

Sean W. Anthony

Muḥammad, the Keys to Paradise, and the *Doctrina Iacobi*: A Late Antique Puzzle*

Abstract: One of the earliest non-Islamic testimonies to the existence of the Prophet Muḥammad can be found within the Byzantine apologetic tract known as the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*. Frequently dated by modern historians to as early as July 634 CE, the tract curiously asserts that the prophet who had appeared “among the Saracens” claimed to possess “the keys to paradise.” This essay investigates this claim and the prevalence of the “keys to paradise” motif in late-antique Christian literature and the early Islamic tradition to provide a new evaluation of the text’s place in and importance to the historiography of Islamic origins.

Keywords: Muḥammad, keys to paradise, Byzantium, Carthage, Palestine, Jews, Saracens, baptism, interreligious polemic

Sean W. Anthony: University of Oregon, swanthon@uoregon.edu

Introduction

The *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* (Eng. *The Teaching of Jacob, the Recently Baptized*) has long been regarded as one of the most important testimonies to the early Islamic conquests. Indeed, most scholars continue to regard the *Doctrina* as one of the precious few contemporary testimonies not only to the earliest phases of the Islamic conquest of Palestine but also to these conquests’ inspiration by a “Saracen” prophet. Outside the Qur’ān itself, the *Doctrina Iacobi* can thus be said to be the earliest known piece of writing to claim that the teachings of an Arabian prophet provided the impetus for the conquests.¹ In this regard, the *Doc-*

* Significant portions of the research for this paper are the result of my time as a member at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, a stay made possible thanks to the funding provided by the Andrew W. Mellon foundation. I would also like to thank Wadād al-Qāḍī, Patricia Crone, Stephen Shoemaker, Stefan Esders, and many more colleagues with whom I discussed this paper and its contents at the institute and at Princeton University.

1 Whether or not the Qur’ān itself predates, or is contemporary with, the earliest phases of the Islamic conquests certainly can and ought to be questioned, but a new consensus has been gradually emerging that the Qur’ān is highly unlikely to post-date the earliest phases of the con-

trina has few, if any, peers – its only rivals being a fragmentary notice preserved imperfectly on the opening fly-leaf of a sixth-century Syriac manuscript, BL Add. 14461, and a brief historical notice penned by Thomas the Presbyter (wr. ca. 640 CE). Yet, even these two texts merely note a series of incursions by “the Arabs of Muḥammad” (Syr. *ṭayyāyē d-M.ḥ.m.ṭ.*) into Palestine and Syria as well as their clashes with Roman forces,² and unlike the *Doctrina*, these other two, near-contemporary sources, albeit cognizant of a leader named Muḥammad, exhibit not a shadow of cognizance that the conquests were inspired either by a prophet or, for that matter, any religious message at all.³

The *Doctrina Iacobi* is itself a Christian apologetic tract written in Greek with little obvious direct concern for Islam, the Islamic conquests, or the prophet who inspired them. Rather, the tract’s principal audience seems to have been Byzantine Jews caught in the net of an imperial decree of Heraclius, which led to the forced baptism of the Jews of Carthage into the Christian Church.⁴ As such,

quests, even if the documentation of its textual history and subsequent transmission still needs to be further studied. This argument can be made on the basis of the intrinsic qualities of the Qur’ān itself, as, for example, most cogently argued in Fred M. DONNER, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin, 1998), 35–63, and Angelika NEUWIRTH, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), 235–275. However, the argument for Qur’ān’s antiquity can increasingly also be made with the aid of the empirical analysis of its earliest surviving fragments, e.g., see Behnam SADEGHI and Mohsen GOUDARZI, “Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān,” *Der Islam* 87 (2012), 1–129.

2 Robert G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin, 1997), 116–120; Alfred-Louis DE PRÉMARE, *Les fondations de l’Islam: Entre écriture et histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 146–148; Michael PENN, “Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims: Syriac Textual Changes in Reaction to the Rise of Islam,” *Hugoye* 12 (2009), 240–244.

3 See now the cogent summary of the data from Syriac writings in Michael PENN, “God’s War and His Warriors: The First Hundred Years of Syriac Accounts of the Islamic Conquests,” in Sohail H. Hashimi (ed.), *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads: Christian, Jewish and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 71 ff. The first Syriac text to refer to Muḥammad as a prophet, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, does not appear until the 690s CE; see Gerrit J. REININK, “From Apocalypitics to Apologetics: Early Syriac Reactions to Islam,” in Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (eds.), *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 77.

4 Following the reading of David OLSTER, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 1994), 158–175. The *Doctrina* is quite transparently a Christian phantasy, yet, even so, scholars have frequently noted that the tract demonstrates a remarkably detailed and even “embedded” familiarity with the Jewish diaspora of Byzantium. See Pieter W. VAN DER HORST, “A Short Note on the *Doctrina Iacobi Nuper Baptizati*,” *Zutot* 6 (2009): 1–6. Although set in Carthage, the choice of Greek as its literary medium reflects

the *Doctrina Iacobi* recounts the tale of a certain Palestinian Jew named Jacob who, upon arriving in Carthage from Constantinople to conduct business there, is captured, imprisoned, and forcibly baptized by the Byzantine authorities on Pentecost (31 May) 632 along with the other Jewish denizens of that North African city. The first response of this Jacob “the recently baptized” is to delve into the Holy Scriptures where he seeks succor and insight into his plight. Yet as he reads the scriptures, Jacob finds that, rather than resenting his fate, he soon comes to rejoice over the serendipity of his forced baptism. Jacob realizes that he has now found himself on the right side of the truth: that of Christianity. It is Jacob’s newfound faith in Jesus of Nazareth as God’s true Messiah that really moves the narrative forward in what follows, and throughout the *Doctrina Iacobi*, we find Jacob ardently and masterfully producing arguments from Scripture to convince his fellow “recently baptized” Jews that, despite any doubts and reservations they may harbor, the forces of history have indeed landed them within the saving graces of the truest faith. In Jacob, the tract displays, the Christians had gained a sharp and formidable apologete.

The portion of the *Doctrina Iacobi* most interesting to Islamicists comes toward the end of the tract with the arrival in Carthage of another Palestinian Jew named Justus, who has known Jacob since his childhood and who is dismayed to find Jacob and his fellow Jews now baptized as Christians. It is this Justus who proves to be Jacob’s most intractable opponent in debate, although Jacob bests even him in the end, and it is also this Justus who relates stories of the recent troubles afflicting his homeland in Palestine. Justus recounts before Jacob and the other Jews that his brother, Abraham, has written to him of a prophet who has appeared among “the Saracens” “who is proclaiming the arrival of the Anointed One who is to come, the Christ.”⁵ Abraham then speaks in his letter of how he fled by boat from Caesarea after an incursion of the Saracens killed the imperial guard (*candidatus*). After arriving safely in Sykamina to the North, Abraham approaches a man well versed in Scripture to seek his verdict on this Saracen prophet. “He is an imposter (πλάνοϛ),”⁶ avers the learned man, “Do prophets come with sword and chariot (μετὰ ξίφους καὶ ἄρματος)?” Encouraged to investigate this Saracen

the prevalence of Greek as the quotidian language of Byzantine Jewry; see Joshua HOLO, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 4 ff.

5 V. DÉROCHE (ed. and trans.), “*Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*”, 208 f. (v.16), in: Gilbert DAGRON and Vincent DÉROCHE, “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient du VII^e siècle,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), 17–273.

6 Cf. 2 John 1:7.

prophet further, Abraham continues until he ends his quest. Concluding the letter to his brother Justus, Abraham writes of what he had discovered:

So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He also says that he has the keys of paradise (τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ παραδείσου), which is incredible.⁷

Through Abraham's letter, the *Doctrina* thus consoles its audience that no messianic hopes can be placed in this prophet claiming to possess the "keys to paradise." Despite its mordant dismissal of the Saracen prophet, the identity of the unnamed prophet is immediately recognizable to Islamicists (and many others besides). He must certainly be Muḥammad. Not only is the *Doctrina*'s polemic against "the Saracen prophet" early, it also seems to have been seminal.⁸ Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics continue to mock the idea of Muḥammad as a heavenly "key-bearer" (κλειδοῦχος) entrusted with the authority to admit his follower to paradise in the centuries to follow.⁹

Assuming, for the moment, that the conventional dates assigned to the *Doctrina Iacobi* by the majoritarian position of modern scholarship are sound, this testimony to Muḥammad is extraordinarily early, and perhaps, as claimed by Abraham in his letter, culls its impressions of the prophet from contemporary

⁷ *Doctrina Iacobi*, 208–210 (v.16).

⁸ The *Doctrina* was also translated into a number of languages at least from the 12th century onwards, including Arabic, Ethiopian, and Slavonic (see DÉROCHE, "Juifs et chrétiens," 51–55). A Syriac translation has also been postulated by DÉROCHE (*ibid.*, 50 f.); however, the evidence for this is really quite poor. A modified version of the prologue seems to appear in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* discussing the events of 616–617, but there the events described are anachronistically said to have transpired in the reign of Phocas (r. 602–610), rather than Heraclius (r. 610–641). The Syriac chronicler's narrative appears to refer to the riots and uprising of Jews in Antioch during the reign of Phocas in ca. 609 also mentioned in *Doctrina Iacobi*, 128–131 (i.40); see Michael WHITBY AND Mary WHITBY, tr., *Chronicon Paschale 284–628AD* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 150; Robert W. THOMASON, tr., *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 1: 106; and Roger SCOTT AND Cyril MANGO, tr., *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine History and Near Eastern History AD 284–013* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 426 f. (*sub anno* 6101 AM = 609–10 CE). The Zuqnīn chronicler's mention of "Jacob the Jew" may in fact be a corruption of the name of the well-known Syriac-speaking scholar Jacob of Edessa. See Amir HARRAK, tr., *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV, AD 488–775* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 141, and n. 4 thereto.

⁹ MONTET, "Un rituel d'abjuration des Musulmans dans l'église grecque," *RHR* 53, 1906, 151.14. On the date of the text, see HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 517 f., and A. RIGO, "Ritual of Abjuration," in D. Thomas (ed.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2009–2012), 1: 821 ff.

witnesses to the earliest phases of the Islamic conquests. DAGRON fixed the *terminus ante quem* for the text to 646/647 CE, and scholars writing on the *Doctrina Iacobi* subsequent to his study have been even bolder and placed its composition as early as July 634, i.e., in the immediate aftermath of the events Abraham's letter describes as having transpired in Palestine.¹⁰ DAGRON's conservative, early dating of the text has hitherto only been seriously challenged by Paul SPECK, who, rejecting the early seventh-century dating as well as the *Doctrian Iacobi*'s very unity as an integral text, dated the compilation of the *Doctrina* into a single text well into the eighth century CE.¹¹ However, SPECK's conclusions, and in particular the methods and assumptions behind them, have not been widely followed.¹²

The *Doctrina Iacobi* certainly offers an intriguing depiction of its Saracen prophet, even if modern historians find it either grossly distorted when set against the backdrop of the *sīra-maghāzī* and *ḥadīth* corpus or, at the very least, enigmatically at odds with said corpus. Yet, with that being said, the *Doctrina* offers us four touchstone details about the prophet that merit serious consideration: (1) his prophecy begins among the Saracens; (2) he endorses warfare and conquest as integral to his prophetic mission; (3) he affirms the eschatological return of the Anointed One, the Christ; and (4) he claims to possess the keys to paradise. Polemical as they may be, at least items 1 through 3 find as much confirmation as one could expect in the Qur'ān itself.¹³ The most intractable problem lies in the

10 HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 58 f., and DE PRÉMARE, *Fondations*, 148–150, 352 (§ 13). Cf. Patricia CRONE and Michael COOK, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 3; Averil CAMERON, *The Byzantines* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 182; Shaun O'SULLIVAN, "Anti-Jewish Polemic and Early Islam," in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arabic Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 51; and Stephen SHOEMAKER, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muḥammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2011), 21 ff.

11 P. SPECK, "Die *Doctrina Iacobi* nuper baptizati," in *idem*, *Varia VI. Beiträge zum Thema 'Byzantinische Feindseligkeit gegen die Juden' im frühen siebten Jahrhundert*, Poikila Byzantina 15 (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1997), 263–439.

12 See Andreas KÜLZER's review of SPECK's *Byzantinische Feindseligkeit* in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 91, 1998, 583–586; cf. Reinhard PUMMER, *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism*, TSAJ 92 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 356; HOLO, *Byzantine Jewry*, 33 ff.; Walter KAEGL, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 35 f.

13 The Qur'ān's sanction of religious warfare is well known and uncontroversial (e.g., see F. M. DONNER, *Muḥammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010, 82 ff.) and so too its designation of itself as coming in the Arabic tongue (*bi-lisān 'arabī mubīn*, Q AL-SHU'ARĀ' 26: 195) and as espousing the ancestral faith of Abraham's progeny (*millat abikum Ibrāhīm*, Q AL-ḤAJJ 22: 78). That the Qur'ān affirms the Second Coming of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (Ar. *al-masīḥ*) is more contested, although the affirmation of the Second

fourth item: the prophet's claim to possess the keys to paradise. This is a harder nut to crack.

In what follows, the keys to paradise motif as attached to Muḥammad by the *Doctrina* will be the foremost focus of our analysis. The significance of the “keys to paradise” motif, I argue, must be read against backdrop of two literary traditions: that of the Christian literature of late antiquity, especially in the Syriac-speaking tradition of the East, on the one hand, and that of a hitherto-neglected corner of the early Islamic tradition, in particular the early *ḥadīth* corpus, and its utilization of the “keys to heaven” motif (*mafāṭīḥ al-janna*), on the other. As will become clearer below, the end results of such an analysis are striking and, in my view, may potentially change modern scholarship's evaluation of the relationship between the *Doctrina* and the early Islamic tradition.

The Keys to Paradise and Apostolic Authority in Christian Late Antiquity

In the context of the *Doctrina Iacobi* and its unabashedly pro-Christian propaganda, the “keys to paradise” motif seems, at first blush, to conjure up imagery associated with Christian conceptions of apostolic authority.¹⁴ In late-antique literature, the imagery of possessing the keys to (the kingdom of) heaven is attached to the clerical leadership of the church and their stewardship of the authority conferred by Christ onto his disciples.¹⁵ The 4th-century, Syriac-speaking ascetic Aphrahat thus refers to Christian bishops as “keepers of the keys (*aḥīday qlīdē*),”¹⁶ since he regarded them as having inherited the legacy of the apostle Peter, to

Coming in the *ḥadīth* corpus from an early date is indubitable. DONNER, for example, has rejected the notion that the Qur'ānic term *al-masīḥ* signals anything approaching a type of Qur'ānic messianism. See F. M. DONNER, “La question du messianisme dans l'islam primitif,” *REMMM* 91–94 (2000), 21. However, the early attestations to the alternative readings of Q AL-ZUKHRUF 43:61, which makes Jesus “a sign (*'alam*) of the Hour” rather than merely “knowledge (*'ilm*) of the Hour” constitute, in my view, rather definitive evidence to contrary. See 'Abd al-Laṭīf AL-KHAṬĪB, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 9 vols. (Damascus: Dār Sa'd al-Dīn, 2002), 8: 392 f.

¹⁴ First noted by SPECK, 406.

¹⁵ See esp. Robert MURRAY, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study of Early Syriac Tradition*, rev. ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 182–187, 217 f., a work from which the following discussion has benefited considerably.

¹⁶ E.g., *Dem.* xix, 612.23, 680.7–8 in J. PARISOT, ed. and tr., *Patrologia Syriaca, pars prima* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Socii, 1894).

whom Jesus declared, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and what you bind on earth will be bound on heaven, and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19, NRSV) – a view widely espoused in the patristic literature, whether in the East or the West.¹⁷ The significance of Peter as the “key-bearer” who grants humanity access to the kingdom of heaven is all the more intelligible given that Jesus of Nazareth reproaches the Pharisees for locking people out of the kingdom of heaven later on in Mt 23:13.¹⁸ Invoking Jesus’s rebuke of the Pharisees, Aphrahat likewise mobilizes this gospel passage in his admonition to ecclesiastics who risk losing their flocks to the ways of perdition:

“Let the keepers of the keys (*aḥīdē aqlīdē*) open to those who enter, that the gate of the kingdom (*traʿ malkūtā*) may not be shut in their face.”¹⁹

The Petrine metaphor equating apostolic authority with carrying “the keys of (the kingdom of) heaven” is extraordinarily common and well known in patristic writings and particularly in Palestine. Hence, one of the region’s most revered church fathers, Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), refers to Peter in his *Catechesis* as he who “carries the keys of heaven” (τὰς κλεῖς τῶν οὐρανῶν) (*Cat.* vi.15) and elsewhere names the apostle the “key-bearer” (κλειδοῦχος) (*Cat.* xvii.27).²⁰ The later title of “key-bearer” (Gk. *kleidoûchos*) is notably the same title applied to Muḥammad in the counterfactual parodies of his prophecy characteristic of Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics. Cyril’s depiction of Peter as the apostle entrusted with the keys of heaven is even more intriguing for our purposes, as fragments of his *Catechesis* translated into Christian Palestinian Aramaic survive from ca. 5th to 7th centuries CE. In the Christian Aramaic translation, the passages where Cyril speaks of Peter as one who “carries the keys of heaven” is rendered as *š.y.d m.p.t.ḥ.w.h.y d-š.w.m.ā.y.ā*, translating the Greek *kleís* with the Aramaic cognate of the Arabic word for key (*miftāḥ*) so central to the motif in the Islamic literature.²¹

¹⁷ W. HAUNERLAND, “Schlüsselgewalt,” in W. KASPER (ed.), *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, 10 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001), 9: 167–168.

¹⁸ Also in Gos. Thom. 39; cf. Peter SCHÄFER, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009), 166 n. 66.

¹⁹ *Dem.* xiv, 612.23–25; the above English translation, slightly modified, is taken from MURRAY, *Church and Kingdom*, 185.

²⁰ W. C. REISCHL and J. RUPP, *Cyrilli Hierosolymarum archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia*, 2 vols (repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1976), 1: 176 and 2: 282, respectively.

²¹ C. MÜLLER-KESSLER and M. SOKOLOFF (eds.), *A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic V: The Catechism of Cyril of Jerusalem in the Christian Palestinian Aramaic Version* (Groningen: STYX, 1999), 61b.19. This is closer to the regional, Aramaic version of Mt 16:19 where “keys to the kingdom of heaven” is rendered as ܩܠܝܕܘܚܘܨܐܘܬܐܘܪܐܢܐ, as opposed to the Syriac render-

The “keys to (the kingdom of) heaven” motif in Christian literature does not remain merely a metaphor for apostolic authority either. Its role as a metaphor for the efficacy of Christian teaching to gain believers admittance into God’s kingdom virtually attained the status of a banality in Christian literature by 7th century CE. Thus, one Syriac-speaking divine declares in a homily that Christ “gave authority over his kingdom (*šaleṭ ‘al malkūteh*) [to the apostles], and by their hands gave the keys of heaven (*qlidē da-šmyy*) to humankind.”²² Throughout his hymns, Ephrem Syrus (d. 373 CE) repeatedly employs keys as a central, animating metaphor in the luscious imagery for which his writings are deservedly revered. Ephrem is keen in particular to portray the cross itself as the “key to paradise” that unlocked the gates of heaven for believers, stating:²³

He knows the multitude of his treasure-stores
 The keys to his treasure-stores He has placed in our hands
 He made his cross our treasure-keeper
 by which the gates of Paradise (*tar‘ē d-pardaysā*) are opened to us
 as Adam opened the gates of Gehenna

Ephrem expands these themes even further in a hymn on paradise, writing:²⁴

ing ܟܘܠܝܢ ܟܘܠܝܢܝܢ ܟܘܠܝܢܝܢ. See Agnes S. SMITH and Margaret D. GIBSON, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1899), 287.19. That this depiction of Peter as the apostle to whom the “keys of heaven” had been entrusted was current and widespread in 7th-century Palestine is further confirmed by a memorandum composed by Stephen of Dora, a papal legate and inveterately anti-Monothelite disciple of Sophronius of Jerusalem, for the Lateran council of 649. See J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collection*, 54 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960–1961), 10: 893D. Cf. Andrew J. EKONOMOU, *Byzantine Roman and the Greek Popes: Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, AD 590–752* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 113 f., 131–133, and Milka LEVY-RUBIN, “The Role of the Judaeae Desert Monasteries in the Monothelite Controversy in Seventh-Century Palestine,” in Joseph PATRICH (ed.), *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 293.

²² M. KMSKO, “Analecta Syriaca e codicibus Musei Britannici excerpta,” *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903), 406. Whether this is the Marutha of Maypherqaṭ (fl. 4th/5th century) or the Marutha of Tagrit (d. 649) who speaks in this homily is uncertain; see Sebastian BROCK’s comments in S. BROCK, A. BUTTS, G. KIRAZ, and L. VAN ROMPAY (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2011), 274a.

²³ E. BECK (ed.), *Hymnen de Navitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186, *scr. syri* 82 (Leuven: Peeters, 1959), 183–184 (*Epiph.* x.16).

²⁴ Sebastian BROCK, trans., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns of Paradise* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 119; E. BECK (ed.), *Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum* CSCO 174, *scr. syri* 78 (Leuven: Peeters, 1957), 25 (*Parad.* VII.1, 3–7).

..., and His treasure house is not so paltry
 that we should doubt His promise;
 He has surrendered His own Son for us
 so that we might believe in Him;
 His body is with us,
 His assurance is with us,
 He came and gave us his keys,
 since it is for us that His treasures lie in waiting
 RESPONSE: Blessed is He who, with his keys,
 has opened up the Garden of Life (*gannt d-ayy*).

The Keys to Paradise in Late Antique and Early Islamic Eschatology

Throughout the texts in which late-antique Christian authors mobilize the “keys to heaven” motif, the emphasis consistently falls either on the role of the apostles and their successors as the stewards entrusted with the salvific teachings of Jesus of Nazareth or on the redeeming sacrifice of the cross that grants humankind access to the eternal felicity of the righteous. Yet, the wording of the *Doctrina Iacobi* gives us reason to pause to introduce a precise distinction of potential consequence: the *Doctrina Iacobi* speaks not of the Saracen prophet claiming to possess “the keys to heaven” (Gk. *ouranós*), as is virtually ubiquitous in the Christian tradition, but rather of the “keys to paradise” (Gk. *parádeisos*). True, it is a small difference, but it also a difference that potentially makes all the difference.

The cosmological notion of humankind being blocked from accessing paradise by gates, and thus the existence of a heavenly gatekeeper, is quite an ancient one and by no means exclusive to Jewish, Christian, or Muslim sacred cosmology.²⁵ Indeed, where “the keys to heaven” as opposed to “the keys of *paradise*” motif appears first in the Islamic tradition is in the Qur’ān itself. According to the Qur’ān, however, it is God alone who possesses “the keys to the Heavens and Earth” (*maqālīd al-samawāt wal-arḍ*) (Q AL-ZUMAR 39:63, AL-SHŪRĀ 42:12). In the Qur’ān, the keys to the Heavens and Earth are cosmological and do not assume an explicitly eschatological function – rather the emphasis falls on God’s unri-

²⁵ Gerhard KITTEL (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., trans. and ed. G. W. BROMILEY (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 3: 744–753, s.v. κλείς (Joachim JEREMIAS).

valed sovereignty over the cosmos as its sole Creator. Yet, the Qurʾān does speak of the *doors* of heaven in a strikingly eschatological vein.²⁶ Most illustrative of this is the sole verse in which both paradise (*al-janna*) and heaven (*al-samāʾ*) are mentioned together: “Truly, as for those who disbelieve and spurn our signs, the doors of heaven will not be opened for them nor will they enter Paradise (*lā tufattaḥu lahum abwābu l-samāʾi wa-lā yadkhulūna l-jannata*) until the camel passes through the eye of a needle” (Q AL-AʾRĀF 7:40). If a distinction is to be drawn between heaven (*al-samāʾ*) and paradise (*al-janna*) in Qurʾānic cosmology, paradise appears to be the felicitous abode that lies beyond the sky-canopy of the heavens above the Earth.²⁷

²⁶ Thus, “if we were to open for them a gate in heaven and they continuously ascended through it (*law fataḥnā ʿalayhim bāban mina l-samāʾi fa-zallū fihi yaʿrajūna*)...” (Q AL-ḤĪJR 15:16) and “heaven has opened wide and become as gates (*wa-futiḥati l-samāʾu fa-kānat abwāban*)” (Q AL-NABĀ 78:19). Cf. Angelika NEUWIRTH, *Der Koran, I: Frühmekkanische Suren* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011), 466–467.

²⁷ A similar impression is left by the earliest Muslim epitaphs mentioning the opening of “the gates of heaven” (*abwāb al-samāʾ*) to believers; see Werner DIEM and Marco SCHÖLLER, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 1: 151 f. Cf. Christian LANGE, *The Discovery of Paradise in Islam: The Here and Hereafter in Islamic Traditions* (Utrecht: Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen Universiteit Utrecht, 2012), 9–11. The keys to the heavens’ gates (rather than paradise as such) also feature in the popular, albeit notorious, *ḥadīth*-tract known as *Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh b. Salām li-l-Nabī*, wherein the Medinan Jewish convert, ʿAbdallāh b. Salām, tests the Prophet’s knowledge in an extended series of queries. At one point in the *Masāʾil*, ʿAbdallāh b. Salām asks the Prophet to inform him whether or not the heavens (*al-samāwāt*) have gates. Muḥammad then affirms that the heavens do indeed have gates, golden and sealed with light, and that the key to opening them is the greatest name of God (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*). See Sirāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Wardī (d. 861/1457), *Kharīdat al-ʿajāʾib wa-farīdat al-gharāʾib*, ed. Anwar Muḥammad AL-ZANĀTĪ (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2007), 400. The text of the *Masāʾil* likely originated in Karrāmiyya circles prior to the middle of the 3rd/9th century, as can be inferred from the views it espouses on the sufficiency of faith (*īmān*) for salvation and on God’s throne (*ʿarsh*). In an exposé written on the text, the Shāfiʿī ḥadīth-scholar Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) attributes the forgery of the text to the reviled *muḥaddith* of Herat, Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Jūybārī, who allegedly forged reams of prophetic *ḥadīth* for the name-sake and founder of the Karrāmiyya, Ibn Karrām (d. 251/865). See Bayhaqī’s *Ḥadīth Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Jūybārī fī Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh b. Salām*, in: Abū ʿUbayda Mashūr b. Ḥasan ĀL SALMĀN, ed., *Majmūʿa ajzāʾ ḥadīthiyya: al-Majmūʿa al-thāniya* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001), 206–242, and cf. *Elr*, art. “Karrāmiyya” (A. ZYSOW). On the subsequent popularity of the text in the West and the East, see G. F. PIJPER, *Het Boek der duizend Vragen* (Leiden: Brill, 1924); Óscar DE LA CRUZ PALMA and Cándida FERRERO HERNÁNDEZ, “Liber de doctrina Mahumet,” in David Thomas and Alex Mallet (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 3 (1050–1200)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 503–507; and Ronit RICCI, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Returning to the *Doctrina Iacobi* in light of the data examined above, I believe it is less likely that in referring to the Saracen prophet as claiming to possess “the keys of *paradise*” that the *Doctrina Iacobi* offers us some mere Petrine parody of its so-called false prophet. In referring to the keys to paradise rather than the keys to heaven, the emphasis strikes me as being purely eschatological. That is, we are likely dealing here with real data about early Muslim belief rather than a Petrine parody thereof, and this despite the deformations introduced through the tract’s polemical lens.²⁸

That the keys to paradise can be justifiably distinguished from the keys to the kingdom of heaven can also be inferred from the Syriac tradition. Ephrem notably also mobilizes the “keys to *paradise*” (Syr. [a]qlīdē d-pardaysā) motif quite frequently, and in his writings, the motif appears not as an apostolic metaphor but rather as an eschatological one. Hence, in a hymn pondering the fate of the Good Thief crucified alongside Christ (see Lk. 24:43), Ephrem writes:²⁹

I beheld a dwelling there
and a tabernacle of light,
a voice proclaiming
“Blessed is the Thief
who has freely received
the keys to paradise (qlīdē d-pardaysā)!”

In the above passage, the Good Thief’s “keys to paradise” are clearly Christ’s promise upon the cross that the penitent thief will be with him in Paradise and not, as seen above, any promise or conference of apostolic authority.³⁰ Hence, the *Doctrina*, by casting the Saracen prophet as making claims to the keys of para-

²⁸ Pace CRONE and COOK who write, “the keys of the *Doctrina* are, so to speak, Christianised rather than Hagarised” (*Hagarism*, 203 n. 16).

²⁹ BROCK, trans., *Hymns on Paradise*, 131–132; BECK (ed.), *Hymnen de Paradiso*, 33 (*Parad.* VIII.2).

³⁰ The “keys to paradise” theme appears in again in a hymn by Ephrem on the church featuring Enoch. There he writes (*Ecclesia* L.6):

In Enoch Adam saw
a prefiguring of our Savior (tūpseh d-pārūqan)
who opened and granted entrance to
a symbol of the Gardner
by whom He concealed Mercy [bearing]
the key to Paradise (aqīdēh d-pardaysā)

See E. BECK (ed.), *Hymnen de Ecclesia*, CSCO 198, scr. syri 84 (Leuven: Peeters, 1960), 129. Here, again, the keys to paradise are spoken of in an eschatological, rather than apostolic, vein.

dise, attributes to him *mutatis mutandis* not so much claims to apostolic authority over the Kingdom of Heaven but, rather, a promise to his followers of eschatological salvation.

The Keys to Paradise in Early Islamic Kerygma

Whereas “the keys to the heavens and earth” are the exclusive possession of the Divinity in the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth* corpus does frequently claim that Muḥammad as a prophet possesses “the keys to paradise” (*mafātīḥ/maqālīd al-janna*), yet in the latter corpus, “the keys of paradise” are conceived of in multifarious terms. In canonical *ḥadīth*, the keys to paradise are either said to be ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) or the confession (*al-shahāda*) that there is no god but God.³¹ One particularly fascinating tradition recorded by Ibn Ishāq (d. 768) has the semi-legendary Jewish convert Ka’b al-Aḥbār declare that:

[The Prophet] had been given the keys, that by him God may make the blind see, deaf ears hear, and stammering tongues speak that they may testify that there is no god but God (*wa-u’ṭiya l-mafātīḥu li-yabaṣṣira llāhu bihī a’yunan ‘ūran wa-yusammi’a bihī ādhānan waqran wa-yuqīma bihī alsunan mu’wajjatan ḥattā tashhada allā ilāha illā llāhu*).³²

Curiously, an apparently later, historicizing adaptation of this *ḥadīth* trope also appears in a tradition about a Jewish-Muslim polemical exchange during the lifetime of Muḥammad. According to this account, when sent by Muḥammad to the Yemeni town of al-Janad in Rajab 9 AH/October 630 CE, the prophet’s companion Mu’ādh b. Jabal successfully convinces the Jews of Kinda resident there to convert *en masse*. Mu’ādh only achieves this feat after the Jews interrogate him about the keys of paradise. Mu’ādh answers the Jews as the Prophet had previously instructed him to and according to the well-known *ḥadīth*: the keys to paradise, Mu’ādh proclaims, are “to bear witness that there is no god but God.”³³

31 See A. J. WENSINCK, *e. a.*, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, 8 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1936–1988), 5: 55a–56b.

32 Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *K. al-Siyar wa’l-maghāzī li-Muḥammad ibn Ishāq*, ed. Suhayl ZAKKĀR (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 141 f.; cited in Uri RUBIN, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton: Darwin, 1995), 30.

33 Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Janadī (d. 1332), *al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-‘ulamā’ wa’l-mulūk*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn AL-AKWA’ AL-ḤIRWĀLĪ (Sanaa: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1993–1995), 1: 81 f.; cited in Michael LECKER, “Judaism among Kinda and the Ridda of Kinda,” *JAOS* 115, 1995, 638 f., and idem, “The Jewish Reaction to the Islamic Conquests,” in Volkhard KRECH and Marion

Yet, such vanilla maxims hardly seem likely to be the teaching inspiring the sardonic polemic of the *Doctrina Iacobi*. For this reason, CRONE and COOK dismissed long ago the appearance of the “keys to paradise” motif as the *shahāda* and ritual prayer in the *ḥadīth* corpus as resulting from a process whereby the militancy castigated in the *Doctrina Iacobi* had been “sublimated into a harmless metaphor.”³⁴ This appraisal strikes at the heart of the disjuncture between these *ḥadīth* and the polemics one encounters in the *Doctrina*.

In Christian sources, the polemics against Muḥammad’s promises of paradise have a harder edge. Thus does the converted Justus ponder martyrdom at the hands of Jews and Saracens whom he pledges to defy even if they threaten to cut him into pieces.³⁵ In this vein, too, Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818) writes that Muḥammad “taught his subjects that he who kills an enemy or is killed by an enemy goes to paradise.”³⁶

Hence, the “keys to paradise” motif appears in two further contexts that should also be brought to bear on the *Doctrina Iacobi*’s depiction of its Saracen prophet and add nuance to the hitherto Christian-dominated discussion of the motif. The first is the association of the motif with the Umayyads in early Muslim historiography, and the second is the prominence of the motif in Islamic prophetic eschatology.

In the *Doctrina Iacobi*, the Saracen prophet is scorned for coming armed with “sword and chariot,” shedding blood, and for claiming to possess the keys to paradise, but these are separate items that should not necessarily be collapsed into one another and thus conflated as one and the same. Still, the explicit criticism of the Saracens’ prophet for embracing martial means to expand his authority inevitably colors how one reads the Palestinian Jew Abraham’s dismissive mention of the keys to paradise. Could the *Doctrina Iacobi*, therefore, offer an early testimony to the doctrine of *jihād* procuring believers access to paradise?

The data for Umayyad conquest propaganda lend this interpretation some credence. In an account preserved by Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfi (wr. mid-9th century CE), for instance, the Umayyad prince Marwān b. Muḥammad (later, the caliph Marwān II “al-Ḥimār”, r. 744–750) spurs on his soldiers while campaigning against the Khazars by declaring, “Know that the keys of paradise have come to

STEINICKE (eds.), *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 177 f.

³⁴ *Hagarism*, 4.

³⁵ *Doctrina Iacobi*, 212–213 (v.17). Note that the Jews and Saracens are here seen to be in cahoots.

³⁶ ROGER SCOTT and CYRIL MANGO, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 465; cf. ROBERT HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2011), 87–90.

you, and yours is the bountiful reward God has promised” (*i‘lamū annahu qad atatkum mafātīḥu l-jannati wa-lakum mā wa‘adakumu llāhu min jazāli thawābīhi*).³⁷

Such a coupling of the pietistic militancy animating Umayyad conquest ideology with the “keys of paradise” motif occurs again in a dictum attributed to the Umayyad general Yazīd b. Shajara, who famously exhorted his soldiers: “Verily, swords are the keys to paradise” (*inna l-suyūfa mafātīḥu l-jannati*). An Arab notable of the Rahā’ clan who settled first in Kūfa during the early conquests, Yazīd b. Shajara thereafter established his military fame as a sea commander for the Umayyad navy under Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 661–680). While not at sea, the indefatigable Yazīd spent his winters campaigning on land against the Byzantines, although, indeed, it was while fighting at sea that he would meet his end in 58 AH/679 CE.³⁸ His loyalty to Mu‘āwiya was of legendary repute, as he headed the *ḥajj* caravan that nearly entered into open conflict with the rival caravan sent by ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib from Kūfa in 39/660.³⁹ Yet, the *ḥadīth*-folk primarily remembered him as a silver-tongued orator who encouraged his soldiers to fight their foes on the battlefield with unyielding religious conviction rather than as a sanguine partisan of the Umayyads. Hence, the traditionist Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. c. 722) narrates the following account:⁴⁰

Mujāhid related from Yazīd b. Shajara, a man whose deeds confirmed the truth of his words, saying: Yazīd would exhort us as follows (*kāna yakhtubunā*):

“Recall the grace that God has bestowed upon you (pl.) and how beautiful the mark of his grace is upon you! If only you could see what I see among the dark- and fair-skinned, and what lies among the steeds of war (*law tarawna mā arā min akhḍar wa-aṣfar wa-fī l-riḥāl mā fihā*)!”

And he would say,⁴¹ “When the ranks of men are aligned, whether for battle or in prayer, the gates of heaven open as do the doors of paradise and hellfire (*futiḥat abwābu l-samā‘i wa-abwābu l-jannati wa-abwābu l-nār*). The houris (*ḥūr al-‘in*) are then adorned and look

37 Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, 8 vols., ed. ‘Alī SHĪRĪ (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā’, 1991), 8: 256.

38 Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), *Tārīkh al-rusul wa l-mulūk*, ser. I–III, eds. M. J. DE GOEJE *e.a.* (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), 2: 2, 173, 181; cf. Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ, *K. al-Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Suhayl ZAKKĀR (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993), 137, and Ibn Sa‘d, *K. al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 7: 446. Cf. the extensive biography given to him in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 80 vols., ed. ‘Umar b. Gharāma AL-‘AMRAWĪ (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995–2000), 65: 220–233.

39 Ibn A‘tham, *Futūḥ*, 4: 220–224; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 2, ed. Wilferd MADELUNG (Beirut: Klaus Schwarz, 2003), 406 ff.

40 ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 827), *al-Muṣannaf*, 10 vols., ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān AL-A‘ZAMĪ (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1970–1972), 5: 256–258.

41 Reading «كان يقول» for «كان يقال»; cf. al-Ṭabarānī (d. 971), *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 25 vols., ed. Ḥamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd AL-SALAFĪ (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiya, 1983²), 22: 246–244, and al-Hannād ibn

to see: if a man charges, they say, ‘O Lord, grant him victory!’ But if he flees, they say, ‘O Lord, pardon him!’ So charge the enemy until you exhaust their resolve (*fa-nhakū wujūh al-qawm*), may my father and mother be your ransom! Do not dishonor the houris! The first drop of a man’s blood grants him atonement with God for all that he has done. Two houris shall descend to meet him, wipe the dust of the earth from his face, and say, ‘Your time has come.’ ‘Your time too has come,’ he shall reply. Then he will be wrapped in a hundred flowing coats (*mi’at ḥulla*) woven not from the fabric of the sons of Adam but from the plants of paradise (*al-janna*). Even if the cloth were to be placed between two fingers, space would remain.”

And he also would say, “I have been told that swords are the keys to paradise” (*unbi’ tu anna ’l-suyūf mafātiḥu ’l-janna*)....

Yazīd’s dictum that “swords are the keys to paradise” circulated independently as a stand-alone, pious maxim;⁴² it is even upgraded to a prophetic *ḥadīth* in some collections, albeit more rarely.⁴³ In terms of sheer content, it is particularly striking how in Yazīd’s sermon the believers’ “swords” switch places with the “cross” of Ephrem’s Savior as the key to unlocking the celestial gates to paradise.

A dictum similar to that of Yazīd appears in Shi’ite *ḥadīth*, too; however, in the Shi’ite collections, the saying is attributed directly to the Prophet rather than an illustrious Umayyad general, as would be in keeping with their sectarian scruples. Thus, the sixth imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) reports the following on the authority of his ancestors:⁴⁴

The Messenger of God said, “All that is good lies in the sword and under the sword’s shadow, for people shall not rise save by the sword and swords are the keys to Paradise and Hellfire” (*al-khayru fī l-sayfi wa-taḥta ḥilli l-sayfi wa-lā yuqimu l-nāsa illā l-sayfu wal-suyūfi maqāliḍi l-jannati wa l-nāri*).

al-Sārī al-Kūfī (d. c. 857–858), *K. al-Zuhd*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbār AL-FARYAWĀ’Ī (Kuwait: Dār al-Khulafā’ li-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 1985), 123–124.

42 See, e.g., Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1038), *Ṣifat al-janna* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1989), 70. Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176), for instance, records three versions of the sermon quoted above without the “keys to paradise” motif (*Dimashq*, 65: 230–232).

43 Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 849), *al-Muṣannaf fī l-aḥādīth wa l-athār*, 16 vols., eds. Ḥamad b. ‘Abdallāh AL-JUM’A, and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm AL-LAḤĪDĀN (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2004), 7:10; al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī (d. 1012), *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 4 vols., ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘AṬĀ’ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya), 3: 563.

44 Muḥammad b. Ya’qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 941), *al-Kāfī*, 8 vols., ed. ‘Alī Akbar AL-GHAFFĀRĪ (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyya, 1968–1971), 5: 2; cf. Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq (d. c. 991), *Thawāb al-a’māl* (Najaf: al-Ḥaydariyya, 1972), 190, and Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), *Tahdhib al-aḥkām*, 10 vols., ed. Ḥasan al-Mūsawī AL-KHARSĀN (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyya, 1958–1962), 6: 122.

The imagery in this Shi‘ite *ḥadīth* resonates quite well with ‘Alī’s famous dictum, “Verily, jihad is one of the gates to paradise (*inna l-jihāda bābun min abwāb al-janna*),”⁴⁵ but it also seems to fuse the dictum of Yazīd b. Shajara with the famous canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet exhorts his followers before battle that, “the gates of heaven are under the shadow of swords” (*inna abwāba l-jannati taḥta ḡilāli l-suyūf*).⁴⁶

In quite a different vein, the association of the motif with the Umayyads can be seen in an early narrative about the caliph ‘Uthmān (r. 644–656) and his gathering together of the Prophet’s companions for counsel when signs emerge of an impending civil war (*fitna*) looming just over the horizon. Defying ‘Uthmān and censuring the favoritism shown during his caliphate to his clansmen from the Banū Umayya, ‘Ammār b. Yāsar – who typically acts as a spokesman for pro-‘Alid partisans in such narrations – addresses those gathered in caliph’s company, saying, “I ask you all and abjure you by God: Do you not recognize that the Messenger of God (ṣ) gave authority to (*kāna yu’thiru*) the Quraysh above all others, and gave authority to the Banū Hāshim over the rest of the Quraysh?” When his audience remains silent, ‘Uthmān defiantly retorts:

Indeed, were the keys to paradise in my very hand, I would hand them over to the Banū Umayya until the last of their number entered; by God I would give [the keys] to them and appoint them in authority just to spite any who object! (*law anna mafātīḥa l-jannati fi yadī la-a‘ṭaytuhā banī umayyata ḥattā yadkhuḷū min ‘indī ākhirihim wa llāhi la-u‘ṭiniyannahum wa-la-asta‘milannahum ‘alā raghmi anfi man raghima*)⁴⁷

The subtext of the above account strikes me as an anti-‘Uthmānī attack on Umayyad legitimist claims: the Umayyads’ founding caliph neither had the “keys to paradise” nor are they ‘Uthmān’s to give, and the context brings attention to the ineptitude of ‘Uthmān’s fraught caliphate. An absence of genuine legitimacy to lead Muḥammad’s *umma* is marked out by the fact that ‘Uthmān can only wish to have the type of eschatological authority that possession of the keys to paradise confers. The implications of this account are all the more intriguing given Shi‘ite assertions that the head of the Umayyads’ rival clan among the Quraysh,

⁴⁵ Abū l-‘Abbās al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, 4 vols., eds. Muḥammad Abū ‘l-Faḍl IBRĀHĪM and al-Sayyid SHAḤĀTA (Cairo: Naḥḍat Miṣr, 1957), 1: 20; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, 20 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl IBRĀHĪM (repr. Beirut: Dār al-Sāqiya lil-‘Ulūm, 2001), 2: 60 (*khuṭba* 27)

⁴⁶ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 875), *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2 vols. (Vaduz: Jam‘iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2001), 2: 833 (no. 5025, *bāb al-imāra*); cf. Wensinck, *Conc.*, 4: 79b.

⁴⁷ ‘Umar b. Shabba al-Numayrī (d. 876), *Tārīkh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, 4 vols., ed. Fuḥaym Muḥammad SHALTŪT (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Iṣfahānī, 1973), 3: 1099.

the Banū Hāshim – the Prophet’s son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – had received the keys to paradise from the Prophet himself (see below).

Whereas the swords-as-keys traditions make a metonymy out of the sword and thus emphasize the salvation promised by sacred struggle in the path of God (*al-jihād fī sabīl Allāh*), other traditions use the “keys to paradise” motif to highlight Muḥammad’s prophetic authority not only in this life but also in the world to come. In one such eschatological *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad thus declares:

I will be the first to exit the grave when they are resurrected; I will be their leader once they arrive; I will address them as they hearken; I will be their mediator when they are imprisoned; and I will bring good-tidings when they are struck dumb with fear. On that day the banner of nobility, the keys of paradise, and the banner of praise shall be in my hands (*liwā’u l-karāmati wa-mafātīḥu l-jannati wa-liwā’u l-ḥamdi yawma’idhin fī-yadayya*).⁴⁸

A similar permutation of this proclamation features at the end of a grand heavenly ascension narrative preserved in the Qur’ān commentary of al-Tha’labī (d. 1035), suggesting that these powers were granted to Muḥammad only after God had translated him to Paradise during his Night Journey.⁴⁹ The theme emerges prominently in early Shi’ite literature, too, where in typical Shi’ite fashion ‘Alī is said to aid Muḥammad in his prophetic task of carrying the keys to paradise.⁵⁰ In one early Shi’ite ascension narrative, ‘Alī accompanies Muḥammad on his heavenly journey, and when Riḍwān, the guardian of paradise, hands the keys to Para-

48 Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Rawwās QAL’AJĪ and ‘Abd al-Barr ‘ABBĀS (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā’is, 1986), 1: 64. Cf. al-Dārimī (d. 869), *al-Sunan*, 4 vols., ed. Ḥusayn S. A. AL-DARĀNĪ (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2000), 1; 196; Ibn Abī Ya’lā al-Mawṣilī (d. 918), *al-Mu’jam*, ed., Ḥusayn Salīm ASAD (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’mūn, 1989), 206 (no. 160); Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa wa-ma’rifat aḥwāl ṣāḥib al-sharī’a*, 7 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Mu’ṭī QAL’AJĪ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1985), 5:484. This *ḥadīth* was transmitted with the *mafātīḥ al-janna* motif omitted, too; see, e.g., Tirmidhī (d. 892), *al-Sunan*, 2 vols. (Vaduz: Jam’iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2001), 2: 798, 925 f.

49 *al-Kashf wa l-bayān*, 10 vols., ed. Abū Muḥammad b. ‘ĀSHŪR (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2002), 6: 67.

50 Shaykh al-Ṭā’ifa al-Tūsī (d. 1067), *al-Amālī* (Qom: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1993), 209. Cf. Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar AL-GHAFFĀRĪ (Qom: Markaz al-Manshūrāt al-Islāmiyya, 1943), 415; Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 1192), *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, 3 vols., ed. Muḥammad Kāẓim AL-KUTUBĪ (Najaf: al-Ḥaydariyya, 1956), 3: 55; Shadhān b. Jibra’īl (d. c. 1260), *al-Fadā’il* (Najaf: al-Ḥaydariyya, 1962), 121. The tradition where Muḥammad calls ‘Alī “my aid in carrying the keys of paradise (*‘awn li fī ḥaml mafātīḥ al-janna*)” appears in Sunni sources after such traditions are appropriated by the *manāqib al-ṣāḥāba* genre; e.g., Ibn Asākir, *Dimashq*, 42: 331. Cf. also 3 Enoch 48(C): 3, and the variant “‘awnī ‘alā mafātīḥ khazā’in raḥmat rabbi” in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dimashq*, 42: 330, and Abu Nu’aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1038), *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānji), 1: 66.

dise (*mafātīḥ al-janna*) to Muḥammad and subsequently the angelic guardian of Hell hands him the keys to Hellfire (*maqālid al-nār*), the prophet proceeds to then hand both sets of keys to ‘Alī.⁵¹

Eschatological traditions of this sort are often dismissed out of hand as ‘Abbāsīd-era confections produced in response to the expansion of Muḥammad’s super-human dimensions in later Islamic prophetology. Yet, the eschatological centrality of Muḥammad as his community’s prophet enjoys strong attestations from a remarkably early date. The most compelling evidence for such a robust, eschatological vision of Muḥammad comes from an Umayyad-era epitaph composed for a certain ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. al-Ḥārith b. al-Ḥakam that was discovered in 1886 at Khirbat Nitil and that dates prior to 100 AH/718 CE. This exceptional epitaph invokes God’s forgiveness for ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and then proceeds to ask God “to lea[d him to] the Basin of Muḥamamd” (*wa-aw[ri]dhu] ḥawḍ Muḥammad*).⁵² The basin (*ḥawḍ*) mentioned in this epitaph is undoubtedly the same of the *ḥadīth* corpus: a mammoth basin in Paradise from which Muḥammad will only allow his true followers to drink and, thus, gain admittance to paradise.⁵³ Curiously, among the other rare texts where an eschatological basin features prominently, the keys to paradise feature too. In 3 Baruch 11:2–5, the archangel Michael is not merely the keeper of the celestial basin (φιάλη) of paradise, he is the “key-bearer” (κλειδοῦχος) for the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁴ Like Muḥammad’s famous basin (*ḥawḍ*) in paradise, could the image of him as a celestial key-bearer date from the first century AH as well?

51 Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār (d. c. 902), *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt fi faḍā’il Āl Muḥammad*, ed. Muḥsin KŪCHABĀGHĪ (Qom: Maktabat Āyatallāh al-‘Uzmā al-Mar’ashī, 1983), 417f. Cf. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *al-Taḥfīr*, 2 vols., ed. Hāshim al-Rasūlī AL-MAḤALLĀTĪ (Tehran: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya al-Islāmiyya, 1961), 2: 326; Ibn Bābūyah al-Ṣadūq, *Ma’ānī al-akḥbār*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar AL-GHAFFĀRĪ (Tehran: Intashārāt-e Islāmī, 1959), 117; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, 2: 9–11. Cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1448), *Lisān al-mizān*, 10 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ ABŪ GHADDA (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 2002), 6: 36.

52 DIEM and SCHÖLLER, 1: 168–170.

53 Ibid.; cf. WENSINCK, *Conc.*, 1: 537f. The Shi’ites placed the basin in this world (*al-dunyā*) rather than the Hereafter (*al-ākhirā*). See Mohammad Baqer ANSARI (ed.), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, 3 vols. (Qom: Dalīl-e Mā, 2005), 2: 562.

54 Alexander KULIK, *3 Baruch: Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2010), 304ff. These keys are described as the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” and, therefore, unlikely to be the same as temple keys surrendered to heaven by the priests and Jeremiah mentioned in 2 Baruch 10:18 and 4 Baruch 4:3.

Conclusion: A new Evaluation of the *Doctrina Iacobi*

Returning for the last time to the *Doctrina Iacobi* and “the keys of paradise” its Saracen prophet claims to possess, an array of interpretative possibilities are spread out before us: Is the Saracen prophet making a pseudo-Petrine claim to apostolic authority by proclaiming that his teachings offer the keys to paradise? Or, is the Saracen prophet endorsing conquest in the name of his religion and promising that any martial efforts on his behalf will gain his fighting faithful passage into paradise? Or, finally, does this Saracen prophet lay claim to the eschatological authority to permit or deny entry to paradise any person he so wills in a manner that does not necessarily entail a martial component?

The Islamic *ḥadīth* corpus renders all these options plausible, or even a combination thereof. In my view, there is no certain way to distill the clear waters of historicity from the muddy rivers of these literary tropes. Yet what also tempers my pessimism in this regard is how reading the *Doctrina Iacobi* in light of the data discussed above presents us with two, rather starkly opposing, ways to approach its depiction of the “Saracen prophet.”

One possibility is that, as CRONE and COOK have noted, “we have in the *Doctrina Iacobi* a stratum of belief older than the Islamic tradition itself.”⁵⁵ This position means that the *Doctrina Iacobi*’s portrait of the Saracen prophet must be taken seriously, even the *Doctrina*’s assertion that the Saracen prophet claimed to possess the keys to paradise. Hence, the *Doctrina*’s portrait of Muḥammad should not be jettisoned as a merely malicious invention of religious polemic. If one accepts DAGRON’s conservative, early dating of the text as truly tenable, then the *Doctrina Iacobi* offers us a type of “*ḥadīth avant la lettre*,” confirming thereby the authenticity of a seemingly dubious vein in the Muslim tradition that modern historians would otherwise be inclined to dismiss out of hand as late and tendentious. As a consequence, the *Doctrina Iacobi* would serve to establish the historicity of the importance of Muḥammad’s prophethood in Islamic eschatology at the very outset. Without the perspective of the *Doctrina Iacobi*, the appearance of the “keys to paradise” in the Islamic tradition would only seem to be yet another, albeit fascinating, example of a pre-Islamic, late-antique religious motif that entered the Islamic tradition through the massive assimilation machine we call the *ḥadīth* corpus, albeit only after undergoing the vagaries of historical transformation at hands of piety-minded tradents of the Islamic tradition.

⁵⁵ *Hagarism*, 4.

The second interpretive possibility, and slightly tragic for the *Doctrina Iacobi*'s value to Islamicists, is that the Islamic tradition of the Umayyad periods – i.e., of the late seventh or, less likely, of the early eighth century CE – influenced the *Doctrina Iacobi*'s polemical portrait of the prophet appearing among the Saracens. In which case, also, the *Doctrina Iacobi* must have taken “the keys of paradise” motif either from early *jihād* preaching or from a predecessor of one of the sundry *ḥadīth* in which the motif features. If this second option is to be accepted, then the dating traditionally assigned to this Christian apologetic tract, whether in whole or part, is far too early – a conclusion that would affirm the suspicions first voiced by Paul SPECK against the mid-seventh-century dating, albeit for radically different reasons.

Yet, it is also problematic to date the *Doctrina Iacobi* too late, given the nature of the text itself. There is much in the text that is anecdotally rich in historical detail: The *Doctrina* undeniably paints a rare verisimilitude of the lives of Jewish traders and merchants in the early seventh century and thus their role in the broad reach of the Eastern Mediterranean economy to the West, which would be hardly conceivable for an author to portray convincingly after the 690s.⁵⁶ Still, this type of argument for the text's antiquity only takes one so far. HOYLAND has voiced concerns that to date the *Doctrina Iacobi* “a decade or so after [the forced baptism of the Jews of Carthage] is to render it both irrelevant and inexplicable,”⁵⁷ but surely, HOYLAND's argument here overstates the case. The *Doctrina Iacobi* itself has Jacob declare that the Jews have been “trampled underfoot by the nations for 640 years, since our fathers, the Jews, crucified Christ, and since then until today we are slaves and playthings of all nations” – a number that, counting from the crucifixion, would produce a date sometime in the 670s.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cf. Michael MCCORMICK, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 106–108.

⁵⁷ HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 59

⁵⁸ *Doctrina Iacobi*, 100 f. (I.22); cf. *ibid.* 146 f. (II. 6) where Jacob declares, “We [Jews] have effectively offended Christ with our disbelief for 600 years.” HOYLAND himself notes these passage but dismisses their importance for dating the *Doctrina*, writing, “since such statistics were usually given in round number and often updated by copyists, they can only ever be a rough guide to the date of the text” (*Seeing Islam*, 58). This dating appears in a similar anti-Judaic disputational tract likely composed in the mid-7th century, where the beginning of the “600 years” of the Jews' humiliation also starts with the crucifixion of Christ in the year 30 as is typical in Byzantine anti-Judaic literature; see P. W. VAN DER HORT, “Twenty-Five Questions to Corner the Jews: A Byzantine Anti-Jewish Document from the Seventh Century,” in E. G. Chazon, D. Satran, and R. A. Clements (eds.), *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 291–292 (§§ 7, 11).

Given that the *Doctrina Iacobi* shows not a shadow of cognizance that Carthage had been taken by the Muslims, its passage on Muḥammad likely predates the 690s and the period before Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān's conquest of Carthage in ca. 695–696, given the city's subsequent total decimation by Umayyad forces.⁵⁹ Taking our cues from the actual text, the 670s might, therefore, actually be the best period in which to date the *Doctrina Iacobi*. Prior to the 690s, the Jewish communities of Carthage would still be living under Byzantine control and would undoubtedly be aware of the recent goings-on in Palestine through their contacts in the region and via refugees, as epitomized by Jacob's own plight and by the correspondence between Justus and his brother Abraham.

It is perhaps rather significant the first non-Muslim text to speak of Muḥammad as a “prophet,” albeit a false one, besides the *Doctrina Iacobi* dates to the 690s; it is the Syriac apocalypse known as *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, which also speaks of Muḥammad as a warrior-cum-(false-) prophet. For this apocalypse's Syriac-speaking author, Muḥammad is merely “a man of war (*gabrā qarbatnā*) whom they shall claim is a prophet” (*nabiyā*).⁶⁰ The apocalyptic tenor of the *Doctrina* is especially high-pitched throughout, casting Rome as “shriveled, destroyed, and overthrown,” a process set in motion by the overthrow of the emperor Maurice by Phocas in 602. The *Doctrina*'s author, moreover, is convinced that, as witnesses to the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Fourth Beast of the prophet Daniel's vision, his contemporaries potentially stand at the climax the Danielic scheme of history preceding Christ's return.⁶¹ As Justus opines confessing his trepidations to Jacob:⁶²

⁵⁹ On these events, see KAEGI, 247–256.

⁶⁰ J. RENDEL HARRIS (ed. and trans.), *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1900), 18 (Syr.). Not even the Armenian historian Pseudo-Sebeos (wr. 660s CE?) calls Muḥammad a prophet, but rather a “merchant,” “teacher,” and “lawmaker.” See R. W. THOMSON (trans.), *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1999), 95–96. An acute awareness of Muḥammad as a prophet among non-Muslims manifests simultaneously with the proclamation of Muḥammad's prophethood in Zubayrid and, subsequently, Umayyad coinage in the late 680s and early 690s. See Stefan HEIDEMANN, “The Evolving Imagery of the Early Islamic Empire and Its Religion on Coin Imagery,” in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 149–195.

⁶¹ Cf. A. M. SIVERTSEV, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 18 f.

⁶² *Doctrina Iacobi*, 172–173 (III.12).

And if [the End] comes to pass, we [Jews] have erred by not accepting the Christ who has already come, for it is prior to the destruction and shriveling of the Fourth Beast, and of the ten horns, that there shall come the Anointed in the name of the Lord, who comes from the seed of Jesse, the Lord God.

Hence, although the findings presented here potentially undermine the earliest dating hitherto proffered for the text – i.e., as early as 634–647 – the *Doctrina* must nonetheless remain highly esteemed as being one of the earliest non-Arabic, non-Muslim testimonies to belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad.

Whatever the true date of text, the anxieties about the Saracen prophet that the *Doctrina Iacobi* expresses are presciently clear: The *Doctrina* aims to rebut all Jewish hopes that Muḥammad might be a type of messianic forerunner, a role he apparently embodies in the 8th-century Jewish apocalypse *The Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on b. Yoḥai* and for the Jewish messianic movements of 8th-century Near East.⁶³ The subtext of the *Doctrina's* passage on the Saracens' prophet is also crystal clear: Only the Christian faith and its Christ bears the keys to paradise – surely no upstart Arabian prophet can lay claim to them – and Christian eschatology will be vindicated despite all indications to contrary in the wake of the Roman retreat from Palestine and, seemingly, Rome's imminent collapse.⁶⁴

There is the flipside to consider, too. For those whose enchantments led them to actually embrace the new faith and its polity, Islam was no mere insurgent political contender with delusions of imperial grandeur, nor was it a mere rapacious takeover of the Levant by an ethnic wave of Saracen marauders. Rather, Islam was giving birth to God's true eschatological empire. In the words of the Umayyad panegyrist Jarīr (d. c. 729), "God has bequeathed to us [the sons of Ishmael] glory and ageless dominion" (*awrathanā 'izzan wa-mulkan mu'ammārā*).⁶⁵ And unlike Rome, the new Islamic dominion would spread invincible and unimpeded, carry-

⁶³ John C. REEVES, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 79 f. and especially n. 20 thereto. On Jewish movements that recognized Muḥammad as a prophet and messianic forerunner, see now S. W. ANTHONY, "Who was the Shepherd of Damascus? The Enigma of Jewish-Messianist Responses to the Islamic Conquests in Umayyad Syria and Mesopotamia," in Paul M. COBB (ed.), *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 21–59.

⁶⁴ Cf. SPECK, 406, and Gerrit J. REININK, "Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius," in G. J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 93.

⁶⁵ *The Naḳā'id of Jarir and Farazdak*, ed. A. A. BEVAN (Leiden: Brill: 1905–1912), 994, l. 28 (no. 104). Cf. Q AL-NISĀ' 4:54, "We have given the family of Abraham Scripture and Wisdom, and we have given them great dominion (*wa-ataynāhum mulkan 'aẓīman*)."

ing within its bosom the keys to paradise for all those who place their hopes in it. In many ways, it is this very viewpoint that these passages of the *Doctrina Iacobi* aims to rebut.