

About Mohammed I: A Biopic

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I once dined with a Muslim who was visiting the United States from the Middle East. The topic of Mormons came up, and—understandably intrigued—he asked me to briefly explain the Church of Latter-Day Saints. I saw this as an opportunity to engage in a brief experiment, so opted to be strategically vague in my explanation:

“Well, you see...” I started. “Once, a while ago, there was this man—an American in upstate New York named Joseph—who claimed that, one day, the god of Abraham sent an angel to visit him. This celestial envoy conveyed to him—and ONLY him—an important memo. It was, according to this man’s testimony, the LAST REVELATION to all mankind. Effectively: It was the final up-date to Abrahamic scripture.”

(I left out the part about the golden plates written in Egyptian symbols; and magical decryption goggles.)

“This man,” I explained, “then proceeded to notify everyone of what happened. He eventually had all the things that the angel had told him written down, from memory, ostensibly verbatim. Mormons believe everything this man recounted; so they treat that transcript as the infallible word of the Creator of the Universe; conveyed by a divine emissary.” I concluded: “And that’s effectively what that institution is based upon.”

The response of the Muslim was comically ironic: “And people actually BELIEVE that?!” he harrumphed, shaking his head in bewilderment. He seemed not to recognize that I had just relayed to him the basis of HIS OWN religion. Indeed, I had just described—in sufficiently general terms—the origin of both the Latter-Day Saints and Islam. “Yes,” I replied. “And people like me honestly can’t understand how anyone could subscribe to a religion that is based on such a story.”

“I don’t either,” the Muslim said with a shrug.

Surely, if someone scoffed at the tale of Mohammed of Mecca (MoM), this same gentleman would have taken such a reaction as an intolerable affront: a rejection of something that was indubitably true. The Mormons? That’s bonkers. But we Muslims? The credence of the tale is incontrovertible. It is beyond dispute. So what’s going on here?

Dogmatism doesn’t like mirrors. It is only preposterous when OTHERS believe it. Absurdity is typically only apparent when it is not one’s own version of absurdity.

Perhaps if the angel in my recounting had been named Gabriel instead of Moroni, my interlocutor may have noticed the salient parallels. Apparently when it happens in 19th-century up-state New York, it’s bullshit; but if it happens in 7th-century Arabia, it MUST be true.

Staunch, vested interests tend to compromise our ability to assess things judiciously.

By replacing Hira in the Hijaz with a hill in Palmyra, New York (and changing the name of the angel), Joseph Smith made use of the “I’m the last prophet” routine. “The final revelation has been delivered to ME...and ONLY to me. So you are obliged to listen to everything I say. Only I am privy to the latest

update to the sacred scriptures.”

This is a time-honored sales-pitch; and has been used by demagogues since time immemorial. Notably, Mani of Ctesiphon had used it in the 3rd century, inaugurating the Manichaeism Faith. In the 19th century, Joseph Smith wasn't alone. Baha'ullah did it, inaugurating the Baha'i Faith. And Hong Huo-xiu (a.k.a. "Hong Xiu-quan") did it, inaugurating the Tai-ping Heavenly Kingdom. The list of those who use the "revelations in isolation" leitmotif is quite long. (I enumerate the most notable examples throughout history in my essay on "The History Of Exalted Figures".)

Homo sapiens are story-telling creatures. So we are all—every one of us—suckers for a good story. (Alex Rosenberg explores the neuroscience behind this in his "How History Gets Things Wrong".) Not only are we suckers for a good story; once we decide that we really, really, really like a certain narrative (one that captivates us; one that we find compelling), we tend to become hostile toward anyone who threatens to muddle it with unsolicited annotation / critique. Acrimony is generated even if interlocutors are merely attempting to shed light on important facts (by, say, offering disclaimers or proposing caveats). Such meddling spoils the desired "effect".

This isn't just about ruining the mood; it is about threatening the structural integrity of a sanctified dogmatic edifice.

Such proclivities invariably sabotage worthwhile assessments. So, when it comes to any critical inquiry, the key is impartiality; which entails something that is actually quite rare: having no vested interest AT ALL in any given verdict. If one wants Old Testament Biblical scholarship, don't look to Haredim / Hassidim. And if one wants New Testament Biblical scholarship, don't look to a Christian fundamentalist. Likewise, if one is seeking out a Koranic scholar, don't look to an Islamic fundamentalist. This is for the same reason that if one wanted an objective assessment of Dianetics, one wouldn't look to a Scientologist. Indeed, one would look to almost ANYONE BUT a Scientologist. The logic holds across ALL religions.

Such prudence should be a matter of common sense. Alas, such intuitions are uncommon when it comes to religious studies—a domain wherein many academics feel obliged to walk on egg-shells and demure; while those with the most strident voices are contending with conflicts of interest, and inevitably find themselves pariahs. In academia, upsetting sacred apple-carts is a big no-no.

Yet the fact remains: For those who subscribe to the dogmatic system in question, what we end up with is religious apologetics propounded under the aegis of scholarship. Theology is, if nothing else, a litany of elaborate—often pedantic—rationalizations for a designated set of dogmas, propounded with intellectual pretenses.

While religionists are ideal sources when gathering information about how their religion operates "on the ground"; they are the WORST sources when one is seeking a candid appraisal of the dogmas in question. For, invariably, they will only offer rationalizations for certain (foregone) conclusions. They are subjects to be studied (as though by anthropologists doing field work), not the ultimate source for assaying their own dogmas. One does not depend on a neurotic to diagnosis his own neurosis; or on a delusive person to assess the credence of his own delusions. The logic here applies irrespective of the attendant neurosis / delusion.

So how shall we approach the oodles of sanctified folklore surrounding the Seal of the Abrahamic prophets in Islamic historiography? First, we must bear in mind that official "sahih" accounts of MoM are the result of a long chain of oral transmission (an "isnad"). At each juncture, the material was subjected to

considerable embroidery; as—along with way—each amanuensis was obliged to revamp things to suit his own interests, and to accord with his own biases. Of course, such alterations are not announced WITHIN the altered text. According to any favored version, the “isnad” on which it was based is invariably going to be announced as incontrovertible (“mutawatir”).

Embellishment has a narrative ratcheting effect: after being thoroughly instantiated, it cannot be easily rescinded. This is how gossip works: Once an enticing bit of farce catches on, it’s as if it had always been there. People lose track of its ACTUAL origins; as the end-product does not announce its own genealogy. And the determining factor for how avidly an account will be promulgated is resonance, not credence.

As I think of the aforementioned Muslim gentleman, I realize how facile it is for people to recognize whenever OTHERS have succumbed to such psychical errancies, yet how onerous it can be to recognize when we’re doing it ourselves. The aforementioned Muslim is, of course, an extreme case; as he seemed completely oblivious to obvious parallels. He quickly noticed the specious nature of the Mohammedan leitmotif when it was given a different branding; yet his analogical thinking completely failed him the moment he applied the same standards to his own dogmatic indulgences.

When it comes to homo sapiens, we’re working with mental machinery that is eager to see significance—and patterns—where none actually exists. And so it goes: A pithy anecdote is transformed into an interlude with cosmic significance; thereby making the narrative all the more sensational (read: captivating). Quirky episodes are rendered monumental events—that is: irrefutable signs that Providence is at work. Nifty coincidences are seen as examples of divine ordinance. The most quotidian occurrences are treated as Earth-shattering developments. All this is taken as validation of foregone conclusions.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Mohammedan lore is comically overwrought. It caught on BECAUSE it is fantastical, not in spite of it. (Hence the epidemiology of juicy gossip.) Bullshit is always more compelling when it is SPECTACULAR bullshit. The bullshit that is easiest to dismiss is the more banal kind. (For more on this point, see Scott Atran’s “In Gods We Trust”.)

Titillating emendations come naturally, as they flower in minds hankering to find meaning. Consequently, the dogmatically-inclined are prone to embracing in a slew of self-serving misapprehensions. (Once the commitment to believe is made, it is very difficult to un-do.) Apocryphal tales soon go from fanciful yarns to bona fide history (to wit: historiographies that serve an ideological purpose). Flights of fancy come to be treated as sacrosanct truths—which mustn’t ever be questioned, as they are the foundation of a house of cards. The narrative calcification is virtually irreversible. Consequently, ingratiating farce is eventually presented as incontrovertible fact. This is not only how origin myths propagate (etiologies that provide ballast for an ideological agenda); it’s how urban legends propagate to the present day—be they about miracle-workers or UFOs.

Creating the widespread (though inaccurate) IMPRESSION that many lend credence to the claim-in-question ITSELF persuades many to lend credence to that claim. (For the same reason, it is possible for people to become famous for branding themselves AS famous. That’s why celebrity—which is based entirely on perception—feeds off of itself. Nothing succeeds like the stigma of success. Hence the famous-for-being-famous phenomenon.)

So we hear from True Believers within Christendom that a Palestinian Jew from Galilee was the incarnation of the Abrahamic Deity, and effected vicarious atonement via the Passion...and all sorts of other enthralling bunkum (see my essay on “America’s National Origin Myth”). They eagerly endorse confabulation because it plays a crucial role in abetting a certain worldview. And once we have subscribed to a sanctified dogmatic system, we are inclined to think that what we think we already know is enough; no

need to inquire further. For PART OF the dogmatic system is that contention that the dogmatic system is adequate. Why expose oneself to unsettling truths? Why upset the apple-cart?

We encounter the same rigamarole when it comes to the folklore surrounding Mohammed of Mecca (MoM). Recall the apocryphal tale of Omar when we conquered Egypt, and razed the great library of Alexandria to the ground. When his soldiers asked what they should do about the library, he stated that if the books are in accord with the Koran, then they are not needed and can be burned. On the other hand, if they contradict the Koran, they are sacrilegious and so must be burned. And so it went.

Fast-forward a thousand years. Voltaire was known for repudiating the rampant dogmatism of his era; and upsetting plenty of sacred apple-carts. In a letter to Frederick II of Prussia, the French philosopher marveled at several bewildering facts about this Saracen demagogue:

- “That a camel merchant should stir up insurrection in his village.”
- “That—in league with some miserable followers—he persuaded them that he spoke with the angel, Gabriel.”
- “That he boasted of having been carried to heaven [on a flying horse], where he received—in installments—this unintelligible book, each page of which makes common sense shudder.”
- “That to pay homage to this book, he delivered his countrymen to iron and flame.”
- “That he cut the throats of fathers and kidnapped daughters [to put into sex slavery].”
- “That he gave to the defeated the choice of [submission to] his religion or death.”

Voltaire concluded: “This is assuredly nothing any man can excuse, at least if he was not born a Mohammedan; or if superstition has not extinguished all natural light within him.” His incredulity when it came to Mohammedan lore was loud and clear.

I submit that Voltaire’s assessment is not overly harsh. Voltaire’s brute candor was not born of bigotry; it was impelled by his (warranted) suspicion of archaic dogmas (whether Judaic, Roman Catholic, or Islamic), and his antipathy toward reactionary thinking in all its forms.

What’s going on here? Our most cherished lore tends to reflect a hankering for some kind of heroic figure—a protagonist that instills wonder. We crave someone who inspires us, who helps us make sense of the world, who enables us to deal with life’s daunting challenges. Mohammed of Mecca (MoM) has traditionally served that role for Muslims—which makes who the HISTORICAL MoM was a rather moot point. This is a familiar routine—as similar things have been done with a myriad of other (glorified) historical figures. For commentary on this topic, notable is the work done by Joseph Campbell, especially “The Hero With A Thousand Faces”.

One of the first thinkers to recognize the human penchant for confabulating fantastical histories—then proceeding AS IF they were literal histories—was the Sicilian (Greek) philosopher, Euhemerus of Messene (late 4th / early 3rd century B.C.) Euhemerus was intrigued by the emergence of strategically-crafted myths that were treated as non-fiction by certain communities. He noted that myth is “natural history plus human history, disguised by time and distorted by form.”

Euhemerus’ crucial insight was that myriad (mythological) tales can come to be based on (actual) historical figures / events—and that any given account tends to become embellished / modified over time, as the incentive to do so arises. This phenomenon was demonstrated by such famed chroniclers as Xenophanes of Colophon and Herodotus of Halicarnassus / Caria.* Predictably, this “Euhemerusian” effect is exacerbated whenever staunch vested interests are involved. Euhemerus’ key point is that ALL myth somehow reflects historical events in some way. The key, then, is transitioning from the world of facts into

what Joseph Campbell called “the realm of dream and vision”. The “catch” is that, upon making such a transition, people sometimes forget that there WAS A TRANSITION.

The timing here was apropos, as Alexander the Great had just recently conquered half the known world, and there was (most likely) already a plethora of apocrypha circulating about HIM by the time Euhemerus wrote. Presumably, the great Sicilian philosopher noticed this.

The stories that we tell ourselves—especially about things that concern ourselves—generally reflect what we want to have been the case far more than what really was the case. This is especially so when what really was the case does not serve our purposes. Elision is just as much a part of romanticization as embellishment. (Inconvenient facts typically become OBFUSCATED facts; longed-for facts typically become INCONTROVERTIBLE facts.) This tendency is amplified when it comes to sacred histories about our tribal identity.

Here, we’ll look at Mohammed of Mecca. To those who protest that the following account of MoM’s life is uncharitable, the only response is: So what? History is about accuracy, not charity. For those who claim this biopic is insufficiently sympathetic, it might be noted that coerced sympathy—as with drummed-up antipathy—is the hallmark of partiality.

I aim for impartiality at all costs—even if it means refraining from the narrative emoluments with which legend is often bedecked. Though delectable, artificially flavored hogwash is still hogwash.

De-romanticizing a hyper-romanticized hagiography will appear to some (those most smitten with conventional Mohammedan folklore) to be a project of disparagement rather than what it really is: bringing the account back into alignment with historical reality. Setting the record straight is rarely well-received by those with a vested interest in the favored account. {1} Nobody enjoys their claims of Providence being exposed as nothing but smoke and mirrors.

The present endeavor is to show what MoM looks like outside the echo-chamber of Mohammedan apologetics. The end here is not diplomacy; it is historical fidelity. The Truth, we should remind ourselves, is hardly ever diplomatic. How ingratiating an account happens to be is a poor measure of credence.

We should keep in mind that the point of being frank is no more to ruffle feathers than to avoid ruffling feathers. (Antagonizing others is never a good idea; yet creating discomfiture should never dissuade someone from telling it like it is.) Touting consoling fables for the sake of placating an audience is intellectually dishonest; and morally irresponsible. Muslims are adults; so it is demeaning to treat them as splenetic adolescents incapable of handling straight-talk.

For generations after MoM’s alleged death, there is NOTHING in the historical record that mentions a particular prophet named “Mohammed”...or a book entitled the “Qur’an”...or even a religion called “Islam”. (For more on this, see my essays “Mecca And Its Cube” and “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.)

From his inauspicious beginnings as an orphan near Mecca to his ignominious death at the hands of a disgruntled Jewess in Khaybar, there is almost nothing SPECIFIC that can be said with certainty...other than the fact that, like so many other folkloric figures from Jesus of Nazareth to Mani of Ctesiphon, the historical person on which THIS folkloric figure came to be based ended up having a profound impact on world history. {2}

The first occurrence of any mention of MoM was in an Armenian document (penned by a historian named Sebeos) c. 660. The missive obliquely mentioned a “Mu-H-M-D” (as “Mahmet”) in passing—a general

Semitic term for a “person who is praised”. It referenced a panjandrum who was the leader of a band of Saracens (the sons of Hagar). More specifically, it referred to a man who urged his fellow Arabs to recognize the Abrahamic deity. It mentions that this figure—whoever he might have been—was familiar with Mosaic law. That’s it. The comment occurred almost three decades after the death of MoM.

A couple other oblique references to a “Mu-H-M-D” exist in Syriac sources. They pertain to Mohammedan raids—where the antagonists are variously referred to as Arabians (based on their place of origin), Saracens, sons of Hagar, and Ishmaelites (based on their Abrahamic lineage). Later, they referred to themselves as “Mu-hajirun” [“emigres”].

The “Didaskalia Iakobou” [Teaching / Doctrine of Jacob] is a piece of anti-Semitic agit-prop supposedly composed between 635 and 640, which dismissively refers to Arab interlopers.

The next reference occurs on coinage issued during the Umayyad caliphate. The coins were likely made pursuant to the dispute (over succession) between the Qays faction (who supported Ibn al-Zubayr as caliph) and the Quda’a faction (who supported Marwan as caliph) when Abd al-Malik (Marwan’s son) was eventually anointed caliph. The inscription was written in Kufic (an offshoot of Syriac that was the precursor to Classical Arabic). This was over a half-century after MoM’s death; and was around the same time the inscription was made on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see my essay: “The Syriac Basis For Koranic Text”.)

In these two cases, there was nothing much said ABOUT this “Mu-H-M-D” (praised one); only that there was a person of prominence referred to in this way. (For an in-depth discussion of this point, see Appendix 3 of my essay: “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.)

Subsequently (generations after the fact), certain story-tellers “took it and ran with it”. So goes the treatment with folkloric figures ANYWHERE in the world at ANY time in human history.

What might have been the incentive for the development of the tall tales surrounding MoM qua “Seal of the Prophets”? It is quite possible that the Mohammedan movement began as an Arab re-branding of Abrahamic lore—in a gambit to confer a legacy created BY Arabs FOR Arabs. After all, when it came to the extant Judeo-Christian tradition, the Arab world may have felt—as it were—left out.

“Why do THEY get all the prophets? We want a prophet too!” Hebrews had prophets; Roman Catholics (Western Romans) had prophets; the Byzantines (Eastern Romans) had prophets; even those pesky Sassanids (the Persians) had prophets! (ALL of it monotheistic.) It seemed only fair that the Arabs should get in on the action, and have one—at least ONE—for themselves. So it was only a matter of time before the Arab world would designate a prophet of their own. During the last decade of the 7th century, Caliph Malik delivered. He championed an Abrahamic prophet with a proudly Ishmaelite pedigree, thereby bringing Arabs into the divine fold.

Bear in mind that the seed for this idea had already been planted by the Hebrews (in the Torah). The conventional Abrahamic lineage proceeded from Abraham via Sarah through their son, Isaac. But what about via Abraham’s (heartlessly banished) Gentile lover, Hagar—through their son, Ishmael? This was a loose end that was waiting to be tied. And one can’t blame anyone for wanting to tie it. Indeed, it is difficult for any decent person to hear the tragic Judaic tale and not feel sympathy for Hagar and Ishmael, whose “crime” was not being pure-bread Hebrew. They were mutts, and so were banished for it. (Sound familiar?)

Consequently, the authors of the Koran simply swapped sacrificial sons—thereby rendering Ishmael rather

than Isaac the pivotal character in the story about god's test of Abraham's unconditional Faith (37:101-112). Presto! The anointed lineage is instantly rendered Arab instead of Hebrew. Sweet restitution for Hagar's tears!

Granted, Saul of Tarsus sought to bring Gentiles into the fold; but what he did NOT do was make any Gentiles (let alone non-Westerners) full-fledged prophets. Ergo the notion of a latent Ishmaelite lineage was pregnant with possibility.

In this sense, a charismatic Qurayshi merchant was just what the doctor ordered. And the region was primed for a revivalist Abrahamic movement. The "sirah" (hagiographical) tradition did not begin until the "Book of Expeditions" by Persian writer, Ma'mar ibn Rashid of Basra in the 8th century. (He is said to have been a protégé of the fabled commentator, Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Hasan Yasar of Basra.)

We then come to Ibn Ishaq, who's account is based on (now lost) antecedent material (see my essay, "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Verse"). One of Ibn Ishaq's purported sources were the fabled "tabi", Urwah ibn al-Zubair al-Awwam (brother of the famed "qurra", Abdullah ibn Zubair; and nephew of Aisha), who's material is only known via Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, who worked for Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik out of Damascus—then Rusafa—in Syria.

Fabrication or not, most Muslims today are apt to lend credence to a garishly stylized, ostentatious product of historicity (read: a fictional character that may have been based on an actual historical figure). This would have resonated for the sole reason that such a caricature comports with preconceived notions of divine election. Insofar as they had a dogmatic bent, amanuenses' vetting process was based almost entirely on appealability, not on credibility.

It seems that—in ancient times—members of each "race" wanted to believe that the Creator of the Universe chose THEM to be special. Per this protocol, it doesn't matter if a source is not ACTUALLY veritable; so long as it is telling you what you want to hear, it will be deemed "authentic" and thereby accorded unimpeachable credence. Ergo the success of well-funded mountebanks TODAY like say, Martin Lings (as well as the gaggle of academic frauds like Karen Armstrong and David Levering Lewis; not to mention the legions of charlatans polemicizing on the internet like Nouman Ali Khan and Zakir Naik).

Martin Lings fancied himself a "scholar" and—until his death in 2005—was considered the go-to-guy by tens of millions of Occidental Muslims whenever the topic of "the Prophet" came up. He indulged in highly dubious historiography to the glee of his target audience, who eagerly ate up every word he dished. Lings spent his career telling credulous listeners exactly what they wanted to hear, and they thanked him for his validation by giving him validation in return. (Tellingly, Lings is not held in such high esteem by died-in-the-wool Salafis / Wahhabis. For he over-compensated in his caricature, portraying MoM as a little bit TOO peaceable.) For an example of Lings' unscrupulous commentary, see Appendix 2.

Hence the quagmire of misinformation through which most of us are forced to wade (should we undertake the task of trying to figure out who MoM REALLY may have been).

In considering sources, the first step in the vetting process must be disqualification due to (glaring) conflicts of interest. Bear in mind that ideology-racketeers are generally at the forefront of rigged historiographies. The explanation for the flagrant biases of such inveiglers can often be found by simply following the money. To wit: They say what they are PAID to say. As Upton Sinclair once put it: We cannot expect someone to understand something when his salary depends on him not understanding it.

Case in point: John Esposito of Georgetown University's Islamic Studies department. As eminence grise

of Islamic apologia, Esposito's paymasters hail from the House of Saud. Suffice to say, once a man makes his money from Wahhabi monarchs, all bets are off. Such a person has forfeited his right to be taken seriously. One may as well deign to learn about the history of Christianity from the faculty at Liberty University.

And so it goes: We must constantly contend with outlandish claims that MoM was somehow a man who was forbearing and wise (contentions that are based on no evidence whatsoever). Consequently, we have entered the theater of the absurd...and words lose all meaning. So it is imperative that we are judicious in how accounts in the historical record are weighed.

When it comes to narrative boondoggles, one of the most risible cases is Karen Armstrong, who is one of the more flagrantly unscrupulous commentators; and does not hesitate to congratulate herself for playing this role. Bafflingly, she has called MoM a "spiritual genius", yet has never stipulated a single thing MoM did / said that would qualify him as anything even remotely resembling "spiritual"...or, for that matter, anything within lightyears of erudite. (This is for the simple reason that such a thing could not be stipulated...by anyone. For no such thing exists in the historical record. "He prayed a lot" doesn't cut it.) Such claims disregard the fact that MoM is not supposed to have been coming up with original ideas (figuring things out on his own); as he was always merely relaying information he was being given by the Creator Of The Universe...via revelation.

Alas. This did not prevent Imam Abdallah Sirjuddin al-Husayni from publishing "Our Master, Muhammad" subtitled, "His Sublime Character & Exalted Attributes". (One wonders if the author understood what the word "sublime" means.) The insufferable Armstrong revels in such maudlin hokum. Of course, people like this are not interested in elucidating Truth; they are in the business of procuring emotionally satisfying "truths" (that is: manufacturing, marketing, then selling a product). Supply meets demand.

People don't mind being bamboozled if they find it validating—or otherwise gratifying.

For a truly astounding case of white-washed hagiography, consider Haroon Moghul of Columbia University's ISPU. Haroon's method is to deny, deny, deny; then just make stuff up as the occasion warrants. He claims cache because he is HIMSELF Muslim—a bizarre basis for credibility if there ever was one.

Once, when asked if non-Muslims could ever procure an understanding of the true origins of Islam, Seyyed Hossain Nasr (professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University) replied with a decisive, "No."

Reasonable people should find such a position jaw-dropping (especially when coming from a faculty member at respected American university). Suffice to say, pompous hyper-dogmatists like Nasr are not only UN-qualified to be a professor; due to their flagrant prejudices, they must be DIS-qualified from ever teaching anything having to do with Islam (at least, in any serious academic institution).

According to Nasr's contorted logic, vested interests make one MORE impartial, and thus MORE qualified, not less. Thus conflicts of interest IN FAVOR OF X make one uniquely positioned to expound upon X. For him, it's as if objectivity were based on augmented bias (in a favorable direction). Per this logic, Revisionist Zionists are best qualified to comment on the history of "Israel" (as opposed to being DIS-qualified from doing so). Presumably, Nasr would consult hard-line Scientologists should he deign to learn about L. Ron Hubbard. {61}

Conflicts of interest should disqualify ANYONE from being taken seriously on a matter—irrespective of the

ideology being peddled. And so we should not take, say, Henry Kissinger (or anyone who has the least bit of respect for him) seriously on matters of U.S. foreign policy.

It seems Nasr is afflicted with the upside-down conception of impartiality typical of most religious apologia. The “insider view” is, indeed, extremely useful; but it is only useful insofar as it provides data ABOUT the phenomenon-in-question. It serves no purpose in critically analyzing said data. The “view from within” is invariably self-validating. A dogmatic system seems eminently credible when apprehended from within. Indeed, such felicitous self-appraisal is what it MEANS TO BE within a dogmatic system. A Muslim’s comments about MoM and the Koran and the history of Islam are valuable as MATERIAL TO STUDY; but he can’t get outside of himself to study it. {62}

Nasr confuses data that PERTAINS TO a religion (something he and his fellow apparatchiks can supply in ample amounts) with the EVALUATION OF that data (something even a thousand years of testifying cannot begin to do). Those who design to assess the credence of something they themselves have already staked their claim are engaging in a self-serving enterprise; and must be seen as such. {63}

Generally-speaking: A religionist is valuable as a source of information about his religion (including the perceptions of its sacred texts, its hallowed figures, its legacy, etc.); yet the religionist is in no position to proffer an objective evaluation OF that information. For a religion is driven entirely by perception. True Believers are incapable of impartiality; as their testimonial is nothing more than a report of that impressions that undergird their ideological commitments: “This is why I happen to believe what I believe.”

No one doubts that one cannot procure a full comprehension of a religion without seeing how it works from the inside. It is, after all, what confessors BELIEVE that makes a religion what it is. This furnishes inquirers with a POINT OF DEPARTURE, not with a conclusion.

Testimonials from a supplicant do not themselves explain what makes the supplicant tick. At best, they indicate how things seem to be from his point of view...which, in turn, helps the rest of us figure out what REALLY DOES make him tick.

People who belong to the religion in question are the primary people we should consult in the information-gathering stage, as anthropologists would do field work. Thus they are the SUBJECT OF analysis, NOT the analyst. They are, then, THE BEST people to convey what the beliefs ARE; and—by the same token—they are THE WORST people to consult regarding an EVALUATION of those beliefs. A critical analysis that is anything but impartial is not critical analysis; it is apologetics. In other words, it turns into a rationalization for the very things under scrutiny.

True Believers are constitutionally incapable of providing an assessment of their own creed; but their accounts—magnificently accurate in their own eyes—elucidate the effect the creed has on them. That effect tells us much of what we’d want to know about the creed and those who are beholden to it. For it shows us how the dogmatic system works—something that can’t possibly be explained by the dogmatists themselves.

And so it goes: The likes of Nasr can—and, indeed, DO—tell us volumes about what Muslims believe about Islam; yet are the least qualified to subject those beliefs to a frank critical analysis. Indeed, one of the most basic principles of critical inquiry is impartiality. It is no secret that when one is too close to something, it is very difficult to see it for what it is (that is: see it independently of how one is personally inclined to see it). Consequently, when vetting jurors, we are careful to control for maximal impartiality. This is done by DIS-qualifying anyone with conflicts of interest. Were Nasr to be selecting a jury, it seems that he would ONLY select people with a conflict of interest (i.e. whatever predisposes someone to deliver the verdict he wants). Gadzooks!

Note that when even the most highly-esteemed judge must consider presiding over a case, he is expected to recuse himself if there EVEN SEEMS TO BE any conflict of interest afoot. Nasr has both a personal and professional stake in the verdicts of certain questions; and so doesn't want anyone meddling who does not have the same vested interests that HE has. He is not merely biased, he is flagrantly and unabashedly biased. Absurdly, he insists on anyone being disqualified who does not share his biases.

To be clear, most Muslim academics are not as dismayingly obtuse as Nasr. Indeed, it is Nasr himself—not his Faith—that disqualifies him from ever being taken seriously. Such is the nature of religious apologetics. Nasr illustrates how apologia is the antithesis of scholarship. His daffy proclamation should make scholars in ANY field recoil.

Alas, Nasr's obnoxious view on the matter is shared by many prominent political leaders throughout the Muslim world. For example, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina once announced that those who are secular "have no right to write or speak against any religion." These are the words of a religious fanatic; and are extremely dangerous. Imagine a world where those MOST qualified to study religion are prohibited from saying anything about religion. (We might assume that Thomas Paine is not on Hasina's nightstand.) Presumably, Hasina means that one must subscribe to SOME brand of cult activity in order to comment on ANY brand of cult activity. Such brazen fatuity is enough to make one wince. As a zealous member of a religion, one's mind is—by definition—already made up.

This harebrained approach to disquisition entails sanctions about who is even permitted to discuss the matter. Shall we suppose that only Jehovahs Witnesses should be allowed to talk about the Watchtower Society...and only Haredim about Judaism...and only witches about Wicca? In such a world, nobody would ever learn anything. For once un-sanctioned perspectives are out of bounds, we wind up living in a world of echo-chambers. {61}

In sum: Testimonies of the True Believer can only ever give us the outlines of the belief in question; they contribute nothing to an AUDIT OF those beliefs. Investment in X precludes one from being able to assess X objectively. It should go without saying that insights about indoctrination (of any kind) could never possibly be proffered by the indoctrinated. What the indoctrinated CAN provide, though, is their own testimony, which itself DESCRIBES the effects of (their own) indoctrination. The rest is for impartial observers to sort out. {62}

I explore the role of delusive thinking in ideological commitment (spec. how hidebound ideologues engage in self-deception) in Appendix 3.

Before the recounting of fantastical tales about MoM, one should always assume the prelude, "As legend has it..." The moment a PIA begins an anecdote with, "One time, the prophet..." we know that we are about to be treated to another apocryphal tale.

One time, we are told, MoM cut the fabric around a slumbering feline before removing the garment on which it lay (so as to not interrupt its nap). One must wonder: Would ruining a garment so as not to awaken a cat be a mark of grace or of idiocy? When we hear such silly tales, we can be certain of one thing: hagiographers are grasping at straws. (We might call this the "He may have done all those malicious things; but at least he doesn't disturb sleeping kitties!" defense.)

For the MoM fetishist, such pithy tales are incontrovertible evidence for MoM's munificence.

The apologetical rigamarole goes on and on. One time, we're told, there was a dispute between a Jew and a Muslim in which the Jew was clearly in the right. So, the story goes, MoM found in favor of the Jew.

Gosh-golly. What, pray tell, is the conclusion to be drawn from this episode? For most of us, the tale is rather inane. But Mohammedan hagiographers opine: “You see there! Was the prophet not the quintessence of fair-minded-ness?” (We might call this the “He wasn’t ALWAYS unjust to non-Muslims” defense. Heck, one time he even found in favor of a wronged Jew!)

Thus: In spite of his slaughter of entire Jewish tribes FOR BEING JEWISH, we hear: “You see! He wasn’t anti-Semitic after all!”

That MoM fetishists resort to such pabulum to rationalize their hyper-romanticized caricature reveals all we need to know about what’s really going on. (Such apologues are of the “George Washington cut down a cherry tree” variety. We’d all love to believe Washington never lied, so this tale fits in splendidly with the varnished American mythology.)

And so it goes with Mohammedan lore. There is a gargantuan buffet of these apocryphal tales, each one of which is brought up any time a MoM-fetishist deigns to uphold the uber-burnished image of his hero in response to any portrayal he finds unpalatable. (We might call this the “But one time he helped an old lady across the street!” defense.) Once tales of small gestures (quotidian acts of kindness) are deemed irrefutable proof that MoM was the greatest person who has ever lived, we’ve gone down the rabbit hole. Yet such grasping at straws is all that MoM-fetishists have recourse to.

An example of MoM’s pedestrian “wisdom” being blown way out of proportion: Prior to his ministry, the leaders of four Meccan tribes were quibbling over who would get to carry the black stone back to the Kaaba (after it had been removed during the shrine’s renovations). As the story goes, MoM suggested that the rock be placed on a cloth so that the four leaders could transport it in unison, by each holding a corner of the fabric. Thus, they could ALL carry it. This purported stroke of genius is upheld as a testament to, well, MoM’s unfathomable genius. What it ACTUALLY does is illustrate the degree to which Mohammedan apologia is just grasping at straws. (According to this standard, the average kindergarten teacher could qualify as a prophet of god...almost any day of the week. “Remember, kids: SHARE.” Brilliant.) When this nifty idea is treated as incontrovertible proof of unassailable brilliance, all perspective has been abandoned.

Alas, there is an endless supply of such saccharine anecdotes, as one is invited to scavenge the THOUSANDS of pages of Hadith to extract whatever passage strikes one’s fancy...all in a desperate attempt to document the rectitudinous nature of the designated folkloric hero. Embarrassingly, only a trivial amount of useful material has been culled from the volumes upon volumes of Hadith available.

And so it goes: After all the gem-mining expeditions, even well-meaning Islamic apologists have surprisingly little to show for it. If one takes away the catalogue of pithy apocrypha to which MoM fetishists routinely resort, they have almost nothing left to say. Deprived of flattering anecdotes excavated from ahadith, their mining project becomes fruitless. Facts, it turns out, are their biggest enemy. Why bother with Reality when one is determined to assert anything MoM is said to have said / done as terrifically astute BECAUSE MoM is said to have said / done it? Don’t like the historical record? No problem; simply ignore it and concoct enticing apologues as the occasion warrants.

When it comes to many Muslims’ treatment of MoM, there is a tendency to add prodigious amounts of artificial sweetener to a roiling cauldron of odious deeds. This is done for obvious reasons. The bedazzling smorgasbord of laudatory apocrypha is an attempt to reconcile Muslims’ devotion to “The Seal of the Prophets” (an idea) with the person of MoM (a historical figure). Alas, even a thousand saccharine anecdotes can’t make up for the slew of historical events that undermine the most vociferous attempts to glorify their hero.

But this doesn't prevent votaries from trying.

Such hagiographic shenanigans isn't just a matter of confabulation; it is a matter of full-blown Reality-inversion (sometimes deliberate; oftentimes unwitting). Most MoM fetishists mean well. Thus, it is more pusillanimity than mendacity that accounts for the persistence of such outlandish illusions. For supplicants and non-supplicants alike, this is often a matter of obligatory genuflection. So the charade persists—unabated by critical scrutiny. This is enabled by mental laziness and good, ol' fashion unscrupulousness—amounting to what is essentially hyper-recension. Again, much of it is unwitting. The 9th-century writer Ibn Qutayba quoted one of MoM's companions (Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman) as acknowledging: “We are Arabians. When we report, we predate and postdate, we add and we subtract at will; but we do not mean to lie.”

Professional academics who have a stake in this or that conclusion must recuse themselves from the discussion. (That means you too, Seyyed Hossain Nasr.) For impartiality is imperative on such matters; a condition that vested interests vitiate. Genuine impartiality is difficult to emulate; but it is something we must all make a concerted effort to do. (I do not pretend that perfect objectivity is possible for ANYONE; but it doesn't follow that we can't try to be as objective as possible.)

As we'll see forthwith, the beneficent Bedouin luminary with which so many Islamic apologists are enamored is pleasant to contemplate; but he is a fabrication that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the historical figure that is MoM. Granted, there is something noble in extolling a thoughtful, kind-hearted person...even if that person is a figment of the imagination. The danger comes when one ceases to recognize that one is dealing with a fiction when one is, indeed, dealing with a fiction. The infatuation of the genteel Hijazi prophet of Mohammedan lore is all fine and dandy...so long as it doesn't preclude us from recognizing its misalignment with actual history.

As we'll also see, like any other cockalorum, while neurotic, MoM was extremely shrewd. That is: he was able to more-than-compensate for his abiding paranoia with formidable canniness. Yet, ultimately, he was too deluded and self-absorbed to realize that hiring a woman who's kin he'd slaughtered to serve him food may not be a very good idea.

Indeed, there is a proliferation of candy-coated material oriented around Islam's exalted “prophet” (and thus the origins of Islam itself). It's the equivalent of Marzipan.

It is for this reason that MoM is one of the most mis-understood figures in human history—both by his most ardent acolytes AND by his detractors. For BOTH those hell-bent on glorifying AND demonizing MoM end up clinging to an *idée fixe* (bronzed and gilded) so as to maintain whatever caricature sustains their conceit.

And so rampant mis-characterization can be attributed either to sycophancy OR to bigotry. In either case, romanticization or slander, the resulting caricature can't help but be born of SOME kind of conflict of interest. Rarely are disinterested accounts of MoM proffered by anyone with vested interests; for rarely do those without ulterior motives have much incentive to pursue the matter in a scientific manner (follow the evidence, WHEREVER it might lead). Etiological myths therefore proliferate with impunity to this day...even when we should know better.

From the more casuistic expositors like Martin Lings, John Esposito, Barnaby Rogerson, Timothy Winter (a.k.a. “Abdal Hakim Murad”), Mark Hansen (a.k.a. “Hamza Yusuf”), Ahmed Deedat, Reza Aslan, and Tariq Ramadan...to charlatans like Deepak Chopra, Karen Armstrong, and Leslie Hazelton, white-washing

MoM (the man, as well as his life and teachings) has become a lucrative vocation.

The world in which we find ourselves seems to be a riddle in need of unraveling; and the life we find ourselves living seems to be a mystery waiting to be solved. An imagined past helps us make sense of who we are and what we do...in a way that serves our purposes (and comports with our sensibilities). In this sense, heritage is self-validating. To wit: One's heritage INSISTS that one's heritage is legitimate. By contrast, the ACTUAL past helps explain what we've become and what is STILL POSSIBLE.

Reality does not care about legacy. By contrast, those afflicted with collective narcissism ONLY care about legacy; hence the tendency to eschew Reality in favor of strategically-crafted historiography.

In the process of white-washing one's subject, one only ends up vandalizing Truth.

It is often difficult to discern whether the dissemination of artificially-sweetened elixir stems more from perfidy or from idiocy; but it is odious in either case. The ensuing intoxication is taken as verification of its indubitable credence. One might be tempted to say that the biggest culprits in candy-coating bios of MoM are ostensibly "liberal" apologists; though fundamentalists are also complicit. If one really wants to go down the rabbit hole, reference "Muhsin-i Insaniyat" [Benefactor of Humanity] by the Pakistani writer, Naeem Siddiqui (founder of the Salafi "Tehreek-i Islami" movement).

Some of the things that such bad-faith actors say about Islam's "Prophet" are mind-boggling to hear. MoM-fetishists regularly make statements about MoM that are not merely patently false; but utterly ridiculous (he sought to put an end to all suffering; he sought to bring all humanity together; he sought to end slavery; etc.) Such claims are not only baseless, but demonstrably wrong. To believe such bunkum, one is required to be completely ignorant of anything and everything we actually know about MoM—especially from the most esteemed Islamic sources. Evidently, such charlatans bank on their audience being completely oblivious. This is an attitude that should offend all those who's time they have wasted.

We can observe the appalling degree of unabashed mendacity when media commentator, Qasim Rashid wrote that "Islam gave women equal rights in 610." (610? It seems that Rashid isn't even aware of the year that MoM started preaching.) Leaving aside the fact that "Islam" qua religion did not yet exist in 610, and that Islam PER SE has never done ANYTHING (because RELIGIONS don't do things; people do), we should ask: What does Rashid cite for this preposterous contention? After all, to make such a brazen pronouncement, he must have oodles of scripture to back him up, right?

Rashid's answer: 33:36.

That's it. A line from a book. As is plain to see (if one has five seconds to spare), this single verse basically states that BOTH men and women must submit, and that BOTH may then be rewarded for said submission. Ergo—according to Rashid—the Koran deems them EQUAL. Q.E.D. (!) This is grasping at straws in its most craven (and comedic) form.

It is very telling that this single verse was the best (read: the ONLY) Koranic verse that Rashid could cite in his rather pitiable attempt to validate his grandiose point. Perhaps Rashid's next project is to convince the world that Genghis Kahn was a celibate pacifist—based on the clear record of his raping and pillaging sprees. (Behold the pristine logic: "Aside from the rampant fornication and plunder, Genghis was chaste and peaceful!") When we read passages like 8:12 and 3:151 (wherein god promises to strike terror into the hearts of non-believers), the context becomes strikingly clear once we refer to the most vaunted hadith (that of Bukhari) wherein MoM declared: "I have been sent with the shortest expressions bearing the widest

meaning: I have been made victorious with terror” (4/52/220).

Rashid is an example of Progressively-inclined Muslims trying their darndest to “clear the name” of their Faith in ham-fisted ways...and so failing to act in good faith. Other whoppers from Qasim include: “The Koran only permits fighting in self-defense” [a blatant falsehood addressed at length in the preceding monograph] and MoM was committed to “universal religious freedom” / “equal human rights for all people regardless of faith”. These aren’t honest mistakes; they are absurdities. {55}

Qasim Rashid is either a liar or an ignoramus. Either way, his incompetence did not prevent Harvard University from making him a teaching Fellow. (!) One cringes at what Rashid deigns to tell his students when he has a captive audience. (We can only pray all those who find themselves in his classroom vet everything he spouts.) With a better-informed (and more honest) demos, apologists like Rashid would be laughed at, not given Fellowships at Ivy League universities.

I suspect that Qasim knows full well that he’s full of horse-pucky. The consolation is that his horse-pucky is WELL-INTENTIONED horse-pucky (which, tragically, is sufficient to keep him in the good graces of decision-makers at even the most prestigious educational institutions). The fact remains, though: Good intentions are not enough if we’re seeking global STRUCTURAL change. {56}

Unfortunately, such flagrant casuistry is what forthright Reformers are currently up against. Well-intentioned as he might be, Rashid’s absurd statements about “Islam” and MoM and the Koran only fetter Reform efforts...while providing easy fodder for anti-Muslim bigots (who are looking for dishonest portrayals in order to rationalize their litany of derisive—often trumped-up—indictments). Each time someone like Rashid lies, he is fueling anti-Muslim bigotry; as he makes it seem that Muslims have to be dishonest with the world in order to legitimize their Faith.

Memo to Rashid (and his unscrupulous ilk): You don’t need to lie about MoM—or about the Koran, or about Islam—to be a Progressive Muslim. More to the point: dishonesty (nay, delusion) is incompatible with a robust, sustainable Reform movement.

To reiterate: Islamic apologists only shoot their cause in the foot by disseminating poppycock. Unfortunately, Rashid is merely one of many who are taken with the notion that we NEED MoM to have been a wonderful man (and the Koran to be a wonderful book) in order for Progressive Islam to be a viable option. A Reformed approach would vanquish this severely debilitating misconception. Only with a paradigm shift is genuine reform tenable. {57}

The point here isn’t to single out Qasim Rashid; it’s merely to offer a case-study in the fetishization of MoM. I do this to illustrate the casuistry indicative of popular Mohammedan hagiography.

Other well-meaning yet white-washed accounts of Islam’s “Nabi” include:

- Richard W. Bulliet’s “The View From the Edge”
- Marshall Hodgson’s “The Venture of Islam”
- William Montgomery Watt’s “Mohammad: Prophet and Statesman”
- Jonathan A.C. Brown’s ironically-entitled, “Misquoting Muhammad” (in which he proceeds to relentlessly misquote MoM)

While not as gushing—and utterly spurious—as the maudlin tales provided by the likes of Karen Armstrong and Deepak Chopra, these contrived historiographies proceed more from affectation than from solid documentation. For some, the fanciful trumps the actual. Hard facts are a moot point when one is crafting a narrative to fit forgone conclusions.

Other craven academics in the pockets of the House of Saud include Georgetown's Jonathan A.C. Brown—an unscrupulous man who's "Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World" is nothing more than an exercise in white-washing. (Brown submits that slavery was once justified; as the condemnation of the practice is merely a modern social construct; and that the Sunnah was a good thing because it "revolutionized" slavery.) Brown is part of a long line of deluded converts to Islam, joining the likes of Mark Hansen (a.k.a. "Hamza Yusuf") and Timothy Winter (a.k.a. "Abdal Hakim Murad") in defending the indefensible. Their target audience is limited to uneducated Muslims who are credulous enough to view them as founts of erudition, and their fatuous asseverations as sage commentary.

In 2018, another hack, Juan Cole, came out with the utterly preposterous "Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires". What sort of conflict of interest could possibly account for such a risible publication. Lo and behold: Cole is funded by Iran's Ayatollahs via the National Iranian American Council (NIAC). Tragically, he is a professor of history at the University of Michigan.

Intellectual capture by Wahhabi elements is becoming ever-more widespread; as FUNDING invariably influences—and in some cases, DICTATES—curricula. Saudi cash has made it into Northwestern University, UCLA, Texas A&M, Johns Hopkins, George Mason University, George Washington University, and the University of Toronto under various auspices. Faculty in such Islamic studies departments are highly suspects—as many are effectively bought and paid for by Wahhabi ideologues (who hold further funds over the departments' heads as leverage). Even such esteemed institutions as Harvard and Oxford have accepted tens of millions in cash...EACH. We should find this tremendously disturbing. {58}

None of what follows rests on mere rumors...or, for that matter, proceeds from a whitewashing campaign. Indeed, the majority of popular tid-bits about MoM are laughably ridiculous. (Celebrity charlatan, Karen Armstrong informs us that MoM was very good-looking and had a nice smile. Thanks, Karen.) Such fatuous attempts to paint MoM in a flattering light—often done in smug desperation—belie the credence of the hyper-romanticized portrayal that they aim to promulgate.

It is worth considering the ingrained thought routines that people often mistake as their own thinking. These routines lead True Believers to pre-fab conclusions—positions that they are firmly convinced they have taken as a result of logical deduction.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

We all like to think that the suppositions we most covet are accurate reflections of Reality. Rarely are we willing to take the time—and expend the prodigious amount of mental effort—to engage in the kind of deliberation required to audit those suppositions. We would much prefer to think that our convictions stem from a process of fastidious critical analysis (after a meticulous evaluation of all available evidence); and, of course, with no biases whatsoever: a process in which we've been in complete control at every moment.

So what MoM the greatest human being that has ever lived? The most important? Yes on both counts, responds any dogmatic Muslim, as if a programmed robot. How can we be so sure? Well, you see, it's incontrovertible. End of discussion. To even bring this into question is malapropos.

Mental habits don't announce themselves as mental habits. Very often, they determine our most deeply-held beliefs without us ever really noticing. (When one has been conditioned to think a certain way from mother's knee, one is generally unaware of the conditioning. That's what makes conditioning so effective.) Impartiality is an illusion we entertain because it is so wonderfully self-ingratiating. Rarely is

the True Believer inclined to consider that his most cherished beliefs might be resting on a (consecrated) house of cards.

Every house of cards has its day.

What follows is a judiciously abridged bio of MoM. As an impartial compiler of data (i.e. someone with no vested interests in the subject, one way or the other), I limit comments to salient highlights of MoM's life—annotated, as needed, with tempered inferences. I do this using material based on plausible documentation—then adducing things based on my own (fallible) powers of deduction.

As it turns out, the available facts are far more limited than most hagiographers would like to admit. I simply work with what is available. I do this so we can see what happens when an overview of MoM's life is done when no conflicts of interest are involved (a situation that—it should be noted—is rarely the case). The summery is no longer than it is simply due to the fact that it is all we can say about MoM with any degree of certainty. It neither adds nor detracts salient details.

Needless to say, I refrain from including any of the plethora of saccharine anecdotes that abound in the Ummah. Such ingratiating accounts are typically presented in the form, “One time, the prophet did / said X” (where X is something nice). Ask any Islamic apologist why he thinks MoM was such a swell guy, and one will invariably be treated to a litany of these delectable narrative morsels.

Tragically, many Muslims have been programmed to recite this or that piece of apocrypha on queue. They are brought up on tales of a gentle, wise, holy man who was viciously persecuted before he rose to prominence, a divinely-ordained ascension as the Seal of all Abrahamic prophets, a paragon of virtue, who spread nothing but good will. (What's not to admire?!) There can be little argument that such a fabulous fictional character is worthy of reverence.

As a matter of course, parts of the Mohammedan narrative that are problematic are simply overlooked by most commentators. For example, take the widely-recognized fact that MoM's foster parent (his uncle, Abu Talib; i.e. the man who raised him and—until adulthood—was most devoted to his care) did not believe MoM when the latter put forth his grandiose claims of revelation. In other words: The man who best knew MoM was convinced that he was, as it were, full of shit. One can't help but wonder: How could that be? If what MoM said was true, is it not rather odd that the person closest to him was completely unpersuaded? We know that Abu Talib was unwaveringly devoted to MoM's well-being until his dying breath, so we can't attribute his lack of credulity to antipathy.

Though he was likely the most important person in MoM's life until the aspiring prophet married Khadijah (at about 25 years old), Abu Talib is not featured in a prominent role in Mohammedan hagiography. Imagine why. (When he is mentioned, he is summarily vilified. Wherefore? For his inexcusable intransigence!)

The cherry-picking expedition begins the moment Islamic apologists deign to give an account of their prime subject. ANYTHING that is does not comport with the desired narrative (that is: put the “Last Prophet” in a flattering light) is dismissed as a “forgery” or “fabrication” by nefarious interlopers who sabotaged the “isnad” process...EVEN IF such blotches occur in the exact same work as other bits that those same apologists insist must be taken seriously. This is even done in the most vaunted Hadith, that of Bukhari (in which countless highly problematic passages can be found, and are blithely dismissed with the same rational).

Such inconsistency, glaring as it is to anyone who's paying attention, is typically passed without notice.

This is simply because most people aren't really paying attention to such pesky details. Who has the time?

Ask a dogmatic Muslim why he thinks MoM was such a great person, and one will be treated to a smug litany of vague character descriptors: he was humble, he was kind, he was honest, he was forgiving, etc. The problem is that there is no evidence to support any of this. At every point in his life, MoM strove to advance his own interests; and did so using draconian means. He seemed to always have ulterior motives in all of his dealings—even the one's where he was “trustworthy”. (It might be said that he epitomized Machiavellian-ism a millennium before Machiavelli penned “The Prince”.) Bear in mind that almost any charismatic leader is successful in accruing a cult following precisely because his acolytes would swear on their lives that he is “trustworthy” and his intentions nothing by noble.

So it comes as little surprise that a smorgasbord of apocrypha about MoM continue to proliferate: He wore simple clothing and ate simple food and treated animals nicely and never lied. And, in any case, he adopted a slave-boy to be his foster son (therefore he MUST be one of the most amazing humans that's ever walked the face of the Earth.) That most of us can name several acquaintances that meet the exact same qualifications doesn't seem to attenuate the poignancy of such rationalizations.

Silly as it is, this is the rhetorical strategy regularly employed by high-profile expositors. Some of the most notable cases of hyper-romanticization are based on spurious conjectures and groundless—often outlandish—claims. Here are ten:

- Tariq Ramadan's “In the Footsteps of the Prophet”
- The vehemently anti-science, young-Earth creationist, Martin Lings' “Muhammad: His Life Based On The Earliest Sources” (in which he proceeds to AVOID basing his bio on the earliest sources)
- Georgetown pseudo-scholar, Jonathan Brown's “Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction”
- Daniel C. Peterson's “Muhammed: Prophet Of God”
- David Levering Lewis' “God's Crucible”
- (Shiite) Ayatollah, Sayed Muhammad al-Shirazi's absurdly titled, “The Prophet Muhammad: A Mercy to the World”
- Chapter 2 of Tamim Ansary's “Destiny Interrupted”
- Deepak Chopra's entirely farcical, comically-overwrought “Muhammad: A Story Of God's Messenger”
- Karen Armstrong's risible “Muhammad: A Prophet For Our Time”
- Lesley Hazleton's “The First Muslim” (a cloying hagiography in which she fails to recognize that Muslims do not, in fact, see MoM as the first Muslim) {64}

Many of these books are examples of intellectual capture—the most flagrant of which border on mendacity. They are all instances of Islamic apologia run amok. Each is preposterous in its own way.

Such Islamic apologia is often directed at children—as with Fine Media Group's “Muhammad: The Last Prophet” and Barajoun Entertainment's “Bilal: A New Breed of Hero”. Such animated features—mawkish and puerile—are nothing more than propaganda for kids. {65}

Though some of the most popular modern biopics of MoM, the aforementioned books are authored by men with nil credibility. In each case, the exposition is written more as ingratiating farce than as an honest summary of historical documentation. (The last three books don't even pretend to be a works of scholarship.) Yet those who don't know any better treat such books as primary sources when seeking to learn about the HISTORICAL MoM.

Let's be clear. Such publications are little more than exercises in whitewashing—replete with extensive

embellishment and hefty dose of narrative flare. Each “bio” highlights palatable tid-bits from the ACTUAL historical record while ignoring everything else. That is to say: Such expositors are highly selective in what they opt to mention...and then put a spin on whatever they can. Much of the time, they just make things up as they go (concocting narrative “filler” as it suits their purposes).

Many Islamic apologists have become so enraptured by their own half-baked narratives, blatantly spurious portrayals often pass as bona fide “history” for those who don’t know any better. Unscrupulous actors like Deepak Chopra, Karen Armstrong, and Leslie Hazelton (who cash in on the lucrative MoM-fetishization industry) aren’t helping the matter. The sooner we start ignoring such unscrupulous expositors, the better. {48}

It is the refusal to abide the propagation of farce that grounds the following bio. The brief overview here is based on facts that can be found in the “sahih” Hadith—primarily, in the most vaunted of them all: that of Bukhari from c. 870. (That is: It was compiled about 240 years after MoM’s death.)

Note, especially, the earliest biography of all: Ibn Ishaq’s “Sirat Rasul Allah”. This was composed via a recension that was cobbled together by Ibn Hisham of Basra c. 833, who had (purportedly) redacted a version done by Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, who in turn had (purportedly) redacted a version done by Al-Bakka’i, a student of Ibn Ishaq. And Al-Bakka’i had HIMSELF redacted Ishaq’s—now lost—accounts, which themselves were from over 130 years after MoM’s death. Ergo the version we have NOW (Ibn Hisham’s) is from over two centuries after MoM’s death; and is hyper-derivative in nature. The earliest Hadith (that of the Persian writer from Bukhara now known as “Bukhari”) is from almost four decades after THAT.

Ibn Hisham is surprisingly forthcoming about the liberties he took regarding redaction—unabashedly declaiming that he omitted “things which it is disgraceful to discuss, matters which would distress certain people.”

Suffice to say, two intervening centuries is ample time for prodigious embellishment to have crept into the folklore—both witting and un-. This is especially so when the authors were strongly incentivized to tweak things as the occasion arose. {49} We should bear in mind that embellishment has a ratcheting effect: once it is introduced, and widely embraced, it is virtually impossible to rescind.

The other three highly-touted bios from the Middle Ages are:

- “Kitab al-Maghazi” by Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Omar ibn Waqid al-Aslami of Medina [a.k.a. “Al-Waqidi”] (from the early 9th century)
- “Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kubra” by the hagiographer, Muhammad ibn Sa’d ibn Mani al-Hashimi of Basra (from the early 9th century)
- “Ta’rikh al-Rusul-wa al-Muluk” [Histories of the Messenger and the Kings] by Persian historiographer, Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir of Tabaristan [a.k.a. “Al-Tabari”] (dating from shortly after c. 915, perhaps in the early 920’s)

The last was almost exclusively based on Ibn Hisham’s (highly edited) version of Ibn Ishaq’s bio; so it is rather redundant. In any case, it was composed almost three centuries after MoM’s ministry. Since then, accounts have been—to put it mildly—FURTHER embellished—as with, say, the bio of the (Mamluk) Syrian commentator, Ismail ibn Kathir (a protege of Ibn Taymiyyah) from the 14th century. Today, no honest scholar would pretend otherwise. {50}

Another noteworthy chronicle is Malik ibn Anas’ “Muwatta” (a compilation of the alleged accounts of caliph Uthman’s son, Abban ibn Uthman ibn Affan). Note that Malik ibn Anas was a contemporary of Ibn

Ishaq, and was opposed to the latter's testimony. He eschewed Ibn Ishaq's controversial "qadariyah" sympathies (the belief in free will) due to the Koran's clear explication of pre-destination. {66} Moreover, Malik ibn Anas disapproved of Ibn Ishaq's emphasis on MoM's son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib—the 4th of the four so-called "Rashidun" (rightly-guided) caliphs...and the first legitimate "imam" according to Shia tradition. This antipathy accounts for Malik's less predominant role in Shi'ism. In the Ali'd (Shiite) version, the first three caliphs are seen as illegitimate (while Ali is accorded pre-eminence). Such disputes are indicative of the extensive quibbling that characterized the germination of Mohammedan lore.

The derivative nature of hagiographies continued on through the centuries. The "Siyer-i Nebi" was a hagiography written by Mustafa ibn Yusuf of Erzurum in the 1380's. It was based on the "Sirah" by the Andalusian writer, Al-Bakri from the 11th-century...which was itself based on the "Kitab al-Tarikh wa al-Maghazi" ["Book Of History & Campaigns"] by Al-Waqidi from the early 9th century.

Bottom line: ALL these sources are ENTIRELY based on hearsay. They make no secret of being highly-selective accounts of their protagonist. Anything beyond the few early accounts listed here is—invariably—based on hearsay of hearsay of hearsay... It's not ideal; but THAT is all we now have to work with.

When it comes to MoM, three examples of relatively honest scholarship would be:

- Michael Cook's 1996 book from Oxford University Press, "Muhammad"
- Nevo and Koren's 2003 book, "Crossroads to Islam"
- Kecia Ali's 2014 book from Harvard University Press, "The Lives of Muhammad"

These scholars are honest not so much about what they know, but about what they DON'T know. They realize what they do NOT know simply because NOBODY can possibly know it. Note that I enumerate my own primary sources in the Appendix to part 2 of this series.

Other bios that are only marginally whitewashed are:

- Maxime Rodinson's "Muhammad: Prophet of Islam"
- David Margoliouth's "Muhammad And The Rise Of Islam"
- Aloys Sprenger's "The Life Of Muhammad From Original Sources"
- William Muir's "The Life Of Mahomet"
- Francis Edward Peters' "Muhammad And The Origins of Islam"
- John Glubb's (now out-of-print) "The Life And Times Of Muhammad"
- Sean W. Anthony's "Muhammad And The Empires Of Faith: The Making Of The Prophet of Islam"
{67}

Meanwhile, much of what Islamic documentation reveals is infelicitous, or even downright embarrassing. Those who have the gall to point this out are often accused by MoM-fetishists of slandering the prophet of Islam. Such an indictment is, of course, an inversion of reality. ABSENCE OF a caricature is not itself a kind of caricature. Alas, many expositors get swept up in their subject, and succumb to MoM-fetishism. So, as far as they can see, anyone who strays from the program simply MUST be guilty of casuistry. It's a classic case of projection.

For historical revisionists, then, the mission is to manufacture "the past" so as to gild Dar al-Islam's heritage. The process is a racket—orchestrated by a MoM-fetishization industry. It is a project undertaken by careerists who really, really, really don't want to be put out of business; so they protect their turf from unwelcome incursions; and are quickly incensed the moment anyone has the gall to bring their perfidy to

light.

And so it goes: The difference between unscrupulous hagiographers and honest historians is glaring—but often neglected. It boils down to vested interest vs. lack thereof.

MoM-fetishists demand that only the narrative tid-bits they find appealing should be acknowledged; and that the world should disregard (or strategically “re-interpret”) everything else. That is, of course, not how genuine scholarship—of history or of anything else—works. But, then again, apologia is never about an honest attempt to elucidate Reality. (If one wants to befuddle a bio-chemist, ask her about her own “interpretation” of the Krebs Cycle. One would elicit the same reaction from a physicist were one to ask about her own “personal take” on the first law of thermodynamics.)

For most hagiographers engaged in this rigamarole, the sine qua non is eminently straight-forward: sustaining a delusion that has been crafted to serve certain purposes (among them, to keep such hagiographers in business). This is far more than merely some good-faith effort to sanitize the past; it is a program of calculatedly transforming it. The endeavor to whitewash MoM amounts to an effort to insist a particular person said / did what one NEEDS for him to have said / done in order for one’s worldview to continue to seem to hold water.

The routine here is familiar to any of us who’ve dealt with dishonest people (i.e. those with a staunch vested interest in certain things being certain ways when those things are clearly NOT the way they desperately want them to be). In a coy slight-of-hand, “the way we would PREFER things to have happened” transplants “the way things ACTUALLY happened”. The trick is to pass the former off as the latter—in a ploy to, as it were, seamlessly interweave Reality with fantasy...thereby yielding a well-varnished taffeta.

When it comes to heroic figures, weaving a such a yarn is surprisingly easy. It might be called “historiography-by-needlepoint”. The hyper-romanticized bio of MoM with which most Muslims are familiar was woven—in large part—from whole-cloth. Creative amanuenses—and subsequent scribes—added pithy anecdotes to extant material, giving their provocative accounts some tantalizing luster. (Narrative flair is what entices the audience in the beginning, and then makes the material memorable thereafter. Per epidemiology, the pneumatic strategy is quite clear: “catchiness” and “stickiness” are features of any successful contagion (in this case: memes).

So how shall we treat the AVAILABLE accounts of MoM? An instructive case is the recounting of the 13th-century Dalmatian explorer, Marco Polo. Polo’s famed memoirs—essentially, a travelogue of his exploits in the Far East—were not FROM HIM. They were primarily the work of a novelist named Rustichello of Pisa (with whom Polo shared a prison cell after being captured by the Genoese in 1296). Though Polo (allegedly) dictated the tales of his escapades to his cell-mate, it was Rustichello who ultimately wrote the book (“Livre des Merveilles du Monde” / “Devisement du Monde”) in a language with which Polo was likely unfamiliar (Old French). Polo likely spoke Venetian Italian (and—of course—Mongolian).

The original codex of this travelogue no longer exists; and there are significant variances in later manuscripts. (This is partly due to intermediaries like Giovanni Battista Ramusio, a 16th-century writer from Treviso had taken liberties, and added his own touches to the manuscripts.) Exactly HOW MUCH of the final product (commonly entitled, “Il Milione” in Italian) is narrative adornment, nobody will ever know for sure.

The “real story” probably died along with the original amanuensis (Rustichello) and—of course—with Polo

himself. Alas, none of this prevents many avid “fans” from reading “The Travels of Marco Polo” as unadulterated non-fiction. Where accurate documentation ends and embellishment begins is difficult to discern; and can now only be a matter of speculation. {51}

The same issues arise with the 13th-century Scottish folk hero, William Wallace of Elderslie. What is our primary source for Wallace’s exploits? “The Acts & Deeds of Sir William Wallace” written by Blind Harry, a musical poet (minstrel) in the late 15th century. Blind Harry compiled his narrative from two centuries of oral tradition; and obviously took many liberties with his re-telling. So even with the most celebrated Scotsman in history, we don’t know nearly as much as we might think we know. {52}

Such high-wattage revisionism is STANDARD in hagiographies—especially when it pertains to a (lionized) folkloric figure around whom cult activity has coalesced.

American folklore is no different. We might ask: Who was the real Daniel Boone? John Filson concocted romantic accounts of the frontiersman in his “The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone” (1784). Later, Timothy Flint composed his own embellishment in the best-seller, “Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone: The First Settler of Kentucky” a half-century later (1833). The myth and the historical figure soon became blurred...as the myth took on a life of its own. (Contrary to conventional portrayals, Boone never wore a coon-skin hat.) Of course, that is what TYPICALLY happens with tales of extraordinary people. (As for the hard facts about the fabled pioneer, we may never know.) High-wattage revisionism trumps dry, turgid historical documentation in virtually every case—from King Arthur to Robin Hood. This effect is amplified when it comes to CULTIC figures—as with, Siddhartha Gautama and Jesus of Nazareth.

The tale of MoM in Islamic lore is the king of all hagiographic splurges—arguably surpassing even the fantastical mythos surrounding the avuncular Hebrew carpenter from Galilee in Christian lore. The point here is not merely to “set the record straight”; it is to show what happens when one looks STRAIGHT AT the available record; and unabashedly reports what one finds. The record ITSELF isn’t our biggest problem; it is the dishonest TREATMENT OF the record that leads to an abiding temptation to countenance fantastical balderdash.

Here’s a helpful hint to those evaluating the melange of Mohammedan hagiographies that proliferate: Honest historians do not emphasize only the parts of the story that they happen to like (while glossing over anything they find unpalatable). Alas, fraudulent “scholars” of MoM adamantly insist that any accounts that don’t comport with their desired portrayal of “the Prophet” are to be deemed null and void. Why? Because such unpalatable material is “offensive” and “unsettling”. In other words: It throws a wrench into the works they’ve dedicated their careers to maintaining. And so we witness the same ol’ song and dance the moment the topic of “Islam’s Prophet” is broached.

The Hadith collections provide enough narrative filigree to dazzle listeners. In the end, the aim was—from the start—to resonate with an audience that was hankering for a scintillating tale. And so the yarn that was woven needed to be brocaded.

As with any captivating narrative that is used for ideological propulsion, the key is to FLATTER the audience; and tantalize it as well. Why settle for regular old fabric when one can be regaled by satin damask? Ishmaelites were in need of a compelling narrative vehicle for their new-fangled creed; and Mohammedan hagiography delivered with flying colors.

The fetishization of MoM renders many incapable of even considering the possibility that their impression of MoM might be based on farce. (The indoctrinated don’t see their own indoctrination as, well, indoctrination.) Yet, as Mark Twain aptly pointed out, “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into

trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so." When we pretend to know things we don't really know, we wind up sabotaging our aptitude for ratiocination; and forestall any prospect of objectivity indefinitely.

Confirmation bias renders an account invalid for the simple reason that the account is based on a disingenuous (often, unscrupulous) reading of the available evidence. Such is what we find with readings of the Hadith. As it turns out, many of the claims encountered in Mohammedan lore simply reflect Arabian superstitions at the time:

- Tales of 30-meter-tall prehistoric men (likely taken from chapter 7 of the Book of Enoch, which describes the giant "Nephilim" as being 3,000 "ells" in height)
- Tales of a rock stealing Moses' clothes (while he was swimming) and then fleeing (with a naked Moses in pursuit).
- Claims of a fly carrying the cure for a disease on one wing while carrying the disease itself on the other wing.
- The notion of a flat Earth, with mountains (as stakes) holding it in place; and the heavens as a magically-suspended dome. (Yes, the authors of the Koran thought the world was flat.)

Mohammedan lore appropriated much of what was already circulating in the Hijaz at the time (see my essay on "Syriac Source-Material For Islam's Holy Book"). For example, the "talking baby Jesus" story of 19:29-34 is probably from the Syriac Infancy Gospel, which held sway in the region during MoM's lifetime.

The point is this: The authors of the Koran / Hadith were often simply repeating accounts that we now know to be obvious fabrications (or just plain-old mistakes), then passing them off as "revelations" and "teachings" conveyed by an exalted figure named "Mu-H-M-D" ["praised one"]. When one has been shown to have done such a thing ONCE, one has—as it were—been caught red-handed. When one has been shown to have done such a thing over and over again, one has clearly been revealed as a fraud.

It is, of course, not a SURPRISE that MoM (or, as the case may be, the authors of the Koran / Hadith) perpetuated claims (thereby repeating mistakes) found in, say, the Syriac Infancy Gospel. It is merely a testament to the fact that such claims were fashionable dogmas. They merely parroting certain things that people happened to believe in the Hijaz at the time; then insisting that god informed them of it. They did not count on people in the future learning about the ACTUAL source of the material.

By approaching such lore with a new frame of mind, such tall-tales are rendered unproblematic. That is to say: There is no reason for Muslims to be embarrassed by the presence of such zany tales in the Islamic canon...any more than liberal Christians are embarrassed by the derangement of the Book of Revelation...or Reform Jews are embarrassed by the ridiculous-ness of the Pentateuch.

After MoM's death, NEW tales began to proliferate. A couple of the more notable gems:

- MoM had an evil spell cast upon him—by a conniving Jew—via a follicle procured from a pilfered hair-brush.
- MoM rode a winged horse ("al-Buraq") to Jerusalem; then to the seven heavens to hold court with the pantheon of fabled Abrahamic prophets. {59}

No kidding. This is the caliber of "documentation" with which we must work when we sift through the reams upon reams of available material. Suffice to say, much of it is OBVIOUSLY hokum. Yet to hear many Islamic apologists, all of it must be treated as if it were solid documentation—a collection of hard

facts, each of which is beyond dispute.

The delusive thinking at work is staggering to behold. From the most deluded MoM-fetishists, we hear statements made about MoM with a kind of apodictic certainty that is indistinguishable from fanaticism. As with any other form of fetishism, the abiding embrace of these tales amounts to dogmatism-on-steroids. In order to sustain the intoxicating delusions about MoM, the highly dubious must be treated as utterly incontrovertible. Some things must be invented out of thin air while other things must be obfuscated. For MoM-fetishists, this is done as a matter of course. Islamic apologists demand that the rest of us just sit back, keep our mouths shut, nod and smile as this charade continues apace.

Much of what we hear about “the Prophet Mohammed” comes from people pretending to know things that there is no way they—or ANYONE, for that matter—could possibly know. It can’t be emphasized enough: There is no way for me—or anyone else—to be certain about ANY of the things found in the summary of MoM’s life presented forthwith. All I—or anyone else—can do is look at the available evidence and see where it points. Anyone paying attention to the largely-contrived accounts of MoM that are found in the earliest sources will see that it all—quite plainly—points to certain things (and plainly does NOT point to certain other things). The following bio simply summarizes what can be tentatively surmised by a sober perusal of the available material.

The limited amount we can adduce about MoM is hopelessly intertwined with legend. It is snippets of quasi-historical account festooned with apocrypha. But not just ANY apocrypha; it was only the apocrypha the transmitters wanted to be told.

Other than the earliest biographies and the “sahih” Hadith, what ELSE do we have to work with? The TOTAL catalogue of biographies of MoM is astoundingly voluminous. Roughly five dozen major bios had been written by 1800; and roughly six dozen major bios have been published since then. (Countless minor accounts have surely circulated in the meantime.) The corpus of hyper-romanticized material is gargantuan. (One of the more popular is the 20th-century “Ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum” [“The Seal of Nectar”] by the Indian “alim”, Safiur Rahman Mubarak-puri; which glorifies MoM by touting his military conquests.)

Barring very few exceptions, reading any one of these works is a complete waste of time. For all of it is derivative; and virtually all of it serves a singular purpose: To propagate an IDEA OF “the prophet Mohammed” rather than try to document the ACTUAL MoM. That is to say: The focus is on a fictional character rather than on a historical figure—even as the former is passed off as the latter.

The following bio of MoM is offered not merely because it REALLY IS the most likely account anyone might manage given the available documentation; it is also offered—and should be accepted—simply because it TOTALLY MAKES SENSE. That is, almost nothing in MoM’s life DOESN’T make sense. Everything he did, everything that happened, makes perfect sense once we understand how and why it happened. Surprisingly, literally NOTHING comes as a surprise.

As I hope will be evident, almost everything that we know about MoM MAKES PERFECT SENSE. There is nothing “mysterious” that happened during MoM’s life. All can be explained through basic deduction from what were, in turns out, normal circumstances during the Dark Ages. To resent the fact that MoM comes out looking less than fabulous is effectively to express resentment for the elucidation of who he actually was.

The grievance that MoM is thereby cast in an “unflattering light” doesn’t make sense here, as what follows is merely a matter of CASTING LIGHT. Blaming the illumination for how MoM “looks” is a peculiar

course. For it is not the light itself that is unflattering. So I am not “casting” MoM in a “bad light”; I am merely shedding light, and he ends up looking however he looks. As far as honest inquirers are concerned, the more light the better.

The inordinate brevity of the following bio attests to how little we actually know about MoM qua historical figure—in spite of the THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of pages of ahadith available about Islam’s “Khatam an-Nabiyyin”. When people indulge in flights of fancy, they rarely admit to themselves—let alone to others—that that is what they’re doing. They’d just assume call it “fact”, and pass it off as such.

The point, then, is to see what happens when we UN-DO the “just so stories” at the center of Mohammedan hagiography. The following is what remains when ad hoc emendations are rescinded from prevailing Islamic lore. What we are left with is something extremely important to those of us who are ultimately concerned with Truth: what most likely ACTUALLY HAPPENED. What I strive to do here, then, is simply “front only the essential facts,” as Thoreau once put it. In other words: This is what an unvarnished account of MoM looks like.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in his letter to King George III (declaring the American colonies’ independence from the British Kingdom): “Let facts be submitted to a candid world.” I second that motion. Anything beyond what is written here is most likely farce.

According to the conventional hagiography, MoM was born to Amina bint Wahb c. 570 in the vicinity of Mecca. This year of his birth is placed at 570 for two reasons. First, to retroactively place his age at roughly forty years-old at the time of the delivery of the first revelation (on the Night of Power, c. 610). Second, to get the year to roughly correspond to the so-called “Year of the Elephant” (i.e. the year that the Yemeni “negus”, Abraha unsuccessfully attacked Mecca). He was purportedly sired by a man (retroactively dubbed “Abd-Allah”; grandson of a figure named Hashim ibn Abd Manaf via a man retroactively named “Mu-Talib”) who died before he was born.

Amina promptly relinquished her newborn (for reasons that remain vague), and the infant was purportedly reared in another tribe: the Banu Sa’d ibn Bakr.

The first forty years of MoM’s life are not pivotal to the Faith. The most that might be said is that he grew up an orphan. He was primarily raised by his uncle, Abu Talib, as a member of the Quraysh tribe, somewhere in the vicinity of the Hijazi municipality of Mecca (so the story goes; though there is evidence to question this as I discuss in my essay on “Mecca And Its Cube”). {4} The Banu Quraysh was a sub-group of the Banu Kinana, said to have descended from the Abrahamic patriarch, Ishmael. They transplanted the (Qahtanite) Banu Khuza’a—which hailed from Azd—as proprietors of the Meccan cube at some point in Late Antiquity.

The details of how MoM lost his biological parents are unclear. He would have grown up speaking a local Hijazi dialect of Syriac, and was most likely illiterate (as attested in Bukhari’s Hadith). {5}

MoM did not claim to have received his first “revelation” (purportedly, a missive from the Abrahamic deity) until he was 40 years old (c. 610); and did not undertake his ministry until three years later. That inaugural missive allegedly occurred on the outskirts of Mecca {6} during what came to be dubbed the “Laylat al-Qadr” (literally, “Night of Destiny”; though typically translated as “Night of Power”). The importune missive, he claimed, was delivered by the same divine envoy that had visited Daniel in Babylon and the mother of Jesus of Nazareth (prior to her immaculate impregnation) in Galilee. That envoy was the archangel Gabriel.

As the story goes, MoM was initially hesitant to believe the encounter was real. When he reported the paranormal experience to his wife at the time, Khadijah, she encouraged her husband to pursue his prophetic charge. To settle the matter, she recommended that MoM consult her cousin, an Ebionite / Nestorian (Christian) Qurayshi preacher named Waraka ibn Nawfal. When MoM met with Waraka, the latter noted that Gabriel was surely an emissary of the Abrahamic deity—delivering the same law to the anxious Bedouin as had been delivered to Moses. Therefore, MoM’s wife—and subsequently, MoM—concluded that the visitation must be genuine; and that he REALLY HAD been selected as a messenger of the the godhead. {7}

There can be little doubt that in the subsequent years, MoM would be very influenced by Waraka—who likely peddled an anti-Trinitarian version of Abrahamic theology. Egged on by his wife, and perhaps even importuned by Waraka, MoM would begin his ministry three years later—a campaign that would last almost two decades (613-632). (I discuss this influence in greater depth in my essay: “Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book”.)

It should be noted that, by the time MoM would have come of age (in the late 6th century), the full compliment of pagan rituals would have already been established around the sanctified structure in the middle of town: a cube (“kaaba”) containing a pantheon of Arabian idols—chief amongst which was probably the moon-god, Hubal. Such extant rituals included not only pilgrimage and a month of fasting, but circumambulation (“tawaf”), daily propitiations (ablutions, prostration, etc.), animal sacrifice, running between the Safa and Marwah hills, throwing stones at a stone structure (symbolizing Satan), drinking from the Zamzam well, and kissing a venerated black stone (“hajar al-aswad”). {8}

It is no surprise that, while phasing out much of the pagan *theology*, the first Mohammedans opted to appropriate virtually ALL of the extant pagan *practices*; as we can see to this day. {9}

Naturally, as he came of age, MoM became part of the local merchant culture. {10} In the years prior to his ministry, MoM developed a reputation for being a savvy arbiter (so the story goes). Locals who experienced him as a trustworthy mediator in mercantile affairs even nick-named him, “al-Amin” (the trusted one) and “al-Sadiq” (the truthful one). It can be conjectured that this esteem may have gone to his head; which would help explain MoM’s decision to start devising grandiose claims. (“If so many people trust me, well, then...”) {11}

MoM was, if nothing else, extremely ambitious. Prior to his relocation to Yathrib (an oasis town 450 kilometers to the north), it can be surmised that MoM over-estimated his (limited) clout amongst the Quraysh; thereby parlaying what social capital he had accrued into verging ostracism. That is to say, he frivolled away his limited prestige in Mecca with a slew of brazen petitions (of which his proselytizing was likely comprised).

However...MoM would never mis-play his hand ever again. Once he caught wind that a potentially more receptive audience dwelled in a local to the north (Yathrib), he recognized serendipity when it befell him. Greener pastures awaited elsewhere; an exigency on which MoM was quick to capitalize.

MoM’s first wife, an affluent elder named Khadijah bint Khuwaylid al-Kubra, died in 620. Prior to making her acquaintance, MoM had been rebuffed by all other women he’d wooed. So when given the chance to wed a woman of considerable means, though she was middle-aged, he jumped. MoM’s betrothal to Khadijah would have conferred much-needed clout (and crucial financial wherewithal) on the aspiring prophet; as she had long been an esteemed business owner. Indeed, the marriage would have bolstered MoM’s status in merchant circles, affording him the means to exercise influence. (For more on this first

marriage, and on the daughters' nuptials, see Appendix 1.)

The degree to which such new funds (and stature) ENABLED MoM's mantic enterprise (and, for that matter, encouraged his delusions) is difficult to ascertain; though it's safe to assume that the socio-economic boost probably did not engender humility. To reiterate: Khadijah was the one who encouraged the (allegedly) initially-reluctant MoM to heed the purported communiques from the Creator of the Universe. The basis for Khadijah's pivotal hunch is never explained.

By 622, with his first wife (Khadijah) and his foster parent (his widely-respected uncle, Abu Talib) deceased, and the larger community's sympathy for MoM dying along with them, MoM had lost a major source of clout—as well as his remaining familial tie to Mecca. (An only child, he'd alienated what remained of any other family members. It bears worth repeating: Outside of Khadijah, the only quasi-sympathetic member, his uncle and foster father, Abu Talib, passed the same year. It would be safe to assume that those last couple years in Mecca had become increasingly difficult. The trying times following his highly-connected wife's passing surely catalyzed the aspiring prophet's decision to emigrate from his home town.

It is important to understand the circumstances that prompted MoM to seek greener pastures. By making his audacious pronouncements (esp. that he'd been selected as the new mouthpiece for the Abrahamic deity), he had squandered the good will he'd garnered in Mecca during his days as "al-Amin". By 622, his pretensions were well-received by only a handful of tight-knit acolytes. All other denizens of Mecca were incredulous...including his own uncles.

This point can't be emphasized enough. For it is very telling that the man who knew MoM the best—and for the longest—did not believe his grandiose claims: his own uncle / step-father. It can be surmised that Abu Talib did not believe MoM in large part BECAUSE he knew him so well. Conversely, had MoM been the "real deal", Abu Talib would have been in a unique position to be the FIRST one to recognize that fact. It speaks volumes that Abu Talib called his nephew's bluff in spite of clear incentives to do otherwise. Even as he strove diligently to keep MoM from harm, he couldn't bring himself to believe the bold claims his foster son was making. { 12 }

In spite of his incredulity, as his step-father, Abu Talib felt obliged to protect MoM from those who meant him harm. This speaks even further to Abu Talib's good intentions; and to his objectivity. He obviously harbored no ill will toward his nephew; and even cared about him enough to risk ostracism amongst the Quraysh by declining overtures to reprimand MoM for his feather-ruffling proselytization. Indeed, even as he sought to protect MoM, Abu Talib STILL did not believe MoM's tales of divine revelation.

As a foster parent, Abu Talib obviously cared for the well-being of MoM...EVEN THOUGH he did not believe his adopted son's claims of prophethood ["nubuwwah"]. Short of believing his grandiose claims, Abu Talib went to bat for his nephew in every way he could. Ergo his incredulity cannot be attributed to antipathy.

Abu Talib went so far as to plead with MoM to cease and desist in his brazen proclamations: "Spare me and yourself; and do not put a greater burden on me than I can bear," he beseeched his adopted son. Allegedly, MoM's response to this plea was: "Oh, uncle. By the Almighty, I swear, even if they should put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left that I abjure this cause, I shall not do so until god has vindicated it or caused me to perish in the process" (ref. Muhammad Husayn Haykal's "The Life of Muhammad").

Meanwhile, MoM's OTHER uncle (Abu Talib's brother, Abd al-Uzza) recognized MoM's claims to be

fraudulent as well; yet—not being in the capacity of a step-father—was NOT moved to protect him. {13} The discrepancy between MoM’s two uncles’ handling of the situation, then, was not due to a disparity of belief. (Both concurred that MoM was delusional.) Rather, it was a matter of concern for MoM’s safety after he started alienating his fellow Quraysh with his ornery pronouncements. (Unsurprisingly, Abd al-Uzza is condemned in Surah 111 of the Koran—where he is referred to by the epithet, “Abu Lahab”.)

And so it went: When, in 622, both MoM’s wife AND foster father passed, the aspiring prophet found himself without the two people who most cared about his well-being. Without either Khadijah or Talib to stick up for him anymore, MoM was deprived of vital social assets; and was newly vulnerable...and socially isolated.

The aspiring prophet had clearly over-estimated the social capital he’d garnered via his savvy mercantile dealings. Consequently, he ended up writing checks he couldn’t cash. However, while his audacity backfired in Mecca, that same audacity would play in his favor in Yathrib (as we shall see).

The bottom line: The first decade of MoM’s ministry (613-622; pre-Hijra), Mecca was not primed for a Messianic figure. Politically-speaking, it was not in need of a strong-man; unified as it already was. Hence the denizens of the city—who had previously esteemed MoM for his fair dealing—largely turned against him after he started telling his tall-tales of “revelation”...and, to top it off, from a deity that they likely saw as a variation on their moon-god. It was this unfavorable development that warranted MoM’s emigration to a Hijazi settlement to the north—a venue with a starkly different social dynamic. Yathrib was a conglomeration of tribes—some Jewish—that also traded; but, unlike Mecca, would have been engaged in farming.

Note that, over the course of the next decade (622-632), MoM would marry at least a dozen women—some as young as 6 years old (Abu Bakr’s daughter, Aisha, whom MoM mercifully waited to start having sex with until she was 8 or 9). {14} Hence the 4th verse of Surah65 in the Koran, which sanctions sex with pre-pubescent girls (defined in the Koran as those who have not yet menstruated). The subsequent marriages started WITHIN DAYS of Khadijah’s passing—an eventuality that indicates that MoM’s refrain from polyandry during his first marriage had more to do with the dictates of his head-strong wife than with his own volition. MoM learned his lesson: He would not allow his wives to have so much power ever again. (His teachings would reflect this sentiment.)

It might be noted that, per her own testimony, on at least one occasion Aisha was physically assaulted by MoM (that is: struck hard enough to cause her significant pain and leave bruises [skin that turned green]; Muslim’s Hadith, vol. 4, no. 2127). It should come as no surprise, then, that in the most vaunted Hadith collection, Aisha famously stated: “I have not seen any woman suffer as much as the believing women” (Bukhari’s Hadith, no. 5825). Indeed, Aisha was known to express revulsion for her husband. Most infamous of the passages that attest to this is her testimony in Bukhari’s Hadith (1/9/490): “The things which annul prayer were told to me. They said, ‘Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey, or a woman.’ I said, ‘You have made us [women] dogs.’” Aisha added: “I saw the prophet praying while I used to lie in my bed between him and the qibla. Whenever I was in need of something, I would slip away; for I disliked having to face him.”

At one point, Aisha tried to flea her domineering husband. According to the Hadith record, the aggrieved wife disappeared for several days before eventually being retrieved by a loyal servant of MoM. Following to her insolence, Aisha’s life was only spared after extensive pleading on her part. (She insisted to her master that she had not committed adultery during her unsanctioned absence. Assured that he had not been dishonored, MoM refrained from killing her.) This incident is likely what prompted the “revelation” concerning testimony about adultery (either one male or three females must witness the actual

penetration—that is: witness it first hand).

So we know that on at least once, Aisha tried to run away from MoM. (If you were a young girl who was raped by a man who was old enough to be your grandfather, who beat you whenever you were insubordinate, and who routinely had sex with other women, you'd probably try to run away too.)

By 630, MoM had at least eleven wives (he'd married at least TWELVE more times, but one had died three years earlier). At least seven of them were young girls acquired in the course of just three years, usually from conquered tribes (as with the Jewish teen, Safiya bint Huyayy, discussed in Appendix 1 of my essay: "Debunking Three Myths"). Such betrothals were certainly not done in the name of pluralism. (It likely had to do with other appetites for variety.)

As luck would have it, MoM received special dispensation from god (via revelation 33:50), giving him—and only him—the right to have as many wives as he wanted (i.e. more than the four specified in 4:3). It should be noted that this was not because god wanted him to be able to have more offspring (unless we suppose that god's plan was completely thwarted). For, pursuant to starting his ministry, MoM had no children that survived past a very young age. Needless to say: This inability to procreate is an odd hindrance to have placed on someone who was supposed to be the most important person to have ever lived. (I discuss this matter in Appendix 2 of "Debunking Three Myths".)

The unique entitlement to a plethora of wives was a political maneuver, as acquiring wives from different (conquered) tribes was a means of diplomacy. Such a rationalization is silly for reasons too obvious to explain. There is no other conclusion than that this "special privilege" was about access to sex—pure and simple. (I address this matter in my essay on special dispensations for cult leaders, and MoM's ad hoc revelations.) Alas, even with all these uteri at his disposal, MoM still couldn't manage to procreate.

MoM insisted that his wives had unique obligations. They should devote more time to praying. They needed to remain more covered than other women. They would not be allowed to ever be touched by another man (even after his death), that their transgressions were more grievous than those of other women—thus warranting more severe punishment.

And so it went: In 622, with minimal headway made with his ministry in Mecca (and with his first wife and uncle gone), MoM realized that he needed to employ a different strategy. It had been almost a decade that he'd been proselytizing, and to minimal success. It is worth reiterating: Even his foster father—with whom he was very close, and who had MoM's best interests at heart—refused to believe MoM's mantic claims. So that year, the aspiring prophet opted to strike out; and try his luck in the town of Yathrib: a fortnight's camel-ride from Mecca, through the deserts of the Hijaz.

(It is possible the journey lasted for TWO fortnights. As the story goes, MoM and his companions made it as far as Quba, on the outskirts of Yathrib; and remained there for a fortnight in order to wait for Ali, who was delayed. This indicates that the Yathribis were not eagerly awaiting MoM. Rather, we might adduce that he did not want to go into the settlement until he had his closest companions with him, to make the kind of entrance he envisioned.)

With roughly 80 followers (certainly less than a hundred; i.e. all he had managed to convert in Mecca), MoM headed north in search of a more receptive audience. It was at this juncture that there purportedly occurred the fabled "Night Journey" ["Mi'raj"]: a magical sojourn to the seven heavens (replete with negotiations with—and tutorials from—the godhead). {15}

The emigration from Mecca to Yathrib is now known as the "Hijra", and marks YEAR ONE of the Islamic

calendar. {16}

The transition to Yathrib proved to be a very shrewd decision. For—unlike the Meccans—the denizens of Yathrib was prone to conversion to a newfangled Faith—that is: so long as it had the right inducements. (Put more bluntly: Yathribis were ripe for exploitation by a savvy demagogue who offered what they were looking for.) Being a largely Jewish municipality, many Yathribis were already familiar with Abrahamic monotheism—and so were open to the prospects of (charismatic) new prophet. Not just any self-proclaimed Messianic figure; but a persuasive cynosure, ensconced in mystique, who claimed to speak on behalf of the Abrahamic deity...bringing a fresh vision for a wayward people.

The Yathribis were thus primed for a compelling narrative—that is, so long as it catered to their needs. Violent incursions from the Byzantines in the past centuries had likely left a bad taste in their mouths with regard to Christianity; though their predilection for Abrahamic lore remained largely in tact. So what better idea than a RE-VAMPED Abrahamic creed that had been customized to fit incipient theological preconceptions. {17}

Moreover, many Yathribis hoped to gain supremacy over Mecca, as they were most likely quite envious—perhaps even resentful—of Mecca’s preeminence in Arabian culture (if, that is, we are to assume the standard Islamic narrative about Mecca). Therefore, a new monotheistic Faith that incorporated rights to the exalted “Kaaba” would have held significant appeal. (It is quite possible that the origin of Mohammedism was NOT in the Hijazi location now called Mecca, but in Petra; which was to the north. For more on this, see my essay: “Mecca And Its Cube”.)

Bear in mind: MoM grew up in Mecca (or, alternately, Petra), and regularly worshipped at the Kaaba—which included the precursor to the Mohammedan “Allah”. (The most prominent statue was for the moon-god “Hubal”, which was the Nabataean moniker for the Canaanite deity, “Baal”; and seems to have been conflated with “Allah”. See my essay on “The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text”.) So the appropriation of the coveted “cube” was likely on MoM’s agenda.

At the time of MoM’s ministry, the denizens of Saba (southern Hijaz) referred to their god-head as “El-Muqah” (alternately rendered “Al-makah”), which simply means “god the preserver”. The Arabian godhead, “Allah” likely ALSO incorporated elements of the Sabaeen god-of-mercy, Rahmaw / Rahman[an] (the Merciful), which was alternately rendered in the lingua franca of the region (Syriac) as “al-ilah” (the god)...which was itself derived from the word for “god” in Sabaeen, Akkadian, and Phoenician: “El”. {18}

The strategy here was quite clever. MoM could persuade those inclined to worship the Abrahamic deity that, well, “al-ilah” WAS that deity. Meanwhile, he could persuade those with attachments to the pre-eminent deity of the pagan Bedouins, the moon-god (which was sometimes referred to as “al-ilah”) that this represented him as well. Thus, in a way, all they were being asked to do was disregard the lesser pagan gods in favor of the most prominent one. Such legerdemain was a masterstroke of casuistry which surely ingratiated MoM with his target audience. (For more on this point, see “Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book” as well as Appendix 3 of my essay, “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.) For disheartened Yathribis, a novel movement that incorporated both extant (local) Hijazi traditions AND Abrahamic lore into its theology was just what the doctor ordered; especially since most were already aware of the god of the Jews. Ergo the process of syncretism that yielded Mohammedan lore (and what would eventually become Islam). A shrewd opportunist, MoM simply played to the crowd, as needed.

Equipped with a well-crafted Messianic message that hit all the right buttons, the task of courting the denizens of Yathrib posed little difficulty for a nascent panjandrum. Regarding MoM’s schtick (claims of

revelation from the Abrahamic deity), everything fell into place in short order. MoM was nothing if not crafty. He surely recognized: What better way to “fit the bill” than to offer a newfangled religion that transcended all internecine squabbles and established a common purpose? This new theology co-opted all the elements that it needed—both pagan and Abrahamic—to sweeten the deal.

There was a festering, un-met need in Yathrib for a new zeitgeist. The newcomer from Mecca wasted no time rising to the occasion.

In addition to ideological exigencies, there were political / logistical exigencies that worked in MoM’s favor. Put plainly: Yathribis were in need of a strong man. That is to say: They were desperate for someone (esp. an outsider who had no local baggage; no partialities) who could arbitrate the town’s (rather contentious) internal dealings.

The record makes it clear that Yathribis yearned for a disinterested party to settle disputes and finally—at long last—unify the city’s eight factious tribes. MoM fit the profile of such a “grand mediator”; so the stage was set for him to seize the reigns of power. Sociologically, this all makes perfect sense: There was a power vacuum in need of filling; and the rogue Qurayshi merchant was primed to fill it.

Before too long, the self-proclaimed “rasul Allah” (messenger of god) proved himself savvy at arbitrating disputes amongst the town’s quibbling factions—employing skills he had cultivated in Mecca when overseeing Khadijah’s caravan business. This is primarily how MoM managed to curry favor with so many people in that settlement.

And so it went: MoM was quick to accumulate prodigious cachet amongst quarreling parties by being the favored (municipal) power-broker. Arbitration, it turned out, was one of his best talents (in part, because of his undeniable charisma); as he had already demonstrated in Mecca. (Indeed, his Meccan days had afforded him ample time to refine his skills in that craft.) As MoM became the “go to” guy for ameliorating Yathrib’s disagreements, he garnered a reputation that enabled him to unite all of the town’s tribes. Such esteem would explain how he came to exercise so much influence in the locality within just a few years. He was above partisanship; and so was uniquely positioned.

In sum: MoM had succeeded decisively in Yathrib in key ways he had not been able to succeed in Mecca. This reflected more on the different climates of the two cities than on MoM himself. Meccans did not have a pressing problem in need of solving; Yathribis did.

Naturally, once MoM managed to unite Yathrib, the town’s (highly superstitious) inhabitants were more inclined to listen to what he had to say—WHATEVER he had to say. The aspiring prophet capitalized on such receptiveness by putting his “revelations” into overdrive. In so doing, he offered a singular explanation for all their woes (“You’ve been subscribing to an errant theology!”) MoM thus provided an enticing palliative for Yathrib’s tribulations: a re-vamped Abrahamic monotheism tailored to the sensibilities of Arabian pagans that would also comport with incipient Abrahamic partialities.

To reiterate: MoM’s prescription was primarily a theological one. It was as if worshipping more than one deity were the biggest threat to human civilization; and that polytheism, above all else, was the ultimate source of all Arabians’ woes. Such a straight-forward solution held tremendous appeal for simple-minded people seeking a “quick fix” for life’s otherwise inexplicable travails. Just BELIEVE, and all your tribulations will vanish...and glory will be yours.

Here’s the key: MoM’s poignant ministry was the perfect way to parlay his newly-minted (lofty) reputation into political authority (a reminder that, even in the Dark Ages, celebrities would vie for political

prominence). Indeed, as he gained influence in Yathrib, MoM proved himself to be extremely crafty. He was quick to establish ordinances to win over the city's wealthy Jews; then promptly rescinded those ordinances once he had accrued sufficient power (and no longer needed their support).

This is a key point. MoM changed his mind after certain decrees had served their initial purposes. He even rescinded ACTUAL REVELATIONS (i.e. verses in the "Recitations") after they were no longer needed in their original form. For a discussion of the most infamous episode of such an "oops, on second thought..." reversal, note what occurred with the so-called "Satanic Verses". {9}

Once the exigencies are understood, it should come as little surprise that MoM's designs on the people of Yathrib were a resounding success. The city was re-christened "Madinah-tun-Nabi" ("City of the Prophet"; later simply referred to as "Medina"), and MoM was anointed its undisputed potentate.

As is the case with any other cult activity, MoM had succeeded in bringing lots of people together (at least, those who went along with his program). He did so at the expense of separating them from everyone else. That is, after all, the how tribalism works. For, while creating solidarity amongst a delimited community, it succeeds in Balkanizing mankind on a larger scale—erasing old divisions while creating new ones. It is not so much "bringing people together" as it is re-defining the manner in which the global community is fragmented. This is, after all, what EVERY demagogue does.

As far as his followers were concerned, the self-identified "Last Prophet" did a marvelous job bringing THEM together; only to pit them against everyone else. (He "unified" the Arabian peninsula, which simply means he brought it all under the subjugation of one authority. Such unification is a hallmark of imperialism; it is more a matter of re-formatting divisiveness than it is about global human solidarity.)

Eventually, MoM had a charter for the city written up; which would serve as a de facto "constitution" for the newly-minted municipality. The document codified MoM's official status as not only a religious leader, but also as a political leader—thereby consolidating the two stations (and, more importantly, merging the two realms). Thus Mohammedism was an inherently political ideology, unlike most other religions (which are only OPTIONALLY theocratic).

In effect, the charter dealt with quotidian matters like trade, personal property, entitlements of citizens, civic obligations, adjudication of disputes, etc. It thereby eradicated vigilante justice—establishing a system of local governance (for the first time: centralized, organized, and systematically enforced) to which everyone was beholden. It was an iron-clad legal AND soteriological system—with MoM as the divinely-appointed, absolute sovereign. The distinction between the political and theological was erased.

There is no surviving copy of this (fabled) Medinan "constitution". What we have now are re-creations made well over a century after MoM's death. So far as can be ascertained, the contents were utterly unremarkable—mostly ordinances for the day-to-day dealings of a small city. Of two things we can be quite certain: It stripped women of their civil rights, which they'd had up until then in Arabia (see Appendix 1; as well as Appendix 2 of my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book"). Recall that the "Revelations" were addressed explicitly to MEN. Meanwhile, the new system put slavery into over-drive, something that had actually been quite rare in Arabia / Nabataea up until then (see my essays on "The Long History Of Legal Codes" and "The Universality Of Morality").

In the earlier days, MoM's ordinances were rather tolerant of diversity—accommodating the different tribes (rather than demanding complete conformity / submission). One of the first things he was supposed to have done was segregate the markets: one place for the Jews; another place for his followers (per the "separate but equal" approach). Thus local Gentiles were encouraged to conduct business only in the

Mohammedan “souk”. Of course, that conciliatory posture would soon change—and change dramatically—as MoM’s power grew.

“Let there be no two religions in Arabia,” MoM later declared. According to Muslim’s “sahih” Hadith (no. 4366; alt. 32/75), the self-proclaimed prophet announced: “I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslims.” According to Bukhari’s “sahih” Hadith (Book 8; no. 387), he announced: “I have been ordered to fight the people until they say, ‘None has the right to be worshipped but god.’ And if they say so, and pray as we pray, and face our qibla, and slay those we slay, then their blood and property shall be protected, and we will not interfere with their affairs except according to our laws.”

Suffice to say, the document was no Magna Carta. This new political arrangement (top-down control; authority vested in a potentate claiming divine sanction; treatment of Jews, Mandeans, Zoroastrians, and Manichaeans as subalterns) comports with Koranic passages like 3:32, 4:65/80, 5:19, 7:157, 24:63, 33:31-36, and 59:7, which present MoM as the divinely-appointed law-giver (that is: issuing edicts on behalf of the Abrahamic deity).

4:65 tells us that Islam is about completely submitting not only to the Abrahamic deity, but also to MoM’s commands (thereby arrogating absolute authority to this singular figure). MoM’s judgement / example is the final word on all matters. 59:7 reads: “So take what the Messenger assigns to you, and refrain from what he withholds from you.” Translation: This new cynosure calls all the shots. Do what he says, lest you cross the Creator Of The Universe.) It was textbook authoritarianism. {19}

Initially, the (eventual) mandate for routine supplication (3 to 5 daily salat) was not in place. This was a shrewd political concession (the uses for which would soon become obsolete). {20}

This storied charter deemed the “Ummah” (community) to be synonymous with the “Ahl al-Kitab” (“People of the Book”; i.e. the community of all Abrahamic monotheists), not exclusively with Mohammedans. To reiterate: Diplomacy was only needed in the early stages, then discarded the moment sufficient power had been consolidated. Not coincidentally, the earliest “Recitations” were tailored to the sensibilities of MoM’s larger target audience. For example, the new leader issued “revelations” that permitted his followers to raid Meccan caravans (22:39-40). The city’s inhabitants were all-too-eager to oblige. (“Legitimized piracy...exclusively for US, you say?” Who could argue with THAT?) Sweetening the pot with a promised “Garden of Pleasures” in “akhira” (for those who signed up for the program) was a nice added touch. Note that the pleasures were geared to MEN: the intended audience. (For more on this, see my essay on “A Brief History Of Heaven And Hell”.)

Meanwhile, quietly at first, MoM eliminated detractors—even if it was just people writing unflattering poetry. This pogrom included the Jewish poet Ka’b ibn al-Ashraf (ref. Hadiths Bukhari 5/59/369 and Muslim vol. 19, no. 4436). MoM had nothing but contempt for poets, who were the closest thing to civil rights activists at the time; and so were seen as a threat. The Koran makes no secret of this draconian protocol vis a vis subversives (a matter I explore in part 1 of my essay: “The History Of Literature”).

There is an irony to MoM’s disdain for poets, as he was essentially just another (oral) poet HIMSELF—though, barring his winning delivery, not a very erudite one. Rather than let his material rise or fall on its own merits, he was inclined to vanquish the competition (read: eliminate threats to his reputation as the only viable proselytizer). His followers could then brag that nobody else could match his divinely-inspired oratory. (It’s easy to win when you’re the only horse in the race.) In a sense, it was not the heretical material that was MoM’s fear, it was (possibly superior, possibly compelling) competition with his own middling oration.

The stratagem was clear: If MoM's fabulous narrative was to become a monopoly, he needed to bring it about by fiat. His ample charisma (or, more accurately, his guile) would do the rest. And so MoM convinced his Yathribi followers that the "revelations" he spouted were pearls of wisdom so eloquently articulated that they could not possibly have come from him. Most likely, the literary standards at the time were quite low (as what later became Koranic text clearly attests); so such persuasion was not a Sisyphean task.

The goal, then, was for MoM to be the only game in town; and so he made it so (with lethal force when necessary). He was shrewd enough to strategically position himself as THE go-to guy for, well, EVERYTHING. He became the analogue of a mafia king-pin: the undisputed lord of a burgeoning cartel. Nothing happened without his say-so; and that's exactly how he wanted it.

The gambit worked like a charm. For, as it turned out, throughout much of the Hijaz, there was a hankering for a Messianic figure who would set things aright in a blighted desert landscape addled with chronic disputes. Needless to say: When a swashbuckling, smooth-talking popinjay appeared from out of town, his pitch was fresh and new; and not easily dismissed. It was a message of hope and validation; and promises of booty—lucre and women—for those who participated in the raids.

At the time, the Hijaz likely had its fair share of aspiring demagogues jockeying for prominence. However, MoM seems to have boasted clout that was unmatched by other comers (at least, for the time being, in that particular region). Like a savvy mob boss, he consolidated his power by eliminating competitors, and promising a cut of the spoils. As with any charismatic leader, he galvanizing his target audience with soaring rhetoric, which was passed off as a message from the Creator of the Universe...directly directly AT THEM: the Ishmaelites.

MoM's neo-Abrahamic stratagem surely resonated with disenchanting pagan Bedouins: people who likely had limited vested interest in the tediously antiquarian Arab polytheism that they'd inherited—by default—from their forebears. Indeed, those with a less-than-marvelous lot in life may have felt forsaken by their traditional gods. Where once the Saracens were, well, JUST Saracens (unassuming, nomadic desert-dwellers on the margins of civilization), they were now given an invitation to be proud of their Ishmaelite pedigree; and—now the focal point of the Creator of the Universe—to be at the center of the world.

As is usually the case, it was gravitas more than anything resembling objective merit that afforded MoM prodigious socio-political capital. {53}

So in a shrewd sort of theological arbitrage, MoM made use of nascent Abrahamic motifs, repackaged them, then sold it as a marvelous new-wave movement. Like any charismatic leader, he offered a way for restive Bedouins to spruce up their lackluster lives, imbued with new meaning. With the imprimatur of the godhead, ANYTHING GOES. That is: "We're doing god's work" / "It's god's will" is a blank check one can cash for whatever agenda one might happen to have. Once one is furnished with a casus belli (which can be put in the service of LITERALLY ANYTHING), there are no limits to one's aspirations.

All the while, MoM kept his eye on the prize: Mecca. For Mecca provided his followers with the most galvanizing of causes: a holy crusade (a phrase I use un-ironically). More to the point, Meccans (qua non-Mohammedans) represented a common enemy; and thus an enticing prospect for glory. (What better way to unify and mobilize a fragmented population than to posit a shared nemesis?) {21}

And so it went: In resolving some divisions (the internecine quarrels within Yathrib), MoM ended up stoking others (the grander Medinan-Meccan feud). Strategically, via 2:136-147 (addressing "qibla": the

direction followers should pray) MoM established Mecca—instead of Jerusalem—as the NEW focal point of the Faith; castigating those who continued to bow toward Jerusalem after the change. By inserting the pagan Kaaba into the newly appointed theology, MoM’s followers became convinced that they were ENTITLED to Mecca. This inducement proved effective. For it provided further rational for the Yathribis’ mounting enmity with the demonized Quraysh. (Those pesky pagans were now desecrating hallowed ground! They need to be stopped!)

MoM was careful to emphasize the fact that his new movement was primarily about accumulating booty (as with 4:94 and 8:1). This added to its appeal amongst the restive denizens of the Hijaz—especially disenfranchised Bedouin searching for something glorious—and lucrative—of which to be a part. The self-proclaimed messenger-of-god was not embarking on some grand humanitarian mission; he was accumulating myrmidons...and booty. Those predisposed to sycophancy were easily brought into the fold. Many of the rest—yearning for something to live for—were understandably swept up in the fervor. The appeal of an opportunity for both glory AND a cut of the spoils was almost irresistible for poor Bedouins in desperate search of gainful employment. Access to a steady supply of sex slaves was icing on the cake. The Mohammedan cartel (effectively, an expanding posse of desert-pirates) soon became the best employer in the region. {54}

In 624, once he had accumulated adequate power and military might, MoM orchestrated the victorious “Battle of Badr” against a small band of Qurayshis (a victory that he cunningly attributed to the assistance of special “combat” angels). The idea was simple: Intercept a Qurayshi merchant caravan (which was returning to Mecca from lands to the north) along one of its routine trade routes. The plan was to ambush the merchants as they arrived at the wells located at Badr to replenish their water supply.

The point is worth emphasizing: The peaceable Meccan convoy posed no threat whatsoever to the Mohammedans, as it had actually gone out of its way to stay clear of Medina ON ITS WAY BY, heading southward, toward home. But defense was not the point of the Mohammedan onslaught. Glory (and plunder) was the motive. PIRACY would be the new modus operandi.

Having caught wind of plans for a possible ambush, the Quraysh in Mecca sent a few hundred escorts to protect the caravan from attack. (The legend embellishes this number, rendering it as much as a thousand.) Alas, this was done to no avail, as—even with superior numbers (perhaps double the number of the Mohammedan pirates)—the caravan was unprepared for such militancy. The Mohammedan assault prevailed, and the loot was seized. {22}

It is not for nothing that one of the longest chapters in the Koran is entitled “Spoils of War”. The Surah was written according to the practice (plunder) on which the movement was originally based. The raid on the (neutral) wells of Badr was the first martial conflict in the Mohammedan crusade: a harbinger of what was to follow. Indeed, it set a decisive precedent for confrontation that would endure thereafter. {23}

Bedouins were only too happy to participate in this new cause (all in the name of the Abrahamic deity, of course) considering there was plenteous booty to be seized...including enough female captives to go around (ergo 33:50). The incentives for men were hard to turn down: More sex during life; and more sex AFTER DEATH (that is: ON-DEMAND sex, for all eternity, with a bevy of buxom, wide-eyed, angelic virgins). Such inducements were clearly designed for men; as MoM’s ideology was overtly patriarchal. {24}

MoM proved himself a maestro at galvanizing restive Bedouins, enticing them with the same things that had enticed men since time immemorial. Piracy and evangelism thus took on a symbiotic relationship as his hordes burgeoned.

And so it went: The vicious raid on the merchant caravan at the wells of Badr was a rout. Predictably, such a resounding military triumph conferred a veneer of credence on MoM's germinating movement, dispelling any lingering doubts (regarding the movement's viability) amongst the region's disillusioned Bedouins. Nothing succeeds like success. {25} This would have been especially so amongst the existentially beleaguered denizens of the Hijaz. {26}

Everyone loves a winner; and so additional recruits—including aspiring marauders—flocked to the Mohammedan ranks. Buoyed by these successes, emboldened by an ethos of triumphalism, and girded by an air of Providentialism, the bandwagon effect was quickly gaining momentum.

The point is worth emphasizing: A new vocation within a burgeoning force of brigands would have been extremely tempting for the common, disillusioned Bedouin. Nothing like this had ever appeared before in Arabia. By the time word of the triumph at Badr had spread, the movement had become more than a lucrative cartel; it had become a full-fledged cult (a cult, that is, that specialized in piracy). The reaction seemed not to be, "Why did these men attack a peaceable merchant caravan?!" Rather, the reaction was: "How can *I* get in on the action?!"

Another point is worth emphasizing: Prior to the later campaigns, which were primarily concerned with the conquest of land (replete with theocratic hegemony), illicit acquisition of booty was the primary focus of the fledgling movement. For the wayward Bedouin, joining such an operation would have been VERY enticing—analogueous to contemporary misfits opting to join the local mafia (or disenfranchised urban youth opting to join a city's most powerful street-gang). The prospects were tough to resist; for not only could they get a piece of this growing pie, they could be part of something PROVIDENTIAL. {27}

Pursuant to the successful Badr assault, MoM's celebrity sky-rocketed amongst the non-Qurayshi sectors of the Hijaz. Later, even when Mohammedan desert-pirates lost battles (as in the battles of Uhud and Mu'tah, or in failed attacks on the Banu Murra and Banu Layth, or in the faltering siege of Ta'if), MoM concocted "revelations" to rationalize the set-backs (e.g. 3:152). The message was clear: Even when we FAIL, divine ordinance was at play. No matter what happened, it was taken as confirmation of all that MoM said.

Thus, whatever occurred, MoM's brazen pronouncements appeared to be validated; so his popularity continued to soar. Aspiring bandits continued to rally to the movements growing ranks.

MoM was a humble, beneficent man? The evidence paints a very different picture. The self-proclaimed "rasul allah" was merciless. When it came to subversives, MoM either banished them (e.g. the Jewish tribes of Qaynuqa and Nadir) or he had them massacred (e.g. the Qurayza and Uraina tribes). The message was clear: If someone in any way disparages the cause, or stands in the way of the cause, they should be killed (see, for example, Bukhari Book 4, no. 241 and Book 56, no. 369; as well as Sunan Abu Dawood no. 4348-4349). This precedent was in keeping with 8:12, 9:29, 33:57-61, 47:4, and 48:29 in the Koran.

The examples of this draconian protocol are legion. I'll mention the most notable ones here.

MoM proclaimed that seven men (including Abu Jahl, Utba ibn Rabi'a, Shaiba ibn Rabi'a, Al-Walid ibn Utba, Umaiyah ibn Khalaf, and Uqba ibn Abu Muayt) should be severely punished because ONE of them (some say Abu Jahl, others say Uqba ibn Abu Muayt; and some even say it was MoM's own despised uncle, Abu Lahab) placed camel viscera on MoM's back while the latter was praying...as the others stood by and laughed at the prank (ref. Bukhari's Hadith 1/4/241). The culprit was executed for the prank.

It should go without saying that such reprisal reflects pettiness rather than beneficence. Indeed, MoM's

petulance was legendary. We might note the account given by his most celebrated wife, Aisha bint Abu Bakr (ref. Bukhari's Hadith no. 6404) that MoM "only became angry when people transgressed the limits and boundaries of god. In that case he exacted vengeance." No kidding. (Says the sociopath: "I'm only violent when I feel crossed.")

The bruises Aisha incurred from her husband's temper attested to this plaintive observation. The "I only punish you when you displease me" defense is the favorite of ANY abusive husband. "He only gets VERY angry when I get out of line," is what any battered housewife learns to say. "But he really loves me." (Says the abusive husband to his cowering spouse: "I'm doing it for your own good.") {28}

MoM's tolerance for dissidence (read: lack of complete submission, or any disruption to his program) was virtually nil. "Hits" were ordered even for those who merely offended him. To reiterate: many of the targets for assassination were just POETS—that is: regular people who had the gall to simply write / recite critical things. To name just a dozen documented cases:

- Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf (mentioned above; beheaded—in front of MoM—for speaking out against the Mohammedan movement)
- Asma bint Marwan (a pregnant woman assassinated while lying in bed with her children)
- Al-Nadr ibn al-Harith (beheaded—in front of MoM—for reciting Persian folktales)
- Abu Afak [an elderly Jewish man of the Banu Ubayda, who's poem about MoM we still have] (slain for speaking out against MoM)
- Jewish brothers, Sallam and Al-Rabi ibn Abu al-Huqayq of Khaybar [renown poets from the Banu al-Nadir] (both slain for speaking out against MoM in their verse) {29}
- Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul al-Aufi (for speaking out against MoM)
- Huwayrith ibn Nafidh [or ibn Nuqaydh] (for "insulting" MoM)
- Sara [a freed slave of Abdul Al-Muttalib] (for "insulting" MoM)
- Ka'b ibn Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulama of the Banu Muzaina [the circumstances of his death are disputed; as is the nature of his poetry]
- Al-Harith ibn al-Talatil (a Meccan poet slain by MoM's lieutenant, Ali)
- Khalid ibn Sufyan al-Hathali of the Banu Lahyan (beheaded for speaking out against MoM)
- The male slave of Abdullah ibn Khatal of Banu Taym [ibn Ghalib] (EVISCERATED for failing to slaughter a goat as ordered) as well as two slave-girls, Fartana and Quraybah (slain for singing satirical verses)

And on and on. {30} Others were executed simply for refuting MoM's claims—as with the dissident, Al-Nadr. In his "Sirat Rasul Allah", Ibn Ishaq relays that some marks were initially ordered executed, but then spared when they repented in desperation (e.g. Abdullah ibn Zib'ari). Was this a sign of mercy, or a condition for remaining alive? (I explore the effects MoM's ministry—and the Mohammedan movement in general—had on free speech in part 1 of my essay on "The History Of Literature".)

Bear in mind that all this is perfectly in keeping with myriad Koranic passages—notably 5:33-39, 9:61-63, 33:26/57-61, and 83:13. If any of these people were being accused of treason (note that heresy and treason were equated), we might wonder why none of them were given a trial. After all, treatment of so-called "subversives" defines how (un)civil a society happens to be.

(Helpful hint: It is a sign of strength when the powers-that-be tolerate both dissent and criticism. I explore this matter in my essay: "In Defense Of Satire".)

There were plenty more examples of people being killed for speaking out against MoM. In Sunan Abu Dawood (vol. 2, no. 4361; then again in vol. 38, no. 4348), Abdullah ibn Abbas tells us that a blind man

loyal to MoM executed his slave-girl (the mother of his child, and pregnant with a second) for disparaging MoM—prompting further accolades to the new leader. In Bukhari 4/56/826, we hear from Abdullah ibn Masud about MoM directing his men to kill Umaiya ibn Khalaf Abi Safwan for speaking out.

Ibn Ishaq, MoM's earliest biographer (via Ibn Hisham), tells of the execution of the female tribal chief, Umm Qirfa (of the Banu Fazara) after a raid on Wadi al-Qurra (under MoM's lieutenant, Zaid ibn Harith). How was Umm Qirfa executed? In vol. 8, Al-Tabari explains that—under orders—a brigand named “Qays” tied each of her legs with a rope and tied the ropes to two camels. The camels then split her in two. Umm Qirfa's young daughter was then sold into sex slavery. {31}

Suffice to say, forbearance was not MoM's strong suit. One can scour the volumes of ahadith in vain for an account of MoM undertaking a project in which he HELPED people—REGARDLESS OF THEIR FAITH. No such account exists. Amongst the massive compendium of Hadith records, one might expect to find at least a few descriptions of something resembling humanitarian outreach...or acts of magnanimity. Yet there are none. All that can be found is account after account after account of FIGHTING...and subjugation.

The only poets who were permitted during MoM's ministry—and in the centuries following—were those who composed elegies / eulogies, or those who were charged with composing encomia / panegyrics (i.e. propaganda for the rulers; mostly by court poets). That's it. If it was anything more than poetry for the deceased or tribute to MoM / the presiding kalifa, it was forbidden. The early Mohammedans did not even appreciate the theretofore renown Arab poets (who were widely hailed prior to MoM's ministry). Indeed, the father of Arabic poetry, Imr al-Qays, was denounced as the infidels' “leader on the road to hell.” So much for that.

MoM personally employed his own panegyrist, and actively sought out and persecuted anyone who had the audacity to compose / disseminate poetry that dared mock him. That is, he killed anyone who made him look bad. In one case, not only was the writer of the offending poem (a satire) executed, the singing girl who had merely performed the poem was executed as well.

There were, of course, reasons for killing other than mere disparagement of the newly-anointed “nabi” and his burgeoning movement. As mentioned above, MoM ordered Abdullah ibn Khatal executed for not following orders (regarding failure to perform a goat sacrifice while MoM was napping). Transgressions that warranted execution included leaving the fold (per 3:86)—as with Al-Harith ibn Suwayd al-Ansari and Miqyas ibn Hubaba, each executed for apostasy. In true Mohammedan fashion, they were both beheaded. {32}

If MoM had a compassionate bone in his body, it rarely showed.

Bear in mind: These accounts are all from sources that ROMANTICIZE MoM. That is to say: The evidence on which the present bio is based was provided by those who had a staunch, vested interest in portraying MoM in as good a light as possible. Apparently the early Muslim hagiographers thought these were all COMMENDABLE things; and so should be included in the romanticized accounts they composed. I'm merely summarizing here what they went out of their way to advertise.

It is also well-attested that MoM ordered two men assassinated for claiming that they were (also) prophets: Musaylima[h] of Yamama and Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid ibn Nawfal of the Banu Asad. The order was sustained even after they offered to work in alliance with MoM. {33} At the end of his life, MoM ordered his lieutenant, Fayruz al-Daylami, to kill [Habbat] Al-Aswad al-Ansi of Najran (a.k.a. “Abhala bin Ka'b”), who had claimed himself prophet and amassed a following in Yemen.

Eliminating the competition was the name of the game. As with most demagogues, MoM refused to share the mantle of exaltedness. For MoM, cooperation wasn't part of the plan; it had to be all about him, and him alone. {34}

Later, MoM had his former scribe—Abdullah ibn Sa'ad (ibn Abi Sarh)—executed for telling people that he'd caught the self-proclaimed “rasul” fabricating revelations during the dictation process. On a few occasions, while taking dictation from MoM, he suggested alternate wording that MoM adopted. This was suspicious insofar as MoM claimed to be channeling the exact wording of the Creator of the Universe. Once the scribe started telling others about these episodes, he signed his own death warrant. (See my essay: “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.)

Under the new regime, heresy was a capital offense. And making MoM look bad was the gravest heresy of all.

In addition to all this, there were many documented revenge killings ordered by MoM, per 83:13. (For more on this, reference Ibn Ishaq's “Sirat Rasul Allah” and various accounts throughout the “sahih” Hadith record.)

As aspiring Hijazi bandits rallied to MoM's cause (re-cast as “ghazi”), the “nabi” continued to ply them with a cut of the booty (“al-anfal”) from their raids (“ghazw”). Persuading participants that they were doing everything in the cause of an all-powerful deity provided further motivation. (The lure of banditry is all the more enticing when one is convinced it is in the service of a righteous cause.) Within such an incentive structure, it would have been more surprising when a wayward Bedouin DIDN'T opt to sign up for the program. {35}

MoM carried out several massacres. According to the earliest biography (by Ibn Ishaq), when the (Jewish) Banu Qurayzah tribe surrendered pursuant to a Mohammedan siege of their village, MoM had all the men (apart from a handful of converts) beheaded. Ibn Ishaq reported that as many as 900 men and boys were “brought out in batches,” ceremonially decapitated, and thrown into trenches that MoM had his men to dig for that express purpose (47:4). Meanwhile, all the women and children were enslaved (in accordance with 4:24). (Also reference 33:9-10/26 in the Koran; as well as Bukhari's Hadith 4/52/68, 4/57/66, 5/59/459, and 7/62/137.)

The rationale for the slaughter of almost a thousand civilians was simple: treason / heresy (the two were equated, as—either way—one was deemed an “enemy of god”). The rationale for making sex slaves of female captives was simple: the age-old precedent of entitlement to the spoils of war (women were, after all, seen as PROPERTY) going back to the Hebrew Bible (Numbers 31:18; Deuteronomy 21:10-14, 22:28-29; Judges 21:10-14; 2 Samuel 8:2; etc.) MoM was merely resuming what had been an ancient Abrahamic tradition. Another verse (5:33) was eventually produced to legitimize such heinous practices (crucifixion, dismemberment, etc. for the “crime” of sacrilege). Enslavement of captives was eventually enshrined in the Islam's holy book. So the conduct of the Mohammedan raiders (as “mu-jahideen”) made perfect sense when seen through the prism of god's FINAL MESSAGE to mankind.

Meanwhile, per Bukhari's Hadith (4/52/176-177 and 4/56/791; alt. no. 3593) and Muslim's Hadith (vol. 41; no. 6981-6985), MoM himself had this to say about those pesky Jews: “The time [for the realization of our destiny] will not arrive until we [Muslims] prevail over the Jews; until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees—which will yell out, ‘Oh, Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him!’” (Yes, inanimate objects will help the servants of god...by TALKING.)

MoM's enjoiner to seek out and kill "kuffar"—even if they are fleeing and hiding from you—was loud and clear. (Even the rocks and the trees were in on the plan.) It is—above all else—vindictiveness that drove most of MoM's hostility toward those who did not follow him. The evidence is conclusive on this point. Once he had become sufficiently powerful, the self-proclaimed "nabi" was merciless against anyone who stood in his way. Demonization of THE OTHER was standard operating procedure.

Today, the de rigueur depiction of Islam's "nabi" as the paragon of beneficence is not only farcical, but a vulgar distortion. Temperance and magnanimity were clearly not a part of his repertoire (pace his reticence to disturb slumbering cats). He not only unabashedly urged his followers to militancy; he routinely exalted violence. (To reiterate: Transgressions that warranted EXECUTION included having the audacity to sully MoM's image; especially when done in poetry.)

This is not to say that the Quraysh were entirely innocent. They saw a competitor (i.e. a threat), and—predictably—retaliated in kind. So there did occur sporadic confrontations in which Mohammedans were simply defending their own turf. But such a scenario was the exception; not the rule.

The ONLY case in which there was a major military confrontation in which the Mohammedans were in a defensive posture was the so-called "Ghazwah al-Khandaq" ["Battle of the Trench"], which wasn't even an actual battle. On this singular occasion, after repeatedly having their merchant caravans attacked by Mohammedan desert-pirates, the Meccans deigned to attack the Mohammedan stronghold (Medina). Yet a trench that had been (preemptively) dug across the primary access point rendered Medina inaccessible; thereby precluding actual combat. Unable to traverse the trench, and faced with inclement weather (a sandstorm), the Quraysh eventually gave up and departed, not a single sword unsheathed.

(If this event HAD involved combat, it would have been the only major instance of Mohammedans defending themselves in an actual battle. As it turned out, not a single "ghazwah" occurred in which Mohammedans had to defend themselves from militant incursion. Pursuant to the call for "jihad" ["holy war"], they were ALWAYS the aggressors.)

MoM was a gentle, kind-hearted man who regularly exercised forbearance? The record tells a different story. Once he had become sufficiently power, he was violent and ruthless. Case in point: the celebrated Battle of Khaybar (628) was a massacre of Jews (the Banu Nadir). Pursuant to that battle, MoM raped—then forcibly married—the young daughter of the (slaughtered) tribe's chief, Huyayy ibn Akhtab: the 17-year old Safiya. Her husband, Kenana ibn al-Rabi, who was the tribe's treasurer, was also tortured and executed (see Appendix 2). Pursuant to that particular massacre, a revelation (4:20) was promptly produced to establish MoM's personal rights to the spoils. Mohammedan raiders' right to enslave / marry all female captives quickly became a matter of policy.

Recall that MoM insisted that ANYTHING and EVERYTHING he commanded was merely a decree channeled from the Abrahamic deity. Ergo to obey MoM was simply to heed the will of god (and to disobey HIM was to thwart god's will). He essentially fashioned himself the Abrahamic deity's proconsul on Earth. He was the sole spokesperson for the Creator of the Universe, and so should NEVER be questioned. (The refrain is familiar to anyone familiar with cult-leaders: "To question ME is to question GOD.") 4:65 goes so far as to designate the self-proclaimed prophet as the ultimate arbiter in all matters. This particular verse demands submission TO MoM HIMSELF. This treatment of MoM as ultimate authority is corroborated by other Koranic passages (notably: 3:32, 4:80, 5:19, 7:157, 24:63, 33:31-36, and 59:7). {36} And so it went that MoM was effectively seen as deity by proxy—if not explicitly, then implicitly. Such is the nature of divinely-appointed mouthpieces. {37}

Regarding MoM's teachings / example, this begs the question: If such instructions were so crucial, then why were they not included in the Koran itself? There is a prophet who is—on the one hand—delivering the verbatim transcript of the Abrahamic deity (the “Recitations”); and—on the other hand—providing important guidance that is needed as a kind of SUPPLEMENT TO said transcript. What's going on here? It seems that some things were deemed Koranic whilst other things were not; yet ALL of it is purportedly integral to the final message (and thus to the “Sunnah”).

Here's the problem: The criteria for any given edict being articulated in one way as opposed to the other way turns out to be entirely arbitrary. Each time MoM issued a decree, one would have had to have asked of the statement: “Ok. But wait. Is that a direct quote from god (and thus to be deemed part of the Koran) or is that just you teaching us (and thus to be considered part of the Sunnah)?” If it's all coming directly from god, what purpose would such a distinction serve? {38}

To recapitulate: On several occasions, an opportune revelation was suddenly produced that ended up being extremely beneficial for MoM PERSONALLY. Most notable was one that enabled him to acquire the attractive wife of his adopted son, Zayd (by nullifying the status of adopted sons as legitimate sons). {39}

In 628, MoM tried to return to Mecca—ostensively, for the purpose of a pilgrimage to the “Kaaba”: a time-honored pagan tradition. Predictably, he encountered resistance from the Quraysh. Consequently, he was forced to stop short of the city and negotiate.

The result of the negotiations was the so-called “Treaty of Hudaibiya” (named after the town from which MoM conducted the negotiations). The gist of the agreement was that the Mohammedans would be required to stop attacking Meccan caravans. Once MoM satisfied that request, he was notified, his followers would be allowed to visit the Kaaba—unarmed, strictly as pilgrims—the following year. This is an illustration that the Meccan's primary bone to pick with MoM was his PIRACY.

MoM acquiesced to this year-long “probation” period; but would not be dissuaded from his larger agenda. {40}

To save face, MoM promptly produced a new “revelation” in which god pronounced the compromise a victory—thereby placating his frustrated followers. In the end, assenting to the Hudaibiya treaty proved to be extremely shrewd on MoM's part. Once again, he demonstrated that he had an uncanny knack for picking his battles prudently (to wit: only when he was confident that he would win). MoM may well have been the most savvy opportunist in world history. He knew when to bide his time and when to act.

The next year (629), MoM used his sanctioned visit to Mecca to astounding aplomb. It was not just the first pilgrimage (though not yet considered an official “Hajj”, since the Kaaba was still polytheistic); it was also a prime opportunity—a second chance—to garner support from WITHIN Mecca. As it so happened, the sovereignty of the Quraysh in the city was on the wane by 629 (and may even have actually been waning for a few years by that point). {41} The timing for this could not have been any better from MoM's point of view. Circumstance was playing right into his hands.

This highly-monitored visit turned out to be a resoundingly successful PR campaign for the Mohammedans. Taking a temporary reprieve from their militancy, they behaved themselves. This proved to be an extremely wise move.

Following the well-received Mohammedan pilgrimage of 629, the (resentful) Quraysh promptly shot themselves in the foot. They did this by conducting an unprovoked attack on one of MoM's allies. This gambit proved to be a PR disaster for the Quraysh; and all but sealed their fate. For, juxtaposed against the

recent (and very publicly visible) peaceable Mohammedan pilgrimage to Mecca, the ill-advised assault made the Quraysh look mean-spirited—as if only THEY were the aggressors (and the Mohammedans the innocent victims).

The timing of this fatal mis-step could not have worked more in MoM's favor. He had refashioned his movement's image (for the time being) as quasi-conciliatory; while the Qurayshi impresarios stigmatized themselves as bad-faith actors.

In 630, MoM went back to Mecca to seize it. By this time, he had mobilized an army of over 10,000 men; so he posed a formidable threat to any possible resistance. Unsurprisingly, the Mecca's inhabitants capitulated quickly, thereby minimizing casualties. For by then, the Quraysh (who were merchants above all else, not warriors) knew that resistance would have been utterly futile—nay: suicide. They were—after all—primarily merchants; whereas the Mohammedans highly-practiced fighters.

It didn't hurt that MoM also bribed the most influential tribal sheiks with camels and silver—an enticement to get them to go along with the new order. Predictably, this worked. For the sheiks did not really care one way or the other about theology; they were businessmen who coveted lucre. MoM bought off anyone who may have had the power to intercede. The entire campaign was a master-stroke.

Another leitmotif was recycled from antecedent Abrahamic lore at this point in the story. Just as JoN is said to have ridden into Jerusalem on an ass, so too MoM was said to have ridden into Mecca on an ass. In both cases, the exalted figure makes a triumphal—yet unassuming—entrance. As it turns out, the leitmotif had been recycled by the authors of the Gospels as well. In the Hebrew Bible, we encounter the use of an ass for the exultant—if not grand—entrance of the long-awaited ruler of Zion: triumphant yet humble (Zechariah 9:9 and 14:1-5). The problem is that, while the “riding in on a donkey” shtick makes sense in the Gospels (as it is consummate with JoN's mild-mannered nature; and is in keeping with his moral message), it is entirely incongruous with the character of MoM. Needless to say, one does not show up with a legion of 10,000 warriors...only to awkwardly saunter into town on a donkey.

Use of this trite leitmotif in the Mohammedan legend was likely a post-hoc narrative emendation—a tid-bit of flattering apocrypha inserted so as to illustrate MoM's (purported) good will. Be that as it may, even the most effusive accolades about MoM don't pretend that he was humble.

The fact that MoM abstained from carrying out what would have been a completely gratuitous massacre in Mecca is often cited by apologists as evidence (nay, conclusive proof) that MoM represented the quintessence of magnanimity. This interpretation overlooks the fact that it was the MECCANS' decision not to fight, not the Mohammedans'. Had the Meccans opted to resist, then the Mohammedans were prepared to spill all the blood they needed to accomplish their mission. The lack of bloodshed, then, is attributable more to the Meccans' prompt surrender than to any design on MoM's part to not hurt anyone. I discuss this matter at length in my essay: “Debunking Three Myths”.

Moreover, such an interpretation conveniently omits the fact that there were at least six (pre-planned) targeted assassinations (of figures who were “causing mischief”) upon his seizure of the city. This included two slave girls (“Fartana” and “Quraybah”). Why kill slave girls? For—you guessed it—reciting subversive poetry (satirical songs). So much for magnanimity. The girls' crime was exercising free speech in a manner of which MoM did not approve.

It is safe to say that MoM was likely the most easily-offended demagogue in recorded history—a precedent that many Muslims follow to this day. (It is no coincidence that MoM's thin skin is reflected in the glaring insecurity of the protagonist of his magnum opus.)

Pursuant to overtaking the city, those MoM had assassinated (in addition to those already listed) included Abd al-Uza ibn Akhtal (referenced in verse 68:4 of the Koran), Ikrimah ibn Abu al-Hakam, and Al-Huwayrith ibn Naketh ibn Wahab. There were surely untold others critical of the Mohammedan movement who met the same fate. (Already mentioned, the scribe who defected, Abdullah ibn Sa'ad ibn Abi Sarh, was the most famous case.) {42}

As it turns out, the self-proclaimed “nabi” was strikingly consistent in setting a precedent—one that did not even remotely resemble diplomacy. It was a precedent that was diametrically opposed to the decorous “example” that Islamic apologists often tout. Pace the panoply of saccharine anecdotes proliferating throughout Dar al-Islam, I have been unable to find EVEN ONE counterfactual to MoM’s stark pattern of truculence. At no point did magnanimity characterize his modus operandi. He was very easily angered, and ruthless in his response to interlopers.

It was immediately after Mecca was overtaken that MoM issued the notorious Koranic passage: 9:28-29. Among other things, this rendered Mecca off-limits to non-Muslims forevermore. (So much for pluralism.) It also clarified the plight of mankind: a battle between Muslims and “mu-shrikun” (polytheists—a category that included Christians due to the doctrine of the Trinity). Henceforth, all plights would be couched strictly in those Manichaeic terms.

The Ummah was now ONLY professed followers of MoM. No more were other “People of the Book” accorded equal esteem. The utility for inclusiveness had run its course.

Thereafter, the violence resumed...to an ever-higher degree.

With his legions of “ghazi” (raiders) galvanized, MoM proceeded with an reinvigorated offensive across the deserts of Arabia—out of the Hijaz (eastern Arabia) and through the Nejd (central Arabia). With his bolstered forces, he soon chalked up major military victories against the Hawazin and Thaqif tribes (in the Battle of Hunayn; c. 630), thereby completing his conquest of Arabia.

Rather than fight (and risk slaughter), some tribes simply surrendered (e.g. the “Banu Udhrayh”), acceding to demands to convert, submit, or die. Such a decision does not attest to the credence of Mohammedan theological declarations; it attests to the movement’s mounting domination at the time. (For another example of the “convert, submit, or die” ultimatum, see: South American natives vis a vis Spanish Conquistadors...who, after all, were only “helping” the indigenous population by bringing god’s word to them.)

At this point, the wider geo-political exigencies came into play. Regarding the Middle East, the time was ripe for a strong-man to come to power. The two warring empires that skirted Arabia (the Sassanians on the eastern flank and the Romans on the western flank) were severely beleaguered; and had consequently lost control of their outer fringes. {43} The faltering Byzantines had been enervated by FOUR CENTURIES of extremely costly, relentless conflict with the Persians, which had been especially debilitating during the 6th century; and reached a fever pitch by the early 7th century. {44} Even worse, in the mid-6th century, the Eastern Roman empire had been afflicted with a massive black plague (which may have killed up to half of its population—eviscerating not only the military but the economy as well).

As Ian Morris put it: “The great Persian-Byzantine wars convulsed this Arabian periphery; and when the empires fell apart, Arabian strongmen battled over the ruins. In western Arabia [i.e. the Hijaz], Mecca [read: the Quraysh] and Medina [read: the Yathribis] fought through the 620’s over trade routes—their war-bands fanning out across the [Najd] desert to find allies and ambush each other’s caravans. Old imperial

frontiers meant little in this game; and by the time Medina's leader [MoM] took over Mecca c. 630, his raiders were already fighting in Palestine." {45} It also didn't help the Sassanians that their great Emperor, Khosrow II, was assassinated in 628.

The aforementioned Koranic passage (9:28-29) explains why MoM sent an armed force under his fiercest general Khalid ibn al-Walid, to subdue the peaceable Banu Jazima [alt. "Jadhimah"]. It also explains the unprovoked invasion of Adummatu (a.k.a. "D[o]uma[t] al-Jundal") in 626; ostensibly to subdue the population. The modus operandi was crystal clear in almost all cases: hegemony. The more attacks that succeeded, the more news spread of MoM's triumphant movement, the more his ambition was bolstered.

Are we to suppose that MoM's incursion into eastern Arabia was carried out "in defense" of his movement in the Hijaz? The Hawazin and Thaqif tribes (to the east) had no designs on invading either Medina or Mecca. Nor were the Ghassanids from the Byzantine-held Levant (to the northwest). The same goes for the Syrian town of "D[o]uma[t] al-Jundal", which was over 800 kilometers away from Medina, and clearly posed no threat. Yet the Mohammedans sacked these places nevertheless.

Such distant locals were not disrupting MoM's rule in the Hijaz; yet he was hell-bent on attacking all of them anyway. Just glancing at a map reveals that hegemony, not protection, was the motivation for these invasions...unless, that is, we imagine Medinans magically incurred "persecution" from peaceable tribes located many hundreds of kilometers away, across barren desert.

In the aforementioned Battle of Hunayn, over 6,000 women and children were taken captive and raped (after the tribe's men were slaughtered) thereby prompting the notorious verse, 4:24 (designating captive women as a form of booty). {46} Such baleful conduct is, of course, perfectly in keeping with 2:191-193, 4:74/89-91, 5:33, 8:12/67, 9:5/29/73/111, 17:16, 33:61, 47:3-4/35, 48:29, and 66:9 (as well as no. 177 and 256 in vol. 52 of Bukhari's Hadith). Suffice to say: the spreading of good will was not part of MoM's agenda.

Towering compassion? The propagation of bonhomie? Not for a moment did the Mohammedan movement exhibit these traits. The Battle of Autas (also c. 630) was a decimation of non-Muslims in which many women and children were taken captive and raped (in accordance with 4:24), as recounted in Sunan Abu Dawood (21/50). A pattern is hard not to notice. Only by whitewashing such major events can MoM be characterized as anything less than a militant megalomaniac. {47}

In his last days, MoM set his sights on the Levant, attacking the Ghassanids (unprovoked) in what was called the "Battle of Mu'tah". Here MoM bit off more than he could chew, as that attack ended in a humiliating defeat. (As it happened, the Ghassanids had the Byzantine Empire behind them.)

The last campaign of the Mohammedan rampage—while MoM was still alive—was the Battle of Tabouk. There, the Mohammedan raiders engaged in a completely unprovoked attack on a garrison of Byzantines at the northern edge of Arabia, to little avail.

Suffice to say, there is no avuncular sage to be found anywhere in the earliest records of MoM's life. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how MoM could have been any more belligerent. His tenure as "god's messenger" demonstrates with glaring clarity that he was driven far more by avarice than by, say, good will toward all mankind. Yet the way the more unscrupulous Islamic apologists prattle on, whenever it comes to peaceable movements, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. had nothing on this "Last Prophet". So far as they see it, MoM never took the life of a person that didn't have it coming. ("They deserved to die, so I didn't do anything wrong" said every sociopath ever.)

In 632, with Arabia conquered, and untold thousands of civilians slaughtered and enslaved, MoM made his only “hajj” to Mecca. It was then that he delivered a speech on Mount Arafat that would retroactively be labeled his “Farewell Sermon” (as, at the time, he had no idea he was about to be murdered).

In that last sermon, he tacitly admonished the audience to not take race into consideration when spreading Islam. Clearly, he did not want his followers to discriminate based on skin-color during the assimilation process—as doing so would have entailed foregoing potential converts. This was not a denunciation of racism; it was an evangelical strategy (see Appendix 4).

MoM clearly harbored biases against black-skinned Africans (raisin heads, as he called them). He personally kept dozens of black slaves—including men named Nabtal ibn Al-Harith, Anjasha, and Mid’am. According to Ibn Ishaq’s biography, MoM claimed that Satan resembled Nabtal ibn Al-Harith: a sturdy black man with inflamed eyes; dark, ruddy cheeks; and long, scraggly hair. In chapter 66 of Sunan as-Sughra (a.k.a. “Sunan an-Nasai”) entitled “Selling Animals For Animals Of Different Amounts Or Quality”, we are told that MoM bought an Arab slave for two “zanj” (black slaves). This not only meant that black slaves were considered animals (usable as currency), it meant that they were worth less than fairer-skinned slaves.

The lesson of the anecdote is even more disturbing. It shows that MoM would not accept pledges of devotion from slaves. In this case, MoM accepted the man’s pledge, yet didn’t realize he was a slave until later on. So MoM vowed to never accept the Shahadah until first asking if it came from a slave.

MoM’s audience being men (the teachings were not addressed to women), he also included (in the “Farewell Sermon”) the comment that you [men] can physically reprimand your wives for getting out of line; and that women are powerless captives in your households.

Just a few months later, while in Khaybar, he was poisoned by an aggrieved woman, suffered in agony for a few days, and died.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 It’s like notifying American Dominionists that the United States was not founded as a Christian nation. Also note Revisionist Zionists’ reaction to the dismantling of their delusions about “Israel”; right-wing libertarians’ reaction to the dismantling of their delusions about the “free market”; or gun-fetishists’ reaction to the dismantling of their delusions about the Second Amendment. I have composed an essay on each one of these topics.}

{2 There is not only zero evidence to suppose that MoM had a direct hotline to the divine, but plenty of evidence to conclude that he did not. Take, for instance, his unexpected (and oddly-timed) death. Not only did the Creator of the Universe allow this purported “Seal of all Prophets” to be murdered just as he was achieving the apogee of his power; the Creator of the Universe did not even give him a “heads up” on this rather important development. Consequently, MoM never got around to designating a successor / executor; nor did he specify any kind of protocol for shepherding his movement forward. Obviously, an omniscient super-being would have foreseen the massive problems this would cause. Alas. (See footnote 3 below.) That divine Providence was not at play AFTER MoM is also quite evident. His successor (Abu Bakr ibn Quhafa) fell sick and died after only two years at the helm. The next THREE Rashidun caliphs were assassinated. (Ali was murdered by his own disillusioned supporters.) Then Ali’s son, Hasan, was also assassinated (by his own wife, Ja’da). All this might be taken as an indication that the lofty station of these

cynosures was not the result of divine ordinance. It was certainly not a vote-of-confidence from the deity they claimed to serve.}

{3 Note especially the so-called “First Fitnah”; the civil war that broke out in the 7th century after the (Umayyad) Caliph Uthman’s assassination—leading to the acrimonious Sunni-Shia schism. There is an oft-touted piece of apocrypha claiming that MoM once stated that his teachings [the “sunnah”] would only endure for thirty years after he was gone—a statute of limitations that falls at approximately the death of the final Rashidun caliph, Ali (c. 661). If true, this means that MoM was somehow aware—ahead of time—that things would go completely off the rails; and that averting this errancy was not part of the divine plan. (Ergo, Islam as it came to be, was—in a sense—illegitimate; and was foreordained to be so.) According to this apocryphal tid-bit, god foresaw the distortion of his last revelation, yet was fine with it. Taken seriously, this gambit manages to disqualify the Umayyads and Abbasids as valid posterity...thereby bringing into question ANYTHING and EVERYTHING we (suppose we might) know today about Islam’s origins. On the positive side, it excuses all the terrible things that were done in the name of Islam starting c. 632+30 (by absolving MoM and the Sahabah of culpability in later iniquities); yet it manages to also deprive us of having any idea what the REAL “sunnah” may have been. Thus not only is the baby thrown out with the bath-water; the entire tub is jettisoned so as to exculpate Islam’s prophet. This does more damage than salvage, as the implication is: Since c. 662, NONE of what’s been considered “Islam” was really ever bona fide Islam. (So much for correcting the errancies of Judeo-Christianity!) Later discord would lead to the toppling of the (corrupt) Umayyad dynasty by the (equally corrupt, flagrantly decadent) Abbasid dynasty in 750. Divine sanction was always the justification for power—as when (Abbasid) Caliph Harun al-Rashid fashioned himself the “Shadow of God on Earth”. By the 11th century, the Ummah had fragmented into the Taifas in Andalusia; the Osmani [later, Ottomans] in Anatolia, Armenia, Mesopotamia and the Levant; the Fatimids (followed by the Mamluks) in northeast Africa / Hijaz; and the Seljuk Turks further east. This last was later overtaken by Mongol hegemony, only to become Timurid...then the (Shia) Safavids in Persia and the (Sunni) Mughals in Bharat[a]. This seems to not be what the Sahabah had in mind when they talked about an “Ummah”.}

{4 Abu Talib was actually a leader within the Hashemite clan, a sub-group of the Quraysh. The record of MoM’s early life is quite hazy; and what little is said is rather convoluted. As the story goes, his biological father (retroactively named “Abd-ullah”) died six months before MoM was born. After his mother (retroactively named “Amina”) gave birth, she sent her infant son to live with a foster family. She is said to have died by the time MoM was 6 years old. At around that time, MoM went to live with his paternal grandfather (referred to as Abdul Mu-talib), who died shortly thereafter. Custody was then transferred to his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, in the Banu Hashim. MoM’s biological father (and possibly even his grandfather) were Bedouin merchants who—so far as can be surmised—would have traded with the Nabataeans. ALL of them would have spoken Syriac.}

{5 This is announced in the opening passage of the first chapter of the first volume of Bukhari’s Hadith. It is also important to note that MoM would have spoken SYRIAC, not Arabic. Hence: If you were to take a time machine back to MoM’s lifetime and recite what is now the “Cairo” version of the Koran to him, he almost certainly would not understand much of what you said.}

{6 As the story goes, the location was in the hills called “Jabal an-Nour” [“Hill of Light”], within a small talus cave that came to be known as “Gar Hira”.}

{7 Hagiographers opted to assign Waraka a noble bloodline, making him the great-great-grandson of Qusai ibn Kalib, MoM’s great-great-great-grandfather; himself a descendent of the fabled Adnan...who was, in turn, a descendent of Ishmael.}

{8 For more on traditions surrounding the “Kaaba”, see my essay on “Pilgrimages”. For more on the history behind the shrine, see my essay on “The Meccan Cube”, in which the Petra theory is discussed.}

{9 Obviously, the earliest converts would have been reticent to relinquish their coveted pagan rituals. The solution was to simply incorporate the full compliment of those rituals into the new-fangled religion. Ergo the sacred rites of the “Hajj” that survive to the present: a set of re-vamped pagan liturgies (enumerated in my essay on “Pilgrimage”). As is explicated in my essay, “Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book”, the ensuing syncretism involved incorporated a potpourri of extant Abrahamic lore. (See Appendix 3 of my essay on “Genesis Of A Holy Book”, where I discuss the so-called “Satanic verses”.) Hence the credence of Islam’s sacred scripture rises or falls on the credence of said lore.}

{10 Islamic sources are the only sources in which a depiction of Mecca (during MoM’s time and before) exists; and even those are rather circumspect about evidence. There is none. All such sources post-date MoM’s lifetime by generations, and were written for the express purpose of providing a Mohammedan historiography. They paint a picture of a place that was afflicted by no grievous social dysfunction (barring, of course, the authors’ quibbles about the endogenous Arab theism being more poly- than mono-). The portrayal we are given includes no indication of tyranny; nor was there any significant persecution or oppression mentioned. What is portrayed, rather, is a relatively peaceable, Hijazi merchant hub that was governed by a cadre of Qurayshi chieftains; in which there was no excessive socio-economic stratification, and no major feuds. And an Arabian woman (MoM’s first wife, Khadijah) was able to own and operate a thriving business in the area (see Appendix 1).}

{11 By nature, those driven by avarice tend to do whatever they can get away with; especially in the event they manage to garner an ample amount of social capital (a.k.a. “street-cred”). This is illustrated on a daily basis by business tycoons and ambitious politicians; as well as by gang leaders and mafiosos.}

{12 In Mohammedan hagiography, Abd al-Uzza (later rendered “Abu Lahab”; Father of Flame) is often omitted (for obvious reasons). Instead, we hear about the other brothers of Abu Talib and MoM’s father: Zubair and Harith (who were sons of MoM’s purported grandfather, Abdul Mu-Talib). Ironically, the only place we encounter mention of this particular uncle is in the Koran (Surah 111), where the authors saw fit to devote an entire passage to excoriating him.}

{13 Indeed, after Khadijah’s passing, Talib stood the most to benefit if he just played along. This fact is moot, as Talib ended up dying the same year.}

{14 Ref. Bukhari’s Hadith 5/58/234-236; as well as 7/62/64-65 and 7/62/88 (alt. no. 3896, no. 5133, and no. 5158); wherein the marriage took place at 6 years old and consummation within the next couple years. MoM even wondered why men would marry grown women when they could simply wed young girls (so that they may then play with each other), as attested in Bukhari (no. 5080). One might also consult Yusuf Al-Hajj Ahmad’s Book of “Nikah” (in which MoM encourages his followers to marry young girls, the better to fondle them). Also see Muslim’s Hadith (vol. 8, no. 3309-11 and 3480-3481; wherein the marriage took place at 7 years old, consummation at 9 years old); as well as Sunan Abu Dawood (vol. 2, no. 2116 and vol. 41 no. 4195 & 4916-19). The account is corroborated by Aisha’s own testimony (vol. 9 of Tarikh al-Tabiri). How did MoM think of Aisha? As a tasty dish. In Bukhari (no. 3411), MoM announced that the superiority of his child-bride to other women was like the superiority of “tharid” (a savory meat) to other meals.}

{15 This leitmotif is common throughout the world. In ancient Chinese myth, King Mu of Zhou visited the celestial paradise. A brave charioteer, Zao-fu, used his magical chariot to whisk the king up to the

heavens. During the journey, the king had a chance to meet the Chinese goddess, Xi Wang-mu, and to taste the peaches of immortality. (For more on the fabled “Night Journey”, see Appendix 2 of the next essay in this series: “Debunking Three Myths”.) The “Night Journey” is, of course, an example of a “just so” story: It is used—among other things—to rationalize the number of daily propitiations [“salat”]. As the story goes, MoM haggled with the Abrahamic deity, talking him down to five (per the Sunni version), three (per the Shia version). The tale has Zoroastrian and Manichaeic antecedents. }

{16 The placement of the beginning of the Mohammedan calendar (i.e. year one) at this particular point is telling. It is not when MoM was born or when he received his first revelation. Rather, it is the year that he made the pivotal transition from a middling street-preacher in one place to a municipal authority in another place. In other words, the significance was POLITICAL, not spiritual. }

{17 It might be noted that Yathrib was not so much a unified township as an agrarian area in which there was a conglomeration of villages, each corresponding to a tribe—at least three of which were Jewish. }

{18 Bedouins even had the analogue of the Holy Spirit to accompany the godhead: “ar-Ruh al-Qudus” [“sacred breath”]. }

{19 Meanwhile, 10:16 and 46:9 indicate that the only Sunnah is the Koran itself. That is to say: Koranic dictates exhaustively account for the Sunnah; there is nothing more to add. THAT would entail that the Hadith are entirely superfluous, as MoM was NOT in a position to personally teach / decree anything beyond what can be found in the recitations—which, we should recall, are purportedly not authored by him (as they are transcripts of communiques delivered from the Creator of the Universe). Exactly where the Medinan “constitution” is supposed to have fallen in these categories (divinely-inspired yet man-made vs. divinely dictated) is anyone’s guess. What CAN we say of this fabled compact? It was a medieval charter for a Hijazi municipality, drawn up by a charismatic leader who arrogated to himself ultimate authority. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights it was most certainly not. }

{20 This initial conception of “community” as inclusive rather than exclusive was a brilliant bait and switch. As “the community” would soon discover, said inclusivity had a statue of limitations. “Dhimmi” status (accorded to non-Muslim “People of the Book”) involved considering Jew and Christians as NOT part of the “Ummah”. }

{21 This issue was obviously at the forefront of MoM’s mind—as if mankind’s primary problem was the direction in which it prayed. 48:25 in the Koran indicates the degree to which MoM was bitter about being unable to initially co-opt the Kaaba in Mecca. Later, in the same verse, we see gloating after he was able to appropriate it (rendering it “al-Masjid al-Haram”). 2:142-145 stresses the sanctity of the new qibla, denigrating those who don’t acknowledge the change. The passage even specifies that the change was effected in order to please MoM himself [or, alt., in order to make it easier for MoM to distinguish between his followers and those who still followed the old way]. For more on this matter, see my essay on “Mecca And Its Cube”. }

{22 Note how ironic this assault was, considering the stern rebuke Abraham gave Philistine King Abimelech for the Philistines’ attempt to seize the watering hole belonging to Abraham’s settlement at Gerar. It seems that MoM cherry-picked the elements of Abrahamic lore that suited his own purposes. The highly-selective invocation of Abraham’s legacy in Mohammedan lore is quite blatant. }

{23 During the raid on Badr, the Mohammedan desert-pirates apprehended the physician, Nadr ibn al-Harith ibn Kalada (a physician) as well as Uqba ibn Abi Muayt, brought them back to Medina, and had them publicly beheaded. Other raids promptly ensued. The storied “Nakhla Raid” also occurred in early

624. MoM sent one of his lieutenants, Abdullah ibn Jahsh, to lie in wait for the Quraysh at Nakhla—so as to engage in a surprise attack on the unsuspecting yeomen. The completely unprovoked assault was successful. The marauders took two captives and seized all the booty. Upon returning to their master, they gave him 20% of the spoils. For more on this clear precedent, see my essays on “The History Of Salafism”.}

{24 Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of cunnilingus in the Koran’s depiction of heaven. The “Recitations”, after all, are addressed exclusively to men—a target audience that reveals who the authors saw as the one’s making all the calls.}

{25 This adage reflects the catch-22: To attract followers, one must show that one can attract followers. Victory (or at least being stigmatized as a “winner”) tends to attract followers. The explanation for all this is relatively straight-forward. MoM was able to accrue a nascent following by giving disaffected Bedouins a sense of purpose—and even glory. That is to say, so far as they were concerned, his cause gave their lives PURPOSE. But not just ANY purpose; it was a divinely ordained purpose...with wonderful things held in store for those who joined. With a sense of shared purpose, people will fight with augmented fervor, and even sacrifice themselves for the common cause if need be. Most Hijazis had never had that before. It is little surprise that many were enamored with this alluring invitation (see footnote 27 below). This reflects a universal law of human nature: People tend to rally behind—or at least get onboard with—whoever they see as willing to help them, especially in times of strife. The choice is often one of DEFAULT. It is why Latin American peasants—when contending with tyrannical rulers, most of whom were supported by the United States—sought support from Soviet Russia during the Cold War. It was primarily done in desperation; not due to fealty to Moscow...or some ideological devotion to Soviet-style communism. It was largely done by default. This also explains why many anti-colonialist movements in the Arab world allied themselves with the USSR. Since 1967, it explains why many Palestinians have resorted to a tacit support for Hamas. It might even explain why Americans who were fed up with “politics as usual” and the abiding corruption of Washington bureaucrats opted for a cockamamy wildcard in the 2016 presidential election...even though said wildcard only COMPOUNDED the very problems on which their grievances were based.}

{26 Religious conversion tends to occur most with those who are disaffected—or feel somehow short-changed. Newfound cult activity—of SOME kind—offers a kind of rebirth to anyone who is disenchanted with life. Religion, we find, holds especial allure for those groping around in the dark for something—anything—to hold onto. When grasping in desperation for something that seems solid, there is an eminently pragmatic aspect to religionism—what with its reassurances and consolations. That dogma-based Faith is based on delusion (false pride, false hope, false certainty) is beside the point; as the ILLUSION does the trick.}

{27 By wayward Bedouins, it is simply meant: disenchanted, and possibly disenfranchised. The social psychology here is elementary. It should not come as a surprise that the non-Jewish Yathribis had grown weary of a stale pagan theology that did not seem to speak to them. In addition, it is likely they were aggrieved by—nay, fulminating from—dashed hopes. They were a community suffering from an existential malaise. Certainly, a charismatic figure who manages to galvanize those afflicted with ennui will tend to marshal an ardent following. Some Yathribis may have even been resentful of the notoriety of the burgeoning mercantile hub (Mecca) to their south. Thus MoM may have seemed to have been a godsend; as he was able to channel simmering resentments toward a shared antagonist (thereby giving Yathribis a sense of direction / purpose). Bear in mind that when people feel lost at sea, they are far more susceptible to suggestion. Like ALL humans, everywhere, at every time, disillusioned Bedouins were surely looking for MEANING; for something exhilarating to live for. This newly-arrived Messianic figure was offering OODLES of meaning...if, that is, they signed up for the program. And, while they were at it, they could enjoy a cut of the spoils (including FREE GIRLS)...with complete impunity. There is nothing

mysterious—or miraculous—about anything that occurred during the earliest phases of the Mohammedan movement. The most primeval motives were at play; and the most basic incentives were provided. Generally, when people are existentially disoriented, it is as if they are groping around in the dark, searching in desperation for something to hold onto. When they find something that feels SOLID, they will eagerly grasp onto it, and cling to it thereafter. Sometimes that thing FINDS US. And sometimes it CLINGS BACK. A compelling narrative can seize hold of us, exercising a grip from which it is difficult to emancipate ourselves. Of course, if sufficiently entranced, we DON'T WANT to be emancipated. We thus become imprisoned by our own enchantment. }

{28 Decent people should find this all quite disturbing. Says the battered house-wife, “He only hits me when I deserve it.” That MoM’s wives are ON RECORD saying such a thing tells us much of what we need to know about his character. As with his well-attested pedophilia, the commonly-invoked “it was more normal at that time” evasion doesn’t cut it; as MoM is touted as the ultimate moral example for all mankind, for all time. Is he to be taken as an exemplar or is he not? }

{29 Their other brother, Abu Rafi, was their tribe’s chieftain. All three brothers were assassinated, per MoM’s orders. Later, Al-Rabi’s son, Kenana, was also tortured and decapitated—as recounted by Ibn Ishaq. Al-Tabari relayed the account thus: “The Prophet gave orders concerning Kinana to Zubayr, saying, ‘Torture him until you root out and extract what he has. So Zubayr kindled a fire on Kinana’s chest, twisting it with his fire-stick until Kinana was near death. Then the Messenger gave him to Maslamah, who beheaded him’” (Bukhari: vol. 8, p. 122). And what of the executed man’s wife (Safiya bint Huyayy)? MoM forced her to marry him, and bed her THAT NIGHT. }

{30 Many Islamic apologists will dispute some of the victims in this list. A typical rebuttal is that the accused was guilty of more than just impugning MoM; and was probably killed for the standard reasons that adversaries are killed in war-time situations (treason). Two points might be made. First: It was the Mohammedans that CREATED the alleged “war-time” situation in the first place. Second: EVEN IF some of these victims were somehow guilty of subversive activity (e.g. plotting against MoM in some way), they were summarily executed; thereby belying the claim that MoM was merciful. Capital punishment for dissidents is the modus operandi of a tyrant, not of a beneficent leader. Finally, all this comes from the most esteemed ISLAMIC sources; not from external polemics. Much of it was recorded as a BRAG. }

{31 Why was Umm Qirfa executed in such an unusually cruel way? (As if the usual decapitations weren’t gruesome enough.) MoM made it clear that he would not tolerate women having leadership roles; and seemed to be particularly irked by Umm Qirfa’s elevated status in the rival tribe. This chauvinistic position—characteristic of the Mohammedan movement—was made clear in Bukhari 9/88/219. To reiterate: The account of this brutal execution comes from the earliest available biographical sources. MoM’s contempt for females in positions of power was also documented in Bukhari’s Hadith. According to one of MoM’s companions, Abu Bakra: When MoM heard that Persians had made the daughter of “Khosrow” their ruler, he said, “Never will a nation succeed that makes a woman its ruler.” }

{32 Instructions to proceed in this manner may also be found in Bukhari’s Hadith (4/52/260; 9/84/57-58; 9/84/64; 9/89/271): “Whoever changes his [Islamic] religion, kill him.” Moreover, women were routinely stoned to death for merely BEING ACCUSED of sexual indiscretion. This instruction is found in Bukhari 8/82/805-817. }

{33 Ref. Bukhari’s Hadith 4/56/817 and 5/59/662. Even one of Musaylima’s messenger-boys (Ibn an-Nawwahah) was killed, just for reporting his master’s claims of prophethood. }

{34 There was even a woman, Sajah bint al-Harith [ibn Suaeed], of the Banu Tamim, who claimed to be a

prophetess; and joined the cause against the Mohammedans. (She eventually allied herself with Musaylima; to whom she eventually deferred the mantle of prophet.)

{35 We should bear in mind that many Hijazis were probably disenchanted with Arabian paganism—a Faith that had most likely grown stale; and seemed not to be working for them. Prospects of something fresh and new surely enticed the area’s disaffected Bedouins. The stage was set for a charismatic leader offering not only BOOTY, but NOVELTY: a provocative worldview, and an opportunity to be part of a glorious cause. }

{36 It might be noted that all this contradicts the Koran’s declaration about itself as eternal and self-sufficient. One can’t help but wonder: If the “Recitation” were, indeed, the final word on all matters (that is: all anyone would ever need to grasp god’s will), and it was perfectly clear (“mubeen”), then why the need for elaboration by the one charged with delivering the message? }

{37 Needless to say, the ruse worked like a charm. It worked for MoM as it has for so many demagogues throughout history. For a list of examples, see my essay on “The History Of Exalted Figures”. }

{38 It is difficult to make head or tails of this distinction. Many spurious rationalizations are provided by Islamic apologists to account for it; none are convincing. Usually, the explanation proffered has something to do with PRECEDENCE and/or FUNDAMENTALITY; but that does not comport with what we find. To wit: Many incidental and petty matters are addressed in the Koran (e.g. how quickly to depart after dining with MoM) while many issues of profound import are found only in the Hadith (e.g. the stoning of women for adultery). This is an odd hierarchy of priorities. }

{39 Some hypothesize that MoM had epilepsy, and that many of his purported “revelations” were received during epileptic seizures. The hypothesis is based on descriptions of his symptoms during such episodes. This is certainly possible; but it is mere speculation. For more on MoM’s penchant for oddly-fortuitous, bespoke “revelations” (strategically-timed memos from the Abrahamic deity that were suspiciously beneficial for him personally), see my essay on “Ad Hoc Revelations”. Note that even MoM’s own wife, Aisha, thought such convenient, self-serving revelations to be rather suspicious (ref. Bukhari’s hadith, no. 4078). }

{40 There is an account of MoM breaking this treaty. The breach was based on the (purported) primacy of men over women. One of the conditions of the treaty was that if a person from one side were to fall into the hands of the other side, the latter would be obliged to return the person to the former. However...when a WOMAN ended up falling into the hands of the Mohammedans, MoM refused to honor the agreement. His reason for not doing so was straight-forward: Women don’t count. Unless otherwise specified, he contended, statements only pertain to men. This is, of course, perfectly in keeping with both the Koran and the Hadith: Any important declaration is addressed exclusively to men; and concern only men. To wit: Only when explicitly specified does a declaration pertain to women. As it turned out, the Meccans acceded to this furtive renege (for reasons that are unclear); and so did not hold MoM in contempt for the transgression. }

{41 The fortuitous deterioration in Quarayshi clout was likely due to poorly orchestrated PR on their own part. This dereliction couldn’t have occurred at any worse a time for themselves or any better a time for the Mohammedans. }

{42 Note that the enumeration of so many cases of retribution is not the result of a one-sided tabulation on my part. In other words, I am not being selective in citing these incidents. The fact of the matter is: I have encountered ZERO accounts of MoM explicitly encouraging his followers to be tolerant of—or conciliatory

toward—those who openly disagreed with him; let alone accepting of those who openly dissented. Not a single case.}

{43 The interminable pissing contest between Anushirwan (a.k.a. “Khosrow”) of Persian pride and Justinian of Byzantine pride left the once-dominating empires on either side of Arabia / Mesopotamia frayed and exhausted, creating a power vacuum ripe for exploitation by any ambitious enterprise that arose in their midst. MoM’s timing (or rather, the timing of his birth) could not have been more advantageous. Six centuries earlier, an Arabian offensive would have been up against the Roman Empire at its peak. Six centuries later, it would have been up against the Mongol juggernaut (the “Golden Horde”). A germinating Bedouin campaign would have been decimated in either case. Even just a century earlier, BOTH the Sassanians to the east (at the beginning of Khosrow’s reign) and the Byzantines to the west (at the beginning of Justinian’s reign) would have been un-beatable. It was only after the two had spent a century battering each other into pulp that a power-play from betwixt their tattered frontiers would have been viable.}

{44 Moreover: On the western frontier, the Romans were contending with the hegemonic Gallic Empire; and were also contending with the Germanic tribes [Alemanni and Vandals] as well as the Goths, who were making incessant incursions from the north. Briefly, even the Palmyrenes from the Levant posed a threat. The Huns and Avars threatened everyone from the north. In sum: The battles between Byzantine Emperor Heraclius and Sassanid Emperor Khosrow II occurred throughout MoM’s ministry. Unbeknownst to these warring empires, a demagogue was gathering strength to the south...in a place to which few paid much heed: the Hijaz.}

{45 “Why The West Rules—For Now”; p. 349.}

{46 Mohammedans were given license to rape their female captives by several other Koranic verses—including 23:1-6, 33:50, and 70:22-30. Seeing women as loot was crucial to inducing men to fight. Hence, the prospects of sex was one of the perks of signing up for the program. On this point, the documentation is conclusive. “Spoils of War” was such a central theme of the movement that the authors of the Koran saw fit to devote one of the book’s longest chapters to the topic. It wasn’t for nothing that the audience for the “Recitations” (MEN) were lured by promises of sex-on-demand...forever...with buxom, wide-eyed concubines. For wayward Bedouins, many of whom probably were NOT enjoying access to beautiful women, this was an offer they couldn’t refuse.}

{47 I do not use this as a mere pejorative. It is meant in the literal sense. As is plain to see, ALL evidence points to a figure with distinct traits. (Note: not “most” evidence; ALL evidence.) According to the best sources available, MoM was monomaniacal. By the time his patron (and first wife), Khadijah, died, MoM’s ego had been buoyed to the nth degree. From that moment on, he was self-aggrandizing at every turn. This is incontrovertible. Unburdened by rectitude (and unfettered by any scruples with dishonesty), the self-proclaimed prophet proceeded with unbridled ambition. Avarice characterized his life from the Hijra forward. As he accrued acolytes, his confidence was invariably bolstered. It is apparent that he sought those who were suffering from spiritual as well as material destitution. By targeting the demoralized (read: vulnerable) denizens of the marginal Hijazi town of Yathrib, he was able to galvanize a following. Bear in mind that Yathrib would have been playing second fiddle to his hometown, Mecca, for generations. More than just dejected, the wayward Bedouins who joined him likely felt rejected. The success of the fledgling movement is unsurprising. MoM reinvigorated a beleaguered municipality that had been hindered by chronic quibbles. Preying on the disaffected, as most demagogues often do, MoM parlayed the Yathribis’ deprivation into depravation (nay, depredation)...all to his own benefit. While bringing an end to Yathrib’s interminable factioning, he re-defined the scope of tribal identity to encompass a wider audience...all while giving direction / purpose to those who theretofore had had very

little. Joining such a movement was an offer they couldn't refuse. The scenario is a familiar one. Indeed, it is precisely the scenario we find with ALL successful demagogues around the world, throughout history.}

{48 Regarding MoM-fetishism, the policy is ironclad: Only soaring encomia to MoM, no candid critiques, are allowed. Period. End of discussion. In this sense, most Muslims idolize MoM (qua "rasul allah"; messenger of god) just as much as most Christians idolize JoN (qua son of god). The irony here is lost on many. Suggest, for example, that JoN may have been lovers with Cephas (a.k.a. Simon; renamed "Petras") in addition to Miriam of Magdala), and many Christians might SCOFF, but they will generally not become HOSTILE. It would seem this disparity of blasphemy standards is quite backward—given that, so far as Christians are concerned, JoN is LITERALLY GOD INCARNATE. One would think broaching the topic of the Abrahamic deity's homosexual tendencies might pose a graver problem than suggesting one of his messengers was not as magnanimous as we might like to think he was. Alas, "god is gay" doesn't elicit nearly the acrimony vis a vis Christians as "Mohammed was making things up as he went" elicits vis a vis Muslims. Go figure.}

{49 The question remains: Why on Earth is there no copy of ANY biography from prior to Ibn Hisham's? Not a single document (i.e. codex) survives from the two centuries following MoM's death. This even as Dar al-Islam stretched from the Barbary Coast to the Hindu Kush...including all of Persia / Bactria. Yaqub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi of Basra was writing by then; yet nothing. Abu-Muhammad Abdullah Ruzbeh ibn Daduya of Fars (a.k.a. "Ibn al-Muqaffa") was writing by then; yet nothing. Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan of Tus / Khorasan (a.k.a. "Geber") was writing by then; yet nothing. One would think that copies of bios of Islam's "Seal of the Prophets" would be circulating all around the Muslim world by then. What was everyone waiting for?}

{50 Various other bios were composed, mostly of dubious credence—as with, say, those of Abi Mekhnaf from the 8th century.}

{51 A contrast to such romantic revisionism might be the more well-documented excursions of the renown Berber traveler, Muhammad ibn Battuta during the next (14th) century. There is no reason to think that much of the accounts about this man were not quite accurate. So, in assaying the material available, it is prudent to give accounts the benefit of the doubt...though with perhaps a hefty grain of salt.}

{52 Also note folk-heroes like "Saint Ursula", daughter of King Dionotus of Dumnonia [Cornwall]. It is difficult to ascertain even which century this fabled female martyr might have lived (anywhere from the 3rd to the 5th century). Fables of martyrs abound in most religions; but "Ursula" is revered even though this may simply be a moniker that historiographers eventually settled upon for SEVERAL women. In other words, "Ursula" may only be a collective pseudonym—representing a few now-unknown women.}

{53 For more on how this happens, see Eric Hoffer's "The True Believer". Hoffer noted that fanatical movements begin when those who are disenchanted with the world hanker for "a new life—a rebirth—or, failing this, a chance to acquire new elements of pride, confidence, hope, a sense of purpose and worth." How? "By an identification with a holy cause." Those afflicted with "anomie" (that is: the existential ennui that comes from a sense of alienation) can be galvanized very quickly when offered the chance to participate in a holy crusade (a phrase I use un-ironically). Once given a sense of direction, people will tend to go inexorably in THAT DIRECTION. And once assigned purpose, people will tend to define their entire lives according to THAT PURPOSE. The new cause is seen as their *raison d'être*. Having committed to it, they will adhere to it with pathological obstinacy. The result is zealotry.}

{54 Like any savvy impresario, MoM was quick to specify that he was personally entitled to a 20% cut of all the spoils (via a well-timed revelation, 8:40-41); an entitlement that was dubbed "khums".}

{55 After wincing at his brazen pronouncements, one can't help but wonder: Maybe 9:29 was smudged—and thus illegible—in Rashid's copy of Islam's holy book.}

{56 We might wonder which book Rashid is reading when he refers to the “Koran”. Perhaps he has the only copy in the world of a special, expanded edition; and all of the wonderful stuff he mentions is packed into Surah 115. The scholars at al-Azhar University should be notified immediately. Indeed, this heretofore-lost chapter must be quite a doozy!}

{57 Incidentally, I refuse to believe that Qasim actually believes all the sugar-coated bunkum that he peddles. One must wonder if he realizes how embarrassingly easy it is to SHOW his statements to be patently false...or if he simply presumes everyone to be uninterested in vetting his claims. In any case, he certainly expects his audience to not do their homework. Regardless of his motives, Qasim loses all credibility the moment he makes unfounded statements like the ones mentioned here. Meanwhile, in hawking tid-bits of enticing farce, he diverts attention away from the more scrupulous advocates for judicious religious tolerance—specifically: those basing their case on REALITY rather than on castles in the sky.}

{58 Step off the train at Oxford station, at the edge of campus, and one can look straight ahead at the new business building named after the House of Saud. Just down the street is the Stephen Schwarzman Centre for humanities—named after the fascistic New York plutocrat who praised Saudi Arabia's “intelligent, reform-oriented” government... while comparing American Progressives' democratic policy proposals to the Nazi genocide.}

{59 This is the tale of the “Mi'raj” (“Night Journey”), devised in the 11th century. After a series of meetings with prophets of yore; MoM engaged in dialogue with the Abrahamic deity...in which he undertook negotiations regarding the number of obligatory daily prayers (as if that were the most pressing matter to broach should one be given a single meeting with the Creator of the Universe). MoM talked god down to just five. This fantastical tale was likely inspired by the Sassanian “namag” [book] of “Arda” Wiraz from the 9th or 10th century—which tells of a Zoroastrian prophet named “Viraza” who, one night, goes on a “dream journey” to the next world. During the sojourn, he engages in dialogues with angels and the godhead. For more on the “Mi'raj”, see Appendix 3 of my essay: “Debunking Three Myths”.}

{60 The strategy is simple: If enough people assert something for long enough and vociferously enough, with no countervailing expression allowed, then it will eventually come to seem kinda-sorta “true”. This is how conditioning works.}

{61 For the supplicant, the conclusions are pre-determined; and all that's left to do is find as many rationalizations as possible for “sticking to one's guns” (see footnote 60 above). For the same reason, we should all be suspect when an apologist of ONE religion attacks OTHER religions. He has, as it were, a bone to pick. To have an agenda (for OR against) is to be biased. Mohammedan expositors are not alone in this. Israel Kolatt—amongst many others—insists that only Revisionist Zionist “historians” (read: right-wing historiographers) are qualified to comment on the “history” of Zionism / Israel. In other words, rather than ideological zeal being a DIS-qualifying factor, it is deemed THE qualifying factor. (Shall we assume he would also insist that only KKK Grand Wizards are qualified to give a history of American white nationalism?) Here, “toeing the line” is equated with scholarship. In reality, anyone with a staunch vested interest in the outcome of a study should recuse himself from participating. Conflicts of interest must be minimized in ANY scholarship. Want to know about the Vatican? Don't ask a devout Roman Catholic. Want to know about the Church of Latter-Day Saints? Don't ask a devout Mormon. Etc. A true scholar literally does not care one way or the other what the verdict of an inquiry might be.}

{62 A program for assessing things can't be used to assess itself. This is one implication of Godel's Incompleteness theorem—whereby a system cannot get outside itself in order to audit itself. (Ludwig Wittgenstein had this insight about the totality of fact / pictures of which the world is comprised: the logic that makes it all possible cannot itself be pictured; it can only be SHOWN.) Put another way: A diagnostics system cannot be used to diagnose ITSELF, as any glitch it may have may itself prevent it from recognizing the glitch. Thus a potentially defective diagnostics system cannot be used to diagnose its own (potential) defects; which explains why paradigms can't be evaluated within themselves.}

{63 The ornery posture—and stunningly blinkered thinking—exhibited by the likes of Nasr is diametrically opposed to the most fundamental principles of scholarship. So long as figures like him are allowed to have influence in the field of Islamic / Koranic studies, worthwhile inquiry will be forestalled—and genuine Reform will remain untenable. (That Nasr also fashions himself a “philosopher” is laughable.) Nasr construes his assertion of inviolate propositions as testament to the credence of those propositions. Their credibility is—preposterously—equated with their sacrosanctity. According to this logic, the ideologue is qualified to weigh in on certain dogmas simply because he is ONE OF THOSE who happens to espouse them. Hence: “I believe it; and THAT makes me an authority on the matter. You do NOT believe it; so you are unqualified to say anything on the matter. Not only does my conviction about X give X credence; but it gives me an exclusive license to weigh in on how much credence X has.” This is epistemic narcissism of the most blatant kind. Were we to abide this daft standard, only alchemists have the right to determine whether or not alchemy is true. (In reality, we find that alchemists are perhaps the only people who CANNOT determine whether or not alchemy is true.) The problem, of course, is that once one has wed oneself on a proposition, one will be disinclined to bend over backwards searching for countervailing evidence. Indeed, one will not even be inclined to acknowledge countervailing evidence when it is brought to one's attention. This goes far beyond run-of-the-mill confirmation bias...or even choice-supportive bias we encounter with the slew of post-purchase rationalizations we concoct to make ourselves feel justified after the fact. Elsewhere, this has been called “perseverance bias”: Once we settle on a view of the world, we are strongly inclined to stick with it no matter what. Obduracy is the hallmark of the True Believer. If forced to confront discordant facts, one will undertake mental acrobatics in order to rationalize ways around it. Once invested, we're “in it” for the long haul, come what may.}

{64 The general understanding is that ALL Abrahamic prophets have really—even if unwittingly—been Muslims, going all the way back to the first human-being: Adam. The alternate view is that “Muslim” is limited to followers of Mohammed—in which case Khadijah (MoM's first wife) would have been the first Muslim.}

{65 The movie is not so much a bio as it is vehicle for conditioning. Throughout, we are treated to an incessant, zombie-like repetition of the mantra, “there is no god but god and Mohammad is his prophet.” It's as if the entire point of the movie is to inculcate viewers (presumed to be programmable robots) with a particular piece of dogma rather than to inform them of what might be known about the protagonist's life. Whenever MoM's name is mentioned in the narration, PBUH is included—a sure sign that the film was produced by sycophants. The Sahabah are portrayed as kind-hearted, humble supplicants (who only wanted to end slavery) while everyone else is portrayed as nefarious (often drunk) adversaries. The film takes prodigious liberties with most key events, and includes the apocryphal Abyssinian sojourn prior to the Hijra. But the most egregious point of dishonesty is when the narrator contends that the Koran states (wonderful) things it does not state, and that MoM said (wonderful) things that there is no record of him saying. It then omits virtually everything that would tarnish the pristine caricature it presents. All of this is done without showing the protagonist. Though such craven pandering helps no one, this was surely a decision made by the producers so as to avoid eliciting the ire of fanatics...and, presumably, to placate the powers-that-be so as to secure their endorsement for the film.}

{66 In chapter 2 alone, there were verses 6, 15, 142, 258, 264, 270, and 272. For more on this, see my essay on “Fiduciary Theology, The Straight Path, and Pre-Destination”.}

{67 Some interesting observations can be found in the very sympathetic “Muhammad And The Empires Of Faith: The Making Of The Prophet of Islam” by Sean W. Anthony (at Ohio State); though he much too blithely takes the standard Islamic narrative as actual history—supposing, for example, that the Koran (as it eventually came to exist) REALLY WAS first compiled during caliph Uthman’s reign, word for word. (To disabuse himself of this misapprehension, he is advised to read “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.) Meanwhile, Sean dismisses the Petra theory out of hand, with an eye-roll and a scoff. (To disabuse himself of this misapprehension, he is advised to read “The Meccan Cube”.) A red flag is that Sean is peculiarly coy about his personal beliefs; and thus not forthcoming about his own biases. He has said, for example, that religious fundamentalism is not incompatible with civil society (i.e. liberal democracy). From this spurious pronouncement, he deduces the following proposition: When it comes to even the worst Salafi dysfunction, it is not Islamic dogmas that are the problem. It is solely geo-politics that accounts for such illiberalism. (To disabuse himself of this misapprehension, he is advised to read “The Universality Of Morality”; and with respect to Islam in particular, parts I and II of “The History Of Salafism”).}

APPENDIX 1: Khadijah

The first wife of Mohammed of Mecca (MoM) is conventionally identified as Khadijah bint Khuwaylid ibn Asad ibn Abd-al-Uzza ibn Qusai ibn Kilab ibn Murrah ibn Ka’b ibn Lu’ay ibn Ghalib ibn Fihr ibn Malik. She was from the prestigious Asad clan, which was purportedly founded by her paternal grandfather.

The above genealogy is almost certainly apocryphal. That is to say: It propounds a lineage constructed to render MoM’s first wife a descendent of “Malik” (eleven generations removed); who—in turn—is held to be a descendent of Abraham (via Ishmael). Malik’s son, Fihr, is held to be the progenitor of the Quraysh. This would place “Malik” c. 200 A.D. (Note that this lineage would make Qusai both Kadijah’s AND MoM’s patrilineal ancestor.)

Khadijah, who owned her own business, met MoM by employing him as a courier for her goods. Due to her thriving caravan / trading enterprise, she was known in Mecca as “Ameerat-Quraysh” [Princess of the Quraysh].

The tale of their first encounter—and the subsequent germination of their relationship—is relatively straightforward. MoM ingratiated himself with the wealthy widow by carrying out important business out of town—reputedly surpassing her expectations. As the story goes: In 595, Khadijah sought a trustworthy agent for an important transaction that would take place far to the north, in Syria. A familial confidant (commonly identified as Abu Talib ibn Abd al-Muttalib) suggested she hire her distant cousin, Mohammed, for the job—as the young man had earned a reputation around town for being a dependable employee. So she hired him for the task; and he carried it out with aplomb. (Note this was only possible because the Syrians spoke the same language that MoM would have spoken: Syriac.) MoM was undoubtedly up for the challenge, and eager to please.

After witnessing the charismatic bachelor’s aptitude in conducting business, the lonely widow surely would have seen reason to offer marriage.

When the financially-well-off Khadijah (then 40+) offered the struggling MoM (then 24 or 25) her hand c. 595, the soon-to-be-aspiring prophet jumped at the chance. Aside from the fact that his efforts to court

other women had been in vain, the betrothal was a huge opportunity to bolster his socio-economic standing. This boost in clout would prove pivotal, augmenting his gravitas once he started proselytizing to the town-folk. In other words: Khadijah offered not only financial means, but social leverage.

Meanwhile, from the point of view of a middle-aged business-woman, this would have been somewhat of a boon. Indeed, the aging widow would suddenly have a young, loyal companion—who had proven himself savvy—to assist her in all her affairs. (Her previous two husbands had passed away.) She would have a dependable cohort to carry out dealings—dealings that her age was probably rendering increasingly difficult for her to handle herself.

In sum: The union made perfect sense for both parties.

The stature of Khadijah shows that, in pre-Mohammedan Arabia, women could manage their own businesses; and enjoyed control over ALL of their property. There is a rather perverse irony here. Within the dominion of the Muslim world, someone like Khadijah would no longer be able to rise to a position of such prominence. For sharia would deprive women of the rights that had enabled MoM's first wife to become who she was...and thereby HELP the soon-to-be-aspiring-prophet in his endeavors.

In my series on Female Empowerment, I show that, pursuant to the establishment of the Mohammedan order, women would not be afforded the kind of opportunity—nor accorded the kinds of esteem—that had been the norm around much of the world for centuries. The number of female business owners (with male employees) in the entire Muslim world for the next millennium is close to zero.

Khadijah and MoM had six children over the course of a monogamous marriage that lasted 24+ years (595-619). Oddly, there is not much documentation of any of these children in the Islamic record. (As it turned out, the children by Khadijah ended up being MoM's only offspring—as every other pregnancy in subsequent marriages ended in the child's death.) Two of the six children sired via Khadijah were boys—both of which died in early childhood. Only limited details can be found about the four daughters (Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum, and Fatima)—primarily from quasi-apocryphal tales. This paucity of documentation is rather peculiar; as these are the four surviving children of (supposedly) the most important man to ever live.

Here are the highlights:

Zaynab—the eldest daughter—married her maternal cousin (Khadijah's nephew), Abu al-Aas ibn al-Rabee. She subsequently had a falling out with her father due to her husband's refusal to become a Mohammedan; and she died only a few years after the Hijra. (Supposedly, Abu al-Aas later agreed to become a follower of MoM; a development that is rather unlikely, though remotely possible.)

[Note: This exigency was very telling, as MoM's two closest blood-relatives (his uncle—his foster parent—and his first daughter) both had anti-Mohammedan sympathies.]

Ruqayyah also had a husband that refused to become a Mohammedan (Utbah /Utaybah ibn Abu Lahab). MoM eventually forced her to divorce him and marry a man of his choosing—someone loyal to the Mohammedan cause: the son of MoM's companion, Uthman ibn Affan.

Umm Kuthum ALSO married a man who refused to become a Mohammedan. As with Ruqayyah, MoM eventually forced his daughter to divorce her husband and marry a loyal follower. As it so happened, this was Uthman ibn Affan, her older sister's husband (after Ruqayyah died). (Eeesh!)

Suffice to say: A woman having a choice in her nuptials was not part of the plan. A new precedent had

been set.

Fatima passed away the same year as her father (632); only a couple months later, in fact. This is also interesting, as she was enemies with MoM's closest friend and most loyal confidant, Abu Bakr. One can't help but wonder: How could that enmity possibly be if Abu Bakr was the man beyond reproach that Mohammedan lore makes him out to be?

It is documented that the two had heated disputes, disagreeing on major points of doctrine—both before and after MoM's ignominious death. One of the disputes involved her right to inheritance after her father's passing. This dispute promptly ended when Fatima wound up dead (again, within a couple months of MoM's death); and Abu Bakr prevailed.

And so it went: It is quite likely that MoM's closest confidant (and most loyal acolyte) killed his daughter once MoM was no longer in the picture. The motives are obvious.

There were also two quasi-foster children involved in MoM's marriage with Kadijah: Mohammed's younger cousin (Ali ibn Abi Talib) and a boy from the Udhra tribe who had been kidnapped by Mohammedan brigands and become one of Kadijah's slaves (Zayd ibn Harithah). MoM eventually adopted Zayd as a foster son, yet later issued a special revelation prohibiting adoption (thereby annulling Zayd's status as a step-child) so that he could marry Zayd's attractive young wife (whom the self-proclaimed Prophet fancied).

Khadijah enthusiastically supported MoM's bid for prophethood in its early years. As the story goes, it was she who encouraged him to claim the herald of god's messenger (and enthusiastically supported him in pursuing the enterprise). She was a very savvy businesswoman, so she likely saw the potential that the bold gambit held in store. Indeed, with Khadijah's great wealth, her connections, and her clout, MoM was provided with a robust "launching pad" from which to undertake his ministry.

According to Muslim sources, she effectively viewed MoM's ministry as a business venture; backing it with her wealth. It is telling that after Khadijah died and the spigots were cut off; many Meccans who had gone along with the program dissociated.

Alas, Khadijah would die only seven years into MoM's ministry, and thus was only present for the earliest (pre-Hijra; Meccan) phase of her young husband's campaign for prophethood. MoM was remarried by the end of the year—to two women. One (Sawda bint Zam'a) he married only a few days after Kadijah's passing.

The other was his child-bride, Aisha—daughter of his best friend, Abu Bakr. (This latter betrothal was done in order to "strengthen" his friendship with Abu Bakr; so the story goes. Aisha was only 6.) Though rather embarrassing for Mohammed-fetishists to now admit, this fact is incontrovertible. It is attested in Bukhari's Hadith 5/58/234-236; as well as 7/62/64-65 and 7/62/88. Also ref. Muslim's Hadith vol. 8, no. 3309-11; as well as Sunan Abu Dawood vol. 2, no. 2116 and vol. 41 no. 4195 & 4916-19. The account is corroborated in vol. 9 of Tarikh al-Tabiri's biography of MoM. (As far as the Sunnah goes, these are the most esteemed sources.)

Unsurprisingly, immediately after Khadijah's passing, Mohammed was anxious to have a younger woman (probably for the first time in his life). Accounts vary as to exactly how long MoM waited until the nuptials with Sawda; but it was certainly the same month as Khadijah's death (April / May of 620). By some reports, upon Khadijah's death, he did not even wait until the week was out. Sawda was the daughter of Zama'a ibn Qays—a man from the Amir ibn Luayy clan in Mecca. More interesting, though, was her

mother—who hailed from the Khazraj clan in Yathrib; and so likely had connections there. This may have been the first piece in MoM’s eventual motivation to relocate to Yathrib after his luck ran dry in Mecca. All we know about Sawda is that she was a large woman; and that she had recently been widowed. It is said that she eventually gave her [weekly] night of sex with Mohammed to Aisha, since Aisha was younger and more attractive. (Mohammed married Aisha when she was only 6 years old, and started raping her a couple years later.)

Suffice to say, if this was a family the activities of which the Creator of the Universe was overseeing (and a family held in the highest favor of an omniscient super-being), he had a very strange way of showing it.

As with the Koran, the only incredible thing about MoM’s family life was that there is virtually nothing incredible about it. That is to say: given everything else we know about Mohammed, all of the accounts mentioned here are eminently plausible. It is this plausibility that we should find most disturbing.

Appendix 2: The Rape of Safiya

As it turns out, the “earliest sources” in the title of Lings’ book are hagiographies that were composed by ardent followers over two centuries after MoM’s death...based on whatever (orally-transmitted) lore was available at the time. (Predictably, Lings does not go out of his way to bring this to his readers’ attention.)

One of today’s doyens of hyper-romanticized Mohammedan hagiographies, Martin Lings, contends—for reasons that are hard to fathom—that, pursuant to the Battle of Khaybar, MoM “freed” his soon-to-be-wife, Safiya bint Huyayy (ibn Akhtab), from her people (a Jewish tribe near Yathrib: the Banu Nadir). He states this as if MoM RESCUED her instead of ENSLAVING her. Lings cites no evidence for this spurious claim. Why not? Because there is none. Indeed, people like Lings don’t expect their readers to actually check the historical record for themselves.

So let’s check.

According to Ibn Ishaq (the earliest source on the matter; and the earliest source that exists on MoM’s life in general), after slaughtering her family, MoM “gave orders that Safiya was to be put behind him and threw his mantle over her, so that the Muslims knew that he had claimed her for himself.” According to Bukhari’s “Sahih” Hadith (2/14/68), “God’s apostle vanquished [the Jewish tribe] by force; and their warriors were killed. The children and women were taken as captives. Safiya was taken by Dihya al-Kalbi; and later she belonged to god’s apostle, who married her. Her dowry [“mahr”] was the condition for her exoneration.” In other words, “marry me or die” was the deal she was given...that is, after MoM “freed” her from her own family by slaughtering them.

Got it?

One imagines a rapist claiming that he was just “liberating” his victim from her chastity—as if the assault was a favor. (No kidding: Islamic Hagiographers routinely couch MoM’s forced marriage to Safiya as a FAVOR TO her.) Note also that Safiya needed to be “exonerated”; a condition that reveals all we need to know about the situation. Exonerated from WHAT, exactly? From the crime of not being a Mohammedan (i.e. for being Jewish). And what was the ransom for said exoneration? We are told explicitly: Mom got to take her as his own—treating rights to Safiya herself as her dowry.

Such appropriation of humans, according to Lings’ contorted logic, is a way of LIBERATING humans. (Emancipation via subordination!)

So what really happened? The answer is quite clear. MoM took Safiya as his sex slave (“ma malakat aymanukum”; i.e. as his PROPERTY) after he had her father and husband (as well as all the other male members of her Jewish tribe, the Banu Nadir) tortured and killed. He then forced her to don a face-veil so that she could be considered a wife rather than just his concubine. Brilliant. (But hey, don’t fret. One time, we’re told, MoM helped her to mount his camel. Even slavers can be chivalrous.)

The degree of cruelty in this particular case was especially egregious. Safiya’s husband, Kenana ibn al-Rabi, was the tribe’s treasurer. So MoM set him afire (after branding his chest) in order to extract information about the hiding-place for the tribe’s (suspected) cache. When the man did not divulge the location of the (suspected) treasure, like any ruthless pirate, MoM had him killed...for his impudence. (MoM wanted his loot, and to hell with anyone who stood in his way. Cooperate or die.) Another account has MoM beheading the treasurer for failing to cough up the (suspected) treasure’s location.

Apparently, no such treasure was ever found.

MoM promptly seized the man’s wife (Safiya), took her to his tent, and bedded her before the day was out. (Yes. After slaughtering her family, he took her THAT VERY NIGHT.) Try to imagine the degree of cruelty involved here; and then note that the biographical accounts BRAG about this event.

To conclude from this, “Wow, what a swell fellow” is rather bizarre. Indeed, as we read in the earliest account (that of Ibn Ishaq), on that fateful night, one of MoM’s loyal servants (Abu Ayyub) found the need to remain next to MoM’s tent for the duration of the night. Why? As the servant explained to MoM the next morning (I paraphrase): “You had just killed her husband and her father and her people; so naturally—with you in the tent alone with her—I feared for your life.” No shit. *

But you’d never know ANY of this by reading Martin Lings’s outlandish re-telling. It seems not to occur to Lings that a girl might not be eager to sleep with—let alone wed—a man who’d just murdered her father and husband...THAT DAY. To hear Lings tell it, this was an estimable marriage. Indeed, it was yet another illustration of MoM’s breathtaking magnanimity.

Such glaring casuistry is at the same time jaw-dropping and cringe-inducing; yet it is standard operating procedure for the majority of Mohammedan hagiographers. Predictably, this is what happens when someone who fetishizes X deigns to write a book about X.

The rest of us are left to, as it were, “take it or leave it”. One can only endure so many large grains of salt—while swallowing the intoxicating elixir being proffered—before all one is doing is pouring salt down one’s own throat.

Lings is not an unfortunate anomaly; he is—tragically—emblematic of a widespread phenomenon. Unfortunately, people regularly learn about MoM from such highly dubious sources. It is no wonder, then, that so much of Dar al-Islam takes a revanchist position regarding any effort to set the record straight vis a vis their uber-glamorized prophet.

Setting the record straight requires rejecting the sumptuous cornucopia of apocrypha of which most Mohammedan hagiographies are largely comprised—leaving only a basic skeleton of quasi-credible accounts remaining. (Ergo the brevity of the bio that I did on Mohammed of Mecca.) It should be noted that even the earliest accounts are based on biased sources that are far-removed from the events they purport to describe.

{ As it turned out, MoM was actually quite safe. As is usually the case with rape, the victim's capacity to retaliate against her assailant was rather limited. One can only speculate that Safiya was likely paralyzed by terror; and too traumatized to pose any threat as the self-proclaimed prophet had his way with her.}*

APPENDIX 3:

Vested Interest As Disqualification

Though the present task (outlining the bio of MoM) is one of illumination rather than of obfuscation; many would prefer that certain things just be—shall we say—left alone. Broaching contentious subjects (e.g. the dubious credence of the cherished hagiography of a folk-hero) induces what might be called “narrative transition anxiety” (NTA). Indeed, feeling as though one is being pressured into disassociating oneself from a coveted Grand Narrative can be rather disquieting—nay: quite aggravating. This is especially so if it's the only Grand Narrative one has ever known. Few enjoy being cajoled out of their comfort zone; and nobody likes to feel as though they are being coerced into relinquishing something into which copious amounts of time / energy / emotion have been invested. Consequently, anyone considering such a transmutation will probably experience NTA. And anyone seeking to instigate such a transmutation in others will surely be confronted with an epidemic of NTA—and thus a prodigious amount of push-back. I have sympathy for this condition...up to a point. Indeed, pulling the proverbial rug out from beneath another's feet can be construed as an untoward gesture: gratuitous or even mean-spirited. Religionists of ANY stripe will surely feel existentially marooned (or even lost at sea, in turbulent waters) should they be deprived of a worldview on which they've come to depend for existential ballast. We should have sympathy for THEM; but not for their delusions.

As Robert Trivers put it in his “Folly Of Fools”: “A very disturbing feature of overconfidence is that it often appears to be poorly associated with knowledge. That is, the more ignorant the individual, the more confident he or she may be” (p. 14). Thus confidence is generally proportional to the severity of the delusion—as Socrates tried to demonstrate 24 centuries ago. The worst kind of ignorance, he noted, was ignorance of one's own ignorance.

Alas. Confidence—nay, stridency of conviction—is often inversely proportional to in-touch-ness with Reality. This “Dunning-Kruger Effect” exists because false certainty is one of the hallmark symptoms of ignorance (being as how obliviousness to one's nescience is—in effect—tied into one's out-of-touch-ness with Reality). Here, conviction is proportional to delusion. Confidence is inversely proportional to the warrant for that confidence. When people are thoroughly-enough wed to an idea, they INVARIABLY convince themselves that they are certain. After all, false certainty is a corollary of ideological commitment. The question becomes: How do we handle ignorance when those who are most ignorant believe themselves to be (uniquely) “in the know”?

Those without wisdom lack the wisdom necessary to recognize their own lack of wisdom. Their ignorant state entails seeing that state as erudite: an integral part of ignorance is ignorance of one's own ignorance. Senescence often construes itself as sapience—like the faulty diagnostics system that diagnosis itself as operating splendidly.

The Dunning-Kruger effect is exacerbated in cases where a tribalistic mindset is involved (as tribal honor needs to be upheld). And it is especially pronounced when the conviction is doctrinal (when that which is sacrosanct needs to be protected). After all, to be doctrinaire is to be blinded by own's own ideological commitment. Hence the Dunning-Kruger effect is most severe when it is undergirded by cult activity.

In his disquisition on “The True Believer”, Eric Hoffer noted that the zealot is “mentally cocky, and hence barren of new beginnings. At the root of his cockiness is the conviction that life and the universe conform to a simple formula—his formula [i.e. the formula he espouses]. He is thus without the fruitful intervals of groping.” Critical reflection is anathema to the ideologue. This is a necessary prohibition for sustaining the false certainty he so covets.

Once committed to an idea X with sufficient ardor, one will be strongly inclined to stick to one’s guns—no matter how erroneous X is shown to be. Confirmation bias goes into overdrive; and objectivity goes out the window. With enough vested interest, obduracy turns into defiance; and the more countervailing one encounters, the more one digs in one’s heels.

It is no secret that strong personal bias translates into selectively-adumbrated memory in conjunction with wishful thinking (see my essay, “The Island”). It’s a blissful crucible of delusiveness. *

Staunch, vested interest explains why the remedial (consoling) tales of MoM came to be as they have; but we still must ask: How did they come to be in the first place?

In “Folly Of Fools”, Trivers noted: “Once information [about the outside world] arrives in our brains, it is often distorted and biased to our conscious minds [according to our sensibilities / interests]. We deny the truth to ourselves. We project onto others [unpalatable] traits that are in fact true of ourselves—and then attack them. We repress painful memories, create completely false ones, rationalize immoral behavior, act repeatedly to boost positive self-opinion, and show a suite of ego-defense mechanisms.”

Thus, our minds “bias information, from initial avoidance, to false encoding, memory, and logic, to incorrect statements [made] to others—from one end [of the process] to the other. Key mechanisms [for doing this] include denial, projection, and perpetual efforts to reduce cognitive dissonance” (p. 2). **

On cognitive dissonance, Trivers points out that “the more a person commits to a position, the more he or she needs to rationalize the commitment; and great rationalization apparently produces greater positive effects” (p. 72). This is the psychological mechanism at work when one makes an imprudent purchase (of a consumer product that one can’t return). Pursuant to such sunk costs, every rationalization will be concocted to make oneself feel justified in the commitment...even when all evidence is to the contrary.

Similar psychological mechanisms are operative when it comes to anyone who has invested a prodigious amount of time / energy / emotion into a certain system of dogmas. While economists refer to it as “sunk costs” (and the ensuing syndrome as “post-purchase bias”), it actually involves a psychical process known as “irrational escalation of commitment” (a.k.a. “commitment bias”).

Hidebound ideologues thus “create an artificial world and then choose to live in it” (p. 109). Trivers further explains: “Self-deception is intimately tied to false historical narratives”, which are essentially “lies we tell ourselves about our past, usually in the service of self-forgiveness and aggrandizement” (p. 6). On this matter, Atran’s “In Gods We Trust” is also worth reading. Akerlof and Shiller’s “Phishing For Phools” has some fascinating things to say about mass-manipulation; as does Robert Cialdini’s “Influence”.

Trivers reminds us that deception “always takes the lead in life while detection of deception plays catch-up. As has been said regarding rumors, the lie is halfway around the world before the truth puts its boots on. When a new deception shows up in nature, it starts in a world that often lacks a proper defense” (p. 7). Regarding the transmission of information (i.e. the propagation of memes): “At every single stage—from its biased arrival, to its biased encoding, to organizing it around false logic, to misremembering and then misrepresenting it to others, the mind continually acts to distort information flow in favor of the [espoused

narrative]” (p. 139).

This tendency becomes even more salient when it comes to orality. Most of us are completely unaware of the biasing that takes place during hearing, information processing (a.k.a. encoding), and then in re-telling. All of it is susceptible to self-deception and projection; any part of it may involve cognitive dissonance. “However much we champion freedom of thought, we actually spend much of our time censoring input” and thereby allowing our memory to be distorted in order to suit our own purposes (p. 140).

How does this work? A “quick-biasing procedure is available to us when the information is preferred because it boosts our self-esteem... There are few more powerful forces in the service of self-deception than personal fantasies; so when these are aroused, selective attention is expected to be especially intense” (p. 142). Thus, “many processes of memory can be biased to produce welcome results” while keeping unwelcome results at bay (p. 143).

Urging the thoroughly-indoctrinated to disabuse themselves of these faulty impressions is like asking a fundamentalist Christian to consider that JoN may not have been resurrected.

When we hear someone like Reza Aslan glibly aver that the first thing MoM did when he came to power was ban slavery, we can only recoil and slap our foreheads. That MoM clearly MANDATED slavery seems not to bother Aslan; so his casuistic asseveration persists, unabated. That the Koran ADAMANTLY enjoins slavery (ref. all passages regarding “those whom your right hands possesses”) poses no problem for Aslan either. By making such patently absurd statements, we can be quite sure that ostensibly liberal Islamic apologists like Aslan have gone through the looking glass in their avid pursuit of a palatable narrative. Such rampant perfidy does not bode well for reform. In fact, it positively inhibits reformation at every turn.

If one is seeking an orgy of charlatanry, the bountiful material on MoM is one of the best places to look. Indeed, what one encounters when one embarks on a quest to uncover information about Islam’s “seal of the prophets” is a raucous jamboree of casuistry. One is thereby forced to sift through reams upon reams of material (fabricated for mass-consumption and maximum impact)...all of it churned out by expositors with glaring partialities—and incessantly promulgated by the cadre of theological plenipotentiaries known as the “Ulema”. Eager supplicants become infatuated with the rosy portrayals, never bothering to vet any of the claims they’re fed.

Infatuation often leads to addiction. Dependency leads to obstinacy.

Ironically, it is ostensibly “liberal” Islamic apologists who indulge in THE MOST Reality-denial. They fail to see that insofar as they revise history, it deprives their audience of the opportunity to learn the right lessons from it. (History does us little good if we can’t learn lessons from it. Step one is acknowledging what REALLY HAPPENED.) Here, we must bear in mind the difference between actuality and potentiality.

The world in which we find ourselves seems to be a riddle in need of unraveling. The life we find ourselves living seems to be a mystery waiting to be solved. An imagined past helps us make sense of who we are and what we do...in a way that serves our purposes (and comports with our sensibilities). In this sense, heritage is self-validating. To wit: One’s heritage INSISTS that one’s heritage is legitimate. By contrast, the ACTUAL past helps explain what we’ve become and what is STILL POSSIBLE.

Reality does not care about legacy. By contrast, those afflicted with collective narcissism ONLY care about legacy; hence the tendency to eschew Reality in favor of strategically-crafted historiography.

Impartial inquirers who hope to ferret out a grain of verity in a churning sea of fables are often left dismayed by the alluvion of warmed-over pabulum that passes for “scholarship”. So what do honest inquirers discover? That we really do not know much about MoM simply because we CAN’T know much (though, from the volumes of mesmerizing twaddle that litter bookshelves, one would tend not to get this impression).

On this point, Trivers put it well: “False historical narratives widely shared within a population can easily be exploited to arouse sentiments in favor of [enmity regarding THE OTHER]. At the same time, political success often may turn on the ability of leaders to arouse the belief in people that something is in their self-interest when it is not” (p. 67).

In the event that a threshold is passed by which one becomes emotionally vested in X to a sufficiently high degree, one may well defend it to the death—even in the face of overwhelming countervailing evidence. It is with that obduracy that one must contend when brazen enough to question the official narrative about a hallowed religious figure.

And so it goes with Mohammedan lore. Removing the “history” label from sacrosanct historiography is no easy task; as one is tampering with the sacred...thereby offending those who bank on things not being tampered with.

But tamper we must.

{ PERSONAL memory is, by definition, subjective. This does not preclude the possibility of objectivity in a collective project, where subjectivities (i.e. biases and errors) can be, as it were, cancelled out. The individual is always subject to the vagaries of personal (and thus personalized) memory. As Proust aptly put it, “The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object...which we do not suspect. As for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.” This is a rather bleak way of looking at it; but this plaintive observation holds an element of truth—that is, as far as it goes. (The problem is that it only goes so far.) On our own, all we can do is make ourselves receptive to (what turns out to be) the “truth of the matter”. In a sincere effort to get past our own biases, we can only hope that we are discerning enough to recognize it when we find it. The “catch” is that, when engaged in a shared enterprise, we can all check each other; thereby correcting for errors. This only works if everyone is honest. Perspicacity is no friend of dogmatism; whereas confirmation bias is just about all the dogmatist has at his disposal.}*

{** Islamic apologists tend to accuse anyone making a sincere attempt to elucidate Reality (based on the available evidence) of “revisionism”. This is, of course, a textbook case of projection. What (honest) scholars do is (attempt to) COUNTERACT any revisionism they encounter. Anti-revisionism is not itself a kind of revisionism...any more than correcting an errant record is itself its own form of errancy. The traditional “legend” of MoM is revisionist through and through. (That’s what makes it a LEGEND.) It is the result of amanuenses modifying “the record” to suit one’s own purposes, over the course of centuries. It may be unseemly to debunk the skein of revisionist rigamarole with which we are now familiar; but it is imperative. Note that this is the opposite of how we use the term when we say we “revise” something; which means that mistakes are corrected, defects are rectified, and shortcomings are addressed. In that sense, a sober view of MoM is, indeed, a REVISED view. But this is, of course, not what reactionary critics of scholarship mean when they deride “revisionism”—which, for them, is a pejorative for “straying from the conventional view.” Dismissing iconoclasm as “revisionism” is no better than simply scoffing, “How dare you?” with an ornery harrumph when others refuse to play along with the game one insists the entire world must play. The sort of “revisionism” that they accuse others of doing is, of course, the basis of their own sacred lore.}

Appendix 4: The Fabled “Farewell Sermon”

There is a myth that during this particular speech, MoM decried racism, as if he were using the occasion to make a clarion call for racial equality. This is complete farce. One of the mythical statements attributed to the “Seal of the Prophets” in Islamic apologetics is something along the lines of: “Arabs are not above non-Arabs, nor non-Arabs above Arabs; light-skinned people are not above dark-skinned people [“zanj”], nor dark-skinned people above light-skinned people. All are to be judged only according to their Faith and good deeds.” This is entirely made up.

According to ONLY ONE version of the sermon, there was an oblique reference to race; but only insofar as piety was to be extolled irrespective of whether a Muslim was Arab or not. This version was recounted in the “Kitab al-Hayawan” [“Book Of Animals”] by Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Kinani of Basra (a.k.a. “Al-Jahiz”) in the 9th century. According to Al-Jahiz, at one point MoM said: “The noblest of you in god’s sight is the most god-fearing: Arab has no merit over non-Arab, other than being god-fearing.” In other words: Piety is pre-eminent among all considerations, even with respect to race.

Al-Jahiz was notable in that he wrote favorably about the Zanj—arguing that, contrary to popular belief, their dark skin was NOT a disfigurement. It is no surprise, then, that this particular point of contention crops up in HIS fanciful version of the sermon.

For more on the Farewell Sermon, see Appendix 4 of my essay: “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.