails turned greenish.”\(^\text{236}\) As the isnāds show, these traditions about Muhammad’s decaying body circulated in eighth-century Iraq, in Baṣra and Kūf.\(^\text{237}\)

When they were first narrated, where else they were disseminated, if indeed they were, remains unknown.

There are two reasons to regard these ḥadīths as representing the oldest extant Muslim account of Muhammad’s death. First, while the Qur’ān has no elaborate portrayal of the Prophet, let alone his death, its references to Muhammad as an ordinary man are in

\[^{234}\] Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, vol. 1/4, p. 1817 (lammā qubida l-nabiyyu kāna abū bakrin ghāʾ iban fa-djāʾa baʿda thalāthā wa-lam yadjiṭaʾ āhādun an yakhsīfaʾ an wadjhihi ḥattā irbadda bāṭnuhu fa-kashaṭaʾ an wadjhihi...). The rest of the ḥadīth is familiar from the standard Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death. It recounts the speech of Abū Bakr intended to convince wavering Muslims that Muhammad had indeed died. For the transmitters, see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (3).” They are Kūfan until the end of the eighth century, then move to Rayy.

\[^{235}\] Balāḏurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf (1997), vol. 1, p. 568 (dufina yawma l-thalāthāʾi ḥīna zāghati l-shams wa-taghayyara l-awnuḥu). Not all editions of Ansāb al-ashrāf contain the last phrase. In the edition published in Damascus in 1996, the words are missing from the main text, and the editor explains in the footnote that the phrase is effaced in the manuscript “because nobody transmitted that” (see Balāḏurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf [1996], vol. 1, p. 657, n. 4). For the only known transmitter of the ḥadīth, the Kūfan Abū Mikhnaf, see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (4).”

\[^{236}\] Ibn Saʿd, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 59 (lam yudfan rasūlu llāhi ḥattā ʿurifa l-mawtu fihi fī [sic] azfārīhi ʿkhḍarrar). For the transmitters, who are Kūfan for most of the eighth century, see Appendix Two, “The decaying corpse traditions (5).”

\[^{237}\] Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad is the only early non-Iraqi transmitter; the next two were Kūfans (see above).
harmony with these hadīths.\textsuperscript{238} In the Qur’ān, only unbelievers inquire why Muhammad is no more than a human being, for example, why he is not an angel.\textsuperscript{239} Second, almost all the traces of this narrative of Muhammad’s death have been supplanted by an idealized one, as I will discuss below, by traditions that describe his corpse as incorruptible, or as exuding exquisite scent, or Muhammad himself as fully alive in his tomb. Four of the five hadīths about Muhammad’s ordinary death are hardly ever quoted again;\textsuperscript{240} the fifth fared better only because a prominent traditionist was almost executed because of it.

The four hadīths, intriguing as they are, are isolated sayings, devoid of context. Apart from the mere list of their transmitters’ names prefixed to them, we know nothing about their reception. However much biographical data may have survived about some of these transmitters, one cannot hope to retrieve what they thought about the hadīths and why they narrated them at all. Who heard these four hadīths from the transmitters, how widely they were known outside of the immediate circles of their students, how their audiences understood them and reacted to them is also lost. The story about Wâkî’s transmission of the fifth hadīth in Mecca fills this void to some extent. Thanks to his fame, the story of his ordeal is preserved in three versions in medieval Muslim literature. These accounts offer some insights into the reception of the hadīth, and thus of the narrative of Muhammad’s ordinary death among ninth-century Muslims.

\textsuperscript{238} Āl ‘Imrān 144, al-Isrā’ 93, al-Kahf 110, al-Anbiyā’ 3.

\textsuperscript{239} Al-An‘ām 8-9.

\textsuperscript{240} The hadīth of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is referred to in Māwardī, Ḥāwī, vol. 14, p. 97, and quoted, with isnād, in Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-arab, vol. 18, p. 254. The hadīth of Ibrāhīm al-Nakha’ī is discussed, and rejected on the basis of its inconsistencies with other hadīths on Muhammad’s death, in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, vol. 13, pp. 20-21. The other two, it seems, were not quoted by later authors.
In addition to al-Fasawī, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Adī l-Djurdjānī (d. 365/976) and ‘Alī b. ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176) give independent versions of the account, and both of them ascribe the stories to ninth-century transmitters: Ibn ‘Adī to Qutayba b. Sa‘īd (d. 240/854), Ibn ‘Asākir to ‘Alī b. Khashram (d. 257/871). The three versions are quoted by some later authors as well. They have in common only that Waki‘ was about to be executed in Mecca because of transmitting the ḥadīth and that Ibn ‘Uyayna saved him from certain death. The story was recorded early enough not to let one doubt this much, but additional circumstances vary so widely in the three versions that it is hardly possible to reconstruct what really happened to Waki‘ in Mecca beyond this. Whether or not their attribution of various utterances to Waki‘, Ibn ‘Uyayna and others is correct, the three versions of the ordeal reveal a range of views held by their ninth-century transmitters, al-Fasawī, Qutayba b. Sa‘īd, and ‘Alī b. Khashram, with regard to the ḥadīth about Muhammad’s ordinary death.


242 Abū Radjā Qutayba b. Sa‘īd b. Djamīl al-Thaqafī l-Balkhī l-Baghlānī (d. 240/854); see Mizzi, Tahdhib al-kamāl, vol. 23, pp. 523-537. Ibn ‘Adī, of course, could not have met Qutayba, but he does not mention any other transmitters in between.


According to the picture that emerges from the stories, ordinary Muslims were most eager to execute Wakī’, while fellow-scholars—ḥadīth transmitters—usually defended him. Al-Fasawī’s version does not say who denounced Wakī’ to al-ʿUthmānī, but later the inhabitants of both Mecca and Medina appear determined to put the scholar to death. Ibn ʿUyayna persuades the governor to let Wakī’ go, al-Ḥārith b. al-Ṣiddīq visits Wakī’ in the prison, then praises the governor for his decision to release Wakī’, and Saʿīd b. Manṣūr warns Wakī’ about the danger awaiting him if he comes to Medina. In the version of ʿAlī b. Khashram, the Qurashīs make preparations to execute Wakī’, without recourse to the authorities. As in al-Fasawī’s version, it is Ibn ʿUyayna who saves Wakī’. According to Qutayba’s version, Wakī’ was taken to Hārūn al-Rashīd (rg. 786-809), who happened to be in Mecca on pilgrimage, and the caliph consulted in the matter two local scholars, Ibn ʿAbī Rawwād (d. 206/821f.) and Ibn ʿUyayna. Ibn ʿAbī Rawwād declared, “This [man] must be executed. He would not have transmitted this [ḥadīth] unless he bears disloyalty to the Prophet in his heart.” Ibn ʿUyayna, again, defended Wakī’, and the caliph followed his advice.

The only explicit explanation for the rage against Wakī’ is Ibn ʿAbī Rawwād’s, but the manner of the planned execution shows that al-ʿUthmānī and the Qurashīs agreed with Ibn ʿAbī Rawwād’s opinion of the crime committed by Wakī’: execution and exposure of the corpse (ṣalb) was practiced, among other things, as a punishment for


slandering the Prophet (ṣabb al-nabī). In the eyes of many ordinary Muslims, the transmission of the narrative about Muhammad’s ordinary death, other versions of which are ascribed to several prominent eighth-century Muslim scholars, placed the early ninth-century traditionist outside the boundaries of the Muslim community.

Wakī’ nevertheless continued to relate the hadīth after this incident: ‘Alī b. Khashram and Ibrāhīm al-Djawharī (d. 249/863) assert that they heard him do so. One wonders whether Wakī’ narrated the hadīth out of conviction that it was true, or because he regarded it as his duty to transmit the hadīths he had learned. The three stories could support both possibilities. First, before Ibn ‘Asākir reports Wakī’’s ordeal, he quotes two hadīths transmitted by Wakī’. The first is “Abū Bakr came to the Messenger of God after his death, threw himself down on him, kissed him, and said, ‘Dearer to me than my father and my mother! How fragrant is your life, and how fragrant is your death!’”

This one is followed by Wakī’’s tradition about Muhammad’s decaying corpse. Both

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247 See F. E. Vogel, “Ṣalb,” EI² 8: 935; and the examples mentioned in Fierro, “Andalusian «Fatāwā»,” pp. 104-105 and p. 109. Two further such incidents resulting in execution and exposure of the corpse are quoted in al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, Shifā’, vol. 2, p. 191. The first is the execution of a certain Ibn Ḥātim al-Ṭulayṭuli (affā fujahā ’u l-andalust bi-qatli bni hātimin l-mutafaqqhi hi l-tulayṭuliyyi wa-ṣalbihi bi-mā shuvida ’alayhi bihi min istikhfāfīhi bi-ḥaqqī l-nabī). The second is that of a poet called Ibrāhīm al-Fasārī in Qayrawān which must have happened in the second half of the ninth century, since the judgment was passed on him by the qāḍī Abū Zakariyā Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar b. Yūsuf al-Kinānī (d. 289/902) (wa-amara bi-qatlihi ṣaḥabihi fa-ṭu’īn bī-l-sikkīnī wa-ṣuliba munakκasan thumma unzila wa-uḥrida bi-l-nār). For Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar, see al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, Tartīb, vol. 1, pp. 505-509.

248 He is Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Sa’īd al-Djawharī l-Baghdādī, originally from Ṭabaristān (d. 249/863 or later, in ‘Ayn Zarba); see Mizzi, Tahdhīb al-kamāl, vol. 2, pp. 95-98. Ibn ‘Asākir quotes him to this effect (see his Dimashq, vol. 63, p. 102).


250 Ab[fā] bakrin djā’a ilā rasūli llāhi ba’da waṭṭatihi fa-akabba ’alayhi fa-qabbalahu wa-qāla bi-abī wa-ummi wa-mā ayyaba ḥayātaka wa-mā ayyaba mītataka. Variants of this hadīth are also quoted elsewhere; see below.
traditions are given the same *isnād*, ascribed to ‘Abdallāh al-Bahī and Ismā‘īl b. Abī Khālid before Wakī‘. The attribution of two contradictory traditions to the same traditionists points to a mechanical transmission process; the transmitters memorize the traditions they hear from their teachers, and transmit them regardless of the content. The same attitude could be understood from the beginning of Ibn ‘Uyayna’s answer to Hārūn al-Rashīd, “He should not be executed. A person who heard a *ḥadīth*, and transmitted it should not be executed.”

But Ibn ‘Uyayna continued, “Medina is a very hot place. The Prophet died on Monday, and was left [unburied] until Wednesday because the people were busy with the matter of Muhammad’s community (*li-anna l-qawma kānū fī ṣalāhi amri ummati muḥammadin*), and the Quraysh and the Anṣār disagreed, that is why he changed.” Wakī‘’s explanation in ‘Alī b. Khashram’s version of the events also points to the transmitter’s endorsement of the content of the *ḥadīth*: “Wakī‘ argued, saying that several Companions of the Prophet said that the Messenger of God did not die, and God wished to show them the sign of death (*āyatu l-mawti*).” These interpretations show that the content of the traditions did matter to the transmitters.

The voicing of such views about Muhammad’s death is rare; it is limited to the five *ḥadīths* about Muhammad’s decaying corpse and to these remarks. Later authors, when quoting the *ḥadīths* at all, usually do so without comment. In the twelfth century,

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Ibn ‘Asākir, telling the story of Wakī’’s ordeal, cites the ḥadīth from al-Fasawī, then adds, “He mentioned other sayings as well which I do not consider it lawful to quote (wa-dhakara kalāman siwā hādhā lam astaḥill dhikrahu).”253 Wakī’ could still mock Ibn Abī Rawwād for his ignorance on the basis of his opinion in this matter,254 but al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) was very much displeased by Wakī’’s transmission of the ḥadīth. Al-Dhahabī was also vexed that others told the story of Wakī’’s ordeal at all, and worse, that they did so without commenting on it. He remarks on the ḥadīth a few times in his works.255 He says, for example, in his Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’i:

This is a slip from a scholar! What do Wakī’ and the transmission of this disagreeable story, with its broken isnād (al-khabaru l-munkaru l-munqaṭi’u l-isnādi), have in common? An error almost claimed his life! Those who attacked him are excused, even rewarded, because they thought that the dissemination of this refuted story would cause a certain lowering of the rank of prophethood. That is indeed the first thought that the story brings to mind (wa-huwa fī bādi’i l-ra’yi yuwahhimu dhālika), but if you reflect on it, God willing, there is no problem with it. For the abdomen of the living may also bloat, and his joints may slacken. This is caused by illnesses, and the prophets are the most afflicted of all people (wa-ashaddu l-nāsi balā’an al-anbiyā’u).257 But beware of allowing for him the change of other human dead, their smell, and the consuming of their bodies by the earth (taghayyura sā’iri mawtā l-ādamiyyīna wa-rā’i ḥatahum wa-akla l-adjadihīm)! The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him salvation, is different from

255 Dhahabī, Ta’rīkh, vol. 13, p. 452; idem, Siyar, vol. 9, pp. 159-165; and idem, Mīzān, vol. 4, p. 391-392.
257 This may be a reference, for instance, to the ḥadīth, “The prophets are the most afflicted of all people (inna ashaddu l-nāsi balā’an al-anbiyā’u thumma lladhīna yalūnahum thumma lladhīna yalūnahum).” Several similar ḥadīths circulated; see, for example, Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 8, p. 326; Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, vol. 6, p. 369; and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, Nawādir, vol. 4, p. 233.
the rest of his community in this regard. He does not disintegrate, the earth
does not consume his body, and his smell does not change. Instead, he is
now, he has not ceased to be, more fragrant than musk and he is alive in his
tomb (fa-lā yablā wa-lā ta'kulu l-arḍu djasadahu wa-lā yataghayyaru rīḥahu
bal huwa al-āna wa-mā zāla aṭyaba rīḥan mina l-miski wa-huwa ḥayyun fī
laḥdiḥī)...
Muhammad’s incorruptible and fragrant corpse

Al-Dhahabî’s comments, depicting Muhammad’s corpse as emitting pleasant smell, as incorruptible, and Muhammad as fully living in his tomb, derive from ḥadīths that circulated among Muslims already in the eighth century. In Muslim literature, these ḥadīths are quoted much more frequently than the ones about Muhammad’s decaying body. In this part of the chapter, I try to trace when and where beliefs about Muhammad’s corpse defying the course of nature were disseminated in the early Islamic world.

The traditions about Muhammad’s fragrant corpse appear in the standard narrative of his death. According to one of them, “Abû Bakr was not present when the Prophet died. He came after his death, removed the cloth from his face, kissed his forehead, and said, ‘How fragrant is your life and death!’”259 In other versions, Abû Bakr kisses Muhammad and says, modifying the same phrase, “How fragrant is your life, and how fragrant is your death,”260 or “You are fragrant alive and dead!”261 Abû Bakr’s kissing of

190, about a man who was executed for calling Muhammad “the orphan of Abû Ṭālib (yatīmu abī ṭālib).”

259 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 52 (anna abā bakrin lam yashhad mawta l-nabiyyi fa-djā’a ba’da mawtihi fa-kashaşa l-thawba ‘an wadjhihi thumma qabbalahu thumma qāla mā aṭyaba mahyāka wa-mamātaka). The ḥadīth ends with Abû Bakr saying, “You are indeed so precious to God that He would not make you drink [of death] twice (la-anta akramu ‘alā l-lāhi min an yusqīka marratayn).” For the transmitters, all Iraqis, see Appendix Two, “The fragrance traditions (1).” I did not find this ḥadīth quoted in any other early work.

260 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 52 (anna l-nabiyya lammā qubiḍa atāhu abū bakrin fa-qabbalahu wa-qāla bi-abī anta wa-ummī mā aṭyaba ḥayātuka wa-ayyaba mītataka). For the transmitters, ‘Abdallâh al-Bahî, Ibn Abî Khâlid, Wakî’, and others, all Kûfans, see Appendix Two, “The fragrance traditions (2).” The only other early work in which I found a version of this ḥadīth quoted is Ibn Abî Shayba, Muṣannaf, vol. 3, p. 57 (anna abâ bakrin djā’a ilā l-nabiyyi ba’da mā qubiḍa wa-kashaʃa ‘an wadjhihi fa-akabba ‘alayhi fa-qabbalahu wa-qâla bi-abī anta wa-ummī mā aṭyaba ḥayātuka wa-ayyaba mītataka). This is the same ḥadīth that Ibn ‘Asâkir quoted from Wakî’ before the one about Muhammad’s decaying corpse; see above (anna abâ bakrin djâ’a ilâ rasîli llâhi ba’da waʃṭhihi fa-akabba ‘alayhi fa-qabbalahu wa-qâla bi-abī anta wa-ummî wa-mâ aṭyaba ḥayâtuka wa-mâ aṭyaba mîtataka). The beginnings of Ibn Abî Shayba’s
the Prophet was related in different variants, and Abū Bakr’s remark on the sweet scent of the corpse is sometimes omitted from them. Sometimes it constitutes only a small detail in elaborate accounts of the events following Muhammad’s death, too small to justify making use of their isnāds in tracing the dissemination of the fragrance motif in the early Islamic world. The three brief traditions quoted above from Ibn Sa‘d, thematically similar, but textually unrelated apart from the fragrance motif, are attested with two Kūfan and a Medinan isnād.

Another group of traditions attributes similar words to ‘Alī. According to one of these, ‘Alī, with other relatives of the Prophet, entered the room where Muhammad had died and said, like Abū Bakr, “You are dearer to me than my father and my mother! How fragrant you are alive and dead!” Following his words, a scent spreads in the room, a scent so sweet that those present have never smelled anything like it. According to Ibn ‘Asākir’s versions are phrased differently from Ibn Sa‘d’s, despite the identity of the transmitters; both somewhat resemble the previous and the next hadīths of Ibn Sa‘d in their choice of vocabulary (see the previous and the next footnotes).

261 Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 53 (lammā intahā abū bakrin ilā l-nabiyyi wa-huwa musadidjan qāla tuwufiya rasūlu llāhi wa-lladhī nafsī bi-yadhi șalawātu llāhi ‘alayka thumma akabba ‘alayhi fā-qabbalahu wa-qāla tība ḥayyan wa-mayyitan). For the transmitters, all of whom lived in Medina, see Appendix Two, “The fragrance traditions (3).” I did not find this hadīth quoted in any other early work.

262 These accounts narrate the disagreement between ‘Umar and Abū Bakr as to whether or not Muhammad had died; for one version, see Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 55; Bukhārī, Ṣahīh, p. 842; Ṣaḥīḥ, Ta‘rīkh, vol. 1/4, pp. 1817-1818 (two hadīths); Lālakā’ī, I’tiqād, vol. 1, pp. 346-347; Bayhaqī, Sunan, vol. 8, p. 142; for another, Bazzār, Musnad, vol. 1, pp. 182-183. For some examples of the same story without the fragrance motif, see Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, pp. 52-53 (dhikru taqbīli abī bakrin al-siddiqi rasūla llāhi ba‘da wafātihi).

other traditions, ‘Alī uttered these words while washing Muhammad’s corpse. For example, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalib, al-Faḍl b. al-‘Abbās, and Usāma b. Zayd washed the Messenger of God. While washing him, ‘Alī said, ‘You are dearer to me than my father and my mother! You are fragrant alive and dead!”264 In other traditions, it is made even clearer that Muhammad’s corpse resisted deterioration. A ḥadīth claims, “When washing the Prophet, ‘Alī looked for what is [usually] looked for on the dead, but he did not find anything.” After this, the remark usually attributed to ‘Alī follows.265 These traditions


265 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 63 (iltamasara ‘aliyyun mina l-nabiyyi ‘inda ghaslihi mā yultamasu mina l-mayyit fa-lam yadyīd shay’an fa-qāla bi-abī anta wa-ummī tībla hayyān wa-mayytān). For the transmission of this ḥadīth, through Medinan and Iraqi traditionists, see Appendix Two, “The fragrance traditions (6).” For other versions of the ḥadīth, see ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Muṣannaf, vol. 3, p. 251; Ibn Abī Shayba, Muṣannaf, vol. 2, p. 452 and vol. 7, p. 429; Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashraf (1997), vol. 1, p. 659; and Abū Dawūd, Marāṣil, p. 299. These variants agree almost word by word with Ibn Sa’d’s; for their inṣāds, see Appendix Two, “The fragrance traditions (6a).” For another version, see Ibn Mādiya, Sunan, vol. 1, p. 471. The first transmitter in the version of Ibn Mādiya is ‘Alī, while in the ones referred to earlier it was Sa’īd b. al-Musayyab. Ibn Mādiya’s version still shows traces suggesting that its ascription to ‘Alī was secondary; the inṣād ends with ‘an sa’īd bni l-musayyabi ‘an ‘aliyyi bni abī Ṭalibin qāla which is followed by a main similar to the one quoted above, as if ‘Alī was describing his actions in the third person (lammā ghassala l-nabiyya dhahaba yaltamasu minhu mā yultamasu mina l-mayyiti fa-lam yadyīdhu fa-qāla bi-abī l-tayyībī [sic] tībla hayyān wa-ṭībla mayytān). Two versions of the ḥadīth are attributed to ‘Alī in al-Bayhaqī’s Sunan, but the main is changed to the first person.
about ‘Alī’s words circulated, like those about Abū Bakr’s, in the Ḥidjāz and in Iraq; we find them with Kūfan, Başrān and Medinan isnāds, with a late eighth-century Marwazī link.

Most such traditions are placed in the context of the preparations for Muhammad’s burial, especially the washing of his corpse. Since, according to the biographers of Muhammad, ‘Alī was in charge of this task, with other relatives of Muhammad helping him, in most cases he is quoted as describing Muhammad’s body as fragrant. In another hadīth, Muhammad’s dead body makes somebody else fragrant. Umm Salama places her hand on Muhammad’s chest on the day he dies, and the fragrance of musk stays on it for weeks afterwards in spite of her usual activities. The latter tradition is ascribed to Medinan and Kūfan transmitters.

So far I have not found the fragrance motif attested in hadīths in other regions of the Islamic world. Since the majority of all extant hadīths come from Iraq and the Ḥidjāz, the probability of the motif coming down to us from these two regions is in any case higher than from any other region of the Islamic world, even if it was equally well known elsewhere. The only reference I found to a Muslim belief in the fragrance of prophets’ corpses, although not of Muhammad’s in particular, in the western part of the Fertile Crescent comes from an unlikely and somewhat later source, Leontius of Damascus’s life

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singular; see idem, Sunan, vol. 3, pp. 545 (ghassaltu l-nabī fa-dhahabtu li-anzarqa mā yakūnu mina l-mayyit fa-lam ara shay’an wa-kāna ṭayyiban ẓallā llāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallama ḥayyan wa-mayyitan, and ghassaltu rasūla llāh fa-dja’al‘tu anzurqa mā yakūnu mina l-mayyit fa-lam ara shay’an wa-kāna ṭayyiban ḥayyan wa-mayyitan ẓallā llāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallam).

Bayhaqī, Dalā‘il al-nubuwwa, vol. 7, p. 219 (waḍa’u yadī ‘alā ẓadhr rasūli llāhi yawma māta fa-marra bī djuma’an ākulu wa-atawādha ‘u mā tadhabhu rīhu l-miski min yadī). For the transmitters, who were Medinan and Kūfan, see Appendix Two, “The fragrance traditions (7).”
of Stephen of Mar Sabas (d. 794), written in the early ninth century. In it, Stephen visits Mar Theoctistus’ tomb in the Judean desert with another monk. When the two arrive, they are told by Bedouins (Gr. Arabes, Ar. a’rāb) living in the vicinity: “No one can enter the tomb, for at night we see there a great fire and an incandescence like lightning. We sometimes also can smell a pleasant odor coming from there, the smell of which surpasses that of musk and every perfume. Many times we wanted to go down there but were afraid, for we knew that there are prophets and righteous men buried there.” It might be a genuine, if approximate, quotation from Muslims because in Christian hagiography the “odour of sanctity” motif occurs in connection with holy men, not with prophets.

It is significant that the Muslim traditions describe Muhammad’s corpse as fragrant before or during the washing of his body. Since preparations for burial included

267 Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas (English), p. X. The text was written in Greek in the early ninth century, and was translated into Arabic in 903; see Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas (Arabic), p. VII.


269 It is also noteworthy that Leontius does not apply the “odour of sanctity” motif in his work to saints, only to angels once; for the latter passage, see Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas (Arabic), pp. 109-110 (63.1-3); Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas (English), pp. 99-100; and Acta Sanctorum Julii, vol. 3, p. 586 (132). Differently from many other writings of Christian hagiography, the olfactory references in the life of Stephen are limited to describing sin as foul. For Leontius, the characteristic sign of sainthood is fire or light, similarly to the first sentence ascribed to the Bedouins above. Indeed, those words are more likely to stem from the pen of the Christian author than from his Muslim interlocutors; unlike in Christian hagiography, fire is not a sign of sanctity in Muslim literature.
perfuming the corpse, the sequence of events in the traditions implies that it was fragrant before this, and thus emphasizes that Muhammad’s body defied the course of nature. The early Muslims who created the fragrance motif and inserted it into traditions about Muhammad’s burial were not satisfied that their Prophet was a mortal just like themselves, distinguished only by the revelation he received from God, but wanted to differentiate him from others in all aspects of his life. They were very successful in achieving their goal. On the one hand, the fragrant corpse motif generated several variants. On the other, probably every account of Muhammad’s death includes at least one of them. In contrast to the decaying corpse traditions, the fragrance motif has been omnipresent in Muslim literature since the early ninth century.

270 See Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, p. 65; and Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, pp. 41-42 and p. 85. In fact, we do not know if perfuming the corpse was practiced in Arabia in the early seventh century; what Halevi describes is an eighth- and ninth-century Iraqi custom, and Harvey refers only to funeral practices prevalent in the Mediterranean. Burial customs varied from region to region, even within the Ḥidżāz, where the Meccans and Medinans buried their dead in graves dug differently (see Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 72-75; see also John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, pp. 147-148, on the difference in burial practices among the Christians of Jerusalem and Egypt). That perfuming the corpse was not an inevitable part of the preparation for burial in seventh-century Arabia appears from Ibn Sa’d’s *Ṭabaqāt*, which preserves contradictory traditions about the perfuming of Muhammad’s body (see vol. 2/2, pp. 67-68), and perhaps not even later, as is shown by the funeral of Sūkayna bt. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAṭā’ who also died in Medina, in 117/736. She died on a summer’s day, and frankincense (*ṭīb, bukhūr, aʿwād*) was burnt by her corpse only because her funeral had to be postponed until the evening (or night); it does not seem to have originally belonged to the funerary preparations (see Baladhuri, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* [1987], vol. 2, pp. 141-142). Whatever was the custom in seventh-century Arabia, for those who told these ḥadīths in eighth-century Iraq perfuming the corpse was probably an essential part of its preparation for burial.

Two hadiths take the claims of the fragrant corpse traditions further. They assert not only that Muhammad’s body resisted deterioration in the days immediately following his death, but also that it remained incorrupt forever after burial. According to one of them, Muhammad says, “Friday is among your best days. On Friday, Adam was created, and on Friday, the horn will be blown. Multiply your blessings for me on Friday because your blessings are presented to me [on it].” Somebody then asks him, “Messenger of God, how will our prayers be presented to you when you will have perished, that is, disintegrated?” “God has forbidden the earth to consume the bodies of the prophets,” answers Muhammad.272 In the second hadith, Muhammad similarly exhorts his followers to utter blessings on him on Friday, and Abū l-Dardā’, the first transmitter of the hadith according to its isnād, asks him, “Also after your death?” “Also after my death. God has forbidden the earth to consume the bodies of the prophets,” Muhammad again replies.273 The first tradition circulated widely; it appears in dozens of medieval Muslim works.274

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272 My translation is based on the text in Ibn Abī Shayba, Muṣannaf, vol. 2, p. 253 (qāla rasūlu llāh inna min afḍali ayyāmikum yawmu l-djumʿati fīhi khulīqa ādamu wa-fīhi l-naṣṣatu wa-fīhi l-ṣaʿṣa qatu fa-akthiriʿ alayya mina l-salāṭi fīhi fa-inna salāṭukum maʿrūdatunʿalayya fa-qāla radjul yā rasūla llāhi kayfa tuʿraṣūlaṭumāʿalayka wa-qad arīmta yaʿnī balīṭa fa-qāla inna llāha harramaʿalā l-arḍi an taʿkula adjsāda l-anbiyāʿ).


Although the two ḥadīths are textually related,²⁷⁵ their isnāds show no common link.²⁷⁶ Moreover, the second and the third transmitters of the first ḥadīth, and the first and the second transmitters of the second ḥadīth could never have met. In both cases, therefore, it seems that the earliest traditionists who indeed transmitted the ḥadīths were, respectively, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yazīd (d. 153-156/770-773) and ‘Ubāda b. Nusayy (d. 118/736f.). Both of them were from Syria; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān from Damascus, ‘Ubāda from Tiberias. The next transmitter of the first ḥadīth is Kūfan, that of the second is Egyptian; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and ‘Ubāda thus represent what might be called a regional common link. A version of these ḥadīths must have circulated in Syria in the early eighth century when ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and ‘Ubāda heard and transmitted it. Either these, or later transmitters, attributed their ḥadīths to earlier Syrian traditionists, with errors in the chronology.

According to these two ḥadīths, Muhammad remained alive in his grave; his body remained incorruptible in order to ensure his presence for his followers in all generations to come. Traditions about the virtue of Friday, about Muhammad being presented with

²⁷⁵ In addition to the incorruptibility sayings in the end which agree word by word, the exhortation to prayer on Friday and the assurance that the prayer will be heard are expressed with the same vocabulary in both ḥadīths. The remaining sentences (less than half of the texts) differ; the virtues of Friday and the Muslim’s question to Muhammad do not resemble at all in the two ḥadīths.

²⁷⁶ For the transmitters, see Appendix Two, “The incorruptibility traditions (1)” and “The incorruptibility traditions (2).”
the deeds of the Muslims, and about Muhammad being fully alive in his grave are rather common.\textsuperscript{277} A comparison of such \textit{ḥadīths} with the two quoted above shows that the saying “God has forbidden the earth to consume the bodies of the prophets” must originally have circulated independently, without connection to the rest of the \textit{matn}s. Therefore, it has to be understood on its own terms, as attesting a belief in the mere incorruptibility of Muhammad’s corpse, without a connection to his life in the grave.

Some other \textit{ḥadīths} reinforce this impression. One again encourages the Muslims to utter blessings on Muhammad on Friday, arguing that since the bodies of the prophets are not consumed by the earth, the prayers will be presented to Muhammad.\textsuperscript{278} Two Imāmī \textit{ḥadīths} also express a similar idea. In one of them, the Prophet says to his followers, “My life is good for you and my death is good for you.” Surprised, they ask him, “Oh Messenger of God, this life of yours, yes, but your death?” “God has forbidden that the earth taste our flesh.”\textsuperscript{279} The second \textit{ḥadīth} makes Muhammad explain his words more fully. In it, he says that his death will be beneficial for his followers because of his intercession with God, “As for my death, your deeds will be presented to me. I will ask

\textsuperscript{277} See, for example, Bayhaqī, \textit{Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’} who quotes several such \textit{ḥadīths}.

\textsuperscript{278} It is quoted with \textit{isnād} in Ibn Qudāma, \textit{al-Sārīm al-munkī}, p. 277 (\textit{anna rasūla illā qāla akthirū ’alayya mina l-ṣalāti fī l-laylati l-gharrā’i wa-l-yawmī l-azhar fa-‘innahumā yu’addiyāni ‘ankum wa-inna l-arḍa lā ta’kulu adjaṣāda l-anbiyā’}). For \textit{al-layla l-gharrā’} and \textit{al-yawm al-azhar} meaning Friday, see Lane, \textit{Lexicon}, p. 2240 and p. 1262. A slightly different version of the \textit{ḥadīth} is quoted, with the first transmitter only, in al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād, \textit{Shifā’}, vol. 2, p. 67 (\textit{akthirū mina l-ṣalāti ’alayya fī l-laylati l-zahrā’i wa-l-yawmī l-azhar fa-‘innahumā yu’addiyāni ‘ankum wa-inna l-arḍa lā ta’kulu adjaṣāda l-anbiyā’ wa-mā min muslimin yuṣallī ’alayya illā ḥamalahā malakun ḥattā yu’addiyahā ilayya wa-yusammiyahā ḥattā innahu la-yaqūlu inna fulānān yaqūlu kadhā wa-kadhā’). I did not find this \textit{ḥadīth} in any earlier work.

God for more of the good ones, and I will ask for his forgiveness for the bad ones.” A hypocrite then asks, “How will this be, oh Messenger of God, when you have decayed (that is, became decayed)?” Muhammad responds with an explanation similar to the one in the previous hadīth. The two Imāmī hadīths are clearly related to each other; the first agrees with the second almost word for word, except for the question which gives Muhammad the opportunity to tell his followers about his incorruptibility. Only one hadīth refers to the incorruptibility of Muhammad’s body in a different context, without connection to the benefit of his continued presence for his followers, or to his life in his tomb in general. In this Sunnī tradition, Muhammad says, “Spread out for me my robe in my grave, because the earth was not given power over the bodies of the prophets.”

These four hadīths show that the incorruptibility motif was connected to different traditions, and thus probably circulated independently of them, attesting to an early Muslim belief in the incorruptibility of Muhammad’s corpse. According to their isnāds, the motif was disseminated in different regions. The first hadīth, attributed to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhārī, and transmitted in the western part of the Fertile Crescent, might be of Syrian origin, just like the ones ascribed to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yaẓīd and ‘Ubāda b. Nūsāyy.

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281 Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, vol. 2/2, p. 75 (ufrushū lī qaṭīfī fī laḥdhī fa-īnna l-arḍa lam tusallat ‘alā adjsādī al-anbiyā’). This tradition is not quoted in any other early work.

282 For its isnād, see Appendix Two, “The incorruptibility traditions (3).”
The two Imâmī hadîths are ascribed to Djaʿfar al-Ṣâdiq, their only common link; in the late eighth or early ninth century they are transmitted in Kûfa.\textsuperscript{283} The third one, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrî, is of entirely Baṣran provenance.\textsuperscript{284}

To sum up, the fragrance and the incorruptibility motifs express two distinct beliefs held by eighth-century Muslims. Both sought, in different ways, to idealize Muhammad’s death, the one by attributing a sweet scent to his body, the other by claiming incorruptibility for it. They were connected to different stories, and thus included in different hadîths. By the early ninth century, both were disseminated all over the Caliphate, found their way into the great hadîth compilations, and thus continued to influence beliefs about Muhammad’s postmortem fate in the centuries to come.

The fragrant and incorruptible corpses of Christian saints

Living and dead holy men occupied a central position in the religious worldview of late antique Christians. Reading the hagiographical literature of the period, one frequently encounters motifs similar to those discussed above in relation to Muhammad’s death: a sweet smell emanates from the corpse when the holy man dies, and his body resists corruption in death. Although these motifs are not necessarily included in the story of

\textsuperscript{283} For their isnâds, see Appendix Two, “The incorruptibility traditions (5)” and “The incorruptibility traditions (6).”

\textsuperscript{284} For the full isnâd, see Appendix Two, “The incorruptibility traditions (4).”
each saint’s death, and their popularity and precise form varies from region to region, even author to author within a single tradition, they do occur fairly often.

Of the two, the fragrance motif is the more widely attested in Near Eastern Christian hagiography: it appears everywhere from Egypt to Iraq. Cyril of Scythopolis (d. 558) writes about John the Hesychast: “He once conceived a desire to see how the soul separates from the body. While he was entreating God over this, he was snatched up in spirit to holy Bethlehem, and saw in the narthex of the honored church there a holy man, unknown to him, stretched out and on the point of death. He saw the man’s soul received by angels and carried up into heaven with a certain fragrance and singing of hymns.”

The presence of the fragrance at the holy man’s death is even more emphatic in Antonius’ life of Simeon Stylites (d. 459): “Throughout his body and his garments was a scented perfume which, from its sweet smell, made one’s heart merry.” Simeon is described by Antonius in this way when the latter found him already three days dead. Similarly, in the Syriac life of Simeon Stylites, a pleasant smell spread around the pillar where Simeon died. There is fragrance also when Qardagh dies a martyr’s death, according to his sixth-century Syriac martyrology: “And at that hour the odor of spices

285 Dozens of holy men die in the hagiographical literature without anything miraculous happening to their corpses. There is no reference at all to the incorruption of corpses of holy men, for example, either in Theodoret of Cyr’ History of the Monks of Syria, or in John of Ephesus’ Lives of the Eastern Saints. Most often their death is expressed in biblical metaphors, for example, crowning (cf. 2 Timothy 4.7-8; e.g. John of Ephesus, Lives, vol. 1, p. 18), receiving the reward, falling asleep, or as simply as “departing from the world” (e.g., ibid., vol. 3, p. 210), or “ending his course in good old age” (e.g., ibid., vol. 3, p. 225).
287 Doran (trans.), Lives, p. 98.
288 Ibid., pp. 185-186. About the olfactory references in the three lives of Simeon Stylites, see Harvey, Scenting Salvation, pp. 186-197.
filled the air throughout the entire region in which the blessed one was stoned."  

Muhammad’s body does not emit fragrance at the time of his death, but somewhat later, and it is felt only by those next to him, yet the similarity is undeniable.

Susan Ashbrook Harvey has noted, in connection with Antonios’ life of Simeon Stylites: “That olfactory message drew its force from ancient and enduring pan-Mediterranean traditions, wherein foul odors signified all that was evil, mortal, and corrupt, while sweet scent characterized everything good, divine, and incorrupt.”

The Christians of the Near East, embedded in this pan-Mediterranean tradition applied to the lives of holy men, would have found it inconceivable to call a prophet a man whose corpse started to decay perceptibly soon after his death, as his followers related. Therefore, the Iraqi Christians who in the eighth century devised the Christian story of Muhammad’s death, mocking Muhammad’s ordinary death, and most probably basing themselves on Muslim traditions that referred to the deterioration of Muhammad’s corpse before his burial, emphasized its accompanying olfactory aspect. The narrative, as we saw in the previous chapter, was widely disseminated in the ninth century among the Christians of the Islamic world, from al-Andalus to Iraq.

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289 Walker, Legend, p. 67. For more examples, see Budge (ed.), Histories, vol. 1, p. 106 (Syriac), vol. 2/1, p. 157 (English); Les légendes syriques, p. 761 and pp. 772-773 (Syriac and French); and Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha, p. 392. I owe the last reference to Adam Becker. Christian hagiographers continued to use this motif in the Islamic period as well, both in Syriac and Arabic works; see, for example, Thomas of Marga, Governors, vol. 1, p. 405 (Syriac), vol. 2, p. 682 (English); The Life of Timothy of Kākhushā, pp. 496-497, pp. 510-511, pp. 566-567, and pp. 586-587; and Wensinck (ed.), Legends, vol. 2, p. 29 (Arabic), p. 87 (English).

290 Harvey, Scenting Salvation, p. 191.
This Christian polemical legend might have been one of the reasons for the shift in the Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death, the omission of the reference to the decay of his body, and the addition of the fragrance motif. The Christian story could well have appeared more pernicious to its audience at the time than it does to us today. In the eighth century, when it started to circulate among the Christians of the Near East, the Muslims ruled, but their Christian subjects far outnumbered them. Christians and Muslims discussed the prophethood of Muhammad in public, and especially in private religious debates. As Anastasius of Sinai (d. ca. 700) attests, public debates between Christians and Muslims were common as early as the late seventh century, and the complaints of al-Djähīz (d. 255/868) about Christians harassing uneducated Muslims with their critique of the Qur’ān reminds one how deeply interreligious debate could penetrate everyday life. This story could well have been brought up in such disputations. Converts from Christianity to Islam could also have played a part in the change in the Muslim narrative. Their number could not have been very large in the seventh and eighth centuries, but they probably did make a significant impact on the religious worldview of early Islam. They were not, after all, necessarily educated about Islam beyond the basics. Christian women who married Muslims perhaps played a similar role; the Islam of their children must have been heavily influenced by their mothers’ Christianity. Converts and Christian wives could have influenced the Muslims to apply the Christian olfactory code to Muhammad’s image.

292 See his al-Radd ʿalā l-naṣārā, p. 320.
The presence of this olfactory code can be detected in all the extant narratives of Muhammad’s death. Although some Iraqi traditions, as we saw above, did not shy away from describing his corpse as decaying before burial, none of these extant Muslim traditions refers to the olfactory aspect of its corruption; they describe only its accompanying visible signs. In fact, one of these traditions, after first referring to the changed color of Muhammad’s abdomen, continues with the fragrance motif, “When the Prophet died, Abū Bakr was absent, and he came after three [days]. No one dared to uncover his face until his abdomen became ashen-colored. Abū Bakr uncovered his face, kissed his forehead, and said, ‘You are dearer to me than my father and my mother! You are fragrant alive and you are fragrant dead.’”

The pan-Mediterranean olfactory code appears no less pervasive in Islam than in Christianity; religious meanings were expressed by relating them to smells. The Paradise is associated with exquisite scent already in the Qur’ān. Musk is mentioned in this connection, not only in the Qur’ān, but also in later Muslim Tradition. Muhammad was described as fragrant not only in his death, but also in his life: “The Messenger of God had the most luminous complexion, his sweat was pearls, and he inclined forward when he walked. I never touched brocade or silk softer than his palm, and I never smelled scent of musk or ambergris more fragrant than the Messenger of God.”

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293 For the beginning of the tradition, see above. For the second part, see Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, vol. 1/4, p. 1817 (wa-qabbala bayna ʿaynayhi qāla bi-abi anta wa-ummī ṭibta ḥayyan wa-ṭibta mayyītan).


296 Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, vol. 3, p. 228. The tradition ends: “He said, ‘[He was like] the excellence of musk, not ambergris’” (kāna rasūlu llāhi azhara l-lawini kāna ʿaraqhu l-lu’lu’ idhā mashā
having a pleasant odor wafting around it. Foul smells were associated, as in
Christianity, with sin, and nothing could conjure worse images than the foulest of them,
the smell of a decaying cadaver. According to a ḥadīth attributed to Djābir b. ʿAbdallāh,
the Prophet likened the smell of those who slander the believers to the smell of a putrid
corpse. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, it is said, saw al-Ḥadjdjad in a dream after his death
as a decayed corpse (djīfā muntina). In the ‘Arāʾis al-majālis of al-Ṭlabī, John the
Baptist is said to have often reproached the “daughter of the king of Sidon,” costing him
eventually his life: “It is written in the Torah that adulterers will be raised on the Day of
Resurrection stinking worse than corpses.”

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takaffaʿa wa-lā masistu dibadhjan wa-lā ḥarīran alyana min kaffi rasūli llāh wa-lā shamintu
rāʾiḥata miskin wa-ʿanbarin atyaba rāʾiḥatan min rasūli llāh qāla ḥusnū miskatīn wa-lā
ʿanbara). See also the section devoted to this topic, for example, in Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, vol. 8, pp. 62-
63 (bāb ṣib rāʾiḥat al-nabī wa-līn massihi wa-l-tabarrūk bi-mashihī); and Bayhaqī, Dalāʾīl al-
nubūwawa, vol. 1, pp. 254-258 (bāb ṣib rāʾiḥat rasūl allāh wa-burūdat yadihi wa-līnihā fī yadi
man massahā wa-ṣīfāt ʿaraqihi).

297 Samhūdī, Khulāṣat al-wafāʾ, vol. 1, p. 322, quoting from the works of Ibn Zabāla (wr. 814)
and a certain Yahyā, attributed to Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAqīl b. Abī
Ṭālib, a great-grandson of ʿAlī through Zaynab, his daughter (Medinan, d. ca. 140-145/757-
763). For Ibn ʿAqīl, see Mizzī, Taḥdīḥ al-kamāl, vol. 16, pp. 78-85. For a similar Imāmī tradition,
attributed to Abū l-Djārūd, see Madjlīsī, Biḥār al-anwār, vol. 22, p. 553: “They dug at the grave
of the Prophet, at his head and at his feet. At the beginning of the digging, strong-scented musk
was emitted in which they did not doubt” (ḥufira ʿinda qabrī l-nabiyyī ʿinda raʾsihi wa-ʿinda
ridjlayhi awwala mā ḥufira fa-ukhrīdja miskīn adhfaru lam yashukku fīhi). For a parallel in
Christian hagiography, see Thomas of Marga, Governors, vol. 1, p. 329 and vol. 2, p. 276 (“... and
how the tablets above their [the saintly monks] coffins are hewn out, and how little holes...
have been left [in the coffins]... for the sweet odour from their dust [to come out]...”).

298 Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, vol. 3, p. 351 (kunnā maʿa l-nabiyyī fa-rtafaʾat rīḥu dījāfatin muntīn fa-
qāla rasūlu llāh a-tadrūna mā ḥādihi l-rīḥ hādhihi rīḥu l-ladhīna yaghtābūna l-muʿminīn). On
Djābir b. ʿAbdallāh, see above.

299 See, for example, Damīrī, Ḥayawān, vol. 1, p. 247 and vol. 2, p. 428.

300 Thaʿlabī, Qīṣāṣ al-anbiyāʾ, p. 340 (maktūbuṭtī l-tawrātī anna l-zunāḥa yuwaqqafūna yawmī m-
qiymāmati wā-rīḥuhum antaunī mina ṣīfāt); for an English translation, see ‘Arāʾis al-majālīs
The incorruptibility motif might have been imported through similar channels. While I have not found any references to incorrupt bodies of saints in Syriac hagiography,\textsuperscript{301} they often occur in Byzantine Christian texts. The works of two Palestinian monks, Cyril of Scythopolis (d. 558) and John Moschus (d. 619 or 634), who lived not long before or at the time of the rise of Islam, seem to be particularly important in this regard. Cyril of Scythopolis writes about St. Sabas’ corpse: “Certainly his body has been kept sound and incorrupt to this day. This I witnessed with my own eyes in the recent tenth indiction. For when the precious tomb was opened in order to lay to rest the remains of blessed Cassianus, I descended in order to venerate the body of the godly old man and found it had remained sound and incorrupt. I gave glory to God who had glorified his servant and honored him with incorruption before the general and universal resurrection.”\textsuperscript{302} This miracle was not needed to ascertain Sabas’ sanctity, but a similar incident in John Moschus’ \textit{Pratum spirituale} serves as proof of it for an anchorite. A group of people find the corpse of a dead man and, as they tell the author, “Beside him we found writing-tablets inscribed thus: ‘I, the unworthy John, died in the fifteenth indiction.’ We calculated the time and discovered that he had been dead for seven years, yet he was as though he had died that very day.”\textsuperscript{303} This proved the sanctity of the

\textsuperscript{301} Syriac texts describe the holy man’s corpse as “his bones” (\textit{garmaw}); it is the “bones” of the saint that work miracles in Syriac hagiography even shortly after his death. This expression hardly carries a connotation of incorruption.


\textsuperscript{303} John Moschus, \textit{Pratum spirituale}, p. 70.
anchorite, and the people who found him buried him in their church. The *Pratum Spirituale* relates four more cases of finding incorrupt corpses of holy men.\(^{304}\)

The Muslim belief in the incorruptibility of Muhammad’s body might have developed under the influence of the same belief regarding holy men in Byzantine Palestine. That these mentions of incorruption are found in the writings of two men who spent much of their lives in Palestine agrees well with the conclusion that can be drawn from the transmission history of the incorruptible corpse *ḥadīths*, as the latter points to their circulation in the western part of the Fertile Crescent, in Syria and Egypt, in the eighth century. While such *ḥadīths* are found in Iraq as well, in Baṣra probably from the early eighth century and in Kūfa from the late eighth century, the small proportion of Syrian and Egyptian *ḥadīths* among all *ḥadīths* makes the western provenance of three out of the six incorruptible corpse traditions remarkable. In fact, the oldest genuine transmitter of the incorruptibility traditions, ‘Ubāda b. Nusayy al-Kindī (d. 118/736f.),\(^{305}\) lived in Palestine as *qāḍī* of *djund al-Urdunn*,\(^{306}\) in its capital, Tiberias, only about twenty kilometers from the town where Cyril of Scythopolis was born.

Despite the probable Christian source of the Muslim fragrance and incorruptibility traditions, the Muslim belief regarding the postmortem fate of the prophets developed in a direction different from its Christian counterpart. In Islam, Muhammad, the prophets, as

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\(^{304}\) See ibid., pp. 67-68, pp. 71-72, pp. 74-75, and p. 91. See also the later addition to Theodoret of Cyrhhus’ life of Symeon Stylites, according to which “he remained even after death unshakable, for while his soul repaired to heaven, his body even so could not bear to fall, but remained upright in the place of his contests” (Theodoret of Cyrhhus, *History*, p. 172).

\(^{305}\) On him, see Appendix Two, “The incorruptibility traditions (2).”

well as the saints, are present in their full bodily existence in their graves. As several hadīths attest, they are fully alive there, mostly described as praying, and they listen to the blessings of those who come to their graves as pilgrims. Pious stories circulated about Muslims who heard the sound of Muhammad praying in his tomb, and about those who heard him answering their greeting. It was not possible to attribute so full a corporeal life to the Christian saints, as their bodily parts were often separated, divided between various locations, exhibited in reliquaries; their presence in the scattered parts could be only spiritual. In Islam, Muhammad’s body remained intact, and this made possible the development of this distinctly Muslim belief.

Conclusion

The fragrance and incorruptibility motifs are only two of many examples that could be cited as possibly having entered the Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s life under the influence of Christian hagiography, channeled through converts, Christian wives, and Christian-Muslim religious debates during the seventh and eighth centuries. Many other episodes of Muhammad’s biography have parallels in sixth- and early seventh-century Christian hagiography. For instance, a cloud gives shade to the holy man in the heat of the desert, just as it does to the young Muhammad during his commercial journey to Syria; the holy man foretells someone’s ascension to the patriarchal throne, just as a

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307 See several hadīths quoted in Bayhaqī, Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’.
308 See the stories told in Suyūṭī, Tanwīr al-ḥalak.
309 John Moschus, Pratum spirituale, pp. 42-43. For some versions of the Muslim story, see Ibn Hishām, al-Sīra l-nabawiyya, vol. 1/1, pp. 115-117 and pp. 119-120; Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, vol. 1/1,
Christian monk prophesies about Muhammad’s future greatness;\(^3\) the holy man had been a shepherd, as “many of the saints were,” and as Muhammad had been, like all the prophets.\(^4\)

But the fragrance and incorruptibility motifs can be contrasted with a possibly earlier alternative Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death and thus, unlike the motifs of the cloud and the shepherd, can be proven to represent a case of borrowing. In the case of other motifs in Muhammad’s biography that are also found in Christian hagiography, no corresponding earlier rival traditions appear; these might even have been part of the Muslim image of Muhammad from the very beginning of Islam and might be the result not of a cross-fertilization during the first two centuries following the Arab conquests, but rather of the relative homogeneity of Near Eastern religious worldviews.

The fragrance and incorruptibility motifs shifted Muhammad’s Muslim portrait from a probably original “everyman’s prophet”\(^5\) to something closer to the images of Christian holy men. Of course, such a shift could only be minor: Muhammad’s body could emit sweet scent after his death, his body could remain incorrupt in the earth, and

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\(^3\) John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, p. 28. For the Muslim story, see again Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra l-nabawiyya*, vol. 1/1, pp. 115-117 and pp. 119-120; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1/1, pp. 75-77, pp. 82-83, and pp. 98-102; and Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 1/3, pp. 1123-1128. With the passing of time, it apparently became a widely held folk belief that a cloud sheltered Muhammad throughout his life. Several scholars argued against this belief, saying that this was the case only on some specific occasions or during his journey to Syria (see Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Djawāb al-ṣahīḥ*, vol. 6, p. 340; and Sakhāwī, *Maqāsid*, pp. 63-65).

\(^4\) The quotation is from Thomas of Marga, *Governors*, vol. 2, p. 276; for further examples, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *History*, pp. 160-161, and p. 173, n. 3; and John of Ephesus, *Lives*, vol. 3, p. 214. For Muslim parallels, see, for example, Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1/1, pp. 79-80.

\(^5\) The expression is from Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, p. 45.
he could perform miracles similar to those of Christian holy men, but the main outlines of his biography did not change in the process. He was never portrayed as a celibate and solitary monk.
Chapter Four

From Easterners to Orientalists: The Reception of the Christian Narrative of Muhammad’s Death after 900 AD

After considering the origins and meanings of the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death with attention to detail in the previous chapters, this chapter will give a bird’s-eye view of its reception from the tenth to the eighteenth century. After the ninth century the Christian authors of the Muslim world shunned the kinds of polemical narratives that their earlier counterparts favored; when they included accounts of Muhammad’s life in chronicles and other texts, they adopted the classical Muslim narrative with minor adjustments. Byzantine authors (including those of Byzance après Byzance) avoided, as they had done earlier, the topic of Muhammad’s death. Medieval Latin Christian authors, however, produced a deluge of stories that often closely resemble the ninth-century eastern Christian narratives. These most often form part of full-fledged biographies of Muhammad incorporated into universal histories, Crusader chronicles, polemical treatises, travelogues, and popular epics. In the early modern period free-standing histories of Islam and biographies of Muhammad were added to these genres. This multitude stands in sharp contrast to the near-total silence on Islam and Muhammad in western Christendom before the first Crusade.

Turning from the East to the West, one encounters a mushrooming of secondary literature similar to that of primary sources. These studies tend to take two forms: books
providing a general survey of a particular period, often of a very long one, \textsuperscript{313} and articles examining a particular author or a particular work of a particular author. \textsuperscript{314} In the best examples of the latter group, scholars, drawing on their expertise on the author and the text, are able to provide rich contextual information which illuminates the way their subject viewed Islam. The former group, as broad-brush studies often are, is better at tracing long trajectories, but analysis of context is necessarily restricted by the authors’ competence and interests. In particular, as the authors of these works are nearly all scholars of some period of western history, the background information is skewed towards western history and culture. They often provide illuminating discussions of what, in western culture, predisposed authors to depict Islam as they did, but are rarely able to offer satisfactory explanations for what in Islam and Muslim culture might have led the western authors view it as they did. They often suffer from an outdated knowledge of the history and historiography of Islam, resulting in the treatment of the western literature on Islam in isolation from the religion and culture that generated it.

This chapter resembles the former group in that it tracks reception history over almost a millennium, yet its subject matter is more restricted than usual. Its contextual information is also shaped by its author’s competence and interests: minimal in relation to the western background, but more in-depth in relation to the eastern one, Christian polemic against Islam in the Muslim world and the history and historiography of Islam. The chapter focuses on the periods of change. First it discusses the depiction of


\textsuperscript{314} See, for example, many of the essays collected in Tolan, \textit{Medieval Christian Perceptions}; Blanks and Frassetto, \textit{Western Views}; and Tolan, \textit{Sons of Ishmael}. 

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Muhammad’s death among eastern Christians after the ninth century. Then it turns to twelfth-century Europe, when the Christian story of Muhammad’s death arrived from the Middle East. This section is followed by one that looks at the variety of narratives of Muhammad’s death in late medieval Europe and examines the popularity of the various versions. Finally it turns to the period between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, when new material arrives again, based on the classical Muslim Tradition, the dissemination of which resulted in a historiographical revolution in the western study of Islamic history.

If the examination of a small subject matter in a broad range of writings makes this chapter unusual in the study of western perceptions of Islam, it does not make it unique. This very topic has already received two expert analyses: from John Tolan (1998) and Etan Kohlberg (2000). Tolan’s article provides a typological survey of the story of Muhammad’s death in medieval and early modern Europe and discusses its function through the centuries. He explains the manner in which Muhammad’s death was told (killed torn apart and eaten by dogs or pigs, among other lurid stories) with the Christian authors’ intention to depict him as Antichrist and anti-saint. But despite the title of the article (“Un cadavre mutilé”), Tolan’s primary focus is on Muhammad’s tomb, on the Christian writings’ mythological sarcophagus of Muhammad that was imagined floating mid-air in the mosque of Mecca, suspended by gigantic magnets. He identifies this tomb as the symbolic locus of Muslim power for Christian authors, who predicted the decline

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of Muslim power were the tomb ever to be destroyed. Tolan argues that the popularity of the story declined after the Turks’ loss of Buda in 1686—that is, the story of the symbolic locus of the Muslim power lost its purpose after Muslim power weakened and lost its grip on Europe.

The other scholar who has examined western depictions of Muhammad’s death, unusually in the study of western perceptions of Islam, is a scholar of Islam. Etan Kohlberg’s article covers broader ground than Tolan’s. While Tolan cited a few early modern European discussions of Muhammad’s death, the main thrust of his study was the interpretation of the medieval material. Kohlberg, by contrast, surveyed not only medieval, but also later lives of Muhammad to the end of the nineteenth century. The governing principle of his article is the extent of his subjects’ reliance on Muslim sources; he distinguishes between the various Christian texts depending on whether their source material is entirely non-Muslim (“nothing but malicious calumnies”), partially Muslim, or fully Muslim. He concludes that “by the mid-seventeenth century the non-Islamic elements had largely been discarded,” and the debate among historians of Islam settled on which Muslim narrative should be accepted as historical.\footnote{The quotations are from Kohlberg, “Western Accounts,” p. 187 and p. 188. For shorter discussions of Muhammad’s death in European writings see Daniel, \textit{Islam and the West}, pp. 125-129; Tolan, \textit{Saracens}, pp. 142-143; and Cuffel, \textit{Gendering Disgust}, pp. 131-137. For a study of the legend of Muhammad floating coffin, see Eckhardt, “Le cercueil flottant.”}
Cautious or courteous? The Christians of the Islamic world on Muhammad’s death after 900 AD

Muslim texts show no new awareness whatsoever of the story up to the nineteenth century. After the Egyptian Christian’s slip had elicited the query to Mālik b. Anas discussed in the first chapter, a long line of Mālikī law books cited the incident and the punishment recommended by Mālik. None of them evince any familiarity with the story independently of the incident; they merely copy the case word by word. The next Muslim response to the story was written in the nineteenth century, after Nu‘mān b. Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (1836-1899), from a distinguished Baghdadi family of religious scholars, came across the *Apology of al-Kindī*—in London. Al-Ālūsī penned a hefty refutation of the *Apology*, countering the Christian story of Muhammad’s death in it with the classical Muslim narrative. He was convinced that he was responding to a European attack on Islam, however; he could not imagine that the *Apology* could be anything other than a forgery of European missionaries. He clearly had not heard of it in his native Iraq.317 The only certain attestation of the story in the Islamic world after the ninth century comes from a Jewish author, Yefet ben ‘Eli, a Karaite exegete residing in Jerusalem in the late tenth century, who inserted a variant into his commentary on the Book of Isaiah, discussed above.

No new text written by Christians under Muslim rule after the ninth century contains the Christian story of Muhammad’s death. Some redactors went so far as to

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excise it from their recensions of earlier texts that included it: the two Arabic retellings of
the Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, produced independently from each other from Syriac
originals in the tenth and the twelfth century, both lack it.318 The story was neglected
despite the continuing currency of the argument for the superiority of Christianity from
Christ’s resurrection and ascension: among several other later polemical texts, the
Disputation of George the Monk points out that Muhammad is in the earth while Christ is
in heaven, yet remains silent about the way he died.319

Some Christians under Muslim rule, authors of chronicles and universal histories,
did recount Muhammad’s death after the ninth century.320 These writers, however, either
merely mention the fact of his death, perhaps adding the date, or summarize it in line with
the classical Muslim tradition. The tenth-century Melkite historian, Agapius of Manbidj
belongs to the first group; his lacunose reference to Muhammad’s death could not have
amounted to more than a few words.321 Another Melkite historian of the period, Saʿīd b.
Biṭrīq (877-940), or Eutychius, as he was known after his election to the patriarchal seat
of Alexandria, provides some details.322

318 For the text of the Arabic recensions, see Roggema, The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, pp. 375-527.
319 See Mudjādalat al-anbā Djirdjī (ed. Carali), p. 58; and Controverse religieuse, p. 32 (with
minor variants). For more examples of similar arguments, see Chapter Two.
320 For surveys of the chronicles written by Christians of the Islamic world, see Conrad, “Syriac
Perspectives” and Heijer, “Coptic Historiography.”
321 Agapius’ work has a lacuna in the manuscript precisely where Muhammad’s death should be
mentioned, but as far as I can gather from the edition the space is too small to contain anything
more than a note of the fact of his death (see Agapius of Manbidj, Kitāb al-ʿUnwān, p. 468).
322 On Eutychius and his chronicle, see Uriel Simonsohn, “Saʿīd b. Biṭrīq,” CMR 2: 224-233. For
the Arabic text of Muhammad’s death in his chronicle, see Saʿīd b. al-Baṭrīq, Naẓm al-jawhar
(ed. Breydy), p. 130 (par. 273). Breydy’s manuscrit de base, MS Sinai Ar. 582, is accessible
In the eleventh year of the reign of Heraclius, the Prophet, peace be upon him, died on Monday, on the second day of Rabī‘ al-Awwal, eleven years after the *hidjra*. He was buried in his house where he died, which is the house of ʿĀ’isha. His illness lasted for thirteen days. He died aged sixty-three years.

All these details come straight from the classical Muslim Tradition. Among Copto-Arabic works, the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* does not refer to Muhammad’s death at all—the Muslims appear only with their emergence as conquerors from the desert.\(^{325}\)

The chronicle of the Copt Djirdjis b. al-ʿAmīd al-Makīn (1206-after 1280) is more detailed.\(^{326}\)

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\(^{323}\) The phrase ‘*alayhi l-salām* is illegible (stained) on the online reproduction of the microfilm.

\(^{324}\) The word *li-laylatayn* seems incorrect, but I do not know how to read the manuscript here.

\(^{325}\) See *History of the Patriarchs*, pp. 487-503 for the life of Benjamin I (622-661), the patriarch at the time.

In the year eleven [...]. He said, “In this year he passed away to the mercy and pleasure of God, may He be exalted. It happened that when he returned from the farewell pilgrimage, he stayed in Medina until the 28th of Sa‘far, and then his illness began. He ordered Abū Bakr to lead the communal prayer, and he prayed with them for seventeen days. He died on Monday, 12th of the month Rabī‘ al-Awwal. He, may peace and blessing be upon him, was sixty-three years old; it was also said sixty-five years.”

This text could just as well have been written by a Muslim—it perfectly matches Samuel Moawad’s characterization of Ibn al-‘Amīd’s approach, that he “wrote as neither a Christian nor an Egyptian, but as a historian within the Islamic state.”

His account of Muhammad’s death, as the rest of his work, is devoid of polemical asides. The only detail of some interest is that while Ibn al-‘Amīd mentions Muhammad’s poisoning by Zaynab bt. al-Ḥārith on the previous page of his narrative, he never connects it to his death. Thus he leaves his death unexplained—Muhammad died as a result of a random illness.

The account of the only extant East-Syrian chronicle, by Elias of Nisibis (975-1046), is terse, but nevertheless evinces the use of Muslim sources. Its Arabic version adds a detail not given by any other Christian historian (or by Elias in Syriac):329

327 The edition has fa-ṣalātuhum instead of the last two words. It must be a copyist’s slip or an editorial mistake.

328 See Moawad, “Al-Makīn Jirjis ibn al-‘Amīd (the elder),” CMR 4: 569.

329 For the Arabic and Syriac text, see Elias of Nisibis, Opus Chronologicum, p. 130.
This year Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh died in the early morning of a Monday, at the end of Șafar, and Abū Bakr succeeded him on that day.

Most West-Syrian chronicles give extremely short notices. Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) notes Muhammad’s death merely to name his successor, “After Muhammad died, Abū Bakr succeeded him…” The anonymous author of the Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens tells us that Muhammad died in 631 AD (943 AG), after ten years of ruling his “empire” (malkutho). Barhebraeus (1225 or 1226-1286) is as concise as Michael the Syrian in his Syriac chronography, “After Mâḥammâd, Abû Bakr [ruled] for two years.” In his Arabic chronicle, however, he is more forthcoming with details:

wa-fi hâdhihi l-sanati wa’aka ‘alayhi l-salâmu wa-marîda wa-tuwuﬀiya yawma l-ithnâyinî li-laylataynî baqiyatâ min șafar wa-kâna ’umruhu bi-djumlatihi thalâthan wa-sittîna sana mânhî arba’îna sana qabla da’wati l-nubuwwati wa-minhâ ba’dahâ thalâtha ’ashara sana muqîman bi-makkata wa-minhâ ba’dâ l-lhidjrati ’ashara sinîn muqîman bi-l-maḏînati wa-lammâ tuwuﬀiya arâda ahlu makkata min al-muḥâdjiřîna raddahu ilayhâ li-annahâ masqaṭu ra’sihi wa-arâda

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330 See Michael’s chapter on Muhammad’s life and teachings (chapter 2 of book 11), vol. 3, pp. 404-405 (Syriac text) and pp. 403-405 (French translation) and the beginning of his account of the Arab conquests (chapter 4 of book 11), vol. 3, p. 411 (Syriac text) and p. 413 (French translation). In Chabot’s translation, “Quand Moḥammed fut mort, Abou Bekr lui succéda…” The Armenian version remains terse: “Mâhomet s’empara par la violence de plusieurs provinces… et mourut après avoir exercé sa puissance durant sept ans” (see Langlois (trans.), Chronique, version arménienne, p. 229).

331 See Chronicon, vol. 18, pp. 238-239 (Syriac text) and vol. 34, p. 187 (Latin translation).

332 On Barhebraeus and his works, see Herman G. B. Teule, “Barhebraeus,” CMR 4: 588-609. The definitive account of Barhebraeus’ life and works is Takahashi, Barhebraeus.

333 See Barhebraeus, Chronography, vol. 1, p. 93 (English translation) and vol. 2, 36r (facsimile of the Syriac text). Barhebraeus, like Michael the Syrian, gives a little biography of Muhammad and an account of his teachings, but there is nothing about the manner of his death (see pp. 90-93 of the English translation of the biography and 35r-36r of the facsimile).

334 See his Barhebraeus, Historia compendiosa, pp. 164-166 (Arabic text) and see below for the Latin text. I do not have access to more recent editions of the chronicle.
ahlu l-madīnati mina l-anṣāri dafnahu bi-l-madīnati li-annahā dāru hidjratihī wa-
dāru nuṣratihī wa-arādat djamā’atun naqlahu ilā bayti l-maqdīsī li-annahu
mawdī’u dafni l-anbiyā’i thumma ttafaqū ‘alā dafnihi bi-l-madīnati fa-dafanūhu
bi-ḥudjratihī ḥaythu qubiḍa

In this year he, peace be on him, caught a fever and fell ill. He died on
Monday, two days before the end of Safar. His age was sixty-three years
altogether: forty years of these before the call of prophethood, thirteen years
of these after it, residing in Mecca, and ten years of these after the hidjra,
residing in Medina. When he died, the Immigrants of the Meccans wanted
to return him to Mecca because it was his birthplace, the Companions of the
Medinans wanted to bury him in Medina because it was the place of his
hidjra and the place of his victory, and a group wanted to take him to
Jerusalem because it is the place of the burial of the prophets. Then they
agreed to bury him in Medina and buried him in the room where he passed
away.

Again, the details draw on Muslim sources and make no use of the Christian story.

There are two seeming exceptions from this avoidance of the story: the thirteenth-
century Armenian historians, Mxit’ar of Ani and Vardan. They both heavily relied on the
Qashun Document for their account of the rise of Islam—Mxit’ar reproduced it with only
minor variations and Vardan interwove it with the corresponding accounts of two other
Armenian historians. As Robert Thompson showed, Mxit’ar and Vardan were familiar
with the Document independently of each other. However, Mxit’ar and Vardan spent
much of their lives away from direct Muslim rule and in any case wrote in a language
unintelligible to most Muslims, so their use of the story does not break the silence of
Christian writers under Islamic rule.

Why the silence? If it were only a decline in attestations, not a total absence, it could be explained simply in terms of the decline of polemic vis-à-vis Islam. The heyday of anti-Islamic polemical writing among the Christians of the Islamic world was the ninth century, presumably because at that time they had already recognized the seriousness of the challenge and had not yet lost hope of countering it. This was followed by an age of despondency: the Christians of the Islamic world produced roughly the same number of polemical treatises against Islam in a millennium as they had done in the ninth century. But while the Christian narrative of Muhammad’s death is entirely unattested after the ninth century, some other stories about Muhammad oft-told by early Christian polemicists remained in use. The most conspicuous example is the story of Muhammad’s instruction by Christians and Jews. The two Arabic recensions of the Legend of Sergius Bahîrâ, mentioned above, are fully based on this story. Two polemical texts written in the wake of the Crusaders’ successes, the Disputation of the Monk George and the Refutation of the Saracen by Bartholomew of Edessa, both include versions of it. Even the chronicles of the Syriac renaissance, those of Michael the Syrian and Barhebraeus, and the Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens, contain a variant of the story. The reasons for the absence of the Christian story of Muhammad’s death should therefore be sought elsewhere.

The most compelling explanation for it is the steep decline in its polemical utility. By the end of the ninth century, the classical Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death had fully formed and did not admit promises of resurrection by the Prophet or admissions of decay for his corpse. Those educated Christians who were familiar with the Muslim
Tradition of their day (that is, the Christians who were in position to engage in religious debates) knew very well that the story of Muhammad’s death as told by the Muslims differed fundamentally from the one in earlier Christian writings. However well-informed they might have been about Islam, it is unlikely that any of them would have been able to detect the few surviving shreds of the old alternative Muslim story of Muhammad’s death and exploit it for polemical purposes. Familiar with the dominant Muslim narrative, educated Christians were aware that telling their story in private or public discussions would be counterproductive and thus teaching it to their less well-informed coreligionists pointless—were they ever to bring it up in conversations with Muslims, they would merely attract ridicule. Stories of Muhammad’s encounter with Christians and Jews, mostly on trading trips to Syria, were, by contrast, part of any Muslim account of his life. Thanks to these and to oblique references in the Qur’ān to accusations that Muhammad was instructed by a non-Arab and that a mysterious person dictated to him, the Christian narratives of Muhammad’s Christian and Jewish teachers never lost their verisimilitude. Although Christians in the Islamic world preserved the old stories about the rise of Islam longer than Muslim historians did, they stuck to their guns only as long as they suited their purposes—in retelling them they were not led by antiquarianism, but by urgent and practical motives. When a story ceased to be polemically useful, they dropped it from their repertoire. Christian forgetfulness about the story after the ninth century was generated neither by caution towards the authorities nor by courtesy towards Muslim neighbors, as one might think, but by the wish to avoid obsolescence.

The most detailed survey of Muslim stories of Muhammad’s encounter with Christians and Jews is in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahirā*, pp. 37-60. The references in the Qur’ān are *al-Nahl* (16): 103 and *al-Furqān* (25): 5.
Although educated Christians living under Muslim rule did not cite the story in their new writings, there is ample evidence for continued familiarity with it among Christians in the Islamic world in general. This is indicated by, first, the copying of ninth-century texts that included it: the Apology of al-Kindī, the Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, and the Qashun Document. Two manuscripts of the last, from the thirteenth and the eighteenth century, are kept and were presumably copied in Jerusalem. The Syriac recensions of the Legend, unlike the Arabic recensions, retained the story of Muhammad’s death. Eighteen Syriac manuscripts (extant or lost) of the Legend are documented, seven of West-Syrian and eleven of East-Syrian provenance. They are mostly very late, from the nineteenth and the twentieth century, all produced east of Syria, in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq, when the location of copying is known. Earlier, relevant, examples include a West-Syrian copy dated to ca. 1600, another made from a manuscript copied in 1584, and two East-Syrian manuscripts possibly as early as the fifteenth century. Barbara Roggema suggested that the Latin recension of the Legend was made from Syriac originals in Outremer—so if her hypothesis is correct the Syriac recensions might have circulated as far west as the Levant.\footnote{See Thompson, “Muhammad,” p. 844.}

\footnote{The basis of these calculations is Roggema, The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, pp. 238-246. They rely only on Roggema’s concise descriptions of the manuscripts, often derived from old catalogs; a re-examination of the manuscripts themselves could easily throw up new data. For Roggema’s suggestion of the origins of the Latin recension, see her “The Legend of Sergius-Bahīrā,” pp. 120-123; and for her revised opinion, The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā, pp. 215-218. But even this does not necessarily mean the circulation of the Syriac Legend in the Levant. Although sources for literary activities are limited to the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Principality of Antioch, they could have taken place in the County of Edessa just as well. The Latin recension was published, based on one of the two extant manuscripts, in Bignami-Odier and Levi Della Vida, “Une version latine” in 1950.}
About thirty manuscripts of the *Apology of al-Kindî* are also known today, copied between the thirteenth and the early twentieth century. Their circulation is attested from al-Andalus to Kurdistan. Authored by an East-Syrian, the *Apology* was read by Christians outside of the Church of the East already in the eleventh century, when the Melkite ‘Abdallāh b. al-Faḍl of Antioch cited it in his *Kitāb al-manfa’a l-kabīr*, and on the Iberian Peninsula in the twelfth century, when Petrus Alphonsi used it in his *Dialogi contra Judaeos* and Peter the Venerable commissioned its translation into Latin. Copyists of the *Apology* in the Ottoman period belonged to virtually all Christian communities in the Arabic-speaking Middle East: Copts, Greek Orthodox, Maronites, Chaldeans, East- and West-Syrians are all represented, as is an Anglican priest from Aleppo who set out to produce a recension in line with Anglican doctrines in 1863. Gerasimos Masarra (1859-1936), the Greek Orthodox metropolitan of Beirut, thought so highly of the *Apology* that he not only copied it, but also rendered it into Greek in 1879. The chronological distribution of the known copies is also much broader than those of the Syriac recensions of *Legend*: one copy comes probably from the thirteenth century and the rest from the Ottoman period, with each century represented by at least one manuscript.\(^{339}\) Judging from the number of copies alone, the text must have attracted a fair number of readers.

\(^{339}\) For the latest published list of the manuscripts, see van Koningsveld, “The Apology of al-Kindî,” p. 92. His list gives only eighteen manuscripts. The thirty manuscripts (based on my own calculations) include both extant and lost manuscripts and the uncertainty is caused by the difficulty of access to some manuscripts to verify cataloguers’ identifications. ‘Abdallāh b. al-Faḍl cites the *Apology* in chapter 64 of the *Kitāb al-manfa’a ‘a*; see MS Bibliothèque Orientale 541, f. 54v where the author of the *Apology* is cited by name. (I owe this reference to Sasha Treiger and Sam Noble who are preparing an edition of the *Kitāb al-manfa’a ‘a*.) For Petrus Alphonsi’s knowledge of the *Apology*, see Tolan, *Petrus Alphonsi and His Medieval Readers*, pp. 27-33; for the translation commissioned by Peter the Venerable, see Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and*
Another possible indication of continued knowledge of the story among the Christians of the Islamic world is copyists’ modifications of it—some variants seem to attest to the copyists’ familiarity with the story independently of their Vorlagen. I have so far noted two examples of this. A West-Syrian manuscript of the Legend, copied around 1600, exhibits an interesting variant: the copyist inserts that guards were ordered to keep watch of Muhammad’s corpse when he was laid out. Mxit’ar of Ani modified the Qashun Document in a similar way: while the latter blames “the drowsy disciples” for the dogs’ defilement of the corpse, Mxit’ar accuses “the guards” instead. Guards are unattested in most versions of the story; they appear only in the two Latin texts from the Iberian Peninsula that surely did not circulate in the East. These modifications are suggestive of independent knowledge of the story, yet they by no means constitute firm evidence: the Jews, according to the Gospel of Matthew, ordered guards to keep watch over Jesus’ tomb. The copyists and the chroniclers might have willfully or inadvertently altered the story of Muhammad’s death on the analogy of that of Jesus, thereby accentuating the different outcomes of the three-day wait of their respective followers: in the story of Jesus, hostile guards are unable to thwart the resurrection; in that of Muhammad, faithful guards are powerless against the desecration.

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340 The manuscript is MS Mingana Syr. 71; the copyist’s modifications are indicated in Roggema, The Legend of Sergius Bahîrâ, p. 334, n. 32 in the apparatus. For the description of the manuscript see ibid., p. 239.

341 Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 850, cf. the main text (Mxit’ar’s version) and n. z in the apparatus (the Qashun Document).

The most incontrovertible evidence for the continued familiarity of the Christians of the Islamic world with the story comes from western European sources. As I will discuss below, the Latin stories of Muhammad’s death resemble those of the eastern Christians and their resemblances cannot be explained by knowledge of texts possibly available in Latin translation. It is more probable that the Latin authors relied on oral tradition. Latins probably picked up the stories from indigenous Christians in the Crusader states; some indeed claim to have done so. Educated Christians under Muslim rule, it seems, were reluctant to record the legend any more in their works, but their coreligionists with no learning in the Muslim Tradition had no compunctions about telling it.

**From Easterners to Westerners: The first northern European narratives of Muhammad’s death**

For centuries after the Arab conquests, we hear of few medieval Europeans displaying any familiarity with Islam. Although a significant number of Latin Christians lived under Muslim rule and on the frontiers of the Islamic world, or traveled there regularly for trade, their experiences left few traces in the sources. European Christianity was perhaps too focused on converting the pagans on the northwestern and northeastern fringes of their world to engage with Islam. Their disinclination ended in the eleventh century, after most of the northern lands had been Christianized. By the time when troubles arose on the pilgrimage route to Palestine, their attention was free to turn southwards. The successes of the southern European powers, Aragon, Castile, and the Normans of Italy, in
conquering Muslim lands must also have encouraged them to intervene militarily in the Islamic world. By the early twelfth century, much of Latin Christendom was engaged in wrestling territory from the Muslims—northerners in the eastern Mediterranean and southerners on their own southern borders. The age of insulation was over; an age of engagement followed, in both military and intellectual terms.343

Before the twelfth century, few sources were available in Europe about Muhammad’s life and Europeans showed little interest in even these few. The ninth-century Latin excerpts from the chronicle of Theophanes Confessor in Anastasius Bibliothecarius’s (d. ca. 877-879) Chronographia tripertita contained a brief biography.344 Other texts that circulated included the short Istoria de Mahomet, the yet shorter Tulusceptru de libro domni Metobii,345 and shortest of all, the Adnotatio Mammetis.346 These texts amount to no more than several pages altogether in print. Of these, the Istoria and the Adnotatio were unknown outside the Iberian Peninsula (they survive in five and two medieval manuscripts respectively, all copied and preserved in the northern part of Spain),347 as was the Tulusceptru (it survives in one manuscript only, copied in the tenth century in Navarre).348 The sole text with circulation outside of the Iberian Peninsula in this period was the Chronographia tripertita: Anastasius made his

343 For explanations of the lack of European interest in Islam, see Southern, Western Views, pp. 1-33; and Kedar, Crusade and Mission, pp. 35-41.
344 On him and his work, see the entry of Bronwen Neil, “Anastasius Bibliothecarius,” CMR 1: 786-790.
345 On this work see John Tolan, “Tulusceptru de libro domni Metobii,” CMR 2: 83-84.
346 On the Istoria and the Adnotatio, see Chapter One.
347 On the manuscripts and their provenance, see Chapter One.
translation in Rome. It survives in six manuscripts, one from the tenth, two from the eleventh and three from the twelfth century.\(^{349}\) However, the *Chronographia* did not influence northern European historiography until the twelfth century, at the time when other accounts of Muhammad were also being written.\(^{350}\) Muhammad’s name was mentioned by a northern European author for the first time in the eleventh century, by Raoul Glabert, but his account of Islam amounted to only a few lines.\(^{351}\) Of the texts known outside of the Iberian Peninsula, only Theophanes’ chronicle (and its adaptations) refers to Muhammad’s death and it does so as “his murder” (*usque ad caedem eius*).\(^{352}\) No other text mentions it even in passing.

In the twelfth century, shortly after the start of the Crusades, this meager crop quickly swelled. Four biographies of Muhammad were written in northern Europe in the twelfth century, witnessing the sudden European interest in Islam. The earliest of these is the *Vita Mahumeti* of Embrico of Mainz. It is a verse life of Muhammad—a masterful anti-hagiography modeled on contemporary verse hagiographies. Nothing is known about the author beyond his name; he probably wrote the *Vita Mahumeti* in the early twelfth century.

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\(^{349}\) On its manuscripts and influence, see Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, pp. 33-34; on the manuscripts, see also Brown, “The *Chronographia Tripertita*.”

\(^{350}\) See Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, p. 86; for adaptations of Anastasius’ text by two northern European chroniclers, see pp. 206-207 (Appendix I/b). Their work was only slightly earlier the twelfth-century lives of Muhammad.

\(^{351}\) See Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, p. 85; for another eleventh-century mention of Muhammad’s name, see ibid., pp. 85-86.

\(^{352}\) On the reference to Muhammad’s “murder” in the Greek and the Latin text, see Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, p. 465, n. 2.
century.\textsuperscript{353} The following is John Tolan’s summary of Muhammad’s death in the
poem:\textsuperscript{354}

Shortly thereafter, God strikes Mammutius dead for his sins, and pigs begin to
devour his body. The Magus comes along, finds Mammutius dead, drives off the
pigs, and takes the corpse away. He dresses and perfumes the body and comes to
the people to make a funeral oration, in which he bids the people not to eat pork,
since pigs have devoured the dead Mammutius. […] Embrico closes with a
description of Mammutius’ tomb, designed by the Magus. His gilded sarcophagus
is held aloft by a system of magnets; hence it appears to the credulous masses that
God is miraculously holding Mammutius in midair.

The second text, \textit{Otia de Machomete}, was penned by Gautier de Compiène who wrote it
between 1137 and 1155. Gautier was a cleric; nothing else is known about him.\textsuperscript{355} He
describes Muhammad’s death as follows:\textsuperscript{356}

\begin{verbatim}
1055  The days which made up the life of Muhammad
having gone by in such a great peace,
Muhammad is dead and received, as fitting reward,
the punishment of hell, as our dear faith holds.
But his people, believing that his soul had gone over
1060  to the stars, are afraid to put the corpse in the ground.
Building a coffin, marvelously made,
they put him inside as nobly as they can.
Since, as it is said, the vessel inside which
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{353} On the author and the text, see Tolan, “Anti-Hagiography”; reprinted in his \textit{Sons of Ishmael},
pp. 1-18 (notes on pp. 161-164); see also idem, “Embrico of Mainz,” CMR 3: 592-595. The poem
was formerly ascribed to Hildebert of Tours on stylistic grounds; this error occurs in the entry of
\textsuperscript{354} The Latin text was edited in 1962 in Embricon de Mayence, \textit{Vie}. The summary is from Tolan,
“Anti-Hagiography,” p. 16.
\textsuperscript{355} On this work and its author, see John Tolan, “Gautier de Compiène,” CMR 3: 601-603.
\textsuperscript{356} The Latin text was edited by R. B. C. Huygens in 1977 in Alexandre du Pont, \textit{Roman}, pp. 96-
208; the account of Muhammad’s death is on pp. 200-206, printed parallel to that of Alexandre du
Pont. The translation is mine. I am grateful to John Marenbon for reading this text with me. For
another translation, see Tolan, “European Accounts,” p. 231.
Muhammad’s limbs lie buried seems to float in a way that it seems suspended in the air without prop, and neither does any chain hold it up, if you ask them through what art it does not fall, mistakenly, they attribute it to the power of Muhammad. But the vessel is in fact enclosed in iron on every side, and is placed in the middle of a square building. Its stone is steel, with equal distance separating the four sides of the shrine in each direction, and the stone, through the force of its nature, draws the iron to itself equally so that the vessel does not fall in any direction.

They therefore revere Muhammad with divine honor and will revere him as long as God allows it. The city where Muhammad’s limbs are said to be buried is called Mecca (Mecha), not without portent: For Muhammad, lover of all filthy things, taught adultery (mechiam), and was himself an adulterer (mechus).

The third biography of Muhammad to come from northern Europe was written by an otherwise unknown Crusader, called Adelphus. He wrote it in prose, in the middle of the twelfth century. Adelphus concludes his life of Muhammad:

At last, when the earth was not able to bear Muhammad’s wickedness at all any more, the one who makes souls stumble, whom he always served, foresaw the death suitable to his life and the end appropriate to him. […] When one day Muhammad went to the forest to hunt and by chance strayed from his men, he suddenly happened upon a herd of pigs. He was torn apart member by member as well as completely eaten by them, so that nothing but his right arm remained from him.

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358 The Latin text was edited in Bischoff, “Ein Leben Mohommeds,” pp. 113-122; the account of Muhammad’s death is on pp. 121-122. The translation here is mine. I thank John Marenbon for reading this text with me.
Therefore, it was decreed throughout the Hagarene world that because of this no one should ever use pigs after that, which law is kept among them until today for the reason that their king, their teacher and prophet himself, was eaten by pigs. And the king who, as a young man, was very much in the habit of grazing pigs, rightly happened to be eaten by pigs.

Finally, Guibert de Nogent (ca. 1055-1124) also included a life of Muhammad in his Dei gesta per francos (The Deeds of God through the Franks), a chronicle of the first Crusade he wrote in the first half of the twelfth century. Guibert is the only one of the four authors whose figure is not obscure, thanks to his autobiography. He came from a noble family and became a Benedictine monk. He did not participate in the First Crusade; his Gesta is the rewriting of an anonymous chronicle of it.359 His life is Muhammad is sarcastic; this is his take on the end of it:360

But now to describe how this marvellous law-giver made his exit from our midst. Since he often fell into a sudden epileptic fit, with which we have already said he struggled, it happened once, while he was walking alone, that a fit came upon him and he fell down on the spot; while he was writhing in this agony, he was found by some pigs, who proceeded to devour him, so that nothing could be found except his heels. […] They [his followers] imagined that he had been taken up into heaven, with only his heels left as a monument for his faithful adherents, who visit them with great veneration, and condemn eating pork, because pigs consumed their lords with their bites.

All four texts are unreservedly polemical portrayals of Muhammad’s death. The motif of the expected resurrection or ascension does not loom as large as in the eastern Christian narratives. Only two stories, by Gautier and Guibert, claim that the Muslims believed in

360 The Latin text has been edited by R. B. C. Huygens in 1996 in Guibert de Nogent, Dei gesta and translated into English a year later in Guibert de Nogent, Deeds. For Muhammad’s biography, see pp. 94-100 (Latin) and pp. 32-36 (English); for the account of Muhammad’s death, see pp. 99-100 (Latin) and pp. 35-36 (English). I give the passage here in Levine’s translation.
Muhammad’s ascension to heaven—but of his soul only, because the corpse clearly remains on earth, waiting to be buried according to their narratives. There is no mention of any expectation of resurrection which leads to the decay and the mauling of the body in the eastern Christian narratives. Perhaps for this reason, the motif of the decaying corpse is lost. The embalming in Embrico’s poem might be a faint echo of it—it was necessary in order to prevent the otherwise inevitable decay. It also recalls a reference to embalming in the Syriac recensions of the *Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*. The role of animals, by contrast, is much more prominent than in the eastern Christian versions: they appear in three of the four stories. In Europe these animals are not dogs, but pigs. In Embrico’s story they only desecrate the corpse, as dogs do in the eastern Christian narratives. In Adelphus’s and Guibert’s story they kill Muhammad; in the latter text they attack him when he has an epileptic fit. In all three narratives, they maul Muhammad’s body; Embrico does not specify how much of the corpse remained to be buried, while in Adelphus’s and Guibert’s stories only the right arm and the heels, respectively, are left uneaten. In all three texts, the appearance of the swine on the scene leads to the banning of pigs or pork in Islam, recalling the decree against dogs in the eastern Christian narratives. Finally, a new motif appears in Embrico’s and Gautier’s story: they claim that Muhammad’s remains were placed in an iron coffin suspended with the help of magnets such that it appears to be floating in the middle of a building.
Despite the differences of detail and emphases, these four stories of Muhammad’s death show uncanny similarity to those recorded by Christians of the Islamic world centuries earlier. We find only two motifs that are entirely missing from narratives of Muhammad’s death told by the Christians of the Islamic world: Guibert’s reference to Muhammad’s epilepsy and Embrico’s and Gautier’s description of Muhammad’s floating coffin. Guibert might have received the idea of epilepsy from Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, while the invisibly suspended coffin is entirely new in Christian writings on Islam.

Of these, some motifs crop up also in classical Muslim texts. Muslim belief in the ascension of Muhammad’s soul to heaven occurs of course also in classical Muslim sources, as does the claim that his body was embalmed. But since each Latin narrative, taken as a whole, shows more similarity with eastern Christian texts than with Muslim ones, it is far more likely that the former lie behind them.

How did the four Latin authors learn about these narratives? Two are forthcoming about their sources; both refer to oral, not written, sources. Adelphus describes his
informant as “a little Greek with some knowledge of Latin as well as Arabic in addition to his own language.” Adelphus says that he met the Greek in Antioch after arriving there from Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{361} We have even more concrete details about Gautier’s informants: a Muslim convert to Christianity who had become a cleric in Sens in Burgundy told the story to his canon, who related it to an abbot called Garnier, who in turn related it to Gautier. Of these three, only the convert cannot be identified with certainty.\textsuperscript{362}

John Tolan, who discussed these ascriptions, interprets them as rhetorical devices, the authors’ means of distancing themselves from their narratives. This interpretation is indeed supported by Adelphus’s explicit abdication of responsibility for the story to his Greek informant. He concludes his narrative with the following words, “It is enough to say this about Mahomet, the Hagarene Nestorius, exactly as the Greek reported to me. Whoever believes it false should hold back from reproaching me, but should ascribe it either to his ignorance or to the inventiveness of the Greeks.”\textsuperscript{363}

In view of the motifs the northern European stories share with eastern Christian ones, however, we should consider the verisimilitude of these references to informants. There were surely Greeks (whether Adelphus meant by \textit{Grecus} a Greek native speaker who lived long enough in Arab lands to master the language or a Melkite whose mother tongue was Arabic, but knew Greek as well) who were happy to present their take on

\textsuperscript{361} See Bischoff, “Ein Leben Mohammeds,” p. 113.

\textsuperscript{362} The chain of transmission reported by Gautier was complemented in the next century by Alexandre du Pont, in his Old French version of the story. For the texts, see Alexandre du Pont, \textit{Roman}, pp. 96-99. For the identification of the people in the chain of transmission, see Hyatte (trans.), \textit{The Prophet of Islam}, p. 6 and pp. 37-38.

\textsuperscript{363} See Bischoff, “Ein Leben Mohammeds,” p. 122. For Tolan’s discussion of these passages, see his \textit{Saracen}s, p. 138 and p. 142.
Muhammad’s life to the Crusaders, as there were converts from Islam to Christianity, especially after the establishment of Crusader states in the Levant, who could have learned polemical narratives about Muhammad from other Christians of the Islamic world. The two interpretations do not of course exclude each other: the informants might have been historical even if the Latins decided to mention them out of consideration for their authorly credibility.

Yet there are significant differences between the northern European and the eastern Christian narratives. How to explain them? The transmitters’ forgetfulness and imagination certainly played an important part in the general transformation of the narratives. The lack of prominence allocated to the ascension and the decomposition of the corpse can perhaps be explained by the distance of Islam from Christianity in the religious world of Latin Christians. For the Christians of the Islamic world, living next to the Muslims, it was meaningful to deny the possibility of comparison between Muhammad and Jesus or Muhammad and Christian holy men. For Latin Christians, far away from Muslims, such a comparison could not even have arisen, so there was no need to underline its impossibility.

Mauling by animals, as I argued in the previous chapter, places the victim in the lowest strata of society, if not among its outcasts, and casts doubt on the possibility of his bodily resurrection. These points were worth making about Muhammad also for Latin Christians. The dogs turned into pigs because the impurity of dogs for Muslims was a little known fact and their slaughter, if historical at all, had been a long-forgotten event, while the impurity of pigs was still there for every non-Muslim to see. The pigs, in fact,
appear in a similar role in the *Chanson de Roland* that the Latin authors might have been familiar with. After the “pagans” lose their first battle with the Franks,\(^{364}\)

They scurry to Apollo, in a crypt, insult him, mutilate him horribly:
“Oh evil god, why bring such shame on us?
Why our king you allowed to be defeated?
You give poor pay to those who serve your well!”
They take away his scepter and his crown, then hang him from a column by the hands, and topple it to earth about their feet.
They pound on him and shatter him with mauls.
They strip the fire-red gem off Termagant and throw Mohammed down into a ditch, where pigs and dogs will gnaw and trample him.

In these lines about the idol Muhammad both domesticated animals that eat flesh appear as desecrating it. The motifs of the eastern Christian legends and the *Chanson de Roland* could have merged and produced the pig of the northern European narratives. Few northern Europeans could have known that pigs could not be kept in the climate of the Arabian Peninsula (if they knew at all that Muhammad lived there), so the lack of historical verisimilitude would not have bothered them.\(^{365}\)

To conclude, few written sources were available in the twelfth century in Latin about Muhammad when the first four northern European authors penned their works and

\(^{364}\) See laisse 187 in *Song of Roland*.

\(^{365}\) The motifs of the floating coffin and the severed heel of Muhammad were also prominent in European texts on Muhammad’s death. They too were almost certainly not mere inventions of the Europeans, but based on oral narratives from the Islamic world. Since they are missing from eastern Christian narratives of Muhammad’s death, I will not discuss them here.
it is unlikely that they were familiar even with those available.\textsuperscript{366} They did have access, however, to oral sources via the Crusaders. Unlike the ninth-century Christian polemicists of the Islamic world, these informants were probably uneducated and not overly concerned about the accuracy of their stories—they never needed to test them in debates against Muslims. The Latins who heard and transmitted them must have been aware of their questionable credibility. By the time the narratives reached Europe, let alone the four authors, they were inevitably corrupted further with some features forgotten and others replaced with different ones. Latin Christians in twelfth-century Europe had no great need to be precise: it was not until the next century that Dominicans and Franciscans traveled to the Islamic world attempting to convert Muslims. Material from educated informants or from texts might have commanded more careful transmission, but those did not arrive in time for Embrico, Gautier, Adelphus, and Guibert. Yet however fanciful the stories were, the Latin authors did not invent them: just like the eastern Christians in the previous stage of the narratives’ development, the Latins wove their web of stories from threads readily available. Their contribution amounted to little more than combining them in novel ways. The distance these stories of Muhammad’s death show from the early Muslim ones is not the result of innovation, but of prolonged oral transmission.

\textsuperscript{366} The only possible exception, as I mentioned before, is Guibert de Nogent who might have learned about Muhammad’s epilepsy from Anastasius’ version of the chronicle of Theophanes.
The multifaceted Latin Christian tradition after the twelfth century

Beginning also with early twelfth century, other Latin Christians busied themselves with paraphrasing and translating eastern Christian texts on Muhammad’s life. The first such attempts happened in southern Europe. The earliest one forms part of Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogi contra Judaeos* (wr. 1110). Petrus Alfonsi was born a Jew under Muslim rule. He converted to Christianity and was baptized in 1106 in Huesca, after the Aragonese king conquered it. Thanks to his Andalusian background, he knew Arabic well.\(^{367}\) Although the main target of the *Dialogi* is Judaism, its fifth chapter focuses on Islam. The account of Muhammad’s life ends with the following:\(^{368}\)

> [A]fter his death, they all wanted to abandon his law. For he himself had said that on the third day his body would be raised up to heaven. When they knew that he was a deceiver and saw that the cadaver stank, with the body unburied, the greater part [of his followers] departed. Haly [‘Ali], however, the son of Abytharius [Abu Talib], one of Muhammad’s ten companions, obtained the kingdom after his death. He preached flatteringly and cleverly admonished the people to believe, and told them that they did not properly understand Mohammad’s expression. He said, “Mohammad did not say that he would be raised up to heaven before burial, nor while people watched. Indeed, he said that after the burial of his body the angels would bear him off to heaven, with none being aware of it. Therefore, because they did not bury him immediately, certainly he began to stink, in order that they might bury him right away.” Therefore, by this argument he held the people a little while in their earlier error.

This account of Muhammad’s death is a summary of that in the *Apology of al-Kindī*, with slight modifications. Not long after, the entire text of the *Apology* was made available to


a Latin readership. Three decades later, in the early 1140s, several Arabic texts were rendered into Latin in the Iberian Peninsula at the behest of Peter the Venerable of Cluny. Among these was the entire text of the Apology, entitled *Epistola Saraceni et rescriptum Christiani* in this Latin version. The translation was produced in 1142 in Toledo, by Peter of Toledo.\(^{369}\) The Latin text differs from the Arabic time and again; it does so also in the account of Muhammad’s death. It deviates from the Arabic original in one significant detail: it claims that when Muhammad’s corpse became putrid, his followers, according to Humbran, threw him away naked (*tandem sicut retulit Humbran nudum eum proiecerunt*). This detail is a corrupt version of the last tradition cited in the Arabic original: “Ḍ-mrān said, ‘A red cloth was under him during his illness, he died on it, was wrapped in it after his death, and was interred without washing or burial clothes’” (*wa-dḥakara d-mrān annahu kāna taḥtahu fī maraḍīhi mashmala ḥamrāʾ wa-ʿalayhā māta wa-fīhā udridja baʿda mawtihi wa-wuriya fī l-turāb bi-ghayri ghusl wa-lā akfān*).\(^{370}\) In the Arabic text, Muhammad is wrapped in clothes, if not in suitable ones, and buried; in the Latin text, his corpse is disposed of without any regard to decency.

This was not the only time the Apology was translated into Latin. Another version was prepared almost a century later, in 1236, by Dominican missionaries stationed in Acre. The full translation does not survive and neither does the *Gregorian Report* of

\(^{369}\) The first critical edition of the Latin text was published in González Muñoz, *Exposición y refutación*. On this work and its author, see Fernando González Muñoz, “Peter of Toledo,” CMR 3: 479-482.

which it formed part, but we know of it from citations of the latter by later historians.  

Muhammad’s ingestion of a piece of poisoned mutton, despite the sheep’s warning, and a remark that he died of it eighteen years later, precedes the story of his death. According to the story, Muhammad told “his parents and friends” (parentibus et amicis suis), that they should not bury him, because his body would be carried off to heaven three days later. “His followers therefore, after he died on a Monday, guarded the corpse for twelve days. But realizing that what he said would not happen, they buried him in the month which the Arabs call Rabe Alauguil, sixty years after his birth” (Socii itaque eius, defuncto eo in die lune, servaverunt corpus usque ad xii dies. Videntesque dicta eius caruisses effectu, in mense illo qui apud Arabes dicitur Rabe Alauguil, anno lx sue nativitatis, sepelierunt.). After this the narrative contradicts itself about the number of days Muhammad’s corpse was kept unburied, but is clear that they eventually entombed him unwashed (eum aqua non lavantes sub terram in tumba posuerunt).

Other eastern Christian texts that included accounts of Muhammad’s death were also translated into Latin in Outremer. One of these was the Legend of Sergius Bahîrā, translated, according to Barbara Roggema, from the Syriac. While the two extant Latin recensions omit the story of Muhammad’s death, the translation from Syriac indicates that Latin Christians had access to the account in the Syriac recensions of the Legend at least in the Levant. A few medieval European historical figures were familiar with the


372 For the text, see Vandecasteele, “Étude comparative,” p. 127.
Another text relevant in this context is the Book of Rolls. It was shown to Pelagius, the papal legate, in 1219 in Damietta, and he had it translated into Latin. The translation is lost today, so we do not know whether its account of Muhammad’s death deviated in from the Arabic original known to us today.

The Latin literature of the Crusader states is mostly lost today, so we do not know what else might have reached Latin Europe in this period. Yet the translations we do know about provided much eastern Christian material about Muhammad’s death for Europeans to read and, together with Petrus Alfonsi’s Dialogi, transformed the literary landscape of Latin Christendom concerning Muhammad. From now on, Latin Christian authors of biographies of Muhammad could rely on written sources as well, sources that had not undergone multiple changes before they reached their readers. They did indeed take the opportunity to use them.

The Apology of al-Kindī proved captivating and convincing enough to be summarized, excerpted, and cited by several later European authors. Vincent de Beauvais was one of them. He gave a substantial excerpt from the Toledan translation of the Apology in his Speculum historiale (wr. ca. 1244-1260), including its account of Muhammad’s death. The Speculum historiale was much read in the late Middle Ages and its material was often borrowed. Its story of Muhammad reached, among others, Boccaccio (1313-1375), as his notebook (wr. 1342-1345) testifies. It contains a two-page

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373 Roggema, “The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā,” pp. 121-123.
account of Muhammad’s life, entitled *De Maumeth propheta Saracenorum*. He did not take it directly from the *Speculum historiale*, but through Paolino Venetus’s (c. 1270-1344) *Gesta Machumeti et Saracenorum*, part of his *Satirica ystoria*.376

Another author who cited the *Apology* was Matthew Paris in his *Chronica maiora* (wr. ca. 1240-1259).377 But he did not cite only the *Apology*: he gave three accounts of Muhammad’s death; the first an amalgam of some of the northern European biographies, the second based on the *Apology* via the *Gregorian Report*, and the third another version based on similar northern European material. According to the first, Muhammad was mauled to death by a pig while he was drunk and having an epileptic fit. He had told his followers that he would be resurrected on the third day after his death, so they waited for thirty days. When they saw that the resurrection was not going to happen, they interred him. The second narrative is the one I summarized above, derived from the *Gregorian Report*. According to the third story too Muhammad was mauled to death by a pig in similar circumstances as in the first one. In this story, however, he felt sick not only because of his epilepsy and the wine he drank, but also because of the poison that some of his followers gave him. In this version there is no expectation that Muhammad is to be resurrected; the remnants of his corpse are hidden in a tomb hurriedly. The manner of his

376 See Roberta Morosini, “Giovanni Boccaccio,” CMR 5: 76-87. The notebook is known in only one unedited manuscript and the *Satirica ystoria* has not been edited yet.

death also gives rise to the Muslim prohibition of eating pork. Although his stories clearly contradict each other, Matthew Paris made no attempt to synthesize them.378

Late medieval authors also occasionally related Muhammad’s death along lines similar to those of Matthew Paris’s last narrative. For example, John Lydgate (c.1370-c.1451) condenses the story into three lines in his *Fall of Princes*:379

Lik a glotoun deied in dronk[efe]nesse,
Bi excesse of mykil drynyng wyn,
Fill in a podel, deuoured among swyn.

Another author to rely on a northern European life of Muhammad was Alexandre du Pont. He created a fable fitting the Arabian nights, the *Roman de Mahon*, from the *Otia de Machomete* of Gautier de Compiègne. He wrote his poem, an adaptation of the Latin text for a lay audience in Old French, in 1258 in Laon in northern France.380 It largely follows the story of Gautier, but adds embalming to the process of burial (“They honor his cadaver greatly / And embalm it with a very costly unguent / So that it can neither rot nor disintegrate”) and makes the sepulcher of Muhammad more ornate: it now features not only the floating coffin, but also inextinguishable candles and a bright stone.381

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378 For the text, see *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica*, vol. 1, p. 270 (year 622), vol. 3, p. 351 and vol. 3, p. 360 (year 1236).
379 See John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, part III, bks. VI-IX, p. 923, ll. 152-154. One of the copyists added a heading to the section about Muhammad that tells almost everything we will know of his death from the poem: “Off Machomet the fals prophete and how he beyng dronke was deuoured among swyn” (p. 922).
381 See Alexandre du Pont, *Roman*, pp. 203-207 (Old French text) and Hyatte (trans.), *The Prophet of Islam*, pp. 91-94 (quotation from p. 91).
Latin Christian authors continued to occupy themselves with the material that they received from the Christian East through oral and written transmission. They repeated, embellished, elaborated, and elucidated it, creating multiple variants of the stories. As discussed above, most of this material ultimately originated in the early Muslim Tradition, but by the time it reached the Latin Christians it had been transformed almost beyond recognition.

There were two exceptions to this rule, both from the Iberian Peninsula. Ramon Martí (c.1220-c.1284), a Catalan author, relied exclusively on Muslim sources in his life of Muhammad in his *De seta Machometi* (before 1257). Ramon Martí grew up in an environment where it was easy to access Arabic learning or speakers of Arabic. He knew Arabic and as a Dominican friar, he worked as a missionary in Spain and Tunis. In his chapter on Muhammad’s death Martí has nothing to say about failed resurrection, about a decaying corpse, mauling dogs or pigs, about a floating coffin—rather he presents parts of the standard Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death:

In the following we touch upon the misfortunes, the sickness, and the death of Muhammad. […]

It is told in the book *The Deeds of Muhammad* that a certain Jewess by the name Zaynab offered Muhammad roast sheep and put poison in it, in particular in its forearm. When al-Barrā’, a companion of Muhammad, ate from it, he died immediately. However, Muhammad also tasted it and, although not immediately, but afterwards he died from that poison, according to what ‘Ā’isha, his wife, reported in the book called *Bukhārī*, in the chapter *The Sickness of the Prophet*. […]

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382 For the Latin text, see Ramón Martí, *De seta Machometi*. On the work and its author, see Thomas E. Burman, “Ramon Martí,” CMR 4: 381-390.
It is told in the book called Bukhārī that Muhammad said to his followers: “Come, I will write you a book so that you would not be in error after that book.” Then some of them said, “Muhammad is very much vexed by the pain of the sickness. And you have the Qur‘ān. It is enough for us.” And there was an altercation between those who were in the house. Some said, “Come near. A book will be written so that you will not be in error after that.” But others talked differently. And, after the curses and the altercation increased, Muhammad said, “Get up.” Then Ibn ‘Abbās said, “It is fortune in misfortune that it divided between this (?) that the Messenger of God did not write that book for us.” From this, one can infer that after the death of Muhammad the Saracens remained and still are in error.

It is said about his death in the book called Bukhārī, in the chapter Enemies, that ‘Ā’isha said that Muhammad died in her house, because then it was her day, when he had to be with her. When he died, she was holding his head between the beard and the breast of ‘Ā’isha, and her saliva mingled with the saliva of Muhammad himself. He died in such a way. It is well known that the death or the end of Muhammad was common, impure, and abominable. Such death is not fitting for a prophet or a messenger of God.

Martí cites at least three sources in the course of the chapter: the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and Ibn Hishām’s Sīra. His citations are authentic and the accuracy of his translations reveals him as a good Arabist.

Pedro Pascual, bishop of Jaén (d. 1300), was also familiar with the classical Muslim Tradition. In his Sobre la seta Machometana, a work he wrote in Castilian, he included two lives of Muhammad: the author claims that the first one relies on Muslim sources and the second on Christian ones.\(^{383}\) According to the former, Muhammad died

\(^{383}\) For the Castilian text, see Pere Pasqual, Obras, vol. 4, pp. 1-354. For the two stories of Muhammad’s death, see pp. 56-62 (chapter 6) and pp. 138-143 (chapter 8). I read the Latin translation of the editor. I could not yet access the new edition, Ps. Pedro Pascual, Sobre la se[c]ta mahometana. On the Sobre la se[c]ta mahometana and its author, see John Tolan, “Pedro Pascual,” CMR 4: 673-677. Unfortunately, the authorship of Sobre la seta Machometana is uncertain. Not much is known for certain about Pedro Pascual, despite the existence of a life of his and several works ascribed to him. Since he was reputedly executed in captivity in Granada, he was considered a Christian martyr and made saint by the Catholic Church. As a result of the
from the poisoned meat that a Jewish woman gave him. Contrary to the narratives in Muslim sources, Muhammad died not years, but days after ingesting the poison. This happened on a Monday in the house of ‘Ā’ishā. His followers buried Muhammad only on the third day. Pedro Pascual cites three explanations for the delay of the burial. First, he says, the Muslims did not bury Muhammad because they were too busy quarreling over who was going to take power after his death. Another explanation Pedro Pascual presents is that Muhammad had in his life prohibited his followers to bury him, promising that he would be carried off to heaven. The Muslims respected Muhammad’s wishes, but when the corpse started to emit a stench, they buried him in a ditch dug underneath his bed. A third explanation cited is the story of the angels’ cleaning of Muhammad’s heart in his childhood; its connection with the delay of the burial is never made clear. After some effort to refute the standard Muslim explanation for the choice of burial place for Muhammad—that prophets are buried on the spot where they die—Pedro Pascual turns to a detailed account of ‘Umar’s denial of Muhammad’s death. According to the account based on Christian sources, Muhammad asked for a tryst from a Jewish woman who agreed, but asked her relatives to come and kill him that night. The Jewish conspirators cut off Muhammad’s foot and threw the rest of the corpse into the pigsty where the pigs devoured it. When Muhammad’s followers came looking for him, the woman admitted that Muhammad had visited her and, she claimed, angels had come for him that night.

reverence for him, much legendary material accumulated around him and the details of his life are by no means secure. The same is true about the writings ascribed to him—later generations might have ascribed some of them to him in order to invest them with the authority of a martyr. Most scholars are inclined to accept Pedro Pascual’s authorship of Sobre la seta Machometana. But some are not and if they are correct, the text was perhaps not written in the thirteenth, but in the fourteenth or even as late as the fifteenth century, as its only manuscript was copied around 1500.
The angels attempted to carry him off to heaven, but she was afraid that Muhammad’s followers would look for him, so she took hold of his left foot. The angels proved stronger and only the left foot remained on earth. The woman embalmed it and put it into a casket. She advised the Muslims to build a sepulcher made of steel and place the casket in it. The Muslims obeyed her.

Clearly, even the first narrative does not fully derive from classical Muslim sources—no Muslim would have claimed that Muhammad was thrown into a ditch dug underneath his bed. This section of the story follows no Muslim source, but rather the Apology of al-Kindī. For the rest of the “Muslim” narrative, the sources are indeed Muslim. The second narrative is an unusually elaborate tale; a few, but not all of its elements are indeed known from Christian texts. Pedro Pascual does not discuss the authenticity of the Muslim story, but comments on the reliability of the Christian one, lurching from rejection to hesitant acceptance:

Since [the Christian story] is not found written in authentic books nobody should state it as certain. What is written above about… the death of Muhammad, therefore, I neither affirm nor deny. However, a book was given to me written in our Latin in conformity with grammar which they ordered me to translate into Romance and I translated it into Romance exactly as it was written.

But I found a great many things asserted even by the Moors and the Jews and many things can also be read in the books of the Moors, of which a few were mentioned above. From them it seems that the story written just above is true. For it is not an argument of light presumption that in truth the Jews killed Muhammad and it is proven from what the Moors themselves affirm.

It seems that the southern European and the second generation of northern European authors rarely relied on oral sources any more. They had access to written sources and
made use of them. They might occasionally have complemented them with snippets of information transmitted orally, but these did not dominate their writing. Their selection of sources depended primarily on accessibility, physical and linguistic. Northern European authors of the thirteenth century did not favor other northern European authors—when texts written by eastern Christian authors, heretics in the eyes of Latin Christians, were available in Latin translation, they used them. Northern European authors did not employ Muslim sources probably only because none of them had access to any; the two authors who did use Muslim texts lived in the Iberian Peninsula where they had ample opportunity to learn Arabic and access relevant Muslim sources. Yet Latin Christians might well have felt uneasy about relying on eastern Christian and Muslim sources. Latin authors often introduced their lives of Muhammad with the spread of “heresy” among the Christians of the East; eastern Christians are often portrayed in no more positive light than the Muslims. Latin authors must have found themselves in a quandary when they realized that the best historical sources they could rely on—the only ones that could potentially go back to eyewitness accounts—originated with heretics. Perhaps this is what led some of them, among them Matthew Paris and Pedro Pascual, to present duplicate narratives, one they received from Latin Christians and another they learned from heretics. They might have wanted to seem impartial and leave the choice for their readers.

Reading the stories of Muhammad’s death written in medieval Latin Christendom, it might seem that the average European (if ever there was such a person) must have been familiar with the most lurid narratives about him. One gets the same impression reading scholarly literature about Muhammad’s literary image in the West. Titles with shocking
images abound; “A Human Head to the Neck of a Horse,” “A Mangled Corpse,” or “Walls of Hatred and Contempt” are a few recent examples. Narratives full of revolting details must have dominated the imagination of Europeans about Muhammad.

Yet this impression does not bear scrutiny. Any one text shows only that its author considered it worthy of further circulation. Whether or not it did subsequently circulate further was decided by others. As it happens, the most lurid European stories of Muhammad’s death show few signs of popularity. Many are preserved in unique or few manuscripts. Some have come down in several copies, but all produced close to the time of composition—their success barely outlived the authors. The limited geographical distribution of the manuscripts of some of them is telling too. A text known only in copies produced near the location of its writing could hardly have gained much fame. By contrast, a text copied in several distant places must have garnered significant reputation.

Of the four twelfth-century northern European accounts of Muhammad’s life based on oral sources, none seems to have gained much popularity. Adelphus’s work is extant in a single twelfth-century copy—not an autograph, so it had at least one reader, but evidence for more is lacking. Gautier’s survives in three manuscripts; all three were produced in the thirteenth century. In addition to this meager crop of copies, an Old French life of Muhammad is based on it—written a century later by Alexandre du Pont who lived in Laon, a town less than a hundred kilometers from Compiègne.

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384 The first title is that of an article by Dimmock: “‘A Human Head’.” The other titles are of articles by John Tolan, all collected in his Sons of Ishmael. The volume contains a few more pertinent examples.


Embrico’s *Vita* is extant in many more, sixteen manuscripts, but most of these were copied in the twelfth, four or three in the thirteenth century, and none later. Where the provenance is known, all the manuscripts were produced within 300 km of Mainz, mostly in northern France.\textsuperscript{387} Guibert’s chronicle of the First Crusade, according to John Tolan, “was among the least read, during the middle ages, of the various chronicles of the First Crusade. Seven of the eight surviving manuscripts date to the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. His text was rediscovered and edited by Jacques Bongars in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century.”\textsuperscript{388}

Later similar texts were hardly more successful. Alexandre du Pont’s *Roman de Mahon* is extant in only one manuscript—-not an autograph, but copied close to the time of its composition, in the late thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{389} The *Chronica majora* of Matthew Paris is extant in a single autograph manuscript.\textsuperscript{390} The anti-Islamic polemical treatises of the two thirteenth-century authors from the Iberian Peninsula fared worse. The *De seta Machometi* of Ramon Martí, so well-informed on classical Muslim narratives, is extant in three fourteenth-century manuscripts.\textsuperscript{391} Pedro Pascual’s *Sobre la seta machometana* survives in a unique manuscript copied around 1500.\textsuperscript{392}

Some paraphrases or translations from eastern Christian texts were, by contrast, much read. Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogi* became the most popular anti-Jewish tract in the

\textsuperscript{387} See the detailed description of manuscripts in Embricon de Mayence, *Vie*, pp. 38-45.

\textsuperscript{388} For the quotation see John Tolan, “Guibert de Nogent,” CMR 3: 332.


\textsuperscript{390} On this work and its author, see Svetlana Luchitskaya, “Matthew Paris,” CMR 4: 403. The two manuscripts listed by her are two different volumes of the *Chronica majora*.

\textsuperscript{391} See Thomas E. Burman, “Ramon Martí,” CMR 4: 389.

\textsuperscript{392} See John Tolan, “Pedro Pascual,” CMR 4: 676.
Middle Ages. It is extant in 63 manuscripts. It influenced many authors, including those interested in Islam only—they copied only chapter five. Peter of Toledo’s translation of the Apology of al-Kindī fared even better: although it is extant in only eleven copies, these are distributed through the centuries until it was printed in the sixteenth century. More importantly for the dissemination of the text, long excerpts from it were included in the Speculum historiale of Vincent de Beauvais (books 23, chapter 39-67) which survives in hundreds of manuscripts. The thirteenth-century Dominican translation from Acre did not fare so well, but better than most other Latin texts on Muhammad. Before its original and the Gregorian Report in which it reached a European readership had been lost, it was included in a few works; one of them, the Historia orientalis of Jacques de Vitry, went on to achieve great popularity. It is extant in 124 Latin manuscripts and was translated into French in the thirteenth century.

Most texts with many extant manuscripts and other indications of wide readership among Latin Christians in the Middle Ages, therefore, presented a relatively restrained narrative of Muhammad’s life: their stories of Muhammad’s death usually derived from or were versions of the Apology of al-Kindī. There was even a medieval bestseller that included a life of Muhammad, but lacked any story of his death. The Travels of John Mandeville, written by an anonymous author in the fourteenth century, extant in hundreds of manuscripts, and “translated… into almost all the languages of Latin Christendom,”

394 See the list of manuscripts in Fernando González Muñoz, “Peter of Toledo,” CMR 3: 480.
395 See Eduard Frunzeanu, “Vincent de Beauvais,” CMR 4: 411-412. (According to Fernando González Muñoz, “Peter of Toledo,” CMR 3: 481, it survives in more than 1000 manuscripts.)
has nothing to say about Muhammad’s death. We only learn that Muhammad is dead from the mention of his floating coffin elsewhere.\(^{397}\) Despite the polemical potential of the story, the author did not judge it indispensable or perhaps even desirable to include it.

The most popular medieval work to include a version of Muhammad’s death derived from the classical Muslim Tradition. The *Legenda aurea* (wr. ca. 1265) of James of Voragine, a thirteenth-century collection of saints’ lives written in Genoa, was, according to its English translator, the only book more widely read in the Middle Ages than the Bible.\(^{398}\) Its story of Muhammad’s death shows no resemblance to that of most medieval Christian texts.\(^{399}\)

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\text{Venenum insuper sibi in carne agnina oblatum fuisse dicunt. Agnus autem ei locutus est dicens: ‘Caue ne me sumas quia in me habeo uenenum.’ Et tamen post plures annos ueneno sibi dato interiit.}
\]

Moreover, they said that the poisoned flesh of a lamb was once set before him. The lamb spoke to him, saying: “Beware and do not eat me, because I have poison in me.” Yet after many years he perished from the poison given to him.\(^{400}\)

\(^{397}\) On this work and its author, see Iain Macleod Higgins, “John Mandeville,” CMR 5: 147-164. For the manuscript count and the citation see ibid., p. 157. My conclusion about the lack of an account about Muhammad’s death is based on several English versions.

\(^{398}\) On this work and its author, see Stefano Mula, “James of Voragine,” CMR 4: 639-644. On its popularity see ibid., p. 640 and p. 642. The citation is from the introduction to Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*.


\(^{400}\) Ryan translates the last sentence as “Yet after many years poison was given to him and he perished.” While this is a possible translation of the Latin and many readers may have understood the story in this way, my translation is consistent with both the Latin text and the underlying Muslim story which thus conveys the meaning the author probably intended. It is a sign that the English translator was not familiar with the Muslim story and at the same time a good illustration how someone not well-informed about Islam might have misunderstood details of Muslim narratives that do not follow common sense. Indeed, a Castilian translator of the text understood
The text that contains this passage, a brief summary of the standard classical Muslim narrative, survives in thousands of manuscripts, was translated into every western European language, and was the most often published work in the first hundred years of printing. This three-line story is the most telling indication that the lurid tales of Muhammad’s death were relatively little known in medieval Europe.

Although no medieval bestseller contains a version of Muhammad’s death in which he is mauled to death by pigs, this came about accidentally. Muhammad’s biography is not the main topic of any of the most widely read books of the Middle Ages—he usually appears in them in a short chapter. We cannot know for certain whether James of Voragine or Vincent de Beauvais selected a benign story from a number of others they were aware of, but it is unlikely: regarding other episodes of Muhammad’s life, they were not averse to presenting rather far-fetched and lurid legends. We can be certain that the type of narrative they included about Muhammad had nothing to do with making their work popular. The stories of Muhammad’s death in the Speculum historiale and the Legenda aurea, drawn from the Apology of al-Kindī and the classical Muslim Tradition, became well known as an accidental result of the popularity of these works. This outcome is nevertheless significant, because it must have influenced the subsequent reception of the Christian narrative of the story in early modern Europe.

Had he known the Muslim tradition, the translator would have inserted a definite article or a demonstrative pronoun before the last word. See Tolan, “A Life of Muḥammad,” p. 433 (Castilian text) and p. 437 (English translation).
Back to the (Muslim) sources: Muhammad’s death in early modern Europe

As a result of the relentless Ottoman military advance into Europe and the increasing commercial interests of some European powers in the Ottoman Empire, interest in Muslim culture and Islam surged again in the early modern West. Printing presses published many works on Muslim history and culture, Islam, and the Qur’an, with Muhammad’s life a semi-permanent fixture in them. European readers especially favored histories of the Ottoman Empire and accounts of Ottoman customs; these works also often contained accounts of the rise of Islam (“the law of the Turks”) with brief biographies of Muhammad.

The intellectual and religious changes sweeping through Latin Christendom in this period altered how Islam’s beginnings, including Muhammad’s death, were presented. With the Reformation’s rejection of Catholicism, the medieval Latin texts about him, overwhelmingly creations of Catholic ecclesiastics, seemed suspect for Protestants and their sympathizers. Protestants were of course no closer doctrinally to eastern Christians, let alone Muslims, but their lack of trust in the Catholic clergy created a degree of equivalence between eastern Christian and Muslim sources on the one hand and medieval Latin ones on the other. Arabic manuscripts were steadily accumulating in European libraries, especially in Rome, Paris, Leiden, and Oxford. The publication of several of them and their translation into Latin was a major accomplishment of the budding discipline of Arabic studies. The new accessibility of Arabic primary sources made it possible to apply the Renaissance historiographical principle of relying on primary sources to writing the history of Islam also outside of the narrow circle of
Arabists. As a result, eastern Christian and Muslim sources on Muhammad and Islam translated into Latin gradually displaced medieval Latin texts.

The study of Islam was fundamentally transformed in Europe in this period. The period from the 1620s to the 1720s can be identified as the watershed period—a historiographical revolution in the study of Islam. By the end of it, several Arabic sources were available to wider readership in editions and translations into Latin. The sources European authors relied on when treating the history of Islam and Muhammad’s life were different at the beginning and at the end of this period. As a result, the contents of their accounts differed dramatically.

The first material printed for those interested in Islam was a volume consisting primarily of a medieval collection of texts—the Toledan Collection in Theodor Bibliander’s edition, published in Basel in 1543. It gained so much interest that it was reprinted twice already in 1543 and a revised edition was published in 1550. The version of Muhammad’s death that the readers of this book encountered was the one in the Latin translation of the Apology of al-Kindī.401 Other works printed in the same period contained this version too: Vincent de Beauvais’s Speculum historiale, an encyclopedia phenomenally successful in the Middle Ages, was printed already in the late fifteenth

The first printed texts therefore reinforced the popularity of the Latin Apology’s version of Muhammad’s life, already strong in late medieval Europe.

In the seventeenth century new types of texts were printed: the Arabic originals and the Latin translation of three Arabic chronicles newly available in Europe. All three were written by Christians in the Islamic world: by the Copt Djirdjis b. al-ʿAmīd al-Makīn (1206-after 1280), the Melkite Saʿīd b. Bīṭrīq (877-940), and the West-Syrian Barhebraeus (1225 or 1226-1286).

The first one to be published was the second part of the chronicle of al-Makīn that opens with the rise of Islam and concludes with the year 1260. Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624) edited it on the basis of one manuscript and translated it into Latin. The volume was published in Leiden in 1625 with the title Historia Saracenica. Samuel Purchas (1575-1626) translated it into English and his version was published in London already in 1626, in the second edition of Purchas his Pilgrimes. In 1657 it was also published in

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402 For example, in Strasburg by Johann Mentelin in 1473, in Augsburg in 1474, in Nuremberg by Anton Koberger in 1476, in Venice by Hermann Lichtenstein in 1494, etc.

403 That is, three chronicles with material on Muhammad and early Islam. For the complete list of Arabic works published and translated, see Holt, “The Study of Arabic Historians,” p. 452 (the only additional work is Ibn ʿArabshāh’s ‘Adjāʿ ib al-maqdūr).

404 On al-Makīn, see above. The full title of Erpenius’ edition and translation is Historia Saracenica, qua res gestae muslimorum inde a Muhammede arabe, usque ad initium Imperii Atabacaei per XLIX Imperatorum successionem fidelissime explicantur. Insertis etiam passim Christianorum rebus, in Orientis Ecclesiis eodem tempore potissimum gestis. al-Makīn’s chronicle takes up the first 372 pages of the volume and is followed by Rodrigo Jiménez’s Historia Arabum.

405 It was published under the title The Saracenical historie: contayning the acts of the Muslims from Muhammed to the reigne of Atabaceus... (London, 1626).
Paris in French, in the translation of Pierre Vattier (1623-1667).\textsuperscript{406} The Latin version of the Arabic text remained faithful to the original and it presented the standard classical Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death.\textsuperscript{407}

The next historical work to be translated into Latin was the chronicle of Eutychius. Parts of it were first edited by John Selden (1584-1654)\textsuperscript{408} and published in 1642 in London.\textsuperscript{409} Later Edward Pococke (1604-1691)\textsuperscript{410} translated it into Latin and his version, together with Selden’s Arabic text, was published in Oxford in 1654-1656, and reprinted in 1658-1659.\textsuperscript{411} With this translation another account of Muhammad’s death

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{406}{It is entitled \textit{L’histoire mahometane, ou les quarante-neuf chalifes du Macine: divisez en trois livres, contenant un abregé chronologique de l’histoire Mussulmane en general, depuis Mahomet jusques au regne des Francois en la Terre-Saincte, nouvellement traduit d’arabe en françois…} (Paris, 1657).}

\footnote{407}{For the story, see pp. 9-10 in Ibn al-‘Amīd, \textit{Historia Saracenica}; for the Arabic text, see the transcription earlier in this chapter. The Latin version reads: “Anno autem undecimo […] Muhāmedis mors. Eodem hoc anno Muhammed gloriosae memoriae mortem obiit: cum enim à peregrinatione Meccana rediisset, & Medinae substitisset ad diem 28 mensis Safari, aegrotare coepit: & praecepit Abubecro ut cum populo oraret: ac orarunt orationes septemdecim. Obiit autem die Lunae, qui duodecimus erat mensis Rabii prioris: || cum natus esset annos sexaginta tres, aut, secundum alios, sexaginta quinque.”}

\footnote{408}{On Selden, see Toomer, \textit{Eastern Wisedome}, pp. 64-71; and more recently idem, \textit{John Selden}.}

\footnote{409}{It is entitled \textit{Eutychii Aegyptii, Patriarchae Orthodoxorum Alexandrini, scriptoris, ut in Oriente admodum vetusti ac illustris, ita in Occidente tum paucissimis visi tum perrarò auditi, Ecclesiae suae origines.}}

\footnote{410}{On Pococke, see Toomer, \textit{Eastern Wisedome}, pp. 116-226.}

fully based on classical Muslim material, although on this topic adding hardly anything to that of Ibn al-‘Amīd, became available to European readership.

The third account of the history of Islam was the Arabic chronicle of Barhebraeus. The edition was prepared by Edward Pococke. He had published excerpts from it in Latin in 1650, with notes far more extensive than the edited text itself, with the title *Specimen historiae arabum.* This became the primary resource for those interested in the history of Islam. In 1663 Pococke published the entire chronicle in Arabic with Latin translation, with the title *Historia compendiosa dynastiarum.* The story of Muhammad’s death also follows the standard classical Muslim narrative in Barhebraeus’ chronicle. It does contain a few details not found in the accounts of the two Christian Arabic chronicles published earlier; it does not, however, add anything to the story after the *Specimen*

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412 The full title is *Luma‘ min akhbār al-‘Arab = Specimen historiae Arabum, sive Gregorii Abul Faraji Malatiensis, De origine & moribus Arabum succincta narratio, in linguam Latinam conversa, notisque è probatissimis apud ipsos authoribus, fusius illustrata.* For the story of Muhammad’s death, see Pococke, *Specimen,* pp. 12, 15 for the Arabic of Barhebraeus, pp. 13-14 for Pococke’s Latin translation, and pp. 178-181 for his notes on the text.

413 The full title is *Ta’rīkh mukhtaṣar al-dawal = Historia compendiosa dynastiarum authore Gregorio Abul-Pharaio, Malatiensi medico, historiam complectens universalem, à mundo condito, usque ad tempora authoris, res orientalium accuratissime describens.*

414 For the Latin translation, see Barhebraeus, *Historia compendiosa,* p. 103: “Porro hoc anno febriculâ correptus Mohammedes aegrotavit, & diem obit die Lunae, qui vicesimus octavus fuit Mensis Sephar, annos natus 63: quorum 40 [transacti sunt] antequam munus Propheticum sibi vendicaret; 13 alii dum Mecchae subsisteret, & decem demum post Hejram, quibus Medinae substitit. Cúmque iam mortuus esset, voluerunt Mecchenses fugae Comites, Meccham eum reportari, quòd ibi natus esset; at Medinenses Adjutores, Medinae eum sepeliri, quòd Asylum ipsi fuisset, et auxilii locus, Voluerunt demum nonnulli, Hierosolymam eum transferri, locum scil. in quo sepulti essent Prophetae. At in hoc tandem convenerunt ut Medinae sepeliretur, ubi eum mantiuculâ suà humârunt, eodem quo mortuus est loco.” (For the Arabic original, see above in this chapter.) Pococke’s translation is excellent—not slavish, but does not miss anything important, and even translates the rare *wa‘aka* correctly. It is only in one case that he slightly deviates from the Arabic. In Barhebraeus’ text we read *da‘wat al-nubuwwa*—an ambiguous expression, but it falls short of denouncing Muhammad’s prophethood. In the Latin version Pococke makes clear his opinion: he translates this phrase as *munus propheticum sibi vendicaret* (“he claimed the office of prophethood for himself”).
The Specimen already contained this part of the chronicle and its notes added much else not included by Barhebraeus.

What did these seventeenth-century Latin translations relate about Muhammad’s death? Every one of them mentioned that Muhammad died in year 11 of the hidjra on a Monday in Medina and that he died as a result of an illness. On other matters they presented conflicting traditions from Muslim sources: all three said that Muhammad died aged 63, but one added that according to another opinion he died aged 65; two gave Rabī‘ al-Awwal as the month of his death, one its second day, another its twelfth day, and a third gave the 28th of Ṣafar as the date. Two gave the length of the illness, one as thirteen days and another as fourteen days. Two of them mentioned that Muhammad was buried in the house where he died and Eutychius added that it was the house of Ā’isha. Barhebraeus also described a dispute about the place of burial: whether it should be Mecca, Medina, or Jerusalem. Ibn al-‘Amīd added that Muhammad asked Abū Bakr to act as imām. Eutychius gave the hidjrī year of the death correctly, but coordinated it wrongly with the reign of Heraclius—he said Muhammad died in the eleventh year of his reign, although Heraclius came to power in 610, so Muhammad died in the twenty-second year of his reign. Barhebraeus also described a division of Muhammad’s life: forty years before the mab’ath, thirteen years between the mab’ath and the hidjra, and ten years after the hidjra. The chronicles made available a skeletal summary of the classical Muslim Tradition for European readership: they provided a lot of data, but told very little about the actual events and circumstances. While the medieval Christian narratives—eastern and western alike—usually focused on the stories to the detriment of dates, these
chronicles provided what looked like a lot of hard data. The only exception was the notes Pococke wrote in the Specimen. In these, he supplied several stories from Muslim sources not mentioned by any of the Christian authors: he mentioned the book Muhammad wanted to write in his illness, the disagreement among Muslim authors over the exact date of his death, and the refusal to believe that he had died. Pococke also noted that the Muslims find the legend of the floating coffin ridiculous.  

European readers had to wait until the eighteenth century to be presented with the Latin translation of a detailed Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death. John Gagnier (c. 1670-1740) prepared an edition of Muhammad’s life from the Kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī taʾrīkh al-bashar of Abū l-Fidāʾ (1273-1331) with a Latin translation and copious notes. The book was published in Oxford in 1723. His account of Muhammad’s death occupies four brief chapters; all the material of course comes from the classical Muslim Tradition. The first chapter discusses his illness, the second his death, the third his burial, and the fourth his age at death. The chapters are provided with copious footnotes by the editor.

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415 See Pococke, Specimen, pp. 180-181 (unde igitur nobis Mohammedes cistae ferrae inclusus, & magnetum vi in aere pendulus: haec cum Mohammedis recitantur, risu exploduntur, ut nostrorum, in ipsorum rebus, inscitiae argumentum).

416 Its Latin title is De vita et rebus gestis Mohammedis, moslemicae religionis auctoris, et imperii saracenici fundatoris. It was not translated into other languages until the middle of the nineteenth century. A French version appeared in Paris in 1837, by Adolphe Noël des Vergers. An English version was published in Delhi in 1847f., with the title The History of Abool-Feda, translated by Carīm al-Dīn Ibn Sirādj al-Dīn.

417 Chapters 61-64 contain the full story of Muhammad’s death; see pp. 133-142 in Abū l-Fidāʾ, De vita, ed. Gagnier.
Abū l-Fidā’ adds little to the data that had been available in the three Christian chronicles. What this text provided to European readers first and foremost was the way Muslims thought about the events and their circumstances. It gave a lot that read like background information: traditions about the pain Muhammad was in during his illness, his agreement with his wives to spend the time of his illness in the house of ‘Ā’isha, the disbelief among Muslims that he died, the names of those who washed him, the type of clothes he was wrapped in, and the like. In addition, Gagnier gives extensive footnotes and cites in them additional traditions common among Muslims or additional details about the events from other Muslim biographies of Muhammad. The authors he most often cites in the footnotes are al-Suhaylī, al-Bukhārī, and al-Djannābī. The chronicle of Abū l-Fidā’ filled the skeletal narrative readers knew from the writings of the three eastern Christian historians with details.

Simultaneously with the publication of these Arabic texts and their Latin translations, European authors, Arabists and non-Arabists alike, composed biographies of Muhammad as part of their works, primarily written in Latin, French, and English.418

Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) wrote two works that included biographies of Muhammad: *De orbis terrae concordia libri quatuor*, first published in Basel in 1544, and *De la republique des Turcs*, first published in Poitiers in 1559.419 The two books,

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418 At least one relevant German work was also written in this period, Heinrich Cnustin’s *Von geringem herkommen schentlichem leben schmeilchem ende des türkischen abgots Machomets und seiner verdamlichen und Gotsslesterischen ler allen froßen Christen zu disen geferlichen zeiten zur sterckung unnd trost im glauben an Jesum Christum* (Hamburg, 1542). I could not yet access it.

419 The full title of the latter is *De la republique des Turcs: & là ou l’occasion s’offrera, des meurs & loy de tous Muhamedistes*. As befits a putative founder of Orientalism, the bibliography
separated by fifteen years, give slightly different accounts of Muhammad’s death—Postel, it seems, changed his mind on a few details. According to *De orbis terrae concordia*, Muhammad died in Medina at the age of 63, having an epileptic seizure (*correptus... suo sontico morbo*) which tightened his muscles and made his limbs appear bent. Postel opines that Muhammad should not have foretold that he would be resurrected on the third day, but should instead have arranged to disappear as the divine beings of old did. But since he did foretell his resurrection, his followers waited for it for three days. Eventually every one of them was driven away by the stench of his corpse and returned to his previous beliefs, and Muhammad’s corpse was thrown out of the city. Those closest to him, ‘Ali, Zayd, and some others attended to it, embalmed it, and laid it to rest in a crypt in the mosque of Yathrib (*in Mesgeda Iezrab*). Every year the pilgrims who visit Mecca also go to his tomb in Medina. Postel here points out that Muhammad was not laid to rest in the “Temple of Mecca” (*in Mechaе templo*), as Europeans usually believe.

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420 Muhammad’s biography covers book 2, chapters 2-8 (pp. 136-150 in the 1544 edition); for Muhammad’s death, see book 2, chapter 7 (p. 147).

421 *Obijt uero in eadem urbe anno aetate 63. correptus tam uehementer suo sontico morbo, ut musculis contractis, omnibus membris formam circularem repraesentare uideretur, digitis potissimum.* The literal meaning of *sonticus morbus* is “serious illness.” For its use to designate epilepsy, see Eberle, *The Practice of Medicine*, vol. 2, p. 42, n. † and Eadie and Bladin, *A Disease Once Sacred*, p. 16.
According to *De la republique des Turcs*, Muhammad died of epilepsy, aged 60 or 64 or thereabouts. According to “Humeram,” however, he died not of epilepsy, but of pleurisy, after an illness of thirteen days. Of these, he was insane for the first seven days; therefore, he said that he would be raised to heaven on the third day after his death. Everyone was expecting this to happen, but when they noticed on the fourth day that Muhammad’s corpse was stinking and his fingers were bent, the masses wanted to throw him naked into the fields. ‘Alī and al- Faction collected his corpse, washed it, and wrapped it in three clothes. Postel also mentions the general apostasy after Muhammad’s death and the state of his body: his belly was swollen and his fingers turned back. After this account, he corrects two false opinions. Many believe that the Muslims do not eat pork because Muhammad was devoured by pigs. It cannot be true, Postel says, because Muhammad was buried and the eating of pork is prohibited in the Qur’an four or five times. Also, many believe that the drinking of wine is prohibited in Islam because Muhammad caught his fever as a result of drunkenness. Again, this cannot be true—drinking wine was already prohibited in the Qur’an.

Postel’s opening assertion in both texts, that Muhammad died of epilepsy, is a common motif in medieval Latin accounts of Muhammad’s life and has no trace at all in the writings of Christians living in the Islamic world. It is usually presented together, however, with opinions similar to those Postel corrects in *De la republique des Turcs*. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, according to Matthew Paris, for example, the drunken

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[422] For Muhammad’s life, see pp. 75-82; for the story of his death, pp. 81-82. I am relying on the 1560 edition published in Poitiers; the book was published again in Poitiers in 1565 and in Paris in 1575.
Muhammad had an epileptic fit and while writhing from it, he was attacked and devoured by pigs. Postel, it seems, rejects the details of such stories, but accepts the central claim.

The more detailed story, ascribed to “Humeram” in *De la republique des Turcs* but anonymous and fully interwoven with the death from epilepsy in the earlier work, however, comes straight from the *Apology of al-Kindī* whose author Postel describes as a learned Christian.⁴²³ There are two differences between Postel’s story and the Latin *Apology*. One of them is that in Postel’s versions not just one of Muhammad’s little fingers is bent, but all his fingers. This seemingly minute deviation from the Latin *Apology* becomes a symptom of death from epileptic seizure in Postel’s *De orbis terrae concordia*. The other difference, mentioned in *De la republique des Turcs*, is that Muhammad predicted his resurrection during the insane first seven days of his illness. No other text that mentions Muhammad’s foretelling of his resurrection attempts to mitigate the audacity of the claim—they never ascribe it to Muhammad’s temporary derangement caused by his illness or try to explain it in any way. This is a difference between *De orbis terrae concordia* and *De la republique des Turcs*—in the first text Postel regarded Muhammad’s prediction of his resurrection as the result of severe lack of judgment, whereas in the second one, fifteen years later, he found a reason for this lack of foresight: Muhammad was delirious when he predicted the resurrection.

⁴²³ His source in Postel’s own words (p. 83): “Mais pour congnoistre encor plus au long la vie de cet home, ou de ce bon Prophete, je veus encor escrire sa vie en bref, comme la remonstra bien au long, vn Chrestien fort docte, & bien experimenté en la loy de Muhamed, & qui en auoit esté, & qui’l escriuoit a vn Turc ou Mussulman, que s’il y eust trouué faute ou diuersité d’eus, il n’eust creu rien du tout.”
Where did Postel become acquainted with the *Apology of al-Kindi*? He travelled to the Near East twice—to Ottoman Turkey and Palestine; in Turkey he spent at least two years and studied Arabic and Turkish. He spent years in the Middle East, both in Istanbul and in Palestine—he might have encountered the *Apology* during these years in the Middle East. At the time it was about to become the single most popular Christian polemical treatise among the Christians of the Middle East—while only one copy is known to have survived from the sixteenth century, the seventeenth century boasts the most copies of all the work’s history, more even than the nineteenth century. But Postel did not cite the Arabic *Apology*—he relied on the Latin version, probably in the edition published by Bibliander. He did not have to go far to become familiar even with this version of the *Apology*: Johannes Oporinus printed Postel’s *De orbis terrae concordia* in Basel in 1544, a year after he printed Bibliander’s collection of texts on Islam. We cannot be certain that Postel got to know the text from his printer, but it is tempting to believe so. In any case, he knew the *Apology* only in Latin: it is only in the Latin text that much of the story seems to have been told by “Humeram” and that Muhammad’s corpse is thrown away naked. The Arabic version of the narrative is more fragmented, Ḍ-mrān only one of the transmitters, and Muhammad’s body, if according to one account it was not buried properly, was not discarded naked. Ḍ-mrān’s name is spelled differently in different Latin manuscripts, and of those cited in the apparatus, Postel’s “Humeram” most closely resembles Bibliander’s “Humeran.”

Not only was Postel unaware of the Arabic original of the *Apology*, but he does not seem to have been familiar with Muslim Arabic biographies of Muhammad either.
His refutations of popular legends about Muhammad’s death rely not on Muslim writings, but the Qur’ān and common sense: if pork is prohibited in the Qur’ān (it was not doubted in Postel’s lifetime that the Qur’ān was produced in Muhammad’s lifetime), the reason for its prohibition could not be the way Muhammad died. The same held true for the prohibition of alcohol.

It is disappointing that the putative founder of Orientalism used only two primary sources, both of which were translated into Latin at the time. The French king instructed Postel to collect manuscripts on his trip to Constantinople and it was he who procured the manuscript of Abū l-Fidā’ which was published in the early eighteenth century and later went on to become a prominent source of European biographies of Muhammad. Postel, it seems, did not read it.

It is less surprising that other authors, with no first-hand familiarity with the Islamic world, lack originality in their choice of sources—and unfortunately even their speculations, when they had any at all, were less interesting than Postel’s. Another Francophone author, Michel Baudier (c. 1589-1645), historiographer to the Court of France, included a substantial biography of Muhammad in his Histoire generale de la religion des Turcs. Avec la naissance, la vie, et la mort, de leur Prophete Mahomet, et les actions des quatre premiers Caliphes. It was published in Paris in 1625, the same year as Erpenius’ Latin translation of the chronicle of Ibn al-‘Amīd in Leiden. Baudier tells two accounts of Muhammad’s death; he does not mention the author of either of them, but
they can be identified.\textsuperscript{424} The first story is the one based on the \textit{Apology of al-Kindi}; the spelling of names gives it away as the Latin version in Bibliander’s edition. According to the second narrative, Muhammad told his disciples that he would be resurrected after his death. In order to hasten this, his disciples poisoned Muhammad and guarded his decaying corpse. On the twelfth day, the guard went out to breathe fresh air and when he returned, he found the body mangled by dogs. Muhammad’s remnants were placed in an iron coffin and suspended with the help of magnets in Medina. Baudier merely introduces this story with “Quelques-vns racontent autrement sa fin malheureuse.” The earliest source of the story I could trace is Lucas of Tuy’s \textit{Chronicon mundi} (wr. 1230s),\textsuperscript{425} but Simon Goulart’s (1543-1628) French translation of Philipp Camerarius’s (1537-1624) \textit{Operae horarum succisiuarum, siue, Meditationes historicae} was Baudier’s most probable direct source.\textsuperscript{426} The \textit{Chronicon mundi} was not published until the early twentieth century, but the Latin original of Camerarius’ \textit{Meditationes historicae} appeared in 1591 and was translated into French by Simon Goulart in 1608.\textsuperscript{427} Baudier does not entirely reject the second story, yet he professes his preference for the one from the \textit{Apology}.

An Anglophone contemporary of Baudier, the Scottish Alexander Ross (1591-1654), also wrote a life of Muhammad. In the study of Islam, his primary claim to fame is


\textsuperscript{426} The story of Muhammad’s death is in book 3, chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{427} On Simon Goulart’s translation, see Fragonard, “Les additions à la traduction.”
the first English translation of the Qur’an, printed in London in 1649 with the title *The Alcoran of Mahomet*. Ross probably knew a little Arabic, but not enough for the understanding the Qur’an: he rendered it into English from André du Ryer’s French version, published a year earlier in Paris. The translation was much read. It was printed twice already in 1649 and for the third time in 1688, and “writers and thinkers from all sectors in English society read Ross’s ‘Alcoran’ and alluded to it.” Its popularity lasted even after George Sale’s superior translation had appeared: it was published in New England as late as 1806. Ross’s own original contribution to the volume was four brief pieces placed before and after the translation, one of them a short biography of Muhammad entitled “The Life and Death of Mahomet, the Prophet of the Turks, and Author of the Alcoran.” In the 1649 editions of the Alcoran, the biography follows the text of the Qur’an, and in the edition of 1688 it was placed before it, turning it into an introduction. (It was omitted from the New England edition.)

An examination of Ross’s story of Muhammad’s death confirms that he could not have known much Arabic: his story is squarely based on the Latin version of the *Apology*

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431 On the popularity of the translation on both sides of the Atlantic, see also Dimmock, “‘A Human Head,’” p. 79 and p. 87, n. 59.
of al-Kindī.\textsuperscript{432} The only modification Ross introduced was that, in his story, ‘Alī concealed Muhammad’s derangement before his death, because he wanted to inherit his power. This detail indicates a possible additional source known to Ross: the Dialogue against the Jews of Petrus Alfonsi. It is in Petrus Alfonsi’s retelling of the Apology of al-Kindī that we see ‘Alī deceiving Muhammad’s followers in order to hold on to power.\textsuperscript{433} Ross takes the story of the talking mutton as a trick to feign a miracle. Muhammad, says Ross, ate at the house of someone who “pretended to be his friend” and was informed that this person wants to poison him. “... [A] shoulder of mutton served in to the Table, forewarned him that he should not eat of it; and though many were present, none but he heard or understood the language of the mutton, & yet he permitted one of his dearest friends to eate of it, and die impyoioned.”\textsuperscript{434} Although by the time of Ross’s translation the chronicles of Ibn al-‘Amīd and Eutychius had been published, he shows no sign of consulting them.

These three authors base their narratives on the most up-to-date sources available to them: they all use the Latin version of the Apology of al-Kindī, already well known in the Middle Ages and made accessible to a broad readership in the middle of the sixteenth century. They combine it with some other medieval Christian narratives, all written in Christian Europe. Astonishingly, even Guillaume Postel did not use Arabic primary


\textsuperscript{433} See Petrus Alfonsi, Dialogue, pp. 162-163 (English version of Resnick) and Pedro Alfonso, Diálogo, pp. 102-103 (Latin). An additional, minute pointer to possible connection between the two texts is that both Ross and Petrus Alfonsi spell ‘Alī as Haly, and ‘Alī in the Apology is always spelled as Hali.

sources, and Alexander Ross, writing decades after Erpenius published the chronicle of Ibn al-ʿAmīd, completely disregards it. This attitude, however, changes with the next author who wrote a biography of Muhammad.

Henry Stubbe, an English deist, penned a little book on the beginnings of Islam in the 1670s with the title *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism with the Life of Mahomet and a Vindication of him and his Religion from the Calumnies of the Christians*. It appeared in print for the first time as late as 1911. Stubbe’s work therefore influenced hardly anyone from subsequent generations; its main historiographical significance lies in it begin the first attempt to depict Muhammad and his mission as something to be praised, rather than bemoaned in the manner of earlier western authors. What is more relevant in this context, however, is that Stubbe’s *Account* was the first life of Muhammad that mainly relied on the Arabic sources published and translated into Latin earlier in the century.435

According to the story of Muhammad’s death in Stubbe’s work,436 Muhammad was given poison by Zainab, a Jewish woman, hidden in the mutton she offered to him. The mutton, however, warned Muhammad that it is poisoned. Muhammad’s follower, “Bashar”, who also ate from the meat, died of it, but Muhammad lived for another three years. When he finally fell ill, he was sick with fever for thirteen days and died at the age of 63. His followers denied that Muhammad could be dead—he would be resurrected and


ascend to heaven as Jesus did, they said. ‘Umar agreed and claimed that Muhammad had disappeared from his people for a while, as Moses had done. Abū Bakr, however, recognized that Muhammad was indeed dead and corrected them, so his followers finally buried him, in the same house where he died.

This is a standard classical Muslim account, with one possible exception. As Stubbe writes about the sepulcher of Muhammad, he rejects the legend of the floating coffin, but mentions another wondrous feature:

> There is a stately Temple since built by the Mahometans upon the place, and richly adorn’d within and without. There is in this Temple a Chapell with a roof contrived by an extraordinary Architect. Within the Chapell is a tombstone called Hayar Monaner (Hajar Munav-ver), or the Bright Stone, said to have apperteyned to Ayesha, the wife of Mahomet, and within that is lodged the Body of the Prophet; nor is the Tomb suspended in the Air by Loadstones or any other contrivance, but is placed on the floor and hung about with rich Hangings of Silk and Gold, and environed with rails of iron sumptuously gilded.

The bright stone adorning Muhammad’s sepulcher is mentioned by Alexandre du Pont—the only medieval author to have done so. Four and half centuries later Stubbe is the first author to refer to it since Alexandre du Pont. The source of this fascinating detail is an enigma—and since Stubbe does not seem to base his narrative on medieval western legends, it might reflect some description of the tomb in Medina as reported by contemporary travelers.

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437 For Alexandre du Pont and his life of Muhammad, see above in this chapter.
Not only does Stubbe present Muhammad’s death following the standard classical Muslim version, but he also argues against medieval Christian legends:\footnote{See Stubbe, Account, pp. 152-153.}

They tell us that Mahomet should promise his followers to revive again in three dayes or some such time, and that they expected his Return there so long till his Carcas grew noisom; and that they still expect his return, that his body is inclosed in an iron Tomb and hangs in the Air, suspended by the force of two opposite Loadstones. Others tell us that his body is not in the tomb, but being deserted when it stunk, it was eaten up by dogs, and that they put the bones only into the Tomb. But these are such figments as the Mahometans laugh at, and deride the Christians for relating them. Doctor Pocock refutes them more then once.

After this, Stubbe cites Pococke’s assertion that these are legends. Stubbe’s reference to Edward Pococke is indicative of his choice of sources in general.\footnote{For a description of Stubbe’s sources, see Holt, Defender of Islam, pp. 19-20.} As the marginal notes of one of the manuscripts of the Account make it clear, he relies mainly on Arabic texts edited in the seventeenth century, in particular on Pococke’s work, and, to a lesser extent, he draws from accounts of travelers. His account of Muhammad’s death largely falls into the first category, with the possible exception of his reference to the Bright Stone. Stubbe misunderstood some of his sources according to Holt, but this does not seem to have happened in his account of Muhammad’s death.

Ludovico Maracci (1612-1700) was also better informed than the authors of the first half of the seventeenth century, as befit the professor of Arabic at the Sapienza in Rome. Like Alexander Ross, he produced a biography of Muhammad to be published together with his Qur’ān, but neither his translation nor his biography could be more different from those of his Scottish colleague. Maracci’s Latin translation of the Qur’ān
was based on the Arabic text and Muslim commentaries on it, and the biography of Muhammad on Arabic sources. The biography prefaces the bilingual edition of the Qur’ān. Its chapters 24 and 25, on year 11 of the hidjra, discuss Muhammad’s death. It was first published in 1691 and reprinted in 1698.\footnote{It's full title is \textit{Refutatio Alcorani in qua ad Mahumetanicae superstitionis radicem secures apponitur & Mahumetus ipse gladio suo jugulatur} (Padova, 1698). The story of Muhammad’s death is in chapters 24 and 25 (pp. 29-30). It was published with the title \textit{Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani} in Rome in 1691. The 1698 edition is accessible online at \url{http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/ts1/object/display/bsb10210797_00001.html?contextType=scan}.}

Maracci’s account of Muhammad’s death is based on standard classical Muslim narratives. Early in year 11, he says, Muhammad ingested poison while eating a shoulder of mutton and became sick from it. His wives agreed that he stay with ‘Ā’isha, his favorite wife, while ill. He died on a Monday, in Rabī’ al-Awwal, aged 63 in her house. After he died, most of his followers left his religion. Some, however, did not want to believe that he had died and did not want to bury him. According to some sources, he remained unburied for two, according to others, for three days. Then ‘Alī, ‘Abbās, and others from his household washed him and wrapped him in three burial clothes. They buried him in the house of ‘Ā’isha, under the bed on which he died. Muhammad was thus buried in Medina, not in Mecca, “as the majority among us have erroneously claimed” (ut plerique ex nostris per errorem scripsere). Then Maracci cites the description of the tomb from the travel account of Gabriel Bremond of Marseilles in Italian and says that Bremond seems to have believed the medieval legend about the mangling of Muhammad by dogs, implying his own disagreement with the story.\footnote{Hactenus Auctor; ex cujus verbis, quibus asserit in sepulchro Mahumeti tam exiguum corporis ejus portionem inveniri, persuadetur, verum esse id, quod gravissimi Scriptores tradider;}

\footnote{440}{441} As Maracci cites it, the story
of the corpse’s desecration by dogs has nothing to do with the expectation of resurrection or the guards’ inadvertence, but results from the wrangling over power. In this, the text also shows the influence of Muslim sources, because Christian narratives of Muhammad’s death do not discuss the disputes about power omnipresent in Muslim sources.

A few years after Maracci’s work appeared, an Anglican priest, Humphrey Prideaux (1648-1724), also wrote a biography of Muhammad. His book was published in 1697 with the title *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display’d in the Life of Mahomet*.\(^{442}\) The book became extraordinarily successful—a veritable bestseller. It was printed at least a dozen times in English into the early nineteenth century. It was translated into French and German within two years of its publication. Later authors on early Islam often refer to this book as an authority. Among the authors discussed below, Pierre Bayle recommends it to his readers for more information on Muhammad in the third edition of his *Dictionnaire*.\(^{443}\)

\(^{442}\) The full title is *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display’d in the Life of Mahomet with A Discourse annex’d for the Vindicating of Christianity from this Charge, Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age*. On Prideaux and his book, see Holt, “The Treatment of Arab History,” pp. 290-302; and Toomer, *Eastern Wisedome and Learning*, pp. 289-292.

\(^{443}\) See Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 903-905. (I used the third edition of the *Dictionnaire*, published in Rotterdam in 1715.)
There is no need to summarize what Prideaux says about Muhammad’s death: his narrative, apart from small details, is the same as Stubbe’s and Maracci’s. Like these two authors, Prideaux also argues against some typical medieval European beliefs about Muhammad. First denies that the Muslims had expected Muhammad’s resurrection: “What goes so current among us, as if the Mahometans expected Mahomet again to return to them here on Earth, is totally an Error. There is no such Doctrine among them, nor are there any of them that ever fancied such a Thing…” Then he denies the existence of the iron coffin: “… and there he lieth to this Day, without Iron Coffin, as the Stories which commonly go about of him among Christians Fabulously relate…” Finally, he corrects those who think Muhammad is buried in Mecca: “The Pilgrimage which that enjoyns being to be perform’d to the Caaba at Mecca, and not to the Tomb of the Impostor at Medina, as some have erroneously related.”

Just like Stubbe, Prideaux could not read Arabic, but by the end of the seventeenth century he could rely on several translations of Arabic works into European languages. What distinguishes between the works of Prideaux and Stubbe is not their content, but their tone: derogatory in the case of the former, complimentary in the case of the latter. For example, this is the conclusion Prideaux drew from the story of the poisoned mutton: “So it seems notwithstanding the Intimacy he pretended with the Angel Gabriel, and the continual Revelations which he bragged that he received from him, he could not be preserved from thus perishing by the Snares of a silly Girl.” He concludes

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his biography of Muhammad: “And thus ended the Life of this wicked Impostor…”\(^{446}\) By contrast Stubbe filled his work with admiring adjectives and adverbs (“wonderful,” “wisely,” or “stately Temple… richly adorn’d”) and ended his life of Muhammad on a friendly note: “Thus dyed this extraordinary person.”\(^ {447}\)

In the same year that Prideaux’s biography of Muhammad saw the light of the day, a worthier work with even farther-reaching influence was published: the *Bibliothèque orientale* of Barthélemy d’Herbelot de Molainville (1625-1695),\(^{448}\) a precursor of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Unlike the two Englishmen discussed above, d’Herbelot was an Orientalist who could and did rely on Arabic sources. His account of Muhammad’s death is brief:\(^{449}\)

> Les Historiens Musulmans ne conviennent pas sur le temps de la mort de Mahomet; car les uns la mettent dans la dixième année & les autres dans l’onzième de l’Hegire. Mais tous sons d’accord, qu’il mourut d’un poison lent qui luy avoit été donné par une femme que ses ennemis avoient subornée. Sa mort fut d’abord cachée par Omar, un de ses principaux Compagnons; mais elle fut ensuite

\(^{446}\) The citations are from Prideaux, *The True Nature*, p. 112 and p. 115.

\(^{447}\) The citations are from Stubbe, *Account*, pp. 137-139.


\(^{449}\) The entry on Muhammad is in *Bibliothèque*, vol. 2, pp. 648-657; on Muhammad’s death see ibid., p. 656. I do not know which Muslim sources d’Herbelot refers to as dating Muhammad’s death to 10 AH; I have seen only year 11 AH in this context in Muslim sources.
The Bibliothèque also reports about the disagreement over Muhammad’s age at death (63 or 65) and informs us that he was buried in the mosque of Medina, under the pulpit he used to preach from on Fridays. All the material he gives is squarely based on Muslim sources; it has no trace of any Christian source at all. D’Herbelot of course knew the three chronicles published in Latin translation (“les Annales d’Eutychius, les Dynasties d’Aboulfarage & l’Histoire Saracenique d’Erpenius”), but since he expected his readership to be acquainted with them, he chose to base his biography of Muhammad on other sources, available only in Arabic. He mentions few Muslim authors by name or Muslim works by title; he usually refers to them as “les Interpretes de l’Alcoran & autres Docteurs de la Loy Musulmane ou Mahometane,” “[l]es Docteurs Mystiques des Musulmans… leurs Theologiens Scholastiques.” Some of the works he mentions by title are “Nacdalnossous” (Djämi’s Naqd al-nuşūş fi sharḥ naqš al-fuṣūş), “Fetouhat” (Ibn al-‘Arabī’s al-Futūḥat al-Makkiyya), and “Keschaf” (the Kashshāf of al-Zamakhsharī). Typically he relies on commentators on the Qur’ān even when writing Muhammad’s life.450

D’Herbelot’s younger contemporary, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), included a brief biography of Muhammad, supplied with copious footnotes, in his Dictionnaire historique et critique, first published in 1697, the same year as d’Herbelot’s Bibliothèque. The Dictionnaire became an unlikely bestseller—it was reprinted many times and was widely read well into the nineteenth century. Bayle was a Huguenot philosopher, not an

450 The citation is from Bibliothèque, vol. 2, p. 648.
Orientalist, and did not read Arabic. Unlike d’Herbelot, he had to rely on Arabic works translated into Latin and on other writings of Orientalists.\footnote{I used a later edition: Dictionnaire historique et critique (Rotterdam, 1715). On the author see Thomas M. Lennon and Michael Hickson, “Pierre Bayle,” in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. I have not found any study of his approach to Muhammad or Islam.}

Bayle does not reveal how he thinks Muhammad died, only how he did not die: “Je ne saurois croire que son cadavre ait été mangé des chiens, comme plusieurs le debitent…”\footnote{See Bayle, Dictionnaire, vol. 2, p. 896 (his full life of Muhammad is on pp. 887-905).} By the time Bayle wrote the Dictionnaire, this seems to have been a fairly common sentiment—Postel had already rejected a similar legend. More interesting than Bayle’s rejection of this legend are his marginal references and humungous footnotes; they give an indication of the breadth of the literature written in European languages from which one could get information about Muhammad in the late seventeenth century.

The first author Bayle refers to is “Camerarius… dans… ses meditations historiques,” i.e. Philipp Camerarius (1537-1624) in his Operae horarum succisivarum, siue, Meditationes historicae, published first in 1591 and many times later.\footnote{The full title is Operae horarvm svccisivarvm, sive, Meditationes historicae: continentes accuratum delectum memorabilium historiarum, & rerum tam veterum, quàm recentium, singulari studio inuicem collatarum, que omnia lectoribus & vberem admodum fructum, & liberalem pariter oblectionem afferre poterunt. It was published in Latin several times and translated into French and English, in 1608 and 1621 respectively. Both translations were printed at least twice.} Bayle read the French translation first published in 1608, as he names the translator, Simon Goulart, in his marginal note.\footnote{The story is in book 3, chapter 1. On Simon Goulart’s translation of Camerarius’s work, see Fragonard, “Les additions à la traduction.”} According to Bayle, Camerarius included a story similar to the one Baudier quoted early in the seventeenth century that a disciple of Muhammad

\footnote{\textsuperscript{451} I used a later edition: Dictionnaire historique et critique (Rotterdam, 1715). On the author see Thomas M. Lennon and Michael Hickson, “Pierre Bayle,” in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. I have not found any study of his approach to Muhammad or Islam.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{452} See Bayle, Dictionnaire, vol. 2, p. 896 (his full life of Muhammad is on pp. 887-905).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{453} The full title is Operae horarvm svccisivarvm, sive, Meditationes historicae: continentes accuratum delectum memorabilium historiarum, & rerum tam veterum, quàm recentium, singulari studio inuicem collatarum, que omnia lectoribus & vberem admodum fructum, & liberalem pariter oblectionem afferre poterunt. It was published in Latin several times and translated into French and English, in 1608 and 1621 respectively. Both translations were printed at least twice.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{454} The story is in book 3, chapter 1. On Simon Goulart’s translation of Camerarius’s work, see Fragonard, “Les additions à la traduction.”}
poisoned him in order to test whether he spoke the truth about his resurrection and dogs then mauled his corpse while the disciples were waiting for the resurrection. Camerarius himself identified his source, “J’ai voulu transcrire cette histoire de la Chronique d’Espagne dressée par Jean Vasaeus, qui dit avoir suivi un Auteur nommé Lucas de Tude…” Bayle verified the citation from Johannes Vasaeus (1511-1561), presumably in the latter’s *Rerum Hispaniae memorabilium annales*, published in Salamanca in 1552 and in Cologne in 1577. Bayle probably could not check the citation from Lucas of Tuy (d. 1249), as the latter’s *Chronicon mundi* (wr. 1230s) was not published until the early twentieth century. The next author Bayle cites is Baronius who “a inseré dans les annales un fragment de l’apologie d’Eulogius Auteur du VIII. siècle.” The indirect source here is of course Eulogius’ *Liber apologeticus martyrorum* and the direct source is the *Annales Ecclesiastici* of Caesar Baronius (or Cesare Baronio, 1538-1607). The *Annales* was also a bestseller; it was published in twelve volumes in 1597-1612 for the first time and several times later. The third author Bayle quotes is the Lutheran Samuel Schulter who also does not believe the story, but lists a few authors who tell it in his *Ecclesia Muhammedana*, published in 1668, among them Eulogius again and Vincentius. More obvious works mentioned by Bayle in his notes were written by near-contemporary

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455 It was first edited by Julio Puyol with the title *Crónica de España* in 1926 (see Lucas of Tuy, *Chronicon mundi*, ed. Puyol) and again recently by Emma Falque Rey as *Lucas Tudensis Chronicon mundi* (see Lucas of Tuy, *Chronicon mundi*, ed. Falque Rey). In the meantime, another edition was prepared as part of a doctoral dissertation in Olga Valdés García, *El Chronicon Mundi* (see Lucas of Tuy, *Chronicon mundi*, ed. Valdés García). On the author, see P. Henriet, “Lucas of Tuy,” CMR 4: 271-272.
Orientalists, the *Prodromus* of Ludovico Maracci and the *Historia Orientalis* of Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620-1667), published in 1651.\footnote{On the latter work, see Loop, “Johann Heinrich Hottinger.”}

Bayle also rejects the legend of the floating coffin, because “il n’est pas trop certain qu’aucun architecte soit capable d’un tel ouvrage.”\footnote{See Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 899-900.} Most of his discussion in the footnote concerns the technical impossibility of such a structure, but he cites some Orientalists too: Edward Pococke and his *Specimen*, Gabriel Sionita, Johannes Hesronita, and a travel account, the *Voiages de Monconys* by Balthasar de Monconys (1611-1665). This list is of course just a minute segment of what Bayle used for his entries on Islam, but it illustrates the amount of contradictory information available in print in his lifetime.

*La Vie de Mahomed* of Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), apparently the most sympathetic life of Muhammad written in the eighteenth century, was published posthumously in French twice in the eighteenth century (in London in 1730 and in Amsterdam in 1731) and in English translation in London in 1731.\footnote{The full references are [Henri de] Boulainvilliers, *La Vie de Mahomed* (London, 1730); idem, *La Vie de Mahomed; avec Des Réflexions sur la Religion Mahometane, & les Coutumes des Musulmans* (Amsterdam, 1731); and idem, *The Life of Mahomet* (London, 1731). On the author and the work, see El Diwani, *Boulainvilliers* and Frigerio, “Une source méconnue.”} Boulainvilliers describes Muhammad’s life following classical Muslim sources then available in Latin translation. He is concise when it comes to Muhammad’s death.\footnote{Boullainvilliers, *La Vie de Mahomed*, pp. 438-442 (in the Amsterdam edition). I do not know why he thinks that Muhammad died on a Saturday; I have not seen Saturday mentioned in a Muslim source in this context.} He says that
Muhammad continued to feel the poison he ingested in Khaybar years earlier and finally
his condition turned worse, until

[enfin Mahomed mourut, après 14 ou 15 jours de maladie, entre la 63. & 64. Année de sa vie, un samedi, second jour de la semain chez les Musulmans, dans le mois Rabie premier. Ali & All-Abbas laverent son corpse, le revetirent de trios habits, & l’enterrèrent deux jours après, a Medine, dans la chamber de sa Femme Aischa, ou il avoit voulu mourir.

After his death, Umar believed that Muhammad had not died, but Abū Bakr set the
Muslims right. After the disagreement over the appropriate place for burial (Mecca, Medina, or Jerusalem) was resolved, Muhammad was buried in Medina.

In response to Boulainvilliers’s positive evaluation of Muhammad and Islam, Jean
Gagnier (1670?-1740), professor of Oriental languages at Oxford and editor and
translator of Abū l-Fid‘, published his own *La vie de Mahomet*. It was printed twice in
Amsterdam, in 1732 and 1748.\(^{460}\) Gagnier’s account of Muhammad’s death is very
detailed.\(^{461}\) It is based, as could be expected from the editor and translator of Abū l-Fid‘,
mainly on the relevant sections of the *Mukhtasar*. He complemented this with some other
sources, most often the chronicle of the Ottoman historian al-Dannābī (d. 1590). He also
Elsewhere in the book he expresses his admiration for Prideaux and Maracci and
criticizes Boulainvilliers. He makes no reference to Christian polemical sources, yet

\(^{460}\) The full title of both editions is *La vie de Mahomet; traduite et compilée de l’Alcoran, des traditions authentiques de la Sonna, et des meilleurs auteurs Arabes*. It was later translated into
German by C. F. R. Vetterlein and published as *Leben Mohammeds, des Propheten* (Köthen, 1802-1804).

\(^{461}\) It involves three chapters (18-20) at the end of Book 6 (vol. 3, pp. 219-271 in the 1748
edition).
shares a feature with some eastern Christian accounts of Muhammad’s death: he
mentions that Muhammad’s belly was swollen when he was buried. This is the only early
Islamic tradition about Muhammad’s death that entered the classical Muslim Tradition
and is mentioned by several late Muslim authors, including Abū l-Fidā’. Their ultimate
source for it is usually Ibn Sa’d.

The later eighteenth century did not bring many changes. Edward Gibbon (1737-
1794), in chapter 50 of *The History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*,
also gives the same classical Muslim narrative:462 Muhammad “seriously believed that he
was poisoned at Chaibar by the revenge of a Jewish female.” In the four years afterwards,
writes Gibbon, Muhammad’s health deteriorated and a fourteen-day fever ended his life.
Gibbon mentions Muhammad’s final good deeds, his returning money to someone and
freeing his slaves. While deranged from fever, he asked for ink and paper to write a book
for his followers. He finally died in the lap of ʿĀʿisha. ‘Umar refused to believe that
Muhammad had died until Abū Bakr set him right. Gibbon says that Muhammad was
buried in Medina and refutes the legend of the floating coffin in a footnote.

The section is very sympathetic to Muhammad and the Muslims; the Muslim
understanding of the narrative is adopted by Gibbon (with the exception of the poisoned
sheep where he seems hesitant). His last footnote reveals his main sources and the way he
thought about them: “The last sickness, death, and burial, of Mahomet, are described by
Abulfeda and Gagnier. […] The most private and interesting circumstances were

462 I used a later edition, printed in 1825. For the story of Muhammad’s death, see pp. 327-329.
On Gibbon’s discussion of Muhammad, see Lewis, “Gibbon on Muhammad.”
originally received from Ayesha, Ali, the sons of Abbas, &c. and as they dwelt at Medina, and survived the prophet many years, they might repeat the pious tale to a second or third generation of pilgrims.\[463\] Although earlier European historians of Islam relied on Arabic sources in the belief that they were more likely to be true testimonies to the events than the medieval Latin ones, Gibbon here reveals a problem that did not seem to have preoccupied them: How can a thirteenth-century text give an accurate account of seventh-century events? Solving this problem would preoccupy generations of Orientalists after Gibbon. But even while locating earlier and earlier sources and finding more and more refined methods in an attempt to separate the legend from the historical truth, they would continue to tell the same narrative about Muhammad’s death for another two hundred years.

To sum up, early modern authors, as the above sampling from their work shows, gradually discarded medieval Christian legends about Muhammad’s death, whether transmitted by Latin or eastern Christians. It was a gradual process. It started with the authors’ reliance mainly on the Apology of al-Kindī, while rejecting or disregarding the wildest narratives from medieval Latin Christian writings. This was what Postel, Baudier, and Ross did. Later authors relied on Arabic chronicles (whether the Arabic originals or their Latin translations) and through them on the classical Muslim Tradition. The stories of Muhammad’s death presented by European authors after the middle of the seventeenth century are rarely more than permutations of the standard classical Muslim material,

presented in shorter or longer versions. This was true of all the authors examined here from this period: Stubbe, Maracci, Prideaux, d’Herbelot, Bayle, Boulainvilliers, Gagnier, and Gibbon. Yet medieval legends died hard—as late as the second half of the eighteenth century, Gibbon still found it appropriate to argue against them, although their decline had started in the sixteenth century, as Postel’s work illustrates.

Early modern historians do not seem to have suspected that in many cases they were merely replacing medieval Christian legends with Muslim legends, Christian polemical representations with Muslim hagiographical ones. Their intention was of course correct—to rely on primary sources and not on second-hand narratives. Western historians adopted the classical Muslim narratives as soon as they became accessible in Europe. The uniformity of the material did not preclude its usefulness for polemical purposes when this was the author’s goal. An early modern European Christian had a definite idea about how it was right to live one’s life and it rarely matched an Arab Muslim’s in seventh-century Arabia—such differences remained available to be exploited for polemical purposes. The standard Muslim narratives of Muhammad’s death eloquently illustrated that Muhammad did not die as he should have—he did not die as early modern Christians thought one should die.
Conclusion

Religious Polemic as an Art of Resistance

Medieval Christian polemical writings against Islam are conventionally seen as misleading, unreliable, often willfully ignorant, emptily combative, prone to flights of malevolent fancy, and as such, worthy of consideration by historians only as relics of past perceptions of Islam, never as sources for the reconstruction of the history of Islam and Muslim culture. They are generally thought to have stemmed from fear—fear of Islam the religion and Islam the expansive empire. The word polemic itself is regarded as negative; a text can only “degenerate” or “descend into polemic,” never ascend or rise to it.

The first in-depth study of medieval polemic against Islam, Norman Daniel’s *Islam and the West*, added a yet darker hue to it: the book portrays polemicists as architects of prejudices that were to endure until today. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* made the latter idea widely known by depicting medieval polemicists as the forebears of incorrigibly prejudiced and fossilized Orientalists, servile promoters of western imperialism.Edward Said sketches the trajectory most clearly in the “Afterword” he penned in 1994: “The earliest European scholars of Islam… were medieval polemicists… […] The most interesting problems about Islamic or Arabic Orientalism are… the forms taken by

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464 In the book the continuity is never discussed, but it is stated or implied several times; see Said, *Orientalism*, p. 116 and p. 287.
the medieval vestiges that persist so tenaciously…" Since the publication of
Orientalism, medieval Christian polemic against Islam has been blamed for a variety of
skewed perceptions of Islam—and it is Orientalists who are accused of having
perpetuated its hoary biases, misconceptions, and errors. Despite all the criticism the
book has received and the common knowledge that Said was anything but an expert on
the Middle Ages, scholars all too often interpret medieval Christian polemic against
Islam with reference to Said’s concept of Orientalism. His ideas may be qualified in their
works, but constitute a permanent element in the discussion. John Tolan, one of the
most prominent contemporary scholars of the field, agrees with Said that medieval
polemic influenced western attitudes to Islam up to the twentieth century.

In the previous chapters I have attempted to demonstrate that several elements in
this conventional image of medieval polemic, especially of that written by eastern
Christians, need reassessment: it may be vociferous, but hardly matches the rest of the
labels. Medieval polemic, instead of being generally unreliable, let alone ignorant,
employs a clever strategy: the narratives it uses to attack Islam are, more often than not,
squarely based on the early Muslim Tradition. As the early Christian narratives of
Muhammad’s death illustrate, Christian authors combed the Muslim Tradition for
elements that, while in accord with the religious world of Islam, were repugnant to
Christians, so that their mere retelling to a Christian audience achieved the goal, to

465 Ibid., p. 343.
466 There are exceptions, of course. Nancy Bisaha does not see all western thought about Islam
and Muslims as part of the same trajectory; see her Creating East and West.

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discredit Islam in the eyes of their readers. As centuries passed, Muslims quietly let their own early narrative of Muhammad’s death, which had served as the basis for its Christian counterpart, fall into oblivion, possibly under the influence of Christian polemic against it. Christians and Jews of the Islamic world preserved it longer, but when it had entirely been supplanted by alternative narratives in the Muslim Tradition and was of no further use for their polemical purposes, they too dropped it. They preserved it, however, long enough for Latin Christians, via Mozarabs and Europeans in the Latin East, to borrow it. Latin Christians, in their turn, elaborated and embellished it and made it popular in Europe. In this process, the eastern Christian polemical narratives have often changed beyond recognition. Although my conclusions are based on versions of only one polemical narrative, many more such cases must lie unnoticed—not all the material even eastern Christians used in their polemic against Islam relies on the Muslim Tradition, but most of it certainly does. Considering its roots in the preclassical Muslim Tradition, medieval Christian polemic is not only worthy of serious consideration by historians of Islam, but should be regarded as gold mine.

For all their faults, Orientalists did not thoughtlessly adopt medieval Christian polemical narratives about Muhammad and Islam; they did not do so in the early modern period, let alone later. They were open to using Muslim sources: as soon as Arabic manuscripts containing the classical Islamic versions of the narrative became available in Europe, Orientalists started to present Muhammad’s death in accordance with them. Most authors of lives of Muhammad with no knowledge of Arabic or Muslim culture followed suit as soon as these texts became available in Latin translations. Already in the
seventeenth century, most European scholars considered Muslim sources more authentic and reliable than medieval Christian ones, even though they recognized that many of the latter were written centuries closer to the rise of Islam than the Muslim ones available to them.

Even medieval European polemicists, bigoted villains in discussions of western perceptions of Islam, presented classical Muslim narratives if they knew them. Ramón Martí and Pedro Pascual, two thirteenth-century Christian polemicists from the Iberian Peninsula, recounted the standard Muslim narrative of Muhammad’s death—Ramón Martí instead of any Christian story, Pedro Pascual in addition to one. These two authors owed their familiarity with the Muslim story to their proximity to Muslims and their knowledge of Arabic. If twelfth-century northern European authors failed to ever present Muslim versions of events, they did so because they were unavailable to them. The works of Ramón Martí and Pedro Pascual, like most polemical texts, survive only in a handful of manuscripts. But Jacobus de Voragine, the thirteenth-century Italian author of the *Legenda aurea*, also adopted a version of the classical Muslim narrative, a summary of the poisoned shoulder story. The *Legenda aurea*, being a collection of saints’ lives, became a much-read book in medieval Europe, and thus probably made the gist of the classical Muslim story better known among Latin Christians than the Christian narrative ever was.

The use of Muslim sources by Christian polemicists, medieval or early modern, eastern or western, did not of course make their writing less polemical. The Christian religious worldview has always been different enough from its Muslim counterpart to
allow polemicists to find authentic Muslim narratives on which to base their critique of Islam—they did not need to invent anything for this purpose. When early modern authors agree with medieval ones on their evaluation of Muhammad’s character and deeds, this is rarely the result of direct filiation, rather of the relative stability of the Christian religious worldview. To take an obvious example, Muhammad’s polygamy was condemned by Christians from the earliest Middle Eastern observers to modern Europeans as lewd and lustful. Yet this was hardly the result of eighteenth-century Protestants taking advice from eighth-century Syrian monks, but rather of their agreement on the relevant issue of sexual morality, the preferment of monogamy.

There is another reason why medieval Christian polemicists against Islam cannot be regarded as forerunners of Orientalism and, by extension, western imperialism: for centuries almost all of them came from the ranks of peoples subject to Muslim rule, from the eastern Christian communities of the Islamic world. Their polemicists were no forerunners of imperialists, but rather targets of the imperial project of Islam. Latin Christians produced virtually no polemic against Islam until the Crusades; apart from brief and scattered references, Muslims rarely feature in their writings. With the launch of the Crusades, interest in Islam spiked in Europe and, as a result, some eastern Christian polemical writings were translated into Latin in Christian Spain and the Crusader states. In addition to this well-attested eastern lineage, Latin polemicists probably often also

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468 See Crone, “Post-Colonialism ,” pp. 9-14 for an interpretation of the tenth-century Islamic world as a post-colonial society. Her main examples are the Iranian Shu‘ūbīs, but ninth-century eastern Christians would constitute no less suitable material for a similar case study. Unlike the Iranians and other peoples largely converted to Islam, the Christians of the Islamic world did question the legitimacy of the Arab conquests.
heard stories about Muhammad and early Islam from eastern Christians. The material Latin authors borrowed from eastern Christians should be regarded as an offshoot, if an extremely productive and often bizarre offshoot, of eastern Christian polemic, not as the invention of western Christians.

The trajectory sketched by Daniel and Said is therefore to be rejected for several reasons. Another way of understanding the roots of medieval Christian polemic against Islam perhaps more fully accounts for it. In his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, published in 1990, the political scientist James C. Scott analyzed the techniques the oppressed employed and continue to employ in various societies in order to question the social order and its official interpretation. He calls the verbal and nonverbal manifestations of this questioning the “hidden transcript”—hidden from the powerful, that is, because the weak and poor use it only out of earshot of their superiors. When in the presence of the powerful, the oppressed, of course, pay lip service to the official ideology—Scott calls this and its manifestations the “public transcript.” The book relies primarily on analyses of societies where powerholders had disproportionate power over the subordinate population (slaves, serfs, peasants, the untouchable), but also posits relations of a similar character between the dominant and the weak in societies with less extreme power relations. It is their disadvantaged position that unites the subordinate in these societies: their material resources are dwarfed beside those of the powerful and they suffer constant humiliation at their hands.469

Religious polemic against Islam in the Islamic world fits Scott’s hidden transcript: it constitutes a questioning of the official ideology, Islam, by a disadvantaged group, non-Muslims under Muslim rule. From the end of the seventh century onward, when Islam was being proclaimed from sumptuous mosques all over the Islamic world, non-Muslims—mostly Christians in our case—resorted to the only means left for them to confront its hegemony: words.

At first sight there might seem to be some incongruence between Scott’s theory and the case of medieval polemic against Islam. The oppressed groups Scott analyzes were disadvantaged primarily as a result of material deprivation, indignities and injustices; religion, as one might expect from a political scientist, plays little role in his book. At the same time, it is not customary to describe Christians in the medieval Islamic world as oppressed and disadvantaged. After all, many civil servants and scholars came from their ranks and the immediate consequence of Muslim rule for them was limits to the free practice of their religion and even that resulted from Muslim rule only for the Melkites—others, Copts and West-Syrians, had not fared much better under Byzantine rule in this respect. Yet in the face of growing Muslim military and political power, they certainly experienced indignities and compared to Muslims they were materially deprived too. Socio-economic disadvantages came hand in hand with exposure to religious oppression. It was easy to convert to Islam and escape from these disadvantages, but for those who remained Christian, status was precarious: any success they achieved could be wiped out overnight by an overzealous official or an agitated mob. On the other hand, the primarily religious rationale of their oppression accounts for the Christians’ use of
religious language to question Muslim power—while in non-Muslim texts addressed to non-Muslims we occasionally come across remarks that blame the Muslims for material shortage, they never appear in texts directly questioning Islam. Had their oppression been based, for example, on ethnic differences, they would probably have questioned the ethnic superiority of their rulers, as indeed the non-Arab Muslims of the Shu'ūbiyya did.\footnote{See Crone, “Post-Colonialism,” pp. 14-18.}

But was the medieval polemic written by the Christians of the Islamic world a hidden discourse? The mere transmission of much of this literature in Arabic might indicate that it was not necessary to conceal it. But there are frequent signs of caution and concealment in non-Muslim critiques of Islam. Some of these come from Jewish sources. For example, Yefet ben ‘Eli switches from Arabic to Hebrew when telling his story, discussed in the first chapter, about the desecration of Muhammad’s corpse. Other Jewish authors, such as Samuel ben Ḥofni and Maimonides, explain their reluctance to make explicit statements on certain topics as resulting from their fear of the authorities.\footnote{See Sklare, “Responses,” p. 150; and Maimonides, Iggerot, p. 56.} In the Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias, the Christian interlocutor asks the emir to take an oath to guarantee his safety before he agrees to engage in discussions about Islam.\footnote{See Mudjādalat al-Rāhib Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī, pp. 316-317.} In addition to indications of caution in polemical texts, Muslim authors’ ignorance of them and their outrage when they encountered one shows that these writings were usually hidden from Muslim eyes. It seems that al-Bīrūnī was the only medieval Muslim familiar with the Apology of al-Kindī. The next Muslim author to take notice of it
was Nu‘mān b. Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī in the late nineteenth century. He was so outraged by it that he wrote a refutation at least ten times the size of the Christian text. Adding insult to injury, the Christian author claimed to be from Baghdad, where al-Ālūsī lived—the latter found the Apology so alien to his world that he took it to be a missionary forgery.473 Similarly, the response of al-Qarāfī to Paul of Antioch’s Letter to a Muslim Friend and those of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī to the Letter from the People of Cyprus474 indicate that the arguments put forward in them, although many are well-documented in Christian polemical texts, were not commonly known among Muslims. The judgment passed on the Egyptian Christian, also cited in the first chapter, illustrates what fate awaited those who revealed their thoughts on Islam uncensored. Islamic law forbade certain types of criticisms of Muhammad, and those who fell foul of this law could save their lives only by conversion to Islam.475 Indeed, Christian martyrlogies from the Muslim world often take the form of stories of Christians who deliberately or in the heat of the moment made uncomplimentary statements about Muhammad and paid with their lives for it.

Eastern and western Christian writings on Islam should not be mistrusted because of their polemical character—it is no more a barrier to their fruitful use by historians than the hagiographical character of classical Muslim writings on Muhammad and the Companions. Recognition of a text’s polemical agenda should not spur us to avoid using

473 See al-Ālūsī, al-Djawāb al-fasīḥ.
474 See Ebied and Thomas (ed.), The Letter from the People of Cyprus, pp. 1-35.
475 On the laws relating to the vilification of the Prophet (sabb al-nabī), see Friedmann, Tolerance and Coercion, pp. 149-152; and Wiederhold, “Blasphemy,” pp. 39-70.
it, but rather help us read it correctly. A much fuller picture of the history of Islam and Muslim culture is to be gained from the simultaneous study of Muslim and non-Muslim sources—a picture that includes the experience of the oppressed too. The works of eastern Christian polemicists deserve, instead of neglect and contempt, dispassionate study.
Appendix One

The Qashun Document

The *Qashun Document* is a rich but unexploited source of early Christian anti-Islamic polemic. The text survives only in an Armenian version. The date of the Armenian translation is unknown; the oldest extant manuscript dates from 1273. Before that, two Armenian historians, Mxit’ar of Ani and Vardan, in the twelfth and the thirteenth century respectively, used the *Document* as their main source on Muhammad and the rise of Islam, probably in the Armenian version known to us.\(^{476}\) Although the *Document* is first attested in Armenian in the twelfth century, I would like to suggest that it was probably written in the eighth or the early ninth century in Iraq or Syria. The main reason to think so is that most of its motifs and themes are lacking from other Armenian texts on the rise of Islam, but not from Syriac and Arabic Christian writings produced in central Islamic lands in the ninth century and earlier.

The most prominent themes of the *Qashun Document* are Muhammad’s life, the rise of Islam, and the *ḥadīdj*. It interweaves Iraqi and Syrian Christian stories with Islamic traditions. Widespread Christian narratives about the origins of Islam are juxtaposed with otherwise unknown ones, like the attribution of snake worship and the veneration of the idol Raman to the pagan Arabs, and the alleged survival of these

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practices up to the time of writing.\textsuperscript{477} A detailed comparison with a wide range of sources would be necessary to disentangle the layers of this text; what follow here are only a few tentative suggestions. Since I do not know Armenian, my analysis is entirely reliant on Thomson’s English translation of the text.\textsuperscript{478}

Several episodes of Muhammad’s life as found in the \textit{Qashun Document} were used in the 810s in Iraq for the \textit{Legend of Sergius Bahīrā}. In addition to the Christian story of Muhammad’s death, these include the legend of Muhammad’s instruction by the monk Sergius (not Bahīrā, as he is usually called in the tenth century and later) at Mt. Sinai (not around Yathrib, as in the \textit{Legend of Sergius Bahīrā}), the claim that after his instruction by the monk Muhammad studied with a Jew (here an anonymous merchant instead of the Kaʿb al-Aḥbār of the \textit{Legend of Sergius Bahīrā}), and the legend of the cow about the forging of the Koran (instead of the monk Sergius, here it is Muhammad himself who writes the scripture).\textsuperscript{479} At the end of the document we are told that Muhammad ordered his followers to pray seven times a day.\textsuperscript{480} This appears also in the \textit{Legend of Sergius Bahīrā} and in no other extant Christian writing from the Islamic world, as far as I know. The \textit{Qashun Document}, however, does not connect these episodes together as the \textit{Legend of Sergius Bahīrā} does, and thus probably reflects an earlier stage in the development of the latter—the time when versions of these stories circulated orally and separately among the Christians of Iraq, before the written version became widely

\textsuperscript{477} For the snakes, see Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 847-849; for the idol, ibid., pp. 848-849.
\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., pp. 846-853.
\textsuperscript{479} For the first episode, see ibid., p. 846, n. c; for the next two, p. 846; for the fourth, pp. 852-853 and p. 853, n. \textit{tt}.
\textsuperscript{480} Ibid., p. 853, n. \textit{tt}.
known and supplanted them. Since the earliest version of the *Legend of Sergius Bahîrā* was probably written in the 810s, the source behind these episodes in the *Qashun Document* cannot be much later.

The following note of the author of the *Qashun Document* also seems to point to the first half of the ninth century as the *terminus ante quem* for the composition of either the *Document* or one of its major sources: “All this one of Mahmed’s disciples revealed to us, who had been himself an eye-witness of it all. And terrified by the appearance of the demons, he fled to the island of Crete; and there he became a Christian and believed in Christ.”

This note might well refer to a Muslim convert to Christianity; probably an insider was the source of the *Document*’s extensive discussion of the ḥadīdj and the quotations of ḥadīths. Crete was occupied by Andalusian Arabs in 827 and remained under Muslim rule until 961; it is unlikely that between 827 and 961 anyone would have fled there to convert to Christianity. It is also unlikely that a text with this content was in the second half of the tenth century or later. It must predate 827.

While the episodes related to the *Legend of Sergius Bahîrā* probably stem from Iraq, other details point to possible Egyptian and Syrian sources. For instance, Muhammad comes to Mount Sinai, and Abraha’s expedition against Mecca is related “in *Egypt* by tradition down to today.”

Still other details indicate Melkite or Byzantine sources; for example, the author refers to the *great* Theodosius, and tells us that Sergius,

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481 Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 849, n. w; for two additional such notes, see ibid., p. 846, n. a, and p. 853.


483 Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 846; and p. 848; italics mine.
the monk who instructed Muhammad, was an Arian; the Arianism of Muhammad’s teacher is unattested outside of Syrian Melkite circles before the early ninth century and remains unattested among the Christians of the East later too.

The document mentions “Yathrib Medina” as the capital of the Arabs; this might be a residue of a seventh-century source. Other details might also point to possible seventh-century sources. The text presents Islam in general and the hadjdj in particular as demon worship; three Christian writings from late seventh-century Syria refer to the Muslims as companions of the demons.

Finally, although Thomson calls the text the Karshûnî Document, it is improbable that the Armenian translation was made from Karshûnî. Macler noted that the Armenian version refers to the text as “extrait de Qachoun” or “recueil de Qachoun” (i qachounēn qaghadzou), and suggested that Qashun should be taken as a corruption of the word Karshûnî. But this is unlikely, for two reasons. First, dated Arabic glosses in Syriac script are first attested only in the twelfth century (only a few undated ones are earlier), and the oldest manuscripts containing Arabic literary texts copied in Syriac letters come from the thirteenth century. Second, the name Karshûnî begins even later, in

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484 Ibid., p. 848, n. o; and p. 846, n. c.
485 Ibid., p. 847.
486 Ibid., p. 846, p. 849.
488 For example, in Thomson, “Baḥira,” p. 889.
the sixteenth century, in the form “Garshûnî.” It is therefore unlikely that the Armenian translation, known to Mxit’ar of Ani in the twelfth century, was made from a Karshûnî text. A Syriac or Arabic Vorlage is much more probable.

490 This paragraph owes much to the papers given in the session on Karshûnî at the Eighth Conference of Christian Arabic Studies, held in Granada (Spain), September 26-27, 2008: Emanuela Braid, “Garshuni manuscripts and Garshuni notes in Syriac manuscripts,” Gregory Kessel, “The importance of the manuscript tradition of the ‘Book of Grace’ (7th c.) for the study of Garshuni,” and Ray Mouawad “Maronites and the Garshuni script.”
Appendix Two

The Isnāds

The decaying corpse traditions

(1) [Medina? Iraq?] Kūfa

‘Abdallāh al-Bahī, mawlā of Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr, no data about ‘Abdallāh, but Muṣ‘ab, the Zubayrid governor of Iraq, died in 72 (691)\(^{492}\)

Ismā‘īl b. Abī Khālid al-Badjalī l-Aḥmasī (m.), Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Kūfī, d. 145-146 (762-764)\(^{493}\)

Wakī‘ b. al-Djarrāḥ b. Maliḥ al-Ru‘āṣī, Abū Sufyān al-Kūfī, originally from Persia or Sogdia, b. 127-130 (744-748), d. 196-198 (811-814) in Fayd, while returning to Kūfa from pilgrimage\(^{494}\)

(2) Baṣra

al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Hasan al-BAṣrī, Abū Sa‘īd, mawlā of Zayd b. Thābit (or of somebody else), b. 21 (641 f.) in Medina, grew up in Wādī l-Qurā, traveled to Kābul, Khurāsān, Mecca, d. 110 (728), aged 88-89\(^{495}\)

\(^{491}\) The following pages summarize the dates of the traditionists and the places where they spent their lives, as well as any other data that might be relevant for the circulation of the traditions, as mentioned mainly in Mizzā, Tahdhib al-kamāl. For the traditionists not mentioned in Tahdhib al-kamāl, and for them only, I collected the data from other rīḍāl works. Mawlā is abbreviated with (m.) after the tribal nisba. The Christian dates include the full extent of the Muslim year; when the month of the birth or death of the traditionist is provided in Tahdhib al-kamāl, I give only the Christian year corresponding to the month. The first line, after the number of the tradition, indicates the places where the tradition circulated in the eighth century; as my focus in this paper is on the early circulation of the traditions, I did not refer to the later places there. In those cases when the isnād goes back to the seventh century, I included the seventh-century places in square brackets.


‘A wf b. Abī Djamīla l-‘Abdī l-Hadjarī, Abū Sahl al-Baṣrī, known as al-A’rābī, of Iranian origin, d. 146-147 (763-765), aged 86 or more 496

‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Āṭā’ al-Khaffāf al-‘Idlī (m.), Abū Naṣr al-Baṣrī, moved to Baghdad, d. 204-206 (819-822) 497

(3) Kūfā

Ibrāhīm b. Yazīd b. Qays al-Nakha‘ī, Abū ‘Imrān al-Kūfī, d. 96 (714f.), aged 49 or 58 498

Abū Ayyūb ?

Ziyād b. Kulaib al-Tamīmī l-Ḥanẓūlī, Abū Ma‘shar al-Kūfī, d. 110 or 119 (728f. or 728f.), d. 132-136 (749-754) 500

Djarīr b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Qurṭ al-Ḍabbī, Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Rāzī, al-qādī, hailed from the region of Iṣfahān, grew up in Kūfā, settled in a village next to Rayy, transmitted hadīth also in Mecca and Baghdad, b. 107 or 110 (725f. or 728f.), d. 188 (804), aged 77-79 501

Muḥammad b. Ḥuyyān al-Tamīmī, Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Rāzī, transmitted hadīth also in Baghdad, d. 248 (862f.) 502

(4) Kūfā


497 Ibid., vol. 18, pp. 509-516.
500 Ibid., vol. 28, pp. 397-403.
501 Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 540-551.
(5) [Medina] Kūfa


Djābir b. Yazīd b. al-Ḥārith al-Djuʿī, Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Kūfī, d. 128 (745f.)505

Qays b. al-Rabīʿ al-Asadī, Abū Muḥammad al-Kūfī, wālī of Madā’in, d. ca. 165-168 (781-785)506

Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Wāqid al-Wāqidī l-Aslamī (m.), Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Madanī, qāḍī of Baghdad, b. 130 (747), moved to Baghdad in 180 (796f.), traveled to Shām and Raqqa, d. 207 (823), aged 78507

The fragrance traditions

(1) [Medina? Iraq?] Kūfa

‘Abdallāh al-Bahī, mawla of Muṣʿab b. al-Zubayr, no data about ‘Abdallāh, but Muṣʿab, the Zubayrid governor of Iraq, died in 72 (691)508

Ismāʿīl b. Abī Khālid al-Badjalī l-Aḥmasī (m.), Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Kūfī, d. ca. 145-146 (762-764)509

Sharīk b. ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Sharīk al-Nakhaʿī, Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Kūfī al-qāḍī, originally from Bukhārā, transmitted hadith also in Wāsiṭ, b. 95 (713f.), d. 177 (793f.)510

al-Faḍl b. Dukayn (‘Amr) b. Ḥammād al-Qurashī l-Taymī l-Ṭalḥī (m.), Abū Nuʿaym al-Mulāʾī l-Kūfī l-abhwal, b. 129-130 (746-748), d. 218-219 (833-835)511

505 Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 465-472.
510 Ibid., vol. 12, pp. 462-475.
(2) [Medina? Iraq?] Kūfa

‘Abdallāh al-Bahī, mawlā of Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr, no data about ‘Abdallāh, but Muṣ‘ab, the Zubayrid governor of Iraq, died in 72 (691)\(^{512}\)

Ismā‘īl b. Abī Khālid al- Badjālī al- Aḥmasī (m.), Abū ʿAbdallāh al- Kūfī, d. ca. 145-146 (762-764)\(^{513}\)

Wakī‘ b. al-Djarrāḥ b. Malik al-Ru‘āsī, Abū Sufyān al- Kūfī, originally from Persia or Sogdia, b. 127-130 (744-748), d. 196-198 (811-814) in Fayd, while returning to Kūfa from pilgrimage\(^{514}\)

Ya‘lā b. ‘Ubayd b. Abī Umayya l- Iyādī or al- Ḥanafi (m.), Abū Yūsuf al- Ṭanāfīsī l- Kūfī, b. 117 (735 f.), d. 207-209 (822-824)\(^{515}\)

Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd b. Abī Umayya l- Iyādī or al- Ḥanafi (m.), Abū ʿAbdallāh al- Ṭanāfīsī l- Kūfī l- ḥadab, brother of the previous, b. 124 (741 f.), lived in Baghdad for some time, d. 203-205 (818-820) in Kūfa\(^{516}\)

\[
\text{al-Bahī} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Ibn Abī Khālid} \\
\downarrow \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Wakī‘} \quad \text{Ya‘lā} \quad \text{Muḥammad}
\]

(3) Medina

Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab b. Hazn al- Qurashi l- Makhzūmī, Abū Muḥammad al- Madani, b. 15 or 17 (636-639), d. 93-94 (711-713), aged 75\(^{517}\)

Muḥammad b. Muslim b. ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Abdallāh b. Shihāb al- Qurashi l- Zuhrī, Abū Bakr al- Madani, b. 50-58 (670-867), settled in Shām, owned an estate in the Ḥidjaz, d. 123-125 (740-742) on his estate, aged 72\(^{518}\)


\(^{513}\) Mizzī, Tahdhib al- kamāl, vol. 3, pp. 69-76.


\(^{516}\) Ibid., vol. 26, pp. 54-60.

\(^{517}\) Ibid., vol. 11, pp. 66-75.
Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muslim b. ʿUbaydallāh al-Qurashī l-Zuhrī, Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Madanī, nephew of the previous, d. 152 or 157 (769f. or 773f.) on the same estate in the Ḥīdżāz as his uncle.519

Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. Wāqid al-Wāqidī l-Aslamī (m.), Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Madanī, qāḍī of Baghdad, b. 130 (747), moved to Baghdad in 180 (796f.), traveled to Shām and Raqqā, d. 207 (823), aged 78.520

(4) [Medina? Baṣra?] Kūfa

ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ḥārith b. Nawfal al-Qurashī l-Ḥāshimī, Abū Muḥammad al-Madanī, son of Hind bt. Abī Sufyān, b. before the Prophet died, settled to Baṣra, d. 79 (698f.) or 84 (703f.)521

Yazīd b. Abī Ziyād al-Qurashī l-Ḥāshimī (m.), Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Kūfī, mawlā of the previous, b. 44-46 (665-666), d. 137 (754f.)522

Masʿūd b. Saʿd al-Djuʿfī, Abū Saʿd al-Kūfī, n.d.523

Mālik b. Ismāʿīl b. Dirham al-Nahdī (m.), Abū Ghassān al-Kūfī, d. 219 (834)524

(4b) [Medina] Kūfa, then Marw

ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib al-Qurashī l-Ḥāshimī, Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Madanī, b. a few years before the ḥidjra or in its year, d. 68-70 (687-690), aged 71 or 72.525

Miqsam b. Badara (?), Abū l-Qāsim (?), mawlā of ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ḥārith, d. 101 (719f.).526

Yazīd b. Abī Ziyād al-Qurashī l-Ḥāshimī (m.), Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Kūfī, mawlā of ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ḥārith, b. 44-46 (665-666), d. 137 (754f.).527

522 Ibid., vol. 32, pp. 135-140.
523 Ibid., vol. 27, pp. 473-475.
524 Ibid., vol. 27, pp. 86-91.
Muḥammad b. Maymūn al-Marwazī, Abū Ḥamza l-Sukkārī, d. 167-168 (783-784)  

‘Abdallāh b. ʿUthmān b. Ḥabala l-Azdi l-ʿUtqī (m.), Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Marwazī, known as ʿAbdān, d. 220-222 (835-837), aged 76  

Aḥmad b. Sayyār b. Ayyūb al-Marwazī, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-faqīḥ, traveled to Syria and Egypt, d. 268 (881), aged 70  

Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim b. al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī, b. 207 (822f.), d. 297 (910)  

(5) Kūfā  

ʿĀmir b. Sharāḥīl al-Shaʿbī, Abū ʿAmr al-Kūfī, b. 19 (640), his mother was an Iraqi prisoner of war, d. 103-110 (721-728), aged 77 or 79 or 82  

Ismāʿīl b. Abī Khālid al-Badjālī l-Aḥmasī (m.), Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Kūfī, d. ca. 145-146 (762-764)  

ʿAbdallāh b. Numayr al-Hamdānī l-Khārifī, Abū Hishām al-Kūfī, b. 115 (733f.), d. 199 (814f.)  

Wakī b. al-Djarrāḥ b. Maliḥ al-Ruʾāsī, Abū Sufyān al-Kūfī, originally from Persia or Sogdia, b. 127-130 (744-748), d. 196-198 (811-814) in Fayd, while returning to Kūfā from the pilgrimage  

al-Shaʿbī  

↓  

Ibn Abī Khālid  

↓  

‘Abdallāh  

Wakī
‘Abdallāh b. Idrīs b. Yazīd al-Awdī l-Za‘āfirī, Abū Muḥammad al-Kūfī, b. 115 or 120 (733-734 or 737-738), d. 192 (808).

(6) Medina and Baṣra

Sa‘īd b. al-Muṣayyab b. Ḥazn al-Qurashi l-Makhzūmī, Abū Muḥammad al-Madanī, b. 15 or 17 (636-639), d. 93-94 (711-713), aged 75.


Ma‘mar b. Ṭāḥshīd al-Azdi l-Ḥudāndi (m.), Abū ‘Urwa l-Baṣrī, settled in Ṣan‘ā’, traveled also to the Dāirah, d. 150-154 (767-771), aged 58.

Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Wāqid al-Wāqidī l-Aslamī (m.), Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Madanī, qāḍī of Baghdad, b. 130 (747), moved to Baghdad in 180 (796f.), traveled to Shām and Raqqa, d. 207 (823), aged 78.

Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Yashkurī, Abū Suṭyān al-Ma‘marī l-Baṣrī, settled in Baghdad, d. 182 (798f.).

‘Abdallāh b. al-Muḥārak b. Wādīh al-Ḥanḍalī l-Tamīmī (m.), Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān l-Marwazī, b. 118 (736f.), his mother was Khwārizmian, his father Turkic, slave of an Arab in Hamadhān, ‘Abdallāh traveled to Iraq, Djazīra, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Ḥidżaz, d. 181 (797f.) in Hīt, returning from raiding, aged 63.

Yaḥyā b. ‘Abbād al-Du‘bī, Abū ‘Abbād al-Baṣrī, settled in Baghdad, d. 198 (813f.).

Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān al-Madanī, Abū Muḥammad, mawlā of Banū Ghifār or others, d. 127-132 (744-750) or after 140 (after 757f.).

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537 Ibid., vol. 11, pp. 66-75.


539 Ibid., *Tahdhib al-kamāl*, vol. 28, pp. 303-312.


544 Ibid., vol. 13, pp. 79-84.
Ibrāhīm b. Sa‘d b. Ibrāhīm al-Qurashī l-Zuhrī, Abū Isḥāq al-Madani, settled in Baghdad, b. 108 (726f.), d. 182-184 or after 185 (798-801, 801f.), aged 73 or 75

Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm b. Sa‘d al-Qurashī l-Zuhrī, Abū Yūsuf al-Madani, settled in Baghdad, d. 208 (824) in Fām al-Silh

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Ibn al-Musayyab} & \\
\downarrow & \\
\text{al-Zuhrī} & \\
\text{Ma‘mar} & \text{Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān} \\
\text{al-Wāqidī} & \text{Ibn Ḥumayd} & \text{Ibn al-Mubārak} & \text{Ibrāhīm} \\
\downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow & \\
\text{Yaḥyā} & \text{Ya‘qūb} & \\
\end{align*}\]

(6a) Medina, then Baṣra and Kūfa

Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab b. Ḥazn al-Qurashī l-Makhzūmī, Abū Muḥammad al-Madani, b. 15 or 17 (636-639), d. 93-94 (711-713), aged 75


Ma‘mar b. Rāshid al-Azdī l-Ḥuddānī (m.), Abū ‘Urwa l-Baṣrī, settled in Ṣan‘ā’, traveled also to the Dżazīra, d. 150-154 (767-771), aged 58

‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak b. Wādiḥ al-Ḥanḍalī l-Tamīmī (m.), Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Marwazī, b. 118 (736-737), his mother was Khwārizmian, his father Turkic, slave of an

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545 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 88-94.
546 Ibid., vol. 32, pp. 308-311.
547 Ibid., vol. 11, pp. 66-75.
Arab in Hamadhān, ‘Abdallāh traveled to Iraq, Džārā, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Ḥijdāz, d. 181 (797f.) in Hīt, returning from raiding, aged 63\footnote{Ibid., vol. 16, pp. 5-25; and J. Robson, “Ibn al-Mubārak,”} 550

‘Abd al-A‘lā b. ‘Abd al-A‘lā b. Muḥammad al-Sāmī l-Qurashī, Abū Muḥammad al-Ṣārī, d. 189 (805)\footnote{Ibid., vol. 31, pp. 188-192; and W. Schmucker, “Yahyā b. Ādam,” EI\textsuperscript{2} 11: 243-245. Yahyā and al-Ḥusayn are the last two transmitters of Balādhur‘i’s version; they transmitted the \textit{ḥadīth} from Ibn al-Mubārak.} 551

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Ibn al-Musayyab} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{al-Zuhrī} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Ma‘mar} \\
\end{array}
\]

Ibn al-Mubārak ‘Abd al-A‘lā

Yahyā b. Ādam b. Sulaymān al-Qurashī l-Umawī, Abū Zakariyā l-Kūfī, d. 203 (818) in Fam al-Ṣīlī\footnote{Ibid., vol. 30, pp. 311-313. Hannād is the last transmitter of Abū Dāwud’s version of the \textit{ḥadīth}; he transmitted it from Ibn al-Mubārak.} 552


Hannād b. al-Sarī b. Muṣ‘ab al-Tamīmī l-Dārīmī, Abū l-Sarī l-Kūfī, b. 152 (769f.), d. 243 (857)\footnote{Mizzā, \textit{Tahdīb al-kamāl}, vol. 6, pp. 391-393.} 554

(7) Medina, then Kūfā

Hind bt. Abī Umayya, Umm Salama l-Qurashiyya l-Makhzūmiyya, the Prophet’s wife, d. 59-64 (678-684)\footnote{Ibid., vol. 16, pp. 359-363. He is the other last transmitter in the \textit{isnād} of Ibn Abī Shayba.} 555


\footnote{Ibid., vol. 16, pp. 5-25; and J. Robson, “Ibn al-Mubārak,” EI\textsuperscript{2} 3: 879. He is the last transmitter in the \textit{isnād} of Ibn Abī Shayba; ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s \textit{isnād} ends with Ma‘mar.} 550

\footnote{Mizzā, \textit{Tahdīb al-kamāl}, vol. 16, pp. 359-363. He is the other last transmitter in the \textit{isnād} of Ibn Abī Shayba.} 551

\footnote{Ibid., vol. 31, pp. 188-192; and W. Schmucker, “Yahyā b. Ādam,” EI\textsuperscript{2} 11: 243-245. Yahyā and al-Ḥusayn are the last two transmitters of Balādhur‘i’s version; they transmitted the \textit{ḥadīth} from Ibn al-Mubārak.} 552

\footnote{Mizzā, \textit{Tahdīb al-kamāl}, vol. 6, pp. 391-393.} 553

\footnote{Ibid., vol. 30, pp. 311-313. Hannād is the last transmitter of Abū Dāwud’s version of the \textit{ḥadīth}; he transmitted it from Ibn al-Mubārak.} 554

\footnote{Ibid., vol. 35, pp. 317-320; and Ruth Roded, “Umm Salama,” EI\textsuperscript{2} 10: 856-857.} 555
Nadjīh b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sindī, Abū Ma‘ṣhar al-Madanī, mawla of the Banī Hāshim, originally from Yemen, or, according to his son, from Sind, perhaps spent a year in Iraq, d. 170 (787).\footnote{Mizzā, Tahdhīb al-kamāl, vol. 26, pp. 317-318.}

Yūnus b. Bukayr b. Wāṣil al-Shaybānī, Abū Bakr al-Djammāl al-Kūfī, learned from Ibn Ishāq in Rayy, d. 199 (814f.).\footnote{Ibid., vol. 29, pp. 322-331.}


Abū l-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb b. Yūsuf al-Umawī (m.), al-Naysābūrī, known as al-Asamm, b. 247 (861f.), traveled everywhere in the Islamic world between Egypt and Khurāsān, and people traveled to him from as far as al-Andalus, Central Asia, and Sind, d. 346 (957).\footnote{ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 378-383.}


The incorruptibility traditions

(1) Damascus, later Kūfā

Aws b. Aws al-Ṭhaqafī, Companion, settled in Syria, died in Damascus, n.d.\footnote{Ibid., vol. 12, pp. 408-410.}

Sharāḥīl b. Ṭāda, Abū l-Asḥāth al-Ṣan‘ānī, from the Syrian Ṣan‘ā’ (a village near Damascus), or from the Yemeni Ṣan‘ā’, died during the reign of Mu‘āwiya (41-60/661-680).\footnote{Ibid., vol. 18, pp. 5-10.}

‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Yazīd b. Džābir al-Azdī, Abū ‘Utbā l-Sulamī l-Dimashqī l-Dārānī, first settled in Basra, then moved to Damascus, d. 153-156 (770-773), aged more than 80.\footnote{Ibid., vol. 26, pp. 317-318.}
al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. al-Walīd al-Dju‘fī (m.), Abū ‘Abdollāh al-Kūfī *al-muqīr*’, b. 119 (737), d. 203-204 (818-820), aged 84\(^{565}\)

(2) Palestine, then Egypt

‘Uwaymir b. Mālik al-Anšārī, Abū l-Dardā’ al-Khazraḏī, Companion, settled in Damascus and died there in 32-33 (652-654)\(^{566}\)

‘Ubāda b. Nusayy al-Kindī, Abū ‘Umar al-Shāmī l-Urdunnī, *qāḍī* of Ṭabarīyya, died in Damascus in 118 (736-737)\(^{567}\)

Zayd b. Ayman, n.d.\(^{568}\)

Sa‘īd b. Abī Hilāl al-Laythī (m.), Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Miṣrī, b. 70 (690f.) in Egypt, and grew up in Medina, then returned to Egypt by the end of his life, or originally from Medina, d. 133-135 or 149 (750-753 or 766f.)\(^{569}\)

‘Amr b. al-Ḥarīth b. Ya‘qūb al-Anšārī (m.), Abū Umayya l-Miṣrī, b. 90-94 (708-713), originally from Medina, or from Egypt, d.147-149 (764-767), aged 58\(^{570}\)

‘Abdollāh b. Wahb b. Muḥammad al-Qurashī l-Fihrī (m.), Abū Muḥammad al-Miṣrī *l-faqīh*, b. 125 (743), d. 197 (813)\(^{571}\)

(3) Ḥijdāz or Syria, then Egypt

Muḥammad b. Muslim b. ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Abdollāh b. Shihāb al-Qurashī l-Zuhrī, Abū Bakr al-Madanī, settled in Shām, b. 50-58 (670-678); d. 123-125 (740-742) on his estate in the Ḥijdāz, aged 72\(^{572}\)

Yūnūs b. Yazīd b. Abī l-Nijdād al-Aylī, Abū Yazīd al-Qurashī (m. Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān), he often traveled to Medina, d. 152 (769f.) in Upper Egypt, or 150-160 (767-777)\(^{573}\)

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\(^{565}\) Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 449-454.

\(^{566}\) Ibid., vol. 22, pp. 469-475; and A. Jeffer, “Abū l-Dardā’,” *EI* 2: 113-114.


\(^{568}\) Ibid., vol. 10, pp. 23-24.

\(^{569}\) Ibid., vol. 11, pp. 94-97.

\(^{570}\) Ibid., vol. 21, pp. 570-578.


‘Abdallāh b. Wahb b. Muṣlim al-Qurashī l-Fihrī (m.), Abū Muḥammad al-Miṣrī al-faqīh, b. 125 (743), d. 197 (813).574

(4) Baṣra

al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū Saʿīd, mawla of Zayd b. Thābit (or of somebody else), b. 21 (641 f.) in Medina, grew up in Wādī l-Qurā, traveled to Kābul, Khurāsān, Mecca, d. 110 (728), aged 88–89.575

‘Uqba b. Abī l-Ṣahbā’ al-Bāhilī (m.), Abū Khuraym al-Baṣrī, settled in al-Madā’in, n.d.576


(5) Medina, then Kūfā

Djaʿfar al-Ṣadiq b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Hāshimī, Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Maḍāni, b. 80 or 83 (699 f. or 702), traveled to Iraq (Ḥīra), d. 148 (765), aged 58 or 66 or 68.578


Djaʿfar b. Bashīr al-Badjalī (m.), Abū Muḥammad al-Kūfī, d. 208 (823) in Abwā’.580

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn?581

581 Al-Nadjāshī lists two transmitters with this name who lived at the right time: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Khaṭṭāb, Abū Djaʿfar al-Zayyāt al-Hamdāni, d. 262 (875 f.), and Muḥammad
(6) Medinan, then Kūfan (?)

Dja‘fār al-Ṣādiq b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Hāshimī, Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Madānī, b. 80 or 83 (699f. or 702), traveled to Iraq (Ḥira), d. 148 (765), aged 58 or 66 or 68\(^{582}\)

A man (rajdul)

al-Qāsim b. ‘Urwa ?\(^{584}\)

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. [Abī] Ḥammād, Abū l-Qāsim, Kūfan, settled in Qum, n.d.\(^{585}\)

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Djabbār ?

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\(^{583}\) Nadjāshī, RIDJĀL, vol. 2, p. 32.

\(^{584}\) Al-Nadjāshī mentions only one al-Qāsim b. ‘Urwa, but since he transmitted from Dja‘far al-Ṣādiq, he is too early for this isnād. I could not find any other transmitter with this name who would fit here.

\(^{585}\) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 51-52; see also n. 4.
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