

HOLY SPIT AND MAGIC SPELLS: RELIGION, MAGIC AND THE BODY IN LATE  
ANCIENT JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Adam Collins Bursi

May 2015

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Adam Collins Bursi, Ph. D.

Cornell University 2015

This dissertation examines the ways that bodies are used in defining the boundaries between pious ‘religion’ and illicit ‘magic’ in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literatures of the fifth to ninth centuries of the Common Era. Drawing upon narratives and legal discussions both of exceptional bodies (of martyrs, saints, rabbis, and prophets) and of average laypeople’s bodies, this dissertation suggests that ritual usage of the body functions in these literatures as a site for the rhetorical construction of religious identity through the differentiation of acceptable bodily practices from those defined as unacceptably sectarian or ‘magical.’ By reading discussions of ‘magical’ bodies and bodily rituals, we see that late ancient ideas of the body’s inherent power simultaneously enforced and violated the constructed boundaries between religious communities.

Devoting particular attention to the usage of spittle and hair in discussions of magic and the power of the body, this project illustrates that the body was an important yet paradoxical site for the performance of religious identity and for the construction of religious difference in late antiquity. While late ancient sources draw upon the discourse of ‘magic’ to define as illicit those bodily performances understood as problematic and insufficiently ‘orthodox,’ these same bodily articulations or pieces (such as spittle and hair) might also be called upon to display ritual authority and concentrations of power in certain individuals. Spitting could signal holiness and

healing, but could also be marked as an act of sectarian practice or sorcery. Hair could be a source of divine blessing, or a material for sorcerous cursing. The different valences ascribed to spittle and hair display the ambiguity of these distinctions between religion and magic in late antiquity, as well as the power placed in even these most effluvial bodily parts. Late ancient sources map a variety of discursive categories onto these bodily pieces and the distinctions between religion and magic, or orthodoxy and heresy, often hinge on variant usages of these corporeal items. The efforts to define the proper usages of the body—including even spittle and hair—highlight the late ancient image of the body as standing on the edge of religion and magic, holiness and heresy, health and illness, power and weakness.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Adam Collins Bursi was born in Memphis, Tennessee, where he attended Lausanne Collegiate School. In 2007, he graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio with a major in Classics and a minor in Religious Studies. He began studying in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University in 2008. While a graduate student at Cornell, he worked as an Editorial Assistant for Dr. Kim Haines-Eitzen during the completion of her book *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity*, published in 2012. Adam served as a Teaching Assistant for many Near Eastern Studies courses at Cornell and designed and taught three Freshman Writing Seminars: “Many New Testaments: Early Christian Texts, Manuscripts, and their Arguments”; “Pagans, Jews, Christians, and Muslims: Being Religious in Late Antiquity”; and “Early Islamic History in Modern Fiction.” He has presented his research at several national and regional conferences, including the American Academy of Religion – Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, the Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, the American Academy of Religion Eastern International Regional Meeting, and the Marco Manuscript Workshop. In 2015-2016, he will be a Haslam Postdoctoral Fellow at the Marco Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

To my parents, Charlotte Collins Bursi and Frank Michael Bursi.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first and most immediate thanks go to my adviser and committee chair at Cornell University, Kim Haines-Eitzen, without whose academic expertise and humane kindness I would never have made it to this point. Most graduate students do not have the benefit of an adviser who is nearly as generous with her own time and energy as Kim has always been for me. Kim has performed the advisory miracle of giving me the freedom to pursue my own interests while gently pushing me to get the work done that needed to get done. She has been a constant source of encouragement, thoughtful comments, and healthy advice. This project and my graduate work more generally would have been impossible without her. I will always be grateful for everything that she has given me and I am thrilled to have her as my *Doktormutter*.

Secondly, I would like wholeheartedly to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Near Eastern Studies, especially my other committee members, Ross Brann and David S. Powers, and Shawkat Toorawa. Never have I questioned my decision to study in this department, as my experience in NES has been wonderful beyond anything I could have hoped. My classes and discussions with Professors Brann, Powers, and Toorawa have been foundational for the work that underlies this and all of my future academic projects. Additionally, the tireless work of departmental administrators Chris Capalongo and Julie Graham has enabled my life and work to progress smoothly over the last seven years. I feel extremely lucky to have been among such great people in the Near Eastern Studies department, and I want to thank all of them.

Finally, I thank my friends and family for all of the support they have given me over the years and during the time of this project in particular. I am lucky to have such great life friends as Alex Pollack, Chris Thomsen, and Michael Widener, the humor and kindness of each of whom make my life much more joyful than it would otherwise be. My NES graduate colleagues Dustin Nash, Sarah Pearce, and Hamza Mahmood Zafer have been great interlocutors and friends and I feel very privileged to know them as they move on to exciting scholarly careers. Friends at Cornell like Julie Balazs and Linda Ösp Heimisdóttir were there for me through many happy

and hard times. I don't know if I would have ever thought a project on spit and hair would have seemed feasible if not for the enthusiastic conversations I had at Gimme Coffee with my good friend and fellow graduate student Kristen Strehle. Most importantly, my parents have made all things possible for me and I would never have gotten here, or anywhere, without their knowledge, support, patience, and love. This project is dedicated to them.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EI</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition</i>
<i>EI</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam, Third Edition</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Islamic Law and Society</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JQS</i>	<i>Journal of Qur'anic Studies</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca</i> (ed. J.-P. Migne)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina</i> (ed. J.-P. Migne)
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>SLAEI</i>	<i>Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam</i>

## Introduction

In the *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘* of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), a story appears describing an unusual event in the lives of two Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina.<sup>1</sup> As Sahl b. Ḥunayf (d. 38/658) is washing himself one day, ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a (d. *circa* 35/656) sees Sahl’s handsome form and gushes, “By God, I’ve never even seen a woman secluded in her boudoir like [i.e. as beautiful as] what I’ve seen today!” As the words leave ‘Āmir’s mouth, Sahl falls to the ground crippled, unable even to lift his head.

When he is informed of Sahl’s condition, the Prophet asks if any foul play is suspected. “No, Messenger of God,” he is told, “except that ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a said ‘such and such’ to him.” Immediately ascertaining the problem, Muḥammad summons ‘Āmir and exclaims, “Glory be to God, why would any of you kill his brother!? If you see something that you admire of someone, then wish blessing upon him.” The Prophet informs ‘Āmir how to cure Sahl’s condition: he commands ‘Āmir to wash himself in a water vessel, cleansing his face, palms, elbows, chest, the inside of his *izār* (the garment covering his lower body), his knees, and the sides of his feet. After ‘Āmir has complied, the Prophet orders the dirty water to be poured over Sahl’s head and for him to drink a few sips of it. At the completion of these actions, Sahl stands up and leaves, cured of his malady.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘* was appended to the end of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*, but appears to have also circulated separately. See Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 291; Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, trans. Marion H. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 57-8; *EI*<sup>3</sup>, s.v. “‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī” (Harald Motzki).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘zamī, 11 vols. (Beirut: Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), 11:14-5 (no. 19766). The *isnād* is: ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] > al-Zuhrī > Abū Umāma b. Sahl. On this tradition see: G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 286; E. W. Lane, *An Arab-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 2258-9. For other versions, see: Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 16 vols, ed. Ḥamad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Jum‘a and Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-

While not explicitly stated at any point in the story, it is clear that ‘Āmir caused Sahl’s paralysis by praising his beauty. We find here a phenomenon common in many traditions of the Mediterranean world that early Islam both inherited and developed within: the “fear of envy,” the idea that a person’s good fortune would draw the ire of some evil force(s), especially if that pleasant circumstance was actively acknowledged by another person.<sup>3</sup> In many cultural contexts this malignant envy was termed the “evil eye” and indeed the “the eye” (*al-‘ayn*) is acknowledged in several early Islamic traditions.<sup>4</sup> The story of Sahl and ‘Āmir appears in the chapter of the *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘* on “incantations, the eye, and blowing spittle” (*bāb al-ruqā wa-l-‘ayn wa-l-naftħ*), which also includes a Prophetic *ḥadīth* stating: “The eye is real, if there is anything that might outrun God’s decree (*al-qadar*), it would be the eye. If one of you is asked to

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Laḥīdān (Riyādh: Maktabat al-Ruḥd Nāshirūn, 2006), 8:45 (no. 23942); Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa‘* [recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā], ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1406/1985), 2:938-9 (*kitāb al-‘ayn, bāb al-wuḍū‘ min al-‘ayn*); idem, *al-Muwaṭṭa‘* [recension of Suwayd b. Sa‘īd al-Hadathānī], ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd Turkī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994), 507 (nos. 723-4); ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb b. Muslim al-Qurashī Abū Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2 vols., ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥasan Ḥusayn Muḥammad Abū al-Khayr (al-Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1996), 2:731-4 (nos. 641-2); ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, ed. Camilo Álvarez de Morales and Fernando Girón Irueste (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe, 1992), 88-9; ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-sunan wa-l-ādāb wa-l-ḥikam wa-l-māghāzī wa-l-tārīkh wa-ghayr dhālika*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd Turkī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 267-8 (no. 198); Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Qazwīnī Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 2 vols. (Cairo: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1972), 2:1160 (no. 3509) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 32*); Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Salāfi, 25 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, n.d.), 6:78-83 (nos. 5573-5, 5578-82).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Dundes describes this phenomenon as “based upon the idea that an individual, male or female, has the power, voluntarily or involuntarily to cause harm to another individual or his property merely by looking at or praising that person or property.” Alan Dundes, “Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview,” in *The Evil Eye: A Casebook*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 258. John M. Roberts notes the widespread but not universal presence of belief in the evil eye in world cultures in “Belief in the Evil Eye in World Perspective,” in *The Evil Eye*, ed. Clarence Maroney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 223-78. Dundes and Roberts are cited in Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 144-5. For studies of the evil eye in Mediterranean and Near Eastern traditions, see Matthew W. Dickie, “The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye,” in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 9-34; *ibid.*, “Heliiodorus and Plutarch on the Evil Eye,” *Classical Philology* 86 (1991): 17-29; Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1994); *ibid.*, “The Power of the Evil Eye and the Good Eye in Midrashic Literature,” *Judaism* 40.3 (1991): 344-353; Shai Secunda, “The Fractious Eye: On the Evil Eye of Menstruants in Zoroastrian Tradition,” *Numen* 61 (2014): 83-108.

<sup>4</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ayn” (Ph. Marçais).

wash himself, then let him wash himself.”<sup>5</sup> We see here that early Muslims understood the evil eye to be a real force and that they cited the ritual washing of the kind performed by ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a as the method for getting rid of it.

A particularly interesting component of the story about Sahl and ‘Āmir is the commentary tacked onto the very end of the tradition. After the completion of the narrative, a short exchange is recorded between two eighth-century Muslims: the Syrian *ḥadīth* transmitter Ja‘far b. Burqān (d. *circa* 150/767) and his teacher, the great scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), who appears in the *isnād* as one of the transmitters of the story about Sahl and ‘Āmir.<sup>6</sup> Responding skeptically to the story, Ja‘far b. Burqān states, “We had considered this worthless,” (*mā kunnā na‘uddu ḥādihā illā jufā‘<sup>am</sup>*). Disagreeing with this assessment, al-Zuhrī responds, “No, it is the *sunna!*” (*bal hiya al-sunna*). While Ja‘far apparently finds (or had previously found) such treatment for the evil eye as a “worthless” act, al-Zuhrī instead includes this ritual within the *sunna*—the set of bodily acts that defined the performance of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the human body, its usages and movements, play a crucial role in this story, in which the bodies of both Sahl b. Ḥunayf and ‘Āmir b. Rabī‘a are heavily invested with ritual power. Not only does the beauty of Sahl’s body provoke ‘Āmir’s envious eye, but it is ‘Āmir’s body that then provides the cure. The water that had washed ‘Āmir’s body contains an essence that, when it flows over Sahl’s own body, is able to repel the effect of the evil eye. A power, perhaps a part of ‘Āmir himself, is contained in this water that had touched ‘Āmir’s body. Indeed the power in such water is indicated by the Prophetic command on the evil eye’s power: “If one

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:16-7 (no. 19770). The *isnād* is *mursal* (meaning there is not a direct link to the Prophet from the Successor-level transmitter) and runs ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] > Ibn Ṭāwūs > Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān > Prophet. See Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 653.

<sup>6</sup> On Ja‘far b. Burqān, see: Muḥammad b. Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* [*Biographien Muhammeds, seiner Gefährten unter der späteren Träger des Islams, bis zum Jahre 230 der Flucht*], ed. Edward Sachau, 9 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1904-40), 7/ii: 181. On Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, see: Michael Lecker, “Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41.1 (1996): 21-63.

<sup>7</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Sunna” (G.H.A. Juynboll and D.W. Brown).

of you is asked to wash himself, then let him wash himself.” Water containing the bodily dirt of the envious or hateful one ritually cleanses the envied or hated one when it is poured over and ingested by the latter.

Apparently, Ja‘far b. Burqān did not ascribe such power to this ritually-produced water, while al-Zuhrī did. Alternatively, perhaps they both saw significance in this water, but Ja‘far interpreted this ritual to draw upon illicit (magical, heretical, or idolatrous) power, while al-Zuhrī interpreted this power as acceptable. In either case, a clear disagreement is present over the significance of such bodily ritual and its place in the performance of proper Islam. Ja‘far attaches no importance to (and an apparent distaste for) this ritual to get rid of the evil eye, while al-Zuhrī makes its performance canonical.

This discrepancy between Ja‘far’s and al-Zuhrī’s perspectives is one example of a wider phenomenon that I study in this dissertation: the distinctions drawn in the fifth through ninth centuries between practices, persons, and objects counted as licit and “religious,” and those that were marginalized as empty or evil “magic.” Controversies of the kind aroused by this healing ritual appear within many early Islamic sources, which often present differing viewpoints about what was considered acceptable and what was unacceptable, i.e. practices labelled as pagan, idolatrous, and “magical.” In many cases, these controversies turn on disagreements over the ways that the body is used or with the connotations of the power understood to reside in the body. Many cultural ideas were placed upon and within the body and, as a result, the differentiation between religion and magic included the definition of how the body was properly and improperly used.

Strikingly, these early Islamic discussions exhibit many close correspondences with those found in earlier and roughly contemporaneous Jewish and Christian sources. Recent scholarship

has emphasized that the ideas in the Qur'ān, *sīra*, and *ḥadīth* are in many respects in dialogue with what we find in rabbinic texts, Christian hagiographies, and other literatures of late antiquity. Among these correspondences between the early Islamic and the late ancient Jewish and Christian ideological worlds are the efforts at constructing a dichotomy between religion and magic. The techniques used by Jews and Christians in this differentiation included—as in the early Islamic sources—the deployment of the body as a rhetorical and social field upon which to distinguish the licit from the illicit.

We see one example of this much larger phenomenon in a sermon in Coptic by the fifth-century Egyptian abbot Shenoute of Atripe on healing practices performed by his fellow Christians:

But at the time of suffering, those fallen into poverty or in sickness or indeed some other trial abandon God and run after enchanter or diviners or indeed seek other acts of deception, just as I myself have seen: the snake's head tied on someone's hand, another one with the crocodile's tooth tied to his arm, and another with fox claws tied to his legs—especially since it was an official that told him that it was wise to do so! Indeed, when I demanded whether the fox claws would heal him, he answered, “It was a great monk who gave them to me, saying ‘Tie them on you [and] you will find relief.’” Listen to this impiety! ... Still again, they pour water over themselves or anoint themselves with oil from elders of the church, or even from monks!<sup>8</sup>

As in the disagreement between Ja'far and al-Zuhrī, we find here two very different perspectives on ritual healing practices. Likening the rituals described to the work of “enchanters or diviners,” Shenoute is disgusted that monks and elders of the church prescribe behaviors that he, by

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<sup>8</sup> Translation of Shenoute's *Against the Origenists* in David Frankfurter, “Popular Religious Practices in Fifth-Century Egypt,” in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 474.

contrast, characterizes as “impiety” and the abandonment of God. While some Christians found these rituals perfectly acceptable—and indeed legitimated by the authority of monks and church elders—Shenoute instead sees them as “acts of deception,” at best. Like Ja‘far’s dismissal of the evil eye ritual as “worthless,” Shenoute criticizes in even harsher language a set of practices that some Christians performed without apparent compunction, rather like how al-Zuhrī considered the evil eye ritual as *sunna*. These debates point to strong disagreements over the bounds of acceptable and unacceptable behavior among religious communities in late antiquity.

Similar concerns are expressed a century later in the Syriac canons of the Synod of Isho‘yahb I from 585 C.E., in which we find mention of those who carry saints’ bones (ܐܘܬܐܪܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܝܗܘܢ), hang them as amulets upon themselves and others, and “dare to put in people’s mouth or nostrils the water in which they had washed, or the oil in which they had plunged, the bones of martyrs” (ܕܘܢܝܡܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܐܘܬܐܪܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܐܘܬܐܪܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܐܘܬܐܪܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܝܗܘܢ).<sup>9</sup> Immediately after describing the usage of the bones of saints and martyrs to make unguents, the text states, “And because of this, the beloved name ‘Christianity’ is blasphemed” (ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܐܘܬܐܪܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܝܗܘܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܐܘܬܐܪܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܝܗܘܢ). Here, such manipulation of the bodies of the saints and martyrs is labelled a blasphemy against the name of Christianity, an act inimical to the tradition.

As in Ja‘far and al-Zuhrī’s disagreement over the evil eye, we see in these Christian texts that the usage of the body could be highly contested. In both texts, it is clear that liquids such as water and oil were understood by some Christians to acquire ritual power through contact with the bodies of religiously authoritative individuals. The bodies of monks, saints, and martyrs are imbued with power such that, even in death, their bones might be used to bless and heal. Yet

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<sup>9</sup> J. B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil de Synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1902), 150 (Isho‘yahb, canon 14). On the Synod of Isho‘yahb I, see: Philip Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128-31.



Shenoute categorizes those who use monks' water or oil alongside those "impious" individuals who visit "enchanters" and hang animal parts upon themselves. The Synod of Isho'yahb I criticizes the usage of such water and oil in the same canon that bans divination, auguries, [magical] knots, amulets, and astrology, indicating that these relic practices are grouped in the same category of detested activities.

Late ancient Jewish texts likewise map the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable religion upon particular rituals and usages of the body, and also exhibit disagreements over which activities were, in fact, considered acceptable and which not. Thus in Mishnah Shabbat 6:10 we find:

We may go out with a locust's egg, or with a fox's tooth, or with a nail from a gallows, for the purpose of healing — [these are] the words of Rabbi Meir. But the Sages say: Even on weekdays these are forbidden because of [the prohibition against following in] the ways of the Amorites.

יוצאין בביצת החרגול, ובשן שועל, ובמסמר מן הצלוב, משום רפואה - דברי רבי מאיר. וחכמים אומרים: אף בחול אסור משום דרכי האמורי.<sup>10</sup>

Much like Shenoute's Christians wearing snake heads, crocodile teeth, and fox claws, here we find mention of Jews wearing locust eggs, fox teeth, and the nail of an executed convict for amuletic purposes. While these objects' functions are not explained in the Mishnah, "both the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmud identify the objects enumerated here as medicinal amulets."<sup>11</sup> For example, the nail of an executed convict is described as helping against a spider's bite or a skin inflammation, in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, respectively.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Mishnah. The Artscroll Mishnah Series: A New Translation with a commentary, Yad Avraham, anthologized from Talmudic sources and classic commentators*, revised ed., 25 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2000-2008), 9:164-5.

<sup>11</sup> Giuseppe Veltri, "The Rabbis and Pliny the Elder: Jewish and Greco-Roman Attitudes toward Magic and Empirical Knowledge," *Poetics Today* 19.1 (1998): 69. These traditions occur at *p. Shab.* 6:9 (8c) and *b. Shab.* 67a.

Rabbi Meir finds no problem with such medicinal activity, even allowing the wearing of these objects on the Sabbath.

Yet, like Shenoute's discomfort with the practices he describes, the Sages forbid the usage of these amulets on weekdays (let alone the Sabbath) since these activities fall within the bounds of the "Ways of the Amorites."<sup>12</sup> The "Ways of the Amorites" appears in rabbinic texts as a category for describing customs or practices understood to be idolatrous or sorcerous.<sup>13</sup> Thus while Rabbi Meir places the wearing of objects such as fox teeth on the body within the realm of acceptable Jewish behavior, the Sages categorize such activities as unacceptable outsider practice. Like Shenoute's description of "impious" users of amulets and monks' oil and the statement of the Synod of Išo'yahb I about the users of saints' relics "blaspheming" the name Christianity, the Sages characterize this practice as not acceptably Jewish.

All of these cases illustrate how significant the movements, manipulations, marks, and fragments of the body were to the definition of proper Islamic, Christian, and Jewish practice in late antiquity. This included not only the whole of an individual's body, but even dead or disembodied pieces. Like the Christians and Jews who hung animal parts, martyrs' bones, or nails on themselves, a variety of Christians, Jews, and Muslims considered the body—even dismembered bodily parts—as transmitting power to those who came into contact with it. Indeed, that the story of Sahl and 'Āmir appears in Ma'mar b. Rāshid's chapter on "incantations, the eye, and blowing spittle" is a sign of the power with which such tiny bodily fragments as spittle might be endowed in late antiquity.

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<sup>12</sup> In the Mishnah manuscripts and in the Babylonian Talmud, it is Rabbi Meir who allows and the Sages who forbid these practices, as described here. On the other hand, the text in the Palestinian Talmud reads that Rabbi Meir forbids these practices while Rabbi Yose allows them. See: *Mishnah: The Artscroll Mishnah* 9:65 (ad. m. *Shab.* 6:10); Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *The Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order: Mo'ed. Tractates Šabbat and 'Eruvin* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 191, 193n.37, 222.

<sup>13</sup> See *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, s.v. "Amorites" (Norman K. Gottwald). This category will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

The themes that I examine in this dissertation include: (1) the distinctions drawn by late ancient Christians, Jews, and Muslims between “religion” and “magic,” (2) correlations between such distinctions and particular ritual usages of the body, and (3) the different representations of Muḥammad in early Islamic literatures’ explorations of these themes. I argue that the body was utilized in fifth- to ninth-century C.E. Christian, Jewish, and Islamic literatures as a site for defining what was acceptable ritual practice and what was detestable “sorcery”/“magic,” and thus as a site for mapping out licit and illicit usages of the divine. In defining this difference, Muslims deployed the body of the Prophet Muḥammad in ways that illustrated both his status as a divinely-inspired prophet, unlike other humans, and as a model for others’ ritual actions.

### **Outline of Chapters**

Chapter One explores some of the continuities between the conceptions of “magic” and the usages of the body found in early Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literatures, and then outlines the methodological standpoints from which I examine “magic” and “body” in this project as a whole. This chapter also introduces the particular parts of the body upon which I will focus: spittle and hair. As will become clear over the course of this chapter and the dissertation as a whole, these were corporeal objects that carried a degree of ideological significance disproportionate to their size and upon which often hinged the distinction between proper and improper ritual practice and thus between “religion” and “magic.”

Chapter Two examines stories from late ancient literature that describe the saliva and other bodily fluids of prophets, saints, and other especially holy or pious individuals as vehicles of miraculous power. Using a literary-historical approach, I situate *sīra* and *ḥadīth* narratives of

the Prophet Muḥammad's miracle-working saliva, breath, and bathwater within the milieu of Christian hagiographical literature of roughly the fifth to eighth centuries C.E. In this chapter, I conclude (1) that early Islamic representations of the Prophet Muḥammad were inflected by conceptions of holiness that circulated within late ancient Christian stories of holy persons and (2) that saliva functioned as a site of holy healing in late ancient Christian and Islamic literatures.

In Chapter Three, I read *ḥadīth* texts that record eighth-century Muslim scholars' opinions, from which I reconstruct a particular aspect of these scholars' construction of a distinctly Islamic ritual identity: the definition of Islamic healing rituals. The texts examined here indicate that eighth-century Kūfan scholars were particularly discomforted by the act of spitting (*naftḥ* or *tafl*) or blowing (*nafkḥ*) in the performance of healing incantations. Comparing the early Islamic attitudes towards spitting/blowing as a component of ritual healing to perspectives recorded in Tannaitic and Amoraic rabbinic literature, I argue (1) that spitting was marked as a sectarian component of healing activities by late ancient rabbinic Jews and (2) that Muslims in Kūfa may have been influenced by these Jewish attitudes in their own opposition to the act of spitting during incantations. We see in this chapter that—rather than an illustration or performance of holiness, as in Chapter Two—spitting was in some cases a ritual act that could place one outside of the accepted religious community.

In Chapter Four, I move from studying saliva and spitting to hair and the ways in which the different ritual usages of hair flirted on the border between religiously acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Examining two narrative phenomena found in early Islamic sources—the usage of the Prophet Muḥammad's hair for the procurement of blessings and the manipulation of the Prophet's hair for bringing curses upon him—I conclude (1) that the usage of even very small pieces of the body could display extremely different meanings and (2) that the usages of the

Prophet's hair for both blessing and cursing offer one example of the divergent perspectives on the Prophet and his body that circulated in the eighth century C.E. After identifying these different ideas about the Prophet in early Islamic literature, I turn to late ancient Christian and Jewish descriptions of saints', rabbis', and prophets' bodies and relics that suggest that these holy persons and objects occupied a paradoxical space between presence and absence.

## Chapter 1: Intersections between Religion, Magic, and the Body in Late Antiquity

The Prophet Muḥammad’s biography (*sīra*) characterizes the Meccan period of his career as a series of denials by his fellow Qurashīs of his prophetic status and their accusations against him of “[practicing] poetry, sorcery, soothsaying, and being possessed” (*al-shi‘r wa-l-siḥr wa-l-kihāna wa-l-junūn*).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the *sīra* stories describing his first revelations, Muḥammad himself bemoans his surprising visions using similar language, proclaiming “Woe is me, poet or possessed!” (*inna al-ab‘ada li-shā‘ir aw majnūn*)<sup>2</sup> and “I am afraid I am a soothsayer!” (*innī la-akhshā an akūna kāhin<sup>an</sup>*).<sup>3</sup> Only after a series of attestation events convince Muḥammad that his message is of divine origin, coming from “an angel and not a satan,” does he feel sure of his

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb Sīrat Rasūl Allāh: Das Leben Muhammed’s nach Muhammed Ibn Ishāq bearbeitet von Abd el-Malik Ibn Hishām*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1858-60), 183. Alfred Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 130 (adapted here). Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk [Annales]*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., 15 vols. in 3 series (1879-1901), 1/iii:1185. W. M. Watt and M. V. McDonald, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume 6: Muḥammad at Mecca* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 101.

<sup>2</sup> Worries of being “a poet or possessed” appear in Ibn Bukayr’s recension of Ibn Ishāq’s *sīra* and in al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīkh*, where the story is cited from Ibn Ishāq. Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq (attrib.), *Kitāb al-siyar wa’l-maghāzī*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 121-122 = Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq (attrib.), *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq al-musammāt bi-kitāb al-mubtada’ wa’l-mab‘ath wa’l-maghāzī*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh (Rabat: Ma‘had al-Dirāsāt wa’l-Abḥāth li’l-Ta’rīb, 1976), 101 (no. 140). al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/iii:1150-1151. Translated from al-Ṭabarī in Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 106-107 and in Watt and McDonald, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 71-2. For *ab‘ada*, see Lane, *Arab-English Lexicon*, 226. The story of Muḥammad bemoaning his fate has been “expunged” from Ibn Hishām’s version of the *sīra*, along with the related story of Muḥammad’s suicide attempt at the time of his first revelation. Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 108. Gregor Schoeler similarly states that, “in Ibn Hishām’s abridged version, these passages are eliminated,” whereas they appear in al-Ṭabarī’s and Ibn Bukayr’s “unabridged versions of the Ibn Ishāq recension.” Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 61-2.

<sup>3</sup> The worry about being a “soothsayer” appears in Ibn Sa’d’s *Ṭabaqāt*, along with a story that Muḥammad fears that he has a jinn (*innī akhshā an yakūna fīyī junun<sup>an</sup>*). Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/i:130. Schoeler argues that the “soothsayer” tradition may originate with ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr. Schoeler, *Biography of Muḥammad*, 51. Stephen Shoemaker takes issue with this ascription, but argues that it is a “very old tradition” in “In Search of ‘Urwa’s *Sīra*: Some Methodological Issues in the Quest for ‘Authenticity’ in the Life of Muḥammad,” *Der Islam* 85 (2011): 307-313. A similar story occurs before Muḥammad’s call to prophecy, when as a young man he hears a voice warning him not to touch an idol and he thus worries that he is possessed (*innī akhshā an yakūna bī lamam<sup>an</sup>*). Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/i:103.

prophetic office and spread his message more confidently.<sup>4</sup> Events like Muḥammad’s recognition by the Christian figure Waraqa b. Nawfal assuage worries about Muḥammad’s status and emphasize that he is not a poet, sorcerer, soothsayer, or possessed, but rather an authentic prophet in the line of the previous prophets sent to various peoples of the past.<sup>5</sup>

While the Quraysh do not hesitate to label Muḥammad a poet, soothsayer, or demon-possessed on several occasions in the *sīra*, their most consistent accusation is that Muḥammad is a “sorcerer” (*sāḥir*). In parallel passages in the *sīra*, two prominent Meccans (al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra and al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith, respectively) discuss with their fellows Qurashīs how to most effectively criticize Muḥammad’s activities.<sup>6</sup> Both men concede that Muḥammad does not actually exhibit the characteristic behaviors of poet, soothsayer, possessed man, or sorcerer. Yet when pressed by the Qurashīs on how he would choose to describe Muḥammad, al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra states:

The closest word to [call] him is if you were to say that he is a sorcerer. He has brought a message that is a sorcery by which he separates a man from his father, and from his brother, and from his wife, and from his family.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For the story of Muḥammad’s distinguishing between an angel and “a satan” with Khadīja’s help, see: Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 154; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 107; Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 133 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 113-4 (no. 159); al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/iii:1152-1153; Watt and McDonald, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 73.

<sup>5</sup> For discussions of these attestation narratives in the *sīra*, see: Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 103-110; Chase Robinson, “Prophecy and holy men in early Islam,” in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward, 241-62 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 244-7.

<sup>6</sup> Version describing al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra: Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 171; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 121; Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 151 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 131-2 (no. 196). Version describing al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith: Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 191; Guillaume, trans. *Life of Muhammad*, 135; Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 201 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 181-2 (no. 256).

<sup>7</sup> *Inna aqraba al-qawlī fī-hi li-an taqūlū sāḥir<sup>um</sup> jā’ a bi-qawlī<sup>um</sup> huwa siḥr<sup>um</sup> yufarriqu bi-hi bayna al-mar<sup>ī</sup> wa ibn<sup>ī</sup>-hi wa bayna al-mar<sup>ī</sup> wa akhī-hi wa bayna al-mar<sup>ī</sup> wa zawjat<sup>ī</sup>-hi wa bayna al-mar<sup>ī</sup> wa ‘ashīrat<sup>ī</sup>-hi.* A similar characterization of sorcery is given by al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra in the early *tafsīr* text ascribed to Muqātil b. Sulayman in a passage interpreting Q. 74:24. Muqātil b. Sulaymān b. Bashīr, *Tafsīr Muqātil bin Sulaymān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd, 3 vols. (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 3:415.

The Quraysh use similar words when warning the “poet of standing and intelligent man” al-Tufayl b. ‘Amr al-Dawsī about Muḥammad, saying that he “talks like a sorcerer separating a man from his father, his brother, or his wife.”<sup>8</sup> Referencing the disruptive effect that Muḥammad and his prophetic message have upon traditional religion and society in Mecca, the Quraysh ascribe the label “sorcerer” to this troublesome figure.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to his words/message, the Quraysh likewise dismiss as “sorcery” the miraculous signs produced by Muḥammad. For example, Muḥammad’s uncle and fierce opponent Abū Lahab says that Muḥammad has “bewitched” (*saḥara*) his guests when Muḥammad produces a feast that miraculously feeds a large group from a small amount of food.<sup>10</sup> On some occasions Muḥammad’s opponents acknowledge that his feats embody the greatest “sorcery” they have ever seen, as when Rukāna, “the strongest man among Quraysh,” says that he has “never seen greater sorcery” (*mā ra’aytu aṣhara min-hu qaṭṭu*) after Muḥammad defeats him in a wrestling match and is then able to move a tree with a verbal command.<sup>11</sup> A man of the Banū ‘Āmir says that he has “never seen greater sorcery than I have seen today” (*mā*

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 252. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 175.

<sup>9</sup> These descriptions of the effects of Muḥammad’s “sorcerous” message—with its disruptive effect upon familial relations—clearly echo the mythical story of sorcery’s beginnings amongst mankind at Q. 2:102, where sorcery (*al-sihr*) is described as that “by which they separate a man from his wife” (*yufarriqū bi-hi bayna al-mar’i wa jawjī-hi*). Michael Dols notes that al-Walīd’s description of a sorcerer’s message breaking up families likely draws upon “the reputation of magicians for casting spells that damaged family relations,” but “also recalls the criticism of early Christianity because the new religion often disrupted family loyalties.” Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 222-3. He does not note the usage here of Qur’ānic vocabulary. Qur’ān translations used herein are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur’an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), modified for context in some cases.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 146 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 127 (no. 189). al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/iii:1171-1172. Watt and McDonald, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 90. Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii: 124-5. Abū Nu’aym al-Isbahānī, *Kitāb Dalā’il al-nubuwwa* (Haydarābād: Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmānīyah, 1977), 364. Similar food miracles (without the charge of sorcery) appear in many sources, including: Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 672; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 452; Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 279 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 259-60 (no. 431). Muḥammad’s food miracles are discussed in Ignaz Goldzisher, “The Ḥadīth and the New Testament,” in *Muslim Studies*, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, ed. S. M. Stern, 2 vols. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967-71), 2:346-7; Tor Andræ, *Die person Muhammeds in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde* (Stockholm: Kungl. boktryckeriet. P. A. Norstedt & söner, 1918), 46-8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 258. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 178-179. See also Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii:97.



*ra'aytu ka-l-yawm ashāra*) after Muḥammad is able to call a cluster of dates to him and make it go back by his command.<sup>12</sup> While the impressiveness of these feats is enough for the Quraysh to grant them some ambivalent praise, they nonetheless continue to categorize Muḥammad as a “sorcerer” rather than a prophet.

The stories about the Meccans’ accusations often function in the *sīra* and other early Islamic literature as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (“occasions of revelation”) for the Qur’ānic *āyāt* that describe the Qur’ānic recipient (traditionally identified as the Prophet Muḥammad) being rejected by his contemporaries.<sup>13</sup> These *sīra* stories historicize the Qur’ān’s revelation by situating the revelation of specific verses in terms of the events of the Prophet’s life in Mecca and Medina.<sup>14</sup> For example, immediately following the story in which al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra says that Muḥammad is best called a sorcerer, the *sīra* relates that “God revealed concerning al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra in those of his [God’s] words” (*fa-anzalu Allāh<sup>u</sup> fī al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra fī dhālika min qawl<sup>i</sup>-hi*), then cites the verses of Q. 74:11-25, which reference a wealthy, obstinate disbeliever. At verses 24 and 25, this disbeliever evaluates the words of the Qur’ān: “He said, ‘This is just old sorcery, just the talk of a mortal!’”<sup>15</sup> According to the *sīra*, then, the speaker mentioned at Q. 74:24 is al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra: Through this narrative intervention, the Qur’ānic words are placed in al-Walīd’s mouth and he is identified as the specific disbeliever

<sup>12</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/iii:1146. Watt and McDonald, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 66-7 (adapted here).

<sup>13</sup> Accusations of sorcery against the Qur’ānic recipient: Q. 6:7, 10:2, 11:7, 21:3, 34:43, 37:15, 38:4, 43:30, 46:7, 52:15. On this theme see Constant Hamès, “La notion de magie dans Le Coran,” in *Coran et talismans: Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman*, ed. Constant Hamès (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2007), 18-24; Marilyn Waldman, *Prophecy and Power: Muhammad and the Qur’an in the Light of Comparison* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012), 53-6.

<sup>14</sup> John Wansbrough, *The Sectarial Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 10-11. Robinson, “Prophets and Holy Men.” Q. 17:47 (“You are only following a man bewitched”) is also explained in the context of Meccan opposition in Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 204; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 143.

<sup>15</sup> *Fa-qāla in hādihā illā sihr<sup>u</sup> yu’tharu*. In *hādihā illā qawl<sup>u</sup>-l-bashar<sup>i</sup>*. Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 171-2. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 122.

referenced in these verses. In this and other instances, the words of the Qur'ān are made to fit the particular circumstances of the life of Muḥammad, including his experiences of rejection.

The accusations of sorcery found in the Qur'ān are part of a more general Qur'ānic prophetic typology in which “every previous people to whom a messenger was sent also said, ‘A sorcerer, or maybe a madman!’” (Q. 51:52). The Qur'ān recounts the accusations of being “bewitched” leveled against the prophets Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb (Q. 26:153, 185), and frequently invokes the examples of Moses and Jesus being defamed for practicing/exhibiting “sorcery” (Q. 5:110, 7:109-132, 10:76-83, 17:101, 20:57-71, 26:34-51, 27:13, 28:36, 40:24, 43:49, 51:39, 61:6). At Q. 28:48, explicit comparison is drawn between the accusations of sorcery levelled at these past prophets and those that the receiver of Qur'ānic revelation similarly experiences:

Even now that our truth has come to them, they say, “Why has he not been given signs like those given to Moses?” Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Moses before? They say, “Two kinds of sorcery, helping each other,” and, “We refuse to accept either of them.”

Counterintuitively, the accusations of sorcery thus serve within the Qur'ān as further proof of its recipient's prophetic status and his continuity in the line of previous prophets.

Indeed this Qur'ānic theme finds many parallels in earlier Jewish and Christian literature, in which religion/prophesy is frequently and forcefully demarcated from magic/sorcery. In the Hebrew Bible and subsequent Jewish and Christian literatures, the opposition between sanctioned religious activities and unsanctioned “magic” characterizes the rhetoric of Jewish and Christian texts, in which Jewish and Christian holy figures are ideologically juxtaposed with, and/or narratively opposed by, “magicians”/“sorcerers.”<sup>16</sup> This theme is perhaps best exemplified

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<sup>16</sup> On this theme in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, see Brian Schmidt, “Canaanite Magic vs. Israelite Religion: Deuteronomy 18 and the Taxonomy of Taboo,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. P. Mirecki

in the stories of conflict between Moses and the Egyptian court magicians and between the apostle Peter and Simon Magus, but it appears within the stories of Joseph and Daniel as well.<sup>17</sup>

In Jewish and Christian texts, religious opponents are denigrated as “magicians”/“sorcerers” and thus any power or authority they might exhibit is dismissed as demonic or fraudulent.<sup>18</sup> By the same token, accusations of merely practicing “sorcery” are lodged against Jesus and the apostles by antagonists wishing to discredit them and to suggest that their power or knowledge comes not from divine assistance but from the demonic or the mundane.<sup>19</sup>

The distinction between prophet and sorcerer as found in the Qur’ān (and narratologically developed in the *sīra*) is thus part of what Peter Brown calls “a long tradition that prevailed in the Mediterranean” and that continued in late ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literatures about prophets and other holy persons such as saints and rabbis.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Brown suggests that,

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and M. Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 243-62; S. D. Ricks, “The Magician as Outsider in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 131-43; Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, ed., *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); David E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.23.2 (1980): 1507-57; Giuseppe Veltri, “The False Prophet and the Magician,” *Scritti in onore di Horacio Simian-Yofre S.J.*, ed. E. M. Obara and G. P. D. Succi (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2013), 343-57; Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> For Moses and the Egyptians, see: Exod. 7-9; Philo, *Vita Mosis* 1.92; Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.284-6; *Jubilees* 48:9-11. For Peter and Simon Magus, see Acts 8:9-24. The sorcerers (מְכַשְׁפִּים), and other ritual experts are unable to interpret dreams that Joseph and Daniel can discern: Gen. 41:8, 24; Dan. 2:2. Similar themes are found in Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 9-11, 19; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 4-6, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 13:6-11, 19:13-6.

<sup>19</sup> Jewish opponents explicitly label Jesus a “magician” (γόης, μάγος, πλάνος in different manuscripts) in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus/Acts of Pilate: Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, ed., *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 430-1. Justin Martyr says the Jews label Jesus a “magician” (μάγος). Justin, *Dial.* 69:6ff. In idem, *I Apol.* 30, Justin cites accusations of Jesus’ miracles being works of magic. On these texts and others, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 102-6; Graham N. Stanton, “Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophet Who Deceived God’s People?” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner, 164-180 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann, 1994). For accusations of sorcery made against the apostles in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, see: P. J. Achtemeier, “Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers in the Apocryphal New Testament,” in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 149-186 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976); François Bovon, “Miracles, Magic, and Healing in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” in *Studies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 260.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 19.

“the antithesis of saint and sorcerer underlies much of late ancient literature,” a contention we see manifested in a variety of late ancient texts.<sup>21</sup> Very similar accusations to those found within biblical literature, the Qur’ān, and the *sīra* occur in many Christian hagiographical texts: a saint’s “miracle-working being [charged as] nothing but sorcery” is a “standard narrative-pattern” in such texts, as is the contest of powers between the saint and the magician.<sup>22</sup> Late ancient Jewish literature likewise exhibits this opposition between holy person (in the form of the rabbi) and sorcerer and “rabbinic literature contains, as does the contemporary Christian hagiography, numerous tales” of contests between holy persons and magicians.<sup>23</sup>

The label of “sorcerer” (*sāḥir*) thus possesses a particular resonance and history within Near Eastern traditions, and it is likely these qualities that make it, in al-Walīd’s purported estimation, “the closest” to accurately characterizing Muḥammad. While the labels “soothsayer,” “poet,” and “possessed” are also flung at Muḥammad, the valences of these terms were not polemically marked in quite the same way as “sorcerer.” For example, while the position of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew W. Dickie, “Narrative-Patterns in Christian Hagiography,” *GRBS* 40 (1999): 86-7, 94. “Long and intimate duels with the local sorcerer were almost *de rigueur* in the life of a successful saint” according to Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 67. H.J. Magoulias notes that “the Saints, the conquerors over demonic forces, could themselves be accused of indulging in sorcery” and provides several examples. “The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries, A. D.: Sorcery, Relics and Icons,” *Byzantion* 37 (1967): 241ff. See also: Dols, *Majnūn*, 190, 233; Alexander Kazhdan, “Holy and Unholy Miracle Workers,” in Maguire, *Byzantine Magic*, 73-82. In addition to the instances of saints being accused of sorcery cited by Dickie, Magoulias, and Kazhdan, see Paul Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, 7 vols. (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890-97), 2:610 (ll. 4-7). Cited and translated in Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and Christian scholastic culture in late antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 34. Bedjan, ed., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, 2:254-8 [Tarbo], 565-6 [Pethion], 589, 596 [Anahid], 603 [Pethion]. Translated in S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 73-5, 82, 90, 95, 98. Brock and Harvey note “It is interesting that the accusation of sorcery is a recurrent one in the hagiographical texts emanating from Sasanid Iran.” Ibid., 65.

<sup>23</sup> Joshua Levinson, “Enchanting Rabbis: Contest Narratives between Rabbis and Magicians in Late Antiquity,” *JQR* 100 (2010): 55. Stories include Yannai and the innkeeper (*b. San.* 67b) and Rabbi Yohua ben Ḥanania and the *min* in Tiberias (*y. San.* 7.19 [25d]). See Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 392-401; idem, “Magical means for handling *minim* in rabbinic literature,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in the Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 267-79.

“soothsayer” (*kāhin*) is negatively charged in early Islamic texts, the ideological importance of such figures in late antiquity was apparently still powerful enough that soothsayers are ascribed a role alongside Jewish rabbis and Christian monks in attesting Muḥammad’s coming as a true prophet in the *sīra* stories.<sup>24</sup> The story of the conversion to Islam of the poet al-Ṭufayl b. ‘Amr al-Dawsī—and his manifestation of a miraculous “sign” to assist his conversion of others—similarly points to the *sīra*’s usage of the authoritative figure of the poet (*shā‘ir*) for attestative purposes.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the accusation of being “possessed” (*majnūn*) is damning, but complicated also in its connections to poetic and mantic power and revelation and in the jinn’s connection to the powers of the unseen world.<sup>26</sup>

All of these labels carry negative connotations and the distinctions between these often overlapping categories are not always clear. Yet the literary usage of soothsayers, poets, and jinn in attesting Muḥammad’s prophecy also indicates the continuing resonance in early Islamic literature of such figures as embodiments of some ambiguously respectable power. Conversely, “sorcerer” appears only as a term of derision in the *sīra* and no “sorcerer” is cited as affirming

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 130-134. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 90-93. Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 111-112 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 90-2 (no. 119-20). Tales of the soothsayers of ancient Arabian kingdoms predicting Muḥammad’s coming are found in: Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 9-11, 28; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 4-6, 695n.32; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/ii:909 (with an *isnād* from Ibn Ishāq); Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 694n.17. On soothsayers, see Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 53-5; *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, s.v. “Soothsayer” (Devin Stewart); Waldman, *Prophecy and Power*, 59-61. The continuing authority and relevance of “soothsayers” even after the advent of Islam is perhaps illustrated by commands found in *ḥadīth* books not to visit them or believe in the things they say: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:209-11 (no. 20346-51); Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:28 (23872, 28375); ‘Abd Allāh b. Wāḥb, *al-Jāmi‘ fi-l-ḥadīth*, 2:764-7 (nos. 683-7); al-Qāḍī Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām wa dhikr al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām wa-l-qaḍāyā wa-l-ahkām ‘an ahl al-bayt Rasūl Allāh*, 2 vols., ed. Aṣaf b. ‘Alī Aṣghar Fayḍī (Miṣr: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1389/1969), 2:483 (no. 1727); al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ. Musnad al-Imām al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb*, ed. Muḥammad Idrīs and ‘Āshūr bin Yūsuf (Beirut/Damascus: Dār al-Ḥikma; Oman: Maktabat al-Istiḳāma, 1415/1995), 371 (no. 971).

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 252-254. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 175-176. On poets: *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Shā‘ir” (T. Fahd, et al.); Waldman, *Prophecy and Power*, 56-59.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of ‘The Poets’ and the Qur’ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority,” in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. James L. Kugel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 75-199. Waldman, *Prophecy and Power*, 57. Dols, *Majnūn*, 216-9.

Muḥammad’s prophecy.<sup>27</sup> This label functions most appropriately as a polemical means for the Quraysh to discredit Muḥammad’s message, and narratively connects that disparagement both to earlier biblical/prophetic history (including the Qur’ān’s version of that history) and to more contemporary late ancient literary representations of the trials of holy people.

### Small Issues of Large Consequence: Spittle and Sorcery

Al-Walīd’s statement that Muḥammad is “closest” to being a sorcerer is predicated on the Prophet’s words and their divisive effects upon familial relations in Mecca. Yet this purported “closeness” is particularly interesting in light of the specific way that both he and al-Naḍr characterize the activities of “sorcerers.” In refuting the Quraysh’s labelling of Muḥammad as a sorcerer, al-Walīd states: “He is not a sorcerer. We have seen the sorcerers and their sorcery, and he [exhibits] no blowing spittle and no knots” (*mā huwa bi-sāḥir la-qad ra’aynā al-suḥḥār wa-siḥr<sup>a</sup>-hum fa-mā huwa bi-naftḥ<sup>i</sup>-hi wa-lā ‘aqd<sup>i</sup>-hi*). Al-Naḍr conveys the same idea: “He is not a sorcerer. We have seen the sorcerers, their blowing spittle and their knots” (*mā huwa bi-sāḥir qad ra’aynā al-saḥarat naftḥ<sup>a</sup>-hum wa-‘uqad<sup>a</sup>-hum*). Thus the reason cited for Muḥammad’s not in fact being a *sāḥir* is that he does not ritually manipulate either his own body or external objects—i.e. practice ritual(s) involving “blowing spittle and knots” (*naftḥ wa-‘uqad*)—that the Quraysh are said to find emblematic of such figures.

This characterization of the sorcerer’s activities, narratively placed in the mouths of the Quraysh, draws clearly upon the language of Q. 113:4, which warns against the “the evil of those

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<sup>27</sup> For example, a rabbi criticizes Muḥammad by stating: “He alleges that Solomon was a prophet, and by God he was nothing but a sorcerer.” Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 376. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 255. This story is itself a gloss on Q. 2:102. Guillaume translates *‘arrāfa* as “sorceress.” Ibid., 67. However, this word does not occupy the same semantic range as the root *s-ḥ-r*, but is actually closer to *kāhin* according to Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2016.

who blow spittle upon knots” (*wa min sharr<sup>i</sup> naffāthāt<sup>i</sup> fī-l-‘uqad<sup>i</sup>*). This phrase was understood by early Qur’ān interpreters to refer to the activities of sorcerers, as when al-Bukhārī glosses these words with the comment “the ones who blow spittle are sorcerers” (*wa al-naffāthāt al-sawāhir*).<sup>28</sup> The early *tafsīr* text ascribed to Muqātil b. Sulaymān states that this verse:

refers to sorcery and its devices—that is to say, an incantation that is a disobedience against God—i.e. those incantations that they blow into the knot, and the charm with which sorcery [is performed]. They [the *naffāthāt*] are the sorceresses who incite enchantments.<sup>29</sup>

In these interpretations, the vocabulary of “blowing spittle” and “knots” is clearly associated with the negatively charged category of “sorcery.” Indeed this association is evidenced not only in Qur’ānic exegesis but also in the characterization of sorcery in other genres of Islamic texts.<sup>30</sup>

While not explicitly labelled as such in the Qur’ān, the mention of “the evil of those who blow spittle upon knots” displays parallels with ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern characterizations of “magic” and “sorcery.” The ritual language and physical usage of knots for symbolically “binding” individuals goes back to ancient Babylonia and Egypt, and is associated

<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: ṭaba‘at<sup>um</sup> jadīdat<sup>um</sup> maḍbūṭat<sup>um</sup> muṣaḥḥaḥat<sup>um</sup> wa muḥarrasat<sup>um</sup>* (Damascus and Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1423/2002), 1458 (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 47* [chapter heading]).

<sup>29</sup> *Ya ‘nī al-sihr<sup>u</sup> wa ālāt<sup>u</sup>-hu, ya ‘nī al-ruqyat<sup>u</sup> allatī hiya li-llāh<sup>i</sup> ma ‘shiyat<sup>u</sup>, ya ‘nī bi-hi mā tanfuthna min al-ruqā fī-l-‘uqdat<sup>i</sup> wa-l-ākhdhat<sup>u</sup> ya ‘nī bi-hi al-sihr<sup>u</sup>. Fa-hunna al-sāhirāt<sup>u</sup> al-muhayyijāt<sup>u</sup> al-ukhādhāt<sup>u</sup>*. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 3:537-8.

<sup>30</sup> The sorcerers use *naftḥ* in the story of Jirjīs: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/ii:802-803; Moshe Perlmann, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume 4: The Ancient Kingdoms* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), 178-9. In one of the tenth-century C.E. *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*), it is stated that “People view that the sorcerer has recourse to spells from the saliva, the breath, and the like” (*wa innamā yurī al-rāqī yasta’īnu ‘alā al-ruqyat<sup>i</sup> bi-l-naftḥ<sup>i</sup> wa-l-nafkḥ<sup>i</sup> wa ghayr<sup>i</sup> dhālika*). Godefroid de Callataÿ and Bruno Halflants, ed. and trans., *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On Magic I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 156 (Eng.) and 101 (Arabic). Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 933) notes that “people commonly claim that sorcery affects the spirit of humans and further claim that the speech of sorcerers and their acts – such as incantations, blowing upon knots, and other types of magic [*al-ruqā wa-l-naftḥ fī-l-‘uqad wa aṣnāf al-sihr*] – affect the heart.” *Proofs of Prophecy*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2011), 181-2. A *ḥadīth* in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ* includes the statement that “if someone has tied a knot with an incantation in it, he has done sorcery” (*man ‘aqada ‘uqdat<sup>um</sup> fī-hā ruqyat<sup>um</sup> fa-qad saḥara*): ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:17 (no. 19772). This and similar texts will be discussed in chapter two.

with “witchcraft” and illicit divinatory activities in Deut. 18:10-1 and Isaiah 47:9, 12.<sup>31</sup> In Plato’s *Laws*, knots (καταδέσεις) appear alongside enchantments and incantations as actions that can be punished, even with death.<sup>32</sup> This usage of knots is known also in late ancient texts, such as several sixth- and seventh-century Syriac Christian synodal texts that condemn the usage of “knots” (ܩܘܒܐ) alongside other “magical” practices such as incantations, divination, auguries, amulets, and astrology.<sup>33</sup>

Conversely, the apotropaic usage of knots for repelling/binding antagonistic forces was also known in late antiquity, as in a Mishnaic ruling that allows children to wear knots in their clothes on the Sabbath.<sup>34</sup> In the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Abaye relates from his mother that “three [*qesharīm*, i.e. knots] arrest [illness], five cure [it], seven are efficacious even against witchcraft” (אם תלתא מוקמי חמשה מסו שבעה אפילו לכשפים מעלי) and that “all incantations that are repeated several times must contain the name of the patient's mother, and all knots must be on the left [side?]” (כל מנייני בשמא דאימא וכל קטרי בשמאלא).<sup>35</sup> In this usage of knots, their power to bind is turned against forces such as witchcraft.

<sup>31</sup> Marie-Louise Thomsen, “Witchcraft and Magic in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Biblical and Pagan Societies*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 37-8. Robert Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 142-4. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1939), 127. Solomon Gandz, “The Knot in Hebrew Literature, or from the Knot to the Alphabet,” *Isis* 14 (1930): 189-214. Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 159n.1. T. M. Johnstone, “Knots and Curses,” in *Arabian Studies III*, ed. R. B. Serjeant and R. L. Bidwell, 79-94 (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1976). *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, s.v. “Magic” (Gabriel Mandel Khān).

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Laws*, chapter 11 (933a-3). Cited in Veltri, “The False Prophet and the Magician,” 350-1.

<sup>33</sup> Chabot, ed., *Synodicon Orientale*, 106 (Joseph, canon 19), 116 (Ezekiel, canon 3), 150 (Isho’yahb, canon 14), 548-9 (Aba, canon 23). Cited in Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 416-7. Arthur Vööbus, ed. and trans., *The Synodicon in the West Syriac Tradition*, 4 vols. (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1975-6), 1:244 (Answers of Ja’qōb to Addai, no. 50), 2:4 (Giwargī, canon 16), 2:10 (Qyriaqos, canon 12).

<sup>34</sup> *m. Shab.* 6.6, 6.9. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 383, 411-2. Ulmer, *Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature*, 140, 162.

<sup>35</sup> *b. Shab.* 66b. *The Babylonian Talmud: translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of I. Epstein*. London: Soncino Press, 1978. Gandz, “Knot in Hebrew Literature,” 193n.13. Kuehn, *Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art*, 160n.17. On Abaye’s mother, see Rebecca Lesses,



Spittle too has a long history within Mediterranean and Near Eastern “magic” or “sorcery.” Like knots, the association between the ritual usage of saliva and “magic” is found in ancient Babylonian and Egyptian texts, as in an Akkadian anti-witchcraft tablet that recites “by the pure incantation of life, let witchcraft, drugs, spittle be off from him.”<sup>36</sup> Greco-Roman narratives also associate rituals involving saliva with practitioners of magic, as when the protagonist of Lucian’s *Menippus* describes the actions of a Babylonian magus (τινος τῶν μάγων): “After the spell he would spit into my face three times and then he went back without looking at any of the people we met.”<sup>37</sup> Such rituals are represented as among the stereotypical acts of “sorcerers” in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, where the philosopher Celsus (as reported to us by Origen) dismissively describes “the works of sorcerers who profess to do wonderful miracles ... who for a few obols make known their sacred lore in the middle of the market-place and drive daemons out of men and blow away diseases and invoke the souls of heroes ...”<sup>38</sup> Such ritual performance is also prescribed by ritual experts, as when the user of a love spell composed by a witch (*saga*) is commanded: “Sing it three times, and spit after each of the three singings.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly an exorcism text found in the so-called *Greek Magical Papyri* commands its user, “And I adjure you, the one who receives this conjuration ... while conjuring, blow once, blowing air from the tips of the feet up to the face, and it [the spell] will be assigned.”<sup>40</sup>

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“Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity,” *JAAR* 69 (2001): 344, 348, 362-4.

<sup>36</sup> Translated in Tzvi Abusch, “The Demonic Image of the Witch in Babylonian Literature,” in Neusner et al., *Religion, Science, and Magic*, 37. Thomsen, “Witchcraft and Magic in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 38. *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, s.v. “Magic” (Gabriel Mandel Khān).

<sup>37</sup> Lucian, *Menippus* 6-7. Translated in Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 185. Similar examples include: Lucian, *Pharsalia* 6.667ff.; Petronius, *Satyricon* 131.

<sup>38</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.68. Henry Chadwick, trans., *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 62-3.

<sup>39</sup> Tibullus, *Elegies* 1.2.42-66. Translated in Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 125.

<sup>40</sup> *PGM IV*. 3080-3086. Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 97. On this text see Fritz Graf, *Magic in the*

Mesopotamian incantation bowls commonly cite saliva and spitting/blowing within the context of the ritual invocation of curses and sorcery. These bowls, which can be roughly dated to the sixth and seventh centuries, illustrate what Shaul Shaked calls “a broad common denominator in the field of popular religious beliefs, around which members of different communities could be united.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the wide variety of scripts and client names on the bowls displays an interaction of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and other religious communities in these objects’ creation and usage as amuletic objects for the protection of homes and individuals against demonic entities.<sup>42</sup> Saliva and spitting appear frequently in the bowls, as, for example, in a bowl inscribed in Manichean Syriac script that seeks protection for a client against spirits, sorcerers, curses and spells and contains the following request: “Thus may [the client] be wiped away and may the saliva be annulled of any one who is born of a woman and who stands against him. May the power of Christ arise and help him.”<sup>43</sup> The request to “annul” the saliva suggests that saliva is a significant component of the curse itself.

Indeed in some cases saliva seems to be equated with a curse, as in a Mandaic bowl that describes demons’ activity: “The spit has been spat, and bitter are (the curses) which they have cursed.”<sup>44</sup> The bowl writer then commands the demons to “dissolve that which you have cursed

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*Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 109, 270n.73; Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian*, 88-9.

<sup>41</sup> Shaul Shaked, “Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia,” *JSAI* 21 (1997): 106.

<sup>42</sup> “Proper names and religious referents in the texts themselves testify to the mixed religious and ethnic population of Sasanian Iraq. There were Jews, Mandaeans, Zoroastrians, Christians, and polytheists, divided ethnically between Aramaeans and Persians, sometimes in the same household ... Polytheist, Jewish, proto-Mandaean, Zoroastrian, and Christian content tend to be mixed in the same text, two or more of these being represented. This mixture of religious content might indicate either the presence of different religious traditions in the same household or the existence of syncretistic sorcerers.” Michael G. Morony, “Magic and Society in Late Sasanian Iraq,” in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 94-5. See also Tapani Harviainen, “Syncretistic and Confessional Features in Mesopotamian Incantation Bowls,” *Studia Orientalia* 70 (1993): 29-37.

<sup>43</sup> Shaul Shaked, “Manichaeic Incantation Bowls in Syriac,” *JSAI* 24 (2000): 63 (Eng.), 75 (Syr.). Shaked suggests that the bowl is intended for a Christian client based on the presence of crosses and specifically Christian phrases. *Ibid.*, 63-4.

<sup>44</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1967), 164-7.

and uproot that which you have spat!”<sup>45</sup> A Jewish Aramaic bowl describes the protection sought for a client’s family and possessions:

They [the clients] are sealed and counter-sealed from a demon ... from evil sorceries/sorcerers, from an evil eye and evil envy, from an open space, from a plague that plagued, from the spittle of mouths and all ...and all thoughts and from scary things ... by day, and anything evil. They are all sealed and countersealed in the name of YH YHWH Sebaot. Amen amen, selah, hallelujah hallelujah.<sup>46</sup>

Here “the spittle of mouths” appears alongside demons, plagues, sorceries, and the evil eye, equating the spittle with such dark forces. This sentiment is likewise found in another Jewish Aramaic bowl that reads:

Save (?) (him) from evil sorceries and magic practices and oaths and moaning, from the places (here) and beyond, and from spells and from black (rites) and from spittle and from vows and incantations of all the children of Adam.<sup>47</sup>

In these bowls, we thus find evidence that Christians, Mandaean, and Jews in Sassanian Mesopotamia associated spit/spitting with sorcerous activity in at least some contexts, and that the ritual activity of spitting carried some highly charged connotations.

Such charged connotations for spitting appear also in early Islamic texts that cite incantations to use for protection against demons and other evil forces. For example, an incantation related from the Shī‘ī Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) includes the formula:

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., with a parallel in another bowl at 168-9.

<sup>46</sup> Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), 108-9. An image of the bowl is found at *ibid.*, 207.

<sup>47</sup> J. B. Segal and E. C. D. Hunter, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Publications, 2000), 52.

In the name of the great God, I seek protection from the magnificent God for X [*fulān*]... from jinn and humans, from Arabs and non-Arabs, from their spittle, their wrong/evil behavior, and their breath ...<sup>48</sup>

With the mention of spittle (*naftḥ*) and breath (*nafkḥ*) alongside wrong/evil behavior (*baghy*), we see here a reification of bodily products as carriers of negative forces similar to that on view in the Mesopotamian incantation bowls. In *aḥādīth* related from the Prophet Muḥammad, a similar formula appears in the context of seeking God's aid against evil forces at the beginning of one's prayer: "O God! I seek your protection from Satan, from his spittle, his breath, and his slander."<sup>49</sup> Again we see the mention of spittle (*naftḥ*) and breath (*nafkḥ*), here those of Satan, as objects with negative force that must be fought against. Spittle and breath seem almost coterminous with Satan's power, much like the equation of spittle with sorcery and witchcraft that appears in the incantation bowls. These formulae seeking God's protection from spittle and breath are indeed much like the texts in the incantation bowls that also explicitly mention such corporeal products as conveyers of evil.

### What Makes a Sorcerer Sorcerous?

By saying that Muḥammad does not engage in practices involving spittle and knots, the *sīra* narrative serves to disassociate the Prophet from sorcery, using the Quraysh's own words to attest that he cannot actually be a sorcerer. Yet while the absence of rituals involving spittle and

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<sup>48</sup> *Bi-smi Allāh al-jalīl u 'īdhu fulān<sup>an</sup> bi-Allāh al-'azīm ... min al-jinn wa-l-ins wa min al-'arab wa-l-'ajam wa min naftḥ-him wa baghy-him wa nafkḥ-him*. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 8 vols., ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1983), 2:570.

<sup>49</sup> *Allahumma innī a 'ūdhu bi-ka min al-Shayṭān min naftḥ-hi wa nafkḥ-hi wa hamz-hi*. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 2:82-4 (nos. 2572, 2573, 2580, 2581). This formula also appears in a prayer ascribed without *isnād* to the important Companion 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās (d. 68/686-8) in: 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi' fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:675 (no. 584).

knots in Muḥammad’s life is stated quite clearly by the Quraysh in the *sīra*, many early Islamic texts depict Muḥammad engaging in several activities with bodily fluids produced from his mouth, variously termed *naḥṭh*, *taḥḥl*, *buṣāq*, *nukhāma*, or *rīq*. In a variety of narratives in *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature, Muḥammad’s bodily fluids function as miraculous proof of his prophethood by curing disease, exorcising demons, splitting rocks, and turning salty waters sweet. Although Muḥammad does not combine his bodily liquids with knots, he does use his bodily products (frequently termed *naḥṭh*) for ritually efficacious purposes, despite al-Walīd’s and al-Naḍr’s claims that Muḥammad’s actions involve neither spittle nor knots.

Rather than a sorcerous act, the Prophet’s spitting appears in these sources as a manifestation of his prophetic office. For example, the following story appears in Ibn Hishām’s version of Ibn Ishāq’s *sīra* text:

I have heard some stories about the digging of the trench in which there is an example of God’s justifying his apostle and confirming his prophetic office, things which the Muslims saw with their eyes. Among these stories is one that I have heard that Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh used to relate: When they were working on the trench a large rock caused great difficulty, and they complained to the apostle. He called for some water and spat in it (*taḥḥal fī-hi*); then he prayed as God willed him to pray; then he sprinkled the water on the rock (*naḍaḥa dhālika-l-mā’a ‘alā tilka-l-kudya*). Those who were present said, “By Him who sent him as a prophet with the truth, it was pulverized as though it were soft sand so that it could not resist axe or shovel.”<sup>50</sup>

The ritual usage of spitting (in this case *taḥḥal*) is here clearly not represented as a manifestation of the Prophet’s sorcery but rather is described “confirming his prophetic office” (*taḥqīq*)

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<sup>50</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 671. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 451. The identity of the narrator is unclear since a collective *isnād* is given by Ibn Ishāq.

*nubuwwat<sup>i</sup>-hi*). This is one of many such stories, which are often placed in “proofs of prophecy” (*dalā’il al-nubuwwa*) collections that cite miracles illustrative of Muḥammad’s prophetic status.

In some cases, Muḥammad’s use of his saliva is explicitly cited in early Islamic legal debates as justification for the practice of rituals involving spitting, which seems to have been a controversial topic in the early Islamic period. Several early eighth-century Muslim jurists describe the usage of spit in healing incantations as a “detestable” practice, as, for example, in the chapter on “Those Who Found it Detestable That One Blow Spittle during Incantations” (*man kāna yakrahu an yanfithu fī-l-ruqā*) in Ibn Abī Shayba’s (d. 235/849) *Muṣannaḥ*. Yet the *Muṣannaḥ* also includes a chapter titled “Those Who Allowed the Blowing of Spittle during Incantations” (*man rakkhasha fī-l-naḥḥ fī-l-ruqā*) that includes a series of stories relating Muḥammad’s use of his spittle in healing activities, as well as a *ḥadīth* stating explicitly that “the Prophet used to blow spittle during his incantation” (*anna al-nabiyya kāna yanfuthu fī-l-ruqya*).<sup>51</sup> These reports point to debates over whether Muslims are allowed to use spittle in their own ritual activities. In that context, the Prophet’s example was invoked to justify such practices.

The questionable status of spitting continued to be discussed by Muslim jurists in later centuries. Reviewing the traditions about Q. 113 in his thirteenth-century *tafsīr* work *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkām al-Qur’ān*, the Mālikī scholar al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) cites many of the opinions found in Ibn Abī Shayba’s chapters on blowing spittle during incantations, as well as a few that do not appear therein.<sup>52</sup> To resolve the disagreement over whether this activity is acceptable Islamic practice, al-Qurṭubī cites the *sunna* of the Prophet as manifested in the *aḥādīth* in which the Prophet heals with his spittle and the one stating that “the Prophet used to blow spittle in his

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<sup>51</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8: 34-36 (nos. 23905-14).

<sup>52</sup> Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd, 20 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, 1967), 20:258-9. It may be that the *akhbār* that do not appear in our extant version of Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḥ* were present in other recensions. Al-Qurṭubī does not cite Ibn Abī Shayba here but it seems very likely that he drew upon his work, given the parallel *akhbār* appearing in both texts.

incantation.” Discussing some of these same reports “cited by Ibn Abī Shayba and others” (*akhraja dhālika Ibn Abī Shayba wa ghayr<sup>u</sup>-hu*), the Shāfi‘ī scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) in his commentary on al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* suggests that “what is reprehensible is the spittle [*naftḥ*] of sorcery and of the people of error/falsehood, but no reprehensibility adheres in spittle generally” (*al-madhmūm<sup>u</sup> mā kāna min naftḥ<sup>i</sup> al-suḥrat<sup>i</sup> wa ahl<sup>i</sup> al-bāṭil<sup>i</sup> wa lā yalzamu min-hu dhamm<sup>u</sup> al-naftḥ<sup>i</sup> muṭlaq<sup>an</sup>*), citing as proof “the trustworthy traditions” (*al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*) in which the Prophet or a Companion uses saliva in a ritual activity.<sup>53</sup> As witnessed in the continuing citation of earlier debates in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the usage of saliva seems to have caused some consternation among early Muslims who sought to identify appropriate and acceptable ritual practices. Stories of the Prophet were used to justify activity that in some circumstances was associated with sorcery and contemptible practice.

Why were bodily fluids—and particularly Muḥammad’s bodily fluids—of such consequence in these different contexts? I suggest that we read these sources as traces of the debates in the early Muslim communities of the eighth and ninth centuries C.E. regarding the distinction between religiously acceptable rituals and rituals tainted with illicit ‘magic’ or ‘sorcery.’ The ways in which early Muslims ideologically engaged with Muḥammad’s (and their own) usages of spittle display some of the work that was being done to distinguish properly Islamic healings, prayers, and other bodily rituals from those done with ‘magic.’ The *sīra* testimony that Muḥammad exhibited “no blowing spittle or knots” attempts to distance Muḥammad from sorcerers by making clear that he did not participate in certain rituals associated with their craft. Spit functioned as a marker of sorcery in some ritual contexts, as we

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<sup>53</sup> Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi-sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī and Muḥibb al-Dīn Khaṭīb, 14 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1987/1407), 10:220.

have seen, and the effort to disassociate Muḥammad from rituals involving spittle and/or knots is thus also an effort to disassociate him from sorcery.

It was extremely difficult, however, for early Muslims to draw such distinctions with precision, since the boundaries between religion and magic were open to negotiation in late antiquity, as they are in all periods. Writing about the definition of acceptable ‘medicine’ among early Muslims, Lawrence Conrad notes that “the difference between medicine and magic, the pious and the blasphemous, depends very much on how such terms are defined and where boundaries between them are set ... all this posed serious problems.”<sup>54</sup> This problem is illustrated quite clearly by the traditions about Muḥammad’s spittle: while early Muslims often seem to have characterized activity involving spittle as sorcery or sorcery-like, Muḥammad’s performance of such activity was complicated. Instead of treating Muḥammad’s spitting as evidence of his proclivity towards ‘sorcery,’ stories of Muḥammad’s saliva take part in the larger hagiographic representation of Muḥammad found in early Islamic biographical and *ḥadīth* texts, and might even legitimate other Muslims’ practice. Muḥammad’s saliva thus does double work in many early Islamic texts: its absence distinguishes him from sorcerers in some contexts, whereas its miraculous presence serves as evidence of his prophetic status and demonstrates his example for others.

The human body in general—and Muḥammad’s body in particular—provided a significant ideological canvas upon which early Muslims painted very different, sometimes contradictory messages. Like spittle, hair also had more than one meaning in early Islamic texts, some acceptable and others not. For example, in an unusual and likely quite early *sīra* story, Muḥammad himself falls prey to sorcery when an enemy acquires and ritually manipulates

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<sup>54</sup> Lawrence I. Conrad, “Arab-Islamic Medicine,” in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, vol. 1, ed. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, 676-727 (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 683.



strands of his hair. In this narrative, Muḥammad's hair acts as a source of weakness and his suffering offers a tangible proof of the vulnerability of the human body to the dangerous power of sorcery. The Prophet is healed only when the magical material, including his hair, is recovered and destroyed.<sup>55</sup> This story highlights the need for maintenance and control of the body, even its smallest parts, treating small corporeal pieces as gateways to the practice of sorcery and the experience of being bewitched. Indeed, even the Prophet himself is portrayed as vulnerable to the danger of sorcery and he relies upon divine intervention to relieve his suffering.

Conversely, other early Islamic sources portray the Prophet's hair as a source of strength and holy power. Functioning as a holy relic endowed with charismatic power (*baraka*), Muḥammad's hair confers military victory on its possessor, provides healing to those who touch it, and intercedes with God for those buried with it. In these stories, the Prophet's hair serves as a vibrant object emanating holiness to those around it and illustrates the power residing in even the smallest pieces of the Prophetic body.

The different functions of Muḥammad's spittle and hair point to the ambiguity of the distinction between religion and magic in early Islamic sources, and to the ways in which both descriptors could be mapped onto particular pieces and ritual usages of the body. When is spitting sorcerous? When does hair provide a blessing, and when a curse? The religio-magical manipulation of the body is mapped onto the Prophet's body and its fragments in these stories, displaying the body's perilous position on the border between religion and magic, holiness and heresy, health and illness. The confusion of corporeality—including the Prophet's corporeality—is on full display in these stories that seem to complicate the conceptions of what the body can, and should, be used for.

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<sup>55</sup> Some versions of this narrative connect the Prophet's recovery from bewitchment to Gabriel's revelation to him of Q. *sūras* 113 and 114: the *mu'awwidhatayn* ("the two protecting ones"), *sūras* understood to exude apotropaic power against the forces of sorcery and other evil forces.

This dissertation will outline the ways in which spittle and hair are recalled in different contexts in early Islamic literature and will explore the ideological issues at play regarding the elusive status of bodily products and bodily rituals in late antiquity. By situating stories about the Prophet Muḥammad’s saliva and hair in the context of similar traditions found Jewish and Christian literature of roughly the fifth through ninth centuries, and in terms of the evolving and differing representations of the Prophet in the Arabic literature of the first Islamic centuries, I will explore the usage of these stories about Muḥammad in defining him as an authentic prophet without any taint of sorcery, and in validating and defining proper Islamic ritual practices that were distinguished from illicit sorcery. This will allow an examination of the complicated intersections between religion, magic, and the body in the late ancient Near East in the centuries in which Islamic traditions began to emerge in dialogue with the other religious traditions of this geographical area and historical period.

### **Magic and Body: A Discussion of Terms**

In my treatment of magic in late antiquity, I draw upon the body of scholarship from the past century that has questioned any static or essential distinction between beliefs, practices, and texts that are labelled as “magical” as opposed to “religious.” Instead of reading and using such terms uncritically, more recent scholarship is characterized by a “growing consensus that such labels as ‘magic’ are inseparable from their pejorative use in the past”<sup>56</sup> and examines the

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<sup>56</sup> Naomi Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), xiv. Idem, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1-6.

category “magic” as “a new discourse of alterity that emerged in Greece in the fifth century BCE and persisted as a marginalizing strategy until the modern period.”<sup>57</sup>

In my understanding, magician/magic does not describe some essential characteristic of a person or act but instead serves as “a locative or relational category [that] serves to differentiate between the person(s) labeling and the person(s) so labelled,” much like the attachment of the label “heretical” to beliefs, practices and actors regarded as insufficiently “orthodox.”<sup>58</sup> As when the Quraysh place Muḥammad in the category of “sorcerer,” the labelling of an act, person, or object as “magical” is dependent upon “the culturally governed behavioral norms of the persons involved, their relative social locations, and the complex particularities of the persons involved” and is bound up with the identification of those who possess the authority to impose such labels and the concentrations of power that such labeling draws upon and reinforces.<sup>59</sup> While there is often little or no intrinsic difference between activities and beliefs labelled ‘magical’ or ‘religious,’ these categories matter and have ramifications both for those who impose them and for those upon whom they are imposed.<sup>60</sup>

These assertions do not mean something as simple as “magic is religion” or vice versa, but that the distinction between these categories was and is always contextual and contested, as we see quite clearly in the competing accusations of ‘sorcery’ lodged between different groups

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<sup>57</sup> Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1. For an overview of scholarship on ‘magic’ from the past century, see *ibid.*, 4-12.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Garrett, “Light on a Dark Subject and Vice Versa: Magic and Magicians in the New Testament,” in Neusner et al., *Religion, Science, and Magic*, 144.

<sup>59</sup> Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 17-8. David Frankfurter, “Beyond Magic and Superstition,” in *A People’s History of Christianity. Volume 2: Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Virginia Burrus, 255-84 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 257ff.

<sup>60</sup> Stratton notes that “magic is *constructed* through shared belief: once the concept exists in a particular culture, it acquires power, forever altering the way certain practices or people are viewed ... The practices themselves are neutral ... Certain practices become magic only by the shared definition or understanding of people in that society ... magic becomes real when the concept of it exists and people in that society live and act in such a way as to realize that concept through their actions.” *Naming the Witch*, 11-2. See also Alan F. Segal, “Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition,” in *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 99-100. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 3 notes “any ritual action could be labeled ‘magic’ ... entire religions were defined as ‘magic.’”

and individuals in late antiquity.<sup>61</sup> Recent scholarship insists that we do not simply reproduce uncritically the same categories and distinctions—orthodox and heretic, religious and magical—used by our sources, but rather examine what was at stake in the lines drawn by these labels.<sup>62</sup> The binary oppositions reflected in these categories were not only literary topoi in late antiquity (as in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts I examined above), but rather such literary representations offer one instantiation of a larger set of processes distinguishing proper from improper (and often “magical”) behavior and power: “debates about who was permitted to engage in [rites, rituals, and other activities] and who was not, and what the use of divine power implied.”<sup>63</sup> Much like “idolatry” and “heresy”—concepts that were intimately tied to the discourse of “magic” in late antiquity—“magic” was an oppositional category called upon in order to deride practices, objects, and individuals.<sup>64</sup>

This perspective is particularly significant and useful for thinking about holy men, healing rituals, and bodily relics, each of which were alternately understood (and labelled) as embodiments of licit and pious religion or of abhorrent and impious magic. The holy men of certain traditions might be labelled sorcerers or charlatans by others: instead of signs of holy power, the miracles and other signs of power performed by these individuals might be said to come from the control of demons or other “false” entities or to be simple shams. The rabbinic

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<sup>61</sup> Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 3, 17-8.

<sup>62</sup> Segal, “Hellenistic Magic,” 103. Garrett, “Light on a Dark Subject,” 148-52. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, xii. Garrett, “Light on a Dark Subject,” 144, 146.

<sup>64</sup> On accusations of idolatry in “monotheist polemic,” see Gerald Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67-87. On the connections between conceptions of idolatry, heresy, magic, and the demonic in late antiquity, see Peter Brown, “Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970); Garrett, *Demise of the Devil*; Giuseppe Veltri, “The False Prophet and the Magician”; Brigitte (Rivka) Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and the Greek Concept of Magic,” *JSJ* 27.3 (1996): 295-6.

charge of “practicing sorcery” (כִּשְׁשֵׁף, *kishshesh*) against Jesus is one example;<sup>65</sup> the Christian categorization of the pagan holy man/philosopher Apollonius of Tyana as a “sorcerer” (γόνης) is another.<sup>66</sup> Healing rituals were similarly contested territory, with medical assistance rhetorically linked either to divine or demonic intervention. John Chrysostom, for example, is convinced that “sorcery” lies behind Jewish healings in the synagogues of fourth-century Antioch,<sup>67</sup> early Islamic texts are ambivalent about the healing power of incantations and amulets, sometimes labelling them sorcery (*sihr*) or idolatry (*shirk*).<sup>68</sup> Finally, the usages of bodily relics were sites of disagreement: Christians were met with Jewish and Muslim accusations that “you pray to and worship dry and withered bones” (כִּי לַעֲבוֹדָתְכֶם לֵבֵי יְדָיִם יְבֵשִׁים וְעוֹצְמוֹת יְבֵשִׁים),<sup>69</sup> and some fellow Christians discouraged others’ relic practices, as when the sixth-century Synod of Isho‘yahb I forbids wearing or healing with “images of the bones of the saints or the bones of the saints themselves” (וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּמְּשׁוּ בְּצִלְמֵי עוֹצְמוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּמְּשׁוּ בְּעוֹצְמוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים) in the same canon in which it bans divination, auguries, [magical] knots, amulets, and astrology.<sup>70</sup> In this dissertation, I

<sup>65</sup> *b. Sanh.* 43a-b, *b. Sanh.* 107b, *b. Sot.* 74a. On these passages and manuscript evidence see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 35-40, 64, 137, 139-40, 155n.2.

<sup>66</sup> Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem* 39.3, 42.2. A compendium of ancient testimonia to Apollonius, including from Christian commentators, is found in Christopher P. Jones, ed., *Philostratus: The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005-6), 3:83-143. Jas Elsner, “Beyond Compare: Pagan Saint and Christian God in Late Antiquity,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 655-83. Christopher P. Jones, “Apollonius of Tyana in Late Antiquity” in *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism*, ed. Scott F. Johnson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 49-66. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 90-1.

<sup>67</sup> John Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.*, 8.6.6, 8.7.5, 8.8.5.

<sup>68</sup> This will be extensively discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>69</sup> A. P. Hayman, ed., *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*, 2 vols. (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1973), 13.1. The unpublished *Disputation between a Monk of Bêt Hālê and an Arab Notable*, composed in the late Umayyad period, similarly represents a Muslim stating to a Christian “we do not worship the cross, nor the bones of martyrs, nor images as you do.” Sidney H. Griffith, “Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Hālê and a Muslim Emir,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3:1 (2000). Gerrit J. Reinink, “The Veneration of Icons, the Cross, and the Bones of the Martyrs in an Early East-Syrian Apology against Islam,” in *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Dimitrij Bumazhnov, Emmanouela Grypeou, Timothy B. Sailors, and Alexander Toepel (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 329-42.

<sup>70</sup> Chabot, ed., *Synodicon Orientale*, 150 (Isho‘yahb, canon 14). Cited in Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 417n.136. Gillian Clark has noted that “using a martyr’s relics to invoke his or her help might look suspiciously similar” to certain necromantic practices often labelled sorcerous in Mediterranean society. Gillian Clark, “Translating relics: Victricius of Rouen and fourth-century debate,” *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001): 171-2. Certain relic practices are criticized in: Vööbus, ed., *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 1:199 (Answers of

explore some of the conflicting discourses surrounding these people, practices, and objects in late antiquity.

A factor that these phenomena all share is an involvement of/with the body: the miraculous bodies of holy men, the maintenance of bodily health through ritual means, and the bodily remains of martyrs and saints. Recent anthropological, sociological, and literary scholarship has drawn attention to the importance of the human body for both social and individual experience. Marcel Mauss and other theorists suggest that the body is a “*tabula rasa*”: without any unmediated significance, its actions and parts take on meaning only through the interpretations of the society within which the individual operates.<sup>71</sup> The body is thus “good to think with” in symbolic terms, and scholars such as Mary Douglas have examined ways in which “the symbols based on the human body are used to express different social experiences.”<sup>72</sup>

Additionally, the body has emerged as a crucial site of analysis because all human experience (including religion) is performed with and mediated through the body.<sup>73</sup> As Meredith McGuire states, “Human bodies matter, because those practices—even interior ones, such as contemplation—involve people’s bodies, as well as their minds and spirits.”<sup>74</sup> Yet the importance of the surrounding culture is still paramount on the level of individual experience as well, and the work of Pierre Bourdieu and others has demonstrated that a society’s ideas are unconsciously embodied in daily practices, both performing and creating a “socially informed

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Jōhannān to Sargīs, no. 12), 1:241 (Answers of Ja‘qōb to Addai, no. 37); Arthur Vööbus, ed. and trans., *Syriac and Arabic Documents regarding legislation relative to Syrian asceticism* (Stockholm: Etse, 1960), 32 (Rules of Rabbūlā for the Monks, no. 22), 99 (Rules of Gīwargī, no. 1), 104 (Canons of Qūriaqos, no. 20).

<sup>71</sup> Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 70-88. Margaret Lock, “Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practice and Knowledge,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 135.

<sup>72</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Vintage, 1973), vii. For an overview of scholarship, see Lock, “Cultivating the Body,” 135-6; Meredith B. McGuire, “Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (1990): 288-90.

<sup>73</sup> Idem, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 234, citing Merleau-Ponty. Idem, “Religion and the Body,” 285. Lock, “Cultivating the Body,” 133, 137-8.

<sup>74</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 98ff., see also 13, 119.

body,” such that body and society are mutually implicated in individual experience and action.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Michel Foucault emphasizes in his work on “technologies of the self” that individuals often partake in purposeful activities to alter/affect physically the body in order to reach “a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” according to communal standards.<sup>76</sup> As Courtney Bender writes, “both the self and the social world are constitutively interlinked, made for and by the other ... Religious and all other practices are thus *socially* embodied.”<sup>77</sup> The ritual usages of the body are “neutral” and it is the socially transmitted meanings with which particular actions are imbued that allow categories such as “religious” or “magical” to be ascribed (either by others or by oneself) to bodily movements or parts.<sup>78</sup> According to this understanding, the body appears as a variable, malleable, and openly interpretable thing—simultaneously subject and object—to which society and experience ascribe meaning(s).

Over the last two decades, such scholarship has been used to examine the place of the body in late ancient Christianity and Judaism.<sup>79</sup> Peter Brown, Elizabeth Clark, Patricia Cox Miller, Georgia Frank, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Daniel Boyarin, and many others have successfully brought to bear the insights of theorists of the body and bodily practice(s) like Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Catherine Bell, Michel Foucault, and Anthony Synnott for Christian and

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<sup>75</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 94, 124, 218n.44.

<sup>76</sup> Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 225. Cited by Shahzad Bashir, “Body,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 79-80.

<sup>77</sup> Courtney Bender, “Practicing Religions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 280 (emphasis added), 283-4.

<sup>78</sup> Garrett, “Light on a Dark Subject,” 146-7.

<sup>79</sup> A useful collection of recent work in this direction is given in Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 185n.2. In his study of Mesopotamian Christian and rabbinic academies, Adam Becker notes that “the human body is the fundamental site of ritualization” and emphasizes the “embodied practice and embodied experience of the ancient school.” Becker, *Fear of God*, 206-9, citing Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 202-4.

Jewish sources of the fourth through seventh centuries C.E. Attention to the embodied nature of religious practice and to the bodily imagery found in many of these literary sources has allowed greater insight into the daily practices and ideological worlds of late ancient Jews and Christians and different viewpoints into the histories of these religious traditions than is provided in transcriptions of their theological debates and abstractions.

During the same time period, a series of scholars has sought to situate the emergence of Islam within the context of late ancient history. Drawing upon the pioneering efforts of Islamicists like John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook to subject the sources for early Islamic history to close scrutiny, scholars like Fred Donner, Robert Hoyland, Gerald Hawting, Gabriel Reynolds, Chase Robinson, Thomas Sizgorich, Stephen Shoemaker, Nancy Khalek, and Krisztina Szilágyi have demonstrated that early Islamic ideas, practices, and literatures have close connections to and continuities with those found among Jews and Christians in the centuries preceding and during the Arab conquests. Rather than relying solely upon biblical literatures for Jewish and Christian parallels to early Islamic texts, these scholars have drawn upon a vast array of sources in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Hebrew, Ethiopic, and other languages that provide more chronologically proximate evidence of the types of ideas, practices, and literatures that circulated in the Near East in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. In so doing, they have accumulated a sizeable body of evidence for the examination of “the obvious fact that the formation of Islamic civilization took place in the world of Late Antiquity.”<sup>80</sup>

This project relies strongly upon both of these scholarly trends and utilizes their insights to suggest that the body offers a particularly useful lens through which to examine the discourse

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<sup>80</sup> Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), vii.



of religion and magic in late antiquity. Many of the efforts at demarcating religion from magic in late ancient sources involve distinguishing proper from improper usages of the body. On one level this involves identifying acceptable ritual movements and manipulations of the human body (both the living body as well as the remains of the dead).<sup>81</sup> In demarcating acceptable healing rituals, questions are asked regarding forms of bodily ritual, the usage of spoken words, and the deployment of objects (both bodily and non-corporeal). On another (but certainly intricately related) level, the effort to distinguish proper from improper usages of the body involves identifying whose bodies are endowed with the authority to perform certain types of ritual, and thereby to exercise certain forms of ritual/religious authority.<sup>82</sup> It is here that the identification of holy men and holy relics—and the discrimination of these from sorcerers and lifeless/demonic objects—is a particularly pertinent point of contention in our sources. In all of these cases, usages of the body in late antiquity had the potential to be marked as problematic and irreligious, and often labelled as performances of “magic.”

In this study, I examine the body (broadly defined) and the ways that certain deployments thereof were marked as positive or negative, often through the discourse of “magic,” in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literature of roughly the fifth through ninth centuries C.E. I treat both narrative and legalistic literature in which one finds descriptions of both exceptional bodies—those of martyrs, saints, rabbis, and prophets—and average laypeople’s bodies. In this process, I

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<sup>81</sup> In the inaugural issue of the journal *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Michael D. Bailey notes: “How various cultures, societies, or groups perceive body functioning in and being affected by ritual could be an important way for scholars of magic to analyze their subjects.” Bailey, “The Meanings of Magic,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1 (2006): 18. Catherine Bell emphasizes the power relationships involved in the elaboration of ritual: “The production of ritualized agents is a strategy for the construction of particular relationships of power effective in particular social situations.” Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 202, citing Foucault.

<sup>82</sup> “Body postures, gestures, use of space and time serve, simultaneously, to express metaphorically and actually perform political arrangements – power relationships. So when members of political or social elites engage in virtuoso spirituality, their rituals are particularly likely to include specific embodied practices for performing hierarchy and superior status.” McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 173. “Social life is practiced; authority and orthodoxy are no less ‘practiced’ than popular religions.” Bender, “Practicing Religions,” 281, 274.

draw upon, alternatively, literary, sociological, and anthropological methodologies to elucidate various aspects of these texts and the worlds in which they were composed.<sup>83</sup> Before moving on to my examination of the sources themselves in the following chapters, it is necessary to discuss the bodily parts or products that I focus upon the most in this work: saliva and hair.

### **Strange Bodies: Spit and Hair**

Hair and spit have long held symbolic value in mapping distinctions between “religion” and “magic.” In her classic study of cultural systems of bodily purity and pollution, *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas suggests that particular significance is ascribed within such systems to products issuing from the “margins” of the body such as “spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears ... bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat.”<sup>84</sup> Drawing upon the notion of “dirt” as “matter out of place,” Douglas notes that these kinds of “bodily refuse” or “bodily dirt” are “specially invested with power and danger” due to the ways in which they confuse the categorizations and boundaries that distinguish “pure” from “polluted.”<sup>85</sup> Simultaneously part of the body but separate from it due to movement across bodily “boundaries” such as the mouth and skin, bodily refuse such as saliva or hair is imbued with significance that can function both positively and negatively: this strange matter can “be used ritually for good,” as in the transmission of blessings, or as a “ritual instrument of harm,” as in the transmission of curses and manipulative “witchcraft.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> On “magic discourse” as appearing in a variety of genres of ancient texts, see Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 121.

<sup>85</sup> “In short, our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.” *Ibid.*, 35-6.

<sup>86</sup> See also Marion Holmes Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunnī Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 15.

More recently, scholars have critiqued the applicability of Douglas' general theories to specific religious/cultural traditions and to specific bodily products.<sup>87</sup> For example, in her examination of Jewish purity law, Mira Balberg writes about rabbinic texts that challenge “the Douglasian paradigm of impurity as a breach of bodily boundaries” and notes that “the rabbis depict the human body as an extremely fluid entity whose boundaries are constantly transformed, and which becomes impure not only through penetration but also and especially through direct and indirect *touch*” with people or things considered to be polluting.<sup>88</sup> Ze'ev Maghen similarly argues that “Douglas' schema on this subject—pivotal to her overall thesis of ‘liminality’—is completely and utterly groundless ... neither pus, nor excreta, nor sweat, nor saliva are in any manner impure of themselves according to the Biblical and Talmudic system.”<sup>89</sup> Rather than being pollutants, “some of these substances can ... function as *facilitators* and *conductors* of impurity” from individuals or things that are themselves considered to be impure, such as menstruating women, while the saliva and hair of pure individuals is not polluting.<sup>90</sup>

In her study of early Sunnī texts on purity and impurity, Marion Holmes Katz notes that “despite the helpfulness of the concepts of structural ambiguity and cultural control in understanding some aspects of the Islamic law of ritual purity ... neither of those concepts explains the system as a whole.”<sup>91</sup> The Islamic position on saliva in particular does not fit Douglas' classification system: similar to the Jewish system, “in the Islamic purity system, saliva as a category has an indifferent/neutral—or fluctuating/dependent—ritual status ... saliva—

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 16-8 outlining critiques of Douglas' conclusions by several anthropologists.

<sup>88</sup> Mira Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 52. On saliva and other liquids as “duplicators” of impurity through contact, see *ibid.*, 30-1, 60, 90-1, 213n.70.

<sup>89</sup> Ze'ev Maghen, “First Blood: Purity, Edibility, and the Independence of Islamic Jurisprudence,” *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 73.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. For hair, see Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 59. On the saliva of polluting individuals: *m. Maksh.* 6:5-6, *m. Nid.* 7:1, *m. Zabim* 5:7, *m. Tehar.* 4:5 and 5:8, *b. Shabb.* 14b. For the saliva of non-polluted individuals as clean: *m. Sheqal.* 8:1, *t. Nid.* 5:3.

<sup>91</sup> Katz, *Body of Text*, 21.

unlike many other bodily fluids and secretions which are *najis* [ritually impure] in themselves—essentially functions as a conductor or transmitter (or even extension) of the impurity of the creature whence it emerges.”<sup>92</sup>

With these qualifications in mind, it is nonetheless quite clear that “bodily dirt” such as saliva and hair carried ideological/symbolic significance in many late ancient Near Eastern cultures. Douglas’ emphasis on the simultaneous “power and danger” embodied in such objects is well illustrated by the variant resonances of Muḥammad’s saliva and hair as potentially both sorcerous and holy. These Prophetic fragments well exemplify Robert Ritner’s statement that “‘spitting’ is primarily neither positive nor negative, but only ‘power-laden.’”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Ritner’s claim that “saliva is not itself the blessing or curse, but only its conveyer or medium” echoes Balberg’s and Maghen’s observations that saliva is primarily a “conductor or transmitter” of impurity from an (im)pure individual, but not (im)pure itself in either the Jewish or the Islamic traditions. Yet in both cases, the bodily object serves as an important vehicle for some status or energy.

The idea that some part or reflection of the individual (her purity or impurity, her blessing or curse) is present in such bodily substances is part of what makes these objects so interestingly polyvalent. Due to their separability from the body, these objects can “be understood as quite

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<sup>92</sup> Ze’ev Maghen, “Close Encounters: Some Preliminary Observations on the Transmission of Impurity in Early Sunnī Jurisprudence,” *ILS* 6.3 (1999): 360-4, drawing upon ninth-century sources. Several Companions and Followers indicate that saliva is not inherently impure. See the chapter on “ablution with saliva” (*bāb wuḍū’ bi-l-buṣāq*) in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 1:184-5 (nos. 721-5). Statements from Jarīr b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 56/767), Qatāda b. Di’āma (d. 117/735), and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/779) indicate that saliva does not pollute water used to perform *wuḍū’*. The opinions of Ṭāwūs b. Kaysān (d. circa 106/724) and Ma’mar b. Rāshid (d. 154/770) are more restrictive, stating that if one scratches a place on the body with spit while performing *wuḍū’*, he must wash the place with water. The most (implicitly) restrictive position given here is from Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/729), who states that tailors should wet string with water rather than saliva when sewing, suggesting that saliva is polluting.

<sup>93</sup> Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 87.

literally both subject *and* object.”<sup>94</sup> Writing of hair, Esther R. Berry draws attention to the ways in which it “blurs the boundaries between literal and symbolic life and death” and “straddles the boundaries of presence and absence.”<sup>95</sup> The same might be said of saliva, which operates as a substance separate from the body yet simultaneously carries the memory and qualities of the subject with it in its transference of impurity, blessing, etc. This ambiguous connection between piece and person charges the idea of the transference of status or energy through saliva or hair, as in the usage of these bodily fragments as the “essence” (οὐσία) of a victim in rituals of manipulative “magic,” or in the veneration of these bodily objects as holy relics.

Yet the transference of both blessings and curses demonstrates that the issue is not always as simple as the transmission of the individual’s qualities through these corporeal fragments, but that their usage can be quite contextually dependent. In his article, “The Saliva Superstition in Classical Literature,” Frank W. Nicolson notes that “belief in the deadly power of human spittle ... seems to have been quite as general among the ancients as the belief in its curative power.”<sup>96</sup> Depending upon the context, Greeks and Romans might use saliva for killing or for healing, as both a deadly force as well as a beneficial element was understood to be present within it.<sup>97</sup>

A similar, though less lethal, phenomenon appears in early Islamic sources in which the Prophet’s spit is represented as conveying either blessing or curse, depending on the circumstances. In one narrative, the Prophet spits upon the Medinese hypocrite ‘Abd Allāh b. Ubayy during the latter’s burial and thus “subject[s] the corpse to public indecency,” according

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<sup>94</sup> Esther R. Berry, “The Zombie Commodity: Hair and the Politics of its Globalization,” *Postcolonial Studies* 11 (2008): 75.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-6.

<sup>96</sup> Frank W. Nicolson, “The Saliva Superstition in Classical Literature,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 8 (1897): 24.

<sup>97</sup> Nicolson provides a number of examples from classical literature. *Ibid.*, 24-9.

to Leor Halevi.<sup>98</sup> In this case, the Prophet's saliva appears to convey not his blessing, but rather his disrespect and perhaps his curse upon this enemy of the early Muslims. The Prophet's saliva does not transfer some static essence from Muḥammad's body to another's; rather, the force that is transmitted depends on context and intent.

A particularly illustrative example of the contextually dependent nature of a bodily fragment's usage occurs in a rabbinic story that appears in the Palestinian Talmud and in several midrashic sources.<sup>99</sup> According to this story, a woman who had regularly been attending study sessions on Sabbath nights taught by Rabbi Meir is confronted by her husband. Unhappy with his wife's participation in these nighttime synagogue activities, the husband tells her that he will not allow her back into their house until she spits (רקק) into the rabbi's face. Alerted to this turn of events by the Holy Spirit, Rabbi Meir feigns to have a pain in his eye during the next study session attended by the woman and he asks if anyone in his audience knows the charm to heal an eye (מילחוש לעיינא). Encouraged by others in the audience to "pretend to be a charmer" so that she might spit in the rabbi's face without compunction, the woman goes up to Rabbi Meir. Afraid, she admits that she does not actually know the charm for healing an eye. Rabbi Meir tells her to spit into his eye seven times and then to tell her husband that she had done so, thus ending the domestic squabble.

Within this one story, we find several different valences for saliva. The husband's demand that his wife spit into Rabbi Meir's face illustrates the negative and disrespectful usage of spit. It appears that the husband, perhaps shamed in some capacity by his wife's activities, desires that

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<sup>98</sup> Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 111, 290n.105. Halevi notes that "being spat upon by the Prophet was no humiliation if his saliva carried blessings." According to the *ḥadīth*, the Prophet "blew upon [the corpse] from his spit" (*nafatha 'alay-hi min rīq<sup>i</sup>-hi*). See also Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 579; A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 8 vols. (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), 6:497.

<sup>99</sup> y. *Sotah* 1:4 (16d). Leviticus Rabbah 9:9. Numbers Rabbah 9:20. Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:15.

his wife disrespect the rabbi publicly by spitting in his face. Yet the woman's spit was clearly understood to have the potential to carry healing as well, as acknowledged by the women in the audience who understand that Rabbi Meir's (fake) eye ailment presents an opportunity for spitting in his face. The multivalent significations of the woman's saliva is played upon in this story, with neither a positive nor a negative meaning of saliva rejected or given clear precedence.

The story also illustrates that corporeal pieces like saliva have both "physical" and the "symbolic" usages in ritualistic activities. Is the woman's spit meant, or understood, to convey something physically present in her saliva: her disrespect, curse, healing, or blessing? Or is her action more "symbolically" significant? Is it the act of spitting that is understood to disrespect, curse, heal, or bless, or is it the spittle itself?

The extent to which any given ritual may be understood "literally" or "symbolically" is, of course, a fraught question. As Naomi Janowitz writes, "scholars have spilled more ink about the role of analogical thought and action than about any other topic related to ritual."<sup>100</sup> These issues are certainly evoked in the rituals under discussion here, such as relic veneration, οὐσία rituals, and other manipulations of the body. Questions of the symbolic or actual connection between person and part, of symbolic or literal pollution, and of symbolic or physical healing may be asked about the ideas and usages of saliva and hair that are witnessed in the late ancient sources under investigation.

In the case of Islamic understandings of ritual(s), William Graham argues that we find in Islam "a ritualism that is unlike the ritualism of most other religious communities."<sup>101</sup> Graham suggests that Islamic ritualism does not correlate with the ritual systems described in Douglas' *Natural Symbols*, which exhibit a "heightened appreciation of symbolic action" and a "belief in

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<sup>100</sup> Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 101.

<sup>101</sup> William Graham, "Islam in the Mirror of Ritual," in *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis, Jr., 53-71 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1983), 63.

the efficacy of instituted signs.”<sup>102</sup> Instead, a “fundamental, ‘reformational’ urge to purify and to maintain worship and service of the One God has given [Islam’s] ritualism and ritual symbolism a quality that is perhaps unique ... in which sacramentalism and elaborated symbolism have been emphatically rejected by orthoprax tradition as potential threats to pure obedience and monotheism.”<sup>103</sup> Rather than embodying a “sacramental or magical efficacy” in which ritual words or actions “do things,” Islamic ritual practice is (according to Graham) “fundamentally aniconic, amythical, commemorative or traditionalist in character” and “rites are explicitly commemorative of prototypical human acts of faith or of God’s acts of mercy and guidance to His servants.”<sup>104</sup> Arguing this same point, Leor Halevi writes that, according to Muslim traditionists, “the principal religious justification for performing a ritual lay not in any magical or symbolic effects associated with the ritual, but in a simple historical fact: a ritual’s origin in the works of Muḥammad. If the Prophet had performed an action, according to Muslim tradition, this was usually enough for elevation of the action to the status of a religious ritual.”<sup>105</sup>

For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that the majority of rituals under investigation here seem quite clearly to have been understood in late antiquity to be effective through the manipulation of real, unseen forces. The idea of sympathetic relationships between objects both physical and immaterial—such as the relationship between οὐσία (hair, saliva, clothing, etc.) and the individual’s body, as well as between saints’ relics and some spiritual blessing/benefit—was “common in Late Antiquity” and “sympathy establish[ed] a set of relationships between the seen and the unseen, opening up innumerable ways of using the material world to influence the

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<sup>102</sup> Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 26, cited in Graham, “Islam in the Mirror of Ritual,” 64.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 68.

<sup>105</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 210.



immaterial.”<sup>106</sup> A great variety of rituals involved the use of words, actions, and objects to manipulate various forces for various goals, including for the improvement of health or the procurement of blessings. Indeed, both Graham and Halevi note that within Islam there were “popular Muslim rituals imbued with magical efficacy ... [that] developed despite the ‘anti-sacramental’ emphasis of traditionist Islam.”<sup>107</sup> In this regard, Halevi cites the recitation of prayers associated with intercession for the dead, while Graham writes that “at the popular level and in large measure in the special case of Shi‘i practice, ritual activities such as ziyāra [*sic*] [i.e., pilgrimage to shrines] carry a strong element of belief in ritual efficacy (e.g., the healing power of saint’s or Imām’s tomb) and have developed complex, ‘condensed’ symbols.”<sup>108</sup>

It is the power understood to reside within the body that perhaps provoked the most controversy regarding the usage of corporeal pieces in rituals. Using objects or “props” in a ritual “seems to have been taken as evidence that the ritual employed lower-level supernatural powers such as daimons” by many late ancient Jewish, Christian, and pagan observers.<sup>109</sup> The manipulation of objects—including bodily fragments like spittle or hair—might connote “magic” and/or “idolatry” to those unsympathetic to a particular ritual. For example, rather than holy relics, a saint’s remains might be seen as decaying bones that “you [Christians] worship and honor as gods.”<sup>110</sup> More generally, the effects of the manipulation of pieces of the body might be seen as using some holy power present in the body of the individual or invoking holy powers in some way, or to be instead the result of demonic or other forces seen as allied with “magic.”

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<sup>106</sup> Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 103. Idem, *Magic in the Roman World*, 8, 15, 59, 68.

<sup>107</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 264n.50.

<sup>108</sup> Graham, “Islam in the Mirror of Ritual,” 65. Distinguishing between “popular” and “orthoprax” Islam in the way that both Graham and Halevi do has recently been questioned, particularly in Travis Zadeh, “An Ingestible Scripture: Qur’ānic Erasure and the Limits of ‘Popular’ Religion,” in *Material Culture and Asian Religions: Text, Image, Object*, ed. Benjamin J. Fleming and Richard D. Mann (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 97-119. These issues will be discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>109</sup> Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 14-5.

<sup>110</sup> Hayman, ed., *Disputation of Sergius the Stylite*, 14.14.

This power of the body and its pieces seems to have been what drove their usage in a variety of rituals, both “religious” and “magical.” In this dissertation, I examine the ways in which such power was put to use and how such usages could be labelled positively or negatively, depending upon perspective. What was at issue in many of the discussions I examine below was not whether rituals worked, either physically or symbolically: it was whether they worked through divine aid or through illicit “magical” assistance.<sup>111</sup> The lines drawn by such labelling are illuminating for understanding the formation of religious identities and boundaries amongst Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in late antiquity and the ways that late ancient ideas of the body’s power reinforced such boundaries while also routinely permeating them.

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<sup>111</sup> “In the main magic was dangerous because it *worked*. In the eyes of our ancient sources magic produced real results. It did so, however, by means of evil powers.” Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 3.

## Chapter 2: The Spitting Image of Holiness: Miraculous Bodily Fluids in Hagiography, *Sīra*, and *Ḥadīth*

According to Islamic historical tradition, in the sixth year of the Hijra the Prophet Muḥammad set out from Medina with many of his followers to make a “lesser pilgrimage” (*‘umra*) to the holy sites of Mecca. Barred from entering the city by the Quraysh, Muḥammad and his followers halted in the nearby village of al-Ḥudaybiyya, where they exchanged messages with the Quraysh, negotiating how Muḥammad and the Muslims from Medina might be able to enter Mecca without war. One of the Quraysh’s messengers, a man named ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd al-Thaqafī, visited Muḥammad’s camp and was astonished by what he saw. According to the version of events recorded in Ibn Hishām’s recension of Ibn Ishāq’s *Sīra*, on the authority of the traditionist Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī:

He [‘Urwa] got up from the Messenger of God’s presence having seen how his Companions treated him. He [the Messenger of God] did not perform ablution without their running to get the water he had used (*lā yatawaḍḍa’u illā ibtadarūhu waḍū<sup>a</sup>-hu*), and he did not spit out saliva without their running to it (*wa lā yabṣuqu buṣāq<sup>an</sup> illā ibtadarū-hu*), and none of his hairs fell without their taking it. Then he returned to Quraysh and said, “O men of Quraysh! I have been to Chosroes in his kingdom, and Caesar in his kingdom, and the Negus in his kingdom, and by God I have never seen a king among a people like Muḥammad among his Companions.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 744-745. Guillaume, trans. (adapted here), *Life of Muhammad*, 502-503. The *isnād* for this section of text reads: *qāla Ibn Ishāq, qāla al-Zuhrī*.

Reflecting on this sight, ‘Urwa warns the Quraysh about their prospects for making war on Muḥammad: “I have seen a people who will never abandon him for any reason, so form your own opinion.”<sup>2</sup> As a result of this exchange of messages, an agreement is reached specifying that Muḥammad and the Medinans will be allowed to make pilgrimage to Mecca in a year’s time: according to Islamic “salvation history,” the Quraysh’s breaking of this treaty would eventually lead to the retaking of Mecca by the Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

While the narrative purpose of ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s testimony in the context of the *Sīra* is to encourage the Quraysh to enter into negotiations with Muḥammad and his forces, the story also functions as an attestation narrative for Muḥammad’s holiness and the faithfulness of the early Muslim community.<sup>4</sup> ‘Urwa’s description of the interactions between Muḥammad and his Companions displays not only the latter’s extreme devotion to their leader, but also the charismatic power of a figure who could command this kind of respect from those around him.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the *Sīra*, years later ‘Urwa himself would accept Islam and attempt to convert his tribe of Thaqīf to the faith. He was killed by members of his tribe who resisted this effort, and is reported to have been buried amongst the martyrs of Islam at his own request. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd” (C.E. Bosworth). Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 914. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 614. Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 960-1. Rizwi S. Faizer, Amal Ismail, and AbdulKader Tayob, trans., *The Life of Muḥammad: al-Wāqidi’s Kitāb al-maghāzī* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 470-1.

<sup>3</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “al-Ḥudaybiya” (W. Montgomery Watt). Gerald Hawting and Furrugh B. Ali have called into question this traditional version of the events of al-Ḥudaybiyya and its aftermath in: Hawting, “Al-Ḥudaybiyya and the Conquest of Mecca: A Reconsideration of the Tradition about the Muslim Takeover of the Sanctuary,” *JSAI* 8 (1986): 1-24; Ali, “Al-Ḥudaybiya: An Alternative Version,” *Muslim World* 71 (1981): 47-62. For my purposes here, the historicity of these accounts is not significant. However, Ali’s note that “one glimpses the handwork of the *quṣṣās*, the storytellers” (ibid., 49) in the narrative that includes ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s testimony does correspond with my conception of this narrative’s similarity to hagiographic stories.

<sup>4</sup> That this testimony is placed in the mouth of a non-Muslim Arab is certainly narratologically important: this “outsider” viewpoint indicates its reliability, since ‘Urwa would have little reason to manipulate the truth about Muḥammad and his followers. In this way, this story is similar to that found within Arabic historiographical narratives of the Islamic conquests in which a Roman informant who has been amongst the Muslim forces describes them as “a people staying up through the night praying and remaining abstinent during the day, commanding the right and forbidding the wrong, monks by night, lions by day.” Even this outside voice testifies to the strength of faith of the Muslims. Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 160-161, 336n.68. Idem, “Become Infidels or we will throw you into the fire: the martyrs of Najran in early Muslim historiography, hagiography and Qur’anic exegesis,” in *Writing ‘True Stories’: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Early Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou in collaboration with Muriel Debié and Hugh Kennedy (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 132.

‘Urwa compares Muḥammad to the rulers of the great empires of the late ancient Near East, Persia and Rome (as well as the Negus, the ruler of Ethiopia), and suggests that even these powerful figures were not revered by their retinues to the extent that Muḥammad was by his Companions.<sup>5</sup> This narrative thus also subtly foreshadows the Muslim forces’ military victories over the Persians and Romans, in which the Sassanian Empire would be essentially demolished, and the Roman-Byzantine Empire’s holdings in the Near East would be substantially curtailed.

The specific details that ‘Urwa draws upon when describing Muḥammad’s holiness and the Companions’ convictions are striking. Muḥammad’s bodily wastes—his used ablution water, his spit, and his fallen hairs—are picked up and cherished by those around him. The collection of these objects indicates the deep reverence that Muḥammad’s Companions felt towards him, and perhaps the power they saw in these remnants of the Prophet’s body. The Companions’ care for these objects is further emphasized in the version of ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s testimony found in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *al-Muṣannaḥ*, in which ‘Urwa speaks in the first person:

By God, I have gone forth to the kings, and I have gone forth to Caesar, and Chosroes, and the Negus. By God I have never seen a king whose Companions have revered him as Muḥammad’s Companions revere Muḥammad. By God, he does not spit out phlegm without it falling upon the palm of one of them, who then rubs his face and skin with it (*in tanakhkham nukhāmat<sup>an</sup> illā waqa‘at fī kaḥḥ<sup>ī</sup> rajul<sup>īn</sup> min-hum fa-dalaka bi-hā wajh<sup>a</sup>-hu wa-jild<sup>a</sup>-hu*). When he orders them, they hasten to do his order. When he performs ablution, they nearly come to blows over the water he had used (*wa-idhā tawaḍḍa‘a kādū*

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<sup>5</sup> Why ‘Urwa would have had any contact with such rulers is not explained, and is perhaps beside the point in terms of this text’s function as an attestation narrative. Yet a *Sīra* story that places ‘Urwa in Byzantine territory, learning about siege techniques, may indicate that ‘Urwa held some position of culture prestige. Alternatively, this story could be read as an attempt to cleanse ‘Urwa’s life story of any opposition to Muḥammad, as it places ‘Urwa outside of Ḥunayn and al-Ṭā’if during Muḥammad’s sieges of those towns. Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 869. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 587. al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 3:960. Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 470.

*yaqtatilūna* ‘alā waḍū<sup>i</sup>-hi). When they speak, they lower their voices around him, and they do not look upon him too closely.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast to Ibn Hishām’s account, here the Prophet’s hair is not included in the list of bodily objects kept by Muḥammad’s Companions. However, a more elaborate description of the Companions’ usage of Muḥammad’s spit is provided, specifying that they rub it onto their faces and skin, presumably out of a desire to receive some benefit from its touching their own bodies.<sup>7</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s version also intensifies the competition found between the Companions over these objects: not only do they “run to” Muḥammad’s ablution water, as in Ibn Hishām, but in fact they “nearly come to blows” (*kādū yaqtatilūna*) over it.<sup>8</sup> Combined with their obedience to Muḥammad’s orders and their deference in how they speak and look when around him, these actions clearly convey that the Prophet’s Companions greatly respected Muḥammad and manifested that respect in some quite striking ways.

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 5:336. This narrative is found in the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* section of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s late eighth- or early ninth-century *ḥadīth* collection *al-Muṣannaf*. The *Kitāb al-maghāzī* and the *Kitāb al-jāmi* sections of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* are distinct in that their traditions come almost exclusively from ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s teacher Ma’mar b. Rāshid (d. 154/770) and that these sections seem to have been transmitted independently of the *Muṣannaf* (as a collected book) for some time. See: Harald Motzki, “The Author and His Work in the Islamic Literature of the First Centuries: the Case of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*,” *JSAI* 28 (2003): 181. *EI*<sup>3</sup>, s.v. “‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī” (Harald Motzki). This version of ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s testimony is found also in al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* with an *isnād* that traces it through ‘Abd al-Razzāq: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 671 (nos. 5731-2) (*kitāb al-shurūt*, *bāb* 15). A similar version is found in al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 2:598-599; Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 294; and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, 6 vols, ed. Muḥammad Naṣr al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, n.d.), 4:329-30.

<sup>7</sup> This desire for the benefits of such Prophetic fluids is displayed in a version of ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s testimony recorded in the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* section of Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaf*, which states: “If he performs ablutions, they run to get the water he had used and they pour it upon their heads, taking it as a blessing” (*in-hu la-yatawaḍḍa’ fa-yabtadirūna waḍū<sup>u</sup>-hu wa-yaṣubbūna-hu ‘alā ru’ūs-him, yattakhidhūna-hu ḥanān<sup>am</sup>*). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:330 (no. 37836). For *ḥanān* as “blessing,” see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 653; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:330n.2. It is possible that we here have a cognate usage of Arabic \*ḥ-n-n with Syriac ܚܢܢܐ (*ḥnānā*), “a mixture of consecrated oil, dust from a holy place, and water used for liturgical as well as private devotional purposes.” Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and “The Lives of the Eastern Saints”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 39. Another version of the narrative appears in Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:347 (no. 37852).

<sup>8</sup> Beside its appearance in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* and in the *kitāb al-shurūt* section of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* (see note 6), this description of the Companions occurs in: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 59 (no. 189) (*kitāb al-wudū’*, *bāb* 40); Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:329, 330. See Wensinck, *Concordance*, 5:302.

While it is difficult to verify ‘Urwa’s claim that Chosroes, Caesar, and the Negus were not revered to the same degree as was Muḥammad, late ancient literature presents another “type” of figure whose veneration is often represented in ways quite similar to ‘Urwa’s description of Muḥammad’s treatment by his Companions: the varieties of “holy men” of late ancient pagan, Jewish, and especially Christian traditions. In a body of different sources—primarily saints’ lives, but also stories situated in other literary contexts—those who believe in the power of these “holy men” manifest this belief in behaviors similar to those of Muḥammad’s followers. Specifically, these “holy men” are treated like “living relics” whose bodies—including their bodily fluids—can transmit blessings and create “contact relics” similarly to the ways in which saints’ relics and holy spaces, such as saints’ shrines, were understood to do so in the late ancient world.

Indeed living holy men and the remains of deceased martyrs and saints both served as bridges between the profane and divine worlds.<sup>9</sup> The holy man and his relics were objects of pilgrimage and devotion for religious communities, functioning as embodiments of those communities by displaying the characteristics deemed most essential to these communities’ identities.<sup>10</sup> While the holy men performed such characteristics in their daily lives, relics served as reminders of previous martyrs and saints who had displayed their proximity to the divine in their own lives and, in the case of the martyrs, their deaths.

Yet holy men and relics were not only symbolic for their religious communities, but were also understood to be corporeal conveyers of divine power. The divine power believed to lie

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<sup>9</sup> Claudia Rapp writes: “Dead saints and living holy men alike were believed to hold a special connection to the divine that they were able to share with those who approached them . . . many acts of veneration shown to saints after their death had their origin in the connection of the faithful to living holy men.” Claudia Rapp, “Saints and holy men,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Volume 2: Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 548.

<sup>10</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 114, 130, 136. Peter Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* 2 (1983): 1-25. Robert Kirschner, “The Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity,” *Vigilae Christianae* 38 (1984): 105-124.

within, and emanate from, these holy persons and their bodily remains was understood to manifest itself in a variety of ways in late antiquity: ways that, we will see, are quite similar to the manners by which the powers of Muḥammad's body and its products are described in early Islamic sources. I would suggest that it is within the context of stories of late ancient holy men and relics that we should read the story of 'Urwa b. Mas'ūd's testimony about Muḥammad and his Companions, as well as the many stories in which Muḥammad's bodily fluids are sources of miraculous power. Denis Gril notes: "The *Sīra* and the *ḥadīth* attribute to the Prophet a number of miracles, either of healing or of resolving a difficulty. His body, his hands, and in particular his bodily emanations [*émanations corporelles*] like his breathe or saliva (or the two at once) are often the transmitters" of these miracles.<sup>11</sup> The stories of these miracles that involve Muḥammad's "bodily emanations" fit particularly well within the late ancient hagiographic milieu, in which a holy person's wastewater, spit, and breath often possess miraculous powers. While these miracles often occur during the lifetime of the holy man, they might also occur after his death, in which case the bodily fluid acts as a relic, transmitting the power of the holy person even after his body has withered away.

I suggest that the manifestation of such characteristics in a wide distribution of stories of late ancient holy men and their relics indicates that similar stories about Muḥammad sprang from similar oral, literary, and cultural environments.<sup>12</sup> The attribution of such miracles to Muḥammad illustrates the engagement of early Muslims with the ideas and characterizations of the "holiness" of sacred figures that circulated amongst the religious communities of late antiquity,

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<sup>11</sup> Denis Gril, "Le corps du Prophète," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 113-114 (2006): 44.

<sup>12</sup> The relationship between late ancient hagiography and various aspects of early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature has been demonstrated by a variety of authors. Examples include: Gordon D. Newby, "An Example of Coptic Literary Influence on Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah*," *JNES* 31.1 (1972): 22-8; Nancy Khalek, "He was tall and slender, and his virtues were numerous": Byzantine Hagiographical Topoi and the Companions of Muḥammad in al-Azdī's *Futūḥ al-Shām*," in Papaconstantinou, *Writing 'True Stories'*, 105-123; Sizgorich, "Become Infidels"; Krisztina Szilágyi, "A Prophet Like Jesus? Christians and Muslims Debating Muḥammad's Death," *JSAI* 36 (2009): 155-7.



and their interest in their own Prophet’s exhibition of similar characteristics.<sup>13</sup> Reading the traditions about the Prophet’s spit and ablution water within the frame of reference of the stories of these late ancient figures and their relics provides an example of the ways that early Muslims molded the story(-ies) of their community’s founder by using some of the conceptions of holiness present within the late ancient “koinē.” Indeed, they utilized that koinē to argue for Muḥammad’s prophetic status.<sup>14</sup> The specific manifestation of holiness herein examined—the power contained in saintly or prophetic bodily fluids—is one that, we will see in later chapters, did not go uncontested, but was a pregnant signifier of power in a variety of circumstances.

### **A Prophet (who spits) Like Jesus?<sup>15</sup>**

In studying the “idealized” Muḥammad of early Islamic *sīra* and *ḥadīth* texts, modern scholars have often drawn parallels between the stories of Muḥammad’s miraculous feats and those of Jewish and Christian scriptural characters, especially Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>16</sup> Already the pioneering Islamicist Ignaz Goldziher suggested that, among the early biographers of the

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Bell writes, “Thus we see even in the first two centuries, the biography of Muhammad being decked out with all the kind of miraculous and legendary stories with which we are familiar in the case of the Christian saints and the Jewish rabbis”: *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Cass, 1968), 200. Josef Horowitz catholically notes the influence of “Old Arabian ‘motifs’ ... Hebrew tales of godly men and pious rabbis, apocryphal gospels and legends of Christian saints, ancient heathen, Buddhistic and Zoroastrian elements” upon the representation of Muḥammad. He then states in regard to the *sīra*, “Here the Christian influence is stronger than the Jewish, which latter [*sic*] is triumphant in the *kisas al-anbiyā*. It is remarkable how often in the biography of the Prophet we find mention of things Christian”: “The Growth of the Mohammed Legend,” *Muslim World* 10 (1920): 57. Michael Dols writes that “Muslims shared, as we have seen, in the miracle-workings of the Christians in the early Islamic era, and they created their own saints and shrines with comparable powers of healing” and that, specifically in the case of Muḥammad, “the urge to glorify the founding-father was irresistible, and he gradually emerged in the Middle Ages as a miracle-worker – as a paradigmatic saint.” *Majnūn*, 233, 224-225.

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the terminology and concept of a late ancient “koinē,” drawn upon by early Muslims as by other late ancient actors, from Thomas Sizgorich: *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 13, 144-149.

<sup>15</sup> I borrow the title of this section from Krisztina Szilágyi’s article, “A Prophet Like Jesus? Christians and Muslims Debating Muḥammad’s Death.”

<sup>16</sup> The distinction between the study of the “historical” and of the “literary” or “idealized” Muḥammad is discussed in: Uri Rubin, “Introduction: The Prophet Muḥammad and the Islamic Sources,” in *The Life of Muḥammad*, ed. Uri Rubin (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998), xiii-xlvi.

Prophet, “an unconscious tendency prevailed to draw a picture of Muhammed that should not be inferior to the Christian picture of Jesus,” and one manifestation of this tendency was to “make him perform miracles such as are related of the founder of Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Gordon Newby suggests that the ascription of such miracles to Muḥammad is “part of the program of the *Sīrah* to make Muḥammad Christomorphic,” i.e. to make Muḥammad into a figure like Jesus.<sup>18</sup> In essence, the miracles of Jesus are seen as the primary bases for similar stories about Muḥammad, and the attribution of the miraculous powers of Jesus to Muḥammad is assumed to have been motivated by a desire to combat Christian critiques of Muḥammad’s prophetic status.<sup>19</sup>

This idea of a “Christomorphic” Muḥammad has often been applied, more specifically, to the stories of Muḥammad’s healing and exorcistic activities. In an article discussing such stories, Uri Rubin suggests that early Muslims ascribed powers of healing to Muḥammad “to provide the proofs that, in spite of Jewish and Christian claims to the contrary, Muḥammad was indeed a genuine messenger of God,” and he further suggests that in these stories, “he is much like Jesus, with whom he shares various healing powers.”<sup>20</sup> Goldziher specifically cites the stories of Muḥammad’s multiplication of food and water as examples of miracles similar to those mentioned in gospel stories, but further states that, “The Muslim biographers of the Prophet try even more eagerly to emulate Christians in developing the miraculous feature of the healing of

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<sup>17</sup> Goldziher, “The Ḥadīth and the New Testament,” in *Muslim Studies*, 2:346.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon D. Newby, “Imitating Muhammad in Two Genres: Mimesis and Problems of Genre in *Sīrah* and *Sunnah*,” *Medieval Encounters* 3.3 (1997): 275.

<sup>19</sup> This general hypothesis is well exemplified by Uri Rubin’s statement: “Muslims . . . sought to provide their prophet with a biography no less glamorous than that of previous prophets; and in order to do so, they applied to it biblical themes inherent in the stories about those prophets.” Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 4. Similarly: Sarah Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature,” *HTR* 78.1-2 (1985): 101-114.

<sup>20</sup> Uri Rubin, “Muhammad the Exorcist: Aspects of Islamic-Jewish Polemics,” *JSAI* 30 (2005): 96-7.

the sick on the part of the Prophet, and they represent that this took place through the efflux of a healing power which dwelt in his body, or in things that belonged to him.”<sup>21</sup>

While neither Goldziher nor Rubin appear to point this out directly, a particularly striking parallel between the miracles of Jesus and Muḥammad is found in the fact that, in some gospel stories, Jesus uses his saliva for the purposes of healing, as Muḥammad does in several stories in the *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literatures. At Mark 7:31-37, Jesus heals a deaf mute by putting his fingers into the man’s ears; spitting and touching the man’s tongue; and then commanding “Ephphatha!” (“Be opened!” in Aramaic, as the author of Mark informs us).<sup>22</sup> Later, at Mark 8:22-26, Jesus heals a man’s blindness by spitting into his eyes and then placing his hands upon them. Interestingly, Jesus’ spit only partially works in this latter story, and he is forced to place his hands upon the man’s eyes again in order to fully restore his sight.<sup>23</sup> Another healing that involves spittle occurs at John 9:1-7, in which Jesus places mud, formed from dirt and his own saliva, upon the eyes of a blind man, then tells this man to bathe himself in the Pool of Siloam.

One can hear distant echoes of these gospel stories in those stories in which Muḥammad uses his saliva for the purposes of healing. An example similar to the healings in Mark 7-8 is the widely attested story of Muḥammad’s spitting into the eyes of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in order to cure

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<sup>21</sup> Goldziher, “The Ḥadīth and the New Testament,” 347. Goldziher states that the transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) “has served as a pattern for a whole series of miraculous legends, which were inserted at an early date into the biography of Muhammad.” Ibid., 346. It is strange that he does not cite the much more comparable miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes that is found in all four gospels: Matt. 14:15-21, Mark 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-13.

<sup>22</sup> It has been pointed out that it is not clear exactly what the purpose of Jesus’ spitting is here, nor exactly what he does with the spittle: Eric Eve, “Spit in Your Eye: The Blind Man of Bethsaida and the Blind Man of Alexandria,” *New Testament Studies* 54.1 (2008): 14. Some have suggested that “the verb ‘touched’ in [verse] 33 and the immediately preceding mention of Jesus’ fingers favor that he spits on his own fingers and applies the saliva to the deaf mute’s tongue.” Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 389. This interpretation was apparently favored by many ancient interpreters, based on the several ancient versions that make clear in their texts of Mark 7:33 that Jesus spits upon his fingers. Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> This is particularly interesting since “the need for two stages to the healing is unique in the surviving Jesus tradition”: Eve, “Spit in Your Eye,” 14.

an eye infection, thereby enabling ‘Alī to participate in the battle at Khaybar.<sup>24</sup> In another story, like Jesus in John 9, Muḥammad mixes his saliva with dirt in order to cure the illness of Thābit b. Qays b. Shammās: visiting a bedridden Thābit, Muḥammad invokes God before “he then took dirt from Buṭḥān [a wadi in Medina], placed it in a drinking vessel, and blew spittle with water into it (*nafatha ‘alayhi bi-mā’*) and poured it upon him [Thābit].”<sup>25</sup> As we will see, these two stories provide only a small sample of the many narratives in which Muḥammad heals with his saliva, or with other liquids associated with his body.

It seems possible that the gospel stories about Jesus’ healing activities with his spittle have influenced, in some capacity, the representations of Muḥammad’s usage of spittle and other bodily products for healing purposes. As the citations above from Goldziher, Newby and Rubin indicate, intertexts between the stories of Muḥammad and of Jewish and Christian biblical characters have been suggested, and often persuasively argued, by many scholars. An “accommodation of [Muḥammad’s] biography to that of Jesus” is most clearly apparent in stories of Muḥammad’s birth and childhood, as demonstrated by scholars such as Arendt J. Wensinck and Toufic Fahd.<sup>26</sup> Fahd notes that the “Moses-model” is imposed upon Muḥammad

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 762. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 514. al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 2:654. Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 322. Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/i:81. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:228 (no. 20395). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:360 (no. 37871), 13:370 (no. 37892). al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1034 (no. 4210) (*kitāb al-maghāzī*, *bāb* 38). Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 1:43 (no. 117) (*kitāb al-muqaddima*, *bāb* 11). See Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadīth*, 450.

<sup>25</sup> Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash’ath al-Azdī al-Sijjīstānī, *Kitāb al-Sunan: Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Awwāma, 5 vols. (Jeddah: Dār al-Qibla li-’l-Thaqāfat al-Islāmiyya; Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Rayyān; Mecca: al-Maktaba al-Makkiyya, 1419/1998), 4:329-30 (no. 3881) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 18). On Buṭḥān, see Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadīth*, 67n.2 and 618n.4.

<sup>26</sup> A.J. Wensinck, “Muḥammad and the Prophets,” trans. Melanie Richter-Bernburg, in Rubin, *Life of Muhammad*, 20-21. Wensinck writes, “The similarity of the features is in part so obvious that we can scarcely avoid thinking of direct adoption ... On the other hand, this parallelism can be traced back to unconscious tendencies that led to similar phenomena in widely separated areas.” See also Toufic Fahd, “Problèmes de typologie dans la «Sīra» d’Ibn Iṣḥāq,” in *La Vie Du Prophète Mahomet: Colloque De Strasbourg (Octobre 1980)*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983), 70-3. From a more polemical perspective, the nineteenth-century missionary S. W. Koelle writes that “the biographies of Mohammed by Moslem authors [are] ... a thinly disguised plagiarism of the Evangelical record” and suggests that their presentation of “Mohammed himself [is] an obvious parody of Jesus Christ”: *Mohammed and Mohammedanism Critically Considered* (Waterloo Place, London: Rivingtons, 1889), 246.

during the period of the organization of the new community in Medina, although “it is imposed more in the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* than in the *Sīra*.”<sup>27</sup> Ze’ev Maghen has also pointed to “what appear to be direct and indirect influences exerted by the story of David (in its various Biblical, rabbinic and Islamic permutations) on the traditions relating to the life of Muḥammad.”<sup>28</sup> Given this tradition of scriptural typology in early Islamic representations of Muḥammad, we might easily assume that stories of Muḥammad’s miraculous spit are somehow in dialogue with the gospel accounts of Jesus’ healing saliva.

It is worth noting that, in this respect, early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* texts have much in common with late ancient Christian saints’ lives. As Derek Krueger writes, “typological composition defined the hagiographical genre as a consciously postbiblical narrative form,” in which biblical models for the saints’ actions are quite often cited.<sup>29</sup> The examples of Jesus and the apostles—as well as Old Testament patriarchs and prophets like Moses, Abraham, David, and Elijah—are drawn upon in a variety of ways to make the saints into inheritors of such figures’ authority and importance such that, in the texts surrounding the late ancient saints, “biblical heroes and monastic heroes stand side by side, inhabiting and exhibiting the same virtues.”<sup>30</sup>

With this tendency towards scriptural typology in saints’ lives, it is unsurprising to find that scholars have sometimes described the many stories in which Christian saints also use their own saliva for miraculous purposes as “clearly under the influence of the gospel accounts.”<sup>31</sup> As is the case with Muḥammad, the assumption of a scriptural typology is used to explain the

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<sup>27</sup> “C’est dans la période d’organisation de la nouvelle communauté que le modèle-Moïse s’impose. Mais il s’impose davantage dans le Coran et le Ḥadīth que dans la *Sīra*.” Fahd, “Problèmes de typologie,” 73.

<sup>28</sup> Ze’ev Maghen, “Davidic Motifs in the Biography of Muḥammad.” *JSAI* 35 (2008): 91-140. Idem, “Intertwined Triangles: Remarks on the Relationship between Two Prophetic Scandals,” *JSAI* 33 (2007): 17-92.

<sup>29</sup> Derek Krueger, “Typological Figuration in Theodoret of Cyrillus’s *Religious History* and the Art of Postbiblical Narrative,” *JECS* 5.3 (1997): 399.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, “The Old Testament and Monasticism,” in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), 202.

<sup>31</sup> John Martin Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (Naperville, Illinois: A. R. Allenson, 1974), 78.

variety of saints' stories in which their saliva is used to heal or provide some other miraculous blessing. Such assumptions are not completely unfounded, since we do, in fact, find that some saints' lives exhibit explicit modeling of the saints' usage of healing spit upon the actions of Jesus. For example, in a story found in Jerome's late fourth-century *Vita Hilarionis*, the Palestinian saint Hilarion spits upon the eyes of a blind woman, whose sight is instantly restored. Jerome describes Hilarion's healing with the words "at once the same miracle of healing occurred as when the Savior did this," making clear that this representation of Hilarion's miraculous capability is directly connected and comparable to that of Jesus in Mark 8:23.<sup>32</sup>

Another case of clear gospel influence is found in a story in the apocryphal texts about saint Mark (the *Martyrium Marci*, *Acta Marci*, as well as various encomiums) in which the apostle Mark mixes dirt with his own saliva and places it upon a man's injured hand, which is then instantly restored.<sup>33</sup> While an explicit identification of the saint's healing act with that of Jesus is not present here, Greek lexical parallels with the gospel text lend strong credence to A. D. Callahan's statement that this story of saint Mark is "of course modeled on Jesus' healing of the man born blind in John 9:1-7."<sup>34</sup> The Hilarion story offers an explicit identification between the act of the saint and that of Jesus, while the story of saint Mark presents an explicit parallel in wording: in both cases, one notes a clear literary and typological relationship between a gospel story and a hagiographic narrative.

While the gospel stories found in Mark and John almost certainly served as precedents in some capacity for many of the stories to be discussed in this chapter, the many healings and other

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<sup>32</sup> *Vita Hilarionis* 15. Carolinne White, trans., *Early Christian Lives* (London and New York: Penguin, 1998), 96.

<sup>33</sup> On these various texts about Mark, see: Aurelio de Santos Otero, "Later Acts of Apostles," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke & Co.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991-1992), 2:461-5.

<sup>34</sup> Allen Dwight Callahan, "The Acts of Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1992), 63. John 9:6 reads: ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἔπτυσεν χαμαὶ καὶ ἐποίησεν πηλὸν ἐκ τοῦ πτύσματος, καὶ ἐπέχρισεν αὐτοῦ τὸν πηλὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς. The *Martyrium Sancti Marci Apostoli* (PG 115, cols. 164-165) reads: καὶ πτύσας χαμαὶ ἐποίησεν πηλὸν ἐκ τοῦ πτύσματος καὶ ἐπέχρισε τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ ἀνδρὸς λέγων.

usages of holy persons' saliva, breath, and other bodily fluids found in *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature, and indeed also in a variety of saints' lives, seem unlikely to have emerged from a simple patterning on these New Testament models. To begin with, it is unclear how widely the Markan image of a "spitting" Jesus might have been circulating amongst those crafting a life of Muḥammad in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, since the Gospel of Mark was not nearly as influential in this period as the other canonical gospels.<sup>35</sup> Our knowledge of the relative importance lent to, and interpretations of, the Markan spit stories by early and late ancient Christians is limited, since no full-length commentary on Mark exists until, perhaps, the seventh century C.E.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, there are fewer extant early manuscripts of Mark as compared to the other gospels (perhaps indicating that this gospel was less popular amongst copyists and readers), and also far fewer citations of this gospel in patristic writings, and Mark is less commonly included in ancient church lectionaries.<sup>37</sup> Brenda Deen Schildgen clearly summarizes the

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<sup>35</sup> As Eric Eve points out, the stories of Jesus' saliva that are found in Mark are "peculiarly distinctive" for that gospel, and Mark's many other healing stories—as well as the vast majority of those found in Matthew, Luke, and John—involve only Jesus' touch or spoken word. Eve, "Spit in Your Eye," 1. In fact, the importance or value of Mark's "spit" stories for early Christian tradition appears to have been disputed, given that these stories were apparently excised (or at least not included) in the parallel synoptic passages in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. While Mark 7-8 is part of a large chunk of Markan text not included in Luke, the two stories involving Jesus' spittle are two of only three Markan miracle stories not included in Matthew, suggesting a quite intentional excision of this material in the latter case. See Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1537; Eve, "Spit in Your Eye," 2; Harold Remus, *Jesus as Healer* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 40, 43, 57.

<sup>36</sup> This is a Latin commentary, previously ascribed to Jerome, which has been tentatively dated to the seventh century based on "a clear terminus a quo dating by demonstrating the use of the work of Gregory the Great (c. 540-604)" and the absence of any identifiable use of sources from later than *circa* 600. Michael Cahill, *The First Commentary on Mark: an Annotated Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6-7. It is clear that the author of this commentary "was aware that his was a pioneering effort," as he notes in the prologue to his work that Mark has not been commented upon previously. *Ibid.*, 3. "Whereas Matthew, Luke and John have all benefited from being the subject of several line-by-line patristic commentaries, there are no complete commentaries of Mark that have survived the patristic period." Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament II: Mark* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), xxxi. See also: Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Power and Prejudice: the Reception of the Gospel of Mark* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 39-40.

<sup>37</sup> Joanna Dewey, "The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story?" *JBL* 123.3 (2004): 506-7.

situation regarding the ancient reception of Mark, writing: “despite the gospel’s presence in the canon, it was not treated equally with the others.”<sup>38</sup>

Given this treatment of Mark in the first millennium, it seems unlikely that Mark’s distinctive stories of Jesus’ spit would have been so widely influential as to account for the number of stories involving Muḥammad’s miraculous bodily fluids found in early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature, and of Christian saints in late ancient saints’ lives. If we are searching for stories of Jesus that might have informed such representations of Muḥammad and late ancient saints, we might more profitably look to a text that we know was commonly circulating in the eastern Mediterranean in many different languages in the sixth and following centuries, and which is even indirectly witnessed in the Qur’ān: the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (IGT).<sup>39</sup> In this text, a story appears in which, after Joseph’s son Jacob is bitten by a snake, Jesus blows upon Jacob’s wound and thereby miraculously heals it.<sup>40</sup> The popularity of IGT in the eastern Mediterranean in late antiquity indicates that the traditions about Jesus found in this text were likely just as influential, if not more so, than the Markan stories of Jesus using his saliva for healing.<sup>41</sup> As has been noted by several recent scholars, distinctions between the usages and

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<sup>38</sup> Schildgen, *Power and Prejudice*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> It has long been recognized that the miracle of Jesus giving life to clay birds by blowing (*nafakha*) into them found in Q. 3:49 and 5:110 seems to reflect traditions found in IGT of Jesus forming birds from clay and bringing them to life by clapping his hands. See: Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 142-4; Suleiman A. Mourad, “On the Qur’anic Stories about Mary and Jesus,” *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1 (1999): 13-24.

<sup>40</sup> In Greek, ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ κατεφύσησε τὸ δῆγμα. Constantin von Tischendorf, *Evangelia apocrypha. Adhibitis plurimis codicibus graecis et latinis maximam partem nunc primum consultis atque ineditorum copia insignibus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1876), 155. In Latin, Iesus sufflavit in plagam eius. Ibid., 178. In Syriac, ܡܫܘܚܘܢ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ. Tony Burke, “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas from an Unpublished Syriac Manuscript: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 16.2 (2013): 295.

<sup>41</sup> Evidence of this popularity can be seen in the citation of these stories in sermons and other texts, as well as the attestation of these apocryphal texts in extant manuscripts. On the popularity of IGT, as well as other apocryphal texts, in Late Antiquity see: Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: the Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 89-119; Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, “Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity,” in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2007), 47-66; Els Rose, *Ritual Memory: the apocryphal Acts and liturgical commemoration in the early medieval West (c. 500-1215)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).



conceptions of canonical, apocryphal, and hagiographic texts are not clear in this period, and it is reasonable to suggest that this story (or similar ones) of Jesus blowing upon a wound circulated in similar ways/circles to the gospel stories, as well as the miracle stories of the late ancient saints.<sup>42</sup> Many early Islamic texts, including the Qur'ān, appear also to have been in conversation with Christian apocryphal texts, and it is therefore likewise reasonable to suggest that the *sīra* and *ḥadīth* stories of Muḥammad were in conversation with such apocryphal/hagiographical stories.<sup>43</sup>

Yet while various aspects of both the canonical and the apocryphal Christian images of Jesus are indeed found in early Islamic texts, no stories of Jesus' healing capabilities found in Islamic texts that I am aware of relate his usage of saliva or breath for healing purposes. The Qur'ānic mentions of Jesus' miracles of healing the blind and the leper and raising the dead at Q. 3:49 and 5:110 do not relate how he was able to accomplish these feats, other than "by the permission of God" (*bi-idhn<sup>i</sup> allāh<sup>i</sup>*). The elaborations of these stories in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* and in the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* works of al-Kisā'ī and al-Tha'labī relate that Jesus cured by prayer alone, and only rarely with the usage of his body.<sup>44</sup> If these texts are any

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<sup>42</sup> On the lack of distinction between canonical, apocryphal, and hagiographic texts, see: Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Between Scripture and Tradition: The Marian Apocrypha of Early Christianity," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 491-510; Rose, *Ritual Memory*, 34-42; and the literature cited in both works.

<sup>43</sup> On the Qur'ān, see: Cornelia B. Horn, "Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and in the Qur'ān," *Apocrypha* 17 (2006): 113-150; idem, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on the Structural and Motif Parallels Regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The 'Book of Mary,' the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur'an," *Apocrypha* 19 (2008): 267-291. André Ferreé, "L'historien al-Ya'qūbī et les Évangiles," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977): 65-83 illustrates that al-Ṭabarī's *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* and al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* draw upon Christian apocryphal material about Jesus. Cited in David Pinault, "Images of Christ in Arabic Literature," *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s. 27 (1987): 107. *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* material about Jesus also draws upon apocryphal Christian material: Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 59-63. In his collection of *ḥadīth* material involving Jesus, Khalidi draws attention to parallels to Christian apocrypha. Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001), 7-9, 14, 49, 108-9, 158, 169, 197, 208-9.

<sup>44</sup> Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 60. Al-Ṭabarī writes, for example, that Jesus "would heal them by praying to God" (*kāna yudāwī-him bi-l-du'ā' ilā allāh*): al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 1/ii:731; Perlmann, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 118. Similar statements are found in: William M. Brinner, trans., *Arā'is al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, or,

indication of the early Islamic understandings of Jesus' healing miracles, it does not appear that Jesus' saliva and breath were seen as significant in this capacity.<sup>45</sup> It is therefore not particularly convincing to suggest that it is stories of Jesus' spit and breath that explain the stories of Muḥammad's healing bodily fluids in *sīra* and *ḥadīth* texts.

When looking for the literary-cultural milieu for those stories about Muḥammad and late ancient saints, it is also important to note that, while the gospel stories of Jesus' usage of saliva for healing might appear unusual and/or distinctive, in fact "none of these gestures and material means [of healing] is unique to the gospel accounts."<sup>46</sup> That the saliva of "special" men, like their bodies more generally, held healing capabilities was an idea exhibited in several different contexts, amongst many different peoples, in the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern world.<sup>47</sup> A notable example is the story of the Roman emperor Vespasian, who is reported to have miraculously restored a blind man's sight by spitting into his eyes, as well as to have healed a man's lame hand by stepping upon it with his foot.<sup>48</sup> In his *Natural History*, the first-century Latin writer Pliny the Elder states that the saliva of certain ethnic groups holds special curative powers, citing the tribes of "the Psylli, the Marsi, and the people called 'Ophiogenes,' in the Isle

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"*Lives of the Prophets.*" As Recounted by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 648, 652, 653, 657, 659, 668. Al-Tha'labī does relate a story in which Jesus heals a blind man by touching his eyes and praying to God for the man (*massa 'Īsā baṣara-hu wa-da'ā la-hu*). However, Jesus' spit and breath do not appear. Ibid., 661. Arabic text: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā' al-musammā 'Arā'is al-majālis* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyya, n.d.), 355.

<sup>45</sup> Jesus' breath is of course important in the Qur'ān because it is through his breath that Jesus brings to life the clay birds. See note 39. In medieval Sufi texts, this Qur'ānic idea finds mystical expression in "Jesus' life-giving breath," but this idea does not appear in narratives of Jesus' ministry, and is not related in terms of healing illness. See Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 85, 92-100.

<sup>46</sup> Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, 18. Remus in fact suggests that the author of Matthew may have excised the stories involving Jesus' spittle "to distance Jesus from run-of-the mill healers who employ gestures ... and other materials considered potent against disease." Ibid., 43.

<sup>47</sup> Barry Blackburn, *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Anēr Concept as an Interpretative Background of the Miracle Traditions used by Mark* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 218. On the powerful touch of holy men in ancient Hellenistic and Jewish contexts, see: ibid., 112-117; Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, 20-22.

<sup>48</sup> The similarity of this story to the stories of Muḥammad's healing saliva has already been noted by Andræ, *Die person Muhammeds*, 48. Originally these miracle stories about Vespasian appear to have been part of a propaganda campaign supporting Vespasian's right to the emperorship. Eve, "Spit in Your Eye," 3-7. Notably, "there is nothing to suggest that any other emperor ever tried to legitimate his position by healing": ibid., 5.

of Cyprus.”<sup>49</sup> Rabbinic literature indicates that there is a healing power present in the saliva of a person who is fasting and in that of a firstborn child (though only the firstborn of a father, but not of a mother).<sup>50</sup> In regard to the use of spittle for healing purposes, John M. Hull states that “we are in that shadowy world where medicine fades into magic and no sharp distinction can be made”: a belief in the miraculous healing capabilities of spittle (whether considered magical, medicinal, or religious) of certain particularly holy or unique people was a phenomenon in several cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East.<sup>51</sup> The gospel stories of Jesus are not entirely unique in this regard.

Based on these considerations, drawing a straight line between the spitting stories of Jesus and of Muḥammad—and indeed between those of Jesus and of the late ancient Christian holy men—seems too simplistic an explanation for the variety of stories in which the bodily fluids of holy men are cherished for their miraculous power. Instead of a direct dependence on scriptural models of Jesus, I would argue that the value placed upon Muḥammad’s bodily fluids—and those of late ancient saints—is in many cases better explained from within the context of an expanded role granted to the holy person’s body in late antiquity: part of a “material turn ... in the late ancient religious sensibility,” as Patricia Cox Miller phrases it, that was “based on the view that spiritual beings are corporeally present in human life, and that the

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<sup>49</sup> Plin. Nat. 28.6, also 7.2. Traditions about these “snake-handling races” are discussed in Oliver Phillips, “Singing Away Snakebite: Lucan’s Magical Cures,” in Meyer and Mirecki, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 391-400; Naomi Janowitz, “Natural, Magical, Scientific or Religious? A Guide to Theories of Healing,” in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson*, ed. April D. DeConick, Gregory Shaw, and John D. Turner (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 315-331.

<sup>50</sup> Saliva of a fasting person: *b. Shab.* 108b. Saliva of a firstborn: *b. B.B.* 126b. See: Fred Rosner, *Encyclopedia of Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000), 273; Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols. (Munich: C. H. Becksche, 1922-1961), 2:15. Pliny the Elder also holds that there is curative power in the saliva of a fasting person: Plin. Nat. 7.2, 28.7. Importantly, while rabbinic literature and Graeco-Roman texts provide evidence of a belief in the healing power of saliva, “there has been no Old Testament influence upon the New Testament use of healing saliva”: Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, 76.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

human body is a locus of spirituality.”<sup>52</sup> This “increasing materiality inherent in late antique notions of sanctity” was embodied in stories about the saints, which over the course of the fourth through seventh centuries became increasingly focused on the holy person’s body as a source of miraculous power.<sup>53</sup> This same tendency was also found in practices like relic and icon worship that typified Christian religious practice in late antiquity.<sup>54</sup>

I suggest that this increased reverence for the holy persons’ bodies explains the treatment of their bodily fluids in the stories studied in this chapter. This material turn saw “the presence of the divine in the living bodies of holy men and also in their relics,” including their saliva, their breath, and fluids that had touched their bodies, such as bathwater or ablution water.<sup>55</sup> The stories of the cherished bodily fluids of saints and of Muḥammad may perhaps be understood as extensions of the gospel stories’ representations of the power in Jesus’ body, but seem to make more sense within the context of late ancient emphases on holy bodies, alive or dead.<sup>56</sup> Indeed the emphases on the bodies of holy persons as transmitters of divine blessings, and on their

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<sup>52</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, “Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity,” *JECS* 12.4 (2004): 392, 403.

<sup>53</sup> Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 121. Miller notes, “Unlike such earlier saints as Macrina and Anthony, who healed primarily by prayer, later saints were more interactive physically,” healing much more often by touch and through holy water and oil: “Visceral Seeing,” 399. Michael Dols notes a similar difference between the exorcism stories of Jesus in the New Testament and those of “Byzantine saints” since “the saints usually touched the demon-possessed individual,” whereas Jesus more often simply verbally ordered demons to leave: *Majnūn*, 188-189. Peter Brown writes, “Christian holy persons had been shot into prominence, at this time, by an exceptionally stern and world-denying streak in late antique Christianity . . . Yet, by sharing, through their prayers, in the concerns of the mighty angels, Christian holy persons had come to embrace the *mundus*, the material world itself.” Peter Brown, “Arbiters of Ambiguity: A Role of the Late Antique Holy Man.” *Cassiodorus: rivista di studi sulla tarda antichità* 2 (1996): 141.

<sup>54</sup> Miller writes that “matter became central to Christian identity in late antiquity, first in the form of relics, and then in the form of icons.” Patricia Cox Miller, “On the Edge of Self and Other: Holy Bodies in Late Antiquity,” *JECS* 17.2 (2009): 186.

<sup>55</sup> Idem, “Visceral Seeing,” 403.

<sup>56</sup> For scriptural stories of healing bodies and quasi-relics, see: 2 Kings 13:20-21; Mk 5:26-34 [=Mt 9:20-22, Lk 8:43-48]; Acts 3:4-7; Acts 19:11-12. Discussions in: Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 227; Lionel Rothkrug, “The ‘Odour of Sanctity,’ and the Hebrew Origins of Christian Relic Veneration,” *Historical Reflections* 8.2 (1981): 95-142; John Wortley, “Origins of the Christian veneration of body-parts,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 223.1 (2006): 5-28; idem, “De latrone converso: The Tale of the Converted Robber (BHG 1450kb, W861),” *Byzantion* 66 (1996): 227-8; John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West c. 300-1200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 25-6.

followers' desire for relics of their bodies, are themes that find particular resonance in late ancient literature more generally. While this late ancient tendency is certainly similar, and undoubtedly related, to the power ascribed to Jesus in the gospels, it also steps beyond such scriptural precedents and forms a particularly striking picture of the holy person's body as a site of holy power.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, some fairly early Islamic sources directly bear witness to this way of representing late ancient Christian holy men and to the shared milieu of late ancient hagiography and early Islamic texts. Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'riḫ al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* and al-Tha'labī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* both incorporate the story of Saint George (in Arabic, Jirjīs), a legendary Christian martyr figure of around the fourth or fifth century. It is quite clear that these Arabic versions depend upon earlier Christian texts about George that circulated widely in late antiquity, since al-Ṭabarī's and al-Tha'labī's versions directly parallel these Christian texts in many places.<sup>58</sup> One such element found in earlier Christian versions, as well as the George stories of al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha'labī, has direct relevance for my purposes here: When a woman brings a blind and deaf boy to George, the saint instantaneously heals the boy by spitting (*baṣaqa*) into his eyes and blowing spittle (*naḫatha*) into his ears.<sup>59</sup> The saint's body is thus used to cure the boy through the conduit of his bodily products, his spit and breath.

Here we find a clear illustration that ideas and stories of the holy person's miraculous bodily fluids circulated among those constructing early Islamic texts, and an indication that similar stories in the *sīra* and *ḥadīth* texts about Muḥammad likely partake in the traditions of

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<sup>57</sup> Frankfurter writes that in late ancient Egypt, "Christian bodies [specifically of saints] ... come to serve as the axis points between Egyptian peasant culture and the Christian pantheon of holy beings" and the "sense of a cosmos held together with saints' bodies." This applied not only to living saints, but "devotion towards the saint as *physical* center often continued into the very corpse": David Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt," *J ECS* 11.3 (2003): 365-366, 380.

<sup>58</sup> The Christian versions will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>59</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, 1/ii:807. Perlmann, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 182. al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 390. Brinner, trans., *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 722.

hagiographic texts as much as, if not more than, scriptural models. While al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī depict George healing through breath and spit, they do not transmit stories of Jesus doing so. Whether this was because they did not know of such stories about Jesus, or deliberately chose not to include them, is impossible to say. However, the presence of such stories about George and the absence of similar ones about Jesus speak to the milieu within which stories of Muḥammad’s healing breath, spittle, and ablution waters likely developed.

The stories described in the following sections of this chapter will illustrate how the bodily fluids of late ancient Christian saints and the Prophet Muḥammad were similarly understood and described in Christian and Islamic biographical literatures. While I do not posit a direct literary dependency on saints’ lives on the part of the early biographers of Muḥammad, I would suggest that these bodies of literature participate in a shared literary and cultural milieu in which a common set of topoi are drawn upon for displaying holiness in individuals. Such a milieu provides a much closer temporal and cultural context for Muḥammad’s special spit than the somewhat marginal gospel stories of Jesus’ saliva. The comparable evidence found between saints lives and early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* texts suggests that perhaps these stories were not attempts to make Muḥammad appear “as holy as” scriptural characters like Jesus, but to make him into a holy man according to the conceptions of holiness contemporary to the time period(s) within which the early Islamic texts took shape.

## “It is holy spittle”: Proving Holiness and Prophecy with Dirty Water and Spit

The following story in the life of the sixth-century saint Daniel of Sketis provides a point of entry into this larger phenomenon of holy bodily fluids.<sup>60</sup> While on a journey, Daniel sends a disciple to a women’s monastery to ask if the two men might spend the night there. The female archimandrite is initially skeptical of letting men into the monastery, but the disciple then tells her that it is Abba Daniel of Sketis who wishes to stay:

When she heard this, she opened the gates and came running out, and so did the whole community, and they spread out their veils from the gate down to where the elder [i.e. Daniel] was, groveling at his feet and licking his footsteps. When they came into the monastery, the amma [the female head of the monastery] brought a basin and filled it with warm water and herbs. She drew up the sisters in two groups and washed the elder’s feet and his disciple’s. She took a cup and took [water] from the basin and poured it on the sisters’ heads. Then she poured it on her own breast and head.<sup>61</sup>

Out of profound reverence for this holy man, the community of sisters pours forth from the walls of their monastery, licking the very dirt upon which Daniel had trod.<sup>62</sup> The sisters’ actions illustrate an aspect of the “material turn” that we have just discussed: the belief that a holy person’s body contained a miraculous power that could be conveyed to other persons and objects via touch.<sup>63</sup> The collection of such sanctified dirt is a common late ancient hagiographic trope:

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<sup>60</sup> On Daniel of Sketis, see: Tim Vivian, “Introduction,” in *Witness to Holiness: Abba Daniel of Scetis. Translations of the Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Syriac, Armenian, Latin, Old Church Slavonic, and Arabic accounts*, ed. Tim Vivian (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 8-17, citing older literature.

<sup>61</sup> Greek text and English translation in: Britt Dahlman, *Saint Daniel of Sketis: A Group of Hagiographic Texts Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2007), 142-143.

<sup>62</sup> Tim Vivian translates the Greek here (τὰ ἕχνη τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ) as “soles of his feet” in Vivian, ed., *Witness to Holiness*, 48. Both translations are possible, though licking the footprints makes more sense in this context.

<sup>63</sup> On transmission of holy power via touch, see: John Wortley, “Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm: Leo III, Constantine V and the Relics,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982): 262; Sabine MacCormack, “Loca Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 21; Josef W. Meri, “Aspects of *Baraka* (Blessings) and

found not only in stories about Christian saints, but also in the Babylonian Talmud in a story about Rabbi Ḥanīna (d. *circa* 250 C.E.) in which a woman collects dust from beneath his feet, just as the sisters do with Daniel of Sketis.<sup>64</sup>

This same late ancient belief is displayed in the story of the sisters' actions once Daniel and his disciple arrive within the monastery's doors, a story that displays some interesting parallels to the Companions' treatment of Muḥammad in 'Urwa b. Mas'ūd's testimony to the Quraysh. After washing Daniel's feet, the dirty bathwater is poured upon the heads of the sisters, lined up to receive their share. As the editor and translator of this Greek text notes, "the water is used as an *eulogia* [a material blessing] for the sisters and for the *hegumene* [the amma] herself."<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the Syriac version of this story explicitly states that the water is poured over the women "as a blessing" (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܓܝܐ): the water that has run over the dirty feet of this holy man (as well as those of his disciple) has in fact become a blessing by virtue of its touching those same dirty feet.<sup>66</sup> Like the used ablution water over which Muḥammad's Companions clamored, Daniel's bathwater has become a blessed token, cherished by those who believe in this figure's sacrality and wish to partake in that sacrality through his bodily waste. Found in several different

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Ritual Devotion among Medieval Muslims and Jews." *Medieval Encounters* 5.1 (1999): 46-69; idem, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 103.

<sup>64</sup> *b. San.* 67b. Richard Kalmin says that the woman in this story "gathers dirt from under the feet of R. Hanina, apparently because she believes the dirt possesses magical or medicinal powers": Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 41. For a very different interpretation of this passage, see: Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 150-1; Markam J. Geller, "Deconstructing Talmudic Magic," in *Magic and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Charles Burnett and W. F. Ryan (London: The Warburg Institute; Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2006), 16. Examples of the collection of soil associated with saints in Christian texts include: Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna, *A panegyric on Apollo, Archimandrite of the Monastery of Isaac*, ed. and trans. K.H. Kuhn (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO 1978), 29 (Coptic), 22 (Eng.); *Life of Pachomius* [Bohairic] 150; Paphnutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* 108, 124; Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III.10-11, IV.3.

<sup>65</sup> Dahlman, *Saint Daniel of Sketis*, 215. On *eulogiai*, see: Alfred Stuiber, "Eulogia," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, ed. Franz Joseph Dölger et al. (Stuttgart: A. Hiersmann Verlag, 1950- ), 6:922-927; Daniel Caner, "Towards a Miraculous Economy: Christian Gifts and Material 'Blessings' in Late Antiquity," *J ECS* 14.3 (2006): 333.

<sup>66</sup> Syriac text: François Nau, "Vie et récits de l'Abbé Daniel, de Scété (VI<sup>e</sup> siècle). II. Texte Syriaque (1)," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 5 (1900): 391-406. Translation in: Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 143-145. Brock and Harvey note that while Nau's Syriac edition is based on a thirteenth century manuscript (Paris syr. 234, folios 339ff.), for their translation "use has also been made of British Library Add. 14649 of the ninth century (whose text is in fact very similar)." *Ibid.*, 192.



languages—Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic—this story displays a motif that spread far in the representation of holiness of such late ancient figures.<sup>67</sup>

Another example of this theme, this one found in a text extant today only in Coptic, displays again that a blessed person's wastewater could become a valuable commodity to his community.<sup>68</sup> In the "Panegyric on Apollo, Archimandrite of the Monastery of Isaac," when death is approaching the "prophet and archimandrite, Apa Apollo,"<sup>69</sup> his last actions are described by the text's author:

But before he died he bade them bring water to him. He washed his face, his hands and his feet. He told them to pour it into the little cistern on the south side. O how many healings came to pass in that water which had received blessing!<sup>70</sup>

Here again, water that had passed over the body of a holy man becomes a cherished object and a "blessing" (CMOY) for the community of believers around him. Here the "blessing" is transmitted through one more step than is found in the previously discussed stories: the used water is not poured directly onto the heads of the believers, as in the story of Daniel of Sketis, nor caught by the followers, as in Muhammad's case. Instead it is poured into a cistern, this time at the archimandrite's command. The cistern's water "received blessing" via Apollo's bathwater, and thus becomes the vehicle for the transmission of Apollo's blessing, manifested in the form of healing, to a group of unidentified individuals.

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<sup>67</sup> Discussions and translations of these different versions can be found in: Vivian, ed., *Witness to Holiness*.

<sup>68</sup> The text is extant in a Coptic manuscript copied in 822-823 C.E. and in Coptic fragments tentatively dated also to the ninth century: Kuhn, "Introduction," in Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna, *Panegyric on Apollo*, VII-IX. Kuhn discusses the question of whether the text was originally composed in Greek or Coptic, noting that some of the wordplay found in the text makes sense only with knowledge of Greek: *Ibid.*, X-XI.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna, *Panegyric on Apollo*, 1. On monks as "prophets," see: Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt," 369-371; L. S. B. MacCoull, "Prophethood, Texts, and Artifacts: The Monastery of Epiphanius," *GRBS* 39 (1998): 311-312; David Brakke, "Shenoute, Weber, and the Monastic Prophet: Ancient and Modern Articulations of Ascetic Authority," in *Foundations of Power and Conflicts of Authority in Late-Antique Monasticism*, ed. A. Camplani and G. Filoramo (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 47-73.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna, *Panegyric on Apollo*, 37 (Coptic), 28 (Eng.).

These stories of Daniel of Sketis and Apa Apollo exhibit parallels not only to the report of ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd discussed at the beginning of this chapter, but also to other stories about Muḥammad, such as one that appears in Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba’s late eighth- or early ninth-century *ḥadīth* collection *al-Muṣannaf*, and in Ibn Mājah’s ninth-century *Sunan*:

Umm Jundub said: I saw that [the Messenger of] threw pebbles at al-‘Aqaba from Baṭn al-Wādī on the Day of Sacrifice (*yawm al-naḥr*) while he was on a riding animal. Then he left, and]<sup>71</sup> a woman from Khath‘am followed the Messenger of God. With her was her child who had an affliction (*balā’*). She said, “O Messenger of God! This is my son, and he is the last one of my people (*ahlī*). He has an affliction (*balā’*) such that he does not talk.” The Messenger of God said, “Give me some water.” Water was brought to him and he washed his hands in it and rinsed out his mouth (*ghasala fī-hi yaday-hi wa-maḍmaḍa fā-hu*). Then he gave it to her and said, “Give this to him to drink and pour some of it upon him, and ask a cure from God for him.” I [Umm Jundub] said: I encountered the woman and said, “Would that you gave some of it to me!” She said, “No! It is for this suffering one.” I encountered the woman after a year and I asked her about the child. And she said: “He recovered and is endowed with an intellect unlike that of the people (‘*aqala ‘aql<sup>an</sup> laysa ka- ‘uqūl al-nas*).”<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> The words between brackets are absent in the version recorded by Ibn Abī Shayba in the *kitāb al-ṭibb*. These words may have been excised due to their irrelevance in the context of the discussion of medicine. Other *aḥādīth* narrated by Sulaymān b. ‘Amr b. al-Aḥwaṣ from his mother and father deal with *ḥajj* rituals, including some that describe the Prophet performing Jamrat al-‘Aqaba but without the appearance of the miracle story. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 2:510-1 (nos. 1961-2) (*kitāb al-manāsik, bāb 77*); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1008-9 (nos. 3028, 3031) (*kitāb al-manāsik, bāb 63-4*). For information on the rituals mentioned here, see: *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Minā” (Fr. Buhl) and *ibid.*, s.v. “Ḥaḍjīdī” (A.J. Wensinck, et al.).

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:40-41 (no. 23931) and 11:47 (no. 32289). In both versions, the *isnād* is Abū Bakr > ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Sulaymān > Yazīd b. Abī Ziyād > Sulaymān b. ‘Amr b. al-Aḥwaṣ > Umm Jundub. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1168 (no. 3532) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 40*) has the same *isnād* narrated from Ibn Abī Shayba. It also appears in Abū Nu‘aym, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 399 with this *isnād*. On the dating of Ibn Abī Shayba’s *al-Muṣannaf*, see: Scott C. Lucas, “Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*? A Study of the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba,” *ILS* 15 (2008): 289. Christopher Melchert writes that, while he is not convinced by Harald Motzki’s early dating of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*, “However, I do not see that there is a strong case against Motzki, either, and their stress on post-

A sick child's "affliction" is thus cured by his drinking and being bathed in water that had run over the Prophet's hands and been spat from his mouth. The child's mother does not explicitly ask for this specific gift from the Prophet, but her recognition of this water's value and potential power is clear from the exchange between her and the narrator (Umm Jundub). Umm Jundub states that she had in fact asked for some of the water that she had seen flow through the Prophet's hands and mouth, but the mother refused her request on the grounds of giving it to her ill child. After being given this healing token, the boy recovers—and in fact more than recovers, growing to possess an intelligence unlike (and, we can imagine, better than) that of average individuals. The implication seems to be that that the boy's healing and great intelligence spring from the Prophetic water that he had drunk and with which he had washed.<sup>73</sup>

Here we find a story with elements familiar to us from the narratives discussed above. Umm Jundub's story resonates with 'Urwa b. Mas'ūd's testimony about Muḥammad, with a mother zealously guarding her child's access to Muḥammad's ablution water just as the Companions "nearly come to blows" over it at al-Ḥudaybiyya. Like the bathwaters of Daniel of Sketis and Apa Apollo, the water that had washed the Prophet becomes a healing token, a contact relic by virtue of its touching Muḥammad's body. This water is not only poured over the sick child's body, but is also ingested by the child, taking the water's power inside of him. Exposure to relics of Muḥammad's body functions as a source of healing, enabled by the physical contact with, and ingestion of, water that had run over the Prophet's hands and through his mouth.

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prophetic hadith (over 75 percent of 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaḥ*, 80 percent of Ibn Abī Shaybah's) seems an additional reason to suppose that the two *Muṣannaḥs* did predate the Six Books." Melchert, "The Life and Works of Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī," *Al-Qanṭara* 29 (2008): 25 n.93. This characteristic of the two *Muṣannaḥs* is discussed in Lucas, "Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*" and Motzki, *Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*.

<sup>73</sup> Rubin similarly suggests that here "the story is centred [*sic*] on the blessedness of the Prophet's saliva." Rubin, "Muḥammad the Exorcist," 101.

A similar story about the healing powers of Muḥammad’s ablution water is found in several canonical *ḥadīth* compilations of the ninth century, including al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and al-Tirmidhī’s *Jāmi‘*, as well as in al-Nasā’ī’s non-canonical *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*.<sup>74</sup> The story is narrated by Sā’ib b. Yazīd (d. *circa* 91/709):

My aunt brought me [Sā’ib] to the Prophet and said, “O Messenger of God, my nephew has a pain.” He touched my head and invoked a blessing upon me (*masaḥa ra’sī wa-da’ā lī bi-l-barakatī*). Then he performed ablutions and I drank from his ablution water (*thumma tawaḍḍa’a fa-sharibtu min waḍū’i-hi*). Then I stood behind him and looked at the seal of prophethood between his shoulders, like the button of a bridal tent.

In this text, a variety of healing methods is combined in the remedy of Sā’ib’s pain. The Prophet first places his hand upon Sā’ib, and calls for a blessing upon the boy. This physical contact is then followed by Sā’ib’s ingestion of the Prophet’s ablution water, similar to that of the boy in the previous *ḥadīth* narrative. The story closes with Sā’ib’s vision of the “seal of prophethood” between Muḥammad’s shoulders, drawing the reader’s vision to this physical manifestation of the Prophet’s status.<sup>75</sup> The Prophet’s body stands as proof of his prophecy, both with this mark upon his body, as well as in his ability to repel illness by his touch and his saliva.

<sup>74</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 59 (no. 190) (*kitāb al-wuḍū’*, *bāb* 40); 874 (no. 3541) (*kitāb al-manāqib*, *bāb* 22); 1438 (no. 5670) (*kitāb al-marḍā*, *bāb* 18); 1584 (no. 6352) (*kitāb al-da’āwāt*, *bāb* 31). Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim li-imām Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī ma’a sharḥi-hi al-musammā Ikmāl al-Ikmāl al-Mu’allim li-imām Muḥammad ibn Khalīfa al-Washṭānī al-Ubbī wa sharḥi-hi al-musammā Mukammil Ikmāl, al-Ikmāl li-imām Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī al-Ḥasanī*, ed. Muḥammad Sālim Hāshim, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008), 8:84 (no. 2345) (*kitāb al-faḍā’il*, *bāb* 30). Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, ed. ‘Ādil Murshid (‘Ammān: Dār al-A’lām; al-Tā’if: Maktabat al-Dār Bayān al-Ḥadīth, 2001), 799 (no. 3643) (*kitāb al-manāqib*, *bāb* 23). For these references, see: Wensinck, *Concordance*, 7:245. See also: Aḥmad b. Shu’ayb al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, ed. Abū Anas Jād Allāh ibn Ḥasan al-Khaddāsh, 3 vols (al-Riyād: Maktabat al-Rushd Nashirūn; ‘Ammān: al-Dār al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1427/2006), 2:1163 (no. 7476).

<sup>75</sup> On the “seal of prophethood” (*khātam al-nubuwwa*), see: Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 11, 34. Relevant traditions are found in: Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sirat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 116; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 80; Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-Siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 75; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/iii:1124; Watt and McDonald, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 45; Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii:121, 125, 131-3; ‘Umar Ibn

While the stories examined thus far focus upon a holy person's washing water—with the blessedness of the holy person's body thus filtered through water as a secondary object, a “contact relic”—other stories explicitly involving a holy person's saliva or breath, direct “bodily emanations” of the holy person. A striking example is found again in the “Panegyric on Apollo” in a passage describing the illness that would eventually take the life of the archimandrite:

He fell into a great illness when his inward parts were stricken, and thereafter he continued to spit blood and phlegm for the rest of his days. So he was sick in this fashion, but his sickness was also a healing for others. For while he was sitting one day speaking with believers who had come to him to be blessed by him, there was one among them, too, who was suffering from a sickness. O that spittle that issued from the saint's mouth! O the sickness that became the healer of another's sickness! For the sickness constrained our father to expectorate such things. It is holy spittle, one might almost say.<sup>76</sup> At once when it had dropped upon the ground, the sick man took it in perfect hope and swallowed it. And suddenly the grace of faith became the healing of the believer through that holy spittle. And so the man was healed ...<sup>77</sup>

This story makes clear that Apollo's disgusting saliva, full of blood and phlegm that the illness “constrained our father to expectorate,” is interpreted as a valuable object by at least one man around him. This ill man picks up the saliva from the ground as soon as it is spat, and puts it in his mouth fully convinced of its beneficial potential. And the spit does in fact become a source of blessing for the man when, in combination with his “faith,” the man is healed “through that holy spittle.” As Robert Ritner notes, in this story Apollo's “holy spittle now functions as a ‘bodily

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Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. Fuhaym Muḥammad Shaltūt, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 1990), 2:619-20; al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 3:1018; Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 499.

<sup>76</sup> Ritner notes that “almost” should be removed from Kuhn's translation here and that “The author [of the “Panegyric”] does indeed call the spittle ‘holy’”: *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 91n.437.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna, *Panegyric on Apollo*, 35 (Coptic), 27 (Eng.).

relic,' deriving its power from divinity inherent in the saintly figure."<sup>78</sup> Apollo's spit itself functions as a healing relic, a subdivision of his holy body into a form accessible (and ingestible) to one of his followers.

That a holy person's spittle could be a source of healing is also found in a source from the other side of the Mediterranean: the sixth-century *Lives of the Fathers* by Gregory of Tours. In this work, Gregory includes the story of Lupicinus, an ascetic who locks himself in an abandoned building, where he receives only bread and water through a small window. As he considers this not a harsh enough discipline, Lupicinus decides also to wear on his neck "a large stone, which two men could hardly lift."<sup>79</sup> Near the end of his life, the stone weighed so heavily upon him that "blood began to come from his mouth; he used to spit this out against the walls."<sup>80</sup> After his death, that spit-spattered wall becomes a source of blessing and contention, as Lupicinus' spiritual "brothers and sons" come to his makeshift cell to see his blessed body:

Some kiss his feet; others take away some fragment of his garment; others collect from the walls the blessed blood that he had spat out. And indeed scuffles break out among them, for each thought himself wretched if he left without having some relics of the holy man to take with them. The wall today still witnesses to what we have just said, for it has as many little holes as it had merited drops of spittle from the mouth of the blessed man ... I have indeed myself seen many who scraped from the wall the spit which had come from that sanctified mouth, who have had the honour of relief from several illnesses.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 91. See also: Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man," 377.

<sup>79</sup> *Lib. vit. patr.* 13:1. Gregory of Tours, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, trans. Edward James, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), 86-7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Lib. vit. patr.* 13:2. Gregory of Tours, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, 88.

The story of Lupicinus offers parallels to the collection of saliva found also in the stories about Muḥammad and Apollo, and even a parallel to the story of Muḥammad’s Companions “nearly coming to blows” over Muḥammad’s ablution water. In fact, the text explicitly labels the collection of bits of Lupicinus’ bloody saliva as the attempt to have “some relics of the holy man,” comparing it to the attempt to touch his feet or to collect bits of his garments. Gregory further makes clear that the benefit of collecting Lupicinus’ saliva (like that of Apollo) includes the possibility of healing, as “many who scraped from the wall the spit . . . have had the honour of relief from several illnesses.”

Similar to such tales of a holy person’s saliva, the miraculous power of a holy person’s breath is displayed in the Acts of Saint George, a hagiographical biography “first set down, in Greek, in the fifth century or the end of the fourth” and widely dispersed in several different versions in a number of languages in late antiquity, including Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Arabic.<sup>82</sup> George’s story was also included in some early Islamic texts, as we saw above. In the Christian versions of this text, a woman tells George that she will believe in his God if George is able to cure with his prayer a blind and deaf boy who lives in her house. Different versions of the text display different particulars of what happens next, but generally George gives a prayer (often stating that Jesus will heal the boy) before then blowing into the boy’s face or eyes: in Greek “blew into his eyes” (ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ);<sup>83</sup> in

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<sup>82</sup> Lionel Casson and Ernest L. Hettich, ed., *Excavations at Nessana, II: Literary Papyri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 126.

<sup>83</sup> Karl Krumbacher, ed., *Der heilige Georg in der griechischen überlieferung* (Munich: Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1911), 10 (line 15) and 24 (line 30). A fragmentary papyrus codex of the Greek Acts of George that was found at Nessana in the Negev – dated paleographically to the late seventh or early eighth century by its editors – displays “blew into the face of the child” (ἐν[ε]φύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ παιδίου) in this passage. The editors state that ἐν[ε]φύσησεν should be corrected to ἐνεφύσησεν, as is found in the later Greek texts. The papyrus’s reading with George blowing into the boy’s “face” seems to be the more original text, preserved also in the non-Greek versions, but changed (along with many other changes throughout the text) in the extant Greek manuscripts from the thirteenth century or later. The editors of the Nessana papyri state that “There

Syriac “breathed into his face” (ܒܚܝܒ ܠܘܫܝܗܘܬܐ);<sup>84</sup> in Coptic “breathed upon him.”<sup>85</sup> After this, “there fell from his [the boy’s] eyes as it were scales” and his eyesight is restored, a clear reference to Ananias’ healing of Paul’s blindness in Acts 9:18. While the woman’s request centers on George’s prayer, the technique George applies involves a combination of his prayer and his breath: a combination of holy words and holy body.

Another case of a holy person using his breath for healing is found in the *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon, a text likely written in the early seventh century about a late sixth-century Christian bishop from Asia Minor.<sup>86</sup> In this text, Theodore performs many feats of healing, including many exorcisms of demon-possessed individuals.<sup>87</sup> Theodore’s breath appears as part of his healing practice on three different occasions, and each time Theodore blows into the afflicted person’s mouth thrice, preceded or followed by other ritual actions and/or words. The first instance occurs in the case of an eight-year-old mute girl, brought to Theodore by her teacher: the holy man tells the girl to open her mouth, takes hold of her tongue, makes the sign of the cross over it, “blew three times” (ἐνεφύσησε τρίτον), and commands the girl to drink. The girl shouts, “I have drunk, master!” (κατέπιον, δέσποτα) and goes away “healthy” (ὕγιες), cured of her muteness.<sup>88</sup> In the second case, an innkeeper named Pherentinus—who is possessed by a demon such that “he had been lying half-dead for a long time and his face was twisted right

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is no question that the new manuscript contains a pure text of the old popular form of the legend.” Casson and Hettich, ed., *Excavations at Nessana. Volume 2: Literary Papyri*, 123, 126-127, and 136-137.

<sup>84</sup> Ernest Walter Brooks, “Acts of S. George,” *Le Muséon* 38:1-2 (1925): 87 (Syriac) and 108 (Eng.).

<sup>85</sup> E. A. W. Budge, ed. and trans., *The Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia* (London: D. Nutt, 1888), 223 (Eng.).

<sup>86</sup> According to the *Life*, Theodore was born during the reign of Justinian (r. 527-565) and died during the reign of Heraclius (r. 610-641). The text is ascribed to Theodore’s disciple, named George. See: A.-J Festugière, “Introduction,” in *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, ed. and trans. A.-J Festugière, 2 vols. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1970), v; Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 115.

<sup>87</sup> Peregrine Horden gives “A rough count of individually described possession cases in the *Life* of Theodore: 26 males, 11 females”: Horden, “Responses to Possession and Insanity in the Earlier Byzantine World,” *Social History of Medicine* 6.2 (1993): 180n.15.

<sup>88</sup> *Vie de Théodore* 95 (p. 78). Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies translated from the Greek* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), 152.



round to the back”—begs Theodore to give him a blessing. After hearing of Pherentinus’ plight, Theodore prays over the man, “blew three times into his mouth” (ἐνεφύσησε τρίτον εἰς τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ), and gives him water that he has blessed, telling him to drink it and anoint himself with it.<sup>89</sup> Theodore then continues on his journey, but when he again passes through Pherentinus’ town, Pherentinus is “in good health” (ὕγιαίνων) and out of gratitude for his miraculous healing “he brought him [Theodore] a horse from his [Pherentinus’] herd” (προσήνεγκεν αὐτῷ ἵππον ἐκ τῆς ἀγέλης αὐτοῦ).<sup>90</sup> In the final instance of Theodore’s healing breath, a man tearfully brings his nephew to Theodore because the young man has “an incurable malady – the so-called ‘*phugadaina*’” (ἀνίατον πάθος τὸ καλούμενον φαγέδαινα).<sup>91</sup> Theodore touches the infected body part before then blowing into the young man’s mouth three times (ἐνεφύσησεν ἐκ τρίτου εἰς τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ) and giving him water that he has blessed. The man and his nephew leave Theodore, and before they arrive at home the boy is cured.

While these are only three out of a great number of healing stories in the *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon, the repetition of the saint’s use of his breath for healing indicates an interest in the sacralized status of his body and its products. The usage of his breath in several different healing scenarios—involving muteness, demon possession, and disease—points to the far-reaching applicability and power of the saint’s holy breath. Like George blowing into the eyes/face of the blind boy, Theodore’s breath plays a part in his healing practice, seemingly as an extension of his holy body and its healing power.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> *Vie de Théodore* 106 (pp. 84-85). Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 158-9.

<sup>90</sup> *Vie de Théodore* 108 (p. 87). Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 160.

<sup>91</sup> *Vie de Théodore* 111 (p. 88). Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 161. On *phugadaina*, see *ibid.*, 191.

<sup>92</sup> It is possible that this representation of Theodore of Sykeon’s healing with his breath is dependent in some way upon the very similar tradition about George in the Acts of Saint George. The usage of the same Greek verb (ἐνεφύσησε) for the act of blowing in both texts is interesting, but even more striking is the prominent role of Saint George throughout the *Life* of Theodore, in which “Theodore ... was not only accompanied and aided from birth to death by Saint George, but also encouraged others to look to him for aid.” Christopher Walter, “The Origins of the Cult of Saint George,” *Revue des études byzantines* 53 (1995): 297. There was clearly a “special relationship

What is striking is the similar usage of miraculous spit or breath that occurs in the material about the Prophet Muḥammad. Like George, who convinces the woman to believe in his God by healing a boy's blindness, Muḥammad uses his holy spit/breath to instill faith in his prophetic status more generally. One such story is found in the *a'lām al-nubuwwa* ("Signs of Prophecy") section of Ibn Bukayr's recension of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, as well as in later *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* ("Proofs of Prophecy") compilations, such as those of Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038).<sup>93</sup> This story narrates a set of three wonders that Ya'lā b. Murra's father (or Ya'lā b. Murra himself in some versions) witnessed while on a journey with the Prophet. After relating the Prophet's ability to order two trees to move together so that he might relieve himself behind them with some privacy, the following story occurs:

And a woman came to him [Muḥammad] and said, "This is my son. He has had a demonic possession (*lamam*) for seven years that takes hold of him twice a day, every day. The Messenger of God said, "Bring him close to me." She brought him close, and he spat (*tafala*) in his mouth and said, "Get out, enemy of God, I am the Messenger of God!" (*ukhruj 'adūww<sup>a</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> anā rasūl<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup>*). Then the Messenger of God said to her, "When we return, let us know what happened." When the Messenger of God returned, she met him, and she had with her two rams (*kabshān*), some dried milk curd (*aqiṭ*) and some clarified butter (*samn*). The Messenger of God said to me [Ya'lā b. Murra's father], "Take this ram (*khudh hādhā-l-kabsh*)." I took from it what he wanted. And she [the

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between Theodore and the saint" (idem, *Warrior Saints*, 117), and it therefore seems possible that the literary tradition about George healing with his breath informed this representation of Theodore's healing activities. Nonetheless, the repetition of this topos in the *Life* of Theodore far exceeds any mention found in the George corpus. On George in the *Life* of Theodore, see: Ibid., 115-119; Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 206-7.

<sup>93</sup> It is also found in Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id wa manba' al-fawā'id*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1933-1934), 9:5-7.

woman] said, “[I swear] by he who honored you [i.e., God], we have not seen anything in him since we parted ways.”<sup>94</sup>

This story is then followed by a third miraculous occurrence in which a camel, slated for butchering due to its old age, stands in front of the Prophet with tears flowing from its eyes. The Prophet rescues the camel by telling its owners not to slaughter it and to return it to the camel flock among which it had lived.

In this story of a boy with a demonic possession, the Prophet’s spit functions as a manifestation of his body’s healing power. Surrounded by other stories of the Prophet’s miraculous powers, it conveys that a miracle was wrought by the Prophet’s spit. Yet the healing ritual described here is more elaborate than those found in the stories of Muḥammad that we have so far examined. Instead of merely handing off his ablution water to be administered to the ill boy, Muḥammad himself spits into the boy’s mouth and uses an exorcistic formula to call out the demonic entity inside him. Powerful words are combined with the Prophet’s powerful body, and thus the verbal articulation of the Prophet’s identity (“I am the Messenger of God!”) is mixed with a physical articulation of his body’s authority over demonic forces, in this case in the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 277 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 257 (no. 427). *Isnād*: Yūnus b. Bukayr > al-A‘mash > al-Minhāl b. ‘Amr > Ya‘lā b. Murra > his father. Cited in Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 99. Al-Minhāl b. ‘Amr (d. 117/735) is listed as a Companion of the Shī‘ī Imāms al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, al-Bāqir, and al-Ṣādiq in: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī* (al-Najaf: al-Maktaba wa-’l-Maṭba‘a al-Ḥaydariyya, 1381/1961), 79, 101, 138, 313. Al-A‘mash (d. 148/765) was an important Sunnī *ḥadīth* transmitter noted for his Shī‘ī theological beliefs. Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shī‘a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 221-8. Versions with this same *isnād* (and the Prophet spitting in the boy’s mouth) appear in: al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed. Ḥamdī al-Dimirdāsh Muḥammad, 10 vols. (Mecca: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 2000), 4:1586-7 (no. 4232); Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā‘il al-nubuwwa wa-wa-ma‘rifat aḥwāl ṣāhib al-sharī‘a*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mu‘ṭī Qal‘ajī, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1985), 6:20-1. A version narrated with the same first four links, but with Wakī‘ then replacing Yūnus b. Bukayr, does not include spitting in the exorcism: *ibid.*, 6:21-2; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:171, 172. A version with the *isnād* ‘Abd Allāh [b. Ḥanbal] > his father [Ibn Ḥanbal] > ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] > ‘Aṭā’ b. al-Sā‘ib > ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥafṣ > Ya‘lā b. Murra relates that the boy was possessed by a *jinn* (*bi-hi jinnaṭ<sup>um</sup>*) and the Prophet does not including spitting in the exorcism: *ibid.*, 4:173.

form of his saliva.<sup>95</sup> As a reward for this effort, the boy’s mother offers the Prophet a set of gifts that calls to mind the horse that Theodore of Sykeon receives from Pherentinus, grateful for his own exorcism. The Prophet modestly chooses to take only one ram.<sup>96</sup>

The combination of Prophetic bodily emanation and verbal formula is also found in the version of this narrative recorded in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaf*. In this version, narrated by Ya‘lā b. Murra himself instead of his father, the description of the Prophet’s healing occurs in this way:

I went out with him on a journey, until on one of the roads we came upon a woman sitting, and a child was with her. She said, “O Messenger of God! This is my son. He suffers from an affliction (*balā*) and we suffer it through him. It takes hold of him during the day, I don’t know how many times.” He said, “Hand him to me.” She lifted [the boy] up to him, and he placed [the boy] between himself and the front of the saddle. Then he opened his [the boy’s] mouth and blew spittle (*nafatha*) in it three times, “In the name of God, I am the servant of God: Get out, enemy of God!” (*faghara fāhu fa-nafatha fīhi thalāth<sup>an</sup> bi-sm<sup>i</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> anā ‘abd<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> ikhsa’ ‘adūww<sup>a</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> The Prophet’s identity is also used for healing purposes in the next story recorded in the *a‘lām al-nubuwwa* section of Ibn Bukayr’s *sīra* text, when the Prophet is brought a mute boy and asks him, “Who am I?” The boy, suddenly cured of his muteness, responds, “You are the Messenger of God!” Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 278.

<sup>96</sup> Versions of this story are recorded, however, in which the Prophet says: “Take one of the rams, and return the other, and take the dried milk curd and the clarified butter” (*khudh aḥad al-kabshayn wa-rudda al-ākhar wa-khudh al-samn wa-l-aqiṭ*). Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:171, 172. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 6:22. al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-zawā’id*, 9:6. Rubin (“Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 101) notes that the receipt of a gift differentiates this story of Muḥammad from the stories of Jesus’ exorcisms, and cites Michael Dols, who writes, “The exorcisms of the Byzantine saints, for example, differ from Jesus’ in that the saints usually touched the demon-possessed individual, used invocations, and were usually remunerated in one way or another.” Dols, *Majnūn*, 188-189. Dols perhaps overstates his case in saying that saints are “usually” remunerated, but examples do occur. See, for example: Palladius, *Lausiac History* 18:11.

<sup>97</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:44-45 (no. 32287). Abū Bakr > ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Numayr > ‘Uthmān b. Ḥakīm > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz > Ya‘lā b. Murra. Shortened versions of this narrative are found in *ibid.*, 8:35-36 (no. 23912) and 8:42-43 (no. 23936) with the same *isnād*. It also appears with this *isnād* in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:170; Abū Nu‘aym, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 399-400. A very similar story of the three Prophetic miracles, related in this case from the Companion Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. *circa* 73-78/692-698), appears in Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 278. Here, it is Satan (*al-Shayṭān*) that takes hold of the boy and his exorcism does not include the

The wording here indicates that the Prophet's exhalation of his spit or breathe into the boy's mouth is coterminous with his stating the verbal formula, as there is no separate verb for the Prophet's speaking as distinct from his blowing or spitting: the Prophet in fact blows or spits the words into the boy's mouth.<sup>98</sup> The power of the Prophet's words is combined with that of his exhalation, and his spit/breathe partakes in this ritual affirmation of his prophetic identity.<sup>99</sup> As in the version of this story recorded in Ibn Bukayr's *sīra* text, Muḥammad and his Companion return to find the boy cured, and they are offered a flock of sheep as recompense. The Prophet tells Ya'ālā b. Murra to take one sheep and to return the rest to the woman.

Another story narrates the Prophet's exorcism of a grown man whose prayer has been troubled by a demonic presence. This man, 'Uthmān b. Abī al-Āṣ (d. 50s/670s)—a member of the Thaḳīf tribe that the Prophet had placed in charge of the town of al-Ṭā'if—relates the story of his experience:

When the Messenger of God appointed me over al-Ṭā'if, something began to appear to me during my prayer, such that I did not know what I was praying. When I experienced

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Prophet's spitting. The *isnād* is Yūnus [b. Bukayr] > Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. before 158/775; Mecca) > Abū al-Zubayr [Muḥammad b. Muslim b. Tadrās] (d. *circa* 126/743; Mecca) > Jābir [b. 'Abd Allāh]. This version also appears (with the same *isnād* except Ibn Bukayr replaced by 'Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsa [d. 213/828; Kūfa]) in: 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī, *Musnad al-Dārimī al-ma'rūf bi-Sunan al-Dārimī*, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad al-Dārānī, 4 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Mughnī li-'l-Nashr wa al-Tawzīya', 1420/2000), 1:67-8 (no. 17). In another version narrated from Jābir, the exorcism includes both the Prophet's spitting [*baṣaqa*] in the boy's mouth and his command that Satan "Get out, for I am the Messenger of God" (*baṣaqa fī-hi rasul<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> thumma qāla ikhsa' 'adūww<sup>a</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> fa-anā rasul<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup>*). Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān. 11 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li-'l-Nashr wa al-Tawzīya', 1405/1985-1415/1995), 10:48 (no. 9108). The *isnād* here is Mas'ada b. Sa'd (d. 281/894; Mecca) > Ibrāhīm b. al-Mundhir (d. 236/850-1; Medina) > Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa al-Taymī (d. 180/796; Medina) > 'Abd al-Ḥakīm b. Sufyān b. Abī Namir > Sharīk b. 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Namir (d. *circa* 140/757; Medina) > Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh.

<sup>98</sup> The version in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:170 does make a distinction between the two actions, with the text reading: "He blew spittle into it [the boy's mouth] three times and said ..." (*naḥatha fī-hi thalāth<sup>am</sup> wa qāla*).

<sup>99</sup> Discussing these exorcism stories, Rubin suggests that, "The most crucial element in the ritual is not the instrument or the substance [i.e., the Prophet's saliva/breath] but rather the verbal formula that the Prophet utters in order to have the demon exorcised ... The idea is that since the messenger of God ranks higher than the devil, the latter must obey the instructions of the former." Rubin, "Muḥammad the Exorcist," 98-99. I would argue that the articulation of the Prophet's body, and the holiness inherent in it, is just as significant a part of the ritual described here as the verbal command itself. The citation of this story in Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaḥ* within the context of a chapter that draws attention to the Prophet's use of *naḥth*, and without mention of any verbal command, further suggests that this aspect of the ritual is highly significant. See: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:35-36 (no. 23912).

this, I rode to the Messenger of God, who asked, “[Is this] Ibn Abī al-‘Āṣ?” I said, “Yes, Messenger of God!” He said, “What has brought you here?” I said, “O Messenger of God, something appeared to me in my prayers, such that I did not know what I was praying!” He said, “That was Satan (*dhāka-l-Shayṭān*)! Come close.” I came close to him and sat down. He [‘Uthmān] said: He struck my chest with his hand and spat (*tafala*) in my mouth and said, “Get out, enemy of God!” He did that three times and then said, “May your deeds be true (*al-ḥaqq bi-‘amalī-ka*).” He [‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jawshan?] said: ‘Uthmān said, “By my life, after that I did not think about the thing that had infected me.”<sup>100</sup>

In response to a confusing presence during his prayer, ‘Uthmān goes to the Prophet, who reveals that it is fact Satan that is troubling him. To cure this condition, again the Prophet uses his thrice-expelled spittle combined with his command that the demon leave the victim’s body and, unlike the case of the possessed child, his striking ‘Uthmān on the chest. ‘Uthmān is cured through this combination of the Prophet’s spittle, verbal command, and touch.

We have now examined several stories of Muḥammad’s healing bathwater, spit, and breathe, and similar stories of some late ancient Christian saints. Commenting upon such stories about Muḥammad, Annemarie Schimmel writes, “It is natural that Muhammad’s companions should have used his washing water as medicine, as is common in the veneration of a powerful

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<sup>100</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1174-5 (no. 3548) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 46). The *isnād* is Muḥammad b. Bashshār (d. 252/866; Baṣra) > Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830; Baṣra) > ‘Uyayna b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 139/757?; Baṣra) > his father [‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jūshan] (d. 98/716?; Baṣra) > ‘Uthmān b. Abī al-‘Āṣ. A version of this story is also found in Abū Nu‘aym, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 400-1 with the *isnād*: ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ja‘far > ‘Alī b. Sa‘īd > ‘Abbās [b. Muḥammad] al-Dūrī (d. 271/884; Baghdad) > ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Thaqafī (d. unknown; Baṣra) > his father [‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Thaqafī] (d. 194/809-10; Baṣra) > Yūnus [b. ‘Ubayd b. Dīnār] (d. 139/758; Baṣra) > al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] (d. 110/728) > ‘Uthmān b. Abī al-‘Āṣ. Compare: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 2:85 (no. 2582).

leader, for everything that touches his body participates in his *baraka*.”<sup>101</sup> Not unlike ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s comparison of Muḥammad to the kings of the earth, Schimmel here cites “the veneration of a powerful leader” as the point of comparison for the Companions’ behavior. Elsewhere, she more specifically suggests that the Companions’ usage of Muḥammad’s washing water and saliva for healing purposes is “a custom well known in the history of religions” and that the ability of such materials to provide healing is “part of the *baraka* that accompanies the saintly person and that enables him sometimes to perform healing miracles by merely touching a person or breathing upon him.”<sup>102</sup>

Although Schimmel does not specify what kind of “saintly person” she has in mind here, we can certainly find similarities between the behavior and beliefs that she describes and, for example, Carol Walker Bynum’s description of the power ascribed to Christian holy persons’ bodies in Medieval European literature: “Holy people spit or blew into the mouths of others to effect cures or convey grace. The ill clamored for the bathwater of would-be saints to drink or bathe in and preferred it if these would-be saints washed seldom and therefore left skin and lice floating in the water.”<sup>103</sup>

While I have not found mention of skin or lice as part of the appeal of a holy person’s bathing water in any of the late ancient sources under examination, it is worth recalling the story of the worm that fell from Simeon the Stylite’s purulent leg according to a fifth-century biography of the saint: an Arab pilgrim to the living saint picked up the worm, placed it upon his eyes and his heart, and kept it as a “blessing and forgiveness of sins” (εἰς εὐλογίαν καὶ εἰς ἄφεσιν

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<sup>101</sup> Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 76. Joseph Meri similarly writes, “Since the Prophet’s person embodied *baraka*, it was natural for his washing water and objects which he touched to be blessed or for his Companions to use his saliva for healing.” Meri, *Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, 111.

<sup>102</sup> Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 45.

<sup>103</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, “Bodily Miracles and the Resurrection of the Body in the High Middle Ages,” in *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, ed. Thomas Kselman (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 70.

ἀμαρτιῶν).<sup>104</sup> Even a worm could become a blessing by virtue of its connection to the body of a saint. More generally, I would argue that a conception very similar to that described by Bynum of the holy person's body—and of the power transmitted by its bodily products and wastes—is on display in the stories of late ancient holy men such as Daniel of Sketis, Apa Apollo, Saint George, Theodore of Sykeon, Lupicinus, and, indeed, Muḥammad. In the stories about these men, too, spit, breath, and bathwater are treated as transmissions of blessings and often, more specifically, healings.

As in the medieval period, in late antiquity bodily healing was a primary means by which physical contact with a holy person—whether through the touch of a hand, or through exposure to a saint's wastewater, saliva, or breath—was understood to manifest a “blessing” in a recipient.<sup>105</sup> Healing miracles were an important way in which the holiness of a figure was represented and reinforced in late antiquity: the holy person's body was understood and represented as a site of holiness, and contact with it or with objects that had come into contact with it was understood to provide a benefit, often in the form of healings. That such healings could result from exposure to the (ostensibly) less desirable parts of a holy person's body—his used water, his saliva, even his toenail in at least one case—serves to further reinforce the

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<sup>104</sup> Antonius, *The Life and Daily Mode of Living of Blessed Simeon the Stylite*, 18. H. Lietzmann, *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 45. Robert Doran, trans., *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 95.

<sup>105</sup> “Perhaps the commonest manifestation of holiness is the healing power of the saint”: Robert Browning, “The ‘Low Level’ Saint's Life in the Early Byzantine World,” in *The Byzantine Saint: University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Sergei Hackel (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981), 121. Alexander Kazhdan includes healings among the “types of miracle [that] were particularly popular with Byzantine saints”: “Holy and Unholy Miracle Workers,” 74. In discussing continuities in the practices associated with the cult of saints in Egypt from the fifth to eighth centuries, Arietta Papaconstantinou notes the stability of the “extreme importance of health questions among the varied problems brought before the saints”: “The cult of saints: A haven of continuity in a changing world?,” in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 363.



holiness of those bodies, and displays their status as “living relics” whose bodily products could be used and/or kept as blessings.<sup>106</sup>

The early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature’s display of stories that describe Muḥammad’s spit, breath, and washing water as vehicles of miraculous power places this literature very strongly within the tradition of late ancient hagiographical literature, which similarly understood and represented the bodies and bodily products of holy men and saints. I would suggest that the appearance of such stories within *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature illustrates Muslims’ engagements with the conceptions of holiness that circulated amongst other late ancient religious communities, and specifically the conception of the holy person’s body as a site of great power. In the next section, I will further examine late ancient literatures’ representations of holy bodies, and how the subsections of those bodies—what we might call their bodily relics—were understood to contain similar power, enabling the sanctification of spaces far removed from the original holy body itself.

### **“Sprinkle the Place with this Water”: Fluid Relics and Holy Places**

From the fourth century onwards, pilgrimage to holy sites became an increasingly prominent feature of religiosity in the late ancient Near East.<sup>107</sup> Christian pilgrims journeyed to holy locations seeking *eulogiai* (“blessings”) “through sacred contact with a relic, a holy man, or a *locus sanctus* ... gained either immaterially, as by kissing the wood of the True Cross, or taken

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<sup>106</sup> For a saint’s toenail, see: John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, in *PO* 17.1 (1923): 70. Notably, Muḥammad’s fingernails are also mentioned as items kept as relics: Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:300; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2*ī*: 201; Michael G. Morony, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume 18: Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Mu’āwiyah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 212. See David S. Margoliouth, “The Relics of the Prophet Mohammed,” *Moslem World* 27 (1937): 20.

<sup>107</sup> The bibliography on this phenomenon is huge. For a representative sample, see the sources on pilgrimage in: David M. Gwynn, “Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity: A Bibliographic Essay,” in *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, ed. David M. Gwynn and Susanne Bangert, et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 117-121.

away materially, as in the form of a relic fragment or, more typically, by way of some everyday substance such as earth, oil, wax, or water, which had been blessed through sacred contact.”<sup>108</sup> Such practices were not restricted to Christians in these centuries: Jews also took part in similar rituals, such as collecting dirt from Rav’s grave and placing it upon their bodies to relieve fever, or making pilgrimage to holy sites such as the Oak of Mamre in Palestine.<sup>109</sup> By the ninth century C.E. we have testimony of similar practices regarding the holy places associated with Muḥammad: Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal finds “no problem” with “the man who touches the *minbar* of the Prophet, seeking blessing from touching it, or who approaches his [the Prophet’s] grave and does something similar, wanting by that to come near to God,”<sup>110</sup> and stories are recorded, for example, of how “Ibn ‘Umar placed his hand upon the seat of the Prophet’s *minbar*, then placed it [his hand] upon his face.”<sup>111</sup> Jews, Christians, and Muslims in late antiquity each attached sanctity to certain places, and experienced that sanctity in large part through touch.

<sup>108</sup> Gary Vikan, “Icons and Icon Piety in Early Byzantium,” in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. C. Moss and K. Kiefer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 572. On the association between saints’ tombs, relics, and pilgrimage, see: Alice Mary Talbot, “Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts,” *DOP* 56 (2002): 154, 157, 159.

<sup>109</sup> On Rav’s grave, see: *b. San.* 47b and commentary in Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, 5 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965-1970), 2:143-4. Jack N. Lightstone, *The Commerce of the Sacred: Mediation of the Divine among Jews in the Greco-Roman World*, new ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 54 states: “We have here a relic in the true sense.” On Jewish pilgrimage and relic veneration in late antiquity, see: *ibid.*, 51-62; *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, s.v. “Holy Places” (James W. Parkes, Raphael Posner, and Saul Paul Colbi); Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: the Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 130, citing *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* 30 (CCL 175:144); Yoram Tsafrir, “Jewish pilgrimage in the Roman and Byzantine periods,” in *Akten des XII. Internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie, Bonn 22.-28. September 1991*, ed. Ernst Dassmann and Josef Engemann, 2 vols. (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1995), 1: 369-76; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 365-88.

<sup>110</sup> Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-‘Ilal wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, ed. Waṣī Allāh ibn Muḥammad ‘Abbās, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī; al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Khānī, 1988), 2:492.

<sup>111</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii: 12-3. Similarly, “a group of Companions of the Prophet, when the *masjid* [of the Prophet] was empty, took hold of the polished knob of the *minbar* next to the [Prophet’s?] grave, then faced the *qibla* and did *du‘ā*.” *Ibid.* A version of this story of unnamed Companions is found in: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 5:685 (no. 539). The following *ḥadīth* in the *Muṣannaḥ* states that Sa‘d b. al-Musayyib—one of the great jurists and *ḥadīth* scholars of Medina—“detested” that one touch the *minbar*. In another *ḥadīth*, the Companion Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī is described placing his head upon the Prophet’s grave, saying he “came to the Messenger of God, not to the stone” (of the grave): al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:3053 (no. 8571); al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-zawā‘id*, 4:2 and 5:245. For evidence of early controversies over the veneration of the Prophet’s grave, see: Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabic* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

In the different stories of holy men and their bodily fluids studied in this chapter, it is worth noting that, in the case of Lupicinus, the collection and usage of his saliva occurs after his death: the bits of spit scraped from his wall are the literal “relics” of this holy man. Lupicinus’ dried saliva, scraped from the walls of his cell for its healing power, recalls pilgrimage practices and objects: “oil and dirt skimmed off some holy person, relic, or ground ... taken home as medicaments by whoever visited holy sites or shrines.”<sup>112</sup> His saliva itself becomes a *eulogia*, collected after his death for its beneficial power. There are similar correspondences between the uses that pilgrims made of the blessed objects obtained from shrines, relics, or living holy men and how individuals in the stories examined above use the bodily fluids of the living holy men. The washing waters and the waters from the mouths of Daniel of Sketis, Apa Apollo, or Muḥammad also function essentially as *eulogiai*: they are understood to be endowed with the holiness of these figures through physical contact with such holy men, and are thus cherished and used as conduits of sacred power.

Such correspondences display the fluidity between a dead saint’s body as relic and a living saint’s body as “living relic.” As Claudia Rapp suggests, religious practices such as pilgrimage and the collection of blessings that are “usually associated with the cult of dead saints” in late antiquity are in fact “also present in the interaction between living holy men, including martyrs before their execution, and their followers and disciples. Comparable to pilgrimage to a saint’s tomb are the frequent visits to a holy man by admirers – some, but by far

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2014), 123-47; M. J. Kister, “Sanctity Joint and Divided: On Holy Places in the Islamic Tradition,” *JSAI* 20 (1996): 39-41; idem, “‘You Shall only Set Out for Three Mosques’: A Study of an Early Tradition,” *Le Muséon* 82 (1969): 174-175, 193-194; Ignaz Goldziher, “Veneration of Saints in Islam,” in *Muslim Studies*, 1:281, 333-334. On the sacralizing of the geography of Muḥammad’s life, see: *ibid.*, 279-81; Miklos Muranyi, “The Emergence of Holy Places in Early Islam: On the Prophet’s Track,” *JSAI* 39 (2012): 165-71. Some early traditions on veneration of the Prophet’s grave are found in: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, *The Muwatta of Imām Muḥammad: the Muwatta of Mālik ibn Anas in the narration of Imām Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī* (London: Turath Publishing 1425/2004), 412 (17:49 [no. 947]); ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:576-80 (no. 6724-36); Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:557-67 (no. 11893-935).

<sup>112</sup> Caner, “Towards a miraculous economy,” 358.

not all of them, miracle-seekers.”<sup>113</sup> Indeed there is little difference between the actions of the followers of Muḥammad, Daniel, Apollo, or Lupicinus in the ways that they collect and cherish the bodily remnants of these holy men. The man scraping Lucipinus’ spit from the walls after his death is not too different from the man who jumps to grab Apollo’s phlegm on the ground, or the Companions who clamor for Muḥammad’s ablution water and spit: the essential understanding and usage of the holy person’s body and its corporeal products as holy objects remains essentially the same.

The blessedness inherent in the bodies of holy men, and thus also in the relics of their bodies, was understood in late antiquity as a portable commodity that could be moved from place to place via physical contact, as we see for example in the phenomenon of pilgrims’ *eulogiai*. Yet the portability of that blessedness was not limited to transmission to water, dust, or human bodies (in the form of healings) but was also understood to be transferable to new spaces, in the sense of the blessedness of a relic sacralizing the space of its new resting place, physically separated from the original holy man, shrine, or even the original relic.<sup>114</sup> Thus instead of the necessity of making pilgrimage to a single holy location (or a holy person or relic located in a particular location) to seek a blessing, the movement of a relic to a new location might allow that new space to become endowed with blessedness in its own right, and thus to provide blessings of its own.<sup>115</sup> The relic was understood to transmit its holiness to the new location: for this reason

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<sup>113</sup> Rapp, “Saints and holy men,” 557-560. Similarly Josef Meri writes of how “*baraka* ... was believed to manifest itself in, and to emanate from, living and dead saints in the Islamic context”: *Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, 102. This notion is displayed in a *ḥadīth*, ascribed to Ibn ‘Umar, according to whom, “the Prophet said: One who visits (*zāra*) my grave after my death is like one who visits me during my life”: al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-zawā‘id*, 4:2; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 12:406-7 (nos. 13496-7).

<sup>114</sup> On the division of relics, see: Patricia Cox Miller, “‘Differential Networks’: Relics and Other Fragments in Late Antiquity,” *J ECS* 6.1 (1998): 113–38; Clark, “Translating relics.”

<sup>115</sup> “Like the tomb, relics linked the martyr’s commemoration to physical places; but they made possible the multiplication of such places, liberating the possible holiness of places from the immovability of the tomb”: Robert A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?,” *J ECS* 2.3 (1994): 270. See also: Talbot, “Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines,” 159; Meri, *Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, 103.

the movement of relics to buildings, most prominently churches, became a widespread practice in late antiquity, even becoming official church policy at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.<sup>116</sup> As Robert Markus writes, “The presence of relics turned the churches into ‘holy places’ housing the saint, in a sense they could not be while they housed only the worshipping congregation.”<sup>117</sup>

With such ideas in mind, we can again draw attention to the story in which the water with which Apa Apollo had washed is deposited in a cistern, which thus receives “blessing” and becomes a site from which “many healings came to pass.” By coming into contact with the Apa’s used bathwater—a “contact relic” through its physical contact with Apollo’s body—the cistern itself emerges as a site of holy power, able to provide healings of its own apart from the body of Apa Apollo. Similarly, in Gregory of Tours’ story of Lupicinus, health can be gained not only from the saliva scraped from the walls of Lupicinus’ cell, but also from exposure to the stream from which Lupicinus had drawn water:

The channel from which the holy man drew the water he needed is another witness; in kissing it with faith one can drink health from it.<sup>118</sup>

While it is not stated explicitly, we can imagine that here, too, exposure to the body of Lupicinus—his hand drawing water, his mouth drinking from the stream—has led to the healing capabilities of this water source, as had the cistern that had received the washing water of Apa Apollo. The power inherent in these holy men has been transferred to new locations by exposure to their bodies: these water sources have been touched by the holiness of these men, and are thus able to provide blessings to those who seek them. These water sources become holy places and

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<sup>116</sup> Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and church spaces in the late antique Mediterranean: architecture, cult, and community* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 152-5.

<sup>117</sup> Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy,” 270.

<sup>118</sup> *Lib. vit. patr.* 13:2. Gregory of Tours, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, 88.

sources of new blessings, perhaps pilgrimage sites, by virtue of their exposure to the bodies of these holy men.<sup>119</sup>

A similar phenomenon occurs with “the wells which the Messenger of God would drink from, bless, and spit in” (*al-bi’ār allatī kāna rasūl allāh (ṣ) yasta’ dhibu min-hā wa allatī barraka fī-hā wa baṣaqa fī-hā*), which are chronicled in Ibn Sa’d’s *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* as sites of special importance.<sup>120</sup> Like the water sources associated with Apa Apollo and Lupicinus, the water sources associated with Muḥammad also have curing capabilities, as related in the following story:

The Messenger of God came to the well of Buḍā’a, performed ablutions in a bucket and poured it [this water] into the well. He ejected spittle (*majja*) into the bucket another time, and spat in it (*baṣaqa fī-hā*), and drank from its water. When there was an ailing person he prescribed, “Bathe him with the water of Buḍā’a.” [The person] would be bathed and would recover immediately [literally, “it would be as if he was loosened from a rope”].<sup>121</sup>

The saliva and washing water of Muḥammad thus sanctify the waters of Buḍā’a and other wells, as had the bodily fluids of Apa Apollo and (perhaps) Lupicinus. It is noteworthy that the special status of these wells comes not only from Muḥammad’s having blessed or drunk from them: Ibn Sa’d’s text makes clear that exposure to the Prophet’s saliva and washing water is a key aspect of these wells’ significance. Part of Muḥammad’s body has thus been deposited in the waters of

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<sup>119</sup> Frankfurter writes of such stories that, “These are, to be sure, etiological legends for the reservoirs of holy water and oil kept in monasteries for popular use and to keep present the memories of their heroes”: Frankfurter, “Syncretism and the Holy Man,” 378.

<sup>120</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii:184-6.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 185. Other examples are cited, such as the well of Banū Umayya b. Zayd into which Muḥammad “would spit and from which he would drink” and the story that Muḥammad would “gather spit and eject it into the bucket in the well of Anas.”

these wells, sanctifying these spaces and enabling them to provide new blessings even apart from the Prophet himself.<sup>122</sup>

In sanctifying space, the placement of relics could be used not only to add holiness to an otherwise neutral space, such as these water sources, but also to symbolically (and, in all likelihood, literally in the minds of many late ancient observers) cleanse a space perceived to contain a pagan or heretical past. For example, the first attested *translatio* of relics—the movement of a Decian-era martyr named Babylas from Antioch to a sanctuary in the Antiochene suburb of Daphne—is associated with the repelling from Daphne of a previously powerful oracle of Apollo. As the fifth-century church historian Sozomen writes:

It is said that from the time of this translation, the demon ceased to utter oracles. This silence was at first attributed to the neglect into which his service was allowed to fall and to the omission of the former cult; but results proved that it was occasioned solely by the presence of the holy martyr.<sup>123</sup>

The presence of the martyr's remains is understood to fight off the “demonic” presence of Apollo's oracle. This tradition continued into the sixth century and later, as in a homily of Severus of Antioch in which he states that Apollo has fled from the martyr.<sup>124</sup> These fifth- and

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<sup>122</sup> The Prophet's saliva is also able to make water miraculously flow. See: al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 3:1012-3; Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 496. A similar story is told about the Prophet's grandson (and the important Shī'ī Imām) Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. On Ḥusayn's way from Mecca to join his followers in Kūfa, he encounters 'Abd Allāh b. Muṭī' b. al-Aswad (d. 73/692), who tells Ḥusayn that his well is leaking. Ibn Muṭī' asks Ḥusayn to “invoke God for us and bless [the well]” (*da'awat Allāh<sup>a</sup> li-nā fi-hā bi-l-barakat<sup>i</sup>*). Ḥusayn calls for water from the well, drinks from it and rinses out his mouth, and returns this used water to the well (*shariba min-hu thumma maḍmaḍa thumma radda-hu fi-l-bi'r*). Thereafter, the well had sweet water that poured forth in great amounts. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:107. This story is also included in Ḥusayn's biography in: 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 80 vols., ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Sa'īd 'Umar b. Gharāma al-'Amrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr: 1995-2001), 14:182 (no. 1566). Ḥusayn's encounter with 'Abd Allāh b. Muṭī' is recorded without any mention of this water miracle in: Abū Mikhnaḥ, *Kitāb al-Maqtal al-Ḥusayn* (Qum: al-Maṭba'at al-'Ilmiyya, 1398/1976), 13-4; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, 2/i: 232; I.K.A. Howard, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume 19: The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiyah* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 22-3.

<sup>123</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5:19. Translated by Chester D. Hartranft in *NPNF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, vol. 2. Cited in Juana Torres, “Emperor Julian and the Veneration of Relics,” *Antiquité Tardive* 17 (2009): 208n.21.

<sup>124</sup> Severus of Antioch, *Homily* 50, cited in Torres, “Emperor Julian and the Veneration of Relics,” 213.

sixth-century authors thus understood the martyr's relics to have an ability to transform a powerfully pagan space into a potentially Christian space.

As was noted above, the placement of relics became a standard component of church dedications, and in at least one instance these objects' installation is cited as an official part of the ritual process for converting pagan temples into Christian church spaces. In a letter recorded in the Venerable Bede's (d. 735 C.E.) *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Pope Gregory the Great advises a monk named Abbot Mellitus, charged with spreading Christianity in Britain, about how to treat pagan temples that he comes across during his missionary work. Gregory tells Mellitus not to destroy the temples themselves, but only to destroy their idols, and in fact to turn the pagan temples into Christian spaces:

Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them. For if the shrines are well built, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God.<sup>125</sup>

Holy water, altars, and relics serve to symbolically remove the pagan past and to repurpose these spaces for Christian usage. While the "well built" temples themselves are maintained, their religious orientation and purpose is decisively altered by the presence of these Christian objects. The holy water, sprinkled in the temples, is the most explicitly cleansing of these objects, yet the relics clearly play an important role as well, notably in the fact that Gregory in the same letter then suggests that the "nativities of the holy martyrs, whose relics are there deposited" should serve as replacement feast days for pagan holidays previously celebrated in these temples.<sup>126</sup> The relics thus not only serve as Christian objects, marking the space as Christian by their presence,

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<sup>125</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, I.30. Latin text and English translation: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 106-107.

<sup>126</sup> The holy water itself may have been related to relics, as it was common practice to use water poured over bones and other relics as holy water. See: G. J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: a process of mutual interaction* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 344-48.



but also act as focal points for explicitly Christian communal rituals in these newly Christianized areas.

A similar ritual for the conversion of religious space is described in a *ḥadīth* regarding the conversion of Christian *biya* ‘ (“churches, prayer spaces”) into Muslim *masājid*.<sup>127</sup> This *ḥadīth* provides what Suleiman Bashear describes as “the only ‘historical’ policy the Prophet is reported to have taken” regarding the conversion of Christian religious spaces into Muslim *masājid*.<sup>128</sup> Regardless of the report’s historicity, which seems questionable, this *ḥadīth* displays a very interesting usage of a Prophetic contact relic—the Prophet’s used ablution water—for the cleansing and repurposing of heterodox religious space, similar to the ritual prescribed in Gregory the Great’s letter as recorded in Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*.

The shortest version of this *ḥadīth* is recorded in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *al-Muṣannaḥ*, where it occurs in the *kitāb al-ṣalāt* in the section on “Prayer in Churches and Jewish/Christian Places of Worship” (*al-ṣalāt fī-l-kanā’is wa-l-biya* ). The *āḥadīth* in this section are largely taken up with the legality of Muslim prayer in Christian churches (*kanā’is*) or Jewish/Christian prayer spaces (*biya* ), with a great majority of the recorded opinions stating that there is “no problem” (*lā ba’* ) with prayer in such spaces, implying that (at the time of these traditions’ collection) there was

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<sup>127</sup> “*Biya* ” is a *hapax legomenon* in Qur’ān 22:40, where it appears alongside other words for places of worship, including *masājid*.

<sup>128</sup> Suliman Bashear, “*Qibla Musharriqa* and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches,” *Muslim World* 81.3-4 (1991): 274. Bashear describes this as “an isolated tradition,” citing Ibn Abī Shayba and al-Nasā’ī. Brannon M. Wheeler cites al-Nasā’ī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 74, 194n.23. Neither Bashear nor Wheeler cites Ibn Sa’d, though his version is discussed by William Muir in his 1861 *The Life of Mahomet*, where Muir states that, “The story appears improbable, because nowhere else is Mahomet represented as exhibiting such antagonism to Christians and their Churches, when they submitted themselves to him”: Muir, *Life of Mahomet*, 4 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1861), 2:303-304. None of these authors mentions the versions found in Ibn Shabba’s *Ta’rīkh* or in al-Ṭabarānī’s *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr*. The story is also found in later texts: Abū ‘Umar Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘ab fī ma’rifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajjāwī, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Naḥdat Miṣr wa Maṭba‘atu-hā, 1960), 2:776-7 (no. 1300); ‘Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jazarī, *Usd al-ghāba fī ma’rifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ and ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1417/1996), 3:91 (no. 2636).

little or no perceived problem with prayer in Christian religious spaces.<sup>129</sup> The *ḥadīth* under investigation here, however, discusses the destruction of a *bī‘a* and its conversion into a *masjid*. The story is narrated by Ṭalq b. ‘Alī, a member of the Banū Ḥanīfa tribe from the central Arabian region of al-Yamāma:

We went as a delegation to the Prophet and told him that we had a *bī‘a* in our land, and we asked him to give us the leftovers of his ablution water. He called for water, performed ablutions, then washed out his mouth, and placed it [the leftover water] in a water vessel. He said: Take this with you, and when you have reached your country, destroy your *bī‘a*, and sprinkle its place with the water and take [the place] as a *masjid*.<sup>130</sup>

In the *Muṣannaf*, the story ends here, without any further explanation or a record of whether or not the group did what the Prophet commanded. The description here is laconic, but it seems that Ṭalq b. ‘Alī’s party has come to Muḥammad looking for a way to get rid of the *bī‘a* present in their land, and they specifically ask for the remnants of his ablution water. Complying with their wish, Muḥammad performs *wuḍū’* and pours the water into a vessel, telling them to sprinkle it upon the destroyed *bī‘a* before using the place as a *masjid*.<sup>131</sup>

Muḥammad’s instructions for the conversion of a *bī‘a* into a *masjid* offer some noticeable parallels to the instructions reportedly given by Gregory the Great for the conversion of pagan temples into Christian churches. With the notable exception that Muḥammad calls for the physical destruction of the *bī‘a* (whatever that might mean), whereas Gregory allows for the temple structure itself to remain standing, the instructions in both texts are similar. In both cases, a sacred liquid is sprinkled in the spaces to be newly re-sacralized: holy water in Gregory’s case,

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<sup>129</sup> This phenomenon is discussed in Bashear, “*Qibla Musharriqa*.”

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 2:501 (no. 4903). Biographical information about Ṭalq b. ‘Alī is given in Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:402.

<sup>131</sup> Muir calls the liquid that Muḥammad gave them “the leavings of the water with which he had performed his lustrations”: *Life of Mahomet*, 2:304.

and the Prophet's leftover ablution water in Muḥammad's case. Additionally, both cases involve the installation of some form of relic(s) in the structures: Gregory calls for unspecified "relics" of martyrs to be placed in the churches, and Muḥammad orders the sprinkling of water that had run over his body and mouth (i.e., a contact relic) before the previous *bī'a* is to be taken as a *masjid*.

Indeed, in Muḥammad's case, the power of holy water and relic are combined into one liquid. As in the stories examined previously in this chapter, fluids from Muḥammad's body serve as a source of holy power or blessing, manifested here not in physical healing, but in the ability of such a fluid to sanctify a space and cleanse it of heterodox connotations. As Brannon Wheeler states, "the saliva of the prophet Muḥammad ... is transported to a distant location as an extension of his authority for the foundation of Islamic worship."<sup>132</sup> The power and authority of Muḥammad's body is transmitted even in his used ablution water, and that power can be conveyed even across great distances. Like Christian relics, divided and translated to new spaces for the sanctification of new spaces, Muḥammad's ablution water offers a transportable embodiment of his authority to be brought to a distant location for the establishment of a new Muslim religious space.

Notably, Muḥammad's used ablution water here provides a site of interreligious contestation that it had not occupied in the previously examined stories of his prophetic fluids. In those stories, Muḥammad's miraculous bodily fluids are cited among the "signs of prophecy" and are described alongside the "seal of prophecy" on his shoulders, perhaps demonstrating the likelihood that the powers of his body were called upon in interreligious debates when arguing the truth of Muḥammad's prophetic status. Yet none of these stories displays a direct contestation between Muslim and Jewish or Christian claims or authority. The story of the *bī'a*, on the other hand, describes the destruction of an explicitly Christian religious space to make

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<sup>132</sup> Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 74.

way for a Muslim one, and the ritual for this conversion of religious space involves the Prophet's ablution water. Muḥammad's bodily fluids are placed directly into the context of interreligious competition and the usurpation of Christian religious preeminence by Muslim conquest.

More so than is found in Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaḥ*, these themes are strongly pronounced in the versions of this *ḥadīth* found in Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, in al-Nasā'ī's *Sunan* and *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, in Ibn Shabba's *Ta'rīkh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, and in al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*. In these texts, Ṭalq b. 'Alī narrates that his group came to Muḥammad and "we pledged allegiance to him and we prayed with him" (*bāya' nā-hu wa ṣallaynā ma'a-hu*), before they then tell Muḥammad of the *bī'a* in their land and ask for his leftover ablution water. While it is not explicitly stated in al-Nasā'ī's texts, the statement that the group "pledged allegiance" to Muḥammad indicates that Ṭalq's party has come to the Prophet in order to "convert" to Islam. Indeed one of the versions of this *ḥadīth* displayed in Ibn Sa'd's text situates this narrative specifically within the context of the delegation of the Banū Ḥanīfa to the Prophet for the submission of their tribe to the Prophet's authority. During their visit to Muḥammad, the Banū Ḥanīfa "testified to the truth" (*shahadū al-shahāda al-ḥaqq*), making it clear that a "conversion" is being displayed here.<sup>133</sup>

In regard to such a conversion, it is important to note that the Banū Ḥanīfa are reported to have been an (at least partially) Christian tribe in the period of early Islam.<sup>134</sup> This explains the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii:56. The delegation of Banū Ḥanīfa to Muḥammad is also described in Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sirat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 945-946. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 636-7. However, the stories under discussion here do not appear in Ibn Hishām's text. The story under discussion here is left unaddressed in the examination of the delegations from the Banū Ḥanīfa to the Prophet in: Abdullah al-Askar, *Al-Yamama in the Early Islamic Era* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press in association with the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, 2002), 97-100. The author clearly knows this tradition, however, as he cites it elsewhere in the book, saying that "[i]t is reported that a Nestorian temple was found in al-Yamama, where a monk from the tribe of Tai' [sic] served." Ibid., 78, 101n.9.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 78-9. J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London and New York: Longman, 1979), 283-286. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Ḥanīfa b. Luḍjāym" (W. Montgomery Watt). Fred M. Donner, "From

presence of a Christian religious building, a *bī'a*, in their land, and indicates that—in this narrative, regardless of its historicity—the Banū Ḥanīfa's conversion to Islam is understood to involve their transforming their Christian building into a Muslim *masjid*. In order to carry out this transformation of religious space, Muḥammad gives them a prophetic relic: his leftover ablution water. Instead of a Christian martyr's relic sanctifying a church, a contact relic from the Muslim prophet allows this religious space to become a *masjid*. Christian space becomes Islamic space through the presence of a specifically Islamic relic.

This usurpation of Christian space, and thereby preeminence, is brought to the foreground in the conclusion to this story as found in al-Nasā'ī's, Ibn Sa'd's, Ibn Shabba's, and al-Ṭabarānī's texts. In the version of al-Nasā'ī, Ṭalq b. 'Alī relates what happened after his group had visited Muḥammad:

We went and arrived in our country, and we destroyed our *bī'a*, then sprinkled its place [with the water], and we took it as a *masjid*. We called the *adhān* in it. He [Ṭalq?] said: The monk (*al-rāhib*) was a man from [the tribe of] Ṭayyi'. When he heard the *adhān*, he [the monk] said: It is a true call! Then he turned his face to one of our high, rugged grounds, and we never saw him again.<sup>135</sup>

Ibn Sa'd's version (recorded in the third person) is similar to that of al-Nasā'ī, though the monk's tribal affiliation is not reported, and it is specified that he is “the monk of the *bī'a*” (*rāhib al-bī'a*), apparently meaning that he is affiliated with this structure in some formal capacity.<sup>136</sup>

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Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community,” *Al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-2003): 29n.1

<sup>135</sup> Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī bi-Sharḥ al-Imāmayn al-Suyūṭī wa-'l-Sindī*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Sayyid, 'Alī Muḥammad 'Alī, and Sayyid 'Umrān, 5 vols. (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1420/1999), 1:476 (no. 700) (*kitāb al-masājid*, *bāb* 11). Idem, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 1:128 (no. 782).

<sup>136</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii:56 and 5:402.

Ibn Shabba's and al-Ṭabarānī's versions are also essentially the same, though here Ṭalq calls the monk "our monk" (*rāhib"-nā*), indicating the Banū Ḥanīfa's affiliation with Christianity.<sup>137</sup>

Although the exact identity of this monk is left unexplained in the texts, his function in the narrative is clear. The authoritative late ancient figure of the monk—deployed in so many early Islamic texts to witness to the truth of Islamic claims—here confirms the "truth" of the Islamic call to prayer, and therefore synecdochically the truth of the entirety of this new tradition of Islam.<sup>138</sup> With this religious truth revealed and triumphant in the land—including architecturally in the form of a *masjid* situated over the site of the *bī'a*—the monk leaves, never to be seen again. This embodiment of Christianity gives approval before exiting, his religion's preeminence and space having been supplanted by a new tradition.

This supplantation involves the usage of a specifically Islamic relic—the Prophet's ablution water—for the demarcation of a specifically Islamic prayer space. In this story, the relic demarcates Islamic space from previously Christian space, just as, according to Gregory the Great, the Christian martyrs' relics could be used to demarcate Christian space from previously pagan space. Like the story of Apa Apollo's bathing water sanctifying the monastery's waters, and that of healing emanating from the waters from which Lupicinus had drunk, this story too places power in the fluids that had run over the body and through the mouth of a holy person and further suggests that such power and authority could be transmitted to a new space. Indeed, the story of the foundation of the *masjid* provides a usage of saliva for explicit boundary formation unseen in the other stories examined in this chapter. Here Muḥammad's body itself serves as a boundary marker, distinguishing Christian from Muslim space and identity.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna*, 2:601. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, 8:393 (no. 8241).

<sup>138</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 156-61. Garth Fowden and Elizabeth Key Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* (Athens: Kentron Hellēnikēs kai Rōmaikēs Archaioētētos, Ethnikon Hidryma Ereunōn; Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 2004), 157, 172.

## Conclusion

Having witnessed the ways that Muḥammad's Companions cherish even his spit and used ablution water, 'Urwa b. Mas'ūd calls upon the images of the great kings of the earth for comparison. Examining these narratives, modern scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher and Uri Rubin have looked to biblical figures, and especially Jesus, to explain Muḥammad's powerful bodily fluids, suggesting that competition with such figures accounts for these stories.

In this chapter I have instead sought to situate the power ascribed to Muḥammad's bodily products within the context of the ideas of the holy body in late antiquity, and particularly within the context of the holy bodies of fifth to ninth century Christian saints. The stories of these figures provide a variety of examples of the ways in which the holy person's body—whether alive or dead—manifested as a site of holy power: and not only the body itself, but seemingly everything that comes into contact with the holy man's body. Even the dirt from beneath these characters' feet, the water with which they had washed, and the spit from their mouths operate as blessings, collected and cherished by their followers, who bathe in these liquids, swallow them, and rub them into their skin. These liquids also function as relics, “installed” in locations that further provide the blessings attached to these holy bodies, apart from the original bodies themselves.

The use of Muḥammad's bodily fluids as healing substances and as bodily relics situates his prophetic character firmly in the world of the Christian saints of the hagiographic literature of roughly the fifth to ninth centuries C.E. While hagiographical literature and *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature contain many stories that exhibit echoes of the gospel narratives of Jesus, and in some cases explicit parallels to such narratives, the stories examined in this chapter seem informed less

by direct modeling of scriptural stories than by conceptions of the holy body that developed in late antiquity in the fifth to ninth centuries C.E.

It is feasible to suggest, therefore, that the narratives of Muḥammad's healing and blessing with his spittle, his ablution water, and his breathe should be examined as examples of the types of stories told of holy persons in these centuries. In this respect, we find that spittle could function as an embodiment of holiness in both the Christian and Islamic traditions of this period: spit could in fact display an individual's proximity to God. In the next chapter, I will examine texts that display a very different valence for spit, one that seems to place certain spitters outside of the religious community.



### Chapter 3: Spells and Spit: Healing Rituals in Rabbinic and Early Islamic Texts

The power inherent in words and rituals—central to religious ideas and practices in the ancient world—was particularly pronounced in the realm of ancient healing practices, in which chanted or written words and the rituals accompanying their performance/production were understood as useful tools in the healing or prevention of illness.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the ancient Mediterranean world, in which magic, religion, and medicine were not easily divisible spheres of knowledge or activity, these practices transcended such categories, and thus healing incantations and recipes appear both in ancient medical treatises and in religious/magical texts and practices.<sup>2</sup>

In the pagan, Jewish, and Christian traditions of late antiquity, shared conceptions of the healing power of words are displayed in the crisscrossing between different religious

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<sup>1</sup> “Socially the most important aspect of the healing event is the charm or utterance.” Richard Gordon, “The Healing Event in Graeco-Roman Folk-Medicine,” in *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context. Papers read at the congress held at Leiden University, 13-15 April 1992*, ed. Ph.J. van der Eijk, H.F.J. Horstmanshoff, and P.H. Schrijvers, 2 vols. (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 367. On the belief in the power of words (both oral and written) and ritual in the ancient world, see: David Frankfurter, “Curses, Blessings, and Ritual Authority: Egyptian Magic in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 5 (2005): 157-185; the essays in Meyer and Mirecki, ed., *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 104ff., 120; Derek Krueger, “Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 305-6; Sara Sviri, “Words of Power and the Power of Words: Mystical Linguistics in the Works of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī,” *JSAI* 27 (2002): 204-244; Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts,” 293, 300; Sarah Iles Johnston, “Magic,” in *Religions of the Ancient World. A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 142-7; Isaac Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever: Ancient Israel’s Perception of Literature and the Resultant Hebrew Bible* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1993); Janowitz, “Natural, Magical,” 320-1.

<sup>2</sup> “The remarkable thing is, though, that the method of magicians and physicians did only differ in details ... The magicians—or, to use a more neutral expression, the healers—are no less rational than the doctors.” Fritz Graf, “How to Cope with a Difficult Life. A View of Ancient Magic,” in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997), 111. “One of the most popular kinds of magic in all cultures in antiquity was connected with healing ... the transition from magic to medicine, and vice versa, was extremely fluid; a clear-cut border-line between magic and medicine did not exist, and this, of course, applies also to ancient Judaism.” Peter Schäfer, “Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism,” in Schäfer and Kippenberg, *Envisioning Magic*, 34. See also: Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 25; Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts,” 293; Segal, “Hellenistic Magic”; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 115-24.

communities of otherwise communally-specific “words of power” (such as pagan gods’ names, the name YHWH, and Jesus’ name) and of ritual activities associated with such words.<sup>3</sup>

Distinguishing between specifically pagan, Jewish, and Christian healing formulae and rituals is not easy in the extant sources, and the identities of the purveyors and users of such practices do not appear to map neatly onto the community boundaries fashioned by religious elites. In the quest for bodily integrity and health, individuals in some cases explicitly crossed communal religious boundaries in hopes of finding cures from ritual experts outside of their own communities.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, religious officials such as priests, rabbis, and monks also functioned as the purveyors of these healing words and practices,<sup>5</sup> and this may well have been a large part of the appeal of participating in local religious communities in late antiquity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “The nature of magic is so syncretistic that pagan magicians use Jewish or Christian formulae, and Jewish-Christian magicians invoke pagan gods.” Markham J. Geller, “Jesus Theurgic Powers: Parallels in the Talmud and Incantation Bowls,” *JJS* 28.2 (1977): 149-50. For examples of this interchange between communities, see: Hans Dieter Betz, “Jewish Magic in the Greek Magical Papyri (*PGM* VII.260—71),” in Schäfer and Kippenberg, *Envisioning Magic*, 45-63; Gideon Bohak, “Greek, Coptic, and Jewish Magic in the Cairo Genizah,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 36 (1999): 7-44; Judah Goldin, “The Magic of Magic and Superstition,” in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 132-5; Dan Levene, “. . . and by the name of Jesus . . .”: An Unpublished Magic Bowl in Jewish Aramaic,” *JSQ* 6 (1999): 283-308; Shaul Shaked, “Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene’s ‘. . . and by the name of Jesus . . .’” *JSQ* 6 (1999): 309-19; idem, “Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam: Theoretical Attitudes and Genres,” in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction. Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, ed. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), 97-109; Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, “Jews and Healing at Medieval Saints’ Shrines: Participation, Polemics, and Shared Cultures,” *HTR* 103.1 (2010): 111-129; Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 194-5.

<sup>4</sup> On “pagan and Zoroastrian” usage of Jewish scribal experts for the production of magic bowls, see: Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1998), 17ff. Jack N. Lightstone writes: “Early rabbinic literature knows of persons within the rabbinic movement hiring the services of Christian charismatics or Jewish holy men healing in Jesus’ name” and also “it would seem then that not only did Christians visit Jewish priestly-magi, but also Christian healers made free use of charms of their Jewish contemporaries.” *Commerce of the Sacred*, 89-91. Ephraim Shoham-Steiner suggests that medieval Jews visited Christian saints’ shrines: “Jews and Healing at Medieval Saints’ Shrines.” Frankfurter writes of such boundary crossing that it is not “a matter of belief or affiliation so much as utility: who can best resolve danger, illness, social tension, and afflicting spirits”: “Beyond Magic and Superstition,” 277.

<sup>5</sup> Incantations and other magical techniques were “partly parasitic upon the legitimate speculations of official religious experts.” Gordon, “Healing Event in Graeco-Roman Folk-Medicine,” 367. On the Coptic magical texts from fifth- to tenth-century Egypt, David Frankfurter writes: “the collectors, scribes and experts in the use of the spells . . . had some status—even authority—in the church as monks or priests . . . Nor can the spells be understood separately from Christian officials—monks, scribes, priests—and the mediation and expertise they offered in communities.” “Beyond Magic and Superstition,” 279. See also: *ibid.*, “Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category ‘Magician,’” in Schäfer and Kippenberg, *Envisioning Magic*, 128-129; Jaclyn Maxwell,

However, the power ascribed to these ritual words and practices meant that their usage could also be contentious and divisive. From a variety of “rationalist” perspectives, many ancient writers questioned the effectiveness of incanted words, and labeled such practice as “superstition.”<sup>7</sup> Even when the efficacy of these rituals was not necessarily being questioned, the acceptability of such techniques was often called into question through what David Frankfurter calls “a *discourse of ritual censure*” in which “certain practices . . . [were associated with] anything from vulgar rural culture to magic, heresy, and heathenism.”<sup>8</sup>

In many sources, this discourse includes the stipulation that participation in certain healing practices—used to curb illness, anxiety, and/or death—is explicitly described as being worse than death itself. This idea is present in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* when he says, “I do not indeed hold that life ought to be so prized that by any and every means it should be prolonged. You . . . will none the less die, even though you may have lived longer through foulness or sin.”<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom similarly criticizes the members of his fourth-century Antiochene congregation for seeking to be cured by the “incantations, amulets, charms, and spells” of Jewish “sorcerers,” and argues that those who refuse such treatment, and perhaps die

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“Paganism and Christianization,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 857-8. “In Antioch and elsewhere in the Hellenistic Jewish world, one went to the Synagogue to contact those who dispensed amulets, incantations, exorcisms and the like”: Lightstone, *Commerce of the Sacred*, 100. Regarding rabbis, Jacob Neusner writes that “many of the things they did, especially the supernatural character alleged to have been imparted to them by their knowledge of Torah, must be seen in the context of antiquity as appropriate to divine-men or magicians” and notes the presence of Rabbi Joshua b. Perahiah in Babylonian magic bowls, cited there as a force with power over demons. Neusner, “The Phenomenon of the Rabbi in Late Antiquity,” *Numen* 16.1 (1969): 13-17. For examples of incantations cited by the rabbis, see *b. Abod. Zar.* 12b. *b. Shab.* 67a. *b. Ber.* 60b, 62a. *b. Pes.* 110a.

<sup>6</sup> Krueger, “Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century,” 305-306. Discussion of healing as possibly a major factor in early Christianity: Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 64ff.

<sup>7</sup> Georg Luck, “Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 96-7, 101, 140. Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). Veltri, “The Rabbis and Pliny the Elder,” 77-8, 82-4.

<sup>8</sup> Frankfurter, “Beyond Magic and Superstition,” 257, 265.

<sup>9</sup> Plin. Nat. 28.2.9. Translation from Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 10 vols. trans. H. Rackham and D. E. Eichholz (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1938-1963), 8:7-9.

in the process, are equals to the Christian martyrs.<sup>10</sup> This rhetoric is also found in a story in the Palestinian Talmud in which the grandson of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is healed by the recitation of an incantation that includes Jesus' name. When Rabbi Joshua learns of the nature of the words that healed his grandson, the rabbi states of his grandson, "It would be better for him had he died and not this" (ניה הוה ליה אילו הוה מיית ולא כן).<sup>11</sup> A similar story relates how Rabbi Eleazar b. Dama, the nephew of Rabbi Ishmael, died before he could be healed in Jesus' name: Rabbi Ishmael responds, "Happy are you, Ben Dama, for you have expired in peace and did not break down the prohibition established by the Sages!"<sup>12</sup>

According to Rabbi Ishmael, as with many others, dying was a better option than certain healing options that might involve breaking down the boundaries that defined communities. Participations in healing rituals could thus function as important sites of boundary maintenance in late antiquity by either affirming or calling into question one's status in one's religious community.<sup>13</sup> A proper ritual (however defined) was understood as a source of strength and power, and its success was a sign of one's faith; on the other hand, an unacceptable activity was a sign of one's willingness to sacrifice religious purity for the sake of bodily comfort, placing

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.*, 8.5.6. John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 222-3. Similarly Augustine, *Serm.* 306E. Cited in Frankfurter, "Beyond Magic and Superstition," 277.

<sup>11</sup> *y. Shabb.* 14:4 (14d); Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order: Mo'ed. Tractates Šabbat and 'Eruvin*, 433 (trans. adapted here). Peter Schäfer and Hans-Jürgen Becker, *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991-2001), 2.1:65. A parallel is found at: *y. 'Abod. Zar.* 2:2 (40d) with the slightly different text מה הוה ליה אילו מית ולא שמע הדא מילתא "It would [have been better] for him if he had died and had not heard this word." Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *The Jerusalem Talmud. Fourth Order: Neziqin. Tractates Ševi'it and 'Avodah Zarah* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 299-300 (trans. adapted here). It seems possible that the מה in 'Avodah Zarah's version is a scribal error for ניה as found in the Shabbat version, though I have not seen this suggested.

<sup>12</sup> *t. Hullin* 2:22. M. S. Zuckerman, ed., *Tosefta: 'al pi kitve yad 'Erfurt u-Ṷinah 'im mar'eh mekomot ye-hilufe girsa' ot u-maftehot* [*Tosefta: Based on the Erfurt and Vienna Codices with parallels and variants*] (Jerusalem: Sifre Ṷahrman, 1963), 503: פירצת גזירן של חכמים ולא שיצאת בשלום ויהי פירצת גזירן של חכמים. Translation in Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> "Medical conditions push people to their limits ... practices that according to the Rabbis may be considered marginal and thus traditionally categorized as folk medicine, including magic, are often sites of abstruse transgressions of boundaries, of individual as well as of group identity." Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 79-80. See also Schäfer, "Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism," 34.

one outside of the community of properly controlled religious bodies. Yet the dividing line between these categories is difficult to discern from the sources we possess, both because of the widely divergent regional and local practices on display in many cases, as well as the fact that the literary representations of the distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable behavior often both obscure and betray the much wider variety of practices that were carried out in the name of healing in late antiquity.<sup>14</sup>

In early Islamic texts, we come across many of the same concerns and rhetoric regarding healing practices as are found in other texts of the late ancient Near East, and the *ḥadīth* books include extended discussions of what constitutes an acceptable Islamic healing practice. We find a parallel to the notion that participation in inappropriate healing rituals is worse than death itself in a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet's Companion 'Abd Allāh b. 'Ukaym al-Juhanī (d. before 95/714), sick with an illness called *ḥumra*, is asked why he does not hang an amulet for healing. He answers that "death is better than that" (*al-mawt aqrab min dhālika*), and cites a Prophetic statement that "One who hangs something [i.e. an amulet or charm] is entrusted to it" (*man ta'allaqa shay<sup>an</sup> wukila ilay-hi*), meaning that the amulet user will have to call upon the amulet for healing without the benefit of God's mercy.<sup>15</sup>

The usage of amulets is one of several healing practices that are contested in the *ḥadīth* books and are in some cases labeled as sorcery (*siḥr*) or idolatry (*shirk*). Another is the usage of verbal incantations, commonly called in Arabic *ruqan* (sing. *ruqya*), for healing or apotropaic

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<sup>14</sup> On the geographical variability of healing traditions, see Gordon, "Healing Event in Graeco-Roman Folk-Medicine," 365-6, 368n.27.

<sup>15</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, 465 (no. 2072) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 24*). A parallel to this story is found in al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, 5:103. Parallels to "One who hangs something/an amulet is entrusted to it" without the accompanying story: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:13 (no. 23804), 8:15 (no. 23813), 8:16 (no. 23821); 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:209 (no. 20345); 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi' fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:757 (no. 674). A different wording is found at: *ibid.*, 2:748 (no. 662).

purposes.<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, I will examine some of the early Islamic discussions of *ruqyas* before focusing specifically on an early point of contention in these discussions: the inclusion of spitting or blowing as part of the ritual process of *ruqya* recitation. The importance of recited incantations as a component of religio-medical practice is displayed in a variety of late ancient sources, and the complex of meanings attached to healing incantations in early Islamic sources can be well understood within the context of the controversies over these issues in the late ancient world.

Yet the Islamic sources' discomfort with the deployment of spit or breath within healing rituals is unusual for the late ancient world, given how commonly the usage of spittle is positively cited in ancient healing/medical contexts.<sup>17</sup> While we saw in Chapter One that spitting could be associated with magic in antiquity, saliva was also commonly cited for its medicinal qualities in Greco-Roman and Jewish texts, a few of which we saw in Chapter Two.<sup>18</sup> The polemical attention that some early eighth-century Islamic scholars paid to spitting/blowing in healing rituals indicates that something was at stake for them in this ritual.

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<sup>16</sup> Fahd writes: "Rukya, corresponding to Latin *carmen*, magical chant, consists in the pronouncing of magical formulae for procuring an enchantment." *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Rukya" (T. Fahd). "*Rāq*<sup>m</sup> designated, in the society of Muhammad's time, the professional in regard to exorcism, conjuration, and incantation(s) against any evil ... The practice of the *ruqiya* [*sic*] (pl. *ruqā*), i.e. of healing via incantation, was strongly rooted in the society of the time. It drew upon very rhythmic and rhymed poetic material, and could be accompanied by other efficacious symbolic gestures." Hamès, "Le notion de magie dans Le Coran," 38. See also: Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. "r.q.y."; Rubin, "Muḥammad the Exorcist," 104-5.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Gordon notes "how common threefold expectoration is in magical healing, and in other related contexts," and suggests that performing an action three times is one of the "standard building-blocks for rituals" and that spitting, "generally recognized as peculiar, serv[es] to isolate the event as socially remarkable." Gordon, "Healing event in Graeco-Roman folk-medicine," 372n.40, 366. For example, Pliny the Elder commends "in using any remedy, of spitting on the ground three times by way of ritual, thus increasing its efficacy." Plin. Nat. 28.7.35; trans. Jones 27. Similarly Nicolson, "Saliva Superstition in Classical Literature," 39; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 120-1, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Pliny the Elder collects a variety of medicinal usages of saliva: Plin. Nat. 28. Rabbinic literature cites the healing power present in the saliva of a person who is fasting (*b. Shab.* 108b) and in that of a firstborn child (*b. Bava Batra* 126b). Pliny the Elder similarly cites the curative power in the saliva of a fasting person: Plin. Nat. 7.2, 28.7. Medicinal usages of saliva are also cited in: Celsus, *de Med.* 5.18; Gal. Nat. Fac. 3.7; Marcellus Empiricus, *de Med.* 18.4.

A parallel to this preoccupation with spit emerges in some rabbinic sources, where spitting during incantations marks the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable healing practices. The way in which spitting functions in these rabbinic sources as a negatively charged aspect of healing rituals perhaps points to a connection to these early Islamic discussions and to a shared ascription of meaning in regard to this deployment of bodily fluids during healing incantations.

I would suggest that an anxiety over sectarian boundaries is part of this focus on spittle. In the rabbinic case, the demarcation between formative (rabbinic) Jewish and “sectarian” practices, perhaps including Christianity, is part of this dismissal of spitting. The rhetoric against spitting in healing incantations present in some early Islamic sources is similar to this rabbinic effort to enact communal boundaries, and Muslims too appear to have demarcated sectarian boundaries through the discouragement of certain healing rituals.

### **Sorcerous Spells and Detestable Spittle: Early Islamic Discussions of *Ruqan* and *Nafth***

In early Islamic sources, *ruqan*—recited “incantations” or “spells” used for various healing or apotropaic purposes—are a point of contention, and overall these sources do not offer a consistent message on their acceptability.<sup>19</sup> While their usage, like that of amulets and talismans, is sometimes labeled idolatry (*shirk*), they are also deemed permissible (if perhaps only in certain circumstances) according to certain *aḥādīth*. The implicit conclusion reached by the eighth- and ninth-century *ḥadīth* scholars, evidenced by the inclusion of material on *ruqyas* in both the pre-canonical and the canonical *ḥadīth* books, seems to have been a middle ground

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<sup>19</sup> The most elaborate discussions of *ruqyas* in early Islamic sources occur in several *ḥadīth* books in chapters on medicine (often labeled *kitāb al-tibb*). They also occur elsewhere in *ḥadīth* books, and relevant stories are also found in certain *sīra* texts.

between complete acceptance and complete rejection, with an effort made to define which types of *ruqya* were allowed and which were not. The widely variant traditions point to debates over what types of *ruqya* were allowed, whether they should be allowed at all, and how to define what was acceptable and what was not.<sup>20</sup>

If the reports recorded in such early *ḥadīth* books as the *Muṣannaḥ* works of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba regarding the opinions (*aqwāl*) of Muslim scholars from the generations of Successors (*tābi ‘ūn*) and Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) are any indication, it appears that there were several different views regarding the acceptability of healing activities like *ruqya* recitation in the late seventh and early eighth centuries C.E.<sup>21</sup> These included very critical attitudes, such as when the Kūfan Successor Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī (d. *circa* 96/714) states that “they detested amulets, incantations, and charms” (*kānū yakrahūna al-tamā’im wa-l-ruqā wa-l-nushra*), expressing a clear distrust of these objects and associated rituals.<sup>22</sup> When asked about “a

<sup>20</sup> These divergent reports on *ruqyas* and other healing practices are similar to other examples of variant positions on ritual activities exhibited in early *ḥadīth* collections: such contradictory texts, as M.J. Kister writes, “reflect differences in the opinions of various circles of Muslim scholars and indicate that in the early period of Islam many ritual prescriptions were not yet firmly established.” M. J. Kister, “On ‘Concessions’ and Conduct: A Study in Early *Ḥadīth*,” in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 89. G. H. A. Juynboll states that the issue of the acceptability of *ruqyas* “surely is very old,” citing the “number of *aqwāl*, *mursalāt*, and *mawqūfāt* dealing with charms (*ruqy*) [*sic*].” Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 642.

<sup>21</sup> On opinions ascribed to Successors and Companions as important early sources, see: G. H. A. Juynboll, “Some Notes on Islam's First *Fuqahā’* Distilled from Early *Ḥadīth* Literature,” *Arabica* 39.3 (1992): 289-90. Juynboll notes that the *Muṣannaḥs* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba “teem with” such reports. *Ibid.*, 298. Travis Zadeh discuss many of these traditions in regard to their relevance for tracing early ideas about the permissibility of the writing of the Qur’ān and its usage in different ritual contexts in: “Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates over the Material Qur’ān,” *JAOS* 129.3 (2009):463-6; *idem*, “Ingestible Scripture,” 102-6

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:16 (no. 23818). The Kūfan *isnād* runs: Abū Bakr > Wakī’ [b. al-Jarrāh] > Sufyān [al-Thawrī] > Manṣūr [b. al-Mu’tamir] > Ibrāhīm. In another report, Ibrāhīm states that “they detested all amulets, from the Qur’ān or not” (*kānū yakrahūna al-tamā’im kulla-hā min al-Qur’ān wa-ghayr al-Qur’ān*): *ibid.*, 8:15 (no. 23814). Abū Bakr > Hushaym [b. Bashīr] > Mughīra [b. Miqsam] > Ibrāhīm. This report is also found in Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, ed. Wahbī Sulaymān Ghāwījī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub ‘Ilmiyya, 1991), 231 (no. 60\_1) with the same *isnād*. Ibrāhīm is also described as hating Mughīra’s placing a Qur’ānic amulet upon his forearm to fight off fever. Abū ‘Ubayd, *loc. cit.* and Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:15 (no. 23816). Lane translates *nushra* as “a charm or an amulet . . . by which a sick person, and one possessed, or mad is cured,” and equates it with *ruqya*. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2795. Zadeh suggests that “*nushra*, a charm or spell . . . in this context is generally interpreted as either reciting verses of the Qur’ān over water for ingestion . . . or writing them on paper to be dissolved and then ingested”: “Ingestible Scripture,” 104-5. A recipe for reciting Qur’ānic verses over water does appear in the *bāb al-nushra wa mā jā’a fī-hi* in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:13 (no. 19763).



man in Kūfa who would write verses from the Qurʾān and give it to the sick to drink,” Ibrāhīm similarly responded that he detested that.<sup>23</sup> When asked about charms (*nushra*), the Successor al-Ḥasan al-Basrī (d. 110/728) responds with a single word: “Sorcery” (*sihr*).<sup>24</sup> He is also reported to have rejected the drinking of verses of the Qurʾān for healing or using them as amulets and to have said of those who did this: “You are making the book of God [the Qurʾān] into *ruqyas*” (*ajʿaltum kitāb<sup>a</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> ruqan*).<sup>25</sup> The Kūfan Successor Saʿīd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713) is reported to have rejected the usage of gems (*kharaja*), amulets (*tamīma*), and incantations (*al-ruqā*).<sup>26</sup> When the Companion Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh (d. circa 73-78/692-698) is asked about charms (*nushra*), he says that they are “amongst the works of Satan” (*min ʿamal<sup>i</sup> al-Shayṭān<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>27</sup> Another Companion—Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān (d. 36/656), who migrated from the Ḥijāz to Madāʿin and

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:25 (no. 23861). Abū Bakr > Hushaym [b. Bashīr] > Ibn ʿAwn > Ibrāhīm. Also found in Abū ʿUbayd, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, 231 (no. 60\_2) with the same *isnād*. This ritual activity is discussed in Zadeh, “Touching and Ingesting,” 464-5 and idem, “Ingestible Scripture,” 105. Ibrāhīm seems to have discouraged all usage of the written Qurʾān for healing purposes, and Zadeh notes that more generally, “Ibrāhīm al-Nakāʾī ... consistently views the textual form of the Qurʾān with apprehension.” Zadeh, “Touching and Ingesting,” 466.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:25 (no. 23862). Abū Bakr > [ʿAbd al-Raḥmān] Ibn Maḥdī > al-Ḥakam b. ʿAṭīyya > al-Ḥasan. See note 22.

<sup>25</sup> Abū ʿUbayd, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, 231 (no. 60\_3). ʿAbd al-Raḥmān > ʿUthmān b. Wakīʿ > Yūnus b. ʿUbayd > al-Ḥasan. Cited in Zadeh, “Touching and Ingesting,” 465.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:16 (23819-20, 22). The *asānid* are, respectively: (1) Abū Bakr > ʿAbda [b. Sulaymān] (d. 188/804; Kūfa) > Muḥammad b. Suwaqa (d. circa 140/757; Kūfa) > Saʿīd b. Jubayr; (2) Abū Bakr > Hafṣ [b. Ghiyāth] (d. 197/813; Kūfa) > Layth [b. Abī Sulaym] (d. 142/759; Kūfa) > Saʿīd b. Jubayr; (3) Abū Bakr > Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāh (d. 197/813) > Abū Shihāb [Mūsa b. Nāfiʿ] (d. unknown; Kūfa) > Saʿīd b. Jubayr.

<sup>27</sup> ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:13 (no. 19762). ʿAbd al-Razzāq > Uqayl b. Maʿqil [b. Munabbih] > Hammām b. Munabbih > Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh. See *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Djābir b. ʿAbd Allāh” (M.J. Kister). It appears as a Prophetic *ḥadīth* with a similar *isnād* in Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:323 (no. 3864) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 9): Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal > ʿAbd al-Razzāq > Uqayl b. Maʿqil [b. Munabbih] > Wahb b. Munabbih > Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh > Rasūl Allāh. It is a Prophetic *ḥadīth* with a *mursal* Baṣran *isnād* in Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:25 (no. 23863). Abū Bakr > Abū Usāma [Ḥammād b. Usāma] > Shuʿba [b. al-Ḥajjāj] > Abū Rajāʾ [ʿImrān b. Milḥān] > al-Ḥasan > the Prophet. A similar *isnād* (with the Companion Anas b. Mālik added) appears in al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:2943 (no. 8292). Abū Muslim b. Abī Shuʿayb al-Ḥarrānī > Maskīn b. Bukayr > Shuʿba [b. al-Ḥajjāj] > Abū Rajāʾ [ʿImrān b. Milḥān] > al-Ḥasan > Anas b. Mālik > the Prophet. In Abū Dāwūd’s *al-Marāsīl*, a *mursal* report (with a similar *isnād* to the Ibn Abī Shayba report) records that when al-Ḥasan was asked about *nushra*, he replied, “I was told that the Prophet said ‘They are amongst the works of Satan’” (*dhukira lī ʿan al-nabīyyi ʾanna-hu qāla inna-hā min ʿamal<sup>i</sup> al-shayṭān<sup>i</sup>*). The *isnād* is: ʿAlī b. al-Jaʿd (d. 230/844-5; Baghdad) > Shuʿba [b. al-Ḥajjāj] > Abū Rajāʾ [ʿImrān b. Milḥān] > al-Ḥasan. Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ashʿath al-Sijistānī, *al-Marāsīl*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūt (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1408/1988), 319 (no. 453). On the transmitter ʿAlī b. al-Jaʿd, see: Pavel Pavlovitch, “The ʿUbāda b. al-Ṣāmit Tradition at the Crossroads of Methodology,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 11 (2001): 167-9. The statement on *nushra* is ascribed to the Prophet from Anas b. Mālik without further *isnād* in al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid*, 5:102.

Kūfa—is reported to have said to a man he saw wearing an amuletic string (*khayṭ*) on his arm, “If you died, and this was on your arm, I would not pray over you” (*law mutta wa hādḥā fī-l-‘aḍud’-ka mā ṣallaytu ‘alay-ka*).<sup>28</sup> The Egyptian Companion ‘Uqba b. ‘Āmir (d. 58/678) states, “Placing an amulet on an adult or a child is *shirk*” (*mawḍi‘ al-tamīmat’ min al-insān’i wa al-ṭifl’i shirk<sup>um</sup>*).<sup>29</sup>

Shī‘ī tradition offers similar criticisms of those kinds of practices from the early Imāms. Sources report that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first Shī‘ī Imām (d. 40/661), “would say that ‘Many of the incantations and amulets are snares’” (*fa-inna ‘Aliyy<sup>um</sup> kāna yaqūlu inna kathīr<sup>um</sup> min al-ruqā wa-l-tamā‘im’i min al-ashrāk’i*).<sup>30</sup> The Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) likewise “said that many amulets are idolatrous” (*qāla Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Šādiq inna kathīr<sup>um</sup> min al-tamā‘im’i shirk<sup>um</sup>*).<sup>31</sup>

In each of these reports, one or more healing practices are strongly discouraged.

Conversely, we also find lenient opinions about many of these same practices. Regarding the use

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:14 (nos. 23809). Abū Bakr > ‘Alī b. Mushir (d. 189/804; Kūfa) > Yazīd [b. Abī Ziyād] (d. 136/753; Kūfa) > Zayd b. Wahb (d. 96/714; Kūfa) > Hudhayfa. In an alternate version, it is specified that the string had been supplied with an incantation (*khayṭ<sup>um</sup> ruqī lī fīhi*). Ibid., 8:14-5 (no. 23810). Abū Bakr > Abū Mu‘āwiya [Muḥammad b. Khāzim] (d. 194/810; Kūfa) > al-‘A‘mash (d. 148/765; Kūfa) > Abū Zubyān [Ḥusayn b. Jundab] (d. 90/708; Kūfa) > Hudhayfa. On Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān, see Michael Lecker, “Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān and ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, Jewish Converts to Islam,” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 11 (1993): 149-62.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:15 (no. 23812). Abū Bakr > Shabāba b. Sawār (d. 206/821; Madā’in) > Layth b. Sa‘d (d. 175/791; Egypt) > Yazīd [b. Abī Ḥabīb] (d. 128/746; Egypt) > Abū al-Khayr [Marthad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Yaznī] (d. 90/709; Egypt) > ‘Uqba b. ‘Āmir (d. 58/678; Egypt). ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:751 (no. 665); Ibrāhīm b. Nushayṭ (d. 161/777; Egypt) and Layth [b. Sa‘d] > Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb > Abū al-Khayr [Marthad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Yaznī] > ‘Uqba b. ‘Āmir.

<sup>30</sup> Ibnā Bistām al-Naysābūrayn, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, ed. Miḥsin ‘Aqīl (Beirut: Dār al-Muḥajja al-Bayḍā’, 1994), 191. Batool Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom. The Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, ed. Andrew J. Newman (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1991), 54. *Isnād*: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Muslim > Muḥammad al-Bāqir > ‘Alī. On the compilers of this book, al-Ḥusayn b. Bistām and ‘Abd Allāh b. Bistām, see: Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 2 vols, ed. Muḥammad Jawād al-Nā’inī (Beirut: Dār al-Adwā’, 1408/1988), 1:137 (no. 78) and 2:15 (no. 565). Their father, Bistām b. Sābūr, is described as transmitting from the Imāms Ja‘far al-Šādiq and Mūsā al-Kāzim in: ibid., 1:275 (no. 278). For this tradition, see also Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār al-jāmi‘at li-durar akhbār al-a‘imma al-aṭḥār*, 110 vols. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1957-73), 95:5 (*kitāb al-Qur‘ān wa-l-dhikr wa-l-du‘ā’, bāb 54*). In a version found in a tenth-century C.E. Ismā‘īlī text, ‘Alī “would say that ‘Many of the incantations and hung amulets are part of the snares’” (*kāna yaqūlu inna kathīr<sup>um</sup> min al-ruqā wa ta‘līq’i al-tamā‘im’i shu‘bat<sup>um</sup> min al-ashrāk’i*). al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām*, 2:483 (no. 1727). A similar statement is ascribed to ‘Alī in: ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:752-3 (no. 667). Here, he says, “Hanging amulets is part of the Jāhiliyya” (*ta‘līq’i al-tamā‘im’i shu‘bat<sup>um</sup> min shu‘ab’i al-jāhiliyyat’i*). The *isnād* is Ibn Lahī‘a (d. 174/790; Egypt) > ‘Abd Allāh b. Hubayra (d. 126/743; Egypt) > ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

<sup>31</sup> Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 191. Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 54. *Isnād*: Ja‘far b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Sa‘dī > Naḍr b. Yazīd > al-Qāsim > Ja‘far al-Šādiq. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 95:5 (*kitāb al-Qur‘ān wa-l-dhikr wa-l-du‘ā’, bāb 54*).

of amulets, we find reports that the Baṣran Successor Muḥammad Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728),<sup>32</sup> the Meccan ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 115/733),<sup>33</sup> and the Shī‘ī Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. *circa* 117/735) and Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) all saw no problem with amulets containing words from the Qur’ān.<sup>34</sup> The Meccan Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. *circa* 100/718)<sup>35</sup> and Muḥammad al-Bāqir<sup>36</sup> allowed hanging amulets on children. The Medinan Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib (d. 94/715)<sup>37</sup> and Imām

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:32 (no. 23895). Abū Bakr > ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Sulaymān > Ismā‘īl b. Muslim > Ibn Sīrīn.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. (no. 23897). Abū Bakr > Yaḥyā b. Ādam > Ḥasan [b. Šāliḥ b. Ḥayy] > Layth [b. Abī Sulaym] > ‘Aṭā’. On Ḥasan b. Šāliḥ b. Ḥayy, see note 38. In another report ‘Aṭā’ specifies that, for a menstruating woman or a person in a state of major impurity, such an amulet must be contained in a hollow tube. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 1:345 (no. 1347). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ibn Jurayr > ‘Aṭā’. See Zadeh, “Touching and Ingesting,” 466.

<sup>34</sup> Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 191. Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 54-5. *Asānīd*: (1) Ishāq b. Yūsuf al-Makkī > Faḍāla [b. Ayyūb] > Abān b. ‘Uthmān > Zurāra b. A‘yān > Abū Ja‘far al-Bāqir; (2) Ishāq b. Yūsuf > Faḍāla [b. Ayyūb] > Abān b. ‘Uthmān > Ishāq [al-Šayrafi] b. ‘Ammār > Ja‘far al-Šādiq; (3) ‘Amr b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar al-Tamīmī > Ḥammād b. ‘Īsā > Shu‘ayb al-‘Aqarqūfi > al-Ḥillī > Ja‘far al-Šādiq. On Abān b. ‘Uthmān, see Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī‘ite Literature. Volume One* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 129-31. On Zurāra b. A‘yān, see *ibid.*, 404-5. On Ishāq al-Šayrafi, see *ibid.*, 299. A version ascribed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq without *isnād* appears in: al-Qaḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām*, 2:142 (no. 497).

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:31-2 (no. 23892). Abū Bakr > Wakī‘ > Isrā‘īl [b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq al-Sabī‘ī al-Hamdānī] > Thuwayr [b. Sa‘īd b. ‘Ilāqa= Thuwayr b. Abī Fākhta] > Mujāhid. On Thuwayr, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 1:295-6 (no. 301). Here a report appears in which Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq (d. *circa* 152/769) is asked why he does not transmit from Thuwayr since Isrā‘īl (Yūnus’ son [d. *circa* 160/776]) does so, as we see in this *isnād*. Yūnus responds, “He [Thuwayr] was a *Rāfiḍī*” (*kāna Rāfiḍiyy<sup>an</sup>*), i.e. a Shī‘ī. Thuwayr is listed as a Companion of the Imāms ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, al-Bāqir, and al-Šādiq in: al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, 85, 111, 161. Mujāhid is also said to have written amulets and hung them upon children in: Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 97. Contrary to Mujāhid’s position, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī detested that children wear an amulet (*al-ma‘ādha*) since “they go into the privy with it [the amulet] on” (*inna-hum yadkhalūna bi-hi al-khalā‘<sup>an</sup>*). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:16 (no. 23823). Abū Bakr > Wakī‘ > Ibn ‘Awn > Ibrāhīm.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 8:32 (no. 23898). Abū Bakr > Yaḥyā b. Ādam > Abān b. Taghlib > Yūnus b. Khabbāb > Abū Ja‘far [=Imām al-Bāqir]. Abān b. Taghlib (d. 141/758-9) was “a prominent member of the Shī‘ite community and head of its Imāmīte branch in Kūfa ... Shī‘ites and Sunnīs alike consider him a reliable transmitter of *ḥadīth*.” Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 107. Both Abān and Yūnus b. Khabbāb are listed as Companions of the Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Šādiq in: al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 106, 151 and 141, 335 respectively. While it may seem unusual to find a Shī‘ī Imām’s opinion cited in a Sunnī collection, in fact “Sunni and Shi‘ite sources agree in describing [al-Bāqir] as an eminent religious scholar.” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Bāqer, Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad” (W. Madelung). Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq is also said to have allowed hanging amulets on children. Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 191. Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:31 (no. 23890). Abu Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > ‘Uqba b. Khālīd > Shu‘ba [b. Ḥajjāj] > Abū ‘Iṣma [=Nūḥ b. Abī Maryam?] > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib. Another report has Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib say that there is no problem with a menstruating woman or a person in a state of major impurity carrying an amulet (assumedly containing Qur’ānic verses), so long as the amulet is contained in a hollow tube or wrapped in a parchment sheet. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 1:345-6 (no. 1348). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar > ‘Alqama b. Abī ‘Alqama > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib. ‘Aṭā’ similarly allows hanging Qur’ānic amulets on children if the amulet is contained in an iron tube. Ibid., 1:345 (no. 1347). The Egyptian Layth b. Sa‘īd (d. 175/791) is reported to have said, “There is no problem with hanging something from the Qur’ān on women or a sick person, so long as it is ascribed upon leather or placed in a tube. But I detest [the usage of] an iron tube” (*lā ba‘<sup>an</sup> an yu‘allaqu ‘alā-l-nisā‘<sup>in</sup> wa-l-marīḍ<sup>in</sup> shay‘<sup>an</sup> min al-Qur’ān<sup>in</sup> idhā khuriza ‘alay-hi adīm aw kāna fī qaṣabat<sup>in</sup> wa akrihu qaṣabat<sup>an</sup> ḥadīd<sup>an</sup>*). Ibn Abī

al-Bāqir<sup>38</sup> both saw no problem with amulets so long as they were written on leather (*adīm*). Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq is recorded in a Shī‘ī tradition stating there was no problem with drinking verses of the Qur‘ān,<sup>39</sup> as is the Medinan Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) in a ninth-century Andalusian Mālikī source.<sup>40</sup> Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib, ‘Atā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ, Mālik b. Anas, Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/779),<sup>41</sup> and the Medinan Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd (d. 143-4/761-2)<sup>42</sup> are recorded giving lenient opinions on *nushra*. The Syrian ‘Atā’ b. Abī Muslim al-Khurāsānī (d. 135/752-3) is recorded as seeing no problem in performing rituals to release a victim who has been “ensnared [by charms] and bewitched” (*al-mu‘akhhadh wa-l-maṣḥūr*).<sup>43</sup> Similarly, scholars deem certain incantations (or certain usages of incantations) to be acceptable: al-Ḥasan al-Basrī (d. 110/728) “saw no problem in the *ruqya* [against] venom” (*kāna lā yarī bi-ruqyat’ al-ḥumat’ ba’s<sup>am</sup>*)<sup>44</sup> and Ibn Sīrīn allowed three types of *ruqya*: “the *ruqya* of skin pustules, of venom (i.e. of a scorpion),

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Zayd, *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*, 266 (no. 196). The Medinan Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) reportedly required that the Qur‘ānic words be inscribed upon leather (*jild*). *Ibid.*, 264 (no. 193).

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:32 (no. 23893). Abū Bakr > ‘Ubaydallāh [b. Mūsā al-‘Absī] > Ḥasan [b. Šāliḥ b. Ḥayy] > Ja‘far [al-Šādiq] > his father [=Imām al-Bāqir]. Ḥasan b. Šāliḥ b. Ḥayy (d. 168/784-5) is a significant Zaydī figure who was accepted as a reliable transmitter by Sunnīs. See *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “al-Ḥasan b. Šāliḥ b. Ḥayy al-Kūfī” (Ch. Pellat); Haider, *Origins of the Shī‘a*, 227n.71. ‘Ubaydallāh b. Mūsā al-‘Absī (d. 213/828) was known for having Shī‘ī beliefs but is considered a reliable transmitter and is cited in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 25 vols., ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūt et al. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1981-88), 9:553-7. Ja‘far al-Šādiq allows an amulet on a menstruating woman so long as it is inscribed in leather or silver or is contained in an iron tube. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 3:106. Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl > al-Faḍl b. Shādhān > Safwān b. Yaḥyā > Manṣūr b. Ḥāzim > Ja‘far al-Šādiq. On Manṣūr b. Ḥāzim, “a learned member of the Shī‘ite community of Kūfa in his time,” see: Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 317-8. On Safwān b. Yaḥyā (d. 210/825), a prominent transmitter of Shī‘ite books, see *ibid.*, 170. On al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Naysābūrī, a “prominent Shī‘ite scholar of the third century,” see *ibid.*, 140. Similar traditions are ascribed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq in Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 191-2. Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 55-6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 191. Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 55. Ishāq b. Yūsuf > Faḍāla [b. Ayyūb] > Abān b. ‘Uthmān > Ishāq [al-Šayrafī] b. ‘Ammār > Ja‘far al-Šādiq.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-’l-Ṭibb*, 97.

<sup>41</sup> The opinions of each of these four appear without *isnād* in: *ibid.*, 90. Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib’s lenient opinion (reported on Qatāda) is also recorded in: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1459 (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 49 [chapter heading]). A similar opinion from ‘Atā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ is recorded in: ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:761 (no. 680), with the *isnād* Muḥammad b. ‘Amr [al-Yāfi‘ī] (d. unknown; Egypt) > Ibn Jurayj > ‘Atā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: Yaḥyā b. Ayyūb [al-Ghāfiqī] (d. 163/779; Egypt) > Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:27 (nos. 23868-9). The *āsānīd* are, respectively: (no. 23868) Abū Bakr > Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ayyāsh (d. 182/798; Syria) > Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767; Hijāz) > ‘Atā’; (no. 23869) Abū Bakr > Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ayyāsh > ‘Atā’ al-Khurāsānī. The actual cure is not specified here. In Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 185; Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 45, we find an incantation for treating this condition.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:29 (no. 23880). Abū Bakr > Khalaf b. Khalīfa > Manṣūr [b. al-Mu‘tamir] > al-Ḥasan.

and of *al-nafs* (i.e. the [evil] eye)” (*ruqyat al-namla wa-l-ḥuma – ya ‘nī al- ‘aqrab – wa-l-nafs – ya ‘nī al- ‘ayn*).<sup>45</sup> Shī‘ī tradition records Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s statement that “there is no problem in the *ruqyas* for the [evil] eye, fever, teeth, and any animal with venom” (*lā ba ‘s bi-l-ruqā min al- ‘ayn wa-l-ḥummā wa-l-ḍirs wa kull dhāt hāmmat li-hā ḥumat<sup>un</sup>*).<sup>46</sup> These lenient approaches differ greatly from the harsh characterizations of these healing practices found in other Successors’ opinions, cited above.

In *aḥādīth* ascribed to the Prophet, we similarly find variant statements regarding healing activities, including many condemnations. In ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ*, a harsh discouragement of *ruqya* and amulet usage appears: “If someone ties a knot with a *ruqya* in it, he has done sorcery. And if someone does sorcery, he disbelieves. And if someone hangs an amulet, he is entrusted to it” (*man ‘aqada ‘uqdat<sup>an</sup> fī-hā ruqyat<sup>un</sup> fa-qad saḥara wa-man saḥara fa-qad kafara wa-man ta ‘allaqa ‘ulqat<sup>an</sup> wukila ilay-hi*).<sup>47</sup> A similar *ḥadīth* is found in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḥ*: “the Prophet said ‘If someone hangs amulets and ties *ruqyas*, he takes part in idolatry’” (*al-nabī qāla man ‘allaqa al-tamā ‘im<sup>a</sup> wa- ‘aqada al-ruqā fa-huwa ‘alā shu ‘ba‘i min al-shirk<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>48</sup> Several texts record a story in which the Kūfan Companion ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652-3) finds his wife wearing a string (*khayṭ*) that has been charmed to protect her from

<sup>45</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:17 (no. 19773). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] > Ayyūb [al-Sakhtiyānī] > Ibn Sīrīn. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:29 (no. 23881). Abū Bakr > Abū Usāma [Ḥammād b. Usāma] > Hishām [b. Ḥassān] > Muḥammad [Ibn Sīrīn].

<sup>46</sup> Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a‘imma*, 190. Ispahany, trans. (adapted), *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 53-4. al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār* 95:4 (*kitāb al-Qur‘ān wa-l-dhikr wa-l-du‘ā‘*, bāb 54).

<sup>47</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:17 (no. 19772). The *isnād* runs ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Abān [b. Abī ‘Ayyāsh] > al-Ḥasan and then appear the words “he raised/ascribed the *ḥadīth*, he said” (*yarfa ‘u al-ḥadīth qāla*).” I interpret this to mean that the *ḥadīth* is ascribed to the Prophet, since the statement “One who hangs an amulet is entrusted to it” is found at *ibid.*, 11:209 (no. 20345) with the similar *isnād* ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] > Abān [b. Abī ‘Ayyāsh] > al-Ḥasan > Messenger of God. Alternatively the verb could be passive (*yurfi ‘u*) and mean that the *ḥadīth* is ascribed to al-Ḥasan. A parallel is found in al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan*, 4:30 (no. 4090) (*kitāb al-taḥrīm al-damm*, bāb 19) with “with a *ruqya* in it” (*fī-hā ruqyat<sup>un</sup>*) replaced by “blow spittle in it” (*thumma nafatha fī-hā*) and with “disbelieved” (*kafara*) replaced by “committed idolatry” (*ashraka*). The *isnād* runs ‘Amr b. ‘Alī > Abū Dāwūd > ‘Abbād b. Maysara al-Manqarī > al-Ḥasan > Abū Hurayra > Messenger of God.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:16 (no. 23817). Abū Bakr > Sharīk [b. ‘Abd Allāh] > Hilāl [al-Wazzān] > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā > Prophet. On the Prophet’s hatred of amulets (*tamā ‘im*), see: *ibid.*, 8:13 (no. 23803-4); Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 97.

the illness called *ḥumra* (*ruqī lī fīhi min al-ḥumrat*).<sup>49</sup> Ibn Mas‘ūd shouts that “the family of ‘Abd Allāh does not need idolatry” (*āl ‘Abd Allāh aghniyā’ an al-shirk*) and that he has heard the Messenger of God say, “Indeed *ruqyas*, amulets, and love spells are idolatry” (*sami‘tu Rasūl Allāh yaqūlu inna al-ruqā wa-l-tamā’im<sup>a</sup> wa-l-tiwalat<sup>a</sup> shirk<sup>um</sup>*).<sup>50</sup> A story in the *Muṣannaḥ* works of ‘Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba, as well as in several ninth-century collections, narrates a version of Muḥammad’s ascension to heaven (*mi‘rāj*) in which a crowd of 70,000 appears who—Muḥammad is told by Moses—“will enter Paradise without a reckoning” (*yadkhulūna al-jannat<sup>a</sup> bi-ghayr<sup>i</sup> ḥisāb<sup>in</sup>*). When someone asks who these individuals are, the Prophet tells his followers, “They are the ones who do not use cauterization, do not seek out incantations [*ruqyas*], do not believe in omens, and trust in God” (*hum alladhīna lā yaktūna wa lā yastarqūna wa lā yataṭayyarūna wa ‘alā rabb<sup>i</sup>-him yatawakkalūna*).<sup>51</sup> All of these *aḥādīth* display disquiet with, if not rejection of, the usage of *ruqyas* and other healing practices.

It is worth noting that, in these Successor opinions and Prophetic *aḥādīth*, the usage of objects such as amulets (the preparation of which might include the recitation of certain formulae, i.e. *ruqyas*) seems to be more at issue than the usage of recited words.<sup>52</sup> For example,

<sup>49</sup> Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 640 defines *ḥumra* as “a certain disease which attacks human beings, in consequence of which the place thereof becomes red ... a certain swelling, of the pestilential kind.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:13-4 (no. 23805-6). ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:208 (no. 20343). ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:750 (no. 664) [without the Prophetic *ḥadīth*]. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1167 (no. 3530) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 39). Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:328-9 (no. 3879) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 17). Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 1:381. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 9:193-4 (no. 8861-3). al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:2942 (no. 8290). On this *ḥadīth*, see Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 55. The Prophet’s rejection (and definition) of amulets and love spells appears in: al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, 2:142 (no. 497). Ibn Mas‘ūd defines *tiwala* in: ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:747 (no. 661).

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:52-3 (no. 23969, 23972). *Asānīd*: (1) Abū Bakr > Muḥammad b. Fuḍayl b. Ghazwān > Ḥuṣayn [b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān] > Sa‘īd b. Jubayr > Ibn ‘Abbās > Messenger of God; (2) Abū Bakr > al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā > Shaybān [b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān] > Qatāda [b. Dī‘āma] > al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] > ‘Imrān b. al-Ḥuṣayn > Ibn Mas‘ūd > Messenger of God. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 10:408-9 (no. 19519). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] > Qatāda [b. Dī‘āma] > al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] > ‘Imrān b. al-Ḥuṣayn > Ibn Mas‘ūd > Prophet. Discussed in Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: the Legacy of the Mi‘raj in the formation of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 63, 101-2.

<sup>52</sup> Fahd notes that “casting a spell was usually by means of a magical formula pronounced or written on an amulet of parchment or leather.” *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ruḳya” (T. Fahd). See also Hamès, “Le notion de magie dans Le Coran,” 39.

the story of Ibn Mas‘ūd clearly condemns as *shirk* the usage of a string that has been charmed. In a version of this story found in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḡ*, Ibn Mas‘ūd sees that “hung upon the neck of his wife was a gem [protecting] against *ḥumra*” (*fī ‘unuq imra’ati-hi kharaz<sup>an</sup> qad ta ‘allaqat-hu min al-ḥumra*).<sup>53</sup> Versions in al-Ṭabarānī’s *Mu‘jam al-kabīr* describe the object as “an amulet” (*tamīma*) or “a strip of leather in which were amulets” (*sayr fī-hi tamā’im<sup>im</sup>*).<sup>54</sup> Ibn Mas‘ūd’s ripping the string/stone/amulet(s) from his wife’s throat and declaring it/them idolatrous suggests that it is the usage of such physical objects that is reprehensible, with somewhat less attention paid to the usage of recited words. This tendency is similarly found in pagan, Jewish, and Christian traditions of late antiquity in which there was “a low evaluation or skepticism about the use of objects in ritual” and a preference for the exclusive usage of spoken words.<sup>55</sup>

Yet the vocabulary in these *aḥādīth* is slippery. Does the condemnation of one who “ties (*‘aqada*) *ruqyas*” refer to the recitation of a *ruqya* over an amulet or knot, or does the word *ruqya* in this case refer to the amulet or knot itself? The former interpretation is consistent with the *ḥadīth* regarding one who ties a knot “with a *ruqya* in it”: we might imagine in this case that the recited *ruqya* is “in” the knot through the words being recited over it. But when someone “ties *ruqyas*,” does the word *ruqya* refer to a physical object? This is indicated by the similarity in language to another *ḥadīth*, in which it is related that “the Prophet detested the tying of amulets” (*kāna rasūl<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> yakrahu ‘aqd<sup>a</sup> al-tamā’im<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>56</sup> Ultimately it is unclear whether *ruqya*

<sup>53</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, 11:208 (no. 20343). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar > ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jazrī > Ziyād b. Abī Maryam or Abū ‘Ubayda [b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd] > Ibn Mas‘ūd. Also in al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 9:193 (no. 8861) with the same *isnād*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:193-4 (no. 8862-3).

<sup>55</sup> Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 14-5. Many traditions that appear to turn on the usage of objects as problematic appear in: Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 87, 90, 91, 97; Ibn Abī Zayd, *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*, 264-5 (no. 193).

<sup>56</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, 8:13 (no. 23803): Abū Bakr > Jarīr [b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Qurt] (d. 188/805; Kūfa/Rayy) and Mu‘tamir [b. Sulaymān] (d. 187/803; Baṣra) > al-Rukayn [b. al-Rabī‘] (d. 131/748; Kūfa) > al-Qāsim b. Ḥassān (d. unknown; Kūfa) > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥarmala (d. unknown; Kūfa) > ‘Abd Allāh [b. Mas‘ūd]

signifies a verbal or physical object in some of these cases. Be that as it may, in all of these texts, we can see that the usage of *ruqyas* —whether objects, recited words, or perhaps both—is described as reprehensible.

In other cases, however, the Prophet is said to have labeled certain types of *ruqyas* as permissible, as did the Successors in the narratives above. The Prophet’s permittance of certain *ruqyas* is often phrased as an exception to a general prohibition, such as in the statement “no *ruqya* except from an [evil] eye or from venom” (*la ruqyat<sup>a</sup> illa min ‘ayn<sup>in</sup> aw ḥumat<sup>in</sup>*).<sup>57</sup> His ruling is also phrased as an allowance, as in the report that “the Prophet allowed a *ruqya* against venom, and the [evil] eye, and skin pustules” (*al-nabī rakhkhaṣa fī-l-ruqya min al-ḥuma wa-l-‘ayn wa-l-namla*).<sup>58</sup> Such pronouncements are also traced to Companions, such as Ibn Mas‘ūd and ‘Ā’isha,<sup>59</sup> and, in Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* texts, to the Imāms.<sup>60</sup> These well-attested *aḥādīth*, found in

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(d. 32/652-3; Kūfa) > Messenger of God. He is reported to have forbidden amulets (*nahā al-rasūl<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> ‘an al-tamā’im*) in: Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:29 (no. 23878): Abū Bakr > Abū Usāma [Ḥammād b. Usāma] (d. 201/816-7; Kūfa) > Mujālid [b. Sa’īd] (d. 144/761; Kūfa) > ‘Āmir [b. Sharāḥīl al-Sha‘bī] (d. circa 104/722; Kūfa) > some of the Prophet’s Companions (*ba’d aṣḥāb al-nabī*) > Messenger of God. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:638 (no. 374) (*kitāb al-īmān, bāb* 94): al-Sha‘bī > Burayda b. al-Ḥuṣayb al-Aslamī (d. 60s/680s). Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:329 (no. 3880) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 17): Musaddad [b. Musarhad] (d. 228/843; Baṣra) > ‘Abd Allāh b. Dāwūd > Mālik b. Mīghwal (158/774-5; Kūfa) > Ḥuṣayn [b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān] (d. 136; Kūfa) > al-Sha‘bī > ‘Imrān b. Ḥuṣayn (d. 53/673) > the Prophet. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1161 (no. 3513) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 34): Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Numayr (d. 234/848; Kūfa) > Iṣḥāq b. Sulaymān (d. circa 200/815; Kūfa/Rayy) > Abū Ja‘far al-Rāzī (d. circa 160/776; Merv/Rayy) > Ḥuṣayn [b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān] > al-Sha‘bī > Burayda > Messenger of God. al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘*, 462 (no. 2057) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 15): (1) Ibn Abī ‘Umar > Sufyān [al-Thawrī] (d. 161/779; Kūfa) > Ḥuṣayn [b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān] > al-Sha‘bī > ‘Imrān b. Ḥuṣayn > Messenger of God; (2) Shu‘ba [b. al-Ḥajjāj] (d. 160/776; Baṣra) > Ḥuṣayn [b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān] > al-Sha‘bī > Burayda > the Prophet. al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-zawā’id*, 5:110-1. For *ḥuma*, see: Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 636, 651.

<sup>58</sup> This is found in: Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:378 (no. 2196) (*kitāb al-salām, bāb* 21); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1162 (no. 3516) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 34); al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘*, 462 (no. 2056) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 15); al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 2:1167 (no. 7499). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:30 (nos. 23883-4) list only the evil eye and venom. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1162 (no. 3517) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 34) says the Prophet allowed “the *ruqya* against the snake and the scorpion” (*al-ruqyat min al-ḥayyat wa-l-‘aqrab*). Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:331 (no. 3884) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 18) and al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:2936 (no. 8270) list the evil eye [literally envy], venom, and a bite (*naḥs<sup>in</sup> aw ḥumat<sup>in</sup> aw ladghat<sup>in</sup>*). The Prophet allowed “*ruqya* against everything venomous” (*fī-l-ruqya min kull<sup>i</sup> dhī ḥuma*) according to: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:28-9 (no. 23876); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1454 (no. 5741) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 37); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:376-7 (no. 2193) (*kitāb al-salām, bāb* 21); al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 2:1166 (no. 7497); al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-zawā’id*, 5:111. See Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> “No *ruqya* except from an [evil] eye or from venom” is ascribed to Ibn Mas‘ūd (Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:30 [no. 23884]) and to ‘Ā’isha (Ibid., [no. 23886]).



many different collections, seem to reflect an eighth- or ninth-century C.E. consensus on the acceptable limits of *ruqya* usage.

Yet *ruqyas* occupy an ambiguous position in the early Islamic sources in terms of their legality and acceptability as Islamic practice. This ambiguity is perhaps best illustrated by the Prophetic comment found in some collections: “There is no problem with the *ruqyas* in which there is no *shirk* (*lā ba’s<sup>a</sup> bi-l-ruqā mā lam yakun fī-hi shirk<sup>um</sup>*).”<sup>61</sup> The statement is tautological: a *ruqya* is acceptable so long as there is nothing wrong with it. What constitutes *shirk* in this context is not defined, and the polemical nature of this label (continually contested and prone to negotiation) prevented any clear lines of delimitation.<sup>62</sup> The very existence of this *ḥadīth* points to the liminal status of *ruqyas*, lying very near the border of *shirk*. This ambiguity is similarly illustrated by the statement that “the nearest *ruqyas* to *shirk* are the *ruqya* of the snake and of the insane” (*aqrab al-ruqā ilā-l-shirk ruqyat-l-ḥayya wa-l-majnūn*), presumably referring to *ruqyas*

<sup>60</sup> “No *ruqyas* except for venom, or an [evil] eye, or blood that does not stop flowing” (*lā ruqan illā fī thalāthat<sup>in</sup> fī ḥumat<sup>in</sup> aw ‘ayn<sup>in</sup> aw damm<sup>in</sup> lā yarqa*) is ascribed to Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in: Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl* (Najaf: al-Matḥa‘a al-Ḥaydariyya, 1391/1971), 148-9 (no. 201); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 79:211 (*kitāb al-‘ashrat wa-l-adāb wa-l-sunan*, bāb 96), 95:6 (*kitāb al-Qur‘ān wa-l-dhikr wa-l-du‘ā*, bāb 54). This saying is ascribed to the Prophet in: al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām*, 2:141 (no. 494); al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:2937 (no. 8271).

<sup>61</sup> ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:792 (no. 714): Mu‘āwiya b. Ṣāliḥ (d. circa 150s/770s or 170s/790s; Syria/Egypt) > [reading عن for بن] ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jubayr (d. 118/736; Ḥims) > ‘Awf b. Mālik al-Ashja‘ī (d. 73/692; Syria). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:380-1 (no. 2200) (*kitāb al-salām*, bāb 22): Abū al-Ṭāhir [Aḥmad b. ‘Amr b. al-Sarḥ] (d. 250/864; Egypt) > [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn Wahb (d. 197/813; Egypt) > Mu‘āwiya b. Ṣāliḥ > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jubayr > his father [Jubayr b. Nufayr al-Ḥaḍramī] (d. 80/699; Syria) > ‘Awf b. Mālik. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:330 (no. 3882) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, bāb 18): Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 248/862; Egypt) > [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn Wahb > Mu‘āwiya [b. Ṣāliḥ] > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jubayr > his father [Jubayr b. Nufayr al-Ḥaḍramī] > ‘Awf b. Mālik. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ja‘fī al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, 4 vols. in 8 (Ḥaydarābād al-Dakkan: Maṭba‘at Jam‘iyyat Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Uthmāniyya, 1360-84/1941-64), 4:56 (no. 256): ‘Abd Allāh [b. Wahb] > Mu‘āwiya b. Ṣāliḥ > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jubayr b. Nufayr > his father [Jubayr b. Nufayr al-Ḥaḍramī] > ‘Awf b. Mālik. I read this as the *isnād* based on the above parallels despite the slightly garbled text in the edition of *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 18:49 (no. 88): Bakr b. Sahl > ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 223/838; Egypt) > Mu‘āwiya b. Ṣāliḥ > ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jubayr b. Nufayr > his father [Jubayr b. Nufayr al-Ḥaḍramī] > ‘Awf b. Mālik. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 96: it is here ascribed to ‘Awf b. Mālik without further *isnād*.

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Three, “Shirk and idolatry in monotheist polemic,” in Gerald Hawting, *Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*.

used to heal snakebite and madness.<sup>63</sup> This *ḥadīth* does not state that these *ruqyas* constitute *shirk*, but implies that they are quite near to it and that *ruqyas* in general abut the line between Islam and *shirk*. The boundary between *ruqya* and *shirk* is thin, it would seem, even in practices that are characterized as acceptable.

Some *aḥādīth* describe Muḥammad banning *ruqyas* outright due to their being so easily mixed with *shirk*, allowing them when their use was necessitated by quotidian life and when their practitioners could demonstrate that they did not actively involve *shirk*:

The Messenger of God arrived in Medina and they [the Medinans?] were performing *ruqyas* mixed with idolatry (*yarqūna bi-ruqan yukhālīṭu-hā al-shirk*), so he forbade them. Then one of his Companions was bitten: a snake bit him. The Prophet said, “Who is an incantation performer (*rāq<sup>in</sup>*) who might perform an incantation for him (*yarqī-hi*)?” A man said, “I used to perform incantations (*arqī ruqya*), but when you forbade it I stopped.” He [the Messenger of God] said, “Show it [the incantation] to me.” The man showed it to him, and he [the Messenger of God] saw no problem with it and ordered the man to perform an incantation for [the Companion] (*raqā-hu*).<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly, stories such as these do not actually involve a description of the *ruqya* that was used, but only state that it was found acceptable by the Prophet. While illustrating the effort to define and control *ruqyas*, such narratives also provide plausible deniability for any *ruqya*-user whose *ruqya* might be thought to involve *shirk*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:18 (no. 19776). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar > Ibn Ṭāwūs > his father > Messenger of God.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:16 (no. 19767). ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar > al-Zuhrī. Similar stories are found in: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:29-30 (no. 23882), *ibid.* 8:30 (no. 23886); ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ ft-l-ḥadīth*, 2:778-81 (no. 700-2); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:379 (no. 2198) (*kitāb al-salām, bāb 21*), 7:380-1 (no. 2200) (*kitāb al-salām, bāb 22*); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1161-3 (nos. 3515, 3519) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bābs 34-5*).

<sup>65</sup> “The intellectual classes were unanimous in formally forbidding the practice of magic, but, in the absence of a definition of the idea of *siḥr* in the Qur’ān, as likewise in Islamic law, this prohibition was watered down by the

Indeed, such an opening for questionable activities is widened by versions of this story in which the Prophet is asked about the permissibility of *ruqyas*, and he responds, “If one of you is able to do something to help his brother, then do it” (*man istaṭā‘a min-kum an yanfa‘a akhā-hu fa-l-yaf‘al*).<sup>66</sup> Here leniency is accorded to an activity that, in other contexts, clearly seems to have been understood as legally problematic, so long as that activity is beneficial for health. It is unclear how this Prophetic statement is to be reconciled with the statements found in other *aḥādīth*, where usage of an amulet or *ruqya* is equated with *shirk*.

As we can see, the early *ḥadīth* texts record a variety of positions regarding the status of *ruqyas* in Islamic practice. This instability in the acceptability of *ruqyas* is also present in early *sīra* literature, in which a consistent message on how the Prophet treated *ruqyas* is difficult to identify. For example, the papyrus fragments of *sīra* literature ascribed to Wahb b. Munabbih (d. *circa* 110/728)—called by M.J. Kister “probably the earliest extant document of *sīra*-literature”—contain a version of the story of the Prophet’s flight from Mecca with Abū Bakr in which the latter is stung in the cave in which they seek refuge.<sup>67</sup> The narrative is related from the perspective of Abū Bakr:

I was stung on them [my heels] and I felt pain in my heart. The Messenger of God saw the sign of it on my face. He [Abū Bakr] said: He placed his hand on my leg and said, “In

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Prophetic example.” *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ruqya” (T. Fahd). See also Conrad, “Arab-Islamic Medicine”; Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns*, 63, 101-2.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:27 (no. 23870). *Ibid.*, 8:29 (no. 23877). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:379-80 (no. 2199) (*kitāb al-salam*, *bāb* 21). Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:334, 382. al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:2938 (no. 8277). ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:781 (no. 703). al-Nasā‘ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 2:1167 (no. 7498). Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 93.

<sup>67</sup> M. J. Kister, “On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih,” *BSOAS* 37.3 (1974): 545. Kister calls it “the earliest *Sīrah* compilation” in: *idem*, “The *Sīrah* Literature,” in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 356.

the name of God, I charm you (*arqī-ka*). And may God heal you from all that pains you.”

He [Abū Bakr] said: The pain left me and I was healed after that.<sup>68</sup>

This is an early example of a representation of the Prophet performing a *ruqya* to heal his Companion, without any question posed on the acceptability of this activity. The earliness of this text indicates that *ruqyas* were present, and apparently represented as permissible, in *sīra* literature from early in the history of its being written down.

However, another early *sīra* tradition, this time found in Yūnus b. Bukayr’s (d. 199/814-5) recension of Ibn Ishāq’s *sīra* text, conveys a very unclear message about how *ruqyas* are to be treated:

The Messenger of God used to suffer from the [evil] eye in Mecca and it came upon him swiftly before the revelation came to him. Khadīja, daughter of Khuwaylid, used to send for an old woman in Mecca to charm him (*tarqī-hi*). When the Qur’ān came down to him and he suffered from the [evil] eye as he had before, Khadīja said to him, “O Messenger of God, shall I not send for that old woman to charm you (*tarqī-ka*)?” He replied, “For the present, no.”<sup>69</sup>

The implications of this story—which is absent from Ibn Hishām’s edition of Ibn Ishāq’s *sīra*, as well as from other *sīra* literature that I have examined—are not clear. It might seem that the revelation of the Qur’ān imposes a break in history, after which the Prophet either does not need

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<sup>68</sup> R.G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih. Der Heidelberger Papyrus PSR Heid. Arab 23. Leben und Werk des Dichters*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972), 1:142. I incorporate in my translation the relevant corrections to Khoury’s reading of the Arabic text that are offered in: Kister, “On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih,” 549; idem, “On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih: An Addendum,” *BSOAS* 40.1 (1977): 126.

<sup>69</sup> Translation adapted from Alfred Guillaume, *New Light on the Life of Muhammad* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 29. Guillaume published the Arabic text in Appendix C (ibid., 59) of his study. This is the same text found in: Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 124 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 104 (no. 143).

or want to receive a *ruqya* against the evil eye from the old woman, as he had previously.<sup>70</sup> Yet the text states that Muḥammad still “suffered from the [evil] eye” even after the beginning of revelation, and he does not completely reject the old woman’s *ruqya* or label her work *shirk*: the text says only that he does not want Khadīja to call for her at the moment. This is a profoundly ambiguous statement regarding the acceptability of both giving and receiving a *ruqya*, without a very clear message on whether the Prophet considered such practices acceptable or not.

When early eighth-century Muslim scholars discuss the status of spitting and blowing during the performance of a *ruqya*, they are engaging in a discussion in which the boundary between acceptable practice (on the one hand) and idolatry and sorcery (on the the other) is lurking in the background. This helps us to situate and understand the debate on this subject displayed in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaf*, a *ḥadīth* collection that “records a Kufan perspective on a larger corpus of transmitted Islamic knowledge in circulation around the year 200/815.”<sup>71</sup> Amongst the Prophetic *aḥādīth* and the opinions of the Successors, the *Muṣannaf* includes two chapters on “Those Who Found Detestable That One Blow Spittle during Incantations” (*man kāna yakrahu an yanfithu fī-l-ruqā*) and “Those Who Allowed the Blowing of Spittle during Incantations” (*man rakhkhaṣa fī-l-naḥṭh fī-l-ruqā*).<sup>72</sup> The reports within these chapters, whose *asānīd* situate their transmission within Iraq in the eighth century C.E., display distinctly different opinions regarding the acceptability of the use of spitting and/or blowing during *ruqyas*.

The *Muṣannaf*’s chapter on “Those Who Found Detestable That One Blow Spittle during Incantations” provides several statements from Successors clearly rejecting spitting and blowing

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<sup>70</sup> A *ḥadīth* states that after the revelation of the final two *sūras* of the Qur’ān (the *mu’awwidhatayn*) the Prophet stopped using other healing formulae. Whether or not this is what is being referred to here is not clear. See M. J. Kister, *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), XIII:5. See below.

<sup>71</sup> Lucas, “Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*,” 287.

<sup>72</sup> On the difficulty in translating *naḥṭh* see: Sviri, “Words of Power,” 226-7n.65; Afnan H. Fatani, “The Lexical Transfer of Arabic Non-core Lexicon: Sura 113 of the Qur’an – *al-Falaq* (The Splitting),” *JQS* 4.2 (2002): 74-6.

during *ruqyas*. For example, a *ḥadīth* traced to the Kūfan Successor Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī (d. *circa* 96/714) states: “They would perform *ruqyas*, but they detested blowing spittle in *al-ruqā*” (*kānū yarqūna, wa yakrahūna al-naftḥ fī-l-ruqā*).<sup>73</sup> Using the language of “detest” (*kariha*), this *ḥadīth* appears to invoke the communal wisdom and *sunna* of the early Muslim community to condemn blowing spittle during the performance of *ruqyas*. Similarly dismissive is the next *ḥadīth* in this chapter, in which al-Ḍaḥḥāk<sup>74</sup> is asked if a healing incantation should be performed for a pain he is suffering. “Yes, certainly,” he replies, then adding, “But do not blow spittle! (*balā wa lā tanfuth*).”<sup>75</sup> These opinions—attributed to Irāqī and Khurāsānī Muslim scholars of the early eighth century C.E—clearly display a discomfort with the use of blowing/spitting in incantatory rituals and indicate that at least some early Muslims found such activity problematic.

This discomfort with spitting/blowing in incantations is found also in another chapter in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaf*, in a report about two angels who visit the Prophet during an illness:

The Messenger of God said: Two angels came down and sat, one at my head and the other at my feet. The one at my feet said to the one at my head, “What’s with him?” He said, “A severe fever.” He said, “Perform a charm/incantation for him (*‘awwidhi-hi*).” He

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:34 (no. 23905). The Kūfan *isnād* runs: Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Abū Mu‘āwiya [Muḥammad b. Khāzim] > al-A‘mash > Ibrāhīm [al-Nakha‘ī]. Juynboll labels Abū Mu‘āwiya a “partial common link” from al-A‘mash, and Lucas lists him as one of Ibn Abī Shayba’s most frequently cited sources. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 53. Lucas, “Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*,” 292. On al-A‘mash’s connection to Ibrāhīm, see Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Sa‘d, Ibn Ma‘īn, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 66.

<sup>74</sup> Likely referring to Abū Muḥammad al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim al-Hilālī al-Khurāsānī. “Al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim is a Successor from Balkh who studied in Kūfa and transmitted qur’ānic exegesis ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās, which he almost certainly obtained from one of his pupils. Al-Dhahabī offers possible death dates of 102/720-1, 105/723-4, and 106/724-5; *Siyar* 4:598-600.” Lucas, “Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*,” 306n.91. See also Kees Versteegh, “The name of the ant and the call to holy war: Al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim’s commentary on the Qur’ān,” in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 279n.1; Claude Gilliot, “A Schoolmaster, Storyteller, Exegete, and Warrior at Work in Khurāsān: al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim al-Hilālī (d. 106/724),” in *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur’anic Exegesis (2nd/8th-9th/15th Centuries)*, ed. Karen Bauer (Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013); Haider, *Origins of the Shī‘a*, 218n.12.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:34 (no. 23906). The *isnād*, full of obscure names, runs: Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > ‘Ar‘ara b. al-Barnad > Abū al-Hazhāz.

[the Prophet? One of the angels?] said, “He did not blow spittle, nor did he blow [breath] (*fa-mā nafatha wa lā nafakha*).” He said, “In the name of God, I charm you and God heals you. Take this and may it bring you joy” (*Bi-’smī allāhī arqī-ka wa Allāhū yashfika, khudh-hā fa-la-tahanna’a-ka*).<sup>76</sup>

Here the two angels discuss what “charm/incantation” to use for healing the Prophet, and eventually one recites a formula calling upon God’s help in healing him. However, when describing what the ritual process was that the angel used, it is explicitly stated that neither spittle nor breath was included. Semi-divine mandate is thus given for a rejection of the usage of spitting or blowing in incantation rituals.

The vociferousness with which such practices are denied by the angels in this report and criticized by individuals such as Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaṭī and al-Ḍaḥḥāk might be explained by the specific vocabulary used in these texts for spitting/blowing: *naftḥ*. For many Muslim scholars, well-versed in the Qur’ān, this word likely recalled the warning in sūra 113 about “those who blow/spit upon knots” (*al-naffāthātī fī-l-’uqadī*). As we saw in Chapter One, this phrase was understood by early Qur’ān interpreters to refer to the activities of sorcerers or witches, and the vocabulary of *naftḥ* and *’uqad* was often called upon during discussions of the negatively charged category of “sorcery” within Islamic tradition, as we saw above in the condemnations of tying knots as acts of sorcery. It may be that the practice named with the negatively charged word *naftḥ* was seen as unacceptable by early Muslim scholars.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:41 (no. 23932). The chapter containing this story is on incantations performed for ill individuals (*fī-l-marīḍ mā yurqī bi-hi wa mā yu’awwadhu bi-hi*). The *isnād* runs: Abū Bakr [b. Abī Shayba] > ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Sulaymān > Yaḥyā b. Abī Ḥabba > ‘Abd al-’Azīz b. Rufay’ > ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī al-Ḥussayn > ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm is a prominent source for Ibn Abī Shayba: Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 76n.45; *ibid.*, “Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*,” 292. The format of the story (two angels visiting the Prophet during an illness and sitting at his head and feet while he sleeps) matches the context of the story of the “bewitchment” of the Prophet, but this *ḥadīth* does not make explicit that this is the circumstance/illness under discussion. Notably, however, a very similar incantation to that used by the angel(s) in this tradition appears as “the charm that Gabriel used for the Prophet when the Jews bewitched him through his food” (*al-ta’wīdh alladhī ‘awwadha bi-hi Jibrīl al-nabiyyū hīna saḥarat-hu al-Yahūdū fī ta’āmī-hi*) in Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:16. See Chapter Four.

Yet the likelihood of this simple issue of vocabulary and its negative connotations being the primary motivation for the rejection of the practice(s) under discussion is complicated by several factors. First, *naft̥h* is not the only word used in reference to discouraged practice in the chapter on “Those Who Found Detestable That One Blow Spittle during Incantations” in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḡ*. The chapter closes with a *ḥadīth* relating that the Kūfan Successors al-Ḥakam b. ‘Uṡayba (d. 114-115/732-734) and Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān (d. 120/737) “both detested spitting during incantations” (*anna-humā kariḥā al-taḡl ḡl-ruqā*).<sup>77</sup> Like the statement ascribed to Ibrāhīm al-Nakḥa‘ī (“they detested *al-naft̥h* in *al-ruqā*”), this *ḥadīth* uses the same language to discourage the usage of *taḡl* during *ruqyas*. Immediately prior to the *ḥadīth* from al-Ḥakam and Ḥammād is a statement attributed to the Successor ‘Ikrima (d. 105/723-4): “I detest that one say in *al-ruqya*, ‘In the name of God, *uff*’” (*akraḥu an aqūla ḡl-ruqyat̥ bi-sm̥i Allāḥ uff*).<sup>78</sup> It is not immediately obvious what is being referred to here, but among the meanings of *uff* is “a puff, or blast of breath,” which would seem to fit the context of this *ḥadīth*.<sup>79</sup> The placement of these *aḥādīth* in a chapter ostensibly on *naft̥h* indicates that the line between the activities of *naft̥h*, *taḡl*, and *uff* is not as clear cut as the distinction in vocabulary might indicate, and that the *ḥadīth* scholars saw some relationship (if not equivalence) between the practices described by these different words.

In fact, texts other than Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḡ* also betray a quite slippery distinction between the vocabulary of *naft̥h*, *taḡl*, and other salivary language. In al-Bukḥārī’s

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḡ* 8:34-5 (no. 23908). The *isnād* runs: Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > [‘Amr b. al-Haytham] Abū Qaṡan > Shu‘ba [b. al-Ḥajjāj] > al-Ḥakam and Ḥammād. Lucas lists al-Ḥakam b. ‘Uṡayba as one of Ibn Abī Shayba’s most frequently cited sources and notes “Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān, appears regularly in the *Muṣannaḡ* of Ibn Abī Shayba, occasionally even in narrations transmitted by Shu‘ba b. al-Ḥajjāj”: Lucas, “Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*,” 293, 310. On al-Ḥakam and Ḥammād, see: Christopher Melchert, “How Ḥanafism Came to Originate in Kufa and Traditionalism in Medina,” *ILS* 6.3 (1999): 337.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, 8:34 (no. 23907). The *isnād* runs: Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Ibn ‘Ulayya > Ayyūb [al-Sakhtiyānī] > ‘Ikrima. Ibn ‘Ulayya and Ayyūb are both Baṡrans, and Juynboll identifies Ibn ‘Ulayya as a “partial common link” from Ayyūb: Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 225.

<sup>79</sup> Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 67.



*Ṣaḥīḥ*, the chapter on “Blowing Spittle in the Incantation” (*bāb al-naḥṭh fī-l-ruqyā*) in his *kitāb al-ṭibb* not only includes material about the use of *naḥṭh* during *ruqyas*, but also relates a story about a Companion’s usage of his *taḥḥ* during a *ruqya*.<sup>80</sup> A *ḥadīth* describing ‘Ā’isha’s care for the Prophet during his illness displays—in the variant versions found in different *ḥadīth* books—either *naḥṭha*<sup>81</sup> or *taḥḥa*<sup>82</sup> to refer to her blowing/spitting upon him for healing purposes. Similarly, in a report (studied in Chapter Two) about Muḥammad healing a boy of an illness or demon by blowing/spitting into his mouth, the verb *naḥṭha* is used in the versions found in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḥ*,<sup>83</sup> while the verb *taḥḥa* is used in the version found in Ibn Bukayr’s recension of Ibn Ishāq’s *Sīra*.<sup>84</sup> The same kinds of variants also occur in the description of rituals for spitting/blowing to ward off evil after a bad dream or during prayer: a noteworthy example appears in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ*, wherein both the verb *baṣaqa* and the noun *naḥṭhāt* are used to describe the act.<sup>85</sup>

While the usage of these different words may indicate some perceived difference in activity, the discussion of *taḥḥ* under the rubric of *naḥṭh* and the interchange of words in variant *ḥadīth* indicate some degree of commensuration in the practices represented by these different semantic terms. We can also recall that the angels who visit the Prophet during his illness in the report in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaḥ* discourage not only the usage of *naḥṭh* in their

<sup>80</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1455 (no. 5749) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 39). This point is explicitly made in Ibn Ḥajar’s commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ*: he uses the story of the Companion’s spitting (*taḥḥa*) during a *ruqya* to demonstrate the acceptability of *naḥṭh* during the recitation of the Qur’ān. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 10:220. A version of this *ḥadīth* about the Companion, in which *naḥṭh* appears instead of *taḥḥa*, occurs in: ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi‘ fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:794 (no. 716).

<sup>81</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1452 (no. 5735) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 32); 1456 (no. 5751) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 41). Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:14-5.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:20 (no. 19785).

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:35-36 (no. 23912), 8:42-43 (no. 23936), 11:44-45 (no. 32287).

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 277 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 257 (no. 427).

<sup>85</sup> The wording is *fa-l-yabṣaq ‘an shamālī thalāth naḥṭhāt*. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:212 (no. 20353). *Baṣaqa* also appears in: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 10:116 (no. 30039). *Naḥṭha* appears in *ibid.* (no. 30038); al-Shaybānī, *Muwatta‘ of Imam Muḥammad*, 401-2 (no. 920). *Taḥḥa* to ward off evil appears in: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 2:85 (no. 2582), 2:499 (no. 4219); Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 10:127-8 (no. 30085); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:384 (no. 2203) (*kitāb al-salām*, *bāb* 25); al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 40 (no. 52).

charm/incantation, but also that of *nafkh*. It seems that the distate for the usage of *nafth*, *tafl*, or *uff* during *ruqyas* that is attributed to figures like Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Ḥakam b. ‘Utayba, and Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān is best explained by something other than a discomfort with the vocabulary of *nafth* and its linguistic association with the Qur’ānic condemnation of *naffāthāt*.

Shī‘ī *ḥadīths* provide further indication that the vocabulary of *nafth* is not the entirety of the issue. In an opinion attributed to the Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, it is stated that “he detested blowing during incantations, on food, and in a place of prostration” (*yakrahu al-nafkh<sup>a</sup> fī-l-ruqā wa-l-ṭa‘ām<sup>i</sup> wa mawḍi‘<sup>i</sup> al-sujūd<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>86</sup> In a similar *ḥadīth*, the fourth caliph (and first Shī‘ī Imām) ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib states: “one does not blow in his place of prostration, nor on his food, nor on his drink, nor during his incantation [or upon his amulet?]” (*lā yanfukhu al-rajul<sup>u</sup> fī mawḍi‘<sup>i</sup> sujūd<sup>i</sup>-hi wa lā yanfukhu fī ṭa‘ām<sup>i</sup>-hi wa lā fī sharāb<sup>i</sup>-hi wa lā fī ta‘wīdh<sup>i</sup>-hi*).<sup>87</sup> While the references to food, drink, and places of prayer are likely unrelated to the issue under discussion here, the mention of hatred of blowing (*al-nafkh*) during incantations is quite close to what we have found above, particularly in the story of the angels performing an incantation for Muḥammad that is devoid of both *nafth* and *nafkh*.<sup>88</sup> Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s position regarding blowing

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl*, 149 (no. 203). Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Haytham al-‘Ijlī > Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā al-Qaṭṭān > Bakr b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥabīb (d. 280/893?) > Tamīm b. Bahlūl (d. 250/864?) > his father > al-Ḥusayn b. Muṣ‘ab > Abū ‘Abd Allāh [=Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq]. It appears with the same *isnād* in al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 79:211 (*kitāb al-‘ashrat wa-l-ādāb wa-l-sunan*, bāb 96), 95:6 (*kitāb al-Qur’ān wa-l-dhikr wa-l-du‘ā*, bāb 54).

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Khiṣāl*, 578. al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 79:212 (*kitāb al-‘ashrat wa-l-ādāb wa-l-sunan*, bāb 96).

<sup>88</sup> A very similar tradition appears in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 2:189 (no. 3016), 10:422 (no. 19567) with the *isnād* ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar > Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr (d. 129/746; Baṣra): “Three blowings were detested: blowing on food, blowing on drink, and blowing during prostration” (*thalāth<sup>a</sup> nafkhāt<sup>i</sup> yukrahuna: nafkhat fī-l-ṭa‘ām<sup>i</sup> wa nafkhat fī-l-sharāb<sup>i</sup> wa nafkhat fī-l-sujūd<sup>i</sup>*). Prohibition of blowing on drinks appears in: Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa’* [recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā], 2:924-5 (*kitāb al-ṣifāt al-nabī*, bāb al-nahī ‘an al-shurb fī āniyat al-fiḍḍat wa-l-nafkh fī-l-sharāb); idem, *al-Muwaṭṭa’* [recension of al-Hadathānī], 502 (no. 712); al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’*, 431 (no. 1887-8) (*kitāb al-ashriba*, bāb15); Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 10:95. There may be a relationship to the Successor opinions criticizing “blowing during prayer” (*al-nafkh fī-l-ṣalāt*) found in: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 2:188-9 (nos. 3015-23); Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3:183-5 (nos. 6597-6609); Abū Ghānim al-Khurāsānī al-

during incantations is also similar to that about *nafth* and *tafl* during incantations ascribed to Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī, al-Ḥakam b. ‘Utayba, and Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān. These Shī‘ī traditions provide two more textual examples of discomfort involving the deployment of bodily products during healing rituals and, I suggest, further evidence that it is not only the Qur’ānic vocabulary of *nafth* that is understood as problematic by these early Muslims.

How, then, do we explain these traditions about eighth-century C.E. Muslims’ discomfort with spitting or blowing during *ruqyas*? If it is not simply an issue of the charged vocabulary of *nafth*, what is the issue? Perhaps we can find some help in answering these questions if we consider the existence of a similar debate in rabbinic sources about the acceptability of incantations and the usage of spit therein. These texts display a marked discomfort with such ritual activities, to the point of excluding those who practice them from the Jewish community and condemning them to a doomed fate in the afterlife. Whether early Muslims were informed by these rabbinic discussions is not clear, but the ideological problems that such practices seem to have presented to rabbinic Jews of a similar time and place as that of the Iraqī *ḥadīth* scholars offers an interesting parallel to the deep ambivalence found in some early Islamic sources. In the next section, I will examine these late ancient Jewish sources in order to gain some insight into the discourse on healing rituals seen in the early Islamic sources we have read so far.

### **“Those Who Have No Share in the World to Come”: A Parallel Rabbinic Discussion**

Tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 10 (*Heleq*), of the Mishnah begins with the following statement, referenced as a “Pharisaic Credo” by Louis Finkelstein and “the supposed *locus*

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Ibādī [Bishr b. Ghānim], *al-Mudawwana al-Kubrā*, 2 vols. (Oman: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfa, 1404/1984), 1:146-7. In these cases, the issue seems to be whether it is allowable to blow dust away from one’s place of prostration.

*classicus* of tannaitic heresiology” by David M. Grossberg:<sup>89</sup>

These are the ones who have no share in the World to Come: who says there is no [basis for] resurrection of the dead in the Torah, [one who says] that the Torah is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean. R. Akiba says: Also one who reads external books, and one who whispers over a wound and says: “All the sickness which I placed upon Egypt I shall not place upon you because I am YHWH your healer.” [Exod. 15:26]. Abba Shaul says: Also one who utters the Name with its letters.

ואלו שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא: האומר אין תחית המתים מן התורה, ואין תורה מן השמיים, ואפיקורוס. רבי עקיבה אומר: אף הקורא בספרים החיצוניים, והלוחש על המכה ואומר: כל המחלה אשר שמתני במצרים לא אשים עליך בי אני ה' רפאך. אבא שאול אומר אף ההוגה את השם באותיותיו.<sup>90</sup>

By designating some individuals as having “no share in the World to Come” based on certain beliefs (such as a denial of the day of resurrection) or particular actions (such as reading “external books”), this Mishnaic statement “seems to be promulgating,” as Daniel Boyarin argues, “a rule of faith to adjudicate who is orthodox and who not.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Finkelstein’s comment is cited and translated in Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 58. David M. Grossberg, “Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature,” *JSJ* 41 (2010): 517.

<sup>90</sup> *Mishnah: The Artscroll Mishnah*, 22:238-243. See also: Herbert Danby, trans., *Tractate Sanhedrin, Mishnah and Tosefta: the judicial procedure of the Jews as codified towards the end of the second century A.D.* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: Macmillan, 1919), 120.

<sup>91</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 58. Adiel Schremer has criticized Boyarin’s position here, arguing the more conventional scholarly viewpoint that Tannaitic texts do not use the categories of “heresy” and “orthodoxy” in regard to communal belonging, but “instead, they formulate the issue with respect either to descent, or to adherence to the law ... dogmas and beliefs were not the main focus of the rabbinic thinking about Jewish identity.” Adiel Schremer, “Thinking about Belonging in Early Rabbinic Literature: Proselytes, Apostates, and ‘Children of Israel,’ or: Does It Make Sense to Speak of Early Rabbinic Orthodoxy,” *JSJ* 43 (2012): 254. Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 41 writes, “At no point in antiquity did the rabbis develop heresiology and ecclesiology, creeds and dogmas.” I would argue that Schremer and Cohen draw too sharp a distinction between “orthodoxy” and “orthopraxy,” implying that “practice” has nothing to do with “doctrine.” As Grossberg states, “the editors of the Mishnah chose to phrase matters in terms of practice that would have more relevantly been expressed in terms of belief and doctrine ... This is not to say that the Mishnah avoids doctrinal concerns ... However, they are never addressed directly through the establishment of a creed but indirectly through the proscriptions of verbal acts, liturgy, and heterodox teaching.” Grossberg, “Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature,” 551. Grossberg finds that the phrase “the one who says” appears “in other contexts relevant to doctrine and heresy” in the Mishnah (citing *m. Meg.* 4:9, *m. Ber.* 5:3, *m. Sanh.* 7:6, *m.*

Of particular interest is the fact that this language of exclusion is applied—according to the addition offered by Rabbi Aqiva—both to “he who whispers over a wound” (והלוחש על המכה) and to those associated with other “heterodox” beliefs and practices.<sup>92</sup> The description of “he who whispers over a wound” refers to the practice of reciting/chanting certain words for purposes of healing, a phenomenon referred to elsewhere in rabbinic literature.<sup>93</sup> According to this Mishnaic statement, such ritualistic activity is outside the bounds of acceptable Jewish practice, marking the individual who does so as without a “share in the World to Come” and therefore, in some sense, as outside the bounds of the people “Israel.”<sup>94</sup>

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*Sanh.* 11:3) and argues that “the Mishnah consistently works to *establish a uniform practice intending to discourage heterodox beliefs* rather than establishing creeds forbidding heresy.” *Ibid.*, 538, 549, emphasis mine. On the presence of a Tannaitic notion of heresy, see also: Martin Goodman, “The Function of *Minim* in early Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, Peter Schäfer, 3 vols. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), 1:501-10. See further discussion below.

<sup>92</sup> Galit Hasan-Rokem notes that in this passage “folk healing is thus discussed in the context of explicitly theological matters.” *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 78.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Sokoloff translates וַחֲשָׁא as “to whisper, recite a charm” (*A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* [Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002], 623) and “to whisper, recite an incantation” (*A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002], 281). See also: “...the word *lahash*, a common term for a magical incantation,” in Michael D. Swartz, “The magical Jesus in ancient Jewish literature,” in *Jesus among the Jews: Representation and Thought*, ed. Neta Stahl (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 23; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 379-380; Yuval Harari, “The Sword of Moses (*Harba de-Moshe*): A New Translation and Introduction,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7.1 (2012): 83n.57; Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 2:15; Geller, “Jesus’ Theurgic Powers,” 148.

<sup>94</sup> “The Mishnah [in this passage] distinguishes between ‘Israel’ and those who are not ‘Israel.’” Israel J. Yuval, “All Israel Have a Portion in the World to Come,” in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, ed. Fabian E. Udoh, with Susannah Heschel, Mark Chancey, and Gregory Tatum (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 119. “The mishnah’s formulation makes it clear that those who doubt the resurrection are those outside the community of Israel.” Christine E. Hayes, “Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of *Mīnīm* and Romans in *B. Sanhedrin* 90b-91a,” in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. Hayim Lapin (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 1998), 276. In some Mishnaic manuscripts, this section opens: “All Israel have a portion in the World to Come, as it is written, And thy people are all of them righteous; the shall inherit the earth forever [Isa. 60:21].” Many scholars have suggested that the statement that “All Israel have a portion in the World to Come,” followed then by a list of groups who do not have a portion, implies even further that this Mishnaic passage distinguishes between the latter groups and “Israel.” For example, Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 53 writes: “Whereas all those who belong to Israel do have a share in the World to Come, the heretics listed by the anonymous author, Aqiva, and Abba Shaul do not – because they do not belong (any longer) to Israel” due to their unorthodox beliefs/practices. Bohak describes this list as “several specific cases of Jews whose deeds are so horrible as to deprive them of their share in spite of their Jewish pedigree.” *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 378. See also Daniel Boyarin, “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism,” *Church History* 70.3 (2001): 443n.55; Goodman, “Function of *Minim*,” 171. Yet as Schremer (“Thinking about Belonging,” 270 n.64) and Grossberg (“Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature,” 520n.7) note, the “All Israel” passage is absent from the

Although it does not indicate why this particular ritual activity is so problematic, the Mishnah's association of these "wound whisperers" with such heterodox groups as Epicureans and those who deny the day of resurrection is suggestive of the strength of rabbinic conviction that such activity is religiously problematic.<sup>95</sup> Like the Muslim scholars who cite Prophetic statements indicating the proximity or identification of *ruqya* usage with idolatry or sorcery, the rabbis place incantation whisperers in the category of those without a place in the next world. In both cases, one finds rhetoric of boundary maintenance: the distinction between Islam and *shirk* for the Muslim scholars discussing *ruqyas*, and the distinction between Israel and non-Israel for the rabbis in the Mishnah. In both cases, healing activities involving the recitation of incantations are marked as potentially problematic, if not completely unacceptable.

Just as the *ḥadīth* books do not provide a consistent message on the acceptability of *ruqyas*, the rabbinic literature does not present a consistent image of the permissibility of whispering over wounds. While the Mishnah appears to totally reject whispering over wounds for healing purposes, several stories in the Tosefta, the Palestinian Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud, and other rabbinic literature indicate the rabbis' explicit or tacit approval of this practice. Tosefta Shabbat 7:22-23 states:

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"most reliable" manuscripts of the Mishnah and therefore is of questionable utility in interpreting the list. Yet even without the "All Israel" passage, it seems correct to read this Mishnaic section as a whole as promulgating a heresiological argument/polemic to define who counts as having a "share in the World to Come," i.e. to define who is legitimately "Israel." See next note.

<sup>95</sup> Louis Ginzberg suggests that "the losing of the share in the World to Come is not always to be taken literally" and that this is merely an instance of the rabbis' use of "emphatic language." Ginzberg, "Some Observations on the Attitude of the Synagogue towards the Apocalyptic-Eschatological Writings," *JBL* 41 (1922): 121n.17. Shaye Cohen similarly implies that this punishment is of little importance, writing "Those who held incorrect beliefs were chastised or denied a share in the World to Come, not denied a share in the people of Israel in this world." Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh," 41. Other scholars seem not to see this description as unimportant, for example Judah Goldin, who sees this as "quite a stiff penalty, as is obvious from the context of that whole Mishnah ... if Rabbi Aqiba, to whom the statement is attributed, is prepared to go to such lengths, it seems to me fair to say that ... he must feel that such recitation is downright sacrilegious and blasphemous." Goldin, "Magic of Magic and Superstition," 120. See also Yuval, "All Israel Have a Portion in the World to Come," 117; Markham J. Geller, "Joshua b. Perahia and Jesus of Nazareth: Two Rabbinic Magicians" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1974), 151.

These are the practices which are permitted ... Whispering(s) over an eye, a serpent [bite], and a scorpion [sting], and passing(s) of [a remedy] over an eye on the Sabbath.

ואילו דברים מותרין... לוחשין על העין ועל הנחש ועל העקרב ומעבירין את העין כשבת<sup>96</sup>

Variants to this tradition also appear in the Palestinian Talmud (Shabbat 14:3) and the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 101a).<sup>97</sup> As Peter Schäfer states, “The Tosefta and Talmudim take it for granted, therefore, that people whisper over wounds for healing purposes and even allow this practice on Sabbath.”<sup>98</sup>

Schäfer adds that the “Talmudim do not resolve the contradiction” between the Mishnah’s condemnation of whispered healing incantations and the description (and apparent acceptability) of such practices in other rabbinic texts.<sup>99</sup> One explanation for this apparent contradiction may be the fact that the instances of acceptable whispering cited in the Tosefta and the Talmudim do not explicitly mention the recitation of scriptural verses as part of this practice. It may be that it is the inclusion of scriptural verses (specifically Exodus 15:26 according to the Mishnah) in the whispered incantation that deprives one of a part in the World to Come.<sup>100</sup> While

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<sup>96</sup> Zuckerman, ed., *Tosefta*, 119. Translation modified from Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 52. Regarding manuscript variants for this passage, see: Lutz Doering, “Much Ado about Nothing? Jesus’ Sabbath Healings and their Halakhic Implications Revisited,” in *Judaistik und neutestamentliche Wissenschaft: Standorte, Grenzen, Beziehungen*, ed. Lutz Doering, Hans-Günther Waubke, Florian Wilk (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 220-1; Giuseppe Veltri, *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 162. Schäfer understands the reference to snakes and scorpions in this passage to mean “over the bite/string inflicted by a serpent or a scorpion,” as do: Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order: Mo‘ed. Tractates Šabbat and ‘Eruvin*, 425; Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 79; Veltri, *Magie und Halakha*, 163-4. The next section of the Palestinian Talmud mentions the “evil eye” (עיינא בשא) and for this reason “some Medieval authors explain that the treatment authorized in the preceding paragraph does not refer to ophthalmology but to action against magic spells.” Guggenheimer, op. cit., 425. On these ambiguities in the language of these passages, see: Doering, “Much Ado about Nothing,” 220-2.

<sup>97</sup> Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order: Mo‘ed. Tractates Šabbat and ‘Eruvin*, 423-4. Schäfer and Becker, *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*, 2:64.

<sup>98</sup> Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 52.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 53. Interestingly, the cases in which the rabbis deem such activity acceptable parallel the several *aḥādīth* which permit using *ruqyas* for healing activities involving serpents, scorpions, and the evil eye. See further below.

<sup>100</sup> This interpretation of the Mishna passage is preferred by Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 379; Veltri, “Rabbis and Pliny the Elder,” 77. Becker more specifically suggests that “the important thing about the biblical verse cited by Rabbi Aqiva is the fact that it contains the tetragrammaton in connection with the healing powers of God. Obviously, it is the pronouncement of this name with its proper letters to which the healing power is ascribed here.

this stipulation is not explicitly stated—and what assumedly non-scriptural words the acceptable incantations might thus include is not specified—this may be one way in which to resolve this apparent contradiction between the Mishnah and other rabbinic texts.

However, it seems difficult to maintain that it is solely the usage of biblical verses that is the problem when we take into account the number of other passages throughout rabbinic literature that explicitly mention the usage of “numerous biblical verses in a long range of apotropaic and healing rituals.”<sup>101</sup> A particularly interesting indication that the usage of biblical verses for healing is not the problem is found at *y. Shab.* 6:2 (8b), where it is stated that: “One does not recite a verse over a wound on the Sabbath” (אין קורין פסוק על גבי מכה בשבת).<sup>102</sup> This textual unit seems to imply that reciting a verse over a wound on a non-Sabbath day is acceptable. The language of reciting “over a wound” is quite close to that found in the Mishnah passage, further indicating that the problem with the practice is not to be found exclusively in the usage of biblical scripture for the purposes of healing.

Another way of resolving this seeming contradiction within rabbinic tradition is quite consistently cited throughout the Tosefta, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud: the whispering of scriptural verses over wounds is permissible, but not in combination with spitting. According to this tradition, it is not the whispered incantation by itself that deprives one of a “share in the World to Come” nor the inclusion therein of scriptural verses, but instead the

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Consequently, the dictum of Abba Sha'ul is added, which condemns any such pronouncing.” Hans-Jürgen Becker, “The Magic of the Name and Palestinian Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 399. Similarly Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 78.

<sup>101</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 380. See the number of examples cited in *ibid.*, 380n.90-92; Goldin, “Magic of Magic and Superstition,” 123-5; Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic,” 299-300; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 107; Ludwig von Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1898), 68-71.

<sup>102</sup> Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order: Mo'ed. Tractates Šabbat and 'Eruvin*, 209-10. Cited in Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 380.



combination of the incantation with spitting. Spitting serves here as the boundary marker between acceptable and unacceptable Jewish practice.

Tosefta Sanhedrin 12:9-10 provides the earliest example of this tradition, in an alternative (or additional?) version of the Mishnah's list of those "who have no share in the World to Come":

To these they added: they who break the yoke and violate the covenant, or misinterpret the Law, or pronounce the Name with its proper letters, have no share in the World to Come. R. Aqiva says: He who, at a banquet, renders the Song of Songs in a sing-song way, turning it into a common ditty, has no share in the World to Come. Abba Shaul, in the name of R. Akiba, says: He also who whispers over a wound, (אף הלוהש על המכה) "It is written, 'And all the sickness which I brought upon Egypt I will not bring upon thee,'" and spits (ורוקק), has no share in the World to Come.<sup>103</sup>

While the same rabbis found in the Mishnah are also mentioned in this Toseftan version, the transmission history given for the information listed differs slightly, as do the activities described as unacceptable.<sup>104</sup> The condemnation of he who "has no share in the World to Come" is narrowed from the Mishnah's condemnation of "he who whispers over a wound" to the Tosefta's "he who whispers over a wound ... and spits." As Strack and Billerbeck interpret this passage, "Thus it is not the magic incantation for a wound itself nor the usage of a verse in it that is forbidden, but what forbids one from a share in the World to Come is only this: that the recitation of biblical words occurs in connection with spit."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Zuckerman, ed., *Tosefta*, 433 (ll. 25-29). Danby, trans., *Tractate Sanhedrin*, 120.

<sup>104</sup> In the Tosefta, the stipulation regarding whispering over a wound is given in the name of Abba Shaul, who in turn speaks "in the name of R. Akiba," his teacher, as opposed to the ascription directly to R. Akiba found in the Mishnah's version.

<sup>105</sup> "Also nicht das Besprechen einer Wunde an sich, auch nicht die Verwendung eines Schriftverses dabei ist verboten, sondern was vom Teilhaben an der zuk. Welt ausschließt, ist lediglich dies, daß das Rezitieren des

The Tosefta does not acknowledge the difference between its text and that of the Mishnah, and it is unclear how the Tosefta's specification of one who "whispers over a wound ... and spits" is meant to interact with the Mishnah's more general condemnation of one who "whispers over a wound." Whether the Tosefta's version is to be understood as a clarification of the Mishnah's, or simply an alternative tradition, is unclear from the context. The question of the relationship between the Mishnah and the Tosefta is a vexed one, and the presence here of an alternative version of a rabbinic statement is not unusual.<sup>106</sup> If nothing else, we can certainly see that the Mishnah and Tosefta present differing opinions regarding what in the use of healing incantations should be condemned in the name of Rabbi Aqiva.<sup>107</sup>

Both the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmuds acknowledge the existence of differing traditions regarding the relative permissibility of whispering scriptural incantations over wounds, and explicitly attempt to resolve the contradictions between the points of view exemplified in the Mishnah's and the Tosefta's statements. In the process, they adopt the position on view in the Tosefta's text: that it is the act of combining scriptural incantations with spitting that makes one ineligible for the "World to Come." Yet they do this not by citing the Tannaitic tradition from Rabbi Aqiva as found in the Tosefta, but through other traditions and interpretive means.

In discussing *m. San.* 10, the Palestinian Talmud incorporates the following passage at Sanhedrin 10:1 (28b):

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Bibelwortes in Verbindung mit dem Ausspeien geschieht." Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 2:15.

<sup>106</sup> While traditionally the Tosefta has been understood as a "commentary and expansion" of the Mishnah, "contemporary scholarship, however, has revealed a more complex picture of mutual influences and parallel development between the two works." Grossberg, "Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature," 521 citing further literature.

<sup>107</sup> Grossberg suggests that "at least regarding *t. Sanh.* 12:9-11, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Tosefta postdates and is aware of the Mishnah," citing the fact that "it begins *hosifu* ["They added"], indicating that it is adding to a previously known list of those without a portion in the World to Come." *Ibid.*, 522, 523.

One who whispers over a wound and says, “All the sickness which I brought on Egypt I will not bring upon you, for I am the Eternal, your Healer” [has no portion in the World to Come]. Rav said, only one who spits. Rabbi Joshua b. Levi said, even if he only said, “damage by skin disease if it be on a human” [Lev. 13:9] and spits, he has no part in the World to Come.

והלוחש על המכה ואומר כל המחלה אשר שמתני במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני יי רופאיך. רב אמר ובלבד  
ברוקק. רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר אפילו אמר נגע צרעת כי תהיה באדם ורוקק אין לו חלק לעתיד לבוא.<sup>108</sup>

Several points are made here. Firstly, the tradition from Rav—an important third-century Amora who spent time in both Palestine and Babylonian and is reported to have founded the rabbinic school at Sura in Babylonia—qualifies the Mishnah’s condemnation of those whispering over a wound, stating that spit is the problematic aspect of this activity.<sup>109</sup> The phrasing here emphasizes that the Mishnah’s ruling applies “only” (בלבד) if spit is included in the incantation ritual and makes it particularly clear that the problematic aspect of such a practice is the inclusion of spit. As stated by Becker, “According to Rav’s opinion, then, whispering the divine name over the wound *without* spitting is allowed.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *Jerusalem Talmud. Fourth Order: Neziqin, Tractates Sanhedrin, Makkot, and Horaiot* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 346. Schäfer and Becker, *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi*, 4:201.

<sup>109</sup> On Rav (also called Abba Arika) see H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, ed./trans. Markus Bockmuehl, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 85; *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Rav” (Moshe Beer). “He is the only one of the Babylonian teachers whose haggadistic utterances approach in number and contents those of the Palestinian haggadists. The Palestinian Talmud has preserved a large number of his halakic and haggadistic utterances; and the Palestinian Midrashim also contain many of his Haggadot”: *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Abba Arika” (W. Bacher).

<sup>110</sup> Becker, “The Magic of the Name and Palestinian Rabbinic Literature,” 399 (emphasis in original). Becker adds: “Thus the Mishnah’s polemic is interpreted in a way that allows for the use of the power of the name,” i.e. the usage for healing of a verse which contains the Divine Name is allowed. This tradition is cited in the name of Rav rather than from the Tanna Rabbi Aqiva as found in the Tosefta. Whether the authorities cited in the Palestinian Talmud knew of the Tosefta’s version is not clear, but they do not make mention of it. The reasoning for Rav’s specification is not given, and whatever authority he drew upon for this statement is not cited. Notably, though, Rav is sometimes granted the authority of a Tanna: *b. Ket.* 8a. See further in *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Rav” (Moshe Beer). Becker suggests that this ascription to Rav, a Babylonian sage, “is consistent with the tendency of the Babylonian tradition ... the magical use of the power of the name is not being rejected.”

Secondly, in this passage, Joshua b. Levi (a third-century Palestinian Amora whom we saw above saying his grandson's death would be better than his being healed in Jesus' name) offers another scriptural text—Leviticus 13:9—and states that “even if” (אפילו) one recites this verse and spits (ורוקק), one is left with “no portion in the World to Come.”<sup>111</sup> Joshua b. Levi's statement seems to imply that it is not only Exodus 15:26 (as cited in the original Mishnaic and Toseftan passages) that cannot be combined in a healing incantation with spit, but other scriptural texts as well. Whether the ban thus extends to all scripture is not explicitly stated, but a notable feature of the verse cited by Joshua b. Levi is what it lacks: the name of God. The passage cited by Rabbi Aqiva in the Mishnah and the Tosefta (Exodus 15:26) contains the name of God, whereas the passage cited by Joshua b. Levi (Leviticus 13:9) nowhere contains mention of God's name. It seems that Joshua b. Levi's point may be that even scriptural quotations lacking God's name should not be incanted in combination with spit, and that such activity will deprive one of a “share in the World to Come.” Thus the point is further confirmed that it is not the whispered incantation itself that is problematic, but the spitting associated with it.<sup>112</sup>

The Babylonian Talmud's discussion—at Sanhedrin 101a—of *m. San.* 10 similarly specifies that spitting is the problematic part of whispering a verse over a wound:

“And one who whispers over a wound,” etc. [has no share in the World to Come]. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: And who spits upon it, because the Divine Name may not be mentioned over spittle.

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<sup>111</sup> On Joshua b. Levi, see: Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 84; *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Joshua ben Levi” (Zvi Kaplan).

<sup>112</sup> “While Rav's comment was concerned with maintaining the possibility of using the name of God for healing, this dictum hardly shows any special interest in the power of the divine name, but rather in healing through scripture recitation in general, *combined with spitting*. This is clear from the fact that the incriminated verse Lev 13,9 does not contain the name at all.” Becker, “The Magic of the Name and Palestinian Rabbinic Literature,” 299 (emphasis added). Similarly Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 2:16.

<sup>113</sup>הלווחש על המכה וכו' אמר ר' יוחנן וברוקק בה לפי שאין מזכירין שם שמים על הרקיק.

Here the Babylonian Talmud gives a specific reason for the legal ruling in the Palestinian Talmud: i.e., that it is the combination of the whispered incantation with spit that is problematic, and not the whispered incantation by itself. Here it is Rabbi Yoḥanan (a second generation Amora) who makes this specification, before then further explaining that the problem is the mixing of God's name with spit.<sup>114</sup> Rabbi Yoḥanan's specification is repeated in the Babylonian Talmud at Shebu'ot 15b, in the context of another discussion over the usage of recited biblical verses for healing purposes.<sup>115</sup> Thus the Babylonian Talmud's emphasis, like that of the Tosefta and the Palestinian Talmud, is much more firmly placed on the spit than on the recited incantation itself.

The Babylonian Talmud also provides a parallel to Joshua b. Levi's statement in the Palestinian Talmud that even whispering a piece of scripture without any mention of God, when accompanied by spitting, will deprive one of a "share in the World to Come." Immediately following Rabbi Yoḥanan's specification regarding spittle at Sanhedrin 101a, the Babylonian Talmud then includes further information:

It has been said, Rav said: Even [the verse], "When the plague of leprosy" [Lev. 13:2] etc. R. Ḥanina said: Even [the verse], "And he called unto Moses" [Lev 1:1].

איתמר רב אמר אפילו נגע צרעת ר' חנינא אמר אפילו ויקרא אל משה.

Like Leviticus 13:9 cited by Joshua b. Levi in the Palestinian Talmud, the verse cited here by Rav (Leviticus 13:2) does not contain the name of God. Rabbi Ḥanina (a third-century

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<sup>113</sup> Soncino translation *ad loc.* Discussion in Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 2:15-6.

<sup>114</sup> Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 86.

<sup>115</sup> "And we have learnt: He who whispers over a wound has no portion in the World to Come. But it has been said about this: R. Yoḥanan said, 'And who spits, because the Divine Name may not be mentioned over spittle'" (התנן (הלווחש על המכה אין לו חלק לעולם הבא הא איתמר עלה א"ר יוחנן ברוקק שנו לפי שאין מזכירין שם שמים על הרקיקה). Discussion of Abba Shaul's statement from *m. Sanh.* 10 on "He who pronounces the Name with its proper letters" is found at *b. A.Z.* 18a.

Palestinian Amora) goes one step further: the verse he cites (Leviticus 1:1) not only contains no mention of God’s name, but it also has nothing to do with illness or healing, unlike Leviticus 13:9 and 13:2 cited by Joshua b. Levi and Rav respectively.<sup>116</sup> Rav’s and Hanina’s traditions in the Babylonian Talmud do not explicitly cite the stipulation that it is the inclusion of spitting that invalidates these verses’ usage as healing incantations, yet their placement following Rabbi Yoḥanan’s statement certainly implies that this stipulation applies also to them.<sup>117</sup> Alternatively, one might argue that—because these verses do not include the name of God, and the mixture of spit and God’s name is the problem with the recitation of Exodus 15:26, according to Yoḥanan’s immediately preceding statement—the Babylonian Talmud’s emphasis in citing these verses is on the problem of using biblical verses in healing, without or without the inclusion of spittle.

A similar ambiguity is present in the mention of whispering and spitting in the Abot de Rabbi Nathan (ARN), “a commentary on, and elaboration of, the mishnaic tractate *Avot* ... contain[ing] many ethical sayings, but also historical traditions, stories and bits of folklore.”<sup>118</sup> Chapter 36 of ARN is a collection of predictions of the eschatological fates of various groups and individuals, including those who will have “no share in the World to Come.” In this chapter, individuals deprived of such a share overlap with the information we find in *m. San.* 10 and *t. San.* 12:

Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Nuri says: So, too, he that pronounces God’s name according to its consonants has no share in the World to Come. He used to say: He who makes a (mere) song of the Song of Songs, or whispers over a wound, or spits over a wound and recites,

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<sup>116</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 380. Sancino translation of *b. San.* 101a at note 9. On Ḥanina, see: *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Ḥanina b. Ḥama” (S. Mendelsohn).

<sup>117</sup> As argued in Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 2:16.

<sup>118</sup> *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Avot de-Rabbi Nathan” (Menahem Kister). The text perhaps contains third-century Tannaitic material, but it likely reached its present form in the post-Talmudic period, perhaps the eighth century, with the earliest extant manuscripts coming from the ninth century. *Ibid.*

“I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee” [Exod. 15:26] has no share in the World to Come.

רבי יוחנן בן נורי אומר אף ההוגה את השם באותיותיו אין לו חלק לעולם הבה. הוא היה אומר המנענע קולו בשיר השירים. והלוחש על המכה והרוקק על המכה ואומר כל המחלה אשר שמתני במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני ה' רופאיך אין לו חלק לעולם הבה.<sup>119</sup>

We find here considerable overlap with the activities discouraged in the Mishnah and Tosefta, including the mention of one who “pronounces God’s name according to its consonants” and one who “makes a (mere) song of the Song of Songs.” Notably these words are ascribed not to Rabbi Aqiva or Abba Shaul, as in the Mishnah and Tosefta, but to Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Nuri, an early second-century Tanna who studied under Gamaliel II in Palestine.<sup>120</sup> Thus a completely different Tannatic tradition is cited for this information.

The information about whispering and spitting in ARN has significant overlap with what we have seen so far, albeit with some notable differences. The text’s phrasing here is ambiguous as to whether it is the *combination* of whispering and spitting that is at issue, or if each action is to be considered *separately*. The repetition of “over a wound” after both “whispers” and “spits” would seem to indicate that these are two separate acts and thus perhaps two separately condemnable offenses. If this is the case, does this mean that the actions condemned are (1) whispering [any incantation] over a wound and (2) spitting over a wound while reciting Exod. 15:26? Or, instead, should we understand Exod. 15:26 to be part of both clauses, such that the text condemns (1) whispering Exod. 15:26 over a wound and (2) spitting over a wound while reciting Exod. 15:26? On the other hand, while I have retained Goldin’s usage of “or” to translate

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<sup>119</sup> Salomon Schechter, ed., *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1979), 108. Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 151 (adapted).

<sup>120</sup> Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 73. *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Johanan b. Nuri” (S. Schechter and S. Mendelsohn).

the *vav* that connects “whispers over a wound” and “spits over a wound and recites,” this *vav* could also be translated “and” and be understood to connect these two elements together. This would be similar to what we saw in the Tosefta, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud, all of which indicate that it is the combination of the whispered incantation with spitting that is problematic.

We thus see that, in addition to the general condemnation of whispering scripture over a wound offered in Mishnah Sanhedrin 10, rabbinic literature also offers a variety of other, more nuanced perspectives on this issue. As Gideon Bohak states, “The permissibility of using biblical verses in healing rituals clearly was much debated among the rabbis of Palestine and Babylonia over the generations, and no consensus on this score was ever achieved.”<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, while many rabbis appear to have criticized the usage of biblical verses in such ritual activities, the continuous discussions of these practices “provide us useful evidence concerning the wide diffusion of such practices” throughout the Near East in the centuries of late antiquity.<sup>122</sup>

While these practices were clearly much debated, what appears with a surprising frequency in these sources is the citation of spitting as the demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable practice. Whether in the Tosefta’s and Palestinian Talmud’s simple assertion of reciting and spitting as being enough to deprive one of a share in the “World to Come,” or the Babylonian Talmud’s specific statement that it is the action of combining spit with God’s name (or, according to some rabbis, any scriptural verse) that is problematic, spit functions as a boundary marker in these texts between correct and incorrect practice. The negative valence of the usage of spit during incantations was apparently powerful enough in rabbinic circles that it could be called up in several different texts to identify what unacceptable behavior looked like.

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<sup>121</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 380.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.



## Sectarian Spitting: Ritual Boundary Maintenance in Rabbinic Texts

It is difficult to prove a direct relationship between (1) these rabbinic discussions of healing incantations and the usage therein of spit, and (2) the discussions about *ruqyas* and spitting/blowing in the *ḥadīth* sources. I would suggest, however, that the rabbinic sources provide a striking parallel tradition against which to read the early Islamic efforts towards the construction of specifically Islamic healing rituals. In this section, I will use the rabbinic texts to try to elucidate what is going on in the *aḥādīth* criticizing spitting/blowing during *ruqyas*, since the correspondences between these traditions seem to point to some overall connection.

Both the rabbinic and the *ḥadīth* texts offer a variety of positions on the acceptability of healing incantations, and these positions are often paralleled in the two sets of sources. These range from the banning of healing incantations generally as non-Jewish or non-Islamic, to much more accepting positions. Of the latter, many of the specific allowances find parallels in both bodies of texts, such as the acceptance of whisperings/*ruqyas* against serpent and scorpion bites/stings and against the evil eye. While these are common ailments of the ancient Near Eastern world, evidenced also in pagan and Christian incantation texts, it is interesting that these particular exceptions to general prohibitions against healing incantations are common in both bodies of texts.<sup>123</sup>

Both the rabbinic and the *ḥadīth* texts also exhibit a remarkably lenient option in regard to the issue of what is legally acceptable in regard to healing rituals: as long as a practice is beneficial for a person's health, it is allowable. We saw above that some *ḥadīth* books exhibit a story in which, when the Prophet is asked about the permissibility of *ruqya* recitation, he responds, "One of you who is able to do something to help his brother, then do it." Similarly, in a

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<sup>123</sup> Veltri, *Magie und Halakha*, 163 notes that "snake and scorpions are often mentioned together" in ancient incantations.

tradition “found in both Talmudim, and attributed to some of the greatest rabbinic authorities of late-antique Palestine and Babylonia,” the statement is made that “Anything which heals is not of the ‘Ways of the Amorites’” (כל דבר שיש בו משום רפואה אין בו משום דרכי אמורי).<sup>124</sup> The “Ways of the Amorites” is a halakhic category used by the rabbis to describe customs or practices—particularly healing and apotropaic rituals, though other practices such as certain types of haircut are also categorized in this way—that they understood to be problematic and potentially idolatrous or sorcerous and thus forbade, despite the absence of a specific biblical injunction.<sup>125</sup> Thus according to this statement that anything that “heals” does not count as “of the ‘Ways of the Amorites,’” the rabbis allow practices that they might otherwise find objectionable, so long as such practices are understood to be beneficial in regard to health.<sup>126</sup> In both cases the rabbis and *ḥadīth* scholars adopt an attitude of leniency towards activities that, in other contexts, they deem legally problematic, so long as these activities are beneficial for another’s health.

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<sup>124</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 364. The statement is found in *y. Shab.* 6:10 (8c), *b. Shab.* 67a-b, and *b. Hull.* 77b.

<sup>125</sup> The Ways of the Amorites appears in *t. Shab.* 6-7 and *b. Shab.* 67a-b as “a conglomeration of different magical genres, superstitions, and medical-magical recipes which can be compared with Greco-Roman magic literature.” Giuseppe Veltri, “The ‘Other’ Physicians: the Amorites of the Rabbis and the Magi of Pliny,” *Korot* 13 (1998-1999): 39. The list of activities under this label “offers a kaleidoscope of practices that lack a clear common denominator or an obvious organizing principle.” Beth A. Berkowitz, “The Limits of ‘Their Laws’: Ancient Rabbinic Controversies about Jewishness (and Non-Jewishness),” *JQR* 99.1 (2009): 142. Several scholars have suggested that the Ways of the Amorites should be read as a category constructed by the Rabbis “to expunge practices that fall through the cracks of clearer categories of prohibition as defined by the Torah ... a catch-all for practices that some rabbis do not like but for which they have no clear justification to prohibit.” *Ibid.*, 145. See similarly: Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 385; Veltri, “Rabbis and Pliny the Elder,” 85; Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 135; Jonathan Seidel, “Charming Criminals: Classification of Magic in the Babylonian Talmud,” in Meyer and Mirecki, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 160-2. Moreover, Veltri has pointed out that “‘magic’ or the expression ‘Ways of the Amorite’ is in Rabbinic Judaism a relative concept, not an essential quality of an act”: “Defining Forbidden Foreign Customs: Some Remarks on the Rabbinic Halakhah of Magic,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, Volume I: Rabbinic and Talmudic Literature (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), 32. Indeed Janowitz notes that “in various rulings rabbis permit practices which are identical to those in the ‘Ways of the Amorites’ ... Since the only way to tell exactly which ‘Way of the Amorites’ was permitted was to ask a rabbi, this strategy effectively brought the practices within their sphere of power”: *Magic in the Roman World*, 24. For examples, see *ibid.* and Goldin, “Magic of Magic and Superstition,” 118-9. For a review of literature on the Ways of the Amorites: Berkowitz, “Limits of ‘Their Laws,’” 142n.54.

<sup>126</sup> According to Bohak, this stipulation was “destined to have the greatest impact on the relations between magic and *halakha*” and is “probably the widest door they [the rabbis] left open for the entry of magical recipes and practices into the very heart of rabbinic Judaism.” *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 364-5. Bohak further notes that this ruling regarding the Ways of the Amorites “should also be seen within the wider context of the rabbis’ insistence on the sanctity of life, evident in many other halakhic discussions,” citing *m. Yoma* 8:5-7, *t. Shab.* 9:22 and 15:11-17.

Yet these acceptances of healing practice are decidedly different than the attitudes found in many of the other traditions studied in this chapter, in which certain practices are quite clearly condemned by the rabbis and *ḥadīth* scholars. As Jonathan Seidel points out:

The principle “that which heals cannot be considered an Amorite custom” (and hence is permitted) is itself arbitrarily applied. “Healing” remedies can be considered magical in some cases and not in others. “Healing” is a socially constructed concept, and in rabbinic texts this aphorism remains more of a slogan than an applicable guideline for halacha.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, the rabbinic suggestion that those who “whisper over wounds . . . and spit” have no share in the World to Come certainly implies that this healing activity should not be performed, no matter how beneficial it might be. Similarly, the many *aḥādīth* equating amulet or *ruqya* usage with idolatry (*shirk*) or sorcery (*siḥr*) imply that whatever health benefits these objects and rituals might bring are not sufficient reason to use them. While *ḥadīth* sources do not cite a damning punishment for the usage of breath or spit during *ruqyas* as do the rabbinic sources, this practice is nonetheless clearly detestable according to many of the scholars whose opinions are given in Ibn Abī Shayba’s *Muṣannaf*.

But why was “spitting” such a problem for late ancient Jews and some eighth-century Muslims?<sup>128</sup> Why was this practice so negatively valenced as to be specifically mentioned and criticized in these sources?<sup>129</sup> I would argue that the phenomenon of healing incantations provided religious authorities an opportunity to define the performance of religious identity in

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<sup>127</sup> Seidel, “Charming Criminals,” 162. Similarly: Goldin, “Magic of Magic and Superstition,” 118-9; Conrad, “Arab-Islamic Medicine,” 183.

<sup>128</sup> Notably, in the commentary provided for the *Artscroll Mishnah* on m. San. 10:1, Rabbi Matis Roberts writes about the statement at *b. Sanh.* 101a that whispering Exod. 15:26 and spitting is a disrespect for the name of God: “The [medieval Jewish] commentators are strangely silent on this point and offer no explanation as to why this particular disrespect—even when not done for that purpose—is considered to be of such great severity,” i.e. depriving one of a share in the World to Come. *Mishnah: The Artscroll Mishnah*, 22:242n.1.

<sup>129</sup> In neither case, Jewish or Islamic, was saliva seen as inherently ritually impure: fear of bodily pollution therefore was not the primary reason for the rejection of spitting in healing rituals. On saliva in Jewish and Islamic pollution laws, see the discussion in Chapter One.

regard to an important, everyday practice. In defining what constituted an acceptable (and an unacceptable) healing incantation, Jews and Muslims were able to demarcate religious identities and boundaries in an important sphere of life: the rituals used for health and wellness. However, why spitting was a boundary marker in this demarcation is not immediately clear from the sources at hand: rabbinic sources do not identify spitting with any specific group, set of individuals, or tradition(s); later Islamic sources vaguely label such practitioners as “sorcerers.” Who or what was being defined “against” in the effort to specify what properly Jewish and Islamic healing incantations were? Why was spitting used as a boundary marker?

It is worth taking note of the literary contexts of these discussions of wound whispering and *ruqyas*. While the rabbinic texts do not explicitly label incantations or the usage therein of spit/breath as “magic/sorcery” or “idolatry” the contexts in which incantations are discussed involve these sorts of issues.<sup>130</sup> In the Tosefta, the statement that it is permitted to “whisper over an eye, a serpent, and a scorpion” occurs within the context of a discussion of the “Ways of the Amorites,” mentioned above. While the text states that these whisperings are allowed, the fact that they are discussed under the rubric of the “Ways of the Amorites” illustrates that these ritual actions were on the cusp of the unacceptable.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, as discussed above, the discussions of *ruqyas* occur in sections of the *ḥadīth* books in which the proper healing methods are under discussion and the distinction between proper practices and illicit “sorcery” (*siḥr*) or “idolatry” (*shirk*) are discussed. Given the literary positioning of these discussions within contexts in which

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<sup>130</sup> Bohak notes that “Only in t Shab 7.13-14 ... are specific ‘Ways of the Amorites’ equated with the biblical categories of *me’onen* and *menahesh* or with the rabbinic category of *’ahizat ’einayim*. Other ‘Amorite ways’ are not identified as related to magic”: *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 384n.107. See *ibid.*, 378, 385. Similarly Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman Empire*, 24; Seidel, “Charming Criminals,” 160-1.

<sup>131</sup> Doering, “Much Ado about Nothing,” 223-4. Veltri, *Magie und Halakha*, 163. This is further indicated by the discussion of the Ways of the Amorites in correspondence with the discussion of “sorcery” and the other practices that are cited at Deut. 18:10 in the Sifra (*parashat Aḥare Mot, pereq 13*), an early rabbinic commentary on Leviticus. Jacob Neusner, trans., *Sifra: An Analytical Translation*, 3 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 3:78-9. Cited in Veltri, “False Prophet and the Magician,” 346; *idem*, “Rabbis and Pliny the Elder,” 66.

practices explicitly labeled “magic” or “idolatry” are discussed, it seems clear that the line between acceptable religious practice and unacceptable “magic”/“idolatry” is part of what is at stake in the anxiety about healing incantations.

This is not unusual, since the “discourse of ritual censure” was commonly used against the spoken word as a tool for healing in the ancient world. We find condemnation of the usage of certain healing incantations in Graeco-Roman sources such as Pliny the Elder and Galen, as well as in Christian texts of the first millennium.<sup>132</sup> There were many overlaps between Graeco-Roman, rabbinic, and Islamic conceptions of superstition and magic, and thus the rabbinic and Islamic characterizations of such practices as illicit are not surprising.<sup>133</sup> Similar to the condemnation of such practices found in these other sources, the labeling of certain practices as (almost) part of the Ways of the Amorites perhaps illustrates the rabbis’ effort “to describe ‘in-group’ practices that needed to be pushed outside the boundaries of society.”<sup>134</sup>

Yet both the rabbinic and early Islamic sources accept the usage of healing words, while suggesting that—close to or transgressing the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable practice—is the usage therein of spit or breath. Given the rabbinic interest in controlling “foreign” customs that had been (or might be) accepted as part of Jewish practice, it is possible that the rabbinic polemic against spit in incantations is a response to this aspect of Graeco-Roman ritual practice, and an effort to draw a specific line between what an acceptably Jewish incantation looks like and how it differs from a “pagan” incantation. Goldin, for example, suggests that the rabbinic references to the usage of saliva in incantations “must refer to imitation

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<sup>132</sup> Veltri, “Rabbis and Pliny the Elder,” 77-8, 82-3. Janowitz, “Natural, Magical,” 320-1.

<sup>133</sup> Shaked, “Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam.” See also the essays in Emilie Savage-Smith, ed., *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot, U.K. and Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004).

<sup>134</sup> Seidel, “Charming Criminals,” 161.

of the practice of heathen magi.”<sup>135</sup> In the case of Islam, too, clear connection to earlier Graeco-Roman and pre-Islamic Arabian traditions can be traced.<sup>136</sup> Thus an effort to root out “pagan” elements may lie behind this polemic against saliva in healing incantations.

The way in which the activity of “spitting” or “blowing spittle” comes to function as a marker between acceptable and unacceptable practice in the rabbinic texts and in some early Islamic texts stands unusually beside the other examples of practices that these texts discourage. The usage of saliva for healing purposes was not exclusively associated with illicit “magic” in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures, but was also understood to have legitimate medicinal power, as was noted above. Even authors such as Pliny the Elder who were wary of “superstitions” or the practices of “Magi” were willing to cede the power contained in spitting as a component of healing rituals.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, rabbinic passages which indicate the existence of healing power in the saliva of a fasting person and in that of a firstborn child (cited in Chapter Two) illustrate a familiarity and acceptance of certain healing practices involving saliva. Why is this particular practice so negatively marked by the rabbinic texts, when there was so much overlap between Graeco-Roman and rabbinic medicinal practices?

Moreover, it is clear that the rabbis did know of, and seemingly tolerated, the usage of whispered incantations accompanied by spitting, as demonstrated in the story from the Jerusalem

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<sup>135</sup> Goldin, “Magic of Magic and Superstition,” 121.

<sup>136</sup> Conrad, “Arab-Islamic Medicine,” 683 writes that, over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries, “traditional popular medicine became embroiled in controversy over its animistic tenor and a host of customs and practices increasingly regarded as unacceptable ... the use of the Qur’ān for charms and incantations and the presentation of the Prophet as a purveyor of such remedies smacked of sorcery.” Citing examples of spitting that appear in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, Hoyland writes that these appear in “magical contexts”: *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 152. However, Zadeh has recently called into question the “long tradition in Western scholarship on Islam of viewing various medicinal and ritual practices as reflections of superstitious folk tradition,” noting that “religious authorities have historically participated in what modern scholarship identifies as popular or mystical practices.” Zadeh, “Ingestible Scripture,” 98-9. See further discussion in Chapter Four.

<sup>137</sup> Justin Meggitt, “Magic, healing and early Christianity: Consumption and Competition,” in *The Meanings of Magic: From the Bible to Buffalo Bill*, ed. Amy Wygant (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 89-114. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, 76. Janowitz, “Natural, Magical,” 318-25.

Talmud and midrashic sources cited in Chapter One. Recall the story of a woman whose husband demanded that she spit into the face of Rabbi Meir because of her attending nighttime Torah study sessions. The resolution to this conflict involved Rabbi Meir's creating a situation in which the woman could spit into his face justifiably. Thus he feigns a problem with his eye and asks if anyone knows the incantation (or "whisper") for an eye (מִלְחוּשׁ לְעֵינָא). Clearly it is understood that spitting (קִקְרָ) is involved in this incantation, as only this would explain Rabbi Meir's request for the incantation, and he in fact instructs the woman to spit into his eye. Here we find the combination of a whispered incantation with the act of spitting explicitly requested by a Palestinian rabbi, with no apparent halakhic problem seen in its performance.

The presence in the rabbinic corpus of traditions that involve the usage of saliva for healing purposes creates a difficulty in understanding why "whispering over a wound" and spitting would be so harshly criticized in the Tosefta, Talmudim, and ARN. While a variety of healing activities are condemned in these rabbinic texts, no other such activity that I have found is said to deprive one of a share in the World to Come.

This difficulty may perhaps be understood when we remember that the original context for the discussion of whispering verses for healing purposes with (or without) spitting comes not within that of the Ways of the Amorites, but within the list of those "without a share in the World to Come" at Mishnah Sanhedrin 10 and Tosefta Sanhedrin 12. As I described above, these lists of beliefs/practices in the Mishnah and Tosefta appear to demarcate activities deemed "heretical" and thus marking their practitioners as outside the bounds of Israel. Those who perform this particular healing activity are categorized amongst those who are "doomed" and are "brand[ed] as God's most dangerous enemies," alongside individuals who do not subscribe to rabbinic

theological ideas, such as that the Torah comes from heaven.<sup>138</sup> As Michael Becker notes, “The salvation ban seems effective as a threat only in an inner-Judaic context or in the context of Jewish Christianity. The distinction between a permissible prayer for a sick person and an unauthorized magic act suggests a group-specific position, though admittedly it may be thought of as demarcating that within Judaism from that outside of it.”<sup>139</sup>

While it might appear unusual that such a harsh punishment is assigned to those using a seemingly benign healing practice, this makes greater sense when we read these passages from the Mishnah and Tosefta and their parallels in the Talmudim within the context of a larger trend in rabbinic sources: the harsh rhetoric reserved for rituals, including healing rituals, that are practiced by *minim*, i.e. “sectarians” or “heretics.”<sup>140</sup> Recall, for example, the stories in which Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says that his grandson who was healed by an incantation in Jesus’ name would have been better off dead, and in which Rabbi Ishmael praises Rabbi Eleazar b. Dama for having died before the latter could be healed in Jesus’ name. As Kimberly Stratton writes, “[T]hese two anecdotes suggest that rabbis witnessed Jesus’s name being used (by Christians or perhaps others) for healings and exorcisms but thought that death was preferable to enlisting this idolatrous or heretical power ... It would be better to die, they claim, than participate in Christianity.”<sup>141</sup> The rabbis’ preference that a sick individual die rather than be healed in Jesus’ name stands “in marked contrast with their general rule that anything which heals should not

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<sup>138</sup> Yuval, “All Israel Have a Share,” 117.

<sup>139</sup> “Der Heilsausschluß scheint aber als Drohung nur innerjüdisch – oder im Kontext des Judenchristentums – wirksam. Die Abgrenzung zwischen einem erlaubten Gebet für einen Kranken und einer nicht erlaubten Zauberhandlung deutet auf eine gruppenspezifische Position, die allerdings innerjüdisch wie nach außen hin abgrenzend gedacht sein kann.” Michael Becker, *Wunder und Wundertäter im früh-rabbinischen Judentum: Studien zum Phänomen und seiner Überlieferung im Horizont von Magie und Dämonismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 180n.152.

<sup>140</sup> For examples of the condemnation of ritual practices associated with sectarians, see: *m. Meg.* 4:9; *b. Meg.* 25a; *m. Ber.* 5:3; *m. San.* 11:3. Grossberg, “Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature,” 538-51. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: a study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, 135-425*, trans. H. McKeating (New York: Published for the Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1986), 199 ff.

<sup>141</sup> Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 153.



really be forbidden.”<sup>142</sup> A very harsh rhetoric surrounds these stories in which “sectarian” healing rituals are practiced, a rhetoric that prefers death over the rabbis’ penchant for preserving life even at the cost of sullyng a Sabbath and of performing actions for an hour more of life.<sup>143</sup>

The implications of such stories are better understood when we take into account their larger literary contexts.<sup>144</sup> Immediately before the story of Eleazar b. Dama’s death, Tosefta *Hullin* lists a variety of forbidden relations with heretics (*minim*), including the stipulation that “it is forbidden ... to allow them to heal belongings [i.e. animals] or bodies.”<sup>145</sup> Similarly in the Babylonian Talmud, the Ben Dama story is immediately preceded by the statement that “no man should have any dealings with *minim*, nor is it allowed to be healed by them even for an hour's life.”<sup>146</sup> Strikingly, these statements are even harsher than the rabbinic positions on receiving healings from gentiles, which in the Mishnah at least allow for the “healing of belongings.” In these passages, *minim* are clearly singled out for exclusion, and specific attention is drawn to avoiding them in regard to healing activities.<sup>147</sup>

As Michael Swartz and others have noted, no clear theological or scriptural justification is given for these rulings that it would be better to die than to be healed in Jesus’ name or by a

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<sup>142</sup> Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 399.

<sup>143</sup> Yaakov Y. Tepler, *Birkat haMinim: Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World*, trans. Susan Weingarten (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 248-9.

<sup>144</sup> Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 152. Swartz, “The magical Jesus in ancient Jewish literature,” 23. Schäfer, “Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism,” 36. Tepler, *Birkat haMinim*, 240-9.

<sup>145</sup> *t. Hul. 2:21*. Zuckerman, ed., *Tosefta*, 503: ואין מתרפאין מהן לא ריפוי ממון ולא ריפוי נפשות. Cited in Steven T. Katz, “The Rabbinic Response to Christianity,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 275. Although the question of the identity of *minim* in rabbinic texts is a vexed one in contemporary scholarship, Katz notes regarding this Tosefta passage: “Though the class being criticized here is *minim* (heretics), not specifically *Notzrim* (Jewish Christians), the continuation of the discussion in Tos. *Hullin* 2.22-4 does make a clear connection between *minuth* and Jewish Christians.”

<sup>146</sup> *b. 'Avod. Zar. 27b*: לא ישא ויתן אדם עם המינין ואין מתרפאין מהן אפילו לחיי שעה. In this passage, the reference to an incantation in the name of Jesus (found in the Tosefta version) does not appear. For the manuscript evidence for *b. 'Avod. Zar. 27b*, all lacking the explicit mention of Jesus, see: Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 139.

<sup>147</sup> The emphasis on healing is noted in: Richard Kalmin, “Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *HTR* 87.2 (1994): 160-1; Seidel, “Charming Criminals,” 162; Goodman, “Function of *Minim*,” 167; Tepler, *Birkat haMinim*, 240-9.

*min*, nor is it stated or implied that such healing rituals are ineffective.<sup>148</sup> Instead, the issue clearly is the maintenance of a boundary between Israel and “non-Israel,” using participation or nonparticipation in particular healing rituals as a site where this boundary can be erected/maintained with some clarity. Peter Schäfer writes regarding Rabbi Ishmael’s refusal to allow Ben Dama to be healed in Jesus’ name:

He aims at fending off people that do not belong to Judaism as defined by him and his fellow rabbis. In other words, what we have here is an (early) attempt to establish boundaries, to delineate Judaism by eliminating heretics – in this particular case clearly heretics belonging to a group that defined itself by its belief in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>149</sup>

Holger Zellentin similarly writes that, in this story, “the orthodoxy of *using* Jesus’ name is under scrutiny and *orthodoxy* is the proper term when it comes to the rabbis’ delineating themselves from Christian creed.”<sup>150</sup> These stories about healings in Jesus’ name, as well as the condemnations of receiving healings from *minim* more generally, demonstrate that healing rituals were a point at which the distinctions between (what the rabbis constructed as) Israel and “non-Israel” were called upon as instances where difference should be maintained.<sup>151</sup>

I would argue that the harsh condemnation of “those who whisper over wounds” at Mishnah Sanhedrin 10, and the emphasis on spitting in the parallel passages in the Tosefta and the Talmudim, should also be read within this context of rabbinic boundary maintenance through healing rituals. Specifically, I would argue that the boundary likely is meant to divide “Jewish”

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<sup>148</sup> Swartz, “The magical Jesus in ancient Jewish literature,” 23. See also Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 152-3. Schäfer notes that Rabbi Ishmael states that Ben Dama is blessed for not having broken down “the prohibition established by the Sages” and that “instead of justifying his refusal to accept the heretic’s healing power with an appropriate verse from the Bible, Ishmael resorts to the authority of the rabbis”: *Jesus in the Talmud*, 55.

<sup>149</sup> Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 60. Idem, “Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism,” 36.

<sup>150</sup> Holger M. Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 204 (emphasis in original).

<sup>151</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 35, 41. Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 77-8.

from “Christian” ritual healing practices. Indeed, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars have suggested that at least some of the groups mentioned at Mishnah Sanhedrin 10 should be understood as Christians and thus that this text is stating that they are not part of the community of “Israel.”<sup>152</sup> Many of these scholars have suggested that the mention of people who “whisper over a wound” should be read as a reference to Christian healers, reading this Mishnah passage alongside the rabbinic texts in which Christians are represented using healing incantations with the verb  $\psi\eta\lambda$ ,<sup>153</sup> as well as the many New Testament stories of healings performed by Jesus and other early Christian figures.<sup>154</sup> According to this interpretation, then, the Mishnah’s condemnation of those who “whisper over a wound” while reciting Exod. 15:26 should be understood as an effort to exclude Christians from the people “Israel.”

Whether or not Christians are specifically being referenced in Mishnah Sanhedrin 10, it seems quite clear that a heresiological agenda is part of the condemnation of the “wound whisperers.” Yet while Mishnah Sanhedrin 10 has been described (and treated in scholarship) as “the supposed *locus classicus* of tannaitic heresiology,” significantly less attention has been

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<sup>152</sup> Jakob Guttman, “Über zwei dogmengeschichtliche Mischnastellen,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 42 (1898): 289-305, 337-345. R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1903), 65. Hugh J. Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1936), 53-4. Geller, “Joshua b. Perahia and Jesus of Nazareth,” 150-1. Ginzberg, “Some Observations on the Attitude of the Synagogue,” 123-4. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 53. Adiel Schremer, *Brothers estranged: heresy, Christianity, and Jewish identity in late antiquity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 208-9. Yuval, “All Israel Have a Portion,” 117ff. Teppler, *Birkat haMinim*, 247, 257, 276. Becker more circumspectly writes: “Whether or not one can see, in the criticism listed here, reference to an inner Judaic confrontation—even with the early Christians—must remain open in light of the sources” (Ob in der hier aufgeführten Kritik ein über innerjüdische Bezüge hinausgehende Auseinandersetzung gesehen werden kann – auch mit dem frühen Christentum –, muß angesichts der Quellenlage offenbleiben). Becker, *Wunder und Wundertäter*, 180n.152.

<sup>153</sup> Yuval, “All Israel Have a Portion,” 118. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 53ff. Moreover, Yuval and others have drawn parallels to the rabbinic representation of Jesus as a “magician,” the similar representations of *minim* (commonly interpreted to be Christians) in some rabbinic texts, and the quasi-magical usage of scripture for healing purposes in Sanhedrin 10.

<sup>154</sup> Hasan-Rokem suggests that “the two tales about curing in the name of Jesus [found in rabbinic texts] show amply that the Jewish culture of Late Antique Galilee retains a clear knowledge of the traditions regarding the miraculous healings by Jesus,” either through oral traditions or direct acquaintance with gospel texts: *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 82, 168n.43. Teppler notes the many healing stories in the New Testament and writes that “it is on these deep theological foundations, and only on these, that we can understand thoroughly the episode described in the Tosefta and its parallels”: *Birkat haMinim*, 246.

given to the question of whether the parallel Tannaitic and Amoraitic passages also pursue a heresiological agenda and, if so, why spitting would be emphasized for this purpose. Some scholars have suggested that the rabbinic condemnation of spitting during healing incantations may be in reference to Jesus' usage of his saliva for healing purposes in some New Testament stories that I studied in Chapter Two.<sup>155</sup> Yet if we look beyond these gospel stories, what other evidence might we draw upon to see a reference to sectarian practice in the rabbis' condemnation of spitting in healing rituals?

In fact, there are several other indications that spittle and breath played a significant part in early Christian ritual. For example, the second-century North African Christian writer Tertullian notes that demons are exorcised by the very touch and breath (*afflatus*) of Christians, indicating that breath was used by early Christians in exorcistic rituals and was understood as a demon-repelling substance.<sup>156</sup> The *Apostolic Tradition*—a church order ascribed to the third-century writer Hippolytus of Rome, but likely containing mid-second- to fourth-century material from the eastern Mediterranean—mentions the usage of breath and its moisture for bodily purification at the time of prayer:

But when you breathe on your hand and seal yourself with the spittle that you will bring up from your mouth, you are purified down to your feet. For this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the drops of water are those of baptism coming up from a fountain that is in the heart of the faithful that purifies him who believes.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “The magical averruncation mentioned in Tosefta Sanhedrin, XII, 10, and Abot R. Nathan, XXVI in connection with this mode of healing is said in Mark 7:33, 8:23, John 9:6, to have been employed by Jesus.” Ginzberg, “Some Observations,” 123n.20.

<sup>156</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 23.16. Cited in Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 114.

<sup>157</sup> *Apostolic Tradition* 41.14. Translation of Sahidic Coptic text in Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 198-200. The Arabic version of the related *127 Canons of the Apostles* has *idhā nafakhta fī yaday-ka wa tarshumu bi-l-rīq alladhī yakhruju min fī-ka* for “when you breath on your hands and seal [yourself] with spit that comes from your mouth.”

We see here that “signing oneself with one’s wet breath and saliva has ... a sanctifying effect,” in which one’s spittle functions as a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>158</sup> Breath and saliva seem to have occupied an important place in some early Christian healing and purification rituals.

Similarly, Christian texts describing baptism rites mention rituals that include the initiate being blown or spat upon by church officiants for the purposes of ritual cleansing/exorcism as part of the process of becoming a Christian. The aforementioned *Apostolic Tradition* provides instructions for the bishop’s actions on the day before the initiants receive their baptism:

And when he [the bishop] has finished exorcising [the candidates], let him [the bishop] blow into them. And when he has sealed their foreheads and their ears and nostrils, let him raise them up.<sup>159</sup>

Here the bishop’s breath serves as a further exorcistic substance or a sort of seal to keep any other demons from entering the candidate.<sup>160</sup> The *Testament of Our Lord (Testamentum Domini)*—a church order whose origins likely lay in fifth-century Syria—also contains the instructions that the attendant priest “breathe on them [the initiants] and seal them on their foreheads, on the nose, on the heart, on the eyes.”<sup>161</sup> This breathing ritual is mentioned in the writings of the fourth-century bishop Cyril of Jerusalem and of the famous Augustine of Hippo

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Jean Périer and Augustin Périer, *Les “127 canons des apotres”: texte arabe, en partie inédit, publié et traduit en français d’après les manuscrits de Paris, de Rome et de Londres*, in *PO* 8 (1912): 619 (chap. 47).

<sup>158</sup> Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 88.

<sup>159</sup> *Apostolic Tradition* 20.8. Translation of Sahidic Coptic text in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, 106. In the Arabic *127 Canons of the Apostles* and the Arabic *Canons of Hippolytus*, the word that is used for “blowing” is *nafakha*. See: Périer and Périer, *Les “127 canons des apotres,”* 601 (chap. 33); René-Georges Coquin, *Les Canons d’Hippolyte: édition critique de la version arabe, introduction et traduction française*, in *PO* 31.2 (1966): 378-9.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 111. Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 87.

<sup>161</sup> *Testamentum Domini* 2.7. Translation in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, 107; James Cooper and Arthur John Maclean, *The Testament of Our Lord, translated into English from the Syriac with introduction and notes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 124. Vööbus, ed., *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 1:36. On dating and provenance, see Simon Corcoran and Benet Selway, “A Newly Identified Greek Fragment of the *Testamentum Domini*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2011): 131-5 citing further literature.

as a component of the baptism process.<sup>162</sup> It is also included in the canons of the Council of Constantinople (381 C.E.) as part of the process by which heretics are re-baptized into the church.<sup>163</sup>

This association of Christian ritual practices—and particularly exorcistic healing rituals in the characteristically Christian initiation ceremony, the baptism—with breath and spittle provides a useful point of comparison with these rabbinic condemnations of incantation practices involving spitting. While Christians were, by no means, the only ones to include spitting in their ritual practices in late antiquity, spitting or breathing upon an individual (or upon oneself) does appear to have developed a deeper resonance within early Christian ritual than in contemporaneous Jewish or pagan traditions. As we saw in Chapter Two, stories of the miraculous power of Christian holy men’s spittle and breath were widespread in fifth- to ninth-century hagiography: this perhaps offers a further indication of the importance of such bodily rituals to Christian practice in these centuries. While speculative, this early Christian emphasis on spitting and breathing perhaps helps to explain the placement of those who spit during incantations alongside other sectarian practitioners in Mishnah Sanhedrin 10 and its parallels.

In contrast, many scholars have labelled the rabbinic dismissal of whispered incantations accompanied by spitting as a rejection of “magic,” rather than any reference to sectarian practices. Judah Goldin, as I noted above, writes that the rabbinic denunciation of spitting during incantations “must refer to imitation of the practice of heathen magi.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Giuseppe Veltri draws comparisons between the practices condemned by the rabbis and those dismissed by

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<sup>162</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, 9; idem, *Mystagogic Catechesis* 2, 3. Translated in Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 82, 174. Augustine, *Contra Iul. op. im.* 3.182 (PL 45:1323); *ibid.*, *Ep.* 194.46. See Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 112-4, 181; Robin M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: ritual, visual, and theological dimensions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 36.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* Franz Josef Dölger, *Der Exorzismus im altchristlichen Taufritual. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1909), 119. B. Botte, “La Sputatio, Antique Rite Baptismal?” in *Mélanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht and Antwerp: Spectrum Editeurs, 1963), 199.

<sup>164</sup> Goldin, “Magic of Magic and Superstition,” 121.

Pliny the Elder as the “magical deceits” (*magicae vanitates*) of the Magi.<sup>165</sup> Alan Segal writes that R. Aqiva’s additions at Mishnah Sanhedrin 10 refer to those who “practice magic.”<sup>166</sup> Lutz Doering writes that the problem “lies in the nature of such ‘whispering’ ... [with] its clear *magical connotations*.”<sup>167</sup> Similarly, S. Daniel Breslauer explains the emphasis on whispering at *m. San.* 10 as a criticism of secret knowledge and suggests that “Aqiva is clearly a champion of the public declaration of knowledge. That seems to be the contrast that he draws between magic and normative Jewish practice.”<sup>168</sup>

It is true that whispered words appear as a topos in the characterization of sorcerers or magicians in late ancient Near Eastern texts. In several Christian synodical texts in Syriac, the vocabulary of whispering (ܘܠܘܢ, cognate with Aramaic ܘܠܘܢ) appears in contexts associated with illicit “magical” practices. A representative example is found in the Synod of Ezekiel of 576 C.E., the third canon of which fulminates against:

...those who go to sorcerers and soothsayers ... and those who wear amulets, knots and talismans.

ܠܘܠܘܢܐܠܘܢ ܠܘܠܘܢܐܠܘܢ ܠܘܠܘܢܐܠܘܢ ... ܠܘܠܘܢܐܠܘܢܐܠܘܢܐܠܘܢ<sup>169</sup>

Here “talismans” (ܠܘܠܘܢܐܠܘܢ) is related to the root for “whisper,” as is a word used for “wizards” (ܠܘܠܘܢܐܠܘܢ) that appears in other Syriac texts.<sup>170</sup> This connotation to whispering also appears in a story in the midrash Genesis Rabbah: When the patriarch Joseph is seen “whispering as he went

<sup>165</sup> Veltri, “The ‘Other’ Physicians,” 44.

<sup>166</sup> Alan Segal, *Rebecca’s Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 166.

<sup>167</sup> Doering, “Much Ado about Nothing,” 223-4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>168</sup> S. Daniel Breslauer, “Secrecy and Magic, Publicity and Torah: Unpacking a Talmudic Tale,” in Mirecki and Meyer, *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, 269.

<sup>169</sup> Chabot, ed., *Synodicon Orientale*, 116 (Ezekiel, canon 3). Other examples are in *ibid.*, 106 (Joseph, canon 19), 150 (Isho ‘yahb, canon 14), 548-9 (Aba, canon 23); Vööbus, ed., *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 1:121, 2:10. Cf. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 416-7.

<sup>170</sup> Vööbus, ed., *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 40 (Rules of Rabbūlā for the Qeiāmā, no. 17), 168 (Rules of Dadīshō’, no. 2). Vööbus, ed., *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 1:57, 84, 121, 203, 268, 2:4.

in and whispering as he came out” (מלחש ונכנם מלחש ויוצא) his Egyptian master asks, “What is this, Joseph ... have you brought witchcraft to the capital of witchcraft [i.e. Egypt] (מה יוסף ... (באתר דחרשין חרשין אתמהא)?”<sup>171</sup> Joseph’s whispering has thrown him under suspicion of practicing illicit magic. Is whispering thus the problem that we encounter in the rabbinic texts studied above?

Rabbinic texts, it will be recalled, offer several instances in which whisperings are explicitly allowed or recalled without criticism. Whisperings are allowed for certain illnesses even on the Sabbath according to the Tosefta, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud. The story of Rabbi Meir offers an example of a whispered incantation accompanied by spitting! The resolution to the aforementioned story in Genesis Rabbah removes the taint of sorcery from the patriarch Joseph’s whispering when it is revealed that Joseph’s master saw the Shekinah hovering over Joseph: his whispering was not magical after all, but part of his relationship with God. Whispering itself does not seem to be the problem, contrary to what Doering and Breslauer suggest.

Rather, as I have argued, the problem according to the rabbinic texts seems to be in the act of spitting in the process of the whispered incantation. Was such ritual activity associated only with “heathen magi,” as Goldin suggests, so that it the “magical” connotations of spitting that deprive its practitioners of a place in the World to Come?

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<sup>171</sup> Genesis Rabbah 86:5. Cited and translated in Jacob Neusner, “Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism: System and the Difference,” in Neusner et al., *Religion, Science, and Magic*, 75. Critical edition: J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Bereshit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> printing, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 2:1057-8. The oldest extant manuscript (Ms. Vat. Ebr. 60 of the tenth century, not used in Theodor and Albeck’s edition) contains the same text in this passage. *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Codex Vatican 60* (Jerusalem: Makor Publishing, 1972), 321. The same text also appears in Ms. Vat. Ebr. 30, “written in Egypt in the tenth or eleventh century by several scribes [and] considered the best textual version of GenR.” Michael Sokoloff, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Ms. Vat. Ebr 30 with an Introduction and Index* (Jerusalem: Makor Publishing, 1971), f. 158v. On the manuscript evidence and modern editions of Genesis Rabbah, see Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 280-2.



It is worth remembering that the distinction between “religion” and “magic” was bound up in antiquity with sectarian distinctions and that “magic” often functioned as a polemical label to “other” those understood to lie outside the bounds of communal standards. Kern-Ulmer writes that “the reproach that Christians practiced magic is a standard part of Jewish religious polemic.”<sup>172</sup> This is certainly on display in the rabbinic texts that label Jesus a “sorcerer” and “idolater,” using such labels to place him firmly outside of acceptable Jewish practice.<sup>173</sup> The discourse of “magic” being used against sectarians—and particularly Christians, it seems—is likewise found in the condemnation of the books of *minim* as “books of magic” (ספרי קוסמין) at Tosefta *Hullin* 2:20 and Babylonian Talmud *Hullin* 13a.<sup>174</sup> Even to the extent that the condemnation of incantations accompanied by spitting may have been understood as “magical” activity by the rabbis, it seems to have been magical activity that was associated with Jewish sectarians and, I would argue, particularly with Christians.

Indeed, we have already seen that Christians are described in rabbinic sources performing healings with whispered incantations, although they are not explicitly associated with the usage of saliva in incantation rituals in any of these texts. However, one Jewish source does in fact describe Jesus himself performing a whispered incantation accompanied by spitting. This portrayal of Jesus appears in a version of the *Toledot Yeshu*, a parodistic biography of Jesus that circulated among Near Eastern Jewish communities as a complete text likely by the eighth or

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<sup>172</sup> “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts,” 295.

<sup>173</sup> See recently Tal Ilan, “Jesus and Joshua ben Perahiah: A Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Magic in Babylonia,” in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ra’anana S. Boustan, Klaus Herrmann, Reimund Leicht, Annette Yoshiko Reed, and Giuseppe Veltri with the collaboration of Alex Ramos, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 2:985-995.

<sup>174</sup> Becker, *Wunder und Wundertäter*, 131. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 392, 398-401. Katz, “Rabbinic Response to Christianity,” 275. Kern-Ulmer, “Depiction of Magic,” 295. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 53. Tepler, *Birkat haMinim*, 239, 275-6.

ninth century, but many elements of which are far more ancient.<sup>175</sup> In this text, Jesus is described performing miraculous acts through “words of sorcery” (מילי דהרשין) and through “whispering” (להישנא ליה) to individuals.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, one version of the *Toledot Yeshu* presents one of Jesus’ miraculous acts as accomplished through his combination of whispering and spitting.

The story appears in a sixteenth-century Hebrew manuscript of the *Toledot Yeshu* that, despite its late date of composition, offers “evidence of early versions of the composition.”<sup>177</sup> At the climax of the story, Jesus is called before Tiberius Caesar to prove his wonderworking and promises to make a barren woman pregnant. The description of Jesus’s ritual actions states that, “he spoke whispered words into her ears and spat into her mouth, whereupon she conceived” (ודיבר באזניה דברי להישות ורק רוק בפיה ונתעברה).<sup>178</sup> In this instance, we find the vocabulary of

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<sup>175</sup> “Recent studies by Michael Sokoloff and Peter Schäfer have firmly fixed the date of the earliest versions of TY to the eighth century on linguistic and textual grounds: the language of the Aramaic fragments is Geonic Babylonian, and our earliest fragments of and references to TY appear in the early ninth century and presuppose a somewhat earlier text.” Sarit Kattan Gribetz, “Jesus and the Clay Birds: Reading *Toledot Yeshu* in Light of the Infancy Gospels,” in Boustan et al., *Envisioning Judaism*, 2:1041. On *Toledot Yeshu* as parody, see Philip Alexander, “Jesus and his Mother in the Jewish Anti-Gospel (the *Toledot Yeshu*),” in *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities*, ed. Claire Clivaz, Andreas Dettwiler, Luc Devillers and Enrico Norelli with the assistance of Benjamin Bertho (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 597-9. On elements of the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative that clearly circulated from quite early in the Common Era, see Pierluigi Piovanelli, “The *Toledot Yeshu* and Christian Apocryphal Literature: the Formative Years,” in *Toledot Yeshu (“The Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 89-100.

<sup>176</sup> The earliest surviving texts of the *Toledot Yeshu* are Aramaic fragments from the Cairo Geniza variously dated from the ninth to eleventh centuries by different scholars. Two of them cited here (T.-S. Misc. 35.87 and 88) are edited in Louis Ginzberg, ed., *Ginze Schechter: Genizah Studies in Memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter*, 3 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1928), 1:329-335 (nos. 34-5). A supplemented and corrected version of the Aramaic text appears in William Horbury, “The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition,” in *The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in honour of C. F. D. Moule*, ed. Ernst Bammel (Naperville, Illin.: Alec R. Allenson, 1970), 116-21. An English translation appears in Horbury’s unpublished dissertation: “A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Yeshu” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1971), 77-89.

<sup>177</sup> English abstract for Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*” in *Tarbiz* 69.2 (2000): vi. The manuscript is St. Petersburg Russian National Library EVR 1.274. “St. Petersburg RNL EVR 1.274 copied in 1536, is written in a Byzantine hand, meaning that its provenance might be Asia Minor, Greece or Southern Italy ... Although these [the Russian manuscript and New York JTS 6312] are both much later than Cambridge Univ. Lib. T-S Misc. 35.87 from the Cairo Geniza (ca. 10th century), they are still the earliest dated manuscripts containing *Toledot Yeshu*.” Michael Meerson, “Yeshu the Physician and the Child of Stone: A Glimpse of Progressive Medicine in Jewish-Christian Polemics,” *JSQ* 20 (2013): 301. “Deutsch has convincingly shown that this version differs from the later Hebrew versions of TY; the second half of the text is a translation of an Aramaic text, while the first half, which includes Jesus’ conception and early life, was added independently of the Aramaic second half.” Gribetz, “Jesus and the Clay Birds,” 1034n.32.

<sup>178</sup> Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of *Toldot Yeshu*,” 190 (ll. 12-4).

whispering and spitting—exactly the combination of actions condemned in the rabbinic texts studied above—used in a Jewish text to describe the activities of the sorcerer Jesus.

While later than the Tannaitic and Amoraic texts I have examined, this version of the *Toledot Yeshu* provides evidence that the combination of whispering and spitting was explicitly associated with sorcerous Christian practice by the period of the production of this version of the *Toledot Yeshu*. This provides indirect evidence that the problem that rabbis saw in whispered incantations accompanied by spitting may have been their association with Christian ritual activities. Even if whispering together with spitting was associated with “sorcery,” it appears to have been associated by late ancient Jews with a particularly Christian form of sorcery. Alongside disbelief in the bodily resurrection and the practice of Epicureanism, this ritual usage of the body was categorized as unacceptable and as depriving one of a share in the World to Come.

### **Creating Islamic Healing Rituals**

I would suggest that, like the rabbinic discussion of sectarians that lies behind the rabbis’ condemnation of spitting in healing incantations, the sectarian environment of early Islamic Iraq likely provides the context for voices expressing dismay over the presence of *nafth*, *tafl*, and *uff* during *ruqyas* in early *ḥadīth* literature. It is striking that the individuals condemning these practices are almost exclusively from Iraq and Persia, and many are more specifically from the Iraqī city of Kūfa. The sectarian milieu of this garrison town appears to have provided the background against which these discussions occurred, in which the rejection of spitting or

blowing during incantations was tied to the stabilization of a specifically Islamic ritual practice.<sup>179</sup>

Indeed, Kūfan authorities display a distinct antagonism towards many healing rituals, as we see in the reports that the Kūfan Successor Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī (d. *circa* 96/714), for example, “detested amulets, *ruqyas*, and charms” as well as the drinking of Qur'ānic verses. This attitude seems to have been particularly characteristic of Iraqī scholars, as we hear in a report from the Kūfan Ḥajjāj b. Artāt (d. *circa* 144/761).<sup>180</sup> Learning that the Kūfan Successor Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713) had written out amulets for those who asked him to do so, Ḥajjāj asks the Meccan scholar 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ if Sa'īd had checked with him about this practice. 'Aṭā' replies, “We had not heard of its [i.e., writing amulets'] detestability before you people of Iraq [said so]” (*mā sami'nā bi-karāhiyatī-hi min qabla-kum min ahlī al-'Irāq*). The rejection of healing rituals such as the usage of amulets is thus identified as a specifically Iraqī position, of which the Meccan 'Aṭā' had not previously been aware before the Iraqī scholars expressed such discomfort.

These hostile attitudes stand in notable contrast to the opinions that are related from Meccan and Medinese scholars, who appear much more accepting of many of the healing practices that the Kūfan scholars rejected.<sup>181</sup> If we look at the scholars mentioned above who accepted the usage of amulets, the majority are of Hijāzī origin, including 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ (Mecca), Mujāhid b. Jabr (Mecca), and Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib (Medina). The opinions attributed

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<sup>179</sup> In his recent essay “An Ingestible Scripture,” Travis Zadeh reaches similar conclusions about the geographical distribution of some of the practices discussed by Ibn Abī Shayba.

<sup>180</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:24 (no. 23858). Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Hushaym [b. Bashīr] > Ḥajjāj [b. Artāt] > 'Aṭā' [b. Abī Rabāḥ]. Also found in Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 233-4 (no. 60\_11). See Zadeh, “Ingestible Scripture,” 104.

<sup>181</sup> I am not entirely as skeptical of the authenticity of these reports as is Zadeh, who writes of the opinions cited by Ibn Abī Shayba in regard to drinking the Qur'ān: “The presentation of the information, though, is clearly designed to root the practice of Qur'ānic ingestion in the Hijaz and locate the opposition to it in Iraq. It should be noted that accounts in favor of these practices are related overwhelmingly by Iraqī authorities, highlighting the point of contention over the matter may well have been entirely focused in Iraq and that the early Hijazi authorities ... are deployed by Iraqī jurists precisely to counter the authority of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī.” “Ingestible Scripture,” 105.

to the Shī‘ī Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq also exhibit relatively lenient attitudes towards amulet usage and the drinking of Qur’ānic verses. This too might be tied to regional differences in practice, since these Imāms were in residence in Medina.<sup>182</sup>

The Ḥijāzī acceptance of ritual healing activities appears to have extended to the usage of breath or spit during *ruqyas*. In a *ḥadīth* in Ibn Abī Shayba’s chapter on “Those Who Allowed Blown Spittle during incantations,” we read: “The Prophet used to blow spittle during the *ruqya*” (*anna al-nabiyya kāna yanfuthu fī-l-ruqyat*).<sup>183</sup> Another *ḥadīth* in the chapter narrates the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha doing the same thing, when Qays b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash‘ath states: “I was brought to ‘Ā’isha when there was something evil in my eye, and she performed a *ruqya* for me and blew spittle.”<sup>184</sup> Citing the Prophet’s example, as well as that of his most-favored wife, these traditions provide validation of blowing spittle during the *ruqya* that is very different from the hatred displayed towards this activity by the eighth-century Kūfan authorities. Kūfans could accept *ruqyas* in some instances, as when Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī reports on *ruqyas* used against scorpions and venom without any apparent condemnation.<sup>185</sup> Yet the Kūfans appear to draw the line, as we have seen, at *ruqyas* that involve blowing or spitting.

According to the *isnād*, the *ḥadīth* stating that “the Prophet used to blow spittle during the *ruqya*” was related from the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha through the Medinese scholars Mālik b.

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<sup>182</sup> Najam Haider finds evidence of overlap between Imāmī Shī‘ī and Medinese ritual practice: “Geography of the *Isnād*: Possibilities for the Reconstruction of Local Ritual Practice in the 2nd/8th Century,” *Der Islam* 90.2 (2013): 310, 312, 328, 336-7.

<sup>183</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:35 (no. 23911). Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Wakī‘ > Mālik b. Anas > al-Zuhārī > ‘Urwa > ‘Ā’isha.

<sup>184</sup> *Dhuhība bī ilā ‘Ā’ishat*<sup>in</sup> *wa fī ‘ayniyyi sū<sup>um</sup> fa-raqat-nī wa nafathat*. *Ibid.*, 8:36 (no. 23913). Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Ḥafṣ [b. Ghiyāth] (d. 197/813; Kūfa) > ‘Uthmān b. Qays [b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash‘ath] > Qays b. Muḥammad b. al-Ash‘ath (Kūfa). Qays was, however, not contemporaneous with ‘Ā’isha. On him, see: al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, 4:152 (nos. 679-80). On his son, ‘Uthmān, see: *ibid.*, 3:246 (no. 2297).

<sup>185</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:33-4 (no. 23901-3). See also *ibid.*, 8:30 (no. 23886).

Anas (d. 179/795) and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742).<sup>186</sup> The distinct difference in attitude displayed in this *ḥadīth* and in the Kūfan Successors' opinions on spitting during *ruqyas* is perhaps tied to a difference in the practice of, or attitude towards, incantations in the Ḥijāz (and especially Medina) and in Iraq (and especially Kūfā). Medinese scholars appear not to have seen a problem in spitting during ritual activities that the Kūfan scholars quite clearly did.

The Medinese acceptance of spitting/blowing during ritual activities is further indicated by a *ḥadīth* found in many collections that describes the Prophet blowing spittle upon himself (*nafatha*) during an illness or before going to bed. In 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaḥ*, we find this statement related from the Prophet's wife 'Ā'ishā: "The Prophet used to blow spittle upon himself with the *mu'awwidhāt* [the final sūras of the Qur'ān] during the illness that killed him."<sup>187</sup> We see the Prophet here using his spit/breath as part of a healing or apotropaic ritual, in which he spits the words of the *mu'awwidhatayn* upon himself for their protective power.<sup>188</sup>

While the phrasing of this version of the *ḥadīth* places the Prophet's actions specifically during

<sup>186</sup> It also appears in: Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Makhlad al-Ḥanzalī al-Marwazī, *Musnad Ishāq bin Rāhwayh*, 5 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Ghafūr 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥusayn Burr al-Balūshī (Medina: Maktabat Dār al-Īmān: 1990-95), 2:283 (no.796) with the same *isnād* as in Ibn Abī Shayba. See also: Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1166 (no. 3528) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 38*): Abū Bakr b. Abī Shayba and 'Alī b. Maymūn al-Raqqī and Sahl b. Abī Sahl > Wakī' > Mālik b. Anas > al-Zuhrī > 'Urwa > 'Ā'isha. al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 2:1168 (no. 7506): Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm > Wakī' > Mālik b. Anas > al-Zuhrī > 'Urwa > 'Ā'isha. The Kūfan traditionist Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/813) appears in all of these *asānīd*. He "transmitted ... from many 'Irāqī and non-'Irāqī scholars of the 2nd/8th century, such as Ismā'īl b. Abī Khālid, 'Ikrima b. 'Ammār, al-A'mash, al-Awzā'ī and Mālik" and was known for his intellectual honesty. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Wakī'" (R.G. Houry). He is one of Ibn Abī Shayba's main sources. Lucas, "Where are the Legal *Ḥadīth*" 290, 292. Since the transmitters all split off from Wakī', it is possible that he fabricated this Prophetic *ḥadīth* in order to validate ideas about ritual practice that included *naḥṭh*. I have found no data indicating this to be the case, however.

<sup>187</sup> *Kāna Rasūl Allāh yanfuthu 'alā nafs-hi fī al-maraḥ' alladhī qubīḍa fī-hi mu'awwidhāt*. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:20 (no. 19785). 'Abd al-Razzāq > Ma'mar > al-Zuhrī > 'Urwa > 'Ā'ishā. Versions in which this practice is ascribed to the period of the Prophet's final illness also occur in: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1452 (no. 5735) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 32*), 1456 (no. 5751) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 41*); Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:14; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:374-5 (no. 2192) (*kitāb al-salām, bāb 20*).

<sup>188</sup> Juynboll translates *nafatha* here as "to sputter upon his hands in enchantment": *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 726.

his final illness, other versions suggest that the Prophet performed this ritual more generally whenever he was sick<sup>189</sup> or as part of his nightly ritual for preparing for bed.<sup>190</sup>

In the *asānīd* for this *ḥadīth*, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī appears as the Common Link with Mālik b. Anas, Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), Yūnus b. Yazīd b. Abī al-Najād (d. 154/771), ‘Uqayl b. Khālid (d. 141/759), and Ishāq b. Rāshid (d. unknown) all transmitting from him.<sup>191</sup>

The tradition’s association with al-Zuhrī is further indicated by versions of the *ḥadīth* that include in the *matn*:

Ma‘mar [b. Rāshid] said, “I asked al-Zuhrī, ‘How would he [the Prophet] blow spittle upon himself?’ He [al-Zuhrī] said, ‘He would blow spittle upon his palms and then anoint his face with them.’”<sup>192</sup>

With al-Zuhrī himself explaining the ritual, we find here a direct correlation between the Medinese scholar and the usage of *naḥīth*. Indeed some versions add another statement, attributed alternately to Yūnus Yazīd b. Mushkān or ‘Uqayl b. Khālid, “I used to see Ibn Shihāb do that

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<sup>189</sup> Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaḥḥa*’ [recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā], 2:942-3 (*kitāb al-‘ayn, bāb al-ta’wūdh wa-l-ruqya min al-maraḍ*). Idem, *al-Muwaḥḥa*’ [recension of Suwayd b. Sa‘īd al-Hadathānī], 509-10 (no. 731). al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1281 (no. 5016) (*kitāb faḍā’il al-Qur’ān, bāb 14*). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:375-6 (no. 2192) (*kitāb al-salām, bāb 20*). Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:14. Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1166 (no. 3529) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 38*). Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:337-8 (no. 3897) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 19*). Ibn Rāhwayh, *Musnad*, 2:282 (no.795\_252). ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi’ fi-l-ḥadīth*, 2:792-3 (no. 715). al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 2:1165-8 (nos. 7488, 7502, 7507). Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fi-l-Ṭibb*, 95-6. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Kitāb al-Jāmi’*, 265 (no. 194). al-Rabī’ b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 254-5 (no. 648).

<sup>190</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1455 (no. 5748) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 39*); 1281 (no. 5017) (*kitāb faḍā’il al-Qur’ān, bāb 14*). Ibn Rāhwayh, *Musnad*, 2:281 (no.794\_251).

<sup>191</sup> Juynboll writes of this tradition that “Mālik may be the most prominent PCL of this bundle, its clear CL is Zuhrī.” Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 726. The only exception to this pattern in the *asānīd* that I have found appears in an Ibādī *ḥadīth* compilation, where the tradition that “when the Messenger of God was sick, he recited upon himself the *mu’awwidhatayn* and blew spittle” is related from: Abū ‘Ubayda [Muslim b. Abī Karīma al-Tamīmī] (d. *circa* 150/767; Baṣra) > Jābir [b. Zayd] (d. 94/712 or 104/722; Baṣra) > ‘Ā’isha. This appears in: al-Rabī’ b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 254-5 (no. 648). On the author of this book and the figures in this *isnād*, see: *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ibādīyya” (T. Lewicki). The attribution of this work to al-Rabī’ b. Ḥabīb and the antiquity of the *asānīd* that appear therein have, however, been called into serious question. On these issues, see: John C. Wilkinson, “Ibādī Ḥadīth: an Essay on Normalization,” *Der Islam* 62.2 (1985): 231-59; Ersilia Francesca, “The Formation and Early Development of the Ibādī Madhhab,” *JSAI* 28 (2003): 260-77.

<sup>192</sup> *Qāla Ma‘mar fa-sa’altu al-Zuhrī kayf kāna yanfithu ‘alā nafsī-hi. Fa-qāla kāna yanfithu ‘alā yaday-hi wa yamsaḥu bi-humā wajh<sup>h</sup>-hu.* This appears in: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:20 (no. 19785); Ibn Rāhwayh, *Musnad*, 2:282 (no.795\_252); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1452 (no. 5735) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 32*); *ibid.*, 1456 (no. 5751) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 41*).

when he went to bed.”<sup>193</sup> Al-Zuhrī’s own practice is thus directly linked to this tradition. The ascription of this *ḥadīth* to the Medinese scholar al-Zuhrī, as well as its circulation by the Medinan Mālik b. Anas, provide further evidence that the acceptance of blowing/spitting in ritual activity was part of Medinese practice.

Why would Kūfans be so opposed to the usage of breath or spit in ritual incantations when Medinans were not? Perhaps because it was in the environment of the garrison city of Kūfa—founded in 638 C.E. as a “permanent military establishment of the Arabs in Mesopotamia”—that a distinct effort was made over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries to distinguish Islamic from non-Islamic ritual practice.<sup>194</sup> As Leor Halevi argues, “it was in the new garrison cities, particularly in Baṣra and Kūfa, that profound ritual—and consequently social—transformation first occurred,” and Halevi points to the “Muslims’ endeavor to establish a new religion in the garrison cities founded by the Arab conquerors.”<sup>195</sup> A central way in which these “pietists drew a line dividing the Islamic from the Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian” and thus created an Islamic “communal identity” was in their definition of “ritual form[s] that would signal the divergence of their religious community from others.”<sup>196</sup> Najam Haider similarly argues that “ritual form functioned as a visible marker for sectarian identity in early 2nd/8th-century Kūfa,” pointing for example to different forms of ritual prayer and how these differences were used to perform Shī‘ī identities and “amounted to a public declaration of communal membership.”<sup>197</sup> In this way, ritual activities were sites of religious identity

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<sup>193</sup> “‘Uqayl said: I saw Ibn Shihāb do that” (*qāla ‘Uqayl wa ra’aytu Ibn Shihāb<sup>a</sup> yaf’ alu dhālika*): Ibn Rāhwayh, *Musnad*, 2:281 (no.794\_251). “Yūnus said: I used to see Ibn Shihāb do that when he went to bed” (*Qāla Yūnus kuntu arā Ibn Shihāb yaṣna’u dhālika idhā atā ilā firāsh<sup>h</sup>-hi*): al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1455 (no. 5748) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb* 39).

<sup>194</sup> *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “al-Kūfa” (Hichem Djaït).

<sup>195</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 13, 252n26

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 236, 159.

<sup>197</sup> Haider, *Origins of the Shī‘a*, 215.



formation: the Muslim pietists in Iraq worked hard to create “an ideology of praxis” that signaled and performed religious identity and difference.<sup>198</sup>

This effort to define the boundaries of properly Islamic rituals extended into such practices as the use of incantations, amulets, talismans, and other healing activities, such that Muslim scholars of the garrison city of Kūfa appear to have made an effort to distinguish the Islamic from the non-Islamic performance of *ruqyas*. Like the other ritual activities that defined what it meant to be a proper Muslim, the way in which one performed an incantation also indicated one’s status inside or outside of the community.

What determined the acceptable limits of *ruqya* usage? Discussing this issue of early Muslims’ creation of distinctly Islamic incantations, Uri Rubin writes that “the Qur’ān emerges as an anti-demonic power in versions [of *ḥadīth*] which ... gained wide circulation in the authoritative collections” and he suggests there was a “polemical background of the traditions in which only Qur’ānic *ruqyas* are accepted as legitimate ... designed to turn the Qur’ān into the sole origin of anti-demonic powers.”<sup>199</sup> Rubin is certainly correct that the Qur’ānic content of incantations is a point of emphasis in many of the recorded traditions. For example, Ibn Mājah’s *Sunan* includes a tradition stating that, while the Prophet used to use incantations against the evil eye, “once the *mu’awwidhatān* [the last two *sūras* of the Qur’ān] were revealed, [the Prophet] took them and abandoned anything similar to that.”<sup>200</sup> In a Shī‘ī text, Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq states that “there is no problem with an incantation, or invocation, or charm if it is from the Qur’ān” (*lā ba’s<sup>a</sup> bi-l-ruqyat<sup>i</sup> wa-l-‘awwadhat<sup>i</sup> wa-l-nushrat<sup>i</sup> idhā kānat min al-Qur’ān*). In this same text, Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir states that only incantations from the Qur’ān are allowed (*lā illā min*

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<sup>198</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 131.

<sup>199</sup> Rubin, “Muḥammad as Exorcist,” 103, 105.

<sup>200</sup> Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1161 (no. 3511) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 33*).

*al-Qur'ān*), since “many of the incantations and amulets are idolatries.”<sup>201</sup> These traditions do clearly indicate that there was an interest in demarcating the Qur'ān as the only acceptable incantatory text.

However, there are many reports in both non-canonical and canonical *ḥadīth* collections from both the Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions that indicate that the Qur'ānic content of *ruqyas* was not understood as strictly mandatory. Indeed, some early traditions attest to the usage of incantations not completely or at all in Arabic. For example, traditions from Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī state that his uncle, the Companion al-Aswad b. Yazīd al-Nakha'ī (d. 74/693), “would perform *ruqyas* in the Ḥimyarī language” (*kāna yarqī bi-l-Ḥimyarīyyatī*) and that when al-Aswad showed one of these *ruqyas* to 'Ā'isha, the Prophet's wife found it acceptable.<sup>202</sup> An interesting Shī'ī tradition records Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq giving a *ruqya* for healing a tooth that includes the invocation “O Hayyā Sharāhiyyā!” Ja'far explains that these are “two names of God the exalted in Hebrew” (*ismān man asmā'ī Allāhī ta'ālā bi-l-ibrāniyyatī*).<sup>203</sup> Mentions also appear of Ibn 'Umar receiving a *ruqya* in Persian (*bi-ruqyatīn fārisiyyatīn*) or from a Berber man (*rajul barbarī*).<sup>204</sup>

Even among the Arabic *ruqyas* cited, not all include Qur'ānic verses. For example, a non-Qur'ānic, partly rhyming *ruqya* is cited in many collections as having been used by the Prophet during illnesses and in some traditions is even referred to as “the Messenger of God's *ruqya*” (*ruqyat rasūl Allāh*):

Remove the harm, Lord of the people, and heal. You are the healer; there is no healing but yours, a healing that will not abandon the sick.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibnā Bisṭām, *Ṭibb al-a'imma*, 190-1; Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 54.

<sup>202</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:33-4 (no. 23901-3). See also *ibid.*, 8:29 (no. 23879) and 8:30 (no. 23886). Cited in Rubin, “Muḥammad as Exorcist,” 105. These traditions include a “*ruqya* for scorpions” (*ruqyat al-'aqrab*), the strange language of which perhaps betrays a Ḥimyarī origin.

<sup>203</sup> Ibnā Bisṭām, *Ṭibb al-a'imma*, 98; Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 17.

<sup>204</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi' fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:783 (no. 705). 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:18 (no. 19775). Cited in Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 105.

*Adhhibi al-ba's<sup>a</sup> rabb<sup>a</sup> al-nās<sup>i</sup> wa-ishfī wa anta al-shāfi lā shifā<sup>ā</sup> illā shifā<sup>ū</sup>-ka shifā<sup>ān</sup> lā yughādiru saqam<sup>an</sup>.*<sup>205</sup>

Another commonly cited incantation is said to have been performed by the angel Gabriel for the Prophet Muḥammad during his illnesses. It runs:

In the name of God, I charm you and God heals you. From everything that harms you, and from every evil eye and envier, in the name of God, I charm you.

*Bi-sm<sup>i</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> arqī-ka wa-'llāh<sup>ū</sup> yashfī-ka min kull<sup>i</sup> shay<sup>in</sup> yu'dhī-ka wa min kull<sup>i</sup> 'ayn<sup>in</sup> wa ḥāsīd<sup>in</sup> bi-sm<sup>i</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> arqī-ka.*<sup>206</sup>

Based on these and other traditions, it does not appear that the Qur'ānic status of *ruqyas* was paramount in the early eighth century when these traditions were circulating, though this may have been an increasing point of emphasis.<sup>207</sup> Rather than strictly Qur'ānic *ruqyas*, we see an emphasis on *ruqyas* passed down through *ḥadīth* from the primordial figures of the Islamic tradition: the Prophet Muḥammad, his Companions and Successors, and, in the Shī'ī case, the Imāms. In this sense, the *ḥadīth* scholars here reaffirm their own authority by suggesting that

<sup>205</sup> Translation slightly adapted from Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 39. Many variant versions occur in different collections, such as: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:36-8 (nos., 23917, 223921), 10:98 (nos. 29980, 29982); 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:19 (no. 19783); 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi' fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:784 (no. 706); Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:14-6; Ibn Rāhwayh, *Musnad*, 2:283 (no. 797-9); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1454 (nos. 5742-4) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 38); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:372-4 (no. 2191) (*kitāb al-salām*, *bāb* 19); al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 2:1165-7 (nos. 7489, 7496, 7503); Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:328-9 (no. 3879) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 17), 4:332 (no. 3886) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 19); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1163 (no. 3520) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 36), 2:1167 (no. 3530) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 39); Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-'l-Ṭibb*, 94, 95, 96.

<sup>206</sup> 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:18-9 (no. 19779). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:36-8 (nos. 23915, 23920, 23923). Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:15-6. 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Jāmi' fī-l-ḥadīth*, 2:786-8 (no. 708-10). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:358-9 (no. 2185-6) (*kitāb al-salām*, *bāb* 16). Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1164-6 (no. 3523-4, 3527) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bābs* 36-7). al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 8:109. Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a'imma*, 157; Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 39. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-'l-Ṭibb*, 91, 95, 96. al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 200 (no. 495) and 254 (no. 647). al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 8:2935 (no. 8268). See Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 39-40.

<sup>207</sup> This may have also been a period when the question of what words counted as "Qur'ānic" was not yet fully resolved. Notably, the Qur'ān recitation of Ibn Mas'ūd is reported not to have included what are now the final two suras, the *mu'awwadhatayn*. For example, see: Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-a'imma*, 558; Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 148-9; al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 305-6 (no. 810). It is quite possible that some of this controversy involved the distinction between Qur'ān and *ruqya*.

they know the acceptably Islamic incantations, turning this practice into another area of Islamic ritual for which only they have the perquisite knowledge for determining correct practice.

Beside the specific verbal content of the *ruqyas*, early Muslim jurists were also interested in the ways that *ruqyas* were performed: the movements of the body and other physical components that made up the ritual performance of healing. We find, for example, the citation of the Prophet's placing his right hand upon the face of the sick while performing a *ruqya*, and the discussion (cited above) of how the Prophet would "blow upon himself" by rubbing his *naft*-covered hands over his body. Other traditions state that the individual should place his right hand upon the afflicted part of the body while reciting the *ruqya*.<sup>208</sup> In the Introduction, we saw the Prophet offer an intricate description of a ritual for getting rid of a paralyzing enchantment, a ritual defined as part of "the *sunna*" by al-Zuhrī. Healing rituals were clearly part of the body of practices that made up proper Islamic ritual identity.

Yet compared to the discussions of these other physical components of the performance of *ruqyas* recitation, an inordinate amount of attention is given to the presence of spitting/blowing during incantations by the Kūfan scholars. No other component of *ruqya* performance receives its own chapter in Ibn Abī Shayba's text regarding those who rejected or allowed it. Why might this have been? The Kūfans' silence in regard to their reasoning for hating spitting during incantations complicates our effort to identify the context of these traditions. I offer two explanations, not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The first is that the usage of saliva in incantations simply recalled "sorcery" too readily for early Muslim scholars to allow this to be practiced without comment. We can recall the association between spitting and sorcery that is implied in Q. 113:4 and the associations between

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<sup>208</sup> Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa'* [recension of Suwayd b. Sa'īd al-Hadathānī], 509 (no. 730). al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1455-6 (no. 5750) (*kitāb al-tibb*, *bāb* 40). Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:332 (no. 3886) (*kitāb al-tibb*, *bāb* 19). al-Rabī' b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 255 (no. 649).

the two present in some Mediterranean and Near Eastern traditions. It is possible that saliva and spitting were particularly associated with sorcery in Mesopotamia in late antiquity, since they are often mentioned alongside sorcery in the Aramaic incantation bowls, as we saw in Chapter One. Perhaps this is why the Kūfan scholars in particular seem to have been troubled by the presence of saliva/spitting in incantations, especially as compared with the nonchalance of their Ḥijāzī colleagues.

This explanation is not entirely satisfying. To the extent that saliva was associated with magic, I would again note its presence also in the context of healing rituals in the late ancient world. For this aspect or valence of saliva to be completely overridden by a sorcerous connotation is relatively unknown in late ancient traditions that I have found. Moreover, the fact that the Baṣran scholar Muḥammad Ibn Sīrīn is reported to have known of “no problem” (*lā a lamu bi-hā ba’s<sup>an</sup>*) with “a *ruqya* in which one blows spittle” (*al-ruqya yunfithu fī-hā*) somewhat diminishes the likelihood that spitting was inextricably associated with sorcery in Mesopotamia.<sup>209</sup> Were it only *naftḥ* that was criticized, we might explain this by reference to Q. 113:4. However, as we have seen, the criticized practices also include *tafl*, *af*, and *nafkḥ*.

A second possibility is that the rejection of incantations that included spitting is an early position that Kūfan scholars adopted from Jewish practice. In his article “Magian Cheese: An Archaic Problem in Islamic Law,” Michael Cook draws upon rabbinic sources to suggest that the rejection of the consumption of Magian cheese (i.e. cheese produced by Zoroastrians) found in some early *ḥadīth* sources “started from a position taken from Jewish law, and moved away from

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<sup>209</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:36 (no. 23914). Abū Bakr > Abū Usāma [Ḥammād b. Usāma] > Ibn ‘Awn > Muḥammad [Ibn Sīrīn]. The early *ḥadīth* scholar ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234/849) states “no one is more reliable in [the *ḥadīth* of] Ibn Sīrīn than Ayyūb [al-Sakhtiyānī] and Ibn ‘Awn.” Cited and translated in Eerik Dickinson, *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: the Taqdīma of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (240/854-327/938)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001), 95.

it towards the more liberal attitudes of classical Islam.”<sup>210</sup> I suggest that the rejection of spitting/blowing in incantations was similarly an early Kūfan position that was adopted in some way from Jewish practice, but was abandoned over time.

Cook’s argument for a correspondence between Jewish and early Islamic practice draws upon the similarity in reasoning and issues found in the Jewish and Islamic discussions of whether it is permissible to eat Magian cheese. A similar set of comparisons can be made in regard to the Jewish and Islamic discussions of spitting in incantations, which offer several parallels between the early Muslim jurists’ and the rabbis’ comments. Most prominently, that the issue of spitting in incantations is discussed at all in both bodies of texts is striking, as this issue is not a point of worry in any other traditions (pagan or Christian) that I have come across.<sup>211</sup> Secondly, that the incantation (*ruqya* or שִׁחָה) is acceptable so long as it does not include spitting is found in both bodies of texts: in Rav’s qualification that “only one that spits” loses his share in the World to Come, for example, and in al-Ḍaḥḥāk’s acceptance of an incantation so long as it does not include spitting. Thirdly, the idea that the controversy involves the combination of God’s name with spit appears as an opinion in both the Jewish and Islamic discussions: we see this in the Babylonian Talmud traditions from Rabbi Yoḥanan stating that “the Divine Name may not be mentioned over spittle” and in ‘Ikrima’s statement that “I detest that one say in *al-ruqya*, ‘In the name of God, *uff*.’”

Other details of the discussions of Islamic *ruqyas* also exhibit parallels to the rabbinic discussions of whispered incantations, particularly the situations in which these acts are deemed allowable. The situations in which *ruqyas* are deemed acceptable overlap in many cases with the “whisperings” explicitly allowed in rabbinic texts, i.e. against snakes, scorpions, and the evil

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<sup>210</sup> Michael Cook, “Magian Cheese: An Archaic Problem in Islamic Law,” *BSOAS* 47.3 (1984): 466.

<sup>211</sup> Similar to *ibid.*, 465.

eye.<sup>212</sup> The even more liberal statement ascribed to Muḥammad—“If one of you is able to do something to help his brother, then do it”—parallels, as I noted above, the rabbinic statement that “anything that heals is not of the ‘Ways of the Amorites.’” Incantations that involve spitting to treat eye infections/diseases are described in both traditions, though admittedly the importance of this parallel is perhaps less significant since “this cure was well known in the ancient world.”<sup>213</sup> The situations in which incantations were deemed acceptable thus seem to be similar in these two traditions.

These correspondences might appear too general to prove a connection between the Jewish and Islamic traditions on spitting during incantations. Yet the possibility of a connection between these early Islamic and Jewish traditions is further indicated by the presence of Jewish figures in Islamic texts that involve the usage of incantations.<sup>214</sup> In one *ḥadīth*, when the caliph Abū Bakr visits his sick daughter (and the Prophet’s wife) ‘Ā’isha, he finds a Jewish woman performing a *ruqya* for her (*Yahūdiyyat<sup>um</sup> tarqī-hā*). Abū Bakr does not discourage this, but orders the Jewish woman to “incant her with the Book of God” (*arqī-hā bi-kitāb<sup>i</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup>*).<sup>215</sup> In a story offering a more constrictive position in regard to Jewish healers, Ibn Mas‘ūd is upset by his wife’s seeking a *ruqya* from a Jew, calling this the work of Satan.<sup>216</sup> A more lenient perspective than Ibn Mas‘ūd’s seems to have been common, since seeking out “People of the Book” in order

<sup>212</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:28-31 (no. 23876-89).

<sup>213</sup> On the Jewish traditions, see Doering, “Much Ado about Nothing,” 220-3. Instances of *ruqya* usage for eye issues that include spitting (specifically *naḥīh*) appear in Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:35-6 (nos. 23910, 23913). On saliva and eye disease, see Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood*, 168n.43; Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the literary transmission, beliefs and manners of Palestine in the I century B.C.E. - IV century C.E.* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 187-8n.62.

<sup>214</sup> Ze’ev Maghen makes a similar case in regard to the presence of Jewish figures in Islamic narratives about sexual positions and the connection between Jewish and Islamic perspectives on this issue. Maghen, *After Hardship Cometh Ease: The Jews as Backdrop for Muslim Moderation* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 192-4.

<sup>215</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:39-40 (no. 23928). Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa’* [Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā], 2:943 (*kitāb al-‘ayn, bāb al-ta’wūdh wa-l-ruqya min al-maraḍ*). Idem, *al-Muwaṭṭa’* [recension of Suwayd b. Sa‘īd al-Hadathānī], 510 (no. 731). Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 96. Cited in Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 107.

<sup>216</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 4:328-9 (no. 3879) (*kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb 17*). See Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 107-8.

to receive a *ruqya* was reportedly deemed acceptable by al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820)<sup>217</sup> and by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and the Egyptian Mālikī scholar ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/813),<sup>218</sup> all of whom cite the aforementioned *ḥadīth* about Abū Bakr and the Jewish woman. Noticeably, in these cases in which a religious affiliation is given for the “People of the Book” who performed *ruqyas*, they are uniformly Jewish rather than Christian.

That there is a connection between Jewish and early Islamic definitions of acceptable incantations—and specifically the early Kūfan rejection of incantation performance involving spitting—seems plausible given the picture of interaction that these texts draw for us. Discussing these issues, Rubin writes that “it becomes clear that the Jewish legacy of therapeutic magic was widespread in early Islamic society, and gained the support of eminent scholars.”<sup>219</sup> Shaul Shaked similarly writes about the amuletic texts found in the Cairo Geniza that “in the field of magic, perhaps even more than in several other fields of literary production, the contact between Jews and Muslims was close and intimate. We know that Muslims used the services of Jews ... Here there was no need to bridge the worlds of Judaism and Islam. Magic was one of those solid bridges.”<sup>220</sup> These scholars agree that the connection between Jewish and early Islamic traditions of “magic,” including that used for healing, was strong.

If this is the case, it is reasonable to assume that there was a connection between late ancient Jewish and Islamic conceptions of what kinds of incantations were considered acceptable. If spitting during an incantation was considered to deprive one of a “share in the

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<sup>217</sup> Asked “can the People of the Book perform *ruqyas* for Muslims” (*a-yarqī ahl<sup>u</sup> al-kitāb<sup>i</sup> al-muslimīn*), al-Shāfi‘ī responds, “Yes, if they use what is known from the book of God” (*na ‘m idhā raqū bi-mā yu ‘rafu min kitāb<sup>i</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup>*). al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 9:349 (*kitāb al-ḍaḥāyā, bāb* 90). Cited in Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 107.

<sup>218</sup> “Ibn Wahb said, ‘I do not find detestable a *ruqya* of the People of the Book ... and he [Mālik] did not observe detestableness in that’” (*qāla Ibn Wahb la akrahu ruqyat<sup>a</sup> ahl<sup>i</sup> al-kitāb<sup>i</sup> ... wa lam ya ‘khudh bi-karāhiyyat<sup>ih</sup> fī dhālika*). Ibn Abī Zayd, *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*, 266 (no. 196). Cited in Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 107.

<sup>219</sup> Rubin, “Muḥammad the Exorcist,” 107.

<sup>220</sup> Shaked, “Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam,” 107. Similarly Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 195.



World to Come” in late ancient Jewish traditions, that early Muslims would have similarly found this practice detestable is easy to understand. Evidence suggesting the existence of “a noticeable Jewish presence in early Kufa ... in which Jewish practice might have been accessible to some [Muslim] sectarians” can further explain the overlap in ideas of ritual practice in this particular location of the early Islamic world.<sup>221</sup>

I would suggest, however, that the connection between Jewish and Islamic tradition pointed out by Rubin, Shaked, and others is best understood not in regard solely to some sphere of activity commonly constructed as “magical” by modern scholars, such as the production and usage of amulets and incantations. Instead, the connections between these traditions involve the definition(s) of what practices constitute “magic” as opposed to legitimate practice. As Dov Noy writes in discussing the rabbinic case, “medicine and healing, and whatever was connected with them, were part of an ideology, and the controversial issues of this domain were regarded as central topics within the Jewish society.”<sup>222</sup> The line between acceptable medicine and illicit “magic” was a contested field and the discussions of *ruqyas* and “whispers” that we find in the early Islamic and rabbinic sources are explicitly about distinguishing what practices were and were not “magical” or “idolatrous.” It is not only a connection that we see between these traditions regarding what practices were understood as effective, but also a connection regarding what practices (effective or not) should be considered within the sphere of acceptable practice. Jews and Muslims were not practicing magic in similar ways, but rather they were performing similar rituals that they defined as *not* being magic.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 124-5 citing further literature. Josef van Ess writes, discussing anthropomorphic descriptions of God found in Jewish and Kūfan Islamic sources: “Was Islam, then, the continuation of Judaism, as has been suggested anew in recent studies? Perhaps in Kūfa, but only there; in other places the constellation was different.” Josef van Ess, “The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam” (The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University, March 3, 1988), 13.

<sup>222</sup> Dov Noy, “Talmudic-Midrashic ‘Healing Stories’ as a Narrative Genre,” *Korot* 9 (1988): 125.

Related to these issues is the usage of healing practices for distinguishing sectarian identities. The rabbinic sources offer particularly interesting examples of the healing rituals as sites where identities could be determined: Mishnah Sanhedrin 10 and its parallels are explicit in stating that how one performs a healing incantation distinguishes one as either inside or outside the community of Israel. I have suggested that this rabbinic rejection of the usage of saliva in healing incantations is best read within the context of rabbinic efforts to distinguish, through the performance of ritual, acceptably Jewish from unacceptably sectarian (and perhaps specifically Christian) identities.

Eighth-century Muslims were similarly interested in defining Islamic ritual performance, and this interest may explain the similar discomfort that we find in some early *ḥadīth* sources in regard to the usage of saliva and breath in healing incantations. This early Islamic boundary, however, appears not to have been quite as firm as was the rabbinic one. In the texts allowing Muslims to seek healing incantations from Jews, we see that this was a field in which the line dividing Muslim from Jew was not particularly strong in the eighth century C.E. This helps to explain the discomfort with spittle in incantations that we find in the Successor opinions from this period: Jewish misgivings about this practice likely affected the evolution of specifically Islamic healing rituals. Rather than drawing a specific sectarian distinction, the Kūfan traditionists' rejection of spitting appears to have been a cultural practice adopted (or adapted) from Jewish practice. With time, this early stipulation was dropped, as we see in al-Qurṭubī's and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's unworried statements about incantations that include spitting, cited in Chapter One.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> In the Magian cheese example, Cook suggests that, in contrast to the lenient attitudes found in classical Sunnī sources, "hostile attitudes, by contrast, bear the marks of archaism—they crop up among the minor sects, or in non-Prophetic Sunnī Tradition, or as in implicit background to the Imāmī traditions." Cook, "Magian Cheese," 462. This

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn upon early Islamic *ḥadīth* and rabbinic literature to ascertain details about the ritual practices (and the ideas about ritual practice) of Muslims of the late seventh and early eighth centuries C.E. I have drawn attention to the role of a particular bodily practice, spitting, in demarcating religious identities during this time period. It appears that this bodily activity had acquired or had begun to acquire particularly significant valences in this period, perhaps inflected by Christian ritual practice. The harsh punishment that the rabbis mete out for performing this ritual indicates that spitting had significant connotations for late ancient Jews. Similarly, that so many eighth-century Muslim jurists expressed displeasure with this ritual indicates that it likewise mattered to Muslims of this period.

Unlike the Prophet's usage of his blessed saliva (see Chapter Two), here we find that spitting could be a bodily ritual that was marked as religiously problematic. Indeed, the stories of the Prophet's blowing spittle during incantations are cited in Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf* in opposition to the Kūfan Successors' very negative assessments of this activity. We see here a distinct clash between the stories of what the Prophet practiced and the opinions of early Muslim scholars regarding these same (kinds of) practices. The resonance of spitting was sufficiently powerful and multivalent to stimulate not only stories of the Prophet's healing with it, but also debates about the acceptability of such healing methods for Islamic ritual identity.

In this formative period of Christianity, rabbinic Judaism, and Islam, ritual usages of the body carried a plethora of significant, often contradictory meanings. The Christian rituals involving breath and spittle demonstrate that even such effervescent corporeal substances held great power. Indeed, the rabbinic displeasure with such rituals further indicates the importance of

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perhaps dovetails with the continued discomfort with *naḥkh* in *ruqyas* that is found in later Imāmī traditions, cited above.

these same corporeal practices and parts. Religious differences were mapped onto the body, such that its usage was a guide for identifying communal membership.

Yet the multivalency of the body also allowed it to hold mutually contradictory meanings simultaneously. Not only could the body be read in different ways—as we see in these very different interpretations of saliva—but divergent readings might be embodied and acknowledged simultaneously. Such paradoxical understandings of the body will be studied in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Splitting Hairs: The Paradox of the Prophetic Body

Chapter Two opened with ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s description of Muḥammad’s Companions scooping up the Prophet’s spit, used ablution water, and fallen hairs during the events of al-Ḥudaybiyya. As we saw in that chapter, there are late ancient hagiographic parallels to this veneration of saintly/prophetic bodily fluids in stories about Daniel of Sketis, Apa Apollo, Lupicinus, and other figures represented in Near Eastern Christian texts of the fifth to ninth centuries. I argued that the representation of Muḥammad’s spit, breath, and ablution water as transmitters of a *baraka* or “healing efflux” shared much with the representations of late ancient saints’ miraculous bodily fluids, and that this representation of the Prophet likely developed in a literary and cultural environment similar to that which produced these late ancient Christian hagiographies, in which the “holiness” of individuals was understood to be present in their bodies and their bodily “emanations.”

The other bodily objects that ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd described being snapped up by the Prophet’s Companions were Muḥammad’s fallen hairs. According to ‘Urwa’s narration about al-Ḥudaybiyya, among Muḥammad’s Companions “a hair of his [the Prophet’s] does not fall without their taking it.”<sup>1</sup> In stories about Muḥammad’s Farewell Pilgrimage, we again hear of the Companions catching the Prophet’s falling hair, as in a tradition reported by Anas b. Mālīk: “I saw the shaver shaving the Prophet. His Companions circled him, not allowing any of his hair to

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<sup>1</sup> *Wa lā yasquṭu min sha‘ar<sup>h</sup>-hi shay<sup>um</sup> illā akhadhū-hu*. Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 745. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 503 (adapted here).

fall but into a man's hands."<sup>2</sup> In some reports about his shaving, the Prophet himself encourages his followers to take his hair, commanding Abū Ṭalḥa al-Anṣārī, "Divide/distribute it amongst the people."<sup>3</sup> In these stories, the Prophet's hairs are not simply thrown away, but saved by those around him as precious objects. As they had done with the Prophet's saliva and ablution water, those around Muḥammad similarly save his hair, and are permitted to do so by Muḥammad himself.

Despite these testimonies, some early Islamic sources are ambiguous regarding the fate of the Prophet's discarded hair. According to a story contained in Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*, the Companions did not catch the Prophet's falling hair at al-Ḥudaybiyya, but instead his and the Companions' hairs were made to miraculously disappear when "God sent a violent wind that carried away their hairs, casting them into the Ḥaram."<sup>4</sup> In their respective sections on the Farewell Pilgrimage, al-Wāqidī and Ibn Sa'd include stories about the distribution of the Prophet's hairs to his Companions, yet they also state that the Prophet ordered that his hair (along with his nail clippings) should be buried.<sup>5</sup> Without reconciling these contradictory reports, both al-Wāqidī and Ibn Sa'd simply place these very different stories one after the other.

Thus, the Prophet's hairs were either: (1) distributed amongst the people, (2) blown away by a divine wind, (3) or buried underground. These discrepancies signal differing ideas about these remnants of the Prophet's body. In the first of these alternatives, the willing distribution of the Prophet's hair indicates an acceptance of the spreading and accessing of the Prophetic body

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<sup>2</sup> *Anas qāla: ra'aytu al-nabī wa al-ḥallāq<sup>a</sup> yaḥliq<sup>u</sup>-hu wa qad aṭāfa bi-hi aṣḥāb<sup>u</sup>-hu mā yurīdūna an yaqa' sha'rat<sup>u</sup>-hu illā fī yaday rajul<sup>m</sup>*. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii:135. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8:58 (no. 2325) (*kitāb al-ṣaḍā'il, bāb* 19). Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:133, 3:137.

<sup>3</sup> *Iqṣam-hu bayna al-nās*. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (*kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb bayān anna al-sunna yawm al-naḥr an yarmī thumma yanḥara thumma yaḥliq<sup>a</sup>*); al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'*, 215 (no. 912) (*kitāb al-ḥajj, bāb* 73). al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 1:227.

<sup>4</sup> *Ba'atha Allāh<sup>u</sup> rīḥ<sup>an</sup> 'āṣif<sup>an</sup> fa-iḥtamalat ash'ār<sup>a</sup>-hum fa-alqat-hā fī-l-Ḥaram*. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/i: 76.

<sup>5</sup> al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 3:1108-9. Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 542. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/i: 125.

by his followers. The second and third alternatives indicate a rejection (and perhaps some discomfort?) with any such distribution and call for the hair to be safely placed away from grabbing hands. While issues of Islamic legal precedent regarding the way that the Prophet treated his shaved hair likely influenced these narratives, another concern was perhaps more immediately present to early Muslim storytellers: who had access to pieces of the Prophet's body.

Such a concern is articulated in some later Islamic sources, in which the Prophet explicitly states that one's hair should be buried so that it might not fall into the wrong hands and, specifically, so that "the sorcerers among men will not make mischief with it" (*lā yatala 'abu bi-hi saḥarat banī Ādam*).<sup>6</sup> It is likewise reported that 'Ā'isha "used to order that nails, hair, and cupped blood be buried, fearing that one be bewitched by means of it."<sup>7</sup> The relevance of such concerns is reflected in a story recorded in early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* sources in which the Prophet himself is the victim of such aggressive magic through hair collected from his comb. In several versions of this story, a Jewish sorcerer named Labīd b. al-A'ṣam uses this hair in a magical ritual to bewitch Muḥammad, leaving him mentally confused and weak of body. To counteract this magic, the angel Gabriel reveals the location of the magical material, including the hair, which is then buried or burned, releasing Muḥammad from the spell. Perhaps the burial of the Prophet's shaved hair negates the worry that this dangerous incident might have been repeated if the hair had been freely distributed.<sup>8</sup>

In a variety of sociological contexts, hair is made to stand in for the whole of a person, acting as *pars pro toto* for the individual's body and self. An example is the usage of hair as

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 15 vols., ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī and 'Abd al-Fattāh Muḥammad al-Ḥulw (Riyadh: Dār al-Ālam al-Kutub, 1418/1997), 1:119.

<sup>7</sup> *Kānat 'Ā'isha ta'muru bi-dafnī al-azfārī wa-l-sha'rī wa damī al-maḥājimī makhāfat<sup>an</sup> an yuṣḥara fī-hi*. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-Ṭibb*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> This story will be discussed later in the chapter.

relic, as an embodiment of the holy man and his power. Access to a holy person's hair signals access to the power understood to be present within him, mediated through this fragment of his body. Similarly, in rituals of "aggressive magic," hair can likewise function as *pars pro toto* of the individual who is to be manipulated. In this case, access to the victim's hair allows power over his body and self, including his health, mind, and passions.

The early Islamic stories of the Prophet's hair represent both of these cases: hair as relic, and hair as magical material. Strikingly, the Prophet's hair functions as both a source of power as well as a source of sickness and potential death. The Prophet's hair imparts power to others in both scenarios, yet, depending upon the context, this power may be *from* the Prophet's body or *over* the Prophet's body. The fragmentation of the Prophet's body allows its access by individuals, either for good or for ill.

The presence of both types of stories in the early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* sources illustrates an ambiguity in the Prophet's representation in early Islamic texts. In the usage of the Prophet's hair as relic, we witness a hagiographical treatment of the Prophet very similar to that exhibited in late ancient Christian veneration of saints' relics: here, the Prophet stands greater than a normal man, with a divine power (*baraka*) that resides in his body even after death. In the story of Muḥammad's bewitchment, a very different depiction of Muḥammad is offered. Unlike late ancient Christian hagiographical sources that often paint the saint as an *alter Christus*, impervious to sorcerous attacks, early Islamic sources depict Muḥammad as a victim of a sorcerer's spell and thus as a mere man with a body as frail and susceptible to sorcery as anyone else's. Muḥammad's hair thus marks him as both greater than and equal to humankind, illustrating conflicting and paradoxical notions of the Prophet's nature that circulated in the seventh, eighth, and later centuries.



## “My most valuable possession”: the Prophet’s Hair in Early Islam

Many scholars have noted that hairs of Muḥammad appear as venerated objects in early Islamic texts: commenters upon this phenomenon have included early Orientalist pioneers such as Ignaz Goldziher, David Margoliouth, and Samuel Zwemer, and, more recently, Leor Halevi, Josef Meri, and Brannon Wheeler. Yet the significance of these textual witnesses as evidence of a reverence for hair of the Prophet Muḥammad—both ideologically and in practice—in early Islamic religiosity has been largely minimized, even in studies specifically examining Muḥammad’s relics. Part of wider trends in the academic study of religion, scholarship on early Islamic veneration of Muḥammad’s hairs (and on Islamic relic veneration more generally) has often dismissed such practice as “an expression of individual piety and superstition” and a “low fetishistic form among the common populace.”<sup>9</sup> Practices and ideas involving relics are often set in contradistinction to a reified and unitary “orthodox Islam” that is assumed to have discouraged both relic and icon veneration from the very beginning of Islamic history.<sup>10</sup> Patricia Crone voices

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<sup>9</sup> Goldziher, “Veneration of Saints in Islam,” 322-4, 327, 329. Zwemer is more polemical and explicitly Protestant in his language, stating that relic veneration is reflective “that a great deal of Animism persists in popular Islam even today.” He writes that “superstition and relic-worship die hard ... The Reformation under Luther and Calvin, for example, was not able to exterminate relic worship in Medieval Europe.” He classifies relic veneration as a “species of *shirk*” that is criticized by “austere, orthodox Moslems.” Samuel M. Zwemer, “Hairs of the Prophet,” in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume. Part I*, ed. Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi (Budapest, 1948), 48-54. On the marginalization and under-theorization of the study of relics in modern religious studies, see: Gregory Schopen, “Relic,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 256-68; Alexandra Walsham, “Introduction: Relics and Remains,” in *Relics and Remains: Past and Present* Supplement 5, ed. Alexandra Walsham (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15-16. As Robert Sharf notes, when writing on relics “scholars tend to fall back, implicitly rather than explicitly, upon some version of animism, sympathetic magic, or even primitive mentality”: “On the Allure of Buddhist Relics,” *Representations* 66 (1999): 79. More specifically regarding Islamic studies’ inattention to relics, see: Walsham, “Introduction: Relics and Remains,” 16; Josef Meri, “Relics of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam,” in Walsham, *Relics and Remains*, 97-9. Robinson provides a similar critique of earlier scholarship on the emergence of a cult of living saints in Islam in “Prophecy and holy men in early Islam,” 259, citing Goldziher, “Veneration of Saints in Islam,” 262ff. and 332ff. Bernd Radtke likewise writes: “it is totally unacceptable in mainstream Islamic scholarship for the cult of the saint ... to be described or analysed under the rubric of popular Islam or of quaint folk superstition”: “Between Projection and Suppression: Some Considerations concerning the Study of Sufism,” in *Shī‘a Islam, Sects, and Sufism: Historical Dimensions, Religious Practice and Methodological Considerations*, ed. Frederick De Jong (Utrecht : M.Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1992), 78-9.

<sup>10</sup> Such ideas appear also in discussions of Christian relic practices, using Islamic comparisons as a foil. See: Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

the assumptions of most scholars of religion when she asserts that, unlike Christian ecclesiastical acceptance of relic and icon veneration, “in Islam, by contrast, such concessions to practice were staunchly refused.”<sup>11</sup>

Such marginalization of early Islamic relic veneration has recently been called into question by Nancy Khalek, who has argued that “the encounter with Byzantine Christian praxis had a strong impact on Muslim worship in the arena of relic veneration.”<sup>12</sup> In her study of Umayyad patronage of the bodily relics of John the Baptist in the Great Mosque in Damascus, Khalek finds that “relics . . . were wholly accepted and absorbed into the Umayyad program of elevating the status of Damascus into *terra sancta*.”<sup>13</sup> She writes that the cult of John the Baptist “is but one aspect of the broader phenomenon of relic and saint veneration in early Islamic Syria” that “would come to fruition in and around Damascus . . . with the full benefit of the long-standing tradition of relic veneration in Byzantine Syria, and in dialogue with the particular theological elements of Byzantine Christianity.”<sup>14</sup> As she suggests more generally, “in late seventh- and early eighth-century Damascus, Christian devotion to objects of veneration directly informed early Muslim sensibilities regarding the potency of contact and corporeal relics.”<sup>15</sup> Khalek makes a forceful case for the presence and relevance of relic veneration in early Islamic Syria and demonstrates that veneration of the relics of John the Baptist was not just a component of “individual piety” or the religiosity of the “common populace,” but was in fact “part of the

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1981), 10; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 273-9.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *JSAI* 2 (1980): 64 n.24.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 94.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

early Islamic process of identity formation as publicly articulated” through the patronage of the Umayyad administration.<sup>16</sup>

While there is little firm evidence for early Islamic imperial patronage of a cult of Muḥammad’s relics on the level that Khalek identifies for the cult of John the Baptist in Umayyad Damascus, it is clear that relics of the Prophet Muḥammad were also venerated in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. An example comparable to the Umayyad installation of John the Baptist’s relics in the Great Mosque of Damascus is “the reported attempt by [the Umayyad caliph] al-Walīd, like ‘Abd al-Malik and Mu‘āwīya before him, to transfer the Prophet’s staff and/or *minbar* from Madīna to Damascus.”<sup>17</sup>

In regard to more portable relics of the Prophet, we find mention of the collection and veneration of the Prophet’s cloak, cup, shoes, swords, and hairs in many early texts: both in non-canonical *akhbār* and *ḥadīth* texts as well as in the canonical *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.<sup>18</sup> For example, in regard to the Prophet’s hair, both Ibn Sa‘d and al-Bukhārī include in their respective collections of *aḥādīth* a tradition in which the Baṣran scholar Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728) notes his possession of hair of the Prophet that he had received from his teacher, the prominent traditionist Anas b. Mālīk (d. 93/713). The Kūfan traditionist ‘Abīda b. ‘Amr al-Salmānī (d. 72/691-2) says to Ibn Sīrīn in response, “If I had one of his hairs, it would be dearer to me than all the gold and silver in the world.”<sup>19</sup> In the version cited by al-Bukhārī, ‘Abīda

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>17</sup> Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the makings of an Umayyad visual culture* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001), 107-8. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 2/i:92-3; Morony, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 101-2.

<sup>18</sup> David Margoliouth, “Relics of the Prophet Mohammed” offers a useful collection of *ḥadīth* citations related to Muḥammad’s relics. Goldziher himself notes that “even the oldest of the biographical accounts of the Prophet are permeated by belief in the beneficial powers of everything belonging to him or emanating from him.” Goldziher, “Veneration of Saints in Islam,” 323.

<sup>19</sup> *Qāla ‘Abīda: li-an yakūna ‘indī min-hu sha‘rat<sup>m</sup> aḥabbu ilayya min kull al-ṣafrā’ wa-l-bayḍā’ fī-l-arḍ*. Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 3:505-6. ‘Abīda was “one of the most important early *fuqahā’* of Kūfa.” Juynboll, *Encyclopedia*

states more dramatically: “If I had a strand of those hairs, it would be dearer to me than the world and everything in it.”<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the collections of al-Wāqidī, Ibn Sa‘d, al-Bukhārī, and Muslim all include accounts describing the specific circumstances under which the Prophet’s hairs were collected and identifying the Prophetic Companions who collected, distributed, and held these Prophetic hairs. Most prominent amongst these are the stories of the distribution of the Prophet’s shaved hair during the events of al-Ḥudaybiyya and the Farewell Pilgrimage, and the citation of these as the occasions when Abū Ṭalḥa al-Anṣārī, Khālīd b. al-Walīd, and the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha collected their strands of the Prophet’s hair.<sup>21</sup> For example, al-Wāqidī relates, in a report attributed to the caliph Abū Bakr:

He said: I asked ‘Ā’isha, from where is this hair that is with you? She replied, “Indeed the Messenger of God, when he shaved his head during the pilgrimage, dispersed his hair among the people, and we took what the people took.”<sup>22</sup>

The collection of the Prophet’s hair is thus situated in history, and ‘Ā’isha’s precedent for collecting and retaining his hair appears alongside the precedent of other Prophetic Companions. However, we also find less public, more intimate circumstances for the collection of Prophetic relics, such as the Companion Umm Sulaym’s collection of the Prophet’s hair and sweat while he slept.<sup>23</sup> In both cases, these stories mention specific occasions on which the collection of the

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of *Canonical Ḥadīth*, 238n.2. On him, see also: Michael Cook, “The opponents of the writing of tradition in early Islam,” *Arabica* 44 (1997): 437-530, s.v. index.

<sup>20</sup> *Li-an takāna ‘indī sha‘rat<sup>m</sup> min-hu aḥabbu ilayya min al-dunyā wa mā fī-hā*. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 55 (no. 170) (*kitāb al-wuḍū’*, *bāb* 33). Cited and translated in Meri, “Relics of Piety,” 104.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see: al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 2:615; Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 303.

<sup>22</sup> al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 3:1108-9; Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 542.

<sup>23</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1568 (no. 6281) (*kitāb al-isti’dhān*, *bāb* 41). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8:64-5 (no. 2331-2) (*kitāb al-faḍā’il*, *bāb* 22). See Meri, “Relics of Piety,” 104-5; Brannon M. Wheeler, “Gift of the Body in Islam: The Prophet Muhammad’s Camel Sacrifice and Distribution of Hair and Nails at his Farewell Pilgrimage,” *Numen* 57.3 (2010): 360-4.

Prophet's hair is said to have occurred, placing the events in (sacred) history and in the possession of prominent early Muslims who encountered the living Prophet.

These stories authenticate the Prophet's relics and function much like the texts and oral stories that circulated alongside late ancient Christian relics "that trace [the relics'] movement from time to time and place to place, and ... in turn serve to authorize the relics' authenticity and power."<sup>24</sup> For example, a seventh-century collection of Christian relics in Lombardy includes a set of twenty-eight glass ampullae that apparently contained the oil of saints. Accompanying these objects is "a *notula* or catalogue enumerating which saints and martyrs were represented in the oil contained by the ampullae and confirming that they had been sent to Theolinda [the seventh-century queen of Lombardy] by [Pope] Gregory, and a number of papyrus strips (or *pittacia*)[,] one of which was originally attached to the neck of each glass ampulla labelling its contents by marking which saint's oil it contained."<sup>25</sup> The stories about Muḥammad's hair similarly provide narratives about these objects' genesis from the Prophet and their trajectories through history.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kevin Trainor, "Pars pro toto: On Comparing Relic Practices." *Numen* 57 (2010): 269. On such textual accompaniments to relics: Gillian Clark, "Translating Relics," 168, 173; Cynthia Hahn, "What do Reliquaries Do for Relics?" *Numen* 57 (2010): 296, 301. Wheeler has compared the transmission of the Prophet's relics to the transmission of *ḥadīth*, with these physical and textual relics serving as "a physical manifestation of the otherwise intangible link between the prophet Muhammad and later generations of followers." Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 75. Flood similarly describes the Prophet's robe as a "visual manifestation of an *isnād*." Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>25</sup> John Elsner, "Replicating Palestine and Reversing the Reformation: Pilgrimage and Collecting at Bobbio, Monza and Walshingham," *Journal of the History of Collections* 9.1 (1997): 121. This and other examples of labelled relics are cited in Georgia Frank, "Telling Jerusalem: Miracles and the Moveable Past in Late Antique Christianity," in *Objects in Motion: The Circulation of Religion and Sacred Objects in the Late Antique and Byzantine World*, ed. Hallie G. Meredith (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 49-50.

<sup>26</sup> Shoemaker compares the stories of Muḥammad's death and burial in Medina to Christian narratives "which aim to link a holy person and her or his death with a particular location claiming to possess her or his relics or shrine" and suggests that "the narratives of Muḥammad's death in Medina developed alongside the emergent veneration of Muḥammad's grave and the related transformation of Yathrib into the 'City of the Prophet.'" Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 260.

The attention given to relics of the Prophet Muḥammad by the early Umayyads and the references to relic veneration in early Islamic texts points to an approval of (and apparently participation in) such practices among the elite classes of Muslims in the seventh and eighth centuries. The inclusion of ‘Abīda’s statement by both Ibn Sa‘d and al-Bukhārī, for example, points to these authors’ ideological willingness to cite witnesses supportive of the veneration of the Prophet’s hair, if not their participation in such a cult.<sup>27</sup> Just as Peter Brown rejects a “two-tiered” understanding of late ancient Christianity that distinguishes between elite and popular religious practice and that places saint and relic veneration firmly in the latter category, I reject the idea that relic veneration was a practice inimical to “orthodox” Islamic thought and practice of the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>28</sup> Patrick Geary’s statement that “categories such as ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ have little meaning in terms of relic cults” applies to the Muslims of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries as much as it does to late ancient and medieval Christians.<sup>29</sup>

However, to the extent that modern scholarship has examined the significance of the Prophet’s relics in early Islam, attention has often focused on Muslim elites’ patronage of the Prophet’s relics for the purposes of religio-political legitimacy.<sup>30</sup> Barry Flood, for example, writes that the Umayyad installation of relics in the Damascus mosque “represents an attempt to capitalise on the sanctified or mythologized relics of an historical past in order to bolster the status and significance of the Umayyad capital, to garner for its cathedral mosque the visible

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<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note the statement by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Bukhārī’s scribe, that al-Bukhārī carried a hair of the Prophet with him in his clothing. *Qāla Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥātim al-Warrāq... qāla wa kāna ma ‘a-hu shay<sup>um</sup> min sha ‘r al-nabī fa-ja ‘ala fī malbūsi-hi*. Quoted in Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Hady al-sārī: muqaddimat Faḥ al-Bārī bi-sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Ṭaha ‘Abd al-Ru’ūf Sa‘d and Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Hawārī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, n.d.), 235.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 17-21. See also Schopen, “Relic,” 263-4.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Geary, “Sacred commodities: the circulation of medieval relics,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjan Appadurai (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 181. A similar point of view regarding the attribution of miracles to Muḥammad in the early period is found in Horowitz, “Growth of the Mohammed Legend,” 50.

<sup>30</sup> Goldizher, “Veneration of Saints in Islam,” 330. Margoliouth, “Relics of the Prophet Mohammed.” Meri, “Relics of Piety,” 103, 112-6. Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 74, 81, 87. M.E. McMillan, *The Meaning of Mecca: The Politics of Piety in Early Islam* (London: Saqi Books, 2011), 50.

trappings of religious authority and political power.”<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere he writes that the tenth-century efforts by “rival claimants to the caliphate” from the ‘Abbāsīd and the Fāṭimid dynasties to control the Prophet’s cloak (*burda*) reflect how “possession of the cloak (along with other relics of the Prophet such as his ring and staff) conferred a degree of legitimacy on its possessor by virtue of an indexical relation to earlier owners and ultimately to the Prophet himself.”<sup>32</sup>

The symbolic value of the Prophet’s relics undoubtedly affected their usage in many circumstances, similar to the usage of saints’ relics as items of legitimizing authority by political and religious elites in late antique and medieval Christianity.<sup>33</sup> As in the Christian case, however, there is evidence that in the late seventh and early eighth centuries the Prophet’s relics not only functioned as ideological representations of the Prophet’s authority, but also that a distinct power was understood to reside within the items themselves. From the texts under investigation here, it appears that the relics of the Prophet—particularly bodily relics such as his hairs—functioned as “locus[es] and conduit[s] of power” that “channel redemptive and intercessory forces and are vehicles of grace, blessing, and *baraka* in the guise of miracles of healing or inner enlightenment.”<sup>34</sup> Like the relic practices described in late ancient Christian texts, the usages of

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<sup>31</sup> Flood, *Great Mosque of Damascus*, 108.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, *Objects of Translation*, 78, 133. On the rivalry between the ‘Abbāsīds and Fāṭimīds over relics, see: Paul E. Walker, “Purloined Symbols of the Past: The Theft of Souvenirs and Sacred Relics in the Rivalry between the Abbasids and Fatimids,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri (New York: I.B. Tauris; London: Institute of Ismaili Studies: 2003), 364-87; Yūsuf Rāḡib, “Un épisode obscur d’histoire fatimide,” *Studia Islamica* 48 (1978): 125-32. In another example, ‘Ā’isha is describing brandishing the Prophet’s hair, sandal, and shirt in a politically fraught situation. See: Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 5, ed. S. D. F. Goitein (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 1936), 48-9, 88-9. Cited in Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 101.

<sup>33</sup> Noted by Flood, *Great Mosque of Damascus*, 108. See Brown, *Cult of the Saints*; Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Walsham, “Introduction: Relics and Remains,” 13. That the Prophet’s relics were understood and treated in this way by Muslims in the twelve century C.E. and later has been discussed at length in several studies, but considerably less attention has been given to the early Islamic period. For example, Daniella Talmon-Heller, citing Goldziher, states that “[i]n early Islam, the cult of relics was considered to be a despicable *bid’a*,” before then describing the Ayyūbid-era cult of relics: Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic piety in medieval Syria: mosques, cemeteries and sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146-1260)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 55. See

the Prophet's hair evidenced in early Islamic texts indicate that the hairs themselves were understood to contain power and were not merely signs pointing to the authority/power of the Prophet.<sup>35</sup>

Such an understanding of the Prophet's hair is displayed, for example, in texts that mention usage of his hair as a protective amulet. Several texts ascribe the Prophet's hair a role in the early Islamic conquests, crediting the many victories of the famous *futūḥ*-era military leader Khālid b. al-Walīd to the blessing brought to him by his wearing a cap (*qalansuwa*) containing hairs of the Prophet. An early version of this tradition appears in al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, which describes Khālid receiving a special portion of the Prophet's hair at the Farewell Pilgrimage:

Khālid b. al-Walīd spoke to [the Prophet] about [the Prophet's] forelock, so that he gave it to him when he shaved. Khālid placed it in the front of his cap, and he did not confront an army without dispersing it. Abū Bakr said: I looked at Khālid b. al-Walīd and thought about how we had battled him at Uḥud, Khandaq, al-Ḥudaybiyya, and every place where

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also: Meri, "Aspects of *Baraka*"; Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> I disagree with Wheeler's assertion that in traditions about the Prophet's hair and other bodily relics they "do not appear to be understood primarily as means to venerate the Prophet Muhammad's physical body . . . By contrast, the prophet Muhammad's relics and their distribution seem to reflect and stress his physical absence, and the concurrent spread of Islam to the widespread centers of civilization where these relics have been carried." Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 80. The traditions I study here clearly focus upon the miraculous nature of pieces of the Prophet's physical body, with little importance placed upon the relics' location in specific geographic locales. Similar arguments that the relics of the Buddha "stress his absence" appear in Buddhist studies, but have been critiqued by Robert Sharf, who writes that "with few exceptions Buddhist sources do not speak of relics in terms of absent presences or present absences. On the contrary, the materials at our disposal suggest that relics were treated as presences pure and simple." Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," 78. In a later article, Wheeler states that reports about the distribution of the Prophet's hair "might be related to the many reports of the miracles performed by the Prophet, especially those associated with the unusual nature of his body." Wheeler, "Gift of the Body in Islam," 359. However, he then suggests that "the Prophet's distribution of hair and nails as relics are [*sic*] not best understood to be magical links to his living presence. As dead pieces of his body, his hair and nails are reminders of his sacrifice [of a camel while on *hajj* and/or *umra*]," drawing a connection between the occasion of the Prophet's distribution of his hair and nails, his sacrifice at Mecca, and "cosmogonic myths" about the sacrifice of the body. *Ibid.*, 373 and 365. Whatever the validity of Wheeler's comparison of this story to "cosmogonic myths," I would argue that it is quite clear that these stories emphasize something like a "living presence" in the Prophet's hair that does provide a "magical link" to some divine force. On relics in the Christian and Buddhist traditions understood to be "alive" in some sense, see: Schopen, "Relic," 261-2, 266.



we encountered him. Then I saw him on the day of the sacrifice when he came before the Prophet and his camel, hamstrung for the sacrifice. While the Messenger of God was shaving his head, I saw [Khālid] say, “O Messenger of God, your forelock! Do not pass it to anyone but me. I will ransom my father and my mother for you!” I saw him take the forelock of the Messenger of God and place it on his mouth and eyes.<sup>36</sup>

The testimony ascribed here to the first caliph Abū Bakr implies that Khālid’s strength as a military commander was tied to his possession of the Prophet’s forelock, contrasting his losses at the battles of Uḥud, Khandaq and al-Ḥudaybiyya (all fought before Khālid had converted to Islam) with his subsequent successes after receiving the Prophet’s hair. Khālid keeps the hair with him in his cap, using it is a sort of amulet that protects him and/or grants him victory by its physical presence on his person.

The association between Khālid b. al-Walīd’s victories and the hairs of the Prophet suggests that some of the prominent military successes of the early Islamic conquests were assisted, if not enabled, by these relics of the Prophet’s body. The Prophet’s hair is understood to have transmitted a divine protection to Khālid that enabled his military success, thus situating the Prophet’s hair in the midst of Islamic salvation history. This idea also appears in a tradition about Khālid’s role in the important battle of al-Yarmūk in Syria in 636 C.E.:

Khālid b. al-Walīd had a cap on the day of al-Yarmūk. He said [to his troops], “Find it! Find it!” But they couldn’t find it. Eventually they found it, and it was a very worn-out old cap. Khālid said: “When the Prophet went on *‘umra*, his head was shaved and the

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<sup>36</sup> al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 3:1108-9. Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 542 (adapted here). A shorter version of this story, narrated on the authority of al-Wāqidī and Ibn Sa’d, is found in Abū al-Faraj al-Isbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 21 vols. (Būlāq: Dār al-Kutub, 1868-9), 15:12. “The Prophet had shaved his head one day and Khālid took his hair and put it in his cap. When he had it with him, he did not encounter any army that he did not defeat” (*kāna rasūl Allāh qad ḥalaqa ra’s<sup>a</sup>-hu dhāt al-yawm fa-akhadha Khālid sha’r<sup>a</sup>-hu fa-ja’ala-hu fī qalansuwat<sup>m</sup> la-hu fa-kāna lā yalqī jaysh<sup>m</sup> wa hiya ‘alay-hi illā hazama-hu*).

people fought one another over pieces of his hair. I beat them to his forelock and I placed it in this cap. I have not witnessed any battle when it was with me without my being given victory.<sup>37</sup>

Here the Prophet's hair clearly plays a key role in Khālid's series of military victories, and thus in the history of the Islamic conquests.

In al-Wāqidī's narrative, Khālid places the Prophet's forelock on his mouth and eyes after receiving it, indicating that a power resided in these hairs that could be transmitted to Khālid's body through touch. Khālid's intention in touching the Prophet's hair to his body is not identified, but his actions make sense within the context of similar practices witnessed in the usage of Prophetic and saintly relics. As we saw in the stories of Companions rubbing the Prophet's saliva onto their skin and in the similar stories about Christian saints, the Prophet's bodily relic is understood to transmit a blessing through physical contact. Khālid, in a sense, ingests the Prophet's power by placing the hair in his mouth, while also anointing himself by applying the hair to his eyes.<sup>38</sup>

A similar ritual is witnessed in early texts, in which the Prophet's hair is used as a healing relic to treat sick individuals. In a *ḥadīth* found in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the Kūfan Isrā'īl b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq (d. 162/778) transmits a story in which 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab (d.

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<sup>37</sup> al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, 5:1967 (no. 5299). al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, 9:349. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 16:236-7, 246-7. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 6:249. Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 381-2. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, 1:374-5. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 2:28. The sixteenth-century *al-Ishārāt ilā Amākin al-Ziyārāt* by Ibn al-Ḥawrānī states that Khālid "conquered Damascus wearing a *qalansuwa* containing hair of the Messenger of God, MPBUH – seeking victory through it (*yastansir bihi*) and its blessing (*baraka*).” Translated in Josef W. Meri, “A Late Medieval Syrian Pilgrimage Guide: Ibn al-Ḥawrānī's *al-Ishārāt ilā Amākin al-Ziyārāt* (Guide to Pilgrimage Places),” *Medieval Encounters* 7.1 (2001): 74.

<sup>38</sup> This is much like another passage in al-Wāqidī's text (again narrated from Abū Bakr), where the Meccan Qurashī Suhayl b. 'Amr is said to “pick up [the Prophet's] hair ... and place it on his eyes” (*yalquṭu min sha'r-hi ... yaḍa'u-hu 'alā 'aynay-hi*) when the Prophet is being shaved during his Farewell Pilgrimage. Abū Bakr notes this as a sign of how God has “brought him [Suhayl] to Islam” (*hadā li-l-Islām*) after Suhayl's previous opposition to the Prophet at al-Ḥudaybiyya. al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 2:610. Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 300.

160/776-77) describes his experience with this ritual and implies that it was commonly used in the early Muslim community to combat the evil eye and other afflictions:

Isrā'īl reported that 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab said, "My people sent me to Umm Salama with a cup of water—Isrā'īl then clutched three fingers together [indicating the size of the container?—]—for the silver bell that contained hair of the Prophet. When an evil eye or something else struck someone, one would send a vessel [of water to Umm Salama]. I looked in the vessel and I saw some red hairs."<sup>39</sup>

The Prophet's hair is here retained by the Prophet's wife Umm Salama, who is highly esteemed in early Islamic sources as a transmitter of religious knowledge.<sup>40</sup> The hair appears as a cherished relic, kept by Umm Salama in a special container, and sought by members of the early Muslim community for its healing capabilities. Accordingly, Umm Salama permits regular access to the hair for the purposes of healing, although she retains possession of the sacred object itself.

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<sup>39</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1487 (no. 5896) (*kitāb al-libās, bāb* 66). Cited and translated in Meri, "Relics of Piety," 105. On 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab, see Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Yūsuf b. al-Zakī 'Abd al-Rahmān Mizzī and 'Abd al-Ghanī b. 'Abd al-Wāhid Jammā'īlī, 12 vols. (Dār al-Ṣādir, 1968), 7:132-3. Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Bukhārī both state that 'Uthmān was originally from Medina but moved to Iraq. This *ḥadīth*'s *isnād* contains Kūfān transmitters after the initial Medinese individuals: Abū Ghassān Mālik b. Ismā'īl al-Nahdī (d. 219/834; Kūfa) > Isrā'īl b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq (d. 162/778; Kūfa) > 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. The next *ḥadīth* in this chapter in al-Bukhārī describes Umm Salama bringing out hairs of the Prophet without the mention of any healing rituals. It has a Baṣran *isnād*: Mūsā b. Ismā'īl al-Tabūdhakī (d. 223/838; Baṣra) > Sallām b. Abī Muṭī' (d. 164/780; Baṣra) > 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. This shorter version is also found in Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1196-7 (no. 3623) (*kitāb al-libās, bāb* 32) with the following Iraqī *isnād*: Abū Bakr [=Ibn Abī Shayba] > Yūnus b. Muḥammad (d. 207; Baghdad) > Sallām b. Abī Muṭī' > 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. It also appears in Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna*, 2:618 with a similar *isnād*: Bahz [b. Asad] (d. 200/815; Baṣra) and 'Affān [b. Muslim b. 'Abd Allāh] (d. 220/835; Baṣra) and Mūsā b. Ismā'īl [al-Tabūdhakī] > Sallām b. Abī Muṭī' > 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. The same beginning of the *isnād* (Sallām > 'Uthmān > Umm Salama) also appears in the following texts: Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii: 139; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6:296, 319, 322; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, 23:332 (nos. 764-5); Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf. al-juz' al-awwal* [Volume 1], ed. Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi-Miṣr, 1959), 395; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 1/iv:1793. It would appear that Sallām b. Abī Muṭī' (d. 164/780; Baṣra) is the common link for this version of the story that lacks a mention of healing.

<sup>40</sup> On Umm Salama's status as an important Prophetic Companion whose "testimony carried legal weight," see: Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 35-45. Stories of other individuals' retention of the Prophet's hair appear in: Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna*, 2:617; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/ii: 139. None of these versions mention a healing ritual. A story attributes possession of the Prophet's hairs to the Companion Umm 'Umāra Nusayba bint Ka'b and says that these hairs "were with her until she died washing for the sick" (*kānat 'anda-hā ḥattā mātat tuḡsalu li-l-marīḍ*). This seems likely to be a reference to washing the hair for the sick. al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 2:615; Faizer, et al., trans., *Life of Muḥammad*, 303.

The healing power of the Prophet's hair is transmitted through water that has come into contact with the hair, creating a contact relic, although the exact ritual is not described in al-Bukhārī's text. A version of this *ḥadīth* found in the *Musnad* of Ishāq Ibn Rāhwayh (d. 238/853) is clearer regarding how this water is actually used:

‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mawhab said: “Umm Salama had a silver bell containing hairs of the Prophet. And whenever someone was sick or had been struck by an evil eye, he would bring a vessel of water and put the hair in it, then drink from it and perform ablutions with it.” ‘Uthmān said: “My family sent me with a vessel of water, and I looked down [into the silver bell], and behold there were red hairs [in it].”<sup>41</sup>

The dipping of the hair in water transmits blessing/healing to the liquid, which can then be drunk and used for ablutions in order to transmit that blessing/healing to the afflicted individual.

Versions of this *ḥadīth* in some texts similarly stipulate that “one would shake [the hair] with water then drink that water,”<sup>42</sup> or “when a fever struck a person, he would send to [Umm Salama] and she would shake it [the hair with water], then the man would sprinkle it upon his face”;<sup>43</sup> alternatively, Umm Salama would dip the hair into the sick person's vessel of water and this person “would either drink the water or would wash himself with it, seeking a cure through

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<sup>41</sup> Ibn Rāhwayh, *Musnad*, 4:172-3 (no. 1958) and 4:141-2 (no. 1913). The *asānīd* for these traditions are, for tradition no. 1913: al-Muṣ‘ab b. Miqdām (?) > Isrā‘īl b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq (d. 162/778; Kūfan) > ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. For tradition no. 1958: al-Naḍr b. Shumayl (d. 203; Baṣra/Merv) > Isrā‘īl b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq (d. 162/778; Kūfan) > ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. For biographical information on Ishāq Ibn Rāhwayh, see *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ibn Rāhwayh” (Joseph Schacht); Susan Spector, “*Ḥadīth* in the Responses of Ishāq Ibn Rāhwayh,” *ILS* 8.3 (2001): 407-31. A similar version appears in Ibn Shabba, *Ta’rīkh al-Madīna*, 2:618 with the *isnād*: ‘Abd Allāh b. Rajā’ [b. ‘Umar] (d. 219/834; Baṣra) > Isrā‘īl [b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq] > ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Mawhab > Umm Salama. Isrā‘īl b. Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq (d. 162/778; Kūfan) seems to be the common link for the versions in which the Prophet's hair is used for healing.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:621. Hārūn b. Ma‘rūf (d. 231/845; Baghdad) > ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/813; Egypt) > Ḥaywa [b. Sharīh] (d. 158-9/774-5; Egypt) > Abū ‘Aqīl [Zuhra b. Ma‘bad] (d. 127/743 or 135/751; Medina/Egypt). An alternate *isnād* for this tradition is related on the same page: Aḥmad b. ‘Īsā (d. 243/857; Egypt) > Rashīdīn b. Sa‘īd al-Mahrī (d. 188/803; Egypt) > Abū ‘Aqīl Zuhra b. Ma‘bad.

<sup>43</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 1:236.

it, and he would acquire its *baraka*.<sup>44</sup> In either case, physical contact between the hair and an individual (transmitted through water as a contact relic) is understood to provide relief from illness.

The type of healing ritual alluded to here is similar to one described in the collection of answers to questions (*masā'il*) of the famous jurist and *ḥadīth* scholar Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), as recorded by his son 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad. This ritual appears in a chapter on “writing amulets” (*kitābat al-ta'wīdh*), in which the permissibility of writing amulets containing Qur'ānic verses to treat certain afflictions is permitted according to Aḥmad. His son, 'Abd Allāh, narrates:

I saw my father write amulets [*ta'wīdh*] for someone who had been injured and for fever, for his relatives on both his father's and his mother's side. He would also write one for a woman having difficulty in childbirth ... I also saw my father take a strand of the Prophet's hair and place it upon his mouth and around it. I believe that I saw him place it upon his head and his eyes, then plunge it in water and drink [the water], seeking a cure through it. I saw him take the bowl of the Prophet that Abū Ya'qūb b. Sulaymān b. Ja'far had sent to him and wash it in a cistern of water and then drink from it. I also saw him more than once drink from the water of Zamzam, seeking a cure through it.<sup>45</sup>

In this text, we find several different healing techniques attributed to the practice of Ibn Ḥanbal, as reported by his son's eyewitness testimony. Not only does Ibn Ḥanbal write Qur'ānic amulets for healing, but he also uses the Prophet's relics and water from the holy site of Zamzam (the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 10:365.

<sup>45</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad, *Masā'il al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1401/1981), 447. A slightly different version of this account appears in the biography for Ibn Ḥanbal in al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-lām al-nubalā'*, 11:212.

well in the Ḥaram in Mecca).<sup>46</sup> We find both the direct application of the Prophet's hair to Ibn Ḥanbal's body (as Khālīd b. al-Walīd had done), combined with the ingestion of water that has touched the Prophet's hair (as 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mawhab had done). 'Abd Allāh makes clear that Ibn Ḥanbal used the hair for healing, stating that Ibn Ḥanbal was "seeking a cure through it." Ibn Ḥanbal also uses a bowl said to have belonged to the Prophet, a relic said to have been sent to him by Abū Ya'qūb b. Sulaymān b. Ja'far.<sup>47</sup> Here again we see that veneration of the Prophet's relics, including his hair, was not restricted to "popular" practice, but was reported to have been practiced by Muslims as "orthodox" as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.

The texts examined so far describe the use of the Prophet's hair by and for living practitioners. The sources also describe a similar administration of Prophetic relics for the transmission of blessing to Muslims who have died. Several sources describe the burial of prominent late seventh- and early-eighth century Muslims with the Prophet's hair and/or nails, including the Umayyad caliphs Mu'āwīya b. Abī Sufyan (d. 60/680) and 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101/720), as well as the *ḥadīth* scholar Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712). 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz is said to have had the hair and nails of the Prophet placed in his burial shroud.<sup>48</sup> Anas b. Mālik absorbs fragments of the Prophet into his own body in death: in a variety of sources, he is said to have been embalmed with a perfume (*sukk*) that contained the sweat and hair of the Prophet.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Mu'āwīya is reported to have asked that he be buried in a cloak that the Prophet had

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<sup>46</sup> On this usage of the Qur'ān for healing, see: Christopher Melchert, "Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur'an," *JQS* 6.2 (2004): 24; Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting," 464-6; idem, "An Ingestible Scripture," 113. On the usage of water from Zamzam, see: Meri, "Aspects of *Baraka*," 52; Ibnā Bisṭām, *Ṭibb al-a'imma*, 214; Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 59-60.

<sup>47</sup> I have not been able to identify this individual.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:300. Cited in Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 289n.104.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:418 (no. 11132). Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 7i:16. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1568 (no. 6281) (*kitāb al-isti'dhān*, bāb 41). See: Goldziher, "Veneration of Saints in Islam," 323n.3; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 170; Meri, "Relics of Piety," 104-105; Wheeler, "Gift of the Body in Islam," 363.

given him, and that the Prophet's nail clippings and hair be sprinkled over his eyes and into his mouth after his death, intimately mixing these relics with Mu'āwīya's own body.<sup>50</sup>

It would appear that burial with bodily relics of the Prophet was a component of “elite” Islamic religious practice in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, similar to the usage of the Prophet's bedstead (*sarīr*) for funereal purposes, as discussed by Leor Halevi and Muhammad Qasim Zaman.<sup>51</sup> While there was likely a symbolic value to the inclusion of Prophetic relics in one's grave goods, this usage of relics not only was only a marker of status, but also allowed the individual buried to benefit from the power understood to reside within these items.<sup>52</sup> The intercessory power understood to reside within the relics of the Prophet's body is explicitly indicated by Mu'āwīya's request that the Prophet's nail clippings be placed in his mouth and eyes, “for perhaps God will have mercy on me through their blessing (*fa- 'asā Allāh yarḥama-nī bi-barakatī-hā*).”<sup>53</sup> Like Ibn Ḥanbal's “seeking a cure” by administering the Prophet's hair to his face or Khālīd b. al-Walīd's seeking victory by placing the Prophet's

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<sup>50</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 2/i:201. Morony, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 212. Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī-l-ta'rikh*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1966), 8:143. al-Qāḍī Maḥmūd al-'Adawī, *Kitāb al-Ziyārāt bi-Dimashq*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus: al-Majmā' al-'Ilmī, 1956), 12. See: Goldziher, “Veneration of Saints in Islam,” 323; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Mu'awīya ibn Abi Sufyan: from Arabia to Empire* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 134; Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest*, 125; Margoliouth, “Relics of the Prophet Mohammed,” 20; Meri, “Relics of Piety,” 104; Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 72. Interestingly, in al-Ṭabarī, the cloak is reported to have been the garment with which Mu'āwīya had caught the Prophet's nail pairings as he trimmed them, perhaps emphasizing the mixture of the Prophet's body with his own since the cloak itself had held these Prophetic fragments.

<sup>51</sup> Reportedly “a number of Medina's famous women ... alongside a few distinguished men, such as caliph Abū Bakr, used Muḥammad's bed as a hearse,” and Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, the governor of Medina in the 660s-670s C.E., is said have “restrict[ed] its use, allowing only dead men of noble birth (*al-rajul al-sharīf*)” to use it. Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 153, citing Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 8:77. The scholar Yaḥyā b. Mā'in is said to have been carried on the Prophet's bed (*sarīr*) in this way at his death in 233/847. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Death, funeral processions, and the articulation of religious authority in early Islam,” *Studia Islamica* 93 (2001): 27, citing the tradition in: Yaḥyā Ibn Mā'in, *Yaḥyā ibn Mā'in wa kitābu-hu al-Tārikh*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr al-Sayf, 4 vols. (Cairo: Mu'assasat Tabūk, 2010), 3:68 (no. 264).

<sup>52</sup> While he is as much later than the sources under investigation here, the Hanbalī jurist Ibn Qudāma's (d. 1223) statement regarding the story of a Companion's burial in a shirt of the Prophet that “by the blessing of the Messenger's long shirt, the torture [of the grave] would be warded off” (*yandafī 'a 'an-hu al-'adhāb bi-barakatī gamīṣī rasūlī Allāhī*) indicates there was more than a symbolic benefit to burial with Prophetic relics. Ibn Qudāma, *Mughnī*, 3:384 (no. 344) translated at Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 111. On the “torture of the grave,” see below.

<sup>53</sup> Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 2/i:201. Morony, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 18:212.

forelock in his cap, Mu‘āwiya seeks a specific benefit from his physical proximity to these relics of the Prophet’s body, even in death. These were not only symbols of the Prophet, but objects imbued with blessing that could bring tangible benefits: victory in battle, health, or forgiveness after death. To the extent that these were practices in which Muslim social and religious elites participated, it seems worthwhile to read the deployment of these relics not only as symbolic gestures but also in terms of elite access to the divine through their connection to and/or control of relics.<sup>54</sup>

As noted, Nancy Khalek has drawn attention to Umayyad patronage of a cult of John the Baptist’s relics in the late seventh and eighth centuries. She writes that “Christian sanctuaries in Syria, of St. Simeon or St. Sergius, had made the veneration of relics and holy spaces a familiar concept for early Muslims.”<sup>55</sup> Andrew Palmer writes that “relics were clearly of great importance in the seventh century ... it may stand as a general characterization of the seventh century that it saw a particular accentuation of the cult of relics among the Syrians.”<sup>56</sup> A similar argument can be made for Iraq and Iran, where a growth in the number of shrines dedicated to Christian martyrs with concomitant veneration of their relics occurred over the course of the fifth to seventh centuries C.E.<sup>57</sup>

We thus find that these representations and usages of Muḥammad’s relics, and especially his hair, find many parallels to those of Christian holy persons’ relics, including their hair, in

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<sup>54</sup> On proximity/access to relics as a marker of status, see Peter Brown, “Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours,” in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 222-250. This same theme is present in the phenomenon of *burial ad sanctos*, in which burial “close to saints” was understood to enable access to blessing.

<sup>55</sup> Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest*, 126.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: the early history of Tur ‘Abdin* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90-1.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Payne, “The Emergence of Martyrs’ Shrines in Late Antique Iran: Conflict, Consensus, and Communal Institutions,” in *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict, and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, ed. Peter Sarris, Matthew Dal Santo, and Philip Booth (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 89-113. See also Peter Bruns, “Reliquien und Reliquienverehrung in den syro-persischen Märtyrerakten,” *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 101:3-4 (2006): 194-213.



these same centuries. Like the Companions eagerly catching strands of Muḥammad’s spittle and hair falling to the ground at al-Ḥudaybiyya and the Farewell Pilgrimage, Christians are likewise represented desperately seeking to acquire pieces of holy men’s bodies or objects associated with them to keep as a εὐλογία or φυλακτήριον. After the death of Symeon Stylites, for example, “the bishop of Antioch wished to take a hair from his beard as a relic” (ἠλέθησεν δὲ ὁ ἐπίσκοπος Ἀντιοχείας ἄραι τρίχαν τοῦ πάγονος αὐτοῦ εἰς εὐλογίαν).<sup>58</sup> The representation of the Companions “nearly coming to blows” over pieces of the Prophet is similar to a trope, found in several saints’ lives, depicting the bodies of recently deceased holy men being ravaged by individuals rushing to touch the holy man’s body: tearing off pieces of his clothes, bed, or even pieces of his body, and (commonly) plucking hairs from his head or beard.<sup>59</sup> These relics are also gained while the saint is still alive, as when a priest comes to St. Symeon Stylite the Younger and asks for “some of his holy hairs [to use] as a phylactery” (ἐκ τῶν ἁγίων τριχῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς φυλακτήριον).<sup>60</sup> In these stories, the hairs of these Christian figures clearly appear as cherished objects and we can hear resonances in individuals’ aspirations to obtain these items in ‘Abīda al-

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<sup>58</sup> This bishop’s hand, however, withered at this affront, and was only restored after the all the bishops prayed to Symeon’s corpse that nothing would be taken from it. Doran, trans., *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 98. Lietzmann, *Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, 70.

<sup>59</sup> Callinicos, *Vie d’Hypatios*, ed. and trans. G. J. M. Bartelink (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 290 (chap. 51.10). Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa*, 21.9. Hermann Usener, ed., *Der heilige Theodosios. Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrillos* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1890), 97. *Bios kai thaumata tou hosiou patros hēmōn Eustratiou hēgoumenou tēs monēs tōn Augarou*, in *Analekta hierosolymitikēs stachiologias*, vol. 4, ed. Alexander Papadopoulou-Kerameōs (St. Petersburg: V. Kirsvaoum, 1897), 393-4 (chap. 39). Talbot, “Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines,” 161n.42. Such scenes from fifth- through tenth-century Greek texts are discussed in Sergey A. Ivanov, “Pious Dismemberment: The Paradox of Relics in Byzantine Hagiography,” in *Eastern Christian Relics*, ed. Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Progress Tradition, 2003), 130-1. See also David Frankfurter, “On Sacrifices and Residues: Processing of the Potent Body,” in *Religion in Cultural Discourse: Essays in honor of Hans G. Kippenberg on the occasion of his 65th birthday*, ed. Brigitte Luchesi and Kocku von Stuckrad (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 514-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521-592)*, ed. Paul van den Ven, 2 vols. (Brussels: Société des bollandistes, 1962-70), 1:122 (chap. 130). This would seem to have been a common occurrence for this particular saint, as mention is made elsewhere in this text of a specific building used for storing the Stylite’s hair, presumably kept for future distribution or similar usage. *Ibid.*, 1:173 (chap. 196). Gary Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium,” *DOP* 38 (1984): 72n.43.

Salmānī's statement that a hair of the Prophet "would be dearer to me than all the gold and silver in the world."

The specific usages to which such holy hairs and other relics are put by late ancient Christians are often similar to the deployments of Muḥammad's hairs described above. As discussed in Chapter Two, the usage of relics for healing purposes was common in these centuries, and this is indeed displayed in the stories of hair and other relics. Thus a cross containing the hair of St. Symeon the Younger is used to heal a variety of illnesses, and a monk uses a hair of this same saint to heal a Praetorian prefect.<sup>61</sup> While saints' hairs are not commonly mentioned as war amulets, relics and icons were used by early Byzantine emperors for talismanic purposes during battles. In a story in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* we hear that:

... a certain king in eastern parts had obtained possession of the thumb of Saint Sergius the martyr, and that he had attached this to his own right arm. Whenever he needed help to drive back his enemies, he would put his trust in this support; for when he raised his right arm the enemy troops would immediately turn in flight, as if they had been vanquished by the martyr's miraculous power.<sup>62</sup>

Like Khālīd b. al-Walīd's usage of the Prophet's hair, this "king in eastern parts" uses a bodily relic of the famous military saint Sergius to obtain miraculous military victories. Given Sergius' fame in the eastern Roman and Sassanian Empires in the fifth and sixth centuries, it is interesting that Gregory's story of the military endeavors of a "king in eastern parts" involves a relic of this particular saint.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, 1:122-3 (chap. 130) and 1:209 (chap. 232). Magoulias, "Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic," 253.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth and Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), 7.31.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (University of California Press, 1999).

While it would be simplistic to suggest Islamic “borrowing” or “appropriation” of these rituals and cultural expressions from Christians, we can certainly point to a shared literary and cultural milieu in these centuries that allowed beliefs about, representations of, and usages of the holy person’s body across these traditions. In Chapter Two, I suggested such a shared literary and cultural milieu to explain the parallels found between representations of Christian saints’ holy spit and breath in Christian hagiographies and stories of Muḥammad’s miracle-working bodily fluids in early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* literature. Here I would suggest that our evidence likewise points to a shared milieu for the representations of holy persons’ powerful hair and other bodily relics and the ritual usages to which that power was put by Christians and Muslims of roughly the fifth through ninth centuries.<sup>64</sup>

It is noteworthy that many of the traditions cited above regarding the veneration of the Prophet’s hair circulated in Mesopotamia and Persia. The veneration of the Prophet’s relics would fit well into the religious environment of late ancient Iraq, where “saint veneration was deep-rooted among Christians and Jews.”<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Leor Halevi has drawn attention to the elaboration in eighth-century Kūfa and Baṣra of Islamic rules and norms for corpse handling and burial rituals that indicate that Muslims there “overcame pharisaical obsessions with the impurity of corpses and grew extremely comfortable handling them, assured by the belief that pure Muslims cannot defile.”<sup>66</sup> He specifically suggests that the less prohibitive Muslim positions on the handling of corpses “likely emerged in reaction to Zoroastrian notions, perhaps under the

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<sup>64</sup> Josef Meri similarly suggests that “the concepts of internalization, accommodation, or assimilation of non-Islamic practices and notions of centre versus periphery and heterodoxy versus orthodoxy are not sufficient to explain the cult of saints within the Islamic world” and that “within the multi-faith environment which existed in the medieval Near East similarities in ritual practice were only natural – they were common to all and were arguably intrinsic to ‘religion’ itself in this part of the world.” Josef W. Meri, “The Etiquette of Devotion in the Islamic Cult of Saints,” in Howard-Johnston and Hayward, *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 264-5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>66</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 81.

influence of a Christian sensibility” and cites the Christian cult of saints as comparison.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the Muslim traditions about healing with Muḥammad’s hair would certainly fit within the context of Christian relic veneration and would be inimical to Zoroastrian attitudes towards bodily products such as hair and nails as polluting substances.<sup>68</sup> The veneration of the Prophet’s hair and nails is also notable in comparison to rabbinic stipulations that hair and nails are not ritually contaminating once they are removed from the corpse itself.<sup>69</sup> If, as Halevi suggests, “the Iraqī dogma that ‘a Muslim cannot become inherently impure, whether dead or alive’ developed in polemical reaction to Zoroastrian beliefs” about corpses as inherently polluting, it is worth considering whether or not the ideas about the Prophet’s miraculous hair (and nails) might have been part of this exchange of ideas.<sup>70</sup>

The appearance in early Islamic texts of a set of practices associated with the Prophet’s hair that are—I would argue—comparable to practices associated with the relics of holy figures in late ancient Christian texts has significant implications. As discussed above, it destabilizes the notion that relics were not accepted as a part of “orthodox” Islam in the early centuries: instead, we can see that veneration of Prophetic relics appears to have been an acceptable and discussed component of Islamic religiosity from an early date, at least by the late seventh century C.E. It also points to a set of ideas shared with Christians in this period regarding the holiness of the “very special dead”: Christians and Muslims both seem to have participated in a set of beliefs and practices regarding the potential of holy individuals’ powerful remains.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 80-1. See also Katz, *Body of Text*, 205-6.

<sup>68</sup> Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism: Triumph over Evil* (Austin: University of Texas, 1989), 80-4. Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 278n.97.

<sup>69</sup> *m. Ohol.* 3:3. According to amoraic traditions hair and nails may even serve to preclude impurity from corpse rot: *b. Naz.* 51a-b; *b. Nidd.* 55a. This will be discussed further below.

<sup>70</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 79.

<sup>71</sup> For the phrase “very special dead,” see: Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 69ff.

Indeed traditions about the Prophet's hair suggest that early Muslims believed that these relics of the Prophet's body possessed a distinct power, a power that was able to grant victory in battle, heal individuals of the evil eye and other bodily afflictions, and even to intercede with God on behalf of an individual after death. The objects themselves seemingly radiated this power outwards, into the bodies of their possessors: into Khālid's body fighting in battle, into Ibn Ḥanbal's body seeking health, into Mu'āwiya's body seeking mercy after death. These hairs were not just symbols of authority, but were in fact "perched on the boundary between sign and substance," both symbolic of the Prophet's power but also powerful in their own right as substantive objects.<sup>72</sup>

The hairs were not mere objects, but something more. As Patricia Cox Miller writes in regard to late ancient Christian relics,

when a martyr's dust, bone, or body becomes the center of cultic activity and reverence, it loses its character as a natural body and begins to function as a site of religious contact. No longer a mere object, it becomes a thing that does indeed signal a new subject-object relation, a relation of the human subject to the sanctifying potential of human physicality as locus and mediator of spiritual presence and power.<sup>73</sup>

In much the same way, the Prophet's hair appears to have functioned in the late seventh and early eighth centuries as a locus of power, a (part of a) holy body that both symbolized the Prophet's power as God's messenger while simultaneously transmitting that power to other bodies through victory, healing, and blessing after death.

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<sup>72</sup> John Plotz, "Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory," *Criticism* 47.1 (2005): 112.

<sup>73</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 2.

## Tying the Prophet in Knots: The Bewitchment of Muḥammad

With such power residing within Muḥammad’s hair, how strange then to find a story in which his hair nearly proves to be the death of him. In a variety of early *sīra*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr* sources, we find a story in which the Prophet is “bewitched,” depriving him (in different versions of the narrative) of his sight, hearing, sanity, sexual ability, and nearly his life. In many versions of this narrative, the “sorcerer” who puts his spell upon the Prophet gains this power over him through possession and manipulation of strands of the Prophet’s hair, collected from his comb. Here the Prophet’s hair does not transmit power to a new source/body, but in fact the hair is used to sap vitality from Muḥammad’s own body.

According to most versions of this story, the individual who bewitches the Prophet is a sorcerer named Labīd b. al-A‘ṣam, one of the Jews of the Banū Zurayq, a sub-group of a larger Medinese tribal unit, the Khazraj.<sup>74</sup> Labīd’s bewitchment of the Prophet is accomplished through his ritual manipulation of certain items physically or symbolically associated with Muḥammad. In the most common version of the story, Labīd b. al-A‘ṣam collects the comb and comb-hairs of the Prophet (*mushṭ wa-mushāṭa*) and (in some versions) the spathe of the spadix of a male palm-tree (*juff ṭal‘a dhakar*) and hides these items either in or around a well or pit.<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, a version of this story attributed to the legendary *mufasssīr* Ibn ‘Abbās connects this story to the mention at Q. 113:4 of “women blowing upon knots”: Labīd b. al-A‘ṣam bewitches the Prophet by tying knots in a string, placing the string in the spathe of the spadix of a male palm-tree, and

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<sup>74</sup> On the relationship of the “Jews of Banū Zurayq” to the larger tribal units, see Uri Rubin, “The ‘Constitution of Medina’: Some Notes,” *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985): 7-9. See also Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002-12), 4:30, 277-8.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 4. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:26 (no. 23866). Abū Ya‘lā Mawṣilī, *Musnad Abī Ya‘lā Mawṣilī*, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad, 14 vols. (Beirut and Damascus: Dār al-Ma‘mun li-’l-Turāth, 1984-1990), 8:290-1 (no. 4882). Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 2:1173 (no. 3545) (*kitāb al-ṭibb*, *bāb* 45). Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6:57, 63, 96. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 6:247. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:363-70 (no. 2189) (*kitāb al-salām*, *bāb* 17).

then placing this set of objects in the well.<sup>76</sup> Further tying this event to scriptural history, this version of the story usually cites this occasion as the *sabab al-nuzūl* for the revelation of the last two sūras of the Qurʾān (the *muʿawwidhatān*), with God revealing these verses as apotropaic devices to help ward off Labīd’s spell.<sup>77</sup>

As it does with other stories, Ibn Saʿd’s *Ṭabaqāt* includes traditions about Muḥammad’s bewitchment that have not been preserved elsewhere. One particularly interesting narrative combines these two versions of the bewitchment story, stating that Labīd “took [the Prophet’s] comb and the hairs combed from his head. He tied knots in them and spat upon them (*tafala fī-hi tafī<sup>am</sup>*), then placed them in the spathe of the spadix of a male palm-tree.”<sup>78</sup> He then hid the items in a well. Here Labīd’s manipulation of pieces of the Prophet’s body is emphasized in his physically twisting the hairs into knots and spitting upon them before inserting them in the well.

The story of the Prophet’s bewitchment fits into the general narrative pattern in the post-*hijra* portion of the *sīra*, in which Muḥammad experiences a series of conflicts with several

<sup>76</sup> Some (generally later) *tafsīr* sources adapt this story to even better fit the Qurʾānic context by saying it was the sisters or daughters of Labīd who bewitched the Prophet, thus matching the mention of “women who blow upon knots” at Q. 113:4. See David Cook, “The Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī and the Commentaries to Sūra 113,” *JSS* 45.2 (2000): 334, 336; Michael Lecker, “The Bewitching of the Prophet Muḥammad by the Jews: A Note a Propos ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb’s *Mukhtaṣar fī l-Ṭibb*,” *Al-Qanṭara* 13 (1992): 564. This tradition appears in Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī l-Ṭibb*, 86-7.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 5-6. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 6:248. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 3:537 (without *isnād*). Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, 26 vols., ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Riyadh: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1424/2003), 2:351 (ad loc. Q. 2:102). Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī l-Ṭibb*, 87. Ibnā Bistām, *Ṭibb al-ʿimma*, 552-8. Ispahany, trans., *Islamic Medical Wisdom*, 147-9. al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Daʾāʾim al-Islām*, 2:138-9 (no. 487). Furāt b. Ibrāhīm b. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāzīm (Tehran: Muʿassasat al-Ṭabʿ wa-l-Nashr, 1990), 619-20. On this last text, see *EI*<sup>3</sup>, s.v. “Furāt b. Furāt al-Kūfī” (M. A. Amir-Moezzi). On the *muʿawwidhatān* and the *tafsīr* stories, see Shawkat M. Toorawa, “Seeking Refuge from Evil: The Power and Portent of the Closing Chapters of the Qurʾan,” *JQS* 4.2 (2002): 54-60. A version without the revelation of the *muʿawwidhatān* but with mention of “the knots within which the sorcery was” (*al-ʿuqad allatī fī-hā al-siḥr*) appears in ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:14 (no. 19764). It is related on ʿAbd al-Razzāq > Maʿmar > al-Zuhrī > Ibn al-Musayyib and ʿUrwa. In another tradition, Gabriel tells the Prophet, “Some man from the Jews has bewitched you by tying knots against you” (*inna rajul<sup>am</sup> kadhā min al-Yahūd saḥara-ka ʿaqada li-ka ʿuqad<sup>am</sup>*). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:25-6 (no. 23865). Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Abū Muʿāwiya > al-Aʿmash > Yazīd b. Ḥiyyān (Kūfa) [reading حبان for حبان] > Zayd b. Arqam (d. 67-8/686-7; Medina/Kūfa). See further below.

<sup>78</sup> *ʿAmada ilā mushīʾ wa-mā yumshīṭa min al-raʾs min al-shaʾr wa-ʿaqada fī-hi ʿuqad<sup>am</sup> wa-tafala fī-hi tafī<sup>am</sup> wa-jaʿala-hu fī hubb<sup>i</sup> talʿaʿi dhakar<sup>im</sup>*. Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 4-5.

Medinese Jewish groups.<sup>79</sup> As noted, the sorcerer Labīd b. al-A‘šam is identified as a Jewish figure, one of “the Jews of Banū Zurayq.” The Jewish identity of the sorcerer is emphasized in nearly all of the sources, with one set of traditions stating that the “the Jews of Banū Zurayq” (*Yahūd Banī Zurayq*) as a group bewitched the Prophet, without specific mention of Labīd,<sup>80</sup> and another simply identifying “a man from the Jews” (*rajul min al-Yahūd*) as the culprit.<sup>81</sup> While the motivations behind the Jewish sorcerer’s (or sorcerers’) actions are not described in most versions of the narrative, Ibn Sa‘d relates a narrative in which Labīd is hired for his great skill in sorcery by the “leaders of the Jews who had remained in Medina [i.e. they had not gone on the expedition to al-Ḥudaybiyya] who outwardly displayed Islam but were hypocrites.” They say to Labīd, “You have seen his [Muḥammad’s] effect among us, his disagreement with our religion (*dīn*), and those of us whom he has killed.”<sup>82</sup> This certainly sets this episode against the backdrop of the conflicts between Muḥammad and various Jewish groups in Medina.

In their studies of the story of Muḥammad’s bewitchment, David Cook and Michael Lecker emphasize the Jewish identity of the sorcerer. Cook writes that “this story shows the continuity of the idea of the Jew as magician” that occurs as a polemical trope in ancient

<sup>79</sup> Lecker, “Bewitching of the Prophet,” 566. On the “themes” and “topoi” of the troubled relations between the Medinese Jews and Muḥammad in the *sīra* and their relationship to Islamic sacred history see: Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 14-22, 40. See also: M. Gil, “The Median Opposition to the Prophet,” *JSAI* 10 (1987): 64-96; Hannah Rahman, “The Conflicts between the Prophet and the Opposition in Madina,” *Der Islam* 62.2 (1985): 260-97.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 6:65 (no. 10018), 10:369 (no. 19395), and 11:14 (no. 19764). In these traditions, the *isnād* is ‘Abd al-Razzāq > Ma‘mar > al-Zuhrī > Ibn al-Musayyib and ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr. The plurality of the culprits is clear from the plural verb form in these traditions: *anna Yahūd<sup>ā</sup> Banī Zurayq saharū al-nabī/rasūl Allāh*. In no. 19764, appended at the end of the main tradition appears: “al-Zuhrī said, ‘the Prophet used to say (according to what has reached us): The Jews of Banū Zurayq bewitched me’” (*qāla al-Zuhrī fa-kāna al-nabī yaqūlu fī-mā balagha-nā saharat-nī Yahūd Banī Zurayq*). This is similar to the tradition in Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 5, according to Muḥammad b. ‘Umar [=al-Wāqidī] > Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh > al-Zuhrī > Ibn al-Musayyib and ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr. This tradition reads, “The Messenger of God used to say: The Jews of Banū Zurayq bewitched me” (*fa-kāna rasūl Allāh yaqūlu saharat-nī Yahūd Banī Zurayq*).

<sup>81</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:25-6 (no. 23865). Abū Bakr [Ibn Abī Shayba] > Abū Mu‘āwiya > al-A‘mash > Yazīd b. Ḥiyyān [reading حبان for حبان] > Zayd b. Arqam. al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan*, 4:31 (no. 4091) (*kitāb tahrīm al-dam, bāb* 20). Hannād b. al-Sarī (d. 243/857; Kūfa) > Abū Mu‘āwiya > al-A‘mash > Yazīd b. Ḥiyyān > Zayd b. Arqam.

<sup>82</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 4. They also report that they have previously attempted to bewitch the Prophet and their attempts have thus far failed.



sources.<sup>83</sup> While noting that “reading [the story] as a straightforward historical record is out of question [*sic*],” Lecker similarly suggests that “we can probably employ it as an indication of the forms of witchcraft practiced by the Jews of Medina on the eve of Islam” or at least as evidence that “the Jews of Medina were *thought* to have been involved in such practices” (emphasis added).<sup>84</sup> In fact, Cook further suggests that—because “the idea of Jewish magic is ... deeply rooted in the Muslim tradition”—there was a “need to have the Prophet face down a Jewish magician.”<sup>85</sup> In sum, the power of the idea of the “Jew as magician,” and particularly that idea’s importance in “Muslim tradition,” is thought to lie behind and even to necessitate the presence of this story in early Islamic sources, in order to demonstrate Muḥammad’s victory over this force.

While the story of the Prophet’s bewitchment certainly does fit into the narrative pattern of conflict between the Medinese Jews and Muḥammad—a series of events central to the “sacred history” of early Islam—I would suggest that it is better situated within a Near Eastern narrative tradition simultaneously more pervasive in Near Eastern literature and more relevant to late antiquity specifically. By depicting Muḥammad in conflict with a representative of “sorcery,” early Islamic literature fits well within Jewish and Christian traditions of demarcating true religion/prophesy from magic/sorcery. As discussed in Chapter One, the juxtaposition between a holy figure (prophet, apostle, or other rightly-guided individual) and a sorcerer/magician is prominent in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and later literatures, appearing for example in the conflicts between Moses and the Egyptian court magicians (Ex. 7-9), and between the apostle Peter and Simon Magus (Acts 8). The former example, of course, also appears in the Qur’ān,

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<sup>83</sup> Cook, “Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī,” 344. Cook provides examples of Jewish magician stories at *ibid.*, 344 n. 98. Other examples are cited in Magoulias, “Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data,” 236-9.

<sup>84</sup> Lecker, “Bewitching of the Prophet,” 566. It is unclear whether Lecker thinks that Jews in fact performed these “forms of witchcraft” in seventh-century Medina, or merely were thought (and therefore represented) to have performed them.

<sup>85</sup> Cook, “Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī,” 344.

which similarly distinguishes between “religion” and “magic” as discrete entities that rely upon completely different sources of authority and power. The juxtaposition between correct religion and incorrect “magic” is a pervasive theme in the literature of late antiquity and is prominent in the late ancient stories of saints and rabbis, who often face off with sorcerers. Peter Brown notes that “long and intimate duels with the local sorcerer were almost *de rigueur* in the life of a successful saint.”<sup>86</sup> More generally, he suggests that “the antithesis of saint and sorcerer underlies much of late ancient literature.”<sup>87</sup>

This antithesis between holy man and sorcerer occurs frequently also in early Islamic literature, such as in the *sīra* story of the confrontation between the Christian monk (*rāhib*) Faymiyūn and a sorcerer (*sāḥir*) in Najrān in the period before the birth of Muḥammad.<sup>88</sup> The story of the contest of feats between Jirjīs (George) and the sorcerers in the court of King Dacianus likewise makes this distinction a central part of this tale’s dramatic narrative.<sup>89</sup> This latter example, of course, draws directly upon earlier Christian hagiographical material, illustrating very clearly the connection between early Islamic literature and late ancient Christian stories of saints. The differentiation between “holy man” and sorcerer appears also in early Shī‘ī literature, in which opponents label as “sorcery” the miraculous powers or divine insights

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<sup>86</sup> Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Idem, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 22.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 23-24. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 16-17. In the version of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 5:420-423 (no. 9751), the confrontation is between a monk and a soothsayer (*kāhin*) and the contest over whose teaching is authoritative is even more pronounced. See: David Cook, “The Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd: History and Ḥadīth in a Martyrological Narrative,” *JSAI* 34 (2008): 125-48.

<sup>89</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1/ii:802-804. Perlmann, trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 178-80. While the story of Jirjīs does not appear in the versions of Ibn Ishāq’s work extant today, it has been suggested that the story was part of the *Kitāb al-Mubtada’* (“Book of the Beginning”) that stood at the beginning of Ibn Ishāq’s longer world history, which itself was used by al-Ṭabarī in his *Ta’rīkh* and by other authors. See: Gordon D Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 4, 15; Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 135; W. M. Watt, “Translator’s Foreword,” in Watt and Macdonald, trans., *History of al-Ṭabarī*, xi-xiv; Josef Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002), 80-83; Schoeler, *Biography of Muḥammad*, 33. For a criticism of reconstructing earlier material from later sources, see: Lawrence I. Conrad, “Recovering lost texts: some methodological issues,” *JAOS* 113 (1993): 258-63.

displayed by such Imāms as ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq.<sup>90</sup> Conversely, the acts of the seventh-century “false prophet” Musaylima are dismissed by the Muslim writer al-Jāhiz (d. 254/868) as works of sorcery, learned in the Arabian markets of al-Ubulla, al-Anbār, and al-Ḥīra.<sup>91</sup> We can see that the late ancient opposition between holy person and sorcerer was fully present in early Islamic narratives.

In a sense, then, David Cook is correct that there was a “need to have the Prophet face down a Jewish magician”: however, I would emphasize the “magician” part of this formulation more than the “Jewish” part. As a prophet whose biography was composed in dialogue with the traditions of late ancient Christianity and Judaism, it is characteristic that Muḥammad—as a representative of correct monotheistic religion—would face a conflict with a representative of illicit magic. Labīd’s Jewish identity is not inconsequential in the story of Muḥammad’s bewitchment and is narratologically consistent with Muḥammad’s history in Medina and with polemical representations of Jews as magicians in many texts from antiquity. However, it seems that his identity as a “sorcerer” is more pertinent than his Judaism for reading this story within its narrative context in the early biography of the Prophet and this biography’s involvement in late ancient Near Eastern narrative traditions.

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<sup>90</sup> ‘Alī’s vision of Muḥammad dismissed as sorcery: Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Farrūkh al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt fī faḍā’il al-Muḥammad*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Ḥasan al-Mu‘allim, 2 vols. (al-Qum: Maktabat al-Ḥaydarīyah, 1426/2005), section 6 chap. 5 (nos. 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17). See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism: the sources of esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 73, 193n.371. Ḥasan b. ‘Alī’s making a tree bloom called sorcery: al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt*, section 5 chap. 13 (no. 10). Ja‘far’s similarly making a tree bloom called sorcery: Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *Kitāb Kharā’ij wa-’l-Jarā’ih*, 3 vols. (Beirut: 1411/1991), 1:296 (no. 3). See Judith Loebenstein, “Miracles in Šī‘ī Thought: A Case-Study of the Miracles Attributed to Imām Ġa‘far al-Ṣādiq,” *Arabica* 50.2 (1993): 234-6.

<sup>91</sup> Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *al-Ḥayawān*, 8 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Miṣr: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1966-9), 4:369-71 and 6:206. Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāhiz: translations of selected texts*, trans. D. M. Hawke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 162-4. Cited in Morony, *After the Muslim Conquest*, 394. Musaylima fails in his attempts to perform miracles in: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf b. Ḥubaysh, *Ghazawāt Ibn Ḥubaysh*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1992), 1:55-6. Cited in M. J. Kister, “The Struggle against Musaylima and the Conquest of Yamāma,” *JSAI* 27 (2002): 43-4.

Yet if we read Muḥammad's story within this late ancient narrative tradition, it offers a distinct twist. Almost universally in the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic literatures cited above, the prophet, apostle, saint, or rabbi is victorious in his struggle with a sorcerer(s). In fact, that victory is often not hard-fought: in many cases, the sorcerer has no authority whatsoever over the Christian, Jewish, or Muslim figure and the sorcerer's abilities are shown to be worthless in the face of the holy man's power. This is particularly true in the narratives about the lives of Christian saints, in which "the inevitable sorcerers, who emerge only to be defeated and converted, are trotted out as foils to the saint."<sup>92</sup> Exactly this happens in the case of Theodore of Sykeon, whose effortless defeat of a sorcerer's attempts to kill or poison the saint convinces the failed sorcerer to convert to Christianity.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Saint George is able to swallow the poison that is offered to him by magicians, with its only effect being to slake his thirst.<sup>94</sup> Even in rabbinic stories in which the magicians' powers are often depicted as real threats to the rabbis, the rabbis are almost always victorious through their own miraculous (or perhaps magical) abilities.<sup>95</sup> In all of these cases, there is little indication that any one of these figures is in any real danger when facing a sorcerer.

Muḥammad, on the other hand, is gravely susceptible to the acts of the sorcerer Labīd and exhibits a series of severe symptoms, reported in different sources as "thinking he had done something when he had not done it," "being kept from his wives" (i.e. being unable to perform sexually), and/or losing his eyesight and hearing to the point of near or actual blindness and

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<sup>92</sup> David Frankfurter, "Hagiography and the Reconstruction of Local Religion in Late Antique Egypt: Memories, Inventions, and Landscapes," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86.1-4 (2006): 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Vie de Théodore* 37-8 (pp. 32-4). Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 113-5. Cited in Magoulias, "Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data," 235.

<sup>94</sup> Coptic Martyrdom of Saint George, in Budge, ed. and trans., *Martyrdom and Miracles of Saint George of Cappadocia*, 8 (Coptic) and 210 (English).

<sup>95</sup> On the rabbis' usage of "magical powers," see: Bohak, "Magical means for handling *minim*," 268-76.

deafness.<sup>96</sup> Different versions of the story record that Muḥammad was in this state for a few days or up to a whole year.<sup>97</sup> It is only after Muḥammad's desperate prayer to God that an angelic messenger appears and presents Muḥammad with an explanation and a way of escaping from this bewitchment. The messenger—variously identified as Gabriel, Gabriel and another unnamed angel, or two unnamed angels—reveals to Muḥammad that he has been bewitched and explains where he may find the magical material that brought him to this state. With this knowledge, Muḥammad himself then goes, or he sends a messenger, to extract the objects from the well or pit. Depending on the version of the story, the sorcerous objects (comb, hair, etc.) are burnt or buried to destroy their power, and/or *sūras* 113 and 114 are revealed to Muḥammad and are recited over the magical knots, causing them to become untied. Muḥammad is thus released from the spell and his mental and/or physical impairments disappear as quickly as they had appeared.

This is very unlike the stories of prophets, apostles, saints, and rabbis discussed above, which often provide a stage upon which a Jewish, Christian, or Muslim protagonist displays his ability to overcome such a sorcerer or magician. If anything, Muḥammad appears in this story less like a holy man, and more like the individual(s) whom holy men healed, exorcised, or otherwise saved from magical attacks. In the seventh-century *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John*, for example, a man named Theodore is released from a sorcerer's spell by the two saints, who reveal to Theodore that he should dig up and destroy a sorcerous object that the sorcerer has used

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<sup>96</sup> David Cook and Michael Lecker have both drawn attention to Muḥammad's loss of sexual abilities in this story (i.e. being "kept from his wives"). Muḥammad is otherwise described as having superhuman virility and this is even cited as a "proof of his elevated office," and thus this loss is a large symbolic blow. Cook, "Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī," 328-9; Lecker, "Bewitching of the Prophet," 563. Lecker suggests that the usage of a male part of the palm tree and that part's particular characteristics—its color and odor are compared to sperm in Arabic lexica—was symbolic for "the desired effect (or at least one of the desired effects), namely harming the Prophet's sexual potency." Ibid., 563. The usage of Muḥammad's hair, too, might have some symbolic capacity in this regard, as there was a connection between hair and sexual vitality in many of the ancient Mediterranean cultures cognate with the early Islamic period. For Labīd to have stolen locks of the Prophet's hair (and to have tied knots in them in one story) may have implied a symbolic castration of Muḥammad.

<sup>97</sup> "The Messenger of God was kept from 'Ā'isha for a year" (*hubisa Rasūl Allāh 'an 'Ā'isha sanat<sup>an</sup>*). 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:14 (no. 19765).

to curse him.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, the Jerusalem Talmud contains a story in which Rabbi Joshua ben Ḥananiah cures a childless man of the impotence-inducing spell placed upon him by the manipulation of magical materials.<sup>99</sup> Yet in the story of his bewitchment, Muḥammad functions more like the Theodore character or the childless man than like the saintly or rabbinic protector(s). Indeed, we could draw upon many more such examples in which saints save individuals from the activities of sorcerers since this appears as one of the “stereotypical story-patterns” in late ancient hagiographical literature.<sup>100</sup> For Muḥammad not to save but instead to be saved from a sorcerer is a distinct break from this pattern.

We hear clear echoes of Muḥammad’s vulnerable position in several curse texts from the late ancient Mediterranean that exhibit the usage of hair as a material for cursing. Hair was one of the objects commonly used as the “essence” (in Greek οὐσία) of an intended victim in ancient Mediterranean curse (and love) magic.<sup>101</sup> For example, a Coptic curse directed against a man named Kyr(i)akos, the son of Sanne is found on a sixth- or seventh-century lead sheet, invoking unnamed forces against Kyr(i)akos. According to the text of the curse, the lead sheet was placed under a corpse like how Muḥammad’s hair was placed in a well:

At the moment that I shall place you beneath this corpse, you must cast Kyr(i)akos son of Sanne, the man from Penjeho, into a painful sickness and disease and a wasting illness and a suffering in all his limbs...nor shall any person be able to heal him until I take you

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<sup>98</sup> Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John*, no. 55. Cited in Magoulias, “Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data,” 236. Greek text in Natalio Fernandex Marcos, ed., *Los Thaumata de Sofronio: Contribucion al Estudio de la Incubatio Cristiana* (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1975), 370-1. Jean Gascou, trans., *Sophrone de Jérusalem: Miracles des Saints Cyr et Jean (BHG I 477-479)* (Paris: De Boccard, 2006), 190-1.

<sup>99</sup> y. *San.* 7:13 (25d). Discussed in Levinson, “Enchanting Rabbis,” 64-9.

<sup>100</sup> Dickie, “Narrative-patterns in Christian Hagiography,” 85-92, 98.

<sup>101</sup> Johnston, “Magic,” 148. Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 8, 176.

from there beneath this corpse. For this is the hair of his head; this is his personal effect that I give to you.<sup>102</sup>

The victim's hair is hidden away, keeping any possibility of healing at bay. While we do not know what happened to Kyr(i)akos, the intention was certainly something like what we find in the story of Labīd's bewitchment of Muḥammad.

The Mesopotamian incantation bowls provide evidence of such ideas among the communities of late ancient Iraq and western Iran.<sup>103</sup> In a couple of these bowls, we find a similar usage of hair to that studied in this section, though with an interesting twist: the bowl author proclaims that he has procured a demon's hair in order to bind the demon and thus to protect his client. One example is a bowl written in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic that invokes the anti-demonic authority of Rabbi Joshua bar Peraḥ(i)a. The bowl invokes "healing from heaven" (אסותא מן שמייה) for the home and family of Abudimme son of Dad(ay) and states that Abudimme's home is protected "from demons and from *dēvs*, all of them" (מן שדין ומן דוין כולהן), proclaiming:

Some of their hair for Abudimme son of Daday, some of their blood I have taken for sealing them; and some of their skin I have taken for patching them; seven times seven it is seized by its tufts of hair.

מן שערהון לאבודימי בר דדי מן דמיהון שקלית לחתמהון ומן גלדהון שקלית לרקאה בהון [ע] שבֿע לקיט

בסוסייתה<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Translated in Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, ed., *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 202-3 (no. 96).

<sup>103</sup> See "Introduction: The Historical, Literary and Religious Context" in Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells. Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls: Volume One* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 1ff.

<sup>104</sup> Text and translation: Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 153 (MS 1928/43).

Specific mention is made of the demons' and *dēvs*' hair (שערהוון), alongside their blood and skin, as the bodily materials that the bowl author has taken "for sealing them" (להתמהוון). While it is not explained what was done with the hair, blood and skin, the acquisition of these materials (likely metaphorical, though the presence of some sort of physical "demons' hair" may have been part of the ritual of the creation and/or installation of the bowl) is offered as part of the bowl writer's authority over these unseen forces.<sup>105</sup>

A similar usage of demons' hair is cited in another Babylonian Jewish Aramaic bowl, this one a text that aims to exorcise demons from a woman named Miškoy, daughter of Anušfri. The bowl's text addresses the demons directly, threatening them:

And if you do not go out from Miškoy daughter of Anušfri, I shall take some of your hair for binding you and some of your fat for sealing you, and I shall throw you to the depths of the netherworld, from which it is not possible to ascend.

וּאִם לֹא תִיפְקוּן מִינָה מִן מִישְׁכוּי בֵּת אֲנוּשְׁפְרִי נְסִיבְנָא מִן סַעְרִיכִין לְפַכְרִיכִין וּמִן תְּרַבִּיכִין לְחַתְמִיכִין וּשְׁדִינָא  
לְכִין לְעוּמְקֵי אַרְעָה. תַּחְתִּיתָא דְלִית אִיפְשֵׁר לְמִיסק מִינָה<sup>106</sup>

Here, the speaker threatens to take their hair (סַעְרִיכִין) in order to "bind" (פַּכְר) the demons and fat in order to "seal" them and then to throw the incapacitated demons into the underworld. Again the acquisition of these bodily materials is cited as part of the exorcist's ability to control the demons.

Here, again, the possession of hair is seen to have a distinct power over the individual, whether human or demonic. Many other examples of this usage of hair can be cited, both in ancient literary descriptions of "magical" activities and in "magical texts" themselves. In some

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<sup>105</sup> See Levene, "... and by the name of Jesus," 300-1 and n.58.

<sup>106</sup> Text and translation: Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 246 (MS 1928/1).



cases, the victim's hair has been recovered alongside the ancient spell texts.<sup>107</sup> A final comparison to the story of Muḥammad—admittedly distant in time and place—is a third-century lead curse tablet recovered from a well in Athens. The text of this curse tablet reads, in part:

Mighty Typhon, I hand over to you Tyche, whom Sophia bore, that you may do her harm...over the blacking out and chilling of Tyche, whom Sophia bore, whose hairs these are, here rolled up. Yes, mighty Typhon ... let Tyche, whom Sophia bore, whom I have inscribed on the tablet, grow cold and not walk about ... As I have written down these names and they grow cold, so, too, let the body and the flesh and the muscles and the bones and the members and the bowels of Tyche, whom Sophia bore, grow cold, that she may no longer rise up, walk around, talk, move about, but let her remain a corpse, pale, weak, paralyzed, chilled until I am taken out of the dark air, rather let her grow exhausted and weak until she dies. Yes, mighty Typhon.<sup>108</sup>

In this text the “Egyptian god Seth-Typhon” is invoked against a woman named Tyche, the daughter of Sophia.<sup>109</sup> We find here a variety of parallels to the story of Muḥammad's bewitchment, including the usage of hair, the hiding of the curse material in a well, and the bodily afflictions that the victim suffers or is intended to suffer.

As David Cook notes with regard to the bewitchment story, “The Prophet does not come off looking very impressive here: he cannot perform any of the normal functions and does not know what has happened to him to boot.”<sup>110</sup> Not only is the Prophet bewitched, but he also fails to meet out much of a punishment to the sorcerer. In many versions, no mention is made of what

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<sup>107</sup> “*PGM XVI, XIXa, and LXXXIV* – all prescription love spells – were actually founded wrapped with hair.” John J. Winkler, “The Constraints of Eros,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 224. See also D. R. Jordan, “Defixiones from a Well Near the Southwest Corner of the Athenian Agora,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 54.3 (1985): 251.

<sup>108</sup> Greek text and English translation in *ibid.*, 252-3.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>110</sup> Cook, “Prophet Muḥammad, Labīd al-Yahūdī,” 329.

happened to Labīd: however, the Prophet’s leniency in allowing the sorcerer who bewitched him to live is cited in some early *ḥadīth* collections in connection with sorcerers (*suhḥār*) from the *ahl al-kitāb* or the *ahl al-‘ahd*.<sup>111</sup> One tradition states that, after being healed of the sorcery, “the Prophet did not ever mention that Jew nor did he ever look him in the face.”<sup>112</sup>

On its surface, the Prophet’s never again looking directly at Labīd would seem to demonstrate his disrespect for this sorcerer: but may he not also have feared that Labīd might still have some magical power over him, or that he might act again? Whether or not this is the case, it is clear that Labīd in this story exhibits a great power over the Prophet’s body and mind, and that he does so (in many versions of the story) through his possession and manipulation of the Prophet’s hair. We are not told what Labīd actually did with the hair, except in Ibn Sa’d’s version in which Labīd ties knots in them. Through its association with the Prophet’s body, these hairs transmit suffering to the Prophet. Here we find Prophet’s hair, not as a source of healing or protection, but as a vehicle for the destruction of the Prophet’s own body. He appears not as a holy man but instead as one who, like the rest of humanity, is susceptible to magic.

### **“Even little relics”: the Paradox of the Prophetic Body**

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, and in the introductory chapter, hair often serves as a symbolic referent for the individual. The nature of one’s hair is understood as a reflection of the nature of one’s very self, with control of hair often correlated with control of the body as a whole. These tiny pieces of the body both contain and exude a plethora of meanings

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 6:65 (no. 10017-8), 10:368 (no. 19394). ‘Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Muwaṭṭa’*: *Kitāb al-muḥāraba*, ed. Miklos Muranyi (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 284.

<sup>112</sup> *Fa-mā dhakara al-nabī dhālika al-Yahūdī wa lā ra’ā-hu fī wajhi-hi qaṭṭu*. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 8:25-6 (no. 23865). al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, 4:31 (no. 4091) (*kitāb taḥrīm al-dam, bāb 20*).

that reflect the nature, status, and other characteristics of the individual. This section will explore the several different and often contradictory ways in which hair and body were ideologically related in late ancient Christian, Jewish, and early Islamic sources.

Against the background of the “material turn” of the fourth through seventh centuries, such a tendency to read meaning out of small pieces of the body appears in Christian writings that suggest that even tiny pieces can contain something like the entirety of body and ‘self.’ The cult of relics strongly displays this idea, as when Gregory of Nazianzus writes that saints’ bodies “possess equal power with their holy souls, whether touched or worshipped ... Even the drops of their blood and little relics of their passion produce equal effects with their [whole] bodies.”<sup>113</sup> In a late fourth-century sermon, Victricius of Rouen announces: “We proclaim with all our faith and authority that there is nothing in relics which is not complete.”<sup>114</sup> In fifth-century Syria, Theodoret of Cyrus writes of martyrs’ relics: “although the body has been severed, grace has remained undivided, and this tiny piece of a relic has a power equal to that which the martyr would have had if he had never been carved up.”<sup>115</sup> As Caroline Walker Bynum writes, “the more the martyr’s parts were spread throughout the Mediterranean world, the more he or she came to be seen as housed within the fragment.”<sup>116</sup>

The perceived importance of small bits of the body could also provoke anxiety. Patricia Cox Miller suggests, for example, that “anxieties about death, physical disintegration, and bodily reintegration lay close to the surface of late ancient thinking about martyrs and the cult of relics,”

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<sup>113</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Contra Julian* 1. Translated in Vasiliki Limberis, “The Cult of the Martyrs and the Cappadocian Fathers,” in *A People’s History of Christianity. Volume 3: Byzantine Christianity*, ed. Derek Krueger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 45

<sup>114</sup> Victricius of Rouen, *In Praise of the Saints* 9. Translated in Gillian Clark, “Victricius of Rouen: *Praising the Saints*,” *J ECS* 7.3 (1999): 390.

<sup>115</sup> Theodoret, *Graecarum affectionum curatio* 8:11. Translated in Thomas Halton, trans., *Theodoret of Cyrus: A Cure for Pagan Maladies* (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 173.

<sup>116</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 105-6. Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 95-6. Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 11, 88.

noting the vicarious thrill and comfort in the stories of bodies violently divided and miraculously reconstituted.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, in Christian discussions of bodily resurrection in the fourth and following centuries, Bynum finds an “extraordinary materialism” that “focused increasingly on material bits” and within which even “the fate of fingernails and hair clippings ... command greater attention.”<sup>118</sup> In a discussion of the resurrected body in his *City of God*, Augustine writes:

What am I to say now about the hair and nails? .... No one will lose these parts at the resurrection, for they shall be changed into the same flesh, their substance being so altered as to preserve the proportion of the various parts of the body. However, what our Lord said, “Not a hair of your head shall perish,” might more suitably be interpreted of the number, and not of the length of the hairs, as He elsewhere says, “The hairs of your head are all numbered.”<sup>119</sup>

Interpreting Luke 12:7, Augustine affirms that hair in its entirety will be restored to the resurrected body, though perhaps only in the number of hairs rather than in their length. The seventh-century Latin bishop Braulio of Saragossa recalls Augustine’s exegesis of this passage and similarly writes that “I believe that the Lord remembers and includes the smallest and most remote of our limbs when He speaks of the hair.”<sup>120</sup>

Christian writers of the fourth century onwards combatted such anxieties about the corporeal self’s dissolution “by asserting God’s power to freeze every moment and sustain every

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<sup>117</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 101, citing Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 82-3. See also Peter Brown, “Enjoying the saints in late antiquity,” *Early Medieval Europe* 9.1 (2000): 6-10, citing Victricius of Rouen, *In Praise of the Saints* 12: “Let there be no day, dearest brothers, on which we not meditate on these stories. This one did not pale before the tortures ... this one greedily swallowed the flames ... another was cut to pieces, yet remained whole.” On the “pornographic detail” of the violence described in the martyr stories, see Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 124-7.

<sup>118</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 111-3. Nicholas Vincent similarly writes: “From a very early date, the nature of the resurrection body and, by extension, the degree to which its various constituent parts such as the humours, or the nails or hair, were necessary to resurrection, had formed a regular topic of scholastic debate.” Nicholas Vincent, *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic* (Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 93.

<sup>119</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 13.19. Translated in *NPNF* 2:497. Cited in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 99.

<sup>120</sup> Braulio of Saragossa, *Letter* 42. Translated in Claude Barlow, *Iberian Fathers*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1969-99), 2:91.

particle of the flux that is ‘us’” and to reassemble all of these pieces after death.<sup>121</sup> In a passage about the day of resurrection, the fourth-century Syriac writer Ephraim describes a resurrection process that betrays a distinct concern with even the smallest pieces of the body: “And the dust of the earth will be commanded to separate itself from the dust of the dead; not the tiniest particle of that dust will remain behind; it will come before the judge.”<sup>122</sup> Here the very dust of one’s body is made whole again through the power of God. In the early eighth century, John of Damascus uses similar language in describing bodily resurrection, asserting that God, “who made it [the body] in the beginning of the sand of the earth, does not lack the power to raise it up again after it has been dissolved again and returned to the earth from which it was taken.”<sup>123</sup>

In contrast to these Christian attitudes, rabbinic sources portray an attitude of relative acceptance towards the process of the dead body’s decay: indeed the rabbinic attitudes regarding bodily fragmentation in death represent something like an inversion of late ancient Christian anxieties. Rabbinic comments on corpses are largely taken up with issues of ritual purity—rooted in the biblical Priestly Code’s statements on the corpse’s impurity—and with the specifics of how and which pieces of a dead body transmit impurity, seeking to determine “at which point a dead body ... is still a ‘corpse’ that can convey impurity, and at which point it is so disintegrated and decomposed that it can only be seen as organic matter, incapable of conveying impurity any longer.”<sup>124</sup> Mira Balberg illustrates in a recent study that rabbinic literature’s understandings of

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<sup>121</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 113.

<sup>122</sup> Translated in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 75.

<sup>123</sup> John of Damascus, *In librum de fide orthodoxa*, 4:27. PG 94, col. 1120. Translated in *NPNF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 9:99.

<sup>124</sup> Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 100. As Halevi notes, “rabbinical notions of purity were not static ... still, rabbinic attitudes remained to some degree rooted in the ancient Levitical framework.” Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 76-9, 279n.102. On the corpse as polluting see: Num. 19:11-16; *m. Kelim* 1:4; *m. Ohol.* 1:1-4. “Rather than addressing the theological meaning of death, the rabbis of the Mishnah are almost exclusively concerned with the ritual, familial, and economic problems the death of a specific individual raises ... These issues involve, most prominently, corpse uncleanness ... and the rules for the distribution of wealth.” Alan J. Avery-Peck, “Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources: The Mishnah, Tosefta, and Early Midrash Compilations” in *Judaism in Late*

corpse impurity take the entire dead body as the “yardstick against which all corpse parts are assessed” and “the ability of corpse fragments to convey impurity is diminished as they disintegrate and become more fragmented.”<sup>125</sup> Unlike the Christian tendency to see the whole of a person in each piece, late ancient rabbis “construct a distinction between different types of corpse fragments” in which different pieces possess different significances and significations, such that “corpse fragments can convey impurity only insofar as they can stand for whole persons.”<sup>126</sup> Thus while small pieces of bone or flesh are considered (depending upon their size) less polluting or not at all polluting, “specific bones that are discernibly human, like the skull, the spine, or limbs with flesh on them, can be emblematic of an entire person and [thus] convey impurity.”<sup>127</sup>

Balberg suggests that “we may define the determinant requirement that corpse parts must meet in order to convey impurity as *symbolic personhood*, that is, as the ability of a part of a corpse to invoke a mental image of a whole human being.”<sup>128</sup> Thus the bodily pieces that are understood to represent an individual person—such as bones like the skull that clearly come from a human being—are in fact the pieces the rabbis saw as simultaneously the most polluting. Unlike late ancient Christian concerns and claims about each bodily particle’s fate, in which each bit theoretically contained the whole, rabbinic sources generally place the greatest significance only on certain parts of the dead body. It is in the case of these most significant bodily fragments that “the part not only represents the whole, but actually functions like the whole” as a polluting object.<sup>129</sup>

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*Antiquity. Part Four: Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), 244-5.

<sup>125</sup> Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 101, 103.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 100 and 109. See *m. Ohol.* 2:1-2.

<sup>127</sup> Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 107. See *m. Ohol.* 2:1-2.

<sup>128</sup> Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 105.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

As Balberg notes, this is much like the relic cult's ideas of part representing whole: yet unlike Christian relic veneration, which valorized contact with synecdochic pieces of holy persons' bodies, the rabbis in fact saw the most polluting power in those pieces that were the most representative of the whole of an individual.<sup>130</sup> The most representative pieces were in fact those that it was most necessary *not* to come into contact with. For the rabbis, bones appear to have been understood as the most important conveyors of self. The "symbolic personhood" of these bodily fragments is attested, for example, in *Semaḥot* (Tractate Mourning) 2:10, stating that the days of mourning for a person "found limb by limb ... may not begin until the head or the greater part of the corpse is found."<sup>131</sup> A tradition from Rabbi Judah is then given, stating "The spinal column or the skull constitutes the greater part of the corpse." Later this same tradition from Rabbi Judah is given after the stipulation that, "A body may not be carried out on a bier unless the head or the greater part of the corpse is intact." Clearly the spinal column and skull were important constituent parts of the body in rabbinic understanding and functioned as representatives of the whole individual.

Such an understanding of the representative power of bones is witnessed also in the late ancient Jewish burial practice of *ossilegium*, as well as in rabbinic traditions about the role of bones in the resurrection. *Ossilegium*, mentioned in both tannaitic and amoraic literature, involved the installation of the corpse's bones in a new location after the flesh had decayed therefrom.<sup>132</sup> While open to interpretation, this practice certainly indicates an importance seen in the bones as representative parts of the dead individual over the decayed flesh. Moreover, some rabbinic traditions indicate that the individual's bones are the bodily fragments that convey

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>131</sup> *The Tractate "Mourning" (Šemaḥot) (Regulations Relating to Death, Burial, and Mourning)*, trans. and ed. Dov Zlotnick (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), 36.

<sup>132</sup> *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, s.v. "Likkut Aẓamot." *m. M.K.* 1:5. *b. M.K.* 8a. *Semaḥot* 12-13.

individual identity until the time of the resurrection. A story found in several midrashic commentaries narrates that, to the question “Whence will man sprout in the Hereafter,” Rabbi Joshua b. Ḥananiah responds: “From the nut of the spinal column.”<sup>133</sup>

What unifies all these discussions of relics, resurrection, and corpses is a sense that “body is person or self.”<sup>134</sup> Nicholas Conostas writes that “Byzantine thinkers consistently (if not always uniformly) promoted the material continuity of the self as it flowed from life through death to the resurrection.”<sup>135</sup> This idea was strong enough that many late ancient Christians appear to have feared that, in the process of bodily decomposition, “our self will perish”: alongside a power seen in the fragmentation of holy bodies, allowing holiness to be multiplied and spread, there appeared in late ancient Christian thought a “throb[bing] with fear of being fragmented, absorbed, and digested by an other that is natural process itself.”<sup>136</sup> While natural decomposition and fragmentation seem not to have concerned the rabbis nearly as much as they did late ancient Christians, the rabbis similarly placed identity in the body and thus in the material remains of the individual.<sup>137</sup> Not only do rabbinic traditions state that certain bones are the material from “whence man will sprout” at the resurrection, the rabbis likewise cite God’s power to bring life from dust and suggest that individuals will emerge at the resurrection in their clothes from life and with the same bodily defects they had while alive.<sup>138</sup> While Christian writers seem quite

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<sup>133</sup> Cited in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 25n.9, 54n.135.

<sup>134</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 76.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholas Conostas, “Death and Dying in Byzantium,” in Krueger, *People’s History of Christianity*, 143.

<sup>136</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 111-2.

<sup>137</sup> On rabbinic anthropology as based on a union between body and soul in which “the distinction between spirit and matter is not known,” see: Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 33-5; Alon Goshen Gottstein, “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” *HTR* 87.2 (1994): 176-8; Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 61-2.

<sup>138</sup> *b. San.* 90b-91b. Cited in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 25n.9, 54n.135. See discussion in Alan J. Avery-Peck, “Resurrection of the Body in Early Rabbinic Judaism,” in *The Human Body in Death and Resurrection*, ed. Tobias Nicklas, Friedrich V. Reiterer, and Joseph Verheyden, in collaboration with Heike Braun (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 261-4.



clearly to have placed more significance in very small pieces of the body, late ancient Jews also displayed ideas about the continued importance of some bodily fragments.

In early Islamic sources, a similar understanding of the power in small bodily relics appears (as discussed above) and a similar discourse of bodily continuity is also displayed. Already in the Qur'ān there is a defiant affirmation of God's ability to make humankind "gathered" (*majmū'ūn*) again at the day of resurrection after "we have died and become dust and bones" (*mitnā wa kunnā turāb<sup>an</sup> wa 'izām<sup>an</sup>*, Q. 56:47-50). As Halevi states, "Unbelievers had the fragmentation of the body in mind when they inquired how Muslims could be recreated anew 'once you are torn to pieces' (*idhā muzziqtum*, Q. 34:7)."<sup>139</sup> The Qur'ān's affirmation "again and again ... that God is powerful (*qadīr*) enough to bring life out of dust" is reminiscent of the claims about the resurrection made by late ancient Christian and Jewish writers and perhaps betrays a similar anxiety about the process of decomposition and the fear of bodily fragmentation that seems particularly to have plagued late ancient Christian thinkers.<sup>140</sup>

A concern for even very small bits of the body, similar to what we see in Augustine and Braulio of Saragossa, appears in an early Shī'ī text: the *aṣl* (or *kitāb*) attributed to Zayd al-Narsī, a Companion of the Imāms Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim.<sup>141</sup> This short collection includes a tradition, related by Zayd from Mūsā al-Kāẓim, describing the proper *sunna* for cutting the hair of one's head, as well as a prayer to be said during the process. The prayer runs as follows:

In the name of God, [I swear] by the *milla* of Ibrāhīm and by the *sunna* of Muḥammad and Muḥammad's family: as a *ḥanīf* and a Muslim, I am not one of the polytheists. O God, give me, for every hair and nail in this world, a light on the day of the resurrection.

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<sup>139</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 205. *Muzziqtum* could alternatively be translated as "disintegrated."

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> On this text, see: Etan Kohlberg, "al-Uṣūl al-Arba 'mi'a," *JSAI* 10 (1987): 152-4; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 401. On Zayd al-Narsī, see: al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 1:395 (no. 458).

O God, replace each hair for me in its place, may it not disobey you! Make it an adornment for me and a decoration in this world and a shining light on the day of resurrection.<sup>142</sup>

The narrator (Mūsā al-Kāzim) then instructs the listener to gather the shorn hair and bury it while reciting another prayer, this one asking God to bless the hair (*qaddis* ‘alay-hi), to keep/make it pure (*tahhir-hu*), and, once again, to replace one’s hairs with lights on the day of resurrection. Like the Christian sources that witness concerns over what will happen to even the tiniest of human remains, this early Shī‘ī text indicates a similar interest in hair and nails and suggests that they will be present on the day of resurrection, albeit in some kind of transformed state.

Indeed, similar to late ancient Christian and Jewish ideas, early Islamic anthropology imagined the body as a conveyer of ‘self’ such that “personal identity continues to reside in the body beyond death until the resurrection.”<sup>143</sup> This concern with small bodily remains is displayed in the reluctance of early jurists to displace hair and nail parings from dead bodies.<sup>144</sup> When asked what to do “when hair or fingernails fall off a dead person,” the Kūfan traditionist ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Laylā (d. 83/702) is recorded as saying, “Place them in his burial shroud.”<sup>145</sup> The Baṣran Muḥammad Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729) and his traditionist sisters (Banāt Sīrīn) are also said to have advocated burying the corpse with anything that falls from the dead body, “hair or

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<sup>142</sup> *Bi-smi Allāhi wa ‘alā millati Ibrāhīmi wa sunnati Muḥammadi wa āli Muḥammadi ḥanīfi muslimi wa mā anā min al-mushrikīn allahumma a ‘ṭi-nī bi-kulli sha ‘ratī wa za‘faratī fī-l-dunyā nūr<sup>an</sup> yawm al-qiya‘ama‘ allahumma ubdul-nī makān<sup>a</sup>-hu sha ‘r<sup>an</sup> lā ya ‘ṣī-ka ta ‘jal-hu zīnat<sup>an</sup> lī wa waqār<sup>an</sup> fī-l-dunyā wa nūr<sup>an</sup> sā‘i<sup>an</sup> yawm<sup>a</sup> al-qiya‘ama‘. Kitāb al-Uṣūl al-sittat ‘ashar: min al-Uṣūl al-awwliyat fī-l-riwāyāt wa aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt (Qum: Dār al-Shabistārī li-l-Maṭbū‘āt, 1363/1984), 56.*

<sup>143</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 211, 81, 205, 210. Halevi discusses the distinction between Qur’ānic and post-Qur’ānic conceptions of the relation between soul and body, but in both cases an importance component of ‘self’ is understood to reside in the body. Ibid. 205-7, 211. See also *ibid.*, 200 and 324n.2, citing Bynum’s work.

<sup>144</sup> Proper treatment of the dead body was a point of intense interest amongst eighth-century Muslim jurists, with particular concern displayed for what potentially polluting effect the living would have on the dead (instead of vice versa) and with “safeguarding the reputation” of the dead. Ibid., 75.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣanna‘*, 3:436-7 (no. 6231). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣanna‘*, 4:403 (no. 11052).

otherwise.”<sup>146</sup> Within the context of this discussion of hair and nails, it is reported that when the military leader Qays b. Sa‘d (d. 59/678-9) found a finger that had become separated from a man’s corpse he tied the digit to the body.<sup>147</sup> In a tradition found in the tenth-century C.E. Ismā‘īlī jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, the Shī‘ī Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) states: “Nothing is to fall from a dead person—either hair, flesh, bone, or anything else—without it being placed in the burial shroud with him and buried with him.”<sup>148</sup> Hair and (perhaps to a lesser extent) nails are thus grouped with flesh and bone as constituent parts of the body and are kept with the corpse to maintain its physical integrity.

In fact, many early jurists appear to have understood the bodily integrity of the corpse to be potentially compromised by the removal of such small pieces as hair and nails. Ibn Sīrīn says not to clip the hair or nails of a dead person, as do the Meccan ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 115/773) and the Shī‘ī Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq.<sup>149</sup> The Kūfan Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān (d. 120/737) discourages the clipping of nails, asking rhetorically “If you saw that he [the corpse] was uncircumcised, would you circumcise him?”<sup>150</sup> Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) offers a more moderate position, allowing for the trimming of hair and nails if they are long, though in one version he advises that the trimmings should be buried along with the corpse, as described above.<sup>151</sup> The Baṣran Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. 131/748) also suggests that any trimmings should be placed with the corpse.<sup>152</sup> Even combing the hair of the corpse is discouraged by some, as when the Medinese scholar Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) says, “Do not comb the corpse’s head or

<sup>146</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:403 (no. 11053). See also: *ibid.*, 4:410-1 (no. 11092-3).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:404 (no. 11056).

<sup>148</sup> *Mā saqaṭa min al-mayyit min sha‘r<sup>in</sup> aw laḥm<sup>in</sup> aw ‘azm<sup>in</sup> aw ghayr dhālik ju‘ila fī kafan<sup>i</sup>-hi ma‘a-hu wa dufina bi-hi.* al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, 1:234 (no. 824). Cited in Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 274n.54. A similar tradition from Ja‘far al-Šādiq is found in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 3:155.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:436 (no. 6228-9). al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 3:155-6.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:437 (no. 6233). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:402 (no. 11046).

<sup>151</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:436-7 (no. 6228, 6234). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:403 (no. 11054).

<sup>152</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:436 (no. 6230). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:404 (no. 11055).

beard, for it is detestable that its hair would fall off from being combed.”<sup>153</sup> Perhaps offering a middle course, Ḥafsa bint Sīrīn (d. 101/719), says “Comb the hair of the dead person, and then place it [i.e. the combings] with him.”<sup>154</sup> A similar compromise appears in a ninth-century Ibāḍī legal text: the *Jāmi‘* of Ibn Ja‘far (d. 281/894) says that a female corpse’s hair should not be combed and that any hair that falls off should be washed and returned to the rest of the corpse, but, if wind blows some of the hair away, then “that is all allowable, God willing” (*kull<sup>u</sup> dhālika jā‘iz<sup>um</sup> in shā‘a Allāh*).<sup>155</sup>

As a point of comparison, hair appears quite clearly not to have drawn this kind of attention within rabbinic tradition. Mishnah Ohelot 3:3 states that “everything appertaining to a corpse is unclean except the teeth, hair and nails.”<sup>156</sup> Recalling that the rabbis understood the most polluting bodily remains to be those invested with the most “symbolic personhood” (such as the skull and spinal column), the lack of any polluting power associated with hair, nails, and teeth implies that the rabbis understood little “personhood” to reside within these effluvial pieces. Exactly this point is made in Babylonian Talmud Niddah 55a, where Rabbi Adda b.

<sup>153</sup> *Lā yusarraḥ ra‘sa al-mayyit<sup>i</sup> wa lā liḥyat<sup>i</sup>-hi wa-innamā karuha min tasrīḥ<sup>i</sup> an yantafa sha‘r<sup>u</sup>-hu*. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm*, ed. Rif‘at Fawzī ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 11 vols. (al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Wafā‘ li-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1422/2001), 2:590 (no. 647). Halevi writes that Mālik forbade combing the hair, “fearing the irreparable loss of hair that might result from this activity.” Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 65. On the following page of his *al-Umm*, al-Shāfi‘ī reports that among his associates (*min aṣḥāb<sup>i</sup>-nā*) there is one who says “I do not think that hair [should] be shaved after death nor nails be shortened” (*man qāla lā arā an yuḥlaqa ba‘d al-mawt<sup>i</sup> sha‘r<sup>u</sup> wa lā yujaza la-hu zufur<sup>um</sup>*) and one who “sees no problem with that” (*man lam yara bi-dhālika ba‘sa<sup>an</sup>*).

<sup>154</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:404 (no. 11057). It is interesting to note that the Baṣran scholars—Ḥafsa bint Sīrīn, Muḥammad Ibn Sīrīn, and Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī—who seem to have been unopposed to the idea of combing corpses’ hair (as discussed in Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 64-5) are also reported to have advocated placing fallen hairs together with the corpse. I would suggest that this illustrates that hair was seen to be a constituent element of the body and that even if the hair is combed, it should not be completely removed from the presence of the body in death. See also: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:410-1 (no. 11092-3).

<sup>155</sup> Abū Jābir Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Izkawī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Ibn Ja‘far*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Āmir and Jabr Maḥmūd al-Fuḍaylāt, 5 vols. (Oman: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa-l-Thaqāfa, 1981-1994), 2:461. Discouragement from trimming a male corpse’s nails and from trimming or combing the corpse’s hair appears in: *ibid.*, 2:450. On Ibn Ja‘far, see: *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Ibn Dja‘far” (T. Lewicki). In another Ibāḍī text, other traditions appear that also discourage trimming hair and nails or combing the head. See: Abū Ghānim, *al-Mudawwana al-Kubrā*, 1:202. Cited in Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 274n.54. Compare these texts with the tradition about Khārijites’ cutting the hair of corpses cited in: Ignaz Goldziher, “On the veneration of the dead in paganism and Islam,” in *Muslim Studies*, 1:226.

<sup>156</sup> Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self*, 59.

Ahabah states that, in order for a part of the corpse to be polluting, “It must be exactly like a bone; as a bone was created simultaneously with it [the body] and when cut does not grow again so must every other part be such ... the hair and nails were excluded since, though they were created with [the body], they grow again.” The rabbis’ disinterest in hair as a constituent part of the body is further confirmed in Babylonian Talmud Nazir 51a, where it is stated that hair buried with a corpse (and perhaps even long hair that has not been trimmed therefrom!) acts as *galgalin*, an “external addition to the body” that (when buried with the corpse) functions to negate the laws of corpse rot.<sup>157</sup> Thus, according to the rabbis, not only does hair not serve symbolically for the bodily whole, but hair can, in fact, function as a foreign object essentially unrelated to one’s own body.

Conversely, small pieces of the body such as hair were invested with significance in both the Christian and Islamic sources of this period and stood in close symbolic relationship with the body as a whole, as suggested above. Thus if hair is understood as an extension of the body, the stories of Muḥammad’s hair present a paradoxical image of his Prophetic body: he was simultaneously supernaturally strong and humanly weak; greater than and, at times, even less than a normal man. Like Theodore of Sykeon, Muḥammad’s hair is able to heal others. Yet like Kyr(i)akos son of Sanne, Muḥammad’s hair is also used to deprive him of his bodily and mental functioning. Like saintly relics, the blessing present in Muḥammad is entirely present even in the strands of his hair, yet Labīd’s usage of that hair illustrates the vulnerability in his body’s fragmentation.

That Muḥammad’s hair could endow others with such a blessing, yet also allow a curse to fall upon the Prophet himself, seems irreconcilable. Yet if we understand Muḥammad’s hair

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 120, 222n.92. As Balberg notes, the “exact literal meaning” of this word is not clear, but the concept is that such objects as cloths wrapped around the body serve to negate the laws of corpse rot, since such objects “mix” with the body in the process of its decomposition.

synecdochically, as a metonym for his body, we see that the conflicting images of Muḥammad found in stories of his hair find parallels in the divergent representations of his body as a whole after its (theoretical) movement from subject to object, i.e. after Muḥammad's death. In the stories and statements about Muḥammad's corpse, a similarly conflicting set of notions is displayed, again demonstrating variant ideas about Muḥammad's nature/human status. Likely "reflect[ing] an ideological conflict within the earliest community," the dramatically different representations of the characteristics and even location of Muḥammad's body after death flesh out the ideas about Muḥammad's nature that are reflected obliquely in the stories of the Prophet's hair.<sup>158</sup> Yet these different representations and understandings of the Prophet continued in subsequent centuries and they present a paradoxical image of Muḥammad's body, much like the conflicting images of Muḥammad's hair.

On the one hand, some traditions exhibit a hagiographic portrait of Muḥammad's body: his corpse is uncorrupted by death, demonstrating no signs of decay and, in fact, exuding a sweet smell like that which the Prophet exhibited while alive. This image is found in *sīra* stories in the context of Muḥammad's death and burial: 'Alī exclaims, while washing the Prophet's corpse for burial, "How fragrant you are alive and dead!" and it is narrated that "nothing was observed on the Messenger of God of what is usually observed on the dead."<sup>159</sup> A similar representation of the non-decaying prophetic body appears in a *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad states that "God has

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<sup>158</sup> Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 184.

<sup>159</sup> *Mā aṭyabaka ḥayy<sup>an</sup> wa-mayyit<sup>an</sup> ... wa-lam yura min rasūl Allāh shay<sup>um</sup> mim mā yurā min al-mayyit*. Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 1018-9. Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 688. Translation here adapted from Szilágyi, "Prophet like Jesus," 157. This tradition is also found in: Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:63; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 13:459 (no. 38030); al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 1 (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 569 and 571; idem, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Zirīklī (Beirut: Maktab al-Buḥūth wa-'l-Dirāsāt fī Dār al-Fīkr, 1996), 245 and 247; Abū Dāwūd, *al-Marāsīl*, 299 (no. 415). These words are also ascribed to Abū Bakr in: Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:53.

forbidden the earth to eat away the bodies of the prophets.”<sup>160</sup> Like the stories of his powerful hair, these traditions endow Muḥammad’s body as a whole with a blessed, exceptional status, distinctly different from that of the average human being.

Muḥammad’s body here displays qualities much like those of other holy men in late antiquity. The “incorruptibility of the bodies of the saints” is a prominent theme in late ancient Christian hagiographical literature, in which the non-decaying body serves as a sign of “the purity or sinless conduct of the saint.”<sup>161</sup> For example, the life of Symeon Stylites ascribed to his disciple Antonius states that during the preparation for the saint’s interment, “although he was already dead for four days, his holy body looked as if he had died just an hour before.”<sup>162</sup> Late ancient Jewish sources similarly portray the bodies of the biblical patriarchs, as in the Talmudic statement: “Our rabbis taught that there were seven over whom the worms [of the grave] had no power, and they were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and Benjamin son of Jacob.”<sup>163</sup> At least one rabbi’s body did not decay after death, as Jeffery Rubenstein notes

<sup>160</sup> *Inna Allāh<sup>a</sup> ḥarrama ‘alā-l-arḍ<sup>ā</sup> an ta’kula ajsād<sup>a</sup> al-anbīya’*. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3:602 (no. 8781). Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 1:345 (no. 1085) (*kitāb al-iqāmat al-ṣalāt wa-l-sunna fī-hā, bāb 29*) and 1:524 (no. 1636-7) (*kitāb al-janā’iz, bāb 65*). al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 2:981 (no. 1613). Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’ ba’da waḥātī-him*, ed. Aḥmad b. ‘Aṭīyya al-Ghā’irī (Medina: Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa-’l-Ḥikm, 1414/1993), 88-90. Abū Nu’aym, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, 496. In a Shī’ī version, Ja’far al-Ṣādiq states, “God has forbidden the earth to eat anything from our flesh” (*inna Allāha ḥarrama luḥūm<sup>a</sup>-nā ‘alā-l-arḍ an taḥ’ama min-hā shay<sup>am</sup>*): al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, 2:346. Compare the fate of normal human beings’ bodies: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3:591 (no. 6759). Commenting on another *ḥadīth* about the status of prophets after death, discussed below, Szilágyi notes that this statement is about “prophets in general” but suggests that it is “likely that early Muslims created and circulated these *ḥadīths* out of interest in Muḥammad’s, and not an earlier prophet’s, postmortem fate.” This seems relevant to this *ḥadīth* as well. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 141 and n.34. This characterization of the prophets’ non-decaying bodies also appears in the descriptions of the Prophet Daniel’s body. See: Ibn Ishāq, *Kitāb al-siyar* (ed. Zakkār), 66-7 = *Sīrat Ibn Ishāq* (ed. Ḥamīdullāh), 43-4 (no. 49); Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:562-4 (nos. 34392-3).

<sup>161</sup> Douglas Karim Crow, “The Death of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and Early Shī’ī Views of the Imamate,” in *Shī’ism: Origins and Early Development*, ed. Etan Kohlberg (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2003), 61.

<sup>162</sup> τετάρτην ἡδὲ ἔχων ἡμέραν τελευτήσας. καὶ οὐτως ἤπλωσεν τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ λείφανον ὡς πρὸ ὥρας μιᾶς ἀναπαεῖς. Lietzmann, *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, 70. Doran, trans., *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 98.

<sup>163</sup> ואלא גם לחה ר' אליעזר בן יעקב אומר אל תהי קורא לא גם לחה (אלא לא גם לחה עכשיו כל הנוגע בבשרו של משה לחה פורחת אילך ואילך Deuteronomy 357, Rabbi Eliezer b. Jacob comments on Moses’ body after death: “Read not, ‘Nor his natural force abated’ [Deut. 34:7], but ‘Even now his natural force is still not abated,’ for if anyone should touch the flesh of Moses, its natural force would spring forth in all directions” (אלא לא גם לחה עכשיו כל הנוגע בבשרו של משה לחה פורחת אילך ואילך L. Finkelstein, *Siphre ad Deuteronomium H. S. Horovitzii schedis usis cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus* (Berlin: Abteilung Verlag 1939), 429. Translated in:

regarding the stories of Rabbi Eleazar b. Rabbi Shimon’s corpse in the Babylonian Talmud and the *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*.<sup>164</sup> Muḥammad’s body, devoid of decay, thus demonstrates holiness similar to that of saints, prophets, and rabbis in late antiquity.

Additionally, as Szilágyi, Shoemaker, and Halevi all note, “the pleasant aroma of the dead body of the holy man is a common motif in Christian saints’ *vitae*,” indicating that these traditions about the sweet smell of Muḥammad’s corpse “probably ... developed under the influence of Christian saints’ lives.”<sup>165</sup> Antonius describes the corpse of Symeon Stylites: “Throughout his body and his garments was a scented perfume which, from its sweet smell, made one’s heart merry.”<sup>166</sup> Like ‘Alī’s description of Muḥammad’s body as “fragrant ... alive and dead,” the Syriac *vita* of Symeon describes the saint exhibiting a pleasant aroma during his life—“a cool, refreshing, and very fragrant wind blew as though a heavenly dew were falling on

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R. Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 382. On Sifre Deuteronomy, see *ibid.*, 1-21; Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 270-3. A similar tradition appears in D. Hoffman, *Midrasch Tannaim zum Deuteronomium aus der in Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin befindlichen Handschrift des “Midrasch haggadol” gesammelt und mit Anmerkungen versehen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Druck von H. Itzkowski, 1908-9), 2:227. On Midrash Tannaim, see Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud*, 273-5. Citations found in Lynn Holden, *Forms of Deformity* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1991), 67; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols., trans. Henrietta Szold et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909-38), 6:164n.953.

<sup>164</sup> For full discussion, see Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “A Rabbinic Translation of Relics,” in *Ambiguities, Complexities and Half-Forgotten Adversaries: Crossing Boundaries in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Kimberly Stratton and Andrea Lieber (forthcoming), in which Rubenstein suggests that “we should understand this episode, at least in part, in light of the cult of relics of Christian martyrs and holy men in late antiquity, so brilliantly explicated by Peter Brown as indicative of a distinct form of late antique piety.” I am grateful to Professor Rubenstein for sharing his work prior to publication. In *b. B.M.* 84b, Eleazar’s wife reports that (for a period between 18 and 22 years) Eleazar’s corpse lay in their attic, from whence Eleazar’s voice would come when petitioners came asking for a legal judgment. She also says that, each day, when she pulled a hair from Eleazar’s head, blood would flow out. As Rubenstein argues, “flowing blood is presumably a sign that the corpse remained in the same state as when alive and did not decompose, therefore retaining the ability to bleed.” At *b. B.M.* 83b, it is also reported that Eleazar’s fat does not decompose and that, speaking to his guts, he says “worms will have no power over you” ( שאין רמה ותולעה ) ( שולטת בכב ), echoing the vocabulary used for the patriarchs’ non-decaying state. At *Pesiqta* 11:23, Eleazar states, “I am about to lay among worms but, God forbid, they will have no power over me” ( מהדמוך אנה ברם רימה הם ושלום לית ) ( הוא מישלוט בי ).

<sup>165</sup> Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 157 and n.95. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 95 and 304n.99 citing Szilágyi. Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 43, 47, 80-1, 270n.16. Szilágyi and Halevi both cite the example of the fragrant corpse of Symeon Stylites. Several other examples of fragrant saintly corpses are cited in Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 325n.27.

<sup>166</sup> καὶ ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱματίοις αὐτοῦ ἦν ὀσμὴ μύρου, ὥστε εὐφρανθῆναι ἀπὸ τῆς εὐωδίας ἐκείνης. Lietzmann, *Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, 66. Doran, trans., *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 98.



the saint and were sending forth a fragrant scent from him such as has not been spoken of in the world”—that Symeon’s body continued to exhibit after his death.<sup>167</sup> This is similar to a narrative in Ibn Sa‘d’s *Ṭabaqāt*, where it is stated that during ‘Alī’s preparation of the Prophet’s corpse “a fragrant wind blew, the likes of which they had never experienced before.”<sup>168</sup> Muḥammad’s body appears here as a holy object: though we do not find followers scrabbling for pieces of it as we do in the stories of Christian saints’ corpses, the image is otherwise similar to the fragrant, blessed relic that the saint’s body became after death.

On the other hand we have stories in which Muḥammad’s corpse appears distinctly human. A variety of details in these reports provide witness that the Prophet’s body was not exceptional, but normal in its decay and putrefaction. The story of the corpse’s sweet fragrance is “directly contradicted” in narratives in which the Prophet’s uncle al-‘Abbās argues that the Prophet must be buried since he has begun to stink.<sup>169</sup> In addition to the scent, the image of the body is said to have changed, and it is specified in some traditions that the fingernails had turned “greenish.”<sup>170</sup> In sum, according to these stories, “death was apparent on him” when the body was buried. Instead of an inviolable prophetic body, we find here a corpse, decaying as any other. As when his hair was used to bewitch him, Muḥammad in these traditions appears distinctly human and capable of human corruption and deterioration.

The differences here between an exceptional and an unexceptional body are stark, much like the disparate representations of Muḥammad’s hair. Moreover, these different representations

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<sup>167</sup> *Ḥayāt al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 2:382 and 392. S.E. Assemani, *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et occidentalium*, 2 vols. (Rome: Collini, 1748), 2:382 and 392. Doran, trans., *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 185-6 and 193. A slightly different version appears in Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, 4:630 and 641.

<sup>168</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Biḥār*, 2:63. Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:63.

<sup>169</sup> “He is decomposing as people do” (*fa-inna-hu ya ‘sanu ka-mā ya ‘sanu al-nās*). Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 53-4. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 5:434-5. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 70, 95, 185-6. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 150-1.

<sup>170</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 57-9. Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: the Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 27.

of Muḥammad’s corpse participate in larger narratives regarding the location and nature after death of the Prophet’s body and soul. These representations illustrate conflicting (or conflicted) conceptions of the very nature of the Prophet himself. While some traditions acknowledge the Prophet as a man present in his grave like other bodies, in others he is a miraculous being raised to heaven and transcending death.

The notion that the Prophet did not die is most often associated with ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in the historiographical traditions about the contested events surrounding the Prophet’s death: however, early sources ascribe such a belief to others as well and the details of the Prophet’s status and fate vary in these different versions. In the iteration narrated through Ibn Ishāq, ‘Umar recalls the story in Q. 2:51 and 7:142 of Moses’ forty-day meeting with God on Mount Sinai, declaring: “By God he is not dead: he has gone to his Lord as Moses b. ‘Imrān went and was hidden from his people for forty days, returning to them after it was said that he was dead. By God, the Messenger of God will return as Moses returned.”<sup>171</sup> In other versions, ‘Umar or others suggest that Muḥammad has been “raised in his spirit” (*‘urija bi-rūḥi-hi*) as Moses was, perhaps

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<sup>171</sup> *Mā māta wa-lākinnu-hu dhahaba ilā rabb<sup>i</sup>-hi ka-mā dhahaba Mūsā b. ‘Imrān fa-qad ghāba ‘an qawm<sup>i</sup>-hi arba ‘īna laylat<sup>am</sup> thumma raja ‘a ilay-him ba ‘da an qīla qad māta wa wa-‘llāh<sup>i</sup> la-yarji ‘anna ka-mā rasūl Allāh ka-mā raja ‘a Mūsā.* Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 1012; Guillaume, trans., *Life of Muhammad*, 682-3. This version is narrated through Ibn Ishāq also in: al-Ṭabarī, *Tā’rīkh*, 1/iv:1815-6; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 1:565-6 (no. 1149). In another version, ‘Umar says that “his Lord summoned the Messenger of God” (*arsala ilay-hi rabb<sup>u</sup>-hu*) as he had summoned Moses: Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 53 and 55-6; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 5:433; and Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:459-60 (no. 38033). Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 91, 94, 179. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 149-50. El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics*, 28, 40. The Qur’ānic narrative about Moses on Mount Sinai recalls Ex. 24:18 and 34:28. A version appears within the context of the story of ‘Umar refusing to give the Prophet a pen and paper to record a will on his deathbed, at which point ‘Umar says: “The Prophet will not die until we conquer [the cities of Rome], and even if he dies, we shall expect him as the children of Israel expected Moses” (*inna Rasūl<sup>u</sup> Allāh<sup>i</sup> laysa bi-mayyit<sup>in</sup> ḥattā naftatiḥa-hā wa law māta la-intazarnā-hu ka-mā intazarnat banū Isrā’īl Mūsā*). Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii: 38. Translated in Said Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classic Period,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism. Volume 2: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1998), 247. A different interpretation of this latter narrative is offered in: Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, “The Story of ‘Pen and Paper’ and its Interpretation in Muslim Literary and Historical Tradition,” in *The Study of Shi‘i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (London and New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute for Ismaili Studies, 2014), 240-1.

specifying his “spirit” in order to account for the continued presence of the Prophet’s body.<sup>172</sup> In a variant tradition found in al-Balādhurī’s *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ‘Uthmān states: “The Messenger of God has not died, but he has been raised as Jesus b. Mary was raised,” drawing upon the Qur’ānic description of Jesus being raised to God (Q. 3:55 and 4:158).<sup>173</sup> Ibn Sa’d’s *Ṭabaqāt* includes traditions suggesting that such beliefs were more widespread, with the Prophet’s Companions (*aṣḥāb<sup>u</sup>-hu*) wondering among themselves if “perhaps he was taken up” (*la ‘alla-hu ‘urija bi-hi*) or “the people” (*al-nās*) as a whole suggesting that the Prophet “did not die but was raised, as Jesus b. Mary was raised” (*mā māta wa-lākinna-hu rufi ‘a ka-mā rufi ‘a ‘Īsā ibn Maryam*).<sup>174</sup> These traditions illustrate not only disbelief in Muḥammad’s death, but also belief in the exceptional status of Muḥammad’s soul and (perhaps) his body.

These ideas are narratologically stopped in their tracks by assertions from prominent members of the early Muslim community that Muḥammad did, in fact, die. In one version, it is the first caliph Abū Bakr who corrects this misconception by citing Qur’ān 3:144 on the inevitability of Muḥammad’s death.<sup>175</sup> In another, likely earlier version, al-‘Abbās asserts, “The Messenger of God has died. He is a mortal, and, as it is with mortals, his odor changes. People, bury your master.”<sup>176</sup> The version attributed to al-‘Abbās more viscerally points to the Prophet’s death, arguing on the basis of corpse’s physical decay that death has clearly occurred.

Whether or not such disagreements actually occurred immediately following the Prophet’s death, these traditions demonstrate that stories about early Muslims’ reluctance to bury Muḥammad out of a belief that he might be/have been raised to heaven “circulated in the entire

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<sup>172</sup> In Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:53 and al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 1:567 (no. 1151), this statement is ascribed to ‘Umar. Another tradition on the same page of Ibn Sa’d states that “they said that he has been raised in his spirit as Moses was,” without specifying the speakers.

<sup>173</sup> al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 1:567. Cited in Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 152.

<sup>174</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/ii:56-7. Cited in Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 151-2; El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics*, 347n.7.

<sup>175</sup> Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 179-188. El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics*, 40.

<sup>176</sup> Translated in Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 150-1.

Caliphate from the early eighth century onwards.”<sup>177</sup> As both Shoemaker and Szilágyi note, it is unlikely that this story was invented at a late date. Shoemaker dates it no later than the early eighth century, while Szilágyi suggests that it might be rooted in events following Muḥammad’s death.<sup>178</sup> While the placement of such beliefs and conflicts within the time of the earliest Companions may or may not be a pious fiction, Shoemaker notes that “it is unimaginable that the later Islamic tradition would address such beliefs so directly if in fact they were not widespread within the early community.”<sup>179</sup>

We might suggest that these stories say just as much about the period of their circulation (the late seventh and eighth centuries) as they do about the period of Muḥammad’s death and burial. Variant images of Muḥammad’s death are set in opposition to one another in these historiographical traditions about the early Islamic community, with the victory of the human image of Muḥammad clearly prevailing. Yet, despite the apparent denouement offered by these narratives, the *ḥadīth* literature describes late seventh- and early eighth-century individuals advocating beliefs about Muḥammad’s ascension similar to those reported in the stories of the Companions. These traditions suggest that beliefs about Muḥammad’s ascension were not merely ‘wrong’ ideas that some members of the early Muslim community had held immediately following the Prophet’s death, but rather “indicate a belief in Muḥammad’s ascension to heaven after his death in some circles in pre-classical Islam,” i.e. the mid-eighth century.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 153. On the basis of *isnād* analysis, Szilágyi argues that these stories were circulating in Iraq “by the beginning of the eighth century or earlier” and that stories about a belated burial “circulated in Syria already in the first decades of the eighth century or earlier.” Ibid., 147, 149. Shoemaker similarly suggests that “a tradition indicating the initial denial of Muḥammad’s death by at least some within the earliest Islamic community ... can be traced back to [Ibn Shihāb] al-Zuhrī’s teaching,” and thus at least to the mid-eighth century. Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 94-5.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 94-5, 184. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 154-5.

<sup>179</sup> Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 187.

<sup>180</sup> Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 145.

The Medinese jurist Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/712-3) reportedly declared that “no prophet remains in the earth for more than forty days.”<sup>181</sup> The wording here indicates that the Prophet was raised from his tomb to heaven after forty days, as is made explicit in a version of this *ḥadīth* (also reported from Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab) found in al-Bayhaqī’s *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’*: “No prophet remains in his grave for more than forty nights before he is lifted.”<sup>182</sup> Another *ḥadīth* in this same work by al-Bayhaqī narrates: “The prophets do not stay in their graves longer than forty nights, but are praying before God until the horn is blown [i.e. the judgment day].”<sup>183</sup> Commenting on this tradition, al-Bayhaqī notes that “it is possible that the meaning is that their bodies were lifted with their spirits” (*qad yaḥtamīlu an yakūna al-murād<sup>u</sup> bi-hi rufi ‘a ajsād<sup>u</sup>-hum ma ‘a arwāḥ<sup>i</sup>-him*).<sup>184</sup> In an Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*, the Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) emphatically states, “No prophet or legatee remains in the earth for more than three days before he is lifted to heaven in his spirit, his bones and his flesh.”<sup>185</sup> As Szilágyi argues, the *asānīd* of these traditions (both Sunnī and Shī‘ī) suggest that these “ascension traditions” circulated in Kūfa at least by the middle of the eighth century C.E., if not earlier, though how popular they were we cannot know.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>181</sup> *Mā makatha nabīyy<sup>um</sup> ft-l-arḍ<sup>i</sup> akthara min arba ‘īna yawm<sup>um</sup>*. Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3:576-7 (no. 6725). *Isnād*: Abd al-Razzāq > Sufyān al-Thawrī > Abū al-Miqdām > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib. Cited in Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 142.

<sup>182</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’*, 76-7. *Isnād*: Sufyān al-Thawrī in his *Jāmi‘* > one of our shaykhs (*shaykh li-nā*) > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib Cited in Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 142n.39.

<sup>183</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’*, 75. On the *isnād* for this tradition, see Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 143-4.

<sup>184</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’*, 76.

<sup>185</sup> *Mā min nabīyy<sup>in</sup> wa-lā waṣīyy<sup>in</sup> yabqā ft-l-arḍ<sup>i</sup> akthara min thalāthat<sup>i</sup> ayyām<sup>in</sup> ḥattā yurfa ‘u bi-rūh<sup>i</sup>-hi wa- ‘azm<sup>i</sup>-hi wa-laḥm<sup>i</sup>-hi ilā-l-samā’*. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt*, 2:349. al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, 4:567. Ibn Qūlūya, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Surūr, 1418/1997), 544 (*bāb* 108, nos. 3-4). Szilágyi writes that the *asānīd* found in these traditions—all beginning Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā > ‘Alī b. al-Ḥakam b. al-Zubayr > Ziyād b. Abī Ḥilāl > Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq—suggest that this *ḥadīth* circulated in Kūfa in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 145. See also Crow, “Death of al-Ḥusayn,” 61n.47. On Ziyād b. Abī Ḥilāl see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 1:390 (no. 449). On ‘Alī b. al-Ḥakam, see al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 382, 403; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 243, 360, 371. On Aḥmad b. Muḥammad see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 1:216-8 (no. 196).

<sup>186</sup> Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 143-6.

Additionally, a ninth-century Christian Arabic text, the *Apology of al-Kindī*, uses the idea of the Prophet's ascension for polemical purposes:

During his life, he [the Prophet] used to say, and he entrusted to them, that when he died they should not bury him—for he would be lifted to heaven as the Messiah was lifted, since God honored him too much for him to be left upon the earth longer than three days.<sup>187</sup>

While the author of the text then goes on to say that the Prophet's body decayed and the Muslims were forced to bury him, the reference here clearly indicates knowledge of some notion that the Prophet would be resurrected. As Szilágyi argues, this author draws upon Islamic sources, and is in fact citing a “version of [a] *ḥadīth*” in which the Prophet makes such a claim about his bodily ascension to heaven.<sup>188</sup>

Other traditions maintain that Muḥammad was located not in heaven, but in his grave in Medina. “The prophets are alive in their graves, praying,” runs one *ḥadīth*, demonstrating that prophets such as Muḥammad are in fact terrestrially located in their graves.<sup>189</sup> Some *āḥadīth* record Muḥammad's vision of different prophets praying in their graves.<sup>190</sup> This idea is connected to Muḥammad specifically in traditions in which Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab hears a voice performing the call to prayer from within Muḥammad's tomb many years after the Prophet's death.<sup>191</sup> A Shīʿī tradition relates that Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq warned individuals not to climb upon

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<sup>187</sup> Anton Tien, ed., *Risālat ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ismāʿīl al-Hāshimī ilā ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī yad ʿūhu bihā ilā l-Islām wa-risālat ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ilā l-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā ʿalayhi wa-yad ʿūhu ilā l-Naṣrāniyya* (Cairo, 1880), 64.

<sup>188</sup> Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 139.

<sup>189</sup> Abū Yaʿlā, *Musnad*, 6:147 (no. 3425). al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʿid*, 8:211. al-Bayhaqī, *Hayāt al-anbiyāʾ*, 69-74. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tarīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 13:326. Marion Holmes Katz, “The Prophet Muḥammad in ritual,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.

<sup>190</sup> ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:577 (no. 6727). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:219 (no. 37572). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8:138 (no. 2375) (*kitāb faḍāʾil, bāb 42*).

<sup>191</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:97-8. al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1:227-8 (no. 94). Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 496. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 143 and n.41. Andrae, *Die person Muhammeds*, 286. Szilágyi points out that Saʿīd b.

the Prophet's tomb while it was being reconstructed, since "I am not sure that [such a person] would not see something that would take away his sight, or see him [the Prophet] standing and performing his prayers, or see him together with one of his wives."<sup>192</sup> Another story indicates that the Prophet's physical presence in his grave is related to miraculous occurrences, as when a drought leads the community to place a hole in the grave's roof such that "a roof is not between him [the Prophet] and the sky."<sup>193</sup> Presumably, the hole allowed the Prophet to directly address the heavens for aid, as the story reports that after this alteration rain began to fall, plants to sprout, and the camels to fatten.

While the description of Muḥammad and the other prophets as "alive in their graves, praying" might appear to grant them a special status, it seems worthwhile to read this description within the context of late ancient and early Islamic ideas about the fate of the body after death and the "punishment of the grave" (*adhāb al-qabr*). As Halevi writes, "Muslims ... believed in a close connection between body and soul even beyond the moment of death" and, according to this post-death anthropology, the body and soul are united in the tomb in a (semi-) conscious state until the day of resurrection.<sup>194</sup> The idea of individuals being in some sense "alive" in their graves was widespread in the Islamic Near East at least by the early eighth century, and similar ideas appear in some eastern Christian and Jewish sources on the afterlife.<sup>195</sup> Both those who were good in life and those who were bad experience the "punishment of the grave," though with

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al-Musayyab is also reported to have stated the prophets "do not remain in the earth for more than forty days," and thus he appears to offer contradictory positions on the Prophet's location. This will be addressed below.

<sup>192</sup> *Lā āmanu an yarā shay<sup>am</sup> yudhhibu min-hu baṣar<sup>a</sup>-hu aw yarā-hu qā'im<sup>am</sup> yuṣallī aw yarā-hu ma 'a ba 'd<sup>i</sup> azwāj<sup>i</sup>-hi*. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:452. Cited in Fritz Meier, "A Resurrection of Muḥammad in Suyūfī," in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999), 518-9 and Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 194n.375.

<sup>193</sup> al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1:227 (no. 93). This idea is attributed to 'Ā'isha. She commands: "Place a hole to the sky so that there is not a roof between him and the sky" (*ija' lū kaw<sup>am</sup> ilā-l-samā' ḥattā lā yakūna bayna-hu wa bayna al-samā' saq<sup>am</sup>*).

<sup>194</sup> Halevi, *Muḥammad's Grave*, 81, 207-13. For a striking image of the dead body appearing 'alive,' see 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3:589-90 (no. 6756). Translated in Halevi, *Muḥammad's Grave*, 211-2.

<sup>195</sup> Halevi, *Muḥammad's Grave*, 218, 223-5. See for example *b. Ber.* 18a-b and *b. Shab.* 152b.

varying degrees of suffering.<sup>196</sup> Muḥammad himself is reported to have prayed to God that he be spared from this “punishment of the grave.”<sup>197</sup> In this sense, the description of prophets as alive, praying in their graves, does not appear to be exceptional, except in so much as their suffering in the grave is minimal if not absent.<sup>198</sup> That the prophets would be “alive in their graves” reinforces their status as mortals, subject to the rules of universal resurrection much like other human beings, rather than granted a special place in heaven before the resurrection.

We thus have a contradictory image of the Prophet: he was raised to heaven in a miraculous way, or lowered into his grave, where he awaits the resurrection like other mortals. While the historiographical tradition suggests that beliefs about Muḥammad’s special status were stamped out at the moment of their genesis, in fact these ideas appear not to have passed away. We see them living on in the traditions ascribed to Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in Sunnī and Shī‘ī sources, respectively, and cited polemically in a ninth-century Christian source. These contradictory understandings of Muḥammad are well-illustrated in the ascription to both Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq of disparate and seemingly irreconcilable understandings of the Prophet’s location. Both men are credited with sayings—cited above—indicating that the Prophet was raised to heaven or that he is located in his grave. Conflicting positions regarding the Prophet’s status after death are thus ascribed to these authoritative Sunnī and Shī‘ī figures.

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<sup>196</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 208, 213, 219, 221, 328n.46. For example, a tradition ascribed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq states that the Shī‘a will receive intercession on the day of resurrection, but will nonetheless suffer in the grave during the intervening period. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 3:242 (no. 3). Cited in Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 216. In the Babylonian Talmud, it is stated that the bones of the righteous will not rot, though they will be in the grave until the day of judgment. *b. Shab.* 152b.

<sup>197</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3:585 (no. 6743), 3:589 (no. 6755). Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4:611-4 (nos. 12145-57). Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 218, 220.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 219. In this sense, Szilágyi’s suggestion that these traditions were part of a “strategy” to make Muḥammad seem comparable in status to that which Christian thought granted to Jesus and the saints seems misleading. Szilágyi, “Prophet like Jesus,” 156.



The *asānīd* for Sa‘īd’s and Ja‘far’s traditions about the Prophet’s resurrection indicate that they circulated in Kūfa in the mid- to late eighth century.<sup>199</sup> The fact that both Sunnīs and Shī‘īs in the eighth century transmitted such a tradition about prophetic bodies indicates that this was a fairly widespread or common idea there, since Najam Haider’s research indicates that by the early eighth century there were distinct Sunnī and Shī‘ī communities in Kūfa.<sup>200</sup>

By contrast, the traditions that describe Sa‘īd hearing a voice from within the Prophet’s grave are transmitted largely by Ḥijāzīs and Syrians.<sup>201</sup> Another tradition that indicates that the Prophet’s body is located within his grave in Medina is transmitted through Egyptian scholars in the *Kitāb al-Zuhd* of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), as well as in al-Dārimī’s *Sunan* and Abū Nu‘aym’s *Ḥilyat al-awliya’*.<sup>202</sup> Narrated by the famous Jewish convert to Islam Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, this *ḥadīth* states:

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 143-5.

<sup>200</sup> Haider, *Origins of the Shī‘a*, passim.

<sup>201</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:97-8: al-Walīd b. ‘Aṭā’ > ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Sulaymān (Medina) > Abū Ḥāzīm [Salama b. Dīnār] (d. circa 135/752; Medina) > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib. The same first three links are found in Abū Nu‘aym, *Dalā‘il al-nubuwwa*, 496: Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Sahl al-Khashab al-Naysābūrī > Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Anmāfī > Muḥammad b. Sulaymān Luwayn (d. ca. 246/861; Kūfa and al-Maṣṣīṣī) > ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Sulaymān > Abū Ḥāzīm [Salama b. Dīnār] > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib. The common link here, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Sulaymān, was considered weak (*da‘īf*) by several *ḥadīth* scholars. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 6:116 (no. 232). On Muḥammad b. Sulaymān Luwayn see Luke Yarbrough, “Upholding God’s Rule: Early Muslim Juristic Opposition to the State Employment of non-Muslims,” *ILS* 19 (2012): 27n.58, 33n.82; Benjamin Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law: Harun-al-Rashid’s Codification Project* (Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 387n.459. al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1:227-8 (no. 94): Marwān b. Muḥammad al-Ṭāṭarī (d. 210/825; Damascus) > Sa‘īd b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Tanūkhī (d. 167/783; Damascus) > Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib. On the Syrian Sa‘īd b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Tanūkhī, see G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 45.

<sup>202</sup> Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa yalīhi Kitāb al-Raqā‘iq*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-‘Azamī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 558 (no. 1600). al-Ḥusayn > Ibn al-Mubārak > ‘Abd Allāh b. Lahī‘a (d. 174/790; Egypt) > Khālīd b. Yazīd (d. 139/757; Egypt) > Sa‘īd b. Abī Hilāl (d. 135/753 or 149/766; Egypt and Medina) > Nubayh b. Wahb b. ‘Uthmān (Ḥijāz) > Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (Ḥijāz). The same first four links around found in al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1:228 (no. 95). ‘Abd Allāh b. Šāliḥ (d. 223/838; Egypt) > al-Layth b. Sa‘d (d. 175/791; Egypt) > Khālīd b. Yazīd > Sa‘īd b. Abī Hilāl > Nubayh b. Wahb b. ‘Uthmān > Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. This *isnād* is also found in Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliya’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘āda, 1974), 5:390 Ibrāhīm > Muḥammad > Qutayba [b. Sa‘īd b. Jamīl] (d. 240/854) > al-Layth > Khālīd > Sa‘īd > Nubayh b. Wahb b. ‘Uthmān > Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. On Ibn Lahī‘a and Egyptian *ḥadīth* scholars generally, see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 43-4, 80ff., 110, 129, 132. On al-Layth b. Sa‘d and ‘Abd Allāh b. Šāliḥ see: Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957-72), 2:102. This tradition also appears, ascribed to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-mawt (The Book of Death) and Kitāb al-qubūr (The Book of Graves)*, ed. Leah Kinberg (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1983), 75 (no. 21).

No dawn arises without 70,000 angels descending, touching the [Prophet's] grave with their wings and surrounding it. They ask forgiveness for him, give him what contents him, and pray for him until the evening. In the evening, they arise and [another] 70,000 angels descend, touching the grave with their wings and surrounding it. They ask forgiveness for him, give him what contents him, and pray for him until the morning. And so it goes until the Hour. On the Day of Judgment, the Prophet will emerge amongst 70,000 angels.<sup>203</sup>

The Prophet's grave appears here as a holy site with constant angelic visitors and it is from this location that the Prophet is predicted to "emerge" on the Day of Judgment with this angelic retinue.

The *asānīd* for these traditions might indicate a regional difference in beliefs: perhaps the idea of Muḥammad's resurrection was favored in Iraq, while the presence of the Prophet's body in his grave was favored in the Ḥijāz, Syria, and Egypt as an expression of regional pride in the grave of the Prophet in Medina.<sup>204</sup> As attractive as such an easy distinction in regional beliefs might be, such a hypothesis is arguably counterbalanced by the Baṣran *isnād* of the story of the Prophet's ceiling-less grave enabling rain to fall,<sup>205</sup> and the Iraqī and Iranian *isnād* of the Shī'ī tradition in which Ja'far al-Ṣādiq warns people not to climb upon the Prophet's tomb for fear of seeing his body.<sup>206</sup> A version of the miraculous rain story—in which an unnamed man prays at

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<sup>203</sup> *Mā min fajr<sup>in</sup> yaṭlu 'u illā habaṭa saba 'ūn alf malak<sup>in</sup> yaḍribu al-qabr<sup>a</sup> bi-ajniḥat<sup>i</sup>-him wa yaḥuffūna bi-hi fa-yastaghfirūna la-hu wa aḥsabu-hu Qāla wa yuṣallūna 'alay-hi ḥattā yumissū. Fa-idhā amassū 'arajū. Wa habaṭa saba 'ūn alf malak<sup>in</sup> yaḍribu al-qabr<sup>a</sup> bi-ajniḥat<sup>i</sup>-him wa yaḥuffūna bi-hi wa yastaghfirūna la-hu aḥsabu-hu. Wa yuṣallūna 'alay-hi ḥattā yuṣbihū. Wa ka-dhālika ḥattā takūn al-sā'at<sup>a</sup>. Fa-idhā kāna yawm<sup>u</sup> al-qiyāmat<sup>i</sup> kharaja al-nabī fī saba 'ūn alf malak<sup>in</sup>.*

<sup>204</sup> On the idea of regional pride as a factor in early Islamic relic cult, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 260.

<sup>205</sup> al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1:227 (no. 93). Abū al-Nu'mān [Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl al-Sadūsī] (d. 224/839; Baṣra) > Sa'īd b. Zayd b. Dirham (d. 167/783; Baṣra) > 'Amr b. Mālik al-Nakrī (d. 129; Baṣra) > Abū al-Jawzā' Aws b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 83/702; Baṣra).

<sup>206</sup> al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:452. The *isnād* is "many of our Companions" (*'addat<sup>un</sup> min aṣḥābi-nā*) > Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Barqī (d. 274/888 or 280/894; Qumm) > Ja'far b. al-Muthannā al-Khaṭīb (Kūfa) > Ismā'īl b. 'Ammār

the Prophet's grave for rain and is granted a vision in his dream—also circulated in Kūfa.<sup>207</sup> It is difficult to maintain that these different ideas about the Prophet's body are a product of regional variation.

While further source-critical study may pin these ideas down more firmly in time and space, I would suggest that instead of trying to distinguish Ḥijāzī from Iraqī ideas, elite from popular ideas, earlier from later ideas, or Sunnī from Shī'ī ideas, it is worthwhile to see in these data a set of essentially irreconcilable notions of the Prophet whose details had not yet been spelled out in the early centuries of Islamic history and thought. As Nicholas Conostas writes of late ancient Christians: “The nature of the soul, its relation to the body, and its fate after death are subjects that, despite their importance, were never authoritatively defined or systematically organized in the late antique period.”<sup>208</sup> Late ancient Jewish sources likewise display “inconsistency in the Rabbinic approach to the concept of afterlife” and they “overall do not yield a cogent or systematic picture” of the nature of existence after death.<sup>209</sup> This appears to be true amongst Muslims in late antiquity as well. As Leor Halevi notes, “No one was all that clear about the precise nature of this connection between spirit and corpse in the grave.”<sup>210</sup> In

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al-Ṣayrafi (Kūfa). On al-Barqī see: Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism: ḥadīth as discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 50ff; Roy Vilozny, “Pre-Būyid Ḥadīth Literature: The Case of al-Barqī from Qumm (d. 274/888 or 280/894) in Twelve Sections,” in Daftary and Miskinzoda, *Study of Shi'i Islam*, 203-30. Ja'far b. al-Muthannā al-Khaṭīb is listed as a Companion of Imām 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818) in al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 370. Ismā'īl b. 'Ammār al-Ṣayrafi is listed as a Kūfan Companion of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in *ibid.*, 148.

<sup>207</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:118 (no. 32538). Abū Mu'āwiya (d. 194/810; Kūfa) > al-A'mash (d. 148/765; Kūfa) > Abū Ṣāliḥ Dhakwān al-Zayāt al-Sammān (d. 101/719; Medina and Kūfa) > Mālik b. al-Dār b. 'Iyād (Medina). Also found in al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 7:47 with the same *isnād* and in Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī-l-ta'rikh*, 7:91-2 cited from al-Bayhaqī. It is worth noting that this tradition is transmitted by al-A'mash, who was recorded in *ilm al-rijāl* sources as harboring “possible Shī'ī inclinations.” See Najam Haider, “Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage,” *ILS* 16 (2009): 160-1.

<sup>208</sup> Nicholas Conostas, “An Apology for the Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death* (CPG 7522),” *J ECS* 10 (2002): 269.

<sup>209</sup> Avery-Peck, “Resurrection of the Body,” 243, 246. Commenting on the Mishnah and Tosefta, Avery-Peck states, “the extremely limited and unsystematic discussion of these topics means that the exact nature of the resurrection and the character of the world-to-come remain unexplored, as does the character of the individual's existence after death, a topic that never enters the picture.” Avery-Peck, “Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources,” 247.

<sup>210</sup> Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 211.

Christian, Jewish, and Islamic sources from late antiquity, and especially those on the post-death ontologies of holy men, we see that “this lacuna provided an opportunity for the free play of the imaginative, the visionary, and the superstitious, as a result of which one may find any number of psychologies and eschatologies strewn about somewhat carelessly across the late antique religious landscape.”<sup>211</sup>

Conflicting ideas about the Prophet’s bodily nature and location are paralleled in some significant respects in the ideational realm of the late ancient Christian cult of saints. In particular, the sites of saints’ shrines and relics were “*loci* where Heaven and Earth met ... where the normal laws of the grave were held to be suspended,” not least in how the saint was understood to be fully present simultaneously in the grave and in heaven.<sup>212</sup> Peter Brown illustrates this “paradox involved in the graves of saints” with the inscription carved on the grave of Saint Martin of Tours:

Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully here [*sed hic totus est*], present and made plain in miracles of every kind.<sup>213</sup>

While Martin’s soul (*anima*) is in heaven, he is nonetheless fully present (*hic totus est Praesens*) in the tomb as well, as evidenced by the miracles performed there. Sabine MacCormack writes that “inscriptions marking the tombs of martyrs and saints regularly associate these two themes—the body resting in the tomb and the soul reigning with God in the stars—with one and the same person.”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Constan, “An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,” 269-70.

<sup>212</sup> Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 10-1. Meri cites this passage when writing about medieval Muslims saints, stating that “the tomb became in Brown’s words, ‘a place where the normal laws of the grave were held to be suspended,’ a public space where Muslims spiritually, physically, and ritually interacted with saints.” Meri, “Etiquette of Devotion,” 273.

<sup>213</sup> Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 3-4.

<sup>214</sup> MacCormack, “Loca Sancta,” 17.

This “paradox of the linking of Heaven and Earth” is likewise displayed in a variety of late ancient Christian writings that portray the power of the saints and their relics to transcend their tombs, while still residing within them, and even to transcend the distinctions between the material and spiritual realms.<sup>215</sup> Proclus, fifth-century archbishop of Constantinople, writes in a hymn to Mary that “with each of the saints ... even though their relics are enclosed within tombs, their power under heaven is not restricted.”<sup>216</sup> An early fifth-century Greek homily, pseudonymously ascribed to John Chrysostom, states of the apostle Thomas that “nothing is able to conceal him, and he is absent from no place ... he was buried in a tomb but rises everywhere like the sun. The relics of this righteous man have conquered the world, and have appeared as more expansive than creation itself.”<sup>217</sup> These writers provide clear examples of what Peter Brown describes as the tendency in the late ancient cult of saints “to raise the physical remains of the saints above the normal associations of place and time” and illustrate Brown’s comment that “at [the saints’] graves, the eternity of paradise and the first touch of the resurrection come into the present.”<sup>218</sup>

The tombs of late ancient rabbis appear also as sites of uncanny linkages between heaven and earth. At the entrance to Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai’s tomb, Rabbi Joshua b. Levi has a conversation with the prophet Elijah and Rabbi Shimon himself and is told there how to meet the Messiah.<sup>219</sup> Elijah also grants an unnamed rabbi the ability to see rabbis “ascending and descending” (סלקי ונחתי) from their graves to the Heavenly Academy (מתיבתא דרקייע) and back

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<sup>215</sup> Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 78.

<sup>216</sup> Proclus, *hom.* 5.1. Greek and text and English translation in Nicholas Constatas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the cult of the Virgin in late antiquity: homilies 1-5, texts and translations* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 256-7.

<sup>217</sup> *PG* 59:498. *BHG* 1838 (2, 302). Translated in Constatas, “An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,” 271n.10. On this text’s date, see: J. A. de Aldama, *Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1965), 193 (no. 517).

<sup>218</sup> Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 78.

<sup>219</sup> *b. San.* 98a. See: Kristen H. Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis: Story and Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 87, 123, 187-8.

down to their graves.<sup>220</sup> According to Elijah, while nearly all of the rabbis must be accompanied by angels to accomplish such travels, “the chariot of Rabbi Ḥiyya ascends and descends of his/its own accord” (מגוהרקא דר' חייא דמנפשיה סליק ונחית). While these passages do not provide evidence of a cult of the rabbis’ tombs on the level of that witnessed for the Christian saints, they do indicate that the rabbis’ tombs were places where the boundary between heaven and earth was flexible and where the rabbis were able to cross that boundary.

Late ancient Christian writers dealt with the liminal status of the saint by acknowledging and affirming this paradox. Patricia Cox Miller writes: “Hagiographical texts from the late fourth through the seventh centuries . . . present the holy body of the saint as ambiguously corporeal, bodies, that is, whose visionary appearances are nonetheless tangible, or whose fragments are nonetheless whole.”<sup>221</sup> In their simultaneous existence on earth and in heaven, their location within their relics while being present everywhere, “saintly images deny the dualistic position that splits matter from spirit, body from soul, nature from divine.”<sup>222</sup>

Such paradoxical ideas are not explicitly affirmed in early Islamic sources, though it is tempting to see such paradox in the ascription to Sa‘īd and Ja‘far of seemingly diametrically opposed views on the location of the Prophet’s body. Instead, the more common approach to dealing with these different conceptions of the Prophet’s body is in the simple juxtaposition of these ideas. For example, in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s chapter on “wishing peace upon the Prophet’s grave” questions are implicitly raised about Muḥammad’s status and location. While Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab states that prophets do not remain in their graves for more than forty days, another *ḥadīth* in this same chapter relates that, during the *Isrā’*, the Prophet Muḥammad saw Moses

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<sup>220</sup> *b. B.M.* 85a. Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis*, 51, 127, 175. See *EJ*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Academy on High” (H. Freedman and G. Scholem).

<sup>221</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 104.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-5.

“standing praying in his grave.”<sup>223</sup> How are we to make sense of this? Are prophets present in their graves or not? The question seems unanswerable from the data presented in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s chapter, and perhaps is meant to be left unresolved.

While the early Islamic sources testify to a certain reticence with regard to the paradoxical status of the Prophet’s body, later sources are not so hesitant about this subject. As Fritz Meier notes, “two scholars of the 5th/11th century, Abū Manṣūr ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghādī (d. 458/1037) and Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) ... say more or less the same thing: Muḥammad came back to life again after his death.”<sup>224</sup> Moreover, al-Bayhaqī appears to directly acknowledge the paradoxical state of the Prophet when, after citing *aḥādīth* that alternatively describe the prophets in the grave and in heaven, he states: “Their [the prophets’] taking up abode for times in alternating places is rationally possible, as is adduced in accurate reports. In all that is proof of their life.”<sup>225</sup> Here al-Bayhaqī does not ask if or how these boundaries may be crossed, but simply states that it is (and must be) possible, as indicated by the accurate reports (*khābar al-ṣādiq*) that have been transmitted from the Prophet. These scholars, like the scholar Suyūfī (849-911/1145-1505), argued that Muḥammad “is alive in spirit and the body, [and] that he moves about freely and travels wherever he wishes on the earth and in the supernatural world.”<sup>226</sup>

Thus just as we find conflicting notions of the Prophet’s hair—a source of both strength and weakness—so too we find conflicting notions of the Prophet’s body, pleasantly scented and raised to heaven, or moldering and stuck in the grave. Instead of resolving the question of the Prophet’s body, as al-Bayhaqī would do in the eleventh century by embracing the Prophet’s

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<sup>223</sup> It also appears in: Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 13:219 (no. 37572).

<sup>224</sup> Meier, “Resurrection of Muḥammad,” 519.

<sup>225</sup> *Wa ḥulūl<sup>u</sup>-hum fī awqāt bi-mawāḍ<sup>ī</sup> ‘ mukhtalifāt jā’iz fī al-‘aql ka-mā warada bi-hi khābar al-ṣādiq wa fī kull dhālika dalālat<sup>u</sup> ‘alā ḥayāt<sup>i</sup>-him.* al-Bayhaqī, *Ḥayāt al-anbiyā’*, 85.

<sup>226</sup> Meier, “A Resurrection of Muḥammad,” 520, 524, 529, 530.

paradoxical status, early Islamic sources leave these conflicting traditions next to one another without a solution. The tales of Muḥammad’s holy hair and of his bewitchment are often present in the same works: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Ibn Abī Shayba, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and al-Bayhaqī all include both types of story in their works.<sup>227</sup> In much the same way, different notions of the nature and location of the Prophet’s body appear in early sources, often almost directly next to one another. As Stephen Shoemaker notes, in Ibn Ishāq’s *sīra* we “find in the same text both [an] archetypal representation of Muḥammad’s relics and his tomb together with an explicit condemnation of such practices.” Shoemaker suggests that “the dissonance between the two traditions may reflect a diversity of opinion within the early Islamic community regarding the appropriateness of the cult of the Prophet and his relics.”<sup>228</sup> There was clearly a dissonance also in ideas about the nature of those relics and whether they were in the Prophet’s grave or not.

## Conclusion

In the stories of Muḥammad’s hair, we find conflicting images of the Prophet, with his hair signifying his status as both greater than, and equal to, mankind. Similarly, in the differing conceptions of Muḥammad’s status and location after death, we find a series of conflicting, irreconcilable images of the Prophet. As Marion Holmes Katz states, “Some *ḥadīth* texts that circulated in the early centuries of the Islamic era at least suggest the Prophet’s continued life

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<sup>227</sup> Is Muḥammad’s command to have his hair buried (narratologically) a result of his encounter with a sorcerer? Interestingly, the only early biographical text I have found that does not include ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd’s story of the Companions collecting Muḥammad’s hair and spit at al-Ḥudaybiyya is Ibn Sa‘d’s *Ṭabaqāt*. This is also the only early biographical text that includes the story of a wind blowing Muḥammad’s and the Companions’ hairs into the Ḥaram. Ibn Sa‘d includes some of the most elaborate stories about the Prophet’s bewitchment, much longer than what is included in Ibn Hishām’s recension of Ibn Ishāq’s *sīra*. It seems possible that Ibn Sa‘d (or some transmitter of his text) was particularly concerned with these issues of the usage of the Prophet’s hair for bewitchment and made an effort to place his hairs safely out of any dangerous hands by including such stories as the miraculous wind, and excising most (though not all) mention of the Companions catching those hairs.

<sup>228</sup> Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, 259-60.



and/or accessibility, although they did not fully resolve the question of his location or the nature of his existence before the Day of Judgment.”<sup>229</sup> While some traditions assert Muḥammad’s human death and burial in his tomb, others offer more complex and less human images of a being able to transcend the grave and normal human death.

The paradoxical status of Muḥammad’s hair thus stands in for his body as a whole in seventh- and eighth-century sources that display drastically different ideas about Muḥammad’s nature and status. The Prophetic image that emerges is much like that of other late ancient holy men, and particularly the Christian saints. Here, too, an image appears of beings whose nature stands apart from the easy distinctions between human or divine, dead or alive, terrestrially or celestially located. The cult of the Christian saints presents figures of this complicated status that “hover between material and light, damage and healing.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Katz, “Prophet Muḥammad in ritual,” 148. Meier, “A Resurrection of Muḥammad,” 539-546.

<sup>230</sup> Comments of Karmen MacKendrick quoted in Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 218n.45.

## Conclusion

The material objects examined in this dissertation—spittle and hair— have important ramifications for, and help us to understand, late ancient conceptions of the body as a whole. Late ancient Jews, Christians, and Muslims attended to the ways that saliva and hair could, and did, stand in for and affect the entirety of the body in a variety of situations, both positively and negatively connotated. A tiny fragment of a saint might stand in for his or her whole holy personhood in providing healing and other blessings; yet a tiny bit of a person, when (im)properly used, could also bring illness and death to the whole of the victim's body. In addition to these objects functioning as *pars pro totus*, usages of saliva and hair were in some cases understood in late antiquity as indicative of the individual's communal identity and as marking her body (and thus her self) as properly or improperly constituted. Often using a discourse of 'magic' to demarcate proper from improper ritual, religious authorities called the individual's body into question by othering those who used their saliva or hair in ways labelled as nefarious to orthodox standards. Despite their size, saliva and hair played big roles in many sectors of late ancient religious life and in the definition of acceptable religious activity.

### Stories of Holy Bodies

In Chapters Two and Four, I examined narratives about Christian saints, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the followers venerating these figures. Chapter Two compared stories of the miraculous saliva of holy figures and suggested that we can profitably understand stories of the

Prophet Muḥammad’s saliva within the hagiographic milieu of the “material turn,” as Patricia Cox Miller has characterized the fourth to seventh centuries C.E. At the end of that chapter, I also pointed to usages of saintly and Prophetic saliva as holy “relics” that could transmit blessing to new spaces removed from the place and time of the holy person himself. Chapter Four provided further examples of the usage of bits of the saints and the Prophet—in this case strands of their hair—for the transmission of blessing. Even these most ephemeral vestiges of saints and prophets thus appear as conveyors of the characteristics present in their blessed bodies and function as proofs of the status of these holy individuals, both while alive and while dead. Saliva and hair performed the miracles characteristic of these holy figures and participated in the hagiographic portrait of their bodies as touched by divinity.

My reading of the early Islamic sources alongside contemporaneous Christian texts allows us to see that the usages of (and debates about) holy persons’ bodies found in early Islamic texts were part of a wider set of cultural phenomena of the late ancient Near East. The many early Islamic sources that describe Muslims healing with, being buried with, praying for rain with, and wearing Muḥammad’s relics destabilize the common notion that relic practices were not accepted as a part of “orthodox” Islam in the early centuries: instead, we can see that veneration of Prophetic relics appears to have been an acceptable and discussed component of Islamic religiosity from a fairly early date, at least by the late seventh century C.E. This indicates that there was a set of ideas shared with Christians in this period regarding the holiness of the, in Peter Brown’s words, “very special dead”: Christians and Muslims both seem to have participated in a set of beliefs and practices regarding the potential of holy individuals’ powerful remains.

Yet we also see a discomfort with such ideas about the holy Prophetic body reflected in the Islamic sources.<sup>1</sup> The stories about the Prophet Muḥammad's hair highlight the ways that early Islamic sources provide a paradoxical image of the Prophet's body that is simultaneously similar to, and quite different from, that of late ancient Jewish and Christian holy figures. Narratives from early *sīra* and *ḥadīth* texts describe the usage of strands of the Prophet Muḥammad's hair for a variety of beneficial activities much as Christian saints' hairs were used: in both the Christian and Islamic texts, such hairs are understood to transmit blessing to their possessors. However, Christian saints' lives do not describe the saints suffering the kinds of torments from sorcerers that we find Muḥammad experiencing in the stories about Labīd b. al-A'ṣam's "bewitching" of the Prophet through strands of his hair. In these stories, the Prophet's hair is a source not of divine blessing, but of sorcerous weakness that nearly kills the Prophet. Unlike the Christian saints' immunity to the powers of sorcerers, Muḥammad appears here in a state of danger enabled by Labīd's ritual manipulation of hair collected from the Prophet's comb.

The paradoxical status of the Prophet's hair—able to provide blessings, while also used to curse him—can be read as a synecdoche for the conflicting descriptions of the Prophet's body displayed in early texts: both rotting and perfectly preserved, in the grave and raised to heaven. While these contradictory representations have interesting overlaps with some descriptions of late ancient Christian saints and Jewish rabbis transcending their own graves, these early Islamic stories also seem to indicate conflicts over the Prophet's status (and his corporeal existence) as either completely human or something more than. The Prophet's hair thus demonstrates the debated position of the Prophet himself within early Islamic sources.

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<sup>1</sup> This discomfort can itself be studied from within the context of late ancient Christian conflicts over the place of the cult of the saints in the life of the church. See dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, passim.

## Ritual Discussions

Chapter Three focused on another corporeal conflict within early Islamic sources: that over the acceptability of spitting/blowing in incantatory rituals. Unlike the positive connotations to the Prophet's spitting studied in Chapter Two, here I examined some early *ḥadīth* texts that exhibit a markedly polemical attitude towards spitting/blowing as a part of incantatory healing. Within the contested sphere of acceptable healing practices, spitting during incantations appears as a particularly detestable practice according to the reported opinions of several eighth-century Muslim jurists. We find here traces of the effort towards boundary formation that characterized eighth-century Iraqī jurists, who used ritual practice as one of many social spheres where boundaries could be drawn between Muslims and other religious practitioners, such as Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. Rabbinic sources that similarly reject spitting in incantatory healing rituals (and even go so far as to deprive those who perform these activities of a share in the “World to Come”) allow us to see how Jewish ritual practices were directly or indirectly influential for formative Islamic healing practices.

In studying such rituals, we see the vital role of the body in the contested differentiation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy/magic. Looking at such a simple act as spitting, we see how bodily rituals could be determinative of inclusion or exclusion from the community of the saved. Some rabbis apparently considered spitting during incantations enough to deprive one of a share in the “World to Come”; similarly, some Muslim jurists expressed clear disgust with this activity and commanded its avoidance. This movement of the body (and its fluid) was so ideologically invested as to necessitate the exclusion of those practicing it from the community. Spitting here provides an excellent illustration that the constructed “orthodoxies” in late antiquity often

“included a bundle of practices as well as a set of beliefs” and that their constructors were “very interested in differences of practice, some of them seemingly rather trivial.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet similar spitting rituals (performed by Christian saints, the Prophet Muḥammad, and even priests initiating new Christians) appear elsewhere not as reasons for religious exclusion, but as signs of the holiness of bodies and of the inclusion of bodies in the community of the healed and saved. In same late ancient sources, such as Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* and medical texts, spitting appears as a legitimate means of medicinal cure. Spitting carried a plethora of meanings, irreducible to any such category as magic, miracle, healing, curse, heterodox, or orthodox. Rituals involving hair, too, had the capacity for all of these labels, as we saw not only in the various usages to which Muḥammad’s hair was put, but also in the manipulations of various individuals’ hairs for healing and miracles or for magic and cursing.

### **The Body in Late Ancient Religion**

In late ancient texts, we thus see that both saliva and hair provide multivalent symbols of strength and weakness, acceptable and unacceptable practice. By virtue of this multivalency, saliva and hair well exemplify the constantly shifting and negotiated place of the body in the construction of religious orthodoxy and subjectivity. Late ancient religious authorities debate, in our sources, the proper and improper usages of hair and saliva. Yet neither saliva nor hair provides stable ground upon which they might plant definitions of religious orthodoxy, as each offers multiple and contradictory meanings, often simultaneously. The efforts to demarcate the proper bounds of practice are attempts also to define which of these connotations might be

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<sup>2</sup> Averil Cameron, “The Violence of Orthodoxy,” in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 106n.19. Cameron here is discussing “orthodox Christianity.”

operative at a given time: that healing with saliva was (or was not) acceptable meant that it should not (or should) be understood as sorcerous or heretical. Yet the discussions of these rituals in our sources indicate that the issues were not conclusively resolved, as when the Prophet's example is cited in contradiction to the Iraqī jurists' criticism of spitting during incantations, or when al-Zuhrī defines as "*sunna*" the apotropaic bathing ritual that Ja'far b. Burqān had considered "worthless." Even tiny parts of the body, and the rituals accompanying their usage, functioned as sites of religious definition and contestation.

Recent theorists have emphasized the important place of corporeal practice in the performance of religious identity. Shahzad Bashir, for example, writes that "it seems useful to think about Islamic law as it pertains to ritual ... as a technology of the self that is a constitutive element in the construction of properly Muslim selves/bodies."<sup>3</sup> The stories and discussions that I have examined in this dissertation provide excellent evidence of the role of the body in both understanding and performing religious identity in late antiquity. The late ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic discussions of ritual all appear as efforts towards the management of the body and, thereby, of the self: both in terms of individuals' conceptions of the body and in their physical usages thereof.

A focus upon the role of bodily practice in the performance of late ancient religion provides important insight into the nature of the category "religion" itself, as well as to the way in which different practitioners defined membership in their communities. Rather than simply a set of thoughts or beliefs, the lives or identities labelled "Jewish," "Christian," or "Muslim" were characterized also by particular experiences of and attitudes towards their bodies. In examining such embodied practice, we see that "religion" could extend all the way into the strands of one's hair and the spit in one's mouth.

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<sup>3</sup> Bashir, "Body," 80.

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