A Form-Critical Analysis of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna Stories: Tribal, Ideological, and Legal Incentives behind the Transmission of the Prophet's Biography*

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Abstract

Due to their heavy reliance on late, contradictory, and tendentious literary sources, scholars of formative Islam have always been in danger of taking as authentic evidence what is mere literary topos. Adopting a form-critical methodology that includes both classic and "new" approaches to the accounts of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna expeditions, this article strives to reveal the literary devices deployed in the sources and to demonstrate the motivations behind their utilization. It will argue, using the classic form-critical method, that reports about the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna raids reflect far more about the circumstances of their composition and redaction than about first/seventh-century Arabia. Motivated by second/eighth-century tribal feuds, many components of these narratives owe their existence to later modifications and adornments that were retrojected to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. We shall, furthermore, see that by the third/ninth century, when tribal motivations ceased to be amongst the prime socio-political exigencies of the time, new incentives emerged for the transmission of these narratives, which can be uncovered through implementation of "new" form criticism.

Introduction

At a date not far removed from the Meccans' resounding victory at the Battle of Uḥud, when morale amongst the infant Islamic community is poor, and privation and the menace of foreign aggression is about to bring the denizens of Medina to their knees,[1]

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1. On the tumultuous period following the Battle of Uḥud see al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones (Beirut: Aʿlamī, 1989), 1:342; Walid Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme in the Story of Khubaib b.ʿAdiyy and the Related Poems," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 21, no. 1 (1958): 15–30, at

two simultaneous dramas, known as the massacres of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna, strike a crippling blow to the already vexed adherents of the emerging creed in the Arabian Peninsula. Dispatched by the Prophet to promulgate the cause of Islam in Najd, two contingents of "pious" Companions fall victim to the adversaries' perfidy, are seized by them, and then slaughtered or brought into captivity. This is a succinct narration of the incidents as reported in the vast corpora of Islamic historiographical and exegetical sources, where the memory of the expeditions' participants, through deployment of hagiographical embellishments, has been held in profound reverence.[2] As laudable and extraordinary as the narrated destiny of these supposed "holy bands" may appear, the actual course of events does not seem to have diverged considerably from the mundane realities of the time.

Appraising the relevance of Muslim narrative sources for the historical reconstruction of the rise of Islam has long been a challenge to modern scholars.[3] Whereas the Islamic faith emerged, according to some, "in the full light of history,"[4] for others first/seventh-century Arabia is largely, if not entirely, *terra incognita*.[5] Radical theories aside, a growing understanding seems to have now been shaped about the problematic nature of our sources, which, so it is often opined, may be of some use as direct historical testimonies, but with which one is bound to deal with due caution.[6] It would seem, then, that the *sīra* literature is yet regarded as "an indispensable source"[7] for the study of "the historical Muḥammad" and that a significant number of scholars still hold that they can "work" with the traditional material,[8] formidable though it might be: to this end, differing critical methodologies have

24; Meir Jacob Kister, "The Expedition of Biʾr Maʿūna," in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. P. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi, 337–57 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 355.

2. On the wide range of the sources in which these stories feature, see below.

3. See, for instance, Harald Motzki, "The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. H. Berg, 211–57 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Herbert Berg, "Competing Paradigms in the Study of Islamic Origins: Qurʾān 15:89–91 and the Value of Isnāds," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. H. Berg, 259–90 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*, in collaboration with and translated by Shawkat M. Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 9–12; Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 50–56; Sean W. Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 1–21.

4. Ernest Renan, "Muhammad and the Origins of Islam," in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq, 127–66 (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 128.

5. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 3; John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), x.

6. J. N. Mattock, "History and Fiction," *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies* 1, no. 1 (1986): 80–97, at 97; See also Fred M. Donner, "Muhammad und die frühe islamische Gemeinschaft aus historischer Sicht," *Asiatische Studien* 68, no. 2 (2014), 439–51; idem, "Early Muslims and Peoples of the Book," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. H. Berg, 177–93 (New York: Routledge, 2017), 189.

7. Anthony, *Muhammad*, 7.

8. According to Crone's oft-quoted sentence, "One can take the picture presented [in Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*] or one can leave it, but one cannot work with it" (Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 4). Her view was nonetheless called into

been expounded. While the practitioners of these methods have, albeit not to the same degree, an awareness of the source-critical challenges, one fundamental flaw has been likely to adversely affect the results of all such critical, let alone naïve, approaches to the traditional biography of the Prophet.[9] This is the fact that scholars are often in danger of taking as authentic evidence what is a mere literary *topos*, a pitfall to which one is particularly prone when having to redeem the historical realities from the *faḍāʾil* material.

The *sīra nabawiyya* genre seldom narrates the incidents it relates outside the framework of the individual in question's "virtues" (*manāqib*/*faḍāʾil*) and/or "vices" (*mathālib*), and when it does, the narration is notoriously tainted with discrepancies and inaccuracies, chronological and otherwise. The significance of the issue of *faḍāʾil* may well be symptomatic of fierce rivalries of whatever kind that were taking place at various stages in the collection and compilation of the Prophet's biography.[10] A tradition circulated by a political, tribal, or confessional faction to burnish its own image would have engendered rival traditions disseminated by the opposing party,[11] with the natural repercussion being the proliferation of literary commonplaces and parallel *faḍāʾil* motifs. One may venture to say that the early tradents' endeavor to preserve "what really happened" was demonstrably feeble, if indeed it was, for some of them, ever an aim. The anecdotes contained in the *sīra* should then be

question by later scholarship; see, for example, the "promising approaches to uncovering historical facts about Muḥammad" (in spite of the serious "limits" thereof) in Andreas Görke, "Prospects and Limits in the Study of the Historical Muhammad," in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki, ed. N. Boekhoff-van der Voort, K. Versteegh, and J. Wagemakers, 137–51 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).* Despite its serious problems, the accounts of the *sīra* have been utilized, at least as supporting evidence, even by some "skeptical" scholars. See, for example, Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Muḥammad," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. H. Berg, 49–64 (New York: Routledge, 2017), 59, who holds that the juxtaposition of the Qurʾān, non-Muslim sources, and the biographical traditions can be a promising line of approach in the quest for "the historical Muḥammad."

9. For an overview of these methodologies, see Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 5–31; On the academic debate between the representatives of "sanguine" and "skeptical" scholarship, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's *Sīra*: Some Methodological Issues in the Quest for 'Authenticity' in the Life of Muḥammad," *Der Islam* 85, no. 2 (2011): 257–344; Andreas Görke, Harald Motzki, and Gregor Schoeler, "First-Century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate," *Der Islam* 89, no. 2 (2012): 2–59. It is not within the purview of the present study, it should be stressed, to treat, let alone to settle, any aspect of these vexing controversies. Instead, this article aims to re-address some form-critical methodologies and to urge caution about the abundance of literary devices in our narrative sources, points that seem to have been overlooked by different modern biographers of the Prophet, regardless of the degree of their skepticism or sanguinity about the *sīra*.

10. For the traces in the *sīra* of political, sectarian, and legal disputes, see Isaac Hasson, "Contributions à l'étude des Aws et des Ḫazraǧ," *Arabica* 36, no. 1 (1989): 1–35, at 25; Robert Hoyland, "Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions," *History Compass* 5 (2007): 1–22, at 3–4; Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's *Sīra*," 337–8.

11. Michael Lecker, "The Death of the Prophet Muḥammad's Father: Did Wāqidī Invent Some of the Evidence?," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 145, no. 1 (1995): 9–27, at 11; Gautier H. A. Juynboll, "Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) and his Position Among the Traditionists of Baṣra," *Le Muséon* 111, no. 1–2 (1998): 187–226, at 193.

treated with due circumspection, with an acute consciousness of the literary devices they might contain and the motivations behind their utilization.[12]

Adopting a form-critical approach to our narrative sources, the present article strives to demonstrate (*inter alia*) what wide-reaching ramifications the tribal and sectarian rivalries might have had on the historiography of formative Islam. It is fitting, then, to first provide brief introductory notes on form criticism, including the classic and "new" approaches. Concerned with a text's formal features, classic form criticism (Ger. *Formkritik*)[13] is a modern exegetical method that rests on the working premise that behind each narrative unit of a given text lies an oral "form" (*Form*) and a "social setting" (*Sitz im Leben*). In addition to the synchronic assessment of a text, a form critic's task is to peruse "the history of form" (*Formgeschichte*), viz., to diachronically analyze the different redactional stages undergone by the narrative.[14] Form criticism approaches, thus, a historical report from the vantage point of parsing its building blocks. Though not always a simple job, the "lines of cleavage" between the narrative's (once independent) subunits are often recognizable in the Islamic traditional material, thanks to the tradents' use of *isnād*s[15] and schemata (in the form of transitional formulae).[16] Mention should be made, too, of "new" form criticism that, unlike its traditional counterpart, is not concerned with *Sitz im Leben*,[17] but with *Sitz in der Literatur* ("setting in literature"), concentrating on the narrative as it stands before us.[18]

12. On the significance of *topoi* and their underlying motivations, see Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 267–8; Albrecht Noth, "Iṣfahān-Nihāwand: A Source-Critical Study of Early Islamic Historiography," in *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State*, ed. Fred M. Donner, 241–62 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 253.

13. While the German word *Formgeschichte* has been translated by some as "form criticism," certain recent studies, particularly those followed by Richter (who deserves the credit "for being the first scholar to offer terminological and methodological clarity"), rendered *Formgeschichte* as "form history." According to Richter, "*Formgeschichte* ('form history') proceeds mainly diachronically [but] form criticism is strictly synchronic"; see Johannes P. Floss, "Form, Source, and Redaction Criticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu, 591–614 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 596. On rendering "form criticism" as *Formkritik*, see Marvin A. Sweeney, "Form Criticism: The Question of the Endangered Matriarchs in Genesis," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, 17–38 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 18. On the use of the terms "*Formgeschichte*" and "*Gattungsforschung*," respectively, by Dibelius and Gunkel as equivalents for "form criticism," see Samuel Byrskog, "A Century with the *Sitz im Leben*: From Form-Critical Setting to Gospel Community and Beyond," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98, no. 1–2 (2007): 1–27, at 3.

14. Marvin A. Sweeney, "Form Criticism," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, 227–41 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 227; idem, "Form Criticism: The Question of the Endangered Matriarchs," 17; Floss, "Form, Source, and Redaction Criticism," 592, 596; Michael Graves, "Form Criticism or a Rolling Corpus: The Methodology of John Wansbrough through the Lens of Biblical Studies," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 1 (2016): 47–92, at 48.

15. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 4

16. Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, 2nd ed., in collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad, trans. Michael Bonner (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1994), 174–7.

17. The term was coined by Gunkel, see, for instance, Hermann Gunkel, "Die Grundprobleme der israelitischen Literaturgeschichte," *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 27 (1906): 1797–1800.

18. Martin J. Buss, "Goals and Processes of the 'New' Form Criticism," in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, 305–9 (Atlanta, GA: Society of

Deconstructing the accounts of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna expeditions, one discerns distinct formal subunits within the reports that each possess their own generic character[19] and setting. We shall see that these stories share a high number of similar literary motifs that serve to aggrandize or, rather, vindicate the members of these *sariyya*s (expeditions). Furthermore, some episodes of the former story have salient parallels in the narratives of other historical events occurring during the Umayyad caliphate. One must then cast one's net wider and examine not only the accounts of the expeditions themselves, but certain isolated records scattered here and there in the immense body of the Islamic tradition.[20] This will no doubt render our task more daunting, but the result will probably be more reliable, for we are more likely to be able to distinguish a historically tenable narrative from a patchwork of *topoi* in this way. A similar line of approach has already been pursued by Noth who, in a seminal article, expounded the view that traditions concerning the conquest of Iṣfahān and Nihāwand are made up of individual "narrative motifs which can be separated as easily as they have been joined together." He further observed that the motifs shaping these stories appear elsewhere in the same or a differing order.[21]

Following in the footsteps of form critics in Islamicist circles, and drawing upon the rich and extensive body of literature in the sphere of biblical form criticism, the present article seeks to scrutinize the historiographical implications conveyed by formal assessment of the sources. To this end, the formal similarities between the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna narratives, and parallel motifs found in accounts of the former event and the records of Umayyad-era movements, will be addressed. Implementing the classic form-critical approach, it shall subsequently be demonstrated that rivalries between various tribes (be they minor clans of the Aws and the Khazraj, or larger tribal entities like the Quraysh and the Anṣār) dramatically affected the way in which our narratives were constructed. As is customary in form-critical practice, the diachronic evolution of the expeditions' reports will then be investigated. Though analysis of the "original" tradition and life-setting of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna (viz., the classic form-critical approach) is the primary concern of this study, the "new" form-critical method will also be brought to bear on the al-Rajīʿ and

Biblical Literature, 2015), 306; Colin M. Toffelm, "*Sitz im* What? Context and the Prophetic Book of Obadiah," in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, 221–44 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 224. For the supplementary discussion see below, the section on "The Massacre Narratives in their Broader Contexts: 'New' Form Criticism."

19. As noted by Wilson, the terms "form" (*Form*) and "genre" (*Gattung*) are quite frequently used interchangeably by form critics; see Robert R. Wilson, "New Form Criticism and the Prophetic Literature: The Unfinished Agenda," in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, 311–22 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 313. However, some used these words in a different sense; see Sweeney, "Form Criticism: The Question of the Endangered Matriarchs," 18. In the present essay, the terms have been deployed interchangeably.

20. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 18–19.

21. Noth, "Iṣfahān-Nihāwand," 246–9. The same contention has been propounded in Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East," *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, 317–401 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992), 386–98.

Biʾr Maʿūna accounts, and the stories' functions within the context of the Muslim literary collections (*ḥadīth* or otherwise) will be probed in the final section of the article.

Parallels between the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna Expeditions

Below is a comparative analysis of the narrative motifs (*Erzählmotive*) that constitute the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna accounts. It will be shown that contained in these reports are certain transferrable motifs and hagiographic *topoi* that, strung together, make up our extant tales.[22] The accounts that are quoted below are drawn from the compilations of the foremost *maghāzī* authorities,[23] including (but not exclusive to) Ibn Isḥāq (hereinafter IS), Mūsā b. ʿUqba (MU),[24] Maʿmar b. Rāshid (MR), and al-Wāqidī (Wq),[25] in which the massacre stories with similar *Erzählmotive*, analogous *wordings* and roughly the same *narrative plot* quite often appear.[26]

22. An example of a useful case for form-critical practice in the domain of biblical studies is "the Endangered Matriarchs" story in Gen 12, 20, and 26, in which three separate stories have been shaped by similar *Erzählmotive*, narrating a tale in which a patriarch (Abraham/Isaac) passes his wife (Sarah/Rebeka) off as his sister. See Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*, trans. S. M. Cupitt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 112–15. Also see the formal similarities between the major tellings of the prophet Shuʿayb's tale in John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, with foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Andrew Rippin (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 21–3.

23. The compilations of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) and two of his contemporaries, Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770) and Mūsā b. ʿUqba (d. 141/758), are the earliest biographies of the Prophet. Ibn Isḥāq's *sīra* have come down to us in several redactions, noteworthy amongst which is that of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/834). Maʿmar's *maghāzī* has survived in the recension of his student, ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām (d. 211/827). Mūsā b. ʿUqba's work has been preserved in later quotations (see the following note). These first, Abbasid-era compilers of the Prophet's biography, along with their successor, al-Wāqidī, based themselves on materials, many (but not all) of which were transmitted from the late-Umayyad authorities, most particularly ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/713) and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (124/742); see Josef Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, trans. and ed. Lawrence Conrad (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2002).

24. Throughout this study, various reports from Mūsā b. ʿUqba's lost *sīra* have been gleaned and cited from later works, e.g., *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, *Imtāʿ al-asmāʾ*, *al-Iṣāba*, and *al-Iktifāʾ*. This is *not*, however, to endorse the ascription of all of the material found under Mūsā b. ʿUqba's name in later sources (despite the fact that recent studies have shown that a remarkable portion of the material attributed to him is not "fictitious"; see Gregor Schoeler, "Mūsā b. ʿUqba's *Maghāzī*," in *The Biography of Muhammad. The Issue of the Sources*, ed. H. Motzki, 67–97 [Leiden: Brill, 2000]). The inclusion of the accounts allotted to Mūsā b. ʿUqba in our analysis is just to ensure as comprehensive an analogy as possible between the earliest narratives of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna massacres, while acknowledging that some of these reports may not be authored by Mūsā b. ʿUqba. This, nevertheless, in no way changes the main results of the present essay's formal analysis.

25. The translations given throughout this essay from the works of Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī are from, respectively, Guillaume and Faizer. Very slight alterations are at times introduced to the texts for the sake of clarity. Furthermore, when an analogous narrative motif occurs in various sources, Guillaume's translation of Ibn Hishām's recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *sīra* is quoted, but the works of other historiographical authorities are likewise cited and their notable variants with Ibn Isḥāq's text are mentioned.

26. The same criteria for the comparison of historical accounts have also been adopted in previous studies; see Ehsan Roohi, "Between History and Ancestral Lore: A Literary Approach to the *Sīra*'s Narratives of Political Assassinations," *Der Islam* 98, no. 2 (2021): 425–72, at 428; Jens Scheiner, *Die Eroberung von Damaskus: Quellenkritische Untersuchung zur Historiographie in klassisch-islamischer Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 7–8.

1. The Arrival of the Tribal Deputies in Medina

Both stories open with the respective tribal delegations arriving at Medina and expressing their enthusiasm to embrace Islam. Beneath the veneer of the envoys' apparently heartfelt sincerity lies, however, a subterfuge to lure the Muslims into a place in which they are to be caught in an ambush.[27]

a) **al-Rajīʿ**: After Uḥud a number of ʿAḍal and al-Qāra[28] came to the apostle (IS: *qadima ʿalā rasūl Allāh raht min ʿAḍal wa-l-Qāra,* MU: *inna nafaran min ʿAḍal wa-l-Qāra qadimū ʿalā rasūl Allāh*, Wq: *fa-qadima sabʿat nafar min ʿAḍal wa-l-Qāra*). They said that some of them had already accepted Islam and they asked him to send some of his companions (IS, MU, Wq: *fa-ibʿath maʿanā nafaran min aṣḥābika*) to instruct them in religion, to teach them to read the Qurʾān, and to teach them the laws of Islam.[29]

b) **Biʾr Maʿūna**: Abū Barāʾ ʿĀmir b. Mālik b. Jaʿfar,[30] "the Player with Spears," came to the apostle in Medina (IS, MU[31], Wq: *qadima Abū Barāʾ ʿĀmir b. Mālik b. Jaʿfar mulāʿib al-asinna ʿalā rasūl Allāh*, MR: *jāʾa mulāʿib al-asinna ilā al-nabī bi-hadiyya*). The apostle explained Islam to him and invited him to accept it. He said: "O Muḥammad, if you were to send some of your companions to the people of Najd (IS, Wq: *law baʿathta rijālan* [Wq: *nafaran*] *min aṣḥābika,* MU: *ibʿath maʿī man shiʾta min rusulika*, MR: *fa-ibʿath ilā aḥl Najd man shiʾta*) and they invited them to your affair, I have good hopes that they would give you a favorable answer.[32]

27. Both stories, as we shall see below, have another recension in which there is no mention whatsoever of the proselytizing character of the mission.

28. The North Arabian ʿAḍal and al-Qāra tribes belonged to al-Hūn b. Khuzayma, a branch of the Muḍar tribal confederation. They were parts of the so-called Aḥābish, the traditional allies of the Quraysh, and had close ties with Mecca. They were also on friendly terms with the Hudhayl tribe; see W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 88.

29. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 426; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ʿAbd al-Ḥafīẓ Shalabī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1971), 2:169; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:354. See also Mūsā b. ʿUqba's account in al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿtī Qalʿajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1985), 3:327.

30. Abū Barāʾ was the chief of the ʿĀmir b. Ṣaʿṣaʿa tribe, a branch of the Hawāzin, which was a prominent subdivision of the Northern Arabian federation of Qays ʿAylān b. Muḍar. ʿĀmir b. Ṣaʿṣaʿa's territory extended from the west of the Turaba oasis to the uplands south of the Riyadh–Mecca road (W. Caskel, "ʿĀmir b. Ṣaʿṣaʿa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. [Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009]).

31. Mūsā b. ʿUqba's words are the same ones that appear in Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Wāqidī's versions, though there is a minor variation in the word order.

32. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 433–4; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:169; Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, trans. Sean W. Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 108; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:346. See Mūsā b. ʿUqba's report in al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:343.

2. The Nomads' Treacherous Assault on the Muslim Party

The stories proceed with the Muslims departing from Medina and a surprise raid being launched on them en route at a watering place. As for al-Rajīʿ, the tribe of Hudhayl[33] (or a branch thereof called Liḥyān, at whose instigation the members of ʿAḍal and al-Qāra come to Medina) set an ambush for the Prophet's Companions, while in the case of Biʾr Maʿūna, it is Abū Barāʾs nephew, ʿĀmir b. Ṭufayl, who devises the fiendish plot against the Muslims.

a) **al-Rajīʿ**: The band got as far as al-Rajīʿ, a watering place of Hudhayl. There they (ʿAḍal and al-Qāra) betrayed them and summoned Hudhayl against them (IS, MU: *fa-istaṣrakhū ʿalayhim Hudhaylan*, Wq: *fa-istaṣrakhū ʿalayhim aṣḥābahum al-ladhīna baʿathahum al-Liḥyāniyyūn*). While they were off their guard sitting with their baggage (IS, MU: *fī riḥālihim*) suddenly they were set upon by men (IS: *ghashūhum*), with swords in their hands, so they took their swords to fight them.[34]

b) **Biʾr Maʿūna**: The Muslims went on until they halted at Biʾr Maʿūna watering place. When they alighted at it, they sent Ḥarām b. Milḥān with the apostle's letter to the enemy of God, ʿĀmir b. Ṭufayl. When he came to him, he rushed at the man and killed him before he even looked at the letter. Then he tried to call out the Banū ʿĀmir against them (IS, Wq: *istaṣrakha ʿalayhim Banī ʿĀmir*, MU: *fa-istanfara Banī ʿĀmir*, MR: *fa-istajāsha ʿalayhim ʿĀmir b. Ṭufayl Banī ʿĀmir*), but they refused to do what he wanted, saying that they would not violate the promise of security which Abū Barāʾ had given these men. Then he appealed to the tribes of Banū Sulaym[35] (IS, Wq: *fa-istaṣrakha ʿalayhim qabāʾil min Banī Sulaym*, MU: *fa-istanfara lahum ʿĀmir b. Ṭufayl Banī Sulaym*, MR: *fa-istajāsha ʿalayhim Banī Sulaym*) and they agreed and came out against them and surrounded them (IS: *ghashū al-qawm*) as they were sitting with their baggage (IS: *fī riḥālihim*). Seeing them, they drew their swords and fought to the last man.[36]

33. The North Arabian tribe of Hudhayl belonged to the Khindif subdivision of the Muḍar. Their territory was in the Ḥijāz, the area located to the north and east of Mecca, and they were closely connected with the Quraysh. See Kirill Dmitriev, "Banū Hudhayl," in *Encyclopedia of Islam THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

34. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 426; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:170; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:355; see Mūsā b. ʿUqba's account in al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:343.

35. The Sulaym tribe was a branch of Qays ʿAylān b. Muḍar. The Banū Sulaym's territory was in the vicinity of the road between Mecca and Medina, and this caused the inhabitants of both cities to establish good relations with the Sulaym. The lands of the Banū ʿĀmir lay on the Sulaym's southern border. See the chapter "Tribes in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia," in Michael Lecker, *People, Tribes and Society in Arabia around the Time of Muḥammad* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 30.

36. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 434; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:185; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:347; Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *al-Maghāzī*, 108–10. See Mūsā b. ʿUqba's account in al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:343; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), 6:172.

3. The Fate of the Participants

The fate of those who are killed is narrated at some length in each story. We hear in this section of intrepid warriors who refrain from succumbing to the enemies and yearn to embrace martyrdom.

a) **al-Rajīʿ**: Marthad b. Abī Marthad, Khālid Bukayr, and ʿĀṣim b. Thābit said: "By God, we will never accept an undertaking and agreement from a polytheist." (IS: *wa-llāhi lā naqbalu min mushrik ʿahdan wa-lā ʿaqdan abadan*). According to al-Wāqidī, "ʿĀṣim b. Thābit, Marthad, Khālid b. Abī Bukayr, and Muʿattab b. ʿUbayd refused to accept their (i.e., the adversaries') protection and their security" (*fa-abaw an yaqbalū jiwārahum wa-lā amānahum*). ʿĀṣim b. Thābit then said, "I swear that I will never accept the protection of a polytheist" (Wq: *innī nadhartu allā aqbalu jiwār mushrik abadan*, MR: *ammā ana fa-lā anzilu fī dhimmat kāfir).*[37]

b) **Biʾr Maʿūna**: Having killed all the Companions, narrates al-Wāqidī, the Banū ʿĀmir told al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr, the Muslims' commander: "If you wish, we will protect you." He replied, "I will never submit nor accept your protection (Wq: *lā aqbalu lakum amānan*) unless you bring me to the place of Ḥarām's killing[38] and then free me from your protection (Wq: *bariʾa minnī jiwārukum*)." They protected him until they brought him to the place of Ḥarām's death, and then released him from their protection (Wq: *bariʾū ilayhi min jiwārihim*), and he fought them until he was killed.[39]

4. The Martyrs' Last Words

Having found themselves in the face of certain death, the warriors pray to God to convey their message to the Prophet.

a) **al-Rajīʿ**: The polytheists raised Khubayb on the wood (to crucify him), and when they had bound him he said, "O God, we have delivered the message of Thy apostle, so tell him tomorrow what has been done to us (IS: *Allāhumma innā qad ballaghnā risālat rasūlika fa-ballighhu al-ghadāt mā yuṣnaʿu binā*)." According to al-Wāqidī, Khubayb said: "O God, there is no one here who will take your Messenger greetings from me, so please convey my greetings to him." (*Allāhumma innahu laysa hāhunā aḥad yuballighu rasūlaka minnī al-salām fa-ballighhu anta ʿannī al-salām*).[40]

37. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 426; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:170; Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *al-Maghāzī*, 60; al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, trans. Rizwi Faizer (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1:173; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:355.

38. Al-Mundhir aspired, so the story says, to die where Ḥarām's blood spilled on the ground.

39. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:348; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:170.

40. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 428; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:173; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:360; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:176. Here, Mūsā b. ʿUqba's wording is analogous to al-Wāqidī's, see Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar fī funūn al-maghāzī wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar*, ed. Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Ramaḍān (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1993), 2:62.

b) **Biʾr Maʿūna**: As reported on the authority of Anas b. Mālik,[41] the last words of the participants of Biʾr Maʿūna are to be found in some *sīra* and *ḥadīth* compendia presented in the following form: "O God, deliver from us to our Prophet our message that we have met You, and we are pleased with You and You are pleased with us." (*Allāhumma balligh ʿannā nabiyyanā annā qad laqaynāka fa-raḍaynā ʿanka wa-raḍayta ʿannā*).[42]

5. Divine Revelation concerning the Victims

Once the Prophet's emissaries are slain, he is made aware of their death and their last words by a revelation. The Prophet then announces lugubriously to his entourage that the members of the *sariyya* have met a tragic end, and were cut into pieces at the hands of the deceitful Najdī tribes.

a) **al-Rajīʿ**: Mūsā b. ʿUqba says: "It is alleged (*zaʿamū*) that the messenger of God—seated in the gathering of his Companions on the day in which Khubayb and Zayd b. al-Dathinna were killed—said: "Peace be upon you," the Quraysh killed Khubayb (*Khubayb qatalahu Quraysh*)." Al-Wāqidī's report runs as follows: "Usāma b. Zayd related to me from his father that the Messenger of God was seated with his Companions, when a faint overcame him just as when he is inspired by a revelation. Then we heard him say, 'And peace unto him and God's blessings.' Then he said, 'This is Gabriel who brings me greetings from Khubayb.'"[43]

b) **Biʾr Maʿūna**: Not long following the Prophet dispatching an envoy to Banū ʿĀmir, he ascended the pulpit, praised God, and lauded Him, saying: "Your brothers met the polytheists and they cut them to pieces, and none of them survived."[44]

41. Anas b. Mālik, a member of the Najjār subdivision of the Khazraj, was allegedly the last Companion of the Prophet to die, in Basra in 93/712. Anas' purported life span covers the entire first century AH, making him a key figure on whose authority Prophetic traditions have been reported. His name frequently occurs in traditions with Baṣran *isnād*s, the Anṣār-favoring material in particular. See Gautier H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 131; idem, "Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj," 206.

42. According to some accounts, these words (that occur in the sources with certain variants) were allegedly once part of the Qurʾānic text, but were eventually abrogated; see al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:350; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), 3:390; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1969), 1:416; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 6:45; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿAlī Shīrī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415 AH), 26:104. See also the doubts expressed by Juynboll as to the authenticity of these traditions in Gautier H. A. Juynboll, "The Qurrāʾ in Early Islamic History," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 16 (1973): 113–29, at 128–9.

43. See Mūsā b. ʿUqba's account in al-Maqrīzī, *Imtāʿ al-asmāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Namīsī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999), 13:273; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn*, 2:62; al-Kalāʿī, *al-Iktifāʾ fī maghāzī rasūl Allāh wa-l-thalātha al-khulafāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Bayḍūn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2000), 1:407. See also al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:176.

44. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:344; al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Marʿashlī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), 2:111.

6. A Parallel "Virtue" Tradition

From the viewpoint of the earliest authors and audiences of the *sīra*, the narratives' apogee was the episodes in which they could relate or hear the heroic tales of Islam's "golden age," where the image of the Companions was adorned with innumerable *faḍāʾil* traditions. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the remarkably analogous accounts of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna are also alike in the way in which their martyrs are exalted. Our stories have episodes in which the protagonists' corpses vanish in a miraculous fashion; one "ascends to the sky," the other is "swallowed up by the earth."

a) **al-Rajīʿ**: After a period of imprisonment in Mecca, Khubayb b. ʿAdī is taken out by the Meccans to al-Tanʿīm and is crucified there. Purportedly sent by the Prophet to take down Khubayb's crucified body, ʿAmr b. Umayya is the supposed narrator of the following account: "I came to the cross to which Khubayb was bound, frightened that someone might see me, climbed up it, and untied Khubayb. He fell to the ground, and I withdrew a short distance. Then I turned round, and I could not see a trace of Khubayb; it was as though the earth had swallowed him up (*ibtalaʿathu al-arḍ*)." The account concludes, "And no trace of Khubayb has appeared up to this time (*lam yudhkar li-Khubayb rimmatan ḥattā al-sāʿa*)."[45]

b) **Biʾr Maʿūna**: The episode of the Biʾr Maʿūna story that is of interest to us here is a *faḍīla* narrated about ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra, the *mawlā* of the first caliph, Abū Bakr. The person into whose mouth the tradition puts the virtues of ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra is none other than his slayer, Jabbār b. Salmā. ʿĀmir, who is killed by Jabbār's spear, ascends, much to his murderer's astonishment, to the sky, and it is his marvelous ascension to the heavens that convinces Jabbār to convert to Islam. Al-Wāqidī's account also stresses that "the angels have concealed [ʿĀmir's] dead body"[46], and Ibn Saʿd assures us that his corpse was never found (*lam tūjad juththatahu*), just as with the body of Khubayb b. ʿAdī.[47]

7. Banū Nawfal, the Driving Spirit behind the Massacre

We have seen so far that the turn of the fourth year of the Islamic era witnessed two almost simultaneous disasters befalling the Muslims. The sources aver that two proselytizing groups of Companions were entrusted at roughly the same time the similar task of preaching

45. al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, *Foundation of the Community*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 146–7; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:332; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:139; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1989), 1:599; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba*, 2:226. See also Sean W. Anthony, *Crucifixion and Death as Spectacle: Umayyad Crucifixion in Its Late Antique Context* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2014), 38.

46. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:170: al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:353; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 4:344.

47. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 3:174; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, ed. I. Lichtenstadter (Beirut: Dar al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d.), 183; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 1:194.

Islam in an identical geographical region, Najd. Both parties are attacked en route at a watering place and die the deaths of martyrs. In addition to this, the diction and narrative schemes of the tales are very much alike. But there is more to this analogy. The authors/compilers of the *sīra* reports want us to believe that both incidents involve a specific clan of the Quraysh, namely the Banū Nawfal,[48] as their instigators. As regards al-Rajīʿ and its most dramatic occurrence, viz., Khubayb's crucifixion, the sources unequivocally state that the "rationale for his murder" was his killing al-Ḥārith b. ʿĀmir of Nawfal, an act that prompted the latter's fellow-tribesmen to wreak vengeance upon Khubayb.[49] Akin to this situation are the circumstances surrounding the Muslims' massacre at Biʾr Maʿūna. Here, we have again an implacable opponent of Islam from Nawfal, Ṭuʿayma b. ʿAdī, whom Muslims kill at Badr. This induces his kinsmen, his maternal uncle (Anas b. ʿAbbās al-Sulamī) in particular, to exact revenge on the Muslims by launching an onslaught against the members of Biʾr Maʿūna.[50] The tradition's claim concerning the Banū Nawfal having been culpable in the two allegedly simultaneous tragedies is not impossible, but there are hints that what is at work here is not a reoccurrence of a similar situation in two separate incidents, but a literary *topos tout court*. Although it is the very "logic behind the plot of Khubayb's death and the cruelty of his executioner,"[51] the attribution of al-Ḥārith b. ʿĀmir's murder to Khubayb b. ʿAdī is wholly at odds with the *maghāzī* scholars' consensus that the latter was *not* present at Badr, and that it was *another* Khubayb, the son of Īsāf, who was responsible for al-Ḥārith b. ʿĀmir's murder.[52] As Arafat has convincingly argued, Khubayb b. ʿAdī is a historically obscure figure with a murky background whom Ibn Saʿd does not even deem worthy of an entry in his biographical compendium.[53] The *sīra*'s Khubayb b. ʿAdī is, in fact, more of a mythical hero than a historical character. If he is not remembered, as seems entirely credible, as performing a role in the expedition of Badr, the Banū Nawfal's supposed retaliatory actions at al-Rajīʿ and their complicity in killing Khubayb would then become a dubious motivation in the al-Rajīʿ story, which merely serves to promote Khubayb to the stature of a renowned warrior and to impart more drama into his anecdote.[54]

48. Banū Nawfal was a clan of the Meccan tribe of Quraysh. According to the classic Islamic genealogies, Nawfal was the brother of Hāshim, the Prophet's great-grandfather. Despite this family link, Banū Nawfal was reportedly present in the Quraysh's anti-Islamic measures, including the boycott of Banū Hāshim. See W. Montgomery Watt, "Nawfal," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009).

49. Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 35.

50. See Kister, "Biʾr Maʿūna," 350–4; Michael Lecker, *The Banū Sulaym: A Contribution to the Study of Early Islam* (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, 1989), 174.

51. Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 35.

52. See Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 20; Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 35; Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, "The Raid of the Banū Hudhayl: Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's Version of the Event," in *Analyzing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth*, ed. H. Motzki et al., 305–83 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 367.

53. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 19.

54. Nawfal's supposed role in al-Rajīʿ has been accepted as historical in Kister, "Biʾr Maʿūna," 356.

8. The Chronology of the Massacres

The "lateness and artificiality"[55] that runs through the entire *sīra*'s chronology seems also to frustrate any attempt at the precise dating of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna raids. But the dates of these events are of interest to us from a historiographical perspective, as they give us an idea, tentative as it may be, of the kind of concerns and criteria based on which the chronology of the Prophet's *maghāzī* came to be standardized by the medieval *sīra* scholars.[56] The al-Rajīʿ incident is explicitly stated by al-Wāqidī to have taken place in Ṣafar of 4/625, but there are competing accounts at play. Khubayb was reportedly brought to Mecca in the sacred month of Dhū al-Qaʿda 4/625 and was crucified when the sanctified months had passed, which means that his incarceration lasted no longer than a couple of months. The Liḥyān expedition, a retaliatory raid purportedly launched by the Prophet himself to take vengeance for the martyrs of al-Rajīʿ, is dated to 6/627. The account of this incident claims, however, that Khubayb was still imprisoned in Mecca at the time of this *sariyya*, adding that when the Prophet arrived at al-Ghamīm, the Quraysh said that "Muḥammad only came to al-Ghamīm to get Khubayb."[57] According to al-Wāqidī, the Liḥyānīs' onslaught on the members of al-Rajīʿ was itself a punitive measure due to fact that a Companion of the Prophet had assassinated the chief of Liḥyān, Sufyān b. Khālid. Al-Wāqidī conflictingly assigns Sufyān's murder to fifty-four months AH, while he himself places al-Rajīʿ at thirty-six months AH.[58] The chronology of al-Rajīʿ, as can be seen, is anything but apparent, though amidst this chronological mess one date was of obvious appeal for the *sīra* scholars: the assertion that Muḥammad got the news of both events *on the same night* (*fī layla wāḥida*).[59] In line with this claim are a number of reports that the Prophet cursed the Liḥyān together with the Sulaym. The account of the Prophet's curse on the Muḍar and the Sulaym is a well-known episode of the Biʾr Maʿūna story.[60] That some, though not certainly all, of our reports include the Liḥyān in the tribes cursed by the Prophet signifies later attempts to show the simultaneity of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna.

55. Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's *Sīra*," 261. See also Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muḥammads: das Korpus ʿUrwa ibn Az-Zubair* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2009), 291–2; Pavel Pavlovitch, "The *Sīra*," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. H. Berg, 66–78 (New York: Routledge, 2017), 76.

56. See, in this respect, J. M. B. Jones, "The Chronology of the Maghāzī: A Textual Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, no. 2 (1957): 245–80, at 258–9; Rizwi Faizer, "Muhammad and the Medinan Jews: A Comparison of the Texts of Ibn Ishaq's *Kitāb Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* with al-Waqidi's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 463–89, at 471.

57. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 2:263. See Jones, "The Chronology of the Maghāzī," 276, where he astutely observes that the Liḥyān expedition's account is nothing but "a curious patchwork of themes."

58. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:354 and 2:531.

59. al-Wāqid, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:360, appears to be the sole early attestation of this claim which has subsequently been repeated in later sources; see al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAmrī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1416 AH), 3:424; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2:40.

60. See Meir Jacob Kister, "O God, Tighten Thy Grip on Muḍar," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 24, no. 3 (1981): 242–73; Uri Rubin, "Muhammad's Curse of Muḍar and the Blockade of Mecca," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, no. 3 (1988): 249–64.

This artificial synchronization, preferred by al-Wāqidī, appears to be yet another attempt by the traditionists to make the al-Rajīʿ incident all the more analogous to the massacre of Biʾr Maʿūna, to assign to the martyrs of each expedition an equal share of the Prophet's grief, and finally, to render the overall picture all the more poignant and dramatic.

The above comparative assessment of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna's accounts has crucial implications. The virtually identical narrative lines, the analogous circumstantial details, and the correspondences in the wording of the two stories can hardly be regarded, even by the most credulous readers, as mere coincidences. It is by no means tenable that an entirely similar catastrophe happened to concurrently dispatched "holy bands" and that the Prophet received the news of both massacres on the same night. Be that as it may, it is worth attempting to delve deeper into the process of, and the impetus behind, the formation of the parallelism in these accounts, for the light it sheds on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Prophet's traditional biography, and on the way in which our literary sources are to be treated. Before proceeding to the historical background of these stories, however, it is necessary to deal with the marked resemblance that one of the aforesaid stories, al-Rajīʿ, bears to the accounts of certain rebellious movements of the Umayyad caliphate.

Parallels between the al-Rajīʿ Massacre and Umayyad-era Movements

For no other figure involved in the al-Rajīʿ incident do we have such a great bulk of *faḍāʾil* accounts as we do for Khubayb b. ʿAdī.[61] Nonetheless, the traditions about his virtues and sufferings, as Arafat observes, are of a legendary character, consisting as they do of a series of pious attempts at "virtually canonizing Khubayb."[62] What deserves closer inspection in this respect is the fact that Khubayb's maudlin tale is a mélange of hagiographic motifs that are not specific to his story but are also deployed broadly elsewhere, for example in the accounts of the insurrections and tribulations of Umayyad-era rebels, including (but not limited to) such (pro-)ʿAlid figures as Ḥujr b. ʿAdī, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, and Zayd b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. These similarities have not gone entirely unnoticed in previous scholarship, receiving passing mention in the works, for instance, of Arafat and Keshk.[63] However, the analogies made therein are not exhaustive.[64] Arafat draws attention to only one parallel between the Khubayb and al-Ḥusayn stories, while Keshk offers a brief comparison of the analogous episodes in the accounts of Khubayb and Ḥujr b. ʿAdī; neither scholar mentions the other motifs shared by Khubayb's martyrology and certain accounts related to various politico-religious dissidents during the Umayyad caliphate. We need thus to draw a more

61. Cf. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 18; Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 37. ʿĀṣim b. Thābit occupies the second place.

62. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 19.

63. Ibid., 23; Khaled Keshk, "The Historiography of an Execution: The Killing of Ḥujr b. ʿAdī," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2008): 1–35, at 12–13.

64. This is despite the fact that both articles present insightful hints concerning the motifs that Khubayb's story share with the accounts of the (pro-)ʿAlid revolts.

comprehensive comparison between these narratives. This is undertaken in the remainder of this section.

1. The Final Prayer of the Martyr

The first noteworthy parallel is found in the episode of Khubayb's imprisonment, where his story betrays apparent correspondences with that of Ḥujr b. ʿAdī. Ḥujr, a fervent partisan of the fourth caliph, ʿAlī, is renowned for having fomented an insurrection against Muʿāwiya. The rebellion proved ill-fated and was quelled by Muʿāwiya's governor in Kufa, Ziyād b. Abīhi, who subsequently sent Ḥujr and his adherents to Marj ʿAdhrāʾ, where, after a period of incarceration, Ḥujr was sentenced to death.[65] Khubayb and Ḥujr are thus alike in being held in captivity for a short period, at the end of which they are executed. A more significant similarity, touched upon by Donner and discussed at more length by Keshk, appears in the moment of the protagonists' execution, when they both seek solace in praying to God, asking the executioner to allow them to pray two *rakʿa*s.[66] The parallel becomes all the more overt when, taking into account that "Ḥujr's words to his executioners [are] exactly the same as those of Khubayb," both hurriedly finish the prayer and say: "Were it not that they might think I was afraid, I would have taken more time with them [i.e., the two *rakʿa*s of prayer]."[67] Keshk seems to have taken it as axiomatic that the hagiographical elaboration of Ḥujr's account has its roots in Khubayb's martyrology,[68] but, as we shall argue later, the nature of Khubayb's story does not permit one to make such firm assertions. Anyhow, whether Khubayb's story inspired or was inspired by Ḥujr's, there is no doubt about the existence of sectarian rivalries at the turn of the first Islamic century, mirrored in the identification of the first person to pray two *rakʿa*s before martyrdom (*rakʿatayn ʿinda al-qatl*).[69] And it is interesting to note that the traditionist Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728), in a blatant act of reconciliation, contends that these two *rakʿa*s were prayed by Khubayb *and* Ḥujr (*ṣallāhumā Khubayb wa-Ḥujr wa-humā fāḍilān*).[70]

2. The Performance of Miracles during the Imprisonment

Khubayb's preternatural qualities are redolent of the miracles our sources allot to Ḥujr. While in captivity in the house of a woman called Māwiyya, Khubayb is once seen by her

65. Gerald R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41; Andrew Marsham, "Public Execution in the Umayyad Period: Early Islamic Punitive Practice and Its Late Antique Context," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 11 (2011): 101–36, at 128.

66. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 271; Keshk, "The Historiography of an Execution," 12–13.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., 13.

69. See Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Saʿīd al-Laḥḥām (Beirut: n.p., 1409 AH), 8:340; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Asʿad Dāghir (Qumm: Dār al-Hijra, 1409 AH), 3:3; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Beirut, 1992), 2:441; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2:43.

70. Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī taʾrīkh Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 5:2111; Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Thaqafī, *al-Ghārāt*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥusaynī Urmawī (Tehran: Anjuman-i Athār-i Mellī, 1353 AH), 2:814.

"with a bunch of grapes in his hand as big as a man's head from which he was eating." "I did not know," says the astonished Māwiyya, "that there were grapes on God's earth that could be eaten (at that time)."[71] On the day of his execution, Khubayb is reported to have asked Māwiyya to lend him a razor to cleanse himself before death (*ataṭahharu bihā li-l-qatl*).[72] She sends her son to give Khubayb the razor but suddenly gets apprehensive lest Khubayb kill her son in revenge. She hastens towards them and finds the boy sitting on the prisoner's thigh. Khubayb lets the lad go, however, assuring the woman that "in his religion, treachery is not lawful."[73] The tradition tends likewise to exalt the imprisoned Ḥujr by recounting his deeds of piety. Khubayb and Ḥujr do not merely resemble one another in their being depicted as paragons of virtue, but also in regard to "purification" (*ṭahāra*) as a key element in the glorifying traditions woven around these early Islamic martyrs.[74] During his imprisonment, we read, Ḥujr becomes ritually impure. He asks his jailer to give him his ration of drinking water to perform *ghusl* (the ritual ablution) (*aʿṭinī sharābī ataṭahharu bihā*). The latter refuses, saying: "I fear you might perish from thirst, and then Muʿāwiya would kill me." Ḥujr then prays to God, and He sends forth a rain cloud, providing Ḥujr with the water he needs for the *ghusl*.

Aside from the common episodes centered upon the notion of *ṭahāra* in the narratives of Khubayb and Ḥujr's incarceration, the miracle-working character of Khubayb also bears strong parallels to the protagonists of certain stories outside the corpus of Shīʿī martyrology. Similar to Khubayb's case, an imprisoned person eating of heavenly sustenance occurs in accounts about the messianic claimant of Marwānīd Syria known as the Shepherd (*al-rāʿī*), who initiated "a movement among Syro-Mesopotamian Jewry during the caliphate of Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-Malik."[75] The life and career of the Shepherd has recently been subject to an in-depth examination by Sean Anthony, which he conducted using, among other sources, a report of the no longer extant *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* of Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (d. after 249/864), preserved in *Bayān al-adyān*, a Persian heresiography authored by Abū al-Maʿālī al-ʿAlawī (writing ca. 485/1092). Amongst the miracles ascribed to the Shepherd, we read that after he was thrown in Damascus' prison (*ū rā dar Damishq be zendān kardand*), "every day there would fall near him sustenance" (*har rūz be nazdīk-e ū khūrdanī yāftand*).[76] This is a reflection, as Anthony notes, of "a similar miracle attributed to the

71. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 428; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:175.

72. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:172.

73. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:175.

74. On Khubayb remaining in the "state of purity" till his martyrdom, see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22.

75. Sean W. Anthony, "Who Was the Shepherd of Damascus? The Enigma of Jewish-Messianist Responses to the Islamic Conquests in Umayyad Syria and Mesopotamia," in *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner*, ed. P. Cobb, 21–59 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 21. On Khubayb and the shepherd eating from "sustenance of an unknown origin," see ibid., 29.

76. Abū al-Maʿālī al-ʿAlawī, *Bayān al-adyān*, ed. ʿAbbās Iqbāl Āshtiyānī, Muḥammad Taqī Dāneshpazhūh, and Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Rūzana, 1997), 75. The translation is quoted from Anthony, "Who Was the Shepherd of Damascus?," 27.

Qurʾānic Mary,"[77] which has likewise been assigned to the Syrian pseudo-prophet of ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān's caliphate, al-Ḥārith b. Saʿīd.[78]

3. Echoes of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī's Martyrology in the Story of Khubayb

In an illuminating case of detection, Arafat noticed a similar poetic composition found in Khubayb and al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī's martyrological tradition. Castigating Khubayb's murderers for their nefarious deeds, the poet asks: "What would you say if the Prophet speaks to you when the loyal angels are in the horizon?"[79] An analogous poem, preserved by al-Ṭabarī, was reportedly recited by a Hāshimī woman after al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom, on the occasion of his family's arrival in Medina. "What would you say if the Prophet says to you," the woman asks, "'What have you done – you who are the last of peoples – with my relations and my family, after my death?' Among them are captives and bloodstained dead."[80] Both excerpts of poetry are instances of censure directed against evildoers, reminding them of their tremendous guilt and the turmoil of the Day of Judgment in which the Prophet is to ask them about their wrongdoings. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the former poem's first hemistich (i.e., *mādhā taqūlūna in qāla al-nabī lakum*) is a verbatim repetition of the latter. As shown by Arafat, the first poem exhibits flagrant signs of late origin and secondary status, foremost among which is the verse's insinuation that, unlike the actual circumstances at the time of the al-Rajīʿ raid, the Prophet is dead and has to interrogate the executioners about their villainous acts only on the Day of Judgment.[81] One may assume that the incongruity in the verse stems from the poet being inspired by the material at his disposal on al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom, which was composed years after the Prophet's death.

There is further evidence, which has gone unmentioned by Arafat, that substantiates his shrewd, though passing, remark on the existence of shared motifs in Khubayb's story and the Shīʿī martyrological heritage. Al-Ṭabarī reports, on the authority of Jābir al-Juʿfī, that in his final moments, al-Ḥusayn approaches the Euphrates River to quench his intense thirst, but, all of a sudden, he is struck by the enemy's arrow and blood gushes out from his mouth. He then raises his hands, beseeches God to bring down wrath upon his adversaries, and says: "O God! Count their number, kill them one by one, and do not let one of them remain on the earth" (*Allāhumma aḥṣihim ʿadadan wa-uqtulhum badadan wa-lā tadhar ʿalā al-arḍ minhum aḥadan*).[82] The last words supposed to have been uttered by Khubayb are almost identical with al-Ḥusayn's prayer. He says: "O God! Count their number, kill them one by one, and let none of them escape" (*Allāhumma aḥṣihim ʿadadan wa-uqtulhum badadan*

77. Ibid. 29.

78. S. W. Anthony, "The Prophecy and Passion of al-Ḥāriṭ ibn Saʿīd al-Kaḏḏāb: Narrating a Religious Movement from the Caliphate of ʿAbdalmalik ibn Marwān," *Arabica* 57 (2010): 1–29, at 1.

79. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 22. See the verse in Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:177.

80. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 23. The poem is to be found in al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 1967), 5:467; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 3:221; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, 3:68.

81. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 23.

82. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 3:201; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 5:449; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:470.

wa-lā tughādir minhum aḥadan).[83] The similarities between these invocations of divine retribution are very striking, but there is more to the curses of Khubayb and al-Ḥusayn. The sources relate in vivid detail the fates of the bystanders in the al-Rajīʿ and Karbalāʾ incidents, on whom divine punishment is said to have been inflicted. Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, who was allegedly present at Khubayb's crucifixion, is said to have been thrown on the ground by his father from fear of Khubayb's curse (*daʿwat Khubayb*). Abū Sufyān believed, we are told, "if a man is cursed and is thrown to one side, the curse will pass over him."[84] Having attended Khubayb's execution, Saʿīd b. ʿĀmir al-Jumaḥī, governor of Ḥimṣ under the second caliph, is reported to have had a fainting spell whenever he remembered the martyr's tragic death.[85] No less than seven individuals are mentioned by name in al-Wāqidī's account as either fearfully fleeing or concealing themselves somewhere in fear of Khubayb's curse, one of whom says: "By God, I did not think that Khubayb's prayer would miss any one of them (the Meccans),"[86] (*mā ẓanantu an tughādira daʿwat Khubayb minhum aḥadan*). As regards al-Ḥusayn, there is similarly an impressive number of individuals who are said to have perished in fulfillment of al-Ḥusayn's curse.[87] He is reported as cautioning ʿUbayd Allāh b. al-Ḥurr that "By God, those who hear our wailing (*wāʿiya*) and do not help us will perish."[88] Elsewhere al-Ḥusayn is quoted as exhorting some of his entourage, "Leave here lest you hear my wailing (*wāʿiya*), for he who hears our wailing without answering and helping us will be thrown into the fire."[89] One may then speak of a parallelism in the sources, that of *wāʿiyat al-Ḥusayn* vis-à-vis *daʿwat Khubayb*. And it is significant that hearing the martyr's curse, in both cases, would be accompanied by evil consequences for passive bystanders.[90]

4. The Crucifixion Episode

One recognizes in the climax of Khubayb's lachrymose narrative, the crucifixion episode, some motifs that are by no means characteristic of his story, but also occur elsewhere, for

83. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:173; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:359; Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *al-Maghāzī*, 62; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 5:12; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:294; Boekhoff-van der Voort, "The Raid of the Banū Hudhayl," 362.

84. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 428. Also see al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:359.

85. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:173–4; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:359–60.

86. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:175.

87. On al-Ḥusayn's curses see, for instance, al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 5:45; Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), 117.

88. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 5:407.

89. al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl* (*Rijāl al-Kishshī*), ed. Ḥasan Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad: Mashhad University Press, 1409 AH), 114. A similar tradition is found in Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Amālī* (Tehran: Ketābchī, 1376 AH), 137.

90. Admittedly, the notion of the *duʿāʾ maẓlūm* ("the call of the oppressed") is a general martyrological theme (Cook, *Martyrdom*, 22) and cannot be linked exclusively to Khubayb and al-Ḥusayn. However, the fact that the curses of these martyrs (*Allāhumma aḥṣihim ʿadadan* ...) are almost identical in diction signifies a stronger connection between these stories than the mere utilization of the theme of *al-duʿāʾ al-maẓlūm*.

example in the crucifixion account of the renowned Shīʿī rebel, Zayd b. ʿAlī (d. 122/740).[91] The latter is said to have been crucified facing the direction of the Euphrates. The next morning, however, his cross (*khashabatahu*) was reportedly found facing toward the *qibla*, and this event occurred several times (*mirāran*).[92] In a similar vein, the *qibla*'s direction is a prominent element in the narrative of Khubayb's crucifixion, which has it that the Meccan polytheists directed the crucified Khubayb towards "where he came from" (*min ḥaythu jāʾa*). He then said, "Regarding your turning my face away from the *qibla* (*ammā ṣarfukum wajhī ʿan al-qibla*), indeed God says: Wherever you turn is God."[93] According to a rival account, the Meccans faced him in a direction other than the *qibla*, but his body turned miraculously towards the *qibla*, and this was to happen several times (*mirāran*) until they let him remain in the direction of the *qibla*.[94]

As observed by Anthony, the "miraculous shift of the cross" bearing a martyr is similarly attested in Armenian accounts of the martyrdom of David of Dwin (d. 703/705), whom the Umayyads crucified.[95] David was a former Muslim soldier by the name of Surhān who "apostatized" upon his arrival at Armenia and became a Christian. His cross is reported to have been "raised facing south," or, as Anthony and Sahner plausibly posit, toward the *qibla*.[96] As David's *Vita* puts it,[97] "the cross, which was facing south, turned to the east (viz., the Christian direction of prayer). This miraculous sign was shown to the believers and unbelievers, so that the power of Christ might be manifest."[98] The miraculous turn of the martyr's corpse is then a *topos* functioning as a proof for the supremacy of the creed for which the martyr lays down his life, and as such, it could – and did – readily appear in different martyrological traditions.

The attempt by the martyr's fellow rebels or co-religionists to take down his body is another oft-repeated motif in different crucifixion accounts. The crucifixion site in the martyrological accounts of Khubayb and Zayd is reported as having been guarded by a number of men in order to thwart the people from taking the martyr's crucified corpse

91. Zayd, the great-grandson of the fourth caliph, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, led an insurrection against the Umayyad caliphate that gave rise to the formation of the Zaydiyya sect. His revolt broke out during the caliphate of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik and was crushed by the governor of Iraq, Yūsuf b. ʿUmar al-Thaqafī. Zayd's decapitated body remained crucified in the *kunāsa* of Kufa for six years, Wilfred Madelung, "Zayd b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009); Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 46–51.

92. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 19:479; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, 9:4050; Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 48.

93. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:176.

94. See Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba*, 2:227, who quotes ʿAbd al-Dāʾim b. al-Marzūq al-Qayrawānī (d. after 467/1074).

95. Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 59. Anthony detects the appearance of this motif in the martyrologies of David and Zayd, but does not refer to the similar episode in Khubayb's story.

96. Ibid.; Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 250.

97. The *Life* of David, or the so-called *Passion of David of Dwin*, was written "shortly after the martyr's death" in 703/705 (ibid., 93). David's story features also in the Armenian history written by John Catholicos (d. ca. 925). On David and his *Vita*, see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2002), 370–3.

98. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 676.

down from the cross. ʿAmr b. Umayya al-Ḍamrī is said to have tried, though eventually in vain, to take down the body of Khubayb, whose *khashaba* was surrounded by guards watching over him (*ḥawluhu ḥaras yaḥrusūnahu*).[99] Zayd's body is likewise reported to have been kept under surveillance (*ʿalayhi ḥaras yaḥrusūnahu*) lest his body be stolen. Like ʿAmr b. Umayya, Dāwūd b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās allegedly attempts to take down Zayd's corpse, but he is ultimately forced to withdraw due to the intervention of the Kufan governor's forces (*khayl*).[100]

To conclude, Khubayb's narratives are comprised of a general body of hagiographic motifs that not only appear elsewhere in the Islamic (including the Shīʿī) tradition, but feature in the Christian martyrologies as well. It goes without saying that this kind of material is sorely problematic for the purpose of positivist historical enquiry.

Beneath the Surface of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna Narratives: Classic Form Criticism

The point-for-point correspondence between certain episodes of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories, and the former's considerable similarities with the reports of Umayyad-era insurrections, undoubtedly demand an explanation other than chance. The immediate question arising is which individual or faction could be responsible for putting these stories in circulation and what the motivation was behind the literary borrowing between these stories.

Shared Episodes in the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna Accounts: Literary Form and Life-Setting

A fundamental step in *Formkritik* is to determine our narratives' form.[101] The al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories attained significance and popularity as they mirrored the norms and concerns of the community in which they were generated. To appropriately determine the narratives' form would, therefore, be a useful guide to our tales' life-setting.[102] As shown by Wansbrough, the *sīra nabawiyya* encompasses some of Andre Jolles' "simple forms" (*einfache Formen*), each of which is characterized by a specific "mental disposition"[103] (*Geistesbeschäftigung*) and "verbal gesture" (*Sprachgebärde*).[104] To take two pertinent examples: The "legend" (*Legende*) reflects the need for heroic ideals and models, with its mental disposition being *imitatio* (emulation of shining moral and spiritual examples), and its verbal gesture being the typical constituents of saints' *Vitae*, for example, torture instruments, a heavenly voice, etc. Another form, "saga" (*Sage*), is the result of a

99. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:170; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2:544; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:336.

100. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 3:234, 256; *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*, ed. A. A. Duri and ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 1391 AH), 232. Notably, the crucified body of Mītham al-Tammār (the date seller) is said to have been stolen and subsequently buried by his fellow date sellers (Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 55).

101. George W. Coats, "Genres: Why Should They Be Important for Exegesis," in *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Forms in Old Testament Literature*, ed. George W. Coats, 7–15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 9.

102. Graves, "Form Criticism or a Rolling Corpus," 56.

103. Or "motive" in Wansbrough's rendering (idem, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 33).

104. Ibid., 4; Pavlovitch, "The *Sīra*," 69.

preoccupation with family, tribe, and blood kinship, with its characteristic *Sprachgebärde* being, for instance, the issue of inheritance.[105]

However, classifying a narrative under such common generic taxonomies is not always a straightforward practice. Aside from the morphological criteria, there are subtler factors that must likewise be taken into consideration (of particular significance among which is the abovementioned *Geistesbeschäftigung*).[106] The task becomes all the more challenging in the discipline of Islamic historiography, where the character of the *sīra*'s *Sitz* has brought about a situation in which the genres are not always neatly demarcated.[107] Thus, we see that a not insignificant portion of the miracles (the distinguishing feature of *Legende* in Jolles' definition) are recounted with the purpose of promoting familial and/or tribal glory. This holds true for both the miracles performed by the Prophet to show a Companion's merits and the miracles performed by the Companions themselves. Naturally, such *faḍāʾil* tales are quite often replete with episodes featuring "the abolition of the boundary between the supernatural and the natural,"[108] and they fully adopt the verbal gesture of *Legende*, but in doing so the mental disposition of *imitatio* is either absent or very tenuous. Rather, *Geistesbeschäftigung* of clan and consanguinity remains dominant in many of these *faḍāʾil* materials.[109] The *sīra*'s "extensive use of the basic form of the saga,"[110] along with the frequent occurrence of "family accounts" in the Prophet's biography,[111] have been stressed in previous scholarship. And this is the very point of which we should not lose sight when we want to categorize the *sīra*'s reports (including the ones having supernatural sub-narratives) under the customary typology of narrative forms.

Tellingly, the accounts of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna expeditions gravitate also toward *Sage*, these narratives' inclusion of miraculous scenes and virtue materials notwithstanding. As we shall see, both internal and external evidence testifies that the issue of family and

105. See André Jolles, *Simple Forms*, trans. Peter J. Schwartz (London: Verso, 2017), 19–67. On *Legende* see also Edgar V. McKnight, *What is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 24.

106. John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20, at 1–2; Rolf Knierim, "Review of *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*, by Klaus Koch," *Interpretation* 24 (1970): 243–8, at 247; Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, 151; Sweeney, "Form Criticism: The Question of the Endangered Matriarchs," 22. Also, see in this regard, Martin J. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in its Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 15–16.

107. On the "overlapping, or intersecting genres" in the Islamic literary tradition, see Nancy Khalek, "'He Was Tall and Slender and His Virtues Were Numerous:' Byzantine Hagiographical *Topoi* and the Companions of Muhammad in Al-Azdī's *Futūḥ al-Shām*," in *Writing "True Stories:" Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou, M. Debié, and H. Kennedy, 105–23 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 110.

108. Dan Ben-Amos, *Narrative Forms in the Haggadah: Structural Analysis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1967), 87. Also cited in Anthony J. Saldarini, "'Form Criticism' of Rabbinic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (1977): 257–74, at 270–1.

109. See Roohi, "Between History and Ancestral Lore," 435–9.

110. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 33; Pavlovitch, "The *Sīra*," 71.

111. Michael Lecker, "The Assassination of the Jewish Merchant Ibn Sunayna According to an Authentic Family Account," in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki, ed. N. Boekhoff-van der Voort, K. Versteegh, and J. Wagemakers,* 181–96 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

tribe was integral in relaying the pious deeds of these stories' martyr-Companions, whose heroic feats were invoked, years after their death, by their offspring during the polemically charged tribal *mufākhara*s in the squares of Medina. Let us start with the hints within the text itself. As is the case with a sizable fraction of the *sīra*, the detailed tribal affiliations of our narratives' *dramatis personae* are introduced at the outset of the tales. It is possible, therefore, to see Khubayb and ʿĀṣim b. Thābit's episodes, for example, as Khubayb and ʿĀṣim's *Sagen*. There is nonetheless more to it than that. The explicit references to the matter of tribe and consanguinity are palpable enough in our reports that they do not escape the notice of even a half-acquainted modern reader (as opposed to the first-century Medinan audiences, who deeply breathed the atmosphere of a tribally segmented society). Thus, in an episode of the Biʾr Maʿūna account, Anas b. Mālik narrates the laudable *Sage* of his uncle (*khāl*), Ḥarām b. Milḥān, and elsewhere there are ample clues in the story that render it a *Sage* of the larger tribal group of Anṣār (known also as "Sons of Qayla").[112] We shall now turn to the historical evidence on our stories' *Sitz* that argues in favor of their identification as *Sage*.

As Juynboll has demonstrated, "most traditions brought into circulation by certain traditionists in early Islam prompted contemporary or later traditionists, who were the adherents or, the case so being, adversaries of the former, to proliferate their own, more or less closely related, traditions."[113] As regards the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna narratives, real-life tribal rivalries have gone hand in hand with the proliferation of *faḍāʾil* motifs in the domain of historiography. What we have here, as will be argued, is a case of back-projection into the Prophet's history of *faḍāʾil* traditions by members of the Aws (more precisely, the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf subdivision) and the Khazraj (more specifically, the Banū Najjār branch) to bolster their claim of superiority in the formative period of Islam.[114]

Members of the Aws and the Khazraj tribes constituted, as Arafat has observed, the majority amongst the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna expeditions, respectively.[115] The most famous martyrs of al-Rajīʿ, i.e., Khubayb and ʿĀṣim b. Thābit, upon whose characters the sources' glorifying traditions almost exclusively centered, belonged to ʿAmr b. ʿAwf.[116] Similarly, as a

112. See below in this section.

113. Juynboll, "Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj," 193.

114. The Aws and the Khazraj were two major Medinan tribal groups that were called Banū Qayla (after their eponymous mother) in pre-Islamic times, but were designated as the Anṣār ("the helpers") following Muḥammad's immigration to Medina. On the Aws' and the Khazraj's subdivisions, see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 154; Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 5, 7.

115. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 16, 28. Arafat, however, generally speaks of the preponderance of the Aws and the Khazraj in these expeditions and does not refer specifically to Najjār and ʿAmr b. ʿAwf. Moreover, he asserts that "the group [sent to al-Rajīʿ] included none from the Khazraj," which is at odds with the traditional material, for only one member of the Khazraj, i.e., Zayd b. al-Dathinna, was reportedly among the participants of this expedition. On him, see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:170; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 2:553; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), 375.

116. The great reverence shown by the tradition towards ʿĀṣim b. Thābit likely has much to do with his family relations with prominent political figures. He was the maternal uncle of ʿĀṣim b. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the latter was the maternal ancestor of the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*,

glance at the biographical sources reveals, the members of the Banū Najjār were noticeably more numerous amongst the participants in the Biʾr Maʿūna raid.[117] It has been reported that: "For no other Companions of his did the Prophet lament as he did for the people of Biʾr Maʿūna (*aṣḥāb Biʾr Maʿūna*)."[118] The pronounced pro-Najjārī/Khazrajī tendency of this tradition comes to light when one takes into account the overwhelming numerical preponderance of the Najjār (and the Khazraj in general) at the day of Biʾr Maʿūna. Moreover, of the Companions whose alleged great exploits are recounted in the reports of Biʾr Maʿūna, two Khazrajīs, namely Ḥarām b. Milḥān (of the Najjār) and al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr (of the Sāʿida with maternal kinship with the Najjār[119]) take centre stage. The virtues of the so-called *qurrāʾ* (reciters) who were slain at Biʾr Maʿūna have been reported in various *sīra*s and *ḥadīth* collections on the authority of Anas b. Mālik, himself a Najjārī, who held these *qurrāʾ*, most particularly his uncle (*khāl*), Ḥarām b. Milḥān, in great esteem.[120] Having been raised to the status of saint-like figures, the *qurrāʾ* are described in the following terms:

> When it was evening they would gather on a side of Medina, studying together and praying, until it was dawn. They would gather fresh water and firewood and bring it to the rooms of the Messenger of God. Their families thought that they were in the mosque, while the people in the mosque thought that they were with their families.[121]

The other participant of Biʾr Maʿūna to be highly venerated in the tradition is al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr, to whom the Prophet is said to have given the epithet *al-muʿniq li-yamūt*, "The quick to seek death (viz., martyrdom)."[122]

It should be clear by now that the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf and Banū Najjār played the most active part at al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna respectively, or, at any rate, the tradition tended to single them out for extravagant praise. We may reasonably assume, therefore, that later tradents from these tribes would have incorporated similar *faḍāʾil* motifs into their al-Rajīʿ and

3:11; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 1:428; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab*, 152; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:253; Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 129). ʿĀṣim b. ʿUmar's mother, Jamīla bt Thābit is reported to have divorced ʿUmar and married a man from her own clan (Ḍubayʿa b. Zayd of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf) named Yazīd b. Jāriya. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz seems to have been on good terms with some of his maternal kin from Ḍubayʿa b. Zayd, as he appointed ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yazīd b. Jāriya (i.e., the maternal brother of ʿĀṣim b. ʿUmar) as the *qāḍī* of Medina (Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:62; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* [Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984], 6:267).

117. As far as this author was able to count in various biographical compendia, there were fourteen Najjārī participants at Biʾr Maʿūna. They can be said to have clearly outnumbered the members of other tribes viz., Nabīt of the Aws (with three participants), Sāʿida of the Khazraj (one), Zurayq of the Khazraj (four), ʿAmr b. ʿAwf of the Aws (two, including a member and a client), and the Muhājirūn (four). While this reckoning makes no claim for exhaustiveness, it sufficiently demonstrates the numerical majority of the Najjār (and also the Khazraj in general) in comparison with other tribes at Biʾr Maʿūna.

118. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:111; Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *al-Maghāzī*, 110. See also al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:345.

119. See Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 15.

120. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:270; Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *al-Maghāzī*, 110; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 3:390; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6:45.

121. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:169.

122. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:184; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:348.

Biʾr Maʿūna accounts to articulate the notion that their tribal background was no less praiseworthy than that of their rivals. Remarkably, the tribally motivated concoction of the analogous "virtue" material in the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories is not a mere supposition implied by the sources, as there is direct evidence that one of the Companions to whom the accounts of these expeditions ascribe spectacular feats and great miracles is in fact the very figure whose name is invoked elsewhere in the context of Aws–Khazraj, Anṣār–Quraysh, and Muḍar–Yemen,[123] disputations and *mufākhara*s, where each tribal entity strives to eulogize their ancestors, and in doing so, to substantiate their superior status at the dawn of Islam. Undoubtedly, this kind of representation by the traditionists of the past was in line with, and hence deeply tinged by, their contemporary needs and concerns. Put another way, one of the manifestations of sectarian feuds at the time of the *sīra*'s collection and compilation (the late first and early second centuries of the Islamic era) was the attribution by differing factions of extraordinary *faḍāʾil* to their progenitors and bragging about these alleged virtues in the face of the opposing party. Perusal of these *mufākhara* materials is revealing in terms of the elucidation of the true nature of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories. It is reported that:

> The Aws and the Khazraj boasted over one another (*iftakharat al-Aws wa-l-Khazraj*). The Aws said, "From us is Ḥanẓala b. Abī ʿĀmir, the one washed by the angels (*ghasīl al-malāʾika*), and from us is the one protected by the wasps (*man ḥamathu al-dabr*, i.e.,ʿĀṣim b. Thābit),[124] and from us is the one at whose death the throne shook (Saʿd b. Muʿādh) and from us is the one whose testimony was equivalent to the testimonies of two men (Khuzayma b. Thābit)." The Khazraj then said, "From us are the four men who collected the Qurʾān during the lifetime of the Prophet: Ubayy b. Kaʿb, Muʿādh b. Jabal, Zayd b. Thābit, and Abū Zayd."[125]

The symbolic scene of the Aws' invocation of, among others, ʿĀṣim b. Thābit in front of their arch-rivals, the Khazraj, contains a valuable clue as to the significance for the Aws of this figure in the context of their rivalries with the Khazraj.[126] It is worth highlighting that

123. The Islamic genealogists categorize the Arabs as the sons of Ismāʾīl (northerners) and the sons of Qaḥṭān (southerners). The latter group was also referred to as *al-Yamaniyya* (Yemenis). Of the northerners, the most prominent subdivision was the progeny of one of Ismāʾīl's descendants named Muḍar. The Qaysiyya, the descendants of Qays, one of Muḍar's offspring, also received specific attention in the sources, see Patricia Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?" *Der Islam 71, no.* 1 (1994): 1–57, at 2.

124. He is reported as saying in his last moments, "O God, I defended your religion from the first light, so protect my flesh at the end of the day." In fulfillment of his aspiration, God sends a swarm of wasps to prevent the polytheists from getting access to his body; see al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:174.

125. This tradition appears with minor variants in al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd (Beirut: 1404 AH), 4:10; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 1:382; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 5:128; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 16:368.

126. There is ample evidence that the pre-Islamic Aws-Khazraj feuds endured well into the Islamic period; see Hasson, "Contributions à l'étude des Aws et des Ḫazraǧ," 29–31. See also Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 3:29, where the renowned singer of the Umayyad period, Ṭuways (d. 92/711), is said to have renewed by his provocative verses the hostilities between the Aws and the Khazraj. It is by no means surprising, then, that such a drawn-out conflict would have left its vestiges on the

among the Companions mentioned in this tradition, both the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf and Najjār have two representatives. ʿĀṣim and Ḥanẓala belonged to the former, and Ubayy b. Kaʿb and Zayd b. Thābit were from the latter.[127] No doubt, these invocations were intended to resonate with, and had a clear meaning for, their contemporary Medinan audiences.

Some genealogical remarks would be useful here to explicate the tribal interests behind the aggrandizement of ʿĀṣim and Ḥanẓala, and also Khubayb. ʿĀṣim b. Thābit belonged to the Ḍubayʿa b. Zayd clan of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf. Of the same clan was Ḥanẓala al-Ghasīl, who was also ʿĀṣim b. Thābit's maternal uncle.[128] Given the prominence of matrilineal ties in Arabian society,[129] it is easy to see why the names of ʿĀṣim b. Thābit and Ḥanẓala al-Ghasīl came to be so firmly associated with each other in the tradition. The renowned Anṣārī poet of the Umayyad period, al-Aḥwaṣ (d. ca. 105/723), who was of ʿĀṣim b. Thābit's progeny,[130] boasts in a poem of his "father" (i.e.,ʿĀṣim) "whose flesh the wasps protected" and of his "uncle" (*khāl*) "who was washed by the angels."[131] Tellingly, ʿĀṣim b. Thābit's wife was of the Banū Jaḥjabā, a clan of the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf, of which Khubayb was a member.[132] Due to the bonds of kinship on both the maternal and paternal side, ʿĀṣim b. Thābit's offspring had ample reason to extol ʿĀṣim and Khubayb, leaving us with an image of saintly martyrs whose historical characters have been buried underneath the overlays of pious inventions.

What renders the hypothesis of the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār rivalry all the more tenable is the fact that the parallelism in the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories is not the sole example of these tribes' vying with one another in the realm of literature. There are more instances of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār polemics, including their both claiming one and the same "virtue" for their own tribe. The identification of the mosque alluded to in Q 9:108 ("the mosque founded upon god-fearing"), as Lecker aptly notes, has provoked considerable controversy amongst "the Aws and Khazraj, or perhaps more specifically, the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf and the Najjār." The mosque in question, according to the "Aws/ʿAmr b. ʿAwf claim," is the Qubāʾ mosque,

historiography of formative Islam.

127. On ʿĀṣim and Ḥanẓala's lineage, see, for example, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 2:779, and Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 1:543; and on Ubayy and Zayd, see Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 1:65, and Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 2:126.

128. See Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab*, 333.

129. On the somewhat undervalued "significance of matrilineal kinship and marital links," see Asad Q. Ahmed, *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Ḥijāz: Five Prosopographical Case Studies* (Oxford: Prosopographica et Genealogica, 2011), 12–13. See also Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 273, who observes that "the material on which we are dependent was written down at a time when the patrilineal system had superseded the matrilineal, and that the writers therefore tend to exaggerate the patrilineal features."

130. He was ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿĀṣim b. Thābit; see Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 32:198; al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 4:411; Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarā*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 1:509. On him see also Everett K. Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 4 (1991): 671–93, at 686–92.

131. al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 4:411; al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, ed. M. al-Saqqā (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1403 AH), 2:642.

132. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 3:352; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 32:198. On the "closely-knit" clan of Banū Jaḥjabā, see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 162.

while on the basis of the "Khazraj/Najjār contention" it is none other than "the Mosque of the Prophet, which was on Khazrajī soil." [133]

The roots of the controversy that shrouds the evidence concerning the leadership of the Anṣār at the battle of al-Ḥarra must likewise be sought in ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār antagonism. It is not coincidental that while certain accounts mention ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥanẓala al-Ghasīl (of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf) as commanding the Anṣār, other reports speak of Muḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Ḥazm (of Najjār) as having been the Anṣār's commander.[134]

The final, and perhaps most vivid, exemplification of deep-seated ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār rancor lies in the bitter accusation of complicity in the murder of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān leveled by ʿAmr b. ʿAwf against the Najjār. Particularly noteworthy in this respect are the elegies on ʿUthmān, allegedly recited by Ḥassān b. Thābit, the famous poet of the Banū Najjār.[135] In one of these poems, he rebukes his own tribe, the Najjār, for their treachery against ʿUthmān and expressly lauds the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf for "fulfilling their vow" (*awfat Banū ʿAmr b. ʿAwf nadhrahā wa-talawwathat ghadran Banū al-Najjār*).[136] The historical background of the poem is of great importance. The reason for Ḥassān praising ʿAmr b. ʿAwf and lampooning his own tribe is their supposed role in the circumstances surrounding the assassination of the third caliph. During the siege of ʿUthmān, it is reported that al-Zubayr sent his client to the caliph to inform him of his loyalty and that of the Banū ʿAmr b. ʿAwf towards the caliph, and of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf's consent to defend ʿUthmān against the besiegers. The attackers, however, killed ʿUthmān before the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf arrive.[137] The rebels are said to have broken the siege and reached the caliph through the house of ʿUthmān's neighbor, ʿAmr b. Ḥazm (of the Najjār).[138] In another poem, Ḥassān addresses Zayd b. Thābit, the "chief of Banū al-Najjār," and asks him to protect his people from committing a grievous sin (viz., the caliph's murder).[139] Arafat adduces a persuasive body of evidence that calls the

133. Lecker, *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans*, 79.

134. As for ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥanẓala, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 5:324; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:251; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:49; Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der Zweite Bürgerkrieg (680–692)* (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1982), 47. On Muḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Ḥazm, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, n.d.), 5:347; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 9:329. On the contradictory nature of the evidence on the Anṣār's leadership at the battle of al-Ḥarra, see Lecker, *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans*, 111.

135. Ḥassān b. Thābit is the most famous of several Companions reputed for their poetic career. While traditionally known as Muḥammad's "poet laureate," Ḥassān had reportedly attained considerable fame already during the Jāhiliyya, composing panegyrics for the Lakhmid and Ghassānid kings. See Walid Arafat, "Ḥassān b. Thābit," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009).

136. Walid Arafat, "The Historical Background to the Elegies on ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33, no.1 (1970): 276–82, at 277; Ḥassān b. Thābit, *Dīwān,* ed. W. Arafat (London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, 1971), no. CLVII; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 39:542.

137. Arafat, "The Historical Background," 281; Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 105.

138. Ibn Shabba, *Taʾrīkh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1410 AH), 4:1279; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 5:591; Arafat, "The Historical Background," 281; Madelung, *The Succession*, 128, 374.

139. Arafat, "The Historical Background," 277.

ascription of these poems to Ḥassān into question. According to Arafat, the forger betrays his ulterior intentions when he forgets "how illogical it would be for Ḥassān to slander his own tribe so viciously on such feeble grounds, to praise an Awsite clan without a very good cause."[140] It is almost certain that the panegyric poetry in praise of the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf is not recited by the Najjārī Ḥassān, but by a forger from ʿAmr b. ʿAwf, who shows his hand by the fulsome admiration he expresses for his own clan. This artificial glorification of the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf by Ḥassān is likewise discernable in the narratives of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna, which are embellished by a large number of Ḥassān's tragic elegies on Khubayb, a man of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf with no kinship to the poet, but contain *only* "one line in one poem" in lamentation of al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr, a man from the Khazraj who was Ḥassān's maternal cousin.[141]

The true provenance of the elegies on ʿUthmān is unveiled by a vituperative poem composed by al-Aḥwaṣ, ʿAmr b. ʿAwf's famous poet. He says: "Do not be moved with pity for a Ḥazmī if you see poverty in him or even if the Ḥazmī has been thrown into the fire. Those who pricked the mule of Marwān at Dhū Khushub, the invaders of ʿUthmān's house."[142] Thus the very allegation of treachery that (Pseudo-)Ḥassān makes against the Banū Najjār (more specifically against the Ḥazmīs) is the central thread of al-Aḥwaṣ' satiric verse. This does not seem to leave room for doubt that the severe reprimand that the Najjār receive in the elegies on ʿUthmān is to be attributed to a forger from the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf,[143] who simply put his words into the mouth of the prestigious poet of the Banū Najjār, Ḥassān b. Thābit.[144]

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140. Ibid., 282.

141. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 19.

142. al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 29, *Al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī: A.D. 763–786/A.H. 146–169*, trans. Hugh Kennedy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 125. The poem is attested likewise in al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 1:54; Ibn Shabba, *Taʾrīkh al-Madīna*, 4:1279.

143. Some (though not all) of the sources maintain that these verses belonged originally to a poet of Tamīm whose poem Ḥassān ascribed to himself (*tanaḥḥala*); see, for example, Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 39:542. However, it is hardly credible that a Tamīmī poet would have engaged in polemical controversies between the Medinan tribes. This is hardly what one would envisage as regards Arabian tribal society. Given that these verses tally perfectly with the late first-/seventh-century satiric poems recited by a member of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf to denigrate the Banū Najjār, it makes much more sense to attribute them to a later source belonging to the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf tribe.

144. On the traces of professional forgeries in the *sīra*'s poems, attributed to various early Islamic figures, including Ḥassān, see Walid Arafat, "An Aspect of the Forger's Art in Early Islamic Poetry," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28, no. 3 (1965): 476–82, at 478; idem, "The Historical Significance of Later Anṣārī Poetry – I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, no. 1 (1966): 1–11. Towards the end of his review of the edition of Ḥassān b. Thābit's *Dīwān* edited by Arafat, Kister offers some critical hints on Arafat's assessment of Anṣārī poetry. While Kister's criticism is on the whole justifiable, one of the points he raises deserves comment. He asserts that "a poem that contains boasting with regard to the ancestors of the Anṣār does not necessarily indicate that the poem is forged" (Meir Jacob Kister, "On a New Edition of the Dīwān of Ḥassān b. Thābit," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 [1976]: 265–86, at 284–6). *A priori*, there would seem to be no reason to impugn Kister's contention. However, this essay's negative observations, along with some recent critical studies on tribal/family accounts, appear to offer no room for charitable reading of the tribal and family traditions in general, and of the Anṣārī poetry in particular; see, for instance, Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's *Sīra*," 337–8, and Roohi, "Between History and Ancestral Lore," 425–72, esp. 454–64.

Worth pondering here is the fact that al-Aḥwaṣ was on decidedly acrimonious terms with Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Ḥazm, the *qāḍī* and governor of Medina.[145] Al-Aḥwaṣ is said to have frequently expressed his invective against Ibn Ḥazm by calling him "Ibn Ḥazm b. Fartanā" (Fartanā was reportedly a prostitute during the pre-Islamic era),[146] and Ibn Ḥazm is reported to have given al-Aḥwaṣ one hundred lashes, poured oil on his head, and paraded him in humiliation before the populace of Medina. The antagonism between al-Aḥwaṣ and his "inveterate enemy," Ibn Ḥazm, reached its climax when the latter sent al-Aḥwaṣ into a five-year exile on the Red Sea island of Dahlak, at the end of which Caliph Yazīd II pardoned him due to the intervention of al-Zuhrī, the well-known partisan of the Umayyads.[147] This conflict appears to have had far-reaching consequences and to have continued unabated up until the caliphate of al-Manṣūr. A Medinan deputation received by al-Manṣūr in Baghdad is said to have included "a young man of the descendants of ʿAmr b. Ḥazm" who brings his complaint to the caliph, saying, "O Commander of the Faithful, al-Aḥwaṣ recited a poem about us[148] and we were deprived of our wealth sixty years ago because of it." Al-Manṣūr orders him to read the poem and is finally persuaded to return the estates of the Banū Ḥazm.[149] In reviling the Banū Ḥazm for their alleged involvement in ʿUthmān's murder, al-Aḥwaṣ can be said to have looked at the past from the viewpoint of the present. As a historical testimony, al-Aḥwaṣ's verses are, then, more informative about the sectarian strife of the late first/seventh century than the first half of the century. Similarly, it seems highly likely that these very same ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār polemics can be seen in the formation of the parallel virtue motifs that are projected back to the events of the Prophet's era, the raids of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna.

Though initially intended as Aws–Khazraj polemics, the invocation of the martyrs of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna and description of their extraordinary merits transcended the

145. A descendant of the Companion ʿAmr b. Ḥazm, who was faced with the charge of treachery against ʿUthmān, Abū Bakr b. Ḥazm was the *qāḍī* of Medina during the caliphate of Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik. When ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz succeeded to the caliphate, he appointed Abū Bakr as governor. On this figure, see Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: l'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 310; Steven C. Judd, *Religious Scholars and the Umayyads: Piety-minded Supporters of the Marwānid Caliphate* (London: Routledge, 2014), 153–4; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:335–6; and Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab*, 348.

146. See Michael Lecker, "'ʿAmr ibn Ḥazm al-Anṣārī and Qurʾān 2,256: 'No Compulsion is there in Religion'," *Oriens* 35 (1996): 57–64, at 58; al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 4:419.

147. Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," 687; Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet*, 56; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 32:208; al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 4:427. It is probably not accidental that the same al-Zuhrī, as recent research has demonstrated, had the leading role in the dissemination of the al-Rajīʿ story: see Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 718; Boekhoff-van der Voort, "The Raid of the Banū Hudhayl," 305–82. After all, the narratives of al-Rajīʿ were an important part of the ancestral pride of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf, with whom the caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had family ties. It is not hard to envisage that the ardent supporter of the Umayyads, al-Zuhrī, would have been behind the admiration of the Umayyad caliph's maternal kin. On al-Zuhrī's adherence to the Umayyads, see Michael Lecker, "Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41, no. 1 (1996): 21–63; Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 73–6; Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith*, 132–7.

148. i.e., the above-quoted poem accusing them of ʿUthmān's murder

149. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* (trans. Kennedy), 29:125.

boundaries of intra-Medinan tribal disputes, gaining special prominence in the wider polemical context, the Anṣār–Quraysh and Muḍar–Yemen *mufākhara*s. Despite the active part they played during Muḥammad's days, the Anṣār never achieved political power comparable to that of the Quraysh in the decades after the Prophet's death.[150] It was only in the realm of the *ḥadīth* and the *sīra* that the Anṣār strove to secure their share of glory.[151] It is reported, via Baṣran *isnād*s,[152] that no single Arabian tribe (*ḥayyan min aḥyāʾ al-ʿArab*) had more martyrs than the Anṣār, of whom seventeen were slain at the day of Uḥud, seventeen at the day of Biʾr Maʿūna, and seventeen at the day of Yamāma.[153] To substantiate their claim to leadership of the Islamic community after the Prophet's death, the Anṣār purportedly boasted in the Hall (*saqīfa*) of the Banū Sāʿida of their most influential figures, amongst whom are numbered the names of "the one whose flesh the wasps protected" and "the one washed by the angels."[154] It is these very martyrs whose names are invoked in a gathering held in Caliph al-Saffāḥ's palace, where the members of Muḍar and Yemen enumerated their ancestor's glorious feats.[155]

Shared Episodes in Accounts of al-Rajīʿ and Umayyad-era Movements: Literary Form and Life-Setting

As is the case with the great bulk of the *sīra* material, the narratives of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna are of a heterogonous nature, with each portion being of its own provenance and having its own ulterior motives.[156] The parallelism between al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna, and in ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār polemics discussed so far pertains to the first half of the al-Rajīʿ story, viz., prior to Khubayb's captivity. The imprisonment of Khubayb is something of a turning point in the al-Rajīʿ narratives, as from this point onwards, the story bears many more parallels with reports of Umayyad-era revolts than the account of Biʾr Maʿūna. From Arafat's

150. Aside from some notable examples like Zayd b. Thābit and Muḥammad b. Maslama, the number of Anṣār who enjoyed great political prominence or had close ties to the Qurashī ruling circle was demonstrably exiguous. Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Ḥazm, the grandson of the Companion ʿAmr b. Ḥazm, was the first among the Anṣār to be appointed as governor (Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet*, 41). The scarcity of the Anṣār among those whose names are reported as Medinan estate owners in the Umayyad era is bitterly ironic, and perhaps equally striking is that when we sporadically hear of an Anṣārī's land ownership, it is in the context of such staunch partisans of the Umayyads as Abū Bakr b. Ḥazm, whose landholding is known to us only in the context of the confiscation of his estates by al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik; see Harry Munt, "Caliphal Estates and Properties around Medina in the Umayyad Period," in *Authority and Control in the Countryside: From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (Sixth-Tenth Century)*, ed. A. Delattre, M. Legendre, and P. Sijpesteijn, 432–63 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 435.

151. See Juynboll, "Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj," 206; Arafat, "The Historical Significance of Later Anṣārī Poetry – I," 1–3.

152. On Basra as the "bulwark of Anṣār-supported traditions" see Juynboll, "Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj," 212.

153. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:350; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:38; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:277.

154. al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, ed. Y. al-Jubūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 45.

155. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 16:105. On the antagonism between Muḍar and Yemen, see Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 53–55, 73–76; Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?".

156. Cf. Pavlovitch, "The *Sīra*," 66.

standpoint, it was Shīʿī or Shīʿī-sympathizer traditionists "who saw the parallel between the killing and crucifixion of Khubayb and the sufferings of the various descendants of ʿAlī."[157] But, as already shown here, the narrative motifs that fashion Khubayb's tale have parallels outside the corpus of the Shīʿī tradition. One cannot, therefore, assign a specific role to the Shīʿīs for "canonizing" the Anṣārī martyr, Khubayb. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that parallelism in the genre of *faḍāʾil*, which means the attribution of one and the same "virtue" to different individuals, is shaped mostly in polemical milieus. It is highly implausible, therefore, that a Shīʿī narrator would have utilized the very martyrological motifs used of al-Ḥusayn and Zayd b. ʿAlī (with their extreme sensitivity in Shīʿī eyes) to embroider the story of Khubayb.

There is evidence to the effect that the *faḍāʾil* of both Anṣārī and Shīʿī martyrs were sometimes recounted in polemical milieus, central in which was the issue of ancestral pride.[158] For example, al-Aḥwaṣ is reported to have once been in Sukayna bt al-Ḥusayn's presence when they heard the chanting of the *adhān* (call to prayer). When the *muʾadhdhin* said: "I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God," she started boasting about her illustrious pedigree, which prompted al-Aḥwaṣ to praise his forefather and uncle, i.e.,ʿĀṣim b. Thābit and Ḥanẓala al-Ghasīl (*fakharat Sukayna bi-l-nabī fa-fākharahā bi-jaddihi wa-khālihi*).[159] This makes it clear that the mental preoccupation behind the ʿĀṣim-venerating episode of the al-Rajīʿ story is consanguinity and blood relationship, and that one may safely speak here of ʿĀṣim's *Sage* (despite the abundance in his story of miraculous happenings).

Of note in this context is also a piece of evidence preserved by al-Ṭabarī. According to him, when Zayd b. ʿAlī's head was brought to Medina, an Anṣārī poet recited in front of it: "O violator of the covenant, rejoice in what has brought you disaster! You have violated the trust and the covenant. You are steeped in wrongdoing. Satan has broken faith over what he promised you."[160] Therefore, the correspondence between Khubayb's heart-rending tale and the (pro-)ʿAlid rebels' tragic dramas seems to owe its existence, *pace* Arafat, to pro-Anṣārī tradents, not to the "Shīʿītes or narrators with Shīʿī tendencies."[161] Given the wide cluster of common themes used by Muslim and non-Muslim sects to "lionize their martyred heroes,"[162] it would seem safer to suppose that the literary character of the Anṣārī

157. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 30.

158. Though the pro-ʿAlid leaning was discernable amongst the Anṣār as early as the Rāshidūn caliphate, they were in no way unanimous in backing the ʿAlids. On the Anṣārīs who did not give their allegiance to ʿAlī, see Maya Yazigi, "ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and the Anṣār: The Issue of Succession," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 53, no. 2 (2008): 279–303, at 302.

159. al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 4:417. Even if we tend not to take the anecdote's finer points of detail at face value, the wider context that the account takes for granted, i.e., the Shīʿī–Anṣārī polemical encounter, sounds historical.

160. al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 26, *The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate: Prelude to Revolution, A.D. 738–745/A.H. 121–127*, trans. Carole Hillenbrand (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 52.

161. Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 30.

162. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam*, 251. Also see in this respect, Khalek, "'He Was Tall and Slender,'"

martyr of the al-Rajīʿ story has its provenance in the martyrological materials which were in vogue equally amongst non-Muslims and Muslims, including (but not exclusively) the Shīʿīs.

A Diachronic Assessment of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna Accounts

The oral tales of those massacred at al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna, as recounted in the quarters of Medina by the events' contemporaries, seem to have little to do with the elaborate written accounts of the second/eighth- and third/ninth-century biographers of the Prophet. The analysis of the historical evolution of a narrative is one of form criticism's essential functions, for which some criteria have been postulated. It is conventionally presumed, for instance, that the more concise texts are the earlier ones.[163] Additionally, more archaic recensions are often assumed to be profane in character, leaving more questions unanswered, more critical points unexplained, and more problematic matters exposed. Eventually, though, the equivocal points are elucidated, and problematic facts are glossed over in more recent texts in response to changing life-settings and emerging ideological or apologetic needs.[164]

It is noticeable that both the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories underwent a metamorphosis from utterly mundane accounts to highly embellished hagiographies and martyrologies. For both expeditions, there are two rival depictions of the event at work—one calling the participants mere scouting contingents (*ʿuyūn*) and the other introducing them as "holy bands" dispatched for proselytizing purposes. The former version of both stories appears to be the archaic stratum of our extant material. Regarding al-Rajīʿ, the account attributed to ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr simply states that "the Messenger of God sent the companions of al-Rajīʿ as spies to Mecca to inform him of the Quraysh. They went towards al-Najdiyya until they reached al-Rajīʿ, where the Banū Liḥyān confronted them."[165] This report fulfills virtually all the criteria: it is truly succinct and demonstrably mundane, and must be very close to the "original" story. Here, there is no mention whatsoever of the martyrs' extraordinary feats, nor do we even hear of the mere idea of their proselytizing mission or the mendacious ʿAḍal and al-Qāra, let alone Khubayb's miracles and pietistic deeds.[166] ʿUrwa's account is also

105–23.

163. See Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, 126; Graves, "Form Criticism or a Rolling Corpus," 55. However, this is not always the case with the Islamic literary tradition: see Pavel Pavlovitch, "Dating," in *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith*, ed. D. W. Brown, 113–32 (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 122–3.

164. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. W. L. Jenkins (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1972), 227–8; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 161; Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*,122–7; Graves, "Form Criticism or a Rolling Corpus," 55.

165. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:173. See also Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *al-Maghāzī*, 60, where the members of the expedition are said to have been spies.

166. On the archaic style of a portion of the traditions ascribed to ʿUrwa, see Andreas Görke, "Prospects and Limits," 145–6. On the "matter-of-fact" fashion of ʿUrwa's epistles, see Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 287.

opaque in many respects, noteworthy among which is the actual reason behind Hudhayl's deep hostility towards the Muslims. Our earlier evidence's silence notwithstanding, al-Wāqidī avers that in slaying the Muslims at al-Rajīʿ, the Hudhalīs actually took vengeance for their leader, Sufyān b. Khālid, who had been assassinated at the Prophet's instigation. Here, the historically questionable murder of Sufyān b. Khālid[167] functions as a pseudo-cause to explain what earlier versions of the al-Rajīʿ massacre left unresolved. But the hasty and superficial link al-Wāqidī created between the massacre of al-Rajīʿ and the assassination of Sufyān b. Khālid (which seems to be grounded on nothing beyond the mere common Hudhalī affiliations of the actors of two entirely separate stories) placed him, as we have seen, in an obvious predicament, eventuating an overt inconsistency in his chronology of the Prophet's expeditions.

The crucifixion of Khubayb also deserves particular attention. As emphasized by previous scholarship, the crucifixion did not appear in al-Zuhrī's account of Khubayb's execution, which says merely that the Meccans "killed him (*qatalahu*)."[168] This stands in stark contrast to Ibn Isḥāq's "acute focus on the details and narratives of Khubayb's death."[169] In his *Crucifixion and Death*, Anthony sets out to appraise the authenticity of the reports of early-Islamic crucifixions, whose "most vivid example" is the case of Khubayb. The *sīra*'s source-critical problems, however, do not allow Anthony to reach a firm conclusion. Though seeing in the *sīra* "a wealth of archaic data" and assigning the reports of Khubayb's crucifixion to "the earliest, initial strata of the genre," Anthony concedes the possibility of "anachronistic embellishments in the Khubayb story." Khubayb's tale, he says, tallies with the "normative descriptions" of crucifixion as detailed by late-Umayyad and early-Abbasid jurists. Not only do the finer minutiae of the story of Khubayb's death sound highly suspicious, but the sources do not permit Anthony to acknowledge even the historicity of "the raw 'fact'" of Khubayb's crucifixion.[170]

The form-critical analysis undertaken in the present essay may allow us to make a somewhat more confident contention concerning the historical value of reports of Khubayb's crucifixion. It has been argued that the accounts of Khubayb's imprisonment and death are an amalgamation of the motifs found in the stories of the insurrections that happened during the Umayyad caliphate. That the crucifixion episode, the apex of Khubayb's story, does not feature in the version of al-Zuhrī cannot be a fortuitous coincidence. The construction of the al-Rajīʿ story was an ongoing process of augmentation, commencing in the form of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr's matter-of-fact account, to which significant additions were subsequently made over the course of time. It is not unexpected, then, that the crucifixion motif made its way to Ibn Isḥāq's *sīra* after the death of al-Zuhrī in 124/742,[171]

167. See Roohi, "Between History and Ancestral Lore," 458–9.

168. Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 36; Boekhoff-van der Voort, "The Raid of the Banū Hudhayl," 372.

169. Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 36.

170. Ibid., 37.

171. And most probably before Ibn Isḥāq left his native Medina at the beginning of the Abbasid caliphate (given the Medinan/pro-Anṣārī character of the al-Rajīʿ story).

the year preceding Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik's (r. 105-125/723–43) death.[172] Turning to look at the historical circumstances during the time of and immediately following al-Zuhrī's death would be revealing, as the events occurring in this period might have been mirrored in the al-Rajīʿ story.

Hishām's two-decade-long reign witnessed a considerable number of insurgents' crucifixions. The Qadarī heretic Ghaylān of Damascus was crucified sometime between 115/733 and 117/735.[173] Zayd b. ʿAlī met a similar fate a couple of years later.[174] Zayd's rebellion against the Umayyads' authority was remarkable enough to end up even in non-Muslim sources. Agapius of Manbij and Elias of Nisibis allot a very terse entry to Zayd's revolt, but the event receives more detailed treatment in the Syriac *Chronicle of 1234* in which, aside from the chronological hints, we hear of the disloyalty of Zayd's entourage (*ḥaḏ men aylēn d-sām ʿammeh tanway lā ʿaḏreh)* and the disgraceful nature of the Umayyads' deed of slaying a man who was a descendant of their own Prophet (*men šarbṯēh da-nḇīyā dīlhun Muḥammad*).[175] Moreover, according to the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, it was during Hishām's caliphate that an imposter (*maṭʿyānā*) named Severus[176] appeared in the West (*arʿā d-maʿrḇā*) and seduced many Jews. This false messiah is reported to have been crucified by the consent of the caliph at the hands of his former supporters who "made him suffer all kinds of tortures and injuries (*koll šendē wa ulṣānē*)."[177] Some other well-known rebels were crucified in the period between the caliphate of Hishām's successor, al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125-126/743-744), and the end of Umayyad dynasty in 132/750. Yaḥyā b. Zayd, Judayʿ b. ʿAlī al-Kirmānī, and the Khārijī rebel Abū Ḥamza are but certain noteworthy examples.[178] To this list we may add David of Dwin who, though being crucified some twenty years before the beginning of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik's caliphate, is nonetheless of particular concern to

172. That is perhaps why the narratives of Khubayb's crucifixion tallies precisely with "the trending normative descriptions in the discussions of crucifixion in Islamic legal discourse" (Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 36).

173. Anthony, *Crucifixion*, 76.

174. Zayd's crucifixion has variously been dated by the chroniclers between 120/738 and 122/740 (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 7:160; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:251; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, 3:206), and al-Zuhrī's death is reported to have been in 124/742 (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh* [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995], 231; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 10:48; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:356).

175. Agapius of Menbij, *Kitāb al-ʿunwān*, ed. and trans. Alexander Vasiliev (Turnhout: Brepols, 1912), 509; Elias of Nisibis, *Eliae Metropolitae Nisibeni, opus chronologicum*, ed. E. W. Brooks and J. B. Chabot (Paris: n.p., 1909–10), 2:168; J. B. Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum 1234, CSCO 81* (Paris: L'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, 1920), 1:312. Theophilus of Edessa's lost chronicle seems to have been the ultimate source of this account; see Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 235. On "the moral impact" of the killing of Zayd as a descendant of Muḥammad, see Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72.

176. He has been identified by Anthony with the above-mentioned Shepherd of Damascus (Anthony, "Who Was the Shepherd of Damascus?," 46).

177. J. B. Chabot, ed., *Incerti auctoris Chronion Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, *CSCO* 91 (Louvain: Peeters, 1927), 2:174; Amir Harrak, trans., *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn Parts III and IV, A.D. 488–775* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 164.

178. Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 484; Marsham, "Public Execution in the Umayyad Period," 135–6.

us in that his crucifixion account (like that of Zayd b. ʿAlī) had strikingly similar motifs to Khubayb's martyrology.[179]

It is plausible that, inspired by the numerous crucifixions of the rebels of the time, the (pro-)Anṣārī tradents incorporated the crucifixion episode into the story of the historically obscure Khubayb. The participation of Khubayb in the Battle of Badr and his killing of al-Ḥārith b. ʿĀmir (and hence the very "rationale for [Khubayb's] murder") is extremely dubious, as is the "raw" fact of his crucifixion. By contrast, the crucifixions of the famed rebels of the Umayyad time are undoubtedly historical. It makes sense thus to assume that these dissidents' destiny was a source of inspiration for the crucifixion episode in the story of the enigmatic Khubayb. Naturally, the ornate account of Khubayb's crucifixion was unlikely to have appeared in the report of al-Zuhrī, who died right at the time, or rather shortly after, some of these tragic events were unfolding. Some time would have had to pass such that the traditionists, now seeing the late-Umayyad crucifixions in retrospect, recognized these incidents as fitting for the elaboration of the story of al-Rajīʿ. The pious endeavors of the (pro-)Anṣārī tradents blossomed, therefore, in Ibn Isḥāq's recension of Khubayb's narrative.

The accounts of Biʾr Maʿūna seem to have likewise gone through a process of modification and elaboration, changing from a more mundane portrayal to an ideologically embellished report. The Muslim party sent by Muḥammad is said, in some portrayals of the event, to have been "his spy in Najd" (*ʿaynan lahu fī ahl Najd*).[180] The later versions, however, elevate these *ʿuyūn* above the level of ordinary people, representing them as a group of divinely chosen individuals, with the appellation of *qurrāʾ*, who spend the whole night in prayer and provide fresh water for the Prophet at dawn, without any of their contemporaries being aware of their great spiritual eminence.[181] It is in the same spirit of embellishment that the number of Biʾr Maʿūna's victims is rounded up to forty/seventy, as are the numbers of the Anṣārī martyrs in the battles of Uḥud and Yamāma. As opposed to these "appealing numbers,"[182] Muqātil b. Sulaymān's "demonstrably ancient" account speaks of twenty-seven martyrs at Biʾr Maʿūna.[183] These aggrandizing endeavors pertain to a period wherein the members of the Aws and the Khazraj had long ceased to be of political prominence and had nothing to be proud of except the genuine and fictitious glories of their ancestors.[184]

179. According to Sahner, "there is strong internal evidence that the biography [of David] was written shortly after the martyr's death," viz., not too remote from the time when the foregoing late-Umayyad crucifixions had taken place. Sahner argues plausibly that various factions "had recourse to the same hagiographic motifs in order to lionize their martyred heroes" (see Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam*, 93, 251).

180. al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:343; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 26:101; Kister, "Biʾr Maʿūna," 340.

181. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:347; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:235; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 26:102.

182. See Lawrence I. Conrad, "Seven and the Tasbīʿ: On the Implications of Numerical Symbolism for the Study of Medieval Islamic History," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31 (1988): 42–73.

183. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 291. See also al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 3:423, where eighteen of the Anṣār and Muhājirūn are said to have been dispatched to Najd; and Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*, 118, where the author gives the number of the participants as twenty-six from the Anṣār and four from the Muhājirūn.

184. Arafat assigns, rightly it seems, the genesis of the Anṣār aggrandizing traditions to the period following the battle of al-Ḥarra (Arafat, "The Historical Significance of Later Anṣārī Poetry – I," 1).

One of the main alterations introduced in the course of time to the Biʾr Maʿūna story concerns the presence of the Muhājirūn in this expedition, a point that the tradition takes pains to repudiate. Of Muhājirūn participation at Biʾr Maʿūna there is not a word in some early *sīra* compendia, and when this point finally appears in al-Wāqidī's account, it is emphatically rejected by the author who insists that "only the Anṣār were with the raid."[185] Notwithstanding the tendency on the part of the *sīra* scholars to gloss over or reject the participation of the Muhājirūn (most particularly Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ) in Biʾr Maʿūna, their presence in the *sariyya* is confirmed in the *tafsīr* sources. The account given in the *sīra* avers that ʿAmr b. Umayya and a certain Anṣārī did not accompany the main group and "were with the camels at pasture."[186] The *tafsīr* counter-tradition includes Saʿd among those who "lost their camel" (*aḍalla baʿīran lahum*) and "lagged behind" their fellow-Muslims.[187] The statement "leaving behind" in this context must be taken as a euphemistic alternative for "fleeing." As Kister puts it, "Later collections of the *maghāzī* preferred not to mention the version claiming that Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, the first who shed blood for the cause of Islam, the hero of al-Qādisiyya, did not take part in the battle of Biʾr Maʿūna but saved his own life, while the other Companions died the death of martyrs."[188] When it comes to Saʿd's part at Biʾr Maʿūna, we are likely dealing with a literary *topos* that is found in similar form in the account of the raid of Nakhla, in which he and ʿUtba b. Ghazwān are reported to have "left behind" the main party and "lost their camel" (*aḍalla baʿīran lahumā*).[189] Saʿd's "numerous progeny" who left us with a range of "family accounts" on him could be responsible for whitewashing the character of their forebear.[190]

The Massacre Narratives in their Broader Contexts: "New" Form Criticism

The traditional biblical form criticism which was propounded in roughly the middle of the twentieth century later underwent fundamental alterations, culminating in what has now been termed "new" form criticism.[191] As opposed to "old" form criticism's preoccupation with *Sitz im Leben*, the "new" approach is concerned with *Sitz in der Literatur* ("setting in literature"), focusing on the text as it lies before us.[192] To offer an example: while certain versions of the "Ancestress of Israel in Danger" story in Genesis have been classified, on account of their exaltation of YHWH and divine assistance, as *Legende* according to the classic form-critical method,[193] "new" form criticism contends that "the pentateuchal

185. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* (trans. Faizer), 1:173.

186. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 434; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:347.

187. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shaḥāta (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 1423 AH), 1:458; al-Ṭabarānī, *Tafsīr* (Irbid: Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfī, n.d.) 2:367.

188. Kister, "Biʾr Maʿūna," 357.

189. al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:17; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 1:602.

190. See Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 7.

191. Wilson, "New Form Criticism and the Prophetic Literature," 311.

192. Buss, "Goals and Processes of the 'New' Form Criticism," 306; idem, *The Changing Shape of Form Criticism: A Relational Approach* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 191.

193. Sweeney, "Form Criticism: The Question of the Endangered Matriarchs," 22.

narrative [including the "Endangered Matriarch" story] at large must be recognized generically as a saga," as it concentrates on "the formation of the people of Israel."[194]

In a similar vein, the formal character of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories may be determined, on the basis of a "new" form-critical approach, by taking into account the broader literary contexts in which these narratives feature. In other words, whereas tribal feuds played a pivotal part in the formation of narratives of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna expeditions, from the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries onwards the issue of clan and consanguinity ceased to be the main incentive behind the dissemination of these stories. The accounts of these incidents feature in a wide spectrum of sources (including the *sīra nabawiyya*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh* compendia) with variegated editorial policies and concerns on the part of the actual authors in whose compilations the massacre reports have been preserved. In what follows, we shall take a look at the wider contexts of the massacre accounts in different genres of Islamic religious literature, and identify the narratives' formal character and the motivations behind their transmission.

1. The Articulation of the Notion of Martyrdom

Amongst the major impetuses behind the narration in later Muslim collections of massacre stories were the inclusion of moving martyrdom episodes, which abound with flattering portrayals of the martyr-Companions as exempla of both temerity and piety.[195] As committed and God-fearing Muslims, the martyrs are frequently said to have abstained from accepting the polytheists' protection, and to have passionately craved martyrdom.[196] The narratives of al-Rajīʿ include the martyrology of Khubayb, in which many "classical elements" of martyrdom are unmistakably observable.[197] Likewise, the theme of martyrdom is central in the reports of Biʾr Maʿūna, to extent that this massacre is one of the historical events to which "the most famous and often-cited verse (on the concept of martyrdom),"[198] Q 3:169–70,[199] has been attributed by the exegetical sources.[200] Additionally, the story of Biʾr Maʿūna appears in certain *ḥadīth* collections under martyrdom-related rubrics (e.g., *Bāb Faḍl al-shahāda* and *Bāb al-Shahīd*),[201] which shows how integral a theme martyrdom is to

194. Ibid., 25.

195. On the significance of "the Companions as military and spiritual heroes," see Khalek, "'He Was Tall and Slender,'" esp. 106, 108.

196. See above, part three of the section "Parallels between the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna Expeditions."

197. David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 22.

198. Ibid., 18.

199. "Think not of those who are slain in Allāh's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord; They rejoice in the bounty provided by Allāh. And with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them (in their bliss), the (martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve." The translation is by Yūsuf ʿAlī.

200. See, for instance, al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1985), 4:268; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfī, 1422 AH), 3:201.

201. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut: al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī, 1972), 5:267; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūt, (Beirut: n.p., 1993), 10:508.

this story. All such attestations of the massacre reports in Islamic compendia stem from the mental disposition of *imitatio*.[202] In this context, thus, our stories should be categorized generically as *Legende*.

2. The Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa *Material in the Massacre Reports*

The stories of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna were also appealing for tradents on account of the supernatural tales and miraculous happenings whose ultimate function was the veneration of Islam and the verification of Muhammad's prophetic status. This kind of material belongs to the category of "The Signs of Prophecy" (*aʿlām/dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*). Episodes such as the awe-inspiring ascension of ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra's body to the sky, Khubayb eating of heavenly sustenance, the miraculous disappearance of his body, and the protection of ʿĀṣim b. Thābit's corpse by "a swarm of wasps," rendered the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories as perfect materials for the authors of the *dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* compilations.[203] Here, once more, the stories can be classified as *Legende*.

3. The Massacre Reports and the ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān *Genre*

"The Sciences of the Qurʾān" (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*) is another genre within Islamic literature in which the story of Biʾr Maʿūna appears. The account of the *qurrāʾ* slaughtered at Biʾr Maʿūna was much adopted by the authors of *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* and *tafsīr* collections, serving as evidence in favor of the existence in the Prophet's time of people who knew the Qurʾān (or some part thereof) by heart (*ḥamalat al-Qurʾān*).[204] Furthermore, the Biʾr Maʿūna massacre and the verses supposedly revealed on that occasion but which failed to find a place in the final codex are commonly adduced for the articulation of the concept of the Qurʾānic verses' abrogation (*naskh*), i.e., the phenomenon of the supersession of earlier legal norms by means of more recent revelations.[205] The text adopts then the formal character of "case" (*Kasus*), which is concerned with norms and values.[206]

4. The Biʾr Maʿūna Massacre and the Legal Controversies Surrounding the Qunūt

The Biʾr Maʿūna story was of special interest for Muslim scholars in the context of legal discourse over the permissibility or otherwise of the *qunūt* in the daily prayer. In this context, the narrative functions generically as a *Kasus* whose *Geistesbeschäftigung* is weighing actions against norms. One discerns heated discussions among the advocates of different schools as to in which (if any) prayer is the *qunūt* mandatory, where this practice

202. On Companions as "figures worthy of pious emulation," see Khalek, "'He Was Tall and Slender,'" 107.

203. See al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, 3:345; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. Muḥammad Rawwās Qalʿajī and ʿAbd al-Barr ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1986), 1:506–15; al-Maqrīzī, *Imtāʿ al-asmāʾ*, 13:271.

204. al-Zarkashī, *al-Burḥān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1410 AH), 1:336; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī), 1:254.

205. al-Farsī, *al-Ḥujja li-l-qurrāʾ al-sabʿa* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʾmūn li-l-Turāth), 2:201; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:665. See also John Burton, "Abrogation," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J. D. McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–6).

206. Jolles, *Simple Forms*, 124–44.

should be placed in the prayer (before or after the *rukūʿ*), what is the content and wording of the *qunūt*, and so on.[207] Muhammad's alleged cursing of the slayers of the Biʾr Maʿūna martyrs in the *qunūt* of his morning prayers provides a possible precedent for the Islamic community, and has thus occupied an important place in the *qunūt*-related debates in Islamic *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* literature.[208]

5. The Biʾr Maʿūna Massacre and the Expedition against the Banū al-Naḍīr

Perhaps most telling in the context of the present article's critical analysis of the sīra nabawiyya is the way in which the massacre reports are situated in the wider narratives of Muḥammad's life. By the end of the second/eighth century many of the *sīra*'s audiences, based upon the "orthodox" version of the Prophet's biography, must have shared the conviction that the expulsion from Medina of the Jewish tribe of Banū al-Naḍīr occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Biʾr Maʿūna massacre, and that these two events were closely related. During the course of his flight from the watering place at Biʾr Maʿūna to Medina, according to Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī, ʿAmr b. Umayya al-Ḍamrī kills two men of the Banū Kilāb (of Banū ʿĀmir). The Prophet departs for the Banū al-Naḍīr's territory, requesting their assistance for the payment of the Kilābīs' blood money, for the Banū al-Naḍīr were confederates of the Banū ʿĀmir. The Naḍrī Jews allegedly attempt in vain to assassinate Muḥammad (by throwing a stone at him from the top of their forts),[209] and the latter lays siege to their fortresses and expels them from Medina.[210] As vividly as Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī's "orthodox" accounts remember the affair of Biʾr Maʿūna as related to Banū al-Naḍīr's fate, the connection was in no way self-evident during and before al-Zuhrī's time.

Schöller argues, on the basis of *tafsīr* materials, that at a certain stage of the collection of the Prophet's biography, possibly at the end of the first Islamic century, there existed an account of a joint conflict between the Prophet and the Medinan Jews (*yawm Qurayẓa wa-l-Naḍīr*) which Schöller designates the "Qurayẓa-*cum*-Naḍīr" episode. Of this "unorthodox" recension of the Prophet's confrontation with the Jews of Medina a remnant is noticeable in the report of al-Zuhrī, who relays that the Jews of al-Naḍīr asked Muḥammad to attend a meeting in the company of thirty of his entourage, debating there with the Jewish rabbis (who were also thirty in number). The Jews hatch a plot to assassinate the Prophet, who gets wind of their treachery through a Jewish woman from al-Naḍīr. Subsequently, Muḥammad besieges the strongholds of al-Naḍīr, and then of the Qurayẓa (which implies that the latter played some part in the treason), summoning them to the conclusion of a non-agression pact with him. The Qurayẓa agree, but the Banū al-Naḍīr refuse and enter into an armed

207. For useful overviews on the issue and the sources in which these controversies appear, see Kister, "Muḍar," 267–72; Najam I. Haider, "The Geography of the *Isnād*: Possibilities for the Reconstruction of Local Ritual Practice in the 2nd/8th Century," *Der Islam* 90, no. 2 (2013): 306–46, at 329–36.

208. Kister, "Muḍar," 267–8.

209. This is a ubiquitous *topos* in the reports of the Prophet's conflicts with the Medinan Jews: see Marco Schöller, *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie: eine quellenkritische Analyse der Sīra-Überlieferung zu Muḥammads Konflikt mit den Juden* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 266.

210. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:190; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:363–5.

conflict with the Prophet, which results in their defeat and exile.[211] According to Schöller, al-Zuhrī's report (which is confirmed by that of Mūsā b. ʿUqba) preserves vestiges of the archaic Qurayẓa-*cum*-*Naḍīr* recension. And it is noteworthy that neither version speaks whatsoever of the connection between the Biʾr Maʿūna and Banū al-Naḍīr expeditions.[212] In sum, the "orthodox" account of Banū al-Naḍīr may be said to be characterized by several main features: the murder by ʿAmr b. Umayya al-Ḍamrī of the Kilābī men following the Biʾr Maʿūna massacre, the Prophet's seeking help from the Jews as regards the blood money, and the extremely dubious *casus belli* for the al-Naḍīr expedition, namely the ubiquitous *topos* of "throwing a stone" to kill the Prophet.[213] Seen in this light, the historical framework assigned to the Biʾr Maʿūna incident is of key significance for the authors of Muḥammad's "orthodox" biography to achieve their aim of separating the Prophet's expeditions against the Qurayẓa and the Banū al-Naḍīr by an interval of two years.[214]

Conclusion

Reading the *sīra* with intense cognizance of the literary tools used and the impetus behind their deployment carries negative implications for the historicity of the accounts. To recapitulate the results, we have observed that there is a close correspondence between the accounts of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna massacres, and that the former story comprised a wide array of hagiographic motifs shared by many medieval sources, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The close similarities between the massacre reports have their roots in the tribal feuds between the ʿAmr b. ʿAwf of the Aws and the Najjār of the Khazraj. Significantly, the parallelism in the accounts of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna is not the sole manifestation of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf–Najjār polemical encounters. The quintessential example

211. On the Qurayẓa-*cum*-Naḍīr episode and its residues in later accounts, see Marco Schöller, "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr:* Muḥammad al-Kalbī on the Jews of Medina," in *Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Source*s, ed. H. Motzki, 18–48 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 28–34; idem, *Exegetisches Denken*, 273–4. Rizwi Faizer, "Expeditions and Battles," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J. D. McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–6), leans in the same direction. It is interesting to note that some faint echoes of the Qurayẓa-*cum*-Naḍīr episode are yet audible even in the poems quoted by Ibn Isḥāq, which, inconsistent with his prose material, assign the calamity befalling on the Qurayẓa *and* the Naḍīr to Saʿd b. Muʿādh, otherwise known to be the protagonist only of the Qurayẓa incident: "O Saʿd, Saʿd of B. Muʿādh, for what befell Qurayẓa and Naḍīr (*limā laqiyat Qurayẓa wa-l-Naḍīr*)." See Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 713; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:273. See also in this respect, Barakat Ahmad, *Muḥammad and the Jews: A Re-examination* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979), 92.

212. Schöller, "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr*," 33.

213. Interestingly, the cause of war between the Prophet and the Jewish tribe of Banū Qaynuqāʿ is yet another *topos*, that of the sexual harassment by the Jews of a (Muslim) woman (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra*, 2:48; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1:176), the occurrence of which was also reportedly the *casus belli* for the first battle of the so-called sinful wars (*ḥurūb al-fijār*): see Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 145; Schöller, *Exegetisches Denken*, 258.

214. Schöller suggests (not implausibly) that multiplying the incidents in the Prophet's life (here the separation of the Qurayẓa and Naḍīr expeditions) might have been connected to the rise of different legal views on such "vital" matters as "practices of warfare and sharing the booty" (Schöller, "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr*," 42). If this interpretation is correct, then the mental disposition behind placing the Biʾr Maʿūna–Naḍīr episode in their present context is that of norms, which corresponds to the form *Kasus*.

of these tribes' hostile confrontation in the domain of literature is to be found in Pseudo-Ḥassān's elegies on ʿUthmān, in which a versifier with categorical bias in favor of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf carries out a severe verbal assault on the Banū Najjār. As far as can be gleaned from the sources, the descendants of the main actors of al-Rajīʿ had the leading role in chastising the Banū Najjār for their purported culpability in the caliph's murder. Worth recalling is the trenchant satire of al-Aḥwaṣ (the descendant of ʿĀṣim b. Thābit, and Khubayb's fellow-tribesman on the maternal side) against the Najjār on account of their treachery (*ghadr*) against ʿUthmān. Given this active presence of the progeny of al-Rajīʿ victims in hostile encounters with the Najjār, it is entirely conceivable that they themselves would have been behind the significant literary borrowing from the *faḍāʾil* motifs found in the Biʾr Maʿūna story. After all, the descendants of a person have the strongest motivation for extolling their ancestor,[215] and the descendants of the al-Rajīʿ martyrs were no exception. Thus, it seems that we can speak of a period of antagonistic activities on the part of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf (in the realm of literature) against the Najjār,[216] culminating in the dissemination of poems regarding the Najjār's complicity in ʿUthmān's assassination and in the formation of parallelism between the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna accounts. In the latter case, the forgers of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf did their best to include in the al-Rajīʿ story the very *faḍāʾil* material of which the Banū Najjār were so proud. By the third/ninth century, when tribal motivations ceased to be amongst the prime socio-political exigencies of the time, new incentives emerged for the transmission of our narratives, which we have unfolded through assessment of the literary contexts in which the massacre accounts appear.

Form-critical analysis points once more to the fact that traditional Islamic material must be treated, as Noth propounds, as the combination of discrete *Erzählmotive* transferable from one framework to another.[217] This entails adopting "an all-encompassing view of the forms and biases of early Islamic tradition as a whole in order to assess accurately even *one*" event.[218] Due probably to the "preliminary character" of Noth's source-critical studies, his detection of literary *topoi* was limited, for the most part, to the *futūḥ* traditions. As it turned out, the subsequent corpus of scholarship that owed its inspiration to Noth's *Quellenkritische Studien* remained mostly as limited in agenda as Noth's original endeavors, and no comprehensive attempt has been made to identify the literary commonplaces in the *sīra nabawiyya*.[219] In his *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, Donner stresses the usefulness

215. See Lecker, "The Assassination of the Jewish Merchant Ibn Sunayna," 181–96; Chase F. Robinson, "History and *Heilsgeschichte* in Early Islam: Some Observations on Prophetic History and Biography," in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past* 68, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto, 119–50 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 131; Michael Cook, "Muḥammad's Deputies in Medina," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015): 1–67, at 42.

216. The termini of this period cannot be precisely established, but it must have coincided with al-Aḥwaṣ' (d. ca. 105/723) professional career as the well-known poet of Medina, so roughly the last quarter of the first Islamic century.

217. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 109; Noth, "Iṣfahān-Nihāwand," 246–7.

218. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 18.

219. On the studies that were preoccupied with the literary analysis of the *futūḥ* accounts see, for example, Thomas Sizgorich, "'Do Prophets Come with a Sword?' Conquest, Empire, and Historical Narrative in the Early Islamic World," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 993–1015, esp. 995, 1005–7; Chase F. Robinson,

of "a comprehensive catalog of *topoi*" to assess early Islamic *akhbār* but, adds Donner, "little further work on this task has been undertaken since Noth's preliminary listing."[220] Unfortunately, the "comprehensive catalog" proffered by Donner more than two decades ago seems to be still lacking, at least inasmuch as the biography of the Prophet is concerned.[221]

As they stand, the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna stories are "undifferentiated reports" with "no genuine relation to any particular historical event."[222] The narratives are archetypal depictions of failed deputations and, as such, must be taken with a grain of salt. Relevant in this context is the account of the deputation of Ṭayyiʾ, comprised of many elements which feature in the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna accounts: (I) arrival of tribal deputation, (II) *daʿwa* (summons to Islam) made by the Prophet, (III) his premonition that the chief of Ṭayyiʾ, Zayd al-Khayl, might die of the Medina fever, (IV) the deputy departing with a letter documenting a land grant, (V) Zayd's being overcome by fever at a watering place in Najd, and (VI) his poetic last words. Readers with more positivistic leanings may nonetheless be inclined to go beyond mere historiographical assessment of the *sīra*, venturing to reconstruct the general outlines of events. After all "[a] *topos* may very well have a basis in fact, for it is often the case that a *topos* was once securely anchored to real historical referents."[223] A possible reconstruction in the case of the Biʾr Maʿūna event would be that the expedition may have commenced following the Prophet's *daʿwa*, an offer to embrace Islam which, according to Noth/Conrad, "may very well correspond to reality."[224] However, the *sariyya*'s participants were undoubtedly not proselytizers, but envoys to convey the Prophet's letter (documenting land grant to Abū Barāʾ?), a mission Ḥarām b. Milḥān failed to successfully accomplish and for which he was killed by ʿĀmir b. Ṭufayl.[225] Lecker is of the opinion that geography, or more accurately the proximity of the Sulaym's gold mine to Biʾr Maʿūna, could be important to a proper understanding of the expedition. Muḥammad's letter to Abū Barāʾ, according to this interpretation, may be seen as a document intended to secure for Abū Barāʾ the contested rights over Maʿdan Banī Sulaym.[226]

"The Conquest of Khūzistān: A Historiographical Reassessment," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67, no. 1 (2004): 14–39, at 30; Khalek, "'He Was Tall and Slender,'" 118.

220. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 267.

221. Donald P. Little, "Narrative Themes and Devices in al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson, 34–44 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 35, already highlights the necessity of the project of cataloging the *topoi*. On the limited scholarly attempts at identifying the *topoi* in the Prophet's biography see, for instance, Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 269, 271; Lawrence I. Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic Tradition: Some Indications of Intercultural Transmission," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1988): 1–44, 17; Robinson, "History and *Heilsgeschichte*," 141.

222. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 148.

223. Ibid., 109. See also Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (London: Routledge, 2012), 2.

224. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 165.

225. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, 434.

226. Michael Lecker, "Biʾr Maʿūna," in *Encyclopedia of Islam THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

All this said, there is no infallible methodological path from *topoi* to historical realities,[227] and any historical reconstruction undertaken on the basis of literary *topoi*, including the one proposed here, remains hypothetical in nature.

However, thanks to the approach pursued in this study, we are on firmer ground when it comes to separating historical realities from literary *topoi* in the stories of al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna. Hitherto assumed as authentic, such elements of the stories as the religious nature of the expeditions, the crucifixion of Khubayb (and presumably his very incarceration[228]), the supposed part played by the Banū Nawfal in the al-Rajīʿ incident, and the simultaneity of the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna events all seem to be highly dubious, not to say pure invention.[229] Our sources for the al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna raids reflect far more about "the circumstances of [their] composition and redaction" than about first/seventh-century Arabia.[230] Motivated by the second/eighth-century tribal feuds, many components of these narratives owe their existence to later modifications and adornments that were retrojected to the time of the Prophet. Should form-critical analysis be extended to encompass other anecdotes of the *sīra*, we might be able to discover more and more later accretions engendered not only by tribal discord, but also by disputations of other kinds, e.g., political, religious, and legal.[231] Though this method yields, by its nature, results that narrow the margins of our knowledge about the rise of Islam, it remains an indispensable tool for historians of this period who often have to rely heavily, if not exclusively, on literary sources between which and the events they purport to narrate lies a yawning abyss of a century or so in which eyewitness accounts, if they existed at all, would have been contaminated by a gamut of distortions and falsifications.[232]

227. Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 114; Conrad, "Arwād," 322; Pavlovitch, "The *Sīra*," 73.

228. The story of the Hudhalīs selling their captives as slaves to the Meccans is a famous pre-Islamic theme whose occurrence in the al-Rajīʿ account is in danger of being a *topos*, particularly when one takes into account the stereotypical character of Khubayb's story as a whole. See Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 106; Kirill Dmitriev, "Banū Hudhayl," in *Encyclopedia of Islam THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Nathaniel Ashton Miller, "Tribal Poetics in Early Arabic Culture: The Case of *Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016), 172.

229. See Kister, "Biʾr Maʿūna," 342; Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 34; Arafat, "The Development of a Dramatic Theme," 15; Jones, "The Chronology of the Maghāzī," 267, where al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūna are considered roughly simultaneous; Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 33, where the mission is taken as a proselytizing one; Kister, "Biʾr Maʿūna," 356, where Nawfal's role at al-Rajīʿ is accepted as a historical fact; and Keshk, "The Historiography of an Execution," 13, where the author assigns the primary status to Khubayb's story *vis-à-vis* Hujr's.

230. Pavlovitch, "The *Sīra*," 66. See also Ilkka Lindstedt, "'One People to the Exclusion of Others' – Recategorized Superordinate Identity in the Medinan Community," in *The Study of Islamic Origins: New Perspectives and Contexts*, ed. Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen et al., 325–76 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 335, who treats the *sīra*, "for the most part, as part of the social (and mythic) memory of the burgeoning Muslim community."

231. It is worth stressing that this method does not automatically prove the whole *sīra* spurious, but enables us to separate the wheat from the chaff.

232. Cf. Conrad, "Seven and the Tasbīʿ," 42.

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