

Islamic 'Psalms of David'

Various anonymous Muslim authors

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown, probably 12th century and after

PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown

DATE OF DEATH Unknown, probably 12th century and after

PLACE OF DEATH Unknown

BIOGRAPHY —

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary —

Secondary —

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Kitāb al-zabūr al-sharīf alladhī unzila 'alā sayyidinā Dā'ūd, 'The noble psalms which were revealed to our lord David'; *Al-Zabūr*, 'Psalms'; *Zabūr Dā'ūd*, 'Psalms of David'; *Tarjamat al-zabūr*, 'A translation of the Psalms'

DATE Ongoing composition; extant texts redacted c. 12th century and after

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The Psalms of David, rewritten in Arabic by several unnamed Muslim authors, form a small body of literature that is partly based on the biblical Psalms, but consists mostly of Islamic materials such as qur'anic allusions, *ḥadīth qudsī*, sermonic exhortations, laws, proverbs, and traditions about David from the *Tales of the prophets* literature. They also contain predictions of Muḥammad, scattered polemics about Christ's divinity and the corruption of the Bible, and stories and sayings from the Gospels and other pre-Islamic sources. As in the

Qur'an, these elements are woven together in the form of revelations spoken by God to a prophet and his people.

These Psalms stem from two principal source collections, which were rearranged and rewritten and expanded by medieval authors to produce at least four distinct texts that are extant today in at least seven different recensions. The freedom with which these authors rewrote their sources shows that they regarded their work not as a recovery of David's original revelation, but as a creative literary endeavor. David's traditional connection to desire, sin and repentance made him an ideal recipient for the authors' admonitions about the vanity of this world and the importance of piety, repentance, reliance on God, and devotional practices.

The Moses source (M) was originally composed as a rewritten *Torah of Moses*, which has been dated to the 12th century by J. Sadan ('Some literary problems', p. 378). Extant copies vary in length from six to 25 folios, and contain 20 or 30 or 40 short, elegant chapters. Some copies bear the title *Psalms of David*. M also appears at the end of some recensions of another Psalm text described below.

The Core source (C) was older, and may have included material from the early Muslim expert on Jewish lore, Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. c. 728). No extant copy of C itself has yet been identified. It consisted of about 50 folios, divided into some 50 or 100 Psalms. It was redacted and expanded, probably beginning in the 12th century, by three authors whose outlooks may be characterized respectively as Şūfī, Orthodox and Pious.

The Şūfī author (S) started out using material from C to respond to the biblical Psalms. His first Psalm paraphrases most of Ps 1, then follows C in commanding David to rebuke the Children of Israel for their harshness toward the poor. His second Psalm turns Ps 2 on its head. He apparently read Ps 2 as a Christian text, perhaps in light of the Crusaders' establishment of a kingdom in Jerusalem, and in response he replaced God's Anointed with the Muslim community, by changing *masīḥih* to *musabbīḥih*, so that instead of scoffing at those who join together against a putatively Christian king in Zion, the Psalm decries the aggression that the Christians themselves have committed against the Muslims' holy shrine in Jerusalem. From his third Psalm on, S left the biblical text behind and followed C, redacting it to suit his own message. He then added another 102 Psalms of his own, for a total of 154 Psalms occupying 104 folios in the Florence MS. His writing expresses a moderate Şūfī vision of divine love and

forgiveness, of *dhikr* and night worship and tearful repentance, and of a common spirituality that is at least potentially shared by the Bible and its adherents. He shows less concern with legally correct behavior or anti-Christian polemic than the Orthodox and Pious authors. He is not named, but one manuscript gives a chain of transmission from Wahb ibn Munabbih to Abū Walīd ibn Yūnus, a preacher in the mosque of Cordova who travelled to Egypt and Arabia and died in India in 1156 (see Zwemer, 'A Moslem apocryphal Psalter').

The Orthodox author (O) made fewer modifications to the relatively simple and primitive text of C, though he did rectify parts he found theologically problematic, and appended 48 rather prosaic Psalms of his own, for a total of 147 Psalms occupying 85 folios in the Leiden MS. He spoke less of night vigils and God's love, and more of obedience and God's greatness.

The Pious author (P) gave C a new level of literary polish, and adapted it to his own strict legal piety, dropping or mitigating allusions to David's sin, and adding language about outward obedience and punishment for disobedience. He added 65 Psalms of his own, for a total of 143 Psalms occupying 78 folios in the Oxford MS. One early copy of P skipped over two folios near the beginning, and this 'Broken Pious' recension (BP) was reproduced many times, sometimes with M tacked on at the end to produce a 'Broken Pious with Moses' recension (BPM). A further recension, BPM₂, contains only the second half of BPM (Psalms 67-169).

SIGNIFICANCE

These Psalms were written principally for Muslims, as an exhortation to pursue a repentant and ascetic piety like that associated with David. Sadan has argued that M was written primarily as a set of sermons for Muslims, and secondarily as a polemic against Jews ('Some literary problems', pp. 384-88), but M also contains a critique of the People of the Book that seems to be directed especially at Christians: they fail to live by the principles of the Sermon on the Mount (MS Leiden, Leiden University – Or. 14.027, fols 142v-143r; MS Princeton – Garrett 108B, fol. 98r-v). O and P, and to a lesser extent S, have at times a more specifically anti-Christian character, echoing polemical themes from the Qur'an. First and foremost, however, these Psalms are part of an internal Muslim argument against worldliness and hypocrisy. They have more in common with Islamic sermons, wisdom literature, divine sayings, law, and Tales of the Prophets, than with the Psalms

they purport to rewrite. They are more like rewritten Qur'an than rewritten Bible.

Nevertheless, these Islamic Psalms have a two-fold significance for Muslim-Christian relations. First, they draw upon sayings, stories and values that are shared by Muslims, Christians and Jews. Each author depends upon that common symbolic repertoire, and especially upon the shared figure of David and the idea of his Psalms, to lend the authority and rhetorical force of scripture to his own message. Second, because they are presented as *Psalms of David*, these texts assert and indeed embody the polemical claim that the Jewish and Christian scriptures are corrupt. An analysis of Psalm 2 in the Şūfī text suggests that the decision to frame this material in this implicitly polemical fashion was motivated in part by some external challenge to the Muslim community, most likely the Crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem. Today, however, these Islamic *Psalms of David* are not widely known, and do not appear to play any significant role in Muslim-Christian discussions of the corruption of scripture or any other topic.

MANUSCRIPTS

Most of the following manuscripts have not been studied, but are tentatively identified with specific texts and recensions based on a check of the first few Psalms, or on published excerpts and descriptions.

The Moses text (M):

MS Leiden, Leiden University – Or. 14.027, fols 141r-148v (1876; 30

Psalms, the basis for my description of M)

MS Paris, BNF – Ar. 5647 and 5681

MS Cairo, Taymūriyya – *diyānāt* 3 and 4

The Şūfī text (S):

MS Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana – Orient. Palat. 267 (Assem.

XXVIII), 105 fols (1262; 154 Psalms, the basis for my description of S)

MS from Cairo described by Zwemer, 'Apocryphal Psalter' (present location unknown) – c. 108 fols (1759; 150 Psalms, with *isnād* from Wahb ibn Munabbih to Abū Walīd ibn Yūnus)

MS Berlin, State Library – Spr. 466, fols 33v-140 (1766; 137 Psalms, may represent a precursor to S)

- The Orthodox text (O) (some of these may actually contain C):
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Fatih 28, 95 fols (1229; 118 Psalms plus conclusion, Arab League microfilm *Al-kutub al-samāwiyya* 36)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Damat İbrahim Paşa 5, 125 fols (1303; 157 Psalms)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Ayasofya 30, 47 fols
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Halet Efendi ve Eki 11, 26 fols (110 Psalms)
 MS St Petersburg, National Public Library – 51, 72 fols (1609; 150 Psalms)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Hüsrev Paşa 4, fols 1-37
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Fatih 29, 120 fols
 MS Mecca, Maktabat al-Ḥaram – 117 fols (1860; 148 Psalms, trans. ascribed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib)
 MS Leiden, Leiden University – Or. 6129, 85 fols (1917; 147 Psalms, copied from preceding MS, the basis for my description of O)

The Pious text (P):

- MS Oxford, Bodleian Library – Hunt. 515, fols 5v-83r (1356; 143 Psalms, the basis for my description of P)
 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library – Bodley Or. 429, 1v-64r (copy of Psalms 60-143 from preceding MS)

The Broken Pious recension (BP; some of these may actually contain BPM):

- MS from Mosul described by Cheikho, 'Quelques légendes', p. 41 (present location unknown) – 90 pages (137 Psalms)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Hamidiye 14, 94 fols (1755)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Carullah 5, 155 fols
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Laleli 19, 125 fols (late, illuminated, ends with a short biography of David)
 MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Laleli 20, 97 fols (similar to Laleli 19)

The Broken Pious with Moses recension (BPM):

- MS Princeton, Princeton University Library – Garrett 108B, 118 fols (1672; 169 Psalms)

The second half of the Broken Pious with Moses recension (BPM₂):

MS Jerusalem, Maqām Dā'ūd/Khizānat kutub al-Sayyid Ḥasan Ṣidqī
l-Dujjānī (1738; described in Mukhlis, 'Al-zabūr al-sharīf')

MS Jerusalem, al-Khālidiyya (modern copy of preceding MS)

MS Istanbul, Nuruosmaniye – 48/1 (some recension of P, probably
BPM₂)

MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye – Bağdatlı Vehbi 3 (some recension of
P, probably BPM₂)

Additional manuscripts of uncertain classification:

An additional MS from Cairo mentioned by Krarup, *Auswahl*, p. 3

MS Jerusalem, J. N. L. – Yahuda Ar. 261 (about 170 Psalms)

MS Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional – *Al-zabūr al-munazzal 'alā nabī
Allāh Dā'ūd*

MS Paris, BNF – Ar. 760 and 1397

MS Cambridge, University Library – Add. 3256

There are doubtless many other manuscripts and perhaps other
texts and recensions in existence, but they cannot always be identified
from manuscript catalogues because they are often listed in the same
way as ordinary Arabic translations of the biblical Psalms.

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

L. Cheikho, 'Quelques légendes islamiques apocryphes', *Mélanges
de la Faculté Orientale* 4 (1910) 33-56 (includes an edition of the
first 18 Psalms of BP)

O.C. Krarup, *Auswahl pseudo-Davidischer Psalmen*, Copenhagen,
1909 (edition and German trans. of 19 Psalms selected from S)

Short excerpts are also included in some of the studies described
below. There is no complete edition or translation of any
version.

STUDIES

D. Vishanoff, 'An imagined book gets a new text: Psalms of the
Muslim David', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011)
forthcoming

J. Sadan, 'Some literary problems concerning Judaism and Jewry in
medieval Arabic sources', in M. Sharon (ed.), *Studies in Islamic
history and civilization, in honour of Professor David Ayalon*,
Jerusalem, 1986, 353-98 (see pp. 370-98, on M)

R.G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih, Teil 1: Der Heidelberger Papyrus
PSR Heid Arab 23, Leben und Werk des Dichters*, Wiesbaden,
1972, pp. 258-63

- 'A.A. Mukhliş, 'Al-zabūr al-sharīf. Nuskha ukhrā minhu', *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī* 13 (1933) 341-42 (on Princeton MS of BPM)
- 'A.A. Mukhliş, 'Al-zabūr al-sharīf', *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī* 12 (1932) 627-30 (principally on Jerusalem MS of BPM₂)
- [A. 'A. al-Zayn,] 'Bayna Şīdā' wa-Makka' part 7, *Al-'Irfān* 8 no. 7 (1923) 481-91 (p. 491 is on Meccan MS of O)
- S.M. Zwemer, 'A Moslem apocryphal Psalter', *MW* 5 (1915) 399-403 (on a MS of S)
- Cheikho, 'Quelques légendes islamiques apocryphes'; trans., without Cheikho's partial edition of BP, by J. Spaeth as 'Some Moslem apocryphal legends', *MW* 2 (1912) 47-59

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