About Mohammed II: Debunking Three Myths



In part 1 of this series, I explored the hyper-romanticization of Mohammed of Mecca (MoM). As I mentioned, many who claim to be “scholars” of Islam don’t want to risk “offending”–and possibly eliciting reprisal from–1.5 billion people; so abstain from bringing to light anything that supplicants would much prefer remain in the dark. Consequently, many expositors demure–and even dissemble–when pressed on such matters.

The most exalted of folkloric figures become fixed stars in each culture’s constellation. The (proverbial) heavens are thus populated with something to admire; and to wonder at. Each retelling of the folk-tale is more overwrought (maudlin, fantastical, enthralling) than the last. Consequently, the audience becomes increasingly invested in the tale’s extraordinary-ness and its sanctity…

whilst the tellers become ever-more-stoked on their souped-up flights of fancy. Before too long, the folk-heroes are larger than life; beacons in an otherwise dark night.

E.O. Wilson put it well in “The Social Conquest of Earth”: “The creation stories gave the members of each tribe an explanation for their existence. It made them feel loved and protected above all other tribes. In return, their gods demanded absolute belief and obedience. And rightly so. The creation myth was the essential bond that held the tribe together. It provided its believers with unique identity, commanded their fidelity, strengthened order, vouchsafed law, encouraged valor and sacrifice, and offered meaning to the cycles of life and death. No tribe could long survive without the meaning of its existence defined by a creation story.”

In his next book, “The Meaning of Human Existence”, Wilson elaborated on the point: “Unfortunately, a religious group defines itself foremost by its creation story– the supernatural narrative that explains how humans [or at least the humans that matter; i.e. the in-group] came into existence. This story is also the heart of tribalism. No matter how gentle and high-minded, or subtly explained, the core belief assures its members that god favors them above all others. It teaches that members of other religions worship the wrong gods, use wrong rituals, follow false prophets, and believe [farcical] creation stories. There is no way around the soul-satisfying but cruel discrimination that [religious communities] must practice among themselves” (p. 151).

Again, while it is our yearning for MEANING that impels us, it is sheer PRACTICALITY that dictates the nuts and bolts of the Grand Narrative, from etiology to eschatology (from origins to destinations). We homo sapiens are, as Max Weber pointed out, meaning-making machines; and we are also eminently pragmatic creatures.

Exaltation of the in-group is the sin qua non of most romanticized origin stories. Exalted legacy translates to exalted destiny. Ergo etiological myths (origin stories) are often the handmaidens of tribalism. Interestingly, one of the earliest thinkers to connect historiography with a tribalistic mindset (“asabiyyah”) was the celebrated Tunisian thinker, Ibn Khaldun in his “Muqaddimah” c. 1377. The work is significant for acknowledging the role of systemic bias in evaluating versions of one’s own tribe’s history.

Ibn Khaldun recognized that conflicts of interest–and false certainty–often hamper endeavors to provide an objective account of historical events. He held that all chronicling is prone to error for any of seven reasons:

- A strong partiality towards an ideology
- An over-confidence in one's chosen sources
- A failure to understand the motivations of the sources
- Mistaken belief in what constitutes "truth"
- An inability to place an event in its proper context
- A desire to curry favor with those in authority
- An ignorance of the laws governing the transformation of society

Perhaps Ibn Khaldun's greatest insight was that "asabiyyah" (tribalism; partisanship) can sabotage attempts to chronicle historical events.

In fact, many of the same mechanisms as when sycophants (especially those with a tribalistic mindset) cling to sanctified narratives are at play when ANYONE flocks to escapist media–be it a novel or a film or a video game…or orally transmitted folklore. We are all hungry for myth because we are all hungry for enchantment. We are especially drawn to narratives that cater to our needs. In our eagerness to consume what's on offer, we sometimes lose track of the MYTHICAL aspect of myth. When we are so earnest to believe in something fantastical, any captivating narrative will do. If the narrative serves as a compelling vehicle for an ideology, then all the better.

We all like to think that WE (however defined) have had a glorious past–a bygone "golden" age to which we can harken back. This comes in handy whenever we need some kind of validation–or, as the case may be, consolation. A well-woven etiological yarn serves as a touchstone–something wonderful to "get back to" in times of strife (a touchstone in a time of existential disorientation). In the event that one can't find a source of pride in the present, one may resort to an embellished past to "do the trick".

Anyone who deigns to bring the dubiousness of a sanctified narrative to light is invariably persona non grata; and often excoriated for heretical thinking. For such a person is tampering with a homeostasis. Those who have the audacity to upset sacred apple-carts are, as it were, threatening to bring down a house of cards (a dogmatic edifice on which others have come to depend). Such un-welcome interlopers are–to mix metaphors even further–raining on a very important parade.

It’s as if the marplot has impugned the believer personally (rather than that which he believes). Rather than shooting the messenger, this posturing is often a matter of pretending that one has been SHOT BY the messenger, then pressing charges accordingly.

It comes a little surprise, then, that few disinterested parties have made an effort to summarize MoM’s life candidly–that is: infusing the account with oodles of maudlin apocrypha. One of the more notable attempt at a sincere biopic was made in the 1840’s by the American man of letters, Washington Irving. In composing the work, he merely sought to capture the MYTHOS of MoM–replete with apocrypha, though without the raft of overwrought exposition with which such works are typically festooned. The result of this project was a dramatization entitled “Mahomet and His Successors”.

Reactionaries indulge in confabulation as the need arises–so as to accord with whatever version of events they have adopted, and maintain their sanctified dogmatic edifice. Most people tend to prevaricate whenever their cherished claims collide with mountains of countervailing evidence. Meanwhile, TRUTH is a nuisance to be disposed of whenever it undermines our most cherished beliefs. So anything that does fit comfortably into the narrative is summarily jettisoned.

We often forget that “received wisdom” (alt. “conventional wisdom”) is often not wisdom at all. It is simply what we’ve been notified we’re supposed to believe; or it is simply what someone said about something once, and happened to catch on. Contrary to received wisdom:

The Egyptian pyramids at Giza were not built by enslaved workers (of ANY ethnicity, let alone Hebrews). The Hebrews were never enslaved ANYWHERE. And the Egyptians did not practice slavery. There was never an “exodus” from Egypt.

Abraham Lincoln was not a died-in-the-wool abolitionist. (Though he was not a fan of slavery, only after much hesitation did he finally issue the Emancipation Proclamation; and then primarily for strategic–rather than explicitly moral–reasons).

Walt Disney did not invent Mickey Mouse. (Ubbe Eert Iwerks did.)

However…It is easier to just hold that the Egyptian pyramids were built by (Hebrew) slaves, that Abrahamic Lincoln thought blacks were equal to whites, and credit Disney himself for Mickey. That it’s all technically untrue needn’t pose a problem for

most of us. After all, why complicate what is a marvelously straight-forward (conventional) narrative with (disruptive) technicalities like, well, what ACTUALLY HAPPENED?

We might bear in mind that MoM is not the only figure about whom tall tales proliferate in Islamic lore. In the Koran, we hear stories about an Arabian prophet named “Saleh” of Thamud / A[a]d. The character seems to have been nay, re-purposed for Ishmaelite sensibilities; and thus co-opted into Mohammedan lore from antecedent pagan lore (rather than from extant Abrahamic lore). Another prophet, “Idris” [ibn Yard ibn Mahla’il] (19:56-57) is considered to be the oldest Abrahamic prophet (after Adam). Based on WHAT is anyone’s guess. It seems to have sounded plausible at the time; so it stuck.

A minor folkloric Arabian figure was a woman named “Omm Kharija”, known for her many temporary marriages. Whether she was a Mohammedan invention or was adopted from (pre-Islamic) Arabian folklore is hard to say. But she caught on as well.

In the Maghreb, the “Taghribat Bani Hilal” [a.k.a. “Sirat Abu Zeid al-Hilali”] has played a prominent role in Arab folklore. It tells of the Fatimid Caliph sending the (Arab) Banu Hilal to Tunisia to put down the Zirid [alt. “Zenata”; i.e. Sanhaja Berber] rebellion in the 11th century. For centuries, this tale was orally-transmitted. Unsurprisingly, it was crafted to glorify the in-group.

Shiites tell tales about their patriarchs–the heirs of Ali ibn Abi Talib: imams Husayn, then Ali “Zayn al-Abidin” [adornment of the worshippers], then Muhammad “al-Baqir” [revealer of knowledge], and then Jafar “al-Sadiq” [the Truthful]. Much of the lofty claims are dubious; but it serves an ideological purposes, so it touted with unassailable fervor.

Another example is the “Ali’d” [Shia, Persian] mystic, Shams al-Din Mohammad of Tabriz (a.k.a. “Shams-i Tabrizi”). Variously described as Sufi or Isma’ili, he is said to have been the mentor of the famous Sufi poet, Jalal ad-Din Rumi (in Konya); and is best known for his “Maqalat” [Discourse]. (Shams-i Tabrizi was himself said to have been a disciple of a figure named “Baba Kamal al-Din Jumdi”.) He is often downplayed by mainstream Muslims, though, as one of his beliefs was that his own tongue (Middle Persian) was so marvelous that the meanings and elegance found in Pahlavi literature could not be duplicated in Classical Arabic. (Heresy!)

Also of note is the legend of “al-Khidr”, a mystic who was not explicitly identified in the Koran, yet who has cropped up in myriad Islamic folktales–specifically in Ahmad ibn Hanbal’s “Al-Zuhd” and Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari’s “The History”. (He also appears in both Bukhari’s and Bayhaqi’s writings.) The moniker is a variation on the Arabic term for “the Green One” (“al-Akhdar”)–which might explain why that particular color has often been accorded a prominent role in Islam. This enchanting figure was probably a take-off on the Canaanite (Ugaritic) mystic, Kothar-wa-Khasis of Memphis–legends of whom date back to the late 3rd millennium B.C. We know that the Semitic tale likely proliferated in the Hijaz, as it is referenced on Sumerian tablets from Ebla (Syria); and the Nabataeans were likely familiar with the figure. (Curiously, Kothar-wa-Khasis was connected with the ancient Canaanite deity, Baal.)

There are also tales about Salman al-Farsi [“Salman the Persian”; actually named Roozbeh] in Islamic lore. Salman was purportedly one of the Sahabah. He eventually came to be governor of the Mesopotamian city of Al-Mada’in. The credence of his historicity is anyone’s guess. But, hey, it was surely fun to talk about; so the tale eventually caught on.

Before proceeding, we might survey the Koranic basis for the glorification of MoM. Notably, in 3:31-32, god instructs MoM to tell everyone that “If you love god, then you will follow ME.” The Koran then instructs followers to obey god and MoM together. Mercy is therefore conditional–in part–on obeying MoM (i.e. following his “teachings”). It is no wonder, then, that fabrications about MoM abound. For many feel that they are–as it were–forced to countenance Mohammedan farce in order to lend their Faith credence. To eschew said farce would be, in their minds, to abandon their Faith. Insofar as fealty to MoM is a PROXY FOR fealty to the Abrahamic deity, the former becomes imperative.

There’s more. 4:65 tells us that Islam is about completely submitting not only to the Abrahamic deity, but also to MoM’s commands. (This notorious verse effectively arrogates absolute authority to MoM. His judgement / example is the final word on all matters.) Thus, the Seal of the Prophets is a surrogate for divine authority: his edicts are to be taken as proxies for divine law. If he decrees it, it is by the authority of the Abrahamic deity. To reiterate this point, both 4:80 and 33:36 announce that to obey MoM IS to obey god. And as if that still weren’t clear enough, 9:24 puts MoM with god as the object of ultimate devotion. This “forces the hand” of any supplicant. To wit: It sets Muslims up for HAVING to exalt MoM…lest their theology be undermined (and their holy book betrayed). This ties the hands of the confessor.

In general, the concept of “nubuwwah” [prophethood] does not involve making obedience to the prophet HIMSELF a condition for salvation–as prophets often claim only to be facilitators. So this “fealty to MoM” routine is a red herring–a deviation from the standard prophetic template. This is a deviation, it turns out, that is in keeping with the modus operandi of ALL demagogues. Bear in mind that the “I’m god’s mouthpiece” leitmotif had been in use since the Bronze Age.

It is insofar as MoM is rendered a proxy for the godhead that the Sunnah has purchase the lives of most people in Dar al-Islam. Supplicants are compelled to not only submit to the Abrahamic deity, but to cow-tow to his designated proconsul on Earth. 4:65 and 33:36 make this cosmogenic arrangement crystal clear.

Indeed, we all have ancestors who believed outlandish things. That needn’t reflect poorly on US. Those of us who are well-adjusted to Reality have gotten past it. Should the rest of mankind think so lowly of Muslims as to think them incapable of doing with THEIR heritage what the rest of the world can clearly do with theirs?

Reticence to come to terms with (actual) history stems from an anxiety about losing one’s spiritual moorings, one’s moral compass, and perhaps even the basis for one’s very identity. This anxiety is compounded by the sense that one must avoid wounded pride by persisting in one’s dogmatic indulgences. (Reactionary thinking is largely about fear.) The difficulty in UN-doing conditioning is also a factor. The deeply-ingrained mental habits that are endemic to hard-line religiosity (what neuro-scientists refer to as pathway dependency) is not an easy thing from which to extricate oneself–a matter I explore in Appendix 3 of the previous essay.

Most people are smitten with the lore that they’ve inherited from their forefathers. For the True Believer, though, HOW it (actually) came to be what it now happens to be is entirely beside the point. It is what it is; and that’s the bottom line. It’s sacrosanct; so we’re NOT SUPPOSED to question it.

To reiterate: Embellishment has a ratcheting effect. This is true for ALL of us; as it is how memory tends to work. Once it has been thoroughly inculcated, we are reticent to subject our coveted impression–which takes on the status of an ironclad conviction–to critical scrutiny (let alone to relinquish it if it comports marvelously with our sensibilities). The psychology here is quite straight-forward: Once firmly instantiated, it becomes difficult to rescind an enticing IDEA from one’s memetic

repertoire. Why disrupt a glib psychic homeostasis with discursive perturbations? If a long-coveted narrative seems to serve its purpose, we will be strongly-inclined to continue to covet it.

What makes this ordeal exasperating is that much overt religiosity is a masquerade. Few REALLY BELIEVE that which they publicly profess to believe. Mullah Omar, faithful leader of the Taliban, banned music in Afghanistan–though apparently liked very much to listen to Rod Stewart behind closed doors. Homosexuality is forbidden in Islamic theocracies, yet there are countless Saudi oil billionaires and Iranian ayatollahs and Pashtun mullahs who covertly maintain boy harems. Etc. What we often find with objects of fetishization–like Islam's holy book and its prophet–is a second-order belief (BELIEF IN believing something; without actually believing the thing itself). Due to its hyper-ritualized nature, religion is often more a performance than a sincere enterprise.

MoM a humble man? Hardly. According to his own wife, Aisha bint Abu Bakr, MoM once relayed to her that "the angel in charge of the mountains" had called out to him and said, "May god praise you and keep you safe from all evil! Oh, Muhammad, I will do whatever you command me to do. If you want, I can bring the Akh-Shabain mountains together and crush them all!" (Bukhari no. 3059). {17}

Let's suppose for a moment that this REALLY HAPPENED. What is the appropriate response to such a swaggering pronouncement from one's spouse? "Really, dear? THAT is what 'the angel in charge of the mountains' said to you today? Splendid. Now eat your dinner."

It should go without saying that these are the words of a deluded popinjay. Only a man who was–shall we say–rather full of himself would utter such a thing (no matter how "special" he may have purportedly been*). So let's assume MoM actually said this. In real life, what role could such a statement possibly play? None. It is an utterly inane thing to say.

But here's the thing: Such words might be put into the mouth of a story's protagonist for NARRATIVE reasons…which is precisely why we encounter this rather silly anecdote in the hadith. Note that it is in keeping with passages in the Koran like 68:4, in which MoM notified everyone that god said to HIM: "You are of magnificent character." Thus we have a first-person communique addressed to MoM

in Islam's holy book. (Other verses of this nature (in the first person) include 21:107-8, 33:46-47, and 68:5.) The lesson to learn: MoM was of magnificent character. "That's what god told ME. So YOU must believe it."

The "I am the god's mouthpiece" gimmick is simple: By fashioning oneself as god's vicar on Earth, one renders oneself unimpeachable. For if a man is a proxy for the godhead, then to rebuff that man is tantamount to rebuffing the godhead.

Meanwhile, we encounter a memo composed in the SECOND person (addressed to the general audience) in 33:21: "In the prophet of god, you have an excellent example." Also see 9:128; as well as two other verses in Surah 33 (41 and 57).

Additionally, there are verses in the THIRD person to reiterate the point (e.g. 48:29). This is also done in the Hadith. In Bukhari (129/36/22), MoM refers to himself in the THIRD person, declaring: "I have been commanded to fight the people until they bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but god; and that Mohammed is the messenger of god." He then switches back to the first person: "If they establish 'salat' and pay the 'zakat', then their blood and wealth are protected from me." The implication here is plain to see: If one does not submit, one is not safe.

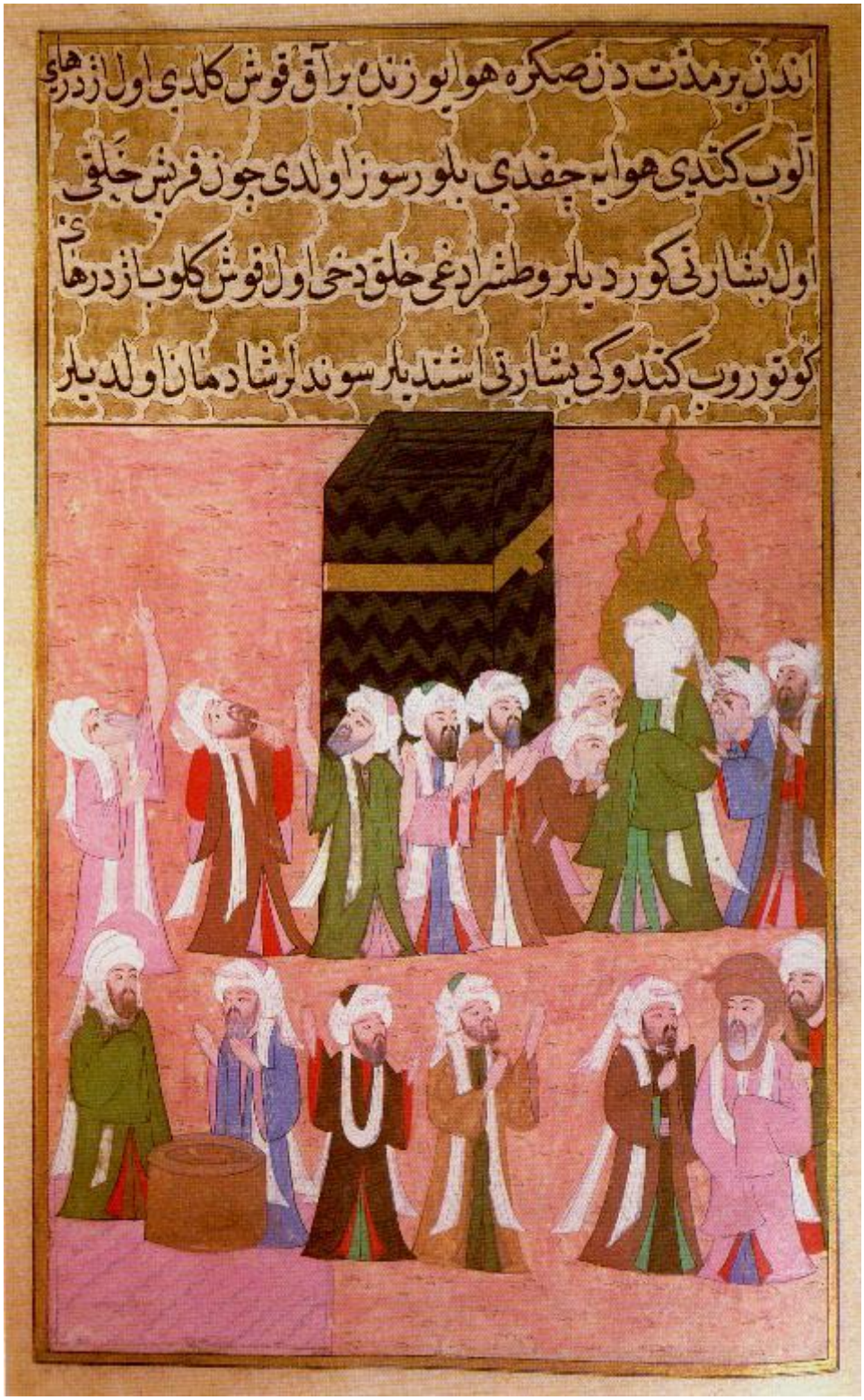
In any lived experience, such bumptious declarations about oneself serve no purpose other than indulging one's own braggadocio. There are psychological diagnoses for people that say such things; yet hagiographers expect the world to exempt their figure-of-choice from any frank diagnostic scrutiny.

In the summary that follows, we will look at what MoM DID, not at what he is said to have said. There are other points that are readily made via the most elementary of deduction. It seems not to occur to many Islamic apologists that men who might accurately be described as "mild-mannered" tend not to become military commanders obsessed with conquest, assassination, and plunder. Vengeance was incontrovertibly MoM's forte–just as with the protagonist of his recitations.

As we saw in part 1 of this series, MoM's movement was–first and foremost–based on piracy; and thus on militancy. (Show me a tender-hearted pirate, and I'll show you a carnivorous vegan.) As I attempted to show, the "nabi" of Islamic lore is more a dramatis personae than a historical figure. Having become so infatuated with this fictional character (the product of centuries of hagiographic artifice), many have succumbed to what can only be described as institutionalized paramnesia. This enables them to take a sordid career and pass it off as the most sterling of records (then summarily accuse anyone who doesn't play along of being–somehow–

bigoted). There is, of course, nothing wrong with revering a kind, caring prophet who urged nothing but good will. However, when one prizes a fictional character more than one prizes Truth, things can't help but go awry.

Step one in forging a Progressive version of Islam is disabusing ourselves of fanciful impressions that have no basis in reality. After all, one cannot reform something without first acknowledging what, exactly, it is that is in need of reforming. Here, we'll debunk three myths.



The Farcical Persecution of Mohammed

It is sometimes suggested that MoM was somehow persecuted in pre-Hijra Mecca. As the story goes, the self-proclaimed “rasul allah” endured incredible hardship after having valiantly taken a righteous stand. But is this true?

Starting c. 613 when he began preaching, almost nobody in Mecca believed MoM’s grandiose claims about having received communiques from the Abrahamic deity. As might be expected, his fellow Meccans chastised him–sometimes vituperatively–for his audacious evangelism; and reproached him for berating the gods of their forefathers. Naturally, he was rebuked. In romanticized historiography, said rebuke is characterized as persecution.

The aspiring prophet was most likely mocked–and perhaps even aggressively shunned–by most Meccans for touting such brazen assertions. Be that as it may, MoM was never punished–or harmed in any way–for his pronouncements. The most we hear in the Hadith is passing mention of MoM having things thrown as him in the street…and, as we shall see, once having viscera placed on his back during morning prayer.

It is no newsflash that, in the medieval world, some people sometimes threw things at other people–a gesture that often occurred when there was vociferous disagreement between them.

A popular tale is about a visit MoM’s once made to Ta’if. After having no success in his hometown, the aspiring prophet–along with his adopted son, Zayd ibn Harithah–tried his hand in this nearby Hijazi settlement. As the story goes, the chieftains of Ta’if initially welcomed MoM. However, they–along with virtually everyone else in town–paid little heed to his preachments. As it turned out, it was street urchins who ended up giving MoM and Zayd grief–mocking them, and even throwing stones at them. Hence we are expected to believe that MoM was driven out by hordes of homeless children.

The verisimilitude of this account becomes even more tenuous when we hear that, immediately after having left the edge of town (bleeding, we’re told, from having been hit by stones), MoM and his companion were taken in by the Christian owners of a nearby orchard–illustrating that there did not exist any widespread animus directed toward MoM. He had insulted them, yet was still given hospitality by locals.

Calling a situation in which people simply rejected MoM's proselytization "persecution" is a disingenuous use of the term. The aspiring prophet incurred no such thing. In the nine-plus years he conducted his (early) ministry in Mecca, he was never imprisoned. He was never even fined. There was never, at any point, severe battery–at least none that caused injury.

It should come as little surprise that the aspiring prophet was ostracized by Meccan pagans, as he was actively flouting their most hallowed religious traditions. MoM had made himself a pariah; not a martyr.

So we might inquire: If we seek answers in Islamic sources, what DID MoM supposedly endure? According to Ibn Ishaq (the earliest biographer of MoM), "the worst attack seen by the Quraysh" on the self-proclaimed "rasul" was as follows:

According to the testimony of a prominent Meccan named Abdullah ibn Amr al-As: "I was with him when their nobles assembled one day in the Hijr [town square] and discussed [MoM]. They said, 'We have never seen the likes of what we have encountered from this man. He has derided our traditional values, abused our [fore]fathers, reviled our religion, caused division among us, and insulted our gods. We have endured a great deal from him.' Or words to that effect.

"While they were saying this, [MoM] himself appeared. He walked up and kissed al-hajar al-aswad [the sacred black stone]. He then passed by them while performing the tawaf [circumambulation]; and as he did so, they made slanderous remarks about him."

Note that this was a significant enough event to have been recorded for posterity.

So what was MoM's response to being chastised? As it turns out, it was to threaten his audience with violence. (Surprise.) On his third time around the Kaaba, he stopped and proclaimed to those insulting him: "Hear me, men of the Quraysh. By he in whose hands my soul rests, I shall bring you slaughter."

Even after this threat, the Qurashi nobles ("even those who had urged the most severe measures against MoM") spoke in a conciliatory way to MoM; and still "used the most polite expressions they could"; and then simply bid him to "depart in true guidance".

MoM then departed.

So even those who were MOST hostile to MoM were deferential. This was as bad as it got. But wait. The story isn't quite over. Ibn Ishaq continues the account of Abdullah ibn Amr al-As:

"The next day, they gathered in the Hijr, and I was again present. They said to each other, 'You were talking about the unpleasantness that you have endured and the things that [MoM] has done to you; but when he openly said something antagonistic, you shrank from him.' As they said this, [MoM] appeared, and they came upon him as one man, and surrounded him, saying: 'Is it you who says this and that?' repeating what they had heard of his denunciation of their gods and their religion. [MoM] replied, 'Yes, I am the one who says that.' Then I saw one of them grab his cloak. But Abu Bakr stood in front of him weeping and pleading, 'Woe upon you all! Would you begrudge a man because he says, my lord is god?' They then departed. And that is the worst thing I ever saw the Quraysh do to him." {1}

Suffice to say: Being repudiated is not the same as being tormented. MoM was persona non grata, not a victim of persecution.

What else tells us of THE WORST that the pagan Meccans did to MoM for his Abrahamic proselytizing? In Islamic lore, we are told that the derided "Abu Jahl" (a snide re-naming of a prominent Qurayshi named Amr ibn Hisham) confronted the self-proclaimed prophet, saying: "You have forsaken the religion of your father who was better than you. {2} We will brand you as a fool, and destroy your reputation." According to this account, if a follower of MoM was a merchant, Abu Jahl called for those in the marketplace to not buy the man's goods. In other words: Cursing Mecca's pagan gods was met with a boycott. Far from violent aggression, the response was peaceable protestation. {3}

Here's the thing. The Quraysh had no grievances about MoM's personal theology PER SE; it was only his public–outspoken–desecration of their gods that they found objectionable. Ibn Ishaq recounts: "[MoM] proclaimed god's message openly and declared Islam publicly to his fellow tribesmen. When he did so, they did not withdraw from him or rebuff him in any way, as far as I have heard, UNTIL he spoke of their gods and denounced them. When he did this, they took umbrage with it and united in opposition to him, except for those whom god had protected from error."

So what did the nobles do to address this grievance? Did they seek to doll out lashings in the public square? Nope. Did they seek to imprison him? Nope. They went to MoM's uncle (his foster father, Abu Talib), and said: "Your nephew has

reviled our gods, denounced our religion, derided our traditional values, and told us that our [fore]fathers were misguided. {4} Either curb his attacks on us or give us a free hand to deal with him, for you are just as opposed to him as we are, and we will deal with him for you."

Abu Talib demurred. So the aspiring prophet persisted in his ministry, and with his slander. After a while, the nobles returned: "Abu Talib, you are our elder and our chief, so give us justice against your nephew; and order him to desist from reviling our gods; and we will leave him to his god." {5}

Contrast this conciliatory attitude to MoM's tendentious posturing. The self-proclaimed messenger-of-god routinely berated the Qurayshi leadership, including his own paternal uncle–who was dubiously referred to as "Abd al-Uzza" [slave of the pagan goddess, al-Uzza]; and later dubbed "Abu Lahab" [Father of the Flame]. This uncle was a prominent figure in the community–as HIS father (MoM's grandfather) was chief of the Hashim clan. The authors of the Koran even saw fit to devote an entire chapter of the Koran (Surah 111) to the excoriation of this particular man: "May the hands of Abu Lahab perish! May he himself perish! His wealth and gains shall avail him of nothing. He shall be burned in a flaming fire, and his wife–laden with firewood–shall have a rope around her neck."

Splendid.

Keep in mind, per Mohammedan lore, MoM himself would have announced this as a revelation. That is to say: He would have PERSONALLY–and publicly–leveled this threat; as he was the source of the "Recitations".

What were the reprisals for these threats to this man and his wife? Nothing.

It is important to note how incredibly easy it would have been, in those early days, for the Qurayshi nobles to imprison–or even assassinate–MoM for his offensive behavior; and to do so without fear of repercussion. Yet at no point in the his pre-Hijra ministry were Mecca's leaders moved to do either. The point cannot be emphasized enough: MoM was engaged in his feather-ruffling proselytization for almost a DECADE before he finally emigrated to Yathrib (the settlement a fortnight's camel-ride to the north, later re-christened "Medina").

To put it plainly: If the Meccan leadership would have wanted MoM incarcerated or eliminated, they could have–and would have–done so. They didn't. But why not?

As the above testimony shows, freedom of religion was the norm in pre-Islamic Mecca. MoM was an apostate with regards to the prevailing Faith, yet he was not IN ANY WAY persecuted for this impertinence (barring, perhaps, a boycott on his goods in the market). {6} It is ironic that those who did the same in Islam were executed for it.

MoM openly insulted the Quraysh's pagan gods year after year after year, IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE, inciting all his followers to do the same; and yet he was STILL was not punished–even once–by the city's nobles.

It is a fiction that MoM would have been persecuted for preaching Abrahamic monotheism in Mecca, as others had been promoting BOTH Judaism and Christianity long before he undertook his ministry. Most notable was the cousin of MoM's first wife, Khadijah: Waraka ibn Nawfal. Waraka was a well-respected Nestorian preacher in area, who ministered to willing audiences years before MoM claimed to have received his first revelation (ref. Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat Rasul Allah"). In fact, MoM may well have gotten the idea to undertake his own ministry after having had numerous dialogues with Waraka.

Another important point: MoM was never exiled. Indeed, he left the city of his own accord; and did so for purely opportunistic reasons. An acolyte had scouted the town of Yathrib to the north, and returned with the news that it held better promise. Naturally, upon hearing of the possibility of a more receptive audience, MoM was moved to try his luck elsewhere. And so he did.

The aspiring prophet was not fleeing persecution, he was seeking greener pastures. The fact that he was harassed tells us nothing other than precisely what we would expect when a street-preacher decries the Faith of his townsfolk. Surely, throughout the Dark Ages, anywhere in the world, harangues were a daily occurrence wherever disagreement occurred–regardless of who it may have been. Recrimination is not persecution.

An indication that farcical accounts were constructed to make it appear as though MoM was escaping immanent doom is the obviously-contrived tale about the day he finally opted to leave Mecca. As the story goes, MoM fled at nighttime…just in the nick of time! For he managed to sneak away minutes–nay, SECONDS–before a band of assassins burst into his home to kill him. (Queue suspenseful music.)

Such a riveting account is, of course, preposterous. Had the Qurayshi leaders wanted MoM dead, they could have easily made it so at any point, on any day, over the course of the previous DECADE. (MoM's pre-Hijra ministry lasted from 613 to 622.) It strains credulity to suppose that they finally decided to assassinate MoM only moments after his (covert) departure.

And so it went: MoM decided to re-locate to Yathrib based on the prescient council of some of his followers. Deciding to move on to greener pastures is not the same as escaping with one's life in the darkness of night.

A final anecdote is worth mentioning–versions of which can be found in various places (most notably in Bukhari's Hadith 1/4/241). A Qurayshi bystander once said to his cohorts: "Who amongst you will bring entrails of a camel and put it on the back of Mohammed while he prostrates?" It is unclear who the volunteer for the act may have been. Some say it was Uqba ibn Abu Muayt; some even say it was MoM's own despised uncle, Abu Lahab; and others say it was Abu Jahl. Whoever the culprit was, he waited until MoM did his morning prayer, and then placed the entrails on his back "between his shoulders." The onlookers then laughed. MoM continued praying, and "did not lift his head until Fatima came and wiped the entrails off his back." How does the story end? MoM stood up and exclaimed three times: "O god! Punish the Quraysh!" He was livid at having been slighted…and laughed at.

So what, then, did the self-proclaimed prophet do years later when he took over Mecca? He had the culprit EXECUTED. To be clear: A man was killed for having committed a prank. MoM then had all of those who'd been present (including Abu Jahl, Utba ibn Rabia, Shaiba ibn Rabia, Al-Walid ibn Utba, Umaiyah ibn Khalaf, and Uqba ibn Abi Muayt) severely punished…for having stood idly by; and–even worse–for having laughed at him. (Abu Jahl had already been killed at the wells of Badr.) Here, the asymmetry in reprisal is striking, and tells us all we need to know about who was persecuting whom.

MoM had Uqba ibn Abi Muayt beheaded after he was apprehended at Badr. Another of his transgressions? He once spat at MoM's face after being egged on by his friend, Ubay ibn Khalaf (Umaiyah's brother).

THESE are incidents of legendary proportions. (!)

In sum: MoM was hardly a victim of anything remotely resembling persecution. Having married a successful businesswoman (yes, Meccan females could own their own businesses prior to Islam), the aspiring prophet found himself enjoying a

relatively privileged merchant life in Mecca. Once he began his program of contemptuous preachments, the worst thing the Quraysh did to him was throw things at him…and sternly rebuke him.

Ironically, it was MoM HIMSELF who would eventually set the standard for the aggressive persecution of dissidents and apostates. To suggest that he was at some point a VICTIM OF persecution is therefore disingenuous in the extreme.

In sum: Having one's brazen claims rejected (and being chastised for making slanderous statements about others' Faith) is not tantamount to enduring persecution. There WAS a pathologically vindictive character in this story. {6} In Islamic lore, he came to be known as "Mu-H-M-D".



The Mohammedan Seizure of Mecca: A Case of “Nolo Contendere”

A common myth is that the Mohammedan seizure of Mecca c. 630 illustrated the peaceful nature of the movement; which explains why the event involved few casualties.

The almost-bloodless conquest of Mecca is often touted by MoM-fetishists as evidence that their hero was magnanimous. Such a rosy characterization couldn’t be further from the truth. Let’s look at what the record says.

As we saw in the previous section, the Quraysh had never actually been cruel to MoM in his pre-Hijra days; they simply rejected his evangelism. Though chided for his grandiose claims, he was never persecuted. Though mocked, he was never punished. So there was no pressing need to exact vengeance upon the Quraysh once he had the upper hand.

The only grudge MoM may have harbored would have been the Meccans’ reluctance years earlier to entertain his proclamations. Yet he surely would have also recognized the USE the city’s sheiks would have been to him were they to be coopted.

The virtual bloodless-ness of the Mohammedan army’s seizure of the city reflected the fact that there was little resistance. To repeat: There WOULD HAVE been much blood had the Meccans resisted. Therefore it was the MECCANS’ decision to make the encounter a bloodless one; not some pre-established (magnanimous) plan on the part of MoM. The warlord of the arriving army was undoubtedly prepared to do whatever he had to do. He didn’t bring 10,000 armed warriors with him to hand out olive branches.

When a bully’s adversary throws in the towel without putting up a fight, this does not attest to the magnanimity of the bully.

The picture was not ENTIRELY rosy when it came to the Mohammedans’ seizure of Mecca. Indeed, the “displease me and you’re dead” protocol remained in full effect. Bukhari’s Hadith stipulates that, after he had taken over Mecca and asserted his authority, those who mocked MoM were summarily killed (ref. 1/4/241).

A comparison is in order here. Fast-forward 1,308 years. During the “Anschluss”, the Nazis incursion into Austria was ALSO bloodless. But there was a reason for that; and it certainly had nothing to do with magnanimity on the part of the Wehrmacht. To conclude from the non-violent nature of the Nazi seizure of Austria that Nazism was a non-violent movement is, of course, bonkers.

The parallels are instructive. We might start with a newly-powerful charismatic leader returning to his birthplace (from which he’d been alienated) in order to subjugate it. The difference is that Austrians were already primed for adoption of the arriving ideology simply because Austria–Hitler’s home country–was every bit as fascist as was Germany at the time. Indeed, part of what enabled the Third Reich to make incursions in Austria with almost no resistance is that there were many in Austria already sympathetic to the cause. (Who’s to say that Mecca did not already have residents–partial to monotheism–who were sympathetic to the Mohammedan cause?)

The LACK of bloodshed in the Mohammedan takeover of Mecca can no more be attributed to magnanimity than the bloodless seizure of Austria during the “Anschluss” can be attributed to magnanimity on the part of the Nazis. The salient factor is the recognition–on the part of the domestic population–of the futility of putting up a fight against massively superior forces. The decision was made on the part of the less powerful party to minimize–or completely avoid–civilian casualties.

The scenario boils down to what is called in legal jargon, “nolo contendere” [no contest]; which has little to do with whether or not the weaker party is copacetic with the stronger party’s prosecution. Even as the former capitulates to the demands of the latter, it is not a matter of concordance–as though all were simpatico. Rather, it is a matter of acceding to those in a more privileged position, as resistance would be in vain. The phrase effectively intimates: “I don’t agree with you, but I will go along with you; as I have surmised that challenging you would be futile; and only cause more arm before my inevitable surrender.” The decision is born of practicality, not of endorsement.

The “Anschluss” is a well-known example of bloodless take-over. However, one can find analogues in Islamic history as well.

Just nine years later (in 639; after MoM had died), the Egyptian city of Alexandria ALSO surrendered to the Mohammedans without a fight. This was not because the denizens of the city were eager to be ruled by Arabian invaders…let alone to convert

to Islam. {7} When the Mohammedan forces arrived at the city gates, the situation was promptly deemed “nolo contendere”. The city’s rulers acted accordingly (probably to save their own hides). To take their surrender-without-a-fight as a sign of diffidence (an indication that they found Mohammedanism APPEALING) is to completely misread the event.

As it happened, similar occurrences happened again in Mecca…on NUMEROUS occasions:

- In 1803, hostile Wahhabis (under military commander, Saud ibn Abd al-Aziz) seized Mecca from Ottoman vassals with minimal–if any–violence.
- The same was the case a decade later when military commander Tusun “Pasha” seized the city BACK on behalf of the Ottomans.
- It then happened AGAIN when the Wahhabis retook the city five years after THAT.

No bloodshed. No bloodshed. No bloodshed. In fact, there has NEVER been a violent battle at Mecca when a change-of-hands occurred. (!) Ignominiously, throughout history, the worst assaults on Meccans have never come from non-Muslims. (Notable, casualties have been incurred come from from pilgrims trampling each other and from cholera outbreaks during the Hajj.)

There were several other instances of the phenomenon. In 1516, after the Ottoman Turks had decisively defeated the Mamluks at Marj Dabiq, Ottoman Sultan Selim “the Grim” seized both Aleppo and Damascus without any resistance from the Mamluk rulers of either city. This was not because the Mamluks welcomed the Ottoman Turks with open arms; it was because they found themselves in a “nolo contendere” situation. They simply pleaded “no contest”…pragmatically yet begrudgingly. In 1832, Aleppo and Damascus ONCE AGAIN capitulated without a fight, this time to Egyptian military commander, Ibrahim “Pasha”.

“Nolo contendere” is a real thing. When Napoleon seized Cairo in 1798, there was almost no resistance from the Mamluks. Surrender happened after a 45-minute shock-and-awe display (by the French infantry) made the reality of the situation quite clear to the indigenous population. There was nothing bizarre about this. Here are five more examples:

- The take-over of England by Prince William of Orange in 1688 (whereby Protestants overthrew a Catholic regime).

- The “Harakah at-Tashihiyah” [Corrective Movement] led by general Hafez al-Assad overtook Syria in 1970 (whereby authoritarian forces engaged in a coup d’etat).
- The Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974 (whereby democratic forces overthrew an authoritarian regime).
- The Velvet Revolutions in Bohemia–as well as its counterpart in Bulgaria–in 1989 (whereby democratic forces usurped Soviet control)
- The Russian take-over of the Crimea in 2014 (whereby Vladimir Putin used the military to seize the peninsula from the Ukraine).

History offers many notable examples of (almost) bloodless take-overs. In none of the cases above were the conquered seeking to be bosom-buddies with the conquerers.

Sometimes coups are non-violent. Rarely does this attest to the moral integrity of those doing the overthrowing.

The parallels here pertain to the logistics of the incursion; not to the ideology of the conquerers. Indeed, transitions of power can occur irrespective of what, exactly, is being imposed.

Such acquiescence has zero correlation with the legitimacy of the arriving force. It may be the case irrespective of the credence of that which is being imposed, or of the moral status of the prosecution. In such cases, the indigenous population’s acquiescence is a calculated decision to not risk the dire consequences of refusing to “go along”. Acceding to the demands of the superior force is pragmatic, not a show of endorsement.

In taking over Mecca, MoM naturally preferred that civilians convert–that is: rather than be eradicated. After all, his goal was to increase his movement’s numbers. He would have been cutting off his nose to spite his face had he carried out an extermination in that particular city. Indeed, doing so would have been completely gratuitous; and possibly deprived the movement of vital resources. Surely MoM recognized this.

Even in their beleaguered state, the Quraysh were numerous and had been very influential throughout Arabia for quite some time; so bringing them into the fold would only serve to amplify MoM’s burgeoning power. Wiping them out would have been very, very bad PR; and a missed opportunity. ANY savvy opportunist would have acted just as MoM did.

Good PR was as much a concern for MoM as brute conquest. Indeed, once word spread that even the Quraysh were now “on board”, MoM’s laurels would have seemed–to many Arabians–to be unimpeachable: a clear sign of divine favor. Surely, MoM understood this fact, as would have any astute conquerer. {8}

The significance of this development cannot be overstated. Not slaughtering the population of an entire city–arguably, the KEY city in the entire campaign–was not an act of mercy; it was a political strategy; and a very shrewd one at that. MoM’s treatment of Mecca was perfectly in keeping with one of the most infamous verses in the Koran: 9:29. This verse sheds light on the nature of the Meccan seizure as well as much of the subsequent activity. “Demand submission. If they submit, then let them be.” {9}

To reiterate: The lack of resistance was more a grudging resignation than it was an eager embrace. Confusing capitulation with approbation is an elementary mistake, as anyone can tell you who has lived in a police State. Indeed, submission is not always volitional; it is often just a matter of GIVING UP (as anyone who has tapped out in a Brasilian jiu-jitsu bout can attest).

Another key factor was the financial interests of the Meccan merchants. Under the circumstances, the city’s wealthiest business-owners would have been incentivized to go along with the new leadership if they saw–in the transition–an opportunity for financial gain. The Hadith recounts that MoM bribed the city’s more influential tribal sheiks with camels, silver, and other wares. In many ways, falling in line with a hegemonic regime–the modus operandi of which was plunder of anyone outside the dominion–would have seemed rather enticing for those who FELL WITHIN the dominion. The ultimatum was simple: Either be “on board” with the plunders; or be the plundered. The choice was obvious. “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” is the rationalization of any business owner who succumbs to a mafia or cartel. The most prudent option is to “get with the program”, and become part of the protection racket.

This brings to mind a passage from Isaac Asimov’s “Foundation and Empire”, where an astute observer said of an unstoppable hegemonic conquerer (the “Mule”, who’d just overtaken the galaxy’s trade federation…without anyone having put up much of a fight): “The Mule has been politic enough to promise to safeguard the property and profits of the great Merchant Traders; and they have gone over to him. It is apparently an insurmountable temptation to give up endangered political power if that will maintain your hold over economic affairs.” As is well-known even today,

business trumps rectitude–as per the most elementary Machiavellian schemes. Mecca's tribal sheiks surely cared far more about lucre than they did about the details of theology; so it would have been a cinch to buy them off. {10}

And as for those who displeased the new demagogue…well, THEY were executed. (So much for a bloodless coup.) This is attested in the most vaunted ("sahih") Hadith (those of Bukhari and of Muslim); as well as in the "sunan" Hadith of Abu Dawood. It is also attested in the earliest biography ("sirah") of MoM: that of Ibn Ishaq. How many people did MoM order to be executed? At least ten: six men and four women:

- Habbar ibn al-Aswad al-Ansi (murdered after he fled to Yemen)
- Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh (MoM's former scribe, decapitated for apostasy)
- Miqyas ibn Sababah [alt. Hubaba] al-Laythi (a polytheist accused of killing the man who murdered his brother)
- Huwayrith ibn Nuqaydh Wahb Qusayy (killed by Ali–at MoM's instruction–for his irreverence)
- Abd Abbah ibn Hilal ibn Khatal al-Adrami
- Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl
- Hind bint Utbah
- Sarah {11}
- Fartana bint al-Zibra and Qurayba (slave girls of Abdullah ibn Khatal of the Banu Taym, who was also killed) {12}

We find corroboration of this in Ibn Sa'd's "Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir". The most likely explanation for this was not blood-lust, but savvy PR. For while MoM opted not to slaughter the townspeople, he saw the utility of making an example out of certain individuals. Thus: "I'll let you live; but if you should ever cross me, THIS shall be your fate." Suffice to say: Forbearance was hardly the over-riding principle.

But how can this be reconciled with Islamic theology? 48:24 offers a simple answer: It was GOD (of course) who stayed the Meccans' hand against the Mohammedans, and thus the Mohammedans' hand against the Meccans. Translation: "You didn't need to slaughter them because I caused them to not resist." It then adds that this was only after [god] gave YOU the upper hand [enabling you to triumph]." Thus what occurred is explained in Providential terms.

If MoM's refrain from slaughtering the Meccans had been an act of beneficence, there surely would have been some sort of pronouncement expressing as much in the Hadith record. No such pronouncement exists.

The lesson here is relatively straight-forward: Due to the overwhelming power wielded by MoM by c. 630, the vast majority of Meccans agreed to submit–thereby averting a grimmer fate. The purported "restraint" on MoM's part was not a matter of him being beneficent; it was a matter of him being pragmatic. Had the Meccan leaders opted to resist, the seizure of the city would have surely been a very bloody affair.

In sum: To suppose the bloodlessness of the Mohammedans' seizure of Mecca was a mark of magnanimity is a grave misreading of history.

MoM's Ignominious Death:

It is widely believed that MoM's death must have been as divinely ordained as the events of his life. Yet is involved about as much Providence as anything he did or said while he was alive: none whatsoever. He was, after all, the victim of an eminently worldly affliction: toxin.

The woman who murdered the prophet of Islam was a Jewess named Zaynab bint al-Harith–who's husband and father MoM had recently had executed. It was during a visit to Khaybar that she poisoned him with lamb. {13}

Oddly, the Abrahamic deity did not see fit to warn MoM of the toxic mutton served to him by his new slave-girl. Moreover, it did not occur to MoM to be suspicious of being given food by a woman who's family he had just killed. Did she covertly finagle her way into the position of food-server…or had MoM carelessly assigned her the role? Lord only knows. Either way, a fatal misstep was made by the self-proclaimed prophet. {14}

Interestingly: In the Koran, 3:144 stipulates "IF [MoM] should die, or be killed…" as opposed to "WHEN MoM dies…" or "After MoM is dead…" This is intriguing phrasing…if, that is, we were to assume that the "Recitations" are timeless, and composed by an omniscient source. For this verse was written as a contingency; and was clearly intended explicitly for a contemporaneous audience. Did the Koran's protagonist not know that MoM would be killed? Evidently.

As it turns out, god works in mysterious ways–including allowing his last prophet to be assassinated at the peak of his supremacy.

There has been much revisionism, mostly to elide the ignominious nature of MoM's passing. Take, for example, his so-called "Farewell Speech": a sermon he purportedly gave in Mecca just before his unexpected death. At the time, nobody–including MoM himself–could have possibly known that he would soon thereafter be fatally poisoned by a Jewish woman, who was avenging her family's death.

The primary sources for the account of MoM's murder are the two most vaunted ("sahih") Hadith: Bukhari (no. 2617 and 4428) and Muslim (no. 5430). Also see the "sunan" hagiography of Abu Dawood of Sistan c. 888 (vol. 45; no. 4498 and no. 4512-13), where it TWICE stipulates that MoM perished due to poisoned mutton… which "cut off his aorta." The account was corroborated by Al-Tabari in his hagiography.

The fact that such highly-esteemed sources admit that this is what happened is rather remarkable–considering how embarrassing it was (and still is). It seems not to have occurred to these writers that the account would serve as evidence against virtually everything else they wrote about…or, at the very least, seriously undermined the credence of MoM's putative status (namely: that he was chosen and protected by god).

It seems not to have occurred to the Creator of the Universe to warn his last "rasul" of the impending danger. This means that not only didn't MoM see his death coming when it did; the Creator of the Universe didn't see it coming either. (!)

MoM's humiliating death is incongruent with the proposition that MoM was the appointed messenger of the Abrahamic deity–commissioned to deliver the Final Revelation to mankind. For if that were the case, we can only presume that god would have sought to protect him from a resentful Jewess.

And what of MoM's failure to arrange for a clear plan of succession? He seems not to have gotten around to this crucial task; which means he was not expecting to die quite so soon. While receiving all these importune communiques from god, he was never notified that he needed to attend to this pressing matter. This dereliction led to "fitna" within Dar al-Islam that endures to the present day.

But wait. It gets worse. 10:26 promises that ignominy will not befall true Muslims. Considering the nature of MoM's death (not to mention how grueling it was), it seems that either this promise was broken or MoM was not a true Muslim. If we take 10:26 seriously, those are the only two alternatives.

Surely, such an unflattering account would not have survived for so long in the "isnad" (chain of narration; via a series of approved amanuenses) and deemed to be "mutawatir" (trustworthy) had it been seen as fallacious. And there would have been no incentive to confabulate such an humiliating bit of apocrypha. So, per the principle of "embarrassment", it's probably true.

But here's where it gets REALLY interesting. In virtually every account, as he died, MoM described himself as suffering from a "cut-off aorta [alt. life-artery]". This is a peculiar choice of wording; as it just so happens to fulfill an omen stated in the Koran. In 69:44-46, it is proclaimed that if MoM were a "false prophet", god would "cut off his aorta." In other words, MoM died in exactly the manner Islam's holy book said he would die if he was a false prophet.

What, exactly, does the relevant verse say? A false prophet would perish via "la-qata'a-naa min-hu al-wateena" (by having his aorta cut off). That this foreboding prophecy is stipulated in a book that is unimpeachable creates quite the theological pickle for Islamic apologists.

Sure enough, in Bukhari's Hadith (5/59/713; no. 4428), Aisha reported: "In his ailment by which he died, the prophet used to say, 'O Aisha! I still feel the pain caused by the food I ate at Khaybar. And at this time I feel as if my aorta has been cut off from that poison." {15} Essentially, if we are to take him seriously, MoM HIMSELF conceded that he was fraudulent (by implication); and did so on his own death-bed.

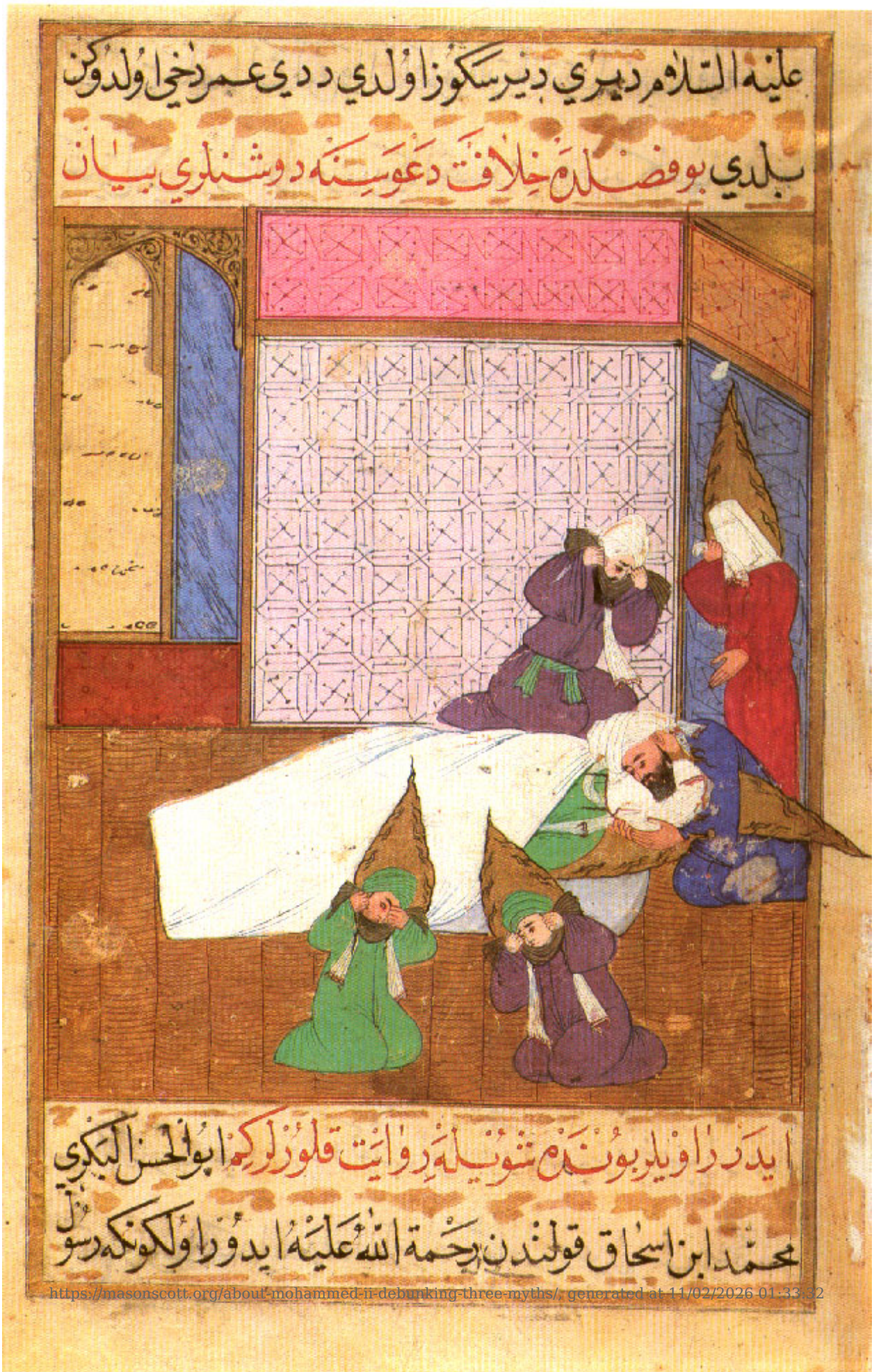
The fact that this phrasing was left in both the Hadith account AND the Koran is rather odd considering it is so incriminating. It seems that those who compiled the Hadith accounts (esp. those based on an "isnad" which qualified as "mutawatir") and those who compiled the Koran failed to connect the dots on this matter.

Thus Mohammedan lore sets up its starring character for a strikingly ironic demise: Dying in precisely the manner that he himself predicted he would die if we was a fraud. (The irony of being outwitted by a Jewish woman speaks for itself.)

It might be noted that the toxic mutton also killed MoM's companion, Bashir ibn al-Bara ibn Murar "al-Ansar[i]" [the Helper], who was present at the same meal. The record of that fatality bolsters the plausibility of the overall account.

Shortly after consuming the deadly meat, MoM realized what had happened. When asked why she had done it, Zaynab plaintively responded: "If you are really the prophet of god, then you will not die." {16} MoM agreed.

They were both right.



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FOOTNOTES:

{1 Some versions have “kill” instead of “begrudge” in this account. In either case, the gist of Abu Bakr’s rhetorical question remains the same. The answer was: NO. That is: It was NOT deemed appropriate to attack MoM in response to his castigation of the Qurayshis’ Faith. (See footnote 4.) Such forbearance contrasts starkly with MoM’s vindictiveness. (See footnote 6.) I address the myth of MoM’s magnanimity when taking over of Mecca here as well.}

{2 There is a peculiar obsession with Abu Jahl even in the Koran. 96:9-19 is often said to pertain to him.}

{3 Note that in Islamic lore, there are claims of Abu Jahl being so vituperative that he beat impertinent slaves; and once even attacked the fabled convert, Sumayyah bint Khayyat. In other words, even as he is vilified ad nauseam, he is never accused of having persecuted MoM in any way. More to the point: Even as he is consistently depicted as violent-tempered, never once is this antagonist said to have laid a hand on MoM. The most hair-raising episode we hear about is comically anti-climactic: One morning, Abu Jahl CONSIDERED bashing MoM over the head with a rock as the latter prayed; then thought better of it…and refrained. And so it went that MoM was not imperiled even by the meanest of the mean Qurayshis.}

{4 Note that the Quraysh simply wanted to continue practicing what their [fore]fathers had been practicing for generations; and that they were fine with MoM breaking from this tradition…so long as he desisted from berating them for their religion. He was even permitted to proselytize in the public square…so long as he refrained from openly denouncing their gods. (Indeed, their gripe with him was not that he was preaching monotheism; it’s that he kept cursing their gods.) It makes sense, then, that there is a fixation on [fore]fathers throughout the Koran. Indeed, in surah after surah, the authors of Islam’s holy book exhibit contempt for following the traditions of the audience’s [fore]fathers: 2:170, 5:104, 7:28/70-71, 9:23, 11:62/87/109, 12:40, 14:10, 21:52-54, 26:70-76, 31:21, 34:43, 43:21-25, etc. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with breaking from tradition. (In fact, Koran 2.0 is ENTIRELY ABOUT departing from what one’s forefathers used to believe.) Be that as it may, throughout Islam’s holy book there seems to be an ongoing emphasis on jettisoning the precedent of one’s forefathers–an ironic twist, to put it mildly; as such advise would later backfire on anyone in the Muslim world seeking to leave Islam. The “Recitations”, it is apparent, were not composed for an audience fourteen centuries later.}

{5 Interestingly, after this second entreaty, Abu Talib summoned MoM and asked his nephew why he was doing what he was doing. MoM's reply: "I summon them to utter a saying [There is no god but god] by which the Arabians will submit to them and they will rule over the non-Arabians."}

{6 Even after MoM had ascended to power in Yathrib-cum-Medina, and started routinely attacking Meccan caravans, he was STILL allowed safe entry into Mecca the year after the treaty of Hudaibiya (in 629). Tellingly, MoM trusted the integrity of the Meccans so much that he entered unarmed; confident he would be safe. As it turned out, he WAS safe. No hand was laid upon him, even as reprisal for the violent crimes against the Quraysh he had been committing. He was a subversive AND an enemy combatant, yet was permitted to perform his pilgrimage to the Kaaba nevertheless. This is, to put it mildly, quite remarkable. It is all the more striking to note that, upon seizing the city the following year (in 630), MoM immediately had a slew of people executed for impertinent speech–including Al-Harith ibn al-Talatil, Abd al-Uza ibn Akhtal, Ikrimah ibn Abu al-Hakam, Al-Huwayrith ibn Naketh ibn Wahab, and various singing girls. (For more on that, see part 1 of my essay on "The History Of Literature".}

{7 During the first century of Mohammedan hegemony, less than 10% of conquered peoples converted to Islam. Instead, denizens of conquered territory opted to simply submit to the new regime. There was rarely forced conversion, as forced conversion would have entailed disingenuous Faith–something that would not have been desirable. (It was important to be able to identify True Believers from posers.) So when we talk about the early "Muslim world" outside of Arabia, we are speaking of an Islamic dominion in which most people were not Muslim. After all, Islam PER SE was not spread by the sword; Islamic DOMINION was spread by the sword. (Put another way, Islamic FAITH was not imposed; Islamic LAW was imposed.) Within that dominion, most people had "dhimmi" status. It was only later that the majority of people within said dominion became Muslim–usually due to the incentive structure in which they found themselves (read: carrots and sticks). After that, accident of birth took care of the rest. When it came to officials, conversion was generally done for political reasons; not as the result of theological convictions. For example, King Parameswara (né Iskandar of Singapura), who founded the city-state of Malacca (on the Malay peninsula), converted to Islam after marrying a Persian princess in 1409 (five years before his death). The conversion was an obvious political strategy. Among other things, it rationalized his fashioning himself as a "shah"; thereby rendering him untouchable by the (Majapahit) Javanese from whom

he'd originally fled. He was a shrewd ruler, as he meanwhile paid tribute–literally and metaphorically–to the (decidedly non-Muslim) Ming dynasty, in a gambit for protection against the Siamese. These maneuvers enabled his city to conduct business unfettered, and thus become a burgeoning mercantile hub.}

{8 Note, for example, the modus operandi of the Persians during their hegemonic campaigns in Late Antiquity. Then note the modus operandi of the pre-Islamic Mongols in the Middle Ages. They much preferred integration of conquered peoples to eradication.}

{9 This is also in keeping with 4:90 and 60:8. "If [your adversaries] leave you alone, and do not wage war against you, and offer you peace, then god does not obligate you to fight them." Thus submission is a way out of slaughter.}

{10 Bear in mind, one of the reasons Meccan leaders were initially concerned about MoM's preachments is that it posed a possible threat to the lucrative pilgrimage business, in which pagan Bedouins came from all over the region to pay tribute to the idols at the Meccan cube ["Kaaba"]. It is likely they suspected that MoM's proposed brand of monotheism could undermine the incentive for the pilgrimage, and thereby stymie the surrounding economic activity. Once it was clear that the pilgrimages would continue apace (under the aegis of a new religion), and possibly even be a BOON to commerce, such concerns were surely allayed. Indeed, the Mohammedan version of the pilgrimage ended up bringing more business than ever before.}

{11 This girl was derided as the "mawlat" [enfranchised girl] of the derided Amr ibn Hashim. She was killed for insolence (read: for having the audacity to be an empowered woman). It probably didn't help that she was named after the mother of Isaac (Abraham's wife) rather than the mother of Ishmael (Hagar, the Arabian maidservant).}

{12 The slave-girls were killed for having sung irreverent songs about MoM. That may have occurred at a different time than the Mohammedan seizure of Mecca. But a clear incident was recorded: Abdullah ibn Khatal was disemboweled as he pled for his life, clinging to the curtains of the Kaaba.}

{13 Note that this was likely not directly after the fabled “Battle of Khaybar” c. early June of 628. It was likely during a visit to Khaybar in early June 632. Had the Jewess’ family been killed in said battle, the revenge would have been years in the making; not directly after the battle. Obviously, a fatal poisoning does not require four years to take effect.}

{14 Note that, throughout history, various other cynosures have experienced machinations against their lives, often via the (repeated) poisoning of their food–notably: Benedict of Nursia. In the 4th century B.C., the Persian vizier, Bagoi successfully poised TWO kings…and was then HIMSELF poisoned. When such assassination attempts failed (as they often have; e.g. Alexander the Great), it was seen as confirmation of god’s favor. No such luck with MoM. Also note the Rashidun caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib (who would be fatally poisoned at the beginning of 661) and his grandson, (Shia imam) Ali ibn Husayn Zayn al-Abidin (who would be fatally poisoned in 713). Clearly, the method was common at the time when it came to the assassination of prominent figures.}

{15 Here, the term “abhar” us used instead of “wateen” (the term used in the Koran). BOTH words were used at the time to refer to the main artery of the heart (i.e. the “life artery” or “aorta”). For the predicate “is being cut off”, the same wording is used as was used in the Koran: “ut-qata’a[t]”.}

{16 Alternately rendered: “If you were a prophet, it would not harm you.”}

{17 If MoM spoke of “the angel in charge of the mountains”, he was probably thinking of the Nabataean deity, “Dushara”–tales about whom he likely heard as a child. So it makes sense that he would have been moved to make such a pronouncement. Dushara would have been spoken of by Arabian pagans at the time, as she was based on the Sumerian goddess of the (Zagros) mountains, Ninhursag.}



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Appendix 1: Ad Hoc Revelations

Islam's canonical text comes off as largely improvised. It is quite apparent that, over time, MoM contrived new revelations–essentially, amendments–as it suited his own purposes. As he became more and more powerful, he became increasingly audacious–and aggressive–with his "revelations". This is no coincidence.

It is no secret that self-proclaimed prophets who claim to be receiving messages from the great beyond end up claiming a raft of suspiciously convenient revelations (that is: convenient for THEMSELVES). Anyone familiar with Mohammedan lore can't help but notice a raft of strange coincidences in which the Creator of the Universe seemed to be catering to MoM's every wish and desire–precisely as the occasion required.

The "god told me he changed his mind" gimmick has been used by prophets as long as there have been prophets. This avoids the rigamarole of deliberation while ensuring the revised edict retains the imprimatur of the godhead. In 1890, Wilford Woodruff, leader of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, invoked this (regarding god's allowance for polygamy) so as to avert persecution by the U.S. federal government. So as not to compromising the credence of his status as god's mouthpiece, he was forced to proclaim that god had changed his mind on the matter. Even that didn't quite work, as it became plain that he'd only done so for PR purposes (a bargain struck in order to secure Utah's admission into the Union). Consequently, a subsequent Mormon President, Joseph F. Smith, was forced to re-issue the proclamation in 1904.

When it comes to Islamic lore, the most blatant instance of MoM…err, god… changing his mind is found in 4:95. We know this from Bukhari's Hadith (6/61/512). According to Bukhari, MoM initially declared (in 4:95) that those who "stay at home" (i.e. do not fight in the cause of god) are less than those who go out and fight.

…UNTIL, that is, a blind man named Zaid brought to MoM's attention that this judgement might be unfair to the handicapped…at which point MoM essentially said: "Oh, yeah. Uh, good point. Scratch that. Instead, the revelation stipulates: 'except for those who are disabled'."

Oops.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that physical injury would not be an issue if "jihad" were merely an internal spiritual struggle.

It is evident that MoM concocted new revelations as the need arose. He wanted to marry a 6 year old girl? Presto: new revelation. He wanted more than four wives? Presto: new revelation. He wanted justification to kill those who challenged him? Presto: a SLEW of new revelations. He wanted to die a glorious death in battle? Oops; poisoned by a woman who's family he'd slaughtered.

As we've seen, MoM's contrivance eventually had an abrupt encounter with Reality. Where, we must wonder, was the Abrahamic deity when MoM REALLY needed him? Such an ignominious death seems strange if MoM is who the Koran says he was.

A blatant example of MoM's shameless arrogation of special privileges to himself was 33:50. This verse gave him and ONLY him the right to an extra number of wives (above the four allotted in 4:3). MoM's child-bride, Aisha once caught him mid-coitus with one of his sex-slaves, Miriam the Copt. The former was irked by this. Naturally, the self-proclaimed prophet needed only conjure a new "revelation"… which, sure enough, decreed that this was his unique right. It's not for nothing, then, that in Bukhari (no. 4788), Aisha observed: "I feel that your god hastens to fulfill your wishes and desires."

Even amongst those closest to the self-proclaimed prophet, there was suspicion about the self-serving "revelations" concocted ad hoc.

We need not point out that this is standard operating procedure for cult founders of all stripes…in all eras. Throughout history, we see charismatic leaders according to themselves special exemptions from their own moral laws, and arrogating to themselves special privileges…time after time after time. Why? Because they CAN. (Savvy cult founders are, if nothing else, extraordinarily opportunistic when it comes to their own interests.)

The most infamous example of the trend of suspiciously "convenient" revelations involved Zainab bint Jahsh, the (soon to be divorced) wife of MoM's adopted son, Zayd ibn Harithah.

At one point, MoM decided that he wanted his young daughter-in-law for himself. However, when he sought to acquire her, his followers reminded him that–according to current strictures endorsed by MoM himself–such an act was forbidden (as she was his daughter-in-law). MoM's response to this objection was as comic as it is was crafty.

Effectively, the justification MoM used for his acquisition of Zainab was: “Oh, uh… Check this out. I just got a new revelation (33:37). As it turns out, we can marry the wives of our (adopted) sons after all. Wouldn’t you know it!” (How did this attain? By the self-proclaimed prophet declaring: “By the way, there’s no adoption. So, you see, Zayd was never really my son!” ref. 33:4.)

That this was a self-serving “revelation” is blindingly obvious. The only explanation for such a highly suspicious “amendment” is that, pursuant to new developments, god modifies his edicts. As it so happened, this was ALWAYS done in accordance with the personal interests of MoM. Funny how that worked out. {1}

There is an obvious problem with this explanation. For it countermands the claim that the Koran is an ETERNAL word–and so would not need modification in order to address new developments. The only way around this theological “fix” is to hold that god revealed various parts of the eternal book in INSTALLMENTS; delivering certain verses at strategic points. When he was caught (by his wife, Hafsa) engaging in coitus with one of his slave-girls (Miriam the Copt) AFTER he’d promised his wives that he would abstain from doing so, MoM opted to concoct a new revelation that granted him–and him alone–exemption from matrimonial vows: 66:1-2. This enabled him not only to contravene his vow to abstain from sex with his slave-girl(s); it granted him permission to contravene ANY vow forevermore. Such a self-serving license gave the self-proclaimed prophet wide berth to do whatever he wished (while claiming god’s imprimatur), it gave him license to break promises whenever he saw fit (e.g. when he wished to have sex with one of his slave-girls after he’d promised his wives he wouldn’t).

Of course, MoM’s designs on Zainab are unsurprising. But are we to believe that the Abrahamic deity caused the divorce of a married couple so as to pave the way for Zainab’s betrothal to MoM? It seems everything as conveniently designed to serve MoM’s carnal interests, as the need arose. If we are to believe the Koran, the Creator of the Universe was very concerned about satisfying MoM’s sexual cravings.

PIA insist that god brought about this fortuitous scenario in order to, well, make a point. In other words, the cosmic overlord wanted to demonstrate that men COULD marry the (ex-) wives of (adopted) sons…in order to prove that adoption was illegitimate. (Obviously, a crucial matter for mankind!)

But even that explanation makes no sense. For elsewhere god DECLARED the adoption of children to be illegitimate (33:4)…thereby rendering the Zainab predicament a NON-predicament. Was god trying to solve a problem that, according to him, didn't exist in the first place?

Or…was MoM just coveting a nubile piece of ass? At what point to special dispensations start to become suspect?

Verses were regularly modified as circumstances warranted. Not only is it evident that this was done, but the Koran itself ANNOUNCES that it was being done. In 2:106, the book's protagonists admits that certain communiques (read: revelations) shall be abrogated (or cause to be forgotten) whenever he opts to bring a better one. This isn't necessarily god changing his mind; he may well have planned the sequence of the revelations ahead of time (as though accounting for a learning curve). The problem is that the Koran is supposed to be, in its entirety, perfect and timeless: not just for the Sabahah, but for everyone for all time.

In any case, 2:106 proffers a rationalization for any apparent contradiction; and furnishes the audience with a simply way to resolve it: Heed the LATEST revelation delivered…which invariably entails the post-Hijra Surahs. Thus, Medinan verses trump Meccan verses. Those does not bode well for those seeking to cull conciliatory passages from the book, as the later revelations are generally the more derisive ones (e.g. 8:12 and 9:5).

But what 2:106 did IN PRACTICE was to enable MoM to change his mind, and address unexpected developments with new instructions (esp. ones that may not have jived with what he'd said previously). In other words, 2:106 provided a quick-fix for MoM PERSONALLY…under the auspices of god's master plan.

In many ways, the Koran itself ends up being a parody of the Koran. It hardly serves as the ultimate guide for humanity–a fact that becomes especially stark when we see that it addresses such pressing matters as how long to remain at the table after having dinner with MoM. Indeed, 33:53 notifies us that one should not arrive to dinner with the Prophet until the meal is ready to be served; and one should not linger after having finished eating. After dinner, "do not stay for conversation; for doing so causes annoyance to the Prophet": a crucial point for maintaining civil society for the next thousand years. (We are also abjured to speak with MoM's wives from behind a curtain, a matter the Creator of the Universe deemed sufficiently importune that it had to be included in his final instructions to the world.)

As it turns out, some of the revelations had only to do with rationalizing MoM's own behavior (exigencies that had only to do with him personally) and NOTHING to do with guiding mankind for all time. This becomes especially peculiar once we remind ourselves that the Koran is alleged to be eternal (i.e. composed at the creation of the universe).

Even MoM's own wife noticed how suspiciously convenient some of his revelations were–for him personally, and for him alone. (Were these really from an eternal book meant to guide mankind, or were they simply tailored to suit the desires of her husband?) Reference Aisha's comment in the most vaunted Hadith: "I feel that your Lord hastens to fulfill each of your desires" (Bukhari's Hadith, 6/60/311; alt. no. 4078 and no. 4788). Note that Aisha said "YOUR" Lord–phrasing that is quite telling.

Even those closest to the self-proclaimed Prophet noticed his raft of conveniently-timed revelations. The Creator of the Universe seemed quick to fulfill MoM's every wish and desire–just as if MoM were simply making things up as he went. A coinky-dink, to put it mildly.

The ad hoc nature of the revelation-deliveries indicates that they were concocted by MoM to suite his own purposes. This was no more evident than when a revelation (33:37) was conjured when MoM decided he wanted the rights to Zainab, his step-son's beautiful wife. {2}

Yet another indication (and thus a corroboration) of this can be found in the most vaunted Hadith, that of Bukhari (4/55/546). Here, there is an encounter with a Jewish man named Abdullah bin Salam, who poses three questions to MoM (as a sort of test). MoM responds by declaring that the angel Gabriel "has just delivered" to him the answers: That a great fire (as portent of the Last Day) would eventually unite people from east and west; that the first meal served in heaven would be fish viscera; and that children resemble either the father or the mother's brother depending on which parent "discharges first" during copulation. (Elsewhere, MoM notifies us that whether or not an offspring is male or female depends on whether the father's or mother's fluids prevail pursuant to conception.)

For a tract that purports to be timeless (or at least a guide for all mankind for the next few millennia), the Koran seems oddly designed to address MoM's personal affairs–as with the passages pertaining to when to arrive, and when to depart, when dining with MoM (don't come too early, and don't tarry).

In several places, we find the material conveniently catering to MoM's own concerns. 33:30-31 specifically addresses MoM's wives–telling them that they will receive unique treatment–unlike any other woman in the world: double the reward for piety; double the punishment for getting out of line. 66:5 then gives wives a guilt-trip if they displease their husbands.

66:1-2 even gives MoM–and only MoM–permission to break his promises (as he sees fit). Such wonderfully convenient dispensations from the Creator of the Universe strain credulity. Unsurprisingly, 66:1-2 pertains to–you guessed it–access to sex (in this case, with a Coptic slave-girl named Maryam al-Quibtiyya, who was one of MoM's concubines). Even Aisha noted at one point that god always seemed to be clamoring to satisfy her prophet's desires. (Funny how that works.) This passage is especially comic if we remind ourselves that the Koran is supposed to be the UN-CREATED speech of the Abrahamic deity.

These verses are a reaction to a development that seems to take the book's protagonist by surprise: "Why are you forbidding to yourself that which god has not forbidden for you?" god inquires of MoM. Of course, when MoM was caught having sex with the slave-girl in one of his wives' beds, he needed to justify it. 66:1-2 was promptly delivered, and served the purpose. One can't help but laugh at the zany nature of such a passage–which does not benefit mankind one iota.

But it certainly benefited MoM.

The abuse of (manufactured) clout by charismatic leaders is a reminder that social cache can be leveraged to get what one desires from others–as every panjandrum can attest since time immemorial. From Pontiffs and muftis to public officials and Hollywood executives, this disreputable dynamic has been played out ad nauseam in every culture on Earth. Such power asymmetry is bad enough. But when it comes to CULT activity, sycophancy compounds with the usual cowing (hence: supplication couple with intimidation) to ensure devotees always do as they are told…lest they displease their exalted paladin (on who's good graces they have become dependent). There is no doubt that "god told me X" is the quickest way to rationalize X to credulous followers. The lesson from this is that we should get out of the revelation business and into the (critical) deliberation business.

If this does not demonstrate that MoM was just making things up as he went, nothing possibly could. (Needless to say, this would have been an excellent opportunity for god to notify mankind of gene theory; or at least the nature of gametes and zygotes.) Meanwhile, this is EXACTLY the kind of nonsense that we'd expect from an illiterate Bedouin from the Dark Ages. {3}

The incidence of special dispensation for cult leaders is commonplace; and is standard operating procedure. The line typically goes as follows: "Here are the rules for everyone else. However, due to my (unique) exalted position, I am exempt. For it is god's will that I have special privileges." Usually, those special privileges involve sex with young girls (and/or boys). And usually this maneuver is justified by revelations of convenience. There was nothing special about MoM in this respect.

Suffice to say, this was being done long before Jim Jones and David Koresh. So when Joseph Smith received a special revelation from the angel, Moroni, giving him license to have FORTY wives, he was engaging in a sham that goes back THOUSANDS of years.

Soon, cracks in the halo start to appear; and the patina of righteousness dissipates; as everything is exposed to sunlight.

{1 The "Trust me, THIS is what god wants" claim is routine for avaricious charismatic leaders…especially when it comes to on-demand sex with fawning female acolytes. Take, for instance, the notorious cult-leader Chandra Mohan Jain (popularly known as "Osho"), a faux Buddhist who was–it turns out–a big fan of Rolls Royces and coitus with naive, young girls. It is no secret that men in power tend to use their ill-earned clout to gain access not only to prestige, but to money and sex. In 2014, after his private jet (a $37 million Gulfstream III) was damaged, Christian mega-church leader (and "Prosperity Gospel" icon) Creflo Dollar persuaded his credulous flock to fund the purchase of a NEW jet (a $67 million Gulfstream G650) for his recreational use. They dutifully obliged–presumably, in their own minds, just as Jesus would have wanted. (Alas, Toufik Benedictus "Benny" Hinn still gets by with a Gulfstream IV.) "God WANTS me to have sex with you; and god WANTS me to live in a mansion and have my own private jet" has also been used routinely by New Orleans televangelist Jesse Duplantis, already worth over $40 million, who–at the time of this writing–is asking his congregation to fork over $54 million so that he can purchase his FOURTH private jet: a Falcon 7X.}

{2 It might be argued that this was preferable to King David's approach. David had Uriah the Hittite sent to his death so that he could sleep with his beautiful wife, Bathsheba. David did not derive his power from claiming to deliver revelations; he was simply the appointed monarch. So he required no excuse for his hubris.}

{3 This is the same Hadith that tells us that a nefarious magical spell was once cast over MoM by a devious sorceress–who used strands of the prophet's hair from a pilfered brush. Incidentally, that spell caused MoM to–among other things–think that he'd had sex with his all wives when he really hadn't. This is peculiar, since elsewhere we're told that MoM had the sexual virility of thirty men; and so presumably would not be in need of such salacious hallucinations (see footnote 4 below). The moral of the story, it would seem, is that god's messenger may have been susceptible to evil hexes that deluded him; but–hey–he sure could fuck like a stallion.}

{4 As it turns out, MoM did not even have the virility of ONE man. His failure to sire a single son in all his years in power–with all the uteri he wanted at his disposal, awaiting insemination on any given day–is a rather incommodious fact that Islamic apologists prefer to elide (in favor of more flattering portrayals). It seems the Creator of the Universe did not see fit to empower the gametes of the Last Prophet so as to ensure the most important man in history had progeny. For comments on this, see Bukhari, no. 268; where Qatada narrates that Anas ibn Malik bragged that MoM had the sexual virility of THIRTY MEN–contending that he would copulate "in a round" with ELEVEN wives in a single night. Heavens to Murgatroyd! The only problem with this sophomoric boast is MoM's (rather embarrassing) inability to sire male heirs…even with a bevy of nubile women at his disposal…on a daily basis…for many years. This rather abashing incapacity belies such brazen claims of preternatural potency.}

Appendix 2: The Night Journey

In any religion, it is de rigueur to countenance a hyper-romanticized caricature of the hallowed founder. It is routine to render taboo ANYTHING that brings that caricature into question. After all, to render something sacrosanct it to forbid anything that might challenge the terms of that sacrosanctity.

The problem encountered in Islamic hagiography–especially as it pertains to the fetishization of its “Seal of the Prophets”–is as follows: So many Muslims have created in their own minds what can be best described as a fictional character (or have allowed others to inculcate them with hyper-romantic portrayals of said character). This character is mostly the product of fabrication…based on little other than what many Muslims WANT MoM to have been. Traits and achievements are attributed to MoM that have no basis in Reality (read: evidence). But no matter: even the most ridiculous fables of MoM persevere. After all: Why let intellectual integrity deter one from embracing a captivating story?

There’s romanticizing a revered historical figure…and then there’s just “making shit up”. Sober-minded people can tell the difference. Sycophants cannot.

Unsurprisingly, there were various outlandish fables about MoM concocted during the earliest generations of Islam. Here, I will use the most well-known tall-tale as an illustration of the degree to which farce was incorporated into the Mohammedan legend. According to the standard version, c. 620 or 621 (i.e. a year or so prior to the “hijra” to Yathrib), MoM went on the so-called “Night Journey”; and did so with his favorite angel, Gabriel, as his tour-guide (17:1).

In the first part of the fantastical voyage (the “Isra”), MoM travelled on a winged horse, “Buraq” [literally: “lightning”, based on the Persian “barag”] from Mecca to “the farthest mosque” (“masjid al-aqsa”; alt. “bayt al-maqdis”)–which contemporary Muslims usually identify with the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. This sounds marvelous…except that there was no mosque in Jerusalem in 620; there was only a Byzantine Church (i.e. Church of the Sepulcher)…which was about to be taken over by the (Zoroastrian) Sassanians…and then given to the Jews. (Oops.)

In the second part of the fabulous voyage (the “Mi’raj”), MoM toured both heaven and hell. {1}

During the trip, MoM was afforded the opportunity to converse with Adam (but not Eve), Abraham (Ibrahim), Joseph (Yusuf), Moses (Musa) and his brother Aaron, John the Baptist (Yahya), Jesus of Nazareth (Isa), and other Abrahamic prophets. All of this happened in one night. In the Koran, this is alluded to in 53:6-18. {2}

The more deluded Muslims take this tale literally–and presumably wonder whether or not a winged horse was able to also whisk MoM down to hell…or if some kind of magical gopher might have been required for that leg of the journey. (Was Satan

privy to the visit? Did MoM solicit dialogue with any djinn during the sojourn to the underworld? And, gosh-golly, how did the guided tour protect MoM from all that fire?)

When it comes to such outlandishness, one need not mock the Koran. The Koran–it turns out–does a thorough job mocking itself.

Silly legends aside, the biggest problem with this particular tale is that it claims MoM reached the upper limit of all human knowledge (at the so-called “Lote Tree”). {3} According to this claim, there is nothing–NOTHING–that the Enlightenment conferred upon mankind that had not already been provided by MoM.

Gee-wiz.

Note that 17:1 describes the sojourn as being from the “sacred place of worship” to the “remote place of worship”. The former, which refers to a “masjid” that is “haraam”, is (dubiously) presumed to be Mecca. The latter, which refers to a “masjid” that is “aqsa”, is (credibly) presumed to be Jerusalem.

The fantastical tale of the “Miraj” likely originated with a popular book (retroactively referred to as simply as the “Kitab al-Miraj”) composed by an author from Nishapur in the 11th century–four centuries after MoM’s lifetime. But where did THAT author get the idea? As it turns out, it was adapted from the Persian tale of “Arda” [Just] Wiraz[a] (the Book of Arda Viraf), which had been put into book form well over a century earlier. The Persians told of the magical sojourn of the fabled Zoroastrian prophet, Viraf. One night, he goes on a “dream journey” to the next world, where he engages in dialogues with angels (notably: Atar) and past prophets (notably: Sraosha, a variant of the “Saoshyant” figure); and even meets the godhead, Ahura Mazda. The godhead tells the prophet that Mazda-ism is the one true Faith, the only way to salvation. Viraf is also given a glimpse of hell, so that he might witness the torments visited upon the damned. All this should sound very familiar.

In the Mohammedan version, part of the sojourn in heaven included a stop at “al-Bayt-ul Mamur” [House of piety; conventionally taken to be a celestial manifestation of the Kaaba]. MoM is also said to have engaged in negotiations with the Creator of the Universe, talking the deity down to just five obligatory prayers per day–as if such an entity would be one to barter on ANYTHING, let alone on such a petty matter (and as if there were no more judicious use of his time than to haggle over the number of daily propitiations). Indeed, when it came to how mankind should behave–there were no more pressing matters in need of addressing than frequency of “salat”.

And what of the creature that whisked MoM away? We are given a description in Bukhari's hadith as a "white beast smaller than a mule, bigger than a donkey" (4/54/429). The use of magical (flying) horses is not uncommon in ancient myth. The Greeks had their own winged horse, Pegasus, from which the Arabians likely got the idea for "al-Buraq".

The notion of magical horses was not unfamiliar to those in the Middle East during the Dark Ages. (The Thracians and Dacians associated their gods with horses.) In ancient Norse mythology, the golden maned horse "Gulltoppr" was used by the shining god, Heimdallr to bring the blessings of the gods to humanity.

The magical / flying horse leitmotif is timeless. Indeed, it goes back to the Achaemenid Empire (5th century B.C.), in which Xerxes the Great fetishized magical white horses. In Kushan lore, Kanishka the Great is said to have ridden a magical white horse (ref. the "Sridhama Pitika" c. 470 A.D.) Winged horses also appeared in ancient Turkic myth ("tulpar")…and thereafter in Turkish, Tartar, Kazakh, and Mongolian myth as well.

In Hindu myth, "Uchchaihshravas" is a white, flying horse (often depicted with seven heads) ridden by the sun-god, Surya. Also, the final incarnation of Vishnu ("Kalki") arrives on a magical, white horse–leading an army of righteous souls to combat the forces of evil (thus ushering in a new epoch of peace).

In Taoist and Mahayana Buddhist myth, the Buddhist monk, Kumarajiva of Kucha (the man who brought Buddhism to China) is said to have been transported by a magical white horse referred to as "Tian-liu" [Heavenly Liu; referencing the clan of legendary Chinese Emperor Yao]. Tales of winged horses could also be found in ancient Chinese myths of the "qianli-ma" ["cholli-ma" in Korean, "senri-ma" in Japanese], alternately rendered as "tian-ma" [celestial horse; horse of heaven] or "long-ma" [dragon-horse]. In Confucian / Taoist lore, a unicorn ("qilin") attended the birth of "Master K'ung". {4} In Siamese lore, legends are told of the flying horse ("ma-ninmangkorn") whisking away the hero ("Sudsakorn") when he embarks on his quest.

In Celtic myth, the divine maiden "Rhiannon" rode a magical, white horse (ref. the "Mobinogi[on]" from the 12th century), a story that is based on legends dating back to "Taliesin" in the 6th century. In the Irish legend of the princess Niamh of Munster

(a.k.a. “Nieve of the Golden Hair”), a flying horse is used to whisk her lover, Oisin away to the magical land of eternal youth, “Tir na-n-Og” (a.k.a. “Mag Mell”). The steed is generally known as a “selkie”.

In Norse myth, Odin rode a magical horse named “Sleipnir”. The Viking hero “Sigurd” rode a magical horse named “Grani”. Tales of flying horses even appear in “A Thousand And One Nights” [“Alf Layla” in CA], itself based on the Pahlavi (Persian) story-collection: “Hazar Afsan”.

Meanwhile, tales of an auspicious figure making a sojourn to hell date back to the 2nd millennium B.C. with the Babylonian account of Inanna’s journey. The theme is timeless. It was found in Homer’s “Odyssey” (late 8th century B.C.)…and was then incorporated into Roman lore by Virgil in his “Aeneid” (1st century B.C.)…which was eventually incorporated into Christian lore by Dante in his “Inferno” (early 14th century A.D.) Thus: Sumerian to Greek to Latin to Tuscan (medieval Italian). In each iteration, the hero of the story is given a tour of the underworld.

But where might the authors of the Koran gotten the idea? Lo and behold: The Persian tale of Arda Viraf’s celestial journey (ref. the “Arda Wiraz Namag”) involved the protagonist being offered a libation, dialogues with astral beings (as well as past saints), holding court with the godhead, and–sure enough–being given a guided tour of hell. This myth was the direct antecedent of the Mohammedan rendition. It is telling that the fantastical Islamic story retained all the key plot points of its Zoroastrian precursor. As with so much in Mohammedan lore, it was lifted from Pahlavi and/or Syriac sources. Such material was widely available at the time. Indeed, there existed Pahlavi Psalters in the region going back to the 6th century–which were themselves based on the (Syriac) writings of the Nestorian proselyte, “Mar” Aba of Asorestan (a.k.a. “Abba The Great”). {5}

In sum: There is almost nothing original in Mohammedan lore. As we have seen, it appropriated elements from antecedent (pagan) Arabian lore, antecedent (Syriac) Abrahamic lore, and contemporaneous Persian lore–thereby creating a novel syncretism adapted for a Bedouin audience in the Dark Ages. That anyone in the post-Enlightenment world would take any of this seriously is testament to the thirst people still have for enchantment.

It seems not to occur to many that once a source starts relaying tales of flying horses, it is prudent to start questioning the credence of EVERY OTHER account it provides. The moment we're told that a celestial steed once whisked the prophet off to the seven heavens (so that he could hold court with past prophets, then engage in negotiations with the Creator of the Universe), we should take pause.

That such an outlandish tale is found in the most vaunted Hadith (that of Bukhari) is extremely inconvenient. Magical, white equidae equipped aside, the credibility of this fantastical tale is undermined by virtually everything else that is in the tale. This meretricious hallucination is garbed in ornate narrative regalia. It is a reminder that to treat MoM as a paragon of virtue is to indulge in delusive thinking. It's not that the Emperor has no clothes; it's that the clothes have no emperor.

{1 Note that this extravagant tale bears a striking resemblance to a piece of fantastical apocrypha associated with the Ancient Greek philosopher, Parmenides of Elea (from the early 5th century B.C.) According to verse attributed to Parmenides, he gleaned his insights via revelation from a goddess during an otherworldly journey, in which he was taken up to the celestial spheres. How did he get there? You guessed it: By riding a flying horse. For a survey of the use of flying horses, see my essays on "Mythemes".}

{2 It was later elaborated upon in Bukhari's Hadith (4/54/429 and 5/58/227). In comparing the "sahih" Hadith to virtually ANY OTHER sacred history, the former come out looking rather adolescent. As with the Koran, the Hadith are remarkably puerile. They present crudely hewn apocrypha, comprised–in large part–of antecedent folklore.}

{3 This tree of knowledge is also referred to as the "Sidrat al-Muntaha", located at the end of the seventh heaven. It is ironic, as it was eating from the tree of knowledge that led to mankind's fall IN THE FIRST PLACE. Suddenly, the Abrahamic deity decided that it was a GOOD thing to eat from the tree of knowledge.}

{4 The Korean version of "qilin" was "girin", the Siamese version was "gilen", and the Japanese version was "kirin". Unicorns go back to the Brahmic mythology of the Indus Valley civilization. The Persians had "Shadhavar". The Russians had "Indrik". Even medieval Christians tried to get in on the action, translating the Hebrew "re'em" in the Book of Job as "unicorn" instead of "aurochs" (a kind of cattle). In Arabian myth, there were also tales of a unicorn-like creature known as the

“shad’havar”, which were also lifted from Persian myth. For reasons that are elusive, unicorns–especially winged–have become the go-to creature for enchantment.}

{5 As mentioned in my essay on Mythemes, the idea of the “Sirat al-Mustaqim” (the Arabic version of the “Chinvat Bridge”) and of angelic “houri” were also appropriated from Persian lore (ref. the “Bundahishn”).}

Appendix 3: Hung-Over Henchmen

The matter of “no alcohol” becomes rather confounding upon reflection.

If the concern was–ostensibly–about “wine” (or, more generally, about beverages made from fermented grapes), then questions arise. Not all wine is made from grapes; and not all things made from grapes are alcoholic. Technically, the issue is about drinks that contain ETHANOL. So we might ask: When the Chinese drink rice-wine, is THAT okay? And if one decides to quench one’s thirst with a glass of (virgin) grape-juice, does THAT count?

So what qualifies as “khamr”? 5:90 and 16:67 refer to “strong drink” as being off-limits (along with divining arrows). Does that mean we can’t drink (virgin) prune juice or kvass…both of which have a very potent taste? (And so much for super-tangy beverages.)

Tellingly, MoM’s prohibition of alcohol consumption seems to have become more stringent as time progressed. It is possible that this was in response to problems that arose during his marauding campaigns. Most likely, the self-proclaimed prophet discouraged imbibing for practical reasons. Surely, he did not want his band of desert-pirates to become inebriated before the next day’s pillaging spree. Though it may not have posed much of a problem for the raping, it is difficult to plunder with hung-over henchmen. (Tipsy bandits are ineffectual bandits.) 2:219 shows that this was the likely rational, as it points out that inebriation has certain usefulness, but that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. In other words, the issue was one of UTILITY, not of morality.

It is no secret that pirates like to imbibe; so this was probably an issue that needed to be addressed. So the matter of wine was about deferred reward: wine WOULD be provided in heaven! Hence the memo: “Don’t drink now, but you’ll get to party later (after you die). However, if you imbibe now, you’ll be sorry.” So it wasn’t imbibing

PER SE that was bad; it was imbibing NOW, whilst in the service of the cause. In the hereafter, it's all well and good. (Might we think of any other activity that is deemed iniquitous during life, yet rendered copacetic in Paradise? Alas, there is no sin in heaven; as–presumably–there is no more need for morality amongst sentient beings.)

MoM was able to placate his followers in the interim. Providing his brigands with a cut of the booty and a steady supply of sex-slaves also did the trick. And, surely, terrifying them with threats of eternal damnation further served to cajole them into participating. In any case, MoM was busy providing intoxicants of another nature. Why fuss over libations when one could feast and fuck to one's heart's content?

But why GRAPES? There were no apples or potatoes or wheat fields in Arabia. Consequently, grapes were the only thing that fermented of which the authors of the Koran would have been aware. Wine was the prototypical beverage made from grape fermentation; hence THAT was the primary concern. Never mind libations made from ingredients other than fermented grapes. It seems not to have occurred to the (putatively omniscient) Abrahamic deity to mention opioids as cognitively hampering. (Apparently, Chinese opium dens were not on his mind when he opted to mention mentally deleterious substances to "watch out for". And he was certainly not concerned with today's hyper-commercialized pharmaceutical industry.)

This is yet another reminder that the declarations of the Koran's protagonist reflects the extremely limited knowledge of medieval Arabians (a matter I explore in Endnote *108).

Here, "historical context" becomes salient–as is typically the case when evaluating the declarations made in ancient texts. Once we understand WHY the prohibition was originally put into effect, it is plain to see that the Koranic prohibition against drinking "khamr" has no bearing on me sipping a wine-cooler with my mother on the back porch on a quiet Sunday afternoon.

To reiterate: 2:219 reveals that the stricture spawned more from a pragmatic than a moral concern. This particular prohibition attained, in part, because the consolation provided by MoM was efficacious: "Don't worry, you'll get all the wine you want in the hereafter…IF you die while serving my cause". Such an enticing caveat surely worked like a charm.

As with everything else he commanded, MoM (as the deliverer of the final revelation) rationalized this stricture with, “God wills it!” End of discussion.

Alas, some Islamic apologists continue to tout the notion that the Koran does not actually forbid ALL alcohol; it only forbids wine (fermented grapes)–as that is the libation that the Koran singles out when specifying the libation served in heaven. (There is no mention of strawberry daiquiris in Jannah.) This involves the translation of “khamr” exclusively as intoxicants made from fermented grapes (rather than encompassing all ethanol-based intoxicants, or intoxicants-in-general). This is plausible, as the term is traditionally construed as “fermented grape juice”. This narrow interpretation would thus render off-limits the ONE kind of libation that might actually have some health benefits…while keeping the far more harmful libations in-bounds. *

And so it goes: According to this interpretation, becoming inebriated is copacetic… so long as it’s Chambord; because THAT is made from distilled raspberries. However, to sip a fruity Merlot is to defy the Creator of the Universe.

Suffice to say, Islamic apologists rarely think through the implications of this interpretation. Depending on whether your libation-of-choice is made from fermented potatoes / apples / grain / berries / milk or not, you might be screwed. If you prefer Pinot Grigio to booze, you’re outta luck; but vice-versa, and you’re in the clear.

This also leaves one to explain how:

- **Irish** getting trashed on Guinness and **Scottish** getting trashed on scotch and **Londoners** getting trashed on gin are all halal, YET…when **Parisians** do a champagne toast at a wedding, they are somehow contravening god’s commands. **
- **Danes** getting trashed on karsk and **Fins** getting trashed on pontikka and **Germans** getting trashed on lager are all halal, YET…when the **Dutch** serve snifters of brandy at grandpa’s birthday party, they are contravening god’s commands.
- **Russians** getting trashed on samogon and **Georgians** getting trashed on chacha and **Slavs** getting trashed on palinka are all halal, YET…when **Norwegians** and **Swedes** treat themselves to some warm glogg on Christmas Eve, they are contravening god’s commands. (They’d have been better off having akvavit!)

- **Greeks** getting trashed on uzo and **Albanians** / **Bulgarians** / **Serbs** / **Croats** getting trashed on raki[ja] and **Armenians** getting trashed on oghee are all halal, YET…when **Persians** serve shiraz as a digestif after dinner, they are contravening god's commands.
- **Ethiopians** getting trashed on tella / suwa and **Kenyans** getting trashed on changaa and **Native Americans** getting trashed on perique are all halal, YET…when stodgy old **Brits** nurse some vermouth in the study, they are contravening god's commands.
- **Mongols** getting trashed on ayrag and **Indians** getting trashed on fermented molasses and **Punjabis** getting trashed on tharra are all halal, YET…when **Turks** wet their palates with a swig of raki before supping, they are contravening god's commands.
- **Koreans** getting trashed on so-ju and **Chinese** getting trashed on huang-jiu / bai-jiu / shao-jiu and **Japanese** getting trashed on sake are all halal, YET… when **Latino** vacationers enjoy some sangria while relaxing on the beach, they are contravening god's commands.
- **Canucks** getting trashed on cider and **Yankees** getting trashed on Long Island iced-tea and **American Southerners** getting trashed on bourbon are all halal, YET…when **New York** socialites order mimosas whilst meeting for brunch, they are contravening god's commands.
- **Puerto Ricans** getting trashed on piña coladas and **Mexicans** getting trashed on tequila and **Brasilians** getting trashed on caipirinha are all halal, YET… when **Portuguese** art-critics savor some port at a gallery opening, they are somehow contravening god's commands.
- **Filipinos** getting trashed on lambanog and **Caribbean** revelers getting trashed on rum and **Polynesians** getting trashed on mai-tais are all halal, YET…when **Spanish** lovers share a glass of sherry while admiring a sunset, they are somehow contravening god's commands.

Good grief! We may not be able to prevent frat-boys from guzzling beer, but at least we can stop **Florentine** artisans from sipping chianti.

Meanwhile, Arak from raisins is prohibited; but Arak from dates is fine. How does this make sense? Is it written in the stars: "Moonshine: fine. Wine coolers: forbidden"? If not, then where does this leave us? When the Koran was composed, shall we suppose that chugging vodka would have been permissible simply because

it isn't made from grapes? When sipping a Campari spritzer is considered a greater transgression than decapitating kuffar, one might inquire into whether or not one's priorities have perhaps gone awry.

The inconsistencies involved with this prohibition become obvious once we realize that JoN, considered a "nabi" [prophet] free of sin, even in Islam, is known not only for having drunk wine, but for providing it to crowds when water was already available!

In sum: The issue of imbibing is a memetic relic left over from an era of piracy. The stricture had little to do with ethical behavior and more to do with protocol. Plying henchmen with women and treasure more than made up for a prohibition on libations.

TODAY, the stricture seems not to attain beyond the common-sense rule of thumb: If you are going to imbibe, do so responsibly. If you aim to regularly engage in physically-taxing activity (be it piracy or pilates), getting hammered the night before is probably not a good idea. One doesn't need to reference antiquarian edicts in a holy book to understand such things.

{* Consumed in moderation, wine is known to mitigate heart disease while helping to increase the amount of HDL in one's system. Its cardiac benefits are primarily attributable to reduction in stress; as it is a relaxant (thus reducing blood pressure). Meanwhile, while having no health benefits whatsoever, beer and "hard" alcohol cause a tremendous amount of sickness and death. So god surely had strange priorities if "khamr" only meant fermented grapes. One wonders: Wasn't the Creator of the universe aware of the dangers of Absinthe?}

{** It seems that Champagne is just as useful for inaugurating new ships and new years as it is for inaugurating new marriages. No matter. For with regards to those at dinner who deliberate between a Burgundy and a Bordeaux, we are to suppose that they are simply vacillating between which way they will be damned to eternal hellfire. Be it a Cabernet and a Chardonnay, one's fate in the hereafter may boil down to which beverage one opts to drink when having dinner. Sticking with chocolate milk, it seems, is required in order to not irk the Creator of the Universe.}