DANTE AND ISLAM: A STUDY OF THE EASTERN INFLUENCES IN THE

DIVINE COMEDY

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Dante's poetic masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy* (1308-20), has been continually analyzed, explained, and retranslated by scholars in the centuries since its publication. The poem is a definitive work in multiple canons and has been an inspiration for countless other works, and it has been claimed that, excluding the Bible, Dante's *Divine comedy* is the most studied work in the English canon.[1] Scholars have carefully analyzed the work's many references to other literary works, historical figures, religion, social norms, and politics to reveal a complex tapestry of symbolism, allegory, and intertextuality. Despite this wealth of critical attention, few have addressed the poet's interest in Islam. Dante ultimately rejects Islam as a religious, social, and political system throughout his work, but the frequent references to Islamic topics, characters, and images demonstrate that the religion of Islam was an important consideration worthy of repeated mention in his *Divine Comedy*. Islamic references can be found throughout the work, making them an important motif, but these references are often missed or discounted by literary scholars.

An explanation for this critical oversight could be that many Western literary scholars are untrained in recognizing Islamic imagery and unable to assign significance in the same way they are trained to recognize references from Western history or the Western canon. Another barrier to understanding the full richness of Dante's non-Western references in his poem has been the nationalistic tone Dante scholarship has adopted.[2] Dante was seen by many of his critics as the progenitor of an identity and emblem of Western literary superiority, helping the West to transition from the Middle

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[1] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 115.
[2] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 36.

Ages into the Renaissance. This view was not incorrect; the poet's use of the vernacular when the literary language of the West was still Latin was revolutionary, and in terms of content the *Divine Comedy* is an encyclopedically incorporated religion, philosophy, history, autobiography, and much more in high literary style.[3] The poet has earned the accolades awarded to him by critics and commentators over the centuries, who have noted that the poem's complexity and richness that seeks to guide Dante's Christian, European audience. While Dante was addressing a European and Christian audience about perceived threats to Christianity, Dante's continual references to Islam signal for the reader that not all of the challenges to Christianity and Christians are domestic or matters of reform. While acknowledging internal problems, Dante's Pilgrim is also confronted with foreign and eerily omnipresent representations of Islam.

My aims in the present work are to analyze some of the Islamic references in the *Divine Comedy* to better understand how the poet draws on Islam in his work, to analyze how these references impact the meanings of the poem, and to better understand the points of intersection between the Islamic East and the Christian West as presented in the poem. This project analyzes the poem through lens of competition for territorial, ideological, and economic dominance between East and West, and narratives from both Eastern and Western traditions are consulted to help negotiate the often-fine lines separating the two. The present work pays attention to expanding empires and spheres of influence as well as and religious doctrine in an attempt to gain a more complete view of the intertextual dialogue, and sometimes battle, the poet engages in with Islam through his poem about the Christian otherworld.

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[3] Henry F. Cary, "Introductory Note," in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, 4.

The two areas of the poem that are be most heavily analyzed in the present work

are *Inferno* Cantos IV and XXVIII. These two areas in the poem are the most emphatic

representations of Islam in the *Divine Comedy*. In *Inferno* Canto IV, the figure of Ṣalāḥ

al-Dīn (Saladin) is present among other virtuous pagans. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was commonly

used held up as an ideal for chivalry in medieval Europe, but historically represented the

military and economic threat of Islam during the Crusades. As a Muslim military leader

during the Crusades, his presence in Dante's poem presents a problem of interpretation.

In *Inferno* Canto XXVIII the Islamic Prophet Muhammad is punished as a representative

of Christian schism. Because he was not a Christian but treated as one, his punishment

represents unique problem for Dante scholars because it means that Islam is a threat from

outside as well as within Christianity.

To accomplish my aims in the present work, Dante's poem and the work of Dante

scholars will be synthesized with close readings and historical analysis, and compared to

often inaccessible or obscure Islamic texts and scholarship to establish the various roles

that Islam plays in the poem.[4] As with many of his commentators and critics, Dante had

little more than a base knowledge of Islamic traditions and no practical knowledge of

Islamic texts, yet this should not be taken to mean that the poet was ignorant of Islam or

that the religion was not active in his mind or a concern for Christian Europe generally.[5]

Presentations of Islam from other medieval European writers are compared with sections

of the *Divine Comedy* and compared with Islamic texts to gain a fresh understanding of

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[4] Islam is treated as a heretical ideology, foreign culture, and a threat at various points in the *Divine Comedy*.

[5] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 42. Menocal notes the poor, anti-Islamic paraphrases of Peter the Venerable taken from Arabic language works and presented as scripture in addition to his translation of the *Qur'ān* as a common source on the Islamic religion for Christian writers. These "translations" made parts of the Islamic East accessible to Western scholars, but were little more than "a very imaginative vision of Islam" (42).

the East-West dichotomy that both sides struggled to maintain in forging discreet Christian and Islamic identities. Highlighting these gaps between Western representations of the Islamic East and Islamic representations of the Islamic East will help to better inform the reader about the longstanding traditions that have developed and limited the West's understanding of Islam. Dante's *Divine Comedy* provides a good starting point for this type of analysis because of the frequency with which these demarcating lines between East and West break down and are reinforced.

A fresh reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an Italian language poem, in light of Arabic works is relevant to English literary studies because of the poem's importance as a direct or indirect influence on many writers and works in the English canon. Dante's *Divine Comedy* negotiates a fine line between political and religious poetry and has enjoyed wide appeal with writers concentrating on either or both, giving it a long period of relevance while other medieval classics have either faded into obscurity or been lost altogether. Because of the *Divine Comedy's* recognized importance to the English canon, a revised reading of Dante's poem in light of Islamic texts allows for analysis of latent Islamic ideas in texts inspired by it. In addition to the *Divine Comedy's* longstanding cultural significance in the West (the poem is virtually unknown in the Islamic East) it can also be used to measure changes in Western representations of the Islam over time.[6]

The present work has important limitations. Linguistics-based studies on Dante and are available for reference,[7] and most translations include an introduction in which the translator provides some brief notes about their translation. Because I lack familiarity

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[6] The *Divine Comedy* has never been fully translated into Arabic, although Persian language editions are available.

[7] One good example is Trullio di Mauro, *Storia Linguistica dell'Italia Unita* (Rome: Laterza, 1993). Italian edition.

or fluency in the Italian language, this analysis must be limited to content based on translations and will therefore always be slightly removed from the original verse. Because of this handicap in language, discussions about syntax, grammar, word choice, and to some extent meter and rhyme do not figure largely in the analysis. To compensate I have compared multiple translations for my analysis.

It is outside the scope of the present study to provide an exhaustive catalogue and analysis of every Islamic reference in the *Divine Comedy*. Instead, key passages are analyzed to establish the important roles the Islamic religion and Islamic philosophy played in the writing of Dante's masterwork. Much work remains to be done on the significance of the mosques (*meschite*) of Dis;[8] the importance of ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and ibn Ru<u>sh</u>d (Averroes), who are in Canto IV and whose writings were the basis for many philosophical works by Thomas Aquinas, a major influence on Dante; and the plethora of Crusader characters and the ways in which they reinforce a framework of Christian militarism in the *Divine Comedy* and serve as a constant reminder for the reader of the hostility of Islam and the threat of war.

Explaining the significance of Islam in the *Divine Comedy* does not allow much space to appreciate the inherent beauty of Dante's poem. Commentators have written volumes on Dante's *terza rima*, which is believed to have been invented by Dante. It has been used by poets from Petrarch, known for the Petrarchan sonnet and his literary rivalry with Dante, to modern poets such as William Carlos Williams. In English, iambic

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[8] Dante, *Inferno*, VIII.71, or *Inferno* VIII.70 in the Italian. In his long commentary, Musa writes, "Referring to the towers and fortifications the Pilgrim can already glimpse in the distance, it evokes the barbaric, non-Christian mood and environment the two poets are about to enter" (117). More than just being Islamic or Eastern architecture in Hell's city Dis, the structures noted by the travelers are mosques—Islamic places of worship. While Christianity dominates in the heavens, the landscape of Dante's Hell is designed for Muslims.

pentameter is the preferred meter for terza rima because of its relative flexibility, but does not need to be used exclusively.[9] More important than the meter, the rhyme scheme gives the poem a musical quality that is both pleasant to the ear and more complex than blank verse, couplets, and many other forms used in long poems. The three-line stanzas of the terza rima likely refer to the Christian Trinity and complement the many incarnations of the number three within the *Divine Comedy*.

Before beginning an analysis of Islam in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a brief note is required on the texts taken as standard in the present work and the treatment of foreign languages. Texts written in multiple languages will be cited; however this project is intended for an English language reader, so foreign language text will be presented accompanying translations. Linguist Mark Musa's English translation of the *Divine Comedy* (Penguin) has been selected as the standard text for references. From available translations, Musa's work was chosen because of his careful attention to capturing the poet's meanings, tone, and imagery. He also avoids rhyme while striving to maintain the poem's rhythm, which complements the aims of this project better than other translations.[10] Musa abandons the rhyme scheme of the terza rima in favor of blank verse, believing that rhymed translations rely heavily on vowel and consonant rhymes that disrupt the poem's readability. He also claims that the translator's quest for rhyme often forces him to compromise meter and use uneven stresses. Musa refers to the translator's "mechanical necessity of finding rhyme, good or bad" as coming at too high a price because "it is apparently impossible…to find perfect rhymes in English for a long stretch

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[9] Musa, "Translator's Note," in *The Divine Comedy Volume I: Inferno*, 63.
[10] Musa, "Translator's Note," in *The Divine Comedy Volume I: Inferno*, 57-64.

of lines…it is a reminder that the search for rhyme has failed."[11] Musa also cites the constraints of rhyme as forcing translators to use "aesthetically unacceptable" diction that often compromises the spirit of the poet's language in terms of tone, pacing, and imagery, which Musa refers to as "the first of the Capital Sins in translating" because it makes the translation *feel* like a translation.[12] While he has abandoned the terza rima of Dante's Italian verse, Musa has retained three-line stanzas. I use Musa's long and short commentaries on the *Divine Comedy* extensively to explain Dante's meanings, reinforcing his translation as the logical choice. Following Musa's lead, I refer to Dante the author as either Dante or the poet, but refer to Dante the character exclusively as the Pilgrim.

The translation by Dorothy Sayers (Penguin) was also considered as a standard English edition for this work. The Sayers translation is excellent and in many ways artistically superior to Musa's translation because she strictly adheres to Dante's terza rima and emulates the poet's enjambments and end stops as much as possible. Sayers's use of the terza rima allows her to maintain the poem's unceasing pacing and forward movement through the rhythm, which keeps the intensity of the original. Her devotion to the rhyme is a main distinguishing point between Sayers and Musa. Citing poet Maurice Hewlett, Sayers writes, "for the translator, the choice is 'terza rima or nothing,'" and to achieve this Sayers uses "half-rhyme, light 'Cockney,' identical, and (if necessary) eccentric rhyme."[13]

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[11] Musa, "Translator's Note," in *The Divine Comedy Volume I: Inferno*, 61-2.
[12] Musa, "Translator's Note," in *The Divine Comedy Volume I: Inferno*, 62.
[13] Dorothy Sayers, "Introduction," in *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, the Florentine: Cantica I, Hell*, 56.

Sayers's strict adherence to rhyme, which carries the musical tone of the original when read aloud, makes her translation cumbersome and abstract when reading and analyzing for content.[14] To illustrate this difference in translations, compare the first two stanzas of *Inferno* Canto I:

Dante:

> Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita (a)
> mi ritrovai per una selva obscura, (b)
> che la diritta via era smarrita. (a)
>
> Ahi cuanto a dir qual era è cosa dura (b)
> esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte (c)
> che nel pensier rinova la paura! (b)[15]

Musa's translation:

> While halfway through the journey of our life
> I found myself lost in a darkened forest,
> for I had wandered off from the straight path.
>
> How hard it is to tell what it was like,
> this wood of wilderness, stubborn, so savage,
> that just the thought of it renews my fear!

Sayers's translation:

> Midway this way of life we're bound upon, (a)
> I woke to find myself in a dark wood, (b)
> Where the right road was wholly lost and gone. (a)
>
> Ay me! how hard to speak of it—that rude (b)
> And rough and stubborn forest! the mere breath (c)
> Of memory stirs the old fear in the blood; (b)

Of the three versions, Musa's has the most end stops and Dante's original has the most enjambment, with Sayers's translation closely mimicking both the rhyme and punctuation of the Italian original. In an effort to negotiate meaning and rhyme, Sayers awkwardly

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[14] The Sayers translation is meant to be read aloud without breaks.
[15] Dante, *Inferno*, I:1-6.

rhymes *wood*, *rude*, and *blood* while Dante's verse rhymes *obscura*, *dura*, and *paura*. The case endings in Romance languages like Italian make rhyming easier than in a language like English, which has a different cadence. It is a testament to Sayers's tremendous skills as a translator and a poet that she was able to translate the *Divine Comedy* in rhyme. While in many areas Musa's and Sayers's translations run parallel, Musa's translation offers greater clarity and fewer obvious language constraints, allowing for more in-depth analysis of content when comparing Dante's poem with Islamic texts.[16]

Long translations from the *Divine Comedy* are provided following the original Italian verse, and where necessary in the analysis the Italian is referenced. This provides the reader with the sounds of the original as well as Musa's translation, which captures the meaning but reads with a different spirit. Dante's Italian verse is retained in the long quotations because of the importance of the intersections of language and culture analyzed in this project.[17] To allow of the reader, if uninterested in the foreign text to gloss these sections without sacrificing meaning, all non-English language material that is quoted in the original language is presented in italics unless the word has been adopted into the English lexicon through heavy use.

The Arabic language is featured heavily in the analysis, but Arabic script is not used out of consideration for the reader, who is not expected to be familiar with non-Latin based scripts. Instead, Arabic words and phrases used in the analysis are translated into English, and when useful also transliterated. The analysis frequently makes refers to *ḥadīth*, a body of Islamic literature that catalogs the sayings, traditions, and

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[16] Other translations, such as the Henry Carey (Harvard Classics) and Henry Longfellow (Benedictine Classics) were considered but ultimately rejected in favor of Musa's more modern and readable translation.
[17] For the sake of consistency this formula is retained for all long quotes from the *Divine Comedy*.

reminiscences of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. *Ḥadīth* reports are composed of two parts: the *isnād*, or "support," and the *matn*, or "story." The *isnād* is the chain of transmitters (teacher to student) who passed down the tradition word for word. The *isnād* is one indicator for Islamic scholars of the validity of a particular report. *Ḥadīth* scholars work with biographies to determine if any of the scholars listed in the *isnād* had been proven to be wrong or to have told a lie, and if so, the *ḥadīth* is thrown out as unreliable. Because the science of *ḥadīth* developed slowly over the first generations of Islamic scholars, the *isnād* is the necessary connection from the text to the Prophet Muhammad, but like the game "Telephone" leaves room for error. *Isnād* chains, which are beneficial for the Islamic scholar, can be cumbersome and distracting. An example of an *isnād* is: "Abdullah bin Muhammad said that Hāshim bin al-Qāsim said, Shaībān Abū Mu'āwīah reported that Zīād bin 'Ilāqah saidal-Mughīrah bin Shu'bah said…"[18] I have omitted the *isnād* except for the name of the companion who witnessed the event or heard the words from the Prophet Muhammad. Following the *isnād* is the *matn*, which is the actual tradition being transmitted. Scholars compare the *matns* of similar traditions for consistency as another measure of accuracy for *ḥadīth*. These narrations may be long or short and the content can vary from the Prophet's favorite sweet drink to rules for capital punishment.

Translations of select long quotations from the *ḥadīth* are provided in the Appendix and paraphrased and excerpted in the text. The length of these selections and unfamiliar style of storytelling draw focus away from the comparison with Dante's *Divine Comedy* and cloud meaning rather than clarify it when presented in the main text.

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[18] *al-Bukharī* 1043. The *matn* would follow the ellipsis points.

The *ḥadīth* collection *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, abbreviated *al-Bukharī* after the name of the scholar who compiled the reports,[19] is used as the primary source for *ḥadīth* because it is recognized by Sunni Muslims as the most authoritative and accurate collection. Reports from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī* are supplemented by *Musnad Aḥmad*, a massive compilation of *ḥadīth* by Ahmad bin Hanbal (780-855) when necessary. These two collections are taken as the sources for *ḥadīth* because of their recognized status with Islamic scholars, and not because of any familiarity Dante would have had with them. I make no pretense that Dante had read these works or spoke with anyone who had read these specific texts, but because these texts are the criterion for *ḥadīth* studies and all traditions radiate from them.

While a nine-volume English translation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī* by noted translator Muhammad Muḥsin Khān (Dar-us-Salam) is available, I have decided to do my own translations for the present work. Khān's translation is excellent, but intended for an English speaking Islamic audience. Khān's *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī* makes frequent use of parenthetical notes that direct the reader's interpretation along dogmatic lines that are helpful to the Islamic scholar but not the literary critic. Because his translation follows a specific view of Islam and Islamic studies, his translations are sometimes closer to the dominant scholastic interpretations of *ḥadīth* but do not always give the most direct translation of the text. I have translated the selections from *Musnad Aḥmad* as well because there is no English translation of the entire work.

Ḥadīth reports are not cited by page number, but instead cited as they are listed in the original work, being numbered successively in ascending order. These listings can

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[19] Abū Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismā'īl bin Ibrāhīm bin al-Mughīrah bin Bardizbah al-J'afī al-Bukharī (810-70).

change based on edition. Only one edition of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī* figures in the present work, but two separate editions of *Musnad Aḥmad* were useful and the footnotes cite the specific edition.

Citations from the *Qur'ān* are taken exclusively from the Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation printed by the King Fahd Holy Qur'ān Printing Complex in Madīnah (Madina), Saudi Arabia. This edition is the most widely known of English language translations and has gained official status after being distributed by the Saudi government to religious pilgrims. Like the verses of Dante, quotations from the *Qur'ān* are accompanied by a transliteration of the original in italics followed by a citation listing the name of the *sūrah* (sometimes translated as "chapter"), the number of the *sūrah*, and the *ayah* (literally "sign" but usually translated as "verse"). Out of respect for the status of the *Qur'ān* and following scholarly traditions, the text is offset from the main text and set within guillemets, which allows for a clearer distinction between Islamic scripture and Islamic scholarship.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The question of Islamic influences in the composition of the *Divine Comedy* is not new, and the resulting debate, while never occupying the forefront of Dante studies, has been lively. Despite the multiple direct references to Islam in the poem and the portrayal of Muslim characters, Dante scholars have been quick to defend the poet against allegations of Oriental influence. Oriental arguments about Dante's *Divine Comedy* gradually progressed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until Miguel Asín Palacios, professor of Arabic at the University of Madrid, published *La escatología musulmana y la Divina Comedia* (1919). Asín's work with Dante redefined the relationships between Dante and Islam by using Islamic texts to support his claims. While Asín's *La escatología musulmana* overshadowed the works of his predecessors and set the standard for Islamic studies of Dante's *Divine Comedy* that followed, Asín's writings drew from a tradition of acknowledging non-Western references in the poem.

In the late eighteenth century a Spanish Jesuit named Juan Andrés (1740-1817) wrote a book titled *Del origen, progresos y estado actual de toda la literatura*, in which he speculated that Dante may have been influenced by some Arabic traditions when writing the *Divine Comedy*. Andrés's book is neither a work on Dante or Islam, but is distinguished as the first spark in what would ignite a firestorm of literary controversy roughly one hundred years later. In 1874 Andrés's work was followed up by Alessandro d'Ancona, who noted a few similarities between Dante's poem and Indo-Iranian traditions in his *I precursori di Dante*. In 1889 Tomasso Vitti published "Le origini della *Divina Commedia*," which agreed with d'Ancona's claims that Dante's poem is similar to Eastern traditions, but problematically seeks parallels that could not be sustained with the

Indian *Mahabharata*.[20] In 1896, Angelo De Gubernatis furthered Andrés's, d'Ancona's, and Vitti's claims about Eastern connections with Dante when he claimed that before Dante no Christian artist or writer depicted Purgatory as a mountain and that this was copied from Islamic tradition. He also claimed that the Inferno section of Dante's otherworld was copied from Buddhist tradition, but a lack of substantial Buddhist references in the *Divine Comedy* makes this claim difficult to sustain.

The question of Islamic influences on the *Divine Comedy* began to gain greater traction in 1901, when Edgar Blochet speculated that Dante's poem might be part of an older story cycle originating in Indo-Iranian legends that were only able to take literary form after crossing into Europe.[21] Blochet speculated that the poet became familiar with the Prophet Muhammad's *Mi'rāj*,[22] or ascension to the heavens, through knights who had travelled to Jerusalem during the Crusades. Because Dante himself did not speak or read Arabic, Blochet's theory requires the knights as intermediaries. While Blochet's story about the knights is intriguing, he admits that it is hypothetical at best and advocated analysis of Dante's known Western sources for Eastern traces.[23] Blochet searched for Indo-Iranian influences in Dante's work, but he was keener to demonstrate that Islamic thought had Hellenistic roots and did not perform in-depth studies of Islamic literature.[24] While admitting to some Eastern influences, he does not make room in his theory a stable Islamic text or coordinated Islamic thought to have migrated from the Islamic East to the

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[20] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 31-2. The *Mahabharata*, the longer of two classical Sanskrit epics, tells the story of the Kurukshetra War between Kaurava and Pandova princes.
[21] Edgar Blochet, *Les sources orientales de la Divine Comédie*, 155.
[22] The *Mi'rāj* is the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey from Jerusalem to the heavens, guided by the angel Gabriel. Similarities between the Prophet's *Mi'rāj* and the Pilgrim's journey in the *Divine Comedy* are analyzed in the present work.
[23] This technique is employed in Chapter 4 of the present work.
[24] Islamic philosophy has two separate roots: the *Qur'ān* and Greek philosophy.

Christian West. Instead, he believes that only scattered stories and oral traditions existed

that could then be developed and written by a more sophisticated West. While Blochet

did not give due credit to the Islamic East, he at least acknowledges non-Western sources

in Dante's poem. Blochet wrote, "The glory of Dante is not in having invented the

legends so much as inserting episodes that have no counterpart in any other literature,

above all the Oriental versions of the Ascension legend."[25] Blochet correctly recognizes

the literary quality of the *Divine Comedy*, which is unique and unparalleled in many

ways, but is unable to commit to the idea of Eastern influence completely.

  As support for the case of Islamic influences in the *Divine Comedy* mounted,

criticism and rejection was not far behind. In 1903, shortly after Blochet published his

theory, Marcus Dods claimed that any similarities between Dante and other writers were

incidental. Dods believed that Dante was solely responsible for the *Divine Comedy* and

rejected outside influences, especially from the Islamic East. Dods conceded that the poet

may have been influenced by Jewish traditions via his friend, Immanuel ben Salamone.[26]

In 1905 Dods's rejection of Islamic influences in the *Divine Comedy* were amplified by

Francesco Torraca, who claimed that Dante had no precedent at all. Torraca wrote,

"Dante does not have a precursor, the *Divine Comedy* does not belong to the shadows of

the Middle Ages, it belongs to the new, complex, illuminated Italian civilization."[27] Dods

and Torraca put the poet in a vacuum in their attempts to discount any influence from the

Islamic East. The opposing views continued in a deadlock, with scholars able to identify

potential Islamic influence but unable to prove it and the rejection from their opponents

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[25] Edgar Blochet, *Les sources orientales de la Divine Comédie*, 195. Translation my own.
[26] Marcus Dods, *Forerunners of Dante: An Account of Some of the More Important visions of the Unseen World, from the Earliest Times*, 3.
[27] Francesco Torraca, *I precurori della Divina Commedia*, 30. Translation my own.

taking an increasingly nationalistic tone. The Italian nationalism in Dante studies at the turn of the century is not surprising. Dante's use of vernacular rather than Latin and the poem's focus on Italian conflicts and characters while struggling to regain a sense of lost identity and greatness in the wake of the fallen Roman Empire resonated strongly with Italian literary scholars in post-unification Italy.[28]

In 1907 De Fabrizio extended Blochet's theory when he claimed that medieval writers were aware of the Islamic *Mi'rāj* as an oral tradition, and said that it was possible Dante was also aware of the story. De Fabrizio concedes that there was no way to confirm whether the poet was aware of the oral tradition. The *Mi'rāj*, he believed, played an important background role in the poet's mind when composing the *Divine Comedy*, but its ultimate significance could not be determined. De Fabrizio kept the fires of controversy burning in Dante studies, but was unable to advance the question of Islamic influences in the *Divine Comedy* because his theories were easily dismissed by Dante scholars as conjecture.

The debate over the possible Islamic influences on the *Divine Comedy* remained largely unchanged for the next decade. Then, in 1919, Miguel Asín Palacios published *La escatología musulmana y la Divina Comedia*. Rather than restating ideas or making vague speculations, Asín presented a fresh reading of Dante's poem in light of an abundance of Arabic texts. Asín, a professor of Arabic at the University of Madrid, had access to Arabic texts that other scholars were only aware of only as vague traditions, and he cataloged versions of the *Mi'rāj* from commentaries on the *Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth*,

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[28] After the fall of the Roman Empire, Italy split into a series of city-states that were often in a state of hostility against each other. During the early 1800s the process of Italian unification began. By the early 1900s after a series of bloody wars and political and social turmoil, Italians had achieved independence. In forging their new national identity it makes sense that scholars were attracted to Dante as a symbol of Italian heritage.

theological, and literary works to identify different narrative cycles of the *Mi'rāj* story as well as distinct versions within each cycle. When analyzing these various retellings of the Prophet Muhammad's *Mi'rāj*, Asín noticed that each had strong parallels with the *Divine Comedy*. Asín claimed that the Islamic *Mi'rāj* was a prototype for the Pilgrim's journey in Dante's poem,[29] and used his own work on *Mi'rāj* narratives to extend Blochet's theory.

The main strength of Asín's work is his wide knowledge and presentation of Islamic works. Citing specific texts, he was able to trace *Mi'rāj* scholarship to Islamic Spain and establish Spain as a conduit for the transmission of texts and knowledge between medieval Christians and Muslims throughout Europe. Asín concedes that Islamic Spain is not the only possible source of diffusion for Islamic texts, but argues that because of its cosmopolitanism it was the most likely. He avoids the claim that the Islamic *Mi'rāj* story was the origin of Western interest in Islamic eschatology, and instead used it as an example of that interest.

Asín's theory reignited controversy among Dante scholars because his theories were more difficult to refute. His arguments cited Arabic works that his detractors had no access to, and he explained similarities between these texts and Dante well. If accepted, Asín's theory required a reinterpretation of the entire *Divine Comedy* in light of Islamic thought, let alone other medieval works. It also implied that the West's understandings of Christian and Muslim relations were not historically accurate.

Asín's detractors quickly noted the many flaws in his work. A major flaw in Asín's theory is that it relied on problematic assumptions about the transmission of

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[29] Miguel Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, 19.

Islamic texts into Europe. Asín identified many Arabic language Islamic texts that had parallels in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but was unable to provide evidence that Dante was aware of these texts or their contents. Because he was unable to connect Islamic sources directly to Dante, the gap in his theory became known as his textual missing link, a problem that Asín was unable to solve. Asín proposed three possible solutions: that Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini, who was at the court of Alfonso X while the *Mi'rāj* was being translated there, came to know of the Islamic tradition, and brought it back to Italy, and shared it with the poet; that Dante learned of the *Mi'rāj* through Jewish friends; or that Dante was attracted to Islamic culture and learned about the tradition through his own interests (likely through reading Arabic accounts himself).

In 1949 an obscure manuscript of the Castilian *Book of Muhammad's Ladder* was published. Scholars disagree about whether *Muhammad's Ladder* is Asín's missing link because it cannot be proven (or, as Asín may argue, it cannot be disproven) that Dante read the either French, Latin, or Castilian translations of the Arabic work.

The missing link was a headache for Asín, but his theory had a bigger problem. While his extensive documentation provided his argument with an abundance of textual support, it is also his theory's greatest weakness. Only when his many sources were combined did the various *Mi'rāj* narratives begin to show parallels with all of the *Divine Comedy*—separately, these parallels appear as little more than coincidence. To combat this weakness, Asín grouped *Mi'rāj* stories into narrative cycles that displayed multiple parallels with Dante's work. Because these different retellings of the *Mi'rāj* narrative were from different texts written in various parts of the Islamic East at different times, and because most of these texts were never translated into European languages, it is

unlikely that Dante would have had direct access to them. While most Dante scholars

(both those who supported and those who denied the idea of Islamic influence on the

poem) agreed that the poet did not speak or read Arabic (or any other Semitic language),

Asín went so far as to claim that, based on Dante's writings, it could not be proven that

he was ignorant of Arabic or other Semitic languages.[30] Because Asín's theory hinged on

the poet's intimate knowledge of multiple Arabic-language texts, the search for the

missing link, a text that unified the disparate Arabic texts, became top priority. Asín

defended his theories as published in 1919, without revision, until his death in 1944, but

was never able to definitively prove his case.

Asín's theory was given new life in 1987 with María Rosa Menocal's book *The

Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, which corrected the flaws in Asín as well as

presented new theories. Menocal's research reinforced Asín's notions about Islamic

Spain as primary conduit for Islamic culture to influence Europe, but demonstrates the

importance of Islamic Sicily in the transmission of Islamic texts and culture to Europe.

Menocal wrote that the Islamic kingdom in Sicily strove to emulate Islamic Spain but

was unable to become a cultural center on a large scale. After the Norman Conquest of

Sicily (ending roughly 1091), however, elements of Islamic culture remained after the

Muslims were expelled.[31] Clothing, music, poetry, and harems were all appropriated by

the Normans and incorporated into the new, hybridized Sicilian court culture.[32] Sicily

provided another conduit for transmission of texts to mainland Italy that was much closer

than Islamic Spain and more likely to be on friendly terms with the various Italian city-

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[30] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 35.
[31] The Norman conquest of Sicily is hinted at by Dante in *Inferno* Canto XXVIII when Dante refers to those slain by Roberto Guiscardo (Robert Guiscard). For his service, Guiscardo is numbered among the warriors of the faith in the Heaven of Mars (the Fifth Sphere) in Dante's *Paradise*.
[32] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 46.

states of Dante's time because it was a Christian kingdom. Figures from the Sicilian court, such as Frederick II, are present in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, demonstrating his familiarity with Sicily.

Menocal called for a reevaluation of medieval history without the nationalistic fervor that was used to counter claims of Islamic influence, and that prevented historians and literary critics from acknowledging the constant cultural exchanges that characterized the cosmopolitan Islamic kingdoms. To demonstrate the need to revise accounts of history, Menocal analyzed the popularity of Arabic-style poetry in Sicily after the fall of the Islamic kingdom under Norman rule. Menocal wrote, "Arabic poems of courtly love would influence the Provençal courtly traditions that would later have a significant impact on the styles of Dante (especially *Vita Nuova*) and Petrarch (*Canzoniere*)."[33] Menocal's studies of Sicilian-Arab poetry were linked Dante directly to Arabic style poetry as an influence on his works that he may have been unaware of himself.

After demonstrating that many Italian poets took their styles, knowingly or unknowingly, from Arab predecessors, Menocal illustrated how Arabic literary trends and Islamic ideas penetrated European culture. While Arabic poetry and culture had a demonstrable impact in Europe, this legacy is not reflected in the anthologies of the time (or later), and this unaddressed literary debt, Menocal claims, has destroyed the West's understanding of intertextuality and creates a pattern of avoidance that has been a problem for literary scholarship generally and Dante scholarship specifically.[34]

Menocal's extensive work on Spanish and Sicilian Islamic poetry established vehicles through which Islamic texts were transmitted to non-Muslim Europeans, and

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[33] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 118.
[34] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 120-31.

Menocal extended this analysis to *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder*, which she believed to be Asín's missing link. Menocal, like other scholars, was unable to definitively prove that Dante had access to *Muhammad's Ladder*, but did make a strong case for the likelihood that Dante was familiar with it "in [at least one of] several vulgarized versions of the legend that existed in Both Latin and vernaculars during his lifetime."[35] Menocal traced the history of the manuscripts and demonstrated, "knowledge of the *mi'rāj* tradition was quite widespread throughout Europe by the end of the thirteenth century," and highlighted the many "coincidences" that link *Muhammad's Ladder* to Dante.[36]

There are a few more works that inform this project on an ideological level but do not relate directly to Dante or his *Divine Comedy*. Most immediately, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, forced the reexamination of the representations of the Islamic East by the West. Said dealt with Dante and his *Divine Comedy* only a handful of times in the work, but *Orientalism* established the vocabulary and ideological foundations for the analysis of the Islamic East through its various incarnations in Western literature. *Orientalism* claimed that Western culture was able to define and identify itself only as unique after distinguishing itself from an imagined decadent, barbarous, and exotic Eastern culture. "The Oriental is irrational," Said wrote. "Depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.'"[37] While Said's comments on the Western canon are illuminating, his claims about the formation of Western identity were particularly groundbreaking and provided an interesting filter for reading Dante's treatment of Islam. Dante's Muslim characters *need* to be condemned to Hell in the same

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[35] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 123.
[36] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 123.
[37] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

way that the architecture of Dis in Hell *must* be Islamic because it creates a diametric contrast with the Christian Heaven. Dante's Muhammad *must* lead a procession of corruption because his antithesis (for Dante and other Christian writers), the Christ, leads the procession of faithful believers. Positioning the Prophet Muhammad as a rival for the Prophet Jesus allows Islam and the Prophet Muhammad to be labeled as heretics, guilty of falsifying a new sect. By presenting the Prophet Muhammad in this way, Islam's influence is diminished and the truth of Christianity is reinforced. This comparison, highlighted by Said's work, breaks down because Islam is not an analog of Christianity and on closer inspection the name Mohammedianism, which comes from the belief that Muhammad is a rival Christ, is unsustainable when faced with Eastern representations of Islam, such as Islamic culture or texts. Said wrote, "Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity. The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating this to itself as either 'original' or 'repetitious.'"[38] According to Said, the representations of Islam in works like Dante's *Divine Comedy* are more telling about the Western image-creators than the referent Islam. These images continue because Western literature continues to refer to itself for validation, and I believe Dante's work is important because these representations are frequent and range from ambivalent to hostile.[39]

In a spirit similar to Said's postcolonial revisionist interpretations of literature, Sayyid Quṭb (1906-66), Egyptian educator, literary critic, and Islamic reformer called

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[38] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 59.
[39] Dante's presentation of Saladin, Averroes, and Avicenna are with the virtuous pagans, whose only sin is not believing in Jesus and experience no actual suffering (with the exception of being cut off from God's light), while the Prophet Muhammad and his nephew 'Alī are eviscerated in Canto XXVIII.

into question representations of Islam, although his work has a different focus. Here, Quṭb's work is secondary to Said's because his writings were not well known in the West and because, while his commentaries on the Islamic East (in terms of religion, politics, and society from the early Medieval period to contemporary events) were lucid and insightful, his views on non-Islamic societies ranged from illuminating and well-constructed arguments to gross generalizations. Quṭb's best known work, *Ma'alim fī al Ṭarīq* (*Milestones*), and his extensive commentary on the *Qur'ān* titled *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (*In the Shade of the Qur'ān*), critiqued contemporary Islamic societies and reanalyzed both Eastern and Western histories from a postcolonial perspective. Quṭb's work was monumental in many ways but was not without flaws or controversy. Quṭb's *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* was rejected by many Islamic scholars because it broke the traditional format for commenting on the *Qur'ān* that had been an established norm for centuries, because of his preoccupation with and comments on contemporary politics, and because he claimed that there were no true Muslims or Muslim societies left in the world. While Said claimed that the West was able to forge an identity based on differentiating itself from an imagined East, Quṭb claimed that contemporary Islamic societies had lost their identities in imitation of an imagined West.

Quṭb's revisionist view of history called all Western representations of the West as well as the East into question. Qutb attempted to demonstrate that self-serving political motives were a driving force behind the development of Christianity and the Papacy.[40] He extended his theory to Eastern politics as well, but at times was not able to remove the rose colored glasses when analyzing Islamic history. Quṭb's analysis of the Crusades was

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[40] To some extent Qutb and Dante appear to agree on this.

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particularly troublesome. His analysis of Western politics helps to re-contextualize that series of wars as a colonial expansion and recognized the complex political alliances that crossed religious or ethnic lines rather than subscribing to the view that the Crusades were a pious attempt to regain the Holy Land, but his portrayal of the Islamic East as the innocent victim who piously struggled to defend its homeland ignores the parallels between Islamic and Christian expansion in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Sayyid Abul ʿAlā Mawdūdī (sometimes transliterated as Maududi [1903-79]), in his Urdu language commentary *Tafhīm ul-Qurʾān* (*Toward Understanding the Qurʾān*), presented a more balanced interpretation of history and culture than Quṭb, but maintained a similar postcolonial reading. Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm* lacked some of Quṭb's fire, but earned a strong reputation with Islamic scholars because he did not agree with Quṭb that all contemporary Islamic societies had lost their Islamic character in imitation of the West.[41]

While Islamic scholars and their works provided a theoretical framework necessary to reinterpret Dante's *Divine Comedy* in light of Islamic texts, two literary works were similarly useful. The Persian *Miʾrāj Nāmah* (*The Story of Ascension*) by ibn Sīnā (*Inferno* Canto IV) and the Arabic *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (*The Letter of Forgiveness*) by Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʾarrī have striking similarities to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. While both of these works predate Dante's *Divine Comedy*, there is no indication that the poet was aware of either text.[42]

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[41] Both Mawdūdī and Qutb spent time in prison for their political associations and beliefs, but the Egyptian government executed Qutb and this may have had impacted the Indo-Pakistani Mawdūdī in his works about contemporary Islamic governments. Mawdūdī and Qutb both referenced each other in their works.

[42] The poet was familiar with ibn Sīnā through references in other European works, such as the writings of Thomas Aquinas, who was a major influence on Dante. It is unknown if Aquinas had read the *Miʾrāj Nāmah*.

While there are many accounts of the *Mi'rāj* in Islamic literature, ibn Sīnā's account is unique because, rather than treating the Prophet Muhammad's ascension as a matter-of-fact story, as many Islamic scholars do, ibn Sīnā retold the *Mi'rāj* as an allegory. In addition to this allegorical retelling of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey through the heavens, ibn Sīnā provided a detailed commentary of his retelling of the *Mi'rāj* that explained his philosophy. If Dante was influenced by a version of the *Mi'rāj* story, then studying ibn Sīnā's *Mi'rāj Nāmah* allows for an analysis of two independent allegorical extensions of the same narrative from different cultures and written in different languages, a fascinating topic that falls outside the goals of the present work.

al-Ma'arrī's poem has gained some infamy with Dante scholars because of the claim that it prefigures the *Divine Comedy*. This argument has been largely discredited because, unlike the *Mi'rāj* story, al-Ma'arrī's poem lacks a possible vehicle of transmission to the West.[43] In al-Ma'arrī's poem, a rather snarky and tongue-in-cheek response to a letter received from grammarian and poet ibn Qarih, he visits the heavens and meets with pre-Islamic pagan poets. The poem is a loose adaption of the *Mi'rāj* narrative. Unlike ibn Sīnā's *Mi'rāj Nāmah*, al- Ma'arrī's poem does not have a religious character and is largely a satire whose charm comes from its clever wordplay in Arabic.

Neither al-Ma'arrī's nor ibn Sīnā's works were likely influential on Dante or even known to the poet directly, but they do provide useful background knowledge for comparing the *Divine Comedy* to Islamic traditions and texts. They highlight medieval

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[43] Geert Jan van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler, "Introduction," in *The Epistle of Forgiveness or A Pardon to Enter The Garden*, xv, xxv. Gelder and Schoeler, while denying al-Ma'arrī's influence on Dante, speculate that ibn Sīnā's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, an imaginary cosmic journey, may have been known by the poet (xxv).

Christian and Islamic cultures' approaches to reinterpreting stories from the same narrative tradition. Analyzing the texts that radiated from the original *Mi'rāj* narratives found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī* demonstrates where the failures of schemes that artificially separate the similar aspects of the two cultures dominant in the Mediterranean and competing for influence, believers, and resources.

Chapter 3: Dante, Saladin, and the Crusades

Dante scholars have debated the poet's views on war, with most modern scholars

agreeing that Dante was anti-war,[44] but the number of soldiers, particularly Crusaders,

that the Pilgrim encounters on his journey demands that this view be revisited. This view,

held by many Dante scholars, is taken from Dante's letters and other works, which

chronicle his career as a soldier before devoting his time to learning and writing. Barbara

Reynolds and Mark Musa emphasize the horrors of war and the bloody nature of

medieval, hand-to-hand combat as having a profound impact on Dante that gave him a

distaste for war altogether. Without disregarding Dante's reluctance fight noted by

modern Dante scholars, we might consider that the rewards awarded to Crusader soldiers

in his *Paradise* demonstrate that the poet's views on war are more subtly nuanced. While

Dante may have taken issue with the wars and conflicts between the various Italian city-

states or other European powers, he appeared to recognize the Crusaders' efforts as

satisfying a higher calling worthy of salvation that did not apply to all soldiers. The

Divine Comedy implied that holy wars are separate from territorial or political disputes

between sovereigns and therefore justifiable.

Dante's justification of holy war through salvation for the Crusaders has been

validated by Western historians, such as Bernard Lewis, who described the Crusades as a

series of conflicts in the late Middle Ages in which Christians sought to reclaim the Holy

Land, Jerusalem, and to repel Islamic aggression. In his view, the Crusades were a

Western response to (and imitation of) aggressive Islamic *jihād*, but "unlike the *jihād* it

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[44] Dorothy Sayers, "Introduction," in *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri The Florentine: Cantica I Hell*, 31; Barbara Reynolds, *Dante: The Poet, the Political Thinkier, the Man*, 9; Mark Musa, "Introduction," in *The Divine Comedy Volume I: Inferno*, 16-7.

was concerned primarily with the defence or reconquest of threatened or lost Christian territory."[45] Lewis's analysis of *jihād* paints an image of a pious West, victimized and violated by the belligerent East as it greedily attempted to take Christian lands and remove their Christian identity.[46] Efraim Karsh presented a similar characterization of the Crusades in his *Islamic Imperialism: A History*.[47]

The common threads in scholarship on the Crusades include a narrative of the Islamic East, which was gaining momentum as an imperial power, spreading its political and social influence across North Africa and into Southern Europe. Unprovoked Islamic expansion and hostilities demanded a swift Western response. This view of the Crusades is not altogether incorrect; the Muslims did have an expanding empire and had taken large tracts of Spain and established Islamic kingdoms in Europe. They were also expanding their influence through the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. This view, however, unfairly sets up a dichotomy in which Western motives are presented as being clearly right and Eastern motives as clearly wrong.[48]

One of the reasons Dante scholars have been slow to recognize the full significance of the Crusades in the *Divine Comedy* is that they have been even slower to recognize the importance of Islam there. Because Crusaders were treated as defenders of the faith that was so important to Dante, and historians portrayed the West as pious defenders rather than imperialists, analysis of Dante's poem often accepts the references to the Crusades at face value, simply glossing the importance of these international wars.

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[45] Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, 233.
[46] Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, 236.
[47] Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History*, 69-73.
[48] Excellent, although Eurocentric accounts of the Crusades can be found in Bernard Lewis's *The Middle East* and *The Arabs in History*, Joseph Dahmus's *A History of the Middle Ages*, Jonathan Riley-Smith's *The Crusades: A Short History*, Efraim Karsh's *Islamic Imperialism: A History*, and Andrew McCall's *The Medieval Underworld*.

An admission of the centrality of the Crusades to the poem carries an implicit admission that the work is in part a response to Islam, or a type of literary crusade that supplements the greater Crusader movement by providing literary salvation to historical Crusaders. Dante scholarship and the work of Western historians validates each other, often without consulting the East, and their readings of both history and the *Divine Comedy* reflect this. The twenty-first century needs a reading of Dante that explores the poem's complex relationships with Islam and the West's early nation-state notions of empire.

The traditionally received interpretation of *Inferno* Canto IV shows the importance of such historical and critical premises. In Canto IV the Pilgrim and Virgil first "descend into the sightless world," entering the First Circle, also known as Limbo.[49] While rubbing shoulders with the virtuous pagans of Limbo, Dante's Pilgrim met with great figures of Western history, including Homer, Horace, Ovid, Aeneas, Hector, Lucius Brutus, and even Julius Caesar. The presence of these figures was easily explained by Virgil, who told the Pilgrim that it was not sin that damned these shades to Limbo, but their disbelief in the One God (prior to the coming of the Christ) or their lack of baptism (after the coming of the Christ) that condemned them to their "untormented grief."[50] The presence of these monumental figures makes sense for the reader: while not Christians, they were foundational to Western (Christian) civilization.[51] More difficult to explain is the presence of the Ṣulṭān of Egypt (*Miṣr*), Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf bin Ayyūb, Kurdish

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[49] Dante, *Inferno* IV:13, 24, 45.
[50] Dante, *Inferno*, IV:34-8, 28.
[51] Distinction is made here between Eastern and Western Christians and Christianity's Afro-Asiatic roots and the form it took medieval Europe.

general and leader of the coordinated Islamic resistance during the Crusades.[52] He was

joined in Limbo by fellow Muslims ibn Sīnā and ibn Rushd (no other Muslims are

mentioned in Limbo but were possibly present). The philosophical writings and

commentaries on Aristotle by ibn Sīnā and ibn Rush inspired Western thinkers. Their

roles are not explored in the present work for considerations of space and because they

were openly referenced in some Western works, making their positions less disputed and

because thematically, these philosophers seem more at home in Limbo with the other

great non-Christian thinkers. Salāḥ al-Dīn, on the other hand, represented Islamic

political authority and military might.

This chapter will seek to make sense of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's presence with the virtuous

pagans in *Inferno* Canto IV. This exploration calls into question traditional readings of

the Crusades and reinterprets them in the context of expanding colonial empires that used

religion as a justification for territorial expansion. In addition, comparing the legacies and

representations of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in the East and West will help to address the important

question of why this Muslim general, whose career was spent defending *Dār al-Islām*

against *Dār al-Ḥarb*,[53] was worthy of mention in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and in a

section of the Canto so densely populated with such great minds that the Pilgrim "cannot

tell about them all in full"?[54]

The most necessary step in explaining Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's presence in the *Divine*

Comedy is to reinterpret the Crusades as more than simply a religious defense of holy

sites. The strength of the religious fervor that drove armies of Christian soldiers to leave

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[52] Saladino in Italian, or Saladin in English translation. The more accurate Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is used here to reflect the historical person. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was an important leader during the Second and Third Crusades (1147-9 and 1189-92). Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn died shortly after the conclusion of the Third Crusade.

[53] Literally "House of Islam" and "House of War."

[54] Dante, *Inferno*, IV:145.

their homes and travel abroad to fight and die in the Middle East cannot be denied and Western historians are right to have noted this as a central motivation, but, as Edward Said notes, "every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort."[55] The official discourse of the West has maintained that the European Christians resisted Afro-Asiatic Islamic aggression in the Crusades. This discourse supports a binary that is not sustainable from a close analysis of the period.

Arab historians generally reject the terms of the Western binary. ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī called for a similar reanalysis of the greater history of East-West relations in his encyclopedic works. In his biography of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn he wrote, "a nation that wishes to renew itself and rise again must also renew its historical memory to learn the lessons of history, which will benefit its present and help plan for its future."[56] al-Ṣallābī claimed that the use of the words *Crusade* and *Crusader* have been applied retroactively by the West to the series of active conflicts between Christian Europe and the Islamic East (primarily Syria, Iraq, Turkey or Anatolia, Egypt, and Tunisia) that were fought for territory, economic gain, and cultural hegemony using religion "as fuel and a way to conceal these motives."[57] He also claimed that the view held by many historians that the Crusades were a series separate wars fought in the late Middle Ages is incorrect. He wrote, "Indeed, the Crusades (*al-Ḥarb al-Ṣalībīah*) have not ended and never will end,"

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[55] Edward Said, "Preface," in *Orientalism*, xxi.

[56] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 14. Arabic edition. Translation my own.

[57] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 20-4. Translation my own.

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citing modern conflicts in Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan as examples of a continuation of the Crusades.[58]

The strengths of al-Ṣallābī's historical analysis were his recontextualizing of the Crusades as a single conflict made of active and inactive periods of open hostility rather than a series of discreet wars, and his work demonstrated that Crusader expansion into Islamic lands was a form of colonialism (*al-āsta'mār*). al-Ṣallābī occasionally constructed a reverse of the Western binary rather than refute it. He carefully analyzed Western motives with intense scrutiny unparalleled in Western histories, but tends to lenient on the East. While al-Ṣallābī's writings are not perfect, when read in light of Western accounts a third eclectic reading of history can be constructed that recognizes social, religious, and political complexities faced by Eastern and Western powers.

Asserting that the Crusades had a material dimension as well as religious motivation was a direct challenge to the West's understanding of the Crusades and the West's understanding of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. To support his material reading of the Crusades, al-Ṣallābī cites Pope Urban II (*al-Bābā Urbānūs al-Thānī*), who reigned from 1088-99, as offering salvation to any sinner who fought in the Crusades as well as tax emptions and promises that the families of every soldier would be looked after by the Church in his absence.[59]

The common Christian's hatred toward Islam, according to al-Ṣallābī, was stoked by the nobility and clergy who reminded them that the Muslims had taken lands that had previously been theirs (Jerusalem) and freed the slaves that had previously been under their (Christian) dominion in those territories. The Christian legacy was the historical

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[58] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 20, 24. Translation my own.
[59] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 26.

aftermath of the Byzantine Empire's former rule, itself a residual of the Roman conquests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant. These territorial and economic losses were then used to blame the Muslims for Christian disunity in Europe and the concurrent (if temporary) eclipse of Papal power in Rome,[60] which was a problem that plagued Dante as well. Driving the point home, al-Ṣallābī wrote that the European feudal system was "inherently connected to the land," and the larger the fiefdom the higher a noble's status and income. Landless knights and nobles had two options: marry an heiress or raise an army and take someone else's lands. With no abundance of available heiresses, the movement presented a unique opportunity for Crusaders to establish themselves in the East.[61]

The series of Crusader states established throughout the Middle East, some at war with the Christians of Jerusalem or other Crusader states, and some allied with neighboring Islamic kingdoms, testifies to the material nature of the Crusader movement as well as the aims of the local Islamic nobility. Crusader often plundered many of the Christian communities they passed through on their way through the Middle East, ostensibly to exterminate the Muslims.[62] If the Crusaders had been sincere in their strictly religious motivation to reclaim the Holy Land, al-Ṣallābī wrote, they would have concentrated their efforts on Jerusalem rather than spread across the Levant.[63]

If the Crusades are seen as at least partially a colonial expansion then the absolute nature of Christianity, as presented by Dante, becomes more flexible. Had the wars been

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[60] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 27.
[61] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 27-8.
[62] Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, trans. Jon Rothschild, 5. Maalouf notes that many Greek churches were plundered and entire villages were often exterminated once their resources were exhausted. Children, he notes, were often burned alive (6).
[63] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 27-8.

limited to their religious character, then anyone opposing the Christians would represent the worst type of traitor or villain, but if the motivations for these wars include secular considerations, then the enemies of the Christians are not forced into an absolutist role. A figure such as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn can be read as a chivalrous knight resisting expansionists rather than as the representative of the medieval Christians' arch enemy—the Muslims. Unlike the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, who is punished in *Inferno* Canto XXVIII, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is not presented as a fighter attacking Christianity. He is still guilty of being associated with the uncomfortable shift in the balance of power in the Mediterranean by virtue of being an Islamic leader, but this guilt can be mitigated by his secular roles and recognized chivalry.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn may have also appealed to Dante because, while he was a Kurd in service to Nūr al-Dīn Zankī (sometimes Zangī), ātābak of Aleppo and Mosul, and a unifier of the Islamic front against the Crusaders, he was known as a leader in North Africa. The African-Italian conflict resembled the ancient Carthage-Rome rivalry that would have resonated with Dante, an avid reader of Virgil and lover of Roman heritage. Glorifying Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn allowed Dante to create a suitable African adversary for his age that he could defeat in verse by condemning him to Hell even if the battlefield results were mixed. The Italian city-states played an role in the Crusader movement in North Africa, and regardless of the poet's views on war, Dante would have been unable to escape the martial atmosphere as men were actively recruited into service and others returned from the field.[64] The martial atmosphere in the Italian city-states would help

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[64] ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 34.

account for the militaristic tone and presence of large numbers of soldiers present in the *Divine Comedy*.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn enjoys a favorable legacy in both East and West, although the two legacies differ. In his long commentary on *Inferno*, Dante translator Mark Musa writes:

> A distinguished soldier, Saladin (Salah-al-din Yusuf ibn-Ayyub) became sultan of Egypt in 1174. He launched many military campaigns and succeeded in expanding his empire. Although he won scattered victories over the Crusaders, he was soundly defeated by Richard the Lion-Hearted. A year after the truce he died (1193). Medieval opinion of Saladin was highly favorable; he was lauded for his generosity and magnanimity, especially as a result of the First and Third crusades…By including him among the virtuous souls in Limbo (although he is spatially isolated from the Trojan and Roman luminaries), Dante reflects the judgment of his age.[65]

Musa's comments support the general Western reading of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's life and career, which acknowledges his noble and charitable nature but also reinforces his (and therefore the Islamic resistance's) ultimate defeat. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's willingness to negotiate peace is what Musa is referring to when he writes that he was "soundly defeated,"[66] but al-Ṣallābī considered his willingness to negotiate peace a manifestation of his Islamic faith and humane values, preferring to preserve human lives even at the cost of territory.[67]

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's legacy has been a problem for the West since the Crusades. His chivalry and charisma captured the admiration of the Christian soldiers who opposed him, and legends about him captured the popular imagination of Europe. As Musa aptly notes, "Dante reflects the judgment of his age."[68] Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is a character in multiple stories in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and the story of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Melchizedek

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[65] Mark Musa, *Inferno Commentary*, 60.
[66] Mark Musa, *Inferno Commentary*, 60.
[67] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 11.
[68] Mark Musa, *Inferno Commentary*, 60.

the Jew, and the three rings was the basis for eighteenth-century playwright Gotthold
Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*. Sometimes including his humble poverty, these
stories reflect Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's wisdom and tolerance of diversity.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn captured the hearts of the Europeans he was at war with because his
life embodied medieval Christian ideals of chivalry. In his most famous example of
charity, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sent his personal physician to Richard the Lionheart (Rīshārd Qalb
al-Asad), Crusader and king of England (*mulk Brīṭānīā*).[69] He was known to have kept all
his promises, show mercy toward prisoners (he often released them as charity), to take
care to protect the wives and daughters of slain soldiers, to show respect for the feelings
and religious sensibilities of Christians in his territories, and to maintain his status and
authority as a strong leader. His many great qualities and his legacy as a unifier would
have been particularly attractive to Dante, whose life was plagued by the fractured nature
of Italian politics and foreign domination that prevented Italian unification for another six
centuries. While Westerners in the Middle Ages were taken by the qualities of Ṣalāḥ al-
Dīn that represented ideals they sought for themselves, they often overlooked his deep
love for Islam, his kind treatment and respect for Islamic scholars and jurists, and his
commitment to uniting an Islamic front for a coordinated *jihād* movement.[70]

At the time of his death, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had only one dinar and a few dirhams; he
did not own a home or hold any property, even a garden, or any other wealth because he
refused to draw a salary from the treasury and spent what he had in preparation for wor or
charity.[71] For Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn war and charity were intertwined because both became

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[69] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 13.
[70] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 11.
[71] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 13.

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necessities of state and faith. With his territories under constant threat from Crusader invaders as well as other Islamic principalities seeking to expand their own territories, battle took on both a religious and a secular character. Despite his constant preparation for battle Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn preferred peace. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's lack of enthusiasm for engaging in holy wars did not prevent him from fighting, but was likely a factor in his willingness to negotiate peace.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's qualified acceptance among medieval Europeans based on the appeal of his character and the denial of his religion and role as enemy combatant can be used to help explain Dante's brief mention of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in *Inferno* Canto IV:

e solo, in parte, vidi 'l Saladino.[72]

Musa's translation:

off, by himself, I noticed Saladin,

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was present with the other virtuous pagans, whom Virgil notes were innocent of sin but guilty of not being baptized and whose good deeds alone were not sufficient to secure salvation (or purgation), but he is kept separate from this group.[73] The spatial disparity becomes necessary because of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's position as an Islamic military leader, distanced not from Christians but from other virtuous pagans. Islam is defined as a separate and somehow different form of paganism that even in Hell cannot integrate with virtuous non-Christian cultures.

Dante's treatment of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in the text allows us read the poem in light of the combined religious and material natures of the Crusades written about by al-Ṣallabī, which allows the simultaneous incorporation of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as a character and his

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[72] Dante, *Inferno*, IV:129.
[73] Dante, *Inferno*, IV:34-42, 129.

rejection as a historical personage. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was unique in his reputation in the West, as he is unique in Dante's Hell. In the East, however, he was not without precedent. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn rose to prominence through his service to his predecessor, Nūr al-Dīn. He emulated Nūr al-Dīn in abolishing taxes, appealing directly to the people, giving prominence to scholars and jurists, building schools, working to unite Islamic kingdoms against the Crusaders, and establishing large propaganda and information networks.[74] While Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was presented as an exception in the West, a virtuous Muslim leading a nation of barbarians, in the East he was only one example of pious, charismatic Islamic leadership. The difference between Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and other leaders, however, was that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's charismatic nature and close interactions with Westerners allowed for his legacies to be known and respected on both sides of the conflict. al-Ṣallābī writes:

> With the death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn a bright chapter in history came to an end, in which the society of man saw a brilliant man, similar to Nūr al-Dīn Maḥūd al-Shahīd. Accumulating wealth didn't appeal to him; he didn't seek power, and maintained his goal of sending the Crusader armies from the land and sending them back where they came from.[75]

When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn died in 1193, African, Asian, and European chroniclers prayed for mercy on his soul and praised his commitment to toleration, his strong sense of justice, and his strength as a leader.[76] This wide renown is reflected in Dante's poem, which demonstrates a conflicted ambivalence toward Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn by allowing him to reside in a portion of Hell reserved for Dante's favorite non-Christians, but also holding him separate from this community.

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[74] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 167-200.
[75] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 14. Translation my own.
[76] ʿAlī Muhammad al-Ṣallābī, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*, 14.

Chapter 4: The European Muhammad

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is peppered with references to Islam and Muslims, but the most emphatic representation of Islam is in *Inferno* Canto XXVIII, when the Pilgrim and Virgil see the shades who have sown scandal and schism in the world and are now suffering in the Ninth Bolgia. Among the sea of mutilated shades the Pilgrim and Virgil meet are the Islamic Prophet Muhammad and his nephew ʿAlī. Unlike other references to Islam or Muslims in the *Divine Comedy*, which are relatively brief, the Prophet Muhammad occupies over forty lines of text and has his own speaking parts. Of the five Muslim characters in the poem, Salāḥ ud-Dīn, ibn Rushd, ibn Sīnā, ʿAlī, and the Prophet Muhammad, only the last is used to articulate his suffering, which he does in graphic detail. The Prophet's suffering, of course, testifies for his alleged sin. More significantly, it permits the poet to reject and punish a symbol of Islam as an erroneous religious, a political, and a militant force because it is diametrically opposed to Christianity, "a [religious] system he defends every step of the way during his journey in the *Commedia*."[77]

This chapter will review medieval characterizations of the Prophet. These will demonstrate how frequently Europeans referred to the Prophet Muhammad in literary and scholastic works, showing the uniquely European view of Islam and the Prophet that helps to explain and contextualize Dante's portrayal in the first section of *Inferno* Canto XXVIII.

Islam and its Prophet were active topics in literary, theological, and philosophical works at the time Dante was working on his *Divine Comedy* and there were multiple

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[77] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 127.

competing origin myths and legends about Islam making the rounds among Europe's intellectual elite. The late Middle Ages were a time of great intellectual advancement, textual exploration, and controversial debate that would go on to spark the Renaissance.

One of the longest and most dynamic accounts of the Prophet Muhammad from medieval literature is a biographical sketch included in Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (1260), a series of biographies on the Christian saints. *The Golden Legend* is an important starting point because Dante referenced it in writing his *Divine Comedy* and it accused the Prophet Muhammad as creating Islam as a forgery of Christianity. In *The Golden Legend*, de Voragine gives three separate accounts of the rise of the Prophet Muhammad, whom he refers to as Magumeth.[78] De Voragine begins his biography by establishing the historical context:

> It was in the time of [Pope] Boniface IV, about the year of the Lord 610, when Phocas was dead and [Emperor] Heraclius reigned in his place, that Magumeth, a false prophet and sorcerer, began to lead into error the Agarenes or Ishmaelites, whom we call Saracens.[79]

This historical introduction, while brief, sets an important tone for the following three biographies in de Voragine's work. It established Magumeth in relation to European spiritual and political leaders and directly accused him of being an imposter. These features of the introduction are typical of how European writers, such as de Voragine, viewed the Prophet Muhammad as emblematic of the spiritual and political threat that Islam represented, or appeared to represent, to preserve the Romanesque Christian order.

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[78] While there are three separate accounts given, there is a great deal of overlap in the narratives and parts of this biography are intermingled. Each of the following European biographies of the Prophet Muhammad will use a European variation of his name. These various names, as used in the translations consulted, are retained to highlight the many different and often conflicting aspects of these writings on Muhammad.

[79] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 756. The term Saracen, often used by medieval writers, is of Roman origin and seems to refer to a specific tribe whose name was used for all Arabs generally by medieval Christian writers. Agarene refers to the descendants of Abraham's second wife Hagar (Hājar or Agar).

De Voragine adds authority to his biographies by writing, "This, as we read in a history of Magumeth and in a certain chronicle, came about in the following way."[80] These centers of European learning, such as Paris, Toledo, Florence, and Bologna, actively translated (with varying degrees of correctness) Arabic texts as scholars generated new texts in response.[81] Citation and bibliographical standards were not a consideration for medieval writers and the works that de Voragine is alluding to are unknown, but the versions of the Prophet Muhammad's biography he gives are not completely unique to his work.

The first of the three biographies de Voragine wrote is the simplest but was also very popular. It chronicles the rise of a nameless cleric and a trickster Arab who spread a corrupt forgery of Christianity in the Middle East. The second critiques the first by eliminating the nameless Roman cleric and instead has Magumeth learn religion while traveling with trading caravans. The third combines elements the first and third, reintroducing the cleric and connecting Magumeth to known Christian heresies.

De Voragine, in the first biography, wrote, "a very famous cleric" was unable to obtain a desirable position in the Roman Curia and, "took flight to the regions beyond the sea and drew a great number of followers after him by his deceptions."[82] The nameless European cleric met Magumeth after his flight to the Middle East, where he developed his own following, yet devises a plan by which he will install Magumeth as the leader of his people. Copying the imagery of the dove as the Holy Spirit from the Bible, the cleric hid seeds in Magumeth's ear and trained a dove to fly to him and peck the seeds out.

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[80] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 756.
[81] María RosaMenocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 120-1.
[82] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 756.

After some practice, "The dove became so accustomed to this that whenever it saw

Magumeth, it lighted on his shoulder and thrust its beak into his ear."[83] The routine was

perfected and the cleric brought the people together, "and told them that he would put

over them the man whom the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, would point out."[84] After

calling the assembly and making this announcement the cleric, in secret, released the

dove, which flew to Magumeth and put its beak into his ear. The people saw the routine

and believed that the Holy Spirit had descended upon Magumeth with a message from

God, and "In this way Magumeth deluded the Saracens, and under his leadership they

invaded the kingdom of the Persians and swept through the eastern empire as far as

Alexandria."[85]

The first version of the Prophet's biography is the least complex, giving no details

about the nameless cleric's own rise among the Saracens or how they were able to amass

armies that could challenge the great kingdoms of the day. In this first biography,

Magumeth is only a bit player, a puppet who is propped up so history can happen around

him.

The second biography maintained that Magumeth learned religion from others,

but made the corruptions his own and made more references to Islamic laws. In the

second version, Magumeth wrote his own set of laws that includes elements from the Old

and New Testaments.[86] After completing his laws, Magumeth goes to the people and

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[83] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 756. The dove is a recurring image in the accounts of the Prophet
Muhammad used to prove his message is false and imitation. The dove is used as a symbol for the Holy
Spirit multiple times in the Bible and this image would have strongly resonated with a medieval Christian
audience.
[84] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 756.
[85] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 756.
[86] *Laws* here meaning *scripture* and is most likely referring specifically to the Qur'an rather than *sharī'ah*
or *ḥadīth*. The Qur'an is the basis of *sharī'ah*, which is explained in the *ḥadīth*.

claims to have received them from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the dove in this version, which had often been seen flying above his head, although no mention is made of the trick with the seeds. Instead of birds delivering the message to him directly, the strength of revelation is based on his relative proximity to the bird. In this version, Magumeth learns about the Old and New Testaments from Jews and Christians he met while accompanying trading caravans through Egypt and Palestine, and retold the stories he had heard from the Old and New Testaments to his people.

De Voragine's narrative shifts to discuss Islamic doctrine in an attempt to expose it as false, beginning with the admission, "The Saracens believe, as do Christians, in one and only one all-powerful God, creator of all things."[87] He also acknowledges the miracle of Jesus creating birds "out of the slime of the earth. But then Magumeth mixed in some poison," de Voragine continues, "teaching that Christ had not truly suffered or risen from the dead."[88]

From doctrinal differences, de Voragine shifts to Magumeth's personal life and his marriage to Cadigan (Khadījah), whom it is claimed, "ruled the province of Corocanica."[89] Cadigan was impressed that Magumeth had the acceptance and protection of Jews and Arabs, and "she took it that the divine majesty was hidden in him, and, being a widow, she married him."[90] Through this marriage Magumeth became the ruler of the entire province of Corocanica. Magumeth was also characterized as a magician, and the

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[87] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757.

[88] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757. See Qur'an 3:49 and 5:110 for the story of Allāh breathing life into the bird made from dust *through* the Prophet Jesus. Many Islamic scholars maintain that the Prophet Jesus was not crucified but raised bodily to Heaven, while others believe he was put on the cross but did not die there. See *Qur'ān* 4:157-8.

[89] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757. The provence of Corocanica is likely *Ūstān-i Khurāsān* (Khurasan Province, sometimes transliterated Khorasan) in modern day Iran bordering Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.

[90] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757.

narrative implies that he used his magic to seduce Cadigan into marriage and to fool the Jews and Arabs "so completely that he could publicly proclaim himself to be the Messiah promised in the Law."[91] His ascendency among the Arabs weakens when he begins to suffer from epileptic seizures, which made Cadigan regret the marriage to "a most unclean man and an epileptic."[92] To counter her anxiety, Magumeth told her, "I often contemplate the archangel Gabriel as he talks with me, and I cannot bear the brightness of his face, so I grow faint and fall down."[93] This second version ends with the cryptic note that Cadigan, like the others, believed Magumeth's claims. De Voragine's Magumeth is more sinister in the second version because, unlike the puppet in the first version, here Magumeth is the puppet master. He uses sorcery his own lies to manipulate the Jews and Arabs into protecting him, and then uses them to seduce Cadigan and use this marriage to inherit the lands and power needed to create his empire.

The third version combines elements of the first two, the cleric returns and is named, and also Magumeth's manipulations become more sinister. This account begins by naming the cleric from the first account; Sergius, a monk who had been caught up in the Nestorian heresy and expelled, came to Arabia and joined with Magumeth. The account claims that yet another unnamed source lists Sergius as an archdeacon in Antioch who was also a Jacobite, a sect noted for the practice of circumcision and for the teaching "that Christ was not God but only a righteous holy man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. All this the Saracens affirm and believe."[94] The wayward archdeacon

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[91] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757.
[92] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757.
[93] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757.
[94] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 757.

made his way south from Turkey into Arabia where he taught Magumeth the Old and New Testaments.

Magumeth had been emboldened by the assumption of Cadigan's wealth through marriage and wanted to assume kingship of all Arabs,[95] but because of his small stature, he struggled to seize authority by force because none his tribesmen take him seriously. Because of his inability to take control by force of arms, in his scheming with Sergius it was decided that feigning holiness would be the best way for Magumeth to supplement his weakness (physical and political) and assume power. In order to maintain the illusion of divine revelation, Sergius was kept hidden from the people and Magumeth would consult with him on the questions presented by the populace. Sergius's answers were presented as messages from the angel Gabriel. Any among the population who were not fooled into believing the new religion were executed. De Voragine writes, "and they all believed him either willingly or for fear of the sword. This [the third] account is more true than what was said about the dove, and therefore to be accepted."[96] This third version extends the first two but adds an important element, Magumeth's willingness to execute any who dissent.

Jacobus de Voragine's biographical sketches on the Prophet Muhammad are significant because of their length and the degree to which he blends history and propaganda. He gives rich of details, and the various accounts of the Prophet's life each support Dante's treatment of the Prophet in the *Inferno* as the cause of schism in

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[95] The third account maintains that Cadigan was a wealthy woman but not that Magumeth inherited the territory of Corocanica, which is featured in the second version.
[96] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 758.

Christianity because according to de Voragine, Islam's roots are corrupted Christianity and pagan innovation.

Notably in the three accounts Magumeth is not himself the sole originator of his religion, but instead relies on outside influences. In the first version a nameless, yet famous, cleric flees to Arabia in order to spread corruption and eventually takes Magumeth as a mouthpiece, using the dove to prove divine communication. In the second version Magumeth has multiple tutors from his trading expeditions that teach him about Judaism and Christianity and he blens these stories with his own, possibly confusing them. In this version, Magumeth's Islam would be less reflective of Christianity because he did not have a cleric to rely on for immediate answers but instead took lessons from laymen and merchants in Egypt and Palestine. In the third version Sergius is either associated with the Nestorian heresy or an archdeacon from Antioch, Turkey. While there is a noticeable difference between these two possible origins for Sergius, the Nestorian heresy is notable for being Persian and alien to de Voragine's European, Catholic audience. Associating Sergius with a Persian heresy allows de Voragine to condemn an ancient Roman enemy that is also an Asiatic *other* at the same time by creating an East/West paradigm that implies European Christianity, centered in Rome, is authentic and Eastern Christianity, be it Persian or Anatolian, is inauthentic.

While de Voragine gave detailed accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's biography, Tomas Aquinas references him in his theological works. Dante was a voracious reader of Aquinas and his influence on Dante is so great that the *Divine*

Comedy is sometimes referred to as "the *Summa* [*Theologica*] in verse."[97] Despite this connection between the thoughts and works of the two writers, it is a mistake to assume that the works of either author define the other. Rather, their works form a dialogue that can inform a careful reader about layers of subtext.

Aquinas, a near contemporary of Dante, helped reconcile classical philosophy with Church doctrine, and outlined and defined Christian laws and regulations. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1260-4), sometimes seen as a missionary manual for Christians working to convert Jews, Muslims, and other pagans, Aquinas addresses aspects of Islam that make the faith irreconcilable with Christianity, making Muslims especially difficult to convert, and also draws his own characterization of the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslims, Aquinas claims, are difficult to relate to and debate in matters of faith because they do not hold Christian scriptures to be divine truths that can then be used to convince them of their religious errors.[98] Aquinas writes, "Thus, against the Jews we are able to argue by means of the Old Testament, while against heretics we are able to argue by means of the New Testament. But the Mohammedans and the pagans accept neither the one nor the other."[99] To combat this handicap Aquinas suggests Christians rely on "natural reason, to which all men are forced to give their assent," but admits, "in divine matters the natural reason has its failings."[100]

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[97] Br. Dominic Bouck, O.P., "The Summa in Verse, Or Why You Should Read All of Dante's *Divine Comedy*," in *The Dominicana Journal*, posted 12 May 2014, access date: 31 March 2016.

[98] Islamic tradition holds that the Old and New Testaments are important works but have been corrupted over time. The Qur'an has only existed in its present version and this eliminates questions of heavy handed editors and self-serving holy men. For this reason the texts can be used as a common ideological ground but not theological argumentation.

[99] Thomas Aquinas, "Book One: God," in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) 1.2.3.

[100] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.2.3.

Aquinas references the Prophet Muhammad directly in only one section of his

Summa Contra Gentiles:

> …those who founded sects committed to erroneous doctrines proceeded in a way that is opposite to this. The point is clear in the case of Mohammed. He seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also contained precepts that were in conformity with his promises, and he gave free rein to carnal pleasure. In all this, as is not unexpected, he was obeyed by carnal men. As for proofs of the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom. Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth. On the contrary, Mohammed said that he was sent in the power of his arms—which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants. What is more, no wise men, men trained in things divine and human, believed in him from the beginning. Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Mohammed forced others to become his followers by the violence of his arms. Nor do divine pronouncements on the part of preceding prophets offer him any witnesses. On the contrary, he perverts almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law. It was, therefore, a shrewd decision on his part to forbid his followers to read the Old and New Testaments, lest these books convict him of falsity. It is thus clear that those who place any faith in his words believe foolishly.[101]

His appropriation of Islam and the Prophet as a Christian sect with a heretical leader "committed to erroneous doctrines" allows Aquinas to appeal to his Christian audience in terms they are already familiar with. The lack of Christian texts in the images of Islam that Aquinas is recreating for his audience only furthers the heresy of the sect.

Aquinas, like de Voragine, references the illicit sexuality associated with Islam, but de Voragine mentions sexual corruption on the part of the Prophet himself while Aquinas extends this to his followers and reasons that because the message of Islam is

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[101] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.6.4.

essentially carnal, it must therefore appeal only to carnal men. In this case the Prophet Muhammad is not accused sleeping with any woman he pleases, but instead the early Arab Muslims are defamed by being portrayed as naturally inclination toward sexual deviance, implying a distinction between their depraved nature and the reserved, pious nature of Christianity and Christians. This allegedly carnal nature of Islam poses a unique threat. Acknowledging a breakdown in his Christianity/Islam distinction, Aquinas acknowledges, "The concupiscence of the flesh goads us." He is working with a definition of human nature that characterizes man, regardless of religion, as essentially carnal or sensual, and this underlying nature continually *goads* man toward corrupt messages like Islam. Aquinas's assertions about human nature undercut his argument that Muslims are specially depraved.

Aquinas's rough, sensual characterization of Muslims relies on ethnic stereotypes to create his image of "brutal men and desert wanderers."[102] Indeed, all his representations of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam are based not on the historical person or religion, but instead on pre-Islamic Arabs or wholesale projections onto a political and theological rival of negative attributes that he opposes to Christian ideals.

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[102] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.6.4. Aquinas's description of Muslims echoes of pre-Islamic Arabian culture. Islam heralded a massive cultural shift that introduced trade norms, scholarship, and laws to the largely lawless tribal systems. Prior to Islam, female infanticide was an acceptable practice where girls were buried alive in the desert to avoid the costs or perceived liabilities of raising them. The Qur'an exclusively forbids this practice in three places (81:8-9, 17:31, and 16:58-9). The Qur'an chillingly reads: «*wa ādhā al-maw', dahu su'ilat biāī dhanbin qutilat*» (*al-Takwīr* 81:8-9), rendered into English as «When the female (infant), buried alive, is questioned for what crime she was killed». According to al-Mughīrah bin Shu'abah the Prophet said, "Indeed, Allāh has forbidden you…to bury your daughters alive" (*al-Bukharī* 2408 as part of a longer narration). One day a woman with two daughters came to the home of 'Aishah, the Prophet Muhammad's wife, asking for charity. 'Aishah only had one date fruit in the house but gave it to the woman, who split it into two pieces and gave one to each of her daughters and left. When the Prophet returned home and 'Aishah told him the story he said, "Whoever is tested by their daughters and treats them with generosity then they (the daughters) will be a shield from the Fire (*al-Nār*)" (*al-Bukharī* 5995, also see 1418, both translations from *al-Bukharī* are my own).

Thomas Aquinas is primarily remembered for his monumental *Summa Theologica*, an encyclopedic text that addresses issues of faith and religion and seeks to continue the works of ibn Ru<u>sh</u>d and ibn Sīnā (*Inferno* Canto IV) in reconciling Aristotelian philosophy with the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition. Aquinas makes liberal use of Christian scripture and the writings of Christian thinkers, pairing these with the pagan Aristotle, whom he was able to access largely through Arabic editions and commentaries.[103] While Aquinas benefitted greatly from his intellectual inheritance from Muslim scholars, he was quick to associate Muslims with pagan traditions and reject them. He mentions the Prophet Muhammad directly only once in his *Summa Theologica*, in his chapter on apostasy:

> Further, unbelief is an act of the understanding; whereas apostasy seems rather to consist in some outward deed or utterance, or even in some inward act of the will, for it is written (Prov. iv. 12-4): *A man that is an apostate, an unprofitable man walketh with a perverse mouth. He winketh with the eyes, presseth with the foot, speaketh with the finger. With a wicked heart he deviseth evil, and at all times he soweth discord.* Moreover if anyone were to have himself circumcised, or to worship at the tomb of Mahomet, he would be deemed an apostate. Therefore apostasy does not pertain to unbelief.[104]

Aquinas's analysis separates unbelief from apostasy because one requires thought while the other requires action. This mention of the Prophet Muhammad does not offer biographical details as the other examples do, but does make pilgrimage to his grave an act of apostasy, which could be loosely defined as *the abandoning of one's religion or ideals*. The implication is that, as stated in de Voragine's biographies, Islam is based in Christianity (as a heretical sect or offshoot) and therefore the Muslims are actually

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[103] See Charles Buttersworth, "Introduction," and "Preface," in *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's* Poetics.

[104] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q12.A1.arg2.

Christians guilty of apostasy. Aquinas's condemnation of Muslims as guilty of apostasy relies on a problematic similarity to Christian pilgrimage and worshipping at the tombs of saints.[105]

Another important biography of the Prophet Muhammad is found in *The Book of John Mandeville*, which was a fictional medieval travel guide through the Near and Far East. Unlike the *Summas* of Aquinas or *The Golden Legend* of de Voragine, *The Book of John Mandeville* is not a theological text, but it echoes and amplifies the other biographies.

The biography begins by saying that Machomet was born among the Saracens of Arabia where he was a servant boy who tended flocks of camels and accompanied the merchants on trips to Christian Egypt. While crossing the deserts of Arabia, they came to a chapel, "where there was a hermit, and when he entered the chapel—which was quite small, and had a small and low door—the entry then became as large and as high as if it had been a palace gate."[106] This was acknowledged by Saracens as Machomet's first miracle. Sometime after the miracle in the chapel, Machomet became rich, wise, and a skilled astronomer, as well as governor of some lands in the territory of the prince of Corrodane (Khurasan), which he administered well. After the prince's death, Machomet married the lady Gadryge (<u>Kh</u>adījah).[107] Shortly after the marriage, his epilepsy became known and Gadryge began to angrily regret the marriage. To save face, Machomet told her that when he fell down Saint Gabriel spoke to him. Unable to stand the brightness of

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[105] See the frame narrative from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* for a literary example.
[106] *The Book of John Mandeville*, ed. Iain Macleod Higgins (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011), 87.
[107] *John Mandeville*, 87-8. It is unclear from the text if Gadryge is the prince's widow or not, but the statement about the death of the prince and the marriage to the lady Gadryge are two clauses in the same sentence.

the angel he would fall, and since he fell often, the Saracens believed that he was under a constant state of revelation.[108]

The writer of *Mandeville* wrote that, by the year 610 Machomet had become the ruler of Arabia. He had become greatly attached to a hermit who lived near Mount Sinai and often visited this hermit while accompanied by his servants. Machomet listened to the hermit preach late into the night and forced his servants to stay awake and listen with him, which angered his uninterested servants who plotted to kill the hermit. The servants waited until Machomet became exceedingly drunk and lost consciousness. Taking his sword from its sheath, the servants murdered the sleeping hermit and put the bloody sword back in Machomet's sheath. The following morning Machomet awoke to find his beloved hermit murdered, and in his shock and rage demanded that the murderers be found and punished. The servants showed Machomet his bloody sword and, believing their lie, Machomet cursed wine, and all drinkers and sellers of wine. Because of this curse, it is claimed, devout Saracens refuse to drink wine, although the story claims that many drink it in secret. The story of Machomet ends with a warning about the seductive attraction that Islam has for weak-minded Christians: "Also, it often happens that a Christian becomes Saracen, either out of simplemindedness or poverty, or out of wickedness."[109]

The story of the Prophet Muhammad in *John Mandeville* extends others of this period by having him closely associated with the prince of Persia (Khurasan), which explains the political ascendency of the Arabs as having roots in an established Asian empire and explains Islam through a known but still foreign quantity. While Machomet

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[108] *John Mandeville*, 88.
[109] *John Mandeville*, 89.

is, according to the story, known to have governed parts of Persia well, any political wisdom directly contrasts with his personal intemperance. His tendency to excess not only complicates his personal life but highlights his own shortcomings as a leader and a legislator. Machomet's first reaction to the death of the hermit is to demand firm justice, only to make exceptions by blaming all alcoholic drinks for what he believes to be his own crime. Machomet circumvents justice in the interest of self-preservation and rather than take responsibility, he invents a new law by which an inanimate object can be the murderer without compromising his authority.

The servants in the *John Mandeville* form an interesting contrast with the followers in Aquinas. While the Prophet's entourage are presented as barbarians in both, the difference between a servant, who is employed, and a follower, who believes, demonstrates that the new faith had not entered the hearts of the Prophet's companions in *John Mandeville*, although forced conversion is a common theme in the European accounts of the Prophet Muhammad, and both accounts demonstrate that Arabs should not be trusted.

The Prophet Muhammad's alleged epilepsy in the story underscores his physical infirmity. While this handicap is a physical vulnerability that has faint echoes of de Voragine's third account, which discusses Magumeth's physical weakness as a barrier to political ascendency, it also seeks to discredit his revelations. This claim subtly attacks Islam on two fronts claiming that the religious and political systems of Islam are based on a weak, infirm, and duplicitous leader. If the Prophet's revelations can be explained as epilepsy, then the Christian writer can effectively remove any spirituality from Islam.

This line of argumentation echoes Aquinas's claims that the Prophet Muhammad had not performed any miracles and therefore could not be a prophet.

The author of *John Mandeville* validates notions of the correctness of Christianity while removing any traces of spirituality from the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. The Prophet enjoys the sermons of the hermit, an echo of the cleric (Sergius) from de Voragine, the narrative does not explore whether the sermons had a spiritual impact or were merely a source of entertainment. While the author of *John Mandeville* seeks to remove the spirituality from Islam, he does appear to diverge from Aquinas when he states that the Saracens believe the Prophet did perform a miracle by expanding of the small doorway. The statement actually supports Aquinas's claim that the Prophet Muhammad could not be a prophet, however, because in *John Mandeville* there is only the belief in a miracle on the part of the Saracens, who are simple and easily fooled.

Each of the traits assigned to Machomet in *John Mandeville* was carefully chosen and crafted to solidify Machomet's image as an imposter, a criminal, and an intemperate fool. Clearly only barbarous and superstitious murderers like Muslims could accept such a leader. Thus the Prophet and Islam were presented as wholly separate from the work's Christian and European audience.

The existence and acceptance of falsified biographies such as those retailed by de Voragine, Aquinas, and in *John Mandeville* gave Dante and other authors an intellectual landscape from which the Prophet Muhammad could be transformed from a political, social, and religious reformer into a gruesome monster. The population of Dante's Hell is

marked by the interactions between monsters[110] and the sinners they are often punishing

or keeping from wandering away from their respective punishments, but the extreme

nature of the Prophet Muhammad's punishment—he circumambulates his sphere of Hell,

cut from groin to head, holding his guts as he marches—makes him monstrous by

comparison to those around him and blurs the lines between sinner and devil.

Because the Prophet Muhammad is used as a symbol for what Dante believed to

be a heretical sect in his complex allegory, Islam and its Prophet are presented as

monstrous hybrids that split Christian truths with pagan inventions, or corruptions.[111] The

Christian fear of hybridity is echoed in each of the biographies, which insist that Islam is

an appropriation of Christianity for political purposes rather than a spiritual extension of

the Abrahamic tradition. Ironically, this argument obliges Christian writers and apologists

to establish Islam as a Christian sect and doing themselves what they accuse the Prophet

and Islam of having done—appropriating a religion to spread a false teaching.[112]

This is by no means an exhaustive compilation of medieval biographies and

narratives offering information on the Prophet Muhammad and they are not the only

works that Dante would have been familiar with, but these capture many of the variant

narratives offered to explain Islam, the Prophet, and dangers their dangers for

Christianity.

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[110] Sometimes *devils, fiends, demons*, or other more specific creatures such as minotaurs, centaurs, or sirens.

[111] Sarah Salih, "Idols and Simulacra: Paganity, Hybridity and Representation in *Mandeville's Travels*," in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003) 115. Also see Peter the Venerable's writings on Islam.

[112] The Prophet Muhammad's transformation in Dante's *Inferno* echoes the words of the medieval French theologian and poet Alain de Lille (1128-1203), who wrote, "Muhammad's monstrous (*monstruosa*) life, more monstrous sect, and most monstrous end is manifestly found in his deeds." From Alain de Lille, *Contra Haereticos*, in Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills "Introduction, in *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 9. Alain de Lille's original is available only in manuscaript.

In isolation, each of these accounts could be understood as one theorist's opinions or as necessary plot devices used by an author for literary effect, but when analyzed as part of a larger cultural narrative an East/West divide that perpetually reinforces itself becomes visible. The Islamic East is forcibly separated from the Christian West because everything in the various accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's rise among the Arabs testifies to a violation of the firmly established European social order: the infirm trickster marries a rich widow and assumes leadership of large tracts of Persian lands, learning enough of Christianity to recognize its apparent (to Christian audiences) truths and falsify miracles, and solidifying his political power through fear and harassment before usurping the lands of established, more respectable empires. As a religion, Islam is seen as having no respect for the sanctity of marriage;[113] threatening the feudal system, which stabilizes society because everyone knows his or her place, by allowing a shepherd to marry outside his class and become the sole secular and religious authority. The strength of these characterizations, gruesomely illustrated in the *Divine Comedy*, rests on the belief that Islam is not a discrete religion from the same ideological tradition as Christianity, but a Christian sect. The appropriation of Islam into Christianity as a heretical sect allows Christian writers to recontextualize and redefine Islam in Christian terms and dismisses Islam as a heresy for any perceived difference. In this way Christian writers are not only controlling the terms of the debate, but also silencing Islam.

While each of these stories is slightly different, their shared corruptions as well as the aspects that make each unique form an important European mythology based on

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[113] Both de Voragine and Aquinas place great emphasis on this point, whether it is the Prophet claiming any woman he pleases, the carnal nature of his message, or the sensualist Muslims themselves. The Prophet's marriage to a rich, older widow that allowed him to "marry up" in society also violates European class structures and social norms.

assigning vices to the Prophet Muhammad (and often his followers) and then using these often invented narratives to discredit him and Islam, validating Christianity in the process. The *Divine Comedy* draws from these cultural narratives, even the competing and contradictory elements, and benefits from a mythology that allows it to assume rather than demonstrate the Prophet Muhammad's corruptions.

Chapter 5: The Prophet Muhammad in the *Divine Comedy*

While the Islamic Prophet Muhammad was featured in a number of medieval

works, his presence in the *Divine Comedy* is peculiar for a number of reasons. One of the

most important aspects of the Prophet Muhammad as a character in *Inferno*, in direct

contrast to the other Muslim characters, is that he is a prophet from the Abrahamic,

monotheistic tradition shared in common with Jews and Christians. The other Muslims in

the poem are simple believers without divine office. Muhammad's claim of prophethood

means that he has to be dealt with in a different and that, from Dante's point of view, his

deviation (or sin) is more pronounced than that of his followers because he is the

originator. The Prophet Muhammad's message claimed to correct Christianity and

operated as the dominant political across the Mediterranean in al-Ma<u>gh</u>rib (North Africa),

al-<u>Sh</u>ām (the Levant), al-Andalus (Islamic Spain), Turkey (Anatolia), and, a few

generations before, in Sicily (Islamic rule from roughly 902-1091 with complete

expulsion of Muslims by 1300).

Although the Prophet Muhammad is a central character in *Inferno* XXVIII, he is

not formally introduced for the first thirty lines and comes into the Pilgrim's view only at

line twenty-three. The text that precedes the Prophet's introduction is as important as his

inclusion in the poem because it illustrates the degree to which the Christian West

believed Islam and the Prophet Muhammad to be both in error spiritually and a political

menace. Dante links the perception of schism with images of warfare and gore to

highlight the dangers of Islam. The canto begins with the Pilgrim describing his inability

to articulate the gruesome scene witnessed in the Ninth Bolgia:

> *Chi poria mai pur con parole sciolte*
> *dicer del sangue e de le piaghe a pieno*

> *ch'I' ora vidi, per narrar piú volte?*[114]

Musa's translation:

> Who could, even in the simplest kind of prose
> describe in full the scene of blood and wounds
> that I saw now—no matter how he tries!

Musa replaces the rhetorical question in Dante's Italian verse with an exclamation, but

the enjambment is preserved to maintain the pacing that highlights the Pilgrim's

confusion. The Pilgrim notes that even without the constraints of meter there are none

skilled enough to communicate the scene.[115] The failure of the languages of man to

capture this level of suffering is then offset by accounts of war and suffering that still fail

to capture what the Pilgrim witnessed.

> *S'el s'aunasse ancor tutta la gente*
> *che già, in su la Fortunata terra*
> *di Puglia, fu del uo sangue dolente*
>
> *per li Troiani e per la lunga guerra*
> *che de l'anella fé sì alte spoglie,*
> *come Livïo scrive, che noon erra,*[116]

Musa's translation:

> If one could bring together all the wounded
> who once upon the fateful soil of Puglia
> Grieved for their life's blood spilled by the Romans,
>
> and spilled again in the long years of the war
> that ended in great spoils of golden rings
> (as Livy's history tells, that does not err),

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[114] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII.1-3.
[115] Language and its limitations are an important motif in the *Divine Comedy*, which is famous for having been written in the vernacular. It is common for the Pilgrim to interrupt the narrative to express his difficulty in communicating an image or idea to the reader. In *Inferno* XXXI.67-81 Nimrod is punished with incoherence for the creation of the Tower of Babel, before which all mankind spoke a common tongue (see *Genesis* XI.1).
[116] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII.7-12.

These accounts of bloody Roman warfare in southern Italy are followed by a reference to the Norman adventurer Ruberto Guiscardo (Robert Guiscard), famous for his many battles in the Puglia and Sicily regions. Dante takes the gore and death from the Romano-Carthaginian conflicts and combines them with the many slain from Guiscardo's battles:

> *con quell ache sentio di colpi doglie*
> *per contrastare a Ruberto Guiscardo;*
> *e l'altera il cui ossame ancor s'accoglie*
>
> *a Ceperan, là dove fu bugiardo*
> *ciascun Pugliese, e là da Tagliacozzo,*
> *dove sanz' arme vines il vecchio Alardo;*[117]

Musa's Translation:

> and pile them with the ones who felt the blows
> when they stood up against great Robert Guiscard,
> and with the rest whose bones are still in heaps
>
> at Ceprano (there where every Publian baron
> turned traitor), and add those from Tagliacozzo
> where old Alardo conquered, Weaponless—

These descriptions powerfully testify to the brutality of warfare. The reference to Ruberto Guiscardo is of particular interest to us for two reasons: first, Guiscardo is referenced by name and that makes him unique in this account (Guiscardo is not the first person referenced, as Livy is mentioned in line twelve, but Livy is referenced through his text and used to testify to the authenticity of these accounts of suffering rather than as a battlefield figure or discrete person). Second, Guiscardo's career is marked by his long military service and even time leading a band of highwaymen in Puglia—Musa calls him

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[117] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII:13-8.

an "adventurer"—before he gained control of large territories and became a duke.[118]

Once holding a position of power and leading an army, Guiscardo was heavily involved

in the Conquest of Sicily, capturing the island from its Saracen (ethnically Arab Muslim)

rulers. Guiscardo is remembered favorably in Western histories for his advancements

against the Islamic kingdom in Sicily in what can be seen as a prelude to the Crusades

because of his attempt to expel Muslims from European territories. For this reason, he

enjoys the status of being individually named in *Inferno*.

Guiscardo's inclusion early in the canto and the reference to the many dead on the

battlefields who stood against him puts him in direct confrontation with the Prophet

Muhammad,[119] who will be introduced a few stanzas. Dante prepares the reader for an

image of the Prophet Muhammad as a warlord through this comparison. This relationship

is pushed to completion in *Paradise* XVIII:48 when Guiscardo is numbered among the

warriors for The Faith in the circle of Mars, which, for the poet, legitimizes his

campaigns and starkly contrasts Christian warriors (and warlords) in Paradise and the five

Muslims referenced by name in the *Divine Comedy* and trapped in Hell, chiefly the

Prophet Muhammad who, is heralded by trails of gore left in the wake of centuries of war

in Puglia.[120]

In addition to his campaigns against the Muslims, represented through the Prophet

Muhammad, Guiscardo also fought against schismatic Greek Christians in Puglia. The

importance of Guiscardo's militant rejection of Islam cannot be overstated, and the

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[118] Musa, *Inferno Commentary*, 372.

[119] The text gives no indication that any from the army of Guiscardo are counted toward this account of suffering.

[120] In Paradise Guiscardo is with Roland, Charlemange, William of Orange, Renouard, and Duke Godfrey, all of who fought against the Saracens, or Muslims. Their association with Guiscardo later in the *Divine Comedy* as warriors for the Faith and the use of Guiscardo here highlights the Christian-Muslim conflicts in the poem.

contrast between Guiscardo and the Prophet Muhammad is strengthened through his combat against schismatics generally.[121]

When weighed against these sights, mankind's gruesome history still cannot compare:

> *e qual forato suo membro e qual mozzo*
> *mostrasse, d'aequar sarebbe nulla*
> *il modo de la nona bolgia sozzo.*[122]

Musa's translation:

> if all these maimed and pierced and lopped off limbs
> were on display, the scene would be nothing
> compared to the foul ninth *bolgia's* bloody sight.

Dante had been a soldier and seen hand-to-hand combat.[123] The speaker's inability to describe the scene around the Pilgrim is not from lack of real-life referent but a rhetorical device. These visions of mutilation—too graphic to represent using human language, far worse than intense warfare or any combination of battlefield mutilations—are the Prophet Muhammad's introduction.

Dante shifts from using battlefield carnage to describe the horrifying spectacle as a whole to the arresting image of the Prophet Muhammad's mutilations:

> *Già veggie, per mezzul perdere o lulla,*
> *com' io vidi un, così non si pertugia,*
> *rotto dal mento infin dove si trulla.*
>
> *Tra le gambe pendevan le minugia;*
> *la corata pareva e 'l tristo sacco*

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[121] Musa notes that the location of Guiscardo's name at the end the verse testifies to his importance. This verse marks the first of sixteen instances where a proper name, used either as a noun or adjective, assumes a rhyme position. Musa cites Fubini's claim that "the canto is characterized by names and examples (in an ethical-rhetorical function) rather than complex psychological portraits" (*Inferno Commentary*, 373).

[122] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII:19-21.

[123] Reynolds, *Dante*, 202.

che merda fa di quell che si trangugia.[124]

Musa's translation:

> No wine cask with its stave or cant-bar sprung
> was ever split the way I saw someone
> ripped open from his chin to where we fart.
>
> Between his legs his guts spilled out, the heart
> and other vital parts, and the dirty sack
> that turns to shit whatever the mouth gulps down.

This first description shows the Prophet Muhammad split open; not only has his body been mutilated, but the language is noticeably vulgar. Dante scholar Barbara Reynolds writes, "Of all the lowly language Dante permits himself to use, these lines are among the most vulgar and the most coarse. We are among the maimed and mutilated; no illustrious vernacular will serve here."[125] The poet makes sure that the course language invokes images of dirty, dead meat by referencing butchers, the anus, and excrement. These initial images of the Prophet Muhammad's shade are bodily in sharp contrast to the spirits in Paradise who are recognized by their varying degrees of brilliance.

Each of these stanzas forms one complete sentence, and their full stops isolate the description of the Prophet's and his condition from the earlier introductory material. While Dante's Italian verse uses terminal punctuation in the form of commas on lines twenty-two and twenty-three and a semicolon on line twenty-five, Musa has used enjambment to allow for the description of the Prophet Muhammad's mutilation to read uninterrupted. The verse's structure in the translation contrasts with the Prophet's split condition while Dante uses stops to highlight it.

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[124] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII:22-7.
[125] Reynolds, *Dante*, 202.

The tenth stanza marks the beginning of the Prophet Muhammad's speech, which he uses to highlight the Pilgrim's description as he marched foward:

> *Mentre che tutto in lui veder m'attacco,*
> *guardommi e con le man s'aperse il petto,*
> *dicendo: "Or vedi com' io mi dilacco!*
>
> *vedi come storpiato è Mäometto!*
> *Dinanzi a me sen va piangendo Alì,*
> *fesso nel volto dal mento al ciuffetto.*[126]

Musa's translation:

> While I stood there staring into this sinner,
> he looked at me and with both hands he opened
> his chest and said: "You see how I am split!
>
> See how Mahomet is deformed and torn!
> In front of me, and weeping, Ali walks,
> his face cleft from his chin up to the crown.

The Pilgrim initiates contact through his stare, which is returned by the Prophet Muhammad before he pulls open the wound on his chest, an action that both emphasizes his punishment and intensifies it. He introduces himself by name giving the Italian version, although Musa chose a classic, though still inauthentic, Mahomet. Mäometto and Mahomet are both European adaptions of the Arabic Muhammad. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the version used in the translations, Mahomet, is from the old French *Mahumet*, which itself is from the Latin *Machometus* and is also linguistically related to the noun *mammet*, meaning a false god or idol.[127] Each of these variations represents a gap between the literary character, who is a product largely of the European imagination, and the historical figure.

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[126] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII:28-33.
[127] "Mahomet, n.". OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy.ulib.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/112410?redirectedFrom=Mahomet (accessed March 27, 2016).

While the Prophet Muhammad is the most mangled of the sufferers in this Bolgia,

he is not the only Muslim. Muslim characters are mentioned only in two places in

Inferno, Canto IV in Limbo and Canto XXVIII, in the circle of the schismatics. While the

Muslims in Limbo indicate that Islamic thought may be of limited redemption, the

Muslims in the Ninth Bolgia indicate that Islam, at its core, is unredeemable. In the Ninth

Bolgia, 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's nephew and son-in-law, is walking ahead of him

and weeping. This is the only mention of 'Alī and, like that of the three Muslims among

the virtuous pagans, the mention is brief. 'Alī has been mutilated in some way like the

others in this circle, but he is split only in the face. While Muhammad is recognized as

chief of the sowers of schism, as he will explain later in the Canto, 'Alī's presence and

punishment may seem puzzling to the casual reader. 'Alī's contested leadership of the

Islamic community (*Ummah*) created Islam's first sectarian split and his inclusion here

demonstrates Dante's knowledge of Islamic history.

According to the medieval Persian historian Muhammad bin Jarīr Ṭabarī, when

the Prophet Muhammad died in 632, there was no agreed-upon successor. When a

council elected Abū Bakr al-Ṣaddiq, the Prophet's longtime companion, best friend, and

father-in-law 'Alī's followers protested the election, believing that since 'Alī was the

Prophet's nearest male relative, he should assume authority, thus establishing a dynastic

tradition. This disagreement over having a leader elected by a council versus having the

office of authority be inherited is the origin of the Sunni-Shia split.[128] In Dante's view,

'Alī can be seen as guilty of splitting the leadership, or the head, of the Islamic

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[128] al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. Ismail K Poonawala, 163-209.

community in a move that created division among the followers, already seen as heretical Christians.

For most of the Pilgrim's journey, the burden of explanation has fallen to Virgil, with supplemental information gathered from key figures in each area, but here the Prophet Muhammad assumes the role for stanzas twelve through fourteen to elaborate on the nature of the punishments displayed before the Pilgrim.

> *E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui,*
> *seminator di scandalo e di scisma*
> *fuor vivi, e però son fessi così.*
>
> *Un diavolo è qua dietro che n'accisma*
> *sì crudelmente, al taglio de la spade*
> *rimettendo ciascun di questa risma,*
>
> *quand' avem volta la dolente strada;*
> *però che le ferrite son richiuse*
> *prima ch'altri dinanzi li rivadad.*[129]

Musa's translation:

> The souls that you see passing in this ditch
> they all were sowers of scandal and of schism,
> and so in death you see them torn asunder.
>
> A devil stands back there who trims us all
> in this cruel way, and each one of this mob
> receives anew the sword blade of the devil
>
> each time we make one round of this sad road,
> because the wounds have all healed up again
> by the time each one presents himself once more.

The Prophet Muhammad's explicit account explains that the shades in this sphere caused division and schism in life and now wander in circles, where they are continually mutilated in the literal physical punishment characteristic of Dante's Hell. The Prophet

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[129] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII:34-42.

Muhammad's designation as a sower of schism is reliant on his being classified as the heretical Christian of Dante's sources.

Thomas Aquinas gives valuable clues to deciphering the Prophet Muhammad's punishment and the nature of his crime. In the most general sense, schism means division. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas deals with the complexities of schism, where he wrote, "A man is apparently a schismatic if he disobeys the Church. But every sin makes a man disobey the commandments of the Church…Therefore every sin is a schism."[130] Aquinas deals with this problem that designates any sinner as a schismatic by writing a more stable definition:

> Accordingly schismatics properly so called are those who, willfully and intentionally separate themselves from the unity of the Church; and the particular unity of several individuals among themselves is subordinate to the unity of the Church, even as the mutual adaption of each member of a natural body is subordinate to the unity of the whole body.[131]

What separates schism from other sins is the combination of willful rebellion against the Church and its commandments, and a disregard for the unity of the community. This threat to the unity of the community is the true danger of schism and a sin worthy of a horrific and eternal punishment. Aquinas compares the sins of heresy and schism, which can be seen as similar, by writing, "heresy is essentially opposed to faith, while schism is essentially opposed to the unity of ecclesiastical charity," but notes, "whoever is a heretic is also a schismatic."[132] A heretic, Aquinas writes, "is one who devises or follows false or new opinions," which means that heresy "is opposed to the truth, on which faith is

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[130] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q39.A1.arg2.
[131] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q39.A1.arg3.sc.
[132] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q39.A1.ad2.

founded; and consequently it is a species of unbelief."[133] In this context, the Prophet

Muhammad's suffering in Canto XXVIII becomes clearer, as we have seen, medieval

narratives of the Prophet Muhammad often portrayed him as either a renegade Christian

himself or a pupil of one. In the Christian rejection of Islam it was necessary for

Christians to appropriate the Prophet Muhammad and Islam as an offshoot or a sect in

order to condemn them as heretics; once Islam has been reduced to a heretical new

interpretation of Christianity, the Prophet Muhammad can be punished as a schismatic.[134]

Therefore the strength of Aquinas's argument, and by default Dante's, rests on the

Prophet Muhammad's Christian roots, but the problem with Christianizing the Islamic

Prophet is that he must be artificially brought into the community if he is to be guilty of

dividing it.

Aquinas's definitions of heresy and schism would apply to any non-Christian

religion and many Christian sects, but are important here because they can be used to

explain Dante's presentation of the Prophet Muhammad as a schismatic. While his strong

commitment to Christianity means that pagan Greeks and Romans must suffer in Hell

(*Inferno* Canto IV), they are seen as the progenitors of a great cultural legacy inherited by

European Christians. Islam, on the other hand, was a competing empire and religion that

was slowly spreading out from the fringes of the world into Europe. Unlike other

"heresies," Islam presented not only a spiritual, but a practical challenge to Dante's

Europe.

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[133] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q11.A1.sc.
[134] This seems to contradict the characterization of Muslims given in Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*, which stated that there was no common ground on which to debate or convert Muslims because they do not recognize Christian texts as authentic. Muslims see the Old and New Testaments as scriptures that have been altered by heavy-handed editors, copyist mistakes, and disingenuous holy men. This is why the *Qur'ān* takes precedent for Muslims, who recognize all Old and New Testament Prophets. For Aquinas and others, the use of the *Qur'ān* as scripture would be seen as a heretical insertion into Christianity.

The threat of Islam as a schismatic sect has roots in Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle. Aquinas frames his ideology in Christianity, both in terms of Christian traditions and Christian scriptures,[135] but Aquinas's philosophy, which directs his interpretations of Christianity as a whole, stems from Aristotle. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle wrote, "The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine."[136] To this, Aquinas replies:

> Just as the good of the multitude is greater than the good of the unit…the good of ecclesiastical unity, to which schism is opposed, is less than the good of Divine truth, to which unbelief is opposed…Nevertheless of all sins committed by man against his neighbor, *the sin of schism would seem to be the greatest, because it is opposed to the spiritual good of the multitude.*[137]

Aquinas creates a hierarchy that extends from Divine truth to ecclesiastical unity to a more general multitude and ends with the individual, each of which is affronted by schism. According to this hierarchy, a threat to spiritual unity is also worse than unbelief, which is an individual act with only individual consequences. Schism threatens the community and its social power structures. The Prophet Muhammad is punished not simply because of an imagined fracture in Christianity but also because Islamic expansion represented a threat to European power structures.

Aquinas writes that schismatics should be punished with excommunication, or separation from the community from which they have already ideologically separated themselves. Acknowledging that a schismatic does not recognize the authority of the

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[135] Not all traditions or teachings have a basis in scripture, some are influenced by culture or other outside factors.

[136] Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962) I:2.

[137] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q39.A2.ad2-3. Emphasis mine.

Church, Aquinas invokes secular authority in dealing with sowers of discord.[138] Aquinas's appeal to secular authority in dealing with the schismatics is in line with reading the Prophet Muhammad's punishment as a result of the perceived threat of Islam as a political and imperial rival.

The Prophet Muhammad's speech ends with his asking why the Pilgrim is watching the sufferers make their rounds and asks if he is trying to avoid his own punishment. Virgil replies by explaining that he is guiding a living man through the Underworld, and many of the shades stop their perpetual march to watch the Pilgrim and Virgil; the presence of a living being is apparently more of a shock than their tremendous suffering. As the eternal shuffle of the suffering shades ceases in their stupor, the reader is given a momentary prelude to the Ninth Circle and its frozen stillness, making the Prophet Muhammad comparable to Satan.

The Prophet Muhammad continues his speech while expressing interest in the world. His interest in the Novarese heretics furthers his connection to Christian heresies, but also demonstrates a concern for European affairs without showing any concern for his own community of followers. Like other sufferers who address the Pilgrim directly, the Prophet Muhammad gives the Pilgrim a message to take back to the world but abruptly ends the conversation to resume his punishment when he says,

> *"Or dì a fra Dolcin dunque che s'armi,*
> *tu che forse verda' il sole in breve,*
> *s'ello non vuol qui tosto seguitarmi,*
>
> *sì di vivanda, che stretta di neve*
> *non rechi la vittoria al Noarese,*
> *ch'altrimenti acquistar non saria leve."*

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[138] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q39.A4.arg3.sc.

> *Poi che l'un piè per girsene sospese,*
> *Mäometto mi disse esta parola;*
> *indi a partirsi in terra lo distese.*[139]

Musa's translation:

> "And you, who will behold the sun, perhaps
> quite soon, tell Fra Dolcino that unless
> he wants to follow me here quick, he'd better
>
> stock up on food, or else the binding snows
> will give the Novarese their victory,
> a conquest not won easily otherwise."
>
> With heels of one foot raised to take a step
> Mahomet said these words to me, and then
> stretched out and down his foot and moved away.

The Prophet Muhammad's departing words refer to Fra Dolcino and the sect he founded, the Apostolic Brothers, who were declared heretics by Pope Clement V in 1305 and fled into the hills near Novara where they hid for a year to avoid the Pope's order of execution. Dolcino was burned at the stake along with Margaret of Trent in 1307.[140] The Prophet Muhammad's interest in Dolcino is interesting and problematic; the poem does not state if there are any connections between the Prophet Muhammad and Dolcino beyond the accusation of schism, but in his short commentary Musa writes that the two may have shared similar beliefs on marriage.[141] In his longer commentary, Musa writes, "Dolcino's sect…preached the return of religion to the simplicity of apostolic times, and among their tenets was community property and sharing of women."[142] Musa notes that any similarity between Dolcino and the Prophet Muhammad are only "what Dante *believed* were their similar views," but does not take pains to compare the treatment of

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[139] Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII:55-63.
[140] Barbara Reynolds, *Dante: The Poet, The Political Thinker, The Man*, 202.
[141] Musa, *The Divine Comedy Vol I: Inferno*, 331.
[142] Musa, *Inferno Commentary*, 376.

women by the two groups.[143] The notion that the Apostolic Brothers' communal women are connected to marriage and sexual ethics in Islam is worth exploring, and strongly echoes de Voragine's claim that Magumeth made it legal for himself "to approach other men's wives in order to beget virtuous men and prophets."[144] While this level of sexual corruption is not found in any other history, it offers an explanation for the Prophet Muhammad's interest in Dolcino and implies a parallel that Dante's early audiences would have understood.

In *Inferno*, Dolcino and the Prophet Muhammad become abstract symbols for coordinated militant resistance to the Church and Universal Faith: Dolcino by creating internal schism through the redefinition of current laws, and the Prophet Muhammad by impeding "the possibility of a single, unified religion."[145] Even without his symbolic importance as a schismatic Christian, the Prophet Muhammad represents the ethnically alien and hostile expanding Islamic empires and kingdoms, that threatened Europe, her territories, and the trade routes and waterways connecting East and West. Given nearly two centuries of Crusades by Dante's era, the threat of a militant Islam would have been ever-present in the poet's mind. Dante's parallel succinctly vilifies both.

Dante appears to be wrestling with two different views of Islam in the *Divine Comedy*. One that depicts Muslims as a community that, while separated from Christians through its heresy, is still connected ideologically to the Christian community. The other presents Islam as an ethnically different and hostile empire that cannot coexist with Christianity. Ambivalent, Dante recognizes cultural contributions from the Muslims in

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[143] Musa, *Inferno Commentary,* 376. Italics added for emphasis.
[144] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 758.
[145] Musa, *Inferno Commentary*, 376.

Limbo (*Inferno* Canto IV) while also grotesquely, uniquely punishing the Prophet Muhammad in the Ninth Bolgia.

Regardless of the poet's views on Islam as a whole, the Prophet Muhammad's suffering in Canto XXVIII becomes clearer in the context of Aquins's definitions and ideas. A theologian and philosopher rather than a literary figure, Aquinas supported and validated other medieval authors through his scholarship. While his accounts of the Prophet Muhammad may not directly match theirs, the similarities gave legitimacy to European accounts of Islam and the Islamic Prophet. In the absence of consultation with Eastern sources, they became a self-reinforcing round of binaries to separate Christianity and Islam, the West and the "Orient."

Why did Christian writers perpetuate a mythology that brought Islam within the ideological boundaries of Christianity while simultaneously refuting it? There is no theological necessity for the appropriation and redefinition of Islam, which could have been dismissed as a pagan religion. The need for qualifications and the corpus of scholarship and literature dealing with Islam demonstrates that medieval Christians had Islam on their minds as more than a competing religion, as an existential threat. The Christian view of Islam as a threat rather than a corruption is highlighted by the lack of a call for coordinated missionary activity to correct deviant interpretations of Christianity. Rather than calling for missionaries, medieval Christians called for soldiers to rally round the banner of the Crusades. They aimed to reclaim lost territories, not their souls.

Europeans might well have felt that Europe itself had already been invaded. Islam was an attractive option for potential converts. Spain (756-1492) and Sicily (827-902) had come under Islamic governments and had become cultural centers where Muslims,

Christians, and Jews coexisted (sometimes peacefully and sometimes not); Muslim works

were actively translated in intellectual centers throughout Europe; Muslim merchants

traded in European ports; and elements of Middle Eastern cultures and fashions were

adopted into European cultures.[146] From a Christian perspective, Christianity was under

siege: Muslims were already in Europe; had firmly established their rule in North Africa,

Arabia, and much of Asia; and had established empires that rivaled any Christian

authority. Historian María Rosa Menocal writes that it was not uncommon for Christians

living under Islamic governments to convert, and cultural conversions were evolving in

some European courts,[147] an action that shrinks the Christian community and

compromises the Church's power. Conversion is one tactic that can be used for Islamic

expansion in Europe, paving the way for an Islamic power to win the hearts of the

populace and take a city or territory more easily. To combat these secular threats

Christian writers rallied around a central cause: to discredit Islam by making it appear

little more than a corrupt echo of Christianity. With the exception of the translators of

Arabic texts and any traveling scholar with first-hand experience with Muslims,

European scholars and writers would have had no way of knowing that the writings about

the Prophet Muhammad and Islam produced in the West had no real Eastern referent.

While the Western texts consisted mostly of European projections of the Islamic East

rather than Eastern realities, Dante believed them.[148]

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[146] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 115-27.
[147] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 118-21.
[148] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 129.

Chapter 6: Islamic and Christian Intertextuality in the *Divine Comedy*

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a highly referential work, and mountains of scholarship exist on the classical, religious, and political references. The intertextual nature of the work is uncontested, but relatively few strides have been taken toward linking the *Divine Comedy* with non-European, namely Arabic, sources. Noting these and other connections between East and West found in Dante's work indicates that Dante was able to draw on a basic knowledge of Islamic traditions and stories in the formation of his *Divine Comedy* even as he rejects Islam as a viable spiritual or political system.

In this chapter we will analyze the *Divine Comedy* in light of Islamic literature taken from *ḥadīth* reports, which contrasts European traditions that controlled generations of Dante scholarship. The use of Islamic texts will help to inform readers about an alternate history and perspective of the Prophet Muhammad that is often misquoted or misrepresented in Western sources.[149] We will also study the textual parallels between the three long accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj*,[150] found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, and the Pilgrim's journey through the afterlife. The Prophet's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* is his own guided tour through a layered Heaven in which he meets with many other prophets from the monotheistic tradition, has visions of the sufferings of Hell, and is granted audience in the Divine Court, a clear parallel to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. We will also analyze other similarities in style and structure between the Prophet Muhammad's descriptions of the sufferings and blessings in the afterlife and those found in the *Divine Comedy*. Once literatures from the Arabic and European traditions have

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[149] While the two literary and historical traditions provide ample contrast, of course, neither is positioned to claim absolute authority.

[150] Literally, "the Night Journey and the Ascension."

been put in conversation with each other, unique patterns of hybridity can be identified

and analyzed in the representations of the Prophet Muhammad as a character, and in the

Divine Comedy itself as a potential counter text.

There is no indication that Dante's use of Islamic ideas to inform his *Divine*

Comedy comes from first-hand knowledge of primary sources, such as the *Qur'ān* or

works of *ḥadīth* like *Saḥīḥ al-Bukharī*. While these two Arabic works were potentially

unknown to the poet, they are the focus of our comparison because they are the standards

for Islamic literature, and all Islamic texts radiate from them. There is no reason to

believe that Dante either spoke or read Arabic, and there is no direct evidence he read

translations of these works. As with the poet's knowledge of Homer, whose works Dante

had never read, enough scholarship existed to allow for a basic level of information to be

accessible to the poet through his readings, conversations with intellectuals who were

exposed to translations, and possible exposure to foreign merchants in cosmopolitan hub

of Medieval Italy.

The Prophet Muhammad's life appears to be a series of contradicting and

complementary reports in Western sources, each adding to a complex mythology that

validates a Western dichotomy outlining the Christian West as pious and the non-

Christian East as innovative and barbaric. [151] The illusion this binary's validity can only

be maintained so long as the two are kept entirely separate, but influx of pilgrims s and

international wars like the Crusades in the Middle Ages made that an impossibility.

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[151] This dichotomy is further complicated by the Crusades, which provided stark religious contrast as well as highlighting ethnic differences between Christians and Muslims in Europe, Asia, and Africa. While there is a tendency to fall back on the safety of the binary as European-Arab or Christian-Muslim, the reality, which is underscored by Dante's own intertextuality, is that both sides were characterized by overlapping shades of gray. Both sides of the cultural divide interacted heavily with each other, exchanging ideas and experiences.

To date, countless biographies of the Prophet Muhammad have been written and translated into many languages, but the most authoritative and authentic accounts are embedded within the *ḥadīth*, which includes the Prophet's interactions with other world leaders and illustrates a series of striking similarities between the Prophet Muhammad's visions of Paradise and Hell as well as his own *al-Isrā wa al-Miʿrāj* and the *Divine Comedy*.

Arabia was on the fringes of the empires of the Middle Ages. Historian Bernard Lewis writes, "For the first six centuries of the Christian era, Turks and Arabs alike were still beyond the imperial borders…Neither Persians nor Romans, even in their periods of imperial expansion, showed much interest in conquering the steppe or desert peoples, and took care not to get too closely involved with them."[152] The isolation of the Arabs allowed Islam to rise uninhibited by colonial powers, and over the course of a few short decades the nomadic Arab tribes would coalesce into an international power that would become a successor state to the old Roman Empire, absorb the Persian Empire, and become the main rival of the reinvented, Christianized Rome. Eventually Muslims would spread across the deserts into Anatolia and into Eastern Europe, across North Africa and down along Africa's eastern coast, and the European heartland via Sicily and Spain. These territories covered such large expanses of land that Islamic authority governed ethnically and religiously diverse peoples by the time Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy*. Islamic territory had expanded and established itself on three continents and was powerful economic and political force in Dante's world. Islamic power had been

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[152] Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 1995) 38.

expanding out from the Arabian Desert for nearly one thousand years, and that tradition of expansion began with the Prophet.

While the budding Islamic government in Arabia was still based in the cities Makkah and Madīnah, news of the new Prophet who had united the Arabs into a single force reached the established empires on the Arab world's periphery. The Persians and the Romans were exhausted from centuries of fighting, and both had begun their decline as Islam rising across Arabia. After the death of the Prophet in 632, Islam spread further into Roman Syria, Persia, and other surrounding areas.

In March 628 (*Dhū al-Q'adah* 6 of the Islamic calendar), the Prophet Muhammad negotiated, among other things, peace (*hudnah*)[153] between the cities of Medina, the cosmopolitan home of the Muslims, and Makkah, the home of the pagan Arabs headed by the Quraysh, with the Treaty of *Hudaybiyyah*.[154] The treaty with the Quraysh elders was the first time the Prophet Muhammad was recognized as an authority outside the Muslim community (*Ummah*). Shortly after the treaty was signed, the Prophet Muhammad sent letters to world leaders, including the Negus of Ethiopia; *al-Muqawqis* of Egypt (*al-Misr*), who was an administrator for the Byzantines; Mundhir bin Sāwā al-Tamīmī, the governor of Bahrain, which included modern Kuwait, eastern Saudi Arabia, southern Iraq, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman; and Heraclius (575-641), Emperor of

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[153] *A Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, "hudnah," ed. Deeb al-Khudrawi (Beirut: Al Yamamah, 1995) 422. Also see *Hippocrene Standard Dictionary: Arabic-English English-Arabic*, n. "Truce," ed. John Wortabet and Harvey Porter (New York: Hippocrene, 2005), 387.

[154] The terms of the treaty guaranteed that there would be ten years of peace between Makkah and Madīnah, that any citizen of Makkah who fled without the consent of a guardian or their tribe to join the Muslims would be returned but that anyone was free to leave Medina for Makkah, that both sides maintained the right to enter into contracts freely with other Arabs, and that the Muslims would not be allowed to enter Makkah for one year, at which point they could return to make the sacred pilgrimage to the Kabbah, an ancient temple allegedly built by the Prophet Abraham. More importantly, this was the first time the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims were recognized as sovereign rather than a minority religion.

Byzantium (610-41). His letter to the Byzantine emperor marked the Prophet

Muhammad's first true point of contact with the West. The Prophet's letter to Emperor

Heraclius is important for Dante scholarship because it is the first in a series of Muslim-

Christian interactions that set the tone for future relations.

> 'Abdullah bin 'Abbās reported: Allāh's Messenger wrote a letter to Caesar
> (*Qayṣar*) that invited him to Islam and sent this letter with Dihyah al-
> Kalbī, who was ordered to hand the letter over to the governor of Basrah
> to forward to Caesar. Caesar, showing gratitude to Allāh, travelled from
> Ḥimṣ to Ilyah after Allāh granted him victory over the Persians. When the
> letter of Allāh's Messenger arrived, Caesar read it and said, 'Seek for me
> anybody from his people to ask them about Allāh's Messenger.'[155]

Abū Sufyān, leader of the opposition movement against the Prophet Muhammad

and Islam, was called to the court of Emperor Heraclius while traveling with a trade

caravan and was questioned by the Emperor about the Prophet and the political situation

in Arabia.[156] After Abū Sufyān's interrogation about the Arabian Prophet, Heraclius read

the letter he had received from the Prophet Muhammad aloud for the entire court to hear:

> In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.[157]
> From Muhammad, Allāh's slave and Messenger, to Heraclius (*Hiraql*),
> ruler of Rome (*al-Rūm*). Peace on him who follows the correct path. Then,
> after: I invite you to Islam. If you become Muslim then Allāh will double
> your reward; reject this invitation and you are committing a sin by
> misguiding your subjects (*al-ārīsīn*).[158]

The letter then quotes the Qur'an:

> «*Qul yā hal al-kitāb ta'ā lawā ilā kalimatin sawā' baynanā wa baynakum
> āllā na'bud illā Allāh wa lā nushrika bihi shayān wa lā yattakhidha*

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[155] *al-Bukharī* 2940. Narration continues into *al-Bukharī* 2941, which is a long variant of *al-Bukharī* 7. Also see *al-Bukharī* 2936. Translation my own.

[156] See the Appendix A1 for a translation of Abū Sufyān's audience with Heraclius, Emperor of Rome, in which he is interrogated regarding the new Arabian prophet.

[157] *Bismallāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*, the opening lines of 113 of 114 chapters in the *Qur'ān*. Most lexicographers and translators will translate this with slight differences depending on the school of thought. Much work has been done on the roots of the words *al-Rahmān* and *al-Rahīm*, which share similar roots and close, but not parallel, meanings. Translation my own.

[158] *al-Bukharī* 7. Translation my own.

ba'ḍunā baḍān ārbābān min dūn Allāh fain tawallawā faqūlūā āshhadūā biānnā muslimūn» (*Āl 'Imrān* 3:64)

«Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to terms as between us and you that none but Allāh, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not from among ourselves lords and patrons other than Allāh.' If then they turn back say: 'Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims.'»

After the letter was read aloud, Abū Sufyān witnessed a great commotion in the royal court and the Arabs were turned out. Once outside he told his companions, "Ibn Abī Kabashah [a mocking name used for the Prophet Muhammad] has become so noticeable that even the king of Byzantines (*banī al-Āṣfar*) is afraid." Abū Sufyān recalled that after seeing the commotion caused by the Prophet Muhammad in the Roman Empire, he became convinced Muhammad would be victorious in their conflict, although Abū Sufyān continued his fight against him.[159] The Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims ended the conflict years later when they took the city of Makkah, at which point most Quraysh including, Abū Sufyān, conceded and converted to Islam without significant battle.[160]

Alternatively, Ibn 'Abbās, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad and one of the primary collectors of *ḥadīth* reports said that the letter sent to Khusraū II (*Kisrā*) in Persia was read and immediately torn into pieces.

While the Byzantine response was to investigate, according to ibn 'Abbās when the letter was read to Khusaraū (*Kisrā*), ruler of the Persian Empire, he immediately tore the letter into bits for its audacity.[161]Khusraū II (Chosroes II) likely never thought about

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[159] *al-Bukhariī* 7. Also see *al-Bukharī* 4553 for a slightly different narration of the same event. Translation my own. The name *Byzantines* has been used in place of Romans.
[160] Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 1995) 53.
[161] *al-Bukharī* 4424. See *al-Bukharī* 64. Science fiction writer and amateur historian Isaac Asimov, in his *The Near East*, wrote, "Even while Chosroes II had lingered at the heights of his success, a message reached him from Arabia. Some Arab fanatic was ordering him to abandon his religion and accept instead

the letter again because he died that year, leaving his successors to deal with the rapid decline in the Persian Empire and its eventual takeover by and acceptance of Islam.

The Persians were a culturally Eastern empire but were more alien to the early Muslims than the Byzantines, who were also monotheists. Not long after the letters were received, both empires went through a period of decline and were eventually replaced by Islamic governments in many of their territories. The Persian administrative system was torn into pieces as large numbers of Persians abandoned their traditional Zoroastrian religion in favor of Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad's letters to world leaders largely escape Western histories, and when they are mentioned, their significance is greatly reduced. One possible explanation for this is that historians at the courts where letters were received would not have seen the Arabian Prophet as having any particular significance, and modern historians take court historians as primary sources. The Arabs were still seen as a wild and disunited peoples on the fringe of the world, and their unification and assumption of political power still an unlikely future. The reaction to the letters shows that there was a religious common ground between the Byzantines and the Muslims that the Emperor Heraclius thought worthy of study even if it was not enough to prompt actual conversion.

Assuming the Arabic account to be completely correct, twentieth-century *mufassir* (commentator on the Qur'an) Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) speculated in multiple areas in his monumental *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an* that Heraclius recognized Islam as the true religion after his interview with Abū Sufyān, but decided not to accept the Prophet

that Arab as his prophet. The prophet was Mohammed. Chosroes II tore up the message and, in all likelihood, never thought of the matter again" (214).

Muhammad's invitation to the new religion because that would have compromised his authority over the Byzantines.[162] Using this as the basis of his argument, Qutb claimed that the Byzantine Empire's decline was due to liberties they took in interpolating false teachings into the Christian religion to suit the political agendas of that society's elites.

These early encounters between the Prophet Muhammad and the world powers established a tradition of hostility against the Arab upstart and outsider in the West that continued after Dante's time, and these points of cross-cultural contact help to inform the reader about the Prophet Muhammad's punishment in the *Inferno*. Building on this complex relationship characterized by a close and interactive history offset by an extreme animosity, Dante's *Divine Comedy* echoes a significant journey in the life of the Islamic Prophet: *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj*.

The *Mi'rāj* story has been told and retold in multiple sources; it is featured in most *tafsīr* (commentaries on the Qur'an) and books of *Sīrat al-Nabī* (biographies of the Prophet, sometimes abbreviated to *Sīrah*), but the most authoritative accounts are found in the books of *āḥādīth*. *Ṣaḥiḥ al-Bukharī*, the most authoritative collection of *ḥadīth* reports, contains three long accounts of the Prophet's *Mi'rāj* as well as many fragments. The *Mi'rāj* accounts in the *tafsīr* and *Sīrat al-Nabī* are based on the reports from *al-Bukharī*, but are subject to retelling and interpolations by the work's author. In the most general terms, the *al-Isrā wa al- Mi'rāj* (sometimes referred to as The Night Journey or Journey by Night in English-language works) is the story of the night the Prophet Muhammad was taken by the angel Gabriel to Jerusalem before ascending to Heaven. He

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[162] Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1-6 (Beirut: *Dār al-Shourouk*, 1972). Arabic edition.

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is shown visions of Hell, meets and prays with the Prophets of the Abrahamic tradition, and receives prayer regulations from Allāh before returning to his home.

The *Mi'rāj* narrative has been compared to Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the past and Dante scholars have been quick to discount any influence the story has had on Dante, but the many textual and narrative parallels are noteworthy.[163] The first significant comparison between Dante's poem and the Prophet's *Mi'rāj* was *La Escatologia Musulmana en la* Divina Comedia, by Spanish Catholic priest and Islamic studies scholar Muguel Asín Palacios (1871-1944). Asín tried to catalogue the *Mi'rāj* stories, collate them, and trace the development of the story as an evolving narrative over time. While his work is incredibly useful as an early acknowledgment of Christian-Islamic intertextuality in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and his work in comparing massive amounts of Arabic language Islamic texts with Dante's works is a monumental achievement, his study is not without flaws. Asín's main problem is that he approached the *Mi'rāj* as a textual editor comparing different versions of the same story. This approach makes sense when the *Mi'rāj* stories are seen as a story constantly re-edited and rewritten to form a better, more complete narrative, but *hadīth* narratives are not the same as successive editions of a literary work where an author's revisions can be traced and analyzed. The Prophet Muhammad was illiterate and untrained in storytelling. He spoke in a very matter-of-fact style and lacked the skill to embellish stories. Different *hadīth* reports were recorded at different times and were captured from conversations or lectures that had a different focus; meaning different parts of the same story would be emphasized depending on the context while other parts of a story might be left out entirely. The

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[163] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 122.

different chains of narration and different times in which the story was told change the basis of the narrative. Similarly, a story may be told in multiple places in the *Qur'ān*, and each telling has a different theme or perspective. Asín also compared retellings of the *Mi'rāj* that extended the narrative.

In his *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, al-Bukharī recorded three long versions of the *Mi'rāj*, and Islamic scholars generally accept the three long narrations as supplementing each other. These complementary narrations combine to create a fourth, eclectic narrative that synthesizes the similar elements and incorporates the dissimilar features.[164] Asín, on the other hand, assumes competition between the narratives.

At first glance, these long narrations from *al-Bukharī* appear to tell three similar but ultimately different stories and seem to have only faint and superficial echoes in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but a close reading reveals many thematic parallels. The more obvious connections are in the basic elements of the stories themselves: night journeys to heaven with the assistance of a guide who can explain the visions; along the way the traveller meets various important figures; and after the journey the protagonists return home to share the lessons they have learned to help guide mankind away from error. In the narrative cycles of both Dante and the Prophet Muhammad's *Mi'rāj*, the story is told in the first person by the traveller himself, whose journey begins after being awoken from a type of sleep. Dante's *Inferno* begins:

> *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*
> *mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,*

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[164] For example, the first two long narrations provided in the Appendix make no mention of how the Prophet and Gabriel ascend into the heavens, while the third long narration mentions the Burāq, a mythological beast, as carrying them. Islamic scholars maintain that the lack of direct mention of the Burāq does not exclude its presence.

che la diritta via era smarrita.[165]

Musa's translation:

> While halfway through the journey of our life
> I found myself lost in a darkened forest,
> for I had wandered off from the straight path.

In both stories the awakened traveller is made to follow in the footsteps of a guide on a journey that begins in Jerusalem and ends with the traveller experiencing an audience before the Divine Throne. The Prophet Muhammad is awoken in the city of Makkah and taken to Jerusalem by the angel Gabriel. For Dante's awakened, these guides are the spirits of people who were important to the author, each representing a fundamental element of the living faith, and for Muhammad the guides are angels.[166] The Pilgrim's three main guides are Virgil, who represents wisdom, art, and European authority as it shifted from Troy in the East to Rome in the West; Beatrice, who represents Love and relieves Virgil as the Pilgrim's guide in *Purgatory* XXX; and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who was an active promoter of the Crusades and the militaristic defense of the Faith and Holy Land against the Muslims. Saint Bernard relieves Beatrice as the Pilgrim's guide only briefly, beginning in *Paradise* XXXI, and has the distinction of being his final guide. Saint Bernard's status as final guide highlights the importance of his role in the journey and what he represents for believers generally and underscores the poems

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[165] Dante, *Inferno* I.1-3.

[166] The Pilgrim's three main guides are Virgil, who is a representation of wisdom, art, and emblematic of European authority as it shifted from Troy in the East to Rome in the West; Beatrice, who is a representation of Love and relieves Virgil as the Pilgrim's guide in *Purgatory* XXX; and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who was an active promoter of the Crusades and militant defense of the faith and the Holy Land against the Muslims. Bernard relieves Beatrice as guide only briefly, beginning in *Paradise* XXXI and has the distinction of being the Pilgrim's final guide. Bernard's status as final guide highlights the importance of his role in the journey and what he represents for believers generally. The Prophet Muhammad's main guide is the angel Gabriel, but in some narrations he is accompanied for part of the journey by the angel Michael.

connections to and rejections of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad's main guide is the angel

Gabriel, but in some narrations they are accompanied for part of the journey by the angel

Michael.

While on their journeys, the travelers stop to speak with the souls of men who

played a noteworthy role in life. The types of souls seen in the afterlife are different in the

two works but overlap. Underscoring the importance of Virgil, Dante's Pilgrim witnesses

the grotesque monster Minos in Hell. In his *Aeneid* Virgil wrote:

> Minos the grand inquisitor stirs the urn
> he summons the silent jury of the dead,
> he scans the lives of those accused, their charges.[167]

Dante's Minos also judges the dead. Musa's translation:

> There stands Minòs grotesquely, and he snarls,
> examining the guilty at the entrance;
> he judges and dispatches, tail and coils.

Dante's Minos has a parallel and precedent in Virgil, but also can be seen in Mālik from

the second long narration in *al-Bukharī*,[168] who serves as gatekeeper and kindler of the

Fire. The Minòs/Mālik connection is unique among parallels between the narratives

because it breaks the Christian-Muslim dichotomy because of the classical origins of

Minòs. This either highlights the coincidental nature of the comparison or allows for a

possible Roman-Islamic connection. Early in the second long narration of the Prophet

Muhammad's journey he is shown visions of Hell, and as in Dante's poem the suffering

of the sinners corresponds to their sins. The Prophet Muhammad is shown an oven-like

pit that he later learns was filled with adulterers who are burning, rising to the top of the

hole as it was filled with flames and falling to the bottom again as the flames receded.

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[167] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006) VI.499-501.
[168] See Appendix A3 for a full translation of the second long narration by the present author.

Much of Dante's *Inferno* has oven-like burning, but this specific episode with the oven-like hole has strong echoes in Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*:

> *Io venni in loco d'ogne luce muto,*
> *che mugghia come fa mar per tempest,*
> *se da contrary venti è combattuto.*
>
> *La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,*
> *mena li spirit con la sua rapina;*
> *voltando e percontendo li molesta.*[169]

Musa's translation:

> I reached a place where no light shone at all,
> that bellowed like the sea racked by a tempest,
> when warring winds attack it from both sides.
>
> The infernal storm, eternal in its rage,
> sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast:
> it whirls them, lashing them with punishment.

The violence of the winds is amplified by their bellowing and strongly contrasts with this sphere's darkness. Dante's adulterers submitted to their tempestuous passions in life and now in Hell they are constantly blown by punishing winds in a dark place. The crime is symbolic of their lack of light (or reason). In the second long narration of the Prophet Muhammad's journey, the adulterers are whirled up and down in the rising and falling flames of the great oven-like hole. The hole, which is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom, is lit only by the kindling at the bottom and grows darker as the fires recede. Both traditions employ an allegorical punishment in which adulterers are tossed violently because they allowed themselves to be driven by their lusts in life.

Dante's description of this region of Hell as "*in loco d'ogne luce muto*" ("a place where no light shone at all") refers not only to the lack of reason associated with the sin

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[169] Dante, *Inferno*, V.28-33.

of adultery, but also uses darkness as a punishment. In Italian, the word *muto* literally means "silent,"[170] and the silence of the light dramatically offsets the bellowing winds. The silent light allows the poet to associate darkness with pain and suffering without giving specific details or describing an inability to depict the scene accurately (see in *Inferno* Canto XXVIII). In this darkness, sinners are isolated, despite their large numbers. Unlike the *Divine Comedy*, which uses masses of sinners to create communities dispersed through Hell, the adulterers are the only sinners in the Prophet Muhammad's vision who exist in a community. Dante's use of darkness as a literary device creates a paradoxical relationship between the two stories in which the Islamic tradition moves from a singular representation to a group of sinners and the Christian poem takes a group and isolates it in darkness. Dante cleverly employs the limitations of language to his advantage by using the darkness to invoke his audience's imagination to create the horrors of Hell for themselves.[171]

Dante invokes his audience's imagination more directly with his graphic depiction of the sinners in the boiling river of blood, which is another extraordinary parallel between the second long narration and Dante's *Inferno*. In Canto VII the shades of violent criminals are held at different depths of the blood river according to the severity of their violence. The Prophet Muhammad's vision of Hell show two men—a man on the riverbank with a pile of stones, and a usurer, who is in the water and has stones thrown into his mouth every time he approaches the bank. While the sinners are being punished

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[170] *Cassell's Italian Dictionary*, *s.v.* "muto." In the Sayers translation, she refers to the light as "dumb" rather than silent or mute.

[171] Deborah Youngs and Simon Harris, "Demonizing the Night in Medieval Europe: A Temporal Monstrosity?" in *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003) 137.

for different crimes, the river itself is an important feature in both. Dante's river violently

boils the sinners:

> *Ma ficca li occhi a valle, ché s'approccia*
> *la Riviera del sangue in la qual bolle*
> *qual che per vïolenza in altrui noccia.*[172]

Musa's translation:

> But now look down the valley. Coming closer
> you will see the bloody river boiling souls
> of those who through their violence injured others.

While the rivers of blood (*la Riviera del sangue*) feature in both stories, Dante's river is

boiling and the river from the Prophet Muhammad's vision is not. The boiling adds to the

suffering of the sinners, while the river in the Prophet Muhammad's vision is naturalistic.

The sinner in the river in the Prophet Muhammad's vision was a usurer, and in contrast to

these violent sins of murder and tyranny, the sin of usury seems like a passive crime.

Usurers do not physically injure their victims, but Aquinas writes in his *Summa*

Theologica, "a usurer sins by doing an injury to the person who borrows from him under

a condition of usury."[173] He also writes, "it is the usurer who finds an occasion of sin in

the malice of his heart."[174] Aquinas bases his argument that usury can be a violent crime

on Aristotle's *Nicomachaen Ethics*, Book V.5, where the philosopher argues that

exchanges without exact reciprocity are crimes and violence against society. In his short

commentary, Musa's writes that the sinners in Dante's river are "those shades who

committed violence against their fellow men. Here are murderers and tyrants; men who

through their violent deeds in life caused hot blood to flow are now themselves sunk in

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[172] Dante, *Inferno*, XII.46-8.
[173] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q78.A4.arg3.sc.
[174] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.Q78.A4.ad2.

flowing, boiling blood."[175] Musa's analysis brilliantly explains the connection between the violence of the crimes and the nature of the river itself.

Dante's *Inferno* is structured so the deeper a sinner is found the worse his crime, and Dante punishes his usurers in Canto XVII, deeper in Hell than violent murderers and tyrants and at the opposite end of Lower Hell (the sixth and seventh circles). Musa writes that the sinners of these areas are all guilty of one form of violence or another (heretics; violence against neighbors; violence against the self; and violence against God, art, and nature) with the usurers suffering near the final border of this region of Hell before the descent further into the subsection of Lower Hell (circles eight and nine).[176]

The close proximity of the usurers to the murderers and tyrants embeds a link in the subtext of the two stories, but is not the only parallel within the narratives. The focus so far has been on the sinners in the rivers because the subject in this section of each narrative is the sinner being punished, but the conflict in both narratives comes from the sinner's attempt to get out of the river. In the Prophet Muhammad's vision, every time the sinner tries to get out of the river of blood there is a man on the shore who prevents him by throwing stones. Nothing specific is known about the man on the bank from the *ḥadīth*, who is referred to only as *a man* (*rajulun*). The man from the Prophet Muhammad's vision of Hell has an analog in Dante's poem in the form of the centaurs, who work to keep the sinners at the depth that reflects the severity of their sin:

> *et tra 'l piè de la ripa ed essa, in traccia*
> *corrien centauri, armati di saette,*
> *come solien nel mondo andare a caccia*
> *...*
> *Dintorno al fosso vanno a mille a mille,*

[175] Musa, *The Divine Comedy Vol. 1: Inferno*, 182
[176] Musa, *The Divine Comedy Vol. 1: Inferno*, 148.

> *saettando qual anima si sville*
> *del sangue più che sua colpa sortille.*[177]

Musa's translation:

> Between the river and the steep came centaurs
> galloping in single file equipped with arrows,
> off hunting as they used to in the world;
> …
> They gallop, by the thousands round the ditch,
> shooting at any daring soul emerging
> above the bloody level of his guilt.

The most noticeable difference between the stories of the river of blood in Dante's poem and the Prophet Muhammad's vision is that the centaurs (*centauri*) are monsters, swarming by the thousands (*mille a mille*) around the human sinners, while the Prophet Muhammad's vision has a single nondescript human enforcing the sinner's punishment (although he, like the usurer in the river, represents a larger community).

The larger numbers and the use of monsters rather than humans enhances the literary quality of Dante's *Inferno* in comparison to the Prophet Muhammad's visions by providing a classical reference for the guardians of the ditch (*fosso*), but the essentials are the same.

Centaurs are a hybrid, a mix of horse and man that is itself a violence against nature, making them fitting guards for those guilty of violence against their neighbors. Because their top half is human, centaurs are capable of reason even while maintaining their dual human and animal natures. These creatures are noted in Dante's verse for their affinity for hunting, and their hunting skills are used as the centaurs' to keep the sinners in the boiling river. The centaurs' weapons are a connect to and amplify the Prophet Muhammad's vision because, while Dante's centaurs shoot arrows, the Prophet

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[177] Dante, *Inferno*, XII.55-75.

Muhammad's man on the bank throws stones. Despite the differences between arrows and stones, the sinners' guardians use projectiles to enforce their punishments.

The Prophet Muhammad's visions of Hell are limited to the second long narration and not mentioned in the first or third. As a unit, the second long narration is the most comparable to the *Divine Comedy* as a complete story, but the connections between the two stories are not limited to visions of Hell. The main focus of the Prophet Muhammad's *al-Isrā wa al- Mi'rāj* is the journey through Paradise. The Prophet Muhammad's heavenly journey is largely consistent despite variants in the three long narrations: Gabriel awakens the Prophet, accompanying him to Paradise and acting as navigator as he negotiates the Prophet's entry at each gate, where the Prophet is greeted and welcomed by some of the prophets from the Abrahamic tradition and ends with the Prophet Muhammad being received at the Divine Court where he is given prayer regulations before returning to earth.

The most notable similarity between the stories is the geography of Paradise, which exists in layers. Dante's heavens correspond with the planets and stars visible to astronomers, and the heavens described by the Prophet Muhammad are numbered according to their layer. In the *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* of the Prophet Muhammad, the prophets of the Abrahamic tradition, children, Hell's kindler Mālik, and a series of gatekeepers who maintain the barriers between the heavens are found in the various heavens. The heavens in Dante's poem are allegorical and those who embodied certain good qualities inhabit each heavenly sphere. In Dante's poem the higher the sphere, the closer to God and His light, creating an inversion of the spheres of punishment in *Inferno*, where the lower spheres are further from God's light and the punishments are worse.

Before Dante's Pilgrim can travel from Purgatory into Paradise, he must be purified because he still carries traces of the impure places he has been. Islamic tradition does not recognize a Purgatory, so there is no direct analog for that section of the *Divine Comedy* in the *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj*; rather, Hell and Purgatory as they exist in Dante's work are largely combined in Islamic tradition as the Fire (*al-Nār*).

In the third long narration of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey,[178] he is shown four rivers, two apparent and two that are invisible. The rivers in the heavens (the invisible rivers) and in the world (the apparent rivers, which are Nile [*al-Nīl*] and the Euphrates [*al-Furāt*]) are important symbols of life, economic prosperity, and purity.

After being shown the rivers of Paradise, the Prophet Muhammad iss presented with the three cups containing wine, milk, and honey. According to Abu Huraīrah, the Prophet Muhammad said:

> During the night of my *Isrā*… containers of milk and wine were brought
> and he [Gabriel] said, 'Drink the one you want.' I took the milk and drank.
> He [Gabriel] said, 'You have taken *al-fiṭrah*; if you had taken the wine
> then your community would have gone astray (*ghawat*).[179]

The purity of the heavenly rivers in the Prophet Muhammad's visions of Paradise are directly paired with the milk, which represents *al-fiṭrah*, or what is natural (here meaning Islam). These form a transformative cycle in the Prophet Muhammad's journey, which begins with his body being opened and his heart being washed by and filled with faith (and sometimes Zamzam water). The purification ritual from the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey involves a series of steps that begin with his organs being cleansed and ends with his making a conscious decision to choose the milk (something natural) over

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[178] See Appendix A4 for a full translation by the present author.
[179] *al-Bukharī* 3394. See 3437, 4709, 5576, 5603. Also see 3239 and 3396 for related narrations. In some narrations a container of honey is also presented to the Prophet. Translation my own.

the wine. Dante's Pilgrim finds himself in a similar purification cycle once he has

ascended Mount Purgatory, beginning in Canto XXVIII and ending in Canto XXXI when

he meets Matelda on the banks of Dante's heavenly rivers:

> *Da questa parte con virtù discende*
> *che toglie altriu memoria del peccato;*
> *da l'altra d'ogne ben fatto la rende.*
>
> *Quinci Letè; così da l'altro lato*
> *Eünoè si chiama, e non adopra*
> *se quince e quindi pria non è gustato*[180]

Musa's translation:

> The water here on this side flows with power
> to erase sin's memory; and on that side
> the memory of good deeds is restored;
>
> it is called Lethe here, and Eunoë there
> beyond, and if one does not first drink here,
> he will not come to know its powers there—

The Pilgrim encounters two rivers that correspond to the two invisible rivers in the

Islamic tradition, but the two apparent, or visible, rivers are missing. The rivers before the

Pilgrim each have a specific effect on anyone who bathes in them, and as Matelda

explains, one must be purified in the river before he can continue to Paradise. After

learning about the purifying properties of these heavenly rivers, the Pilgrim is chastised

by Beatrice faints. When the Pilgrim awakens he is taken into the stream by Matelda,

who bathes him in waters deep enough for him to drink from the purifying stream.[181] The

purification ritual has been unified in Dante's poem rather than happening in sections and

lacks the test, or choice, given to the Prophet Muhammad, but still incorporates a key

series of parallels and ends with a physical transformation that cleanses the subject,

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[180] Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVIII:127-32.
[181] Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXXI:88-105.

making him ready to enter Paradise. The Prophet and the Pilgrim were both washed by another, the Prophet by the angel Gabriel and the Pilgrim by Matelda, and both drank purifying liquids, although, the Prophet Muhammad's drink purified his community and allowed it to follow a straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*).

Closely associated with the Pilgrim's purification in the river is the divine procession that arrives after his cleansing. Scholars have spent pages explaining the symbolism and significance of the seven candlesticks, the twenty-four elders, the four creatures, the dancing women (three on the left and four on the right), the seven men, the griffin, and the chariot—and what these mean in a Christian context. While the majority of those in the procession are representations of the Church, Christian doctrine, or Christian dogma, the griffin provides a link to the third long narration of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey that adds an unexplored layer of complexity to Dante's poem.

In the first and second long narrations of the Prophet Muhammad's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* there is no mention of the method of ascent, similar to much of the Pilgrim's journey. The third long narration of the Prophet Muhammad's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* he mentions the *Burāq,* a mythical beast that often has the face of a man when depicted in artwork. The *Burāq* acts as a vehicle for the Prophet's journey, and is also the only potential classical reference made in the accounts of his *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj*.[182] The word *burāq* means "lightning," and the Prophet Muhammad describes it as being white and smaller than a mule (*dūn al-baghl*) but larger than a donkey (*fawq al-ḥimār*). The *Burāq*

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[182] In addition to any similarities with the griffin that will be explored in detail, a useful comparison for another study would be an analysis of the *Burāq* and the Greek Pegasus.

takes one long stride, taking the Prophet Muhammad and the angel Gabriel from Makkah to Jerusalem before carrying them to the nearest heaven.

The thematic emphasis and functions of the *Burāq* and the griffin differ in that and Dante's griffin is used as a literary symbol while the *Burāq* is simply a means of transport. In his short commentary on *Purgatory*, Musa writes: "The Chariot represents the church. Literally, the griffin is a mythical beast who is part eagle and part lion. Here, his dual nature is symbolic of the two natures of Christ, who was both human and divine."[183] Musa's attention to the dual nature of the griffin in relation to the dual natures of Christ is important because the Christian rejections of Islam were rooted in its perceived hybridity, a heresy that Christian writers believed came from the combination of Christian teachings with pagan traditions. Islam's corrupt hybridity is then projected onto the Prophet Muhammad and takes solid form in his monstrous appearance in *Inferno* Canto XXVIII. Hybridity alone is not enough to create heresy, as seen in the griffin, who is an acceptable hybrid, unlike Islam, which Dante saw as an ideological hybrid, or the centaurs, mythological hybrids.[184] Allowing for a gradient of acceptability when dealing with hybrids helps to explain why extra care was exercised in the creation of a false mythology around the Prophet Muhammad in medieval European writings. The inclusion of the hybrid griffin near the end of *Purgatory* (Canto XXIX) creates a structural parallel with *Inferno* (Canto XXVIII) in which the Prophet Muhammad, the monstrous hybrid, heralds a transition to a new phase in the journey and occurs in roughly the same place in

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[183] Musa, *The Divine Comedy Vol. 2: Purgatory*, 315.
[184] The centaurs are not known to have committed any individual or community sin, and their role as guardians of the sinners in the river of blood does not appear to have any special status (aside from not being tortured). It is more likely that they are fellow sufferers, condemned to that region of Hell because their dual nature (man and animal) makes them a corrupt hybrid, unlike Jesus who is man and divine. This would mean that the centaurs *are* being punished in Hell, and their punishment is to enforce punishment on those in the river for eternity.

each poem. Using the griffin as a vehicle, the poet is able to offset the perceived corruptions of the monstrous Prophet Muhammad with the divine and powerful griffin, who is acting as a metaphor for Christ. Through this arching comparison, the poet is able to put the Prophets Muhammad and Jesus into direct competition with each other. Completing the contrast between the Prophet Muhammad and the griffin, the Prophet Muhammad is leading a procession of corruption and schism as he comes into the Pilgrim's view while the griffin's procession is emblematic of the Church and the Christian faith.

The *Divine Comedy's* pattern of hybridity is completed in *Paradise* XXXI-XXXIII when the Pilgrim meets Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153), a holy man and driving force behind the Crusades who is now among Heaven's Elect. Saint Bernard's importance in the poem is underscored by his role as the Pilgrim's final guide, replacing Beatrice. Saint Bernard then becomes the final surrogate to the Angel Gabriel in the three long narrations of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey. Each of the Pilgrim's guides in the *Divine Comedy* were humans, although Beatrice and Saint Bernard are rendered angelic in the verse and counted among the Elect of the Divine Court at the Celestial Rose (*Paradise*, Canto XXXII).

Just as the comparison between Dante's hybrid Muhammad is put in direct conversation with Jesus through the griffin, he becomes the antithesis of Saint Bernard. Saint Bernard's dual natures as a holy man and recruiter for the Crusaders represent the administrative arm of the Church and the physical force required to protect or expand Christians and their territories. The Prophet Muhammad's dual natures represent the threats to unity and stability that false teachings from clever manipulators and self-

serving and unscrupulous corruptors can bring as well as the militaristic Islamic threat. Bernard's appearance later in the work suggests a greater emphasis on the practical affairs of the world than the spiritual (represented through the griffin) and supports larger arguments about Dante's complex negotiations between secular and ecclesiastic authorities.

The parallels between Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey are striking, but without a concrete to link between the texts, these similarities could be coincidence rather than an intertextual conversation. Dante references many works directly and indirectly in his poetry, but he did not leave behind a bibliography or a reading log that scholars can use to definitively say what Dante did, or did not read.

Because the features of the Pilgrim's journey match so closely with the Prophet Muhammad's, it is important to expand our investigation from where these stories intersect to focus on possible transmission of texts and stories from East to West. The majority of Dante scholars disregard claims of Islamic influence on the poet, favoring the theory that Dante extended and refined Western literature as opposed to owing an intellectual debt to the East.[185] The importance of Western texts and traditions in the *Divine Comedy* is unquestioned, but to deny the role of Islamic thinking in the work is to deny many layers of its richness. The references to the Crusades, the Muslim characters, and the Islamic architecture in the city of Dis all show that Islam was active in the poet's mind and a pressing concern for the West both politically and spiritually, but a

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[185] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 36

generalized knowledge of Islam alone does not indicate that the poet is adapting an Islamic literary tradition to support his interpretation of Christianity.

Theories linking the *Divine Comedy* to Islamic thinking and texts are not new. In the late eighteenth-century the Spanish Jesuit Juan Andrés wrote that Dante might have been influenced by Arabic traditions in his *Del origen, progresos y estado actual de toda la literature*.[186] This theory gained traction with the 1919 publication of Miguel Asín Palacios's *La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, in which he claimed that Dante's poem relied heavily on Islamic texts and pointed out many key parallels between the Pilgrim's journey and the Prophet's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj*. Dante scholars were quick to defend him and his works "against allegations of Muḥammadan influence" and rightly picked up on some of the key flaws in the work.[187] Asín's wide knowledge of Arabic literature gave his theories legitimacy because it allowed him to put Eastern and Western literatures in conversation with each other, but proved to be his theory's greatest flaw; Asín's work assumed that Dante not only had access to a large library of Arabic language texts (some of which have never been translated or have an obscure textual history), but also requires the poet to be able to read and understand specialized Arabic language texts or learned from someone who could. Dante scholars have routinely denied these assumptions without much effort because of the volume of separate texts required for Asín's theory to connect the religion of Islam to the *Divine Comedy*. In evolutionary terms, Asín's theory was hinged on a *missing link* between the Prophet's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The lack of a single text that incorporated all the necessary components of the Prophet's Night Journey that would have also been

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[186] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 32.
[187] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 31.

accessible to non-Arabic speakers in Europe makes Asín's theory fascinating but impractical. The textual missing link that best connects the Prophet's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* to the Pilgrim's otherworldly journey was found independently through the work of two European scholars. In 1949 the Italian Enrico Cerulli and the Spanish José Muñoz published Latin and French versions of an old Hispano-Arabic text that contained the Prophet's Night Journey.[188] The Hispano-Arabic text was the anonymous *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder* (1264).[189] *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder* as supposedly translated from Arabic into Castilian at the request of Alfonso X of Castile by a Jew named Abraham, and then from Castilian into Latin and Old French by the Italian Bonaventura da Siena in 1264,[190] roughly fifty years before the composition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. *Muhammad's Ladder* is divided into eighty-five chapters and closely follows and embellishes upon the long narrations from *al-Bukharī*. It does not have the same, overtly anti-Islamic tone as the other medieval European tales about the Prophet Muhammadn and its only English translator, Reginald Hyatte, who translated *Muhammad's Ladder* in 1997, speculates that it was from an authentic Arabic source because of its combination of favorable treatment of the Prophet Muhammad and detailed description of each of the heavens.[191]

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[188] Vicente Cantarino, "History and Analysis of a Controversy," in *Dante and Islam*, 39.

[189] *Le livre de l'eschiele Mahomet*.

[190] Reginald Hyatte, "Introduction," in *The Prophet of Islam in Old French*, 21. Hyatte writes that there is reason to doubt that Bonaventura da Siena was the translator. Instead, he argues, it is likely the work of an anonymous translator, although, he acknowledges that the translation was still completed by or before 1264 in the court of Alfonso X. Among the many other translations from Arabic that Alfonso X commissioned, none were requested in Old French.

[191] Reginald Hyatte, "Introduction," in *The Prophet of Islam in Old French*, 21.

Muhammad's Ladder is written in first person from the perspective of the Prophet

Muhammad, but ends with statements of authenticity similar to the chain of transmission

given at the beginning of an Arabic *ḥadīth* report:

> We, Habubekar and Abnez, attest with true heart and pure conscience that
> the matters which Muhammad related above are completely true, so that
> all those who will hear them told ought surely to place their trust in them
> as regards each particular just as we have written them down and shall do
> henceforth.[192]

This note of authenticity is interesting for two reasons: first because of the names used to

testify to authenticity and second because of the location of this section of text in relation

to the narrative. Habubekar, an adaption of the name Abū Bakr,[193] the Prophet

Muhammad's close companion, father-in-law, and the first Caliph (*Khalīfah*) for the

Sunni Muslims, is one of the most important figures in early Islam. Because Abū Bakr

often accompanied the Prophet Muhammad, many *ḥadīth* reports come from him or

involve him in some way. His daughter 'A'ishah was the Prophet's youngest wife and an

active member of the Muslim community. She was a transmitter of many *ḥadīth* reports

and worked closely with the first generation of Islamic scholars. After the death of the

Prophet Muhammad, and shortly after that the death of her father, she was the rebel

commander of an army fighting against Imam 'Alī, fourth Caliph to the Sunni Muslims.

(see *Inferno* Canto XXVIII).

Abū Bakr's importance in Islamic history and jurisprudence is emphasized by his

inclusion as the first companion whose *āḥādīth* were listed in Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal's

Musnad, an early and massive collection of *ḥadīth* reports that is a fundamental

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[192] "The Book of Muhammad's Ladder," in *The Prophet of Islam in Old French*, trans. Reginald Hyatte, 198.

[193] Abu Bakr 'Abdullāh bin Abī Quḥāfah al-Ṣaddīq (573-634).

component of the *al-madhhab al-Hanbali*.[194] According to ibn 'Abbās, during his final

illness the Prophet Muhammad mounted the pulpit and told the Muslims that Allāh had

given him a choice between the world (*dunyā*) and the afterlife (*khaīra*) and that he had

chosen the afterlife. On hearing this, Abū Bakr began weeping. The Prophet Muhammad,

standing on the pulpit before the Muslims said:

> O Abū Bakr, don't weep! Indeed from among mankind (*al-nās*) Abū Bakr
> has secured me with his wealth (*mālah*) and his company (*ṣuḥbatih*). If I
> were to take a *khalīl*[195] from my community, I would take Abū Bakr, but
> his Islamic brotherhood (*ūkhūwatu al-Islam*) is better. Close the doors
> (*bāb*) to the mosque except the door of Abu Bakr.[196]

Educated Europeans who had read Islamic literature and history would have known that

Abū Bakr was the Prophet Muhammad's successor, and might have known that during

his last twenty-seven months as Caliph, he sent armies to combat the Sasanian Empire in

Persia and the Byzantines in Syria.[197] His legacy as the leader who expanded the Islamic

state beyond Arabian borders would made him infamous to Europeans contemporary

with the Crusades, when Christian and Islamic boarders were breaking down.

   Abū Bakr's testimony to the authenticity of the work would have been a major

endorsement for an Islamic audience, but would likely have been irrelevant to the

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[194] Imam Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal Abū Abdullāh al-Shaybānī (780-855), also known as Imam Ahmad or by his honorific title *Shaīkh al-Islam* for his outstanding contributions to Islamic scholarship, was the founder of one of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Specifics from Imam Ahmad's *Musnad* come from the 20 volume Arabic edition published by Dar ul-Hadith al-Qahira (27,519 total narrations) and the 14 volume dual language (Arabic/Urdu) edition published by Maktaba-e-Rehmania (28,199 narrations).

[195] *Khalīl* is generally translated as "friend," but according to Muhammad Muhsin Khan it is, "The one whose love is mixed with one's heart and it is superior to a friend or beloved. The Prophet had only one *khalīl*, i.e., Allāh, but he had many friends." (Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Taqi ud-Din al-Hilali, "Appendix I," in *The Noble Qur'an* [Madinah: King Fahd Complex, 872] 1984).

[196] *al-Bukharī* 466. See *al-Bukharī* 467, 3654, 3656, 3657, 3904, and 6738. The expression "Close the doors to the mosque except the door of Abū Bakr," means that the community should follow his example. Note that this tradition comes on the authority of ibn 'Abbās. Translation my own.

[197] The Sasanian Empire (Persian: *Shāhanshāhaī Sāsānī*, Arabic: *al-Imabrāṭūriyyah al-Sāsānīah*, or *al-Sāsānīūn*) fell in 651. Roman Syria (sometimes *The Levant*; Arabic: *Walāyat Rūmāniyyah* or in Arabized Latin *Sūrīā*) fell in 638.

Christian European audience for whom the translations were commissioned, and according to Hyatte it is extremely doubtful that this note of authenticity was a European forgery.[198] While the work is likely authentic this does not mean that heavy-handed European editors did not alter the text.

While Abū Bakr's significance in Islamic history is largely political and his high-profile relationship with the Prophet put him in close proximity that was recorded in the *ḥadīth*, this was not the case with ibn 'Abbās, who was the Prophet Muhammad's cousin. Only about thirteen years old when the Prophet died in 632, he had spent most of his life following the Prophet, listening to him and his companions; he acted as an advised the Prophet's successors. Because he spent his time observing the Prophet, committing his words and actions to memory, he is also the transmitter of a large number of *ḥadīth* reports. Abū Bakr may have been the first companion whose narrations were recorded in Imam Ahmad's *Musnad*, but only 81 of the nearly 30,000 total narrations are from him (although many others reference him someone present). On the other hand, 1709 narrations in the *Musnad* are transmitted by ibn 'Abbās. A narration would not likely come from both these companions, as is the case with *Muhammad's Ladder*, but their combined endorsement of the work's authenticity would have been important for an educated audience.

It is difficult to read *ḥadīth* without learning the name ibn 'Abbās, which would have stood out to any medieval European translator of *ḥadīth*, but would not have had much significance to the lay European reader. The narrations that make up the *ḥadīth* consist of two parts, the chain of narrators (*insad*) and the actual words or story (*matn*).

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[198] Hyatte, "Introduction," in *The Prophet in Old French*, 21.

The word *sanad* in Arabic means "support," and is the first mark of authenticity or first

indicator of forgery or error for scholars of *ḥadīth*; it acts as a citation system to trace the

scholars who have recorded and transmitted the information.

The *ḥadīth* are not recorded from two companions but preserved from teacher to

student or scholar to scholar to prevent changes in the text over time, and these

amendments to the standard style found in Arabic scholarship calls attention to the

translation of *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder* as a hybrid text that still has much of its

original, Arabic character, but also as a text that has been reformatted for a European

audience. *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder* may be a hybrid text, coming from the East,

being translated and transmitted throughout the West, but is it Asín's missing link?

Scholars are divided on the question of the influence of *Muhammad's Ladder* on

Dante. Many literary scholars concede that it is possible that the poet was aware of the

text, but those who claim it is likely (or even near certain) that Dante was familiar with

the work are still a minority. Hyatte, the translator of *Muhammad's Ladder*, weighs in on

the debate in his introduction:

> The diffusion of Latin and Old French manuscripts and several instances
> of adaption of the Castilian version [of *Muhammad's Ladder*] are evidence
> that this narrative of Muhammad's night journey and ascent was known in
> a good part of Western Europe in the second half of the thirteenth
> century…[we cannot, however,] conclude definitively that *Muhammad's
> Ladder* influenced Dante's poem in any significant manner.[199]

Hyatte largely avoids the question of influence on Dante by writing that there is

no way to prove that this text was *the* text that informed the poet about Islam and warns

that similar Christian works could have provided Dante with some of his ideas about the

otherworld, but does concede that it is possible that Dante became familiar with the story

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[199] Reginald Hyatte, "Introduction," in *The Prophet of Islam in Old French*, 25-6.

of the Prophet Muhammad's ascent either through *Muhammad's Ladder* or the anti-Islamic "translations" of Peter the venerable.[200]

María Rosa Menocal argues the opposite position, that it Dante was not only influenced by *Muhammad's Ladder*, but that the *Divine Comedy* was written as a countertext:

> Dante is, in this view, a true believer and a true defender of the faith…he would, consciously or not, have chosen to write a countertext to the *mi'rāj*, which he believed was part of Islamic sacred writings and which described a sensuous and self-fulfilling paradise in which the prophet of that religion had the mysteries of his faith explained to him by his guide, a text replete with both astonishing similarities to Dante's *Commedia* and, perhaps, more significant, important counterpoints.[201]

Menocal's theory is attractive because it acknowledges Dante's literary mastery while also celebrating his intertextuality. Menocal's Dante read what he believed to be a seminal Islamic text (likely believing it was scripture) and created a more literarily excellent Christian version that adds and extends metaphors and allegories, fuses classical mythology with religion and contemporary politics, and reinforces his view of Christianity in a newly invented verse style. Menocal's theory is not dissimilar from Aquinas's treatment of ibn Rushd and his commentaries on Aristotle in which Aquinas acknowledges the role of "the commentator" but also strives to surpass him.

María's reading of the *Divine Comedy* relies on two ideas: first that Dante was anxiously responding to a threat to his belief systems (philosophical and religious), and second that Islamic texts and culture were established in Europe even where there were no Arabs. The idea that Dante was vehemently defending his belief system makes sense

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[200] Reginald Hyatte, "Introduction," in *The Prophet of Islam in Old* French, 11-12. Also María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 38, 126. The word "translations" is in quotation marks because many of the translations amounted to little more than distorted paraphrases. Other translations were fictional works presented as scripture for missionary and propaganda purposes.
[201] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 130.

if the *Divine Comedy* is read in the context a Europe that felt under siege by Islamic territorial, cultural, and economic expansion into the European heartland. While Muslims had recently been expelled from Islamic Sicily, elements of Arab and Muslim culture were still prevalent in the Sicilian.[202] The threat of cultural conversion, a dangerous opening for religious conversion, posed a significant threat to European culture in cosmopolitan areas and even at the court of Frederick II of Sicily, a European figure in the Crusades, this type of cultural appropriation might occur.[203] The frequent references to European secular and spiritual figures of authority who failed in their duties, and Dante's appeals to a strong, centralized secular authority lend strong support to Menocal's theory.

Menocal also works to establish the prominence of Arabic poetry and Arabic court styles in Sicily that persisted after the Muslims were expelled. Arabic court poetry, noted for being bawdy and sensual, Menocal claims, had a strong influence on Italian poetry.[204] Courtly culture in Islamic Sicily emulated Islamic Spain but was never able to achieve the same level of widespread relevance among Muslims. It did, however, establish a lasting legacy with the Europeans who reclaimed Sicily and provided an additional avenue of transmission for Arabic and Islamic texts like *Muhammad's Ladder* a little over one thousand kilometers south of Dante's beloved Florence.

The question of transmission of Arabic texts from Islamic scholars to European readers has not been settled and likely never will. On one hand, scholars who agree with

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[202] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 46.
[203] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 46-7. Frederick II is listed as a heretic in Dante's *Inferno*. In his short commentary on *Inferno*, Musa cites the "commonly held belief that he was an Epicurean" as the reason for his punishment, but his dangerous attraction to Arab culture may have also played a role (166).
[204] María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 54.

Hyatte claim there is no proof that Dante was familiar with texts such as *Muhammad's Ladder*, and on the other hand scholars who agree with Menocal claim that there is no proof Dante was unfamiliar with these texts and provide convincing arguments about the lost history of Arab influence in Europe and their textual footprints. Scholars from both camps are embattled in the struggle to prove which texts or traditions Dante was familiar with, an important question, but focusing too heavily on an unanswerable question overshadows the intertextual and intercultural richness of the *Divine Comedy*. The number of parallels between the Prophet Muhammad's *al-Isrā wa al-Mi'rāj* and Dante's *Divine Comedy* combined with the frequent direct and indirect references to Islam establish that Islam was on his mind, regardless of the texts he was or was not familiar with.

Appendix

The following selections were too long to fit comfortably in the text without distracting from the main point, but I felt they were essential to the debate about the influence Islam might have had on the *Divine Comedy*. Following are four new translations I have done for the sake of this study. While the selections from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* are my own translations, the quotation from the *Qur'ān* is from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, although the transliteration of the *Qur'ān* is mine. Explanatory footnotes have been provided where appropriate.

The first (A1) is Abū Sufyān's account of his interview with Roman Emperor Heraclius about the Prophet Muhammad, from whom the Emperor had received a letter recently requesting that he convert to Islam. This story is absent in Western histories of the Roman Empire, probably because the Muslims were still an insignificant power on the fringes of the world and interactions with a non-Muslim Arab would not have seemed worth much attention to the chroniclers of the time. It is also possible that the Arabic account of the meeting was embellished either by Abū Sufyān or others who recorded the story.

After are three separate accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's *Mi'rāj* (A2, A3, and A4), his otherworldly journey from Arabia to Jerusalem and then the heavens. Each of the accounts has faint echoes and direct parallels in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and each version is slightly different than the other two. Each of these three narrations was recorded by a different companion to the Prophet, and there is no indication that these three narrations came from the same time the Prophet Muhammad retold his Night Journey for his followers. On different occasions a one aspect of the journey may be

stressed over another, which would account for minor inconsistencies or missing information. The third narration is unique among the three because the speaker interacts with others while telling the story. These interruptions from the original have been retained. The three long narrations are not the only versions in the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, and many were retold in other areas of the work as fragments. Those references are noted in the footnotes. These are explored in more detail in Chapter 6, where they are compared with similar elements of the *Divine Comedy*, although space constraints demand that a exhaustive comparison be saved for a future study.

A1: The account of Abu Sufyān's audience with Heraclius, Emperor of Rome:

According to ibn 'Abbās: Abū Sufyān[205] and his companions were accompanying a trade caravan[206] when Abū Sufyān and his companions were called to the Emperor's court at Jerusalem (Ilyah), where he [the Emperor Heraclius] asked the merchant Arabs through his interpreter, 'Whom among you is the most closely related to the man who claims to be the Messenger of God?'

Abū Sufyān replied, 'I am his closest relation here.' On hearing this, Heraclius had Abū Sufyān step closer but had his companions remain a few steps behind, and had his translator instruct the Arab traders that the Emperor would put some questions about the Prophet Muhammad to Abū Sufyān; if he told a lie his companions were to make a sign and contradict him. Abū Sufyān recalled (to ibn 'Abbās), 'By Allah! If I had not been terrified that my companions would label me a liar I would not have told the truth about the Prophet.'

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[205] Abu Sufyān was a Quraysh elder who, after the death of Abu Jahl, led the anti-Islamic opposition based in Makkah. He led multiple military campaigns against the city of Madīnah before converting to Islam himself after losing the long war against the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims.
[206] Modern Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon.

Heraclius then put a series of questions to Abū Sufyān, asking first what was his family's status among his people, to which Abū Sufyān replied, 'He is of a noble family.' Heraclius asked if any other Arabs had claimed to be a prophet before Muhammad, and Abū Sufyān said 'No (*lā*).' The Emperor asked if any of his family had been a king (*malik*) in the past, to which Abū Sufyān said 'No.' The Emperor then asked if it was the nobles and well-to-do (*fā<u>sh</u>rāf*) who followed him or if it was the poor (*ḍa'fāū'hum*) who follow him, and Abū Sufyān replied that it was the poor. He asked if the Prophet's followers were increasing or decreasing, and Abū Sufyān said that they were increasing. When asked if any of his followers ever renounce their new faith Abū Sufyān also replied 'No.' Heraclius followed this question by asking if Abū Sufyān or any others had accused Muhammad of telling lies before he made this claim, and Abū Sufyān replied by saying 'No.' Heraclius asked if the Prophet had ever betrayed his covenants or proven treacherous and Abū Sufyān said, 'No, we currently have a truce (*hudnah*), but are unsure what he will do in this.' Abū Sufyān recalled to ibn 'Abbās that this was the only chance he found to say a word against the Prophet Muhammad. Heraclius asked if there had been any battles between his people and the Muslims and asked about the outcomes of these battles. Abū Sufyān said that the fighting was largely undecided and they shared victory in turns. Emperor Heraclius's final question was, 'What does he order you to do (*Adhā yāmurkum*)?'

Abū Sufyān said, 'To worship Allāh alone with none beside Him and to renounce all that our ancestors said before. He commands that we pray (*al-ṣalāh*), speak truths (*al-ṣadiq*), remain chaste (*al-a'fāf*), and maintain good relationships with our relations and near ones (*al-ṣilah*).'

With his questions done Heraclius had his translator tell Abū Sufyān and his companions that, in response to the answers provided, all the Messengers had come from noble families among their people. He said that because no other Arab had claimed to be a prophet before then it was unlikely that Muhammad was copying a predecessor, and that because none of his ancestors was a king he was not making false claims to restore an ancestral kingdom. He also reiterated that his staunch opponent, Abū Sufyān, admitted that Muhammad never told lies and that anyone who does not tell lies to man would not tell lies about God. Heraclius said that it is always the poor who follow a Messenger in the beginning, and that the increasing numbers was a sign of the validity of the message, especially since none who entered the religion left unhappy. He also reminded Abū Sufyān that Muhammad had never broken a covenant between them, as was the habit of Messengers, and that what Muhammad commands are in accordance with the True Faith. According to ibn 'Abbās, Heraclius said, 'If your statement is true, he will soon come to this place, I knew he would appear [because of signs in the scriptures] but did not know that he would come from your people. If I were to meet him I would wash his feet.'

After Abū Sufyān's interrogation about the Arabian Prophet, Heraclius read aloud the letter he had received from the Prophet Muhammad:

> In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
> From Muhammad, Allāh's slave and Messenger, to Heraclius (*Hiraql*), ruler of Rome (*al-Rūm*). Peace on him who follows the correct path. Then, after: I invite you to Islam. If you become Muslim then (*wa*) Allāh will double your reward; reject this invitation and you are committing a sin by misguiding your subjects (*al-ārīsīn*).

The letter then quotes the Qur'an:

> «*Qul yā hal al-kitāb ta'ā lawā ilā kalimatin sawā' baynanā wa baynakum āllā na'bud illā Allāh wa lā nushrika bihi shayān wa lā yattakhidha*

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ba'ḍunā baḍān ārbābān min dūn Allāh fain tawallawā faqūlūā āshhadūā biānnā muslimūn» (*Āl 'Imrān* 3:64)

«Say: 'O People of the Book! Come to terms as between us and you that none but Allāh, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not from among ourselves lords and patrons other than Allāh.' If then they turn back say: 'Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims.'»[207]

A2: The first long narrative from *al-Bukharī*:

Abū Dhar reported that the Messenger of Allāh said, "When I was at my home in Makkah the roof opened and Gabriel (Jibrīl) descended. He opened my chest and washed it with Zamzam water.[208] Then he brought forward a gold tray full of wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and faith (*īmān*), then after pouring these contents into my chest he closed it again. Then he took my hand and ascended with me to the nearest heaven (*'ilī al-samā' al-dunyā*), and when we reached the nearest heaven Gabriel said to the gatekeeper of the heaven (*khāzin al-samā'*),[209] 'Open (*Aftaḥ*).'[210]

The gatekeeper asked, 'Who is it?'

Gabriel replied, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'Is there anyone with you?'

[Gabriel] said, 'Yes, with me is Muhammad.'

He asked, 'Has he been sent for?'

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[207] *al-Bukharī* 7. Also see *al-Bukharī* 4553 for a slightly different narration of the same event.

[208] Zamzam is a well in the city of Makkah that, according to legend, was dug by Hagar (Hājr), mother of Ishmael (Ismā'īl), the progenitor of the Arabs.

[209] *khāzin* literally means *treasurer*, but in English the term *gatekeeper* is more appropriate. *al-Samā'* literally translates to *sky*, with a secondary meaning of *heaven* or *heavens* and a tertiary meaning of *canopy*. The word *heaven* has been preferred based on context. The following Islamic cosmology has distinct echoes in Dante's *Paradise*.

[210] Raymond P Scheindlin, *501 Arabic Verbs* (Hauppauge: Barron's, 2007), 358. The word is in the masculine singular imperative tense. Gabriel is commanding the gates be opened, not requesting. This is the first of a series of highly formulaic exchanged required to pass from one heaven to the next. The third long narrative emphasizes this procedure more strongly.

[Gabriel] said, 'Yes.' The gate was opened and we went into the nearest heaven (*al-samā' al-dunyā*) and there we saw a man sitting with a large number of people (*āswidah*) on his right side and a large number of people on his left side. When he looked toward his right he laughed (*ḍaḥik*), and when he looked toward his left he wept (*bakaī*).

Then he [the man] said, 'Welcome (*marḥabān*), righteous Prophet (*al-nabī al-ṣāliḥ*) and righteous son (*al-ibn al-ṣāliḥ*)!'[211]

I [Muhammad] asked Gabriel, 'Who is this?'

He said, 'This is Adam, and those on his right and on his left are the souls of his offspring. Those on his right are the people of Paradise (*āḥl al-Jannah*) and those on his left are the people of the Fire (*āḥl al-Nār*), and when he looked toward his right he laughed and when he looked toward his left he wept.

Then we ascended to the second heaven and he [Gabriel] said to the gatekeeper, 'Open.' This gatekeeper said the same as the first and then opened the gate."

Anas (who recorded the narration from Abū Dhar) said, "[Abū Dhar] mentioned that in the heavens the Prophet [Muhammad] met Adam (Adam), Enoch (Idrīs), Moses (Mūsā), Jesus ('Isā), and Abraham (Ibrāhīm), on whom be peace. He [Abū Dhar] did not mention which heaven they were in, but he did mention that he [the Prophet Muhammad] met Adam in the nearest heaven and Abraham in the sixth heaven (*al-samā' al-sādisah*)."

Anas said, "When Gabriel, with the Prophet [Muhammad] passed by Enoch, he said, 'Welcome, righteous Prophet and righteous brother (*al-ākh al-ṣāliḥ*)!'

[The Prophet Muhammad] said, 'Who is this?'

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[211] The word *al-ṣāliḥ* can mean *good*, *perfect*, or *righteous* according to *A Dictionary of Islamic Terms* (241), and *good, fit,* or *just* according to *Hippocrene* (176). In religious usage the meaning *righteous* takes precedence over *good*. Also note the use of the secular *marḥabān* (welcome) rather than the later standard Islamic greeting of *salām* (peace) or *al-salāmu 'alaīkum* (peace onto you).

[Gabriel] said, 'This is Enoch.'"

[The Prophet Muhammad] added, "I passed by Moses and he said, 'Welcome, righteous Prophet and righteous brother!'

I asked [Gabriel], 'Who is this?'

He said, 'This is Moses.'

Then I passed by Jesus and he said, 'Welcome, righteous brother and righteous prophet!'

I said, 'Who is this?'

[Gabriel] said, 'This is Jesus.'

Then I passed by Abraham and he said, 'Welcome, righteous Prophet and righteous son!'

I said, 'Who is this?'

[Gabriel] said, 'This is Abraham.'"

The Prophet [Muhammad] said, "Then we ascended to a place where I heard the creak of pens."

Ibn Ḥazm and Anas bin Mālik reported that the Prophet [Muhammad] said, "Then Allāh commanded that my followers perform fifty prayers [daily]. When I returned with this commandment and passed by Moses he asked, 'What commandments has Allāh put on your followers?'[212]

I said, 'He has commanded that my followers offer fifty prayers.'

Moses said, 'Return to your Lord, surely your followers can not bear that.'

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[212] The word in the text is *ūmmatik*, literally *your community*, but the word *followers* may be more appropriate in English.

So I returned [to Allāh] and requested a reduction and [the number of prayers] was reduced by half. Again, I passed by Moses and he said, 'Return to your Lord, surely your followers cannot bear that.'

So I returned [to Allāh] and He said, 'These are five [daily prayers commanded for you and your followers] that are equal to fifty, for my Word does not alter.'

I passed by Moses and he said, 'Return to your Lord.'

I said, 'Now I feel too embarrassed to ask my Lord.'

Then we went ahead until we came to *Sidrat al-Muntahā*,[213] which was covered in colors I cannot describe. Then I entered Paradise, where I found walls made of pearl and the soil was musk."[214]

A3: The second long narrative from *al-Bukharī*:

Samurah bin Jundab reported that whenever the Prophet [Muhammad] finished praying the [*Fajr*, or morning] prayer he would turn his face to us and say, "Who saw a dream (*rū'yā*) last night (*al-laylah*)? Who saw one should relay it, *mā shā' Allāh*."[215] One day he asked, "Did any one of us have a dream?"

We said, "No."

He said, "Last night I saw two men (*rajulaīn*)[216] who came and took me by the hands and took me to the Holy Land (*al-ārḍ al-muqaddasah*). There was a man sitting and a man standing, and in his hand was an iron hook (*kallūban man ḥadīdan*).[217] He put

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[213] Most Islamic literature written in or translated to English translates this to *lote tree of the utmost boundary*, but since it is a proper noun it has been transliterated only.
[214] *al-Bukharī* 349. See *al-Bukharī* 1636 and 3442.
[215] *Mā shā' Allāh*, lit. *what Allāh wished* or *what Allāh wills*, a common Arabic idiom.
[216] Arabic, like other Semitic languages, recognizes words in the singular, dual, and plural.
[217] Embedded in this sentence is a note that reads, "He [Muhammad] said, 'From the companions of Moses.'" It is unclear which man is being referred to, although it is likely that the reference is to the sitting

it into the [sitting man's] mouth until it reached the back and tore one side of his cheek. Then he did the same to the other side. When he did the second cheek the first had healed and he repeated the cycle. I said, 'What is this?' They [the two guides] said to go on and we proceeded until we came to a man lying on his back and another man standing over his head carrying a stone or rock and using it to crush the lying man's head. When he would strike with the stone, it would roll away. The man went to pick it up, and when he returned, this man's head had healed and he would strike him again. I said, 'What is this?' They [the two guides] said to go on. We went until we came to a hole like *al-tannūr*[218] with a narrow top and a wide bottom and a fire kindling beneath it. The fires rose until they [the people in the hole] almost came out through the top, and when the flames subsided the people went back down into it. The men and the women [in the fiery hole] were naked (*'urātun*). I said, 'What is this?' They said to go on and we went until we came to a river of blood (*nahrin min dam*). Standing in the center of the river was a man and another man on the bank with stones. When the man who was in the river wanted to get out the man [on the bank] threw a stone in his mouth and he would go back to where he was [at the center of the river]. I said, 'What is this?' They said to go on and we continued until we came to a green garden (*rawḍatin khaḍrā'*) and in it was a great tree (*shajarun 'aẓīmatun*), and near that was an old man (*shaīkh*) and children (*ṣibyānun*). Then close to the tree was a man with fire in front of him and he was kindling it. I entered a house, the like of which (or better) I have never seen. In it there were old and young men, women, and children. Then they had me climb the tree and enter another house that

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man. Because of the uncertainty of the interjection it has been omitted from the translation. It is not a detail that recurs later.

[218] *al-tannūr* is a special type of oven that is like a clay jar heated by putting kindling in the bottom.

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was better [than the first] and in it were old and young people. I said [to my two companions], 'You have had me traveling all night, tell me about the things I have seen.'

They said, 'Yes. The one whose cheek you have seen cleaved (*yushaq*) was a liar (*fakadhdhābun*) who told lies (*yuḥaddith bal-kadhbah*) that the people would report on his authority until they spread everywhere, now he will be punished like this until the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qīāmah*). And the one you saw being crushed is one who had been given knowledge of the Qur'an by Allāh [someone who had memorized the text and proper forms of recitation], but slept the whole night without acting [on his knowledge] during the day. Now he will be punished like this until the Day of Resurrection. Those you saw in the hole were adulterers (*al-zunāh*), and whom you saw in the river was an eater of usury (*ākilū al-ribā*). The old man at the tree was Abraham, peace be on him, and the children around him are the offspring of mankind (*al-nās*).[219] And him who was kindling the Fire was Mālik, gatekeeper of the Fire. And the first house you entered was the abode of common believers; the second house you entered was the abode of the martyrs (*al-shuhadā'*). I am Gabriel and this is Michael (*Mīkā'īl*). Raise your head (*fārfa' rā'sak*).'

I raised my head and above me was something like clouds (*al-saḥāb*). They said, 'That is your place (*manziluk*).'

I said, 'Allow me to enter my place.'

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[219] *al-Nās* lit. *people*. The wording here implies that all children are welcome in this level of Heaven. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Each child is born with *al-fiṭrah* (submitting to Allāh) and is made Jewish, Christian, or Magian [by the parents]." (*al-Bukharī* 1385).

They said, 'You have some life yet remaining to complete, when you complete it you can come to your place.'"[220]

A4: Third long narration from *al-Bukharī*:

Anas bin Mālik reported that Ṣa'ṣa'h said that Allāh's Prophet described his Night Journey (*Isrā*) to them, saying, "While I was lying in *al-Ḥaṭīm* (or perhaps said 'in *al-Ḥijr*')[221] someone came to me suddenly and split (*fashaq*) me open from here to here."

I [Anas bin Mālik, the narrator] asked al-Jārūd, "What does this mean?"

He said, "That he was opened from his throat (*naḥrih*) down to his pubic area (*shi'ratih*)."

[The Prophet Muhammad said,] "He took out my heart (*qalbī*) and then a golden tray full of belief was brought for my heart and guts to be washed and filled in before being returned to their place. Then a white animal, smaller than a mule (*dūn al-baghl*) and larger than a donkey (*fawq al-ḥimār*) was brought to me."

al-Jārūd asked, "Is this the *Burāq*,[222] O Abū Hamzah?"[223]

Anas replied, "Yes."

[The Prophet Muhammad said,] "The animal's step reached the maximum distance within his sight, and I was carried on it with Gabriel until we came to the nearest heaven. He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

He [The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

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[220] *al-Bukharī* 1386. Also see *al-Bukharī* 845, 7047.
[221] The narrator is in doubt as to which term was used. I have changed the interjection in the text into a parenthetical note to preserve the dialogue-based style of the original and avoid confusion about speakers.
[222] A type of mythical beast, often depicted with a human face in artwork, whose name translates to *lightning*.
[223] Abū Hamzah (father of Hamzah) is another name for the narrator, Anas bin Mālik (Anas, son of Mālik).

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

[The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What an glorious (*al-majī'*) visit this is!' The gate was opened and inside I found Adam.

He [Gabriel] said, 'This is your father Adam, give him your greetings (*fasallim 'alaīh*).'

So I greeted him and he said, 'Welcome, righteous son and righteous Prophet!'

Then we rose until we came to the second heaven (*al-samā' al-thānīah*).[224] He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

[The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

He [The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What a glorious visit this is!" The gate was opened and inside I found John (*Yaḥyā*) and Jesus, who were maternal cousins (*ābnā khālah*).

He [Gabriel] said, 'These are John and Jesus, give them your greetings.'

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[224] Literally, *the second sky*.

So I greeted them and they said, 'Welcome, righteous brother and righteous Prophet!'

Then we rose until we came to the third heaven (*al-samā' al-thālathah*). He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

[The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

He [The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What a glorious visit this is!' The gate was opened and inside I found Joseph (Yūsuf).

He [Gabriel] said, 'This is Joseph, give him your greetings.'

So I greeted him and he said, 'Welcome, righteous brother and righteous Prophet!'

Then we rose until we came to the fourth heaven (*al-samā' al-rābi'ah*). He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

[The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

He [The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What a glorious visit this is!' The gate was opened and inside I found Enoch.

He [Gabriel] said, 'This is Enoch, give him your greetings.'

So I greeted him and he said, 'Welcome, righteous brother and righteous Prophet!'

Then we rose until we came to the fifth heaven (*al-samā' al-khāmsah*). He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

[The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

He [The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What a glorious visit this is!' The gate was opened and inside I found Aaron (Hārūn).

He [Gabriel] said, 'This is Aaron, give him your greetings.'

So I greeted him and he said, 'Welcome, righteous brother and righteous Prophet!'

Then we rose until we came to the sixth heaven (*al-samā' al-sādisah*). He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

[The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

He [The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What a glorious visit this is!' The gate was opened and inside I found Moses.

He said, 'This is Moses, give him your greetings.'

So I greeted him and he said, 'Welcome, righteous brother and righteous Prophet!'

When I passed by him he wept (*bakī*), and I asked him, 'Why do you weep?'

He said, 'I weep because a young man (*ghulāmān*) has been sent after me, and his followers will enter Paradise in larger numbers than my followers.'

Then we rose until we came to the seventh heaven (*al-samā' al-sābi'ah*). He [Gabriel] asked for the gate to be opened.

[The gatekeeper said,] 'Who is it?'

He said, 'Gabriel.'

He said, 'And is anyone with you?'

He [Gabriel] said, 'Muhammad.'

He said, 'Has he been called?'

He said, 'Yes.'

He [The gatekeeper] said, 'Welcome! What a glorious visit this is!' The gate was opened and inside I found Abraham.

He [Gabriel] said, 'This is your father, Abraham. Give him your greetings.'

So I greeted him and he said, 'Welcome, righteous son and righteous Prophet!'

Then we ascended to *Sidrat al-Muntahī*, whose fruits were like the Jars of Hajar (*qilāl hajar*) and its leaves like the ears of the elephant (*ādhān al-fīlah*). He [Gabriel] said, 'This is *Sidrat al-Muntahī*.' There were four rivers, two hidden (*nahrān bāṭinān*) and two apparent (*nahrān ẓāhirān*).

I asked, 'What are these, O Gabriel?'[225]

He said, 'As for the two hidden rivers, they are in Paradise, and as for the apparent rivers, they are the Nile (*al-Nīl*) and the Euphrates (*al-furāt*).'

Then I was lifted up to the Sacred House (*al-Baīt al-Ma'mūr*). Then containers of wine (*khamr*), milk (*labn*), and honey ('*asal*) were brought and I took the milk.

He [Gabriel] said, 'This is *al-fiṭrah* that you and your followers are following.'[226]

Then the command to pray fifty daily prayers was given. When I returned I passed by Moses, who asked, 'What has been ordered?'

I said, 'I have been commanded to pray fifty daily prayers.'

He said, 'Surely your followers cannot handle fifty prayers daily. By Allāh, I have tried people before you and did my best with the Israelites (*Banī Isrā'īl*). Go back to your Lord and ask him for a reduction (*al-takhfīf*).'

So I went back and it was reduced to ten ('*ashrān*). I returned by Moses and he said the like [repeated the above]. So I went back and it was reduced by a further ten. I passed by Moses again and he said the like so I returned [to Allāh] and it was reduced to ten [daily prayers]. When I came back by Moses he repeated the like so I returned and it

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[225] The text reads, *mā hdhān yā Jibrīl?* Literally, *what are these two, O Gabriel?* In the text *these two* refers to the two types of rivers, visible and invisible. This is in the dual and not the plural form, which means he can only be referring to the types of rivers and not the rivers collectively (which number more than two).
[226] The word *al-fiṭrah* has no direct English equivalent, but means something similar to *natural* or *instinct*. Here it is being paired with Islamic monotheism through the metaphor of the milk.

was reduced to five daily prayers. When I passed by Moses he asked, 'What has been ordered?'

I said, 'I have been ordered to pray five prayers daily.'

He said, 'Surely, your followers cannot handle five prayers each day. I have tried people before you and did my best with the Israelites. Return to your Lord and ask for a reduction for your followers.'

I said, 'I have already asked much of my Lord and feel embarrassed [to ask more]. I am satisfied with his command.' As I left I heard a voice say, 'I have reduced the burden on my worshippers (*'abādī*).'"[227]

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[227] *al-Bukharī* 3887. See *al-Bukharī* 3207 and Imam Ahmad's *Musnad* 12096 and 12262. This narration has been graded *ṣaḥīḥ* by contemporary *ḥadīth* scholar Muhammad Nāṣr al-Albānī (1914-99) in his *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmiʾ*, also see al-Albānī's *al-Silsilah al-Ṣaḥīḥah* number 112 (Arabic editions).

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