Muhammad and the Empires of Faith

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The Making of the Prophet of Islam

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Sean William Anthony

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many of the ideas underlying this book began to emerge early in 2012, when I first began translating one of our earliest surviving examples of a literary biography of the prophet Muḥammad: the eighth-century *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, subsequently published in New York University Press's Library of Arabic Literature series in 2015. Shortly after I finished the project, the editorial board of the Library of Arabic Literature (to my great surprise) took me under their wing and even invited me to join their ranks. Ever since, I have had countless discussions and exchanges with them about the ideas in this book, Arabic literature in general, and life writ large—so much so that it is impossible to keep track of the debt that this book owes them. All I know is that debt is large. So to Phil Kennedy, James Montgomery, Shawkat Toorawa, Julia Bray, Michael Cooperson, Joseph Lowry, Tahera Qutbuddin, Devin Stewart, and Maurice Pomerantz, I extend my deepest thanks for keeping the fire in my bones for Arabic and its literary heritage well kindled.

In Fall 2013, I arrived in Princeton with a Mellon fellowship at the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study. My intent was to work on my still unfinished book on early Shiʿite apocalypticism, but with my translation of Maʿmar's *Maghāzī* still fresh in my mind, I mostly ended up working on and researching topics and issues that appear in this book. My good friend Stephen Shoemaker shares part of the blame for this—we ended up with offices facing each across the hall that autumn, and we couldn't resist constantly debating the historical Muḥammad. We're still debating, and he's still teaching me a thing or two as well. The early stages of this book benefited immensely from the incredible resources of IAS and Princeton University, but even more from the faculty and fellows there. I must thank Hassan Ansari, Stefan Esdars, Sabine Schmidtke,

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All of these people greatly contributed to the betterment of this project, but it would scarcely have been possible, or even worthwhile, without the love and support in trying times of my wife, Catherine Bronson, and our children, Julius, Suraya, and Sawim. To them I extend not just my sincerest gratitude but also my heartfelt love and affection. Together we fought dragons—and won.

Caliphs marked with an asterisk (*) played a seminal role in the compilation and recording of the earliest traditions of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. Years are C.E.

THE EARLY CALIPHATE 632–61 (MEDINA)

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, 632–34
ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 634–44
ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, 644–56
In Kūfah:
ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, 656–61

(First Civil War 656–61, begins with the assassination of ʿUthmān and ends with the assassination of ʿAlī and Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī's peace with Muʿāwiyah)

THE UMAYYAD DYNASTY 661–750 (SYRIA)

The Sufyānids
Mūʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, 661–80
Yazīd I ibn Muʿāwiyah, 680–83

(Second Civil War 683–92, begins with the rebellion of ʿAbdallah ibn al-Zubayr and his establishment of a rival caliphate in Mecca and ends with his defeat and the bombardment of the Kaʿbah in Mecca by Umayyad forces in 692)

The Marwānids
Marwān I ibn al-Ḥakam, 684–85
*ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, 685/692–705
*al-Walīd I ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, 705–15
*Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, 715–17
*ʿUmar II ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, 717–20
Yazīd II ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, 720–24
*Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, 724–43
al-Walīd II ibn Yazīd, 743–44   (Third Civil War 744–50, Yazīd III assassinates al-Walīd II in a putsch, and in the East the Hāshimite movement in Khurāsān launches a call to install a descendant of the Prophet's clan, the Banū Hāshim, as caliph, eventually replacing the Umayyads with the Abbasids)

Yazīd III ibn al-Walīd, 744
Marwān II 'al-Ḥimār', 744–50

THE ABBASID DYNASTY (IRAQ)

Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Ṣaffāḥ, 750–54
*Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr, 754–75   (762, Baghdad founded as the new imperial capital)

*al-Mahdī, 775–85
al-Hādī, 785–86
Hārūn al-Rashīd, 786–809

KEY EARLY COMPILERS OF THE *SĪRAH-MAGHĀZĪ* LITERATURE

ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr (born ca. 643, Medina; died 713, Medina)
A prominent notable of Quraysh from the Asad clan, the son of the eminent Companions of the Prophet al-Zubayr ibn ʿAwwām and Asmāʾ Dhāt al-Niṭāqayn, the daughter of the caliph Abū Bakr. He was revered as one the seven learned men (*fuqahāʾ*) of Medina. His correspondence with the Umayyad caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd I may be the earliest surviving biographical writings on the Prophet Muḥammad in Arabic.

Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (born ca. 670, Medina; died 742 at his estate in al-Adāmā in the Ḥijāz)
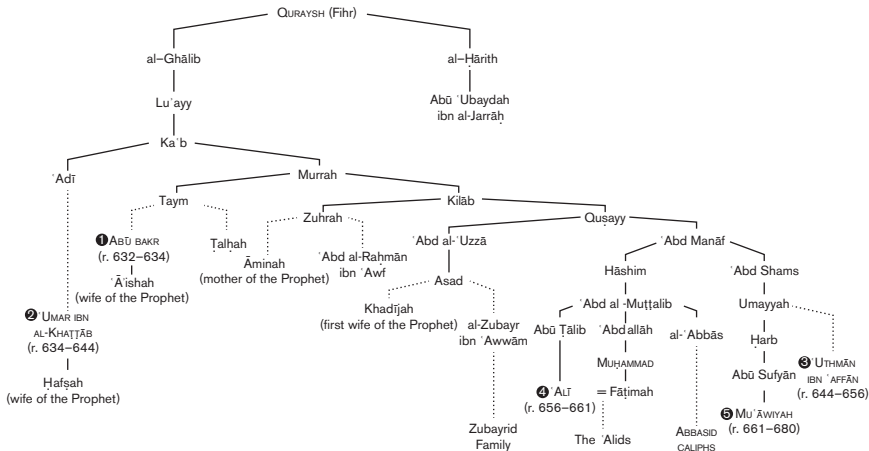
FIGURE 1. Genealogical table of the Quraysh and the early Caliphs.

Perhaps the most seminal figure in the history of the Islamic tradition writ large, al-Zuhrī was an eminent member of the Zuhrah clan of Quraysh and a prominent member of the Umayyad court from the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik until the end of his life. During the caliphate of Hishām, the court sponsored a massive effort to record the traditions of al-Zuhrī, effecting a sea change in early attitudes to the codification and distribution of the oral tradition.

Maʿmar ibn Rāshid al-Azdī (born ca. 687, Baṣrah (Basra, Iraq); died 770, Ṣanʿāʾ)

A Persian cloth-merchant and a non-Arab client (*mawlā*) of Azd clan of Baṣrah who traveled widely from southern Iraq to Syria (where he studied under al-Zuhrī), the Ḥijāz, and eventually Yemen, where he settled. In Yemen, he transmitted one of the earliest surviving accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad's life, *The Expeditions* (*Kitāb al-Maghāzī*), to his prominent student ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī.

Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah (born after 675, Medina; died 758, Medina)

A non-Arab client of the Zubayrid family who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the Prophet's life entitled *The Book of Expeditions* (*Kitāb al-Maghāzī*), reputedly quite short, which only survives in later quotations. A teacher with his own study circle in the Prophet's mosque in Medina, he maintained a strong reputation among the scholars of Medina and their school, especially their doyen, Mālik ibn Anas.

Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (born 704, Medina; died 767, Baghdad)

The greatest architect of the *sīrah-maghāzī* genre and its most influential author, Ibn Isḥāq was a non-Arab client of the household of the Qurashī Qays ibn Makhramah and lived a tumultuous early life in Medina, although he earned the admiration and praise of eminent teachers such as al-Zuhrī. He found fame after he abandoned Medina and went to the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr, under whose patronage he and his work flourished until the end of his days.

Introduction

The Making of the Historical Muḥammad

This is a book about the formation and beginnings of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, an early genre of Arabic writing about the life of Muḥammad, the prophet and founder of Islam. It is also about how to situate this genre historically in the thought world of Late Antiquity (approximately 250–750 C.E.), a period that witnessed the ascendance of today's major monotheistic faiths (Christianity, rabbinic Judaism, and Islam), as well as others that are no longer so prominent (such as Manicheanism, Zoroastrianism, and other Iranian religions). In addition to the burgeoning of these faiths, Late Antiquity also saw the rise of their political fortunes, often by means of imperial expansion, and the articulation of their intellectual, literary, and legal traditions, which led to the transformation of a broad array of civic ideas, such as empire, law, and political community.

Employing the reading strategies of historical and comparative philology, this study explores what sort of insights situating the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature in a late antique context might provide. Hence, the work has been written with two primary goals in mind: firstly, to explore how historical and comparative readings of the earliest Arabic sources on the biography of Muḥammad in tandem with the non-Muslim sources of the sixth to eighth centuries C.E. might revitalize historical research into the life and times of Muḥammad; and, secondly, to shed new light on the historical circumstances and the intellectual currents that gave rise to the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition as a discrete genre of Arabic letters from the last decade of the seventh century C.E. up until the end of the eighth. In a nutshell, this is a book about what can currently be accomplished by researchers dedicated to investigating the historical Muḥammad using modern historical methods and close readings of our earliest source-texts. It is not a comprehensive biography of Muḥammad

but rather an attempt to open new paths of research in the near term and to lay the methodological groundwork for future comprehensive accounts of him as a historical figure.

Although the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature remains an indispensable source for studying the historical Muḥammad, it must be emphasized that the corpus of traditions that this literature preserves is by no means our only source of data about his life. Much of this study is concerned, therefore, not just with understanding the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, but also with how this corpus relates to these other sources. There are four cardinal sources upon which all research into the historical Muḥammad hinges: (1) the Qurʾan; (2) epigraphic, documentary, and archaeological evidence; (3) contemporary and near-contemporary non-Muslim accounts, written primarily in Armenian, Greek, and Syriac;[1] and (4) Arabic literary sources that are mostly, but not exclusively, preserved in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature and the *ḥadīth* compilations.[2]

Ideally, these cardinal sources must be viewed as complementary, rather than mutually antagonistic, layers of historical evidence.[3] In practice, however, this ideal proves difficult to achieve. Of these four cardinal sources, the first three are for the most part quite early, inasmuch as they were written, composed, or (in some cases) disposed of within the first hundred years following Muḥammad's death in 632 C.E. The last of these sources—comprising the Arabic literary sources in general and the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions in particular—is often seen as the most formidable and daunting. Although all historical sources pose challenges of interpretation for historians, the challenges of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition are particularly acute. This bromide may be a common refrain among historians of the early Islamic period; however, the challenges of relying on the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature are salient and still worth articulating.

For one thing, the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus is the latest of the four cardinal sources. No extant books that preserve the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions date from before the period stretching from the late eighth century C.E. to the early ninth—approximately 150 to 250 years after Muḥammad's death—and the works that do survive are filled, to varying degrees, with theologically tendentious and even outright legendary materials. For this reason, a great number of modern historians have come to hold that the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature tells us far more about the formation of the

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1. I refer here only to sources written prior the close of the seventh century C.E. The most important of these to mention Muḥammad are discussed in chapter 2 below. My rationale for excluding the other, later sources is relatively simple: by the 700s, a strict division between Muslim and non-Muslim sources becomes a false one, inasmuch as the authors of this era, regardless of confessional identity, begin to read one another's writings and respond to their respective, competing visions of the past with increasing regularity (see Hoyland 2011, 26ff.; id., 2017, 114–15).

2. Brockopp 2017, 11ff., offers a similar breakdown of the sources.

3. See the astute comments of Salaymeh 2016, 25–28.

early cultural memory of Muḥammad than it does about the so-called historical Muḥammad. Expressed another way, the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus is a primary source less about the historical figure of Muḥammad than for understanding how early Muslims understood Muḥammad and his message, as well as how they chose to depict God's disclosure of His providential plan for human salvation through both. From the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, we learn mostly about how Muslims of the eighth and ninth centuries C.E. wished Muḥammad to be known and how they used their constructed images of him to forge their own confessional and sectarian identities, but perhaps not much else.

Secondly, the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition is problematic because it is such a noisy source—its version of history tends to drown out the other sources or else demand that they be read within the framework it provides. This applies especially to how one reads the Qurʾan, itself a source relatively devoid of historical narrative (which is not to say that it is uninterested in history, or that it lacks its own historical vision).[4] For over a century, modern scholarship has seen early Muslim efforts to interpret and historicize the Qurʾan as the very fount of the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions. In other words, although the traditions may appear to be historical narrative, this current in modern scholarship holds that such traditions are, in fact, fundamentally exegetical rather than historical in character.[5] Whatever the drawbacks of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, the versions of history that its representative books offer is a rather cogent one and a useful heuristic, so its narratives and frameworks are inevitably the first narratives that one learns as a neophyte. Hence, the arc of this tradition's narrative is often difficult (and, for some, impossible) to unlearn. Even today, modern scholars have scarcely begun to imagine what it would be like to read the Qurʾan without the aid of the exegetical and chronological framework of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition.

The late Patricia Crone, our field's most articulate skeptic, once expressed just how acute the problem is for modern historians when she characterized the most important representative of the early *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (*Book of Expeditions*) of Ibn Isḥāq (d. A.H. 150/767 C.E.), as follows:

> The work is late: written not by a grandchild, but by a great-grandchild of the Prophet's generation, it gives us the view for which classical Islam had settled. And written by a member of the ʿulamāʾ, the scholars who had by then emerged as the classical bearers of the Islamic tradition, the picture which it offers is also one-sided: how the

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4. Paret 1961; Neuwirth 2010, 223–34.

5. Becker 1913 and Blachère 1952, 10–11. Cf. the countervailing view articulated by Rubin 2003a, who offers an important riposte to the monomania that clings blindly to the premise that all the traditions of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature are exegetical in origin; he demonstrates compellingly that many traditions were, rather, "quranicized" at a secondary stage of their development rather than invented for exegetical ends.

> Umayyad caliphs [as opposed to the scholar's Abbasid patrons] remembered the Prophet we shall never know. That it is unhistorical is only what one would expect, but it has an extraordinary capacity to resist internal criticism . . . one can take the picture presented or one can leave it, but one cannot *work* with it.[6]

Crone calls Ibn Isḥāq practically our only source, which is likely to strike specialists nowadays as rather outdated.[7] Ibn Isḥāq's corpus can no longer be regarded as the historiographical bottleneck it once was. I myself have published a new Arabic edition and English translation of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* by his younger contemporary Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. A.H. 153/770 C.E.), which not only provides an important additional source but also helps reconstruct the traditions of a key Medinan teacher of both Ibn Isḥāq and Maʿmar: Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. A.H. 124/744 C.E.). However, the pall that such dreary prognoses cast over the prospect of successful research into the historical Muḥammad persists. At the time she published these words in 1980, Crone's intervention was indispensable for the field, a much-needed revolt against a stubbornly dominant strain of Orientalist positivism that took these texts as simple records of historical fact—and, indeed, the iconoclastic spirit of her intervention remains vital to moving the field forward.[8] But is the problem truly as intractable as Crone characterized it four decades ago? Can a historian really not *work* with the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature? This monograph has in large part been written to counter this pessimism and demonstrate that, yes, one indeed *can* work with this corpus. But the question of *how* remains.

The distinctive élan of Crone's writing often obscures the fact that her pessimistic attitude to the *sīrah-maghāzī* material was not isolated, or even especially new. Three decades earlier, the German Orientalist Rudi Paret characterized the period preceding the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate in 750 C.E. as a historiographical "blank slate."[9] This is not because nothing had been written about it—quite the contrary, the sheer volume of sources discussing this period is in fact daunting, and its events and crises serve as the *locus classicus* for the sectarian and theological debates over early Muslim history. Rather, Paret was pointing to a gaping chasm between the earliest sources of the Arabo-Islamic tradition written in the late eighth and ninth centuries and early Islamic history of the early seventh century. No matter how many late sources we have, their sheer number does not mitigate the fact that they are late. This chronological source gap, not to mention the ideological tendentiousness of the later sources that do survive, has been charac-

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6. Crone 1980, 4.

7. That Ibn Isḥāq was not the only game in town was noted early on by M. Cook 1983, 62, 91.

8. Robinson 2015a, 606.

9. Paret 1954, 149–50, "Die Zeit, die dem Ende der Omayyadenherrschaft vorausgeht, ist . . . ein unbeschriebenes Blatt. . . . Am Anfang der Überlieferung über den Urislam klafft eine Lücke"; cited in Schöller 1998, 53n14.

terized by some modern scholars as so dire as to render a historical approach to Muḥammad impossible[10]—a nihilistic abnegation of the importance of historical inquiry if there ever was one. After all, conclusions about what may or may not be knowable about the past itself arises from historical inquiry, not despite it. If this is where the pursuit of the historical Muḥammad takes us—that he is as historically as unknowable as, say, the King Arthur of the Arthurian legends or the patriarch Abraham of biblical lore—then so be it. That too, however, would constitute a sort of progress.

Recent research has mitigated at least one key aspect of our knowledge of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition and its utility as a source base. One of the reasons that our sources are so voluminous is because they compile, redact, and preserve *earlier* sources. Like the biblical critic who compares synoptic Gospel accounts to uncover the underlying source(s) behind them, modern scholars of the Arabic literary tradition have leveraged to their advantage this tradition's own "synoptic problem"— namely, the problem of relying upon a voluminous corpus of divergent accounts that relate the same historical event in slightly different ways—to discover whether or not older sources lie underneath these accounts and are embedded in the later texts. How far back one can go remains controversial, but the current consensus holds that, at the very least, we have a robust sense of what one of Ibn Isḥāq's teachers, the scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. A.H. 124/742 C.E.), transmitted about Muḥammad. As discussed in chapter 5 below, we even know what one of al-Zuhrī's teachers, ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, likely said as well.[11] This insight takes us well into the cultural and intellectual milieu of the late Umayyad period, which ended in 750 C.E. It turns out after all that we have a rather good sense of how the late Umayyads (not to mention a good number of their contemporaries) viewed Muḥammad.

The main methodology that has been used in recent decades to achieve this narrowing of the source gap is called, somewhat esoterically, *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis.[12] The methodology that these works pioneered exploits a feature of the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literary corpus that makes it ideally suited for source-critical analysis. This corpus is for the most part made up of small, discrete accounts, stories, anecdotes, and utterances that constitute easily identifiable textual units. This applies especially to the *ḥadīth* literature, which unlike the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, usually excludes "extraneous" catalogues and compositions

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10. Chabbi 1996.

11. Görke and Schoeler 2008.

12. Schoeler 1996 and Motzki 1996 gave the term "*isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis" wide currency. Although the studies of Schoeler and Motzki laid the groundwork for the methodology, previous scholars had employed similar methods; see Pavlovitch 2016, 24, and Zaman 1991, with which Pavlovitch and Powers 2015 engages fruitfully. For helpful reviews of other methods, see Motzki 2005, Sadeghi 2008, and Haider 2013.

such as lists of battle participants, tribal genealogies, and poetry.[13] Each of these textual units, called a *matn,* varies in size. They can thus be merely a sentence long or even stretch for a few pages. Each *matn* is also accompanied by a chain of authorities, called an *isnād,* that recounts who transmitted the account from whom, from teacher to pupil, and so on across generations. The best *isnād*s list a series of pupil-teacher relationships that stretch back from author/compiler either to Muḥammad himself or to someone who knew him or witnessed the events being recounted. *Isnād*s, of course, could be forged and indeed quite often were forged and improved upon as the ages passed—something long recognized by Muslim and Western philology alike, albeit while addressing the problem with different approaches and assumptions.[14] But as a source-critical method, what *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis does is test *isnād*s by comparing the *matn*s to which they are attached. Scholars who practice this method pair together *matn*s concerned with the same topic and/or event and then analyze their accompanying *isnād*s in order to track the evolution of a *matn* over time and determine the authenticity of the transmission represented in the *isnād*s. Some traditions are revealed to be spurious and forgeries, whereas others have been revealed to have been faithfully transmitted and recorded by later redactors, who, in most cases, did so without attempting to harmonize the disparate accounts.

Earlier scholars' pessimism nonetheless remains with us despite these recent achievements in the source-critical analysis of the Arabic literary sources. Some scholars still dismiss the vaunted insights of the method, even if they rarely offer a better interpretation of the evidence.[15] That said, the method is not a panacea despite its insights, a fact readily recognized by even its most ardent and experienced practitioners. Besides being exceedingly arduous and time-consuming, it has very real limitations. Here are some of the most important of these,[16] worth keeping in mind:

1. With regard to episodes from the life of Muḥammad, *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis produces the most reliable results when the number of different traditions on a given episode is high and when they are transmitted by numerous authorities. Many, if not most, of the events recounted in the

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13. Of course, within the *sīrah-maghāzī* compositions themselves, these literary companions of the "raw" *ḥadīth* material are anything but "extraneous"; they are, rather, integral to an expansive project to encompass all of human time within the prophetic frame of early Islamic kerygma.

14. Brown 2009 offers what is by far the best comparative account of Muslim and Western approaches to the problem of the falsification of *ḥadīth*.

15. Tilman Nagel 2013, 568, for example, has likened the practitioners of *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis to treasure-hunters who, having set out to discover gold, rejoice even when they only turn up worms. Nagel's characterization grossly misrepresents the methods and results of *isnād*-cum-*matn* analysis; see the riposte of Görke and Motzki 2014.

16. I rely here on Görke 2011b, 143

sīrah-maghāzī tradition are not attested widely enough and in a sufficient number of variants to yield significant results.

2. Individual traditions vary widely in terms of wording, often due to the process of transmission and reception. Such variants resulted, not only from the vagaries of oral transmission, but also from those of textual transmission in manuscripts. Even if the existence of an early source text or template can be proven with a reasonable degree of certainty, some of the "original" wording of many accounts as transmitted from teacher to pupil has often been lost.

3. The earliest *hadith* and *sīrah-maghāzī* accounts that can be reconstructed generally date from no earlier than sixty years after the death of Muḥammad, and, with very few exceptions, they are not eyewitness reports. Hence, the chasm between source and event is never really eliminated; it is only narrowed.

4. Although analysis can verify the authenticity of transmission (i.e., that teacher *x* transmitted tradition *n* to pupil *y*), it cannot verify the historicity of a given tradition being transmitted. We merely get a sense of its beginnings. Moreover, the epistemological problems of all historical projects are never entirely resolved just because the beginnings of a tradition can be placed at an early date. An early tradition is neither necessarily a historically accurate tradition nor even a historical one.[17]

Overall, the *isnad*-cum-*matn* method has given modern scholars a better understanding of how our earliest sources came to be, and reliable methods for dating the traditions that fill these sources. However, these new insights have merely reconfigured the terms of the debate rather than settling the oldest questions. Chase Robinson (2015b) delineates what he sees as the recent emergence of two camps of historians of early Islam, and his observations equally apply to the historical investigations into the biography of Muḥammad. The first camp is populated by those historians who are determined to ascertain the general outlines of events that constituted Muḥammad's life and who are confident they can do so successfully, perhaps even to peel back the layers of pious legend to arrive at a bedrock of raw historical fact.[18] And in the second camp are those historians

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17. Görke and Motzki 2014, 499ff., and Pavlovitch 2016, 22–49.

18. The hard-won *Grundschicht* (base layer) of Sellheim 1965–66, 73ff. Although dismissed as historically naïve by Hoyland 2007, 5, this sort of textual stratigraphy has been invoked as foundational as recently as Lassner 2000, 45ff., and Azmeh 2014b, 83ff. Hoyland likely echoes the verdict of Crone 1980, 14, "Sellheim published his stratigraphy of the *Sīra*, a work notable . . . for its definition of a *Grundschicht* so broad that the basic problems of the formation of the Prophet's biography were evaded." Sellheim later singled out the erudite tradition sorting of M. J. Kister as offering the key to approach early Islamic history; see Sellheim 2005.

who are content to document how the cultural memory of early Muslim communities coalesced and the formation of the literary forms that preserved this cultural memory.[19] Robinson expresses his sanguinity about the second project, but of the two camps, the second bears the more pessimistic message in my reckoning. Its message seems to be that modern historians can sort and sift through the memories of the past—or, more accurately, the literary representations of the past that élites used to construct the cultural memory of their societies and, thus, sustain and shape the identities of subsequent Muslim communities—but they cannot look beyond them.

Robinson's attitude is understandable and justified in numerous respects—just because he is pessimistic does not mean that he is wrong. The habits cultivated by historians create an aversion to naïve and credulous approaches to sources, and a healthy skepticism is a staunch and indispensable inoculation against such naïveté.[20] But even skepticism has its limits.[21] More important, Robinson's observations help us to focus on the salient point: the gap between the events of early Islamic history and the sources that narrate them cannot be entirely bridged by modern methods. We must still grapple with the process of how early Arabo-Islamic historiography in general and the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition in particular used literary narratives to forge competing communal memories of the past. Even if historians happily undertake this Sisyphean task, however, is the process of how early Muslim élites constructed this cultural memory really all there is for them to ponder?[22] Certainly not.

As Alan Megill has noted, "far from being a continuation of memory, true history stands almost in opposition to memory."[23] Memory ought not to be confused with the craft of history. Yet what is really meant by "memory" in such parlance? As used by contemporary historians, it has become an increasingly slippery term, and in the eyes of some perhaps even at risk of losing analytical value altogether,[24] but in the context of the discourse pervading modern historical scholarship, "memory"

19. Robinson 2015b, 122.

20. Cf. the comments of Aziz al-Azmeh : "the terms of the debate seem to be starkly simple, counterposing confidence in Arabic sources, critical or uncritical, to the use of hyper-criticism as an elixir against credulity" (Azmeh 2014b, 3).

21. Robinson 2015b, 122, "No historian familiar with the relevant evidence doubts that in the early seventh century many Arabs acknowledged a man named Muḥammad as a law-giving prophet in a line of monotheistic prophets, that he formed and led a community of some kind in Arabia, and, finally, that this community-building functioned . . . to trigger conquests that established Islamic rule across much of the Mediterranean and Middle East in the middle third of the seventh century."

22. Azmeh 2014b, 6, "some scholarship which despairs of historical reconstructing later literary representations of the Paleo-Muslim period, as a contribution to what might be termed a history of mentalities." On the relation of the proliferation of memory to a loss of confidence in history, see Dirlik 2002, 83–84.

23. Megill 2007, 18.

24. Algazi 2014.

must certainly mean the sense-making stories that convey meaning(s) about the past for societal groups. Such sense-making stories simultaneously play a role in the constitution of an individual's selfhood and a group's collective identity and perform that function independently of any academic discipline or professionalized craft called "history."[25] Certainly, this social function of cultural and historical memory merits the careful attention of historians; but it is not theirs to wield. As a "basic anthropological feature" of human communities, Jan Assmann notes, cultural memory must not be confounded with the task of the historian and its evidentiary demands. "One must simply bear in mind," he warns, "that memory has nothing to do with the study of history." Assmann does not mean that professional historians ought not to be concerned with the process of how cultural memory is formed—to the contrary, the process is of utmost concern to historians (and, in particular, to Assman's own work). The distinction is simply this: the human and societal drive to construct a cultural memory of the past must not be confused with the actual craft of historical scholarship.[26]

This is, of course, simply a word of caution and not intended to cast aspersions on historians of cultural memory or memory studies more broadly—their contributions to our understanding of the construction of the past and the contingency of our knowledge thereof has been invaluable. Our widespread fondness for using "memory" as a catch-all analytical category risks leading us astray. By terming such traditions about the past simply as "memories," one risks leaving the impression that these traditions are in fact literal, cognitive memories passed on by people who experienced the events in question. More often than not, these accounts merely don the guise of eyewitness reports rather than actually preserving them. Even when, in rare instances, historians unearth records of actual memories of the literal, vernacular sort, one cannot necessarily use them as shelter from historical scrutiny. "The frailty of human memory should distress all of who quest for the so-called historical Jesus," Dale Allison writes,[27]— and we who study the so-called historical Muḥammad would also do well to keep in mind the deficits of memory.[28] Though history *needs* memory, memory *needs* history too. Given the importance of cultural memory to all historical projects, I doubt that historians will quit overusing "memory" as a term of art any time soon.[29] The salient point is that history as a craft and discipline is not merely about cataloging these sense-making

25. "History turns into myth as soon as it is remembered, narrated, and used, that is, woven into the fabric of the present" (Assmann 1997, 14).

26. Assmann 2011, 60.

27. Allison 2010, 1; see Ehrman 2016 for the most devastating case.

28. Cf. Schoeler 2011, 113, "even in the case of authentic traditions, we should not expect to have objective reports on actual events. What we have are 'memories' at best, if not actually 'memories of memories.'"

29. On the staying power of memory studies, see Rosenfeld 2009.

stories told about the past. History uses memory and its reconstructions of the past as a source, even an extraordinarily important source, but still just one source to be read and utilized in light of many others.[30] Rather than merely cataloging memories, the historical craft corrects memory, supplements it, subverts it, and demonstrates it to be contingent and contested. Focusing too much on memory poses a certain risk for modern historians of early Islam, who risk confining themselves to a mere "affirmative historiography" that values memories for their own sake and elevates memory and tradition to the most authentic view of the past. This is, in fact, to evade history.

What this discussion is meant to highlight is that the constructions of the past purveyed in the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition ought not to be seen simply as "history" writing; rather, these works rely on historical discourse in order to construct a sophisticated theological narrative about the past.[31] Much of what is conventionally termed "historical memory" is in fact such "narrativized theology," and a failure to recognize it as such leads to gross historical errors. That is, to view memory-cum-tradition as our main and most important source of history is to recapitulate and enracinate the theological and political projects of the past in the present. But then history ceases to be history. It collapses into tradition, aimed at carrying forward past traditions into the future tradition of specific groups (confessional, sectarian, tribal, nationalist, or otherwise), or else it collapses into memory, used to promote the vaunted and valorized memories of parochial groups.[32] A habit of speaking of Muslim scholars of the Abbasid period as curating and passing on early communal memory has occluded an important reality: this "memory" was no unbroken chain mooring them to an authentic past; rather, it was an imagined story, not just about the recent Islamic past, but about the deep human past and the ordering and guidance of creation and historical time by divine providence. It was, briefly stated, a theological construct that served theological aims. If we historians confine our task merely to cataloguing such "memory," we risk sublimating some of the most problematic aspects of the past and the craft of historical writing: how to avoid historical error, how to refine (or challenge) authoritative accounts of the past, and how to perceive the contingency of the evidence that survives about the past and thus measure our knowledge thereof. As Megill notes, "If the historian enters into the service of memory, the consciously or unconsciously self-

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30. "Memory is the raw material of history . . . the living source from which historians draw," Jacques Le Goff writes (1992, xi). However, the raw materials of history necessarily include not just memory but also remnants of the pasts, whether remembered or forgotten (see Megill 2007, 25–26). Indeed, even Le Goff warns: "To privilege memory excessively is to sink into the unconquerable flow of time" (1992, xii; cf. Ricoeur 2004, 385–86).

31. Robinson 2015b, 129.

32. Megill 2007, 33.

interested and self-serving memories of individuals and groups become the final arbiter of historical knowledge."[33]

How, then, can historians escape the cognitive loop of memory's horizon? The answer is surprisingly prosaic: broaden the source base and enlarge the archive. However, the implementation of the solution is also fraught: the boundaries between history and memory are often elusive, and history can never fully vanquish memory or its own pluralities (i.e., the perennial existence of "histories" rather than an all-encompassing, grand narrative of History).[34] One sees this in the first such strategy to be adopted in modern times—namely, setting aside the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition for the historical Muḥammad and turning to the other cardinal sources, especially the Qurʾan and early non-Muslim accounts. Since much of *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith* in fact argues for the importance of integrating non-Muslim source material, I shall here briefly single out the challenges the Qurʾan poses vis-à-vis the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature.

The Qurʾan is the earliest and most important artifact of the life of Muḥammad and, therefore, the best witness to the religiosity and sociocultural milieu of his earliest followers. Moreover, the Qurʾan's documentation and the material evidence for its redaction and transmission are peerless in the Arabic literary corpus. This assertion reflects, not the naïve sentiments of believers or pietistic scripturalists, but rather an emerging consensus based on over a century and a half of Western scholarship and debate, inaugurated by the publication of the first edition of Theodor Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorâns* in 1860. That the text of the Qurʾan had been established as a written document mere decades after Muḥammad's death was first demonstrated on the basis of the intrinsic qualities of the Qurʾan itself.[35] However, the arguments for the Qurʾan's antiquity have in recent decades been considerably strengthened by breakthroughs in the paleographical analysis of the early Arabic script and codicological and radiocarbon analysis of the earliest surviving fragments of the Qurʾan on parchment and papyrus.[36] All of this leads modern historians to an encouraging conclusion: the theological narrative that renders the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature such a problematic historical source has not touched the Qurʾan, the primeval document of Islamic religiosity.

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33. Megill 2007, 37. This phenomenon can be seen in recent popularizing works such as Tariq Ramadan's *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* (2007), Asma Afsarrudin's *The First Muslims* (2008), and Omid Safi's *Memories of Muhammad* (2009). That "memory" serves gate-keeping purposes can be readily discerned in how rarely, if ever, non-Muslim sources are said to reflect the historical memory of Muḥammad or the early Islamic conquests.

34. Megill 2007, 58–59.

35. First by Donner 1998, 35–63, and then Neuwirth 2010, 235–75 and Sinai 2017b, 40–77.

36. George 2010; Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012; Déroche 2013; Youssef-Grob 2019; Marx and Jocham 2019.

This is not to say that all the historical problems surrounding the Qurʾan have been resolved—they have not, not by a long shot. The earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾan are copied in a "defective" Arabic devoid of vowel markings and often lacking signs to disambiguate similarly written consonants. As result, how the highly stylized, oral recitations (*qirāʾāt*) of Qurʾan relate to the archaic text of the earliest manuscripts has yet to be fully determined.[37] Codicology has simultaneously established the early date of the Qurʾan and called into question the circumstances and motivations behind its compilation as recounted in historical accounts of its codification dating from the second/eighth century.[38] Deeply intertwined with the question of the Qurʾan as well is the very history of the Arabic language. Thanks to new discoveries in epigraphy and historical linguistics, that history is on the brink of being rewritten, upending old certainties.[39] The list goes on, but that just means there is still plenty of work for scholars to do.

So why not just jettison the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition and rely solely on the Qurʾan as our main source about the historical Muḥammad? Although historians can, and indeed *must,* rely on the Qurʾan when writing on the historical Muḥammad, it is "an unusual historical source."[40] Embedded in the Qurʾan is a great deal of information about the worldview and religiosity of its Messenger, his community, and even their opponents, but the text contains few details about Muḥammad that one could easily organize into a historical narrative. The Qurʾan relates no stories of Muḥammad's life, offers no narratives of his Companions or his enemies, and in general takes little interest in directly providing the immediate historical context for its own message. While the Qurʾan was divided into chapters called *sūrah*s at its earliest stage (e.g., see Q. Nūḥ 24:1), in its current form it does not present these *sūrah*s to us in chronological order but, rather, roughly in order of the *sūrah*s' size, with the longest *sūrah*s placed closer to the beginning and the shortest towards the end. The Qurʾan, not surprisingly, has been preserved with the needs and concerns of the faithful in mind, not historians.

At first sight, then, the Qurʾan contains few concrete historical data despite its substantial length.[41] It mentions only six historical personages by name, of whom only two are Muḥammad's contemporaries;[42] fourteen geographical place-names and

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37. For important steps forward, see Nasser 2012; Dutton 2012; Kaplony 2018, 342–43.

38. Anthony and Bronson 2016; Anthony 2019b.

39. E.g., see Al-Jallad 2017a; van Putten and Stokes 2018; van Putten 2017a, 2017b, and 2019.

40. Welch 1983, 15.

41. I have adapted the following list from Robin 2015, 27–28—who himself relies on Paret 1961, Horovitz 1925, and Horovitz 1926. My tally also differs slightly from Robin's; even straightforward lists will reflect idiosyncratic decisions by the compiler. For instance, should "Badr" be counted as an event, a place, or both?

42. These named persons are Abū Lahab (Q. Masad 111:1), Aḥmad (Q. Ṣaff 61:6), Muḥammad (Q. Āl ʿImrān 3:144; Muḥammad 47:2), and Zayd (Q. Aḥzāb 33:37). Even this list could be shorter. "Aḥmad,"

monuments;[43] eight tribes and peoples, many of whom are from the distant historical past;[44] and only explicitly refers to five historical events, only three of which were contemporary.[45] This amounts to a mere thirty-three data points with which to situate the Qurʾan within a historical context. All of this is *not* to say that the Qurʾan does not propound its own view of the human past—indeed, it conveys a cosmic vision not merely of the primeval and the human past but also of the eschatological future as illuminated by divine providence and prophetic revelation.[46] What I do mean to say is that, even when it addresses "historical" material, the Qurʾan does not so much aim to convey, to clarify, or to record historical facts as to edify and to exhort—it is emphatically an oratorical and liturgical text, not a historical one.[47]

To illustrate this problem and its practical effects for historians, consider a famous example cited by the late Andrew Rippin, a short, early Meccan *sūrah,* Q. Ḍuḥā 93:

> By the white forenoon
> and the brooding light!
> Thy Lord has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee
> and the Last shall be better for thee than the First.

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usually interpreted as the name of the prophet Muḥammad as announced by Jesus, may not be a proper name at all, as I have argued in Anthony 2016b. In addition to these four figures, the Qurʾan mentions by name two quasi-historical figures, Dhū l-Qarnayn and Tubbaʿ, five "Arabian" prophets (Hūd, Idrīs, Luqmān, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb), and twenty-four biblical figures.

43. The places and monuments are: al-Aḥqāf (Q. Aḥqāf 46:21); al-ʿArim (Q. Saba' 34:16); al-Arḍ al-Muqaddasah/the Holy Land (Q. Māʾidah 5:21); Bābil/Babylon (Q. Baqarah 2:102); Bakkah (Q. Āl ʿImrān 3:96); Egypt/Miṣr (Q. Yūnus 10:87); al-Ḥijr (Q. Ḥijr 15:80); Iram dhāt al-ʿImād (Q. Fajr 89:7); al-Kaʿbah (Q. Māʾidah 5:95, 97); al-Madīnah (Q. Tawbah 9:101, 120; Aḥzāb 33:60; Munāfiqūn 63:8); Makkah/Mecca (Q. Fatḥ 48:24); Mt. Sinai (as *Ṭūr Sinā'* in Q. Muʾminūn 23:20; as *Ṭūr Sīnīn* in Tīn 95:2; and as *al-Ṭūr* in Baqarah 2:63, 93; Nisāʾ 4:154; and Ṭāhā 20:80); the sacred valley of Ṭūwā (Q. Ṭāhā 20:12, Nāziʿāt 79:16); and Yathrib (Q. Aḥzāb 33:13).

44. ʿĀd (twenty mentions; Q. Aʿrāf 7:65, etc.); Bedouin nomads/Aʿrāb (ten mentions; Q. 9 Tawbah 9:90, 97–99, 101, 120, etc.); the Children of Israel/Banū Isrāʾīl (forty-three mentions; Q. Baqarah 2:40, etc.); Midian/Madyan (ten mentions; Q. 7:85, etc.); Quraysh (Q. Quraysh 106:1); Romans/al-Rūm (Q. Rūm 30: 2); Sheba/Saba' (Q. Naml 27:22; Saba' 34:15); and Thamūd (twenty-six mentions; Q. 7:73, etc.). This tally excludes qurʾanic terms that identify specific religious groups such as believers (*muʾminūn*), Muslims (*muslimūn*), Jews (*yahūd*), Christians (*naṣārā*), Magians (*majūs*), Sabeans (*ṣābiʾūn*), unbelievers (*kuffār, kāfirūn*), pagans (*mushrikūn*), apostles (*ḥawāriyyūn*), emigrants (*muhājirūn*), and helpers (*anṣār*).

45. These events are the battle of Badr (Q. Āl ʿImrān 3:123); the battle of Ḥunayn (Q. Tawbah 9:25); the Byzantine-Sasanid War (Q. Rūm 30:2–3); the massacre of the Christians at Najrān (Q. Burūj 85:4–8); and the defeat of Abrahah's elephant troop (*aṣḥāb al-fīl;* Q. Fīl 105). As noted by Robin (2014, 27n4), one could also cite further events merely alluded to in the Qurʾan, e.g. the battle of the Trench (Q. Aḥzāb 33:7–27), the expulsion of the Banū Naḍīr (Q. Ḥashr 59:1–8), the massacre of the Banū Qurayẓah (Q. 33:26–27), and the treaty of Ḥudaybiyah (Q. Fatḥ 48:1–10). However, to affirm that these passages in fact allude to the events in question, one must assent to the exegesis of the later tradition.

46. Cf. Paret 1951 and Cheddadi 2004, 101ff.

47. Robin 2015, 31.

> Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shall be satisfied.
> Did He not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee?
> Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee?
> Did He not find thee needy, and suffice thee?
> As for the orphan, do not oppress him,
> and as for the beggar, scold him not;
> and as for the Lord's blessing, declare it.[48]

How should the historian read this text as a *historical* text? The voice of this *sūrah* throughout addresses a singular "thee" (-*ka*) rather than a plural "you" (-*kum*). So is it addressing the individual to whom the *sūrah* is revealed or any believer who individually hears the message? The *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition used this *sūrah* to anchor its narratives of the Prophet's early life in the qurʾanic text, and some modern historicizing readings of the *sūrah* have adopted this strategy too, thus claiming to find direct references to factual data about Muḥammad's early life in its verses. For example, the sixth verse queries its addressee, "Did He not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee [*a-lam yajidka yatīman fa-āwā*]." The *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, the modern argument goes, holds that Muḥammad had been orphaned at an early age by the deaths of his father and mother, and this *sūrah* confirms it: Muḥammad was an orphan.[49] That's simple enough. However, if one continues with this line of reasoning, the seventh verse is more problematic. "Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee [*wa-wajadaka ḍāllan fa-hadā*]," it asks. But could God have allowed His Prophet to have gone astray or been in error? Now, merely two steps into the analysis, the historian has unwittingly entered the arena of theological debate. Muslim theology of nearly all sectarian stripes came to hold that Muḥammad was granted divine protection from sin (ʿiṣmah) and could thus never have gone astray or been in error (ḍāll), a term used to describe infidels, so how could God have found His prophet astray or in error (ḍāll)? A theologically motivated reading might posit that the verse must be read contrary to the prima facie meaning of ḍāll (contending, for example, that Muḥammad was "guided" away from his "erring" assumption that he was an ordinary person to the realization of his prophethood).[50] The historian might respond that these later theological concerns are irrelevant and that many early traditions do indeed hold that Muḥammad went from a period of "error" (ḍalāla) to "guidance" (hudā),"[51] but this observation by our hypothetical historian is really beside the point. By assuming that Muḥammad is the "orphan" in this *sūrah*, the historian has *already*

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48. A. J. Arberry's translation.

49. Paret 1983, 194; W. M. Watt 1988, 48–49.

50. E.g., see al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh,* 150–51; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ʿIṣmah, 137; Ṣābūnī, *Muntaqā,* 216.

51. E.g., see Kister 1970; Rubin 1995, 76ff.; and Ḍirār, *Taḥrīsh,* 118–20.

imbibed a theological proposition from the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition and entered the fray of its theological debates; the assumption does not rest on the purely forensic basis that one might otherwise assume.

Rippin's example is intended to demonstrate just how fraught the prospect of historicizing the Qurʾan can be. He himself seems to have regarded the project as impossible, since even outwardly banal facts derive their perceived facticity from one unconsciously imbibed theological supposition or another. These passages from Q. Duḥā 93, according to Rippin, "need not be taken to reflect historical 'reality' as such, but, rather, could well be understood as the foundational material of monotheistic religious preaching."[52] Rippin's ultimate verdict thus seems to have been against historical readings of the Qurʾan altogether. "In no sense can the Qurʾān be assumed to be a primary document in constructing the life of Muḥammad," he wrote, "The text is far too opaque when it comes to history; its shifting referents leave the text a historical muddle for historical purposes."[53] Rippin's argument owes a profound a debt to John Wansbrough's contention that the very premise "that a chronology of the revelation is possible" internalizes the dubious axioms of the theological projects undertaken by Muslim exegetes of the second/eighth century.[54] Rippin is correct in saying that this qurʾanic verse and other passages like it do not inherently demand to be read in a manner that distills historical data about Muḥammad. But is he right to assert that any such reading that does so is necessarily contingent on or, at worst, wholly tendentious in its reliance on the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition as providing a lens through which the Qurʾan ought to be read?

I contend that the utility and richness of the Qurʾan as a historical source has been undersold.[55] For one thing, the Qurʾan can be read *historically* even if one rejects the proposition that it may be mined for prooftexts to confirm the historicity of this or that narrative of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition. Increasingly, reading the Qurʾan historically has come to mean enriching our understanding of its historical context. As our understanding of late antique Arabia has radically changed in recent years due to new findings in archaeology and epigraphy, so has our understanding of the Qurʾan. No longer can the Qurʾan, its Arabian context, and thus Muḥammad himself, be seen as aloof from the political stakes and imperial machinations in the region of the Eastern Roman Empire and Sasanid Persia.[56] Likewise, comparing qurʾanic laws to the contemporary legal cultures of Late Antiquity has cast considerable light on why the Qurʾan's interest in divine law assumed

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52. Rippin 2000, 299–300.

53. Ibid., 307.

54. Wansbrough 1977, 38; cf. Pavlovitch 2017, 68.

55. A point also made by Azmeh 2014b, 113ff.

56. Robin 2015 contains three examples. For a good overview of these recent discoveries in English, see Robin 2012a.

the shape it did.[57] Understanding the history of the Qurʾan and the historical and cultural context from which it emerged will inevitably enrich and redound to our understanding of Muḥammad.

Much has been said of the recent "literary turn" in Qurʾanic Studies,[58], which has also produced considerable *historical* insight. Literary analysis of the Qurʾan has reminded historians of its textual heterogeneity, and the consequences thereof for how we read the text as a product of late antique Arabia. Although short on history, the Qurʾan contains a staggering array of textual themes and types, such as eschatological warnings, descriptions of nature and the cosmos, moral exhortations, narratives of prophetic legends, creation myths, parables, hymns, creeds, prayers, and even laws. This heterogeneity is framed by *sūrah*s, coherent textual units whose literary features can be individually analyzed and placed in dialogue with their broader historical context and the religious currents of Late Antiquity. In the main, modern scholars of the Qurʾan currently hold that from this heterogeneity of materials one can also provide the basis for the reconstruction of the chronology of the Qurʾan's composition based solely on internal textual criteria.[59] The lack of *external* chronological order in the post-redaction Qurʾan does not necessarily imply the absence of an *internal* order:[60] the convergence of internal features within *sūrah*s—including style (such as verse length and end-rhyme), literary structure, terminology, and content—and the Qurʾan's own self-referentiality reveal four distinct classes of *sūrah*s (viz., early Meccan, Middle Meccan, late Meccan, and Medinan), which can be arranged diachronically and, therefore, interpreted *historically*.[61]

Although the diachronic approach to the Qurʾan is still very much in the making, recent findings are very promising. Patricia Crone's work on the pagans (*mushrikūn*) of the Qurʾan, the last project she completed before her death, has revealed extraordinary information, not just about their beliefs and cultural world, but also about their livelihood.[62] Fred Donner has quite convincingly demonstrated

57. Zellentin 2013.

58. Zadeh 2015.

59. *Pace* Reynolds 2011. The contention that the most recent chronological reconstructions rely on and/or reproduce the chronology of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is a common canard of its detractors—a criticism that might be leveled against early pioneers of the method, such as Gustav Weil and Theodor Nöldeke, but certainly not the more updated approach of, for example, Nicolai Sinai. See esp. Stefanidis 2008. As Neuwirth notes, the Qurʾan's self-referentiality, not the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus, is the key, "Once we concede this self-referentiality, we must also concede a historical development: only a text that grows around a nucleus is able to comment on itself" (Neuwirth 2014, 281).

60. Neuwirth 2014, 280–81.

61. Sinai 2010, 410ff. Cf. Sinai 2009; Schmid 2010; Sadeghi 2011. As Neuwirth argues, this entails moving beyond examining the Qurʾān *only* "in its post-redaction form, as a unified document made up of pieces of evidence of equal chronological and hierarchical value, and regardless of the process of change reflected within the Qurʾan's language, style, and self-referentiality" (Neuwirth 2014, 279).

62. Crone 2016.

that the defining characteristics of the early community of believers (muʾminūn) can be extensively reconstructed on the basis of the Qurʾan alone in terms of their basic beliefs, piety, and rituals, the status of Muḥammad among them, their militancy, and (albeit far more controversially on this final point) their early openness to Jews and Christians joining their community's movement.[63] Hence, it should not deter us that early attempts to construct Muḥammad's biography using only qurʾanic data more or less failed to gain traction. These first studies were mostly prosaic and not at all comparative, and worst of all treated the Qurʾan forensically as an ad hoc apparatus for confirming the broad outlines of the sīrah-maghāzī tradition.[64]

The Qurʾan's lack of interest in narrating contemporary events in any but the most allusive fashion, and, consequentially, the difficulty of reading it as a historical text, should not deter modern historians from pursuing the considerable insights it does contain. Fundamentally, this entails embracing a diachronic approach to reading the Qurʾan, while simultaneously rejecting attempts to treat it as a prooftext for verifying the historicity of the sīrah-maghāzī tradition, which not only constitutes an entirely different genre of Arabic literary expression but also came into being via a fundamentally different historical process. The sīrah-maghāzī tradition and the Qurʾan are not two panels in a diptych. The sīrah-maghāzī tradition is a second-order source to be read in light of the Qurʾan; it ought not to provide a framework for reading the Qurʾan, because, unlike the Qurʾan, it is not an artifact of the earliest phase of Islamic religiosity but rather a corpus that attests to the centuries-long formation of Muslim identities and ideologies. A famous (and somewhat notorious) legal maxim attributed to the Syrian scholar al-Awzāʿī (d. 157/773) boldly declares, "the tradition determines the meaning of scripture; scripture does not determine the meaning of the tradition."[65] As a historian, what I advocate is essentially the inversion of Awzāʿī's principle—to take the historical and philological insights gained from reading the Qurʾan to reinterpret the sīrah-maghāzī literature.[66]

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63. Donner 2010a, 56–89. For a critique of Donner's "ecumenical" hypothesis, see Sinai 2015–16, 76–80.

64. E.g., as did Régis Blachère's Le problème de Mahomet (1952) and W. Montgomery Watt's Muḥammad's Mecca: History in the Qurʾān (1988). Nagel 2014 likewise has stated that the Qurʾan is the only reliable source of Muḥammad, but his 1,000-page tome Muḥammad: Leben und Legende (2008) makes liberal use of al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) upon whom he lavishes extraordinary praise as a historical source. See Nagel 2008, 902ff. However, al-Wāqidī in particular has been demonstrated time and again to be a comparatively late and tendentious source. E.g., see Hagen 2009, 104–5; Motzki, Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Anthony 2010, 458ff., 464–65; Lecker 2015b; Motzki 2017, 12–14.

65. My loose translation of al-sunnatu qāḍiyatun ʿalā kitab Allāh wa-laysa l-kitābu bi-qāḍin ʿalā l-sunnah (Dārimī, Sunan, ed. Dārānī, 1: 473–75).

66. See Dayeh 2010 and Saleh 2016 for two studies that achieve this. Put another way, it may be hoped that future historical biographies of Muḥammad will bear far more resemblance to Rudi Paret's Mohammed und der Koran (1957) and Michael Cook's Muḥammad (1983) than they will to the works of W. Montgomery Watt.

Both the Qurʾan and the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition must be read historically and philologically. This process entails subjecting these two sources to the traditional realms of philological research, such as the comparative study of texts and their genres and the historical evolution of languages and language families as they evolve and interact with each other over time. But doing so relies on a conceptually pluralistic methodology that draws upon methods that are text-critical, codicological, rhetorical, historical, and so on.[67] Lastly, this type of philological reading requires self-reflection on the part of the philologist-cum-historian. No philological reading is absolute and immutable. Each reading is contingent, rather, on the philologist's access to the particular constellation of source material available to her as well as her embeddedness in her own time, place, and cultural context—it is not the product of "a view from nowhere." The scholar and her project are just as historically bound and contingent as her sources.[68] Each scholar must contend with "the vast domain of historical unknowability."[69]

Sheldon Pollock terms such an approach "philology in three dimensions," a scholarly practice that takes seriously "its factitiousness and historicity as a knowledge form." As conceived by Pollock, three-dimensional philology plots the practice of reading texts philologically across three planes that presume the intersecting dimensions of time and space through which every reader encounters texts: "1) the text's genesis; 2) its earlier readers; and 3) me reading here and now."[70] Modern scholarship of the Arabo-Islamic tradition already boasts skilled practitioners who engage with this second dimension of philological scholarship. Modern research into the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition that analyzes *isnād*s, compiles and compares all the accounts of a given event, and establishes criteria for distinguishing reliable sources from unreliable ones is deeply embedded in (and frankly unthinkable without) the tools and methods inherited from the monumental philological undertakings of the Muslim communities of scholarship, whether of the past or the present.[71] Indeed, recognizing this redounds to the methodological and conceptual pluralism of modern philological practice at its best. Philological practice, as Pollock has noted, is a knowledge form that appears wherever texts and the problem of their interpretation appear; it cannot be owned by or exist as the self-contained scholastic enterprise of a single discursive community. Hence, making sense of texts inevitably entails learning how others have done so, and often done so very differently.[72]

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67. Turner 2014, x; Pollock 2016, 14–15.

68. Particularly vivid explorations of these theme can be found in Ali 2014.

69. Megill 2007, 58.

70. Pollock 2014 and 2016, 20.

71. Hoyland 2008, 6–10, has rightly seen this aspect of modern scholarship as a good thing, albeit not acknowledged frequently enough..

72. Pollock 2016, 15.

The field has excelled in analyzing these early texts in their vertical dimension—the manner in which subsequent generations of Muslims glossed, commented upon, critiqued, and debated these texts over centuries—but it has not yet sufficiently read these texts in the lateral dimensions: in their original historical context and comparatively across cognate literary traditions. Philologically informed and historical readings need both a holistic reconstruction of a text's reception *and* a reconstruction of its original context—one reconstruction cannot be realized without the other. Although there has long been a widespread consensus on the indispensability of close readings of the Qurʾan and the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition in Arabic that draw on the full insights of the philological apparatus of the Muslim tradition, the emerging consensus that one must *also* know and comparatively engage with the languages and literary traditions of Late Antiquity and modern scholarship thereon, not as a mere desideratum for the field but as a prerequisite for scholarly analysis, is less well established. In an important article, Angelika Neuwirth eloquently described the shortcomings our field's insularity as a failure to situate the Qurʾan in the "thought world" and "epistemic space" of Late Antiquity—a failure she diagnoses as rooted in a subconscious, but nonetheless persistent, tendency of modern scholarship to reproduce the premodern view of early Islamic history as momentous yet "foreign" and somehow outside and beyond the forces exerted by Late Antiquity on Western and European history.[73] As Garth Fowden has recently noted, the great pioneer of the *sīrah-maghāzī* genre, Ibn Isḥāq, placed Muḥammad not in a parochial Arabia but rather in a capacious world of "generous historical contextualization." The world of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is not just one of Arabian tribal pagans and their idolatrous soothsayers; its scope reaches into the cosmic and primordial past of Genesis, of the Israelites and their patriarchs and matriarchs, and its narratives include characters who abide in and travel in Egypt, Axum, Syria, and Iran, and who set foot in monasteries, synagogues, Mazdean temples, and even the courts of Roman and Sasanian rulers. The *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is just as much interested in rabbis and monks and how their exegetical cultures reimagined the cosmos and humanity's place therein as it is in the world of Arabian barbarism (Ar. *al-jāhiliyyah*) into which Muḥammad was purportedly born.[74] To embed the *sīrah-maghāzī* within the societal, literary, and cultural contexts of Late Antiquity is not only to correct methodological dereliction; it is also to shed light on the fundamental human process at work in these early Islamic texts—namely, the manner in which interconnected human communities interpret their historical experiences and imbue them with meaning.[75]

73. Neuwirth 2017, 167; cf. Hoyland 2012.
74. Fowden 2014, 76–77.
75. Neuwirth 2017, 169.

The solution, therefore, cannot be to return what Joseph Schacht termed "the gratuitous assumptions" of earlier generations of scholars[76]—namely, that there exists a pure, original, or authentic core of material, the proverbial "historical kernel" of the life and times of Muḥammad. Such a view is not only historiographically naïve, it is epistemologically unsound and a betrayal of the philological method. There seems to be a persistent misconception that all hopes of future insights rely on our field's ability to purloin the methods and tools of biblical studies. Not so—truth be told, current scholarship shows an unwelcome emergent trend of neglecting the centuries-long philological tradition of Muslim scholarship or else traducing what this tradition actually contains. The field will have to develop its own tools, better suited to the corpora with which we work.

Nor is the solution to resign ourselves to the role of curators and catalogers of historical memory. Historical research into the founding personalities of religions (Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muḥammad, or whoever) has often been misconstrued as a project aimed only at undermining the truths of scripture and demolishing the claims of a religious tradition once vaunted as self-evident. However, the aims of such historical research into the founders of religions are far more banal: to derive new knowledge from ancient sources using the tools and methodologies of historical inquiry. That such historical inquiry poses no challenges for contemporaries, whether persons of faith or not, is also a common canard. New knowledge always entails a new way of looking at the world and at humanity itself. Early modern humanistic research into the historical Muḥammad dismantled hoary European views of him as a demoniac possessed of the malevolent spirits of the age (such as heresy and pseudo-prophetic imposture) and rendered untenable the view of him as the archenemy of Christendom. So too contemporary research into the historical figure of Muḥammad might dismantle the paranoiac fear-mongering discourses that cast Muḥammad, and by extension Muslims, as possessed by demons that torment our own time, such as terrorism and religious fanaticism. This is not a call for the politicization of scholarship on early Islam, but merely to recognize that not only the findings of historical research but also its very undertaking have ramifications for our time.[77] In the cosmopolitan pursuit of an understanding of Muḥammad's life as a historical figure, the formation of his image among early Muslims, and the history-bound contingency of our knowledge about him and the stories of his life, we find a common humanity. As Guy Stroumsa has persuasively argued, when Enlightenment thinkers naturalized Muḥammad as a mere man rather than a demonic false prophet, they forged a humanistic intellectual environment that inexorably led to the naturalization of Moses and Jesus as men of history and of their times as well. Hence, the three founders of Judaism, Christianity, and

76. Schacht 1949, 146.
77. Cf. the instructive comments in Robinson 2009.

Islam suddenly came to stand on par with one another in the humanists' imaginary, a parity and equilibrium that established the foundations of the very enterprise of the comparative study of religions.[78]

The process that Stroumsa describes, albeit considerably transformed by successive generations of scholars, still endures. There is no reason to work in the cloud of pessimism once expressed by Maxime Rodinson, who, now decades ago, began his book on the historical Muḥammad with this concise *apologia,* "My book does not propose to bring out new facts about the subject. None have been discovered for a long time, and it is unlikely that any will be."[79] The somnambulatory era of Rodinson and his ilk has ended and hopefully will remain far behind us into the foreseeable future. Studying the founder of any ancient religious tradition poses formidable challenges, but for all the difficulties posed by our sources, modern researchers have plenty of justification to be optimistic about what can be achieved in the field and the importance of that work. "We probably know more about Mohammed than we do about Jesus (let alone Moses or the Buddha), and *we certainly have the potential to know a great deal more,*" the late Patricia Crone observed.[80] If this monograph succeeds only convincing its readers that this optimism about the field's future is indeed justified, I will be quite satisfied with the fruits of my labor.

78. Stroumsa 2010, 137.

79. Rodinson 1971, ix; cited in Lecker 1995a, x, who rightly quips, "Rodinson's pessimism is totally unwarranted."

80. Crone 2008a, para. 2 (emphasis added).

1

The Earliest Evidence

Despite the limitations of the Qurʾan for reconstructing the events of Muḥammad's life, it remains our best and earliest witness to the historical existence of a man named Muḥammad who was revered by a faith community of Arabic-speakers as God's messenger and prophet, not to mention the message that he preached and the religiosity that he espoused. Yet do the limitations of the Qurʾan as a historical source per se demand that we inevitably fall back on the *ḥadīth* corpus and the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature as our *only* other option for knowledge about the historical Muḥammad? Apart from the Qurʾan, is there any knowledge to be gained at all about the historical figure of Muḥammad from sources that predate either the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature or the *ḥadīth* corpus? One can pose the question in even simpler terms: apart from the Qurʾan, what are the earliest references to Muḥammad as a historical figure, and where are they found? More important, what do these earliest testimonies say about him, and how do these sorts of testimonies differ, if at all, from the depictions of Muḥammad in either the early *sīrah-maghāzī* literature or the *ḥadīth* corpus? Chapters 1 and 2 offer some answers to these formidable questions. This chapter in particular aims to demonstrate what historians can learn by examining the earliest documentary testimonies to Muḥammad as a historical person, as well as what can be gleaned from the three of the earliest non-Muslim sources to mention Muḥammad and his activities.

The corpus of material evidence for the historical existence of Muḥammad that survives in the form of artifacts from the seventh century C.E.—be they Arabo-Islamic papyri, graffiti, or official inscriptions—is surprisingly rich, especially considering the amount of survey work and documentation that still remains to be done by archaeologists, papyrologists, epigraphers, and historians. As ongoing

surveys and expeditions continue to discover new finds, particularly in the field of Arabian epigraphy of late, it is prudent to begin by highlighting this material, as it provides compelling evidence not only for the existence of Muḥammad as a historical figure but also for the salience of his message and persona among Arabic-speakers in the first century after his death.

Arabo-Islamic documents and inscriptions—that is, material evidence bearing words that are either written in Arabic, that bear the names of Muslims and/or their rulers, or that contain touchstone features of Islamic religiosity such as pious invocations and prayers composed in the religious idiom of the Qurʾan—appear on the historical record within mere decades after Muḥammad's death in C.E. 632.[1] The earliest dated documents and inscriptions of this sort hitherto discovered are recognized as such by modern historians because they either explicitly refer to contemporary, datable events and/or because they use the newly minted *hijrī* calendar, or *anno hegirae* (represented in modern Western scholarship by acronym A.H.). The significance of the *hijrī* calendar, one of the earliest, most visible markers of Muslim identity, is considerable. As a distinctive means of timekeeping, reckoning years according to a cycle of lunar months, it regulates Islamic ritual and its observance, and the early Islamic polity also eventually used it for broader administrative and societal purposes as well.[2] It is important to point out that, on the one hand, the use of this calendar, as well as the names of the months it employs, are unattested in any Arabic or Arabian inscriptions that predate Islamic conquests,[3] and, on the other hand, that the calendar putatively begins counting the passing of years with the year A.H. 1 (622–23 C.E.), the year in which Muḥammad purportedly fled persecution in his native city of Mecca and undertook the Hijrah, or Emigration, to the city of Yathrib (subsequently renamed Medina), where he would become ruler and inaugurate the Muslim community, or *ummah*. The ideological importance of the calendar is, therefore, immense—it represents no less than a reorientation of human time-keeping around an event deemed so significant that it was placed at the axis of a community's historical consciousness.

Though adopted at an early date, the counting of years beginning with Muḥammad's *hijrah* to Yathrib was not an innovation of Muḥammad himself. If our earliest sources are to be trusted, the second caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44) instituted its use sometime between A.H. 16/638 C.E. and A.H. 18/639 C.E.[4]

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1. The surveys of Hoyland 2016, Imbert 2011, 2013, and Lindstedt forthcoming *a* and *b* are especially useful. Imbert 2013's catalogue of the citations of the Qurʾan contained in Arabic inscriptions from the first two centuries of Islam demonstrates just how swiftly the Qurʾan was disseminated and how indispensable the epigraphic record is to its textual history.

2. Hoyland 2006, 396; see now the overview in Shaddel 2018.

3. Robin 2016.

4. Prémare 2002, 272, cited in Imbert 2011, 6. Key features of the calendar, however, date to and/or precede the lifetime of Muḥammad and are partially attested in the Qurʾan, such as its cycle of sacred months and the qurʾanic prohibition of intercalation.

The earliest documents bearing a *hijrī* date—two papyri known as P.Berol 15002 and PERF 558, first published by the Austrian scholar Adolf Grohmann in 1932— seem to confirm this, because they date from the final years of ʿUmar's rule. The first papyrus, a fragmentary tax receipt, is written solely in Arabic, and merely mentions "[the] year twenty-two."[5] The second papyrus, however, is better preserved and bilingual as well, being written in both Greek and Arabic. It is a receipt for the delivery of sixty-five sheep by two *pagarchs* of Herakleopolis to an Arab commander (*amīr*) in Egypt named ʿAbdallāh ibn Jābir. The Arabic portion of the text provides us with details such as the name of the Arabic-speaking scribe (one Ibn Ḥadīd) and the date of the transaction: Jumādā I A.H. 22/March–April 643 C.E. Significantly, the verso side of the document also calls the early conquerors to whom the sheep are delivered by an important name: it refers to them as in Greek as *magarítais,* a neologism that originated as a calque of the Arabic *muhājirūn,* meaning "emigrants," or "those who have undertaken a *hijrah* [to join the community and/or conquests]."[6] Despite their importance, both documents leave one question unanswered: twenty-two years into which epoch exactly? The most compelling answer to this question remains, "twenty years after the *hijrah* of Muḥammad," a *hijrah* that becomes the archetype for the subsequent *hijrah*s of the Arabian tribesmen to the conquered territories.[7] Indeed, at this juncture this answer remains the only feasible one—particularly when read in light of the pivotal, conceptual role of *hijrah* in the qurʾanic corpus, which renders this inference virtually irrefutable.[8]

The earliest, known Arabo-Islamic inscriptions to utilize the calendar follow quickly on the heels of the papyri: they are two early inscriptions dated to A.H. 23 (643–44 C.E.) and A.H. 24 (644–45 C.E.), respectively.[9] The first, and earliest, is a laconic graffito discovered west of Medina near Yanbuʿ that simply reads, "Salamah wrote [this] in the year three and twenty."[10] The second inscription, first discovered

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5. Grohmann 1932, 44; cf. Diem 1984, 272–73; Rāġib 2009; Rāġib 2013, 702ff.

6. Grohmann 1932, 40–43; cf. Lindstedt 2015.

7. Crone 1994.

8. Sinai 2015–16, 54–55; cf. Hoyland, 2006, 396, and Saleh 2006, 270. Other epochs do seem to be attested in the documentary record of this era, such as the enigmatic *qaḍāʾ al-muʾminīn.* However, what sort of era the phrase *qaḍāʾ al-muʾminīn* refers to, and even whether or not it refers to an era at all, still remains unclear. See Shaddel 2018.

9. Imbert 2011, 6–7. Still enigmatic is a claim made by an early-thirteenth-century scholar named Abū Bakr al-Harawī to have found an epitaph dated to A.H. 29 on the tombstone of a certain ʿUrwah ibn Thābit on the wall of a church in Cyprus, which was subsequently made into a shrine dedicated to the early female martyr Umm Ḥarām. His testimony has not been authenticated by modern observers; however, if authentic, the inscription is not merely extraordinarily early: it is also bears the earliest written attestation to the 112th sūrah of the Qurʾan. Cf. Elad 2002, 284–87; Ghabban and Hoyland 2008, 215 n15. Recent surveys in the area have not turned up any trace of the inscription; see Akçam and Akçam 2017.

10. Kawatoko 2005, 51.

by Ali Ghabban, is particularly famous. Written by a certain Zuhayr, it mentions not merely the *hijrī* date but also the death of the caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, "In the name of God. I, Zuhayr, wrote (this) at the time ʿUmar died, the year four and twenty."[11] These early graffiti attest to the use of *hijrī* era, not just in an official, administrative capacity (as attested in the papyri), but also in nonofficial capacities as well.

This material evidence for early Islamic religiosity is extraordinarily early. In fact, it is so early that it even predates the traditional date assigned to the systematic compilation of the Qurʾan under the third caliph, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 23–35/644–56).[12] Such attestations to early Muslim religiosity may not mention Muḥammad directly, but one can reasonably argue that his importance in them is nonetheless implicit and can reasonably be inferred: an inscription that makes no mention of Muḥammad yet records a date employing the *hijrī* calendar likely presupposed both the historicity of his emigration from Mecca to Yathrib in 622 C.E. and the monumental significance of that event to the formation of his community. However, insofar as this line of argumentation relies on inference rather than on direct evidence, it is not completely watertight. Although evidence for the *hijrī* calendar in the seventh century C.E. is both early and abundant,[13] the earliest inscriptions and documents in fact merely read "in the year *x*" and make no explicit mention either of Muḥammad's *hijrah* or of Muḥammad himself, either by name or by title as a messenger (*rasūl*) or as a prophet (*nabī*). In fact, mentions of Muḥammad are entirely absent in the earliest chronological stratum of Arabo-Islamic epigraphy and papyri. In the earliest stratum of the epigraphic and papyrological record Muḥammad's existence thus remains implicit: the numeracy displayed in these early inscriptions and papyri prove the existence of a new calendar to mark a new epoch, but they offer no explicit rationale for its use. The rest must be inferred from evidence external to the papyri and inscriptions themselves.[14]

Explicit mentions of Muḥammad's name or qurʾanic epithets (e.g., *nabī/rasūl Allāh*) are much harder to find in the earliest strata of the material evidence. Indeed, Muḥammad, whether by name or honorific, does not begin to reliably appear in the epigraphic record until the A.H. 70s/690s C.E. and, even then, only begins

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11. Ghabban and Hoyland 2008, 211.

12. On the historicity of this compilation, see Motzki 2001; M. Cook 2004; Anthony and Bronson 2016. The precise year of ʿUthmān's compilation is difficult to determine; see *GdQ,* 2: 49.

13. At the last count made by K. M. Younes and J. Bruning, there are ninety-four papyri dating from the first-century *hijrī*. Adding undated papyri which bear the paleographic features of first-century documents to this tally more than triples this number. See www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/geesteswetenschappen/onderzoeksprojecten/foi-arab.-docs..pdf (accessed September 12, 2019).

14. The fact remains, however, that alternative explanations for the existence of the *hijrī* calendar have fallen flat. See in particularly the case laid out by Shaddel 2018, 301ff.

to appear in abundance by the second century A.H.[15] Yet even though the earliest Arabo-Islamic graffiti and papyri do not mention Muḥammad's name or invoke his common epithets, they still mobilize the idioms and touchstones of qurʾanic piety. They are replete with confessions of faith in God alone, prayers for divine blessing, petitions for the forgiveness of sins, and petitions to be admitted into Paradise (*al-jannah*) and to be spared the Inferno (*al-nār*).[16]

The above statements are accurate as of the time of writing, but my strong intuition is that the accuracy of some of these statements may soon be overturned by future discoveries. More recently, a couple of near misses have turned up in epigraphic surveys. A simple example can serve to illustrate this.[17] Among the earliest, undated inscriptions to mention Muḥammad are a series of inscriptions that Maysāʾ al-Ghābbān discovered during an epigraphic survey in the Ḥismā region near Tabūk.[18] Two of these inscriptions bear the name Yazīd ibn ʿUmayr al-Anṣārī al-Khaṭmī. From his epithet 'al-Anṣārī', one may surmise that he was a descendant of one of the two tribes of Yathrib who originally welcomed Muḥammad and his early Meccan followers to their city in 622 C.E.; and from the epithet 'al-Khaṭmī', one can discern that he descended from a clan of the Aws tribe of the Anṣār, as opposed to the Khazraj tribe. Although an obscure figure, it appears that he can nonetheless reasonably be identified in the Arabic literary sources: Yazīd ibn ʿUmayr's father was regarded as a contemporary of the Prophet, and Yazīd's son was, moreover, known as a reliable transmitter of prophetic traditions in the second century A.H.[19] Of the two inscriptions of Yazīd to mention Muḥammad's name, one of Yazīd's inscription contains the double testimony of faith (*al-shahādatān*),[20] and the other contains a version of the formulaic invocations of blessings upon Muḥammad called the *taṣliyyah,* which derives from qurʾanic piety (cf. Q. Aḥzāb 33:56).[21] Maysāʾ al-Ghabbān cautiously dates both of Yazīd's inscriptions to the end of the first century A.H.[22] As comprehensive epigraphic surveys of many regions of the Ḥijāz still

15. One of the most helpful surveys in the regard is the recent publication of Prof. Mohammed Al-Thenyian at the Department of Archaeology of King Saud University. Al-Thenyian's extensive survey of dated graffiti from the first *hijrī* century reveal a bevy of materials that attest to early Islamic religiosity and even the text of the Qurʾan, yet none of the inscriptions of this period (unlike those of the following century) mention Muḥammad either by name or title. See Thenyian 2015, 145–49.

16. Imbert 2013.

17. For a discussion of the challenges to dating these inscriptions, see Anthony 2018.

18. Ghabbān 2016–17, 103–4, 386ff.

19. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 3 (2): 379; Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* ed. Maʿrūf, 22: 391–93

20. Ghabbān 2016–17, 212–13, no. 147, testifying "that there is no god but God alone without partners and that Muḥammad is the servant of God and His messenger [*annahu lā ilāha illā 'llāh waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu wa-anna muḥammadan ʿabdu 'llāhi wa-rasūluh*]."

21. Ibid., 230–31, no. 170, "May God bless Muḥammad the Messenger of God [*ṣallā 'llāhu ʿalā muḥammadin rasūli 'llāh*]."

22. Ibid., 323–24.

remain to be done, one may reasonably anticipate that future finds like these will provide even earlier attestations.

Yet such epigraphic attestations to Muḥammad are not the earliest Muslim documentary texts to mention his name—and certainly not the earliest that can be dated with precision. The earliest datable attestations hitherto discovered come from numismatic rather than epigraphic evidence. Hence, Muḥammad's name and epithet "the Messenger of God" (Ar. *rasūl allāh*) are first attested on silver coins minted in Bīshāpūr in the Fārs province of southern Iran. The coins were struck early in the Second Civil War between the Umayyads and the Zubayrids, which pitted two families of Quraysh against each other in a political contest for the leadership of the early Islamic polity. Between 66/685 and 69/688–89, these coins were put into circulation as a new issue minted on behalf of the would-be caliph and the leader of the Zubayrid faction, ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, by his brother-in-law and governor of the east, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿĀmir. The margins of these coins bear the simple confession, "In the name of God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" (see fig. 2). Although these Zubayrid coins also offer the earliest-known attestation to the Muslim confession of faith (*al-shahādah*), they only feature an affirmation of Muḥammad's prophethood and curiously lack the otherwise ubiquitous companion phrase "'There is no god but God [*lā ilāha illā Allāh*]," which subsequently achieved prominence in the documentary record after 70s/690s.[23] The confession of Muḥammad's messengership conveyed on these early coins seems to have played an integral role in the Zubayrids' attempts to bolster the legitimacy of Ibn al-Zubayr and his claim to the title "Commander of the Faithful [*amīr al-muʾminīn*]," and thus to the Zubayrids' efforts to articulate a counter-discourse against their rivals, the Umayyads, whom they sought to displace.[24] We will encounter the Zubayrids repeatedly in the course of this monograph, but for now it suffices to note the following. While the Zubayrids mounted a formidable military and ideological challenge to the Umayyads' leadership over the early Islamic polity, they ultimately failed to vanquish the Umayyads or to permanently dislodge them from the caliphate. Yet, however brief the Zubayrid intermezzo, the influence of their ideological and numismatic innovations left an indelible imprint on how political legitimacy would be articulated by the early Islamic polity's elites ever thereafter.

23. Hoyland 2017, 122.

24. Heidemann 2011, 167. An outlier to this chronology might be a series of undated, "standing caliph"' type coppers that seem to bear the names of local governors and commanders, such as *Saʿīd* and *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān*. One of these bears the name *Muḥammad* but lacks honorifics alongside the name, suggesting rather that the coin refers to a local of governor rather than the Prophet. See Goodwin 2010 and Goodwin 2012, 95–96. Cf. Theniyian 2015, 81, for an inscription dated to A.H. 83 bears the name "Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm."

FIGURE 2. Zubayrid silver drachm struck ca. 686–87 C.E. in Bīshāpūr (Iran) by ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿĀmir, bearing the legend in the margins of the obverse side: *In the name of God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.* The arrow points to the place where the name "Muḥammad" appears. This specimen is a "Sasanian style" example of pre-reform coinage: the crowned figure on the obverse represents the Persian shah Khusro and the two figures on the reverse represent Zoroastrian priests flanking a fire altar. http://numismatics.org/collection/1975.238.12 (public domain). Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

Under the leadership of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705), the Marwanid branch of the Umayyads spearheaded the efforts to eliminate the Zubayrid threat to their dominance over the Islamic polity, and by A.H.73/692 C.E., ʿAbd al-Malik had eliminated the Zubayrids' political threat and had become the sole ruler of the early Islamic polity. Throughout the 70s/690s—during his contest with the Zubayrids and well after—ʿAbd al-Malik undertook a series of reforms of the administrative apparatus of the early Islamic empire. Famous among these measures is his reform of the coinage, adapting and expanding upon the Zubayrid tactic of featuring Muḥammad's name and the confession of faith in official inscriptions (see fig. 3). ʿAbd al-Malik's coinage reforms were, however, far more radical than those of the Zubayrids. Although the Umayyads eventually adopted an aniconic, creedal aesthetic for their coinage, the earliest coins of the experimental phases depict representations of the caliph standing in Arabian dress with a sword in its sheath and a scourge hanging from his right shoulder (see fig. 4).[25] The "standing caliph" coinage appears in diverse issues; it was struck not just in gold but also in silver and (most abundantly) in copper at as many as nineteen separate mints (see fig. 5).[26] The striking iconography of the "standing caliph" coins and the prominence of the declarations of Muḥammad's messengership thereon have even inspired some

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25. Treadwell 2009; Heidemann 2011, 170ff.
26. Goodwin 2018.

FIGURE 3. Umayyad gold solidus struck ca. 691–92 C.E., likely in Damascus. The reverse side (right) reads along the margins: *In the name of God. There is no god but God alone. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.* http://numismatics.org/collection/1968.225.1 (public domain). Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

FIGURE 4. Umayyad gold solidus of the "standing caliph" type struck in A.H. 75/694–95 C.E., likely in Syria. The legend surrounding the "standing caliph" figure on the obverse (left) reads: *In the name of God. There is no god but God alone. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.* The legend surrounding the pole on steps on the reverse (right) reads: *In the name of God. This dinar was struck in the year five and seventy.* http://numismatics.org/collection/1970.63.1 (public domain). Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

FIGURE 5. Samples of the diversity of the "standing caliph" type of Umayyad coins: (a) obverse of a copper alloy fals from Edessa (ca. 694–97 C.E.) whose legend reads "Muḥammad" (left) and "Messenger of God" (right); (b) obverse of copper alloy fals from Harran (ca. 694–97 C.E.), whose legend reads "Muḥammad" (left) and "Ḥarrān" (right); (c) obverse of a copper alloy fals from Jerusalem (ca. 694–97 C.E.), whose legend reads "Muḥammad Mes-" (right) and "-senger of God" (left); (d) reverse of a silver drachm minted in A.H. 75/ 694–95 C.E., whose legend reads "Commander of the Faithful" (left) and "Caliph of God" (right). Image (a) from http:// numismatics.org/collection/1998.25.77; image (b) from http://numismatics.org/collection/1917.215.3376; image (c) from http://numismatics.org/collection/1971.316.288; image (d) from http://numismatics.org/collection /1966.151.1 (all in the public domain). Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

scholars, such as Clive Foss and Robert Hoyland, to speculate that at least some of the coins bearing the so-called standing caliph figures depict, rather, a "standing prophet"—in other words, that these coins portray the Prophet Muḥammad and not ʿAbd al-Malik. Numismatists, however, have generally rejected this interpretation.[27] Indeed, the coins' iconography seems caliphal rather than prophetic. The standing figure depicted on the coins often carries both a whip and a sword, corresponding well to the image in Arabic literary sources of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik.[28]

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27. I. Schulze and W. Schulze 2010, 342ff.; Treadwell 2015; Goodwin 2018, 29–30.

28. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 858, "ʿAbd al-Malik the commander of the Faithful . . . his scourge falls upon any who disobey, his sword upon any who defy him [*sawṭuhu ʿalā man ʿaṣā wa- ʿalā man khālafa sayfuh*]"; noted also in Goodwin 2018, 27. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is also described with similar imagery by Ibn Sabaʾ in Saʿd al-Qummī, *Maqālāt,* 21; see Anthony 2012a, 155.

As Chase Robinson has observed, "the Marwanids seem to have learned a Zubayrid lesson—that . . . principal articles of belief should be proclaimed and disseminated publicly."[29] Muḥammad's name and title suddenly became ubiquitous in official inscriptions—a touchstone of Umayyad coinage and their monuments and a major milestone in their effort to unify the Islamic polity theologically and politically around the figure of Muḥammad as a prophet. The most prominent, famous example is the epoch-making Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, ʿAbd al-Malik's monument to the supremacy the Muslim faith and the Islamic polity over its monotheistic forebears.[30] The Dome of the Rock's inner mosaics, which bear the longest extant official inscriptions of the first century A.H., date from 72/692 and bespeak a new Islamic orthodoxy rather than political concerns.[31] The phrase "Muḥammad the Messenger of God" appears six times in the mosaic inscriptions of the inner and outer octagonal arcades of the Dome of the Rock. Among the most striking examples is the inscription on the northeast section of the outer octagonal arcade:

> In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God alone. He has no associate. To Him belongs dominion, and to Him belongs praise. He gives life, He causes death, and He has power over all things. Muḥammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him and accept his intercession on the Day of the Resurrection on behalf of his community.[32]

Here, one sees not merely a declaration of belief in the unity of God and the messengership of Muḥammad as the final, supreme prophet of monotheistic faith but also a full-fledged eschatology that adds a new belief unattested in the prophetology of the Qurʾan. In this newly espoused orthodoxy, Muḥammad is not merely God's lawgiver and the messenger of God's final revelation to humankind; he is the intercessor on behalf of his community and the focus of all their hopes for salvation on the Day of Judgment.[33]

The invocation Muḥammad's name and epithets is not the most striking fact here—a papyrus from Nessana in southern Palestine dating to the late 680s C.E. that bears the phrase "the pact of God and the pact of His Messenger" (*dhimmat Allāh [wa-dhimmat ras]ūlih*) suggests that such invocations by officialdom may have not been entirely unprecedented in Syria[34]—rather, it is how truly widespread

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29. Robinson 2005, 39.

30. Grabar 2006, 118–19.

31. Donner 2010, 205ff., 233ff.

32. Kessler 1970, 9; Milwright 2016, 67–75.

33. Tillier 2018, 7–9. By the middle of the eighth century, the theme of Muḥammad's intercession is already fully developed in the *ḥadīth* literature; see *EI²*, art, "Shafāʿa" (A. J. Wensinck [D. Gimaret]).

34. Hoyland 2015b. See Sharon 2018 for the phrase "the protection of God and the guarantee of His messenger [*dhimmat Allāh wa-ḍamān rasūlih*]" in an inscription on a limestone slab discovered during excavations at the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount in 1968. Sharon dates the

and quotidian such proclamations had become in the documentary record as markers of political and religious supremacy, communal belonging, and even personal hope. The Umayyads permanently inscribed public proclamations of Muḥammad's messengership and prophethood into the triumphalist imperial ideology of the early Islamic polity and made the theological axioms undergirding such proclamations among its hallmarks. Thereafter, Muḥammad and his prophethood remained an integral facet of the ideological discourses of Umayyad legitimism and a bedrock of their hegemonic claims as rulers over the Islamic polity and the territories that fell beneath its shadow.

The increased importance of public declarations of Muḥammad's messengership and his prophethood was, moreover, not merely a phenomenon restricted to officialdom—at least not for long. It was also simultaneously mirrored in other parts of the Arabic epigraphic record not directly connected to officialdom, such as in epitaphs and graffiti left behind by early Muslims who lived farther away from the centers of imperial power and who did not necessarily participate in its maintenance and expansion. Muḥammad's name first appears in a non-official inscription on an epitaph written for a tombstone found in Aswān, Egypt, which belonged to a woman named ʿAbbāsah bint Jurayj. The inscription on the tombstone states that ʿAbbāsah died on 14 Dhū l-Qaʿdah 71/21 April 691 and begins, "the greatest loss to afflict the people of Islam [ahl al-islām] was their loss of the Prophet Muḥammad, God's blessing and peace be upon him." The inscription goes on to provide us with one of our earliest attestations to the Muslim confession of faith: "She bears witness that there is no god but God alone, that He has no partner, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, God's blessing and peace be upon him."[35] Also from this period, we have an inscription with a dual confession of faith similar in wording discovered in the Ḥijāz near al-Ṭāʾif, around seventy-five miles southeast of Mecca (fig. 6). The author of this was one al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh, who dates it A.H. 78 (697–98 C.E.), which he specifies was the year of the "[re]construction of the Sacred Mosque [al-masjid al-ḥarām]"—presumably by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik after the siege of Mecca and the defeat

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inscription to A.H. 32/ 652 C.E.; however, most of the text on the limestone is illegible, particularly the date of the inscription in the final line, and Sharon's proposed reading of "the year thirty-two" is, in my view, paleographically indefensible. As Sharon himself notes (ibid., 100), the stratigraphy of the excavated mosque where the limestone slab was first found by Benjamin Mazar seems to date to the eighth-ninth centuries C.E. I see no justification for Sharon's contention that "the inscription, dated more than a hundred years earlier, had no connection to it" (ibid.).

35. Bacharach and Anwar 2012; cf. Halevi 2004, 125ff., and Brockopp 2017, 65–67. See also Hoyland 1997b, 87n65, where he suggests that the epitaph, based on its content and wording, may in fact date to A.H. 171 rather than A.H. 71. Brockopp 2015, 137–38, regards Hoyland's doubts as ideological rather than evidentiary.
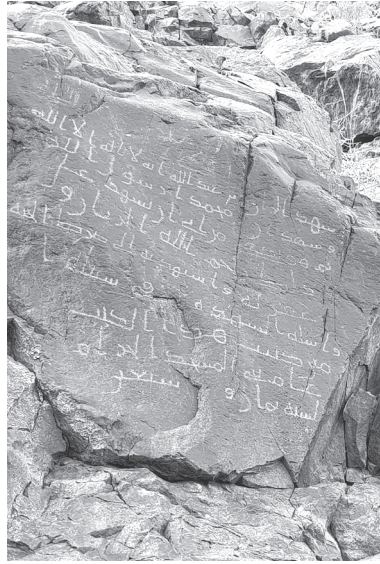
FIGURE 6. Arabic inscription of al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh mentioning the construction of the Sacred Mosque (A.H. 78/ 697–98 C.E.) in Ḥimā al-Namūr near al-Ṭāʾif. https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DYGvKTAXkAEfltY.jpg. Courtesy of Abdallah al-Thoomaly.

of Ibn al-Zubayr in 74/693.[36] Testifying that there is no god but God, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, al-Rayyān beseeches God for His Mercy, to be admitted into Paradise, and to find martyrdom in His path.[37] By the time such inscriptions were completed, an irreversible sea change was by then under way—invocations of Muḥammad as the prophet and messenger of God had become nearly ubiquitous in the public religiosity of Muslim material culture.

THREE EARLY NON-MUSLIM TESTIMONIES TO MUḤAMMAD

Turning to non-Muslim and non-Arabic sources, the textual and material evidence for Muḥammad as a historical figure is not as plentiful, but does appear quite early, decades earlier, in fact, than the evidence of early Arabo-Islamic epigraphy, papyri,

36. This renovation of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca is likely the same one referred to in Theophanes, *Chronographia,* ed. de Boor, 365 (trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 510, *sub anno* A.M. 6183 = 690–91 C.E.), where the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik resolves to plunder the pillars of the church of Gethsemane for the renovation of the temple in Mecca, but is dissuaded from doing so by his Christian treasurer, Sergius Manṣūr. For the broader historical context, see Anthony 2015, 613–18, and Guidetti 2009, 9.

37. Ḥārithī 2007, 535. Arabic sources mention a man named al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Yashkūrī, a Ḥarūrī/Khārijite who died in 101/719–20 fighting against Umayyad forces alongside Bisṭām al-Shaybānī. His brother composed an elegy in remembrance of him, preserved in Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 2: 1378. See ʿAbbās 1974, 258 and Robinson 2000, 125.

Al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh's Inscription

Translation	Arabic text adapted from Ḥārithī 2007, 535
1. al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh bears witness that there is no god but God	١) شهد الريان بن عبد الله أنه لا إله إلا الله
2. and bears witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God	٢) وشهد أن محمدا رسول الله
3. Afterwards it suffices any who come to bear witness to	٣) ثم هو يكفي أن من أتى أن يشهد على
4. that. May God show mercy to al-Rayyān and	٤) ذلك رحم الله الريان و
5. forgive him and guide him to the passage to Paradise	٥) غفر له واستهديه إلى صر[ا]ط الجنة
6. and I ask him to be martyred in His path, A-	٦) واس[أ]له الشه[ا]دة في سبيله آ
7. men. He wrote this writing	٧) مين كتب هذا الكت[ا]ب
8. the year the Sacred Mosque was [re]built	٨) عام بنى المسجد الحرام
9. in the year eight and seventy	٩) لسنة ثمان وسبعين

or coins. The earliest testimonies to Muḥammad to survive, therefore, are not in the Arabic language but, rather, in works written in languages such as Greek and Syriac. One of the earliest and most important historical testimonies to the Prophet Muḥammad can be found embedded in a Byzantine apologetic tract known as the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* (*The Teaching of Jacob, the Recently Baptized*). Frequently dated by modern historians to as early as July 634 C.E.—a mere two years after Muḥammad's death—the tract curiously asserts that a prophet has appeared "among the Saracens" who claims to possess "the keys to Paradise." ("Saracens" is the most common contemporary Greek name for the nomads and oasis dwellers of Arabia).[38] The Saracen prophet is not named in the work, but is nevertheless readily recognizable from its description of his message.[39] The *Doctrina Iacobi* has long been regarded as one of the most important testimonies to the early Islamic conquests. Indeed, most scholars continue to regard it as one of the precious few contemporary testimonies, not only to the earliest phases of the Islamic conquest of Palestine, but also to these conquests' inspiration by a "Saracen" prophet. If its early date is accepted, the *Doctrina Iacobi,* may thus be said to be the earliest-known piece of writing, aside from the Qurʾan itself, to assert that the teachings of an Arabian prophet provided the impetus for the conquests. In this regard, the *Doctrina Iacobi,* analyzed in extensive detail below, has few peers.

38. On the term "Saracen," see now Ward 2015, chap. 1.

39. A common objection to this interpretation is that even the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature names Arabian prophets other than Muḥammad who were active during his lifetime and that the reference could perhaps be to one of them instead. However, not one of these contemporary claimants to prophecy operated near Palestine, nor did they share Muḥammad's irredentist ambitions within Arabia or seek to lead conquests outside of it. Cf. Kister 2002; Robin 2012b; Hawting 2017b.

However, the *Doctrina Iacobi* is not the only source to make mention of the Arabian prophet within a decade of his death in 632 C.E. The earliest extant document to mention Muḥammad tout court by name was written not by one of his early followers but by an observer in Palestine. Overlooked for centuries, this mention of Muḥammad appears on the opening flyleaf of a sixth-century Syriac manuscript of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark currently housed at the British Library in London. The Gospel manuscript in question predates the Islamic period, but around 637 C.E. an anonymous Levantine observer noted several recent events, some of which he may have witnessed himself, on the blank page preceding it.[40] Written a mere five years after Muḥammad's death and, therefore, by a contemporary of the Arabian prophet, the notice is just as intriguing for what it does not say as it is for what it does. Alas, this opening page of the manuscript—catalogued today as British Library Add. 14,461—is poorly preserved and can only be deciphered with difficulty (fig. 7). The translation below reflects a slightly conservative reading of what might be deciphered of the text (the dates follow the Seleucid calendar):

> . . . Muḥamma[d] . . .
> [p]riest Mār Elijah . . .
> . . . and they came
> . . . and . . . and from . . .
> . . . strong . . . month . . .
> . . . . . . and the Romans fled. . . .
> and in January assurances for their lives were received
> [by the people of] Emesa and many villages due to the killing by
> . . . Muḥammad and many people were killed and captives . . .
> . . . from Galilee to Bēt . . .
> . . . those Ṭayyāyē camped by . . .
> . . . and we saw/rejoiced [ܣܒܝ ; or, ܣܕܒ] everywhe[re] . . .
> . . . and the o[liv]e that they . . . them and on the twe[nty]
> [sixt]h of May the s[acellarius?] went . . .
> . . . from . . . the Romans pursued them . . .
> . . . . and on the ten[th]
> [of August?] . . . the Romans fled from Damascus . . .
> many, about ten thousand. The followin[g]
> [ye]ar the Romans came. On August twenty in the year n[ine hundred]
> [and forty]-seven [636 C.E.] there gathered in Gabitha . . .
> . . . the Romans and many people were ki[ll]ed, [from]
> [the R]omans [a]bout fifty-thousand . . .
> . . . in year nine-hundred and for[ty-eight?] . . .[41]

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40. Penn 2009, 240.
41. Brooks 1904, 75; I have adapted my translation from Penn 2015b, 23–24.
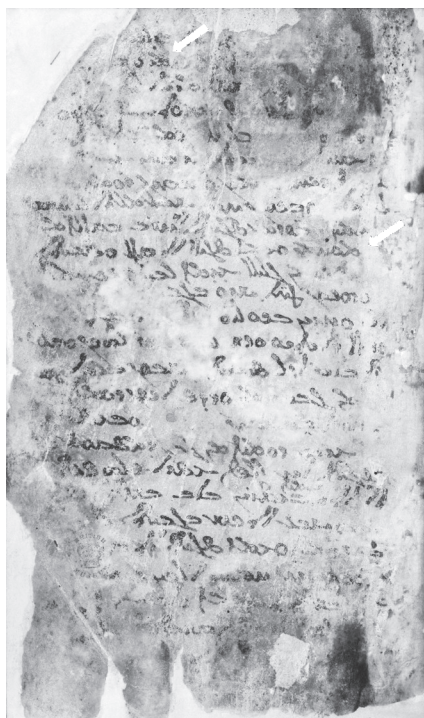
FIGURE 7. BL Add. 14,461, fol. 1r, the earliest mention of the name "Muḥammad"; red arrows point to where faintly legible traces of Muḥammad's name occur in the manuscript. © The British Library Board.

Inhabitants of Palestine in the early seventh century C.E. were long familiar with the threat of rapine and pillage from Arabia, especially in times of political chaos;[42] however, the scale of events recounted here is truly exceptional. Despite its poor state of preservation and its fragmentary nature, the text offers modern historians remarkable insights from a contemporary testimony. Firstly, we have before us an extraordinarily early attestation to Muḥammad's name—written here in Syriac letters as MWḤMD (ܡܘܚܡܕ) rather than what was to become the more widespread Syriac rendering MḤMṬ (ܡܚܡܛ)[43]—and what may be an eyewitness account of the earliest battles between the "Romans" (i.e., Byzantines) and Arab forces, here

42. Hoyland 2015, 41.

43. It is rare, but not unique, in early Syriac texts to spell Muḥammad's name MWḤMD (ܡܘܚܡܕ). This is how the name Muḥammad is rendered in the eighth-century East-Syriac *Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē;* see Taylor 2015. Indeed, it is also comparable to the common Hebrew rendering of Muḥammad as מוחמד. This evidence should serve as corrective to the hypotheses on the early pronunciation of the name Muḥammad in Kaplony 2015, 11–12; cf. Al-Jallad 2017b, 433–34n25.

called "Ṭayyāyē," the standard Syriac ethnonym for the tribal peoples of Arabia.[44] The gathering of forces near Gabitha mentioned in the text likely refers to what Arabic sources commonly call the battle of Yarmūk: the decisive defeat of the Romans, which led to their total withdrawal from Syria. The account's date for the battle even corresponds to the standard date provided in early Arabic chronicles— that is, Rajab 15/August 636.[45] Aside from being an early attestation of Muḥammad's *name,* one gets a sense that he is a leader of the "Ṭayyāyē" who assail the native populace and overwhelm local Roman forces. Absent is any mention of any notion of prophetic authority undergirding his leadership or, for that matter, any religious inspiration motivating the conquests and rapine of the "Ṭayyāyē" who follow him.

To this fragmentary account, we may add another brief historical notice penned in Syriac around 640 C.E., often attributed to "Thomas the Presbyter." The second Syriac account also recounts a series of incursions by the Ṭayyāyē who fol-low Muḥammad (ܛܝܝܐ ܕܡܚܡܕ) into Palestine and Syria, as well as their victorious clashes of the Ṭayyāyē with Roman forces:

> In the year 954 [634 C.E.] . . . on Friday, February the fourth, at the ninth hour, there was a battle between the Romans and the Ṭayyāyē of Muḥammad in Palestine, twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled. They abandoned the patrician BRYZDN (ܒܪܝܙܕܢ), and the Ṭayyāyē killed him. About four thousand destitute villagers from Palestine—Christians, Jews, and Samaritans—were killed, and the Ṭayyāyē destroyed the whole region.[46]

As above, in addition to the description of bloodshed and destruction wrought by the incursions, one finds in this passage an acute awareness of the ethnic origins of the forces as Arab tribesmen, or Ṭayyāyē, and that these men followed a man named Muḥammad. Unlike the *Doctrina,* however, these other two, near-contem-porary sources—albeit cognizant of the leader of the Arab tribesmen named Muḥammad—exhibit not a shadow of cognizance that the conquests were inspired either by a prophet or, for that matter, any religious message at all. The initial con-quests of Ṭayyāyē thus appear in these sources as a mere ethnic wave: their preda-tions may emanate from the lands of Ṭayyāyē, but from the viewpoint of these two early authors, they are seemingly unmoored to any religious ideology or pietistic fervor.[47] Nonetheless, that these authors associate the name Muḥammad with these events and explicitly identify him as a central figure underscores just how

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44. Tannous 2018, 525–31.

45. *EI*², s.v. "Yarmūk" (W. Kaegi).

46. Brooks 1904, 147–48. I have adapted the translation of Penn 2015b, 28. Cf. Hoyland 1997a, 116–20; Prémare 2002, 146–48.

47. See now the cogent summary of the data from Syriac writings in Penn 2012, 71ff. The first Syriac text to refer to Muḥammad as a prophet unambiguously, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,* does not appear until the 690s C.E.; see Reinink 2008, 77.

early the movement had been associated with him, even in the eyes of outsiders with relatively limited knowledge of the beliefs and motives of his followers when they first encountered them.

REVISITING THE *DOCTRINA IACOBI*

With these two brief Syriac texts as a point for the comparison, the importance and distinctiveness of the *Doctrina Iacobi* can be brought into stark relief. All three of these sources are exceptional because they single out from the anonymous "wolves of Arabia" depicted in other early sources an individual whom the early conquerors revered as a leader.[48] However, the *Doctrina Iacobi* also differs considerably from these two early Syriac accounts not only in content but also in genre and form.

The *Doctrina* is itself a Christian apologetic tract written in Greek with little obvious direct concern for Islam, the Islamic conquests, or the prophet who inspired them. Rather, the tract's principal audience seems to have been Byzantine Jews caught in the net of an imperial decree of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641 C.E.), which mandated the forced baptism of the empire's Jews into the Christian Church.[49] As such, the *Doctrina* recounts the story of a certain Palestinian Jew named Jacob who, upon arriving in Carthage from Constantinople to conduct his business there, is captured, imprisoned, and forcibly baptized by the Byzantine authorities on Pentecost (31 May) 632 along with the other Jewish denizens of that North African city.[50] The forced baptisms were part of a sweeping, empirewide edict of the emperor Heraclius, who decreed the forcible baptism of the Jews of the Byzantine empire in the wake of his recent victory over the Sasanids and his triumphal recapture of Jerusalem and the relic of the True Cross from the Persians. The *Doctrina* recounts the response of this Jacob "the recently baptized" and how he delves into the Holy Scriptures to seek succor and insight into his plight. As he reads the scriptures, Jacob finds that, rather than resenting his fate as

48. The phrase "wolves of Arabia" derives from the Septuagint (see LXX Zephaniah 3:3 and Habakkuk 1:8) and seems to have been used by the Maximus the Confessor in a letter written as early as 632 C.E. to refer to the first incursions of the Arabian followers of Muḥammad into Palestine; Strickler 2016, 430–34. The biblical phrase likely entered the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus as well as *dhuʾbān al-ʿarab;* Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 54–55 (3.3.6).

49. Following the observations of Olster 1994, 158–75, and Cameron 1996, 258–65. The *Doctrina* is quite transparently a Christian fantasy, yet, even so, scholars have frequently noted that the tract demonstrates a remarkably detailed and even "embedded" familiarity with the Jewish diaspora of Byzantium. Although set in Carthage, the choice of Greek rather than Latin as its literary medium reflects the prevalence of Greek as the quotidian language of Byzantine Jewry. See van der Horst 2009 and Holo 2009, 4ff.

50. The date is confirmed by a letter written about the event by Maximus the Confessor; see Booth 2014, 171n131.

a man forcibly baptized into the Christian faith, he finds solace. Jacob soon discovers that he need not feign sincere faith out of fear of the authorities. Rather, he realizes that he has now happily found himself in the arms of the true faith, that of the followers of Jesus Christ. It is Jacob's newfound faith in Jesus of Nazareth as God's true Messiah that really moves the narrative forward, and throughout the *Doctrina Iacobi,* Jacob is portrayed as an ardent master at producing arguments from Scripture to convince his fellow recently baptized Jews that, despite their doubts, providence has led them to the truest faith. In Jacob, the tract would have us believe, the Christians had gained a sharp and formidable apologist who was more than capable of convincing forcibly baptized Jews to remain loyal to Christ.

The portion of the *Doctrina Iacobi* most interesting to Islamicists only comes towards the end of the second half the tract, which begins with the arrival in Carthage of Justus, another Palestinian Jew, who has known Jacob since his childhood and is dismayed to find Jacob and his fellow Jews now baptized as Christians. Justus proves to be Jacob's most intractable opponent in debate—though Jacob bests even him in the end. It is also this Justus who relates stories of the recent troubles afflicting his homeland in Palestine. Justus recounts before Jacob and the other Jews that his own brother, Abraham, has written to him with reports of a prophet who has appeared among "the Saracens," and, according to Abraham, "proclaims the arrival of the Anointed One and Christ."[51] Abraham then relates how he had to flee by boat from Caesarea after an incursion of the Saracens killed the local imperial guard (*candidatus*). After arriving safely to the north in Sykamina, Abraham asks a man well-versed in Scripture about this Saracen prophet. "He is a deceiver [πλάνος],"[52] he is told. "Do prophets come with sword and chariot [μετὰ ξίφους καὶ ἅρματος]?"[53] Encouraged to investigate this Saracen prophet further, Abraham persists. Concluding the letter to his brother Justus, he writes about what he discovered: "So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He also says that he has the keys of Paradise [τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ παραδείσου], which is incredible."[54]

Through Abraham's letter, the *Doctrina* thus assures its readers that no messianic hopes can be placed in this Saracen prophet who claims to possess the keys to Paradise. However, the identity of the unnamed prophet is immediately recognizable. He must certainly be Muḥammad, and subsequent readers, medieval and modern, have easily made the connection. Not only is the *Doctrina*'s anti-Islamic

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51. *Doctrina Iacobi,* ed. and trans. Déroche, 208–9 (v. 16).

52. Cf. 2 John 1:7.

53. The mention of a "chariot" is figurative rather than literal, since the Arab conquerors did not use chariots either in battle or in daily life. See Crone 2008b.

54. *Doctrina Iacobi,* ed. and trans. Déroche, 208–10 (v. 16).

polemic early, it also seems to have been seminal.[55] In the following centuries, Byzantine polemicists would continue to mock the idea of Muḥammad as a heavenly "key bearer" (κλειδοῦχος) who could admit his followers to Paradise.[56]

Assuming, for the moment, that the conventional dates assigned to the *Doctrina Iacobi* by the majoritarian position of modern scholarship are sound, this early testimony to Muḥammad perhaps draws on eyewitnesses to the earliest phases of the Islamic conquests. The late French byzantinologist Gilbert Dagron put the text's *terminus ante quem* at 646/647 C.E. Scholars writing on the *Doctrina Iacobi* subsequently have been even bolder and have placed its composition as early as July 634, that is, in the immediate aftermath of the events Abraham's letter describes as having transpired in Palestine.[57] Dagron's dating of the *Doctrina* has hitherto only been seriously challenged by Paul Speck, who contends that it was compiled into a single text only later in the eighth century.[58] However, Speck's conclusions, and in particular the methods and assumptions behind them, have not been widely followed.[59]

The *Doctrina Iacobi* certainly offers an intriguing depiction of its Saracen prophet, even if modern historians find it either grossly distorted when set against the backdrop of the *sīrah-maghāzī* and *ḥadīth* corpus or, at the very least, enigmatically at odds with said corpus. All the same, the *Doctrina* does offer us four touchstone details about the prophet that merit serious consideration: (1) that his prophecy begins among the Saracens; (2) that he endorses warfare and conquest as integral to his prophetic mission; (3) that he affirms the eschatological arrival of the Anointed One and the Christ; and (4) that he claims to possess the keys to Paradise. Polemicized as they may be in their presentation, at least items 1 through 3 find as much confirmation as one might expect in the Qurʾan itself—in other words, the *Doctrina*'s depiction of Muḥammad, at least on these points, is fundamentally accurate.[60] The most intractable problem lies in the fourth item: the prophet's claim to possess the keys to Paradise. This is a harder nut to crack.

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55. The *Doctrina* was also translated into several languages at least from the twelfth century on, including Arabic, Ethiopic, and Slavonic; see CPG 3: 466 (no. 7793) and Dagron and Déroche 1991, 51–55. A partial Syriac translation has also been postulated; however, the evidence for this is slim.

56. Montet 1906, 151.14. On the date of the text, see Hoyland 1997a, 517–18, and Rigo 2009.

57. Hoyland 1997a, 58–59; Prémare 2002, 148–50, 352 (§13). Cf. Crone and Cook 1977, 3; Cameron 2006, 182; Shoemaker 2011b, 21ff.; Boudignon 2013, 255.

58. Speck 1997, 263–439.

59. See Külzer 1998; Holo 2009, 33ff.; Kaegi 2010, 35–36.

60. The Qurʾan certainly appears among "the Saracens," reflected at the very least in its self-designation as coming in the Arabic tongue (*bi-lisān ʿarabī mubīn,* Q. Shuʿarāʾ 26:195), as espousing the ancestral faith of Abraham and Ishmael's progeny (*millat abīkum Ibrāhīm,* Q. Ḥajj 22:78), and as coming from a messenger of their own people (*laqad jāʾakum rasūlun min anfusikum,* Q. Tawbah 9:128). The identification of Saracens with Ishmaelites (and thus as the progeny of Abraham) was already long established in the ethnographic imagination of Late Antiquity; see Ward 2015, 25ff. On the second point, the qurʾanic sanction of religious warfare and its influence on early Muslim religiosity is well

The keys to Paradise motif attached to Muḥammad by the *Doctrina* is at the forefront of the analysis in the remainder of this chapter. It must be read, I argue, against the backdrop of two literary traditions: that of the Christian literature of Late Antiquity, especially in the Syriac-speaking tradition of the East, on the one hand, and that of a hitherto-neglected corner of the early Islamic tradition, in particular the early *ḥadīth* corpus, and its utilization of the keys to Paradise motif (*mafātīḥ al-jannah*), on the other. As will become clearer below, the end results of such an analysis are striking and, in my view, have the potential to change modern scholarship's evaluation of the relationship between the *Doctrina* and the early Islamic tradition.

THE "KEYS TO PARADISE" IN LATE ANTIQUE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

In the context of the *Doctrina Iacobi* and its unabashedly pro-Christian propaganda, the keys to Paradise motif evokes Christian conceptions of apostolic authority.[61] In late antique literature, possessing the keys to (the kingdom of) heaven is attached to the clerical leaders of the church and their stewardship of the authority conferred by Christ on his disciples.[62] The fourth-century Syriac-speaking ascetic Aphrahat refers to Christian bishops as "keepers of the keys,"[63] since he regarded them as having inherited the legacy of the apostle Peter, to whom Jesus declared, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and what you bind on earth will be bound on heaven, and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19)—a view widely espoused in the patristic literature, both East and West.[64] The

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documented and uncontroversial; e.g., see Donner 2010, 82ff.; Sinai 2017b, 188–96; and Lindstedt forthcoming a. The third point is more difficult than the first two. The *Doctrina*'s reference to the Saracen prophet foretelling the coming arrival of "the Anointed One [Ἠλειμμένου] and Christ" is ambiguous, since it is unclear whether he announces the coming of a Jewish messiah or the second coming of Jesus. Regardless, that many early readers of the Qurʾān did read it as affirming the second coming of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (Ar. *al-masīḥ*) is attested in an early reading of Q. Zukhruf 43:61, which makes Jesus "a sign [ʿalam] of the Hour" rather than merely "knowledge [ʿilm] of the Hour." See Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* ed. Turkī, 20: 631–33, and Khaṭīb 2002, 8: 392–93. The affirmation of the second coming of Jesus in the *ḥadīth* corpus is indubitable (e.g., ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 11:399-402). On this final point, one may cite a *ḥadīth* preserved by Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849). It states that when grief overtook Muḥammad's followers after the losses sustained in 8/629 at Muʾtah—the first northern expedition into the Transjordan—he consoled them saying, "Truly some of you from this community shall see Christ. They are like you or better . . . God will not allow a community of which I am the first and Christ is the last to be disgraced" (*Muṣannaf,* 13: 419–20).

61. Noted by Speck 1997, 406.
62. Murray 2006, 182–87, 217–18.
63. Aphrahat, *Dem.,* xix, 612.23, 680.7–8.
64. Demacopoulos 2013, 43, 151 et passim.

significance of Peter as the "key bearer" who grants humanity access to the kingdom of heaven is all the more intelligible given that Jesus of Nazareth reproaches the scribes and Pharisees for locking people out of the kingdom of heaven later on in Matthew 23:13.[65] Invoking Jesus's rebuke of the Pharisees, Aphrahat likewise mobilizes this gospel passage in his admonition to ecclesiastics: "Let the keepers of the keys open to those who enter, / that the gate of the kingdom may not be shut in their face."[66]

The Petrine metaphor equating apostolic authority with carrying the keys of the kingdom of heaven is extraordinarily common and well-known in patristic writings and particularly in Palestine. The revered church father Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386 C.E.) refers to Peter in his *Catechesis* as he who "carries the keys of heaven,"[67] and calls him the "key bearer" (κλειδοῦχος).[68] The title "key bearer" is also applied to Muḥammad in the counterfactual parodies of his prophecy characteristic of Byzantine polemics. Cyril's depiction of Peter as the apostle entrusted with the keys of heaven is even more intriguing for our purposes, inasmuch as fragments of his *Catechesis* translated into Christian Palestinian Aramaic survive from the fifth to seventh centuries C.E., where passages in which Cyril speaks of Peter as one who "carries the keys of heaven" are rendered as *ṣyd mptḥwhy d-šwmᵌyᵌ*, translating the Greek κλεῖς with the Aramaic cognate of the Arabic word for key (*miftāḥ*), so central to the motif in the Islamic literature.[69]

The keys motif in Christian literature does not remain merely a metaphor for apostolic authority either. Its role as a metaphor for the efficacy of Christian in granting believers admittance into God's kingdom is a commonplace in Christian literature by the seventh century C.E. Thus, one Syriac-speaking divine declares in a homily that Christ "gave [the apostles] authority over his kingdom [*šaleṭ ʿal malkūteh*], and by their hands gave the keys of heaven [*qlīdē da-šmāyā*] to humankind."[70] Throughout his hymns, Ephrem of Syria (d. 373 C.E.) repeatedly employs keys as a central, animating metaphor in the luscious imagery for which

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65. Also *Gos. Thom.* 39; cf. the Talmudic parallels discussed in Schäfer 2009, 166n66, and Davies and Allison 2004, 3: 287.

66. Aphrahat, *Dem.,* xiv, 612.23–25; the English translation, slightly modified, is taken from Murray 2006, 185.

67. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.,* vi.15, ed. Reischl and Rupp, 1: 176.

68. Ibid., xvii.27, ed. Reischl and Rupp, 2: 282; cf. Lampe 1961, 755b.

69. CCPA 5: 61b.19. This version is closer to the regional, Aramaic version of Mt 16:19 where "keys to the kingdom of heaven" is rendered as ܟܠܝܕܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ, as opposed to the Syriac rendering ܩܠܝܕܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ. See Smith and Gibson 1899, 287.19. That this depiction of Peter as the apostle to whom the "keys of heaven"' had been entrusted was current and widespread in seventh-century Palestine is further confirmed by a memorandum composed by Stephen of Dora, a papal legate and inveterately anti-Monothelite disciple of Sophronius of Jerusalem, for the Lateran council of 649 C.E. See Ekonomou 2007, 113–14, 131–33; Levy-Rubin 2001, 293.

70. Kmosko 1903, 406.

his writings are deservedly revered. Ephrem is keen in particular to portray the cross itself as the key that unlocked the gates of Paradise (*pardaysā*) for believers, stating:

> He knows the multitude of his treasure-stores
> The keys to his treasure-stores He has placed in our hands
> He made his cross our treasure-keeper
> by which the gates of Paradise are opened to us
> as Adam opened the gates of Gehenna[71]

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

> . . . and His treasure house is not so paltry
> that we should doubt His promise;
> He has surrendered His own Son for us
> so that we might believe in Him;
> His body is with us,
> His assurance is with us,
> He came and gave us his keys,
> since it is for us that His treasures lie in waiting
> RESPONSE: Blessed is He who, with his keys,
> has opened up the Garden of Life.[72]

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

The cosmological notion of humankind being blocked from accessing Paradise by gates and, thus, the existence of a heavenly gatekeeper is quite an ancient one and by no means exclusive to Jewish, Christian, or Muslim sacred cosmology.[73] Indeed, where "the keys to *heaven*" as opposed to "the keys of *Paradise*" motif appears first in the Islamic tradition is in the Qurʾan itself. According the Qurʾan, however, it is God alone who possesses "the keys to the Heavens and Earth [*maqālīd al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*]" (Q. Zumar 39:63, Shūrā 42:12). In the Qurʾan, the keys to the Heavens

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71. Ephrem, *Epiph.,* x.16, ed. Beck, 183–84.
72. Ephrem, *Parad.,* vii.1, 3–7, ed. Beck, 25; trans. Brock 1990, 119.
73. TDNT 3: 744–53, s.v. κλείς (Joachim Jeremias).

and Earth are cosmological and do not assume an explicitly eschatological function—rather the emphasis falls on God's unrivaled sovereignty over the cosmos as its sole Creator. Yet the Qurʾan does speak of the *doors* of heaven in a strikingly eschatological vein.[74] Most illustrative of this is the sole verse in which both Paradise (*al-jannah*) and heaven (*al-samāʾ*; lit., "the sky") are mentioned together: "Truly, as for those who disbelieve and spurn our signs, the doors of heaven will not be opened for them nor will they enter Paradise until the camel passes through the eye of a needle" (Q, Aʿrāf 7:40). If a distinction is to be drawn between heaven (*al-samāʾ*) and Paradise (*al-jannah*) in qurʾānic cosmology, Paradise appears to be the felicitous abode that lies beyond the sky canopy of the heavens above the Earth.[75]

Returning to the *Doctrina Iacobi* in light of the data examined above, I believe it is less likely that in referring to the Saracen prophet as claiming to possess "the keys of *Paradise*" that the *Doctrina* offers us some mere Petrine parody of its so-called false prophet. In referring to the keys to Paradise rather than the keys to heaven, the emphasis strikes me as being purely eschatological. That is, we are likely dealing here with real data about early Muslim belief rather than a Petrine parody thereof, and this despite the deformations introduced through the tract's polemical lens.[76]

The premise that the keys to Paradise differ from the keys to the kingdom of heaven can also be inferred from the Syriac tradition. Ephrem notably also

74. Thus, "if we were to open for them a gate in heaven and they continuously ascended through it" (Q. Ḥijr 15:16), and "heaven has opened wide and become as gates" (Q. Nabaʾ 78:19). Cf. Neuwirth 2011, 466–67. These qurʾanic keys have been connected to the three keys possessed by God in the rabbinic literature (cf. b.Taʿanit 2a): the key of rain, the key of birthing, and the key of the resurrection of the dead. Cf. Speyer [1939] 2013, 37.

75. Early Muslim epitaphs mentioning the opening of "the gates of heaven" (*abwāb al-samāʾ*) to believers leave a similar impression; see Diem and Schöller 2004, 1: 151–52; Lange 2012, 9–11. The poetry attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt—an alleged prophetic claimant of the Thaqīfah tribe of Ṭāʾif, the nearest neighbors of Mecca's Quraysh—also mentions the "gates of heaven." One of Umayyah's odes speaks of the keys of heaven as being held by angelic sentinels stationed beneath the Throne of God: "Beneath Him the guardians of the gates of heaven//standing near Him with the keys ever watchful (*wa-ḥurrāsu ʾabwābi l-samawāti dūnahu//qiyāmun ladayhi bi-l-maqālīd ruṣṣadū*)" (Ibn Dāwūd, *Zahrah,* 2: 498.3; cf. Q. Jinn 72:27 and Seidensticker 2011, 47–49). In a tradition attributed to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), upon hearing the news of the Muḥammad's victory at Badr, Umayyah felt compelled to abandon his wanderings in Syria in order to seek him out in Medina and to join his followers. When asked by a companion in Syria where he is heading, Umayyah answers, "I shall put my faith in him and hand him the keys to this matter [*uʾminu bihi wa-ulqī ilayhi maqālīd hādhā l-amr*]." The meaning here of *hādhā l-amr,* "this matter," is unclear, but the phrase seems to refer to prophecy. In any case, the tradition relates that Umayyah changes his mind when he learns that kinsmen of his were among the dead at Badr and Muḥammad had thrown them into al-Qalīb, a dry well that served as a mass grave for enemy corpses. Abandoning his plans, Umayyah returns to al-Ṭāʾif, where he meets his death. See Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 9: 286 (with thanks to May Shaddel for pointing this tradition out to me).

76. *Pace* Crone and Cook, who write, "the keys of the *Doctrina* are, so to speak, Christianised rather than Hagarised" (1997, 203n16).

mobilizes the "keys to *Paradise*" (Syr. [*a*]*qlīdē d-pardaysā*) motif quite frequently, and in his writings the motif appears not as an apostolic metaphor but rather as an eschatological one. Hence, in a hymn pondering the fate of the Good Thief crucified alongside Christ (see Luke 24:43), Ephrem writes:

> I beheld a dwelling there
>   and a tabernacle of light,
> a voice proclaiming
>   "Blessed is the Thief
> who has freely received
>   the keys to Paradise [*qlīdē d-pardaysā*]!"[77]

In the above passage, the Good Thief's "keys to Paradise" are clearly Christ's promise upon the cross that the penitent thief will be with him in Paradise and not, as seen above, any promise or conference of apostolic authority.[78] The keys theme appears again in a hymn by Ephrem on the church featuring the biblical figure Enoch. There he writes:

> In Enoch Adam saw
>   a prefiguring of our Savior
> who opened and granted entrance to
>   a symbol of the Gardener
> by whom He concealed Mercy [bearing]
>   the key to Paradise [*aqlīdeh d-pardaysā*][79]

Again, the keys to Paradise are spoken of in an eschatological, rather than an apostolic, vein. Hence, the *Doctrina,* by casting the Saracen prophet as making claims to the keys of Paradise, attributes to him mutatis mutandis not so much claims to apostolic authority over the Kingdom of Heaven as, rather, a promise to his followers of eschatological salvation.

THE "KEYS TO PARADISE" IN EARLY ISLAMIC PREACHING

Whereas "the keys to the heavens and earth" are the exclusive possession of the Divinity in the Qurʾān, the *ḥadīth* corpus does frequently claim that Muḥammad

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77. Ephrem, *Parad.,* viii.2, ed. Beck, 33; trans. Brock 1990, 131–32.

78. The motif is expanded upon further in a Syriac dialogue poem relating the dispute between the Good Thief crucified beside Jesus and the Cherub who bars humanity from Paradise/Eden; though the Cherub seeks to bar the Good Thief's way, by the end of the dialogue the Cherub must acquiesce, since the Thief produces his cross—his key to enter Eden (ܩܠܝܕܐ ܕܥܕܢ)—to gain entrance to Paradise. See Brock 2002. My thanks to Jack Tannous for this reference.

79. Ephrem, *Eccl.,* l.6, ed. Beck, 129.

as a prophet possesses both "the keys to the treasures of the earth [*mafātīḥ khazāʾin al-arḍ*]" and "the keys of Paradise [*mafātīḥ/maqālīd al-jannah*]." In the *ḥadīth,* whereas as the former keys represent the Prophet's mandate for conquest,[80] the "keys of Paradise" are conceived of in multifarious terms. In canonical *ḥadīth,* they are either said to be ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) or the confession (*al-shahādah*) that there is no god but God.[81] One particularly fascinating tradition, recorded by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768) in his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* has the semi-legendary Jewish convert Kaʿb al-Aḥbār declare that the Prophet "has been given the keys, that by him God may make the blind see, deaf ears hear, and stammering tongues speak that they may testify that there is no god but God."[82]

A later adaptation of this *ḥadīth* trope also appears in a tradition about a Jewish-Muslim polemical exchange during the lifetime of Muḥammad. According to this account, when sent by Muḥammad to the Yemeni town of al-Janad in A.H. Rajab 9/October 630 C.E., the Prophet's companion Muʿādh ibn Jabal successfully persuades the Jews of Kindah resident there to convert en masse. Muʿādh only achieves this feat after the Jews interrogate him about the keys of Paradise. Muʿādh answers the Jews as the Prophet had previously instructed him to and according to the well-known *ḥadīth:* the keys to Paradise, Muʿādh proclaims, are "to bear witness that there is no god but God."[83]

Since such plain vanilla maxims hardly seem likely to be the teaching inspiring the sardonic polemic of the *Doctrina Iacobi,* Patricia Crone and Michael Cook dismiss identification of the keys as the *shahādah* and ritual prayer, attributing it to a process whereby the militancy castigated in the *Doctrina* was "sublimated into a harmless metaphor."[84] This appraisal strikes at the heart of the disjuncture between this *ḥadīth* and the polemics one encounters in the *Doctrina.* In Christian sources, the polemics against Muḥammad's promises of Paradise have a harder edge. Thus, when Justus converts at Jacob's hands, he immediately ponders the possibility that he might face martyrdom at the hands of Jews and Saracens, whom

80. Goldziher 1971, 2: 127, 261. Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 30: 625–26, where Muḥammad has a vision of being granted to keys to conquer the Levant, Persia, and Yemen just prior to the battle of Khandaq. According to another tradition, the Prophet was offered "the keys to the world and eternal life therein [*mafātīḥ al-jannah wa-l-khuld fīhā*]" but chose instead a mortal life in order to meet his Lord; see ibid., 25: 376–77.

81. Cf. Wensinck 1936–88, 5: 55a–56b.

82. Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 141–42 (cited in Rubin 1995, 30); Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 1: 155 (citing the same tradition as Ibn Isḥāq via the Rayy recension of Salamah al-Abrash). The tradition echoes Luke 7:23.

83. Janadī, *Sulūk,* 1: 81–82, cited in Lecker 1995b, 638–39; 2012, 177–78. A similar story appears in Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis,* 466–67; however, in this version the caliph ʿUmar is questioned by a group of Jewish scholars, whose questions he is unable to answer without consulting ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

84. Cook and Crone 1977, 4.

he pledges to defy even if they threaten to cut him into pieces.[85] In this vein, too, Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818 C.E.) writes that Muḥammad "taught his subjects that he who kills an enemy or is killed by an enemy goes to Paradise"[86]—perhaps a polemical nod to Q. Tawbah 9:111. Hence, the "keys to Paradise" motif appears in two further contexts that should also be brought to bear on the *Doctrina*'s depiction of its Saracen prophet and add nuance to the hitherto Christian-dominated discussion of the motif. The first is the association of the motif with the Umayyads and their campaigns of conquest in early Muslim historiography, and the second is the prominence of the motif in Islamic prophetic eschatology.

In the *Doctrina Iacobi,* the Saracen prophet is scorned for coming with "sword and chariot" and shedding blood *and* for claiming to possess the keys to Paradise, but these are separate items that should not necessarily be conflated.[87] Still, the explicit criticism of the Saracens' prophet for embracing martial means to expand his authority inevitably colors how one reads the Palestinian Jew Abraham's dismissive mention of the keys to Paradise. Could the *Doctrina* thus offer early testimony to the doctrine of *jihād* procuring believers access to Paradise?

The data for Umayyad conquest propaganda lend this interpretation some credence. In an account preserved by Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī (wr. mid-ninth century C.E.), the Umayyad prince Marwān ibn Muḥammad (later the caliph Marwān II 'al-Ḥimār'; r. 127–32/744–50) spurs on his soldiers while campaigning against the Khazars by declaring, "Know that the keys of Paradise have come to you, and yours is the bountiful reward God has promised."[88]

Such a coupling of the pietistic militancy animating Umayyad conquest ideology with the keys motif occurs again in a dictum attributed to the Umayyad general Yazīd ibn Shajarah, who famously exhorted his soldiers: "Verily, swords are the keys to Paradise." An Arab notable of the Rahāʾ clan who settled first in Kūfa during the early conquests, Yazīd ibn Shajarah thereafter established his military fame as a navy commander renowned for his martial preaching under Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 661–80).[89] The indefatigable Yazīd spent his winters campaigning on land against the Byzantines, but it was at sea that he met his end in A.H. 58/ 679 C.E.[90] His loyalty to Muʿāwiyah was legendary, and he headed a *ḥajj* caravan

85. *Doctrina Iacobi,* ed. and trans. Déroche, 212–13 (v. 17). Note that the Jews and Saracens are here seen to be in cahoots.

86. Theophanes, *Chron.,* ed. de Boor, 334 (trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 465); cf. Hoyland 2011, 87–90.

87. Cf. the hopes of the patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius (634–39), once believers have returned to the orthodox faith, "we will blunt the Ishmaelite sword, turn away the Saracen knife, and the break the Arab bow"; cited in Booth 2013, 22.

88. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ,* 8: 256.

89. Armstrong 2017, 49ff. (esp. 60–64).

90. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 2: 2, 173, 181; cf. Khalīfah, *Ṭabaqāt,* 137; Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 446; and the extensive biography given to him in Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 65: 220–33.

that nearly came into open conflict with a rival caravan sent by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib from Kūfah in 39/660.[91] Rather than as a sanguine partisan of the Umayyads, however, the *ḥadīth* scholars remembered him primarily as a silver-tongued orator who exhorted his soldiers to fight with unyielding religious conviction. Hence, the traditionist Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722–23) recounts:

> Mujāhid related from Yazīd ibn Shajarah, a man whose deeds confirmed the truth of his words, saying: Yazīd would exhort us as follows: "Recall the grace that God has bestowed upon you [pl.] and how beautiful the mark of his grace is upon you! If only you could see what I see among the dark- and fair-skinned, and what lies among the steeds of war [*law tarawna mā arā min akhḍar wa-aṣfar wa-fī l-rihāl mā fīhā*]!"[92]
>
> And he would say,[93] "When the ranks of men are aligned, whether for battle or in prayer, the gates of heaven open as do the doors of Paradise and the Inferno [*futiḥat abwābu l-samāʾ wa-abwābu l-jannah wa-abwābu l-nār*]. The houris are then adorned and look to see: if a man charges, they say, 'O Lord, grant him victory!' But if he flees, they say, 'O Lord, pardon him!' So charge the enemy until you exhaust their resolve, may my father and mother be your ransom! Do not dishonor the houris! The first drop of a man's blood grants him atonement with God for all that he has done. Two houris shall descend to meet him, wipe the dust of the earth from his face, and say, 'Your time has come.' 'Your time too has come,' he shall reply. Then he will be wrapped in a hundred flowing coats woven not from the fabric of the sons of Adam but from the plants of Paradise. Even if the cloth were to be placed between two fingers, space would remain."
>
> And he also would say, "I have been told that swords are the keys to Paradise."

Yazīd's dictum that "swords are the keys to Paradise" circulates independently as a stand-alone pious maxim;[94] it is even upgraded to a prophetic *ḥadīth* in some collections, albeit more rarely.[95] Strikingly, in Yazīd's sermon, believers' "swords" substitute for the cross of Ephrem's Savior as the key to unlocking the celestial gates to Paradise.

A dictum similar to Yazīd's appears in Shiʿite *ḥadīth,* too; however, in the Shiʿite collections, in keeping with their sectarian scruples, the saying is attributed directly to the Prophet rather than to an Umayyad general. Thus, the sixth imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), reports the following on the authority of his ancestors: "The Messenger of God said, 'All that is good lies in the sword and under the sword's shadow, for only the sword will set the people aright and swords are the

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91. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ,* 4: 220–24; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 2: 406ff.

92. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 5: 256–8.

93. Reading كان يقول for كان يقال; cf. Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 22: 246, and al-Hannād ibn al-Sārī, *Zuhd,* 123–24.

94. E.g., see Abū Nuʿaym, *Jannah,* 70. Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 1176), e.g., records three versions of the sermon quoted above without the "keys to paradise" motif (*Dimashq,* 65: 230–32).

95. Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf,* 7: 10; al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī, *Mustadrak,* 3: 563.

keys to Paradise and Hellfire.'"[96] The imagery in this Shiʿite *ḥadīth* resonates quite well with ʿAlī's famous dictum, "Verily, jihad is one of the gates to Paradise,"[97] but it also seems to fuse the dictum of Yazīd ibn Shajarah with the famous canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet exhorts his followers before battle that, "the gates of heaven are under the shadow of swords."[98]

In a quite different vein, the association of the motif with the Umayyads can be seen in an early narrative about the caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 23–35/644–56) and his gathering together of the Prophet's companions for counsel when signs emerge of an impending civil war (*fitnah*). Defying ʿUthmān and censuring the favoritism shown during his caliphate to his clansmen from the Banū Umayyah, ʿAmmār ibn Yāsar—who typically acts as a spokesman for pro-ʿAlid partisans in such narrations—addresses those gathered in the caliph's company, saying, "I ask you all and abjure you by God: Do you not recognize that the Messenger of God gave authority to Quraysh above all others, and gave authority to the Banū Hāshim over the rest of Quraysh?" When his audience remains silent, ʿUthmān defiantly retorts: "Indeed, were the keys to Paradise in my very hand, I would hand them over to the Banū Umayyah until the last of their number entered; by God I would give [the keys] to them and appoint them in authority just to spite any who object!"[99]

The subtext of the above account strikes me as an anti-ʿUthmānī attack on Umayyad legitimist claims: the Umayyads' founding caliph neither had the keys nor are they ʿUthmān's to give, and the context signals the ineptitude of ʿUthmān's fraught caliphate. An absence of genuine legitimacy to lead the Muḥammad's *ummah* is marked out by the fact that ʿUthmān can only wish to have the type of eschatological authority that possession of the keys to Paradise confers. The implications of this account are all the more intriguing given Shiʿite assertions that the head of the Umayyads' rival clan among Quraysh, the Banū Hāshim—the Prophet's son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib—had received the keys to Paradise from the Prophet himself (see below).

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

> I will be the first to exit the grave when they are resurrected; I will be their leader once they arrive; I will address them as they hearken; I will be their mediator when

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96. Kulaynī, *Kāfī,* 5: 2; cf. Ibn Bābawayh, *Thawāb,* 190, and Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 6: 122.
97. Mubarrad, *Kāmil,* ed. Ibrāhīm and Shaḥātah, 1: 20; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ,* 2: 60 (*khuṭbah* 27)
98. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* 2: 833 (no. 5025, *bāb al-imārah*); cf. Wensinck 1936–88, 4: 79b.
99. Ibn Shabbah, *Madīnah,* 3: 1099; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 1: 492–93.

they are imprisoned; and I will bring good tidings when they are struck dumb with fear. On that day the banner of nobility, the keys of Paradise, and the banner of praise shall be in my hands.[100]

A similar permutation of this proclamation features at the end of a grand heavenly ascension narrative preserved in the Qurʾān-commentary of Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), suggesting that these powers were granted to Muḥammad only after God had translated him to Paradise during his Night Journey.[101] The theme emerges prominently in early Shiʿite literature, too, where in typical Shiʿite fashion ʿAlī is said to aid Muḥammad in his prophetic task of carrying the keys to Paradise.[102] In one early Shiʿite ascension narrative, ʿAlī accompanies Muḥammad on his heavenly journey, and when Riḍwān, the guardian of Paradise, hands the keys to Paradise (mafātīḥ al-jannah) to Muḥammad and subsequently the angelic guardian of Hell hands him the keys to the Inferno (maqālīd al-nār), the prophet proceeds to then hand both sets of keys to ʿAlī.[103]

Eschatological traditions of this sort are often dismissed out of hand as ʿAbbāsid-era confections produced in response to the expansion of Muḥammad's super-human dimensions in later Islamic prophetology. However, the eschatological centrality of Muḥammad as his community's prophet enjoys strong attestations from a remarkably early date. Compelling evidence for such a robust eschatological vision of Muḥammad may be found in Umayyad-era inscriptions. We have already encountered the most famous of these: the mosaic inscriptions of the outer and inner ambulatory of the Dome of the Rock, completed in A.H. 72. Following a litany of qurʾanic inscriptions comes the declaration, "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, may God bless him, and may his intercession be accepted on the Day of the Resurrection for his community [muḥammadun rasūlu Llāhi ṣallā Llāhu ʿalayhi wa-tuqbal shaf[ā]ʿatuhu yawma al-qiy[ā]mati fī ummatih]," a declaration echoed again on the copper-plaque inscription at the east entrance.[104]

Far less famous are two other Umayyad-era inscriptions of the early seventh century C.E. that invoke the eschatological role of Muḥammad. The first, discovered in 1886 at Khirbat Nitil, is an epitaph composed for a certain ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz

100. Abū Nuʿaym, Dalāʾil, 1: 64; cf. Dārimī, Sunan, ed. al-Dārānī, 1; 196; Abū Yaʿlā, Muʿjam, 206 (no. 160); Bayhaqī, Dalāʾil, 5:484.

101. Kashf, 6: 67.

102. Tūsī, Amālī, 209; cf. Ibn Bābawyh, Khiṣāl, 415; Ibn Shahrāshūb, Manāqib, 3: 55; Shādhān, Fadāʾil, 121. The tradition where Muḥammad calls ʿAlī "my aid in carrying the keys of paradise [ʿawn lī fī ḥaml mafātīḥ al-jannah]" appears in Sunni sources after such traditions are appropriated by the manāqib al-ṣaḥābah genre; e.g., Ibn Asākir, Dimashq, 42: 331. Cf. also 3 Enoch 48(C): 3 and the variant "ʿawnī ʿalā mafātīḥ khazāʾin raḥmat rabbī" in Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, 42: 330, and Abu Nuʿaym, Ḥilyah, 1: 66.

103. Ṣaffār, Baṣāʾir, 417–18; cf. Qummī, Tafsīr, 2: 326; Ibn Bābūyah, Maʿānī, 117; Ibn Shahrāshūb, Manāqib, 2: 9–11.

104. Milwright 2016, 67–75; Elad 2008, 186.

ibn al-Ḥārith ibn al-Ḥakam. The epitaph asks God's forgiveness for ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and then proceeds to ask God "to lea[d him to] the Basin of Muḥammad [*wa-aw[ridhu] ḥawḍ Muḥammad*]."[105] The second inscription, discovered in the ʿAsīr region, and recently published by Saʿd al-Rāshid, is even more extensive.[106] Written by a certain ʿUthmān ibn Qays, the inscription invokes the blessings of God and the angels upon Muḥammad "the gentile prophet, the blessed guide" (*al-nabī al-ummī al-h[ā]dy al-mbrʾk* [sic]) and implores, "Lord, lead us to his Basin, without disgrace and neither regretful, misguided, nor misguiding."[107] The basin (*ḥawḍ*) mentioned in these inscriptions is undoubtedly that of the *ḥadīth* corpus: a mammoth eschatological basin from which Muḥammad will only allow his true followers to drink, and thus gain admittance to Paradise.[108] Curiously, among the other rare texts where an eschatological basin features prominently, the keys to Paradise feature too. In 3 Baruch 11:2, 8, the archangel Michael is not merely the keeper of the celestial basin (φιάλη), he is the "key bearer" for the kingdom of heaven.[109] Like Muḥammad's famous basin, could the image of him as a celestial key bearer date from the first century A.H. as well?

THE *DOCTRINA* IACOBI AND THE HISTORICAL MUḤAMMAD

Returning for the last time to the *Doctrina Iacobi* and the keys of Paradise that its Saracen prophet claims to possess, an array of interpretative possibilities are spread out before us: Are we meant to believe that, by proclaiming that his teachings offer the keys to Paradise, the Saracen prophet is making a pseudo-Petrine claim to apostolic authority? Or is the Saracen prophet of the *Doctrina* merely endorsing military conquest in the name of his religion and promising that it will earn the faithful fighters passage into Paradise? Or, finally, does this Saracen prophet lay claim to the eschatological authority to permit or deny entry to Paradise to any person he so wills in a manner that does not necessarily entail warfare?

The foregoing analysis has sought to show how reading the *ḥadīth* corpus alongside the *Doctrina* might provide answers to such questions. Here, I would like to argue that the *ḥadīth* corpus renders all of these options plausible, or even a combination thereof. In my view, there is no way to distill the clear waters of his-

105. Diem and Schöller 2004, 1: 168–70

106. See Rāshid 2008, 46, where he tentatively suggests that the ʿUthmān ibn Qays of inscription might be identified as a scribe (*kātib*) who served in the late Umayyad bureaucracy under Marwān II.

107. Rāshid 2008, 25.

108. Ibid.; cf. Wensinck 1936–88, 1: 537–38.

109. Kulik 2010, 304ff. These keys are described as the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" and, therefore, unlikely to be the same as temple keys surrendered to heaven by the priests and Jeremiah mentioned in 2 Baruch 10:18 and 4 Baruch 4:3.

torical certainty from the muddy rivers of these literary tropes. Yet what also tempers my pessimism in this regard is how reading these passages from the *Doctrina* in light of the data discussed above presents us with two rather starkly opposing ways to approach its depiction of the "Saracen prophet."

One view is that, as Crone and Cook argue, "we have in the *Doctrina Iacobi* a stratum of belief older than the Islamic tradition itself."[110] This position means that the *Doctrina*'s portrait of the Saracen prophet must be taken seriously, including its assertion that the Saracen prophet claimed to possess the keys to Paradise. Hence, the *Doctrina*'s portrait of Muḥammad should not be jettisoned as merely a malicious religious polemic. If one accepts Dagron's conservative early dating of the text, the *Doctrina* offers us a type of "*ḥadīth* avant la lettre," thereby confirming the authenticity of a minor motif in the Muslim tradition that modern historians would otherwise be inclined to dismiss out of hand as late and tendentious. Consequently, the *Doctrina* would serve to establish the historicity of the importance of Muḥammad's prophethood in Islamic eschatology at the very outset and thus offer an indispensable insight into the eschatological character of early Islamic preaching and its reception outside peninsular Arabia. Without the perspective of the *Doctrina,* the appearance of the "keys to Paradise" in the Islamic tradition would seem merely yet another, albeit fascinating, example of a pre-Islamic, late antique religious motif that entered the Islamic tradition—albeit historically transformed by its pious representatives—through the massive assimilation machine we call the *ḥadīth* corpus.

The second interpretive possibility, unfortunately for the *Doctrina Iacobi*'s value to Islamicists, is that the Muslim preaching and religious discourse of the Umayyad period—that is, of the late seventh or, less likely, of the early eighth century C.E.—influenced the *Doctrina*'s polemical portrait of the Saracens' prophet. In which case, the *Doctrina* must have taken the keys motif either from early *jihād* preaching or from a predecessor of one of the sundry *ḥadīth* in which the motif features. If this second option is accepted, the *Doctrina* remains an indispensable testimony to early Islamic preaching; however, the consensus date assigned to this Christian apologetic tract, whether in whole or part, is far too early—a conclusion confirming the doubts about a mid-seventh-century dating first voiced by Paul Speck, albeit for radically different reasons.

Yet this second observation runs the historian into the sticky problem of revising the date of the *Doctrina Iacobi* and overturning a long-held consensus about its early composition. Once entrenched, such a consensus can be difficult to overturn. As previous scholars have already noted, the prospect of dating the *Doctrina Iacobi* too late is problematic given the internal features of the text. There is much in the text that is anecdotally rich in historical detail, suggesting that it could not have

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110. Cook and Crone 1977, 4.

been composed at a truly great historical remove from the events it recounts. The *Doctrina* undeniably paints the lives of Jewish traders and merchants in the early seventh century and their role in the broad reach of the Eastern Mediterranean economy to the West and North Africa, with rare verisimilitude. Such a world of unhindered and extensive trade would be hardly conceivable for an author to portray convincingly after the 690s.[111] Still, this type of argument for the text's antiquity only takes one so far. Hoyland has voiced concerns that to date the *Doctrina* "a decade or so after [the forced baptism of the Jews of Carthage] is to render it both irrelevant and inexplicable,"[112] but surely he overstates the case here.

Do we have enough evidence to suggest a new, later date for the *Doctrina Iacobi*? I would like to suggest that we do. The *Doctrina* itself has Jacob declare that the Jews, abandoned by the Holy Spirit, have been "trampled underfoot by the nations for 640 years. Because our fathers, the Jews, crucified Christ, since then until today we have been slaves and playthings of all nations."[113] This passage seems unintentionally to reveal the date of the composition of the treatise, for it provides a number that, counting the years from the crucifixion, would produce a date sometime in the 670s.[114] In my view, the 670s make for a far more plausible date for the composition of the treatise. Given that the *Doctrina* shows not a shadow of cognizance that Carthage had been taken by the Muslims, its passage on Muḥammad likely predates the 690s and certainly Ḥassān ibn al-Nuʿmān's conquest of Carthage for the Umayyads ca. 695–96 C.E. The treatise notably shows no knowledge of the subsequent total destruction of Carthage by Umayyad forces.[115] Prior to the 690s, moreover, the Jewish communities of Carthage would still have been living under Byzantine control and undoubtedly aware of the recent goings-on in Palestine through their contacts in the region and via refugees, as epitomized by the *Doctrina*'s depiction of Jacob's own plight and by the correspondence between Justus and his brother Abraham. The contents of the *Doctrina* seem to imply that its author feared that the forcibly baptized Jews of Carthage would be disloyal and, hence, inclined to collaborate with, or perhaps even join, the Umayyad

111. McCormick 2001, 106–8; Wickham 2009, 224-25.

112. Hoyland 1997a, 59.

113. *Doctrina Iacobi,* ed. and trans. Déroche, 100–101 (i. 22).

114. Cf. ibid. 146–47 (ii. 6), where Jacob declares, "We [Jews] have effectively offended Christ with our disbelief for six hundred years." Hoyland himself notes these passages but dismisses their importance for dating the *Doctrina,* writing, "since such statistics were usually given in round number and often updated by copyists, they can only ever be a rough guide to the date of the text" (Hoyland 1997a, 58). This dating appears in a similar anti-Judaic disputational tract, *Twenty-Five Questions to Corner the Jews,* likely composed in the mid-seventh century, where the beginning of the six centuries of the Jews' humiliation also starts with the crucifixion of Christ in the year 30, as is typical in Byzantine anti-Judaic literature; see van der Horst 2004, 291–92 (§§7, 11).

115. On these events, see Kaegi 2010, 247–56; and on the archaeological evidence for the eclipse of Carthage after the Islamic conquests, see Fenwick 2013, 16 et passim.

forces marching westward out of Egypt. Moreover, the tract clearly aims, on the one hand, to rebut the position expressed passionately by the likes of Maximus the Confessor that the forced baptism of the Jews was invalid and, on the other hand, to persuade the baptized Jews of Carthage to remain loyal to the Christian faith into which they were baptized and thus reject the preaching of a Saracen prophet proclaiming that the Messiah's arrival was nigh.[116]

It is perhaps rather significant as well that the first non-Muslim text besides the *Doctrina Iacobi* to speak of Muḥammad as a prophet, albeit a false one, dates from around 690–700 C.E. This is the Syriac apocalypse known as *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,* which also speaks of Muḥammad as a warrior and (false) prophet. For this apocalypse's Syriac-speaking author, Muḥammad is merely "a man of war (ܓܒܪܐ ܩܪܒܬܢܐ) whom they call a prophet (ܢܒܝܐ).[117] The apocalyptic tenor of the *Doctrina* is especially high-pitched throughout, casting the Roman Empire as "shriveled, destroyed, and overthrown," a process seen as having begun with the overthrow of the emperor Maurice by Phocas in C.E. 602. The *Doctrina*'s author is convinced, moreover, that his contemporaries might indeed be witnesses to the collapse of the Roman Empire—identified with the fourth (and last) kingdom of the biblical prophet Daniel's vision of the four kingdoms to precede the eschaton—and urgently warns his contemporaries that they stand at the climax of the Danielic scheme of history preceding Christ's return.[118] As Justus opines confessing his trepidation to Jacob: "And if [the End] comes to pass, we [Jews] have erred by not accepting the Christ who has already come, for it is prior to the destruction and shriveling of the Fourth Beast, and of the ten horns, that there shall come the Anointed in the name of the Lord, who comes from the seed of Jesse, the Lord God."[119]

Although the findings presented here potentially undermine the earliest dating hitherto proffered for the text—that is, as early as 634–47 C.E.—the *Doctrina* must nonetheless be respected as one of the earliest non-Arabic, non-Muslim testimonies to belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad and the importance of this belief to the ongoing conquests on behalf of his message. Whatever the true date of the text, the anxieties about the Saracen prophet that the *Doctrina* expresses therefore remain prescient: The *Doctrina* aims to rebut all Jewish hopes that Muḥammad might be a type of messianic forerunner, a role he does indeed embody in the eighth-century Jewish apocalypse *The Secrets of Rabbi Shimʿōn bar Yoḥai* and for

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116. Boudignon 2013, 251ff.

117. Harris 1900, 18 (Syr.). The Armenian historian Pseudo-Sebeos (ca. 660s C.E.?) calls Muḥammad a "merchant," "teacher," and "lawmaker, but not a prophet: Ps.-Sebeos, chap. 42 (trans. Thomson in Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 1: 95–96).

118. Cf. Sivertsev 2011, 18–19; Shoemaker 2014, 539–41.

119. *Doctrina Iacobi,* ed. and trans. Déroche, 172–73 (iii.12).

the Jewish messianic movements of the eighth-century Near East.[120] The subtext of the *Doctrina*'s passage on the Saracens' prophet is clear: only the Christian faith and its Christ offer humankind the keys to Paradise—surely no upstart Arabian prophet can lay claim to them—and Christian eschatology will be vindicated despite all indications to the contrary in the wake of the Byzantine retreat from Palestine and the seeming imminent collapse of the Roman Empire.[121]

Perhaps most important, the contours of this polemic allow for robust conclusions about what Muḥammad and his earliest followers believed as well. The *Doctrina Iacobi* testifies, however obliquely, that for those who embraced the new faith and its political vision, this new prophet was no mere insurgent political contender with delusions of imperial grandeur, nor was his people's expansion a mere rapacious takeover of the Levant by an ethnic wave of Saracen marauders. Rather, this prophet's message bespoke God's true eschatological empire. In the words of the Umayyad panegyrist Jarīr (d. ca. 110/728), "God has bequeathed to us [the sons of Ishmael] glory and ageless dominion."[122] And unlike the Roman Empire, Muḥammad's adherents were persuaded, the new Islamic dominion would spread invincible and unimpeded, carrying within its bosom the keys to Paradise for all those who placed their hopes in it. It was this viewpoint that these passages of the *Doctrina* aimed to rebut and, in the process, provided one of the most vivid and compelling portraits of Islamic kerygma in the seventh century C.E. That this account of Muḥammad's early preaching and community strikes us today as somewhat strange bespeaks its antiquity; but that most of its details resonate to a great extent with beliefs that one can locate in the Qurʾan and the *ḥadīth* should reassure us that it is also historically authentic.

120. Reeves 2005, 79–80n20. Shoemaker 2012, 27ff. dates the Jewish apocalypse to 635–45 C.E., an unjustifiably early date in my view. The text speaks vividly of historical events from the beginning of the Islamic conquests to the Abbasid revolution in 132/750, so I do not regard this early date as defensible. In all likelihood, the Jewish apocalypse dates to the period after the Abbasid ascendency. In my view, the text must be read in light of the Jewish millenarians and messianic movements of the late Umayyad and early Abbasid period. On Jewish movements of the early Islamic period that recognized Muḥammad as a prophet and messianic forerunner, see Anthony 2012b.

121. Cf. Speck 1997, 406; Reinink 2002, 93.

122. Abū ʿUbaydah, *Naqāʾiḍ,* ed. Bevan, 994, l. 28, *awrathanā ʿizzan wa-mulkan muʿammarā* (no. 104).

Muḥammad the Merchant

Few purported facts about the historical figure of Muḥammad have come to be regarded as axiomatic as the assertion that he earned his living as a merchant prior to receiving his call to prophecy and embarking on his prophetic mission. In modern accounts, this claim has become so interwoven into presumptions about who the historical figure of Muḥammad was that it is now rare to see historians even question whence the assertion derives or, for that matter, whether it is indeed accurate. For early modern scholarship in the West, the image of Muḥammad as a merchant seems to have first gained a firm foothold in 1650 when the Oxford Arabist Edward Pococke published his influential Latin translation of the Arabic chronicle of the Syrian Orthodox bishop Bar Hebræus (1226–86 C.E.). Yet the image of Muḥammad as a merchant has far deeper roots in the past than that, whether one looks to Europe or the Near East.[1] This chapter investigates on what basis modern historians can indeed claim that Muḥammad had been a merchant and also reexamines the evidentiary justifications for the assertion. The answer turns out to be rather surprising.

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1. Bobzin 2000, 32–34. Medieval European accounts refer to Muḥammad unambiguously as a merchant at least as early as Hugh of Fleury's *Historia Ecclesiastica,* completed ca.1109–10 C.E.; see Di Cesare 2012, 3–4, 72. And his occupation as a trader also played a key role in the portrayal of Muḥammad in the widely popular *Legenda aurea,* Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century compilation of hagiographies. The earliest known Latin life of Muḥammad is the *Storia de Mahometh,* which seems to date from the mid-eighth/mid-ninth centuries C.E. The *Storia,* likely reproducing the polemics of Byzantine historiography, already claims that the Saracen prophet was an "avaricious usurer" who "travelled on business and began assiduously to attend assemblies of the Christians"(Wolf 2014, 15; and see Bianchini 2008).

The assertion that Muḥammad had been a merchant is one of the earliest attested historical claims about his life; the claim is so early, in fact, that the evidence for it even predates the emergence of either the *ḥadīth* collections or *sīrah-maghāzī* literature as discrete literary corpora. In other words, the very facticity of the assertion need not rely upon the Arabo-Islamic historiographical and prophetological traditions at all. Indeed, Muḥammad's occupation as a merchant ranks among the few claims about his life that can be ascertained by relying merely on the earliest source materials available and without recourse to the earliest Arabic sources. Two of our earliest sources to describe Muḥammad as a historical figure at all are also the earliest sources to testify to his having been a merchant. Both can be dated securely to the seventh century C.E.

THE EARLIEST DEPICTIONS OF MUḤAMMAD AS A MERCHANT

Of these two sources, the earliest is an account of Muḥammad and the early "Ishmaelite" conquests written by the seventh-century Armenian historian known today as Pseudo-Sebeos.[2] Writing in the wake of Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān's victory over Muḥammad's son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in the First Civil War (656–61 C.E.), Ps.-Sebeos describes the life and mission of Muḥammad in the following terms, remarkably, a mere three decades after his death in 632 C.E.:

> [A] man from among those same sons of Ishmael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant [*tʾangar*], as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] a path to truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed in the history of Moses.[3] Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: "With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever . . . and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham and go and seize your land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you."[4]

2. A name that derives from an early misidentification of the author with a certain Sebeos, an Armenian bishop attested in the account of the Canons of the council of Dvin held in 645 C.E. Although the identity of the author of this Armenian chronicle is unknown, the evidence for dating the work to the seventh century is secure. See Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 1: xxxiii–xxxix; Howard-Johnston 2010, 71–74.

3. I.e., the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

4. Ps.-Sebeos, chap. 42 (trans. Thomson in Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 1: 95–96).

Certain aspects of Ps.-Sebeos's account of the early Islamic conquests have been highlighted by modern scholars for their alleged "peculiarity" vis-à-vis the narratives of early Arabo-Islamic historiography. The starkness of the alleged disjuncture between Ps.-Sebeos and early Arabic accounts has also, however, frequently been exaggerated.[5] In many aspects, Ps.-Sebeos's account of Muḥammad's preaching, of his teachings and lawmaking,[6] and of the early Islamic conquests (or, "Ishmaelite" conquests, as our Armenian chronicler would term them) is a marvel for how much it does accord with not just the broad outlines of early Arabo-Islamic historiography,[7] but also the finer details of the proclamation of the Qurʾan and early Islamic kerygma.[8] Such debates need not detain us here. For present purposes, it suffices to highlight and take note of the account's matter-of-fact assertion that Muḥammad earned his living as a merchant.

The second seventh-century scholar to mention Muḥammad's occupation is Jacob of Edessa, a churchman whose Syriac chronicle provides not just an early attestation to Muḥammad's occupation as a merchant but also a surprisingly detailed description of the geographical ambit of his mercantile journeys. Jacob of Edessa was a well-informed witness to the Umayyad world as well as the societal upheavals set in motion by the new hegemony of the early Islamic polity. An acute observer of his times, Jacob possessed firsthand experience of the momentous social and religious shifts transpiring in the local Christian communities under his care. His extant writings generally combine the keen pastoral observations of a bishop facing the challenges of his time and place with a surprisingly sophisticated familiarity with Muslim ritual and belief. This feature of his writings can be most readily seen in his surviving letters, most of which date to his time as bishop of Edessa (684–88 C.E.).[9] However, Jacob never mentions Muḥammad by name in these letters. For his comments on Muḥammad, one must turn to his chronicle, which he likely completed around 692 C.E. His chronicle directly refers to

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5. Cf. Crone and Cook 1977, 7–8; Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 2: 233–40.

6. Ps.-Sebeos's description of Muḥammad's laws are genuinely qurʾanic: the commands to abandon vain cults for the faith of their father Abraham and lay to claim to his patrimony appear in Q. Ibrāhīm 14:35–41, Baqarah 2:125–29, Nūr 24:55; and proscriptions against eating carrion appear in Q. 2:173 and Māʾidah 5:3, against consuming wine in 5:90–91, against speaking falsely in Ḥajj 22:30 (etc.), and against fornication in 24:2–3 and Furqān 25:68. Much of what Ps.-Sebeos writes also finds independent verification in the writings of the monk John bar Penkāyē (wr. *ca.* C.E. 687), who describes Muḥammad as the conquerors' "guide [*mhaddyānā*]" and their "teacher [*tārʾā*]" and speaks of "the tradition of Muḥammad [*mašlmānūtā da-mḥmd*]" and his "laws [*nāmōsē*]." See Brock 1987, 61; Penn 2015b, 82. These earlier interpretations of Muḥammad as a lawgiver even precede Muslim conceptualizations of him as such, inasmuch as the Qurʾan does not unambiguously call him a "lawgiver" or "legislator." See Lowery 2010.

7. Hoyland 1995; Rubin 1999, 49–52; Shoemaker 2018, 154–58.

8. Anthony forthcoming; cf. Saleh 2015 and Shoemaker 2014.

9. Hoyland 1999; Tannous 2018, 439–60.

Muḥammad and names him as the founder of the new dominion of the Arabians. In his entry for the 349th Olympiad of his chronological table (corresponding to approximately the years 617–18 C.E.), Jacob writes, "Muḥammad [*mḥmṭ*] traveled to conduct trade in the provinces of Palestine, of the Arabias [*ʾarabāyē*],[10] of Phoenicia, and of the inhabitants of Tyre." The ambit described by Jacob traces a rather far-reaching trade circuit, focusing mostly on the names of late-Roman provinces where the regional networks of Syria and Palestine brought Arabian tribesmen into their annual trade fairs.[11] Jacob also seems to imply that Muḥammad's trading activities preceded his rise to power, for he dates the beginning of the dominion of the Arabians (*malkūtā d-ʾarabāyē*) and the rise of Muḥammad as the first king of the Arabians to 622 C.E., just four years later. This date, of course, aligns perfectly with the year of Muḥammad's *hijrah* from Mecca to Yathrib.[12] Although this is an event that Jacob does not mention explicitly, Syriac epigraphy from his era nevertheless confirms that among these Christian communities, dating according the *hijrī* calendar—or, as the earliest Syriac inscription phrases it, "the era of the Emigrants [*Mhagrāyē*]"—had already become prevalent.[13]

All of this leads us back to a rather striking observation first made by the French Arabist Alfred-Louise de Prémare: one of the first pieces of concrete historical information about Muḥammad *as an individual* is that he was a merchant.[14] Hence, Muḥammad's occupation as a merchant, and even a merchant who conducted trade across a broad swathe of geography, seems prima facie to be one of the most salient facts about him as a historical figure. But where did Ps.-Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa acquire their information about Muḥammad's occupation? Only Ps.-Sebeos hints at a possible answer. The Armenian historian (or perhaps his source) claimed to derive his account of Muḥammad and his preaching from

10. Alfred-Louis de Prémare unfortunately confuses the Syriac words *ʾarabāyē* (ܥܪܒܝܐ < Ἄραβες) and *ʿarbāyā* (ܥܪܒܝܐ) (Prémare 2002, 38–39) ; thus, he mistakes Jacob's reference to this region as a reference to ecclesiastical province of Bēt ʿArbāyā in Mesopotamia. Rather, this passage merely relates that Muḥammad traded in the provinces of Arabia; contrary to Prémare's claim, it does not indicate that he did so either near Nisibis or throughout northern Mesopotamia.

11. See Binggeli 2012.

12. Brooks 1898, 306 (col. a). See *Chr. Zuqnīn*, 2: 149–50 (trans. Harrak, 141–42).

13. Rāġib 2007, 192. Cf. Penn 2015b, 188–90, where he prefers to render *mhagrāyē* as "Hagarenes." *Mhagrāyē* is at this early stage, in my view, a Syriac calque of the Arabic *muhājirūn,* although it is undeniable that, for Syriac writers, the term comes to be associated with *bnay Hagar,* "sons of Hagar." Cf. Brock 1982, 15. Two seventh-century Syriac manuscripts of the New Testament bear a *hijrī* date, speaking of the sixty-third year "of the *Mhagrāyē,* the sons of Ish[mael], the son of Hagar and Abraham" (C.E. 682) and the eighteenth year "of the Ṭayyāyē, in the reign [*mlkwtʾ*] of the house of Marwān, in the days of . . . [the Ishm]aelites" (C.E. 699), respectively. See Brock 2005, 278, 283; Penn 2015b, 77–78, 144–45. The practice of dating the beginning of the Islamic era from Muḥammad's *hijrah* also appears in the Syriac *Chronicle AD 724*; see Penn 2010, 290ff.

14. Prémare 2002, 38.

captives taken by the Ishmaelite conquerors in the course of their campaigns. "Having been themselves eyewitnesses of these events, they gave this account to us," he says.[15] At least one scholar has postulated that Jacob of Edessa also relied on an earlier source rather than a contemporary informant, though it is impossible to be certain.[16] What is most important to emphasize is that the two accounts are early enough to preclude their reliance on either the *ḥadīth* or the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, for neither corpus had yet been committed to writing. Hence, the claim that Muḥammad had been a merchant appears to be one of the earliest, best attested facts about his life as a historical figure.

However, can one attribute the early prevalence of this assertion to something other than a genuine historical witness? One possibility is that these Christian writers who described Muḥammad as a merchant did so under the influence of a popular stereotype associated with the inhabitants of Arabia—perhaps drawing from the depiction of the Ishmaelites/Midianites in Genesis 37:25–36, the biblical passage in which the brothers of Joseph sell him to a well-stocked caravan of merchants headed for Egypt. Indeed, when one looks to the iconographic evidence of Late Antiquity, the desert nomads of the era populate depictions of the biblical scene of Joseph's captivity, just as the denizens of Arabia are consistently referred to by the biblicizing ethnonym "Ishmaelites."[17] Yet one should not be too hasty to adopt this explanation: late antique authors tend to focus on the Ishmaelites' role in Genesis as Joseph's *captors* and not their role as merchants. Hence, late antique hagiographers drew attention to the archetype of Joseph's captivity as a model for the fate of martyrs and saints captured by Ishmaelites, whom they portrayed not as traders but as fierce, barbaric nomads whose nature conformed to that of their violent forefather, Ishmael, the proverbial "wild ass of the desert" (see fig. 8).[18] Moreover, although the Arabians' trade in luxury goods and their emporia were known from hoary antiquity,[19] the denizens of Arabia were equally known for many other trades and occupations as well, and being a merchant was neither a stereotypical nor particularly prevalent image of the tribal and nomadic peoples of

15. Ps.-Sebeos, chap. 42 (trans. Thomson, 1: 102; cf. Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 2: 239–40, where a Palestinian source is posited. Howard-Johnston suspects that this very same Palestine source that Ps.-Sebeos utilizes might be independently attested in the ninth-century Armenian history of Łewond, but this contention is unlikely due to the fact that Łewond most likely drew upon and revised Ps.-Sebeos's account rather than reproducing one of its sources. In any case, Łewond's account of Muḥammad does not mention that he was a merchant. On the relationship between histories of Ps.-Sebeos and Łewond, see now Greenwood 2012, 133–38.

16. Cf. Harrak 2010, 58, who has postulated that Jacob relied on an earlier source for this assertion on the grounds that a reign of seven years is also attributed to Muḥammad in the East-Syriac *Zuqnīn Chronicle* written ca. 775 C.E.

17. Crone 2008b, 2–4.

18. Reinink 1982, 342–44; Fisher and Ward 2015, 290–93; Klein 2015.

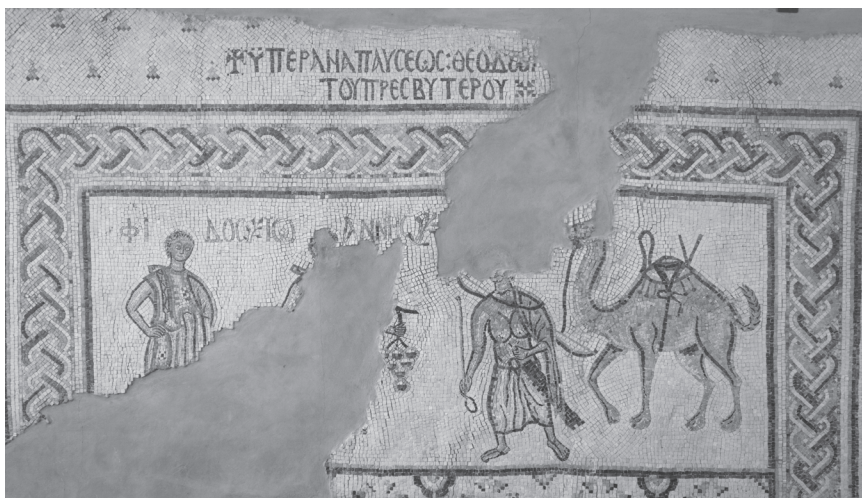19. MacDonald 2009a, V 21- 27 *et passim*.

FIGURE 8. Depiction of a man armed with a bow, sword, and whip leading a camel from a sixth-century C.E. mosaic in the Church of Kaianus in Ain Musa. www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/dams/pages/view.php?ref=51490&search=%21collection2333&offset=0&order_by=field8&sort=ASC&archive=0&k=&. Open access: www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/copyright.html. © Marlena Whiting/Manar al-Athar.

Arabia. Some occupations and livelihoods were seen to be particular to their way of life as inhabitants of the arid lands and oases of Arabia (e.g., bird augurs, brigands, camel and sheep breeders), but others were geographically undetermined (e.g., barbers, guards, market gardeners, merchants, tax collectors).[20] Depictions of Arabian nomads and oasis-dwellers by late antique hagiographers and historians of the Near East mostly (indeed, almost invariably) depict them as barbarous, idolatrous, superstitious, and violent, but rarely as merchants.[21] The information found in the accounts of Ps.-Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa seems likely, therefore, to be based on the reports of actual informants, and not merely ethnic stereotypes of Arabians.

MUḤAMMAD'S OCCUPATION IN THE *ḤADĪTH* AND *SĪRAH-MAGHĀZĪ* LITERATURE

Because Muḥammad's reputation as a merchant has attained such widespread status as a historical trope in modern depictions of him, scholars have often assumed

20. MacDonald 2009b, 283–85.
21. Segal 1984, 102ff.

that the accounts of Ps.-Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa find clear corollaries in the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature and that these earlier, non-Muslim testimonies confirm the claims of the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. However, this assumption turns out to be a historical canard with little basis in the textual evidence: early *ḥadīth* reports, as a general rule, do not depict Muḥammad as a merchant. Rather, when this literature does explicitly mention how Muḥammad earned his living, it is as a shepherd rather than a merchant.

The *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature cultivate this image of Muḥammad as a shepherd carefully, depicting him as recapitulating the model of prior Abrahamic prophets. The following widely attested *ḥadīth* report from the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) exemplifies this tendency:

> . . . Ibn Shihāb [al-Zuhrī] said: Abū Salamah [ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf] reported to me, saying: Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh [al-Anṣārī] said:
> We were with the Messenger of God in Marr al-Ẓahrān and picking fruits off the *arāk* trees, and he said, "Pick the black one, for it's the tastiest."
> "Did you use to shepherd flocks of sheep and goats?" Jābir asked.
> "Yes," he replied, "has there ever been a prophet who has not?"[22]

Reports on this theme abound in the *ḥadīth* literature. According to another report, also included by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ,* the Prophet declares to his followers, "I used to shepherd flocks of sheep and goats for the Meccans in exchange for payment in coin [ʿalā qarārīṭ]."[23] In a report recorded in the *Kitāb al-Kasb* attributed to Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 189/804), the Prophet even names his employer, stating: "I used to shepherd flocks for ʿUqbah ibn Abī Muʿayṭ; for indeed, God has called no prophet whom he did not make a shepherd."[24] ʿUqbah ibn Abī Muʿayṭ was a wealthy Meccan notable from the Umayyah clan of Quraysh who was notorious for his early opposition to the Prophet and for having met his end fighting against Muḥammad's followers at the battle of Badr in 2/624. But ʿUqbah also reputedly hired the early Companion ʿAbdallāh ibn Masʿūd to watch his flocks long before Muḥammad received his first revelations. According to most

22. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. al-aṭʿimah,* 3: 1138–39 (*bāb al-kabāth*); cf. Wakīʿ, *Zuhd,* 1: 347; Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 125 f. and Wensinck 1936–88, 2: 272b.

23. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. al-ijārah,* 1: 418 (*bāb raʿy al-ghanam ʿalā qarārīṭ*); Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 125. The meaning of *qarārīṭ* is sometimes glossed by medieval commentators as an otherwise unknown place name in Mecca, but the word is clearly the plural form of *qīrāṭ,* an Arabic calque of the Greek *kerátion,* a type of silver coin. Some early accounts portray coinage as rarely used by the Meccans, who allegedly used raw ore (Ar. *al-tibr*) mined from local deposits instead; yet the Qurʾān also clearly attests to dīnārs and dirhams (Q. Māʾidah 3:75, Yūsuf 12:20). Cf. Heck 2010, 105.

24. Ps.-Shaybānī, *Kasb,* 36; cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Zuhd,* 468. The attribution of the entirety of this text to Shaybānī is out of the question (see Bonner 2001, 412–15), but the section of the work where this quotation appears does likely derive from the section of the text attributable to him.

early reports, Ibn Masʿūd first met the Prophet and Abū Bakr and embraced the Prophet's message while thus occupied with tending to ʿUqbah's flocks.[25]

Reports attributed to the Prophet's Companions add further details about Muḥammad's time as a shepherd. Such reports come in the form of anecdotes about his knack for fetching his grandfather's stray camels,[26] or in reports that merely depict him as a shepherd anecdotally. An example of the latter can be found in the following report attributed to the Companion ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir who relates the anecdote to demonstrate how earnestly the Prophet kept his word:

> . . . al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī, from Abū l-Yaqẓān ibn Abī ʿUbayd bin ʿAbdallah ibn ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, from Luʾluʾah *mawlāt* ʿAmmār: she said:
>
> ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir said: During the era of barbarism [*al-jāhiliyyah*], I was a peer of the Prophet and his friend. I used to shepherd the flocks of my people, and he shepherded the flocks of his. Once he promised to meet me in a certain place where we would shepherd our flocks. I went to meet him, and he had arrived there before me. Still he did not let his flock go out to pasture. "Muḥammad!" I said, "What's wrong? Why haven't you let your flock go out to pasture?" "I had made an arrangement with you," he replied, "so I wouldn't let them go until you arrived."[27]

The image of Muḥammad as a shepherd permeates both the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, where his occupation as a shepherd often provides the presumed background for a number of the stories in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. This can be seen in the famous story recorded by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) where God causes the Prophet to lose consciousness in order to prevent him from unintentionally joining a raucous party in Mecca: before recounting how God delivers Muḥammad from the carousing Meccans, the story places him off shepherding flocks in the highlands of Mecca.[28] In yet another report, recorded by al-Bukhārī, the Prophet interjects during a dispute between the more affluent herders of camels and the poorer shepherds of sheep and goats on their respective merits. Muḥammad sides with the shepherds who tend after flocks of sheep and goats, proclaiming: "Moses was called to be a prophet while shepherding a flock, David was called while shepherding a flock, and I too was called to be a prophet while shepherding a flock for my people in al-Ajyād."[29]

This last report is particularly intriguing insofar as it implies that Muḥammad received his call to prophethood not—as the most famous account would have it—atop Mount Ḥirāʾ occupied in prayerful meditation and acts of pious devotion

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25. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 3: 150 f.; cf. *EI*², s.v. "Ibn Masʿūd" (S. W. Anthony).

26. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 255 f.; cf. Abū Zurʿah, *Tārīkh,* 1: 144.

27. Fākihī, *Makkah,* 4: 11.

28. Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 79; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1126; cf. Rubin 1995, 86–87.

29. Bukhārī, *Adab,* 297. Cf. Ibn Mubārak, *Zuhd,* 337; al-Muʿāfī ibn ʿImrān, *Zuhd,* 267; Ṭayālisī, *Musnad,* 2: 645; Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 124; Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 126; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 18: 409.

but while shepherding flocks for wealthy Meccans. Hence, this report implies that just as the Angel of Lord appeared to Moses while tending flocks at Horeb (Exod. 3:1) and just as the prophet Samuel anointed David while tending flocks in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:11–13), Muḥammad received his commission of prophecy while shepherding flocks in al-Ajyād on the outskirts of Mecca.[30]

Whereas reports from the *ḥadīth* literature assert that Muḥammad had once earned his living as a shepherd and even offer anecdotal confirmation of this assertion, no parallel statements affirming that he had earned his living as a merchant can be found.[31] Some *ḥadīth* reports even go so far as to categorically deny that Muḥammad had been a merchant or trader in any way. In a report in the *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (*On Asceticism*) of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), the Prophet even emphatically states: "I have not been granted revelation to gather wealth or to be a merchant. Rather, I have been granted revelation to 'glorify your Lord with praise and prostrate before Him' (Q. Ḥijr 15:98)."[32] Another tradition voices a similar rejection of the idea that Muḥammad was a merchant but with apocalyptic overtones: "God sent me as [a messenger of] doom and boon [*baʿathanī malḥamatan wa-raḥmatan*]. He did not send me to be a merchant or tiller of soil. The most wicked of people on the Day of the Resurrection shall be merchants and tillers of soil, except he who embraces penury for his faith."[33] Generally, the *ḥadīth* literature portrays merchants in negative terms and as immoral and profligate.[34]

The diversity and prevalence of traditions depicting Muḥammad as a shepherd in the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature demonstrate how important the image of Muḥammad as a shepherd was, particularly insofar as shepherding flocks exemplified a prophetic archetype. But a key question of this line of investigation remains unresolved. Where does the assertion that Muḥammad had been an Arabian merchant derive from? Do the *ḥadīth* or *sīrah-maghāzī* literature proffer any depiction of the mercantile activities of Muḥammad at all?

MUḤAMMAD AS A TRADER IN ARABIC SOURCES

The most-cited evidence for Muḥammad's mercantile activity relates to his relationship with his first wife, a noblewoman from the Asad clan of Quraysh named

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30. Cf. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 259; Khargūshī, *Sharaf,* 1: 419–20; and Rubin 1993, 219–20. The location called Ajyād (viz., Jiyād) here refers to a stretch of land near Mecca situated west of the hills of Ṣafā.

31. Cf. al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ* 2: 942 f., 993, 1004 where he lists several insults against the Prophet that merit execution without a chance to repent, including those "who belittle him or ridicule him for having shepherded flocks"; however, he makes no mention of Muḥammad as a merchant nor of anyone impugning him for this.

32. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Zuhd,* 468; Ps-Shaybānī, *Kasb,* 38; cf. Bonner 2001, 415.

33. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 14: 302; cf. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 4: 72; Kister 1991, 280–81.

34. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 10: 387, *inna l-tujjār hum al-fujjār* and ibid., 11: 458.

Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, who was herself a wealthy merchant. Muḥammad's relationship with Khadījah has often been cited as a key indicator of his occupation, but even when the *ḥadīth* or *sīrah-maghāzī* literature depict him as having participated in mercantile activities on her behalf, this literature does not explicitly depict him as a merchant by trade—at least not in the same emphatic manner that it depicts him as a shepherd.

Long before her marriage to Muḥammad, Khadījah and her sister Hālah could allegedly be found selling leather hides in one of Mecca's markets, called al-Ḥazwarah.[35] Khadījah apparently also had a reputation both for her considerable fortune and for hiring men to undertake journeys as agents on her behalf. There are no indications that she undertook such journeys herself.[36] Prior to their marriage, Muḥammad served Khadījah as one such hired agent (*mustaʾjar,* or *ajīr*). The sources are not entirely consistent in informing us where he traded on her behalf or how often, and when tallied, these reports produce a rather meagre haul. Reports circulated on the authority of the Medinan scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) mention merely a single journey south into Tihāmah to trade on her behalf at the market called Hubāshah, a report to which we shall return shortly.[37] An early report of the Egyptian scholar al-Layth ibn Saʿd (d. 175/791) neglects to designate where Muḥammad traveled on her behalf, but provides details on the remuneration he received for a single journey, stating that Khadījah hired Muḥammad to undertake the journey, along with another hired man of Quraysh named Maysarah, in exchange for a young male camel. The profits of their journey so exceeded her expectations that she rewarded Muḥammad with two calves instead of one.[38] Again, this report concerns merely a single journey—neither a lifetime nor even a period of life occupied with trade. Other reports, mostly found in later *ḥadīth* collections, likewise reproduce this information but with slight differences in the details. One such report asserts rather that Muḥammad undertook two journeys to trade on her behalf in Jurash, also in southern Arabia and not too far south from Ḥubāshah, in exchange for a young female camel for each trip.[39] After marrying Khadījah, one would expect Muḥammad to become involved in the same buying and selling that had occupied Khadījah and that had made her so wealthy, but such transactions

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35. Ibn Bakkār, *Muntakhab,* 28; Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 158.

36. Just how wealthy Khadījah was is more or less beside the point, but legendary reports claim that she was served by as many as seventy female slaves at her house, who would carry her seated atop a sedan (*sarīr*) and never permit her feet to touch the ground; cf. Khargūshī, *Sharaf,* 1: 408, 411.

37. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 10–11 (1.1.7.)

38. Ibn Bakkār, *Muntakhab,* 24.

39. Bayhaqī, *Sunan,* 12: 116; cf. Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 3: 992 and Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt,* 8: 317. Cf. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 130 and Kharghūshī, 1: 407–8. The Arabic toponym جرش in this tradition can either be read as Jurash (located in South Arabia) or as Jarash (= Gerasa), located in the northern reaches of Arabia in what is today the modern country of Jordan. I have followed the conventional reading "Jurash" above.

need not have involved extensive travels. In anecdotal reports of Muḥammad's conquest of Mecca in 8/630, Muḥammad was reportedly approached by a man of the Makhzūm clan of Quraysh named al-Sāʾib ibn Abī l-Sāʾib who claimed to have traded in leather alongside Muḥammad. "The Messenger of God was my partner [*sharīkī*]," the man reputedly boasted, "and he was the best sort of partner, for he would never cajole and never quarrel [*lā yudārī wa-lā yumārī*]."[40] Early historians of Mecca, such as al-Azraqī (d. ca. 250/864) and al-Fākihī (fl. third/ninth century),[41] placed the housing complex owned by al-Sāʾib ibn Abī l-Sāʾib in the quarter of the ʿĀʾidh clan of Makhzūm near al-Ajyād and testified that the structure still stood in Mecca during the first half of the third/ninth century. Given the location of his partner's house near al-Ajyād, the very location where Muḥammad claimed in other reports to have shepherded flocks for wealthy Meccans, the partnership may in fact have been more related to Muḥammad's days as a shepherd than those years in which he was married to Khadījah.

Such reports about Muḥammad conducting business matters and undertaking trading journeys that do exist are scattered and not well attested. These reports are difficult, therefore, to date with a great deal of precision. However, the reports transmitted by two scholars, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) and Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), can be rather securely dated and relate to one another in instructive ways that allow modern historians to gain insight into how the narratives about Muḥammad's trading journeys evolved over time. Reports transmitted on the authority of the earlier scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī mention merely two trade journeys undertaken in the course of Muḥammad's life. The first Muḥammad undertakes as a youth alongside his uncle and guardian, Abū Ṭālib, who sets off to conduct trade in Syria (*al-Shaʾm*). According to al-Zuhrī's story, however, Muḥammad and his uncle never reached their destination as originally planned. A rabbi met Abū Ṭālib in the North Arabian oasis of Taymāʾ and, after recognizing Muḥammad as a future prophet, warned his uncle that Muḥammad would certainly be murdered if they continued on their journey to Syria, urging him to return straightaway to Mecca with his nephew. Abū Ṭālib heeded the rabbi's warning and promptly returned to Mecca.[42] The second journey took place, according to al-Zuhrī, after Khadījah hired Muḥammad as her agent. This second journey took him and another hired agent southward to Ḥubāshah, a market in Tihāmah, where he met considerable success while conducting business on her behalf. The profit he earned and his trustworthiness impressed his mistress, who determined to marry him

40. Ps.-Shaybānī, *Kasb*, 36; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 24: 258–59, 261, 263–64; Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam*, 7: 165–66.

41. Azraqī, *Makkah*, 2: 898–99; Fākihī, *Makkah*, 3: 326.

42. Maʿmar, *Expeditions*, 8–9 (1.1.5); cf. Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 505 (where the threat is said to be from Jews).

soon thereafter despite his poverty.[43] Al-Zuhrī offers two narratives that are sparse in detail and laconic in the telling, and as anecdotes they do not convey the sense that Muḥammad was a man who often earned his living by trade, let alone that he was a prodigious merchant who traveled widely. These early reports also posit that Muḥammad never left the geographical confines of the Arabian Peninsula.

Ibn Isḥāq, a prominent student of al-Zuhrī, follows the basic scheme of narrating two journeys undertaken by the Prophet prior to his call to prophecy, the first alongside his uncle Abū Ṭālib and the second in the service of his future wife Khadījah; however, the events differ entirely in scope and significance. Ibn Isḥāq's narratives of these two journeys mark a profound generational shift. These two journeys were both imagined and retold as more lavish narratives, which play an increasingly greater role in the articulation of early Islamic prophetology. In this regard, Ibn Isḥāq's narratives are far more seminal. As in al-Zuhrī's version, the first journey also transpires during Muḥammad's youth and alongside his uncle Abū Ṭālib, but in Ibn Isḥāq's version Abū Ṭālib is not accosted by a rabbi in Taymāʾ nor is he prevented from traveling outside the Arabian Peninsula. Rather, he takes his young nephew Muḥammad as far as the trading post of Bostra (Ar. Buṣrā) in Syria, where their caravan encounters a Christian monk named Baḥīrā. From his monk's cell, Baḥīrā espies Abū Ṭālib's caravan from afar with his usual indifference until he notices the young Muḥammad in the caravan and catches a glimpse of a wondrous sight: a cloud follows the young boy and shades him from the heat of the sun wherever he goes. After the caravan stops at a tree nearby the monk's cell, the cloud comes to rest above the tree, and the young boy rests under its shade. Eager to meet the boy, Baḥīrā makes a feast for the Arabian merchants as a ploy to speak with the boy and see him up close. Eventually, the monk discovers that he possesses the somatic markings of a prophet whose description matches the prophecy of a text (*kitāb*) handed down from elder to elder in the hermitage, and which the monk had studied for years. Having discerned the young man's destiny, Baḥīrā warns Abū Ṭālib to return straightaway to Mecca before the boy is killed by the Jews. Abū Ṭālib heeds the warning, much as in al-Zuhrī's tale, and returns to Mecca with Muḥammad. Of all the major recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* that survive, that of Yūnus ibn Bukayr (d. 199/815) provides the most complete version, concluding with three poems about the event attributed to Abū Ṭālib, which the other recensions omit.[44] Otherwise, the three principal recensions of the narrative converge on most details of the story.[45] Ibn Isḥāq has clearly inserted a biblical archetype into al-Zuhrī's original story,

43. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 10–11 (1.1.7); Ibn Bakkār, *Muntakhab,* 25; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1129; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 68.

44. Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 76–78.

45. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 1: 180–82; Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 73–78; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1:

modeling his expanded story of Baḥīrā's annunciation of the prophethood of the young Muḥammad on the biblical story of the prophet Samuel's anointing of David as the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:15–12).[46] This development exemplifies Ibn Isḥāq's tendency to expand on the prophetological impetus behind the narratives of al-Zuhrī.

As in al-Zuhrī's narrative of Muḥammad's second trading journey, Ibn Isḥāq also makes the second journey come about at the prompting of his future wife Khadījah, but key features change that again signal an important generational shift. Ibn Isḥāq adds the name of Muḥammad's traveling companion, Maysarah, who is no longer yet another man of Quraysh and ostensibly Muḥammad's equal, as in al-Zuhrī's account, but is now Khadījah's slave (*ghulām*). The two men do not travel south to Ḥubāshah but to Syria, and Khadījah now promises to pay Muḥammad a wage, "in excess of what she gave any of the other merchants" in her employ. Once the two men reach Syria, a similar tale as above unfolds: a monk sees Muḥammad sitting underneath the shade of a tree and informs Maysarah that, "No man but a prophet has ever alighted beneath this tree." On the caravan's return journey, Maysarah has visions of two angels shielding Muḥammad from the intense heat of the sun's rays. Maysarah's report of these events to Khadījah prompts her to propose marriage to Muḥammad.

Despite relying in part on al-Zuhrī's basic scheme, both the narrative of Muḥammad's journey with Abū Ṭālib and his journey with Maysarah seem at first blush to be entirely Ibn Isḥāq's invention.[47] The narratives lack chains of authorities (i.e., *isnād*s) in most recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* with one important exception: the Rayy recension of the *Maghāzī* transmitted by Salamah ibn al-Faḍl (d. after 190/805). In Salamah's recension, Ibn Isḥāq does indeed cite a source for at least one of his narratives of Muḥammad's journeys—namely, his journey as a youth to Bostra alongside his uncle Abū Ṭālib that sets the stage for the famous Baḥīrā tale. The authority cited for the Baḥīrā narrative in the Rayy recension is the Medinan scholar ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr al-Anṣārī (d. 130/747–48).[48] ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr, as Josef Horovitz noted, was also an important teacher of Ibn Isḥāq. ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr provided Ibn Isḥāq with a great deal of the material found in his *Maghāzī,* including many of its chronological schemata, documents, and the

1123–25.

46. Maghen 2008, 100–104.

47. Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār records a similar tradition about Maysarah with the *isnād* Hishām ibn ʿUrwah< his father [ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr] (*Muntakhab,* 24); however, the wording of this tradition matches that of Ibn Isḥāq exactly and must, therefore, have been spuriously attributed to Hishām ibn ʿUrwah.

48. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1123.

poetry recited by leading characters in the stories.[49] The Medinan scholar may, therefore, indeed be Ibn Isḥāq's source for the Baḥīrā story.[50]

Ibn Isḥāq's story of Muḥammad's encounters with monks during his two journeys in Syria became staples of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature in one iteration or another; however, by the standards of *ḥadīth* critics, the probity of the *isnād*s attached to the reports was sorely lacking. As is typical of his corpus, al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) later provides more extensive versions of Ibn Isḥāq's two stories, albeit with somewhat upgraded *isnād*s that occlude his dependence on Ibn Isḥāq's earlier account.[51] However, only one version of the story came to be regarded as carrying a sound chain of authorities (*isnād*) in the eyes of the *ḥadīth* scholars: a tradition put into circulation by a certain Abū Nūḥ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ghazwān (d. 207/822), which recounts the story of the journey of the young Muḥammad alongside Abū Ṭālib to Bostra as well. Quite strangely, however, this version of the story also portrays the famed Companion Abū Bakr and his slave Bilāl as accompanying Abū Ṭālib and Muḥammad to Syria and witnessing the wondrous events that unfolded. The tradition is clearly derivative of Ibn Isḥāq's account and seems to have been invented in order to shore up arguments in favor of Abū Bakr's respective merits vis-à-vis Muḥammad's son-in-law, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Already by the second half of the second/eighth century, at least three versions of the Baḥīrā story featuring Abū Bakr enter circulation in early Abbasid Iraq, where they came to play a prominent role in anti-Shiʿite polemics. As a prooftext, the argument that such reports strengthened was rather simple: Abū Bakr had witnessed the annunciation of Muḥammad's prophethood by the monk Baḥīrā and thus had believed in his prophethood long before ʿAlī had even been born. How, then, could one possibly assert that ʿAlī's merit outstripped that of Abū Bakr as the Shiʿah claim?[52]

49. See Horovitz 2002, 44, who notes the Medinan scholar's fondness for poetry. In Yūnus ibn Bukayr's recension of the Baḥīrā story (and his alone) three poems attributed to Abū Ṭālib follow immediately after the narrative. Although ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr's name is not cited in his recension, it's conceivable that these poems bear the mark of his influence. According to Ibn al-Nadīm (*Fihrist,* 2: 86), his nephew, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (d. 176/792–93), composed a *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*. However, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) knows him only as a Medinan notable who settled in Baghdad and received an appointment as a *qāḍī* by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd; he reputedly transmitted few *ḥadīth* (Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 12: 155).

50. On the tendency of later redactors of Ibn Isḥāq's materials to shorten his *isnād*s, see Motzki, with Boekhoff-van der Voort and Anthony 2010, 261–67 and Motzki 2015, 379.

51. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 129–31; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 1(1): 240–43.

52. Tirmidhī, *Sunan, k. al-manāqib,* 2: 927–28 (no. 3980); cf. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 3: 4ff. Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) was the first of the ḥadīth folk to transmit the tradition with a "sound" (*ṣaḥīḥ*) chain; see Aḥmad 1992, 119–22. Akpinar 2016, 19–76, demonstrates how versions of the story of Baḥīrā that featured Abū Bakr play an integral role in debates over the respective merits of ʿAlī and Abū Bakr. By placing Abū Bakr at the scene of Baḥīrā's annunciation (*bashshārah*) of the young Muḥammad, these traditions assert that Abū Bakr believed in Muḥammad's prophethood long before ʿAlī's birth.

The tradition was, of course, a manifest forgery, shot through with anachronisms, a fact already noted by some medieval Muslim ḥadīth critics. The renowned Damascene ḥadīth-scholar al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) rejected this tradition, and indeed all the Baḥīrā narratives, with his typical flair, on just such a basis, writing:

> Where was Abū Bakr [at the time of Muḥammad's alleged journey with Abū Ṭālib]? He was a mere ten years old! He was younger than God's Messenger by two and a half years. And where was Bilāl at this time? Abū Bakr only purchased him after the Prophet's commission [baʿda l-mabʿath; i.e., when Muḥammad was forty years old]—Bilāl had not even been born yet! Furthermore, were there some cloud casting its shadow over [the Messenger], how is it conceivable that the tree's shade would shift, since the shadow of the cloud would blot out the shade of the tree where he rested? We also never see the Prophet remind Abū Ṭālib of what the monk said, and neither do Quraysh mention it to him nor do any of those elders relate the tale despite how much they eagerly sought and called for a story such as that. If that had transpired, it would have become extraordinarily famous among them. Also, there would have remained with the Prophet a sense [ḥiss] of his prophethood. Hence, he would not have doubted the first arrival of the revelation to him in the cave of Ḥirāʾ. Neither would he have come to Khadījah fearing for his sanity, nor would he have gone to the mountain peaks to cast himself down. If fear for the Prophet's safety left such an impression on Abū Ṭālib that he returned him [to Mecca], how would he [later] be content to permit him to travel to Syria to trade on Khadījah's behalf?[53]

Patricia Crone famously quipped that, with regard to Muḥammad's trade journeys in sīrah-maghāzī literature, "What the [Arabic] sources offer are fifteen equally fictitious versions of an event that never took place."[54] Even by the standards of medieval Muslim ḥadīth criticism, she seems to have been in good company.

MUḤAMMAD AND THE MONK

To recapitulate our findings so far: although our earliest non-Muslim sources depict Muḥammad as a merchant who traded throughout Arabia and the Levant, the ḥadīth and sīrah-maghāzī literature generally do not concur and cast him most explicitly as a shepherd, whose care for the flocks of Mecca's élites provided the

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The earliest attestations for this tradition come from two late second/eighth-century kalām works, the Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh of Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr and al-Radd ʿalā al-Rawāfiḍ by the Ibāḍī scholar ʿAbdallāh ibn Yazīd al-Fazārī (Ḍirār, Taḥrīsh, 54; Ibn Sallām, Badʾ, 72).

53. Dhahabī, Tārīkh, 1: 503–4. Yet another version of the tale seems to have been put into circulation to resolve these problems; cf. Ibn Mandah, Maʿrifah, 1: 314, where they travel together as young men. The isnād appears to be Meccan; however, it was likely forged by an early third/ninth-century mufassir named Mūsā ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣanʿānī, who notoriously forged a book with many ḥadīth bearing the chain Ibn ʿAbbās → ʿAṭāʾ → Ibn Jurayj. See Ibn ʿAdī, Kāmil, 6: 2348; Ibn Ḥajar, Lisān, 8: 210.

54. Crone 1987, 220.

primary means by which he earned his livelihood prior to becoming a prophet. Scattered references in the Arabic source material imply that Muḥammad conducted some trade locally, but only the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature mentions him undertaking trading journeys outside of the Arabian Peninsula. Even then, the earliest stratum of *sīrah-maghāzī* reports (i.e., that plausibly attributable to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, d. 124/742) mentions only two relatively short journeys, the first no farther north than Taymāʾ and the second no farther south than Ḥubāshah. Only with the *Maghāzī* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) does one encounter narratives that depict Muḥammad as traveling to the Levant, outside the Arabian Peninsula. Returning to the accounts of Ps.-Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa, it was argued that, because of their early date, their depiction of Muḥammad as a merchant could not have been influenced by either *sīrah-maghāzī* or the *ḥadīth* traditions; indeed, these seventh-century non-Muslim accounts of Muḥammad's occupation are more in tension with the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition than they are in accord with it.

By way of comparison, the Greek *Chronographia* of the Byzantine historian Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818 C.E.) provides an intriguing counter-example to the earliest non-Muslim accounts of Muḥammad as a merchant written in Armenian and Syriac. As first noted by Lawrence Conrad, Theophanes' account of Muḥammad is the first non-Muslim source to bear the unmistakable marks of having been influenced by the traditions of the earliest *sīrah-maghāzī* literature.[55] Here, we concern ourselves only with what Theophanes writes concerning Muḥammad's occupation:

> Being destitute and an orphan, the aforesaid Mouamed decided to enter the service of a rich woman who was a relative of his, called Chadiga, as a hired worker with a view to trading by camel in Egypt and Palestine. Little by little he became bolder and ingratiated himself with that woman, who was a widow, took her as a wife, and gained possession of her camels and her substance. Whenever he came to Palestine he consorted with Jews and Christians and sought from them certain scriptural matters.[56]

Most of the details provided by Theophanes about Muḥammad's marriage to Khadījah derive directly from the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature in the form as attested in the *Maghāzī* of Ibn Isḥāq. Two extraneous details added by Theophanes, or his source, are that Muḥammad traded as a hired servant in Egypt and Palestine, rather than Bostra, and that he consorted with the Jews and Christians about their scriptures.

These subtle differences in Theophanes' account result from a reworking of the *sīrah-maghāzī* reports and reveal fascinating insights about their reception. Theophanes' account might even offer insight into why the early Muslim accounts of

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55. Conrad 1988, 16–26; cf. Conterno 2015, 393–95.

56. Theophanes, *Chron.*, ed. de Boor, 1: 333–34 (trans. Mango and Scott, 464).

Muḥammad remained relatively restrained when it came to portraying him as an enterprising merchant who traveled as far and wide beyond the confines of the Ḥijāz as did other notable Quraysh. Firstly, although Theophanes portrays Muḥammad as occupied with business, rather than referring to him as a merchant he demeans him as a mere "hired servant" (Gk. μισθωτός), perhaps to render either the Arabic *mustaʾjar* or *ajīr* (viz., a "hired agent" or "hireling").[57] Hence, unlike most modern historians, Theophanes, or his source, interpreted the account of Muḥammad's relationship of Khadījah in the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus as proof of Muḥammad's servility rather than as an indication that he was an enterprising merchant. Relying on Theophanes, the tenth-century Armenian historian John Catholicos Drasxanakertc'i pushed this claim even further, declaring that Muḥammad was born and raised in servitude.[58]

Somewhat surprisingly, the view that the story of Khadījah hiring Muḥammad potentially demeaned him finds warrant in a report attested in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, too. The Companion ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir allegedly grew angry if he heard someone claim that the Khadījah had hired the Prophet and sent him on errands. According to ʿAmmār, the beauty of Muḥammad's countenance alone was enough to inspire Khadījah to marry Muḥammad, not any business relationship they had.[59] References to Muḥammad's servility or lowly status contravened taboos with long-standing currency and could have dire consequences.[60]

Secondly, in the non-Muslim accounts of Muḥammad's career dating from the early ninth century C.E. and later, Muḥammad's alleged travels outside Arabia came to serve as a pretext for polemical explanations of how he acquired his religious knowledge. For example, Theophanes purports that Muḥammad acquired learning in the scriptures from the Jews and Christians during his journeys. A similar such claim also appears in a parallel account of the Syriac chronicler Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē (d. 845 C.E.), who may have shared a source in common with Theophanes. Dionysius writes that it was while "in the age and stature of youth [ܚܘܪܬܐ ܘܩܘܡܬܐ ܕܛܠܝܘܬܐ]" that Muḥammad began to depart "from his city of Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling [ܡܛܠ ܥܒܕܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ ܘܕܙܒܝܢܐ]. While so engaged in the country, he saw the belief in one God and

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57. Similarly in the ninth-century Latin translation of the *Chronicle* by Anastasius the Librarian, *mercennarius ad negotiandum cum camelis apud Aegyptum et Palestinam;* see Yolles and Weiss 2018, 18–19, §4.

58. Thomas 1986, 840.

59. Ibn Bakkār, *Muntakhab,* 28, *wa-yaghḍabu idhā qīla istaʾjarathu wa-arsalathu* (citing the authority a Meccan traditionist, Maʿrūf ibn Kharrabūdh, a follower of the Shiʿite Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir); cf. Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh,* ed. Houtsma, 2: 20.

60. E.g., Abū l-Ḥasan al-Qābisī (d. 403/1041), a Mālikī faqīh of Qayrawān, ruled that whosoever refers to Muḥammad as "the porter, Abū Ṭālib's orphan [*al-ḥammāl yatīm Abī Ṭalib*]" should be executed (Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ,* 938). Indeed, in 457–464/1064–1072, Ibn Ḥātim of Toledo was put on trial and crucified for referring to Muḥammad as "the orphan" (*al-yatīm*). See ibid., 940 and Fierro 1994.

it was pleasing to his eyes."[61] Such polemics of influence ultimately originate from the counter-discourse of Muḥammad's enemies as recorded in the Qurʾan itself where his opponents accuse him of having a teacher (cf. Q. Naḥl 16:103, Furqān 25:5),[62] but this particular polemic also becomes an early motif in Christian writings about Muḥammad throughout the period intervening between Pseudo-Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa on the one hand and Theophanes and Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē on the other. In Christian writings about Muḥammad from the eighth century C.E., Muḥammad is reputed to have received instruction from a monk, sometimes said to have been an "Arian," hence, an archetypal barbarian heretic.[63] The Melkite theologian John Damascene (d. after 750 C.E.) speaks of Muḥammad as "having been casually exposed to the Old and New Testament" and as a man who, having "supposedly encountered an Arian monk, formed a heresy of his own."[64] According to the eighth-century C.E. East Syriac text known today as *The Disputation between an Arab (ṭayyāyā) and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē*, Muḥammad taught his people "to know the one true God, a teaching that he received from Sergius *bḥyr*ʾ [ܒܚܝܪܐ ܣܪܓܝܣ]."[65] The Syriac *bḥyr*ʾ—meaning "tested," "elected," or "renowned"—is well attested as a title for monks, and its presence here seems to indicate that Muḥammad's teacher had been a monastic.[66] The monk's name in this disputation should, therefore, likely be rendered as "Sergius the Elect/Renowned", rather than the common rendering "Sergius-Baḥīrā."[67] Incidentally, the name "Baḥīrā," which Ibn Isḥāq confers on the monk who announces Muḥammad's future prophethood, is simply a straightforward transcription into Arabic letters of this Syriac monastic epithet *bḥīrā* (ܒܚܝܪܐ |*bḥyr*ʾ > بحيرا|*bḥyr*ʾ), albeit treated as a personal name rather than an epithet.

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61. Cited in *Chron. 1234*, 1: 227. Michael the Syrian's redaction of Dionyius's text has, rather, "While engaged with the Jews, he learned from them the belief in one God, and seeing that his tribesmen worshipped stones and wood and every created thing, he adhered to the belief of the Jews, which pleased him"; see Hoyland 2011, 89n161. Hoyland has attempted to connect this specific passage account to the so-called Eastern source, which he identifies with the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī's court astrologer Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785 C.E.); see Hoyland 2000, 281, and 2011, 86–92n49. However, if such an Eastern source, perhaps authored by Theophilus, lies beneath this account, it is quite sparse in detail; much of the detail seems, rather, to derive from Dionysius. See Brandes 2009, 339.

62. I owe the idea of the Qurʾan's counter-discourse to Azaiez 2015.

63. On Arianism as an "archetypal heresy," see Wiles 1996.

64. Sahas 1972, 132–33. Writing a generation later, the Christian scholar Theodore Abū Qurrah also writes, "it is only because [the Saracens'] false prophet was the disciple of an Arian that he gave them this godless and impious teaching" (*Opusculum 25*, ed. Glei and Khoury, 118; in *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, ed. and trans. J. C. Lamoureaux (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 225.

65. Taylor 2015, 224 (§34).

66. Rogemma 2009, 57n71.

67. In my view, Szilágyi's dismissal (2008, 200n155) of this passage as a possible interpolation is tendentious and lacks sufficient evidentiary justification in the manuscript tradition.

By the middle of the ninth century, such polemical intimations of Christian authors appear in a polemical history of the origins of Islam and an apocalyptic account of its future known as the *Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā.* The earliest recension dates to the period shortly after the end of al-Maʾmūn's caliphate in 833 C.E.,[68] but the earliest stratum of this text likely dates to a period spanning 810–19 C.E.[69] The putative narrator of this early section of the text, one Mār Yahb Alāhā the Wanderer, relates a story of his encounter with a monk named Sergius who settled in the desert of the "Ishmaelites" near Yathrib after receiving an apocalyptic vision atop Mount Sinai that foretold the Ishmaelites' future conquests and the fate of their dominion. There in the desert of Yathrib, Sergius informs Mar Yahb that he "had prophesied to [the Ishmaelites] something they had liked and had written and handed down to them this book which they call 'Qurʾan.'"[70]

Christian legends of an impressionable young Muḥammad falling under the influence of a monk or outsider predate the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* by at least a century;[71] however, in the current state of the evidence, one cannot assert with confidence that Ibn Isḥāq composed his account of the monk Baḥīrā's annunciation to counter claims that Muḥammad had fallen under the sway of the teachings of a monk.[72] What is more certain is that when Ibn Isḥāq's Baḥīrā-narrative and the early apocalyptic tale of the monk Sergius intersect, this intersection produces one of the most seminal polemical accounts of the origins of Muḥammad's prophethood and his scripture. While Ibn Isḥāq's knowledge of these early Christian polemics against Muḥammad may be in doubt, later Muslim authors certainly were not so clueless. "The name of Baḥīrā is Sergius in the books of the Christians," the historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) states unequivocally,[73] and in his esoteric work on prophecy and prophets *Sarāʾir al-nuṭaqāʾ*, Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, the Ismāʿīlī-Shiʿite author and Fāṭimid *dāʿī* (d. shortly after 341/953), even accepts as a casual historical fact that Baḥīrā had indeed been the young Muḥammad's teacher.[74] In the *Kamāl al-Dīn* of the Twelver Shiʿite scholar Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), one encounters a version of the Baḥīrā story where the monk whom Muḥammad encounters is named instead Abū l-Muwayhib the Monk (*al-rāhib*)—a clear corruption of the very name of the narrator of the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā,* where the name "Muwayhib" (مويهب) has resulted from a misreading of the *rāʾ* as a *wāw* when transcribing either the Syriac "Mar Yahb" (ܡܪܝ ܝܗܒ) or its equivalent

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68. Rogemma 2009, chap. 3.

69. Szilágyi 2008, 171–74, 186–87.

70. Roggema 2009, 266–67 (7.2–3).

71. Ibid., 151–66.

72. Szilágyi 2008, 192–99, shows rather that the earliest *sīrah-maghāzī* accounts influenced the *Legend,* not the other way around.

73. Masʿūdī, *Murūj,* ed. Pellat, 1: 83 (§150).

74. *Sarāʾir,* 229ff.; Hollenberg 2016, 94–95, 97–98.

in the Arabic recensions of the *Legend* (مريهب). According to Ibn Bābawayh's account, "the monk spent an hour alone with [the Prophet], confiding in him and speaking with him," and when the young Muḥammad departed, the monk, "kissed him between the eyes and took something out from his sleeve. We do not know what it was, and God's Messenger refused to accept it."[75] This small detail seems to offer a subtle rejection of the claim that Muḥammad received any teaching whatsoever from the monk who, rather, merely confirmed the truth of his prophetic destiny.

THE MERCHANTS OF MECCA

Although the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature does not explicitly portray Muḥammad as a merchant, the same cannot be said of his people, Mecca's Quraysh. That the Meccan Quraysh were a trading people and widely known as such is a staple of early Arabic historiography. One might speculate that those seventh-century historians who first described Muḥammad as a merchant merely imputed to him the reputation of his tribe, who, after all, constituted the highest echelon of the hegemonic élite of the conquest polity. Writing in the mid second/eighth century, Ibn Isḥāq still found it worthwhile aver that "Quraysh were a trading people [*kānat qurayshun qawman tujjāran*]."[76] The importance of Quraysh's mercantile activities for the Arabian *Heilsgeschichte* that Ibn Isḥāq interweaves into his narrative throughout his *Maghāzī* might be seen by some historians as yet another kerygmatic topos. What, for example, are historians to make of a passage wherein Ibn Isḥāq cites an inscription written in the ancient South Arabian script that foretells the future rulers over a territory called "Dhamār"? The inscription was purportedly composed in the rhymed, rhythmic speech of Arabian seers (*kuhhān*):

> To whom belongs dominion [*mulk*] over Dhamār? / To Ḥimyār the righteous / To whom belongs dominion over Dhamār? / To Axum the villainous / To whom belongs dominion over Dhamār? / To Persia the free / To whom belongs dominion over Dhamār? / To Quraysh the merchants![77]

Ibn Isḥāq glosses "Dhamār" as referring to either Yemen or the city of Ṣanʿāʾ; hence, the inscription foretells a series of rulers over the Yemen, a series that culminates in Quraysh and their dominion, a tribe identified first and foremost as a trading people. The report is clearly tendentious—the *Maghāzī* of Ibn Isḥāq is replete with such pagan prophecies of the future dominion of Quraysh, a domin-

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75. *Kamāl al-dīn,* 175–76.

76. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 1: 188; Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 81; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1127.

77. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 1: 70; cited in Prémare 2002, 66–67. Cf. Ibn Durayd, *Jamharah,* 2: 695a, where the text is found written on a slab of stone discovered inside the Kaʿbah.

ion bequeathed to them by the Prophet Muḥammad.[78] Yet even if we reject the historicity of the inscription, must we also reject its depiction of Quraysh as merchants?

Early Arabic historiography likewise depicts the ambit of the trading activities of Quraysh prior to the advent of Islam as geographically vast. Qurashī merchants reputedly traveled north to trade in regions such as Palestine, the Transjordan, Iraq, and Egypt, as well as to regions such as the Yemen and Ethiopia to the south. Abbasid-era scholars compiled lists of the ancestors of Quraysh and the respective trades of their tribal notables (ṣanāʿāt al-ashrāf). Such lists claim, for instance, that Muḥammad's uncle and guardian Abū Ṭālib traded in perfume and wheat; Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq was a cloth merchant, as were ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, Ṭalḥah ibn ʿUbaydallāh, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf; and Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb sold olive oil and leather.[79] Such claims seem plausible when viewed in aggregate, as a bricolage of realia; however, the actual stories of the journeys undertaken by the notables of Mecca's Quraysh strain credulity. For example, are we really to believe that Muḥammad's ancestor Hāshim impressed the Roman emperor by teaching him about the Arabian dish called tharīd, or that Abū Sufyān debated Muḥammad's prophethood with the emperor Heraclius on his way back to Mecca from a trading journey to Syria?[80] However, not all the information in the literary sources can be dismissed as dross.[81] For example, the depictions of Qurashī caravans traveling in and out of the Ḥijāz heavily laden with silver—"which was the bulk of their trade [wa-hiyya ʿuẓm tijāratihim]," Ibn Isḥāq notes in his Kitāb al-Maghāzī[82]—place us on firmer ground. This claim finds some support in the archaeological evidence for mining and the geological richness of gold deposits in the Ḥijāz.[83] Likewise, the Qurʾan speaks of trustworthiness of some of "people of Book" whom one can entrust "a hundredweight of gold [qinṭār]" (Māʾidah 3:85).[84]

In this regard especially, the qurʾanic evidence is indispensable. The journeys of Quraysh feature in one of the very earliest Meccan sūrahs—the sūrah that bears the tribe's name in the Qurʾan (Q. Quraysh 106):

78. Schmid 2016.

79. Ibn Qutaybah, Maʿārif, 575–76. Cf. Ibn al-Kalbī, Mathālib, 87–90; Tawḥīdī, Baṣāʾir, 5: 42–43; Bayhaqī, Maḥāsin, 98; Ps.-Jāḥiẓ, Maḥāsin, 93.

80. Crone 1987 chap. 5; Crone 2007, 78–86; Prémare 2002, 48ff., 68–81.

81. Azmeh 2014a, 158.

82. Ibn Hishām, Sīrah, 2:50; Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1374; Bayhaqī, Dalāʾil, 3: 170.

83. TAVO A.II.2 provides a useful overview of the gold deposits, mined perhaps as early as Late Antiquity and certainly by the early Abbasid period; see Heck 2010, 104–7; Power 2012, 118-34; Azmeh 2014a, 154–63; Munt 2015, 215–25; and Morony 2019, 174–77, 184–85, for useful syntheses of the material and literary evidence.

84. The Arabic qinṭār derives from the Roman centenarius, likely via Greek or Aramaic; see Sokoloff 2002, 491a. Cf. Crone 2005, 398, and 2007, 64.

> [*In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate*]
> 1. For the protection [*īlāf*] of Quraysh,
> 2. their protection [*īlāf*] in the summer and winter journeys!
> 3. Let them serve the Lord of this House,
> 4. Who staves off their hunger and secures them from fear!
>
> [*bismi 'Llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīm*]
> 1. *li-ʾīlāfi quraysh*
> 2. *ʾilāfihim riḥlata 'l-shitāʾi wa-l-ṣayf*
> 3. *fa-l-yaʿbudū rabba hādhā 'l-bayt*
> 4. *alladhī ʾaṭʿamahum min jūʿin wa-ʾāmanahum min khawf*

While the interpretation of this *sūrah,* in particular the meaning of the word *īlāf* (translated "protection" above) poses notoriously intractable challenges,[85] the motif of the mercantile journey (*riḥlah*) of Quraysh in winter and summer remains of intrinsic interest for our purposes. Certainly, the *sūrah* raises other questions, too: Why a journey in the summer and another in winter? Is it because the harvest in Yemen to the south comes in autumn after the summer rains and the harvest in Syria to the north comes at the end of spring after the winter rains? We can defer such questions for now.[86] What remains important to emphasize is that the undertaking of these journeys is *the* distinguishing feature of Quraysh.

Other Meccan *sūrah*s of the Qurʾan add further data and provide an even fuller picture. The early *sūrah*s repeatedly enjoin the unbelievers to consider the mercy of their Lord who provides them with livestock that "carry your heavy loads to a land you would not have reached without great hardship" (Q. Naḥl 16:7) and provide "houses of cattle hides that you find light the day you journey and the day you alight" (16:80). Likewise, the Qurʾan appeals to the wide travels of the unbelievers whom it addresses: "Have you not traveled throughout the earth?" (Q. Rūm 30:9), exhorting them to ponder the woeful fate of the wrongdoers and wicked nations of the past whose ruins populate the routes on which they journey.[87] When the disbelievers who deny the veracity of Muḥammad's revelation mock his claims to be a messenger (*rasūl*) sent by God Himself, the revelation consoles the Messenger, "All messengers whom We sent before you also ate food and walked about the markets" (Q. Furqān 25:20).[88]

The Qurʾan utilizes the geographic landscape traversed by Arabian caravans, admonishes its audience to ponder stark and formidable sights that populate the lands they traverse, and repeatedly appeals to the moral mind-set of the

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85. See Crone 1987, 204–14, and Rubin 2011. Van Putten 2018, 110–11, provides a compelling explanation for the discrepancy in how *ʾīlāf* is spelled in 106:1,2.

86. However, see Robin 2017, 303–4.

87. Crone 2005, 395–96.

88. Crone 2011, 320.

commercial ethos of these merchant travelers. This is an observation long made by scholars,[89] but what is especially surprising, however, is that those disbelievers whom the Qurʾan addresses, as Crone observed, "rode not just on cattle, but also on ships" (cf. Q. Muʾminūn 23:22; Ghāfir 40:80; Zukhruf 43:12) and "were guided by the stars in darkness on both land and sea" (cf. Anʿām 6:97; Yūnus 10:22).[90] Indeed, the Qurʾan reveals a striking familiarity with the sea and seafaring, depicting the sea and its billowing storms with such vividness and clarity that some scholars have inferred that these depictions must draw from a direct experience of seafaring[91]—an observation made all the stranger by the scant narratives of seafaring in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. One might have expected early scholars and exegetes of the Qurʾan to extrapolate from this material that Muḥammad must have himself, therefore, been a merchant and/or traveled by sea; however, they do not. When viewed in the light of such qurʾanic verses, Jacob of Edessa's claim that Muḥammad traded in the emporia of seafarers such as Phoenicia and Tyre does not seem so farfetched. Indeed, insofar as his claim resonates with these qurʾanic data, Jacob's depiction of Muḥammad's journeys should be accepted as more plausible, and likely more historical, than the depiction of Muḥammad as a man scarcely acquainted with trade or travel found in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. This conclusion should even be seen as resonating with Stephen Shoemaker's bold contention that some of the claims of early non-Muslim accounts of Muḥammad's life reveal that the tradition can be "seriously misleading on important aspects of the life of Muḥammad."[92]

This interrogating of one of the most common historical tropes about Muḥammad—namely, that he was a merchant—does not seek to establish the

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89. Paret 1957, 38–39; cf. Torrey 1892; Heck 2008, 89ff.; Crone 2005, 396–97.

90. Crone 2005, 395–96.

91. Barthold 1929, 37, 38. Another explanation—perhaps more likely in my view—is that these vivid passages from Qurʾan draw on the equally vivid passages found in the Psalms; e.g., compare Ps. 107:23–28 and Q. Yūnus 10:22 and the discussion in Speyer [1939] 2013, 448, and Neuwirth 2008, 160.

92. Shoemaker 2012, 277. An interesting exception to the tendency of the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* to minimize the travels of Muḥammad can be found in a brief passage from a *ḥadīth* relating the story of the delegation of the ʿAbd al-Qays tribe from Eastern Arabia to Medina in the final years of Muḥammad's life. On this tribe and its delegation, see *EI²*, s.v. "ʿAbd al-Ḳays" (W. Caskel). According to some accounts, as the tribe's delegates exchange pleasantries and gifts with the Prophet, the delegation is surprised by how thoroughly Muḥammad knows their lands and customs, and the Prophet declares, "I've traveled in your country and stayed there comfortably for some time [*innī qad waṭiʾtu bilādakum wa-fusiḥa lī fīhā*]." In another version, he states, "By God I've visited the country and took its key [*iqlīd*] . . . I stopped at the well of al-Zārah at the rock where the water flows out." Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 298; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 24: 327–31 and 29: 362–69. Cf. Hamidullah 1977, 225–28; Lecker 2002, 120–23. A later, Shiʿite tradition also claims that, before Muḥammad set out for Mt. Ḥirāʾ, where he had his first vision of the angel Gabriel, "he abandoned trading in Syria and dedicated all that God had provided him from those trade journeys to charitable purposes" (Ps.-ʿAskarī, *Tafsīr,* 154). On the date of the *tafsīr* work attributed to the Shiʿite imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/873), see Bar-Asher 2000.

veracity or verifiability of a banal factoid. Rather, it is directed at a more funda-mental question: What does it mean to look at Muḥammad as a historical figure? Essential to the answers that historians have given to this broader question is the axiom that one must first deduce the barest factual data that, no matter how sparse or spare, form the skeletal rudiments of any historical analysis. These rudiments serve, in turn, as the basic certainties upon which one builds subsequent infer-ences to be rationally argued as plausible and/or likely to ever varying degrees. The more robust and numerous these basic certainties are, the better, since they create greater possibilities for subsequent inferences and potential discoveries.

Often such data is admittedly banal: dates of birth and death, geographic origin, native language, social status, occupation, and so on. Yet although such banalities are simplistic, they can be surprisingly elusive. The danger for historians, how-ever, lies in the potential to forget or neglect the contingency of our knowledge as persons ourselves bound up in our history. Too often the path from "datum" to "fact" has been forgotten, ignored, or obscured by the sleepy consensus of histo-rians. In this chapter, I have sought to interrogate the facticity of modern claims that Muḥammad was a merchant. This interrogation has not led to a denial of the assertion that Muḥammad was a merchant, but rather to what I believe is a rather counterintuitive insight: if modern historians wish to assert that Muḥammad was a merchant by trade as one of the many bare facts of his life, they must be cognizant that this "fact" does not originate as such from the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, which portrays him as a shepherd; rather, our modern view of Muḥammad as a mer-chant-turned-prophet ultimately rests on non-Muslim seventh-century accounts of Muḥammad's life that precede both Arabo-Islamic historiography and even the very historical memory of the early Muslim community.

The Beginnings of the Corpus

The beginnings of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature are inextricably intertwined with the story of how a diffuse, orally transmitted corpus of learning distinct from the Qurʾan came to be committed to writing and revered as an authoritative source of knowledge that complemented revealed scripture. At the earliest stages, this body of knowledge was collectively referred to as "learning" (*al-ʿilm*), and it mostly comprised anecdotal stories and sayings (*ḥadīth, akhbār,* and *āthār*) that conveyed the words of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, the manner in which they performed rituals central to early Islamic religiosity, and the exemplary deeds and conduct of the community's forebearers (*sunan*). The corpus was diffuse, since it was dispersed among numerous individuals whose participation in the conquests scattered them across the expansive, and (then) still expanding, territorial reach of the Islamic polity and its settlements; but it was also topically varied, comprising knowledge about an array of issues germane to early faith, such as ritual piety, legal norms, eschatology, past events, and much else besides.

The strand of this learned tradition that most concerns us here is the one that conveyed knowledge about the sacred past. *ʿIlm* comprised a corpus of knowledge, but it did not form a literary genre. Rather, the process of codifying *ʿilm* and its structural organization into writing gave rise to various early genres of Arabic literature that put *ʿilm* to different usages: collections of *ḥadīth* arranged into *muṣannaf* and *musnad* form, organizing the corpus according to the topics of each individual tradition or the authorities who transmitted them, respectively; works of qurʾanic exegesis (*tafsīr*), which attached such traditions to specific qurʾanic verses; works detailing the proper conduct (*siyar*) for waging war and the division of the spoils of conquest; and narratives of significant events from the life of the

Prophet and Companions, usually called *maghāzī* ("expeditions"). Although the raw materials of *ʿilm* did not set the parameters of these genres, such materials did provide their basic building blocks and determined their shape insofar as the primary medium of *ʿilm*'s conveyance was "the report" (*al-khabar*), with its two constituent features: the text (*matn*) and its accompanying chain of authoritative transmitters (*isnād*).[1] In the early period, *ʿilm* served as the ore from which the scholars derived the malleable metals used in forging these genres. Because the genres drew from this shared mine of knowledge (whether learned, performed, or embodied), they necessarily interpenetrated one another from an early date, as they continue to do so today.

THE UMAYYADS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE *SĪRAH-MAGHĀZĪ* TRADITION

The Abbasid-era historian al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870) records a fascinating story of what is ostensibly the first recorded attempt to gather *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions into a literary work and to disseminate them thereby beyond the domain of scholarly circles. The narrative offers the closest thing to an account of the beginnings of this literary genre that one might find. His story begins with the winter Ḥajj of the Umayyad crown prince Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik to Mecca in A.H. 82/ 702 C.E. That the story not only relates the birth of a genre but also the earliest known instance in which a Muslim ruler and/or member of a caliphal house showed interest in committing the stories of the Prophet and his Companions to writing holds a larger significance, to which we shall return below. For now, it suffices to emphasize that the story inaugurates the opening chapter of how the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition transformed from an oral to a written literary tradition.[2]

According to the story, prior to reaching Mecca to lead the Ḥajj, the Umayyad prince followed the usual custom of pilgrims traveling south from Syria and alighted in Medina,[3] the Prophet's capital city from his *hijrah* there in 622 C.E. until his death in 632. Although Mecca housed Islam's most sacred sanctuary and the Kaʿbah—the centerpiece of the Muslim pilgrimage rites and its founding myths— the city of Medina remained the cultural epicenter of the Arab élite of the early Islamic polity. Medina, and not Mecca, was the empire's cultural and intellectual

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1. On the literary uses of the *khabar,* see Leder 1992.

2. *Muwaffaqiyyāt,* 332–33. No collection of *maghāzī* traditions precedes it, *pace* Sezgin who saw in the early citations of traditions attributed to Abū Bakr al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (37–108/657–725), "die Spuren [traces] eine *maġāzī*-Buches" (*GAS* 1: 279; followed by Donner 1998, 194). However, no traces of a *maghāzī* book by him remain, merely the detritus of traditions transmitted on his authority by later tradents. Al-Qāsim's book is a mere figment of Sezgin's historical speculation. Cf. Elad 2002, 269.

3. On this custom, see Munt 2014, 137ff.

powerhouse. The Medinans welcomed the arrival of the crown prince and watched as he rode past the sites of the Prophet's renowned deeds and famous battles. Accompanying Prince Sulaymān throughout his tour were Medina's governor at the time, Abān ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, as well as the governor's brother, ʿAmr, and Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Aḥmad. These three esteemed denizens of the holy city guided the prince to Islam's oldest mosque, in the village of Qubāʾ, to the mosque of al-Faḍīkh, and the mosque at a site known as Mashrabat Umm Ibrāhīm,⁴ to the site of the Battle of Uḥud, and then to any other site Sulaymān desired to see.⁵ Passing from site to site, the prince asked his companions to relate him the stories that imbued each place with significance as they wound their way through a Medinan landscape now sanctified in the few generations that had passed since the Prophet's lifetime. All of this impressive display of knowledge from the Medinans prompted Sulaymān to order his kinsman Abān ibn ʿUthmān—a fellow member of the Umayyad House and a man revered as one of "the seven learned men [*fuqahāʾ*] of Medina"—"to write down how the Prophet conducted himself in war and his military expeditions [*siyar al-nabī wa-maghāzīhi*]." Abān replied that he had already compiled such a work for his own private use, "I took the stories that could be verified from those whose testimony I trusted," he told Sulayman,

Sulaymān immediately commanded that Abān's work be copied on parchment (*riqq*) by ten scribes—a detail meant to indicate that the crown prince's enterprise had been undertaken at a considerable expense and with an aim grander than his own personal enrichment. However, when at last the final product was brought to him, Sulaymān was dismayed at its contents: the stories therein spoke little of his Umayyad kinsmen but told, rather, of the glories of Medina's Anṣār—the tribes of Aws and Khazraj who had originally inhabited the city before the advent of Islam and who had welcomed Muḥammad and his persecuted Meccan followers to Medina after their *hijrah* there in 622 c.e. As for Sulaymān, he knew that the Anṣār of Medina and their descendants were infamous for their antipathy towards the Umayyad clan of Meccan Quraysh. Bemused, Sulaymān opined "I never thought that these people could have possessed such merit; either the people of my House [*ahl baytī*] found fault with them or else they were not as they said." Abān knew that Sulaymān's anxieties harkened back to the feud between the Umayyads and

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4. The site was named after Muḥammad's Egyptian concubine Māriyah, known as ʿUmm Ibrāhīm' (mother of Ibrāhīm) after she bore him a son named Ibrāhīm, who died in infancy and through whom she procured her manumission after the Prophet's death. The site had purportedly been a plot of land bequeathed to Muḥammad by an early Jewish convert to his message, a Medinan man named Mukhayrīq, who died at the battle of Uḥud. See Ibn Shabbah, *Madīnah,* 1:173–74, who notes that the wooden board Māriyah purportedly grasped on while giving birth to Ibrāhīm was revered there even in the ninth century c.e.

5. This itinerary reflects the expansion of Medina's sacred topography in this period as described in Munt 2014, 111ff.

the Anṣār: although the Umayyads held some members of the Anṣār in extremely high regard—such as Zayd ibn Thābit, the scribe of the Qurʾan collected during the caliphate of Abān's father, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 23–35/644–56)—many of the Anṣār had opposed the policies of ʿUthmān and had supported the rival claims of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to the leadership of the community, even after ʿUthmān's assassination by dissidents from Egypt and Iraq in 35/656.[6] But Abān assured Sulaymān that, despite their betrayal of ʿUthmān, the words he read in his book were true. The Anṣār, he affirmed, "were just as we portrayed them for you in this book of ours."

Sulaymān remained reluctant to pursue the project further and even considered consigning the books to flames, though first he resolved to consult his father, the Commander of the Faithful ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705). When Sulaymān had returned from his pilgrimage, he presented his father with the books and related all that Abān had told him. The caliph ʿAbd al-Malik was irate. Upon hearing Sulaymān's proposal, he quipped, "What's the use of you disseminating a book of no benefit to us? You'll teach the soldiers of Syria [*ahl al-Shām*] about matters about which we have no desire for them to learn!" His trepidation thus confirmed, Sulaymān burned the copies of Abān's book.[7]

This story of Abān ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān's ill-fated *Maghāzī* may or may not be true—Abān's reputation for transmitting *maghāzī* traditions survives, but hardly any of it in the form of an actual corpus of traditions ascribed to him. Assuming the story is not a mere rhetorical topos, Sulaymān must indeed have burned the book he had commissioned from Abān.[8] A similar story is also told of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and the fate of a work entitled *Mathālib al-ʿarab* (*Vices of the Arabs*), which was allegedly composed by the Umayyad governor of Iraq Ziyād ibn Abīhi (d. 53/673). Ziyād was the illegitimate brother of the first Umayyad caliph, Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 40–60/661–80), and gained notoriety for the brutality of his governorship in the notoriously intractable province. Although Ziyād was the son of Muʿāwiyah's father, Abū Sufyān, the Iraqis refused to recog-

6. Cf. Madelung 1997, 146ff.

7. Ibn Bakkār, *Muwaffaqiyyāt,* 333; cf. Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 4 (2): 490. Such learning is, however, depicted as more commonplace among the Medinans. "We were taught the expeditions of Prophet and his raids [*maghāzī al-nabī wa-sarāyāhu*], just as we were taught a *sūrah* from the Qurʾan," ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, revered as the fourth Imam by the Shiʿah, purportedly claimed; see Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ,* 2: 288.

8. Traditions modern scholars have ascribed to Umayyad scholar Abān ibn ʿUthmān are in fact attributable to Abān ibn ʿUthmān al-Aḥmar, a later figure and the earliest Shiʿite scholar to compose of book of *maghāzī*. His work is now lost, but parts of it seem to survive in fragmentary quotations by later authors. See Jarrar 2000 and Modarressi 2003, 129–30. Ibn ʿAsākir (*Dimashq,* 60: 72) quotes Ibn Saʿd as claiming that the Qurashī notable al-Mughīrah ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Makhzūmī (d. between 101/724 and 125/742) possessed a written copy (*khaṭṭ maktūb*) of the *Maghāzī* of Abān ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān; also in Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 9: 77. However, see Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 5: 210, where the mention of the written copy of Abān's *Maghāzī* does not appear. Noted first in Elad 2003, 127. For the staunchest argument for the historicity of the work, see Bakrī 2016, 429–41.

nize Ziyād as Muʿāwiyah's legitimate brother because he was born of an adulterous affair. Their refusal was also reputedly rooted in their deference to prophetic precedent.[9] Thus scorned and his claim to Umayyad and Qurashī nobility denied, Ziyād purportedly composed his *Mathālib* to exact his revenge for the slight and to equip his descendants with a fitting riposte to anyone who would dare defame their lineage. When the work was subsequently read aloud to ʿAbd al-Malik, the caliph found its contents so objectionable that he ordered it burned.[10]

What is significant in the above story of the *Maghāzī* of Abān ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, however, is what it tells us about the early codification and recording of traditions about the sacred past in general and stories about the recent Islamic past in particular. Firstly, we see the role of the wealthy courtly élite and politically enfranchised scholars in overseeing and providing the impulse for the compilation of the Prophet's biography—broadly called in Arabic *al-siyar wa-l-maghāzī* (war-conduct and expeditions)—for the sake of its broader dissemination. This theme of court initiatives recurs throughout accounts of subsequent, more successful attempts to compile traditions about Muḥammad's life into books. What is also notable is that Abān ibn ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān had already compiled a book for his own private use prior to Sulaymān's commission. This copy was for Abān's private benefit, however, and what Sulaymān did was seek to disseminate Abān's book among the imperial élite—in effect, to "publish" it.

Another key feature of the account should also be highlighted: although the role of the courtly élite in the story above is certainly decisive, it is also ambivalent. The courtly élite neither controlled nor themselves produced this corpus; they merely intervened in its dissemination at a crucial time in order to oversee its being committed to writing and its dissemination. Hence, while interest in the stories of the Prophet and his Companions thrived, as did instruction therein, independently of the caliphal court, the court played a decisive role in what traditions survived in a written, rather than oral, form and how that writing came to be redacted in the shadow of its patronage and sponsorship.

Lastly, one should also note how the prospect of disseminating the knowledge contained in the books aroused considerable anxiety. Exceptionally in this account, the anxiety is that of the courtly élite. Other accounts tend to invert this. As we

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9. This was in accord with the dictum attributed to the Prophet: *al-walad li-l-firāsh wa-li-l-ʿāhir al-ḥajar*, "the child belongs to the [marriage] bed and the adulterer gets the stone." In order words, a child born of an adulterous affair is to be regarded as a legitimate member of the household in which he or she was born and not as a bastard; the guilty adulterer is however, stoned to death as prescribed. Recognizing Abū Sufyān as Ziyād's father, although a well-known fact, was therefore interpreted as an act of gross impiety on the part of the caliph Muʿāwiyah. See Rubin 1993a, 13–17; Landau-Tasseron 2003, 173–74, 178ff.

10. Elad 2002, 269–70 (citing Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, ed. Ibrāhīm, 20: 78); Ibn Qutaybah, *Excellence*, 8–9 (1.4.2). Cf. Schoeler 2002, 58; 2006, 85–86.

shall see below, usually it is the scholars who are portrayed as most reluctant to see their oral tradition transformed into a written, literary tradition.

The account of Abān's book may also invoke another narrative archetype. Ibn Bakkār's story somewhat resembles another famous story—the story of how the Umayyad caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 23–34/644–656) first codified and collected the Qurʾan, a project he commissioned from the Medinan scholar and Companion Zayd ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī and a council of early converts from among the Meccan Quraysh. At the completion of the project, many copies of the newly standardized Qurʾan codex (*muṣḥaf*) were copied onto parchment in Medina and then subsequently distributed to the major garrison cities across the conquered territories.[11] Sulaymān conceived his project for the *Maghāzī* compiled by Abān along somewhat similar lines, but his project was stillborn and ultimately abandoned. The subtext of the story is that the book of *maghāzī* compiled by Abān was no equal to the scriptural authority of the Qurʾan.

Prior to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik's death in 705 c.e., his son Sulaymān allegedly recounted the story of Abān's *Maghāzī* and its sorry fate to his father's famous imperial secretary, Qabīṣah ibn Dhuʾayb al-Khuzāʿī (d. 86/705), who was a well-regarded Medinan *faqīh* and transmitter of *ḥadīth* in his own right.[12] Qabīṣah bemoaned the caliph's decision to encourage his son to destroy Abān's book as a lost opportunity—a view that would in time come to prevail. Qabīṣah reasoned that it would have been better if Sulaymān himself had learned these traditions and then arranged for his sons and their progeny to be instructed in them as well. He counseled the crown prince:

> [These traditions] contain much that redounds to the favor of the Commander of the Faithful [*inna ḥaẓẓa amīr al-muʾminīn fīhā la-wāfir*]. For more men of the Commander of the Faithful's House [i.e., his clan of Quraysh] witnessed the battle of Badr than any other house: sixteen men from their own ranks, their allies, and their freedmen, for the ally [*ḥalīf*] of the tribe counts as one of them, as does their freedman [*mawlā*]. When the Messenger of God passed away, four of his governors were from the sons of Umayyah: ʿAttāb ibn Asīd over Mecca, Abān ibn Saʿīd over Baḥrayn, Khālid ibn Saʿīd over the Yemen, and Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb over Najrān![13]

Qabīṣah appealed to the considerable benefit contained in such traditions for the Umayyads themselves—often mistakenly portrayed as a clan of Quraysh whose ranks were filled with latecomers to the faith and intractable opponents to the

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11. Cf. Motzki 2001.

12. On the importance of Qabīṣah and his son Isḥāq to Umayyad administration, see CIAP 2: 207–14. The tradition remembers him as a key transmitter of the teachings and rulings of Zayd ibn Thābit; see, e.g., Ibn al-Madīnī, *ʿIlal,* 45ff. According to one report, he was a schoolteacher; see Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 145.

13. Ibn Bakkār, *Muwaffaqiyyāt,* 333–34.

Prophet until he conquered Mecca in 10/630—and thus inveighed against the caliph's neglect of such learning merely because of an intergenerational antipathy to the Anṣār of Medina.[14] When Sulaymān and Qabīṣah subsequently sought to prevail with this view of the matter against ʿAbd al-Malik's opposition, the caliph remained adamant in his opposition to the project.

However, to view Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik as an oafish dolt hostile to the dissemination of knowledge or who held learning in disregard would be a gross error—early accounts of the caliph's life paint just the opposite of such a picture. ʿAbd al-Malik was born in Medina ca. 24/646–47, early enough, according to his own testimony, to recall witnessing the assassination of the caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in 35/656, his fellow Umayyad clansman and a man from whose mouth he claimed to have learned the Qurʾan. ʿAbd al-Malik was also said to be a man educated from his youth by luminaries among the Prophet's Companions such as Abū Hurayrah, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, and Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī. Nāfiʿ, the freedman of Ibn ʿUmar, purportedly once effusively declared concerning ʿAbd al-Malik, "Never in Medina did I see a young man more diligent or more persistent in the pursuit of learning than him."[15] Early Muslim scholars regularly rank ʿAbd al-Malik—uniquely among the Umayyad caliphs—among the most learned Medinans of his generation, mentioning him in the same breath as such luminaries as Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab.[16] Hagiographic excess aside, ʿAbd al-Malik belonged to the upper echelons of Medina's Qurashī élite and was a man deeply enculturated in their milieu, who thus held the Medinans' learning in the highest regard. Something else is at play in his staunch opposition to the dissemination of Abān's *Maghāzī*.

ʿAbd al-Malik esteemed the Medinans and their authority on religious matters, and like the Medinans he was wary of committing sacred knowledge (ʿilm) apart from the Qurʾan to writing. In the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), we find a speech attributed to ʿAbd al-Malk where this wariness is expressed in terms of a fear that the tradition might diminish the authority of the Qurʾan compiled by his Umayyad ancestor Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān:

> People of Medina! Of all people you most deserve to claim to practice the original faith [al-amr al-awwal].[17] Many traditions from the denizens of the Eastern lands

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14. Indeed, Qabīṣah's points are meant to be somewhat shocking, since the sons of the Meccans who emigrated to Medina with Muḥammad in 622 C.E. infamously looked down on the Marwānids in particular. In the famous *majlis al-qilādah* of Medina, Mūsā ibn Ṭalḥah denigrated the Marwānids saying, "They are nothing but [the Emigrants'] slaves, manumitted [ʿabīduhum aʿtaqūhum ʿatāqatan] after they were surrounded and bested [at the conquest of Mecca]!" See Ibn Ḥabīb, *Munammaq*, 359; cited in A. Ahmed 2011, 96.

15. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 5: 234.

16. Ibn Zanjawayh, *Ṭabaqāt*, 92–93.

17. I.e., Islam as first practiced by the Prophet and his Companions.

have come our way [*ṣālat ʿalaynā aḥādīth min qibal ahl al-mashriq*], but we do not recognize them [*lā naʿrifuhā*]. We recognize none of it except the recitation of the Qurʾān. So hold fast to what's contained in your Qurʾān [*muṣḥaf*]—that same Qurʾān whereby [ʿUthmān] the unjustly slain Imam bound you together as a people. And adhere to the statutes whereby the unjustly slain Imam united you. Indeed, for that task he consulted Zayd ibn Thābit, and what an excellent counsellor he was for the sake Islam [*wa-niʿma l-mushīr kāna li-l-islām*]! Thus did [ʿUthmān and Zayd] render their judgment, and thus did they dispense of their disagreements [*fa-aḥkamā mā aḥkamā wa-asqaṭā mā shadhdha ʿanhumā*].[18]

This wariness of non-qurʾanic traditions, whether as *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet on legal and ritual matters or as *maghāzī* accounts of the deeds and battles of the Prophet and his Companions, reflects an early attitude to the transmission of religious knowledge that, at first at least, impeded the recording of the earliest traditions about Muḥammad's life. In this sense, courtly opposition to recording *ḥadīth* and *maghāzī* was a reality rooted in attitudes to religious knowledge held in common with a broader swathe of scholarly élites whose attitudes first needed to be overturned before a "court impulse" made its influence felt. ʿAbd al-Malik's hostility to the dissemination of Abān's *Maghāzī*, therefore, reflects the perspective of a man who, for much of his life, lived in Medina as a privileged scion of the Quraysh, and who had been educated by its learned men. His father, Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, ruled as Medina's governor for two terms (41–48/661–68; 54–57/674–77). ʿAbd al-Malik thus seems to have shared the deeply ingrained assumptions about the tradition of Medina's scholars.

Although he resided in distant Syria while caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik did not relocate there from Medina until he was a man of mature age, just shy of forty. Even then he only abandoned Medina under duress. Like most of his Umayyad kinsmen and their partisans, ʿAbd al-Malik was compelled to abandon Medina because of the rebellion launched from Medina ca. 61/682 against the Umayyad caliph, Yazīd [I] ibn Muʿāwiyah (r. 60–64/679–83). The rebellion would come to a head in the infamous battle of al-Ḥarrah in Dhū l-Ḥijjah 63/August 683 and thus open the floodgates of conflict that gave rise to the Second Civil War between the Umayyads and the Zubayrids.[19] When Yazīd I's branch of the Umayyads, the Sufyānids, lost their hold on the leadership of the *ummah* soon thereafter, the burden fell to another branch of the Umayyads, the so-called Marwānids, named after ʿAbd al-Malik's father, to keep the reins of the caliphate securely in the hands of the Umayyad clan of Quraysh. In the Second Civil War, the Marwānids' initially tenuous control

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18. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 5: 232; cf. Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 42–43. Among the first generations of the Medinans, the rulings of the Anṣārī Companion Zayd ibn Thābit held the most sway, and the Marwānids seemed to have deferred to this tradition; see Ibn al-Madīnī, *ʿIlal*, 44–45.

19. On these events, see now Shaddel 2017, 5ff.

over the Umayyad base of power in Syria was eventually consolidated first under Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, and subsequently by ʿAbd al-Malik himself.

Throughout the Second Civil War, a rival household of Quraysh, the Zubayrids of the Asad clan, spearheaded the opposition to Umayyad leadership. Under the leadership of ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, the Zubayrid camp adopted Mecca as their capital, proclaimed Ibn al-Zubayr as the one, true Commander of the Faithful, and sought to remove the Umayyads from power altogether. The Zubayrids had taken full advantage of their control over Mecca and the Ḥijāz throughout their challenge to Umayyad legitimacy by weaponizing the Ḥajj and by circulating traditions attributed to the Prophet against the Umayyads in an all-out propaganda campaign. The Umayyads, however, matched their ferocity on the battlefield.[20] A key goal of the Zubayrids was to undermine the Umayyads' hold on their Syrian power base by recruiting the Arabian tribes who had once filled the stalwart ranks of the Umayyad forces and who offered them their most reliable source of military strength. Ibn al-Zubayr's proxy, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihrī, had nearly succeeded in doing so when he marched out against Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam at the battle of Marj Rāhiṭ on 1 Muḥarram 65/18 August 684, but the Umayyads prevailed against considerable odds. When ʿAbd al-Malik assumed the leadership of the Umayyads after his father's assassination in 65/685, Umayyad control over Syria had been regained, but their ability to extend their power to their former domains remained precarious. The Abbasid-era historian al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) characterized the situation as follows:

> [ʿAbdallāh] ibn al-Zubayr had taken control of Mecca and, during the Ḥajj, he used to enumerate the vices [*mathālib*] of the Marwānid family, and to summon [the people] to pay homage to him [as Commander of the Faithful]. He was eloquent, so the people inclined towards him. ʿAbd al-Malik therefore prevented the people from performing the Ḥajj.[21]

Another historian of the same era, Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/ 819 or 206/821), describes the Zubayrid propaganda efforts in similar terms:

> Ibn al-Zubayr used to deliver a sermon on the days of Minā and ʿArafah and when the people were at Mecca [viz., during the Ḥajj season].[22] He detested ʿAbd al-Malik and listed the vices [*masāwi*ʾ] of the Umayyads saying, "The Messenger of God cursed al-Ḥakam [ʿAbd al-Malik's paternal grandfather] and his descendants! He was exiled by the Messenger of God and was cursed by him." And most of the Arabian tribesmen of Syria [*ahl al-shām*] inclined towards him [i.e., Ibn al-Zubayr], and

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20. Cf. Madelung 1981; Madelung 1995; Hawting 2017a; Shaddel 2017, 16–19.

21. Adapted from Elad 1993, 34 (Eng.), 53 (Ar.); see Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāh*, 9: 39–40, and Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, ed. Houtsma, 2: 311.

22. Cf. Hawting 1993.

became his intimate and familiar associates. This became known to ʿAbd al-Malik, and he therefore prevented the people from performing the Ḥajj.[23]

Ibn al-Zubayr's stranglehold on Mecca and the Ḥajj, which he led for as many as nine consecutive years (A.H. 64–72),[24] exacerbated the precariousness of ʿAbd al-Malik's position in Syria for years to come. For as long as Ibn Zubayr remained in power, this meant that, as Chase Robinson notes, "many Muslims outside of Syria never regarded ʿAbd al-Malik as anything other than a usurper and tyrant."[25] ʿAbd al-Malik's alleged fear that even after Ibn al-Zubayr's defeat, the tales of the Prophet and his Companions in Abān's *Maghāzī* would introduce unwelcome volatility into the mix of the Syrian armies and might even undermine the Umayyads' claim to the caliphate seems well-grounded, given the political struggles of the recent past.

Beyond the relentlessness with which ʿAbd al-Malik pursued the defeat of the Zubayrids—culminating in the shocking siege of Mecca by his general al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī in 73/692—he responded to the Zubayrid challenge with ever more ambitious projects and reforms to bolster his legitimacy, which he continued to pursue even long after Ibn al-Zubayr's defeat, such as building the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,[26] reforming and Islamicizing the empire's coinage,[27] reforming its script and recompiling the Qurʾan,[28] and Arabicizing the administrative bureaucracy.[29] These initiatives redounded to Umayyad legitimacy and profoundly shaped the trajectory of early Islam, bequeathing to the religion not merely the first icons of its imperial power but also the earliest symbols of Islamic identity itself.[30]

Such was the political context of ʿAbd al-Malik's opposition to the dissemination of Abān ibn ʿUthmān's book of *maghāzī,* so no wonder he found the project troublesome. However, despite the caliph's apparent opposition to the public dissemination of *maghāzī* traditions, he himself was not aloof to the topic of Muḥammad's campaigns or details about his life. Indeed, the earliest written corpus of *maghāzī* materials to survive to our day may actually date from ʿAbd al-Malik's era, albeit not in the form of a publicly disseminated book. Rather, this early corpus survives somewhat surprisingly in the form of a series of letters between the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and the brother of his rival for the caliphate, ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. ca. 93–94/711–13).

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23. Elad 1993, 34 (Eng.), 53 (Ar.).
24. Elad 2008, 191.
25. Robinson 2005, 35.
26. Elad 2008; Levy-Rubin 2017.
27. Treadwell 2009; Heidemann 2011; Treadwell 2017.
28. Hamdan 2006; Sinai 2014.
29. Qāḍī 2010.
30. TG, 1: 9ff.

ʿABD AL-MALIK IBN MARWĀN AND
ʿURWAH IBN AL-ZUBAYR

The pairing of ʿAbd al-Malik and ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr—scions of two rival houses of Quraysh with a history of enmity and violence—might seem improbable, given the antipathies between them throughout the conflict of the Second Civil War, but both men were equally products of the Medinan Qurashī élite, a milieu that bound them together at an early age just as much as its rivalries would later divide them in adulthood. Although the Umayyads and Zubayrids would eventually face each other in a titanic struggle for the leadership of the early Islamic polity, ʿAbd al-Malik once knew the Zubayrid brothers as merely his fellow Medinans and had even been on intimate terms with them during his youth in Medina. ʿAbd al-Malik studied alongside ʿUrwah as a peer. Qabīsah ibn Dhuʾayb used to recount how he, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, and others gathered each night in Medina's mosque in a study circle (ḥalqah) comprised of the city's youthful élite. Qabīsah allegedly distinguished himself with the knowledge he had gained from the Prophet's scribe, Zayd ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī, but Qabīsah admitted that ʿUrwah outstripped them all in his knowledge, because he, as a nephew of the Prophet's widow, ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, could freely visit and learn from her.[31]

The following pious legend about a meeting between ʿAbd al-Malik and the Zubayrid brothers presciently captures the irony of their future conflict in light of their amicable youth:

> The Sacred Mosque [in Mecca] had brought together ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, and his two brothers, in the days that they held each other in mutual affection during the reign of Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān. One of them said, "Come now, let's say what we desire in the future!"
>
> ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr said, "My desire is to one day rule the two sanctuaries [al-ḥaramayn] and to attain the caliphate!"
>
> Muṣʿab said, "My desire is to one day rule over the two Iraqs [i.e., Basra and Kufa] and marry the two noblest women of Quraysh, Sukaynah bint al-Ḥakam and ʿĀʾishah bint Ṭalḥah."
>
> ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, "My desire is to succeed Muʿāwiyah as caliph and rule over the whole earth."
>
> ʿUrwah said, "I'm not after any of those things that you are. I desire renunciation [zuhd] in this life and success in the Hereafter and to be ranked among those who pass on knowledge [ʿilm]."

31. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 40: 248–49 (citing a recension of Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* that seems no longer extant). ʿUrwah was the only one of the men who could approach ʿĀʾishah because, after Muḥammad's death, his wives were cloistered and could only be approached by males who were of their kin (Q. Aḥzāb 33: 32, 55).

Fortune portioned out its favor until each one of them obtained his hope. On that ʿAbd al-Malik used to opine, "Whosoever wishes to find delight by casting his gaze on a man from among the denizens of Paradise, let him look upon ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr."[32]

Fate may have granted each young man his wish, but ʿAbd al-Malik's ambitions enjoyed the most longevity and would ultimately come at the expense of ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr and his brothers. In 692 C.E. the Umayyads' general al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī successfully besieged Mecca, and when ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr fell on the battlefield, al-Ḥajjāj crucified his corpse to signal the ignoble end of the Zubayrids' ambitions. The Umayyads' general pursued his brother ʿUrwah, too, for he had joined his brother in Mecca from the outset of his bid for the caliphate. But ʿUrwah fled Mecca to save his life and absconded with the Zubayrids' wealth, which he hastened to deposit in Medina for safekeeping. From Medina, ʿUrwah then repaired to the court of ʿAbd al-Malik in Damascus, where the caliph granted him the clemency that the Umayyads and their supporters had denied his brothers.[33] According to a narrative recorded by the historian al-Madāʾinī (d. ca. 228/842):

ʿUrwah rode out on a camel whose speed could not be matched. He arrived in Syria even before the messengers of al-Ḥajjāj could deliver word of the execution of ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr to ʿAbd al-Malik. ʿUrwah arrived at ʿAbd al-Malik's doorstep and sought permission to enter. When ʿUrwah entered, he bade him the greetings due a caliph, and ʿAbd al-Malik returned his greetings. He welcomed and embraced ʿUrwah and seated him upon his throne [*sarīr*]. . . . ʿUrwah then spoke until he came to mention [his brother] ʿAbdallāh, then he said, "Abū Bakr [= ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr] has reached his end." "What happened?" ʿAbd al-Malik asked. "He's been killed, may God show him mercy," he replied.

ʿAbd al-Malik then prostrated himself to God in worship. ʿUrwah continued, "al-Ḥajjāj has crucified him. Give his corpse to his mother." "Yes," he said and wrote to al-Ḥajjāj decrying what he heard about the crucifixion of Ibn al-Zubayr. He wrote him, "Leave ʿUrwah be, for I've granted him safety."

ʿUrwah's return journey to Mecca took thirty days. Al-Ḥajjāj took ʿAbdallāh's corpse down from its cross and sent it to his mother [Asmāʾ bint Abī Bakr]. She washed it [to prepare it for burial], but when the water touched the body, it fell apart. She said, "In my sleep a voice once said to me, 'O mother of the man dismembered!' and I thought it was al-Mundhir, because he was cut to pieces with swords.[34] I didn't

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32. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt,* 3: 258. As noted by L. I. Conrad (Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 18n58), a similar story is told in which ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb replaces ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān; cf. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 2: 176; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 40: 267; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt,* 3: 29.

33. Fākihī, *Akhbār Makkah,* 2: 377; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 4 (2): 387 and 5: 52.

34. Her son al-Mundhir ibn al-Zubayr had previously fallen either in battle or in a contest of arms during the first Umayyad siege of Mecca; cf. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 2: 426; Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī, *Nasab,* 245.

think that it was my son. But I washed his body piece by piece, and he stayed whole until I buried him, and ʿUrwah prayed over him."[35]

Understandably weary of politics, ʿUrwah withdrew to Medina to devote the remainder of his life to scholarly pursuits. His only other major journey outside Medina in the years that followed was to pledge his oath of allegiance (Ar. *bayʿah*) to ʿAbd al-Malik's son and successor, al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–15), with whom he also exchanged letters on *maghāzī* traditions. That trip cost ʿUrwah dearly. On the way to Syria, his foot became gangrenous, and after he reached the court, one of the caliph's physicians had to amputate it with a saw. Shortly thereafter, the son who accompanied him on the long journey fell off the roof of the caliphal stables, and the horses inside trampled the young man to death.[36]

ʿUrwah's rapprochement with ʿAbd al-Malik and the House of Umayyah is momentous for our concerns because it purportedly resulted in a series of letters exchanged between him and the caliph and his son al-Walīd. These letters become an "accidental" corpus of early materials for the biography of Muḥammad. The corpus is accidental insofar as the letters were written for private consumption by the caliphs in response to their queries and not for public dissemination and instruction.[37] In this way, they differ markedly from Abān ibn ʿUthmān's book that the caliph ordered to be destroyed. While these letters are not the only *maghāzī* traditions of ʿUrwah to survive—like most scholars of his epoch, his learning was transmitted orally to his students—they are the only such traditions to survive in document-like form.

These letters, the manner of their preservation, and their authenticity are discussed more fully in the following chapter, but here it is worthwhile to note what they contain and reveal about the state of early Arabic traditions on the life of Muḥammad at the time. Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler have meticulously argued that narrative traditions of the following events from the life of Muḥammad can be ascribed to ʿUrwah with a reasonably high degree of certainty:

1. Muḥammad's vision of the angel Gabriel atop Mount Ḥirāʾ and the onset of the revelation of the Qurʾan
2. The Meccans' reactions to Muḥammad's preaching, the emigration (*hijrah*) of some Meccan believers to Axum, the meetings of Muḥammad with the Aws and Khazraj tribe of Yathrib at al-ʿAqabah, and Muḥammad's emigration (*hijrah*) to Yathrib alongside Abū Bakr
3. The battle of Badr
4. The battle of Uḥud

35. Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 4 (2): 387–88; cf. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 553–54, and Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 18ff.
36. Ibn Bakkār, *Jamharah,* 283–84; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 5: 52–53.
37. Cf. M. Cook 1997, 480–81.

5. The battle of the Trench (*al-khandaq*) and the affair of the Qurayẓah tribe
6. The truce signed between Muḥammad and the pagan Quraysh of Mecca at al-Ḥudaybiyah
7. The charges of adultery against Muḥammad's wife ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, and the revelation sent to prove her innocence.
8. Muḥammad's conquest [*fatḥ*] of Mecca and the subsequent battle at Ḥunayn[38]

The most important observation to make here is how this corpus of *maghāzī* traditions attributed to ʿUrwah already provides us with a coherent, albeit still inchoate, outline of Muḥammad's prophetic career from his emigration from Mecca to Medina until his conquest of Mecca some eight years later. Unsurprisingly, the period of Muḥammad's early life and the Meccan period of his preaching is almost a total terra incognita—only the story of Muḥammad's first revelation, its initial reception among the Meccans, and the persecution and emigration of his first followers appears. We shall return to ʿUrwah's account of Muḥammad's first revelation in chapter 7.

All in all, despite the considerable corpus of traditions attributable to ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, whether in the form of his letters or of his orally transmitted reports (i.e., *ḥadīth* and *akhbār*), ʿUrwah never seems to have compiled a *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*. As Gregor Schoeler first noted, much of ʿUrwah's reputation as a compiler of a work called *al-Maghāzī* relies on later figures who compiled works of *maghāzī* traditions in his name. No evidence suggests that ʿUrwah ever compiled a book of *maghāzī* traditions that he himself taught or arranged.[39] Rather, ʿUrwah likely confined his transmission of *ḥadīth* to the oral methods commonplace during his lifetime—transmitting *ḥadīth* arranged into a literary composition or as a written form meant for broad dissemination seems to have been virtually unthinkable in his generation.[40] Only the contents of his teachings can be reconstructed with relative certainty, thanks in large part to the source analyses of traditions transmitted on his authority and to a lesser extent because of the survival of the letters attributed to him.

Materials spuriously attributed to ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr abound. Hence, a substantial corpus of *maghāzī* traditions attributed to ʿUrwah has also been preserved on the authority of an orphan ward he allegedly raised in Egypt, named Abū l-Aswad Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 131/748 or later), who purportedly collected Urwah's traditions in a *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*.[41] The work is invariably transmitted by Egyptian scholars, such as the notoriously unreliable Ibn Lahīʿah

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38. Görke and Schoeler 2005, 213; cf. Görke and Schoeler 2008, 284–85.

39. Schoeler 2011, 22.

40. ʿUrwah reputedly burned his writings before the battle of al-Ḥarrah; however, as Michael Cook notes (2007, 462–63), they were for his private use only and were burned only to prevent them from falling into the hands of others in the event of death.

41. Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 6:15.

(d. 174/790) and is also of dubious authenticity. Medieval scholarship already voiced doubts about these traditions, and more recent scholarship has only cast further doubt on the authenticity of these materials by demonstrating that they plagiarize traditions from the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* compiled by a later Medinan scholar, Mūsā ibn ʿUqba (d. 141/758). Their contents, moreover, are often considerably at odds with other materials attributable with greater certainty to ʿUrwah.[42] In any case, if the Egyptian recension of ʿUrwah's *Maghāzī* is a forgery, it is still an early one: M. J. Kister has shown that a ninth-century papyrus fragment first edited by Nabia Abbott (see fig. 9) preserves an excerpt from the spurious *Maghāzī* attributed to ʿUrwah, or at least a text upon which the forgery relied.[43] The Egyptian recension of ʿUrwah's *Maghāzī* thus likely originates no later than the latter half of the eighth century. It also was not an exceptional case: a scholar from Baghdad named Abū Ḥassān al-Ziyādī (d. 156–243/773–857) also reputedly compiled and redacted his own *Maghāzī ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr,* but it too has not survived, and much of the contents of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ziyādī's compilation seem likely to have

42. E.g., Görke and Schoeler 2008, 18–19; Motzki, Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Anthony 2010, 411–15. The skepticism often expressed over whether not ʿUrwah did indeed live in Egypt is, in my estimation, overblown. Our best information for ʿUrwah's time in Egypt comes from a statement attributed to him recorded by al-Balādhurī (*Futūḥ,* 217–218): "I settled in Egypt for seven years and married there. I found its inhabitants to be exhausted [*majāhīd*], for yoke beyond what they could bear had been placed upon them, even though ʿAmr [ibn al-ʿĀṣ] had conquered the land by a treaty and covenant [*bi-ṣulḥ wa-ʿahd*] with certain imposed burdens." This seems to come from Ibn Saʿd (who cites al-Wāqidī), but it does not appear in the printed versions of his *Ṭabaqāt.* According to another tradition (Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 40: 271–72; Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 4:323), ʿUrwah left Medina for Basra to obtain a salary from Ibn ʿAbbās when his brother ʿAbdallāh refused to distribute his younger brothers their salaries until they paid off the collective debt their house had accrued in the wake of their father's assassination after he fled the battlefield in the midst of the battle of the Camel (36/656). If true, ʿUrwah could hardly have been older than fourteen at the time, for ʿUrwah was said to have been born in the last year of ʿUmar's caliphate (A.H. 23) and Ibn ʿAbbās was only governor of Basra shortly after Rajab 36/January 657; see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 3390 and *EI²,* s.v. "ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās" (Cl. Gilliot). The Egyptian historian Ibn Yūnus (d. 347/958) also mentions ʿUrwah's time in Egypt in his *Kitāb al-Ghurabā',* a work dedicated to foreign scholars who had come to Egypt. According to Ibn Yūnus, ʿUrwah spent seven years in Egypt, where he allegedly also married a Yemeni princess whose family had migrated there during the Islamic conquests (Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 40: 242). Although Ibn Yūnus only mentions her lineage, elsewhere Ibn Yūnus mentions her brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ismayfaʿ ibn Waʿlah al-Sabaʾī by name and notes that he subsequently became a noble (*sharīf*) of Egypt and a transmitter of *ḥadīth* of some repute (Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 17: 478–79). Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 221/845) writes in passing that when his brother Ibn al-Zubayr announced his intention to depose Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiyah, ʿUrwah was in Egypt, whence he traveled to join his brother in the Ḥijāz (Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt,* 1: 153).

43. Kister 1964. For the date of the papyrus fragment, see Abbott 1957, 65ff., which misidentifies the fragment as belonging to the *Maghāzī* of Maʿmar ibn Rāshid. Cf. Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 3: 180–81 (Mūsā ibn ʿUqba), and Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil,* 490 (ʿUrwah).

FIGURE 9. Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago no. 17653, a late second/eighth-century Egyptian papyrus fragment of a *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* likely based on the Maghāzī of the Medinan scholar Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah (d. A.H. 141/ 758 C.E.). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

been spuriously attributed to ʿUrwah as well.[44] Such dubious books spuriously attributed to early scholars proliferated in the ninth century C.E. For instance, a *Maghāzī* book attributed to Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 110/728), a Yemeni scholar of ʿUrwah's generation, also survives in part.[45] However, as Michael Pregill has shown, the *Maghāzī* attributed to Wahb was also likely forged by the main transmitter of the work, ʿAbd al-Munʿim ibn Idrīs (d. 228/842), a man sniffed out as a forger by *ḥadīth* scholars such as Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354/965).[46] In the case of ʿUrwah, our best window into the early character of his transmission of *maghāzī* traditions seems to be the letters that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān. And it is to these that we now turn.

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44. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist,* 1: 339; Abū Hassān al-Ziyādī also appears a transmitter of Ibn al-Kalbī's work (Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh,* ed. Houtsma, 2: 4) and was an important source for Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's *Kitāb Baghdād* (see *GAS,* 1: 316).

45. See Khoury 1972; cf. Kister 1974 and 1977.

46. Pregill 2008, 250–53; cf. Görke and Schoeler 2008, 269.

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The Letters of ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr

Nine letters attributed to ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, one of the famed "seven jurists [*fuqahāʾ*] of Medina," (d. ca. A.H. 93–94/711–13 C.E.), may constitute the earliest extant written sources about the life of Muḥammad. The letters are potentially extraordinary not just for how early they are but also for who wrote them (assuming they are authentic). ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr was the son of one the more prominent Companions of the Prophet, al-Zubayr ibn ʿAwwām (d. 36/656), and, through his mother Asmāʾ, a grandson of the first caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13/632–34). He belonged to the Asad clan of the tribe of Quraysh, and, hence, to the upper echelons of the conquest élite of early Islamic and Umayyad society, and lived most of his life in the Ḥijāz, the region of Islam's original seat of power and its cultural epicenter. He was thus ideally placed to know the earliest traditions about Muḥammad's life.

Although addressed to two Umayyad caliphs, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705) and his son and successor, al-Walīd I (r. 86–96/705–715), the letters attributed to ʿUrwah presumably reflect what he taught his students in his public *majlis,* or "sitting session." If authentic, ʿUrwah's correspondence with these caliphs certainly postdates 73/692, the year of his political reconciliation with the Umayyads in the wake ʿAbd al-Malik's crushing defeat of his elder brother, ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, whose failed bid to become the leader the early Islamic polity ʿUrwah had supported.

That victory was a watershed event for the Umayyads. It put a decisive end to the Zubayrids' efforts to seize the caliphate from their grasp and inaugurated a new stage in the ideological orientation of the early Islamic polity under Umayyad leadership. Henceforth the Umayyads placed confessions of God's oneness and of Muḥammad's messengership front and center in an array of state-commissioned

public manifestations of their far-reaching, imperial power. ʿUrwah himself abandoned Mecca and returned to Medina, the city of his birth, where he spent the remainder of his life as a scholar and teacher. The historicity of ʿUrwah's residence in Medina during this time seems beyond reasonable doubt. Maysāʾ al-Ghabbān has recently discovered an inscription on the Ḥismā plateau dated A.H. 80—which is to say during ʿUrwah's lifetime—that mentions him by name.[1]

The original copies of ʿUrwah's letters do not survive, and neither likely does their exact wording, given the vagaries of their transmission. All that remains of them are citations and excerpts embedded in later works, most completely in the works of Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). The authenticity of most (although not all) of these letters was endorsed by Aloys Sprenger (1813–1893) and Josef Horovitiz (1874–1931),[2] and it has more recently been vigorously defended by Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler,[3] but ʿUrwah's authorship of the letters is also ardently contested, most prominently in recent years by Stephen Shoemaker.[4]

My intent here is not to settle this debate over the letters' authenticity but, rather, to make them more accessible to a broad readership, since, to my knowledge, no attempt has hitherto been made both to collate this corpus and to translate it in its entirety into English.[5] However, I must confess that the very process of translating and gathering these texts has mitigated much of my own skepticism about the authenticity of this corpus—or, rather, what remains thereof. A number of the letters' internal features argue in favor of their authenticity, or at least that of most of them. As Görke has observed, in terms of sheer content the letters are quite "matter-of-fact . . . [and] contain almost no miracle stories and very few embellishments"—hence, they strike a reader of the broader *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus as an early, even relatively primitive, sampling of the historical memory of the

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1. Ghabbān 2016–17, 206–7 (no. 139). My thanks to M.S.M. Saifullah for drawing my attention to this inscription. This graffito, by Ḥabīb ibn Abī Ḥabīb, a non-Arab client (*mawlā*) of ʿUrwah's, begs God's forgiveness and asks that Ḥabīb be granted the honor of being martyred while fighting in the Path of God. On the theme of martyrdom and religious warfare in early Islamic graffiti, see Lindstedt forthcoming *a*.

2. See Sprenger 1850, 108; Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 26.

3. Görke and Schoeler 2008.

4. Shoemaker 2011; cf. the riposte in Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler 2012. See also the doubts expressed by Prémare 2002, 14–16, and the confidence expressed in Azmeh 2004b, 34, 87ff.

5. Translations of some of the letters into Italian appeared in Leone Caetani's monumental *Annali dell'Islām;* see Caetani 1905–26, 1: 267–68 (§269), 307–8 (§ 324), 471 (§ 30) and 2 (1): 105–7 (§39), 151–52 (§ 113), and 166–67 (§139). A German translation of the letters appeared in the first substantial Western study of the traditions attributed to ʿUrwah, Stülpnagel 1957, 61–83, but Stülpnagel's study and his translation have long been neglected, especially in anglophone scholarship. The sections of the letters that appear scattered throughout the *Tārīkh* of Ṭabarī have also been translated into English. I note where this is the case below.

FIGURE 10. Chains of transmission for the letters attributed to the Medinan scholar ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr.

Medinan elites.[6] ʿUrwah's correspondence thus offers a glimpse not so much into the earliest biography of Muḥammad as of the early "biographical prose"[7] that lay at the basis of the fuller accounts of later generations. Also, the letters primarily focus on the narrative exegesis of specific verses from the Qurʾan rather than the transmission of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) for their own sake.

Moreover, much of the letters' contents evoke themes and stories potentially conducive to a Zubayrid–Umayyad reconciliation, or at least reflecting their shared interests, as discussed in chapter 3, which would seem somewhat out of place in later generations who lived under the shadow of Abbasid, rather than Umayyad, rule. Other than the Prophet, himself a Qurashī of the Hāshim clan, the most prominent figures featured in the stories recounted in this correspondence are either from the Umayyad clan of Quraysh, the Asad clan of the Quraysh (to which the Zubayrids belonged), or ʿUrwah's maternal relations, such as Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (his maternal grandfather) and his daughters, Asmāʾ and ʿĀʾishah (ʿUrwah's mother and aunt, respectively). In these letters, therefore, one finds a self-conscious topical focus in keeping with ʿUrwah's purported eagerness to effect a reconciliation between the Umayyads and those Zubayrids who survived the protracted civil war. That the letters were written in response to the caliph's queries

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6. Görke 2011b, 146. However, this observation should not be taken to suggest that the traditions transmitted on ʿUrwah's authority were devoid of any miracles or that offer raw historical material. See the comments on the Ḥudaybiyah tradition in Görke 2000, 260–61.

7. The phrase is from Robinson 2015b, 133.

and exhibit a deference for ʿUrwah's erudition on historical and juridical arcana also fits well with the image of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik found in other sources.

Absences in a corpus can speak volumes as well. Notably excluded from ʿUrwah's letters is any mention of the Prophet's son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Hāshim clan of Quraysh. This absence is all the more conspicuous when one considers the prominence accorded to ʿAlī in other accounts of the events narrated by the letters, such as Muḥammad's *hijrah* to Yathrib/Medina and the conquest of Mecca.[8] Given the hostility to ʿAlī not only of the Zubayrids and Umayyads but also of ʿUrwah's maternal relations, all this argues strongly in favor of the letters' authenticity. These issues all merit further investigation.[9]

THE CHAINS OF TRANSMISSION
OF ʿURWAH'S LETTERS

The letters of ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr survive in their most complete form in the works of a premier scholar of the Abbasid-era, Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)—more specifically in his universal history, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* and his seminal Qurʾan commentary, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*. However, al-Ṭabarī's corpus is neither the only nor the earliest attestation to ʿUrwah's letters. Explicit, albeit fragmentary, citations of letters attributed to ʿUrwah appear in the recensions of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822), the *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/844–45), the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), two historical works of the Baṣran historian ʿUmar ibn Shabbah (d. ca. 262/875), and the *Tafsīr* of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) as transmitted by his son, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/890). This list comprises at least six scholars of diverse geographical provenance who claim to have transmitted the letters of ʿUrwah—or at least excerpts thereof—and some of whose lives and scholarly careers precede that of al-Ṭabarī by decades at least, and, in some cases, by over a century.

That these letters survived in any form whatsoever is noteworthy. *Ḥadīth* scholars did not share modern historians' fetish for documents as the supreme arbiters of historical authenticity; hence, it is quite rare to find traditions transmitted in the letter form, since it potentially detracted from, rather than added to, a tradition's claim to authenticity in the eyes of the early tradents of the Islamic tradition. The sine qua non of scholarly knowledge in the second/eighth century was, rather, the oral transmission and aural reception of traditions via a teacher-pupil relationship that required the mastery of texts through memorization. Indeed, attitudes to the use of

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8. Kister 1974, 569–70.

9. The effects of partisan and political attitudes on the ʿUrwah corpus and on al-Zubayr's descendents more broadly are explored in Hedāyatpanāh 2013.

letters for the preservation of the tradition could be downright hostile—as Michael
Cook has noted, the accumulated private letters of scholars were often burned to
prevent them from falling into the hands of anyone other than the scholar and the
original recipient(s).[10] In ʿUrwah's day, written records of traditions served private,
rather than public, purposes, and early scholars of his generation often were at pains
to prevent the dissemination of letters they had written, or writings that they per-
sonally owned, even instructing that they be destroyed after they died.[11] When texts
owned by scholars did survive their deaths, it was often as family heirlooms. Both
Nabia Abbot and Michael Cook have noted the frequent overlap between family
lines of transmission and the transmission of written materials,[12] a pattern that one
also sees in the transmission of the bulk of ʿUrwah's letters by his son Hishām.

The letters ascribed to ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr survive in three chains of trans-
mission, although the first is far more broadly attested. They are as follows:

Chain 1. The Baṣran Transmission

ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith ← Abān al-ʿAṭṭār ← Hishām ibn ʿUrwah ←
ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr

The Baṣran line of transmission, the principle source for ʿUrwah's letters in Ṭabarī's
Tafsīr and *Tārīkh*, is most fully attested. This chain of authorities, or *isnād,* depicts
the letters as written in response to inquiries the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik
ibn Marwān sent to ʿUrwah. The Baṣran *ḥadīth* scholar ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd
al-Wārith ibn Saʿīd al-Tamīmī (d. 207/822–23, Baṣrah) is the common link for this
line. Ṭabarī cites his authority via his son, ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad
(d. 252/866, Baṣrah) in his *Tafsīr,* but ʿAbd al-Wārith also transmitted the letters to
another Baṣran scholar, ʿAlī ibn Naṣr al-Jahḍamī (d. 250/864, Baṣrah), whose
authority Ṭabarī cites in his *Tārīkh* as well. That ʿAlī ibn Naṣr's transmission of the
letters truly constituted an independent transmission is confirmed by its citation
in the Qurʾan commentary of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/890).

It might seem as somewhat odd that the letters survive in a Baṣran transmission,
given that ʿUrwah and his son Hishām were scions of a distinguished Medinan
family of Quraysh. Hishām's scholarly biography sheds some light on this. In the
wake of Abbasid revolution, Hishām undertook several journeys to Iraq. His depar-
ture seems to have transpired sometime after the Ḥajj season of 140/758, but he may
have returned to Medina, where he allegedly supported the revolt of Muḥammad al-
Nafs al-Zakiyyah in 145/762. However, claims that Hishām supported Muḥammad

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10. M. Cook 1997, 481.

11. Melchert 2014, 219–20.

12. Abbot 1967, 36–37, cited in M. Cook 1997, 478–79. Even the so-called Constitution of Medina
itself survived as an heirloom of descendants of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb; see Lecker 2004, 7.

al-Nafs al-Zakiyyah's rebellion seem questionable in light of the honors paid him by the Abbasid caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr after his death in Baghdād.[13]

Hishām ibn ʿUrwah gathered a considerable following in Kūfah and Baṣrah and eventually even joined the coterie of scholars patronized in Baghdād by the city's founder, al-Manṣūr.[14] Hishām's activities in Iraq tarnished his reputation in the eyes of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) and the Medinans, who accused him of being lax in transmitting among the Iraqis not only traditions learned directly from his father but also the reports of others.[15] According to Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/844), Hishām first met the caliph in Kūfah,[16] likely in nearby al-Hāshimiyyah where al-Manṣūr resided prior to the construction of Baghdād.[17] It was during a subsequent visit with the caliph in Baghdād that Hishām died in the city ca. 146/763–64 while at al-Manṣūr's residence. The caliph honored Hishām with an elaborate funeral, presided over by al-Manṣūr himself.[18] Basrans ranked Hishām along with Ibn Sīrīn and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as one of their most revered authorities.[19]

Assuming for the moment that the line of transmission from Hishām is authentic, then the Baṣran traditionist Abān ibn Yazīd al-ʿAṭṭār presumably acquired a copy of the letters by some means. Yet it seems unlikely that Abān did so via audition (samāʿ), since he does not otherwise transmit traditions on Hishām's authority aside from the letters. As a traditionist of the second/eighth century, Abān al-ʿAṭṭār is a frustratingly obscure figure. Although ḥadīth authorities usually vouch for Abān's trustworthiness,[20] no information survives regarding the nature of the relationship between Hishām and Abān. The best that even the prodigious ḥadīth critic Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/975–76) can muster concerning Abān is to say, "I surmise that he ranks among the trustworthy [arjū annahu min ahl al-ṣidq]."[21]

Chain 2. The Medinan Transmission

This line of transmission is attested only for letters 5 and 9. In this Medinan chain, ʿUrwah addresses his letters, not to ʿAbd al-Malik, as in the Baṣran version, but rather to the caliph's son, al-Walīd I (r. 86–96/705–15). Two lines are attested for

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13. Elad 2016, 367–69.

14. Ibn Bakkār, *Jamharah,* 303–4.

15. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 16: 61; Balkhī, *Qubūl,* 253–54. According to one report, Mālik went so far as to denounce Hishām as a liar; see Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 20.

16. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 321.

17. Elad 2016, 369.

18. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 16: 62

19. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 16: 58.

20. Abān al-ʿAṭṭār appears as trusted authority in the ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim (Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 7: 431–33), although some early ḥadīth scholars objected that he was accused of espousing Qadarite beliefs. See Balkhī, *Qubūl,* 404, 407, and *Maqālāt,* 193, citing the *K. al-Amṣār* of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), on which see Pellat 1984, 134, no. 55.

21. *Kāmil,* 2: 382.

this transmission that both converge at the Medinan traditionist ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī l-Zinād.

> 2a. ʿAbdallāh ibn Wahb ← ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī l-Zinād ← Abū l-Zinād ← ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr

This is the line of transmission for letter 5. Ṭabarī's source for this version is the Egyptian Yūnus ibn ʿAbd al-Aʿlā (d. 264/877, Egypt), who transmits it from the prolific and influential student of the Medinan school, ʿAbdallāh ibn Wahb al-Miṣrī (d. 197/813, Egypt). Given that Ṭabarī only cites the *isnād* for this version in his *Tafsīr,* some scholars have justifiably regarded its independent existence with skepticism. However, the third/eighth-century historian Ibn Shabbah also cites excerpts from this letter in his histories of Mecca and Medina a generation before Ṭabarī. Ibn Shabbah's citations also demonstrate that the text of the Medinan version of the letter largely aligned with that of the Baṣran tradition. Ibn Shabbah's source for the letter is a Medinan, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mundhir al-Ḥizāmī (d. 236/850, Medina).[22] The *ḥadīth* scholar Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/848) records an interesting anecdote about him: Ibn Maʿīn claimed to have copied a book of Ibn Wahb's *maghāzī* traditions from Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mundhir.[23] Although this book is no longer extant, many other works of Ibn Wahb's are partially extant and have been edited by Miklos Muranyi. It is possible, therefore, that Ibn Wahb's *Maghāzī* also drew from ʿUrwah's letters.

Ibn Wahb himself cites the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī l-Zinād (d. 174/790–91, Baghdad) and his father Abū l-Zinād ʿAbdallāh ibn Dhakwān (d. 130/748, Medina), a freedman (*mawlā*) of the caliph ʿUthmān's family and a renowned scholar of the city. Abū l-Zinād is a figure who deserves further scrutiny. One presumes that ʿUrwah's son Hishām inherited the letters of his father and then transmitted them, but how did Abū l-Zinād acquire a copy? As a scholar, Abū l-Zinād was known as "skilled in writing and arithmetic [*ṣāḥib kitābin wa-ḥisābin*]" and served in Medina as a scribe for Khālid ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ibn al-Ḥārith ibn al-Ḥakam and ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He was, in other words, a professional scribe and had access to archival documents and correspondence. Indeed, when requested to do so by the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, Abū l-Zinād knew how to access and bring to the caliph "the accounts of the Medinan bureau [*ḥisāb dīwān al-madīnah*]," and when the caliph once tested his knowledge, Abū l-Zinād knew, unlike the learned Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, that ʿUthmān used to pay the Medinans their salary in the

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22. Ibrāhīm ibn Mundhir's Qurʾān commentary is partially extant. It is probable that Ibn Shabbah cited the tradition from the section on Sūrat al-Tawbah, which unfortunately does not survive in the extant fragment.

23. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 6: 181; Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 2: 209. ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb al-Andalusī cites al-Ḥizāmī in his *Kitāb al-Tārīkh;* however, in this work al-Ḥizāmī relies on the corpus of al-Wāqidī rather than on Ibn Wahb. See Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tārīkh,* 77–8, 82–85, 93, 96. 98, 102, 117, 149.

month of Muḥarram (i.e., the first month of the year in the *hijrī* calendar).[24] For lack of a better characterization, Abū l-Zinād was effectively a bureaucrat-scholar well acquainted with the official documents of Medina.

2b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī l-Zinād ← Hishām ibn ʿUrwah ← ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr

This is the line of transmission for letter 9. The historian al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) is the only scholar who cites the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī l-Zinād directly, and all the sources that cite this letter—the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Saʿd, the *Ansāb* of al-Balādhurī, and the *Tārīkh* of al-Ṭabarī—cite al-Wāqidī's authority. Noteworthy here is the absence of Abū l-Zinād from the *isnād,* given his presence in 2a. In this line of transmission, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān cites the authority of Hishām ibn ʿUrwah rather than his father Abū l-Zinād.

Chain 3. The Zuhrī Transmission

Letter 4 is attested only in the transmission of ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr's prominent student, the Medinan scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). This letter survives in two versions transmitted by the most seminal authors of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition: a shorter one, quoted in the corpus of al-Zuhrī's pupil Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), and a long version quoted by al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) on the authority of al-Zuhrī's nephew Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh. Görke and Schoeler are disinclined to accept the authenticity of this line of transmission.[25]

A TRANSLATION OF THE LETTERS ATTRIBUTED TO ʿURWAH IBN AL-ZUBAYR

The translations below are mine and made directly from the Arabic texts indicated in the citations. I have, however, consulted the English translations of Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* and Alfred Guillaume's translation of Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrah* in the process, as well as the German translations by Joachim von Stülpnagel. Full references and citations of these Arabic source texts as well as the English translations consulted are given at the heading of each letter. The corpus provided here does *not* represent the sum total of traditions and reports attributed to ʿUrwah, historical or otherwise. Indeed, most reports on his authority are not transmitted in letter form but appear in the preferred form of orally transmitted reports (*akhbār;* sg. *khabar*). For further documentation and analysis of the ʿUrwah corpus beyond the letters, the reader is pointed to the work of Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler.

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24. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 265; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 5: 120.
25. Görke and Schoeler 2008, 255–57, 285–86.

LETTER 1. FROM THE PERSECUTIONS IN MECCA
TO THE HIJRAH TO YATHRIB

SOURCES: Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* ed. al-Turkī, 11: 180–82 + id., *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1234–37 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 2: 375–77| trans. Watt and McDonald 1998, 145–47]; cf. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* 1: 1180–81, 1224–25 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 2: 328–29, 366| trans. Watt and McDonald 1998, 98–99, 136–37] and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 42: 510.

§1. 1 ʿAbd l-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad related to me, saying: my father related to me, saying: Abān al-ʿAṭṭār related to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah related to us from his father that: ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān wrote to [ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr] asking him about several things, so ʿUrwah wrote to him:

2 Peace be upon you. I praise God to you—there is no god but He. Now to the heart of the matter. You have written me asking about the departure [*makhraj*] of the Messenger of God [ṣ] from Mecca, so I will inform you about it. There is no power, no strength except from Him.

Early Persecutions

§2. 1 Related to the Messenger of God's departure from Mecca was the fact that God had given him prophecy. And what a fine prophet! What a fine lord! What fine kin! May God reward him well and allow us to see his face in Paradise! May God preserve us in His community of faith [*millah*] from the day He gives us life until the day He causes us to die and the day He resurrects us from the dead!

2 When he summoned his tribe to the guidance and light with which God had sent him and which He had revealed to him, at first they did not distance themselves from him when he began to summon them. They nearly even listened to him until he mentioned their false deities [*ṭawāghītahum*]. Some people arrived from al-Ṭāʾif, wealthy men from Quraysh, and rebuked him for that. They treated him harshly and despised what he said [to them]. Whoever would heed them, they instigated to harass him so that most people kept away from him and abandoned him, except for those whom God preserved, and even they were few.

3 Things remained this way as long as God ordained it to be so, but then their leaders conspired together to compel those who had followed him from their children, brethren, and clans to leave God's religion. It was a persecution [*fitnah*] that sent shockwaves throughout the people of Islam who followed the Messenger of God.[26] Those who were lured away were lured away, but God shielded those whom He willed.

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26. The phrase, 'the people of Islam [*ahl al-islām*] who followed the Messenger of God', has been added from Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1181 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 2: 328]. The locution *ahl al-islām* is first attested in 71/691 in an epitaph from Aswan belonging to ʿAbbāsah bint Jurayj. See chapter 1 above.

4 When that befell the Muslims, the Messenger of God commanded them to depart for the land of Abyssinia. In Abyssinia there was a righteous king called the Negus. None were oppressed in his land, and because of that, word of his righteousness spread. The land of Abyssinia was a destination for trade where the Quraysh would conduct business and where they had found a lucrative livelihood, safety, and a fair market, so the Messenger of God commanded them to go there. Most of them went there when they found themselves beleaguered in Mecca. He feared what the trials of persecution [al-fitan] would do to them, but he himself remained and did not leave. That remained the case for several years as the Quraysh continued to deal harshly with those who became Muslim. Islam still spread in Mecca after that, and even men from their nobles and indomitable warriors [min ashrāfihim wa-manaʿatihim] joined the religion.

5 When the Quraysh saw that, they relented and let the Messenger of God and his companions be for a time. Such was the first persecution [al-fitnah al-ūlā] that led to the departure of those companions of God's Messenger who set out for Abyssinia out of fear, fleeing the trials and tremors it brought.

The ʿAqabah Meeting

§3. 1 Once they were let alone and those of their ranks who joined Islam had joined it, word spread that they were now being let alone. When word reached the Messenger of God's companions in Abyssinia that their fellow believers in Mecca were being let alone and that they were no longer being persecuted, some of those who had emigrated to the land of Abyssinia returned to Mecca, and they nearly even found security there.[27] Those who embraced Islam[28] began to increase and multiply. Many people from the Anṣār of Medina became Muslim, and Islam spread throughout Medina. The Medinans began visiting the Messenger of God [ṣ] in Mecca, and when the Quraysh saw that, they spurred each other on to compel them to abandon their faith and to deal harshly with them. They seized them and were eager lure them away [from their religion], and it was the final persecution [al-fitnah al-ākhirah]. A massive effort struck them, but these were the final persecutions, of which there were two: a persecution that led to the departure of those who went to the land of Abyssinia when he commanded them to go and to whom

27. This long account—narrated continuously in Ṭabarī's tafsīr—is broken up in the Tārīkh. From here onwards, the second excerpt begins in Ṭabarī's Tārīkh, but the sentence before differs from the text found in his tafsīr, reading: "When those who had emigrated to Abyssinia prior to the Emigration [hijrah] of the Prophet to Medina returned . . ." (Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1224 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 2: 366]). This sentence is likely the result of an editorial intervention by Ṭabarī, inserted to render the truncated text more intelligible.

28. "Those who embraced Islam . . . ," from Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1225 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 2: 366]; omitted in Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ, 11: 182.

he granted his permission to depart there, and another persecution once they returned and [the Quraysh] saw the number of Medinans who came to them.

2 Afterwards the seventy delegates [*nuqabāʾ*] from Medina—the leaders of those who had become Muslims—came to the Messenger of God. They caught up with him during the Ḥajj and gave him their allegiance at al-ʿAqabah. They concluded their pact with him on these terms, "We are of you, and you are of us. Any of your companions who come to us, or even you yourself, we shall protect just as we protect our own."

3 From that moment on the Quraysh dealt harshly with them, so the Messenger of God commanded his companions to depart for Medina. It was during the final persecution that the Messenger of God made his followers leave and during which he himself left, and it was concerning this that God revealed, "Battle them until persecution [*fitnah*] is no more and all religion is for God" (Q. Anfāl 8:39).

The Prophet's Hijrah *with Abū Bakr*

§4. 1 When the companions of the Messenger of God had departed for Medina and before he—that is, the Messenger of God—had departed and before God had revealed this verse in which He issued the command to fight, Abū Bakr sought his permission [to leave Mecca]. He had not set out with those companions who had already departed. The Messenger of God held him back and told him, "Wait for me. Perhaps I too shall receive God's permission to leave."

2 Now Abū Bakr had already purchased two riding camels to ready them to set out for Medina along with the companions of the Messenger of God. When the Messenger of God asked him to wait and informed him that he hoped to hear from his Lord that He permitted him to depart, he kept the camels with him and fed them until they grew fat, expecting to accompany the Messenger of God. When the Prophet's departure was delayed, Abū Bakr said, "Do you still hope that He will give you permission?" "Yes," he replied, so he waited on him and remained steadfast.

3 ʿĀʾishah informed me that while they were in their house one afternoon—just Abū Bakr and his two daughters, ʿĀʾishah and Asmāʾ—the Messenger of God suddenly showed up just when the midday heat had reached its peak. Not a day would pass that he would not come to Abū Bakr's house at the beginning and the end of the day, but when Abū Bakr saw that the Prophet had come at midday, he said to him, "Prophet of God, something must have happened to have brought you here!" When the Prophet entered their home, he told Abū Bakr,

"Tell whoever is in your house to leave."
"No one is watching us," he replied, "there are only my two daughters."
"God has granted me permission to set out for Medina," he said.
"Messenger of God!" Abū Bakr said, "I shall accompany you!"
"Yes, you shall accompany me," he said.

"Take one of my two riding camels," Abū Bakr said, and these were the riding camels that Abū Bakr had been feeding to make ready for the journey once God had granted the Messenger of God permission. Thus, he gave him one of the two riding camels, saying, "Take her, Messenger of God, and ride her." "I'll accept her," the Prophet said, "but only in exchange for her fair price."

4 ʿĀmir ibn Fuhayrah was a man from the Azd tribe born of a slave. He was owned by al-Ṭufayl ibn ʿAbdallah ibn Sakhbarah, who was Abū l-Ḥārith ibn al-Ṭufayl. He was the half-brother of ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr through their mother. ʿĀmir ibn Fuhayrah had become a Muslim while he was still their slave, but Abū Bakr purchased him and had him set free. He followed Islam well. When the Prophet and Abū Bakr set out, Abū Bakr still had rights to milk a flock of sheep that passed by his family in the evening, so he sent ʿĀmir with the flock to Thawr. ʿĀmir ibn Fuhayrah had been taking the sheep each evening to the cave in Thawr, the same cave that God mentioned in the Qurʾān.[29] He also sent ahead of them a man from the ʿAbd ibn ʿAdī clan, a confederate of the Quraysh from the Sahm clan, then the house of al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil. That man from the ʿAdī clan was a pagan at the time, but they hired him and he served as their guide along the path [leading out of Mecca].

5 During those nights that the two remained in the cave, Abū Bakr's son ʿAbdallāh used to visit them when evening came around to bring news from Mecca. He would then return to Mecca by morning. Each night ʿĀmir would lead the sheep out, and they would take their milk. He would then lead the sheep out to pasture early the next day and pass the morning with other people's shepherds. No one suspected him of anything, until eventually no one spoke any more of the two of them and word came to them that the people no longer spoke about them.

6 Their guide brought them their two camels, and they left. He brought ʿĀmir ibn Fuhayrah along with them to serve them and to aid them. Abū Bakr had him sit behind him and allowed him to sit on his saddle in turns. No one accompanied them except ʿĀmir ibn Fuhayrah and the brother of the ʿAdī clan who guided them along the path. He led them through the lowlands of Mecca, and they journeyed on, trekking below ʿUsfān parallel with the coast. Then he sought to take them to rejoin the main route after they traversed Qudayd. Then he followed the Kharrār path and trekked across the pass of al-Marah. He then took the route called al-Mudlijah, which lies between the ʿAmq and al-Rawḥāʾ routes, until they reached the route of al-ʿArj. They arrived at the spring called al-Ghābir to the right of Rakūbah and then scaled Baṭn Riʾm. At last they had approached Medina just before noon from the quarter of the ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf clan. It is reported that they only remained there for two days, though the ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf clan claims that they resided there longer than that. He then led his riding camel onwards, and she

29. See Q. Tawbah 9:40

followed him until he entered the quarter of the Najjār clan. The Messenger of God showed them an unused patch of earth [*mirbad:* used for drying dates or for confining animals] that was in the midst of their homes.

COMMENTARY: While much of the narrative in this letter on Muḥammad's *hijrah* accords with later tradition (and indeed forms its basis),[30] the claim made at §2.2 that Mecca's Quraysh were initially receptive to the public preaching of Muḥammad's message until the arrival of certain wealthy Qurashī interlopers from al-Ṭāʾif is unique to the ʿUrwah tradition. The usual scheme portrays Muḥammad's initial preaching as having taken place in secret and mostly gaining him followers among his kin and the downtrodden; the ardent opposition from the Meccans and Quraysh arises only after he begins to proclaim his message publicly and denounce the Meccans' ancestral gods. Those wealthy Quraysh who first opposed Muḥammad are not named in the letter. Hichem Djaït has speculated that ʿUrwah suppressed the names of other wealthy Meccans who owned lands in al-Ṭāʾif because many of them came from the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik's ancestral clan of Quraysh, ʿAbd Shams;[31] however, an Egyptian tradition attributed to ʿUrwah does identify these opponents, naming not individuals from the clans of ʿAbd Shams but, rather, two individuals from the Makhzūm clan of Quraysh, "Abū Jahl" (ʿAmr ibn Hishām) and al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah. Both are well known opponents of Muḥammad's early preaching in the broader corpus of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition.[32] Notably missing from this account of the Meccan phase of Muḥammad's preaching is any mention of the "satanic verses" affair, which plays a prominent role the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions of the subsequent generation of scholars.[33]

LETTER 2. KHADĪJAH'S DEATH AND THE PROPHET'S MARRIAGE TO ʿĀʾISHAH

SOURCE: Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1770 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 3: 163–64| trans. Poonawala 1990, 131].

§1. ʿAlī ibn Naṣr related to us, saying: ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith related to us, and ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad also related to me, saying: my father

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30. Görke and Schoeler 2005; Görke and Schoeler 2008, chap. 3.

31. Djaït 2014, 2: 366–68

32. Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim, *Āḥād,* 1: 442–43; Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 20: 5; and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 57: 153–54. A similarly worded tradition—ostensibly cited from the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah and transmitted on the authority of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī—appears in Taymī, *Dalāʾil,* 864–71 (citing the *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* of al-Ṭabarānī); cf. Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 285ff.

33. A version of the satanic verses story is indeed attributed to ʿUrwah, but the authenticity of its ascription to him is dubious. Cf. S. Ahmed 2017, 105ff.; Anthony 2019a, 241–45.

related to me, saying: Abān al-ʿAṭṭār related to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah related to us from ʿUrwah that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān:

§2. You have written to me regarding Khadījah bint Khuwaylid and you ask, "When did she pass away?" She passed away before the departure of God's Messenger from Mecca by three years, or thereabouts. He married ʿĀʾishah once Khadījah had passed away. The Messenger of God saw ʿĀʾishah twice [before that] and was told, "She will be your wife."[34] On that day ʿĀʾishah was six years old. Then the Messenger of God consummated his marriage with ʿĀʾishah after he had gone to Medina, and the day he consummated his marriage with her she was nine years old.

COMMENTARY. ʿĀʾishah's age at the consummation of her marriage has been the source of much modern controversy, but the assertion that she was six years old when betrothed and nine years old when the marriage was consummated is unanimously attested in traditions attributed to her nephew ʿUrwah and the Medinan scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī.[35] Although pre-pubertal marriage was not the norm in either Roman or Late Antiquity, it is attested in some populations of the era, especially those outside urban centers. Roman and, subsequently, Byzantine law forbade the marriage of pre-pubertal girls (defined as girls under the age of twelve or thirteen, respectively),[36] but this in no way eliminated pre-pubertal marriages entirely.[37] Jewish and Islamic law were, by contrast, far more permissive of men contracting and consummating marriages to pre-pubertal females.[38] Based on the available data, it appears that ʿĀʾishah's age at her first marriage was not an extreme outlier in the seventh-century Ḥijāz.[39]

34. Likely in a numinous vision; see Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 2: 64–65, where Gabriel assumes ʿĀʾishah's form and appears to Muḥammad in his sleep to announce the marriage. Only in Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 1 (2): 1031, citing a tradition from Mālik ibn Anas, does one find a "naturalistic" account: Muḥammad sees ʿĀʾishah playing on a swing and then approaches her mother, adamantly demanding that she be betrothed to him.

35. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 6: 162; Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 321 > Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 7: 284; and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Muntakhab,* 35 > Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 23: 28–29.

36. See the discussion of a sixth-century marriage contract drawn up in Nessana in Katzoff and Lewis 1990, 212. As early as the eighth century C.E., Byzantine law fixed the minimum age of consent for a girl to marry at thirteen and assigned a harsh punishment for the seduction of a girl under thirteen: slitting the man's nose and granting the girl one-half of his property (i.e., both exemplary punishment and civil damages). Laiou 1993, 122–23. Where such data have been surveyed, Christian girls' age at marriage was relatively high compared to the rest of population, but attributing this to Christianity as such seems dubious. Shaw 1987, 41–42.

37. Cf. Shaw 1987; Scheidel 2007.

38. Baugh 2017; Krakowski 2018, 113ff.

39. E.g., another of the Prophet's wives, Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar, had already married her first husband when, at ten years of age, she fled the persecutions of the Meccans alongside him to Axum. See Anthony and Bronson 2016, 96–97.

LETTER 3. THE BATTLE OF BADR

SOURCES: Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje 1: 1284–88 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 2:421–24| trans. Watt and McDonald 1987, 28–32]; cf. id., *Jāmiʿ,* 11: 41, 84.

§1. ʿAlī ibn Naṣr ibn ʿAlī [al-Jahḍamī] and ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith related to us—ʿAlī said: ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith related to us; and ʿAbd al-Wārith said: my father related to us—saying: ʿAbān al-ʿAṭṭār related to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah related to us from ʿUrwah that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān:

§2. 1 Now to the heart of the matter. You wrote me concerning Abū Sufyān[40] and his expedition to ask me about how it transpired. What happened to him is that Abū Sufyān was on a return journey from Syria with riders from the clans of Quraysh, about seventy in all. They had been trading in Syria and were heading back together with wealth and traded goods.

2 They mentioned this to the Messenger of God and his companions, for there had been a battle between them before that. Several warriors had been killed. Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī was killed in a raiding party at Nakhlah, and several captives were taken from Quraysh, including a man from the Mughīrah clan and their client Ibn Kaysān. ʿAbdallāh ibn Jaḥsh and Wāqid, a confederate of ʿAdī ibn Kaʿb, were the ones who attacked them, with a party of the companions of God's Messenger, whom he had sent out along with ʿAbdallāh ibn Jaḥsh. It was this event that provoked the war between the Messenger of God and Quraysh, and the first conflict in which they inflicted casualties on one another. That all happened before the trading expedition of Abū Sufyan and his cohort to Syria.

3 Later, after that, Abū Sufyān and the riders from Quraysh began to head back. Returning from Syria, they followed the coastal route. When the Messenger of God heard about them, he readied his companions and told them how much wealth they carried and how few they were in number. They set out only intending to go after Abū Sufyān and the riders that accompanied him. Seeing it as nothing more than a chance to plunder, they did not imagine that there might be a full-fledged battle when they met them. This is as God Almighty revealed concerning the incident, "your desire was for the party without weapons to be yours" (Q. Anfāl 8:7).

§3. 1 When Abū Sufyān heard that the companions of God's Messenger were heading his way, he dispatched a message to the Quraysh [in Mecca], "Muḥammad and his companions are heading for you, so protect your goods!" When the report

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40. An Umayyad Qurashī and the leader of Meccan opposition to Muḥammad, Abū Sufyān was the father of the Umayyad caliph Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān.

reached them, the Meccans rushed to their aid, for all of the clans of Kaʿb ibn Luʾayy had someone in Abū Sufyān's caravan.[41] The Kaʿb ibn Luʾayy clan provided the men, but no one from the ʿĀmir clan joined them except for those from the sub-clan of Mālik ibn Ḥisl. The Messenger of God and his companions heard no word of the reinforcements of Quraysh until the Prophet had arrived at Badr, which lay along the route taken by the riders of Quraysh who had followed the coastal route to Syria. Abū Sufyān, however, steered clear of Badr and stuck to the coastal route, for he feared an ambush at Badr.

2 The Prophet marched until they made camp at nightfall not far off from Badr. The Prophet dispatched al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām with a troop of his companions to Badr's water source, not suspecting that the Quraysh had set out against them, but while the Prophet stood praying, several water-carriers of the Quraysh suddenly came to draw water. Among those who had come to draw water was a black serving boy of the Ḥajjāj clan. The men whom the Messenger of God had dispatched to Badr's well with al-Zubayr seized the boy, and one of the slave's companions absconded towards the Quraysh. They headed back with the slave in order to bring him to the Messenger of God at the place where he had alighted for the evening. They questioned him about Abū Sufyān and his cohort since they were certain he was with them, but the slave began to tell them how the Quraysh had set out from Mecca and who their leaders were. He gave them an accurate account, but what he said was the most miserable news imaginable to them. At the time, they only sought to send their riders in pursuit of Abū Sufyān and his cohort.

3 All the while the Prophet was praying, completing the bows and prostrations, but he could see and hear how they were treating the slave. Whenever the slave mentioned to them that the Quraysh were coming their way, they beat him and called him a liar, saying, "You're just trying to hide the location of Abū Sufyān and his cohort!" Whenever they struck the slave a blow and asked him about Abū Sufyān and his cohort, he said, "Yes, this man is Abū Sufyān," but he actually knew nothing about them since he was just one of the water carriers for the Quraysh. The riders at the time were in fact just below them, as God Almighty declared, "Recall when you were on the near side of the valley and they were on the far side and the riders were below you" until "a matter already preordained" (Q. 8:42). Eventually they started to beat the slave if he told them, "The Quraysh have come to your location!" And if he told them, "This is Abū Sufyān," they would leave him be.

4 When the Prophet saw what they were doing, he withdrew from his prayer, for he had heard what the slave had told them. They claim the Messenger of God

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41. I.e., nearly all the main clans of Quraysh.

said, "By Him in whose hand my soul resides! You surely beat him when he's told the truth and leave him be when he's lied!"

"But he's telling us that the Quraysh [from Mecca] have come here," they said.

"And he's told the truth," the Prophet said. "Quraysh have set out to protect their riders." He then summoned the serving boy and questioned him, and he informed him about the Quraysh, saying, "I have no knowledge of Abū Sufyān."

"How many of them are there?" he asked him.

"I don't know," he answered, "but by God there's a great number of them."

They claim that the Prophet asked, "Who provided them with food the day before yesterday?" The slave named a man who fed them, and he asked, "And how many animals were butchered for them?" "Nine animals," he said. "Who provided them with food yesterday?" the Prophet asked, and again the slave named a man. "How many were butchered for them?" he asked. "Ten animals," he said.

They claim that the Prophet then said, "They number somewhere between seven hundred and a thousand men," and the forces of Quraysh that day numbered nine hundred and fifty men.

5 The Prophet then left and went down to the water source and filled the cisterns [with sand]. His camp arrayed themselves for battle until the enemy force arrived. When the Messenger of God arrived at Badr, he said, "This is where they will meet their end." They discovered that the Prophet had already beaten them to Badr and had taken up his position there. Once the Quraysh caught sight of him, they claim that the Prophet said, "These Quraysh have arrived with their rambling boasts to challenge You and to make a liar out of Your Messenger! O God, I ask of You what You promised me!"

6 When the Quraysh advanced, he turned to face them and cast the dust of the earth in their direction. God defeated them. Before they had even encountered the Prophet, a rider from Abū Sufyān and his traveling party reached them to tell them, "Go back!"—and the traveling party was ordering the Quraysh to return to al-Juḥfah—but they said, "By God we won't turn around until we go down to Badr and camp there for three nights so that the people of the Ḥijāz can see us. No Arab who sees us and the host we've gathered will dare battle us!" They were the ones about whom God Almighty revealed "those who in arrogance left their homes to be seen by the people" (Q. 8:47).

7 They met each other in battle, the Meccans and the Prophet, and God granted His Messenger victory. He disgraced the leaders of the infidels and granted the believers' hearts the vengeance they craved.

COMMENTARY. It is noteworthy that ʿUrwah's letter is written in response to an inquiry concerning role of the Umayyads' progenitor, Abū Sufyan, in the first major

thematic battle of Muḥammad's prophetic career, the battle of Badr fought in Ramaḍān 2/March 624.[42] Abū Sufyān remains unvanquished in the story in stark contrast to the heedless Abū Jahl, whose overconfidence proves his undoing. Indeed, according the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, Abū Sufyān was never vanquished outright by Muḥammad and his followers in pitched battle.[43] ʿUrwah's letter likewise depicts Abū Sufyān, in contrast to his allies from Quraysh, as canny enough to save his caravan and shrewdly averse to direct engagement with Muḥammad at Badr.

LETTER 4. ON AL-ḤUDAYBIYAH, A GLOSS ON Q. MUMTAḤANAH 60:10–12

SOURCES: version 1—Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 2: 326–27 (Ziyād al-Bakkāʾī) [trans. Guillaume, 509]; cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 22: 579 (Salamah ibn al-Faḍl); Bayhaqī, *Sunan,* 19: 149 (Yūnus ibn Bukayr); Abū Bakr al-Ḥāzimī, *Iʿtibār,* 222 (Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd).[44]

§1. Ibn Isḥāq said: al-Zuhrī related to me from ʿUrwah, saying:

§2. I went to see [ʿUrwah] while he was writing a letter to Ibn Abī Hunaydah, a companion of al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, for he had written to [ʿUrwah] asking about the word of God Most High (Q. Mumtaḥanah 60:10):

> Believers! When the believing women come to you as migrants, subject them to a test. God knows of their faith. If you apprehend that they truly believe, do not return them to the infidels. The women are not lawful to the men, nor are the men lawful to the women. Send back the bride-price the men paid. No harm will come to you if you marry them as long as you pay their bride-price [*ujūrahunna*]. And you also must not hold on to your ties with infidel women. Ask repayment for what bride-prices you had paid and let them ask the same. This is God's judgment: He judges between you, for God is knowing and wise.

§3. He continued: ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr wrote to him: The Messenger of God had made a treaty with the Quraysh [of Mecca] on the day of al-Ḥudaybiyah on the condition that he would send back to them anyone who came [to Medina] without the permission of their guardian [*walī*]. When the women migrated to the Messenger of God and to Islam, God refused to permit them to be sent back to the pagans if they underwent the test of Islam. They knew that the women came out of

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42. See *EI³*, s.v. "Badr" (Khalil Athamina).

43. Cf. the tradition of Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah, which portrays Abū Sufyān as the (self-proclaimed) victor of Uḥud (3/625) and al-Khandaq (5/627) in Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 4: 386.

44. A slightly longer version appears in al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī,* 2: 631–33 > Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 8: 12–13 > Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 70: 220.

desire for Islam. He also ordered for the women's dowers [*ṣaduqāt*] to be returned to the Quraysh if the women were withheld from them, as long as the Quraysh returned the dower of any wife they withheld from the Muslims. "This is God's judgment: He judges between you, for God is knowing and wise."

§4. So the Messenger of God held onto the women but sent the men back, and he demanded what God commanded him to demand concerning the dowers of the wives of those men whose wives were withheld from them, and that they should return to them the like of which they returned to them, if they did indeed do so. Were it not for the judgment God had given, the Messenger of God would have sent the women back just as he did with the men; and were it not for the armistice and the pact made between him and the Quraysh at al-Ḥudaybiyah, he would have kept the women without returning any of the women's dowers, for such was what he used do when Muslim women came to him prior to the pact.

COMMENTARY. Traditions transmitted on the authority of ʿUrwah provide the most detailed outline of the historical events surrounding the pact concluded between Muḥammad and the Meccan Quraysh at al-Ḥudaybiyah in 6/628 in the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus.[45] The pact at al-Ḥudaybiyah set the terms of an armistice between Medina and Mecca, thus giving the Meccans a free hand to recuperate from the ongoing war with Medina and giving the Medinans, under Muḥammad's direction, a free hand to focus their attention on the expansion of their authority to north without the intervention of Quraysh to the south. The pact of al-Ḥudaybiyah effectively allowed Muḥammad to create the political conditions that would enable him subsequently to conquer Mecca with minimal resistance. ʿUrwah's letter here addresses an exegetical issue that bore on a discrepancy in Medina's policy towards those Meccans who sought to abandon Mecca and to join Muḥammad's community. The men who abandoned the Meccan Quraysh were turned away—though in reality many of these men did not return home but instead formed a type of guerrilla movement—but the women were not turned away and forced to return to Mecca. ʿUrwah's letter offers an exegesis of Q. 60:10 that places the divine revelation within the context of al-Ḥudaybiyah and elaborates on the pragmatic rationale behind Muḥammad's policy towards the women.

LETTER 5. THE CONQUEST OF MECCA AND AL-ṬĀʾIF

SOURCES: Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 1634–36, 1654–55, 1669–70 [ed. Ibrāhīm, 3: 54–56, 70, 82–83| trans. Fishbein 1997, 174–76; trans. Poonawala 1990, 1–3, 20–21]; cf. Ibn

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45. Görke 2000; Görke and Schoeler 2008, chap. 8.

Ḥajar, *Fatḥ,* 8: 27 (citing *Kitāb Makkah* of ʿUmar ibn Shabbah); Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 11: 386 and Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* 6: 1773; and Ibn Shabbah, *Madīnah,* 2: 507.

§1. ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith related to me, saying: my father related to me, saying: Abān al-ʿAṭṭār related to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah related to us from ʿUrwah that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān:[46]

§2. 1 Now to the heart of the matter. You wrote to me asking about Khālid ibn al-Walīd:[47] Did he conduct a raid on the day of Mecca's conquest? Under whose command did he fight? The fact of the matter is that, on the day of Mecca's conquest, Khālid ibn al-Walīd was with the Prophet. When the Prophet rode into the Marr basin headed for Mecca, Quraysh had sent Abū Sufyān and Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām,[48] although when they sent the two men they knew not where the Prophet was headed, whether to them or to al-Ṭāʾif. Such were the days of the conquest.

2 Abū Sufyān and Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām followed behind Budayl ibn Warqāʾ, and they were happy to accompany him, for it was just Abū Sufyān, Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām, and Budayl. When Quraysh sent them to the Messenger of God, they said to them, "We won't be approached from the rear, since we don't know whether Muḥammad is heading for us, Hawāzin, or Thaqīf!"

3 At the time, the armistice and the pact made at al-Ḥudaybiyah was in effect between the Prophet and Quraysh for the agreed upon period. The Bakr clan was also party to that armistice with Quraysh, but a group of the Kaʿb clan and another from the Bakr clan battled. One of the stipulations of the armistice drawn up between the Messenger of God and Quraysh was, "No traps laid, and no swords drawn [*lā islāl wa-lā ighlāl*]," but Quraysh aided the Bakr with weapons. The Kaʿb clan made accusations against Quraysh, and on that basis the Messenger of God led an expedition against the Meccans.

4 It was during this expedition that he met with Abū Sufyān, Ḥakīm, and Budayl at Marr al-Ẓahrān. They did not realize that the Messenger of God had gone down to Marr until suddenly they happened upon him. When they saw him at Marr, Abū Sufyān, Budayl, and Ḥakīm went to see him in his dwelling at Marr al-Ẓahrān and pledged their allegiance to him. Once they pledged him their allegiance, he sent them ahead of him to the Quraysh, calling on them to embrace Islam. It has been reported to me that he said, "Whoever enters the home of Abū Sufyān is safe"—and his house was in the upper part of Mecca—"and whoever

46. According to the Medinan recension, the letter is written rather to ʿAbd al-Malik's son, al-Walīd I. See Ibn Shabbah, *Madīnah,* 2: 507; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* 6: 1773; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ,* 8: 2.

47. Khālid ibn al-Walīd al-Makhzūmī: the famed Qurashī commander of the early Islamic conquests called "the Sword of God" (*sayf Allāh*).

48. Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām ibn Khuwaylid al-Asadī al-Qurashī, the nephew of Muḥammad's first wife Khadījah and a member of ʿUrwah's clan of Quraysh, the Banū Asad.

enters the home of Ḥakīm"—which was in the lower part of Mecca—"he is safe. And whoever locks his door and withholds his hand, he is safe."

5 When Abū Sufyān and Ḥakīm exited the Prophet's encampment to head for Mecca, the Prophet sent al-Zubayr in their tracks. He gave him his banner and made him the commander of a troop of migrants and Anṣār on horseback, ordering him to plant his banner on al-Ḥajūn at the highest point in Mecca. He said to al-Zubayr, "Don't abandon the place where I've commanded you to plant my banner until I come to you." After that the Messenger of God entered and ordered Khālid ibn al-Walīd—who was among those from Quḍāʿah, the Sulaym clan, and others who only had just become Muslims shortly before that—to enter from the lower part of Mecca where the Quraysh had called the Bakr clan to prepare for war along with the Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd Manāt clan and the mixed clans [*al-aḥābīsh*]. Khālid ibn al-Walīd thus engaged them from the lower part of Mecca.

6 I was told that the Prophet told Khālid and al-Zubayr when he sent them, "Attack no one unless they attack you." When Khālid came upon the Bakr clan and the mixed clans, he fought them, and God Almighty routed them. This was the only killing that transpired in Mecca. The one exception was that Kurz ibn Jābir, a tribesman of the Muḥārib ibn Fihr, and Ibn al-Ashʿar, a man from the Kaʿb clan, were both with the horses of al-Zubayr, but they went in the direction of Kadāʾ and did not follow the route taken by al-Zubayr and that he had given orders to follow. The two men came across a small force of Quraysh at the slope of Kadāʾ and were killed. There was no fighting in the upper part of Mecca in the direction of al-Zubayr. After that the Prophet came, [and] the people rose to pledge him their allegiance. Thus did the Meccans embrace Islam.

§2. 1 After the victory, the Prophet stayed in Mecca for half a month. Not a moment longer was it before Hawāzin and Thaqīf came and made camp at Ḥunayn, which is a valley next to Dhū l-Majāz. That day they were on their way hoping to face the Prophet in battle. They had joined forces before that when they had heard about the Messenger of God's sortie from Medina, for they thought that he was heading for them when he left Medina. Once they heard that he had encamped at Mecca, Hawāzin turned to head for the Prophet, and they had taken their possessions, their women, and their children along with them. The leader of Hawāzin that day was Mālik ibn ʿAwf, a man from the Naṣr clan. Thaqīf also headed that way and eventually went down to Ḥunayn with the intent to do battle with the Prophet.

2 When the Prophet was told that Hawāzin and Thaqīf had encamped at Ḥunayn and that Mālik ibn ʿAwf of the Naṣr clan led them as their commander that day, he was in Mecca. The Prophet set out until he reached them and confronted them at Ḥunayn. God Almighty routed them. This is the battle that God

Almighty mentions in the Scripture.[49] God Almighty granted His Messenger the women, children, and flocks that they brought with them as plunder, so he distributed their wealth among those Quraysh with him who had recently become Muslim.

§3. 1 On the day of Ḥunayn, the Messenger of God immediately withdrew right away and marched until he came to al-Ṭāʾif. For half a month the Messenger of God and his companions waged war against them because Thaqīf fought from behind the fort and would not fight in open battle. All those who lived in their environs became Muslim and sent their delegations to the Messenger of God.

2 Then the Prophet returned, for he besieged them no longer than half a month until he went down to al-Jiʿrānah where the women and children captives whom the Messenger of God had captured at Ḥunayn were. They claim that the captives seized from Hawāzin that day numbered six thousand women and children. So when the Prophet returned to al-Jiʿrānah, the delegates of Hawāzin came to him as Muslims, so he manumitted all their women and children and resolved to undertake a non-seasonal pilgrimage from al-Jiʿrānah. That was in the month of Dhū l-Qaʿdah.

3 The Messenger of God then returned to Medina and appointed Abū Bakr[50] to govern the Meccans in his place. He commanded him to lead the people in the Ḥajj and to instruct the people in Islam. He also ordered him to ensure the safety of the pilgrims who made the Ḥajj.

4 He returned to Medina, and when he arrived there, delegates from Thaqīf came before him. They secured from him the concessions which were mentioned[51] and gave him their allegiance. That is the written accord that they have in their possession and on which they brokered their allegiance to him.

COMMENTARY. Although prompted by a query about the famous Qurashī general Khālid ibn al-Walīd, the letter provides an extended narrative of the capitulation of the Meccans, and soon thereafter the Muslim victory at Ḥunayn (8/630) over Hawāzin and Thaqīf that presaged the fall of Thaqīf's stronghold, the neighboring city of al-Ṭāʾif. The battle of Ḥunayn is one of the few battles explicitly named in the Qurʾan (see Q. Tawbah 9:25); however, although the letter notes Ḥunayn's qurʾanic mention, it is not exegetical. It is interesting that ʿUrwah's letter, as preserved at least, provides so much additional detail about the capitulation of Hawāzin and Thaqīf yet

49. Q. Tawbah 9: 25–26.
50. Most other accounts state that it was ʿAttāb ibn Asīd, a Qurashī man from the Umayyad clan; cf. Khalīfah, *Tārīkh,* 88, and Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 25. ʿUrwah here claims, instead, that it was his maternal grandfather, Abū Bakr, whom Muḥammad appointed.
51. Kister 1979, 1–11, discusses these concessions.

makes no explicit mention of Khālid ibn al-Walīd's expedition south from Mecca against the Jadhīmah clan, a subtribe of ʿAbd Manāt ibn Kinānah. The expedition was notorious. A tradition transmitted by Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī relates how ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 73/692) testified about how Muḥammad sent Khālid to the tribe to invite them to accept Islam, but when they approached him the tribesmen declared, "We have abandoned our religion [ṣabaʾnā ṣabaʾnā]," rather than "We have become Muslims [aslamnā aslamnā]." Khālid, apparently finding their declaration confusing, slaughtered them and took captives, and then he subsequently ordered the captives to be slain as well. When informed of what Khālid had done, Muḥammad lifted his hands and denounced Khālid's actions.[52] In his *Maghāzī*, Ibn Isḥāq cites a tradition attributed to the Shiʿi imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 117/735), who claims that the motivation behind Khālid's actions was a desire to exact revenge from the tribe for killing his uncle, al-Fākih ibn al-Mughīrah.[53]

LETTER 6. ON THE ḤUMS

SOURCE: Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, 3: 525–26.

§1. ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʿAbd al-Wārith said: my father reported to me, saying: Abān reported to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah reported to us on the authority of ʿUrwah that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān:

§2. You wrote me a letter concerning what the Prophet said to a man from the Anṣār, "I am one of the Ḥums." I do not know whether the Prophet said it or not, but I heard it in a tradition reported from him. The Ḥums was the cultic community [millah] of Quraysh while they were pagans and of those whom men of Quraysh sired from Khuzāʿah and the Kinānah tribe. They used to leave from al-Muzdalifah—which is the Inviolable Ritual Site [al-mashʿar al-ḥarām][54]—and not from ʿArafah. The ʿĀmir tribe were also *ḥums*. That is because the Quraysh sired them. To them it was said, "Then depart from where the people depart" (Q. Baqarah 2:199), for the all the Arabs used to depart from ʿArafah except for the Ḥums, who would leave when they set out in the morning from al-Muzdalifah.

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52. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 10: 174; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 5: 544–45 (no. 6382). Ibn ʿUmar, who accompanied Khālid on this expedition, testifies that he refused to kill his captive, as did his companions (aṣḥāb). The incident parallels a later one during the *riddah* wars under Abū Bakr, in which Khālid took captive Mālik ibn Nuwayrah al-Yarbūʿī, a self-confessed Muslim, killed him and his fellow tribesmen, and then married Māik's wife. Cf. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 10: 174–75 and *EI²*, s.v. "Mālik b. Nuwayra" (E. Landau-Tasseron).

53. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 2: 431; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 5: 114.

54. Cf. Q. Baqarah 2: 198.

COMMENTARY. The tradition about the Anṣārī man alludes to a well-known gloss on Q. 2:189, "Piety is not that you enter houses from the back, rather piety belongs to whosoever fears God. So enter houses from their doors." The verse denounces the act of entering houses by means other than their doors as false piety and then exhorts those who would be truly pious to enter houses by the normal means. What is obscure in this qurʾanic verse is why anyone would even imagine that entering a home by a means other than its door would be an act of piety in the first place. The exegetes answered that the prohibition on entering houses through their doors was a taboo enforced by the Ḥums (sg. *aḥmas, aḥmasī*) of Mecca, a group of cultic élites who observed pre-Islamic religious taboos subsequently abolished by Muḥammad. The story behind this interpretation is relatively widespread among the exegetes, even if ʿUrwah refuses to confirm its veracity. In the story, Muḥammad's interlocutor is an Anṣārī man observing the *aḥmasī* taboo against using doors. Muḥammad clarifies that, although he too is an *aḥmasī* and a prophet besides, he no longer observes the ritual taboos of the Ḥums. Muḥammad's words thus cause the man to abandon his observance of the taboo as well.[55]

LETTER 7. ʿĀʾISHAH'S ACCUSERS

SOURCE: Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, 17: 190.

§1. ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad related to us, saying: my father related to us, saying: Abān al-ʿAṭṭār related to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah related to us from ʿUrwah that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān:

§2. You wrote to me asking about those who concocted the lie, being those about whom God said, "Those who concocted the lie were a group of your own" (Q. Nūr 24:11). None of them were named except for Ḥassān ibn Thābit, Misṭaḥ ibn Uthāthah, and Ḥamnah bint Jaḥsh. Others are said to have been involved, but I have no knowledge of them, except that they were a group as God declared.

COMMENTARY. "The lie" (*al-ifk*) referenced here is the spreading of a charge of adultery against ʿUrwah's aunt and Muḥammad's wife, ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, whose innocence was later regarded as proven by the abovementioned qurʾanic revelation. The caliph seems keen to prod ʿUrwah for the names of all those

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55. Cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, 3: 283–88, for several versions of the story. An English version of Muḥammad's exchange with the Anṣārī can be found in Peters 1994, 37–38. On the Ḥums more generally, see Kister 1965; Simon 1970; and *EI²*, s.v. "Ḥums" (H. Munt).

persons directly involved with the charges against ʿĀʾishah, but ʿUrwah only names three: Muḥammad's bard Ḥassān ibn Thābit; Abū Bakr's nephew (and ʿĀʾishah's cousin) Misṭaḥ; and Muḥammad's sister-in-law Ḥamnah (the sister of his wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh). The caliph may be fishing to implicate ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in the affair, a charge against ʿAlī famously perpetuated by the Umayyads. In a story of an exchange between Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī and the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, the caliph attempts to force al-Zuhrī to admit that ʿAlī was not only among those who spread the accusation against ʿĀʾishah but that he also acted as the main instigator in spreading the story. Al-Zuhrī rejects the caliph's suggestion and cites the authority of ʿUrwah among others in order to exculpate ʿAlī from any wrongdoing.[56]

LETTER 8. ON KHUWAYLAH, THE WIFE OF AWS IBN AL-ṢĀMIT, A GLOSS ON Q. MUJĀDALAH 58:1–4

SOURCE: Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, 22: 453.

§1. ʿAbd al-Wārith ibn ʿAbd al-Ṣamad related to using, saying: my father related to us saying: Abān al-ʿAṭṭār related to us, saying: Hishām ibn ʿUrwah related to us on the authority of ʿUrwah that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik:

§2. You wrote to me to ask me about Khuwaylah, the daughter of Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit, but she actually was not the daughter of Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit. Rather, she was the wife of Aws. Aws was a man who suffered dementia. It used to be that, when his dementia worsened, he would divorce her using the *ẓihār* oath, but when his dementia left him, he would say nothing about that. So she went to the Messenger of God to seek his redress and to voice her complaint to God. Then a revelation concerning her came down, as you heard. Such was their affair.

COMMENTARY. This letter provides a gloss on the qurʾanic prohibition against using the pre-Islamic *ẓihār* oath when divorcing one's wife. The *ẓihār* oath is so called because the divorcing husband declares, "To me you are like my mother's back [*anti ʿalayya ka-ẓahri ummī*]," thus declaring conjugal relations with his wife as sexually taboo as such relations would be with his mother.[57] The revelation stipulates that expiation (*kaffārah*) must be made by any man who invokes the

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56. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, 2: 51–52, where one also finds ʿĀʾishah's criticism of ʿAlī, saying, "He acted wrongly in my affair [*kāna musīʾan fī amrī*]." See Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 57–58; Schoeler 2011, 103–4.

57. Cf. GdQ, 1: 212 (trans. Behn, 172); van Gelder 2005, 118–19.

oath, either by freeing a slave, by fasting for two consecutive months, or by feeding sixty poor persons. He must also refrain from sexual relations until the expiation is complete.[58] Khuwaylah's story is quite famous, and in some versions, she narrates the story of her own ordeal.[59]

LETTER 9. ON THE PROPHET'S MARRIAGE TO THE SISTER OF AL-ASHʿATH IBN QAYS

SOURCES: Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8: 155; cf. Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 1.2: 1128–29, and Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 3: 2458 [trans. Landau-Tasseron (1998), 190].

§1. Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar [al-Wāqidī] informed us: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī l-Zinād related to us from Hishām ibn ʿUrwah, from his father that al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik wrote to him asking him, "Did the Messenger of God marry Qutaylah, the sister of al-Ashʿath ibn Qays? He said [var. lect., wrote to him]:

§2. The Messenger of God never married her, nor did he marry any woman of the Kindah tribe except the woman of the clan of al-Jawn. He married her [*malakahā*], but when she was brought to him and had arrived in Medina, he examined her and then divorced her. He did not consummate the marriage with her.

COMMENTARY: In this seemingly obscure question about the sister of a famed tribal leader of the Kindah tribe, al-Ashʿath ibn Qays, the caliph al-Walīd asks ʿUrwah to settle a matter of some controversy. Although formerly wedded to Muḥammad after the conversion of Kindah in A.H. 10, Qutaylah bint Qays subsequently marries another man, ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl, after the Prophet's death, an act that leads to considerable controversy. The controversy arises from the fact that Muḥammad's wives were forbidden to remarry after his death, since revelation deemed them to be "the mothers of the believers" (cf. Q. Aḥzāb 33:6) and thereby rendered any subsequent marriage to them equivalent to incest. By way of contrast, the same *sūrah* famously declares, "Muḥammad was not the father of any of your men" (Q. 33:40). When Abū Bakr hears reports of Qutaylah's subsequent marriage, he initially threatens to burn down the couple's house with them inside it, but he is persuaded otherwise after being informed that the Prophet had granted her permission to remarry given that their marriage was not consummated. In another version of the story, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb convinces Abū Bakr that Qutaylah's marriage to Muḥammad

58. See *EI²*, s.v. "Expiation" (Christian Lange).
59. See Sayeed 2013, 20–21.

was dissolved by her apostasy. The children she later bears her husband ʿIkrimah were purportedly all born deformed (*mukhabbal*).[60] In his letter, ʿUrwah quells the controversy by denying that Muḥammad ever married Qutaylah. He thus denies her status as a true wife of Muḥammad. He subsequently also denies that the Prophet even consummated a marriage with another woman of Kindah from the clan of al-Jawn. Here the woman is unnamed, but she is often named Asmāʾ bint al-Nuʿmān al-Jawniyyah. Other accounts assert that Muḥammad rejected the woman of al-Jawn due to her high-handed attitude towards him and that he divorced her before the marriage was consummated.[61]

60. Abū ʿUbaydah, *Tasmiyah,* 72–73; cf. Kulaynī, *Kāfī,* 5: 421, where this story applied to Bint Abī l-Jawn from the Kindah tribe.

61. See Lecker 1994, 351–53.

The Court Impulse

At the heart of the early history of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is a puzzle: this vast written corpus first emerged as a tradition of oral learning, whose scholars initially refused, and even actively thwarted, efforts to disseminate knowledge of it in written form. The mere survival of the vast corpora of *ḥadīth* compilations and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature suffices to demonstrate that early trepidation about the public dissemination of these traditions waned. But if attitudes to the writing down of tradition (*ʿilm*) did shift, when and under what historical circumstances did they do so? Our evidence for when this shift transpired is uneven, but enough evidence nonetheless does survive to indicate that the change occurred rather swiftly during the first half of the eighth century C.E.

In an important study of the Umayyads' patronage of scholars and their efforts to commit *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions to writing, Ḥusayn ʿAṭwān placed the watershed moment during the brief, but celebrated, tenure of the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar (II) ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. A.H. 99–101/717–20 C.E.).[1] ʿUmar II reputedly undertook numerous initiatives to commit knowledge of the tradition to writing and to sponsor its dissemination. A descendant of the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44), through his maternal line, ʿUmar II cut an imposing figure among the Umayyad caliphs and attained a stature nearly equal to that of his namesake. Early Islamic historiography marked off ʿUmar II from his fellow Umayyads as a caliph of unparalleled rectitude, a paragon of faith whose very exceptionalism proved the rule of Umayyad impiety.[2] His accession to the

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1. ʿAṭwān 1986, 27–28.
2. Cf. Borrut 2011, 283ff. and Khalek 2014.

caliphate was itself anomalous—brief and unexpected, his caliphal tenure sits in the middle of the caliphates of four of the sons of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Yet, although he was ʿAbd al-Malik's nephew not his son, in many ways ʿUmar II had far more in common with his uncle ʿAbd al-Malik than the latter's sons did. Much like ʿAbd al-Malik before him, ʿUmar II had been profoundly shaped by figures outside the élite circles of the Umayyad court in Syria. Unlike his brothers, who spent much of their youth in Egypt, where their father, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (d. 86/705), ruled as the all-powerful governor, ʿUmar II spent much of his youth in Medina, where he was educated by Medinan scholars and nurtured close ties with them.[3] He even ruled over the Medinans as their governor for some six years (87–93/706–12), a post he was forced to abandon not due to the Medinans' dissatisfaction but because of the machinations of a powerful interloper who resented his stature: the Umayyads' powerful and ruthless governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī. Many Medinans, therefore, regarded ʿUmar II fondly and trusted him as one of their own.

Such close ties between ʿUmar II and the scholars of early Medina can be seen, for instance, in the decision of the Anṣārī scholar ʿĀṣim ibn ʿUmar ibn Qatādah (d. 120/737), to leave Medina and to set off for Syria in order to seek the aid of the newly installed caliph ʿUmar II in relieving his debts . The historian Ibn Saʿd recounts how generously ʿUmar II treated the learned Medinan:

> [ʿUmar II] paid off his debts and thereafter assigned him a regular stipend. He also commanded [ʿĀṣim] to hold regular sessions in the Friday mosque of Damascus to teach the people the stories of the expeditions [*maghāzī*] of the Messenger of God and the virtues of his Companions. ʿUmar said, "The sons of Marwān used to despise this and forbid it. But now hold your sessions and teach that to the people [*fa-ḥaddith al-nās bi-dhālika*]." And so he did and afterwards returned to Medina, where he remained until he passed away in [A.H.] 120.[4]

This anecdote resonates with a common chord struck throughout historical depictions of ʿUmar II, especially his relationship with the scholars of Medina. Key to the literary image of the pious ʿUmar II are a bevy of anecdotes that attribute to him initiatives to commit the oral traditions and knowledge (*ʿilm*) of the Medinans to writing and to disseminate them for the sake of enacting a reformed policy (or, in their view, of restoring a policy rooted in the normative practices of Muḥammad and his early followers, the *sunnah,* which had lapsed under the neglectful oversight of his Umayyad predecessors).

ʿUmar II allegedly also requested Sālim ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 106/724–25) to compile together into a single work the judgments, letters, and

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3. At least so claims his earliest biographer, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 215/829); for reasons to be skeptical, see Barthold 1971, 71–73.

4. Ibn Saʿd (ed. Manṣūr), 128; Lecker 2003, 65–69.

policies of their caliphal ancestor, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.[5] Similar such requests were purportedly sent by ʿUmar II to the revered Medinan scholar Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab.[6] Other accounts purport that ʿUmar II commissioned his governor of Medina, Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAmr ibn Ḥazm (d. 120/738), to undertake a parallel project to copy documents of the Prophet Muḥammad in his family's possession[7] and to record the knowledge of a learned woman of Medina named ʿAmrah bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, a precious source of traditions from her aunt, the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr.[8] Another report claims that ʿUmar II wrote to Abū Bakr Ibn Ḥazm at least one other time with an order to "investigate the names of the servants [khadam] of the Messenger of God, both men and women, and his clients [mawālī]"; the letter that Abū Bakr Ibn Ḥazm subsequently sent him in reply gives a full accounting of their names and closely resembles the format of similar such letters attributed to ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr.[9] Yet another account claims that ʿUmar II even went as far as to order Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) and other Medinan luminaries "to compile the traditions [bi-jamʿ al-sunan]" along lines similar to how ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (and, subsequently, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān) had codified the official codices of the Qurʾan. "We wrote them down booklet by booklet [daftaran daftaran]," al-Zuhrī states in this account, "and [ʿUmar II] dispatched a booklet to every land over which he had authority."[10]

Historians have justifiably regarded the historicity of these accounts with a high degree of skepticism, as they seem to exploit the hagiographic aura that came to surround ʿUmar II after his death.[11] However, this corpus of traditions about ʿUmar II is diverse and detailed; thus, the corpus does not merely rely on a hagiographical leitmotif—the specifics still merit further historical investigation.[12]

5. ʿAṭwān 1986, 28–30. Some accounts of ʿUmar II's correspondence with Sālim portray Sālim's letter as setting much of the agenda for his caliphate; see, e.g., Ājurrī, Akhbār, 71–73. A letter on the alms tax (al-ṣadaqah) attributed to the Prophet seems to survive in later sources in traditions from al-Zuhrī and others; see, e.g., Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 8: 253–58, and Abū ʿUbayd, Amwāl, 497ff.

6. Ibn Rushd, Bayān, 17: 24.

7. Lecker 1996a, 60–61.

8. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, Tārīkh, 2: 271–72. Cf. Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 42; M. Cook 1997, 436; Sayeed 2013, 66ff.; Hassan 2015, 332–33 et passim.

9. Ḥammād ibn Isḥāq, Tarikat al-nabī, 109–11; Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 497–98 > Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, 4: 278–79.

10. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, Jāmiʿ, 1: 331; see also Kister 1998, 156; Zahrānī 2005, 76–77; Schoeler 2006, 124. Abū Zurʿah al-Dimashqī records a similar comment attributed to the qāḍī who worked alongside al-Zuhrī, Sulaymān ibn Ḥabīb al-Muḥāribī, who stated that ʿUmar II attempted to unify legal rulings affecting the Umayyad armies and the inhabitants of the garrison cities. See Abū Zurʿah, Tārīkh, 1: 202.

11. Goldziher 1971, 2: 195–96; Borrut 2011, 307ff.

12. Cf. the tradition purporting that while governor of Egypt under his brother ʿAbd al-Malik, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān heard that a scholar of Ḥimṣ named Kathīr ibn Murrah al-Ḥaḍramī had met there seventy men who had fought alongside the Prophet in the battle of Badr called "the vanguard" (al-jund al-muqaddam). This news prompted ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to write to Kathīr, ordering him to write

IBN SHIHĀB AL-ZUHRĪ AND THE UMAYYADS

In strictly evidentiary terms, we are on much firmer ground with the signs of a cultural shift in attitudes to recording tradition in the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105–25/724–43). Most accounts assert that Caliph Hishām approached the Medinan scholar Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Shihāb of the Zuhrah clan of Quraysh, widely known as Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), and had him record his learning and knowledge of the tradition (ʿilm) in writing at the court's behest.[13] That Hishām chose al-Zuhrī for the task comes as little surprise: al-Zuhrī cultivated intimate ties with the Umayyad court for almost his entire adult life, ties that would have major ramifications for him personally and, more broadly speaking, for the history of committing the Medinans' oral tradition to writing.

Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) records an extraordinary autobiographical account of al-Zuhrī in which he relates how his relationship with the Umayyad court came to be and how it influenced his pursuit of knowledge throughout the course of his life. Since such autobiographical accounts are virtually unprecedented for this period, so it merits quotation in full, lengthy though it is.[14] Al-Zuhrī begins the story with his youth in Medina during the Second Civil War between the Zubayrids and Umayyads:

> When I grew up, I was a young man without any wealth and cut off from the *dīwān* [i.e., the registry of Arab notables who received a stipend due either to their ancestor's participation in the Islamic conquests or their own]. I used to learn the genealogy of my tribe from ʿAbdallāh ibn Thaʿlabah ibn Ṣuʿayr al-ʿAdawī; he was knowledgeable in the lineage of my people and was their ally and related to them by his matrilineal line [*ibn ukhtihim wa-ḥalīfuhum*]. Once a man approached him to ask him a question about divorce, but he couldn't answer him, so he pointed him to Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab.[15] I said to myself, "Ha! It's clear to me that although this old man

down for him all the reports (*aḥādīth*) he had heard from them "except for the reports of Abū Hurayrah, which we already have." Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 448 > Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 50: 58; cf. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 2: 303, and Dīnawarī, *Akhbār,* 180. M. Cook 1997, 474, has suggested that this tradition may have served as a prototype for the traditions about his son, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz; however, as noted above, the traditions strike me as too dispersed and variegated for such a monocausal explanation. On the corpus of letters attributed to ʿUmar II, see now Tillier 2014, 165ff.

13. The two most comprehensive treatments of his biography are to be found in Lecker 1996b and Judd 2014.

14. Ibn Saʿd (ed. Manṣūr), 157–62; cf. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 55: 322–25, and Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 5: 330–31.

15. Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab is widely regarded as the most learned Medinan scholar of his generation in the *sunan* of the prophet and judgments rendered by the caliphs ʿUmar and ʿUthmān. See Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 346; Ibn Zanjawayh, *Ṭabaqāt,* 93. According to Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, al-Zuhrī studied with Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab for eight years (Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 631), but another student said it was six (Ibn Zanjawayh, *Ṭabaqāt,* 101).

knows that the Messenger of God anointed his head, he doesn't know what this [other] man does!" So I set out alongside the questioner to Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, and when he asked him the question, he answered him. Thus did I begin sitting with Saʿīd and abandon ʿAbdallāh ibn Thaʿlabah. I also sat in on the sessions of ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUtbah, and Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām until I gained some knowledge.

I then journeyed to Syria and went inside the Mosque of Damascus around dawn and betook myself to a circle with throngs of students around the spot where the imam leads the prayers and took a seat there. The group asked me my lineage, and I said [I was], "A man of Quraysh from the inhabitants of Medina." They said, "Do you know any tradition [ʿilm] concerning the ruling on slave women who bear their master children [fī ummahāt al-awlād]?"[16] I told them what ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said concerning such slave women, and the group said to me, "This is the gathering of Qabīṣah ibn Dhuʾayb. He's on his way to see you, for ʿAbd al-Malik had asked him about this, and us as well, but he found that none of us knew of a tradition about that."

Qabīṣah came, and they told him the story. He asked my lineage, which I gave, and he asked me about Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab and his peers. I informed him of what I knew. Then he said, "I'm going to take you to meet the Commander of the Faithful." He prayed the morning prayer and then departed, while I followed close behind. He went in to see ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, but I sat at the doorway for about an hour until the sun rose. Later he came out and said, "Where's that Qurashī from Medina?" "Right here!" I said. I stood up to [. . .][17]

I entered the presence of the Commander of the Faithful at [Qabīṣah's] side. I saw before him a copy of the Qurʾan that he had just closed and commanded to be taken away. No one else besides Qabīṣah sat in his presence. I offered him the salutations owed the caliph, and he said, "Who are you?" I said, "I am Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Shihāb ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Zuhrah." "Aha!" he said, "a tribe that clamored for civil strife among the Muslims!"[18]—for [my father] Muslim ibn ʿUbaydallāh was on the side of [Ibn] al-Zubayr. Then he said, "What [tradition] do you have concerning a slave woman who bears her master a child?" I informed him and said, "Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab related to me [. . .]" And he asked, "How is Saʿīd, and how is he doing?" I informed him, and then I said, "[. . .] and Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām also related to me [. . .]" So he asked about him, too. I said, "[. . .] and ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr related to me [. . .], and he asked about him. I said, "[. . .] and ʿUbdaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUtbah related to me [. . .]," and he even asked about him. At last I related him the ḥadīth concerning slave women who bear their masters children from ʿUmar ibn

16. Another account attributed to al-Zuhrī specifies that the dispute was over ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr's attempt to deny an *umm walad* her share in the inheritance of her deceased son. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 626–29; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 3: 367–69; Lecker 1996b, 45–48.

17. Lacuna in the text.

18. Reading قوم نعّارون في الفتن for قوم يغارّون في الفتن.

al-Khaṭṭāb. He then turned to Qabīṣah ibn Dhuʾayb and said, "This is to be written down and sent to all the provinces."

Then I said [to myself], "Right now I find that he's alone, and perhaps I'll never again see him after this instance," so I said, "If the Commander of the Faithful sees fit to recognize my bonds of kinship and to restore to me the salary due to the people of my house—for I am a man cut off without a stipend from the *dīwān*—then may he do so." But he said, "Silent now! Be on your way!"

I swear by God that I left completely despondent—at the time when I set out [from Medina] to meet him I was totally impoverished. I sat down [at the doorway] until Qabīṣah exited and turned to me with an accusing tone and said, "What possessed you to say such a thing without my permission? Could you not have at least consulted me?"

I replied, "I thought that I would never again see him after that meeting! I swear to God!"

"Why did you suppose that?" Qabīṣah said, "You will see him again and join his court. Come now to my house."

I walked behind Qabīṣah's mount while the people addressed him until he entered his house. Hardly had he remained inside until a eunuch brought out to me a document [*ruqʿah*], which read, "This is for a hundred dinars ordered to be handed over to you along with a female mule for you to ride, a young slave [*ghulām*] to accompany and serve you, and ten robes for attire." Then I asked the messenger, "From whom do I get this?" And he replied, "Don't you see on the document the name of the one who you've been ordered to see?" I looked at the bottom of the document and there it was written to go to so-and-so and to receive those things from him. I asked after that man, and someone said, "That's him there. He's the overseer [*qahramānah*]." I brought him the document, and he said, "Yes," and ordered these things to be brought to me right away. I left, and he had looked after and taken care of all my needs.

The next morning I headed out early to [Qabīṣah] who sat in the saddle atop his mule as I walked alongside him. Then he said, "Go to doorway of the Commander of the Faithful so that I can bring you to him." I came at the time he had specified for me and he brought me to him and said, "Take care not to speak to him of anything until he mentions it to you first. I will help you deal with him." I bade him the salutations due to the caliph, and he gestured for me to take a seat. When I had sat down, ʿAbd al-Malik began to speak and started to question me about the genealogies of Quraysh, though he was more knowledgeable of them than I. I started to wish for him to desist because his knowledge of genealogy so surpassed mine. Then he said to me, "I have restored to you the stipend due to the people of your house," and he turned to Qabīṣah and ordered him record that in the *dīwān*. Then he said, "Where do you wish to be registered in the *dīwān*? Here with the Commander of the Faithful, or do wish to receive it in your land?" I said, "Commander of the Faithful, I am here with you. Wherever you and your house receive the *dīwān* payment so shall I." Thus he issued the command for me to be registered and for a copy of my registration [*nushkat kitābī*] to be deposited in Medina, for whenever the *dīwān* payments for the people of Medina were disbursed, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān and his house took their

dīwān payments in Syria.[19] So I did likewise, though perhaps I received it in Medina as well and did not refuse it.

After that Qabīṣah came and said, "The Commander of the Faithful has issued the command for you to be registered among his companions [*fī ṣaḥābatih*] and for you to be given the commensurate salary [*rizq al-ṣaḥābah*] and to increase the level of your stipend. So make sure to be present at the door of the Commander of the Faithful." Now, the man charged with overseeing the courtiers was a boorish, uncouth man who was quite a severe taskmaster. One day, or maybe two, I did not show up, and we had a terrible row. I never failed to show up again, and I was loath to mention anything about that to Qabīṣah. I accompanied ʿAbd al-Malik's military encampment and frequently visited him. ʿAbd al-Malik began asking me, "Whom have you met?" And I would name them to him and tell him about whomever I had met from Quraysh without passing over a single one of them. ʿAbd al-Malik said, "Where are you with regard to the Anṣār? You'll find they have much knowledge in their midst. Where are you with regard to their elder, Khārijah ibn Zayd ibn Thābit? And what about ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Yazīd ibn Jāriyah?" He continued to name several of their men. Later I went to Medina, asked the Anṣār many questions, and heard [traditions] from them—that is, the Anṣār—and discovered a great deal of knowledge in their midst.

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān passed away. Then I attended to al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik until he died, Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, and Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik. (Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik appointed both al-Zuhrī and Sulaymān ibn Ḥabīb al-Muḥāribī to the judgeship.) Later I attended to Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.

Hishām went on Ḥajj in the year A.H. 106 and al-Zuhrī undertook the Ḥajj alongside him, then Hishām made him reside with his son to teach and educate them and to relate *ḥadīth* to them. He also went on Ḥajj with them. He never separated from them until he died in Medina.

The date of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's fateful arrival in Damascus is difficult to determine precisely. The most reliable date appears to be that given by the Syrian historian Abū Zurʿah al-Dimashqī (d. 282/895), who dates al-Zuhrī's arrival in Damascus just prior to ʿAbd al-Malik's expedition to Iraq to defeat Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr in Jumādā I 72/October 691.[20] Other accounts date his arrival in Damascus as much as a decade later, to the year of the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath in 82/701; however, these reports are difficult to reconcile with reports that al-Zuhrī

19. In other words, ʿAbd al-Malik and his clan were registered in the imperial bureaucracy as Medinans; however, his stipend was paid to him in Syria, obviating the need for a journey to Medina.

20. Abū Zurʿah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 583–84. According to Abū Zurʿah's source, a student of al-Zuhrī's named Aḥmad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Miṣrī, al-Zuhrī was just old enough to have taken part in the battle of al-Ḥarrah in 63/683 and remembered it; see Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Tamhīd,* 10: 8, cited in Lecker 1996b, 44. The report cited by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, however, misdates al-Ḥarrah to A.H. 61, the year of the early uprising of the Medinans that precipitated the battle, which in fact occurred three years later. See Shaddel 2017, 5–13.

witnessed ʿAbd al-Malik deliver a sermon in Jerusalem before the arrival of the plague in 79/698 or 80/699, which caused the caliph to leave for the palace in al-Muwaqqar on the outskirts of Damascus.[21]

In addition to being a favored scholar of the court, al-Zuhrī also served the Umayyads in a variety of official capacities throughout his life, including as a judge,[22] a tax collector,[23] and the head of the caliphal élite troop (*al-shurṭah*).[24] The Meccan scholar Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah (d. 196/811) said of al-Zuhrī, "He was surrounded by an entourage of servants, a man of eminence who dressed as soldiers do, and he enjoyed a high rank during the reign of the Umayyads."[25] These words might sound like praise to some modern ears, but these qualities were not of the sort that his fellow scholars admired. For one, most scholars regarded the ruthlessness required of a competent agent working on behalf of the caliphal government as unbecoming of a scholar's vocation and its requisite piety. Indeed, there are glimpses of al-Zuhrī's cruelty to individuals of lower social status concomitant with his employment within Umayyad officialdom. While discharging his duties as a tax collector, al-Zuhrī flogged a man so severely that he died.[26] His student Maʿmar ibn Rāshid recalled discovering that al-Zuhrī kept a Nubian (*barbarī*) slave chained up in his home in al-Ruṣāfah, where Maʿmar had studied under him during the caliphate of Hishām.[27]

Anxieties abounded too that, as a recipient of the rulers' largesse, al-Zuhrī risked compromising his scholarly independence and thus becoming a "scholar for hire." There are famous examples of al-Zuhrī's refusal to bow to Umayyad pressures to manipulate the traditions that he taught, anecdotes often wheeled out in

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21. Abū Zurʿah, *Tārīkh,* 1: 409 > Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 37: 139; cf. Lecker 1996b, 43–47, and Elad 1999, 155–56. Some versions of the report place the caliph's sermon on *yawm al-fiṭr*—that is, during the festival marking the conclusion of the Ramaḍān fast—but do not mention its location (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jāmiʿ,* 1: 493), and others do not attribute the words of the sermon to ʿAbd al-Malik at all (Ibn Mubārak, *Zuhd,* 248; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 3: 369).

22. Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 56; Lecker 1996a, 37–38.

23. Lecker 1996b, 38.

24. Ibid., 39–40.

25. Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 5: 337; cited in Lecker 1996b, 40.

26. Lecker 1996b, 38–39. The event seems to have transpired prior to the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who purportedly considered appointing al-Zuhrī either as his own tax-collector or as governor of Kūfah, but decided against it because of his past misdeeds. Balādhurī, *Jumal,* 8: 127, 184. Twelver Shiʿite sources include the story and attribute a prominent role to their fourth imam, ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, in facilitating al-Zuhrī's penance; see Vahidnia, Naqizadih, and Raisian 2014, 17n39.

27. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Amālī,* 112. On *barbarī,* from Greek *bárbaros,* used to mean "Nubian," see *EI³,* s.v. "Barābra" (P. Sijpesteijn). Sufyān al-Thawrī once asked Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the sixth imam of the Shiʿah, what he thought about chaining up a slave prone to escape (*al-ʿabd al-ābiq*); Jaʿfar replied that there was no harm in it and likened it to preventing a bird from flying away (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Amālī,* 112, *lā baʾsa bihi innamā huwa ka-l-ṭāʾir*).

his defense;[28] but they did not banish all suspicions of him.[29] The Damascene scholar Makḥūl (d. ca. 113/731) bemoaned how al-Zuhrī had ruined himself by associating with kings.[30] A scholar from Wāsiṭ, Hushaym ibn Bashīr al-Sulamī, recalled how his fellow scholar Shuʿbah ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) snatched a scroll of traditions that he had learned from al-Zuhrī out of his hand in a fit of anger and tossed it into the Tigris. Shuʿbah justified his actions by saying that al-Zuhrī was a soldier (*shurṭī*) of the Umayyads.[31] The famed renunciant of Medina Abū Ḥāzim al-Aʿraj famously rebuked al-Zuhrī to his face in front of the caliph Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 96–99/715–17) as the two men passed through Medina headed for Mecca. "The best of rulers are those who love scholars," Abū Ḥāzim reputedly declared, "but the worst of scholars are those who love rulers."[32] The renunciant later wrote a letter to al-Zuhrī in which he rebuked the scholar again for his ties to the Umayyads, saying, "They have made you the axle upon which their mill of falsehood turns, a bridge to cross over into their ruin, and a ladder down into their perdition!"[33] Such examples could be multiplied.[34] However, that al-Zuhrī's influence and stature remained unmitigated by such accusations reveals just how profoundly important his influence proved to be and how deeply subsequent generations of scholars revered his role in transmitting the tradition.

When ʿAbd al-Malik welcomed Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī into his court and resolved to become the scholar's benefactor, he created a relationship with profound consequences. However, as noted above, the seismic shift in early Muslim attitudes to the tradition (*ʿilm*) came not from ʿAbd al-Malik but rather from his son, the caliph Hishām (r. 105–25/724–43). Hishām set wheels in motion that triggered a monumental shift in how knowledge of the tradition would be both transmitted

28. E.g., he refused to blame ʿAlī for spreading the slander against ʿĀʾishah (Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 57–58) or to say that the scribe for the agreement at Ḥudaybiyah had been ʿUthman, not ʿAlī (Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 42–43, 2.5).

29. The Shiʿite historian Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī (*Tārīkh,* ed. Houtsma, 2: 311) famously accused al-Zuhrī of inventing a *ḥadīth* that gave sanction for Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca *and* Jerusalem to aid ʿAbd al-Malik in his conflict with Ibn al-Zubayr; however, the accusation seems to be unfounded. The tradition in question exists in many versions in addition to that from al-Zuhrī; see, e.g., ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 5: 132–35, and Kister 1969. However, al-Zuhrī's deep hatred of Walīd II did indeed lead him to forge a *ḥadīth* denouncing him as the pharaoh of Muḥammad's *ummah.* See ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Amālī,* 108, and TG, 1: 84–85.

30. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 642.

31. Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 7: 226 and 8: 291–92. Even as late as the third/ninth century, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn expressed reservations about al-Zuhrī's traditions because "he served the ruling authority [*kāna sulṭāniyyan*]" (Ibn Junayd, *Suʾālāt,* 355).

32. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 3: 244. This famous incident has been retold in numerous versions; cf. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 22: 27ff.

33. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 3: 247.

34. A similarly themed letter addressed to al-Zuhrī from ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn appears in Shiʿite literature. See Ibn Shuʿbah, *Tuḥaf,* 274–78, cited in Vahidnia, Naqizadih, and Raisian 2014, 8ff.

and recorded, and he singled out al-Zuhrī as the preeminent scholar for the task. In a famous statement, al-Zuhrī himself characterized the shift as transpiring mostly against his will, declaring: "We were unwilling to commit knowledge [of the tradition] to writing until these rulers forced us to do it. Now our view is that we ought not forbid any Muslim from doing it."[35]

In another version, al-Zuhrī said, "The kings had me commit [knowledge of the tradition] to writing, and I had them write it down. Since I wrote it down for kings I would be ashamed before God not to write it down for others."[36] Compelled by the caliphal court, al-Zuhrī's ideological shift thus overturned long-held prohibitions against committing the tradition—more specifically the *ḥadīth* and *sunan* that provided so much of the raw material for the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature—to writing for broad dissemination.

Yet it is important to re-emphasize the following: writing as such was not forbidden—recording the Qurʾan in codices and penning letters on sundry issues contravened no scholarly taboos. Recording tradition, or *al-ʿilm,* was what was interdicted. This attitude is clearly expressed in a saying attributed to the Prophet's cousin Ibn ʿAbbās, "We write nothing on pages except for letters and the Qurʾan."[37] The rationale for the prohibition of writing assumed diverse forms in the early period, but the most salient concerns expressed are that the differences between the Qurʾan and the tradition might become confounded, or that the recording of this tradition might distract the pious from learning the Qurʾan, or even that written records of the tradition might fall into unworthy hands and thus be abused for nefarious ends.[38]

Secondly, the acquiescence of al-Zuhrī to Hishām did not cause such a radical break with the past that scholars of the tradition subsequently devalued oral transmission and aural reception altogether. A prodigious memory that allowed one to memorize vast stores of *ḥadīth* still remained the sine qua non of scholarly acumen for generations of *ḥadīth* scholars thereafter. Rather, what emerged was a compromise position, with al-Zuhrī and Hishām's court at its epicenter, that accommodated oral transmission of the tradition alongside its written codification in books.[39] All the same, the impact of this on the written record of the tradition in future generations is difficult to underestimate.

Precisely when Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī acquiesced to the court's wish and let his knowledge of the tradition be committed to writing has been memorialized in

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35. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 2: 389; see Schoeler 2006, 122ff.

36. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jāmiʿ,* 1: 334; cited in Schoeler 2006, 124.

37. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 1: 312.

38. Schoeler 2006, 117–18.

39. M. Cook 1997, 476–81; cf. the astute comments of Ahmed El-Shamsy 2013, 37, regarding the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), "aurality . . . was still the standard in *transmission,* but the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* itself represented a decisive step toward writing as mode of *expression.*"

several different accounts in addition to that of al-Zuhrī himself. A Medinan student of al-Zuhrī, Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd al-Zuhrī (d. 183/799), recounts the story in al-Zuhrī's words as follows:

> Sālim [Abū l-ʿAlāʾ] the imperial secretary of Hishām met me and said to me, "The Commander of the Faithful commands you to commit your *ḥadīth* to writing for his sons."
>
> I said, "Even if he were to ask about two *ḥadīth,* one following right after the other, I could not do so. Rather, send me a scribe or two, for there is rarely a day that people do not come to me asking about something that I had not been asked about the day before." He then sent me two scribes, and they spent a year with me.[40]

According to the Damascene traditionist al-Walīd ibn Muslim (d. 195/810), he himself witnessed al-Zuhrī enter the central mosque in Damascus, after meeting with Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, and announce to those gathered there that the tradition could be committed to writing. After leaving the caliphal palace, al-Khaḍrāʾ, Makḥūl claims, al-Zuhrī sat with the caliph next to a pillar in the mosque and declared to all those present: "We used to withhold from you something [of the tradition], but now we offer it freely for the sake of these [rulers]. Come so that I can relate *ḥadīth* to you."[41]

Another Damascene scholar of the same generation, Marzūq ibn Abī Hudhayl al-Thaqafī, recounts what is ostensibly the same event:

> Al-Zuhrī would not allow anyone to write [down traditions] in front of him, but Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik forced him to allow it. Thus he would dictate [traditions] to the caliph's sons. When al-Zuhrī left Hishām's palace, he entered the mosque, leaned against one of its pillars, and cried out, "Seekers of *ḥadīth!*" When they gathered around him, he said, "I've withheld a matter from you, but I permit it for the Commander of the Faithful's sake despite myself. Come now and write." People then wrote down [the tradition] from that day on.[42]

Al-Zuhrī's nephew likewise recounts the manner in which he heard *ḥadīth* from his uncle:

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40. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyah,* 3: 361; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 20: 80. Cf. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 632, where there is no mention of Sālim Abū l-ʿAlāʾ, Hishām's famous imperial secretary.

41. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 55: 333 > Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 5: 334. Reading in both texts من عند [هشام بن] عبد الملك for من عند عبد الملك. Lecker 1996b, 25, takes the printed text to be the correct reading; however, this version of the report is not widely attested and seems to be corrupt in the manuscript of Ibn ʿAsākir's text, on which Dhahabī himself depends. Moreover, it would be impossible for al-Walīd ibn Muslim—who died over a century after ʿAbd al-Malik's death—to credibly claim to be an eyewitness of events from the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Additionally, that the event transpired during the caliphate of Hishām finds corroboration in the other accounts.

42. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 55: 333. Marzūq himself was known to write down his *ḥadīth;* see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 27: 373.

> I was with [my uncle] when Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ordered him to write down his *ḥadīth* for him. He seated several scribes around him, to whom al-Zuhrī dictated while they wrote. I attended that session, and if perhaps need arose, I would leave to relieve myself. My uncle would then cease to dictate until I had returned to my place.[43]

The mandate that al-Zuhrī received from the caliph had two key aspects: firstly, the education of the caliph's children and, secondly, the dictation of the tradition to scribes to create a written corpus for the sake of the Umayyad court. The tutelage of Hishām's children overseen by al-Zuhrī met with rather poor results; as Steven Judd has wryly observed, none of Hishām's sons ever amounted to much, and some were downright dastardly.[44] However, the second project had far-reaching results and irrevocably transformed the landscape of early Muslim scholarship by creating an extensive written corpus of the early tradition. Although begun in Damascus, much of the scholarly activity behind this enterprise transpired at Hishām's court in Ruṣāfah some four hundred kilometers northeast of Damascus. According to one of his students there, Ruṣāfah remained al-Zuhrī's primary residence for almost twenty years, that is, nearly the entirety of Hishām's caliphate.[45]

THE CORPUS OF IBN SHIHĀB AL-ZUHRĪ

Although no trace of the "official" corpus of the Umayyads' record of al-Zuhrī's teaching in Hishām's court at Ruṣāfah survives, the writing of al-Zuhrī's students and records kept by the scribes who attended his sessions in Ruṣāfah do survive in part, albeit not as original copies. These fragmentary writings offer us the most insight into the importance of these decades at Hishām's court for the long-term preservation of this early stage of the tradition as it passed from a primarily oral to a primarily literary stage. Such writings also reveal the content of these traditions and give us our best insights into the larger corpus of material held by the Umayyad court. Among those who studied at al-Zuhrī's feet in Ruṣāfah, the following figures[46] ought to be highlighted:

1. Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770), a non-Arab client of the Ḥuddān clan of Azd originally from Basra, ranks among the most important transmitters of al-Zuhrī's traditions. A substantial corpus of the traditions that he heard from al-Zuhrī survive in Maʿmar's two extant works, *al-Maghāzī* and *al-Jāmiʿ*, which are both pre-

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43. Ibn Saʿd (ed. Manṣūr), 453.
44. Judd 2014, 55.
45. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 636.
46. This list expands upon ʿAṭwān 1986, 153–78.

served in the *al-Muṣannaf* of Maʿmar's most important student, the Yemeni scholar ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/877).[47] I have recently re-edited the Arabic text of Maʿmar's *Maghāzī* as preserved in the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq and translated it into English. In the introduction to this translation, I argue that Maʿmar's *Maghāzī* offers our best insight into the shape of the early *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition before the compilation and dissemination of Ibn Isḥāq's far larger and far more ambitious *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* which expanded and transformed the genre considerably.[48] Although Maʿmar transmitted traditions from many teachers, most of the material in Maʿmar's *Maghāzī* draws directly from al-Zuhrī and reveals al-Zuhrī's interest not only in *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* as such but also in broader historical issues such as chronology and literary narrative; however, if Maʿmar's *Maghāzī* is indeed an accurate window into the state of al-Zuhrī's *maghāzī* compositions, one must conclude that the literary armature of al-Zuhrī's corpus, even in terms of sheer chronological order, fell far short of that which we find in the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Ibn Isḥāq. Maʿmar became al-Zuhrī's student when he came to the court of Marwānids as a trader to sell wares on behalf of his Azdī masters. After completing the sale, he also asked the court to be allowed to learn traditions from al-Zuhrī as part of his remuneration.[49] When Maʿmar joined al-Zuhrī in Ruṣāfah, therefore, he did not reside there in an official capacity. Maʿmar claims that during his time with al-Zuhrī in Ruṣāfah he was the only one who asked him about *ḥadīth*.[50] He may, therefore, have been al-Zuhrī's last student. Maʿmar testifies to having remained in Syria at least until the assassination of al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (r. 125–26/743–44), two years after al-Zuhrī's death in 124/742. By the time of Abbasid revolution in 132/750, Maʿmar seems to have made his way to the Ḥijāz, where he reputably spent time in Medina learning a scroll (*ṣaḥīfah*) full of traditions attributed to the Companion Abū Hurayrah from the aged Hammām ibn Munabbih.[51] Maʿmar subsequently traveled to Yemen, where he took up residence in Sanʿāʾ and would spend the remainder of his days—reportedly some twenty years.[52]

2. Shuʿayb ibn Abī Ḥamzah al-Ḥimṣī (d. 162/779), was a client (*mawlā*) of the Umayyads who recorded the dictations of al-Zuhrī's traditions for the caliph

47. Much of ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Tafsīr* also seems largely to be a redaction of an early work by Maʿmar, as L. I. Conrad notes (Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 74n57).

48. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* xv–xxix.

49. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 58: 393.

50. Ibn Saʿd (ed. Manṣūr), 171; Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 639. Cf. Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 72–73, and Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* xxiii–xxiv.

51. Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 5: 312.

52. Isḥāq ibn Yaḥyā, *Ṣanʿāʾ,* 182–83; *EI*³, s.v. "Maʿmar b. Rāshid" (S. Anthony).

Hishām in Ruṣāfah. Shuʿayb also served the caliphal house as one of the imperial scribes who oversaw the caliph's fiscal expenditures.[53] According to one account, his records of al-Zuhrī's sessions in Ruṣāfah numbered as many as 1,700 *ḥadīth* reports.[54] Shuʿayb kept personal records of al-Zuhrī's traditions in addition to those he copied on behalf of the caliphal house. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) claimed to have seen Shuʿayb's books with his own eyes and noted how carefully they were transcribed with markings to disambiguate the letters.[55] Likewise, ʿAlī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234/849) remarked that Shuʿayb's books bore the signs of having been written by an imperial scribe, observing how they resembled the official records of government bureaus.[56] As Shuʿayb prepared to die in Ḥimṣ, he bequeathed his corrected books containing his traditions from al-Zuhrī to his pupil Abū l-Yamān al-Ḥakam ibn Nāfiʿ al-Bahrānī (d. 222/837), among others.[57] A single quire of this record of al-Zuhrī's *ḥadīth* as transmitted by Abū l-Yamān indeed survives in a manuscript from the sixth/twelfth century housed in the Ẓāhiriyyah Library in Damascus.[58] A large swathe of Abū l-Yamān's transmission of Shuʿayb's Zuhrī-material also survives in the *Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn* of the *ḥadīth* scholar Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), as transmitted to him on the authority of Abū Zurʿah al-Dimashqī (d. 282/895).[59] Shuʿayb's transmissions of al-Zuhrī's traditions appear in many additional *ḥadīth* compilations as well. They are, indeed, a mainstay in the *ḥadīth* literature and were extensively used by the likes of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870).[60]

3. Abū Manīʿ ʿUbaydallāh ibn Abī Ziyād al-Ruṣāfī (d. ca. 158/775), a *mawlā* of Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik and a milk brother of the caliph's wife ʿAbdah bint ʿAbdallāh ibn Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiyah, he accompanied al-Zuhrī throughout his stay in Ruṣāfah.[61] His grandson Ḥajjāj ibn Abī Manīʿ inherited a copy (*nuskhah*) of his grandfather's record of al-Zuhrī's dictations, which he learned from him at the end of the caliphate of the Abbasid al-Manṣūr (r. 136–59/754–75).[62] This work seems to

53. Abū Zurʿah, *Tārīkh*, 1: 433, *kāna min kuttāb Hishām ʿalā nafaqātih;* cf. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 23: 94, *kataba ʿan al-Zuhrī imlāʾan li-l-sulṭān kāna kātiban.*

54. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 23: 96.

55. Abū Zurʿah, *Tārīkh*, 1: 433 > Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* 4: 134, *raʾaytu kutuban maḍbūṭatan muqayya-dah;* cf. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ*, 2 (1): 345, and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 23: 96.

56. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 23: 97, *kutub Shuʿayb ibn Abī Ḥamzah tushabbihu kutub al-dīwān.*

57. Abū Zurʿah, *Tārīkh*, 1: 434; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 23: 100.

58. An edition appears in Aʿẓamī 1978, 137–64 (Ar.).

59. Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* 4: 150–266.

60. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 15: 75.

61. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 474.

62. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 474; cf. Qushayrī, *Raqqah,* 162; Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 5: 459–61; and Ibn ʿAdīm, *Bughyah,* 5: 2100–4.

have begun with an account of the Medinan period of Muḥammad's life.[63] Large sections of this corpus survive in the *Kitāb al-Maʿrifah wa-l-tārīkh* of Ḥajjāj's student, Yaʿqūb ibn Sufyān al-Fasawī (d. 277/890).[64] Al-Fasawī most notably preserves large sections from al-Zuhrī's traditions that treat the female members of the Prophet's household, such as his female ancestors,[65] his wives,[66] and his daughters.[67]

4. Yūnus ibn Yazīd al-Aylī (d. 152/769 or later), a *mawlā* of the Umayyads and an imperial scribe to the caliph Hishām, he was a close companion of al-Zuhrī who accompanied him in Syria for either twelve or fourteen years.[68] Whenever al-Zuhrī traveled through Eilat/Aylah in southern Palestine heading for the Ḥijāz, Yūnus would purportedly host al-Zuhrī at his home and then accompany him on his journey to and from Medina. Unlike Maʿmar, who preferred to rely on his memory, Yūnus relied on his books.[69] Yūnus's written record of his traditions from al-Zuhrī fell into the possession of his nephew, ʿAnbasah ibn Khālid ibn Yazīd al-Aylī (d. 198/814), who transmitted traditions of al-Zuhrī from Yūnus's originals, as well as copies thereof.[70] ʿAnbasah's later reputation for depravity and cruelty as the head of the land-tax bureau of Egypt, in particular for torturing women, cast a pall on his transmission of his uncle's traditions from al-Zuhrī in the eyes of many *ḥadīth* scholars.[71]

5. ʿUqayl ibn Khālid ibn ʿAqīl al-Aylī (d. 144/761–62) was a *mawlā* bound by clientage to the family of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, and much like Yūnus, he was a frequent companion of al-Zuhrī during the reign of Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik. He was first sent from Damascus by the Umayyad prince ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik to al-Zuhrī in Ruṣāfah in order to copy down his knowledge (ʿilm) into a book over a period of months. Once ʿUqayl returned, the prince purportedly had

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63. Cited in Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyah,* 5: 2101, هذا كتاب ما ذكرنا محمد بن مسلم الزهري مما سألناه عنه من أول مخرج النبي.

64. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 249–51, 366–68, 371–72, 373, 379–80, 384, 391–93, 394–95, 402–3, 406, 408–9, 433–34, 453, 485, 510; ibid., 2: 321, 748; ibid., 3: 159, 164, 167, 268, 271, 283, 407–8, 412. On Fasawī and this work more generally, see Melchert 1999, 331ff.

65. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 317–18.

66. Ibid., 3: 319–24; cf. Ājurrī, *Sharīʿah,* 3: 331–32.

67. Ibid., 331–32.

68. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 74: 302.

69. Ibid., 74: 306–7. Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *ʿIlal,* 1: 172, where he is contrasted (unfavorably) to Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, who transmitted *ḥadīth* from memory.

70. Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 22: 405, *baʿḍuhā uṣūlun wa-baʿḍuhā nuskhah.*

71. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 3 (1): 402, "he used to hang women by their breasts [*kāna yuʿalliqu l-nisāʾ bi-l-thady*]."

copies made and later returned the originals to ʿUqayl at his request.[72] ʿUqayl seems subsequently to have returned to Ruṣāfah, perhaps on his own accord, for he reputedly spent four years with Hishām and al-Zuhrī.[73] Moreover, ʿUqayl did not merely learn traditions from al-Zuhrī in al-Ruṣāfah: he often accompanied al-Zuhrī on his journeys between Syria and the Ḥijāz as well. According to Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890), ʿUqayl also wrote down traditions from al-Zuhrī when the scholar traveled to ʿUqayl's native Eilat in order to visit his estate in southern Palestine.[74] ʿUqayl not only served the Umayyads as a scribe but, like al-Zuhrī, also as a keeper of the peace in Medina (*jilwāz* or *shurṭī*).[75] Towards the end of his life, ʿUqayl traveled to Egypt, where his book (*kitāb*) containing the traditions of al-Zuhrī survived. Among the transmitters of the book was his nephew Salāmah ibn Rawḥ ibn Khālid, who, however, never directly met his uncle but merely transmitted the traditions from the physical copy of his book.[76] Perhaps the most famous transmitter of the so-called *Kitāb ʿUqayl,* however, is the renowned and affluent Egyptian scholar al-Layth ibn Saʿd (d. 175/791). In 1967, Nabia Abbott published an extraordinary Egyptian papyrus (see fig. 11), currently housed at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, containing a fragment of the so-called *Kitāb ʿUqayl* as transmitted by al-Layth ibn Saʿd to his close companion and student Yaḥyā ibn Bukayr (d. 231/845).[77] The papyrus, dating from the early third/ninth century, is the earliest extant material artifact hitherto discovered that testifies to the transmission of al-Zuhrī's traditions.

Antoine Borrut has characterized Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's time at Hishām's court as marking "the period of a vast effort to codify and set in place a Marwānid historiographical filter."[78] With al-Zuhrī serving as a conduit, the interests of the Marwānids and the learned élite of Medina converged in that filter, as can be seen

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72. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 41: 37.

73. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 28.

74. ʿAṭwān 1986, 154–55. The quotation comes from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 3 (2): 43.

75. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 41: 46, 47–48 and n. 3 thereto, citing the Medinan scholar al-Mājishūn (d. 164/780); cf. Lecker 1996b, 26–27. The comment of al-Mājishūn about ʿUqayl's profession was probably not intended a compliment: a *jilwāz* is usually associated specifically with courts, being something like a court "bouncer," and they had a reputation for severity and violence. See Lange 2009, 163, 175n54.

76. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 2 (1): 301; cited in ʿAṭwān 1986, 156.

77. Abbott 1967, 166–84. Yaḥyā ibn Bukayr is also one of the most important transmitters of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik ibn Anas; however, his recension of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* though attested in a number of manuscripts, remains unpublished as of the time of writing. See *GAS,* 1: 460.

78. Borrut 2011, 74, "la période d'un vaste effort de codification et la mise en place d'un filter historiographique marwanide." For a more skeptical view of the Umayyad contribution, see El-Hibri 2000, 22–23, 345–36. Tayeb El-Hibri writes, "in fact Wāqidī rather than al-Zuhrī . . . gave the main shape to early Islamic history, and . . . Hārūn al-Rashīd rather than ʿAbd al-Malik . . . patronized this enterprise." However, what El-Hibri characterizes as transpiring "in fact" is, rather, blithely dismissive of large swathes of the historical evidence of scholarly activity in the seventh century and the role of the Umayyads in sponsoring this activity in particular. Cf. Donner 2010b.
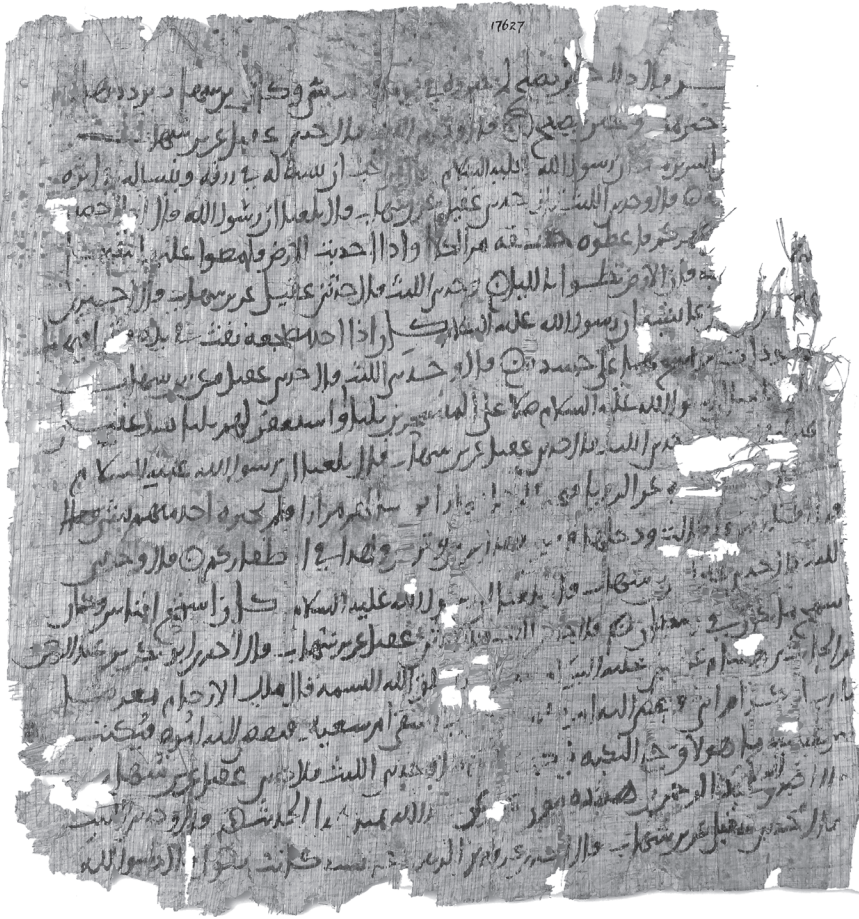
FIGURE 11. Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago no. 17627, an early third/ninth-century Egyptian papyrus fragment containing traditions of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. A.H. 124/742 C.E.) as transmitted from ʿUqayl ibn Khālid to al-Layth ibn Saʿd. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

in the relative uniformity of *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition as it took shape under the next generation of scholars. For example, while the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition can often diverge quite markedly with regards to chronology, its treatment of the actual *events* being ordered is rather uniform.[79] The codification seems to have primarily

79. On chronological inconsistencies in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, see in general Jones 1957. Despite their disagreements in chronology, however, the major Medinan compilers of *maghāzī* in the early Abbasid period, such as Ibn Isḥāq, Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah, and Abū Maʿshar al-Sindī, all concur, for

taken the form of al-Zuhrī dictating stores of his knowledge to scribes who made official records for use by the Umayyads and their court and to students who subsequently passed on this material and organized it as they saw fit without direct intervention by the authorities. The intervention of the authorities to affect the recording of this knowledge in writing seems to have been the most important contribution of the court. Al-Zuhrī's vast knowledge of the Medinan traditions and their learning—in the form of *ḥadīth, maghāzī,* qurʾanic exegesis (*tafsīr*), or jurisprudence (*fiqh*)—and his own élite stature among them guaranteed the lasting and indelible influence of the enterprise.

As for Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī himself, he allegedly owned no books containing traditions and never copied one out himself for public distribution. Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd al-Zuhrī recounts how al-Zuhrī, in cases where a *ḥadīth* was lengthy, would allegedly borrow a sheet of writing material (*waraqah*) from his fellow Medinan scholar al-Aʿraj (d. 117/735), who used to make a living copying the Qurʾan, and then write down the tradition, only to memorize it and then erase what he had written once he had learned it by heart.[80] For al-Zuhrī, and many other scholars of his age, the act of recording a tradition thus served as a memory aid, but it was no substitute for the ultimate goal of memorization. Once that goal was achieved, such records no longer had any purpose. One of al-Zuhrī's closest pupils, Yūnus ibn Yazīd al-Aylī, told of how he once asked al-Zuhrī for his writings, whereupon the aged scholar ordered a female slave to bring them out. However, Yūnus recounted his shock when the slave girl brought out merely "scrolls containing poetry"[81] or, according to another version of the story, "letters written to him by his brothers."[82] Yet another account claimed that al-Zuhrī owned not a single piece of writing except for a record of his tribe's lineage.[83] All of these personal writings of the scholar paled in comparison to the vast record of al-Zuhrī's traditions kept by the Umayyad court. Maʿmar ibn Rāshid claims to have witnessed the fate of these records of al-Zuhrī's traditions: "We used to think that we had learned a great deal from al-Zuhrī until al-Walīd [II] was assassinated and, lo, notebooks full of al-Zuhrī's knowledge were carried out by beasts of burden from [the caliph's] storehouses."[84] The official library of traditions recorded by the Umayyads' court

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example, that Muḥammad personally led twenty-five expeditions and fought on the battlefield in at least nine: Badr, Uḥud, al-Khandaq, the Banū Qurayẓah, the Banū Muṣṭaliq, Khaybar, the conquest of Mecca, Ḥunayn, and al-Ṭāʾif. See Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 1: 195; Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 2: 5–6.

80. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 633; on al-Aʿraj as a copyist of the Qurʾan codices, see ibid., 1: 233.

81. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, 3: 265, *ṣuḥufan fīhā shiʿr;* Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jāmiʿ,* 1: 334.

82. Ibn Ḥanbal, *ʿIlal,* 3: 486.

83. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 641

84. Ibn Saʿd (ed. Manṣūr), 170, *kunnā narā an qad aktharnā ʿan al-Zuhrī ḥattā qutila al-Walīd fa-idhā dafātir qad ḥumilat ʿalā l-dawābb min khazāʾinihi yaʿnī min ʿilm al-Zuhrī.*

scribes, it seems, even far outstripped the number of traditions learned by his student Maʿmar.

Yet reports on al-Zuhrī's own writings can be "eloquently contradictory," as Michael Cook has noted.[85] Another Medinan scholar, Abū l-Zinād (d. 130/748), claims that whenever he and his fellows went with al-Zuhrī to obtain knowledge from their teachers they would laugh at how he would surround himself with tablets and scrolls for writing down all that he heard.[86] A work named *Asnān al-khulafāʾ* (*Ages of the Caliphs*), which seems to have been a regnal list of the early caliphs and thus not a collection of traditions per se, is quoted by the historian Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and seems to be securely attributable to al-Zuhrī.[87] The work, or an early Arabic work dependent on it, may even have exerted its influence on the Syriac historiography of the late Umayyad period as well.[88] In a report transmitted by the Abbasid-era historian al-Madāʾinī (d. ca. 228/842), al-Zuhrī says that the Umayyad governor of Iraq Khālid ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Qasrī ordered him to write down the lineages of all the Arabian tribesmen. He began with Muḍar, but Khālid interrupted him before he could finish and told him to write the *sīrah* for him instead. What *sīrah* means in this specific context is somewhat vague, but the reference to *sīrah* here seems to be more of a book containing examples of exemplary political policies rather than a biography of the Prophet, as suggested in the following excerpt from the passage. Narrating the episode in the first person, al-Zuhrī relates,

> Then I said to [Khālid], "And when something related to the deeds [*siyar*] of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib comes up, shall I mention that as well?"
>
> "No!" he said, "Not unless you find him in the pit of Hell!"[89]

Al-Madāʾinī's story strikes me as tendentious and not too credible—its point being more about Khālid al-Qasrī's famous antipathy to the ʿAlids and the Shīʿah than it is about al-Zuhrī's writings. Hence, when al-Madāʾinī's account portrays Khālid as aghast at the idea that al-Zuhrī would offer to compile a book of ʿAlī's political policies (*siyar*) to aid the governor in administering Iraq, it likely does so in order to poke fun at the governor's trenchant hatred of ʿAlī.[90]

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85. M. Cook 1997, 459.

86. Ibn Ḥanbal, *ʿIlal,* 1: 486; cf. Dhababī, *Siyar,* 5: 329. Abū l-Zinād's comments may have applied to the period during Hishām's caliphate; see, e.g., Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 58–59.

87. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 2: 428, 1269; cf. Donner 1998, 293–94, and Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 64–65n162.

88. See Borrut 2014, 47–51, who astutely notes the absence of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib from Syriac regnal lists based on Umayyad-era sources.

89. Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī,* ed. Ibrāhīm, 22:15.

90. Hinds 1983, 58–59. The use of *sīrah* in the sense of "life story" seems to be anachronistic for this time period, during which a *sīrah* referred rather to a treatise expressing a scholar's doctrinal

The overall impression from accounts of al-Zuhrī's writings remains, however, that his monumental corpus was recorded by officials at the Umayyad court, on the one hand, and by his students, on the other, who subsequently redacted their records. The task of preserving al-Zuhrī's traditions was not undertaken by the scholar himself. As any survey of the early Arabic literature will bear out, the corpus of al-Zuhrī's tradition survives in a bevy of sources, which seem to rely on both oral and written transmissions of these materials. Undoubtedly, however, whatever insights the earliest written records of al-Zuhrī's corpus might have revealed is partially lost. The Medinan scholar Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) purportedly once opined:

> We used to crowd around Ibn Shihāb [al-Zuhrī]'s doorstep until each of us would fall on top of one another. I once had several chests full of writings [*ṣanādīq min kutub*], but they are lost. Were they to have survived, they would have been dearer to me than my family and possessions combined![91]

Later attempts were made to reassemble and reconstitute this corpus, the most famous example being the *Kitab al-Zuhriyyāt,* compiled by the famed *ḥadīth* scholar of Nishapur Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Dhuhlī (d. 258/873), which, alas, seems not to have survived.[92]

All of these reports regarding al-Zuhrī's corpus must be understood as speaking about sundry sorts of writing, recorded or compiled for different reasons and for different audiences. These different types of writings have been conveniently enumerated by Gregor Schoeler:

1. writings recorded in the form of unsystematic notes recorded by a scholar for purely private purposes;

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position and/or political ideology; cf. Hinds 1983, 62–63, and Crone and Zimmerman 2001, 23–24. The assertion of Jarrar 1989, 37, that the title *Maghāzī* acted as a sort of *pars pro toto* for larger, multi-part works such as that composed by Ibn Isḥāq strikes me as essentially correct. Less convincing, however, is Maher Jarrar's view that the word *sīrah* could, and indeed did, refer to works of prophetic biography prior to Ibn Hishām's epitome (*tahdhīb*) of Ziyād al-Bakkā'ī's recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (Jarrar 1989, 32ff.). Sources that refer to Ibn Isḥāq's work as his *Sīrah* do so, in my view, anachronistically. I am in agreement with the view of Abdesselam Cheddadi 2004, 175–86, that all the earliest works of prophetic biography and their genre were simply referred to as [*ʿilm*] *al-maghāzī*. The *nasab* work by al-Zuhrī mentioned in the *khabar* above seems not to have survived, if it ever existed. Lawrence Conrad has speculated (Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 65 n164) that Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī cites the very *nasab* text commissioned from al-Zuhrī by Khālid al-Qasrī for the genealogy of Maʿadd in his *Nasab Quraysh* (ed. Lévi-Provençal, 3); however, that this single line from Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī's treatise derives from a written text by al-Zuhrī strikes me as hardly substantiated.

91. Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, *Tartīb,* 1: 137. Other reports claim that these writings from al-Zuhrī survived and were found in Mālik's home after he died; however, they seem to be quite legendary in character. Cf. Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, *Tartīb,* 1: 186–87 and Wymann-Landgraf 2013, 41n36.

92. See Abbot 1967, 182ff.; cf. *GAS,* 1: 134 f. and ʿAsīrī 1999.

2. writings in the form of elaborate and systematically organized lectures note, usually recited by a scholar-teacher to his student and, more rarely, handed over to students and colleagues for copying or as a bequest; and

3. writings penned for a smaller circle of readers, produced for official collections, and/or by the order of the caliphal court for their exclusive use.[93]

The last category produced what counts as the first appearance of "real books"—what Sebastian Günther has termed a "literary composition"[94]—and the emergence of such compositions in the realm of "the tradition," *al-ʿilm,* marks the watershed moment when writerly culture becomes an integral component in the transmission of *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions. The surviving corpus of al-Zuhrī's students in Ruṣāfah in particular testifies to the transmission of his material in a manner consistent with the second category, but one must keep in mind that these writings were written down by his students in the context of the official codification of his traditions for the consumption and benefit of the Umayyad court. Schoeler continues, "[al]-Zuhrī's toleration of the emergence and even production and commission of writings of the third type . . . marked an important step towards a genuinely written literature."[95]

The fate of the Umayyad court's official record of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's tradition is something of a mystery. The aforementioned testimony of al-Zuhrī's student Maʿmar ibn Rāshid concerning the fate of this official corpus answers this question only partially. Maʿmar testifies to witnessing the removal of the court's official record of al-Zuhrī's traditions from the caliphal storehouses and how those entrusted with the task needed several beasts of burden for the task. According to his own testimony, Maʿmar was surprised to see that the voluminous corpus so outstripped what even he himself had learned from his teacher. Where were these writings taken? We shall likely never know. They are unlikely to have survived the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate. The context of Maʿmar's testimony is important: he says that he witnessed the event after the assassination of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd II in 744 C.E. The assassination of al-Walīd II was an inflexion point, an event that plunged the Umayyad caliphate into political chaos. The piety-minded Yazīd III, who led the putsch to oust the infamously debauched al-Walīd II, reigned only four months after seizing the caliphate, and the ensuing power struggle after Yazīd's untimely demise created a dynastic crisis from which the Umayyads never recovered. The Hāshimid revolution, led by a cabal in Kūfah and strengthened by an army recruited on the eastern frontiers of the empire, manipulated the chaos to its advantage and succeeded in eliminating the Umayyads and installing a new caliphal dynasty, the Abbasids, by 132/750. The rise of the Abbasid caliphate and the

93. This list reproduces Schoeler 2011, 24.
94. Günther 1994.
95. Schoeler 2011, 24.

end of the Umayyad dynasty brought a new dynamism that set in motion transformations of the political, societal, and religious landscape of the early Islamic polity, but much was lost with the decimation of the Umayyads' leadership as well. Certainly, among those loses was the Umayyad court's official record of al-Zuhrī's corpus of traditions, of which the caliphal library had stored at most a few copies for the exclusive use of the court. For the most part written records of al-Zuhrī's learning would survive only through the private copies of his students. This had important consequences for the early Abbasids. After they seized the caliphate and began to consolidate their power, the Abbasids, unlike the Umayyads, could boast no court history, no official record of the past onto which they could project their ideology. To match this Umayyad achievement, the Abbasids "had to start again from scratch," Schoeler notes.[96] They needed another al-Zuhrī. The Abbasids found one of his students, a scholar from Medina named Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq, for the task.

IBN ISḤĀQ AND THE ABBASIDS

Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār ibn Kūthān was, like most transmitters of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition, an inhabitant of Medina, but unlike Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī or his predecessors ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, Ibn Isḥāq was not of Arab descent and could boast no tribal genealogy. Ibn Isḥāq descended from a Jewish man named Yasār ibn Kūthān, whom Arabian tribesmen had taken captive in 12/633–34 from a synagogue in ʿAyn al-Tamr in southern Iraq along with forty other boys. His grandfather Yasār was reputed to be the first captive (*sabī*) of the early Islamic conquests brought to the city of Medina, where he lived out the remainder of his life bound by clientage to a notable family of Quraysh. Like his grandfather and father before him, Ibn Isḥāq was thus a non-Arab *mawlā,* a man bound by clientage to an Arab tribe. The Medinan household to which Ibn Isḥāq and his family were bound was a rather prominent one, that of the Qurashī notable Qays ibn Makhramah ibn al-Muṭṭalib ibn ʿAbd Manāf, who himself was born of a Jewish mother.[97]

As a non-Arab client, Ibn Isḥāq lacked the high social status granted to his famous teachers by accident of birth. A widely reported anecdote from Ibn Isḥāq's youth grants us a glimpse into the societal gulf that separated him from his predecessors. It seems that when Ibn Isḥāq first began to show up at Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's teaching sessions in Medina to learn traditions from him, he would often arrive late. Seeking the reason for this, al-Zuhrī discovered that his doorkeeper had been treating the callow youth as riffraff and shooing him away. Only after al-Zuhrī intervened was Ibn Isḥāq able to join his circle and learn traditions from him.[98]

96. Schoeler 2011, 31.

97. Ibn al-Kalbī, *Mathālib,* 234; Lecker 2015a, 35–36.

98. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 3 (2): 191–92; Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 327.

Despite his lowly status, Ibn Isḥāq also belonged to a new generation of schol-
ars who rose to prominence despite being from non-Arab lineage and the sub-
servient class of the Arabs' clients (*mawālī*). The increasing prominence of the
scholarly influence and accomplishments of non-Arab scholars over Arab scholars
at this time has been exaggerated in past scholarship,[99] but it is no exaggeration
to note how the generation whose lives spanned the late-Umayyad and early-
Abbasid period witnessed an important, demographic shift in the composition
of its learned elite and the eminent bearers of its cultural ideals. Ibn Isḥāq's gen-
eration of *mawālī*-scholars were upwardly mobile, ambitious assimilators to the
new hegemonic culture and, with their zealous embrace of its religion (Islam) and
language (Arabic), they swiftly rose to prominence in the second/eighth century.[100]
Ibn Isḥāq's rise to prominence as a scholar of *maghāzī* and, in particular, of the
traditions of al-Zuhrī in Medina was not an isolated achievement, even if his was
the most spectacular. His rise occurred alongside that of other prominent *mawālī*
of Medina, who also wrote their own books of *Maghāzī,* which are now lost and
survive only in scattered quotations in later works, such as the *Maghāzī* of Mūsā
ibn ʿUqba (d. 141/758)[101] and the *Maghāzī* of Abū Maʿshar al-Sindī (d. 170/786).[102]

Mūsā ibn ʿUqba is a fascinating understudied case. Like Ibn Isḥāq, Mūsā was
also a *mawlā* of an eminent branch of the Medinan Quraysh, the Zubayrids of
the Asad clan. Mūsā had relatively little contact with the Umayyads, although he
recalled joining Sālim ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb on military expedi-
tions against the Byzantines during the reign of al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.[103] The
impetus behind the compilation of his *Maghāzī* was allegedly to put to rest the
Medinans' disputes over who had, and had not, actually participated in the battle of
Badr and his efforts to preserve the knowledge of the Medinan Shuraḥbīl ibn Saʿīd.[104]
Al-Dhahabī characterizes Mūsā's *Maghāzī* as being quite a short work and notes that

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99. See the corrective in Motzki 1999.

100. This demographic transformation is noted in numerous accounts of an exchange between
al-Zuhrī and the caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik and Hishām, where within a single generation nearly all the
most prominent Arab scholars were replaced and outstripped by *mawālī*; see, e.g., Tawḥīdī, *Baṣāʾir,* 8:
85, and Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 20: 81–82.

101. Mūsā's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* although favored by Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) over that of Ibn
Isḥāq (Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 371), is now lost except for fragments of an abridgment by one Yūsuf ibn
Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (d. 789/1387) (*GAS* 1: 286–87, 300). Joseph Schacht's doubts
about the authenticity of the traditions attributed to Mūsā in the second text have been addressed by
Gregor Schoeler; cf. Schacht 1953 and Schoeler 2000.

102. Abū Maʿshar's *Maghāzī* was transmitted by his son Muḥammad (148–247/762–861) and his
grandson Dāwūd (d. 275/888); see Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 4: 52, 9: 350; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist,* 290–91. Those
portions of it that survive can only be found in quotations thereof in later works, such as al-Ṭabarī's
Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk; see *GAS* 1: 292, 300, and Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 91–95.

103. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 60: 458.

104. Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 29: 116; *GAS* 1: 279.

large quotations therefrom appear in the monumental *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* of Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066).[105] Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), the doyen of the Medinan scholars, famously favored Mūsă's *Maghāzī* over that of Ibn Isḥāq.[106]

Medina and its scholars made the deepest impact on Ibn Isḥāq's education, but he did not only study under that city's scholars. In 115/733, he reputedly journeyed to Alexandria, where he studied with prominent Egyptian scholars such as the Nubian convert to Islam Yazīd ibn Abī Ḥabīb (d. 128/745).[107] When Ibn Isḥāq left Egypt and returned to Medina is impossible to say precisely, but his return certainly preceded the year that al-Zuhrī made his final visit to Medina before returning to Syria,[108] a visit dated by his contemporary Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah to 123/740–41.[109] The sources are surprisingly unanimous in their claim that al-Zuhrī declared to the Medinans that knowledge in abundance (*ʿilm jamm*) would never depart from their city as long as Ibn Isḥāq remained there.[110] According to the *ḥadīth* scholar Zakariyyā al-Sājī (d. 307/919–20), the students of al-Zuhrī would subsequently consult Ibn Isḥāq regarding any tradition from al-Zuhrī about which they had doubts because of their high regard for the accuracy and thoroughness of his memory.[111] Indeed, al-Zuhrī was not the only well-established scholar of his generation to lavish praise on Ibn Isḥāq. The revered Anṣārī ʿĀṣim ibn ʿUmar ibn Qatādah (d. 120/737) reputedly also declared, "Knowledge shall remain with the people as long as Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq lives."[112]

Ultimately, however, Ibn Isḥāq's future fame would be found outside of Medina and its scholarly circles, even despite the public praise and high regard for him voiced by the likes of ʿĀṣim ibn ʿUmar and al-Zuhrī. He achieved lasting prominence only after traveling to Iraq to join the court of the Abbasids not long after their victory over the Umayyad dynasty in 132/750. Indeed, Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's considerable success in the élite circles of the Abbasids contrasts sharply to what ultimately proved to be his tarnished legacy among the Medinans.

Although a native son of Medina and effusively praised by many of its eminent elder scholars, most of the scholars of Medina from Ibn Isḥāq's own generation rejected his authority outright, refused to transmit his works, and vigorously

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105. *Siyar*, 6: 115–16.

106. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah*, 3: 371; Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ*, 2: 233. "In the *maghāzī* there exists no work more sound [*aṣaḥḥ*] than the book of Mūsā ibn ʿUqabah, despite it being short and bereft of most of what is mentioned in other books," al-Shāfiʿī reputedly said (Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 6: 115). (;).

107. *GAS* 1:341–42; Motzki 1999, 311. Sellheim 1965–66, 44, speculates that one of the motives for Ibn Isḥāq's journey to Egypt was to acquire papyrus.

108. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah*, 2: 27.

109. Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-awsaṭ*, 2: 283.

110. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād*, 2: 14; cf. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ*, 3 (2): 191, and Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil*, 6: 2119.

111. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 4: 276.

112. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh*, 2: 325.

impugned his reputation. For instance, stories abound of his sexual and moral impropriety during his youth, although it is difficult, if not impossible, to judge their credibility. According to one such story, when Ibn Isḥāq lived in Medina as a youth, his handsome face and his long, well-groomed hair tempted the ladies of the city whenever they saw him praying in Medina's central mosque. This made their husbands and male kin so irate that they complained to the city's governor. According to one version of the story, the governor seized the young Ibn Isḥāq and, after strapping him to a wooden plank, shaved his head and scourged him.[113] In another, equally odd anecdote, the Basran *ḥadīth* scholar Bandār recounts nasty rumors from two of his Medinan teachers about Ibn Isḥāq's youthful days in Medina. The first story recounts how Ibn Isḥāq was once seen walking about dressed in a loincloth so thin and worn that that his testicles dangled out.[114] Bandār's other source of Medinan gossip claimed that Ibn Isḥāq used to dabble in cockfighting, viewed by *ḥadīth* scholars as an act of gross impiety.[115] Most notoriously—and perhaps most credibly—Ibn Isḥāq brazenly transmitted traditions directly from a noble Qurashī woman, Fāṭimah bint Mundhir, without the permission of her husband, the Medinan scholar Hishām ibn ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr. When informed of this, Hishām became incensed and denounced Ibn Isḥāq as a liar to preserve the honor of his wife.[116]

But this last controversy seems to have been a mere tempest in a teapot. Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah testified to the veracity of the claim that Ibn Isḥāq met with Fāṭima bint Mundhir in person.[117] Centuries later, the *ḥadīth* scholar al-Dhahabī dismissed the scandal as a pernicious canard:

> Fāṭimah [bint Mundhir] did not enter Hishām [ibn ʿUrwah]'s household until she was a girl of some twenty plus years old. She was older than he by about nine years. She had heard traditions from Asmāʾ bint al-Ṣiddīq, and Hishām had not heard traditions from Asmāʾ even though she was his grandmother. Moreover, when Ibn Isḥāq heard reports from her, she had grown old and become an elderly woman, whereas he was a mere lad [*ghulām*]—or else a man speaking from behind the partition.[118]

What seems really to have accounted for the longevity of the Medinans' hostility to Ibn Isḥāq is his feud with Mālik ibn Anas, the revered doyen of the Medinan

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113. Abū l-ʿArab, *Miḥan,* 301. A version of this story transmitted by al-Wāqidī also appears in Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 328 and Yāqūt, *Irshād,* 6: 2419; however, al-Wāqidī's version places the events during the governorship of Hishām ibn Ismāʿīl al-Makhzūmī and therefore at an implausibly early date. Hishām's post as Medina's governor ended in Rabīʿ I 87/February–March 706, when al-Walīd I appointed his cousin ʿUmar ibn al-ʿAbd ʿAzīz to the post. The latter remained Medina's governor until Shaʿbān 93/May–June 712.

114. Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 7: 54.

115. Ibid.; Rosenthal 1975, 57–58.

116. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 324–25.

117. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 3 (2): 192; Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 6: 2117.

118. *Tārīkh,* 4: 196–97.

school and the author of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*. The feud between Ibn Isḥāq and Mālik arose when Ibn Isḥāq exposed the falsity of Mālik's claim to be of Arab descent. Mālik laid claim to Arab lineage from the Dhū Aṣbaḥ of Taym ibn Murrah, but Ibn Isḥāq rebutted this. He asserted that Mālik—as well as his father, grandfather, and uncles—descended rather from non-Arab clients of Taym ibn Murrah.[119] Ibn Isḥāq was not the only scholar to make such accusations, nor was he the only learned Medinan to suffer Mālik's wrath as a result.[120] Indeed, every indication suggests that Ibn Isḥāq's charge against Mālik was true.[121] In subsequent years, Mālik ibn Anas boasted about how the Medinans had expelled Ibn Isḥāq from Medina.[122]

Perhaps the most serious accusation leveled against Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq by the Medinan traditionalists, however, was that he denied God's predetermination of human affairs (*qadar*), and was thus a *qadarī*, a man who believed in humankind's innate free will. Such views had dire political consequences in the late-Umayyad period, especially under the caliphate of Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, when the group espousing them—the so-called Qadariyyah—came to be viewed, not without justification, as a hive of sedition. In truth, Ibn Isḥāq's interest in *qadar* was not eccentric: the ideas espoused by the Qadariyyah had been current in Medina for some time—even the despised heresiarch of the Qadariyyah, the Umayyad imperial scribe Ghaylān al-Dimashqī whose followers would eventually stage a coup d'état to install Yazīd III as caliph in 744, had some sort of following there. This following likely dated from the famous public debate that Ghaylān held in the city with Rabīʿat al-Raʾy when he accompanied the caliph Hishām on his pilgrimage in 106/725.[123] Even those scholars sympathetic to Ibn Isḥāq lent credence to this accusation: Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah explicitly states that he was hated for his views on *qadar*.[124] Yaḥyā al-Qaṭṭān even counted him among the followers of Ghaylān al-Dimashqī, and thus squarely among the most politically radical currents of the Qadariyyah.[125]

More certain is the claim that Ibn Isḥāq was arrested and flogged for his *qadarī* views in Medina. This likely transpired in the wake of Caliph Hishām's crucifixion

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119. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Intiqāʾ,* 40; cf. Balkhī, *Qubūl,* 205.

120. Jarrar 2011, 203–4, and Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, *Tartīb,* 1: 110.

121. Ibn Isḥāq likely derived this information from al-Zuhrī, a teacher of both scholars who himself refers to Mālik's uncle, Abū Suhayl Nāfiʿ ibn Mālik, as a *mawlā* of Taym ibn Murrah; see Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* 1: 355 (*k. al-ṣawm,* no. 1933). Cf. Kister 1986, 77–79.

122. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ,* 3 (2): 192–93. Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān is implicated in his exile as well; see ʿUqaylī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ,* 4: 1196.

123. *TG,* 2: 668–69.

124. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 2: 27; Balkhī, *Maqālāt,* 174; Abū Zurʿah al-Rāzī, *Suʾālāt,* 304.

125. Abū Zurʿah al-Rāzī, *Suʾālāt,* 301. This statement, however, has the tinge of polemical censure and might be a mere aspersion.

of Ghaylān al-Dimashqī for heresy and the subsequent persecution of his followers and sympathizers soon thereafter. According to the most famous story, during one of his teaching sessions in Medina, Ibn Isḥāq lost consciousness, and when he awoke, he recounted a vision of a man with a rope entering the mosque to remove a donkey. A man then suddenly appeared at the threshold of the mosque, placed a noose around his neck, and dragged him away to be scourged by the governor of Medina, Ibrāhīm ibn Hishām al-Makhzūmī, for his views on *qadar*.[126] In Iraq, the traditionists were in the main more open to ideas such as those espoused by the Qadariyyah, they having been embraced by the likes of the revered pietist al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, as well as theological rationalism more generally. However, the Medinan opposition to such ideas remained inveterate.[127] This alone may account for Ibn Isḥāq's departure from the city. The accusations leveled against him continued to follow him outside of Medina, and he seems never to have abandoned his early views. Makkī ibn Ibrāhīm, who encountered Ibn Isḥāq in al-Rayy, said, "I attended Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's teaching session and, lo, he was narrating traditions about the divine attributes [*aḥādīth fī ṣifat Allāh*] that my heart could not bear hearing, so I never again returned."[128] The traditions that Makkī censures here likely refer to the lengthy discourses of Ibn Isḥāq on the creation of the cosmos, which are suffused with theological discourse on the nature of God as Creator.[129]

Despite the scope of the controversy surrounding Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's days in Medina and the sustained enmity of Mālik and his acolytes, his influence in *maghāzī* could not be escaped. No less an authority than al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) acknowledged, "Whosoever desires to plunge the depths of the *maghāzī* is utterly reliant on Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq."[130] Critics of Mālik's attitude to Ibn Isḥāq characterized Mālik as largely ignorant of *maghāzī* and given to making errors therein, since he was mostly concerned with legal and ritual matters (*ʿilm al-ḥarām wa-l-ḥalāl*).[131] The personal achievements and erudition of Ibn Isḥāq account for his

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126. Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 2: 2120. Cf. Abū l-ʿArab, *Miḥan,* 300, where one should likely read من المسجد for من السجن. Regarding the problems with the account, see Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 76n64, and *TG,* 2: 675. The story is notably narrated by Ḥumayd ibn Ḥabīb al-Lakhmī, who rebelled against Caliph Walīd II and was a partisan of Caliph Yazīd III. Cf. Crone 1980, 157 §13, and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 15: 276, 18: 145.

127. *TG,* 2: 51ff. On those early scholars who deemed *qadarī*s to be unbelievers (*kuffār;* sing. *kāfir*) whose blood it was licit to shed, see now Judd 2015.

128. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 137, 3: 366; Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 23–24.

129. See, e.g., Abū l-Shaykh, *ʿAẓamah,* 2: 468–76, 3: 1055–57; note that all of Abū l-Shaykh's authorities hail from Rayy.

130. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 15, *man arāda an yatabaḥḥira fī l-maghāzī fa-huwa ʿiyālun ʿalā Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq.*

131. Balkhī, *Qubūl,* 207. In a famous exchange between the two, Abū Yūsuf al-Qāḍī threatens to expose Abū Ḥanīfah's ignorance of whether or not Badr preceded Uḥud after Abū Ḥanīfah chides him for being too interested in studying Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*. See Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ,* 2: 288–89; Goldziher 1971, 2: 193.

success in no small measure; however, the role of the Abbasid court should also not be underestimated. Ibn Isḥāq's life in Medina had become unbearable by the 750s. Invitations from Iraq offered hope of escape. Once Ibn Isḥāq had resolved to leave Medina, Dāwūd ibn Khālid objected that his journey would further diminish him. "By God I think not," Ibn Isḥāq replied, "our virtue is undiminished—though fortune can make a miser even out of generous man."[132]

The Abbasids' patronage of Ibn Isḥāq may have thus saved him from historical obscurity. Our best account of how the Abbasids came to patronize Ibn Isḥāq is that of the historian Ibn Saʿd, who writes:

> Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq was the first who compiled [*jamaʿa*] the *maghāzī* of the Messenger of God and arranged them [*allafahā*] [into a book]. He used to transmit traditions from ʿĀṣim ibn ʿUmar ibn Qatādah, Yazīd ibn Rūmān, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, and others as well. . . . He left Medina early on [*qadīman*], and none of the Medinans relate traditions from him except for Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd.
>
>   Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq was with al-ʿAbbās ibn Muḥammad in al-Jazīrah, and he had [previously] approached Abū Jaʿfar [al-Manṣūr] in al-Ḥīrah and wrote down for him the *Maghāzī*.[133] For that reason the inhabitants of al-Kūfah learned traditions [*samiʿa*] from him, as did the inhabitants of al-Jazīrah when he was with al-ʿAbbās ibn Muḥammad. He went to al-Rayy, and the inhabitants of al-Rayy learned traditions from him. Those whose transmit his book from these lands outnumber those who transmit from him from the inhabitants of Medina. Then he went to Baghdad. Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's son informed me that he died in Baghdad in the year 150 and was buried in the cemetery of al-Khayzurān.[134]

Judging from Ibn Saʿd's account, Ibn Isḥāq seems to have first joined the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75) in al-Ḥīrah prior to the founding of Baghdad. How many years he resided with al-Manṣūr remains uncertain, but Ibn Isḥāq must have undertaken his subsequent journey from al-Ḥīrah to Ḥarrān in northern Mesopotamian after 142/759, the year in which al-Manṣūr appointed his younger brother, al-ʿAbbās ibn Muḥammad, as the governor of the province of

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132. Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ishrāf,* 162–63, *lā wa'llāhi mā akhlāqunā bi-khasīsatin wa-la-rubbamā qaṣṣara l-dahru bāʿa l-karīm;* Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 6: 2118; Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 16; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Tamhīd,* 23: 178

133. This reading corrects that of numerous previous scholars—e.g., Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 79, and Schoeler 2011, 28—who misread the text as indicating that Ibn Isḥāq alighted in the Jazīrah *first* and only then went to al-Ḥīrah. However, the verbal construction *kāna atā* indicates that his journey to Kūfah took place prior to his journey to the Jazīrah. This reading is also confirmed by Ibn Saʿd's shorter biography of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq where the order of his travels is more clearly stated. See Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 322, *fa-atā l-Kūfah wa-l-Jazīrah wa-l-Rayy wa-Baghdād fa-aqāma fīhā ḥattā māt.* A statement attributed to Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn also corroborates this. "The Kūfans heard [the *Maghāzī*], then the Ḥarrānians, and then Salamah in al-Rayy," he says; see Ibn Junayd, *Suʾālāt,* 485. In a forthcoming article, Michael Lecker also corrects this long-standing misreading of Ibn Saʿd's account.

134. Ibn Saʿd (ed. Manṣūr), 401–2.

al-Jazīrah.[135] After his tenure in Ḥarrān, Ibn Isḥāq traveled to al-Rayy where he joined the court of the caliph's son, the future Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī. His time in al-Rayy coincided with the period when the prince ruled the city and its province as its governor—that is, from 141/758 until 152/768.[136]

Ibn Isḥāq eventually returned to al-Manṣūr's court from al-Rayy, a return that likely coincided with the construction of Baghdad, which began in earnest by the middle of 145/762. The earliest possible date that the scholar would have traveled to the city seems to be a year after the initial construction began at the site, since the caliphal palace was only built and occupied by al-Manṣūr in 146/763. The caliph's famed Round City was completed in 149/766, just a year prior to the scholar's death.[137] It is certainly significant that the city's great historian, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), singles out Ibn Isḥāq as the first scholar to pass away within its walls. His grave, the site of which is still visible in the neighborhood of al-Aʿẓamiyyah in Baghdad today,[138] was located in the cemetery of al-Khayzurān on the eastern side.[139] The original alabaster door that sealed his tomb bore the epitaph: "This is the grave of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār, author of *The Expeditions of the Messenger of God*."[140]

Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* was a truly massive undertaking—thitherto unprecedented in the history of Arabic literature—and the programmatic efforts to record and disseminate it were exceeded only by the efforts dedicated to record the Qurʾan. Rudolf Sellheim has depicted the work as intended to rival the world chronicles and epics of the non-Arabs, especially the Persians,[141] but the rivals and competitors that the work encountered at the caliphal court far exceeded even that. The caliph al-Manṣūr also patronized a vast effort to translate into Arabic not merely histories and epics, but also works of wisdom, logic, medicine, mathematics, engineering, and astrology from Greek, Sanskrit, and Middle Persian.[142] What

135. He remained governor of the Jazīrah until his dismissal in 155/772 (Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 2: 141); cf. *EI³*, s.v. "al-ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī" (Th. Bernheimer).

136. The motive for Ibn Isḥāq's travels from court to court remains uncertain. In al-Mahdī's case, perhaps it was didactic in nature. As a young prince, al-Mahdī's Arabic was notoriously poor, so perhaps Ibn Isḥāq was sent to al-Rayy to instruct him. See Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 3: 152, where al-Mahdī's speech is depicted as full of mispronunciations (*laḥn*) like "the babbling of a slave-girl [ʿafak al-amah]." As noted by Antoine Borrut 2011, 75, al-Manṣūr invoked the example of al-Zuhrī when arranging for the education of his son, the future caliph al-Mahdī; see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 3: 404.

137. On the city's construction, see *EI²*, s.v. "Baghdād" (ʿA.-ʿA. al-Dūrī).

138. According to Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf; see his comments in the footnotes in Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 24: 429.

139. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 8; Yāqūt, *Irshād,* 6: 2418.

140. Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 6: 2116, *hādhā qabru Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār ṣāhib maghāzī rasūl Allāh.*

141. Sellheim 1965–66, 37–38.

142. Gutas 1998, 29ff.; cf. van Bladel 2012 and 2014.

was unprecedented about the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* however, was its ambition to capture the entire arc of God's providential ordering of human history, from Adam to the advent of the prophecy of Muḥammad and the victory of the last prophet's *ummah.*[143] An account cited by the historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) lists the *Maghāzī* as one of the most famous accomplishments of the caliphate of Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr:

> In the days [of al-Manṣūr], Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq put into writing the book of the expeditions of the Prophet and his policies, as well as the stories of the beginning of Creation [*waḍaʿa kutub al-maghāzī wa-l-siyar wa-akhbār al-mubtadaʾ*]. Before that, they were neither gathered together [*majmūʿah*], well known [*maʿrūfah*], nor well organized [*muṣannafah*].[144]

Ibn Isḥāq's patronage by the Abbasids and his nearness to the court "put him at the heart of a revolutionary regime" for whom the entire sweep of human time—whether pre-Islamic, prophetic, or the recent past—had taken on new meanings. Theirs was no mere political triumph over the Umayyads; it was also an ideological one with deep political and religious undertones.[145] For the Abbasids and their revolution (*dawlah*), theirs was a victory of the Prophet's clan, the Banū Hāshim, and of the descendants of his uncle, al-ʿAbbās, over an Umayyad clan that had wrested away the rights of Muḥamamd's legacy from his household and had sullied his *ummah* with blood spilled at the hands of tyranny. It is hard to imagine that Ibn Isḥāq's codification and revision of the *Maghāzī* in such a context left the work scarcely untouched.

THE CORPUS OF IBN ISḤĀQ

All these statements must, however, be accompanied with a word of caution: the entirety of Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* does not survive, only recensions and selections of a vast work whose contents are familiar, but whose true parameters remain ultimately unknown. However, one does gain a profound sense of its monumental scope from the substantial portions of the work that do survive—whether in later (partial) recensions, epitomes, or quotations—and the very disparate nature of how the work survives enables scholars to peek around the interventions, omissions, and bowdlerization by any one of its redactors. Following the early precedent of Johann Fück (1894-1974), most modern scholars have accepted the hypothesis that the Ibn Isḥāq's work was originally divided into three sections: "the Genesis" (*al-Mubtadaʾ*), relating humanity's primordial history and the history of

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143. The observation of Chase Robinson 2015b, 137 that the work likely approximated the coverage, though not the content, of the chronicle of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī is quite astute.

144. Masʿūdī, *Murūj,* ed. Pellat, 5: 211.

145. Robinson 2015b, 135.
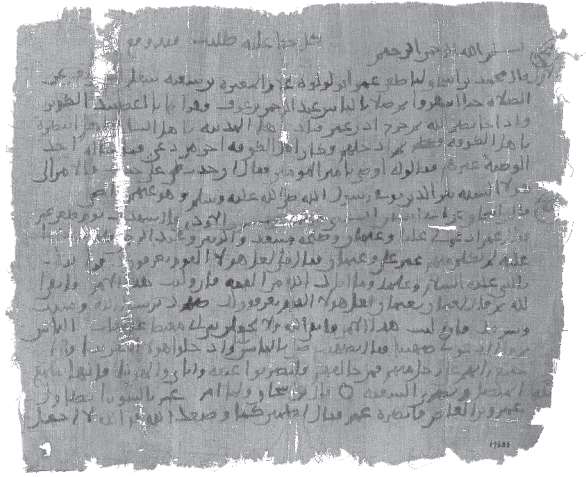
FIGURE 12. Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago no.
17636, a late second/eighth-century Egyptian papyrus fragment
from the *Kitāb al-Khulafāʾ* (*Book of the Caliphs*) of Ibn Isḥāq
(d. A.H. 150/767) C.E. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the
University of Chicago.

the prophets and their nations up to the rise of Islam; "the Commission"
(*al-Mabʿath*), relating the early life of Muḥammad in Mecca up until the Hijrah to
Yathrib; and "The Expeditions" (*al-Maghāzī*), covering Muḥammad's Medinan
decade and concluding with his death.[146] As Nabia Abbott has shown in detail,
Fück's scheme, albeit useful, imposes a neat division on the rather messy, incon-
sistent way in which sources go about describing the contents and various con-
stituent parts of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*.[147] This division also neglects to account for
Ibn Isḥāq's so-called *History of the Caliphs* (*Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ*), even though an
early fragment thereof survives on a papyrus fragment dated by Abbott to the late
second/eighth century (see fig. 12), effectively making it the earliest extant material
witness to Ibn Isḥāq's corpus.[148] As a result, the *Tārīkh al-Khulafāʾ* has wrongly
been designated as a sort of "addendum" to the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*;[149] rather, it seems
likely to have been the concluding section of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* as a whole.
More recently, Muṭāʿ al-Ṭarābīshī has suggested a different tripartite division of

    146. Fück 1925, 34ff.
    147. Abbott 1957, 87–88.
    148. Abbott 1957, 95–95, 97–98. The fragment relates the story of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's assassina-
tion by a Persian slave.
    149. E.g., Sellheim 1965–66, 43.

the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* into (1) *al-Mubtadaʾ*, (2) *al-Maghāzī* [*wa-l-siyar*], and (3) *Tārīkh al-khulafāʾ*. This newer hypothetical division strikes me as more plausible than Fück's;[150] however, a definitive answer to the question is likely unattainable given the current state of the evidence.

The transmitters of Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* attested in the literary sources are legion, and for this reason modern scholars tend, rather lazily, to overly rely on a single redaction. This is an unfortunate habit. Each student's transmission, even when authentically learned from Ibn Isḥāq, represents a different version of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* inasmuch as Ibn Isḥāq continually edited, expanded, and revised his work throughout his life. This process began at an early date: Ibn Isḥāq had likely composed some version of his *Maghāzī* in Medina, but he continued to revise it. Michael Lecker has noted that Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd, the only Medinan scholar to transmit Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī,* explicitly claimed that "Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq undid [the binding of] the *Maghāzī* three times, and I observed and witnessed this"[151]—meaning that Ibrāhīm himself learned at least three unbound and, thus, revised and rearranged versions of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī.* Transmitters of Ibn Isḥāq's works, moreover, often abbreviated, omitted, and supplemented his accounts as they saw fit. Any attempt to reconstruct a pure, unadulterated original is, therefore, a fool's errand—there is no putative "original" to be reconstructed, only multiple versions of accounts transmitted multiple times over.[152]

Scholars are justified in finding the prospect of comparing these versions somewhat daunting. Nearly a century ago, Fück singled out fifteen transmitters of the *Maghāzī,*[153] which seems like a long list but is humble compared to Muṭāʿ al-Ṭarābīshī's more recent list, which exceeds sixty.[154] However, of these many transmitters of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* only a select few seem actually to have transmitted the entire work (or, at least, their version thereof) rather than merely parts of it. Six transmitters stand out as truly exceptional redactors of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* in this regard. These transmitters are as follows.

I. The Medina-Baghdad Recension

a. Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf al-Zuhrī (d. 183/800, or slightly later)[155] is the only Medinan scholar to have transmitted Ibn

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150. Ṭarābīshī 1994, 35–36.

151. Ibn Ḥanbal, *ʿIlal,* 3: 436. Cf. Marwadhī, *ʿIlal,* 61, "I heard the *Maghāzī* from him three times as he undid and changed it [*samiʿtu l-maghāzī minhu thalāth marrāt yanquḍuhā wa-yughayyiruhā*]." Both are cited and discussed at length in Lecker forthcoming. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Lecker for kindly sharing with me a draft of this paper.

152. As eloquently argued by Jarrar 1992, 288, and Conrad 1993, 260–61.

153. Fück 1925, 87.

154. Ṭarābīshī 1994.

155. Ibid., 66ff.

Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*,[156] which he claims to have learned from Ibn Isḥāq at least three sepa-
rate times.[157] The eminent *ḥadīth* scholar ʿAlī Ibn al-Madīnī regarded the reliability
of his copy of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* as equal only to the copy of Ibn Isḥāq's personal
scribe, Hārūn ibn Abī ʿĪsā al-Shāmī.[158] Ibrāhīm was the great-grandson of the famed
Companion of Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf and deeply ensconced in the
circles of elite Quraysh who lived during the early Abbasid period. Ibrāhīm himself
maintained good relations with the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–
809), who appointed him *qāḍī* of Medina.[159] Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd's recension of the
Maghāzī represents the earliest transmission of Ibn Isḥāq's work and, thus, stands as
an important testimony to the fact that Ibn Isḥāq had compiled his *Maghāzī,* at least
in part, prior to his journey to Iraq to join the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr.[160]
According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd's recension also included the *Mubtadaʾ*,[161]
so even this early recension was quite considerable in scope. This "Medinan" recen-
sion, however, survives only through the transmission of scholars from Baghdad,
who cite Ibrāhīm's sons, Yaʿqūb and Saʿd, as well as a scribe named Aḥmad ibn Ayyūb
al-Warrāq who served the Barmakid vizier al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khālid (d. 193/808).
The transmission of Aḥmad al-Warrāq was, however, controversial because he lacked
the bona fides of a *ḥadīth* scholar and because many claimed that he merely copied
Ibrāhīm's recension without learning the text from him personally through audition
(*samāʿ*).[162] What seems to be more certain is the claim of the scholar's son Yaʿqūb ibn
Ibrāhīm that his father made a copy of his recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* for the
Barmakid vizier Yaḥyā ibn Khāld ibn Barmak (d. 190/805), though the vizier was not
personally able to learn the text from Ibrāhīm via audition (*samāʿ*).[163] According to
al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, only in the last year of his life did Ibrāhīm travel from Medina
to Baghdad, where he joined the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd and oversaw the caliphal
treasury.[164] Portions of Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd's recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* survive in
al-Tārīkh al-kabīr of Abū Bakr Ibn Abī Khaythamah (d. 279/892) and in the *Musnad*
of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).

II. The Kūfan Recensions

a. Ziyād ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Bakkāʾī (d. 183/799) transmits the most famous recen-
sion as it is preserved in the widely read revision (*tahdhīb*) of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn

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156. Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 6: 2125.

157. Lecker forthcoming.

158. Ṭarābīshī 1994, 232.

159. Cf. A. Ahmed 2011, 70–72, who maps out his familial connections in detail.

160. Cf. Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 79–80. and Abbot 1957, 89.

161. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist,* 1:290.

162. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 6: 63–64; cf. Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 1: 178–79.

163. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 6: 64; cf. *EI³,* s.v. "Barmakids" (K. van Bladel).

164. Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 1: 174; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 5: 115; Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 6: 603, 606.

Hishām al-Ḥimyarī (d. 218/834), which is commonly called *al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah* or *Sīrat Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*.[165] Ibn Hishām's editorial hand reshaped Ziyād's recension considerably.[166] His interventions, truncations, and omissions from Ziyād's recension become all the more visible even when comparing other citations of Ziyād's recension that do not rely on Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah,* such as one can find extensively throughout the *Akhbār Makkah* of al-Fākihī (d. ca. 272–79/885–93) and the *Tarīkh Madīnat Dimashq* of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176). Ziyād ranks among the earliest students of Ibn Isḥāq in Iraq. He made the journey to nearby al-Ḥīrah, the city where Ibn Isḥāq first settled after leaving Medina, when a summons went out from the Abbasid court for a scribe to copy down Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*. According to one report, upon Ibn Isḥāq's arrival in Iraq, Ziyād sold part of his own house so that he could afford the expenses required to accompany Ibn Isḥāq and learn the entirety of his *Maghāzī*.[167] Ibn Isḥāq purportedly dictated his entire *Maghāzī* to Ziyād twice.[168] The famed *ḥadīth* scholar Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/847) reports hearing Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd criticizing Ziyād al-Bakkāʾī's recension of the *Maghāzī,* saying, "These peasants are relating stories about the shameful acts of the Prophet's companions [*yuḥaddithu hāʾūlāʾi l-nabaṭ bi-maʿāyib aṣḥāb al-nabī*]!" In his defense, Yaḥyā commented that Ziyād would read the work before the people but leave nothing out.[169]

b. Yūnus ibn Bukayr al-Shaybānī (d. 199/815)[170] transmits a recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* that survives in a unique eleventh-century manuscript housed at the library of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque in Fez; however, the manuscript is incomplete. The manuscript has been edited and published in two separate editions, the first by Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh in 1976 and a second by Suhayl Zakkār in 1978. The extant manuscript of this recension begins with Muḥammad's birth and childhood, but other citations of Yūnus ibn Bukayr's recension indicate that it once included the *Mubtadaʾ* as well.[171] At the opening of the Fez manuscript, Yūnus makes a statement that sheds considerable light on how the work was transmitted to him. He notes that all the *ḥadīth* from Ibn Isḥāq are "supported with a chain of authorities [*musnad*], for either he himself dictated them to me, read them aloud

165. *GAS,* 1: 297–99. The historian al-Masʿūdī refers to Ibn Hishām's recension as *Kitāb al-Maghāzī wa-l-siyar;* see Masʿūdī, *Murūj,* ed. Pellat, 3: 5.

166. See Guillaume 1960 and Lecker 2014.

167. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 9: 502. This is perhaps an overstatement, since other accounts state that he only sold a *portion* of his house; cf. Ibn Junayd, *Suʾālāt,* 405, "*bāʿa shiqṣan min dārihi wa-katabahā . . . ʿan Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq.*"

168. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 9: 500, *fa-amlā ʿalayhi marratayn.*

169. Ibn Junayd, *Suʾālāt,* 484. The word *nabaṭ,* translated as "peasants" above, technically refers to the native Aramaic-speaking populations of Iraq.

170. Ṭarābīshī 1994, 104ff.

171. Jarrar 1989, 34–35.

to me, or related them to me from memory." Intriguingly, he adds that whatever *ḥadīth* appearing in the volume not thus supported were garnered from "a reading read aloud to Ibn Isḥāq."[172] His recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* includes numerous additional traditions, which Yūnus received from other authorities (his so-called *ziyādāt,* or "addenda"). The presence of such additions in his recension led to it being called *Ziyādāt al-Maghāzī*.[173] Yūnus was an affluent man, and he gained some notoriety in the eyes of *ḥadīth* scholars for his close ties to the powerful Barmakid vizier Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā (d. 187/803), whose court of redress (*maẓālim*) he oversaw.[174] Yūnus's recension survives predominantly in the transmission of his student Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-ʿUṭāridī (d. 272/886),[175] although there exists some controversy as to whether he actually learned the work from Yūnus himself or merely transmitted the *Maghāzī* from the copy of his father, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who had been a better-known student of Yūnus.[176] Aḥmad al-ʿUṭāridī, as Shahab Ahmed has noted, was "markedly unpopular" among *ḥadīth* scholars.[177] Much of the opprobrium voiced against Aḥmad al-ʿUṭāridī seems to have been due to his love of raising and racing pigeons, a pastime frowned upon by the piety-minded *ḥadīth* scholars.[178] One report has a scholar aghast at finding Aḥmad al-ʿUṭāridī in a pigeon tower, and another claims that he had allowed the satchels containing his copy of the *Maghāzī* to be covered with the excrement of pigeons.[179] Nonetheless, Yūnus's *Maghāzī* as transmitted by Aḥmad al-ʿUṭāridī is extensively cited in later works that preserve portions of his recension not appearing in the incomplete manuscripts thereof, such as the *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* of Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) and the *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176).

III. The Ḥarrānian Recension

a. Muḥammad ibn Salamah al-Ḥarrānī (d. 192/807) transmitted Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* from his time in the Jazīrah at the court the Abbasid governor of the province, al-ʿAbbās ibn Muḥammad (d. 186/802). A short fragment of this recension transmitted on the authority of his student Abū Jaʿfar al-Nufaylī al-Ḥarrānī

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172. Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 23, *kullu shayʾin min ḥadīth Ibn Isḥāq musnadun fa-huwa amlāhu ʿalayya aw qaraʾahu ʿalayya aw-ḥaddathanī bihi wa-mā lam-yakun musnadan fa-huwa qirāʾatan quriʾa ʿalā Ibn Isḥāq.* Cf. Schoeler 2011, 28

173. Cf. Muranyi 1991, 220ff.

174. Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 32: 496. Cf. *EI³,* s.v. "Barmakids" (K. van Bladel) and Tillier 2009.

175. On whom see *GAS,* 1: 146 and Ṭarābīshī 1994, 110. The historian al-Ṭabarī cites the recension of Yūnus from two additional students of his from Kūfah, Abū Kurayb (d. 248/862) and Hannād ibn Sarī (d. 243/857); see Muranyi 1991, 215–16.

176. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 5: 436.

177. S. Ahmed 2017, 99–100.

178. Goldziher 1971, 2: 74–75. Cf. Grotzfeld 1979 cited in S. Ahmed 2017, 100n148.

179. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 5: 436–37.

(d. 234/848–49)[180] survives in the Ẓāhiriyyah Library in Damascus and was edited and published as an appendix to the editions of the recension of Yūnus ibn Bukayr published by Ḥamīd Allāh and Zakkār. Large numbers of citations from this recension can also be found in the works of Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), such as his *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr.*

IV. The Rayy Recension

a. Salamah ibn al-Faḍl al-Abrash (d. after 190/805)[181] transmitted Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* from his time at the court of the Abbasid crown prince al-Mahdī in al-Rayy, where Salamah was a schoolteacher and also the city's judge.[182] The famed *ḥadīth* scholar Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/847) praised his copy of the *Maghāzī* as the most complete recension.[183] Indeed, Salamah claimed to have heard the entirety of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* twice and reputedly acquired the original sheets of papyrus (*qarāṭīs*)[184] on which Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* had been copied at al-Mahdī's court in al-Rayy.[185] Ibn Saʿd explicitly notes that Salamah transmitted both Ibn Isḥāq's *Mubtadaʾ* and his *Maghāzī,* an observation confirmed by other sources.[186] Salamah's recension is most extensively preserved in the works of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī, which he transmits on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd (d. 248/862). Important citations the Rayy-recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Mubtadaʾ* also appear in the *Kitāb al-ʿAẓamah* of Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 369/979) and in *al-Mubtadaʾ wa-l-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* of Wathīmah ibn Mūsā (d. 237/851),[187] half of which survives in the recension of his son published by Raïf Khoury in 1978.[188]

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180. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist,* 1: 290; Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 10: 634.

181. Ṭarābīshī 1994, 147ff.

182. Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 11: 305, 307.

183. Ibid., 307.

184. *Qarāṭīs* is the plural of *qirṭās* (<χάρτη), which could also mean parchment, i.e. writing material made from animal hides (*EI²,* s.v. "Ḳirṭās" [R. Sellheim]); however, the extraordinary size of the work and the costliness of parchment makes this interpretation less likely.

185. Dhahabī, *Mīzān,* 2: 192; Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 16–17.

186. Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 7: 381.

187. Muranyi 1991, 215; Khoury 1978, 114–16. Wathīmah seems not always to have directly transmitted his material from Ibn Isḥāq but, rather, to have relied on Salamah as an intermediary. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān,* 8: 374–75.

188. See Khoury 1978 and *EI²,* s.v. "Wathīma b. Mūsā" (R. G. Khoury). Ibn Isḥāq also appears as a source for the *Mubtadaʾ* of Abū Ḥudhayfah Isḥāq ibn Bishr (d. 206/821), a scholar from Bukhārā who enjoyed the patronage of Hārūn al-Rashīd in Baghdad. Authorities generally impugn his reputation for transmitting materials from figures under whom he had not studied (Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 7: 336–38). Isḥāq ibn Bishr's *Mubtadaʾ* is extant but remains unedited. The most complete manuscript of the work is MS. Oxford Bodleiana, Huntingdon 388 (*GAS,* 1: 293–94). I suspect that Isḥāq ibn Bishr in fact relied Salamah's recension rather than Ibn Isḥāq directly; however, this issue requires further investigation.

V. The Baghdad Recension

a. Abū Ayyūb Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Umawī (d. 194/809) was a native of Kūfah who settled in Baghdad and who claimed to have learned Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* alongside the Abbasids' famed "Judge of Judges" Abū Yūsuf al-Qāḍī (113–82/731–98).[189] Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd's recension does not survive independently; however, numerous quotations from it survive in later sources, in particular via the recension of his son Saʿīd ibn Yaḥyā al-Umawī (d. 249/863).[190] Ella Landau-Tasseron has adduced evidence that, like many other students of Ibn Isḥāq, Yaḥyā may have supplemented Ibn Isḥāq's original work with additional traditions.[191] A renowned *ḥadīth* scholar from Baghdad named Abū l-Qāsim al-Baghawī (d. 317/929) relates a fascinating story of how, after having been introduced to him by his grandfather, Saʿīd ibn Yaḥyā lent him his copy of the first quire (*al-juzʾ al-awwal*) of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* so that he could make his own copy. Al-Baghawī then made the rounds of the local scholars informing him that he intended to learn the book from Saʿīd ibn Yaḥyā, and they agreed to pay him anywhere between ten and twenty *dīnār*s to prepare a copy of the book for them as well, which he would transmit to them in turn. By the day's end, al-Baghawī claims that he had earned over two hundred dinars, spending just a small amount thereof on the writing materials he needed for the copies.[192] The anecdote gives one a sense of how costly a complete copy of the work would be—just the revision (*tahdhīb*) of Ibn Hishām alone was likely divided into thirty quires.[193]

That Ibn Isḥāq had composed and taught portions of his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* before leaving Medina seems relatively well established. The version of the text which Ibn Isḥāq taught to Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd al-Zuhrī dates from the period prior to his departure from Medina and likely offers us a glimpse into the work at its earliest stage. Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* indubitably continued to evolve thereafter. Less certain, however, is how Abbasid patronage exactly shaped the scope of his work. Our most direct account of the Abbasid court exerting its influence on the contents of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* comes from an account cited by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī:

189. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 16: 200. Ibn al-Nadīm lists him as the transmitter of Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Khulafāʾ* but erroneously calls him ʿAbdallāh ibn Saʿīd al-Umawī.

190. Cf. Ṭarābīshī 1994, 218 et passim.

191. Landau-Tasseron 2004, 74–75, analyzing the citations thereof in *Kitāb al-Ghazawāt* of Ibn Ḥubaysh (d. 583/1187).

192. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 11: 328–29.

193. Samarrāʾī 1995, 1: 77.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Muʾaddib [d. 393/1003],[194] said: I heard ʿAmmār say:

Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq entered al-Mahdī's presence and standing before him was his son. "Ibn Isḥāq," al-Mahdī asked, "do you know who this is?" "Yes," he replied, "he's the Commander of the Faithful's son." "Go now," commanded al-Mahdī, "and compose a book for him containing all that has happened since God's creation of Adam until this day." Thus, he departed and composed this book, but al-Mahdī said, "You've made it too long, Ibn Isḥāq! Go now and abridge it!" He departed and made an abridgement, and this became the abridged version of the book, and the large book was deposited in the Commander of the Faithful's library [*khizānah*].

Al-Ḥasan added: I heard Abū l-Haytham say: Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq composed this book on sheets of papyri, and later he passed the sheets of papyri on to Salamah ibn al-Faḍl, so the transmission of Salamah was favored above others because of those sheets of papyri.[195]

The above account depicts the court of having had a direct influence on the scope and subject matter of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī,* especially the court of the Abbasid prince al-Mahdī in al-Rayy. Tantalizing though as the account is, it is also quite odd and riddled with problems.[196] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's source for the account, al-Hasan al-Muʾaddib, is rather late, and even al-Khaṭīb expresses reservations about its reliability. Al-Khaṭīb suspects that the caliph mentioned in the account must have actually been al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75) rather than al-Mahdī, since Ibn Isḥāq addresses 'al-Mahdī' by the full regnal title "Commander of the Faithful." This is indeed a stark anachronism: Ibn Isḥāq did not outlive al-Manṣūr, and al-Mahdī did not merit the designation "Commander of the Faithful" at the time that Ibn Isḥāq was a member of al-Mahdī's court and entourage in al-Rayy.[197] The small revision suggested by al-Khaṭīb seems to resolve the basic problem; however, the mention of Ibn Isḥāq's student Salamah al-Abrash in the second part of al-Ḥasan al-Muʾaddib's account makes it seem likely that the events transpired in al-Mahdī's court in al-Rayy and not with al-Manṣūr in Iraq. In truth, however, al-Ḥasan al-Muʾaddib merges two reports that are inherently contradictory. The first one, attributed to a certain ʿAmmār,[198] claims that al-Mahdī introduced Ibn Isḥāq to his son, requested him to write a universal chronicle and then to abridge it, and finally stored a copy of the scholar's lengthy book in the caliphal library (*khizānat amīr al-muʾminīn*); whereas the second account, attributed to one Abū l-Haytham, claims the main copy of the work became the possession of Ibn Isḥāq's student

194. On al-Ḥasan al-Muʾaddib, see Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 8: 450–51.

195. Ibid., 2: 16.

196. Cf. the comments of Abbott 1957, 89–90.

197. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2:17.

198. Probably ʿAmmār ibn Muḥammad ibn Makhlad (d. 387/997); cf. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 14: 183–84, and Abbott 1957, 89 n6.

Salamah ibn al-Faḍl. If we are to lend any credence to the account of al-Ḥasan al-Muʾaddib at all, then we should perhaps read the accounts as referring to two separate events: (1) the initial composition of the work for al-Manṣūr (anachronistically referred to as al-Mahdī) narrated by ʿAmmār, and (2) the fate of the copy of Ibn Isḥāq's Rayy recension of the *Maghāzī* narrated by Abū l-Haytham.

Rather than relying on an account of dubious historical accuracy, a wiser course is to consider how the wider context of Abbasid court patronage came to bear on Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī.* The innovation of Ibn Isḥāq lies in how he shaped the *maghāzī* corpus into a literary genre. The nature of the novel approaches that he adopted can be inferred in part from the anxieties expressed about his methods in compiling the book and the types of criticisms leveled against him. Firstly, there is Ibn Isḥāq's willingness to rely upon Jewish and Christian authorities, whom he cites as "the scholars of the people of the *first* Scripture [*ahl al-ʿilm min ahl al-kitāb al-awwal*]."[199] The Medinan *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Abī Fudayk (d. 199/814–15) recalled with opprobrium how he witnessed Ibn Isḥāq writing down knowledge from a man from "the People of the Scripture [*ahl al-kitāb*]."[200] Likewise, the Basran *ḥadīth* scholar Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālisī (d. ca. 203–4/819–20) recounts a rumor of how Ibn Isḥāq, when asked to reveal his source for a certain account, answered "a trustworthy man [*thiqah*]." Pressed again to further specify his source, he called him "Jacob the Jew," causing a scandal.[201] It is true that Ibn Isḥāq relied extensively on the works and knowledge of Jews and Christians who were his contemporaries; thus, it is no accident that he also provides us with the earliest extant Arabic translation of a passage from the New Testament.[202] This practice was well established by the time Ibn Isḥāq arrived in Iraq, however, and dated from his time in Medina—as the transmission of Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd suggests, his work on the section of his *Maghāzī* call *al-Mubtadaʾ* was already under way before he left the Ḥijāz to enter Abbasid patronage. Likewise, among the practices for which Mālik allegedly censured Ibn Isḥāq in Medina was his willingness to preserve and transmit stories from the converted descendants of the Jews against whom the Prophet had led expeditions.[203]

199. E.g., Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 139–40 (on the sons of Adam and Eve), cited by Rubin 2003, 80; Abū l-Shaykh, *ʿAẓamah,* 2: 475, where Ibn Isḥāq cites the authority of *ahl al-tawrāh min ahl al-kitāb al-awwal* for the claim that the four angels bearing God's throne are in the shape of a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle, as in Ezekiel 10. The phrase is also used by Isḥāq ibn Bishr (d. 206/821); see, e.g., Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 24: 445.

200. ʿUqaylī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ,* 4: 1200, *raʾaytu Ibn Isḥāq yaktubu ʿan rajulin min ahl al-kitāb.*

201. Abū Zurʿah al-Rāzī, *Suʾālāt,* 302; Ibn ʿAdī, *Kāmil,* 6: 2118.

202. Anthony 2016; cf. Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ,* 2: 157–58.

203. Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt,* 7: 382. Lecker has recently suggested that Ibn Isḥāq relied on and transmitted the books of his father, Isḥāq ibn Yasār, in his *Maghāzī,* for information about the Jews of the Ḥijāz. See *EI³,* s.v. "Ibn Isḥāq" (M. Lecker). While Ibn Isḥāq does indeed cite his father's authority for information about Jews of the Ḥijāz, Lecker has unfortunately misread a passage from al-Dhahabī's *Siyar* which he takes as mentioning the books of Ibn Isḥāq's father. The passage form al-Dhahabī's *Siyar*

The second practice for which *ḥadīth* scholars criticized Ibn Isḥāq was his willingness to insert into his *Maghāzī* written documents sent to him[204]—that is, without hearing such testimony being taught directly by an authority. The historian Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī (d. 236/851) makes the explicit claim that, when notables of Quraysh would stumble upon a piece of writing/document (*kitāb*), they sent it to Ibn Isḥāq so that he could include it in his *Maghāzī,* and that he obliged them.[205] Such documents are referred to rather nondescriptly as "writings" (*kutub*; sg. *kitāb*), but they may have included documents deemed of lasting historical value, such as the document called variously by modern scholars "the Constitution of Medina" and (more accurately) "the Ummah Document," which contained the first legal and administrative principles underlying the duties and rights governing the relations between Muḥammad's community of believers and the inhabitants of Yathrib.[206]

Lastly, poetry appears in an enormous quantity throughout Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī.* Much of the poetry seems to have been added after his arrival in Iraq, although the use of poetry in *maghāzī* narratives was already a well-established Medinan practice.[207] Poetry features in the surviving excerpts from the *Maghāzī* of his contemporary Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah as well.[208] However, the extent of Ibn Isḥāq's interest seems to be without parallel. He allegedly gave poets stories (*al-aḥādīth*) about which they would compose poems.[209] The belletrist Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), for instance, claims that when Ibn Isḥāq traveled to Basra, "the city's youths forged elegies for the daughters of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib for him, and he inserted them into the *Sīrah* and the *Ghazawāt.*"[210] The Basran philogist and literary critic Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 232/846–47) fiercely criticized Ibn Isḥāq for his liberal use of poetry dubiously attributed to figures who never uttered a word of poetry.[211] These criticisms notwithstanding, Ibn Isḥāq transformed the *maghāzī* from

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cites the Medinan scholar Ibrāhīm ibn Mundhir, who states: "[Ismāʿil ibn Abī Uways] brought me the books of Ibn Isḥāq transmitted on the authority of his father on the expeditions [of the Prophet] and other topics, and I excerpted many traditions from them [*akhraja ilayya kutuba Ibn Isḥāq ʿan abīhi fī l-maghāzī wa-ghayrihā fa-intakhabtu minhā kathīran*]" (Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 7: 39). *Pace* Lecker, the phrase "transmitted on the authority of his father [*ʿan abīhi*]" refers not to Ibn Isḥāq's father but, rather, to the father of Ismāʿīl, Abū Uways al-Madanī (d. 169/785–86), who studied Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* in Medina. Cf. Ṭarābīshī 1994, 260–61.

204. Khaṭīb, *Baghdād,* 2: 28.
205. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 2: 329.
206. On which see Lecker 2004 and Donner 2010a, 72ff., 227ff.
207. Horovitz 1926b; ʿArafat 1958.
208. Bakrī 2016, 2: 877.
209. Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ,* 2: 223.
210. Tawḥīdī, *Baṣāʾir,* 6: 224.
211. Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt,* 7–8; cf. ʿArafat 1958, 458ff.

a mere collection of narrative anecdotes into an literary medium shot through with poetry—a veritable "prosimetric" genre.[212] Rudolf Sellheim calculated that as much as one-fifth of Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah* is poetry; certainly, therefore, the fuller, unredacted version of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* contained more.[213] Poetry may have not been the only sort of additions that Ibn Isḥāq made to his *Maghāzī* after arriving in Iraq. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) leveled the criticism that, "Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq went to Baghdad and paid no mind from whom he narrated," and thus began to narrate from historians and genealogists, such as Muḥammad ibn Sāʾib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), whose probity and reliability where impugned by the *ḥadīth* folk.[214]

What all these testimonies point to are facets of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* that, in my view, constitute the indelible legacy that he bequeathed to the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition, a legacy made possible by Abbasid patronage. He expands the '*maghāzī*' beyond a corpus of tradition that includes primarily narrative elements and reports—be they relevant to the legendary, the prophetic, or the recent past (*qiṣṣah, ḥadīth,* or *khabar*). With Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī,* the corpus transformed into a genre that encompassed a bricolage of prose and poetry of sundry origins, some of which was authentic and some of which was contrived merely to serve as a narrative device. The prose elements assumed many forms, too—not just the form of traditional narratives, but also Jewish and Christian scriptural prooftexts, tribal and ethnic genealogies, registers of battle participants and leaders, as well as treaties, pacts, letters, bequests, and so on.[215] This new aesthetic for the *maghāzī* corpus was certainly presaged by al-Zuhrī, who knew the expectations of the courtly milieu just as well as Ibn Isḥāq; however, he seems not to have realized or established the aesthetics of the genre as fully as did his pupil under the Abbasids. Insofar as these scholars were often compilers, redactors, and arrangers of materials, one must rather cautious when relying on appeals to authorial agency when explaining the features of these scholars' corpora. The conceit of the *isnād* is that the compiler acts as a mere conduit of material, not its fashioner. As Chase Robinson has noted, "The Prophet's life was written, it might be said, before there were authors."[216] However, an unmistakable authorial intent can, and probably should, be located in the redactionary project itself.

Hence, for the *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/975–76) the achievements of Ibn Isḥāq were readily perceptible through his elevation of the genre into

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212. On "prosimetrum" in Arabic literature, see Heinrichs 1997.

213. Sellheim 1965–66, 47.

214. Marwadhī, *ʿIlal,* 62. Noted in Lecker forthcoming. Cf. Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ,* 2:231–32 for Ibn Ḥanbal's harsh denunciation of al-Kalbī's *tafsīr.*

215. Cf. Cheddadi 2004, 232–44; Kudelin 2006, 39, and 2010, 6–7.

216. Robinson 2015b, 133.

a form that could compete with other literary works favored by the courtly élites. He writes:

> If Ibn Isḥāq's only merit was that he turned rulers away from frivolous books and turned their energies towards the expeditions [*maghāzī*] of the Messenger of God and the genesis of creation [*mubtadaʾ al-khalq*] and the commission [*mabʿath*] of the Prophet, then this would be a deed meritorious enough to earn Ibn Isḥāq the renown that he first achieved. After him others compiled such books, but they did not attain the level of Ibn Isḥāq.[217]

For Ibn ʿAdī, Ibn Isḥāq was a pathbreaker whose achievements were not even surpassed by his successors and who placed the *maghāzī* narratives on par with other courtly literature. "Knowledge of the *maghāzī*," al-Zuhrī purportedly opined, "grants knowledge of this world and the Hereafter"[218]—that is, it offers a model fusion of the worldly canny and pious enlightenment. Yet Ibn ʿAdī's estimation starkly contrasts to the more recent evaluation of Nabia Abbott, who expressed profound doubts about Ibn Isḥāq's originality. The real innovator, she surmised, was his teacher, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī: "Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* was not superior, in content or method, to those of his fellow pupils and contemporaries . . . the guiding genius . . . was none other than their common master, Muḥammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhrī."[219]

I disagree with Abbott's contention, but her insight that al-Zuhrī and Ibn Isḥāq must be seen in continuity is, in my view, beyond reproach. The fourth/tenth-century *ḥadīth* scholar Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī aptly praised Ibn Isḥāq as "one of the best scholars at composing fluid narratives";[220] the only other scholar whom he describes with such accolades is Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī.[221] Without al-Zuhrī, one could not conceive of Ibn Isḥāq. Together these two scholars made the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition and honed the seminal narrative set pieces that ensured the genre's enduring legacy. However, it is Ibn Isḥāq alone who should be regarded as the scholar who first elevated the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition from a corpus to a literary genre of historical writing that went beyond a depiction of Muḥammad's life story through a series of choice anecdotal narratives attributed to the authorities of the past. Ibn Isḥāq went several steps further. He emplotted Muḥammad's prophethood and his community within a thick description of the Arabian past that entangled them in a historical tapestry of fateful interactions with a cast of imperial players and a host of spiritual seekers—be they Arabs, Romans, Egyptians, Abyssinians, Syrians, and Persians or pagans, Jews, and Christians. The

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217. *Kāmil,* 6: 2125.

218. Khaṭīb, *Jāmiʿ,* 2: 287, *fī ʿilm al-maghāzī ʿilm al-ākhirah wa-l-dunyā.*

219. Abbott 1957, 79.

220. Ibn Ḥibban, *Thiqāt,* 7: 383, *min aḥsan al-nās siyāqan li-l-akhbār;* cited in Schoeler 2011, 27.

221. Ibid., 5: 349, *kāna min aḥfaẓ ahl zamānihi wa-aḥsanahum siyāqan li-mutūn al-akhbār.*

work's unifying ambition was thus to place Muḥammad and his *ummah* at the vanguard of God's plan for human affairs and the zenith of human civilization. To do so, Ibn Isḥāq created a far-reaching vision of the human past that saw the trajectory of human history not merely ordered by divine providence but also illuminated by revelatory irruptions of prophecy, which culminated in the final message of God as revealed through Muḥammad, the last and best of his prophets.

Prophecy and Empires of Faith

A key thesis of this work is that a court impulse lay behind the earliest efforts to record the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition and to commit it to writing as a discrete corpus—a process that reached its culmination in the middle of the second/eighth century with the compilation of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (d. A.H.150/767 C.E.) under the patronage of the Abbasid caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (r. 136–59/754–75). Materials from the formative period of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition are nearly all lost except in redactions by later generations, but this formative period nonetheless produced a written corpus that effectively became a *vulgate historiographique* to employ Antoine Borrut's useful term.[1] Works produced in this period shaped all subsequent historical knowledge and provided the historiographical bedrock for subsequent debates about the early period. Hence, the formative period of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition determined the shape of all subsequent Arabo-Islamic historiography thereafter at a deeply structural level. Understanding this historical vulgate and examining how its framework came into being, therefore, remains to a large extent the mandate and aim of contemporary historical-critical scholarship on this historical corpus. Put another way, our aim is not to arrive at a truer or more original (and, therefore, more authentic) history of this corpus, but rather to take stock of the contingency of the historical knowledge it proffers and the ideological forces that fashioned it.

As argued in previous chapters, the court impulse began, not with the Abbasid caliphs, but rather with the late Umayyad caliphs. The surviving evidence strongly suggests that this process may have begun even as early as the caliphates of ʿAbd

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1. Borrut 2011, 79 et passim.

al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705) and ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99–101/717–20). Yet even if the evidence for such a court impulse is less certain for these early examples, by the caliphate of Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105–25/724–43) the evidence for the court impulse behind the writing down of *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions transmitted by Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) is, in my view, decisive.

The caliphal court did not create the corpus of traditions that served as the raw materials for the emergence of this literature; the court impulse was contiguous with the tradition, but it did not encompass its totality. Only a portion of the early Muslim corpus of orally transmitted religious knowledge (ʿilm) contributed to the raw material of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. The impulse emanating from the caliphal court to write down ʿilm in general and the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions seized upon and harnessed a vibrant, but still relatively amorphous, tradition that flourished without direct intervention from the courtly elite. Yet even if the court did not create the corpus, the legacy of the court's intervention proved decisive for the formation of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature and its emergence as a literary genre of Arabic letters. Hence, although reports about Muḥammad's life circulated on their own without the need for direct intervention and/or prompting by the ruling class of the conquest elite, only a mustering of the considerable resources of the court and the prestige of its patronage accounts for the genre's survival in the shape of its most seminal works, such as Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*.

PROPHECY AND THE RHETORIC OF EMPIRE

If one accepts that the court shaped the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, it is essential to ask how the court impulse also influenced the content of the *maghāzī* traditions as well. In other words, how did the ideologies undergirding the conquests of the early Islamic polity and the expansion of the hegemony of its elites shape and impact the narratives of the *sīrah-maghāzī*? I contend that the rhetoric of empire in Late Antiquity profoundly shaped this corpus in hitherto underappreciated ways. The early purveyors of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition adopted a preexisting language of political legitimacy rooted in the traditions of the Byzantine or Sasanid empires on the one hand, while on the other, they also sought to forge a new imperial discourse that, albeit in dialog with the imperial ideologies espoused by the Islamic polity's predecessors, mobilized the distinctive theological idiom of the Qurʾan and the religiosity it inspired.[2]

This phenomenon can perhaps most easily be seen in the chasm between how Arabic and non-Arabic sources speak about the political fortunes of Muḥammad

2. This phenomenon has also been observed and analyzed in Umayyad approaches to Muslim cult and ritual and in the important corpus of epistles penned by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib, the Umayyads' imperial secretary; cf. Donner 2010b, 193ff.; Qāḍī 1993 and 2019.

and his successors. Although early non-Muslim accounts frequently refer to Muḥammad as a "king" (Syr. *malkā*) and characterize the rule of his followers as a kingdom (*malkūtā*),[3] early Muslim biographical accounts of Muḥammad's life reject royal imagery when depicting Muḥammad and his prophetic office. The early *sīrah-maghāzī* literature eschews any portrayal of Muḥammad "holding court" in the manner of a king or royal.[4] Such early Muslim accounts did recognize that Muḥammad was, however, a ruler who bequeathed a burgeoning regional power to his community. But Muḥammad was a nonpareil—no subsequent ruler of the community could occupy his prophetic office or further disclose divinely instituted laws; his successors could only hope to rule his community "according to the model of his prophetic office [ʿalā minhāj nubuwwatih]" and serve as its lodestar and caretaker.[5] Hence, one should not be surprised to find that, although Muḥammad is rarely called a "king" (Ar. *malik*), the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature do speak frequently and freely of the dominion (Ar. *mulk*) of the prophet and his community (*ummah*) and do so in overwhelmingly positive terms. Indeed, that this literature came to propound a distinctively triumphalist view of the emergence of the early Islamic community of believers should not be surprising, for it was rooted in a robust prophetology that served to sustain and legitimize that community's hegemony, the supremacy of its new conquest elite, and the expansionist policy of the burgeoning polity.

Hence, the political ideology that permeates the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is most evident when it provides answers to the following question: How does the prophecy of Muḥammad undergird the claims of the early Islamic polity to hegemonic rule? That question is usually answered not by an appeal to the kingship of Muḥammad and his successors but, rather, in terms of the prophetic *mulk* that he bequeaths to his community (*ummah*). In the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, prophetic *mulk* is interwoven into the overarching framework of the Islamic salvation history whose narratives of Muḥammad's early life anticipate not merely his political triumph but also that of his people as well. Muḥammad's birth thus portends the future glory and triumph of his people and his community from the very moment of his conception. Even before his conception, the Prophet's father bears a holy light between his eyes that passes on to the Prophet's mother, Āminah, when she bears him in her womb; and at the hour of his birth Āminah witnesses the palaces of Syria fill with that same light, an omen of future conquests.[6] Likewise, as the Prophet travels about as a boy, he is recognized as a future king (*malik*), or as carrying dominion (*mulk*), by

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3. Penn 2015a, 105–7.

4. M. Cook 2011.

5. Thus stated in the letter of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd ibn Yazīd; see Crone and Hinds 1986, 120; Rubin 2003, 90.

6. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 6–7 (1.1.4); cf. Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 44–45, 50–51.

Christian monks, Jewish rabbis, and pagan diviners alike.[7] These narratives frame *mulk,* not in terms of a political office, but rather within a panoramic view of human history as laid out by divine providence. God gives dominion to whomever He wills, and now God's will is to bequeath dominion to Muḥammad and his people. Viewed through this lens, *mulk* and its vicissitudes appear as a preordained destiny brought by Muḥammad to his people, a destiny anticipated and foreshadowed in the narratives that recount the Islamic *praeparatio coranica* and that disclose the architectonics of divine providence on the grandest scale.

Ibn Isḥāq provides us with one of the clearest visions of the Prophet's *mulk* as signaling a manifest destiny conferred upon the Prophet's community in a story of the pre-Islamic Lakhmid king of Yemen, Rabīʿah ibn Naṣr. Ostensibly, Ibn Isḥāq's tale is about how Rabīʿah ibn Naṣr came to abandon his kingdom in Yemen and to make a pact with the Sasanid shāh of Persia in order to establish the rule of his dynasty, the Naṣrids, at al-Ḥīrah in southern Iraq.[8] However, Ibn Isḥāq also interweaves this story with vivid portents of Muḥammad's prophetic destiny and his people's future glory. The story begins with the Yemeni king Rabīʿah being awakened by a dream whose meaning eludes and terrifies him. He summons masters of divination, magic, astrology, and auguries to his court, but these sages are at a loss to discern the hidden meaning of the dream. Enter the famed pagan diviners Saṭīḥ and Shiqq, each a renowned soothsayer far more capable in the interpretations of dreams than the king's courtiers. By the end of Ibn Isḥāq's account, the two diviners successfully interpret the dream of Rabīʿah ibn Naṣr and provide a dire prophecy of the fate of his dynasty in Yemen. They even foretell future events beyond the end of the king's rule in Yemen and prophesy the coming of Axumite rule from across the Red Sea, then the Ḥimyarites' expulsion of Axumite rule under the leadership of the Dhū Yazan, and (finally) the coming of the prophet Muḥammad.

Each diviner delivers his message to Rabīʿah ibn Naṣr individually without the aid of the other in order to prevent collusion between them. The wording of each diviner's prophecy as it appears in Ibn Isḥāq's account is significant in both form and content. Their utterances are couched in the rhymed, cadenced prose of the Arabian diviners,[9] but they are also clearly infused with the kerygmatic expectations of the coming of Islam. When asked who will end the dominion (*mulk*) of the Dhū Yazan in Yemen, Saṭīḥ declares:

A prophet pure | to him will come revelation | from on high

nabiyyun zakiyy | yaʾtīhi l-waḥiyy | min qibali l-ʿaliyy[10]

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7. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 8–9 (1.1.5); Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 1: 88; Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil,* 1: 131. Cf. Rubin 1975, 64–65; 2015, 305–6.

8. Toral-Niehoff 2013.

9. Stewart 2011, 337–38.

10. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 1: 17; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 912.

Rabīʿah asks Saṭīḥ who this man will be, and the diviner answers, "a man from the progeny of Ghālib ibn Fihr [viz., Quraysh] . . . dominion will reside with his tribe until the end of time." The theme of the dominion (*mulk*) of the prophet's tribe (*qawm*) appears yet again in the second diviner's utterances. After Saṭīḥ has been dismissed, Rabīʿah ibn Naṣr summons Shiqq, the second diviner. Shiqq's prophecy confirms that of Saṭīḥ, and when asked when the kingdom of the Dhū Yazan will end, he declares

> It will end by a prophet sent | with truth and justice he comes | from a people of religion and virtue | with his tribe dominion shall remain until the Day of Judgment

> *yanqaṭiʿu bi-rasūlin mursali | yaʾtī bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-l-ʿadli | bayna ahli l-dīni wa-l-faḍli | yakūnu l-mulku fī qawmihi ilā yawmi l-faṣli*

Both of the prophecies uttered by the diviners foretell the transferal of dominion, or *mulk,* from one people to another as the wheel of fate turns, yet they prophesy that the *mulk* of the coming prophet will be of an entirely different sort. His *mulk* will remain with his tribe (*qawm*) until the Day of Judgment.

That dominion fell to the prophet's kindred, Mecca's Quraysh, in these accounts and that theirs would be the last dominion given by God to any people was no accident. The story inscribes Muḥammad's tribe, the Quraysh of Mecca, into eschatological dramas, which in contemporary Late Antique thought had come to be seen as a contest of empires of faith.[11]

Moreover, the ideology behind the story was an extrapolation of qurʾanic themes that were often mobilized in this period to articulate a discourse to undergird the legitimacy of caliphal rule by the Quraysh, who positioned themselves as the vanguard and fount of Muḥammad's *ummah* after his death. In the Qurʾan's revelatory discourse, God had given "a mighty dominion [*mulk ʿaẓīm*]" to Abraham's descendants (Q. Nisāʾ 4:54). God chose the Messenger's community of believers to follow the religion (*millah*) of their father Abraham (Q. Hajj 22:78). They were a community (*ummah*) raised from Abraham's true progeny (*dhuriyyah*) and charged with the custodianship of Mecca as a place of prayer and a sign of God's covenant. God raised up the Messenger from their midst in answer to the prayers of Abraham and Ishmael (Q. Baqarah 2:125–30). The Abrahamic *mulk* promised them is, in part, eschatological and otherworldly (Q. Insān 20:20), but it also manifests in realities that are imminent and this-worldly. In the past, the Israelites had conquered and inherited the lands of their enemies, whom God humbled, such as Egypt's tyrannical Pharaoh (Q. Shuʿarāʾ 26:57–59; cf. Isrāʾ 17:101–4 and Qaṣaṣ 28:4–6), and the qurʾanic Moses promises his people, "Perhaps your Lord shall destroy your enemies and cause you to inherit the land [*yastakhlifakum*

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11. Shoemaker 2014.

fī l-arḍ], so take care how you act" (Q. Aʿrāf 7:128–29).[12] But cursed by God because of their disobedience, the Israelites and Jews no longer had a share (*naṣīb*) in the dominion God had granted them (Q. 4:52–53). God had warned them of such a fate before in the Psalms of David, "We decreed in the Book of Psalms—after admonition [*min baʿdi l-dhikri*]—that my righteous servants shall inherit the earth" (Q. Anbiyāʾ 21:105, citing Ps. 37:29).[13] That is, the promise of God to the Israelites was contingent on their righteousness. Without righteousness the promise was void, for God's covenant (ʿahd) excluded the unrighteous (Q. 2:124). Yet that promise did still await the righteous believers who followed the Messenger, the progeny of Abraham most deserving to lay claim to the biblical patriarch's legacy (Q. Āl ʿImrān 3:68). For the Messenger's community of righteous believers, Abraham's dominion was their inheritance to claim (Q. Nūr 24:55):

> God has promised those of you who believe and act righteously that He will bequeath to them the earth just as He bequeathed it to those before them. He will make their religion firmly established [*la-yastakhlifannahum fī l-arḍ kamā ʾstakhlafa lladhīna min qablihim wa-la-yumakkinanna lahum dīnahum*]

Victories over Jewish opponents mentioned in Qurʾān provided a foretaste of this promise, "and He caused you to inherit their land, their homes, and their wealth and a land you had never stepped foot on before" (Q. Aḥzāb 33:27). Yet the promise of Q. 24:55 was far grander than these earliest gains. Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) interprets the ramifications of Q. 24:55 in an unambiguously triumphalist vein, as a promise that:

> God will cause [the believers] to inherit the lands of pagan Arabs and non-Arabs and make [the believers] kings and managers of those lands [*mulūkahā wa-sāsatahā*] . . . just as He did with the Israelites before them when they destroyed the tyrants in Syria and when He made them the kings and inhabitants of those lands [*mulūkahā wa-sukkānahā*].[14]

This interpretation of the above verse dates at least as early as the late Umayyad period: it also appears in a letter attributed to the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99–101/717–20).[15]

Citations of this qurʾanic theme of the righteous followers of Muḥammad inheriting the dominion of Abraham and, therefore, the lands and wealth of sinful nations do not only appear in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature; they are nearly ubiquitous in the narratives of the early conquests as well.[16] Indeed, one of the

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12. Sinai 2017.
13. Saleh 2014, 282.
14. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, ed. Turkī, 17: 346.
15. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Sīrat ʿUmar*, 69.
16. Sayyid 1997, 82–83.

major themes of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is to make explicit the triumphalist claims of Quraysh to political hegemony rooted in qurʾanic discourse and narratives of the sacred, prophetic recent past.[17] The triumphalist adaptation of this qurʾanic theme even made its impact on early Syriac disputational literature in the eighth century.[18] "This is the sign that God loves us and is pleased with our religion [*tawdītan*]," declares a Muslim emir in an eighth-century Syriac text, "that He has given us authority over all faiths [*deḥlān*] and peoples. And behold, they are our slaves and subjects!"[19] In other words, the hegemony of the Prophet's community was a sign of their favor in God's eyes and explained why the spread of their dominion was unstoppable. The early conquest elite of the Islamic polity were, hence, a community of Abraham's progeny made righteous by following God's chosen prophet from their midst, a prophet who brought with him the mandate to spread God's religion and His dominion. The Umayyad-era poet Jarīr ibn ʿAṭiyyah draws on the qurʾanic idiom of this claim explicitly in the following verses:

> Our father is God's friend[20] and God is our Lord
> We are pleased with what the King[21] gave and ordained
>
> *abūnā khalīlu 'llāh wa'llāhu rabbunā*
> *raḍīnā bi-mā aʿṭā l-malīku wa-qaddarā*
>
> He built God's *qiblah* by which men are guided
> and He bequeathed to us glory and timeless dominion
>
> *banā qiblata 'llāhi 'llatī yuhtadā bihā*
> *fa-awrathanā ʿizzan wa-mulkan muʿammarā*[22]

Jarīr's versified boast of God's promise of a timeless dominion offers a striking Abrahamic riposte—intended or not—to the promise of Jupiter to the Romans memorialized by Virgil as *imperium sine fine,* "empire without end" (*Aeneid* 1.278–79).

THE VISION OF HERACLIUS

Perhaps no narrative of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature captures the spirit of how early Islamic kerygma framed the monumental political transformations that swept over the Near East in the seventh century more vividly than a remarkable legend about the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41 C.E.). The story essentially

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17. Landau-Tasseron 2000, 204ff.
18. Saleh 2014, 281–85.
19. Taylor 2015, 209 (§9).
20. Abraham is called the "friend" (*khalīl*) of God in Q. Nisāʾ 4:125.
21. Cf. Q. Qamar 54:55.
22. Abū ʿUbaydah, *Naqāʾiḍ,* ed. Bevan, 2: 994
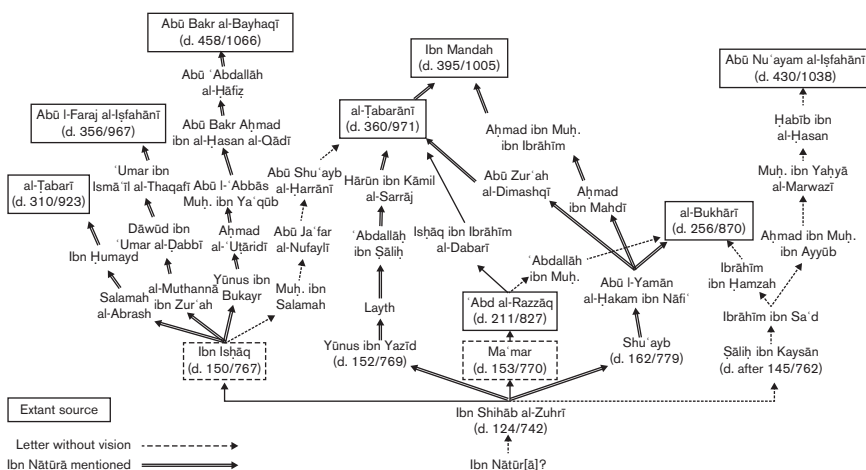
FIGURE 13. Chains of transmission for the story of the vision of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius.

sets the stage for the delivery of a letter from the prophet Muḥammad to the emperor, but the theme of a preordained rise of a new dominion of the Arabs plays a prominent role as well. There are many versions of the story in the Islamic tradition,[23] but the earliest version can be traced back to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). In the preliminary discussion to follow, I rely on the version preserved in the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of his pupil Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770),[24] although other important versions of al-Zuhrī's narrative will have a prominent role to play in the analysis further below (see fig. 13).

The story begins as the Byzantine-Sasanian War of 602–28 C.E. concludes. Having defeated and expelled the armies of the Persian shah Khosro II from the Byzantine Levant and recovered the relic of the True Cross,[25] Heraclius arrives with his army in Syria, whence he begins to ponder what fate awaits him beyond victory and gazes at the stars to find what omens they might auger. He perceives a troubling sign. The heavens portend that "the dominion/king of the circumcised [*mulk/*

23. Leder 2001 and 2005.

24. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 42–49.

25. This historical context is absent from Maʿmar's version of the account from al-Zuhrī, but it is explicit in the versions of Ibn Isḥāq, who places the events as simultaneous with Heraclius's journey to Jerusalem, demonstrating that early Muslim scholars such as al-Zuhrī were not unfamiliar with these events. See Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1561–62, and the recent discussion of the historiography of these events in Zuckerman 2013.

malik al-khitān]"[26] has appeared. The emperor consults his advisors, who proclaim that surely the Jews must be the circumcised people whose dominion the stars portend. Kill the Jews, they advise him, and the emperor will secure his dominion. However, their advice soon proves to be misguided. Heraclius writes to a fellow adept in astrology, who confirms that the emperor has indeed correctly discerned the astral omen, and soon the governor of Bostra sends him a man from the Arabs to inform him of a prophet who has appeared in their midst. When the Romans examine the Arab man, they discover that he too is circumcised, for the Arabs also circumcise their progeny just like their Abrahamic brethren the Jews.[27] This prophet from the Arabs, the emperor surmised, is the one destined to inaugurate the dominion of the circumcised heralded by the stars.

At this point, citing the authority of the prophet Muḥammad's cousin Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Zuhrī segues into telling how none other than Muḥammad's archenemy from among the pagan Meccans of Quraysh, Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb of the Umayyad clan, himself met Heraclius on this occasion. The implication is that Abū Sufyān was in Syria to trade, a venture he could only have undertaken thanks to the truce signed by the Meccan Quraysh with Muḥammad at Ḥudaybiyah in Dhū l-Qaʿdah 6/March 628. The emperor's servants quickly conveyed these Arab merchants to the emperor's court, where they announced that Abū Sufyān and his caravan were of this prophet's people. There at the court, Abū Sufyān speaks with the keen-witted emperor face to face. Aided by a translator, Heraclius begins to interrogate him about this man claiming to be a prophet who has appeared among the Arabs. At the time, Abū Sufyān, a pagan unbeliever, was one of Muḥammad's most implacable enemies, but from what he says, the shrewd emperor perceives that the Arab prophet in question is no fraud, but has really been chosen by God. "His dominion [*mulkuhu*] will stretch to the very earth beneath my feet," Heraclius proclaims.[28]

Just before Heraclius dismisses Abū Sufyān, a letter from Muḥammad addressed to the emperor himself reaches the court, which reads:

> In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Muḥammad the Messenger of God to Heraclius the emperor of the Romans [*ʿaẓīm al-Rūm*]. Peace be upon those who follow guidance. Now to the heart of the matter: I summon you with the summons of Islam. Submit and be saved. Submit, and God will reward you twice over. But if you turn away, you will fall into the sin of the tenants [*ʿalayka ithm*

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26. The ductus of the Arabic, ملك الختان, is ambiguous and accommodates reading either as "king" (*malik*) or "dominion" (*mulk*).

27. The notion that the inhabitants of Arabia practiced circumcision because they, like the Jews, descended from Abraham is an ancient one that preceded the rise of Islam by centuries; cf. Kister 1994, 10–12; Schadler 2015, 367ff.; Ward 2015, 79.

28. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 48–49 (2.7.2).

al-arīsiyyīn]. "O People of the Book! Come to common terms with us: that we worship none but God, that we ascribe no partner to Him, and that we take none other as lord besides God. If they turn away, say: So bear witness that we submit to God [*ashhadū annanā muslimūn*]." (Q. Āl ʿImrān 3:64)[29]

On hearing this, Heraclius tests his courtiers' loyalty by feigning conversion to the new prophet's faith, but the emperor then reveals the ruse and ultimately refuses to heed the summons of the letter.

Al-Zuhrī's story assumes that readers and/or hearers of the account will realize that subsequent historical events vindicate the letter. The Islamic tradition dates the letter's composition to 628, the same year as Heraclius's triumph over the Persians, and a mere eight years before Arab armies routed Byzantine forces at the battle of Yarmūk in 636 C.E., thus opening up the Levant to Arab conquest and forever depriving the Roman Empire of territories that it had ruled for seven centuries. The story of Heraclius's vision and the Prophet's letter foreshadow future events, but this aspect is not the story's most intriguing feature. The importance of the letter, as well as the account framing it, derives from its compelling articulation of early Islamic triumphalism, especially the form of Islamic triumphalism that flourished under the late Umayyad caliphate. This account of Heraclius's vision of the "kingdom of the circumcised" and the Prophet's letter to him embody many of the most enigmatic aspects of the lead-up to the Islamic conquests during the century following Muḥammad's death in 10/632.

By the standards of *ḥadīth,* al-Zuhrī's Heraclius narrative is quite sweeping in scope. In its fullest versions, the tradition has a tripartite structure, with each subdivision of the narrative emphasizing distinct themes and, as I argue below, drawing upon discrete sources. These three divisions can be summarized as follows:

1. Heraclius's observation of astral portents foretelling the rise of the "king[dom] of the circumcised [*malik/mulk al-khitān*]," a people whom he first mistakes for Jews but later discovers are the Arabs (*al-ʿarab*);
2. Heraclius's interrogation of the leader of the caravan of Quraysh trading in Syria, Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, about Muḥammad's prophetic claims; and
3. the delivery of Muḥammad's letter summoning Heraclius to embrace Islam and the emperor's feigned conversion to Islam to test his courtiers' loyalty.

I argue that the first and third section ultimately derive from and rework a non-Muslim, Christian source, likely composed in Umayyad Syria in the mid-to-late

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29. Ibid. (2.7.3). Reference is to the Parable of the Tenants, Mark 12:1–12; Matt. 21:33–46; Luke 20:9–19; see below at n. 73. Heraclius's positive reception of Muḥammad's letter is famous in Arab historiography, where it not only plays into its usual portrayal of him as an ideal ruler but serves to explain the longevity of the Byzantine Empire; see El Cheikh 2004, 47–48.

seventh century. This is perhaps a rather extraordinary claim, but the evidence merits extraordinary consideration.

As a long, extended tradition, the Heraclius legend tends to break up into smaller pieces in the *ḥadīth* corpus and to accrue additional details as well. Even the order of the elements giving rise to the tradition's tripartite structure is subject to rearrangement. In two indispensable studies, Stefan Leder has meticulously tracked down the most salient narrative components of this Muslim Heraclius legend scattered about the *hadīth* literature and elsewhere.[30] Below, however, I rest my case on the versions of the text transmitted by three of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's most prominent students: Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770), summarized above, and the surviving versions of Shuʿayb ibn Abī Ḥamzah (d. 162/779) and Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767). These three stand out not only as the longest redactions of the story but also as the earliest and best attested.

Of the three, the importance of Shuʿayb ibn Abī Ḥazmah's version lies in the fact that he was a scribe commissioned by the caliph Hishām to record al-Zuhrī's traditions in Ruṣāfah. Shuʿayb's version of the legend thus reflects to a greater extent the corpus commissioned and recorded by the caliphal court (see chapter 4 above).[31] Maʿmar and Ibn Isḥāq share the distinction of having each composed his own *Kitāb al-Maghāzī,* albeit in versions surviving only in the recensions of their students, roughly at the same time and in two different geographical locations (Yemen and Iraq respectively). In Maʿmar's case, his *Maghāzī* survives as an integral text in the *Muṣannaf* of his student, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/827). The transmission of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* was far more diverse and widespread; thus, it survives in far more recensions. Interestingly enough, however, the Heraclius story does not appear in the most renowned recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*—that is, Ibn Hishām's revision (*tahdhīb*) of Ziyād al-Bakkāʾī's Kūfan recension. The story does appear, though, in the recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's other prominent students, including Muḥammad ibn Salamah al-Ḥarrānī,[32] Yūnus ibn Bukayr,[33] and Salamah ibn al-Faḍl.[34] Of the two versions, Maʿmar's text reproduces the most basic text of al-Zuhrī's narrative. Whereas Shuʿayb's version is only

30. Leder 2001, 31–39. However, Leder misses some of the most important redactions, preserved in whole only by Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 8: 16–27 (nos. 7269–72) and *Musnad,* 4: 216–20 (no. 3132).

31. Shuʿayb's version (Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* 4: 216–20; Ibn Mandah, *Īmān,* 288–92) specifies that it was the governor of Bostra (*ʿaẓīm Busrā*) who conveyed Muḥammad's letter to Heraclius, that the messenger who delivered the letter was Diḥyah al-Kalbī, that Heraclius was in Aelia/Jerusalem when he saw the omen in the stars, and that he feigned conversion at an estate of his near Homs (*fī daskaratin lahu bi-Ḥimṣ*). Shuʿayb's version of the account is notably extremely close to that of another scribe of Hishām's court, Yūnus ibn Yazīd al-Aylī (d. 152/769 or later); see Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 8: 19–23.

32. Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 8: 23–24.

33. Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 4: 381–84.

34. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1561–68.

moderately more detailed than Maʿmar's account, Ibn Isḥāq recasts and enlarges al-Zuhrī's narrative and, as Leder has demonstrated, alters its structure as a result.[35]

Excavating the origins of the first and third sections of the narrative is the primary goal of the remainder of this chapter. A close philological and historical reading of the story of Heraclius's vision and Muḥammad's letter reveal, I contend, that al-Zuhrī composed his account by appropriating an earlier Christian source of Palestinian provenance. The key evidence of this appropriation can be found in the two bookends of the narrative: the story of how Heraclius foresees the king[dom] of the circumcised and the story of Muḥammad's letter to Heraclius. We begin with the story of Heraclius's vision.

Heraclius Foresees the Kingdom of the Circumcised

The Zuhrī-account from Maʿmar begins by stating that "Heraclius was a seer who peered into the stars [*kāna hirqal ḥazzāʾan yanẓuru fī l-nujūm*]," and says also that "he wrote to a fellow seer who also looked into the stars [*kataba ilā naẓīrin lahu ḥazzāʾin ayḍan yanẓuru fī l-nujūm*]."[36] This characterization of Heraclius features in most of the other versions of al-Zuhrī's account as well. An Arabist's eye is drawn to the peculiar term *ḥazzāʾ* used by the account to describe Heraclius and his fellow stargazer. Though a small detail, this word also provides us with the first clue that a non-Muslim account perhaps lies underneath the story. The word *ḥazzāʾ* is an Arabic hapax that occurs only in the cluster of traditions that transmit this account. Although obscure and difficult words are no rarity in the *ḥadīth* corpus, the word *ḥazzāʾ* in particular appears to be an Aramaicism, related to *ḥazzāyā,* a word meaning "seer" or, more broadly, "one who receives visions" and "one who contemplates" (e.g., a sight, such as the stars).[37] The word *ḥazzāʾ* thus provides us with an important clue and raises the question: Why would the account portray Heraclius as an astronomer at all? The short answer is that al-Zuhrī's claim that the emperor Heraclius was a practitioner of astrology reflects, at least to some extent, real historical knowledge about the emperor—knowledge conveyed to him by a well-informed source—but to appreciate the significance of this point requires further elaboration. As noted above, the legend is set during Heraclius's stay in Syria in the wake of his victory in the Persian-Roman War and his retrieval of the relic of the True Cross. In his version of the story, Ibn Isḥāq even makes this context explicit, and this setting is critical to the narrative idiom of both accounts: it simultaneously presents Heraclius at the height of his powers and on the brink of his greatest loss.

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35. Leder 2005, 136–37.

36. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 43–44 (2.6).

37. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1: 1235–36; Margoliouth 1927, 123. The word might also have originated from the Palestinian dialect of Aramaic; see Sokoloff 2002, 194a, and 2014, 124b, and the discussion of the Arabic phrase *ithm al-arīsiyyīn* below.

With Heraclius's decisive victory over the Persians in 628 C.E., the emperor exploited the victory as a chance to reinvigorate his empire's triumphalist ideology. Heraclius began to promote the idea that with Christian Byzantium's defeat of Sasanid Persia, a new Golden Age had dawned, an age of tranquil prosperity that would prepare humankind for the Day of Judgment under the aegis of the Rome. The universalizing drive behind the Heraclian triumphalism manifested itself in many spheres of imperial propaganda. Kevin van Bladel has, for example, provided a compelling account of how pro-Heraclian propaganda portrayed the emperor as a new Alexander in the *Syriac Alexander Legend* and how the far reach of this propaganda even left its impact, not just on early Islamic kerygma, but also on the very text of the Qurʾan.[38] However, al-Zuhrī's depiction of Heraclius as a stargazer draws on another strand of Heraclian propaganda. As part of his imperial renewal, Heraclius also oversaw a reordering of the calendrical observance of Christian ritual and, concomitantly, the very tabulation of historical time. These calendrical reforms involved the reordering of the time scale of human history that revealed the workings of divine providence but, in practical terms, required a new, up-to-date means of accurately calculating the dates for events such as the Creation, the Flood, and crucial episodes in the life of Jesus Christ. The yearly paschal cycle, which fixed the annual dates of Easter, posed a particularly formidable challenge, and its standardization would constitute a formidable achievement for Heraclius. To provide the best and most accurate means of its determination would, in theory, employ timekeeping sophisticated enough to transcend the ecclesiastical divisions within Christianity itself. Embedded in Heraclius's push to achieve universally accepted calculations for the calendrical cycle was an ambition to mend ecclesiastical schisms through a unified accounting of historical time.[39]

It is no accident that the most important Greek astrological treatise to survive from this era, a commentary on Ptolemy's *Handy Tables* composed in first half of the seventh-century C.E., is attributed in some manuscripts to the emperor Heraclius himself.[40] The attribution is most likely wrong, but it is also not too far off. The astrological treatise was most likely written by an Alexandrian astrologer named Stephanos, if its author can be identified at all; however, Heraclius may indeed have written, or at least revised or commented on, the final chapter, on calculating Easter in 623 C.E.[41] Analyses of the commentary's calculations, as noted decades ago by Otto Neugebauer, reveal that its author was indeed working in Constantinople.[42] Heraclius's interest in astronomy is, therefore, not the invention of al-Zuhrī's

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38. Van Bladel 2007; cf. now the further insights of Tesei 2014.
39. Whitby and Whitby 1989, xii–xiii.
40. Lempire 2011, 244–48; 2016, 3–6.
41. Whitby and Whitby 1989, xiii–xiv; Lempire 2011, 256.
42. Neugebauer 1975, 1046.

fanciful imagination. The portrait of the emperor as an astronomer occurs in Byzantine historiography too. In the words of the Byzantine historian Michael Psellus (d. 1096 C.E.), "Heraclius occupied himself intensively with astronomy and used to say that those who had no use for astrology refused to read God's letters."[43]

All that said, calculating the date of Easter on the calendar is one thing, but finding signs or portents of future events in the stars is quite another. Hence, although Heraclius's interest in astronomy and astrology are historical, the astrological prognostications attributed to the emperor and the scholars of his era subsequently take on quite legendary dimensions. Numerous Greek accounts even claim that Stephanos of Alexandria, the putative author of the commentary on Ptolemy's *Handy Tables,* cast a horoscope predicting the rise of Muḥammad and the coming of "the Saracens" that accurately corresponded to the year of Muḥammad's Hijrah from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.[44] The earliest and most important author to make this claim and to cite this horoscope is the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (r. 945–59 C.E.), who writes the following notice in his *De administrando imperio:*

> From the *kanōn* that Stephanos the astrologer (ὁ μαθηματικὸς) cast from the stars concerning the exodus of the Saracens. . . . The Exodus of the Saracens took place on the third day of the month of September of the tenth Indiction, in the twelfth year of Heraclius, in the year from the creation of the world 6130. And the horoscope of these same Saracens was cast in the month of September, on the third day of the month, the fifth day of the week.[45]

What Constantine VII refers to as the *kanōn* is a Greek astrological treatise that survives under the title *Apotelesmatikē Pragmateía*, known more widely as the *Horoscope of Islam* because it contains a horoscope predicting the advent of Islam, the rise and fall of its political fortunes, and then the eventual triumph of the Romans. According to the treatise, Stephanos recorded the horoscope for his pupil Timotheos, who was at his school in Alexandria when an "Arab merchant" named Epiphanius arrived on their doorstep from Arabia Felix, bearing the news that

> A certain man had appeared in the desert of Ethriboi [Yathrib], a descendent of Ishmael from the tribe of the so-called Korasianoi [Quraysh]. He had the name of

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43. Cited by Roueché 2011, 29 n118.

44. He was also known for his commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* and works on alchemy and astrology. Roueché 2016 argues that only the commentary on Aristotle is genuinely his. Arabic sources know of Stephanos of Alexandria as well. Ibn al-Nadīm calls him "Stephanos the Elder" (ʾṣṭfn al-qadīm) and purports that his books were transmitted to the Umayyad prince Khālid ibn Yazīd (*Fihrist*, 2: 144). See Lempire 2011, 259–61, 262–64. Khālid purportedly acquired the works of Stephanos from a Melkite monk of Dayr Murrān outside Damascus named Morienus (Ar. Maryānus al-Rūmī); see al-Hassan 2004, 218–19.

45. Cited in Roueché 2011, 21.

Moamed [Muḥammad] and claimed to be prophet. . . . He held forth on some radical new religious teaching that was utterly altered, promising those who accepted his teaching that they would win in war, prevail over enemies, and enjoy the pleasure of Paradise.[46]

Startled by the merchant's report, Stephanos prompts his student Sophronios (the later Patriarch of Jerusalem)[47] to hoist the astrolabe in order to cast a horoscope of the impending events.

The lengthy "horoscope of Islam" was ostensibly cast for 1 September 621, and hence within the same solar year that the first lunar year of the *hijrī* calendar began,[48] but the text is a manifest forgery. The horoscope exhibits detailed knowledge of Muslim rulers up until 775 C.E.—that is, the caliphate of the Abbasid dynast al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85)—and modern scholarship has demonstrated that the treatise relied on horoscopes and astronomical tables composed in eighth-century Abbasid Iraq.[49] The true author of the text is unknown, given that it is pseudepigraphal; however, it seems either to have been directly influenced by or to have emerged from the circle of the caliph al-Mahdī's Christian court astrologer, Theophilus of Edessa.[50] Although the story the treatise tells of Stephanos of Alexandria, and its ascription to him is spurious, the *Horoscope of Islam* is one of the earliest Greek accounts of early Islamic history to survive. Subsequent Byzantine historians certainly took the account to be true and employed the horoscope attributed to Stephanos in their accounts of Islamic conquests from at least themid-ninth century C.E. on.[51] The main elements of the al-Zuhrī account predate the *Apotelesmatikē Pragmateía* of Pseudo-Stephanos by a century or more—whether in the version preserved by Maʿmar, Shuʿayb, or Ibn Isḥāq. Al-Zuhrī could not, therefore, have derived his account from the story of the horoscope of Pseudo-Stephanos.

Al-Zuhrī's legend of Heraclius's vision depends, rather, on an earlier legend that predates the *Apotelesmatikē Pragmateía* considerably, a legend that also portrays Heraclius as having some foreknowledge of the early Islamic conquests. This legend, in fact, appears in an extraordinarily broad range of non-Muslim sources. The story of how Heraclius discerned the coming conquests of "the kingdom of

46. Usener 1965, 3: 272. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my colleague Anthony Kaldellis for translating the passage from Greek for me.

47. Papathanissiou 2006, 196–98; Booth 2014, 63–64; Roueché 2016, 548–49.

48. Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1987, 158–60.

49. Roueché 2011, 20–21.

50. Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1987, 190, postulated that the author was, rather, a later scholar known as Stephanos the Philosopher. This hypothesis was adopted by David Pingree 1989, 238–39, and 2001, 12–13, who argues that this younger Stephanos was a pupil of Caliph al-Mahdī's Christian court astrologer Theophilus of Edessa, from whom Stephanos transmitted numerous astrological treatises from Abbasid Baghdad to Byzantine Constantinople in the 790s.

51. Cf. Roueché 2011, 19–24.

the circumcised," whether from astral portents or a dream, appears in chronicles and histories composed in Latin,[52] Georgian,[53] Christian Arabic (translated from Coptic and Syriac),[54] and even Ethiopic.[55] These sources span a wide geographical and chronological range, but of all of them the Latin accounts stand out as the earliest by far. These Latin sources are not merely the earliest sources to attest to this legend; intriguingly, they are also those sources that lay at the farthest geographical remove from these events.

Hence, the earliest, extant version of Heraclius's vision survives in a Latin Merovingian chronicle of uncertain authorship known as *Fredegarii chronicon* (hereafter Ps.-Fredegar) written around 660 C.E. This seventh-century account of the legend reads as follows:

> LXV. The emperor Heraclius . . . [b]eing well-read . . . practised astrology, by which art he discovered, God helping him, that his empire would be laid waste by circumcised races. So he sent to the Frankish King Dagobert [I, r. 623–39 C.E.] to request him to have all the Jews of his kingdom baptized—which Dagobert promptly carried out. Heraclius ordered the same should be done throughout all the imperial provinces; for he had no idea whence this scourge would come upon his empire.
>
> LXVI. The race of Hagar, who are also called Saracens as the book of Orosius attests[56]—a circumcised people who of old had lived beneath the Caucasus on the shore of the Caspian in a country known as Ercolia[57]—this race had grown so numerous that at last they threw themselves upon the provinces of the Emperor Heraclius, who dispatched an army to hold them. In the ensuing battle the Saracens were the victors and cut the vanquished to pieces. . . . The Saracens proceeded—as was their habit—to lay waste to the provinces of the empire that had fallen to them. They were already approaching Jerusalem. Heraclius felt himself impotent to resist their assault

52. *Chr. Fredegarii,* ed. and trans. Wallace-Hadrill, IV, 53–55 (§§ 65–66); *Chr. 754*, §5 (trans. Wolf, 92); *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741*, §12 in Hoyland 1997a, 615.

53. Ps.-Juansher Juansheriani in Thomson 1996, 238, where a monk prophesies the victory of the Saracens and "the astrologers and expert soothsayers" merely convey his words to Heraclius; cf. Stephen H. Rapp, "Georgian Historical Writing," in Hoyland 1997a, 684 n19.

54. *Chr. Siʿirt* II.2, ed. and trans. Scher and Griveau 1918, chap. CI, 206 [600], "When word of [Muḥammad's appearance] reached the king of the Romans, he gave it no heed and relied on what the astrologers who were with him said." Cf. Ps.-Severus ibn Muqaffaʿ, ed. and trans. Evetts 1901, XIV, 492–93 [228–29] and Basset 1915, 562 (8 Tūbah), where Heraclius foresees the rise of a circumcised nation (*ummah makhtūnah*) in a vision in his sleep rather than by consulting the stars or astrologers.

55. Van Donzel 1986, 206–7, where Heraclius has a vision of an angel who tells him of a circumcised people who will rule over him.

56. Paulus Orosius (d. after 418), a student of Augustine of Hippo and the author of the first Christian universal history, the *Historiae adversum paganos,* partially translated into Arabic in the tenth century C.E. as *Kitāb al-Hurūshiyūsh;* see Sahner 2013.

57. Fredegar's odd characterization of the Arab/Saracens as a people from "Ercolia" in the Caucasus reflects geographical ignorance of the East; on his attempts to connect them with the apocalyptic hordes of Gog and Magog, see Esders 2009, 285ff.

and in his desolation was a prey to inconsolable grief. The unhappy king abandoned the Christian faith for the heresy of Eutyches[58] and married his sister's daughter.[59] He finished his days in agony, tormented with fever.[60]

The mid-seventh century provenance of this Merovingian chronicle places the genesis of the Heraclius legend at an extraordinarily early date—slightly more than two decades after the emperor's death. One must push the provenance of the legend even further back chronologically inasmuch as the Latin chronicler draws upon an earlier, eastern source. Ps.-Fredegar frequently mentions Byzantine affairs, but his accounts tend to be of a legendary quality and bear the marks, and mistakes, of a chronicler working exclusively from second-hand information and/or a source he does not fully comprehend.[61] The identification of the sources Ps.-Fredegar used for Heraclius's reign—or for that matter most of his material on events from the Byzantine realm—continues to elude modern scholars. What is certain, however, is that neither al-Zuhrī nor any other Arabic source can possibly lie behind the chronicle's account of how Heraclius used astrology to foresee that his empire would be laid waste by a circumcised people. The earliest extant manuscript of Ps.-Fredegar's chronicle, which dates from circa 715–16 C.E., includes the story, so the legend cannot be a later interpolation.[62] The story thus precedes by decades the patronage of al-Zuhrī by the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 724–43 C.E.) that proved so instrumental to the preservation of the scholar's traditions.[63] The narratives of Ps.-Fredegar and al-Zuhrī must rely, therefore, on a common account that no longer survives.

This Latin version of the story from Ps.-Fredegar also offers us the clearest parallels to the first section of al-Zuhrī's story of Heraclius's vision of the coming

58. The interpretation of the Islamic conquests as divine punishment for Heraclius's role in the monothelete position is also attributed to Heraclius's grandson, Constantine IV (r. 668–85), in Theophanes, *Chronographia,* ed. de Boor, 359–60 (trans. Mango and Scott, 499–500). From the other side of the theological divide, the Syriac *Life* of Maximus the Confessor lays the blame for the Arab conquests at the feet of the dyothelete teachings of Maximus; see Brock 1973.

59. Martina, daughter of his sister Mary; cf. Kaegi 2003, 106–5.

60. *Chr. Fredegarii,* ed. and trans. Wallace-Hadrill, IV, 53–55 (§§ 65–66).

61. Esders 2009, 282–83. On Ps.-Fredegar's Byzantine material more generally, see Collins 2007, 52 et passim. As much can be surmised from Ps.-Fredegar's characterizations of the Arabs in the passage quoted above. His familiarity with Arabs, or "Saracens," exclusively derives from patristic works. Ps.-Fredegar cites Orosius by name, but as Wallace-Hadrill notes, the chronicler has likely confused Orosius with Saint Jerome (d. ca. 419–20), whose descriptions of Saracens were seminal for authors of the Latin West. See Tolan 2012.

62. See Collins 2007, 56, on the dating of this manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 10910, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10511002k (accessed August 24, 2019); see fols. 152v–153v for the Heraclius story. The speculations of Dagron and Déroche 1991, 33n79, that the account of Heraclius is a later insertion, dating from the late eighth century, are thus groundless.

63. Lecker 1996b, 25ff.

A Comparison of the Accounts of the Vision of Heraclius of Maʿmar and Ps.-Fredegar

Maʿmar ibn Rāshid al-Azdī (d. A.H. 153/770 C.E.), *Kitāb al-Maghāzī [= The Expeditions]*, 42–43 (§2.6)	Ps.-Fredegar, *Fredegarii chronicon* (ca. 660 C.E.), IV, §§ 65–66
ʿAbd al-Razzāq, on the authority Maʿmar, on the authority of al-Zuhrī who said:	
Heraclius was a seer who would peer into the stars. One day when he awoke, the people of his court found his countenance to be strange. So they asked him, "What troubles you?" "I peered into the stars last night," he said, "and I saw that the king[dom] of the circumcised has appeared." "Do not let this trouble you," they said, "for only the Jews are circumcised. Dispatch an order to your cities to have every Jew killed."	The emperor Heraclius . . . being well-read, he practiced astrology, by which art he discovered, God helping him, that his empire would be laid waste by circumcised races, so he sent to the Frankish King Dagobert to request him to have all the Jews of his kingdom baptized—which Dagobert promptly carried out. Heraclius ordered that the same should be done throughout all the imperial provinces; for he had no idea whence this scourge would come upon his empire.
al-Zuhrī said: Heraclius wrote to one of his fellow seers who also peered into the stars, and [the other seer] wrote to him the like of what he had said [to his court]. The ruler of Bostra sent to him a man from among the Arabs to inform him about the Prophet. So Heraclius said, "Look! Is he circumcised?" They said, "They looked to see, and lo, he is circumcised." "This," they said, "is the king[dom] of the circumcised who has appeared."	The race of Hagar, who are also called Saracens as the book of Orosius attests—a circumcised people who of old had lived beneath the Caucasus on the shores of the Caspian in a country known as Ercolia—this race had grown so numerous that at last they took up arms and threw themselves upon the provinces of the Emperor Heraclius, who dispatched an army to hold them. In the ensuing battle the Saracens were the victors and cut the vanquished to pieces.

"king[dom] of the circumcised" of all the extant non-Muslim versions. Such parallels are easiest to see when read side by side, so I have placed Ps.-Fredegar's account next to Maʿmar's version of al-Zuhrī's story shown here.

   In my view, the most plausible hypothesis for explaining this extraordinary amount of overlap between the respective accounts of Ps.-Fredegar and al-Zuhrī is that they share a common source. Yet even without the benefit of Ps.-Fredegar's chronicle, al-Zuhrī's legend of Heraclius's vision of the "king[dom] of the circumcised" exhibits peculiarities, intrinsic to his account, suggesting that al-Zuhrī based it on an earlier, non-Muslim source. Several themes that are common in early non-Muslim sources but far less so in sources from the Arabo-Islamic tradition feature prominently in al-Zuhrī's account. For instance, al-Zuhrī portrays the ascendance of Muḥammad's followers: (1) as led by a new king (*malik*), or else as ushering in an era of new kingship/dominion (*mulk*); and (2) as primarily an ethnic dominion,

being a rule not of a community of faithful believers (*al-mu'minīn*) but rather of "the circumcised people [*al-khitān*]." While this is not incompatible per se with early Islamic historiography, these themes deeply resonate with early Christian accounts of the rise of Islam, particularly in the Levant, which most often speak of the new Arab/Saracen rulers in terms a new dominion (Syr. *malkūtā*), not a new religion and hence just as often depict Muḥammad and other early Muslim rulers as merely "kings" (Syr. *malkē*) and nothing more.[64] The account of Ps.-Fredegar fits this pattern perfectly, inasmuch as it describes the "circumcised" conquerors in purely ethnic terms, designating them as either Hagarenes (Agarrini) or Saracens (Saracini), but displays no knowledge of Muḥammad, his religion, or the religious convictions and motivations of the "Saracen" conquerors.[65]

A second feature of al-Zuhrī's account that points to a Levantine, Christian provenance is its pessimistic regard for Heraclius's reign and perhaps even the impending End of the World. Levantine chroniclers viewed Heraclius's victory over the Persians with an ambivalence colored by their mistrust of Roman imperial power. This was not restricted to non-Chalcedonian Christians' resentment of their oppression by Constantinople. Even Chalcedonian Christians, particularly in the churches and monasteries of Jerusalem and Palestine, could swiftly find themselves alienated from Roman rule, as when they entered into open opposition to Heraclius's doctrinal intervention in the monenergist crisis.[66] There is little indication that Heraclius's political ascent inspired any increased optimism for the future of the empire in the Levant.[67]

Indeed, the pessimism of Christian chroniclers writing in the East stands in stark contrast to propagandistic pro-Heraclian sources such as the *Syriac Alexander Legend* (ca. 630 C.E.)[68] and the *cantos* of the emperor's panegyrist George of Pisidia, which exult in Heraclius's victory over the Persians. The *Syriac Alexander Legend* exudes a triumphalist confidence in the wake of Heraclius's victories, recasting its mythic retellings of Alexander of Macedon's conquest of Persia as an archetype for and foretaste of the victories of Heraclius and the defeat of the Sasanid shah Khosro II Parvēz. The *Legend* has Alexander prophesy that "there shall not be found any among the nations and tongues who dwell in the Creation that shall withstand the kingdom of the Romans." Indeed, in the *Syriac Alexander Legend,* it is the Persians and their king, Tubarlaq, who receive the astrologers' prophecy of their kingdom's destruction at the hands of the Romans. When presented

64. Van Ginkel 2007, 175; Penn 2015a, 105–7.

65. Esders 2009, 280–81.

66. Booth 2014, 186ff.

67. Watt 2002, 76.

68. Whether 630 C.E. is the date of the *Alexander Legend*'s "composition" or its "revision" remains debated. Shoemaker 2018, 80–83, provides the most convincing interpretation of the evidence.

with the astrologers' prediction, Alexander orders for it to be codified into a written record. The key passage reads:

> And Alexander took with himself in writing the king's and his nobles' prophecy of what should befall Persia: that Persia would be laid waste, but that that [the kingdom of the Romans] would last and rule *to the end of times* and that [the kingdom of the Romans] *would deliver the kingdom of the earth to Christ, who is to come.*[69]

It is striking to compare the doom awaiting the Romans in al-Zuhrī's and Ps.-Fredegar's accounts, on the one hand, and the eschatological glory awaiting them in the *Syriac Alexander Legend,* on the other. Both are mediated through astral portents interpreted by astrologers. A key difference is that the *Syriac Alexander Legend* has Roman dominion enduring, undiminished and immutable in its mighty grasp, until the eschaton. As Gerrit Reinink has argued, however, it seems that the baseline sentiment of the era was one of imperial pessimism with regard to the fate of the Roman Empire. The positive eschatology exhibited in the *Alexander Legend* and the cantos of George of Pisidia were the exception rather than the rule, seeking to counter fears of "the empire's imminent end."[70] Such sentiments find intriguing echoes in the third section of al-Zuhrī's Heraclius legend: the story of Muḥammad's letter to Heraclius.

Muḥammad's Letter to Heraclius

Though fatalist in its analysis of Roman survival in Syria, al-Zuhrī's account is not pessimistic in the least. Al-Zuhrī embraces and appropriates the anti-Heraclian sentiment of his source material and uses it to construct a legitimizing narrative that accommodates, not only the Umayyads—namely, by introducing Abū Sufyān, one of their progenitors, as the most important interlocutor with the emperor in the middle section of the legend[71]—but also the new dominion (*mulk*) of Muḥammad's people, "the circumcised people."[72] This sentiment is most explicitly stated in the letter Muḥammad sends Heraclius.

The most curious passage in the letter is its exhortation to the emperor to embrace Islam, warning that if he does not, he "will fall into the sin of the *arīsiyyīn* [*ʿalayka ithm al-arīsiyyīn*]." The Arabic of this phrase is enigmatic. Who, or what, are the so-called *arīsiyyīn*? This word perplexed scholars until Lawrence Conrad showed in an important study that "the sin of the *arīsiyyīn*" is an allusion to Jesus's parable of the Tenants in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:1–12; Matt. 21:33–46; Luke 20:9–19).[73] As with *ḥazzāʾ* above, the word employed here for tenants in Arabic,

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69. Budge 1888, 158 (Eng.), 275 (Syr.); cited in Reinink 2002, 85–86.
70. Reinink 2002, 92; cf. Shoemaker 2018, 85.
71. Leder 2001, 15–16.
72. Conrad 2002, 115–16.
73. Ibid., 127–30.

arīsiyyīn, is an Arabic hapax. It derives from Christian Palestinian Aramaic (hereafter CPA) translations of the New Testament, whose term for "tenant," *arīs* (pl. *arīsīn*), appears only in the extant Gospel lectionaries from the churches of the region of Palestine and the Sinai. The word is unique to the CPA versions of the Gospels and does not appear in any of the Syriac translations of the New Testament, which use the term *pallāḥē* for tenants.[74] This borrowing from a CPA translation of the Gospels is definitive evidence that al-Zuhrī incorporated West Syrian source material into his account of Heraclius's vision.[75]

Read in light of the gospel parable, the message conveyed here is that the Romans will be dispossessed of the lands over which God has made them stewards if they repudiate Muḥammad, the Messenger, as the wicked tenants in the parable do in killing the landowner's servants and son. Though traditionally interpreted christologically, here the letter interprets the gospel parable prophetologically. Muḥammad addresses the emperor to warn him of the coming victory of his community of faithful over the wicked and unjust rulers of the age.

Although the language of the letter in al-Zuhrī's account bears the traces of its CPA source, this does not imply that the letter quoted therein is necessarily authentic. As seen in the above comparison of Ps.-Fredegar and al-Zuhrī's account of Heraclius's vision of the circumcised races, one might be able to infer a common textual source, but this inference does not give one access to the original text. Hence, the imprint of al-Zuhrī's source text has been left on the language of the letter ascribed to Muḥammad; but the source text is unlikely to have included Muḥammad's actual letter, if such a letter ever existed. The rationale for its preservation in the account is inextricable from its utility as a narrative device.[76]

Another early source to mention a letter to Heraclius is the account of the Islamic conquests written in the 660s C.E. by the Armenian historian Ps.-Sebeos. However, according Ps.-Sebeos, it is not Muhammad but rather the Ishmaelites collectively who send messages to Heraclius. Their message resonates strongly with the message conveyed by Muḥammad's letter in al-Zuhrī's account. Ps.-Sebeos's text of their letter reads:

74. *CCPA* 1998, 222a, s.v. *ā.r.y.s.* The Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshiṭṭā, and Ḥarklean versions of the Syriac New Testament all read *pallāḥē;* see Kiraz 1996, 1: 322–23, 2: 173, 3: 404–5. For other instances of Gospel parables appearing in *ḥadīth,* see Spies 1975 and Déclais 1995. On Gospel citations in *ḥadīth* more generally, see D. Cook 2006. It has yet to be investigated how many, if any, of these discrete citations of the NT in the *ḥadīth* corpus show traces of CPA; however, the other clear example is Ibn Isḥāq's famous citation of John 15:23–16:1. See Anthony 2016.

75. This suggests, in my view, that the Heraclius letter served as the model for other traditions that expanded the prophetic letter topos to include other rulers, such as Khosro, who loses his kingdom due to *ithm al-majūs;* see Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1071–72; Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 349. Cf. Savant 2013, 183ff.

76. Noth and Conrad 1994, 76–77.

> God gave that land to our father Abraham as a hereditary possession and to his seed after him. We are the sons of Abraham. You have occupied our lands long enough. Abandon it peacefully and we shall not come into your territory. Otherwise, we shall demand that possession from you with interest.[77]

The sentences placed into the mouths of the Ishmaelites in Ps.-Sebeos's account also cite a gospel parable—this time the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:27; Luke 19:23) rather than the parable of the wicked tenants—so it reflects a similar narrative aesthetic and technique as that encountered above. According to Ps.-Sebeos, Heraclius defied the Ishmaelites' threat, saying, "This land is mine," and, citing the inheritance of their father Ishmael, "Your lot is the desert" (cf. Gen. 20:20–21).[78] What makes this parallel account all the more intriguing is that the Armenian historian Ps.-Sebeos himself explicitly claims to have drawn it from a Palestinian source.[79]

IBN SHIHĀB AL-ZUHRĪ'S CHRISTIAN SOURCE

Most of the evidence hitherto mustered to support this chapter's thesis comes to us obliquely and thus from subtle cues and insights only made possible by close and comparative philological readings of al-Zuhrī's account. However, one of the most convincing pieces of evidence that al-Zuhrī drew on a non-Muslim source for this story in fact comes directly from al-Zuhrī himself, or at least in many of the versions of the story transmitted by his students (see fig. 13). These students include Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767)[80] and two scribes who recorded the dictations of al-Zuhrī for Caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, Shuʿayb ibn Abī Ḥamzah of Ḥimṣ (d. 162/778–79)[81] and Yūnus ibn Yazīd al-Aylī (d. 159–60/775–77).[82] In all of the accounts for which he is cited, al-Zuhrī attributes the story of Abū Sufyān's encoun-

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77. Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, Ps.-Sebeos, chap. 42 (trans. Thomson, 97). The reference is to Matt. 25:27, Luke 19:23.

78. Ibid.

79. Shoemaker 2012, 333n8, cites a later account by Thomas Artsruni in which Muḥammad himself sends the letter to Heraclius's brother Theodore. Ps.-Sebeos's apparent use of the later *futūḥ* literature's "summons to Islam" topos is noted by Noth and Conrad 1994, 163–65, who caution, however, against viewing it as historical.

80. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1565 (*usquf li-l-naṣārā*); Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī,* 6: 349 (*usquf al-naṣārā*); Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 8: 23.ult (*usquf al-naṣārā*); Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 4: 383 (*usquf min al-naṣārā*).

81. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. badʾ al-waḥy,* 1: 6 (*ṣāḥib Īliyāʾ wa-Hirqal suqufan ʿalā naṣārā l-Shaʾm*); Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* 4: 219 (*ṣāḥib Īliya wa-Hirqal saqqafahu ʿāla l-naṣārā*)>Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 2: 93; Ibn Mandah, *Īmān,* 1: 287–92.

82. Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam,* 8: 22 (*ṣāḥib Īliya wa-Hirqal saqqafahu* (?) *ʿalā al-naṣārā*). On Yūnus, see 00–000 above.

ter with Heraclius and Muḥammad's letter to his teacher ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUtbah ibn Masʿūd (d. ca. 98/716–17),[83] but he says he heard the story of Heraclius's vision from one Ibn Nāṭūrā (viz., Ibn al-Nāṭūr).

Who was the mysterious Ibn Nāṭūrā? In Ibn Isḥāq's version of the legend, al-Zuhrī informs his pupil:

> A bishop of the Christians [usquf li-l-naṣārā], whom I had met in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, told me this story, and he himself witnessed what transpired concerning the Messenger of God's letter as well as the affair of Heraclius and his intelligence. The bishop said, "When the letter from the Messenger of God came to Heraclius with Diḥyah ibn Khalīfah, Heraclius took it and held it over his lap, and then he wrote to a man in the city of Rome [bi-rūmiyah] who used to read what they read from Aramaic [kāna yaqraʾu min al-ʿibrāniyyah mā yaqraʾūnahu][84] to inform him of its intent, to describe its subject, and to inform him of its contents. The potentate of Rome [ṣāḥib rūmiyah][85] then wrote him, "He is the prophet whom we have awaited. There is no doubt about it. Follow him and believe his message!"[86]

The citation of non-Muslim authorities is rare among tradents of ḥadīth—indeed, the practice eventually becomes quite controversial.[87] One need not affirm the historicity of Ibn Nāṭūrā's purported relationship with Heraclius or even the accuracy of his name. Al-Zuhrī was not the only scholar of Umayyad Syria who purported to have personally met someone who witnessed Heraclius's reaction to Muḥammad's letter.[88] What is important is al-Zuhrī's recognition that he received

83. On whom, see Horovitz [1927–28] 2002, 11–12.

84. Thus, Salamah ibn al-Faḍl's recension; in the recension of Yūnus ibn Bukayr (Bayhaqī, Dalāʾil, 4: 384.8) and Muḥammad ibn Salamah (Ṭabarānī, Muʿjam, 8: 24.4), the passage reads, "he used to read some Aramaic [kāna yaqraʾu min al-ʿibrāniyyah mā yaqraʾu]." That al-ʿibrāniyyah here means "Aramaic" rather than "Hebrew" can be discerned from the fact that a Christian source is being described. Likewise, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, the cousin of Muḥammad's wife Khadījah, allegedly wrote the Gospels in al-ʿibrāniyyah (Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, k. badʾ al-waḥy, 1: 3), which certainly means Aramaic in the context. On how Aramaic came to be commonly called "Hebrew," see Beattie and Davies 2011.

85. The use of the ṣāḥib here is intriguing, since it denotes the authority over the city of Rome; hence, this might also be the earliest reference to the pope in Arabic literature.

86. Cf. Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1565 (recension of Salamah ibn al-Faḍl); Ṭabarānī, Muʿjam, 8: 23–24 (recension of Muḥammad ibn Salamah); Bayhaqī, Dalāʾil, 4: 384 (recension of Yūnus ibn Bukayr). Ibn Ḥajar (Fatḥ al-bārī, 1: 40) cites a report from Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī's Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa where Zuhrī specifies that he met Ibn Nāṭūrā in Damascus; however, it does not appear in the printed editions of the work.

87. Ibn Ḥajar (Fatḥ al-bārī, 1:40) justifies al-Zuhrī's citation of the authority of a non-Muslim by noting that he was a bishop and thus "informed of [the Christians'] secrets and knowledgeable of the reality behind their stories [kāna muṭṭaliʿan ʿalā asrārihim wa-ʿāliman bi-ḥaqāʾiq akhbārhim]."

88. Cf. the story of Saʿīd ibn Abī Rāshid, a mawlā of Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, who claimed that his elderly neighbor in Homs (Emesa/Ḥimṣ), a man from the Christian Tanūkh tribe, had witnessed the events and related his story to him. See Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 24: 416–19

his story from a Christian source whom he describes as the bishop of the Christians and, according to some sources, the potentate (*ṣāḥib*) of Aelia/Jerusalem during the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik.[89]

It is tempting to dismiss Ibn Nāṭūrā's role in this account as a mere attempt to achieve verisimilitude in the historical narrative, as if al-Zuhrī conjures up a Christian-sounding name in order to bolster the veracity of a dubious account. However, when one takes into account the evidence from Ps.-Fredegar's chronicle for a shared account between the two, al-Zuhrī's personal testimony becomes too important to dismiss. Can the identity of Ibn Nāṭūrā, therefore, be discovered?

Three possibilities suggest themselves merely from the name attributed to the source. The first possibility is to read the name 'Ibn Nāṭūrā' rather literally. In this case, the name of al-Zuhrī's source means "Son of the Notarius/Guard/Keeper." *Nāṭūrā* is an Aramaic word, the Arabic being a direct calque of ܢܳܛܽܘܪܐ. Yet, even the Syriac *naṭūrā* can convey multiple meanings. While it usually means "guard," *nāṭūrā* can also be a calque of the Greek νωτάριος, meaning a notary or scribe.[90] Hence, one might imagine our Ibn Nāṭūrā as someone along the lines of a Greek-speaking scribe working for the Umayyad administration. Greek-speaking scribes filled the administrative apparatus of the Umayyads, particularly in Syria. While their influence began to wane with the onset of Arabicisation under ʿAbd al-Malik, even his caliphate is replete with examples of Greek-speaking, Christian scribes who served at the highest echelons of administration, as most famously exemplified by the powerful Manṣūr family from which the famous Byzantine theologian John Damascene hailed.[91] However, this reading also contravenes the fact that all of al-Zuhrī's accounts consistently call Ibn Nāṭūrā a bishop (Ar. *usquf,* from Gk. *epískopos* via Syr. *epīsqōpā*) rather than a scribe.

This brings us to a second interpretation of Ibn Nāṭūrā's name. Al-Zuhrī's source may have indeed been a guard (Syr. *nāṭūrā*) rather than a notary while also being associated with a bishop's see. An attendant guard to a bishop is sometimes called in Syriac *epīsqopyānā* (ܐܦܣܩܘܦܝܢܐ < ἐπισκοπεινός).[92] Yet this interpretation fails in another respect: it cannot account for why Ibn Nāṭūrā sometimes appears as the potentate (*ṣāḥib*) of Aelia (Jerusalem)—certainly a bishop's sentry would not

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and 27: 242–45; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 21: 57–59. This account seems to be rather late, but it is significant that the man describes his neighbor as being from the Christian Arabic-speakers of the Tanūkh tribe near Ḥimṣ. According to the Syriac chronicler Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān's governor of Ḥimṣ, ʿUmayr ibn Saʿd al-Anṣārī, was the first Muslim ruler to command the Bible to be translated into Arabic by members of the Tanūkh tribe. See Penn 2008, 78–79.

89. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. badʾ al-waḥy,* 1: 6; Ṭabarānī, *Musnad,* 4: 219; idem, *Muʿjam,* 8: 22.

90. Sokoloff 2009, 911a

91. Anthony 2015.

92. John of Ephesus, *Hist. Eccl.* III, 30.9, 16.

be described in such lofty terms. This second reading, therefore, should be discarded in favor of a third.

The third possible reading of the name 'Ibn Nāṭūrā' provides, in my view, the most convincing explanation. In this reading, the Arabic Ibn Nāṭūrā (var. Ibn al-Nāṭūr) is a corruption of the Syriac term for either the custodian of the bishop's seat (*nāṭar kūrsyā,* or *nāṭūrā d-kūrsyā*)[93] or the bishop's deputy (*nāṭar dūkktā*)[94]— that is, the church official who acts as an archbishop's locum tenens in lieu of a new bishop having been appointed. To fully appreciate why this interpretation provides the most convincing reading one must turn to al-Zuhrī's claim to have met Ibn Nāṭūrā during the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705).

The period of ʿAbd al-Malik's caliphate is critical because it coincides with the conclusion of an important power struggle within the Jerusalem Patriarchate with its roots in the monoenergist and monothelete controversies of the 630s. After restoring Egypt and the Levant to Byzantine imperial control, Heraclius sponsored the efforts of Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople, to forge a new religious unity in the empire. Sergius aimed to restore ecclesiastical unity with those communities who rejected the Christological doctrines promulgated at the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) by aligning the imperial church with a compromise position that came to be known as the monoenergist doctrine. Initially, the policy met with success. Under the auspices of Heraclius, Sergius engineered a union with the Armenian church in 630 C.E. and, most spectacularly, with the Egyptian Church under the leadership of the patriarch of Alexandria, Cyrus, who promulgated the *Pact of Union* in 633 C.E. However, despite these initial successes, an intractable opposition to the reconciliation swiftly appeared. Palestine and the patriarchate of Jerusalem—a position held by Sophronius from 634 until ca. 638 C.E.—served as the epicenter of the opposition to the new imperial compromise. As patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius spearheaded the opposition to Heraclius and soon rallied to his cause the Roman church, under the papal leadership of Honorius (625–38 C.E.) and later Martin (638 C.E.), and the dauntless theologian Maximus the Confessor. Efforts put in motion by the patriarch Sophronius a decade earlier culminated in the convention of the Lateran Synod of 649 C.E., which forcefully articulated the dyothelete position of Rome and Jerusalem against that imperial compromise promulgated by Constantinople.[95]

The impact of monoenergist and monothelete controversies are not readily perceptible in Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's account of Heraclius's vision, but they are rather explicitly stated in Ps.-Fredegar's account. Recall that Ps.-Fredegar concludes his

93. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2: 2356; Margoliouth 1927, 210a.
94. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2: 2354; Sokoloff 2009, 913b. I owe thanks to Thomas Carlson and Jack Tannous for pointing me in this direction.
95. Ekonomous 2007, 113–14.

account of Heraclius's response to the Arab conquest on this rather somber note: "Heraclius felt himself impotent to resist their assault and in his desolation was a prey to inconsolable grief. The unhappy king abandoned the Christian faith for the heresy of Eutyches and married his sister's daughter. He finished his days in agony, tormented with fever."[96]

The "heresy of Eutyches" referenced here refers to non-Chalcedonian, miaphysite Christology, which the opponents of Constantinople accused Heraclius of embracing while sponsoring the monoenergist and monothelete compromise. Non-Muslim sources frequently explain the Byzantines' defeat in the course of the Islamic conquests by appealing to such imperial policies regarding christological doctrine: imperial espousal of diophysite christology, imperial persecution of miaphysites, and so on.[97] Yet inasmuch as these explanations are *ex parte,* they often tell us more about an author's loyalties than the causal forces behind the startling turn of events. The ghost of Eutyches also appears in Palestinian monastic polemics against the compromise from the 630s—that is, from the very outset monoenergist crisis[98]—and the idea that Heraclius's support for monoenergist and monothelete compromise positions accounts for his losses against the Arab armies runs throughout the work of Maximus the Confessor.[99] In other words, the very mention of the "heresy of Eutyches" in Ps.-Fredegar's chronicle strongly suggests, again, that the Eastern source from which the Latin chronicle drew originated in Palestine and/or aligned with Christian Palestinian resistance to the empire's attempts to reach ecclesiastical unity through a new christological compromise.

This detour through the ecclesiastical politics of seventh-century Palestine grants us insight into the likely community to which al-Zuhrī's 'Ibn Nāṭūrā' belonged. The monothelete controversy had prevented the Jerusalem Patriarchate from producing a consensus candidate after the death of Sophronius in 638 c.e., and the Arab conquests forced many Sabaite monks to flee Palestine and Syria for North Africa and eventually even the city of Rome.[100] The Jerusalem Patriarchate remained in this state of crisis during much of ʿAbd al-Malik's caliphate. Monoenergism and monotheletism eventually lost its imperial backing by the Byzantines, and by the Sixth Ecumenical Council, 680–81 c.e., the Sabaite monastics of the dyothelete faction in Palestine had won the day. Yet even then, no patriarch represented the See of Jerusalem at the ecumenical council. The representative of the Jerusalem See was an apocrisarius, or envoy, for the locum tenens (Gk. *topotērētḗs;*

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96. Fredegar IV, § 66 (Wallace-Hadrill 1960, 55.

97. Hoyland 1997a, 524–25.

98. Booth 2014, 240; cf. *Disputatio inter Maximum et Theodosium,* § 6 in Allen and Bronwen 2002, 102–5, and n. 36 thereto.

99. Allen 2015, 4; cf. Allen and Bronwen 2002, 49–51, on the charges that Maximus counseled against attacking Saracen armies because God had removed his favor from Heraclius and his dynasty.

100. Ekonomou 2007, 204.

Syr. *nāṭar dūkktā*) of the See of Jerusalem named Theodore.[101] No clear candidate for the patriarchate of Jerusalem appears until 691 C.E. at the Council of Trullo, where Anastasius, patriarch of Jerusalem, appears in the list of participants.[102] In other words, throughout much of the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik, the patriarchate of Jerusalem had to make do without a patriarch. Of course, this did not lead the dissolution of the patriarchate and its institutions; rather, a locum tenens served in the capacity of a patriarch. The title for this custodian of the patriarchate in Syriac would, of course, be *nāṭūrā d-kūrsyā.* This individual may indeed have been al-Zuhrī's source for the legend of Heraclius.

This portrait of the Palestinian milieu of al-Zuhrī's 'Ibn Nāṭūrā' brings us back at last to the question of language. As noted above, al-Zuhrī's Heraclius legend bears the mark of having relied on a source written in Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) rather than the Syriac dialect of Aramaic. CPA gradually emerged in Eastern Palestine and the Transjordan from the sixth to eighth centuries C.E. Although also an Aramaic dialect, the distinctive vernacular and unique script of CPA provided a viable, and perhaps purposefully elevated, alternative to the increasingly dominant Syriac lexicon employed by miaphysite theology. Although Syriac remained medium of expression for both non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian Christian communities, CPA emerged in this period as a vernacular favored by the Jerusalem Patriarchate and powerful Sabaite monasteries of the Judean desert.[103] Hence, in all likelihood, Ps.-Fredegar's account, if read in tandem with al-Zuhrī's, reveals that not only do they both derive from a Syrian source, they actually harken back to a Palestinian source staunchly opposed to Heraclius's imperial policies during the monoenergist crisis.

TRANSLATIO IMPERII IN THE EARLY *SĪRAH-MAGHĀZĪ* LITERATURE

My intention in this chapter has been twofold: (1) to argue for the possibility of utilizing such non-Muslim traditions to gauge Muslim tradents' influence upon their sectarian milieu and to gain a vision of late Umayyad ideology; and (2) to highlight the untapped richness of the corpus that begins to emerge when such comparative work is undertaken. The *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus, I contend, still contains surprises for historians, which have the potential to upset the axioms and historical shorthand we use to measure what is historically plausible. These types

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101. Inasmuch as this same Theodore often appears as patriarch in hagiographic *vitae* from the same period, it has been suggested that, although a mere *locum tenens* during the Sixth Council, he assumed the full office soon thereafter. However, this remains uncertain. See Trombley 1986, 632–36.

102. Levy-Rubin 2001, 299–300.

103. Wood 2010, 208; cf. Desreumaux 1987, 95–107.

of traditions will only come to light, however, if we continue to set the early Islamic tradition in dialogue with the resources of Late Antiquity and finally eschew once and for all insular readings of the early Islamic tradition.

Al-Zuhrī's legend of Heraclius's vision must certainly be tied to the Umayyads' efforts to root their political legitimacy in the mandate of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. This is an effort that becomes all the more conspicuous in the historical record after the conclusion of the Second Civil War, when, despite initial reservations, a discernible "court impulse" for the collection of *sīrah-maghāzī* materials arose. In the legend of Heraclius's vision, al-Zuhrī, a major scholar with significant ties to the caliphal elite and the Umayyad court, refashioned his West Syrian Christian source's pessimistic view of the Byzantine imperium into an affirmation of the new, divinely mandated Arab imperium (*mulk al-ʿarab/khitān*) that, in his view, drew its legitimacy from the prophetic mission of Muḥammad.

In particular, by interlacing the narrative of Abū Sufyān's testimony before the emperor Heraclius with an Islamic re-reading of the gospel parable of the Tenants, al-Zuhrī successfully weaves a tale of God's abandonment of one empire for another that simultaneously shores up 'Arabo-Islamic' triumphalism. His account is pleasing, therefore, not just to his Umayyad patrons but also to the conquest elite who embraced the expansionist ambitions of the early Islamic polity more broadly. This last feat he achieves by making the progenitor of this new empire's vanguard, the Umayyad dynasty, the story's principal protagonists.[104] The story thus creates what one might deem a Muslim version of the doctrine of *translatio imperii* ("transfer of rule"), intended to legitimize the transfer of the Romans' imperial capital to Constantinople as the "new" or "second" Rome.[105] This political doctrine had a modicum of success in amplifying the legitimacy of Constantinople as the new epicenter of Roman imperial power, but only at the expense of discreetly relinquishing the status of Rome as the eternal empire. As Garth Fowden notes, "The [Roman] capital's transfer from the Tiber to the Bosporus already demonstrated that Romes might be multiplied, according (among other factors) to the shifting geography of faith."[106] The geography of faith had begun to shift profoundly with Islam—a religion that brought with it a renewed, robust vision of an empire of faith. The irony, of course, is that the emergence of a "New Rome" on the shores of the Bosphorous laid the foundations for such a newly imagined empire, even

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104. Cf. the version of the dialogue between Heraclius and Abū Sufyān transmitted by Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah in Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 4: 386 > Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 2: 11. Perhaps because he was a partisan of the Zubayrids, Mūsā depicts Abū Sufyān as far more conceited and vicious. When asked whether Muḥammad always defeated him in battle, Abū Sufyān replies, "He only defeated us in battle when I was absent. After that I twice sent expeditions against them [i.e., Uḥud and Khandaq] while they were in their homes, and we split open their bellies, sliced off their noses, and cut off their dicks."

105. Nicol 1988, 58–60.

106. Fowden 1994, 125.

empires. As Alexei Siverstev has recently noted, "the commonwealth potentially contained within itself a number of alternative holy empires and alternative Romes ready to spring forth and assert themselves in the face of the imperial center's perceived inadequacy."[107]

Although Christian Rome imagined itself destined to march up to the precipice of the eschaton, a destiny vividly portrayed in apocalypses such as the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*,[108] many of the Romans' rivals were less convinced and dared to imagine themselves to be the empire's divinely appointed successors. Even the Jews, in their renewed apocalyptic enthusiasm throughout the seventh and eighth centuries C.E., saw their imperial star on the rise as they witnessed the successive humiliations suffered by the Roman empire at the hands first of the Persians and then of the Arabs.[109] Yet it would be the Umayyads who in the ensuing decades acted as the vanguards of the mightiest and most ambitious of the burgeoning alternative Romes. Damascus, not Rome, would be the seat of God's eschatological empire in their view. It would also then fall to al-Zuhrī to be the new empire's most eloquent and skillful articulator of its Islamic vision of the *translatio imperii* with the prophetic authority of Muḥammad and his community at its center—reaffirming that with new faith came new dominion.

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107. Siverstev 2011, 2–3.
108. Shoemaker 2014, 541ff.
109. Siverstev 2011; Boustan 2013.

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Muḥammad and Cædmon

According to a historian writing in the eighth century C.E., there lived in the century prior an upright man whose life was irrevocably changed by an extraordinary vision. Even though this man was of meager means and lived far from civilizational centers of his day, he was ultimately destined for eternal fame. The powerful urban and military centers of the late antique Roman Empire scarcely touched the people of his barbarian land. For the greater part of the man's life, days passed by unexceptionally. He was well regarded among his people, and they were accustomed to entrusting him with the care of their animals; yet being meek and unlearned, he was by no means a prominent leader among them. However, one night his life irrevocably changed. Having withdrawn into solitude away from the noise and bustle of the village, he entered quiet contemplation and eventually fell asleep. This was no ordinary slumber, nor was this an ordinary evening. That night there appeared to the man an angelic visitor of formidable countenance who demanded that he proclaim to his people the glory of God and the majesty of His creation. Since he lacked learning and spoke a barbarian tongue, he at first refused to heed the angelic visitor's demands. How could he? But the heavenly visitor insisted even more forcefully, and when at last the man acquiesced to the heavenly charge, he awoke from his somnambulant state transformed. As though by some miracle, he now possessed the ability to fulfill his otherworldly visitor's charge. He spoke forth the wonders of God and His creation in the native tongue of his people. Indeed, he was the first to do so with such astounding beauty. Blessed with a divine gift, the eloquence of his words was peerless. When his people heard him utter the divinely gifted words in their native tongue, they stood in awe at what they heard, certain that it could only be explained as a wonder of God.

This may sound like Muḥammad's story, but it is not. It is the story of another man from the seventh century, who did not live in the Ḥijāz. This man's name was Cædmon; he was a cattle herder in the Northumbrian marshes of the British Isles and among the first poets to compose divine hymns in the tongue of the Anglo-Saxons.

Cædmon's story is recounted in the Venerable Bede's *Historia gentis Anglorum ecclesiastica* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People), completed in 731 C.E. At the monastery of Streonæshalch, during the abbacy of Saint Hilda (657–80 C.E.), Bede writes, there was a brother

> who was specially marked by the grace of God, so that he used to compose godly and religious songs; thus, whatever he learned from the holy Scriptures by means of interpreters, he quickly turned into extremely delightful and moving poetry, in English, which was his own tongue. . . . It is true that other Englishmen attempted to compose religious poems, but none could compare with him. For he did not learn the art of poetry from men nor through a man but he received the gift of song freely by the grace of God. . . . He had lived in the secular habit until he was well advanced in years and had never learned any songs. Hence sometimes at a feast, when for the sake of providing entertainment, it had been decided that they should all sing in turn, when he saw the harp approaching him, he would rise up in the middle of the feasting, go out, and return home.
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> On one such occasion, Cædmon left the place of feasting and went to the cattle byre, as it was his turn to take care of them that night. In due time he stretched himself out and went to sleep, whereupon he dreamt that someone stood by him, saluted him, and called him by name: "Cædmon," he said, "sing me something." Cædmon answered, "I cannot sing; that is why I left the feast and came here because I could not sing." Once again the speaker said, "Nevertheless you must sing to me." "What must I sing?" said Cædmon. "Sing," he said, "about the beginning of created things." Thereupon Cædmon began to sing verses which he had never heard before in praise of God the Creator. . . . When he awoke, he remembered all that he had sung while asleep and soon added more verse in the same manner, praising God in fitting style.
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> In the morning he went to the reeve who was his master, telling him of the gift he had received, and the reeve took him to the abbess. He was bidden to describe his dream in the presence of . . . the more learned men and also to recite his song . . . and it seemed clear to all of them that the Lord had granted him heavenly grace . . . (Bede, *Hist. eccl.,* ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, iv. 23)

The story of Cædmon's call, of course, is remarkably similar to the story of Muḥammad's call to prophethood and the onset of the revelation of the Qurʾan, especially as narrated in its most famous version in the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768). The similarities between the two stories are not mere curiosities. As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, a comparison between the two narratives illuminates an important aspect of the early *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition at its earliest, most formative stages: much like the story of Cædmon, the story of Muḥammad's prophetic call owes a great deal to the

literary conventions, theological outlooks, and cultural aesthetics of late antique hagiography.

To say any more on the matter first requires a close reading of the opening sections of the actual account from Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* as found in Salamah ibn al-Faḍl's "Rayy recension":

Ibn Isḥāq said: Wahb ibn Kaysān, a servant [*mawlā*] of the House of al-Zubayr, said:

I heard ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr say to ʿUbayd ibn ʿUmayr ibn Qatādah al-Laythī, "Tell us, ʿUbayd, the story of how it was in the beginning, at the outset of the Messenger of God's prophethood, when [the angel] Gabriel came to him." ʿUbayd then spoke and began to recount the story to ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr and all those at his court—and I [Wahb] also was in attendance.

[ʿUbayd said:] Each year the Messenger of God used to retreat [*yujāwiru*] for a month to Mount Ḥirāʾ. Such were the acts of pious devotion practiced by Quraysh in the Era of Barbarism [*kāna dhālika mimmā taḥannatha bihi Quraysh fī l-jāhiliyyah*]. . . . Each year during that month the Messenger of God would thus retreat and feed the destitute and needy who came to him. Whenever the Messenger of God finished his retreat that month of his, the first thing he would do—after he had withdrawn from his retreat—was to set out for the Kaʿbah before going home and to circle around it seven times, or however many times God willed. After that he returned to his home.

When the month came that God had willed to ennoble him in the year that He raised him to prophethood—and that was the month of Ramaḍān—the Messenger of God set out for Ḥirāʾ just as he used to set out for his retreat accompanied by his wife [*wa-maʿahu ahluh*].

When the night came that God ennobled him by calling him to be His Messenger and showed mercy to His servants, Gabriel came to him with God's command. The Messenger of God himself recounted:

He came to me while I was asleep with a sheet of silk brocade with writing thereon and said, "Read [*iqraʾ*]!" I said, "I cannot read [*mā ʾaqraʾu*]!" but he pressed against me until I thought I would die. He then released me and said, "Read!" So I said, "What shall I read [*mādhā ʾaqraʾu*]?" but I only said this to be delivered, lest he once again do to me what he did before. He said "Read in the name of your Lord, Who did create| Did create Humanity from coagulate| Read for your Lord is Magnanimous| Who, through the use of the calamus| Has taught Humanity that of which it was oblivious" [Q. ʿAlaq 96: 1–5].[1] I read it, and then he ceased and withdrew from me. I awoke from my sleep, and it was as if he had inscribed a scripture upon my heart [*ka-annamā kataba fī qalbī kitāban*].[2]

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1. I have used the Qurʾan translation of Shawkat Toorawa (2006, 145) with slight modifications.
2. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1149–50. The narrative also survives in, e.g., the Medinan recension of Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿd (Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh*, 1: 192); the Kūfan recension of Ziyād al-Bakkāʾī (Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 1: 235–37; Fākihī, *Makkah*, 4: 86–88; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq*, 63: 12–14); and the Kūfan recension of Yūnus ibn Bukayr (Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar*, 121 > Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 2: 147–48). It is worth noting, however, that Yūnus's version has been corrupted in the process of transmission and has lost its *isnād* (Schoeler 2011, 61–62).

This story of Muḥammad's call to prophethood—hereafter called "the *iqraʾ* narrative"—hits many of the same narrative beats as Bede's story of Cædmon's call. Indeed, on a formal level, the narratives even share much of the same skeletal structure. In Ibn Isḥāq's story, Muḥammad is a humble, unlearned righteous man who withdraws from his village (Mecca) for his evening retreat (atop Mt. Ḥirāʾ), where in his sleep he receives a startling vision of an angel bearing a silk scroll. "Read [*iqraʾ*]!" the angel commands. Muḥammad resists at first but eventually acquiesces. When he awakes, he finds that he has been gifted with the miraculous ability to recite a revealed scripture in his Arabic vernacular, a gift whose divine origin is subsequently affirmed by his wife Khadījah and her learned Christian cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal. The resemblance between the stories is certainly remarkable, and even uncanny, not merely because of their chronological proximity (both accounts were recorded in the mid-eighth century C.E.), but because of the vast distance that separates them—more than 3,728 miles (6,000 km). The number of parallels between the stories seemingly defy mere coincidence. How, then, are they possibly related, if at all?

CÆDMON'S CALL AND THE *IQRAʾ* NARRATIVE

The late Klaus von See, a scholar of Scandinavian and Germanic languages, first put forward a forceful argument for a direct relationship between Ibn Isḥāq's story of Muḥammad's call and Bede's story of the Anglo-Saxon poet Cædmon in 1983. Von See noted how Bede's Cædmon, much like the prophet Muḥammad in Ibn Isḥāq's *iqraʾ narrative*, receives an angelic visitor in his sleep who compels him to sing. Bede's narrative also culminates in Cædmon acquiring the miraculous ability to sing of the glories of God's creation in his own vernacular (English) in much the same manner that, in Ibn Isḥāq's story, Muḥammad acquired the miraculous ability to "read/recite" the Qurʾān in Arabic. Noting these striking correspondences between the two stories, von See boldly postulated that Bede's telling of Cædmon's call relied heavily on an earlier version of the Arabic story preserved in Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*. Hence, although Bede had recorded his account of Cædmon in his *Historia* decades before Ibn Isḥāq recorded his account of Muḥammad's call in his *Maghāzī,* von See regarded the Arabic account as chronologically prior.[3]

In truth, von See's study was not the first to point out the parallels between the story of Muḥammad and Cædmon;[4] however, his study was certainly the first to gain traction with Arabists and historians of early Islam. His was also the first study to frame the similarities between the two stories as a historiographical puzzle. Rudolf Sellheim was the first Arabist to bring von See's insight to the attention

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3. [Klaus von] See 1983, 225–33; for more context, see Scarfe Beckett 2003, 53–54.
4. E.g., see Lester 1974.

of historians of early Islam but only made a passing note of von See's hypothesis.[5] Thereafter, von See's insight went largely neglected among historians of early Islam until his work was once again brought to the fore by Gregor Schoeler in a seminal 1996 monograph on the early *sīrah-maghāzī* literature.[6] The importance of von See's argument to Schoeler's central thesis is unmistakable. In the monograph, Schoeler sought to provide a definitive account of the origin and early evolution of the story of Muḥammad's call to prophecy—the "*iqrāʾ* narrative"—from its earliest, orally transmitted version(s) until the redactions that survive in our earliest written testimonies in Arabic. Schoeler's method for doing so was largely source-critical and relied on the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis jointly pioneered by Schoeler himself, Harald Motzki, and Andreas Görke. Locating the provenance of Bede's tale of Cædmon's dream in the *iqraʾ* narrative seemed to provide independent confirmation of the accuracy of the philological tools Schoeler had developed to precisely trace the dissemination of the historical traditions about Muḥammad's call.

Relying on von See's hypothesis, Schoeler believed he could demonstrate definitively that Ibn Isḥāq had not himself invented the story of Muḥammad's call in the mid-eighth century C.E, but merely transmitted an earlier account not of his own making. In other words, the *iqraʾ* narrative must have circulated far earlier than Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* and in a form highly similar to the one recorded under Abbasid patronage. Indeed, in order for von See's thesis that Bede relied upon the story of Muḥammad's call to be true, Schoeler's thesis must also be correct: Bede could not have possibly relied upon Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī,* for Bede had finished his chronicle decades before Ibn Isḥāq finished compiling his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* during the caliphate of Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (r. 136–59/754–75). Ibn Isḥāq must have been drawing on the same first/seventh-century source that also lay behind Bede's story of Cædmon's call, or so the argument goes.

Regardless of one's evaluation of Schoeler's thesis—one that has its detractors, as we shall see—Schoeler raised a fundamental question unaddressed by previous studies that posited a connection between Bede's Cædmon and Ibn Isḥāq's Muḥammad, a question that also lies at the heart of this chapter's reevaluation of von See's thesis. Namely, *which version* of the story of Muḥammad's call influenced Bede's account, if any at all? The Arabic tradition contains myriad accounts of Muḥammad's call, so why single out Ibn Isḥāq's for special attention? Although Schoeler decided in favor of the antiquity of Ibn Isḥāq's account and, thus, in favor of von See's thesis that the version Ibn Isḥāq included in his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* faithfully represents the same version that influenced the Cædmon story, Schoeler did not derive his rationale for this judgment from von See's precedent. Schoeler's

    5. Sellheim 1987, 13–16.
    6. Schoeler 1996, 61; Eng. trans. Schoeler 2011, 62–63.

arguments thus merit further attention before addressing subsequent criticisms of his thesis.

Long before Schoeler's study, scholars of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature had recognized that the basic story of Muḥammad's call—the *iqraʾ* narrative—survives in two main versions, which in turn survive in numerous redactions in the *ḥadīth, tafsīr,* and *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. Minor alternative versions of the story of how Muḥammad was called to prophethood survive in addition to the better-known versions of the *iqraʾ* narrative and have been extensively documented by prior studies.[7] However, the *iqraʾ* narrative in its two main surviving versions is indisputably the most dominant, preponderant story in the early Arabic literary tradition.

The "original" version underlying the *iqraʾ* narrative is ultimately lost, but the story's redactions are sufficiently attested in early textual testimonies to allow modern historians to credit two scholars with putting the respective versions into circulation with a high degree of confidence. The first version is the one found in the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767) and has been preserved in the numerous surviving recensions of this work; the second is the version of Ibn Isḥāq's teacher, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 742). Although al-Zuhrī's version enjoys a broad attestation throughout the *ḥadīth* literature, the earliest redaction of al-Zuhrī's version survives in the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of his student Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 770), which is in turn preserved in the recension of his student ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 826).[8] Both accounts overlap to a great extent and agree on all the significant details. Overall, al-Zuhrī's account is soberer and more pared-down, whereas Ibn Isḥāq's contains more embellishments. As seen in the prior chapters, this observation is common when comparing the respective accounts of al-Zuhrī and his student Ibn Isḥāq. Furthermore, the account of al-Zuhrī boasts a greater pedigree—inasmuch as the chain of authorities (*isnād*) for his account is more authoritative and claims to derive from ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr's transmission of the story from his aunt, the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr.[9] Ibn Isḥāq's account, however, exhibits more literary élan. These two versions are distinct, therefore, but are they entirely independent accounts?

As long ago as the early 1860s, Aloys Sprenger had already suggested that the accounts of al-Zuhrī and Ibn Isḥāq resembled one another so closely that they must be interdependent, but it took over a century for another scholar, G. H. A. Juynboll, to provide a plausible account of *how* they were interrelated. Both accounts clearly had the same narrative structure, not only purporting to recount how

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7. Rubin 1993b.

8. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 12–17 (§ 1.2); cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 43: 112.

9. As noted by Schoeler 2011, 70–71, an important version of the *iqraʾ* narrative from al-Zuhrī is preserved in Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 139, in which al-Zuhrī cites for the first portion of the tradition, not ʿĀʾishah via ʿUrwah, but Muḥammad ibn al-Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī, a scholar who had settled in Medina (on whom, see Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 56: 124–28).

Muḥammad's revelations began but making specific claims about where, when, and (most important) what verses of the Qurʾān were the first to be revealed. Juynboll's analysis ultimately postulated that Ibn Isḥāq's narrative represented the earliest version of the story, leading him to assert that al-Zuhrī essentially reworked the source preserved by Ibn Isḥāq,[10] a conclusion that Schoeler largely followed and subsequently expanded upon.

Among the features of Ibn Isḥāq's version of the *iqraʾ* narrative that stood out to Juynboll, and subsequently to Schoeler as well, is its frame narrative, which attributes the telling of the story of Muḥammad's initial call to prophecy to a storyteller/preacher (*qāṣṣ*) named ʿUbayd ibn ʿUmayr al-Laythī at the Meccan court of the so-called counter-caliph ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, the brother of ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr (who is al-Zuhrī's putative source). The frame story is one of the most remarkable features of Ibn Isḥāq's version of the *iqraʾ* narrative, and it has played a large role in the rationale articulated by modern historians for favoring its chronological priority to the tradition of al-Zuhrī, which lacks this frame.

Ibn Isḥāq's source for the narrative is ostensibly a freedman (*mawlā*) of the Zubayrid family named Wahb ibn Kaysān,[11] who relates how he heard the tale recounted in Mecca at the court of ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr. The importance of this context is difficult to understate: the *mise en scène* described by Wahb means that he heard the story during the Second Civil War (60–73/680–92) and, thus, amid the conflict in which Ibn al-Zubayr and the Zubayrids were vying with the Umayyads to lay claim to the title of Commander of the Faithful (*amīr al-muʾminīn*) and, consequently, the leadership of the early Islamic polity. The Zubayrids orchestrated their movement from within the Sacred Precincts of Mecca, and the propaganda that ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr and his supporters circulated in favor of his caliphal claims emphasized the religious character of his ambition to unite the Muslims under his rule and denounced the putative impiety of his Umayyad rivals. Zubayrid propaganda promoted Ibn al-Zubayr as the son of the Prophet's Companion al-Zubayr ibn ʿAwwām and vaunted his familial connection to the Prophet's household through his matrilineal line. Ibn al-Zubayr was a grandson of the first caliph Abū Bakr through his daughter Asmāʾ, and Ibn al-Zubayr could thus likewise boast that he was a nephew of ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, the Prophet's wife. As noted in chapter 1, coins minted by the Zubayrids are, significantly, the first to bear official legends that declare Muḥammad to be the Messenger of God and, thus, to appeal explicitly to the prophethood of Muḥammad to legitimate their claims to succeed Muḥammad as the community's leaders.[12]

10. Juynboll 1994, 160ff.; cf. Sprenger 1850, 110ff.
11. On whom, see Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Tamhīd,* 23: 9ff.
12. Heidemann 2010, 166–69.

The ultimate narrator of the story at the Zubayrid court in Ibn Isḥāq's version of the *iqraʾ* narrative also plays an important role for the Zubayrids: ʿUbayd ibn ʿUmayr was Mecca's first and most famous preacher and storyteller—Mecca's revered *qāṣṣ* (pl. *quṣṣāṣ*)—whom ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zubayr continued to employ as Mecca's official storyteller throughout the conflict until ʿUbayd's death in 68/687. ʿUbayd ibn ʿUmayr's status and role as Mecca's main preacher and storyteller meant that his influence was vast and potentially widespread, inasmuch as he was situated at the nexus of Muslim pilgrimage rituals such as *ḥajj* and *ʿumrah*.[13] Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* claims, therefore, to preserve the pious exhortation of a highly esteemed Meccan scholar who himself had been patronized by the Zubayrids, and whom they employed as the Meccan sanctuary's official preacher during the Second Civil War. Although al-Zuhrī claimed to have heard his version from ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr—himself a member of the Zubayrid house who resided in Mecca at the time—which is not inherently implausible, the notion that the two versions of the *iqraʾ* narrative are not genealogically related is, therefore, difficult to maintain.

If we posit that some version of the *iqraʾ* narrative did indeed influence Bede's account of Cædmon's call, which version reached him—that of ʿUbayd al-Laythī preserved by Ibn Isḥāq or that of ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr transmitted by al-Zuhrī? In Schoeler's view, it must have been the former. Ibn Isḥāq's version, rather than having expanded and embellished the pared-down narrative of the *ḥadīth* folk exemplified by the transmissions of al-Zuhrī's versions, ostensibly originates from the circles of professional "preachers" (*quṣṣāṣ*) of the conquest era and, for this reason, exhibits the considerable embellishments for which they are known. Hence, Ibn Isḥāq preserves a "*qiṣṣah*" version of the story—that is, a storyteller's pious tale—which the *ḥadīth* folk apparently adopted for their own purposes, and that, perhaps, ʿUrwah transmitted to al-Zuhrī as a "family story" of sorts.[14] Schoeler considers this "*qiṣṣah*" version of the story more likely to have traveled far and wide, because he regarded a preacher's pious tale, which benefited from the publicity of preachers, as all the more likely to have traveled outside the sphere of Muslim confessional boundaries than a tradition cultivated in the smaller, more inward-facing circles of the *ḥadīth* scholars. He also purports that only Ibn Isḥāq's narrative has Muḥammad receive his vision of Gabriel in a dream, just as Cædmon receives his vision in a dream. In the end, Schoeler's conclusion falls rather neatly into alignment with Patricia Crone's thesis that the storytellers and popular preachers of early Islamic society were just as much responsible for the earliest and most seminal articulations of early Islamic prophetology as scholars from the ranks of the *ḥadīth* folk.[15]

13. Ibn Abī Khaythamah, *Tārīkh,* 1: 194; cf. Armstrong 2017, 291.
14. Schoeler 2011, 57–59, 67–70.
15. Crone 1987, 203ff.

Despite his thorough and meticulous sifting of the evidence, Schoeler's analysis does have flaws. Firstly, his assertion relies on the contention that al-Zuhrī's version of the *iqraʾ* narrative did not place Muḥammad's vision of the angel—called "the true vision [*al-ruʾyā al-ṣādiqah*]" in his account—within a dream, whereas Ibn Isḥāq's account did. This assertion is not entirely accurate: an early and important version of Maʿmar's account from al-Zuhrī, for instance, explicitly states that Muḥammad's vision transpired "in sleep [*fī l-nawm*]."[16] Secondly, Schoeler's view of the role of the *quṣṣāṣ* and their status among *ḥadīth* scholars can be improved. Many *ḥadīth* scholars were themselves *quṣṣāṣ*, and a narrative (*qaṣaṣ* or *qiṣṣah*) related by such a *qāṣṣ* was not necessarily qualitatively different from a *ḥadīth* or *khabar*, especially at such an early stage, when categories such as these were necessarily still inchoate. Strictly speaking, an exhortation delivered by a *qāṣṣ* was not always even an oral composition. Historical reports attest to their being recorded in writing for broad dissemination as well.[17] Although these objections are relatively minor, the implications are straightforward: we have no way of knowing for certain which version of the *iqraʾ* narrative (al-Zuhrī's or Ibn Isḥāq's) better attests to the prototype narrative underlying the Cædmon story in Bede.

All the same, these observations are not fatal to Schoeler's fundamental thesis. Though bold, Schoeler's interpretation of the data went substantially unchallenged for over a decade, until Stephen Shoemaker questioned the evidentiary basis of Schoeler's claim that the *iqraʾ* narrative preserved by Ibn Isḥāq influenced Bede's account of Cædmon's call. Shoemaker directly challenged Schoeler's dependence on von See's thesis as an unwarranted, even farfetched, interpretation of the evidence.[18] Although Shoemaker conceded that the Cædmon narrative "offers some interesting parallels to Muḥammad's *iqraʾ* narrative," he categorically rejected Schoeler's contention that the two texts were directly interrelated, let alone that Bede relied on the narrative recorded by Ibn Isḥāq, arguing that (1) most parallels between the two stories could be attributed to "the Bible's clear impact on the shaping of [the narrative of] Muḥammad's prophetic call . . . [and] presumably

16. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* ed. Arnaʾūṭ, 43: 112; Ājurrī, *Sharīah,* 2:1436, both with the *isnād* ʿAbd al-Razzāq←Maʿmar←al-Zuhrī←ʿUrwah and, thus, citing the *Maghāzī* of Maʿmar via ʿAbd al-Razzāq. The phrase *fī l-nawm* ("while asleep") does not appear in the unicum for this section of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī's *Muṣannaf,* which alone preserves Maʿmar's *Maghāzī.* However, even though the reading of the manuscript is correct, this portion of ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* survives only in the recension of Abū Yaʿqūb Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Dabarī (d. ca. 285–86/898–99)—a recension Ibn Ḥanbal, the most important and prominent student of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, harshly criticized as full of errors because ʿAbd al-Razzāq, who had gone blind in his old age, could not personally review Isḥāq al-Dabarī's copy. See my comments in Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* xxxii.

17. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 2: 881–82, citing the example of the Khārijite preacher Ṣāliḥ ibn Musarriḥ al-Tamīmī (d. 76/695); noted in Armstrong 2017, 65–66.

18. Shoemaker 2011, 309–27.

also . . . Bede's narrative," and (2) that "the interval for transmission . . . [was] much too short for Schoeler's conclusions to be credible."[19] These two objections are addressed below.

FROM MUḤAMMAD'S CALL TO CÆDMON'S CALL

Shoemaker's criticisms of Schoeler's thesis must be taken seriously, especially given the two flaws in von See's original thesis that Shoemaker brings into stark relief. Neither of the two problems are sufficiently addressed by von See's initial study, nor were they resolved by Schoeler's considerable refinement of his thesis. Firstly, as noted above, von See and Schoeler held that Bede's narrative most closely resembles the narrative of Ibn Isḥāq, but given that Bede's history was completed in 731 c.e., and Bede himself died in 735, his account cannot derive from Ibn Isḥāq. In the early 730s, Ibn Isḥāq had just embarked on his scholarly career, going to study in Alexandria under the Egyptian scholar Yazīd ibn Abī Ḥabīb in a.h. 115/733–34 c.e. Ibn Isḥāq's reputation as a formidable scholar does not seem to have been established until around 123/740, most notably after his prominence among his peers in Medina had been publicly heralded by al-Zuhrī himself.[20] Even if one accepts that Ibn Isḥāq's transmission of *maghāzī* materials predated the final, written form they assumed in the redactions of his *Maghāzī* compiled in Iraq under the patronage of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr, the chronologies of the respective texts and their authors' biographies render any direct interdependence between Bede and Ibn Isḥāq impossible. Schoeler's solution to this problem was to cast Ibn Isḥāq, not as the author, but as a redactor of an earlier account that had reached and influenced Bede. Although Schoeler's solution is made all the more plausible by his painstaking source-critical analysis of the *iqra*ʾ narrative, the mechanism for this textual cross-pollination remained vague.[21]

Schoeler's initial study also neglected the conspicuous influence of biblical tropes and archetypes (especially Isa. 29:10–12 and 40:6, but also 1 Kings 19:9-18 and Jeremiah 1:6) on the *iqra*ʾ narrative and Cædmon's call, which certainly had a role to play in the composition of both narratives. The importance of Shoemaker's challenge, therefore, was that he introduced a plausible, alternative mechanism to

19. Ibid., 320. Shoemaker was not the first to question the idea that Muḥammad's call lay behind Cædmon's, but certainly the first to systematically attempt to refute it. His predecessors hopelessly floundered about when discussing the Arabic source material. For example, O'Donnell 2007, 22, carelessly speaks of "Mohammed's Call as told in the Qurʾan and associated Islamic tradition," thus failing to distinguish between the story of Muḥammad's (nonexistent) call in the Qurʾan and the stories of Ibn Isḥāq and al-Zuhrī, let alone realizing that more than one such account exists.

20. See 000–00 above.

21. Schoeler attempts to address this shortcoming in Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler 2012, 32–33, although not entirely satisfactorily in my view.

account for the similarities between the two stories that did not require the Arabic story to vault such extraordinary geographical, linguistic, and confessional boundaries within an exceedingly narrow timespan. The most striking mechanism that Shoemaker highlighted was a biblical archetype behind Ibn Isḥāq's *iqraʾ* narrative that had long been recognized by scholars.[22] This underlying biblical archetype can be perceived in the textual substrate underlying the dialogue between Muḥammad and the archangel Gabriel in Ibn Isḥāq's *iqraʾ* narrative. When Gabriel appears to Muḥammad in his sleep and, holding a silk scroll, he famously declares, "Read [*iqraʾ*]!" to which the Prophet replies, "I cannot read [*mā aqraʾ*]!" This exchange is likely modeled on a biblical archetype. Isaiah 29:10–12 likewise speaks of sleeping prophets who cannot read a sealed scroll when commanded to do so; and Isaiah 40:6 even has a similar structure and wording to the passage, even in the original Hebrew: "A voice says, 'Proclaim [*qĕrā*]!' And I said, 'What shall I proclaim [*māh ʾeqrā*]?'" Could not Isaiah 29:10–12 and 40:6—or less directly even Isaiah 6:6–8 and Jeremiah 1:6–9—also have served as a model for Cædmon's call as well? Details unique and specific to Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative can be ascribed to the local contexts in which the respective stories were composed.

Shoemaker is certainly correct that Bede's account of Cædmon and the *iqraʾ* narrative have in common discrete elements that clearly draw upon biblical archetypes, but these shared biblical archetypes are not actually the most striking commonality between the two stories. Rather, it is their shared narrative frame, the actual scaffolding of the *iqraʾ* narrative and Cædmon's dream, that provides the most compelling evidence of their interdependence. This common biblical material has the potential to account for some of the two narratives' common motifs, but it cannot account for *all* of them.[23] Schoeler's response to Shoemaker's critique makes a similar point: both texts may utilize Isaiah 12:10–12 and 40:6, but this sheer fact is not sufficient to explain the full extent of their parallels.[24] The narrative scaffolding shared by the two stories is most prominently on display where both narratives emplot the call of their respective heroes within a "dreaming-vision." This "dreaming-vision" is a minor hagiographical *topos* in Cædmon's narrative;[25] but it is absolutely essential to the prophetological force of the *iqraʾ* narrative, for Muḥammad's experience is, as both redactions term it, "*the* true dream" (*al-ruʾyā al-ṣādiqah*) inaugurating Muḥammad's prophetic mission. As a "true dream," the *iqraʾ* narrative thus posits Muḥammad's vision of Gabriel as the

22. The impact of biblical materials on the narrative had been noted well over a century ago by Hirschfeld 1886 and Nöldeke et al., *GdQ*, 1: 81 (trans. Behn, 68).

23. Even Sellheim 1987, 16, otherwise reluctant to draw conclusions from Klaus von See's hypothesis, recognized not just the importance of the Isaiah passages to both accounts but also the fact that this commonality was insufficient to account for all the parallels between the two texts.

24. Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler 2012, 31–32.

25. On this topos, see Pratsch 2005, 109, 112–13.

Ibn Isḥāq's Narrative of Muḥammad's Call and Bede's Narrative of Cædmon's Call

Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ed. de Goeje, 1: 1150	Bede, *Eccl. Hist.,* ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors iv.24
He came to me while I was asleep with a sheet of silk brocade with writing thereon and said, "Read [*iqraʾ*]!" I said, "I cannot read [*mā ʾaqraʾu*]!" but he pressed against me until I thought I would die. He then released me and said, "Read!" So I said, "What shall I read [*mādhā ʾaqraʾu*]?" but I only said this to be delivered, lest he once again do to me what he did before. He said "Read in the name of your Lord, Who did create| Did create Humanity from coagulate| Read for your Lord is Magnanimous| Who, through the use of the calamus| Has taught Humanity that of which it was oblivious" [Q. ʿAlaq 96:1–5]. I read it, and then he ceased and withdrew from me. I awoke from my sleep, and it was as if he had inscribed a scripture upon my heart [*ka-annamā kataba fī qalbī kitāban*].	In due time [Caedmon] stretched himself out and went to sleep, whereupon he dreamt that someone stood by him, saluted him, and called him by name: "Caedmon," he said, "sing to me something [*canta mihi aliquid*]!" Cædmon answered, "I cannot sing [*nescio cantere*]! . . ." Once again the speaker said, "Nevertheless you must sing to me [*attamen mihi cantare habes*]!" 'What must I sing [*quid debeo cantere*]?" said Cædmon. "Sing," he said, "of the beginning of the creation!" At which answer he began to sing in praise of God the Creator verses he had not heard before. . . . When he awoke he remembered all that he had sung while asleep and soon added more verses in the same manner, praising God in fitting style.

polar opposite of the Meccans' derision of Muḥammad's revelations as "jumbled dreams [*aḍghāthu aḥlām*]" in the Qurʾān (Anbiyāʾ 21:5).[26] Von See and subsequently Schoeler emphasized this point in their analysis too,[27] but it is unfortunately elided in Shoemaker's critique. The imprint of biblical models on both texts is strong,[28] but they cannot solely account for the *structural* similarities between the two accounts.

Just how striking the structural similarities between the two narratives can be seen most clearly when they are juxtaposed to one another. This table shows Bede's narrative alongside the Rayy redaction of Ibn Isḥāq's account.

The structure shared by the narratives is all the more conspicuous when the two texts are read side by side. Firstly, there is the basic outline of the narratives: they both rely on a dream-cum-vision to frame the narrative and conclude with Cædmon's/Muḥammad's extraordinary ability to perfectly recall the contents of the dream and the divine gifts the dream confers on them after waking. Within this frame of the dream-cum-vision, the order of the interaction between the dreamer

26. Cf. Djaït 2014, 1: 26.
27. Schoeler 2011, 62–63.
28. Cf. Anthony 2016, 272.

and his preternatural visitor is readily recognizable in both stories as well, insofar as they proceed in accord with the same command-response sequence: three commands are given, followed by three responses. Not only do the narratives both share this tripartite symmetry, the two narratives also correspond in the ensuing permutations of the command-response pattern that push the narrative forward: the first permutation being the response of ignorance/inability (I cannot/do not), the second being the response querying what should be read/sung, and the third being the miraculous ability to read/sing of God's creation as commanded by the visitor.

The similarities between the structural architecture of the two narratives are compelling enough on their own. However, overlooked even by von See and Schoeler is yet a further parallel between the stories of Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative. In both al-Zuhrī's and Ibn Isḥāq's accounts, Muḥammad's wife Khadījah swiftly brings her husband to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian man reputed to be knowledgeable in the Scriptures, whom she asks to confirm the veracity of Muḥammad's vision. Waraqah obliges and subsequently informs Muḥammad that the visitor whom he saw was indeed an angelic messenger from God, the same messenger sent to Moses.[29] According to Bede, Cædmon likewise finds confirmation from a woman; she is not his wife but rather the abbess, St. Hilda. After Cædmon "was bidden to describe his dream in the presence of a number of the more learned men and also to recite his song so that they might all examine him and decide upon the origin of the gift of which he spoke . . . it seemed clear to them that the Lord had granted him a heavenly grace." This parallel between the stories is, again, striking and cannot be explained by a mere reliance on biblical archetypes.

Yet even if biblical archetypes can be proven to be insufficient to explain these commonalities between the two narratives, are we, therefore, forced to conclude that the two narratives are directly interrelated? Perhaps not—by focusing too closely on the Bible, scholars have overlooked other important literary genres, not to mention the broader literary production of Late Antiquity. It is prima facie just as possible that the story of Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative, rely on a hitherto unidentified common source, rather than being directly related. Visitations by otherworldly figures are, after all, not rare occurrences in world literature, no less so in stories of holy persons of Late Antiquity. Can one not cite other stories that are similarly structured to those of the call of Cædmon and the call of Muḥammad?

Certainly one can. A few examples illustrate this point. According to the geographer Pausanias (fl. second century C.E.), for instance, the Greek dramatist Aeschylus likewise acquired his ability to compose tragedies after the god Dionysus

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29. Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 14–15 (1.2.2–3); Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh,* ed. de Goeje, 1: 1151–52; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah,* 1: 238; Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 122.

appeared to him in a dream as he slept in a vineyard.[30] *The Shepherd of Hermas,* a second-century Christian treatise, also recounts a series of revelatory visions experienced by its protagonist, Hermas, who saw apparitions of supernatural visitors in his sleep—one of these visitors even brings him a book he cannot decipher until granted divine aid.[31] Even Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967), the great anthologist of Arabic verse, recounts a story that follows this model, in which the famed pre-Islamic Arabian poet ʿAbīd ibn al-Abraṣ (fl. sixth century C.E.) purportedly only began to compose Arabic verse after a preternatural figure appeared to him in a dream and granted him the gift of poetry in answer to his prayers.[32]

Such observations lead us to an important question and one not yet raised in the scholarship on the relationship between these two texts. Setting aside the question of the historical relationship between Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative for the moment, the commonalities between the narratives demonstrate at very least that the two draw a common well of narrative tropes, motifs, and archetypes that go far beyond biblical material. Some of the components that fill out the narratives lead them to differ from each other considerably, such as how the story of Cædmon's call reflects the *Sitz im Leben* of seventh-century Northumbria and the *iqraʾ* narrative that of Mecca in the seventh-century Ḥijāz. However, a common substrate unites the narratives, producing their striking commonalities. Identifying this substrate is perhaps the challenge here. I contend that it was most likely late antique hagiography's tales of holy men and women, whose the narrative conventions shaped both biblical and parabiblical motifs and local folkloric archetypes.

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30. "Aeschylus himself said that when a youth he slept while watching grapes in a field, and that Dionysus appeared and bade him write tragedy. When the day came, in obedience to the vision, he made an attempt and hereafter found composing quite easy." Pausanius 1.21.2 (trans. Jones and Ormerod 1918, 1: 103).

31. Osiek 1999, 16 and Miller 1994, 131ff.; cf. *Vision* 1.2.2 and 2.1.4 where Hermas is presented with a scroll (βιβλίον), which initially he cannot decipher until aided by God.

32. *Aghānī,* 22: 81–82. In this tale, ʿAbīd is a poor shepherd who, caught napping next to his sister Māwiyyah in the shade of some trees, is unjustly mocked for having sex with her by a man from the tribe of Mālik ibn Thaʿlabah. The mockery comes recited in the following *rajaz*-verse (cf. van Gelder 2005, 13): "There's ʿAbīd—he banged Mayyā! * Hopefully he's knocked her up with a boy! * She'll carry and give birth to a runt! [*dhāka ʿAbīdun qad aṣāba Mayyā * yā laytahu alqaḥahā ṣabiyyā * fa-ḥamalat fa-waḍaʿat ḍāwiyyā*]." When ʿAbīd hears these lines, he lifts his hands to heaven and implores God to grant him revenge on the man. The story continues:

> He laid down his head and slept, and he had never spoken a word of poetry [*al-shiʿr*] before that. It's said that there came to him a spectral visitor in his sleep with ball of hair [*atāhu ātin fī l-manām bi-kubbatin min shaʿrin*] that he cast it into [ʿAbīd's] mouth [cf. Isa. 6:5–8]. Then he said, "Rise!" He then awoke reciting poetry in the *rajaz*-meter [*yartajazū*] against the Mālik tribe.

This strikes me as being a somewhat profane parody of the *iqraʾ* narrative. Similar parodies of *sīrah* narratives, such as the opening of Muḥammad's breast, can be found in the reports about Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt, the poet and would-be prophet of Banū Thaqīf; see Rubin 1995, 72–75.

The influence of biblical archetypes on *sīrah-maghāzī* narratives has been dem- onstrated by Arabists and historians of early Islam in recent years,[33] but that of late antique hagiography has been neglected, with a few notable exceptions.[34] Hagi- ography remains a bête noire among historians. Stephanos Efthymiadis laments that historians have too hastily dismissed it as "the genre of perpetual recycling, recreating itself by reproducing clichés which earned it a reputation for timeless- ness, anachronism, triviality and feeble credibility,"[35] an attitude that led to the neglect of the genre and, unfortunately, the data it conveys about the societies and populations portrayed therein.

Hagiography's propensity for recycling and recreating itself in ever-new, fungi- ble forms is, however, precisely why it served as such a fecund source of narrative tropes in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature throughout the transition from Late Antiquity to early Islam. Moreover, the hagiographical genre was no mere ore to be mined for narrative gems. The success of hagiography resulted in a paradigmatic shift in how the sacred and holy people were imagined as existing in and interacting with the world. Hagiography created a constellation of expectations and images

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33. E.g., see Horovitz 1922; Maghen 2007 and 2008; Powers 2014, 24ff., 41ff.

34. Comparative readings of the *sīrah* literature in light of Coptic hagiography has yielded some interesting results. See Newby 1972 (on the figure of Faymiyūn in the *Sīrah* and its reliance on a story preserved in the Coptic *Apothegmata Patrum*) and, more recently, Sizgorich 2004, 29, and Bursi 2016, 2018. The story of the "opening of Muḥammad's breast" is often thought to merely be the exegetical expansion of Q. Sharḥ 94 in the *sīrah* literature (see Rubin 1995, 59–75 for an overview of the many, and often widely divergent, versions of the story), but Horovitz 1919, 170, already noted how the Coptic *Life of Onnophrius* by Paphnutius (fl. 370) recounts a very similar tale about a vision of a desert hermit named Timothy who speaks of how God removed the burden of sin laid upon him. Timothy recounts the experience (Vivian 1993, 149–50, § 8):

> Now I looked and saw a man radiant with glory standing beside me. . . . He stretched out his hand over me, with his fingers joined together, and he cut open my side with a knife. He brought out my liver and showed me the wounds in it. He healed them and bound them up and put my liver back in its place again, and he smoothed over the spot with his hands and rejoined the place which he had cut apart. He said to me, "See, you are healed. Do not sin again so that no worse evil will happen to you."

Horovitz 1919, 170, also cites a similar episode from the life of Zoroaster in the *Wizīdaghā* of the late-ninth-century Zoroastrian priest Zādspram; however, this account is post-Islamic and, therefore, perhaps influenced by the *sīrah* account. Likewise, Muḥammad's willingness to ponder suicide after his initial experience of revelation, until Gabriel consoles him (cf. Rubin 1995, 113ff.), closely mirrors the story of the protagonist of the Nag Hammadi apocalypse *Zostrianos,* who similarly ponders suicide until consoled by an angel; see Burns 2013, 30–32. Lastly, the famous story of how a camel selected the location of the Prophet's home in Medina (Maʿmar, *Expeditions,* 126–27, § 12.9.3; cf. Halm 2008, 263ff.) likewise mirrors Coptic accounts of how a camel chose the spot for the grave and martyrium of St. Menas (285–309 C.E.); see Davis 2001, 122. This handful of examples, I imagine, could be expanded by an intrepid researcher.

35. Efthymiadis 2011a, 1.

associated with holy figures that profoundly shaped the contours of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature of the early Islamic period, especially insofar as the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature vied and competed with Christian hagiography.[36]

In a basic sense, one can locate the imprint of hagiography in the most essential assumptions undergirding the *iqraʾ* narrative: the sheer possibility of holy persons seeing visions of angels in their dreams that provide them with authoritative and/or inspired texts. To overlook how such rudimentary assumptions are deeply rooted in late antique hagiography is to overlook an essential feature of the early narratives of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. For example, consider the following story about a fourth-century Egyptian monk named Pachomius, recorded in the *Lausiac History* of Palladius of Gallatia (d. before 431 C.E.):

> One time when [Pachomius] was sitting in his cave an angel appeared to him and told him: "So far as you are concerned, you conduct your life perfectly. It is in vain for you to continue sitting in your cave! Come now, leave this place, and go out, and call the young monks together with them. Rule them by the model that I am now giving you." And the angel gave him a bronze tablet on which [the following rule] was engraved . . .[37]

The rule the angel disclosed to Pachomius from the bronze tablet laid the groundwork for the foundation of a new monastic community. Hagiographically speaking, the bronze tablet presented to Pachomius is the functional equivalent of the silk scroll Gabriel presents to Muḥammad in the cave atop Mount Ḥirāʾ: both texts are received through preternatural visions and convey a revealed, divine discourse around which a new community of faith coalesces.

Late antique hagiography, therefore, must be regarded as having set a baseline of expectations that shaped how early Muslims conceived of how God's plan for humanity unfolded itself in history and the role of holy persons in the providential plan for humankind. In their seminal narratives, the early purveyors of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition thus strove to depict Muḥammad as the ultimate holy person and the very pinnacle of monotheistic prophecy. All the same, the question of the interrelationship between the *iqraʾ* narrative and Cædmon's call is quite another thing altogether. Did late antique hagiography provide a fixed model, or an identifiable narrative template, shared by both the *iqraʾ* narrative and Cædmon's call that might account for their profound commonalities?

A compelling example of how hagiography might have provided the narrative substrate for both the *iqraʾ* narrative and Cædmon's call appears in the hagiographical *vita* of Romanos the Melodist (490–556 C.E.), a Syrian monk born in Homs

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36. Cf. Stroumsa 2015, 189ff., and Cameron 2015 on how scholars of early Islam and scholars of Patristics might benefit from one another's expertise.

37. Cited in Muehlberger 2015, 129.

(formerly Emessa; Ar. Ḥimṣ) who invented and composed the renowned hymns of the Greek hymnographical tradition called the *kontakia,* named for the rod (κόνταξ) around which a scroll of hymns was wound. Tilman Nagel notes the potential value of comparative analyses of the *kontakia* of Romanos and the Qurʾan,[38] but even more intriguing for our purposes is the story of how Romanos became "the Melodist" and acquired his gift for composing these Greeks hymns. The hagiographical accounts of Romanos offers some extraordinary parallels with Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative. One of the earliest versions of the story reads as follows:

> The venerable Romanos was from [Homs in] Syria and became a deacon of the holy church of Beirut. Arriving in Constantinople in the reign of the emperor Anastasius [r. 491–518 C.E.], Romanos went and settled in the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos [Virgin Mary] in the Kyrou district, where he received the gift [*chárisma*] of the *kontakia.* In piety he would celebrate and pass the night, praying during the vigil at the [Church of the Theotokos] of Blachernae, before returning to Kyrou. Then one of these nights, the most holy Theotokos appeared to him while he was asleep and gave him a paper scroll and said, "Take this scroll [*chártēn*] and eat it" [cf. Ezekiel 3:1–6]. It seems that the saint opened his mouth and swallowed the paper. Now it was the festival of Christ's Nativity [Christmas Eve]. And immediately awakening from his sleep, Romanos was astonished and glorified God. Thereupon he mounted the ambo [pulpit] and began to chant, "Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being!" He also composed nearly one thousand *kontakia* for other festivals before departing for the Lord.[39]

The above account comes from the *Menologion* (church service book) of the Byzantine emperor Basil II, compiled around 1000 C.E.; the account thus considerably postdates Bede's *Historia* and Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī*. There is no extant hagiography of Romanos from earlier than the tenth century C.E. All we have are abridged accounts—each a *metaphrasis,* or "rewriting"—that date from an age in which hagiographical and matyrological corpora were redacted and incorporated into authoritative large compendia; hence, the story's actual provenance harkens back to an account composed centuries earlier.[40]

The fact that the story of how Romanos the Melodist came to compose the *kontakia* might be considerably earlier makes it tantalizing to speculate that perhaps the story of Romanos's call lies behind the accounts of Caedmon's call as well as Muḥammad's. On the one hand, it is certainly easier to imagine Bede's motivations for relying on a story of how the famed hymnographer Romanos came to compose his Greek *kontakia* as a model for his story about how Cædmon came to compose English hymns than it is to divine why Bede, who otherwise knew little

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38. Nagel 2008, 152–54, 195.

39. Translation adapted from Krueger 2004, 189; supplemented with information from the texts collected and collated in Matons 1977, 161–63. Cf. Arenzten 2017, 1ff.

40. Efthymiadis 2011b, 129.

or nothing of Islam, would appropriate a "Saracen"' tale for that purpose. Furthermore, the story of Romanos has some details in common with the *iqraʾ* narrative that do not appear in the story of Cædmon's call. Romanos's vision takes place during an all-night vigil (*παννυχίς*), a common ritual practice in the Christian East that was often keyed to the liturgical calendar (Romanos's vision notably occurs on Christmas Eve, Muḥammad's during Ramaḍān, on a night later determined to be "the night of power [*laylat al-qadr*]"); and subsequently, Romanos's *kontakia* formed an integral part of this nocturnal worship in late antique ecclesiastical ritual.[41] Romanos's night vigil closely mirrors Muḥammad's practice on Mount Ḥirāʾ of *al-taḥannuth*—glossed by both Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī and Ibn Isḥāq as worshipful night vigils (*al-taʿabbudu al-layāliya dhawāt al-ʿadad*)—which occasions Gabriel's appearance to him in his dream. Moreover, that Muḥammad, like Romanos, receives his dream-cum-vision in his sleep, finds echoes in the hagiographic depictions of the visions received by late antique monastics during their nightly vigils. Cædmon also receives his vision at night in his sleep, but the context for the experience is prosaic rather than ascetic like the visions of Romanos and Muḥammad. Hagiographers were keen to distinguish the "true visions" of these holy men from the demonic *phantasia* believed to afflict vulnerable sleepers.[42] Khadījah performs this task in al-Zuhrī's and Ibn Isḥāq's narratives when she assures Muḥammad that he has not been duped by a malevolent spirit.

Key features shared by the story of Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative are, however, absent in the story of Romanos, making it less likely—at least given the present state of the evidence—that this lies behind them. For instance, the biblical archetype that features in the story of Romanos is Ezekiel 3:1–6; whereas in Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative the biblical archetype is Isaiah 29:10–12 and 40: 6. Also absent in the surviving version of Romanos's dream is the tripartite structure of the dream-cum-vision shared by Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative. Hence, while it is true that all these tropes and motifs are common enough in biblical, parascriptural, and hagiographical sources, the peculiar constellation of these motifs and tropes and their precise alignment in both accounts point to a direct relation between the stories of Cædmon and Muḥammad, however conceived. Even if the dynamic environment of late antique hagiographic storytelling facilitates these correspondences, it cannot explain them entirely.[43]

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41. Frank 2006, 61–63. On the importance of the night vigil to monastics of the Palestinian and Syrian deserts that abut Arabia, see Patrich 1995, 233ff.

42. Krönung 2014, 45–46; cf. examples from Syriac hagiography in Fiey 2004, 55–56 (§ 88), 132 (§ 285), and of Shenoute of Atripe discussed in Emmel 2004, 160–61 and n. 25 thereto.

43. Cf. Klaus von See 1983, 231: "Keine der vielen Parallelen, die man bisher zu Cædmons Vision glaubte vorbringen zu können, zeigt auch nur im entferntesten ein solche Ähnlichkeit wie Muhammeds Vision."

MECHANISMS OF NARRATIVE INFLUENCE

Shoemaker's second objection to Schoeler's thesis poses the most daunting diffi-culty: How could the *iqraʾ* narrative have travelled so far and so quickly as to influence Bede's story of Cædmon's call? In order to have influenced the story of Cædmon's call, the *iqraʾ* narrative must have crossed not merely a formidable dis-tance but confessional and linguistic barriers as well. This seems inherently implausible, but other, near-contemporary examples suggest otherwise.

Stories have an incredible capacity for leaping over linguistic barriers and traveling across imposing swathes of geography—and even doing so swiftly. Per-haps our best documented example from Late Antiquity is the remarkable spread of the so-called *Sleepers of Ephesus* legend about Christian youths who hide and fall asleep in a cave while fleeing Roman persecution only to awake a century later to find that the Christian message has spread and their pagan persecutors have long since perished. Our earliest testimonies to the legend are written in Syriac—the story is recounted in the metrical homilies of Jacob of Serug (ca. 451–521 C.E.) and the ecclesiastical histories of Ps.-Zacharias of Mytilene (d. after 569) and John of Ephesus (ca. 507–88)[44]—but one finds the tale in a Latin version circulating in western Europe and even in a Sogdian version that spread in Central Asia as far East as Turfan before the close of the sixth century. By the early seventh cen-tury, the story enters the Qurʾan (Kahf 18:9–22), taking on new life and perennial importance in the Arabo-Islamic tradition.[45] Of all these aforementioned sources, only the early Latin version—the *Passio sanctorum martyrum septum dormen-tium* by the Gallo-Roman historian and bishop Gregory of Tours (538–94 C.E.)—directly mentions the source of story. At the end of one of his versions of it, Gre-gory notes that he rendered the tale into Latin aided by "the interpretation of John the Syrian."[46] Gregory clearly heard the story from a man from the East.

That the *Sleepers of Ephesus* traversed such distances so quickly certainly owes much to the vast, interconnected networks of Christian communities in Late Antiquity. What Shoemaker really found implausible and resisted, in my view, was the proposition that the *iqraʾ* narrative could come into contact with Bede and thus influence his account of Cædmon's call in the absence of these confessional networks—when compounded by geographical distance, the confessional bound-

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44. Witakowski 2011. An English translation of Jacob of Serug's hymn can be found in Brock 2007. If the thesis of van Esbroeck 1994 is correct, the earliest attestation of the legend is found in a fifth-century Syriac manuscript held in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

45. On the Christian background to the versions of the tale found in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* lit-erature, see Griffith 2008.

46. McDermott 1975, 206; cf. van Dam 2004, 88. The Sogdian version, too, relied on a Syriac *Vor-lage,* as noted in Sims-Williams 1985, 154–57.

aries would seem too high after the Islamic conquests. However, the confessional boundaries were likely not as impenetrable as one might imagine.

An important witness to this fact comes from the writings of the Christian theologian John Damascene (d. ca. 750 C.E.), the last of the so-called church fathers and a man who famously descended from a powerful family of Christian imperial scribes who served in the upper echelons of administrative bureaucracy of the Umayyad caliphs until its Arabicization beginning in the early eighth century. In John Damascene's discussions of the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites" in his *De Hæresibus,* John reports questioning Muslims, "How did the scripture come down to your prophet?" Their alleged response to John is intriguing. His Muslim interlocutors claimed that the scripture had been revealed to Muḥammad, "while he was asleep [κοιμᾶται]." Ever the polemicist, John Damascene mocks this assertion, claiming that Muḥammad therefore "did not have a full sense of this event taking place." John's is a rather ironic polemic for him to voice—subsequent hagiographic traditions about his life claim that he himself received a mandate to write treatises and hymns from a dream of the Virgin Mary.[47] Polemics aside, the important point is that John Damascene incidentally reveals that his knowledge of Islam goes beyond his much-vaunted knowledge of the Qurʾan and early Muslim religiosity. That John knows that Muḥammad received the Qurʾan while asleep demonstrates that he had knowledge—however slightly—of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition itself, for the idea that Muḥammad received a revelation in his sleep does not feature in the Qurʾan.[48] That John, writing in late Umayyad Syria, already knows of this tradition adds further proof that the story of Muḥammad's "true vision" (*al-ruʾyā al-ṣādiqah*) circulated outside the Ḥijāz and was not the concoction of Ibn Isḥāq. Moreover, to make such an exchange possible, one must surmise that the articulation of Muslim prophetology and its foundational narratives flourished in Umayyad Syria quite

47. Sahas 1972, 134–35. On the hagiographical traditions about John Damascene's vision, see Louth 2002, 17ff.; Rochow 2007; Anthony 2015, 623–24.

48. However, in Q. Anbiyāʾ 21: 5 (cf. Yūsuf 12:44), Muḥammad's enemies dismiss the revelation as "muddled dreams" (*aghḍāth aḥlām*). Cf. the discussion of John's knowledge of Muḥammad's marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh in Görke 2018, 50–51. A Melkite theologian of the following generation, Theodore Abū Qurrah (d. after 829 C.E.), cites "the account . . . entitled *The Forgiveness of ʿĀʾishah* [συγγνώμη τῆς Ἄισσα]" to show that Muḥammad had been a demoniac:

> She was Muḥammad's wife. Once, when there were suspicions that she had committed adultery, he banished her to her parents' house. A few days later, when he was sitting with them, he fell to the ground in a demonic trance and began to writhe about in such a way that those passing by said that a weighty oracle had been revealed to him. After a bit, he regained his senses and was asked what he had seen. He answered, "The forgiveness of Aisha was revealed to me." On the grounds that he had been assured by an angel that she was innocent of what was suspected, he received her back again. (Theodore, *Opusculum* 20, ed. Glei and Khoury 1995, 100; trans. Lamoureaux 2005, 225)

A version of the story of al-Zuhrī's *ḥadīth al-ifk* (*The Story of the Slander*) is readily recognizable here.

early in the eighth century, and perhaps even as early as the late seventh century C.E.[49] Furthermore, one must hold that the efflorescence of this tradition at the time was so robust and vibrant that it literally overflowed the carefully circumscribed boundaries of communal identity. In other words, the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions did not merely assimilate the "sectarian milieu" of early Islamic Syria, they also stirred the sectarian pot by contributing their own narratives and introducing ingredients from early Islamic kerygma.

John Damascene's comments about Muḥammad's dream emerge from inter-religious polemics, however, whereas Bede's story of Cædmon's call shows no trace of polemic. Indeed, while Bede certainly knows a great deal about the presence of Muslim armies in Europe and the success of their conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries, he does not actually write about these armies as "Muslim" at all. Islam plays little, if any, role at all in his accounts of the conquests achieved by the peoples he refers to as "Saracens" and "Ishmaelites," and he never mentions Muḥammad or the Qurʾan. He views these conquering peoples through the lens of the ethnic stereotypes and biblical archetypes that he had learned and acquired from patristic authorities.[50] These observations make the apparent relationship between the *iqraʾ* narrative and Cædmon's calls all the more remarkable. From whom could Bede have heard the story and in what form? How is it that he regarded the tale as worthy of emulation or indeed anything other than a mendacious fiction to be scorned? Given the scant knowledge of Islam displayed in Bede's works, one cannot even go so far as to suppose that he knew the story was that of a "Saracen" prophet when he first heard it, nor can one presume that he offered Cædmon's story as an irenic gesture towards Islam. Hence, Bede's case is in no way comparable to that of the Syriac-speaking monk of Bēt Ḥālē who, in audience with an Umayyad emir, pronounced Muḥammad to be "a wise, god-fearing man who delivered you from the worship of demons and brought you knowledge of the One True God."[51] All the same, that Bede did not dismiss the tale as the ravings of a demoniac or heresiarch is also significant. If truly modeled on the *iqraʾ* narrative, then the story of Cædmon's call is certainly a far cry, for example, from the mordant reception of the story of Muḥammad's call found in the *Istoria de Mahomet* that Eulogius of Córdoba unearthed from the tomes owned by the monastery of Leyre (Navarra) in 850 C.E. In Eulogius's version, the *iqraʾ* narrative is transmogrified into the tale of a false Gabriel who comes to deceive an accursed Saracen in the form of a diabolical golden-beaked vulture.[52]

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49. Cf. the tradition of al-Zuhrī in Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 139, where he transmits the *iqraʾ* narrative on the authority of a scholar he met in Damascus.

50. Scarfe Beckett 2003, 123–39.

51. Taylor 2015, 223 (§ 32).

52. Wolf 1990, 90, 98.

If imitation did take place, under what conditions could it have taken place? A fruitful corollary to the hypothetical fate of the *iqraʾ* narrative in Anglo-Saxon England might be found in the famous "pseudo-Kufic" *mancus* of King Offa minted for the kingdom of Mercia around 773–96 C.E. (fig. 14). Though a step removed from the original archetype—namely, dinars minted by the Abbasid caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr—the Offa dinar nonetheless serves as indelible testimony to the broader economic exchange between Anglo-Saxon England and the Islamic polity, and, furthermore, of the reach of the latter's rising cultural prestige. Islamic coins had entered Europe in substantial numbers and even reached as far as the British Isles as early as the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, dinars of whose dating from as early as 724–43 C.E. have turned up on the Sussex shore.[53] As Sherif Anwar and Jere Bacharach argue, the Offa dinar provides a striking example of "prestigious imitation"—by imitating the self-representational forms of the Islamic polity, Offa sought to produce a gold *mancus* that could share in the cultural prestige of the ascendant Islamic polity.[54] Bede's use of the scaffolding of Ibn Isḥāq's *iqraʾ* narrative for relating the call of Cædmon might be conceived of as yet another example of such Anglo-Saxon "prestigious imitation" of cultural artifacts from the East, even if the exact form of the narrative available to Bede remains essentially unknown to us.

Von See himself reckoned the transmission of the *iqraʾ* narrative to have taken place between 726 and 730 C.E. when there was a brief lull in the fighting between Christian forces and the Muslims based in Iberia.[55] Schoeler postulates that the "*qiṣṣah* version" of the *iqraʾ* narrative, on which Bede's Cædmon seems to have been modeled, reached Northumbria by way of pious storytellers who crossed the Straits of Gibraltar with the Muslim armies,[56] which strikes me as farfetched given that Bede himself speaks of obtaining knowledge of "the East" and the affairs of the Saracen armies. The possible means of transmission, about which one can only

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53. McCormick 2002, 344–51, 822 (A 16).
54. Anwar and Bachararch 2010–11.
55. [Klaus von] See 1983, 232.
56. Schoeler 2011, 63, 78; cf. his expansion thereon in Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler 2012, 32.

speculate, are manifold rather than singular.[57] The transmission of "soft" materials such as the *iqraʾ* narrative is less difficult to imagine given the "hard" material evidence for the transmission of physical objects. Bede himself speaks of owning and requesting such Eastern luxuries as pepper and incense—the Eastern Mediterranean, though incredibly distant, was not unimaginably so.[58] Although the means postulated by von See and Schoeler are unconvincing, their periodization is still plausible enough. The assumption that such a transmission of the *iqraʾ* narrative to Anglo-Saxon England had to have transpired in a time of peace is superfluous, as attested by pilgrimage traffic from the West to Palestine that continued throughout the Islamic period. The Anglo-Saxon nun Hugeburc's *Vita Willibaldi* provides an excellent example of this, recounting in compelling detail the experiences in Syria around 723–27 C.E of the Anglo-Saxon pilgrim St. Willibald and his party—precious testimony to both Anglo-Saxon pilgrims in late Umayyad Syria and the vicissitudes of Mediterranean travel in the early eighth century.[59]

After Willibald completed his journey to the East, he and his fellow pilgrims stayed a long while in Umayyad Syria, where they alighted at numerous shrines, churches, monasteries, and pilgrimage sites and even traded and smuggled contraband from Jerusalem, such as precious balsam. Some of the most interesting details come in the narratives of what happened to Willibald's band of pilgrims after they had entered Syria via the port of Tartus (Latin Antarados; Ar. Anṭarṭūs/Ṭarṭūs) and proceeded to travel on foot to Homs. There, according to Hugeburc, the "heathen Saracens" suspected them to be spies and arrested them. They were first taken before an elderly gentleman for interrogation:

> So the old gentleman asked them from where they came and what kind of business they [had] been sent to do. They replied by telling him the exact reason for their whole journey. . . . Then the old gentleman answered as follows, "I have often seen men coming from those parts of the world, fellow-countrymen of theirs; they cause no mischief and are merely anxious to fulfil their law."[60]

What is striking about this passage is that, while clearly these Anglo-Saxon pilgrims were a curiosity, they were not totally alien; the elder recognizes their presence in the land as benign, even entirely conventional. Yet despite the elder's reassurances and his testimony that he had "often seen men from those parts of the world," the pilgrims remained under suspicion by the local authorities, who returned them to the local prison, where, according to Hugeburc's account, they were nonetheless treated kindly thanks to the generosity of a local merchant. The

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57. See, e.g., the extensive documentation of Mediterranean communications in the period in McCormick 2002, 852ff.

58. Scarfe Beckett 2003, 61.

59. McCormick 2002, 129–36.

60. Wilkinson 2001, 236.

pilgrims languished for some time in prison but finally obtained their freedom thanks to the intervention of another Westerner—this time their advocate is a Spaniard who has heard of their plight. The Spaniard intervenes with the Saracen king himself (named "Myrmumni" in Hugeburc's account, a name obviously derived from the Arabic *amīr al-muʾminīn,* Commander of the Faithful) by appealing to his brother, a eunuch who served at the court. With the testimony of both the Spaniard and the captain of their ship from Cyprus, the pilgrims at last obtained their freedom to move freely about and to complete their pilgrimage.[61]

Yet, how typical is the story of Willibald? Michael McCormick has documented that travel and communications across the Mediterranean—whether by Westerners headed east or even Easterners headed west—remained far more robust during the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Islamic period than previously imagined. Though incomplete and partial, the historical record offers us impressive numbers. Relying merely on the evidence of epitaphs, Mark Handley has adduced hundreds of long-distance travelers who dared to traverse the Mediterranean as pilgrims, traders, envoys, and the like to foreign shores.[62] Albeit frequently arduous and full of its share of dangers, travel between Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean continued despite the disruptions of Islamic conquests. As McCormick has noted, a careful audit of the evidence for long-distance communications "yields a rich harvest of people on the move . . . around the Mediterranean in an era when movements there are thought to be few and far between."[63]

Hence, the arguments against the plausibility of the *iqraʾ* narrative traveling (in whatever form) as far as Bede's Northumbria are not as fatal as Shoemaker presumes. Though Willibald himself chose not to return to England after his journey to Syria and Palestine, deciding rather to serve the bishopric of Eichstätt from 741 to 787 C.E., many of his fellow pilgrims who made the journey at this and other times during the Umayyad period certainly did return—the mere movements of Willibald and his fellow pilgrims related in Hugeburc's account and the infrastructure and conveyances they relied upon and assumed to be present and readily exploitable by travelers, traders, and pilgrims at large indicate the existence of reliable, functioning networks of commerce and exchange, not ad hoc accommodations.[64] Bede himself knew of many of the adventures and tribulations of Anglo-Saxon pilgrims; although he seems not to have had knowledge of Willibald's

61. Ibid., 237–39.

62. Handley 2011, 63–97. Handley notes that judging on the data from epitaphs alone, it seems that the seventh century saw the sharpest decline in travel after a high point in the fifth; however, he also cautions that this corresponds with a decline in Christian epigraphy itself and, hence, might not be indicative of an absolute decline in travel and commerce, inasmuch as the quantity of evidence from the seventh century closely mirrors that of the fourth (ibid., 103–5).

63. McCormick 2002, 270.

64. Ibid., 272.

pilgrimage, he directly relied on the account of the pilgrim Arculf's journey to Umayyad Jerusalem from Gaul in 679–82 C.E. in a work by Adomnán, abbot of Iona, titled *De locis sanctis* ("On Holy Places").[65] Certainly, Bede's account of Cædmon's call suggests that a number of these pilgrims, or travelers of sundry types on similar routes, could have brought back with them stories from their travels considered by them to be strange curiosities, but which have now become quite familiar to us.

THE *IQRAʾ* NARRATIVE—EARLY, BUT NOT HISTORICAL

For all the impressive evidence for its early date and its extraordinary dissemination, the *iqraʾ* narrative is not likely to be an accurate historical account of Muḥammad's earliest experiences of revelation. Certain details of the *iqraʾ* narrative do find historical warrant from the Qurʾan itself, inasmuch as the Arabic scripture testifies that revelation came to Muḥammad during the month Ramaḍān (Q. Baqarah 2:185, *fī shahri ramaḍāna ʾlladhī unzila fīhi ʾl-qurʾān*),[66] and at night (Q. Dukhān 44:3, *laylah mubārakah;* Qadr 97:1, *laylat al-qadr*), and that numinous visions accompanied the prophetic revelation (Q. Najm 53:1–18; Takwīr 81:19–26).[67] But historians should resist such scriptural proof-texting. Our reading of the commonalities between Cædmon's call and the *iqraʾ* narrative against the backdrop of the intellectual and religious world of late antiquity strongly suggest that other dynamics are at play. Rather than functioning as a record of Muḥammad's first prophetic experiences, or even a historically accurate attestation to the authentic past, the *iqraʾ* narrative first and foremost must be read as a literary artifact of its age, which conveys how early Muslims wished to imagine Muḥammad and how they relied on their image of him to articulate the meaning of prophecy and divine guidance for human affairs, a cultural memory synthesized and constructed from an array of literary forms current in the historical landscape of Late Antiquity.

All the same, insofar as the Qurʾan features in the story, the *iqraʾ* narrative also posits an exegetical *historicization* of the Qurʾan by making explicit claims about

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65. Scarfe Bekett 2003, 44. The historicity of Adomnán's account of the pilgrimage of Arculf has encountered vigorous challenges in recent scholarship. For a recent attempt to answer the skeptics, see Hoyland and Waidler 2014. Nees 2016, 43–47, has sought to reinstate the skeptical view of the historicity of Arculf's pilgrimage, while simultaneously affirming that Adomnán's information on Jerusalem must actually derive from pilgrims and travelers of the seventh century.

66. Note, however, the traditions that state that Muḥammad received his commission to prophethood in the month of Rajab in Kister 1971, 197.

67. Paret 1957, 48–50; cf. Sinai 2011b and 2012.

which verses of the Qurʾan were the first to be revealed.[68] According to the *iqraʾ* narrative, the opening verses of Q. ʿAlaq 96 were the first to be revealed to Muḥammad and, therefore, offer the earliest historical window into the qurʾanic corpus. How should we evaluate the historical claims of the narrative with respect to the chronology of the qurʾanic revelation? The preceding analysis suggests that the claims of the *iqraʾ* narrative should not be trusted. Indeed, modern scholars of qurʾanic studies—beginning with Harris Birkeland and culminating most recently (and systematically) in the analyses of Angelika Neuwirth[69]—have rejected in no uncertain terms the claim of the *iqraʾ* narrative that Q. ʿAlaq 96 represents the qurʾanic revelation at its earliest, most primordial form. A formal and structural analysis of al-ʿAlaq reveals that the *sūrah,* "with its hymnical introduction (vv. 1–5), its polemical middle section (vv. 6–18), and its concluding consolation of the messenger (v. 19) . . . seems to anticipate the multipartite structure . . . so characteristic of middle and late Meccan texts."[70] Hence, although Meccan and thus early, the *sūrah* does not exhibit the simpler structure and thematic elements of the earliest Meccan *sūrah*s; it must belong, therefore, to a later stage of the Meccan Qurʾan. The 'deep Qurʾan'—the oldest textual stratum of the text—lies elsewhere, not in the opening verses of al-ʿAlaq.

The *iqraʾ* narrative provides modern historians with a window into how early the *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions began to coalesce under the Zubayrids and Umayyads, but it is also a textbook example of how even the earliest traditions can have few and/or dubious claims of historical reliability. What insights historians might gain into Muḥammad's earliest prophetic experiences must be drawn from the early Meccan *sūrah*s, whose chronological priority must be ascertained, as Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai have demonstrated, on the basis of internal textual criteria, and hence through a formal and structural analysis of qurʾanic *sūrah*s, rather than their historicization as found in the early *sīrah-maghāzī* literature.

This observation leads us to the final, salient point: the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature should neither be understood as merely arising from historicizing exegesis of the

68. Bobzin 1999, 26–36. The possibility that versions of the *iqraʾ* narrative without such exegetical tendencies may have indeed existed must still be entertained. Uri Rubin raised the possibility of such a "non-exegetical" tradition in his review of Schoeler's monograph by citing a tradition of Hishām ibn ʿUrwah that does not seem to draw on Q. ʿAlaq 96. Rubin's comments led Schoeler in the English translation of his German monograph to refine some of his conclusions about the *iqraʾ* narrative in its pre-Zuhrī phase and its relationship with ʿAlaq saying that "we have to admit that we (still) cannot prove that Hišām [ibn ʿUrwah and his narrative of Muḥammad's call] regarded *sūrah* 96:1–15 as the initial revelation" (Schoeler 2011, 118).

69. Birkeland 1956; Neuwirth 2010, 407ff., and 2011, 275–76. Hichem Djaït 2014, 1:31–49, has arrived at a similar conclusion and rejected the historicity of the *iqraʾ* narrative, albeit on different grounds; cf. Sinai 2011a.

70. Sinai 2008, 152.

Qurʾan nor as arising sui generis as a closed, self-sustaining textual universe that curates the earliest memories of Muḥammad's followers. Rather, a panorama of factors is at play in its conception. Scriptural, parascriptural, and hagiographic discourses as well as the Qurʾan and its exegesis all had an indispensable role to play in the cauldron of early Islamic historical narrative and were key ingredients in the distinctive brew of kerygmatic discourse that shaped how subsequent generations came to imagine and construe their images of the Prophet Muḥammad. Tracing these ingredients, ascertaining their points of convergence with other traditions, and recovering their broader transmission and reception remains in large part a major task and mandate of historical research into early traditions about Muḥammad.

EXCURSUS: ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTS OF MUḤAMMAD'S FIRST REVELATION

The *iqraʾ* narrative remains the most widespread account of Muḥammad's first revelation; however, it is not by any means the *only* account of Muḥammad's first revelatory experience. Had al-Zuhrī (or perhaps ʿUrwah) not co-opted the famous story by Mecca's renowned *qāṣṣ* ʿUbayd ibn ʿUmayr al-Laythī, this particular story might have been yet another obscure *ḥadīth* scarcely known outside the Islamic tradition. Numerous additional accounts posit a more gradual experience and realization of prophethood for Muḥammad that does not initially come with an abrupt delivery of the divine revelation by the angel Gabriel. Gradualist accounts of Muḥammad's experience of prophecy often entail anecdotes that were suppressed for theological reasons: anecdotes in which the archangels Gabriel and Michael chastise Muḥammad for touching an idol or sacrificing an animal to idols during his youth.[71] According to an Iraqi tradition, before receiving his first revelations from Gabriel, "[the archangel] Michael was entrusted with looking after the Messenger of God when he was forty-years-old, for three years he learned the ways of prophecy [*asbāb al-nubuwwah*]."[72] Notable as well is how many of these gradualist accounts place Muḥammad's first revelatory experience at al-Ajyād while he is busy tending flocks as a shepherd. These accounts are not more historical than the *iqraʾ* narrative; they are simply different. They seem, rather, to

71. Rubin 1995, 81–83.

72. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* 3: 599 (citing al-Shaʿbī); cf. Kulaynī, *Kāfī,* 1:176. In another version, the name of the angel to precede Gabriel is Isrāfīl rather than Michael. See Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 132, "Isrāfīl was bound to his prophethood for three years and would teach [Muḥammad] the Word and anything [?] while the Qurʾan has not yet been revealed." Cf. Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh,* ed. Houtsma, 2: 22. Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) denies the story as an Iraqi invention rejected by the Medinan scholars and their specialists in the *sīrah* (*ʿulamāʾuhum wa-ahl al-sīrah minhum*); see Ibn Saʿd (Beirut), 1: 191.

model Muḥammad's first prophetic experiences on biblical accounts of Moses's encounter with the burning bush while tending Jethro's sheep in Exodus 3.

1. A version attributed to Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah, ostensibly from his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (from Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 260):

Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah said: Ibn Shihāb [al-Zuhrī] said:

According to what has reached us, the first vision [the Prophet] saw [*awwal mā raʾā*] was as follows: God gave him a vision while asleep [*arāhu ruʾyā fī l-manām*]. That greatly troubled him, so the Messenger of God related [the vision] to his wife Khadījah bint Khuwaylid. Now God had protected her from disbelief and opened her heart to faith, so she said, "Rejoice, for God has something good in store for you!"

He then parted company from her only to return later, whereupon he told her that he had a vision of his abdomen split open, then purified and washed clean, and then returned to its prior state. She said, "By God, this is a good thing, so rejoice!"

Then while he was at the heights of Mecca Gabriel made himself known to him and sat him upon a noble and wondrous sitting place [*majlis karīm muʿjib*]. The Prophet would say, "He sat me on a carpet shaped like a tapestry of ruby and pearl." He gave him good tidings that God had chosen him to be His messenger so that the Prophet was put at ease. Gabriel then said to him, "Read [*iqraʾ*]!" And he said, "How shall I read [*kayfa aqraʾu*]?" He said, "Read in the name of your Lord, Who did create| Did create Humanity from coagulate| Recite for your Lord is Magnanimous| Who through the use of the calamus | Has taught Humanity that of which it was ignorant!"[73]

2. A Kūfan tradition of Abū Isḥāq al-Sabīʿī (d. 127/145)[74] attributed to Abū Maysarah ʿAmr ibn Shuraḥbīl al-Hamdānī (d. ca. 63/682) (Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 132–33):

73. Cf. two versions that attribute the tradition to al-Zuhrī but do not mention Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah: Kūfī, *Manāqib,* 29ff., and Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 142ff. (related on the authority of Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab). Abū Bishr al-Dūlābī (d. 310/922) also records two very similar stories; however, the first is attributed to ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAmr ibn Ḥazm (Dūlābī, *Dhuriyyah,* 32) and the second to Ibn ʿAbbās (ibid., 33). Cf. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 63: 7–9, 18ff.

74. Samuk incorrectly adduced this tradition as having been transmitted on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq; however, the intermediary authority is, rather, Abū Isḥāq al-Sabīʿī. See Samuk 1978, 56–60, where he consistently misread [السبيعي اسحاق ابي] as اسحاق ابن. Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Maghāzī,* 132–33>Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 158–59> Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 63: 7. The text in Bayhaqī's *Dalāʾil* is a better attestation to the text of Yūnus's recension than the printed edition based on the Fez manuscript. Cf. also the versions in Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf,* 13: 205–6; Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 259; Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 1 (1): 260–62.

Yūnus [ibn Bukayr] related to us from Yūnus ibn ʿAmr, [from his father,][75] from ʿAmr ibn Shuraḥbīl:

The Messenger of God said to Khadījah, "Whenever I am alone by myself I hear a voice call out [*asmaʿu nidāʾan*], and I fear that this could be a bad sign."[76]

"God forbid!" Khadījah replied, "God would not do such a thing to you, for you are a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to you. You honor the bonds of kinship, and you speak only what is true."

When Abū Bakr came to visit—and Muḥammad was not yet the Messenger of God—Khadījah related to him his story and said, "ʿAtīq [= Abū Bakr], go with Muḥammad to Waraqah [ibn Nawfal, for he's a man who reads the scriptures (*yaqraʾu l-kutub*) so he can tell him what he heard]!"[77] When the Messenger of God entered, Abū Bakr took him by the hand and said, "Let's go to see Waraqah." "Who told you what happened?" [the Prophet] asked. "Khadījah," he answered, and the two men went to [Waraqah], and they told him the story.

[The Prophet] said, "When I was alone by myself I heard a voice call out from behind me: 'Muḥammad! Muḥammad!' [cf. Exod. 3:4]. Then I left fleeing across the earth." [Waraqah] said to him, "Do not do that when he comes to you. Rather, stay in place so that you can hear what he will say. Then come back to me and tell me what happens."

When [the Prophet] was alone, a voice cried out to him, "Muḥammad! Say 'In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate | Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds'" until he reached "nor those who are astray" [i.e., Q. Fātiḥah 1]. Say: 'There is no god but God' [cf. Q. Muḥammad 47:19]."

He went to Waraqah and relayed that to him. Waraqah then said to him, "Rejoice! Rejoice! I bear witness that you are the one announced by the Son of Mary [= Jesus], that you have been given the like of the Law of Moses [*nāmūs mūsā*], that you are a prophet sent [by God], and that you shall receive the command to wage the sacred struggle [*al-jihād*] after this day. Were God to permit me to live to see that, I would surely undertake the sacred struggle alongside you!"

When Waraqah died, the Messenger of God said, "I had a vision of the priest [*raʾaytu l-qiss*][78] in Paradise clothed in silk because he had faith and believed in me."

3. An Egyptian tradition attributed to ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, ostensibly from the *Maghāzī* compiled by his orphan ward, Abū l-Aswad (Fasawī, *Maʿrifah,* 3: 259):

75. From Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 158.4 and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq,* 63: 7.2; "his father" is Abū Isḥāq al-Sabīʿī.

76. Following the recensions of Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2:158.6: *an yakūna hādhā amran,* rather than the reading in Yūnus ibn Bukayr, *Siyar,* 132.-6: *an yakūna hādhā l-amr.*

77. The text between brackets is from Balādhurī, *Ansāb,* 1(1): 261.

78. Here Waraqah is not merely a Christian but also "a priest" (Ar. *qiss;* from Syr. *qaššā*).

Ibn Lahīʿah related to us from [Abū l-Aswad] Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, from ʿUrwah, from ʿĀʾishah, who said:

The Prophet of God's [ṣ] first experience was to have visions in his sleep [*yarā fī manāmih*].[79] The first vision was of Gabriel in Ajyād. He set out to attend to his work, and a voice cried out to him, "Muḥammad! *Muḥammad!*" He looked left and right but saw nothing. He looked [again] and saw nothing. Then he lifted his eyes and, behold, he saw him a second time, one of his feet atop the other on the horizon of the sky. He said, "Muḥammad, I am Gabriel! I am Gabriel!" soothing him. Muḥammad fled until he rejoined the company of people. He looked but saw nothing. Then he left the company of people and saw him [again]. That is [the meaning] of God's word "By the star when it sets | your companion strays not; he errs not" (Q. Najm 53:1–2)[80]

4. An Imāmī-Shīʿī tradition transmitted from ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (alive in 307/ 919), likely from his lost *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (Tabarsī, *Iʿlām al-warā,* 103–4)

Once he had become thirty-seven years old, the Prophet would have visions in sleep, as though a visitor [*ka-anna ātiyan*] came to him and said, "Messenger of God!" He paid that no mind. That happened to him for a long time, but while he was shepherding a flock of Abū Ṭālib between the mountains, he saw the form of a person saying to him, "Messenger of God!"

He said to him, "Who are you?"

"Gabriel," he said. "God has sent me to make you a messenger."

The Messenger of God told Khadījah about that, since she had already heard the story of the Jew, the story of Baḥīrā,[81] and what his mother Āminah had related about him. "Muḥammad," she said, "I hope that you are indeed as he said!"

The Messenger of God used to hide that. Then Gabriel descended upon him. He caused water to descend from heaven upon him and said, "Muḥammad, rise and purify yourself for prayer." Gabriel taught him how to do ablutions for the face, the hands up to the elbow, the wiping of the head, and feet up to the ankles [cf. Q. Māʾidah 5:6]. He also taught him how to bow and to prostrate [i.e., the genuflections of Muslim ritual prayer, the *ṣalāh*].

When [the Messenger of God] was fully forty years old, he gave him the command to pray and taught him its requirements [*ḥudūdahā*], but their times were

79. I.e., the location on the outskirts of Mecca where Muḥammad used to herd sheep. See chap. 2 above.

80. Cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* ed. Turkī, 22: 17–18; Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil,* 2: 368

81. I.e., the stories that recounted how various figures had foretold Muḥammad's future greatness when they encountered him as a youth.

not yet revealed to him. The Messenger of God used to pray two sets of two prayer-cycles consecutively each time.

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was so fond of him that he would be at his side at all his comings and goings and never leave him. He came to see the Messenger of God while he was praying, and when he saw him praying, he said, "Abū l-Qāsim, what is this?"

"This is the prayer that God has commanded me to perform," he said.

He then called him to Islam, and he became a Muslim and prayed with him. Khadījah became a Muslim, too, and no one except for the Messenger of God with ʿAlī and Khadījah behind him performed the prayers.

Epilogue

The Future of the Historical Muḥammad

Can the modern historian really work with the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature—or is this corpus hopelessly mired in legend, an impenetrable veil that that must be cast aside because it obscures our view of the historical past? In the Introduction, I referred to the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature as a "second-order source" for the life of Muḥammad and his world and, hence, of lesser reliability as a source of historical evidence than our "first-order sources"—that is, the Qurʾan, material and documentary evidence from the sixth to seventh centuries C.E., and non-Muslim sources from the seventh century. However, I also proposed that, despite it being a second-order source, historians can indeed work with the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, not just as a source for tracing how Muslim communities constructed a cultural memory of Muḥammad and, in the process, forged their identities and beliefs—a process to which it surely attests to a considerable degree—but also as a source for understanding the life of Muḥammad himself, as a mere person of history. Scholars must always approach this material with "skeptical caution rather than optimistic trust,"[1] but throughout this work, I have sought to put forward a number of strategies to help conceptualize how historians might indeed approach the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature and even "work with it" to this end.

One strategy was to take renewed stock of the historical beginnings of this *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus, and especially through the lens of prosopography, with the aim of recovering the social context of its most seminal and earliest compilers, and to examine how the works of these pioneering scholars were impacted by the societal, political, and cultural contexts of their moment in history, and how their

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1. Goldziher 1971, 19.

works were preserved and transmitted, whether during or subsequent to their lifetimes. Among the findings put forward was that the systematic recording and writing of the *sīrah-maghāzī* corpus initially emerged out of a court impulse, which harnessed, rather than created, a preexisting oral tradition about the life of Muḥammad and his companions. In nearly every case, Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs as well as key figures in their courts patronized and funded the most important large-scale projects to compile *sīrah-maghāzī* traditions into systematic literary works. However, although the eighth-century court culture of the caliphs deserves the credit for this initial impulse, these works did not survive solely due to this court culture and the sponsorship afforded by its largesse. The lion's share of the credit for the long-term survival of this corpus and its traditions—whether in whole or in part—belongs to informal scholarly networks that transmitted it via a series of teacher-pupil exchanges. Such exchanges account, in large part, for why this corpus survives (to the extent that it does survive) in the form that it does today: redacted, truncated, and scattered across sundry later works that reorganized and reframed much of the material of the earliest purveyors of the narratives about Muḥammad's life, such as Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, Mūsā ibn ʿUqbah, and Ibn Isḥāq. These observations help us to see that our extant sources preserve sources that are not necessarily as late as they seem; furthermore, these observations facilitate the task of locating earlier sources embedded within later compilations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the process of surmising the limitations on reconstructing said sources—a "vertical" reading strategy for tracing the history of the textual corpus and genre within in its own tradition and discerning its strata.

A second strategy employed in this work was to read the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature as emerging from the epistemic fabric of the Late Antique world—what one might called a "lateral" reading strategy *across* traditions as opposed to the strategy of reading "vertically" within a tradition. Such a reading strategy reveals the shortcomings in any approach to reading this literature as emerging sui generis from the epistemic silo of the Arabo-Islamic tradition (however conceived) or solely from the venerated guardians of early Muslim communal memory (however demarcated). This reading strategy also casts considerable light on how this literary corpus absorbed and refashioned the literary currents and cultural contexts from it emerged. As a corpus, the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature was not insulated from the political and imperial visions of the court or the triumphalist visions of the early Islamic polity's élites. Indeed, it actively participated in them. As a genre competing in the sectarian milieu of the late antique Near East, the genre was deeply enmeshed in the hagiographic and scriptural worlds of the exegetical cultures of the religious communities of the era. More important to this reading strategy than the nomenclature of "Late Antiquity" itself is the heuristic value of viewing the purveyors of the *sīrah-maghāzī* tradition as engaging with the religious and

cultural trends that preceded the emergence of their genre and that were shared by multiple communities—be they Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or other. What should not be lost, in other words, is how the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature responded to this sectarian milieu and the literary genres of Late Antiquity to create a uniquely autochthonous genre of Arabic literature. Although fashioned to serve the particular aims of Arabo-Islamic discourse and identity, the genre nevertheless promulgated a universalistic vision of human history and God's cosmic, providential shaping of the course of human events through a series of monotheistic prophets, culminating in Muḥammad.

Moreover, this work has also argued that working with the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature as a historical source requires first establishing a plausible, well-evidenced historical baseline through recourse to the other cardinal sources for the life and context of the historical Muḥammad: early non-Muslim sources written (mostly) in Armenian, Greek, and Syriac; archaeological, material, and documentary evidence from the sixth to seventh centuries C.E.; and historical-critical readings of the Qurʾan. When viewed as overlapping layers of evidence, rather than mutually exclusive antagonists, these three "first-order" sources offer what one might call a "low-resolution view" of the historical Muḥammad to guide us in approaching the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, and against which its narratives can be measured. Based on these early cardinal sources, it seems beyond doubt that in the first half of the seventh century there emerged a law-giving claimant to prophecy from Arabia, a Saracen/Ishmaelite merchant from an Arabic-speaking tribe named Muḥammad, who claimed to culminate a long line of monotheistic Abrahamic prophets gifted with divine revelation. Furthermore, we can deduce on a well-sourced evidentiary basis that this prophetic claimant, whose earliest followers regarded themselves as descendants of the biblical patriarch Abraham, formed a community in Western Arabia and became a ruler in Yathrib. This community coalesced around the prophet's teachings, instantiated in a revelation called the Qurʾan. Inspired by this prophet's teachings, the new community embarked on wide-reaching campaigns of conquest, which from the mid-seventh century on swiftly engulfed much of Near East, including Sasanid Persia and much of the Eastern Roman Empire.[2] All of these details appear, in one way or another, in seventh-century sources that were either recorded by insiders or written by outsiders who nonetheless witnessed the conquests, experienced their immediate effects, and interacted with these Arabian conquerors firsthand.

Although none of the seventh-century non-Muslim sources yet know of the Qurʾan—they refer rather to Muḥammad's teachings, his traditions, or his laws

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2. This expands upon Robinson 2015b, 122.

rather than a scriptural corpus[3]—the material evidence for the scripture's early codification, its centrality in seventh-century material remains of the earliest Muslims (such as coinage, papyri, graffiti, epitaphs, official inscriptions, etc.), and the explosive emergence of literary and non-literary writings in this scripture's Arabic vernacular precede outsiders' awareness of its existence and thus confirm definitively that this Arabic scripture represents the earliest artifact of both Muḥammad's life and the vaunted religiosity of the community that regarded him as the messenger of God. Even if interpreting the Qurʾan historically is a formidable task, the qurʾanic text fills out the outlines of a "mere Muḥammad" that is much in accord with what one can infer from the earliest non-Muslim accounts of his life. As Fred Donner has masterfully shown, the Qurʾan conveys a great deal to us about the fundamental beliefs espoused by Muḥammad and his early community: his espousal of prophetic monotheism and rejection of Arabian syncretism (*shirk*); his embrace and reinterpretation of the prophetic and scriptural legacy of the Christians and Jews; his belief in eschatological punishments for the wicked and rewards for the righteous; the imminent arrival of the Day of Judgment; his structuring of his community around monotheistic laws and rituals, which are simultaneously familiar to late antique religiosity yet also particular to this community (liturgical prayers, alms, fasting, observance of a sacred calendar, pilgrimage and ritual sacrifice, etc.); his militancy and the sacred struggle (*jihād*) of his community in pursuit of God's path to expand their (and God's) dominion, to establish justice, and to conquer sites they hold sacred; and Muḥammad's own status in the revelation as God's prophet, messenger, and lawgiver.[4] Although this amounts to what I call a "low-resolution" view of Muḥammad, it turns out to offer us quite a lot of information.

If we wish to move on from such a low-resolution view of the historical Muḥammad to a higher-resolution one, the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature has an indispensable role to play. This literature conveys too much in the way of raw data for it to be either ignored or categorically rejected. Even if one decided to be so radical as to reject the historicity of all the narratives of this corpus, the data that it conveys about the geography of Arabia, both human and topographical, remain indispensable. But source minimalism is unwarranted. Larger questions about Muḥammad and his historical context will only come into sharper focus as we scour this corpus. And the corpus is vast—much of it still unexplored in a sufficiently systematic

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3. For example, the East Syriac John bar Penkāyē writes ca. 687 C.E., "as a result of this man's guidance [*mahaddyānūtā*], they held to the worship of the One God, in accordance with the customs of an ancient law [*nāmūsā ʿatīqā*]. At their beginnings, they kept to the tradition [*mašlmānūtā*] of Muḥammad, who was their instructor [*tarʾā*]" (*Riš Mellē*, ed. Mingana, xv, 147; trans. Brock 1987, 61). On the importance of *mašlmānūtā* as "religion," or even "Islam" as such, see Penn 2015a, 216 n104. The earliest non-Muslim sources to make an explicit mention of the Qurʾan, such as John Damascene's *De Hæresibus* and the Syriac *Disputation of Bēt Ḥalē,* appear in the eighth century CE.

4. Donner 2010a, chap. 2; cf. Paret 1951.

way in Western scholarship. As the data are sorted and the literary forms and tropes in which they are couched analyzed, all the insights gained will necessarily have to be weighed against the testimonies of our "first-order" sources from the seventh century C.E. However, if the picture formed is coherent, and reliably so, historians will have scant basis, I believe, for rejecting the data provided by the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature as baseless and unmoored in the historical realities of Muḥammad's lifetime.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
CCPA	C. Müller-Kessler and M. Sokoloff, eds., *Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic.* 5 vols. Groningen: STYX, 1996–99.
CIAP	Moshe Sharon, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae.* 6 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016.
CPA	Christian Palestinian Aramaic
CPG	Maurice Geerard, ed., *Clavis partum Graecorum.* 6 vols. Turnhout: Brepols. 1974–.
EI²	*Encyclopædia of Islam,* 2nd edition. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. von Donzol, and W. P. Heinrichs. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2002.
EI³	*Encyclopædia of Islam, THREE.* Edited by G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and E. Rowson. Leiden: Brill, 2007–.
GAS	Fuat Sezgin. *Geschichte des arabischen Schriftums.* 15 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1963–2010.
GdQ	Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, and Otto Pretzl, *Geschichte des Qorâns.* 3 vols. Leipzig: Dieterich, 1909–38. Translated by W. H. Behn as *History of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
REMMM	*Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*
TAVO	*Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients.* Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1977–94.

TDNT   Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* 10 vols. Translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–76.

TG   Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denken im frühen Islam.* 6 vols. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991–97.

ZDMG   *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

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