THE HONEST MERCHANT

THE HONEST MERCHANT:
RETHINKING HISTORY, CRITERIA, AND MEMORY IN
THE STUDY OF THE HISTORICAL MUHAMMAD

By

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Lay Abstract

This dissertation examines the field of the "historical Muhammad" and applies a new method on extant primary sources related to Muhammad's life. I conduct a literature review of scholars' reconstructions of his life, beginning as early as the seventh century. I also explore numerous primary sources on Muhammad, pointing out their benefits and disadvantages. Next, I overview the quests for the historical Jesus and analyze methods that were established over the last hundred years. In my dissertation, I adopt historical Jesus scholarship, namely memory studies, to develop an original method that provides a unique understanding and fresh perspective of the historical Muhammad. Over the last two chapters, I conduct eight case studies employing my method on events from Muhammad's life in Mecca and Medina. This dissertation demonstrates that we could reconstruct a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life.

Abstract

Over the last fourteen-hundred years, Muhammad ibn ʿAbd Allah (d. 632) has been depicted and portrayed in a variety of ways by numerous scholars, theologians, and polemicists. My dissertation offers a unique approach to the "historical Muhammad" as it develops a new method to examine extant primary sources related to his life. I include available sources that provide pertinent information on Muhammad's life, including the *Qur'an*, *hadith* literature, *sira-maghazi* (biographies and expeditions), and non-Muslim accounts.

My research is original because it adopts current historical Jesus scholarship, particularly modern cognitive studies of memory, and uses it on extant sources related to Muhammad's life. More specifically, I explore how memory, oral tradition, and oral transmission play vital roles in understanding how Muslims remembered their Prophet and how the circumstances of later generations shaped and influenced their commemoration of his life.

By adopting this scholarship, which will be contextualized to examine early Muslim literature, I offer a new perspective on surviving sources, the context of seventh-century Arabia, and the function of memory for the nascent Muslim community. I also apply my method on eight significant, polemical, or neglected events that are traditionally believed to have taken place during Muhammad's life in Mecca and Medina.

In sum, my dissertation offers a dynamic cross-disciplinary venture, encompassing the intersection of innovative, modern critical inquiry and early Islamic literature.

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Introduction: A New Quest Begins

In 2016, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security held a session called "Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror," bringing numerous commentators and experts in the causes of radicalization to share their knowledge and opinions.[1] During this session, Shireen Qudosi, a self-proclaimed Muslim reformer, conservative, and feminist, argued that Muhammad ibn ʿAbd Allah's first twelve years as a Prophet in Mecca (610-622) were suffused with peace; however, after his transition to political and military leadership (622-632), Muhammad established and maintained a Muslim nation through force and domination.[2] Qudosi uses the term "warmongering" to describe Muhammad's transition from Mecca to Medina, which she suggests is called terror today.[3]

Despite living over fourteen hundred years ago, a session on Homeland Security discussed Muhammad's legacy and significance to Muslims today and how political Islam was active during its formative period in seventh-century Arabia. His life is still relevant and explored frequently when discussing radicalized Muslims and Islamic terrorism in government sessions, university courses, and news articles. While Qudosi seems to have some knowledge about who Muhammad was, where does she draw her information from? Which sources are being used? Which sources are being omitted? Opinions about Muhammad's life will often differ between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as amongst Muslims today throughout the world. Authors, scholars, and theologians will also paint different portraits of him as our sources agree but also disagree on

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[1] "Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror," *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency of the Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives: One Hundred Fourteenth Congress (2nd Session)* on September 22, 2016, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114hhrg25270/pdf/CHRG-114hhrg25270.pdf.

[2] "Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror," 81.

[3] "Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror," 89.

particular actions and sayings that were transmitted orally and written down after his life. In addition, historians disagree over the accuracy of available sources as most of them were written at least one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad died.

The Historical Muhammad

The majority of scholars accept that Muhammad lived in Arabia during the sixth and seventh centuries. The Hijaz, a region in Western Arabia, consisted of nomadic tribes who travelled for trading, raiding, and pilgrimage. Religions in pre-Islamic Arabia included indigenous polytheistic beliefs, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. Born around 570, Muhammad was orphaned at a young age as his father, ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbd al-Muttalib (d. 570), died before he was born, and his mother, Aminah bint Wahab (d. 577), passed away when he was six years old. Muhammad was, therefore, raised by his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muttalib (d. 578) and then by his uncle, Abu Talib ibn ʿAbd al-Muttalib (d. 619). At the age of twenty-five, Muhammad served as a merchant under Khadija bint Khuwaylid (d. 619), a wealthy widow and his future wife. When he turned forty, he is believed to have received his first revelation from God and began his prophethood. After preaching to his family and friends, Muhammad faced fierce opposition from his community, which sometimes turned to physical and verbal abuse.

Muhammad was eventually invited to serve as chief arbitrator for Medina, which was called Yathrib at the time, so he had his nascent Muslim community follow him to a new city where he could live freely and spread Islam openly. During his time in Medina, Muhammad established the "Constitution of Medina," which created an alliance or federation between the tribes of Medina, giving them rights and duties to ensure their safety and prosperity. Soon after settling in Medina, he married a number of wives, many of whom were for political purposes to

solidify relationships between families and tribes. Muhammad also began sending Muslims to raid Meccan caravans, which gained many new followers and strengthened the Muslims' position in Medina. Conflicts with Mecca did not end until he gathered ten thousand followers and conquered the city in 630. In 632, Muhammad led Muslims on his final pilgrimage before contracting a fatal illness that took his life at the age of approximately sixty-two years old.

While this outline of Muhammad's life is accepted by most Muslims, scholars, and theologians, the details are often debated, embellished, or omitted. Biographies, narratives, and accounts of him were transmitted orally and in written form as early as the seventh century since Muslims shared his life with one another and preserved them for later generations. Muslims comingled history and theology to legitimize Muhammad as the last Prophet who completed God's message to humankind. By the eighth century, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish accounts of his life were circulating across the medieval world. More particularly, authors and historians took it upon themselves to gather traditions on Muhammad via oral and written accounts to write biographies on his life to share with the masses or rulers of the Islamic world.

Muslims reference accounts of Muhammad during polemics against Christian and Jewish theologians to defend their Prophet's sayings and actions. Because of numerous elaborations, exaggerations, and omissions, we should not consider our primary sources entirely authentic or genuine; rather, we need to be careful when exploring our sources and acknowledge that we cannot reconstruct the "real" Muhammad. In addition, having used oral and written accounts that made their way to Europe from the Islamic world, Christian and Jewish writings on Muhammad incorporated their own bias toward him to portray him as a false Prophet or even as the antichrist. Biographies were under the control, motivation, and agenda of the authors as they decided which sources to use and omit when narrating Muhammad's life.

The quest for the "historical Muhammad" is an attempt by historians and theologians to reconstruct his life based on our surviving sources. These scholars situate Muhammad's life historically in Arabia during the sixth and seventh centuries, filtering through an abundance of sources, which are sometimes contradictory and inconsistent, to identify accounts they believe are authentic and genuine. Unlike theologians, scholars' goal is not to claim to find the "real" Muhammad; rather, they explore what types of portraits could be painted based on surviving sources. Could they bring us closer to understanding who Muhammad was? More importantly, can we reconstruct a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life? Muslims such as ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 713), his student Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 744), and his students Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 767) and Maʿmar ibn Rashid (d. 770) recorded traditions on their Prophet during their lives and several wrote biographies (*sirah-maghazi* literature).[4] Non-Muslim authors, including Sebeos (wr. 660s), John of Damascus (d. 749), and Theophanes the Confessor (d. 817), used oral and written traditions transmitted by Muslim scholars and added their own interpretations, narratives, and depictions of who Muhammad was, especially when comparing him unfavourably to biblical prophets such as Moses and Jesus.

There is a strong relationship between theology and history within extant sources, which makes it challenging to unveil the historical Muhammad. From a theological perspective, Muslims understand Muhammad as being vital to the founding of Islam. His role in establishing Islam in the Hijaz laid the foundation for Islamic empires that reigned for hundreds of years. For Muslims, Muhammad is the perfect Muslim, and they acknowledge him as a model of both spiritual and political leadership. His life itself serves as a religious text, *hadith*, which is literature to help guide Muslims and allow them to follow him as an example and abide by the Qurʾan. Events during his

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[4] I will use *sirah-maghazi* (biographies on Muhammad and his military expeditions) and biography interchangeably throughout this study.

life provide *tafsir* (Qurʾanic exegesis) and *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of the revelation) for theologians to better contextualize verses from the Qurʾan.

From a historical perspective, Muhammad is observed as a person who united most of Arabia under his leadership as a religious and political figure. He began a social, political, and ideological movement that gained numerous followers, leading to new laws, policies, and reformations within Arabia. For Muslims, the Qurʾan is the foundation of Islam as they believe it to be God's words verbatim. Historians will often ask different questions than theologians and incorporate sources beyond those written exclusively by Muslims.

Our two perspectives on Muhammad bring us tension as well as harmony. More particularly, the historical and theological perspectives are intertwined as Islam is a religion that has the Qurʾan enter human history at a particular moment in time and Muhammad live in Arabia during the sixth and seventh centuries. We cannot separate theology from history as latter often derives from the former, especially when exploring Muhammad's life. However, we should not categorize our sources as fabrications or deliberate forgeries of history. Events during this time have become sacred moments for Muslims to remember and preserve. These stories demonstrate the relationship between sacred text and social reality for Muslims as they accept the Qurʾan as the word of God verbatim and Muhammad as the perfect man.

Throughout history, Muslims would rule, engage in warfare, and make peace in the name of Islam and Muhammad. However, a tension emerges between history and theology when exploring truth claims. Did Muhammad *really* receive revelation from God? Did Muhammad *really* travel to Jerusalem and heaven during his night journey (*al-Israʾ wal-Miʿraj*)? Did angels *actually* fight alongside Muslims during battles? Unlike theologians, historians are unable to

confirm the veracity of these divine or supernatural events as they can only claim what the Qurʾan, *hadith*, or *sirah-maghazi* state about them.

Historical Muhammad scholarship has evolved in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to establish new portraits of Muhammad based on the sociopolitical, cultural, and religious contexts of the authors. With the rise of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, a surge of interest on Muhammad, Islam, and the Qurʾan erupted to legitimize or condemn attacks of violence. Most scholars focus on traditional Muslim sources to reconstruct Muhammad's life as they are more reliable and genuine than non-Muslims sources. More particularly, there is evidence that Muslims orally transmitted traditions about Muhammad soon after his death, preserving his sayings and actions. On the other hand, there is no clear evidence on how non-Muslim writers received accounts of Muhammad and on which sources they referenced or modified. However, in the late twentieth century, scholars such as John Wansbrough, the founder of the Revisionist School of Islamic Studies, brought new and challenging questions surrounding the historicity and authenticity of traditional Muslim accounts. Although traditional scholars defended the value and reliability of their sources, there was a need to revisit them more critically.

One important method used to reconstruct the life of Muhammad is to narrow the gap of information and traditions between his death and Ibn Ishaq's biography. Scholars such as Gregory Schoeler, Andreas Görke, and Sean Anthony have focused on the work of ʿUrwah through numerous chains of transmission (*isnad*) tracing back to Muhammad or letters that he wrote to the Umayyad Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685-705). Another method is the *isnad-cum-matn* analysis, which compiles all available sources on a particular event or episode during Muhammad's life and uses *isnad* analysis to compare the texts (*matn*) and chains of transmission. While both methods have given us better insight than ever before, we are unable to distinguish the authentic traditions

from the fabricated ones. A more recent trend from mostly revisionist scholars is to incorporate non-Muslim sources when depicting Muhammad's life. Available non-Muslim sources are explored and even compared with traditional sources to discover consistencies. For example, Anthony and Stephen Shoemaker, have combined these sources with Muslim ones to investigate the originality of accounts of Muhammad's life, while others, such as Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, have found it more beneficial to use non-Muslim sources exclusively.[5]

Historical Jesus Scholarship and Methodology

When investigating the historical Muhammad, we will explore the work of scholars who have faced similar challenges when reconstructing the life of Jesus. Like the works on Muhammad, Jesus's life continues to be important to scholars, especially New Testament scholars, who aim to better understand his sayings and actions, along with events that took place during his life. Historical Jesus scholarship attempts to separate the historical Jesus of Nazareth from the theological Jesus Christ, using available sources ranging from the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, to non-Christian sources written within one hundred years of Jesus's death. The critical study of this field began in the eighteenth century, establishing five "quests" that brought a number of new questions, answers, and criticisms that have challenged both scholars and theologians. Theologians, in particular, have fiercely opposed the search for the historical Jesus, often claiming that there is either no need to understand the historical Jesus or no possible way to reconstruct his life. Portraits of Jesus vary as depictions are based on the sources used and often mirror the author's motivation and agenda. Prominent scholars of the historical Jesus include Hermann Samuel

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[5] Cook and Crone's *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* offers a controversial thesis that has been widely criticized for being intentionally provocative and for only using non-Muslim sources.

Reimarus, Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, John Meier, and Dale Allison Jr., all of whom contributed heavily to the field and established new, ground-breaking theories and conclusions.

The majority and most valuable sources on the historical Jesus are within the New Testament, whereas supplementary evidence on his life is found in non-Christian sources, such as the works of Flavius Josephus (37 – c. 100) and Publius Cornelius Tacitus (d. 120). The Gospels, for example, were written and circulated as early as forty years after Jesus was crucified, making them much earlier than any source on Muhammad, other than the Qurʾan. In addition, the context Jesus lived in is well documented as we have both Roman and Jewish sources that describe the sociopolitical, cultural, and religious context of Jews living in Palestine during the first century.[6]

Methods that were developed during the five "quests" include source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Source criticism analyzes the Gospels side by side to determine inconsistencies and incompatibilities. Form criticism examines the gospel tradition while it was transmitted orally, identifying the milieu, context, and circumstances of Judea in the first century. Redaction criticism focuses on how the gospel writers used oral and written traditions, along with what motivations they may have had to incorporate or omit traditions. Approaches to the historical Jesus differs from traditional theology as scholars aim to dichotomize the historical Jesus from the theological Christ, separating what we can *really* know about Jesus of Nazareth. Traditional theology, on the other hand, explores sources to defend the Gospels and New Testament by pointing out their harmony and authenticity. Theologians developed Christology to establish the nature and role of Jesus Christ, as well as his humanity and divinity. They reconciled contradictions and often condemned the separation of Jesus of Nazareth from Jesus Christ.

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[6] Historical Muhammad scholars do not have the benefit of having an abundance of contemporaneous work on the sociopolitical, cultural, and religious context of pre-Islamic Arabia. Other than the Qurʾan, available sources about this context were written by Muslims well after the rise of Islam.

Over the last fifty years, we have observed an increase in scholarship on who Jesus was and what our sources tell us about him. While these sources fall within the realm of both history and hagiography, there is a kernel of historicity that scholars focus on to reconstruct the life of Jesus, despite embellishments, contradictions, and biases. Biographies on Muhammad, who is recognized as both a Prophet and mortal man, also border between history and hagiography, especially since his life is embellished and likened to his predecessors in the Bible.

Meier, who has written most extensively on the historical Jesus, uses traditionally developed criteria of authenticity to filter our available sources. In his book, *A Marginal Jew: The Roots of the Problem and the Person (Volume 1)* (1991), Meier uses the criteria of authenticity to provide a "scientific" treatment of the historical Jesus. He aims to recover and reconstruct Jesus using tools of modern historical research, which would paint a more genuine portrait of his life. Having written five volumes on his series, *A Marginal Jew*, Meier continues his ongoing quest for the historical Jesus. Other scholars have incorporated memory studies into their work, which offers us a unique perspective on Jesus and how memories of his life were transmitted both orally and in written form.

Both Muhammad's life and Jesus's life have been recorded as a kind of scripture: the *hadith* literature and the Gospels. Within these sources, we have a number of similarities, including that they both offer the largest amount of information on Muhammad and Jesus. Sayings and actions of these figures were recorded in detail, both of which serve as a guide for followers to imitate during their lives. Muslims and Christians were quick to preserve the words and actions of their religious leader early on and share them with new converts. Because of its significance to religious law, *hadith* literature has experienced widescale fabrication that has compromised the authenticity of Muhammad's sayings and actions. In addition, within *hadith* literature, there are Sunni and Shia

collections that offer different portraits of Muhammad and his successors.[7] The abundant, inconsistent accounts on Muhammad's life continue to be a concern for Muslim theologians, leading them to develop methods that filter through traditions and identify those they believe to be genuine. These theologians use the Qurʾan, *hadiths*, and *sira-maghazi* literature in their reconstruction of Muhammad's life, tracing accounts through reliable transmitters and discarding thousands of fabricated traditions.

Method and Approach to the Historical Muhammad

Based on the ways in which scholars have advanced the study of the historical Jesus, we will use a number of methods that have proven most effective in reconstructing Jesus's life and apply them to our sources on Muhammad. More particularly, we will examine four events that are traditionally believed to have taken place during his life in Mecca and four stories that Muslims consider authentic during his time in Medina.[8] We will also include both Muslim and non-Muslim sources when analyzing the veracity of events. Muslim sources give us thorough details, chronology, and variety when understanding episodes during his life. Many of these sources are traced to eyewitness accounts and are written by authors whom we can contextualize historically.

While fabricated and exaggerated accounts of Muhammad's life developed and circulated, there is no widespread conspiracy to deceive every Muslim and invent almost all aspects of his life. In addition, we are unable to determine which Muslim sources are dependent or independent of one another. Despite being quite hostile, non-Muslim sources are important because many of

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[7] I will discuss the differences between Sunni and Shia *hadith* in the second chapter.
[8] I will provide reasoning for my case studies within their respective chapters.

them were written earlier than our extant Muslim sources, allowing us to further investigate their originality and which sources they may have used.

Memory studies will serve as a valuable lens to use when understanding the transmission of oral and written traditions on Muhammad's life, offering a new perspective on the historical Muhammad. The study of memory explores human ability to remember, preserve, and reconstruct past events. One of the most valuable subfields is social memory, which was founded by Maurice Halbwachs, a sociologist and student of Emile Durkheim, who analyzed the function of memory and how it becomes as a social reality for individuals and societies. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann built upon the work of Halbwachs, introducing the importance of culture within memory studies and how it could allow memories to be preserved orally for generations. Other types of memory are significant when understanding why memories are recalled and recounted, including eyewitness, collective, commemorative, salient, and gist memory.

These types of memory help us identify factors and circumstances that allow for memories to be preserved orally for generations. In our study, we will consider accounts and traditions about Muhammad as memories that were formed during his life and transmitted orally until they were written in our extant sources as authors used both written and oral traditions within their work. Depending on when these memories were written down, we will be able to explore the ways in which they were modified, embellished, or invented, despite being traced back to Muhammad.

A number of historical Jesus scholars, including Craig Keener, Christopher Keith, Alan Kirk, and Anthony Le Donne, have used memory studies in their work to examine how oral and written traditions of Jesus were transmitted to gospel writers, biographers, and historians. Other scholars, such as Allison and Bart Ehrman, have voiced their opinions on the fragility of memory and how we cannot rely on it when reconstructing the life of Jesus. However, in his book,

Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History, Allison focuses on gist memory as it provides the "big picture" stemming from long-term memory and not particular details.[9] He also incorporates recurrent attestation, which focuses on repeated themes, stories, and motifs within primary sources to further authenticate particular events and episodes that took place during Jesus's life.[10] We will incorporate Allison's work by examining our sources for recurrent events within our sources on Muhammad.

In addition to recurrent attestation, I will include two other criteria of authenticity in our method: the criterion of multiple attestation and the criterion of embarrassment. The criterion of multiple attestation focuses on episodes that are attested in more than one *independent* literary source or literary genre.[11] One of the challenges with this criterion for both the historical Jesus and the historical Muhammad is, as mentioned before, that we cannot determine the originality and independence of our extant sources. We could, however, classify the Qurʾan, biographies and non-Muslim sources as independent genres because they encompass their own style, form, and content. The criterion of embarrassment concentrates on events that would have embarrassed or created difficulty for the nascent religious community.[12] Meier points out that the early Church would not have created material that embarrassed Jesus or weakened their position as a religious movement.[13] There is evidence of embarrassing traditions about Jesus and Muhammad being omitted or suppressed in later sources. One of the difficulties of using this criterion, however, is what we understand as embarrassing today may not have been embarrassing when the episode took place. Therefore, it is important to be prudent when using this criterion in our case studies.

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[9] Dale C. Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 10-11.

[10] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 21.

[11] John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 174-175.

[12] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 168-171.

[13] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 168.

Situating the Researcher in the Study

John Creswell states that "[Constructivist] researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences."[14] My positionality stems from me being a practicing Muslim in Canada, who believes Muhammad existed and received revelations from God. My experience as a Muslim and interest in Islam from a young age motivated me to learn and understand who Muhammad was as a historical figure, especially after reading accounts that heroize his life and attribute miracles to him. While I acknowledge that my subjectivity may be unintentional and unconscious, I attempt to dichotomize my personal, theological belief in Islam when conducting research and when critiquing available sources.

I am critical and skeptical about many Muslim and non-Muslim sources, leading me to limit their use and my reliance upon them. Although many Muslim texts, including the Qurʾan, have become significant and even sacred to Muslims, I remain cognizant of their sociopolitical and theological agendas, motivations, and embellishments. I also notice an unsurprising omission and silence of women within Muslim texts, which has encouraged me to point out numerous accounts and problematize them. As a scholar of religious studies, I engage theological, historical, hagiographical texts carefully and critically, being mindful that history and theology are interwoven and inseparable.

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[14] John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* 4th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2014), 37.

Overview of the Chapters

In this study, I will explore several aspects of the historical Muhammad, which will prepare us for our case studies over the last two chapters. Following this introduction, I will review the literature that examines works on Muhammad written from the classical period of Islam in the seventh century to the twenty-first century. This chapter will include several biographies, ranging from theological, apologetic Muslim sources to hostile and provocative non-Muslim accounts of his life. I will then examine the rise of the Revisionist School in England, which sometimes brought and inspired extreme criticism of Muslim sources, as well as biographies written over the last few years.

Our second chapter will provide an overview of available sources on Muhammad's life. I will begin with the Qurʾan, which is our earliest source, and then move on to *hadith* literature, which will be used in a limited capacity to corroborate other sources and not provide new information. Biographies offer us thorough details on Muhammad, including his actions and what he said during his life. Other Muslim literature will also be used as they describe pre-Islamic history, the history of Islam, and its spread in the Middle East. Lastly, I will discuss non-Muslim sources and how they could further validate episodes from Muhammad's life.

Chapter three will explore the ways in which memory studies helps us better understand oral traditions transmitted between Muhammad's death in 632 and written sources in the seventh to tenth centuries. Our extant Muslim and non-Muslim sources both contain gaps between this period, so it is important to investigate how and why memories of Muhammad's life were preserved and remembered by Muslims and non-Muslims for generations. While incorporating the study of memory into the historical Muhammad will not give us the "real" Muhammad, it will provide us with more confidence on key events that took place during his life. In this chapter, we

will observe social and cultural memory in depth and how historical Jesus scholars have used this theoretical framework in their research.

In the fourth chapter, I will outline my approach to the historical Muhammad. Methods have been established and used by prominent scholars; however, there is no unanimously agreed upon approach in current scholarship. This chapter will thoroughly explain my method, which I will deploy on our eight case studies, ranging from incorporating memory studies to using the criteria of authenticity. I will also discuss the benefits and potential downfalls of using my method on available sources.

The following two chapters will include eight case studies that were chosen because of their importance to Muhammad's life, neglect by current scholars, or controversial nature today. In chapter five, our first four case studies will focus on events that took place during his life in Mecca, between his birth in approximately 570 and 622. Our first case study is Muhammad's encounter with Khadija, who hired him as a merchant to travel outside Mecca. The next case study is Muhammad's reaction to what he believed was his first revelation, which made him question his own sanity and even contemplate jumping off Mount Hira to his death. Our third case study explores whether ʿAli ibn Abu Talib (d. 661) was the first male convert to Islam. The last case study on Muhammad's life in Mecca is the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, which took place after their tribe, the Banu Quraysh, put harsh restrictions and conditions on him and the two clans.

Our last chapter includes four more case studies that analyze episodes that took place during Muhammad's life in Medina, between 622 and 632. The first case study explores the Battle of ʿUhud (625), which was a major defeat for him and his followers against a much larger Meccan army. Our next case study examines Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh (d. 641), who

was previously married to his adopted son, Zayd ibn Harithah (d. 629). The third case study investigates the Christian delegation from Najran that visited Medina to discuss, debate, and defend their faith. Our last case study observes Muhammad's death, which took place after several days of pain and suffering.

It is the goal of this study to establish a new guide to the historical Muhammad that provides a survey of literature on his life as early as the eighth century, overviews available sources within three hundred years of his death, and explores current and previous methodology used to reconstruct his life. In addition, we will explore a new method that incorporates historical Jesus scholarship, particularly recent trends of using memory studies as a theoretical framework, to reconstruct a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life. Finally, we will use our method on eight case studies on Muhammad's time in Mecca and Medina, acknowledging these events as memories that were transmitted between twenty and three hundred years, to gain a unique perspective of what events likely took place during his life.

<u>Chapter 1: Literature Review on the Historical Muhammad</u>

Introduction

Within a hundred years after Muhammad's death in 632, biographies of his life were written and circulated throughout the Islamic world. The new Muslim community wanted their Prophet to be remembered as a descendant of Abraham, Messenger of God, and the founder of Islam. Hundreds of biographies on Muhammad have been written over the last fourteen hundred years. Throughout these centuries, Muslims found these biographies enriching and the most momentous part of their history. They were, for the most part, taken at face value, especially since great historians such as Ibn Ishaq and Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923) endeavoured to write their own *Sirat al-Nabi Muhammad* (biography on the Prophet Muhammad).

Although Muslim scholars carefully selected which event, episode, or story to include or omit, biographies remained under little scrutiny and criticism for hundreds of years, unless they were deemed to possess Shia sympathies.[1] Sunni accounts on Muhammad became the mainstream biographies that were circulated across the Islamic world. When modern non-Muslim scholars read these biographies, they began their own source criticism and questioned the veracity and authenticity of available material, ranging from the Qurʾan to biographies.[2] Muslim biographers, theologians, and academics were quick to respond and criticize Western non-Muslim scholars for their own presuppositions, animosity, and agendas when analyzing biographies and sources on Muhammad.

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[1] Muhammad ibn Saʿd (d. 845) is an important authority on Islamic biographical literature. Although his *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* is considered one of the earliest works on biographical literature on early Islam, his integrity is sometimes questioned because of alleged Shia sympathies, including claiming that ʿAli was the first male convert to Islam, not Abu Bakr (d. 634).

[2] Besides accusations of Shia sympathies, Muslim theologians have questioned and critiqued *hadith* literature in general for its authenticity. However, *sahih* (sound) *hadith* remains largely unquestioned by Muslim authorities.

It did not take long for a stark division between traditionalist and revisionist scholars to arise. Today, traditionalist scholars maintain the authenticity, historicity, and veracity of most, if not all, extant primary sources, acknowledging the traditional origin story of Muhammad and the founding of Islam. More particularly, this school of thought generally accepts the reliability of the Qurʾan, *hadith*, and *sirah-maghazi*. The Revisionist School of Thought, on the other hand, have called into question almost all sources related to Muhammad, proposing an alternative perspective on the rise of Islam and the sociopolitical and religious context of Muhammad's life.

This chapter will survey literature written on Muhammad ranging from the formative period of Islam to the twenty-first century. First, I will trace both Muslim and non-Muslim biographers before the nineteenth century. I will then overview nineteenth century biographies by both influential Muslim theologians and provocative European scholars. Next, I will discuss defensive and apologetic responses to European critiques of biographies and primary sources, most of which are academic. After that, I will point out the rise of the Revisionist School in London, England, which became the pinnacle of academic critique and scrutiny of biographical literature on Muhammad. This peak in revisionist scholarship allowed for criticism of his life that sometimes questioned whether he even existed. I will then mention biographies that have been written in the twenty-first century. Finally, I will outline current methods and trends to reconstruct the life of Muhammad and how there is room for new approaches in understanding his life. Since there are hundreds of biographies available to us, I will focus primarily on carefully selected academic biographies written by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.

Muslim Biographies Leading Up to the Nineteenth Century

Muhammad has been described and revered in a number of ways over the last fourteen hundred years. Therefore, we need to understand the sociopolitical, theological, and cultural context that led to reconstructions of his life throughout these centuries. When we acknowledge the different contexts surrounding the biographers, we are better able to identify the motivation, agenda, and presuppositions of each biographer. We are fortunate to know who wrote each biography on Muhammad and have information regarding when each biographer lived.

As mentioned earlier, biographies were written and circulated by Muslims within a century after Muhammad passed away. These biographies evolved over time and were sometimes modified significantly to fit the context each biographer was living in. Ibn Ishaq, Maʿmar, Muhammad ibn ʿUmar al-Waqidi (d. 823), and Ibn Saʿd (d. 845) all wrote influential biographies that were referenced heavily by later biographers. Perhaps, the greatest biographer was the renown historian al-Tabari,[3] who not only compiled numerous biographies in his attempt to reconstruct the life of Muhammad, but also offered his monumental Qurʾanic commentary known as the *Tafsir al-Tabari* (Qurʾanic exegesis of al-Tabari). Today, al-Tabari's work remains important and almost universally used for its attention to detail, comprehensiveness, and analysis. Also becoming widely referenced by later biographers is ʿAhmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892), another historian who presented his own account on the life of Muhammad in his *Ansab al-Ashraf* (Genealogies of the Nobles).

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[3] It would seem that all biographies are secondary sources because eyewitnesses did not write any of our extant biographies. Surviving Muslim biographies are all written at least one-hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death. I will, however, label all biographies written before the eleventh century as primary sources, which ends with al-Tabari's *Taʾrikh al-Rusul was al-Muluk (History of the Prophets and Kings)*. Biographies after al-Tabari will not be considered as they mostly repeat and expand on previous sources on Muhammad's life.

Prior to the nineteenth century, biographers drew primarily upon early Muslim sources, reinforcing their authenticity and veracity. In addition, Muhammad continued to be portrayed as the personification of manliness, flawlessness, and sinlessness. Biographies of his life, however, were not uniform. In *Lives of Muhammad*, Kecia Ali points out that Muslim thinkers debated about miracles attributed to Muhammad during his life.[4] Miracles, for instance, presented a conundrum for many biographies since the Qurʾan points out that Muhammad was only a warner and not sent to perform miracles, whereas early biographies possess several instances when he healed others, multiplied food, and journeyed to heaven.[5]

Biographies were hagiographical in nature as they venerated Muhammad as the Messenger of God, epitome of leadership, and model of worshipping one God. Storytelling, heroism, and legends are the foundations of our earliest biographies on his life as they offer an abundance of examples that include miraculous episodes, extraordinary victories over enemies, and an unwavering devotion and belief in God. Ibn Ishaq's biography, for example, begins with the creation story and the first Prophet (Adam) until Muhammad, offering the lineage of biblical and Arab prophets over thousands of years. Gordon Newby says that Ibn Ishaq contextualized Muhammad within the history of the salvation of the world.[6] Other biographers have him as the last Prophet and place him on a pedestal as the greatest Prophet, even performing miracles like his predecessors, Moses and Jesus.

In *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam*, Liyakat Takim outlines challenges when examining hagiographies, especially how they incorporate

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[4] Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 20.

[5] Qurʾan 11:12, 13:7, and 29:50 are only a few examples that have Muhammad understood as one who was sent to give warning to his community and not perform miracles.

[6] Gordon Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 9.

various structures, features, and characteristics to portray and embellish images of a particular person.[7] While Takim looks at depictions of Shia Imams, we could learn much about how biographies employ authority construction to synthesize both supernatural and historical elements in order to establish an exemplary charismatic figure.[8] By idealizing the past, biographies promote and exaggerate accounts of a figure, enhancing their authority and image.[9] In addition, biographers often "establish, document, and idealize the roots of a tradition that may not have been previously accepted," legitimizing the present and creating a recollection of the past.[10]

Biographies of Shia Imams and Muhammad both focus on charisma, divinely inspired knowledge, divine appointment, miraculous feats, and model characteristics, all of which demonstrate spiritual authority and divine guidance.[11] Therefore, there is a merger between human and divine elements within our biographies and *hadiths*, blurring the distinction between the historical life of Muhammad and the idealized form. Biographies on Muhammad have become sacred literature that serves as a confluence between hagiography and biography. More particularly, biographies will often tell us more about the author, how they understand Muhammad, and their sociopolitical and theological contexts. Therefore, how do we explore biographies that idealize the past and important figures?

While our earliest and most detailed biographies on Muhammad are hagiographical, it does not mean that they do not include historical information or a kernel of truth. These idealized biographies present challenges for both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars who want to reconstruct the "real" Muhammad who lived in seventh-century Arabia. However, biographers did not aim to

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[7] Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 145.
[8] Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, 146.
[9] Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, 158.
[10] Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, 158.
[11] Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, 146-147.

fabricate the life of Muhammad, deceive Muslims of who their Prophet was, or deprive them of learning how he overcome his struggles to become victorious. Biographers meticulously found written literature, eyewitnesses, and people who memorized *hadiths* and episodes from Muhammad's life. These accounts were intertwined with embellishments, exaggerations, and elaborations that personified Muhammad as a superhuman Prophet, especially in the context of polemics with Christians and Jews. However, these modifications should not compel us to believe that we cannot know anything about who he was and how he lived fourteen hundred years ago. The historical Muhammad is not lost to us, especially when we consider the extant sources available.

Scholars have also debated whether Muhammad *was* "Sunni" or "Shia." During the Middle Ages (5th to 15th Centuries), there are biographies by Sunni, Shia, and even Sufi scholars, all of whom painted a portrait of him as someone who validates their disparate practices within Islam.[12] The vast majority of biographies, however, were written by Sunni Muslims living under Sunni-ruled territory, particularly during the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258). Although I will discuss issues of having extant biographies written by mostly Sunni Muslims in chapter three, it is worth pointing out that ninth-century biographies omitted events or episodes that potentially legitimized ʿAli as the "rightful" heir and successor to Muhammad. While ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hisham (d. 833), Maʿmar, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Waqidi were Sunni Muslims writing biographies, al-Waqidi and Ibn Saʿd have been accused of Shia sympathies despite their biographies omitting key events that demonstrate ʿAli as Muhammad's successor.[13]

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[12] Shia biographies include instances when ʿAli is presented as a hero, closest to Muhammad, and successor, whereas Sufi biographies portray Muhammad as the prototype of a Sufi saint.

[13] Even though some theologians and historians mention that ʿAhmad al-Yaʿqubi (d. 897), al-Waqidi, and Ibn Saʿd, among others, had Shia subjectivities, it furthered the agenda to have all biographies require Sunni subjectivities, monopolizing biographies on Muhammad's life. For an example on al-Yaʿqubi's particular situation, see page 40 in Sayyid Husayn Muhammad Jafari's *The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam* (2000).

Leading up to the nineteenth century, Muslims who wrote biographies of Muhammad were predominately theologians who rarely questioned or critiqued primary sources, including the Qurʾan, *hadith*, and *sirah-maghazi*.[14] These theologians, as previously mentioned, may have debated the status of miracles but, nonetheless, included them in their accounts of Muhammad's life. Even with the rise of provocative biographies written by European theologians in the medieval period, biographies written before the nineteenth century largely catered to Muslims as a way to celebrate the life of Muhammad and to reinforce his impact as a sinless, perfect Prophet who founded Islam.

Non-Muslim Biographies Leading Up to the Nineteenth Century

Portrayals of who Muhammad was circulated quite early in the medieval period as his image and legacy impacted both Muslims and non-Muslims.[15] More particularly, Muslims' belief in Muhammad as a Prophet impacted non-Muslims, especially Christians and Jews, threatening their legitimacy as the "righteous" followers of God. Other than the Qurʾan, the earliest extant sources on his life are from non-Muslim works. John of Damascus, a Father of the Eastern Orthodox Church, was one of the earliest non-Muslim theologians to write about Muhammad's life. In his *magnum opus* work titled *The Fount of Knowledge*, John argues that he was a false Prophet who happened to encounter an Arian monk and to read the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, allowing him to create his own heresy.[16] John claims that chapters (or *suras*) of the Qurʾan were named by

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[14] Several theologians discussed the authenticity of *hadith* literature decades after Muhammad passed away; however, they were mostly focused on preserving Muhammad's words and actions related to legal decisions, whereas events, stories, and episodes pertaining to his life were of far lesser concern.

[15] A detailed analysis on the agendas and motivations of significant non-Muslim writers, especially those with anti-Muslim bias amidst Christian and Muslim polemics, will take place in the next chapter.

[16] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church: St. John of Damascus*, trans. Frederic Chase, Jr. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153.

Muhammad himself and even recounts an episode of his life that involves Zayd, his adopted son, and Zaynab, his future wife.[17]

Another early depiction of Muhammad comes from the French epic, *Song of Roland*. Written as early as the eleventh century, this poem, which is considered a French masterpiece, historicizes a fictional battle between Charlemagne's army and Saracen (Muslim) forces. This epic poem portrays Muhammad as someone who is worshipped, considered a ruler, performed miracles, and created a law for his followers.[18]

Other biographies emerged of Muhammad, particularly during the Crusades (1091–1492), when a series of religious wars took place between Christians and Muslims to recover the Holy Land from Muslim rule. Descriptions of his life circulated in Europe, condemning him and Islam in order to demonstrate Christianity as the superior religion. Reconstructions of Muhammad aimed to delegitimize Muslim dominion and Muhammad's prophethood, considering him a heresiarch and false Prophet.[19]

Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, European biographers of Muhammad sought to portray him as "monstrous."[20] He was depicted as someone associated with Judaism and Jews, who were demonized as deniers of Jesus. After the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, Muhammad was used as a tool for intra-Christian polemics. Christian theological enemies were compared to him, sometimes called the anti-Christ, or considered Muslims in secret. Associations between Muhammad and the Pope as antichrists continued for centuries after the Protestant Reformation. Catholics also used him as a way to condemn the Reformation. For

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[17] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 157.
[18] *Song of Roland* trans. Jessie Crosland (Cambridge: Old French Series, 1999), 10, 54, 64.
[19] John Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Jacksonville: University Press of Press, 2008), 134.
[20] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 30.

instance, Alfred Guillaume Postel, a French sixteenth-century theologian, wrote that "the spiritual sons of Luther are the little bastards of Mahom'."[21]

The birth of the modern study of Islam emerged during the seventeenth century.[22] Muhammad continued to be portrayed as a heretic, a false Prophet, and imposter. However, during the Enlightenment, many thinkers criticized all religions as being equally false. One of the most famous early modern treatises on Muhammad during this time was Humphrey Prideaux's *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*. Published in 1697, Prideaux used medieval depictions of him to conclude that he was an antichrist and a fraud.

While the majority of biographies on Muhammad written by Europeans were polemical in nature, Kecia Ali points out that a careful study of texts on his life over the centuries demonstrates that not all portraits were unfavourable, including Theophanes the Confessor's ninth century *Chronographie*.[23] More particularly, the eighteenth century brought depictions of Muhammad that were not only negative, but also some that presented him in a more positive light. Henri de Boulainvilliers, for example, published *Life of Mahomet* in 1731, which praised his life and Islam. This biography is considered the first pro-Islamic and sympathetic text written in Europe.[24]

By the end of the eighteenth century, the foundation had been laid for nineteenth century scholars to take a more academic approach, regardless of whether writers were theologians or polemicists trying to demonstrate Islam as inferior to Christianity. Muslim writers, on the other hand, continued to write biographies that were motivated theologically to prove the legitimacy of Islam in the modern world.

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[21] Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: Overlook, 2006), 70.

[22] Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 125.

[23] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 36-37. I will explore this work in my next chapter on available sources.

[24] Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 33.

The Orientalist Quests of Muhammad During the Nineteenth Century

Nineteenth-century biographers brought us similar traits of their predecessors; however, several biographies were published as critical academic approaches to the study of Islam. Gustav Weil's biography *Muhammad and the Prophet, His Life and His Book* was the first major advance of the nineteenth century.[25] This book began a new era in Islamic studies by applying a historical-critical method to the earliest accessible sources in Europe, leading the way for more scholars to write about Islam and its Prophet. In addition, scholars were increasingly drawing upon early Muslim sources in their biographies on Muhammad. For example, Aloys Sprenger, an Austrian medical doctor and the principal of Delhi College, wrote *The Life of Muhammad from Original Sources*, using both Ibn Hisham and al-Waqidi. He challenged the authenticity of *hadith* literature, criticizing numerous contradictions.

The most impactful biography written in the nineteenth century came from William Muir, whose *The Life of Mahomet from Original Sources* was published into four volumes between 1858 and 1861. Many Western scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, continue to use Muir in their own work to reference his findings or attack them. While his biography takes a scholarly approach to the life of Muhammad, Muir has been accused of writing with a "confessedly Christian bias."[26] Despite his agenda, he rejects medieval polemics and sought to ground his study on historical material using a source-critical method. Muir references the Qurʾan and *hadith* literature, along with contemporary documents and Arab poetry, acknowledging that available narratives are legendary but sometimes contain authentic records. These volumes were read by both missionaries

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[25] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 45.
[26] David Samuel Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, (London, The Knickerbocker Press, 1905), iv.

and Indian Muslims. Within a few decades, Muir's work was recognized as one of the greatest Orientalist biographies in English.

Biographies in the nineteenth century also reinforced scepticism towards miracles attributed to Muhammad. As I have previously mentioned, although the Qurʾan mentions that he was not sent to perform miracles as a Prophet, almost all early biographies had Muhammad performing a number of miracles throughout his life, particularly during his time as the Messenger of God. Therefore, a number of biographies during the second half of the nineteenth century minimized miracles performed by Muhammad. This minimalization was used by Christian evangelists in nineteenth-century India to claim that Muhammad was not a Prophet because he did not perform miracles during his life, whereas Jesus and Moses both did.[27]

Some more positive biographies were also written during this century, including Thomas Carlyle's lecture, "The Hero as Prophet." This lecture was significant in the nineteenth century and continues to be impactful to Muslim scholars of Muhammad today, providing both positive and negative perspectives on his life. Carlyle said that he was a "Hero-Prophet" and a true Prophet, but not the "truest of Prophets."[28] He aimed to demonstrate Muhammad as representing an inferior or incomplete form of Christianity. Other relatively positive biographies come from German scholars Abraham Geiger and Theodor Nöldeke. Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* ("What did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism?"), which argues that the Qurʾan was largely unoriginal and compares its terminology with the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature, and Nöldeke's *Das Leben Mohammeds* (Life of Muḥammad), which references Muslim commentators and historians to arrange suras of the Qurʾan and trace them back to

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[27] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 75.

[28] Archibald MacMechan, ed. *Carlyle on Heroes Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Boston: The Athenaeum Press, 1901), 50 and 88.

moments from Muhammad's life, depict Muhammad as sincerely convinced of his divine mission rather than fraudulently claiming prophethood and revelation from God.[29] Within these comparatively positive biographies, Muhammad becomes a major historical protagonist, unlike most nineteenth-century biographies that depict him as a false, heretical Prophet.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, Sigismund Koelle wrote about early Islam, comparing Muhammad and Jesus. In his book, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism, Critically Considered*, Koelle offers a Christian viewpoint, which he considers to be the superior religion, to truly judge Islam and its Prophet.[30] He focuses on the mythical elements in Muslim biographies and the ways in which Muhammad came to be modeled after Jesus in order to prove his equality or superiority.[31] Koelle says that Muhammad's extraordinary attributes were fiction and exaggerated to prevent Muslims from recognizing the true nature of Jesus.[32]

Both positive and negative biographies were written during the nineteenth century, most of which denounced Islam and Muhammad to prove the superiority of Christianity and Jesus. However, non-Muslims increased their effort in using traditional Muslim sources to narrate Muhammad's life. Many of these polemics reached South Asia, where a number of Muslim thinkers were ready to defend and refute these publications with their own arguments and biographies. It was within South Asia where great Muslim thinkers offered a noteworthy rebuttal of provocative, sometimes antagonistic, accounts of Muhammad.

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[29] Nicolai Sinai and William Montgomery Watt, "Muhammad," *Encyclopaedia of Britannica* (2021), accessed January 4, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammad#ref1248263.
[30] Sigismund Koelle, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism: Critically Considered* (London: Rivingtons, 1889), viii.
[31] Koelle, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, x.
[32] Koelle, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, 245.

Traditional Quests of the Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, South Asia became a centre for religious dialogue, debate, and polemics. Muir's biography on Muhammad raised several questions and problems for Indian Muslims who sought to refute his evangelical agenda. Rebutting this biography, as well as other accounts of his life, was required by Muslims who wished to put an end to misconceptions. Two of the most prominent scholars who denounced Western Orientalist biographies on Muhammad were Ahmad Khan and Ameer Ali. They defended their faith and religion of Islam at a time when the Mughal Empire (1526-1857) had been recently replaced by the British Raj (1858-1947), which was particularly aggressive towards Islam and Muslims. These two scholars used English to refute European authors, particularly British authors, directly in a language they could read. In addition, both authors aimed to provide important resources not only for Indian Muslims, but also Muslims across the world, especially those under colonialism. As "colonized people," Muslim intellectuals were tasked to rebut Western misconceptions about Islam and Muhammad as inferior citizens.

Khan was an educated civil servant who was known as a modernist and Islamic reformist. He also founded the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (now Aligarh Muslim University). In *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and the Subjects Subsidiary Thereto*, Khan aligns his topics with those of Muir's in his works, answering similar questions about certain aspects of Islam and its comparison to other religions, including how Muhammad compares to other prophets.

Khan also reviews Muir's method and approach to Muhammad's life, from the sources he chooses to his interpretation of them.[33] He criticizes Muir's selectiveness of sources and biographers who suit his intentions and conclusions, including the "Satanic verses" and miraculous

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[33] Syed Ahmad Khan, *A Series of Essays on the Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto* (Lahore, Premier Book House, 1968).

occurrences. Khan, however, sometimes contradicts himself by selectively choosing sources and biographers who help frame his own portrait of Muhammad. While he refutes provocative views, Khan also includes positive European sources in his book and takes them at face value. In spite of this questionable approach, Kecia Ali says it occurs throughout centuries of Muslim polemic.[34]

Like Khan, Ameer Ali sought to defend Islam against his British colonizers, refuting their claims about his religion and Muhammad. Educated in law in England, he wrote several books during his life, including *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed* and its revised and edited version titled *The Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, or *The Spirit of Islam*, both of which offer comprehensive coverage of Muhammad's life. Unlike Khan's work on Muhammad, Ameer Ali writes about his superiority as the last Prophet in his response to Muir and other European scholarship. He interweaves apologetics and traditional biographical material on Muhammad, situating Islam on the world stage by not only incorporating the Abrahamic religions, but also Buddhism and Hinduism in the religious history of the world.[35]

Another important biography coming from South Asia in the nineteenth century was written by Shibli Nomani. Having only written two volumes before his death, his seven-volume biography of Muhammad, which was completed by his student, Sulaiman Nadvi, is considered to be one of the most important biographies written in the nineteenth century. While the biography is not polemical or defensive in nature, it serves as a hagiography that provides a complete overview of Muhammad, including his life, various aspects of his personality and character, and his teachings. Nomani offers a theological perspective, which uses traditional Muslim resources to teach Muslims about their heritage.

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[34] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 68.
[35] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 70.

The nineteenth century was a time when Muslims defended Islam and its Prophet from polemical biographies that intended to prove the superiority of Christianity and Jesus. In addition, the nineteenth century also brought more power to the West and further fragmentation of the Islamic world. Many scholars, therefore, educated themselves in the West and wrote their biographies in English as a way to refute disparaging portrayals of Muhammad directly.

The Revisionist School and Critical Quests of the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century brought us the pinnacle of source criticism. While scholars throughout the century continued to question early Muslim sources, a new school of thought was founded that changed the way in which scholars approached early Islam, particularly the Qurʾan and life of Muhammad.

David Samuel Margoliouth wrote one of the earliest biographies on Muhammad during the twentieth century. His books include *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, *The Early Development of Mohammedanism*, and *The Relations Between Arabs and Israelites Prior to the Rise of Islam*. *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* focuses on the culture and politics surrounding Muhammad as he united Arabia, converted hundreds of followers, and defeated his enemies. Margoliouth uses early Muslim sources including the Qurʾan, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Tabari's commentary on the Qurʾan. Despite acknowledging these sources as unhistorical, he avoids demonstrating the superiority or inferiority of Islam.[36]

Another important scholar of the twentieth century was Leone Caetani, an Italian scholar who published ten folio volumes, *Annali dell'Islam* (1905-1926). He developed a critical survey that traced the formation of Islamic civilization year by year, using all available early Islamic texts.

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[36] Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, vi-vii.

Caetani attempted to offer a comprehensive overview of Islam, from Muhammad's *hijra* (migration) in 622 to the assassination of ʿAli in 661, pioneering a new era of applying the historical method on early Islamic literature. He uses the opinions of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Muir, Sprenger, and Margoliouth, to develop his own theoretical framework. He then analyzes Muslim sources and points out their inconsistencies and contradictions, invalidating most of them as fabrications by later scholars.

Henri Lammens, a Belgian scholar of Islam, was a noteworthy contemporary of Caetani. He published many works on Muhammad including "The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muhammad was Composed," "The Age of Muhammad and the Chronology of the Sira," and *Fatima and the Daughters of Muhammad*. Influenced by Ignac Goldziher's analysis of *hadith*, he claims that early biographies of Muhammad relied predominately on *hadith* literature and pointed out that only the Qurʾan can serve as a valid historical basis to understand who he was and how he lived in seventh-century Arabia.[37] Muhammad's life, therefore, must be explored within the context of the urban and mercantile community in the Hijaz during the seventh century. According to Lammens, *hadith* is an apocryphal development that should be valued based on its independence from the Qurʾan.[38] He has been criticized for accepting without question material that disparaged Muhammad while rigorously critiquing material that praised him.[39]

Goldziher also influenced Joseph Schacht, who specialized in Islamic law and radically changed approaches to *hadith* and biographical literature, particularly the *isnad*. In *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, he claimed that the *isnads* going back to Muhammad only began to

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[37] Henri Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muhammad was Composed," Translated by Ibn Warraq in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2000), 169.

[38] Henri Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muhammad was Composed," trans. Ibn Warraq in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, 169-170.

[39] Kamal Salibi, "Islam and Syria in the Writings of Henri Lammens," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Peter Holt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 335.

be used at the time of the Abbasid Revolution during the mid-eighth century. Therefore, Schacht said no *hadith* can reliably be traced directly to him; rather, only some could be rooted in Muhammad's teachings as the development of doctrine went through successive stages during the early centuries of Islam.[40] More specifically, every legal tradition attributed to him must be considered inauthentic and developed at a later date, falsely tracing to Muhammad to legitimize its legality.[41] Although Schacht did not write a biography on Muhammad, his method of locating and critiquing the origins and development of *hadith* literature has impacted later works on Muhammad's life.

Maxime Rodinson, a French historian and sociologist, wrote a secular, Marxist biography that focuses on materialistic conditions surrounding the emergence of Islam. His *Muhammad* draws on extensive scholarship, exclusively Muslim sources, to provide insight into Muhammad's character, family, background, and community, along with how he spread Islam, created a religion, and established the first great Muslim military power. By combining sociological and Marxist theories, Rodinson contextualizes Muhammad in his social setting to explore the economical and social origins of Islam as an ideological movement.

The last quarter of the twentieth century includes the work of Wansbrough, an American historian. Considered one of the most innovative thinkers in the field of Islamic Studies, he wrote two highly influential books that helped revolutionize scholarship on early Islam. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* critiques traditional early accounts of the origins of Islam as historically unreliable and influenced by religious dogma. Using form analysis, Wansbrough concludes that the rise of Islam began as a Judeo-Christian sect that later evolved and

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[40] Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 4-5.
[41] Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 83.

distinguished itself from its roots by the end of the eighth century.[42] The Qurʾan and Islam, therefore, were neither products of Muhammad nor established in Arabia; rather, the Qurʾan became canonized in the ninth century.[43] *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* builds upon Wansbrough's previous book as it analyses early Islamic historiography as a "salvation history," which is a literary genre within biblical literature.[44] He argues that early Muslim biographies on Muhammad should not be taken as historical documents. Wansbrough also rejects historical reconstruction because *sirah-maghazi* serves as literary texts, or salvation history, written more than one hundred years after Muhammad's death and used primarily for interconfessional polemics.[45]

Wansbrough's work and scholarship laid the foundation for the Revisionist School of Islamic Studies, which initiated a paradigm shift in the study of early Islam. This new movement questioned all traditional Islamic accounts about the formation of Islam and traditions surrounding its founder. By applying the historical-critical method, Wansbrough and his students believed that they could demonstrate how early Islamic literature is highly questionable and unreliable as historical sources. Students, including Cook, Crone, and Gerald Hawting, furthered his work and thesis, becoming representatives of the Revisionist School.

Studying under both Wansbrough and Bernard Lewis, Hawting focused his work on the question of the religious milieu within which Islam was formed and developed. His *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* includes a comparative religious perspective to demonstrate that Islam rose out of a conflict with other monotheists and not

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[42] John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74.

[43] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 227.

[44] John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), ix.

[45] Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 2-3, and polemic 43-44.

polytheists as originally believed. Hawting uses the Qurʾan and other Muslim sources to argue that other monotheistic religions in Arabia fell short of true monotheism. Crone also questions the milieu of seventh-century Arabia and the origins of Islam. In her controversial book, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, she challenges the standard assertion surrounding the socio-economic milieu in which Islam was founded. Crone points out that Muhammad was not born in a thriving mercantile or religious center. Rather, Islam established Mecca as a sacred site after the religion was formed, while north Arabia is a more fitting center for trading than either Mecca or Medina.[46]

As mentioned before, Crone also co-authored a book with Cook titled *Hagarism*, which draws on archaeological evidence and contemporary documents written exclusively by non-Muslims.[47] Focusing on a small number of contemporary non-Muslim sources, *Hagarism* offers a depiction of early Islam very different from traditional historical accounts, linking Judaism to the earliest forms of Islam. In addition to his co-authored book, Cook wrote a biography titled *Muhammad*. This short biography gives an account of Muhammad based on traditional Muslim sources to indicate how he articulated monotheism to his Arab community. Cook then questions how historically accurate and authentic traditional portraits can be.[48] He also claims that the only reliable sources on Muhammad's life are those outside the Islamic tradition.

The last author who I will mention is Francis Peters, who published a number of works, including "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad" and *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*. He is sceptical in reconstructing the historical Muhammad because he believes that there are so little certainties about Arabia during his life, indicating that the sociopolitical and theological

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[46] Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 185.
[47] Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). On page viii, the authors indicate that this book is "written by infidels for infidels."
[48] Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

circumstances of the authors heavily influence extant sources.[49] For Peters, only the Qurʾan offers a text that could be traced to seventh-century Arabia; however, there is "no appropriate contemporary and contopological setting against which to read the Qurʾan."[50]

While many of the scholars mentioned in this section did not write a biography on Muhammad, their work influenced and modified the ways in which scholars during the twentieth century until today approach early Islam in general and his life in particular. Wansbrough, for instance, not only inspired his students, but also numerous others who sometimes brought provocative perspectives on Islam and its founder.

Defensive and Apologetic Quests of the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century, there were many scholars who responded to revisionist scholarship. Scholars such as Khan and Ameer Ali were, for the most part, not as acknowledged or referenced in the twentieth century as they should have been. Therefore, challenging revisionist conclusions came from several non-Muslim scholars who sought not only to rebut previous scholarship, but also to offer their own depictions and portraits of Muhammad and Islam, using traditional sources.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal was a prominent Islamist who vehemently defended traditional sources and attacked numerous biographies in his book, *Life of Muhammad*. Using early Muslim sources, he challenges Western scholars using a defensive tone to invalidate their claims and historical-critical methods. He also omits all miracles attributed to Muhammad during his life, which has brought both praise and condemnation, particularly from Muslim theologians.[51]

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[49] Francis Peters, "The Quest for the Historical Muhammad" *International Journal of Middle Eastern* Studies 23, 3 (1991), 304.
[50] Peters, "The Quest for the Historical Muhammad," 292.
[51] Muhammad Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad* 8th edition, trans. Isma'il Ragi A. al-Faruqi (Oak Brook: American Trust Publications, 2014), lxxix-lxxxii.

Haykal's biography was applauded by like-minded Muslim scholars as well as Western scholars for being rational in its omission of miracles. On the other hand, he was criticized for debating miracles, some of which are important to Muslims and the formation of Islam, including *Israʾ* and *Miʿraj* (Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven), the opening of Muhammad's chest, and his episode in a cave with Abu Bakr.

A contemporary of Haykal was Tor Andrae, a historian of religions and Lutheran bishop of the Swedish church. Specializing in religious psychology, he looked at Muhammad's response to the divine call that made him a Prophet. He was particularly interested in the development of Islamic piety, which was derived from Muhammad's personal experience of God.[52] Originally published in German, Andrae's *Muhammad: Hans Liv och hans tro* (Mohammed: The Man and His Faith) is a biography that surveys the origins, tenets, and substance of Islam to offer a deep understanding of Muhammad and his faith. He also connects his life to the larger question of what religion is, as well as to other religious figures.[53] Although Andrea does not accept traditional Muslim claims about revelation, he does not reduce Islam as a combination of earlier Abrahamic religions. On the other hand, he does not hide his own subjectivity and bias toward Christianity, which holds Jesus as exalted and unsurpassable.[54]

Perhaps the greatest scholar of Islam and Muhammad in the twentieth century was William Montgomery Watt, a Scottish historian. Having written several books during his life, his greatest accomplishment lies in his account of Muhammad: a two-volume comprehensive biography on his life. Watt's *Muhammad at Mecca* (1953) and *Muhammad at Medina* (1956) reference many of his predecessors' writing in the nineteenth century, including Lammens, Schacht, and Goldziher;

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[52] Tor Andrea, *Muhammad: The Man and His Faith* trans. Theophil Menzel (Mineola: Dover Publications 2000), 12.
[53] Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 219.
[54] Andrae, *Muhammad*, 191.

however, he is cautious not to adopt their ideologies and conclusions that critique early traditional sources.[55] He also uses early biographies such as Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, and al-Tabari in his biography. To set the life of Muhammad in a fuller historical context, particularly in the Meccan Period (570-622 CE), he offers a "sounder methodology" to regard the Qurʾan and the early traditional accounts as complementary sources, "each with a fundamental contribution to make to the history of the period."[56] Watt has been criticized for focusing too heavily on the socio-political and economic factors that led to the founding of Islam.[57]

In the twenty-first century, Martin Lings, a British scholar who converted to Islam, wrote *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, which attempts to provide a comprehensive and authoritative account of Muhammad in a narrative style that is easy to read. It is based on traditional Muslim accounts but is selective and uncritical in its sources. Lings does not directly confront, challenge, or address previous biographies written during his time or before; however, his account of Muhammad offers an approach that simply ignores arguments that question the reliability and authenticity of traditional sources, including Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Waqidi, which he uses frequently. By ignoring attacks against Islam and Muhammad, including those of Wansbrough, Crone, and Cook, Lings's theological and apologetic defence of Islam allows his audience to read what he believes is an inspiring and authentic look at Muhammad's life, without a long, exhaustive attack on polemicists.

Another important scholar of Muhammad's life is Newby, a historian of religious studies. In *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction and Study of the First Biography of*

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[55] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), xiii-xiv.

[56] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, xv.

[57] Watt's views could become problematic because of its capitalist, even Marxist, understanding surrounding the founding of Islam in seventh-century Arabia. In his books, Watt, like many of his Western contemporaries, often neglects the impact that the Qurʾan itself had on the nascent community.

Muhammad, he draws on several sources to recreate a non-extant document, the *Kitab al-Mubtada* (Book of Beginning), which was written by Ibn Ishaq and has been quoted in many later texts. His reconstruction contains a history of religious figures in Judaism, Christianity, and pre-Islamic Arabia, leading to Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets." When added to Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad, we understand his vision to capture world history beginning with creation and the first Prophet (Adam) until Muhammad's death.

The last scholar I will discuss is Karen Armstrong, a British author, scholar, and journalist. She is one of the few female scholars to have ventured to write about the life of Muhammad. Known for her books on comparative religions, Armstrong has written two books on Muhammad, the first of which was during the twentieth century: *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*. Throughout her biography, she draws comparisons between the three Abrahamic religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and sometimes incorporates examples from Buddhism and Hinduism. Armstrong also contextualizes Muhammad's life to modernity as a way to address contemporary relationships between the Islamic world and the West. More particularly, she aspires to "build a bridge" between the West and the Muslim world, which is riddled with cultural prejudice.[58] Armstrong also writes during a time when fear gripped the West in the form of the Gulf War (1990-1991). She relies heavily on traditionalist secondary scholarship and frequently references the Qurʾan, as well as the works of Ibn Ishaq, al-Waqidi, and Ibn Saʿd, to better understand Muhammad's life.

Apologetic and defensive portraits of Muhammad came predominately from non-Muslims whose publications were read by the same audience reading revisionist scholarship about Muhammad. Of course, some Muslim scholars defended their religion and challenged their

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[58] Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 6-7.

Western counterparts in the twentieth century, but the loudest voices came from non-Muslims, such as Watt and Armstrong, all of whom made their voices heard, especially in opposition to contemporary revisionist scholars. Many defensive accounts were labelled as too sympathetic, uncritical, and apologetic, leading to contentious accounts that went as far as to question whether Muhammad even existed.

Contentious Biographies on Muhammad

Biographers in this section wrote provocative portraits of Muhammad, using fundamentally flawed methods that offered no advancement in scholarship or in reconstructing his life.[59] Starting as early as the twentieth century, there have been publications that question whether Muhammad even existed. In 1930, Nikolai Morozov, a Russian revolutionary, claimed that until the Crusades, Islam was indistinguishable from Judaism.[60] In his book, *Christ*, Morozov argued that Muhammad and the early caliphs were mythical figures. Influenced by Morozov, Luitsian Klimovich, a Soviet Marxist orientalist, published an article titled "Did Muhammad Exist?" in 1930, which focused on the large gap between his alleged lifetime and the first written sources. Klimovich claimed information coming from these late sources cannot be authentic and Muhammad likely never existed; rather, he was created by later historians as a myth.[61]

Using the pen name Ibn Warraq, a polemical author compiled the works of scholars who wrote about the life of Muhammad, especially his historicity. In this edited book, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, he uses scholars' work ranging from the nineteenth century to the

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[59] I use the word "contentious" because the authors mentioned in this section hold political and/or religious views, often promoting extreme perspectives on Muhammad's life and legacy. In addition, these authors advocate for a thorough or complete revision of his life and his significance to Muslims and Islamic history.

[60] Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, 49.

[61] Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, 49.

twenty-first century, including Lammens, Schacht, Hawting, and Lawrence Conrad. Using provocative scholars, Ibn Warraq's work reflects anti-Muslim polemic and a selective reading of sources that fails to provide any significant scholarship. Claiming that his anthology of Western scholars has presented objective historical scholarship on the origins of Islam over the last two hundred years,[62] he also neglects to offer any criteria of authenticity or sound methodology during his examination of texts. Rather, Ibn Warraq seems to be a revisionist who not only lacks expertise in early Islamic literature, but also frequently ignores it throughout his book.

Another provocative writer is Robert Spencer, a polemicist and founder of Jihad Watch. Influenced by Ibn Warraq, he claims that Muhammad may not have existed at all. A self-proclaimed expert on Islam, he has written two books on his life, *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* and *Did Muhammad Exist?: An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins*. Although Spencer may be trying to review available historical documents accurately, flaws are present in his selection of sources as well as his omission of others that contradict his polemical agenda. In addition, he interprets early sources on Muhammad in ways that paint a one-sided portrait of his life and makes radically ill-informed conclusions, including claiming that he was an epithet of Jesus.[63] Spencer also points out that Muhammad's revelations were constructed from already existing material, primarily from Jewish and Christian traditions.

Hans Jansen, a Dutch politician and revisionist scholar of Islam, also doubts the historicity of early Islamic traditions because they were written over one hundred and fifty years after

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[62] On page 78 of *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, Ibn Warraq calls upon Western scholars to "unflinchingly, unapologetically defend their right to examine the Islam [sic], to explain the rise and fall of Islam by the normal mechanisms of human history, according to the objective standards of historical methodology." For him, the scholars in his edited book demonstrate instances of Western scholars being "objectively critical," despite having subjective biases and agendas.

[63] Robert Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2014), 22.

Muhammad's death. In addition, he doubts the existence of Muhammad as a historical figure and founder of Islam. In his books, *De Historische Mohammed: De Mekkaanse Verhalen* (The Historical Muhammad: The Meccan Stories) and *De Historische Mohammed: De Verhalen uit Medina* (The Historical Muhammad: The Stories from Medina), Jansen attempts to prove the inauthenticity of Islamic traditions from the beginning of Islam by writing about the self-contradictions within sources, contradictions between sources, and elaborations and embellishments by later biographers. He claims that the Qurʾan is cryptic and merely alludes to events that took place, leading to inaccurate assumptions related to the context of each revelation.

The last contentious biographer of Muhammad who I will point out is Karl-Heinz Ohlig, a German scholar and representative of the Saarbrücken School of Islamic Studies, which is part of the Revisionist School. Ohlig's co-edited *Die dunklen Anfäng: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam* (The Hidden Origins: New Research on the Origin and Early History of Islam) with Gerd Rudiger Puin, another representative of the Saarbrücken School, questions traditional Islamic narratives surrounding the origins of Islam and claims that it did not emerge as a distinct religion separate from Judaism or Christianity until the ninth century. Other members of this school include Christoph Luxenberg and Volker Popp, both of whom have chapters in this co-edited book. Similar to Spencer's work, this book uses evidence from Arab coinage, inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock, and the translation of the word "Muhammad" to demonstrate how the founder of Islam is not Muhammad; rather, the name symbolizes an honorific title attributed to Jesus.[64]

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[64] Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd Puin, eds, *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research into its Early History* (Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2009), 52-53, 391-392.

Critical Biographies on Muhammad in the Twenty-first Century

The twenty-first century brought us a plethora of new biographies on Muhammad that were influenced, inspired, or opposed to previous perspectives and portraits. Muslim biographies, particularly in the West, continued to focus more on an academic approach rather than theologically based methods. Non-Muslim scholars were balanced in their accounts of Muhammad, usually choosing between traditional or revisionist methods and ideology. While several biographies have been published thus far in the twenty-first century, I will mention only a handful to provide an understanding of different portrayals of Muhammad, especially in the midst of 9/11, the rise of ISIS, and Islamophobia.

Irving Zeitlin, a sociologist, published *The Historical Muhammad*, using traditional sources and modern scholarly theories and interpretations. His book offers a glimpse of the founding of Islam and the role Muhammad played in seventh-century Arabia. Zeitlin analyzes monotheistic ideas, especially of Christians and Jews, prior to the birth of Islam to assess the influences that shaped its rise. The title of this book, however, is quite misleading as he does not reconstruct Muhammad's life; rather, he uses the work of medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), primarily his *Muqaddimah* ("Introduction" or "Prolegomenon"), as his theoretical framework to better understand the socioeconomic context of Arabia, along with modern interpretations of Muhammad's life.[65] Although Zeitlin's book was published in the twenty-first century, he focused on scholarship from as early as the nineteenth century, including works from Muir and Watt. *The Historical Muhammad* lacks the use of more contemporary scholarship and focuses predominately on non-Muslim secondary scholarship.

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[65] Irving Zeitlin, *The Historical Muhammad* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), vii-viii.

Having focused his career on early Islamic conquests and narratives, Fred Donner later wrote *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. In his book, he provides a new vision of the birth of Islam from the time of Muhammad until the rule of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. He says that Islam began as a "Believers' movement" founded by Muhammad who preached strict monotheism and righteous behaviour in accordance with God's revelations.[66] This movement included Christians and Jews in its early years because of their monotheistic beliefs; however, Muslims formed a separate religious community a century later when the movement required all members to acknowledge the Qurʾan as the final revelation of God and Muhammad as their final Prophet. Donner's reinterpretation of the origins of Islam relies on a revisionist perspective, which has Islam and the Qurʾan emerging as a religion and scripture much later than traditional accounts. He is also skeptical in the ability to reconstruct Muhammad's life due to the lack of sources available.[67]

Peters, who was previously mentioned, wrote one of the more interesting and creative biographies on Muhammad in the twenty-first century. While Peters has been skeptical and wary of reconstructing the life of Muhammad, he undertakes a difficult task of comparing and contrasting the lives of Muhammad and Jesus. In *Jesus and Muhammad*, he analyzes the lives of both figures, drawing on modern scholarship to better understand evidence of the sources available. He tries to balance traditionalist approaches with revisionist accounts of Muhammad in his biography, accepting his revelations as not being produced or created by himself; however, Peters also subjects traditional biographies to scrutiny, claiming that Jewish Christians made an

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[66] Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 58.
[67] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 50-56.

enduring impression on Muhammad.[68] He mentions that using early traditional sources to reconstruct his life present us with a "serious methodological problem," as these sources, including the Qurʾan and biographies, are either unreliable or offer us few historical details.[69] Although claiming to have "got it right,"[70] he provides unbalanced accounts of Muhammad and Jesus, which are much less problematic when it comes to Christian sources on Jesus's life.

One of the more recent books on Muhammad was written by Juan Cole, a historian of Modern Islam. His book, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires*, draws almost exclusively on the Qurʾan, as well as contemporary accounts and recent scholarship, to contextualize the rise of Islam historically. Cole points out that the founding of Islam's historical context is amidst wars between the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires, when Muhammad, a spiritual seeker, searches for an alternate movement grounded in peace. He reminds us that the Qurʾan spreads the spirit of peace and harmony. For example, Cole breaks down preconceived notions that have Islam as a violent religion, including how *Shariah* (Islamic) law, does not resemble Muhammad's initial message.[71] He, however, also abandons several traditional accounts surrounding his life and the rise of Islam, including his claim that Muhammad regularly conversed with Jews and Christians about their religions in Syria.[72] Cole also depicts him as pro-Roman based on his interpretation of Qurʾanic verses.[73] Lastly, he points out that Muhammad was literate and able to read biblical scripture,[74] which directly contradicts traditional accounts that maintain

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[68] Francis Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 118-119.

[69] Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 35-36.

[70] Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, xxiii.

[71] Juan Cole, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires* (New York: Nation Books, 2018), 204.

[72] Cole, *Muhammad*, 77-78.

[73] Cole, *Muhammad*, 3.

[74] Cole, *Muhammad*, 31-32.

he was illiterate. These arguments by Cole paint a new portrait of Muhammad, closer to those within the Revisionist School.

Biographies published in the twenty-first century are often written in the context not only of 9/11 and the rise of ISIS, but also Islamophobia due to ignorance and hatred against Islam. While some biographers depict Muhammad as a peaceful or pacifist Prophet, their works often fall within scholarship of the Revisionist School as they rely on particular sources and derive conclusions that abandon traditional accounts and methodology. These types of biographies, however, are not the only ones written in the twenty-first century. Over the last twenty years, there have been numerous biographies that depict Muhammad in a more positive light, relying upon traditional sources.

Traditional Biographies on Muhammad in the Twenty-First Century

In the twenty-first century, a number of Western-educated Muslim scholars joined the debate on Muhammad and the authenticity of early Muslim sources. Several non-Muslim scholars continue to write biographies on his life using traditional sources and ignoring revisionist perspectives and conclusions. Their biographies aspire to counter misunderstandings about Muslims, Islam, and Muhammad, especially in light of Muslim terrorist attacks and organizations.

Adil Salahi, a scholar and former editor of "Islam in Perspective" in *Arab News*, wrote two books on Muhammad that focused on his life, character, and conduct: *Muhammad Man and Prophet: A Complete Study of the Life of the Prophet of Islam* and *Muhammad: His Character and Conduct*. *Muhammad Man and Prophet* offers an analysis of who Muhammad was in seventh-century Arabia. Salahi's over eight-hundred-page book was written for Muslim and non-Muslim audiences to teach them about the faith of Islam and why its Prophet is held in the highest regard.

His biography is both hagiographical and theological in nature, aiming to provide an accurate account of Muhammad based on traditional Muslim sources, such as the Qurʾan and *hadith* literature. *Muhammad: His Character and Conduct* overviews Muhammad's life, including his character, prophethood, military conquests, wives, and dealings with Jews. Salahi intends to show Muhammad's "true" character based on what he believes are authentic Muslim sources. This book is also theological in nature as it attempts to portray Muhammad's character to help counter negative depictions about his life circulating today.

Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss Muslim academic, has written several books on topics surrounding Islam in the West and Islamic reformation. He published *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* to share the role of Muhammad today with a wide audience, particularly in the West. Although Ramadan does not engage critics and revisionists, his book focuses primarily on traditional sources to retell Muhammad's life and the ways in which significant events that took place offer valuable lessons to Muslims today. His portrait establishes Muhammad as a strong, intelligent, and capable leader who took arms to defend his faith and his community.[75] In addition, he is painted as a deeply spiritual figure whose ethics and kindness should be used as an example to solve contemporary issues within the Muslim world and beyond.

Omid Safi, an American Muslim of Iranian origin, wrote a biography of Muhammad similar to Ramadan's portrait. In his book, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters*, Safi addresses the "Muhammad problem" that is present in the contemporary world.[76] Like Ramadan, he focuses on the spiritual roots of Islam embedded in Muhammad and the ways in which Muslims are connected to their Prophet. Written for a wide audience, including both

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[75] Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 103-104, 161.
[76] Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 1-4.

Muslims and non-Muslims, Safi's biography provides an investigation of how memories of Muhammad's life could address key issues today, including holy wars, the status of women, tensions with non-Muslims, and the significance of Jerusalem. He uses traditional sources in his reconstruction of Muhammad's life, especially Ibn Ishaq's biography through Ibn Hisham's recension, as well as Tabari's biography. Unlike Ramadan, Safi traces portraits written over the centuries and points out their animosity and agendas.[77]

There have been few scholars like Schoeler whose work has been overlooked by most scholars of early Islam. He has written extensively on early Islam, particularly in German, which may be the reason why his work is not as referenced as it ought to be. Schoeler's book, *The Biography of Muhammad: Nature and Authenticity*, offers a new approach to biographies that traces sayings closer to Muhammad than ever before. He points out that the earliest surviving biographies date almost two centuries after his death; however, Schoeler claims that by analyzing the transmission and contents of the accounts, we can sometimes reach back to the generation of Muslims a century earlier.[78] Tracing his sources to ʿUrwah through al-Zuhri, he conducts case studies that survey Muhammad's first revelation and the event regarding the slander against ʿAʾisha (d. 678), his wife. Schoeler's book adds significant scholarship to the debate surrounding the authenticity of traditional accounts of Muhammad.

In the twenty-first century, biographies on Muhammad continue to be written for Muslims and non-Muslims. These biographies sometimes build upon the fear that non-Muslims have for Muslims, while others doubt and dismiss early Muslim sources on Muhammad's life. However,

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[77] Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, 7-17.

[78] Gregory Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad: Nature and Authenticity* trans. Uwe Vagelpohl and ed. James Montgomery (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15-18. This English translation was published in 2011. The original was published in German in 1996 as *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über des Leben Mohammeds*.

there are also biographies that take early Muslim sources seriously and use them as their foundation when understanding Muhammad's life. With the latest biography written in 2020, biographies continue to be published in the West and in the Muslim world. Although traditional biographers are critical of early sources, they are not so easily discarded. The Revisionist School is still expanding with new scholars who embrace its ideology and methodology. Some have gone to extremes to prove that Muhammad did not even exist, whereas other scholars point out the impossibility of reconstructing his life.[79]

Current Methods and Trends on Reconstructing Muhammad

Scholars' approaches to the historical Muhammad are diverse and offer varying portraits when reconstructing his life. Their methods build upon the work of their predecessors, while others search for methods outside early Muslim scholarship. Several works accept traditionalist understandings of who Muhammad was based on the sources we have available, whereas other works continue on the path towards revisionist perspectives that attempt to re-examine his life using sources often beyond traditional material, especially non-Muslim sources.

Some of the most prominent scholars who have published works on Muhammad's life no longer hold the same significance as they did twenty or thirty years ago. Scholars such as Watt, Lings, Wansbrough, Schacht, and Crone have been criticized for their views and methods to reconstruct or survey Muhammad's life. New scholars have emerged and have taken on the role of their predecessors in leading the quest for the historical Muhammad. Robert Hoyland, Anthony, Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler have solidified themselves over the last few decades as scholars

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[79] Most scholars, revisionist or traditionalist, will agree that Muhammad did exist. However, revisionist scholars almost always agree that we cannot reconstruct the historical Muhammad with the sources we have available.

tasked with developing methods and new (or nuanced) lines of inquiry to approach sources on Muhammad.

A major trend in scholarship today consists of narrowing the gap of information and traditions between Muhammad's death in 632 and Ibn Ishaq's biography, which I highlighted earlier. Schoeler, Görke, and Anthony, among others, have used sources related to the work of ʿUrwah, either through numerous chains of transmission tracing back to him or letters that he wrote to ʿAbd al-Malik.[80] Both of these cases represent some of the earliest evidence we have of oral and written traditions on Muhammad's life.

As mentioned previously, Schoeler uses ʿUrwah and al-Zuhri as the link between eyewitness accounts and Ibn Ishaq's biography. More particularly, ʿUrwah bridges a sizeable gap of written literature in the seventh century. Schoeler's *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* surveys the transmission of the sciences in early Islam, as well as poetry and *hadith* literature. His analysis provides some interesting details on the transmission of oral traditions in lectures, *hadith*, and *sirah-maghazi*. His two works offer us helpful scholarship on how memory was transmitted and preserved by collectors and authors.

Görke also acknowledges the importance of ʿUrwah in reconstructing events from Muhammad's life, including al-Hudaybiyya.[81] He has published on the historical Muhammad alongside his colleagues Schoeler and Motzki. Motzki's edited book, *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources* brings together influential scholars in the field, including Rubin, Schoeler, Hoyland, Lecker, and Andrew Rippin. He also co-authored *Analysing Muslim Tradition: Studies in Legal, Exegetical, and Maghazi Hadith*. Like Schoeler and Görke, Motzki

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[80] There is some dispute as to whom the letters were sent to: ʿAbd al-Malik or his son, al-Walid.
[81] Andreas Görke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Hudabiyya: A Study of Urwa b. al-Zubayr's Account" in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 240-275.

approaches surviving sources with the aim of recovering lost fragments from later compilations and discovering whether we can use them to reconstruct aspects of Muhammad's life.

One of the most interesting works on the historical Muhammad comes from Görke and Schoeler titled *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads: Das Korpus ʿUrwa ibn az-Zubair* (The Earliest Reports About the Life of Muhammad: The Corpus of ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr), which serves as a culmination of the authors' work over the years. This book includes a detailed analysis of the history of oral and written transmission on Muhammad's life and a thorough approach in advancing our understanding of who he was and what events likely transpired during his life based on traditions tracing back to ʿUrwah. Motzki, Görke and Schoeler have relied heavily on the traditional sources, finding original and unique perspectives on Muhammad's life and our extant sources. They have challenged a number of revisionist scholars (as well as their successors) over the years.

Hoyland builds upon the work of previous revisionist scholars, particularly Crone. In addition to publishing several articles on early Islam, he contributed a major collection of Greek, Syrian, Latin, and Jewish sources that reference the rise of Islam and Muhammad. His book *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* remains significant to those who seek to learn more about how non-Muslim sources acknowledged and understood the rise of Islam, early Muslims, and their Prophet. These sources, which include descriptions of Muhammad's life, travels, and battles, are of particular importance as they are often earlier than most of our extant Muslim sources.

Using the work and conclusions of Crone and Cook's book titled *Hagarism*, Shoemaker's *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* furthers the approach of highlighting the importance of non-Muslim literature, especially those written in the

seventh and eighth centuries.[82] He points out the problems and criticisms of *Hagarism* but also acknowledges its contribution to the field. Shoemaker believes that almost all sources on formative Islam are problematic and are in need of new methods.[83] In his approach, he uses Hoyland's work on non-Muslim sources to argue that Muhammad probably did not die in 632, the year that is almost unanimously agreed upon by scholars today. Rather, he survived to lead the invasion of Palestine as late as 634 because we have numerous sources, predominately non-Muslim ones, that indicate that Muhammad was present.[84] Shoemaker claims to use Muslim sources, including *the Correspondence of Leo III and ʿUmar II*, to prove his thesis, despite virtually all of them in agreement that Muhammad died in 632.[85]

The latest contribution to scholarship is *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam*. Anthony, who has also been inspired by Crone, advances her work on reading non-Muslim sources critically to better understand Muhammad's life. He believes that we should read non-Muslim and Muslim sources together as they could bring us closer to the historical Muhammad. In his book, Anthony surveys three early non-Muslim testimonies of Muhammad, including *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati* (The Teaching of Jacob, the Recently Baptized), as well as early Muslim sources, to take a deeper look into statements regarding the keys of paradise that he claims to possess.[86]

Anthony also provides us with a translation of letters attributed to ʿUrwah, which he argues could constitute one of the earliest extant written sources on Muhammad's life. While the original copies of ʿUrwah's letters have not survived, they have been preserved in a few works, most

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[82] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 1.
[83] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 2.
[84] I will examine and critique Shoemaker's sources and methods in chapter six, when I explore a case study on Muhammad's death.
[85] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 113.
[86] Sean Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 36-58.

notably in al-Tabari. The authenticity of these letters cannot be verified; however, most scholars will claim that they were likely written somewhere between the late seventh and early eighth centuries. These letters outline numerous events that took place during Muhammad's life, from the persecutions he faced to his migration to Medina and from the Battle of Badr to the conquest of Mecca. In addition, Anthony provides interesting examples of how it may be possible that *sirah-maghazi* literature was influenced by non-Muslim traditions. For instance, al-Zuhri's legend of Heraclius's vision was possibly based on *Fredegarii chronico*, which could be traced to the mid-seventh century and, therefore, earlier than al-Zuhri's account. Anthony also points out that al-Zuhri references a Christian source, Ibn Natura, whose identity is unknown but could serve as the link between the sources.[87]

There is no doubt that current methods and trends in scholarship on the historical Muhammad have made us revisit and re-examine approaches to his life. Hoyland's work on surveying a large corpus of material has proven that there is an abundance of sources outside traditional ones that describe the emergence of Islam and its Prophet. Shoemaker selected non-Muslim sources to claim that Muhammad may have lived during the invasion of Palestine, despite the vast majority of Muslim sources claiming that he died of an illness in 632. Because of his views on early Islam and the nature of oral transmission in seventh-century Arabia, Shoemaker has debated heavily with Schoeler, Motzki, and Görke through his publications. Anthony's work represents a culmination of previous scholarship from both traditionalist and revisionist schools; however, he leans toward revising and reworking previous scholarship to balance the use of Muslim and non-Muslim sources. Unfortunately, some of his arguments and evidence are not balanced; instead; they are in favour of non-Muslim sources, which lack a thorough analysis.

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[87] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 196-201.

Revisionist scholars rarely scrutinize non-Muslim sources. While some scholars use them to prove the plausibility of their conclusions, these sources are not convincingly critiqued for their authenticity as the motivations and reliability of non-Muslim sources could be as complex and problematic as Muslim sources, if not worse. Non-Muslim sources on the rise of Islam and Muhammad were biased and polemical, frequently pointing out the falsity of Islam and its Prophet. The inability to thoroughly examine these sources is likely due to the fact that these scholars are specialists on Islam and not necessarily medieval Christianity, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism. By providing an unbalanced critique of their sources, Muslim sources are given the inferior position based on what we know about their uncertainty and partiality.

The most promising method that leads us to the most credible portrait of Muhammad is narrowing the gap between his death and extant sources on his life. Anthony points out how several letters and biographies about Muhammad were initiated by both Umayyad and Abbasid courts, which sought to learn about his life and important events that took place, such as migrations, battles, and treaties. Anthony translates ʿUrwah's letters to ʿAbd al-Malik (or his son al-Walid) and includes his own commentary to contextualize each letter. Schoeler and Görke have not only used these letters as well as traditions traced back to him through his students, but they have also written extensively on the benefits of using ʿUrwah to link eyewitness accounts and written biographies on Muhammad. Schoeler, Motzki, along with their colleagues, continue to use the *isnad*-cum-*matn* analysis in their work. This method, which has been deployed over the last few decades, assembles the full corpus of available material on a particular episode or event and uses *isnad* analysis to compare the texts and chains of transmission.[88]

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[88] Gregory Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 18-19. Some of the limitations of this method are outlined in Anthony's *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, pages 5-7.

What recent scholarship has demonstrated is that there is room for new perspectives and understandings of the historical Muhammad as well as our available sources. Although some revisionist understandings of Muhammad's life have brought us new questions, findings, and criticisms, there is still much to learn about who he was. For example, *Hagarism* brought an extreme perspective of how using non-Muslim sources exclusively could paint a unique portrait of Muhammad. Scholars such as Anthony, Hoyland, and Shoemaker build upon Crone and Cook's book and even rectify some of the major flaws and errors. Schoeler, Görke, and Anthony's use of ʿUrwah's letters and traditions passed down to his students have given us new insights of our surviving sources, providing us with the closest accounts about Muhammad we have to date. However, the presuppositions and bias that ʿUrwah had are unknown to us for the most part. For example, there is an absence of ʿAli, who during the time of writing was considered a rival and pretender to the Umayyad court.[89] We could, therefore, conclude that ʿUrwah had his own reservations about ʿAli or left him out to appease and gain favour with the Umayyad court (or both). In addition, his father, al-Zubayr, opposed ʿAli's caliphate and became his rival, claiming that he was responsible for the death of his predecessor, ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan (r. 644-656). Along with Talha ibn Ubayd Allah (d. 656) and ʿAʾisha, al-Zubayr recruited an army to fight ʿAli at the Battle of the Camel (656).[90] ʿUrwah's brother, ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692) fought against ʿAli at the battle, despite his father's withdrawal. He later proclaimed himself Caliph after the death of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid (r. 680-683), who he did not accept.

A number of scholars have used historical Jesus scholarship on the historical Muhammad. For centuries, scholars sought to compare and contrast the lives of Jesus and Muhammad, often trying to demonstrate the latter's problems, falsity, inferiority. Renan was likely the first prominent

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[89] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 105.
[90] According to Muslim sources, Al-Zubayr decided not to take part in the battle after meeting with ʿAli.

historical Jesus scholar to write about the origins of Islam. He famously wrote that Muhammad was "born in the full light of history."[91] The work of Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* inspired some scholars of early Islam to use "objective historical critical analysis" to discover a Muhammad who was different from the conventional picture preserved in traditional accounts of his life. Trying to produce similar results as the field of the historical Jesus, scholars of early Islam began to use "scientific methods" that could filter through sources and reveal the "real" Muhammad.

Why use historical Jesus scholarship on the historical Muhammad? In their article, "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus: A Comparison of Scholarly Reinventions and Reinterpretations," Herbert Berg and Sarah Rollins discuss issues associated with historical reconstructions of Jesus and Muhammad. They mention that few scholars of Islam are knowledgeable on historical Jesus scholarship, whereas scholars of historical Jesus are unaware of the work on the historical Muhammad.[92] In addition, while scholarship on the historical Jesus is more sophisticated and detailed than scholarship on the historical Muhammad,[93] scholars of the historical Jesus and historical Muhammad have much in common and much to teach one another about historical reconstructions, including methodological approaches and conclusions.[94]

Shoemaker's *The Death of a Prophet* uses methods and perspectives borrowed from historical Jesus scholarship to defend his thesis that Muhammad was likely alive past 632 and possibly led a Palestinian invasion in 634. He says, "We must deploy methods capable of identifying different types of bias and excavating information from these sources, along the lines

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[91] Ernest Renan, "Mahomet et les origines de l'islamisme," *Revue des deux Mondes* 12, no. 6 (1851), 1065.
[92] Herbert Berg and Sarah Rollins, "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus: A Comparison of Scholarly Reinventions and Reinterpretations," *Studies in Religion* 37, 2 (2008), 272.
[93] Berg and Rollins, "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus," 278.
[94] Berg and Rollins, "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus," 272.

of those techniques used to reconstruct the historical Jesus from the highly theologized narratives of the Christian gospels."[95] More particularly, Shoemaker makes use of the criteria of authenticity that historical Jesus scholars use to decipher whether a saying or story about Jesus is authentic.

Conclusion

Hundreds of biographies on Muhammad's life have been written over the last fourteen hundred years. Muslim theologians and historians were the first to produce biographies for Muslim communities, allowing them to learn about the rise of Islam and its founder. These biographies were hagiographical in nature and established an idealized and glorified portrait of Muhammad. In the ninth and tenth centuries, biographies were also written with polemical agendas to debate with theologians from other religions, who felt that Muhammad was inferior to other prophets such as Jesus and Moses. Therefore, it may have been deemed necessary for Muslims to exaggerate or create stories to demonstrate that Muhammad had performed miracles during his life. Although the earliest surviving biographies were written in the ninth century, we are aware of biographies written in the eighth century, perhaps even in the late seventh century.[96] Unfortunately, these sources have not survived.

While Muslim scholars were writing biographies on their Prophet, who they considered the final messenger of God, non-Muslims, particularly Christian and Jewish theologians, quickly circulated accounts about Muhammad within and outside the growing Islamic world. Non-Muslim accounts of his life were written as early as the seventh century and focused primarily on his lack

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[95] Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 3.
[96] Ibn Ishaq wrote *Sirat Rasul Allah* (Biography of the Messenger of God) during his life. Al-Zuhri also likely wrote a book of *maghazi* (book of conquests). In addition, ʿUrwah wrote letters about Muhammad to Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and may have even written a biography on his life. See Alfred Guillaume's *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), xiv-xvii.

of miracles, controversial events, and inferiority to other Abrahamic prophets. Muslims and non-Muslims continued to write biographies one after the other, sometimes countering arguments and conclusions. Elaborations and exaggerations also persisted as authors attempted to outdo the other and offer the "real" Muhammad.

Anthony, Hoyland, Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler have established recent trends in the study of the historical Muhammad, publishing numerous works over the last twenty years. Schoeler, along with some of his colleagues, attempt to narrow the gap between Muhammad's death and Ibn Ishaq's biography. More particularly, the works of Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler help us narrow the gap of written literature to approximately one hundred years, which gives us more confidence in recovering the historical Muhammad. Anthony furthers the work of revisionists but also brings to light new questions about our sources as well as the benefits of non-Muslim sources, which are earlier than most Muslim ones.

Biographies continue to advance new perspectives on who Muhammad *really* was, sometimes using previous methods or developing new ones. There has been no unanimously agreed upon method that paints the best portrait of his life. In fact, Cook claims that there are no objective criteria for authenticity in the study of early Islamic literature.[97] Non-Muslim scholars consider several Muslim historians, academics, and theologians too apologetic, defensive, and subjective, whereas Muslim scholars consider many non-Muslim theologians, academics, and historians too hostile, polemical, and biased. There is no middle path that uses traditional sources with a (Western) critical lens that has been accepted by most scholars of the historical Muhammad.[98] Attempts for a "middle path" have been few as the gap between traditionalists and

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[97] Cook, *Muhammad*, 156.
[98] There may never be an unanimously agreed upon method or criteria of authenticity; however, there is ample room to narrow the gap between revisionist and traditionalist approaches to the historical Muhammad.

revisionists widens, especially in light of current events surrounding Muslim terrorism and a lack of understanding of Islam and its Prophet by far too many non-Muslims.

Can there be a method that leads to a critical, historical approach to sources on Muhammad that often serve as hagiographies? Are we able to use traditional methodology to arrive at the "historical Muhammad"? Or should we rather focus on revisionist methods that question and frequently dismiss early Islamic literature? Can there be criteria of authenticity that is welcomed by traditionalists and revisionists alike? What would the criteria be? Before we can establish a method that may become a "middle path" to the historical Muhammad, we first need to better understand what sources are available to us.

Chapter 2: Available Sources on the Life of Muhammad

Introduction

Soon after Muhammad passed away, numerous biographies, accounts, and legends began to circulate about his life. We possess an abundance of sources that depict who he was, what he said, what he looked like, and where he travelled. These sources were written as early as the seventh century, while Muhammad was alive, to as late as the fourteenth century, over eight hundred years after he lived. Sources also range from the Qurʾan to non-Muslim sources. Unfortunately, several early biographies, including those by ʿUrwah and al-Zuhri, are no longer available. We are, therefore, only able to understand and decipher these lost sources based on later extant ones that reference them. Perhaps the most significant example is the work of Ibn Ishaq. While this work is no longer available, we can piece the historical Muhammad together through later biographers, particularly Ibn Hisham, whose recensions of Ibn Ishaq's work have survived.

The historical Muhammad seems almost impossible to reconstruct without the earliest sources in our possession as later ones have evolved and taken on new roles beyond merely recounting his life from his birth in Mecca to his death in Medina. More particularly, later sources ranged from demonstrating him as the sinless, perfect Messenger of God to modelling him as a Prophet who performed miracles as his predecessors had done. While many scholars have and continue to point out the difficulty in chronologizing Muhammad's life, they, nonetheless, endeavour to recount it, choosing certain sources over others to prove their conclusions.

Sources on Muhammad corroborate but also contradict one another. More particularly, *hadith* literature often complements *sirah-maghazi* literature, while the Qurʾan sometimes contradicts it, especially regarding Muhammad's ability to perform miracles. Thus, it is the scholars' choices, motivations, and contexts that frame Muhammad's portrait. In the twenty-first

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century, we have several "lives" of Muhammad that depict him as a terrorist, peacemaker, ruthless raider, military general, and religious leader. Sources can be manipulated to demonstrate him in a plethora of ways, based on the agenda of the historian, academic, or theologian. What can we do to understand how Muhammad *really* lived? Is it possible to understand instances of how he *actually* acted? Are the extant sources sufficient to illustrate his life accurately? Can we narrow sources down to offer the closest and most reliable depiction of who Muhammad was?

While we cannot reconstruct the "real" Muhammad, the historical Muhammad seeks to reconstruct his life based on our extant sources. Scholars contextualize Muhammad's life historically in Arabia during the sixth and seventh centuries, filtering through available sources and identifying accounts they believe could be authentic. Although we are presented with challenges surrounding the amalgamation between history and theology within our sources, we should not discard them as fabrications or deliberate forgeries of history. My aim is to reconstruct a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life based on surviving sources.

When attempting to understand the ways in which we can reconstruct the historical Muhammad, we could explore historical Jesus scholarship and the ways in which scholars of early Christianity approach sources on Jesus. Within the study of Christianity, a number of scholars have written on the life of Jesus, developing their own criteria to authenticate sayings or events in the New Testament and non-Christian sources. This scholarship has produced fascinating observations that have helped us better understand aspects of his life, including his birthplace, baptism by John, and crucifixion. It is, therefore, my intent to use historical Jesus scholarship as a framework and blueprint to learn the advantages and disadvantages of reconstructing the historical Muhammad through modern critical inquiry.[1] As I go through sources in this chapter, I will include a

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[1] As mentioned previously, John Meier's volumes on the historical Jesus titled *A Marginal Jew* inspired me to explore whether we can apply historical Jesus scholarship, particularly criteria of authenticity, to the historical Muhammad.

comparison on how these sources measure up to the ones used to reconstruct Jesus's life, demonstrating that we could use historical Jesus methodology on the historical Muhammad.

We cannot know *exactly* how Muhammad lived his life because most of our sources were written with an agenda to convert non-Muslims, strengthen the faith and cause of Muslims, and debate tendentiously with Christians and Jews. For instance, within a century after the rise of Islam, biographies were written with the intention to debate, discuss, and argue Muhammad as an equal or better Prophet and Messenger than previous prophets, namely Moses and Jesus. Despite certain motivations surrounding these biographies, there, nevertheless, exists a kernel of truth in most sources. In other words, within our available sources, there is likely a core accuracy at the heart of Muhammad's narrative, alongside elaborations and fabrications. Muhammad's life is outlined rather consistently throughout early sources. Thus, it is possible to establish a rough timeline of his birth, migration, battles, and death.

This chapter surveys and examines available sources that I will use in my case studies. I will begin with the Qurʾan, which is the sole source that we can trace back to the time of Muhammad, considering that passages were written down during his life. While verses are not primarily about his life, there are instances in which important events are mentioned and described, including battles. I will then discuss *hadiths* and their importance to understanding who Muhammad was. *Hadith* literature is the most challenging set of sources as they were rarely written down; rather, they were transmitted orally for almost two hundred years. When *hadiths* were written down, they were used to legitimize authority, laws, and actions of leaders, commanders, and scholars. Next, I will explore *sirah-maghazi* literature and how it is the only genre that provides a comprehensive timeline of Muhammad's life. As already mentioned, these biographies were

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In addition, it was after reading Allison's *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* when I realized how limited we are in reconstructing the life of Muhammad (and Jesus).

written as early as fifty years after his death or as late as eight hundred years after he lived. I, therefore, narrow my focus on biographies, which will be discussed further in that section. After that, I will survey other Islamic literature that offers supporting evidence and accounts of Muhammad within works on the history of Islam and pre-Islamic Arabia. Lastly, I will discuss the use of non-Muslim sources and how they could further corroborate biographies, offering some of the earliest depictions of his life, motivations, and characteristics. Non-Muslim sources are narratives about Muhammad written primarily by Christians and Jews living under Muslim or Christian rule.

Tafsir (Qurʾanic exegesis) will neither be explored in this chapter nor within our case studies as it focuses on the interpretation of the Qurʾan. The beginning of *tafsir* can be traced to the time of Muhammad, when he would share verses of the Qurʾan with his companions and explain their meaning and interpretation. After he died, his companions and later scholars took it upon themselves to interpret the Qurʾanic verses based on their knowledge of it and memories of what Muhammad said about them during his life. This method of interpretation requires *asbab al-nuzul* (the occasions of the revelation) to give a context and better understanding of Qurʾanic verses; however, it is not reliable and often contradictory. Scholars would also examine *hadiths* and *sirah-maghazi* literature to historicize passages from the Qurʾan, proving the occasion that called for a particular verse. *Tafsir*, however, was not established to recall, narrate, or reconstruct Muhammad's life and cannot bring us a deeper understanding of events and episodes that took place as its primary focus was to interpret the Qurʾan.

The Qurʾan

The Qurʾan is the only extant source that can be traced to Muhammad's life in the seventh century.[2]

While there is some debate on whether it was compiled before his death in 632, there is evidence that passages were written down on leafs and parchment during his life, making it our earliest surviving source. In the Qurʾan, there are one hundred and fourteen *suras* and over six thousand *ayat* (verses),[3] encompassing over two hundred revelations that Muslims believe Muhammad received between 610 and 632. Early Muslims acknowledge the Qurʾan as the word of God verbatim given to Muhammad, often through an intermediary, namely Gabriel (or Jibril).

The Qurʾan comprises of oral verses in Arabic that Muhammad revealed to his community, who then wrote it down. *Suras* are not sequential or continuous in themes or chronology. Rather, the Qurʾan moves from one context or theme to the other. For most Muslims, this is not a problem as they believe that it is a timeless scripture that guides them in their daily lives toward salvation.[4] Most scholars agree that it was during the reign of ʿUthman, the third *Rashidun* (Rightly guided) Caliph, when the scripture was standardized into the version that exists today.[5] Some of the earliest copies of it were written in Kufic Arabic, which does not contain vowel signs, making it extremely difficult to read and interpret. It was not until the rule of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, when the first written version with diacritics was produced.[6]

Dividing *suras* chronologically has been attempted by several scholars as early as the eighth century.[7] Jurists and scholars of religious law acknowledged the chronological

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[2] I decided to use Muhammad Abdul Haleem's translation of the Qurʾan because he is considered one of the greatest translators of the Qurʾan in the twenty-first century.

[3] The word *ayat* literally means "signs" or "symbols."

[4] Kenneth Cragg, *Readings in the Qurʾan* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 14.

[5] There are some Revisionist scholars who point out that the Qurʾan was standardized well over one hundred years after Muhammad's death, especially John Wansbrough.

[6] Bruce Lawrence, *The Qurʾan: A Biography* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 7.

[7] Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 69-70.

inconsistencies that affected legal stipulations of the Qurʾan.[8] Other scholars, including Qurʾanic exegetes, used biographies on Muhammad to gain more insight on the chronology of the Qurʾan, focusing on reports of his actions, words, and campaigns, which led to the development of a separate genre of literature, *asbab al-nuzul*.[9] One of the earliest scholars to divide the chapters into either Meccan or Medinan is Ibn ʿAbbas (d. 688), who is considered the traditional father of Qurʾanic exegesis.[10] His work was elaborated upon by al-Baydawi (d. 1316) and al-Suyuti (d. 1505).

In his book, *Discovering the Qurʾan: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Neal Robinson offers us several versions of medieval scholars who sorted *suras* into either Meccan or Medinan chapters.[11] He also debates whether the origin of dividing *suras* into Meccan and Medinan really traces back to Muhammad's companions. Robinson is of the opinion that lists of divided *suras* reflect the opinions of scholars at the time.[12] Today, no universally accepted tradition exists about the precise order of the *suras*. Robinson, however, points out that there is a broad consensus about which *suras* are Meccan or Medinan, giving us an approximate chronological order.[13]

The importance of dividing Meccan and Medinan *suras* not only chronologizes the verses of the Qurʾan, but it also provides us with a timeline of Muhammad's life from his childhood to his Farewell Hajj in 632. Over the last two hundred years, a number of Western non-Muslim scholars have found this system of dividing Meccan and Medinan *suras* problematic and many

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[8] Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology and the Qurʾan," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Claude Gilliot, William Graham, Wadad Kadi, Andrew Rippin, Monique Bernards, John Nawas, et al, accessed February 18, 2021. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00034.
[9] Gerhard, "Chronology and the Qurʾan."
[10] Gerhard, "Chronology and the Qurʾan."
[11] Robinson, *Discovery the Qurʾan*, 69-71.
[12] Robinson, *Discovery the Qurʾan*, 75.
[13] Robinson, *Discovery the Qurʾan*, 71.

endeavoured to provide their own distribution. These scholars, including Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, and Richard Bell, established their own timeline of *suras*, which continues to be used today. More particularly, Sprenger, Hubert Grimme, Frants Buhl, and Watt divided the chronological framework of the Qurʾan into four periods: Mecca i, Mecca ii, Mecca iii, and Medina.[14]

Regardless of the precise accuracy of chronologizing *suras*, we can still use them to better understand how the Qurʾan depicts Muhammad. We can trace several *ayat* that mention him directly or events that is said to have taken place during his life. Uri Rubin says that there is a stark difference when reading the Meccan verses of the Qurʾan alone, without post-Qurʾanic interpretation. More particularly, he claims that Muhammad "emerges as a mortal Prophet who still has no miracle other than the Qurʾan, the book he received from God over the last twenty-two years of his life, first in Mecca (610-622) and then in Medina (622-632). In these passages, he appears as a man who both warns of the oncoming Judgment Day and brings God's message of mercy."[15] However, there are *ayat* that early Muslims may have understood as miraculous events, such as the splitting of the moon (Qurʾan 54: 1-2)[16] and the night of *Isra*ʾ and *Miʿraj* (Qurʾan 17:1 and 17:60).[17] Our Meccan timeline using the Qurʾan exclusively cannot stand on its own historically; rather, we require corroborating sources, such as *sirah-maghazi* and *hadith* to complement the scripture.

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[14] Gerhard, "Chronology and the Qurʾan."

[15] Uri Rubin, "Muhammad's Message in Mecca, Warnings, Signs, and Miracles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

[16] *The Qurʾan*, trans. Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 350. Abdul Haleem, along with many other scholars, point out that this verse is one of the signs of the Day of Judgement. He says that the Arabic used is in the past tense, to help the reader imagine how it will be.

[17] The Qurʾanic verses on the Night Journey confirms such an event took place; however, this is not considered a miracle by Muhammad, but rather a sign of God.

The Medinan verses illustrate Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina and reference a number of battles and events, ranging from the Battle of Badr (624) to his conquering of Mecca. Tarif Khalidi points out that in the Medinan verses we "notice a shift from *a* messenger *from* God to *The* Messenger *of* God," which came with an increase in Muhammad's worldly authority, role as a divinely inspired leader, and position as the legislator of the community.[18] The Qurʾan presents us with a unique situation as it is neither a historical narrative nor is its purpose to record history. However, if we explore it as a historical source, it offers us a starting point of who Muhammad was without trying to embellish or exaggerate his life. In the Qurʾan, he is named four times and there are numerous references to him as *Rasul* (Messenger) or *Nabi* (Prophet), along with frequent instances when verses ask Muhammad to "say" or tell his community or opponents particular verses.[19] Regarding other persons and events mentioned in the Qurʾan, we learn of four religious communities (Jews, Christians, Magians, and Sabians), three Arabian deities (al-Uzza, Manat, and al-Lat), three men (Muhammad, Zayd, and Abu Lahab), two ethnic groups (Qurayshis and Romans), and nine places, including battles sites such as Badr, Mecca, Hunayn, and Yathrib.[20]

Several events and stories mentioned in the Qurʾan could help us narrate key aspects of the historical Muhammad. For instance, the Battle of Badr is discussed in Q. 3:121-125:

> [Prophet], remember when you left your home at dawn to assign battle positions to the believers: God hears and knows everything. Remember when two groups of you were about to lose heart and God protected them – let the believers put their trust in God – God helped you at Badr when you were very weak. Be mindful of God, so that you may be grateful. Remember when you said to the believers, 'Will you be satisfied if your Lord reinforces you by sending down three thousand angels?'

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[18] Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 27. On page 25, Khalidi says that it is the "Messenger of God"/"Prophet" not Muhammad who is at the center of the portrait in the Qurʾan.

[19] Qurʾan names Muhammad directly four times: 3:144, 33:40, 47:2, and 48:29. The Qurʾan also mentions ʿAhmad, which is likely referring to Muhammad, in 61:6.

[20] Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, 69-70.

While we learn little of the actual battle in these verses, we understand that Muhammad led his men and assigned battle positions. We also learn how some Muslims were about to lose heart and how the Qurʾan claims that God helped them secure a victory despite the army being weak. If we are able to include Q. 3:13-14, we can further piece together the battle. This verse says, "You have already seen a sign in the two armies that met in battle, one fighting for God's cause and the other made up of disbelievers. With their own eyes [the former] saw [the latter] to be twice their number, but God helps whoever He will. There truly is a lesson in this for all with eyes to see." Together, these two sets of verses help historicize a battle that took place during Muhammad's life, when he led a weaker, vastly outnumbered army to victory against disbelievers at Badr.[21] Whether early Muslims believed God helped them through divine intervention is debatable and beyond the boundaries of this study.[22]

Another important set of verses are from Qurʾan 93:6-7, which ask, "Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you, find you lost and guide you, find you in need and satisfy your need?" Of course, we cannot understand Muhammad's childhood from these two verses alone; however, if we acknowledge these verses as addressing him directly, we learn that the Qurʾan portrays Muhammad as an orphan, lost, and in need. According to Abdul Haleem, *Sura* 93 (*Al-Duha*) is an early Meccan *sura* addressed to Muhammad to reassure him that God had not forsaken him after an absence of receiving revelations.[23] This *sura* continues to be debated among scholars and theologians alike as to who was addressed: Muhammad or the early Muslim community.[24]

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[21] There are more allusions to the Battle at Badr in the eighth *sura* (*Al-Anfal*).

[22] It seems that Abdul Haleem's translation of Q. 3:121-125 does not directly mention whether angels were sent to help during the battle at Badr. Several authors understand this verse to prove that God sent angels to fight alongside Muhammad and his followers, which helped them gain victory over the disbelievers.

[23] *The Qurʾan*, 425.

[24] Andrew Rippin gives a compelling argument against understanding this verse as addressing Muhammad in his chapter titled "Muhammad in the Qurʾan: Reading Scripture in the 21st Century" in Harald Motzki's edited book *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issues of the Sources* (2000).

However, the majority of scholars and theologians conclude that these verses were addressing Muhammad directly.

In many ways, the Qurʾan's usefulness in understanding the historical Muhammad resembles that of Paul's Letters when trying to understand the life of Jesus. His letters are peripheral to the Jesus's life as they are not exclusively meant to recount events or stories. However, they are the earliest sources on him and sometimes recount episodes that reinforce stories in the Gospels. An example is First Corinthians as we learn that Jesus had brothers (1 Cor. 9:5), including one named James (1 Cor. 15:7), twelve disciples (1 Cor. 15:5), and, more importantly, the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26).[25] Paul rarely quotes Jesus or references events from his life; however, when he does in his letters, it is of immense significance because his agenda is to teach and not necessarily to embellish as the Gospels often do. Likewise, the Qurʾan rarely narrates events and episodes from Muhammad's life. When we do come across such verses, we are given valuable insight.

The Qurʾan offers us the earliest and perhaps the most historical information on Muhammad's life. Although we cannot use it exclusively to compile the full picture of who he was, we are able to learn some of the circumstances surrounding his life, along with some significant events that took place. For example, the Qurʾan indicates that Muhammad was an orphan (Q. 93:6), who was lost (Q. 93:7), in need (Q. 93:8), and received revelations relatively late in his life (Q. 10:16). He was also expelled from his own town (Q. 47:13), emigrated, and remained without a male heir (Q. 33:40). When taken together, the Qurʾan offers us the first understanding of Muhammad's character, thinking, and life. The historical Muhammad assembled

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[25] It was not until recently when scholars, including Mark Goodacre, began to take Paul's Letters more seriously, or at all, when attempting to understand the life of Jesus historically. For more information, refer to *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, 168-169.

exclusively from it is incomplete and possesses large gaps as we are not given exact dates for any event or occasion. Therefore, it is most useful as the earliest source that could be used to verify and authenticate other more elaborate descriptions. These descriptions are contained within *hadith*, *sirah-maghazi*, other Islamic literature, and non-Muslim sources. What happens when stories within *sirah-maghazi* or *hadith* literature are not mentioned in the Qurʾan? Most stories about Muhammad found outside the Qurʾan cannot be supported by it; however, we can use it to better understand the environment and context of seventh-century Arabia. In addition, the Qurʾan allows us to understand how intertwined the verses are with Muhammad's life.

Hadith Literature

Hadith literature offers us the largest amount of information on Muhammad's life. Meaning "news" or "story," *hadith* is a record of traditions on Muhammad, including his sayings, actions, and characteristics. It is revered and used as a major source of guidance and religious law, along with the *sunnah* (habitual practice), which is a body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community. Using *hadith*, we are able to piece together the historical Muhammad chronologically and in great detail. The problem, however, revolves around its authenticity as this literature numbers in the hundreds of thousands. While the Qurʾan was likely compiled and organized into chapters within a few decades of Muhammad's death, the authority of his words and actions remained contested and debated among companions, theologians, and leaders for approximately two centuries, before being compiled into major collections.

There is evidence that Muhammad disapproved the practice of recording his words, especially alongside verses of the Qurʾan. He may have wanted to ensure that his followers would

not confuse any *hadith* with Islamic scripture.[26] This disapproval, however, demonstrates that the practice of recording Muhammad's words did exist during his life as many companions differed on whether *hadiths* should be documented. For example, ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644), the second caliph after Muhammad, may have feared a competition between *hadith* and the Qurʾan, leading him to discourage the reporting of them in general during his caliphate.[27] In addition, he prohibited the transmission of *hadiths* altogether due to severity of forgeries being circulated during his reign.[28]

In his book, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, Jonathan Brown mentions how there are *hadiths* that have Muhammad allowing new Muslims visiting from outside Medina to record his sermons.[29] In addition, he points out that it may be possible to understand contradicting accounts by reading works by some Muslim scholars, including al-Nawawi (d. 1277), who have tried to reconcile reports prohibiting the writing of *hadiths*.[30] They explain that reports condemning the writing of Muhammad's sayings came from earlier years of his prophetic career, when he was concerned about his words being mistaken for Qurʾanic verses. Permission was given to his followers later in his lifetime, when his role as leader of a state required some written records.[31]

From the mid-ninth century to the early tenth century, Muslims gathered *hadiths* into a number of important collections. Writing down sayings and actions of Muhammad were deemed important to the nascent Muslim community because they believed it complemented the Qurʾan,

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[26] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Ḥadith," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, volume 6, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 3726-3733.
[27] William Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (Paris: Mouton and Co, 1977), 109.
[28] Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96.
[29] Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 21.
[30] Brown, *Hadith*, 21-22.
[31] Brown, *Hadith*, 22.

sometimes deciphering and interpreting verses. In addition, Q. 33:22 says, "The Messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often." With Muhammad's life as a model for all Muslim believers, it did not take long for thousands of *hadiths* to be deemed as authentic by theologians, especially if they were recorded by early Muslims, traced back to Muhammad or his companions, and transmitted orally for decades or even centuries. In addition, many of them were fabricated in order to establish religious law and manipulate the authority of the *sunnah*.

Within a hundred years of Muhammad's death, many scholars were troubled by the number of fabricated *hadiths* and sought a solution to authenticate them. The level of fabrication particularly affected Sunni Muslims as they needed a way to interpret the Qurʾan after their Prophet's death. Shia Muslims, on the other hand, also looked to *hadith* for instruction and as a way to decipher the Qurʾan, but they had Imams believed to be the rightful successors to Muhammad and interpreters of their scripture. Although Shia *hadith* literature also possesses a significant number of fabrications, there is far less focus on events from Muhammad's life, when compared to Sunni *hadiths*. Therefore, I will focus exclusively on Sunni *hadith* scholarship and methods used to authentic *hadiths*.[32]

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafiʿi (d. 820), the founder of the Shafiʿi School of Islamic Law, argued that *hadith* literature is a necessary complement to the Qurʾan, putting them on equal footing since their scripture requires Muslims to obey Muhammad.[33] In addition, he mentions how the only true *sunnah* was the prophetic *sunnah*.[34] One of his basic criteria that *hadith* required, for

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[32] Early Shia scholars established authentic *hadiths* to not only understand Muhammad's words and actions, but also to legitimize Shia Imams as his rightful successors. In addition, *hadith* scholars include Imam's sayings alongside Muhammad's *hadith*.

[33] Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 8. Qurʾanic verses include Q. 3:32, 5:92, 24:54, and 64:12.

[34] Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, 9-10.

example, is the *isnad* that is traced from the transmitter all the way back to Muhammad, or one of his companions who heard him say the *matn*. Another criterion is that *hadiths* should not conflict or contradict the Qurʾan in any way. Although criteria were introduced to reduce fabrications, it did not stop hundreds of thousands of them being forged and being labelled as authentic.

Scholars, including al-Shafiʿi, established a new method to examine *hadiths* for their authenticity through rigorous criteria to legitimize both *isnad* and *matn*. This was considered a science, or *ʿilm al-hadith* (study of the tradition). The *isnad* includes a formula of several transmitters who claim that they heard the report from A, on the authority of B, on the authority of C, on the authority of D, from E (usually a companion of Muhammad), who heard Muhammad say it in their presence. This science of verifying the *isnad* examined every transmitter on the chain, observing whether they were trustworthy, of sound mind, and good character. Transmitters also had to be verified to have been alive at a certain time, that their lives overlapped with the next transmitter, and their travels allowed transmitters to have crossed paths. The *matn* was not as rigorously critiqued as the *isnad*. When authenticating *matn*, it should not contradict the Qurʾan or other authentic *hadiths* that have already been verified.

By the tenth century, six compilations became the basis for nearly all subsequent and legal use of *hadith* literature, two of which are regarded as chief in authority.[35] Subgenres were labelled to all collections, including *sahih* (authentic or sound), *sunan* (prophetic *sunnas*), *musnad* (supported by an *isnad*), and *musannaf* (compilation arranged by legal topic). The two works paramount in authority are the compilations of Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim al-Hajjaj (d. 875). Al-Bukhari, who was born in Bukhara, is considered one of the greatest Muslim compilers and scholars of *hadith*. His work, *al-Jami al-sahih* (The Authentic Collection),

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[35] Joseph E. Lowry, "The Prophet as Lawgiver and Legal Authority," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 89.

is accepted by Sunni Muslims as second only to the Qurʾan and as a sacred work. Al-Bukhari spent sixteen years editing his compilation, in which he found approximately seven thousand three hundred traditions to be authentic out of about six hundred thousand *hadiths*. Without repetitions, the total number included in his ninety-three books were around two thousand four hundred. Brown writes that al-Bukhari's compilation was an expression of his vision of Islamic law and dogma backed up by the most authentic *hadiths*.[36]

Born in Nishapur, Muslim established his own *hadith* compilation, which is considered second only to al-Bukhari. Examining approximately three hundred thousand traditions, his work contains about four thousand reports and little over three thousand without repetitions. Muslim travelled extensively throughout the Islamic world to collect *hadiths*. He is praised for his meticulous arrangement according to subject matter. Along with al-Bukhari, their collections are considered the "*Sahih*" and remain extremely influential, continuing to be revered as the most authentic *hadiths* that trace back to Muhammad. Although they differ in scope and plan, they are arranged by legal topic. Overall, there are six main collections that hold a canonical status among Sunni Muslims. In addition to al-Bukhari and Muslim, they include Ibn Maja (d. 887), Abu Daud (d. 889), al-Tirmidhi (d. 892), and al-Nasai (d. 915).[37]

Khalidi points out in his book, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries*, that *hadith* literature from its very beginning in the eighth and ninth centuries was subject to heavy criticism from Muslim scholars who questioned the authenticity of individual *hadiths* as well as the overall methodology.[38] Over the last two hundred years, non-Muslim scholars have questioned, critiqued, and delegitimized the authenticity of *hadith* literature,

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[36] Brown, *Hadith*, 32.
[37] Although the six collections are held in high regard, al-Bukhari and Muslim are considered the two most reliable. Therefore, I will focus only on al-Bukhari and Muslim when analyzing Sunni *hadith* literature on Muhammad's life.
[38] Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 37.

including the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim. In our previous chapter, we explored how scholars such as Goldziher and Schacht argued that most *hadiths* were fabricated. More particularly, Goldziher published the second part of his *Muhammedanische Studien* in 1890, which claims that most of the *hadith* material reflect later developments of Islam and therefore cannot be viewed as a contemporary historical source.[39] Several scholars, including Caetani and Lammens, used his scepticism to conclude that almost all the traditions surrounding Muhammad's life were apocryphal.[40] As previously mentioned, Schacht's critique on *hadith* in his book, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, claims that traditions that allegedly go back to Muhammad are the product of legal, political, and theological developments of the eighth and ninth centuries, which is when we have extant sources on Islamic law, traditions, and biographies on Muhammad. Therefore, Schacht claims that *hadith* literature lacks any historical value.[41] Building upon claims by Goldziher and Schacht, scholars of the Revisionist school, including Wansbrough and Crone, omitted *hadith* material as a source for a historical reconstruction.[42]

To counter these conclusions, a number of scholars refuted claims in their own works. Donner, for instance, outlines major weaknesses of the skeptical approach and concludes that it is highly implausible that a conspiracy so widespread took place and was so successful in fabricating the history of Islam.[43] Harald Motzki emerged to critique Schacht's work, while prominent Muslim scholars also entered into the debate. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Fazlur Rahman criticized Western scholarship on early Muslim sources, including *hadith* literature. Both scholars, however, accepted early Muslim theologians did not perform rigorous enough criticism of *hadith* material, resulting

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[39] Goldziher's conclusions affected the biography of Muhammad even though he focused primarily on legal *hadith*.
[40] Harald Motzki, ed., *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), xii.
[41] Harald Motzki, *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of Sources*, xii.
[42] Wansbrough's *The Sectarian Milieu* abandoned using *hadith* to reconstruct historical facts, whereas Crone's *Hagarism* tried to reconstruct historical facts about Muhammad's life by relying exclusively on non-Muslim sources.
[43] Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 283.

in copious forgeries.[44] Rahman even goes as far as to say that there is some truth to the criticisms levelled by Goldziher and Schacht; however, it is possible to re-examine *hadiths* to determine whether they were actually part of the original *sunnah*.[45]

As mentioned above, Shia *hadiths* also play a role in understanding Muhammad's sayings, actions, and characteristics. To legitimize their community as following his rightful successors, Shia scholars developed their own body of literature that reported sayings of the Shia Imams, in addition to those of their Prophet. Reports tracing back to Muhammad were reported via an Imam, many of which authenticated them not only as the successors but also endowed with esoteric knowledge to interpret God's will correctly.[46] Among the most authentic collections of *hadith* compiled by Shia Ithna ʿAshariyyah (Twelver) Muslims, four stand out for their accuracy and authority: *al-Kafi fi ilm al-din* (The Sufficient [Book] of Religious Knowledge) by Muhammad ibn Yaqub al-Kulayni (d. 939); *Man la yahduruhu al-faqih* ([The Book for] Those Who Have no Access to a Jurist) by Muhammad ibn ʿAli ibn Babawayh (d. 991); *Tahdhib al-ahkam* (The Rectification of Rulings) by Abu Jafar al-Tusi (d. 1067); and *al-Ibtisar fima ikhtalafa minhu al-akhbar* (Perceiving the Differences among Reports) also by al-Tusi.[47] These four collections are called the *al-Kutub al-Arbaah* (Four Books) or *al-Usul al-Arbaah* (The Four Principles). For Shia Muslims, *al-Kafi*, which has over sixteen thousand *hadiths*, is considered the greatest as it is the oldest and most accurate. However, this collection is not completely reliable as there are well over nine thousand weak traditions, compared to the roughly five thousand *sahih hadiths*. In addition,

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[44] Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi: Central Institute for Islamic Research, 1965), 40. Christian Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Press, 1978), 123, 134 and 138-140.

[45] Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, 40.

[46] Lowry, "The Prophet as Lawgiver and Legal Authority," 92.

[47] During this time in Islamic history, the Twelver Shia Muslim (Ithna ʿAshariyyah) had the most developed theology and history among Shia Muslims. For instance, the Ismailis developed their theology after they began their rise in North Africa in 909 CE. After their taking of Egypt, their doctrines developed rapidly, especially those surrounding the legitimacy of Ismaili Imams. It is for this reason that I will concentrate on Shia Ithna ʿAshariyyah *hadith* literature.

apart from *al-Kafi*, the other collections were written primarily for *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and not *hadith* in general.

When exploring *hadith* literature on reconstructing the historical Muhammad, we are provided with an abundance of sources that thoroughly detail almost all aspects of his life, from his sayings to his actions and from his characteristics to his physical features. Certain companions narrated *hadiths* based on their observances of their Prophet, as well as particular interests or moments they shared. For example, Muhammad's wives, primarily ʿAʾisha, serve as sources for *hadiths* on his personal hygiene, domestic habits, and sex life. ʿAʾisha also revealed some of the most important events of his life, including what Muslims believe was his first revelation. In *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 1, Bk. 1, No. 3, al-Bukhari has a report purportedly narrated by her, which describes how Muhammad used to go into seclusion in the cave of Hira, where he used to worship God for many days. The report goes on to include the day when an angel came to him and asked him to read. This narration also includes how Muhammad went to Khadija and asked her to cover him. It continues with Khadija taking him to her cousin, Waraqa bin Naufal (d. 610), a Christian.

Some of al-Bukhari and Muslim's most useful *hadiths* are those that discuss Muhammad's expeditions. Al-Bukhari includes a "Book of Military Expeditions led by the Prophet," whereas Muslim includes "The Book of Jihad and Expeditions." Both books include hundreds of *hadiths* that mention important events such as the Battles of Badr, ʿUhud, Khandaq (Trench), Khaybar, Hunayn, and the conquest of Mecca. These reports include descriptions of the events, sayings of Muhammad, and his actions during these events. Some reports contain verses from the Qurʾan, while others are similar to accounts in *sirah-maghazi*. These *hadiths* will serve to corroborate evidence in other sources, such as the *Qurʾan and sirah-maghazi* as they will not be used to reconstruct the historical Muhammad directly.

To determine the ways in which *hadith* literature helps us reconstruct the historical Muhammad, we need to understand its benefits and flaws. Due to the level of uncertainty and fabrication surrounding *hadiths*, regardless of whether they are *sahih*, it is difficult to determine their accuracy and whether they trace back to Muhammad's life. In *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims: A Textual Analysis*, Rubin says that the compilers considered traditions about Muhammad that dealt with his perfect character, prophetic qualities, nobility, names, physical presence, and miracles.[48] The model of his life was also used to legitimize political, social, or theological agendas. The Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258), for example, brought authority to their name by invoking Muhammad's family, who in this case was his uncle, al-ʿAbbas ibn ʿAbd al-Muttalib (d. 653).

Previous comparisons with historical Jesus scholarship usually had *hadith* aligned with the Gospels. This comparison is problematic because they were compiled very late and its reliability varies from *hadith* to *hadith*. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to align them with New Testament sources other than the Letters of Paul and Gospels, such as the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James, and the Letter of First Peter. Major *hadith* collections were compiled approximately two hundred years after Muhammad died, they are often inaccurate, and too numerous to serve as reliable sources that trace back to Muhammad's life. Some New Testament sources were also written late and only offer a small glimpse of who Jesus was. These sources, like *hadith*, should not be used to reconstruct the historical Jesus directly.

The role of *hadith* in my method will be a supplementary and complementary one that supports other more reliable extant sources such as the Qurʾan and *sirah-maghazi*. More particularly, reports on events including Badr and ʿUhud will serve to corroborate how the Qurʾan

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[48] Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims: A Textual Analysis* (Princeton: Darwin Press, Inc., 1995), 8.

mentions and describes them.[49] Along with *sirah-maghazi*, we get a more detailed idea of what happened during these battles. In this way, we have at least three sources that identify the battle taking place during Muhammad's life. Beyond that, we will not authenticate individual sayings or events that are only referenced in *hadith* literature.

Sirah-Maghazi Literature

Sirah-maghazi literature is the most useful and informative material available on the historical Muhammad. Historians, scholars, and theologians endeavoured to write biographies of Muhammad, some beginning with his birth in Mecca around 570 and others focusing on his military campaigns, or *al-maghazi*. Between his death in 632 and 950, we have several biographies that recount Muhammad's life and offer us thoroughly detailed narrations of who he was as a Messenger of God, merchant, husband, and commander. In this section of the chapter, I will focus primarily on the authors of *sirah-maghazi*, exploring their lives, contexts, and possible agendas for writing about Muhammad.

Unfortunately, no extant biographies trace back to the eighth century. There is, however, evidence that biographies were being written as early as the seventh century, which make them within seventy years of Muhammad's death in 632. Authors of these biographies were careful not to eclipse or divert attention from the Qurʾan.[50] Anthony points out that early biographies were seldom written due to the fact that, before the codification of the Qurʾan, the Arabic language was not solidified as a medium in which written literatures were produced.[51] While Muslims were

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[49] Examples of the battles are in *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 5, Bk. 59.
[50] Maʿmar ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muhammad*, trans. Sean Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), xv.
[51] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xv.

likely to have been interested in learning about their Prophet, only a few wrote biographies as Islam emerged as an oral culture, in which written material was an aberration rather than the rule. Over time, biographers were chosen or took it upon themselves to meticulously piece together Muhammad's life based on eyewitnesses or, if they wrote their biographies after the seventh century, used stories or events that were transmitted orally to be passed on to later generations. These traditions were mentioned, memorized, and sometimes written down.

When using *sirah-maghazi*, we are fortunate to have the names and dates of the authors. Thus, we are able to trace authors' sociopolitical and cultural backgrounds, their proclivities, and possible political or religious agendas.[52] The first *maghazi* (book of Muhammad's conquests) is difficult to date because the earliest examples are either lost or only partially preserved in redacted form. There are two very early biographers who deserve recognition. Aban ibn ʿUthman (d. 719-723), a son of ʿUthman, is reported to have been one of the first to write a book containing the *siyar* (conduct) of Muhammad and his *maghazi*.[53] The historian al-Zubayr ibn Bakkar (d. 870) is the only person to reference Aban's work, mentioning that he undertook a project to compile stories of Muhammad's life in 702 at the request of the Umayyad prince, Sulayman ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, who later reigned as caliph from 715 to 717.[54] His book, however, was burned to ashes when it was revealed to be laden with virtues of Medinan companions, *al-Ansar* (the allies).

The other biographer who wrote one of the earliest biographies was ʿUrwah, a prominent historian and scholar in Medina known for his expertise in *hadith*. His father, al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwam (d. 656) was Muhammad's cousin and one of the first Muslims. ʿUrwah's mother, Asmaʾ

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[52] Being able to determine who wrote each biography and survey their lives is essential when reconstructing the life of Muhammad. When compared to the historical Jesus, we are not able to determine who wrote the Gospels. In addition, we can only estimate with some confidence when and where they were written. Only the letters of Paul that we do not label as pseudo-Paul are the most reliable and earliest examples that offer us valuable information on the life of Jesus.

[53] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxi.

[54] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxi-xxii.

bint Abu Bakr (d. 692), was the daughter of Abu Bakr, which made ʿAʾisha his maternal aunt. He is said to have transmitted reports from all of his relatives, especially ʿAʾisha, as well as many companions of Muhammad. Because ʿUrwah was born between 643 and 649, he would have been able to converse with eyewitnesses directly. Unfortunately, he erased or burned his works, much to his regret in hindsight.[55] ʿUrwah believed that the Qurʾan is the only religious text that should be written down permanently. For him, all other religious literature, including *hadith* and *sirah-maghazi*, should be written down temporarily, if needed, before being memorized.[56]

Regardless of ʿUrwah destroying some or all of his works, material was nevertheless transmitted on his authority, especially accounts of significant events during Muhammad's life. It remains to be determined whether he should be credited as the first author of a systematic book on *maghazi*, as only later sources credit him with it.[57] One of the most important students of ʿUrwah was al-Zuhri. There are contradictory reports regarding his use of writing. Some reports, including one from his student Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), have al-Zuhri denying writing down traditions, whereas others, including one from another student, Maʿmar, have him writing down traditions and not immediately destroying them.[58] He specialized in *hadith*, law, and history, particularly *maghazi*. Al-Zuhri's work has been referenced in almost all extant biographies, including Maʿmar, Ibn Ishaq, and al-Tabari.

As previously mentioned, Ibn Ishaq wrote the earliest extant biography of Muhammad. He was a prominent authority in the field of *sirah-maghazi*. He also studied *fiqh*, *tafsir*, and genealogy, transmitting *hadiths* relevant to these fields.[59] For the most part, Ibn Ishaq's authorities were

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[55] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 21.
[56] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 21.
[57] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 22. Older sources do not mention explicitly whether ʿUrwah wrote down traditions on Muhammad.
[58] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 23. For more information on sources that state both sides of al-Zuhri's writing down traditions, see pages 23-26.
[59] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 26.

scholars, as well as Jews and other members of the *ahl al-kitab* (people of the book).[60] His generation no longer shied away from writing down traditions, including biographies and *hadith*. His work was perhaps the first to offer a consistent chronological structure, beginning from Muhammad's birth in Mecca until his death in Medina.

Ibn Ishaq's work titled *Kitab al-Maghazi* (Book of Military Expeditions) was initiated by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754-775), who ordered him to write a book from the creation of Adam to the present day for the crown prince al-Mahdi (d. 785), who became caliph in 775. This book had three parts: the *Kitab al-Mubtada* ("the Genesis") covering events from the creation until Muhammad's life; the *Kitab al-Mabath* ("the Call"), which was on Muhammad's birth, mission, and *hijra*; and the *Kitab al-Maghazi*, surveying his campaigns and life in Medina.[61] There was also a supplementary fourth part, the *Kitab al-Khulafa* (The Book of the Caliphs), which contained information about the reigns of the caliphs until al-Mansur.[62]

Although none of these parts survived in its original form, students of Ibn Ishaq redacted and passed down his work on Muhammad's life. According to Guillaume, there were at least fifteen recensions of Ibn Ishaq and we possess the greater part of what he wrote.[63] The majority of these recensions are lost or available in small fragments that offer little worth. One student of Ibn Ishaq, Ziyad ibn ʿAbdullah al-Bakkai (d. 799), edited a copy of the biography, which was further edited by Ibn Hisham. While al-Bakkai's edited copy has not survived, Ibn Hisham's did. In *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (History of the Prophets and Kings), al-Tabari used two other students of Ibn Ishaq, Yunus ibn Bukayr (d. 815) and Salama ibn al-Fadl al-Abrash (d. 806), in his account of Muhammad's life. When the works of Ibn Ishaq through Ibn Hisham and al-Tabari,

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[60] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 26. The people of the book included Jews, Christians, and Sabeans.
[61] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 152.
[62] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 152.
[63] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxx-xxxi.

among others, are combined, we are able to better understand his work on Muhammad more holistically.[64]

Born in Basra, Ibn Hisham was clear about his editing and redaction of Ibn Ishaq's biography. As previously mentioned, he used al-Bakkai's recension of Ibn Ishaq's work, which may have already been modified and edited. Schoeler points out, however, that Ibn Hisham produced a "fixed" text, which became the basis of further transmission and would not have been modified substantially.[65] He omitted almost all of the *Kitab al-Mubtada* and some portions of the *Kitab al-Mabath* as he found it irrelevant and compromised due to its dependency on Jewish and Christian sources.[66] In addition, Ibn Hisham admitted to abridging the text in some places and adding information of his own making in others.[67] He confined himself to the biography of Muhammad, which meant that he omitted some of the reports Ibn Ishaq recorded as they did not mention Muhammad or was not referenced in the Qurʾan, such as poems.[68] Ibn Hisham states that he offered a full account of what was known and trustworthy.[69]

Ibn Hisham's recension of Ibn Ishaq was titled *Sirat Muhammad Rasul Allah* (The Sira of the Messenger of Allah), which is one of the earliest instances when an author used the term "*sira*" in a biographical sense.[70] For many readers, his recension remains the most important extant biography of Muhammad and has become second in importance after the Qurʾan, as it provides a structured, detailed, and chronological account. In addition, his work is the most complete extant

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[64] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xix-xxxi. Alfred Guillaume has done a phenomenal job with piecing together the numerous works to get us as close as possible to Ibn Ishaq's biography.

[65] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 33.

[66] Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, 3-4. The first part of Ibn Ishaq's work has been preserved in al-Tabari's Book of History (*Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*).

[67] Ibn Hisham is also said to have omitted some events that present ʿAli as playing an important role in the beginning of Muhammad's mission, which would have made his work pro-Shia.

[68] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 691.

[69] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 691.

[70] Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 15.

recension of Ibn Ishaq's work. Despite being edited and modified, it contains a full biography written within two hundred years of Muhammad's death.

While Ibn Ishaq's work contributes greatly to understanding Muhammad's life, he had a contemporary who also wrote a significant biography that was passed down and survived only as a redacted edition. Maʿmar also gathered material from different sources together in one place.[71] Born in Basra in 714, he was of Persian descent and served as a slave-client of the powerful Arab tribe, the Huddan clan of the Azd. Maʿmar had the privilege of being a student of al-Zuhri, first encountering him in Medina, where he was impressed with his vast knowledge. He became his pupil and student after the Umayyad Caliph Hisham (d. 743) brought al-Zuhri to his court in Rusafah, which is in modern-day Syria, to write down traditions about Muhammad's life, among other things.[72] While under Caliph Hisham's order, al-Zuhri's lectures were written down by state secretaries. Maʿmar journeyed to his teacher's new residence as a trader but remained as a pupil. He learned al-Zuhri's traditions, memorized them, and reviewed them for correction.[73]

After al-Zuhri's death in 742, Maʿmar moved to Yemen, where he met his most famous pupil, ʿAbd al-Razzaq ibn Hammam al-Sanʿani (d. 827). ʿAbd al-Razzaq spent the last seven or eight years of Maʿmar's life with him, preserving his teachings and knowledge.[74] He committed to memory Maʿmar's traditions, including the chains of authorities that presumably go back to eyewitnesses of the events.[75] ʿAbd al-Razzaq's work is important to us because it was the first to present Maʿmar's scholarship in a book-like form that has survived today.[76] Although it is not in chronological order, his volume on Muhammad includes several major events, but also glaring

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[71] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xii.
[72] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxiv-xxv.
[73] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxv.
[74] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxvi.
[75] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxi.
[76] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xxvi.

omissions that beg questions on whether he transmitted Maʿmar's entire work, if Maʿmar did not transmit al-Zuhri's entire work, or whether these omitted events ever took place.

Another significant biography that has survived is al-Waqidi's *Kitab al-Maghazi* (Book of Expeditions). Born in Medina in 747, he was a scholar and historian who spent much of his time collecting information and traditions about Muhammad, including meeting people who knew his companions or one of their descendants.[77] Al-Waqidi also served as a tour guide for the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809), which led him to move with his family to Baghdad in 796.[78] He was appointed as a judge over the eastern side of Baghdad due to his knowledge of the traditions surrounding early Islam and Muhammad.[79]

Al-Waqidi is said to have written about twenty-one books, including histories of Mecca and Medina, *fiqh*, and *hadith*; however, only his *Kitab al-Maghazi* has survived, which is the oldest extant biography that we have in its entirety.[80] Rizwi Faizer says al-Waqidi's *maghazi* "describes for us a leader who is very much a part of his community, he shares in the people's hunger and pain, insists on their charity for the needy, participates in their toil and labor, and incessantly reminds them of a just, but forgiving Lord, who is on his (Muhammad's) side, helping him win battles and perform miracles as only a prophet can."[81] She claims that al-Waqidi often combined different accounts offered by transmitters into a blended narrative.[82] She also states that his account of Muhammad was produced as an attempt to challenge the work of his older contemporary, Ibn

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[77] Muhammad ibn ʿUmar al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad: Al-Waqidi's Kitab al-Maghazi*, ed. Rizwi Faizer and trans. Rizwi Faizer, Amal Ismail, and Abdulkader Tayob (New York: Routledge, 2011), xi.
[78] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xi.
[79] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xi.
[80] Al-Waqidi authoring all twenty-one books during his life has been disputed by authors. For more see *The Life of Muhammad*, xiii.
[81] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xii.
[82] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xii.

Ishaq.[83] Al-Waqidi, therefore, pieced together materials that were at times lacking in credibility and neglected to mention when he referenced Ibn Ishaq.[84]

Al-Waqidi's work, nevertheless, offers us a unique perspective on Muhammad's life as he includes material not found in Ibn Ishaq. While it is possible that he used Ibn Ishaq in secret, al-Waqidi likely had other sources that may have traced back to Muhammad or his companions. He could have also possessed the same traditions and transmissions as Ibn Ishaq. Either way, his work represents an independent source for reconstructing the historical Muhammad, especially when it includes material not in Ibn Ishaq's work.[85] Although al-Waqidi is said to have known about Ibn Ishaq's biography,[86] it is unrealistic to assume that he copied it, combined events with other traditions, and invented events that are not mentioned in his predecessor's work.

The next historian who wrote a noteworthy biography was a scribe of al-Waqidi. Ibn Saʿd is considered one of the greatest authorities on Islamic literature, including the life of Muhammad, *hadith*, and *fiqh*. Born in Basra in 784, he became a scribe of al-Waqidi in Baghdad and known as *Katib al-Waqidi* (the scribe of al-Waqidi). Ibn Saʿd travelled to Arabia and Iraq to hear *hadith* by prominent scholars, including Hisham ibn al-Kalbi (d. 819), who he includes in his works. He met numerous scholars during his life, most of whom were considered trustworthy narrators of *hadith*. Ibn Saʿd was meticulous with his examination of narrations and was cautious before including any in his books. He compiled several books, but only three are mentioned by name: *al-Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* (The Great Book of Tiers), *al-Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Saghir* (The Small Book of

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[83] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xii.
[84] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xii.
[85] On the other hand, what is mentioned in al-Waqidi's work and not in Ibn Ishaq's work could be due to the recensions of Ibn Hisham and al-Tabari. While he may have used Ibn Ishaq's work secretly, we should not discount or dismiss the possibility that al-Waqidi used similar resources as his predecessor.
[86] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xiv.

Tiers), and *al-Kitab Akhbar al-Nabi* (The Book of Traditions on Muhammad). *Al-Kitab Akhbar al-Nabi* was later combined with his *Tabaqat*.[87]

Ibn Saʿd's *al-Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* is his only extant work; it is also his most famous text. This book includes various generations of those who transmitted anecdotes, historical or legal, about Muhammad. The first "tier" consists of the *sahaba* (companions) of Muhammad. The first two volumes survey Muhammad's childhood, mission, *hijra*, campaigns, and death. Ibn Saʿd elaborates on some matters in more detail than Ibn Ishaq does, such as letters, embassies, and Muhammad's last illness, but shows almost no interest in pre-Islamic Arabia.[88]

Al-Wadiqi was Ibn Saʿd's main authority regarding Muhammad's life, especially his campaigns. Regarding how trustworthy Ibn Saʿd's work was, we find similar accusations and praise that Ibn Ishaq and al-Waqidi received. While some praise him for his honesty and reliability, others point out that he was untrustworthy and not reliable. Ibn Saʿd's biography of Muhammad provides us with another valuable biography that does not reference Ibn Ishaq and could be considered semi-independent, depending on how al-Waqidi collected his *maghazi*.

Our only Shia historian is ʿAhmad al-Yaʿqubi (d. 897), whose work is rarely used in modern biographies. His writings include the earliest surviving Shia biography of Muhammad, which is within three hundred years of his death. Born in Iraq, al-Yaʿqubi worked in Armenia and then in the Iranian province of Khurasan. His works, particularly the *Taʾrikh* (the History) and the *Kitab al-Buldan* (the Book of the Countries) mention his vast travels across the Islamic world. *Taʾrikh*'s credibility, however, suffered as al-Yaʿqubi was openly Shia. Within this work, there are two parts: the history tracing back to Adam until pre-Islamic Arabia and the rise of Islam until the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Abu al-ʿAbbas ʿAhmad ibn Jaʿfar (al-Muʿtamid) (r. 870-892). There

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[87] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxii.
[88] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxii.

are similarities between this work and the work of Ibn Ishaq as they both begin with creation until the life of Muhammad.

The second half of *Taʾrikh* is particularly important as it includes a detailed biography of Muhammad, offering valuable information surrounding certain events that took place from a uniquely Shia point of view. When placed alongside our other biographies, we are able to paint a portrait of the historical Muhammad that is more holistic and not focused on providing an exclusively Sunni perspective. Though still unbalanced, we are better able to gather evidence from potentially independent sources, despite al-Yaʿqubi not using any chains of transmission. Lastly, his Shia viewpoint is needed as his predecessors and contemporaries were often mindful, cautious, and even fearful about being accused of having Shia views in their work.

The last author to be considered is al-Tabari, who was also a contemporary of al-Yaʿqubi. Born in Tabaristan, which is in modern-day Iran, in the year 839, he was a renown expert in Qurʾanic *tafsir*, *fiqh*, and history. Having travelled extensively to collect both oral and written material from numerous scholars in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, al-Tabari wrote two monumental works that continue to be of significance to academics, theologians, and historians alike: *Tafsir Tabari* (Qurʾanic Commentary of al-Tabari) and *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*.

Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk begins with the time of the prophets, patriarchs, and early kings, followed by the Sassanian Dynasty (224-651), the life of Muhammad, and the rise of Islam until 915. Al-Tabari's section on Muhammad's life draws upon the extensive research of eighth century Medinan scholars. Despite using Ibn Ishaq as his main source, he uses the chronology of both Ibn Ishaq and al-Waqidi and often notes where they differ.[89] Al-Tabari also references Ibn

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[89] Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari: The Victory of Islam vol. 8*, trans. Michael Fishbein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), xx. Al-Tabari was said to have thought al-Waqidi was unreliable as a transmitter of *hadith* and only quoted him when he referred to history, biographies, or Arab stories. In addition,

Hisham, Maʿmar, and Ibn Saʿd as he usually names multiple authorities on a particular tradition, which allows his readers to choose who they believe is more authentic. Examples include who was the first male convert to Islam and how old Muhammad was when he died.

Although al-Tabari was writing around two hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death, his careful compilation of sources, scholarly knowledge, and attention to detail provide the historical Muhammad with a valuable source. As previously mentioned, his work includes traditions that trace to Ibn Ishaq through scholars other than Ibn Hisham, particularly Ibn al-Fadl and Ibn Bukayr.[90] Al-Tabari's work, therefore, offers us a unique compilation of almost every early source on Muhammad, including traditions passed down from ʿUrwah and al-Zuhri.

Sirah-maghazi literature is the most valuable material when attempting to reconstruct the historical Muhammad. Although the biographies I have mentioned were written between one hundred and three hundred years after Muhammad's death, we are not only able to determine the authors of these biographies, but also the chains of authorities for most of their traditions that were passed down orally or in written form. Other important biographies were written after al-Tabari's *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, most notably the biography by ʿUmar ibn Kathir (d. 1373) titled *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* (The Life of the Prophet). However, I use *sirah-maghazi* literature until al-Tabari as sources beyond his work only repeat previous accounts and further elaborate or embellish upon stories or events. New information from later biographers was likely to have been invented or fabricated based on their sociopolitical, cultural, and theological contexts. Al-Tabari's work is the last available biography that thoroughly examines sources for their veracity and plausibility.

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al-Tabari rarely quotes al-Waqidi fully and rarely references him if it is not already mentioned by Ibn Ishaq. For more information, see page xxi.

[90] Salamah ibn al-Fadl's recension of Ibn Ishaq is considered the most reliable one. Ibn Hisham's recension did not include the 'Satanic Verses' episode, which begs the question of whether Ibn Hisham deliberately omitted the episode or his whether his recension from al-Baqqai did not include it.

In addition, we end with his biography because it helps corroborate works from Ibn Ishaq, Maʿmar, al-Waqidi, and Ibn Saʿd.

Ibn Ishaq's biography, although not extant in its original form, provides evidence that biographies were written approximately one hundred years after Muhammad's death. Had it survived fully intact, it would have been significantly longer than the edition we have from Ibn Hisham. Maʿmar's extant edition through ʿAbd al-Razzaq is much smaller in size than Ibn Ishaq's work. Nevertheless, it represents a substantial collection of al-Zuhri's *maghazi*. Ibn Saʿd's work builds upon previous works and serves as a complete biography of Muhammad.

Al-Waqidi's *maghazi* is controversial as scholars have debated its reliability, authenticity, and originality. Faizer mentions that al-Waqidi maintains Ibn Ishaq's broad narrative outline; however, he often mixes transmitters in order to convey a more interesting story.[91] Although he is said to have wanted his *maghazi* to rival Ibn Ishaq's biography,[92] it seems peculiar that he did not write a complete biography of Muhammad, as his scribe, Ibn Saʿd, did. If he had copied Ibn Ishaq's work, he is almost certain to have had copies of his *al-Mabʿath* (the Call) and *al-Maghazi* (the Expeditions). In addition, he likely had the same resources that Ibn Saʿd did but, despite that, he did not write a full biography. Perhaps, it is possible that al-Waqidi did not manipulate or "plagiarize" Ibn Ishaq's work as much as some scholars have claimed. While he may have used his work without referencing it, al-Waqidi may have used other sources to compile his *maghazi*. Of course, he probably elaborated on his sources and offered more details than his predecessors; however, we can, in some instances, identify his work as independent from Ibn Ishaq's biography. Despite being pointed out as untrustworthy, others, including al-Tabari, Ibn Saʿd, and Ibn Kathir, reference al-Waqidi's traditions in their work.

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[91] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxi.
[92] Al-Waqidi, *The Life of Muhammad*, xii.

When compared to historical Jesus scholarship, we could compare depictions of Muhammad from *sirah-maghazi* literature to accounts of Jesus within canonical and some extra canonical gospels, particularly the Gospel of Thomas. Similar to how the Gospels portray Jesus, *sirah-maghazi* covers a significant portion of Muhammad's life. The Gospels, like *sirah-maghazi*, are the most valuable sources to reconstruct the historical Jesus as they offer thoroughly details surrounding his life. It is interesting that both rarely cover events of Jesus and Muhammad's childhood, as there is more emphasis on their adulthood. In addition, the Gospels and *sirah-maghazi* have instances of incompatibility and contradictions that are challenging to reconcile. Our sources, however, usually agree on a general outline of Jesus and Muhammad. A major difference is that the canonical Gospels were likely written within seventy years after Jesus's death, whereas *sirah-maghazi* was written at least one hundred years after Muhammad's death. We are also not able to confirm where and when the Gospels were written, which would allow us to better understand the sociopolitical and cultural context of each gospel. Although *sirah-maghazi* was written much later than the Gospels were, we have the advantage of knowing the authors of biographies, as well as the years in which they lived. In this way, we are able to better assess the context and background of authors and determine political and theological agendas.

Other Islamic Literature

Literature on pre-Islamic Arabia is scarce and not reliable enough to provide us with a complete portrait of Muhammad's life. Early Muslim authors' works on pre-Islamic Arabia and its surroundings were written well after the formation of Islam, recounting a history from a Muslim and Islamic perspective. In his book, Hoyland notes that early Muslim authors on pre-Islamic history focus primarily on the lifetime of Muhammad because they were mostly either "storytellers

wishing to instruct converts in the essentials of Islam or lawyers seeking to formulate Islamic law, and in both cases the Qurʾan and the sayings and deeds of Muhammad were their two major concerns."[93] He neglects to acknowledge that many of these early Muslim authors were historians, scholars, and biographers. Scholars such as Ibn al-Kalbi, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Baladhuri were not storytellers or lawyers; rather, they dedicated their lives to collecting information to write books on genealogies, the history of Islam, and pre-Islamic Arabia. While it is true that Muslim authors wrote with a particular agenda, motive, or bias, we cannot determine or assume that their works are entirely compromised and do not contain any historicity.

This section of the chapter will overview early Muslim works that recount pre-Islamic Arabia and the rise of Islam. I will discuss the works of Ibn al-Kalbi, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Baladhuri, all of whom were influential historians. Since there are no available resources on pre-Islamic Arabia written before the advent of Islam, we are put into a position in which we have to rely upon early Muslim writers to fill in the gaps and take their work at face value.[94] Unlike historical Jesus scholarship, we do not have the benefit of historians such as Tacitus and Josephus who recorded the sociopolitical and cultural context that Jesus lived in.[95] We will, nonetheless, continue with demonstrating how we could lay some foundation of the Arabian context in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Born in Kufa, modern-day Iraq, Ibn al-Kalbi is an important source on pre-Islamic Arabia. His father, Muhammad al-Kalbi (d. 763) was a distinguished scholar of Kufa and an authority on

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[93] Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 9. Hoyland does not use Muslim authors as his primary resource because of their subjectivity. He does, however, present us with a number of sources outside Muslim ones to trace the history of Arabia from the Bronze Age to the rise of Islam.

[94] Non-Muslim authors rarely narrate the setting or background of pre-Islamic Arabia before Muhammad's birth.

[95] Josephus's description of Jesus is almost unanimously considered to have been modified and altered by later Christians to portray Jesus as a miracle worker who came back to life after his crucifixion. See Meier's third chapter on Josephus (56-88) in *A Marginal Jew, vol. 1.*

pre-Islamic Arabia as both father and son were regarded as chief authorities on Arab genealogy. Ibn al-Kalbi spent most of his life in Baghdad, teaching and writing. He wrote extensively on early Arabs and on religion, both Islam and polytheism, most notably *Kitab al-Asnam* (Book of Idols) and *Jamharat al-Nasab* (The Abundance of Kinship). *Kitab al-Asnam* surveys pre-Islamic beliefs in Arabia, as well as tribal Arab deities. Ibn al-Kalbi offers descriptions on twenty-five deities, including the three chief goddesses of Mecca: Manat, al-Lat, and al-Uzza.[96]

Jamharat al-Nasab establishes a genealogical link to demonstrate that Muhammad was a descendant of Ishmael and that all Arabs come from him and therefore Abraham. In 1966, it was compiled into a two-volume study by Werner Caskel entitled *Ğamharat an-nasab: das genealogische Werk des Hišam Ibn-Muḥammad al-Kalbi* (The Abundance of Kinship: The Genealogical Work of Hisham ibn Muhammad al-Kalbi). This significant work surveys the politics, religion, and literature of the pre-Islamic and early Muslim Arabs. Ibn al-Kalbi's extant works preserved valuable information on pre-Islamic Arabian gods, tribal customs, and genealogy.

Although we have previously acknowledged the importance of Ibn Saʿd's biography, we should also point out the importance of his contribution to biographies of Muhammad's companions, wives, and the early Muslim community, in general. He worked under Ibn al-Kalbi, learning genealogy from him. His *al-Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* provides genealogies of early Muslims, descriptions of how particular Muslims met Muhammad, and when they converted. In many ways, Ibn Saʿd's work serves as the first major Muslim biographical dictionary and the most famous *tabaqat* (genealogies). Among later biographical dictionaries of *hadith* transmitters written in the ninth and tenth centuries, his stands out as a detailed account with full biographies that include lineages, dates of births and deaths, and relevant reports. Ibn Saʿd's work consists of eight

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[96] These three idols were considered the daughters of Allah and were worshipped throughout Arabia. They are also mentioned in the Qurʾan and are referenced in the so-called "Satanic Verses."

volumes. While the first two volumes are dedicated to Muhammad's biography, other volumes contain biographies of his companions, wives, and *hadith* transmitters.

By the thirteenth century, *al-Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* became a main point of reference in matters related to early Muslim generations, especially those who were closest to Muhammad. One of the most prominent features of this work is how it contains chains of authorities for each transmission. Readers are, therefore, able to determine the trustworthiness of the narrators in the chain by judging for themselves the authenticity, reliability, and veracity of a particular narration. This work is helpful in understanding the history of early Muslims during the time of Muhammad and the rise of Islam. Ibn Saʿd includes biographies of over four thousand people, including six hundred women and about three hundred men who fought at the Battle of Badr.

The last author who I will note also wrote about both the life of Muhammad and the context of Arabia before, during, and after the rise of Islam: al-Baladhuri. A native of Iraq of Persian descent, he was a close friend of the Abbasid Caliphs al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861) and al-Mustaʿin (r. 862-866). Al-Baladhuri was a student of Ibn Saʿd, studying genealogy under him. Two of his books have survived, both of which describe seventh-century Arabia, particularly the formation of the Islamic empire. *Futuh al-Buldan* (The Origins of the Islamic State) recounts the wars of the early Muslim community from the time of Muhammad, covering conquests within and outside Arabia. This work was actually a synopsis of a much larger work that has not survived. It is based on oral history, documents, biographies, and campaign accounts. In addition, it preserves valuable information on local administration and chief Muslim families. Philip Hitti mentions that reports

trace back to their original sources and are "free from exaggeration and flaw of imagination," as al-Baladhuri attempts to be genuinely concerned to record what actually happened.[97]

Al-Baladhuri's other book, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, which was previously mentioned, is a biographical work in genealogical order dedicated to the Arab aristocracy, beginning with the life of Muhammad and continues with the history of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, recording their reigns as rulers. Its account of Muhammad describes significant events and episodes, including his migration to Medina, his major battles, and his death. In addition, it emphasizes the importance of family tradition and lineage as sources of loyalty and paradigms for descendants. Al-Baladhuri is considered by Hitti to be the last great historian on Muslim campaigns.[98] He relied on the works of Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Saʿd but does not use Ibn Hisham's recension. Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Saʿd, al-Tabari, and al-Baladhuri are considered to be the founding fathers of the early biography of Muhammad.[99] Al-Baladhuri also worked on genealogy and the history of early Islamic campaigns, which help us better understand the context of early Islamic history.

Historians have offered some insight and context of pre-Islamic Arabia. A number of scholars have written reports about events and people who lived during Muhammad's life. It is interesting that Ibn al-Kalbi was the teacher of Ibn Saʿd, who happened to be the teacher of al-Baladhuri. These three scholars are connected as Ibn al-Kalbi passed down his knowledge of genealogies, which reached al-Baladhuri through Ibn Saʿd. While Muhammad is the focal point of these scholars' work, we are still able to understand pre-Islamic Arabian gods, tribal customs, Arab genealogies, and significant figures in his life.

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[97] ʿAhmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan (The Origins of the Islamic State)*, vol. 1, trans. Philip Khuri Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 7.
[98] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, vol. 1, trans. Hitti, 5.
[99] Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 16.

If we are to compare the works of Ibn al-Kalbi, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Baladhuri with literature that describes the region and context Jesus was living in, we would be at a disadvantage. The works of Josephus and Tacitus increase our knowledge of first century Judea considerably as they describe the Roman Empire and Jewish communities living in the Roman province. Both authors mention Jesus of Nazareth; however, there is little information about Jesus in Tacitus, other than the fact that Christians are named after Christ, who was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate (r. 26-36). Josephus also offers a short summary of Jesus's life, but many consider it to have been modified later on to legitimize Jesus as Christ. However, their works, along with others who have written about the Roman Empire in the first century, lay a solid foundation that contextualizes the sociopolitical and cultural background of Judea not only as a land of Jewish communities, but also as a land under Roman administration. The works of early Muslim scholars lay no such foundation for historians to understand seventh century Arabia before the rise of Islam; however, by using the extant historical works in our possession, we may be able to piece together material to get a stronger sense of the Arabian context Muhammad was living in.

Non-Muslim Literature

While Muslim sources provide us with very detailed and thorough biographies of Muhammad, they are not the only portraits and accounts available to us. In fact, there are many Christian and Jewish accounts of his life that were written before the earliest extant Muslim biography. Eastern Christian writings about Muhammad were written as early as 640, within ten years of his death. Their depictions of him, the Arabs, and Islam usually represent initial reactions to battles that took place in Byzantine and Sassanian territory. More specifically, Islam was viewed as a threat militarily, politically, and theologically as it was expanding rapidly into Byzantine territory and

claiming to be a continuation of both Judaism and Christianity. Attacking the legitimacy of Muhammad was one of the ways Christians and Jews attempted to defend their own religions and superiority, as a repudiation of him was also a rejection of Islam. While polemics are usually present within these sources, there is value as it sometimes corroborates with our Muslim sources.

I will only survey a few non-Muslim writers, including Sebeos, Theophanes, and John of Damascus, recounting their works and descriptions of Muhammad. In addition, I will discuss the *Apology of al-Kindi* and the letters between Leo III (d. 741) and ʿUmar II (d. 720), both of which include interactions between Muslims and Christians. I will then examine how these sources can help us fill in gaps between Muhammad's death and our earliest extant Muslim biographies. While some non-Muslims are likely to have invented or manipulated stories about his life, others may have related what they heard from Muslims as early as the seventh century.

One of the earliest references to Muhammad is found in an anonymous history of Armenia, which ends with Muawiya's victory in 661. It is attributed to Sebeos, Bishop of the Bagratunis. Referred to as Sebeos's History, it is a seventh-century document that records the history of Armenia and the Middle East in the sixth and seventh centuries. This document offers valuable information on events taking place within the Byzantine Empire, the Sassanian Empire, and the nascent Arab movement under Muhammad. More particularly, Sebeos includes what is perhaps the earliest extant description of Muhammad, other than the Qurʾan. He discusses how the Jews called the Arabs to their aid and familiarized them with their scripture; however, because the Arab community was divided, they were not able to help.[100] On Muhammad, Sebeos says:

> At that time a man appeared from among these same sons of Ishmael, whose name was Muhammad, a merchant, who appeared to them as if by God's command as a preacher, as the Way of Truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, because he was especially learned and well informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from On High, through a single command they all came together in unity of religion, and abandoning vain cults, they returned to the living God who had

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[100] Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 200.

appeared to their father Abraham. Then Muhammad established laws for them: not to eat carrion, and not to drink wine, and not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication.[101]

Hoyland states that Sebeos may have lived through early Arab conquests and maintains that his account derives from eyewitnesses.[102] He also considers this account trustworthy and generally accurate.[103] While describing Muhammad, Sebeos refers to him as a son of Ishmael and someone who may have received God's command directly. In addition, he is said to recognize the God of Abraham and united Arabs in faith. Although Sebeos merely presents a basic understanding of who Muhammad was and what he believed in, we could use this early document to corroborate him as a merchant who believed in Abraham's monotheism. Muhammad is also said to have united his community in Islam and forbade a number of actions. Of course, we have no insight into his birth, emigration, battles, and victory in Medina. We also have no Muslim sources that have a Jewish community connected directly to the rise of Islam. Nonetheless, we are offered details that help us reconstruct the historical Muhammad.

John (c. 690), Bishop of Nikiu, is another author who wrote one of the earliest descriptions of Muhammad, albeit very brief. His chronicle begins with the creation and concludes with the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century. Although the original work is lost, we have a surviving Ethiopian translation. John of Nikiu writes about Muhammad when discussing the rule of the Arabs in the land. He says, "And now many of the Egyptians who had been false Christians denied the holy orthodox faith and lifegiving baptism, and embraced the religion of the Moslem, the enemies of God, and accepted the detestable doctrine of the beast, this is Mohammed, and they erred together with these idolaters, and took arms in their hands and fought against the

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[101] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 200.
[102] Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press Inc., 1997), 125.
[103] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 128.

Christians."[104] There seems to be an overt sense of animosity towards Muhammad; however, we are able to discern that he brought a doctrine that Muslims embraced. We are also able to learn about the earliest negative depictions of Muhammad and how he is identified as an idolater and enemy of God.

John of Damascus is revered as a church father, prolific writer, and polemicist. Born in Damascus, he was a Byzantine presbyter and monk who also served in a high position under Umayyad caliphs, as did his father and grandfather before him. Information on his life is scarce as biographies about him were written at least two hundred years after his death and are of questionable reliability.[105] John of Damascus's works, however, have survived and offer us great insight into Christian and Muslim polemic and apologetics. *The Fount of Knowledge* is considered the first systematic exposition of the orthodox faith, whereas his *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* represents a brilliant defense of icons during the Christian iconoclast controversy.

Within the *Fount of Knowledge*, there are three parts: the *Dialectica* ("Philosophical Chapters"), which offers the foundational understanding of the faith, the *De haeresibus* ("Concerning Heresy"), which outlines the errors of other communities, and the *De fide orthodoxa* ("An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith"), which summarizes dogmatic writings of the early Church Fathers. Within his part on heresy, John of Damascus includes a rather long section on Muslims. In his treatise, *Heresy of the Ishmaelites*, he calls Muhammad a false Prophet and refers to his religion as "the forerunner of the Anti-Christ."[106] John of Damascus's writings has influenced generations of Christian apologetics and polemics against Islam. His understanding of

[104] John, Bishop of Nikiu, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, trans. R. H. Charles (London: Williams and Norgate, 1916), 201.

[105] Daniel Janosik, *John of Damascus, First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 21.

[106] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 153.

Muhammad and the Qurʾan represent some of the earliest Christian perspectives on Islam, especially those living within the Islamic world. John of Damascus says:

> From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration…As has been related, this Mohammed wrote many ridiculous books, to each one of which he set a title. For example, there is the book On Woman, in which he plainly makes legal provision for taking four wives and, if it be possible, a thousand concubines–as many as one can maintain, besides the four wives. He also made it legal to put away whichever wife one might wish, and, should one so wish, to take to oneself another in the same way. Mohammed had a friend named Zeid. This man had a beautiful wife with whom Mohammed fell in love. Once, when they were sitting together, Mohammed said: 'Oh, by the way, God has commanded me to take your wife.' The other answered: 'You are an apostle. Do as God has told you and take my wife.'[107]

He uses his knowledge of both the Qurʾan and life of Muhammad in his polemics. Beyond naming him as a false Prophet, John of Damascus also discusses how Muhammad conversed with a monk who taught him both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. He mentions that Muhammad produced a new book that he claimed was sent down from heaven, which represents a divine revelation from God. Unlike many early polemicists, John of Damascus includes "books" of the Qurʾan to help him discredit and delegitimize Muhammad as a Prophet. He demonstrates enough knowledge to attack Islam, using several examples from the scripture, including two on Muhammad's treatment of women. Making use of the events surrounding his marriage to Zaynab, who is not named by John of Damascus, he characterizes Muhammad by referencing a story and the Qurʾan (33:36-38) directly. There are, however, a number of issues surrounding this recollection of events, including mentioning that Zayd was a friend of Muhammad and not his adopted son. While we have some important points about the historical Muhammad, we have to unveil them meticulously as this account is clearly polemical.

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[107] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 153-157.

Another important non-Muslim source comes from Theophanes. Born into a wealthy noble family, he renounced his fortune and became a monk.[108] Theophanes then founded a monastery on the island of Kalonymos, where he practiced calligraphy, and later moved to another monastery in Agros in Bithynia. He wrote a chronicle that serves as a major source for the history not only of the Byzantine Empire, but also of the emerging Islamic world. This chronicle, which bears the name of Theophanes the Confessor, covers over five centuries of history, starting from the late third century until the early ninth century. It represents a continuation of George Synkellos's work, which covers the period from the creation of the world to the ascension of Diocletian (d. 311).[109]

In his chronicle, Theophanes includes an account of Muhammad and the emergence of Islam. Similar to his predecessors, he states that Muhammad is a leader and false Prophet, who was viewed by "misguided" Jews as the Messiah. He also writes:

> He was descended from a very widespread tribe, that of Ishmael, son of Abraham…Being destitute and an orphan, the aforesaid Mouamed [Muhammad] decided to enter the service of a rich woman who was a relative of his, called Chadiga [Khadija], 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. He was also afflicted with epilepsy. When his wife became aware of this, she was greatly distressed, inasmuch as she, a noblewoman, had married a man such as he, who was not only poor, but also an epileptic. He tried deceitfully to placate her by saying, 'I keep seeing a vision of a certain angel called Gabriel, and being unable to bear his sight, I faint and fall down.' Now, she had a certain monk living there, a friend of hers (who had been exiled for his depraved doctrine), and she related everything to him, including the angel's name. Wishing to satisfy her, he said to her, 'He has spoken the truth, for this is the angel who is sent to all the prophets.' When she had heard the words of the false monk, she was the first to believe in Mouamed [Muhammad] and proclaimed to other women of her tribe that he was a prophet. Thus, the report spread from women to men, and first to Aboubacharos [Abu Bakr], whom he left as his successor. This heresy prevailed in the region of Ethribos [Yathrib] in the last resort by war: at first secretly, for ten years, and by war another ten, and openly nine.[110]

This account is one of the most detailed portraits we have by a non-Muslim writer. Despite a polemical agenda to discredit Muhammad's claim to be a Prophet, we are provided with some

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[108] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 428.
[109] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813*, trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xliii.
[110] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 464-465.

details that are similar to early Muslim sources. There are also details of Muhammad's life that were passed on either by other non-Muslim sources or by reinterpreting Muslim biographies circulating at the time. He is perceived as a poor orphan who eventually worked for the wealthy Khadija, whom he later married. Muhammad is said to have travelled to Egypt and Palestine, but the latter was where he learned about the Bible.[111] Theophanes also states that Muhammad suffered from epilepsy, which is how he claimed to receive visions of angel Gabriel. This diagnosis is one of the earliest that we have on Muhammad, which is used frequently by later Christian theologians and historians. Muhammad was then proclaimed a Prophet by a false monk and Khadija became the first Muslim. In addition, Theophanes has Muhammad's "heresy" a secret for the first ten years and then public for nine years.[112] This account is important because it includes several details surrounding Muhammad's life in Mecca, including his "revelations," upbringing, and relationship with Khadija. Although we cannot determine the sources Theophanes used in recounting his life, we can conclude that there was enough information circulating about Muhammad's time in Mecca and Medina. There are parts of his life in this account that are similar not only to other non-Muslim sources, but also early Muslim ones.

The Correspondence of Leo III and ʿUmar II alleges that the Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-Aziz (ʿUmar II) sent a letter to Leo III the Isaurian with the hope of converting the Byzantine Emperor to Islam. Hoyland says that this correspondence, which was unlikely to have occurred between these two rulers, can be traced back to the end of the eighth century as Theophanes mentions that ʿUmar II sent a theological letter to Leo III hoping to persuade him to

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[111] Muhammad is not mentioned to have gone to Egypt in other sources, including both Muslim and non-Muslim accounts.

[112] This secret kept by Muhammad for the first ten years may be referring to his time in Mecca after he received his first revelation, whereas the public practice of Islam for nine years may be alluding to his time in Medina.

convert to Islam.[113] The original text of this letter is now lost; however, Leo's "reply" has been known since the sixteenth century. There is no way to confirm that the portion from ʿUmar II's *actually* comes from a Muslim as it could very well be a polemical debate forged entirely by Christians. There is evidence for this theory based on the Arabic language in ʿUmar II's letters and its influence of Greek. Regardless of whether the letters are from these two rulers, they provide details from Muhammad's life, including his controversial marriage to Zaynab, that must have been circulating around the composition of these letters.

Another source that we cannot trace to a particular date is *The Apology of al-Kindi*, a defence of Christianity against Islam, which was reported to have been written at the court of al-Maʾmun (r. 813-833). Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048), a well-known author, quoted this work as the Epistle of "ʿAbd al-Masih ibn Ishaq, Al-Kindi."[114] While this work cannot be dated precisely with confidence, we can acknowledge that it was written before the eleventh century and possibly during the tenth century. In addition, it is unlikely to have been written at the court of al-Maʾmun. Al-Kindi serves as an early Arab Christian apologist who defends Christianity and criticizes Islam, especially Muhammad. This work is an early non-Muslim source from someone who lived within the Islamic world and who had knowledge about the rise of Islam and its Prophet.

Non-Muslim sources present us with valuable accounts of Muhammad's life. Several of these early non-Muslim sources trace back before our earliest extant Muslim biographies. Of course, we are often offered a depiction that has him considered a false Prophet and antichrist; however, there is a layer that gives us insight into who he was to Muslims and as a historical figure.

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[113] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 490.

[114] William Muir, *The Apology of al-Kindy, Written at the Court of al-Maʾmun, In Defence of Christianity Against Islam*, 2nd ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911), 5. The al-Kindi who wrote this epistle is not al-Kindi (d. 870), the famous philosopher who was patronized by the Abbasid Caliphs al-Maʾmun and al-Muʿtasim (r. 833-842).

Using these sources exclusively, we are able to recognize that Muhammad was a merchant who was considered a Prophet and Messenger of God by his followers. He was also observed as following the religion of Abraham, his ancestor, marrying a woman named Khadija, and leading his community both secretly and openly. If we are able to examine the context in which historians and theologians were writing, we may be able to gather some important facts about his life that could have been circulating in both oral and written form. These descriptions are as early as thirty years after Muhammad died, which shortens the gap between his death and Muslim accounts of his life significantly.

If we compare non-Muslim sources to surviving documents in historical Jesus scholarship, we could relate these sources to the works of Tacitus, Josephus, and other Jewish literature written about early Christianity. However, these authors were not as hostile or polemical as non-Muslim writers were on Muhammad. Sebeos' account of Muhammad is almost as detailed as Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, which contains passages on Jesus. Commonly called the *Testimonium Flavianum* (the "Testimony of Flavius Josephus"), it depicts Jesus as the Messiah, who led men, was condemned to the cross, and appeared to those who loved him after three days.[115] While most scholars will question the authenticity of this testimony, several claim that later Christians modified and redacted the original text. In his book, *A Marginal Jew*, Meier carefully attempts to determine Christian interpolation in this text, which could unveil what may be the original unaltered version by Josephus.[116] Although non-Muslim accounts of Muhammad were not altered or modified over time, they could have been using historical facts that were concealed or veiled under attacks by the authors. Therefore, these sources could provide us with some insight into Muhammad's life, especially when they corroborate extant Muslim sources from the ninth and

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[115] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 60.
[116] Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 59-60.

tenth centuries. Despite not knowing how or from whom non-Muslim authors received their information, details about Muhammad as a merchant, leader, and monotheist all help paint a portrait of the historical Muhammad.

Conclusion

There are hundreds of sources on Muhammad that provide us with significant details on who he was as a man, merchant, husband, father, military strategist, and leader. Sources include the Qurʾan, *hadith* literature, *sirah-maghazi*, other Islamic literature, and non-Muslim sources. When we examine Muslim sources, the Qurʾan is the only source that traces back to Muhammad's life. It possesses a number of direct and indirect references to him, which help us create a timeline of his life. While many scholars point to the fact that the Qurʾan does not directly address Muhammad, this disadvantage could also become its strength. By not having him as the focal point, we have the closest understanding of Muhammad because it could be demonstrating the outline of the historical Muhammad, albeit only ambiguously. Although it is almost impossible to reconstruct his life using the Qurʾan exclusively, it could be explored as a historical document and used as the foundation and earliest source on Muhammad.

We do have evidence that early *hadith* and *sirah-maghazi* were circulating within one hundred years of Muhammad's death. Unfortunately, the earliest written *hadiths* and biographies have not survived. What Muslims believe to be the most authentic *hadiths* are compiled within the works of *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. These two major works took years to compile and authenticate. However, these compilations were published in the ninth century, around two hundred years after Muhammad lived. The majority of *hadiths* are considered fabrications and later developments to legitimize political and religious agendas. *Hadith* literature, therefore, is

only useful in the reconstruction of the historical Muhammad when it corroborates with other sources.

Sirah-maghazi literature details a large portion, sometimes all, of Muhammad's life. We are given dates of significant battles, truces, marriages, and deaths that occurred during his lifetime. While the agenda for writing biographies do not necessarily compromise the integrity of their authenticity, the biographies that have survived were written at least one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death. Biographers such as Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, and al-Tabari provide us with the most elaborate portraits. Some biographies claim to trace their accounts through their teachers, and their teachers, all the way back to eyewitnesses, particularly Muhammad's companions. Many stories on his life are not so favourable and seem unlikely to have been made up, including the boycott of the Banu Hisham and Banu al-Muttalib, the "Satanic Verses," and the defeat at ʿUhud. The kernel of history is present in these biographies and helps us get to the historical Muhammad, who lived in the Hijaz during the seventh century, as we have similar core events and episodes between extant narratives on his life.

Islamic literature other than the Qurʾan, *hadith*, and *sirah-maghazi* are limited but offer similar insight. Written predominately by historians, early Islamic literature offers us an important understanding of the context Muhammad was born into. More particularly, some historians discuss pre-Islamic Arabia, including Arabian idols that were worshipped, while others survey genealogies of early Muslims, tracing their Arab customs and traditions before and during Muhammad's time. The foundation established from these sources is not complete as we are lacking a holistic perspective. In addition, since these sources were written by Muslims, we are given a point of view that demonstrates the ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia, the need for Islam, and the importance of

Muhammad and the Qurʾan. Nonetheless, we can use these sources to better understand pre-Islamic Arabia in its sociopolitical and cultural context.

Non-Muslim sources present us with many of the oldest extant accounts of Muhammad. Several works have survived from the seventh and eighth centuries, some of which include important details on his life. We can see an evolution of portraits on Muhammad that expand and exaggerate his life to include further heresy and illegitimacy. From Sebeos, who gives a somewhat historical description, to John of Damascus, who calls Muhammad a false Prophet and reinterprets some stories that were circulating during his life. Regardless of direct attacks on his life, we could attempt to uncover what reports historians and theologians used to reinterpret or manipulate Muhammad's life, such as describing him as a merchant, orphan, and monotheist.

When using all the sources at our disposal, we are given a vast amount of information that often contradicts itself and demonstrates a strong bias, either for or against Muhammad as a Prophet. We narrow some of these sources within the first few centuries to avoid repetitions and obvious elaborations. More particularly, I will limit our boundaries to the first three hundred years after Muhammad's death. Muslim sources were being written as early as the seventh century, but our earliest extant biographies come in the ninth century from Ibn Hisham and al-Waqidi. Extant non-Muslim accounts about Muhammad were written as early as the seventh century and continued for centuries; however, I will only include depictions of his life for the first three hundred years to fill in gaps and corroborate other accounts.

When compared to available sources on the historical Jesus, there are advantages and disadvantages. The most detailed and elaborate sources we have on Jesus are the Gospels, which allow us to chronologize his life. Most scholars date the Gospel of Mark as the earliest; however, there is no way of knowing exactly when this gospel was written and by whom. The Gospels of

Luke and Matthew present another challenge as we do not know if they used Mark exclusively, Mark and some other gospel(s), or Mark and either Matthew knew Luke or vice versa.[117] In addition, we can observe an evolution of theology for the Gospel of John, especially when we compare this it with the Synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke.[118] Biographies of Muhammad, on the other hand, provide authors' names and dates of their deaths, so that we can understand the sociopolitical, theological, and cultural context each author was writing in. However, extant Muslim biographies were written at least one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death, whereas the Gospels were all likely written within seventy years of Jesus's crucifixion.

The Letters of Paul present us with a peripheral understanding of Jesus, as the letters rarely discuss Jesus's life. Similar to the Qurʾan, these letters have scarce information about Jesus's historical life because it is not the focal point. There are, however, a few instances when Paul writes about Jesus's life, particularly First Corinthians, which references the Last Supper. These letters, at least the ones believed to be written by him,[119] are the earliest historical sources we have on Jesus – just like the Qurʾan on Muhammad – and, therefore, give us details on his life that should be acknowledged as the first on the historical Jesus.

Historians such as Tacitus and Josephus lay a solid foundation on first-century Judea, surveying the history, traditions, and culture in the area. These two historians also mention Jesus in their works, but Josephus does so in much greater detail. As already mentioned, later Christians

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[117] The two-source hypothesis believes that Matthew and Luke did not know each other's work but used the same source (Q) that is now lost. Having worked with a number of Q scholars, including Richard Last, who worked under John Kloppenborg, a prominent scholar of the historical Jesus and Q scholarship, I believe it is plausible that the Q gospel did exist and is one of the earliest gospels on Jesus.

[118] In John, we have some unique episodes taking place, including Jesus as the Word becoming flesh (1:14), Jesus turning water into wine (2:6-11), Jesus resurrecting Lazarus (11:38-44), and Thomas calling Jesus his God (20:28).

[119] The Letters of Paul that most academics will agree were written by him include First Thessalonians, Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, Philippians, Romans, and Philemon.

seem to have modified Josephus' larger account of Jesus to include his miracles and resurrection; however, we may be able to unveil the interpolation and possess what may have been the original account. Unfortunately, we have no pre-Islamic historians who recorded the history, traditions, and cultures of Arabia before the rise of Islam. Historians who eventually wrote about pre-Islamic Arabia offer a Muslim perspective that does not provide a holistic picture.

Accounts of Muhammad coming from non-Muslim sources offer us insight into how Christians and Jews, for example, understood his life in the seventh and eighth century. These accounts are riddled with polemic and are written primarily by Christian theologians. Nonetheless, we may be able to get behind this animosity to gain some insight about Muhammad that may have been circulating early on, using them to corroborate Muslim sources such as the Qurʾan and *sirah-maghazi*.

In sum, we possess an abundance of sources on various aspects of Muhammad's life, but it comes down to their authenticity and veracity, as well as how much historicity they reflect. These sources are much more numerous than ones on Jesus, but the majority of Muslim accounts were written at least one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death. However, when combined with the Qurʾan and non-Muslim sources, we may have a better chance at reconstructing the historical Muhammad.

Chapter 3: Memory as a Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Both Muslim and non-Muslim sources contain gaps and inconsistencies in narrating Muhammad's life that cannot always be reconciled. We have varied dates of events, conversions, and deaths that force us to choose one source over the other. For centuries, Muslim theologians, scholars, and historians have usually had apologetic interests when choosing sources and conclusions about who Muhammad was. Western non-Muslim scholars have also endeavoured to write about his life, choosing sources over others to fit their own methods and conclusions. As mentioned before, some of these scholars have gone as far as to dispute whether Muhammad even existed.[1] With the wealth of sources at our disposal, we are able to select those that suit our own benefit and establish our own views and opinions of events that took place over fourteen hundred years ago.

We do not possess all the sources that were written before extant sources such as Ibn Hisham's recension of Ibn Ishaq's work. Had Ibn Ishaq's original work survived, we would have a much earlier account of Muhammad's life. Maʿmar's work would have also been useful, if it was written down and available in its original form. The only traces we have of it come from ʿAbd al-Razzaq. Better yet, if we had the works of Aban, ʿUrwah, and al-Zuhri, we would have reports on Muhammad written within one hundred years of his death. Unfortunately, we only have fragments of their works preserved within later biographies.

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[1] There are Jesus mythicists as well, including Earl Doherty, Thomas Brodie, and Richard Carrier, who believe that Jesus did not exist. They claim that Jesus was a mythical character who was developed out of Jewish, Hellenistic, and Middle Eastern religious thought.

Since our available sources were written so late, we should explore the ways in which memory played a role in the oral and written transmission of sources. Most history is written from memory, including the lives of significant figures such as Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, and Jesus. The lives of these figures were transmitted orally for decades, even centuries, before being written down. Due to the significance of these figures, we can often notice an evolution in biographies that contain embellishments and exaggerations. For instance, within the Gospels, we could observe how the Gospels of Matthew and Luke elaborate on many stories within the Gospel of Mark.

Within New Testament studies, there has been an emergence of memory studies, pioneered by Birger Gerhardsson in the 1950s, demonstrating the impact that social memory research has had on the relationship between past and present.[2] Scholars such as Kirk, Le Donne, and Rafael Rodríguez argue that memory theory, in its social, cultural, and cognitive dimensions, is able to offer us a unique account of the origins and history of Christianity, particularly Jesus's life. Many of these scholars draw inspiration from Halbwachs's work on social memory, as well as others who have helped advance his theory. They use memory studies on a range of primary sources available, especially those within the New Testament.

It seems possible and even useful to apply memory studies to the historical Muhammad as our available sources contain narratives based on the authors' memory and image of Muhammad, as well as oral traditions that were circulating. This approach is necessary as we have a significant gap between Muhammad's death in 632 and the first extant biography of Ibn Ishaq. While we will not find the "real" Muhammad using memory studies, we could better understand how Muslims

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[2] While Gerhardsson did not use social or cultural memory, he pioneered the use of memory and memorization in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, within which he believes Jesus had his disciples memorize his teachings.

remembered Muhammad, what it meant for Muslims to remember him, and how Muslims constructed their identity based on his life.

In this chapter, I will first introduce memory studies as well as some of the main pioneers of the field. I will then survey how historical Jesus scholars have approached and developed methods to better understand the life of Jesus. This section will provide us with an overview of another quest for a historical figure that has created fascinating insights and conclusions, gaining more traction and interest than the historical Muhammad. Next, I will discuss how New Testament Studies has incorporated memory studies, especially within historical Jesus scholarship. I will then analyze the advantages and disadvantages of this approach and what we can learn from them. Finally, I will explore how we could use memory studies on the historical Muhammad, pointing out potential benefits and shortcomings of deploying this method as a lens of study.

Memory Studies

Memory is a basic human ability that allows us to recall, remember, or recount past events and knowledge. The study of memory has become a significant field of study for a number of disciplines across academia, from anthropology to psychology and from sociology to New Testament studies. Memory studies does not simply refer to something remembered from the past or a recollection of an event or episode, but it also serves as a determinant of the relationship between the past and the present and the ways in which they influence one another. Kirk points out that "memory, being an active cognitive capacity of this sort, never amounts to mere retrieval of stored 'traces' of the past. Rather, it manifests itself as a 'formation' expressive of the active relationship that the past – as it has come to be configured in memory – enters into with the

circumstances of the present for which it has its particular cognitive salience."[3] Memory, therefore, not only helps us remember past experiences and events, but also allows us to understand the present circumstances of those who were remembering the past.

For a sociological perspective, memory goes beyond us as individuals, as we, as societies, remember events that happened in our world, recalling significant episodes or figures who lived during or before our lifetime. Throughout history, memory has played a vital role in both oral and written tradition, from the earliest written texts to hundreds of years of transmitting history orally. Society cannot function without memories that unite one another as societies remember their origins, histories, successes, and failures through memory. Without such recollections of the past, societies would not live in the present or move forward into the future.

The past, however, is not always remembered accurately, as the reality of memory is highly selective and sometimes distorted based on our present circumstances. In addition, memory could become unreliable as time passes. Memories of events that took place ten minutes ago are much more accurate than memories we remember from ten years ago. Memories of the past become precarious as we are sometimes fooled by our own recollections of the past depending on our current context. They are, thus, sometimes accurate and historical but also often fabricated and unreliable. Within memory studies, there are several subcategories that help us better understand the role of memory in social and cultural settings. More importantly, this approach will serve as a lens with which to explore the historical Muhammad as we can analyze how Muslims' memories of Muhammad could reveal historicity surrounding episodes from his life.

Social memory is a category within memory studies that has become particularly important for the social sciences and humanities. Originated less than a century ago, sociologist Halbwachs,

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[3] Alan Kirk, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 194.

a disciple of Emile Durkheim, established social memory as a new field of study. Social memory "defines a group, giving it a sense of its past and defining its aspirations for the future."[4] Halbwachs explores memory as a social reality, serving as a function of the individual's membership and identity within various social groups. Traditionally, memory is accepted as a purely individual human faculty, but that overemphasizes the isolation of the individual in social life.[5] Jeffery Prager says that memory is intersubjectively constituted and inseparable from the social world within which remembering occurs.[6]

By focusing on the ways in which structure and inner workings of specific groups shape memory, Halbwachs argues that memory is constituted by social frameworks. For him, these social frameworks are needed in order to remember past events, as "the space within which memory is plotted is a *social* framework because space is conceptualized, organized, and shaped by the group inhabiting it."[7] Halbwachs acknowledges that memory is a social phenomenon that encompasses group formation and identity. Memory sustains social contexts, serves as a facilitator, and is a result of the socialization of human culture.[8] It also selects and modifies subjects and figures of the past, making them serviceable to the current image or aspirations of the community.

Halbwachs made a significant contribution to how we remember or rediscover the past, defining it as a social construct that consolidates the group identity within the social framework of the present circumstances. In addition to him, other scholars have advanced his work to incorporate

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[4] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 25.

[5] Jeffery Prager, *Presenting the Past: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Misremembering* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 59-60.

[6] Prager, *Presenting the Past*, 213-214.

[7] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 156-157.

[8] Werner H. Kelber, "The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as MnemoHistory – A Response," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 222.

different aspects of memory studies. These scholars include Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, Mary Carruthers, and Frances Yates. Halbwachs, Aleida Assmann, and Jan Assmann pioneered social, collective, and cultural memory. "Social memory" is a term used primarily in Anglo-American scholarship, whereas "cultural memory" is used largely in German scholarship, namely works associated with Aleida and Jan Assmann.[9] Aleida Assmann introduced different kinds of social memory in the development of a matrix, consisting of social, collective, and cultural memory. She also found social memory to be limited in time and forming in the medium of conversation, as it dissolves with the passing of the carriers of memory.[10] Aleida Assmann favoured collective memory as it is not limited in time and less likely to be influenced by present circumstances of the community, when compared to social memory.[11] In addition, she argues that collective memory could be extended to religion and nation.[12]

Jan Assmann published numerous studies on people and culture in ancient Egypt, focusing on both theology and philosophy. Along with Aleida Assmann, he developed a theory of cultural and communicative memory that advances Halbwachs's work on social memory. Jan Assmann also uses this theory in a number of books, including *Moses der Ägypter: Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* (Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism), *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien* (Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies) and most recently *The Invention of Religion: Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus*. He claims that ancient Egyptian religion had a significant influence on Judaism, far more than what is generally accepted. He also argues that Moses is not a figure of history, but of memory. Jan Assmann studies

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[9] I will dichotomize and differentiate social and cultural memory from one another as they could be defined and interpreted differently, especially when applying these memories to the study of Islam.

[10] Sandra Huebenthal, "'Frozen Moments' – Early Christianity through the Lens of *Social Memory Theory*" in *Memory and Memories in Early Christianity*, eds. Simon Butticaz and Enrico Norelli (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 27.

[11] Huebenthal, "Frozen Moments," 27.

[12] Huebenthal, "Frozen Moments," 27.

the ways in which factual and fictional events and characters find their place in religious belief and scripture.

Aleida and Jan Assmann, building on Halbwachs's idea that memory is a social phenomenon, took memory further to argue that memory has a cultural dimension too. Their work offers some ground-breaking theoretical analysis of memory, identity, and culture. They investigate how cultures remember and how memories shape cultural identity. For instance, a community commemorates certain elements of its past as being vital to its cultural identity, particularly events and characters foundational to its origins. These events and characters are configured in a foundational narrative, transforming the past into a powerful founding narrative. With cultural memory, societies' long-term memory could span up to three thousand years or a communicative memory that is usually restricted between eighty to one hundred years.

Yates was a specialist on the Renaissance who approaches memory differently and independently from Halbwachs. In her book, *The Art of Memory*, she revolutionizes mnemonic techniques and their relation to the history of philosophy, science, and literature. Yates traces the history of mnemonic systems from the classical period of Simonides of Ceos in Ancient Greece to the Renaissance era of Giordano Bruno, ending with Gottfried Leibniz and the early emergence of the scientific method in the seventeenth century. She claims that the ancient Greeks created an elaborate memory system, which, in turn, was inherited and recorded by the Romans, passed into European tradition, and then revived, in occult form, during the Renaissance. She views cultural history from the perspective of mnemotechnics and spatially constructed concepts of memory, tracing the facilities of memory through Western history.[13] Werner Kelber states that Yates's book is the first in modernity that reconstructs Western history as mnemohistory, which translates as the

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[13] Kelber, "The Works of Memory," 223.

"history of memory," meaning that it is concerned not with the past, but rather the past that is remembered.[14]

One of the most prominent scholars of memory is Carruthers, who has written widely on medieval literature and culture, as well as memory and mnemonic techniques. More particularly, she wrote two monumental works titled *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* and *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*. *The Book of Memory* is a study of the uses of memory in European cultures during the Middle Ages, which has changed and deepened our understanding of medieval memory culture. Carruthers examines the role, nature, and development of memory during the medieval period and compares her findings to our modern conceptions of memory. *The Craft of Thought* examines medieval monastic meditation as a discipline for making thoughts. It also explores the inventive and creative nature of memories and recollection as they were developed and refined in the practices of monastic reading and composition. Carruthers considers meditation as an act of literary composition or invention. In her books, she examines medieval practices and the function of memory, unfolding religious, intellectual, and ethical culture as fundamentally memorial in nature.

When observing memory as a social framework, we are able to break down a number of different types of memory that exist for communities, including collective, commemorative, and episodic memory.[15] Halbwachs established the notion of collective memory, stressing that the social formation of individual memory makes all memory collective. Collective memory refers to how various social groups construct, understand, and remember the past, beyond individual recollections. People collectively contribute to the construction of memory and determine the

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[14] Kelber, "The Works of Memory," 224.

[15] I will relate types of memory to the historical Muhammad in the next chapter and provide a case study on a particular episode from Muhammad's life.

significance that the past holds for individuals in the present. These recollections are socially constructed and shaped by various social groups depending on the societies we are living in. Therefore, collective memories recount not only what happened, but also take into consideration the context and the people who choose to remember, cherish, and preserve the particular memory.

Prager says that "memory is produced by an individual, but it is always produced in relation to the larger interpersonal and cultural world in which the individual lives."[16] Collective memory encompasses the memory of individuals whose identity is bound to one another within that group. In many ways, it reveals more about who is doing the remembering in the present than about the historical characters and events they are recalling from the past. Our present circumstances affect how we remember and what we are trying to preserve. We can have several scenarios of recalling memories, including what actually happened in the past, how that past is being remembered, and why is it remembered a certain way.

Jan Assmann uses the term "communicative memory" to characterize a face-to-face circulation of foundational memories. Kirk points out that "these memories are biographically vested in those who experienced originating events; it is the time of 'eyewitness and living memory.'"[17] These memories are passed by those who claim to have lived with the first generation of eyewitnesses, which is limited to three to four generations (approximately eighty to one hundred years). This sort of memory is important because it offers some of the earliest and most historical memories of the events or characters being remembered. However, after three to four generations, communicative memory can no longer preserve the memory within the group. Jan Assmann argues that this limitation creates a "crisis of memory" within forty years, when living carriers of memory

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[16] Prager, *Presenting the Past*, 70.
[17] Kirk, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition*, 16.

are disappearing.[18] It is around this time communicative memories start to fade and transform into cultural memory.

As mentioned before, Aleida and Jan Assmann use their understanding of Halbwachs's social memory to introduce the idea of cultural memory. Cultural memory, Jan Assmann says, "operates reconstructively as it not only preserves the past, it also constantly reorganizes the memory within the frameworks of the present."[19] Passing down cultural traditions predominately through an oral transmission memory can operate efficiently for centuries in stable societies but eventually turn to media capable of carrying cultural memory across generations, such as writing and other visible and material artefacts.[20] A shared cultural memory within a society creates a shared cultural identity, through which repetition of shared memories reinforces the shared culture.

Cultural memory passes on the community's agreed understanding, whereas communicative memory includes the individual in their social context.[21] Concerning the earlier period of what is remembered as history, cultural memory corresponding to actual events is usually not verifiable. When analyzing biblical texts, it understands texts as canonized normative and formative origin stories of a particular religious group.[22] Cultural memory of the Bible focuses on the origins, which groups refer to when remembering their past and understanding their identity. Sandra Huebenthal says that this type of memory is formal and ceremonial, consisting of codified or even canonized signs mediated through education.[23] Cultural memory deals with the past and how it shapes our identity, current circumstances, and future.

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[18] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische identitiät in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 11.

[19] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 42.

[20] Kirk, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition*, 254.

[21] Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

[22] Huebenthal, "Frozen Moments," 17.

[23] Huebenthal, "Frozen Moments," 17.

Commemoration memory includes the ways in which communities commemorate their past, becoming "the material basis of memory."[24] It establishes commemorative narratives and ritual practices associated with the memory, ensuring the continued vitality of collective memory. Jan Assmann states that commemoration memory aims to establish a visible and stabilizing collective identity that is presented in a symbolizing and dramatic form.[25] Barry Schwartz claims that "commemoration lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values."[26] It shapes identity as a commemorative ritual that sustains memory through re-enactment of a community's master narrative, which draws the community together on a regular basis. Commemorative practice attempts to counteract the danger of rupture, particularly the potential disconnection between a community and its past. These practices aim to bridge the gap between formative events and a community's ongoing historical identity.

Collective, social, and cultural memory are shared memories of information about the past. Individual memories are significant as they are personal recollections of experiences unique to them; however, according to scholars of social and cultural memory, they are influenced by their social context, despite remembering being an individual's personal act. Groups and cultures do not remember and recall as a whole as memories sometimes vary in detail between individuals. The dynamics of individual memory is often overlooked as social memory scholars would argue that society is always present in every act of remembrance and people normally acquire their memories within a society as it is the very nature of memory.

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[24] Gérard Namer, *Halbwachs et la mémoire sociale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 157.

[25] Jan Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien* (Munich: Beck, 2000), 28.

[26] Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61 (1982), 377.

Performance or live utterance memory is when oral tradition establishes a tangible expression. It creates an oral-traditional register, which is a body of authoritative tradition carried by a community "inter-mnemonically" and constitutive of its cultural identity.[27] These face-to-face enactments serve as an "internalizing reception into the production process itself."[28] Kirk states that performance is essential to tradition as it is a matter of actualizing normative tradition within a community's fluid contemporary frameworks.[29] Interpretation in oral tradition occurs internally to the text, as Jan Assmann says that tradition and interpretation are "inseparably connected."[30] Are texts intended to be performed? Can an oral tradition survive and refine itself through performance? Is the performer's act influenced and shaped by the audiences? Performative traditions are open to transformations and multiformity characteristics of oral tradition. Rodríguez proposes that "performances of the tradition accrued a sense of stability and repetition by way of multiple performances through time."[31] He says that transmission is the (re)construction and re(verbalization) of what exists already in our memory.[32] Performance, therefore, does not establish a new tradition; rather, it retells it from memory as the audience learns history through the performer and performance.

Episodic memory is remembering instances that took place in one's own pasts. It is recalling memories that happened to someone personally during their lives. Episodic memories are particularly important for eyewitnesses who have observed something in person during their lives and passed on these memories to others. Although eyewitness testimony is mostly reliable, they are sometimes distorted over time. Semantic memory, on the other hand, involves factual

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[27] Kirk, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition*, 139.
[28] W.F. Hanks, "Texts and Textuality," *ARA* 18 (1989), 112.
[29] Kirk, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition*, 115.
[30] Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 175.
[31] Rafael Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory: Jesus in Tradition, Performance and Text* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 4.
[32] Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory*, 84.

information about the world, regardless of whether one has personally experienced it. The majority of our knowledge about the world involves information that we did not experience firsthand. Both of these memories serve as accurate recollections of the past, but also sometimes unreliable. While we remember things relatively well, we are prone to misremember and distort our memories of the past. In fact, we occasionally misremember things from the past, perhaps more often than accurately recalling a memory. We can even misremember factual information as a false recollection.

The last type of memory that I will describe is salient memory. Some audiences are highly motivated to remember memories that are significant to them. They could preserve memories in greater detail when they are motivated and encouraged to remember, or even memorize, important subjects transmitted by the speaker or performer. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. Several New Testament scholars have been inspired by memory studies, particularly social memory, despite a number of discouraging findings and conclusions. They endeavoured to use memory as a lens to better understand how early Christians remembered and transmitted the life of Jesus from his crucifixion until the writing of the Gospels, along with other historical documents that are available to us.

Scholars on Reconstructing the Historical Jesus

To understand why current historical Jesus scholarship presents us with a unique, helpful approach to the historical Muhammad, it is worth tracing its history. Its development has been methodical, despite fierce backlash and repercussions that took centuries to reconcile. Over the last three hundred years, scholars, many of whom were professed Christians, have painted and repainted the historical Jesus. This effort, which is ongoing, uses the four Gospels and other available sources

to reconstruct Jesus's life, detailing how he lived and what he said. These reconstructions culminated in five "quests" of the historical Jesus, starting as early as the eighteenth century. Each of the five quests create and develop criticism of the Gospels, letters of Paul, and other sources within and outside the New Testament. Methodical approaches were established to get closer to the historical Jesus, who was separate from the theological Christ.

The first quest is referred to as the "Pre-Quest," which took place before 1778. During this time, there was no distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith and, thus, no problems surrounding his life. Since there was no actual quest at this point, scholars were focused more on defending and harmonizing the discrepancies between Gospel accounts. Church Fathers as early as the second century sought to reconcile the Gospels to demonstrate that the stories of Jesus are not contradictory, but rather authored by eyewitnesses who were writing historically or allegorically. The Enlightenment brought a rational approach, which was based on reason and logic, to the search for Jesus. The origins of the first quest took place simultaneously as there was a renewed interest in the literary relationship between the Gospels.[33]

Reimarus is considered the first historical Jesus scholar and founder of the "Old Quest" (1778-1906). He did not publish any of his skeptical views of Christianity during his lifetime as there would have been serious, even dangerous, backlash for publications against Jesus's divinity. Therefore, his views only became known after his death. Between 1774 and 1778, numerous fragments of Reimarus's manuscript were published, which demarcated the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. Using the Gospels, he provided evidence that Jesus, during his lifetime, intended to establish an earthly kingdom with himself as the kingly messiah. During this quest, scholars were now able to engage in the search for the "true" Jesus and possibly recover who he was as a

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[33] W. Barnes Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 93.

historical figure. Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, David Strauss, and Ernest Renan emerged in the nineteenth century, offering their own perspectives of the historical Jesus.[34]

The "No Quest" (1906-1953) was initiated with the work of Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which was published in German in 1906. His book puts an end to the "Old Quest" by demonstrating that his predecessors had failed to recover both the historical Jesus and his ministry. Schweitzer rejects the nineteenth century liberal understanding of Jesus and points out the ways in which his predecessors had modernized his life, painting a portrait based on their own philosophical and theological ideas.[35] His historical Jesus was mostly insignificant for twentieth century faith and practice as only the spiritual Jesus is remembered and relevant.[36] The overall notion of this quest was that it may be methodologically impossible to recover the life of Jesus and not necessary theologically as Christian faith does not require a historical Jesus. Bultmann furthered Schweitzer's cause and demonstrated that the nature of the Gospels and the nature of faith made reconstructing the historical Jesus both impossible and irrelevant.

The next period was the "New Quest" (1953-1985), which brought a renewed quest that included some of Bultmann's students, who found flaws and weaknesses in their teacher's method. This quest was initiated with a lecture by Ernst Käsemann in 1953, which took place during a reunion of Bultmann's former students. Titled "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," this lecture began a new movement that maintained the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. However, there was also a desire to establish continuity between them, which they believed was necessary theologically to conclude that Jesus was a historical figure.[37] This quest

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[34] There is a comprehensive survey of the nineteenth century quest within the work of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (originally published in 1906 and 1910 in English).

[35] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. William Montgomery (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 396.

[36] Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 97.

[37] Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 101.

was popularized by Günther Bornkamm, who wrote *Jesus of Nazareth* in 1956. His book became one of the most widely read books on Jesus's life after it was published. Some of the new developments during this quest include the understanding that the Gospels are not modern biographies but rather faith documents and that the burden of proof rests upon those who claim that an episode or saying within the Gospels is authentic.

The last period is the "Third Quest/Renewed Quest/Post-Quest" (Since 1985), which started after a surge in scholarly and public interest in the historical Jesus. Two major events took place in 1985 to end the previous quest and begin our most recent quest: the publication of Ed Sanders's *Jesus and Judaism*, which suggests that historical inquiry into the life of Jesus is now searched for independent of Christology, and the first Jesus seminar, which was a meeting of approximately thirty scholars aiming to compile a raw list of all the words attributed to Jesus that would then be sorted through to determine their authenticity by consensus. This quest brought new scholarship, establishing new methods and approaches that would enable us to authenticate individual sayings of Jesus. In addition to Sanders, we have other prominent scholars publishing their work, such as John Dominic Crossan, Allison, and Meier.

Throughout these quests, scholars aspired to develop theories and methods that would allow us to paint an accurate, reliable picture of Jesus. They continue to develop methods with recent trends toward using memory studies as a theoretical framework. Other methods brought some interesting insights into understanding Jesus's life, the sources we have available on him, and the context he was living in.[38] Many scholars became gospel critics to evaluate sources, adopting a historical-critical method, which represented a whole body of specialized methods to be applied on available sources, especially the New Testament. Some of the most important

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[38] Several of these methods were criticized but still, in many ways, adapted and used on the historical Muhammad by scholars of early Islam, including Wansbrough.

approaches include source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and criteria of authenticity.

Source criticism, which began in the nineteenth century, critiques the Gospels side by side to determine discrepancies and contradictions. Scholars compared them and concluded that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar, whereas John seems similar in some respects but extremely different in others. In addition, Matthew and Luke have unique similarities that are not present in Mark. Debates concerning these differences and similarities brought questions about the literary relationship between the Synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Which gospel was first? Did any of these authors possess the works of the other gospel writers? Who is copying whom and why?[39] Today, the vast majority of scholars will claim that Mark was written first and was used by both Matthew and Luke. In addition, source criticism established "Q" (or Quelle, or "source" in German) as an early collection of Jesus's teachings found in Matthew and Luke but not Mark. The "two-document hypothesis" was popularized by Holtzmann in his 1863 study titled *Die synoptischen Evangelien, ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter* (The Synoptic Gospels: Their Origin and Historical Character).

Form criticism began in the early twentieth century and is a "discipline that seeks to understand the Gospel tradition as it was transmitted orally before it was written down."[40] Barnes Tatum points out that while form critics provided answers that were unconvincing, unfounded, and controversial, their proposals could be not avoided or ignored.[41] Form criticism identifies basic patterns in the history of oral and written traditions between Jesus's death and written literature we have available to us. There is an objective to determine the milieu, context, and circumstances

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[39] We can think of some of the difficulties that also surface when exploring our sources on Muhammad. Did al-Waqidi copy Ibn Ishaq? And if so, why? What other sources did al-Waqidi have at his disposal?

[40] Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 45.

[41] Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 45.

of the pericopes, which are isolated in their original form, assigned to a category or literary pattern (such as poems, parables, sayings, or legends), and then related to its social setting or circumstances (*Sitz-im-Leben*). The term *Sitz-im-Leben* ("life situation") refers to the situation in the life of the church within which the material was shaped and adjusted to the needs of early Christians and the ministry.

Redaction criticism focuses on the end product of each Gospel, analyzing the ways gospel writers used traditional material that they received and the motivations for incorporating or omitting this material into their work. It answers the question: "What does a gospel writer's editorial work indicate about that writer's theology and, by implication, the situation for which the gospel was written?"[42] Redaction critics explore various sayings, stories, or episodes of the tradition and how they were incorporated into individual Gospels. For example, if we consider the Gospel of Mark to be the first gospel, we can examine how Matthew, Luke, and even John may have used it and integrated, modified, or omitted traditions. Gospel writers are, therefore, observed as editors of the source materials, as redaction critics use available sources to determine on how each editor (or redactor) shaped and carefully selected material to include in their final product.

The last method that I will mention is a compilation of criteria used to determine the reliability of individual sayings, episodes, or stories on Jesus's life. While many authors have compiled their own criteria of authenticity, the most detailed and dynamic compilation came from Meier. *The Marginal Jew*, which claims to be a comprehensive, rigorous scientific treatment of the historical Jesus, uses tools of modern historical research. His five primary criteria of authenticity include the criterion of embarrassment, which focuses on words or episodes of Jesus that could have embarrassed the early Church; the criterion of discontinuity, which concentrates

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[42] Tatum, *In Quest of Jesus*, 49.

on sayings or stories that cannot be derived either from Judaism in the first century or from the early Church after him; the criterion of multiple attestation, which focuses on sayings or stories of Jesus that are attested in more than one independent source or more than one literary form or genre; the criterion of coherence, which is used only after enough information of historical material is gathered to determine whether other words and deeds of Jesus fit well with collected data; and the criterion of rejection and execution, which concentrates on the historical nature of Jesus's violent demise, along with words and episodes that took place during his trial and crucifixion.[43]

Over time, scholars criticized previous methods used on the historical Jesus. Form criticism faced opposition as scholars were quick to point out the flaws of many conclusions, including how the gospel writers used their imagination to invent stories and episodes that took place during Jesus's life. Form criticism created a sense of objectivity between the New and the Third Quests, which paved way for both redaction criticism and criteria of authenticity. Criteria of authenticity later detached itself from form criticism, which received widespread rejection over the last few decades. The foundation of this criticism, which aimed to determine the social settings as well as the assumed state and motivations of the early Church, drew scholarly reproach that problematized the method and its conclusions.

Redaction critics also found resistance as scholars challenged some of its basic principles of identifying the motivations and theology of the gospel writers. Scholars argue that we cannot assume to know gospel writers' locations, motivations, and periods in which they were written. More particularly, the anonymous nature of the gospel writers puts us at a disadvantage when trying to understand the context in which they were writing. While we can theorize about the communities of the gospel writers, as well as their timeframe, we cannot confirm which gospel

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[43] A detailed description of Meier's primary and secondary criteria of authenticity is in *The Marginal Jew vol. 1*, 167-184.

was written first, second, third, and fourth.[44] Criteria of authenticity also faced criticism as scholars called for the approach to be reconfigured significantly or abandoned completely. For instance, in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, which is edited by Keith and Le Donne, scholars take the criteria of authenticity apart one by one to demonstrate its logical problems, including its anti-Semitic bias and misleading conclusions about Jesus. They also point out the implausibility of authenticating sayings of Jesus individually as the criteria of authenticity suggest. Although we may be able determine whether sayings are more probable in comparison to others, there is no definitive method to determine whether a saying, story, or episode *actually* took place.

The history of historical Jesus scholarship established methodology beginning in the eighteenth century and continues to advance new approaches to help us understand the historical Jesus and the sources that recount his life, primarily those within the New Testament. The approaches used to paint portraits of Jesus have evolved based on new trends in the humanities and social sciences. Based on my own interest in the historical Jesus, I have observed the importance of the field not only to scholars, but also to the public at large. By contrast, the field of the historical Muhammad has not been nearly as important to public interest; rather, it is more like a debate between scholars on who Muhammad was and what we can *really* know about his life.

Memory and the Historical Jesus

Over the last three decades, several prominent historical Jesus scholars advanced memory studies to new heights. This approach offers numerous insightful observations such as exploring how memory is transmitted by eyewitnesses to later generations and the ways in which people

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[44] As mentioned earlier, scholars are mostly in agreement that Mark was written first and that John was written last, but there is no solid evidence to validate these assumptions beyond any doubt.

remember past events or figures. While memory studies plays an important role in current historical Jesus scholarship, this is not the first time when a scholar used this approach to examine how events from Jesus's life were transmitted between his death and the writing of the Gospels. In this section of the chapter, I will examine a number of influential scholars who have used memory studies in their work, starting with Gerhardsson, a pioneer of using memory studies as a lens for New Testament studies. These scholars have different perspectives, criticisms, and conclusions when using memory studies on sources related to the historical Jesus. While some of them believe memory studies could help us better understand the historical Jesus, others believe that this approach does not help us discover anything new.

Gerhardsson's work has shaped how several scholars approach memory and tradition today. Considering that memory studies has resurfaced over the last few decades, many scholars have reiterated the importance of his work and brought it into new light. Gerhardsson began his work on memory and tradition when form criticism played a prominent role in historical Jesus scholarship. He was interested in various issues concerning orality and literacy, ancient schools and education, and tradition and transmission. His dissertation, *Memory and Manuscript*, offers an original thesis about Christian origins and tradition. Gerhardsson criticizes form critics for not defining the concept of tradition and transmission. He mentions that the Jewish Torah of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods serves as the principal comparative material for his work on early Christian origins, tradition, and transmission, advancing the thesis that rabbinic Judaism was extremely influential early on in the Jesus movement.

In his book, Gerhardsson asks, "what was the technical procedure followed when the early Church *transmitted*, both gospel material and other material?"[45] He surveys how Jewish rabbis in the first century preserved and passed on their sacred tradition, demonstrating that early Christianity is better understood in light of how tradition was developed and transmitted in Rabbinic Judaism. Gerhardsson argues that trained scholars methodically preserved the sacred Jewish texts in professional, educational, and liturgical contexts, through elementary schools and reading them unchanged in public worship. He is mostly interested in the Oral Torah and its transmission, which he believes was similar to the transmission of the Written Torah. In addition, he states that the Oral Torah interpreted, complemented, and sometimes modified the Written Torah; however, both were memorized through a teacher whose students repeated what the teacher said until without error.

In his approach to memory studies, Gerhardsson uses the paradigm of Rabbinic Judaism as a way to demonstrate the delivery of the gospel tradition in early Christianity, taking the testimony of the early Church Fathers as his point of departure. The Church Fathers wrote about the conception of the origins of the Gospels and placed heavy emphasis on discipleship and memory. Gerhardsson believes that Jesus's disciples memorized his teachings during his life and, in turn, repeated them to others after his crucifixion. More particularly, the procedure was memorization through mediums including notebooks that served as an *aide-mémoire* for Jesus's disciples.[46] Gerhardsson does not reject form and redaction criticism entirely. Rather, he modifies the work of form and redaction critics, whose scholarship was firmly established and influential

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[45] Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 14-15, emphasis in original.
[46] Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, 105.

among New Testament scholars. Focusing on the mnemonic character of written and oral tradition, Gerhardsson emphasizes the importance of memory and tradition in Christian origins.

James Dunn also points out the connection between memory and tradition; however, he does not offer an account of the role memory plays within the tradition. Instead, he combines memory and tradition to demonstrate initial impressions of Jesus that were impactful for the early Christian community, which illustrates how the Jesus tradition contains verbal formulations generated by memory that traces to Jesus through his disciples.[47] In his book, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, Dunn provides insights into the quest for the historical Jesus, Jesus's impact on his followers, and oral tradition. He examines how oral traditions develop and points out that while stories passed orally sometimes change in detail, the essential core of the story often remains unchanged. Dunn claims that the impact of Jesus's words and deeds on his disciples was "translated" into oral tradition, passed down though oral performance within the earliest circles of disciples and churches, and finally written down into the Gospels.[48] Kirk says that Dunn's reading in "memory theory is perfunctory; accordingly his understanding of social and cultural memory is a 'presentist' caricature – it exaggerates the impact of the present upon reconstructions of the past."[49] When exploring memory studies, Dunn dismisses social and cultural memory, preventing him from acknowledging the ways in which tradition sustains crucial connections to the past. He thus seems overly optimistic that the synoptic evangelists do not falsify or forget the memory of Jesus; instead, they preserve historical, authentic information about his life.

Samuel Byrskog, a student of Gerhardsson, builds upon his predecessor's critique of form criticism and advocation for memory studies. He examines gospel origins in light of ancient oral

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[47] James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 239.
[48] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 254.
[49] Kirk, *Memory and the Jesus Tradition*, 60-61.

historical practices. For him, oral history, as practiced by ancient historians, combines history and narrative. Byrskog attempts to answer questions on the uses of eyewitness testimonies, their reliability, and their relevance to the synoptic tradition and the work of the gospel writers.[50] He says that Jesus's followers would have formed "a decisive body of eyewitnesses and informants, to be questioned and interrogated as the gospel tradition eventually took shape and developed."[51]

In his work on memory studies, Byrskog examines how the oral histories of eyewitnesses and the work of the gospel writers as oral historians intersect with the tradition. He takes the view that eyewitness memory and oral tradition share important properties, and that oral history transmission is living and interpretative. For Byrskog, eyewitness testimony played an essential role in the development of the gospel tradition, as eyewitnesses existed and functioned as informants during the emergence of the tradition.[52] In addition, he claims that ideal eyewitnesses and informers were participants in the actual events or episodes and "the dynamic interplay of memory and recall involved the search for the visual images of the past that continued to live as vivid, interpretive images in the memory of the observer."[53]

Jens Schröter has written extensively on memory studies, the historical Jesus, and early Christianity. He wrote *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte* (Memory of Jesus's Words), which provides a framework for assessing the origins and transformations of the gospel tradition within the Jesus movement commemorating its past. Schröter's method evaluates the constitutive past and its effect on present social realities that gives particular refractions to the past. He also recognizes that the past is accessible only through those refractions.[54] He approaches the historical Jesus by

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[50] Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 41.
[51] Byrskog, *Story as History*, 69.
[52] Byrskog, *Story as History*, 65.
[53] Byrskog, *Story as History*, 302.
[54] Jens Schröter, "The Historical Jesus and the Sayings Tradition: Comments on Current Research," *Neot* 30 (1996), 165.

acknowledging that every act of a tradition is an act of remembering in which the past and present interact.

In several of his works, Schröter deals with memory studies and its application to the Jesus tradition. For him, memory is perceived as a category to comprehend the identity of a community, which is different from individual memory that preserves and reproduces events from the past. Schröter has also discussed the relationship between historical event and historical story, arguing that when understanding the historical Jesus, we need to acknowledge the impact that his life had on those who eventually told stories about him. He is aware that memory theory has much to say about the formation and transmission of oral tradition, as well as the transition from oral to written media. Finally, he argues that memory should be applied to the Jesus tradition as a concept to describe the process of oral transmission.

Richard Bauckham uses memory studies as an approach to demonstrate how the four Gospels are based on eyewitnesses who knew Jesus personally. In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, he challenges assumptions on how accounts about Jesus were circulated by anonymous community traditions. Instead, Bauckham claims that Jesus accounts were transmitted in the names of the original eyewitnesses. He also states that the Gospels were written within living memory of the events they recount, meaning that they were written when eyewitnesses of Jesus were still alive. Gospel writers were, therefore, given the Jesus tradition by eyewitnesses, not through oral tradition, which is the prevailing view. In this way, the Gospels are linked directly to eyewitness reports and, therefore, trustworthy, reliable, and accurate.

Although Bauckham agrees that the testimony of the eyewitnesses is not without editing and interpretation, he argues the canonical gospels are still faithful to the eyewitnesses themselves. The gospel writers served as authoritative guarantors of the traditions surrounding Jesus's deeds

and words.[55] He claims that the Gospels are highly reliable, including John's Gospel, which he claims was written by a disciple of Jesus.[56] He values individual "recollective" memory over "collective" memory in order to privilege individual eyewitness memory when assessing the Jesus tradition, which counters many of the problems that come with social memory.

Le Donne understands memory studies in a similar way as Schröter. In his book, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David*, he offers his theory and approach to studying the historical Jesus, which uses social memory to identify "memory refraction" in the early Jesus movement. Memory refraction is the refocusing distortion that occurs as the stories and sayings of Jesus were handed down to the next generation of followers. These sayings and stories were consciously and unconsciously reframed as they were developed and passed down. By recognizing this refraction, Le Donne argues that he is able to understand the relationship between memory and typology.

When discussing the historical Jesus, Le Donne claims that "Jesus can be examined and discussed as a historical figure as long as history is thought of in terms of *memory refraction*."[57] He also suggests that "the multiple (and sometimes contradictory) interpretations of Jesus found in the Gospels allow the historian to chart trajectories of memory refraction that have been propelled forward by the initial perceptions of Jesus by his contemporaries."[58] Le Donne discusses his theory of historiography and the essential relationship between history, memory, and typology, concerning himself primarily with the title "Son of David." He concludes that the first perceptions

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[55] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 93.

[56] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 412.

[57] Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 13, emphasis in original.

[58] Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus*, 13.

of Jesus were "bent and distorted" through the mnemonic process, as memory requires interpretation and a refractive process.[59]

While Allison has published a number of books on the historical Jesus, he has changed his approach to Jesus's life in light of scholarship using the scientific study of memory. In his book, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*, he offers a new perspective to understand Jesus and the ways in which we can reconstruct his life. Allison notes his skepticism of scholars using criteria of authenticity to examine individual sayings or parables. His method, however, does not abandon the quest for the historical Jesus; rather, Allison approaches the sources differently. Considering himself more cautious about making historical claims, he uses modern cognitive studies of memory along with understanding the "big picture" of Jesus to establish general considerations across sources when reconstructing his life.[60]

Allison is very skeptical of human memory as humans are prone to misperceive and misremember. Although he points out that memory is reconstructive, reproductive, and involves imagination, working with generalizations about and inferences from large quantities of data are more ideal than authenticating sayings of Jesus individually. Allison's understanding of memory, which points toward the "gist" as details can be conflated, driven by agendas, and misinterpreted, provides us with a broader portrait of who Jesus was during his life.[61] Allison's approach to memory studies helps us identify the historical Jesus through certain themes and motifs that recur consistently throughout our available sources.

Ehrman also took it upon himself to learn how memory studies could help answer questions regarding the historical Jesus, a field that he has been contributing to for decades. In one of his

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[59] Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus*, 268.
[60] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 10-11.
[61] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 11.

more recent books, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of Their Saviour*, he overviews the rise of memory studies, introducing a number of prominent figures and pioneers of the study. Ehrman surveys research from the fields of cultural anthropology, cognitive psychology, and sociology to re-examine the reliability of the Gospels, analyzing how oral traditions and group memories developed.

Concentrating on the large gap between when Jesus lived and when documents about his life were written down, Ehrman offers us an interesting perspective on how the New Testament developed. He explores memory studies, focusing on "false memories" and the ways in which people believe they actually took place in their lives. Ehrman also explores how collective memory is influenced by the issues and concerns of the remembering community just as much as the events themselves. Collective memory could also develop around misinformation.[62] Ehrman says that it is important to ask how Christians remembered Jesus in the years, decades, and centuries after his death, concluding that "the historical Jesus did not make history. The remembered Jesus did."[63]

Rodríguez has written a number of works on the historical Jesus. Over the last decade, he wrote two valuable books that incorporate memory studies into the historical Jesus. *Structuring Early Christian Memory* focuses on the significance of social memory and how it influences the relationship between past and present through memorial acts. Rodríguez addresses the problems surrounding historical Jesus scholarship and uses social memory to examine the contextualization of written gospels within the fluid oral tradition of the early Jesus movement. He writes, "The written gospels did not constitute the traditional milieux in which the earliest Christian movements developed; the gospels' audience apprehended the texts within those milieux."[64]

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[62] Bart Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented their Stories of the Savior* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), 64.
[63] Bart Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, 223.
[64] Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory*, 7.

Rodríguez also wrote *Jesus Darkly* (2018), which complicates the study of memory beyond simply recollecting past events. He uses memory studies to demonstrate the ways in which the past remembered is shaped and reconstructed by the community's present circumstances and interests. For Rodríguez, memory is constantly changing and put into service when the present circumstances call for it. In his approach to social memory, he fills in a gap in scholarship by claiming that the authors of the New Testament never separated Jesus from the story of Israel, as gospel writers' memories were inextricably embedded in the Hebrew Bible.

Keener is the last scholar who I will mention. Having written numerous books on the Gospels, the Letters of Paul, and the historical Jesus, he, like many of his colleagues, incorporates memory studies into his scholarship. His *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* focuses on the Gospels, attempting to answer how historically reliable they are in recounting the life of Jesus. Keener examines the Gospels as ancient biographies that were narratives of Jesus's life. He also builds on recent work in the study of ancient biographies, claiming that the gospel writers followed the literary practices of other biographers during their time.[65]

Keener examines a number of ancient biographies circulating around the writing of the Gospels to demonstrate the gospels writers' method of writing and accuracy in recounting the life of Jesus. He states that the Gospels have both historical information and flexibility, especially since he believes they were written within living memory of Jesus. The Gospels, however, range in variation and interpretation, but still meet the expectations of other ancient biographies. Based on his analysis of biographers writing within the same period, Keener concludes that the canonical

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[65] Craig Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 16-18.

gospels are historically reliable ancient biographies based on a core of genuine historical information.[66] He claims that the biographies preserve many of Jesus's acts and teachings.[67]

The scholars I have mentioned above are only a handful of those who are using memory studies on the life of Jesus. New Testament scholars using memory studies continue to advance our understanding of the Gospels, Jesus's life, and the development of the Jesus movement. Many scholars have expressed optimism when understanding how memory played a key role in writing down the Gospels and other New Testament texts. Gerhardsson introduced a new perspective on how Jesus's teachings and sayings were remembered by his disciples during his life. Scholars including Bryskog, Bauckham, and Keener have used memory studies as a lens to point out the authenticity and historicity of the Gospels, finding them trustworthy and reliable enough to reconstruct the life of Jesus with some level of accuracy. On the other hand, we have scholars such as Ehrman, Allison, and Schröter who are not as confident about the role memory has played between Jesus's death and the writing of the Gospels. They acknowledge the flaws and misinterpretations of human memory and demonstrate the impact that present circumstances of communities had on their recollection of the past. For them, memory studies do not bring us closer to the historical Jesus.

Advantages of Using Memory Studies on the Early Jesus Movement

Having explored a number of prominent New Testament scholars incorporating memory studies into their work, there are several advantages that come with using this approach on the historical Jesus. Memory studies helps us answer important questions surrounding the reliability of the

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[66] Craig Keener, *Christobiography*, 497.
[67] Craig Keener, *Christobiography*, 497.

Gospels, which are the most detailed and important sources we have on his life. More particularly, social memory provides answers related to the development and transmission of diverse Jesus traditions, how the communities shaped and retold memories and traditions about his life, and the transition from oral tradition or eyewitness accounts to the written composition of the Gospels.

Memory studies helps us understand that memories of Jesus resided with those who knew or saw him personally, including his disciples, family, and others who were present during his activities. The followers of Jesus told stories about him and the Kingdom of Heaven that he proclaimed. The second generation of the Jesus movement repeated stories they heard and remembered via oral transmission; however, they were not able to recall personal experiences with him. This second generation began what is called "the Jesus tradition," which serves as the foundation of the oral tradition that continued for decades, even after the Gospels were written.

Depending on which scholar we observe, the Gospels could have been written by eyewitnesses or writers who used eyewitness testimonies in their accounts of Jesus. The majority of scholars, however, will note that there was a gap of time between eyewitness accounts and the writing of the Gospels. Memory studies guides us to explore the impact that a gap will have on the retelling of Jesus stories and the ways in which present circumstances shape and influence memories of his life. The Gospels, therefore, become storehouses for both memories and traditions, and it is almost impossible to determine the authentic, reliable sayings of Jesus individually.

Individual memories of Jesus were replaced by the Jesus tradition. The benefits of understanding the Jesus tradition through memory studies allows us to identify not only the transition from eyewitness accounts to the writing of the Gospels, but also the process of remembering and recollecting them over a span of decades. Schröter says that the "appropriation of Jesus tradition can be understood as a process of selection, by which the present situation was

interpreted through reference to the person of Jesus."[68] Therefore, we can better trace the history of the gospel tradition and the ways in which people remembered Jesus in their context through the Gospels. In addition, we can account for similarities between the Gospels (and non-canonical gospels), as well as the differences and diversity between them.

Through memory studies, we understand the memory of Jesus as a commemorated past cultivated by various communities throughout the Mediterranean. When the memory of Jesus is observed as a commemorated past, we explore how the demands of the present determine and reconstruct the sacred past to help the identity of the present community. Kirk points out that "a social memory approach would thus also be concerned with the reception history of the Jesus tradition in the early Church, as each previous construction of the past becomes an aspect of the overall social setting in which new memories are produced."[69] Memory studies, therefore, emphasizes the importance of the interplay between the sacred past and present communities, which directly impacts all memories of Jesus's life and his traditions that authors, who likely did not interact with him in person, wrote down.

Although we are lacking important aspects of how memory was transmitted, such as monuments, landscape images, and have little evidence of rituals that took place during Jesus's life, we need to rely heavily on written texts and assume an oral tradition was developed and shaped between the eyewitnesses of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. Memory studies allows us to explore oral communication of the Jesus tradition and how it was performed before and after the Gospels were written down. In addition, social memory also helps link them with Israelite social memory, including the renewal of the Mosaic covenant and the coming of the Messiah. More

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[68] Jens Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logeinuberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 463.
[69] Alan Kirk and Tom Thacher, "Jesus Tradition as Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 33.

particularly, we are able to draw out the ways in which the early Jesus tradition used social memory of Jewish history to legitimize and identify Jesus as the Saviour and Messiah, creating a cultural memory. The early Jesus movement, which was comprised primarily of Jews, drew upon notions of their own ideas and recollections based on both oral and written traditions surrounding the coming of the Messiah. Followers used their own present circumstances after Jesus to shape and influence memories of the past to solidify their Messiah's identity and significance. Nonetheless, Keener would argue that the Gospels contain historical information on Jesus as the core of his life remains consistent.

There is a focus on the communities of the writers that produced the Gospels as much as the actual Gospels themselves. The communities of the gospel writers were influenced by their present circumstances and surroundings while writing down the life of Jesus. When exploring the history of Christianity, which spans over two thousand years, scholars have been able to suggest plausible times, locations, and communities in which the Gospels were written, which helps us better understand why they have innate similarities and profound differences. Social memory has been used as a lens over the last thirty years to further fill in significant gaps on oral traditions, recollecting memories, and the historical Jesus. More particularly, some scholars have argued that memory studies helps them demonstrate how the gospel writers used eyewitness accounts and testimonies in their work.

Disadvantages of Using Memory Studies on the Early Jesus Movement

While many scholars use memory studies to offer new perspectives on Christian origins, the historical Jesus, and oral tradition between Jesus's death and the writing of the Gospels, other scholars point out that the approach possesses a number of flaws that are found among other

approaches to early Christianity. It is unlikely that any approach or lens will give us details and hypotheses that are unanimously agreed upon by all scholars; however, we seem to be progressing forward as advancing new methods close some of the gaps that come with primary sources written decades after events took place.

According to Schwartz:

> "Social memory" refers to the distribution throughout society of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, and moral judgments about the past. Only individuals possess the capacity to contemplate the past, but this does not mean that beliefs originate in the individual alone or can be explained on the basis of his or her unique experience. Individuals do not know the past singly; they know it with and against other individuals situated in diverse communities, and in the context of beliefs that predecessors and contemporaries have transferred to them.[70]

This understanding of social memory becomes problematic as it discounts individual memory and its ability to recollect the past individually. Memory is not always uniform when people within the same community recollect it because the past is remembered, interpreted, and celebrated differently. In a co-written book on collective memory, James Fentress and Chris Wickham note that "an important problem facing anyone who wants to follow Halbwachs in this field is how to elaborate a conception of memory which, while doing full justice to the collective side of one's conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the collective will."[71] Collective memory, therefore, should not be overemphasized at the expense of individual memory.

Social determinism is a potential flaw in social memory, but so is excessive individualism that disregards the social dimension of memory. Barbara Misztal, in her book, *Theories of Social Remembering*, offers a balanced approach in which remembering, though constructed and developed within a social context, is an individual mental act. She points out that individuals

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[70] Barry Schwartz, "Christian Origins: Historical Truth and Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 45.

[71] Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, ix.

engage in remembering past events, but these recollections are in relation to the world, interacting with collective traditions. For her, memory is "intersubjectively constituted" as individuals remember the past, but it is more than merely a personal act.[72] Individual memories enrich and establish a collective memory, whether be it numerous individual memories or a single one from an eyewitness.

Another disadvantage of memory studies is its lack of incorporating and acknowledging memories or stories that are remembered verbatim. Kirk writes that "memory as a factor in the transmission of oral tradition, accordingly, does not signify verbatim mastery and recitation but accurate recall through competence in a system of constraints and cues that eliminate the burden of carrying a verbatim version of a tradition in one's head as a condition for reproducing it from occasion to occasion."[73] Verbatim mastery of past events or stories would nullify many of the effects of social and cultural memory as the individual memory is transmitted without reinterpretation and reconstruction based on societal influences and circumstances.

In his work, Gerhardsson suggests that while Jesus likely had his disciples memorize his sayings during his ministry, it still led to variations of the same sayings over time. He adds that memorization is not always perfect and that the tradition had been reformulated and reinterpreted.[74] Gerhardsson's approach and conclusions were heavily criticized for being anachronistic as he applied Jewish practices of memorizing rabbinic materials centuries after Jesus lived and applied them to the first century. Although there is no evidence that Jesus instructed his followers to memorize his teachings and accounts of his deeds verbatim, that does not mean that

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[72] Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 6.
[73] Alan Kirk, "Memory," in *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives*, eds. Samuel Byrskog and Werner Kelber (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 170.
[74] Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, 335.

disciples did not remember his sayings and actions verbatim by their own volition during or soon after his death.

Halbwachs, in his book *On Collective Memory*, made some problematic assumptions about the Synoptic Gospels. For instance, he states that the Gospels were written in the second century and neglects the relationship between Jewish and early Christian religious belief.[75] Based on his assumptions, Halbwachs concludes that the Gospels are mostly invented and fictive in nature.[76] Regardless of when oral memory was written down, written traditions are as easily corruptible and manipulated as oral traditions. Thus, even though social memory claims to fill in significant gaps between Jesus's death and the writing of the Gospels, there is no way of knowing how the written texts of the Gospels originally looked or passed down in written form. The earliest fragments of the Gospels manuscript have been dated to at least 125, which is well after scholars argue the Gospels were written.

There are many reasons why several New Testament scholars do not engage with social memory. A number of them point to the emphasis of the early Christian communities' influence and circumstances that led to the reinterpretation and recollection of past events and figures. However, when looking at the Gospels, we do not definitively know where or when they were written, as previously mentioned. We also do not know who wrote them and why. Therefore, we are at a disadvantage when trying to assume the motivations and situations of each gospel writer's community when we have no clear evidence surrounding their sociopolitical and cultural context.

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[75] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 202.
[76] Halbwachs, *On Collective* Memory, 213.

Memory and the Historical Muhammad

Social and cultural memory have not been applied to the historical Muhammad in previous scholarship. When understanding sources on Muhammad through memory studies, we may be able to point out some of the difficulties that come with an oral tradition being transmitted for at least one hundred years after his death. Considering that scholars of early Christianity have only applied memory studies on the historical Jesus over the last thirty years, this approach is still relatively new. Memory studies could be applied to both early Muslim and non-Muslim sources on Muhammad, providing us with insightful perspectives on how his life was remembered and preserved for centuries through oral tradition and transmission. In the last sections of this chapter, we will explore how memory studies could be used as a lens for understanding the historical Muhammad, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this approach to sources on his life.

Oral tradition in Islamic history has been debated heavily over the last one hundred years. Some scholars have argued that the oral tradition of early Muslims is inherently flawed and the lack of written tradition problematizes the reliability of all sources on Muhammad, including the Qurʾan. In addition, they have found it unrealistic to assume that traditions about him were accurately transmitted orally for more than one hundred and fifty years. Many scholars have focused on the elaborations and invention of stories about Muhammad that equate his prophethood with Jesus and Moses. *Hadiths* were also criticized for their authenticity, despite a strong oral tradition, as political and social demands shaped and influenced the compilation and invention of hundreds of thousands of them.

The Qurʾan is considered by most scholars to have been transmitted verbatim from memory during Muhammad's life until it was written down. There is also debate on whether it is possible to determine which *hadiths* are authentic and *actually* trace back to him. *Sirah-maghazi* was

transmitted orally and, in some cases, verbatim or temporarily written down for instruction or memorization. We have evidence that stories and events during Muhammad's life were memorized and passed down in lecture form, which strengthens the reliability of oral tradition between his death and biographies about him. In regards to non-Muslim sources, some scholars cast aside these accounts too quickly without identifying whether they offer any useful information. While many of these authors add a layer of polemic into their accounts about Muhammad, they may have been initially stories about his life that were circulating orally or in written form during the formative years of Islam.

Memory Studies as a Lens for Understanding the Historical Muhammad

Numerous types of memory could be applied to understand early Muslim oral tradition, literature on Muhammad, and remembering the past as far back as three hundred years. Memories of the past for Muslims may not have always been merely to recall their Prophet's life, including his actions and sayings. Details surrounding his past could have also been used to understand and remedy current problems and issues for the Muslim community. Memory was individual during Muhammad's life and remained individual for many Muslims who lived well after his death. Important events and episodes may have involved a number of Muslims in addition to him, such as important battles and pilgrimages. With time, however, memories about the past became collectively recalled by Muslims who were in power; held religious authority; or who studied, memorized, and taught stories about Muhammad. Considering that some of our most valuable sources on Muhammad's life are between one hundred and fifty years and three hundred years after his death, there is a sizeable period of oral tradition, which continued after traditions were written down and circulated.

As mentioned before, the past is not always remembered accurately, as we are often highly selective and sometimes biased due to our current circumstances. Halbwachs's work on social memory could help us better understand the ways in which social life influences and shapes how people remembered the past. More particularly, the social framework for early Muslims was to commemorate Muhammad as the founder of their religion, receiver of revelations from God, and the ideal human being. His sayings and actions organized and shaped the community's religious and cultural identities. Muhammad also became the identity and, in many ways, the aspiration of the nascent Muslim community, serving as a role model and example for them to imitate and follow. For example, this identity was demonstrated through coins that not only included the notion of one true God, but also that Muhammad was the Messenger of God.

Present circumstances of Muslims throughout the first three hundred years of Islam defined and redefined the past, especially Muhammad's role and actions. The collective memory of numerous communities was constructed, understood, and remembered based on issues and problems Muslims faced across the Islamic world. One of the most interesting examples comes from the ways in which Muhammad's actions resembled miracles that Jesus performed during his life, according to the Gospels. In many biographies and *hadiths*, there are instances of Muhammad multiplying food, healing the sick and blind, and causing water to spring forth from the ground. In the Gospels, Jesus is said to have healed a number of sick and blind people, multiplied food to feed thousands, and raised Lazarus from the dead. These similarities likely derived from the polemical debates between Christians and Muslims vying to legitimize their founders above all others.

The Qurʾan is direct in dealing with individuals who asked Muhammad to perform miracles. Numerous verses mention his adversaries or sceptics questioning why God did not send

a sign or miracle to him to demonstrate his prophethood (Q. 2:118, 6:37, and 10:20).[77] Q. 13:7 is another verse that states no need for miracles or signs, especially since Muhammad was not sent to perform them. This verse says, "The disbelievers say, 'Why has no miracle been sent down to him from his Lord?' But you are only there to give warning: [earlier] communities each had their guide." Verses such as this one respond to critics by acknowledging that Muhammad was not sent to perform miracles; rather, he was sent to warn his community and guide them to the right path. The Qurʾan states that miracles were given to past prophets, but the community still did not believe, so there was no point in having Muhammad perform miracles (Q. 21:5-9). For Muslims, their scripture is a miracle in and of itself as it was revealed to Muhammad through Gabriel directly from God. So why is it that miracles are attributed to him in *hadith*? In *sirah-maghazi*? And within interpretations of the Qurʾan?

Social memory helps us understand how Christian and Jewish polemic and theological debate impacted the early Muslim community. As previously mentioned, by knowing when scholars such as al-Bukhari and Muslim compiled and authenticated *hadiths*, as well as the years when authors wrote *sirah-maghazi*, we are able to explore the context they were living in and identify plausible circumstances that may have shaped how Muslims remembered Muhammad as a role model, sinless human, or superior Prophet. Apologetic and polemical debates surrounding the works of Christian and Jewish theologians, including John of Damascus, Theophanes the Confessor, and John, Bishop of Nikiu, who recounted several miracles attributed to Moses and Jesus, may have influenced how Muslims remembered Muhammad's life despite verses from the Qurʾan that say otherwise. They knew about previous prophets through their scripture and

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[77] There are episodes in the Gospels when unbelievers such as scribes and Pharisees demand a sign from Jesus. While the Gospels indicate that unbelievers will not receive a sign (Matt. 12:38; 16:4; Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29; John 6:30), there are several stories of Jesus performing miracles. On the other hand, the Qurʾan states clearly that Muhammad will not perform any miracles during his life.

interactions with Christians and Jews living in the Hijaz; however, Muslims learned much more about Christianity and Judaism, especially their doctrines and theology, when they had further interaction, discussion, and polemic outside Arabia.

As biographies were being written down, elaborations and invented stories about Muhammad circulated and were memorized to place him among his predecessors in terms of miracles and extraordinary events. Thus, we could find similarities between these stories and ones from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. We can also observe the embellishments from one biography to a later one, even though Ibn Ishaq's biography already attributes a number of miracles to Muhammad that we find in Biblical scripture. Therefore, we could also use memory studies to demonstrate how Muslims in the eighth and ninth centuries commemorated and remembered their Prophet.

Oral tradition in early Islam is important to understand as it is very unique among other oral traditions in late antiquity. For instance, it is significantly different than early Christianity in the first century. While both possessed a prominent oral tradition, one being in Arabia and the other in the Levant, there are differences in how oral tradition was transmitted. In early Christianity, there were Christians who performed rituals and shared the Jesus tradition to spread their faith and convert new followers. They also wrote down traditions as early as forty years after Jesus's death. While the Gospels represent some of the earliest written traditions of Jesus, they were not universally accepted until the fourth century, when they are believed to have been canonized. Thus, other gospels were probably circulating and acknowledged as important accounts of Jesus.[78]

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[78] There were many non-canonical gospels circulating as early as the late first and early second centuries, including the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Nazareans, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

Early Muslims also spread their faith and converted others, but they primarily used the teachings of the Qurʾan and, to a lesser extent, Muhammad's sayings and actions.[79] A major difference of oral tradition during early Islam is how some Muslims memorized past events, episodes, and verses from the Qurʾan. As mentioned before, there is evidence that early followers not only memorized Qurʾanic verses, but also traditions about Muhammad that were passed down verbatim to future generations. Therefore, while we have a longer period of oral tradition for early Muslims, we also have some scholars who memorized traditions and passed them down to their students verbatim.

The reliability of available sources on Muhammad has been heavily debated, questioned, and criticized. When critiquing early Muslim sources, Wansbrough says, "the language of a historical report is also the language of fiction. The difference between the two is a psychological assumption shared by writer and reader, and it is from that assumption that the historical report acquires significance, is deemed worthy of preservation and transmission."[80] Rippin also offers a skeptical approach saying, "we do *not* know and probably never can know what really happened; all we can know is what later people *believed* happened."[81] Scholars like Henri Lammens claimed that *hadith*, *tafsir*, and *sirah-maghazi* all shared the same source, especially *sirah-maghazi* as it was derived from *hadith* and *tafsir*, which allowed one to freely interpret material based on the Qurʾan. Crone maintains that early Islamic tradition is unrealistic, full of contradictions, oddities, and inconsistencies.[82]

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[79] Once someone became Muslim, *hadith* literature became more prominent and a tool to guide one's life, alongside the Qurʾan.

[80] John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 118-119.

[81] Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of Qurʾan, Tafsir, and Sira: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 157, emphasis in original.

[82] Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 12.

Whereas traditionalist scholars claim some historical value to extant sources we have on Muhammad, revisionist scholars have challenged the authenticity of early Muslim sources and Islamic history as they believe they merely reflect the opinions and problems of later generations well after Muhammad's death. For them, we cannot learn about the actual circumstances of the first Muslims, especially Muhammad, as compilers and collectors of tradition modified and embellished upon the sources beyond repair.

Schoeler points out that major compilations of *sirah-maghazi* and *hadith* from scholars of the ninth and tenth centuries, such as al-Bukhari, Ibn Ishaq, and Maʿmar were produced primarily by *aide-mémoire*, collections of lecture notes, and literature for a particular school.[83] The nature of transmission in the seventh and eighth centuries based on the approximately thirty to sixty year hiatus between the earliest reports and the reported events could represent instances of eyewitness accounts or contemporary reports that reflect the main outlines of actual events during Muhammad's life, even with valuable details.[84] Schoeler does acknowledge that transmission from collectors such as ʿUrwah to collectors like Ibn Ishaq and al-Tabari did go through a "modification process" as other traditions on Muhammad.[85] Nonetheless, he believes that we can receive remnants of the original version if we compare reports and establish intersections between them to reconstruct parts or entire episodes of the tradition.[86]

Muslims did not develop a standard method of transmitting texts verbatim from one individual to another, other than the Qurʾan. However, there are examples of teachers having a process in which students memorized not only a tradition but also the chain of authorities that traces the report all the way back to eyewitnesses of the event. This practice of memorizing

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[83] Gregory Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 1.
[84] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 1-2.
[85] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 2.
[86] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 2.

traditions took place between Maʿmar and his students, particularly ʿAbd al-Razzaq.[87] Maʿmar, in turn, learned and preserved traditions from his teacher al-Zuhri. While only ʿAbd al-Razzaq's work has survived, we can understand that most, if not all, of the traditions likely came from al-Zuhri, who was living within a hundred years of Muhammad's death. Of course, we can assume many redactions and modifications on the part of ʿAbd al-Razzaq, but that does not mean we should cast these traditions aside completely. Rather, we should note some of the consistencies with other biographical works on Muhammad.

Ibn Ishaq's teacher was also al-Zuhri, who studied with ʿUrwah. This chain indicates a teacher and student genealogy that traces to someone who was in contact with people who lived during Muhammad's time. Their collections of traditions provide us with the best chance of authentic material tracing back to Muhammad. While it is impossible to determine exactly what al-Zuhri or ʿUrwah transmitted, we can significantly narrow the gap between Ibn Hisham's recension of Ibn Ishaq's biography and initial collections that were preserved collectively by the Muslim community or at least by some Muslims. ʿUrwah not only had access to eyewitnesses, but also his aunt, ʿAʾisha. Chains of transmission through ʿUrwah often lead back to ʿAʾisha, who was present and knowledgeable about Muhammad.

If we consider Schoeler's work on narrowing the gap of the oral tradition, which accepts that ʿUrwah had access to eyewitness accounts, particularly ʿAʾisha's reports, we only have a gap of thirty to sixty years between Muhammad's death and his collection of reports about his life. The narrower gap of the oral tradition establishes a greater chance of accuracy and authenticity for reconstructing events and episodes. In addition, we have two important biographies on Muhammad

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[87] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, xx.

that trace back to al-Zuhri, which allows us to compare and identify some of the intersections in these two works, in terms of the traditions and chains of transmitters.

Recently, a number of scholars have been writing about material history and the ways in which we could use material evidence to better understand Islamic history, even more so than literary sources. Scholars such as Jonathan Brockopp have argued that material evidence could offer a more trustworthy and uninterpreted view of the past, despite its sparsity and scattered nature. Material evidence, however, is scarce and offers little detail when compared to the copious amount of literary material. We cannot establish a timeline or particular episodes from Muhammad's life from material evidence as we only obtain a glimpse of Islamic history.

While scholars of Islamic history have touched upon a variety of topics related to understanding the historical Muhammad, none have used memory studies, especially social and cultural memory, as a lens with which to approach early Muslim and non-Muslim literature. Could memory studies help us gain a new perspective on oral tradition between Muhammad's death and the writing of *hadith* and extant biographies on his life? Could it help us better situate memories of early Muslims living between the seventh and tenth centuries? Could we learn more about the reliability of available sources and their flaws?

Advantages of Using Memory for the Life of Muhammad

Since memory studies, namely social and cultural memory, has not been used on sources related to Muhammad's life, it is hard to evaluate its advantages. However, having researched the ways in which New Testament scholars have used memory studies in their work on the historical Jesus, the Gospels, and oral tradition in the first century, there are several potential advantages to be explored. We could go further in depth on how memory played an enormous role in the

preservation of sources. Starting with the Qurʾan, scholars have written about how Muslims memorized verses during Muhammad's lifetime until they were compiled into one book. The verses were memorized verbatim by *huffaz* (those who memorized the Qurʾan word for word) and codified during the reign of Caliph ʿUthman. Memory studies allows us to examine how early Muslims preserved the Qurʾan, and question whether there were any other influences that may have shaped it into the form that we have today.

Memory studies could also play a large role for other sources on Muhammad, especially *hadith* and *sirah-maghazi*, both of which were collected and compiled as early as his death and written down at least one hundred years later. We could establish a new connection between Muhammad's life and primary sources available to us. By using memory as a social framework, accounts of his life are observed as memories. We could then examine different types of memory that were formed by early Muslim communities, including collective, cultural, commemorative, and individual memory. All of these types of memory could be explored to offer a new perspective on how people remembered Muhammad until traditions were written down within our available sources. Therefore, memories from the Qurʾan will differ from memories within *hadiths*. Muslims who lived during Muhammad's life possessed an individual memory that remained with them throughout their lives, even passing their memories to the next generation. Later generations developed a more collective memory of him that was commemorative and communal. These memories were shaped and influenced by the context each community was living in.

Performative memory could also be useful when observing whether people re-enacted events from Muhammad's life or retold stories about him from their memory to audiences. Salient memory could provide some perspective regarding how important his life was to Muslims as a Messenger of God and the founder of Islam. Due to the significance of Muhammad's life, many

early Muslims may have wanted to know about events and episodes that took place when he lived. In addition, they may have been eager to learn and preserve memories of their Prophet that were passed down from eyewitnesses from generation to generation.

The validity of almost all Islamic literature comes down to whether we believe that oral tradition and transmission were reliable enough to make them trustworthy and historical. Oral transmission usually takes place during the first generation or two, within which eyewitnesses orally transmit their accounts of an event, episode, or figure. After the first few generations, oral transmission continues but creates an oral tradition that is preserved by communities recalling the past when it is pertinent to their present. Over time, oral tradition is often shaped repeatedly to a point where we may no longer consider the tradition authentic. Memory studies also helps us gain perspective on how oral transmission is produced and developed over time.

When considering all of the potential advantages for using memory studies on the life of Muhammad, numerous conclusions and insights could be gained through this approach. There will always be new perspectives on his life and our available sources; however, memory studies provides us with a unique lens to examine accounts as memories that early Muslims remembered and preserved, instead of relying heavily on the chain of transmission, which is often forged, modified, and unreliable. In addition, we are unable to fully accept the trustworthiness of our transmitters. By examining reports on Muhammad as memories, we consider not only how they could have been preserved and remembered for generations, but also how they could have been invented, embellished, or altered between his death and our extant sources. We, therefore, gain new understandings of surviving sources, Muhammad's life, and oral tradition during early Islam.

Disadvantages of Using Memory for the Life of Muhammad

One of the major disadvantages of using memory studies on the historical Muhammad is that there is no scholarship that uses memory studies, particularly social and cultural memory, on extant sources on his life. Scholars of early Islam have not used the work of Halbwachs to better understand sources and the ways in which Muslims remembered, preserved, and commemorated Muhammad's life. In addition, no current scholarship uses Aleida and Jan Assmann's work on early Muslim culture and identity formation. Therefore, using memory studies as a method on early Islam may present some obstacles and challenges that come naturally with new approaches.

Over the last hundred years, we have observed increasing scepticism towards early Muslim sources. From Christian theologians writing about Muhammad to revisionist scholars, it may be challenging for some of them to accept new methods and approaches that offer unique perspectives on his life. Since there are no approaches on the historical Muhammad that scholars accept universally, a disadvantage is whether scholars will be open to memory studies, which adds to an already exhaustive methodology on the study of early Islam.

One of the biggest flaws of using memory studies, which was developed in the nineteenth century and applied to events over two thousand years ago, is how anachronistic it is. Indeed, it is impossible to know *exactly* how people remembered Jesus and how authentic the Gospels are on portraying who he *really* was. Likewise, scholars may choose to point out that we are unable to understand how reliable oral transmission was in seventh-century Arabia and how Muslims preserved and shared stories of Muhammad over fourteen hundred years ago.

Another disadvantage of using memory studies is that this approach is limited in some ways. Halbwachs, among other scholars of memory studies, have not given enough attention to memories that were transmitted verbatim. Having verbatim memory transmitted word for word to

others greatly undermines much of their scholarship as the sociopolitical, cultural, and theological circumstances of later Muslims no longer directly shape the development and preservation of memories. As mentioned before, the Qurʾan is generally agreed upon as having been memorized verbatim from Muhammad's life until it was written down some twenty years later. Other sources such as *hadith* and *sirah-maghazi* could also be said to have been memorized verbatim in some cases and transmitted orally for over one hundred years before they were compiled. On the other hand, books on the history of Islam or non-Muslim sources on Muhammad were not memorized; rather, they were influenced by the circumstances of their authors. Therefore, we have a combination of sources that may include memorized traditions of Muhammad that were preserved verbatim for centuries.

Memory Studies will not be able to provide us with the "real" Muhammad no matter how we approach our sources. Using memory studies will not tell us exactly how he lived his day-to-day life or exactly what he said to his friends, wives, and enemies. Rather, we can better understand how people remembered him, as well as the flaws and influences that come with preserving a figure through memory and developing an oral tradition that continued for at least one hundred years. In addition, we may learn that some memories of Muhammad could be valuable in historicizing events and episodes that possibly took place during his life. Memory studies could also help us explore the reliability of our sources based on how early Muslim memories were shaped and developed over time.

As with memory studies used on the historical Jesus, there is a lack of focus on individual memory. During Muhammad's life, individuals were present to remember events and episodes that they may have even been a part of. ʿAʾisha, for example, not only helped her nephew, ʿUrwah, with traditions about her husband, she is also said to have provided well over two thousand *hadiths*,

preserving and passing down memories to those around her. There are several others who remembered Muhammad's life individually and passed down traditions about him. Therefore, individual memory will play a greater role than previous work on memory, especially scholarship from Halbwachs. In addition to the significance of individual memory for early Muslims, social and cultural memory will also be helpful in better understanding how memories were transmitted to later generations.

Potential disadvantages come with the use of memory studies on early Islam. While some disadvantages were pointed out by critics of Halbwachs, others were mentioned by New Testament scholars who found inherent flaws with the method. Nonetheless, the insights gained from using memory studies on the historical Jesus offer us valuable perspectives. It is, therefore, worth exploring what new understandings we could receive when using this approach on the life of Muhammad, particularly when observing accounts of his life as memories.

Conclusion

Throughout Islamic history, scholars, historians, and theologians have developed a number of methods to reconstruct Muhammad's life authentically. Methods and approaches continue to develop in order to decipher our available sources and examine their reliability. Although they were written as early as decades after Muhammad's death, the majority of them were written at least one hundred years later. Many sources are no longer extant, which would have narrowed the gap significantly between the time of Muhammad and *hadith* literature, biographies, and other accounts of his life. Therefore, we need to rely heavily on oral traditions that preserved memories for hundreds of years.

Memory studies has made a considerable impact on numerous disciplines, especially New Testament Studies. This approach goes further than merely recollecting and retelling the past; rather, it explores the relationship between the past and present, and the ways in which this relationship shapes one another. Social memory is particularly useful for identifying this relationship as it explores how memories are preserved and developed within a community. Halbwachs established social memory as a new field of study that observes memory as a social framework. His work helps us understand how memory is a social construct that establishes a group identity and guides the group into the future. Aleida and Jan Assmann furthered Halbwachs's work on social memory to pioneer cultural memory, which is another important dimension of memory. They argue that cultures use memory to shape their identity, which is usually based on the community's origins and foundational narratives.

Within historical Jesus scholarship, numerous questions, answers, and criticisms have brought us closer to the life of Jesus, which, prior to the late eighteenth century, was largely unchallenged. Source and redaction criticism raised interesting points about how we could approach the Gospels, whereas criteria of authenticity brought us a method to authenticate sayings and events during Jesus's life. More recently, we have seen a trend of incorporating memory studies into historical Jesus scholarship. This new approach, especially over the last twenty years, has given us further insights into the reliability of the Gospels, oral tradition, and oral transmission. Some scholars have embraced memory studies, while others have voiced their concerns and problems with using it as a theoretical framework.

For over three decades, New Testament scholars have offered new approaches to the life of Jesus, observing how early Christians transmitted stories of his life to future generations. When using memory studies on the historical Jesus, scholars are able to explore different types of

memory such as commemorative, collective, performative, and episodic memory. For instance, they link these types of memories to how early Christians remembered Jesus during their lives and how these memories developed before they were written down in the Gospels. While scholars such as Schröter, Kirk, and Le Donne point out how present circumstances of the gospel writers influenced memories of Jesus, memory studies allows us to gain new insights into the oral tradition of early Christianity and analyze oral transmission between Jesus's death and the writing of the Gospels approximately seventy years later.

Despite some noteworthy insights from memory studies, some scholars continue to be skeptical of the value of this approach. They question whether memory should even be used since we cannot determine how people *actually* remembered Jesus over two thousand years ago. We are not able to trace *exactly* how people shared stories of his life and commemorated him. In addition, this approach is anachronistic as it assumes that we can understand how people remembered and recalled stories of Jesus by understanding how memory works in the twenty-first century. Other scholars have pointed out that individual memory is neglected in social and cultural memory since it sometimes contradicts and undermines how communities preserved memories of the past.

When considering the advantages and disadvantages of using memory studies on the historical Jesus, there are several benefits in gaining new perspectives of how Jesus may have lived in the first century, how he was remembered by early Christians, and how reliable the sources are on his life, particularly the Gospels. It is for this reason that it is worth applying memory studies to the historical Muhammad. Scholars debate whether we can know anything about him based on the extant sources we have, especially since the majority of them date at least one hundred and fifty years after his death. Oral tradition during early Islam has been criticized heavily for its biased perceptions and unreliability, whereas oral transmission is said to have been influenced by

sociopolitical, theological, and cultural circumstances. Therefore, we are at the mercy of scholars, theologians, and biographers, all of whom possess their own agendas, subjectivities, and motivations.

If we use memory studies on the historical Muhammad, we can examine reports on events and episodes as memories that were remembered, modified, or fabricated between his lifetime and the writing of our sources. More particularly, we could analyze the role of social, individual, and cultural memory in the preservation of memories on his life, actions, and sayings. By incorporating social memory, we can analyze how problems and concerns of the authors influenced their understanding and recollection of the past. Communities preserved memories of Muhammad collectively, which could have been elaborated and embellished upon based on the needs of the community. Cultural memory could also be relevant to how Muslims remembered their Prophet as early Muslim communities developed their identity based on their cultural origins. In addition, we can analyze the importance of individual memories that people formed based on their presence or participation in events during Muhammad's life.

Although some disadvantages of memory studies used on the historical Jesus could be applicable to the historical Muhammad, we can attempt to rectify and nuance our approach based on potential flaws and pitfalls that New Testament scholars have pointed out. What is needed is a particular approach in which valuable insights could be gained. The next chapter will concentrate on our particular method, which uses memory studies as a theoretical framework on the historical Muhammad to reconstruct a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding his life.

Chapter 4: Methodology for the Historical Muhammad

Introduction

Numerous scholars have aspired to develop a method that would allow them to filter through sources and identify those that were authentic and those that were fabricated. However, after hundreds of years of scholars searching for the "real" Muhammad, no unanimously agreed upon method gives us a genuine glimpse of who he was, how he lived in the Hijaz, and what he believed about himself. Today, almost fourteen hundred years after Muhammad's death, many scholars have hope that we can still learn more about his life.

Although I am not the first to use historical Jesus scholarship on the study of Muhammad's life, I will be the first to use memory studies on the historical Muhammad to provide us with a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life. I have chosen this approach because of my fascination with both historical Jesus and historical Muhammad scholarship. Indeed, memory studies is a valuable lens and theoretical framework to apply not only to historical Jesus scholarship, but also to the historical Muhammad. The important task ahead is determining which approach within memory studies should be applied. I have carefully selected scholars within historical Jesus scholarship who have used memory studies in their work, provided interesting conclusions about Jesus, and observations about how he was remembered.

While it is difficult to foresee the conclusions of using memory studies on Muhammad, considering that it has not been done before, it is certainly worth attempting to potentially gain a new perspective on the historical Muhammad. In this chapter, I will thoroughly detail my own approach based on memory studies and historical Jesus scholarship. In addition, I will use the Battle of Badr as an example to demonstrate how I will use my method on case studies over our last two chapters. Although scholars usually agree that the Battle of Badr took place during

Muhammad's life, I will use this battle to illustrate how my method works and how it is applied on a particular event. Finally, I will analyze my approach by pointing out potential benefits and downfalls.

My method is important to the study of the historical Muhammad because it could provide new understandings of his life and reveal to us how memories about him have been influenced over time. Memory studies is crucial to understand the historical Muhammad as a man who lived in seventh-century Arabia and who claimed to be a Messenger of God. My approach will serve as the method that I will use in my last two chapters. More specifically, I will use my method on notable events that took place during Muhammad's life in Mecca and Medina based on our available sources.

Approaching the Historical Muhammad

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some scholars are optimistic about using memory studies to paint a clearer portrait of Jesus, while others believe that memory is too fragile and unreliable to help us reconstruct his life. Therefore, it is important to decide which authors' approaches and methods best suit our study of the historical Muhammad. The context of seventh-century Arabia, oral tradition, and late written material will all be taken into consideration when nuancing our method. Not only will we use approaches to the historical Jesus, but we will also explore the benefits of using different types of memory to better understand how and why memories of Muhammad's life were remembered and passed down for centuries, both orally and in written form.

The historical Muhammad has been defined by numerous scholars as they developed their own methods and approaches to better understand his life. While some of them are overwhelmed

by the abundance of surviving sources, others are skeptical of almost all of them. Many traditional scholars believe that the historical Muhammad we can reconstruct using Muslim sources is the "real" Muhammad as early Muslim authors were genuinely interested narrating his life. Some traditional scholars agree that there is a strong bias towards instilling Muhammad as the greatest Prophet, embellishing his life, and comparing him to Jesus and Moses. Revisionist scholars will often investigate and criticize extant sources as they contain both contradictions and fabrications, leading them to use non-Muslim sources alongside Muslim ones. A number of these scholars have attempted to demonstrate the impossibility of reconstructing the "real" Muhammad. My approach agrees that it is almost impossible to reconstruct Muhammad's life in its entirety. In addition, I agree with some scholars that non-Muslim sources could help us receive a more holistic perspective on how Muhammad was depicted within the first three hundred years after his death. Based on using a balanced approach that includes Sunni, Shia, and non-Muslim sources, my approach to the historical Muhammad aims to develop a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding his life.

Although I discussed the work of several historical Jesus scholars in our previous chapter, I will further explore works by Allison and Keener as their scholarship is paramount to my approach to the historical Muhammad. In *Constructing Jesus*, Allison is unconvinced about memory and its trustworthiness; however, he does not abandon the search for the historical Jesus. Rather, he develops new guidelines with which to approach sources on Jesus, including recurrent attestation and reconstructing the gist of his life, which he believes brings us a broader, yet more genuine, picture of his life. Keener, in his book *Christobiography*, examines the Gospels as ancient biographies and narratives of Jesus's life. He also considers the importance of understanding the gist of events and its reliability in relation to individual sayings.

Allison uses memory studies to point out the issues and inaccuracy of human memory across time. His pessimistic observations dictate his skeptical approach to sources on Jesus. Despite his stance on memory's deceptive and problematic nature, he carries on with a unique approach to the historical Jesus. For him, recurrent attestation occurs when "a topic or motif or type of story reappears again and again throughout the tradition."[1] This criterion is different from multiple attestation, which is usually a key component of scholars' criteria of authenticity, as there is no focus on a particular saying or episode being independently attested in two or more sources. Although Allison attempts to modify multiple attestation and replace it recurrent attestation, I will use both of them separately as they could complement one another when used on independent sources or literary genres.

Recurrent attestation themes and motifs are not nonspecific and cursory, according to Allison, as we can interpret themes and motifs in light of early Judaism to receive a clearer picture of Christian origins and a detailed glimpse of Jesus.[2] One of the problems of recurrent attestation is that it cannot be the sole criterion to reconstruct the historical Jesus. However, Allison only seeks to provide a gist of events, which suits recurrent attestation as these themes, motifs, and stories are broad and repeated a number of times within one source. Therefore, we can be more optimistic when generalizing instead of recovering details that may have been forgotten, replaced with new memories, or invented altogether.

Allison's view on memory seems to be very one dimensional as it focuses on issues and concerns surrounding memory. Numerous historical Jesus scholars illustrate the ways in which memory has been preserved for generations and even verbatim for long periods of time. Allison also anachronistically uses modern memory studies to make conclusions about the fragility of

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[1] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 20.
[2] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 21.

memory two thousand years ago. While any study of oral tradition and transmission of the past involves anachronistic approaches and methodology, Allison argues that modern memory studies of how we remember our past today reflects how humans did two thousand years ago. It is, however, difficult to accept that human memory today is identical to early Christians living in the Mediterranean during the first century. Another challenge of understanding memory is how scholars homogenize it without understanding which type of memory is being remembered and transmitted. Salient memories of Jesus are much more likely to be remembered than a less significant event we attempt to remember today.[3]

Keener's *Christobiography* is much more optimistic than Allison's *Constructing Jesus* as he concludes that the Gospels are historically reliable ancient biographies. By considering the Gospels as ancient biographies, he approaches them as he would similar sources written around the same period of time. Other ancient biographies within one hundred years of the Gospels were, according to Keener, generally trustworthy and possess similar ranges of consistency and flexibility.[4] His aim is not to reconstruct the historical Jesus, but rather to "contribute to the epistemology of historical-Jesus research."[5] Keener understands that his approach to the Gospels will not answer all of the questions surrounding their details, contradictions, and omissions; however, it will serve as a rapprochement among scholars using different epistemological approaches.

Although Keener points out that we should approach the Gospels as historical sources consistent with other biographies from the same period, there are exceptions when differences

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[3] Allison in *Constructing Jesus* mentions remembering a Thanksgiving dinner on page 3, whereas Bart Ehrman uses broken telephone as an analogy in *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (pages 51-52). Both examples are unconvincing when compared to early Christians remembering Jesus's life as they are not as significant or memorable.

[4] Keener, *Christobiography,* 24.

[5] Keener, *Christobiography*, 20.

exist within the works themselves and call for unique treatment.[6] The Gospels could be analyzed as ancient biographies, but it does not necessarily mean that they are similar to other biographies written during the same era. We are lacking some of the most fundamental understandings of the Gospels, including who wrote them, why they were written, when were they written, and what sources were available to the authors while they were writing. While Keener addresses how the Gospels are not hagiographical literature, it is not convincing enough to prevent us from understanding the Gospels in this manner. If the Gospels are explored as hagiographical biographies, then the comparison with other biographies around the same period is no longer as pertinent to gauge their trustworthiness and reliability.

Another contribution of Keener's work is his use of memory studies and his understanding of gist memory. When mentioning the gist of episodes in Jesus's ministry, he claims that we can know quite a bit as gist recollection in the gospel tradition is more likely an accurate representation of Jesus.[7] Keener's interest in gist memory demonstrates how historical works focused more on gist than precise wording, including verbatim memory that he claims decays much faster.[8] For my study, his most valuable work is on memory studies, oral tradition, and oral history. Keener also provides a helpful overview on the different types of memory that play a role in preserving Jesus's life and his ministry, along with an analysis on oral tradition and history to conclude that the Gospels were written during the living memory of Jesus.

The use of social and cultural memory in the study of the historical Muhammad serves as a foundation with which to understand what types of memories were formed to preserve Muhammad's life. For instance, collective, communal, commemorative, and individual memory,

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[6] Keener, *Christobiography*, 10.
[7] Keener, *Christobiography*, 18 and 379.
[8] Keener, *Christobiography*, 386.

could shed light on some of the ways and reasons why early Muslims sought to remember their Prophet. Similar to historical Jesus scholarship incorporating different types of memory when reconstructing Jesus's life, early Muslims transitioned from eyewitness and individual accounts to collective and communal memories, which eventually evolved into commemorative memories that established a cultural identity. It is unlikely that eyewitnesses did not share their experiences with their children and younger generations to pass on the struggles, successes, and formation of Islam during Muhammad's life.

Using social memory on the historical Muhammad offers us some new perspectives surrounding the development and transmission of traditions on his life; how early Muslims developed, shaped, and retold traditions; and how they remembered their Prophet's life orally before written traditions were circulated. Memories of Muhammad were formed during his life by early Muslims who lived near him, fought alongside him, or converted to Islam. Episodic memories are instances that took place in one's life. These memories impacted the one preserving the memory directly and were told and retold to others. Eyewitness memories, including episodic ones, are the most trustworthy as there were many Muslims who took part in key events during Muhammad's life, including the *hijra*, Battle of Badr, and conquering of Mecca. These eyewitness, usually independent, memories of Muhammad were likely able to be recalled with little difficulty and laid the foundation for oral tradition.

Communicative memories develop during eyewitness or living memory of Muhammad. These memories are preserved by those who claim to have lived with the first generation of eyewitnesses and is limited to three or four generations, which is approximately one hundred years. When using communicative memories during Muhammad's life, we can observe that eyewitness and living memory remained possible until the seventh century as eyewitnesses passed down

traditions of their Prophet to their children and other Muslims, who lived at least until the eighth century. For example, ʿUrwah lived during the eighth century and learned many traditions from his aunt, ʿAʾisha, who lived with Muhammad for over ten years. Communicative memory, however, is limited and temporary as it is not sustainable beyond one hundred years. Therefore, after the deaths of those who heard traditions about Muhammad directly from eyewitnesses, communicative memory slowly disappeared and transformed into cultural memory.

The cultural memory of Muhammad is not only influenced by the social setting of the preserver, but also includes a cultural dimension. Memories of his life shaped the cultural identity of Arabs, as well as Muslims who converted to Islam outside Arabia. The common cultural identity of Muslims traces back to what the community commemorated as being vital, namely the formation of Islam and the life of Muhammad, who was foundational to its origins. As previously mentioned, cultural memory serves as long-term memory and could span up to three thousand years. Even today, cultural memory of Muhammad and the formation of Islam remain significant to Muslims across the world.

Collective memory develops when numerous social groups construct, interpret, and remember the past, beyond individual and eyewitness recollections. Early Muslims contributed to the construction of Muhammad's memory as well as its significance to them. These memories were socially constructed and shaped by the social groups' sociopolitical, theological, and cultural context, which influenced how early Muslims chose to remember, cherish, and preserve their Prophet. Collective memories of Muhammad began within decades of his death as those who taught or lectured about his life were leaders, historians, or theologians. Muslims travelled across the Islamic world to learn from scholars such as ʿUrwah and al-Zuhri, who lectured to various groups of Muslims to educate them about their history. In addition, scholars were influenced by

their own context and their audiences. For example, ʿUrwah and Ibn Ishaq were meticulous with their stories about Muhammad when writing to caliphs of the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties.

Commemorative memory of Muhammad focuses on how later communities remember their past. By developing commemorative narratives and rituals to help preserve traditions of his life, early Muslims established a visible and stable collective identity of their Prophet and the origins of Islam. This new identity was likely symbolic and included Muhammad, who founded Islam and communicated the Qurʾan, which he claimed was directly from God through angel Gabriel. Muslims connected these traditions to their past and his life, shaping their identity throughout their lives. Discrepancies, however, exist between Muslims, particularly Sunni, Shia, and even Sufi understandings of Muhammad and his past. Although these sometimes disparate and contradictory understandings clash between Muslims, it is normal and even expected as they commemorated his life in different ways throughout history.

Performative memory may have been important to early Muslims in their preservation of Muhammad's life and significant events that helped shape Islam. Performance or live utterance of his life reinforced the oral tradition of early Muslims, internalizing the history of Islam and its founder. Performances likely took place to reinforce traditions from Muhammad's life, which were collectively passed on in gist form. In polemics with other faiths, Muslims must have learned that Christians and Jews performed their histories of the Bible in public and in private. Muslims, if they did not already, probably sought to imitate these performances on Muhammad's life, outlining important events that took place. Teachers presented their material in a lecture form based on their written notes or from memory as students took notes or remembered the lecture through their memory.[9] Performing private lectures or public ones transmitted traditions about Muhammad well

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[9] Gregory Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* trans. Uwe Vagelpohl and ed. James Montgomery (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40.

over a hundred years as lecturers passed on their material to their students, who did the same for their students, and so on, retelling events that took place decades or centuries ago from written notes or through memory.

Salient memories are relevant to both historical Jesus and historical Muhammad scholarship. Memories about Muhammad were salient as many Muslims were highly motivated to remember, preserve, and even memorize events from the past that were crucial to the beginning of Islam. Muslims were likely encouraged to remember important traditions about their Prophet, including his sayings, battles, and treaties. Some Muslims would remember events and traditions verbatim and pass on these memories to their students or children so that they could also memorize these traditions word for word. Salient memories are on a different level from all other memory as remembering events significant to their lives, identity, and history from a fifty years ago triumphs other events that took place recently. While numerous Muslims preserved the Qurʾan word for word, some also preserved traditions of Muhammad verbatim as well because they were salient memories that they believed should not be forgotten.[10]

Verbatim memory plays a larger role for the historical Muhammad than the historical Jesus as we have evidence that early Muslims memorized sayings, actions, and events that took place during Muhammad's life. As previously mentioned, many scholars lectured their students about the origins of Islam, which serve as vital aspects of their identity and culture. Not only did scholars, historians, and theologians remember the traditions of their Prophet, they also preserve the chain of transmission that traced all the way back to him or an eyewitness. Based on our evidence, we are unable to confirm the trustworthiness of *hadith* scholars or biographers; rather, we can assume that some early Muslims remembered traditions of Muhammad verbatim. When there are

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[10] Memorized traditions of Muhammad likely include fabricated ones; however, we should not disregard all *hadiths* as we can use them to further corroborate other sources available on Muhammad.

differences between recollections within our accounts, we are no longer receiving verbatim memory as memories often compete with one another and could be modified, forgotten, or embellished over time. In these cases, it is important to explore all types of memories as there will be consistencies, along with a larger number of memories that support a particular episode over others. Therefore, the majority of recollections will usually be used over minority memories.

Social and cultural memory are important to understand how Muslims may have chosen to remember Muhammad, his significance, his actions, and his words. It is worth noting, however, that we cannot state how precise Muslims were in remembering their Prophet as it is impossible for any scholar to do so. Social memory helps us fill in significant gaps as it includes how social contexts influenced the ways in which early Muslims preserved, reconstructed, and modified memories of Muhammad. For example, as Muslims reached Christian and Jewish populations outside Arabia, they had polemical debates with them, which must have further influenced memories of Muhammad and how he was remembered by later Muslims.[11] The addition of miracles that took place during his life is abundantly clear when comparing the Qurʾan, *sirah-maghazi*, and *hadith* as Muhammad performs more and more miracles as new biographies were written. Although additions and omissions inevitably took place in biographies, the gist of Muhammad's life was likely to have been preserved with more authenticity than individual sayings or actions, including miracles.

In addition to incorporating social and cultural memory on the historical Muhammad, Allison's view on the big picture works well alongside memory studies. Despite his negative impressions of human memory, he points out that long-term memory is more applicable to whole

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[11] Early Muslim learned about Christianity and Judaism while in Arabia because of Christian and Jewish communities residing within the Hijaz, but there were other communities of interpretation within both Judaism and Christianity that had different views, beliefs, and rituals than those living in Arabia in the seventh century.

events rather than subplots.[12] More particularly, over time, as memories become more challenging to retain, we tend to remember the "gist" of an event. For example, early Muslims may not have remembered the exact details of the Battle of Badr, such as which individual fought whom, what time the battle took place, everyone who was captured, and all who escaped.[13] However, significant deaths during the battle, including as Abu Jahl (d. 624), a chief antagonist of Muhammad, is likely to have been remembered by early Muslims and passed on through oral and written traditions.

We could also assume that Muslims would remember key features of a battle as important as Badr, including the outcome, the year it took place, and the location. These features are the gist of the event that had Muslims lead a successful battle in 624 at the wells of Badr. Embellishments are probable, even expected in our literature, as this was the first major battle of Muhammad's life. Victory against the odds they faced is also plausible, especially since it is attested in multiple sources, ranging from the Qurʾan to *sirah-maghazi*. In addition to the battle being thoroughly detailed in sources such as *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, Ibn Hisham, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, and al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Baladhuri, the Qurʾan offers verses that reference the battle directly. As mentioned before, Q. 3:123 says, "God helped you at Badr when you were very weak. Be mindful of God, so that you may be grateful." In addition, Q. 3:13 says "You have already seen a sign in the two armies that met in battle, one fighting for God's cause and the other made up of disbelievers. With their own eyes [the former] saw [the latter] to be twice their number, but God helps whoever He will." The gist of the Battle of Badr could be found in the Qurʾan if we consider it to be an independent source and its own genre. *Hadiths* and *sirah-maghazi* could also be used as additional sources and genres that recount specific details as well as embellishments that are

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[12] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 10-11.

[13] I use the Battle of Badr because this event is one of the most significant battles during Muhammad's life and the details are sometimes contested. In addition, I will not be using this event as a case study in my last two chapters.

difficult to determine their authenticity. Therefore, our approach to this battle, along with other events, is to understand the big picture and gist of episodes that took place using memory studies.

The exact words Muhammad spoke during an event seems beyond our ability to determine their veracity and authenticity. Episodic and independent memory could have retained particular sayings and actions within the generation of eyewitnesses, preserved by those who received these oral or written traditions directly. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to confirm whether a saying or action *actually* took place during Muhammad's life. Salient memories would focus more on the gist of events as it is easily transmitted from one generation to the next with better accuracy. Communal, communicative, and commemorative memory would also benefit from the big picture of events to be handed down and shared with other Muslims. Memories of Badr, along with other important events, became part of Muslims' cultural identity.

With social memory being influenced over time by the sociopolitical, theological, and cultural settings of later Muslims, events that took place during Muhammad's life were sometimes nuanced, invented, embellished, or even omitted as Islamic theology was developed. In addition, some modifications aimed to raise the status of Muslims, while denouncing others. For example, those who fought in battles and were martyred may have been added or omitted intentionally to benefit those who wanted to safeguard their friends, relatives, and ancestors in history. While we cannot verify everyone who fought on each side or those who were martyred during battles, we can identify the big picture of events and focus primarily on the gist that was most likely preserved and passed on with more precision.

Recurrent attestation of themes, stories, motifs, and rhetorical strategies within primary sources greatly benefits our abundant corpus of literature on Muhammad, ranging from the Qurʾan to non-Muslim sources. I will broaden my approach to include events and episodes that are

mentioned not only within sources, but also between sources that could be classified as independent or from different genres.[14] A reason why Allison did not use both recurrent attestation and multiple attestation on larger stories and episodes in the Gospels may be due to the fact that we lack independent sources on Jesus. Larger stories are rarely repeated within each gospel, and if they are between sources, we cannot determine whether one gospel writer referenced another gospel that was circulating at the time.

One of the biggest disadvantages within the study of the historical Jesus is that multiple attestation is not a strong criterion of authenticity as the Synoptic Gospels are literarily linked and cannot be understood as independent from one another. Even the Gospel of John cannot be considered as completely independent as there is evidence that points to John using Mark, which means that it is possible that the gospel writer of John may have had Mark at their disposal, along with other sources.[15] Therefore, it seems more appropriate to use recurrent attestation on larger episodes that took place during Muhammad's life, especially since they are repeated or recalled within sources as well as between independent sources or different genres. Recurrent attestation may not be fully applicable to all of my case studies; however, this approach will provide great insight, especially when combined with multiple attestation.

Using our example of the Battle of Badr again, we notice that the battle is referenced not only once, but several times within the Qurʾan. In addition to the only direct mention of Badr in the third chapter (*Al-Imran*), as well as other references within that chapter, there are many more references in the eighth chapter (*Al-Anfal*), which is considered a Medinan sura based mainly on

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[14] This is the essence of the criterion of multiple attestation, which Meier deploys in his work.

[15] The Gospel of John has many significant parallels with Mark as can be seen in Richard Bauckham's chapter "John for Readers of Mark" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*.

the Battle of Badr.[16] This chapter reminds Muslims that God brought them victory and provides instructions on how to distribute the gains from the battle. Q. 8:7-8 says, "Remember how God promised you [believers] that one of the two enemy groups would fall to you: you wanted the unarmed group to be yours, but it was God's will to establish the truth according to His Word and to finish off the disbelievers to prove the Truth to be true, and the false to be false, much as the guilty might dislike it." Verses that reference the Battle of Badr recur numerous times within the Qurʾan, becoming an important event that Muslims remembered through oral tradition.[17] Therefore, by using the criterion of recurrent attestation, the Battle of Badr is a trustworthy event that took place during Muhammad's life, which was a victorious battle over his adversaries who were at least twice the size of his forces. Further information could be elucidated by using other sources and criteria to portray a reasonably coherent picture of the battle.

For our purposes, I will consider the Qurʾan, *hadith*, and *sirah-maghazi* largely as independent sources and different genres. Although I will be cautious and meticulous when using either *hadith* or *sirah-maghazi*, I recognize that I will likely be criticized for my optimistic views on many primary sources on Muhammad; however, I believe that this view is a more accurate perspective than assuming that the Qurʾan served as the sole inspiration for both *hadith* and *sirah-maghazi*. In addition to our plausibly independent primary sources, we have repeated events and themes within our sources that bring us more confidence than isolating details and confirming whether they occurred individually.

Using recurrent attestation will allow me to point out that some events are more likely authentic than others based on how our sources repeat events, themes, and episodes from his life.

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[16] *The Qurʾan*, 110. Abdel Haleem states that this is a Medinan sura that comments mainly on the Battle of Badr, including the distribution of gains.

[17] The Battle of Badr is mentioned in Q. 3:13, 3:121-127, 3:173-174, 3:7-12, 8:7-12, 8:43-44, and 8:48.

In addition, we can compare these references within one source alongside other available sources we have. Once we establish a recurrent theme or event, we should interpret it within the context of seventh-century Arabia. This context could be found within the Qurʾan, early Muslim sources on Muhammad, and even early non-Muslim sources. Once we contextualize the event or theme, we are plausibly discovering a reasonably coherent glimpse of the historical Muhammad.

Another criterion that will be helpful in understanding the authenticity of events from Muhammad's life is the criterion of embarrassment. Meier places this criterion first among his primary criteria of authenticity. It is considered one of the most straightforward methods to use on the historical Jesus as it understands that disciples and later Christians would not have forged embarrassing verses, actions, and episodes about Jesus. Examples include his crucifixion outside Jerusalem as it was considered one of the most shameful and humiliating executions in the first century under Roman rule. The biggest challenge for this criterion is that we are unable to determine what was embarrassing for disciples and followers living two thousand years ago. How much has changed in understanding an embarrassing story about Jesus? Rodríguez points out that many facts of the Jesus tradition, including his baptism and the disciples' fatigability, are not inherently embarrassing as they only become so when we contextualize them within larger historical narratives.[18]

While the criterion of embarrassment has come under scrutiny over the last few years, there are some positive aspects that could be valuable. This criterion could overlap significantly with multiple attestation and recurrent attestation, especially since we will not be using it on particular verses attributed to Muhammad. Rather, we will use this criterion on the gist of events to help only

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[18] Rafael Rodríguez, "The Embarrassing Truth about Jesus: The Criterion of Embarrassment about the Failure of Historical Authenticity," in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, eds. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012), 145-146.

further validate the plausibility of an episode during his life.[19] As with the historical Jesus, it is challenging to assume what we understand as embarrassing today could have also been embarrassing for early Muslims fourteen hundred years ago. However, this dilemma should not force us to disregard everything that may have been embarrassing to Muhammad, early Muslims, and Islam.

Keener contrasts Allison with his optimism surrounding the uses of memory and the reliability of the Gospels. His *Christobiography* "addresses those who believe that some significant historical information appears in and can be outlined from many historical sources, whatever their weaknesses."[20] Keener hopes to prove that "the sort of substance and variation we see in the Gospels is well within the bounds expected in ancient narratives about actual persons and events."[21] Our conclusions here are similar to his as accounts of Muhammad sought to preserve significant information about his life and are generally trustworthy, if we focus on the gist of events and not on particular sayings or thorough details.

As already mentioned, Keener claims that we could learn quite a bit about Jesus in terms of the gist of episodes that occurred during his life. For him, gist memory focuses more on meaning than exact wording as dialogues and reported conversations were recorded by ancient writers according to their gist.[22] More particularly, ancient historical work was mostly interested in the gist rather than precise wording, which is more easily captured and preserved over time.[23] Our limitations of memory allow us to best transmit the gist of speeches, battles, and other important

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[19] The criterion of embarrassment will not be our most important criteria as it is for Meier.
[20] Keener, *Christobiography*, 10.
[21] Keener, *Christobiography*, 21.
[22] Keener, *Christobiography*, 386-387.
[23] Keener, *Christobiography*, 387.

events. Even eyewitnesses are more likely to accurately remember the gist of an episode instead of the exact details.

Early Muslims who lived during the time of Muhammad may have been able to recall some particular details of an event based on their perspectives, but they were probably better able to remember the overall nature of an episode during his life. More specifically, most Muslims must have passed on the gist or substance of what they learned or saw during their interactions and observations of their Prophet. Muslims would have retold the same stories of Muhammad in varying ways during their lives to their children, students, and others who were interested. In general, storytellers are bound to be more flexible and take liberties each time they tell a story, based on their own perspectives, nuances, and the nature of the audience. However, the core of the story or event surrounding Muhammad's life would remain almost identical every time as it was important for both the storyteller and audience that the essence of his life would be consistent. Therefore, common practices of storytelling account for the range of differences and contradictions but nonetheless leaves the "essential gist."[24]

Although late antique biographies circulated within the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires during the time of Muhammad and later Islamic empires, we are unable to ascertain which biographies may have influenced Muslim historians, scholars, and theologians. With Qurʾanic verses written during Muhammad's life and compiled within twenty years of his death, it is doubtful that they were heavily influenced by any other genre outside the Islamic world. *Hadith* and *sirah-maghazi* are more likely to have been influenced by outside sources, especially biblical scripture and other religious literature.[25] Nevertheless, a comparative analysis similar to Keener's approach is outside the scope of this study as we focus on his understanding of memory studies.

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[24] Keener, *Christobiography*, 442.
[25] For example, Qurʾanic *tafsir* was probably influenced by Jewish folklore.

Unlike Keener, I do not consider the Gospels to be ancient biographies in the same sense as other contemporary biographies. While I am not fully convinced that the Gospels were solely ancient biographies and not hagiographies, I agree that there are many resemblances between the Gospels and ancient biographies that narrate the lives of emperors, teachers, and sages. Keener could have offered a stronger comparison between the Gospels and the Hebrew Bible, which was the most readily available and valuable source to early followers of Jesus. It would seem more appropriate, at least in my opinion, to consider that the Gospels were more of a hybrid between ancient biographies and hagiographies. Although there are numerous parallels between the Gospels and ancient biographies, it is difficult to deny that the Gospels approached Jesus differently than ancient biographers approached the lives of public figures, sages, and emperors.

Other than the Qurʾan, most of our sources on Muhammad represent a similar hybrid between late antique biographies and hagiographies. Extant Muslim sources aim to preserve his life in a similar fashion to those biographies of a saint (or Jesus), which are often idealized portraits of their life with a focus on miracles and other extraordinary experiences. As biographies on Muhammad were written, his life was portrayed as legendary but still with an aim to offer a detailed account of who he was as a man, husband, father, and leader. While miracles were included in biographies to demonstrate his prophetic status, major events and episodes remained largely unchanged in its substance. We may not be able to distinguish or separate what miracles or legends were added by early biographers, which is why it is best to recognize gist memories that preserved who Muhammad was and what he did during his life.

My approach to the historical Muhammad will give us a unique understanding of oral tradition and oral transmission during the period between his death in 632 and the writing of our extant resources. I examine how memories were developed, remembered, and preserved over time

by early Muslims, who shared these memories with later generations. I explore a number of types of memory that could have played a major role for early Muslims soon after Muhammad died, including how memories were sometimes embellished and invented to redefine who Muhammad was when compared to Jesus and Moses. I argue that oral cultures, such as early Muslim culture in seventh and eighth-century Arabia, are more likely to retain the gist of events and episodes. *Sirah-maghazi* and *hadith* first emerged as oral tradition to retain vast traditions about Muhammad, ranging from his words to his actions. Within one hundred years after his death, oral transmission of traditions was more widely accommodated by scholars alongside its written codification in books.[26] Preserving the life of Muhammad in written literature was furthered by Umayyad and Abbasid courts that patronized and funded scholars to compile *sirah-maghazi* traditions into systematic literary works.[27]

As an oral tradition, early Muslim societies would naturally limit modifications concerning the core of a story or event,[28] as it shaped the stories of Muhammad with the goal of remembering his life as part of their cultural identity. These traditions were passed on for generations one to another until they were written down in the eighth century. Based on early Muslims' ability to memorize the Qurʾan verbatim, a tradition that continues even today, it is not farfetched to believe that several Muslims memorized Muhammad's sayings and actions to be passed on orally to future generations. We have evidence that some Muslims wrote down traditions for multiple reasons, including writing them down temporary until they were memorized and keeping written traditions as part of their own private collection.[29]

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[26] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 138.
[27] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 236.
[28] Keener, *Christobiography*, 467.
[29] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 87.

Keener highlights four factors that allow oral traditions to flourish: "the information is significant to the community; the story includes vivid imagery that engages audiences' senses; the core is reinforced through redundancy and repetition; and stories are simplified, elements being conflated, to conserve room in the cultural memory."[30] These factors exist within the oral tradition of early Muslims as the life of Muhammad was, and continues to be, highly significant to them and their identity. Oral traditions must have been engaging and captivating to audiences, with the essence of his mission, hardships, and victories emphasized and reinforced. Events surrounding Muhammad's life were likely simplified at first with the gist of events but embellished as time went on. Using my approach on our case studies, we will learn more about how early Muslim oral tradition and transmission were influenced, preserved, or modified over time based on the salience of the event and its relevance to the society remembering it.

By combining approaches to the historical Jesus, I intend to provide some valuable insights and perspectives of what happened during Muhammad's life and how people remembered him. The use of memory studies on the historical Muhammad has never been applied thoroughly enough to generate significant results. Some scholars have referenced some of the types of memory in their work, but their usage is brief and without analysis. For instance, Anthony mentions cultural and communal memory in his book, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, but it is usually in passing. When he does discuss memory studies, he offers a pessimistic approach that references historical Jesus scholars such as Allison and Ehrman.[31] The range of historical Jesus scholarship using memory as a theoretical framework goes far beyond the handful of scholars whom Anthony mentions.

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[30] Keener, *Christobiography*, 465.
[31] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 8-11.

Historical Jesus scholars do not have the same concerns as historical Muhammad scholars since the majority of scholars are Christian, bringing their own generally positive agendas and beliefs. While some have criticized the historical Jesus for being too optimistic, there is strong support for optimism that the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses or during the living memory of Jesus. The challenges associated with scholars' skepticism towards the reliability of the Gospels have been overcome much easier when compared to the historical Muhammad as the majority of scholars have offered cynical and skeptical approaches to his life, sometimes criticizing scholars who hold a traditional perspective.[32]

My approach of using social and cultural memory, along with approaches from Allison and Keener, will not give us all of the answers. The benefits and disadvantages of using memory studies differ greatly between these scholars, which allows us to be more cautious and not overly optimistic of the results and reliability of our sources. Most of our extant sources were not written within Muhammad's living memory as only the Qurʾan and perhaps the letters of ʿUrwah were written during the lives of eyewitnesses. Beyond these two sources, we have to examine the reliability and reasons why memories were passed down to future generations.

This study seeks to put an end to the exhaustive scholarship, often negative, that aims to authenticate or invalidate sayings of Muhammad. There is simply no way to determine details within *hadith* and *sirah-maghazi* as no method can allow us to confirm his sayings, actions, or what he was thinking. Since we cannot reconcile our sources to find one true account that encompasses all of Muhammad's authentic sayings, along with all of his actions, our most viable option is to approach the historical Muhammad by observing all reports on his life as memories

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[32] This includes students of Wansbrough, such as Crone, Cook, and Hawting, in particular.

and identifying the "big picture," the gist of events and episodes that are most likely to have taken place based on our sources.

Conclusion

For centuries, scholars have created methods with the aim to allow us to reconstruct the life of Muhammad. Over time, we have gone from a solely traditional school of thought regarding early Muslim sources to two schools, challenging one another through their scholarship. The primary method used on sources is the *isnad*-cum-*matn* analysis, which compiles all available sources on a particular episode or event and uses *isnad* analysis to compare the texts and chains of transmission. Many scholars, especially those within the revisionist school, have criticized this method as unreliable due to the widespread fabrication of sources on Muhammad. While this approach has given us greater insight into events and episodes that may have occurred during his life, there is also room for innovative methods that could give us new perspectives on the historical Muhammad, especially recent approaches within historical Jesus scholarship. Scholars of the historical Jesus have faced similar challenges as scholars of the historical Muhammad. Beginning in the eighteenth century, we have seen five "quests" for the historical Jesus, starting with the rise of the "Old Quest" until with the "Third/ Renewed/Post Quest."

Based on observations and conclusions of using memory studies on the historical Jesus, it seems beneficial to apply this lens of study on the historical Muhammad, especially since there is no agreement among scholars as to which method or approach is best. In addition, with historical Muhammad scholarship, we continue to get more questions than answers in understanding who Muhammad was and the sources we have at our disposal. Memory studies may help us answer many of these questions as it provides new details about how memory fits within the study of the

historical Muhammad. Social and cultural memory could bring us interesting perspectives on how early Muslims remembered Muhammad during and after his death, as well as how memories were embellished and elaborated upon over time. Accounts from our sources will be explored as memories that were transmitted orally until they were written down. Therefore, memories of Qurʾanic verses will be more reliable than al-Tabari's biography because they were written down during Muhammad's life and compiled within a few decades. Al-Tabari's work, on the other hand, will need to be further examined for embellishments, fabrications, and omissions, as accounts from this source are analyzed as memories that were orally transmitted for approximately three hundred years. Non-Muslim sources will also be viewed as memories as we are often unable to trace exactly how accounts of Muhammad reached the author, what sources were referenced, and to what extent they were modified or fabricated.

In addition to using memory studies as an approach to the historical Muhammad, Keener and Allison's recent works bring us a more focused and cautious exploration of available sources. Their work on memory studies as a whole, with a concentration on gist memory and recurrent attestation allows us to combine them for the historical Muhammad. In addition, the criteria of multiple attestation and embarrassment provide further examination of events from Muhammad's life, available sources, and their authenticity. Gist memory is particularly significant as we have a wider gap of time between his death and our extant sources. By using this type of memory, we acknowledge that it was doubtful that every Muslim memorized Muhammad's words and sayings and passed them on to future generations.

While some Muslims remembered traditions about Muhammad, passing them on verbatim for generations was not the most prominent and sustainable means of preservation and accuracy. Rather, we can assume more confidence in understanding that Muslims remembered the gist of

events that were passed on until the writing of *sirah-maghazi* and compilation of *hadiths*, if not longer. Accurate details are possibly included in *hadith* literature and *sirah-maghazi*, but we cannot determine or distinguish which details are authenticate and trustworthy. In addition, we cannot confirm each transmitter within every chain of transmission tracing back to Muhammad. While it is easier to dismiss *hadiths* and biographies as fabricated, it seems impossible to create a method that could validate sayings or actions as genuine. No method currently exists, and it is unlikely that one will be created that will be unanimously agreed upon as the "correct" one. Therefore, acknowledging accounts about Muhammad as memories discounts the importance of the chain of transmission within *hadith, sirah-maghazi*, and other Islamic literature.

Over the next two chapters, I will be using my method on specific episodes and events that are believed to have taken place during the time of Muhammad. These cases studies are important in understanding the overall picture of his life and the origins of Islam. I have compiled four cases that took place during Muhammad's time in Mecca and four cases that took place during his time in Medina. Although it is more challenging to confirm whether events occurred during his time in Mecca, I will provide sufficient evidence that could bring us more confidence that they did. Some of these cases have been discussed in recent scholarship, while others have not received the same attention despite their relevance and significance today.

Chapter 5: Muhammad in Mecca

Introduction

Muhammad's life in Mecca brings us much uncertainty as most of our sources skim over his childhood and adolescence. When we do have events concerning his birth, childhood, and teenage years, we often learn of miraculous events of his ability to hold his own head up, walk, and talk. In addition, our primary sources include accounts of trees and plants bowing down to Muhammad as he walked by, or clouds shading him from the sun.[1] Thus, some scholars of early Islam may find Muhammad's life in Mecca too challenging to authenticate and reconstruct with accuracy. These scholars will, therefore, focus on his life in Medina, which offers more details and clarity on events that they deem more likely to have taken place.

Despite pessimism on whether we can *really* know anything about Muhammad's life in Mecca, there is sufficient evidence to give us optimism. More particularly, when compiling our available sources on his life, there are several events taking place in Mecca that are repeated and could be reconstructed with confidence when using our method. In this chapter, I will explore four episodes from Muhammad's life in Mecca and demonstrate their authenticity.[2] These four case studies are his first encounter with Khadija, which ended up with him serving as her merchant and travelling outside Mecca; Muhammad's reaction to what he believed was his first revelation, which had him questioning himself and even contemplating jumping off Mount Hira; ʿAli ibn Abu Talib as the first male convert to Islam, who converted after Khadija; and the boycott of the Banu Hashim

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[1] Many of these miraculous accounts will be examined within my case studies.
[2] I will discuss my reasoning for choosing our four case studies in the next section of this chapter.

and Banu al-Muttalib, which had the Qurayshis put restrictions and harsh conditions on Muhammad and the two clans.

This chapter will use my method on the historical Muhammad, which was outlined in my previous chapter. In my approach, I will first explore the criterion of embarrassment on our cases to analyze how these episodes embarrass or create difficulty for Muhammad's legacy or the nascent Muslim community. I will then analyze how individual sources possess recurrent attestation as they repeat particular events, giving us more confidence that the event took place. Next, I will examine how multiple attestation takes place between our sources, some of which could be considered as independent genres because they encompass their own style, form, and content. Finally, I will incorporate memory studies to answer how these events could have been remembered, interpreted, and modified over time. I will note which types of memory were likely effective in preserving these episodes both orally and in written form.

By using my method on these case studies, I intend to provide a new perspective to examine available sources on Muhammad's life and the ways in which events from his life were preserved and revised as memories through oral tradition. I aim to provide new understandings of these episodes and how they may bring us closer to the historical Muhammad. I aim to offer a balanced approach that examines both Muslim and non-Muslim sources to better understand the role memory played for early Muslims and the foundation of Islam. To that end, I offer a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life.

In this chapter, I will begin with an overview of our four case studies and provide reasoning why I chose these events over other potential episodes that took place in Mecca. I will then conduct my case studies individually, giving a background of the event based on Muslim belief and sources, discussing what recent scholars have said about it, and surveying what evidence we have through

our primary sources.[3] Next, I will use my method to make statements about the authenticity and veracity of each event and offer historical reflections and observations. Lastly, I will offer my final thoughts on Muhammad's life in Mecca and how my method provides a better understanding of events before his migration to Medina.

Events During Muhammad's Life in Mecca

There are a number of events from Muhammad's life in Mecca that could have been examined in this chapter; however, I chose four significant events that have either been neglected over time or continues to be controversial today. Our first case study is Muhammad's first interaction with Khadija, which was an important shift in his life. Prior to this encounter with his future wife, we do not learn much about Muhammad's teenage and adult life until he is around twenty-five years old. It is his first interaction with Khadija that established him as a merchant who traded goods on her behalf. In addition, their first meeting built the foundation upon which Muhammad thrived, married Khadija, and eventually went on isolated retreats, which is where he is believed to have received his first revelation and call to prophethood. Some scholars, who I will name and critique during my case study, question Muhammad as a merchant due to their understanding that there is a lack of evidence demonstrating his profession as a trader.

Our second case study focuses on Muhammad's reaction to what he believed was his first revelation, which is usually overshadowed by what was revealed in Mount Hira, when he was forty

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[3] I will include a survey of secondary sources to identify the ways in which modern scholars explore and interpret primary sources on Muhammad's life. Some of their work is very recent and helps us better understand the current trends and methods applied to our extant sources. The primary sources are fundamental to our analysis, so we will describe how every author narrates each event, which will serve as memories that were preserved over time. When narrating our primary sources, I will begin by outlining our Muslim sources chronologically, except hadith literature, which I will save for the end of this order as they are our least reliable Muslim sources. I will then discuss our non-Muslim sources in chronologically as it will allow us to better assess and compare the similarities and discrepancies between our available sources.

years old. His reaction is significant because it exhibited his fears and hesitance to accept an episode that is believed to have included angel Gabriel appearing to him. Muhammad was terrified and sought help from Khadija, who comforted and reassured him of his good nature. In addition, some accounts have Muhammad intending to jump from the top of the mountains to his death. A number of scholars compare his reaction to biblical accounts of other prophets interacting with angels or God directly. These comparisons question the authenticity of Muhammad's reaction and reduce it to a mere imitation of biblical stories.

Our third case study is one of the most controversial episodes in Muhammad's life: the conversion of the first male to Islam. Because of the implications associated with that position, scholars rarely detail who converted first between three of the earliest male converts. Sunni Muslims recognize Abu Bakr, Zayd, or ʿAli as the first male convert, whereas Shia Muslims acknowledge only ʿAli as the first male to accept Islam. Although this debate continues today, the majority of our evidence leans toward ʿAli, despite anti-Shia sentiments during the writing of our accounts about Muhammad.

Our last case study is the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib that likely took place between 616 and 619. The leaders of the Banu Quraysh wrote a document that banned marriages and business with the two clans to punish them for protecting Muhammad. This boycott is rarely detailed in current scholarship even though it was an extremely challenging time during Muhammad's life. The boycott created a harsh situation that worried him greatly and impacted his family and the two clans financially, physically, and emotionally. Many of our sources directly or indirectly recount this boycott, mentioning the conditions that were placed against both the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib.

All four of our cases represent events that influenced the historical Muhammad significantly. In addition, each case possesses a number of primary sources that provide evidence to help validate their authenticity. Using our approach of comparing multiple sources and examining whether the event is embarrassing or recurring within each source will give us more confidence regarding the veracity of these episodes. In addition, by using memory studies, we will receive a new perspective by observing accounts and reports within the Qurʾan, *hadith*, *sirah-maghazi*, other Islamic literature, and non-Muslim sources as memories that were orally transmitted from Muhammad's life until they were written down. I will also analyze how memories of the events were preserved, communicated, and modified over time, focusing on how the essence or gist of the episode is more likely to be transmitted with accuracy.

Muhammad's First Encounter with Khadija

Based on Islamic traditions, Muhammad was around twenty-five years old when he met one of the richest merchants of Mecca, Khadija bint Khuwaylid of the Asad clan, who learned of his reputation as being known as *al-Amin*, which means the trustworthy. Khadija usually hired men to trade on her behalf, so she inquired further about Muhammad and eventually asked him to take some of her merchandise to Syria. She doubled his fee because of his reputation and sent Maysarah, her servant, along to serve him on his journey.

After his long journey to Syria, Muhammad returned to Khadija triumphantly. It was soon after his return that Khadija made the decision to ask him to marry her, despite being older than him and widowed twice. Muhammad agreed to this marriage proposal and they lived a happy life together for over twenty years, having four daughters (Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Um Kulthum, and

Fatima) and at least one son (Qasim and maybe ʿAbdallah and al-Tahir).[4] During their marriage, Muhammad remained monogamous and cherished Khadija, who supported him not only physically, but also emotionally and financially. Not much is known of the period between his marriage and what he believed was his first revelation, but it is likely that Muhammad continued to trade as a merchant.

In current secondary scholarship, we are rarely offered details regarding the first encounter between Muhammad and Khadija. Rather, current scholars mention his marriage to Khadija, their children, and her support of him during his revelations. There are, however, discrepancies regarding some of the details of their relationship, including Khadija's age at the time of marriage, reasons for wanting to marry Muhammad, and their marriage ceremony. Traditionalist scholars, including Watt, will point out that Khadija was forty years old when she got married, but this advanced age may have been exaggerated.[5] The fact that she gave birth to six children after her marriage may demonstrate that she was younger, especially since some reports mention that she was twenty-eight at the time of marriage.[6]

Most modern scholars assume this encounter between Muhammad and Khadija took place as it lays the foundation of Muhammad's adult life. Without this meeting between them, there is no way to know when he and Khadija met, how they met, and why they met. While we cannot find all the answers from our sources, we have enough evidence that gives us an overview of what may have happened during their first interaction. More recently, Anthony questions whether Muhammad was really a merchant and whether there is enough evidence within our sources to

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[4] There has been some debate as to which daughters are from both Muhammad and Khadija. Some Shia Muslims believe that Fatima was the only biological daughter of Muhammad and Khadija and the rest were daughters of her deceased sister, Halah bint Khuwaylid.

[5] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 38.

[6] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 23.

demonstrate that he was rather a shepherd like Moses or Jesus (as mentioned in the Gospel of John), which is an advantageous claim. I will explore Anthony's discussion in further detail later in this case study.

Muhammad working for Khadija is most likely the reason why they got married. Without her hiring Muhammad, we no longer have any evidence of them meeting, which is doubtful as biographers and historians would have recorded such a pivotal moment in his life. Although there are disparate accounts regarding reasons why Khadija wanted to marry Muhammad, they all trace back to their first encounter when she hired him. In his book, Lings has Khadija wanting to marry him before she hears an episode of angels shading Muhammad from the sun, demonstrating her affection for him before any hint of his prophethood.[7] Cole points out that Khadija wants to marry Muhammad because of his rising reputation as a merchant and manager, both of which impress her on a personal and business level.[8] These scenarios have her wanting to marry him after she hires him to trade on her behalf. Therefore, the beginning of their life together traces back to their initial encounter.

Primary sources recount Khadija's relationship with Muhammad during their time together in Mecca. For example, using the work of Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham mentions that Muhammad was twenty-five when he married Khadija, who was a woman of honour and wealth, which she invested in trade.[9] Their relationship begins after she hears news of Muhammad's honesty and good manners, which inspires her to send for him and offer him a job to trade her property in Syria, paying him the best out of her other merchants.[10] During his journey to Syria alongside Maysarah,

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[7] Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1983), 34-35.

[8] Juan Cole, *Muhammad*, 28.

[9] ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1858, 1859), 119.

[10] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 119.

Muhammad sits under a tree, which was noticed by a monk, who tells Maysarah that only a prophet has ever sat underneath that tree.[11] Maysarah also notices two angels shading him from the heat of the sun while riding his camel.[12] After Khadija learns about the extraordinary events that took place, she informs Muhammad that she wishes to marry him because of his kinship, ancestry, honesty, and true speech.[13] Ibn Hisham offers a thorough account on Muhammad's encounter with Khadija and mentions how it eventually led to her proposing to him.

ʿAbd al-Razzaq traces back to al-Zuhri, when recounting how Khadija hires Muhammad and sends him to Hubashah, a market in Tihamah.[14] He includes a major departure from most accounts as Muhammad does not go to Syria, where miracles are believed to have taken place. Rather, Muhammad only trades a little outside Mecca on behalf of Khadija. Ibn Saʿd, who often traces his source back to Nafisah bint Munyah, Khadija's friend, shares a similar story as Ibn Hisham but has Abu Talib asking Muhammad to go to Khadija and offer his services to her, because he was going through difficult times.[15] Khadija hears about their conversation, sends for Muhammad, and says she will be pay him double of what she pays to others.[16] Abu Talib then negotiates wages and requests four camels.[17] When Muhammad and Maysarah reach Busra, Syria, he rests under a tree. A monk named Nastur says to Maysarah that only a prophet has ever taken rest under that tree and calls him a Prophet.[18] Maysarah also sees two angels protecting Muhammad from the sun.[19] On his way back from Syria, he continues to have two angels cast a shadow over

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[11] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 119.
[12] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 120.
[13] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 120.
[14] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 10 (in Arabic).
[15] Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, ed. Ihsan Abbas (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 1957), 129.
[16] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 129.
[17] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 130.
[18] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 130.
[19] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 130.

him, which is seen by Khadija, who tells other women to see the miracle.[20] Maysarah tells her what he saw during their journey, which leads her to send Nafisa to propose to Muhammad on her behalf.[21] There are two more reports that are almost identical to this account, narrating Muhammad's journey to the market in Busra.[22] Ibn Saʿd builds upon Ibn Hisham's account, providing more details on the episodes that took place during Muhammad's journey to Syria.

Al-Baladhuri writes that Muhammad is told by Abu Talib that Khadija is looking for someone trustworthy to trade her goods.[23] They both approach Khadija and discuss hiring Muhammad, so she sends him to the Levant with Maysarah.[24] When they return, Maysarah tells her what happened and how they made an abundance of profit, leading Khadija to send her uncle, ʿAmr ibn Asad, to speak to Abu Talib and ʿHamzah ibn ʿAbd al-Muttalib (d. 624) about her wishing to marry Muhammad.[25] Another story through al-Waqidi has a very similar story of Khadija hiring Muhammad to trade on her behalf with Maysarah.[26] This story has her proposing to him after she asks him to come to her house at a certain time with Abu Talib and ʿHamzah.[27]

Al-Tabari uses early sources and includes numerous accounts within his biography on Muhammad. Using the work of Ibn Ishaq, he mentions that Khadija is said to have been a wealthy and respected merchant who employed men to engage in trade with her property. One day, she sends for Muhammad after she learns of his "truthfulness, reliability, and nobility of character."[28]

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[20] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 131.

[21] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 131.

[22] See Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 156-157 and Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 16, which is a summary of Khadija's life.

[23] ʿAhmad ibn Yahya Jabir al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, ed. Muhammad Hamidullah (Cairo: Dar al-Maarifbi-Misr, 1959), 97.

[24] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 97.

[25] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 97.

[26] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 97-98.

[27] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 98.

[28] Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 1127.

Khadija asks him to go to Syria and trade her property, and, as a reward, she will pay him more than what she offers to other merchants. Muhammad travels with Maysarah, who is told by a monk that the tree Muhammad halted under was where only a prophet had rested.[29] Maysarah also witnesses two angels shading him from the sun as he rode his camel.[30] After Maysarah tells Khadija about these incredible episodes, she calls for Muhammad, informs him that he is a desirable match for her, and offers herself to him in marriage.[31] It is worth noting that al-Tabari also includes ʿAbd al-Razzaq's account, which is traced back through Ibn Saʿd to al-Zuhri, that has Khadija hiring Muhammad and another man from the Banu Quraysh to go to the market of Hubashah in Tihamah.[32] It is interesting that Ibn Saʿd's biography does not include Muhammad going to Hubashah, whereas he is referenced by al-Tabari through a different chain of transmission. Al-Tabari includes both accounts of Muhammad travelling to Syria and Hubashah, allowing the reader to decide where he went as Khadija's merchant, if not both places.

In addition to Muslim traditions on Khadija's first encounter with Muhammad, a few non-Muslim sources mention her relationship with him. Theophanes overviews Muhammad's life during the year he passed away. After calling him a leader and false Prophet, he writes that Muhammad enters the service of a rich relative of his named Khadija, hired to trade camel in Egypt and Palestine.[33] He becomes closer with her, who is a widow, and takes her as his wife, gaining possession of her camels and assets.[34] *The Apology of al-Kindi* also mentions Khadija's relationship with Muhammad. He enters into her service as a camel driver and riding abroad on

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[29] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, vol. 1*, 1127-1128.
[30] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, vol. 1*, 1128.
[31] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, vol. 1*, 1128.
[32] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, vol. 1*, 1129.
[33] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 464.
[34] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 464.

her behalf.[35] He eventually marries her and with her fortune, he "conceived an idea of claiming power and headship over his tribesmen."[36] Both of these accounts provide further evidence that Khadjia hired Muhammad to trade on her behalf, regardless of what and where he was actually trading.

The following table summarizes which primary sources mention Khadija hiring Muhammad to trade her goods outside Mecca. In addition, I include which sources mention Muhammad going to Syria and which sources have Muhammad going to Hubashah.

Table 1: Muhammad and Khadija Encounter

__Primary Sources__	**Khadija hires Muhammad**	**Muhammad travels to Syria**	**Muhammad travels to Hubashah**
Ibn Hisham	Yes	Yes	No
ʿAbd al-Razzaq	Yes	No	Yes
Ibn Saʿd	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes	No
Al-Baladhuri	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes	No
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes	Yes
Theophanes	Yes	Palestine and Egypt	No
Al-Kindi	Yes	Yes	No

The criterion of embarrassment is helpful as we sometimes have Muhammad going to Khadija and asking her to be hired to trade her merchandise. He was going through a difficult time, so he went with his uncle to Khadija to ask her for work. Although this occurrence took place before Muhammad began his mission as a Prophet, there is little reason to have him ask Khadija for a job, if it was invented. Why have Muhammad ask her for work? What are the benefits for him? On the other hand, we have some sources that have Khadija sending for Muhammad after she learns about his character and trustworthiness, which may have been added to the original episode to demonstrate a less embarrassing interaction.

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[35] ʿAbd al-Mash ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi," trans. Anton Tien, *Syriac Studies* (2012), accessed September 9, 2019, http://www.syriacstudies.com/2012/05/09/the-apology-of-al-kindi-by-anton-tiendialogue-abd-al-mash-b-ishaq-al-kindi/.

[36] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."

Recurrent and multiple attestation on Khadija's first encounter with Muhammad allow us to examine several sources to help corroborate evidence. Recurrent attestation of Muhammad's first interaction with Khadija does not take place within the majority of our sources. However, some authors repeat similar events from different transmitters. Ibn Hisham has Khadija send for Muhammad and ask him to trade in Syria, giving him the best of what she offered her previous merchants. While on the journey, Maysarah notices Muhammad sitting under a tree that a monk said only a prophet ever sat underneath, along with the two angels shading him from the sun. Memories that include details about what happened on the journey further demonstrate that Muhammad had gone on a journey on Khadija's behalf.

Ibn Saʿd has Abu Talib ask Muhammad to go to Khadija and offer his services to her. She learns of this conversation, sends for Muhammad, and pays him double of what she would offer to others. Ibn Saʿd narrates other episodes related to their interaction, including Abu Talib negotiating the wage of camels that Khadija was giving to Muhammad. Al-Tabari discusses two accounts on their interaction. One has Khadija hearing of Muhammad's character and then offering him the opportunity to go to Syria and trade her property. Muhammad agrees to go with Maysarah, who witnesses the miraculous events. Al-Tabari also gives another account that has Khadija hiring Muhammad to go to the market in Hubashah, which is in Tihamah.

Multiple attestation takes place as we have various accounts about them meeting for the first time to discuss working together. We have biographies that recount this episode around the year 595, considering that Muhammad was around twenty-five at the age of marriage. Soon after returning from his journey, we have Khadija wanting to marry him, which is within one year of their first interaction. ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, Theophanes, and al-Kindi all point out that Muhammad goes into the service of Khadija to trade on her behalf.

Out of these sources, Ibn Hisham uses Ibn Ishaq, whereas ʿAbd al-Razzaq references his account on the authority of Maʿmar, who learned it from al-Zuhri. There is a chance that Ibn Ishaq, who also often uses al-Zuhri as his authority, uses a different source since Muhammad has a different trading destination. On the other hand, Ibn Saʿd, who is referenced in ʿAbd al-Razzaq, uses a different chain of transmission in his account that has a description similar to Ibn Hisham. Al-Tabari references Ibn Ishaq and Maʿmar in his work, giving both locations of Muhammad's trading destination. We are unable to conclude where and from whom Theophanes learned about Muhammad's interaction with Khadija; however, it seems to be similar enough to our other examples to demonstrate that he learned it from their work or from Muslims directly. Al-Kindi probably learned about Muhammad through his close interactions with Muslims as he lived within the Islamic world. Either way, memories of this encounter were preserved and modified by non-Muslims; however, they remained significant enough to have consistencies with our Muslim sources.

Using our method on Muhammad's first encounter with Khadija brings us a better perspective of how memories were transmitted orally and sustained for over a century until they were written down. Numerous types of memories developed through their relationship as Khadija became Muhammad's wife, adviser, and supporter. Eyewitness, individual, and episodic memory are only available via accounts that trace back to Muhammad and Khadija as they were often the only individuals present. With regard to their initial interaction, neither of them had direct accounts that trace back to them. Thus, accounts of their encounter were passed on to Muslims, who preserved these memories in our sources, and eventually became part of their collective memory. Although these memories were later shaped by social groups' sociopolitical, theological, and

cultural context, Khadija's key role was remembered as she became Muhammad's first wife and the first convert to Islam.

Social memory of Khadija helped define the emergence of Islam and how she was by Muhammad's side to support him in continuing his path towards prophethood. While the social memory of Muhammad's other wife, ʿAʾisha, quickly overshadowed Khadija as time passed, especially due to her significant role after Muhammad migrated to Medina, where he gained his following and power, she remains important to Muslims today. Social memory is important because it allows us to question whether the journey to Hubashah was later changed to Syria to help elevate Muhammad's status by having a monk legitimize his prophethood and having Maysarah witness miraculous events on their journey.

Communicative memory of Khadija carried on through the living memory of Muhammad as several Muslims knew about his first wife, their relationship, and their love for one another. More particularly, early Muslims are likely to have seen her with Muhammad, praying with him, living with him, and taking care of their children together. Therefore, they likely preserved his relationship with Khadija, which began with their initial meeting at her home. These memories were probably transmitted for generations as they were passed on to new converts and those who were interested in learning about Muhammad's life. With time, these memories became part of the cultural memory of Muslims as they acknowledge Khadija offering Muhammad a chance to serve as her merchant before becoming his earliest and most genuine supporter.

In addition, commemorative memory of Khadija focused on her place alongside Muhammad and the foundation of Islam. Stories of her support, love, and advice were likely commemorated in narratives that were told orally and eventually written down by compilers and collectors of traditions on Muhammad. Commemorating Khadija's life became part of Muslim

identity and an important symbol for both Muslim men and women. When understanding whether Khadija's memory was part of performative memory, events involving her were performed orally through lectures, both private and public, especially those related to Muhammad's first interaction with her. Lecturers, historians, and theologians likely spoke of events concerning Khadija as her role did not fade enough for her to be forgotten. For instance, Shia Muslims mark the death anniversary of Khadija on the tenth day of Ramadan.

Verbatim memory of Khadija is unlikely as we do not have sufficient evidence to demonstrate that stories about her were identical. Muhammad and Khadija must have told others about their first encounter, but we have inconsistencies in our stories, such as where he was sent to and what happened during his journey. The different disparities between these memories show additions and omissions that inevitably took place over time due to the consequences of social memory. Nonetheless, episodes such as Muhammad's first interaction with Khadija are salient memories that are more plausible and very likely to have been transmitted from one person to another due to their importance to his life.

These types of memories allow us to decipher the evolution of this episode and what Muslims preserved over time. Without any eyewitness accounts from Muhammad or Khadija, we have to rely on secondary figures such as Nafisa, who may or may not have been present when Khadija hired Muhammad. However, communicative memory and collective memory of this event were likely formed during Muhammad's life as he must have shared his initial interaction with Khadija to his friends and family. All of the memories surrounding this episode agree that she hired him to trade goods on her behalf. However, we have memories that conflict on where Muhammad travelled to trade as we have memories that mention Syria and a few that report Hubashah.

Gist memory, therefore, is valuable as we do not need to know the exact details of where Muhammad travelled; rather, we can focus on the gist of the episode and make better, more accurate assumptions of what took place. We cannot know exactly where Muhammad went, either Syria or Hubashah, since there is no further evidence at our disposal. However, based on the number of memories, both from Muslims and non-Muslims, that acknowledge their interaction, we can be more confident that Muhammad was hired by Khadija to serve as her merchant. The details cannot be verified as we cannot confirm whether he went to Syria, so there is no reason to accept it unconditionally or dismiss it entirely. By dismissing this event as fictitious and invented, we are ignoring the evidence we do have and doing an injustice to the narrators. We know that the motives of our non-Muslim writers are not overly positive, but they include Muhammad's service under Khadija, which they probably learned from Muslims. Therefore, we can conclude that Muhammad likely initially encountered Khadija to trade her merchandise outside Mecca for a fee, which she offered.

Syria may have been chosen by Muslim biographers to demonstrate Muhammad's prophethood as it involved a monk and Maysarah observing miraculous events. Although we cannot say for certain whether he *really* travelled to Syria, it is possible that he went there to trade Khadija's merchandise. Muhammad is also said to have gone to Syria as a child, where he met another monk who foretold his prophethood. Going back to Syria is fitting to reinforce his legitimacy especially through a Christian monk and miraculous events. On the other hand, Muhammad going to Hubashah seems more plausible and less likely to be invented as it has him travelling within Arabia to a market in Tihamah. This trip did not include extraordinary episodes that were conveyed to Khadija, which are often said to have motivated her or furthered her cause to marry Muhammad. Whether he went to Syria or Hubashah, we have more confidence that

Muhammad met with Khadija to discuss working for her and accepted her proposal to trade on her behalf.

Anthony revisits the question of whether Muhammad was a merchant or not. He uses the work of Sebeos, who calls Muhammad a merchant in his account.[37] Anthony also references Jacob of Edessa, a Syrian chronicler, who attests that Muhammad was a merchant, even offering a detailed geographical description of his mercantile journeys, including Palestine, Arabia, and Syrian Phoenicia.[38] Unfortunately, Anthony's argument heavily discounts oral traditions of Muhammad that may have reached both Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa.[39] In addition, Anthony mentions Theophanes, who he believes reworked biographies to have Muhammad as a hired servant of Khadija and not a merchant.[40] By using *hadith*, Anthony attempts to demonstrate that we should not accept that he was a merchant without question. However, some of the *hadiths* referenced seem to be related to Muhammad's prophethood, which could have been fabricated to illustrate him as a shepherd like Moses. For example, Anthony mentions that there is a report stating that Muhammad received the call to prophethood not while meditating in Mount Hira, but rather while shepherding flocks for wealthy Meccans.[41]

While some *hadith*s may deny that Muhammad was a merchant, they were compiled later than most of our biographies by both Muslims and non-Muslims.[42] Ibn Hisham, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Tabari all confirm that Khadija commissioned Muhammad as a merchant to trade on her behalf. Why did the early biographers claim that he was a merchant and not a shepherd? How else did Muhammad meet Khadija? Would some scholars deny that they ever met and dismiss

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[37] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 60.

[38] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 61 and Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 165.

[39] Anthony dismisses Pseudo-Sebeos and Jacob of Edessa using either *sirah-maghazi* or *hadith* literature as he does not acknowledge oral traditions that passed throughout the Islamic world and into Byzantine territory.

[40] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 75.

[41] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 66-67.

[42] For example, Anthony uses ʿAhmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), who lived in the ninth century.

several sources, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that explicitly mention that he worked for her? What seems more plausible: that Muhammad was a merchant or that he worked as a shepherd as his predecessors did?

It could be possible that Muhammad served as both a shepherd and merchant during his life as he may not have been wealthy enough to stick to one profession. Nomadic, pastoral tribes likely knew how to shepherd flocks, so Muhammad may have served as a shepherd prior to his encounter with Khadija and later became a merchant due to his honesty and reliability. In other *hadiths* compiled by al-Bukhari, Muhammad has a shepherd himself,[43] which could demonstrate that he was no longer a shepherd and exclusively a merchant. We do not know his occupation prior to his interaction with Khadija, but almost all of our sources agree that during this time, Muhammad was well known for his trustworthiness and noble character. Being raised under Abu Talib, who was himself a merchant, Muhammad may have joined him on travel expeditions and learned the trade at a young age.

Even if Muhammad was not a merchant prior to meeting Khadija, is it not possible that he began to trade after meeting with her? Could he not have taken on this role after meeting Khadija at the approximate age of twenty-five? Do we know of the criteria of being a merchant in seventh-century Arabia? Was it impossible for an honest, reliable man to trade around Arabia or abroad with little or no experience? If biographies and *hadiths* do not mention that Muhammad continued to be a merchant after trading Khadija's merchandise, does that mean he no longer traded goods on her behalf? What we can say, however, is that Muhammad probably met Khadija when he was in his early to mid-twenties and agreed to serve as her merchant. The details of the agreed wages,

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[43] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 1, Bk. 4, No. 234 and Vol. 7, Bk. 71, No. 590.

location, and continued nature of serving as a merchant is beyond the scope of gist memory, which gives us the most confidence regarding the authenticity of this episode.

Muhammad's Reaction to his First Revelation

For Muslims, Muhammad's first revelation is perhaps the most significant event that took place in his life. During his retreats to Mount Hira, a mountain on the outskirts of Mecca, he would contemplate, meditate, and enjoy the solitude from the city. According to Muslim sources, on one occasion in 610, Muhammad, who was approximately forty years old, encountered an angel, usually mentioned as Gabriel.[44] He was asked three times to read by the angel, but each time replied that he cannot read. The angel then said, "Read! In the name of your Lord who created: He created man from a clinging form. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, who taught man what he did not know."[45] These words stayed with Muhammad as he worried about his wellbeing and whether he had gone mad.

Muhammad was neither joyful nor thrilled about this encounter; rather, he was terrified and believed that he had become a seer or a poet, or he was possessed by a *jinni* (spirit). In some accounts, we even have him wanting to leap off the mountain to his death as he was so frightened by this encounter, its reality, and its meaning. Muhammad eventually went to his wife Khadija trembling and asked her to cover him up. She comforted and reassured him that God would not allow him to be possessed. Muhammad's reaction to this experience has brought both confidence and controversy over his call to prophethood.

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[44] We will accept Muhammad's vision as an episode and memory that he believed was true, which was transmitted to his followers and later generations. Authenticating the appearance of Gabriel is beyond the scope of this study.

[45] This quote is from Qurʾan chapter 96, verses 1-5, which Muslims generally believe was the first revelation of the Qurʾan to Muhammad.

Modern scholars continue to debate this episode, questioning what exactly was said to Muhammad during his experience, who was present with him, and what references from the Bible are similar to this encounter. For instance, Watt indicates that later traditionalists support a translation of Muhammad's reply to the angel saying that he cannot not read, which is valuable proof regarding the miraculous nature of the Qurʾan.[46] Watt also points out that fear after a divine experience has roots in the Hebrew Bible, except the thought of suicide and comfort from Khadija, both of which he states gives us accurate information about this event.[47]

Schoeler's *The Biography of Muhammad* includes Muhammad's first revelation (the *iqra* narration) as one of his two case studies. While recounting this episode, Schoeler focuses on traditions tracing back to ʿUrwah to reconstruct the interaction between Muhammad and Gabriel as well as his and Khadija's meeting with Waraqa.[48] While he explores this event in great detail, my case study concentrates exclusively on Muhammad's reaction in various sources available to us and how its memory was passed on for generations. Schoeler also discusses a very similar story written in the 730s by the Venerable Bede (d. 735). The story is about an illiterate lay brother named Caedmon who received the gift of praising God in English, the language of the people, in a dream vision of an angel telling him to sing three times.[49] After the third time, the angel recites a song about the Creator. Schoeler argues how one version of Muhammad's revelation must have travelled to Europe in the early eighth century and was reworked as part of a Christian legend in England.[50]

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[46] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 46.

[47] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 50. 1 Kings 19:3-5 has Elijah afraid, running for his life, and praying to God that he may die. This episode, however, is different from our account on Muhammad as he does not pray to God to take his life; rather, he contemplates jumping off the mountain to his death.

[48] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 38.

[49] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad*, 62.

[50] Schoeler, *The Biography of Muhammad: Nature*, 78.

In his book, Anthony also reviews the story of Caedmon's call and compares it with Muhammad's first revelation, especially one account narrated by Ibn Ishaq.[51] However, there are significant differences that makes us think why some aspects were added to Muhammad's story, including Caedmon's lack of fear and contemplation of suicide. Why would biographers of Muhammad add these emotions to his story if they were not present in Caedmon's call? Thus, for our purposes, the reaction to his encounter is not based on or influenced by Caedmon's call to sing.

Some contemporary scholars point out that fear was adopted from the Hebrew Bible. Rubin points out that Muhammad's reaction to his first prophetic revelation seems to have found its origin in the Bible as there are similar episodes of terror and fright.[52] He references Judges 6:22-23 and 13:22, as well as Isaiah 6:5, two of which bear some resemblance but not enough to claim that his revelation was copied or inspired by them. Isaiah 6:5, on the other hand, seems irrelevant and not comparable to Muhammad as it has Isaiah feeling lost, believing he and his community have unclean lips, and despite that, he has seen the King, the Lord of hosts. In addition, Rubin uses 1 Samuel 16:14 to compare it with Muhammad's lapse in revelation; however, it is not as comparable as he may think, because the spirit is said to have departed from Saul and an evil spirit tormented him, which is unlike our accounts as the spirit neither entered Muhammad nor was it later replaced by an evil one.

Cole also uses the Hebrew Bible to shed some light on possible influences over Muslim sources. He mentions that it is not surprising that the narrative of Muhammad's first revelation, which supposedly traces back to ʿAʾisha, appears to paraphrase the book of Daniel, especially chapters seven and eight, as Daniel was frightened, taken to his bed, and laid sick for some days.[53]

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[51] Anthony dedicates a whole chapter to compare Muhammad and Caedmon (pages 204-234).
[52] Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 109.
[53] Cole, *Muhammad*, 39-40.

There seems to be little actual evidence that demonstrates the story being "paraphrased." In addition, Anthony references the "conspicuous influence of the biblical tropes and archetypes" on Muhammad's first revelation and Caedmon's call.[54] He claims that this influence "certainly had a role to play in the composition of both narratives" but does not explore any of the passages he mentions from the Hebrew Bible.

If we explore these passages, Isaiah 29:10-12 has a vision that commands those who can read to read, but they say they cannot since it is sealed, whereas those who cannot read say they are unable to read. Isaiah 40:6 has a voice saying cry out, to which Isaiah says, what should he cry out? These passages from Isaiah cannot be proven to have influenced or even played a role in Muhammad's revelation. 1 Kings 19:8-19 has Elijah hearing a great wind and wrapping his face in his mantle while at the entrance of the cave and is then told by the voice to return to the wilderness. Lastly, Jeremiah 1:6 mentions Jeremiah saying that he does not know how to speak because he is a boy, which is not at all related or evidence to prove that Muhammad's story was influenced by this passage or any of the aforementioned passages.

When exploring primary sources, the Qurʾan has many passages that show how Muhammad's community reacted to his claims of the divine, which could also demonstrate how he felt initially. The Qurʾan reassures Muhammad and his community that he is not a madman. For instance, Q. 52:29 says "…By the grace of your Lord [Prophet], you are neither oracle nor madman." There are also other verses that indicate that Muhammad is not a poet, possessed, or soothsayer, as there seems to have increasing hostility and opposition toward him as he preached to his community.[55] The last verses worth mentioning come from Q. 74:1-7, which says, "You, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning! Proclaim the greatness of your Lord; cleanse

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[54] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 213.
[55] Verses including Q. 21:5, 23:70, 34:46, 36:69, 37:36, 68:1-2, 69:40-42, and 81:22.

yourself; keep away from all filth, do not weaken, feeling overwhelmed; be steadfast in your Lord's cause." Traditional interpreters of the Qurʾan have suggested that this verse was revealed shortly after Gabriel comes to Muhammad on Mount Hira, when he goes home trembling to Khadija and seeking comfort.[56]

Other Muslim sources also mention Muhammad's reaction and try to capture his emotions. Ibn Hisham references Ibn Ishaq to indicate that his first revelation took place when Gabriel came to him while he was asleep.[57] After being asked to read three times and then hearing his first revelation, Muhammad wakes up and sees Gabriel while at the mountain.[58] He is shocked and could not move during that moment but eventually makes his way to Khadija for comfort.[59] This detailed episode by Ibn Hisham does not include Muhammad's fear and intent to throw himself from the mountain, which is included in other accounts.

ʿAbd al-Razzaq, tracing his account through ʿUrwah to ʿAʾisha, includes Muhammad's first revelation as a "true vision" during a time when he secluded himself on Mount Hira to worship God.[60] After his encounter with "the Truth," which seems to be Gabriel, Muhammad trembles as he goes to Khadija and asks her to cover him until the terror leaves him.[61] He asks her what was wrong with him, but Khadija comforts Muhammad and says that God would never disgrace him.[62] After confirmation from Waraqa that his interaction was with the "Nomos," which was also sent to Moses, his revelation ceased for a time and made him extremely sad.[63] This sad feeling made Muhammad want to go to the top of the mountains and cast himself down from their peaks several

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[56] *The Qurʾan*, 397.
[57] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 152.
[58] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 153.
[59] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 153.
[60] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 12 (in Arabic).
[61] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 14 (in Arabic).
[62] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 14 (in Arabic).
[63] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 14 (in Arabic).

times; however, every time he reached the summit of a mountain, Gabriel appeared to him and called him the Messenger of God, which made him steadfast.[64] Another account has Muhammad have a lapse in revelation and then seeing Gabriel on a throne between heaven and earth, which terrified him enough to go to Khadija for comfort.[65]

Using Ibn ʿAbbas, Ibn Saʿd has Muhammad receiving a "true vision" in the cave of Hira.[66] He was terrified after his encounter with Gabriel and eventually returned to Khadija, telling her that he is afraid that he has become a soothsayer.[67] Ibn Saʿd also includes episodes of visions of light and sounds that made Muhammad fear that he is a soothsayer or that he has become possessed.[68] The last account uses al-Waqidi to narrate when there was a suspension of revelation for a few days, Muhammad began to grieve and had the intention of throwing himself down from the mountain; however, Gabriel reappears to him between the earth and the sky, telling him that he is surely the Apostle of Allah.[69]

Al-Baladhuri narrates multiple accounts of Muhammad's first revelation, including one that has him, at the age of forty years old, terrified when seeing Gabriel between the earth and sky.[70] He then quickly returns to Khadija and says that he is afraid that he has become a seer, but she reassures him and mentions how this is good news.[71] Al-Baladhuri references ʿAʾisha to discuss how the first revelation was not a vision but resembling a bright light like the sun.[72] Another account has Muhammad hearing a voice three times but not seeing anyone, which scared him, so he went to Khadija and asked her to cover him up, which was the beginning of the first

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[64] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 16 (in Arabic).
[65] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 16 (in Arabic). This account ends with Q. 74 1-5.
[66] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 194.
[67] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 195.
[68] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 195.
[69] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 196.
[70] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 104.
[71] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 104.
[72] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 105.

revelation.[73] A fourth account has him asked to read in the name of God, but he did not know how to read, saddening him enough to go to the top of the mountain; however, Gabriel came to him and said that he is a Prophet, which calmed him and gave him strength.[74]

Al-Yaʿqubi also describes Muhammad's first revelation and mentions that Gabriel used to come to him often, calling him from the sky, the trees, and from the mountain, all of which would frighten him.[75] He then told Khadija all that happened and she would tell him to cover up.[76] Al-Yaʿqubi does not include Muhammad's fear during his revelation in which Gabriel asks him to "recite" and there is no discussion of how he intended to jump off the mountain to take his own life. However, we do learn that Muhammad was initially frightened when Gabriel began to call on him.

Al-Tabari, who traces his account through ʿUrwah to ʿAʾisha, offers a somewhat distinct vision of Muhammad that includes the "Truth" coming to him unexpectedly and telling him that he is the Messenger of God.[77] He falls to his knees and crawls away with his shoulders trembling to Khadija, telling her to "Wrap me up! Wrap me up!" until the terror leaves him.[78] Muhammad began thinking of hurling himself down from the mountain, but Gabriel appears to him and tells him that he is the Messenger of God.[79] Gabriel then tells Muhammad to "Recite!" three times.[80] After this episode, Muhammad goes to Khadija and tells her that he fears for his life; however, she comforts him and reassures him that he should instead rejoice.[81]

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[73] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 107-108. There is a resemblance between this tradition and Samuel's call in 1 Samuel 3. This chapter has a boy named Samuel hearing the Lord calling his name several times; however, he does not recognize or see who is calling him.

[74] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 108.

[75] Ahmad al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, ed. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 21.

[76] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 21.

[77] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1147.

[78] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1147.

[79] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1147.

[80] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1147.

[81] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1147.

Al-Tabari includes another account that has Muhammad not wanting to throw himself off the mountain; rather, he goes to Khadija and tells her that he thinks he has gone mad.[82] In a third account, which traces through Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad wakes up after his first revelation, which seems to have taken place while he was asleep, and feeling that he has become a poet or a madman.[83] He then intends to take his own life by hurling himself down from the mountain, but halfway up, Gabriel comes to him and tells him that he is the Messenger of God.[84] Muhammad later goes to Khadija to tell her that he is either a madman or poet.[85] An alternative account by al-Tabari recounts which part of the Qurʾan was revealed first. This account does not include verses from sura ninety-six (*Al-ʿAlaq*), but rather Q. 74:1-2. It has Muhammad terror-stricken at the sight of someone sitting on a throne between heaven and earth, so he goes to Khadija and tells her to envelope him.[86]

In addition, *Hadith* literature captures Muhammad's revelation in detail and possesses many similarities with other Muslim sources. *Sahih al-Bukhari* includes a background of Muhammad's seclusion in the cave of Hira. The two *hadiths* that I outline are both narrated by ʿAʾisha. In one *hadith*, Muhammad receives his revelation and goes to Khadija and asks her to cover him until his fear is gone. He also says that he fears "that something may happen to him" but she comforts him and tells him that God would never disgrace him.[87] Another account has Muhammad receiving revelation in his sleep and then trembling as he goes to Khadija, asking her to cover him.[88] After his fear disappears, he asks her what is wrong with him and feels that something bad is going to happen to him; however, Khadija comforts Muhammad and assures him

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[82] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1148.
[83] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1149-1150.
[84] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1150.
[85] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1150-1151.
[86] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1153-1154.
[87] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 1, Bk. 1, No. 3.
[88] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 478.

that he will be fine.[89] Other *hadiths* surrounding Muhammad's first revelation, the lapse of revelation, and references from the Qurʾan also display his fear, including one that has him wanting to throw himself down the mountain.[90]

Like its contemporary, *Sahih Muslim* also includes *hadiths* on Muhammad's first revelation. In one *hadith*, which is narrated by ʿAʾisha, Muhammad's heart is trembling after his revelation from Gabriel in the cave of Hira.[91] He asks Khadija to wrap him up, which she does until his fear leaves him. Muhammad then asks her what has happened to him and says he fears for himself.[92] Another *hadith* has Muhammad hearing voices and seeing Gabriel on a throne, which makes him tremble and fearful.[93] He then asks Khadija to wrap him up. [94] During the lapse of revelation, there is a *hadith* that has Muhammad seeing an angel sitting on a throne between heaven and earth, which terrifies him, so he asks Khadija to wrap him up.[95]

Several non-Muslim accounts of Muhammad recount his first revelation as a momentous occasion that changed his life, even though some accounts have him pretending to have visions. Sebeos,[96] John of Damascus,[97] Theophanes,[98] and al-Kindi[99] all mention Muhammad's purported revelation or claim to prophethood but do not discuss his reaction. Non-Muslim sources are split on mentioning whether he had revelations or never had any call to prophethood as it was conceived out of greed. It is interesting why non-Muslims would not include these instances of terror and

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[89] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 478.
[90] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 4, Bk. 54, No. 461; Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 447; Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 448; and Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 478. Vol. 9, Bk. 87, No. 111 includes Muhammad wanting to throw himself down from the mountain.
[91] *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 1, No. 301.
[92] *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 1, No. 301.
[93] *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 1, No. 307.
[94] *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 1, No. 307.
[95] *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 1, No. 304.
[96] Sebeos, "Sebeos' History," trans. Robert Bedrosian, *Sources of the Armenian Tradition* (1985), accessed September 1, 2019, http://www.attalus.org/armenian/seb9.htm#30.
[97] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 155.
[98] Theophanes, *The Chronicles of Theophanes Confessor*, 464.
[99] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."

suicidal thoughts or attempts. Did these emotions legitimize Muhammad's revelation? Were they too similar to biblical accounts of divine interactions? Or were they invented after Muhammad's death by later Muslim biographers to make comparisons between Muhammad's reaction and prophets from the Bible?

The following table lists which primary sources mention Muhammad's fear after experiencing his first revelation. I will also illustrate which sources discuss Muhammad's intent to jump from the mountains after his revelation.

Table 2: Muhammad's Reaction

Primary Sources	**Muhammad experiences fear**	**Muhammad goes to Khadija for comfort**	**Muhammad intends to jump from the mountains**
Qurʾan	Yes	Yes, indirectly	No
Ibn Hisham	No	Yes	No
ʿAbd al-Razzaq	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes
Ibn Saʿd	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes
Al-Baladhuri	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes
Al-Yaʿqubi	No	Yes	No
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Bukhari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes
Muslim	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	No
Sebeos	No	No	No
John of Damascus	No	No	No
Theophanes	No	No	No
Al-Kindi	No	No	No

The criterion of embarrassment plays a role in this episode as Muhammad was afraid after his first revelation and believed that he was possessed or had gone mad. Despite biblical accounts of prophets having similar feelings as him during their interactions with God or an angel, none of them can be proven to have influenced our reports, especially the intention of jumping from a mountain to his death. Rather, other prophets felt fear, panic, and denial, so why would biographers and *hadith* scholars add Muhammad's intention to jump off a mountain? What gain must there have been for him wanting to jump from the mountain to his death, if it was not genuine? Historians and theologians must have felt embarrassed at this intent, as evidenced by the omission of it within

many accounts. Muhammad was a role model for Muslims, so contemplating suicide endangered his message and stained his reputation, which led authors to minimize or omit this episode.

Muhammad's intent to commit suicide also contradicts the doctrine of ʿisma, which connotes both impeccability and infallibility, and has been interpreted to imply that prophets could not have been able to lie or sin. Shia Muslims used this doctrine ʿisma to assert the absolute authority of their Imams, making them free from sin.[100] Later Muslims, both Sunni and Shia, including the Muʿtazila, a school of Islamic theology that flourished between the eighth and tenth centuries, claimed that all prophets, including Muhammad, were free from sin. In addition, there are several *hadiths* that are against suicide. In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, for example, one *hadith* mentions how if someone commits suicide by stabbing themself, they will continue to do so in the Hellfire.[101] *Sahih Muslim* contains a full chapter (Chapter 48: Book 1) that discusses how suicide is the greatest sin. Why would Muslims want to fabricate Muhammad intending to commit suicide? Why have their Prophet, almost kill himself while *hadiths* are being circulating about the graveness of suicide? It seems more probable that Muhammad was so frightened about his vision that he actually contemplated hurling himself from the mountain.

Recurrent attestation does take place in a number of our sources, some more than others. As mentioned before, Qurʾanic verses repeat the theme about Muhammad, along with others, thinking that he is an oracle, madman, poet, soothsayer, or possessed. These verses range from very early verses that were likely revealed in Mecca to later verses that were revealed in Medina. Some verses seem to be addressing Muhammad directly, while others were to his audience as they

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[100] Paul Walker, "Impeccability," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan*, ed. Jane McAuliffe, Claude Gilliot, William Graham, Wadad Kadi, Andrew Rippin, Monique Bernards, John Nawas, et al, accessed March 12, 2021, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00217. This doctrine was later expanded to include all prophets, including Muhammad. Thus, his infallibility is required in order to argue the infallibility of Shia Imams.

[101] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 2, Bk. 23, No. 446. There are other *hadiths* that refer and condemn suicide such as Vol. 2, Bk. 23, No. 445; Vol. 8, Bk. 73, No. 73; and Vol. 8, Bk. 78, No. 647.

called him these names. ʿAbd al-Razzaq has Muhammad trembling as he goes to Khadija after his first revelation. In addition, there are two accounts of a lapse in revelation: one leading Muhammad to become extremely sad and go up the mountain and jump down and another that has Gabriel appearing to him between heaven and earth, which terrifies him.

Ibn Saʿd has accounts of Muhammad fearful after his revelation, experiencing episodes of light and sounds that make him believe that he was possessed, and intending to throw himself down the mountain after a lapse in revelation. Al-Baladhuri has Muhammad terrified after seeing Gabriel between the earth and sky. There is another account that has him hearing a voice three times, which scares him and leads him to seek comfort from Khadija. The last memory has Muhammad asked to read, which saddens him since he was illiterate, leading him to go up the mountain to jump from its peak.

Al-Tabari has Muhammad trembling and going to Khadija for comfort, during which he asks her to cover him. Later on, he contemplates throwing himself from the mountain, so Gabriel comes to him and asks him to recite. Another account has Muhammad going to Khadija for comfort without his intent to commit suicide. The third account has him wanting to throw himself down the mountain after his revelation, but Gabriel appears to him. *Sahih al-Bukhari* has several verses that have Muhammad fearing for his life after his first revelation, having a lapse of revelation, and one account that has him thinking about throwing himself down the mountain. *Sahih Muslim* also has numerous verses on him being scared after his first revelation and also having a lapse of revelation.

Muhammad's reaction to his first revelation is attested to in several of our sources, predominately Muslim ones, that demonstrate the feelings and emotions he felt. The Qurʾan provides us with some information about how Muhammad felt after his revelation as there is at

least one verse (Q. 52:29) of God telling him and his community that he is neither an oracle nor a madman. In addition, Q. 74:1-5 relates to *hadiths* and biographies that have him wanting Khadija to cover him up after his first (or sometimes second) revelation. Muslim sources including, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim*, all have Muhammad scared and terrified, and eventually going to Khadija for comfort. Ibn Hisham does not use the words fear or terror; rather, he has him feeling shocked and paralyzed after his revelation. Al-Yaʿqubi's biography also does not include Muhammad's fear after his revelation as it seems to be omitted in order to leave his reputation untarnished by emotions of terror and needing comfort.

Regarding Muhammad's intent to hurl himself down the mountain, al-Tabari includes two accounts of this feeling right after his first revelation. ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and *Sahih al-Bukhari* all include his intent to jump from the mountain after there was a lapse in revelation, which grieved him heavily. Ibn Saʿd traces his source back to Ibn ʿAbbas, al-Baladhuri traces through al-Zuhri, and ʿAbd al-Razzaq and al-Bukhari reference ʿAʾisha. It seems that Ibn Hisham removed Muhammad's intention in his account as he may have found it embarrassing or problematic for polemical debate with other religions, primarily Judaism and Christianity. Although we cannot be certain when this episode was first included in oral and written transmission, it is doubtful that it was invented to benefit Muhammad. Fear and terror could be traced back to biblical sources, but not seeking comfort from a woman or attempts to plunge oneself to their death after an encounter with God or an angel.

Using memory studies gives us an interesting perspective on how Muhammad's reaction to his first revelation was preserved as memories and transmitted orally until they were written down. There are several types of memory related to this event. Based on several accounts,

Muhammad most likely shared his experience with his close friends, companions, and wives, namely Khadija and ʿAʾisha. Most of our accounts claim to trace back to ʿAʾisha who reportedly told her close relatives, including ʿUrwah, about his first revelation. Social memory of Muhammad's reaction is important to all Muslims and even non-Muslims as they sought to delegitimize his authority. These memories may have transformed over time, but the essence is likely to have remained the same, despite being further developed, shaped, and retold. For example, social memory of Muhammad's fear and intent to leap off of the mountain was minimized, and in some cases, omitted altogether, as his emotions may have put him in a different light when compared to other prophets, such as Jesus and Moses.

Eyewitness, individual, and episodic memories are only possible with Muhammad telling others what happened during his first revelation and how he felt. We have descriptions of the episode that purportedly trace back to ʿAʾisha, which may offer some authenticity as it is almost certain Muhammad would have shared this story with her. These memories were passed on to early Muslims and later generations as the beginning of Muhammad's call to prophethood, becoming the collective memory as Muslims, as a whole, remembered its importance to the formation of Islam. Communicative memory of this event was preserved and passed on during the living memory of Muhammad as new Muslims were probably curious to learn about his first revelation. These memories included his reaction of fear, seeking comfort from Khadija, and belief that he had become a poet, soothsayer, or madman. Over time, Muhammad's first revelation transformed into the cultural memory of Muslims as they believed it was proof of his interaction with God through Gabriel.

While it is possible that Muslims' sociopolitical, theological, and cultural contexts shaped Muhammad's life, his reaction to what he believed was his first revelation is less likely to have

been changed substantially as it was communicated to Muslims and embedded in their memory. Over time, Muslims commemorated this episode, especially in the form of *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Power), which continues today. Another reason why Muhammad's reaction must have been remembered is because of its salience to all Muslims across time. Salient memory plays a role for this episode because of how significant it was. Muhammad's reaction was remembered and preserved in most of our sources, including those that illustrate how he contemplated jumping from the top of the mountain. While it could be argued that Muhammad's reaction of fright, concern, and panic could have been expected by his community, his attempted suicide is unique as most Muslims would not have imagined his reaction to be this extreme.

Muhammad's revelation was also probably performed orally in lectures and in public as Muslims were motivated to learn about his call to prophethood. Lecturers were unlikely to omit this episode in his life, along with his reaction, as they were foundational to Islam. As we have seen, some lecturers, historians, and theologians eventually omitted aspects of Muhammad's reaction, especially him wanting to jump off the mountain. Lastly, verbatim memory is not a factor in this episode as we have different episodes of his reaction. Even if Muhammad's reaction was initially transmitted verbatim, as time went on, Muslims may have altered the memory so that his fear and intent to hurl himself over the mountain were excluded or minimized. In addition, we have too many discrepancies between stories, including whether he wanted to throw himself off the mountain soon after his first revelation or during his lapse of revelation.

There are a variety of memories that were developed after Muhammad had his first revelation. He must have shared this episode with his family, including Khadija and his friends. Considering that ʿAʾisha is believed to be one of the main transmitters of this event, it is very likely that Muhammad eventually told her what happened, along with his other wives. Other than

accounts by al-Yaʿqubi, all memories transmitted by Muslims agree that Muhammad was frightened and went to Khadija for comfort after his first revelation. However, there are a number of resemblances between Muhammad's reaction and prophets in the Hebrew Bible as it mentions how they also exhibited fear and terror when encountering the divine. One major difference between our traditions is whether he wanted to commit suicide. Some memories postponed this intention until after there was a lapse in time between revelations, while others omit it altogether. It seems that some of our memories delayed Muhammad's contemplating of suicide to demonstrate that he was more accepting of his revelation and mission of prophethood. If we use gist memory to understand this episode, we can identify that Muhammad may have been so frightened that he sought comfort from Khadija and even wanted to jump from Mount Hira to his death.

Memories of Muhammad's first revelation were likely communicated directly to his companions, family, and wives, all of whom would have shared this story with others. We have purported eyewitness accounts of Muhammad telling ʿAʾisha about this episode; however, the credibility of this account is not verifiable. These memories were communicated for generations and became part of Muslims' cultural memory. Muhammad's first revelation, including his reaction, would also develop into a collective memory that was performed orally by lecturers, theologians, and historians in private and in public.

Although our accounts of Muhammad's reaction are not always consistent, over time, memories were modified based on the sociopolitical, cultural, and theological contexts that shaped them to suit audiences. His reaction to his first revelation may have been modified over time to reinforce similarities with biblical stories of prophets' encounters with God or an angel. On the other hand, this episode could have been revised to reinforce Muslims' perceptions of Muhammad.

Either way, there is no proof to indicate that he faked his emotions to imitate his predecessors, especially since it is mentioned in multiple sources and recurs within many of them.

In addition, the extent to which Muhammad's reaction makes him to want to take his own life seems beyond reason to invent. Were these memories invented to legitimize and give a backstory to Q. 74:1-5? The answer is impossible to prove or disprove. The essence of these events demonstrates how Muhammad feared for himself and his mental state, sought comfort and help from Khadija, and contemplated taking his own life. Due to the unstable nature of social memory, we cannot confirm Muhammad's reaction of fear and terror as there are many similarities between his accounts and the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, gist memory is the most reliable way to understand historical events as it was the easiest to transmit memories to others orally until they were written down. We can assume that after what he believed was his first revelation, Muhammad very likely sought comfort from Khadija and, at some point, had the intention to leap off Mount Hira. Whether it was right after his encounter or during a lapse is beyond gist memory as we are understanding the "big picture" that Muhammad wanted to jump off a mountain.

The First Male Convert to Islam

Based on Islamic traditions, after Muhammad began to receive his revelations, Khadija, the first convert to Islam, encouraged him to continue his mission as a Messenger of God. He started his role as a Prophet by preaching secretly and sharing his revelations with close family and friends within his clan, the Banu Hashim. Despite Muhammad's slow and meticulous approach to spreading Islam, it did not take long for others to hear his message and become his followers. After Khadija's conversion, there is no unanimously agreed upon convert who became the next Muslim.

Within our surviving sources, there are three figures who are usually considered to be the first male converts to Islam. First is ʿAli, a cousin of Muhammad, who lived with him and Khadija in their residence. He was approximately nine years old when he converted to Islam. Second is Zayd, the adopted son of Muhammad, who was previously a slave within Khadija's household. He was about twenty-nine years old when he converted to Islam. Third is Abu Bakr, Muhammad's closest companion, who contributed his wealth towards spreading Islam. Abu Bakr would have been around thirty-seven years old when he converted and became a Muslim.

Sunni and Shia Muslims continue to debate over who was the first male convert to Islam as it establishes their legitimacy over the other, especially in regards to Muhammad's rightful successor. Our sources are not unanimous in naming the first male convert as we have differing accounts on who converted after Khadija. Contemporary scholars continue to have trouble agreeing on who was the first male convert to Islam as it is very controversial, giving serious implications as to one's authority and place in Islamic history.

Secondary scholarship will usually include several names of Muslims who converted early on. For instance, Watt points out that several authorities made statements about the first male convert to Islam, but we have different accounts that name ʿAli, Zayd, and Abu Bakr as the first male Muslim after Muhammad.[102] Watt mentions how ʿAli was taken in by Muhammad from Abu Talib; however, even if he was the first male convert, for some, it may not be significant since he was so young.[103] He also says that Zayd has the best claim to be regarded as the first male convert to Islam, whereas Abu Bakr was the most important early convert.[104]

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[102] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, xii.
[103] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 86.
[104] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 86.

In his book, Lings does not indicate the first male convert; rather, he mentions ʿAli, Zayd, and Abu Bakr together as the first few to embrace Islam after Khadija.[105] Khalidi notes out that Shia biographies are explicit about ʿAli being the first convert to Islam after Khadija without any dispute as it helps legitimize his claim as the "rightful" successor to Muhammad.[106] Brown also references Shia sources, which are in this case *hadith* literature, to demonstrate how pro-Shia *hadiths* name ʿAli as the earliest male to accept Islam.[107]

In his edited book, Brockopp writes that there is a major dispute as to who was the first male convert to Islam after Khadija, including ʿAli, Zayd, Abu Bakr, or numerous others.[108] Donner also does not specify who was the earliest male convert after Khadija as he says that some of the earliest converts were close kinsmen of Muhammad, such as ʿAli and Saʿd ibn Abu Waqqas (d. 674).[109] He also mentions that Abu Bakr and Talha were also early adherents to Muhammad's message.[110] In his book, Ramadan offers names of early converts to Islam without naming who was after Khadija. He includes ʿAli, Zayd, Um Ayman, the nursemaid of Muhammad, and Abu Bakr.[111] He says that these followers were the first to recognize Muhammad's message as coming from God, which led them to accept Islam.

In a rare exception, Cole claims that the second to believe in Muhammad was his young cousin ʿAli and then Zayd who accepted Islam.[112] He then mentions Abu Bakr, who embraced Islam and converted many others, including Talha and Ibn Abu Waqqas.[113] Anthony points out how anti-Shia polemics brought new stories within biographies on Muhammad as they wanted to

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[105] Lings, *Muhammad*, 47.
[106] Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 129 and 134.
[107] Brown, *Hadith*, 139.
[108] Brockopp, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, 6.
[109] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 41.
[110] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 41.
[111] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 37.
[112] Cole, *Muhammad*, 44.
[113] Cole, *Muhammad*, 44.

portray Abu Bakr as being favoured over ʿAli. For example, some accounts have Abu Bakr joining Abu Talib and Muhammad to Syria, where the monk Bahira proclaimed Muhammad's prophethood, which is well before ʿAli's birth.[114]

When observing available primary sources, Ibn Hisham uses Ibn Ishaq to conclude that ʿAli was the first male to believe in Muhammad, pray with him, and trust what has been revealed to him.[115] Ibn Hisham also narrates that when the prayer was due, Muhammad would come to the valleys of Mecca and perform all prayers secretly alongside ʿAli.[116] One day, Abu Talib sees them praying and then asks his son which religion he is following, to which he replies that he now believes in Allah and Muhammad as His Messenger.[117] Zayd is said to have embraced Islam and prayed with Muhammad after ʿAli.[118] Abu Bakr converted after both of them, but was open with his new faith of Islam.[119] Ibn Hisham gives us a detailed account of when ʿAli converted to Islam and indicates that it was before both Zayd and Abu Bakr.

ʿAbd al-Razzaq also describes the first convert to Islam. One account that is traced to Hasan al-Basri (d. 728) has ʿAli as the first to believe in Muhammad at the age of fifteen or sixteen years old.[120] Another account referencing Ibn ʿAbbas has ʿAli as the first to become Muslim.[121] Neither of these accounts mention Khadija as the first Muslim, which minimizes her vital role and place as the first convert to Islam. There is also one account, which is traced to al-Zuhri, mentioning that they do not know of anyone who became a Muslim before Zayd.[122] Abu Bakr is mentioned in an

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[114] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 72.
[115] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 158-159. It is questionable why Khadija is not mentioned as praying with them.
[116] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 159-160.
[117] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 159-160.
[118] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 160-161.
[119] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 161.
[120] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 18 (in Arabic). Given that ʿAli was ten years old when Muhammad believed he received his first revelation, the accuracy of this account is problematic.
[121] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 18 (in Arabic).
[122] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 18 (in Arabic).

account as one of two notable converts from Muhammad's tribe, the other being ʿUmar.[123] An interesting story that further corroborates ʿAli's status as the first male convert to Islam is a story traced back to Ibn ʿAbbas, who describes an event surrounding his proposal to Fatima (d. 632), Muhammad's daughter.[124] ʿAli mentions how he does not possess great wealth but was the first to embrace Islam.[125] Another story has Fatima complaining to her father about her marriage to ʿAli, but Muhammad says that he married her to the first of his companions to become a Muslim.[126] ʿAbd al-Razzaq, therefore, includes four different accounts that mention ʿAli as the first male convert to Islam, which is far more than either Zayd or Abu Bakr.

Ibn Saʿd does not have any accounts on the first male convert; however, he points out that Muhammad, Khadija, and ʿAli prayed together.[127] There is another occasion that has ʿAli following the praying rituals of Khadija, who is following Muhammad.[128] Ibn Saʿd also illustrates that when Muhammad and his earliest converts began to present Islam to the public, Abu Bakr began to propagate it secretly.[129] Al-Baladhuri, on the other hand, notes the contested nature of the first male convert.[130] Three accounts have Zayd as the first male convert to Islam, whereas two reports narrate ʿAli as the first male, praying alongside Muhammad and Khadija. Using al-Waqidi, al-Baladhuri describes how he saw Muhammad praying with Khadija and asks him what he is doing, to which Muhammad says that he is practicing the religion of God and invites him to accept

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[123] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 18 (in Arabic).
[124] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 274 and 276 (in Arabic).
[125] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 274 (in Arabic).
[126] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 278 (in Arabic).
[127] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 18.
[128] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 18.
[129] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 200.
[130] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 112.

one God.[131] He also tells ʿAli to join Islam or keep it a secret; however, the next day, he comes back to Muhammad and says that he is a Muslim.[132]

Al-Yaʿqubi recounts a similar story from Ibn Hisham and Ibn Saʿd that has ʿAli seeing Muhammad and Khadija performing ablution and praying, and then doing the same.[133] He also mentions the first people to accept Islam were Khadija of the women and ʿAli of the men.[134] Al-Yaʿqubi does not distinguish who converted first between the two but says Zayd was next after them.[135] After Zayd, he indicates that Abu Dharr was next but some say it was Abu Bakr, which places him as the fourth or fifth to convert to Islam.[136]

Al-Tabari acknowledges the difference in opinion among earlier scholars as to who converted to Islam after Khadija.[137] Numerous accounts have ʿAli the first male convert to perform prayer, praying the day after Muhammad began, and the first to accept Islam.[138] One account has him said to have performed prayer with Muhammad seven years before other men.[139] Other accounts have ʿAli as the first to accept Islam at the age of nine or ten.[140] In addition, he is said in one account to have accepted Islam one year after Muhammad began his prophetic mission.[141] Al-Tabari narrates an account tracing through Ibn Ishaq to an eyewitness merchant, Afif, the narrator, with al-ʿAbbas noticing a man facing the Kaaba to pray, who was then joined by a woman and a young man.[142] Al-ʿAbbas tells the merchant that the man is Muhammad, the woman is Khadija,

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[131] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 112.
[132] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 112-113.
[133] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 22.
[134] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 22.
[135] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 22.
[136] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 22-23.
[137] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1159.
[138] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1159-1160. Again, we see many accounts omitting Khadija as the first convert to Islam.
[139] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1160.
[140] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1163.
[141] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1165.
[142] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1161-1162.

and the young man is ʿAli.[143] A similar account includes Afif with al-ʿAbbas observing a man facing the Kaaba and then joined by a youth on his right and then a woman who stood behind them.[144]

Another account, which is almost identical to our previous two, takes place in Mina, where Afif and al-ʿAbbas notice a man performing his ablutions and then a woman and youth performing their ablutions and praying alongside him.[145] Al-ʿAbbas mentions that the man is his nephew, Muhammad, and the woman is Khadija and the youth is his brother's son, ʿAli.[146] Some scholars have Muhammad going to the ravines of Mecca to pray in secret with ʿAli as they wanted to conceal themselves from Abu Talib and their other uncles.[147] They would pray together and when Abu Talib saw them one day, he asked his son what religion he is following.[148] Ali replied that he believes in God and His Messenger, Muhammad.[149]

After mentioning all of the accounts that have ʿAli as the first male to embrace Islam, al-Tabari includes accounts that have Abu Bakr as the first male convert. One account has someone correcting the other and saying that Abu Bakr was first and not ʿAli,[150] while another account references lines from Hassan ibn Thabit (d. 674), who has Abu Bakr as the first of men to believe in the prophets.[151] Some accounts, including one that has Muhammad quoted, have a free man and a slave as the first to follow Muhammad: Abu Bakr and Bilal.[152] However, contradicting accounts have Abu Bakr as not being the first to convert to Islam.[153] More particularly, as many as fifty

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[143] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1162.
[144] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1160-1161.
[145] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1162.
[146] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1162-1163.
[147] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1164.
[148] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1165.
[149] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1165.
[150] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1160.
[151] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1165.
[152] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1166.
[153] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1166.

people accepted Islam before him.[154] Al-Tabari then includes accounts that have Zayd as the first to believe and follow Muhammad. Accounts from both al-Zuhri and ʿUrwah mention that Khadija was the first woman to accept Islam and Zayd was the first man.[155] On the other hand, al-Tabari includes Ibn Ishaq's account that has Zayd becoming the first male to accept Islam after ʿAli and then Abu Bakr, who proclaimed his faith openly.[156]

ʿAli narrates an account that legitimizes him being one of the earliest converts to Islam. This report has Muhammad, three years after receiving his initial message, inviting his kinsmen to a meal and to embrace his new religion. After everyone had eaten, he called the Banu ʿAbd al-Muttalib to accept his new message and become his brother, his executor, and his successor.[157] The men remained silent except ʿAli, who said that he will be his helper in this matter.[158] Muhammad then accepted him as his brother, executor, and successor and urged his relatives to harken to him and obey him, which was ridiculed by his uncles as they would not obey their nephew.[159] ʿAli also narrates a similar account that has Muhammad assembling the Banu ʿAbd al-Muttalib for a meal and asking which of them will swear an oath of allegiance to him and become his brother, his companion, and his inheritor.[160] When ʿAli rose, Muhammad told him to sit down and repeated his words to his relatives; however, ʿAli stood up again only to be asked to sit down.[161] On the third time, Muhammad struck his hand on ʿAli's hand when he got up, which demonstrated that he was his heir.[162] While this story focuses more on how ʿAli was Muhammad's successor, it also demonstrates how early he converted to Islam.

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[154] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1167.
[155] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1167.
[156] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1167-1168.
[157] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1171-1172.
[158] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1172.
[159] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1172-1173.
[160] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1173.
[161] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1173.
[162] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1173.

Within *hadith* literature, there are no explicit *hadiths* that specify who converted to Islam first. Two identical *hadith*s within *Sahih al-Bukhari* mention only five slaves, two women, and Abu Bakr as the only early converts to Islam, which would eliminate both ʿAli and most likely Zayd from being the first to embrace Islam, unless he is still considered as one of the slaves.[163] When exploring non-Muslim sources, only one recounts the first male convert to Islam. Theophanes mentions that after Muhammad proclaimed himself as a Prophet, Khadija was the first to believe in him.[164] When reports spread from women to men, Abu Bakr was the first to receive them, who was made Muhammad's successor.[165] Other than this account, which gives us no backstory or reasoning for Abu Bakr's conversion, the rest of our sources are from Muslims.

The table below is a summary of which primary sources indicate Ali, Abu Bakr, or Zayd as the first male convert to Islam. I also indicate which sources include accounts that have multiple accounts of the first male convert, even if they are conflicting.

Table 3: The First Male Convert to Islam

Primary Sources	Ali as the first male convert	Abu Bakr as the first male convert	Zayd as the first male convert
Ibn Hisham	Yes, multiple accounts	Converted after Ali and Zayd	Converted after Ali
ʿAbd al-Razzaq	Yes, multiple accounts	No	Yes
Ibn Saʿd	Yes, indirectly	No	No
Al-Baladhuri	Yes, multiple accounts	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Yaʿqubi	Yes, multiple accounts	Converted after Ali and Zayd	Converted after Ali
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Bukhari	No	Before Ali and Zayd	Before Ali, indirectly
Theophanes	No	Yes	No

The criterion of embarrassment is beneficial because ʿAli as the earliest male convert to Islam was controversial for the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties and has been used in polemics to justify his succession over Abu Bakr. ʿAli's conversion at the age of nine or ten was well before other influential figures such as ʿHamzah and ʿUmar, all of whom initially rejected Muhammad's

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[163] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, Bk. 57, No. 12 and Vol. 5, Bk. 58, No. 197.

[164] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 465.

[165] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 465.

mission and earlier pleas to accept Islam. Indeed, it could be embarrassing that only a child converted to Islam after being asked, whereas Muhammad's own family members mocked and ridiculed him when he tried to convert them. In addition, ʿAli converting before Muhammad's adopted son and closest companion is also embarrassing, demonstrated by biographies and *hadith* compilers likely adding some reports of Abu Bakr and Zayd converting before him.

Recurrent attestation also takes place within our sources. For instance, Ibn Hisham repeats claims of ʿAli being the first male convert to Islam, including stories of him praying with Muhammad and admitting to his father that he believes in God and Muhammad as the Messenger of God. ʿAbd al-Razzaq also offers multiple accounts of ʿAli being the first to convert to Islam. More particularly, he provides two valuable stories surrounding ʿAli's proposal and marriage to Fatima. The first has him stating that he was the first to embrace Islam, whereas the other has Muhammad explaining to Fatima that he married her to the first of his companions to embrace Islam. These two stories repeat ʿAli's position as the first male convert and helps provide further evidence to other accounts within ʿAbd al-Razzaq's work.

Al-Baladhuri includes numerous reports that have ʿAli recognized as the first male to convert to Islam. Episodes also have him seeing Muhammad and Khadija praying and later converting. In addition, al-Yaʿqubi not only has ʿAli as the first male to convert, but he also includes a story of him seeing Muhammad and Khadija performing ablution, praying, and then doing the same. Al-Tabari compiles numerous sources and references several accounts of ʿAli as the first male to embrace Islam. After recounting various accounts that claim he was the first to convert to Islam after Khadija, al-Tabari mentions an account of a merchant with al-ʿAbbas watching Muhammad facing the Kaaba to pray alongside Khadija and ʿAli. A similar account has Muhammad in Mina performing ablutions, praying, and then joined by his wife and cousin.

Another story has Muhammad praying at the ravines secretly with ʿAli, who is later approached by Abu Talib who asks him what religion he is following. ʿAli mentions that he believes in God and in Muhammad as the Messenger of God. Al-Tabari has two other significant stories, including Muhammad asking his relatives three times to embrace his new religion and become his brother, his executor, and his successor. When no one replies each of the three times except ʿAli, Muhammad accepts him.

ʿAli's position as the first male convert to Islam is attested in several surviving sources. His conversion was neither significant to non-Muslims nor useful in their polemical debates and attacks on Muhammad or Islam. Theophanes likely chose Abu Bakr as the first male convert because he led Muslims after Muhammad's death. Ibn Hisham and ʿAbd al-Razzaq are mostly direct with their claim that ʿAli was the first male to embrace Islam. Al-Yaʿqubi is also explicit with his statement that he was the first male to convert. In addition, al-Tabari provides several accounts of people claiming that ʿAli, Zayd, and Abu Bakr were the earliest male converts after Khadija; however, the majority of them favour ʿAli being the first.

We also have multiple sources claiming that Abu Bakr was not the first male to convert to Islam. Ibn Hisham, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, and al-Tabari all include accounts that have Abu Bakr converting after ʿAli, Zayd, or fifty others. Likewise, Ibn Hisham, al-Yaʿqubi, and al-Tabari include accounts that have Zayd converting to Islam after ʿAli. A similar episode demonstrating ʿAli as the first male to embrace Islam is within Ibn Hisham, al-Yaʿqubi, and al-Tabari, all of which recount al-ʿAbbas and Afif observing Muhammad publicly performing ablutions, then praying, and being followed closely by ʿAli.[166] These stories are slightly different but seem to trace back to the same episode. These differences in memories are largely due to

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[166] Ibn Hisham does not mention Khadija, while one of al-Tabari's accounts has Khadija praying behind Muhammad and ʿAli.

sectarian disputes that led to polemics during the writing of these biographies. Intrareligious debates may have had Sunni Muslims attempting to undermine ʿAli by claiming that Abu Bakr and Zayd converted before him. These memories were challenged as there is still an overwhelming opinion from both Sunni and Shia sources that ʿAli was the first male convert to Islam.

When incorporating memory studies, we can understand how many stories of ʿAli's conversion have been preserved over generations both orally and in written form. Although a very polemical topic, the first male convert to Islam is a significant episode that took place during Muhammad's life. Regardless of the political and theological implications of who converted after Khadija, we are able to use several types of memories to examine how early Muslims remembered ʿAli being the first male convert to Islam. The majority of our sources indicate that he converted after Khadija. Social memory of his conversion has changed and been challenged as the split between Sunni and Shia Muslims crystallized, which led to some scholars claiming that Abu Bakr was the first male convert to Islam. As the first to convert after Khadija, Abu Bakr would further legitimize his status as Muhammad's "rightful" successor, despite its implausibility.

Zayd was likely another, but more plausible, candidate to be the first male to convert to Islam. Being the adopted son of Muhammad and living with him are two reasons why he could have converted after Khadija; however, no memories recount how and when Zayd embraced Islam. In addition, we do not have any stories or episodes that recall how and when Abu Bakr became a Muslim. Memories of ʿAli as the first male to embrace Islam is an important memory that was preserved in detail within most of our sources. Even with anti-Shia polemics and animosity developing after Muhammad's death, stories of him embracing Islam and praying alongside his cousin and Khadija survived in Muslims' memories and was transmitted orally for generations.

Eyewitness accounts have non-Muslims observing Muhammad praying with Khadija and ʿAli, learning that they are practicing a new religion. These individual and episodic memories have well-known figures such as al-ʿAbbas saying that he was practicing Islam alongside Muhammad and Khadija. Accounts of people observing ʿAli praying with them before any other male convert, including Abu Bakr and Zayd, further demonstrate him as the first male to embrace Islam. His conversion was affected by sociopolitical and theological contexts that rivalled him and Abu Bakr as legitimate successors of Muhammad; however, the stories of ʿAli's conversion are still present and relatively unchanged. His image as Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law who lived with him during his childhood remained untarnished in the face of controversy and animosity that increased after Muhammad's death.

Several Muslims communicated ʿAli being the first male convert to Islam and committed it to their memory. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims commemorate him as one of the earliest converts to Islam, if not the first male, and this memory was likely shared for generations as his role in Muhammad's life was developed and modified over time. While ʿAli's conversion does not hold a strong unanimous cultural memory for Sunni Muslim, Shia Muslims acknowledged him as the first male convert and embedded it into their cultural memory, which further shaped their understanding of Islam, particularly ʿAli's "rightful" succession.

ʿAli's role in the beginning of Islam was probably recounted by scholars, theologians, and historians during their lectures on the beginning of Muhammad's call to prophethood. Muslims might have been curious who were the first converts to Islam, especially Khadija, ʿAli, Zayd, and Abu Bakr, which led to oral performances in the form of public and private lectures on Muhammad's first years as the Messenger of God. It is remarkable that ʿAli mostly remains the first male to embrace Islam despite wars and anti-Shia sentiment between Muhammad's death and

the writing of Ibn Ishaq, al-Waqidi, and Maʿmar. Memories of his conversion to Islam was passed on due to its significance to Islamic history. Salient memory seems to have played a major role in preserving ʿAli as the first male convert, especially since Abu Bakr and Zayd's claims as being the first to embrace Islam after Khadija are overshadowed by the many more memories that place ʿAli before them. Verbatim memory, on the other hand, is not helpful as we have differing accounts that seem to have been modified over time to establish ʿAli, Zayd, and Abu Bakr as the first male convert to Islam.

The different types of memories surrounding ʿAli's conversion to Islam are important because they demonstrate how he was very likely the first male Muslim to convert after Khadija. Muslims remembered and circulated memories of him being the first male Muslim convert despite Abu Bakr succeeding Muhammad as the first caliph. These memories of ʿAli sometimes include an episode of how and why he converted. On the other hand, no memories have been preserved that describe the conversion of Zayd or Abu Bakr as they were either forgotten or not deemed significant enough to be remembered. Over time, it seems that other competing memories were circulating alongside ʿAli's conversion, arguing that Zayd and Abu Bakr converted before him. However, it is more plausible that these accounts were developed later on to either confirm Abu Bakr's succession or attack ʿAli's legitimacy by having Zayd convert before him. Gist memory is the most useful memory as we have sources that mostly agree ʿAli was the first male to embrace Islam. In addition, all of our Muslim sources have multiple accounts that have ʿAli as the first male convert to Islam. While we are not able to confirm exactly when he converted, we are able to point out that he probably converted after Khadija but before both Zayd and Abu Bakr.

There are more accounts confirming ʿAli as the first male convert to Islam than any other figure, including Zayd and Abu Bakr. Several of our narratives trace back to the time of

Muhammad and confirm repeatedly that he was the first to embrace Islam after Khadija. While some accounts have Zayd or Abu Bakr as the first male convert to Islam, they are outnumbered by those stating that ʿAli was before them. In addition, we have numerous reports that mention he was the first male and also indicate that Zayd and Abu Bakr converted after him. Rarely do we have accounts that confirm Zayd or Abu Bakr as the first male to embrace Islam and then specify ʿAli as converting after them.

In addition, only ʿAli has descriptions and episodes that illustrate that he was second, or even the first, to convert to Islam. It is surprising that Khadija is absent in some of these stories or mentioned as praying behind Muhammad and ʿAli, but it may be due to modifications over time orally and in written form. Patriarchalism and Khadija's gender seem to play a role in accounts that minimize or omit her role in Ali's conversion as we often have women neglected or limited in their roles within *hadith* literature and *sirah-maghazi*. Memories of ʿAli's conversion or his early adherence to Islam is preserved due to its importance for all Muslims, especially Shia Muslims who instilled these memories as part of their cultural memory. Social memory helps us understand that some authors likely added Abu Bakr and Zayd as the first males to embrace Islam due to their own sociopolitical and theological motivations; however, most Muslims did not want to tarnish ʿAli's position as the first convert after Khadija because of its salience to Islamic history.

Our sources recount and repeat episodes that confirm ʿAli's early conversion, despite anti-Shia polemics and animosity after Muhammad's death. The gist memory of him being the first male convert remains mostly consistent to demonstrate his influential role for the Muslim community. We cannot confirm whether ʿAli prayed with Muhammad and Khadija or spoke out to join Muhammad while his relatives remained silent; however, numerous sources have him as

the first male to convert to Islam, despite predominately Sunni Muslims compiling and writing down the history of Islam.

The Boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib

According to Muslim sources, when Muhammad began preaching publicly around 613, he received some interest from influential members of the community, including Abu Bakr, ʿHamzah, ʿUmar, and ʿUthman. Once there were enough converts to Islam, Muhammad's opponents managed to establish an alliance of nearly all the clans of the Banu Quraysh against the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. One of the main reasons for this boycott was to put pressure on the two clans to withdraw their protection and support of Muhammad. During this boycott, which is believed to have taken place between 616 and 619, none of the other clans were to have any business dealings or marriages with members of the Banu Hashim or Banu al-Muttalib.

A contract was written and signed by various clans of the Banu Quraysh who pledged to uphold themselves to observe this boycott. The document is said to have been hung inside the Kaaba to make it more binding and public. The two clans were ostracized and isolated from the tribe, except Abu Lahab (d. 624), Muhammad's uncle, and his wife, Umm Jamil, both of whom joined in the boycott. Despite being helped by others outside the two clans who disagreed with the boycott, the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib struggled to live as they exhausted their resources and wealth to sustain themselves. By 619, enough members of the Banu Quraysh called for the end of the boycott, which was annulled, bringing the two clans out of their isolation and dire circumstances.

When writing biographies on Muhammad, many contemporary scholars acknowledge the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib but rarely explore this period in detail. Most

secondary scholarship will include persecution against early Muslims and Muhammad but not always the boycott. A reason for not covering it may be the perceived lack of sources available on this event. In his book, Watt acknowledges that the boycott took place but not only because of the protection given to Muhammad as there were other possible motives.[167] Lings narrates the formation of the document drawn to boycott the Banu Hashim, which was agreed upon by at least forty leaders of the Banu Quraysh.[168] After the Banu al-Muttalib refused to forsake the clan, they were also included in the ban. Lings is more explicit in naming Muhammad as the reason why the boycott was established.[169] He also notes that there may have been loopholes that allowed other members of the Banu Quraysh to help the clans with food and supplies during the boycott.[170]

Ramadan examines the boycott as a banishment of all Banu Hashim, except Abu Lahab.[171] The reason, according to him, was to put an end to Muhammad's mission and end the worship of "One God."[172] The Banu Hashim, along with the Banu al-Muttalib, moved to an area in the Meccan valley, which made the situation worse as many suffered from sickness and hunger.[173] Eventually, several members of different clans within the Banu Quraysh gathered publicly to object to the boycott, leading to one member to go into the Kaaba, tear up the document, and lift the ban against the clans.[174]

Donner briefly mentions the boycott of the Banu Hashim by other clans of the Banu Quraysh, particularly Abu Jahl, chief of the Banu Makhzum, with the aim of having Abu Talib withdraw his protection of Muhammad and hand him over to them.[175] He, however, does not

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[167] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 121.
[168] Lings, *Muhammad*, 90.
[169] Lings, *Muhammad*, 90.
[170] Lings, *Muhammad*, 90-91.
[171] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 66.
[172] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 66.
[173] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 66.
[174] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 67.
[175] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 42.

describe the boycott, its length, or its conditions. Cole does not include it as an event that took place at all. Despite the importance of this ban against Muhammad, the Banu Hashim, and the Banu al-Muttalib, scholars rarely explain the nature and circumstances that led to the boycott. Was it invented? Was there no ban and isolation of the two clans for two to three years? Was the boycott not significant enough to include in contemporary biographies on Muhammad? While evidence may seem scarce, several primary sources acknowledge the boycott directly and indirectly, giving us more confidence in authenticating this event.

The earliest reference we have that alludes to the boycott comes from ʿUrwah's first letter to Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, titled "From the Persecutions in Mecca to the Hijrah to Yathrib." In this letter, he writes that after persecution of Muhammad, the leaders of the Banu Quraysh "conspired together to compel those who had followed him from their children, brethren, and clans to leave God's religion. It was persecution [*fitnah*] that sent shockwaves throughout the people of Islam who followed their Messenger of God."[176] This persecution lasted for several years but was ended after the Banu Quraysh saw Islam continue to spread.[177] Although there is no direct reference to the boycott, there are similarities of the leaders of the tribe conspiring together to persecute followers of Muhammad.

One of the more interesting accounts about the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib comes from Ibn Ishaq, who includes poetry composed by Abu Talib that describes the harsh conditions the ban brought.[178] While we cannot determine whether Abu Talib *really* recited or wrote down this poem, it does offer further evidence that the boycott took place. Ibn Hisham

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[176] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 110. I have used Anthony's translation as he translates the Arabic himself from numerous sources, including al-Tabari.

[177] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 111.

[178] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 160. These two poems will be discussed in greater detail later in this case study.

quotes Ibn Ishaq and writes that the Qurayshis were baffled by the first migration of Muslims to Abyssinia, the conversions of ʿUmar and ʿHamzah, and the spread of Islam among the clans.[179] Therefore, the tribe held a meeting and decided to write down a pact to boycott the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, which included no intermarrying or trade with either clan.[180] The contract was agreed upon, signed, and hung inside the Kaaba to remind members of the Banu Quraysh of their commitment.[181] The two clans joined with Abu Talib and entered his valley, except Abu Lahab who sided with the Qurayshis.[182] The boycott lasted for two or three years, which brought much suffering to both clans.

During the boycott, there is one episode that recounts when Hakim ibn Hizam and his slave take flour intended for his aunt, Khadija. Abu Jahl intercepts this delivery and is confronted by Abu al-Bakhtari, who questions why he is trying to prevent Ibn Hizam from giving flour to his aunt.[183] After a heated conversation, Abu al-Bakhtari takes a camel's jawbone and knocks Abu Jahl down with it. Ibn Hisham also includes the revoking of the pact, which takes place when Hisham ibn ʿAmr leads the revoking of the boycott as he gathers sympathizers who disagree with it.[184] After enough members agree to dissolve it, there is a public gathering that calls for its end.[185] When al-Mutim ibn Adi is about to tear the boycott document, he notices termites had devoured it completely, except the phrase, "In the Name of Allah."[186] Ibn Hisham also includes an episode of Muhammad foretelling the state of the document to his uncle, Abu Talib, which makes him confront the Qurayshis and make a deal that if the document is devoured by termites except "In

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[179] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 230.
[180] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 230. People from Banu al-Muttalib are another clan within the Banu Quraysh.
[181] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 230.
[182] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 230-231.
[183] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 232.
[184] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 247-248.
[185] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 248.
[186] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 248-249.

the Name of Allah," they will annul the boycott, and if it is not true, he will give his nephew to them.[187] This episode of Muhammad predicting the eventual state of the document seems to be added to the original story to demonstrate God's will and miraculous power.

ʿAbd al-Razzaq does not include the boycott by name; however, he narrates a report traced to ʿUrwah that mentions how the Banu Quraysh deliberated what to do with members of their own clans who converted to Islam, including torturing them and imprisoning them, so that they would abandon their religion.[188] Ibn Saʿd is more explicit about the boycott over Muhammad and the Banu Hashim. Using four different chains of transmission, including one that traces to Ibn ʿAbbas, he discusses how the Banu Quraysh was angered by the good treatment of migrants to Abyssinia and aimed to assassinate Muhammad.[189] They then draw up a document against the Banu Hashim, banning them from marital relations with other clans, commercial connections, and interaction of any kind.[190] The document is placed inside the Kaaba, which blockades the Banu Hashim to the valley of Abu Talib.[191] The Banu al-Muttalib also takes refuge with Abu Talib in his mountain pass, siding with the clan. The Banu Quraysh stopped food, grain, and other necessities from reaching the clans, making them suffer to the delight of some Qurayshis, while others feel sorry.[192] They remain in the mountain pass for three years, until God reveals to Muhammad that white ants consumed the portion of the document that mentions the conditions of the boycott, leaving only the words, "In the name of Allah."[193]

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[187] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 249.
[188] Ibn Rashid, *The Expeditions*, 112 (in Arabic). There are similarities between this account and Ibn al-Zubayr's first letter to ʿAbd al-Malik.
[189] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 208.
[190] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 209.
[191] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 236.
[192] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 209.
[193] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 209.

There is some dispute as to whether the blockade lasted for two or three years as Ibn Saʿd includes accounts that mention both.[194] Using al-Waqidi, he mentions how Muhammad tells Abu Talib about a revelation he received, which leads to his uncle going to the Banu Quraysh and telling them that God partially destroyed the document, except where it mentions God's name.[195] He makes a deal with the tribe, telling them that if the document was partially destroyed, they will end the boycott, and if he is wrong, he will hand Muhammad over to them to kill.[196] After the Qurayshis agree to the deal, they discover that the document was partially consumed by ants. Abu Talib and his companions return to the mountain pass, until some Qurayshis visit them and ask them to return to their houses.[197] Other members of the tribe notice this plea and realize that they cannot stop them from returning, so they revoke the blockade.[198]

Al-Baladhuri includes a detailed report on how the Qurayshis isolated and boycotted Muhammad, the Banu Hashim, and the Banu al-Muttalib. The tribe asks Abu Talib to tell his nephew to stop preaching against their fathers, gods, children, and slaves.[199] After Muhammad says that he will not stop, the tribe gathers and decides to no longer have peace with the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib until Muhammad dies.[200] Abu Lahab joins the Qurayshis and the boycott against his clan. The two clans stay with Abu Talib for three years, leading to poor conditions and some deaths as the boycott disallowed trade, talking, and mixing with other clans.[201]

Sympathizers emerge after they felt remorseful about the boycott and attempt to end it. God communicates to Muhammad that the contract has been eaten except for the words "In the

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[194] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 210.
[195] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 209-210.
[196] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 210.
[197] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 210.
[198] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 210.
[199] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 229.
[200] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 229-230.
[201] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 234.

name of Allah."[202] He then tells Abu Talib about the contract, so he goes to the Banu Quraysh and asks them to see its condition.[203] The tribe notices that it is partially eaten, leading Abu Talib to shame the tribe. There is an account of Ibn Hizam sending a camel with flour to Khadija, which is intercepted by Abu Jahl.[204] People continue to advocate against the boycott, starting with Ibn ʿAmr, gathering to end the boycott and to allow the Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib to return. Men of the Banu Quraysh then come to Abu Talib after he returned home to tell him to come back, leading the clans to rejoin the community as the boycott could no longer be enforced.[205]

Al-Yaʿqubi discusses the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. His account begins with members of the Banu Quraysh intending to kill Muhammad but realize they cannot because Abu Talib will not hand him over.[206] The tribe then writes up a boycott document that ceases all buying and selling, intermarriage, and all other dealings with the two clans until Muhammad is delivered to them.[207] This document is made into a contract and pact between members of the Qurayshis, sealed by eighty seals.[208] The tribe isolate Muhammad, the Banu Hashim, and the Banu al-Muttalib in a valley known as Shiʿb Banu Hashim (the valley of the Hashim clan).[209] They stay in the valley for three years until Abu Talib and Khadija exhaust their wealth and are on the brink of poverty.[210]

Gabriel then comes to Muhammad and tells him that God sent termites to attack the document of the Qurayshis, eating everything except the places that mention God.[211] Muhammad

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[202] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 234.
[203] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 234.
[204] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 235-236.
[205] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 236.
[206] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 30.
[207] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 30.
[208] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 30.
[209] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 30.
[210] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 30-31.
[211] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.

then tells Abu Talib what Gabriel said, and they both go to the Kaaba.[212] Abu Talib asks the tribe

to bring the document to him and mentions that it is partially eaten by termites.[213] He says that if

that is true, what will the Qurayshis do, so they reply that they will cease and end their boycott,

and if it is not true, he will deliver Muhammad to them to kill.[214] The document is then unsealed

and they notice that termites have eaten everything except wherever the words "In the name of

Allah" appear.[215] The Qurayshis call it sorcery, but many present that day accept Islam.[216] The

Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib then emerge from the valley and rejoin their community.[217]

Al-Tabari expands on Ibn Ishaq's description of events preceding the boycott. These events

lead to the Qurayshis gathering together to draw up a document to boycott the Banu Hashim and

Banu al-Muttalib, disallowing marriages and any sort of business with either of them.[218] The Banu

Quraysh pledge upon this written contract, which is hung inside of the Kaaba to make it binding

upon all members.[219] The two clans join Abu Talib and stay with him in his valley, except Abu

Lahab who supported the boycott, until they exhaust their resources.[220]

Al-Tabari includes the same episode as other sources regarding Abu Jahl intercepting Ibn

Hizam and his slave when they attempt to bring Khadija some wheat.[221] After two or three years

of boycott, a number of Qurayshis take initiative to repeal the ban against the Banu Hashim and

Banu al-Muttalib. Ibn ʿAmr, in particular, plays a major role and gathers others to speak up against

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[212] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.
[213] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.
[214] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.
[215] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.
[216] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.
[217] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 31.
[218] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1189.
[219] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1189.
[220] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1189-1190.
[221] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1190.

it.[222] One morning, they publicly condemn the boycott as unjust and severing relationships.[223] When Ibn Adi goes to tear up the document, he finds out that it has been eaten by termites, except for the part that mentions, "In the name of Allah."[224]

Hadith literature also references the boycott. *Sahih al-Bukhari* includes two *hadiths* that mention the oath of *Kufr* (unbelief), which was the boycott against Muhammad and the two clans.[225] While there is no direct indication of the boycott, it serves as further evidence of it taking place. *Sahih Muslim*, on the other hand, gives a more explicit description of the boycott. One *hadith* expands on the one included within *Sahih al-Bukhari*, as it says that the Qurayshis and Banu Kinanah pledged against the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. This pledge includes ceasing marriages or transactions with the clans until they deliver Muhammad to them.[226]

The following table reviews which sources mention Muhammad, the Banu Hashim, and the Banu al-Muttalib being boycotted. I also point out which sources make direct or indirect references to this ban.

Table 4: The Boycott of Muhammad, the Banu Hashim, and the Banu al-Muttalib

<u>Primary Sources</u>	Muhammad, Banu Hashim, and Banu al-Muttalib are boycotted	Reference direct or indirect
ʿUrwah	Yes	Indirect
Ibn Ishaq (Poetry)	Yes	Direct
Ibn Hisham	Yes, multiple accounts	Direct
ʿAbd al-Razzaq	Yes	Indirect
Ibn Saʿd	Yes, multiple accounts	Direct
Al-Baladhuri	Yes, multiple accounts	Direct
Al-Yaʿqubi	Yes, multiple accounts	Direct
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	Direct
Al-Bukhari	Yes, multiple accounts	Indirect
Muslim	Yes	Direct

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[222] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1196.

[223] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1196-1198.

[224] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1198.

[225] *Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 2, Bk. 26, No. 659 and Vol. 5, Bk. 58, No. 221.

[226] *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 7, No. 3014.

The criterion of embarrassment is important as Muhammad and two clans were boycotted against, forced to live in isolation, and suffered for two to three years. If this boycott was invented by Muslims, why would they have Muhammad suffer, along with his wife, family, and clans? Why have both Khadija and Abu Talib die during this ban? This was an embarrassing period of time that humiliated Muhammad as the Qurayshis rallied against him and forced him into dire conditions. It seems unlikely that Muslim authors would invent this story to benefit Muhammad or his legacy.

Recurrent attestation also takes places within our sources. Ibn Hisham discusses the formation of the boycott and its conditions against the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. He also narrates the Ibn Hizam incident with Abu Jahl, as well as the movement to annul the ban after members of the Banu Quraysh sympathized with Muhammad and the two clans. In addition, the condition of the boycott is foreshadowed by Muhammad. Ibn Saʿd also mentions the motivations for the boycott and how the Qurayshis draw up a contract to be placed in the Kaaba. He mentions that after two or three years, Muhammad receives a revelation that ants ate part of the contract. The boycott is later annulled, which allows the two clans to return from their blockade.

Like his predecessors, al-Baladhuri explains the reasons for the boycott and conditions laid against the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, leading to poor conditions. He also points out how Abu Jahl intercepts Ibn Hizam, along with the role sympathizers play to end the ban. Al-Yaʿqubi discusses how the Qurayshis intended to kill Muhammad, leading to the creation of the boycott. He also notes its conditions and how it was ended after the contract was found to be partially eaten by termites. Lastly, al-Tabari narrates the formation of the boycott after describing what led to it being written. Like some other sources, al-Tabari includes the Ibn Hizam incident and the role of Ibn ʿAmr in ending the boycott, which was partially eaten by termites.

Another instance of recurrent attestation traces back to Ibn Ishaq, whose biography includes poetry attributed to Abu Talib during the boycott and after it was ended. The poem is recited during the boycott, narrating the clans' condition.[227] It mentions the harsh misfortunes of the boycott, how they will not give up Muhammad, and how they will not lose heart.[228] When the boycott is finally revoked, Abu Talib recited a poem about how God helped those in need, how the boycott document was torn up, and how lies and sorcery were combined in it.[229]

Multiple attestation takes place between many of our sources, directly and indirectly, both of which help provide evidence on the boycott. ʿUrwah's letters, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, and *Sahih al-Bukhari* all indirectly reference the ban without mentioning it by name; however, ʿUrwah's letters and ʿAbd al-Razzaq describe the Qurayshis planning and conspiring against Muhammad. Direct references are numerous and detailed. For instance, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, al-Tabari, and *Sahih Muslim* all include thorough accounts about the writing of the boycott, which was created after Muhammad began spreading Islam and gaining many followers. They also mention the conditions of the boycott against the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, including the ceasing of business and intermarriages, all of which force the two clans to stay with Abu Talib. In addition, Ibn Hisham, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, and al-Tabari include the episode of Abu al-Bakhtari attacking Abu Jahl with a camel's jawbone. Lastly, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, and al-Tabari describe the eventual annulment of the boycott after two to three years, allowing Muhammad and the two clans to return to Mecca.

Using memory studies, we could further our understanding of how this event was preserved over time. The boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib was devastating and likely

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[227] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 160.
[228] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 160.
[229] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 160.

remembered and passed on from generation to generation to recount the struggles Muhammad and the two clans faced for at least two years. A variety of memories come into play with the ban. Eyewitness and individual memory are probable as many members of the two clans were affected directly. In addition, Muhammad and his early followers probably recalled this event and its conditions of ceasing intertribal marriages and business. Episodic memory also plays a role as the boycott was remembered and recounted as a dark period of time for early Muslims. These memories eventually turned into Muslims' collective memory, outlining the persecution they faced. While the boycott was not commemorated in the same way as Muhammad's victory at Badr, it was likely memorialized in the sense that it was a time of pain and suffering.

Social memory of the boycott is important as it demonstrates how Muhammad and the early Muslims struggled to spread Islam through persecution and isolation by the Banu Quraysh. When Muslims remember his life in Mecca, the boycott stands out as one of the toughest obstacles Muhammad faced when beginning his mission as a Prophet. Memories of the boycott within several of our sources, ranging from the beginning of the boycott to its conditions, are consistent. The annulment, on the other hand, is not always the same as some accounts include miraculous events, namely the eating of the document by termites or white ants.

The boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib was also likely communicated not only during Muhammad's time in Mecca, but also in Medina as he gained many new followers. Communicative memory of the boycott was probably passed between Muslims during Muhammad's living memory, especially clan members who lived through the ban. Its memory soon became part of the cultural memory of Muslims as many of Muhammad's struggles in Mecca became the foundation upon which Islam spread. As one of toughest punishments, the boycott by

the Banu Quraysh became a salient memory as this vital time in Muhammad's life was to be remembered for its importance, impact on his life, and the founding of Islam.

When retelling Muhammad's life to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, historians, lecturers, and theologians likely included the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib as a significant event. Performative memory is plausible as the ban lasted two to three years, devastating Muhammad and the two clans to a point of poverty. Public and private lectures on his life were orally performed and must have included the boycott as a pivotal moment and test for him. Verbatim memory, on the other hand, is not possible as our sources are not consistent and differ in some instances. The beginning of the boycott, whether it was before or after the migration to Abyssinia, is unknown due to differing accounts. In addition, the revoking of the boycott is clear but whether the document was partially eaten by termites or white ants is probably an addition to legitimize Muhammad's prophethood as he foreshadows the document's status.

Numerous types of memories developed during the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, providing us with several ways how early Muslims remembered their suffering during those two to three years. All of our memories agree that Muhammad and the two clans suffered harsh conditions after the Qurayshis decided to implement this ban against them, which would not have been forgotten or fabricated as the circumstances must have been communicated to new Muslims and later generations. Why would authors make up this series of events that had the Muslim community isolated and demoralized? How does the boycott benefit Muhammad?

Gist memory gives us the clearest and most accurate description of the boycott, confirming that leaders of the Banu Quraysh created it and targeted it against Muhammad, the Banu Hashim, and the Banu al-Muttalib. The gist of the boycott's conditions included banning intermarriages and business dealings between the Qurayshis and the two clans. The boycott lasted between two

and three years, bringing hardships to Muhammad and his followers. It was annulled when members of the Banu Quraysh spoke out against the boycott, allowing the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib to come back to their homes and reclaim some normalcy.

The boycott was one of the most devastating persecutions of Muhammad and his followers. Lasting between two and three years, the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib suffered severely from the ban. Many scholars have neglected exploring this event due to the limits of our primary sources, leading some scholars to briefly mention the event or omit it altogether. However, plenty of surviving sources recount it and provide significant details. Memory studies helps us receive another perspective on how and why the boycott was preserved and passed on from generation to generation. Memories of this event were remembered as part of Muslims' cultural memory because of its salience to early and later followers of Islam. Eyewitnesses, lecturers, and theologians likely communicated these memories, so no one would forget the persecution Muhammad faced when spreading Islam.

A number of our sources repeat the boycott as the beginning of it is recorded, along with its annulment. In addition, we have episodes that are said to have taken place during the boycott, including the recitation of poetry about the clans' circumstances, delivering food to Khadija, and revelation to Muhammad. The gist of the boycott gives us the most authentic depiction of the boycott without getting into the details, which were often invented or embellished. Therefore, we can confirm that leaders of the Banu Quraysh initiated the boycott against the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, especially against Muhammad and his spreading of Islam. The gist of the conditions of the boycott included no intermarriages or business between the Qurayshis and the two clans, which lasted between two and three years. It was finally annulled when members of the tribe spoke out against the boycott and put an end to it.

Conclusion

Significant events took place during Muhammad's time in Mecca, shaping his life and the emergence of Islam. Although there is more uncertainly when he was in Mecca compared to his life in Medina, there is enough evidence to give us confidence that our four events probably took place. The details of our case studies cannot be confirmed as the essence of the events were more likely to have been preserved and passed on orally and in written form to later generations. I chose four case studies that are not only relevant and significant to Muhammad's life, but also either controversial topics or neglected by current scholars.

Muhammad's first encounter with Khadija around the age of twenty-five is one of the first major events that took place during his adulthood. Our sources indicate that she hired him to trade her goods outside Mecca. One uncertainty is whether Muhammad went to Syria or Hubashah as both places are mentioned in different accounts. By using our method, we explored how memories of Muhammad's encounter with Khadija were salient enough to remembered and transmitted over time until they were written down. Different types of memory play roles in preserving this event and its veracity. While we have some instances of recurrent attestation regarding this episode, we can also use multiple attestation to compare how our sources agree on the gist of the event.

After receiving what he believed was his first revelation, Muhammad did not react with joy or happiness; rather, he was terrified and concerned about his own wellbeing. Some accounts even have him thinking about leaping off the mountain to his death. While a number of scholars compare Muhammad's revelation to biblical accounts that have other prophets communicating with God or an angel directly, the similarities cannot prove that his reaction was invented to imitate his predecessors. Memory studies helps us get a better picture of Muhammad's reaction and how it was significant enough to preserve and modify over time to make it less embarrassing, without

affecting the essence of the event. Multiple attestation and recurrent attestation are important for this case study as we have sources that recount his reaction, especially him asking Khadija to comfort him and his intention to hurl himself from the top of the mountain.

While almost all scholars will agree that Khadija converted to Islam first, there are three males who are considered to have converted next: ʿAli, Zayd, and Abu Bakr. The majority of our sources claim ʿAli as the first male convert to Islam, while some assert Zayd and less so for Abu Bakr. The gist memory of ʿAli being the first male to embrace to Islam was also a salient memory that surprisingly remained mostly intact despite anti-Shia sentiment and a number of Sunni historians commissioned to write biographies for Sunni caliphs. Multiple attestation is helpful as several sources name him as the first male convert and include episodes that reiterate his position over Zayd and Abu Bakr. In addition, recurrent attestation takes place as we have reports of ʿAli being the earliest male convert repeated within our sources.

The boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib was one of the harshest punishments laid upon Muhammad and the two clans. Our sources mention the boycott directly and indirectly, most of which provide evidence and pertinent details. Muhammad, early Muslims, and members of the Banu Quraysh likely preserved the memory of this boycott as it was to be observed by most, if not all, of the tribe. Gist memory helps us understand that the boycott was established to punish the clans, probably because of Muhammad spreading Islam, lasting at least two years. By using multiple and recurrent attestation, we can examine numerous sources that recount the boycott and discuss details surrounding its formation, the conditions of the ban, the welfare of the two clans, and its annulment.

These four case studies demonstrate that we have enough evidence to give us better insight into events that took place during Muhammad's time in Mecca. The cases that I chose to include

are only a few possible events that could be further explored and examined for their veracity. Our surviving sources give us important details on numerous events, and despite many being written late, they are still useful in understanding Muhammad's life in Mecca. Our next chapter will include four more case studies but will focus on his time in Medina. These cases were also chosen because of their lack of attention in current scholarship or because of their relevance and controversy today.

Chapter 6: Muhammad in Medina

Introduction

After the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib, Muhammad lost both his uncle, Abu Talib, and wife, Khadija. He found himself in a very precarious situation that left him unprotected from other clans and without his major sources of support. Muhammad also failed to gain support from other cities and clans that would protect him, until he met some tribesmen from Yathrib, which was later called Medina. He was invited to come to Medina, receive protection, and spread Islam publicly. Along with his followers, Muhammad migrated secretly to Medina in 622, where he began preaching Islam more than ever before, gaining new followers and sympathizers from almost every clan in the city.

During Muhammad's life in Medina, we have more details about how he lived, who he battled with, and where he travelled. Our sources are more abundant when compared to his life in Mecca, especially due to the availability of *maghazi* literature that chronicles his raids and battles. Therefore, scholars find Muhammad's life in Medina more reliable. Over the years, however, some scholars have questioned the historicity of a number of accounts of his life, ranging from his marriages to his death.

Using our sources, we have some confidence as to what Muhammad did during his time in Medina. Several narratives are mentioned among our sources, including the Qurʾan, *hadith*, and *sirah-maghazi*. In addition, some accounts recur within our sources as authors and compilers repeat significant events multiple times within their work. Our last four case studies are the Battle of ʿUhud (625), which was a fierce battle between Muhammad's army and the Meccans that ended in a major defeat for the Muslims; his marriage to Zaynab, who was previously married to his adopted son, Zayd; the Christian delegation from Najran, which arrived in Medina to discuss,

debate, and defend their faith; and Muhammad's death after a long and painful illness that lasted several days.[1] All four of these events are included within our extant sources.

Similar to our previous chapter, I will use my method to offer a new perspective on the historical Muhammad, examining available sources on his life and how events were preserved and revised as memories through oral tradition. By offering a balanced approach that examines both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, I will explore the role memory played for early Muslims and the foundation of Islam. In sum, I offer a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life.

My method will first discuss the criterion of embarrassment and how our events fit into this category. I will then explore how our sources demonstrate recurrent attestation by repeating particular events. In addition, I will examine multiple attestation by comparing how several sources mention the same event. Finally, I will examine memory studies to observe accounts as memories, describing how they could have been preserved, reinterpreted, and elaborated upon over time. I will include numerous types of memory that were developed to remember these pertinent episodes in Muhammad's life.

In this chapter, I will first provide my reasoning for choosing our four case studies and how they are still relevant today, especially when discussing Muhammad's life. Next, I will begin my case studies one by one, giving a background of the event based on Muslim traditions, examining secondary scholarship over the last few decades, and overviewing what our primary sources mention about these events.[2] I will then incorporate my method to analyze the authenticity and

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[1] I will provide my reasoning for selecting our four case studies in the next section of this chapter.

[2] As with our previous chapter, I will overview secondary sources to demonstrate how influential scholars have analyzed and evaluated primary sources on Muhammad's life. Their work continues to influence our scholarship on early Islam today. In addition, the primary sources serve as the foundation of our method, which will allow us to better understand how memories were transmitted for generations, both orally and in written form.

veracity of our events serving as memories and then offer my historical reflections and observations. When concluding this chapter, I will provide my thoughts on Muhammad in Medina and the importance of using my method to better understand the last decade of his life.

Events During Muhammad's Life in Medina

There are more details and narratives about Muhammad's last ten years in Medina than his first fifty-two years in Mecca. Out of the many plausible events that took place during his life in Medina, I have chosen episodes that continue to be significant, debated, or neglected by current scholars. Our first case study is the Battle of ʿUhud, which was the first and only major loss for Muhammad after he moved to Medina. One year before this battle, he won a surprising victory against a much larger army of Meccans at the Battle of Badr. The Battle of ʿUhud is important not only because it was a defeat, but also due the death of ʿHamzah and the injuries to Muhammad himself. Based on the defeat and losses, it seems unlikely that later scholars, biographers, and theologians invented or fabricated this event.

Our second case study is a polemicized episode that continues to be debated and criticized: Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. Muhammad married several wives after Khadija passed away in 619. While some of them may be controversial, including his marriage to ʿAʾisha when she was a child, none have been criticized by early non-Muslim sources as much as his marriage to Zaynab. She was first married to Zayd, Muhammad's adopted son, before her marriage to him, which took place after Qurʾanic verses permitted him to marry her. This event is often overlooked by traditional scholars who do not agree on what motivated Muhammad to marry Zaynab. Polemical scholars ridicule and criticize him for his greed, lust, and selfishness for making Zayd divorce his wife so that he could marry her. More recently, some scholars have pointed out the similarities

between this event and biblical accounts of prophets having affairs and lust for women. These comparisons imply that some aspects of Muhammad's encounter and marriage to Zaynab were fabricated to liken him to his predecessors.

Our third case study is the Christian delegation from Najran that visited Muhammad during the last years of his life. This event is important because it is an example of interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Despite days of theological debate and dialogue, Muhammad and the delegation agreed to disagree on their theology, which was disappointing to both parties, especially to Muhammad as he wanted to convert the delegation to Islam. Instead, he offered protection and religious freedom in exchange for the payment of *jizya* (tax). Scholars do not usually explore this event as there are scarce details within many of our primary sources. However, when combining all of our sources together, we have more confidence than previously assumed that this event took place during Muhammad's life.

Our last case study focuses on the death of Muhammad, who is widely believed to have died in 632 due to a severe illness that had him suffering and bedridden for several days. He was approximately sixty-two years old at the time and his illness began with a fever and headaches soon after he returned from his last pilgrimage to Mecca. After Muhammad succumbed to his pain and illness, he was buried in ʿAʾisha's house, which brought a number of rebellions. Over the last ten years, we have scholars using non-Muslim sources to argue that Muhammad did not die in 632; rather, he was alive years later and even led the Muslim army into Palestine. One of these scholars, who I will mention and critique within my case study, set aside almost every Muslim source available that agree on when and how Muhammad died, preferring to use non-Muslim sources that possess their own challenges and problems regarding their authenticity and veracity.

The Battle of ʿUhud

Muhammad was successful in a number of raids and battles after his migration to Medina. Out of the three major battles that took place during Muhammad's life, one of them ended in a disastrous defeat with several Muslim deaths. According to Muslim traditions, the Battle of ʿUhud took place in 625, approximately one year after Muhammad's victory over the Meccans during the Battle of Badr, when around three hundred Muslims miraculously defeated about one thousand Meccans. Leaders of the Banu Quraysh, led by Abu Sufyan (d. 653), vowed to avenge their loss at Badr, so they mustered an army of three thousand Meccans to march towards Muhammad in Medina.

The battle took place at a valley near Mount ʿUhud. Shortly before the battle ensued, ʿAbd Allah ibn Ubayy (d. 631) deserted Muhammad and withdrew from the battlefield with three hundred men. Despite being vastly outnumbered, the Muslim army fought valiantly and pushed through the Meccans. However, the archers, who Muhammad ordered to remain at their post, left their position to collect the spoils left by fallen Meccans. This departure of strategically placed archers allowed the Meccan cavalry to go around the Muslim army and attack them from the rear, which brought disarray and many deaths, most importantly ʿHamzah. In addition, Muhammad was attacked and severely injured.

Due to its importance, the Battle of ʿUhud is mentioned in almost all secondary scholarship on Muhammad's life. Watt says that although there is a great mass of material on the battle within our primary sources, much of it describes trivial incidents focusing on the glory of individuals or refuting accusations against them.[3] Therefore, he says that we cannot reconstruct a complete account of the battle and only if we accept the "general soundness of the material," we can recount

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[3] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 21.

a rough outline.[4] Watt points out that Muhammad initially wanted to remain in Medina and fight within the city, but younger men argued that this strategy will make them look like cowards and ruin their reputation.[5]

In his book, Lings, recounts the Battle of ʿUhud and mentions how Muhammad was notified of the upcoming battle by his uncle, ʿAbbas, who remained in Mecca. He also dreamt that he was wearing an impregnable coat of mail, which he interpreted as Medina, convincing him to stay and fight within the city.[6] During a consultation with other Muslims, the younger men convinced others to attack the Meccans outside the city walls.[7] Ramadan also provides a detailed account of the battle, pointing out that Muhammad was given notice of the battle through a letter from ʿAbbas, which gave him about a week to prepare his strategy and army.[8] He felt that they should remain within the city and wait for the Meccans to come inside Medina; however, the majority of Muslims at the meeting voted in favour of marching outside the city walls and attacking them directly.[9]

Asma Afsaruddin narrates how the Muslim army fought the Meccans at ʿUhud and were nearly victorious as they were gaining ground over their enemy.[10] She describes the battle as a "major setback for the Muslims but not a total defeat" as it was a great trial for them, especially those who abandoned their post or deserted Muhammad shortly before the battle.[11] Zeitlin very briefly mentions that after the Battle of Badr, the Muslims suffered defeat at the Battle of ʿUhud as the Meccans avenged their earlier defeat and even injured Muhammad.[12]

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[4] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 21.
[5] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 21.
[6] Lings, *Muhammad*, 178.
[7] Lings, *Muhammad*, 179-180.
[8] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 122.
[9] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 122.
[10] Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 8.
[11] Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, 8.
[12] Zeitlin, *The Historical Muhammad*, 12.

Donner also includes a short description of the battle. He says that after the Meccans were defeated at Badr, they became determined to attack Muhammad and his followers.[13] The Battle of ʿUhud ended in defeat with many Muslims losing their lives. In his book, Cole, describes how Muhammad led a debate over how to strategize against the Meccan army, resulting in the majority of Muslims in favour of going outside Medina to confront the Meccans.[14] He indicates that the turning point of the battle took place after some Muslims disobeyed Muhammad's order and advanced to loot the fallen Meccans.[15] Muhammad was then attacked and is said to have almost died, suffering injuries to his face.[16]

When exploring primary sources on the Battle of ʿUhud, we have an abundance of material that describe the battle. The Qurʾan includes several verses that provide us with evidence of what took place, especially chapter three (*Al-Imran*). For instance, Q. 3:139-142 says "Do not lose heart or despair – if you are true believers you have the upper hand – if you have suffered a blow they too have suffered one like it. We deal out such days among people in turn, for God to find out who truly believes, for Him to choose martyrs from among you – God does not love evildoers – For Him to test those who believe and for Him to destroy the disbelievers." These verses discuss the defeat at ʿUhud as God testing the true believers.

One of the most pertinent verses, Q: 3:152, references how the archers disobeyed Muhammad's order to remain in their positions, stating, "God fulfilled His promise to you: you were routing them, with His permission, but then you faltered, disputed the order, and disobeyed, once He had brought you within sight of your goal – some of you desire the gains of this world and others desire the world to come – and then He prevented you from [defeating] them as a

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[13] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 46.
[14] Cole, *Muhammad*, 131.
[15] Cole, *Muhammad*, 132.
[16] Cole, *Muhammad*, 132.

punishment." When Muslims were told that Muhammad was dead, Q. 3:144 refers to these rumors as it states, "Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways? If anyone did so, he would not harm God in the least."[17]

In his biography, Ibn Ishaq includes poetry based on the Battle of ʿUhud that may have also been passed down. Ibn Thabit, along with other poets, recited numerous verses on the battle, the tribes involved, and the fallen Muslims, especially ʿHamzah.[18] These poets are from both sides of the battle as they go back and forth with their verbal attacks. Using Ibn Ishaq's work, Ibn Hisham mentions how the Qurayshis wanted to avenge the loss at Badr.[19] Muhammad then has a dream that includes strong armour, which he interprets as Medina,[20] and summons his companions to discuss their battle strategy.[21] While he favours staying within Medina, others want to encounter the Meccans face to face.[22] Muslims eventually apologize to Muhammad for forcing their views against his opinion.[23]

Before the battle, Muhammad posts fifty archers to repel the Meccan cavalry and tells them not to abandon their station.[24] After seeing the Meccans fleeing the battlefield, most of the them leave their posts for the enemy camp, which leads to the cavalry attacking the Muslim army from behind.[25] After the death of ʿHamzah by Wahshi ibn Harb (d. 660), an Ethiopian slave,[26] there is a cry that Muhammad has also been killed.[27] The enemy approaches him and throw stones at him,

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[17] Other important verses that are considered to referencing the Battle of ʿUhud include Q. 3:153-156 and 165-172.
[18] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 404-426.
[19] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 555-556.
[20] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 558.
[21] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 558.
[22] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 558.
[23] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 558.
[24] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 560.
[25] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 570.
[26] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 564.
[27] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 570.

which knocks him down, breaks his teeth, and wounds his face and lip.[28] Muhammad is then attacked and hit so hard by strikes that two of his helmet's links get into the flesh of his forehead.[29] He eventually recovers and is defended by a number of his companions.

Al-Waqidi uses several authors in his account on the Battle of ʿUhud, including Maʿmar.[30] He mentions that the leaders of the Banu Quraysh want to avenge the loss at Badr.[31] While the Meccans are marching toward Medina, Muhammad has a dream wearing invulnerable armour, which he interprets as Medina.[32] He then desires to stay within the city but the youths want to go out to confront the enemy,[33] leading him to reluctantly agree to fight outside Medina.[34] After some time, many companions regret forcing Muhammad to leave the city walls.[35]

Muhammad positions his army and stations fifty archers, telling them not to leave their post for any reason.[36] When the Muslim army are on the verge of victory, most of the archers leave their position to plunder.[37] The Meccan army then rallies with its cavalry and attacks the Muslims who are busy with the spoils.[38] Soon after Wahshi kills ʿHamzah,[39] someone yells three times that Muhammad has also been killed.[40] Four Qurayshis vow and agree to kill him, so they aim four stones at him, which break his incisor, cut his cheeks after his helmet ring went through his flesh,

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[28] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 571.
[29] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 571.
[30] Muhammad ibn ʿUmar al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, ed. Marsden Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 199.
[31] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 199.
[32] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 209.
[33] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 209-210.
[34] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 211-213.
[35] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 213-214.
[36] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 224-225.
[37] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 229-230.
[38] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 230-231.
[39] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 285-287.
[40] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 232.

and injure his knees.[41] Muhammad also loses his tooth, fractures his forehead, and has blood flowing down from his face.[42]

ʿAbd al-Razzaq recounts the Battle of ʿUhud on the authority of al-Zuhri and ʿUrwah. ʿAbd al-Razzaq describes how Muhammad has a vision that he wears an impenetrable coat of armour, which is interprets as Medina.[43] He then requests that his army fights within the city walls, but several prefer to engage the Meccans outside Medina, which he agrees to.[44] Muhammad is later asked by his followers to remain in Medina but replies that he must go to war now that he has worn his armour.[45] His army is defeated when they disobey him and began to fight and quarrel among themselves.[46] Muhammad is also injured as his tooth is broken, his face is bruised, and a loud cry is heard that he is killed.[47]

Ibn Saʿd also narrates the battle, which took place to avenge the loss at Badr.[48] Muhammad has a vision that shows him in fortified armour, which leads him to believe that he should remain in Medina.[49] He agrees with those who also want to avoid leaving Medina to fight; however, the young men who were not at Badr ask Muhammad to go out, fight, and be martyred.[50] After he prays, Muhammad tells everyone that they will have victory only if they are patient.[51] Many Muslims later regret asking him to go out to fight, but Muhammad tells them that he has already worn his armour and repeats that they will have victory if they are patient.[52]

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[41] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 243-244.
[42] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 1, 244-245.
[43] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 76 (in Arabic).
[44] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 76 (in Arabic).
[45] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 76 (in Arabic).
[46] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 78 (in Arabic).
[47] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 78. (in Arabic).
[48] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 37.
[49] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 37-38.
[50] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 38.
[51] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 38.
[52] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 38.

Before the battle begins, Muhammad positions fifty archers and tells them to protect their backs and not leave their post in victory or defeat.[53] When the battle begins, Muslims are on the brink of winning as the Meccans flee, so they plunder and collect spoils, which several archers notice and leave their post to join in the looting.[54] The cavalry notice the lack of archers and kill the remaining ones before attacking the Muslims from behind, forcing them into disarray.[55] Muhammad is attacked with stones and severely injured, especially his cheeks and forehead as blood flows down his face.[56] In addition, ʿHamzah is killed during the battle.[57] There is another account that has Muhammad placing fifty archers and telling them not to leave under any circumstances. However, the archers leave and cause the defeat of the Muslim army.[58]

Al-Baladhuri's *Ansab al-Ashraf* describes the reason for the Battle of ʿUhud was due to the loss at Badr.[59] In a vision, Muhammad is in fortified armour, which he believes is Medina and motivates him to remain in the city.[60] Younger Muslims urge him to go out and fight and be martyred.[61] Muhammad agrees and tells them that they will victorious if they are patient.[62] At ʿUhud, he posts archers and tells them to stay in their position as they need to protect the army.[63] When the Meccan army begins to flee, the Muslim army start to plunder, which leads to most of the archers leaving their post to join the looting.[64] The Meccan army notices most of the archers left their position, so they go around the mountain and attack the Muslim army from behind.[65]

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[53] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 39-40.
[54] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 41.
[55] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 42.
[56] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 42 and 44.
[57] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 43-44.
[58] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 47.
[59] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 312-313.
[60] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 314.
[61] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 314-315.
[62] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 315.
[63] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 317.
[64] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 318.
[65] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 318.

Muhammad is also attacked as his lip is cut and his cheeks and forehead are injured after being hit with stones and weapons.[66] Blood was dripping from his face and two helmet rings were forced into his cheeks.[67] Wahshi kills ʿHamzah, while other Muslims go into disarray and even attack one another.[68] In his other book, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, al-Baladhuri includes a few references to the Battle of ʿUhud. For example, he describes how Wahshi killed ʿHamzah with a spear.[69]

Al-Yaʿqubi gives an account of the Battle of ʿUhud, saying that the Banu Quraysh sought revenge for the loss at Badr.[70] Through a letter, ʿAbbas warns Muhammad that Abu Sufyan is leading three thousand Meccans towards Medina.[71] Muhammad then has a vision that includes him putting his hand into an invulnerable coat of mail, which he interprets as Medina.[72] Therefore, he does not want to leave Medina to fight but the *Ansar* advise him to go outside Medina.[73] They, however, defer to Muhammad's judgment but he says that he will fight now that he has his armour on.[74] The Muslim army fights the Meccans fiercely at ʿUhud.[75] During the battle, Wahshi kills ʿHamzah,[76] the Muslim army is driven back, and the hypocrites claim that Muhammad is killed.[77] However, he was only left with a mark on his face after being attacked.[78]

When discussing the Battle of ʿUhud, al-Tabari uses Ibn Ishaq's work to mention that the leaders of the Banu Quraysh initiate the battle because of their loss at Badr.[79] When the Meccan

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[66] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 319.
[67] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 320-321.
[68] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 322.
[69] ʿAhmad ibn Jabir al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 52. Other references refer to those who were martyred at ʿUhud (15 and 306) and a woman who took part in the battle (92-93).
[70] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 47.
[71] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 47.
[72] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 47-48.
[73] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 47-48.
[74] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 48.
[75] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 48.
[76] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 48.
[77] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 48.
[78] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 48.
[79] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1383-1384.

army begins to march towards Medina, Muhammad has a vision that includes putting on an invulnerable coat of mail, which he interprets as Medina and how the Muslim army should not fight outside the city.[80] While some, including Muhammad, want to stay within Medina, some urge him to go out to confront the Meccans, forcing him to agree.[81] After seeing him wear his armour, the people repent that they should not have compelled Muhammad against his wishes.[82] He, however, says that he will not take off his armour until after the battle.[83]

Al-Tabari includes several accounts that have Muhammad reach ʿUhud and station fifty archers, telling them not to leave their positions in victory or defeat.[84] Soon after the battle begins, the Meccans are put to flight and the Muslim army begins to collect the booty left by their fallen enemies.[85] Most of the archers disobey their orders and go to the enemy camp, allowing the Meccan cavalry to charge and attack the Muslims from behind.[86] In the chaos, someone shouts out that Muhammad is killed, which puts the Muslim army to flight.[87] He was not dead; rather, his lower lateral incisor is broken, his lip is split, and his cheeks and forehead are wounded.[88] Soon after Wahshi kills ʿHamzah,[89] Muhammad is found by his companions and helped in repelling a group of Meccans.[90]

Hadith literature contains several references to the Battle of ʿUhud, including the fighting, Muhammad's injury, and those who were martyred. In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, a detailed *hadith* mentions how he instructs fifty archers to stay in their position and not leave it under any

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[80] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1387.
[81] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1387-1388.
[82] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1388.
[83] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1389-1390.
[84] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1394-1396.
[85] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1394.
[86] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1396-1397.
[87] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1401.
[88] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1402-1403.
[89] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1405.
[90] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1406-1410.

circumstances.[91] Once the Meccans begin to flee, the archers leave their post to collect the booty.[92] ʿHamzah's death is also mentioned and recounted by Wahshi in a *hadith*.[93] Another *hadith* describes how Muhammad's face is wounded, one of his front teeth is broken, and his helmet is smashed.[94]

Sahih Muslim also includes numerous references to the battle. For example, one *hadith* discusses how after the enemy gets the upper hand, Muhammad is only left with only a handful of men.[95] Another report mentions how his face is injured and his front teeth are broken.[96] *The Apology of al-Kindi* is the only non-Muslim source that references the battle. It includes how Muhammad's front tooth and lower jaw are broken, his lip cut, and his cheek and forehead gashed.[97] He is also struck with a sword.[98] The author questions why Muhammad is severely injured during the battle and why an angel did not protect him.[99]

The following table illustrates which sources include the archers leaving their post, ʿHamzah's death, and Muhammad's injuries.

Table 5: The Battle of ʿUhud

Primary Sources	Archers leave their post	ʿHamzah is killed	Muhammad is injured	Muslims are defeated
Qurʾan	Yes, indirect	No	Yes, indirect	Yes
Ibn Ishaq (Poetry)	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ibn Hisham	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Waqidi	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts

[91] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Bk. 52, No. 276.

[92] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Bk. 52, No. 276. Other accounts of the battle include Vol. 4, Bk. 54, No. 510; Vol. 5, Bk. 58, No. 156; Vol. 5, Bk. 58, No. 161; Vol. 5, Bk. 59, No. 322; Vol. 5, Bk. 59, No. 375; and Vol. 5, Bk. 59, No. 396.

[93] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, Bk. 59, No. 399.

[94] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Bk. 52, No. 159. Other accounts include Vol. 7, Bk. 62, No. 175 and Vol. 7, Bk. 71, No. 618.

[95] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 19, No. 4413. Other accounts of the battle include Bk. 19, No. 4455; Bk. 20, No. 4683; and Bk. 31, No. 6040.

[96] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 19, No. 4414. Other accounts include Bk. 19, No. 4415; Bk. 19, No. 4416; Bk. 19, No. 4417; Bk. 19, No. 4418; Bk. 19, No. 4419.

[97] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."

[98] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."

[99] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."

ʿAbd al-Razzaq	No	No	Yes	Yes
Ibn Saʿd	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Baladhuri	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Yaʿqubi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Bukhari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Muslim	No	No	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, indirectly
Al-Kindi	No	No	Yes	Yes, indirectly

The criterion of embarrassment plays a major role in this event as it was a defeat that is unlikely to have been fabricated. Why would scholars, historians, and theologians want to invent this battle, which was a devastating loss that brought many Muslim deaths, including ʿHamzah? It is unlikely that Muhammad's defeat, severe injuries, and claims that he has been killed were made up for any particular reason. In addition, the archers disobeying him demonstrates a lack of faith and disobedience of their Prophet, which does not seem to be invented, despite putting the blame of the defeat on the archers and not Muhammad.

Recurrent attestation is worth exploring within many of our sources. The loss at ʿUhud is repeated within our sources as a reminder to Muhammad and his followers that they lost a major battle. Those who were martyred during the battle are acknowledged and mentioned several times within our sources, often by name. For example, ʿHamzah's death is referenced a number of times after the battle by Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Baladhuri. More particularly, Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, al-Baladhuri, and al-Tabari include accounts of ʿHamzah being mutilated after the battle and mourned by Muhammad.[100]

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[100] See Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 581-587; al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi*, vol. 1, 289-291 and 309-311; al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 322; and al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1 1415-1417 and 1420-1422.

The Qurʾan includes a number of verses that reference the battle, especially in chapter three (*Al-Imran*). It includes the defeat, the archers abandoning their post, and Muhammad not being killed on the battlefield. Another repeated occurrence within our sources is Muhammad's severe injuries. In addition to reports of his injuries described on the day of the battle, we have additional narrations of Fatima, his daughter, and ʿAli trying to stop the bleeding of his wounds after he returns to Medina. These accounts are included in al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim*.[101]

Multiple attestation also takes place between most of our sources as they all give details about the Battle of ʿUhud. The Qurʾan, Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, al-Tabari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and al-Kindi all mention the battle. More particularly, the Qurʾan includes verses that are linked to the battle directly and indirectly. The strategic positioning of the archers before the battle to protect the Muslim army from getting attacked from behind is alluded to within the Qurʾan, Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, al-Tabari, and *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Although ʿAbd al-Razzaq does not mention the archers by name, he does indicate the Muslims' disobedience during the battle led to their defeat.

One of the most dramatic deaths during the battle was Wahshi killing ʿHamzah. This episode during the battle is mentioned in Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Yaʿqubi, al-Tabari, and *Sahih al-Bukhari*. One of the inconsistencies with the killing of ʿHamzah is when exactly it took place as some mention it was before the archers abandoned their post, while others have it after the archers left their station. Lastly, when examining the similarities in accounts

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[101] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi*, vol. 1, 249; Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 48; al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 324; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Bk. 52, No. 159; Vol. 7, Bk. 62, No. 175, and Vol. 7, Bk. 71, No. 618; and *Sahih Muslim* Bk. 19, No. 4414; Bk. 19, No. 4415; Bk. 19, No. 4416. Not all of the accounts include ʿAli.

of Muhammad's severe injuries, we have almost all sources providing a description of his wounds. These sources include Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and al-Kindi. On the other hand, al-Yaʿqubi only mentions that Muhammad was attacked and left with a mark on his face, which minimizes the severity of his injuries.

When using our method on the Battle of ʿUhud, we can better understand what parts of the battle were preserved and transmitted orally for generations and in written form. In addition to being referenced in the Qurʾan, various types of memory developed as the battle was a momentous event that impacted Muhammad and his followers directly. Eyewitness, individual, and episodic memory are very plausible as approximately seven hundred Muslims fought against a Meccan army of three thousand. Individuals from both sides of the battle must have shared their experiences of what took place. Muhammad, Abu Bakr, ʿAli, and Abu Sufyan are just a few participants who recounted the battle to their friends and families. These memories eventually formed into the collective memory of Muslims as they recalled the loss at ʿUhud; the deaths of Muslims, including ʿHamzah; and the injuries to their Prophet.

Social memory of the battle is significant as it was an event that saddened and demoralized Muslims and their allies. Memories of the loss at ʿUhud are consistent throughout our sources; however, the severity is downplayed in some later sources. For example, Muhammad's injuries are not as severe in *Sahih Muslim* and al-Yaʿqubi. In addition, there are events that seem to have been added to minimize his role and leadership in the loss. For instance, Muhammad is said to have had a vision of wearing an invulnerable armour, making him believe that he should stay within the city walls; therefore, it was the fault of those who convinced him to fight outside Medina. Another example of the blame being placed on the Muslim army is when the archers left

their post to collect the booty while the Muslim army was on the verge of victory. While these two examples are recounted in all of our sources, they may have been added from early on to disallow Muhammad's role as a Messenger of God to be tarnished.

Communicative memory was likely passed between Muslims during the living memory of Muhammad and other eyewitnesses, some of whom lived until the end of the seventh century. The loss at ʿUhud quickly became part of Muslims' cultural memory as it was their Prophet's only major loss in battle. This defeat also demonstrated that the Meccans could not stop or kill Muhammad, leading some Muslims to believe that this battle was not a clear victory for either side as neither fulfilled their goal. On the other hand, Muslims later commemorated the Battle of ʿUhud as a time when God allowed their enemies to be victorious, punishing them for their greed and disobedience. This loss was not forgotten but rather remembered as a learning moment during and after Muhammad's life.

Because of its significance to Muhammad's life, the battle and some pertinent details, including the archers' disobedience, ʿHamzah's death, and Muhammad's injury, became part of Muslims' salient memory. Performative memory helped preserve this event as historians, lecturers, and theologians included the battle's sequence in their work. Public and private lectures to Muslim audiences were orally performed and must have included the battle when recounting Muhammad's life as it was a pivotal moment and test for his followers. Verbatim memory is not likely as individuals who reported accounts of the battle are not consistent and sometimes differ on details pertaining to Muhammad's vision, his speeches to his followers, and his injuries.

The different types of memory that likely developed after the Battle of ʿUhud are important as they help us identify the ways in which Muslims preserved key moments of the event. These memories provide examples of how Muslims remembered the battle and why they were passed on.

Most of the memories that we discussed seem to have been established during Muhammad's life and communicated among eyewitnesses, both Muslim and non-Muslim. By exploring these memories, we can demonstrate that the battle did take place and was neither fabricated nor forgotten over time. It is likely that Muslims later added Muhammad's vision of wanting to stay in Medina as it would take the responsibility of this loss away from him, whereas the assignment of the archers could have also been added or it could be authentic, especially since it is alluded to within the Qurʾan. Gist memory perhaps gives us the most accurate description of the Battle of ʿUhud as we do not have to confirm the exact details. The gist of the battle includes Muhammad leading Muslims to ʿUhud against a larger Meccan army. After being on the verge of victory, the Meccans rallied, killed ʿHamzah, and severely injured Muhammad. After he was helped by his companions, the Meccan army returned to Mecca.

The Battle of ʿUhud was a turning point in Muhammad's career. In addition to being his only major defeat, many Muslims lost their lives. It is almost certain that the battle took place after Badr as there is no reason to suspect that it was invented. Why would such a devastating loss be fabricated? Why have ʿHamzah killed during this battle? Why have Muhammad severely injured and bloodied? The battle seems to be the most impactful defeat he suffered and has been recounted in many of our available sources, including one non-Muslim source.

Our earliest source, the Qurʾan, is important in reconstructing the battle as it offers key moments that occurred. Other sources, particularly biographies and *hadiths*, fill in many gaps and provide us with a detailed account of what happened. Memories of this event were most likely preserved as there were hundreds of Muslims and non-Muslims who participated in the battle. For instance, eyewitness accounts were shared with family members, friends, and other members of

the community. Muhammad, himself, must have shared this defeat with his companions and constantly prayed for the martyrs, which is referenced within many of our sources.

Multiple and recurrent attestation are important as the battle is mentioned between and within our sources. The criterion of embarrassment is also useful as it is very unlikely that this event was invented to benefit Muhammad and Islam. Despite detailed accounts available on this event, gist memory is ideal in understanding how the battle was remembered as it includes an outnumbered Muslim army facing a much larger Meccan army at ʿUhud. During the battle, ʿHamzah was killed and the Muslim army began to flee after a rumour spread that Muhammad had been killed; however, he was only wounded and survived this devastating defeat.

Muhammad's Marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh

Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab is one of the most controversial events that took place during his life. For over one thousand years, Christian polemicists have used their marriage to criticize both Islam and its Prophet.[102] Based on Muslim sources, Muhammad asked Zaynab, a widow and his first cousin, to marry Zayd, a former slave of Khadija who Muhammad freed and adopted as his son. After initially refusing to marry him due to her social status, Zaynab accepted the proposal and married Zayd around 625. This marriage, however, was short-lived as it ended within two years.

There are numerous accounts as to why their marriage ended, some of which describe how Zayd divorced Zaynab after an encounter between her and Muhammad at Zayd's house. Scholars continue to debate the details of this encounter as it often concerns Muhammad's physical attraction to Zaynab while she was married to his adopted son. It is written in a few sources that

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[102] We will examine a number of non-Muslim sources in this case study.

he caught an intimate glimpse of her, which led him to leave immediately. Soon after this encounter, Zayd asked Muhammad whether he should divorce Zaynab, but he told his adopted son to keep his wife. However, there was a revelation from God, giving her to Muhammad and allowing him to marry the former wife of his adopted son without criticism from the community.[103] He then married Zaynab around 627 and held a large banquet.

Modern scholars usually include Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab in their biographies, while others omit it or briefly indicate that she was his wife.[104] Watt says that marrying the former wife of an adopted son, which was a pre-Islamic taboo, was an attempt to demonstrate that it did not lead to any negative consequences.[105] He also points out that the general outline of the story is of little dispute and it is unlikely that Muhammad fell for Zaynab's beauty as there were political implications for this marriage.[106] On the other hand, Lings believes Muhammad was deeply moved by her beauty.[107] According to him, the marriage between Zayd and Zaynab was an unhappy one and they mutually agreed on divorce.[108]

Fatima Mernissi, a feminist writer and sociologist, argues that the physical beauty of Zaynab was a prime factor in her marriage to Muhammad, especially since there was no military justification for their union.[109] She says that Zaynab was always interested in him but their marriage may have led many people to deem it as an incestuous scandal, until it was legitimized in Q. 33:37-38.[110] Prior to being legitimized, Q. 4:23-24 outlined which women men are prohibited

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[103] Q. 33:36-40 narrates this event. I will explore these verses in detail later in this case study.
[104] Surprisingly, Cole's *Muhammad* does not mention Zaynab's divorce from Zayd or her marriage to Muhammad, despite being alluded to in the Qurʾan, which he uses as his main source.
[105] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 314.
[106] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 330-331.
[107] Lings, *Muhammad*, 219.
[108] Lings, *Muhammad*, 220.
[109] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), 103-104.
[110] Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, 175. Q. 33:37-38 legitimizes men to marry the wives their adopted sons.

to marry, including mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives of begotten sons.[111] Peters discusses the controversy of the marriage and how Muhammad's planned marriage to Zaynab was a "messy business" because adoption was observed as a blood tie.[112] He mentions that the Qurʾan ended the matter and abrogated the pre-Islamic taboo against marrying the wives of adopted sons.[113]

David Powers published two revisionist works on Zayd, both of which include Zaynab's divorce from him and subsequent marriage to Muhammad. In his first book, he attempts to demonstrate that their marriage was created in order to make it possible for Muhammad to delegitimize Zayd, whose life was incompatible with him being the last Prophet.[114] In addition, Powers assumes that the first Muslims had to be familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba as related in II Samuel 11:6-27, which he claims was the "inspiration" for Muhammad's encounter with Zaynab.[115] The true purpose of their marriage was to have Muhammad repudiate Zayd as his son, heir, and successor.[116] Powers also uses other biblical stories to show how they may have further influenced the events surrounding his marriage to Zaynab, including Matthew 1:18-21 and Genesis 24. In addition, scholars could also argue that Genesis 38 resembles Muhammad's encounter with Zaynab.

Like his first book, Powers's *Zayd* also deploys weak methods, problematic approaches to primary sources, and an incoherent conclusion. When discussing Muhammad's marriage to

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[111] In the Hebrew Bible, there are some references to relationships between a man and his daughter-in-law. For example, Leviticus 18:15 states, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law: she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. Leviticus 20:12 says, "If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed perversion, their blood is upon them. In addition, 1 Chronicles 2:4 mentions, "His daughter-in-law Tamar also bore him Perez and Zereh," which alludes to a sexual relationship between Judah and Tamar. Muslims may have known these verses during Muhammad's life, along with Q. 4:23-24; however, none of these verses mention a man marrying the daughter-in-law of his *adopted* son.

[112] Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 139.

[113] Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad*, 139.

[114] David Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 35.

[115] Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*, 48-50.

[116] Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*, 69.

Zaynab, he narrates his own interpretation of the story based on selected sources that recount it. Powers repeats much of his previous book's flaws and includes biblical models that resemble or may have influenced the "fabricated story" in Muslim sources.[117] Like his previous book, he attempts to demonstrate how Muhammad repudiated Zayd not to legitimize his marriage to Zaynab, but rather to enforce the Qurʾan, which distinguishes biological sons from adopted ones, abolishing the institution of adoption.[118]

In a more recent article, Görke explores the criterion of embarrassment and the influence of Jewish and Christian stories on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab.[119] He mentions how traditions on the circumstances leading to their marriage are not always featured in primary sources and are absent completely in legal literature.[120] Görke demonstrates that the tradition of Muhammad's encounter with Zaynab is dependent on both the Qurʾan and biblical stories, despite there being no way to actually prove it. He, however, accepts the general outline of events leading to their marriage as there seems to be a historical kernel to most of these narratives.[121]

If we take a closer look at these biblical stories, we will notice that only one story *might* have influenced Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, particularly his encounter with her. Genesis 24 has a servant of Abraham charged with finding a wife for Isaac, who then sees Rebekah, a virgin and very fair to look upon. This story does not resemble Zaynab, who was married and likely not a virgin. In Matthew 1:18-25, Joseph is a righteous man who is unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace after giving birth to Jesus before they lived together. In a dream, an angel appears to Joseph and tells him not to be scared to take Mary as his wife for the child is from the Holy Spirit.

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[117] David Powers, *Zayd* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 41-48.
[118] Powers, *Zayd*, 101-102.
[119] I will discuss Görke's use of the criterion of embarrassment later in this case study.
[120] Andreas Görke, "Between History and Exegesis: The Origins and Transformation of the Story of Muhammad and Zaynab bt Gahs," *Arabica* 65 (2018), 45.
[121] Görke, "Between History and Exegesis," 53.

This story also does not seem to have influenced traditions on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab as she was already married and without a child.

Genesis 38 narrates a story of Judah marrying Tamar to his son Er; however, God puts him to death. Judah then marries Tamar to his other son, Onan, who does not wish to impregnant her, which leads to God putting him to death too. Judah tells Tamar to remain a widow until his son, Shelah, grows up. One day, Judah sees Tamar by the roadside and believes she is a prostitute because she covered her face. He has sex with her and impregnates her, leading to the births of Perez and Zerah. This story unlikely inspired Muhammad's encounter with Zaynab as he recognized her at Zayd's house. In addition, Muhammad neither impregnates her nor sleeps with her before their marriage.

The last story is from II Samuel, which includes a more plausible parallel to traditions on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, especially their encounter.[122] In chapter eleven, David sees a woman bathing, who is very beautiful. This woman is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sends messengers to get her and he lays with her. After she returns home, she notices that she is pregnant and tells David, who then tries to retrieve Uriah and send him home to his wife. Uriah, however, does not go to his house as he refuses to do so during the war. David then sends him back to war and arranges him to be struck down. Bathsheba mourns for Uriah and is later brought to David, who marries her, and she bears him a son.

While there are some similarities between the stories of David and Bathsheba and Muhammad and Zaynab, there are also stark differences. Like David, Muhammad is said in some accounts to have seen Zaynab and found her very beautiful. He also married her and sent Zayd to

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[122] None of our Muslim sources cite this story when discussing Muhammad's encounter with Zaynab. The letters between ʿUmar II and Leo III do reference this story from II Samuel; however, these letters are generally accepted as a non-Muslim source created entirely by Christians for polemical purposes.

the Battle of Muʿtah (629), which resulted in his death. These similarities, however, are not enough evidence to prove that the Bible influenced Muslim sources on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. In addition, there are many more differences that should be highlighted. For instance, Muhammad did not commit adultery with Zaynab, as David did with Bathsheba, and she did not become pregnant with his child. Lastly, Muhammad did not devise a plan to have Zayd killed at the Battle of Muʿtah. These differences outweigh the similarities and cast serious doubt on why Muslims would use this story, which involves adultery and murder, as the foundation for their Prophet's marriage to Zaynab.

When examining our primary sources on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, a number of accounts are available from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources. The Qurʾan offers us the earliest evidence we have on this event. Chapter thirty-three (*Al-Ahzab*) includes a few verses that relate directly to Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. The most important verses come from Q. 33:37-38, which says,

> When you [Prophet] said to the man who had been favoured by God and by you, 'Keep your wife and be mindful of God,' you hid in your heart what God would later reveal: you were afraid of people, but it is more fitting that you fear God. When Zayd no longer wanted her, We gave her to you in marriage so that there might be no fault in believers marrying the wives of their adopted sons after they no longer wanted them. God's command must be carried out: the Prophet is not at fault for what God has ordained for him.

These Qurʾanic verses give us insightful details, albeit with gaps, that indicate how Muhammad tells Zayd to keep his wife and hides what is in his heart, especially since he is afraid of what people might say. God, however, commands him to marry his adopted son's former wife, who is not named, but is likely Zaynab.

Other verses could also pertain to Muhammad and Zayd's relationship, which changed after he married Zaynab. Q. 33:4 says, "God does not put two hearts within a man's breast. He does not turn the wives you reject and liken to your mothers' backs into your real mothers; nor

does He make your adopted sons into real sons." This verse must have impacted Muhammad and Zayd's familial bond as their relationship was through adoption. This verse may have eased tensions and the controversy surrounding Muhammad marrying Zaynab as it distinguished adopted sons from "real sons." The last verse is often related to their wedding reception celebrating their marriage. Q. 33:53 says,

> Believers, do not enter the Prophet's apartments for a meal unless you are given permission to do so; do not linger until [a meal] is ready. When you are invited, go in; then, when you have taken your meal, leave. Do not stay on and talk, for that would offend the Prophet, though he would shrink from asking you to leave. God does not shrink from the truth. When you ask his wives for something, do so from behind a screen.

Guests of the reception who stayed behind may have made Muhammad's wife, or wives, uncomfortable during this visit, which led to the requirement of a screen between them. However, we cannot confirm that this verse relates directly to this marriage, reception, or Zaynab.

Ibn Hisham has a section on all of Muhammad's wives, including a brief description of Zaynab and how, before their marriage, she was married to Zayd.[123] This section also mentions how she may be the one who gave herself to Muhammad. He also quotes Q. 33:37 to connect Zaynab to the verse. Ibn Saʿd, on the other hand, offers a larger narrative of Muhammad's marriage to her in his volume on the women of Medina. Referencing al-Waqidi, he mentions that Zaynab is beautiful and is asked by Muhammad to marry Zayd.[124] One day, Muhammad came to Zayd's house to see him; however, Zaynab, who hastened to wear clothes, came to the door and asked him to enter.[125] Muhammad, who was amazed, refused and left.[126] Zayd then learns what happened and divorces her.[127] Soon after their separation, Muhammad receives a revelation while he is with

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[123] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 1000-1004.
[124] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 101.
[125] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 101.
[126] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 101.
[127] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 101-102.

ʿAʾisha and smiles after learning that God has commanded his marriage to Zaynab.[128] He then marries her and invites people over for food. During the reception, Muhammad got up and walked around a few times after he realized people were not leaving, leading to Q. 33:53 being revealed.[129]

Like his predecessors, al-Baladhuri includes a section on Muhammad's wives, within which there is disagreement on when he married Zaynab and that she was previously married to Zayd.[130] This divorce took place after Muhammad saw her and was amazed.[131] Zaynab later learned that a verse was revealed that she was given to him, so she fasted for two months.[132] After the marriage, Muhammad invited people over for a feast to celebrate the occasion.[133] When people continued to linger, the verse of the veil was revealed (Q. 33:53). Al-Yaʿqubi, on the other hand, very briefly mentions that Muhammad married Zaynab under a section on Muhammad's wives.[134]

Using the work of al-Waqidi, al-Tabari describes how Muhammad goes to Zayd's house but only sees Zaynab, who dressed in haste, which makes him turn away from her and not enter inside.[135] When Zayd comes home, she tells him what happened, which leads him to visit Muhammad and ask him whether he admires her.[136] He then tells Zayd to keep his wife to himself; however, he does not approach Zaynab after that day and eventually separates from her.[137] Soon after their divorce, Muhammad receives a revelation that commands him to marry Zaynab.[138]

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[128] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 102.
[129] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 8, 106-107.
[130] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 434.
[131] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 434.
[132] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 435-436.
[133] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 434.
[134] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 93.
[135] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1460-1461.
[136] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1461.
[137] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1461.
[138] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1461-1462.

Another account by al-Tabari, which traces to Ibn Zayd (d. 812),[139] mentions that one day, Muhammad is looking for Zayd at his house but ends up seeing Zaynab undressed, which brings admiration for her in his heart.[140] After this encounter, she is made unattractive to Zayd, so he tells Muhammad that he wants to separate from her.[141] He, however, tells Zayd to "keep your wife to yourself, and fear God."[142] Al-Tabari also mentions how Muhammad hides in his mind the thought that he will marry Zaynab, if Zayd separates himself from her.[143] He then receives a revelation about marrying her, which he obeys.

Hadith literature mentions some of the events preceding Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, we have an account that mentions how Q. 33:37 concerns Zaynab and Zayd.[144] A more detailed account has him complaining to Muhammad about his wife but is told to keep her.[145] However, God reveals to Muhammad that Zaynab is now given to him as Q. 33:37 is referring to her and Zayd. There are also several *hadiths* on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, especially their reception banquet and how a few guests remain behind and keep chatting. After the guests leave, Q. 33:53 is revealed.[146]

Sahih Muslim also provides a number of *hadiths* pertaining to Muhammad's reception banquet to celebrate his marriage to Zaynab. Two reports mention the wedding feast being the best one he gave to any of his wives.[147] Other *hadiths* mention some guests at the banquet staying

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[139] This Ibn Zayd is not the son of Zayd ibn Harithah.
[140] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1462.
[141] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1462.
[142] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1462.
[143] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1462.
[144] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 310.
[145] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, Bk. 93, No. 516.
[146] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 316. Other verses include Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 314; Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 315; Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 317; Vol. 7, Bk. 62, No. 95; Vol. 7, Bk. 65, No. 375; Vol. 8, Bk. 74, No. 255; and Vol. 8, Bk. 74, No. 288.
[147] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 8, No. 3331 and Bk. 8, No. 3332.

behind, which makes Muhammad get up and return a number of times until they finally leave.[148] A more detailed *hadith* has Muhammad asking Zayd to mention him to Zaynab after their divorce; however, he could no longer look towards her because of what Muhammad said.[149] Zayd then turns his back towards Zaynab and mentions that Muhammad had sent a message for her. She then waits at her place of worship until the revelations pertaining to her marriage to Muhammad are revealed.[150]

When examining non-Muslim sources, we have many accounts that discuss Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. John of Damascus says that he has a friend named Zayd, who had a beautiful wife.[151] Muhammad falls in love with her and tells him that God commanded him to take his wife, so Zayd gives her to him.[152] John of Damascus also says that God initially commands Muhammad to tell Zayd to put his wife away.[153] However, he eventually takes Zaynab, who is not mentioned by name, commits adultery with her, and establishes a law on divorce.[154] There are many problems with this source as Muhammad does not commit adultery with Zaynab and Zayd is not acknowledged as his adopted son. *The Apology of Al-Kindi* calls this event an affair but does not go into detail because the author has too much respect for the paper that he is writing on to disclose what happened.[155] The author then quotes Q. 33:37 incorrectly and says that everyone should judge this affair for themselves.[156]

The letters between the Byzantine Emperor Leo III and the Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar II include a discussion on Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. They are our only sources that relate

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[148] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 8, No. 3333. Other verses include Bk. 8, No. 3334; Bk. 8, No. 3335; and Bk. 8, No. 3336.
[149] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 8, No. 3330.
[150] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 8, No. 3330.
[151] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 157.
[152] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 157.
[153] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 157.
[154] John of Damascus, *The Fathers of the Church*, 157.
[155] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."
[156] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."

their initial encounter to David's interaction with Bathsheba. Leo III mentions the unchasteness of Muhammad as he succeeds in seducing Zeda (likely misspelling of Zaynab) and gives the example of David who takes Uriah's wife, which is a sin.[157] ʿUmar II replies by saying that Leo III rebukes Muslims because Muhammad married a woman after her husband repudiated her, which is what David did in the case of Uriah and his wife.[158] There are many issues with these letters as we do not know who actually wrote them, Zaynab's name is spelled incorrectly, and Uriah did not repudiate his wife for David.[159]

In *Apologeticus martyrum*,[160] Eulogius of Cordoba (d. 857) includes an account on Muhammad desiring the wife of his neighbour named Zeit (likely misspelling Zayd) and subjects her to his lust.[161] Although he is appalled, Zayd decides to stand aside. After he repudiates his wife, Muhammad sets down a law that God united him with Zaynab, who is not mentioned by name, since she was displeasing to Zayd.[162] In the ninth century, John of Seville, who is likely referencing *Apologeticus martyrum*,[163] has a very similar account written in a letter that he sent to Paul Alvarus.[164] This letter, which we cannot confirm the date, discusses how Muhammad took a wife of another due to his lust and copulated with her, which he says no other prophet had done.

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[157] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 495.
[158] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 495.
[159] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 494.
[160] Janna Wasilewski, "The 'Life of Muhammad' in Eulogius of Cordoba: Some Evidence for the Transmission of Greek Polemic to the Latin West," *Early Medieval Europe* 16, 3 (2008), 333. Eulogius was not the author of the polemic on Muhammad's life. The *Leire* text, which is now lost, is the earliest known Latin source on Muhammad. We, however, do not know the author of this work. It is likely that Eulogius modified this account and may have used John of Damascus (See pages 336-341 and 344-345).
[161] Wasilewski, "The 'Life of Muhammad' in Eulogius of Cordoba," 336.
[162] Wasilewski, "The 'Life of Muhammad' in Eulogius of Cordoba," 343-344.
[163] Wasilewski, "The 'Life of Muhammad' in Eulogius of Cordoba," 336-337.
[164] Wasilewski, "The 'Life of Muhammad' in Eulogius of Cordoba," 334.

The following table outlines which sources include Zaynab being married to Zayd prior to her marriage to Muhammad. I will also point out which sources mention Muhammad's encounter with Zaynab and their marriage.

Table 6: Muhammad's Marriage to Zaynab

Primary Sources	Zayd is married to Zaynab	Muhammad encounters Zaynab	Muhammad married Zaynab
Qurʾan	Yes, indirectly	No	Yes
Ibn Hisham	Yes	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Ibn Saʿd	Yes	Yes	Yes
Al-Baladhuri	Yes	Yes	Yes
Al-Yaʿqubi	No	No	Yes
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Bukhari	Yes, multiple accounts	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Muslim	Yes	No	Yes, multiple accounts
John of Damascus	Yes	No	No
Al-Kindi	Yes, indirectly	No	No
The Correspondence of Leo III and ʿUmar II	Yes	Yes, indirectly	Yes
Eulogius of Cordoba	Yes	No	Yes
John of Seville	Yes, indirectly	No	No

The criterion of embarrassment plays a role as it is contentious that Zaynab was previously married to Zayd, Muhammad's adopted son. Görke argues that we must be cautious about using this criterion, especially regarding the encounter between Muhammad and Zaynab.[165] While he argues that it is still difficult to accept this encounter as authentic regardless of its embarrassing nature, marrying the divorced wife of your adopted son seems almost as problematic. Why make up Zaynab being the former wife of Zayd? What did Muhammad hide in his heart according to the Qurʾan? Were there other men who wanted to marry the divorced wives of their adopted sons? Was there really a need for a law like this through the Qurʾan?

We cannot confirm or deny the encounter between Muhammad and Zaynab as there is no way to prove where the story came from or whether it is true. Although Muslims wanted to legitimize themselves and Islam in the eyes of Christians and Jews, why would they use the story

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[165] Görke, "Between History and Exegesis," 63.

of David and Bathsheba as a framework, which includes sinning through adultery, an attempt to have someone killed, and a son born from the scandal? Why not use another less provocative and controversial biblical story? There may, in fact, be truth to the encounter as it is omitted by a number of biographers who may not have wanted the story to circulate. Did some biographers in the ninth century purposely leave it out because of its controversy? Did Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Tabari not care about the embarrassing account and rather stay true to the life of Muhammad, unlike their peers and predecessors, despite some obvious embellishments and elaborations?

Recurrent attestation also takes place within our sources. The Qurʾan repeats verses that allude to the events surrounding Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, particularly him asking Zayd to keep his wife, him being commanded to marry her, and a revelation that could be referring to guests staying behind at the wedding reception. *Sahih al-Bukhari* includes several *hadiths* about Muhammad's reception with Zaynab and how his revelation relates to guests staying too long. There is also a *hadith* that has Muhammad telling Zayd to keep his wife but soon after receives a revelation that commands him to marry Zaynab. *Sahih Muslim* also possesses *hadiths* on the wedding reception, some of which include guests staying too long and leading to a revelation.

Ibn Saʿd includes Muhammad asking Zaynab to marry his adopted son and him later seeing her at Zayd's house and being amazed, leading to their divorce. Muhammad is then said to receive his revelation that allows him to marry her and has a banquet to celebrate his new wife. Al-Baladhuri has Zayd divorcing Zaynab after Muhammad was amazed by her. He also mentions how Muhammad receives his revelation and invites people for a feast to celebrate his marriage. Al-Tabari includes a section on Muhammad's wives that indicates that he married Zaynab. In the next account, al-Tabari reports how he goes to Zayd's house only to see Zaynab dressed in a hurry. The

last account has Muhammad marry Zayd to her and then one day sees her undressed, leading him to admire her.

Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab is mentioned in several of our sources, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Between our sources, we have multiple attestation through various descriptions that are either brief or detailed. For instance, the Qurʾan, Ibn Hisham, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, al-Yaʿqubi, al-Kindi, John of Seville, and the Letters between Leo III and ʿUmar II only briefly include Muhammad was married to Zaynab and that she was initially married to Zayd.[166] On the other hand, we have extended accounts from Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, John of Damascus, and Eulogius of Cordoba who provide further details. Based on our sources, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, and the Letters between Leo III and ʿUmar II discuss the encounter between Muhammad and Zaynab outside Zayd's house. Other sources, including the Qurʾan, al-Tabari, John of Damascus, Eulogius of Cordoba, and John of Seville all allude to or mention that Muhammad admired, fell in love, or seduced Zaynab. Since some of these sources are earlier than Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Tabari, there must have been a common source used that was written or transmitted orally. Lastly, when exploring Muhammad's wedding reception for Zaynab, we have Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and al-Tabari relating this event to Q. 33:53.

By incorporating memory studies, we may gain a clearer understanding of circumstances surrounding Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. Aspects of these memories were preserved and transmitted orally until they were written down by both Muslim and non-Muslim writers. Numerous types of memories developed after Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. Eyewitness, episodic, and individual memories are difficult to assess. While Muhammad, Zayd, and Zaynab

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[166] John of Seville does not mention that Muhammad married Zaynab; rather, he only copulated with her.

are likely to have told others about these events, none of our sources have reports from them directly. ʿAʾisha, however, is referenced in al-Tabari and some *hadiths* as she was said to be present during Muhammad's revelation and his wedding reception.[167] Anas ibn Malik (d.712), who reported almost all of our accounts, especially *hadiths*, was also present during the reception. Therefore, we have two possible eyewitnesses reported by name out of several guests who attended the reception or were present when Muhammad had his revelation. Unfortunately, there are no eyewitness accounts of his encounter with Zaynab at Zayd's house.

While memories that were formed and circulated about this marriage became part of the collective memory of Muslims, social memory of the events surrounding Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab reveals how these memories were embellished and elaborated upon over time as later sources focus more on the unhappy marriage between her and Zayd and her becoming undesirable to men other than Muhammad. Did Muhammad develop feelings and admiration for Zaynab after they met outside Zayd's house? Did he want to marry her while she was still married to Zayd? Was this encounter conceived for polemical purposes or to legitimize Muhammad as a Prophet like David? How did he *really* marry Zaynab? Was she invented? Indeed, the evolution of these memories surrounding Zaynab are due to both tendentious and apologetic debates taking place between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Communicative memory of these episodes, such as Qurʾanic verses allowing Muhammad to marry Zaynab and surrounding their wedding reception, became part of the living memory of Muslims who were present. These memories were preserved and passed on during Muhammad's life, especially if they were controversial and related directly to the Qurʾan. While we cannot know exactly what took place, we can acknowledge that his marriage to Zaynab was embedded into the

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[167] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1461-1462; *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 8, No. 3334; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, Bk. 60, No. 316; Vol. 7, Bk. 62, No. 95; Vol. 7, Bk. 65, No. 375; and Vol. 8, Bk. 74, No. 255.

cultural memory of Muslims and often reinforced as numerous Christian polemicists brought this marriage up as a way to ridicule and delegitimize Muhammad and Islam.

Sociopolitical, theological, and cultural contexts may have modified Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab, especially since it brought controversy. However, it is unlikely that the story was fabricated or invented to improve his image as a Messenger of God. Zaynab is commemorated as the only wife of Muhammad whose marriage was commanded by God and the first wife to pass away after him. Performative memory took place as her life and relationship with Muhammad were likely discussed in lectures and polemics by biographers, theologians, and historians. These memories of Zaynab were significant and established a salient memory of her as a wife of Muhammad. All of his wives are considered important as they are given the title of the mothers of the faithful, as indicated in Q. 33:6. Memories of Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab were so noteworthy that they reached Christians, leading them to criticize it for generations. Verbatim memory, on the other hand, is not applicable since our sources differ greatly.

The different types of memories developed during Zayd's marriage to Zaynab, their divorce, and Muhammad's subsequent marriage to her are significant as they provide us with plausible ways of why and how Muslims remembered and preserved circumstances surrounding these events. They are often present during these episodes and must have shared their experiences with others, especially Zayd's divorce from Zaynab, Muhammad's subsequent marriage to her, and the wedding banquet. We can also understand how memories were created to defend this marriage and make it less controversial over time. While we cannot prove which memories were developed and preserved for generations, there is a strong possibility that oral and written accounts of Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab were remembered, especially the gist. Gist memory helps us focus on the overview of the events without trying to uncover exact details. We can make more

accurate statements about what occurred and observe that Zaynab was married to Zayd before her marriage to Muhammad, which took place after she was divorced. We are, however, unable to confirm what led to the divorce as there are limited details, as well as parallels between Muhammad and Zaynab's encounter and the story of David and Bathsheba in II Samuel.

Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab was his most controversial one. Scholars mention, detail, or omit this marriage as there are inconsistent accounts within our sources. A more recent phenomenon within scholarship has been to demonstrate how the encounter between Muhammad and Zaynab was fabricated and based on David and Bathsheba in II Samuel. While there are some interesting similarities, there are also significant differences that dissuade us from confirming that the story was used as the framework for their encounter. Most of our other Muslim sources briefly mention that Muhammad married Zaynab, who was the previous wife of Zayd. Reports from Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Tabari are the only extant Muslim sources that offer detailed accounts, whereas our non-Muslim sources are more abundant and criticize Muhammad for his actions toward a married woman.

Using memory studies helps us acknowledge what types of memories were developed and preserved during and after Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab. Social memory is particularly significant as memories of their marriage seem to have been modified and elaborated upon to prevent ridicule and criticism during polemical debates. Gist memory allows us to understand what likely took place between Muhammad and Zaynab. The criterion of embarrassment also plays a role as it helps us question why Muslims would want to fabricate a controversial story of their Prophet's encounter with Zaynab, his adopted son's wife, and subsequently marry her. This encounter is not mentioned in some of our sources, which makes us question whether it *actually*

took place. While we cannot confirm or deny this encounter, we can have some confidence that that Zaynab was initially married to Zayd before being married to Muhammad.

Muhammad Receiving the Christian Delegation from Najran

The Christian delegation from Najran visiting Muhammad has become a significant event for interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. While this visit could be viewed as both theological and political, the interaction between these two religions remains relevant and inspiring as it serves as one of the earliest discourses of dialogue and as a precedent for current interfaith relations. According to Muslim sources, Muhammad began sending out letters to various communities, inviting them to convert to Islam. After a letter was sent to Najran, an area south of Mecca where a large Arab Christian community resided, approximately sixty Christians travelled to Medina to meet with Muhammad. During their stay, the delegates, including the chief of Banu Kinda, ʿAbd al-Masih, and a bishop named Abu Harithah, were allowed to pray inside the mosque and engage in theological debate.

These debates surrounded the life of Jesus and the Trinity, the latter of which Muhammad rejected, leading them to agree to disagree with him on many theological subjects and not convert to Islam or acknowledge him as their Prophet. During the discussion, we have the event of *Mubahala* (invocation of God's curse), when Muhammad suggested invoking a curse to reveal who was lying about their religious differences, which led the delegates to later decide not to invoke the cursing and ask for peace instead. Muhammad then offered favourable terms to the Christians of Najran as they would pay *jizya* in order to receive peace, protection, and freedom to practice their religion. In addition, after the delegation returned home, he sent an emissary to

Najran to settle disputes among Christian rival groups and answer additional theological questions about Islam.

Modern scholars include this delegation in their biographies on Muhammad as it inspires interfaith dialogue and pluralism. Some scholars omit this event altogether as they may have questioned its historicity or found it insignificant to Muhammad's life. Watt mentions how Muhammad sent a letter to the bishop of Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb and the bishops of Najran,[168] leading to the arrival of a deputation of Christians. ʿAbd al-Masih, Abu al-Harith, and al-Sayyid ibn al-Harith established a treaty of peace that gave the Christians of Najran protection, freedom of religion, and freedom of religious affairs in exchange for an annual payment of two thousand garments and support during war.[169]

On the other hand, Wansbrough uses a revisionist lens to demonstrate how the narrative and documentation of the delegation from Najran conflict. He argues that the narrative contains midrashic *topoi* and lexical items from the treaty, resulting in a combination of mythic and normative historiography.[170] In addition, he discusses the stereotyped imagery of the reports surrounding the delegation;[171] however, he also notes that the delegation of Christians from Najran may contain a historical kernel.[172] Lings, on the other hand, acknowledges that the event took place and describes how Muhammad received sixty delegates in his mosque and even allowed them to pray inside.[173] He mentions how a revelation (Q. 3:59-61) was revealed during the debates about Jesus, which Muhammad recited and then invited them to join him and his family to settle their

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[168] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 127.
[169] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 127. Watt also includes a letter that is reported to have come from Muhammad on pages 359-360.
[170] Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 37.
[171] Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 103.
[172] Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 22.
[173] Lings, *Muhammad*, 338.

dispute.[174] The next day, he brought ʿAli, Fatima, and his two grandsons, Hasan (d. 670) and Husayn (d. 680), with him and called them "the People of the Cloak." The Christian delegation noticed his family and said that they were not prepared to carry their disagreements concerning the person of Jesus to cursing, so Muhammad created a favourable treaty with them, including full protection, in return for *jizya*.[175]

Ramadan, despite pointing out that the precise date of this event is unknown,[176] includes a narrative showing how a delegation of fourteen religious leaders from Najran visited Medina.[177] Muhammad answered their questions, pointed out similarities between their religions, but rejected the Trinity.[178] The delegation, therefore, refused to accept Islam and Muhammad as their Prophet.[179] When they were about to depart, the delegates invited Muhammad to send an envoy to live amongst them, answer their theological questions, and judge some of their affairs.[180] In her book, Afsaruddin describes how the Christian delegation from Najran was allowed to pray inside a mosque.[181] Muhammad then established a pact with them, which gave them full protection of their churches and their possessions in exchange for the payment of taxes.[182] She notes that Muhammad's reception of the Christians of Najran "set a new standard for inter-faith relations."[183]

While there are a number of books that mention the delegation, there are some that omit it completely. Safi's *Memories of Muhammad*, Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers*, and Cole's *Muhammad* are just three examples of books that do not include the delegation. Mahan Mirza

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[174] Lings, *Muhammad*, 338-339.
[175] Lings, *Muhammad*, 339.
[176] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 114.
[177] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 115.
[178] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 115.
[179] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 116.
[180] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*,116.
[181] Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims,* 13.
[182] Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims,* 13.
[183] Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims,* 181.

points out that some scholars may have omitted the delegation because it is challenging to draw positive conclusions for Muslims and Western audiences today without having serious complications.[184] He also says that scholars who include the delegation in their work lack historical criticism and require a critical re-reading of primary sources.[185] Another reason for omitting the delegation is the intrafaith polemics involved as Muhammad brings ʿAli, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, leaving out his wives, relatives, and closest companions. Shia Muslims understand this occasion, which is narrated in both Sunni and Shia primary sources, as demonstrating the closeness of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the People of the House) as well as ʿAli's right to the Imamate (spiritual leadership) and succession to Muhammad.

When exploring primary sources, the Qurʾan does not refer explicitly to the delegation of Christians from Najran; however, many biographers have indicated that chapter three (*Al-Imran*) includes a number of verses that were revealed about the event. For example, Q. 3:58-62 says,

> We relate to you [Muhammad] this revelation, a decisive statement. In God's eyes Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, 'Be,' and he was. This is the truth from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt. If anyone disputes this with you now that you have been given this knowledge, say, 'Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, and let us pray earnestly and invoke God's rejection on those of us who are lying. This is the truth of the matter.

These verses discuss the event of *Mubahala*, which is said to have taken place when Muhammad called on the Christian delegation to invoke God's curse upon those who were lying about their religious differences. Other verses in this chapter are significantly different than what is mentioned in the New Testament. For instance, Q. 3:55 states "God said, 'Jesus, I will take your soul back and raise you up to Me: I will purify you of the disbelievers. To the Day of Resurrection I will make those who followed you superior to those who disbelieved. Then you will all return to Me

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[184] Mahan Mirza, "A Delegation of Christians from Najran Visits the Prophet Muhammad: Contemporary English Sirah Literature for a Western Audience," *Islamic Studies* 50, 2 (2011), 166.
[185] Mirza, "A Delegation of Christians from Najran Visits the Prophet Muhammad," 168.

and I will judge between you regarding your differences." This verse, if it was recited during the debate, would have established some major differences between Christianity and Islam.

Ibn Hisham, referencing Ibn Ishaq, mentions how the delegation of sixty Christians was led by three commanders, ʿAbd al-Masih, *al-Aqib*, the chief of the people, al-Ayham, *al-Sayyid*, their administrator, and Abu Harithah ibn Alqamah, their bishop and religious leader.[186] The delegation enters Muhammad's mosque and are allowed to pray inside, which they do facing the East.[187] They then debate with Muhammad about the Trinity and Jesus's place within it.[188] Near the end of their dialogue, Muhammad receives a command to invite the delegates to *Mubahala*, if they refuse his words.[189] The delegation departs and discusses whether they should invoke the curse of God upon the liar.[190] ʿAbd al-Masih says that they knew that Muhammad is a Prophet and warns them that they would exterminate themselves if they engage in the cursing.[191] The delegation then goes to Muhammad and says that they do not want to engage in *Mubahala* and want to leave with their religion.[192] They also ask him to send them one of his companions to judge between them.[193] Another account is important as it has Muhammad sending Khalid ibn al-Walid (d. 642) to Najran around the year 631 to invite the Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb to Islam for three days before he would fight them.[194] If they accept Islam, he would live among them and teach them its principles.[195] The Banu al-Harith accepts Islam and a delegation travels to Muhammad to convert personally.[196]

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[186] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 401.
[187] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 402.
[188] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 402-409.
[189] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 409-410.
[190] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 410.
[191] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 410.
[192] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 410.
[193] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 410-411.
[194] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 958-959.
[195] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 959.
[196] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 959-960.

In his work, Ibn Saʿd describes the delegation of Najran, which arrives in Medina after Muhammad sends them a letter.[197] This deputation of fourteen people, including ʿAbd al-Masih, Abu al-Harith ibn Alqamah, al-Aqib, and al-Sayyid, enter the mosque and pray facing the East.[198] Muhammad turns his face from them and does not talk to them because of their fancy garments.[199] The next day, the deputation comes to him dressed as monks and he invites them to embrace Islam.[200] The leaders of the deputation decline and there is a long theological debate.[201]

Muhammad recites the Qurʾan for them and says that if they contradict what he says, they will curse each other.[202] After the deputation retires, ʿAbd al-Masih and two others go to him and say that it is not proper to curse each other.[203] They also say that they will obey him and make peace, which is settled by giving two thousand garments.[204] Najran was now under the protection of Muhammad for their religion, land, and property.[205] Later on, a few Christians from Najran return to Muhammad to embrace Islam.[206] The people of Najran lived under this protection, until the time of ʿUmar, who exiled them for usury.[207] However, in another delegation, Muhammad sends Khalid with an army of four hundred Muslims to the Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb in Najran to invite them to Islam three times before fighting.[208] They accept the invitation and Khalid stays with them to teach them about Islam.[209] A delegation of the Banu al-Harith then joins Khalid on his return to Muhammad and accepts Islam in front of him.[210]

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[197] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 388.
[198] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 357.
[199] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 357.
[200] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 357.
[201] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 357.
[202] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 357.
[203] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 358.
[204] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 358.
[205] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 358. Also mentioned on pages 266 and 287-288.
[206] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 358.
[207] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 358.
[208] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 339.
[209] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 339.
[210] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 339-340.

Al-Baladhuri's *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* references al-Zuhri when narrating how the people

of Najran delegate the military chief and civil chief to ask for terms on their behalf.[211] They agree

to offer two thousand robes, provide lodging for Muhammad's messengers for a month or less,

and loan thirty coats of mail, thirty mares, and thirty camels.[212] In exchange, Muhammad gives

them God's covenant and his promise.[213] Another account has two monks come to him and say

that they embraced Islam before he did, to which Muhammad says they are lying as they eat pork,

worship the cross, and claim that God has a son.[214] He invites them to *Mubahala* and takes hold

of the hands of his daughter, Fatima, and two grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, demonstrating that

he is willing to invoke the curse upon himself and his family.[215] The monks climb up a mountain

to escape and avoid invoking the curse of God.[216]

The last account has Muhammad sending a letter to the people of Najran about the

conditions of their treaty, including religious freedom and protection.[217] Al-Baladhuri also

mentions that the treaty was terminated during the caliphate of ʿUmar, who expelled the Christians

from Najran.[218] On the other hand, in *Ansab al-Ashraf*, al-Baladhuri reports that Muhammad sends

Khalid to the Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb in Najran and invites them to Islam.[219] The majority of them

convert to Islam and pay alms for the poor.[220] Those who did not convert to Islam, fight against

Khalid and are defeated.[221]

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[211] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64.
[212] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64.
[213] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64.
[214] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64.
[215] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64.
[216] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64.
[217] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 64-66.
[218] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 66-67.
[219] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 384.
[220] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 384.
[221] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 384.

Al-Yaʿqubi includes a letter that Muhammad wrote to the bishops of Najran, mentioning that he calls them to worship God, and if they refuse, they must pay *jizya*.[222] If they refuse to pay the tax, he will declare war on them.[223] Abu Harith, the bishop, and ʿAbd al-Masih then decide to lead the people of Najran and travel to Muhammad.[224] After their debate, Muhammad invites them to God's curse upon the ones who lie, which is accepted by the people of Najran.[225] The next morning, they notice him with ʿAli, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn and fear that he may have spoken the truth.[226] Abu Haritha says to Muhammad that they will not engage in invoking curses upon each other and that they will pay the tax.[227] Muhammad then makes peace with them in exchange for two thousand suits of clothing.[228] He writes another letter to Najran about the two thousand garments, lodging his messengers for a month, and loaning coats of mail during war.[229] He also acknowledges that they have God's protection and his promise of security.[230]

Al-Tabari, using Ibn Ishaq, mentions that in 631, Muhammad sends Khalid with an army of four hundred to the Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb, asking them to accept Islam for three days before he fought them.[231] If they accept Islam, then he would stay with them and teach them about the Qurʾan and Muhammad's teachings.[232] The Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb surrenders and Khalid teaches them about Islam.[233] He later travels to Muhammad with a deputation of Christians, so that they could accept Islam in person.[234]

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[222] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 89.
[223] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 89.
[224] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 90.
[225] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 91.
[226] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 91.
[227] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 91.
[228] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 91.
[229] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 91-92.
[230] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 91-92.
[231] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1724.
[232] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1724.
[233] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1724.
[234] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1725-1727.

Hadith literature is limited in giving further evidence on the delegation of Christians from Najran. *Sahih al-Bukhari* includes one *hadith* that has Muhammad sending Abu Ubaydah ibn Jarrah (d. 639) to the people of Najran.[235] *Sahih Muslim* also has someone going to Najran, who in this case is Mughira ibn Shuʿba (d. 671), the one who reported the *hadith*.[236] Another report gives us more details about the delegation, including the people of Najran coming to Muhammad and asking for a man of trust to go with them, which ended up being Abu Ubaydah.[237] These *hadiths* do not provide us with any additional information; rather, they help corroborate accounts from other sources.

The following table lists which sources discuss the *Mubahala* and the treaty that Muhammad made with the Christians of Najran. I also include which sources mention Khalid going to the Christians of Najran.

Table 7: Muhammad and the Christians of Najran

Primary Sources	Muhammad invites the delegation to Mubahala	The delegation leaves with a treaty	Khalid goes to the Christians of Najran
Qurʾan	Yes	No	No
Ibn Hisham	Yes	No	Yes
Ibn Saʿd	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes
Al-Baladhuri	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	Yes
Al-Yaʿqubi	Yes	Yes, multiple accounts	No
Al-Tabari	No	No	Yes
Al-Bukhari	No	No	Yes, but not Khalid
Muslim	No	No	Yes, but not Khalid

The criterion of embarrassment is helpful as Muhammad failed to achieve his goal to convert the Christian delegation to Islam. Many of our accounts point out that Muhammad wanted to convert the Christians of Najran to Islam; however, the delegation rejected his offer and left with a treaty. If this event was invented, why not have them convert to Islam before they left? Why would they be allowed to pray inside a mosque, which was likely not the case during the time

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[235] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, Bk. 91, No. 360.
[236] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 25, No. 5326.
[237] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 31, No. 5949.

accounts on Muhammad were being written? While not all of the verses pertaining to Jesus, Mary, and Zechariah were included in these debates, there were likely some as Muhammad would have referenced the Qurʾan and was able to communicate with Christians in the common language of Arabic.

It is also embarrassing to have some sources describing how ʿUmar terminated Muhammad's treaty years after it was established. Why invent Muhammad creating a treaty of peace, possession of their land, and freedom of religion, only to have ʿUmar revoke it and banish Christians from Najran a decade later? Lastly, the other scenario of Khalid leading an army to Najran and ordering them to either convert to Islam or fight is most likely an invention to legitimize the sociopolitical and religious situation of the ninth and tenth centuries, when Islam was spreading within Byzantine land. Why have the Christian delegation reject Muhammad's offer to convert to Islam and then have them convert later on after Muhammad allowed them freedom to practice Christianity?

Recurrent attestation is also useful in better understanding this event. If we consider that several Qurʾanic verses on Jesus were purportedly revealed or recited during the delegation, then we have recurring evidence of the delegation engaging in theological debates with Muhammad.[238] Ibn Hisham relates how particular verses of the Qurʾan are revealed and how Jewish rabbis are present to dispute the Christian delegation. The inclusion of the Jewish rabbis was probably invented to further contextualize verses from the Qurʾan as they sometimes address both Christians and Jews as the "People of the Book." Ibn Saʿd narrates a number of accounts surrounding the delegation of Christians from Najran. One account has the delegation arrive in Medina, debate

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[238] Q. 3:1-8, 18-20, 21-27, 28-32, 33-38, 42-44, 45-46, and 47-64.

with Muhammad, and leave with a treaty. Two other accounts have Muhammad sending a letter to the bishop of the Banu al-Harith ibn Kaʿb giving them protection and freedom of their religion.

Al-Baladhuri also includes several accounts that relate to the delegation of Christians from Najran. One account has two monks coming to Muhammad and debating with him until they are invited to *Mubahala*, which they reject. Another account includes Muhammad writing a letter to the people of Najran regarding the conditions of the treaty. Both al-Baladhuri and Ibn Saʿd note that the protection of the treaty remained in place until the time of ʿUmar, who expelled them. In his biography, al-Yaʿqubi also includes Muhammad's letter that discusses the conditions of the treaty, which was agreed upon when the delegation came to Medina. The last recurrent attestation is how *Sahih Muslim* includes two accounts that have Muhammad sending his companion to Najran to teach them about Islam.

Multiple attestation occurs between most of our sources as Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Yaʿqubi all mention the Christian delegation from Najran coming to Muhammad. These sources, however, differ on the circumstances for the delegation, how many Christians went to Medina, and what was said during the theological debates, other than the *Mubahala*, which the Qurʾan references. Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Yaʿqubi discuss the conditions of the treaty in exchange for protection and religious freedom. The people of Najran offered garments and agreed to loan equipment and livestock during war. The theological debate between Muhammad and the delegation takes place in the Qurʾan, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Yaʿqubi, which gives us confidence that at least some interfaith dialogue took place, which ended with neither party accepting the other's doctrine.

Despite Ibn Hisham, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Tabari narrating an account of Muhammad sending Khalid with an army of four hundred to Najran, it seems that this account was

invented to legitimize conquering Christian lands and forcing them to convert or fight. It is surprising that al-Tabari does not include the delegation of Christians from Najran, especially since he often references Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Saʿd, and al-Baladhuri. Al-Tabari may have found it problematic to include both the delegation of Christians from Najran, which ended in a treaty of protection and religious freedom, and Khalid leading an army to Najran and forcing them either convert to Islam or fight. In addition, al-Baladhuri does not include the delegation coming to Medina in his *Ansab al-Ashraf*, whereas he reports a more detailed account in his *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*.

When exploring memory studies and the delegation of Christians from Najran, we can discover a new perspective on how memories of this event were preserved over generations both orally and in written form. Numerous types of memories were formed during this event. Eyewitness, individual, and episodic memory are probable as many Muslims were present, including Muhammad, ʿAli, and ʿUmar, when the delegation of Christians from Najran arrived in Medina. Many Christians are said to have been part of the delegation, ranging from fourteen to sixty members of their community. Therefore, Muslims would have witnessed the delegation's arrival and observed them praying at the mosque. Some Muslims may have observed the theological debate, saw how it ended with *Mubahala*, and been present during the establishment of the treaty that brought conditions and taxes to the people of Najran in exchange for protection and religious freedom. The arrival of the delegation, theological debates, and treaty became part of Muslims' collective memory as they wanted to remember how Muhammad welcomed the delegation, allowed them to pray in his mosque, and how he challenged them to *Mubahala*.

Social memory of this event is important as it demonstrates how this event was modified over time within our sources. There are contradicting accounts in most of our sources as the delegation of Christians from Najran arrive in Medina to meet with Muhammad at some point. It

makes little sense that he would later break the treaty and send an army to force the people of Najran to convert to Islam or fight, especially since the delegation arrived during the last years of his life. Why would Muhammad break his treaty after agreeing to it? Did the Christians of Najran do something to offend him? Did Muhammad change his mind and want the people of Najran to convert to Islam?

Based on the sociopolitical and theological context of the biographies being written in the eighth to tenth centuries, it seems that the army led by Khalid may have been added to demonstrate that Christians should convert to Islam or fight. If we look at it the other way, it is more challenging to accept that he came to the people of Najran with an army of four hundred and biographers invented the delegation coming to Muhammad before the ultimatum only to have them going back to Najran without converting and receiving a favourable treaty. It is possible that part of the theological debate was invented to contextualize verses about Jesus, Mary, and Zechariah; however, the event of *Mubahala* leads us to believe that there was a theological debate, which preceded it. It is unlikely that the delegation refused invoking the curse because they believed Muhammad was a Prophet. Rather, they may have declined the offer to avoid further conflict and potential hostility and violence. Having them decline the *Mubahala* because of fear or the fact that Muhammad was a Prophet only furthers his legitimacy as a Messenger of God.

Communicative memory of the delegation was developed during Muhammad's living memory as the event was likely spread across Medina and Najran because of the theological debate and treaty between them. This event became part of Muslims' cultural memory as it provided one major theme of interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians, leading to a treaty offering protection and religious freedom. The delegation of Christians was commemorated as a theological success for Muhammad over the Christians after they declined his invitation to

Mubahala and signed a treaty. Performative memory is very likely as historians, theologians, and biographers orally performed this event to both public and private audiences. Muslims must have been interested in learning how Muhammad dealt with Christians during his life. Verbatim memory, on the other hand, does not help us as there are conflicting accounts that are difficult to accept as memorized events. It is very doubtful that all of our accounts about the delegation are historical.

The various types of memory that developed during and after the Christian delegation from Najran arrived in Medina offer us a number of reasons why Muslims preserved and reinterpreted memories of what occurred after their arrival, what took place during the interfaith dialogue, and what were the terms of the treaty. These memories demonstrate that Muslims were probably present during these episodes and shared their experiences with other Muslims, whereas Christians from the delegation must have also shared what happened after they returned to Najran. Based on how conflicting memories were preserved in our sources, we can acknowledge that some accounts were fabricated later on to legitimize wars and forced conversions against many Christians, taking place after Muhammad's death. While it is not possible to confirm which memories were remembered and passed down for generations, it is likely that this event was transmitted orally and in written form, especially the gist.

Gist memory provides us with the most accurate description of the delegation as we can understand that a Christian delegation from Najran did travel to Medina to meet with Muhammad. During this time, there was interfaith dialogue that led to both parties agreeing to disagree on their beliefs, especially after Muhammad invited them to *Mubahala*. Muhammad did not achieve his goal of having the delegation accept Islam, but he did establish a treaty that was favourable to both parties. While many verses from the Qurʾan were inserted into this episode by biographers, the

only one we have confidence in is regarding the event of *Mubahala*. After the delegation returned, it is unlikely that Muhammad went against the treaty and sent an army to force the people of Najran to convert to Islam or fight.

Due to inconsistent accounts about the delegation, it is challenging to date this event as it has been reported a few years after Muhammad arrived in Medina and also during the "year of deputations," which took place around 631. It seems more plausible that Muhammad received this delegation near the end of his life, after he secured his authority in the Hijaz. The event could have been moved to an earlier date by later scholars who wanted to include the invented story of him sending an army to Najran to convert the Christians to Islam or fight, which concluded with the second delegation coming to Medina to convert in person.

The delegation of Christians from Najran is an interesting event that provides us with a deeper understanding of Muhammad coexisting with Christians in seventh-century Arabia. Sources on the delegation are only present in Muslim sources, which often give us detailed accounts of how they debated with Muhammad and left with a favourable treaty that offered protection and religious freedom. One of the most challenging aspects of this event is deciphering the accuracy of conflicting accounts. If Muhammad made a treaty with the Christian delegation, why would he later order the people of Najran to either convert to Islam or fight?

Memories of a Christian delegation coming to Muhammad are likely to have been formed as many Muslims were present during their stay. Over time, social memory of this event was modified to avoid exhibiting a failed attempt to convert the Christian delegation. This story is remedied by some accounts having a small delegation of Christians from Najran coming to Muhammad to accept Islam after Khalid was sent to convert them or fight. The gist of the event seems the most reliable as it allows us to focus on the bigger picture. By exploring gist memory,

we can accept that a Christian delegation from Najran came to Muhammad in Medina before any ultimatum. During this time, they had interfaith dialogue, which ended with *Mubahala*, and a treaty of peace and religious freedom. Why would biographers invent a failed attempt of Muhammad trying to convert Christians from Najran? It seems more plausible that later events were invented to show how the Christians of Najran eventually surrendered and converted to Islam.

The Death of Muhammad

Muhammad accomplished many great things before his death, including the conquest of Mecca, when he marched with ten thousand men and seized control of the city with minimal violence. He also united most of Arabia under his leadership, receiving military and political agreements with tribes across the Peninsula. Lastly, Muhammad led a Farewell Pilgrimage during which Muslims believe Q. 5:3 was revealed, which states, "Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you and chosen as your religion *Islam* [total devotion to God]." During his life, Muhammad's victories and leadership established the foundation for Muslim conquests and spreading Islam outside Arabia.

According to Muslim traditions, a few weeks after returning to Medina from his Farewell Pilgrimage, Muhammad became ill, suffering from a fever and severe headaches. He remained mostly bedridden in ʿAʾisha's house as his health deteriorated. There were times when Muhammad seemed to have recovered slightly, but these were only temporary as his fever and headaches did not subside entirely. After several days of pain and suffering, Muhammad passed away at the age of sixty-two or sixty-three and was buried in ʿAʾisha's room. His death was a surprise to several Muslims, including some of his closest companions, as they did not believe he would die suddenly and of a severe, painful illness. Indeed, it was not the way most Muslims would have imagined

their Prophet to have died after such an accomplished career as a religious, political, and military leader.

Most secondary scholarship will acknowledge traditional sources on Muhammad's death in 632. Watt notes that when he returned to Medina from his Farewell Pilgrimage in March 632, Muhammad was in poor heath, which led to rumours spreading and false prophets appearing.[239] His health continued to deteriorate and he died in June 632, leading to a series of rebellions within Arabia.[240] In his book, Lings provides a more vivid account of Muhammad's death, including his headaches, inability to lead prayer, and acknowledging his death is near.[241]

In his book, Wilferd Madelung argues that Muhammad's death was unexpected among his followers even during his severe illness.[242] He also states that Muhammad, himself, may have been unaware that his illness would take his life, until it was too late.[243] Ramadan includes the beginning of his headaches, which continued for two weeks, and ultimately made him bedridden during the last days of his life.[244] Afsaruddin also has Muhammad passing away in 632 after contracting an illness, leading to a succession crisis.[245] Cole acknowledges his death in 632 and discusses how the Qurʾan's stance on peace was changed by Bedouins after he passed away.[246]

A few scholars argue that Muhammad did not die in 632. The most vocal and recent scholar is Shoemaker, who takes a revisionist approach, using Cook and Crone's *Hagarism* and Hoyland's *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* as his foundation to demonstrate that Muhammad was alive and leading the conquest of Palestine in 634-635. He uses the criteria for authenticity, to argue that

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[239] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 79.
[240] Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 79.
[241] Lings, *Muhammad*, 354.
[242] Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 18.
[243] Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 18.
[244] Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 205.
[245] Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, 15-16.
[246] Cole, *Muhammad*, 201-202.

non-Muslim sources on Muhammad's conquest of Palestine are likely genuine accounts about the formative period of Islam.[247]

Shoemaker discusses the criterion of embarrassment but neglects to use it on Muslim traditions that have Muhammad dying of an illness. Is his painful death something that Muslims would make up? Why would they want to fabricate an illness that had Muhammad suffering for several days? Would it not have been less embarrassing to have him leading the conquest of Palestine? Shoemaker states that Muslim biographies on Muhammad are "widely regarded as highly stylized and untrustworthy." Why not use the criterion of authenticity on these sources as he does with non-Muslim ones?[248]

Shoemaker uses eleven sources, which he claims are from the seventh and eighth centuries, to demonstrate that Muhammad was leading Muslims during the conquest of Palestine.[249] He indicates that these sources are "free from polemic and apologetic interests, and even when these qualities are evident elsewhere in the text, they do not affect the notice of Muhammad's vitality and leadership of the military campaign in Palestine."[250] Shoemaker neither proves the independence between these sources nor the freedom of polemic and apologetic interests.

When examining primary sources, we have more of a balance between Muslim and non-Muslim sources that describe Muhammad's death or whether he was still living beyond 632. Written in the seventh century, the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper Baptizati* is Greek account that is a dialogue regarding the Roman Empire's forced conversion of North African Jews in 632.[251] This text states, "'A prophet has appeared, coming with the Saracens, and he is preaching the arrival of

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[247] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 4-6.
[248] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 11.
[249] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 64. I will explore Shoemaker's sources and demonstrate how many of them are not from seventh and eighth centuries.
[250] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 65.
[251] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 20.

the anointed one who is to come, the Messiah'…'He is a false, prophets do not come with a sword and a war chariot.'"[252] Muhammad is neither named nor physically described. While the account likely refers to him, it does not prove that he was there, especially since Muhammad would not be on a war chariot as he rarely took part in any of his battles.[253]

The Secrets of Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai is an eighth century apocalyptic, which Shoemaker uses to complement the *Doctrina Iacobi* since it includes an Ishmaelite Prophet as a messianic figure.[254] Again, Muhammad is not named or described in this apocalypse, which is depicting the restoration of the land of Israel to its former glory.[255] The *Khuzistan Chronicle*, which was written in the seventh century, describes the Islamic conquests twice and in two different contexts.[256] When narrating the initial conquests, the Chronicle has the sons of Ishmael, whose leader is Muhammad, taking control of the Sasanian Empire.[257] This period includes the conquest into the Sasanian Empire and Yazdegerd III's death (r. 632-651). Was Muhammad alive until 651? Or was he observed as a symbol and leader of the Muslim army after his death?

Jacob of Edessa's *Chronicle Charts*, which was written in the seventh century, covers the period of history between the end of Eusebius's *Church History* until the late seventh century. Within his work, there is a missing section of events between 631 and 692. However, Muhammad's reign as the first king of the Arabs is said to begin in 620/21, lasting for seven years until 627/28.[258] Jacob mentions that in 625/26, "the Arabs began to make raids in the land of Palestine."[259] Muhammad did, in fact, order the first raids of Palestine during the Battle of Muʿtah, which ended

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[252] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 22.
[253] Muhammad usually watched the battles from a tent and encouraged his followers as seen in the Battles of Badr and ʿUhud.
[254] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 27.
[255] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 310.
[256] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 33.
[257] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 186 and Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 35.
[258] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 37.
[259] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 37.

in a major defeat. In 632, Muhammad ordered another military expedition, which was led by Usama ibn Zayd (d. 681), into the Levant to avenge the loss; however, the expedition was delayed due to Muhammad's death and postponed until the reign of Abu Bakr (r. 632-634).

The *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* is one of the few accounts that actually name Muhammad taking part in the conquest of Palestine. Likely written in the eighth century, the text describes an Arab man from Mecca named Muhammad, believed to be a Messenger of God, who "took possession of Damascus and Syria, and he crossed the Jordan and altered it (for the worse). And the Lord abandoned the army of the Romans before him."[260] Shoemaker also points out a common source between the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741*, written in the mid-seventh century, and the *Hispanic Chronicle of 754*, which is more antagonistic on Muslim conquests, and calls it the *Spanish Eastern Source*, which is not extant but a hypothesis.[261] The *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle* narrates that

> When a most numerous multitude of Saracens had gathered together, they invaded the provinces of Syria, Arabia, and Mesopotamia, while one named Muhammad held a position of leadership over them…When Muhammad, the previously mentioned leader of the Saracens, had finished 10 years of rule, he reached the end of his life. [He is] the one whom they hold in such high regard and reverence until this day that they declare him to be the apostle and prophet in all their rituals and writings.[262]

The *Hispanic Chronicle* provides a similar account but is more polemical as it points out Muhammad's trickery, cunning, and fraud.[263] His leadership and reverence seem to have lived on through his followers even after his death. It is possible that Muslims continued to fight in his name and legacy, which could be the reason why non-Muslim sources would mention Muhammad's leadership over Muslims years after his death.

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[260] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 39-40.
[261] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 40-41.
[262] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 42-43. Shoemaker cites *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741*, ed. Iaonnes Gill in *Corpus Scriptorium Muzarabicorum* vol. 1 (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973), 13-17. He also cites *Chronica minora saec* vol. 2 (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1892-1898), 337-338.
[263] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 45.

When attempting to reconstruct the *Chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa*, which was likely written in the eighth century, Shoemaker uses Michael the Syrian's C*hronicle*, written in 1195, and the anonymous *Syriac Chronicle of 1234* to demonstrate what the *Syriac Common Source* reported about Muhammad.[264] These second hand works with highly probable modifications and almost six-hundred-year gap cannot give us a picture of who Muhammad was in the seventh century. Shoemaker also references the *Chronicle of Siirt*, which was written in Arabic in the tenth century, but does not use it as a source to date Muhammad's life.[265] In this work, Arabs are said to have begun their conquests roughly in 628.[266] After that, Muhammad, who is described as a powerful leader, no longer joined in battles; rather, he began to send out his companions.[267] This source falls in line with the Battle of Muʿtah, which was the beginning of conquests into the Levant.

Shoemaker uses the *Short Syriac Chronicle of 775*, which is an anonymous chronicle that describes Muslim conquests until 775. This chronicle is problematic as it dates the conquest of Palestine to 618/19, which is well before Muhammad's migration to Medina.[268] If this is the date of the Palestine conquests, it would make sense that Muhammad was leading it as he was still alive during this time. Shoemaker then references an equally problematic source, The *Zuqnin Chronicle*, which was written in the eighth century and in which the author admits that he was unable to find any reliable sources for most of the seventh and eighth centuries.[269] He claims that in 621, the Arabs conquered Palestine, and the first king of the Arabs is Muhammad, who they believe is a Prophet.[270] If we look at the dates, Muhammad would have been alive to conquer Palestine. It is

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[264] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 47-49.
[265] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 50-51.
[266] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 50-51.
[267] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 50-51.
[268] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 53.
[269] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 53-54.
[270] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 54.

more likely that these anonymous chronicles are using unreliable sources that make them more untrustworthy than our Muslim sources.

Shoemaker also uses Abu al-Fath al-Samiri al-Danafi's *Samaritan Chronicle* that was commissioned by the Samaritan high priest Pinhas in 1355, which is very late and cannot be proven to authentically recount the conquest of Palestine. The last source that he uses is what he claims is an early Islamic text: *The Correspondence of Leo III and ʿUmar II*.[271] Within ʿUmar's letter, the author discusses Muhammad leading his followers outside Arabia and into Byzantine and Persian lands. The author also says that Muslims went with him to fight the largest empires "bare foot, naked, without equipment, strength, weapon, or provisions."[272] Why would a Muslim author write this about his Prophet and fellow Muslims? How does this account benefit Muslims and Islam? We are unable to confirm that ʿUmar's letter actually comes from a Muslim as it could be a polemical debate forged entirely by Christians. It is for this reason that we should not consider this source a Muslim text.

Almost all of Shoemaker's sources cannot be considered multiple, independent attestations because we are unable to trace their genesis and most of his eleven sources use several other sources that could be related to one another. In addition, his sources are often unreliable, anonymous, and not free of polemics. There are two more non-Muslim sources that are also worth exploring, including the *Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*, which Shoemaker claims but does not prove was influenced directly by early Islamic traditions.[273] This account of Muhammad seems unlikely from Muslim sources as it is polemical in nature. He is said to have died after nine years of reigning in 629/630, having been murdered, which seems more polemical than based on

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[271] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 59.
[272] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 63.
[273] Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 12.

Muslim sources.[274] Abu Bakr is noted as the new leader and leads the conquest of Palestine two years after Muhammad's death.[275]

In the *Apology of al-Kindi*, there are many accounts that describe Muhammad's death. First, there is a poisoned mutton that he tastes and that ultimately causes his death.[276] Another account has Muhammad claiming that he will rise after his death just as Jesus did; however, he dies on a Monday during the sixty-third year of his life after an illness that lasted fourteen days.[277] After three days, Muhammad does not rise, corruption takes place, and he is buried on the fourth day.[278] People revolt and the leadership of the Muslim community goes to Abu Bakr.[279]

When analyzing Muslim sources, the Qurʾan does not provide us with any direct references to Muhammad's death; however, there are verses that discuss its possibility. For example, Q. 3:144 says, "Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways? If anyone did so, he would not harm God in the least." This verse would have likely been referenced after Muhammad died and when the early Muslim community was upset, worried, and wondering what would happen to them. Had Muhammad conquered Palestine during his life, why are there no Qurʾanic verses about it? Why are there no interpretations or exegesis of the Qurʾan that have him leading the Muslim army into Palestine or leaving Medina for another war?

Ibn Hisham uses Ibn Ishaq to describe how Muhammad starts to suffer from a fatal illness and was given a choice between the keys to the treasures of this worldly life or Paradise, to which he chooses Paradise.[280] While his health is deteriorating, he commands Usama to carry out an

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[274] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 464.
[275] Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 466-467.
[276] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."
[277] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."
[278] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."
[279] Al-Kindi, "The Apology of al-Kindi."
[280] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 1000.

expedition but he waits to learn what happens to his Prophet.[281] On the day of his death, Muhammad returns from his mosque and dies in ʿAʾisha's home.[282] An interesting reaction of his death comes from ʿUmar, who denies that he died as he will return as Moses did.[283] Muhammad's body is washed, wrapped, and buried in ʿAʾisha's house.[284]

ʿAbd al-Razzaq, tracing his account to al-Zuhri, says that Muhammad's illness occurs and became so severe that he loses consciousness, which leads to his wives giving him medicine.[285] ʿAʾisha reports that during his illness, he asks for seven waterskins to be poured over him.[286] Muhammad also tells Abu Bakr that he has been given a choice between this world and the Hereafter, and he chose to be with God.[287] While he is alive, he appoints Usama as commander for an expedition, but it is postponed due to his death.[288] Right before Muhammad dies, he asks the men in his chamber to draw near to him so that he can write a testament, which would disallow them to go astray after his death.[289] However, ʿUmar says that their Prophet has been overtaken by pain and that the Qurʾan is sufficient for them.[290] Everyone in the chamber then begins to argue and dispute, leading Muhammad to tell them to leave.[291]

Al-Waqidi writes that before his illness, Muhammad orders Usama to avenge his father's death and lead the raid of the Byzantines.[292] Soon after this exchange, he has a headache and fever but feels better the next day.[293] Usama later returns after learning Muhammad is dying.[294] After he

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[281] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 999 and 1006-1007.
[282] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 1009-1011.
[283] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 1012-1013.
[284] Ibn Hisham, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 1018-1020.
[285] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 176 (in Arabic).
[286] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 178 (in Arabic).
[287] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 178 (in Arabic).
[288] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 218 and 266 (in Arabic).
[289] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 188 (in Arabic).
[290] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 188 (in Arabic).
[291] Maʿmar, *The Expeditions*, 188 (in Arabic).
[292] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 3, 1117-1118.
[293] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 3, 1117-1120.
[294] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 3, 1120.

dies, many Bedouins to leave Islam.[295] Abu Bakr is appointed caliph and tells Usama to complete his mission commanded by their Prophet.[296] Ibn Saʿd includes numerous reports on Muhammad's illness and subsequent death. Before becoming ill, he orders Usama to march against the Romans and fight them where his father was killed.[297] Usama, however, returns after learning that Muhammad was dying and avenges his father during the reign of Abu Bakr.[298]

According to one report traced to ʿAʾisha, first signs of Muhammad's illness began after complaining of headaches, which made him move to ʿAʾisha's house. Another account has him dying on the same day Abu Bakr led prayer.[299] During Muhammad's illness, waterskins are poured over him and he says that he chose God and the Hereafter over the world, which only Abu Bakr understands.[300] Near his death, Muhammad asks to write something, so that his community will not go astray after his death; however, ʿUmar says that they have the Qurʾan and are sufficient.[301] After everyone begins to argue, Muhammad asks them to leave.[302] He then dies in ʿAʾisha's home thirteen days after his illness began.[303] ʿUmar claims that Muhammad is not dead and that he will return as Moses did; however, Abu Bakr confirms his death and quotes the Qurʾan.[304] There are reports of people visiting Muhammad's body, but they still could not believe that he was dead.[305] After ʿAli, ʿAbbas, and Usama wash his body, he is buried within a day or two.[306]

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[295] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 3, 1120-1121.
[296] Al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* vol. 3, 1121.
[297] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 190 and 248.
[298] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 191.
[299] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 216.
[300] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 218, 231, and 250.
[301] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 244.
[302] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 244.
[303] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 234.
[304] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 266-269.
[305] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 271-272.
[306] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 1, 273, and 275-279. There is some disagreement as to which day Muhammad was buried.

In *Ansab al-Ashraf*, al-Baladhuri, referencing the work of al-Zuhri, describes how Muhammad asks his wives for permission to be in ʿAʾisha's house after he becomes sick.[307] He says that after Muhammad's illness becomes severe and renders him unconscious, his wives give him medicine from Abyssinia, which wakes him up angrily as he says that God would not torment him.[308] He also is reported to choose the Hereafter over this world.[309] Near his death, Muhammad asks for a pen and paper so that he could write a statement for his community; however, there is confusion among the Muslims present, leading him to not write anything.[310] Muhammad eventually dies in ʿAʾisha's house after thirteen days of pain and suffering.[311] When he dies, ʿUmar says that their Prophet will return but Abu Bakr confirms that Muhammad is died.[312] He is buried the next day or two after his family, including ʿAli and ʿAbbas, wash his body.[313] Muslims pray over him after he was buried in ʿAʾisha's house. In addition, al-Baladhuri's *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* states that the first conflict between Muslims and Byzantines was during the caliphate of Abu Bakr.[314]

Al-Yaʿqubi writes that before his illness, Muhammad puts Usama in charge of an expedition to avenge his father in Palestine.[315] He then contracts a fever before Usama reaches his destination.[316] Muhammad is sick for fourteen days and dies on a Monday at the age of sixty-three years old.[317] His body is washed by ʿAli, shrouded in garments, and buried on a Wednesday.[318]

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[307] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 544-545.

[308] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 545-546.

[309] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 546-548. One account has Gabriel coming to Muhammad and giving him the choice of this world or the Hereafter.

[310] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 562.

[311] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 558-559.

[312] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 563. Other accounts of ʿUmar's reaction on page 565-567.

[313] Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol. 1, 569.

[314] Al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, 138.

[315] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 125.

[316] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 125-126.

[317] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 126.

[318] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 126-127.

Al-Yaʿqubi says that people thought that Muhammad will not die until he conquers the world, including ʿUmar who says that he did not die and will return as Moses did.[319]

Using sources that trace through Ibn Ishaq, al-Tabari reports that Muhammad orders the expedition to Syria under the leadership of Usama.[320] Soon after this command, he begins to suffer from a fatal illness, which delays the expedition.[321] Rumours of Muhammad's illness spread, leading to al-Aswad, Musaylimah, and Tulayhah to claim false prophethoods for themselves.[322] Al-Tabari also mentions how Muhammad claims that he has been given the keys to the treasures of this world, a long abode, and then Paradise or going to Paradise now, so he chooses Paradise and meeting God now.[323] He suffers significant pain and later has seven skins of water poured over him.[324] Multiple reports have Muhammad asking for a pen and paper to write a document for the community, so that they will not go astray; however, some people present believe that he was talking deliriously.[325] The severity of Muhammad's illness makes him unconscious, which his family believes is due to pleurisy, so they force him to take medicine.[326] When he dies, ʿUmar claims that he is not dead but has gone to God as Moses did and will return after forty days.[327]

Hadith literature also includes numerous reports of Muhammad's illness, death, and last words. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, for example, has reports on his illness and praying at his home.[328] There are also accounts of Muhammad asking for a paper and a pen to write a statement, so that Muslims

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[319] Al-Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrikh*, vol. 2, 128.

[320] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1794 and 1796-1797.

[321] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1794.

[322] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1795.

[323] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1800.

[324] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1801.

[325] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1806-1807. One of the accounts have Muhammad asking for a pen and paper, but the Muslims present dispute and when they returned to him, he said to leave him alone and charged them with expelling the polytheists from Arabia, give presents to the delegations, and became silent with the third command on purpose or he forgot.

[326] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1810.

[327] Al-Tabari, *Taʾrikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, vol. 1, 1815-1817.

[328] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 2, Bk. 22, No. 328; Vol. 2, Bk. 23, No. 414; Vol. 2, Bk. 23, No. 472.

will not go astray.[329] ʿUmar begins the dispute by stating that their Prophet is ill and the Qurʾan is sufficient, leading Muhammad to dismiss them all.[330] Regarding his death, one *hadith* mentions when God took his soul away, the *Ansar* assembled, so ʿUmar told Abu Bakr that they should join in the assembly.[331] *Sahih Muslim* includes a report that when Muhammad first became ill, he asked permission from his wives to stay in ʿAʾisha's house, which they accepted.[332] There are also *hadiths* about when he is dismissed after he requests a pen and paper to write a document, so Muslims will not go astray.[333]

The following table illustrates which sources mention that Zayd led an army to Palestine, along with those that indicate Muhammad leading an army to Palestine. In addition, I outline which sources describe Muhammad's death due to an illness.

Table 8: Muhammad's Death

Primary Sources	Zayd leads army to Palestine	Muhammad leads army to Palestine	Muhammad dies of an illness
Qurʾan	No	No	No
Ibn Hisham	Yes	No	Yes, multiple accounts
ʿAbd al-Razzaq	No	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Waqidi	Yes, multiple accounts	No	Yes
Ibn Saʿd	Yes	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Baladhuri	Yes	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Yaʿqubi	Yes	No	Yes
Al-Tabari	Yes, multiple accounts	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Al-Bukhari	Yes, indirectly	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Muslim	Yes	No	Yes, multiple accounts
Doctrina Iacobi nuper Baptizati	No	Yes, indirectly	No
The Secrets of Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai	No	Yes, indirectly	No
The Khuzistan Chronicle	No	Yes, until 651	No
Chronicle Charts	No	No, Arabs raids in 625/626	No
The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria	No	Yes	No
Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741	No	Yes	No
the Hispanic Chronicle of 754	No	Yes	No
Chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa	No	Yes	No

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[329] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, Bk. 92, No. 468.
[330] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, Bk. 92, No. 468. Similar reports include Vol. 1, Bk. 3, No. 114; Vol. 4, Bk. 52, No. 288; and Vol. 4, Bk. 53, No. 393.
[331] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 3, Bk. 43, No. 642.
[332] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 4, No. 833 and Bk. 4, No. 834.
[333] *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 13, No. 4014; Bk. 13, No. 4015; and Bk. 13, No. 4016.

Chronicle of Siirt	No	No, companions raided after 628	No
Short Syriac Chronicle of 775	No	Yes, in 618	No
The Zuqnin Chronicle	No	Yes, in 621	No
Samaritan Chronicle	No	Yes	No
The Correspondence of Leo III and ʿUmar II	No	Yes	No
Theophanes	No	No	No
Al-Kindi	No	No	Yes

The criterion of embarrassment is important for this case study as Muhammad died of a sudden and painful illness, which had him suffering for several days. If Muslims invented this, why would they have him suffer and eventually die from an illness? Why would they not have Muhammad die of natural causes or have a miraculous event that took him directly to God? It seems possible that Muslims did not publicize his illness and death to non-Muslims at first as it would be used against them. If Muhammad did take part in the victorious conquest of Palestine, why not have his role mentioned in traditional sources? The success of conquering Byzantine lands would have only built upon his reputation and legacy. It seems more likely that the first raid into Byzantine lands was when Muhammad sent Zayd to the Battle of Muʿtah, which ended in a defeat. Muslims would not have invented this embarrassing defeat as it only affects their image negatively.

Recurrent attestation takes place within many of our sources, particularly our Muslim ones. Theophanes includes recurrent attestation as he mentions when Muhammad died and repeats the year of his death the following year. The *Apology of al-Kindi* also repeats his death as it includes how Muhammad was almost poisoned, which ultimately caused his death as he never fully recovered from it. In addition, this source describes how Muhammad died from an illness on the sixty-third year of his life and how he claimed that he would rise three days after his death. Lastly, there is a discussion of his succession dispute after he passed away.

Within almost all of our Muslim sources, Muhammad's death is detailed, remembered, and discussed repeatedly. For example, Ibn Hisham discusses his fatal illness, his burial after his body

is washed, and Usama coming back to Medina after learning about him passing away. He also has Muhammad saying that he was given the choice between worldly treasures and Paradise before dying in ʿAʾisha's house. ʿAbd al-Razzaq has accounts that have him contracting his illness and dying, which delayed Usama's expedition to Byzantine lands. In addition, he mentions Muhammad choosing Paradise over the treasures of the world, asking for a document to write his final words to his community, and taking his last breath in ʿAʾisha's house.

In addition to noting when Muhammad died, al-Waqidi also has him becoming ill while asking Usama to go on his expedition, which was delayed due to his death. Ibn Saʿd also has multiple accounts that repeats his death. In addition to Muhammad asking Usama to go avenge his father's death, which is delayed by his death, he also has him saying that he is choosing the Hereafter over this world, asking for a pen and paper, dying in ʿAʾisha's house, and having his body washed and then buried. Al-Baladhuri repeats Muhammad's illness and death as he narrates him moving into ʿAʾisha's house after becoming ill, receiving medication by his wives, choosing the Hereafter over this world, asking for a document to write a statement down, being washed and then buried, and people praying over him after he was laid to rest.

Al-Tabari includes Muhammad's fever and headaches, how he was given the choice of this world or Paradise, and how he wanted to write a document down so that his community would not go astray. After he died in ʿAʾisha's house, al-Tabari reports that his body was washed and buried. In addition, Usama's expedition was postponed due to Muhammad's death. Al-Yaʿqubi has him become ill and later die from it, which delayed Usama's expedition. Muhammad's body was washed by ʿAli and then buried. *Hadith* literature also repeats Muhammad's death more times than the rest of our sources. For example, both *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* have him becoming

ill and later asking for a pen and paper to write a document down, which would prevent his community from going astray.

Multiple attestation also occurs between our sources. When observing our non-Muslim sources, the *Doctrina Iacobi*, the *Khuzistan Chronicle*, the *Chronicle Charts*, the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle*, the *Hispanic Chronicle of 754*, the *Chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa*, the *Short Syriac Chronicle of 775*, the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, the *Samaritan Chronicle*, and the *Correspondence of Leo III and ʿUmar II* all have Muhammad raiding Palestine while he was alive. However, as we have seen, most of these sources are of questionable reliability, not original, and not always independent from one another. The *Doctrina Iacobi* and the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai* do not name Muhammad directly, while the *Chronicle Charts*, the *Short Syriac Chronicle of 775*, the *Chronicle of Siirt*, and the *Zuqnin Chronicle* all have him raiding Palestine years before they actually took place and during his lifetime based on traditional sources.

On the other hand, we have a stronger consistency as to when Muhammad died within our other sources. Theophanes, the *Apology of al-Kindi*, Ibn Hisham, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, al-Yaʿqubi, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim* all have Muhammad dying before the major conquests of Palestine. In addition, Ibn Hisham, al-Waqidi, ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, al-Yaʿqubi, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim* have Zayd going to Muʿtah, which is considered the first expedition into Palestine.[334] In regards to Muhammad's illness, the *Apology of al-Kindi*, Ibn Hisham, ʿAbd al-Razzaq, al-Waqidi, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladuri, al-Tabari, al-Yaʿqubi, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim* all have him becoming ill before his death.

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[334] *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 2, Bk. 23, No. 392 and *Sahih Muslim*, Bk. 19, No. 4343.

Another example is the episode where Muhammad requests to write something down so that his community will never go astray. We have intrafaith polemics between Sunni and Shia Muslims because they argue over what he wanted to write or have written down, especially Shia Muslims, who claim that he was going to appoint ʿAli as his successor. This event, which is recounted in ʿAbd al-Razzaq, Ibn Saʿd, al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim*,[335] demonstrates how Muhammad did acknowledge that he was near his death and wanted to leave his last testament with his community.

Using memory studies on Muhammad's death will allow us to understand how memories surrounding this event were preserved and remembered until they were written down. His death was a tragic, shocking, and unexpected episode that impacted the Muslim community significantly. A variety of memories were developed during Muhammad's illness and after his death. Eyewitness and individual memories are important as it is very unlikely that he passed away in seclusion or away from his companions and family. It is more plausible that Muhammad died while accompanied by his loved ones, including his wives, Abu Bakr, and ʿAli. Many companions and family members would also have their individual memories of his illness, pain and suffering, and death. Episodic memory is useful as Muhammad's illness and death lasted approximately fourteen days, when he first contracted a fever and headaches. These memories were probably shared and spread throughout Arabia, later becoming part of Muslims' collective memory as they would preserve when Muhammad died and the cause of his death.

Social memory of Muhammad's death is significant as it was not the way Muslims believed he would die. Dying of an illness did not necessarily suit the powerful religious, military, and political leader he became during his life. While the fatal illness could not be forgotten or omitted

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[335] It is surprising that this episode in not included within al-Yaʿqubi's work as he was openly Shia.

from the sources, we have additional information that has Muhammad predict his imminent death and allude to Abu Bakr as his successor.[336] Thus, memories of his death were elaborated upon to legitimize his suffering and succession. The essence of Muhammad's death, however, remains intact, despite later Muslims modifying it. It seems that his death was not communicated to non-Muslims, which may be the reason why they are inconsistent when recounting it.

Communicative memory of Muhammad's illness passed between Muslims during his living memory as they wanted to see their Prophet one last time. When he died, Muslims throughout Arabia must have learned of his illness and death, which became part of Muslims' cultural memory, acknowledging how and when Muhammad died after over twenty years as their religious and political leader. Commemorative memory of his death is memorialized as Muslims recognize that he died on Monday, June 8 in the year 632. Salient memory also plays a role as Muhammad was – and continues to be – the most important figure to Muslims and Islam, so his followers would not forget his death, regardless of whether it was due to a fatal illness.

Historians, theologians, and lecturers likely retold Muhammad's tragic death as they would not omit it when describing his life. Performative memory, therefore, is important as his death was included in public and private lectures as a pivotal moment in his life and Islamic history. Muhammad's death was significant as it brought a succession crisis, a rebellion, and the *Ridda* Wars. Verbatim memory plays a minor role as it seems that Muhammad's illness of having a fever and headaches was constantly remembered, alongside his death. Other aspects of Muhammad's death are inconsistent as there seems to be elaborations to minimize the suffering and shock.

Numerous types of memories that developed during Muhammad's illness and after his death provide us with several ways how Muslims remembered and shared memories of what

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[336] The *hadith* alluding to Muhammad naming Abu Bakr as his successor is *Sahih Muslim*: Bk. 31, No. 5879.

occurred over the last few weeks of his life. Many of them must have been present and in contact with Muhammad during his illness and while he was bedridden, sharing how he was feeling and what he was saying during his last days. The magnitude and unexpected nature of Muhammad's death would have only furthered the preservation of memories surrounding this event, especially eyewitness accounts from his loved ones. Even though we cannot verify which memories were remembered and passed down for generations, it is likely that this significant event was transmitted orally and in written form for generations, especially the gist. Gist memory provides us with a clear and more precise description of Muhammad's death as it confirms that he contracted a fatal illness, which had him bedridden and suffering. He was in pain during his illness, which finally took his life after several days.

Muhammad's unexpected death was shocking to his community, allies, and enemies. His death brought a rebellion and a succession crisis. While most scholars accept his death in 632 at the age of around sixty-two, there are some scholars, namely Shoemaker, who believe that Muhammad was still alive a few years later and led the conquest of Palestine. His scholarship allows us to further examine non-Muslim sources; however, after exploring his work, we find that most of his sources are untrustworthy, unoriginal, and problematic. Our Muslim sources, along with a few non-Muslim ones, all have Muhammad dying of a fatal illness before the conquering of Palestine.

Incorporating memory studies into this case study helps us better understand how and why memories were developed and preserved about Muhammad's death. We learn that his death was salient and there were eyewitnesses present during his illness and death. In addition, many of these memories were embellished and elaborated upon to make the nature of Muhammad's death less embarrassing and shocking to the Muslim community. Besides some agreement between our non-

Muslim sources, they are neither objective nor always reliable. On the other hand, Muslim sources seem more trustworthy than non-Muslim ones as there is no reason to fabricate a painful death for Muhammad. While some scholars may claim that Muslims invented his painful death to liken him to Jesus, why not also give his death a purpose as Jesus's crucifixion served as a redemptive death in Christian theology regarding salvation and atonement? Why not have Muhammad rise again? Not only are there multiple sources that describe his illness and death, but also many sources that repeat episodes of Muhammad's suffering and final words.

Conclusion

Muhammad became an accomplished military, political, and religious leader during his time in Medina. Events over the last ten years of his life are detailed within our sources, giving us greater confidence when analyzing our four case studies. While the details cannot be confirmed by our sources, which sometimes contradict one another, we can focus on the gist or essence of the event that is more likely to have been preserved for generations both orally and in written form. Our cases continue to be relevant today as they are important moments during Muhammad's life or polemical topics that continue to be debated by scholars.

The major defeat at the Battle of ʿUhud was a momentous change in Muhammad's life. We have detailed memories as to what happened during this event. By using our method, we are able to explore how numerous Muslims preserved memories of ʿUhud for generations. Eyewitness, episodic, and individual memories must have all played a role in remembering this battle as hundreds of Muslims participated. More particularly, memories of the location, key losses, and outcome would have been passed on during and after Muhammad's life. This event is reported in all of our Muslim sources and is referenced a number of times.

The controversy surrounding Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab continues to exist within contemporary biographies on his life. Despite some similarities between his encounter with Zaynab at Zayd's house and biblical accounts, there are also profound differences. Gist memory gives us the clearest and most accurate account as we can acknowledge that Muhammad did marry Zaynab after Zayd, his adopted son, divorced her. Unfortunately, we are unable to confirm the reason why he wanted to divorce her and whether Muhammad encountered her at Zayd's house as there is no consistency between our sources. It seems very unlikely that such a contentious marriage would have been fabricated or invented to relate Muhammad to his predecessors in the Bible.

The Christian delegation of Najran is an interesting example of interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians during the rise of Islam. There are a number of problems within our sources regarding this event as there are conflicting and contradictory accounts about Muhammad's treatment of the delegation. However, if this event was invented, why have him unsuccessful in converting the Christians from Najran? It seems that some scholars, historians, and theologians added to the memory of this event by having Muhammad sending an army to Najran to have the people convert to Islam or fight.

Muhammad's death is almost unanimously considered to have taken place in 632. While it is worth noting that some non-Muslim sources have Muhammad leading armies in Palestine well after 632, there is no possibility of confirming these narratives. In addition, many of these non-Muslim sources are unreliable, unoriginal, and polemical, especially since we are unable to confirm where, when, how, and from whom their authors learned of Muhammad's death. There is little doubt that Muslims would remember when and how Muhammad died. The gist of the

narrative has him dying after contracting a fever and having severe headaches, which had him suffering for many days.

Our four cases studies on Muhammad's life in Medina demonstrate that we possess sufficient evidence to reconstruct a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life. Of course, we cannot accept that these events took place without question, but we could acknowledge that there is a strong possibility that they did occur during his life. There are several other events that took place during Muhammad's last ten years that could be further analyzed for their authenticity as our available sources provide us with significant details, despite being written as late as three hundred years after he died.

Conclusion: The Historical Muhammad

The historical Muhammad raises many questions, concerns, contradictions, and answers. Hundreds of biographies on Muhammad have been written for well over one thousand years. Muslims and non-Muslims have written accounts of his life for numerous reasons, including for historical, hagiographical, and polemical purposes. Therefore, what can we *really* know about Muhammad? Who was he in seventh-century Arabia? What actions or sayings of Muhammad should we accept or disregard? Biographies on his life will continue to be written as there are over one billion Muslims who acknowledge him as their last Prophet and understand the significance of his words and actions contained within *hadith* literature. Reconstructing the historical Muhammad is only possible based on our extant sources. Unfortunately, several earlier accounts and biographies of him are lost, leaving us unable to fill in gaps between his death in 632 and biographies written in the ninth and tenth centuries.

When recounting sources used in this study, our earliest source on Muhammad is the Qurʾan, which was compiled soon after his death, providing us with both direct and indirect statements, accounts, and references to him. Biographies on him offer us the most details and chronology, both of which are helpful in reconstructing the historical Muhammad. These sources are invaluable and contextualize the Qurʾan and other sources. *Hadith* literature is helpful only when it corroborates previous accounts or traditions on his life. In addition, other types of Muslim literature are useful in better understanding the sociopolitical, cultural, and theological context of Arabia in the sixth and seventh centuries. One of the newer trends in historical Muhammad scholarship is how scholars incorporate non-Muslim accounts and descriptions of his life, especially since they are earlier than most surviving Muslim sources and offer us a different

perspective. It is important, however, to be careful when using non-Muslim sources as their authors often include their own biases, motivations, and polemics.

The value of our primary sources is reflected in its abundance, variety, and originality. The plethora of sources on Muhammad allows us to compare and contrast traditions and narratives to confirm its level of authenticity. The originality of our sources continues to be debated as some revisionist scholars claim that the Qurʾan is the source upon which historians and theologians created *hadiths* and *sirah-maghazi*. While there is no way to prove this hypothesis, many scholars will claim that these sources are separate and not derived from one source as Muslims preserved and transmitted Muhammad's sayings and actions orally until they were written down.

Gaps, omissions, and a lack of details prevent us from fully reconstructing the historical Muhammad. More particularly, there is a sizable period of over one hundred and fifty years between his death and our earliest extant biographies in the early ninth century. Our authors rely upon previous works, accounts, and details that were passed on to them by their teachers. If we possessed biographies from ʿUrwah, al-Zuhri, and Ibn Ishaq, they could either change our understanding of Muhammad dramatically or reinforce what later scholars claimed they said through their chains of transmission. Although we are at the mercy of Muslim sources, which are apologetic, tendentious, and predominately written between the ninth and tenth centuries, along with non-Muslim sources from the eighth and ninth centuries, our study has demonstrated that we should not overlook the pertinence of oral memory and transmission of early Muslims who lived during Muhammad's lifetime.

Reviewing Our Approach

Historical Jesus scholarship has advanced our knowledge of Jesus significantly, allowing us to examine a number of questions and to search for possible answers. For over three hundred years, scholars have established numerous quests to find the historical Jesus and filter his authentic sayings and actions that are mentioned primarily in the New Testament. One of the most potentially valuable criteria of authenticity is the criterion of multiple attestation as it gives us more confidence to have numerous sources testifying what Jesus said or actions he performed during his life. With several sources in agreement, we are more likely to find a genuine tradition. The criterion of embarrassment is also important as it is unlikely that the early Church would invent an episode from Jesus's life that would reflect negatively on his image or his nascent movement. One of the major issues of this criterion is that there are not enough instances to recreate an image of Jesus, whereas there is an abundance of examples when exploring Muhammad's life.

A newer criterion is recurrent attestation that analyzes an event, motif, or theme that is repeated within a particular source several times. If these episodes recur within a source, it is more likely to have taken place during Jesus's life, rather than an event that is mentioned only once. Neither of the three criteria of authenticity used in this study should be used independently. Using the criteria of multiple attestation, embarrassment, and recurrent attestation together helps us build a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding Muhammad's life.

After incorporating our criteria, it was important to integrate memory studies into our case studies and explore our accounts of Muhammad as memories that were remembered, modified, and transmitted for generations until they were written down. Eyewitness memory serves as the foundation for an event to be remembered and solidifies itself within the collective memory for Muslims. Social memory, for example, allows us to understand how the sociopolitical, cultural,

and theological context of our authors impact memories on our episodes. Communicative memory demonstrates how memories of events were passed on between Muslims during the living memory of Muhammad, eventually transforming into the cultural memory and becoming part of Muslim culture and identity over time, lasting for generations.

Many of these memories were also commemorated and even celebrated for their significance during Muhammad's life. Lecturers, historians, and theologians likely performed these memories orally in public and in private. Salient memory explains to us how some memories of Muhammad would not be forgotten because they were important to his life, Muslims, and Islam. Verbatim memory would have been the most helpful memory; however, we rarely have instances of memories being consistent across our sources. Therefore, gist memory is the ideal memory as it provides us with the most accurate description of an event, giving us the confidence that the essence of a memory would have survived and been passed on, whereas details are often forgotten, modified, or omitted over time.

Summarizing Our Case Studies

Our approach of incorporating the criteria of authenticity and memory studies was used meticulously on several case studies. When observing Muhammad's life in Mecca, we examined four events. His first encounter with Khadija, when he was twenty-five years old, led him to trade goods on her behalf. Most accounts of their first meeting demonstrate that she hired Muhammad and sent him outside Mecca to trade her merchandise. Memories of this event survived because they were salient to the Muslim community, becoming part of their collective memory. The benefits of using our method allowed us to acknowledge that Muhammad most likely worked for

Khadija as a young adult. One of the challenges, however, was determining where he went as we have sources claiming that he went to Syria, while others have him going to Hubashah.

Muhammad's reaction to what he believed was his first revelation is one of the most important events in his life. During one of his retreats at Mount Hira in 610, Muhammad is believed to have encountered an angel, which terrified him and led him to seek comfort from Khadija. Muhammad's reaction is documented in a number of our sources, some of which even have him intending to leap from the mountain to his death. While memories of this episode have become part of Muslim's cultural memory, they seem to have also been modified over time to minimize his frightened reaction after his first revelation, especially jumping off the mountain, an act that is prohibited in Islam. Over the years, some scholars have argued that the Hebrew Bible influenced Muslim writers, who likened Muhammad's reaction to his predecessors. By incorporating our method, we examined how he felt after his first revelation, concluding that his intention to commit suicide was likely not fabricated or imitating reactions from biblical prophets.

The first male convert to Islam continues to be a heavily debated subject, especially between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Disputes between who converted after Khadija favour ʿAli, Abu Bakr, and Zayd. Not only are available sources overwhelmingly in favour of ʿAli being the first male to convert to Islam, but there are also descriptions of when and how he accepted Islam in front of Muhammad. Memories of his conversion were communicated to others as some accounts were transmitted by eyewitnesses. A number of biographers have Abu Bakr as the first male to convert to Islam due to later sociopolitical and theological contexts that had Sunni and Shia Muslims clashing over the political and religious legitimacy of Abu Bakr and ʿAli. Despite our sources being written predominately by Sunni Muslims, our method showed us that ʿAli was most likely the first male convert to Islam.

The chapter's last case study explores the boycott of the Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. The Qurayshis established this ban and formed an alliance to put pressure on two clans to withdraw their protection of Muhammad. Memories of the harsh treatment and conditions against him and the two clans would not have been easily forgotten. Our method helped us identify reasons why leaders of the Banu Quraysh imposed strict conditions against Muhammad and the two clans, bringing them hardship for at least two years. However, it is difficult to confirm how the boycott ended as we have exaggerated accounts within our sources, including God revealing the condition of the signed treaty being mostly eaten by termites or white ants.

In our last chapter, we examined four episodes from Muhammad's life in Medina, which began after he migrated from Mecca in 622. The Battle of ʿUhud was a major defeat as the Muslims fell against a much larger Meccan army. This humiliating loss, which included the death ʿHamzah and serious injuries to Muhammad, is unlikely to have been invented or omitted from the memory of early Muslims as it was imbedded into their collective memory. Our method demonstrated that while this event is included in all of our Muslim sources, some authors blame others to minimize the extent of the defeat on Muhammad.

Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab is arguably his most controversial one as she was initially married to Zayd, his adopted son. This marriage, however, ended within two years. Soon after their divorce, the Qurʾan allows Muhammad to marry Zaynab, which he did around 627 and held a large banquet to celebrate. Memories of the circumstances surrounding their marriage was likely communicated to other Muslims, especially since many individuals would have attended the ceremony and banquet. When incorporating our method, we focused on the overview of the events and not the exact details. One of the episodes leading up to Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab is

their encounter, which we can neither accept its authenticity completely nor confirm whether it was based entirely on the story of David and Bathsheba in II Samuel.

The Christian delegation from Najran is a memorable example of interaction and debate between Muslims and Christians. The delegation travelled to Medina and debated with Muhammad; however, they agreed to disagree on their theology, especially after Muhammad invited them to *Mubahala*. Eyewitnesses must have been present during this interaction, sharing their experiences of the dialogue with their friends and families. Social memory of this event seems to have modified Muhammad's failed attempt to convert the delegation by having him send an army to Najran and forcing Christians to convert to Islam or fight. Our method provided us with a new perspective on how our sources conflict on whether both events took place or one of them was fabricated. We can conclude that the army sent by Muhammad was probably invented as the delegation ended with a treaty that was honoured and mutually agreed upon by both parties.

Scholars today almost unanimously accept Muhammad's death in 632 as he is believed to have died soon after contracting a fever and severe headaches that had him suffering and bedridden for many days. Collective memory of his death would have formed soon after he passed away, especially since it was a salient memory that would not have been forgotten. It is also very unlikely that Muslims would have fabricated Muhammad's painful death. Our method allowed us to explore non-Muslim accounts about him still being alive during the conquest of Palestine, revealing how the problems and unreliability of these sources outweigh the flaws of our Muslim sources. While we are unable to confirm the year Muhammad died, it is very doubtful that he was alive to lead the conquest of Palestine after 632.

Memories of the events within our case studies cannot be proved beyond doubt. We do not know how Muslims preserved and passed down memories of these episodes for generations orally

and in written form; however, I chose these events because of their significance to Muhammad's life and its high probability that Muslims would have chosen to remember these events taking place during their Prophet's time in Mecca and Medina. Memories are flawed and are not the most reliable, which is why we need to focus heavily on gist memory as it offers us the best and most accurate descriptions without needing precise details. The gist of events is most likely what was preserved as it was the easiest to transmit without losing the essence. Other types of memories provide us with plausible motives and reasons why Muslims remembered, modified, or omitted episodes from Muhammad's life over time. Memory studies, therefore, could provide us with a "middle path" that both traditionalist and revisionist scholars could accept, offering a new lens with which to examine our available sources and the historical Muhammad.

Feminist Criticism

"Islamic feminism" has become an umbrella term and a multifaceted approach to Muslim women, scripture, and Islam. For my work, I use Islamic feminism as a lens to reread Muslim texts and figures with the purpose of identifying and problematizing patriarchy and the motivation and manner in which our available sources were written. Indeed, a patriarchal imaginary is embedded within these texts, making it the goal of Islamic feminists to find solutions and new approaches to rereading and reinterpreting them for their generation. They question and challenge the representation of God as male, the assumption that men are the only recipients of revelation, and the roles and responsibilities of women in the Qurʾan and other Muslim texts.

In *Feminist Edges of the Qurʾan*, Aysha Hidayatullah's work on feminist theology, especially scriptural hermeneutics, provides new perspectives and a critical review of how previous scholars have approached and defined Islamic feminism. Hidayatullah offers three

interpretative approaches towards a feminist Qurʾanic interpretation: (1) historical contextualization (2) intratextual reading, and (3) the tawhidic paradigm.[1] She also outlines how Islamic feminists have employed a number of Jewish and Christian feminist theologies in their work to establish new methods of inquiry. I incorporated Christian feminist criticism to reinterpret traditions of Islam and the Qurʾan to determine alternative meanings and understandings of these texts, along with the role of women.

Recovering and investigating the stories of significant women figures in early Islamic history is relevant in portraying Muhammad's life as they provide details on his daily living, behaviours, and actions. Therefore, we should acknowledge the treatment or lack of treatment regarding women within our sources. In her chapter, "Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter," Janice Anderson writes that "feminist critics point out that just as theology, historical circumstances, and literary conventions shape the Gospels and interpretations of the Gospels, gender shapes them as well."[2] She argues that the concept of female is often understood as the "Other," the exception, and the anomaly.[3] Theological concerns are created based on male experiences and needs, leading to androcentric and patriarchal writings that too often deny or ignore the roles of women.[4] In using feminist criticism, Anderson offers a variety of approaches, including critiquing the androcentric and patriarchal character of the Bible and biblical scholarship; concentrating on stories of women in the text in order to recover images of biblical women, images of agency and victimization; and reconstructing the historical and sociological background of the text with reference to the category of gender.

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[1] Aysha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qurʾan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16-17.
[2] Janice Anderson, "Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, eds. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen Moore (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992), 104.
[3] Anderson, "Feminist Criticism," 106.
[4] Anderson, "Feminist Criticism," 107.

By using feminist criticism on our case studies, we observe that women are not given the same voice and presence as their male counterparts, especially regarding their perspectives, words, and actions. For instance, based on Muslim traditions, Muhammad's first encounter with Khadija often serves as a catalyst to him travelling to Syria, where a monk confirms him as a Prophet and Maysarah witnesses miraculous episodes. This event also leads to her wanting to marry Muhammad after she learns from Maysarah what took place during their journey. Were there no other reasons why Khadija wanted to marry him? How did Muhammad feel about her? Did he love Khadija before their marriage? Unfortunately, the circumstances of their marriage are inconsistent, so we are unable to verify how and why they got married.

Within our available sources on the first male convert to Islam, many of our sources have Muhammad and ʿAli praying together secretly, omitting Khadija being present and praying alongside them. While most of our sources will acknowledge that she was the first to convert to Islam, a few of them mention that ʿAli was the first to become a Muslim. When Khadija is mentioned praying along with Muhammad and ʿAli, she is often praying behind them or beside ʿAli, which minimizes her status and position. It seems that the writers were more concerned with the first male convert to Islam, which diminishes her pivotal role in supporting Muhammad to begin his prophethood and being the first to convert to Islam. Did our authors expect readers to know that Khadija was the first convert to Islam, so that they could omit her from sources on ʿAli's conversion? Why does her role as the first convert to Islam seem to be inferior to the first male convert? It is problematic that Khadija is not always mentioned in accounts surrounding ʿAli's conversion, which she seems to have been a part of. Perhaps in the eyes of our predominately male authors, ʿAli was a more visible figure who played a greater role within the early Muslim community.

Muhammad's marriage to Zaynab is also important as our sources are sometimes silent on the circumstances that led to their marriage. Some of our biographers and *hadith* compilers merely name her as his wife, who was previously married to Zayd. While the controversy usually surrounds Muhammad marrying the divorced wife of his adopted son, we learn little about Zaynab's perspective, thoughts, or actions. Even in the Qurʾan, we have verses about Muhammad asking Zayd to keep his wife, but there is no mention of her name. Only three Muslim sources describe how he encountered Zaynab and felt admiration for her. Did this interaction really take place? Was Muhammad not allowed to be physically attracted to women? Was he not allowed to marry Zaynab for her beauty? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered based on our extant sources as they mostly disregard her role, opinions, and feelings.

Women, however, are not always silenced in our case studies. After Muhammad is believed to have received to his first revelation, our sources are consistent in having him terrified and going to Khadija for comfort, who reassures him that God would not disgrace him and that he should rejoice in his encounter with an angel. Her role in Muhammad's life is mentioned in numerous biographies and *hadiths*, establishing her as his greatest supporter and confidant. Khadija is the one who gave him the opportunity to trade her merchandise based on his honesty and good character, paying him more than other merchants. She also proposed to Muhammad, despite her being older and much wealthier than him. She was a beloved wife of Muhammad, who was never forgotten, despite him remarrying several women after she passed away. Lastly, when analyzing our case study on his death, we learn that Muhammad died on the lap of ʿAʾisha. Her role in his death could have easily been replaced with Abu Bakr or ʿAli, having him die by their side instead.[5]

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[5] Some sources have Muhammad pass away next to ʿAli and not ʿAʾisha, which helps legitimize his succession and closeness with his father-in-law.

In *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, Fethi Banslama uses a psychoanalytical lens to approach Khadija's role in Islam and show how Khadija was a figure who guaranteed the path of Islamic feminism by providing Muhammad with certainty that he was a Prophet and by becoming the first convert to Islam. We can understand that from its inception, Muhammad entrusted his religion to a woman who served as a guardian of Islam. More particularly, Muhammad, a man, had to rely on the belief of a woman, Khadija, who had access to a knowledge that preceded and exceeded his own understanding.[6] Banslama points out that Khadija verified Muhammad's truth, bringing the "unknown to light" and allowing him to affirm his religion.[7]

Was Muhammad a feminist figure? Scholars have asked and answered this question several times, citing the Qurʾan and *hadith* to demonstrate their perspectives and understandings of what it meant to be a feminist in seventh-century Arabia. They have found evidence in available sources to demonstrate gender equality and how misogynistic interpretations that discuss marriage, adultery, sexuality, modesty, divorce, and inheritance should be contextualized as the misogyny of religion ought to be derived from the context of pre-Islamic Arabia rather than the text themselves.

Alternative Avenues of Inquiry on the Historical Muhammad

Muhammad continues to serve as the epitome and foundation for Islamic ethics and theology, especially through the Qurʾan and *hadith* literature that establish him as the perfect human being and ideal example for Muslims to follow. This aspiration to perfect Muhammad in Islamic texts and theology motivated early Muslim scholars, historians, and theologians to categorize their work

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[6] Fethi Benslama, *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 134-135.

[7] Benslama, *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, 134-135.

as sacred and vital to Islam as they worked to preserve the moral spirit of his message and life, not necessarily its literal meaning. Many Muslims who wrote about Muhammad became storytellers, preachers, and lecturers, inspiring others to understand and follow their Prophet's example.

On the other hand, historians such as al-Zuhri and Ibn Ishaq dedicated their lives to write about Muhammad, compile stories about him, and transmit traditions to their students. Their mission was to present the life of Muhammad; however, as we read in Chapter Two, caliphs often commissioned historians to write about their Prophet's life. Therefore, these narrators shaped material according to their own vision, motivation, and audience, rather than simply transmitting traditions about Muhammad.

A potential avenue for using available sources is identifying the gist of the ethical and epistemological messages contained within stories about Muhammad. Islamic ethics must have modified and evolved as Islam spread and crystallized. Our historical sources reveal the gist of certain moments in history, alongside Islamic ethics. For example, what was the ethical gist of Muhammad marrying his adopted son's former wife? Christian theologians used this story to attack Islam and its Prophet for condoning incest, adultery, and polygamy. Muslim scholars, on the other hand, often privileged the Qurʾanic verses that allowed Muhammad to marry Zaynab, while minimizing accounts of him falling for her beauty. As we have seen in our case study, there are variations, similarities, and contradictions when reading our extant sources as they were clearly polemical and controversial.

The ethical gist of this story is challenging as the embarrassing nature of it overpowers the moral, timeless lesson that Muslims ought to understand and learn from. Could the lesson transcend politics and theology? For Muslims, the Qurʾan is eternal and applicable for all time, so there must have been a mandate for scholars and theologians to derive or create Islamic ethics from

this story as well as others throughout Muhammad's life, including his loss at ʿUhud and death in Medina. Therefore, how might have Islamic ethics influenced, modified, and evolved stories about Muhammad? What was added or omitted? Which historians took more liberties to construct a Muhammad who was an infallible human being and the best example to follow?

Our second interesting avenue of inquiry is whether the inclusion of archeology and visual arts could complement textual materials on the historical Muhammad. As mentioned in Chapter Three, material culture cannot produce a timeline or stories from Muhammad's life. However, epigraphic discoveries reveal some aspects of his sociopolitical, cultural, and religious context, including the irrigated lands of Sheba destroyed by a flood (Q. 34:15-17), the raiders of Mecca coming from Yemen with elephants in their ranks (Q. 105), "the people of the ditches" burned in the fields of Najran (Q. 85:4-7), and the subjects of the dynastic rulers of Himyar known as the *Tubbaʿ* (Q. 44:37 and 50:14). These examples reveal the Hijaz as a place of influence and power that intersected with other cultures, religions, and peoples.

Another example of material evidence could be found on early Islamic coinage. The earliest dateable coinage bearing Muhammad's name and epithet, "the Messenger of God," are on silver coins minted in Bishapur in the Fars province of southern Iran, during the second civil war between the Umayyads and the Zubayrids (680-692).[8] Between 685 and 689, the leader and caliph of the Zubayrids, ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Zubayr circulated these coins, which included the confession, "In the name of God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God."[9]

After the civil war, Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, who had commissioned the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem with its message to Christians to respect the Oneness of God (*tawhid*) and Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, decided to Islamicize coins used in his empire as

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[8] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 30.
[9] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 30.

many coins, particularly those from Byzantium, had crosses and praised Jesus. ʿAbd al-Malik removed the crosses from the coinage and introduced the inscription "There is no God but God; Muhammad is His Messenger." Justinian II, the emperor of the Byzantine Empire, retaliated by putting his own image on the back of Byzantine coins and the image of Jesus on the front. ʿAbd al-Malik is believed to have put his own image on his coins as a response, the earliest of which are dated from around 694, resembling a standing figure in Arabian dress carrying a sword in its sheath.[10] Some scholars, including Hoyland and Clive Foss, have reignited the debate on whether the image on the coins is in fact ʿAbd al-Malik as it could very well be the earliest representation and image of Muhammad himself.[11] If these coins were of Muhammad, we would have depictions of him from the seventh century, a time when those who saw and interacted with him were still living.

The Historical Muhammad in the Twenty-First Century

Despite living over fourteen hundred years ago, Muhammad's legacy, example, and sayings are remembered by millions of Muslims across the world. From an early age, they learn about his *hadiths* and his role in the founding of Islam. Many Muslims also commemorate important aspects of Muhammad's life, including his birthday (*Mawlid al-Nabi*), his first revelation (*Laylat al-Qadr*), and his mystical journey to Jerusalem and then to Heaven (*al-Israʾ wal-Miʿraj*). During Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, millions of Muslims imitate their Prophet's pilgrimage that he performed during his lifetime. In addition, they will travel to Medina and pay their respects to Muhammad's tomb.

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[10] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 31-32.
[11] Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 33.

Biographies will continue to be written about Muhammad because of his influence and relevance to Muslims today, allowing them to learn how he lived, the struggles he went through, and his victories in spreading Islam in Arabia. He is arguably the most important figure in history as memories of his life reside within all Muslims. Many of them may ask: what would Muhammad say about Muslim terrorism in the world today? How would he react to the treatment of Muslim women by their governments, spouses, and families? Which current Muslim leaders would Muhammad accept as fit to rule their countries? What laws would he put forth in the twenty-first century? What would Muhammad call fundamentalism in the contemporary world?

While we have explored eight case studies, there are several other episodes during Muhammad's life that should be further analyzed for their authenticity. Events from his time in Mecca and Medina should be taken seriously and examined using our method, which may offer more confidence on their veracity. Memory studies, criteria of authenticity, and the use of Muslim and non-Muslim sources offer us a new perspective and understanding of events that took place during Muhammad's life. In addition, sources should be analyzed for their inclusion of women, their roles, and their characterizations. It is concerning how androcentrism and patriarchy impact women's acknowledgment and presence within our sources. Therefore, we should continue to investigate the ways in which primary sources exclude, neglect, and minimize the vital role women played in Muhammad's life.

Can we *really* reconstruct Muhammad's life from a historical-critical perspective in a way that will satisfy all readers? The answer is no. No matter how much we try, we will not be able to fully recreate his life with absolute certainty. While our Muslims sources include some historicity, they are theologically motivated and written by Muslims well after Muhammad lived. The Qurʾan, our earliest source, does not narrate his life; rather, verses are peripheral and include some, but not

nearly enough, direct references about Muhammad and events from his life. Non-Muslim sources were written with their own biases from authors who often wanted to delegitimize him and his status as a Prophet. We can, however, attempt to recover the historical Muhammad, which is the portrait of his life painted by our available sources, Muslim and non-Muslim. Within these sources, we possess a variety of material, ranging from scripture to biographies, that allow us to compare and contrast them and incorporate methods to better understand events that took place during Muhammad's life.

Although many revisionists are skeptical in the ability to reconstruct even a glimpse of the historical Muhammad, there is a historical kernel within our sources, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that give us confidence that particular episodes from his life, if approached critically and meticulously, may have happened. Why would Muslims forget who Muhammad was after he died? Did they not want to preserve the sayings and actions of their Prophet and share them with later generations? Why would Muslims not want to remember the legacy of Muhammad, their last Prophet who revealed the Qurʾan? The goal of this study was to provide a new quest to the historical Muhammad, which explores accounts and reports on his life as memories that were preserved for generations until they were written down. We began with a background of scholarship and listed all available sources, both Muslim and non-Muslim, within three hundred years of Muhammad's death. We then explored memory studies and established our unique approach to the historical Muhammad. Finally, we used our method on four events from Muhammad's life in Mecca and four episodes from his time in Medina. These case studies demonstrate my approach and provide examples of how my method works on the historical Muhammad. It is possible to use my method on other events from Muhammad's life to better understand their context, historicity, and how memories influence both oral and written traditions.

There are, however, limitations when it comes to the availability of sources, supernatural events, and authenticating particular details of episodes. In sum, our method gives us better insight and a new perspective on the historical Muhammad, providing a reasonably coherent picture of events surrounding his life in sixth and seventh-century Arabia.

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