

Liberty University

**The Aesthetics, Sanctity, and Utility of *Jihad* in the Earliest Biography of
Muhammad**

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Introduction

Jihad as Beautiful, Moral, and Rewarded in *Sirat Rasul Allah*

This paper is an examination of the way *jihad* is portrayed in the earliest surviving biography of Muhammad. *Sirat Rasul Allah* is the oldest most complete biography of Muhammad to which we still have access to today,¹ and in this biography wars, raids, and other violent acts are treated as something that is morally good, beautiful, and rewarded. To engage in violence, war, and raids, on behalf of Allah, is seen as a mark of the pious, courageous, and noble-born. *Jihad*² is also seen as Allah's punishment of the wicked and those who enact *jihad* are depicted as being directly controlled by Allah when partaking in those actions. To avoid engaging in *jihad* is synonymous with being a hypocrite, coward, and base-born. The acts of *jihad* are praised as beautiful throughout the text. Those participating in *jihad* are rewarded both on earth and in heaven.

The praxis and beliefs surrounding *jihad* are complex and interconnected with each other in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. While that might seem daunting, it is worth having a knowledge of what the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* entails as it could serve as a provocative tool for Christian and Islamic apologetics. The arguments in this paper could potentially be used for inter-faith dialogue as they will portray Muhammad and one of Islam's earliest sources as supportive of *jihad*. Through Muhammad's praxis, and the text of the earliest biography on his life, *jihad* will

¹Ishaq's book is the first biography on the life of Muhammad "that has come down to us, not as fragments or extracts but as a whole, though with considerable lacunae," Josef Horowitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020), 75-6, ProQuest Ebook Central. Ibn Ishaq wrote his book for the Abbasid Caliphate, *ibid*,79. He died in the *Hijri* year 150-51, *ibid*. That would put his death around 767-768AD in the Gregorian calendar.

²*Jihad*, has several definitions that will be explored extensively below. In this paper the term will be defined as a violent act or raid done in obedience to Allah.

be shown to be portrayed as moral, beautiful, and rewarded in Muhammad's earliest biographical context.

This study will be limited to *Sirat Rasul Allah* as it has been edited and translated by A. Guillaume in his 1955 translation. While modern Islamic jurisprudence and commentaries on other primary sources like the *hadiths* and Qur'an might be helpful for understanding Islamic theology more holistically, this paper will examine *Sirat Rasul Allah* alone because of its early date and narrative structure. Unlike the Qur'an or the *hadiths*, which often have no narrative context, this source has a narrative context within which the theology is taking place and being acted out. The narrative structure of *Sirat Rasul Allah* is also often used as scaffolding within which the *hadith* and Qur'an are placed when scholars of Islam are interpreting those other texts. In this way, *Sirat Rasul Allah* can help interpret itself and give a metaphorical "shelf" (by providing location, chronology, and narrative context) to other Islamic texts that are being examined.

Literature Review

By far the most common form of writings concerning *Sirat Rasul Allah* are biographies of Muhammad, whether contained in a larger volume over religion in general,³ Islam in general,⁴ or books entirely dedicated to Muhammad's life specifically.⁵ It is also referenced in attempted

³For a volume of religion in general that cites *Sirat Rasul Allah* in its section over the life of Muhammad within the section on Islam see, John Bowker, *The Message and the Book Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 140, Proquest Ebook Central. Mohammad Ridha, *Mohammad the Messenger of Allah May Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Him*, (Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah: Beirut, 1999).

⁴To see a work on Islam in general with a section that is biographical see, Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Islamismo al Descubierta*, (Miami: Zondervan, 2002), 71-95. There is also an English version of this book. I am bilingual and only own and have read the Spanish copy.

⁵For the prophet's life specifically, see Martin Lings's work, which is widely acclaimed in Islamic circles. Martin Lings was a convert from Christianity to Islam who knew C.S. Lewis. Martin Lings, *Muhammad His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2006). Also see, W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1956), Canon Sell, *The Life of Muhammad*, (S.P.C.K. Press: Madras, 1913), Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, *When the Moon Split a biography of Prophet Muhammad*, (Darussalam: Riyadh, 1998).

historical reconstructions of Muhammad's life.⁶ The work of Tom Holland and Patricia Crone are examples of this. The distinction between this sort of book and a more traditional biography of Muhammad is that the arguments in Crone and Holland's work challenge the historical reliability of Islamic sources like *Sirat Rasul Allah*.⁷ Crone calls the historical reliability of all of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, except the Constitution of Mecca, "rubble."⁸ Many scholars cite *Sirat Rasul Allah* in passing as they describe *jihad* as a whole.⁹ Some authors are more narrowly tailored toward examining *Sirat Rasul Allah*, such as Rizwi S. Faizer, who wrote an article comparing *Sirat Rasul Allah* with al-Waqidi's *Kitab al-Maghazi*. There Faizer argues that *Sirat Rasul Allah* came from Ibn Ishaq and that *Kitab al-Maghazi* came from al-Waqidi. The subject matter there is primarily authorship and the lineage of manuscript traditions,¹⁰ not theological content, as here. Closer to the paper at hand is the article "Holy Wars: A Historical and Theological Comparison Between Joshua's Conquests VS. Mohammad's First Three Incursions."¹¹ There Khouri makes theological arguments using *Sirat Rasul Allah* as well as other Islamic sources. Khouri argues

⁶For an example of an attempt to make sense of the origins of Islam, looking at archeology and not only at the Islamic sources, see Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword: the Birth of Islam and the Rise of the Global Arab Empire*, (London: Anchor Books, 2013), 15-17, 20-22, 25, 38-40, 42, 328, 431.

⁷Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses the Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4-7.

⁸*Ibid.*, 7. See also her work *Hagarism*. Patricia Crone & Michael Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁹For an example of how the doctrine of *jihad* works historically up to the modern day see, Robert Spencer, *The History of Jihad from Muhammad to Isis*, (New York: Bombardier Books, 2018), 15-46. For how to interact with Islamic theology concerning *jihad* in a way that is truthful but also loving see, Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad A Better Way Forward*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 40-54.

¹⁰Rizwi S. 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*, Vol. 28, Iss. 4 (1996): 463-489. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800063790>.

¹¹Sherene Nicholas Khouri, "Holy Wars: A Historical and Theological Comparison Between Joshua's Conquests VS. Mohammad's First Three Incursions," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies; Cluj* Vol. 20 Iss. 60 (Winter 2021): 78-91.

that there are differences between the conquest of Joshua in the Bible and the wars of Muhammad. Khouri first puts forward a summary of Joshua's campaign, then Muhammad's. In making distinctions, Khouri highlights the unlimited scope of Muhammad's wars, the lack of self-defense in motivation, the unjust nature of Muhammad's wars, and the purpose of the wars in comparison with the purpose of Joshua's conquest. In making her case, Khouri draws from multiple Islamic sources including the Qur'an, various *hadiths*, al-Waqidi's work, and Ibn Ishaq. In that article, Khouri's argument is that Joshua's conquest was morally good and Muhammad's was morally evil.

Other theological writings involving *Sirat Rasul Allah* are works like those of Muslim commentators that have examined the life of Muhammad as a means of giving a "constitution" of which to live by.¹² For example Dr. M. A. Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti sees his work, "*The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography & A Brief History of the Rightly Guided Caliphs*" as an answer to orientalist and Westerners infecting pure true Islam with Western heresies.¹³ He supports using the earliest Islamic sources, and listening to those sources on their own terms, as the correct method for discovering the truth about the life of the prophet. His book makes arguments using all the early Islamic sources; Qur'an, *hadiths*, and *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Additionally he makes arguments concerning all behavior rather than just *jihad* in particular. He is not concerned directly with what Ibn Ishaq was arguing, but rather how his lessons, along with other primary Islamic sources, are applied to a Muslim's life today.¹⁴

¹²Dr. M. A. Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography & A Brief History of the Rightly Guided Caliphs*, (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr Horizons of Knowledge, 2008).

¹³Ibid., 58.

¹⁴For a similar treatment see, Iyad Hilal, *Selections from the Sirat of Muhammad*, (London: Al-Khalifa Publications, 1997).

Nerina Rustomji has an article that looks at the beliefs surrounding paradise throughout history, with a short section examining *Sirat Rasul Allah* together with the Quran. There the argument is short and is concerned only with paradise, not how *jihad* is related to paradise.¹⁵ While paradise does have strong connections to *jihad* in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, this connection is not mentioned in that work.

This paper is distinguished from previous work on *Sirat Rasul Allah* because *Sirat Rasul Allah* will be examined in isolation. Most Muslims believe they are supposed to live a life in alignment with Muhammad but have no knowledge of the earliest biography on his life.¹⁶ To learn about Muhammad they listen to their teachers. Because of the large body of Islamic literature, one can quote specific *hadiths* and Qur'an verses to create whatever sort of picture of Muhammad one wants to create.¹⁷ *Sirat Rasul Allah* is a great place to start from in countering this methodology as it is the earliest source *and* it has a narrative structure to help interpret it. One cannot extract a subjective desired interpretation using selective quotations from *Sirat Rasul Allah* as easily as one can do so using the Qur'an and *hadith*. The Qur'an and *hadith* don't have a narrative structure. They have, in large part, isolated quotes without any context around them. *Sirat Rasul Allah* has a narrative that helps the reader interpret *Sirat Rasul Allah*, of course, but it is also the life and story that form the chronological narrative interpretive structure of the Qur'an

¹⁵Nerina Rustomji, "Early Views of Paradise in Islam," *Religion Compass*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, (2010), 166-175.

¹⁶"Almost everything Muslims know about Muhammad comes to them orally, rarely from primary sources. Unlike Christians learning about Jesus from the Bible, the Quran has very little to say about Muhammad," Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2018), 215.

¹⁷"What young Muslims learn about Muhammad is an airbrushed portrait- this blemish removed and that feature emphasized- that makes him fit a desired image. Through selective quotation, Muhammad becomes the picture-perfect prophet. The vast body of *hadith* and *sirah* literature particularly enables this phenomenon. If a Western Muslim wants to paint a peaceful portrait of Muhammad, all they have to do is quote peaceful *hadith* and verses of the Quran, to the exclusion of the violent ones. If an Islamic extremist wants to mobilize his followers to acts of terrorism, he will quote the violent references, to the exclusion of the peaceful ones," Qureshi, *Seeking Allah*, 216.

and the *hadiths*. The life of Muhammad *is* the interpretive chronological context for all the Qur'an and *hadiths* and *Sirat Rasul Allah* is the earliest most complete source of information for that history.

This paper will also be distinguished from other works because it will be argued that in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, taken in isolation, *jihad* is portrayed as morally good, beautiful, and rewarded. It is not an exploration of what can be learned from the *sunnah*¹⁸ at large, nor is it seeking to teach any other moral aspect about how a pious Muslim is supposed to live their life. Neither is this paper a pure biography of the prophet. This work is different from other books, articles, and papers commenting on *Sirat Rasul Allah* because it is looking specifically at how *jihad* is portrayed as good, beautiful, and moral within *this* particular text.¹⁹ While there are plenty of sources on “the life of the prophet” “Islam” or “*jihad*,” this paper examines *Sirat Rasul Allah* alone, looking specifically at this its portrayal of *jihad*; particularly to the extent that *Sirat Rasul Allah* portrays *jihad* as good, beautiful, and rewarded.

Key Definitions in Islamic Historiography

Violence as Harmful Physical Contact

The word “violence” will be used in this paper to define an action that is non-consensual and physically harmful. In developing an understanding of the theology surrounding raids and violence in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, it is important to illuminate what is meant by “violence.” There is disagreement about what constitutes violence. As Muhammad Khalid Masud notes, “the term

¹⁸The *Sunnah* is a collection of the deeds and sayings of Muhammad. Muslims are to follow the actions of Muhammad and imitate him, Isma‘il Rājī al Fārūqī and Lois Lamyā’ al Fārūqī, *The Qur'an and the Sunnah*, (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2014), 27-8, JSTOR. The first generation of Muslims memorized the sayings of the Prophet, taught them to one another, observed what they prescribed, and emulated what they described as the practice of Muhammad, *ibid.*, 27. This practice continues on until today. “Muslims consider Muhammad’s life exemplary, and devout Muslims emulate him as much as possible,” Qureshi, *Seeking Allah*, 41. See also; Holland, *In the Shadow*, 15.

¹⁹A. Guillaume’s 1955 English translation with his edits.

[violence] is problematic because the use of force would not be termed as violence if justified by law, ideology, and religion.”²⁰ The tension here is the same one expressed by Socrates who states that men do not argue over mathematics or measurements but over, “the just and the unjust, good and evil, honorable and dishonorable.”²¹ Even within one culture, the same act might be seen differently by different individuals. Muslim scholar Muhammad Khalid Masud agrees, “Violence may not be justified, but the same acts may be condemned as violence in one case and may be admired in another situation.”²² When the word “violence” and its etymological family are used in this paper, it is for a short-form definition of non-consensual harmful contact. It will be used in all situations that match this definition, whether warranted or unwarranted by exigent circumstances, simply as a means of communicating the occurrence of a type of action.

Raids as ‘Sanctioned Taking’

Within the narrative context of *Sirat Rasul Allah* there is great importance placed on whether an action is a raid or not.²³ The clarification of this classification is emphasized in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. From the narrative context, a raid appears to be: 1) a trespassory taking of property and or people, 2) sometimes accompanied by violence, 3) that involves travel and is 4) sanctioned by Allah. When the word “raid” is used in this paper it will be under that definition. There are various examples of raids; the Raid of Sa’d b. Abu Waqqas, the Raid of Safawan, the

²⁰Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Hadit and Violence,” *Oriente Moderno*, 21 (82), no. 1 (2002): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25817809>.

²¹Stanley Appelbaum, editor, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1992), 6-7.

²²Masud, “Hadit and Violence,” 5.

²³A. Guillaume, translator, *The Life of Muhammad A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 288.

Nakhla Raid,²⁴ the Raid on B. Sulaym,²⁵ the Raid Called al-Sawiq,²⁶ Raid on Dhu Amarr,²⁷ Raid on al-Furu,²⁸ Raid on al-Qarada,²⁹ the Raid on Judham,³⁰ on B. Fazara,³¹ on B. al-Anbar,³² on B. Murra,³³ and well as many others.³⁴

The Nakhla Raid is demonstrative as it is the time and place in *Sirat Rasul Allah* where the term “raid” is punctiliously defined. In this raid some Muslims were sent out to spy on the Quraysh. As the Muslims approached the Quraysh, the Quraysh were worried that the Muslims might attack them. However, they relaxed once they saw one of the Muslims, Ukkasha, with a shaved head. Peaceful pilgrims shaved their heads, and it was also a holy month, Rajab, so it was natural for the Quraysh to mistake Ukkasha for a peaceful pilgrim and let down their guard. Ishaq records, “when they [the Quraysh] saw him [‘Ukkasha] they felt safe and said, ‘They are pilgrims, you have nothing to fear from them.’”³⁵ Unbeknownst to the Quraysh, the Muslims raiders, and Ukkasha with them, were desperate to get the loot from the Quraysh caravan. At the same time, however, the raiders felt a reluctance. On the one hand, there was still one day left of

²⁴Guillame, *The Life of Muhammad*, 286.

²⁵Ibid., 360.

²⁶Ibid., 361.

²⁷Ibid., 362.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 364.

³⁰Ibid., 662.

³¹Ibid., 664.

³²Ibid., 667.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 360.

³⁵Ibid., 287.

the sacred month and they were not supposed to attack during it, but on the other hand, the Quraysh caravan was about to escape into a sacred area, which would mean the Muslim raiders could not attack the Quraysh if the raiders waited for Rajab to end. The raiders ultimately decided to go ahead and attack, despite it being a sacred month. Ishaq tells us the raiders “took council among themselves, for this was the last day of Rajab, and they said, ‘If you leave them alone tonight they will get into the sacred area and will be safe from you; and if you kill them, you will kill them in the sacred month,’ so they were hesitant and feared to attack them. Then they encouraged each other, and decided to kill as many as they could of them and take what they had.”³⁶ When the raiders returned to Muhammad they were scared they would be punished and potentially killed for wiping out the Quraysh during a holy month. Muhammad was angry at them but asked Allah what should happen. In response, Allah conceded that making war in the sacred month was bad but stated, “keeping people from the way of God and disbelieving in Him... This is a more serious matter with God than the killing of those of them whom you have slain.”³⁷ The raiders were relieved to hear that they were morally right to slay the Quraysh and take their property, but they then turned their concerns to whether this action counted as a “raid” or not, the reason being that a raid had personal benefits for them. “When ‘Abdullah and his companions [the raiders] were relieved of their anxiety when the Qur’an came down, they were anxious for reward, and said, ‘Can we hope that it will count as a raid for which we shall be given the reward of combatants?’”³⁸ Luckily for them Allah answers them in the affirmative, “Those who believe and have emigrated and fought in the way of God, these may hope for God’s

³⁶Guillame, *The Life of Muhammad*, 287.

³⁷Ibid., 288.

³⁸Ibid., 288.

mercy, for God is forgiving, merciful.’ That is, God gave them their greatest hopes.”³⁹ After this message they received the “reward of combatants” and took all the plunder they seized as their own except for one-fifth of it which was given to the prophet. Giving Muhammad a fifth of all plunder seized becomes the norm after this event. There is then a two step process here, first the issue whether killing in a holy month is allowed if the victim is an infidel. This is answered in the affirmative. Second is the issue of whether or not this is a raid. If it is a raid, the raiders get to keep the booty. Here it is found to be a raid and the raiders receive their reward, four fifths of the plunder.

From this example and others we can use Ibn Ishaq’s own narrative context to define the word raid. A raid is a trespassory taking, sometimes accompanied by violence, that involves travel and is sanctioned by Allah. When something is legitimately a raid, taking of booty is permissible.

Jihad as War or Raid Motivated by Allegiance to Allah

In *Sirat Rasul Allah*, *jihad* جهاد is used to denote raids, violence, and wars, fought for the sake of Allah and done in obedience to Him. Not all such instances of raids, war, and violence done in obedience to Allah, are described as *jihad*, in the English text. A. Guillaume’s translation uses the word sparingly. The word will be used in this paper to mean raids, violence, and wars, fought for the sake of Allah, even if such a definition for the word is controversial in many circles today.

Much ink has been spilled in various attempts to define *jihad*, especially amongst modern Western academics. Modern and later medieval views on the definition of *jihad* are varied. Fourteenth century Islamic jurist Ibn al-Qayyim, writing about six hundred years after *Sirat*

³⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 288.

Rasul Allah, “separated *jihad* into four categories: ‘jihad against one’s ego; against Satan; against the disbelievers; and against the hypocrites.’”⁴⁰ Modern writer, Asena Karipek, holds that the term “*jihad*” has several meanings when used within the Qur'an including some contexts where the definition is more violent.⁴¹ Morera writes that, “today, many academic specialists insist that *jihad*- in Arabic, literally ‘effort’ or ‘struggle’ - means in Islamic law principally a spiritual inner effort or an individual struggle for self-improvement.”⁴² Qureshi defines the term as “warfare with spiritual significance.”⁴³ The term is one that has been used by various groups at various times to denote various concepts.⁴⁴ The fact that a word can be used for a broad spectrum of definitions over several hundred years does not constrict how the word can be used but broadens it. Can the word be used to denote a violent act or raid carried out on Allah’s behalf or would this be a distortion? Additionally, would going backward in time constrict the definition of the word *jihad* such that it would be improper to use it with the definition of “a violent act or raid done in obedience to Allah”?

The *hadiths* might be helpful here as they were written around the same time period by roughly the same group of people as Ibn Ishaq, the author of *Sirat Rasul Allah*.⁴⁵ “When it comes

⁴⁰Asena Karipek, “Portrayals of Jihad: A Cause of Islamaphobia,” *Islamaphobia Studies Journal* 211, Vol. 5, Iss. 2 (Fall 2020): 212,
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2477273984/fulltextPDF/3F260A92F4514B29PQ/1?accountid=12085>

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Dario Fernandez-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain*, (Wilmington:ISI Books, 2018), 22.

⁴³Qureshi, *Answering Jihad*, 35.

⁴⁴Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History Doctrines and Practice English Edition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14, Proquest Ebook Central.

⁴⁵Medieval Muslims living in the former Persian Empire in the 8th and 9th centuries. Bukhari and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, both *hadith* collectors, also lived during the Abbasid Caliphate. The *hadith* writers wrote about 100 years later than Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirat Rasul Allah*, (roughly 750AD for *Sirat Rasul Allah* and roughly 850AD for the *hadith* compilers).

to *hadith*, far and away the most frequent context of *jihad* is violent physical struggle.⁴⁶ The two most reliable *hadith* collections, according to Sunni scholars,⁴⁷ are Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Sahih al-Bukhari's collection has an entire book dedicated to *jihad* understood in this way.

Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan was the director of the clinic of the Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia. He made an English translation of *Sahih Al Bukhari* that is the top result on a search for an English translation of *Sahih Al Bukhari* on Amazon. In volume four of *Sahih Al Bukhari*, in the footnotes of the beginning of the book dedicated to *jihad*, Khan states the following. It is worth quoting at length.

Al-Jihad (Holy fighting) in Allah's Cause (with full force of numbers and weaponry), is given the utmost importance of Islam, and is one of its pillars (on which it stands). By Jihad Islam is established, Allah's Word is made superior. [His word being (*La ilaha illallah* which means none has the right to be worshipped but Allah)], and His religion (Islam) is propagated. By abandoning jihad, (May Allah protect us from that), Islam and the Muslims fall into an inferior position, their honour is lost, their land is stolen, their rule and authority vanish. Jihad is an obligatory duty in Islam, on every Muslim, and he who tries to escape from this duty or does not in his innermost heart wish to fulfil this duty, dies with one of the qualities of a hypocrite.⁴⁸

This understanding of *jihad* can also be seen in the narrative structure of *Sirat Rasul Allah* itself. A man named Abr b. al-Jamuh was lame, and physically unable to fight, so he feared he would not be able to join the Muslims in the Battle of Uhud. Abr wanted to go to war alongside the other Muslims in order that he be assured of his place in paradise, but he had four sons who did not want him to go because they did not want their disabled father to be put in danger.

⁴⁶Qureshi, *Answering Jihad*, 35.

⁴⁷John Bowker *The Message and the Book Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*, (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 140, Proquest Ebook Central.

⁴⁸Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyad: Darussalam, 2015), 56.

On the day of Uhud [the sons] wanted to detain [Arb], saying that God had excused him. [Arb] came to the apostle and told him that his sons wanted to keep him back and prevent his joining the army, ‘Yet by God, I hope to tread the heavenly garden despite my lameness.’ The apostle said, ‘God has excused you, and *jihad* is not incumbent on you;’ and to his sons he said, ‘You need not prevent him; perhaps God will favour him with martyrdom,’ so he went along with him and was killed at Uhud.⁴⁹

If *jihad* were merely an inward spiritual struggle in these early sources, why is *jihad* said to no longer have been incumbent on Abr b. al-Jamuh when only his body is lame? Why does he need to be “excused” by Allah? Surely his spirit is still capable of “struggling” even if he is disabled. If *jihad* is a spiritual struggle why is Arb unable to cheer on the troops from the side? Give to the poor? Recite the Qur'an and pray? Very obviously the concern here is whether he can engage in battle. And very obviously here “engaging in battle” is blurred with the term ‘*jihad*.’ In this example we see that *jihad* involves physical combat, going so far as to show us a narrative praxis where Arb goes to war/*jihad* and dies the death of a “martyr.”⁵⁰

Another example of *jihad* in a narrative context from *Sirat Rasul Allah* is with the story of Nafi b. Budayl. Nafi killed a polytheist named Abu'l-Rayyan earlier in the text.⁵¹ In revenge for this killing, Anas b. 'Abbas al-Sulami kills Nafi during a fight that breaks out when polytheists attack Muslims who are preaching. Nafi's comrades mourn his death. One named

⁴⁹Guillame, *The Life of Muhammad*, 385. Interesting to note is that there seems to be an implied corollary. If it is guaranteed that one will go to paradise if one dies a martyr's death, that seems to imply that if one avoids a battle that is ongoing and ordered by Allah, one will not be assured of paradise. After all, Abr says, “I hope to tread the heavenly garden *despite* my lameness,” and the apostle seems to give him a needed pardon from God “*jihad* is not incumbent on *you*.” This would imply *jihad* is incumbent on everyone else who has not received such a pardon. This doctrine of hell from avoiding *jihad* is made explicit elsewhere and explored below, *ibid.*, 322.

⁵⁰Martyrdom is still emphasized in some modern Islamic writings. See, Pieter Nanninga, “‘Among the Believers Are Men’: How the Islamic State Uses Early-Islamic Traditions to Shape Its Martyr Biographies,” *Numen* Vol. 65, No. 2-3, Religion and Terrorism (2018), 165-184.

⁵¹The text mentions either Ali or Hamza as the killer of Abu'l-Rayyan by another name earlier in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, Guillame, *The Life of Muhammad*, 337. Perhaps Anas b. 'Abbas was mistaken in thinking Nafi was Abu'l-Rayyan's killer. The text gives another name for Abu'l-Rayyan with no explanation as to why he has two names. It merely states, “Abu'l-Rayyan was Tu'ayma b. 'Adiy” *Ibid.*, 436. Tu'ayma b. 'Adiy is the name mentioned as killed by either Ali or Hamza. “Tu'ayma b. 'Adiy b. Naufal whom 'Ali killed while others say Hamza killed him,” *ibid.*, 337.

Abdullah b. Rawaha writes this poem while mourning. “God have the mercy on Nafi b. Budayl that belongs to those who seek the reward of *jihad*! Enduring, truthful, faithful, when men talked too much he spoke to the point.”⁵² Interesting to note is that Nafi’s death, that he received for having killed someone else, seems to not quite be as clear of an example of dying in *jihad* as the earlier example of Arb. The text almost seems to be hinting that to die while preaching is inferior to dying while in combat. Abdullah asks for the “mercy” that Nafi be treated as someone seeking the “reward of *jihad*.” This seems to imply a distinction between merely preaching (Nafi) and dying while engaging in holy combat (Arb), with the latter being superior.

A similar definition of *jihad* is seen in the earliest holistic collection of Islamic law called *Al Muwatta*. Imam Malik Ibn Anas wrote this foundational text to systematize Sunni law in the middle of the 8th century, around the same time period that Ibn Ishaq lived. He wrote in the Hijaz and strove to codify the *sunnah*.⁵³ Dario Fernandez-Morera holds that in the most authoritative recension of this text, the use of *jihad* is “only in the martial sense.”⁵⁴

A combination of the use of *jihad* in the *hadiths*, its use in the narrative structure of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, and elsewhere seem to indicate *jihad* at least *can* be defined as a violent act or raid that is motivated out of piety for Allah and is done in obedience to him. As Morera facetiously concludes his argument on the subject:

Now, it is certainly possible that, for centuries, the medieval Muslim scholars who interpreted the sacred Islamic texts, as well as Muslim military leaders (including perhaps Muhammad himself when he led his armies into battle against infidels unwilling to submit), misunderstood (until today’s experts in Islamic studies) the primarily peaceful and “defensive” meaning of “*jihad*,” and that, as a result of this mistake, Muslim armies erroneously went and, always defensively, conquered half the known world...

⁵²Guillame, *The Life of Muhammad*, 436.

⁵³Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, Laith Saud, *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 54-55, Proquest Ebook Central.

⁵⁴Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 24.

Nevertheless, what the correct understanding of the term is according to today's expert academic interpreters matters little for what actually happened.⁵⁵

While there might be many ways to define *jihad*,⁵⁶ any definitive conclusion in that regard is not important here. The aforementioned definition is how the term will be used in this paper unless stated otherwise.⁵⁷ The concern here is the actions and beliefs relating to war, raids, and violence in *Sirat Rasul Allah* and how they are treated and portrayed within the text, as moral, beautiful, and rewarded. This paper is not for the purpose of proving some exhaustive specific limitation of a definition of some particular Arabic word throughout history. The word will be used here because it is at least arguably proper to use it in this context,⁵⁸ it is used with that definition in mind in the text at hand, and it saves time to denote a whole complex theological idea with a single word.

***Sirat Rasul Allah* Introduction**

Guillaume's Translation of Ibn Hisham

The particular copy of *Sirat Rasul Allah* that is being examined at hand is Alfred Guillaume's 1955 English translation. That translation is based on Ibn Hisham's recension of Ibn Ishaq's original work. Guillaume adds small samples from other sources to Ibn Hisham's

⁵⁵Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 23.

⁵⁶Glenn E. Robinson, *Global Jihad: A Brief History*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 1, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵⁷Raids, violence, and wars, fought for the sake of Allah and done in obedience to Him.

⁵⁸There are four main schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, and all four believe that within the context of Shari *jihad* means, "To fight in the path of Allah or anything aiding this course," Moulana Mohammad Masood Azhar, *The Virtues of Jihad The Shortest Path to Jan'nah*, (Ahle Sunnah Wal Jama'at: Sargodha, 1994), 6. The definitions of the four schools are as follows: The Hanafi *Fiqh*- "*Jihad* means to be involved in fighting in the path of Allah by one's life, wealth and speech. It is further explained to call the unbelievers towards the true Religion of Islam and to fight against them, if they are unwilling to accept this true Religion," Maliki *Fique*- "The Muslims are to fight with the Kuffar to advance Allah's religion." Shafic *Fiqh*- "The meaning of *Jihad* in Shari terms is to make utmost effort in fighting in the path of Allah." Hanbali *Fiqh*- "*Jihad* means to fight against the unbelievers," Azhar, *The Virtues of Jihad*, 6-7.

recension by including the occasional word or segment from al-Tabari's version and others⁵⁹ to take the reader at least one step close to the original work of Ibn Ishaq.⁶⁰ Out of these writers, al-Tabari is sampled, by far, the most.⁶¹ Although Guillaume uses other sources, the overwhelming majority and bulk of the text is from Ibn Hisham's version. Ibn Hisham's version is, in turn, from a student of Ibn Ishaq named al-Bakka'i.⁶² Overall, Guillaume strives to give an exact translation of *Sirat Rasul Allah* in clear English. He tells us, "I have endeavoured to follow the text as closely as possible without sacrificing English idiom."⁶³ While some scholars are critical of A. Guillaume's translation,⁶⁴ it appears that the vast majority of scholarly opinion on

⁵⁹Guillaume lists twelve other authors who can be used to reconstruct Ibn Ishaq's original text, but "none has the importance of" al-Tabari, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxi. al-Tabari's version is "virtually the same as" Ibn Ishaq's version of events, Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins : The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020), 132, ProQuest Ebook Central. Guillaume lets his reader know when something is from al-Tabari and not in Hisham's version in his footnotes or in the margins, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 165-66. In this paper, Guillaume's work will be treated as a single unit. If a reader wishes to see which passage comes from which source, Guillaume marks them in his work.

⁶⁰Josef Horowitz argues that, using "numerous fragments preserved in al-Tabari and other historians" it is possible to make "a clear picture of the design of the work [*Sirat Rasul Allah*] in its original form," Horowitz, *The Earliest Biographies*, 81.

⁶¹al-Tabari's recording of *Sirat Rasul Allah* does have some content that Hisham edited out like the Satanic verse passage. In this episode of Muhammad's life he receives the message from Allah that the people of Mecca and the Muslims are allowed to pray to the pagan goddesses al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat as intercessors. This word from Allah pleases the Quraysh polytheists and they all worship in the mosque together. Later Muhammad learns from Gabriel that this wasn't Allah at all but Satan who had given him this passage and he didn't even realize it. Guillaume, 165-66. This passage is seen as an embarrassment today, and reference to it led to violence recently. D'Avolio, Lauren. 2022. "Rushdie Stabbed Roughly 10 Times in Premeditated Attack, Prosecutors Say." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/13/nyregion/rushdie-video-stabbed-ny.html>. "The Satanic verses incident appears in two recensions of the *sirah* as taught by Ibn Ishaq: the Rayy recension of Salamah b. al-Fadl, and the Kufan recension of Yunus b. Bukayr... It does not appear in Ibn Hisham's (d. 218) edition of al-Bakka'i's (d. 183) Kufan recension (what is generally called the *Sirah* of Ibn Hisham), Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 45.

⁶²Horowitz, *The Earliest Biographies*, 81.

⁶³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xl.

⁶⁴Humphreys is somewhat critical and calls Guillaume's translation "extremely valuable though not always reliable," R Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: a Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 78. He does not tell us why he says this, however, *no translation is always reliable*. Another scholar, Tibawi, doesn't even think there should be an English translation, Abdul Latif Tibawi "Ibn Ishaq's Sira, a Critique of Professor Guillaume's English Translation (Book Review)," *Islamic Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Oct 01, 1956): 197, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/ibn-ishaqs-sira-critique-professor-guillaumes/docview/1304274016/se-2>. He does not like that Guillaume added Tabari to the text and put Hisham's notes at the end, *ibid.*, 198. Examples of errors that he gives are Guillaume's leaving out the word "remnant" from a sentence *ibid.*, 201. He complains Guillaume translated a word to mean "Arab" when context

the work is overwhelmingly positive.⁶⁵ He does differ from Hisham's original in some minor instances. For example, Guillaume cuts out repetitive phrases and shortens, "dialogues in *oratio recta* into indirect speech in accordance with English practice unless the *ipsissima verba* of the speaker seemed called for naturally, or are in themselves important."⁶⁶ He also eliminated genealogical data if it is repeated more than once. He used the Cairo edition of 1937 to make this translation.⁶⁷ These details and changes don't affect any of the meaning of the text in such a way as to affect the primary arguments of this paper. The arguments in this paper involve major themes that arch over large narrative structures, often repeated, and don't require the nuanced specificity of the exact syntax of an original language in order to accomplish their goal.

should have brought the meaning to "Bedouin," *ibid.* He protests Guillaume's translation which says, "none shall drink in Mecca except you allow it," saying it should read, "None shall drink in Mecca except what you provide for him," *ibid.* He thinks Guillaume was overly critical of Ishaq as a historian and overstates Ishaq's skepticism in his own sources *ibid.*, 208. He thinks Guillaume was wrong to translate *rasul* as "apostle" instead of "messenger," *ibid.*, 212. These sorts of corrections and preferences don't affect the arguments of this paper. While this English translation may not be perfect, it would have to be absolutely and completely distorted to affect the arguments made here. It is worth noting too that these criticisms come from a scholar who does not think *any* English translation should be made since, "we already have a German translation by Weil," *ibid.*, 197.

⁶⁵"As such it is a good piece of work" R. Levy, "Reviewed Work: The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Iṣḥāq's 'Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,' with an Introduction and Notes by A. Guillaume," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1/2 (1957): 117, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25202006>. "The unpretentious prose adequately reflects the simple language of the original," Nabia Abbot, "Reviewed Work: The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Iṣḥāq's 'Sīrat Rasūl Allāh' by Alfred Guillaume," *The Journal of Religion* 36, no. 4 (1956): 262, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1201089>. It is "a major contribution to Islamic studies, not only because it makes available to the English reader for the first time a translation of the earliest extant and most influential biography of Muhammad, but because it is enriched by the products of researches which clarify or bring to light hitherto vague or unknown facts," Philip K. Hitti, "Review of *The Life of Muhammad*, by A. Guillaume," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 47, no. 1 (1956): 84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453190>. A. Guillaume's translation will stand as "an enduring monument to his tenure as the Chair of Arabic at the University of London," R. B. Serjeant, "Professor A. Guillaume's Translation of the 'Sīrah,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 21, no. 1/3 (1958): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/610485>. "The translation has been very carefully done," Arthur Jeffrey, "Review of *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, by A. Guillaume," *The American Historical Review*, 61 No. 4 (1956): 947, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1848838>.

⁶⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xl-xli.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, xli. He marks differences between the Cairo edition and Wustenfeld's with a "C." and a "W." in his own text.

Muslim Attitudes Toward *Sirat Rasul Allah*

In this paper, the founder of Islam, Muhammad, is argued to be portrayed by *Sirat Rasul Allah* as an advocate of violence, war, and raids done on behalf of Allah. *Sirat Rasul Allah* treats *jihad* as good, beautiful, and rewarded and Muhammad is a praxial cornerstone and archetype of piety at the center of the narrative. This portrayal of Muhammad, and early Muslims with him, is likely to be controversial to those who would consider such a depiction untrue or problematic. This being the case, the relationship between this text, and Islamic attitudes toward this text in general, needs to at least be remarked upon, even if briefly.

Islamic views toward *Sirat Rasul Allah* are varied but largely positive. Guillaume includes a section in his introduction where he briefly touches on the variety of beliefs toward *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Using the work of I. Sayyidu'l-Nas, Guillaume argues that Ishaq was highly regarded early on.⁶⁸ *Hadith* collectors Bukhari and Muslim both cite Ishaq as an authority in their *hadiths*.⁶⁹ Guillaume tells us they did so “often.”⁷⁰ Guillaume lists several scholars who saw

⁶⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxviii. “Those favourable to I.I. were: ‘The best informed man about the maghāzi is I.I. al-Zuhri: Knowledge will remain in Medina as long as I.I. lives.’ Shu'ba, 85-160: Truthful in tradition, the amir of traditionists because of his memory. Sufyan b. ‘Uyayna, 107-98: I sat with him some seventy years and none of the Medinans suspected him or spoke disparagingly of him. Abi Zur'a, d. 281: Older scholars drew from him and professional traditionists tested him and found him truthful. When he reminded Dubaym of Malik's distrust of I.I. he denied that it referred to his veracity as a traditionist, but to his qadarite heresy. Abi Hatim: His traditions are copied down (by others). I. al-Madini: Apostolic tradition originally lay with 6 men; then it became the property of 12, of whom I.I. is one. al-Shaff'i: He who wants to study the *maghzi* deeply must consult I.I.,” *ibid.*, *ibid.*, xxxvi.

⁶⁹Dr. Mahdi Rizquellah Ahmad nuances that Bukhari only cited him for certain reports. “Imam Bukhari for instance did not use [Ishaq's] narratives except in hung reports. However, men like Shu'bah bin Hajjaj, a major Hadith scholar of his time, treated him with great respect calling him Amirul-Mu'minin fil-Hadith. Yahya bin Ma'in, another great Hadith critic, declared him trustworthy. Yaya bin Sa'eed Qattan, Ahmad bin Hanbal, Yahya bin Sa'eed Ansari, and several other scholars cleared him. Ibn Sayyidin-Nas and Khatib Baghdadi have recorded for posterity all the opinions that were voiced about him. However, that was about him in the field of Hadith, *where very strict measures prevail*. In biography and war chronicles, *his mastery is acknowledged by consensus*,” [emphasis added], Dr. Mahdi Rizquellah Ahmad, *A Biography of the Prophet of Islam in Light of the Original Sources an Analytical Study*, vol 1, trans. Syed Iqbal Zaheer (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2005), 19. In his footnotes he gives a list of authors to show Ibn Ishaq's mastery is acknowledged by consensus. “Ibn Sayyidin-Nas, studies of Dr. Salman Hamud ‘Awdah, Dr. Hamadah; studies of Shaykh Muhammad bin Rizq Tarhuni,” *ibid.*

⁷⁰Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxviii.

Ishaq positively. Some examples are the words of those like Ahmad b. Hanbal who calls Ishaq, “excellent in tradition.”⁷¹ Abdullah b. Idris al-Audi tells us he was “amazed at his learning and often cited him.”⁷²

Guillaume also shows a list of those who are at least partially critical of Ishaq. For example, Muhammad b. Abdullah b. Numayr said, “when I.I. reported what he had heard from well-known persons his traditions were good and true, but he sometimes reported worthless sayings from unknown people.”⁷³ Al-Duri said Ishaq, “was trustworthy but not to be used as an authority in *fiqh*.”⁷⁴ Others were more critical like Malik b. Anas who called him “one of the antichrists.”⁷⁵ Sulayman likewise called him “a liar.”⁷⁶ Guillaume, leaning on the arguments of I. Sayyidu’l-Nas, vouches for Ishaq’s material, at least during the *maghazi* phase of Muhammad’s life.⁷⁷

In discussing Muslim views of Ishaq, Shahab Ahmed⁷⁸ emphasizes a distinction between *sirah-maghazi* literature (like *Sirat Rasul Allah*) and *hadith* literature. He argues that the *sirah-maghazi* writers and the *hadith* writers had two different goals. The role of *sirah-maghazi*

⁷¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxvi.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., xxxvii.

⁷⁷The *maghazi* phase is the portion of Muhammad’s life after he leaves Mecca and lives in Medina. It is marked by more violence and aggression and therefore called the *maghazi* or “raid” phase. Of the earlier portions, the Meccan phase, Guillaume states, “The story of those years is filled out with legends and stories of miraculous events which inevitably undermine the modern reader’s confidence in the history of this period as a whole,” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xix. As for the *maghazi* section Guillaume states, “For the most part the stories rest on the account of eyewitnesses and have every right to be regarded as trustworthy,” *ibid*.

⁷⁸He was a Harvard professor and a fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows and the Islamic Studies Program at Harvard Law School.

literature was not, “in the first instance, to establish legal, praxial, and creedal norms,”⁷⁹ but to “furnish the new community with a powerful vocabulary of motifs- heroic, ethical, prosopographical, geographical, rhetorical, miraculous, and so forth- with which the community could affiliate and through which it could express its values and ethos.”⁸⁰ *Hadith* literature, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with “legal, praxial, and creedal norms.”⁸¹ Ibn Ishaq’s work, then, was not to be a *hadith* writer, but to lay out the “words, deeds and actions of the Prophet that are *not* directed at establishing legal, praxial, and creedal norms...”⁸² Between Guillaume and Ahmed we can see that there is a broad spectrum of views toward *Sirat Rasul Allah* and its role in the life of a devout Muslim.

From the above we can make three distinct groups: First, Muslims who hold *Sirat Rasul Allah* as accurate and authoritative. Second, Muslims who do not see *Sirat Rasul Allah* as a guide legally and praxially but still hold it to show the ethos of the community and the words and deeds of the Prophet that are not binding. Third, Muslims who do not believe that *Sirat Rasul Allah* is reliable at all. This paper will be a problem for all three groups. The arguments in this paper will present spiritual and emotional problems for the first two groups and intellectual problems, though much less attention will be given to these, for the third group.

As to the first two groups, the issues are pretty straightforward. Below Ishaq’s portrayal of Muhammad will be shown to treat *jihad* as a good thing. It is moral, beautiful, and richly rewarded both in this life and the one to come. If a Muslim believes this to be false and yet holds

⁷⁹Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy The Satanic Verses in Early Islam*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 34.

⁸⁰Ibid., 31.

⁸¹Ibid., 27.

⁸²Ibid.

Sirat Rasul Allah to be authoritative and true, the arguments below will expose them to internal contradictions in their worldview. The second group will also have issues. Simply saying the book is not an authority for legal and praxial purposes is not enough to alleviate the issues raised if it is a genuine depiction of the Prophet or a genuine representation of the standards of the community. Legal authority or not, imagine a community's "vocabulary of motifs- heroic, ethical, prosopographical, geographical, rhetorical, miraculous, and so forth,"⁸³ were shown to be absolutely saturated in a glorifying depiction of violent *jihad*. Any arguments against *jihad* being morally good, beautiful, and rewarded would be ludicrous in such a communal context.

The third group will be saved from the main focus of this paper, but they open themselves to several vulnerable positions intellectually that will be briefly remarked on below. There is a cognitive imbalance in this third view. Adherents are put in a difficult position. Most Muslims who reject *Sirat Rasul Allah* do so because of its weak *isnads*.⁸⁴ If one rejects *Sirat Rasul Allah* because of its weak *isnads*, by the same logic, they also have to reject *all* the *maghazi* and *tafsir* literature. This is a huge amount of Islamic philosophy and understanding that is suddenly eliminated. All narrative context for interpreting what was going on when a certain *hadith* or Qur'an *ayah* was given is wiped out, leaving the sayings isolated and separate, without any context. If they reject *Sirat Rasul Allah* for Western historiographical reasons, then they will have to also reject all early Islamic literature that has weak *isnads*. Both views come at a high cost to the Muslim.

⁸³Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 31.

⁸⁴An example of an *isnad* from *Sirat Rasul Allah* is the following; "Hisham b. 'Urwa and 'Umar b. 'Abdullah b. 'Urwa from 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr told me that A'isha said: When his apostle..." Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 279. *Isnads* are chains of transmission between a saying and an early authority. Holland, *Shadow of the Sword*, 27. "Their function was, of course, precisely to stamp the *hadiths* as genuine: to provide the Muslim people with tested chains of transmission, grappling hooks cast back across the tumult and upheaval of the centuries, anchors that could serve to moor them to the lifetime of the Prophet," *ibid.*, 36.

The Muslim arguments against Ishaq have terrible implications for Islam if followed consistently. I. Sayyidu'l-Nas's, as quoted in Guillaume, tells us the critics' arguments against Ishaq usually fall into two categories. They either attack Ishaq for being a *shiite* or they attack his lack of use of *isnads*.⁸⁵ I. Sayyidu'l-Nas argues that the first attack is unfair because it has “nothing to do with the *Sira*.”⁸⁶ As to the second charge, he argues that an *isnad* shouldn't be invalidated simply because an author's *isnad* omitted “a link in the chain” or because he “cited the original author without further ado.”⁸⁷ Guillaume fortifies this argument by questioning the assumption that, “early writers ought to have furnished their traditions with *isnads*.”⁸⁸ At the time of Ishaq, the need for *isnads* was not yet existent. Therefore, it makes no sense to assume Ishaq, “would have met the rigorous demands of later generations who were familiar with a whole sea of spurious traditions fathered on the prophet and his companions...”⁸⁹ In other words, it is anachronistic to use a tool of later Islamic historicity “strong *isnads*” against Ishaq, whose work is so early that such a tool was not yet formulated or invented to the satisfaction of future writers. For these reasons, these arguments against Ishaq should be rejected.

Muslims who disregard *Sirat Rasul Allah*, almost always do so because of weak *isnads*. Is it enough to point out that it is anachronistic to demand them? What if it is valid for historiography even if the method was not invented until later? If they use this reasoning they have to deal with the fact that the same rules of exclusion, “only strong *isnads* are allowed,” would also throw out nearly all data having to do with the narrative life of Muhammad. If only

⁸⁵Chains of transmission that link a narrative report (*riwayah*) back to either to Muhammad, his original followers (*sahabi*), or a member of the first-century generations who lived after Muhammad died (*tabi'i*).

⁸⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xxxviii.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

strong *isnads* are allowed as vertical, and all literature based on weak *isnads* must be thrown out, then one would also have to throw out all the biographies of Muhammad and all the *tafsir*.⁹⁰ As Shahab Ahmed says, “If *sirah-maghazi* materials were to be rejected on the basis of bad *isnads*, there would be virtually no narrative history of the life of the Prophet in existence since the vast majority of materials treated by *sirah-maghazi* scholars were transmitted by what, in Hadith terms, were bad *isnads*. The same applies to *tafsir*.”⁹¹ Harris Birkeland states, “In fact every *tafsir* before the time 200 had to be rejected from the standpoint of later criticism.”⁹² Ahmad. B. Hanbal famously noted, “Three genres [*kutub*] have no *isnad*/no final source [*asl*]: *maghazi*, eschatology [*malahim*], and *tafsir*.”⁹³ So far then, if one rejects *Sirat Rasul Allah* because of weak *isnads*, one must realize that it is anachronistic, since such standards did not yet exist at the time of its writing. Also one must realize that a rejection of *Sirat Rasul Allah* over *isnads* also entails a rejection any *tafsir* and all confidence in any biographies of Muhammad.

Let us suppose this group of Muslims rejects *Sirat Rasul Allah* not on grounds of the *isnads*, but instead on broader more objective historiographical criteria. In this way they might attempt to hold onto other biographies and *tafsir* while at the same time rejecting *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Is this position possible? Modern Western historians use several criteria to determine the credibility of a source. Some of these criteria include using sources that are early. Sources that are close in time to the event described are more likely to be accurate.⁹⁴ This is because,

⁹⁰A genre of literature comprised of the earliest Qur’anic commentaries.

⁹¹Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 28.

⁹²Harris Birkeland, *Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran*, (Oslo: Jacob Dybawd, 1955), 27-8.

⁹³Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 29.

⁹⁴Ehrman, Bart D. *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 40.

generally speaking, the closer you are to a source the less time there is to make things up or forget things.⁹⁵ *Sirat Rasul Allah* is the earliest most complete source for the life of Muhammad. This being the case, *Sirat Rasul Allah* is actually in a stronger position than *hadith*.

A source is more likely to be credible if it contains embarrassing information or if it is a statement against interest.⁹⁶ Taking this criterion to *isnads* leads to some startling conclusions. Ahmad actually believes the *isnads* of the *sirat-maghazi* are *more* reliable than those of the *hadiths*. “In the genres of *sirah-maghazi* and *tafsir*, weak *isnads* should be taken at face value as in actual fact representing a genuine transmission history for the report in question, unless there is specific reason to suggest otherwise.”⁹⁷ After all, why would someone make up a weak transmission chain? This being the case, the stories from *sirat-maghazi* could be argued to be more accurate and less biased than *hadith* traditions.

The *hadith* transmission chains or *isnads* are much “stronger”⁹⁸ and later in time, making them much more dubious. The *hadith* scholars of the ninth century had every incentive in the world to make these *isnads* up, and their own scholars even admit that hundreds of thousands

⁹⁵To merely assert a statement along the lines of, “just because a source is early doesn’t mean it’s true,” is missing the point. Historiography isn’t a matter of being certain. It is not deductive, it is abductive. You are trying to create the most credible explanation of events using what evidence you have. These criteria that historians use are to help point in the correct direction as to what actually happened. The criterion of proximity in time isn’t a deductive principle. Gulam, Ehteshaam. n.d. “The-Problems-with-Ibn-Ishaq.” Answering Christian Claims. Accessed September 18, 2022. <http://www.answering-christian-claims.com/The-Problems-With-Ibn-Ishaq.html>. “Historians don’t look for absolute certainty, rather they search for adequate descriptions of the past such that they can be reasonably certain”[my translation], Michael R. Licona, *La Resurreccion de Jesus un Nuevo Acercamiento Historiografico*, (Salem: Publicaciones Kerigma, 2019), 66.

⁹⁶Licona uses the criterion of embarrassment to argue for some of Jesus’s words and actions, *ibid.*, 222,225. N.T. Wright doesn’t mention the criterion of embarrassment explicitly but uses the same method of thinking to argue for the historicity of the resurrection. N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 607. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist*, 41.

⁹⁷Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 33.

⁹⁸Stronger, not in the historiographical sense, but in the detail and authority of the names provided in the transmission chain.

were being made up.⁹⁹ The transmission chains from the “reliable” portions of these sources are suspiciously precise for how late they are. The historical record shows every evidence that these *hadiths* were being fabricated by Caliphs and scholars for their own purposes.¹⁰⁰ Holland outright rejects them as a source of historical knowledge for anything dealing with Muhammad. “As a source for the origins of Islam, the *hadiths* were worse than useless.”¹⁰¹

Tom Holland is not alone. The history of western textual criticism of the *hadith* literature has been devastating since the 19th century. “Beginning in 1890 and continuing to the present day, a succession of scholars have delivered a series of body-blows to the credibility of the *hadiths* as a record of what Muhammad himself might truly have said.”¹⁰² The reason for this is because the *hadiths* look as though they are speaking to a period of time two centuries after Muhammad. They have no record until late in time and when they do appear they seem to be for very specific issues rising out of the century in which they were invented.¹⁰³

Do *isnads* matter at all to most western historians? The answer is no. The *isnads* count for exactly nothing. “If the statements were fakes, then so too, it went without saying, were the *isnads*.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, the more intricate or “strong” the *isnad*, the more likely it is to be a fake.

⁹⁹Hadith scholars a millennium ago “had freely acknowledged that innumerable *hadiths* had been faked; that Caliphs, lawyers and heretics had invented them willy-nilly to serve their various purposes; that many *hadiths* contradicted one another... Of al-Bukhari- the most proficient and celebrated hadith hunter- it was said that he had collected 600,000 supposed sayings of the Prophet, and dismissed all but 7225. His collection of *hadiths*- along with those of five other great scholars- was, in effect, what constituted the *Sunna*,” Holland, *In the Shadow*, 35.

¹⁰⁰Tom Holland calls the *hadiths*, “something to be added to upon the whim of some Caliph or scholar,” *ibid.*, 305.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰³“Far from bearing witness to the opinions of Muhammad, they in truth bear the unmistakable stamp of controversies that were raging two whole centuries after the *hijra*. Over and over again, the Prophet had been made to serve as the mouthpiece for a whole host of rival, and often directly antagonistic, traditions,” *ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 36-7.

Holland compares the suspiciously precise and detailed *isnads* to the alibi of the villains in Agatha Christie novels. “As in an Agatha Christie novel, where it is invariably the suspect with the most ornate alibi who proves to be the murderer, so similarly, in the field of hadith studies, it turned out that there was no surer mark of fraud or distortion than a really exacting attention to detail.”¹⁰⁵ As Western scholars analyzed the *hadith* traditions more and more, they realized that, “the lavish name-dropping of references, in anything affecting to cite the Prophet, was a mark, not of reliability, but of precisely the opposite.”¹⁰⁶ The *hadith* are late in time and bear every evidence of having been fabricated.

If a Muslim accepts the authority of *Sirat Rasul Allah* either authoritatively or as a community-binding collective story, they will have to integrate the arguments made below into their worldview. If they reject the authority of *Sirat Rasul Allah* because of weak *isnads*, they also have to get rid of all of the *tafsir* and other *sirat-maghazi* literature. Without it, the story of Muhammad and the origin story of the Islamic community is non-existent and the Qur’an and *hadiths* have no broader structure to help interpret them. If, on the other hand, they reject *Sirat Rasul Allah* because of modern western historiographical concerns, then they also need to throw away all of the *hadith* literature because the *isnads* are utterly useless.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Holland, *In the Shadow*, 37.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁷“Over the past forty years, the reliability of what the Muslim historical tradition can tell us about the origins of Islam has indeed come under brutal and escalating attack- to the degree that many historians now doubt that it can tell us anything much of value at all,” Holland, *In the Shadow*, 38. “Other Muslims, as early as the ninth century, rejected the reliability of *hadiths* altogether, arguing- rather in the manner of modern-day Western scholars- that they were all unreliable and fabricated,” *ibid.*, 35.

Genre Mostly Biographical

In Islamic scholarship there are three main genres of Islamic works that concern the historical memory of the prophet; *sirah-maghazi*, *tafsir*, and *hadith*.¹⁰⁸ Out of those three, *Sirat Rasul Allah* is a *sirah-maghazi*.¹⁰⁹ Though, one could argue that *Sirat Rasul Allah* has several genres within it. It mostly concerns the life of Muhammad and, in this way, could be classified as biography. However, it starts well before he is born and continues beyond his death. There are long strands of narrative, lists of names of those present at battles or other events,¹¹⁰ commentaries on the Quran,¹¹¹ accounts of what occurred at battles, and poetry following after and reflecting on these battle accounts.¹¹² While one could interpret this as a book about the life of Muhammad, which it is, it is also the story of the formation of a group of people,¹¹³ perhaps analogous to the gospels and Acts for Christians, the Exodus story for Jews, Homer's *Iliad* for

¹⁰⁸“The historical memory materials on the life of Muhammad were collected in works that fall into three main literary genres: *sirah-maghazi* (best rendered as ‘epic biography’), *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis), and Hadith (words and deeds of the Prophet that establish authoritative norms),” Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 20.

¹⁰⁹“A strikingly eminent example of [a *sirah-maghazi* scholar] is the single most famous biographer of the Prophet, Muhammad Ibn Ishaq...” Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 25.

¹¹⁰For samples of strands of narrative Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 146-48, 327-330, 401-3.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 133, 321, 391-401, 429, 438, 451.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 340, 404-26, 429-33, 429-33, 439.

¹¹³“*Sirah-maghazi* literature functioned to provide the new community with a foundational epic with which the new community could affiliate itself,” Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 30.

Greeks, or the Roman *Aeneid*.¹¹⁴ This is the creation myth of an entire community, or at the very least, it is the earliest surviving author's attempt to narrate that myth.¹¹⁵

Jihad as Moral in Sirat Rasul Allah

Allah the Source of Objective Morality

Allah is the fountainhead of all ontology (both physical and metaphysical) in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. It is he who “created heaven and earth”¹¹⁶ and “created man of blood coagulated.”¹¹⁷ He knows all, even “what is within the breasts.”¹¹⁸ God alone is God as “there is no God but the God.”¹¹⁹ He created “heaven and earth and formed the sun and moon”¹²⁰ and has power over all of his created beings.¹²¹ In many ways this feels like a traditional understanding of God. In fact,

¹¹⁴Some of the battle poetry might be mistaken for a segment from the *Aeneid*. Consider this from Ishaq, “Now slaying the enemy and returning with the spoil, scaring wild beasts, swift in war, grim in combat, of noble spirit, well fed and sleek well fleshed yet thin bellied. They bring coats of mail doubly woven with strong spears which hit the mark, and swords whose rust the polishers have removed,” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 691. “Here’s Ornytus riding his Apulian charger in from a distance, all decked out in exotic armor, the huntsman setting up for a soldier. A bull’s-hide covers his broad shoulders, the big yawning maw of a wolf with glistening fangs in its jaws protects his head and a hunter’s hook-tipped javelin arms his hand as into the press he goes, topping all by a head,” Robert Fagles, translator, *The Aeneid*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 347.

¹¹⁵The term “myth” here is used without making judgment on the historicity of the events described. As N.T. Wright states, “It is a truth insufficiently acknowledged that a sensible worldview equipped with appropriate symbolic praxis must be in want of a story... Until the narrative element has been recognized it is open to doubt whether one has yet fully understood what ‘worldview’... is all about... This becomes clearer if... we use the term familiar to sociologists, namely *myth*. I employ this word here purely heuristically, without prejudice to the question of ‘reference in the public world’: I am not at all implying that the events thus narrated need not, or cannot, actually have happened. In this context ‘myth’ simply means ‘story as an element within a worldview,’” N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 456.

¹¹⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 555.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 687. Interesting to note is that the idea that humankind was made with blood rather than merely mud is also found in Mesopotamian creation myths, Craig S. Keener, John Walton, commentators, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 8.

¹¹⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 325.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 317.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 86.

¹²¹Allah states, “power and authority belong to Me, not to any one of my creatures,” *ibid.*, 392.

Allah is portrayed as the God of the Bible at various points in *Sirat Rasul Allah*.¹²² Several pious characters, Jew and Christian, are shown to predict Muhammad,¹²³ and there is a recurring trope where a pious and noble Christian king is secretly a Muslim, as seen in the *Namus of Ethiopia* or in Emperor Heraclius of the Byzantines.¹²⁴ As the God of the Bible, being all-powerful and all-knowing, Allah has a complete monopoly on the power of punishment and reward, both in this life and the next.¹²⁵ This creates a metaphysical system where one's choice is either to follow the decrees of Allah or be destroyed.

Muhammad as Messenger of Objective Morals

Muhammad is closely-knit with Allah as he is his messenger. He is called messenger or apostle hundreds of times in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. He is clearly portrayed as Allah's mouthpiece.

"God's apostle is patient, noble, whenever he speaks 'tis by God's command."¹²⁶ This is straightforward in the text. "God sent Muhammad and sent down the scripture to him."¹²⁷ There

¹²²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 80, 94, 241, 248, 254, 258, 263, 264, 265, 266-67, 268, 269-70, 273, 275.

¹²³A Christian named Bahira, *ibid.*, 79-80, a Jew named Ibnu'l-Hayyan, *ibid.*, 94. Other examples; *ibid.*, 82-3 and 90.

¹²⁴The Abyssian (Ethiopian) king denies the divinity of Christ. He agrees with the Muslims that Jesus was a slave of God and no more than that, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 152. Heraclius is approached by a messenger from Muhammad with a letter and questions the carrier. After questioning him he sees that Muhammad is a true prophet and wishes that he "were with him that I might wash his feet," *ibid.*, 655. He is told, "If you accept Islam you will be safe; if you accept Islam God will give you a double reward; if you turn back the sin of the husbandmen will be upon you," i.e. the burden of it," *ibid.* He responds, "Alas, I know that your master is a prophet sent (by God) and that it is he whom we expect to find in our book, but I go in fear of my life from the Romans; but for that I would follow him," *ibid.*, 656. This story about Heraclius is from al-Tabari's recension of Ishaq.

¹²⁵For power over punishment see Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 344 and 438. For power over reward see *ibid.*, 469. Elsewhere Allah said, "And he who desires the reward of this world We will give him it; and he who desires the reward of the next world We will give him it and We shall reward the thankful," i.e. he of you who desires this world having no desire for the next We will give him his allotted portion of sustenance and nothing more and he has no share in the next world; and he who desires the reward of the next world We will give him what he has been promised together with his reward of sustenance in this world. That is the reward for the thankful, i.e. the pious," *ibid.*, 395.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 422.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 684.

are even miracles that happen in order to substantiate the claim that Muhammad is Allah's messenger.¹²⁸ For example, when the Muslims are digging trenches before the battle of the Trench, Muhammad spits in some water, sprinkles it on a rock, and it became soft. Ishaq tells us this was done as "an example of God's justifying His apostle and confirming his prophetic office... Those who were present said, 'By Him who sent him a prophet with the truth [the rock] was pulverized as though it were soft sand so that it could not resist axe or shovel.'"¹²⁹ In the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, only an actor on God's behalf could spit and make a rock soft. This lets the reader know the glory and veracity of Muhammad's apostleship. The miracles are taken with epistemological weight. This act was a symbol of the metaphysical truth of Muhammad's prophethood, and the metaphysical truth, in turn, has consequences for believer's actions.¹³⁰

As the messenger of Allah, Muhammad has a heavy responsibility.¹³¹ He must share Allah's decrees with mankind in order that they may be followed, even when he doesn't want to.¹³² Allah, in choosing Muhammad, "chose the best of His creation as an apostle, and honoured

¹²⁸Other miracles include when Muhammad calls a tree and it comes up to him, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 179. He also rides a donkey "whose every stride took it as far as the eyes could reach," *ibid.*, 182. When some men are suffering from "an epidemic and enlarged spleens" Muhammad tells them to go to the camels and drink "their milk and urine," *ibid.*, 677. This ends up healing them. He heals a man's eye who got wounded while committing *jihad*, *ibid.*, 381. Muhammad duplicated dates, *ibid.*, 452. And he withered someone's fingers, *ibid.*, 159.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 451.

¹³⁰"And belief is both saying and acting, and it increases and decreases," [emphasis added] Mohammad al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol.1, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina, Darussalam, 2015), 56.

¹³¹"Prophecy is a troublesome burden- only strong, resolute messengers can bear it by God's help and grace, because of the opposition which they meet from men in conveying God's message. The apostle carried out God's orders in spite of the opposition and ill treatment which he met with," *ibid.*, 155.

¹³²"I know that when I made this message known to them I should meet with great unpleasantness so I kept silence until Gabriel came to me and told me that if I did not do as I was ordered my Lord would punish me," *ibid.*, 117.

him with lineage, made him truthful in speech, and favoured him with reputation, and sent down to him His book and entrusted him with it above (all) that He had created. He was God's choice from the worlds."¹³³ What results then is something like Divine Command Theory, with whatever Muhammad receives from Allah, serving as the objective moral standard for the metaphysical framework of *Sirat Rasul Allah*. This is why, concerning the battle of Hunayn, Abbas b. Mirdas can say, "but God's religion is the religion of Muhammad. We are satisfied with it: it contains guidance and laws. By it he set our affairs right after we had erred and none can avert the decree of God."¹³⁴ Allah makes the rules, Muhammad speaks them, and this is why it gives the Muslims satisfaction to follow those rules.

The metaphysical structure then grows naturally, almost deterministically, from what has been established. First, Allah is all-powerful, all-knowing, and he alone has power over punishment and reward. Second, Muhammad is his messenger who has specific decrees from Allah for mankind to fulfill. From this we might add a third point, though hardly needing to be said; no rational being wants to be destroyed by Allah. This then takes us to the conclusion that any rational being that believes the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* will obey Muhammad's commands. This theme of obedience is the pulsating heartbeat of the praxis of *jihad*.

Obligatory Obedience to the Messenger

Calls to obedience and oaths of allegiance are ubiquitous in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, showing just how important the theology of obedience is in the mind of the author. These oaths take many different forms and appear in various different contexts. It is taken for granted that Muslims are supposed to follow the orders of Muhammad.

¹³³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 629.

¹³⁴Ibid., 580.

The theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* is not laid out systematically, like a textbook on theology, rather it is tied together with other complex theological concepts like a knot, planted within a narrative context. You cannot pull on one string of the knot without unraveling other strings that are also important. To this end, it is best to look at these oaths of allegiance, not as conceptual islands independent of any other idea, but instead as quotes within a larger context that branches out in all different directions. Obedience is the bridge between that metaphysical foundation (Who is Allah? Why obey him? Who is Muhammad?) and real world praxis where characters take their place within a dynamic narrative.¹³⁵

This first quote is from a poem composed by Abu Qays. He is described as a monk during the time of paganism,¹³⁶ who worshiped “the Lord of Abraham.”¹³⁷ He lived in Medina and unhesitatingly embraced Islam once Muhammad moved to Medina and proselytized to him. Concerning Muhammad he states, “We spent on [Muhammad] the best of our possessions, sparing not our lives in war at his side. We know that there is nought beside God and we know that God is the best guide. We shall fight any man that fights Him, be he our dearest friend.”¹³⁸ In this oath of allegiance we see the pledge of material goods “we spent on him” as well as a martial duty “sparing not our lives in war at his side.” This is closely tied to and springs naturally from the strict monotheism outlined above. There is an explicit acknowledgment of God as the arbiter of objective morality “best guide” and then an intensification of martial allegiance;

¹³⁵This is similar to a Christian perception of Divine Command Theory. While Islam potentially overlaps with Christianity in the ontology of its moral system, the two religions are completely different when it comes to the consequences and requirements of those moral frameworks. For discussion related to this topic see; Sherene Nicholas Khouri, “Holy Wars: A Historical and Theological Comparison Between Joshua’s Conquests VS. Mohammad’s First Three Incursions,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies; Cluj* Vol. 20 Iss. 60 (Winter 2021): 78-91.

¹³⁶Before the coming of Muhammad and the Qur'an.

¹³⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 237.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 238.

willingness to kill even if “he be our dearest friend.” The resulting praxis from allegiance to Muhammad is not just one of violence but one of violence that supercedes any allegiance from even the most intimate relationships.

This absolute obedience, even to the extent of being willing to kill family members, is not just portrayed as pious, but also as a tool for *dawah*, spreading the religion of Islam. Muhammad ordered the Muslims in Medina to “Kill any Jew that falls into your power.”¹³⁹ On hearing these orders, Muhayyisa obeyed and killed his Jewish friend named Ibn Sunayna. This Jew had given Muhayyisa so much food that he had been fattened from it and they had “social and business relations.”¹⁴⁰ Regardless of their close friendship, Muhayyisa killed his Jewish friend under Muhammad’s orders and Muhayyisa’s elder brother Huwayyisa is shocked in disbelief.

When Muhayyisa killed him [the Jew] Huwayyisa [the elder brother] began to beat him [Muhayyisa] saying, ‘You enemy of God, did you kill him when much of the fat on your belly comes from his wealth?’ Muayyisa answered, ‘Had the one who ordered me to kill him ordered me to kill you I would have cut your head off.’ He said that this was the beginning of Huwayyisa’s acceptance of Islam. The other replied, ‘By God if Muhammad had ordered you to kill me would you have killed me?’ He said, ‘Yes, by God, had he ordered me to cut off your head I would have done so.’ He exclaimed, ‘By God, a religion which can bring you to this is marvellous!’ and he became a Muslim.¹⁴¹

After this narrative there is a short poem written by Muhayyisa. The first two lines of which state, “My mother’s son blames me because if I were ordered to kill him I would smite his nape with a sharp sword...”¹⁴² From this narrative and the following poem it is clear that this call to obedience is incredibly strict and potentially brutal.

¹³⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 369.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 369.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Ibid.

While obedience within the context of *Sirat Rasul Allah* can potentially mean the murder of family or friends, it will, in all other circumstances, at least lead to destroyed relationships with those who don't believe. Warnings against friendships with non-believers are made several times in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. "Unless believer becomes friend of believer to the exclusion of unbeliever even though he is of his kin. 'There will be confusion in the land,' i.e. doubt about the true and the false and the rise of corruption in the land if the believer takes the side of the unbeliever against the believer."¹⁴³ Unbelievers can't actually be friends with the non-believers because non-believers secretly hate all Muslims. They are incapable of loving Muslims and all believers who seem to love Muslims are actually lying.

O you who believe, *do not choose those outside your community as intimate friends. They will spare no pains to corrupt you longing for your ruin.* From their mouths hatred has already shown itself and what their breasts conceal is greater. We have made the signs plain to you if you will understand. Behold you love them but *they love not you* and you believe in the book-all of it,' i.e. you believe in their book and in the books that were before that while they deny your book, so that *you have more right to hate them than they to hate you.* 'And when they meet you they say, We believe and when they go apart they bite their fingers against you in rage. *Say, Die in your rage,*' [emphasis added].¹⁴⁴

To end friendships in this way may seem callous, but from the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, the importance of Islam cannot be overstated, and the importance of the lives and relationships of non-believers cannot be understated. Muhammad goes so far as to state, "that one man should accept Islam is dearer to me than the killing of a thousand unbelievers."¹⁴⁵ The life of the non-believer is of no consequence, so it follows that the friendship of the non-believer would be likewise. True obedience supersedes these friendships.

¹⁴³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 327.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 263.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 377. This quote is from a bracketed portion that Guillaume tells us he got from "from Yunus' *riwaya*. It is cited from Suhayli (ii.132 in W. ii in loc,)" *ibid*.

Commands to end lives and end close relationships can be emotionally difficult for those carrying out the orders. Who doesn't love their own brother or friend? As a way to mitigate this problem, the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* emphasizes the righteousness of those who are willing to ignore their mind and conscience whenever it comes into conflict with Muhammad's commands. This can be seen in some oaths of allegiance. After the Battle of Uhud, Ka'b b. Malik composed a poem that contains these lines. "Among us was God's apostle whose command we obey. When he gives an order *we do not examine it*. The spirit descends on him from his Lord brought down from the midst of heaven and taken up again. We consult him on our wishes, and our desire is to *obey him in all that he wants*,"[emphasis added].¹⁴⁶ This oath of allegiance contains what appears to be parallelism with the first and third line repeating the same idea but in different words, reaffirming God as the arbiter of objective morality and Muhammad as his mouthpiece. The second and fourth lines state that there will be obedience without thought.

A1) Among us was God's apostle whose command we obey

B1) When he gives an order we do not examine it.

A2) The spirit descends on him from his Lord brought down from the midst of heaven and taken up again.

B2) We consult him on our wishes, and our desire is to obey him in all that he wants.

The A lines are a reaffirmation of the metaphysical foundation upon which the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* is built. Allah is in charge of what is good and evil and Muhammad gives those laws to humankind with exactitude. The B lines are an explicit renunciation of use of

¹⁴⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 406.

thought when it would conflict with the orders of Allah given through his prophet. Malik's poem is not merely boasting of the ability to disregard one's own mind, he continues on to applaud being able to disregard one's own emotions in obedience to Muhammad as well. "The apostle said when they appeared, '*Cast off the fear of death and desire it*, be like one who sells his life to draw near to a King by Whom he will be restored to life. *Take your swords and trust in God* to Whom belongs the disposal of all things'"¹⁴⁷[emphasis added]. Do not listen to your mind. Do not listen to your heart. "Take your sword" and "trust in God." As the mind goes to submission, so the hand goes to the sword.

There is the desire in *Sirat Rasul Allah*'s theology for Muslims to see themselves as distinguished from the Israelites of the past by means of their obedience to enact violence. This is seen in another oath of allegiance. "We will not say as the children of Israel said to Moses, 'You and your Lord go and fight and we will stay at home,' but you and your Lord go and fight, and we will fight with you. By God, if you were to take us to Bark al-Ghimad, we would fight resolutely with you against its defenders until you gained it."¹⁴⁸ The oath of allegiance is tied directly to willingness to fight, and this willingness to fight is the central claim used to distinguish the current Muslim from the ancient Israelite.

There are also oaths of allegiance that are tied directly to the oath-swearer emphasizing their willingness to suffer pain themselves on behalf of obeying Muhammad. When Muhammad

¹⁴⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 406.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 293-4. This desire to distinguish themselves from Israel by obeying Muhammad is seen in the *hadith* as well. "He (i.e. Al-Miqdad) came to the Prophet while the Prophet was urging the Muslims to fight against *Al-Mushrikun* [polytheists, pagans, idolaters, and disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah and in His Messenger Muhammad]. Al-Miqdad said, 'We will not say as the people of Musa (Moses) said: 'So, go you and your Lord and fight you two...' But we shall fight on your right and on your left and in front of you and behind you.' I saw the face of the Prophet getting bright with happiness, for that saying delighted him," Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyad: Darussalam, 2015), 180.

questions the loyalty of the Answar, one of their number, Sa'd b. Mu'adh, responds, "if you were to ask us to cross this sea and you plunged into it, we would plunge into it with you; not a man would stay behind. We do not dislike the idea of meeting your enemy tomorrow. We are experienced in war, trustworthy in combat."¹⁴⁹ Here the Answar are willing to drown at sea rather than disobey Muhammad.¹⁵⁰

This self-denying obedience is seen even more widespread when a disease breaks out amongst the Muslim people, making them too weak to stand. Muhammad forces them to stand anyway, despite he himself not being sick.

When the apostle came to Medina with his companions, the fever of Medina smote them until they were extremely ill (though God turned it away from his prophet) to such a degree that they could only pray sitting. The apostle came out to them when they were praying thus and said: 'Know that the prayer of the sitter is only half as valuable as the prayer of the stander.' Thereupon the Muslims painfully struggled to their feet despite their weakness and sickness, seeking a blessing.¹⁵¹

The extent to which this community venerated Muhammad is apparent here. Although he himself is not sick, he is still able to make them all stand and they do exactly as he says despite the harm to themselves. It is exactly and precisely right after this story that Muhammad starts his raids. The very next line of text, in the next paragraph, tells us why Muhammad starts his raids.¹⁵² "Then the apostle prepared for war in pursuance of God's command to fight his enemies

¹⁴⁹The full quote is, "We believe in you, we declare your truth, and we witness that what you have brought is the truth, and we have given you our word and agreement to hear and obey; so go where you wish, we are with you; and by God, if you were to ask us to cross this sea and you plunged into it, we would plunge into it with you; not a man would stay behind. We do not dislike the idea of meeting your enemy tomorrow. We are experienced in war, trustworthy in combat. It may well be that God will let us show you something which will bring you joy, so take us along with God's blessing.' The apostle was delighted at Sa'd's words which greatly encouraged him," Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 294.

¹⁵⁰This sort of attitude is dramatically emphasized in numerous examples throughout *Sirat Rasul Allah*, especially in the Battle of Uhud, as will be explored below.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 280.

¹⁵²Permission for violence is said to have been given by Ishaq at the Second Aqaba previously, *ibid.*, 212.

and to fight those polytheists who were near at hand whom God commanded him to fight. This was thirteen years after his call.”¹⁵³ Obedience and commands to kill blend together so naturally that the narrative can smoothly and organically flow from one to the next just as naturally as one breathes in before breathing out. It is Allah’s commands, and not anything else (including self-defense), that makes violence permissible.

Obedience Not Self Defense

It needs to be stressed that when *jihad* is committed, it is motivated by *obedience* to Allah, not self-defense. Nuance is needed to make this clear. Allah allows violence at the second Aqaba and there he lists self-defense; “He gave permission to His apostle to fight and to protect himself against those who wronged them and treated them badly,”¹⁵⁴ among several other justifications for him allowing violence.¹⁵⁵ However, it is Allah’s words and not situations requiring self-defense that make a violent deed permissible in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Remember in the section defining the word “raid,” in the raid of Nakhla, the Quraysh *were not* a threat because they thought the Muslims were peaceful pilgrims. “They are pilgrims, you have nothing to fear from them.”¹⁵⁶ Yet, the Muslims kill them all and take their property. They return to Muhammad and are scared that what they have done is wrong, but Allah gives them permission. What is Allah’s reasoning? “Keeping people from the way of God and disbelieving in Him.... This is a more

¹⁵³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 280.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 212. Tibawi is critical of Guillaume’s translation in a section after this quotation. He believes the following passage should be added to fully render the Arabic, “The first verse which was revealed... allowing him (i.e. Muhammad) to wage war, and making it lawful for him to shed blood, and fighting those who oppressed him and his companions,” Tibawi, “Ibn Ishaq’s Sira,” 203. This addition does not affect the arguments made in this paper in any way.

¹⁵⁵Aqaba is just the name of a geographical location. The action that happens there is an oath of allegiance to Muhammad.

¹⁵⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 287.

serious matter with God than the killing of those of them whom you have slain.”¹⁵⁷ Self-defense is not even mentioned. Allah’s permission is all that matters.

Where self-defense is a factor, within the context of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, it is a broader term than generally understood in the West today. This text was not written with post-Enlightenment philosophy in mind. Nor was it written as a compliment to the first Amendment of the United States Constitution. It is a product of early medieval Islam. So then there are two facts that are apparent; 1) Violence is permissible because of Allah’s commands, not notions of self-defense and, 2) Where self-defense is mentioned as part of Allah’s reasoning for allowing violence, it is not the sort of “self-defense” that only attacks those who are physically attacking the defender. It is much broader, attacking anyone who “seduces you from your religion” or “lies about the prophet.”

In order to understand the importance of obedience being what makes *jihad* moral, the claims 1) and 2) need to be examined deeply. In order to do that, nuanced textual criticism will need to be used. Some passages from *Sirat Rasul Allah* could be interpreted as evidence against claim 1) if the quotes are taken in isolation and not read carefully. Fortunately *Sirat Rasul Allah* gives us a method for textual criticism that will prove both claims to be true. These rules for hermeneutics come from Allah himself with Ishaq’s commentary. First we are warned not to use the ambiguous passages of a text to interpret the text. Only those with impure hearts would do such a thing. “But as to those in whose hearts is a deviation,’ i.e. turning away from true guidance, ‘they follow what is ambiguous,’ i.e. what can be otherwise interpreted to substantiate thereby what they have invented and introduced anew that they might have an argument and a plausible reason for their doctrine...”¹⁵⁸ Next Ishaq says to let the bedrock of your arguments be

¹⁵⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 288.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 273.

straightforward passages rather than ambiguous ones. “Carry over the interpretation of the obscure to the plain which can have only one meaning and thus the book becomes consistent, one part confirming another, the argument effective and the case clear; falsehood is excluded...”¹⁵⁹ So put together, don’t use the ambiguous passages to form your interpretation of the text, and the straight-forward passages should be used to interpret the ambiguous ones.

Another hermeneutical rule that will come into play is that we should not assume that “self-defense” means to a seventh century Muslim what it means to us today. Instead we should look at the passage as a whole and the text as a whole. As Nietzsche warns, “It is not sufficient to use the same words in order to understand one another: we must also employ the same words for the same kind of internal experiences, we must in the end have experiences *in common*.”¹⁶⁰ With this in mind we can determine what makes more sense of the text as a whole, keeping in mind that “self-defense” may not mean what we think of as “self-defense” when Ishaq uses the term.

Ishaq tells us that the Muslims are first ordered by Allah to attack the infidels at the second ‘Aqaba.¹⁶¹ “The apostle had not been given permission to fight or allowed to shed blood

¹⁵⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 273.

¹⁶⁰Helen Zimmern, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1917), 213.

¹⁶¹Is this really where permission was first given to fight? Perhaps to the Muslims as a whole, but there are certainly specific exceptions with individuals. Sa’d is honorably remembered as the first to draw blood in Islam when he “smote a polytheist with the jawbone of a camel and wounded him,” for interrupting a prayer, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 118. After being insulted three times Muhammad threatens some Quraysh saying, “Will you listen to me O Quraysh? By him who holds my life in His hand I bring you slaughter,” *ibid.*, 131. This threat of deadly force is long before the second Aqaba. Even if Muhammad wasn’t allowed to use deadly force here, he seems to understand he will be allowed to at some point. Hamza hears that some Quraysh yelled insults at his nephew and then beats them with a bow in retribution. “Hamza was filled with rage, *for God purposed to honour him*, so he went out at a run and did not stop to greet anyone, meaning to punish Abu Jahl when he met him. When he got to the mosque he saw him sitting among the people, and went up to him until he stood over him, when he lifted up his bow and struck him a violent blow with it, saying, ‘Will you insult him when I follow his religion, and say what he says? Hit me back if you can!’ Some of B. Makhzūm got up to go to Abū Jahl’s help, but he said, ‘Let Abū ‘Umāra alone for, by God, I insulted his nephew deeply.’ *Hamza’s Islam was complete, and he followed the apostle’s commands*. When he became a Muslim the Quraysh recognized that the apostle had become strong, and had found a protector in Hamza, and so they abandoned some of their ways of harassing him,” [emphasis added] *ibid.*, 132. This story shows that God willed the anger in Hamza in order to honor him. God willed a strike that was not in self-defense, as we would understand it, but was for a mere insult and this before the second Aqaba. The

before the second ‘Aqaba. He had simply been ordered to call men to God and to endure insult and forgive the ignorant.”¹⁶² Then Ishaq proceeds to inform us why Allah allows violence here. “The Quraysh had persecuted his followers, seducing some from their religion, and exiling others from their country. They had to choose whether to give up their religion, be maltreated at home, or to flee the country, some to Abyssinia, others to Medina.”¹⁶³ To this point, the reasoning looks a lot like traditional self-defense, but notice that some terms are blurred; being “maltreated,” and being “seduced from religion” is blurred together with more aggressive accusations like “sending some into exile.” Ishaq continues, “When Quraysh became insolent towards God and rejected His gracious purpose, accused His prophet of lying, and ill treated and exiled those who served Him and proclaimed His unity, believed in His prophet, and held fast to His religion, He gave permission to His apostle to fight and to protect himself against those who wronged them and treated them badly.”¹⁶⁴ Here the language appears quite reasonable at first glance, but if you look closely you see a blurring of terms. The Quraysh are doing multiple things that allow violence; first they are being insolent toward God; second they are rejecting His gracious purpose; third, they are accusing his prophet of lying; fourth, they are ill treating and exiling those who serve him. While this fourth action might include behavior that warrants self-defense, though not necessarily, all the other claims; the first, second, and third, are all strictly religious claims and have nothing to do with defense of self. The implications of this are

result of this violence is that Hamza’s Islam is called “complete” and the Quraysh treat the apostle with more respect. Following the apostle’s commands, committing violence, and having his Islam become complete all intersect for Hamza. There is no indication that this violence is at all immoral, with everything pointing to the contrary.

¹⁶²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 212.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 212.

made evident with the injunction that immediately follows this section. Allah orders, “Fight them so that there be no more seduction,’ i.e. until no believer is seduced from his religion. ‘And the religion is God’s,’ i.e. Until God alone is worshipped.”¹⁶⁵ Although any reader can see that self-defense, “to protect himself,” is a factor that Allah considers when allowing violence, it is his word *ultimately* that actually allows violence, not self-defense. And “protecting self” seems to include broad liberal categories; like using violence to stop lies about the prophet, or keeping people from being seduced away from Islam. The imperative to fight is said to extend until “no believer is seduced from his religion,” which is clearly outside the bounds of self-defense as someone in the modern post-Enlightenment Western context would understand the term.¹⁶⁶ This broad definition of self-defense becomes apparent within the context of the rest of *Sirat Rasul Allah* in various places. Specific examples to be examined below will be other references to the second ‘Aqabah, the lack of development of the concept of “self-defense” in Ishaq’s work, the random and capricious nature of Muhammad’s raids, the story of Quzman, Muhammad’s attitude toward poets who mock him, forced conversions, and the imperative to conquer the large swathes of land for Islam.

Other references to the second ‘Aqabah actually come earlier in the book than the one just examined. In these, the targets allowed for violence seem much larger than would be the case if only self-defense warranted violence. For example we read, “When God gave permission to his apostle to fight, the second ‘Aqaba contained conditions involving war which were not in

¹⁶⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 213. In the hadith we see a similar passage, “I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight against the people till they say *La ilaha illallah* (none has the right to be worshipped but Allah), and whoever said *La ilaha illallah*, he saved his life and property from me except for Islamic law, and his accounts will be with Allah (either to punish him or to forgive him),” (Bukhari 2946).

¹⁶⁶We are reading a text from 8th century Iraq detailing events in 7th century Arabia. Once again, it would be a mistake to impose post-enlightenment understandings of self-defense to the term “protecting self.” The first amendment did not exist. Their context is not our context.

the first act of fealty. Now they bound themselves to war against *all and sundry* for God and his apostle, while he promised them for faithful service thus the reward of paradise”¹⁶⁷[emphasis added]. This is not a singular instance where a broad category is named as a potential target of *jihad*. Elsewhere we see similar language which bothers Asim b. Umar. Asim warns his people when they are swearing their allegiance to Muhammad during the Second ‘Aqabah because of how broad the targets they will be fighting. “O men of Khazraj, do you realize to what you are committing yourselves in pledging your support to this man? It is to war against *all and sundry*”¹⁶⁸[emphasis added]. In other words, he is warning his people that swearing allegiance at the second ‘Aqabah is scary because it means they will have to fight everyone. Swearing an allegiance to act only in self-defense would hardly be scary, it would be the opposite, a relief.

It is odd that there is no discussion of a definition of “protecting self” or “self-defense” in the entirety of *Sirat Rasul Allah*. One would think that if it is the only time *jihad* is allowed, there would be a pretty clear definition, or at the very least a discussion, or some sort of case law, setting the limitations of what praxes are acceptable. Consider the priority in defining the word “raid” above. Ishaq shows the Muslims struggling with and prioritizing a definition of “raid,” because they wanted to ensure their ability to receive loot and act within the bounds of what Allah had deemed permissible. Through this discussion they sought to clarify what is allowed and what isn’t so that they might avoid punishment and keep the booty they seized. That no such similar discussion regarding “self-defense” ever emerges to clarify the meaning of “protecting self” shows that such a definition was as much of a priority in the minds of Ishaq’s characters as the word “raid.” The most likely explanation for this is that a clear definition of self-defense was

¹⁶⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 208.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 204.

not needed in order to conduct *jihad* and this because *jihad* is *barely related to* self-defense, if at all. Rather, it has everything to do with following the orders of Allah; obeying.

There are several factors about Muhammad's tactics that demonstrate that self-defense was not a central concern. If Muhammad's battles were battles of self-defense, we would expect his targets to be open and notorious to him and his fellow Muslims. If you are acting in self-defense you certainly know who is attacking you. You would not attack random people. In other words, self-defense would not appear erratic, arbitrary, or capricious. Secondly you would also expect to see a strong desire to act, to engage in battle. No rational human wants to be deprived of their ability to defend themselves. If they are attacking a random unknown target while feeling hesitant to act, this might indicate that there is some *mens rea* at play besides self-defense.

Before the battle of Tabuk, we read the following: "The apostle ordered his companions to prepare to raid the Byzantines at a time when men were hard pressed; the heat was oppressive and there was a drought; fruit was ripe (T. and shade was eagerly sought) and the men wanted to stay in the shade with their fruit and disliked traveling at that season."¹⁶⁹ Already this seems like a strange set up for self-defense. Are the men really in apprehension for their lives if they would rather sit in the shade and eat fruit than go attack? But what happens next only gets stranger. "Now the apostle nearly always referred *allusively* to the destination of a raid and announced that he was *making for a place other than that which he actually intended*. This was the *sole exception*"[emphasis added].¹⁷⁰ From this passage we can tell that Muhammad was ordinarily

¹⁶⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 602. Whenever a passage has (T...) in Guillaume's translation, it means the content within the parenthesis is an excerpt from al-Tabari.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 602. Martin Ling entirely omits Muhammad lying about targets or being allusive about who he will attack in his story of Muhammad's life. Instead he gives an argument that the Muslims were in apprehension of being attacked because of troops stationed in Balqa by Heraclius, Lings, *Muhammad*, 330. This is not how someone reading only *Sirat Rasul Allah* would interpret the situation. Ishaq mentions Heraclius sending troops "to Maab in the Balqa" in *Sirat Rasul Allah* but the Muslims only learn that those troops are there two years earlier in the raid of

obscure about who his targets were going to be. He would even sometimes lie about it. That is very odd. Here a reader expecting a straightforward example of self-defense could be forgiven for scratching their head and rereading the passage several times to see if they can make any sense of it. Whatever Muhammad's reasons for attacking, the motivation appears to be something besides protecting himself, at least in the way that someone in the modern West would understand it. As to why Muhammad is straightforward with this particular target in Tabuk, Ishaq gives us Muhammad's reasoning. "For he said plainly that he was making for the Byzantines because the journey was long, the season difficult, and the enemy in great strength, so that the men could make suitable preparations."¹⁷¹ This one time Muhammad is clear because he wants his men to be prepared for a difficult and long journey.

Everything about this is odd if we assume that self-defense is the motivation for attacking an enemy. Imagine a defendant in court alleging self-defense and admitting out loud that they were blindfolded and had no idea who was in the room with them when they started shooting their gun. Such a defense would likely not prevail. Here Muhammad refers "allusively" to targets. He also sometimes lies about where he will attack, announcing "that he was making for a place other than that which he actually intended." If an army is attacking in self-defense, they are going to, very obviously, know who they are attacking. It is bizarre then that here the Muslims have no idea where they're going. Muhammad is either ambiguous or directly lies to them. These

Mu'ta after they were already attacking the Byzantines, not in response to any knowledge, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 532. If this is supposed to have provoked the raid on Tabuk, Muhammad's behavior is odd. After learning about the army in Balqa Muhammad spends two years doing precisely nothing about it. Just as odd, Heraclius never attacks with his army in those two years. There is nearly 60 pages of content, various battles, a pilgrimage, Muhammad waiting around for two months, and a two year timespan in between these stories *ibid.*, 542-602. In that time Ishaq never mentions any fear of attack from Heraclius. Though Lings gives no citation for his claim, al-Buti makes the same claim about Tabuk being a response to reports of Heraclius's army, al-Buti cites "Ibn Sa'd and others" al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence*, 513. However al-Buti does classify Tabuk as "conquest" rather than "defensive," in his book sections, *ibid.*, 13-18. If there is a self-defense argument to be made for Tabuk, it is not found in *Sirat Rasul Allah*.

¹⁷¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 602.

don't sound like men in apprehension of danger. They sound like men who "wanted to stay in the shade with their fruit and disliked traveling."¹⁷² Ishaq may have secretly believed Muhammad to be acting in self-defense here. If he did, he made absolutely no effort to point that out. It is as though the issue of whether this was self-defense or not had absolutely no importance to Ishaq. Obeying Allah's commands given through Muhammad is what is emphasized. This is made explicit in the example of Quzman.

Quzman is a warrior who fights on the side of the Muslims against the polytheists at the battle of Uhud. His motivation is the "defense of his people." Because of this Muhammad says that Quzman belongs to the people of hell.

The apostle used to say: '[Quzman] belongs to the people of hell.' At Uhud [Quzman] fought so valiantly that he killed several polytheists. But they severely wounded him and he was carried to the quarters of the B. Zafar. The Muslims said, 'Cheer up, O Quzman; you have done gallantly today and your sufferings have been for God's sake.' He said: 'Why should I cheer up? I fought *only to protect my people*.' And when the pain of his wounds became unendurable he took an arrow from his quiver and cut a vein in his hand and thus committed suicide [emphasis added].¹⁷³

In a near duplicate passage we read that on hearing this news Muhammad (feeling vindicated by Quzman's admission) stated, "I testify that I am truly God's apostle."¹⁷⁴ The day of

¹⁷²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 602.

¹⁷³Ibid., 245. This quote is from a section listing all of the "Jews and Ansari hypocrites." In context Quzman is just listed along with a whole list of names and their crimes. For example, right after we read the account of al-Dahhak b. Thabit. Among B. 'Abdu'l-Ashhal no hypocrite male or female was known except al-Dahhak b. Thabit, one of the B. Ka'b of the family of Sa'd b. Zayd. He was suspected of hypocrisy and love of the Jews. Hassan b. Thabit said of him: Who will tell al-Dahhak that his veins were unable to be glorified in Islam? Do you love the Jews of al-Hijaz and their religion, you liver-hearted ass, and not love Muhammad? Their religion will never march with ours As long as men roam the open desert," *ibid*.

¹⁷⁴Quzman appears again later in the text at the recounting of the battle of Uhud. There we read a similar passage to the one above, though this one does not include the "your sufferings have been for God's sake" line and instead of defense he is fighting for the honor of his people. "There was a man among us, a stranger of unknown origin called Quzman. The apostle used to say when he was mentioned, 'He belongs to the people of hell.' On the day of Uhud he fought fiercely and killed seven or eight polytheists single-handed, he being a stout warrior. He was disabled by wounds and carried to the quarter of B. Zafar. The Muslims began to say to him, 'You have done gallantly, Quzman, be of good cheer!' 'Why should I,' he said, 'I only fought for the honour of my people; but for that I should not have fought.' And when the pain of his wounds became unbearable he took an arrow from his quiver, (T. cut the veins of his wrist, and bled to death. When the apostle was told of this he said 'I testify that I am

Uhud was a trial, a test of pure hearts,¹⁷⁵ and Quzman is found wanting. He will go straight to hell despite dying in battle alongside the Muslims. Why? Because he only fought to defend his people. He is condemned *precisely* because he was motivated by self-defense. Muhammad is vindicated as a prophet.¹⁷⁶ How? Quzman *admits* that he was acting in self-defense. Self-defense is not at all determinative on the morality of an action. All that matters is the answer to this question, “Are you fighting for Allah’s sake?”¹⁷⁷ True *jihad* requires battle, yes, but it must be motivated out of piety for Allah, and not for any other reason. According to the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, Quzman’s fate is no different from the polytheists. Both are in hell where the fire burns and their “ chests contract in anguish.”¹⁷⁸

There are several points in *Sirat Rasul Allah* where infidels, who are in no position to endanger Muslims, are told they either need to convert or die. This principle can be seen when Sarjis, who is a new convert to Islam, chose Abu Bakr as a companion for his first raid as a Muslim. Abu Bakr, when teaching Sarjis the fundamentals of Islam, tells him, “God sent

truly God's apostle’),” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 383-4. After the word “quiver,” Ibn Hisham’s version of the last part of the last sentence is “and killed himself with it,” *ibid.*, 384. It is in Guillaume’s footnotes.

¹⁷⁵The theme of *jihad* as a form of testing true believers will be explored further below.

¹⁷⁶In the *hadith* there is an unnamed warrior at an unnamed battle who is fighting really well and once he is wounded, he commits suicide. Muhammad calls him one of the people of hell seemingly because of his suicide even though others thought he was righteous. “A man may seem to the people as if he were doing the deeds of the people of Paradise, while in fact he is from the people of the (Hell) Fire, another may seem to the people as if he were doing the deeds of the people of Hell (Fire), while in fact he is from the people of Paradise,” (Bukhari 2898). This warrior is not named, unlike Quzman in Ishaq’s writing. And his crime is suicide, unlike Ishaq’s, who fought in self-defense rather than for the glory of Islam.

¹⁷⁷Ilyad Hilal states that “through this battle [Uhud] we can see and understand what slavery to Allah (swt) really means and what the results of this slavery is. Just prior to the actual war, Rasulallah (saaw), after having made all the war preparations, made a very long du’ah (supplication), praying for Allah’s (swt) help. To the point that Abu Bakr remarked to the Prophet (saaw) over the necessity of having such a long du’ah, since Allah (swt) had already promised them victory. This demonstrates that no matter what, one is always a slave to Allah (swt) and *that actions have to be undertaken for His (swt) pleasure alone.*” [emphasis added] Ilyad Hilal, *Selections from the Seerah of Muhammad*, (al-Khilafa Publications: London, 1997), 88.

¹⁷⁸“You will see the pious living in gardens, while for the infidels hell fire is burning. Shamed in life, when they die their breasts will contract in anguish,” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 100.

Muhammad with this religion and he strove for it until men accepted it voluntarily or by force.”¹⁷⁹ What Abu Bakr means by this can be clarified by several conversion stories, like that of Abu Sufyan. Muhammad addresses Sufyan saying, “Woe to you Abu Sufyan, isn’t it time you recognize that I am God’s apostle?” He [Abu Sufyan] answered, ‘As to that I still have some doubt.’ I said to him, ‘Submit and testify there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the apostle of God before you lose your head,’ so he did so.”¹⁸⁰ A similar story is that of Umayr B. Wahb who converts to Islam. Umayr said to Muhammad, “I used to be active in extinguishing the light of God and in persecuting those who followed God’s religion. I should like you to give me permission to go to Mecca to summon them to God and His apostle and to Islam that perhaps God may guide them; and if not I will persecute them in their religion as I used to persecute your companions.”¹⁸¹ Muhammad’s answered in the affirmative, “The apostle agreed and he went to Mecca.”¹⁸² The text is unambiguous about what happens next, “When ‘Umayr came to Mecca he stayed there summoning people to Islam and treating those who opposed him violently so that through him many became Muslims.”¹⁸³ None of these stories are defensible with a post-Enlightenment definition of “self-defense.”

More examples can be seen in the way that Muhammad treats poets who mock him. Abu Afak is one such poet who writes a poem insulting Muhammad.¹⁸⁴ Muhammad had killed Abu

¹⁷⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 669.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 547.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 319.

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴The poem doesn’t seem that inflammatory. It merely states, “Long have I lived but never have I seen an assembly or collection of people more faithful to their undertaking and their allies when called upon than the sons of Qayla when they assembled, men who overthrew mountains and never submitted. A rider who came to them split them in two (saying) ‘Permitted’, ‘Forbidden’ of all sorts of things. Had you believed in glory or kingship you would have followed Tubba,” *ibid.*, 675. Guillaume explains the meaning of the last line in a footnote. “i.e. You resisted

Afak's friend al-Harith b. Suwayd. In retribution for this murder Afak composes a poem insulting Muhammad. After hearing about the poem the following happens; "The apostle said, 'Who will deal with this rascal for me?' whereupon Salim b. 'Umayr, brother of B. 'Amr b. 'Auf one of the 'weepers', went forth and killed him."¹⁸⁵ Then a woman named Asma D. Marwan, who is upset over Abu's death, writes another poem insulting Muhammad.¹⁸⁶ He then has her killed as well. "When the apostle heard what she had said he said, 'Who will rid me of Marwan's daughter? 'Umayr b. 'Adiy al-Khatmi who was with him heard him, and that very night he went to her house and killed her."¹⁸⁷ What was her crime? Writing a poem. What was the punishment? Death. There is no ambiguity in this story. Even if it weren't clearly stated, the results of the event would make what had happened clear. "The day after Bint Marwan was killed the men of B. Khatma became Muslims because they saw the power of Islam."¹⁸⁸ Other stories are similar, with poets writing the wrong words and dying for it, or running for their lives. "The apostle had killed some of the men in Mecca who had satirized and insulted him and... the Quraysh poets who were left- Ibn al-Ziba'ra and Hubayra b. Abu Wahb- had fled in all directions."¹⁸⁹ Muhammad is obviously not acting in self-defense as anyone in the West would understand it. If this is "self-defense" in some other sense, then it is a term with a much more broad definition

Tubba' who, after all, was a king in fact and a man of great reputation, so why believe in Muhammad's claims?"
 ibid.

¹⁸⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 675.

¹⁸⁶"I despise B. Malik and al-Nabit And 'Auf and B. al-Khazraj. You obey a stranger who is none of yours, one not of Murad or Madhhij.' Do you expect good from him after the killing of your chiefs like a hungry man waiting for a cook's broth? Is there no man of pride who would attack him by surprise And cut off the hopes of those who expect aught from him?" ibid., 675-76.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 676.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 676. They saw that they might very well be the next targets if they did not convert.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 597.

than physically harming others in order to avoid physical harm to oneself. “Mean” poems are not physical harm.

There are indications that Muslims are supposed to conquer large parts of the world with no indication that this is an action done in self-defense. Muhammad’s violence is even prophesied before Muhammad is born. A Jew prophesies that Muhammad is coming.¹⁹⁰ “His time has come, and don’t let anyone get to him before you, O Jews; for he will be sent to shed blood and to take captive the women and children of those who oppose him. Let that not keep you back from him.”¹⁹¹ From this prophecy we can tell that he would commit violence, with no mention of self-defense. Obviously no one is hurting him as he hasn’t even been born. Also, if it is self defense, it makes no sense that his violence would cause people to not desire to follow him. Presumably self-defense would not cause this kind of revulsion. That the Muslims are supposed to conquer many nations is made clear when Muhammad is digging a ditch before the Battle of the Trench. Salman al-Farisi tells us:

I was working with a pick in the trench where a rock gave me much trouble. The apostle who was near at hand saw me hacking and saw how difficult the place was. He dropped down into the trench and took the pick from my hand and gave such a blow that lightening showed beneath the pick. This happened a second and third time. I said: ‘O you, dearer than father or mother, what is the meaning of this light beneath your pick as you strike?’ He said: ‘Did you really see that, Salman? *The first means that God has opened up to me the Yaman; the second Syria and the west; and the third the east.*’ One whom I do not suspect told me that Abū Hurayra used to say when these countries were conquered in the time of ‘Umar and ‘Uthman and after, ‘Conquer where you will, by

¹⁹⁰Christians and Jews are repeatedly said to predict Muhammad. Even Arab soothsayers join in the predictions until they are prevented from learning more. The soothsayers were getting their information from jinn who were spying on Allah. Once Allah catches wind of this he beats the jinn away by pelting them with stars. This cuts the soothsayers link with divine knowledge and ends soothsaying forever. The Arab soothsayers “had been visited by satans from the jinn with reports which they had secretly overheard before they were prevented from hearing by being pelted with stars,” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 90. This is mentioned elsewhere as well, “Then God shut off the satans by these stars with which they were pelted, so soothsaying has been cut off today and no longer exists,” *ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 94.

God, you have not conquered and to the resurrection day you will not conquer a city whose keys God had not given beforehand to Muhammad.’¹⁹²

A forthright interpretation of this passage points to Islam conquering large amounts of territory in ways one would not expect Switzerland to do. The terms “east” and “west” are ambiguous. Are they merely Eastern Roman Byzantium and Persia? Further? Regardless, of whether it meant two-thirds of an inch or two-thirds of the entire world of Christendom,¹⁹³ there is no indication that self-defense is a requirement for *jihad*. And there seems to be every indication that it was supposed to continue after Muhammad’s death even with the text itself.¹⁹⁴

Heraclius of the Byzantines has an odd dream in an excerpt from al-Tabari’s writings recorded in Guillaume’s translation.¹⁹⁵ He dreams his kingdom will be conquered by a circumcised man. “‘You have become very sorrowful this morning, O king.’ He said, ‘Yes, in a vision of the night I saw the kingdom of a circumcised man victorious.’”¹⁹⁶ This happens before

¹⁹²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 452.

¹⁹³Muslims conquered two thirds of the Christian world before the First Crusade ever happened, Qureshi, *Answering Jihad*, 135. Persia was conquered and Roman Byzantium was attacked for centuries until it finally fell, Spencer, *History of Jihad*, 47. All of north Africa and Syria was conquered, then also Spain, and up into northern France within one hundred years of Muhammad’s death, *ibid.*, 77. A long, brutal, and bloody campaign was conducted against India, *ibid.*, 84-88. Muslim warriors conquered Crete and attempted to take over Sicily with ten thousand troops, *ibid.*, 104. They attempted to conquer China, Major James G. Pangelinan, *From Red Cliffs to Chosin: the Chinese Way Of War* (San Francisco: Hauraki Publishing, 2015), 41, ProQuest Ebook Central. This shows that literally every territory surrounding Arabia, geographically, was hit at some point as a target.

¹⁹⁴Soldiers who die in *jihad* after the events of Muhammad’s life are still called, “martyrs.” A “martyr” died at the Battle of Yamama, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 177. Another martyr died “in the year of the Yarmuk in the time of Umar,” *ibid.*, 177. The Battle of Yarmuk was against the Byzantines in the year 636AD in Syria, not just in the Arabian peninsula, and four years after Muhammad’s purported death in 632AD.

¹⁹⁵This story with Heraclius and the dream is in Guillaume’s translation and is attributed to al-Tabari. Guillaume, in his footnotes, tells us this section was omitted from *Sirat Rasul Allah* by Ibn Hisham. “Doubtless I.H. [Ibn Hisham] omitted [this portion] for the reasons given in his Introduction,” *ibid.*, 653. Ibn Hisham’s introduction tells us which parts he redacted, “for the sake of brevity, confining myself to the prophet’s biography and omitting some things which I.I. has recorded in this book in which there is no mention of the apostle and about which the Quran says nothing and which are not relevant to anything in this book or an explanation of it or evidence for it...” *ibid.*, 691. Perhaps this story wasn’t seen as related enough to Muhammad directly, since it is just a dream about Muslims in general.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 654.

Heraclius even knows who the Muslims are. This is made clear in the next segment of the text. “They said that they did not know a people who circumcised themselves except the Jews and they were under his sovereignty.”¹⁹⁷ Heraclius’s men try to talk him into having all the Jews in his kingdom killed so that his dream won’t come true, but before he has a chance to agree or disagree, a Muslim man comes into his court and explains who the Muslims are. If Heraclius doesn’t even know who the Muslims are, and it’s already predicted that they will conquer his kingdom, how is it that *jihad* can only be an act of self-defense? Defending themselves from the king who doesn’t even know they exist? This sort of reading seems strained, especially in the context of the rest of *Sirat Rasul Allah*.

In the theology of Ishaq’s work, Muslims will conquer the world, or at the very least, large parts of it.¹⁹⁸ Are the Muslims supposed to do all this conquering by acting in self-defense? This seems dubious. You could only reach this conclusion by taking the ambiguous parts of the text and using them to interpret the clear parts. Conquering the east and the west is a command from God. Allah is the metaphysical absolute. He speaks through Muhammad who then orders the Muslim people to conquer the east and the west.¹⁹⁹ This makes conquering the east and the west a morally good thing to do and, in some parts of the text, arguably an act of Allah himself.²⁰⁰ That the Muslim people are motivated by obedience and not self-defense can be seen absolutely everywhere; the Nakhla raid, in the language of the Second Aqabah, the random

¹⁹⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 654.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 452.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰Muhammad is recorded as “throwing pebbles” at the Quraysh during the battle of Badr (Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 301). “Then God said concerning the apostle’s throwing pebbles at them, ‘When you threw, it was not you that threw, but God.’ i.e. Your throwing would have had no effect unless God had helped you therein and cast terror into their hearts when He put them to flight,” *ibid.*, 322.

nature of Muhammad's attacks, the story of Quzman, in Muhammad killing poets, in Muhammad threatening to kill people unless they convert, and in the prophecies indicating Muslims would conquer other kingdoms and cardinal directions. That the phrase "protecting self" appears in the Second Aqabah is hardly a reason to disregard all the other less ambiguous data. Muslims are supposed to attack infidels, not merely the infidels who are currently attacking them, and doing so is a demonstration of piety.

Jihad a Test of Piety

One of the ways that *Jihad* is shown to be morally good is in the way that it is portrayed as a test of one's piety. Allah uses *jihad* as a means of testing believers at several points, but a point where this is particularly clear is the Battle of Uhud. The Battle of Uhud gives numerous examples of *jihad* in a narrative structure which is then reflected upon with Quranic commentary and poetry to show that *jihad* is Allah's way of testing believers, and therefore morally good. Before looking at the commentary and poetry, we can better understand what is an example of "passing the test" by looking at the stories that Ishaq invites us to interpret as such.

During the battle of Uhud Muhammad himself was injured when Utba b. Abu Waqqas injures his face and breaks his tooth.²⁰¹ Muhammad, hemmed in by the enemy, asked, "Who will sell his life for us?"²⁰² At this point six Muslims get up to defend Muhammad with their lives. All of them die except one who is left disabled, Ziyad.²⁰³ Once Muhammad escapes he asked that

²⁰¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 380. al-Buti comments that this was the result of sin, "that one sin, the sin committed by those Muslims who violated the instructions they had received from their Commander (pbuh)," al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence*, 315. Bukhari states, "The face of the Prophet was wounded and one of his front teeth was broken and the helmet over his head was smashed," (Bukhari 2911). "When the helmet of the Prophet was smashed on his head and blood covered his face, and one of his front teeth got broken," (Bukhari 2903). All quotations from Bukhari in this paper are from Khan's translation unless stated otherwise.

²⁰²Ibid., 380.

²⁰³Ishaq tells us that this last person was either Ziyad or Umara, it is disputed, *ibid.*

Ziyad be brought to him so that Ziyad might die “with his face on the apostle’s foot.”²⁰⁴ Through the sacrifice of *jihad*, Ziyad passes Allah’s test and is rewarded with the honor of dying on the apostle’s foot.²⁰⁵

Immediately afterward we see another example of passing Allah’s test with the example of Abu Dujana. Before the battle of Uhud, Muhammad picked up his own sword and asked who among his followers should be worthy of using the prophet’s sword. The criterion for choosing the sword’s new master was that the new owner needed to use the sword as it deserved to be used. Muhammad denies the sword to several people who try to take it. However, one of Muhammad’s followers, Abu Dujana, told Muhammad exactly what he wanted to hear. When Muhammad questioned Abu Dujana how he would use the sword, Abu Dujana said that in order for this sword to be used correctly, one should, “smite the enemy with it until it bends.”²⁰⁶ At these words, Muhammad gave Abu Dujana his sword.²⁰⁷ At the Battle of Uhud, Abu Dejana protected Muhammad’s body from arrows using his own. He “made his body a shield for the

²⁰⁴Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 380.

²⁰⁵How *Jihad* is rewarded will be explored more fully below. In regards to their behavior al-Buti comments that the source of this spirit of self-sacrifice, “was, first of all, faith in God and His Apostle, followed by love for the Messenger of God (pbuh). These two factors are the reason behind this exceptional, marvelous spirit of self-sacrifice. Muslims are in need of both of these together. It is not sufficient for them to claim to believe in the doctrines they ought to believe in unless, in addition, their hearts are filled with love for God and His Messenger (pbuh). It is for this reason that he (pbuh) said, ‘None of you truly believes until I have become dearer to him than his father, his mother, his children, and all his people,’” al-Buti, *Jurisprudence*, 316.

²⁰⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 373.

²⁰⁷Martin Lings admiringly comments on Abu Dujanah here, “He was a valiant man, who gloried in battle.” Lings, *Muhammadi*, 184. At this point in the narrative Abu Dujana struts around arrogantly. al-Buti gives this commentary on the action. “When Abu Dujanah took the sword from the Prophet’s hand and began strutting about among the ranks of fighters, the Messenger of God (pbuh) did not reprove him for this behavior. Rather, he (pbuh) said, ‘This gait is odious to God except in a situation such as this.’ What this indicates is that the expressions of hubris which are forbidden in most situations become permissible in a time of war. One such manifestation of pride is for a Muslim to swagger about gleefully; this same behavior, however, is considered praiseworthy on the battlefield. Another example of a blameworthy expression of pride is the ornamentation of houses, plates, and cups with gold and silver, whereas the ornamentation of instruments of warfare in the same manner is not forbidden. The reason for this distinction is that in the context of warfare, such displays of arrogance are, in fact, expressions of pride in Islam’s power over its enemies. In addition, it is an aspect of psychological warfare, the importance of which is something which Muslims would do well to realize,” al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence*, 313.

apostle. Arrows were falling on his back as he leaned over him, until there were many stuck in it.”²⁰⁸ Proper *jihad* consists in embracing death and risk of death in combat. The attitude of taking the apostle’s sword with the intent of using it until it bends is seen as virtuous and just. Only with that attitude can one have the honor of wielding the prophet’s sword and taking arrows on behalf of the prophet. Needless to say Abu Dujana is portrayed as passing the test.

Another example from the narrative, of believers being tested at Uhud, is when some followers mistakenly believed Muhammad has been killed.²⁰⁹ Anas b. al-Nadr asks them, “‘What makes you sit there?’ They said, ‘The apostle has been killed.’ He answered, ‘Then what will you do with life henceforth? Get up and die in the way that the apostle was slain.’”²¹⁰ Essentially Anas is asking, “‘What is life worth without the prophet?’” “‘What sort of Muslim are you if you don’t have the courage to follow his example?’” Anas immediately gets up and charges the enemy, finding his death. Ishaq tells us that a child named “Anas b. Malik was named after [Anas b. al-Nadr].”²¹¹ Presumably in hopes that the new Anas will be able to pass the test like his namesake, who charged into combat and died for the glory of Islam.

Perhaps the most theologically significant example of passing the test is the story of Usayrim. Usayrim is famous for being, “a man who entered paradise never having prayed in his

²⁰⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 381.

²⁰⁹al- Buti writes that the reason this happened was a test and a lesson, “the Muslims were so powerfully attached to the Messenger of God (pbuh) and to his presence among them that they could not have imagined his ever leaving them, nor could they conceive of having the strength to hold themselves together without him (pbuh). In short, the idea of the Messenger of God (pbuh) dying was something that had never occurred to them, as if they had blocked the notion out of their minds. There is no doubt, then, that if they had awakened from this state of incognizance to the news that he (pbuh) had actually died, it would have broken their hearts and shaken their faith to its very foundations... It served as an educational experience... helping [Muslims] to wake up to the reality for which they would have to prepare themselves from that time on- namely that their Prophet (pbuh) would eventually die...” al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence*, 315.

²¹⁰Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 381

²¹¹Ibid.

life...²¹² What is interesting about Usayrim is that he had rejected Islam right up until the very day of the Battle of Uhud, in fact he spoke disparagingly of it before that day. This made his conversion, and ability to pass Allah's test of piety, a shock to his compatriots. "In spite of his people [Usayrim] had refused to accept Islam, but on the day that the apostle marched out to Uhud he accepted it. He took his sword, plunged into the heart of the battle, and fought until he was overcome by wounds."²¹³ The B. Abdu'l-Ashal begin looking for those who have died and find Usayrim. They're shocked to see him there because the last time they saw him he was vocal about his dislike of Islam. This made them curious. "They asked him what had brought him, whether it was concern for his people or goodwill towards Islam. He replied it was the latter. 'I believed in God and His apostle and became a Muslim. Then I took my sword and fought with the apostle until I met the fate you see.'²¹⁴ When asked if he did it for his people (self-defense) or Islam, he said Islam. If you compare this with the example of Quzman above, it is illuminating. Quzman fought and died on the side of the Muslims but ended up in hell because he was fighting with a motive besides piety toward Allah. Even self-defense is not a valid motivation for *jihad* in *Sirat Rasul Allah*.²¹⁵ Here Usayrim does the same actions outwardly, but he is motivated by belief "in God and His apostle." It was his "goodwill toward Islam" combined with the praxis of dying in battle that is deemed proper in *Sirat Rasul Allah*'s theology.

Muhammad makes the point clear. "Soon afterwards [Usayrim] died in their hands. When they

²¹²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 384.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Ibid., 384-5.

²¹⁵Strangely enough, the stories of neither Usayrim nor Quzman appear in either Lings's work on Muhammad nor al-Buti's, Ling, *Muhammad*, 182-200. al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence*, 302-321. Though al-Buti does classify Uhud under his section entitled "Section Five: The Defensive War Phase," *ibid.*, 13. Mohammad Ridha mentions Quzman, but as his book is merely a biography, he gives no commentary on the matter. He does not mention Usayrim, Ridha, *Mohammad the Messenger*, 258.

mentioned him to the apostle he said, ‘Verily he belongs to the people of paradise.’²¹⁶ These two counterexamples are one page apart. They are obviously supposed to be compared.²¹⁷ The only difference between them is that Quzman was motivated by self-defense and Usayrim was motivated by love and obedience to the dictates of Islam.

There are other examples as well. Sa’d B. al-Nadir leaves this world to be “among the dead.”²¹⁸ As he is dying, his last words are, “You have no excuse with God if anything has happened to your prophet while you can still flutter an eyelid.”²¹⁹ Anas b. al-Nadir’s body was found with seventy cuts in it. “No one recognized him except his sister, who knew him by the tips of his fingers.”²²⁰ And there are many other examples.²²¹

Ishaq concludes the narration of the Battle of Uhud with this statement as though to tell us the point of everything he just said. “The day of Uhud was a day of trial, calamity, and heart-searching on which God tested the believers and put the hypocrites on trial, those who professed faith with their tongue and hid unbelief in their hearts; and a day in which God honoured with martyrdom those whom he willed.”²²² It is a day of testing where hypocrites are exposed and the true believers are honored with either martyrdom or victory.²²³ From there he

²¹⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 385.

²¹⁷Ibid., 384-5.

²¹⁸Ibid., 387.

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Ibid., 381.

²²¹Another example of someone passing the test is Talha, who helps Muhammad climb onto a rock. Muhammad, “had become heavy by reason of his age” and had on two coats of mail. By helping Muhammad onto the rock “Talha earned paradise,” *ibid.*, 383. Also see the story of Thabit and Husayl who, though they are old, said, “let us take our swords and join the apostle. Perhaps God will grant us martyrdom with him,” *ibid.* They both die at the battle

²²²Ibid., 391.

²²³This sentiment is stated explicitly in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. “Both prospects are fine: victory or martyrdom,” *ibid.*, 533.

goes into poetry and Quranic commentary, as a way to chew on the spiritual significance of what has just been related.

Ishaq quotes 60 verses that were sent down in the Surah entitled “The Family of Imran.” In these *jihad* is, at several moments, portrayed as a test for the believers as interpreted within the context just laid out in the narrative above. For example we read, “Do you think that you will enter the garden and receive the honour of My reward when I have not *tested* you with hardship and *tried* you with misfortune so that I may know your loyalty by faith in Me and steadfastness in what has befallen you through Me?”[emphasis added].²²⁴ Here testing is a prerequisite to “enter the garden,” so that Allah can know the loyalty of his followers. What was this testing? The difficulties of the battle of Uhud.

Later the Qur'an expounds on apostles of the past and the steadfastness of their followers in battle. “They waxed not faint at the loss of their prophet nor showed weakness towards their enemies and were not humiliated when they suffered in the fight for God and their religion. That is steadfastness and God loves the steadfast.”²²⁵ This is steadfastness that was seen when Zayid died at the foot of his prophet, the same steadfastness as Abu Dujana when he offered his body as a pin cushion while holding the prophet’s sword. Why did all this happen? “This has happened that God might test what is in your breasts and prove what is in your hearts, for God knows about what is in the breasts.”²²⁶ Putting the Muslims through bloody battle is how he sees what is secretly in their thoughts, how he purifies the metal and creates a truly holy *ummah*. Through the crucible of battle, no hypocrite heart withdraw and hide in the darkness. *Jihad* exposes and heals

²²⁴Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 394.

²²⁵Ibid., 395.

²²⁶Ibid., 397.

the *ummah* like disinfectant cleaning a wound. “God has made plain your secret thoughts ‘those whose slaying has been written would have gone forth to the places where they were to lie’ to some other place where they would have been slain so that He might *test what was in their breasts* ‘and prove what was in their hearts, for God knows what is in the breasts...’”[emphasis added].²²⁷ In this way, there is no hiding for the hypocrites, the secrets of their hypocrisy (not wanting to engage in battle) are made public to all, and those of pure-heart rise to the occasion and show the world their piety and the glory of Islam through brutal combat.²²⁸

Jihad as Beautiful in Sirat Rasul Allah

Jihad is not just portrayed as good but also as beautiful. There is a subtle shift between goodness and beauty. Beauty is hard to define and also to differentiate from “good.” As Plato tells us, “anything good is beautiful.”²²⁹ But perhaps we could say that it is some sort of pleasantness, or to be purposefully vague, a nice or dreamy experience. We can imagine that manifestation of ultimate beauty that Rumi dreamed of when he said, “We have fallen into the place where everything is music.”²³⁰ There is also an element of honor to beauty, honor that is owed. Lewis touches on this in *The Abolition of Man* when he speaks of a cataract that was sublime.²³¹ Again, in his description of worship, we see honor and beauty enjoyed together in a

²²⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 397.

²²⁸“The hypocrites played a prominent role in this battle. However, this was only fitting given that through this conflict, God was carrying out aspects of His wise plan, one of which involved purifying the believers’ ranks of the hypocrites in their midst. This, in turn, was to serve the Muslims best interest as time went on,” Dr. M. A. Sa’id Ramadan al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography & A Brief History of the Rightly Guided Caliphs*, (Dar al-Fikr Horizons of Knowledge: Damascus, 2008), 309.

²²⁹Robin Waterfield, *Plato Timaeus and Critias*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92.

²³⁰Coleman Barks, Translator, *The Essential Rumi*, (Harper One, New York, 2004), 34.

²³¹“The man who called the cataract sublime was not intending simply to describe his own emotions about it: he was also claiming that the object was one which *merited* those emotions,”[emphasis added]. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (New York: HarperOne, 1974), 15.

single moment. “Fully to enjoy is to glorify.”²³² This pleasantness, merited honor, and/or enjoyment of something in an aesthetic way, and at times more, is what is intended going forward when arguing that *Sirat Rasul Allah* portrays *jihad* as beautiful. It is enjoyable, causes pleasure or laughter, and it is worthy of honor.

That *jihad* is portrayed as beautiful is obvious to anyone reading the text. It can be seen from how the characters behave, to how poetry flows after every battle like water from a fountain; often emphasizing the power, might, and beauty of weaponry used or courage displayed.²³³ There are also narratives about special gifts from the prophet given as a reward for committing *jihad*, poems exalting those who die in *jihad*, and statements saying that *jihad* is pleasurable for those committing it, pleasurable for Muhammad, and pleasurable for Allah.

Beauty and Honor in Military Objects

A casual reader of *Sirat Rasul Allah* will have an itch of curiosity over the ubiquitous references to “Indian swords” in the text of *Sirat Rasul Allah*. These Indian swords are used in poetry of adoration as a symbol of strength and beauty in war. They were clearly highly regarded in the original culture in which this text came to be. The prophet himself is compared to these swords several times. “Truly the Messenger is a light whence illumination is sought—a drawn Indian sword, one of the swords of Allah...”²³⁴ and again, “no camel ever carried a purer man more true to his promise than Muhammad; swifter to do good, more lavish in giving when he

²³²C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), 97.

²³³While poetry is found after battles, it is also found in other places of emotional or spiritual significance in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, like when the sons of Manaf die, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 59, when the well at Zamzam is dug, *ibid.*, 62-4, at the death of Abdul Muttalib, *ibid.*, 74-6, when Waraqa is longing for the coming of a prophet, *ibid.*, 83, etc.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, 601.

went forth like a polished Indian sword...²³⁵ He is a weapon of war in God's hands, the polished Indian sword of Allah. The implications of these metaphors and similes are obviously martial.

Hassan b. Thabit, after the Battle of The Trench, wrote poetry to the Quraysh about the death of one of their mighty warriors Amr b. Abdu Wudd, saying, "Amr, the last of you, we slew with the lance as we defended Yathrib with our small force. We killed you with our Indian swords, for we are masters of war when we attack... You found our horses ready. At Badr you met a band who smote you with no weakling's blow."²³⁶ Here prominently is the line, "We killed you with our Indian swords." The symbol of an Indian sword, the praxis of war on Allah's behalf, it is all mixed together in the poetry and theology of the beauty of *jihad*. The poet emphasizes his own strength, the helplessness of the enemy; the Indian sword serves as a proof of being a "master of war."

Elsewhere we see K'ab write poetry praising some Muslim fighters but leaving out a group called the Ansar. This angered the Ansar so K'ab wrote poetry specifically for them to please them. Where there was a deficit of honor toward the Ansar, so to speak, the words of this poem are given as restitution of that deficit. We read, "The best men are they, sons of the best men who launch with their arms spears like long Indian swords, who peer forward unweariedly with eyes red as burning coals. Who devote their lives to their prophet on the day of hand-to-hand fighting and cavalry attacks. They purify themselves with the blood of infidels; they consider that an act of piety."²³⁷ How do you restore honor to a group who feels cheated of beauty and glory within the reasoning and theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah*? You emphasize that those in need of honor are like Indian swords; those symbols of power and majesty. You

²³⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 559.

²³⁶Ibid., 478-9.

²³⁷Ibid., 601-2.

emphasize how they “purify” themselves with “the blood of infidels,” how they consider being soaked in *kafir* blood an “act of piety.” That is how glory and honor is restored. You can abate the anger of an Ansar Muslim in this text by emphasizing that they are an Indian sword that bathes in the blood of infidels. Yes, *jihad* is permissible, yes it is requested, but beyond that it is intrinsically linked to honor and beauty. Our poet here is essentially saying, “You deserve honor because you glory in *jihad*.”

After the battle of Hunayn, Ka’b b. Malik writes about the strength of the Muslims, “You will hear a cry of alarm with sharp cutting swords in their hands like flashes of lightning by which they bring death to those who would fight them tempered by Indian smiths—not beaten into plates. You would think that the flowing blood of the warriors was mingled with saffron the morn the forces met.”²³⁸ The long red fibers of saffron look like gore. This indicates that the slaughter was so great that not just blood, but chunks of flesh fell from the enemy like fibers of saffron. Ka’b b. Malik uses such colorful language elsewhere as well, for example after the battle of Uhud when he threatens the Quraysh saying, “You will get such blows at our hands that the hyaenas will rejoice at the lumps of meat. We are men of war who get the utmost from it and inflict painful punishment on the aggressors.”²³⁹ They get the “utmost” from war. In both contexts war in the name of Allah is seen as beautiful and glorious. In the same way a skilled poet might reach for just the perfect metaphor to describe their lover’s eyes, the poets here use imaginative language to describe the gore of the enemies of Allah. Within every culture the poets, the artificers of their written tongue, have those moments of inspiration where they are impelled forward into uncharted territory by an itch that can only be scratched with the perfect

²³⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 587.

²³⁹*Ibid.*, 415.

artistry. Poetry is where the human race stretches the limits of its consciousness into something that cannot quite be grasped with literal language.²⁴⁰ Much like when a star disappears when one looks straight at it but becomes visible again when viewed with peripheral vision, so it is with the relationship between poetry and the inarticulable. In the culture, theology, and philosophy of *Sirat Rasul Allah* the most beautiful and articulate imagery and language is reserved for guts, gore, skulls, swords, and blood.

It is not just Indian swords that are referenced in this way, other equipment is also an ornament of beauty in the hands of the early Muslim poet. Those familiar with the Bible will be interested to see the name of King David make several appearances in *Sirat Rasul Allah*.²⁴¹ In some poetry by Abbas b. Mirdas, after the battle of Hunayn, we read, “With long mail whose mesh David chose when he weaved iron...”²⁴² and again, “So we came with a thousand of Sulaym finely clad in armour woven by David.”²⁴³ These references are at points in the poetry where the excellence of armies is being emphasized.²⁴⁴ While Indian swords are the pinnacle of power and beauty in weapons, mesh like David’s is the best in the way of armor. The good, beautiful, aesthetically pleasing army engaged in *jihad* is idealized in poetry by having them hold Indian swords and wear armor made like David’s.

²⁴⁰As one reads in Rumi, “This is how it always is when I finish a poem. A great silence overcomes me, and I wonder why I ever thought to use language,” Barks, *Rumi*, 20.

²⁴¹Christians and Jews will be surprised to learn this is the same King David from the Tanakh. Oddly enough, there is no reference to him being an armorsmith in the Bible.

²⁴²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 579.

²⁴³Ibid. See also; *ibid.*, 592, 601.

²⁴⁴This is one of several points where *Sirat Rasul Allah* feels a lot like the *Iliad*. For example, compare the following, “The time had come, and Prince Alexandros, consort of Helen, buckled on his armor: first the greaves well molded to his shins, with silver ankle circlets; then around his chest the cuirass of his brother Lykaon, a good fit for him. He slung a sword of bronze with silver-studded hilt by a baldric on his shoulder; over this a shield strap and the many-layered shield; then drew a helmet with a horsetail crest upon his head, upon his gallant brow, the tall plume like a wave-crest grimly tossing. He picked out, finally, a solid spear with his own handgrip,” Robert Fitzgerald, translator, *The Iliad Homer*, (Anchor Press: New York, 1975), 79.

Beauty and Honor in Gifts

There are numerous other examples of weapons used to glorify war within the poetry of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, and the examples above are not in any way exhaustive. Additionally weapons are also used to glorify *jihad* within a narrative context, often in a story where a weapon is gifted to a follower of the prophet. One specific example is the miraculous story of Ukkasha b. Misham. Ukkasha was a warrior at Badr who, “fought at Badr until his sword was broken in his hand. He came to the apostle who gave him a wooden cudgel telling him to fight with that. When he took it he brandished it and it became in his hand a long, strong, gleaming sword, and he fought with it until God gave victory to the Muslims.”²⁴⁵ That the sword is miraculous is interesting enough, but as the narrative continues the story ultimately culminates in Ukkasha’s glorious death and welcome into paradise. “The sword was called al-Aun and he had it with him in all the battles he fought with the apostle until finally he was killed in the rebellion, still holding it.”²⁴⁶ Before his death though, Ukkasha was able to get Muhammad to make him a promise, a oath of honor that would be denied others who asked after him. “When the apostle said, ‘70,000 of my people shall enter Paradise like the full moon’ Ukkasha asked if he could be one of them, and the apostle prayed that he might be. One of the Ansar got up and asked that he too might be one of them, and he replied, ‘Ukkasha has forestalled you and the prayer is cold.’”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 305.

²⁴⁶Ibid.

²⁴⁷Ibid. This is not the only time that it appears like the Ansar are being snubbed. Although they are rabidly loyal and follow Muhammad early on, in some ways they almost feel like a group that was too easy to get. They feel metaphorically like the loyal middle-aged house wife who is being cheated on, because her affection was too predictable, her image too familiar; that said, there are places where they are honored as well.

This story has many parallels with the story of Abu Jana above. In both stories we see: the prophet's favor at the expense of others who aren't as pious (ferocious), a sword (though this time a miraculous one), engaging in *jihad*, weapons breaking or bending, obedience to Muhammad, and God giving victory to the Muslims. As if the gift of the cudgel, the miracle of the sword, and the prayer for "paradise like the full moon" was not enough, Muhammad heaps praise and honor on Ukkasha during an argument with Dirar b. al-Azwar when he says, "[Ukkasha] is the best horseman among the Arabs"²⁴⁸ He also emphasizes Ukkasha's loyalty to him in the same passage.²⁴⁹

The story of Abdullah b. Unays. Is similar to Abu Dujana and Ukkasha. Abdullah is ordered by Muhammad to go and kill Ibn Sufyan. When he finds Ibn Sufyan he lies to him and pretends to be his ally to draw him away and alone. The narrative shifts to the first person with us hearing Abdullah's own words. "When my chance came I struck [Ibn Sufyan] with my sword and killed him, and went off leaving his women bending over him."²⁵⁰ When he returns to Muhammad, the prophet rewards him with the gift of a stick that is given as a reward for this accomplishment. It is an eschatological symbol that is given to few others. Muhammad explains, "It is a sign between you and me on the resurrection day. There are few men who will be carrying sticks then."²⁵¹ Abdullah then "fastened it to his sword and it remained with him until his death..."²⁵² Once again there are all the different resonances of *jihad*'s beauty along with

²⁴⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 305.

²⁴⁹"I have heard from his family that the apostle said: 'Ours is the best horseman among the Arabs,' and when we asked who, he said that it was "Ukkasha. When Dirar b. al-Azwar al-Asadi said, 'That is a man of ours,' the apostle answered, 'He is not yours but ours through alliance,'" *ibid.*

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 666.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*

²⁵²*Ibid.*

parallels to the similar stories above; a special gift at exclusion of others, honor, loyalty, the prophet's favor, and committing *jihad*. He fastens this gift to his sword solidifying the connection between this honor and *jihad*, the symbol, praxis, and narrative all point in the same direction. *Jihad* is beautiful.

Another example is when Muhammad gives Ibn 'Auf the standard during the raid on Dumatu'l-Jandal, "'Turban yourself thus, Ibn 'Auf, for thus it is better and neater.' Then he ordered Bilal to give him the standard and he did so. Then he gave praise to God and prayed for himself. He then said, 'Take it, Ibn 'Auf; fight everyone *in the way of God* and *kill those who disbelieve in God*'"[emphasis added].²⁵³ Here the gift is very obviously connected with the imperative to fight in the way of God²⁵⁴ and this is intimately connected to killing those who disbelieve.

In all the examples above we see the same themes emerge; loyalty to the prophet, willingness to commit *jihad*, the favor of the prophet, honor and an exclusive gift. These go together inseparably like rings interlinked in a coat of mail made by David. You cannot get one without also receiving the others.

Beauty and Honor in 'Firsts'

As defined above, beauty, for the purposes of this paper, is defined with an element of honor. In this sense, when something is called beautiful there is an element of honor and when something is shown to be honorable it is also beautiful. Beauty/honor is bestowed by an emphasis to be the first to do an action. These merits of primacy (being the first to merit some honor or use some weapon in the cause of *jihad*) are scattered all throughout *Sirat Rasul Allah*. For example,

²⁵³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 672.

²⁵⁴Literally the definition of *jihad* defended above.

Ishaq stresses “the first blood to be shed in the name of Islam,”²⁵⁵ “first arrow to be shot in Islam,”²⁵⁶ and it is debated whether Hamza or Ubayda was the first to hold the flag in battle.²⁵⁷

The last example is demonstrative of an important point. Less important than *who* held the flag is the fact itself that the characters in the narrative are arguing over who is the first to carry the flag. They are arguing because there is very evidently honor associated with carrying the flag in battle, an act of *jihad*, and being the ‘first’ to do it.

More examples are the author’s mention of the first flag pattern to be held,²⁵⁸ the first Muslim to fall at Badr,²⁵⁹ the first booty over which a lot is cast,²⁶⁰ and the first Muslim warrior

²⁵⁵“While Sa'd b. Abū Waqqāṣ was with a number of the prophet’s companions in one of the glens of Mecca, a band of polytheists came upon them while they were praying and rudely interrupted them. They blamed them for what they were doing until they came to blows, and it was on that occasion that Sa'd smote a polytheist with the jawbone of a camel and wounded him. This was the first blood to be shed in Islam,” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 118. This is interesting to note because it precedes Allah allowing them to go to war in the second Aqaba, *ibid.*, 212, but here a follower of Muhammad kills in the name of Islam and it is portrayed as morally good. Also interesting is that the weapon here is reminiscent of Samson (Judges 15:15).

²⁵⁶“No fighting took place except that Sa'd b. Abū Waqqas shot an arrow on that day. It was the first arrow to be shot in Islam,” *ibid.*, 281.

²⁵⁷“Some people say that Hamza's flag was the first which the apostle gave to any Muslim because he sent him and ‘Ubayda at the same time, and thus people became confused on the point,” *ibid.*, 283.

²⁵⁸“He says that his flag was the first which the apostle entrusted to anyone,” *ibid.* Battle flags are, in general, treated with great importance in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. “‘Zayd took the standard and fought with it until he was killed as a martyr; then Ja'far took it and fought until he was killed as a martyr.’ Then he was silent until the faces of the Ansar fell and they thought that something disastrous had happened to ‘Abdullah b. Rawaha. Then he said: ‘Abdullah took it and fought by it until he was killed as a martyr. I saw in a vision that they were carried up to me in Paradise upon beds of gold. I saw ‘Abdullah's bed turning away from the beds of the other two, and when I asked why, I was told that they had gone on but he hesitated before he went forward,’” *ibid.*, 535. ‘Abdullah getting an inferior place in paradise because he hesitated before taking up the standard (as opposed to his two other comrades who don’t hesitate into battle and get a better reward) is a detail worth mentioning. Of Ja’far Muhammad later states, “Ja’far went by yesterday with a company of angels making for Bisha in the Yaman. He had two wings whose forefeathers were stained with blood,” *ibid.*, 535. The angelic beauty of paradise, the wings, are mixed with the earthly beauty of dying in *jihad*, the blood. The two are one and the same in *Sirat Rasul Allah*.

²⁵⁹ The first Muslim that fell was Mihja', a freedman of ‘Umar: he was shot by an arrow, *ibid.*, 283. See also; *ibid.*, 329.

²⁶⁰“Then the apostle divided the property, wives, and children of B. Qurayza among the Muslims, and he made known on that day the shares of horse and men, and took out the fifth. A horseman got three shares, two for the horse and one for his rider. A man without a horse got one share. On the day of B. Qurayza there were thirty-six horses. It was the first booty on which lots were cast and the fifth was taken,” *ibid.*, 466. The fact that those engaged in *jihad* who had more horses is interesting. It seems to reward those who are better off materially than those who might be more poor. Their booty is not directly related to some theological concept that assumes equality (like being

to hamstringing his own horse.²⁶¹ After the Battle of the Trench, Ka'b b. Malik brags that he was among "the first to respond" to the prophet's call to war.²⁶² Again, this time from Hassan, we read of the honor of being the first to follow the prophet into battle. Hassan mourned Sa'd b. Mu'adh who died while the Muslims are fighting the B. Qurayza. About his comrade he wrote:

They were loyal to the apostle on the day of Badr while over them swords flashed amid the shades of death. When he called them they answered loyally, all of them obeyed him utterly. They gave no ground till all were dead. (Only battles cut short the allotted span.) Because they hoped for his intercession since none but prophets can intercede. That, O best of men, is what we did, our response to God while death is certain. *Ours was the first step to thee, and the last of us will follow the first* in God's religion²⁶³[emphasis added].

The loyalty, the willingness to enter battle at the prophet's command, facing death, these many familiar themes are followed by an additional emphasis on the importance of primacy; "first step to thee" "the first in God's religion." The entire praxis is seen as beautiful and this is emphasized in all sorts of variations and manifestations, including being "the first in God's religion" by "being the first to follow the prophet's lead into battle" etc. The reason such

made in the image of God) but is rather connected to how beneficial they are in combat by means of what martial capital they have available.

²⁶¹"Ja'far was the first man in Islam to hamstringing his horse," Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 534. The honor of superlatives isn't limited to chronology. Honor can also be bestowed in other situations where someone is the "most" or "best" at something related to *jihad*. For example the one who gave the most money to the cause of *jihad*, Uthman b. Affan, gets this honor, *ibid.*, 603.

²⁶²"We obeyed our prophet's orders. *When he called for war we were the first to respond*. When he called for *violent efforts we made them*. When we saw the battle *we hastened thither*. He who obeys the prophet's command (let him do so), for among us *he is obeyed and truly believed*. By this He will give us victory and *show our glory* and so give us a life of ease. Those who call Muhammad a liar disbelieve and go astray from the way of the pious," *ibid.*, 475 [emphasis added].

²⁶³*Ibid.*, 480. In Islam it appears that the first shall be first and the last shall be last. The "upside down" kingdom of Matthew 20:16 is nowhere to be found. It resembles much more the right side up kingdom described by Nietzsche. "For those who are strong and independent, destined and trained to command, in whom the judgment and skill of a ruling race is incorporated, religion is an additional means for overcoming resistance in the exercise of authority - as a bond which binds rulers and subjects in common, betraying and surrendering to the former the conscience of the latter, their inmost heart, which would fain escape obedience," Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (New York: Boni and Liverlight, Inc., 1917), 67.

importance is placed on being “first” is because of the beauty and honor associated with engaging in *jihad*.

Beauty and Honor in Death

The example above shows that the swagger and brutality of the living is not all that is artfully used to show the beauty of *jihad*. There is much to say of beauty and honor that is associated with *jihad* when mourning the dead as well. Earlier in this same poem by Hassan we read of Sa’d²⁶⁴ that he was, “Slain in God’s religion, he inherits paradise with martyrs, theirs a noble company. Though you have said farewell and left us and lie in the dusty darkness of the grave you, O Sa’d, have returned (to God) with a noble testimony and garments of honour and praise.”²⁶⁵ Here the martyr is said to be in “noble” company, clothed with garments of “honour and praise.” These are his just rewards for fighting and, especially, dying in *jihad*.

Even more emotional is the death of Muhammad’s beloved uncle Hamza at Uhud. Ka’b b. Malik’s poetry over the loss of this dear friend is beautiful and moving, “I was crushed by the loss of Hamza, my inward parts trembled. If Mount Hira had been so distressed you would have seen its firm rocks shattered...”²⁶⁶ Hamza’s friendship was so reliable and beautiful that losing it was like the world crumbling apart. Malik elaborates on the meritorious attributes of his fallen comrade. Hamza was the one, “who left a brave opponent prostrate on the ground on the day of battle, with his lance broken. You could see him sweeping along in steel, like a tawny strong-pawed lion, the prophet’s uncle and chosen one came to his death- a goodly end. He met his fate marked out among a people who helped the prophet and sought martyrdom.”²⁶⁷ He goes

²⁶⁴Note that this is the same Sa’d who was willing to follow the prophet into the sea and drown. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 294.

²⁶⁵Ibid., 479.

²⁶⁶Ibid., 419.

²⁶⁷Ibid.

on to call him, “a lion of battle amid the weapons, wishing thereby to please Ahmad²⁶⁸ and the glorious Lord of the throne.”²⁶⁹ Here Hamza is showered with honor by emphasizing his familial connection with the prophet, metaphorical imagery of a lion in the context of battle, and in his willingness to help the prophet in battle. His death is a “goodly end” one of “martyrdom.” Beauty, honor, glory, morality, and death extensions from a central nexus of *jihad*. While all of these stories show the beauty of *jihad*, its beauty is also shown in how it is portrayed as enjoyable or pleasurable.

Beauty and Honor in Pleasure of *Jihad*

The pleasure of dying in *jihad* cannot be overstated. It is said to even surpass the pleasures given by paradise. Allah loves his servants who have died while enacting *jihad* and wants to reward them abundantly. He decides to ask some souls who died committing *jihad* at Uhud how he could make paradise even better:

O, My servants, What do you wish that I should give you more?’ And they say, ‘O our Lord, there is nothing beyond the Garden which Thou hast given us from which we eat when we please.’ After the question has been put three times they say the same, adding, ‘except that we should like our spirits to return to our bodies and then return to the earth and fight for Thee until we are killed again.’”[emphasis added]²⁷⁰

In a similar passage, Jabir, whose father died at the battle of Uhud, receives good news from the prophet. “I will give you good news, Jabir. God has restored to life your father who was killed at Uhud.’ Then He asked him what he would like Him to do for him and he said that

²⁶⁸Muhammad.

²⁶⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 420.

²⁷⁰Ibid., 400. A similar passage can be found in the hadith. “No doubt I wish I could fight in Allah’s Cause and be martyred and come back to life again and then again to be martyred and then come back to life once more,” (Bukhari 2972)

he would like to return to the world and fight for Him and be killed a second time.”²⁷¹ Jabir’s father is returned to life because the only thing more pleasurable than paradise, in his eyes, is the opportunity to die in *jihad* a second time. Yes, even the beautiful gardens, the delicious fruit, gold, silver, clothes, servants²⁷² gold-laced napkins,²⁷³ and the multiple “dark-eyed *houris*”²⁷⁴ with bodies “like the most beautiful statues”²⁷⁵ cannot compete with the pleasure of fighting and dying in *jihad*. This is why at the Battle of Tabuk, Abdullah b. Mas’ud can look on with envy at the corpse of his fallen comrade, Abdullah Dhu’l-Bjadayn, and say, “Would that I had been the man in the grave.”²⁷⁶

Even before death and paradise, *jihad* is comparable to being giddy and drunk as seen in a passage by Ka’b b. Malik. “A day in which fighting is continuous, terrifying, burning those who kindled its blaze, long drawn out exceeding hot fighting. Fear of it keeps the base-born away. You would think the heroes engaged in it *were happily drunk and inebriated*, their right hands exchanging the cups of death with their sharp-edged swords”[emphasis added].²⁷⁷ The moral goodness of *jihad* is apparent here as it is depicted as a test of piety, keeping the “base-born away.” The noble born here appear giddy and joyful in the intense heat of battle, like a merry

²⁷¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 400. In Bukhari we read, “Nobody who enters Paradise likes to return to the world even if he got everything on the earth, except a martyr who wishes to return to the world so that he may be martyred ten times because of the honour and dignity he receives (from Allah), (Bukhari 2817, 2797, 2795)

²⁷²Ibid., 162.

²⁷³Ibid., 608.

²⁷⁴Ibid., 519. *Houris* are mystical beautiful virgins for sexual pleasure that will be given to the Muslim men whenever they enter paradise. There are several references to them in the Qur’an (36:55, 44:54,, 55:56-78 and more); Robert Spencer, *The Critical Qur’an Explained from Key Islamic Commentaries and Contemporary Historical Research*, (Bombardier Books: New York, 2021), 384. See the footnotes.

²⁷⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 349.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 608.

²⁷⁷Ibid., 421.

drunkard. Abbas b. Mirdas (concerning the killing he did during the battle of Hunayn) uses similar imagery, “I liked the punishment Thaqif got yesterday on the side of the valley. They were the chief of the enemies from Najd and their killing was *sweeter than drink*” [emphasis added].²⁷⁸ The pleasant feeling of *jihad*, like sweet drink, like being intoxicated, is mixed with other positive sensations, visual and auditory, elsewhere. All this is done for the purpose of pleasing Allah.

The day we trod down the unbelievers and found no deviation or turning from the apostle’s order. In a battle mid which the people heard only our exhortations to fight and the smashing of skulls by swords that sent heads flying from their base and severed the necks of warriors at a blow. Often have we left the slain cut to pieces and a widow crying Alas! over her husband. “*Tis God not man we seek to please*; to Him belongs the seen and the unseen”²⁷⁹ [emphasis added].

What is the ideal aesthetic situation? Where is the place where God is pleased? It is when the apostle’s orders are followed, the only thing you hear is exhortations to fight and swords smashing skulls, the only thing you see is heads flying from their base and widows mourning the dead gasping, “Alas!” No one is turning from battle. The Muslims trod down the unbelievers. All this creates the aesthetic of *jihad*. We might add to all this the olfactory scent of the Muslim warriors who are raised at the resurrection. Allah will raise the martyrs on the day of resurrection with wounds still, “bleeding, the colour that of blood, the smell like musk”²⁸⁰ This is all done to please God. A Muslim warrior tells us, “If you kill us the true religion is ours and to be killed for

²⁷⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 577.

²⁷⁹Ibid., 580-81.

²⁸⁰“Musk” is perfume, *ibid.*, 388. In the hadith it says, “Whoever is wounded in Allah’s Cause - and Allah knows well who gets wounded in His Cause- will come on the Day of Resurrection with his wound having the colour of blood but its smell will be the smell of musk (perfume),” (Bukhari 2803). Compare the early Christians who are being tortured by the Roman government under Marcus Aurelius in Eusebius, “The faithful stepped out with a happy smile, wondrous glory and grace blended on their faces, so that even their fetters hung like beautiful ornaments around them and they resembled a bride adorned with golden lace elaborately wrought, they were perfumed also with the sweet savour of Christ, so that some people thought they had smeared themselves with worldly cosmetics,” G.A. Williamson, *Eusebius the History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, (Penguin Books: London, 1989), 144.

the truth is *to find God's favour*. If you think that we are fools the opinion of those who oppose Islam is misleading”²⁸¹[emphasis added]. To be killed is synonymous with finding God's favor. To deny this is synonymous with being amongst those who “oppose Islam.” They are the “fools” who say lies that are “misleading.”

There are only a handful of times that Muhammad laughs in *Sirat Rasul Allah*, and several of them are delight that he gets from *jihad* being carried out. For example, Muhammad sends Amr b. Umayya and an Ansar to assassinate Abu Sufyan. Unfortunately Amr is recognized and has to flee and hide in a cave. There he meets a “one-eyed man of the B. al-Dil driving a sheep of his.”²⁸² The one-eyed man learns that Amr is from an allied clan and allows him to sleep in the same cave. As the one-eyed man is going to sleep he sings to himself, “I won't be a Muslim as long as I live, Nor heed to their religion give.” After this Amr tells us, “I said (to myself), ‘You will soon know!’ and as soon as the *badu* was asleep and snoring I got up and killed him in a more horrible way than any man has been killed. I put the end of my bow in his sound eye, then I bore down on it until I forced it out at the back of his neck.”²⁸³ After fleeing the scene Amr finds two Quraysh, kills one with an arrow and then binds the other using his bow string. He brings his prisoner bound back to Muhammad to tell him what happened. “Now I had bound my prisoner's thumbs with my bow- string, and when the apostle looked at him he laughed so that one could see his back teeth. He asked my news and when I told him what had happened

²⁸¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 414-15.

²⁸²Ibid., 674. The version that Guillaume records here is al-Tabari's. Hisham's version is recorded in the section entitled “Ibn Hisham's Notes,” *ibid.*, 790-91. Hisham's version does not include the return to Muhammad and the laugh. Other than that, it is nearly identical.

²⁸³Ibid. There is an odd parallel to the *Odyssey* here. In the *Odyssey* Odysseus meets a one eyed cyclops in a cave. The cyclops is also raising sheep and also gets his eye poked out. Odysseus, like Amr, flees the scene, W.H.D. Rouse, translator, *Homer The Odyssey*, (New York: New American Library, 1937), 102-111.

he blessed me.”²⁸⁴ At seeing a bound prisoner Muhammad laughs with his mouth so wide that those present see his back teeth. When Amr tells Muhammad he killed some men by goring one in the eye and shooting the other with an arrow, he receives a blessing. In this example we can see both pleasure, from the laughter, and honor, from the blessing for violent actions done in *jihad*.

This joy of *jihad* is something of such value that it is imperative that it be shared and enjoyed across generations, with fathers teaching sons. “With silent fine blood-stained swords, blades of Busra which loathe the scabbard; which grow not blunt nor buckle and cease not smiting if they are not held back, like autumn lightning in the hands of heroes overwhelming in blood heads that remain in place. Our fathers taught us how to strike and we will teach our sons.”²⁸⁵ Additionally we read, “When a champion passes, his posterity takes his place And he leaves others to inherit him. We grow up and our fathers perish, and while we bring up our sons we cease to be.”²⁸⁶ It is an experience of joy, honor, and glory that passes from one generation to the next, a gift as intimate as the relationship of a father to a son.

Whenever someone doesn’t desire *jihad* they are never portrayed as a “lover of peace” but rather as someone who has incorrect desires; someone meriting shame and disgrace. This is true even if you are aged and overweight. In the example of Umayya b. Khalaf he is told to put on perfume like a woman since he is avoiding *jihad*.

‘Umayya b. Khalaf decided to stay home [instead of going to fight at Badr]. He was a stately old man, corpulent and heavy. ‘Uqba b. Abū Mu’ayt came to him as he was sitting in the mosque among his companions, carrying a censer burning with scented wood. He put it in front of him and said, ‘Scent yourself with that, for you belong to the women!

²⁸⁴Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 675.

²⁸⁵Ibid., 421.

²⁸⁶Ibid.

'God curse you and what you have brought,' he said, and then got ready and went out with the rest.²⁸⁷

It is moral to see *jihad* as beautiful and desire it. This is seen not just in narrative but in revelations from Allah "You desire the lure of this world,' i.e: its goods, the ransom of the captives. 'But God desires the next world,' i.e. their killing them to manifest the religion which He wishes to manifest and by which the next world may be attained."²⁸⁸

To merely obey calls to *jihad* is not enough. The truly pious desire it, it is an object of beauty. In *Sirat Rasul Allah* we see that *jihad* is portrayed as beautiful and honorable in every way imaginable. It is better than heaven, pleasant as a giddy drunk, it smells of musk, pleases Allah, makes Muhammad giggle with delight, brings honor, glory and beauty to such an extent that a father shares the knowledge of it with his son as an act of love. *Jihad* is as natural and beautiful to a Muslim in *Sirat Rasul Allah* as singing music is to a green bird in paradise.

Jihad Punishments and Rewards in Sirat Rasul Allah

Earthly Reward of Booty, Slaves, Ransom

There are incentives for *jihad* both in this world and the next. The ones in this world are allowed as a mercy from Allah. It is acknowledged in *Sirat Rasul Allah* that this type of looting was not allowed to any of the prophets of the past. Muhammad tells us as much. "I was given

²⁸⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 291. An exploration of the similarities and differences between the first Islamic historian and first Christian historian and how they define "martyr" would be interesting. In Eusebius, Pothinus is comparable to Umayya. "Blessed Pothinus... was over ninety years old. He could scarcely breathe because of his chronic physical weakness, but was strengthened by spiritual enthusiasm because of his pressing desire for martyrdom... he bore the noble witness. When the governor asked him 'Who is the Christians' god?', he replied: 'If you are a fit person, you shall know.' Thereupon he was mercilessly dragged along beneath a rain of blows, those close by assailing him viciously with hands and feet and showing no respect for his age, and those at a distance hurling at him whatever came to hand, and all thinking it a shocking neglect of their duty to be behind-hand in savagery towards him, for they imagined that in this way they would avenge their gods. Scarcely breathing, he was flung into prison, and two days later he passed away," Williamson, *The History*, 143.

²⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 327.

all-embracing words; booty was made lawful to me as to no prophet before me...’’²⁸⁹ Allah allows the taking of property and prisoners for Muhammad and his followers because humanity already had the Bible to warn them. We read, ‘‘Had there not previously been a book from God there would have come upon you [the Muslims] for what you took,’ i.e. prisoners and booty, ‘an awful punishment,’ i.e. had it not previously gone forth from Me that I would have punished you for what you did.’’²⁹⁰ In other words, because Allah had already warned mankind about the coming prophet in scripture, it was allowed for the Muslims to take whatever prisoners and loot they could capture. But this wasn’t the only reason. ‘‘Then He made it lawful to him and to them as a mercy from Him and a gift from the Compassionate, the Merciful. He said, ‘So enjoy what you have captured as lawful and good, and fear God. God is forgiving Merciful.’’’²⁹¹ This is not just a punishment for the non-believer. This is also a gift and a mercy to those enacting *jihad*.

This point of theology is made clear in colorful wording in an episode where Muhammad finds himself in a battle of poetry with a deputation of Arabs from the Banu Tamin. After their poets have a go, Muhammad calls on Thabit b. Qays to give an answer. Thabit states, ‘‘We are God’s helpers and the assistants of His apostle, and will fight men until they believe in God; and he who believes in God and His apostle has protected his life and property from us; and he who disbelieves we will fight in God unceasingly and killing him will be a small matter to us.’’²⁹² Here property and life are both at stake and both taken lightly. Death and loss of property are inevitable unless you believe in God and his apostle. As Thabit states, ‘‘killing him will be a

²⁸⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 326.

²⁹⁰Ibid.

²⁹¹Ibid.

²⁹²Ibid., 629.

small matter to us.” Allah is in control of morals, Muhammad speaks for Allah, and he has allowed taking of booty while conducting *jihad*.

One way to get material benefit from *jihad* is to use those you have captured in battle as a means of extortion. A common practice seen in *Sirat Rasul Allah* is the Muslims grabbing prisoners and then selling those prisoners to the prisoner’s own friends and family. For example in the Raid on B. Sulaym in Al-Kudr we read, “The apostle stayed only seven nights in Medina [after the battle of Badr] before he himself made a raid against B. Sulaym.... and during that time he accepted the ransom of most of the Quraysh prisoners.”²⁹³ There is a massive list of Quraysh who were taken prisoner at Badr.²⁹⁴ In this long list we even see who was first redeemed for money. In this particular example the ransom was paid by the captive’s son. “From B. Sahn b. ‘Amr b. Husays b. Ka'b: Abū Wada‘a b. Dubayra b. Su'ayd b. Sa'd who was the first prisoner to be redeemed. His son al-Muttalib paid his ransom money.”²⁹⁵ In one narrative about captured prisoners the prophet tells his men to divide the prisoners among themselves and treat them well. As they are being bound up someone says, “Bind him fast, for his mother is a wealthy woman; perhaps she will redeem him from you.”²⁹⁶ The wealthier the family, the more money the Muslims can get in ransom. There are even debates about the value of prisoners where various attributes are taken into consideration. Through one of these debates we can see what raises or lowers the price of a captive in the eyes of the ransom market.

Uyayna b. Hisn is happy to sell the captives he captured for six camels each until he gets to a woman who, in his eyes, is worth more. About this woman captive he says, “she is a person

²⁹³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 360.

²⁹⁴Ibid., 338-39.

²⁹⁵Ibid., 339.

²⁹⁶Ibid., 309.

of standing in the tribe and her ransom may well be high.”²⁹⁷ He wants more than six camels for this captive because she is of high standing. Uyayna is trying to sell this woman to Zuhayr Abu Surad but Zuhayr is not willing to pay more than six camels for her. He tries some tricks of a veteran bargainer to put himself at advantage. He points out the flaws that decrease her value. “Zuhayr Abu Surad told him to let her [the captive] go, for her mouth was cold and her breasts flat; she could not conceive and her husband would not care and her milk was not rich.”²⁹⁸ This story is packed full of data to help one see details of the captive market. Captives of high standing are worth more. They decrease in value if they lack sex appeal (breast size) or sexual performance (a cold mouth). They also increase in value if they can produce children, feed the children with rich milk, and/or have a family who strongly desires them back (and is therefore willing to pay good money to get them back). Because of this particular captive’s deficiencies (small breasts, cold mouth, low fertility, no one who loves her), Zuhayr is able to talk Uyayna into accepting the original offer of merely six camels in exchange for the female captive. Uyayna accepts the original offer, but not without complaint. “By God, you didn’t take her as a virgin in her prime or even a plump middle age!”²⁹⁹

It is not just soldiers taken for ransom. Women, like the previous example, and children are also used. The apostle has a Jewish tribe called the B. Al-Nadir deported, he then captures their women and children. “They carried off the women and children and property with tambourines and pipes and singing girls playing behind them.”³⁰⁰ All the Jews of this area lose

²⁹⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 593.

²⁹⁸Ibid.

²⁹⁹Ibid. “Worthless worthless says the buyer, but on his way out he gloats” (Prov. 20:14)

³⁰⁰Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 438.

their families and property except two “who became Muslims in order to retain their property.”³⁰¹

Allah elaborates on what has just taken place by giving more Qur'an verses to Muhammad. This surah was the “Sura of Exile.”

Had not God prescribed deportation against them,’ *which was vengeance from God*, ‘He would have punished them in this world,’ i.e. with the sword, ‘and in the next world there would be the punishment of hell’ as well... *The spoil which God gave the apostle from them*,’ i.e. from B. al-Nadir. ‘You did not urge on your cavalry or riding camels for the sake of it, but God gives His apostle power over whom He wills and God is Almighty,’ i.e. it was peculiar to him, ‘*The spoil which God gave the apostle from the people of the towns belongs to God and His apostle.*’ What the Muslims gallop against with horses and camels and *what is captured by force of arms belongs to God and the apostle* [emphasis added].³⁰²

Here we see, once again, much that has already been argued above. God is the one who prescribes what will happen; in this case deportation and looting. This loot serves two purposes:

1) as a punishment against the B. al-Nadir for rejecting the prophet; 2) as a gift for the apostle of God.

Human trafficking is not just employed for monetary purposes. There are sexual benefits to *jihad* as well. Muslim warriors are said to lead off with the wives of their fallen enemies as though their wives were sheep.³⁰³ Muhammad gets several of his wives as booty captured from battle. For example, Juwayriya d. al-Harith is Muhammad’s prize from the Raid on B. al-Mustaliq. When trying to decide who would get the privilege of having sex with this woman, the lot for her fell to Thabit. The air was electric with anticipation for, “she was a most beautiful

³⁰¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 438.

³⁰²Ibid.

³⁰³“I pierced Ibn Zafila b. al-Irash with a spear which went through him and then broke. I gave his neck a blow so that he bent like a bough of mimosa. We led off the wives of his cousins on the day of Raqaqayn as sheep,” *ibid.*, 536.

woman. She captivated every man who saw her.”³⁰⁴ Aisha, Muhammad’s child bride,³⁰⁵ saw Juwayriya and was jealous because she knew what the apostle would do if he saw her. Aisha states, “As soon as I saw her at the door of my room I took a dislike for her, for I knew that he [Muhammad] would see her as I saw her.”³⁰⁶ Muhammad does see Juwayriya as Aisha did, ends up marrying her, (despite Thabit winning her in the lot), and thus vindicating Aisha’s jealous fears. Muhammad is so pleased with his new bride that he ends up releasing a hundred captured families in celebration.³⁰⁷

Another wife Muhammad gets in this way is Rayhana d. Amr. This situation happens when Gabriel approaches Muhammad and asks him if he is done fighting and Muhammad says that he is. Gabriel then says the angels are still fighting and that the battles are not over. He gives Muhammad a message from Allah. “God commands you, Muhammad, go to the B. Qurayza.”³⁰⁸ Muhammad lays seige to them for twenty-five nights. When the B. Qurayza get desperate they start weighing their options. They are given the message that they should convert to Islam, for “by God it has become plain to you that [Muhammad] is a prophet who has been sent and that it is he that you find mentioned in your scripture; and then your lives, your property, your women

³⁰⁴Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 493.

³⁰⁵In Hisham’s notes we read Muhammad “married Aisha in Mecca when she was a child of seven and lived with her in Medina when she was nine or ten. She was the only virgin that he married. Her father, Abu Bakr, married her to him and the apostle gave her four hundred dirhams,” *ibid.*, 792. This is also recorded in the *hadith*. “The Prophet wrote the marriage contract with Aisha while she was six years old and consummated his marriage with her while she was nine years old and she remained with him for nine years,” Mohammad al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol.7 trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina, Darussalam, 2015), 69. You can tell she was very light in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Some men pick up a *howdah*, thinking that she is in it, and put it on a camel even though she is not in it. This shows that she weighed so little that she didn’t make much difference to the weight of the *howdah*, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 494. She is called Abu Bakr’s “little daughter,” *ibid.*, 116. Her mother calls her “little daughter,” *ibid.*, 495.

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 493.

³⁰⁷*Ibid.*

³⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 461.

and children will be saved.”³⁰⁹ They respond, “We will never abandon the laws of the Torah and never change it for another.”³¹⁰ Muhammad’s commander Sa’d b. Mu’adh is told to give judgment. “I give judgment that the men should be killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives.”³¹¹ Muhammad, as Allah’s mouthpiece, gives assent, “You have given the judgment of Allah above the seven heavens.”³¹² The B. Qurayza surrender, but it does them no good. Muhammad has his men dig trenches throughout the market place. Then he summons the Jewish men to come stand by the freshly dug trenches. “He sent for [the Jewish men] and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches... There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900... This went on until the apostle made an end of them.”³¹³ After all the carnage, property is distributed. “The apostle divided the property, wives, and children of B. Qurayza among the Muslims, and he made known on that day the shares of horse and men, and took out the fifth.”³¹⁴ We read that from this point onward, this formula for dividing up property “remained the custom for raids.”³¹⁵ The apostle sold some of the “captive women of B. Burayza” for “horses and weapons.”³¹⁶ Another he elected to use sexually. “The apostle had chosen one of their women for himself, Rayhana d. ‘Amr b. Khunafa.”³¹⁷ At first Rayhana hates Islam, “she had shown repugnance

³⁰⁹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 461-2.

³¹⁰Ibid., 462.

³¹¹Ibid., 464.

³¹²Ibid.

³¹³Ibid.

³¹⁴Ibid., 466.

³¹⁵Ibid.

³¹⁶Ibid.

³¹⁷Ibid.

towards Islam when she was captured and clung to Judaism. So the apostle put her aside and felt some displeasure.”³¹⁸ However, she eventually converts.

Another bride Muhammad wins is Safiya d. Huyayy. Muhammad decides to attack Khaybar because he does not hear them praying their morning prayers. “If he heard a call to prayer he held back; if he did not hear it he attacked.”³¹⁹ The workers of Khaybar come out to work in the morning and are taken completely off-guard. “We met the workers of Khaybar coming out in the morning with their spades and baskets. When they saw the apostle and the army they cried, ‘Muhammad with his force,’ and turned tail and fled.”³²⁰ Their destruction leaves a trail of booty. “The apostle seized the property piece by piece...”³²¹ He also takes prisoners. “The apostle took captives from them among whom was Safiya d. Huyayy b. Akhtab who had been the wife of Kinana b. al-Rabi' b. Abū'l-Huqayq, and two cousins of hers. The apostle chose Safiya for himself.”³²² After this, Muhammad gives rules for the Muslims regarding all the booty. “The apostle prohibited four things that day: carnal intercourse with pregnant women who were captured; eating the flesh of domestic donkeys; eating any carnivorous animal; and selling booty before it had been duly allotted.”³²³ Interesting to note is that prohibiting carnal intercourse with those who are pregnant implies that such intercourse is acceptable for those who are not pregnant. From the fourth rule it is apparent that there is a

³¹⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 466.

³¹⁹Ibid., 511.

³²⁰Ibid. Also in the hadith. “The prophet set out for Khaibar and reached there at night. He used not to attack if he reached the people at night, till the day broke. So, when the day dawned, the Jews came out with their bags and spades. When they saw the Prophet they said, ‘Muhammad and his army!’ The Prophet said, ‘Allahu Akbar!’” (Bukhari 2945). See also (Bukhari 2991).

³²¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 511.

³²²Ibid..

³²³Ibid.

communal aspect to the gathering of booty.³²⁴ Yes, you may take the possessions of those you kill in *jihad*, but you may not sell it until the property is properly assigned after the battle. In this way the prophet is sure to get his fifth and the distribution can be even for all the other Muslims.

Unfortunately the Muslims weren't able to find the treasury of the Jews at Khaybar, which led to suspicion. The Jew in charge of custody of the treasury was Kinana b. al-Rabi, the same Kinana that was husband of Safiyya, who Muhammad had just taken for himself. Muhammad summoned him and had him questioned. Kinana denied any knowledge of any treasury or where it was located. The Muslims watched Kinana and noticed that he was going around a certain ruin every morning. They decided to excavate where Kinana had been wandering and "some of the treasure was found."³²⁵ Muhammad brought Kinana in for questioning again. "When he asked him about the rest he refused to produce it, so the apostle gave orders to al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwam, 'Torture him until you extract what he has,' so he kindled a fire with flint and steel on his chest until he was nearly dead."³²⁶ Once they had finished torturing him they cut off his head. This story shows the seriousness with which booty is

³²⁴"When Badr was over, God sent down the whole Sura Anfal about it. With regard to their quarrelling about the spoils there came down: 'they will ask you about the spoils, say the spoils belong to God and the apostle, so fear God and be at peace with one another, and obey God and His apostle if you are believers. Ubada b. al-Samit, so I have heard, when he was asked about this sura said: 'It came down about us, the people of Badr, when we quarrelled about the booty on that day, and God took it out of our hands when we showed an evil disposition and gave it to the apostle, who divided it equally among us. In that there was the fear of God, and obedience to Him and to His apostle, and peace among us,'" Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 321.

³²⁵Ibid., 515.

³²⁶Ibid. What is odd is that elsewhere fire is prohibited for use. Muhammad, angry at Habbar b. al-Aswad and his friend, states to his comrades, "I told you to burn these two men if you got hold of them; then I reflected that none has the right to punish by fire save God, so if you capture them kill them," Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 316. Also see the hadith, "Previously I ordered you to burn so-and-so and so-and-so with fire, but as punishment with fire is done by none except Allah, if you capture them, kill them, instead," (Bukhari 2954). Muhammad orders a mosque burned, *ibid.*, 609. There are also prohibitions against mutilation "fight everyone in the way of God and kill those who disbelieve in God. Do not be deceitful with the spoil; do not be treacherous, nor mutilate, nor kill children," *ibid.*, 672. Still we see Muhammad's men cut off their enemies' hands and feet and gouge out their eyes, *ibid.*, 678, and rip apart an old woman "by putting a rope to her two legs and to two camels and driving them until they rent her in two," *ibid.*, 665. Hisham only has "killed her cruelly," obviously editing out Ishaq's original. The original can be reconstructed using al-Tabari, as Guillaume does in his translation.

treated. To try and hide your belongings from the prophet is to open yourself to deserved torture. Even though he had already lost his wife to Muhammad, that was not enough, property too, belonged to the prophet since Kinana had rejected Islam. Such reasoning is not cruel or irrational within the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, but is a completely rational consequence of the metaphysical foundation laid out above. If Allah really exists and really is telling Muhammad to do what he is doing then this is happening by the will of none other than the God of the universe. It is an act of justice and piety.³²⁷

The extent to which raids were occurring is not explicitly stated, though it seems to have been superfluous. Ishaq tells us that, “the apostle took part personally in twenty-seven raids.”³²⁸ We know there were multiple raiding parties.³²⁹ The feel of the narrative as a whole seems to be that small raids were happening continuously.³³⁰ As lucrative as raids and looting could be, the rewards for conducting *jihad* are not merely restricted to the terrestrial.

Heavenly Reward, Gardens, Houries, Pleasure

For those who engage in *jihad* and die, they will have the reward of the martyrs, “gardens and green spreading trees.”³³¹ This is explicitly used as a motivation to engage in combat. In

³²⁷The booty of war is not just used to enrich those enacting *jihad*. It is also used to provide for the needs of the orphans and the poor. “And know that what you take as booty a fifth belongs to God and the apostle and next of kin and orphans and the poor and the wayfarer, if you believe in God and what We sent down to Our servant on the day of furqan, the day the two armies met; and God is able to do all things,” Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 324-25. The booty of *jihad* enriches Muhammad and his followers, yes, but it is also a fountain of social reprieve for members of the Muslim community who are not well off.

³²⁸Ibid., 659. While Ishaq has the number at twenty-seven, Guillaume cites Tabari with the number as six, *ibid.*

³²⁹“Having completed his business he was on his way home when one of the apostle's raiding parties fell in with him and took all he had, though he himself escaped them,” *ibid.*, 316.

³³⁰“When the apostle returned from Khaybar to Medina he stayed there from the first Rabi until Shawwal, sending out raiding parties and expeditions,” *ibid.*, 530. “The apostle stayed only seven nights in Medina before *he himself* made a raid against B. Sulaym...” [emphasis added]. The wording here of “he himself” shows us that there are other raids going on that the apostle is not personally involved in. Additionally the way that it mentions the B. Sulaym seems to indicate that this was not the only raid against that tribe, *ibid.*, 360.

³³¹Ibid., 537.

Sirat Rasul Allah, Muhammad wants people to desire *jihad* but isn't sure how to do this. He complains of his followers: "They were hypocritical and left fighting for God's sake, eager to survive in this world and fleeing from death."³³² Allah sends down a verse of the Qur'an in order that this problem be solved. "Then He said to His prophet *to make the believers wish to fight and desire battle*: 'And do not think that those who were killed for God's sake are dead, nay they are alive with their Lord being nourished, glad with the bounty that God has brought them and rejoicing in those who have not yet joined them that they have nothing to fear or grieve over...'"[emphasis added].³³³ Like the rewards on earth the rewards in heaven help promote *jihad*. Death done in battle for God's sake is not something to be feared or avoided. It is the gate to heaven itself. Heaven is brought up specifically to make believers "desire battle."

This point is so profoundly entrenched in the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* that there is even an example of an infidel slaying a Muslim and then later envying the Muslim he killed. The following is the testimony of a man named Jabbar.

What led me to become a Muslim was that I stabbed one of them between the shoulders that day and I saw the point of the spear come out of his chest, and I heard him say, 'I have won by God!' I could not make out what he meant by the words seeing that I had killed him until afterwards I asked others and was told that it was martyrdom, and then I said, 'By God he has won.'³³⁴

In the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, things are not what they seem. Here the Muslim appears to be losing. He is being stabbed through his chest. His faith that his death is giving him the keys to heaven completely reverses the expected emotional narrative. Rather than losing, he is winning. His murderer sees this resolve and cannot help but be pulled into the worldview

³³²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 399.

³³³Ibid.

³³⁴Ibid., 435

himself. This complete faith and resolution is so dense and massive that it pulls in others who experience it, like a massive blackhole pulling in neighboring stars.³³⁵

We have already heard of Usayrim who was said to have entered paradise without ever having prayed. He did this by dying while fighting in the name of Allah. He is not alone. ‘Amr b. al-Jamüh, like Usayrim, did not want to be deprived of “the heavenly garden”³³⁶ despite his lameness keeping him from battle. Muhammad gives him permission not to have to commit *jihad* but he does so anyway out of piety and desire for heaven. Of Hamza, who also died in *jihad*, we read, “Mention not the slain since Hamza is among them, dead for God's sake in true obedience. Paradise eternal he lives in now.”³³⁷ Of the brethren that were slain at Uhud we read, “God has put their spirits in the crops of green birds which come down to the rivers of the Garden; they eat of its fruits and come home to where there are golden candlesticks in the shadow of the throne...”³³⁸ No deed is depicted as equal to nobility as *jihad* in the narrative of *Sirat Rasul Allah*.³³⁹ No action can please Allah as completely, no deed is a surer assurance of

³³⁵This might be contrasted with early Christian martyrs who are shown to trust in God so much while being killed that some of those who witness their deaths decide to die with them. In Eusebius we see several stories where on-lookers see the injustice of killing innocent Christians and are so disturbed by the perversion of justice that they convert and join the Christians in death. Lucius witnessing the Roman government kill a Christian named Ptolemy unjustly complains, “Why have you punished this man, who is neither an adulterer, a fornicator, a homicide, a thief, nor a robber, and has not been found guilty of any offense, but merely fancies the name of Christian?” The Roman government accusingly states, “I think you’re one of them yourself.” To this Lucius says, “Indeed I am” Lucius dies alongside Ptolemy; Williamson, *Eusebius*, 126.

³³⁶Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 385.

³³⁷*Ibid.*, 412.

³³⁸*Ibid.*, 400.

³³⁹Sahih Bukhari has a similar importance placed on *jihad* over other deeds. “A man came to Allah’s Messenger and said, ‘Guide me to such a deed as equals *Jihad* (in reward). he replied, ‘I do not find such a deed.’ Then he added, ‘Can you, while the Muslim fighter has gone for *Jihad* enter your mosque to perform *Salat* (prayer) without cease and observe *Saum* (fast) and never break your *Saum*? The man said, ‘But who can do that?’ Abu Hurairah added, ‘The Mujahid (i.e. Muslim fighter) is rewarded even for the footsteps of his horse while it wanders about for grazing tied in a long rope.’ The footnote clarifies, “Of course, nobody can offer *Salat* (prayer) and fast incessantly, and since the Muslim fighter is rewarded as if he was doing such good impossible deeds, no possible deed equals *Jihad* in reward,” Mohammad al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol.4 trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina, Darussalam, 2015), 45. “Paradise has one hundred grades which Allah has reserved for the Mujahidun who fight in His Cause...” (Bukhari 2790) Also (Bukhari 2794, 2796, 2787)

heaven. It is completely natural that such a heavenly act is so intimately connected with a heavenly destination. Over and over again, the reader of *Sirat Rasul Allah* is reminded of the same major theme. “But the apostle and those who believe with him strive with their wealth and their lives; for them are the good things; they are the successful. God has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow wherein they shall abide for ever; that is the great triumph.”³⁴⁰ While earthly booty and captured women can bring temporary pleasure, only paradise can bring eternal pleasure.

In paradise there are riches, beauty, and sex. Muhammad tells us, Gabriel, “took me into Paradise and there I saw a damsel with dark red lips and I asked her to whom she belonged, for she pleased me much when I saw her...”³⁴¹ This is precisely what Ubayda b. al-Harith longs for in the poetry he writes after the Battle of Badr. In that battle he lost his leg in the carnage, but it didn’t bother him. He had a bright future to look forward to. “You may cut off my leg, yet I am a Muslim, I hope in exchange for a life near to Allah with *Houris fashioned like the most beautiful statues with the highest heaven* for those who mount there. *I have bought it with a life of which I have tasted the best* and which I have tried until I lost even my next-of-kin.”³⁴² Ubayda lost his leg and his next-of-kin, but he has the prophet’s promise of an eternal future with beautiful *houris* to put earthly loss in perspective. He also calls his time in battle “tasting the best.” Likewise Hassan b. Thabit writes a poem mourning the loss of Khubayb who was crucified by the Adal and al-Qara.³⁴³ In this poem he states, “Then go, Khubayb, may God reward thee well in

³⁴⁰Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 623.

³⁴¹Ibid., 185-6.

³⁴²Ibid., 349.

³⁴³As Khubayb is being crucified, his last words sound like a dark parallel of Jesus’s. “Then he said, ‘O God, reckon them by number and kill them one by one, let none of them escape.’ Then they killed him, God pity him,” *ibid.*, 428.

the eternal gardens with *houris* among thy companions.”³⁴⁴ In mourning his beloved friend he is comforted by the thought of him at least having wonderful sex with a *houris* in a garden.

The belief in this *houris*-filled heaven is so absolutely real that it cannot help but seep into the Muslim praxis in ways that are sometimes astonishing. Life is treated lightly and completely abandoned in favor of paradise and Allah’s pleasure. There are two stories from the battle of Badr in particular that highlight just how important dying in *jihad* is. The first is the story of Umayr b. al-Humam

Muhammad goes out to his troops telling them “no man will be slain this day fighting against them with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause them to enter Paradise.”³⁴⁵ Umayr b. al-Humam was eating some dates when he heard this message. Longing for paradise, his beliefs explode into praxis. He acts with decisiveness. “‘Fine, Fine!’ said he, ‘is there nothing between me and my entering Paradise save to be killed by these men? He flung the dates from his hand, seized his sword, and fought against them till he was slain...”³⁴⁶ The story of ‘Auf b. Harith is similar. ‘Auf asks Muhammad, “‘O apostle of God, what makes the Lord laugh with joy at His servant?’ [Muhammad] answered, ‘When he plunges into the midst of the enemy without mail.’ ‘Auf drew off the mail-coat that was on him and threw it away: then he seized his sword and fought the enemy till he was slain.”³⁴⁷ It is not just death in combat, but also a disregard for life and safety that is desired. And it is not just desired, throwing off the mail causes Allah to “laugh with joy at His servant.” This passage is demonstrative of much that has

³⁴⁴Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 430.

³⁴⁵Ibid., 300.

³⁴⁶Ibid.

³⁴⁷Ibid.

been laid out above. Muhammad speaks out what is the objectively moral thing to do. *Jihad* is seen as beautiful; causing Allah to laugh with joy. The same emotion a father might feel watching his daughter sing for him is what Allah feels when one of his soldiers goes into battle without armor and dies. The desire for paradise and faith in Muhammad's words are so great that a medieval desert-dwelling warrior will toss out delicious dates and run to his death rather than have safety and a delicious meal.

Hell as Punishment for Avoiding *Jihad*

Images of hell are colorful in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. In the lowest heaven all the angels greet Muhammad with a smile except for Malik, the "Keeper of Hell." Gabriel asks Malik to show Muhammad hell, and he does. "He removed its covering and the flames blazed high into the air until I thought they would consume everything."³⁴⁸ There Adam is the one who separates the good souls from the evil ones, looking on the good ones with pleasure and exclaiming "Faugh!"³⁴⁹ in disgust at the evil ones. When he sees an evil spirit he says, "An evil spirit from an evil body."³⁵⁰ The sights of hell are reminiscent of *The Aeneid*³⁵¹ or Dante.³⁵² "Then I saw men with lips like camels; in their hands were pieces of fire like stones which they used to thrust into their mouths and they would come out of their posteriors. I was told that these were those who

³⁴⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 185.

³⁴⁹Ibid.

³⁵⁰Ibid.

³⁵¹Compare the *Aeneid*: "Here Cretan Rhadamanthus rules with an iron hand, censuring men, exposing fraud, forcing confessions when anyone up above, reveling in his hidden crimes, puts off his day of atonement till he dies, the fool, too late. That very moment, vengeful Tisiphone, armed with lashes, springs on the guilty, whips them till they quail, with her left hand shaking all her twisting serpents..." Fagles, *Aeneid*, 201.

³⁵²"I came into a place mute of all light, which bellows as the sea does in a tempest, if by opposing winds 'tis combated. The infernal hurricane that never rests hurtles the spirits onward in its rapine; whirling them round, and smiting, it molests them," Henry Wadworth Longfellow, translator, *The Inferno*, (New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2003), 26. Guillaume, citing M. Asin's *La Escatalogia Musulmana en La Divina Comedia*, postulates *The Divine Comedy* was influenced by the night journey of Muhammad, Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, xxi.

sinfully devoured the wealth of orphans.”³⁵³ Muhammad sees big bellied men, the usurers, being trampled by thirsty camels. Promiscuous men are forced to eat rotten meat while sitting next to fat delicious meat. Women are seen there too, “hanging by their breasts”³⁵⁴ for having fathered bastard children on earth. Other scenes are given elsewhere. Those who forsake Islam are said to “wear a garment of molten pitch for ever.”³⁵⁵ “Amr b. Luhayy, “the first to change the religion of Ishmael”³⁵⁶ is seen “dragging his intestines in hell.”³⁵⁷ Repeatedly we are told, “for the infidels hell fire is burning.”³⁵⁸ But the adulterers, usurers, and infidels are not the only denizens of hell, so too are those who avoid *jihad*.³⁵⁹

It is clear from the text that avoiding *jihad*, even turning your back from it, warrants hell. “O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve on the march, do not turn your backs. He who turns his back except in maneuvering or intending to join another section, incurs the wrath of God, and his destination is Hell, a miserable end.”³⁶⁰ In one specific instance, Muhammad decides to lead his army against the Byzantines at Tabuk. As seen above, it is very hot, the Byzantines are very tough, and a lot of Muslims do not feel like engaging in *jihad*. Jadd

³⁵³Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 185.

³⁵⁴Ibid., 186.

³⁵⁵Ibid., 316.

³⁵⁶Ibid., 35.

³⁵⁷Ibid.

³⁵⁸Ibid., 100.

³⁵⁹Even children of infidels, who don’t do anything wrong themselves, are said to populate hell. “When the apostle ordered him to be killed ‘Uqba said, ‘But who will look after my children, O Muhammad?’ ‘Hell’, he said, and ‘Asim b. Thabit b. Abū’l-Aglah al-Ansāri killed him,” *ibid.*, 308.

³⁶⁰Ibid., 322. The reasoning for this is because Allah has control over victory, so running is a way of questioning his authority. “Then He made you flee from them that He might try you. Yet He forgave you, for God is full of kindness to the believers, i.e. I carried out My promise to give you victory over your enemy when you routed them with the sword, i.e. killing them by My permission and My giving you power over them and keeping them from you,” *ibid.*, 396.

b. Qays of B. Salima claims he does not want to fight the Byzantines with the Muslim army because he is scared of being tempted by the Byzantine women and falling into sin. Muhammad lets him stay back, but Allah is not so easily fooled. “It was not that he feared temptation from the Byzantine women: the temptation he had fallen into was greater in that he hung back from the apostle and sought to please himself rather than the apostle.”³⁶¹ This seems to be like a natural corollary of Usaryim, the man who “entered paradise never having prayed” above. Usaryim fights for the glory of Islam, Jadd avoids combat for the pleasure of self. For someone who makes up excuses to avoid *jihad* the implications are clear, 'Verily hell is behind him.'"³⁶² Jadd is not alone, there are many others who behave similarly. “The disaffected said one to another, ‘Don’t go forth in the heat,’ disliking strenuous war, doubting the truth, and creating misgivings about the apostle.”³⁶³ Allah tells Muhammad what to say in response to their sinful desire to avoid combat in the heat. “So God sent down concerning them: ‘And they said, Go not forth in the heat.’ Say: The fire of hell is hotter did they but understand. Let them laugh a little and let them weep much as a reward for what they were earning.”³⁶⁴ In other words, they think that the march to Tabuk is hot, but by avoiding that march they have won for themselves an eternity in hell. Better to do uncomfortable *jihad* momentarily than to abide in the torture of hell forever! Avoiding *jihad* is listed along with “doubting the truth” and “creating misgivings about the apostle.” To doubt the truth and create misgivings about the apostle are inseparable from avoiding *jihad*. They all interconnect. They are all products of a metaphysical framework that rejects the one laid out above.

³⁶¹Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 602.

³⁶²Ibid., 602-3.

³⁶³Ibid., 603.

³⁶⁴Ibid.

Other examples of Muslims avoiding *jihad* can be found and they are always portrayed negatively. Some Beduin avoid *jihad* because they feared for their belongings.³⁶⁵ They later apologized to Muhammad, but their apology was not received.³⁶⁶ Other Muslims avoid combat but later repent. They are forgiven after being shunned by the community for fifty or so days.³⁶⁷ From these examples it's clear that martyrdom leads to a reward in paradise on the one hand, and avoiding battle leads to hell on the other.

Contextualizing Compassion and Peace Treaties in Light of Depictions of *Jihad*

Sirat Rasul Allah is a massive text with a lot of content. By focusing entirely on positive depictions of *jihad*, one might perceive a positive depiction of a peace treaty or compassion to be a distortion. While there is a positive depiction of a peace treaty and acts of compassion on Muhammad's part such situations are actually well at home with the theology of *jihad* as described above.

³⁶⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 506.

³⁶⁶Ibid., 603. This makes sense in the reasoning of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, as the hesitance to engage in *jihad* literally gives Muhammad more emotional pain than anything else. "The most painful thing to me is that muhajirun from Quraysh and the Ansar and Ghifar and Aslam should stay behind," *ibid.*, 609. The apostle is talking about troops staying back from Tabuk.

³⁶⁷There are many Muslims who avoid the battle of Tabuk, but they make up excuses about why they couldn't go. There are, however, three honest ones who abstain from the battle of Tabuk that repent. "I was never stronger and richer than when I stayed behind," *ibid.*, 611. Muhammad tells them to leave until God decides what to do with them. He forbids anyone to speak to them. After forty or fifty days the apostle orders them to be separated from their wives, except for one of the three who is older. His wife is allowed to serve him but still not allowed to have sex with him. This continues for another ten days until Allah at last reveals that they have been pardoned. As for those who lied though, Ishaq says the following: "For God said about those who lied to him when he sent down the revelation, 'They will swear to you by God when you return to them that you may turn from them. Do not turn from them for they are unclean and their resting place is hell, in reward for what they have earned. They swear to you that you may be satisfied with them, and if you are satisfied with them God is not satisfied with an evil people,'" Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 613-14. In other words, their lies about why they could not fight at Tabuk may keep Muhammad from being mad at them, but Allah is not so easily fooled. He knows the truth and will send those to hell who avoided *jihad* and didn't have a good excuse or repent for skipping. Muhammad gives mercy to the Muslims who fled Mu'ta "They are not runaways but come agains if God will," *ibid.*, 536. There they were outnumbered 200,000 to merely 3,000, *ibid.*, 532.

The Treaty of Hudabiya is a temporary armistice between the Quraysh and the Muslims. Ishaq calls the signing of the treaty Islam's greatest victory. This treaty was supposed to last for ten years but only lasts for two. It ends when some of the tribes involved with the Quraysh breach it by attacking a Muslim tribe. Regarding this treaty Ishaq states, "No previous victory in Islam was greater than this. There was nothing but battle when men met; but when there was an armistice and war was abolished and men met in safety and consulted together none talked about Islam intelligently without entering it. In those two years double as many or more than double as many entered Islam as ever before."³⁶⁸ Even popular culture Muslims today interpret this treaty as proof that Islam is peaceful.³⁶⁹ Taken alone this looks like the sort of quote one could use to argue that peace is favored in *Sirat Rasul Allah*. There is no arguing that peace wasn't favorable here, but even during the treaty Muhammad makes it clear that the peace was never supposed to last. While the treaty is still in effect he states, "Two religions shall not remain together in the peninsula of the Arabs'..."³⁷⁰ The treaty was always limited to 10 years. Peace was never intended to last indefinitely. Additionally the treaty ended after only 2 years. During the signing of the treaty several Muslims protested to having peace with the Quraysh.³⁷¹ While this quote does portray the peace in this isolated situation positively, it doesn't nullify all the surrounding

³⁶⁸Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 507.

³⁶⁹"The Treaty of Hudaibiyah: Key Points, Significance And Lessons." 2021. ZamZam. <https://zamzam.com/blog/treaty-of-hudaibiya/>. Whether or not "Islam," as an entire religion, is peaceful is not the topic of this paper. This is an exploration of the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* specifically. To that point, this treaty will only be examined to the extent that its presence in *Sirat Raul Allah* might be seen to conflict with the proposition that *jihad* is portrayed as good, beautiful, and rewarded in that text.

³⁷⁰Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 525. The armistice is on page 504 and it is not breached until 540. The entire book proceeds chronologically and this quote is said in the intermediary content on page 525.

³⁷¹"Umar jumped up and went to Abi Bakr saying, 'Is he not God's apostle, and are we not Muslims, and are they not polytheists?' to which Abū Bakr agreed, and he went on: "Then why should we agree to what is demeaning to our religion?"' *ibid.*, 504.

700 pages of narratives and context. There are no green birds in paradise (the souls of martyrs from Uhud) wishing to return to life so they can sign peace treaties. We don't have hundreds of examples of poetry glorifying the signing of peace treaties. There are no verses extolling the beauty of pens that sign peace treaties. There is no example where Allah laughs with joy at the signing of a peace treaty. Muhammad does not laugh so wide that his back teeth are visible because of the signing of a peace treaty. Muslim fathers don't extol the merits of teaching their sons the art of signing peace treaties. However, all these above examples are true of *jihad* and dying in *jihad* and in enjoying the beauty, blood, guts, and gore of *jihad*.

Other quotes might be taken to show that Muhammad is compassionate. For example he is portrayed as giving. "Now the apostle never held back anything he was asked for and al-Arqam b. Abū'l-Arqam knew this and asked him for it and the apostle gave it him."³⁷² Additionally we see him showing mercy. For example, after the capture of al-Taif, Muhammad stopped at al-Jirana with his men "having a large number of Hawazin captives." One of Muhammad's men asks Muhammad to curse the captives. "But he said, 'O God, guide Thaquif and bring them (to Islam).'"³⁷³ There are many other examples where Muhammad has mercy or compassion as well.³⁷⁴ However, where Muhammad is most kind and most tender is in the context of those who have given their life in *jihad*. During the battle of Mu'ta, a warrior named

³⁷²Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 507.

³⁷³Ibid., 592.

³⁷⁴"If you would like to let her have her captive husband back and return her money to her, do so.' The people at once agreed and they let him go and sent her money back," ibid., 314. "You know that I have no money, and am in real need with a large family, so let me go without ransom.' The apostle did so on condition that he should not fight against him again," ibid., 318. We see a tender-hearted side of Muhammad at Hamza's death. "The apostle's eyes filled with tears and he wept and said, 'But there are no weeping women for Hamza,'" ibid., 89. "One of our companions told us that the apostle that day passed by a woman whom Khalid b. al-Walid had killed while men had gathered round her. When he heard what had happened he sent word to Khalid and forbade him to kill child, or woman, or hired slave, ibid., 576. Of course, it probably bears mentioning that in a poem on the very next page we read, "And their killing was sweeter than drink," ibid. Both these sorts of quotes are quite at home in *Sirat Rasul Allah*.

Ja'far is killed. Muhammad shows compassion to his family. Ja'far's wife, Asma, gives us this account.

When Ja'far and his companions were killed, the apostle came in to me when I had just tanned forty skins and kneaded my dough and washed and oiled and cleaned my children, He asked me to bring him Ja'far's sons and when I did so he smelt them and his eyes filled with tears. I asked him whether he had heard bad news about Ja'far and his companions, and he said that he had and that they had been killed that day. I got up and cried aloud and the women gathered to me. The apostle went out to his family saying, 'Do not neglect Ja'far's family so as not to provide them with food, for they are occupied with the disaster that has happened to their head.'³⁷⁵

While this shows a tender kind side to the apostle, it also, if anything, encourages *jihad* by showing how the prophet honors the family of those who died in *jihad*. It is possible to be a compassionate person toward your fellow Muslim and also encourage *jihad* against the unbelievers. It is worth comparing the story of Ja'far to another story involving a fallen warrior and children. This story is about an infidel named Uqba. "When the apostle ordered him to be killed 'Uqba said, 'But who will look after my children, O Muhammad?' 'Hell', he said, and 'Asim b. Thabit b. Abū'l-Aglah al-Ansāri killed him.'³⁷⁶ Asking whether Muhammad is compassionate or not is the wrong question. All that matters is whether one is a Muslim or not.

Even a recent revert to Islam like Abdullah b. Sa'd can barely gain Muhammad's mercy. Abdullah originally converted to Islam, then rejected it, and then reaccepted it after Mecca was conquered. Not only did he used to be a Muslim, but he was *a writer for Qur'anic revelations* while he was a Muslim. Even so, he still later abandoned Islam. Muhammad finds him when he conquers Mecca and Abdullah begs for his life and promises to be a good Muslim again. As a rule, Muhammad never kills Muslims, but this time, when Abdullah is begging for his life, Muhammad remains quiet in hopes that someone will kill him without him having to

³⁷⁵Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 535.

³⁷⁶Ibid., 308.

order it. “They allege that the apostle remained silent for a long time till finally he said yes. When ‘Uthman had left he said to his companions who were sitting around him, ‘I kept silent so that one of you might get up and strike off his head!’ One of the Ansàr said, ‘Then why didn’t you give me a sign, O apostle of God?’ He answered that a prophet does not kill by pointing.”³⁷⁷ He ultimately has mercy, but very reluctantly.

Muhammad also limits violence at certain points. He disallows mutilation. “Umar said to the apostle, ‘Let me pull out Suhayl’s two front teeth; his tongue will stick out and he will never be able to speak against you again.’ He answered, ‘I will not mutilate him, otherwise God would mutilate me though I am a prophet.”³⁷⁸ When Khalid comes to some B. Jadhima after the capture of Mecca he tells them that there will be peace since everyone is Muslim now. Once they lay down their swords he ties them up and cuts off their heads. When Muhammad hears the news he says, “O God, I am innocent before Thee of what Khalid has done.”³⁷⁹ Khalid did not have Muhammad’s permission to do this and Muhammad begs for Allah’s forgiveness after it is done. However, Khalid never receives *any* punishment for this killing. While one might expect Khalid to be punished, instead Muhammad chooses him again for his very next mission, to destroy al-Uzza, a temple in Nakhla.³⁸⁰ Perhaps Muhammad’s dissatisfaction in this particular situation was because these were subdued defeated people that had already accepted Islam. Muhammad is always kind to converts and Muslims; it is infidels who feel the sting of death by Muslim sword.

³⁷⁷Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammed*, 550.

³⁷⁸Ibid., 312.

³⁷⁹Ibid., 561.

³⁸⁰Ibid., 565.

Conclusion

Muhammad is a complex character and there are a lot of different things said about him in this book that is over 700 pages long. To have an accurate interpretation of him, an interpreter of the text needs to look at broad narratives and major themes rather than verses in isolation.³⁸¹ Muhammad's personal character aside, if you look at *Sirat Rasul Allah* holistically, it is apparent through narrative, prose, poetry, literary constructions, and major themes that *jihad* is considered moral, beautiful, and rewarded. Other data is situated within that larger framework.

One might Imagine all the theology of *Sirat Rasul Allah* as a tree. The roots, trunk, and branches all lean in favor of a positive depiction of *jihad*. *Jihad* is the most noble deed. *Jihad* is more enjoyable than heaven, beautiful, desperately sought after. *Jihad* has poems and songs written about it with vivid praising imagery, narratives glorifying it and characters that are richly rewarded both on earth as in heaven for consumating it. Any potential quote that is isolated out of the text to run counter to the weight, body, and inertia of the entire rest of the text could be seen as a small twig that runs in the opposite direction of everything underneath it. One cannot look at a little twig and ignore the massive body beneath it. The branch and the trunk and the roots are all positive depictions of *jihad*. They glorify *jihad*. They spiritual nutrition from *jihad*. As Ishaq tells us, "Carry over the interpretation of the obscure to the plain which can have only one meaning and thus the book becomes consistent, one part confirming another, the argument effective and the case clear; falsehood is excluded...."³⁸² It is clear where *Sirat Rasul Allah*'s theology is planted. The roots, trunk, and branches are all constituted of and held together by the

³⁸¹For an example of how distorted a picture one could paint with isolated quotes see the theological claims that could potentially be made. "The holy spirit has no equal," Guillame, *The Life of Muhammad*, 558. "Among the things which have reached me about what Jesus the Son of Mary stated in the Gospel which he received from God... 'He that hateth me hath hated the Lord,'" *ibid.*, 104. "he testifies that Jesus, Son of Mary, is His slave, His apostle, His spirit and His word, which He cast into Mary," *ibid.*, 155. "Worship Jesus son of Mary," *ibid.*, 163.

³⁸²*Ibid.*, 273.

same unifying theological claims. *Jihad* is beautiful, moral, and rewarded. These themes cannot be separated from Ishaq's work, just as one could not remove the roots, trunk, and branches from a tree and still call it a tree.

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