

ISLAMIC LITERATURES: TEXTS AND STUDIES



# Proving Prophecy

*Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Literature as  
Part of the Scholarly Discourse  
on Prophecy in Islam

Mareike Koertner

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## Proving Prophecy

# Islamic Literatures

TEXTS AND STUDIES

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*To the memory of my mother  
Ruth Sofia Körtner (1957–2021)*





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# Abbreviations

- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
- EI*<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First edition*. Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T. W. Arnold, R. Basset and R. Hartmann. Leiden: Brill, 1913–1936.
- EI*<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs. 12 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004. Brill Online.
- EI*<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Leiden: Brill, 2007–. Brill Online.
- EQ* *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*. Edited by Jane McAuliffe Dammen. 6 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006. Brill Online.
- Elr* *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Edited by Ehsan Yarshater. New York: Columbia University. Online <http://www.iranicaonline.org>
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

# Introduction

A shepherd was herding his flock when a wolf approached and stole one of his sheep. The shepherd threw stones at the wolf until it let go of its prey but the wolf turned toward the shepherd and began to scold him for depriving him of the sustenance that God had provided for him. The shepherd was dumbfounded at the animal's speech, yet the wolf countered that there are more important matters than an articulate beast of prey. He informed the shepherd about the Prophet preaching in Medina. The shepherd immediately drove his flock to Medina, told the Prophet and his Companions about his encounter with the wolf, and accepted Islam.<sup>1</sup>



It was this particular account that led the nineteenth-century scholar Tor Andrae (d. 1947) to declare *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature “fantastic legends” and “barbaric embellishments that veil the true historical figure of the Prophet.”<sup>2</sup> Most scholars of the twentieth century followed Andrae's lead and dismissed this literature as a product of popular veneration of the Prophet and edification for ordinary believers. I, however, argue that it not only originated among scholars of *ḥadīth* but also that this literature was part of a wider scholarly discourse about prophethood, one that occurred in numerous religious sciences and reflected specific ideological purposes. After all, prophethood is a significant foundational concept in theological, political, and social realms in Muslim societies. It is an essential pillar of faith, as most Muslim scholars argue that the central belief in the existence and unity of God (*tawḥīd*) can only be achieved through His messengers. Based on the centrality of the notion of prophetic Sunna, prophethood also became the principal subject of political, social, and legal authority. Muḥammad's death brought an end to two vital sources of authority: the ongoing revelation of the Qur'ān and his unique ability to interpret and exemplify its message in his daily life. The resulting challenges to develop new rulings for the community led to the colossal scholarly efforts to collect his *sunna* and develop methodologies on how to center Muḥammad's

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<sup>1</sup> Qāḍī 'Iyād, *al-Shifā'*, 1:432.

<sup>2</sup> Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds*, 28, 92f.

authoritative voice and establish guiding principles after his passing. The political authority vested in Muḥammad and in prophethood as a concept became an immediate matter of concern in early Islamic history when “false” prophets arose. Abū Bakr had to confront the threat of rival tribal figures who claimed prophethood for themselves in a bid for political power, and similar contenders emerged periodically throughout Islamic history. The expansion of Muslim political rule over Christian and Jewish populations, who held their own doctrines of prophethood and frequently sought to delegitimize the faith of their new rulers, further prompted Muslim thinkers to articulate uniquely Islamic concepts of prophethood. These intersecting aspects brought forth a broad scholarly discourse on prophethood that aimed at addressing Muslim and non-Muslim challenges in an attempt to define the nature of prophethood and distinguish between individuals who held legitimate claims and “false” contenders. As Robinson put it, “[p]recisely because Muhammad’s prophecy lay at the heart of Islamic belief, he stood at the center of what might be called the early Islamic imaginary.”<sup>3</sup>

Works of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* do not simply cater toward a Muslim need for edification and veneration of Muḥammad, rather, these works should be seen as part of a larger discourse on prophecy, one that seeks to establish evidence of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission in light of Muslim and non-Muslim challenges that changed over time, according to their intellectual and social historical contexts. While similar works were eventually found in all Abrahamic faith traditions, Stroumsa has argued that this type of literature seems to have originated in the circles of Muslim scholars because there is hardly any precedence of this type of literature in Judaism and Christianity prior to the advent of Islam.<sup>4</sup> Islamic tradition holds that the nascent Muslim community defended the prophetic status of Muḥammad in their day-to-day interactions with the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). In Medina it was mostly members of the Jewish tribes who challenged Muḥammad to prove his prophecy.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, interactions with the People of the Book expanded significantly during the Muslim conquests which brought a Muslim minority into a position of political and military control over a diverse non-Muslim majority. The emerging *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature during the early ‘Abbāsīd period should be seen in the context of socio-political shifts that led learned men among the established Abrahamic traditions to maintain religious supremacy by challenging the legitimacy of Muḥammad’s prophecy and the religious community it brought

3 Robinson, “History and Heilsgeschichte in Early Islam,” 3.

4 Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy”; cf. Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, 22–36.

5 Rubin, “Jews and Judaism.”

forth. The link between challenges to religious legitimacy and shifts in political power seems to be corroborated by the fact that there were no Jewish works directed against the Muslim faith in the first centuries after the rise of Islam, whereas Christian writings of this kind, either in epistles or reports of disputations, abound.<sup>6</sup>

However, the Islamic *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature should not be mistaken as a purely defensive attempt by Muslim scholars to justify their religion, rather it should be understood as a manifestation of an interactive process that also shaped theological notions of the other religious traditions through common and mutually posed questions. Over time some *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works transcended religious boundaries as Jewish, Christian, and Muslim authorities debated the nature of prophecy. Stroumsa has shown that the general frame of the discussion as well as the particular "signs" offered in these works were very similar for the three religious traditions but that the literature of each tradition displayed individual characteristic components.<sup>7</sup> More immediately, these works played an active role in shaping doctrinal views and theological concepts in a variety of scholarly fields in the Islamic religious sciences which devoted attention to the question of prophecy and the parameters by which it might be evaluated. As such, we find Mu'tazilī works, such as *Kitāb Ḥujjaj al-nubūwa* by al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–869) or *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubūwa* by 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025), Ismā'īlī works like *Kitāb Ithbāt al-nubūwa* by Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 360/971), works by Ash'arī theologians, such as *A'lām al-nubūwa* by al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), and *ḥadīth* anthologies by scholars such as Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) and al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066). Given this vast array of contributing scholars, Muslim literature on the "proofs of prophecy" displays variegated approaches to the subject. Dominating these approaches are (1) compilations of accounts from *ḥadīth* and *sīra* literature that relate supposedly evidentiary events or characteristics, (2) works substantiating the Qur'ānic claim that Muḥammad was foretold in previous scriptures by adducing relevant passages from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and (3) theological discussions on the necessity and nature of prophecy. While these various kinds of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works emerged as distinct methodological approaches, they should not be considered as mutually exclusive and later authors often employed more than one approach. For the most part, they have been studied separately based on their methodological context; while *ḥadīth*-based approaches have received the least scholarly

6 Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 140; also see Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret," and Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad."

7 Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 106f.

attention. In this study, I seek to provide a more comprehensive view by contextualizing the *ḥadīth*-based works in broader methodological debates across the various emerging Islamic sciences and the larger discourses on prophecy that occurred across religious boundaries.

## 1 Historiography, Hagiography, and the Marginalization of *Dalāʾil al-Nubūwa* Literature

Despite its contribution to Islam's intellectual landscape, *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature has been under-utilized and mostly dismissed in Islamic studies. It has been categorized as a type of popular work, and this seems to have discouraged scholarly investigations because popular literature tends to be studied to establish a social history, but is rarely seen as part of or contributing to intellectual and doctrinal history. A number of factors led scholars throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to misunderstand the provenance of this literature.

First, the view of early scholars of Islamic studies was, at least in part, informed by the limited sources available at the time; this prevented scholars from realizing the scope of this literature, its origins in circles of *ḥadīth* scholarship, and its wider contribution to the epistemological discourse on prophecy. Many important texts in the early history of this literature are no longer extant and were not known to early scholars of Islamic studies. Tor Andrae dedicated a chapter of his 1918 work *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glaube seiner Gemeinde* to legends and miracles attributed to the Prophet;<sup>8</sup> this provided a tentative outline for the development of *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature. When Andrae first considered the nature of this literature, his study was based on two chapters in the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) as well as works by Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī and al-Bayhaqī, written almost 200 years later. The scarcity of accessible primary sources and their historical distance made an accurate characterization of this literature virtually impossible. Based on these three works, it is not surprising that scholars did not link them to the circles of *ḥadīth* scholars as Ibn Saʿd presents the “signs of prophecy” in his biographical dictionary, and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī and al-Bayhaqī were both scholars of *ḥadīth*, but their respective *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* works were closer to prophetic biographies with regard to their sources, content, and structure. While Meir Jacob Kister indicated in 1983 that Ibn Saʿd may have benefited from his predecessor Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770) and added a few more, mostly later, works

<sup>8</sup> Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds*, 26–91.

to the list of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors,<sup>9</sup> scholars of Islamic studies remained unaware of the full scope of this literature. Even more recent scholars, like Tilman Nagel in his major publication from 2008, still name Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī as two of the earliest authors of this genre.<sup>10</sup> Biographic and bibliographic evidence, however, shows that *ḥadīth*-based works that were intended to validate and defend Muḥammad's claim to prophecy sprawl across the entirety of Islamic history, from thematic chapters in early *ḥadīth* compilations by scholars such as Ma'mar b. Rāshid and the earliest independent works of al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834) and al-Madā'inī (d. between 224 and 231/839 and 845) to scholars of the twentieth century, such as 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (d. 1980). The lack of awareness of earlier texts that are no longer extant led to a late dating of the literature and to misconceptions regarding the authorship of the literature.

Furthermore, when modern scholars of Islamic studies dismissed these works as popular literature, it reflected their own intellectual framework rather than the views of these texts' authors and their contemporaries. Andrae's examination was not based on a thorough study of numerous Islamic sources, rather it focused on very few versions and considered them phenomenologically in the context of various other faith traditions. A key example is the account of a shepherd's encounter with a speaking wolf mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. Andrae refers to an account he found, not in *ḥadīth* collections or the early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations, but in *al-Shifā'* by Qāḍī 'Iyād (d. 543/1149).<sup>11</sup> Thus, Andrae's point of departure was one relatively late text. His methodology and a priori assumptions about the origins and contents of this literature also played a significant role in his dismissal of it. His judgment was primarily based on a comment Qāḍī 'Iyād made in reference to this *ḥadīth*; he states, "This hadith contains *qiṣṣa*" (والْحَدِيثُ فِيهِ قِصَّةٌ). Tor Andrae read this statement as an indication that Qāḍī 'Iyād suspected that it had a folkloristic origin going back to *quṣṣāṣ* rather than a scholarly origin.<sup>12</sup> The mostly negative views of Muslim *quṣṣāṣ* became common among modern scholars of Islamic studies since the work of Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921), who described them primarily as embellishers and fabricators of religious stories that were meant to steer the masses toward religious devotion but who were also suspected of personally enriching themselves in the process.<sup>13</sup> For

9 Kister, "The Sirah Literature," 356.

10 Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, 103–110.

11 Qāḍī 'Iyād, *al-Shifā'*, 1:432.

12 Andrae, *Die Person Muhammed*, 27.

13 Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, 36–38; Goldziher, *Muslim Studies II*, 149–159.

Western scholars of Andrae's time, these storytellers were therefore synonymous with charlatans who freely invented stories about the Prophet in order to please their mostly illiterate audiences. More recently, Jonathan Berkey and Lyall Armstrong have shown that these early *quṣṣāṣ* were, for the most part, properly trained in the prophetic tradition and Islamic law, and that they were often hired by the caliph or other high-ranking officials to spread basic knowledge of Islam among the newly converted population of the expanding Muslim empire.<sup>14</sup> The profession only later came to be associated with dubious characters who entertained the masses with imaginary tales and *Isrā'īliyyāt* (stories of the prophets), and were frequently criticized by the authorities. Andrae's reliance on one late text combined with his general notion of *quṣṣāṣ* as untrustworthy sources led him to dismiss the entire *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature without investigating the occurrence of this account in other texts. The narrative of the speaking wolf, in fact, appears in a number of early and often prominent *ḥadīth* collections, such as the *Musnad* of the famous legal scholar Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855),<sup>15</sup> the two canonical *ḥadīth* collections of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870)<sup>16</sup> and Muslim (d. 261/875),<sup>17</sup> the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd, and in later compilations, such as the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works of al-Bayhaqī,<sup>18</sup> Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī,<sup>19</sup> and *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya* of Ibn Kathīr<sup>20</sup> (d. 774/1373). It is noteworthy that the same *ḥadīth* was related—at the same time and sometimes even in the same collections—in shorter and longer versions. The core of the story—a wolf speaking to a shepherd to inform him about Muḥammad's prophetic mission in Medina—was central in all the versions; the differences only

14 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*.

15 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:203f. (no. 8049; this is a shorter account only relating the shepherd's encounter with the wolf, and without many descriptive details), 4:210f. (no. 11814); 4:222 (no. 11863).

16 This *ḥadīth* is only partially related to the one in Ibn Sa'd's "signs of prophecy." Related in the book of cultivation and agriculture, it states, "While a man was riding a cow, it turned toward him and said, 'I have not been created for this purpose, I have been created for ploughing.' The Prophet added, 'I, Abū Bakr, and 'Umar believe in this story.' The Prophet said further, 'A wolf caught a sheep, and when the shepherd chased it, the wolf said, 'Who will be its guard on the day of wild beasts, when there will be no shepherd for it except I?' After narrating it, the Prophet said, 'I, Abū Bakr, and 'Umar, too, believe it.' Abū Salama said, 'Abū Bakr and 'Umar were not present'; cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3:295 (no. 2324).

17 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 15:103 (no. 2388).

18 The *dalā'il al-nubūwa* encompasses a chapter containing various versions of this narrative. Their *isnāds* vary in strength. Two of these accounts are very close to the one in Ibn Sa'd; cf. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:41–44.

19 Abū Nu'aym's work also contains two versions of this account; cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 222f.

20 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, 4:183.

relate to descriptive details, such as what kind of leaves the sheep were feeding on. The narrative of the speaking wolf has, therefore, clearly been part of the scholarly discourse from the early third/ninth century onward. Given that the term *qiṣṣa* is generally associated with the notion of relating a piece of information, Qādī 'Iyāḍ probably meant that this particular version of the *ḥadīth* he listed was unusually detailed in its descriptions compared to other versions, not that its provenance was unreliable storytellers. Due to an insufficient body of texts and an over-generalization of the role of storytellers in early Muslim societies, Andrae failed to trace this account in other texts and thus was misled into believing that these texts were part of popular veneration.

In addition to having an incomplete textual foundation, early Orientalists held various inter-related views that were common among historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their positivist view of history, which significantly impacted their evaluation of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature, was certainly prominent. Ernest Renan infamously remarked that Muḥammad was “born in the full light of history,”<sup>21</sup> and a number of scholars confidently expressed their ability to distinguish historical and fictional accounts of his life. For instance, Ignaz Goldziher,<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Levi Della Vida (d. 1961),<sup>23</sup> Hamilton A. R. Gibb (d. 1971),<sup>24</sup> Josef Horovitz (d. 1931),<sup>25</sup> and Tor Andrae all viewed elements of the *sīra* as evidence of the increased veneration for the person of Muḥammad that led to the growth of a hagiographic legend. This view in particular shaped the way scholars categorized *dalā'il al-nubūwa* as a popular, and, thus, historically inaccurate, sub-genre of *sīra* literature. As we noted at the outset of this chapter, Andrae viewed the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature exclusively through the lens of Muḥammad's legends and miracles, and declared it “fantastic legends” and “barbaric embellishments that veil the true historical figure of the Prophet.”<sup>26</sup>

At its core, these assumptions were grounded in the positivist approach to history prevalent at the time; this approach differentiated between historiography, i.e., “truthful” and “factual” accounts, and hagiography, i.e., falsified accounts that were aimed at crafting a particular image for ulterior purposes. Historiography was understood methodologically as empirical history and, thus, seen as “scientific” and “objective.” This view of history, however, reflects the academic discourses of post-Enlightenment European scholars, not those

21 Reinhart, *Review of Juynbolliana*, 416.

22 Goldziher, *Muslim Studies II*, 255–262.

23 Della Vida, “Sīra.”

24 Gibb, “Ta'rikh.”

25 Horovitz, “Zur Muḥammadlegende.”

26 Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds*, 28, 92f.

of early Muslim authors of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries who did not categorically view accounts of the past as either sacred history or empirically verifiable history. Famous works of historiography like al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* seamlessly blend the sacred history of the creation of the world and various prophets with the empirical history of rulers and conquests. Likewise, Ibn Ishāq's (d. 150/767) prophetic biography, which preceded Ibn Hishām's edition, started with an account of the beginning of the world. This is not to say that Muslim scholars did not attempt to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable contributions. Their discerning process, however, centered on modes of authentication that related to particular Islamic disciplines and their concrete applications, rather than on a positivist quest for "truthfulness" or historicity. As a foundation for Islamic law, for instance, *ḥadīth* were subjected to an elaborate and rigorous process of authentication. Other literature, such as *sīra* or historiographies, informed its audience of a sense of the past but did not have the same normative import, and accordingly, these works were not expected to uphold the same methodological scrutiny. Thus, these diverging methodologies were reflective of the texts' application rather than the audience's concern for historicity. Categorizing early Muslim texts based on the methodological assumptions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is, therefore, an anachronistic approach and does not contribute to our understanding of these texts in the historical consciousness of their own time period.

In an attempt to move beyond these binary assumptions of historiography and hagiography, contemporary scholars of European intellectual history have offered approaches that are better suitable to understanding these particular sets of texts holistically. Dominick LaCapra addressed the binary assumption of documentary texts, i.e., those that empirically record the past, and "work-like" types of texts, i.e., those that supplement empirical reality through interpretation or imagination.<sup>27</sup> He argued that privileging documentary approaches in the academic study of the past has led to reductionist readings, if not the complete exclusion of complex or literary texts from the relevant historical records.<sup>28</sup> Rather than considering documentary and "work-like" texts as entirely separate categories, he suggests that they be thought of as aspects or components of any given text that may be developed to different degrees.<sup>29</sup> As such, the historian ought to acknowledge that empirical documents possess "work-like" qualities and complex literary texts entail documentary elements

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27 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 30.

28 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 33.

29 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 30.

as well.<sup>30</sup> If all texts entail “work-like” elements, studying historical texts must inevitably consider the relationship between a documentary reconstruction of the past and an author’s dialogue with that past.<sup>31</sup> A text cannot be seen as

a simple illustration of either a long tradition or the specific time. Rather the problem becomes that of the way long tradition, specific time, and text repeat one another with variations, and the matter of elucidation becomes the degree of importance of these variations and how to construe it. The text is seen as a “place” where long tradition and specific time intersect, and it effects variations on both. But the text is not immobilized or presented as an autonomous node; it is situated in a fully relational network.<sup>32</sup>

These texts, then, must be understood in a set of interacting contexts, such as the author’s intentions and motivations, the societal and cultural relation to the text, as well as the structure and corpus of the text.<sup>33</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel has argued, similarly, that

[a]ll texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in the world, with which they entertain often complex and contestatory relations. In that sense, texts mirror *and* generate social realities, are constituted by *and* constitute the social and discursive formations which they may sustain, resist, contest, or seek to transform, depending on the case at hand.<sup>34</sup>

The historian must look beyond the text and reconstitute the social world in question by “looking at the inextricably interrelated nature of social and discursive practices, of the material and linguistic realities that are interwoven into the fabric of the text, whose analysis as a determinate historical artifact in turn grants us access to the past.”<sup>35</sup> Both LaCapra and Spiegel emphasize that all texts, including the ones that historians frequently valorize as “empirical” and, by extension, deem objective recordings of the past, entail an element of subjective interpretation based on the varying contexts in which the texts emerge and with which they interact.

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30 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 30f.

31 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 27.

32 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 44.

33 LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 36.

34 Spiegel, “History, Historicism,” 77–78.

35 Spiegel, “History, Historicism,” 84–85.

Taking the interactive dynamics between texts and their diverse contexts into account is particularly relevant with regard to those texts that aim to construct exemplary religious personae in their shifting imaginary frameworks. After all, exemplary figures constitute, as Pierre Delooz stated, constructed notions that reflect the discrete historical, geographic, social, and cultural factors of the communities that craft them.<sup>36</sup> But it is equally important to understand that these inter-related and interacting relations between so-called hagiographic texts and their intellectual and social environs are fundamentally the same as they are for other kinds of historical texts, as LaCapra and Spiegel have laid out. Felice Lifshitz argued, accordingly, that the notion of hagiography as a distinct form of medieval religious literature is problematic because such a distinction relies on obsolete historiographical suppositions about methodologically sound historiography, on the one hand, and fictional hagiography, on the other, that did not exist at the time they were written.<sup>37</sup> She continued, stating that in order to understand the function of these narratives in their own historical and intellectual contexts, the scholar must go beyond the anachronistic application of positivist theory and the concept of a “hagiographic” genre.<sup>38</sup> Rather than distinguishing the normative binary of “accurate” and “forged” accounts of the past, Lifshitz’s approach appreciates competing imaginations of past figures and, thus, helps us study the particular functions of these texts in the historical conscience of their time. While LaCapra, Spiegel, Delooz, and Lifshitz all work in the realm of European intellectual history, their approaches can benefit the study of premodern Islamic intellectual history, as I discuss below.

## 2 Are Miracles Categorically “Popular”?

Another facet of many nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars’ approaches is their foundation in secularism and concomitant rejection of miracles. The dismissal of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature as popular veneration is largely based on the assumption that the content of these collections consists primarily of miracle narratives. Tor Andrae, for instance, voiced this view as follows:

Ziemlich früh scheint man auf den gedanken gekommen zu sein, die wunder des propheten in besondere werke zu sammeln. Schon Ibn Sa’d

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<sup>36</sup> Delooz, *Sociologie et Canonisations*.

<sup>37</sup> Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre,” 98, 101.

<sup>38</sup> Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre,” 95.

hatte in der *sīra*, die sein klassenbuch einleitet, die “kennzeichen des prophetentums” in besonderen paragraphen behandelt. Diese anordnung gab den anlass, die wundererzählungen monographisch darzustellen. Solchen werken gab man den titel *dalāʾil al-nubūwa*, d.h. beweise für das prophetentum oder zeichen des prophetentum.<sup>39</sup>

Annemarie Schimmel, likewise, defined *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* as “biographies of the Prophet, studded with evidentiary miracles—those that happened before and after Muhammad’s birth as well as before and after his call to prophethood, and those that pointed to his exalted status as the last Prophet.”<sup>40</sup>

This understanding of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature is problematic for a number of reasons. First, considering miracles generically as the defining characteristic of this literature poses an analytical challenge. On the one hand, scholars like Andrae excluded *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* from “acceptable” religious literature because these works include miracle narratives. On the other hand, core texts, such as the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, contain ample references to events that have been deemed “miraculous,” such as Muḥammad’s splitting of the moon, with the consent of Muslim scholars of various fields.<sup>41</sup> This would imply that pre-modern Muslim scholars distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate miracles. Such debates certainly existed, though they were mostly centered on questions of authenticating the narrative rather than accepting the historicity of the event. Understanding these discourses about how such narratives were differentiated requires in-depth examinations of the specific “miracles” related in each work, and examinations of the sources of their narratives and the various positions scholars have held regarding each “miracle.” In the absence of such elaborate examinations, unspecified references to miracles alone do not suffice to classify *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature as popular hagiography rather than historiography.

This notion of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa*, furthermore, equates the epistemological concern for “proofs of prophecy” with the (mostly) theological notion of miracles without considering the complexity of these two approaches and their heterogeneity among various sectarian groups, intellectual disciplines, and theological schools of thoughts, nor does it take into account how these approaches evolved over time. It is, furthermore, incongruent with the content of extant works of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa*. As I show in chapter 3, earlier compilations list numerous events side by side without any systematic distinction or

39 Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds*, 57.

40 Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 33.

41 Q. 54:1.

commentary. We might be tempted to label some of these accounts as miraculous based on their contents, but this would only project our interpretation onto the intellectual mindset of these authors, who did not distinguish or identify narratives as “miraculous” themselves. By contrast, later independent works, such as those of Abū Nu‘aym and al-Bayhaqī, also included a broad range of narratives but clearly classified some of them as miracles, listed them in separate chapters, and contextualized them in an Ash‘arī theological framework in introductions and commentaries. Thus, *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature reflects evolving epistemological notions of “proofs of prophecy” that at times encompasses prophetic miracles but are not limited or equal to them. In other words, the content of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* collections is more diverse than previous scholars may have assumed. By the same token, not every compilation of “signs of prophecy” includes all miraculous accounts known by its author. Gabriele von Bülow studied “miraculous” *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* and found that in this collection the total of these is more extensive than those accounts he included in his chapter on “signs of prophecy in Islam.”<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, the notions of “miracles” and “proofs of prophecy” occasionally overlap but are by no means interchangeable and the evolving discourses behind each of these notions require further research.

The incomplete textual basis, miscategorization as popular literature, and equation with miracles certainly played a major role for many Western scholars, such that they missed the connection between *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature in general to *ḥadīth* circles and to the broader discourse of proofs of prophecy. The boundaries of the field may have contributed as well. Most scholars of Islamic studies tend to examine *dalā’il al-nubūwa* texts individually and in the context of separate disciplines or intellectual fields, such as *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *kalām*, philosophy, and *tafsīr*, rather than considering their interactions.<sup>43</sup> *Ḥadīth* studies, by contrast, were often subsumed under the field of Islamic law and were mostly considered with regard to aspects of authenticity, or they functioned as a *source* for the reconstruction of Islamic history as well as the history of religious ideas and institutions. The importance of *ḥadīth* to questions of theology as well as their formative role in the articulation of Sunnī Islam in

42 Bülow, “Hadithe über die Wunder des Propheten Muhammad,” 109.

43 For biblical and pseudo-biblical approaches, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, particularly 75–110; Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, particularly 139–191; Schmidtke, “The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials”; Schmidtke, “Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī”; Schmidtke, “Biblical Predictions”; Adang, “A Rare Case of Biblical ‘Testimonies.’” For theological approaches, see Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (trans. Khalidi), *The Proofs of Prophecy*; Aminrazavi and Rowson, “Abū Ḥātim Rāzī”; Goodman, “Rāzī vs. Rāzī”; Talbani, “The Debate about Prophecy”; Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, particularly 80f., 178–183.

general is rarely considered.<sup>44</sup> Yet the inclusion of chapters dedicated to *‘alām al-nubūwa* or *dalā’il al-nubūwa* in various *ḥadīth* compilations, including the canonical collections of al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī, highlights the way epistemological questions such as the recognition and veracity of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission were indeed addressed in *ḥadīth* compilations. Rather than being conceived as one or several genres defined by formal qualities, such as organizational structure, compositional rules, or methodological approaches, *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature should be viewed as part of a vast epistemological discourse on prophecy to which Muslim and non-Muslim scholars of various disciplines and schools of thought have contributed.

### 3 Hagiology as an Analytical Tool

This book is a study of *ḥadīth*-based *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature, particularly during the formative period up to the early fifth/eleventh century, with regard to the scholarly discourses and the social milieu that informed it. As such I am interested in positioning the analysis of this literature in the intellectual framework of its time and approaching the historically evolving notions of “proofs of prophecy” from the perspective of *ḥadīth* as a creative field that contributed to the articulation of doctrines, and, by extension, to the formation of Sunnī Islam. Therefore, it seems helpful to understand this kind of literature through the heuristic framework of hagiography. I do not mean by that to project the specifically Christian-based notion of “saints” and their “vitae” onto Islamic texts and realities nor do I assume an unscholarly origin of these texts. My intent is to apply the concept more broadly, following a recent attempt to redefine hagiography as a comparative and collaborative approach across religious traditions.<sup>45</sup> I adopt Rondolino’s view of hagiography “as an analytical category for the taxonomy of sources that contribute to construct and promote the recognition of a given individual as a perfected being.”<sup>46</sup> We then need to distance our understanding of the term from its etymologically defined nature because the individual under consideration is not ontologically imbued with

44 For the relationship between differing arrangements and theological truths among early Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* scholars, see Newmann, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism*. For discussions about the role of authorial aspects in *ḥadīth* compilations, see Burge, “Myth, Meaning and the Order of Words”; and Burge, “Reading between the Lines.”

45 See the special issue of *Religion*, “Comparative Hagiology: Issues in Theory and Method,” particularly Rondolino, “Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy”; Hollander, “Comparison as Collaboration.”

46 Rondolino, “Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy,” 2.

something *hagios*, “sacred” or “holy.” The exemplary status of perfection is crafted discursively among groups of followers. “There can be no saint, no being that is understood as embodying perfection, without a community that recognizes them as such, in light of a given interpretation of particular doctrines and theories of truth, which construct and preserve their memory and promote their cult and way of life.”<sup>47</sup> Sociologist of religion Pierre Delooz pointed out in the 1960s that the exemplary figure in a religious community should be understood as a constructed notion, reflective of discrete historical, geographic, social, and cultural factors.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the historiographical discourse among scholars today is no longer a quest for the most historically accurate account of an individual’s life. In 1994, Felice Lifshitz argued that in order to understand the hagiographic narratives’ function in the historical consciousness of their time periods, scholars must go beyond the anachronistic application of both positivist theory and the concept of a hagiographic genre.<sup>49</sup> She continued, stating that an examination of these texts should focus on the particular function that might be fulfilled by elevating an individual to the station of an exemplar, and on the processes involved in this elevation and how these relate to an individual or collective worldview. Similar approaches are centered in the emerging field of comparative hagiology, which first grew out of interlocking conversations of scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds at the meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in 2017. Similarly, more recent scholars of Islamic intellectual history have found that an examination of the various texts focusing on Muḥammad’s life should be built on an appreciation of competing ideological interpretations and the agendas of various authors and their respective theological, political, and social realities.<sup>50</sup>

I understand *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature as part of this category of hagiographic texts because these authors each crafted particular theologically-imbued images of Muḥammad and his prophetic mission by selecting materials from *ḥadīth*, *sīra*, and auxiliary literatures. This literature, as part of a hagiographical discourse of constructing the distinct personae of the Prophet, can nevertheless be thought of as deeply historiographic texts in the sense that they contribute in concrete ways to the construction of the authors’ own sense of historical identity. Works of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature emerged at the nexus of inter-religious debates, the development of various religious sciences, and the religio-political events and social movements in the rising

47 Rondolino, “Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy,” 6.

48 Delooz, “Pour une étude sociologique”; Delooz, *Sociologie et Canonisations*.

49 Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre,” 95.

50 For instance, Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*; Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*; Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith*; Frederick Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey*; Michael Muhammad Knight, *Muhammad’s Body*.

Muslim empire, and were part of a larger epistemological discourse that often transcended divisions between various religious disciplines in the Islamic tradition as well as between the boundaries of religious traditions. Crucial moments in the intellectual history of Islam, such as the initial divide between the partisans of *ḥadīth* (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) and theologians (*mutakalimūn*), the short period of state intrusion into theology during the trials (*miḥna*) imposed by al-Ma'mūn, and the ensuing intellectual crisis, the rise of Ash'arī theology, and finally the reconciliation of previously disjointed schools of thought all left their mark on *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature. The texts bear witness to these diverse political, social, and intellectual stimuli and enact a past that informs and gives meaning to the authors' context by providing a foundation for their ideological and doctrinal views.

In chapter 1, I challenge some of the crucial underlying assumptions that have led to various misconceptions about this literature and marginalized it. Based on comparative textual analyses of some of the earliest biographical sources as well as recent studies of the intellectual and social environment in which religious knowledge was disseminated during the early Islamic period, I question the clear-cut dichotomy between scholars and storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*), on the one hand, and the equally common assumption that scholars of the prophetic biography rejected the notion of Muḥammad's miracles in its entirety, on the other. My comparative analysis is based on the accounts of the *hijra* by 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/713) and Wahb b. Munabbih (d. between 109 and 113/728 and 732) and juxtaposes their methodological approaches and their contents. Understanding that one narrative is not representative of each author's corpus, I introduce these accounts, their compilers, and their respective transmitters in order to partially show the trajectory of narratives that occurred in these early texts and became well-established parts of the notion of "proofs of prophethood" in later *dalā'il al-nubūwa* collections.

In chapter 2, I further demonstrate the scholarly origin of early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works by identifying twenty-four early authors who contributed to this literature, from Ma'mar b. Rāshid's (d. 153/770) short thematic chapter to the most well-known independent works by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī and al-Bayhaqī. I emphasize the scholarly provenance of the literature by establishing these authors' social networks and the intellectual and doctrinal environments in which they operated. In chapter 3, I study the methodological and structural approaches in eight extant works and explore how the shifts in these authors' works around the fourth/tenth century are mirrored in their organizational structures.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the contents of the earliest extant works of Ma'mar b. Rāshid, Ibn Sa'd, al-Bukhārī, al-Jūzajānī, and al-Tirmidhī, and their various thematic choices of "proofs of prophecy" in order to understand

the processes by which these authors individually and collectively crafted the notion of “proofs of prophecy” through the narratives they selected.

I use the case of Ibn Sa’d in chapter 5 to examine why interest in “proofs of prophecy” may have expanded during his lifetime and to establish what influences might have shaped his selection processes. Ibn Sa’d’s chapters on the proofs of prophecy provide an interesting test case for a number of reasons: While he is not the first known author to compile accounts thematically, the scope of his chapters is considerably larger than that of his predecessor Ma’mar b. Rāshid. Biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*), furthermore, indicate that in this period there was an overall increase in works written on the topic of “proofs of prophecy.” As Ibn Sa’d’s lifetime coincided with various Christian-Muslim debates and literary exchanges that may have triggered his own interest in the subject, I examine both the socio-historical circumstances in which Christian and Muslim scholars interacted as well as the polemical debates held in light of Christian challenges to the religious legitimacy of their new rulers. This chapter juxtaposes Christian theological positions regarding Muḥammad’s claim to prophethood with Ibn Sa’d’s main theme, in which the learned men of the *ahl al-kitāb* recognized and acknowledged Muḥammad’s prophetic mission.

Finally, chapter 6 focuses on the later *dalā’il al-nubūwa* works of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries which display an increasing degree of systematization with regard to their contents and structural organization; in addition, they frequently conform to the established discipline-based methodologies and theological discourses of their times.

Studying a group of texts in relation to the scholarly discourses and social milieus that informed them involves a number of challenges and requires some caveats. First, there is the selection of works to include. Due to my initial identification of works in biographical dictionaries, I was guided to include works with titles such as *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, *Amarāt al-nubūwa* or similar semantically related titles. Inevitably, a title-based selection process will not provide an exhaustive list of all the works that have contributed to epistemological debates about prophethood, but it grants insight into the various ways authors deliberately and distinctively conceptualized their particular notion of “proofs” or “signs of prophethood” in their respective works. Second, my own process of selection occurred on multiple levels, particularly the interpretative labeling of individual narratives and the subsequent attempts to contextualize them. While I tried to trace the possible factors that may have influenced authors’ choices, this process inevitably occurred through my own subjective lens. In the absence of detailed personal commentary by the authors about their choices, I can only outline correlations between an author’s choices and

concurrent discourses and cannot claim causality between the two with any degree of certainty.

Finally, there were numerous restrictions beyond my control, as the final research for this work was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 that led to worldwide library closures, travel restrictions, and stay-at-home orders. I had initially planned on extending the historical reach of this work beyond the fifth/eleventh century but had to settle for what could be researched with a laptop from home. The resulting analysis of Ibn Sa'd's position in Christian-Muslim debates is deeply indebted to the work of colleagues focused on Christian intellectual history; this enabled me to include Jewish and Christian discourses that were otherwise inaccessible to me due to my lack of expertise and language skills. While my excursion into this sub-field was born out of necessity, I believe it vastly enriched my attempt to contextualize early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature in various intellectual discourses of the time.

## The Scholar and the Storyteller?—*Quṣṣāṣ* in Early Islam

In the early twentieth century, Western views of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature were significantly shaped by its perceived connection to unreliable biographical traditions of the *quṣṣāṣ* and the a priori assumptions scholars of Islamic studies held of its contents.\* Their views were based on the notion that information on Muḥammad's life originated and circulated in two distinct circles, those of scholars who transmitted their accounts in study circles and those of laymen preachers who spread popular but inaccurate tales by word of mouth. This juxtaposition between critical scholarly texts and unreliable popular accounts of the Prophet's life is common among Muslim and Western scholars alike and is premised on the assumption that these two groups and the traditions they produced existed within well-defined boundaries. More recent scholarship on the early nature of the *quṣṣāṣ* has modified this clear-cut dichotomy in which the work of scholars is seen as a methodologically critical approach to Muḥammad's biography that catered to an equally critical scholarly audience, while the lay preachers were depicted as careless in their transmission of questionable materials and were frequently accused of fabricating narratives in order to entertain uneducated masses.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, we need to keep in mind that scholarly approaches in any discipline that encompasses agreed-upon critical methodologies, including *ḥadīth* and *sīra*, only emerged over time. Prior to the development of a distinct "scholarly" tradition, Muḥammad's biography was preserved in the living memory of his Companions, particularly those who embraced Islam at later stages in their lives. Their children, by contrast, imbibed religious teachings from infancy and were regular consumers of preaching and religious acculturation. It was their generation's learned elite who embarked on the more structured promotion of religious teachings.<sup>2</sup> It was the generation that flourished between the years 80/700 and 122/744 that saw the increased evolution of specialized circles of

\* An earlier version of this chapter has been published in Jamal Elias and Bilal Orfali, *Light upon Light. Essays in Early Islamic Thought in Honor of Gerhard Bowering* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 3–24.

1 For studies on the positions of early *quṣṣāṣ*, see, for instance, Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher"; Berkey, *Popular Preaching*; Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*.

2 Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, 42.

learning known as *ḥalaqa*. Over time, these circles became fixed institutions that were usually held in the mosques of the major centers of the Umayyad Empire.<sup>3</sup> Gradually, specializations became separate disciplines, each with distinct methodologies and evolving qualifications.

*Quṣṣāṣ*, on the other hand, are difficult to subsume under one homogenous group identity, as their activities, skills, and social backgrounds varied greatly. Goldziher described the majority of *qāṣṣ* as primarily embellishers and fabricators of religious stories attempting to interpret the Qurʾān and promote religious devotion among the masses, though he did acknowledge that there were some early reputable scholars in their midst and they taught wider audiences and encouraged the Muslim armies in their pursuits.<sup>4</sup> His emphasis, however, remained on portraying *quṣṣāṣ* as unreliable sources. “This association between *quṣṣāṣ* and the fanciful stories led to their being identified by some scholars as a primary source of the fabrication both of the predominantly narrative-style exegetical material on the Qurʾān and of Prophetic *ḥadīth*.”<sup>5</sup>

Much of this negative imagery and the devaluation of the *quṣṣāṣ* held by later Muslim and Western scholars were based on three works written by distinguished medieval scholars. The earliest and most important was *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa-l-mudhakkirūn* (The book of the *quṣṣāṣ* and the admonishers) by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), followed by *Aḥādīth al-quṣṣāṣ* (The *ḥadīth* transmissions of the *quṣṣāṣ*) by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), and the *Taḥdhīr al-khawāṣṣ min akādhīb al-quṣṣāṣ* (Warning the educated about the lies of the *quṣṣāṣ*) by al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505). There was some degree of inconsistency regarding the particular identity of the *quṣṣāṣ*. In the first/seventh century, they were known as *wāʾiẓ* (preacher; admonisher), *mudhakkir* (admonisher), or *qāṣṣ* (preacher), but the precise meaning of each of these terms at the time remains uncertain.<sup>6</sup> Even later texts that mostly criticized their activities and, thus, shaped the Western perception of these individuals, lack specificity as to whom their criticism refers. The Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Ibn al-Jawzī began his treatise with definitions of each of these terms, but notes that *qāṣṣ* was most commonly associated with their practice. But while Ibn al-Jawzī seems to use all of these terms interchangeably, they do not appear to be fully synonymous, as only *qāṣṣ* appears to have gained the negative connotation of charlatanism.<sup>7</sup> It remains unclear what specifically distinguished the three terms in this early period and

3 Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, 63f.

4 Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, 36–38; Goldziher, *Muslim Studies II*, 149–159.

5 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 4f.

6 Pedersen, “The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher,” 215.

7 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 4.

later usage. This lack of clarity renders a universally applicable translation of the term *qāṣṣ* virtually impossible. Lyall Armstrong convincingly argued that the commonly used translations of “storyteller” and “preacher,” with their implications of untrained individuals entertaining uneducated masses with wildly fabricated narratives, do not adequately reflect the activities, textual output, or social contexts of these individuals.

First, Armstrong showed that a large number of *quṣṣāṣ* held other positions and were engaged in other activities during the Umayyad period. Textual evidence across multiple types of literature suggests that those identified as *qāṣṣ* during this period, in fact, addressed a number of religious topics with various methodologies, including the theological question of divine will and human responsibilities,<sup>8</sup> the immanence of death and final judgment,<sup>9</sup> pre-Islamic prophets,<sup>10</sup> and the prophetic *sunna* as the exemplar for the Muslim community,<sup>11</sup> legal rulings,<sup>12</sup> statements related to military conquests,<sup>13</sup> and religio-political matters.<sup>14</sup> Their engagement in religious questions in particular required a thorough education in several areas of religious thought and that often also included non-religious expertise, such as history, biography, and Arabic grammar.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, they appear to have been associated with individuals from numerous scholarly disciplines, including Qurʾān reciters and commentators, *ḥadīth* transmitters, jurists and judges, as well as narrators of *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, orators, admonishers, and ascetics.<sup>16</sup> The areas across which *quṣṣāṣ* and scholarly material was spread in the early period is further evidenced in the representation of *quṣṣāṣ* material in the works of commentary (*tafsīr*). Armstrong identified one hundred nine individuals that were specifically referred to as *qāṣṣ* in a broad array of Islamic sources prior to 132/750, and argued that *quṣṣāṣ* played a pivotal role in the *tafsīr* tradition.<sup>17</sup> An analysis of the *tafsīr* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), for instance, reveals that his commentary consisted overwhelmingly of exegesis by the early *quṣṣāṣ*,<sup>18</sup> and Heribert Horst has shown similar results in his analysis of al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*.<sup>19</sup> Armstrong

8 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 15–21.

9 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 21–33.

10 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 33–38.

11 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 39–41.

12 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 41–45.

13 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 49–70.

14 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 70–74.

15 ʿAthamina, “Al-Qasas,” 54.

16 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 74–152.

17 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 83.

18 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 86f.

19 Horst, “Zur Überlieferung.”

has demonstrated that the majority of *quṣṣāṣ* through the end of the Umayyad period were widely acknowledged religious scholars, whose ranks included reliable *ḥadīth* transmitters.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, we should also refine the frequently held view that *quṣṣāṣ* targeted the uneducated and, thus, potentially gullible population as their audience. The sound reputation of the vast majority of early *quṣṣāṣ*, particularly as transmitters of *ḥadīth*, places them in the ranks of the religious establishment, alongside those whose pedagogy included transmitting *ḥadīth* in teaching sessions to their own students. While these sessions may have occurred in a number of locations and formats, they were not necessarily open to the uneducated “masses.”<sup>21</sup> Their versatile intellectual engagement, social and professional interactions, and impact on scholarly disciplines such as Qur’ān commentary show that the early *quṣṣāṣ* were in no way isolated from scholarly circles but, more often than not, deeply rooted in them.

The fact that the majority of the early *quṣṣāṣ* had solid reputations is not to say that their activities were not subject to scrutiny, and criticism of a few individuals occurred early on. The earliest critics appear to have been Sufis, including Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), who perceived the *quṣṣāṣ* gatherings as inferior to their own *dhikr* circles.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, he cites reports from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) who allegedly viewed the sessions of *quṣṣāṣ* as innovation (*bid’ā*).<sup>23</sup> Later, when preaching and storytelling became closely associated with Sufis themselves, critics complained of the wild emotionalism of the audiences in popular meetings.<sup>24</sup> Armstrong suggested that the involvement of a number of *quṣṣāṣ* in theological debates, particularly on the controversial issue of *qadar*, may have contributed to the eventual repudiation of the *quṣṣāṣ* as a class.<sup>25</sup> A more generic criticism of the profession’s activities emerged in the fourth/tenth century, and took its most well-known form in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa-l-mudhakkirūn*.<sup>26</sup> In it, Ibn al-Jawzī criticized certain aberrant tendencies among the *quṣṣāṣ* and advised them to amend their conduct, but he did not outright censure them.<sup>27</sup> What earned his and other critics’ disapprobation was not the contents of their preaching per se but certain practices of those who engaged in these activities.

20 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 151; Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, 40.

21 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 28of.

22 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 27f.

23 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 142.

24 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 27f.

25 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 279.

26 Pedersen, “The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher,” 217.

27 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 3.

According to some reports, the *quṣṣāṣ* were censured for what was perceived to be their negative influence on Islamic society, exemplified in their personal conduct as well as the lack of proper comportment in their sessions. This was indicated by the pride *qaṣaṣ* fostered in the *qāṣṣ*, the unruliness, especially in terms of volume, of *qaṣaṣ* sessions and the breaking down of gender barriers by allowing men and women to participate in the same sessions.<sup>28</sup>

Some critics were also troubled that gatherings threatened the gender boundaries both among the audiences and because of female preachers.<sup>29</sup> Others were concerned that weak or untrustworthy materials were being transmitted. The authenticity of the material spread by *quṣṣāṣ* was only raised in relation to individual *quṣṣāṣ* rather than the entire group. It is noteworthy that this issue was only one of numerous complaints, and often not the predominant one. This stands in contrast to the common view among medieval and modern scholars that the *quṣṣāṣ* were generally lax and unreliable in *ḥadīth* transmission. Armstrong suggests that the pervasive notion of *quṣṣāṣ* as second-rate scholars that is found in medieval Islamic studies and in modern studies was a result of the ongoing categorization of the disciplines of Islamic thought (i.e., grouping scholars into categories such as *ḥadīth* transmitters, legal scholars, etc.) and the evolving methodological restrictions placed on *ḥadīth* transmission.<sup>30</sup> Emerging theological doctrines also appear to have played a role. For instance, as the doctrine of the protection (*iṣma*) of the prophets developed, traditions and stories that tarnished their reputations were rejected and their transmitters marginalized.<sup>31</sup>

Later criticism of the *quṣṣāṣ* should not obscure the fact that the majority of early *quṣṣāṣ* were largely reputable scholars who were well-trained and active in many fields of religious learning, and thus played an important role in the articulation and diffusion of Islam in the first Islamic centuries. Even before the realms of political and legal authority had crystalized, they operated at the center of a network of individuals who shaped Islamic law by answering questions on ritual and correct behavior posed to them by members of their audiences; thus, they contributed to the process by which the nascent religion defined itself.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, I do not follow the common dichotomy of

28 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 279.

29 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 27–31.

30 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 278.

31 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 278.

32 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*, 22–23.

“scholarly” vs. “popular” narratives but instead distinguish various strands of these traditions as “authenticated” and “unauthenticated” narratives in order to focus on the specific methodological approach chosen by these authors, rather than judging the authors’ work and intellectual and social context in a generic sense. As recent scholarship has reevaluated the significance and role of *qāṣṣ* in early Islamic societies, it becomes clear that the origins, content, and social implications of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature, which has long been viewed as a product of the *quṣṣāṣ*, should also be reconsidered on the basis of textual analyses and the intellectual landscape of its authors. Who contributed to this literature? Can we see any substantial differences in the materials transmitted by transmitters who followed the methodological approaches of authenticating individual accounts through *isnāds* and others who did not? In order to examine this question, I briefly introduce two figures: ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and some of his students who played key roles in spreading the authenticated narratives of Muḥammad’s life; and Wahb b. Munabbih, as the earliest extant source for unauthenticated narratives. This lays the groundwork for a comparison between the two earliest textual bodies on the prophet’s life that I examine in the second half of this chapter.

### 1 ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and the “Authenticated” Traditions

One of the first main figures to employ a critical approach to the prophetic tradition was ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/713).<sup>33</sup> ‘Urwa was a leading legal specialist in Medina and a regular participant in the local teaching circles (*ḥalaqāt*).<sup>34</sup> He belonged to the generation of the “Followers” (*tābi‘ūn*) and had direct family relations to some of the closest Companions of the Prophet: His mother was Asmā’, the daughter of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, his maternal aunt was Muḥammad’s wife ‘Ā’isha, who served as his main informant; his grandmother Ṣafiya was the daughter of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib; his father al-Zubayr was one of the earliest Companions of the Prophet; and his paternal aunt was Khadija, the Prophet’s first wife.<sup>35</sup> These relationships enabled him to obtain firsthand accounts of the early days of Islam. He was generally held in high esteem among the scholars of *ḥadīth* and was considered one of the seven jurists (*fuqahā’*) of Medina. He lectured on *ḥadīth* in a family setting and in public at a mosque, and is said

33 For references to Western scholars holding this view, see Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 10.

34 Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolutions of Islamic Law*, 64.

35 Horowitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 15f.

to have attracted large crowds.<sup>36</sup> Based on the materials that have come down to us, it is evident that he transmitted accounts on all the significant events in Muḥammad's life after his call to prophecy.<sup>37</sup> Like other legal scholars of his time, his approach reflects the early stages of critical *ḥadīth* studies, in that he "supported" the material he transmitted with a chain of transmission (*isnād*). The inclusion of *isnāds* was not yet mandatory and there are indeed some accounts found in 'Urwa's corpus that still lack the chain of transmission.<sup>38</sup>

'Urwa's student al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) followed his teacher in his critical approach to the historical material, though there are instances in which he provides no *isnād* at all.<sup>39</sup> A study of those accounts that have survived suggests that he was the first to give the *sīra* a definite structure.<sup>40</sup> The systematization of the prophetic biography took further shape in the subsequent generation. Three of al-Zuhri's students are known to us as the authors of books on the conquests (*maghāzī*): Mūsā b. 'Uqba (d. 140/758), Ma'mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), and Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 150/767).<sup>41</sup> Ma'mar b. Rāshid employed the stricter standards of later *ḥadīth* scholars and used precise *isnāds*.<sup>42</sup> Other well-known pioneers of *sīra* literature were less rigorous in authenticating their accounts. Mūsā b. 'Uqba presented his material in long, continuous, and mostly anonymous reports, but he occasionally included authenticated traditions that were transmitted by acknowledged scholars of *ḥadīth*. Schoeler and Görke suggest that Mūsā b. 'Uqba did not provide specific *isnāds* for his longer reports because he compiled them from various and sometimes questionable sources, while the individual reports that are preceded by an accurate *isnād*

36 Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*, 29.

37 'Urwa compiled written notes on legal *ḥadīth* and legal opinions, but he is also said to have destroyed these notes at one point, something that he later regretted; cf. Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*, 29f. Later sources like Ibn Kathīr and Ḥājji Khalifa claimed that 'Urwa authored a *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, which, according to Schoeler, contradicts both the European scholarly view of the pace of the development of written traditions in Arabic as well as the Muslim tradition that the *taṣnīf* in general only emerged in the generation of Ma'mar b. Rāshid, Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/768), Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796), and Ibn Ishāq; cf. Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*, 31. Lawrence Conrad, however, states that scholars in the Arab world have recently inclined toward the view that 'Urwa himself compiled such a work; cf. Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 26 n. 106. 'Urwa's correspondence with the caliph 'Abd al-Malik and others regarding questions about the Prophet's life was preserved in al-Ṭabarī and by other historians; cf. Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*.

38 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 270.

39 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 271; cf. Motzki, "Der Fiqh des-Zuhri," 6.

40 Dūri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, 27f.

41 Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 67.

42 Ibn Rāshid, *Expeditions*, xxii.

were taken from the lectures of known scholars.<sup>43</sup> Ibn Ishāq mainly used collective *isnāds* at the beginning of a paragraph or section rather than providing individual ones for each account.<sup>44</sup> Peers criticized him for various methodological shortcomings, such as using questionable *isnāds* and accounts transmitted by the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), frequently citing fabricated poetry, referring to erroneous genealogies, and particularly for transmitting the works of contemporary scholars without having heard them.<sup>45</sup> Al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) used all the sources available to him, including written versions of Ibn Ishāq, Mūsā b. ‘Uqba, and ‘Abd al-Razzāq, but presented partially fictitious collective *isnāds* rather than acknowledging these sources.<sup>46</sup> Al-Wāqidī was repudiated by *ḥadīth* scholars (*muḥaddithūn*), but respected with regard to his scholarship on *sīra*, the *maghāzī*, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).<sup>47</sup> After Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845) is the earliest author of a *sīra* that has been preserved in its entirety. His biography of the Prophet is based, for the most part, on the materials of his teacher, al-Wāqidī, and to a lesser extent on Ibn Ishāq, Abū Ma’shar (d. 170/787), and Mūsā b. ‘Uqba.<sup>48</sup> Scholars who became central figures of the *sīra* literature felt a need to authenticate their material and developed distinct standards for this process that differed from those used by *ḥadīth* scholars.

## 2 Wahb b. Munabbih and the “Unauthenticated” Traditions

By contrast, the earliest written source containing “unauthenticated” traditions goes back to Wahb b. Munabbih (d. between 109 and 113/728 and 732). Fragments of his biography of the Prophet are preserved in one of the earliest Muslim papyri.<sup>49</sup> Despite this material evidence of Wahb’s interest in the Prophet’s life, a list of his works demonstrates that his main field of expertise

43 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 274.

44 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 274.

45 Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, 35f.

46 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 121f., 142f., 183f., 276. Regarding the longstanding debate over whether al-Wāqidī in fact used Ibn Ishāq’s work, see Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*, 138–142.

47 Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 116.

48 Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 121.

49 Georges Khoury edited the papyri fragments of Wahb b. Munabbih, which are held at Heidelberg (PSR Heid Arab 23). Dated 229/844, these papyri constitute some of the earliest textual evidence of Muslim culture. They consist of two texts, the story of David and the biography of the Prophet. For a detailed description of the papyrus, see Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 115–32.

was neither *ḥadīth* nor Islamic history. Wahb's work primarily covered the pre-Islamic heritage, such as the stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*); indeed he is often cited as a source for pre-Islamic history by Ibn Ishāq and others.<sup>50</sup> But while scholars frequently named him as a source for pre-Islamic history, his name was never linked with information on the Prophet's life, though some of his material eventually entered the *sīra* literature anonymously.<sup>51</sup>

As a contemporary of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, Wahb also belonged to the generation of the Followers, but he lacked 'Urwa's close connections to the Companions. Wahb was a native of Sanaa. Direct studies under the Companions would have required him to travel extensively, and we only know with certainty that he went on pilgrimage in 99/718.<sup>52</sup> Both Wahb and his brother Hammām b. Munabbih transmitted traditions on the authority of Abū Hurayra (d. 59/678) and 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās (d. 68/687), but only Hammām maintained close relationships to these two Companions and specialized in *ḥadīth*.<sup>53</sup> From the few *isnāds* that he provided in his work, we assume that Wahb b. Munabbih was aware of the practice of authentication of accounts and occasionally employed them when possible.<sup>54</sup> However, the vast majority of his accounts do not include chains of transmission at all. This absence is probably due to his lack of personal interaction with these well-known scholars; Wahb did not belong to their circles and, therefore, did not utilize their methodology.

Wahb b. Munabbih is most frequently associated with the introduction of *Isrā'īliyyāt* into the Islamic tradition.<sup>55</sup> Khoury has argued that his approach to biblical material suggests that he drew his information from oral Jewish traditions, not from his own study of the Bible.<sup>56</sup> In light of his very limited personal

50 The first book attributed to him bears the title *Kitāb al-Mubtada' wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (even though the title was assigned to the book by posterity and varies according to different authors). Furthermore, a *Kitāb al-Isrā'īliyyāt* is attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih, but this does not seem to have been known in the first-/sixth-century literature; it probably relates to stories arising out of those in the preceding book; Khoury, "Wahb b. Munabbih"; cf. Khoury, *Wahb al-Munabbih*, 1:206, 208, 310f.

51 Khoury, *Wahb al-Munabbih*, 1:277.

52 Khoury, *Wahb al-Munabbih*, 1:211. However, he is also said to have visited his father's native Herat more than once; Khoury, *Wahb al-Munabbih*, 1:194.

53 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:211.

54 Ibn 'Abbās was named about twenty times, Ka'b al-Aḥbār was mentioned less than ten times, and Abū Hurayra about five times; other names occur less frequently; cf. Khoury, *Wahb al-Munabbih*, 1:211.

55 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 210–221; Khoury, "Wahb b. Munabbih."

56 Khoury suggests that Wahb (contrary to his own claims) had not actually read the Bible, because there were considerable differences between his material and actual biblical material; early Muslim scholars like Ibn Qutayba pointed this out as well. While the possibility of Wahb embellishing the materials cannot be ruled out, the parallels to Talmudic

interaction with Companions, it seems plausible that he took his Islamic material from the oral traditions that circulated in his vicinity but lacked formal authentication, then added the few properly authenticated traditions he had received to the oral traditions. Yet, his focus on pre-Islamic traditions and his engagement with unauthenticated materials should not automatically lead to the conclusion that he was, during his lifetime, considered a *qāṣṣ*. Despite his wide association with the *quṣṣāṣ* in modern studies, his name does not appear in connection with the term *qāṣṣ* until much later, and even biographers like al-Mizzī (d. 654/1256), al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), who all lived after Ibn al-Jawzī had written his critique and would have associated *quṣṣāṣ* with Isrāʾīliyyāt, did not specifically identify Wahb as a *qāṣṣ*.<sup>57</sup> He was only explicitly linked to the term in two relatively late sources, Ibn Samura al-Jaʿdī (d. 585/1190) and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 696/1229),<sup>58</sup> which supports more recent views that the early engagement with Muḥammad’s biographic material does not fall into a simple and clear-cut binary between *muḥaddith* and *qāṣṣ*. Because he did not utilize the field’s methodology of supporting his reports with an *isnād*, Wahb was not accepted among the *ḥadīth* scholars (*muḥaddithūn*), but he was also not considered a *qāṣṣ*.

The main distinguishing factor between the “authenticated” and the “unauthenticated” traditions so far appears to have been their methodological approach, i.e., whether or not they provided chains of transmission. However, given that various scholars identified the *quṣṣāṣ* material as the potential origin of miracles in the *sīra*,<sup>59</sup> we should expect differences between the two traditions in terms of their content as well. A comparative look at the earliest available sources highlights similarities and differences between both strands of engagement with the prophetic biography. ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s corpus of traditions on the Prophet’s life was reconstructed by Gregor Schoeler and Andreas Görke, who traced, in later works, *ḥadīths* going back to ‘Urwa. The corpus includes accounts on the beginning of the revelation, the *hijra*, the battles of Badr and Uḥud, the incident of the lie surrounding ‘Ā’isha, the battle of al-Khandaq (trench) and the Banū Qurayza, the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya, and the conquest of Mecca.<sup>60</sup> Accounts of the *hijra* constitute the only common narrative found in both the corpus of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and the papyri of

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and Midrash traditions suggest otherwise. But even these materials do not suffice to explain the entirety of the differences; Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:219f.

57 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 94.

58 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 301.

59 Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, 30.

60 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*.

Wahb b. Munabbih. Therefore, it serves as an example to establish the kinds of narratives circulating in the two traditions.

### 3 Comparative Analysis: The Accounts of the *Hijra* according to ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and Wahb b. Munabbih

‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s accounts of the *hijra* are recorded in numerous versions. There are two extended accounts that were handed down through ‘Urwa’s main transmitters, Hishām b. ‘Urwa and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī.<sup>61</sup> Both of these long versions describe the persecutions Muslims were facing in Mecca, and the emigrations to Abyssinia and Medina. Hishām b. ‘Urwa’s recension is preserved in the form of a letter ‘Urwa sent to the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik.<sup>62</sup> The most extensive version of al-Zuhrī’s transmission is narrated on the authority of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid and recorded in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ*.<sup>63</sup> The traditions of Hishām and al-Zuhrī correspond in most central aspects but diverge in numerous details. In the following I provide a summary of those elements of ‘Urwa’s account of the *hijra* that are common to the transmissions of both Hishām and al-Zuhrī. I then summarize Wahb’s account as it is found in the papyri. After presenting general outlines of both narratives, I provide a more detailed juxtaposition of the differences between ‘Urwa and Wahb as well as various strands of transmission in ‘Urwa’s corpus.

#### 3.1 *‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s Account of the Hijra*

After the Prophet started speaking out against their deities, the Meccans began to oppress the Muslim community, which led many believers to revoke their faith. The Prophet advised his community to migrate to Abyssinia, a trading partner of the Quraysh ruled by a Christian ruler, the Negus. In the meantime, the number of Muslims in Mecca increased and some of the leaders of Quraysh converted to Islam. The pressure on the Muslim community lessened

61 In addition to these long versions, there is a tradition of medium length that was transmitted on the authority of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and a number of shorter traditions that only relate to the *hijra* itself. For a detailed analysis of these traditions see Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 38–77.

62 The letter is found in al-Ṭabarī, albeit not in a coherent account but interspersed with other traditions; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1180f., 1224f., 1234f. A continuous version of this letter is found in al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 6:246f., 375; A shorter version of the same letter is found in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6:212.

63 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 5:384f.; cf. Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 49f.

for a while.<sup>64</sup> The emigrants returned from Abyssinia and many of the people in Medina embraced Islam, leading the Quraysh to increase their pressure on the Muslim community. Seventy people from Medina met with the Prophet in Aqaba and guaranteed him protection.<sup>65</sup> The Prophet advised the Muslims to emigrate to Medina. Abū Bakr asked the Prophet for permission to emigrate with the others, but was, in turn, asked to stay. He purchased two camels and took care of them until God gave the Prophet permission to emigrate. ‘Ā’isha related that one day the Prophet came to their house during midday, which was contrary to his custom of coming in the morning or in the evening. Abū Bakr realized the unusual time and anticipated that something had happened. The Prophet asked other people to leave the house and Abū Bakr assured him that he was alone with his daughters. The Prophet related to him that he received permission to emigrate to Medina and confirmed that Abū Bakr was allowed to accompany him. Abū Bakr offered him one of the two camels and the Prophet insisted on buying it from him. At the time of the *hijra*, Abū Bakr owned a sheep. He ordered ‘Āmir b. Fuhayra<sup>66</sup> to drive the sheep to the cave of Thawr every night, where Abū Bakr and the Prophet could milk it. A man from the Banū ‘Abd b. ‘Adī took the camels and was hired as a guide despite being a pagan. ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr brought news from Mecca every night and once the turmoil about the *hijra* subsided in Mecca, the Prophet and Abū Bakr, together with ‘Āmir b. Fuhayra and their guide from the Banū ‘Abd b. ‘Adī, set out. Abū Bakr and ‘Āmir b. Fuhayra took turns riding [the camel].<sup>67</sup> They reached the Banū ‘Amr b. Awf before noon and were said to have stayed with them for two days, though the Banū ‘Amr b. Awf claimed that it was longer. The Prophet then led his camel until he reached the residences of the Banū l-Najjār.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.2 *Wahb b. Munabbih's Account of the Hijra*

The Quraysh gathered to discuss how to treat the growing threat of Muḥammad and his community. Following the advice of Iblīs, the Quraysh decided to kill the Prophet. Gabriel came to Muḥammad and transmitted a Qur’ānic verse<sup>69</sup> and related to the Prophet what happened during the meeting of the

64 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1180f.

65 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1224f.

66 ‘Āmir b. Fuhayra, a maternal half-brother of ‘Ā’isha and ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr, was previously a slave of Ṭufayl b. ‘Abdallāh but after embracing Islam he was bought and released by Abū Bakr.

67 The letter includes a detailed description of their route; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1224f.

68 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1234f.

69 Q. 8:30.

Quraysh.<sup>70</sup> Muḥammad went to Abū Bakr at midday and told him about the newly revealed verse, the meeting of the Quraysh and the presence of Iblīs, and their plot against him. Abū Bakr was then sent to spy on the Quraysh.<sup>71</sup> The Prophet then told Abū Bakr to prepare for their departure at night. Wahb then quotes ‘Alī<sup>72</sup> who related a first-person account of how the Prophet ordered him to sleep in the Prophet’s place that night. The Prophet told ‘Alī that he will pass by the Quraysh and the latter expressed concern about Muḥammad’s safety; he then assured ‘Alī of God’s protection. ‘Alī followed the Prophet to see what would happen and Muḥammad told him to go to Abū Bakr and convey to him that Muḥammad will be waiting for him at the cave of Thawr. Muḥammad added that Gabriel is walking in front of him, spreading his wings to shield him from the eyes of the Quraysh. The Prophet took a handful of soil and scattered it over the Quraysh’s heads. Then Abū Bakr came to ‘Alī who related to him what the Prophet had said.<sup>73</sup> Wahb then quoted Abū Bakr’s first-person account, stating that he followed the Prophet’s traces. The Prophet mistook him for one of his enemies, rushed, and stumbled, causing himself to bleed. Witnessing this, Abū Bakr identified himself to the Prophet by clearing his throat and the Prophet continued on his way at a slower pace until they both reached the cave of Thawr.<sup>74</sup> Inside the cave were twelve holes, ten of which Abū Bakr filled with pieces of cloth he tore from his garments. He covered the remaining two holes with his back but was stung by a scorpion. The Prophet noticed Abū Bakr in pain and placed his hands on his companion’s leg, saying: “Through the breath of God, I will raise you up and God will heal you from everything that causes you pain.” Abū Bakr was relieved of his pain.<sup>75</sup> The scene then shifts to a first-person account of ‘Alī relating that Abū Jahl and the Quraysh came that morning to kill the Prophet. He told them that Muḥammad passed them during the night while they were awake [and the Quraysh did not see him].<sup>76</sup> Abū Jahl sent messengers all the way to Yathrib to inform the people that Muḥammad and Abū Bakr had escaped and offered a reward of 100 camels for retrieving the fugitives.<sup>77</sup> Umayyya b. Khalaf and Abū Jahl sought Usāma b. Fāyiq to track their traces. At first he stated that all the traces look the same but

70 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:136.

71 Wahb supported these passages with two proper *isnāds*, the first going back to ‘Ā’isha and the second one stopping with himself; cf. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:136f.

72 For this, there is no *isnād* provided; cf. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:140f.

73 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:138.

74 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:142.

75 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:142.

76 This first-person account again lacks an *isnād*; Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:142f.

77 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:144.

then he found the place where the Prophet had passed the Quraysh, but they denied that this had happened. He then found the place where the Prophet had started bleeding and followed the traces to the cave [called] Thawr.<sup>78</sup> The narrative again switches to Abū Bakr's first-person account, stating that he began to fear when he heard a noise but that the Prophet said: "Do not be afraid. God is with us." The narrative voice switched back to the third person, proclaiming that God sent a spider that, within an hour, through magic, made a cobweb that normally would have taken a year to spin. God also sent an angel to the cave in the form of a dove. Then Abū Bakr heard the voices of their pursuers who reached the cave but could not find any traces of them and so assumed that God was shielding the Prophet. The pursuers passed the cave and someone suggested that Muḥammad and Abū Bakr might have sought refuge in the cave but they quickly rejected the idea because the cobweb and the dove would not be in place if anyone had entered the cave.<sup>79</sup> 'Alī and Asmā' bt. Abī Bakr brought food to the cave. On the third day, Muḥammad ordered 'Alī to rent three camels and a guide. Muḥammad specified that the guide should be from 'Abd al-Qays, a tribe that is said to have been Christian. 'Alī hired 'Abdallāh b. Urayqīṭ, and the account mentions that he was passionately reading books, which most likely indicates that he was familiar with Christian scripture. The guide saw the Prophet's "seal of prophecy" on his shoulder. He kissed it and embraced Islam.<sup>80</sup>

They set out, 'Abdallāh b. Urayqīṭ leading the way, and passed the Banū Mudlij. One of them recognized the Prophet. Surāqa mounted his racing horse and followed them. Abū Bakr realized that they were being pursued and suggested that Muḥammad ask God to stop Surāqa. The Prophet followed his suggestion and the legs of Surāqa's horse were paralyzed and sank into the sand. Surāqa asked the Prophet to free his horse and promised not to follow them. The horse was set free and Surāqa talked to Muḥammad until he saw his father's men approach. Surāqa returned to them in order to divert them.<sup>81</sup>

Muḥammad continued to Medina and passed Umm Ma'bad al-Khuzā'īya's camp. A third-person narrator praised her generosity and kindness. The Prophet and his Companions asked for food but she could not provide them with any because of a winter drought. Muḥammad saw a sheep and asked whether it had milk. When Umm Ma'bad denied this, he asked permission to try to milk

78 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:144.

79 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:144f.

80 This passage closes with verses of poetry (presumably recited by 'Abdallāh b. Urayqīṭ) mentioning that "God protects His Messenger"; Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:146f.

81 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:148f.

it and renamed it “Baraka.” The milk satiated him and his men, and he milked it a second time for Umm Ma’bad. After a while Abū Ma’bad returned home and asked about the milk, indicating that all the sheep were out in the pastures grazing. Umm Ma’bad told him about “a blessed man” who came by, and she gave him a description of his appearance. Abū Ma’bad realized that it was the fugitive that the Quraysh were looking for and regretted not having met him.<sup>82</sup>

The next morning, the inhabitants of Mecca heard an unidentified voice relating that the Prophet stopped at Umm Ma’bad’s camp. Muḥammad and his Companions were praised and the voice related that the Prophet drew milk from a barren sheep.<sup>83</sup> When Muḥammad and Abū Bakr reached Medina, Abū Bakr sent a letter to the Quraysh mentioning that the people—with the exception of Surāqa—still demanded proof of the Prophet’s cause and so he related what happened to Surāqa’s horse.<sup>84</sup> When the letter reached Mecca, Abū Jahl and the Banū Makhzūm went to Abū Usāma al-Fāyīq to reproach him for his behavior toward Muḥammad but Abū Usāma stated that their inability to harm the Prophet was due to God’s protection. The notables of the Quraysh also sought to reproach Abū Usāma. Abū Jahl sent a letter to the Banū Mudlij blaming Surāqa, who responded with a letter explaining the situation, that his horse’s legs sank into the ground.<sup>85</sup>

The Prophet arrived at the oasis of Medina.<sup>86</sup> After staying in Qubā’ for a couple of days, he offered Friday prayers in Medina. When various Anṣār invited him to stay with them, the Prophet asked them to return to their houses and he rode his camel with loose reins, because he wanted to leave the decision of his residence to God. People stopped him four times asking him to stay with them but the Prophet asserted his intention to wait until his camel kneeled somewhere. His camel finally chose a location, which the Prophet bought from two orphans and his residential complex was built there.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.3 *A Detailed Comparison between the Hijra Accounts of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and Wahb b. Munabbih*

The juxtaposition of the accounts of the *hijra* by ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and Wahb b. Munabbih’s (appendix) shows considerable differences in terms of their content, but little contradictory information. In most cases, the divergences

82 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:150f.

83 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:152f.

84 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:156f.

85 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:156f.

86 The dates of the *hijra* are given: the Prophet left Mecca on the first day of Rabī‘ al-Awwal and arrived at Qubā’ on the fifteenth of that month; cf. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:160.

87 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:160f.

could simply be a result of the selective process by which the compiler omitted some aspects of an existing account. This is not only clear by comparing the accounts of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr to Wahb b. Munabbih, but it also occurs in the various recensions of ‘Urwa’s account. Regarding the provisions for the Prophet and Abū Bakr, for instance, Wahb does not mention sheep being driven to the cave; recension (a) of ‘Urwa’s account, by contrast, mentions the sheep but not the food preparations of Asmā’ bt. Abī Bakr. Recension (b) includes an independent *ḥadīth* relating to Asmā’s food preparation, and recension (c) combines the two. Therefore, it is plausible that the two pieces of information are complementary but not always mentioned in the same tradition, since ‘Urwa sometimes only transmitted some passages relating to certain themes. For instance, in his letter to ‘Abd al-Malik, references to the emigration to Abyssinia are general, while the recension of al-Zuhrī focuses on Abū Bakr’s encounter with Ibn al-Daghina and thus presents the Muslims’ situation in Mecca and their desire to emigrate through the personal experience of Abū Bakr.

Schoeler and Görke have suggested that the circulation of longer and shorter accounts that contain varying degrees of details indicates that ‘Urwa himself presented the material in different ways, by combining a number of narrative elements and details.<sup>88</sup> The technique of combining various events into coherent narratives was, therefore, not restricted to the realm of “unauthenticated” narratives like that of Wahb b. Munabbih, who presented his entire *sīra* in one continuous narrative. We find longer accounts in ‘Urwa’s corpus that combine the description of the Muslims’ situation in Mecca, the emigration to Abyssinia, and the *hijra*, as well as shorter individual accounts of each of these events. Schoeler and Görke pointed to the fact that the independent recensions of Hishām b. ‘Urwa and al-Zuhrī are close enough in content to assume that ‘Urwa himself had combined various themes and elements into one narrative.<sup>89</sup> These acts of combining or separating the accounts indicate two trends among the “scholarly” tradition: (1) even critical scholars did not necessarily transmit their material verbatim but rather attempted to encapsulate the meaning, and (2) this process required them to select certain elements and omit others. This aspect of selectivity may explain the complete absence of certain elements in ‘Urwa’s account.

The greatest divergence between the accounts of ‘Urwa and Wahb is the plethora of supernatural elements that are only included in the *sīra* of Wahb. As such, the presence of Iblīs among the Quraysh, the Prophet passing the

88 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 75.

89 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 74.

Quraysh unnoticed, the healing of Abū Bakr, the concealment of the cave's entrance with a cobweb, and the encounter with Surāqa are absent in all the recensions of 'Urwa's account. The absence of these accounts in the earliest source led Schoeler and Görke to conclude that the "scholarly" tradition developed from the earliest traditions, such as the corpus of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, and the later *maghāzī* works, such as those of Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, or al-Wāqidī. They state that the distinguishing features of the later works are literary embellishments, dramatic additions to the narrative, the addition of miracle stories, and the increasing significance of certain people.<sup>90</sup> This conclusion is based on several observations: 'Urwa focuses almost exclusively on the Medinan period; the only events he describes preceding the *hijra* are the first revelation and the situation of the Muslim community in Mecca that eventually led to the emigration to Medina.<sup>91</sup> Many events that form generally accepted aspects of the Prophet's life in later *sīra* works, such as his genealogy, stories about his grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and his father 'Abdallāh, Muḥammad's birth, and the years of Muḥammad's childhood and adolescence are missing in 'Urwa's traditions. Moreover, accounts of miracles do not play any important role.<sup>92</sup> But the absence from 'Urwa's accounts of Muḥammad's pre-prophetic period and his alleged miracles is not necessarily proof of the development of *sīra* literature, which later incorporated these aspects. This view of an evolving "scholarly" tradition is built on two premises. First, it presupposes that 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr's corpus is representative of the entire scholarly engagement with the Prophet's biography during 'Urwa's lifetime. Second, and closely linked to this, is the premise that *sīra* literature underwent a linear development that began with the life story of the Prophet, which only encompassed his later life after his call to prophecy and did not contain any miracles. Later biographies were supplemented with narratives of the period prior to the beginning of revelation and with miracles throughout Muḥammad's life. Thus, the biography of the historical figure was transformed into hagiographical legends. *Quṣṣāṣ* material is usually considered to be the origin of the miraculous or folkloristic material added to the "factual" *sīra*. The period of these addenda is thought to have occurred in the generation after al-Zuhrī.<sup>93</sup> This view, therefore, assumes that the "scholarly" *sīra* tradition during 'Urwa's lifetime generally did not include prophetic miracles. It is noteworthy that the compilers themselves did

90 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 264.

91 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 263.

92 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 264.

93 Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, 30; Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 275f.

not label these events as miraculous. This theological classification of miracles can be traced to the interpretation of Western scholars who, as I noted in the introduction, mostly relied on their own cultural framework rather than the framework contemporaneous to the early Muslim compilers. Even if we accept this anachronistic assessment, for the notion of a linear development of biographical literature to maintain its validity, we must assume that none of the miraculous narratives were in circulation prior to or contemporary with al-Zuhrī and are found exclusively in *quṣṣās* materials. There are, however, numerous “miraculous” narratives that circulated among the earliest *sīra* scholars, including those of ‘Urwa himself.

### 3.4 *Miracles in the Corpus of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr*

Although ‘Urwa’s account of the *hijra* does not include any miracles, his accounts of other events in the Prophet’s life suggest that he did not deny the notion of prophetic miracles in general. ‘Urwa’s account of the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya, for instance, recounts the Prophet’s restoration of a dry well. The account is transmitted in numerous long versions by al-Zuhrī and in two long versions by Hishām b. ‘Urwa.<sup>94</sup> These accounts all include the narrative of the Prophet’s men facing a scarcity of water at Ḥudaybiyya. The Prophet took an arrow from his quiver and ordered one of his Companions to stir the well with it. The formerly dry well then began to overflow with water.<sup>95</sup> In addition to the versions transmitted by al-Zuhrī and Hishām b. ‘Urwa, there are traditions going back to Abū l-Aswad independently from al-Zuhrī.<sup>96</sup> According to Abū l-Aswad’s version, the Muslims reached Ḥudaybiyya during intense heat but could only access one well. The Prophet rinsed his mouth, poured the water back into the well, and stirred it with an arrow, and this led the well to overflow with water.<sup>97</sup> Görke has pointed out that this narrative may contain only certain elements of ‘Urwa’s account, but not go back to him, given that it encompasses many elements that are not found in other *ḥadīth* collections or historiographical works. Nevertheless, the parallels to ‘Urwa’s account are clear. Finally, there is a report going back to ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr that is not part of the long versions of al-Zuhrī or Hishām b. ‘Urwa; this report is transmitted on the authority of Yazīd b. Rūmān and Ibn Ishāq. According to this account Gabriel miraculously punished four people for ridiculing the Prophet. Gabriel threw a leaf into the

94 Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 186.

95 Görke, “The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya,” 241; cf. Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 188, 194, 202, 208, respectively.

96 Görke, “The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya,” 256f.; cf. Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 186.

97 Görke, “The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya,” 256f.

face of Aswad b. al-Muṭṭalib and this caused him to become blind; he then pointed at the stomach of Aswad b. ‘Abd Yaghūth, it began to swell and he died of hydrops. Next, Gabriel pointed at the inside of al-‘Āṣ b. al-Wā’il’s foot, and he stepped on a thorn and died from the wound. Finally, Gabriel pointed at the head of al-Ḥārith b. al-Ṭulāṭila, it festered, leading to his death.<sup>98</sup> The accounts transmitted by Abū l-Aswad and Yazīd b. Rūmān may not be traceable to ‘Urwa himself, given that they do not appear in any of the longer versions of ‘Urwa’s main transmitters. However, the references to a water miracle at Ḥudaybiyya were transmitted independently by al-Zuhrī and Hishām b. ‘Urwa and, therefore, provide sufficient evidence that ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr did not generally deny the possibility of miraculous events in the Prophet’s lifetime.

Major *maghāzī* scholars, such as ‘Āṣim b. ‘Umar b. Qatāda, and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, in the generation after ‘Urwa include a number of references to supernatural events that occurred around the Prophet. A common motif in these early accounts is that of various people predicting or announcing Muḥammad’s prophecy. Knowledge of his future prophecy was associated with soothsayers and astronomers,<sup>99</sup> sacrificial animals,<sup>100</sup> *jinn*,<sup>101</sup> and Jews who identified and confirmed Muḥammad based on their knowledge of Hebrew scriptures.<sup>102</sup> There are also a number of less frequent motifs, such as the water miracle that is found in all recensions of ‘Urwa’s corpus. In al-Zuhrī’s body of literature, this account of the water miracle is linked to the motif of the divine protection of the Prophet; that is, his camel’s reluctance to proceed on a specific path is interpreted by Muḥammad as God’s protection.<sup>103</sup> ‘Āṣim’s account of Salmān al-Fārisī’s manumission details how gold increased in weight after Muḥammad touched it with his tongue; this caused it to reach the negotiated

98 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 7:550; Ibn Ḥishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, 1:410; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3:106; cf. Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 71f.

99 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 5:343.

100 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1065f.

101 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:141. The *jinn* announce the beginning of revelation or the *hijra* and their inability to access heaven to overhear the discourses of the angels as they used to. This account draws on the belief that, prior to Islam, *jinn* used to overhear the conversations of angels. However, from the advent of Islam onward, they were hindered from doing so and those *jinn* who still tried were chased away by shooting stars (*shihāb*), as is described in various verses of the Qur’ān (cf. Q. 15:17–18, 37:6–10, 67:5, 72:8–9).

102 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:1065f.; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:134; Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 93. A very similar reference is found in Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, 1:291.

103 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 5:332f.

price of Salmān's freedom.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, 'Āṣim related a story of the Prophet healing his grandfather's eyes during the battle of Uḥud.<sup>105</sup>

Such an increase in material among the scholars of al-Zuhrī's generation might be explained by assuming that the material was already in circulation at the time, but was not transmitted by 'Urwa himself. The fact that 'Urwa mentioned a miraculous event in passing, but related only a few such events himself may simply be a result of his selective choice rather than from a lack of such material in scholarly circles. A similar process occurred with regard to Muḥammad's life story prior to his call to prophecy. While 'Urwa mostly restricted himself to events of the Medinan period, all three of the major *maghāzī* scholars of the subsequent generation, 'Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad (d. ca. 120/738), 'Āṣim b. 'Umar b. Qatāda (d. ca. 119/737), and 'Urwa's student al-Zuhrī, transmitted material on the Prophet's life, including his youth and early years. 'Abd al-Razzāq's recension of al-Zuhrī's *maghāzī*, for instance, included many accounts of the Prophet's conception, birth, childhood, and adolescence, accounts that are usually related in later *sīra* works.<sup>106</sup> Prior to the beginning of the revelation, Muḥammad's life may not have been scrutinized and, therefore, was not as rigorously attested to as it was during the prophetic era. Yet the Followers (*tābi'ūn*), particularly 'Urwa himself, certainly had direct access to the collective memory of the Meccan community and could draw information from them about the time before Muḥammad's call to prophecy. While 'Urwa gained prominence as one of the earliest compilers of *maghāzī*, it should be borne in mind that he was primarily a scholar of *ḥadīth* and one of Medina's leading jurists (*fuqahā'*). Thus, his focus on the Medinan period could simply be a result of his professional interest as a scholar. Given that the life of the Prophet prior to his call to prophecy did not have legal implications, it might not have been of interest to him. The same might be true for supernatural events. Therefore, the rarity of miraculous accounts in 'Urwa's corpus is not necessarily based on the scholars' general rejection of the notion of miracles as part of Muḥammad's biography as early Western scholars like Andrae have suggested. These kinds of narratives were already part of the scholarly discourse in al-Zuhrī's generation and possibly earlier. If these assumptions are accurate, then 'Urwa's corpus might not necessarily be representative of all the accounts circulated by his generation of scholars and

104 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:156. An extended version of this account is found in Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra*, 1:241.

105 Qāḍi Iyād, *al-Shifā'*, 1:321f.; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:158.

106 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣammaf*, 5:313–320.

supernatural events such as the ones Wahb recounted may have been part of the earliest discourse. Armstrong has shown that, while Wahb b. Munabbih came to be affiliated with stories of pre-Islamic prophets, the early sources rarely refer to him explicitly as a *qāṣṣ* and the earliest biographers did not view him as such.<sup>107</sup>

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The overlap between the corpora of ‘Urwa and Wahb on the prophetic biography are limited to the accounts of the *hijra*. Therefore, they are not sufficient to provide a general overview of the materials that were in circulation among the earliest “scholarly” and the “unauthenticated” traditions, nor do they allow us to trace the trajectory of individual narratives entering the *sīra* literature over time. They do show, however, that the two strands often contain very similar material and did not contradict, but rather complement, each other in many instances. Divergences in details occur not only between the accounts of ‘Urwa and Wahb, but also between various transmissions of ‘Urwa’s material. The greatest divergence between the two narratives lies in the numerous supernatural elements that are only found in Wahb’s corpus. This does not necessarily support the view that the “scholarly” tradition did not include such elements in its discourse, particularly given that ‘Urwa himself includes at least one such event in a different account and the scholars of the subsequent generation all included various supernatural accounts of Muḥammad in their collections. All of this suggests that the discourse on Muḥammad’s biography continued to allow for flexibility in the material, depending on its intended audience or purpose, and also that there was not yet a clear-cut dichotomy between “scholarly” and “unauthenticated” traditions. Thus, this textual comparison corroborates more recent research about the religious and social roles *quṣṣāṣ* played in the first/seventh century and suggests that religious scholars and *quṣṣāṣ* operated in overlapping social circles. This more refined view of the networks in which early biographic accounts of Muḥammad may have emerged has significant implications for our re-evaluation of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature since many of the premises regarding its origin in circles of *quṣṣāṣ* have been successfully questioned here.

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107 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam*, 94.

## Biographies of the Earliest *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Authors

*Dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations span a period from the mid-second/eighth century through to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Given that the literature was categorized as popular and subsequently marginalized by scholars of Islamic studies, in large part due to the significant gaps in its early textual history, I focus my study on the early and least studied texts, from the first specimen up to the most widely-known works of the fifth/eleventh century. Theodor Nöldeke and Tor Andrae have pointed out that this type of literature had its predecessor in the *sīra* section of Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*,<sup>1</sup> and Meir Jacob Kister indicated that Ibn Sa'd may have benefited from the antecedent in Ma'mar b. Rāshid;<sup>2</sup> however, these scholars were not aware of the scope of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works and still labeled the later *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works of Abū Nu'aym al-Ṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) and al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) as among the earliest authors, without recognizing that there was a continuous tradition of these works that began more than two hundred years earlier.

In the following, I identify the authors of the earliest *ḥadīth* compilations specifically dedicated to the theme of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* in order to show that this literature was squarely positioned in the scholarly works of their time. The compilations considered here are either independent works by an individual author that are entirely dedicated to the topic of the signs of prophecy or chapters in multi-themed *ḥadīth* collections. The majority of early book-length works seems to be no longer extant and, thus, do not allow for any examination of their contents or structure. Therefore, my decision to include them in this study is based on their titles, which are usually *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, *alām al-nubūwa*, *amarāt al-nubūwa*, or semantically related variations listed in biographical and bibliographical dictionaries. I am aware that using the titles as a selection paradigm carries inherent risks, as it is not uncommon for works to be known by various titles or for the works to have been (re)named by individuals other than the authors. In cases of extant works, both monographs and chapters in larger collections, these doubts can be addressed by studying their

1 Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds*, 26–91. See also Horovitz, *Earliest Biographies*, 120; Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, 2:135.

2 Kister, "The *Sīra* Literature," 356.

content and structure and evaluating whether or not the author, in fact, used the signs of prophecy as a foundational notion around which to organize his compilation. Nevertheless, there is value in considering even those works for which we only have an entry in a bibliographical dictionary. The mere fact that these titles were associated with certain scholars shows that the theme itself was recognizable to a larger scholarly audience and was not a type of marginalized popular literature, and this holds true regardless of whether or not we can verify an individual work's existence and contents.

A few words must be said about the notion of authorship in this regard. Given that even the earliest scholars in question, such as Ma'mar b. Rāshid and Ibn Sa'd, drew on existing written sources and authenticated oral reports, the understanding of authorship should be expanded beyond the narrow sense of an individual composer of a literary work. The act of compiling works of *ḥadīth* may not require the same level of literary involvement as the composition of an original work of fiction, but it still necessitates a creative process of selecting, omitting, and arranging accounts in a particular way which, in this case, actively influences the molding of Muḥammad's life story. But here, the implications go beyond the articulation of a biographic narrative. The selection of these accounts and the way the compiler chose to organize and present them in his work may also have a theological and doctrinal importance with regard to the kinds of events he presents as having evidentiary value to Muḥammad's prophetic mission.<sup>3</sup> It is this particular act of creating theologically relevant epistemological paradigms of prophecy that I consider the most significant contribution of authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature.

Given the large number of compilers, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide exhaustive biographies for each of them. Rather, I present short sketches of their lives that enable us to identify the individual authors of these works. In addition, these biographical sketches allow us to conduct a network analysis, by studying their interactions with one another; this, in turn, lays the groundwork for later chapters, in which I investigate whether authors who interacted closely with one another chose similar narratives for their notion of "proofs of prophecy." Finally, these biographical summaries include information about the scholars' legal and theological orientations, as available, in order to place them in a larger intellectual landscape. In subsequent chapters, this background provides us with an opportunity to contextualize their

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3 Andrew Newmann has argued similarly that the early Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections by al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣaffār, and al-Barqī differed in content and arrangement due to differing statements about theological truths in Twelver Shī'ism, see Newmann, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism*, particularly 193–201.

respective methodological approaches as well as their selective emphases and their notions of the “proof of prophecy” with regard to religious disciplines and particular legal or theological schools of thought.

With regard to the parameters of selecting authors and works for this chapter, I focus on *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works. Accordingly, this chapter only includes authors whose works consist of accounts from *ḥadīth* or *sīra*, and does not include theologically oriented collections with similar titles, such as *Kitāb Ḥujjaj al-nubūwa* by al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–869) or *Tathbīt dalāʿil al-nubūwa* by ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025). I have divided the authors of *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works into four generations to establish a better sense of chronology. Given that many of these works are no longer extant, a chronological arrangement by composition is often not possible. Therefore, these works are arranged roughly based on the death dates of their authors. Note that this division is intended to provide a structure to orient readers and follow the literature’s evolution. As such, these generational divisions are often approximated groupings rather than clear-cut distinctions based on essential characteristics of the authors’ biographies or works.

## 1 The First Generation

The earliest compilations of “signs of prophecy” appear in the mid-second/eighth century, at a time when most religious sciences, including *ḥadīth* scholarship, were still in the process of articulating specific methodologies and boundaries between them were not always clear-cut. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors in this period have a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, though they are all part of scholarly circles.

The first author, Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), is a fixture in the early biographical tradition of the Prophet through his *maghāzī* work, one of the earliest surviving books on the subject. Originally a Persian slave from Basra, Maʿmar was deeply steeped in Arabic language and Islamic culture and learning, and allegedly sought knowledge from famous Basran scholars such as Qatāda b. Dīʿāma (d. 117/735) and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728).<sup>4</sup> Maʿmar traveled the Islamic world as a trader for his masters; this allowed him to expand his studies beyond the limits of his native city. He serendipitously became a student of the leading scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) during his stay at the caliphal court in Ruṣafā. Maʿmar’s transmission of al-Zuhrī’s materials was highly desirable in the eyes of other scholars, as Maʿmar was able to recite memorized traditions

4 Ibn Rāshid, trans. Anthony, *The Expeditions*, xxvi.

back to al-Zuhrī for review and correction.<sup>5</sup> Later, as Syria descended into the violence of the third civil war, Ma‘mar settled in Sanaa for the last twenty years of his life. There he became part of what Scott Lucas called a brief efflorescence of *ḥadīth* scholarship;<sup>6</sup> he transmitted *ḥadīth* to major scholars, including ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām (d. 211/827), who claimed to have studied with Ma‘mar for seven years and who was responsible for putting much of Ma‘mar’s work into writing. Among the texts preserved by ‘Abd al-Razzāq is Ma‘mar’s *al-Jāmi‘*, which is included as an appendix in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaḥ*.<sup>7</sup> *Al-Jāmi‘* contains a short chapter entitled “Bāb al-nubūwa,” which contains six *ḥadīths* and which Kister identified as the earliest thematic compilation of what later developed into *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature.<sup>8</sup> Interest in compiling *ḥadīth* about signs of Muḥammad’s prophecy increased significantly after Ma‘mar’s lifetime, as dedicated chapters in multi-thematic works grew in length and the first independent works on the subject began to emerge.

The second known compilation on the subject was penned by Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/845). Born in Basra around 167/784, he died in Baghdad. Only a little is known of his life: He studied with the leading scholars of Medina and later moved to Baghdad, where he became a scribe and transmitter of al-Wāqidi.<sup>9</sup> Among his teachers was ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām. While the majority of his teachers were praised as reputable scholars of *ḥadīth* in Sunnī biographical dictionaries, the eighth-/fourteenth-century Ḥanbalī scholar al-Dhahabī considered two of them, Hishām b. al-Kalbī (d. 206/822) and Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823), weak in *ḥadīth* but invaluable in historical traditions (*akhbār*).<sup>10</sup> Ibn Sa‘d’s famous biographical dictionary *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* is his only work that has come down to us. The work opens with the biography of the Prophet, which constitutes the earliest fully extant *sīra* after Ibn Hishām’s edition of Ibn Ishāq.<sup>11</sup> Ibn Sa‘d’s biography of the Prophet includes two extensive thematic chapters describing the “signs of prophecy” (*‘alāmāt al-nubūwa*); one is dedicated to “signs” preceding Muḥammad’s call to prophecy, the other one presents “signs” subsequent to the first revelation.

5 Ibn Rāshid, trans. Anthony, xxvi.

6 Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 71f.

7 Cf. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaḥ*, 10:379–468, vol. II.

8 Kister, “The Sirah Literature,” 356.

9 Fück, “Ibn Sa‘d,” 3:922; for references in biographical dictionaries, cf. Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 118 n. 129; Mūsā, *Ibn Sa‘d wa-ṭabaqātuhu*, 17.

10 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 1:250 (Ibn al-Kalbī), and 254 (al-Wāqidi).

11 It has been debated whether this biographical account originally existed as an independent work entitled *Akhbār al-nabī*; see Loth, *Classenbuch*, 24–34; cf. Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 120. For a succinct summary of the entire debate, including the reference to Arabic biographical dictionaries, see Mūsā, *Ibn Sa‘d wa-ṭabaqātuhu*, 23f.

Their significance in Ibn Saʿd's biography is attested by the fact that these two chapters are the most voluminous ones of his entire *sīra* section, containing forty-seven and forty-two accounts respectively. Ibn Saʿd was a student of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, who, as noted, was Maʿmar b. Rāshid's student and wrote much of his teacher's materials. Thus Ibn Saʿd's interest in the signs of prophecy might have been influenced by Maʿmar's short chapter on the same subject. In chapter 3, I explore the issue of whether they compiled similar narratives in their respective chapters.

Around the same time Ibn Saʿd compiled his two extensive chapters, the first book-length *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works emerged among contemporaneous *ḥadīth* scholars and early Muʿtazilī figures. As such, Ibn al-Nadīm ascribed a book entitled *Ḥujja fī ithbāt al-nabī* to the alleged founder of the Muʿtazilī school of Baghdad, Bishr al-Muʿtamir (d. 209–210/825–826), and a work of *aʿlām al-nubūwa* to the caliph al-Maʿmūn (r. 198–218/813–833), who famously enforced Muʿtazilism as the creed of the state.<sup>12</sup> The correlations between *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* compilations and other disciplines' interest in the subject is discussed in a later chapter; it is noteworthy that interest in the signs of prophecy during this period was not restricted to circles of *ḥadīth* scholarship. One of Ibn Saʿd's colleagues was Abū Bakr al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834), a *ḥadīth* scholar from Mecca who accompanied al-Shāfiʿī to Egypt and stayed there until al-Shāfiʿī's death in 204/820, then eventually returned to his native Mecca.<sup>13</sup> He transmitted from al-Shāfiʿī,<sup>14</sup> Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 196/811),<sup>15</sup> and others. Al-Ḥumaydī studied with Sufyān for nineteen years,<sup>16</sup> and was in charge of transmitting his teacher's material.<sup>17</sup> Al-Ḥumaydī was generally considered a reliable transmitter<sup>18</sup> and his material was passed down by renowned *ḥadīth* scholars (*muḥaddithūn*) like al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870),<sup>19</sup> Muslim (d. 261/875), Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887), Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), al-Nisāʿī (d. 302/915), Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī (d. 264/878), and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī

12 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 162 and 129, respectively. Neither book has been preserved.

13 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:101f.

14 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:101f.

15 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:502; al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, 5:7f.; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 413f.

16 Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, 5:7 f.

17 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:502.

18 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:502.

19 Sezgin found excerpts of al-Ḥumaydī's books in direct transmission in thirty-three passages in al-Bukhārī's *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, who also quotes him forty times via intermediaries; Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:101f.

(d. 322/934).<sup>20</sup> Ḥājī Khalīfa/Kātib Çelebī mentions his *dalā'il al-nubūwa*,<sup>21</sup> which has not been preserved.

The second author of an independent *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work was Abū l-Ḥasan al-Madā'inī (d. between 224 and 231/839 and 845), who was born 161/777 in Basra but lived in Madā'in and later went to Baghdad.<sup>22</sup> Al-Madā'inī authored *muṣannaḥ* works<sup>23</sup> and was considered one of the greatest *ḥadīth* scholars of his era and was praised for his expertise in criticizing *ḥadīth* narrations (*'ilāl*).<sup>24</sup> As a student, he heard traditions from his father, Ḥammād b. Zayd, Hashīm, Sufyān b. 'Uyayna,<sup>25</sup> and 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām.<sup>26</sup> In addition to *ḥadīth* proper, he was learned in the traditions (*akhbār*) of the Arabs and their genealogies; the history of the conquests (*maghāzī*); and in the transmission of poetry.<sup>27</sup> The sources provide lists of his students. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī names al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, Aḥmad al-Khazzāz, al-Ḥārith b. Usāma, and al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. al-Mutawakkil as people that related *ḥadīth* from him.<sup>28</sup> Al-Bukhārī and al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) also mention that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) heard *ḥadīth* from him.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, al-Dhahabī lists al-Dhahālī, Abū Dāwūd, Ismā'īl al-Qāḍī, Abū Ya'al, and al-Baghawī as his students.<sup>30</sup> Opinions diverge with regard to the year of al-Madā'inī's death. According to Ibn Sa'd, al-Madā'inī died in Samarra in 234/849.<sup>31</sup> Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī states that he died in 224/839 or 225/840 aged 93.<sup>32</sup>

According to Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Madā'inī authored some 200 books on various historical subjects such as the Quraysh, the caliphs, the Arabs, and poets, as well as works on the conquests and *ḥadīth*.<sup>33</sup> The list of al-Madā'inī's works on the Prophet himself includes thirty titles covering aspects of the Muḥammad's life such as his ancestors, marriages, physical appearance, campaigns/conquests (*maghāzī*), his correspondence to rulers, his vows, pledges, and more.

20 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 413f.; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 2:334f.

21 Kātib Çelebī/Ḥājī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 2:1418.

22 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:108.

23 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12:54f.

24 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:108.

25 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 428f.

26 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:108.

27 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12:54f.

28 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12:54f.

29 Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, 6:113f.; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 428f.

30 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 428f.

31 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 7:308.

32 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 12:54f.

33 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:315–323; cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 7:357.

It also mentions one work dedicated to the Prophet's "signs" (*ayāt al-nabī*).<sup>34</sup> None of these books seems to be extant.

A picture emerges that clearly positions all the earliest authors of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works in the scholarly tradition, though their specific fields varied. Ibn Saʿd in particular contributed less to *ḥadīth* scholarship proper and more to its auxiliary field of investigating narrators (*ʿilm al-rijāl*). This first generation of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors were, furthermore, linked in one way or another, and we find many sharing prominent teachers. All drew on the materials of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), either directly or through his student Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 196/811). Sufyān was a Qurʾān commentator, jurispudent, and most prominently, a *ḥadīth* scholar<sup>35</sup> who had studied with al-Zuhrī and was considered one of his major transmitters.<sup>36</sup> The three authors who compiled more extensive material on the signs of prophecy, al-Ḥumaydī, al-Madāʿinī, and Ibn Saʿd, were not only contemporaries, they also shared several of their teachers. As such, all three studied with Sufyān b. ʿUyayna,<sup>37</sup> although it cannot be established whether or not they studied with him at the same time. Thus, theoretically, the compilations of Ibn Saʿd, al-Ḥumaydī, and al-Madāʿinī could offer a comparison as to whether they shared a corpus of accounts that could be traced back to their teacher Sufyān b. ʿUyayna. Unfortunately, the textual basis is insufficient for us to draw such conclusions, given that the only preserved work of al-Ḥumaydī is his *Musnad* and nothing remains of al-Madāʿinī's works. "Sufyān" is mentioned 1,252 times in al-Ḥumaydī's *Musnad*. Yet, there are no obvious parallels in the accounts of al-Ḥumaydī and Ibn Saʿd.<sup>38</sup> Even if the records in al-Ḥumaydī's *Musnad* and Ibn Saʿd's chapters on the signs of prophecy overlapped, the assumption that al-Ḥumaydī also included these accounts in his *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* would be conjectural, as we have no textual evidence from al-Ḥumaydī's *dalāʿil* work itself.

While neither al-Zuhrī nor Sufyān seems to have written on signs of prophecy specifically, various *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors of this generation were connected to the earliest author of this literature, Maʿmar b. Rāshid. Ibn Saʿd

34 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:316.

35 Spectorsky, "Sufyān b. ʿUyayna"; cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:96; Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʿallifīn*, 4:235.

36 Spectorsky, "Sufyān b. ʿUyayna"; Juynboll has pointed out that there was debate whether al-Madāʿinī might have been too young to study with al-Zuhrī; cf. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 568.

37 For al-Ḥumaydī and al-Madāʿinī, see above; for Ibn Saʿd, see Mūsā, *Ibn Saʿd wa-ṭabaqātuḥu*, 19.

38 Furthermore, traditions on the authority of Sufyān in the six canonical collections rarely relate to the Prophet's life and there are no accounts of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* or similar contents; cf. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 568–621; cf. Wensinck, *Concordance*, 8105f.

is indirectly linked with him through the intermediary ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām, from whom Ibn Sa‘d received Ma‘mar’s material,<sup>39</sup> and al-Madā’inī also studied with him. Given that the texts of al-Ḥumaydī and al-Madā’inī are no longer extant, our knowledge of what the first generation of compilers gathered as “signs of prophecy” is restricted to the small chapter in Ma‘mar’s *al-Jāmi‘* and the two chapters in Ibn Sa‘d’s *Ṭabaqāt*.

## 2 The Second Generation

The second generation of early contributors to *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature includes some of the most prominent *ḥadīth* scholars of the third/ninth century. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Sa‘dī l-Jūzajānī (d. 259/873) was born toward the end of the second/eighth century, probably during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 169–183/786–809).<sup>40</sup> There are a number of uncertainties about his biography. It is not known where he was born, but his *nisba* suggests Jūzajān.<sup>41</sup> Even though al-Jūzajānī traveled widely in search of *ḥadīth*, information about his journeys tends to be scarce. Given that a number of his teachers who died before 210/826 were people from Jūzajān, Kufa, Basra, and Baghdad, it seems likely that he visited these places at a young age. It is attested that he traveled to Hamadhan in the year 230/845 or 232/847, and to Egypt in 245/860; we have no details about his trips to Mecca, al-Ramla, and Basra. His biographers agree that he eventually settled in Damascus, and during his time there, he corresponded frequently with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.<sup>42</sup> Some of his later biographers, such as Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), Ibn ‘Adī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/976), and al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), sought to discredit him among Sunni scholars by claiming that he harbored ‘Alid tendencies. However, none of these scholars were al-Jūzajānī’s students or otherwise in contact with him, and those who were in contact with him, including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, never mention any ‘Alid tendencies. Al-Jūzajānī died in Damascus in 259/873.

Al-Jūzajānī was clearly a well-established participant in the circles of *muḥaddithūn*. Biographical dictionaries list that he had a total of 137 teachers,

39 Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 74.

40 The exact date of birth is not known. Based on the fact that some of his teachers died in 203/819, al-Bastawī estimated that al-Jūzajānī was born in the 180s/800s; cf. al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 10f.

41 According to Yāqūt (*Kitāb Mu‘jam al-buldān*), Jūzajān or Jūzajānān are the same, referring to a vast rural district in Khurasan between Balkh and Merv, with cities like Fāryāb, al-Anbār and Kilār. cf. al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 11ff.

42 Al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 39.

including Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/848), Ishāq b. Rahawayh al-Ḥanẓalī (d. 238/852 or 853), and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).<sup>43</sup> He was a contemporary of al-Bukhārī, and Muslim (d. 261/875),<sup>44</sup> and his students included Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), al-Tirmidhī, al-Nisāʿī, Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī, Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 277/891), Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī (d. 281/894), and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).<sup>45</sup> Thus, the list of his teachers and students firmly positions him in the realm of *ḥadīth* scholarship. Indeed, al-Jūzajānī was a famously critical scholar who required that accounts be backed up with sound chains of transmission.<sup>46</sup> A total of seven books are attested to him. Four of these pertain to *ḥadīth* sciences, *Aḥwāl al-rijāl*, *al-Mutarjīm*, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, *Kitāb al-Duʿafāʾ*, one records his correspondence with Ibn Ḥanbal (*Masʿūd al-Imām Aḥmad*), one is a historical work (*al-Tārīkh*), and finally his work dedicated to the signs of prophecy (*Amārāt al-nubūwa*).<sup>47</sup> This last work is preserved in a unique unpublished manuscript fragment in the Zāhiriyya collection.<sup>48</sup>

The list of early *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* contributors also includes three compilers whose *ḥadīth* collections later became part of the six canonical *ḥadīth* collections of Sunnī Islam, namely, those of al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, and Abū Dāwūd. The earliest of these three, al-Bukhārī, was a contemporary and student of al-Jūzajānī. Having finished his elementary studies in his native town of Bukhara at the age of eleven, al-Bukhārī immersed himself in the study of *ḥadīth* and started a series of journeys during which he passed through all the important centers of Islamic learning, including the major cities of Iraq, the Hijaz, and Egypt. Al-Bukhārī's educational journey continued for some four decades; among his numerous teachers, he counted al-Ḥumaydī,<sup>49</sup> al-Jūzajānī, and Ishāq b. Rāhawayh al-Ḥanẓalī. Al-Ḥanẓalī allegedly mentioned to al-Bukhārī that he wished a scholar would compile a comprehensive book containing only sound *ḥadīth* and this is said to have inspired al-Bukhārī to compile his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>50</sup> Al-Bukhārī's magnum opus, in fact, contains a substantial chapter called “Alāmāt al-nubūwa fi l-Islām” of more than sixty *ḥadīth*; this makes it the second most extensive chapter on *ʿalāmāt* of his generation.

43 For a complete list, please see al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 16–26.

44 Al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 9.

45 For a full list of his students, see al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 27–30.

46 Al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 40.

47 Al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 35–37.

48 Damascus Asad Library, MS Majmūʿ 104, fols. 162–165; cf. al-Albānī, *Fihriis*, 250.

49 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 413.

50 Ṣiddiqī, *Ḥadīth Literature*, 53f.

Another contemporary of al-Jūzajānī and al-Bukhārī who is said to have penned an independent *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work was Abū Zur'a al-Rāzī.<sup>51</sup> Together with his friend Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, he was considered one of the most influential *ḥadīth* scholars of his time.<sup>52</sup> He was also a student of al-Jūzajānī and on several occasions visited Baghdad,<sup>53</sup> where he frequently sat with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855).<sup>54</sup> Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898) was among al-Rāzī's students in Baghdad.<sup>55</sup> His *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work does not seem to be extant.

The well-known *ḥadīth* compiler Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān al-Asha'ṭh al-Sijistānī is, of course, most famous for his *Sunan*, but he is also associated with an independent work entitled *A'lām al-nubūwa*,<sup>56</sup> though it is not extant. Following his elementary education in his native city of Sijistān, he studied under Muḥammad b. Aslam (d. 242/856),<sup>57</sup> and then traveled to Basra, where he acquired most of his *ḥadīth* training. In 242/838 he visited Kufa, from where he set out to travel to the Hijaz, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Egypt. He met most of the foremost *ḥadīth* scholars of his time, including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal,<sup>58</sup> al-Jūzajānī,<sup>59</sup> and al-Madā'inī,<sup>60</sup> and acquired from them a profound knowledge of the *ḥadīth* that were available. His most celebrated book on *ḥadīth* and Islamic law is his *Sunan*, one of the six canonical *ḥadīth* collections of Sunnī Islam.

Another compiler whose collection later gained canonical status among Sunnī scholars was Abū 'Īsā l-Tirmidhī. Born in Mecca in 206/821, he traveled extensively in his quest for *ḥadīth*, visiting the great centers of Islamic learning in Iraq, Iran, and Khurasan, where he associated with eminent scholars, such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd,<sup>61</sup> and al-Jūzajānī.<sup>62</sup> He died in Tirmidh in 279/892. Al-Tirmidhī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* is recognized as one of the most important works of *ḥadīth* literature, and is unanimously included among the six canonical collections of Sunnī *ḥadīth*. This collection contains a chapter

51 Al-Sakhāwī, *al-I'lān*, 91; cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Nayl*, 1:222.

52 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:145. He is not to be confused with the Ismā'īlī scholar Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān al-Rāzī (d. 322/934).

53 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārikh Baghdād*, 10:326.

54 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:145.

55 Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:145.

56 Al-Sakhāwī, *I'lān*, 91.

57 Yāqūt, *Kitāb Mu'jam al-buldān*, 3:44.

58 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira al-ḥuffāz*, 549.

59 Al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 27.

60 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira al-ḥuffāz*, 428.

61 Ṣiddīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature*, 61f.

62 Al-Bastawī, *al-Imām al-Jūzajānī*, 27.

entitled “Bāb mā jā’a fī ayāt nubūwat al-nabī wa-mā qad khaṣṣa Allāh bihi” of nine *ḥadīth*.

Adding to the list of widely renowned authors of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works is Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898), who studied *ḥadīth* with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.<sup>63</sup> Among his teachers were the Basran Musaddad b. Musarhad, who was linked to the Ḥanbalī school,<sup>64</sup> ‘Affān b. Muslim, also a *muḥaddith*; al-Qāsim b. Sallām, an exegete and man of letters;<sup>65</sup> and Abū Nu‘aym al-Faḍl b. Dakīn,<sup>66</sup> who was also a teacher of Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī. Later biographers disagree with regard to al-Ḥarbī’s school of thought. Ibn Kathīr calls him a Ḥanbalī, while al-Subkī refers to him as a Shāfi‘ī.<sup>67</sup> Whatever his legal affiliation may have been, in terms of theology al-Ḥarbī vigorously opposed Mu‘tazilism, particularly the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur‘ān. He was joined in his opposition to Mu‘tazilī ideas by the famous *ḥadīth* scholars Ibn Abī Shayba, Ibn al-Munādī, Ibn Ṣā‘id, and Ibn Ma‘īn, who viewed themselves as promoters of Sunnī Islam.<sup>68</sup> Books attributed to al-Ḥarbī include *Kitāb Manāsik al-ḥajj*, *Kitāb al-Hadāyā*, and *Kitāb al-Hammām*, twenty-four collections of *ḥadīth*,<sup>69</sup> as well as a *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* work.<sup>70</sup>

Abū Bakr al-Firyābī (d. 301/913) was another *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* author who moved in similar scholarly circles as did al-Ḥarbī. Having studied *ḥadīth* in Khurasan and Transoxania, as well as in Iraq, the Hijaz, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, al-Firyābī eventually took up residence in Baghdad. Among his numerous teachers was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s well-known protégé Ishāq b. Rāhawayh al-Ḥanzalī.<sup>71</sup> Al-Firyābī was considered reliable in his transmissions and his lectures attracted large crowds. He died in 301/913 at the age of 94.<sup>72</sup> He composed a *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* work that has been preserved and edited.<sup>73</sup>

63 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira al-ḥuffāz*, 584f.

64 Brockelmann, *GAL*, Suppl. 1:310.

65 Vadet, “Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq.”

66 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira al-ḥuffāz*, 584f.

67 Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 9:79; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*, 1:26.

68 Vadet, “Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq.”

69 Vadet, “Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq.”

70 Kātib Çelebi/Ḥājji Khalifa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 1:860; al-Iṣfahānī, *Nayl*, 223.

71 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 7:200; for extensive lists of his teachers, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 7:199–202.; al-Firyābī, *Kitāb Dalāʿil al-nubūwa*, 1:10f.

72 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 7:199–202.

73 Al-Firyābī, *Kitāb Dalāʿil al-nubūwa*.

Abū Sulayman Dāwūd b. ‘Alī b. Khalaf al-İṣbahānī l-Zāhirī (d. 270/884) was born in Kufa around 199/815.<sup>74</sup> His family was originally from Isfahan.<sup>75</sup> He went to Nishabur to study with Iṣḥāq b. Rahwayh al-Ḥanzalī before going on to Baghdad, where he lived and authored his books.<sup>76</sup> Originally a Shāfi‘ī, his tendency to reject human reason and to rely solely on the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* eventually went beyond the Shāfi‘ī practice and later became a pivotal approach of the *madhhab* that bore his name though it died out around the eighth/fourteenth century. Ibn al-Nadīm lists him as the author of a work entitled *‘Alām al-nubūwa*, which seems to be lost.<sup>77</sup>

Being a scholar of *ḥadīth*, theology, and most famously a writer of *adab*, Abū l-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Qutayba (d. 276/889) was one of the great Sunnī polymaths of the third/ninth century. He was born in Kufa in 213/828, but little is known of his early life. Biographers have produced long lists of his teachers,<sup>78</sup> and Lecomte has identified Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Rāhawayh al-Ḥanzalī as someone who greatly influenced the young Ibn Qutayba.<sup>79</sup> After the trials (*miḥna*) imposed by al-Ma‘mūn, Ibn Qutayba found himself popular because of his literary works; he was appointed *qāḍī* of Dinavar around 236/851 and held the office for nearly twenty years. After 257/871, Ibn Qutayba devoted himself to teaching his works in a district of Baghdad until his death.<sup>80</sup> Ibn Qutayba authored a work called *‘Alām al-nubūwa*, of which an incomplete and apparently unique manuscript was preserved in the Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriyya library in Damascus.<sup>81</sup> This work is not a *ḥadīth*-based collection, rather it consists of biblical and, mostly, pseudo-biblical passages that were used to buttress the Qur’ān’s position that Muḥammad’s prophetic mission was predicted in previous scriptures and therefore provides further evidence of the veracity of his prophecy. Despite this very different methodological approach, its contemporaneous existence with the *ḥadīth*-based *dalā’il al-nubūwa* works gives us a sense of contemporary debates around prophecy in other Islamic disciplines.<sup>82</sup>

Abū Bakr ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd b. Sufyān b. Qays (d. 281/894), commonly known as Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, was a teacher and author of

74 Brockelmann, *GAL*, 1:183; Suppl. 1:312; Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:312.

75 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 8:369.

76 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 8:369.

77 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 272.

78 For instance, al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 1:764.

79 Lecomte, “Ibn Qutayba.”

80 Cf. Lecomte, “Ibn Qutayba.”

81 MS Majmu‘ 955/6; fols. 127a–159b. For a description of the manuscript, see al-Albānī, *Fihris*.

82 These debates are discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

*muṣannaf* works on asceticism<sup>83</sup> and edifying literature, such as those that preach patience, humility, penitence, trust in God, silence, frugality, and so forth.<sup>84</sup> He also authored an *ʿalām al-nubūwa* work,<sup>85</sup> though it seems to be lost. Ibn Abī Ḥātim was among those who transmitted *ḥadīth* on Ibn Abī Dunyā's authority and said that both he himself and his father wrote *ḥadīth* they had learned from Ibn Abī l-Dunyā;<sup>86</sup> this suggests that Ibn Abī l-Dunyā may have been in contact with the *ḥadīth* scholar Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī.

While the previously mentioned authors of this second generation were interconnected, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Haytham b. al-Muhallab (d. 278/891), a *ḥadīth* scholar in Baghdad who is said to have written a *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* work,<sup>87</sup> does not appear to have been connected to any of the other authors of this kind of literature at his time.<sup>88</sup>

Based on these biographies, we see some clear patterns among the authors of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* work during the third/ninth century. First, like their predecessors, all the contributors to this literature in this generation are widely acknowledged scholars, not untrained storytellers or preachers. Their affiliation to *ḥadīth* scholarship increased as the vast majority of the authors primarily focused on the compilation and transmission of prophetic traditions. The only exceptions to this are Ibn Qutayba, who wrote on a variety of subjects, including, most prominently, *adab*, and whose *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* is not a *ḥadīth*-based compilation, and Ibn Abī Dunyā, whose works are devoted to ethics and piety.

The ongoing interconnections of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors is, furthermore, a hallmark of the second generation. On the one hand, there are connections between members of this generation and the preceding one. Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī and al-Bukhārī, for instance, were both students of al-Ḥumaydī, while al-Madāʿinī was a teacher of Abū Dāwūd. Abū Dāwūd and al-Ḥarbī both studied with Ibn Ḥanbal. Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Firyābī, al-Zāhirī, and Ibn Qutayba all studied with al-Ḥanẓalī. Al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Tirmidhī were all students of al-Jūzajānī, who authored works on *dalāʿil al-nubūwa*. The following chart visualizes the personal relationships between scholars involved in the transmission of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* compilations. The dark blue boxes in this chart represent authors of self-contained works, boxes with

83 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 10:89.

84 Dietrich, "Ibn Abī al-Dunyā," 3:684. For an extensive list of works, see al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar aʿlām al-nubulāʾ*, 13:401f.

85 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar aʿlām al-nubulāʾ*, 13:401.

86 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar aʿlām al-nubulāʾ* 13:399; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 1:687.

87 Al-Sakhawī, *al-Iʿlān*, 91.

88 For a list of his teachers and students, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 6:206.

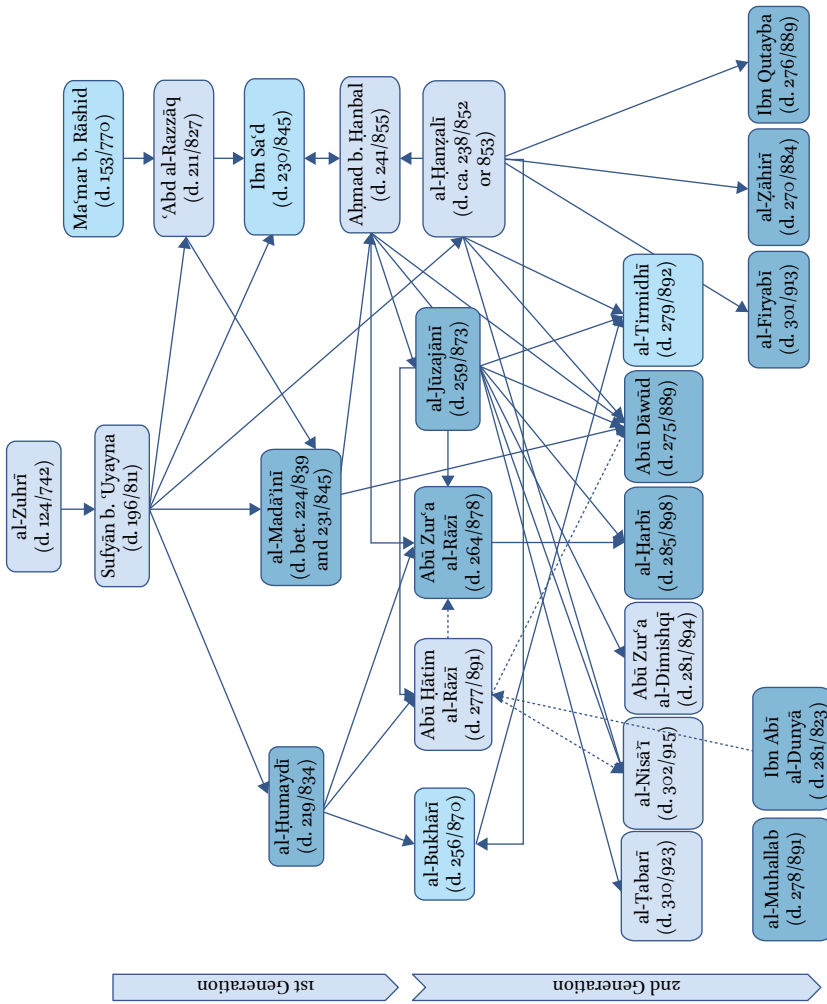


CHART 1 Network of early authors

diagonal stripes represent scholars who compiled “proofs of prophecy” as part of a multi-themed compilations, and light blue boxes identify scholars who did not author such works but are intermediary links between various authors of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* compilations.

The chart above demonstrates that this network was centered around a circle of scholars who were associated with the *ahl al-ḥadīth* movement. Al-Jūzajānī, a central figure for the second generation of authors, was in frequent correspondence with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, who was in turn a student of al-Madāʿinī. A connection between these three authors and the Ḥanbalī circle is, furthermore, established through al-Bukhārī, who was a student of Ibn Ḥanbal’s protégé Ishāq b. Rāḥwayh al-Ḥanzalī. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s opposition to Muʿtazilī doctrine and his strict devotion to *ḥadīth* are well known. Al-Ḥanzalī was an associate of Ibn Ḥanbal and shared his views on the pre-eminence of *ḥadīth*. Al-Ḥarbī was also known as a staunch proponent of *ḥadīth* who dismissed Muʿtazilī ideas, and al-Zāhirī’s rejection of anything but tradition is apparent in the methodology of the *madhhab* that bears his name. While Ibn Qutayba’s *Aʿlām al-nubūwa* was not a *ḥadīth* compilation but rather a collection of pseudo-biblical passages allegedly related to Muḥammad’s prophecy, Sabine Schmidtke has suggested that his work mainly circulated among *ahl al-ḥadīth*. Her judgment is based on the reception of the text and the fact that the only extant manuscript of Ibn Qutayba’s text is part of a *majmuʿ* that contains a total of twelve tracts by scholars belonging mostly to the *ahl al-ḥadīth*.<sup>89</sup> The only exceptions to this tightly knit network of scholars revolving around the *ahl al-ḥadīth* movement are Ibn Abī l-Dunyā who focused on religious ethics, and Ibn al-Muhallab who apparently had no direct relationship to any of the *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors I identify here, *ahl al-ḥadīth* or otherwise. This allows us to conclude that, while *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* literature was primarily centered around a network of scholars, it was not entirely restricted to this narrow group of like-minded scholars who all moved in the same intellectual circles.

### 3 The Third Generation

Various shifts occur among the circle of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors during the fourth/tenth century that clearly distinguish the third generation from its predecessors. As such, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ziyād al-Naqqāsh (d. 351/962) was mostly known as a Qurʾān exegete and was well-versed in the various readings of the Qurʾān. His works include an extensive

89 Schmidtke, “The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials,” 55.

*tafsīr* titled *Kitāb Qirā'āt bi-'ilaliha* and *Kitāb al-Ishāra fī gharīb al-qur'ān* as well as three *muḥjam* works.<sup>90</sup> He was criticized for his *ḥadīth* transmission: Abū Bakr al-Barqānī and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī both stated that al-Naqqāsh's *isnāds* were unknown (*munkar*).<sup>91</sup> Ṭalḥa b. Muḥammad al-Shāhid said that al-Naqqāsh lied about *ḥadīth*, and the eighth-/fourteenth-century scholar al-Dhahabī labeled most of al-Naqqāsh's material as *qaṣṣās*.<sup>92</sup> Al-Dhahabī's position may be derived from the fact that one of al-Naqqāsh's works was called *Kitāb Akhbār al-quṣṣās*.<sup>93</sup> A work titled *Kitāb Didd al-'aql* and a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* were also attributed to him.<sup>94</sup> Hence, al-Naqqāsh was the first of the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors whose reputation as a *ḥadīth* transmitter was called into question. Ibn Shāhīn, another author of a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work, was one of his transmitters.<sup>95</sup>

Abū l-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) was a *ḥadīth* scholar who authored numerous *musnad* works, three *muḥjam* works, a *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, and others.<sup>96</sup> His *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work does not seem to be extant. Biographical dictionaries suggest that he was familiar with the material of al-Firyābī, who had also written a work on *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, but there are contradicting views regarding whether he was a direct student of al-Firyābī or received his material through another scholar. In the *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, al-Dhahabī lists al-Ṭabarānī as al-Firyābī's student.<sup>97</sup> In the *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, however, al-Dhahabī does not mention al-Ṭabarānī's direct connection with al-Firyābī but rather links him with Ibrāhīm b. Abī Sufyān, who transmitted al-Firyābī's materials.<sup>98</sup> Al-Ṭabarānī was also linked to several authors of the subsequent generation of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors, and among his students, we know of Ibn Mandah (d. 395/1005), Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), and al-Ṭabarānī's younger contemporary Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 368/979).<sup>99</sup>

90 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 15:574f.

91 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 15:574f.

92 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 15:574f.; cf. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 2:205.

93 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 15:574f.

94 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 15:574f.

95 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 2:205.

96 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 16:128.

97 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 2:315; cf. al-Firyābī, *Kitāb Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 10.

98 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 16:120.

99 Neither al-Dhahabī's *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz* nor his *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'* list Abū l-Shaykh directly as al-Ṭabarānī's student. However, the *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'* quotes Sulaymān b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāfiẓ relating that Abū Aḥmad al-'Asāl al-Qāḍī claimed to have heard 20,000 *ḥadīth* from al-Ṭabarānī, Abū Ishāq b. Ḥamza heard 30,000, and Abū l-Shaykh heard

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Alī l-Shāshī (d. 365/975) was a Shāfi'ī legal scholar and *muḥaddith* from the Central Asian city of Shāsh, that is, modern-day Tashkent.<sup>100</sup> He authored a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work and was in contact with two later authors of this literature. Ibn Mandah and al-Ḥākim Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh (d. 404/1014) relate material on his authority.<sup>101</sup>

This third generation of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors differs significantly from the previous one with regard to its links to preceding generations. While the first two generations were interconnected through direct teacher-student relationships, we find almost no relation between the second and third generations. Only al-Ṭabarānī received *ḥadīth* material from al-Firyābī, either directly or through an intermediary. Al-Ṭabarānī was also a student of Abū Zur'ā al-Dimashqī, who did not author *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature himself, though he was al-Jūzajānī's student and may have been familiar with the latter's writings on the subject. Al-Naqqāsh and al-Shāshī seem unconnected to any of the previously mentioned *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors. In addition to their break with predecessors, we also notice a decline in the scholarly standing of these authors, as this generation features the first *ḥadīth* scholar of questionable reputation, al-Naqqāsh.

#### 4 The Fourth Generation

Abū l-Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān b. Aḥmad al-Baghdādī (d. 385/995), commonly known as Ibn Shāhīn, studied with teachers in Syria, Iran, and Basra. He was said to be a prolific author who allegedly wrote 330 works, among them a large exegesis (*tafsīr*), a *musnad*, a history (*tārīkh*), and a work on asceticism (*zuhd*).<sup>102</sup> Kister also mentions a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work.<sup>103</sup> He was generally considered sound in his transmissions but was criticized for his flawed Arabic (*lahn*) and his lack of knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).<sup>104</sup> It is worth noting that al-Dhahabī identifies him as a well-known preacher (*wā'iz*). As we have seen, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholars commonly linked *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works with popular preachers and storytellers, implying that they were untrained, unreliable in their transmissions, and

40,000; cf. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 16:122; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:945f.

100 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 16:284.

101 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 16:284.

102 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:988.

103 Kister, "The Sirah Literature," 355.

104 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:988.

prone to fabrication. Ibn Shāhīn is actually the first *dalā'il al-nubūwa* author who is directly identified as a preacher; this provides a much more nuanced insight into the intellectual context of preaching and this kind of literature. First, Ibn Shāhīn is a relatively late author in relation to the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works considered in this book. I have been able to identify eighteen authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works prior to Ibn Shāhīn who were not associated with or considered preachers. Furthermore, Ibn Shāhīn was labeled a preacher by an eighth-/fourteenth-century scholar al-Dhahabī, who may have been impacted by Ibn al-Jawzī's critique. But even if this were the case, it is noteworthy that Ibn Shāhīn's practice as a preacher (*wā'iz*) did not impact al-Dhahabī's view of him as a reliable transmitter. Thus, Ibn Shāhīn's preaching activities do not conform to the assumptions of Orientalists' about the authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works.

Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Isfahānī (d. 368/979), known as Abū l-Shaykh, was a *ḥadīth* scholar. His works include the *Ṭabaqāt al-muḥaddithīn*, which is a biographical dictionary of *ḥadīth* scholars from Isfahan and an important source for Abū l-Nu'aym's *Akhbār Isfahān*.<sup>105</sup> In addition, he authored a *tafsīr* (now lost), a mystical work called *Kitāb al-'Azama*, and he wrote on questions of *fiqh*.<sup>106</sup> Al-Sakhawī attributes a work entitled *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* to him, which—if it ever existed—has not been preserved.<sup>107</sup> His extant work *Akhlaq al-nabī wa-adabuhu* does not address proofs of prophecy, rather it describes the Prophet's physical appearance, mannerisms, character traits, and the numerous objects he possessed and thus is closer to the *Shamā'il* work of al-Tirmidhī than the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works considered here. He was generally thought of as a critical and sound *ḥadīth* scholar. Some, however, found fault with him for being too inclusive. Al-Dhahabī, for instance, castigated him for padding his books with trivia.<sup>108</sup> Abū Nu'aym was among those who transmitted Abū l-Shaykh's material.<sup>109</sup>

Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Mandah (d. 395/1005) was a highly respected *ḥadīth* scholar from Isfahan.<sup>110</sup> He first heard *ḥadīth* from his father, his father's uncle, and other scholars in his native town, before traveling widely in pursuit of his studies. His journeys led him to study in Nishabur, Samarqand, Mecca, Baghdad, as well as Syria and Egypt.<sup>111</sup> The number of teachers he studied with

105 McDermott, "Esfahānī, Abū'l-Šayk Abū Moḥammad 'Abd Allāh."

106 Sezgin lists nine titles that exist at least in part; cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:200f.

107 Al-Sakhawī, *al-I'lān*, 91.

108 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar a'lām al-nubulā*, 279.

109 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:945f.

110 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:1031–1036.

111 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:1031–1036.

or heard *ḥadīth* from allegedly reached 1,700 and he is said to have authored so many books that it required forty mules to carry them.<sup>112</sup> However, none of these has survived. Al-Sakhawī lists Ibn Mandah as the author of a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work, which, like the rest of his works, appears to be lost.<sup>113</sup> Among those who transmitted *ḥadīth* from him were his teacher Abū l-Shaykh and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī.<sup>114</sup>

Another contributor to the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature was Abū Sa'd 'Abd al-Malik b. Abī 'Uthmān Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nisābūrī (d. 407/1016), commonly known as al-Khargūshī. He was Shāfi'i in law and Ash'arī in theology, but was mainly devoted to promoting piety with his sermons; thus, he was referred to as a *wā'iz*.<sup>115</sup> He was known for having built a hospital in Nishabur in which he and his followers dedicated themselves to menial nursing chores. He also built a madrasa and a Sufi convent in Khargūsh Street in Nishabur, where he lived most of his life.<sup>116</sup> In 392/1002, he went to Baghdad on his way to the pilgrimage, and resided in Mecca for a while before he returned to Nishabur where he died in 405/1015 or 406/1016.<sup>117</sup> Abū l-Ḥasan al-Masarjīsī (d. 384/994?), with whom he studied Shāfi'i law, considered him sound.<sup>118</sup>

His extant works include *Tadhīb al-asrār*, a collection of Sufi sayings; the *Bishāra wa-l-nidhāra*, an interpretation of dreams; and the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*, a long biography of the Prophet<sup>119</sup> that also circulated under different titles. Ḥājji Khalifa, also known as Kātib Çelebī, and al-Dhahabī mention a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* by al-Khargūshī that may be an extract of *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*. Brockelmann identified *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* with *dalā'il al-nubūwa* and Storey mentions an extant Persian translation with the alternative title *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*. Melchert has suggested that Storey could be referring to a Persian abridgment. Finally, Kātib Çelebī listed a work under the title *Sharaf al-nubūwa*, and Melchert suggested that this may be an Arabic abridgment of *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*,<sup>120</sup> and an

112 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:1031–1036.

113 Al-Sakhawī, *al-I'lān*, 91.

114 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:1031–1036.

115 Melchert, *Khargūshi*, 29.

116 Al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 5:101f.; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, 3:369; cf. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 251f.

117 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 10:432; al-Sam'ānī adds Egypt to his itinerary, cf. al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 5:101.

118 Melchert, "Khargūshi," 30.

119 *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* has recently been published by al-Ghamrī, *Manāḥil al-shifā'*. A 1967 Egyptian edition of the *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is mentioned by Ṭāhirī and Pūrjavādī, "Abū Sa'd-i Khargūshī-yi Nishābūrī."

120 Cf. Kātib Çelebī/Ḥājji Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1045, 1047, 1569; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 17:256; Storey, *Persian Literature*, 1:175f.; Brockelmann, *GAL*, Suppl. 1:361, no. 3; Melchert, "Khargūshi," 31.

existing Persian translation of the book has been published with yet another title, *Sharaf al-nabī*.<sup>121</sup> Al-Khargūshī was also linked to other authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works, such as al-Ḥākīm and Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) transmitted on al-Khargūshī's authority.<sup>122</sup>

The most famous author of a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work was Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Ishāq b. Mūsā b. Mehrān, also known Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī. He was a famous *ḥadīth* scholar and author of *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, a collection of Sufi biographies; *Akḥbār Iṣfahān*, a biographical dictionary of the city's religious scholars; and one of the most well-known *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works to date.<sup>123</sup> He was born in Isfahan in 336/948<sup>124</sup> into an established family of the town. His maternal grandfather was a major figure in Iṣfahānī Sufism and his father Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh (d. 365 /976) was a *ḥadīth* scholar who had traveled to Iraq and Syria in search of traditions.<sup>125</sup>

At the early age of eight, Abū Nu'aym formally heard *ḥadīth* from the most noted scholars in Isfahan, including Abū l-Shaykh b. Khayyān and Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, then set out to study elsewhere. He traveled to various centers of Islamic learning in the provinces Khūzistān, Iraq, and Hijaz, including Wāsiṭ, Kufa, Baghdad, and Mecca. He probably also intended to visit Syria but was prevented from doing so by the upheavals accompanying the Fāṭimid invasion in 359/969–970. He briefly returned to Isfahan before traveling to the provinces Jurjān and Khurasan. In Nishabur he heard prophetic traditions from Ḥākīm Aḥmad Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, and many others. He is reported to have received permission to transmit *ḥadīth* from over 430 scholars, from some of whom he was the only known transmitter.<sup>126</sup> His reputation spread and he attracted a large numbers of students from far and wide. His teaching activity, however, became severely restricted when a feud broke out between him and another famous Iṣfahānī *ḥadīth* scholar and fellow author of a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work, the above-mentioned Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Mandah. The feud evolved from the division of Iṣfahānī scholars into Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī legal schools. Abū Nu'aym was probably not formally trained in jurisprudence or theology but followed the Shāfi'ī school in legal and ritual matters and apparently approved of the Ash'arī school, which he considered to be a form of *kalām* that was in

121 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*.

122 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubulā'*, 17:256.

123 For extant manuscripts, see Brockelmann, *GAL*, 1:446; Suppl. 1:617.

124 Variant dates are 334/946 or 330/942; Madelung, "Abū Nu'aym al-Eṣfahānī," 354f.

125 Madelung, "Abū Nu'aym al-Eṣfahānī," 354f.

126 Madelung, "Abū Nu'aym al-Eṣfahānī," 354f.

accordance with the doctrine of the *ahl al-sunna*.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, he appears to have criticized the literalist Ḥanbalī reading of anthropomorphic expressions in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*. Because he held these views, he clashed with Ibn Mandah, the leader of the Hanbalī faction, who denounced Abū Nuʿaym’s creed as unorthodox. Ibn Mandah’s adjudication led pro-Ḥanbalī students of *ḥadīth* to ostracize Abū Nuʿaym, and he was expelled from the great mosque in Isfahan, which was dominated by the Ḥanbalī faction.<sup>128</sup> As a result of this feud, Abū Nuʿaym, who had studied *ḥadīth* with Ibn Mandah,<sup>129</sup> later accused his former teacher of becoming confused in his transmission of *ḥadīth* in his old age and of erroneously ascribing doctrines to people.<sup>130</sup> Abū Nuʿaym al-Isfahānī died in 430/1038.

Abū Nuʿaym’s posthumous reputation is somewhat contested. Ḥanbalī scholars, such as Ibn al-Jawzī, rejected his legacy because of his Ashʿarī sympathies.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, they accused him of irregularities in his transmission from Ḥanbalīs. These charges were refuted by Shāfiʿī scholars such as Ibn al-Najjār, al-Dhahabī, and al-Subkī.<sup>132</sup> Later Imāmī sources described Abū Nuʿaym as a crypto-Shīʿī, pointing particularly toward the biographies of early Shīʿī imams in *Ḥilyat al-awlīyāʾ* and in a collection of forty *ḥadīth* concerning the coming of the Maḥdī. According to Madelung, however, these *ḥadīth* do not reflect specifically Shīʿī doctrines.<sup>133</sup>

The other prominent author of an extant *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* work was Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā l-Khusrawjirdī (d. 458/1066), mostly known as al-Bayhaqī, who was a scholar of *ḥadīth* and Shāfiʿī law. He traveled extensively in pursuit of *ḥadīth* and is credited with having had one hundred teachers, including al-Ḥākim. Al-Bayhaqī was a prolific writer, and his *Kitāb al-Sunan al-kubrā* is perhaps his most notable book, and seems to have been held in high esteem. In theology he was an Ashʿarī. Toward the end of his life he went to Nishabur where he taught *ḥadīth* and transmitted his books. Even though he was a *ḥadīth* scholar of some note, he is reputed to have been unacquainted with the works of al-Tirmidhī, al-Nisāʿī, and Ibn Mājah, and it was suggested that he had not seen the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.<sup>134</sup> Later scholars praised him for his skill in arranging his books rather than his

127 Madelung, “Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿEsfahānī,” 354f.

128 Madelung, “Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿEsfahānī,” 354f.

129 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:1032.

130 Madelung, “Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿEsfahānī,” 354f.

131 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, 7:100; cf. Madelung, “Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿEsfahānī,” 354f.

132 Madelung, “Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿEsfahānī,” 354f.

133 Madelung, “Abū Nuʿaym al-ʿEsfahānī,” 354f.

134 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīyya al-kubrā*, 3:9.

scholarship per se. Al-Dhahabī, for instance, said that the breadth of his *ḥadīth* was not great but that he was an adept at arranging it, being versed in the subdivisions and the men who appear in *isnāds*.<sup>135</sup> Al-Subkī declared that his *Sunan* was unparalleled in arrangement and excellence.<sup>136</sup> Al-Bayhaqī died in 458/1066 in Nishabur, and was buried in Khusrawjird.<sup>137</sup> Scholars of Islamic studies have frequently named al-Bayhaqī as the most prominent author of the entire *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature.

The fourth and final generation of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors under consideration here are not only linked to the previous generation but are also closely intertwined with them. Despite the general connections, two strands appear to emerge in this generation. The first is a closely connected network of respected *ḥadīth* scholars, such as al-Ṭabarānī, al-Shāshī, Ibn Mandah, Abū l-Shaykh, and Abū Nu'aym. Despite their interaction, this strand of authors was not free from conflict, as the feud between Ibn Mandah and Abū Nu'aym shows. The second strand is a more loosely linked group encompassing Ibn Shāhīn and al-Khargūshī, and the latter's student al-Bayhaqī. Ibn Shāhīn's teacher, al-Naqqāsh, a scholar of the third generation, may also be included in this circle. None of these four men were of the same scholarly caliber with regard to Sunnī *isnād*-based *ḥadīth* methodology as the first and second generations. Al-Naqqāsh may have been well-versed in Qur'ānic readings but his reputation as a scholar of *ḥadīth* was tainted with accusations of weak *isnāds*, dishonesty, and corruption from *quṣṣāṣ*. Ibn Shāhīn and al-Khargūshī were better known as preachers and ascetics, though their scholarly merits were not entirely discredited. Finally, al-Bayhaqī is faulted with severe shortcomings in his expertise in *ḥadīth*, including his apparent unawareness of the major *ḥadīth* collections. It is important to note, however, that despite this decline in their scholarly reputations none of the authors discussed here correspond to Orientalist assumptions that this kind of literature is a direct output of or strongly influenced by untrained charlatans who produced fabrications in an attempt to entertain laymen.

## 5 The Evolution of Early *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Authors

Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī's *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works have become almost synonymous with the literature as a whole. This fame has misled many scholars of Islamic studies to identify them with the earliest specimen of this literature.

135 Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira al-ḥuffāz*, 3:309f.

136 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, 3:3f.

137 Robson, "al-Bayhaqī."

Having identified the authors of twenty-two *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* compilations prior to their works not only fills a gap in Western scholarship on the textual history of this literature but has also provides opportunities to observe its evolution between the mid-second/eighth and early fifth/eleventh centuries. The following chart illustrates the relations of all four generations.

While each of these scholars may have had scores of teachers and students who did not write on the subject, the identification of the earliest authors of *ḥadīth*-based *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works demonstrates a network of continuous interactions between contributors to this literature. Establishing this network of authors also allows us to locate them in the intellectual landscape of their time. The first two generations are squarely positioned in the circles of respected *ḥadīth* scholars. Their ranks include *muḥaddithūn* who shaped their own field by compiling canonical collections or major contributions to the field's methodology. In the larger context of religious sciences, we can conclude that many of them sided with the *ahl al-ḥadīth* movement's opposition to Muʿtazilī views in particular, and *kalām* more generally. Al-Ḥarībī, for instance, was known for his opposition to the rationalist views of the Muʿtazila. Al-Jūzajānī and the majority of the second generation were directly associated with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal or his protégé Ishāq b. Rahawayh al-Ḥanzalī.

A drastic shift at the end of the fourth/tenth century occurred between the second and the third generations of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors, a shift both in terms of their connections and their scholarly profiles. First, few personal connections link the third generation to its predecessor: al-Ṭabarānī's unverified encounter with al-Firyābī would seem to be the only direct contact. Furthermore, from the third generation onward contributors to this kind of literature were no longer uniformly acclaimed as scholars of the prophetic tradition. Their reputations were built, instead, on their lives as preachers, ascetics, or scholars, whose lack of expertise in *ḥadīth* is noted. Even among the respected *muḥaddithūn* of the third and fourth generations, there is a noticeable change in their intellectual positions. The third generation was particularly marked by their rejection of speculative theology. This position seems to have lost its leverage among authors of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* works in later generations, as Ibn Mandah seems to be the only one who still maintained his disapproval of theology. Others, like Abū Nuʿaym and al-Bayhaqī, openly identify as Ashʿarīs.

These shifts in the intellectual orientation of *dalāʿil al-nubūwa* authors are examined further in subsequent chapters. In chapter 3, I analyze extant works related to the structural and methodological approaches, while chapter 4 explores whether these interconnected authors held similar notions of what constituted "signs of prophecy" and how this is reflected in their selections of narratives.

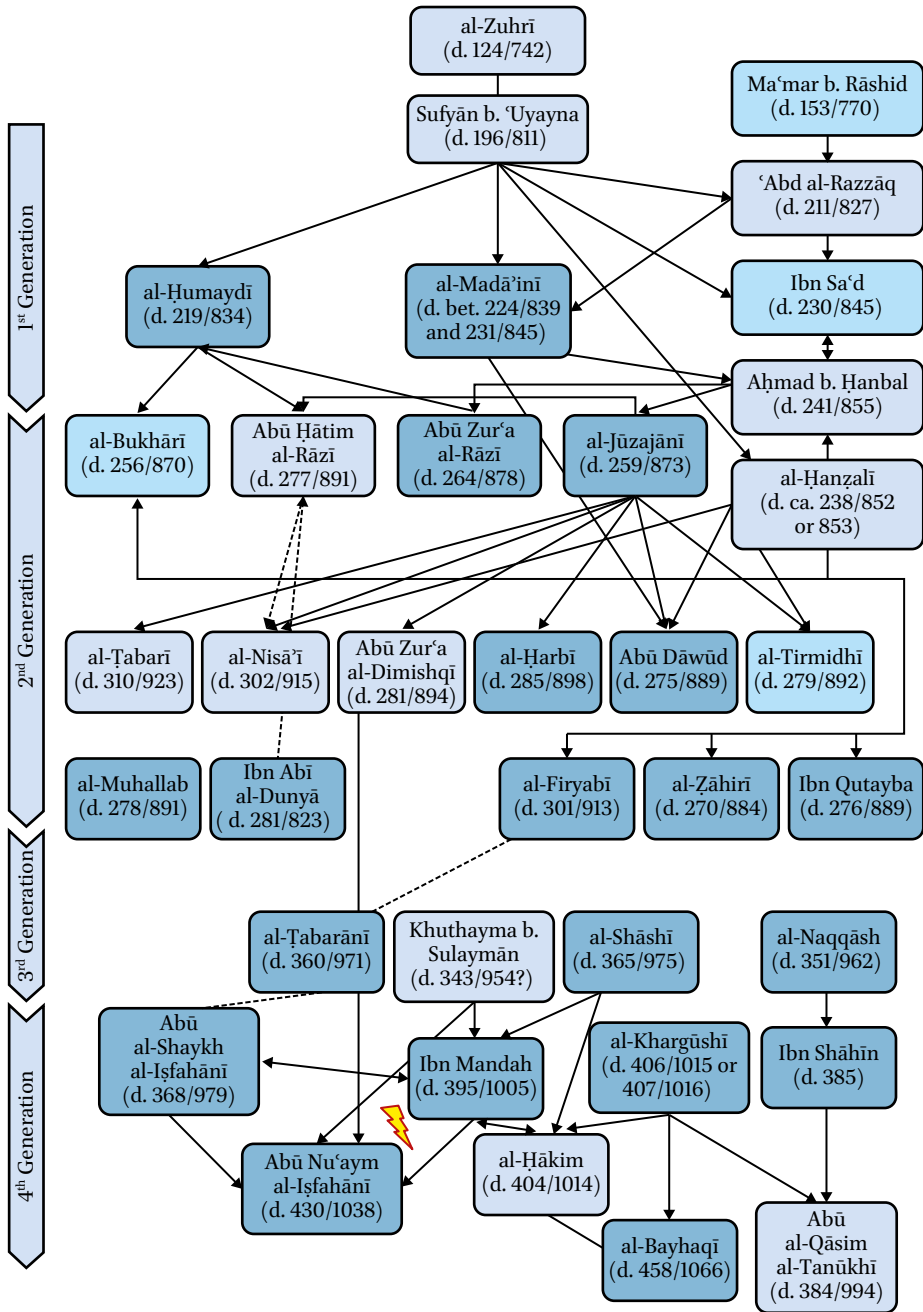


CHART 2 Network of authors

## Methodological and Structural Approaches in *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Literature

*Ḥadīth*-based *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works have been authored since the mid-second/eighth century, but only a few of the compilations that were written in the period up to the end of the third/ninth century have been preserved. The analysis of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors in the previous chapter suggests that the evolution of this literature was marked by shifts in authorship from solidly reputable scholars of *ḥadīth* to authors who came from other fields of expertise or had less than perfect scholarly records. Based on the extant works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature, I examine how methodological and structural changes may reflect these shifts in authorship, and, more generally, the character of the literature, and ultimately reiterate my finding, that this literature clearly originated in the scholarly realm and was not the product of prophetic veneration by laymen.

The means of authentication that these authors employed lay, of course, at the center of this investigation of methodologies. Note that in this process the level of authenticity is based on the parameters of the compilers' respective environments and reflects the value that the compilers themselves ascribed to the accounts. Ultimately, my goal is to understand the intellectual processes that led these authors to craft their notions of the proofs of prophecy. Therefore, I try to avoid projecting later criteria onto the authors' methodological and structural approaches; by later criteria, I refer to the epistemological reliability attributed to particular accounts by later Sunnī legal theorists or the positivist concerns of early Orientalists with regard to the historicity of events described in them.

With the exception of Ibn Sa'd, the majority of extant *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works that date back to this early period were *ḥadīth* compilations in the narrower sense. In the following, I examine the earliest extant works based on the disciplinary backgrounds of the compilers rather than their chronological order. I first study the works of the *ḥadīth* scholars, that is, Ma'mar b. Rāshid, al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, and al-Jūzajānī and their methodological approaches. I examine Ibn Sa'd's compilation of "signs of prophecy" separately and more extensively, not only because his two chapters constitute the earliest comprehensive collection of such accounts, but also because these accounts were part of a *sīra* section in his biographical dictionary the *Ṭabaqāt*, rather than a *ḥadīth*

collection. Given that *sīra/maghāzī* literature followed its own distinct disciplinary approach, Ibn Sa'd's methodology must be studied thoroughly in order to compare it with contemporaneous works of *ḥadīth*.

## 1 Methodologies of Authentication in Early *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Works

Ma'mar b. Rāshid's (d. 153/770) *al-Jāmi'* contains a short chapter of six accounts entitled "Bāb al-nubūwa";<sup>1</sup> this most likely constituted the first systematic compilation of what developed into the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature. A dedicated student of al-Zuhri, Ma'mar b. Rāshid sought to uphold his teacher's strict methodological standards and, therefore, enjoyed a reputation as a reliable transmitter and scholar. Accordingly, all six accounts in his "Bāb al-nubūwa" are introduced with their full *isnāds*. *Ḥadīth* authentication was still in its infancy during Ma'mar's lifetime and *isnāds* were not yet evaluated by the parameters of later *isnād* criticism. Nevertheless Ma'mar was aware of the importance of introducing each *ḥadīth* with an individual chain of transmission and clearly sought to authenticate his traditions with the means accessible at the time. The perceived authenticity of these accounts appears to be further validated by the fact that all six of them are included in the later canonical *ḥadīth* compilations of al-Bukhārī and, to a lesser degree, Muslim, as I show in the next chapter.

In addition, we know of chapters dedicated to the signs of prophecy in two collections that later gained recognition as canonical collections for Sunnī Islam. The chapters "Alāmāt al-nubūwa fī l-Islām" in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and "Bāb mā jā' fī ayāt Nubūwa al-Nabī wa-mā qad khaṣṣa Allāh bihi" in al-Tirmidhī's *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan* are, of course, shaped by the compilers' intentions to single out only those *ḥadīth* that were deemed sound in transmission. Among the compilers of canonical *ḥadīth* collections al-Tirmidhī is particularly interesting because he was the only scholar to provide his evaluation of the *isnād* for each account. He categorizes eight of the accounts he selected as "signs of prophecy" as sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and one as acceptable (*ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*), even though we must keep in mind that at that time these were not yet universal standards.

It may seem intuitive to automatically designate these accounts in Ma'mar, al-Bukhārī, and al-Tirmidhī as authentic based on their inclusion in later canonical works, but such an a priori assumption is problematic. It involves projecting parameters of authentication that were applied by later legal theorists onto earlier scholars of *ḥadīth* rather than examining them in their own specific intellectual environment and with their own methodological

1 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:276–280.

approach. In order to evaluate the compilations in the framework of their authors' intellectual environments, we must bear in mind that their works did not gain prestige and rank immediately. All canonical works acquire that status over time and were not necessarily held in such regard at the time of their composition. "Canonization involves a community's act of authorizing specific books in order to meet certain needs. It entails the transformation of texts, through use, study, and appreciation, from nondescript tomes into powerful symbols of divine, legal or artistic authority for a particular audience."<sup>2</sup> In the case of the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement, which started with al-Bukhārī and Muslim, this act that transformed generally acclaimed works took many decades and was not as inevitable as one might assume today.<sup>3</sup> At the time of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the culture of *ḥadīth* transmission had been undergoing significant change. Initially, the collection and transmission of *ḥadīth*, like all fields of Muslim scholarship, emerged in the circles of pious individuals rather than in established institutions. For these individuals, the impetus to collect and transmit *ḥadīth* was not so much a legal necessity, rather it "carried pietistic significance as a means for everyday Muslims to bind themselves to the inspirational authority of the Prophet and incorporate his charisma into their lives."<sup>4</sup> A self-aware class of religious scholars that distinguished itself from the pious masses only emerged in the late Umayyad and early 'Abbāsīd periods and caused a bifurcation between, on one side, those with knowledge of Islamic law and ritual and, on the other side, laymen and professional scholars.<sup>5</sup> The influential legal scholar al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) divided knowledge of Islamic law and ritual into what is required of the masses (*āmm*) and what is the purview of scholars or specialists (*khāṣṣ*).<sup>6</sup> Jonathan A. C. Brown points to the introduction of Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection and to a letter written by Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī to scholars in Mecca in which Abū Dāwūd explains the content and structure of his *Sunan* collection; this shows that *ḥadīth* scholarship began to adopt a paternalistic view.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement furthered and deepened the gulf between laymen and specialists. Compiling *ḥadīth* collections that were vetted and deemed authentic was supposed to offer the Muslim masses access to the Sunna without expecting them to acquire an understanding of the increasingly more complicated intricacies of *ḥadīth* criticism. This position

2 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 5.

3 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 6.

4 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 57.

5 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 57.

6 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 57.

7 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 57.

marked a departure from existing practice, as it undermined “amateur” *ḥadīth* collection as a means of spiritually connecting to their Prophet.

Furthermore, the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement also led to divergent views among the scholarly class of *muḥaddithūn*. The concept of selective *ḥadīth* collections that excluded vast parts of the body of the *ḥadīth* based on considerations of authenticity was a strident break from the common practices at the time and was met with significant disapproval.<sup>8</sup> “Professional” *ḥadīth* collectors strove to collect as many *ḥadīths* as possible regardless of their quality, based on the commonly held view that any tradition traced back to Muḥammad and containing his name carried prophetic authority and was *prima facie* compelling in a way. For the majority of scholars in this early period, a problematic *isnād* did not necessarily undermine the Prophet’s authority nor did it necessarily preclude a *ḥadīth* from being used. Such *ḥadīths* were “indispensable in fields like the history of the Prophet’s campaigns, contextualizing Qur’ānic verses or recounting the virtues of the Prophet’s Companions.”<sup>9</sup> Even in legal issues, scholars like Ibn Ḥanbal and Abū Dāwūd depended on weak (*ḍaʿīf*) *ḥadīths*.<sup>10</sup>

Another point to bear in mind is that the parameters for authenticity and reliability of *ḥadīth* criticism were still in flux during this time. There is no reason to doubt the stated commitment of early scholars like Maʿmar, al-Bukhārī, and al-Tirmidhī to safeguard the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* corpus, but the means by which they achieved this should not be conflated with the epistemological framework employed by later Sunnī legal theorists. During the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, the prevalence of forged and fabricated *ḥadīths* led to the emergence of a shared three-tiered process of authentication that included requiring individual *isnāds* for each account, evaluating transmitters listed in the *isnāds*, and demanding corroboration of the *ḥadīth*. We have to keep in mind, however, that the theoretical framework for the evaluation of *isnāds*, including the paradigm of *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (good), and *ḍaʿīf* (weak) divisions had not been fully established nor was it generally agreed upon.

The historical reliability of the *ḥadīth* was also not viewed through the same epistemological lens that required numerous chains of transmission as a measure of reliability.<sup>11</sup> Later legal theorists considered the most reliable of reports to be those that were *mutawātir* (i.e., transmitted so frequently that they were very unlikely to have been forged). Reports that were transmitted from the Prophet by a less substantial number of *isnāds*, or *āḥād ḥadīths* (those *ḥadīths*

8 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 6.

9 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 59.

10 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 59.

11 Brown, “Did the Prophet Say It or Not?,” 259.

transmitted from a single person), only yielded “legally compelling probability (*ẓann*)” in the eyes of later legal theorists and were mostly excluded in regard to legal and ritual matters. This epistemological category of *mutawātir*, however, was not universally held in the discourse of *ḥadīth* critics in the third/ninth century; Brown states that *ḥadīth* scholars of this time period described *ḥadīth* as “widely transmitted” (*tawātara*) or “having become manifest” (*taẓāhara*), which simply meant that a *ḥadīth* “appeared widely.”<sup>12</sup> By the same token, *ḥadīth* with less substantial numbers of people in the *isnād* constituted the bulk of the *ḥadīth* corpus dealt with by Ibn Ḥanbal and his cohort.

These gradually evolving notions of authenticity and reliability mostly came to fruition after the generation of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. As a consequence, the fact that chapters dedicated to signs of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission occur in the *ṣaḥīḥ* works that became the yardstick for authenticity by later Sunnī scholars is not relevant for tracing the history of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature or gaining an understanding of how the accounts they contained were evaluated at the time of their compilation. It is more significant that these early chapters of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* emerged in the context of a scholarly discourse. These scholars may not have agreed among themselves regarding the epistemological categories of *ḥadīth* collection and transmission, as we see in chapter 4; however, they are unified in the sense that they constituted a distinct class and they participated in these discourses that excluded the Muslim masses. This stands in stark contrast to the views of Orientalists, who sought the origins of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature in circles of people that intentionally fabricated narratives to entertain the masses, that is, beyond Muslim scholars. One of the most prominent members of the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement, Muslim b. Ḥajjāj, perceived his colleagues’ approach to strive for exhaustive rather than critical *ḥadīth* collections as a laxity in criticism. Muslim went so far as to accuse scholars who aimed at compiling all prophetic traditions, irrespective of their degree of authenticity, of trying to win the acclaim of the masses.<sup>13</sup> It is highly likely, then, that the early chapters on the signs of prophecy compiled by al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī, and by extension the pre-*ṣaḥīḥ* scholar Ma’mar whose six accounts were incorporated by al-Bukhārī, were compiled with the highest standards of authentication available at the time.

### 1.1 Al-Jūzajānī’s “Amārāt al-Nubūwa”

Al-Jūzajānī’s “Amārāt al-nubūwa” appears to be the earliest textual evidence of a self-contained *ḥadīth*-based *dalā’il al-nubūwa* work that has been preserved,

12 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 53–54.

13 Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*, 58.

partially, in a unique manuscript.<sup>14</sup> The title page of the manuscript indicates that it contains selected *ḥadīths* from the sixth chapter of al-Jūzajānī's work rather than representing the entirety of the chapter.<sup>15</sup> This selection was presumably recorded by 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥaytam [?] b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm, who copied it from a manuscript in the hand of Abū l-Khayr al-Salāma b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Salāma al-Ḥaddād, without providing any information about when the selection was made or what the motivation behind it was. The selective nature of the manuscript poses some challenges for the evaluation of al-Jūzajānī's methodological approach and the contents of his work overall, and this makes it difficult to establish a continuous and systematic notion of the way this literature developed. But this particular manuscript allows us some insights into al-Jūzajānī's mode of authentication as well as the reception of the work.

This selection from the sixth chapter appears to be preserved in its entirety, and contains thirteen individual accounts. Similar to previous chapters on *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, this text presents the accounts without any exegesis or explanation of the selection parameters. The first *ḥadīth* is introduced with an *isnād* that traces the transmission from the Prophet Muḥammad through the Companion Jābir 'Abdallāh to the last transmitter, al-Ḥaddād. The *isnād*, thus, links the record of the transmission of the specific selection, even though it is unclear when it occurred, to the work's author (al-Jūzajānī) with the individual *isnād* that al-Jūzajānī presumably provided for this particular *ḥadīth*. All subsequent *ḥadīths* are also introduced with individual *isnāds*, starting with Abū l-Daḥdāh, who transmitted it from the book's author al-Jūzajānī, back to Muḥammad's Companions.

The manuscript closes with a reproduction of an audience certificate; this provides further details about its mode of transmission. Al-Ḥaddād had read the text back to his own teacher, Abū l-Majad Fatayān b. Ḥaydra b. 'Alī l-Bajalī, in the latter's house in the eastern precincts of Damascus during the middle ten days of Ramaḍān 567/1172. According to the audience certificate, several other students of the same cohort also read the text to al-Bajalī and all were given permission (*'ijāza*) to transmit this material. Al-Bajalī himself had heard the book while sitting in the audience of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad b. Ṣafr while it was being read to the teacher in the year 480/1087. Abū Muḥammad, in turn, had heard the book when another student read it to their teacher Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Mūsā b. al-Samsār, who had read it directly back to his teacher, Abū l-Qāsim 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Ṭa'an, in

14 Damascus Asad Library, ms Majmū' 104, fols. 162–165; cf. al-Albānī, *Fihris*, 250 / Riyadh, 2001, p. 339; cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, 1135.

15 The manuscript is entitled *Juz' fthi aḥādīth muntakhaba min al-juz' al-sādis min kitāb amārāt al-nubūwa*, cf. fol. 162a.

Sha'bān 367/987. The latter had heard the book when it was being read back to Abū l-Daḥdāḥ, who was in the audience while another student was reading it back to the book's author, al-Jūzajānī.

As the audience certificate at the end of the manuscript indicates, it had become common to record details of public lectures in Damascus, such as this lecture, which was read with the teacher present and the students read the text back to the teacher during the later stages of this work's transmission. However, there seem to be no extant records of this particular gathering.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, there are no records of the individuals named in the manuscript other than Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Mūsā b. al-Samsār, who was a *ḥadīth* transmitter in Damascus and transmitted *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* on the authority of Abū Zayd al-Marūzī, and was said to have attracted large audiences. Abū l-Walīd al-Bājī accused al-Samsār of being weak in his *'uṣūl* and of harboring Shī'ī leanings and writing about them excessively.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.2 Ibn Sa'd's "*Alamāt al-nubūwa*"

Ibn Sa'd's "*Alamāt al-nubūwa*" is the only compilation dedicated to signs of prophecy during this early time period that is not contained in a *ḥadīth* collection but rather appears as part of the author's extensive *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. This biographical dictionary aims at providing information on the lives and reliability of *ḥadīth* transmitters and, thus serves as an important device to facilitate the assessment of *ḥadīth* transmitters. Given his commitment to critically assessing *ḥadīth* transmitters, it appears plausible that Ibn Sa'd himself also upheld standards that safeguarded the integrity and authenticity of *ḥadīth* to the extent possible at this early time. The fact that these chapters are not part of *ḥadīth* collections in the narrower sense may have consequences for Ibn Sa'd's methodological considerations, as he would not have been held to the same methodological standards. In the following, I examine the general methodological approach Ibn Sa'd employed in his biography of Muḥammad. I then focus more specifically on the two chapters dedicated to signs of prophecy, in order to see if Ibn Sa'd's methodological approach there differed from his approach to the remaining *sīra* section. Rare examples of *ḥadīth* that display obvious shortcomings in their *isnād* function as case studies by which we can explore whether or not Ibn Sa'd utilized unauthenticated materials.

16 There are no entries for these individuals in the register of the Damascene audience certificates compiled by Stefan Leder and Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawwās covering the period from 550/1155 to 750/1349; cf. Leder and al-Sawwās, *Mu'jam al-samā'at*, passim.

17 Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Lisān al-mizān*, 5:259.

The *Ṭabaqāt* opens with the *sīra*, which constitutes the earliest biography of Muḥammad that has been preserved in its entirety, other than Ibn Hishām's edition of the *sīra* by Ibn Ishāq. There was some question about whether Ibn Sa'd's *sīra* was originally an independent work entitled *Kitāb Akhbār al-nabī*.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of whether the *sīra* sections were originally intended to be part of the *Ṭabaqāt* or not, it is important to consider the methodological parameters Ibn Sa'd employed in its compilation, because, from it we can understand the mechanisms by which he sought to authenticate its contents. Ibn Sa'd's biography of the Prophet has two parts, which correspond to the first two volumes of the *Ṭabaqāt*'s printed editions. The first part covers the Prophet's biography in general, like other works of *sīra*, while the second part is dedicated to his campaigns, and thus constitutes a *maghāzī* work in the narrower sense of the term. Ibn Sa'd appears to have applied two distinct methodologies to the *sīra* and the *maghāzī* sections respectively. The *maghāzī* section is prefaced with a comprehensive list of his most important transmitters. For each of the campaigns, Ibn Sa'd provides a principle account, which is collectively based on the authority of the transmitters identified in the preface but does not identify other elements of its origin. There are no individual *isnād* for the general accounts of these campaigns. He then amplifies this general narrative with individual accounts, which each include a specific *isnād*.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, the *sīra* section consists mostly of individual accounts that are grouped in chapters following a mostly chronological order. Each account is introduced by its individual *isnād*, though Ibn Sa'd occasionally employs collective *isnāds*. As such, the *sīra* section displays a stricter degree of authentication than the *maghāzī* section.

The overall chronological arrangement of the *sīra* section is sporadically interrupted by thematic chapters. Ibn Sa'd seems to have given the question of signs of Muḥammad's prophecy special attention because his *sīra* section includes two extensive chapters dedicated to the subject of *'alamāt al-nubūwa*. The first describes the alleged "signs of prophecy" that occurred before the beginning of revelation, while the latter addresses those that took place after Muḥammad's call to prophecy. Ibn Sa'd took a particular interest in this subject, as is evidenced by these two chapters that are the longest (containing forty-seven and forty-two accounts, respectively) in the entire *sīra* section. In the chronological biography, the thematic chapters of "signs of prophecy" are

18 Otto Loth argued that Ibn Sa'd only edited the biography of the Prophet in its current form and communicated it to his students for further transmission, while the *Ṭabaqāt* work was preserved in its current form by al-Ḥusayn b. Fahm (d. 289/902). Both works were then allegedly combined by Ibn Ma'rūf around the year 300/913; Loth, *Classenbuch*, 25–34. For a succinct summary of the entire debate including the references to Arabic biographical dictionaries, see Mūsā, *Ibn Sa'd wa-ṭabaqātuhi*, 23f.

19 Horowitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 121.

distinctive because they do not establish a continuous narrative, but rather highlight individual events or occurrences without reference to their historical context. Furthermore, each account in these chapters is introduced with its own full *isnād*. Many of these *isnāds* go back to Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), and include some of the most prominent *ḥadīth* transmitters, such as ʿĀisha, Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, Anas b. Mālik, ʿAlī, and other members of the Prophet's family, or to Followers (*tābiʿūn*), including such prominent figures as ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, al-Zuhrī, ʿĀsim b. ʿUmar b. Qatāda, and Thābit b. Bunānī. Only five accounts have obvious shortcomings in their *isnād*, such as an unidentified transmitter. By contrast, there are even fewer *isnāds* that go back to the Prophet; most of the accounts in these two chapters appear to have unbroken chains of transmission going back to a Companion or Follower. The overall picture is further complicated by the fact that the chapter dedicated to the "signs of prophecy" prior to the call to prophecy includes several accounts that do not mention the Prophet in the *isnād* or in the *matn*. Narratives announcing or predicting the prophecy of Muḥammad, in particular, occur in the framework of conversations about the Prophet without him being present. These accounts, therefore, are not *ḥadīths* in the technical sense of the term, but rather reports (*akhbār*). These are much more limited in their application than *ḥadīths* as they may not be used to support legal and ritual rulings but, consequently, do not fall under the same demands of authentication.

It appears as if Ibn Saʿd employed varying degrees of authentication throughout the parts of the *Ṭabaqāt* that relate to Muḥammad's life. As we have seen previously, the *sīra* section is more strictly authenticated than the *maghāzī* section, as the *sīra* relies much more consistently on individual *isnāds* for each account, while the *maghāzī* sections rely on collective *isnāds* that provide the general narrative. In the *sīra*, the chapters on the signs of prophecy are held to an even higher standard. There are no collective *isnāds* and only five of the ninety-nine accounts are introduced by *isnāds* with obvious shortcomings. While these *isnāds* do not meet the criteria of later legal theorists, we should keep in mind that they comply, for the most part, with the standards of *ḥadīth* scholarship as it was practiced during Ibn Saʿd's lifetime.

1.2.1 The Question of Unauthenticated Materials in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt*  
Contemporary scholars frequently suggest that authors of *sīra* works incorporated unidentified sources.<sup>20</sup> This assumption raises particularly interesting questions for Ibn Saʿd's chapters on the signs of prophecy because these

20 Schoeler and Görke, for instance, suggested that many *qiṣāṣ* narratives entered the *sīra* literature through the unauthenticated reports of Mūsā b. ʿUqba (d. 140/758) and Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767); Schoeler and Görke, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 275f.

chapters were compiled using the methodological framework of a *sīra*, yet are part of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature, which has commonly been viewed as a popular sub-genre of *sīra*. In order to examine whether Ibn Saʿd indeed incorporated unauthenticated materials in his *sīra*, in general, and in the specific chapters on the signs of prophecy, in particular, I identify narratives found in both in the prophetic biographies of Ibn Saʿd and Wahb b. Munabbih, and juxtapose them, whenever possible, with authenticated traditions. Identifying unauthenticated materials and ascribing them accurately to their alleged sources is methodologically challenging given that there are no chains of transmission to trace back and evaluate. Therefore, my analysis is limited to comparing narrative elements and highlighting textual parallels.

Ibn Saʿd's *sīra* section includes three episodes that overlap with the biography of the Prophet by Wahb b. Munabbih. Wahb's narrative of the *hijra*, for instance, includes Muḥammad's encounter with Umm Maʿbad and her lambs, which Muḥammad milked, even though they had not yet conceived; an encounter with a Qurayshī pursuer named Surāqa; and the well-known narrative of a cobweb and a pigeon settling at the entrance of a cave to conceal Muḥammad and Abū Bakr during their escape.

#### 1.2.1.1 *Muḥammad's Encounter with Umm Maʿbad*

The papyri of Wahb b. Munabbih's *sīra* include the following episode that allegedly took place during Muḥammad's *hijra*: The Prophet passed the camp of Umm Maʿbad al-Khuzāʿīya, who was praised by a third-person narrator for her generosity and kindness. Muḥammad and his Companions asked for food but she could not provide them with any due to a winter drought. The Prophet saw a sheep and asked whether it had milk. Umm Maʿbad denied that it had milk. The Prophet then asked permission to milk it and asked for the sheep's name, which is ʿAqīṣ. The Prophet said: "Its name is Baraka." He then called it by its (new) name, and milked it. The milk satiated him and his men. He milked it a second time and gave the milk to Umm Maʿbad. After a while Abū Maʿbad returned home and questioned his wife about the milk, indicating that all the sheep are out in the pastures grazing. Umm Maʿbad told him about "a blessed man" who came by, and she described his appearance at length. Abū Maʿbad realized that it was the fugitive that the Quraysh were looking for and he regretted not having met him.<sup>21</sup> The next morning, the inhabitants of Mecca heard an unidentified voice relating that the Prophet had stopped at Umm Maʿbad's camp. The Prophet and his Companions are praised and the

21 Houry, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:150f.

voice related how the Prophet drew milk from a barren sheep. This is followed by a poem.<sup>22</sup>

The narrative of Muḥammad milking Umm Maʿbad's animals occurs twice in Ibn Saʿd's work; one account is in the chronological biography as part of the narrative of the *hijra*; the second account is listed among the signs of Muḥammad's prophecy after the revelation. As such, the methodological paradigms of these two accounts differ. Ibn Saʿd's account of the *hijra* is a continuous narrative with a collective *isnād* combining five different chains of transmission. This main narrative is frequently interrupted by additional accounts that provide more detailed information and are usually not transmitted on the authority of al-Wāqidī. The main narrative on the authority of al-Wāqidī relies heavily on Ibn Ishāq's work, though not as much in order than in content.<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that the works of al-Wāqidī and Ibn Ishāq include the poem recited by a *jinn* and vaguely refer to Muḥammad's encounter with Umm Maʿbad, but the encounter itself is missing in Ibn Ishāq's *sīra*.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Saʿd, however, inserts a detailed account of the encounter, which has striking parallels to Wahb's version and includes all the details, such as Muḥammad drawing milk from a barren sheep and the physical description of Muḥammad's features that Umm Maʿbad relates to her husband.<sup>25</sup> Given that neither al-Wāqidī nor Ibn Ishāq included this narrative in their biographies, it seems at least probable that this account was taken from Wahb b. Munabbih.

In the chapter on the signs of prophecy after the beginning of revelation, the narrative of Umm Maʿbad is related in another account. While all accounts in this chapter have individual *isnāds*, this particular account is transmitted on the basis of one of the few *isnāds* with an obvious shortcoming because the account's original narrator is only identified as "a shaykh of the Banū Jumah." The account reads as follows.

When the Prophet came to Umm Maʿbad, he said, "Is there something to offer a guest?" She said, "no." He and Abū Bakr withdrew. Her son came

22 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:152f.

23 Earlier scholarship debated whether al-Wāqidī in fact used Ibn Ishāq's work, given that al-Wāqidī does not mention him in any of his *isnāds*; this was probably due to Ibn Ishāq's questionable reputation among *ḥadīth* scholars. Wellhausen suggested this in his partial edition of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, see Wellhausen, *Muhammed in Medina*, 12–15. This view was rejected by Marsden Jones in the Arabic introduction to his edition (Jones, "The Maghāzī Literature," 29f.) and in Lecker, "Wāqidī's Account," 15–32. Schoeler finally provided conclusive evidence for al-Wāqidī's usage of Ibn Ishāq; Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*, 134–142; cf. Horovitz, *Earliest Biographers*, 114.

24 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 222f.

25 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:196f.; Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:150f.

with the sheep and said to his mother, “Who is that figure who I saw leaving?” She said, “A people looking for provisions. I said we do not have any water.” He came to them and apologized, saying, “She is a weak woman; we have what you need.” The Prophet said, “Go bring me a sheep from your flock.” He went and took a young lamb [younger than one year old]. His mother said, “Where are you going?” He said, “they asked for a sheep.” She said, “What are they doing with it?” He said, “Whatever they want.” The Prophet touched its udder and its teats and they were full with milk and he milked it until a cup was filled and he left it filled with milk. He said, “Bring this to your mother and bring me another sheep from your flock.” He brought his mother the cup. She said, “From where did you get it?” He said, “The milk of such-and-such a sheep.” She said, “How is it [possible]? She has not yet conceived! I think—by al-Lāt—this is the one who departed from his religion to another religion in Mecca!” She drank from it. Then he came with another lamb and he [i.e., the Prophet] milked it until a cup was filled; then he left it filled with milk. Then he said, “drink!” He drank. Then the Prophet said, “bring me another!” and he brought him another and he milked it and poured [the milk] for Abū Bakr. Then the Prophet said, “Bring me another!” and he brought it and the Prophet milked it and left it.<sup>26</sup>

While both accounts relate the same encounter between Muḥammad and Umm Maʿbad, there are significant narrative differences between the account in the chronological section about the *hijra* and that in the thematic chapter on signs of prophecy. In the *hijra* account, the male relative is identified as Umm Maʿbad’s husband, but in the thematic chapter of “signs of prophecy,” he is identified as her son. The age of the animal and the reason for its inability to produce milk also differ. The account in the *hijra* also includes a theme of blessing, as expressed in the Prophet’s renaming of the sheep. The general episode of Muḥammad milking an animal that is deemed incapable of producing milk is common in the account of Wahb b. Munabbih’s biography and in Ibn Saʿd’s two accounts. But while both of Ibn Saʿd’s accounts relate to the same episode, only the one in the chronological framework of the *hijra* closely parallels Wahb b. Munabbih’s account. This should not, however, automatically lead to the conclusion that Ibn Saʿd introduced Wahb’s material into the emerging *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature. Even though the provenance of the account in the chapter on the signs of prophecy is not sufficiently identified, it does appear that Ibn Saʿd deliberately chose a different source than Wahb b. Munabbih,

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:156f.

who was discredited in scholarly circles. This could signify diverging standards of authentication between the chronological *sīra* overall and the particular thematic chapters in which Ibn Sa'd may have felt obliged to provide individual *isnāds* that he could not produce for the one from Wahb b. Munabbih.

#### 1.2.1.2 *Muḥammad's Encounter with Surāqa*

Another case study is the narrative of Muḥammad's encounter with a Qurayshī man called Surāqa, who pursued the Prophet after his escape from Medina. One version of this account, found in the *Maghāzī* of Mūsā b. 'Uqba (d. 140/758), is partially preserved in a unique manuscript.<sup>27</sup> This manuscript includes twenty excerpts of the *maghāzī* work, each containing the *isnād* and actual text.<sup>28</sup> The *maghāzī* contains the following account: After Muḥammad left Mecca, the Quraysh offered a reward of one hundred camels for anyone who returned him to Mecca. A man came to a group of Quraysh and claimed that he had seen three men passing by, one of whom he thought was the Prophet. Eager to pursue Muḥammad himself, Surāqa diverted the group's attention by stating that those men were in search of their animals that had gone astray. Then Surāqa went home and took his divination arrows and rode into the deepest part of the valley. He drew an arrow, which read "He will not harm him." He followed Muḥammad's traces and drew another arrow. The result was the same as the first time. Surāqa was even more insistent on finding Muḥammad and continued his pursuit. Once Muḥammad and his men came into sight, the feet of Surāqa's horse sank into the ground and Surāqa fell off. A cloud of dust accompanied the Prophet and Surāqa realized that he could not harm the Prophet. He shouted that he did not intend to harm the Prophet and Abū Bakr wrote an agreement between the Prophet and Surāqa. When Mecca was conquered eight years later, Surāqa approached the Prophet to show him the letter of agreement. Muḥammad pardoned him and Surāqa converted to Islam.<sup>29</sup>

The episode of Surāqa and his horse also appears in Wahb b. Munabbih's account of the Prophet's life, as summarized in chapter 1.<sup>30</sup> The context is the

27 Sachau, "Der Berliner Fragment des Mūsā Ibn 'Uqba," 445–470; a new edition of this text includes a detailed introduction and systematic listing of parallel accounts; cf. Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Aḥādīth muntakhaba*.

28 The excerpts reflect the ten parts of the original work. It is not clear whether the structure of ten parts goes back to Mūsā himself or to a later compiler; cf. Sachau, "Der Berliner Fragment des Mūsā Ibn 'Uqba," 448. At least twelve of these accounts are found in passages from Mūsā as al-Bayhaqī quotes them in his *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*; Schoeler, "Mūsā b. 'Uqba's *Maghāzī*," 69.

29 Sachau, "Der Berliner Fragment des Mūsā Ibn 'Uqba," 452f.

30 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 148f.; chapter 1, 17f.

same as in Mūsā's account, but in Wahb's account, Surāqa's encounter with the Prophet is presented in more detail. Abū Bakr noticed Surāqa and asked Muḥammad to make supplications (*du'ā'*) to keep Surāqa away from them. The horse's legs then sank into the ground in response to Muḥammad's supplication. Then Surāqa requested the Prophet to ask God to release the horse's legs and in return, he promised not to harm them. The horse was set free and Surāqa accompanied the Prophet and his Companions until he spotted men from his family. He left the Prophet in order to divert the men and thus protect the Prophet.

The two versions display a common context and a number of the same details, but there are also some divergences. Thus, it seems initially that the two accounts of Surāqa's encounter with the Prophet relate to one another the way the accounts of the *hijra* by 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr and Wahb b. Munabbih do. However, the overarching message conveyed in the accounts of Mūsā and Wahb are significantly different. The most prominent difference being that Mūsā b. 'Uqba does not directly connect the stumbling of Surāqa's horse to any action of the Prophet, as the dialog between Abū Bakr and Muḥammad and the supplication (*du'ā'*) are absent in Mūsā's version. Wahb, by contrast, does not mention the letter or the second half of Mūsā's account that is situated at the conquest of Mecca. The reference to men searching for their straying animals appears in both versions, albeit in different contexts. Mūsā's account mentions it as a means for Surāqa to divert his companions' interest in pursuing the Prophet, in order to secure the opportunity for himself. In Wahb's account, Surāqa uses the same statement to divert the attention of his tribesmen, but this time his intention is to protect the Prophet from his Surāqa's family members. Surāqa's encounter with the Prophet is also mentioned in the letter that Abū Bakr sent the Quraysh after the Prophet's arrival at Medina. This letter presents the sunken horse of Surāqa as a sign, which was acknowledged by Surāqa, whereas the other Quraysh still required proof for the Prophet's cause.<sup>31</sup> Following the arrival of the letter, the Banū Mudlij are reproached for their member's support of the Prophet, but Surāqa himself refutes the criticism in the letter, stating that they, too, would have acknowledged the Prophet if the same thing had happened to them.<sup>32</sup> As such, the two accounts may have many elements in common, but generally convey very different messages. Mūsā's version evokes the sense that Surāqa realized his inability to capture Muḥammad following the accidental stumbling of his horse, and this leads to a truce between the two protagonists, while Wahb portrays the encounter as

31 Houry, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:154f.

32 Houry, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:158f.

an act of divine protection of the Prophet which causes Surāqa to acknowledge the Prophet and even defend his actions against his fellow tribesmen.

Mūsā b. 'Uqba's account was transmitted on the authority of al-Zuhrī and is also found—with very similar wording—in 'Abd al-Razzāq,<sup>33</sup> al-Ṭabarānī,<sup>34</sup> al-Bukhārī,<sup>35</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal,<sup>36</sup> Ibn Ishāq,<sup>37</sup> al-Wāqidī,<sup>38</sup> and al-Bayhaqī.<sup>39</sup> These accounts are linked to various *isnāds* but they all go back to al-Zuhrī.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, this account should be regarded as part of the “scholarly” tradition. The account of Wahb, however, only resurfaced in Ibn Sa'd's account of the *hijra*. Ibn Sa'd's work includes this episode in three accounts: two appear in the context of the *hijra* in his chronological *sīra* section<sup>41</sup> and a third is part of the chapter on the signs of prophecy.<sup>42</sup> In the thematic chapter, the episode with Surāqa is supported by an obviously deficient *isnād* based on the authority of “a shaykh from the Quraysh.”<sup>43</sup> Ibn Sa'd's general biography, however, includes shorter versions of Surāqa's encounter with the Prophet, which are closer to the account of Wahb than they are to that of al-Zuhrī.

#### 1.2.1.3 *The Cobweb and the Pigeon*

A third example of unauthenticated materials in Ibn Sa'd's biography is the narrative about a pigeon and a cobweb at the entrance of the cave in which Muḥammad and Abū Bakr hide from their Qurayshī pursuers. The narrative is part of Wahb b. Munabbih's prophetic biography<sup>44</sup> and might have been the source for Ibn Sa'd, as it is not found in this form in other biographies of the time. The narrative is notably absent in Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī only briefly mentions the cobweb over the cave's entrance without providing further

33 Al-Zuhrī's *maghāzī* includes two versions; cf. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 5:392f.

34 Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, 7:133 (no. 6602).

35 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:149–152.

36 Aḥmad, *Musnad*, 4:175f.

37 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 225f.

38 Wellhausen, *Muhammad in Medina*, 374.

39 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 2:485f.

40 Schacht claimed that of some of Mūsā's *isnāds* going back to al-Zuhrī, including the one in question, were not authentic; cf. Schacht, “On Mūsā b. 'Uqba's Kitāb al-Maghāzī”; however, Schoeler rejected this view and demonstrated the authenticity of these *isnāds* based on parallel accounts from independent traditions going back to al-Zuhrī; cf. Schoeler, “Mūsā b. 'Uqbas Maghāzī,” 83f.

41 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:199.

42 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159.

43 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159.

44 Houry, *Wahb ibn Munabbih*, 1:144f.

details.<sup>45</sup> Ibn Sa'd diverges from al-Wāqidi's brevity and inserts a tradition that provides more detail:

The Prophet passed the night in the cave. God commanded a tree to grow in front of the Prophet, which concealed him. God [also] commanded a spider to weave its cobweb and thus conceal him. God [furthermore] commanded two wild pigeons, and they began to live at the mouth of the cave. The youth of the Quraysh—one from each tribe—with their swords, clubs, and rods approached, and they were at a distance of just 40 cubits from the Prophet. The first among them noticed the two pigeons, and so he withdrew. His companion said to him: “Why did you not look into the cave?” He replied: “I saw two wild pigeons at the mouth of the cave from which I concluded that there was no one inside.” [Ibn Sa'd] said: The Prophet heard his voice and realized that God had kept them away. Then the Prophet wished them [i.e., the pigeons] well and in reward they were shifted to the sanctuary of God.<sup>46</sup>

This passage displays some parallels with the account of Wahb b. Munabbih, as well as additional details, such as a tree that grew in front of the cave and the destiny of the pigeons. Based on the extant textual evidence, it appears that Ibn Sa'd might have used Wahb b. Munabbih's account here, at least partially. It is noteworthy, however, that both versions of Ibn Sa'd's narrative are found in the general section on the *hijra* in the *sīra*, but do not appear in the chapter on the “signs of prophecy.” The absence of this account from the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* chapters is not necessarily related to its apparently unauthenticated source, but could indicate that Ibn Sa'd did not ascribe evidentiary relevance to this particular episode.

These three cases show that Ibn Sa'd most likely included some unauthenticated materials in his general *sīra* of the Prophet. His chronological chapters include three narratives that closely resemble accounts in Wahb's biography, but the thematic chapter on the “signs of prophecy” provides a more nuanced situation. Two accounts designated as signs of prophecy relate general episodes that are also found in Wahb's *sīra*, namely the Prophet's encounters with Umm Ma'bad and Surāqa, and both accounts display significant shortcomings in the chain of transmission. However, only the account of Surāqa shows strong narrative parallels to Wahb's account in contrast to the numerous authenticated reports that are transmitted on the authority of al-Zuhri. Muḥammad's

45 Khoury, *Wahb ibn Munabbih*, 1:195.

46 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:197.

encounter with Umm Ma'bad appears twice in Ibn Sa'd's work, once in the chronological part, and a second time in the thematic chapter. But only the version included in his chronological biography exhibits parallels with Wahb's account, while the one in the "signs of prophecy" chapter shares the encounter as a theme but differs decisively in content. Finally, the narrative of the spider and pigeon also shares some details with Wahb b. Munabbih's account but is completely left out of the chapters of the "signs of prophecy." The episodes of Umm Ma'bad and Surāqa may suggest that Ibn Sa'd was more critical in selecting *ḥadīth* for these thematic chapters. In conjunction with Ibn Sa'd's generally thorough employment of *isnāds* to support these thematic accounts, these results suggest that, contrary to the claims of earlier scholars, "unauthenticated" materials constituted a marginal number in Ibn Sa'd's accounts. The vast majority of accounts found in Ibn Sa'd's chapter on the "signs of prophecy" therefore seem to originate in scholarly circles and follow their standards of authentication.

1.2.2 "Popular" Materials in Ibn Sa'd's Chapters on the Signs of Prophecy  
I have shown in the introduction to this book that earlier Orientalists have largely dismissed *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature based on the assumption that many narratives found in these compilations were "popular tales" in the sense that they originated among circles of storytellers who were assumed to be untrained in the Islamic sciences and therefore often fabricated narratives to entertain Muslim masses. Part of the Orientalists' argument relate to narrative styles; these were deemed too detailed and embellished compared to the supposedly more factual style of *ḥadīth*. Ibn Sa'd's chapters on the proofs of prophecy include three accounts (a speaking wolf, Miqdād's encounter with the devil, and *jinn* being chased by meteors) that display such narrative styles. In the following, I trace the inclusion of these narratives in early *ḥadīth* compilations. I argue that while some later Sunnī scholars and Orientalists may have questioned the authenticity of these accounts, many scholars contemporaneous with Ibn Sa'd had no such doubts and included them in their own collections.

I describe the first of these narratives in the introduction of this book: Tor Andrae classified as folklore an account of a speaking wolf that directs a shepherd to drive his flock to Medina and follow Muḥammad and his community. Andrae asserted that this particular account allegedly incited the suspicion of *ḥadīth* scholars because of its folkloristic nature.<sup>47</sup> Andrae's reference is to an account that he had found, not in *ḥadīth* collections or the early *dalā'il*

47 Andrae, *Die Person Muhammed*, 27.

*al-nubūwa* compilations, but in *al-Shifā'* by Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (d. 543/1149).<sup>48</sup> Thus, Andrae's point of departure was one relatively late text and his judgment was primarily based on a comment Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ made in reference to this *ḥadīth* in which he stated (*al-ḥadīth fī-hi qiṣṣa*). Andrae read this statement as an indication that Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ suspected a folkloristic origin that went back to the *quṣṣāṣ* rather than being the work of *ḥadīth* scholars.<sup>49</sup> For Western scholars of Andrae's time, these storytellers were synonymous with charlatans who freely invented stories to please their mostly uneducated audiences. As I laid out in chapter 1, Jonathan Berkey and Lyall Armstrong have more recently shown that, until well into the fourth/tenth century, these storytellers were for the most part scholars who were properly trained in various fields, and that the profession was only later haunted by dubious characters who entertained the masses with imaginary tales or *Isrā'īliyyāt*.<sup>50</sup> Andrae's reliance on one late text combined with his generalized notion of *qiṣās* as untrustworthy led him to dismiss the entire *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature without investigating whether or how this account appeared in other texts. In fact, the narrative of the shepherd and the speaking wolf appears in a number of early and often prominent *ḥadīth* collections, such as the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd, the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855),<sup>51</sup> the two canonical *ḥadīth* collections of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870)<sup>52</sup> and Muslim (d. 261/875),<sup>53</sup> as well as in later compilations, such as the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works of al-Bayhaqī,<sup>54</sup> Abū Nu'aym,<sup>55</sup> and *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* of

48 Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, *al-Shifā' bi-ta'rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā'*, 1:432.

49 Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds*, 27.

50 Berkey, *Popular Preaching*.

51 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:203f. (no. 8049; this is a shorter account only relating the shepherd's encounter with the wolf, without many descriptive details), 4:210f. (no. 11814); 4:222 (no. 11863).

52 This *ḥadīth* was only partially related to the one in Ibn Sa'd's "signs of prophecy." The book of cultivation and agriculture states, "While a man was riding a cow, it turned toward him and said, 'I have not been created for this purpose, I have been created for ploughing.' The Prophet added, 'I, Abū Bakr, and 'Umar believe in this story.' The Prophet said further, 'A wolf caught a sheep, and when the shepherd chased it, the wolf said, 'Who will be its guard on the day of wild beasts, when there will be no shepherd for it except I?' After narrating it, the Prophet said, 'I, Abū Bakr, and 'Umar, too, believe it.'" Abū Salama said, "Abū Bakr and 'Umar were not present"; cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3:295 (no. 2324).

53 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 15:103 (no. 2388).

54 The *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* encompasses a chapter containing various versions of this narrative. Their *isnāds* vary in strength. Two of these accounts are very close to the one in Ibn Sa'd; cf. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:41–44.

55 Abū Nu'aym's work also includes two versions of this account; cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 222f.

Ibn Kathīr<sup>56</sup> (d. 774/1373). It is noteworthy that the same *ḥadīth* appears, at the same time and sometimes even in the same collections, in shorter and longer versions. The core of the story (a wolf speaking to a shepherd to inform him about Muḥammad's prophetic mission in Medina) is central in all versions; the differences relate to descriptive details, such as what kind of leaves the sheep were feeding on. Therefore, the story of the speaking wolf clearly was part of the scholarly discourse from the early third/ninth century onward. Given that the word *qiṣṣa*, more generally, is associated with the notion of relating a piece of information, Qāḍī 'Iyād probably meant that this particular version of the *ḥadīth* is unusually detailed in its descriptions, as compared to other versions; that is, he was not indicating that its provenance was unreliable storytellers. Andrae, however, failed to trace this account to other texts and thus considered these texts part of popular veneration of the Prophet.

The version of this episode also appears in Ibn Sa'd's chapter on the signs of prophecy after the beginning of the revelation. Even though Ibn Sa'd's version appears to be one of the longer accounts containing even more descriptive details than the one in *al-Shifā'*, Qāḍī 'Iyād's remark should not be taken as a dismissal of this account by scholars. We have seen that many other respected scholars included it in their *ḥadīth* compilations. Thus, this account may have stirred the suspicion of later Muslim scholars and Western Orientalists with regard to its "scholarly" provenance, but the frequent references to it in *ḥadīth* works that are closer in time to Ibn Sa'd seem to attest to its acceptance among earlier scholars.

The same can be said about two other lengthy accounts in Ibn Sa'd's chapter. The first describes Miqdād being tempted by Satan to drink Muḥammad's share of milk. In this account, Miqdād relates the following:

I and two of my companions—our hearing and sight had gone due to hardship—approached [Medina]. We set out to submit ourselves to the Companions of the Prophet but not a single one received us. We rushed to the Prophet and he rushed with us to his family. There were three goats. The Prophet said: "Draw that milk and [distribute it] among us." We drew the milk and everyone drank his share and we kept the Prophet's share. He [i.e., the Prophet] came at night and greeted us [in such a way that] he did not wake the sleeping [people] but those awake heard [his greetings]. He went to the mosque and prayed; then he came for his drink and drank it. Satan came to me that night and said: "Muḥammad goes to the Anṣār [i.e., Helpers in Medina] and they offered him presents, he

56 Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, 4:183.

takes meals with them, and he has no need of this mouthful [of milk], so drink it!" He did not cease to persuade me until I drank it. When it [the milk] penetrated my stomach and he knew there was no way for me to regurgitate it, he made me regret it: "Woe to you for what you did! You drank Muḥammad's drink! [When] he comes and he does not see it, he will curse you and you will perish, you lose this life and the afterlife!"

I had a cloak of wool and whenever it was raised to my head, my feet came out, and when it was extended over my feet, my head would come out. Sleep would not come to me, but as for my two companions, they were fast asleep. The Prophet came and greeted us like he had greeted us before, went to the mosque to pray, and [then] came for his drink and uncovered it but he did not find anything there. He raised his head toward the sky and I said: "Now he is praying that I will die." He said: "oh God, feed whoever fed me, and give [something] to drink [to] whoever gave me [something] to drink." I approached with my cloak tightened around me and I took the knife. Then I rushed to the goats, touching them [to see] which [one of them] was the fattest to slaughter it for the Prophet, and they were all filled [with milk]. I approached the vessel of the Prophet's family that was [used to] draw the milk and I drew the milk into it until there was foam on it. Then I went with the vessel to the Prophet and he asked: "Have you not drunk your drink tonight, oh Miqdād?" I said: "Drink, Messenger of God!" He drank and then he passed it to me. I said: "Messenger of God, drink!" He drank and then he passed it to me; I took what was left and drank it. When I knew that the Prophet was satiated and his beneficial supplication had reached me, I laughed until I fell on the ground. The Prophet said: "[Tell me] one of your shameful acts, Miqdād." I said: "Messenger of God, I have done such and such." The Prophet said: "This was only out of God's mercy. Had you not been close to me you would have woken those two Companions and they would have had their share of it [i.e., the milk]." I said: "By Him who sent you with truth, I do not mind sharing with anyone of the people if you and I have partaken of it."<sup>57</sup>

This account stands out from the larger body of *ḥadīth* in terms of its content and style. While Miqdād's encounter with and temptation by the devil may be thematically reminiscent of folktales, it is the style of the narrative that sets it apart from most *ḥadīths*, which tend to be characterized by a succinct, matter-of-fact tone, conveying few circumstantial descriptions or statements

57 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:154f.

of emotion.<sup>58</sup> Yet, the account is found in copious *ḥadīth* compilations that are contemporary with Ibn Saʿd's work, such as the *Musnad* compilations of al-Ṭayālīsī<sup>59</sup> (d. 204/820), Ibn Abī Shayba<sup>60</sup> (d. 235/850), and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal,<sup>61</sup> the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim,<sup>62</sup> *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Tirmidhī,<sup>63</sup> and the *Musnad* of al-Bazzār<sup>64</sup> (d. 292/905). Thus, there can be no doubt that this account was also firmly established in the scholarly circles of the time.

In addition to the narratives of the speaking wolf and Miqdād's encounter with Satan, Ibn Saʿd's chapter on the proofs of prophecy includes another narrative that appears to display "popular" elements that Ibn Saʿd might have taken from *ḥadīth* and *sīra* collections in general, but may also be drawn from material that usually pertains to the interpretation of the Qurʾān. The account reads as follows.

When the Prophet was sent, the *jinn* were chased away and stars were cast upon them. Before that they had listened—to every tribe there was a place [for the *jinn*] to sit and they listened—the first who were afraid of [the presence of the *jinn*] were the people of Taif; they started slaughtering whatever camel and sheep they had every day [as sacrifice] for their deities until their means ran out. Then they stopped and some of them said to others, "Have you not seen the sign of the heavens, as if a thing had come from it?" Iblīs said, "That thing happened on earth. Bring me soil from every land!" Soil was brought and he sniffed it and drew near it until soil was brought from Tihama. He sniffed it and said, "It is happening here."<sup>65</sup>

This narrative draws on the Qurʾānic notion of *jinn* listening to celestial discourses. According to several verses in the Qurʾān, certain *jinn* were said to have played a role in facilitating the work of fortune-tellers and sorcerers in pre-Islamic Arabia by listening to conversations among the angels and conveying this information to human beings.<sup>66</sup> The Qurʾānic commentary (*tafsīr*)

58 Cf. Leder, "Conventions of Fictional Narration in Learned Literature," 37; Leder, "The Literary Use of Khabar," 307f.

59 Al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, 2:476f. (no. 1256).

60 Ibn Abī Shayba, *Musnad*, 1:330f. (no. 487).

61 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 7:889f. (no. 24810 and no. 24813; the latter is the most extensive and closest to the one in Ibn Saʿd).

62 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 14:13f.

63 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 5:66 (no. 2719).

64 Al-Bazzār, *al-Baḥr al-zakhār*, 6:41f.

65 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:140f.

66 Q. 15:16–18, 37:6–10, 67:5, 72:8f.

tradition holds that God cut off all such access to angelic discussions after Muḥammad began receiving revelation; at that point He established angels as sentries and repelled the *jinn* with meteors. This particular episode in which Iblīs tried to establish what caused the disruption and where these meteors took place, however, is not commonly found in exegetical and *ḥadīth* literature. The *Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abī Shayba<sup>67</sup> appears to be the only *ḥadīth* work containing this account. It is also found in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).<sup>68</sup> This account is seldom attested in other scholarly works, and only rarely surfaces in *tafsīr* literature about a generation after Ibn Sa'd. While this does not allow us to trace the origins of this particular tradition, it does suggest that Ibn Sa'd might have occasionally looked to other fields of scholarship when compiling the materials for his chapters on the "signs of prophecy."

In conclusion, it seems that the earliest works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* were authored by *ḥadīth* scholars who compiled thematic chapters in accordance with the standards of their field and employed the appropriate level of authentication available in their respective times. Even Ibn Sa'd, whose expertise was not *ḥadīth* compilation in the narrower sense, proves to have worked according to the scholarly methodological framework of his time. His work displays several standards of authentication, depending on the context of the *maghāzī* or *sīra*, and we could even argue that he attempted to apply stricter standards to his thematic chapters on the "signs of prophecy." Even in the few cases in which Ibn Sa'd included less authentic materials, the accounts themselves mostly appear in other *ḥadīth* collections of his times or in later ones. This is true for methodological and stylistic aspects. While modern scholars have rejected the notion that literature was part of the scholarly discourse, my analyses of the authors' networks and the extant early texts show that the origins of *ḥadīth*-based *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works are squarely situated in scholarly circles.

## 2 Methodologies of Authentication in Later *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Works

The examination of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors in chapter 2 shows a clear distinction between the early authors of the late third/ninth century and later scholars of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries in terms of their intellectual backgrounds and their interconnectedness with other authors of this literature. As such, authors of the third and fourth generations had little personal interaction with previous *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors. In this section I analyze three later extant works, those of al-Khargūshī, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī,

67 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 8:436.

68 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 23:38.

and al-Bayhaqī, with the primary goal of establishing whether the lack of personal student-teacher relations between the earlier and later generations of authors also manifests itself in the methodological approaches and structure of the works. A couple of methodological considerations should be noted: The body of sources dating from this transitional period is limited because there are no works preserved from the third generation. This creates a considerable gap between the last compilation of the second generation, the chapter in the *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, and the first of the fourth generation, the *Sharaf al-nabī* by al-Khargūshī. Therefore, the analysis of the later works only allows us to juxtapose their approaches; it does not allow an extensive outline of the continuously evolving methodology in the third and fourth generations, and this appears to be when this literature was systematized. I focus on the question of the authors' methodological approaches, particularly the presence of *isnāds* and the ways in which they were employed, and, to a lesser degree, the extent to which these compilations included narratives that did not have authenticated sources.

### 2.1 *Al-Khargūshī's Sharaf al-Nabī*

Al-Khargūshī studied with some scholars of *ḥadīth* but was mostly known as an ascetic. His *Sharaf al-nabī* differs significantly from previous works in terms of its methodological approach, scope, and arrangement. While his antecedents followed the scholarly methodology of *ḥadīth* by authenticating their accounts, al-Khargūshī's compilation provides minimal support by including authenticated *isnād* chains. He frequently presents what seems like a complete *isnād* at the beginning of a chapter. However, this appears to be a stylistic feature rather than evidence of his methodological integrity, as the vast majority of the subsequent accounts allude to a single Companion or Follower who transmitted a *ḥadīth*, but omit the subsequent chain of transmission. Therefore, his methodology partially resembles the approaches of *sīra* works that provide collective *isnāds* for the overall framework, and then supplement them with individual reports. Contrary to those individual *sīra* accounts, however, the chain of transmission in al-Khargūshī's subsequent accounts includes just the alleged narrator; this does not allow a proper authentication according to the standards of Sunnī *ḥadīth* scholars of his time. In many other instances accounts are simply introduced with an impersonal construction, such as "it has been said that ..." without any identification of the transmitter. Thus, al-Khargūshī's methodology differs sharply from that of his predecessors, as he fails to meet their scholarly standards of authenticating individual accounts.

Al-Khargūshī's work also contains a number of narratives that are well-known from "unauthenticated" traditions, such as the account of the cobweb concealing the entrance of the cave where the Prophet and Abū Bakr hid

during the *hijra*,<sup>69</sup> or the Prophet sprinkling dust on the heads of the Quraysh while lying in ambush outside of his house.<sup>70</sup> These accounts are found in the biographical reports of Wahb b. Munabbih<sup>71</sup> and Ibn Sa'd.<sup>72</sup> By including these episodes, al-Khargūshī diverges from previous *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors who selected only materials accepted by *muḥaddithūn*. As we have seen, Ibn Sa'd also utilized these sources throughout the *sīra* section of his *Ṭabaqāt*, but did not include them in his chapters on the "signs of prophecy" and generally upheld higher methodological standards in these chapters than throughout the *sīra*. Thus, al-Khargūshī is more lax in relation to these sources than any of the previous authors we have studied here. He is the first *dalā'il al-nubūwa* author we can identify who abandoned the methodological parameters of *ḥadīth* scholarship and more closely approximates those of *sīra/maghāzī* literature, as we also see in our analysis of the organizational structure of his work.

## 2.2 *Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's Dalā'il al-Nubūwa*

Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is one of the most well-known works of this kind and is printed in various editions. The author was a prominent and respected scholar of *ḥadīth*, and, contrary to al-Khargūshī, he studied with several earlier authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, such as al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) and Ibn Mandah (d. 395/1005). Al-Sakhawī attributes a work entitled *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* to another teacher of Abū Nu'aym, namely Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī.<sup>73</sup> Like the earlier *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilers, Abū Nu'aym presents a full *isnād* for every account. His sources, however, also include transmitters that are more commonly found in *sīra* works and related literary genres. In addition to many well-known *ḥadīth* transmitters, such as 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, al-Zuhrī, Ma'mar b. Rāshid, or 'Abd al-Razzāq, Abū Nu'aym's *isnāds* frequently include figures such as Wahb b. Munabbih and Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who were mostly known for transmitting *Isrā'īliyyāt*,<sup>74</sup> as well as Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī, who

69 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 154.

70 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 175f. The theme of the Prophet throwing dust or soil also occurs in an account of the battle of Badr in which the Muslim army was vastly outnumbered. The Prophet threw soil at the opposing army, which incapacitated them and led to the Muslims' victory; Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 159f. In Qur'anic exegesis, this episode from the battle of Badr is commonly associated with verse 8:17.

71 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:140f.

72 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:195.

73 Al-Sakhawī, *al-I'lān*, 91. Abū l-Shaykh's extant work *Akhlāq al-nabī wa-adabuhu* is not a *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* work but a compendium on the Prophet similar to al-Khargūshī's work or the *Shamā'il* work of al-Tirmidhī. It describes the Prophet's physical appearance, mannerisms, character traits, and numerous objects he possessed.

74 Armstrong, *The Quṣṣās of Early Islam*, 93.

were prominent in the fields of *sīra*, *maghāzī*, and early Muslim history, but were often criticized by scholars of *ḥadīth*. This broader pool of sources is also reflected in Abū Nu‘aym’s accounts. Like al-Khargūshī before him, Abū Nu‘aym includes several narratives that are well-known from the “unauthenticated” tradition, such as the incident in which the Prophet sprinkled soil on the heads of the Quraysh who lay in ambush for him on the night of the *hijra*.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, he mentions the incident of wild pigeons sitting at the mouth of the cave and God ordering a tree to grow in front of it to prevent the Quraysh from finding the Prophet and Abū Bakr who were hiding there.<sup>76</sup> These latter elements (the tree and pigeons) are less common in earlier traditions of the *hijra*. Wahb b. Munabbih mentions a cobweb that was spun across the entrance of the cave and an angel in the shape of a pigeon.<sup>77</sup> Al-Wāqidī also mentions the cobweb but no pigeons,<sup>78</sup> and Ibn Ishāq’s account does not mention the incident. Ibn Sa‘d presents an account similar to Abū Nu‘aym’s description of the pigeons and the tree in his chronological biography of the Prophet, but this episode is absent from his chapters on the “signs of prophecy.” Like al-Khargūshī before him, Abū Nu‘aym breaks with the trend of previous *dalā’il al-nubūwa* authors who selected only those materials that were accepted by *muḥaddithūn*. But unlike al-Khargūshī, Abū Nu‘aym makes the case that his approach still follows the methodological parameters of Islamic scholarship. He provides a preface to his work in which he (indirectly) defends this inclusion of “unauthenticated” materials. Notably, he specifically points to prophetic miracles as the aspect of Muḥammad’s biography that requires him to include less authenticated materials, because “the miracles of the Prophet are too many to enumerate and more famous than just those that can be supported by proper *isnāds*.”<sup>79</sup> As such, he briefly touches on questions of methodology but the main subjects in his preface are theological expositions on prophecy, which are discussed in a later section.

### 2.3 *Al-Bayhaqī’s Dalā’il al-nubūwa*

In the preface to his work, al-Bayhaqī sought to legitimize the sources he used, to include them in the methodological framework of *ḥadīth* scholarship and legal theory. Like Abū Nu‘aym, al-Bayhaqī drew on an extensive and

75 Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī relates this account on the authority of Ibn Ishāq and the narrative is also found in Wahb b. Munabbih, as I have previously shown; al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 115f.

76 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 191.

77 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:144f.

78 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:195.

79 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 15.

varied pool of material, ranging from accounts transmitted by participants of the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement, such as Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Mājah, al-Nisā'ī, al-Darāmī, or Mālik b. Anas to less rigorously authenticated ones. Al-Bayhaqī states in the preface of the *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* that he intended to differentiate “sound” narratives from less authoritative ones.<sup>80</sup> He considers the two *ṣaḥīḥ* works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim the foundation of his own work and identifies the *ḥadīths* that are included in these two collections. However, he also accepts accounts from the *maghāzī* works of Mūsā b. 'Uqba and al-Wāqidī and frequently relies on material from Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*. As these sources lack the authority of proper *ḥadīths*, al-Bayhaqī offers an extensive discussion in his preface, in which he argues that employing less authenticated materials for this kind of literature is, in fact, in line with the methodological requirements of *ḥadīth* scholarship. Al-Bayhaqī relies on al-Shāfi'ī's *Risāla* as his authority for scholarly methodology, as we see in the following.

Al-Bayhaqī begins his systematic approach to these methodological questions by reproducing al-Shāfi'ī's argument that the Qur'ān's command to the Prophet to be obedient legitimizes the Sunna as a guideline for Muslim conduct.<sup>81</sup> He continues to reiterate the notion that it is expected that ordinary Muslims and *ḥadīth* experts will possess different levels of knowledge of the Sunna; this reinforces the bifurcation of laymen and specialists' engagement with *ḥadīth* that emerged around the time of the *ṣaḥīḥ* movement. Drawing on al-Shāfi'ī's *Risāla*, he categorizes the accounts into general reports (*akhbār*), such as those that prescribe the basic practices of the faith, which must be known by laymen and scholars alike; and specific *akhbār* that pertain to details of legal rulings and opinions, which only scholars are required to know.<sup>82</sup> Al-Bayhaqī goes on to list al-Shāfi'ī's criteria for specific *akhbār*, in terms of the requirements for their transmitters and levels of authenticity in order for them to be accepted.<sup>83</sup> He classifies these specific *akhbār* as (1) those on whose soundness scholars agree, (2) those on whose weakness scholars agree, (3) and those on which scholars disagree.<sup>84</sup> Of particular interest for this study is the first category, which he further subdivides into accounts transmitted through numerous initial transmitters (*mutawātir*), and those that can be traced back

80 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 47.

81 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 20–27.

82 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 22.

83 The transmitter must be trustworthy in his religion, truthful in his knowledge of *ḥadīth*, of sound mind, and knowledgeable in the meanings derived from *ḥadīths*; he must know the account verbatim exactly like he heard it or studied it from a book, and must be free of any accusations of deceit in *ḥadīth* transmission; cf. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 29–31.

84 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 32–38.

to only one transmitter (*āḥād*). Based on its less rigorously established reliability, the latter category may not serve for legal rulings (*aḥkām*) but remains acceptable for works on edification and admonishment.<sup>85</sup>

Like Abū Nu'aym before him, al-Bayhaqī specifically addressed the question of miracles that are often transmitted by only one Companion, as they were frequently said to have occurred in the presence of one person only, who then spread the account among the people. If such an account were corroborated by other widespread accounts of a miracle or sign, it could even be considered *tawātur*.<sup>86</sup> By the same token, al-Bayhaqī asserts that relying on weak transmitters may also be permissible, depending on the context in which the accounts are used, and stresses that those transmitters who have been accused of lying may not be relied on for legal rulings but their accounts may be used for edifying purposes. He quotes Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal regarding the scholarly value of these transmitters in historical contexts but not for legal or ritual purposes.<sup>87</sup> Al-Bayhaqī also elucidated conditions that permit the use of *ḥadīths* with a *mursal isnād*, that is, a sound chain of transmission that is traced back to Followers (*tābī'ūn*) as transmitters, but that do not mention the Companion (*ṣaḥāba*); he also discussed diverging or contradictory *ḥadīths* and questions of abrogation. Al-Bayhaqī's elaborate discussion of the permissibility of *āḥād ḥadīth* and weak transmitters in certain contexts is clearly meant to justify his own incorporation of *maghāzī* and historical materials.

With this extensive preface al-Bayhaqī comprehensively builds the case that his *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* upholds the required scholarly standards. Since he does not argue for the foundation of religious practices or make legal rulings, the inclusion of *ḥadīths* based on weak *isnāds* and on accounts taken from histories and *maghāzī* works is acceptable. Nevertheless, al-Bayhaqī privileges accounts from sound *ḥadīth* compilations whenever possible and identifies these as such. If he resorts to less authoritative sources, these are commonly identified as well. In some cases, he indicates the weak *isnād* in the heading of a sub-chapter.<sup>88</sup> The same applies to his inclusion of accounts from *maghāzī* literature.<sup>89</sup> However, for the most part, this information must be derived from the *isnād*. The way al-Bayhaqī uses these less authoritative materials differs from case to case. When the same event is related in both sound and weak accounts, he lists these in the same thematic chapter, first the most

85 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 27f.

86 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 33.

87 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 37f.

88 For instance, al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 5:421, 423.

89 For an account on the authority of Mūsā b. 'Uqba, see, al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 3:101; for an account on the authority of Ibn Ishāq, see al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 3:164.

authoritative accounts and then the weaker ones at the end of the chapter. For instance, the water miracle at Ḥudaybiyya is related first in several accounts taken from al-Bukhārī and Muslim and then with accounts on the authority of Mūsā b. ‘Uqba.<sup>90</sup> When weaker materials relate an incident for which there is no sound account, the weak accounts are interspersed between the authoritative ones chronologically, so the chapter as a whole provides a cohesive narrative. For instance, the chapter on the Prophet’s emigration mainly relies on sound accounts based on the authority of al-Zuhri, ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, and ‘Ā’isha, as they are recorded in al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Toward the end of the chapter, however, we find the account of the young Qurayshī men who discover the cave in which the Prophet and Abū Bakr were hiding, but do not enter it because God caused a tree to grow in front of its entrance, a spider to build a cobweb, and pigeons to nest.<sup>91</sup> As I have shown above, this account might be insufficiently authenticated, but it nevertheless appears in other works and is also found in general biography sections in the works of Ibn Sa’d, and in the *dalā’il al-nubūwa* works of al-Khargūshī, and Abū Nu‘aym. While there is some less authenticated material found in his *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, overall, al-Bayhaqī maintains the scholarly standards required for non-legal prophetic traditions as he carefully laid out in his preface.

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This section has outlined the evolving methodological framework applied to *dalā’il al-nubūwa* compilations. The earliest extant compilations of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature emerged in the environment of highly critical *ḥadīth* scholarship. While the collections of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid, al-Bukhārī, and al-Tirmidhī may not fully meet the criteria of authenticity and reliability articulated by later legal theorists, they all took part in the scholarly discourses that contributed to establishing these standards and, in so doing, furthered the bifurcation of professional scholarly engagement with *ḥadīth*, on the one hand, and endeavors by ordinary Muslims to fulfill spiritual devotions, on the other. It is abundantly clear, then, that *dalā’il al-nubūwa* literature was squarely rooted in scholarly circles.

This fact is true even for the one extensive compilation authored by Ibn Sa’d, whose expertise lay in the auxiliary field of the science of narrators (*‘ilm al-rijāl*) rather than *ḥadīth* proper, and whose chapters were situated in the methodological context of *sīra* rather than *ḥadīth*. The analysis of Ibn Sa’d’s

90 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 4:115–128.

91 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 2:481f.

methodological approach in the *sīra* section of his *Ṭabaqāt* shows that he tended to employ *isnāds* for *ḥadīth* but would occasionally insert collective chains of transmission. It has also become clear that he drew on a number of sources for his *sīra* sections; these sources ranged from well authenticated accounts, to material that was likely drawn from the discredited Wahb b. Munabbih, though he is not identified by name. There is also a possibility that Ibn Sa'd drew on materials from other emerging fields of scholarship, such as Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*). While Ibn Sa'd's approach in his chronological biography shows varying degrees of authentication and several instances in which he included unauthenticated material, there are reasons to think that he might have consciously applied stricter levels of criticism to those accounts he included in the chapters dedicated to the signs of prophecy. First, there are no collective *isnāds* in this section, though a few of the individual chains of transmission in these chapters display clear shortcomings, such as unidentified transmitters. In addition to the consistent use of individual *isnāds*, Ibn Sa'd's selective choices of *ḥadīth* for his thematic chapters might also suggest that he sought to use higher standards of authentication. At least the first two episodes, Muḥammad's encounter with Umm Ma'bad and Surāqa, are related in unauthenticated accounts in the *sīra* but were then, in the chapter on the signs of prophecy after the revelation, were replaced by accounts with more rigorously authenticated *isnāds*. Even those accounts whose content later led to questions about its provenance, such as the speaking wolf, were corroborated in *ḥadīth* works contemporaneous with Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*. Based on the parameters *ḥadīth* scholars used to measure historical reliability at this time, this widespread circulation would most likely have been considered sufficient support for the *ḥadīth* in question. Both formal aspects of *ḥadīth* criticism and circumstantial evidence of problematic accounts being corroborated by other contemporaneous scholarly works indicate a scholarly provenance of the "signs of prophecy" and the specific exclusion of laymen masses, even when these works did not yet meet the strictest standards prevalent among scholars of *ḥadīth* in the narrower sense.

We see significant shifts in the methodological approaches of later works of al-Khargūshī, Abū Nu'aym, and al-Bayhaqī. All three include materials from a much broader pool of sources than earlier generations of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors utilized; these included authenticated accounts from well-respected scholars of *ḥadīth* as well as less stringently authenticated materials from specialists in *maghāzī*, *sīra*, *Isrā'īliyyāt*, and historical sources. The extent to which authentication was considered relevant for this type of literature differs among the three authors. Having the least rigorous scholarly credentials, al-Khargūshī provides only minimal support for his accounts, and often reduces the means

of authentication to stylistic features by simply providing the name of an individual narrator without any chain of transmission or even providing entirely anonymous accounts. Therefore, his methodology represents the sharpest departure from his predecessors' dedication to authenticating their contents. Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī both remained committed to providing chains of transmission but also broadened the pool of sources for the material they included. Abū Nu'aym dedicated the preface of his work to address questions of theological import and only mentions, in passing, that Muḥammad's miracles were too numerous and famous to be related exclusively in properly authenticated accounts. Thus, methodological considerations play a much less important role for him than they do for his contemporary al-Bayhaqī. The latter extensively elaborated on why his inclusion of less rigorously authenticated materials fully aligns with the methodological requirements of *ḥadīth* scholarship, given that his work does not relate to matters of legal or ritual norms; therefore, this remains acceptable even with lower levels of reliability and authenticity. It becomes clear that all extant works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, perhaps with the exception of al-Khargūshī's, actively operated in the existing framework of authentication and the scholarly acceptance of their work, and did not seek to gain the attention of Muslim masses.

### 3 Structure and Arrangement of *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Works

In addition to methodological changes, *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature has undergone considerable development in the ways authors structured and arranged their materials. The majority of extant *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works from the earliest period are organized into thematic chapters dedicated to the signs of prophecy, and appear in larger multi-thematic *ḥadīth* compilations. By contrast, al-Jūzajānī's work is a monograph dedicated entirely to the topic of the signs of prophecy. Unfortunately only fractions of one of its chapters have been preserved in a manuscript. This selective process, which was most likely undertaken by someone other than the author himself, causes significant challenges for this study because it makes it impossible to gauge the entire work's extent, content, or structure. Therefore, al-Juzajānī's work is excluded from the discussion of the structure and arrangement these works.

The chapters in Ma'mar, al-Bukhārī, and al-Tirmidhī share common features; they display very little internal ordering and they record numerous *ḥadīths* without thematic or chronological sub-categories. Consistent with many approaches to thematically organized *muṣannaf* compilations, these chapters are not arranged to provide a continuous narrative and are not contextualized

with commentary explaining the choice of accounts or related considerations, such as theological or methodological approaches that may have led to their selection. Later works differ in structure, in that they are crafted to portray Muḥammad in a more systematic way and often, directly or indirectly, address questions of theological import regarding the nature of his prophecy. Given the brevity of the earliest extant works and the analytical challenges posed by the selective excerpt of al-Jūzajānī, this section focuses on Ibn Saʿd and the later authors, al-Khargūshī, Abū Nuʿaym, and al-Bayhaqī.

### 3.1 *Ibn Saʿd's "Alamāt al-Nubūwa"*

Given that Ibn Saʿd's chapters appear in the framework of the *sīra*, his arrangement of materials clearly differs from that of *ḥadīth* scholars. I briefly outline the arrangement of the *sīra* part of his *Ṭabaqāt*, then more closely examine those chapters dedicated to the signs of prophecy.

In the *sīra* section, Ibn Saʿd presents the major events of the Prophet's life in 199 chapters, roughly in a chronological order. He begins with the genealogy of previous prophets (chapters 1–9); the genealogy of Muḥammad's tribe (chapters 10–18); Muḥammad's childhood and youth, including his father's marriage, Muḥammad's conception, and his mother's pregnancy; the death of both parents and his paternal grandfather; his "adoption" by his uncle and going to Syria; and then some stories from Mecca (chapters 19–33). Ibn Saʿd then moves on to Muḥammad's immediate family, including Khadija and his children (chapters 34–37). While Ibn Saʿd arranged this material largely according to chronological order, he also inserted chapters based on themes. The next set of chapters are dedicated to his call to prophecy and the first revelations, their description, the physical impact revelations had on Muḥammad, and the early stages of the dissemination of the message (chapters 38–47). This part of the book includes the two chapters I study here: chapter 39 on the signs of prophecy prior to the call to prophecy, and chapter 41 on the signs of prophecy after the call to prophecy. These two chapters are part of a cluster of four chapters that address issues of prophecy: chapter 38 is entitled "Dhikr nubūwa rasūl Allāh" (Reports of the prophecy of the Messenger of God), which introduces the topic of prophecy and places the beginning of Muḥammad's prophecy in the age of Adam's creation. Chapter 39 is the first chapter on the signs of prophecy; it focuses on narratives that are historically placed before the first revelation. The very short chapter 40 is interspersed between the two chapters on the signs of prophecy; it contains three accounts of Arabs who, having heard from the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) or Soothsayers that a prophet named Muḥammad would emerge among the Arabs, named their sons Muḥammad in order to attain prophecy. Finally, chapter 41 is dedicated to signs of Muḥammad's prophecy

following the onset of revelations. Chapters 42–47 cover narratives from the early days of Muḥammad’s revelation, then cover the persecution of Muslims in Mecca, emigration to Abyssinia and Taif; the *isrāʾ*, *hijra* to Medina (chapters 48–62), and life in Medina, including many aspects of worship and practice (chapters 63–72). The last thematic group of chapters includes accounts of Arabs dying during raids (chapters 73–144); the description of Muḥammad’s appearance, including his description in the Torah and Gospel; the mole between his shoulder blades commonly known as the “seal of prophecy”; and his character, habits, and possessions (chapters 145–199).

In contrast to the chronologically arranged historical chapters of Ibn Saʿd’s prophetic biography, the chapters dedicated to the “signs of prophecy” are largely thematic in their arrangement. While in general, these chapters interrupt the chronology of the Prophet’s biography, the ordering principle in these chapters is roughly chronological, though they do not include direct references to historical events of the nascent Muslim community. In some instances, the contexts of the narratives allow for a historical approximation; however, in general, the historical context is of little relevance to an event’s designation as a “sign of prophecy.” The additional ordering principles in these two specific chapters seem to be thematic as well as based on the accounts’ transmitters. Notably, the accounts compiled in chapters 39 and 41 exceed Maʿmar b. Rāshid’s accounts dedicated to this topic. Their significance in Ibn Saʿd’s biography of the Prophet is attested to by the fact that these two chapters are the most voluminous of his entire *sīra*, containing forty-seven and forty-two accounts, respectively. The following provides a brief description of the chapters 38, 39, and 41 based on the arrangement and content of these chapters. A detailed thematic analysis of the accounts compiled in chapters 39 and 41 and the author’s methodological approach follows in chapter 4 of this book.

In Ibn Saʿd’s *sīra* section, chapter 38 is entitled “Dhikr nubūwa rasūl Allāh” (Reports of the prophecy of the Messenger of God) This chapter encompasses nine *ḥadīth*s that introduce the topic of prophecy in a general manner. Rather than relating events from Muḥammad’s life, the accounts in this chapter present brief utterances of the Prophet, either a response to a question or an individual statement about the time or nature of his prophecy. The first four accounts portray Muḥammad being asked about when he became a prophet. Answering the question, Muḥammad states that he was a prophet when “Adam was between the spirit and body”<sup>92</sup> or when “Adam was between the spirit and his clay.”<sup>93</sup> In the last of these four accounts, Muḥammad adds that this was the

92 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:123.

93 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:123.

time when the *mīthāq*<sup>94</sup> was taken.<sup>95</sup> In the next three accounts, Muḥammad describes himself as “the [answer to] Abraham’s prayers” and “Jesus’ good tidings.”<sup>96</sup> The fifth account mentions an episode from the Prophet’s birth, relating that his mother “had a vision” during the delivery “like the mothers of all prophets” do.<sup>97</sup> Following this first-person narration of the Prophet, an anonymous third-person narrator explains that Āmina (the Prophet’s mother) saw a light illuminating the palaces of Busra; this account is found in Ibn Sa’d’s chronological *sīra* and the “signs of prophecy” preceding the call to prophecy.<sup>98</sup> The sixth account only mentions “Abraham’s prayer” (omitting the reference to Jesus), but adds a Qur’ānic verse.<sup>99</sup> Accounts seven and eight include both references to “the prayer of Abraham” and “Jesus’ good tidings,” but differ from accounts five and six in that the Prophet refers to Abraham as “my father.”<sup>100</sup> The final account of this chapter is in the Prophet’s direct speech: “I was the first of man in creation and the last of them in being sent [as a prophet].”<sup>101</sup>

In contrast to most chapters in the *sīra* section, chapter 38 does not recount specific events in the Prophet’s life but rather creates the notion of a continuous sacred history by situating Muḥammad’s prophecy in the chain of previous prophets. As such, he is depicted as a prophet even before the first prophet was sent. This unique position amidst creation is indicated through the statement that his prophecy preceded the corporal creation of Adam. His prophetic mission is the conclusion of the chain of prophets. This stress on Islam as an integral part of a continuing sacred history is also reflected in the extensive chapters dedicated to prophets preceding the Prophet at the beginning of the book.<sup>102</sup> Thus, this chapter functions as an introduction to the topic of prophecy and prepares the reader for the upcoming section of Muḥammad’s call to prophecy.

The opening of chapter 39, “Dhikr ‘alāmāt fī rasūl Allāh qabl an yuwḥa ilayhī” (Reports about the signs of prophecy prior to the call to prophecy), is closely linked to the preceding chapter. The first account addresses various topics and serves an introductory function. Being asked to share some personal

94 The covenant God enjoined on Muḥammad and other prophets, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, is mentioned in the Qur’ān 33:7 and 3:81; cf. Böwering, “Covenant,” 1:464.

95 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:123.

96 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

97 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

98 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

99 “Oh Lord, send a prophet from among them to them”; cf. Q. 2:129.

100 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

101 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

102 Individual chapters are dedicated to Eve, Idrīs, Noah, Abraham, and Ismā’īl; cf. Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:23–33.

information, Muḥammad's first statement reflects back to the preceding chapter, noting that he is the prayer of Abraham, that Jesus announced him, and that his mother saw a light illuminating the palaces of Busra emanating from her while she delivered the Prophet. After this introductory account, Ibn Sa'd returns to the chronological order of the Prophet's life by describing various events of Muḥammad's infancy and childhood, including his birth, his stay with his foster mother Ḥalīma, and various instances in which he is recognized as a future prophet.<sup>103</sup> Most of these accounts, such as the Prophet's birth, one of his journeys to Syria, or the advent of his prophecy, only allude to the broader historical context. The remaining accounts can be historically approximated through the presence of the Prophet's respective caregivers: Āmina (his mother), Ḥalīma, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and Abū Ṭalib. Thus, the chapter is organized in accordance with the chronology of the Prophet's childhood. Only the fourth account breaks this chronology, as Ḥalīma's quest for a foster child is placed after the opening of Muḥammad's heart, which occurred while he was in Ḥalīma's care. The account further interrupts the chronology, as the Prophet's mother provides a retrospective description of her pregnancy and delivery. The following 37 accounts all constitute predictions or announcements that foreshadow Muḥammad's prophecy in one form or another. These predictions or announcements are presented from a monotheistic perspective, expressed by Jews and Christians based on descriptions found in their scriptures, and also by a *ḥanīf* (non-denominational monotheist), and from a pagan perspective, expressed by soothsayers (*kuḥān*), astronomers, idols, sacrificial animals, *jinn*, and even Iblīs himself.<sup>104</sup> The last account in this chapter describes a food "miracle."<sup>105</sup>

Chapter 41 is entitled "Dhikr 'alāmāt al-nubūwa ba'd nuzūl al-waḥī 'ala rasūl Allāh" (Reports about the signs of prophecy subsequent to the call to prophecy). It consists of 42 accounts that mainly encompass narratives of food and/or water "miracles," natural phenomena, and to a lesser degree, aspects pertaining to the Prophet's states, his interaction with the divine, and his hidden knowledge. A thematic arrangement is less obvious, albeit not completely absent. The overarching arrangement in this chapter is ordered based on the narrator who transmitted the account to Ibn Sa'd.

Overall, Ibn Sa'd clearly and deliberately crafted a section of multiple chapters dedicated to the topic of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. His selection of topics may indicate certain implicit theological notions and epistemological

103 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125–127.

104 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:127–141.

105 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:142.

approaches to verify his prophetic mission. The presence of chapters dedicated to previous prophets in the beginning of the *sīra* section, as well as the introductory chapter 38 suggest that Ibn Saʿd emphasized integrating Muḥammad's prophetic mission into a continuous sacred history. However, like other *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* authors of his time, he did not provide explanations or commentaries in this regard.

### 3.2 *Al-Khargūshī's Sharaf al-Nabī*

*Al-Khargūshī's Sharaf al-nabī* is an extensive and self-contained work that covers more than 700 pages in its printed edition, and thus considerably exceeds earlier works in size. It is divided into fifty-seven thematic chapters but does not constitute a comprehensive biography of the Prophet, rather it is a compendium on select aspects of the Prophet's genealogy, household, and physical environment, similar to Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī's *Akhlāq al-nabī*. The arrangement is roughly grouped as follows: (1) the person of the Prophet, (2) his relationships, and (3) historical events. The first 14 chapters describe the light coming forth from the Prophet, his virtues, manners, and qualities, his names as they appear in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, the oath God made by the Prophet,<sup>106</sup> his physique as described in the Qurʾān, Muḥammad's relationship to or interaction with other prophets, the way his nobility is mentioned in the Qurʾān, the miracles of the Prophet, and his distinguishing characteristics mentioned in poetry.<sup>107</sup> Chapters 15 through 23 describe his lineage, family, and other household members,<sup>108</sup> and the subsequent three chapters address topics of Muḥammad's faith preceding his corporal existence, noting that he was distinguished by his virtues and recognized by soothsayers.<sup>109</sup> Following a chapter on the virtues of the members of his household (*ahl al-bayt*),<sup>110</sup> al-Khargūshī dedicates several chapters to individual historical events, such as the Prophet's stay in the cave, reports of the ascension (*miʿrāj*), the battles of Badr and Uḥud, the Prophet's arrival at Qubāʾ, and the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca; descriptions of various objects the Prophet possessed, such as his horses, his mules, and his swords; and historical reports or physical descriptions of the Prophet's environment, such as descriptions of Mecca and Medina, the Kaʿba, the Prophet's mosque, the chambers of the Prophet's wives, the house of his daughter Fāṭima, and the history of the well Zamzam.<sup>111</sup> This last group

106 Possibly a reference to Q. 81:15–29.

107 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 9–185.

108 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 186–211.

109 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 212–246.

110 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 247–280.

111 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 280–447.

of chapters is not arranged in chronological order, nor is it strictly thematic, as historical events are interspersed with descriptions of specific locations, and inventories of certain personal items. Descriptions of locations are frequently linked to accounts of their virtues and the spiritual significance of visiting them. As such, the last chapters of the work treat the Prophet's death, the virtues of visiting his tomb, the virtues of the martyrs and visiting their tombs, the virtues of praying for the Prophet, seeing the Prophet in one's dreams, and the banner of the Prophet; the book closes with a chapter on the Prophet's intercession.<sup>112</sup>

### 3.3 *Abū Nu'āym al-Isfahānī's Dalā'il al-Nubūwa*

Abū Nu'āym's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is arranged chronologically and covers the entire span of the Prophet's life, including his parents' marriage, his birth, various episodes from his childhood and adolescence, events that occurred during his adult life, and finally his death and signs that appeared after his death. While a comprehensive *sīra*, Abū Nu'āym's work omits aspects that not related to his notion of the "proofs of prophecy." The raids (*maghāzī*), for instance, are only mentioned if events occurred in a context that the author viewed as proofs or signs of prophecy; they are not related as historical accounts of the military campaigns in their own right. Abū Nu'āym's accounts, however, frequently include poetry like that found in early *sīra* works, and occasionally introduce chapters that provide theological contextualizations of accounts or—more commonly—historical contextualization or summaries of related events in the *sīra*.<sup>113</sup>

The two parts of Abū Nu'āym's work are arranged differently from each other. In the first part, the biographical material of the Prophet's life up to his emigration to Medina is arranged chronologically, while in the second part, many of the episodes that were already part of earlier *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works are systematically arranged into thematic chapters. Abū Nu'āym's work differs significantly in its arrangement from previous extant works; it appears to be the result of a process of systematization that merges the form of a comprehensive *sīra* with the teleological presentation of narratives to provide evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. Thus, Abū Nu'āym's comprehensive biography is arranged systematically into thematic chapters and sub-chapters with individual titles.

112 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 448–533.

113 For instance, al-Isfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 134, 157, 241, 279, 321, 333.

### 3.4 *Al-Bayhaqī's Dalā'il al-Nubūwa*

Comprising seven volumes in its printed edition, al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is the most extensive work of this kind; it is a comprehensive biography that is dedicated to the theme of the "proofs of prophecy." Following an extensive preface outlining the author's methodological approach and a brief introduction to the book itself, several thematic parts mostly follow the chronology of the Prophet's life. The first volume contains two thematic parts: The first is dedicated to the Prophet's birth and infancy, including the history of his immediate ancestry and genealogy, and the second part lists detailed descriptions of the Prophet's physical appearance followed by shorter descriptions of him found in pre-Islamic prophetic accounts. The second volume includes two sections: The first returns to the birth and infancy of the Prophet, but focuses on Muḥammad's spiritual preparation for his future prophetic mission. It covers the cleansing of Muḥammad's heart and the removal of "Satan's share"; his encounter with the monk Baḥīrā, who recognizes the signs of prophecy; and God's protection (*iṣma*) of Muḥammad from pagan practices. The other part of the second volume covers Muḥammad's call to prophecy, his life in Mecca, the *hijra*, and the early years in Medina. In addition to major events in the Prophet's life, such as the first revelation, the passing of Abū Ṭālib and Khadija, and his marriage with 'Ā'isha, this section contains many conversion stories. Volumes 3, 4, and 5 treat the Muslim conquests and raids, combining historical information on dates and participants with detailed accounts of incidents and miraculous events. In volume 6 al-Bayhaqī departs from the chronological arrangement to address the miracles and signs, the cases in which the Prophet's prayers were answered, and conversations with Jews who were consulted about the Prophet's prophecy. The final volume covers the Prophet's final illness and his passing.

Al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* shares some features with Abū Nu'aym's work, as both emerged after a process of systematizing previous materials. They deliberately arranged the accounts of Muḥammad's early life to illustrate the spiritual foundation of his prophetic mission. At the same time, this teleological tale merges the well-established corpus of traditions with theological and doctrinal positions current at their times.



This chapter focused on the methodological approach and organizational structure that were employed in the extant *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works up to the fifth/eleventh century. With regard to methodology, it has been shown that all of the early *ḥadīth* scholars who contributed to this literature listed *ḥadīth*

without commentary or contextualization. They employed the highest standard of authentication available at their time by introducing each individual account with a proper *isnād*. In the case of Ibn Sa'd's work, I have shown that he likely adopted certain accounts from Wahb b. Munabbih or other sources that lacked proper authentication. Yet, while many of these questionable accounts would have fit into the thematic compilations of "signs of prophecy," most are only found in the chronological biographies and have been replaced by better attested ones or have been omitted altogether in chapters on the "signs of prophecy." Therefore, it seems that the methodology applied in the two chapters of "signs of prophecy" is actually more rigorous than it is in the remainder of the biography, in which he occasionally used collective *isnāds*. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that even those accounts that formally or stylistically evoke doubt about their scholarly provenance are attested in other *ḥadīth* compilations contemporary to Ibn Sa'd, and thus were accepted in the scholarly discourse of the time.

*Dalā'il al-nubūwa* works in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh century expand the pool of sources from which they draw their accounts and include accounts from the *sīra* and *maghāzī* literature. In doing so, they maintain scholarly methodologies to varying degrees. Al-Khargūshī uses a relatively low standard of authentication; he only lists a complete *isnād* at the beginning of a chapter and confines himself to name the Companion or Follower who narrated it throughout the remainder of the chapter. Some accounts are even presented without any transmitter. By contrast, Abū Nu'aym states in his introduction that he only included sound or well-known accounts; this may imply a similar approach to that of al-Bayhaqī, as both provide complete chains of transmissions for each account. Al-Bayhaqī outlines his methodological approach in an extensive preface and defends the incorporation of less authoritative materials in light of the nature of his own work. He quotes al-Shāfi'ī extensively in his ruling that states that less authoritative sources, such as Ibn Ishāq, are permissible to include in accounts as long as legal rulings are not derived from them. He also addresses the question about accounts transmitted on the authority of a single transmitter; he deems these perfectly acceptable, particularly with regard to miracles and other accounts used for edifying purposes. Even though al-Bayhaqī never explicitly mentions his *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* in the context of his methodological elaborations, we can infer that this discussion is intended to vindicate his inclusion of accounts from *sīra* and *maghāzī* literature. As such, the works of Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī present a shift in the nature of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature, but do not sacrifice their scholarly provenance. The *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature is not part of *ḥadīth* scholarship that must uphold the legal stipulations of authenticity and reliability; rather

it is part of a body of literature of *sīra*, including *maghāzī*, and historiography. Therefore all of these compilations of the “signs of prophecy” are part of scholarly discourses upholding their respective methodological criteria.

In terms of arrangement, Maʿmar b. Rāshid, al-Bukhārī, and al-Tirmidhī listed a few select *ḥadīth* in designated chapters without any apparent thematic order and presented individual events without positioning them in the framework of his biography. Ibn Saʿd’s main goal was to provide a chronological and comprehensive narrative of Muḥammad’s life in which he included two thematic chapters on the signs of prophecy, but did not make them the focus of the work itself. None of these early authors provided any explanation as to why they chose the particular episodes, at the expense of others, in their chapters. The three later works share several features that set them apart from the previous generations of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* compilations. The most notable difference is their wider scope; later compilations are expansive self-contained works. Their individual arrangements, however, differ. Al-Khargūshī’s selective aspects of Muḥammad’s life that are thought to prove his status as a prophet is more extensive than that of previous works, but is arranged thematically like a compendium rather than a *sīra*. The *Dalāʾil al-nubūwa* of Abū Nuʿaym is partial, and that of al-Bayhaqī is a comprehensive biography. The latter two resemble one another in that they combine the chronological narrative of the Prophet’s life with a thematic part. Abū Nuʿaym’s work recounts the Prophet’s life up to his emigration to Medina, then shifts to a more selective thematic approach. Al-Bayhaqī’s extensive *sīra* fills seven volumes, this includes his coverage of the raids and one volume that is thematically focused on the proofs of prophecy.

Overall, we see that the tradition-based *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature evolved structurally and methodologically over time. The literature moved away from the early thematic chapters in the *ḥadīth* collections of Maʿmar b. Rāshid, al-Bukhārī, and al-Tirmidhī with all of their required standards of authentication toward larger scale monographs that merge the stylistic and methodological framework of *sīra* literature with an explicitly teleological arrangement of materials in Abū Nuʿaym and al-Bayhaqī. This methodological shift in and systematization of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature was foreshadowed by Ibn Saʿd, who was the first to explicitly place notions of the signs of prophecy in the context of a prophetic biography. Ibn Saʿd’s chapters, as well as the more extensive later works of Abū Nuʿaym and al-Bayhaqī, contain specifically selected narratives that each author designated as evidentiary events for Muḥammad’s legitimacy as a prophet. The individual selection process of narratives and the sense of religious purpose that predetermined their respective portrayal of the prophet is further explored by way of content analyses of the extant *dalāʾil al-nubūwa*

works in chapter 4 of this book. It is noteworthy, however, that while the specific methodological requirements had shifted away from *ḥadīth* scholarship by the time of Abū Nu‘aym and al-Bayhaqī, the authors were dedicated to staying within the disciplinary boundaries and went to great lengths to argue their respective cases in their introductions. As such, it is clear that while the disciplinary context might have changed, the *dalā’il al-nubūwa* authors still very much viewed their works as contributions to the religious sciences, not as writings of pietistic laymen.

## Content Analysis of Early Extant *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Works

From the first brief chapter of only six accounts in Ma'mar's work, compilations of the signs of prophecy quickly grew in size. The study of the authors' methodological approaches shows that they applied rigorous standards of authentication. In the case of Ibn Sa'd, he may have applied these standards even more rigorously for his thematic chapters than he did in the remainder of his work. Overall, the exponential growth and careful authentication indicate the importance the authors ascribed to this topic. But what did they understand to be a proof of prophecy? Were there established notions of evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission? Since the majority of authors of the early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works were in direct contact with one another and were frequently linked through student-teacher relations, the question emerges, were the corpora of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations simply handed down from one scholarly generation to the next, or did the individual works differ in their content. In order to answer that question, I analyze the contents of the first two generations of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works to establish possible patterns across the compilations. As none of these authors provided explicit information regarding their selection processes, I subsumed the accounts of the "proofs of prophecy" compilations under thematic categories in order to evaluate whether various authors held similar views as to what constitutes such evidence. I am fully aware that this type of thematic categorization is, like all literary analyses, an external process based on my subjective interpretation of the accounts at hand, and that the authors themselves likely did not conceive of these "themes" in the same way while compiling their works. To an extent, these categories are subjectively chosen elements in each account and I have grouped narratives together based on my interpretations and formed new, second-order classifications. With these methodological caveats in mind, I nevertheless consider this approach very useful because it enables me to present the broad spectrum of elements that individual authors considered to have evidentiary value for the veracity of Muḥammad's prophetic mission and for the diversity of these authors' notions of the "proofs of prophecy."

## 1 Ma‘mar b. Rāshid’s “Bāb al-Nubūwa”

Ma‘mar b. Rāshid’s short chapter “Bāb al-nubūwa” appears to have been the earliest compilation of this kind. While the chapter’s title does not specifically refer to “proofs” or “signs” of prophecy, the *ḥadīths* it contains clearly indicate that it was meant to cover aspects that signify Muḥammad’s exceptional status rather than the specifics of his prophetic mission. The majority of accounts, four out of six, relate to the supernatural emergence or provision of water in a moment of need. The first two *ḥadīths* present the same event, albeit with different *isnāds*: One of the Companions is unable to find water to make ablutions. The Prophet places his hand in a vessel that had only a little water in it. As he calls the people to make their ablutions, water gushes forth from between his fingers and suffices for approximately seventy people to make ablutions (*wuḍū’*).<sup>1</sup>

The third *ḥadīth* is also set in the context of water scarcity. The Prophet was traveling with his Companions; when they run out of water, the Prophet sent two of his Companions to a certain place where they are supposed to find a woman with a camel and two water bags. They find the woman and bring her to the Prophet, who pours some water from her water skins into a vessel. Then he returned the water to the water bags and ordered the people to fill their vessels and their water skins. After all the vessels were filled, the woman’s water bags appeared to be even bulkier than before. The Prophet stated: “We have not taken a thing from your water but God has given us [water] to drink.” The account concludes with a conversion narrative, as the woman relates her encounter to her kinsmen who then convert to Islam.<sup>2</sup>

The fourth *ḥadīth* is a water miracle similar to the first two accounts, but it is part of an elaborate narrative of a journey that takes place throughout a night and the next day. By midday the Prophet and his Companions were in dire need of water. The Prophet asked for his ablution bowl and passed it around for the men to drink and make ablutions from it. After seventy-two men had filled their water bags, Muḥammad returned it to the person who gave it to him and the bowl is filled with the same amount of water it had held before.<sup>3</sup>

The fifth account describes an act of material transformation. On the day of the battle of Uḥud, ‘Abdallāh b. Jaḥsh goes to the Prophet because he lost his

1 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:276f. Very similar accounts are found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:151 (no. 169); 4:470f. (nos. 3576, 3577, 3579); 7:305f.

2 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:276f. This account is also found in al-Bukhārī; cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:230f.

3 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:278f. This account is also found in Muslim and Ibn Sa‘d; cf. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:156f.; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:152.

sword. The Prophet gave him a leafless branch from a palm tree and it turned into a sword in his hand.<sup>4</sup>

The last account in this chapter refers to an aspect of Muḥammad's physical appearance as a "sign of prophecy." A Companion described seeing the sign (*alāma*) between the Prophet's shoulders toward the end of his right shoulder blade, it is in the shape of a fist with moles on it.<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of a physical feature in this chapter is interesting given that Ma'mar's work also includes a short chapter called "Bāb šifat al-nabī," which has two accounts describing the Prophet's appearance, similar to later *shamā'il* works.<sup>6</sup> The presence of this description thus indicates that Ma'mar's view of the signifiers of Muḥammad's prophetic mission included events and deeds as well as external features.

While this short chapter is the earliest known thematic compilation, Ma'mar's authorship is questionable. The *Jāmi'* of Ma'mar b. Rāshid has not come down to us in its original form but was preserved by his foremost student, 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ḥimyarī, as an appendix to his *Muṣannaf*.<sup>7</sup> Mahar Jarrar argued that 'Abd al-Razzāq did not include all of his teacher's materials but only preserved accounts of the most important events of the Prophet's life and campaigns in his chapter on the campaigns/raids (*maghāzī*). Other accounts were either entirely omitted or integrated into other chapters.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we cannot be certain whether the chapter on prophecy was arranged in its present form by Ma'mar himself or by his student 'Abd al-Razzāq. In either case, it precedes that of Ibn Sa'd, which has often been taken as a precedent for both the genres of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* and *shamā'il al-nabī*. Even though this compilation is still very limited in terms of the number of accounts it contains, its characteristics are similar to Ibn Sa'd's chapters dedicated to the "signs of prophecy." As we see in the following, Ibn Sa'd included all of these accounts in his compilations of the "signs of prophecy" and similarly focused on accounts pertaining to water miracles.

## 2 Ibn Sa'd's "Alamāt al-Nubūwa"

Given that Ibn Sa'd's chapters are found in the framework of a *sīra*, it is not surprising that his arrangement of the material differs from that of the *ḥadīth*

4 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:280.

5 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:280. This account is also found in Muslim; cf. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 15:80f. (no. 2346).

6 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 11:259f.

7 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 10:379–468; vol. 11.

8 Jarrar, *Die Prophetenbiographie im Islamischen Spanien*, 29f.

scholars. Ibn Sa'd presents the major event of Muḥammad's life following a roughly chronological order. In contrast to the majority of his chapters, the two chapters dedicated to the "signs of prophecy" are almost exclusively thematic in nature. There are a few references to historical events of the nascent Muslim community, such as the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya or the battle of Badr. In other cases, such as the conversion narratives of particular Companions, the contexts of the narratives allow for a historical approximation. In general, however, the historical context seemed to be of little relevance to Ibn Sa'd when he designated an event as a "sign of prophecy."

In this section, I group the narratives thematically across both chapters. The majority of the ninety-nine accounts fall into the following thematic categories: (1) predictions or announcements, (2) food or water miracles, or (3) natural phenomena. Less frequently accounts pertain to historical events in the Prophet's life, to his states, to his interaction with the divine, to hidden knowledge, or to material transformation or healing. These themes are treated together in a fourth category. The categorization is at times equivocal, as several accounts potentially fall into more than one category. In these cases, I selected the strongest aspect to determine the category.

## 2.1 *Announcement or Prediction of Prophecy*

The largest thematic category is that of predictions or announcements of Muḥammad's prophecy. Prediction narratives refer to those accounts that are set in the past and foreshadow the coming of the Prophet in the future, while announcements refer to accounts contemporaneous with Muḥammad's prophetic mission. With a total of forty-one accounts, this category encompasses nearly half of all the "signs of prophecy" *ḥadīths*. The vast majority of these accounts are listed in chapter 39 of Ibn Sa'd, as "signs of prophecy prior to the call to prophecy" and only two accounts are listed after the revelation. This category is subdivided based on the agent articulating the announcement.

### 2.1.1 Monotheistic Predictions

The most frequently occurring announcements are those related to Abrahamic or monotheist beliefs; that is, there are twelve accounts in which Jews announce and/or recognize the Prophet, and five accounts in which Christians do so. Some of these accounts overlap and refer to both groups. More than half of these accounts allude to the respective scriptures of these religious groups as containing Muḥammad's description, and most commonly these references are found in Jewish scriptures.

Christian accounts frequently constitute lengthy narratives of monks recognizing the Prophet, such as the well-known narrative of the monk Baḥīrā

that is set during Muḥammad's childhood. In this account, Baḥīrā notices a cloud following Muḥammad to shade him until he settled under a tree, which then shifts its branches to provide shade for the boy. Upon his discovery, Baḥīrā invites all the men traveling with Muḥammad to a meal. Invoking the deities al-Lāt and al-ʿUzza, Baḥīrā asks the young Muḥammad to inform him about himself, but the Prophet refuses to speak because deities were invoked. Baḥīrā then repeats his question invoking God, and Muḥammad responds. Then Baḥīrā examines the boy's eyes and back, and begins questioning Abū Ṭālib with regard to his relation to the Prophet, the Prophet's family situation, and finally, Baḥīrā predicts "a great cause" for the boy, as his description is found in the scriptures. Baḥīrā warns Abū Ṭālib that the Jews would recognize and inflict hardship on Muḥammad and Jewish men intend to assassinate him. After Abū Ṭālib and Muḥammad's departure, Jewish men confer with Baḥīrā, who questions them about whether they have read about the boy in their scripture. After confirming their discovery, the monk indicates that the Jewish men have no way to harm Muḥammad.<sup>9</sup>

The subsequent account relates the same incident including a monk warning Abū Ṭālib not to travel to Syria with his nephew because the young boy would arouse the envy of the Jewish people, who want the Prophet to be from among the Banū Isrāʾīl.<sup>10</sup> In another version, Abū Ṭālib encounters two monks, and both stress the same features in the young Muḥammad as signs of prophecy, namely, that he is an orphan, and has the face and the eyes of a prophet. The first monk also cautions Abū Ṭālib about the Jews.<sup>11</sup>

While most of these narratives are set in the context of the Prophet's first journey to Syria with his uncle Abū Ṭālib, another account describes an encounter with a monk in a different context. An introductory section describes an impoverished Abū Ṭālib sending his twenty-five-year-old nephew Muḥammad to work for Khadija. Accompanied by Khadija's servant Maysara, the Prophet traveled to Syria, and on the way they rested under a tree in close proximity to a monk's cell in the market (*sūq*) of Busra. This account gives the monk's name as Nestūr, who is acquainted with Maysara. The monk questions Maysara, and indicates that only prophets rest under that particular tree. The Prophet was supposed to finalize his trade by invoking al-Lāt and al-ʿUzza but he refused to make the invocation and canceled the deal. The monk tells Maysara that Muḥammad is a prophet. As they return home Maysara sees two angels flying over the Prophet in order to shade him. Upon entering Mecca, Khadija also

9 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:128f.

10 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:130f.

11 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:127f.

witnesses the angels and Maysara relates to her what the monk had said. The narrative closes by suggesting that Muḥammad brought blessings in the form of increased profits, because her transactions made twice the usual profits.<sup>12</sup>

Other accounts are set after Muḥammad's call to prophecy. One *ḥadīth* relates that a delegation from Najrān that included the city's bishop came to Medina. During the journey, the bishop's mule stumbled and his brother understood the mule's mishap as a bad omen indicating that the bishop intended to follow the Prophet. Confronted by his brother, the bishop cursed and admonished him for vilifying one of the prophets who was announced by Jesus and mentioned in the Torah. At the end of this account, Ibn Sa'd informs us that the bishop embraced Islam immediately after his arrival in Medina.<sup>13</sup>

While Christians acknowledge the Prophet in all five accounts, Jews announce or recognize him, yet display a more ambivalent attitude: seven accounts express Jews acknowledging the Prophet, albeit this acknowledgment does not preclude envy or enmity toward him by individual Jews; thus they contain both acknowledgments and dismissive attitudes. Five accounts relate a general sense of envy toward the Prophet. Two accounts express outright denial of the Prophet. In one of these, Abū 'Umayr al-Hayyabān (a Jew from Syria who had come to Medina a few years before Islam) tells three young men from the Jewish tribe Banū Qurayza that he migrated to Medina because he had hoped to witness the appearance of a prophet. He cautions the young men that this appearance will cause bloodshed and that they should not hesitate to follow the new prophet. Years later, on the night before the Banū Qurayza were conquered by Muslim armies, the three young men remember their past encounter with Ibn al-Hayyabān and warn their fellow tribesmen. While the tribe rejected their warning, the three young men embrace Islam prior to the siege.<sup>14</sup> Very similar accounts describe Jewish people who were aware of the Prophet who was described in their scripture but they refused to depart from the Torah.<sup>15</sup>

The chapter on the signs prior to Muḥammad's call to prophecy contains one account that is set in the context of the king of Yemen threatening to destroy Medina because they are Jewish. The most learned of the Jews, Sāmūl, addresses the king and predicts that a prophet of the Banū Isrā'īl, born in Mecca and named Aḥmad, will settle in this very town; he then provides various details about the struggle between the Meccans and the Muslims and a

12 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:130f.

13 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138f.

14 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:134f. and 1:138.

15 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138.

description of the appearance of the future prophet. The king accepts that he will not succeed in destroying Medina and departs for Yemen.<sup>16</sup>

All of these accounts invoke the impression that the Jewish community—or at least its learned stratum—was aware of the coming of a prophet. In the case of the first and the last accounts, this awareness is passed on to other individuals: the three young Jews remember Ibn al-Hayyabān’s prediction of the Prophet and this causes them to embrace Islam; and the king of Yemen, whom the learned Jews convince that Yathrib (an early name for Medina) is the city of a future prophet, acknowledges that the city is therefore inaccessible to him. These two accounts stand out from most others because they allude to the historical context of the narrative. While the time of the young men’s encounter with Ibn al-Hayyabān is not specified, their remembering it and acknowledgment of the Prophet is historically situated on the eve of the Muslim siege of the Banū Qurayṣa. The “king of Yemen” who seeks the destruction of Yathrib most likely refers to the Ḥimyārī king Abū Karib Asʿad (r. 390–420), who passed through Yathrib during a military campaign to curb Byzantine influence in northern Arabia. After his son was killed, Abū Karib pledged to destroy the city until two Jewish scholars dissuade him from this act of violence and engage his interest in Judaism. Both Jewish and Muslim sources view Abū Karib as the first of the Arab kings to convert to Judaism.<sup>17</sup> This historical contextualization is relevant for Ibn Saʿd’s notions of the “proofs of prophecy” because it gives the impression that those anticipating the Prophet were not limited to the era immediately preceding his prophecy.

Two other accounts express the Jews’ denial of the Prophet despite their alleged awareness that Muḥammad is mentioned in their scripture.<sup>18</sup> Seven other accounts express Jewish envy of the Prophet. None of these accounts is exclusively dedicated to the jealousy of the Jews, rather they overlap with the Prophet being referred to in their scripture, his acknowledgment by Christian monks or other Jews. These narratives are set at various stages of the Prophet’s life. For instance, on the night of Muḥammad’s birth, a Jewish merchant living in Mecca asked the Quraysh whether a boy has been born. The merchant specifies that the boy will be the last of the prophets, he will be called Aḥmad, and the merchant provides a description of the mole on the Prophet’s shoulder. After the Jews confirm that a boy fitting this description was born to the family of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the Jew is brought to the child and expresses his envy, stating: “Prophecy has departed from the Banū Isrāʾīl and the scripture has

16 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:133.

17 Graetz, Löwy, Bloch (eds.), *History of the Jews*, 3:64; Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 7–9.

18 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:133f.

left their hands. The Arabs gained prophecy. Are you glad, people of Quraysh? Indeed, God will provide you with great authority and its prophecy will spread from the East to the West.”<sup>19</sup> In another *ḥadīth*, the Jewish tribes of Medina, Qurayza, al-Naḍīr, Fadak, and Khaybar, found the Prophet’s description in their scripture as well as a reference to Medina being the destination of his emigration. When the Prophet was born shortly after this discovery, a learned Jewish man recognized the sign. “They knew that and acknowledged him and did not reflect on him except with envy and injustice.”<sup>20</sup> Other accounts are set in the time after Muḥammad received the call to prophecy. In one, the Prophet walked by a Jew who was reading the Torah to his sick nephew, and Muḥammad asked whether his description is found in the scripture. The elder Jewish man shook his head in negation, but his nephew answered in the affirmative and converted to Islam. When the young man passed away, the Prophet himself held the funeral prayers.<sup>21</sup>

There are also a number of accounts in which learned Jewish men were consulted in order to establish Muḥammad’s prophecy. In one instance, the Quraysh sent delegates to verify Muḥammad’s claim to prophecy. A rabbi asks for a description of Muḥammad and his followers and affirms that he is the prophet whose description is found in Jewish scripture.<sup>22</sup> In another account the Prophet himself sought confirmation from the most learned of the Jews and is told that his description is found in the Torah. Being warned of the envy of the Jewish community, Muḥammad asks the rabbi what prevents him from acknowledging him. Weary of disagreement among his people, the learned man confesses that he would embrace Islam if his people did so first.<sup>23</sup> In another account, Jews question the Prophet about “customs, which are only known to a prophet.” He answers all the questions to their satisfaction.

The chapter on the “signs of prophecy” after Muḥammad’s call includes an account in which a Jewish woman attempts to verify Muḥammad’s prophetic identity. The woman presents the Prophet with a roasted sheep, and Muḥammad starts eating it with his Companions, when the sheep announces to him that it was poisoned. The Prophet cautions his Companions, relating what the sheep had told him, and they also stop eating. The warning, however, comes too late and one of his Companions dies from the poisoned meat. The Prophet sent for the woman and questioned her about her reasons. She

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19 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:136f.

20 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:134.

21 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:156.

22 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:139.

23 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138.

responded, “I desired to know. If you were a prophet, you would not be harmed, but if you were a king, I would have saved the people from you.”<sup>24</sup>

Many of the elements of the awareness of Jews and Christians of the coming of the Prophet are reiterated by the *ḥanīf* Zayd b. ‘Amr b. Nufayl. Two separate accounts relate that his quest for a “true” religion had led him to Jews, Christians, and others. As all of these groups foretell the coming of a prophet in Mecca, he settles there to await the Prophet’s appearance, but passes away before Muḥammad’s call to prophecy.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1.2 Previous Prophets

In addition to adherents of monotheistic faiths, Ibn Sa’d presents previous prophets as a group of individuals who predicted or were informed about the Muḥammad’s prophecy. A number of accounts include indirect predictions from previous prophets, such as the accounts in chapter 38 that refer to Muḥammad as “the prayer of Abraham” and “the good tidings of Jesus,”<sup>26</sup> the first account of the “signs of prophecy prior to the call of prophecy,”<sup>27</sup> and the account of a Christian delegation traveling to Medina.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the chapter on the signs prior to the prophetic mission includes a number of accounts predicting Muḥammad’s prophecy by or in the presence of one of the previous prophets. One account states that God revealed to Ya’qūb: “I send from your offspring kings and prophets until I send the Prophet of the *ḥaram*, whose people built the temple in Jerusalem. He is the ‘seal of prophets’ and his name is Aḥmad.”<sup>29</sup> In another account, God said to Abraham that his offspring will be a succession of people until He sends the illiterate prophet, who will be the ‘seal of prophets.’<sup>30</sup> Two other accounts focus on Abraham as Muḥammad’s forefather.<sup>31</sup> Another account relates that Hagar was told that her son will be “father to many peoples and from his people the illiterate prophet living in Mecca will come.”<sup>32</sup> Finally, there is an account that states that God revealed to an unnamed prophet of the Banū Isrāʾīl: “I severed my anger of you because of what you destroyed from my order. I swear to you the holy spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*)

24 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:145.

25 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:135f.

26 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

27 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125.

28 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138f.

29 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:137.

30 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:137.

31 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138.

32 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138.

will not come to you living. I send the illiterate prophet from the land of the Arabs to whom the *rūḥ al-quḍus* will come.”<sup>33</sup>

The majority of accounts pertaining to announcements or predictions of the Prophet occur through Jews or Christians. While their reaction toward the Prophet and his message varies significantly, in these accounts the overarching notion is that the learned men of these respective faiths were aware that a future prophecy would be revealed. Knowledge of the Prophet and the ability to recognize him is grounded in the respective scriptures, and to a lesser degree in statements of previous prophets. In some instances, monotheists announced the birth of a new prophet based on astronomical signs in conjunction with scriptural predictions of a future prophet. One narrative relates that the Jewish tribes Qurayṣa, al-Naḍir, Fadak, and Khaybar found Muḥammad’s description prior to his call to the prophecy and learned that the destination of his flight would be Medina. When the Prophet was born, the learned man of the Jews said: “Aḥmad was born tonight, this planet has risen.” When the Prophet Muḥammad became a prophet, they said: “Aḥmad has become a prophet, the planet that had risen, rose.” They knew that and acknowledged him and did not reflect on him except with envy and injustice.<sup>34</sup>

### 2.1.3 Predictions by Pagans

In addition to statements by monotheists regarding a future prophet, there are a number of accounts of announcements, and to a lesser degree, predictions by various pagan entities, such as soothsayers, idols, or sacrifice animals. Three accounts narrate instances in which soothsayers recognize the prophetic future of the child Muḥammad and ask their tribes to kill the boy.<sup>35</sup> Other accounts relate how idols or sacrifice animals announced the beginning of the prophecy. One account states that the Banū ‘Ifār intended to sacrifice a calf to their idols, but the animal began crying out, announcing that Muḥammad was testifying in Mecca that there is no god but God.<sup>36</sup> A very similar account mentions a fatted cow being brought to the idol Suwā‘. After they sacrificed the animals, the idol worshipers heard a voice from inside it. The voice announced that a prophet had come, who forbade adultery and sacrificing [animals] to idols, and said that heaven was guarded and shooting stars were thrown at intruders. The idol worshipers met Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq who confirmed the beginning of

33 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:140.

34 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:134.

35 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f., 1:140.

36 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:132.

the revelation.<sup>37</sup> Finally, there is an account that provides some insight into the Prophet's position toward idol worship prior to his call to prophecy. A group of pagans was worshiping an idol at Buwāna. Abū Ṭālib was attending with his people and he told the Prophet to attend the "festival," but the Prophet refused. Abū Ṭālib became angry and reprimanded him for not participating in the customs of their ancestors. Muḥammad withdrew from them but later returned, frightened and alarmed. He stated: "Every time I am near an idol, a man appears to me, tall and white, and he yells at me, 'Behind you, Muḥammad, do not touch it!'" The account concludes that Muḥammad was said not to have returned to their festival until he became a prophet,<sup>38</sup> implying that he never returned at all.

Ibn Sa'd also includes *jinn* as agents who announced Muḥammad's prophecy. There are five accounts that relate very similar narratives of women having a follower (or lover) among the *jinn*; the *jinn* visit them and inform them of the beginning of prophecy and the prohibition of wine and adultery.<sup>39</sup> Building on a Qur'ānic theme, two of these accounts mention that *jinn* are no longer allowed to listen to the conversations of the angels and are chased away by shooting stars.<sup>40</sup> This is based on the pre-Islamic notion that *jinn* have the capacity to enter the heavenly realm and listen to the discourse of angels, which they then pass on to pre-Islamic soothsayers. The idea that the *jinn*'s access to heaven was blocked at the beginning of the revelation is found in various passages of the Qur'ān, which describe how those *jinn*, who continued to attempt to enter the heavenly realm were driven out by shooting stars.<sup>41</sup> One account that is thematically linked to this Qur'ānic motif narrates that the shooting stars frightened the Arabs and confused the *jinn* themselves. The *jinn* consulted Iblīs (Satan), who sent them to retrieve samples of soil from their earth to establish what was happening. Iblīs identified the origin of the occurrence as something that happened in Tihāma, that is, the coastal region in Arabia that also includes Mecca and Medina.<sup>42</sup> Another account related to this Qur'ānic notion presents pagan Arabs, rather than *jinn*, as agents. Some Arabs were terrified by the shooting stars and consulted 'Amr b. Umayya's opinion. He stated that a prophet was sent to the Arabs and was revealed through these

37 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:141. Another account narrates a very similar event at the idol Suwā' but in this case the sacrifice animal was a sheep; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:149.

38 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:132f.

39 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:140f., 1:159.

40 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:141.

41 See Q. 15:17–18, 37:6–10, 67:5, 72:8–9.

42 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:140f.

shooting stars.<sup>43</sup> As such, this account almost functions like a human reiteration of the narrative.

In other instances, Meccans encountered the infant Muḥammad and his future leadership is foreshadowed in a worldly sense rather than a religious one. In one account, news of Muḥammad's birth reached the family of Lihb, who proclaim that "this newborn will overcome the people of the earth."<sup>44</sup> Another account narrates that the Prophet's grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, spread a cushion out in the shade of the Ka'ba. Still a toddler, Muḥammad climbed on the cushion and his paternal uncles went to remove him; however, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib intervened and said that the boy was just getting accustomed to rule.<sup>45</sup> Two accounts describe a vision and a dream, respectively, that announce the coming of the Prophet.<sup>46</sup> Finally, there are two accounts in which people are informed of the Prophet's activities. The first account relates an encounter between a Syrian caravan and a horseman who announces that "Aḥmad has come! The *jinn* have been chased away." The caravan leaves immediately to hear news of the prophecy.<sup>47</sup> The second account narrates an encounter between a shepherd and a wolf; this became a central point of Tor Andrae's view on *dalā'il al-nubūwa*. The wolf reprimanded the shepherd for withholding his ordained share and informed him about Muḥammad's prophetic mission. The account then became a conversion narrative as the shepherd drives his flock to Medina and embraces Islam.<sup>48</sup>

In sum, almost half of Ibn Sa'd's accounts of the "signs of prophecy" include various monotheistic and pagan entities that function as agents of predictions and announcements of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. In some instances, monotheistic and pagan elements are combined, for example, when Jews determine the night of the Prophet's birth through astronomy, or in the Qur'ānic motif of the *jinn*. Interestingly, narratives that have monotheistic agents are not centered on conversions to Islam, but rather on the ability of learned monotheists to predict and recognize Muḥammad's prophecy based on their scripture.

## 2.2 *Water- and/or Food-Related Incidents*

The second largest thematic category contains narratives in which water and/or food is obtained or increased through supernatural means. These incidents

43 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:137.

44 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125.

45 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:127 and 139.

46 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:139.

47 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:135.

48 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:146f.

most commonly occur in situations of scarcity or dire need, both before and after Muḥammad's call to prophecy, and usually affect other people, not just Muḥammad himself. In some instances, these accounts fit into more than one category.

These narratives are commonly set in a context in which water (either for drinking or less often, for ablutions) is scarce. The first account occurs in the Prophet's childhood. During a journey with his uncle, Abū Ṭālib complained about thirst. The young Muḥammad dismounted from his riding animal and dropped his heel into the ground. Water came forth and he invited his uncle to drink.<sup>49</sup> Most accounts are set later, after Muḥammad has reached adulthood and received the call to prophecy. One account describes the severe scarcity of water as part of a lengthy narrative of the Prophet traveling with his Companions. Using a small water bowl, he poured each of the men some water and it sufficed everyone.<sup>50</sup> This account was noted in the chapter by Ma'mar b. Rāshid.<sup>51</sup> Two other accounts specifically name the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya as historical context. The Prophet arrived at Ḥudaybiyya with a large army that was in dire need of water. In the first account, the Prophet sat on their watering trough and either spat in it or prayed over it and it overflowed with water.<sup>52</sup> In other accounts describing similar circumstances, water gushed forth between the Prophet's fingers.<sup>53</sup> An additional statement at the end of both of these accounts notes that the men drank water and used it for ablutions. The same narrative is also found in relation to ablutions; the purpose of the water was not unanimously certain. In one of these accounts, the event is referred to as one of the "marvelous (*ʿajāʾib*) things".<sup>54</sup> This is the only incident that any of the "signs of prophecy" are explicitly described as being out of the ordinary, as Ibn Sa'd generally does not make theological assessments or provide any other context for the accounts. Two further accounts relate the same occurrence with minor variations.<sup>55</sup>

A number of accounts in the chapter dedicated to the "signs of prophecy" that follow Muḥammad's call to prophecy include narratives in which the milk of a single goat or sheep suffices numerous people. At other times milk is drawn from a specific sheep or goat that is known to have no milk at the time;

49 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:127.

50 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:152f.

51 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣammaf*, 11:278f.

52 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:151.

53 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:150, 154.

54 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:150f.

55 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:150f.

these include the accounts of Ibn Mas‘ūd,<sup>56</sup> Umm Ma‘bad,<sup>57</sup> and Miqdād,<sup>58</sup> which were discussed in chapter 3. Occasionally milk-related accounts feature various elements from other categories, such as hidden knowledge or a divine response to the Prophet’s invocations. One of these accounts is set in a situation similar to many water miracles, but in this account Muḥammad’s foreshadowing of a future occurrence is emphasized more than the milk sufficing a large number of people.

Nāfi‘ said, “The Prophet was at Zuhā’ with 1,400 men, and we were [severely] suffering from a lack of water. They saw that the Prophet had dismounted [his riding animal] when a goat approached him so closely that [its] sharp horns touched the Prophet. The Prophet milked it and gave the army [milk] to drink and he drank [himself]. Then he said, ‘Oh Nāfi‘, take it [but] I do not see you taking [possession of] it.’ I took a stick and rammed it into the ground, and I took a rope and tied the goat [to it] and checked on it. The Prophet and the people and I slept. I woke up and the rope was untied and the goat was gone. I went to the Prophet and told him, ‘The goat is gone.’ The Prophet said to me, ‘Oh Nāfi‘, have I not told you that you would not take possession of her? The one who came with her, [should] leave with her.’”<sup>59</sup>

Food-related incidents go hand in hand with those related to water or milk. It is interesting to note that while scarcity of water and milk required Muḥammad to perform some specific action, increases in food occasionally occurred simply through his presence. The earliest “sign of prophecy” pertaining to food is the account of Ḥalīma taking in the orphaned Muḥammad as a foster child. The lengthy account describes the poverty of Ḥalīma and her family while they were traveling to Mecca as well as the blessings of abundant food and healthy livestock they experienced once they had taken in the infant Muḥammad.<sup>60</sup> Another account relates that the poverty that struck Abū Ṭālib for some time was not felt in Muḥammad’s presence, as food would suffice everyone eating in his company. Thus Abū Ṭālib said to the Prophet, “you are a blessing.”<sup>61</sup> In another account, the Prophet’s presence provides a sufficient amount of food to feed a large group of guests after a woman from the Anṣār (lit., Helpers)

56 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:155.

57 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:156f.

58 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:154f.

59 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:150f.

60 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

61 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:142.

prepared only enough food to host the Prophet. Muḥammad extended the invitation to everyone sitting with him and the host feared the embarrassment of not having enough food to feed her guests. The people ate until they were satiated but the amount of food remained the same.<sup>62</sup> A similar account presents the family of 'Alī and Fāṭima who were so impoverished that they skipped several meals. After obtaining a little food, Fāṭima told her husband to invite her father. Once the Prophet arrived at her house, he instructs her to fill a plate not only for the three of them, but also for each of his wives, and the food sufficed all of them.<sup>63</sup> In one account the Prophet, who had very little food, served it to forty members of the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, hoping to convince them to follow him.<sup>64</sup> This last account appears to be the only instance in which the increase of food is performed deliberately to convince his adversaries to convert.

Muḥammad's role in providing food differs in an account that describes the Prophet and his Companions running out of provisions during a raid. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb suggested that the Prophet should collect the remaining provisions and invoke God's blessings over them. The Prophet followed the advice and made a supplication (*du'ā*). Then he called the army to fill their containers and the provision sufficed everyone and left them plenty of excess.<sup>65</sup> This is the only case in which Muḥammad explicitly sought divine intervention to provide food. All the other accounts related to food show that Muḥammad could supply food either by interacting with it, such as pouring or serving it himself, or with his mere presence during a meal.

### 2.3 *Natural Phenomena*

Natural phenomena are the third most common thematic category in Ibn Sa'd's two chapters. These phenomena include Muḥammad's interaction with animals and plants (or an array of natural elements). Both notions are premised on nature's recognition of his prophetic status. The first account in this category reflects the effect the Prophet had on animals. After a visit by the Prophet, Sa'd lent him his donkey to ride home and the donkey returned to Sa'd smarter and swifter than before.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the act of serving the Prophet was rewarded with a blessing for the donkey's owner through his animal. This is reminiscent of the account of Ḥalima's riding animals, which were old and

62 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1152.

63 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1157f.

64 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1158.

65 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1152.

66 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1138.

lame on her way to Mecca, becoming swifter after she took in the orphaned Muḥammad.<sup>67</sup>

Animals also interacted with the Prophet by seeking his protection. In one account the Prophet was sitting with others in the mosque when a camel approached him and placed its head in his lap and brayed. The Prophet told his Companions that the camel claimed that it belonged to a man who wanted to slaughter it as a dish for his father and it was seeking his help and protection. A man sitting with the Prophet recognized the camel and confirmed that its owner had such intentions. The Prophet summoned the owner and asked him to spare the camel.<sup>68</sup> In this case, an animal was aware of the Prophet's moral reputation and social position; this allowed him to intervene with the owner. The Prophet not only showed mercy for the animal, but was also able to understand the message it conveyed through braying. Hence, there is also an element of the Prophet's hidden knowledge in this account. Overall, these two accounts that pertain explicitly to animals differ in that the first account describes a passive act in which qualities were given to an animal, while the second account relates an animal actively interacting with the Prophet.

As another element of nature, trees serve multiple purposes in Ibn Sa'd's "signs of prophecy" chapter. Prior to the revelation, trees and stones recognized the future prophet and greeted him.<sup>69</sup> A protective aspect of nature is mentioned in the lengthy account of the Prophet's childhood encounter with the monk Baḥīrā. The monk witnesses first a cloud and then a tree shading the Prophet. The tree itself reacted to Muḥammad's presence and moved its branches such that he was shaded.<sup>70</sup> Other accounts describe trees relocating on demand to serve several purposes. In one account the Prophet wanted to relieve himself but could not find anything that would shield him for privacy. He saw two trees far apart and asked Ibn Mas'ūd to tell the trees to draw closer to one another so that they could cover him. One of the trees moved next to the other and Muḥammad relieved himself behind them.<sup>71</sup> Similar incidents are found as explicit "signs" of prophecy. Chapter 41 contains two accounts of trees that changed their locations, one serving as a sign for the Prophet himself,<sup>72</sup> and the other providing evidence of prophecy to another man.<sup>73</sup>

67 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

68 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:157.

69 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:132.

70 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:128f.

71 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:143f.

72 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:143f.

73 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:154.

Finally, there is an account in which a palm tree expressed its desire to be close to the Prophet. The Prophet used to give sermons standing on the trunk of a palm tree that was in the mosque. When the *minbar* was built and the Prophet ascended it, the palm tree yearned audibly. The Prophet descended from the *minbar* and embraced the palm tree until it became quiet.<sup>74</sup>

Clouds also fulfill a protective function. In addition to the incident noted in the previously mentioned encounter with Bahīrā,<sup>75</sup> there is an independent account of clouds shading the Prophet. This narrative is set during the Prophet's time with his foster mother, Ḥalīma, who came looking for the young boy and found him out in the heat. His foster sister assured Ḥalīma that Muḥammad was in no danger because a cloud had been moving around with him, shading him from the scorching midday heat.<sup>76</sup> In another account, Muḥammad mentions that he was shaded by clouds in response to a rabbi who asked him about favors God bestows on him.<sup>77</sup>

In two accounts, soil and rain, respectively, interact with Muḥammad as a result of his prophetic status. Soil concealed the Prophet's excrement, as we can see in a short account relating a dialogue with his wife 'Ā'isha. 'Ā'isha said, "I said, 'Oh Messenger of God, you relieve yourself and nothing offensive is visible of you.' He said, 'Do you not know, oh 'Ā'isha, that the earth takes what comes out of prophets and nothing is seen of it?'"<sup>78</sup> The soil concealing the Prophet's waste granted him dignity and decency; in this he is distinguished from other humans and at the same time is grouped with previous prophets. In another account rain indicated that the Prophet's prayers were answered. Anas b. Mālik related that he was in the mosque during the Friday prayer when people informed the Prophet that a drought was threatening their livelihood and they asked him to pray for rain. Immediately after the Prophet's prayer a heavy rain set in and continued for seven days until the people turned to the Prophet during the next Friday prayer and informed him that the rain was now threatening them. The Prophet said: "O God, around us, not on us!" Anas b. Mālik reported that the clouds split asunder and separated until they were encircled by clouds but it did not rain on them.<sup>79</sup>

While Ibn Sa'd chose an array of natural phenomena as "signs of prophecy" only three of these accounts describe acts that were explicitly and deliberately performed to prove Muḥammad's claim to prophecy. The vast majority of

74 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159.

75 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:128f.

76 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:126f.

77 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:138.

78 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:144.

79 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:149.

accounts of natural phenomena qualify as “signs of prophecy” simply because they are placed in chapters dedicated to “proofs of prophecy.” The agents of these phenomena include animals, trees (and stones), clouds, soil, and rain. There is no clear pattern in these natural elements and how they react to or interact with the Prophet. Animals are seen to interact both actively and passively, while trees fulfill various functions. On the most basic level, they acknowledge and greet him; they actively protect the Prophet from the sun; they relocate in order to shield him from the public eye while he is relieving himself and thus protect his decency, or they provide evidence for his prophetic mission. Some of these functions are also fulfilled by other agents, such the soil that absorbed his excrement in order to protect his decency. By contrast, rain is a means of demonstrating God’s responsiveness to the Prophet’s supplications (*du‘ā*), rather than interacting with or reacting to the Prophet. But while specific reactions to the Prophet vary considerably, a common feature of almost all of these accounts is that an element of nature recognizes Muḥammad’s status and is aware of his significance. Given that these incidents take place before as well as after the call to prophecy, natural phenomena corroborate the underlying idea of announcement and prediction accounts of the future or present prophet.

#### 2.4 *Events in the Prophet’s Childhood*

There are a number of less frequently recurring themes, such as events that took place in Muḥammad’s early life prior to the beginning of the prophetic mission; these start with the first four *ḥadīths* in the chapter on the “signs of prophecy.”<sup>80</sup> The first *ḥadīth* echoes the preceding chapter’s statements that Muḥammad is Abraham’s prayer and Jesus’ good tidings while linking them to the accounts of the Prophet’s birth and the opening of his heart. The birth and opening of his heart are treated separately in the second and third report, respectively. The fourth account relates Ḥalima’s journey in search of a foster child and the blessings her family received after taking in the infant Muḥammad, and an encounter with a soothsayer predicting his future prophecy.

These childhood narratives provide an opportunity to contextualize some evidentiary narratives amidst the larger framework of Ibn Sa’d’s prophetic biography and to study how the selection and presentation of otherwise biographical material shaped Ibn Sa’d’s notion of the “signs of prophecy.” Those biographical accounts found in the thematic chapters dedicated to the “signs of prophecy” are also found in the chronological biography of the Prophet. Their presentation, however, frequently differs from one another depending

80 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

on their structural context. The chronological biography provides the broader historical context without emphasizing the exceptionality of individual events. By contrast, the thematically compiled chapters identify specific events and describe them in great detail to convey their exceptional significance. Ibn Sa'd's portrayal of the Prophet's conception, birth, and infancy showcases the various modes of presenting events in these frameworks as well as the selections Ibn Sa'd made to compile the thematic chapters. I have demonstrated elsewhere that these themes constituted an intricate part of the Prophet's life in al-Zuhrī's corpus.

Ibn Sa'd's chronological biography of the Prophet includes a chapter containing two accounts of the marriage of Muḥammad's parents, 'Abdallāh and Āmina,<sup>81</sup> as well as a chapter with four accounts relating the narrative of another woman offering herself to 'Abdallāh. The first account states that 'Abdallāh displayed a "bright light in his face," but adds that some people say it was a "blaze like the white spot on a horse's face." The third account conveys an interpretative theological notion referring to the light as the "light of prophecy" and the fourth account mentions a "brightness between the eyes shining up to heaven." In the account about the light, 'Abdallāh was just married to Āmina and was on his way to consummate his marriage when a woman offered herself to him, because of the light on his head. 'Abdallāh rushed to his wife and they conceived Muḥammad. He returned to the other woman, who stated that she was no longer interested in him because the light had disappeared. Thus, the chronological *sīra* contains several accounts stating that, at the time immediately preceding the conception of the Prophet, a light had been visible on 'Abdallāh's face. Even though this light is at least once explicitly referred to as a marker of prophecy, Ibn Sa'd does not list any of these accounts among the "signs of prophecy."

Āmina's pregnancy is also less emphasized among the "signs of prophecy" than in the general biography. The chronological *sīra* contains five accounts, the first of which states that she did not experience the burdens of pregnancy, only the cessation of her menstruation. Furthermore, it was said that a visitor came to her twice; the first time he related that she was pregnant and bearing "the lord of this community and its prophet"; and the second time he exclaimed that the child would receive divine protection.<sup>82</sup> The second account also mentions that she would not experience any discomfort and the third account

81 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:75.

82 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:75.

describes her pregnancies as being “as light as a lamb.”<sup>83</sup> Finally, the fifth report recounts that Āmina was told to call the child Aḥmad.<sup>84</sup> By contrast, the chapter the “signs of prophecy before the call to prophecy” does not contain an individual account of the pregnancy, though Āmina briefly mentions (in the account of the blessings the wet nurse experienced after taking him) to Ḥalima that she did not experience any discomfort during the pregnancy.<sup>85</sup>

The Prophet’s birth is mentioned in Ibn Sa’d’s chronological *sīra* in fifteen accounts. The first five accounts identify the day the Prophet was born;<sup>86</sup> the sixth account relates that his mother did not experience any discomfort during the pregnancy and that a light was emitted with him as emerged from her. This cast a bright light on everything between the East and the West; some narrators add that the Prophet himself fell on the ground resting on his hands, and raised his head.<sup>87</sup> The next account also mentions that the light that was emitted from the womb illuminated the palaces of Syria, and the newborn was described as being as clean as a lamb, without impurities, resting on his hands.<sup>88</sup> The eighth account recounts Āmina stating “I noticed the earth was lit, as if a meteor came out of me.”<sup>89</sup> The narrative found in the ninth account is unique, as it states that following the delivery, Āmina placed the Prophet under a stone vessel, which then split in two.<sup>90</sup> And she saw him gazing toward heaven. The next two accounts recount, in the Prophet’s first-person narration, the lights that illuminated Busra.<sup>91</sup> The twelfth and thirteenth accounts describe the Prophet’s state during the delivery, and how he rested on his palms and knees, gazed toward the sky, was born circumcised, and his umbilical cord was cut, respectively. The last account includes ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib stating “A child of mine will achieve greatness.”<sup>92</sup> The next account reiterates many of the preceding details, as Āmina sent for ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and related to him everything she perceived during her pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>93</sup> The final

83 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:79. The account immediately following this one quotes Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Aslamī, that is, al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823), who remarked that the preceding account was not known because it referred to the Prophet’s children in the plural, while she only had one child, Muḥammad.

84 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:79.

85 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125.

86 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:81f.

87 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:81f.

88 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:82.

89 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:82.

90 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:82.

91 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:83.

92 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:83.

93 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:83.

account reports the lines of poetry ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib uttered on his grandson’s birth.<sup>94</sup> These fifteen accounts of the Prophet’s birth find only few counterparts in the chapter on the “signs of prophecy.” Only three accounts mention these events; most accounts include the ease of his mother’s pregnancy, the lights that were visible during the delivery, and the Prophet’s position resting on his hands. Furthermore, they touch on a visitor announcing Āmina’s pregnancy and the omen of the Banū Lihb, the last of which is not found in the chronological biography.<sup>95</sup>

Both in the general biography and in the chapter on the “signs of prophecy,” Ibn Sa’d dedicates more attention to the time period the Prophet spent in the care of his wet nurse Ḥalīma than to the conception, pregnancy, and birth. The chronological *sīra* contains a total of twenty-six accounts related to “those who suckled the Prophet.” The first twelve accounts note the names of foster mothers and siblings as well as stories about them.<sup>96</sup> The following account contains the narratives of Ḥalīma accepting the orphaned Muḥammad as her foster child, and Āmina recounting her experiences during her pregnancy.<sup>97</sup> The fourteenth account captures Āmina’s reaction to her son’s departure with Ḥalīma.<sup>98</sup> The subsequent account is a condensed narration about when his breast was opened and when Ḥalīma took him back to his mother, who urged her to take him back. Later Ḥalīma watched a cloud shading him and intended once again to return him to his mother. However, young Muḥammad was lost on the way, and his grandfather ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib prayed at the Ka’ba for his safe return.<sup>99</sup> The sixteenth account in this chapter is closely related to the fifteenth and recounts ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib praying at the Ka’ba for the return of his grandson. In this account, however, the reason for Muḥammad’s disappearance differs: he went missing trying to find one of his grandfather’s camels.<sup>100</sup> The Prophet’s return to his grandfather is related in the subsequent account.<sup>101</sup> The eighteenth account simply constitutes a statement that the Prophet was nursed by a woman from the Banū Sa’d b. Bakr.<sup>102</sup> The nineteenth account describes Jews coming to Ḥalīma; in it, she relates details about the Prophet’s conception and birth, and this incites the men to kill the infant. Ḥalīma then

94 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:84.

95 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125.

96 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:87–89.

97 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:89f.

98 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:91f.

99 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:91f.

100 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:92.

101 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:92.

102 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:92.

claims that Muḥammad is her own son, and the Jewish men lose interest in him, as they were seeking an orphan.<sup>103</sup> The next account contains a statement that the Prophet derived his eloquence from the Quraysh and from the tribe in which he was nursed.<sup>104</sup> The remaining accounts describe the interaction between the Prophet as an adult and his foster mother.<sup>105</sup>

The chapters on the “signs of prophecy” include several of these episodes, some of which occur in the framework of longer, multi-themed accounts, while others are presented in shorter, individual accounts, and some occur in both modes. The opening of the Prophet’s breast and the cleansing of his heart are treated in greater detail as a “sign of prophecy,” as they are mentioned both in the introductory first account as well as in one independent account.<sup>106</sup> In the chronological biography, the incident in which Ḥalīma witnessed a cloud shading her young foster child is merely one aspect of a multi-themed account, whereas the “signs of prophecy” include an independent account of the same event.<sup>107</sup> Finally, the general biography also mentions that Ḥalīma showed the infant boy to a soothsayer because his mother had instructed her to. The soothsayer ordered that the boy be killed and predicted his prophetic future. In the “signs of prophecy,” this episode is presented in several individual accounts.<sup>108</sup> In addition to the variety of lengths in which events are related in the specific chapters, the accounts also exhibit different thematic *foci*. For instance, the “signs of prophecy” chapter includes a lengthy account of Ḥalīma’s quest for a foster child and the numerous blessings her formerly impoverished family received after accepting the orphaned child.<sup>109</sup> As we have seen, the chronological biography also mentions this episode. However, it is noteworthy that the previous dire need of Ḥalīma’s family and the blessings are only alluded to in the general biography, but described in great detail in the chapter on “signs of prophecy.”

Finally, the chronological biography contains a chapter dedicated to the “First Journey to Syria”; this contains numerous incidents that are also part of the “signs of prophecy.” Its first account describes the Prophet’s closeness with his uncle Abū Ṭālib and relates a food-related incident<sup>110</sup> that is paralleled in

103 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:92.

104 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:93f.

105 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:93f.

106 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

107 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

108 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

109 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125f.

110 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:98.

an account of the signs of prophecy preceding the call to prophecy.<sup>111</sup> The next two accounts refer to incidents with ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s cushion; these foreshadow Muḥammad’s future leadership qualities. The next account refers to a monk in Syria who recognizes “a pious man” among Abū Ṭālib’s group and warns that he should be protected from the Jews.<sup>112</sup> The fifth account in the “First Journey to Syria” contains only very short references to Baḥīrā in the description of virtues.<sup>113</sup> The remaining thirteen accounts all discuss Abū Ṭālib’s children, his death, and subsequent revelations that pertain to matters for which Abū Ṭālib set a precedent, such as a funeral prayer for non-Muslims and their salvation.<sup>114</sup> Thus, while some of the accounts in this chapter have counterparts in the “signs of prophecy” chapter, the vast majority of them are unrelated. As noted, the presentation of those events that overlap differs in thematic focus. In the chronological biography, the encounter with a monk is only briefly referred to while it is covered extensively in the chapter dedicated to the “signs of prophecy prior to the call to prophecy.”

The juxtaposition of accounts of the “signs of prophecy” narratives with their counterparts in the general biography demonstrates that accounts occurring in both sections generally corroborate one another; however, they frequently differ with regard to the extent of detail provided on a certain event and on their thematic foci. The most prominent examples of such divergent foci in the presentation of the same event are Ḥalīma’s quest for a foster child and the lengthy accounts of the Prophet’s encounter with Baḥīrā. The most prominent themes are emphasized by being included more than once, such as the water-related incident at Ḥudaybiyya, which is presented several times with a number of differing aspects. Therefore, it is obvious that Ibn Sa’d chose precisely which narratives to include in the chapters of the “signs of prophecy,” and to what extent certain details would be elaborated. Such a selective approach corroborates Leder’s observation that “the editing of *akhbār* implies operations similar to authorship.”<sup>115</sup> This editorial process of selecting some accounts and omitting others presupposes that Ibn Sa’d held a notion of the “signs of prophecy” that functioned as a guiding principle in compiling these thematic chapters.

111 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:142.

112 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:99.

113 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:99.

114 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:100–103.

115 Leder, “The Literary Use of Khabar,” 284. Leder concluded this based on a comparative study of parallel narratives found in the works of early compilers such as Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqīdī, and Ibn Sa’d. The results of this chapter, however, allow us to extend this observation of the authorial processes of a single compiler.

### 2.5 *States of the Prophet*

In addition to narratives of Muḥammad's childhood, one of the less frequently employed themes in Ibn Sa'd's chapters are narratives that refer to the heightened sense of discretion and decency that distinguished Muḥammad from his contemporaries, and also connected him to other prophetic figures. In one account Ibn al-ʿAbbās states that he first became aware of Muḥammad's prophetic status when Muḥammad was told to "cover" (his private parts) as a young boy. Ibn al-ʿAbbās states that from that day onward he never saw the Prophet's private parts again.<sup>116</sup> In the account immediately following, ʿĀ'isha confirms this notion and states in a report that can only be understood in conjunction with the previous one: "I did not see that of the Prophet."<sup>117</sup> The Prophet's heightened sense of discretion and decency is also reiterated in the accounts relating the relocation of trees that shielded him from the public eye while he was relieving himself<sup>118</sup> and the dialogue with ʿĀ'isha stating that nothing offensive is ever seen if prophets relieve themselves because the soil absorbs it.<sup>119</sup> These two accounts have already been discussed in the section on natural phenomena, as Muḥammad's sense of propriety was facilitated by natural elements. In addition to this sense of discretion, the Prophet's sleep is described as a state affecting his eyes, not his heart.<sup>120</sup> Like the soil absorbing excrement, this particular state of sleep is explicitly described as only reaching prophets.

The accounts that I subsumed under this theme of prophetic states combines the notion of the external recognition of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, including instances that occurred long before the first revelations, with those of his exceptional personal characteristics. These characteristics single him out from his contemporaries while also linking him to previous prophets. The image that is crafted here implies a unique human being who is, at the same time, part of a continuous sacred history, equal in character to the other prophets.

### 2.6 *Interactions with the Divine*

Six accounts relate various aspects of the Prophet's interactions with the divine; these can be further subdivided into acts of revelation, divine protection, and divine responses to the Prophet's invocation. One of these two accounts is a

116 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:131.

117 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:131.

118 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:143f.

119 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:144.

120 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:145.

first-person narration by the Prophet describing how he encountered Gabriel during the revelation.

The Prophet said, “When I was standing during the day Gabriel entered, he struck me between my shoulder blades so that I went to a tree in which there was the like of two bird’s nests. He sat in one of them and I sat in the other. They began to rise up until [they reached] the final point of the East and the West. If I wanted to touch the heaven I touched [it] and I turned my side and bent over to Gabriel and he was like a wrapped saddle-cloth. [Thereby] I came to know his knowledge of God. The door of heaven was opened for me and I saw a great light and there was before me a curtain with patches of pearls and rubies in it. Then God revealed to me what He willed.”<sup>121</sup>

One account narrates the Prophet’s dream, in which the angels Gabriel and Michael relate an allegory to him.

The Prophet came to us and said, “I saw in my dream as if Gabriel was at my head and Mikhāʿil [Michael] at my legs. One of them said to his companion, ‘Impart words of wisdom to him.’ He said, ‘Listen! Your ears must listen to it. Comprehend! Your heart must comprehend it. You and your Companions are like the king who erected a mansion then built in it a room, then prepared a table in it, then he sent a messenger to invite the people to [share] his food; among them [i.e., the people] there are those who respond to the invitation and [those who] decline it. As for God, He is the king and the mansion is Islam, the room is heaven, and those who accept the invitation, [are those who] embrace Islam and those who embrace Islam enter heaven and eat what is in it.”<sup>122</sup>

Another account contains a lengthy narrative about the Prophet sitting with ʿUthmān b. Mazʿūn in the courtyard of his house at the moment a revelation occurred. Engaged in conversation, the Prophet suddenly turned away from his guest and stood up gazing toward the sky. ʿUthmān noticed the Prophet’s nodding as if he was indicating his comprehension of information that was conveyed to him. Then the Prophet returned to his previous position facing his guest, who expressed his surprise over the Prophet’s behavior. The Prophet explained that he had just received a revelation from God and ʿUthmān inquired

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:144.

<sup>122</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:145.

about what was revealed. After the Prophet recited the newly revealed verses,<sup>123</sup> ‘Uthmān b. Maz‘ūn immediately embraced Islam.<sup>124</sup> Given that receiving and conveying divine messages became the defining feature of prophecy in Islam, it is surprising that only two of ninety-nine accounts of the “signs of prophecy” explicitly refer to revelation, and a third relates a dream-based encounter with the angels Gabriel and Michael.

In addition to revelation, divine interaction is presented in one account that explicitly describes an act of divine protection. ‘Ā’isha relates that the Prophet used to have guards who protected him. When a verse was revealed that God protects him,<sup>125</sup> Muḥammad was at ease and dismissed his guards.<sup>126</sup>

A third form of divine interaction pertains to immediate responses to the Prophet’s prayers. Three accounts refer to God’s response to the Prophet’s invocations. The first two were treated under previous thematic divisions. The first of these two relates the Prophet’s *du‘ā*, in which he asked for rain on behalf of his suffering community, and was instantly answered with a rainfall so strong that the Prophet invoked God again, asking Him to stop the rain. The second *du‘ā* was also immediately answered.<sup>127</sup> God’s response is part of a lengthy narrative of Miqdād seeking milk. Miqdād came to the Prophet and shared the milk of a goat with his companions and the Prophet. One night he was tempted by the devil to drink the Prophet’s share. When the Prophet came to the mosque at night and did not find his share of milk, he made a *du‘ā* asking God to feed the one who had fed him. After the *du‘ā*, Miqdād found the goats’ udders full of milk in spite of having been milked recently. He drew milk from them and shared it with the Prophet.<sup>128</sup> The third account is the Prophet’s well-known encounter with Surāqa b. Mālik, who was following the Prophet and Abū Bakr. The Prophet prayed that the legs of Surāqa’s horse would become firm, and they sank into the ground. Surāqa promised to prevent further persecution if the Prophet would set his horse free. The Prophet made another *du‘ā*, asking God to release the horse, and the legs of the horse came out.<sup>129</sup> The accounts of Miqdād and Surāqa have been discussed in other sections of this book.

123 “God enjoins justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbids lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorts you in order that you may take heed” (Q. 16:90).

124 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:146.

125 “O Messenger, proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord; but if you do not, you would not have delivered His message. God will protect you from mankind. God does not guide the unbelieving people” (Q. 5:67).

126 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:144.

127 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:149.

128 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:154f.

129 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159.

### 2.7 *Hidden Knowledge*

Three accounts imply that the Prophet had access to hidden knowledge. I define hidden knowledge broadly as the Prophet's access to any information he could not have gained from his surroundings. In the first account, he is aware of the conversations of some hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*)—members of his community who converted outwardly but continued to resent the Prophet:

The Prophet said, "If men among you gathered and said such-and-such, then get up and ask for forgiveness and I will ask forgiveness for you." They did not get up. He said, "What is the matter with you? Get up and ask for God's forgiveness and I will seek forgiveness for you." [He said this] three times and then he said, "Get up or I will call you by your names!" He said, "Get up such-and-such!" They got up, ashamed, covering their faces.<sup>130</sup>

The second account refers to a goat that appeared to a group of hungry Muslims during a raid. The animal walked up to the Prophet and he milked it. Then he commanded one of his Companions to secure it, but also announced that the Companion should not think of himself as having taking possession of the goat. The Companion secured the goat with a rope only to find it gone in the morning. The Prophet said that the animal had been taken by God, who provided it.<sup>131</sup>

The third account is set during the Quraysh's boycott of the Banū Hāshim. The boycott was put into writing in the form of a document that declared that none of the Quraysh was allowed to buy from, sell merchandise to, or associate with a member of the Banū Hāshim. Three years after the document was drafted, God informed the Prophet that a termite ate the part of the document that specified the terms of the boycott, but those parts mentioning God remained intact. The Prophet mentioned this to Abū Ṭālib, who in turn asked the elders of the Quraysh to look at the document. Abū Ṭālib negotiated with the elders to end the boycott if the document is indeed in the state Muḥammad described it. When they found that the Prophet had spoken the truth, they remained silent. Abū Ṭālib realized that they will not keep their word to lift the boycott and invoked God to help the Muslim community.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:149.

<sup>131</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:151.

<sup>132</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159f.

### 2.8 *Material Transformation and Healing*

Finally, Ibn Sa'd's chapters contain accounts that describe incidents of material transformation and the Prophet healing another person's ailment. The first material transformation occurs in the context of Salmān al-Fārisī being released from his owner through a contract. The price for Salmān's manumission was three hundred saplings of fruit-bearing date palms and forty ounces of gold. Since Salmān did not have the means to pay this price, the Prophet asked his community to provide for him. The people came and brought two or three saplings each until they collected three hundred. The Prophet instructed Salmān to dig pits and helped him plant the saplings. In the meantime, someone brought a piece of gold the size of a pigeon's egg, but Salmān realized that it would not suffice to buy his freedom. The Prophet touched it with his tongue and it increased in weight. Salmān took forty ounces of it to pay for his manumission and still had an equal amount left.<sup>133</sup>

The second account of material transformation states that 'Ukāsha b. Miḥṣan broke his sword on the day of Badr. The Prophet gave him the stem of a tree and in his hand it turned into a sharp sword of pure iron.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, the only healing narrative found among the "signs of prophecy" relates that the eye of Qatāda b. al-Nu'mān was infected and the eyeball was dropping down his cheek. The Prophet brought the eye back with his hand, and it [became] the healthier of the two eyes and the better one.<sup>135</sup>

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The juxtaposition of narrative accounts of the "signs of prophecy" with their counterparts in the general biography demonstrates that accounts occurring in both sections generally corroborate one another, but frequently differ with regard to the extent of detail provided about an event and their thematic foci. As such, the chronological biography usually aims at providing the general historical framework of events, while accounts in the thematic chapters emphasize the exceptionality of individual events. It is, therefore, obvious that Ibn Sa'd selected specific narratives to include in the chapters of the "signs of prophecy." Such a selective approach corroborates Leder's observation that "the editing of *akhbār* implies operations similar to authorship."<sup>136</sup> This

133 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:155.

134 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:158.

135 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:158.

136 Leder, "The Literary Use of Khabar," 284. Leder concluded this based on the comparative study of parallel narratives found in the works of early compilers such as Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidi, and Ibn Sa'd. The results of this chapter, however, allow us to extend this observation to the authorial processes of a single compiler in his work.

editorial process of selecting some accounts and omitting others presupposes that Ibn Sa'd had a notion of the "signs of prophecy" that functioned as a guiding principle in compiling these thematic chapters.

The analysis of the "signs of prophecy" chapters in the *Ṭabaqāt* establishes that Ibn Sa'd designated certain incidents as "signs of prophecy" and deliberately selected them from the larger pool of *ḥadīth*. Only three of the ninety-nine accounts actually mention that Muḥammad's actions were intended as proofs of his prophetic mission or are an attempt to convince others to convert. In all other cases, there are no explicit indications of "signs of prophecy" in the accounts themselves and Ibn Sa'd established the supposed evidentiary nature of the particular incidents simply by including them in these designated chapters. Therefore, we can approximate Ibn Sa'd's epistemological notion of what exactly constitutes evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission by looking at the various themes he highlights in these chapters. The accounts fall into three large categories of (1) predictions and announcements, (2) food- and/or water-related signs, and (3) natural phenomena, and a number of themes that occur less frequently. The following chart illustrates the distribution of themes.

With forty-one accounts, predictions and announcements make up the largest thematic group by far, accounting for almost half of the ninety-nine accounts found in these two chapters. These predictions and announcements occur in both monotheistic and pagan contexts, and frequently imply that the monotheists not only anticipated the coming of a future prophet but were also able to accurately identify Muḥammad based on information found in their own scriptures. Many of these accounts are set in a time long before the first revelation and, therefore, suggest that Muḥammad embodied particular features indicating his prophetic status long before he actively began the prophetic mission.

A similar notion underlies many accounts involving natural phenomena. Here, too, various natural elements, such as animals, trees, or clouds, react to

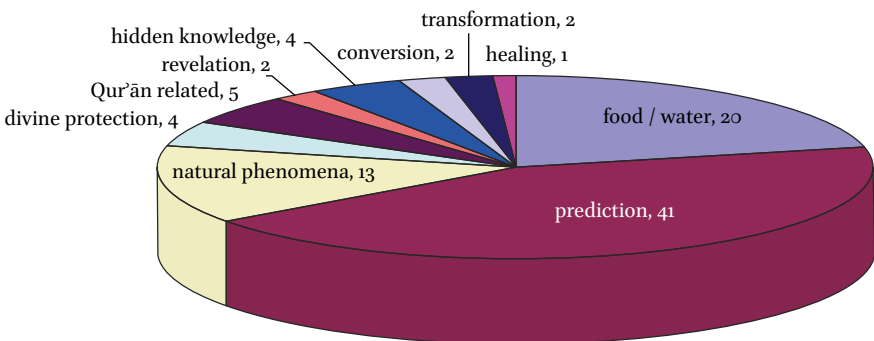


FIGURE 1 Thematic categories in Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*

or interact with Muḥammad based on their innate ability to recognize his status and significance. Another common motif in these accounts highlights his character traits as exceptionally empathetic, generous, and sincere.

Narratives related to an increase in food and water make up the second largest group and are, of all the thematic groups, the ones that correspond most closely to Ibn Sa'd's predecessor, Ma'mar b. Rāshid, whose main focus was on water-related narratives. All six of Ma'mar's accounts can be found in Ibn Sa'd's two chapters. The sudden emergence or increase in food or water always occurred in moments of dire need and mostly benefited individuals or groups other than just Muḥammad himself. These occurred through a deliberate action or simply because of Muḥammad's presence and, thus, occasionally carried the notion of "blessings."

Certainly, the most astonishing feature of Ibn Sa'd's selection is that the act of revelation itself is hardly found.<sup>137</sup> Given that Islam views receiving and conveying divine messages as the defining feature of prophecy, it is surprising that acts of revelation appear explicitly in only two accounts. Furthermore, these two describe marginal aspects when compared to the more well-known narratives of the beginning of the revelation, such as Muḥammad's retreats in the cave of Ḥirā' or the first revelation and the fear it invoked in him. These prominent narratives are all left to several other chapters in the chronological biography, but are not mentioned with regard to the "signs of prophecy." Dovetailing this paucity of revelation as a "sign of prophecy" is the absence of any references to challenges from pagans or adherents of other faiths to prove the revelation, or references to the literary qualities of the revelation. This seems to indicate that theologically charged questions, such as the inimitability of the Qur'ān, did not influence Ibn Sa'd's notion of the "signs of prophecy."

Scholars like Tor Andrae and Annemarie Schimmel have stated that the works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* are compilations of miracle narratives. However, this thematic analysis demonstrates that not every account included in the "signs of prophecy" of Ibn Sa'd involved miraculous elements. In fact, the majority of accounts of prediction and announcement are based on descriptions found in religious scriptures or information conveyed to previous prophets through revelation. Other announcements were based on dreams, visions, or the appearance of *jinn*. Neither one of these would be considered "miraculous" in nature by contemporary scholars. By the same token, not every incident that later came to have "miraculous" significance is included in the "signs of prophecy." An elucidation of various Qur'ān-inspired materials demonstrates this. In the two chapters dedicated to the "signs of prophecy," there are various accounts

137 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:146.

that refer to *jinn* as agents announcing the beginning of the revelation. These accounts frequently mention a “fire in the sky” or shooting stars (*shihāb*, pl. *shuhūb*), which are thrown at demons or *jinn*.<sup>138</sup> In Ibn Sa’d’s chapters on the “signs of prophecy,” both the *jinn* and the shooting stars appear as agents announcing the advent of the revelation; thus, their placement in these chapters corroborates the thesis that Ibn Sa’d followed a specific notion of the “signs of prophecy.” Notably, other Qur’ān-inspired narratives that play a prominent role in later *dalā’il al-nubūwa* works and that are, arguably, more “miraculous” incidents, only find their way into Ibn Sa’d’s general biography, but not into these specific chapters. Among these narratives are the Prophet’s night journey to Jerusalem,<sup>139</sup> the Prophet’s ascension to heaven where he encounters previous prophets,<sup>140</sup> and the splitting of the moon.<sup>141</sup> We can conclude that the “miraculous” quality of an incident or event was not a contributing factor in Ibn Sa’d’s selection of the “signs of prophecy.”

### 3 Al-Bukhārī’s “Alāmāt al-Nubūwa fi l-Islām”

The canonical *ḥadīth* compilation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* contains a chapter of sixty-four “signs of prophecy in Islam” in the book of virtues.<sup>142</sup> About fifteen of these accounts are parallel to Ibn Sa’d’s “signs of prophecy,” such as various water- or food-related incidents,<sup>143</sup> the Prophet’s *du‘ā’* for rain on behalf of his community,<sup>144</sup> the yearning of the palm tree after the Prophet started using the *minbar* for his sermons,<sup>145</sup> and the Prophet’s encounter with Surāqa.<sup>146</sup> The remaining accounts in this chapter relate incidents that are not mentioned in Ibn Sa’d. Most of these accounts pertain to the Prophet’s knowledge of things

138 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:135 (explicit); 1:139f. (five subsequent accounts: implied; listening explicit; explicit; explicit; explicit).

139 “Glory be to Him Who caused His servant to travel by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, in order to show him some of Our Signs. He is indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing” (Q. 17:1).

140 “He has indeed seen him (Gabriel) a second time; By the Lotus Tree of the outermost limit. Close by it is the Garden of Refuge. His gaze did not shift nor did he exceed the bound. He saw some of the Great Signs of his Lord” (Q. 17:13–18).

141 “The Hour is drawing near and the moon is split asunder. If they see a sign, they turn away and say: ‘Continued sorcery’” (Q. 51:1–2).

142 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:466–500.

143 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:467–470 (nos. 3571, 3572, 3573, 3574, 3575, 3576).

144 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:474f. (no. 3582).

145 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:475f. (nos. 3583, 3584, 3585).

146 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:490f (no. 3615).

unknown to man, such as references to “the Hour,”<sup>147</sup> and future trials and afflictions (*fitna*) of the Muslim community.<sup>148</sup> In one account, Muḥammad informs his daughter Fāṭima about his impending death and she begins to weep. He consoles her by saying that she will be the first of his family members to join him in paradise.<sup>149</sup> According to Muslim tradition, Fāṭima died less than six months after her father. In other accounts, the Prophet predicts the victory of the Muslim armies during the conquests, and is aware of the death of his Companion at the moment of their passing, even though he died far from Medina and news only reached the city hours or even days later.<sup>150</sup>

A comparison between the selections of Ibn Sa’d and al-Bukhārī clearly shows that they differ in their epistemological notions of the “proofs of prophecy.” The most prominent difference between the two compilations is that al-Bukhārī only includes accounts of events after Muḥammad’s call to prophecy while Ibn Sa’d dedicates an entire chapter to signs preceding the first revelation, including Muḥammad’s childhood. It is quite likely that al-Bukhārī excluded this material on methodological grounds. The standards of authentication required in a *ṣaḥīḥ* collection mean that most accounts from Muḥammad’s early life would not be included.

By contrast, there is a partial congruence between the notion of the “signs of prophecy” of Ibn Sa’d and that of al-Bukhārī, given that both include a number of common accounts, mostly including water-related incidents. Furthermore, Ibn Sa’d and al-Bukhārī overlap in their notion that the Prophet’s hidden knowledge constitutes a “sign of prophecy,” but this is only a thematic congruence given that the specific accounts do not correspond. Ibn Sa’d’s other

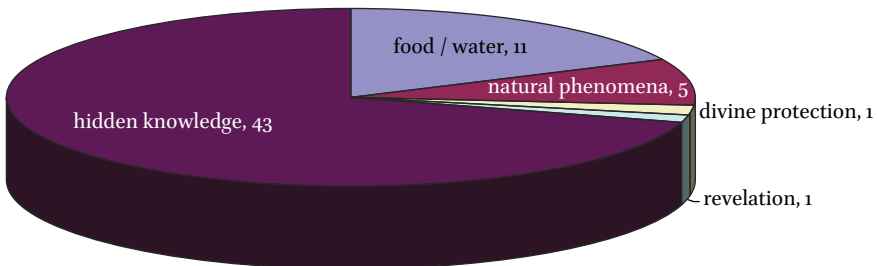


FIGURE 2 Thematic categories in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī

147 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:477f. (nos. 3587; 3590; 3591; 3592).

148 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:481f. (nos. 3597; 3599; 3600; 3601).

149 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:495f.

150 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:497.

large categories, such as predictions and announcements or natural phenomena, and the less significant categories are almost completely absent from al-Bukhārī's chapter. All of this suggests that there was a shared understanding among *ḥadīth* scholars that certain aspects of Muḥammad's life are evidence of his prophetic mission, but there was no generally accepted notion of what constituted the signs of prophecy. While the scholars shared many accounts in their general repertoire, they constructed their own epistemological notions of the proofs of prophecy through their own selection processes and by grouping their choices of accounts under thematic headings.

#### 4 Al-Jūzajānī's "Amārāt al-Nubūwa"

Unlike the collections that have been studied so far in this chapter, al-Jūzajānī's *Amārāt al-nubūwa* is not extant in its entirety; from it we have a selection of *ḥadīths* from the sixth chapter. The excerpt of al-Jūzajānī's work contains thirteen *ḥadīths* that I group into four thematic categories, including two that were not part of the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations discussed earlier.

##### 4.1 Food-Related Incidents as "Proofs of Prophecy"

Food-related events appear frequently in this selective compilation; they make up five of the thirteen accounts. The fourth *ḥadīth* of this excerpt sees a group traveling with the Prophet setting up camp, when the Prophet asks Sa'd to milk a particular goat. Sa'd states that he is familiar with the territory and that there are not many "milk-giving" goats in the area. Then he successfully milks the goat countless times and assigns someone to milk them but the goat disappears. The Prophet said: "As for the goat, the one requesting it left with it."<sup>151</sup>

The next *ḥadīth* presents a significantly more elaborate version of the same incident. The *ḥadīth* describes the Prophet's habit of retreating to the mountains with Abū Bakr to reflect on the Qur'ān. One day Muḥammad asked Abū Bakr's slave, Sa'd, for something to eat. Sa'd gave them raisins and asked the Prophet to request that Abū Bakr manumit him. Abū Bakr did so after initial concerns and Sa'd reiterated his loyalty to both of them. His loyalty was further stressed in a tangent that mentions that Sa'd had saddled their riding animals on the day of the *hijra*. At a later point, the Prophet set out on a raid without bringing provisions and turned to Sa'd who brought some dates for the Prophet and Abū Bakr. Muḥammad invoked a blessing over the dates and they

<sup>151</sup> Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 162b, line 21 to fol. 163a, line 3.

were spread out over leather mats. He then pointed to a goat behind a tree and instructed Sa'd to milk it. Using his drinking cup, Sa'd milked the goat and called the army to come and have food with them. The men ate and drank until they were all satisfied, and the remaining dates still filled a vessel. Sa'd asked permission to leave and assigned another person to guard the goat, but this person soon reported to Sa'd that the goat had disappeared even though he was holding its neck. The Prophet was informed but told the two men to forget about it.<sup>152</sup> Ibn Sa'd's chapter on the "proofs of prophecy" after the call to prophecy includes a very similar account in which Nafi' is instructed to milk a goat, which then fed an army of 1,400 men before disappearing. In this version, the Prophet foretold the goat's disappearance.<sup>153</sup> The narrative in al-Juzajānī's work is interesting because it merges the tropes of increasing a small amount of food to sustain a large crowd and milking an animal that is otherwise incapable of providing milk.

The next *ḥadīth*, written in the third person, states that the Prophet fed Khadija with grapes from paradise.<sup>154</sup> The twelfth *ḥadīth* of the excerpt describes how Abū Hurayra brought dates to the Prophet, who then invoked blessings over them. Abū Hurayra put them into his bag of provisions and continued eating from them until the day 'Uthmān was killed.<sup>155</sup>

The last *ḥadīth* mentions the Prophet going to the Bāhila tribe. He arrived while they were having a meal and was invited to join them but declined saying that he had come to forbid the kind of food they were indulging in. He identified himself as a prophet but the Bāhila rejected him and drove him away. Muḥammad, overcome by severe hunger and exhaustion, slept and was provided with food and milk to such an extent that his stomach became extended. One of the Bāhila men admonished the others for rejecting the Prophet and sent men after him to offer him whatever food was permissible to him. When the men find Muḥammad, he declined their offer saying that God had provided for him and pointed to his extended belly. The men convert to Islam.<sup>156</sup>

While the theme of abundant food is common in both previous compilations, the specific accounts differ. Ma'mar focused on water-related incidents that are not found in this excerpt of al-Juzajānī's work. There is more thematic overlap with Ibn Sa'd's compilation, including the tropes of milking a single goat to feed a large crowd, the goat's disappearance, and Muḥammad being

152 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 163a, line 3 to fol. 163b, line 18.

153 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1151.

154 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 163b, line 18 to fol. 164a, line 1.

155 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164b, lines 15–22.

156 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164b, line 22 to fol. 165a, line 10.

provided for by God, but the specific accounts differ. In other places, al-Juzajānī includes tropes that are absent in previous compilations of *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, such as the increase in dates after Muḥammad invoked blessings over them or his feeding Khadija in paradise. The subtext also differs as al-Juzajānī presents narratives in which the abundant food is directly linked to Muḥammad's actions or directions to his Companions, while Ibn Sa'd also included many accounts in which Muḥammad's presence automatically led to the abundance in food. This notion of a "blessed presence," both before and after the call to prophecy, is absent in the excerpt we have of al-Juzajānī.

#### 4.2 *The Prophet's Character as "Proof of Prophecy"*

The first two *ḥadīths* of the excerpt both relate an incident in which the Prophet asked Jābir to sell him his camel. In the first account, Jābir named a price for the camel but the Prophet paid more than Jābir asked for and later returned the camel. The second account describes Muḥammad and Jābir traveling together. Muḥammad rides Jābir's camel and asks him to sell it to him. No further details of the transaction are mentioned, but on their return the Prophet told Jābir that his request was not serious and he should keep both the animal and the money.<sup>157</sup>

The third *ḥadīth* relates, on the authority of Jābir b. 'Abdallāh, that the Prophet never said no when he was asked a favor.<sup>158</sup> Another *ḥadīth*, the seventh of the excerpt, describes how Abū Hurayra and others were praying with the Prophet when his two young grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, leaped onto the Prophet's back. The Prophet gently put them down. Once he had finished praying, the boys climbed into his lap, one sitting on each of the Prophet's thighs. Abū Hurayra asked the Prophet whether he wanted the children removed but the Prophet insisted that he let them be. Then a light appeared and immersed the boys until his mother came to take them.<sup>159</sup>

The predominant motif in these four *ḥadīths* appears to be the Prophet's exceptional character, as seen in his generosity, kindness, and patience. Ibn Sa'd included narratives that highlighted Muḥammad's character as evidence for his prophetic mission. In these cases, it is the sense of discretion and decency that is emphasized and presented as a feature of all prophets. This demonstrates that Ibn Sa'd and al-Juzajānī only shared the general notion that the quality of Muḥammad's character can serve as evidence for his prophetic

157 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 162b, lines 13–19.

158 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 162b, lines 19–21.

159 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164a, lines 1–8.

mission but each one highlighted different traits and selected different narratives for their respective compilations.

### 4.3 *Light as “Proof of Prophecy”*

A thematic category that appears for the first time in al-Jūzajānī’s work relates to light. In the eighth *ḥadīth*, Qatāda takes advantage of a dark and rainy night to watch the Prophet pray ‘*ishā*’. When the Prophet noticed him, he asked Qatāda why he was in the mosque while Satan is hiding in his house with his family. The Prophet offered him his walking stick and told him “to seek light from it until you reach your house. You [will] find him in the corner of the house. Beat him with the branch.”<sup>160</sup> The moment Qatāda left the mosque the walking stick lit up like a candle and illuminated the way home. Qatāda found Satan in the corner of his house and beat him until he disappeared.<sup>161</sup>

Illuminated walking sticks are also the topic of the next *ḥadīth* which describes two men leaving the Prophet. When they leave, the walking stick of one of the men lit up and illuminated their way home until they reached a fork where they had to separate and the other man’s walking stick also lit up. Both walked home in the light of their sticks.<sup>162</sup> It is noteworthy that al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* includes a very similar account, though it is listed in the “Bāb al-Manāqib” (Book of virtues).<sup>163</sup> This chapter also includes the “signs of prophecy in Islam,” but unlike al-Jūzajānī, al-Bukhārī includes this light-themed account in a later *ḥadīth* without a heading. The following *ḥadīth* in al-Jūzajānī relates that camels scattered during the night and that the Prophet’s fingers provided light until the people had collected their possessions.<sup>164</sup>

The degree to which the Prophet actively engaged with the light source differs in these three accounts. In the first account, the Prophet’s walking stick is given to Qatāda to illuminate his way home. In the next *ḥadīth*, the walking sticks of the two companions light up and illuminate the way and the only connection to the Prophet is a reference to the fact that the two men were leaving the Prophet. In the last *ḥadīth* of this category, the Prophet, actively and without the agency of another object, provides light with his fingers.

Light also plays a role in another *ḥadīth* listed in this excerpt; this one relates to the Prophet’s kindness toward his grandsons who are immersed in light when they sit in their grandfather’s lap. Notably, the compiler of the excerpt

160 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164a, lines 16–17.

161 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164a, lines 8–20.

162 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164a, line 20 to fol. 164b, line 4.

163 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:502 (no. 3639).

164 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 164b, lines 4–9.

placed this *ḥadīth* immediately before the three *ḥadīths* with light themes. In this *ḥadīth*, however, the light symbolism appears to be of secondary importance and therefore I have subsumed this *ḥadīth* under another category.

In general, evidentiary incidents revolving around light were not part of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations, though light symbolism was a part of other accounts. The birth narrative of the Prophet, for instance, describes a light coming forth from the Prophet's mother; this light was so bright that it illuminated the fortresses of Syria. This narrative was among some of the earliest *ḥadīth* compilations and *sīra* works predating al-Jūzajānī but it does not figure prominently in the early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works as the analysis of Ibn Sa'd's chapters shows.

#### 4.4 *Interactions with the Divine*

A single *ḥadīth* mentions the Prophet's encounter with Gabriel in the cave Hirā'. The angel announced that the Prophet's wife Khadija bring a certain dish and then conveyed God's greetings to her. When Khadija arrived the Prophet asked about the dish and told her about Gabriel's presence and the greetings he sent to her.

The analysis of the content of al-Jūzajānī's *Amārāt al-nubūwa* shows that the thematic categories are much more evenly distributed; in particular it is more even than in the compilations of Ibn Sa'd and al-Bukhārī, with food or water-related incidents, the Prophet's character, and light providing five, four, and three "proofs," respectively. It should be borne in mind, however, that the present analysis is based on a selective fragment al-Jūzajānī's *Amārāt al-nubūwa* rather than the entire work.

Furthermore, al-Jūzajānī's *Amārāt al-nubūwa* displays thematic arrangements to a greater degree than previous works. In two instances, two accounts of the same incidents are placed one after the other, possibly to provide the context.

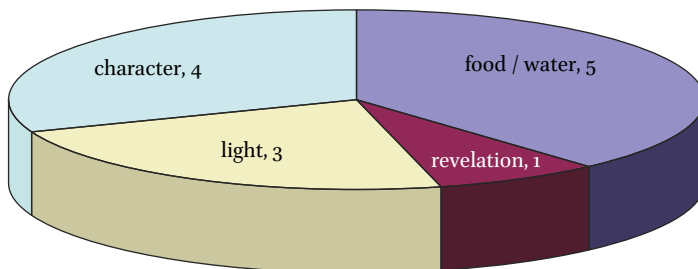


FIGURE 3 Thematic categories in an extract from al-Jūzajānī's *Amārāt al-nubūwa*

## 5 Al-Tirmidhī's "Bāb mā jā' fi ayāt Nubūwa al-Nabī wa-mā qad khaṣṣa Allāh bihi"

Al-Tirmidhī's canonical collection of *ḥadīth* contains a small chapter with nine accounts dedicated to "the signs of the Prophet's prophecy and how God distinguished him." The *ḥadīth* in al-Tirmidhī's chapter on the "signs of prophecy" fall into four thematic categories: food- or water-related incidents, natural phenomena, blessings (*baraka*) through the Prophet's touch, and revelation. Both the food- or water-related incidents and natural phenomena overlap at least partially with accounts found in Ibn Sa'd's and Bukhārī's compilations.

### 5.1 Food/Water Related Incidents

The most frequently occurring theme in al-Tirmidhī's chapter is food- and water-related incidents, which overlap considerably with the compilations of Ibn Sa'd and al-Bukhārī. Al-Tirmidhī's second *ḥadīth* relates that the Prophet was passing a large bowl—presumably filled with water—among a large group of people from daybreak until night fell. The people wondered how there remained water in it and the Prophet pointed toward heaven in response.<sup>165</sup> The sixth *ḥadīth* in this chapter provides an elaborate account of a conversation between Abū Ṭalḥa and Umm Sulaym. On hearing the Prophet's weakened voice, Abū Ṭalḥa concluded that he was very hungry and approaches Umm Sulaym to ask for food for Muḥammad. Abū Ṭalḥa found the Prophet sitting among the people in the mosque. The Prophet inquired about whether Umm Sulaym had sent him with food, and after Abū Ṭalḥa answered in the affirmative, Muḥammad invited the people to join him. Abū Ṭalḥa raised the concern that the amount of food would not suffice, but Umm Sulaym reassured him that "God and His messenger know best." The people lined up and were fed in groups of ten.<sup>166</sup> The same account is also contained in al-Bukhārī's chapter.<sup>167</sup> The seventh and ninth *ḥadīths* relate the well-known narrative of water coming forth from the Prophet's fingers and providing enough water for a large group to make the ablution;<sup>168</sup> this is also found in the chapters of Ibn Sa'd<sup>169</sup> and al-Bukhārī.<sup>170</sup>

165 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:192.

166 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:193f.

167 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:470f. (no. 3578).

168 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:193f.

169 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:150, 1:154.

170 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:468f. (nos. 3572, 3573, 3574).

## 5.2 *Natural Phenomena*

The second largest thematic category generally overlaps with Ibn Saʿd's category of natural phenomena, albeit at a much smaller scale. In the first account, the Prophet relates that a rock greeted him in Mecca when he received the call to prophecy.<sup>171</sup> The third *ḥadīth* describes the yearning of a palm tree that the Prophet had used to deliver his Friday sermon. Once a *minbar* was built and the Prophet delivered his first sermon there, the palm tree wailed in sadness until the Prophet consoled it.<sup>172</sup> Another natural phenomenon is recounted in the fourth *ḥadīth*, in which Muḥammad was approached by Arabs asking for a sign of his prophecy. The Prophet asked a palm tree to testify to the veracity of his prophetic mission. The Bedouins accepted Islam after the palm tree bowed down and the Prophet told it to return to its original position.<sup>173</sup> All of these accounts also occurred in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt*.

The two remaining accounts in al-Tirmidhī's chapter do not fall into any of these categories. One short account relates that the Prophet ran his hand over a man's face and prayed for him, and the man lived for one hundred twenty years and had only little white hair.<sup>174</sup> This implies a blessing (*baraka*) through the Prophet's touch. The other account relates, on the authority of ʿĀ'isha, that when God initiated the beginning of the prophetic mission, Muḥammad would see the break of dawn in a dream. This situation remained as long as God wanted it to last and He caused Muḥammad to seek solitude and seclusion above all else.<sup>175</sup> This account, which al-Tirmidhī evaluated as *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* (a good sound *ḥadīth*), is situated in the context of the first revelation, though it does not explicitly refer to revelation itself.

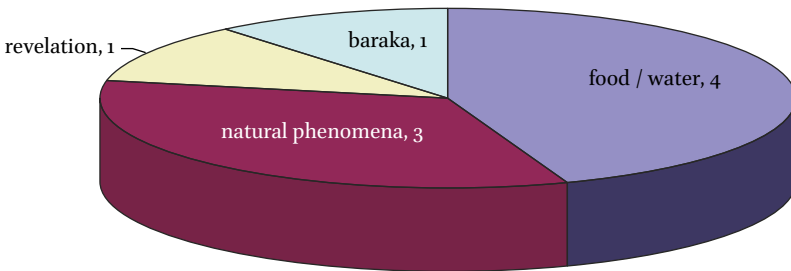


FIGURE 4 Thematic categories in al-Tirmidhī's chapter

- 171 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:192.  
 172 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:192.  
 173 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:193.  
 174 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:193.  
 175 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 3:193.

Overall, al-Tirmidhī's selection of accounts overlaps considerably with his predecessors, though there are a significantly smaller number of accounts dedicated to the "signs of prophecy" and unprecedented accounts that indicate that each author held their own notion of what the "signs of prophecy" encompassed; this was reflected in their individual selections of accounts.



In this early time period, these extant compilations demonstrate a considerable diversity in terms of size, scope, and content. Very few of the accounts in all these compilations explicitly refer to any intention of providing evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, rather their intended epistemological meaning rests almost entirely on their inclusion in specifically dedicated thematic chapters. The analyses of the chapters in Ibn Sa'd and al-Bukhārī, in particular, show that the authors undertook a deliberate editorial process of selecting certain accounts from their vast repertoires and including them in their thematic chapter. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Ibn Sa'd deliberately chose narratives and specific accounts for his thematic chapters rather than including them in his overall chronological biography of Muḥammad. A similar observation can be made for al-Bukhārī's chapter, which includes many accounts that are also found in other chapters. Bülow shows that there are more "miraculous" *ḥadīths* in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* than can be found in his chapter on the signs of prophecy, and thus she concluded that al-Bukhārī only used a selection of these narratives to provide legitimacy for Muḥammad's prophetic mission.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, the question guiding this analysis is whether or not these authors held a common notion of the "signs of prophecy" that guided their deliberate selections.

The analytical comparison of these five early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations shows that there was considerable variance in the size, scope, and contents of the various chapters. Ma'mar's first contribution to this literature included only six accounts; this stands in stark contrast to the voluminous compilations of Ibn Sa'd and al-Bukhārī, who present ninety-nine and sixty-four accounts, respectively. By contrast, Ibn Sa'd stands out in this group as the only one whose scholarly background was in fields other than *ḥadīth*, a fact that is reflected in the scope of his compilations. While all the other authors I examine limit their compilations to accounts after the first revelations, Ibn Sa'd dedicates an entire chapter to "signs of prophecy" preceding Muḥammad's call to prophecy, and starts with Muḥammad's conception and birth. As *ḥadīth* scholars,

<sup>176</sup> Bülow, "Ḥadīthe über Wunder des Propheten Muḥammad," 109.

authors like al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī were bound by strictly defined requirements of authentication that precluded most biographical information on Muḥammad’s early life. Ibn Sa’d, however, explored a greater pool of sources in his scholarly field, and this clearly shaped his notion of “signs of prophecy” as compared to other contributors to this literature.

The starkest differences are found in the thematic distribution of these compilations. A number of themes, and even specific accounts, occur in all the compilations, such as water- or food-related incidents. Other themes are unique to particular authors. Ibn Sa’d’s overwhelming emphasis on predictions and announcements of Muḥammad’s mission are absent from all the other compilations, given that the vast majority of these accounts concern Muḥammad’s early life. But even among the *ḥadīth* scholars proper, there are significant differences in their themes.

In other instances, authors agreed on the thematic motifs they emphasized in their accounts, but project them through very different narratives.

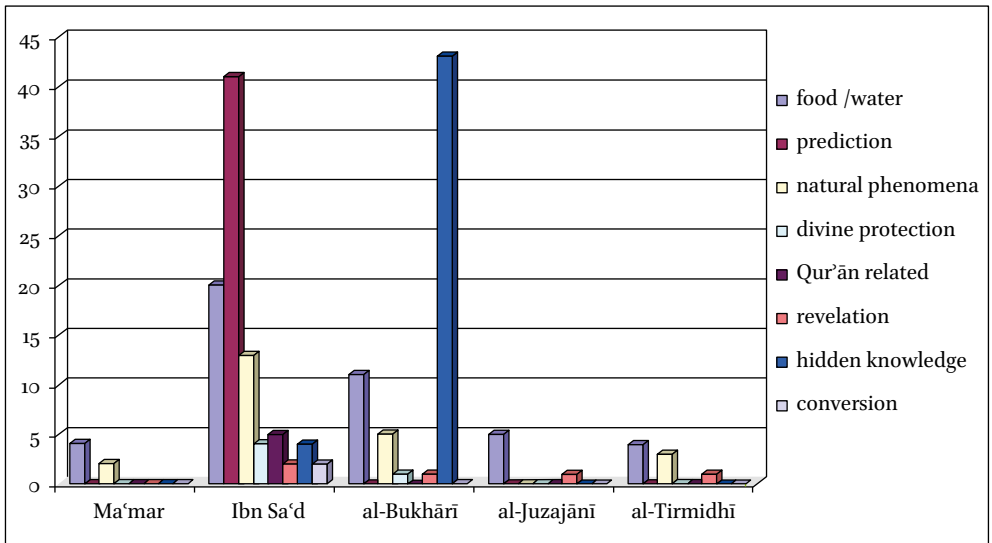


FIGURE 5 Distribution of themes

## Ibn Sa'd's "Proofs of Prophecy" and Its Intellectual Landscape

Since early authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works did not display a consistently agreed-upon notion about which kinds of events provide evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, I understand each author's selective designation of accounts as "proofs of prophecy" and the epistemological notions on which they operate as a creative act of theologizing Muḥammad's biography. In doing so, I borrow Sean Anthony's concept of "narrativized theology" in *sīra-maghāzī* works.<sup>1</sup> This use of "theology" is not meant in the narrower sense of *kalām*, but more generally as a sense of a religious purpose that pre-determines the portrayal of the Prophet. While it is common to view authors of *sīra-maghāzī* works as simply scholars transmitting existing traditions, we must keep in mind that each author's individual selection of accounts consciously or unconsciously led to the construction of a theological notion of prophecy and shaped particular images of Muḥammad and his prophetic mission. Being part of a hagiographical discourse of constructing distinct personae of the Prophet, the texts bear witness to the diverse political, social, and intellectual stimuli their authors experienced. Rather than reproducing an objective past, these texts enact a past that informs and gives meaning to the authors' present context by providing a foundation for their ideological and doctrinal views. Therefore, when we study them in relation to the political, social, and intellectual environments in which they emerged, we gain significant insight into the larger discourse on prophecy and the purposes these texts may have served.

Ibn Sa'd's chapters on the proofs of prophecy provide an interesting case for such an analysis. First, his chapters appear to be the only extant texts from the first wave of *ḥadīth* scholars' extensive engagement with the notion of the proofs of prophethood. While he is not the first known author to compile accounts thematically, there is a considerable increase in the number of accounts compared to his predecessor. Ma'mar's chapter included only six accounts while Ibn Sa'd's chapters contain ninety-nine accounts. At the same time, it seems as if Ibn Sa'd was not the only author of his period to be interested in the proofs of prophecy. Biographical dictionaries indicate that autonomous

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith*, 11.

works dedicated to the topic were written by al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834) and al-Madā'inī (d. 224/839), respectively. Even though none of their works seem to have been preserved, the fact that they emerged concomitantly with Ibn Sa'd's chapters indicates that interest in this topic was not limited to an individual author but may have been part of a larger scholarly discourse during this period. This raises the question of what was happening at the time to trigger numerous authors to provide "proof" of Muḥammad's prophetic mission and, by extension, contribute to the epistemological boundaries of "legitimate" prophecy. Did methodological developments in various Islamic sciences play a role? Were broader social circumstances of an 'Abbāsīd era multi-confessional milieu central to these processes?

Ibn Sa'd's compilation of proofs of prophecy is also particularly interesting because of its methodological context. As part of a prophetic biography which is itself situated in the framework of a work on the transmitters (*rijāl*, lit. men), Ibn Sa'd's selection of narratives was not confined by the methodological restrictions of *ḥadīth* works, which focused on the question of reliability and authority. Ibn Sa'd's broader potential pool of sources allowed him greater freedom to craft an epistemological notion of the "proof" of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. Did the closer proximity to other faith communities and scholarly debates among scholars of various religious communities shape his selection? This is certainly a plausible assumption given Ibn Sa'd's notable focus on the notion that Muḥammad's prophetic mission was recognized based on predetermined signs prior to the advent of his prophecy by members of other religious groups, both pagans and monotheists. The narratives centered on monotheists are notable for the way they imply that both Christian and Jewish individuals were aware of the coming of another prophet based on their own scriptures. While the notion of an ongoing sacred history in which Muḥammad is the last link in a chain of prophets is a common element in Islamic doctrine, Ibn Sa'd is the only early *dalā'il al-nubūwa* author to distinctly anchor his notion of the "proofs of prophecy" in the awareness and recognition by other monotheistic communities of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. Investigating the intellectual landscape in which Ibn Sa'd worked sheds some light on his thematic choices.

## 1 Political and Religious Impulses on the Notion of Prophecy

Born in Basra around 168/785, Ibn Sa'd settled in Baghdad sometime after 189/805 and remained there until his death in 230/845. Not much is known about his life, but given the time period in which he lived, we can assume that he

witnessed a period of immense intellectual flourishing as well as deep-rooted strife. The time and locale of his life place him in the midst of the burgeoning developments in *‘ilm al-kalām* (theology) and the concurrent struggle among scholars over the legitimacy of the sources of religious knowledge. It is attested that Ibn Sa‘d was personally affected by some of these debates.<sup>2</sup> As an avid proponent of the Sunna, he was tried during the trials (*miḥna*) imposed by al-Ma‘mūn, where he proclaimed, and later revoked, the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān.<sup>3</sup> This was probably the most immediate way in which Ibn Sa‘d was impacted by the attempts of the political elite to dictate matters of theology. But it was not the first nor the last time that political rulers tried to intervene in questions of faith and Ibn Sa‘d’s conceptualization of prophecy was shaped by the ongoing processes of negotiation and interpretation of prophetic authority that occurred at the intersection of religious knowledge and political power.

The locus of doctrinal authority was contested after Muḥammad’s death, particularly after the generation of Companions, who had intimate knowledge of the Prophet and his practices, perished. Scholars, political rulers, and some of Muḥammad’s kinsmen all vied for religious authority long before Ibn Sa‘d’s lifetime. Some of the Umayyad caliphs, particularly those most skilled in administrative affairs, became central in shaping the way religious thought unfolded by imposing “orthodoxy” and persecuting “heresy” as they defined it.

‘Abd al-Malik’s reign was crucial both for the survival of the Umayyad dynasty and for the development of the Islamic faith. His extensive efforts to centralize authority, consolidate military command, standardize coinage and articulate a uniform vision of Islam have been subject to extensive scholarly attention. In addition to his better known reforms, ‘Abd al-Malik also initiated the systematic interrogation and persecution of suspected heretics. He holds the distinction of being the first Umayyad caliph to execute heretics for what appears to be purely doctrinal offenses.<sup>4</sup>

Almost all of the Umayyad persecutions focused on the question of human free will, and frequently targeted its proponents, the Qadarīs, as the Umayyad rulers advocated for predestinarian views in order to legitimize the caliph

<sup>2</sup> Mūsā, *Ibn Sa‘d wa-ṭabaqātuḥu*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Mūsā, *Ibn Sa‘d wa-ṭabaqātuḥu*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Judd, “Muslim Persecution of Heretics during the Marwānid Period,” 3.

as God's chosen and absolute ruler.<sup>5</sup> The first victim of 'Abd al-Malik's persecution, al-Ḥārith b. Sa'īd al-Kadhdhāb, was executed around 80/699 on the grounds of heresy after he had declared himself a prophet. It is clear that claims to prophecy served as a potent ideological vehicle for some of the challengers to the Umayyads; this required the political elite to restrict the notion of prophecy to Muḥammad.

Before, during, and after Muḥammad's lifetime, there was a continuous stream of self-proclaimed prophets. The concept of prophecy permeated the Near Eastern world and Late Antiquity, from the prophets of ancient Israel, early Christian groups like the second-century Montanist sect, or the third-century Mesopotamian prophet Mani, who established Manichaeism as a major religion.<sup>6</sup> With the concept of prophecy being so widely known in the pre-Islamic Near East, it is not surprising that claims to prophecy continued during Muḥammad's lifetime. Among the contemporaneous prophets, Khālīd b. Sinān allegedly performed miracles, while Musaylima b. Ḥabīb from Yamāma tried to establish relations with Muḥammad but was eventually killed in battle. The prophetess Sajāh, who hailed from northeastern Arabia was reportedly married to Musaylima for some time; in addition, Aswad b. Ka'b al-'Ansī from Yemen and Ṭulayḥa of the Banū Asad emerged as self-proclaimed prophets. All of them held political and military aspirations in addition to religious ambitions and some indeed rose to prominence as political leaders.<sup>7</sup> As claims to prophecy were (at times successfully) tied to political control, it is also not surprising to find that self-proclaimed prophets after Muḥammad's death occurred geographically closer to new centers of power in Syria and Mesopotamia. The most famous of these claimants was Mukhtār al-Thaqafi, who rebelled against the Umayyads in Kufa in 66/685 and remained in control there for two years until his rebellion was quelled by Umayyad forces.<sup>8</sup> Mukhtār's main ideological rallying points were his pro-Hashimite leanings; he rebelled in the name of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. 81/700). Rebellions by self-proclaimed prophets persisted until the end of the Umayyad dynasty. A Jewish rebel by the name Abū 'Īsā l-'Iṣfahānī and his movement rose against the caliphate during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705); he mixed Jewish and Muslim elements in his teachings.<sup>9</sup> Between the 110s/730s and 130s/750s, several individuals claimed prophecy,

5 Judd, "Muslim Persecution of Heretics during the Marwānīd Period," 3.

6 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad" (forthcoming).

7 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad," 15f.

8 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad," 16.

9 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad," 16.

including three different rebellions in the town of Kufa.<sup>10</sup> The self-proclaimed prophets Bayān b. Samʿān al-Nahdī and Mughīra b. Saʿīd al-ʿIjlī organized the first of these rebellions in 119/737. While their aspirations for the rebellion are not clear, their threat was considered great enough to merit a public execution, which was presided over by Kufa's governor, Khālid b. ʿAbdallāh al-Qasrī.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that claims to prophecy remained common in the decades after Muḥammad's death shows that the concept of prophecy was well enough established to provide a potentially powerful ideological conduit for the political ambitions of numerous individuals who sought to wrestle power from the Umayyads. Furthermore, it highlights the reality that the doctrine of Muḥammad's prophetic mission held neither the theological sophistication nor the exclusivity of later generations. As we noted, the continuous challenges to political power through claims to prophecy contributed to the Umayyad's growing interest in defining and implementing notions of orthodoxy with the full coercive power of the state apparatus in an effort to consolidate their own power.

There are several other indications that legal and religious authority was not exclusively associated with Muḥammad in the first/seventh century, nor was it as central to Islamic law, theology, and piety as later scholars held. Recent studies show, for instance, that Muḥammad's name and title as prophet of Islam did not begin to appear in inscriptions on coins, monuments, and tombstones until the second half of the first/seventh century. In 72/691, the first major use of an inscription appeared on the newly erected Dome of the Rock and brought Muḥammad's prophetic mission into full public display. From this time onward, Muḥammad's name and other religious formulae appeared regularly on coins, inscriptions, and epitaphs, though at the time, these references were not anchored in a well-established theology of prophecy and could still have gone unnoticed by broad parts of the population, particularly as Arabic continued to be the minority language and literacy was still limited.<sup>12</sup> These formulae were, however, part of a broader process by which the Umayyads sought to elaborate the theological and textual content of Islam. During the last decades of Umayyad rule, the same process eventually led scholars, under court patronage, to write Muḥammad's biography as part of an Islamic salvation narrative in an effort to bolster their political legitimacy. This text, as we see later in this chapter, had a significant impact on Ibn Saʿd's work in the early ʿAbbāsīd period.

10 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad," 4.

11 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad," 16f.

12 Asatryan, "Prophecy after Muhammad," 17f.

Another shift in the notion of Muḥammad's prophetic authority was still underway during Ibn Sa'd's lifetime; this was the consolidation of the legal concept of the Sunna. As the normative precedence of human behavior, the term Sunna existed in pre-Islamic Arabia; the concept simply signified any behavior by individuals or groups that formed a normative precedent that was to be followed. While Muḥammad's behavior was almost immediately understood to be exemplary, the scope of the Sunna remained broader during the first/seventh century and a half and included, in addition to Muḥammad, the precedent of certain Companions and the *khulafā' al-rāshidūn* (rightly-guided caliphs). The narrowing of the term to exclusively designate a generally-approved practice of the Prophet is commonly associated with the legal scholar al-Shāfi'i (d. 204/820), although it took significantly longer to establish this notion universally in Islamic legal thinking. Thus, Ibn Sa'd lived and worked in an environment in which the religious and legal authority of Muḥammad's prophetic mission was continuously evolving along with, and in part in service of, the consolidation of political power. His ideas of what constituted a proof of prophecy were, therefore, part of extensive discourses on prophecy in the context of an emerging Muslim empire and various nascent religious sciences.

His intellectual milieu was, of course, also defined by rapid demographic changes, particularly in the urban centers of the Muslim empire. These changes took place as a result of increased conversion to Islam, the social proximity in which Muslims and Christians lived, the languages they shared, and the intellectual exchanges that occurred directly and indirectly among scholars. While demographic changes occurred among the wider population, we should keep in mind that the competing theological positions of various Muslim and Christian groups as well as the exchanges between them, likely only represented the discourses of intellectual elites rather than the religious conceptions of the general population. The vast majority of Christians and Muslims were mostly unfamiliar with the minutiae of theological teachings that dominated the writings of their religious leaders.<sup>13</sup> The "simple" believers, Muslims and Christians alike, seem to have frequently practiced and believed beyond the confines of what the religious elite defined as orthodoxy and may well have seen the boundaries between religions, let alone theological or sectarian factions within them, as fluid and permeable. The religious and intellectual elites, on the other hand, were deeply engaged in fleshing out the demarcations of acceptable religious teachings in relation to, and often in dialogue with, each other. The Greco-Arabic translation movement added to the intellectual wealth of this period by introducing Greek texts from various fields of knowledge to

13 Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*.

an Arabic-speaking audience. Christian scholars and ecclesiastics actively participated in this rich exchange and challenge of notions and ideas. Ibn Sa‘d’s time in Baghdad saw a new height in direct and indirect Muslim-Christian intellectual interaction.<sup>14</sup> The Christian theologians Abū Qurra, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, and Ḥabīb Abū Rā’iṭa were all active during Ibn Sa‘d’s lifetime writing apologetic works and engaging in public debates at the caliphal court in the capital. The Jewish theologian Dāwūd b. al-Marwān al-Raqqī l-Muqammiṣ (d. after 248/862), who addressed the question of the “signs of prophecy” in one of his treatises and specifically appears to have aimed at countering the challenge of Islam, was also active during this time. Of all the factors that fueled discourses on prophecy among Muslim scholars, this inter-religious aspect appears to have had the potential to shed some light on Ibn Sa‘d’s selection of “proofs” of prophecy. Could his strong emphasis on Jewish and Christian religious figures foretelling or confirming Muḥammad’s prophetic mission reflect arguments from a number of Christian-Muslim exchanges that are attributed to this period?

## 2 Christian-Muslim Encounters in the Early ‘Abbāsīd Period

A number of political, social, and religious factors converged over the decades prior to Ibn Sa‘d’s arrival in the capital; these factors brought forth a wealth of apologetic and polemic texts among the Christian and Muslim communities, and contributed to the exchanges and debates between them. When Arab Muslim armies initially conquered the Christian territories in the early first/seventh century, they frequently made contracts that allowed Jewish and Christian communities, the so-called People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), to continue their religious practices in exchange for a special tax (*jizya*). These contracts frequently included certain conditions and stipulations for Christian practices and were designed to lower the social profile of subject religious groups living under Islamic rule.<sup>15</sup> Based on the earliest Syriac, Armenian, Greek, and Coptic texts written after the Islamic conquests, Christian authors living in newly conquered territories seem to have been preoccupied with these restrictions and hardships, and frequently viewed the conquests as a

14 Muslims seem to have been preoccupied with refuting Christianity; by contrast, there seem to be no polemical works from the first four centuries of the Islamic era specifically directed against Judaism. See Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics,” 16.

15 Griffith, “Answering the Call of the Minaret,” 92.

consequence of Christian sinfulness.<sup>16</sup> Yet during this time, few Christian writers took an interest in Islam's doctrines or religious objections to Christianity.

Serious inter-religious controversies between Christians and Muslims emerged in the context of the attempts by Muslim political rulers to impose social hegemony in the public sphere under the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705) and his sons. From a religious perspective, this campaign was mostly concerned with symbolic dominance, as it sought to remove the ubiquitous cross from the public sphere and replace it with symbolic manifestations of Islam. The realm of Islam was expressed through large monuments such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, which both proudly broadcast the call to prayer to the cities' diverse populations.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, however, these monuments displayed a remarkable merging of stylistic continuity to Byzantine architectural and decorative features; this was largely because many of the Byzantine artisans were hired to build these edifices, and to shape the symbolism of the newly established religion. Coins signaled this shift in cultural hegemony as well. Following the conquests and for many decades, the Umayyads initially continued to use the Byzantine and Sassanid coinage with their respective religious symbolism. Distributing the newly minted Muslim coinage that displayed the testimony of faith (*shahada*) across the burgeoning empire conveyed a similar notion of symbolic cultural dominance over non-Muslim populations.<sup>18</sup> The program of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (r. 99–101/717–720) to financially equalize, at least in theory, the status of all Muslims, Arab conquerors, and new converts alike was the most relevant socially. This incentivized conversion to Islam, particularly among Christians who sought upward social mobility. On the one hand, this intensified the perception of Islam as a religious challenge but, on the other hand, it also triggered a process of inculturation among Christian communities into the cultural realm of Islam around them, and included the churches' adoption of the Arabic language. The early second/eighth century was the beginning of a codependent, but at times inimical, intellectual relationship between Muslim and Christian thinkers that maintained them in tension with one another throughout the first 'Abbāsīd century. Christian scholars were central to the state-sponsored Greco-Arabic translation movement, and Christian theology developed parallel to and often in dialogue with Islamic *kalām*.

16 Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret," 92.

17 Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret," 93.

18 Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret," 93. For more on early Muslim coinage, see Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire."

While this period is marked by the ‘Abbāsīd elite’s political and military rule over non-Muslim communities and by their attempts to establish cultural hegemony through newly disseminated Islamic symbols, the Muslim political and intellectual elites also experienced momentous frictions. The most prominent political conflict was the fourth civil war over the succession of Hārūn al-Rāshīd (d. 193/809) between his sons, al-Amīn (r. 193–198/809–813) and al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218/813–833). At the same time, the Muslim intellectual landscape was deeply conflicted over questions of the legitimacy of sources for the dissemination of religious knowledge. Muslim scholars, broadly speaking, fell into two camps: first, those who held firmly and exclusively to the scriptural sources of the Qur’ān and Sunna as the foundation for all religious questions, and second, those who allowed human reasoning and public debates in the form of *kalām*. *Kalām* brought forth the particular theological notion of the createdness of the Qur’ān, which was briefly favored among the ruling class and enforced through the trials (*mihna*), which in turn led to unrest among the disfavored partisans of *ḥadīth* (*ahl al-ḥadīth*).

Various Christian churches were equally divided over Christological doctrines, but they faced the religious challenge of Islam collectively. Various genres of Christian apologetics emerged in response to both internal and external challenges.<sup>19</sup> Many texts emerged during a period when large numbers of Christians converted to Islam.<sup>20</sup> Medieval conversion rates to Islam suggest that the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries marked the beginning of the first great wave of conversions in Iraq, Syria, and even Egypt. The years 175–274/791–888 comprise the period of the “early majority” when up to thirty-four percent of the population may be estimated to have converted to Islam.<sup>21</sup> These demographic shifts triggered responses in Christian churches, and are reflected in some apologetic texts. Christian church leaders viewed converts to Islam with contempt, and some Christian texts portrayed their conversions to be merely for the sake of gaining personal power and social advancement. The author of a fictitious Christian-Muslim correspondence, for instance, puts this view in the mouth of al-Ma’mūn, with the caliph allegedly acknowledging the Christian charge that Muslim converts at his court were spiritually insincere.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, Muslims argued that particularly learned Christians had recognized the veracity of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission but refused to embrace his message in order to maintain their personal power. For

19 Griffith, “Excursus 1: Christian Theological Thought,” 91.

20 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 109.

21 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, 1979.

22 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 110.

instance, this sentiment is articulated in the voice of a bishop, Abū Ḥāritha of Najrān, in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*<sup>23</sup> and is found in a number of accounts presented by Ibn Sa'd.<sup>24</sup> However, even though the resentments of conversion certainly provide a significant social context, we should not discard the religious aspect of these apologetic texts altogether. The sheer number of such texts that emphasize the credibility of Christian doctrines, provide responses to Islamic religious challenges to Christian doctrines, and refute Islamic teachings and practices confirm the genuine presence of spiritual challenges that church leaders and theologians sought to counter. The confluence of religious and social aspects in Muslim and Christian texts then, is simply a manifestation of the social proximity in which the two communities lived and the intellectual exchange that resulted from it.

This social proximity and intellectual exchange of Muslim and Christian scholars is evident in Arabic Christian apologies. First, unlike Greek Christian authors, Arab Christian apologists were not writing in isolation from Islam.<sup>25</sup> While they were adversaries in religious controversies, the personal isolation that must have contributed to the hostile fantasies we find in Greek or Latin works were absent; Near Eastern Christians were in personal contact with Muslims in their daily lives, shared a common language, and had at least a basic knowledge of Islamic practices, the Qur'ān, and other Muslim traditions.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the majority of Near Eastern Christian apologetics are far less hostile in tone than their Latin and Greek counterparts. The intellectual exchange between Muslim and Christian scholars is also reflected in the fact that all the apologetic literature that has survived from the under 'Abbāsīd rule in the second/eighth century, across religious communities and languages of composition, is dialectical in form. Disputation narratives, epistolary exchanges, and even formal treatises were designed to counter the questions or views of an alleged inquirer from a rival religious community.<sup>27</sup> This shared methodology for discussing religious questions is not surprising given that Christian apologetic theology was methodologically and idiomatically deeply connected to Islamic *kalām* and Christian apologists frequently participated in formal scholarly conversations with Muslim intellectuals at the courts of high administrative officials.<sup>28</sup>

23 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 271.

24 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*.

25 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 117.

26 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 131.

27 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 116.

28 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 117.

A correspondence, allegedly between the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99–101/717–720) and the Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717–741) is mentioned in several Eastern Christian and Muslim sources from the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries onward. The correspondence appears to consist of ‘Umar’s epistle to Leo and the latter’s response.<sup>29</sup> ‘Umar’s letter raises critical questions about Christian doctrines and practices, and furthermore adduces biblical passages to argue for the corruption of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and provides evidence for biblical predictions of the coming of Muḥammad as a future prophet. Leo responds to the caliph’s questions and rejects his invitation to convert based on his own refutation of Islam.

An entry in the section “On heresies” in John of Damascus’s *The Fount of Knowledge* is generally viewed as one of the earliest Greek texts denouncing Islam. As the section title suggests, John of Damascus (d. 750) viewed Islam as a heretical branch of Christianity rather than a religion in its own right. The earliest Syriac apology is the brief report of a letter exchanged between the Jacobite Patriarch John I (d. 648) and a Muslim official named ‘Amr.<sup>30</sup> The Syriac treatise that presents the first detailed argument for Christianity against the standard Muslim objections, such as the trinity and incarnation, can be found in a chapter by Theodore bār Kōnē (fl. ca. 792). This chapter is composed as a dialogue between a Christian master and his Muslim disciple, in which the master provides a defense of Christian doctrines and religious practices that Muslims find objectionable. Theodore completed this work in the last decade of the second/eighth century; thus, he was a contemporary of the most well-known Syriac anti-Muslim apologist, the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I.

Timothy I (r. 780–823) was a Patriarch of the Church of the East (i.e., Nestorian), first in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and then in Baghdad. He certainly spoke Arabic, but composed his writings in Syriac. In a half dozen of his letters, the patriarch describes in some detail the responses he gave to questions put to him by Muslims or inspired by Muslim concerns.<sup>31</sup> By far the best known of these are the patriarch’s account of his debate with the caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785) on the beliefs and practices of the Christians. The letter

29 The original documents of the “correspondence” between ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Leo III are lost, but it is recorded or mentioned in numerous Christian and Muslim sources, including manuscripts in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Aljamiado, and Arabic. The dating, authorship, original language, and function of the text(s) are still open to debate. Cecilia Palombo recently suggested that all the extant versions of the “correspondence” derive from an original Arabic Christian apologetic work, composed in the monastic circles of Syria-Palestine in the mid-eighth century CE. For a summary of the main theories, see Palombo, “The ‘Correspondence’ of Leo III and ‘Umar II.”

30 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 99.

31 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 103.

became so popular that it circulated in the Christian community in a longer Syriac recension, in an abridged version, as well as in several Arabic copies.<sup>32</sup>

The Jacobite writer Nonnus of Nisibis (d. ca. 870?) composed a treatise in Syriac that was structured as a guide for someone searching for the true religion among the several options available in third-/ninth-century Iraq. Yet in spite of its purported intent it is quite clear that it was primarily addressing Islam as a spiritual contender.<sup>33</sup> In addition, there is an incomplete Christian Arabic document from the early third/ninth century that records a debate that was allegedly held in Jerusalem in the year 199/815 between a monk named Abraham of Tiberias and a Muslim official named 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Mālik b. Ṣāliḥ.<sup>34</sup>

The three most important Christian apologists writing in Arabic during the first 'Abbāsīd century were the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra (d. ca. 820), his Jacobite rival Ḥabīb b. Khidma Abū Ra'īṭa (d. ca. 851), and the Nestorian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (fl. ca. 236/850). Abū Qurra was the most prolific of these apologists to author a long defensive treatise of Christianity as well as a dozen shorter ones on specific Christian doctrines. The popularity of his apologetic works among Arabic-speaking Christians is attested to by the considerable number of manuscripts that have survived, including one with a transcript of an alleged conference between Abū Qurra and a Muslim official, usually designated as the caliph al-Ma'mūn.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known of the early Christian apologies circulated under the pseudonym of 'Abd al-Maṣīḥ b. Iṣḥāq al-Kindī. This fictitious epistolary text written in Arabic consists of a letter allegedly written by a Muslim named 'Abdallāh b. Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī, who invites his Christian interlocutor to convert to Islam and provides the principal features of Islam. The Christian 'Abd al-Maṣīḥ b. Iṣḥāq al-Kindī's response letter is a lengthy defense of the standard Christian doctrines and practices along with a vigorous polemic against the Qur'ān, the Prophet, and the teachings and practices that characterize Islam. The two letters circulated as halves of a single work, and the correspondents are presented as members of the court of the caliph al-Ma'mūn. Both letters can be traced back to the same Christian author, hence it is noteworthy that the author's knowledge of Islam and scripture is very extensive. The text had a long-lasting impact on Christian polemic thinking against Islam. It circulated widely among Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian Christians in the Middle East. Later, it was adopted by Mozarabs, Iberian Christians living

32 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 100.

33 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 101.

34 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 104.

35 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 105.

under Muslim rule in al-Andalūs, and in the twelfth century even translated into Latin on the commission of Peter the Venerable (d. 1156). French and English missionaries even used it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>36</sup> The text's prominence was not limited to Christian audiences; some later Muslim scholars, such as Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) and al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) mention 'Abd al-Maṣīḥ b. Iṣḥāq al-Kindī as if he had been a real Christian author. While they do not refer to the text itself, the fact that it is the only known work attributed to this fictitious author suggests that it must have been well-known among Muslim scholars.<sup>37</sup>

A Christian legend of Baḥīrā is closely related to apologetic works. From about the eighth century onward, Muslims and Christians told the story of Muḥammad's encounter with the Christian monk named Baḥīrā. We have seen in previous chapters that Muslim accounts depict Baḥīrā as recognizing the signs of true prophecy in his encounter with the young Muḥammad. Christian versions of the same encounter, as we see below, insist that the monk recognized Muḥammad as a future heretic and pretender to prophecy. Although the communities offered vastly different views about the specific events that allegedly took place, both agreed that the encounter was central to understanding the origins of Islam, its message, and the issue of whether it was truly a divine revelation. These questions were ultimately tied to the self-images of the various authors writing about it, since each religious community claimed to possess divine truths and automatically excluded the truths of others.<sup>38</sup>

Taken together, apologetic texts from the first 'Abbāsīd century create a mosaic of competing self-images grounded in cultural elements common to Near Eastern peoples; these include literary genres, prophetic history, contact between humans and the divine, and types of philosophical argumentation. Through complex strategies of adaptation and rejection of these shared elements, each community came away with their own coherent exclusive and exclusivist self-image.<sup>39</sup> The creation, recreation, and reinforcement of the self-image of various Christian churches occur simultaneously in response to competing Christian doctrines and the emergence of Islam, which each posed threats to their communities' disintegration and the dilution of their religious identities.

Taken together, the aspects outlined above paint a picture of an intellectual landscape marked simultaneously by social proximity and spiritual

36 Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret," 107.

37 Griffith, "Excursus 1: Christian Theological Thought," 98.

38 Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 1.

39 Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 2.

competition among Muslim and Christian elites. This social context led to the emergence of various literary genres aimed at reassuring their own community of the veracity of their beliefs, addressing doubts or critiques from both within and outside their group, while also discrediting the views of rival religious communities. Muslim and Christian religious scholars were, to some extent, aware of their competitors' discourses and engaged with one another in direct and indirect exchanges. They frequently employed their knowledge of each other's scriptures and traditions to craft counter-historical narratives and discredit the other's doctrines.

### 3 Analysis: Approaches to Christian Apologetic Literature

The works presented above typically fall into three categories: disputation narratives, epistolary exchanges, and formal treatises. Disputation narratives were the most popular genre of Christian apologetic writing. These works typically feature accounts of monks or other ecclesiastics summoned to the presence of Muslim authorities in order to defend their faith in an open debate with a caliph, official, or scholar. The most commonly known disputation narratives detail the previously mentioned encounters of Patriarch John I (r. 631–648) and the Muslim amir 'Umayr b. Sa'd al-Ansārī, the encounter of a Christian monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim notable, the debate of Patriarch Timothy I (r. 780–823) and a Muslim scholar that is said to have occurred at the court of the caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785), as well as the debate between Theodore Abū Qurra and the caliph al-Ma'mūn. Closely related to this genre were epistolary exchanges, that is, Christian apologetics written in the style of letters that were allegedly exchanged between Muslims and Christians. The most well-known text dating to the period prior to or contemporary with Ibn Sa'd's lifetime was the aforementioned fictitious exchange between 'Abdallāh b. Ismā'īl al-Ḥashimī and 'Abd al-Maṣīḥ b. Ishāq al-Kindī.

We can question the historicity of these texts. In some cases it appears that disputation narratives and epistolary exchanges refer to real historical encounters, though the texts themselves might not have been written at the exact time of the event. The narrative structure of the disputation between Patriarch Timothy I and caliph al-Mahdī, for instance, suggests that the text is the recording of an actual encounter rather than a carefully but predictably crafted literary piece.<sup>40</sup> In other cases, the accounts appear to be entirely fictional. The dispute between the monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim notable does

40 Heimgartner, *Die Disputatio des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos*, 54.

not provide any details of the participants' identities and solely focuses on the contents of their debate; this suggests that these are literary personae rather than historical figures. The fictionalization is most obvious in the alleged exchange of letters between the Muslim 'Abdallāh b. Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī and the Christian 'Abd al-Maṣīḥ b. Ishāq al-Kindī. The three elements of each of the authors' names neatly represent the confessional statement of each creed; this makes their historicity highly unlikely. Furthermore, the narrative model suggests that both letters can be traced back to the same Christian author.<sup>41</sup> But the actual historicity of the encounters overall is a secondary issue, because all of these texts clearly had their own literary and social functions, independent of their historical roots. As apologetic texts they were intended for circulation among the Syriac- and Arabic-speaking Christian communities. The contexts of the exchanges mirrored the circumstances of the milieu of religious competition in which the audience lived. The Christian responses to religious challenges were likely intended to defend the credibility of Christian doctrines, perhaps to prevent Christian conversions to Islam, and also to provide the reader with potential responses for their own challenging encounters with their Muslim neighbors.

While Christian apologists often display extensive knowledge of the Qur'ān and Islamic traditions, it is noteworthy that the details of Muslim narratives in these apologetic texts are clearly limited to and shaped by the Christian authors' intention to discredit Muslim religious claims. This was part of a Christian strategy to defend their own faith by creating what the intellectual historian Amos Funkenstein described as the phenomenon of counter-history. Working mostly on Jewish-Christian polemics, Funkenstein identified one community's tendency to rewrite the history of the rival community by appropriating and exploiting their most trusted sources in order to deconstruct their memory and distort their self-image.<sup>42</sup> The most obvious examples of this approach are the various ways the Islamic tradition of Baḥīrā was used in Christian texts. In the Muslim context, this narrative is a standard component of the prophetic biography that describes an adolescent Muḥammad traveling to Syria with his uncle Abū Ṭālib. They passed a monk in his cell who questioned Muḥammad and examined his body for signs of prophecy and then identified him as a future prophet who will be envied by the Jewish community. The narrative serves to anchor Islam in the continuous sacred history of the Abrahamic traditions, with Baḥīrā as a representative of the most important scriptural tradition at

41 Bottini, "al-Kindī," 587.

42 Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory, and Narrative," 69; cf. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 31.

the time and as a witness to the authenticity of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. In the Christian context, this legend is retold in a way that bears little or no resemblance to the Islamic accounts. It is extant in two Syriac versions, and one in Arabic, and referenced in numerous apologetic texts. While the major outlines of these versions of the legend itself are the same, there are considerable differences in the details. In all versions, the story is told by a traveling monk who is said to have met Baḥīrā on his deathbed. Baḥīrā recounts his apocalyptic vision of Muslim history to his visitor, including a story about his own encounter with the young Muḥammad, who is said to have accepted Baḥīrā's teachings. Muḥammad appears in princely style in Baḥīrā's cell. Described as the leader of his band of Arabs, he returns many times to learn the monk's doctrines. The monk ultimately takes responsibility for the very wording of the Qur'ān and explains at each step the real Christian meanings, which were distorted by Arabs and Muḥammad himself, a result of their moral and intellectual shortcomings.<sup>43</sup> The Christian account is built on the Islamic tradition but completely reframes the narrative to convey two distinct messages. First, the broader apocalyptic vision interprets Muslim rule as a phase in human history that will end at a future time when God will bring victory and peace to his people. Such an apocalyptic interpretation of the events in the second/eighth century was also current in the Jewish community.<sup>44</sup> Second, aspects of the legend that specifically reinterpret Baḥīrā's encounter with Muḥammad serve the purpose of designating the Christian monk, rather than God, as the source of Muḥammad's teachings and as the real author of the Qur'ān.

The fictional correspondence between al-Kindī and al-Hāshimī also includes a reworking of the Baḥīrā narreme. Here the author argues in the voice of the Christian al-Kindī that Nestorians were the sort of Christians whose monks evangelized Muḥammad, and who, once revelations began to come to the Prophet, even protected him from the Jews and the polytheists of the Quraysh. For this reason, Muḥammad offered Christians the covenant of protection.<sup>45</sup> Like the aforementioned Christian reworking of the Baḥīrā legend, al-Kindī's version of the narreme shares little with the known Muslim accounts of Muḥammad's encounter with the monk. This narrative in the voice of al-Kindī serves a double-purpose, of discrediting Islam's message and elevating Nestorians over rival Christian doctrines.

43 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 138.

44 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 108.

45 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 129.

Another prominent example of narratives that discredited both Islamic scripture and Muḥammad's biography is the account of Muḥammad's marriage to Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh. According to Muslim tradition, Zaynab was married to Muḥammad's adopted son Zayd, who divorced her so that Muḥammad could marry her. The Qur'ān itself addresses this situation and declares that there were no obstacles to Muḥammad's marriage to Zaynab, once she was divorced.<sup>46</sup> While in the Muslim tradition this episode constituted a relatively marginal aspect of Muḥammad's biography, it became a standard component in Christian polemical writing to discredit Muḥammad as an immoral opportunist. While these counter histories clearly run counter to the narratives as they are told in respected Islamic sources, they do so in an implicit or subtle way, presenting themselves as factual eyewitness accounts rather than as subversive retellings of existing narratives. This obvious selection and adaptation of Muslim sources clearly indicates that these texts were tailored toward Christian rather than Muslim readers. Yet it is precisely the inclusion of key elements of Muslim narratives that are vaguely recognizable to a Christian audience living in close proximity to Muslims that makes a convincing argument for Christians. The faint familiarity with the story and objective mode of presentation were deliberately chosen to create a sense of historical evidence for the Christian audience, who then need little convincing to conclude the impermissibility of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, based on their own intrinsic understanding of prophethood.

While their own community was the intended audience, the intellectual endeavors of church leaders and Christian *mutakallimūn* certainly did not go unnoticed by Muslims. Letters and narratives written in Syriac were quickly translated into Arabic, while Christian works of *kalām* were frequently composed in the new lingua franca, Arabic. Thus, the common language enabled Arabic-speaking Muslim audiences to access these texts and there are numerous indicators that Muslims were aware of many Christian apologetic texts. As we have seen, the fictional al-Kindī was well known among later Muslim authors. The Christian apologetic efforts, furthermore, drew the counter-fire of contemporary Muslim intellectuals; there is clear textual evidence that Muslim and Christian thinkers' theological discourses were intertwined. The Nestorian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī was deeply influenced in his topical outlines and mode of discourse by the intellectual milieu of his native Basra. He rejected the specific reasoning of the Mu'tazilī Abū Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. ca. 226/840), which apparently elicited Abū Hudhayl's refutation in a treatise called "Against

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46 Q. 33:37.

‘Ammār the Christian, in Refutation of the Christians.”<sup>47</sup> There are a number of similar rebuttals, such as that of ‘Īsā b. Ṣubayḥ al-Murdār (d. 226/840), who wrote an attack against Abū Qurra, the early Mu‘tazilī Ḍirār b. ‘Amr (fl. 169–193/786–809) wrote a refutation of Christians in general, as did Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. 247/861). The Zaydī imam al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 240/860) wrote a refutation of Christians based on his stay in Egypt during the years 199–211/815–826, where he frequented the discussions of *mutakallimūn* in the company of a Copt named Salmūn. And there is, of course, the well-known work of ‘Alī b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī, a Nestorian who converted to Islam at some point between 223/838 and 233/848. His rebuttal of the Christian claim to be the only true religion includes a treatise against the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Christians actively participated in debates at the caliphal court; these brought more public attention to their intellectual work. Religious debates at court were especially fruitful in the reigns of al-Mahdī, al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861), and al-Ma‘mūn. The public aspect of these debates provided a high social profile to non-Muslims and eventually aroused the opposition of al-Mutawakkil, who finally put an end to them and demanded the rigorous application of strictures against the high profiles of the non-Muslim population (*dhimmi*).<sup>49</sup>

Ibn Sa‘d worked in the same environment in which these developments took place. He most likely arrived in Baghdad just a few years after al-Mahdī’s reign ended, though the account of that caliph’s debate with Patriarch Timothy I, which allegedly took place in 165/782 or 166/783, was soon translated into Arabic and might have been accessible to Ibn Sa‘d. Theodore Abū Qurra’s disputation allegedly took place at the court of al-Ma‘mūn,<sup>50</sup> a period when Ibn Sa‘d was a resident of the capital. Furthermore, it seems to be established that Abū Qurra’s *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawīm* (Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and True Religion) was written at the outset of his monastic life in Mar Saba monastery in Judea, perhaps between the years 163/780 and 168/785.<sup>51</sup> At least the latter text might have been available in Baghdad during Ibn Sa‘d’s time. A majority of scholars also attributed the fictional exchange

47 Griffith, “Excursus 1: Christian Theological Thought,” 97.

48 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 112.

49 Griffith, “Faith and Reason,” 2.

50 Following the judgment of Georg Graf, most modern scholars doubt the authenticity of these widely differing reports, and conclude that later Christians in the Muslim milieu produced them, elaborating on Abū Qurra’s well-known retorts to particular Muslim allegations about Christian beliefs or practices, Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 103.

51 Griffith, “Faith and Reason,” 10.

between al-Hāshimī and al-Kindī to this era.<sup>52</sup> With many of these developments taking place shortly prior to or during Ibn Sa'd's residency in Baghdad, it is useful to explore whether Ibn Sa'd's potential awareness of Christian perspectives toward Muḥammad might have influenced his selection of the proofs of prophecy. This is not to suggest that Ibn Sa'd intended to address a Christian audience, but rather that he might have attempted to counter existing polemical arguments in an effort to reassure his co-religionists in their faith. The following section examines the kinds of tropes Christian thinkers employed in their rejection of Islam. Christian arguments against Islam roughly fall into three, often inter-related themes, which I examine in the following.

### 3.1 *Christians Addressing Muḥammad's Prophetic Status and Islam's Role in Sacred History*

Islam perceives itself as the last iteration of divine messages sent to mankind through a chain of prophets; the Qur'ān declares "what We have revealed to you from the Book is the truth, confirming what was before it."<sup>53</sup> Muḥammad is represented in the Qur'ān as following in the footsteps of earlier prophets and the ancient prophets themselves promised God that they would have faith in and support a prophet who would come in the future and confirm their message.<sup>54</sup> But the Qur'ān also judges the communities to whom the earlier prophets were sent because these communities altered or forgot their messages, and this was one of the principal reasons for Muḥammad's mission.<sup>55</sup> Christian scholars, however, rejected both of these notions. They argued that the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and their respective messengers, constituted a continuum of sacred history that culminated in and ended with Christianity, while refuting Islamic claims that it was the final iteration of divine revelation. Christian apologists had to explain their own views of Islam's position within, or outside sacred history and thus they presented a number of

52 Bottini, "al-Kindī," 587f. In the course of the twentieth century, scholars formulated different hypotheses that were affected by the lack of critical editions of Arabic texts and the fact that the Latin translations were made in the twelfth century. Some believe it originated in the fourth/tenth century because of its supposed borrowings from Ibn al-Rāwindī (d. 297/910), al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), and Yahyā b. 'Adī (d. 363/974). Others propose a date as late as the ninth/fifteenth century. On the basis of internal historical references, a majority of scholars, however, situate the text in the era of the caliph al-Ma'mūn. The epilogue of the text refers to the fact that al-Ma'mūn, while in Marw or Baghdad, became aware of the letters and ordered them to be read to him. Also see Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 106–107.

53 Q. 3:3; cf. Q. 2:4, 2:41, 2:91, 2:97, 3:3, 4:47, 6:92, 5:46–48, 10:94, 35:31.

54 Q. 3:81.

55 Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 11.

strategies to reject Muḥammad's prophetic mission and the legitimacy of the religious tradition he founded.

One of the earliest Christian thinkers to address the religious challenge of Islam, John of Damascus, in the final entry in the section titled "On heresies" of his work *The Fount of Knowledge*, outright rejected Islam's claim to be part of sacred history. He argued that Arabs were pagans until Muḥammad falsely claimed to be a prophet and composed his own scripture after accessing the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and speaking to an old Arian monk. While John acknowledged that Muḥammad taught Arabs the existence of one God and that Jesus was understood as the word of God, born "without a seed" from Mary, he viewed Islam as a falsification of Christian teachings, and, thus, a Christian heresy rather than a religion in its own right.

In his disputation with al-Mahdī, Patriarch Timothy I presented an integrative notion of Islam as a marginal development of Judaism on its way toward Christianity. This notion denies Islam the status of a revelatory tradition but grants Muḥammad a relatively favorable position as a teacher who spread aspects of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament in line with teachings of Arab Christian communities.<sup>56</sup> Muḥammad was said to essentially have imitated previous prophets without being one himself. Even if not a prophet, Timothy portrays Muḥammad as a figure of sacred history, sent to punish the Persians for their sins. By the same token, Timothy does not fully reject the Qur'ān but views it as a text that—while not scripture itself—functions to bring Arabs to Christianity.<sup>57</sup> Heimgartner argues that Timothy presented more benevolent views to win over the caliph and his Muslim entourage to Christianity.<sup>58</sup> In a different letter addressed to his friend Sergius, which dates roughly to the same time period, Timothy's tone is more dismissive; he calls Muslims "the new Jew[s]," who cause "the same struggle and the same contest to distinguish falsehood and truth" as "in the days of Herod, Pilate, and the old Jews."<sup>59</sup> This echoes the opinion of Timothy's contemporary, the theologian Theodore bār Kōnē, whose literary dialogue between a Christian master and a Muslim disciple includes the master's assessment of his student who says, "as I see it, you are believing as a Jew."<sup>60</sup>

Nonnus of Nisibis compares Muslim views about Christ with Jewish ones and declares that Muslims are "more right minded than others."<sup>61</sup> A similarly

56 Heimgartner, *Die Disputation des ostsyririschen Patriarchen Timothy*, 48.

57 Heimgartner, *Die Disputation des ostsyririschen Patriarchen Timothy*, 48.

58 Heimgartner, *Die Disputation des ostsyririschen Patriarchen Timothy*, 45.

59 Griffith, "The Syriac Letters," 106.

60 Griffith, "The Syriac Letters," 106; cf. Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 121.

61 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 121.

favorable view is portrayed in the debate between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim notable. The monk states that Muḥammad was a wise and God-fearing man who freed the Arabs from pagan beliefs and introduced them to monotheism. The Muslim interlocutor asks why Muḥammad did not engage in proper Christian doctrines and teach Arabs about the trinity. The Christian monk then provides two inter-related strands of reasoning. First, Arabs were religiously immature and would have seen the trinity as a pretext for idolatry. Second, he alleges that Muḥammad only taught Arabs what Baḥīrā taught him, and, thus, he blames the monk for any shortcomings in the allegedly Christian teachings of Muḥammad.<sup>62</sup>

Abū Qurra takes a different approach to the continuity of sacred history. In his *Treatise on the existence of the creator and true religion*, he attempts to devise a rational scheme to compare the truth claims made by nine contemporary religious communities on the basis of the Neoplatonic theory of knowledge that was current in Basra and Baghdad at the time. Unsurprisingly, the treatise concludes in favor of Christianity's claim to be the only religion whose history and doctrine warrants acceptance, as it fulfills all conditions set out in the Neoplatonic tract for discerning the true religion.<sup>63</sup> He argues that the Gospel is the scripture that reasonable individuals would recognize as truth.<sup>64</sup> Abū Qurra anchors Christianity's truth solely in Christ and the Gospel and acknowledges that this might raise a question concerning the Christian acceptance of Moses and the other prophets. He argues that Christ legitimizes previous scriptures, and that Christians consequently have to accept the Old Testament and its prophetic figures because Jesus understood them as such. This line of arguing, consequently, excludes both Muḥammad and the Qur'ān.<sup>65</sup> Abū Qurra's approach is particularly original because it accepts the Islamic scenario of successive messengers, including Muḥammad, but argues against the notion that being chronologically last in the series offers Muslims any advantage in the effort to convince those searching to find the true religion. God's true messenger and the message he delivers must be discerned not by chronology, rather they rely on rational stratagems to recognize God's true message.<sup>66</sup>

All of these early texts are marked by the tension of acknowledging Muḥammad's commitment to monotheism and also rejecting Islam's claim

62 Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac," 46.

63 Griffith, "Faith and Reason," 8.

64 Griffith, "Faith and Reason," 23.

65 Griffith, "Faith and Reason," 24.

66 Griffith, "Faith and Reason," 31f.

to being the final corrective iteration of divine revelation. Interestingly, many authors even grant Muḥammad some role in sacred history, albeit not as a prophet, but as an intermediary bringing an imperfect version of monotheism to Arabs. The reasons offered for Muḥammad's limited mission vary. Timothy I and Theodore bār Kōnē compare his teachings with those of the Jewish community and fault Muḥammad himself for any shortcomings. John of Damascus sought the origins of Muḥammad's teachings with an unnamed heretic monk. The monk in the debate of Bēt Ḥālē finds fault in Muḥammad's audience, the pagan Arabs who are presented as incapable of grasping the complex doctrine of the trinity, or his alleged teacher, Baḥīrā. This demonstrates that the debate of Bēt Ḥālē was probably conversant with the Christian legend of Baḥīrā, which was established in Christian lore explicitly linking Muḥammad's teachings with the Christian legend of Baḥīrā. In doing so, the blame for his "inadequate" monotheistic teachings lies with his teacher Baḥīrā. Abū Qurra then takes into account a model of successive prophets but excludes Muḥammad due the absence of Jesus' affirmation.

### 3.2 *Islam as a Vehicle for Muḥammad's Personal Gain or Immoral Behavior*

A number of Christian apologists referred to biographical details in Muḥammad's life in order to argue that he could not have been a prophet in the biblical sense.<sup>67</sup> A common approach included presenting incidents that allegedly occurred during Muḥammad's early career to argue that his alleged religious vocation was actually part of a broader attempt to gain political power and preeminence among the Arabs or to justify otherwise illicit and immoral behavior. This approach was often linked to Muḥammad's encounter with a Christian monk, which was presented as an attempt to craft a narrative that his religious message was not original to him nor did it come from God.<sup>68</sup>

John of Damascus foreshadowed many arguments that later Christian apologists presented to refute the new religion. These arguments were based on the notion that Islamic teachings provided an immoral and materialistic scenario that was incompatible with spiritual advancement and divine communication with mankind. John argued that Muḥammad had crafted his scripture to justify his lustful behavior and sexual promiscuity. He pointed to several passages in the Qur'ān that permit men to engage in polygamy, take concubines, and divorce. Furthermore, he mentions the narrative of Muḥammad's adopted son Zayd, who chose to divorce his wife Zaynab in order for Muḥammad to

67 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 132.

68 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 132.

marry her. As we have seen, this narrative became a prominent argument in Christian literature refuting Islam in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries.<sup>69</sup> The fictionalized treatise of ‘Abd al-Maṣīḥ b. Iṣḥāq al-Kindī likewise seeks to demonstrate that Muḥammad, as opposed to previous prophets, had to be a false prophet because his violent and morally reprehensible behavior ran counter to ideas of divine dignity and he lacked the qualities of prophethood.<sup>70</sup> He dedicates many pages to describing the physical delights in paradise along with the permissible worldly joys for Muslims.<sup>71</sup> In addition, al-Kindī portrays Muḥammad as a violent brigand and describes him as “a man who had no care or concern except for beautiful women with whom he might be paired, or for a people whose blood he was zealous to shed, to take their wealth, and to marry their women.”<sup>72</sup> Al-Kindī extended his critique of Islam to show that the Qurʾān was a false scripture that provides a law inspired by the devil, unlike the valid commandments of Christian scriptures. He further asserted that people’s conversion to Islam should be explained as a result of their attraction for its laws regarding marriage, polygamy, the possession of concubines, and divorce.<sup>73</sup>

In his treatise on true religion Abū Qurra made similar observations regarding violence. Based on his premise that humans can discern true religions from false ones based on their ability to recognize reflections of God’s attributes in their teachings, Abū Qurra’s examination of the doctrines of nine communities included their respective teachings about permissible and forbidden human conduct (*ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*), as well as the kinds of reward or punishment that each group proposes as the appropriate recompense for human behavior. He claimed that non-Christian religions condone violence against other humans, including capital punishment and plunder. Therefore, these religions cannot be true, since this kind of behavior is antithetical to acceptable ethical values and morality.<sup>74</sup> By the same token, Abū Qurra pointed out that other religions’ notions of reward for a good life stand in stark contrast to the Gospel’s commands to curtail worldly pleasures.<sup>75</sup> Although Abū Qurra made these observations about all nine religious communities, in general, they reflect the charges of Christian polemicists that were consistently brought against Islam.

69 Bottini, “al-Kindī,” 587.

70 Bottini, “al-Kindī,” 588–589.

71 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 129.

72 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 134.

73 Bottini, “al-Kindī,” 589.

74 Griffith, “Faith and Reason,” 21–22.

75 Griffith, “Faith and Reason,” 22.

While the alleged materialistic gains, sexual licentiousness, and violent inclinations formed the core of many Christian apologetic works, a number of less common strategies were used to delegitimize Muḥammad's prophetic status; these also drew on their authors' knowledge of Islamic teachings. One of John of Damascus's central arguments to reject Muḥammad's claim to prophecy was twofold. On one hand, John of Damascus argued that there were no witnesses to Muḥammad receiving revelation, while Moses received the Law of God on Mount Sinai in the clear sight of his people. According to John, Muslims hold that Muḥammad received his scripture in his sleep; hence he ridiculed Muslims' inconsistency in accepting Muḥammad's claim to prophecy without a witness to revelation while their tradition requires them to take witnesses for any transactions, such as the purchase of a donkey or entering marriages. He presented this reasoning in conjunction with the claim that all prophets, from Moses onward, foretold the coming of Christ, the Son of God who would be crucified, but no such verification exists for Muḥammad's claim. Overall, John of Damascus appears to be more concerned with the lack of witnesses to Muḥammad's revelation than the idea that it was not foretold in earlier scripture. In Timothy's report of their alleged encounter, the notion of Muḥammad having been announced was presented in the voice of caliph al-Mahdī, but this seems to reflect the discourses among Muslim scholars rather than Christian ones, as we see below.

Abraham of Tiberias presented Muḥammad's family history as an argument against the Muslim claim that Muḥammad is the paraclete whose coming Jesus foretold in the Gospel of John.<sup>76</sup> Specifically naming Muḥammad's father, mother, and both grandfathers, Abraham contends that his genealogy precludes the possibility that he could be the heavenly paraclete described in the Gospel as the spirit of God.<sup>77</sup> This reasoning was specifically aimed to counter Muslim interpretations of the Gospel of John, as discussed at greater length below.

### 3.3 *Miracles*

The contention that miraculous signs worked by prophets in the name of God are the only sufficient reason to accept a religion's genuine divine origin runs like a refrain through the Christian apologies of the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries.<sup>78</sup> At the center of this debate lies the Qur'ān's rejection of evidentiary miracles as a criterion for religious credibility. 'Ammār

76 John, 14:16.

77 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 132.

78 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 141.

al-Baṣrī, for example, cites specific verses from the Qurʾān<sup>79</sup> and claims that the rejection of miraculous signs recorded in this verse came down to Muḥammad on the occasion of an oath sworn by Christians, Jews, and polytheists, in which they swore that if they should see such a sign at the hands of Muḥammad they would put their faith in him. ‘Ammār reasoned that since Muḥammad rejected the very notion of miraculous signs, even in an instance like this, neither Islam nor Muḥammad would have any reasonable claim to credibility. A couple of elements should be noted here. Christians and Jews are not explicitly mentioned in the passage he quotes and, while ‘Ammār claimed to be following the interpretation of ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās, this interpretation of the verse attributed to Ibn al-‘Abbās has not been located in a Muslim source.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, it is quite likely that ‘Ammār was crafting a counter-history in this particular statement. Nevertheless, this case clearly indicates that ‘Ammār was aware of the Qurʾān’s negative view of personal evidentiary miracles in Muḥammad’s instance and used this for his own doctrinal purposes.<sup>81</sup>

The author of al-Kindī’s letter also referred to the Qurʾān’s rejection of personal miracles, as found in another Qurʾānic verse.<sup>82</sup> He emphasized the tension between this Qurʾānic claim with a number of miracles, such as water-related miracles, and claimed that later Muslim traditions attributed them to Muḥammad against his wishes in order to provide evidence of his prophetic status. The author concludes that Muḥammad’s claims to prophecy were initially only accepted by force of arms.<sup>83</sup> Based on this absence of evidentiary miracles, most Christian apologists of the first ‘Abbāsīd century held similar views and believed that people accepted Islam and Muḥammad’s status as a prophet, or in fact any non-Christian religious tradition, for unworthy motives. Christianity, by contrast, was viewed as the only religion that is accepted because of the divine testimony of the miracle of Christ. It is in this vein that Abū Qurra, Ḥabīb b. Khidma Abū Rā’iṭa, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq all provide lists of various, though mostly similar, motives to explain why individuals follow other traditions, particularly Islam. In his *Kitāb*

79 “They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that were a sign to come unto them, they would surely believe in it. Say, ‘Signs are with God alone.’ What will make you realize that, even if they were to come, they would still not believe.” (Q. 6:109).

80 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 142.

81 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 142.

82 “Naught hinders Us from sending signs, save for those of old denied them. And We gave Thamūd the she-camel as a clear portent, but they wronged her. And We do not send down Our signs, save to inspire fear.” (Q. 17:59). ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī also refers to this verse in a passage of his *Kitāb al-Burhān*, see Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 142.

83 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 142.

*al-Burhān*, ‘Ammār, for example, lists “tribal collusion,” “the sword,” “wealth, dominion, and power,” “ethic bigotry,” “personal preference,” “licentious laws,” and “sorcery” as predominant reasons.<sup>84</sup>

#### 4 Ibn Sa’d and Christian Apologetics

The analysis of themes in Christian apologetic literature shows that the attempts by Christian authors to exclude Islam from their notion of continuous sacred history relied predominantly on arguments (1) denying the divine origin of Islam’s message because of the absence of evidentiary miracles, or (2) attributing the origin of Islam to Muḥammad in conjunction with a heretic Christian monk, and (3) emphasizing the moral unworthiness of Muḥammad’s character, actions, and teachings. If we juxtapose these arguments with the accounts Ibn Sa’d designated as “proofs of prophecy,” it seems unlikely that Ibn Sa’d compiled these chapters in immediate response to Christian attempts to discredit Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. First, Ibn Sa’d did not engage in the main polemical themes in which Christians portray Muḥammad’s moral or ethical behavior. He addressed some moral questions of Muḥammad’s character, such as his honesty in financial affairs, but none of the major Christian accusations of materialism, sexual licentiousness, or violent strife for political power are addressed in any significant way in Ibn Sa’d’s conceptions of the proofs of prophecy. The same is true for the Christian emphasis on miracles as necessary proof for prophecy. In chapter 4 I have shown that Ibn Sa’d did not employ the theological category of miracles nor did he provide any differentiation between ordinary and miraculous events, though his chapters include narratives that were classified in such a way by other (mostly later) scholars. The Christian theologians’ emphasis on the necessary requirement of evidentiary miracles may be reflected in the work of *mutakallimūn*, but Ibn Sa’d did not engage in that debate about the epistemological notion of prophecy at all.

By contrast, the question of previous prophets announcing the coming of a future prophet, which was central to Ibn Sa’d’s proof for Muḥammad’s prophetic mission, was not featured prominently among Christian apologists of this period. Only John of Damascus raised the issue as a secondary concern; he placed far greater emphasis on the absence of contemporary witnesses to the actual occurrence of revelation. A few authors argued against Muḥammad being the paraclete of the Gospel of John. These are counter-arguments to Muslim claims rather than original Christian notions and are limited to the

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84 Griffith, “The Prophet Muḥammad,” 143.

particular context of the Muslim approach to biblical exegesis rather than the question of the biblical prophets' collective awareness of a future prophet. Thus Ibn Sa'd's focus on external affirmation of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, particularly through learned Jewish or Christian individuals or prophets from the biblical tradition, cannot be seen as an immediate response to Christian discourses. Furthermore, his notion of prophecy does not function as a corrective to the ubiquitous Christian claim of Islam's message originating in the teachings of a heretical Christian monk. The Christian apologists' intention in this claim was to negate Muslim claims to divine revelation by attributing the message's origin to a single flawed member of their own communities. If Ibn Sa'd sought to invalidate these Christian claims and argue for the divine origin of Muḥammad's message, we would expect to find an emphasis on Muḥammad experiencing the act of revelation. Instead, revelation itself does not play a significant role in Ibn Sa'd's epistemological concept of the proofs of prophecy. Therefore it seems unlikely that he intended to counter specific Christian claims that sought to discredit Muḥammad's prophetic status but operated in the intellectual framework of Muslim discourses on prophecy. In order to explore more likely influences on Ibn Sa'd's decisions about which narratives to include in his chapters on signs of prophecy, we must examine Muslim approaches to the discourse of Muḥammad's prophetic mission as a source for his selection process.

## 5 Muslim Discourse on Pre-Qur'ānic Annunciations of Muḥammad

While Ibn Sa'd's epistemological concept of prophecy may not have been crafted to counter Christian apologetic literature, the focus on situating Muḥammad's prophetic mission in relation to preceding Abrahamic messengers and their scriptures was not uncommon among Muslim scholars. The prominence of this subject was, at least partially, a result of the Qur'an's inherently ambiguous position toward biblical scriptures. On one hand, Islam's self-perception as the last iteration of a chain of revelations is based on the Qur'an's declarations that Muḥammad's message not only confirms previous revelations<sup>85</sup> but was also announced by previous prophets. As such, Jesus addressed the Children of Israel as a messenger of God whose message confirms "that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who comes after me, whose name is Aḥmad."<sup>86</sup> In another verse, the Qur'an

85 For instance, Q. 2:89, 3:3, 4:47, 46:12, 46:30.

86 Q. 61:6.

assures God's mercy to those Jews and Christians who follow Muḥammad as the prophet described in the Torah and the Gospel.<sup>87</sup> Finally the ancient prophets themselves are said to have promised God that they would have faith in and support a prophet who would come in the future and confirm their message.<sup>88</sup>

On the other hand, the Qur'ān claims to abrogate the earlier scriptures, denies that Muḥammad was informed by nearby Jews and Christians,<sup>89</sup> and, maybe most importantly, accuses both Jews and Christians of tampering with their scriptures,<sup>90</sup> a practice that contributed to the widespread doctrine of scriptural corruption (*tahrīf*). It is precisely this accusation that the messages of previous prophets were altered or forgotten that served as one of the principal justifications for Muḥammad's own mission.<sup>91</sup> Yet, despite common allegations of altered and, consequently, untrustworthy texts, pre-Qur'ānic scriptures played a prominent role in providing evidence for Muḥammad's prophetic status as Qur'ānic verses that refer to biblical annunciations or descriptions of Muḥammad encouraged a trend among a few select Muslim scholars (some of whom are discussed in the following) to adduce non-Muslim scripture to buttress their own positions. Even though most Muslims lacked the language skills to directly consult biblical texts in Hebrew, Syriac, or Greek, and Arabic translations were probably not available prior to the third/ninth century,<sup>92</sup> a number of texts indicate that Muslims drew on biblical passages.

The earliest text in which a Muslim voice adduces biblical passages to support the claim of Muḥammad's annunciation in pre-Qur'ānic scripture is found in a written exchange attributed to the caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and the Byzantine emperor Leo III. The exchange is preserved in four versions (Arabic, Armenian, Aljamiado,<sup>93</sup> and Latin), with considerable variations found in the texts. In the Armenian manuscript, a summary of 'Umar's letter includes the coming of God's paraclete as predicted in the Gospel of John and the question of why Christians do not believe that Muḥammad is the "equal and the like of Jesus" since both prophets were allegedly foretold in Isaiah.<sup>94</sup> The

87 Q. 7:157.

88 Q. 3:81.

89 Q. 16:103, 29:48.

90 Q. 2:75–79, 4:46, 5:13.

91 Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 11.

92 Adang, "Torah," 8.

93 Aljamiado manuscripts use Arabic script to transcribe mostly Romance languages, such as Mozarabic, Aragonese, Portuguese, or Spanish; they were mostly produced in al-Andalus during the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries.

94 Palombo, "The 'Correspondence' of Leo III and 'Umar II,'" 238.

Aljamiado version of ‘Umar’s letter also references Christian scripture for the annunciation of the paraclete and interprets this biblical passage as a reference to Q. 61:6, which claims that the coming of “Aḥmad” was foretold in the Bible. The letter also applies Isaiah 21:7 to Muḥammad.<sup>95</sup> It is not clear whether the reference to the paraclete was part of the original text from which all versions derive or whether it was only selectively mentioned in some later versions, given that these passages are neither included in the Latin version that only records Leo’s response, nor in the incomplete Arabic version. But at least two versions of these letters hint at Muslim attempts to interpret specific passages of the Bible for their own doctrinal purposes. Furthermore, Leo’s response in the Armenian version appears to confirm that such approaches were common as the emperor highlights ‘Umar’s ignorance regarding the scripture and aims to delegitimize any Muslim attempts to examine biblical texts exegetically. He accuses,

It is this way, that you are accustomed to elude and mutilate the evidence of Holy Scriptures which you have not read and you still do not read. You are but merchants of the things of God and faith, who catch hold of some word in the Scriptures which appears favourable to your opinions.<sup>96</sup>

The complex textual history of this exchange complicates an accurate dating, or identification of its original language, authorship, target audience, and intended function. It has been convincingly argued, however, that all versions likely derive from an Arabic Christian apologetic work authored in the mid-eighth century in the monastic circles of greater Syria (Syria and Palestine).<sup>97</sup> But despite the Christian apologetic origin of the text, the various versions of the letter still give us insight into the Muslim discourses used to challenge Christian doctrines and defend Muḥammad’s prophetic mission, because the positions presented in the voice of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Azīz are in line with the positions presented in other texts from this period.

Another epistle between high-ranking ‘Abbāsīd and Byzantine officials is the *Risāla* of Abū l-Rabī‘ Muḥammad b. al-Layth (d. ca. 203/819), which was written on behalf of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI. The young emperor ruled Byzantium between 790 and 797, and this is the period to which the epistle has commonly been dated. It has been preserved in a work by Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (d. 280/893); its authenticity

95 Palombo, “The ‘Correspondence’ of Leo III and ‘Umar II,” 246.

96 Palombo, “The ‘Correspondence’ of Leo III and ‘Umar II,” 238.

97 Palombo, “The ‘Correspondence’ of Leo III and ‘Umar II,” 231.

and dating have not been seriously questioned by modern scholars.<sup>98</sup> Ibn al-Layth's defense of Muḥammad's prophetic mission is also based on the claim that Muḥammad fulfills the biblical predictions about him, as well as the Qur'ānic predictions about the victories of Islam. The author also argues that the Qur'ān was already proven to be inimitable during Muḥammad's lifetime, and that Muḥammad worked evidentiary miracles.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, many common Christian arguments, most prominently the claim that Muḥammad had been instructed by a monk, are refuted. Ibn al-Layth's letter states that the teachings of Christianity and Islam differ too much to share a common source and that Muḥammad's community would have been aware of frequent visits to a monk and, thus, would have realized his deception. Furthermore, being illiterate and unschooled, he could not have known about phenomena such as the shooting stars described in the Qur'ān. These, he argues, must be proofs of Muḥammad's miraculous foreknowledge of events.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to giving us insight into Ibn al-Layth's reasoning, the letter ascribed to him also furthers our understanding about the contexts in which questions of Muḥammad's prophetic legitimacy might have occurred, as the epistle's religious discourse is part of a deeply political agenda. Hārūn al-Rashīd reminds the emperor that Byzantium used to pay a certain amount to the 'Abbāsids during the early 780s CE in exchange for a cessation of hostilities. Constantine VI, who halted these payments, is told that hostilities would resume if he neither converts to Islam nor reinstates the payment of tribute. This political context provides the framework for a refutation of Christianity and a detailed defense of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, both of which incorporate common themes of Muslim-Christian controversy and conflict during the early 'Abbāsīd period.<sup>101</sup> The discourse regarding Muḥammad's prophetic mission was, therefore, not limited to socio-religious contexts but extended to political interactions between Christian and Muslim communities as well.

In addition to Muslim texts, the disputation report of Patriarch Timothy I also provides glimpses into the line of argumentation employed by Muslim scholars and dignitaries. The report portrays the caliph al-Mahdī adducing some biblical passages and interpreting them in support of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. In this dispute, the caliph initially accused Christians of falsifying scripture to conceal the biblical announcement of Muḥammad's coming that is recorded in the Qur'ān. Like 'Umar and Ibn al-Layth, al-Mahdī

98 Roggema, "Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth," 349.

99 Roggema, "Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth," 350.

100 Roggema, "Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth," 350.

101 Roggema, "Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth," 350.

quotes Qur'ān 61:6 but Timothy rejects the accusation altogether, stating that there is no textual evidence for alterations.<sup>102</sup> The caliph then shifted strategy and presented biblical passages that allegedly refer to Muḥammad, such as Deuteronomy 18:18 and Isaiah 21:6–9.<sup>103</sup> Here the persona of al-Mahdī is mainly a literary figure of Timothy's creation, but it represents an approach of adducing biblical passages as employed among Muslim scholars at the time. More specifically, these references by Ibn al-Layth and al-Mahdī clearly indicate that the approach was practiced in Baghdad prior to Ibn Sa'd's arrival in the capital and continued well beyond his lifetime.

From Ibn al-Layth's letter onward, fairly consistent lists of biblical passages were available to Muslim scholars. By the second half of the third/ninth century, there were at least two monographs dedicated to the proofs of Muḥammad's prophetic mission that mainly adduced biblical passages. 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 251/865) was a Christian-born physician who converted to Islam under the rule of al-Mutawakkil and authored two apologetic tracts in defense of his new religion.<sup>104</sup> The longest chapter of his *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-dawla fi ithbāt nubuwwat al-nabī Muḥammad*, which takes up almost half of the book, deals with the alleged references to Muḥammad in earlier scripture. Ibn Rabban searched the Bible for passages that he suggested refer to Muḥammad and events related to the advent of Islam. As far as we know, he was the first Muslim author to use this method on this scale. Apart from a few quotations from the New Testament, the testimonies in Ibn Rabban's work were all taken from the books of the Hebrew Bible, such as Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, Ibn Rabban's work was aimed at a predominantly Christian audience, in the hopes of removing their doubts about Muḥammad's prophecy and the divine origin of his message. He provides the grounds on which Muḥammad should be accepted, including his preaching of monotheism, his pious and sincere character, his miracles, his prophesies about future events, his military victories, and the fact that earlier prophets announced his coming and described his mission.<sup>106</sup> These arguments clearly countered the immediate concerns Christian authors had laid out in their works. Furthermore, these or very similar criteria had been adduced by Jewish and Christian theologians as proof of the veracity

102 Roggema, "Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth," 50.

103 Roggema, "Risālat Abī l-Rabī' Muḥammad ibn al-Layth," 52.

104 Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 17.

105 Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 264–266.

106 Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 17.

of Moses and Jesus, respectively.<sup>107</sup> An examination of Isaiah proves particularly interesting because specific passages had to a large extent already been claimed by Christians as references to Jesus, which the former Christian Ibn Rabban must have known very well. In many cases, to suit his new pro-Muslim apologetic purpose all he had to do was explain why it was more plausible that they referred to Muḥammad rather than Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Ibn Rabban sought to demonstrate that Muslim acceptance of Muḥammad's mission was based on the same criteria as those that led Jews and Christians to lend credence to their prophets. Consequently, he argued that there was no reason for the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) to reject Muḥammad. Initially, Ibn Rabban's *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-dawla* circulated exclusively among Christian circles and apparently was unknown to Muslim scholars until the fifth/eleventh century.<sup>109</sup> The earliest Muslim author known to have consulted the work was the Mu'tazilī Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1045).<sup>110</sup> Later, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) quoted some materials from this work using Abū l-Ḥusayn's work as an intermediary source.<sup>111</sup>

Another important work that circulated among Muslim scholars was the *A'lām* (or *dalā'il*) *al-Nubūwa* by Ibn Rabban's contemporary Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889). Most of the scriptural material included in Ibn Qutayba's work is also found in Ibn Rabban's otherwise much richer book.<sup>112</sup> The *A'lām* was used over the following centuries by various authors as a reference text for the biblical material it contained.<sup>113</sup> Camilla Adang suggests that Abū Naṣr Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī (d. before 355/966) was apparently the earliest author to use Ibn Qutayba's work.<sup>114</sup> It was also cited by the Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025) in his *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubūwa* and extensive segments cited in Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 446/1064) *Kitāb al-Uṣūl wa-l-furū'* attests that it reached al-Andalus.<sup>115</sup> In eastern territories, the work appears

107 The Jewish theologian al-Muqammiṣ (first half of the third/ninth century) had a similar list of prerequisites for the veracity of a prophet. As Sarah Stroumsa has shown, this Jewish author also took his argument from a yet unidentified Christian source. Even though the aim of this source was no doubt to prove the truth of Jesus' mission, al-Muqammiṣ sought to demonstrate the applicability of the same criteria to Moses and Judaism. See Stroumsa, *Dāwūd ibn Marwan al-Muqammiṣ's Twenty Chapters*, 31f.

108 Adang, "Medieval Muslim Polemics," 18.

109 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 52.

110 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 52.

111 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 52.

112 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 51.

113 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 53.

114 Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, 156.

115 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 54.

to have circulated mostly among *ahl al-ḥadīth* circles, including Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1200) *al-Wafā' bi-aḥwāl al-Muṣṭafā'*<sup>116</sup> and some later Ḥanbali scholars, such as Abū l-Qāsim al-Taymī l-Iṣfahānī (d. 535/1140–1141) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who appear to have had access to the original work.<sup>117</sup>

These glimpses into the Muslim approach of adducing biblical materials demonstrates that Ibn Sa'd's extensive chapters on the proofs of prophecy, with their distinct focus on various monotheistic predictions of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, emerged during the relatively early stages of an ongoing Muslim discourse on biblical passages that allegedly referred to Muḥammad. While we may not be able to affirm with certainty that the original text of the correspondence between 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and Leo III, dating from the mid-second/eighth century, contained references to biblical passages as a means to verify the Qur'ānic claims of Muḥammad's annunciation, we can safely assume that such a discourse was well underway during Ibn Sa'd's time in Baghdad. When he arrived in the new capital sometime after 189/805, the caliphal court had witnessed the disputation between Patriarch Timothy I and al-Mahdī and had commissioned Ibn al-Layth's letter to Constantine VI. From the time of Ibn al-Layth's letter onward, the discourse not only continued in both Muslim and Christian circles, but also gained momentum in the monographs of Ibn Rabban (who converted to Islam during the reign of al-Mutawakkil, at least two decades after Ibn Sa'd's death), and his contemporary Ibn Qutayba. The existence of these works and their prominence among later authors demonstrates that the discourse of anchoring Muḥammad's prophetic legitimacy in pre-Qur'ānic scripture was taking place during and continued for a considerable time after Ibn Sa'd's lifetime.

Emerging from Qur'ānic references, this discourse was decidedly Muslim in origin and was mostly concerned with legitimizing Islam in the framework of monotheistic continuity while simultaneously reflecting interactive dynamics with Christian scholarly audiences. First, Muslim scholars who were able to provide biblical exegesis in order to fit the Qur'ānic claims of Muḥammad's annunciation inevitably generated Christian refutations. At the same time, many of the verses adduced by Muslim scholars stood in the traditions of Jewish and Christian scholars who referred to the same verses as evidence of the prophetic status of Moses and Jesus, respectively. The parallel arguments are particularly clear in Ibn Rabban's *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, as he could capitalize on his extensive familiarity with Christian doctrine. The thematic

116 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 55.

117 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 56.

structure of this discourse is very much in line with Ibn Sa'd's focus on narratives in which monotheistic practitioners or even prophetic figures confirm Muḥammad's prophetic mission. But Ibn Sa'd clearly relied on a very different set of texts as evidence. With the exception of the Qur'anic-inspired narrative of the shooting stars preventing *jinn* from overhearing heavenly discourses, which are mentioned both in Ibn Sa'd and the epistle of Ibn al-Layth, the narratives Ibn Sa'd presents are entirely different than the ones used by scholars who adduced biblical passages. Ibn Sa'd's sources might be found elsewhere as heavily Islamicized canonical and extra-canonical biblical materials took a prominent position in various forms of early Muslim literature, such as exegesis (*tafsīr*), historiography, and *ḥadīth*. These materials usually serve one of two purposes: they substantiate the Qur'anic claim that Muḥammad was predicted and described in the Bible, or they serve as raw material for accounts of universal history, of which the lives of the earlier prophets often constitute a substantial part.<sup>118</sup>

### 5.1 *The Kitāb al-Maghāzī of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767)*

Ibn Ishāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* is the earliest narrative biography of the Prophet and the only extant biography that predates Ibn Sa'd's work. Its textual history is notoriously difficult to establish, as Ibn Ishāq revised it continuously throughout his career and at least four different partially extant recensions have been transmitted by his numerous students. The most prominent recension is that of Ibn Hishām, which contains many of the narratives that we find in Ibn Sa'd's first chapter on the proofs of prophecy. In the context of Muḥammad's birth, for instance, Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674) relates a childhood encounter with a Jewish man who alerts his community that "the star has risen under which Aḥmad is to be born."<sup>119</sup> The same narrative is found in Ibn Sa'd.<sup>120</sup> Ibn Ishāq's work also contains the account in which Muḥammad himself states that "I am what my father Abraham prayed for and the good tidings of Jesus"; this is followed by accounts of Muḥammad's birth and the opening of his chest.<sup>121</sup> Ibn Sa'd included three versions of the first account in the brief chapter immediately preceding the first chapter on "proofs of prophecy,"<sup>122</sup> while accounts of his birth and the opening of his chest and purification of his heart are found in the chapter on the proofs of prophecy prior to the onset of Muḥammad's

118 Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials," 50.

119 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 70.

120 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:134.

121 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 72f.

122 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:124.

mission.<sup>123</sup> The narratives of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib predicting his grandson’s future role as a leader<sup>124</sup> is included, as well as the story of the seer Liḥb who predicted Muḥammad’s great future to his uncle, Abū Ṭālib.<sup>125</sup> Both of these are also found in Ibn Sa’d’s chapter.<sup>126</sup> Prominent narratives of Muḥammad’s encounters with the monks Bahīrā and Maysara (whom he met later in life) are featured in both works.<sup>127</sup> Maysara’s recognition of Muḥammad’s future prophecy is taken up again in the context of Khadija’s marriage proposal to Muḥammad. Ibn Ishāq portrays Khadija seeking her Christian uncle Warāqa’s advice prior to proposing marriage to Muḥammad. She relates Muḥammad’s previous encounter with Maysara while working for her. Warāqa responded: “If this is true, Khadija, verily Muhammad is the prophet of this people. I knew that a prophet of this people was to be expected. His time has come.”<sup>128</sup> Ibn Ishāq then includes an entire chapter titled “Akḥbār al-Kuhān min al-‘arab wa-l-aḥbār min al-yuhūd wa-l-rihbān min al-naṣāra bi-ba‘thatihi” (i.e., Reports of Arab soothsayers, Jewish rabbis, and Christian monks about his prophecy), which starts with a summary of the events and then lists many narratives later found in Ibn Sa’d’s chapters, such as the reference to *jinn* being stopped from listening to heavenly discourses after the beginning of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. Ibn Sa’d’s chapters also include related references to the Qur’ān,<sup>129</sup> and an account of a voice coming from inside a sacrificed calf proclaiming the coming of a monotheistic prophet to the pagan worshipers present.<sup>130</sup> There are, furthermore, various accounts of Jews warning their co-religionists of a coming prophet who will be hostile to them. This account includes reference to three young Jewish men who encounter an older Jew from Syria who predicted the coming of an Arab prophet. After the older man’s death, Muḥammad arrived in Medina and the three Jewish men recognized him as the foretold prophet and they converted to Islam.<sup>131</sup> Ibn Ishāq also includes a lengthy account of Salmān al-Fārisī’s conversion to Islam. In this narrative, Salmān left his devoted Zoroastrian father after being introduced to Abrahamic monotheism in a church. He traveled to various Christian officials in Syria and Iraq, and planned to convert to Christianity until he observed various moral inadequacies

123 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125–127.

124 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 73.

125 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 79.

126 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:125, 127, 139.

127 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 79–82; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:127f., 130f.

128 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 83.

129 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 90, cf. Q. 72:1, 46:28; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:141.

130 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 93, Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:132.

131 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 93–95; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:134f., 138.

among Christians. He then set out to Arabia after being told by a bishop about the coming of a prophet. He reached Medina and was purchased as a slave by a member of the Banū Qurayza; then he finally encountered Muḥammad. The narrative ends with Salmān's manumission after Muḥammad calls on his Companions to help provide the necessary number of palm tree seedlings, he himself contributed a piece of gold.<sup>132</sup> Similar versions of the last part of this narrative are found in Ibn Sa'd's chapter, including a narrative twist in which gold is transformed after Muḥammad licks it or puts it in his mouth.<sup>133</sup>

The striking parallels between this chapter in Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Sa'd's selection of narratives in his first chapter on the "proofs of prophecy" suggest that Ibn Sa'd adopted Ibn Ishāq's approach of presenting a host of witnesses to emphasize the legitimacy of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. While the specific accounts are not always the same, the overall narratives and their mostly chronological arrangement align in very similar clusters. At the same time, each chapter also contains narratives that are absent in the other collection, which is to be expected given their different thematic orientations. There are also a few non-annunciation narratives in Ibn Sa'd's chapters; these also occurred elsewhere in Ibn Ishāq's prophetic biography. For instance, these include the incidents in which trees and stones greet Muḥammad,<sup>134</sup> and an account in which Muḥammad calls on a tree to relocate as evidence of his prophetic mission.<sup>135</sup> Ibn Ishāq mentions these episodes only in passing, in the framework of longer narratives, rather than emphasizing their significance in the way Ibn Sa'd did by presenting them explicitly in the context of his thematic chapter. But overall, Ibn Sa'd's notion of proofs of prophecy prior to Muḥammad's call clearly reflect Ibn Ishāq's attempt to present a comprehensive group of testimonies for the authenticity of his mission. These testimonies range from monotheist and pagan practitioners to prophetic figures, soothsayers, animals, and inanimate elements of nature. The parallels between Ibn Sa'd's selection and long stretches of Ibn Ishāq's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* raise interesting questions regarding Ibn Ishāq's potential participation in the larger Muslim discourse on the proofs of prophecy.

The *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* was without a doubt formative for the *sīra/maghāzī* tradition as a whole, both in form and content. First, Ibn Ishāq expanded the *maghāzī* tradition beyond the existing corpus of accounts by incorporating "a bricolage of prose and poetry of sundry origins," including *ḥadīth*, *akhbār*, tribal

132 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 95–98.

133 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1155.

134 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 105; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1132.

135 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 178, cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1154.

and ethnic genealogies, registers of battle participants, treaties, pacts, letters, and Christian and Jewish scriptural proof texts.<sup>136</sup> Along with these methodological and organizational innovations that triggered ample critique from his peers, Ibn Ishāq's work provides the creative impetus to anchor Muḥammad's prophetic mission in a broader notion of the past. Ibn Ishāq

emplotted Muḥammad's prophethood and his community within a thick description of the Arabian past that entangled them in a historical tapestry of fateful interactions with a cast of imperial players and a host of spiritual seekers—be they Arabs, Romans, Egyptians, Abyssinians, Syrians, and Persians or pagans, Jews, and Christians.<sup>137</sup>

Ibn Ishāq's incorporation of annunciation narratives clearly exemplifies a form of what Sean Anthony called narrativized theology, in which a particular sense of religious purpose predetermined the portrayal of the prophet. Many of these narratives of Muḥammad's early life were, individually, already part of earlier collections, as I have shown in chapter 2, and later became a common feature in *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works. But it is Ibn Ishāq's consolidated arrangement of materials in the section titled "Reports of Arab soothsayers, Jewish rabbis, and Christian monks" that crafts and accentuates the notion that existing spiritual communities anticipated and acknowledged Muḥammad's prophetic mission as a pivotal moment in their shared sacred history.

Ibn Ishāq advanced this notion even further by linking these narratives with pre-Qur'anic scriptures. The chapter containing annunciation narratives is followed by a chapter on the "Ṣifa rasūl Allāh min al-injīl" (Description of the messenger of God from the Gospel), which provides a lengthy, albeit Islamicized, quotation from the Gospel of John (15:26–16:1) referring to the paraclete. Here Ibn Ishāq claimed that the Syriac word he found in this passage is a translation for Muḥammad, which is "paraclete" in Greek.<sup>138</sup> This reference to the Gospel immediately precedes Ibn Ishāq's account of the first revelation and his claim that earlier prophets entered a covenant with God to accept Muḥammad's prophetic mission and help him against his adversaries, an obligation that was then transferred to the adherents of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>139</sup> Thus, Ibn Ishāq skillfully embeds the biblical passage into a wider narrative of Muḥammad's prophecy having been predestined and anticipated by historical individuals

136 Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith*, 169.

137 Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith*, 170f.

138 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 103–104.

139 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 104–105.

from the past and by figures of sacred history. It is worthwhile, then, to explore what role Ibn Ishāq might have played overall in the discourse about prophecy.

Ibn Ishāq's biblical quotations appear to be the earliest recorded Muslim attempt to connect the Qur'anic claim of Jesus announcing the Prophet (Q. 61:6) to the paraclete mentioned in the Gospel of John. This connection became ubiquitous in later Muslim literature as Muslim scholars frequently turned to this passage when looking to corroborate the Qur'anic trope of Muḥammad's annunciation voiced by Jesus in Q. 61:6 and 7:157. After scanning the Gospel, they concluded that if Jesus only foretold the paraclete, then the paraclete must be Muḥammad. This interpretation, albeit not the precise textual *Vorlage* of Ibn Ishāq's work, is found in almost all the texts previously examined in this chapter, including the Armenian and Aljamiado manuscripts of the correspondence between 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and Leo III, the disputation between Timothy I and al-Mahdī, the epistle of Ibn al-Layth on behalf of Hārūn al-Rashīd, and Ibn Rabban's *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*. Naturally, the Christian apologists of the first 'Abbāsīd century simply denied this interpretation of the paraclete or any claim that other biblical passages refer to Muḥammad.<sup>140</sup> Muslim scholars, in turn, frequently explained the lack of references to Muḥammad by pointing to the doctrine of scriptural corruption (*tahrīf*). Timothy I, for instance, emphasized the absence of any references to Muḥammad by stating that he himself would have converted to Islam had he found any evidence in the Gospel. He goes on to explain that the paraclete is actually the spirit of God and, therefore, cannot be identified with Muḥammad. The caliph counters by accusing Christians of having altered the scriptures, not only the Gospel, but also passages in the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah 21:7; Timothy, in turn, refutes this.<sup>141</sup> In his debate with Abraham of Tiberias, another Muslim scholar employs the doctrine of scriptural corruption (*tahrīf*) and claims that John and his associates revised the Gospel after Christ's ascension to heaven.<sup>142</sup> The former Christian 'Alī b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī went a step further and employed his intimate familiarity with Christian scripture and doctrine to argue at some length in favor of the Muslim interpretation of the passages in question. He refuted the usual Christian objections to Muslims identifying the paraclete with Muḥammad, and in particular Timothy's claim that the paraclete is God's consubstantial spirit.<sup>143</sup> Thus, it is clear that Ibn Ishāq's representation of Muḥammad's prophecy with his

140 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 140.

141 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 140.

142 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 140.

143 Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 141.

innovative reproduction of a particular biblical passage became part of a broader discourse about Muḥammad's prophetic mission among numerous Muslim scholars interacting with Christian refutations of Islam. It is less clear to what extent this discourse was already underway when Ibn Ishāq worked on his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*.

In this context, Ibn Ishāq's proximity to and, indeed, dependence on the 'Abbāsīd court are an intriguing aspect given the centrality of the court in Christian-Muslim oral and written exchanges. It raises the question of whether Ibn Ishāq himself was influenced by these discourses. It is well-established that Ibn Ishāq started compiling accounts in his native Medina before he sought patronage at several 'Abbāsīd courts during the reign of the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–158/754–775). After being ostracized from Medinan scholarly circles, he initially joined al-Manṣūr's court in al-Ḥira, then in Harran, before traveling to Rayy, where he stayed at the court of the caliph's son and future successor, al-Mahdī. Eventually, around 146/763 during the construction of Baghdad as a new capital, he returned to al-Manṣūr.<sup>144</sup> The role of the 'Abbāsīd court in influencing the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* has been debated. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī provides the most direct account of the court's influence over the text as it reports that al-Mahdī commissioned Ibn Ishāq to compose for his son a comprehensive universal history, from God's creation to the present day. Once the work was complete, al-Mahdī deemed it too long and ordered Ibn Ishāq to abridge it before it was stored in the caliphal library.<sup>145</sup> Thus, the account suggests that al-Mahdī's court in Rayy had an immediate impact on the work's content and scope. This possibility should, however, be taken cautiously. First, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī himself points out that his source, al-Ḥasan al-Mu'addib, may not have been reliable. He further suggests that the caliph in question is more likely to have been al-Mahdī's father, al-Manṣūr, given that he is addressed with his full regal title and al-Mahdī did not succeed his father until after Ibn Ishāq's death, making it implausible that al-Mahdī would have been addressed as the "commander of the faithful" during Ibn Ishāq's sojourn in Rayy.<sup>146</sup>

144 Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith*, 157.

145 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 2:17.

146 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 2:17. Sean Anthony points to further problems and suggested that al-Ḥasan al-Mu'addib actually merged two separate accounts which, if credible, might be better understood as referring to two separate events: the initial composition of the work for al-Manṣūr, who is erroneously referred to as al-Mahdī in an account narrated by 'Ammār b. Muḥammad b. Makhḥad (d. 387/997), and the fate of a copy of the Rayy recension of the *Maghāzī* narrated by Abū l-Haytham; Anthony, *Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith*, 166f.

Furthermore, an examination of the linguistic and geographical background of Ibn Ishāq's particular rendition of the paraclete suggests that Ibn Ishāq had already written this prior to leaving Medina and obtaining 'Abbāsīd patronage in Iraq. It has been convincingly argued that Ibn Ishāq's translation of the Gospel of John was derived from a Syrian Umayyad-era tradition of ad hoc translations of the Bible into Arabic that is otherwise no longer extant.<sup>147</sup> What distinguishes Ibn Ishāq's translation from all subsequent renderings of the paraclete discourse is that his version draws on neither a Greek nor a Syriac version of the Gospel text, but rather on a Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) version.<sup>148</sup> As far as we know, Ibn Ishāq himself possessed no knowledge of CPA.<sup>149</sup> This sheds considerable light on the translation's provenance, both in terms of geography and chronology, as CPA gradually emerged as a key language for the monastic communities of eastern Palestine and Transjordan from the sixth to the eighth centuries CE.<sup>150</sup> It was, however, foreign to the western cities in which Ibn Ishāq sought exile and patronage. Consequently, Ibn Ishāq probably acquired his translation of the Johannine paraclete before leaving Medina. Furthermore, the version of the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* that Ibn Ishāq taught Ibrāhīm b. Sa'd al-Zuhrī dates from the period prior to his departure from Medina, and likely offers us a glimpse into the work at its earliest stage.<sup>151</sup> This shows that Ibn Ishāq had begun compiling the first part of the work, the *Mubtadā'*, in Medina and relied heavily on the works and knowledge of Jews and Christians. This is corroborated by the fact that it was this particular practice that stirred the rebuke of Mālik,<sup>152</sup> even though citing non-Muslim materials was not Ibn Ishāq's innovation. He appears to have emulated his teacher Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). In his narrative of Muḥammad's letter to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius, al-Zuhrī refers back to a Christian cleric from Jerusalem, whom he claimed to have met during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik.<sup>153</sup> A philological examination of this account suggests that he indeed drew, at least partially, on a source in CPA.<sup>154</sup> Ibn Ishāq and al-Zuhrī are, in fact, the only Muslim scholars documented to have utilized CPA versions of the Gospel; this

147 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete," 264.

148 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete," 263.

149 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete," 264.

150 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete," 258–259.

151 Anthony, "Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith," 165.

152 Anthony, "Muḥammad and the Empires of Faith," 167.

153 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete," 265.

154 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete," 265.

suggests that Ibn Ishāq either directly derived his translation from his teacher or relied on the same Christian networks as a source.<sup>155</sup>

All of this indicates that Ibn Ishāq's interest in linking Muḥammad's prophetic mission with pre-Qur'ānic scripture did not emerge under 'Abbāsīd patronage and the intellectual exchanges taking place at the court but in fact dates back to the early days of his career. Yet after Ibn Ishāq had established his residency at the caliphal courts, the discourse on the paraclete appears to have resonated with other Muslim scholars in the vicinity who were already engaged in Christian-Muslim debates over Muḥammad's prophecy. While Ibn Ishāq's particular rendition based on a CPA text is scarcely cited outside Ibn Hishām's recension of the *Sīra*,<sup>156</sup> the passage that it reproduces became well-established as a central component in the subsequent Muslim-Christian discourse on prophecy, albeit on the basis of more easily accessible translations from Greek, Syriac, or a combination of the two. A similar process seems to have occurred with Ibn Ishāq's distinct portrayal of Muḥammad's prophetic mission as an integral part of Arabia's greater sacred history in that Ibn Sa'd's focus on the annunciation narratives in his chapter on the "proofs of prophecy" frequently reproduces the narremes found in Ibn Ishāq without relying on the same sources but replacing them with more reliable ones. The court's role in the formation and dissemination of this discourse is not based on an immediate influence of its contents since the corpus of traditions that served as the raw materials was already in circulation. It is, rather, the considerable resources and the prestige its patronage generated that amplified these sources and eventually facilitated their dissemination.

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Ibn Sa'd increased the scope of the "proofs of prophecy" as a topic and his particular integration of Muḥammad's prophetic mission into the tapestry of Arabia's sacred history occurred in and was shaped by a set of political, social, and intellectual circumstances of the early 'Abbāsīd period. The Muslim minority's political and cultural dominance that extended over a majority Christian and, to a lesser extent, existing Jewish population, in combination with their social proximity, a new common language of Arabic, shifting demographics, and the relative familiarity of their respective sacred histories and texts gave rise to unprecedented intellectual exchanges across the three Abrahamic faith traditions. Muslim and Christian religious discourses ran mostly parallel and

155 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menahem, and the Paraclete," 265–266.

156 Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menahem, and the Paraclete," 265–266.

were focused on the epistemological needs of their own communities. Their encounters and exchanges were at once competitive and symbiotic, antagonistic and invigorating for their respective fields. The attempts by religious scholars to maintain, establish, or protect their respective community's political, social, and religious legitimacy brought forth discourses regarding the epistemological evidence of the veracity of various prophetic missions and the means by which they could be distinguished from fraudulent imposters. These discourses eventually found their expression in *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature and, in the Muslim context, could be addressed theologically or by using Muslim or non-Muslim scripture.

The broader discourses about prophecy that occurred in Muslim and Christian communities also left their mark on works of *sīra*, albeit indirectly. While Muslim theologians often interacted and engaged directly with their non-Muslim counterparts, frequently facilitated through the patronage of the courts, scholars like Ibn Sa'd contributed to the same discourses about the proofs of prophecy in the contours of their own fields and, presumably, with a Muslim audience in mind not a focus on Christian polemics against Muslims. Ibn Sa'd crafted his evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission in his thematic chapter on the proofs for prophecy not so much in direct response to Christian refutations as by drawing on the outlines of Muḥammad's life as it had been presented by Ibn Ishāq. Ibn Ishāq, in turn, was an innovator in the field of *maghāzī* and *sīra*; he anchored Muḥammad's prophetic mission in the broader historical and religious contexts of Arabia. Thus, neither Ibn Ishāq nor Ibn Sa'd directly participated in Christian-Muslim exchanges but their works each display forms of narrativized theology that were shaped by the discourses of their times. This theologically predetermined portrayal of Muḥammad's early life became formative for later tradition-based *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature. Ibn Ishāq's inclusion of annunciation narratives and the discussion of the paraclete in his portrayal of Muḥammad's early life was a prescient presentation of two approaches to Muslim discourses on the proofs of Muḥammad's prophetic mission and the wider body of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature. On one hand, Ibn Sa'd used the accounts of annunciations from broader biographical traditions in a central way to craft epistemological evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, as is reflected in his first chapter on "proofs of prophecy," and which eventually became an integral part of later tradition-based *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works, as I show in the next chapter. On the other hand, there is an approach that adduces biblical passages in support of the prophetic character of Muḥammad's mission and as a rejection of Christian refutations of Muḥammad. This process constitutes a form of counter-history in the same way Christians have retold the account of Bahīrā for their own purposes.

Furthermore, the early attempts by Ibn Ishāq were foundational for later works, such as Ibn Qutayba's *A'lām al-nubūwa*, and some Christian-Muslim exchanges.

Ibn Sa'd's two chapters on the proofs of prophecy appear to be the earliest extant example of an emergent trend among scholars of *ḥadīth* at the time to address questions of theological significance through the lens of their own fields. Ibn Sa'd's contemporaries al-Ḥumaydī and al-Madā'inī authored the first independent *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works around the same time; interest in this subject increased thereafter, as numerous scholars of *ḥadīth* compiled their own independent works or chapters in large *ḥadīth* collections, including those of al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī, which became part of the *ḥadīth* canon in later centuries. These examples of narrativized theology contributed to shaping the Muslim imagination of prophethood and to exploring its theological and historical boundaries even among audiences that were not closely familiar with concurrent theological debates. *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, then, are not so much a genre in one particular field of Muslim religious sciences, but more a discourse that took its impetus from the social and intellectual environment of the early 'Abbāsīd period and its form and specific content from the individual field or discipline of the scholar at hand.

## Recurring Themes in Later *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Literature

With the exception of the partially preserved self-contained work of al-Jūzajānī, the compilations that I studied in chapter 3 were thematic chapters in larger multi-themed *ḥadīth* compilations. These chapters displayed very little internal ordering and recorded numerous *ḥadīths* without sub-categorizing them by theme or chronology. Written in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, the independent works of al-Khargūshī, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, and al-Bayhaqī are marked by a much larger scope, more coherent structural organization, greater methodological leniency, and a mostly consistent systematization of materials that previously circulated in earlier *dalā'il al-nubūwa* chapters and *sīra/maghāzī* literature. Unlike earlier contributors to this literature, all three authors were Shāfi'ī in law and Ash'arī in theology, which their works reflect to varying degrees.

### 1 Al-Khargūshī's *Sharaf al-nabī*

Al-Khargūshī's *Sharaf al-nabī* is an extensive and self-contained work that covers more than 700 pages in its printed edition, and thus considerably exceeds earlier works in size. It is structured as a compendium of select aspects of Muḥammad's genealogy, biography, physical appearance, relationships, virtues, and characteristics, interspersed with inventories of his possessions and descriptions of his environment. As such it differs considerably in structure and content from the thematic chapters in *ḥadīth* compilations, as well as from Ibn Sa'd's thematic chapters in his comprehensive biography. Furthermore, there are questions concerning whether this work actually constitutes a collection of the signs of prophecy in the narrower sense. Al-Khargūshī is listed as an author of a work entitled *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, but there is some uncertainty regarding the specific content of this work. Kātib Ḥalebī<sup>1</sup> and al-Dhahabī<sup>2</sup> mention a *dalā'il al-nubūwa* by al-Khargūshī, which might be an extract of al-Khargūshī's

1 Kātib Ḥalebī/Ḥājī Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1045, 1047, 1569.

2 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyār a'lām al-nubulā'*, 17:256.

extant prophetic biography, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*.<sup>3</sup> Brockelmann identified *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* with *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature and Storey also mentions an extant Persian translation with the alternative title of *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*. Melchert suggested that Storey could be referring to a Persian abridgment. Finally, Kātib Çelebī listed a work under *Sharaf al-nubūwa*, and Melchert suggested that it might be an Arabic abridgment of *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*.<sup>4</sup> An existing Persian translation of the book has been published with yet another title, *Sharaf al-nabī*,<sup>5</sup> which is used throughout this study. It remains unclear how many versions, translations, or abridgments can be traced back to the author himself, how they relate to one another, and which, if any of them, were originally entitled *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*. Nevertheless, *Sharaf al-nabī* is included in this study because it contains a number of narratives found in previous *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations clustered together in one chapter; this provides valuable insight into the integration of the theme into theological discourses.

The chapter that overlaps most with the narratives found in previous “signs of prophecy” compilations is dedicated to miracles.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that al-Khargūshī specifically employs the term “miracle” (*mu'jiza*) in the title of this chapter, which demonstrates that he deliberately distinguished the accounts gathered here from “ordinary” events in Muḥammad’s life, though he does not provide a detailed definition of what constitutes a miracle in his view. The only exception to his silence on the theological discourses regarding miracles is one account that calls the Qur’ān the most glorious of all signs (*‘alāmāt*).<sup>7</sup> This statement is in line with the contemporary theological position of the Qur’ān as a miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad but al-Khargūshī does not enter further into the theological arguments. His notion of prophetic miracles must be drawn from his selection of narratives subsumed under this chapter.

The chapter contains seventy-four accounts of varying lengths; these are only very roughly organized by theme. Like most of the earlier *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors, al-Khargūshī only includes narratives that are set in Muḥammad’s adult life following his call to prophecy.<sup>8</sup> The miracles may be broadly sub-divided

3 *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* has recently been published as al-Khargūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā*. A 1967 Egyptian edition of the *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is mentioned by 'Irāqī and Pūrjavādī, “Abū Sa'd-i Khargūshī-yi Nishābūrī,” 19f.

4 Cf. Kātib Çelebī/Ḥājji Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 1045, 1047, 1569; al-Dhahabī, *Siyār a'lām al-nubulā*, 17:256; Storey, *Persian Literature*, 1:175f.; Brockelmann, *GAL*, Suppl. 1:361, no. 3; Melchert, “Khargūshī,” 31.

5 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*.

6 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 150–181.

7 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 162.

8 Given the author’s incoherent ordering system, miracles of the Prophet’s birth and childhood may be compiled in a different chapter.

into food- and water-related miracles, divine protection of the Prophet against enemies, natural phenomena, speaking animals testifying to his prophecy, and conversion miracles. Many accounts are already found in previous compilations; these include Muḥammad's encounter with Umm Ma'bad and her barren sheep that provide milk for the Prophet,<sup>9</sup> trees and stones extending their greetings to Muḥammad,<sup>10</sup> trees relocating at his order,<sup>11</sup> various food- and water-related miracles,<sup>12</sup> a roasted goat that warns the Prophet that its meat has been poisoned,<sup>13</sup> a speaking wolf attesting to his prophecy,<sup>14</sup> voices announcing him from inside a sacrifice animal,<sup>15</sup> the account of Surāqa and his horse,<sup>16</sup> and a cloud shading the Prophet.<sup>17</sup>

While these narratives were already part of an established scholarly discourse on the signs of prophecy, al-Khargūshī's chapter also contains a number of narratives that are well-known from "unauthenticated" traditions, such as the account of the cobweb concealing the entrance of the cave where the Prophet and Abū Bakr hid during the *hijra*,<sup>18</sup> or the Prophet sprinkling dust on the heads of the Quraysh while lying in ambush outside his house.<sup>19</sup> These accounts were already included in the biographical reports of Wahb b. Munabbih,<sup>20</sup> Ibn Ishāq<sup>21</sup> and Ibn Sa'd.<sup>22</sup> By including these accounts, al-Khargūshī treats his sources with much greater leniency than his predecessors, who only selected materials that were accepted by *ḥadīth* specialists (*muḥaddithūn*). This was not just true for authors whose main field of engagement was *ḥadīth* in the narrower sense. As I have shown in chapter 3, Ibn Sa'd utilized unauthenticated sources in the *sīra* section of his *Ṭabaqāt*, he upheld

9 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 151–153.

10 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 153.

11 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 155f.

12 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 157f.

13 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 156f.

14 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 157.

15 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 165.

16 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 153f.

17 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 165.

18 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 154.

19 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 175f. The theme of the Prophet throwing dust or soil also occurs in an account of the battle of Badr in which the Muslim army was vastly outnumbered. The Prophet threw soil at the opposing army; this incapacitated them and led to the Muslims' victory; al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 159f. In Qur'anic exegesis, this episode from the battle of Badr is commonly associated with the verse 8:17.

20 Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, 1:140f.

21 Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 222f.

22 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:195.

stricter requirements in his thematic chapters, and did not include these kinds of sources in his chapters on the “signs of prophecy.”

In addition to well-known narratives from the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations and unauthenticated sources, al-Khargūshī's chapter also contains a number of completely “new” accounts. For example, when a Bedouin asked for proof of the veracity of Muḥammad's prophetic mission, we encounter a lizard who testifies to it.<sup>23</sup> There are also narratives of speaking camels, one testifying to Muḥammad's prophethood in a context similar to that of the lizard, the other seeking refuge with the Prophet from its owners who want to slaughter it and the Prophet asking the owners to spare it.<sup>24</sup> In another account, a lion takes it upon himself to fulfill the Prophet's curse of Abū Lahab's son, 'Utba, who was Muḥammad's son-in-law. The Prophet cursed him, saying: “O God, send after him a dog among your dogs!” after Abū Lahab ordered his son to divorce Muḥammad's daughter. One night, when 'Utba was traveling with a trade caravan in Syria, they heard a lion. 'Utba's companions reassured him that he would be safe in the crowd but he countered that the Prophet had cursed him and that his predictions always come true. At night the lion found 'Utba in the midst of the men and camels and dragged him away by his head, without anyone hearing his screams.<sup>25</sup>

A number of accounts in al-Khargūshī's chapter focus on the physical transformation of humans and animals. In one account, 'Umar sent some men to get water on behalf of the Prophet. They came across a black slave with full water skins and asked him to come to the Prophet. The slave does not believe in his mission until Muḥammad rubbed the slave's face with his hand and it became white. The slave returned to his people, told them the story, and they accepted Islam.<sup>26</sup> In another account, a woman took her child to the Prophet and asked him to touch his child's bald head so that hair may grow. The Prophet ran his hands across the child's head and hair appeared immediately. A remark is interpolated that this kind of hair became characteristic of the people of Yamāma ever since. Al-Khargūshī then presents the notion that this miracle is evidence of Muḥammad's genuine prophetic mission. He then juxtaposes it to a similar request that was asked of Musaylima, a man known in Muslim tradition as a false prophet. According to al-Khargūshī's account, Musaylima ran his hand across a child's head and it lost the little hair it had. The child's progeny is

23 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:162–164.

24 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:164f.; the latter account is similar to one found in Ibn Sa'd; cf., Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:157.

25 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:170f.

26 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:167.

said to have been bald ever since.<sup>27</sup> Another account relates that the people of 'Abd al-Qays brought a sheep to Muḥammad and asked him to produce some form of sign that would prove his prophetic mission. The Prophet inserted his finger into the sheep's ears and they turned white. The account concludes, stating that, until today, white ears distinguish the sheep of this group.<sup>28</sup>

The narratives that largely shaped al-Khargūshī's notion of prophetic miracles concur with those found in previous *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations. This appears to be a paradigm shift from most previous compilations, in which these narratives served as evidence of Muḥammad's prophetic mission more generally, but were not yet specifically defined or framed as miracles. Al-Khargūshī adopted rudimentary theological notions and subsumed many of these narratives under the chapter's title of miracles. However, his selection of narratives and, by extension, his notion of miracles does not entirely overlap with the narratives of previous compilations because al-Khargūshī added new material. At the same time, the framework of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature was also drastically expanded to include biographical and historical information, the virtues and traits of his character, genealogy and relationships, as well as the inventories of his possessions and descriptions of his environment. This new structural framework was mostly crafted from accounts and narratives that were well-established in the prophetic biographical tradition and in unauthenticated materials. The arrangement as a compendium, however, is original in nature.

## 2 Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*

Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is one of the most well-known works of this kind and has been printed in various editions. In contrast to al-Khargūshī, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī was a prominent and respected scholar of *ḥadīth* who had studied with several earlier authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works, such as al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), Ibn Mandah (d. 395/1005), and possibly Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 368/979). The extant text of Abū Nu'aym's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is most likely an abridgment of a longer original work.<sup>29</sup>

27 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159.

28 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159.

29 Three manuscripts have been preserved. Two of these contain abridgments of the original works, cf. no. 2246, Khan Bahadur Khuda Library in Patna, India; no. 510 of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. The third contains the first part of the original work, cf. no. 613 of the Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Cairo; cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, ed. 'Abbās and Qal'ajī, 20f. The manuscript encompasses the first thirteen of a total of thirty-five

Abū Nu‘aym’s *Dalā’il al-nubūwa* differs considerably from previous works with regard to its arrangement, content, and sources. The work covers the entire span of the Prophet’s life, but it does not constitute a comprehensive *sīra*, as those aspects irrelevant to his notion of the “proofs of prophecy” are omitted. The raids, for instance, are not covered independently, but only mentioned with regard to proofs or signs of prophecy that manifested themselves in their historical context. I have shown in chapter 3 that Abū Nu‘aym intentionally broadened his pool of sources to include both well-known *ḥadīth* transmitters and less authenticated sources. Furthermore, Abū Nu‘aym’s accounts frequently contain poetry like that included in early *sīra* works.

In contrast to previous *dalā’il al-nubūwa* compilations, which listed *ḥadīth* without any apparent thematic order, Abū Nu‘aym arranged his accounts systematically into thematic chapters and sub-chapters with individual titles, and occasionally introduced chapters with a theological contextualization of the subsequent accounts or—more commonly—historical contextualization or summaries of related events.<sup>30</sup> His work is arranged in a mostly chronological form and is divided into two parts, which each display distinct presentational arrangements. In the first part, the biographical material of Muḥammad’s life up to his emigration to Medina is arranged chronologically, the materials are presented teleologically to emphasize that Muḥammad was prepared early in life for his future prophetic mission. Events begin before the Prophet’s birth, with one chapter containing numerous accounts of Jewish and Christian learned men aware of the coming of the Prophet based on their own scriptures,<sup>31</sup> another containing the reaction of soothsayers and “kings of the earth,”<sup>32</sup> what was heard from the *jinn*, and from within idols and from soothsayers;<sup>33</sup> it then proceeds to the marriage of the Prophet’s parents,<sup>34</sup> and his mother’s pregnancy.<sup>35</sup> A lengthy chapter covers key moments of the Prophet’s youth, and as the chapter’s title already indicates, one of Abū Nu‘aym’s main intentions in his portrayal of Muḥammad’s early life was to argue that these early years constituted the foundation for and prediction of his prophetic

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chapters that are recorded on 203 folia. All references to al-Ḥafḥānī’s *Dalā’il al-nubūwa* in this book refer to the work edited by al-Mājdī.

30 For instance, al-Ḥafḥānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 134, 157, 241, 279, 321, 333.

31 Al-Ḥafḥānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 35–50.

32 Al-Ḥafḥānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 51–58.

33 Al-Ḥafḥānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 59–72.

34 Al-Ḥafḥānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 73–75.

35 Al-Ḥafḥānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 76–80.

mission.<sup>36</sup> As such, we find the well-known account of his impoverished wet nurse Ḥalīma, who took in the orphaned Muḥammad as a foster child despite little prospect of compensation for her services, only to receive rich blessings during the Prophet's stay with her family.<sup>37</sup> In a new account Ḥalīma and the toddler Muḥammad encounter an Ethiopian man who studied the child's mole between his shoulder blades and identified him as a future prophet.<sup>38</sup> This new element is woven seamlessly into the common childhood narrative of Ḥalīma taking the young Muḥammad to a soothsayer, who also recognized the signs of a future prophet and called on his people to kill the child. Other well-known aspects of Muḥammad's childhood, such as the cleansing of his heart, are also interspersed with accounts of encounters in which the prophetic mission is anticipated. For example, an account that was already part of Ibn Sa'd's chapter relates that the young Muḥammad sat on his grandfather's cushion and his uncles attempted to remove him; however, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib ordered them to let him sit there so he can become accustomed to rule.<sup>39</sup> Two new accounts follow in which 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's interlocutors, a bishop he had befriended and a Jewish travel companion, respectively, see the prophetic future of his grandson.<sup>40</sup>

Following a brief chapter on the characteristics and physical appearance of the Prophet, Abū Nu'aym portrays Muḥammad as having been "protected from venerating pagan deities, and protected from the ruses of *jinn* and men."<sup>41</sup> This chapter sets out with the famous account from Ibn Ishāq in which the Prophet was tending sheep at night with a friend when they heard music from a wedding celebration. The young Muḥammad asked his companion to watch the sheep for him as he wanted to attend the festivities. But as soon as he came close, deep sleep overcame him even before he reached the premises and he woke only after the celebrations had ended. The following night he attempted to attend another wedding, but he fell asleep again and the account ends with Muḥammad stating that from that night onward he was never interested or engaged in any pre-Islamic practices or customs ever again.<sup>42</sup> Subsequent

36 The chapter's title is "About his development, behavior, and states until God bestowed upon him the revelation and established for him the foundation for prophecy and paved the path to messengership, and what became apparent to his people from his perfecting of excellent characteristics, and their recognition of him through what was made a proof for those who refrained from subjugation to him ..."; al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 87.

37 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 89f.

38 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 91.

39 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 94; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 127.

40 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 94.

41 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 107–123.

42 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 107f.

accounts relate Muḥammad's failed attempts to attend gatherings around the idols, and how God protected him from several assaults Iblis had plotted against him,<sup>43</sup> and that he was informed by a dead goat that a Jewish woman had attempted to poison him with its meat.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, Abū Nu'aym's intention of presenting Muḥammad's early life as preparation for his prophecy continues in his chapter on the beginning of the revelation, in which accounts about the events of the first revelation are followed by others about the cleansing of the Prophet's heart.<sup>45</sup> These latter accounts are clearly set in Muḥammad's childhood and thus break the chronology. Furthermore, the narratives of the cleansing of his heart are emphasized here in connection with the revelation more than in their earlier chronological appearance. The chronological occurrence only includes one brief account of this incident, while the chapter on the revelation contains one longer account that presents the general outline of the Prophet's encounter with the angels who purify his heart, another one in which the two angels weigh him against his community to find that he outweighs them, and finally a third account that returns to the heart's cleansing and specifies that the angels removed "Satan's share" from the Prophet's heart. The chapter continues with the revelation itself and closes with the reactions of Satan and the *jinn*. The latter theme is elaborated in several accounts that echo some of Ibn Sa'd's accounts of the devil identifying the location of the new revelation by sniffing soil that the *jinn* bring to him, or accounts in which the *jinn* were chased away by shooting stars from overhearing the divine discourses.<sup>46</sup> I have previously identified this last theme as a Qur'anic narrative. It is particularly interesting that Abū Nu'aym, who links numerous accounts to relevant Qur'anic verses, does not quote the related verses with this account.

Abū Nu'aym dedicates the two final chapters of the first part of his work to the Qur'ān, the inimitable quality of its language, and how just listening to it compelled several individuals, such as Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, 'Umar b. 'Abasa al-Sulamī, and Salmān al-Fārisī, to convert.<sup>47</sup> Other accounts tell of encounters between the Prophet and the *mushrikūn* who demanded signs, including the splitting of the moon;<sup>48</sup> this was not mentioned in any previous compilation, despite the fact that it appears in the Qur'ān. The first part of Abū Nu'aym's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, therefore, positions key elements of the prophetic biography

43 Al-İṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 108–111.

44 Al-İṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 114.

45 Al-İṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 128f.

46 Al-İṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 132f.

47 Al-İṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 134–156.

48 Al-İṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 157–187.

in such a way to make the theological or doctrinal points that Muḥammad's future prophetic mission was not only destined and known but that he had been prepared for that role.

The ordering principle of the second part of Abū Nu'aym's work is very different from the first chronologically arranged part, as it mostly systematizes many of the narratives that were already part of earlier *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works. He begins this part with a chapter on the signs of prophecy that became apparent during the *hijra*; it contains accounts of Muḥammad and Abū Bakr hiding in a cave while God places pigeons in the entrance of the cave; the Prophet's encounter with the young Ibn Mas'ūd, who tends barren sheep that the Prophet nevertheless milks successfully; the account of Muḥammad's encounter with Surāqa; and accounts of his correspondence to the Byzantine emperor and the Persian ruler, and the reactions of several foreign delegations to Muḥammad's message.<sup>49</sup> The remainder of the second part of Abū Nu'aym's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* systematically reworks well-known themes, such as interactions with animals,<sup>50</sup> the prostration and relocation of trees,<sup>51</sup> the wailing of the palm tree trunk during the Prophet's sermon (*khutba*),<sup>52</sup> water coming forth from his fingers,<sup>53</sup> or the increase of food in his presence.<sup>54</sup> While most of these chapters include the same or similar accounts as preceding works, the chapter dedicated to animals only shares the broader theme of animals showcasing Muḥammad's prophetic mission, but does not share specific accounts with previous works. This chapter includes the account of a wolf that approaches a shepherd and informs him about the Muḥammad's prophetic mission;<sup>55</sup> other accounts, such as a camel seeking the Prophet's protection because its owner intends to slaughter it,<sup>56</sup> are missing. However, a similar theme is found in an account in which the Prophet passes the hiding place of hunters and the gazelle they are ambushing. The gazelle tells the Prophet that she has two young fawns that depend on her milk for their lives. The Prophet asks her if she would return to the hunters if they let her feed her young first and the gazelle agrees. When the gazelle finally returns to them, the hunters, touched by her obedience to the Prophet, leave her to him. Muḥammad then

49 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 188–221.

50 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 222–230.

51 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 231–236.

52 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 237–240.

53 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 241–246.

54 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 247–256.

55 al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 222f.; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 157.

56 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 146.

sets her free.<sup>57</sup> One account that is found in al-Khargūshī but not in previous works involves a lizard that testifies to Muḥammad's prophecy. In this account a man who was carrying a lizard in his bag of provisions meets the Prophet and states that he does not believe in his message. When the Prophet asks what would convince him of the veracity of his message, he says that only his lizard's testimony could convince him. Upon the Prophet's request, the lizard then testifies to his belief in the Prophet's message, and the man converts to Islam.<sup>58</sup> In other accounts, camels and sheep prostrate themselves in front of the Prophet.<sup>59</sup>

On one hand, Abū Nu'aym's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is predominantly marked by the systematization of materials that were already well established in the literary themes of *dalā'il al-nubūwa*. This is particularly the case in the second part of his work, in which he systematically rearranges earlier materials into a coherent thematic structure. On the other hand, he significantly expands the teleological portrayal of Muḥammad's life to include the period prior to the first revelations. Thus, Abū Nu'aym aims at presenting manifestations of Muḥammad's prophecy throughout his life. The incorporation of accounts from Muḥammad's life prior to his call to prophecy is not entirely new, as Ibn Sa'd had dedicated an entire chapter to this subject. But Abū Nu'aym's incorporation and systematization of this material enabled him to present the notion that Muḥammad was destined to become a prophet.

### 3 Al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*

In many ways, Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī's work follows a similar trajectory of systematizing previously used narratives, though he extends the scope even further. Comprising seven volumes in its printed edition, al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* is the most extensive work of this kind so far, and the first comprehensive biography that is dedicated to the theme of the "proofs of prophecy." As such, we find a combination of biographical information in line with *sīra* literature and specific teleological portrayals of Muḥammad's life. The first volume, for instance, provides mostly chronologically arranged accounts dedicated to the Prophet's birth and infancy, lineage, and physical appearance. The first part of the second volume returns to the birth and infancy narratives, but focuses on Muḥammad's spiritual preparation for his future prophetic mission. It

57 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 223f.

58 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 225f.

59 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 226f.

covers the cleansing of Muḥammad's heart and the removal of "Satan's share"; his encounter with the monk Baḥīrā, who recognizes the signs of prophecy; and God's protection (*iṣma*) of Muḥammad from pagan practices. The second part of the second volume continues the chronological biography and covers Muḥammad's call to prophecy, his life in Mecca, the *hijra*, and the early years in Medina, as well as many conversion stories. Volumes three, four, and five treat the Muslim conquests and raids, combining historical information on dates and participants with detailed accounts of incidents and miraculous events. In volume six, al-Bayhaqī departs from the chronological arrangement to study miracles and signs that have occurred thus far, and the seventh volume covers Muḥammad's final illness and his passing.

Examining the material al-Bayhaqī included in his *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, we find material cited in previous *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations. Like most of the earlier authors, al-Bayhaqī includes the several accounts of water miracles in Ḥudaybiyya.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, al-Bayhaqī incorporated accounts of several natural phenomena, such as trees and stones greeting the Prophet or relocating upon his request<sup>61</sup> and the yearning of the palm tree trunk that the Prophet had used as an interim *minbar*,<sup>62</sup> that were also commonly included in other *dalā'il al-nubūwa* compilations. We also find the account of Qatāda b. al-Nu'mān's eye in the context of the battle of Uḥud,<sup>63</sup> which was incorporated in the earliest thematic chapter on the "proofs of prophecy" by Ma'mar b. Rāshid and Ibn Sa'd.<sup>64</sup> The account relates that Qatāda's eye was severely injured during the battle and he came to the Prophet with his eyeball outside its socket. The Prophet placed the eye back in its natural position and he was able to see even better with it than with his uninjured eye. A *ḥadīth* about a sheep that mysteriously disappeared after being milked to feed several hundred men<sup>65</sup> is also found in Ibn Sa'd<sup>66</sup> and al-Jūzajānī.<sup>67</sup> Finally, al-Bayhaqī also includes the accounts of Miqdād and his encounter with the devil who tempted him

60 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 4:115–128; cf. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 11:276–280; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:150f.; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:466–472; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 193f.

61 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:7–27; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:132, 1:143f., al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 193f.; al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 155f.; al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 231–236.

62 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:66; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:159; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:475f.; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 192; al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 237–240.

63 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 3:251f. In one of these accounts, al-Bayhaqī points out that it has also been transmitted in the context of the battle of Badr.

64 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:157.

65 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 137f.

66 Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:151.

67 Al-Jūzajānī, *Amārāt al-nubūwa*, fol. 163a, line 3 to fol. 163b, line 18.

to drink the Prophet's milk<sup>68</sup> and the wolf who informed a shepherd about Muḥammad's prophetic mission.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to material that was long established as part of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* collections, al-Bayhaqī also includes material that only appears in his own generation of *dalā'il* authors; this includes the account of a lizard testifying that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God in order to convince a Bedouin,<sup>70</sup> which is shared with al-Khargūshī<sup>71</sup> and Abū Nu'aym,<sup>72</sup> but absent from the previous compilations. Finally, al-Bayhaqī also includes some material that was not part of the earlier collections. He records several accounts of a man who is stranded on an island with a lion. The lion approaches to attack him, but instead becomes his trusted companion when the man tells him that he is on a mission for the Prophet.<sup>73</sup> Another account relates that a newborn child uttered the testimony of faith (*shahāda*) in order to convince a pagan of the veracity of Muḥammad's prophetic mission.<sup>74</sup>

Al-Bayhaqī's intellectual background as a scholar of *ḥadīth* and Shāfi'ī law, and follower of Ash'arī theology<sup>75</sup> are apparent in his voluminous work. Like Abū Nu'aym, he built on an established corpus of *ḥadīth* and biographical materials, which he then systematically rearranged. He justified his broader pool of sources in an extensive review of al-Shāfi'ī's thoughts on the permissibility of various sources based on their respective application and purpose, then argues for the legitimacy of including less authenticated sources. The originality of this extensive work lies in its structural rearrangement of mostly known materials into an extensive *sīra*. The heuristic framework of establishing proofs for Muḥammad's prophetic mission is, at times, diluted in the process.

#### 4 Theology in Later *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa* Works

Theological concepts were gradually integrated into *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature starting around the fourth/tenth century. Most of the earliest authors were scholars who frequently rejected the very notion of theology as a means

68 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:85f.; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:154f.

69 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:39; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:146f.; al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 157f., al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 222f.

70 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:36f.

71 Al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabī*, 162–164.

72 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 225f.

73 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:45f.

74 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 6:59f.

75 Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyya al-kubrā*, 3:9.

to derive religious knowledge. Their collections of proofs of prophecy reflected this, in that they simply placed several *ḥadīth* together without providing any theological or doctrinal framework. Al-Khargūshī, Abū Nu‘aym, and al-Bayhaqī, by contrast, followed Ash‘arī theology and its influence can be seen throughout their works. Al-Khargūshī’s incorporation of theological concepts is mainly restricted to the deliberate use of the term “miracles” in a chapter heading; that is, he indicates a categorical distinction between “miraculous” and “ordinary” events in Muḥammad’s life. In addition, he refers to the Qur’ān as the most important miracle in Islam. Abū Nu‘aym and al-Bayhaqī, by contrast, extensively incorporate theological concepts in crafting a narrative of Muḥammad’s life that serves, in its entirety, as evidence of his prophetic mission.

#### 4.1 *Theology in Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī’s Dalā’il al-Nubūwa*

Abū Nu‘aym displays his familiarity with Ash‘arī theology throughout his work. In the preface, he addresses a potentially fictive interlocutor who allegedly asked the author to gather “all circulating traditions, proofs (*dalā’il*), miracles (*mu’jizāt*), truths (*ḥaqā’iq*), and particularities (*khaṣā’iṣ*) of prophecy.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, Abū Nu‘aym categorizes the accounts contained in his work according to specific theological notions, including that of miracles. He does not define miracles, but the categorization in itself is significant. First, it sets his work apart from the works of his predecessors who placed all the accounts together, without distinguishing between “miraculous” and ordinary or natural events. At the same time, his listing of “miracles” and “proofs of prophecy” as separate categories indicates that these were not to be considered synonymous, as some twentieth-century Western scholars hold. Rather, the miracles constitute a subtype of proofs of prophecy.

Beyond acknowledging miracles as a theological concept, Abū Nu‘aym establishes a hierarchy, ranking Muḥammad’s miracles in relation to one another and in relation to those of other prophets. In the introduction, Abū Nu‘aym states that the Qur’ān is the greatest of all prophetic miracles, the “mother of miracles, which denial and ignorance cannot refute.”<sup>77</sup> Introducing a later chapter, he extends this hierarchy of miracles beyond the ones Muḥammad received.

God Almighty supported Muḥammad with what he had not supported any one of the two worlds, and He distinguished him with what surpassed the boundaries of the miracles (*karamāt*) of the prophets and the

<sup>76</sup> Al-Isfahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Isfahānī, *Dalā’il al-nubūwa*, 15.

stations of the *awliyā'* [saints] for the signs of prophecy are in accordance with his [i.e., the Prophet's] station and position with God. There is no sign (*āyā*) and no indicator (*'alāma*) more exceptional and more marvelous than the signs of Muḥammad, and that is the eloquent Qur'ān<sup>78</sup>

Abū Nu'aym corroborates this point with the incident in which the Meccans challenged the divine origin of the Qur'ān by claiming that they could match it. Abū Nu'aym continues to state that they fell short in soundness (*faṣāḥa*) and expression (*lisān*), in eloquence (*balāgha*), and explanation (*bayān*).<sup>79</sup> Abū Nu'aym then quotes one of the famous "challenge" (*taḥaddī*) verses in which God challenges those denying Muḥammad's prophetic mission: "Say: 'Were men and *jinn* to band together in order to come up with the like of this Qur'ān, they will never come up with the like of it, even if they back up one another.'"<sup>80</sup> Thus, Abū Nu'aym adopts the theological position held by both Mu'tazilī and Asha'rī theologians, which identifies the Qur'ān as Muḥammad's primary miracle. More specifically, he shows that he was familiar with the literary approach to the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*'jāz al-Qur'ān*), which Mu'tazilī scholars like al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–869), 'Alī b. 'Īsā l-Rummānī (d. 384/994), or Ḥamd b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d. ca. 386/996) and Asha'rī theologians like Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), or 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 470/1078) had set forth.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to ranking Muḥammad's miracles, Abū Nu'aym also juxtaposes those miracles ascribed to Muḥammad in extra-Qur'ānic sources with those of preceding prophets. In the introduction to the chapter on accounts of water gushing forth from the Prophet's hands, Abū Nu'aym notes the similarity of this miracle to that of Moses, in which he caused water to come forth from a stone,

78 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 134.

79 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 134.

80 Q. 17:88.

81 While these scholars differed on the specific aspects of the Qur'ānic language that rendered it inimitable, they collectively rejected the notion of some Mu'tazilī scholars, like al-Nazzām (d. ca. 230/845), who held that the Qur'ān per se was not inimitable. Rather, al-Nazzām understood that the inimitability of the Qur'ān was because it was a divine intervention, and thus humans were incapable of producing any literary work of equal eloquence. This theory of *ṣarfa* found some acceptance in the fourth/tenth century among some of the *mutakallimūn* of the Baghdad branch of the Mu'tazila, and among some Imāmī Shī'a. Al-Nazzām's doctrine of the Qur'ānic inimitability based on divine intervention (*ṣarfa*) was refuted most prominently by his one-time student in Basra, 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868 or 869); as well as Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933), his contemporary and founder of the Ash'arī school of *kalām*; and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī; and eventually by the majority of Sunnī Muslims in the centuries to come.

but at the same time, Abū Nu'aym argues for the superiority of Muḥammad's miracle.

This sign is among the most wondrous of [Muḥammad's] signs, the most splendid miracle and the most effectual proof (*dalā'il*), similar to the proof of Moses in his bringing forth water from a rock by tapping it with his cane. However, this is a more effectual wondrous act, since bringing forth water from flesh and bones is more wondrous and greater than its coming forth from a rock, because the rock is the root of the water's root [as is] well-known and commonly mentioned. But in the past, it has never been related nor heard of for water to come forth from a human being.<sup>82</sup>

Abū Nu'aym's intention in writing his *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, therefore, appears to go beyond establishing the veracity of Muḥammad's prophetic mission; he also sought to prove Muḥammad's superiority over previous prophets based on their miracles.

Abū Nu'aym invoked another theological concept, namely, that of the divine protection of the Prophet. One sub-chapter is entitled "Iṣma Allāhi rasūlahi ḥayna ta'āqad al-mushrikūn 'ala qatlihi" (God's protection (*iṣma*) of His messenger when the *mushrikūn* agreed to kill him). The term used for protection here is *iṣma*, which was further developed by the fourteen Shī'ī imāms to denote the theological concept of infallibility, but which also applies (in various degrees) to the Prophet in Sunnī theology. Abū Nu'aym's selection of accounts in this sub-section indicates that he considered *iṣma* to be only a form of divine protection from physical harm. He lists two accounts of a poisoned roasted goat presented to the Prophet by a Jewish woman. The Prophet gathered some of his Companions for the meal, but as he reached for the meat, the dead goat informed the Prophet that its meat was poisoned.<sup>83</sup> Other accounts include the Prophet being shielded from a stone that was flung at him during the prayer<sup>84</sup> and a lengthy account from Ibn Iṣḥāq's *sīra* in which the Quraysh plot Muḥammad's death in the night before the *hijra*. In the latter account, the Prophet was able to leave his house despite the Quraysh's ambush because God impaired their vision and enabled the Prophet to walk unnoticed through their midst.<sup>85</sup> In another chapter, Abū Nu'aym presents accounts that show that the Prophet—prior to his call to prophecy—was protected from the

82 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 241.

83 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 113.

84 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 113f.

85 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 114–118.

pagan beliefs of the society he grew up in; this includes the famous account of the adolescent Muḥammad falling asleep on the way to a wedding as a form of divine protection that kept him away from the immoral conduct of the ignorant partying folk.<sup>86</sup>

#### 4.2 *Theology in al-Bayhaqī's Dalā'il al-Nubūwa*

Like Abū Nu'aym, al-Bayhaqī employed his knowledge of Asha'ri theology in framing his work. He dedicated much attention to situating Muḥammad's miracles in the context of continuous sacred history. In his extensive preface, al-Bayhaqī introduces the topic of prophecy with a verse from the Qur'an:

We have revealed to you, as We have revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; and to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and We gave David a book. [163] And We sent forth some messengers We have already told you about. And God spoke to Moses directly. [164] Messengers who were bearers of good news and warners, so that mankind will have no plea against God, after the Messenger's coming. God is Mighty and Wise.<sup>87</sup>

This verse places Muḥammad in the continuous history of revelation, as all prophets were sent to instruct mankind about the obligation to praise God, to teach them specific acts of worship, and to proclaim the heavenly reward they would receive for obedience and the threat of hellfire as a punishment for negligence.<sup>88</sup> In addition to their common task, all prophets were supported by God who granted them signs and miracles as evidence of the veracity of their missions. After establishing these commonalities, the author briefly discusses the miracles of Moses, David, and Jesus mentioned in the Qur'an.<sup>89</sup> He concludes that the Prophet Muḥammad was granted more signs and miracles than previous prophets.<sup>90</sup>

Like Abū Nu'aym before him, al-Bayhaqī's main focus is on the scripture itself. "The sign that has been linked to his mission extended [throughout] the days of his life and what remained in his community after his passing is the noble Qur'an, the clear miracle."<sup>91</sup> Al-Bayhaqī then outlines some aspects of the miracle of the Qur'an (*i'jāz al-Qur'an*) and uses the Qur'an's arrangement

86 Al-Isfahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 107–123.

87 Q. 4:163–165.

88 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 17.

89 Q. 17:101 (Moses), 34:10 (David), 5:110 (Jesus); cf. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:7–10.

90 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:10.

91 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:10.

and the events surrounding the “challenge” (*taḥaddī*) verses as the main evidence of the inimitability of the Qurʾān.<sup>92</sup> In the process, he quotes two theologians: al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Ḥalīm (d. 403/1013)<sup>93</sup> from Bukhara and Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Ayyūb (d. 421/1030).<sup>94</sup> The former compares the revelation with the verses of the impostor Musaylima.<sup>95</sup> In addition to the Qurʾān’s arrangement and inimitability, al-Bayhaqī finds in the Qurʾān knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*) and stories of previous prophets as further evidence of its miraculous nature. According to al-Bayhaqī, tales of the previous prophets could not have been known to Muḥammad, who was illiterate and “did not sit with ‘people of the book’ to take [information] from them.”<sup>96</sup> Having established the Qurʾān as the prime miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad, al-Bayhaqī lists additional miracles, and presents them with their full *isnāds* later in his book.

## 5 Conclusion

The first distinguishing feature that later *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works share is their common shift in methodology and structure, as studied closely in chapter 3. The greater methodological leniency and the extended pool of permissible sources to draw from opened the possibility for al-Khargūshī, Abū Nuʿaym, and al-Bayhaqī to craft all-encompassing narratives of Muḥammad’s life that teleologically steered their audiences to the inevitable conclusion that not only had Muḥammad been anticipated as a future prophet in the realm of a shared sacred history with the People of the Book, but that he had also been spiritually prepared to fulfill this function from the moment of his conception. These narratives about Muḥammad’s life prior to the call to prophecy were likely absent from (most) earlier contributions to *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature, because, based on methodological grounds, they would not have met the authentication standards that applied to compilations of *ḥadīth*. But as the methodological and organizational structure of the *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature shifted to align more closely with *sīra* literature, the stylistic opportunities to craft a more wholesome epistemological proof for Muḥammad’s prophetic mission expanded in tandem with the narratives that were at the authors’ disposal.

92 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:11; al-Bayhaqī also mentions the notion of *ijāz al-Qurʾān* in his brief introduction, cf. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:49.

93 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:12.

94 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:15.

95 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:13.

96 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:16.

The evolving incorporation of theological ideas is clearly visible when we consider the ways in which the authors of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature approached the concept of miracles. In the earliest extant works, the designated chapters on proofs of prophecy do not classify particular events as miraculous and even throughout these works more generally, we seldom find references to miracles. Al-Bukhārī, for instance, relates *ḥadīths* about the splitting of the moon in two chapters. The chapter of the splitting of the moon is listed in the same section as the signs of prophecy, it is in the “Bāb al-manāqib,” (Book of virtues). But this event is not labeled as a miracle, but rather as a sign (*āyā*) that was requested by the polytheists (*mushrikūn*). While the content of the *ḥadīth* suggests that the splitting of the moon is evidence of the veracity of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission, this event is surprisingly absent from the chapter specifically dedicated to the signs of prophecy. Other scholars do not raise the issue of miracles at all. Ibn Sa’d’s chapters are devoid of theological commentary or the explicit use of theological terminology, though there appear to be implicit references to questions of theological import, such as the emphasis on Muḥammad’s prophecy being part of a continuous sacred history that is expressed in a chain of prophets.

Al-Khargūshī’s *Sharaf al-nabī* appears to be the first extant work that specifically employs the term “miracle” and dedicates a chapter to the subject. The chapter title, *Mujīza*, demonstrates that al-Khargūshī deliberately identified miraculous accounts gathered from “ordinary” events in the Prophet’s life. He does not define what constitutes a miracle, but simply presents a number of accounts under this heading without further explanation. The only exception to his silence about the nature of miracles is one account in the chapter on miracles, which calls the Qur’ān the most glorious of all signs (*‘alāmāt*).<sup>97</sup> This statement is in line with contemporary theological positions that the Qur’ān was a miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad but al-Khargūshī does not enter further into the theological arguments. The willingness and ability to incorporate these theological notions into *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature reached a new high point in the generation of Abū Nu’aym and al-Bayhaqī.

While the extent to which specific theological concepts were employed in these works varies, the mere fact that all three works reflect their authors’ acceptance of and commitment to Ash’arī theology stands in stark contrast to earlier generations of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* authors who frequently belonged to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* movement and rejected speculative theology as a whole. Ash’arī theology is most prominently represented in the notion of the Qur’ān as Muḥammad’s main miracle. While earlier authors seldom included the

97 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, 1:162.

Qur'ān in their notion of "proofs of prophecy," these later authors gave it prime importance among the prophetic miracles. Al-Khargūshī includes a single account in his chapter on the Prophet's miracles that simply states that the Qur'ān is superior to other prophetic miracles. Abū Nu'aym mentions the same topic in his introduction and dedicates two chapters to the notion of the inimitability of the Qur'ān: one draws on literary considerations that are commonly associated with the concept of *ijāz al-Qur'ān* and the second chapter recounts a number of conversions caused by Qur'ānic recitation, most prominently the well-known account of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who staunchly opposed Islam until he heard his sister's recitation. These chapters seem to lay the theoretical foundation for the miraculous nature of the Qur'ānic text, which is then bolstered by "case studies." Al-Bayhaqī discusses the superiority of the Qur'ān briefly in his introduction and lists, like Abū Nu'aym before him, literary aspects of its inimitability but also adds content-related aspects, such as the fact that the Qur'ān contains knowledge of the unseen (*ghayb*) as well as knowledge of the previous prophets. Both Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī stress the primacy of the Qur'ān's inimitability, not only in the context of Muḥammad's miracles, but also with regard to those of previous prophets.

Other commonalities between Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī are their notion that Muḥammad was spiritually prepared for his prophetic mission and that he was granted divine protection (*iṣma*). Abū Nu'aym compiles one thematic chapter on signs that manifested the boy's significance, such as the blessings Ḥalīma received or several individuals' awareness of the child's prophetic future, and specific measures taken to prepare him for this mission, such as the cleansing of his heart. In a later chapter, Abū Nu'aym cites God's protection of the Prophet from the beliefs of pagan society. Al-Bayhaqī combines these notions in a similar way in the second volume of his work. The notion of Muḥammad's spiritual preparation in childhood and adolescence were new additions. Only Ibn Sa'd listed events like the Prophet's birth or the cleansing of his heart. Yet, he does not seem to afford much significance to these accounts, given that his chapters on the "proofs of prophecy" only included four accounts on these topics, even though he lists many more accounts in the *sīra* section of his work.

Having completed the methodological and structural examination as well as the content analysis of several *dalā'il al-nubūwa* works from the late second/eighth to the early fifth/eleventh centuries, it is clear that these works should be viewed as hagiographic texts. As part of a hagiographical discourse of constructing a distinct persona, each author sought to craft a particular theologically imbued image of Muḥammad and his prophetic mission by selecting materials from *ḥadīth*, and, in case of the later authors, from *sīra* and auxiliary

literature. Their selection of these materials was determined both by the methodological restrictions of their respective field at the time and their own theological assumptions about how “genuine” prophecy might be proven through the materials at their disposal. These texts, then, are historiographic in the sense that each author’s individual retelling of the past grants us glimpses into the social and intellectual circumstances that contributed to the construction of their own sense of historical identity. The texts bear witness to the diverse political, social, and intellectual stimuli and enact a past that informs and gives meaning to the authors’ present by providing a foundation for their ideological and doctrinal views.

## Epilogue: *Dalā'il al-nubūwa* and the Promise of Comparative Hagiology

Captivating as their narratives may be, works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* were not authored for sheer entertainment, and diverse as their content may be, they were not the product of fabrications either. Rather, in recounting and reshaping narratives about his prophetic mission, the scholarly authors of these texts mapped their theories of truth onto the persona of the Prophet Muḥammad. These theories of truth are both reflective of and contribute to a complex web of distinct intellectual, social, cultural, and political contexts in which the texts' authors and their readers operate. These works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* were embedded in the wider discourses of their times. Yet, as I have laid out in the introduction, scholars of Islamic studies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries commonly dismissed *ḥadīth*-based *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature based on a presumed juxtaposition between historiographic and hagiographic texts. In this presumed binary, historiographic texts were considered those that give accurate accounts of the past, while hagiographic texts were seen as those that intentionally misconstrued a person's life story and were generally written by authors who were stigmatized as unqualified or catering toward a "popular" audience. As a consequence, these works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* were deemed hagiographic, omitted from serious academic study, and were, for the most part, excluded from our understanding of Islamic intellectual history; this significantly limited our views of the discourses on prophecy that occurred across numerous fields of Islamic religious sciences.

In order to overcome many of these restrictive frameworks, in my examination of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature I adopted theoretical and methodological advances from other disciplines, and by drawing on the works of LaCapra, Spiegel, Lifshitz, and Delooz. In doing so, I joined the emerging field of comparative hagiology. While these scholars refined their understanding of hagiography in the context of European intellectual history, with its focus on particular expressions of Christian texts, doctrines, and institutions, more recently, scholars of various fields and religious traditions have set out to reexamine and reimagine the study of hagiography in both comparative and collaborative ways. At a workshop at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), conversations have led to a broader understanding of hagiography as well as "comparative hagiology" as a new methodological approach "by which scholars hailing from different disciplines and working in different fields might collaborate in threshing out commonalities and entanglements

in their respective treatments of holy figures.”<sup>1</sup> The first workshop, held at the AAR meeting in Boston in 2017, yielded a special issue of *Religions*, entitled “Comparative Hagiology: Issues in Theory and Methods.” In one article, Aaron Hollander summarized three pillars of general consensus that grew out of these conversations:

That hagiography (1) is constituted not only in verbal texts but in a wide array of media, both material and ephemeral; (2) is best interpreted by attending substantially to the “processes” of thought, life and society in which it is rendered; and (3) opens possibilities of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparison by way of the many family resemblances in how saints (or more broadly, religious and even para-religious exemplars) are rendered in transmittable media and mobilized for a particular group’s benefit.<sup>2</sup>

All three aspects allow scholars working on various religious traditions and disciplines to apply the analytical methodologies and conceptualizations of studying hagiography, without being limited to the textual, social, and doctrinal particularities of the Christian context in which these approaches first emerged. It also necessitates a new and broader working definition of hagiography, which Massimo Rondolino offered as the “complex web of behaviors, practices, and productions (literary, visual, acoustic, etc.) in and by which a given community constructs the memory of individuals who are recognized as the embodied perfection of the religious ideal promoted by the community’s tradition and socio-cultural context.”<sup>3</sup> It is the emphasis of Rondolino and his colleagues on the social process of constructing an exemplary persona that allows scholars of various religious traditions to employ this heuristic tool to their respective fields of study and facilitate cross-cultural comparative analyses of the social functions of such hagiographic media. Rondolino, for example, employed the comparative study of sources on the lives of the Christian medieval saint Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) and the Tibetan Buddhist Milarepa (d. 1135) in his piece on hagiographic taxonomy.

The works of *dalā’il al-nubūwa* that I have studied in this book suggest that applying hagiology as a methodological framework might offer more opportunities to deepen our understanding of Islamic intellectual history. In addition to demonstrating that these works were the product of established scholarly

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1 Hollander, “Comparison as Collaboration,” 1.

2 Hollander, “Comparison as Collaboration,” 1.

3 Rondolino “Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy,” 5.

circles, I argued that these works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature demonstrate the processes of constructing religious personae and their shifting imaginary frameworks that underlie Pierre Deloos's understanding of exemplary figures. As such, each *ḥadīth*-based *dalā'il al-nubūwa* work is a selectively presented and discursively arranged narrative of Muḥammad's life taken from existing texts with the intended goal of constructing "evidence" of his prophetic mission, in dialogue with intellectual, social, and political discourses in the form of a kind of narrativized theology. During this process, sources and disciplinary methods, as well as theological and ideological agendas shifted over time. The initial thematic chapters that were part of larger *ḥadīth* collections adopted their methodological demands along with the evolving paradigms of *ḥadīth* criticism and were eventually transformed in scope, methodology, and structure to more closely resemble the framework of *sīra* literature. At the same time, *dalā'il al-nubūwa* literature reflects disciplinary attitudes toward other religious sciences such as *kalām*. The earliest compilers of *ḥadīth* offered no interpretative or theological context for their selections while works in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries seamlessly integrated theological notions of miracles (*mu'jizāt*) and divine protection (*ʿiṣma*).

In this study, adopting core ideas of comparative hagiology as a methodological framework has proven helpful in various ways. First, the notion that the social and doctrinal construction of exemplary figures is not limited to one particular genre but rather occurs across numerous media has encouraged me to extend the scope of sources I used beyond the boundaries of genre or even fields in the Islamic sciences. The strong emphasis of hagiology on the numerous social, cultural, intellectual, and political contexts that shape the crafting of exemplary figures first provided me with an incentive to look into the wider social realities of Ibn Sa'd's time, as these realities marked the emergence of several works dedicated to the proofs of prophecy. Finally, the ambition of scholars employing comparative hagiology to compare the social processes by which religious exemplars are crafted and employed across traditions persuaded me to broaden my view of disciplinary fields. The academic study of Islam mostly locates discussions on the nature of prophecy in the realm of *kalām*. Works of *dalā'il al-nubūwa* in the broader sense are no exception to this. As I outlined in the introduction to this book, works entitled *dalā'il al-nubūwa* (or semantically related titles) were authored by scholars of various schools of thought and fields of religious sciences. They include Mu'tazilī works, Ismā'īlī works, works by Ash'arī theologians, as well as *ḥadīth* compilations, and studies adducing biblical or pseudo-biblical passages as "evidence" of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. Scholars of Islamic studies mostly examined these works individually and in the isolated context of their author's "discipline." That

is, works whose author is commonly viewed as a theologian were examined in the context of theological discourses on prophecy, while works based on *ḥadīth* or biblical passages were examined under different parameters, such as linguistic provenance in the transmission and translations of the Bible or levels of authenticity or legitimacy with regard to *ḥadīth*-based works. This compartmentalized approach is certainly understandable in light of the distinct skill sets and kinds of expertise required of contemporary scholars by each of these forms of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* literature. However, as a consequence, studying these expressions of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* distinctly and in isolation from the others has impeded our recognition of the theological import that lies in biblical and *ḥadīth*-based approaches. Furthermore, the compartmentalization of these diverse forms of *dalāʾil al-nubūwa* leads scholars to overlook the fact that these were individual expressions of a larger discourse that transcended disciplinary and, at times, religious boundaries and potentially cross-pollinated notions of prophecy among these diverse scholars.

In the broader field of Islamic studies, theoretical and methodological reflections on hagiographic media are not new and are particularly useful in areas of study such as the lives of Sufi masters, Shīʿī imams, or the prophets, as well as the study of diverse sets of texts that make up virtues (*manāqib*), remembrance (*tadhkira*), or merits (*faḍāʾil*) literature. But the particular methodological framework of comparative hagiology appears to me to be a promising avenue to advance a more holistic understanding of Islamic discourses on prophecy. And I was heartened to see that these particular approaches seem to gain momentum among some scholars of Islam. When I participated in the AAR's now formalized Hagiology seminar in 2021, the largest group of participants was working in the field of Islam and I hope that this methodological approach will gain more traction in other fields of Islamic studies.

# Appendix: A Detailed Comparison between ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr and Wahb b. Munabbih

The following table lists elements that distinguish the account of ‘Urwa from that of Wahb and the divergences between strands of transmission of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s account of the *hijra*. Furthermore, it indicates some divergences in the transmission of Hishām b. ‘Urwa: (a) designates the recension of the letter to ‘Abd al-Malik; (b) designates the shorter traditions that were transmitted by Abū Usāma via Hishām b. ‘Urwa; and (c) designates a short tradition on the authority of Ḥammād b. Salama via Hishām b. ‘Urwa.

TABLE 1 A comparison of *hijra* accounts of ‘Urwa and Wahb

‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Hishām b. ‘Urwa	‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri	Wahb b. Munabbih
	‘Urwa inserts the following account from ‘Ā’isha: Abū Bakr decided to immigrate to Abyssinia, then he met Ibn Daghina who offered him protection. Ibn Daghina consulted with the Quraysh who imposed a condition on Abū Bakr’s protection; i.e., he may pray and recite the Qur’an in his house only. Abū Bakr established a prayer space outside his house; members of Quraysh insisted on their requirement, and Abū Bakr released Ibn Daghina from his vow of protection.	

TABLE 1 A comparison of *hijra* accounts of ‘Urwa and Wahb (*cont.*)

‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Hishām b. ‘Urwa	‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri	Wahb b. Munabbih
<p>Seventy people from Medina met with the Prophet at al-‘Aqaba and guaranteed protection to the Muslims. The Prophet advised his people to immigrate to Medina. Here there is a reference to Q. 8:39. Abū Bakr wished to move to Medina but followed the Prophet’s request to stay.</p>	<p>The Prophet had a dream about the destination of the immigration: it would be a landscape with date-bearing palm trees between two lava plains. Many Muslims immigrated to Medina.</p>	<p>Gabriel went to the Prophet and informed him of the Quraysh’s intention to kill him. Here there is a reference to Q. 8:30. The Prophet went to Abū Bakr to tell him about the plot and the newly revealed verse. He informed Abū Bakr to prepare for their departure at night.</p>
<p>Abū Bakr took care of two camels and waited until the Prophet received permission to immigrate. The two rode together to the cave of Thawr.</p>	<p>Abū Bakr fed two of his camels with leaves from the Samur tree. He offered the Prophet one of the camels as a gift but Muḥammad insisted on buying the camel from Abū Bakr.</p>	<p>The Prophet left Mecca on foot, Abū Bakr followed him, on foot as well. ‘Ali joined them at the cave and was sent to hire three camels and a guide.</p>

TABLE 1 A comparison of *hijra* accounts of ‘Urwa and Wahb (*cont.*)

‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Hishām b. ‘Urwa	‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri	Wahb b. Munabbih
(a) ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr brought news from Mecca each night [they were in the cave]. ‘Āmir b. Fuhayra brought Abū Bakr’s sheep (together with sheep from his own flocks) to the cave so that Abū Bakr and the Prophet could have the sheep’s milk.	Food for the Prophet and Abū Bakr was prepared (possibly before they left). Asmā’ tied the bag of food into her belt, from this she took the nickname Dhāt al-Niṭāqayn.	‘Alī and Asmā’ bt. Abū Bakr brought food to the cave.
(b) Very similar to (a) but there is no mention of a messenger from Mecca. (While Asmā’ is not mentioned, there is an independent <i>ḥadīth</i> about the food preparations, Asmā’s nickname, and ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr taking the food to the cave.)	‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr brought news from Medina.	
(c) ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr brought news, ‘Āmir b. Fuhayra brought sheep, and Asmā’ bt. Abū Bakr prepared food, which she tied up in her belt and for this reason she came to be called Dhāt al-Niṭāqayn.	‘Āmir b. Fuhayra herded sheep to the cave for the Prophet to milk them.	

TABLE 1 A comparison of *hijra* accounts of 'Urwa and Wahb (*cont.*)

'Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Hishām b. 'Urwa	'Urwa b. al-Zubayr via Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri	Wahb b. Munabbih
(a) The <i>hijra</i> to Medina was undertaken by the Prophet, Abū Bakr, 'Āmir b. Fuhayra, and a guide from the Banū 'Abd al-'Adī.	A man from the Banū 'Abd al-'Adī was trusted by Abū Bakr even though he was still a pagan; he took care of the camels. The <i>hijra</i> to Medina was undertaken by the Prophet, Abū Bakr, 'Āmir b. Fuhayra, and the guide from the Banū 'Abd al-'Adī.	The <i>hijra</i> to Medina was undertaken by the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and their guide; they rode three camels. The guide was 'Abdallāh b. Urayqit, a pagan who read books, presumably religious scriptures, and thus recognized the 'sign of prophecy' on the Prophet's shoulder. He embraced Islam.
(b) A guide from the Banū 'Abd al-'Adī is not mentioned.		
(c) The <i>hijra</i> was undertaken by the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and 'Āmir b. Fuhayra; Abū Bakr and 'Āmir took turns riding one of the camels.		
(c) On their way to Medina, a gift from Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubaydallāh reached Abū Bakr. The gift consisted of white garments, which they wear when entering Medina.	The Prophet and Abū Bakr encountered al-Zubayr on their way to Medina. He was part of a caravan traveling from Syria to Mecca and presented them with white garments.	

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*Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* literature that is centered on narratives from the Prophet Muḥammad's life has most commonly been viewed, or even dismissed, as the product of popular veneration. Building extensive research on biographical and bibliographical sources, this book demonstrates that *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* literature emerged among the circles of early *ḥadīth* scholars of the late 2nd/8th century. By analyzing extant texts of *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* regarding their sources, structures, methodological approaches, and selection of contents, it showcases that these works were part of epistemological discourses on prophecy that transcended religious boundaries as well as the dividing lines between various Muslim scholarly disciplines.

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