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Muslims debating Muḥammad's death**

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## A PROPHET LIKE JESUS? CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS DEBATING MUḤAMMAD'S DEATH\*

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Scholars commonly accept that medieval Christian polemicists based much of their representation of MuḤammad's life on ignorance and misunderstanding, even willful distortion of the Muslim tradition. This has also become the standard interpretation of the legend of MuḤammad's death that circulated among the Christians of the Islamic world. This polemical story recounts MuḤammad's death and its immediate aftermath. It claims that MuḤammad foretold that he would be resurrected three days after his death, yet while his followers delayed the burial in anticipation of his resurrection, his body started to exhibit signs of decay. As a scholar of medieval Latin Christendom asserts, in this legend "MuḤammad's death is described in a manner that has nothing to do with Muslim tradition."<sup>1</sup>

A careful examination of the Muslim tradition, however, suggests otherwise. The purpose of this paper is to show that, although the full story fundamentally differs from the classical Islamic 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, suggesting that Christians borrowed most of the narrative directly from the Islamic 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 *ḥadīths* that were suitable for their polemical purposes. The first part of the paper surveys and analyzes the surviving versions of the Christian legend, while the next two examine their Muslim sources. The fourth part attempts to trace the interrelationship of these narratives against the background of the polemical milieu of the eighth century.

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<sup>1</sup>Tolan, *Saracens*, p. 92. For more similar opinions about the legend, see below, p. 138, n. 25.

## Muḥammad's death according to the Christians

The oldest extant Christian texts containing the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death date from the ninth century. Their authors lived in distant parts of the Islamic world, belonged to different Christian communities and spoke different languages. In the East, the narrative appears in the Syriac recensions of the Christian Baḥīrā legend, a popular Christian counterhistory of the rise of Islam.<sup>2</sup> The oldest version of the Christian Baḥīrā legend was most probably written by a West-Syrian monk in Iraq in the 810s; the story of Muḥammad's death occurs in two recensions, a West-Syrian and an East-Syrian. They should probably be dated to the middle of the ninth and to the tenth century, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Another text, the *Apology of al-Kindī*, an Arabic polemical treatise against Islam, has a detailed biography of Muḥammad which includes the legend.<sup>4</sup> Its author was probably an East-Syrian courtier of al-Ma'mūn (813–33), a Christian Arab belonging to the tribe of Kinda, and it seems that he wrote the *Apology* in the 820s in Baghdad.<sup>5</sup> A

<sup>2</sup>On the Christian Baḥīrā legend, see Roggema, *The legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, pp. 11–208.

<sup>3</sup>For the two versions, see *ibid.*, pp. 302–303 (East-Syrian, Syriac and English text), pp. 334–335 (West-Syrian, Syriac and English). The two Arabic recensions omit the episode. The dating of the Christian Baḥīrā legend to the reign of al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–33) is now generally accepted; see *ibid.*, pp. 86–87. For an attempt to date the individual recensions more precisely, see Szilágyi, “Muḥammad and the monk,” p. 191. The story of Muḥammad's death in the East-Syrian recension does not strictly belong to the Christian Baḥīrā legend, since it is found in an appendix with a separate heading; therefore, its date is uncertain (see *ibid.*, pp. 177–178, 192). Its proximity to the version in the West-Syrian recension (see below, pp. 133–134) nevertheless justifies the discussion of these two together.

<sup>4</sup>About the *Apology of al-Kindī*, see Samir, “Apologie d'al-Kindī;” Koningsveld, “The Apology of Al-Kindī;” Landron, *Attitudes nestoriennes*, pp. 78–88. There is no critical edition of the text; the most readily available printing, based on two manuscripts, is Tien, *Risāla*; another one, based on four manuscripts, is Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*. For the *Apology's* discussion of Muḥammad's death, see Tien, *Risāla*, pp. 109–110; and Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*, pp. 92–93.

The *Apology* was translated into Latin in 1142. This translation sometimes reflects an earlier stage of the text than the published Arabic versions that are based on manuscripts copied in the seventeenth century or later. The Latin rendering of the story of Muḥammad's death is, however, very similar to the Arabic text. For the relationship of the Latin and the Arabic texts, see Koningsveld, “The Apology of al-Kindī,” pp. 70–75; Samir, “Apologie d'al-Kindī,” pp. 48–74; for the most recent critical edition of the Latin translation, see González Muñoz, *Exposición y refutación del Islam*.

<sup>5</sup>The dating and the authorship of the *Apology* are controversial (for a recent overview of the arguments for the various positions, see Samir, “Apologie d'al-Kindī,”

lesser-known text that contains the legend is the Qashun document. The Qashun document, although extant only in Armenian translation and first attested only in the thirteenth century, appears to preserve a Christian account on Muḥammad's life and the rise of Islam from the late eighth- or early ninth century Iraq. Its original language was probably Syriac or Arabic.<sup>6</sup> The legend was known in Spain too. Eulogius of Córdoba (d. 859), learned priest, supporter of the Córdoba martyrs, and eventually one of them, included a brief Latin life of Muḥammad, *Istoria de Mahomet*, in his *Liber apologeticus martyrum*. Eulogius remarks that he found the *Istoria* in the monastery of Leyre beside Pamplona, during his travels in Northern Spain in 849–50. The *Istoria* ends with the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death, its longest extant version. Finally, a note on Muḥammad's life, *Adnotatio de Mammet* that also mentions the story, appears in the letter of John of Seville, addressed to the Córdoba Paul Albar (d. ca. 861). John probably wrote the letter before 851.<sup>7</sup>

The legend as given in the West-Syrian recension of the Christian Bahīrā legend is a typical example of the shorter versions:<sup>8</sup>

He [Kaʿb al-Aḥbār] said to them, "... There will be a sign to you: When Muḥammad dies he will ascend to heaven like ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, and will be resurrected after three days."

pp. 33–41). The text refers to the revolt of Bābak al-Khurrāmī (from 816 or 817 to 837 AD) as contemporary, and states that little more than 200 years (*nayyif wamiʿatā sana*) passed since the time of Muḥammad (200 AH = 815–6 CE) (Tien, *Risāla*, pp. 76, 97; Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*, pp. 68, 84), but a tenth century dating has been proposed by some scholars on the basis of what they see as the reliance of al-Kindī on late ninth- or early tenth-century works. It is not possible to discuss this issue here in detail, but al-Kindī's references to the early ninth century, the Islamic sources he used and the Muslim authors he mentioned make the *Apology*, in my opinion, fit the early ninth century much better than the tenth.

<sup>6</sup>The Qashun document has been translated into English in Thomson, "Muḥammad," pp. 846–853; the story of Muḥammad's death is told on p. 850, to be read with notes y–z. On the dating and provenance of this text, see the Appendix, pp. 159–162.

<sup>7</sup>On Paulus Alvarus, see Colbert, *The martyrs of Córdoba*, pp. 148–166, 305–332; on the *Adnotatio*, see *ibid.*, pp. 156–157. About Eulogius, see Colbert, *The martyrs of Córdoba*, pp. 174–222; about the *Istoria*, see *ibid.*, pp. 334–339, and Wolf, "The earliest Latin lives," pp. 89–100. The Latin text of the *Istoria* has been edited in Díaz y Díaz, "Los textos antimahometanos," pp. 157–159; Gil, *Corpus scriptorum muzarabicorum*, vol. 2, pp. 483–486; for English translations, see Wolf, "The earliest Latin lives," pp. 97–99, and Colbert, *The martyrs of Córdoba*, pp. 336–339. For the Latin text of the *Adnotatio*, see Díaz y Díaz, "Textos antimahometanos," p. 153; Gil, *Corpus scriptorum muzarabicorum*, vol. 1, pp. 200–201; for an English translation see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 513.

<sup>8</sup>Roggema, *The legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, p. 335 (modified).

It happened that when Muḥammad 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 stink of Muḥammad's body. No one needs to investigate what happened to it.

The version of the story in the West-Syrian recension of the Christian Baḥīrā legend attributes the prophecy of Muḥammad's resurrection from the dead to Ka'b al-Aḥbār. No other version does so. The East-Syrian recension of the Christian Baḥīrā legend leaves the prophecy's origin unspecified, and the rest ascribe it to Muḥammad himself. Both the Syriac recensions of the Christian Baḥīrā legend and the *Apology of al-Kindī* speak of an expectation of ascension;<sup>9</sup> 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 Muḥammad. The anticipated resurrection is explicitly compared to Christ's story in all versions, with the exception of the two Latin texts. His followers secure Muḥammad's corpse in a locked house in both Syriac recensions of the Christian Baḥīrā legend, and they lay it out in his garden in the Qashun 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 Qashun document. In both Syriac recensions of the Christian Baḥīrā legend and the *Apology of al-Kindī*, 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. As we read it in the *Istoria*, "... dogs followed his stench and devoured his flank. Learning of the deed, they surrendered the rest of his body to the soil. And in vindication of this injury, they ordered dogs to be slaughtered every year..."<sup>10</sup> A yearly massacre of dogs was instituted also according to the Qashun document; it is, the text claims, observed "up to the present day."

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 Christian Baḥīrā legend and in the *Apology of al-Kindī*, the former two being more closely related to

<sup>9</sup>The resurrection, since it is referred to only *after* the ascension, appears to be secondary in the West-Syrian recension.

<sup>10</sup>Wolf, "The earliest Latin lives," p. 99.

each other than to the latter. The second comprises the two Latin texts and the Qashun 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. The texts of the second subgroup show roots earlier than the ninth century. But there is reason to believe that the legend circulated already in the first half of the eighth century. The Qashun 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.<sup>11</sup> It is not possible, however, to establish the origin of the individual parts of the text with certainty. The two Latin texts, the *Istoria* 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 *Istoria* and the *Adnotatio* related to Byzantium, the Eastern source seems to have been of Melkite provenance. Since the *Istoria* 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 Muḥammad to the seventh year of the reign of Heraclius (610–41), similarly to the Hispanic chronicles of 741 and 754, which again points to its origin in the first half of the eighth century.<sup>12</sup> We can thus conclude that the Christian story of Muḥammad's death was, in all probability, known among Christians in the Near East during the first half of the eighth century.

In addition, Muslim authors occasionally quote a brief reference to the story from an Egyptian Christian in their discussions of the punishment of non-Muslims who commit the crime of slandering the Prophet. According to the earliest extant citation, in the *Shifā'* of al-Qāḍī 'Iyād,<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>See Appendix, pp. 159–162.

<sup>12</sup>See the discussions about the interrelationship and the origin of the texts in Colbert, *The martyrs of Córdoba*, pp. 156–157; Franke, *Die freiwilligen Märtyrer von Córdoba*, pp. 38–47; Díaz y Díaz, "Los textos antimahometanos," pp. 165–168 (appendix by I.B. Ceinos); Daniel, *Arabs and mediaeval Europe*, pp. 39–48; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 514–515.

<sup>13</sup>Al-Qāḍī 'Iyād, *Shifā'*, vol. 2, pp. 1037–1039, quotation from pp. 1037–1038 (*qāla bnu 'l-qāsimi sa'alnā mālikan 'an naṣrāniyyin bi-miṣra shuhida 'alayhi annahu qāla miskīnun muḥammadun yukhbīrukum annahu fī 'l-jannati māluhu [or mā lahu] lam yanfa' nafsahu idh kānati 'l-kilābu ta'kulu sāqayhi law qatalūhu 'starāḥa minhu 'l-nās qāla mālikun arā an tuḍraba 'unuquhu*). Safran, "Identity and differentiation," p. 589 cites the incident.

Ibn al-Qāsim said, “We asked Mālik [b. Anas] about a Christian in Egypt against whom there was testimony that he said, ‘Poor Muḥammad! 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. Had he been killed, the people would have found rest from him.’ Mālik answered, ‘I think he should be executed.’”

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

Several Mālikī works cite the story in full, and sometimes they name their source as the *Shifā’*. Many curtail it, giving only the Copt’s words and Mālik’s decision, in a long series of non-Muslim slanders of the Prophet and their recommended punishment, collected for the edification of future generations. With two exceptions, their authors display no knowledge of the incident apart from what could be gleaned from the *Shifā’*.<sup>14</sup> The first of the two exceptions, al-Wansharīsī perhaps used a different source, but gives no further indication of the participants or information about the circumstances.<sup>15</sup> The second, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī gives a better version of the Copt’s outburst than al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād, and 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. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Qāsim (d. 191/806) was the most prominent disciple of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), studied with him for twenty years in Medina, then settled in Egypt and died there. Ibn Ḥajar furthermore identifies the *qāḍī* who carried out the punishment as al-Mufaḍḍal b. Faḍāla (d. 181/797), a contemporary of Mālik.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that all these three quotations go back to a single earlier source, but the reference to several contemporary locals in the last version ascertains that the incident indeed took place in the second half of the eighth century in Egypt. It thus constitutes the only datable attestation of the story before the ninth century, when it first appears in Christian sources, and the only one in Egypt.<sup>17</sup> A Mālikī judge would hardly have invented this lurid story. At the same time, the similarity of the quotations of

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Qarāfī, *Dhakhāra*, vol. 12, p. 20; Šāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā*, vol. 12, p. 34; *Hāshiyat al-Dasūqī*, vol. 2, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup>Wansharīsī, *Mi‘yār*, vol. 2, p. 345.

<sup>16</sup>Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf‘ al-iṣr*, p. 440 (*miskīnun muḥammadun yaqūlu lakum innakum fī ‘l-jannati a-huwa al-āna fī ‘l-jannati miskīnun fa-māluhu lā yanfa‘u nafsahu idh kānati ‘l-kilābu ta’kulu sāqayhi law kāna uḥriqa bi-‘l-nāri ‘starāḥa minhu* [add: ‘l-nās]).

<sup>17</sup>I did not find it in the relevant sections of the *Mudawwana*.

this incident and the lack of remarks by any later Muslim scholar makes it clear that the Christian story was unknown among medieval Muslims.

By contrast, the legend did not lose its popularity among Christians after the ninth century. Sundry versions of it are known from European Latin lives of Muḥammad, especially from texts written from the twelfth century onwards, when European settlement in the Outremer accelerated the flow of Oriental Christian legends about Muḥammad and the rise of Islam to Europe. In them, Muḥammad's end becomes ever more ghastly; in many versions, his corpse is devoured by pigs instead of dogs, and in some, he dies torn apart by pigs.<sup>18</sup>

Although no anti-Islamic polemical writings produced by Christians living in the central Islamic lands after the ninth century included the story (the two later Arabic translations of the Christian Bahīrā legend tacitly omitted it) we can be fairly certain that it remained part of the Oriental Christian oral tradition. First, a distant but recognizable variant of the legend, which appears in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a Christian Arabic text that probably originated in late ninth-century Syria or Mesopotamia in the Syriac tradition, is also attested in the Judaeo-Arabic commentary that Yefet ben ʿEli, a Karaite Jew who lived in Palestine in the late tenth century, wrote on the book of Isaiah.<sup>19</sup> “Peter, verily I say to you that after the death of the Son of Perdition I will send the loathsome beast to him to dig him out from his grave and devour his flesh,” said Jesus to Peter according to the *Apocalypse of Peter*.<sup>20</sup> In Yefet's commentary we read, “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’.”<sup>21</sup> The most probable explanation of this similarity is that the legend was part of both Christian and Jewish lore about the rise

<sup>18</sup>Kohlberg, “Western accounts,” pp. 165–166; Tolan, “Un cadavre mutilé,” pp. 55–58 = *idem*, “A mangled corpse,” pp. 21–23; Tolan, *Saracens*, 142–143; Daniel, *Islam and the West*, pp. 125–129.

<sup>19</sup>For the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Mingana (ed.), “Apocalypse of Peter,” p. 323 (Karshūnī text), and p. 254 (English translation); for the reference to the legend in Yefet's commentary, see Vajda, “Un vestige oriental,” pp. 177–179. On the dating and provenance of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Roggema, “Biblical exegesis,” pp. 137–138.

<sup>20</sup>Mingana (ed.), “Apocalypse of Peter,” p. 323 (*ḥaqqan aqūlu laka yā faṭrūsa in-nahu idhā tuwuffīya bnū ʿl-halāki ursiluhu ʿl-ḥayawāna ʿl-samja ḥattā yanbushahu min qabrihi wa-yaʿkula lahṃahu*). I have slightly modified Mingana's English translation (*ibid.*, p. 254).

<sup>21</sup>Vajda, “Un vestige oriental,” p. 178. 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 “man of the spirit,” see Hosea 9:7 (*ibid.*, p. 178, n. 4). Although Yefet wrote his commentary in Judaeo-Arabic, most of this passage is in Hebrew, probably out of cautiousness.

of Islam in the medieval Islamic milieu. Second, from the twelfth century onward, some authors of European Latin lives of Muḥammad who included the legend in their works refer to Oriental Christians as their informants on Muḥammad's life.<sup>22</sup> Third, modifications of the narrative in late manuscripts of the ninth century Christian works exhibit variants that attest to the copyists' familiarity with the story independently of their *Vorlage*.<sup>23</sup>

Whichever version one is acquainted with, the failed-resurrection legend at first sight seems but a malicious slander invented by Christians. Most writings that contain it are polemical, their tone often acrid and scathing. It reads as the inversion of the Christian story of Christ's resurrection. The legend 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.<sup>24</sup>

However preposterous the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death appears, the Christians did not invent it: they borrowed almost all of its motifs from the early Islamic tradition. In the rest of this paper, I will discuss each motif separately, and show that three out of four<sup>25</sup> of them were known among Muslims in the middle of the eighth century, the probable *terminus ad quem* of the formation of the Christian narrative.

<sup>22</sup>For example, Adelphus (see Tolan, *Saracens*, pp. 138, 142). Note also Gautier de Compiègne's ultimate source, the "Saracen convert to Christianity" (*ibid.*). These versions of the legend are, as mentioned above, often at variance with those known from the ninth-century Middle East, and it cannot be ascertained which motifs originated among Oriental Christians, and which among Europeans. Beginning with the Crusades, the European Latin versions exercised their own influence in the Middle East, which further complicates the question of sources. For example, see the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Armenian abridgement of a Latin text ("[Extrait] de l'*Histoire des Latins*") in Macler, "Un document arménien," pp. 287–295.

<sup>23</sup>One of the five manuscripts used for the edition of the West-Syrian recension of the Christian Baḥīrā legend (Mingana Syr. 71; undated) exhibits several significant variant readings. For instance, the copyist inserts that guards were placed by Muḥammad's corpse (see Roggema, *The legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, p. 334, n. 32); a detail unattested in any other version of the Christian Baḥīrā legend, but familiar from the *Istoria* and the *Adnotatio*. Mxit'ar of Ani (see Appendix, pp. 159–162) might also have known the legend independently from his source. The Qashun document blames "the drowsy disciples" for the dogs' defilement of the corpse; Mxit'ar charges "the guards" instead. Guards are never mentioned in the Qashun document (see Thomson, "Muḥammad," p. 850).

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 514; Kohlberg, "Western accounts," pp. 166–167; Wolf, "The earliest Latin lives," p. 90; Daniel, *Islam and the West*, pp. 19, 125–129; Tolan, *Saracens*, pp. 92–93; and *idem*, "Un cadavre mutilé," pp. 56–57 = *idem*, "A mangled corpse," pp. 21–22.

<sup>25</sup>The four motifs are the following: (1) Muḥammad's resurrection and ascension to heaven after his death, (2) the three-day delay in his burial, (3) the putrefaction of his corpse, (4) the dogs' mauling of his corpse.

I will begin with discussing *ḥadīths* about Muḥammad's resurrection and ascension to heaven after his death, 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 dogs' mauling of Muḥammad's corpse appears to be unattested in the early Muslim tradition.

### Muḥammad's ascension after his death in the Islamic tradition

Regarding the first motif of the story, Muḥammad's foretelling of his own resurrection, it is beyond doubt that the 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 (Muḥammad) used to say to them in his life and commend to 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 is so precious to God that He would not leave him on the earth for more than three days (*wa-annahū akramu 'alā Allāhi min an yatrukahū 'alā 'l-arḍi akthara min thalāthati ayyāmin*)," begins the story in the *Apology of al-Kindī*.<sup>26</sup> 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 Allāhi min an yatrukanī fī 'l-arḍi ba'da thalāthin*)," said Muḥammad according to a rare *ḥadīth*.<sup>27</sup> Although the Christian and the Muslim traditions differ in the time of the anticipated, 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 *ḥadīth*.

It would be interesting to trace the transmission history of the *ḥadīth* in order to learn when and where it circulated, and thus to gain a better

<sup>26</sup>See Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup>See Karājikī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, vol. 2, p. 140; Juwaynī, *Nihāyat al-maṭlab*, vol. 3, p. 66; Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-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-arḍ*. 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).

understanding of its relationship with the *Apology*, but I was unable to recover it. The *ḥadīth* is attested only in a few relatively late writings; none of them quotes it with *isnād*. The oldest surviving works which mention it were written by the Imāmī Shīʿī al-Karājīkī (d. 449/1057), and two Sunnīs, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111).<sup>28</sup> Al-Juwaynī ascribes it to Abū ‘Alī al-Sinjī, a scholar of the previous generation,<sup>29</sup> and says that it was related also with the phrase “more than two days (*akthara min yawmayni*).” Al-Rāfiʿī (d. 623/1226) also cites the *ḥadīth* in his *al-Sharḥ al-kabīr*.<sup>30</sup> 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 Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), unsuccessfully tried to trace its *isnād*.<sup>31</sup> They could only refer to the *ḥadīth* in older works; the earliest scholar named in this connection is al-Azraqī, possibly Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Azraqī (d. 222/837) who is best known as the main source of his grandson’s *Akhhbār Makka*.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

There are further *ḥadīths* (I will call them “ascension traditions”) that corroborate an early Muslim belief in Muḥammad’s ascension to

<sup>28</sup>See previous note.

<sup>29</sup>He died in the 430s (1038 or later); see, for example, Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 2, p. 115.

<sup>30</sup>See Rāfiʿī, *al-Sharḥ al-kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 445.

<sup>31</sup>See Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *al-Badr al-munīr*, vol. 5, pp. 283–292; Ibn Ḥajar, *Talkhīs al-ḥabīb*, 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 Suyūṭī, *al-Laʾālī al-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-dhakarahū baʿḍu man adraknāhu... fa-lam yaʿzuhu*); see *al-Badr al-munīr*, vol. 5, p. 283. Even later authors, such as al-Suyūṭī or al-Zurqānī, refer to the *ḥadīth*, but they merely reiterate what the earlier ones said.

<sup>32</sup>Mentioned by al-Zarkashī who is quoted in Suyūṭī, *al-Laʾālī al-maṣnūʿa*, vol. 1, p. 285. On Azraqī, see art. “al-Azraqī Abū ʿl-Walīd Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad,” s.v. Ibn Ḥajar refers to Ibn Abī Laylā (Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī Laylā al-Anṣārī, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kūfī, d. 148/765–6, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 25, pp. 622–628) as a possible source of the *ḥadīth*, but it seems that Ibn Ḥajar’s only reason for doing so is another *ḥadīth* with somewhat similar content that he quoted just before this one and that was transmitted by Ibn Abī Laylā (see Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, vol. 7, p. 296).

<sup>33</sup>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 akramu ʿalā Allāhi min an yatrukanī fī ʿl-turābi alfa ʿāmin*),” and “I am so precious to God that He will not leave me under the earth for two hundred years (*anā akramu ʿalā Allāhi min an yadaʿanī taḥta ʿl-arḍi miʿatay ʿāmin*)” (see Ṣaghānī, *Mawḍūʿāt*, p. 44; ‘Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 161 and p. 231; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-ʿl-nihāya*, vol. 5, p. 66). Both are rejected as forgeries.

heaven after his death and show that it existed already in the mid-eighth century. They clearly express the same belief as the *anā akramu* tradition, but differ in significant details. All of them refer to the ascension of prophets in general to heaven, not specifically to Muḥammad's. It is, however, likely that early Muslims created and circulated these *ḥadīths* out of interest in Muḥammad'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 Muḥammad's destiny; on the other hand, many other *ḥadīths* that make general statements about prophets clearly intend to say something primarily about Muḥammad.<sup>34</sup> Also, 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 forty days (one variant does not specify the time the prophets remain in the grave). Instead of having Muḥammad speak in first person, they are ascribed to later generations of Muslims. But the ascension traditions are somewhat better documented than the *anā akramu* 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 akramu* 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 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. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb also came, and recognized in it the foot of his grandfather, 'Umar.'<sup>35</sup> As far as I know, this is the only version of the story about Muḥammad's collapsed tomb that interweaves an ascension tradition,

<sup>34</sup>Compare, for example, the following *ḥadīths*, "Each and every prophet tended sheep (*mā min nabīyyin illā qad ra'ā 'l-ghanama*)," "No prophet dies until he is given the choice (between this world and the hereafter) (*mā min nabīyyin yamūtu ḥattā yukhayyaru*)," and "No prophet is buried except where he dies (*mā tawaffā Allāhu nabīyyan qaṭṭu illā dufīna ḥaythu tuqbaḍu rūḥuhu*)" in Ibn Sa'īd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1/1, pp. 79–80; vol. 2/2, pp. 28, and 71.

<sup>35</sup>Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401), *al-Badr al-munīr*, vol. 5, p. 285 ([*i*]nna juthatha 'l-anbiyā'i ṣalawātu Allāhi 'alayhim lā tuqīmu akthara min arba'īna yawman fī 'l-arḍi thumma turfa'u).

and it is clearly a composite of the two different stories.<sup>36</sup> It is not the only version of ascension traditions connected to Muḥammad'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 Muḥammad'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.<sup>37</sup> "No prophet remains in the earth for more than forty days," he said according to the other.<sup>38</sup> A very similar variant of the last one appears, without connection to Muḥammad's grave or the pilgrimage to it, in al-Bayhaqī's (d. 458/1066) *Kitāb mā warada fī ḥayāt al-anbiyā' ba'd wafātihim*.<sup>39</sup> All four versions are associated with Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab, the famous Medinan scholar of the late seventh and early eighth century.

If we trusted the attribution of these sayings to Sa'īd, possibly their only common link,<sup>40</sup> we could conclude with certainty that in the late seventh or early eighth century some Muslims, at least in Medina, believed that Muḥammad had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. We should not, however, rush to ascribe this opinion to Sa'īd, since elsewhere he is said to have been holding that Muḥammad lives not

<sup>36</sup>According to other versions about the collapsed tomb, 'Umar's horror abated after 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (or Sālim b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, or Sālim's brother, 'Abd Allāh) recognized the foot as 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb's. See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3/1, p. 268; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-'l-nihāya*, vol. 9, p. 75; Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 322; and elsewhere.

<sup>37</sup>I found the only reference to this one in Samhūdī (d. 911/1506), *Khulāṣat al-wafā'*, vol. 1, pp. 115–116 (*innahu lā yabqā nabīyyun min ulī 'l-'azmi fawqa arba'īna laylatan ḥattā yurfa'u inna nabīyya Allāhi lam yabqā fī 'l-arḍi fawqa arba'īna laylatan ḥattā rufi'a*). 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 Muḥammad. See, for example, Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 26, p. 37; Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 9, pp. 24–26. I am thankful for the Qur'ānic reference to Professor Michael Cook.

<sup>38</sup>The earliest quotation of this one is 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), *Muṣannaf*, vol. 3, p. 383 (*mā makatha nabīyyun fī 'l-arḍi akthara min arba'īna yawman*).

<sup>39</sup>Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā'* (1), pp. 29–30; *idem*, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā'* (2), pp. 76–77 ("No prophet remains in his grave for more than forty days before he ascends," *mā makatha nabīyyun fī qabrihi akthara min arba'īna laylatan ḥattā yurfa'u*). The first edition's *fī qabr* instead of *fī qabrihi* must be a typographical error.

<sup>40</sup>The *isnād* of the first is Sufyān al-Thawrī, an unnamed *shaykh*, and Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab; of the second, 'Abd al-Razzāq, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Abū 'l-Miqdām, and Sa'īd 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 Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab... Sa'īd said..."). Ibn al-Mulaqqin does not name any transmitters.

in heaven, but in his grave.<sup>41</sup> 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-Bayhaqī says that his version was included in the *Jāmiʿ* of Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778).<sup>42</sup> Whichever of Sufyān's *Jāmiʿ*'s al-Bayhaqī meant (he wrote a large and a small one), it is lost today, but there is no reason to doubt al-Bayhaqī'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 transmitting from Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab, Abū ʿl-Miqdām and al-Minhāl b. ʿAmr. Both of them were Kūfans.<sup>43</sup>

As we saw, the earliest transmitter mentioned in connection with these four ascension traditions is Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab, a Successor although their attribution to him is dubious. I found only one Sunnī *ḥadīth* 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 Muḥammad according to a tradition quoted in al-Bayhaqī's tract.<sup>44</sup> Its first transmitter is said to have been Anas b. Mālik, Muḥammad's servant, who later settled in Baṣra, the second Thābit al-Bunānī (Baṣran, d. 120s/740s), and the third Ibn Abī Laylā (Kūfan, d. 148/765–6).<sup>45</sup> Since this is the only known *isnād* of the tradition,<sup>46</sup> its origins cannot be identified with any certainty.<sup>47</sup> Still, Ibn Abī Laylā belonged to the same generation

<sup>41</sup>It is related that Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab heard the *adhān*, or the noise of somebody praying, or mumbling (*hamhama*) inside Muḥammad's tomb during the battle of Ḥarra (63/683); see Dārimī, *Sunan*, vol. 1, pp. 227–228; Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, p. 496; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 5, pp. 97–98.

<sup>42</sup>On him, see "Sufyān al-Thawrī," *EF<sup>2</sup>*, s.v.

<sup>43</sup>On Abū ʿl-Miqdām al-Ḥaddād, Thābit b. Hurmuz, Kūfan as Sufyān (dates unknown), and on al-Minhāl b. ʿAmr al-Asadī, also a Kūfan (dates are also unknown), see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 4, pp. 380–381, and vol. 28, pp. 568–572.

<sup>44</sup>See Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyāʾ* (1), p. 29 (*al-anbiyāʾu lā yutrakūna fī qubūrihim baʿda arbaʿīna laylatan wa-lākinnaḥum yuṣallūna bayna yadayi Allāhi ʿazza wa-jalla ḥattā yunfakhu fī ʿl-ṣūri*).

<sup>45</sup>For Ibn Abī Laylā see above, note 32; for Thābit b. Aslam al-Bunānī, Abū Muḥammad al-Baṣrī, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 4, pp. 342–349. The identity of the fourth transmitter, Ismāʿīl b. Ṭalḥa b. Yazīd, might also be relevant, but I was unable to identify him.

<sup>46</sup>The only author who may have given the *ḥadīth* 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 *ḥadīth* from al-Bayhaqī.

<sup>47</sup>Another similar tradition, "No prophet dies and remains in his tomb except for forty days (*mā min nabiyyin yamūtu fa-yuqīmu fī qabrihi illā arbaʿīna ṣabāḥan*)," is attested in a tenth-century and in 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

of Kūfan scholars as 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 Shīʿī ones, it is worth quoting all of them here. One of them is connected to Kūfa, similarly to 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 *ḥadīth*, 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 the people are asleep, and those who have mercy over the poor of my community."<sup>48</sup> Its transmission history cannot be reconstructed.<sup>49</sup> The other Sunnī saying, "God does not leave a prophet in his grave for more than half a day" was cited by the Ḥanbalī Abū 'l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Zāghūnī (d. 527/1132),<sup>50</sup> but I was unable to trace further information about it. Al-Shawkānī (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.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps further Sunnī traditions of this

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cases, it is impossible to decide which version is the original. For this *ḥadīth*, see Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* (with typographical errors), vol. 8, p. 333; and Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-majrūhīn*, vol. 1, p. 285.

<sup>48</sup>Daylamī, *Firdaws*, vol. 3, p. 35 ('*ashara lā yutrakūna fī qubūrihim wa-lākinnahum yuṣallūna bayna yadayi Allāhi 'azza wa-jalla ḥattā yunfakhu fī 'l-ṣūri 'l-anbiyā'*'u wa-'l-shuhadā'u wa-'l-mu'adhdhinūna wa-'l-mulabbūna wa-'l-mutawaffā fī ṭarīqi makkata wa-'l-mar'atu tamūtu fī nifāsihā wa-'l-tā'ibūna mina 'l-dhunūbi wa-khādīmu 'l-muslimīna fī ṭā'ati Allāhi 'azza wa-jalla wa-'l-muṣallūna bi-'l-layli wa-'l-nāsu niyāmun wa-'l-mutarahḥimūna 'alā fuqarā'i ummatī'). The only edition of the text has the erroneous "*ḥattā yunfakhu fī 'l-ṣadri*" instead of "*fī 'l-ṣūri*."

<sup>49</sup>The *ḥadīth* is ascribed to 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far (b. Abī Ṭālib); according to the footnote, another manuscript attributes it to 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ja'far (*ibid.*). None of this helps to trace the origins of the tradition.

<sup>50</sup>So it is said in Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *al-Ṣarīm al-munkī*, p. 273, and in Suyūṭī, *al-La'ālī al-maṣnū'a*, vol 1, p. 285 (*inna Allāha lā yatraku nabīyyan fī qabrihi akthara min niṣfi yawmin*). Ibn al-Zāghūnī's *Īdāh* (apparently his only work published so far) does not contain the tradition.

<sup>51</sup>Al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-awṭār*, 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 [that] beyond forty [days]" (*qad warada anna 'l-anbiyā'a lā yutrakūna fī qubūrihim fawqa thalāthīn wa-ruwiya fawqa arba'īna*). Only al-Samhūdī quotes an ascension tradition with *fawqa arba'īna* instead of the usual *ba'da arba'īna* (see above); the

kind also circulated once, but were subsequently forgotten.

An Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, “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 *imām*, Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765), appears in four late ninth- and tenth-century writings, with identical *isnāds*. The two earliest transmitters, Ziyād b. Abī ‘l-Ḥalāl and ‘Alī b. al-Ḥakam, were both Kūfans, providing further support for the circulation of the *ḥadīth* in Kūfa in the late eighth and early ninth century.<sup>52</sup> Another Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, also attributed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq, claims that “the corpse of a prophet or of a prophet’s legatee does not remain in the earth for more than forty days.”<sup>53</sup> The information I found about its early transmitters is insufficient and cannot support any conclusions about its circulation.<sup>54</sup>

Although only a small corpus, the ascension traditions indicate a belief in Muḥammad’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 town. The bulk of all recorded Islamic 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 Muḥammad’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 already in the middle of the eighth century, but it is hardly possible to trace when it first appeared, or how

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phrase *fawqa thalāthīn* does not occur elsewhere.

<sup>52</sup>Abū Ja‘far al-Qummī, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, vol. 2, p. 349; Ibn Qūlūya, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, pp. 329–330; Ibn Bābawayh, *Faqīh*, vol. 2, pp. 577–578; and Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, vol. 4, p. 567 (*mā min nabīyyin wa-lā waṣīyyin yabqā fī ‘l-ardī akthara min thalāthati ayyāmin ḥattā yurfa‘u bi-rūḥihi wa-‘azmihi wa-laḥmihi ilā ‘l-samā’i. . .*). The version in *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* has some textual variants, without changing the meaning. The first four transmitters in all four works are Ja‘far al-Šādiq, Ziyād b. Abī ‘l-Ḥalāl, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥakam b. al-Zubayr, and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Isā al-Ash‘arī. Ziyād b. Abī ‘l-Ḥalāl is named as transmitting from Ja‘far, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥakam from ‘Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818) and his son, Muḥammad Jawād Taqī (d. 220/835). On Ziyād and Aḥmad, see Najāshī, *Rijāl*, vol. 1, p. 390 and pp. 216–218; on ‘Alī, see Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, p. 361.

<sup>53</sup>See Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 6, p. 118 (*lā tamkuthu juththatu nabīyyin wa-lā waṣīyyi nabīyyin fī ‘l-ardī akthara min arba‘īna yawman*).

<sup>54</sup>The first transmitter, ‘Aṭīyya al-Abzārī is listed among the disciples of Ja‘far al-Šādiq (see Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 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. Yaḥyā, brother of Mughallis; he is Kūfan, if he is identical with al-‘Alā’ b. Yaḥyā al-Makfūf in Najāshī, *Rijāl*, vol. 2, p. 154.

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.<sup>55</sup>

The ideas expressed in the ascension traditions resemble the Christian stories about Muḥammad's expected resurrection and ascension to heaven. The *anā akramu* tradition was directly quoted by the author of the *Apology of al-Kindī*. There is, however, a crucial difference: according to the Islamic traditions the resurrection and the ascension were supposed to happen and did indeed 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 for only the ascension traditions it could be argued that the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death originated as the rejection of the eighth-century Muslim belief. There circulated, however, further *ḥadīths* that the Christians drew on when constructing their account of Muḥammad's death.

### Muḥammad's belated burial in the Islamic tradition

According to Ibn Hishām, Muḥammad died in the late morning of a Monday in Rabī' al-Awwal, and was buried "in the middle of the night of Wednesday,"<sup>56</sup> that is, on Tuesday night, according to our reckoning of time. Islamic tradition, both Sunnī and Imāmī Shī'ī, agrees about the day of Muḥammad's death, but is divided over the day of his burial. Some Sunnī *ḥadīths* claim that Muḥammad was interred *yawma 'l-thulāthā*' (between the sunsets of Monday and Tuesday), while other Sunnī and apparently all Shī'ī *ḥadīths* maintain that it happened *yawma 'l-arbi'ā*' (between the sunsets of Tuesday and Wednesday).<sup>57</sup> There

<sup>55</sup>The terror that seized 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz when he thought that he saw Muḥammad's foot behind the collapsed wall of his grave might also be related to this belief. Even though only one version connects Muḥammad's ascension to the story, the question remains as to why would 'Umar be awed to see Muḥammad's foot, but calm down when told it is 'Umar's, unless the former was not supposed to be in the grave at all.

<sup>56</sup>Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, vol. 1/2, pp. 1009–1011, 1020 (*wasāṭa 'l-layli laylata 'l-arbi'ā'i* or *jawfa 'l-layli min laylati 'l-arbi'ā'i*).

<sup>57</sup>See the remarks of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr to this effect (Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 1/4, pp. 1815, 1830; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-'l-nihāya*, vol. 5, pp. 193, 206); and the lists of traditions in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 57–59, 78–79; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 1/4, pp. 1831–1832, 1832–1833, 1837 (two *ḥadīths*); and Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-'l-nihāya*, vol. 5, pp. 193–194, 205–206. The section of Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* on Muḥammad's death (vol. 22, pp. 503–549), on the other hand, only quotes traditions that refer to *yawma l-arbi'ā*' as the day of burial, and mentions one tradition that places the death on a Friday (*ibid.*, p. 521).

circulated at least one tradition placing Muḥammad's burial *yawma 'l-khamīs* (between the sunsets of Wednesday and Thursday).<sup>58</sup> Traditions further vary with regard to the time of the day when Muḥammad was interred.

The first two opinions are both attested in the middle of the eighth century; although the *yawma 'l-arbi'ā'* tradition seems to have gained wider currency by that time, the other one was also known.<sup>59</sup> Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. ca. 150/767) is a firmly supported common link in the *isnāds* of the *yawma 'l-arbi'ā'* tradition; several traditionists transmitted it from him.<sup>60</sup> An older common link, Makḥūl al-Shāmī (d. 112–8/730–7), supported by two transmitters from him, makes it likely that the *yawma 'l-arbi'ā'* tradition circulated in Syria already in the first decades of the eighth century or earlier.<sup>61</sup> I did not find a similarly old common link for the *yawma 'l-thulāthā'* tradition, 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 Muḥammad 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 Muḥammad's body was committed to earth, its color had changed.<sup>62</sup> According to another Kūfan tradition, Muḥammad

<sup>58</sup>Al-Diyārbakrī, the only biographer of Muḥammad who mentions the tradition, quotes it from the *Tafsīr al-Zāhidī* and the *Kanz al-'ibād*, two thirteenth century works (see Diyārbakrī, *Ta'rikh al-khamīs*, vol. 2, pp. 172), if indeed the author of the first is Mukhtār b. Maḥmūd al-Ghazminī al-Zāhidī (d. 658/1259–60). I did not find any *tafsīr* attributed to him.

<sup>59</sup>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, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā b. 'Uqba by name as deciding for *yawma 'l-arbi'ā'*, and mentions al-Awzā'ī and Sufyān al-Thawrī as holding the other opinion.

<sup>60</sup>Most versions mention Ibn Ishāq as their transmitter. For these, see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1/2, p. 1020; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (1), vol. 1, pp. 657, 661–662; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1/4, pp. 1832–1833, 1837; and elsewhere.

<sup>61</sup>Abū 'Abd Allāh Makḥūl al-Shāmī, a Damascene transmitter who died three or four decades earlier than Ibn Ishāq (ca. 112–8/730–7). Ibn Kathīr and al-Balādhurī give two *yawma 'l-arbi'ā'* traditions. Makḥūl is their oldest transmitter and their only common link. For the first tradition, see above, n. 57; for the second, Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (1), vol. 1, p. 657; on Makḥūl, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 28, pp. 464–475.

<sup>62</sup>See Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (2), vol. 1, p. 568 (*dufina yawma 'l-thulāthā' i ḥīma zāghat al-shamsu wa-taghayyara lawnuhu*). This tradition is ascribed to the Kūfan Abū Mikhnaf (d. 154/774); on him, see "Abū Mikhnaf," *EF<sup>2</sup>*, s.v. Not all editions of *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* [1], vol. 1, p. 657, n. 4).

was interred only when “death was apparent on him,” and his fingernails turned greenish.<sup>63</sup> Still another Kūfan tradition claims that by the time of Muḥammad’s burial his corpse was bloated and his little finger bent.<sup>64</sup> A Baṣran *ḥadīth* similarly mentions the commencement of bloating before burial.<sup>65</sup> Finally, a Kūfan *ḥadīth* begins as follows, “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. . . .”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 59 (*lam yudfan rasūlu Allāhi ḥattā ‘urifa ‘l-mawtu fihī fī [sic] azfārīhi ‘khārrat*). The oldest transmitter is a grandson of Abū Bakr, Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad al-Qurashī al-Taymī (Medinan, d. ca. 101–12/719–31); he is followed by Abū ‘Abd Allāh Jābir b. Yazīd b. al-Ḥārith al-Ju’fī (Kūfan, d. 128/745–6), Abū Muḥammad Qays Ibn al-Rabī‘ al-Asadī (Kūfan, d. ca. 165–8/781–5), and finally the Medinan al-Wāqidi (d. 207/822) who later settled in Baghdad. On the first three transmitters, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 23, pp. 427–436; vol. 4, pp. 465–472; and vol. 24, pp. 25–38; on the last, see “al-Wāqidi,” *EI<sup>2</sup>*, s.v.

<sup>64</sup> See Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 58–59 (*turika rasūlu Allāhi ba‘da wafātihī yawman wa-laylatan ḥattā rabā qamīshuhu wa-ru‘iya fī khinširihī inthinā*). The transmitters are ‘Abd Allāh al-Bahī, *mawlā* of Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr (no dates or places are known for al-Bahī, but Muṣ‘ab, the governor of Iraq, died in 72/691); Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ismā‘īl Ibn Abī Khālid al-Bajalī al-Aḥmasī (Kūfan, d. ca. 145–6/762–4); and Abū Sufyān Wakī‘ b. al-Jarrāh b. Malīḥ al-Ru‘āsī (Kūfan, originally from Persia or Sogdia, d. ca. 196–7/811–3). For the three transmitters, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 16, pp. 341–342; vol. 3, pp. 69–76; and vol. 30, pp. 462–484; for Wakī‘, see also “Wakī‘ b. al-Djarrāh,” *EI<sup>2</sup>*, s.v.; on Muṣ‘ab, see “Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr,” *EI<sup>2</sup>*, s. v. The *ḥadīth* is quoted elsewhere too.

<sup>65</sup> See Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 56–57 (*lammā qubīda rasūlu Allāhi i‘tamara aṣḥābuhu fa-qālū tarabbaṣū bi-nabiyyikum la‘allahu ‘urija bihi [qāla] fa-tarabbaṣū bihi ḥattā rabā baṭnuhu. . .*). The transmitters are al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728); Abū Sahl ‘Awf b. Abī Jamīla al-‘Abdī al-Ḥajarī (Baṣran, of Iranian origin d. 146–7/763–5); Abū Naṣr ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Aṭā’ al-Khaffāf al-‘Ijlī (Baṣran, also lived in Baghdad; d. 200–6/815–22). For the first, see “al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,” *EI<sup>2</sup>*, s.v.; for the latter two, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 22, pp. 437–441; and vol. 18, pp. 509–516.

<sup>66</sup> See Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 1/4, p. 1817 (*lammā qubīda al-nabiyyu kāna Abū Bakrin ghā’iban fa-jā’ a ba‘da thalāthin wa-lam yajtari’ aḥadun an yakshifa ‘an wajhihi ḥattā irbadda baṭnuhu fa-kashafa ‘an wajhihi. . .*). I am not sure why *The history of al-Ṭabarī* (vol. 9, p. 185) translates *baṭn* as “exterior,” and interprets *ba‘da 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 *ba‘da thalāth* here means “after three days” (see *Sharḥ*, vol. 13, pp. 35–37). The transmitters are Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī (Kūfan, d. ca. 96/714–5); a certain Abū Ayyūb; Abū Ma’shar Ziyād b. Kulayb al-Tamīmī al-Ḥanzalī (Kūfan, d. 110/728–9 or 119/737); Abū Hishām (al-)Mughīra b. Miqsam al-Ḍabbī (Kūfan, d. ca. 132–6/749–54); Abū ‘Abd Allāh Jarīr b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḍabbī al-Rāzī (originally from the region of Isfahān, grew up in Kūfa, then settled around Rayy; d. 188/804); and Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Ḥumayd al-Tamīmī al-Rāzī (d. 248/862–3). For the first transmitter, see “Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī,” *EI<sup>2</sup>*, s. v.; for the rest, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 9, pp. 504–506; vol. 28, pp. 397–403; vol. 4, pp. 540–551; and vol. 25, pp. 97–108. I was unable to identify Abū Ayyūb.

The oldest transmitter named in the *isnāds* of the foregoing traditions is ʿAbd Allāh al-Bahī who probably died in the late seventh or the early eighth century.<sup>67</sup> The earliest transmitters mentioned in three others died in the early eighth century: Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. ca. 96/714–5), al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad (a grandson of Abū Bakr; d. ca. 101–12/719–31), and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). The fifth tradition is ascribed solely to Abū Mikhnaḥ (d. 154/774).<sup>68</sup> 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 Islamic traditions resemble the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death. Both mention that Muḥammad's burial took place on the third day following his death,<sup>69</sup> and that during this time his followers were anxiously waiting for *something* to happen. Both claim that when Muḥammad was finally interred, his body was in the process of decomposition. The Christian legend therefore did not invent, but borrowed from an Islamic narrative of Muḥammad's death, both the outline of events (the delayed burial and the putrefied corpse) and part of the explanation for it (from the *ana akramu* tradition). These *ḥadīths*, however, each contain only one motif of the Christian narrative. Another Islamic tradition, a version of the story about ʿUmar's denial of Muḥammad's death, presupposes a conjunction of several elements that also occur in the Christian legend.

After Muḥammad's death, says Ibn Hishām, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb addressed the Muslims and denied Muḥammad's death. He accused of hypocrisy those who claimed that Muḥammad died, and threatened them with severe punishment after Muḥammad would return. He compared the situation to the story of Exodus 32, and asserted that Muḥammad "has gone to his Lord as Mūsā b. ʿImrān went and was hidden from his people for forty days, returning to them after it was said that

<sup>67</sup>See above, n. 64.

<sup>68</sup>For the traditionists, see above, nn. 62–63, 65–66.

<sup>69</sup>Al-Ṭabarī, when summarizing the two opinions about the day of Muḥammad's burial, contrasts the view that he was buried *yawma ʿl-thulāthā* with the one that "he was buried three days after his death (*dufina baʿda wafātihī bi-thalāthati ayyāmin*)," clearly referring to the *yawma ʿl-arbiʿā* tradition (*Taʿrīkh*, vol. 1/4, p. 1830). Al-Fasawī also quotes a tradition according to which Muḥammad "remained for three days without burial (*makatha thalāthata ayyāmin lā yudfanu*)" (*al-Maʿrifā wa-ʿl-taʿrīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 289–290). Some did not agree with calculating the period from *yawma ʿl-ithnayn* to *yawma ʿl-arbiʿā* 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 ʿl-ithnayn*, the entire *yawma ʿl-thulāthā*, and was buried on the night of *yawma ʿl-arbiʿā*."

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 Muḥammad’s death. 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 Muḥammad, Muḥammad is dead; if anyone worshiped God, God is alive, does not die.” He then recited a passage from the Qur’ān, “Muḥammad 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.”<sup>70</sup> According to Ibn Hishām, the Muslims reacted as if they had never before heard this passage.<sup>71</sup>

Several versions of the ‘Umar story appear in biographies of Muḥammad 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 Muḥammad had to die like any other man. The story, as told by Ibn Hishām, creates the impression that ‘Umar alone believed that Muḥammad did not die, and 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;<sup>72</sup> at least one version, however, presents the events differently. In it, ‘Umar does not act alone, but with many Muslims sharing his opinion.<sup>73</sup>

In this version of the story, it is ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib who opposes ‘Umar. His speech strikingly differs from that of Abū Bakr. It alludes to a prolonged disagreement over the burial of Muḥammad, the distressing physical symptom of his death, and the expectation of Muḥammad’s resurrection among the Muslims. ‘Abbās says, arguing against ‘Umar, “The Messenger of God has died. He is a mortal, and, as

<sup>70</sup>Qur’ān 3:144 (Arberry’s translation).

<sup>71</sup>Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1/2, pp. 1012–1013 (*dhahaba ilā rabbihi kamā dhahaba Mūsā bnū ‘Imrāna fa-qad ghāba ‘an qawmihi arba‘īna laylatan thumma rada‘a ilayhim ba‘da an qīla qad māta wa-wa-‘llāhi la-yarji‘anna rasūlu Allāhi kamā raja‘a Mūsā*, and *ayyuhā ‘l-nās innahu man kāna ya‘budu Muḥammadan fa-inna Muḥammadan qad māta wa-man kāna ya‘budu Allāha fa-inna Allāha ḥayyun lā yamūtu*); translations from Guillaume, *The life of Muḥammad*, pp. 682–683 (modified).

<sup>72</sup>See, for example, Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 53–56 (several versions); Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (1), vol. 1, pp. 651–652, 654–656 (four versions); Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 1/4, pp. 1815–1819 (three versions); ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, pp. 301–302; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, pp. 427, 429.

<sup>73</sup>See Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 53.

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."<sup>74</sup> On the basis of its *isnāds*, the *ḥadīth* probably circulated in Baṣra, in the middle of the eighth century at the latest.<sup>75</sup> ‘Abbās’s speech in this *ḥadīth* assumes an expectation of Muḥammad’s resurrection on the part of ‘Umar and other Muslims instead of a denial of Muḥammad’s death. If it assumed only Muḥammad’s death it would not argue that God would not allow his Prophet die twice.

A few unique traditions similarly hint that disbelief in Muḥammad’s

<sup>74</sup>Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar ta’rīkh Dimashq*, vol. 2, pp. 385–386 (*inna rasūla Allāhi qad māta wa-inmahu la-basharun wa-innahu ya’sinu kamā ya’sinu ’l-basharu ay qawmu fa-’dfinū ṣāhibakum fa-innahu akramu ‘alā Allāhi min an yumūtahū imātatayn a-yumūtu aḥadākum imātatān wa-yumūtuḥu ithmatayn huwa akramu ‘alā Allāhi min dhālika ay qawmu fa-’dfinū ṣāhibakum fa-in yaku kamā taqūlūna fa-laysa yu’dhabu ‘alā Allāhi an yanjutha ‘anhu ’l-turāba inna rasūla Allāhi wa-llāhi mā māta ḥattā taraka ’l-sabīla nahjan wādiḥan fa-aḥalla ’l-ḥalāla wa-ḥarrama ’l-ḥarāma wa-nakaha wa-ḥallaqa wa-ḥāraba wa-sālama. . . ay qawmu fa-’dfinū ṣāhibakum*). The sections on Muḥammad’s death are missing from from Shīrī’s edition of Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq* (apparently 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, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, pp. 53–54; Dārimī, *Sunan*, vol. 1, pp. 220–222; and Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf* (2), vol. 1, p. 567; *ibid.* (1), vol. 1, pp. 655–656 (this edition replaces al-‘Abbās with Ibn ‘Abbās). Although much later than the others, I chose to translate Ibn Manẓūr’s text because it contains the same ideas as other longer versions of the *ḥadīth*, and presents them in a more logical order.

<sup>75</sup>Ibn Manẓūr does not give a full *isnād*, only attributes the *ḥadīth* to the Medinan ‘Ikrima (d. ca. 105/723–4). ‘Abd al-Razzāq has Abū Bakr Ayyūb b. Abī Tamīma al-Sakhtiyānī (Baṣran, d. 131/748–9), and then Abū ‘Urwa Ma‘mar b. Rāshid al-Azdī al-Ḥuddānī (Baṣran, d. 150–4/767–71) transmit it from ‘Ikrima. The remaining three *ḥadīth* collections name Abū Ismā‘īl Ḥammād b. Zayd al-Azdī al-Jahḍamī (Baṣran, d. 179/795) as the third transmitter instead of Ma‘mar, and after Ḥammād they ascribe the transmission to three different traditionists, respectively: Abū ‘l-Nu‘mān Muḥammad (‘Ārim) b. al-Faḍl al-Sadūsī (Baṣran, d. 223–4/837–9); Abū Ayyūb Sulaymān b. Ḥarb al-Azdī al-Wāshihī (Baṣran, d. ca. 223–7/837–42); and a certain Zayd b. Yaḥyā al-Anmāṭī. Al-Balādhurī has Abū Zayd ‘Umar b. Shabba al-Numayrī (Baṣran, d. 262/876) as the last transmitter, and inserts Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687–8) as the first transmitter before ‘Ikrima, surely an instance of the backward growth of *isnāds*. For ‘Ikrima and Ibn ‘Abbās, see “‘Ikrima,” and “‘Abd Allāh b. (al-)‘Abbās,” s.vv. For the other transmitters, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 3, pp. 457–464 (Ayyūb); vol. 27, pp. 303–312 (Ma‘mar); vol. 7, pp. 239–252 (Ḥammād); vol. 26, pp. 287–292 (Muḥammad); vol. 11, pp. 384–393 (Sulaymān); and vol. 21, pp. 386–390 (‘Umar). I did not find any biography of Zayd b. Yaḥyā al-Anmāṭī, but he is listed in Mizzī’s biography of ‘Umar b. Shabba as one of the traditionists from whom the latter transmitted (see *ibid.*, vol. 21, p. 387).

death was rampant in the Muslim community. A Medinan tradition depicts the Muslim community as divided into two parties over the question whether Muḥammad had died or not.<sup>76</sup> According to a Baṣran *ḥadīth*, when Muḥammad died, his Companions (*aṣḥābuhu*) assembled and decided to wait with the burial because “perhaps he ascended” (*la‘allahu ‘urija bihi*).<sup>77</sup> According to another tradition, ‘Uthmān also asserted that Muḥammad did not die. Unlike ‘Umar, however, ‘Uthmān claimed that Muḥammad ascended to heaven just as Jesus did (*rufi‘a kamā rufi‘a ‘Īsā bnu Maryama*).<sup>78</sup> According to still another (possibly Medinan) *ḥadīth*, “the people” (*al-nās*) denied that Muḥammad died, and they believed that he temporarily ascended to heaven similarly to Jesus (*rufi‘a kamā rufi‘a ‘Īsā bnu Maryama*). These people, claims the tradition, threatened those who claimed that Muḥammad died, and demanded that Muḥammad not be buried.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion: le cadavre exquis?

We can thus conclude that most motifs of the Christian legend of Muḥammad’s death were present in the Islamic tradition in the early eighth century, and it was not the Christians who invented them. The creativity

<sup>76</sup>Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 57 (*akhbaranā Muḥammadu bnu ‘Umara ḥaddathanī al-Qāsimu bnu Ishāqa ‘an ummihī ‘an abihā al-Qāsimi bni Muḥammadi bni Abī Bakrīn aw ‘an Ummi Mu‘āwiyata annahu lammā shukka fī mawti al-nabiyyi qāla ba‘duhum māta wa-qāla ba‘duhum lam yamut. . .*). The only Umm Mu‘āwiya I found is Hind bint ‘Utba b. Rabī‘a who would be a rather unlikely transmitter in this *isnād*. The other first transmitter is al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq al-Qurashī al-Taymī, Abū Muḥammad (Medinan, d. ca. 101–17/719–36), followed by his daughter, Umm Ḥakīm; then by her son, al-Qāsim b. Ishāq b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far b. Abī Ṭālib; finally by al-Wāqidi. About Hind, see “Hind bt. ‘Utba,” *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v.; about al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad and al-Wāqidi, see above, nn. 63–64. I found Umm Ḥakīm bint al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and his son mentioned in Ibn Qutayba, *Ma‘ārif*, p. 208. He does not give any date or place. Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, p. 271 lists al-Qāsim b. Ishāq as a Medinan disciple of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765).

<sup>77</sup>Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 57; for the full text and the transmitters, see above, note 65.

<sup>78</sup>Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (1), vol. 1, p. 655. The *ḥadīth* is ascribed to al-Wāqidi (*wa-rawā al-Wāqidiyyu fī isnādin lahu*). I did not find it with a more detailed *isnād*.

<sup>79</sup>Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2/2, p. 57. The first transmitter is Abū Salama b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf al-Qurashī al-Zuhrī (Medinan, d. ca. 94–104/712–23); followed by Zayd b. Abī ‘Attāb (n.d.); then the unknown Maslama b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr; and al-Wāqidi. For the first two transmitters, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 33, pp. 370–376; vol. 10, pp. 85–89; for Maslama, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mizān*, vol. 6, p. 715; and for al-Wāqidi, see above, note 63.

required of the Christians in developing it amounted at most to connecting the available motifs to each other. Even this might not have been necessary; countless *ḥadīths*, 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 Islamic traditions are poorly attested. Were it not for the extensive collection of *ḥadīths* about Muḥammad's death in Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, most traditions describing its widespread denial in the Muslim community and the state of the corpse when committed to earth would not have survived.

Not only were the motifs used in the legend present in the Islamic tradition, but they were available at the right time and place. While the *yawma 'l-arbiʿā* traditions and the *ḥadīths* about the early Muslims' widespread reluctance to admit Muḥammad's death apparently circulated in the entire Caliphate from the early eighth century onwards,<sup>80</sup> the *ḥadīths* about the decaying corpse of Muḥammad at the time of the burial are attested by the turn of the seventh and eighth century in Kūfa and Baṣra,<sup>81</sup> and the ascension traditions by the middle of the eighth century only in Kūfa.<sup>82</sup> In view of the small number of extant traditions we cannot exclude the possibility that the latter traditions circulated earlier and elsewhere too. It is significant, however, that they did circulate at the same place, 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.

The oldest traces of the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death and of the Muslim narrative from which they borrowed are, then, mostly datable to the first half of the eighth century, and they all vanish from our sight as we push back into the seventh century. This makes it all the more intriguing to consider how old the story might be, or, to put it differently, to what extent it might reflect the events that took place in Medina when Muḥammad died. It is not uncommon among scholars to regard unorthodox traits of Muḥammad's image in the Islamic tradition as going back to the early seventh century in cases when they can be contrasted with later features that became the classical Islamic position.<sup>83</sup> This method, however, does not seem easily applicable to the reconstruction of a sequence of events; after all, not all of their episodes became matters of doctrine and controversy in the Muslim community. The only elements of the narratives discussed above that are likely to

<sup>80</sup>See above, pp. 146–147, 150–152.

<sup>81</sup>See above, pp. 147–149.

<sup>82</sup>See above, pp. 139–146.

<sup>83</sup>See, for example, Friedmann, "Finality of prophethood," pp. 177–215; and Goldfeld, "The illiterate Prophet," pp. 58–67.

reflect historical reality to some extent are therefore those that became contentious issues: the belated burial of Muḥammad, the disagreements it aroused in the Muslim community, and perhaps ‘Umar’s role in the controversy.

As would be expected in hot climate, in the Arabian Peninsula it was both customary and necessary to inter the dead soon after their death. Although the date of Muḥammad’s death varies in the Muslim sources, it may be worth noting that all the dates I have encountered fall in May, June or July. The 24-hour average temperature in Medina during these months is ca. 32–36 C (90–96 F).<sup>84</sup> The burials of some early Muslims are said to have taken place shortly after their death. Abū Bakr, for example, died on a Tuesday night (or evening) about two years after Muḥammad and was interred on the same night.<sup>85</sup> Also, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) refers to the late burial of Muḥammad as one of his special characteristics, so the delay was regarded as exceptional in the Islamic tradition itself.<sup>86</sup> In view of the general implausibility of anyone in the Arabian Peninsula not being buried on the day of his death or at the latest on the day following it, it is improbable that traditions about Muḥammad’s late burial were invented. Also, it can be easily imagined that before somebody as important as Muḥammad was interred, his followers wanted to ascertain that he had indeed passed away, and before modern medical facilities were available, only signs of decomposition could serve as infallible evidence of death. Muslims, in Iraq or elsewhere, had no reason to invent such traditions. No party in early Islam could have gained anything by inventing the delay in the burial of Muhammad in order to blame some of the protagonists: one way or another, the heroes of all of them were involved in it. Once they were in circulation, however, some traditionists could as well continue to transmit them. After all, nobody doubted that Muḥammad was a mortal,<sup>87</sup> and should accordingly have died as one. The *yawma ‘l-thulāthā* tradition might have been put into circulation in order to contest this version of events.

<sup>84</sup>See [www.worldclimate.com](http://www.worldclimate.com) (Madinah, Saudi Arabia). The average temperature during daytime would naturally be much higher than this. The data was collected between 1956 and 1990. It should be mentioned, however, that the average temperature could have been different in the seventh century CE.

<sup>85</sup>See the traditions quoted, for instance, in Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, vol. 1/4, p. 2130, and in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rikh madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 30, pp. 431–434. Another example for the custom of quick burial is that of Sukayna bint al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī who also died in Medina, in 117 AH (736 CE). She died on a summer day, and since her funeral had to be postponed until the evening (or night, depending on the variant), frankincense (*ṭīb*, *bukhūr*, *a’wād*) was burnt by her corpse to dispel the smell (or fearing that the corpse might smell) (see Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* [1], vol. 2, pp. 141–142).

<sup>86</sup>Suyūṭī, *Khaṣā’iṣ*, vol. 2, p. 485.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. Qur’ān 3:144 and 18:110.

That a relatively new community would split after the death of its leader is not surprising. The array of the versions of the ʿUmar story can be plausibly explained with an underlying attempt to trivialize a split that Muḥammad's death caused, and that might have involved the entire early Muslim community, including its leaders. The most widespread version of the ʿUmar story probably developed as a result of ascribing the belief of many to one, thus representing the division as inconsequential and saving other Companions from what soon proved to be a discomfortingly mistaken view. In addition to the split of the community itself, ʿUmar's association with the wrong party was likely not invented either. I am not aware of any group in the early eighth century, when versions of the ʿUmar story already circulated, that was interested in presenting Abū Bakr or ʿAbbās as superior to ʿUmar. The events, therefore, might be reconstructed as follows. The Muslim community, including its leaders, split as a result of Muḥammad's death, with the more powerful group, led by ʿUmar, denying that Muḥammad's death was irreversible, and opposing his burial. Due to their influence, Muḥammad's interment was postponed. As nature started taking its course on the corpse, however, the position of this group was exposed as fallacious.<sup>88</sup>

Whether the events took place as suggested above cannot be proven. But regardless of what really happened in Medina when Muḥammad died, the Christian legend largely agreed with what many Muslims in the eighth century themselves told about Muḥammad's death. It was not the contents that made the story polemical, but the difference between the religious worldview of its first, Muslim audience and that of the new, Christian one. Early Muslims saw Muḥammad as a mere mortal with a divine message, and apart from the misguided judgment of their leaders after Muḥammad's death, they probably did not find anything embarrassing in his ordinary death. But soon after the dead Prophet's followers conquered the Near East, the predominantly Christian inhabitants of these lands compared the story of Muḥammad's life and death to the stories of the life and death of those whom they believed he should have resembled: the biblical prophets, Jesus and Christian saints. Comparing Muḥammad's death to that of the biblical prophets was not detrimental to his standing; apart from Enoch and Elijah who, according to the Bible, were translated to heaven alive, the rest were believed to have died the ordinary death of a mortal. But Muḥammad, in Christian eyes, did not fare well in comparison with Christ. One of the most significant contrasts between their stories was the end of their lives: the one disintegrating in the earth, the other being resurrected from the dead

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<sup>88</sup>For a different reconstruction of the events, see Madelung, *Succession*, pp. 356–360.

and ascending to heaven. When compared to the saints, Muḥammad also failed the test. According to his own followers, Muḥammad's body putrefied in death; the corpses of the saints, according to their *vitae*, resisted decay, emitted sweet fragrance, and their complexions remained fresh. The all too-human death of Muḥammad, according to the religious worldview of the Christians, did not fit his claim to divine authority. The eighth-century Muslim narrative of Muḥammad's death, as understood by Christians, made him look inferior to Jesus and the saints, and was thus a useful polemical argument.

It is tempting to believe that some Islamic traditions were invented in order to eliminate direct comparison between the stories of Muḥammad's and Christ's death. According to the Christian legend, the Companions' expectation of Muḥammad's resurrection on the third day after his death was the reason that they did not bury him. The *yawma 'l-thulāthā'* tradition might have been devised to contest the legend's factual basis.<sup>89</sup> Had Muḥammad been buried *yawma 'l-thulāthā'*, on the second day, not *yawma 'l-arbi'ā'*, on the third day after his death, nobody would have believed the Christians that the Companions waited for Muḥammad's resurrection.<sup>90</sup>

Other traditions that might have been invented in response to the Christian legend adopted a different strategy. They maintained that Muḥammad's resurrection, which the Companions had expected according to the Christian story, indeed took place. One group of these comprises the *ḥadīths* about Muḥammad's resurrection and subsequent life in his tomb. According to these traditions, Muḥammad, instead of rising from the dead while not yet buried, was resurrected later, in his grave, and continues to be alive there.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, the ascension traditions acutely resonate with Christ's story. According to some of them, Muḥammad ascended to heaven three days, according to others, forty days after his death.<sup>92</sup> Three and forty days were not selected simply because they are *topoi*; in this case we would encounter traditions about Muḥammad's ascension after seven days too. They were selected in order to create a parallelism with the resurrection and ascension of Christ as told in the Gospels: Christ rose from the dead on the third day after his burial, ascended to heaven from his tomb, then appeared to his disciples, stayed with them for forty days, and ascended to heaven again,

<sup>89</sup>For the *yawma 'l-thulāthā'* tradition, see above, pp. 146–147.

<sup>90</sup>Another reason for the invention of the *yawma 'l-thulāthā'* tradition could have been an attempt to bring Muḥammad's burial into harmony with Islamic law. In the late eighth century, Islamic law prescribed quick burial; see Halevi, *Muḥammad's grave*, pp. 158–159.

<sup>91</sup>See, for example, some of the traditions collected in Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā'*.

<sup>92</sup>See above, pp. 139–145.

in their presence.<sup>93</sup>

Traditions countering the claims that Muḥammad's corpse putrefied before burial also circulated. A *ḥadīth* quotes 'Alī exclaiming while washing Muḥammad's corpse, "You are dearer to me than my father and my mother! How fragrant you are alive and dead." The *ḥadīth* ends with the words, "Nothing was observed on (the corpse of) the Messenger of God of what is (usually) observed on the dead."<sup>94</sup> Showing its popularity, many variants of this tradition circulated; no biography of Muhammad fails to include at least one of them. The pleasant aroma of the dead body of the holy man is a common motif in Christian saints' *vitae*. For example, Antonius, the biographer of Simeon Stylites (d. 459), writes about the holy man's corpse, "throughout his body and his garments was a scented perfume which, from its sweet smell, made one's heart merry."<sup>95</sup>

About a century ago, Carl H. Becker suggested that Christian polemic against Islam in the eighth century influenced the formation of Islamic theology.<sup>96</sup> More recently, Sarah Stroumsa proposed that the genre of *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* developed in response to the non-Muslim communities' probing into Muḥammad's prophethood.<sup>97</sup> A comparison of the various ways the Muslim community remembered Muḥammad's death also reveals an impact of Christian polemic on Islam. As we saw above, Christian polemic, and the Christian legend of Muḥammad's death itself, might have influenced the formation of Islamic narratives about Muḥammad's death. Although none of the aforementioned Islamic traditions contains any hint to the Christian legend (or to Christian polemic,

<sup>93</sup>So at least in the writings of Luke; see Luke 9:22, 18:33, 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 1:3, 9–12, 10:40. Only the Book of Acts refers to Jesus' ascension to heaven after forty days. The resurrection on the third day is, of course, mentioned also elsewhere in the New Testament; see, for example, Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, 27:64; Mark 9:31, 10:34, and 1 Corinthians 15:4.

<sup>94</sup>Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1/2, pp. 1018–1019; translations from Guillaume, *The life of Muḥammad*, p. 688 (modified) (*bi-abī anta wa-ummī mā aṭyabaka ḥayyan wa-mayyitan*, and *wa-lam yura min rasūli Allāhi shay'un mim mā yurā mina al-mayyiti*). These are the last sentences of a *ḥadīth* about the washing of Muḥammad's corpse. Most of the other passages quoted in this paragraph are also parts of longer traditions. See also Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, vol. 1/4, p. 1831; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, vol. 2, p. 479.

<sup>95</sup>Doran, *Lives*, p. 98. A common Islamic tradition, "God has forbidden the earth to eat away the bodies of the prophets (*inna Allāha [qad] ḥarrama 'alā 'l-ardī an ta'kula ajsāda al-anbiyā'i*)" appears in several *ḥadīth* collections; see, for example, Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 1, pp. 524, 345; Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, vol. 3, pp. 63–64; and Dārimī, *Sunan*, vol. 2, p. 981. Probably this too developed under the influence of Christian saints' lives.

<sup>96</sup>Becker, "Christian polemic," pp. 242–257.

<sup>97</sup>Stroumsa, "The signs of prophecy," pp. 105–106, 114.

even to Christians), it is suggestive that they all circulated at the same time and the same place. While intra-Muslim debate, triggered by converts from Christianity who probably imported their religious worldview into Islam, did certainly contribute to the development of the foregoing traditions as well, the concentration of the relevant traditions in southern Iraq (and not in the Ḥijāz where a similarly great proportion of Islamic traditions were recorded) points to polemic as the more important factor. The polemical milieu of southern Iraq was more likely to create polarized opinions than the more uniform society of the Ḥijāz.

The Christians strove to preserve the account of Muḥammad's ordinary death just as eagerly as the Muslims wanted to forget it. The various versions of the Christian legend in fact imply more contact with the eighth-century Islamic tradition than they would seem at first sight. It seems that they did not develop from a single original Christian legend; some of them are related to different *ḥadīths* independently from the others. The story of Muḥammad's death in the *Apology of al-Kindī* is the richest of them. It gives four different accounts, probably all based on Islamic traditions.<sup>98</sup> According to the Qashun document, the *Istoria* and the *Adnotatio*, the "disciples" were guarding Muḥammad's corpse to see what happens to it. This echoes the *ḥadīth* about the Companions deciding to lie in wait (*tarabbaṣū*) to see what happens to the body.<sup>99</sup> The different versions of the Christian legend locate the events in two different places; some in a closed room, others in Muḥammad's garden.<sup>100</sup> The former parallels the usual scene of Muḥammad's death and funeral in the Islamic tradition, the room of 'Ā'isha, "The Messenger of God was in his house, his matter is not completed yet, his family closed the door on him," as Ibn Hishām tells us, in the first episode of *yawm al-saqīfa*.<sup>101</sup> The latter echoes a rare tradition according to which the Muslim community prayed over Muḥammad's body in "the garden" (*bi-wasaṭi al-rawḍati*).<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup>In addition to the one discussed above, pp. 132–134, 137–138 (unattributed), he quotes three others ascribed to various transmitters; one is attributed to Abū Najīd 'Imrān b. (al-)Ḥuṣayn al-Khuzā'ī (Companion, later *qāḍī* in Baṣra, d. 52/672–3), another to a certain Ḍamrān (perhaps a corruption of Shuqrān, Muḥammad's freed slave, n.d.), still another to "one of them" (see Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*, pp. 92–93; and Tien, *Risāla*, pp. 109–110). About 'Imrān and Shuqrān, see Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 22, pp. 319–321; and vol. 12, pp. 544–546.

<sup>99</sup>See above, p. 136, and p. 148, note 65.

<sup>100</sup>See above, p. 135.

<sup>101</sup>Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1/2, p. 1013 (*wa-rasūlu Allāhi fī baytihī lam yufragh min amrihī qad aghlaqa dūnahu al-bāba ahluhu*).

<sup>102</sup>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 Muḥammad died and was buried.

To conclude, the Christian legend exhibits intimate knowledge of the Islamic tradition, not the ignorance of it, as is usually supposed. The Christians, instead of inventing the story, borrowed it from the Muslims in the eighth century, and have tenaciously preserved it despite subsequent changes in the Islamic narrative of Muḥammad's death. Instead of misrepresenting Islam at will or out of ignorance, the Christians selected from the wealth of *ḥadīths* those that made it the 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 Muḥammad's corpse. But such inventiveness is rarer than it appears at first sight. It was not necessary. There were enough differences between the religious worldviews of Christianity and Islam, between their concepts of sanctity, to make some Islamic narratives function as polemical stories for Christians without modifying 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 about Muḥammad's ordinary mortality is an example of such a narrative.

#### Appendix: The Qashun document

The Qashun document, a fascinating diatribe of an anonymous Christian author against Islam, deserves more attention than it has so far received in the study of Christian-Muslim relations.<sup>103</sup> Its most prominent themes are episodes from Muhammad's life, such as stories of a Christian and a Jew instructing him, his miracles, his death and his forging of a scripture. It also includes an unusually long account of the *ḥajj* and shorter ones of Muslim prayer and of Muslim attitude to Christ and Christianity. The author attributes this material to a Muslim convert to Christianity.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the text gives some astonishingly detailed and verifiably accurate descriptions of Muslim rituals which distinguishes it from most Christian writings on Islam and makes the contribution of an eyewitness conceivable. At the same time, it includes Christian narratives unattested in Muslim tradition. Some of these, such as the story of

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<sup>103</sup>For the English translation of the text, see Thomson, "Muḥammad," pp. 846–853 (the main text is the translation of a later adaptation of the document; the footnotes give the variants of the Qashun document). Thomson calls the text "Karshuni document" which is probably incorrect (see below). Since I do not know Armenian, I fully rely on this English version. Macler, "L'Islam dans la littérature arménienne," discusses the text briefly; I am not aware of other studies.

<sup>104</sup>See Thomson, "Muḥammad," p. 846, n. a, p. 849, n. w., p. 853.

Muhammad's instruction by a Christian monk, are widespread in Christian polemical literature, while others, like the description of the Ka'ba as a center of snake cult, are entirely unknown.

This work today survives only in a medieval Armenian translation. The date of rendering is unknown, but its *terminus ante quem* can be set to the twelfth century: although the oldest extant manuscript dates only from 1273, Mxit'ar of Ani, an Armenian historian who wrote at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, already used the document as his main source on the rise of Islam probably in the same translation.<sup>105</sup> Despite this relatively late and solely Armenian attestation, I would like to suggest here that the Qashun document (or a substantial source of it) was originally written not on the fringes but in the center of the Islamic world, most probably in Iraq, in Arabic or in Syriac, and no later than the early ninth century. The main reason to think so is that the text contains many motifs unattested in Armenian texts on Islam, and several of these occur in Christian Arabic and Syriac writings produced in Iraq in the early ninth century. Furthermore, some details may indicate another source written much earlier by a Melkite monk in the Sinai. Disentangling the layers of the text, however, would require detailed comparison with a wide range of Muslim and Christian writings by an Armenian specialist. What follow are an amateur's tentative suggestions, an attempt to draw attention to the value of this document.

Five episodes recall Iraqi Christian polemic against Islam: the stories of Muhammad's instruction by a Christian monk, then by a Jew, his death, his forging of a holy scripture, and his enjoining of the Muslims to pray seven times a day.<sup>106</sup> All these five episodes occur in the earliest Syriac version of the Christian Baḥīrā legend, and three of them also in the *Apology of al-Kindī*. The details are somewhat different in the various versions, but when datable, the Qashun document contains an earlier variant. For example, its author calls the Christian monk Sargis. This is the monk's name in the *Apology* and in the ninth-century West-Syrian version of the Christian Baḥīrā legend; the name Baḥīrā for Muḥammad's Christian teacher appears only in the following century. Also, the Qashun document does not connect these episodes into a continuous narrative as the Christian Baḥīrā legend does, and thus probably reflects an earlier stage in its development. Since the earliest version of the Christian Baḥīrā legend was in all likelihood written in the 810s and the *Apology of al-Kindī* was probably written in the 820s,

<sup>105</sup>On the manuscript of the Armenian translation and its use by Mxit'ar, see *ibid.*, pp. 844–845.

<sup>106</sup>For the first and the second episodes, see *ibid.*, p. 846 (cf. n. c), for the third, p. 850, for the fourth, pp. 852–853, and for the fifth, p. 853, n. tt.

both in Iraq,<sup>107</sup> the Qashun document or the source its author used for these episodes probably antedates it and originated in the same region.

The author's description of his source also seems to point to the early ninth century as the *terminus ante quem* for either the composition of the document or for 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."<sup>108</sup> As remarked above, it is conceivable that a Muslim convert to Christianity is responsible for the detailed information on Muslim rituals, and the idiosyncrasy of the reference to Crete as the site of the conversion makes the note sound authentic. Crete was occupied by Andalusian Arabs in 827, and it remained under Islamic rule until 961;<sup>109</sup> in the intervening period no one would have fled there to convert to Christianity. Since the contents of the document make it unlikely that it was written in the second half of the tenth century or later, it must predate 827.

Other details perhaps point to another, earlier source from the Sinai. Apart from people and locations from Muhammad's biography and the Bible, the geographical focus of a part of the Qashun document is in the Eastern Mediterranean: it mentions the Mt. Sinai, Egypt, Alexandria, the Egyptians, and the Damascenes.<sup>110</sup> For instance, according to the text, Abraha's campaign against Mecca (referred to as war between the Ethiopians and the Arabs of Mecca) is related "*in Egypt* by tradition down to today."<sup>111</sup> But since the campaign was a standard part of Muhammad's biography and as such it was related everywhere in the Islamic world, this remark makes better sense if read as coming from somebody who knew about it only as an Egyptian tradition, i.e., who spent his life in Egypt or nearby and had no opportunity to become acquainted with Muslim traditions elsewhere. The note that Muhammad *came* to Mt. Sinai<sup>112</sup> is best understood from the perspective of an author writing on Mt. Sinai or nearby. The author writes that Sergius, the monk who instructed Muhammad, was an Arian.<sup>113</sup> The Arianism of Muhammad's teacher is first attested among Syrian Melkites in the early eighth century, but remains unknown among the Christians of Iraq, even later. Also, the text presents Islam in general

<sup>107</sup>See above, p. 132.

<sup>108</sup>Thomson, "Muhammad," p. 849, n. *w*; for two other similar notes, see *ibid.*, p. 846, n. *a*, and p. 853.

<sup>109</sup>See "Iḳriṭīsh," *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v.

<sup>110</sup>Thomson, "Muhammad," pp. 846, 848.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 848 (italics mine).

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 846.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 846, n. *c*.

and the *hajj* in particular as demon worship.<sup>114</sup> Three Christian writings from late seventh-century Syria refer to the Muslims as companions of demons: two Syriac ones written probably in Syria and one Greek text from the Sinai.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, the document refers to “Yathrib Medina” as the capital of the Arabs.<sup>116</sup> Since after the mid-seventh century Medina never again became a noteworthy political center, this might be a residue of a seventh century source. Taken together, these details may point to a seventh-century Melkite source from the Sinai which could have been used by the ninth century Iraqi author whose work was in turn translated into Armenian some time prior to the end of the twelfth century.

Finally, it should be noted that Thomson’s dubbing the text “Karshuni document” is unlikely to be correct. With this appellation, he followed Macler who, reviewing the edition of the text and noting that the Armenian version refers to it as “*extrait de Qachoun*” or “*recueil de Qachoun*” (*i qachounen qaghadzou*), suggested that Qashun should be taken as a corruption of the word Karshuni.<sup>117</sup> But this is unlikely, for two reasons. First, while dated Karshuni glosses are already attested in the twelfth century (only a few undated ones could be earlier), the oldest manuscripts containing texts copied in their entirety in Karshuni date from as late as the thirteenth century, after the earliest attestation of the Qashun document in Armenian translation. Second and even more importantly, the name Karshuni first appears much later, in the sixteenth century, and then in the form “Garshuni.”<sup>118</sup> It is thus improbable that the Armenian translation, dating from the twelfth century at the latest, was made from a Karshuni text and referred to itself as Karshuni. A Syriac or Arabic *Vorlage* is much more likely.

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<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 846, 849.

<sup>115</sup>Reinink, “The doctrine of the demons,” pp. 132–134.

<sup>116</sup>Thomson, “Muhammad,” p. 847.

<sup>117</sup>Macler, “L’Islam dans la littérature arménienne,” pp. 494 and 522.

<sup>118</sup>This discussion owes much to the papers given in the session on Karshuni at the Eighth Conference of Christian Arabic Studies, held in Granada (Spain), September 26–27, 2008: Emanuela Braidà, “Garshuni manuscripts and Garshuni notes in Syriac manuscripts,” Gregory Kessel, “The importance of the manuscript tradition of the ‘Book of Grace’ (7<sup>th</sup> c.) for the study of Garshuni,” and Ray Mouawad “Maronites and the Garshuni script.”

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