"The Monasticism of My Community is Jihad"

A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam

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Abstract

This article explores Muslim attitudes towards asceticism in the eighth and ninth centuries AD by examining the famous Prophetic *ḥadīṯ*: "Every community has its monasticism, and the monasticism of my community is *ǧihād*." The *ḥadīṯ* serves as a lens for assessing several broader phenomena, including early Muslim views of Christian monasticism, the rejection of celibacy in Islamic culture, and the promotion of a new code of sexual ethics in the post-conquest Middle East – what this article terms the "second sexual revolution of Late Antiquity." It concludes by presenting several accounts of Christian monks who converted to Islam and joined the *ǧihād*, as well as Muslim soldiers who converted to Christianity and became monks.

Keywords

Monasticism, *ǧihād*, asceticism, Abbasids, Ibn al-Mubārak, ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn, sexuality in Islam, celibacy, conversion, Christianity under Muslim rule

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I first learned about these traditions from Fritz Zimmermann in Oxford and conducted my initial research on them under Michael Cook in Princeton. Over the years, the article benefitted from the feedback of Peter Brown, Alexander Treiger, Lev Weitz, Luke Yarbrough, and John Zaleski; audiences at Princeton University and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; and the two anonymous readers commissioned by *Arabica*. They have greatly improved the final product. All remaining mistakes are my own.

Introduction

Interactions between Muslims and Christians shifted between two modes through much of the eighth and ninth centuries AD. On the one hand, theirs was a testy relationship circumscribed by polemic and fierce competition for converts. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians lived side-by-side throughout much of the region, intermarrying, sharing neighborhoods, and engaging in commerce together.[1] What is more, as time went on, the ranks of the Muslim community swelled with converts from Christian backgrounds, bringing with them their former cultures and religious beliefs.[2] It was an encounter shaped by hostility and amicability in equal parts.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Muslims sometimes struggled to differentiate themselves from their non-Muslim subjects. This was especially true in places like Egypt or Syria, where Muslims remained a demographic minority for generations after the conquests. We can sense the risks and anxieties surrounding this state of mixture in a *ḥadīṯ* made famous by M.J. Kister: "Whoever imitates a (non-Muslim) people is one of them" (*man*

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1 For introductions, see Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2008; Jack Boulos Victor Tannous, "Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak", Princeton Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2010, p. 379-569; now Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*, Philadelphia, U. of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, p. 142-182.

2 Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 1979, p. 33-42.

tašabbaha bi-qawm fa-huwa minhum).[3] One way Muslims resisted the threat of "imitation" was by embracing practices perceived as opposite to those of Christians and other non-Muslims. Thus, a related group of *ḥadīṯ* exhorted Muslims to "do things differently" (*ḫālifūhum*) than those around them.[4] This applied to a range of quotidian concerns, including hair styles, dress, handshaking, and horseback riding. Though mundane, these prescriptions were meant to endow the early Muslims with a distinct social identity, and furthermore, to reinforce the political hierarchy between rulers and ruled. These were part of a wider campaign aimed at shielding Muslims from the potentially damaging effects of assimilation, lest they disappear in a sea of larger, older, and more deeply rooted communities in the Near East and Central Asia.

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3 M.J. Kister, "'Do Not Assimilate Yourselves…': *Lā tashabbahū*", *JSAI*, 12 (1989), p. 321-371; I borrow the phrase "state of mixture" from the Pahlavi term *gumēzišn*, meaning the state of human history in which different groups (Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians) exist together in uneasy tension; highlighted recently in Richard Payne, *State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, Oakland, CA, Univ. of California Press, 2015.

4 Ḥabīb Zayyāt, "Simāt al-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd fī l-Islām", *Al-Machreq*, 43 (1949), p. 161-252; Albrecht Noth, "Problems of Differentiation between Muslims and Non-Muslims: Re-Reading the 'Ordinances of ʿUmar' (*al-Shurūṭ al-ʿUmariyya*)", in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. R.G. Hoyland, Farnham, Ashgate, 2004, p. 103-124; Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2011, p. 58-98; Luke Yarbrough, "Origins of the *ghiyār*", *JAOS*, 134 (2014), p. 113-121.

Among the most important perceived areas of imitation between Muslims and Christians was asceticism. The first generations of Muslims were deeply impressed by the Christian monks they encountered across the newly conquered territories and assimilated many of their ideas and practices. Not everyone, however, was pleased by these contacts. They were even less pleased by the emergence of a renunciant streak in Islam that risked blurring the line with monasticism (even if Muslim ascetics drew on varied influences, both endogenous and exogenous to Islam).[5] Thus, at the precise moment when Islamic asceticism was coming into its own in the early Abbasid period, there emerged an opposition – led mostly by proto-Sunnī scholars – determined to fend off what it regarded as the most blatant forms of Christian influence, in particular, celibacy. The *ḥadīṯ* which circulated from the mid-eighth century onward as a result of this debate on asceticism, sex, and warfare constitute the subject of the following essay. It is concerned with some of the oldest forms of Muslim renunciant piety which came to be practiced

[5] For general introductions to asceticism and Sufism, see Geneviève Gobillot, "Zuhd", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition* [hereafter, *EI²*], eds. H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers, E. Lévi-Provençal, et al., Leiden, Brill, 1954-2009, XI, p. 559-562; L. Massignon & B. Radtke, "Taṣawwuf", *EI²*, X, esp. p. 313-317; Jacqueline Chabbi, "Remarques sur le développement historique des mouvements ascétiques et mystiques au Khurasan, III^{e}/IX^{e} siècle – IV^{e}/X^{e} siècle", *SI*, 46 (1977), p. 5-72; Leah Kinberg, "What is Meant by *Zuhd*", *SI*, 61 (1985), p. 27-44; Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.", *SI*, 83 (1996), p. 51-70; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, Leiden, Brill, 2000; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

at the start of the Abbasid period, before the emergence of classical Sufism in the tenth century and beyond.

This article has two goals. The first is to use a select group *ḥadīṯ* on the themes of monasticism and *ǧihād* to investigate attitudes towards asceticism in early Islamic tradition, more broadly. On the one hand, Muslims of the eighth and ninth centuries looked upon monasticism as an emblem of pure, undiluted monotheism, but on the other, as a symbol of a corrupt and decadent Christian church. The second is to explain how and why early Muslims fused the practice of *ǧihād* with this ambivalent understanding of Christian monasticism. Furthermore, it is to show how this synthesis of heroic warfare and heroic asceticism helped Muslim ascetics differentiate themselves from their Christian competitors at a time of heightened conversion and social mixing.

By exploring these themes, we can peer into one of the major changes in the moral texture of an entire region, what I shall refer to as the "second sexual revolution of Late Antiquity." It was a revolution ushered in by the advent of Islam, which took root in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, and which implicitly challenged the "first sexual revolution" of the period, brought about by the rise of Christianity generations earlier. Scholars rarely examine Muslim sexual ethics within the ecology of the late ancient world in which they emerged, and therefore, tend not to be surprised by this transformation. But by the standards of the day, this shift was dramatic and decisive, especially in regions where Christians made up a majority of the population. What we are talking about is nothing short of the replacement of one set of principally male moral codes throughout much of the Middle East – about the virtues of permanent continence for the spiritual elite (that is, monks) and of sexual chastity for everyone else (that is, the laity and married clergy) – with a completely different set of values – about the

virtues of virility and fertility for all believers. The second sexual revolution made widespread a distinctly unmonkish ideal of how sex and piety should fit together, an ideal that was intimately bound up in the valorization of warfare. This, in turn, implicitly challenged the hard-won consensus of the Christian church. The *ḥadīṯ* on monasticism and *ǧihād* offer a snapshot of this transformation in real time, of the great debates it provoked among religious elites, as well as the quiet but profound changes it wrought for common people across the region.

I. Traditions About Monasticism and *Ǧihād*

The traditions on monasticism (Ar. *rahbāniyya, siyāḥa*) and *ǧihād* are not unknown to scholars, having been studied in a preliminary fashion by Ignaz Goldziher, Louis Massignon, and Thomas Sizgorich, among others. Until now, however, they have never been studied systematically or with an eye to their historical context.[6] The first Muslim scholar to transmit

[6] For prior discussion, see A.J. Wensinck, "Rahbāniyya", *EI²*, VIII, p. 396-397; idem, *Concordances et indices de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden, Brill, 1936-1988, ii, p. 312; Sidney H. Griffith, "Monasticism and Monks", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J. Dammen McAuliffe, Leiden, Brill, 2001-2006, III, p. 405-407; Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, eds. & trs. S.M. Stern & C.R. Barber, Allen and Unwin, London, 1966-1971, II, p. 357; F.W. Zimmermann, "Islam", in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, London, SPCK, 1986, p. 499; Sara Sviri, "*Wa-rahbānīyatan ibtadaʿūhā*: An Analysis of Traditions Concerning the Origin and Evaluation of Christian Monasticism", *JSAI*, 13 (1990), p. 196, 200; Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, tr. Benjamin Clark, Notre Dame, IN, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1997, p.

these *ḥadīṯ* on a large scale was ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/ 797), a famous *mutaṭawwiʿ* (volunteer solider) who combined a life of combat, scholarship, and prayer along the borders of the Abbasid caliphate. Near the beginning of his *Kitāb al-Ǧihād* – which as Christopher Melchert has recently argued, was probably not compiled by Ibn al-Mubārak himself, but by one of his disciples – he included the following traditions:[7]

> Muḥammad – Saʿīd b. Raḥma – Ibn al-Mubārak – al-Qāsim b. al-Faḍl – Muʿāwiya b. Qurra, who said: "He (*i.e.* the Prophet) used to say: 'Every community (*umma*) has its *rahbāniyya*, and the *rahbāniyya* of my community is *ǧihād*'"[8]

99; Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 180-186.

[7] ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Ǧihād*, ed. Nazīh Ḥammād, Tunis, Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, 1972, p. 35-36, no. 15-17; Christopher Melchert, "Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-Jihād* and Early Renunciant Literature", in *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qurʾān to the Mongols*, eds. R. Gleave and I.T. Kristó-Nagy, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2015, p. 49-69, on the monasticism traditions, see p. 61; on Ibn al-Mubārak more generally, see now Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism: ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunnī Identity in the Second Islamic Century*, Leiden, Brill, 2016.

[8] Muḥammad= Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad al-Abnūsī, Baġdādī, fl. c. 455/1063 (Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Ǧihād*, p. 27). Saʿīd b. Raḥma= Saʿīd b. al-Muġīra al-Ṣayyād, alias Abū ʿUṯmān al-Maṣṣīṣī, Mopsuestian, no death date (al-Mizzī, *Tahḏīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-riǧāl*, ed. Baššār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1980-1992, XI, p. 75-76, no. 2359. Ibn al-

Muḥammad – Ibn Raḥma – Ibn al-Mubārak – Sufyān – Zayd b. ʿAmmī – Abū Iyās – Anas b. Mālik – the Prophet, who used to say: "Indeed, every community has its *rahbāniyya*, and the *rahbāniyya* of this community is *ǧihād* in the path of God"[9]

Muḥammad – Ibn Raḥma – Ibn al-Mubārak – Ibn Lahīʿa - ʿUmāra b. Ġaziyya told me: "Indeed, *siyāḥa* was mentioned by the Prophet, and the Messenger of God said: 'For us, God has replaced that with *ǧihād* in the path of God and *takbīr* (*i.e.* crying "God is Great!") atop all the hills'"[10]

Mubārak al-Tamīmī, Ḫurāsānī, d. 181/797 (*Ibid.*, XVI, p. 5-25, no. 3520). al-Qāsim b. al-Faḍl al-Azdī, Baṣran, d. 167/783f (*Ibid.*, XIII, p. 410-414, no. 3812). Muʿāwiya b. Qurra al-Muzanī, Baṣran, d. 113/731f (*Ibid.*, XVIII, p. 210-217, no. 6065).

9 For Muḥammad, Ibn Raḥma, Ibn al-Mubārak, and Abū Iyās (= Muʿāwiya b. Qurra), see above, n. 8. Sufyān= Sufyān b. Saʿīd al-Ṯawrī, great *ḥadīṯ* scholar, Kūfan, d. 161/778 (al-Mizzī, *Tahḏīb*, XI, p. 154-169, no. 2407; cf. H.P. Raddatz, "Sufyān al-Thawrī", *EI²*, VIII, p. 770). Zayd b. al-Ḥawārī al-ʿAmmī, Baṣran, no death date (*Tahḏīb*, X, p. 56-60, no. 2102). Anas b. Mālik al-Anṣārī, servant to the Prophet from boyhood, Medinese, died at Kūfa, d. c. 91/709 (*Ibid.*, III, p. 353-378, no. 568; A.J. Wensinck & J. Robson, "Anas b. Mālik", *EI²*, I, p. 482).

10 For Muḥammad, Ibn Raḥma, and Ibn al-Mubārak, see above, n. 8. Ibn Lahīʿa= ʿAbd Allāh b. Lahīʿa al-Ḥadramī al-Uʿdūlī, chief *qāḍī* of Egypt, Egyptian, d. c. 174/790f (al-Mizzī, *Tahḏīb*, XV, p. 487-503, no. 3513). ʿUmāra b. Ġaziyya al-Anṣārī, Medinese, d. 140/757f (*Ibid.*, XXI, p. 258-261, no. 4195).

Ibn al-Mubārak included a related tradition in his *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, a collection of *ḥadīṯ* dealing with the theme of asceticism:[11]

> Abu ʿUmar b. Ḥayyawayh - Yaḥyā – al-Ḥusayn – ʿAbd Allāh – Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāš - ʿAqīl b. Mudrik – Abū Saʿīd al-Ḫudrī, who said that a man came to him and said: "(What) am I enjoined to do, O Abū Saʿīd?" So Abū Saʿīd said to him: "You have asked what I myself once asked the Prophet before you, and he said: 'I enjoin you to fear God, for he is the master of all things. You should practice *ǧihād*, for it is the monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) of Islam; you should constantly remember God (*dhikr Allāh*); and you should read the Koran. For in this way, your soul shall be in the company of heaven while your memory (is preserved) among men on earth. You should also practice silence except in (matters of) truth, for in this way, you shall overcome Satan'"[12]

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11 ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa-l-raqāʾiq*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī, Beirut, Muḥammad ʿAfīf al-Zuġbī, 1971, p. 289.

12 Abū ʿUmar b. Ḥayyawayh, d. 382/992f (Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab al-Zuhd*, p. 20-21). Yaḥyā= Abū Muḥammad Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad, Baġdādī, d. 318/930f (*Ibid.*, p. 19-20). al-Ḥusayn= al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-Sulamī, companion of Ibn al-Mubārak, Meccan, d. 246/860f (al-Mizzī, *Tahḏīb*, VI, p. 361-363, no. 1304). ʿAbd Allāh= Ibn al-Mubārak (see above, n. 8). Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāš al-ʿAnsī, studied in Baghdad, Ḥimṣī, d. c. 181/797f (*Ibid.*, III, p. 163-181, no. 472). ʿAqīl b. Mudrik al-Sulamī, Syrian, no death date (*Ibid.*, XX, p. 239-240, no. 3999). Abū Saʿīd al-Ḫudrī= Saʿd b. Mālik al-Anṣārī, Medinese, d. 64/683f or 74/693f (*Ibid.*, X, p. 294-300, no. 2224).

In the centuries after Ibn al-Mubārak's death, variations on these *ḥadīṯ* also appeared in the collections of a number of other prominent Sunnī scholars, including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855)[13], Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889)[14], Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim (d. 287/900)[15], Abū Yaʿlā l-Mawṣilī (d. 307/919)[16], al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971)[17], al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014)[18], and al-Bayhaqī

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13 Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, eds. Šuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ & ʿĀdil Muršid, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1995-2001, XXI, p. 317, no. 13807 (*isnād* per n. 8-9); XVIII, p. 297-298, no. 11774 (*isnād* per n. 12).

14 Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Riyadh, Maktabat al-Maʿārif li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1996, p. 377, no. 2486 (*Kitāb al-ğihād*, *Bāb fī l-nahy ʿan al-siyāḥa*) (Damascene *isnād*); cf. Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, p. 290, no. 845, and below, n. 18.

15 Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim, *Kitāb al-Ğihād*, ed. Abū l-Raḥmān Musāʿid b. Sulaymān al-Rāšid al-Ḥumayd, Medina, Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa-l-Ḥikm, 1989, I, p. 189, no. 34 (*isnād* per n. 12).

16 Abū Yaʿlā l-Mawṣilī, *Musnad Abī Yaʿlā l-Mawṣilī*, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad, Damascus, Dār al-Maʾmūn li-l-Turāth, 1984-1987, VII, p. 210, no. 1449/4204 (*isnād* per n. 9).

17 al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Maǧīd al-Salafī, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1984-1993, VIII, p. 168, no. 7708 (Ḥimṣī *isnād*); the *ḥadīṯ* states that *rahbāniyya* is the "*ribāṭ* in the heart of the enemy('s territory)," referring to the frontier fortresses from which the *mutaṭawwiʿa* would wage *ğihād*; cf. Nasser Rabbat, "Ribāṭ", *EI²*, VIII, p. 493-506.

18 al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā l-ṣaḥīḥayn*, n.e., Cairo, Dār al-Ḥaramayn li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1997, II, p. 91-92, no. 2453 (Damascene *isnād*, per n. 14).

(d. 458/1066).[19] Although the *isnād*s of these *ḥadīṯ* vary from one to the next, it is clear that they first circulated in places like Baṣra, Damascus, Ḥimṣ, and Egypt starting in the early- to mid-eighth century. The majority were transmitted directly from Ibn al-Mubārak, which is significant for understanding their historical context and meaning, as we shall see below.

II. The Meaning of the Terms *Rahbāniyya* and *Siyāḥa*

The first step in understanding these traditions is to grasp their key terms: What did the eighth-century scholars mean by *rahbāniyya*, *siyāḥa*, and *ǧihād*, and how did these relate to one another? The word *rahbāniyya* derives from the Arabic root *rāʾ-hāʾ-bāʾ*, meaning "fear." A minimalist translation of *rahbāniyya*, therefore, is "the state of living in fear," but the most widespread meaning in the medieval period was "monasticism" or "the monastic state."[20] At first glance, it may strike us as odd that monasticism was understood as a form of fear. After all, the

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[19] 1. al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭāʾ, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993-1994, IX, p. 271, no. 18506 (Damascene *isnād*, per n. 14). 2. al-Bayhaqī, *Šuʿab al-īmān*, ed. Abū Hāǧar Muḥammad al-Saʿīd b. Basyūnī Zaġlūl, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990, IV, p. 14, no. 4226 (*isnād* identical to above).

[20] *E.g.* Ḫalīl b. Aḥmad (d. c. 160/776). *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, eds. Mahdī al-Maḫzūmī & Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī, Baghdad, Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Iʿlām, 1980-1985, IV, p. 47-48; al-Azharī (d. 370/980), *Tahḏīb al-luġa*, eds. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn & Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Naǧǧār, Cairo, al-Muʾassasa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿAmma li-l-Taʾlīf wa-l-Anbāʾ wa-l-Nashr, 1964-1967, VI, p. 290ff; cf. E.W. Lane, ed., *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* Beirut, Librairie du Liban, 1968, III, p. 1168.

monachos in Greek was "the solitary" or "the one who lived alone" (a meaning also expressed by the Latin *monachus*, the Syriac *īḥīdāyā*, and the Ethiopic *monakos*).[21]

Scholars have offered several theories about the etymology of the term *rahbāniyya* – tracing it back to a Middle Persian loanword[22] and a Syriac honorific, according to two well-

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[21] Greek: G.W.H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961, p. 878-880. Syriac: R. Payne Smith, ed., *Thesaurus syriacus*, Oxford, E. Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1889, I, p. 855 (*dayrāyā*, "one who lives in a monastery"), 1588-1589 (*īḥīdāyā*, "one who lives alone"). Ethiopic: Wolf Leslau, ed., *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez (Classical Ethiopic)*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1987, p. 104 (*barrāḥ*, "desert-dweller"), 160 (*falāsi*, "exile, stranger, wanderer"), 183 (*gadāmāwi*, "wilderness-dweller"), 350 (*manakos*, from Gk.), 633 (*zəguḥāwi*, "the one who is enclosed").

[22] Shlomo Pines, "The Iranian Name for Christians and the 'God Fearers'", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 2 (1968), p. 143-152; which discuss the relationship between the Middle Persian *tarsāg*, "fearer, Christian," and the Arabic *rāhib*, "fearer, monk." The article is thought-provoking, but the proposed transmission via Middle Persian is circuitous and historically dubious. Why would pre-Islamic Arabs have looked to Zoroastrian Persian speakers to describe a phenomenon which existed all around them in Late Antiquity? Cf. Theodor Nöldeke, "Review of Friedrich Schulthess, *Homonyme Wurzeln im Syrischen. Ein Beitrag zur semitischen Lexicographie*. Berlin, 1900", *ZDMG*, 54 (1900), p. 163. For general discussion of the etymology, see Holger Michael Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 222-228.

known proposals.[23] It seems to me, however, that the most straightforward etymology is via the Syriac *deḥlat Alāhā*, or "fear of God." This term, which has Biblical roots (cf. Prov. 9:10, Act. 10:2, 13:16, 13:26, etc.), [24] was often used to express "piety" or "religion" more generally, much like *thrēskeia* in Greek or *dīn* in Arabic.[25] Thus, to label someone a "God fearer" (*daḥel Alāhā*) in Syriac was to call him a very pious person (and indeed, some Christians even referred to Muḥammad and the first Muslims in this way).[26] To my knowledge, the term never acquired a specifically monastic connotation in Syriac, as "fearer" (*rāhib*) later did in Arabic. Despite this,

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[23] François de Blois, "*Naṣrānī* (*Ναζωραῖος*) and *ḥanīf* (*ἐθνικός*): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam", *BSOAS*, 65 (2002), p. 9 n. 49, which asserts a connection between Ar. *ruhbān* ("monks") and Syr. *rawrbāne* ("lords,'" pl. of *rabbā*).

[24] For the most comprehensive study of the topic, see Folker Siegert, "Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten", *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 4 (1973), p. 109-164; cf. Lampe, *Greek Patristic Lexicon*, p. 1486-1487; Payne Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus*, p. 862-866.

[25] On "fear of God" in late antique Syriac Christianity more broadly, see Adam H. Becker, "Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and 'Fear' as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire: The Case of the *Martyrdom of Gregory* and the *Martyrdom of Yazdpaneh*", *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 2 (2009), p. 300-336. I thank Jack Tannous and Nicholas Marinides for their advice on this matter.

[26] In the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, written c. 775: J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Chronicon anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, Louvain, L. Durbecq, 1949-1989, II, p. 149; cited in Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, p. 107.

it is not difficult to see how monks came to be known as "fearers" in late antique Arabic culture, since these spiritual athletes were the most "afraid" of God's people.[27]

Aside from these etymological observations, the other significant point is that the term *rahbāniyya* is Koranic, though it appears only once in Kor 57, 27. On the basis of the late antique legal text known as the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Emran El-Badawi and Holger Zellentin have recently cast doubt on whether the Koranic term *rahbāniyya* originally referred to monasticism specifically or to an office of clerical leadership more generally.[28] Whatever the word meant in its original context, nearly all Muslim exegetes of later generations interpreted it narrowly as "monasticism," and it is this understanding that influenced the development of *ḥadīṯ* literature in the eighth century and beyond. The syntax of the Koranic verse has been examined elsewhere, so a few summary remarks here will suffice.[29] Given the unclear quality of the grammar, I include

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[27] Given this, it may not be a coincidence that early Arabic translations of the Bible rendered the term *duḥḥālā* (cf. Ps. 9:21, Jer. 32:21) as *tarahhub*, which medieval Muslim lexicographers regarded as a synonym for *rahbāniyya*, or "monasticism"; see Payne Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus*, p. 863.

[28] Emran El-Badawi, "From 'Clergy' to 'Celibacy': The Development of *Rahbānīyyah* between the Qurʾān, *Ḥadīth* and Church Canon", *Al-Bayān*, 11 (2013), p. 1-14; Holger M. Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*: Religious Leaders in the Qurʾān in Dialogue with Christian and Rabbinic Literature", in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, eds. A. Neuwirth & M.A. Sells, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, p. 262-293.

[29] Massignon, *Essay*, p. 100-104; Sviri, "Origin and Evaluation"; Christian C. Sahner, "Islamic Legends about the Birth of Monasticism: A Case Study on the Late Antique Milieu of the Qurʾān and Tafsīr", in *The Late Antique World of Early Islam: Muslims among Christians*

two possible translations of the thorny clause, *ǧaʿalnā fī qulūb allādhīna ttabaʿūhu raʾfa*^{tan} *wa-raḥma*^{tan} *wa-rahbāniyya*^{tan} *ibtadaʿūhā*:

> Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow and gave him the Gospel. [1. And We put in the hearts of those who followed him (*i.e.* Jesus) compassion, mercy, and the monastic state; they invented them — We did not prescribe them to them – only out of a desire to please God. Yet they observed them as they ought truly to have been observed] [2. And We put in the hearts of those who followed him (*i.e.* Jesus) compassion and mercy; and the monastic state they invented – We did not prescribe it to them – only out of a desire to please God. Yet they observed it not as it ought truly to have been observed].

As the translations above indicate, the crucial clause leaves open two possibilities: either *rahbāniyya* was a divine institution which was later corrupted by man (in which *rahbāniyya*, *raʾfa*, and *raḥma* form a triplet, and together supply the direct object *hā* of *ibtadaʿū*) or *rahbāniyya* was a human institution which was corrupted from the start (in which *rahbāniyya* stands apart from *raʾfa* and *raḥma* and alone supplies the direct object *hā* of *ibtadaʿū*).

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and Jews in the East Mediterranean, ed. Robert G. Hoyland, Princeton, The Darwin Press, 2015, p. 393-435; cf. Edmund Beck, "Das christliche Mönchtum im Koran", *Studia Orientalia*, 13/3 (1946), p. 17-25; Paul Nwiya, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmanes*, Beirut, Dar el-Machreq Editeurs, 1970, p. 52-56; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1991, 260-284.

Most medieval Muslim scholars settled for an in-between solution. As Sara Sviri and I have shown in separate articles, these exegetes often presented the verse within a larger narrative about the decadence of the religion of the Prophet Jesus – which they understood as a manifestation of the pure monotheism of the pre-Islamic *ḥunafāʾ*. According to this reading, *rahbāniyya* emerged as a perversion of this original "Jesus religion" (*dīn ʿĪsā*). The exegetes contrasted the "bad monasticism" of *rahbāniyya* with the "good monasticism" of Jesus' real followers, who "went into seclusion" (*wa-ʿtazalū*) in order to flee the persecution of the mainstream church. They preserved this "Jesus religion" in hermitages, caves, and desert abodes, spending their days atop columns and wandering the earth (*nasīḥu fī l-arḍ*). Thus, we find in the early interpretive tradition a condemnation of mainstream, worldly monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) alongside praise for non-mainstream, solitary asceticism. As we shall see, the ambiguous status of monasticism inherent in the verse influenced the *ḥadīṯ* of the early Abbasid period.

The Koran criticizes worldly monks elsewhere, too, and as Zellentin and El-Badawi have shown, this discourse has deep roots in late antique literature.[30] Kor 9, 31, for example, accuses Christians of taking their priests and monks as lords instead of God. Kor 9, 34, meanwhile, assails priests and monks for devouring the riches of their communities. In both cases, the text is concerned with Christian clergy who exploited their spiritual authority for material gain. Thus, even if early Muslims sometimes held favorable views of monasticism, they looked negatively upon *rahbāniyya* as such.

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30 Emran El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 114-143; Zellentin, *Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, p. 203-228; see also above, n. 28.

It is important to note that Abbasid-era *ḥadīṯ* use the term *siyāḥa* interchangeably with *rahbāniyya*. *Siyāḥa* derives from the Arabic root *sīn-yāʾ-ḥāʾ*, which is connected to the idea of "journeying" or "flowing" (hence the term for "tourism" in modern Arabic). In Prophetic *ḥadīṯ*, however, *siyāḥa* had a narrower religious meaning: wandering the earth as a form of ascetic exercise.[31] The *sāʾiḥ*, therefore, was the one who walked in the wilderness out of devotion to God. The connection between *siyāḥa* and monasticism in Arabic may derive from classical Ethiopic, in which the participle *sayəḥ* – from the verb *seḥa*, "to foretell or divine" – was one common word for "monk."[32] The Koran uses a related term several times, as in Kor 9,112, in which the believers are praised as "wanderers" (*sāʾiḥūn*; cf. Kor 9, 2). Kor 66, 5, meanwhile, characterizes good wives as those who "submit, believe, obey, perform penance, worship, and wander" (*muʾmināt*^{in} *qānitāt*^{in} *tāʾibāt*^{in} *ʿābidāt*^{in} *sāʾiḥāt*^{in}). As Christopher Melchert has recently shown, the medieval exegetical tradition understood these terms – *sāʾiḥūn* and *sāʾiḥāt* – to mean "those who fast."[33] He has explained the shift as a reflection of concerns among proto-Sunnī

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31 Wensinck, *Concordances*, III, p. 44-45; Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qurʾan*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1983, p. 1118; Ḫalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, III, p. 272-273; al-Azharī, *Tahḏīb*, V, p. 173-174; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, IV, p. 1482. For a general introduction, see Hourari Touati, *Islam & Travel in the Middle Ages*, tr. Lydia D. Cochrane, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 157-169.

32 Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez*, p. 522.

33 *E.g.* al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī min kitābihi Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, eds. Baššār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf & ʿIṣām Fāris Ḥurristānī, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1994, IV, p. 164; VII, p. 329; cf. Muḥammad Murtaḍā l-Zabīdī, *Tāǧ al-ʿarūs*, ed. ʿAbd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāǧ, Kuwait City, Maṭbaʿat Ḥukūmat al-Kuwayt, 1965-2001, VI, p. 492.

scholars in the late eighth century, who wished to promote "an ethical model within reach of the average believer, which ruled out wandering."[34]

Indeed, for all the praise *siyāḥa* garnered in the Koran, it attracted increasing criticism over time. Specifically, the peripatetic, anti-social aspect of *siyāḥa* drew the anger of many medieval Muslim scholars. In their dictionary entries for the term *siyāḥa*, for example, the lexicographers al-Ǧawharī (d. c. 393/1002) and Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210) glossed the famous *ḥadīṯ*, "There is no *siyāḥa* in Islam," by stating that Muslims were forbidden from quitting the cities (*al-amṣār*), going around the earth, living in deserts, and abandoning the communal prayers.[35] Thus, even if the *sāʾiḥ* was admired for his ascetic discipline, his habit of renouncing the world was considered problematic in later periods when extreme forms of piety were coming under fire. In a sense, the critique of *siyāḥa* in medieval Muslim culture echoed that of late antique writers such as Cyril of Scythopolis (d. c. 559), who wrote of wandering monks: "Just as

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[34] Christopher Melchert, "The Interpretation of Three Qur'anic Terms (*Siyāḥa*, *Ḥikma* and *Ṣiddīq*) of Special Interest to the Early Renunciants", in *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicography and Qur'anic Exegesis*, ed. S.R. Burge, Oxford & London, Oxford University Press & Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015, p. 89-116, here: p. 96. On the conflation of *siyāḥa* and *tarahhub* ("monasticism") in connection with fasting in a later Sufi text, see Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥāriṯ al-Muḥāsibī*, Bonn, Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bon, 1961, p. 115-119; I thank John Zaleski for this reference.

[35] Cited in al-Zabīdī, *Tāǧ al-ʿarūs*, VI, p. 491.

a plant that is constantly replanted cannot bear fruit, a monk does not bear fruit if he moves from place to place."[36]

III. Early Muslim Attitudes towards Christian Monasticism

The next step in understanding the *ḥadīṯ* of the eighth and ninth centuries is to situate them in a wider social context: How did Muslims in the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods regard the monks they encountered as they settled throughout the Near East?[37] Their earliest impressions were no doubt colored by the words of the Koran, which as we have seen, were sometimes extremely negative, though at other times, surprisingly positive. For instance, Kor 5, 82 praises Christians as friends, for they possess "priests and monks who do not behave arrogantly" (*qissīsīn wa-ruhbān^{an} wa-annahum lā yastakbirūna*). Inspired by this verse, images of "good monks" became widespread in early Muslim literature, the most famous of whom was Baḥīrā, a monk from Syria who met Muḥammad when he was only a boy and predicted that he

[36] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, tr. R.M. Price, with John Binns, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1991, p. 26 (translation slightly modified). On the phenomenon in Late Antiquity more broadly, see Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002.

[37] For an introduction to the subject, see Bradley Bowman, "The Status of Christian Monasteries in the Early Islamic Period: An Examination of Early Muslim Attitudes toward Monastic Communities and Its Relevance to the Formative Period of Islam", Univ. of Chicago Ph.D. thesis, 2013.

would one day become a mighty prophet.[38] The episode was designed to represent Islam's eclipse of Christianity in salvation history. A similar motif appears in al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *History*, where we find a monk predicting the site of the construction of Baghdad for the city's founder, the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136-58/754-75).[39]

Stories of encounters between Muslims and monks abound from the time of the conquests onward. In a sense, this should not surprise us, since monks were ubiquitous in practically every corner of the nascent caliphate with significant Christian populations. The Syriac chronicler John bar Penkaye (fl. late seventh c.), for example, writing only a few decades after the conquest of his native Mesopotamia, remarked that Muslims had received a "special commandment from God concerning our monastic station, that they should hold it in honor."[40] Likewise, the East Syrian catholicos Ishoʿyahb III (d. 659) wrote in a letter to a fellow bishop, "For also these Arabs (Syr. *ṭayyāye*) to whom at this time God has given rule over the world, behold (how) they are toward us. Not only, as you know, do they not oppose Christianity. Rather, they are givers of praise to our faith, givers of honor to our Lord's priests and holy ones,

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38 Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's* Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, tr. A. Guillaume, London, Oxford UP, 1955, p. 79-81. There is an extensive scholarly discussion of this episode; see esp. Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 2009.

39 al-Ṭabarī, *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari cum aliis*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, Brill, 1879-1901, III, 276.

40 Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāye's *Ris Melle*", *JSAI*, 9 (1987), p. 57.

and givers of aid to churches and monasteries."[41] This curious affection for monks is echoed in a Syriac disputation text of the early eighth century, in which a Muslim *amīr* proclaims that Christian monks will "enjoy the kingdom" after their deaths.[42]

Such asides may help contextualize contemporary Muslim reports that the Prophet made special provisions for the protection of monks when his armies conquered new areas.[43] Elsewhere, we find stories of caliphs conversing with monks, of Muslims consulting monastic libraries, and of monks collecting donations made by Muslim pilgrims to their foundations.[44] The

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41 Ishoʿyahb III, *Ep*. 14C, cited in Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, p. 60.

42 David G.K. Taylor, "The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē: Syriac Text and Annotated English Translation", in *Sonderdruck aus Christsein in der islamischen Welt. Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds. S.H. Griffith & S. Grebenstein, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2015, p. 237.

43 Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīḫ madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Munağğid, Damascus, Maṭbūʿat al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī, 1951-, I, p. 391; cited in Ofer Livne-Kafri, "Early Muslim Ascetics and the World of Christian Monasticism", *JSAI*, 20 (1996), p. 107 n. 20.

44 1. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz conversing with a monk: Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn al-Ḫānjī, Maktabat al-Ḫānjī & Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, Cairo, 1932-1938, IV, p. 91; cited in Livne-Kafri, "Early Muslim Ascetics," p. 108. 2. Muslims in monastic libraries: Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, II, p. 375. 3. Donations by Muslims to Christian monasteries: Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, n.e., Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1977, II, p. 500; cited in: Souleiman Mourad, "Christian Monks in Islamic Literature: A Preliminary Report on Some Arabic *Apophthegmata Patrum*", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 6 (2004), p. 84 n. 16.

most famous genre connected to Christian ascetics were the "books of monasteries" (*kutub al-diyārāt*).[45] The best known of these – by the Fatimid *belle-lettrist* al-Šābuštī (d. c. 388/988) – details the author's journeys to monasteries across Iraq, Syria, northern Mesopotamia, and his native Egypt. These sources describe amusing and occasionally racy gatherings at which Muslims enjoyed song, drink, and the company of handsome Christian youths in monastic surroundings. The *diyārāt* books developed alongside a related genre known as *ḫamriyyāt*, or wine poetry, sometimes set inside Christian monasteries. One such poem ascribed to the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125-6/743-4) and discussed by Elizabeth Key Fowden is staged in a monastery in the Ġūṭa Oasis outside Damascus, where the caliph is said to have led a pantomime Eucharist while he and his guests feasted.[46]

Amidst this, it is the figure of the black-clad, wraith-like monk which left the deepest impression in early Muslim literature. These were Muslims *avant la lettre*: men who had obeyed

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[45] al-Šābushtī, *Kitāb al-Diyārāt*, ed. Kurkīs ʿAwwād, Maktabat al-Muthannā, Baghdad, 1966; cf. C.E. Bosworth, "al-Shābushtī", *EI²*, IX, p. 165; Hilary Kirkpatrick, "Monasteries through Muslim Eyes: The Diyarat Books", in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in ʿAbbāsid Iraq*, ed. D. Thomas, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 19-37; Elizabeth Campbell, "A Heaven of Wine: Muslim-Christian Encounters in Monasteries", Univ. of Washington Ph.D. thesis, 2009; Thomas Sizgorich, "Monks and their Daughters: Monasteries as Muslim-Christian Boundaries", in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, ed. M. Cormack, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2013, p. 193-216.

[46] Elizabeth Key Fowden, "The Lamp and the Wine Flask: Early Muslim Interest in Christian Monks", in *Islamic Cross Pollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East*, eds. A. Akasoy, J. Montgomery, & P. Pormann, Exeter, Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007, p. 15.

the summons to *islām* long before the Prophet Muḥammad preached *Islam*. Such figures were considered icons of the spiritual life generally, so much so that Muslims renowned for their piety were given the moniker "the monk," as with Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd al-Raḥman, who was called the "*rāhib* of Medina and Quraysh."[47] Solitary ascetics were also a source of wisdom for Muslims, as exemplified by the spiritual aphorisms ascribed to monks in early Islamic literature, like the ones collected and analyzed by Suleiman Mourad.[48] Solitary monks also featured in biographies of Muslim ascetics (Ar. *zuhhād*). Ibrāhīm b. Adham al-Balḫī (d. 161/778f), for instance, apparently refined his ascetic routine through conversations with a monk named Abba Simʿān, according to Sufi hagiography.[49] And at Nineveh in northern Iraq, there are reports that the city walls were filled with Christian monks and Muslim ascetics living side by side.[50]

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47 Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, II, p. 187; cf. Abū ʿĀmir al-Rāhib in Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina*, Leiden, Brill, 1995, *passim.*

48 Mourad, "*Apophthegmata patrum*", *passim*.

49 Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, VIII, p. 29-30; cited in Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism*, tr. Birgitta Sharpe, Albany, State Univ. of New York Press, 1987, p. 12-13; Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, p. 174; for background, see Russell Jones, "Ibrāhīm b. Adham", *EI²*, III, p. 985-986; D.G. Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare: Chivalry, and the ʿAyyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World*, Würzburg, Ergon, 2007, p. 46-48. For a recent collection of such anecdotes, see Yūḥannā Ṣādir, *Ruhbān ʿarab fī baʿḍ siyar al-Mutaṣawwifīn al-Muslimīn*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 2005; Christopher Melchert, "The Islamic Literature on Encounters between Muslim Renunciants and Christian Monks", in *Medieval Arabic Thought: Essays in Honour of Fritz Zimmermann*, eds. Rotraud Hansberger, M. Affi al-

IV. The Rejection of Extreme Asceticism

If we wish to understand the significance of the *ḥadīṯ* on monasticism and *ǧihād*, we must resist the impulse to see asceticism as something "out there," far beyond the confines of the early Muslim community. Rather, we must see renunciant piety as something taking root at the very heart of the Muslim *umma* starting in the seventh century and maturing during the course of the eighth and ninth. Indeed, we find general parallels to late antique ascetic practices among the first believers (including the Prophet himself), who engaged in intensive fasting, penance, almsgiving, and prayer.[51] In fact, some ascetic practices in early Islam show such clear parallels to older ones in Christianity that the possibility of direct influence is impossible to ignore. These include ritualized crying (Ar. *bukāʾ*) and the remembrance of God (Ar. *ḏikr Allāh*; cf. Gk. *mnēmē Theou*), to name but two examples.[52] Scholars have also identified tantalizing parallels between

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Akiti, and Charles Burnett, London & Turin, The Warburg Institute & Nino Aragno Editore, 2012, p. 135-142.

[50] Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2000, 66.

[51] Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1998, 64-97; Claude Gilliot, "Le Coran avant le Coran. Quelques réflexions sur le syncrétisme religieux en Arabie centrale", in *Le Coran : nouvelles approches*, ed. Mehdi Azaiez with Sabrina Mervin, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2013, p. 165-177.

[52] On pious crying in Islam, see F. Meier, "Bakkāʾ", *EI²*, I, p. 959-961. Anastasius of Sinai (d. c. 700; one of the earliest Christian writers on Islam) referred to pious crying as a "gift of God granted by the Holy Spirit" and claimed that Jews and Arabs did not possess the Holy Spirit because they did not cry: Anastasius of Sinai, *Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et responsiones*,

the writings of certain Christian mystics – such as Isaac of Nineveh (d. c. 700) and the monks of Bēth Qaṭrāye – and those of early Sufis.[53] This is not to suggest that Muslim asceticism – known according to various names, including *zuhd* and *taṣawwuf* – were wholly dependent on Christian models. There was much that differentiated Islamic asceticism from late antique Christian precedents, not to mention inputs from Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and innovations within Islam itself.[54] Rather, it is to stress that Islamic asceticism evolved in conversation with and in reaction to existing Christian practices.

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eds. Marcel Richard & Joseph A. Munitiz, Turnhout, Brepols, 2006, p. 102; I thank Nicholas Marinides for this reference. On remembrance of God in Islam, see L. Gardet, "Dhikr", *EI²*, II, p. 223-227; Mary Hansbury, "Remembrance of God and its Relation to Scripture in Isaac III Including Insights from Islamic and Jewish Traditions", in *The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century*, eds. M. Kozah, A. Abu-Husayn, S. Shaheeh Al-Murikhi, & H. Al Thani, Piscataway, NJ, Gorgias Press, 2014, p. 93-121 (with further references).

[53] This constitutes the subject of a forthcoming doctoral dissertation by John Zaleski at Harvard University; for a preliminary effort to explore these themes, see Serafim Seppälä, *In Speechless Ecstasy: Expression and Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Classical Syriac and Sufi Literature*, Helsinki, Finnish Oriental Society, 2003; Georg Günter Blum, *Die Geschichte der Begegnung christlich-orientalischer Mystik mit der Mystik des Islams*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2009; cf. Tor Andrae, "Zuhd und Mönchtum", *Le monde oriental*, 25 (1931), p. 296-327.

[54] For a recent argument against Christian influence, see Feryal, *Emergence of Early Sufi Piety*, esp. 142-143.

Here we arrive at the most significant social context for the *ḥadīṯ* on monasticism and *ǧihād* from the eighth century. Despite the obvious affinities between Islamic and Christian practices, there was one aspect of Christian asceticism that did not sit well with many Muslims of the period, and this was permanent celibacy, as Ignaz Goldziher and Tor Andrae noted long ago.[55] This was especially true of the nascent Sunnī scholarly community of the early Abbasid period, who rejected the excesses of the early renunciant tradition and advocated for a more "mild" approach to asceticism, as Nimrod Hurvitz has aptly termed it.[56] Almost all Christian ascetics in Late Antiquity and beyond renounced sex, while most of their Muslim counterparts – except for extreme renunciants – did not (this despite the passing justification for celibacy found in the Koran).[57] As Muḥammad is alleged to have said in a famous *ḥadīṯ* preserved in the collection of Ibn Māǧah (d. 273/887): "Marriage is my *sunna*, and whoever does not act in accord with my *sunna* has nothing to do with me!" This statement mirrors an even more

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55 Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p. 122-123; Andrae, *Garden of Myrtles*, p. 41-50.

56 Nimrod Hurvitz, "Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of Islamic Moral Imagination", *Studia Islamica*, 85 (1997), p. 41-65.

57 Kor 18, 46: "Wealth and children are the attractions of this worldly life, but lasting good works have a better reward with your Lord and give better grounds for hope"; a sentiment offset by the much larger number of verses in the Koran advocating for marriage and family; *e.g.* Kor 4, 1-4; 25, 74, etc.

categorical proscription from the collection of Abū Dāwūd: "There is no celibacy (*al-ṣarūra*) in Islam!"[58]

One of the main vehicles for articulating anti-celibate attitudes in the eighth and ninth centuries were stories about the Companion ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn (d. c. 3/624f). According to Muslim lore, ʿUṯmān was the thirteenth man to convert to Islam, later taking part in the Hijra to Ethiopia.[59] According to some stories, the Prophet was quite fond of ʿUthmān and mournfully took part in his funeral rites. At the same time, the Prophet harshly rebuked ʿUthmān for his ascetic adventures (he was reportedly so extreme in his asceticism that he even refused to drink wine during the Ǧāhiliyya when it was not yet forbidden). This censure, in turn, fills much of the extant biographical literature. The exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. c. 150/767) recounted the following story about ʿUṯmān while explaining Kor 5, 87, a verse which warns against the dangers of excessive religiosity:[60]

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58 Ibn Māǧah, *Sunan,* ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, Cairo, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1952-1953, I, p. 592, no. 1846; cf. Wensinck, *Concordances*, VI, 554ff; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan,* p. 266, no. 1729; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon,* IV, p. 1672, specifically '"absence of intercourse with women." For more on this, see El-Badawi, "From 'Clergy' to 'Celibacy.'"

59 For background, see A.J. Wensinck, "ʿUthmān b. Maẓʿūn", *EI²,* X, p. 951-952; Gilliot, "Le Coran avant le Coran," 165-177; Ibn Saʿd, *Biographien Muhammeds, seiner Gefährten und der späteren Träger des Islams,* ed. Eduard Sachau, Leiden, Brill, 1904-1940, III, ii, p. 286-291 (including ʿUṯmān's aversion to alcohol).

60 Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Šiḥātah, Cairo, al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1979-1989, I, p. 498-500.

> "O ye who believe! Do not forbid the good things which God has made licit for you!" Regarding clothing and women, this verse was revealed to ten men, among them ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, ʿUmar (b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb), Ibn Masʿūd, ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn, al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad, Abū Darr al-Ġifārī,[61] Salmān al-Fārisī, Ḥuḏayfa b. al-Yamān, Sālim the *mawlā* of Ḥuḏayfa, and another man. They had gathered in the home of ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn and then said: "Come on, so that we may deny ourselves food, clothing, and women!" Indeed, some of them castrated themselves (*yaqṭaʿ baʿḍuhum maḏākīrahu*), donned tattered cloths (*al-masraḥ*),[62] built cells (*al-ṣawāmiʿ*), so as to take up the monastic life in them and cut themselves off (from the community).

Later, the angel Gabriel discovered what the group had been doing and reported this to the Prophet. The Prophet, in turn, notified ʿUṯmān's wife, Ḫawla bt. Ḥakīm, who was shocked by the discovery. Muḥammad then left her with a stern warning for ʿUṯmān: "Clothing, food, and women are our *sunna* – so notify your husband!" Upon their return, Ḫawla informed the men what the Prophet had said, prompting the revelation of the aforementioned Koranic verse. It

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61 Elsewhere, the Prophet quotes the *rahbāniyya-ǧihād* tradition to Abū Darr al-Ġifārī, along with other ascetical advice: Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, I, p. 168; on the asceticism of Abū Darr, see Ahmed Mohamed Al-ʿAssal, "Asceticism in Early Islam, with an Edition of Part of the *Kitāb al-Zuhd waʾl-Raqāʾiq* of Ibn al-Mubārak", Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1968, p. 47-54.

62 The meaning of this term is not entirely clear; the root *sīn-rāʾ-ḥāʾ* pertains to "pastoring," and a related form of the verb, *munsariḥ*, means "denuded," or "lightly clad"; see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, IV, p. 1344-1346.

seems that ʿUṯmān had exceeded the Koranic provision of temporary celibacy of up to four months (Kor 2, 226), after which a woman could divorce her husband for not upholding his marital duties.

In addition, many early traditions about ʿUṯmān invoke the concept of *rahbāniyya* – always in a negative light. Ibn al-Mubārak, for instance, included the following tradition about ʿUṯmān in his *Kitāb al-Zuhd*:[63]

> Abū ʿUmar b. Ḥayyawayh - Yaḥyā – al-Ḥusayn - ʿAbd Allāh (b. al-Mubārak) – Rišdīn b. Saʿd – Ibn Anʿam – Saʿd b. Masʿūd: ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn came to the Prophet and said: "Are we permitted to castrate ourselves (*iḫtiṣāʾ*)?" The Messenger of God replied: "The one who has castrated someone is not one of us, nor is the one who has castrated himself (*laysa minnā man ḫaṣā wa-lā iḫtaṣā*), for the castration of my community is fasting!" So he replied: "O Messenger of God, are we permitted to perform *siyāḥa*?" The Prophet said: "Indeed, the *siyāḥa* of my community is *ǧihād* in the path of God!" Then he said: "O Messenger of God, is monasticism (*al-tarahhub*) permitted for us?" He said: "Indeed, the monasticism of my community is sitting in the mosques and awaiting the prayer!"

Here, we find the familiar statement on *siyāḥa* and *ǧihād* subsumed into a larger story about ʿUṯmān and his asceticism. Although they appear in the same early source – the *Kitāb al-Zuhd* –

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63 Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, p. 290, no. 845; *isnād*, for Abū ʿUmar b. Ḥayyawayh, Yaḥyā, al-Ḥusayn, and ʿAbd Allāh, per above, n. 12. Rišdīn b. Saʿd al-Mahrī, Egyptian, no death date (al-Mizzī, *Tahḏīb*, IX, p. 191-195, no. 1911.

it is easy to imagine how the familiar statement may have first circulated as an independent aphorism before being yoked to biographical reports about this Companion.

Strictly speaking, the *ḥadīṯ* discussed at the start of this essay do not denounce *rahbāniyya* and *siyāḥa*. Instead, they express the idea that each community has its own form of pious fear – *rahbāniyya* – and the form this pious fear takes in Islam is *ǧihād*. At most, therefore, we can speak about a "supersessionist" attitude in the *ḥadīṯ* of the early Abbasid period: following the ambiguous language of the Koran, they portray *rahbāniyya* as both a general category of piety and as a specific form of Christian practice voided by the advent of Islam.[64] At the same time, it is clear that they do not speak with the decisiveness of the explicitly negative slogan found in later medieval sources (often wrongly assumed to be the earliest iteration of the *rahbāniyya* traditions), which reads: "There is no *rahbāniyya*/*siyāḥa* in Islam."[65] Rather, the message lies somewhere between these views.

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64 Along these lines, see the telling anecdote from al-Ġazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* in which a monk from China (*rāhib min ruhbān al-Ṣīn*) explains to a Muslim visitor what a monk is: "The monk is the one who fears God in His heaven, who exalts Him in His majesty, who perseveres in His trials, who is content in His judgement and praises Him in his signs, and thanks Him for His blessings, who is humble before His greatness, who is lowly before His might, who submits to His power, who surrenders to His dignity, who reflects on His debts and His penalties. During the day he fasts, at night be stands watch, for hellfire and the interrogation of the Almighty keeps him up through night. That is a monk'; cited in Ṣādir, *Ruhbān ʿArab*, 63.

65 This slogan is missing from pre-canonical and canonical *ḥadīṯ* collections. Despite this, several distinguished scholars have regarded the slogan as antedating the *rahbāniyya-ǧihād*

How did early Muslims move from respectful ambivalence about monasticism to outright rejection?[66] Textually speaking, Abbasid-era stories about ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn seem to have played an important role in the process. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/827), for example, included a report about ʿUṯmān which articulates a much blunter disapproval of *rahbāniyya* than anything we have seen so far. It appears in a chapter of *ḥadīṯ* entitled "The Necessity and Virtues of Marriage," most of which have an implicit anti-celibate message.[67]

> The wife of ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn, known as Ḫawla bt. Ḥakīm, came upon ʿĀʾiša and seemed very pained. So she asked her: "What's troubling you?" She said in reply: "My husband stays up all night in prayer and fasts throughout the day." Then the Prophet came, and ʿĀʾiša mentioned the situation to him. Therefore, the

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tradition; *e.g.* Massignon, *Essay*, p. 99; cf. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, II, p. 357; El-Badawi, "From 'Clergy' to 'Celibacy,'" p. 9. The closest we find in the early sources is the categorical statement against abstaining from sex with women (*lā ṣarūra fī l-Islām*), see above, n. 58.

66 On this point, see esp. Melchert, "Muslim Renunciants and Christian Monks," p. 142. Although rejection of *rahbāniyya* was widespread in early Islam, some Sufi writers treated it more ambivalently; *e.g.* al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), *al-Riʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, ed. Margaret Smith, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust & Messrs Luzac & Co., London, 1940, p. 4-5; and Ǧunayd (d. 298/910), *Kitāb dawāʾ al-arwāḥ* in A.J. Arberry, "The Book of the Cure of Souls", *JRAS*, 2 (1937), p. 225, 231; I thank John Zaleski for these references.

67 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1970(?), VI, p. 167-168, no. 10375; cf. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, eds. Samīr Ṭāhā l-Maǧḏūb & Muḥammad Salīm Ibrāhīm Samāra, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1993, VI, p. 256, no. 25772.

> Prophet met with ʿUṯmān, saying: "O ʿUṯmān, *rahbāniyya* was not ordained for us (*inna l-rahbāniyya lam tuktab ʿalaynā*)! Or is this some disgrace for you?"

A similar sentiment is found in reports from Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) and al-Dārimī (d. 255/869), in which the Prophet notifies ʿUṯmān that *rahbāniyya* is under no circumstances part of his religion.[68] *Ḥadīṯ* collections of the ninth centuries – including those of al-Buḫārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), Ibn Māğah (d. 273/887), and al-Tirmiḏī (d. 279/892) – do not use the term *rahbāniyya* in this context, but make clear that ʿUṯmān's practice of celibacy (here, *al-tabattul*; cf. Kor 73, 8) was un-Islamic.[69] It seems, therefore, that renunciation of marriage, sex, and social life lay at the heart of the problem with ʿUṯmān – and therefore, with *rahbāniyya*, too.

V. Islam and the Second Sexual Revolution of Late Antiquity

At this point, let us zoom out to consider what this rejection of celibacy meant in the wider context of late ancient culture, particularly existing debates about continence and spirituality. Here, it is important to note that denunciations of celibacy in early Islam could only

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[68] Ibn Saʿd, *Biographien Muhammeds,* III, ii, p. 287; al-Dārimī, *Musnad al-Dārimī,* ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad al-Dārānī, Riyadh & Beirut, Dār al-Muġnī & Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2000, III, p. 1386, no. 2215.

[69] al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī*, n.e., Damascus, Dār Ibn Kaṯīr, 2002, p. 1294, no. 5073-4; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim,* ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, Cairo, Muʾassasat al-Muḫtār, 2005, p. 563, no. 1402a-b; Ibn Māğah, *Sunan,* I, p. 340-341, no. 1853; al-Tirmiḏī, *al-Ğāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ wa-huwa sunan al-Tirmiḏī,* ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Šākir, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 197-, III, p. 394, no. 1083; on *tabattul,* see Al-ʿAssal, "Asceticism in Early Islam," p. 6-7; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon,* I, p. 150.

exist in a world in which celibacy was first a real option for some of the Muslim faithful. Indeed, aside from ʿUṯmān, we know of other prominent Muslims who gave up sex and marriage during the first centuries after the Hijra. These include the Follower ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Qays (fl. mid-first/mid-seventh c., who was reportedly exiled for his celibacy under the Umayyads), the *mutaṭawwiʿ* Ibrāhīm b. Adham, discussed above, and the Baṣran mystic Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. c. 180/796), to name but a few.[70] They belong to a strain of early Muslim asceticism that Alexander Knysh has termed "extreme world-renouncing piety."[71] We should keep in mind that ascetics like these were exceptions to the rule, not the rule itself: despite sophisticated arguments on behalf of celibacy by later Sufi writers such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/998) – whose treatise *Qūt al-qulūb* provoked a famous reply by al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) – the renunciation of sex was always a marginal practice in early Islam, and in fact, was widely condemned by contemporary Muslims.[72]

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[70] Charles Pellat, "ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd al-Ḳays", *EI²*, I, p. 441; Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, p. 46-47; Margaret Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic & her Fellow Saints in Islām*, new edn., Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1984, p. 10-19.

[71] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 18-26.

[72] Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Die Nahrung der Herzen: Abū Ṭālib al-Makkīs* Qūt al-qulūb, ed. & tr. Richard Gramlich, Stuttgart, F. Steiner, 1992-1995, III, p. 536-602; cf. Beatrix Immenkamp, "Marriage and Celibacy in Mediaeval Islam: A Study of Ghazali's *Kitāb ādāb al-nikāḥ*", Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1994; and the English translation of al-Ġazālī's treatise: *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: A Translation of al-Ghazali's Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the* Iḥyāʾ, tr. Madelain Farah, Salt Lake City, Univ. of Utah Pres,1984. I am grateful to Khaled El-Rouayheb for pointing me to this debate. Here, I feel that the useful overview of Shahzad Bashir,

If we wish to understand this debate about celibacy in the eighth and ninth centuries – both its rejection and its allure – we must remember the nature of the world the Muslims inherited: starting in the fourth century, if not before, Christianity began to upend many widely held attitudes about sex in ancient society. As Michel Foucault, Peter Brown, and Kyle Harper have shown, the sexual revolution of Late Antiquity had two practical effects.[73] First, virginity came to be considered the highest, most pious expression of the Christian life. Although this ideal was shared across all social classes, in reality, it was practiced by a relatively small group of people, consisting mostly of monks, nuns, and higher clergy. Thus, the most radical aspect of the Christian sexual worldview was confined to a narrow social class, leaving the rest of society to carry on reproducing. Second, for the vast majority of Christians who were not spiritual athletes – that is, the laity and lower clergy – high standards of sexual chastity became the norm. These standards promoted monogamy within marriage and condemned divorce. Although this

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"Islamic Tradition and Celibacy", in *Celibacy and Religions Traditions*, ed. C. Olson, New York, Oxford UP, 2008, p. 133-147 overstates just how widespread celibacy ever was in Islamic culture, especially in the early period; the article does not engage with any of the denunciations of celibacy cited here.

[73] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976-1984; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, Columbia UP, 1988, and 20th anniversary edn., 2008); Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

revolution had its opponents[74] and what is more, did not succeed in transforming every society it touched,[75] it did spread a bold new ideal about sex throughout much of the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Into the arena transformed by Christianity stepped the first Muslims. Indeed, an underappreciated consequence of the rise of Islam was the onset of what I have called a "second sexual revolution" that implicitly challenged late antique Christian ideas about marriage and family (at least in places like Egypt, Syria, North Africa, and al-Andalus where Christians formed a majority of the population and the legacy of Roman rule endured for centuries after the conquests). Under the new order, Muslim men were entitled to take up to four wives and to engage in sexual relations with a variety of non-marital partners, including concubines and slaves.[76] Divorce was considered licit. More importantly, Islam asserted that the pursuit of

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74 *E.g.* Jovinian (d. c. 405), who believed that celibate and non-celibate Christians were of equal spiritual merit: David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2007.

75 Lev Weitz, "Polygyny and East Syrian Law: Local Practices and Ecclesiastical Tradition", in *The Late Antique World of Early Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean*, ed. R.G. Hoyland, Princeton, The Darwin Press, 2015, p. 157-191; cf. Richard E. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, Oakland, CA, University of California Press, 2015, p. 108-117.

76 Wael Hallaq, *Sharīʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009, p. 271-280; on women, sex, and marriage in early Islam, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven, Yale UP, 1992, p. 41-63;

holiness no longer required the pious man to abandon the pleasures of the flesh, as the monks of Late Antiquity had once done. Instead, the pious man was free to exercise his sexual prowess – much like the Prophet Muḥammad, who had married thirteen women and fathered seven children over the course of his life.[77] Vis-à-vis the social principles of late ancient Christianity, the moral code of early Islam was plainly different.

It is important to remember that sexual practices among the early Muslims were not consciously formulated in opposition to Christianity, at least at first. They drew on a variety of inputs, including those of the pre-Islamic Arabs, Jews, and Iranians, all of whom saw fertility as a positive and necessary component of the cosmic struggle. [78] Indeed, there was much continuity

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Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 2010; eadem, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2006.

[77] Ibn Isḥāq, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 792-798. In this context, we can begin to understand why some Christian polemicists took issue with the Prophet's alleged "carnality"; *e.g.* the famous Zayd-Zaynab incident (see Kor 33, 37), mentioned by John of Damascus (d. 749): Gk. text in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 1972, p. 138; and Eulogius of Córdoba (d. 859): Juan Gil, ed., *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, Madrid, Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973, II, p. 398; cf. David S. Powers, *Zayd*, Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, p. 30-48.

[78] On Jewish attitudes towards celibacy, see Immanuel Jakobovits, "Celibacy", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica. Second Edition*, ed. F. Skolnik, Detroit, MacMillan Reference, 2007, IV, p. 537. On Zoroastrian views of marriage, see Maria Macuch, "Incestuous Marriage in the Context of Sasanian Family Law", in *Ancient and Middle Iranian Studies: Proceedings of the 6th European Conference of Iranian Studies*, eds. M. Macuch, D. Weber & D. Durkin-Meisterernst,

between early Muslim and ancient Near Eastern practices. These continuities were so powerful, in fact, that one suspects it was Christianity that was out of step with the sexual ethics of the region over the *longue durée*, not Islam. What is more, lay Christian practice both before and after the conquests sometimes veered from the ideals preached in the pulpits: in addition to polygyny, practices such as concubinage, sex with slaves, and divorce were common among Christians at both elite and sub-elite levels.[79]

Still, even if the overarching system of sexual ethics in Islam was not a calculated reaction to Christianity at the start, and even if some Christians engaged in practices resembling those of Muslims, it is undeniable that the *practical* effect of the conquest was to make widespread a view of marriage and sex that implicitly undermined those of the late antique church, something we can detect most obviously in Muslim attacks against celibacy from the early Abbasid period. For Muslims, celibacy came to be seen as a totem of monasticism specifically and of Christianity generally.[80] By contrast, it is hard to find explicit Muslim

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Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2010, p. 133-148. In the *Martyrdom of Aqebshma*, a Syriac text set in the fourth-century Sasanian Empire, a mowbed criticizes Christians for teaching the Zoroastrian faithful "not to marry women, not to produce sons or daughter," just as a Muslim might do in later periods; cited in Payne, *A State of Mixture*, p. 38.

79 *E.g.* Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1993, p. 188-199; Kyle Harper, "Marriage and Family", in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S.F. Johnson, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2012, p. 682-684.

80 See al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *Talāṯ rasāʾil*, ed. Joshua Finkel, Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿat al-Salafiyya, 1925-1926, p. 17, 21, in which al- Ǧāḥiẓ mentions celibacy and prohibitions on divorce and concubinage as distinctive markers of Christian social identity in the Abbasid period in contrast

critiques of the chaste Christian layman, other than general exhortations to polygyny and a certain permissiveness towards divorce. Rather, what strikes me as significant is that the Muslim case against Christian sexual ethics targeted only its most extreme manifestation – monastic celibacy – not the more widely-held behaviors of the average Christian on the street.

Why were Muslims in the early Abbasid period so focused on the sexual practices of such a narrow slice of Christian society? Here, it seems that the prospect of permanent celibacy becoming widespread in the Muslim *umma* must have been deeply threatening. It was a threat not only because celibacy was a distinctively Christian practice, and therefore, bad for Muslims to imitate (a feeling echoed in a striking tradition in the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī).[81] It was also a threat because the Sunnī scholarly class of the eighth and ninth centuries regarded celibacy as laying beyond the ability and appetite of the average pious Muslim on the street. If asceticism was to become widespread in the *umma*, it was not to be the extreme form of figures like ʿUtmān b. Maẓʿūn or Ibrāhīm b. Adham.

The threat was particularly pronounced in the eighth and ninth centuries – precisely when the *ḥadiṯ* on *rahbāniyya* became popular – because, I have argued elsewhere, this was precisely the moment when Muslims and Christians came into contact and competition as members of an

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to the practices of their Muslim neighbors. I owe this reference to Lev Weitz, who discusses the passage in the introduction of his forthcoming book, *A God-Fearing House*.

[81] ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, VI, p. 171, no. 10387; here, the Prophet meets a celibate Muslim named ʿAkkāf b. Bišr al-Tamīmī. When the Prophet discovers that ʿAkkāf has neither a wife nor a concubine, he proclaims: "You are among the children of the devils! If you were a Christian, you would be one of their monks! Verily, marriage is part of our *sunna*!"

integrated society with vertical divisions, rather than as a ruling class of conquerors and a complex tax-paying base with horizontal divisions.[82] Muslims and Christians around 800 were no longer exclusively distinguished from one another as Arabs and non-Arabs, as city-dwellers and village-dwellers, as soldiers and peasants, as they had been through much of the Umayyad period. These tidy divisions were collapsing as non-Muslims entered the *umma* in droves, as Muslim settlement of the countryside increased, and as Islam reached ever more into the peasantry and sub-elites. In this world, contact and competition between old Muslims, new Muslims, and non-Muslims was on the rise, and this spurred new fears about influence and differentiation. These fears expressed themselves in anxieties about Christian asceticism (and extreme Muslim practices that might be confused with it), which were articulated through the *ḥadīṯ* about *rahbāniyya* and legends about ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn.

VI. Monks Waging Jihad, Muslims Becoming Monks

A final element in the *ḥadīṯ* literature requires explanation: why did the traditionists associate monasticism and *ǧihād*?[83] At first glance, they make for uneasy bedfellows. It is hard to think of a stronger contrast than the one between the life of a monk and a *ġāzī* — the former living in peaceful solitude in his cell, the latter fighting the infidel along the frontiers of a heathen empire. But the genius of the *ḥadīṯ* – along with the anecdotes discussed in this final section – was to obscure all sense of opposition between these routines. In fact, they presented

82 Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (forthcoming), Conclusion; I owe this language to Luke Yarbrough.

83 For the meaning of *ǧihād* in the works of Ibn al-Mubārak, see now Melchert, "*Kitāb al-Jihād*," p. 64-69.

the conversion of Christian monks to the life of *ǧihād* as being completely effortless, even predictable. This radical claim requires explanation.

To understand the relationship between monasticism and *ǧihād* in eighth- and ninth-century sources, we should remember certain features of Christian monastic culture in Late Antiquity. As Michael Gaddis, Thomas Sizgorich, and others have shown, monks in Late Antiquity were not strictly passive men of prayer.[84] They were also men of action – sometimes violent action – smashing idols, demolishing temples, and forcibly baptizing unbelievers. Challenging the enemies of God in whatever form they took lay at the heart of their vocation.[85] The militancy of the monks was an extension of the culture of martyrdom. After Constantine, Christians could no longer undergo the red martyrdom of the circus, but they could undergo the white martyrdom of the monastic cell.[86] There, the struggle against evil was as real and effortful as it had been in the arena centuries before.

The connection between monasticism and militancy was not only symbolic, but also sometimes literal: a number of late antique saints embraced asceticism after having served as

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84 Michael Gaddis, *There is No Crime for those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 2005, p. 151-250; Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, p. 108-143.

85 See below, n. 101.

86 Edward Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1950; cf. Adolf Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*, tr. David McInnes, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1981.

soldiers, including Apollonius (d. c. 284-305), Pachomius (d. 348), and Martin of Tours (d. 397).[87] St Sabas (d. 532), one of the founders of Palestinian monasticism, was the son of a soldier and reportedly refused his father's command to enlist in the army and command a regiment.[88] Ascetic literature from Late Antiquity also described the monastic life using sharply martial language. The opening lines of the Rule of St Benedict (d. 547) are exemplary in this respect; they call on men "willing to renounce self-will and take up the powerful and shining weapons of obedience, to fight for the Lord Christ, the true king."[89] Given this, it is not

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87 On the military careers of Apollonius and Pachomius, see Norman Russel, tr., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The* Historia monachorum in Aegypto, London, Mowbray, 1980, p. 16; on Martin: Adalbert de Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'antiquité : première partie : le monachisme latin : Sulpice Sévère et Paulin de Nole (393-409), Jérôme, homéliste et traducteur des 'Pachomiana',* Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1997, p. 28-33.

88 Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, p. 101. The emperor Valens tried to conscript monks into the Roman army in 375: Noel Lenski, "Valens and the Monks: Cudgeling and Conscription as a Means of Social Control", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 58 (2004), p. 93-117. After Sabas' time, Gregory the Great protested an order of the emperor Maurice (r. 582-602) forbidding able-bodied men from joining monasteries while Rome was at war with Persia: Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd edn., Malden, MA, 2003, p. 224-225.

89 Terence G. Kardong, tr., *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1996, p. 3; cf. Tim Vivian, Kim Vivian, Jeffrey Burton Russell, et al., trs., *The Life of the Jura Fathers*, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications,1999, p. 101; John Cassian, *The Institutes*, tr. Boniface Ramsey, New York, Newman Press, 2000, p. 38, 129, 220-221, 243.

surprising that Arab Christians of later generations used the term *ǧihād* – a word redolent of Muslim holy war, but also of "struggle" or "striving" more generally – to translate the Greek term *agōn*.[90]

Islam inherited this distinctive fusion of asceticism and militancy. As Thomas Sizgorich reminds us, in the imagination of Abbasid-era writers, the soldiers of the conquests had been formidable on both the battlefield and in prayer.[91] The historian al-Azdī (d. 157/774) aptly described the tribesman who overran Syria during the 630s as "monks by night (and) lions by day."[92] The best example of how asceticism and militancy could meet in a single lifestyle was the *mutaṭawwiʿa* phenomenon of the eighth and ninth centuries, studied so ably by Michael Bonner and D.G. Tor.[93] The *mutaṭawwiʿa* were volunteer soldiers who carried on waging *ǧihād* at a time when the caliphate was ceasing to fight the infidel as systematically as it had done during the seventh and early eighth centuries. Overwhelmingly Ḫurāsānī in origin with a strong Sunnī bent, these men were pious and deeply ascetical: when they were not fighting, they busied themselves transmitting *ḥadīṯ* and undertaking great ascetic feats.

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90 This usage was common; for example, the martyr-monk George-Muzāḥim (d. 978) is called a *muǧāhid* at several points in his *vita*, *e.g.* Cairo, Coptic Museum, Hist. MS. 469, fol. 77^{r}, 80^{v}, 81^{r}.

91 Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, p. 144-167.

92 al-Azdī, *Tārīḫ futūḥ al-Šām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Munʿim ʿAbd Allāh ʿĀmir, Cairo, Muʾassasat Siǧil al-ʿArab, 1970, p. 262.

93 Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier*, New Haven, American Oriental Society, 1996, p. 107-134; Tor, *Violent Order*, p. 39-84.

The most famous of the *mutaṭawwiʿa* was ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, the very man responsible for circulating the traditions about monasticism and *ǧihād*. In his day, he was known as "lord of the ascetics" (*sayyid al-zuhhād*), and his book about asceticism, the *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, was among first of its kind in Muslim literature.[94] According to hagiographic traditions, Ibn al-Mubārak was kind to the poor, committed to fasting, and humble in spirit. Like late antique monks, whose spiritual charisma empowered them to speak frankly (Gk. *parrhēsia*) before emperors and kings, Ibn al-Mubārak rebuked the authorities as he willed ("commanding the right and forbidding the wrong," to use the technical phrase).[95] He held such a dim view of the Abbasid government, in fact, that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal quoted him as saying: "Do not go near (the caliph's court), for if you come to them, you must speak truth to them, and I, I fear (the consequences) of speaking truth to them."[96] Given all this, it is no surprise that we find the *ḥadīṯ* on monasticism and *ǧihād* circulating in the milieu of figures like Ibn al-Mubārak. These were

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94 For general discussion, see now Feryal, *Emergence of Early Sufi Piety*, for *zuhd*, esp. p. 105-138; on Ibn al-Mubārak's scholarly circle, see Al-ʿAssal, "Asceticism in Early Islam," p. 92-154, for the *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa-l-raqāʾiq*, *Ibid*., p. 158-170; Melchert, "*Kitāb al-Jihād*," with discussion of contemporary treatises on *ǧihād* at p. 58.

95 See the definitive study of Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2000, esp. 50-67.

96 These anecdotes are cited in Tor, *Violent Order*, p. 53-62; also Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*, p. 119-125; Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, p. 180-186. On *naṣīḥa*, or "advice," especially challenging advice given to a ruler, see Claude Gilliot, "*In consilium tuum deduces me*: le genre du « conseil », *naṣīḥa, waṣiyya* dans la littérature arabo-musulmane", *Arabica*, 54 (2007), p. 467-499.

men who managed to contain the tension between asceticism and militancy, who knitted them together into a seamless spiritual garment. Theirs was a *ǧihād* of the frontier as well as of the soul.[97]

It is significant that their spiritual garment also embraced family life. Like most of the *mutaṭawwiʿa*, Ibn al-Mubārak was married. He reportedly said that the only thing more pleasing than the life of a warrior was that of a pious father who relinquishes his cloak to protect his children from the cold.[98] As with other practitioners of "mild asceticism" – who in the recent words of Feryal Salem, "shun[ned] worldliness but not the world itself" – sex was a central component of his life and worldview: in his *ḥadīṯ* collection, Ibn al-Mubārak provided his readers with detailed descriptions of the sexual pleasures that awaited warriors like him on the battlefield as well as in heaven.[99] One tradition in the *Kitāb al-Ǧihād*, for instance, speaks of how *ḥūrīs* – the voluptuous virgins of paradise mentioned in the Koran (*e.g.* Kor 52, 20; 56, 36-37; 78, 33, etc.) – encourage soldiers in battle and descend on them as sexual rewards in their moments of death.[100] In the world of the *mutaṭawwiaʿ*, at least, there was no contradiction

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97 Paul L. Heck, "Sufism — What Is It Exactly?", *Religion Compass*, 1/1 (2007), p. 152.

98 Cited in Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, p. 46.

99 Salem, *Emergence of Early Sufi Piety*, p. 87, citing Hurvitz, "Biographies and Mild Asceticism."

100 Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Ǧihād*, p. 38-39, no. 22; p. 117-118, no. 143; for discussion and further references to the sexual qualities of the *ḥūrīs*, see Maher Jarrar, "The Martyrdom of Passionate Lovers: Holy War as a Sacred Wedding," in *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach, Proceedings of the International Symposium in Beirut, June 25th-June 30th, 1996*, eds. A. Neuwirth, B. Embaló,

between asceticism and the desire for sexual experience. The latter was an outcome – in fact, a prize – of the former, a notion no Christian monk could have countenanced. [101]

The valorization of the *mutaṭawwiʿa* left traces in Abbasid literature as complex and fascinating as the *ḥadīṯ* on monasticism and *ǧihād*. In particular, there are tantalizing stories about Christian monks converting to Islam and waging *ǧihād*. One comes from the *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār* of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), which tells of a Muslim visitor to a Syrian monastery known as Ḥarmala.[102] Inside, the Muslim discovered a monk whose eyes were swollen with tears. When the Muslim asked why he was crying, the monk replied: "I am crying because I no longer rejoice in my work, and the days go by and by, and my work accomplishes nothing." The Muslim passed by the monastery sometime later and inquired about the monk. He was told that the man had converted to Islam, become a *ġāzī*, and died fighting the Byzantines. A related story comes

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S. Günther, & M. Jarrar, Beirut, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p. 87-107; David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2007, p. 18 n. 11.

101 For vivid scenes of sexual temptation in late antique monastic literature, see Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, p. 57; Armand Veilleux, tr., *The Life of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1980, p. 26, 36; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, p. 46, 70 (prepubescent boys); and more generally, David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 2006.

102 Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, n.e., Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1925-1930, II, p. 297; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih al-Andalusī, *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, eds. Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn & Ibrāhīm al-Ibyārī, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1940-1949, III, p. 167; cited in Mourad, "Christian Monks," p. 90.

from the *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), a compilation of biographies of early Muslim ascetics. In it, we read how the famous Jewish convert Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. c. 32/652f) encountered a monk who had been living alone in his cell for forty years. The two began discussing monasticism, and at the end of their conversation, the monk decided to abandon his vocation, take up arms, and live in the military camps of the Muslims (*al-fasāṭīṭ*).[103] He then recited the *šahāda* and joined Kaʿb fighting the Byzantines.

What makes these anecdotes interesting is not merely that they portray improbable kinds of conversion. What makes them surprising is how they portray these conversions as not improbable at all. In fact, the anecdotes convey a powerful message about the continuity between seemingly opposite religious practices: although these monks left Christianity for Islam, they did not lose their spiritual callings. Instead, by embracing the life of *ǧihād*, they fulfilled their original vocations as monks with even greater fervor and devotion. In these anecdotes, therefore, the act of converting is portrayed as crossing a barely delineated frontier. Such a view accords well with much recent research about the weak boundaries separating Muslims and Christians at this time, especially in the realms of everyday life.[104] There is no sense of the monk as the errant religious "other" or as the man abandoned by God and caught in the grip of demonic possession, as Christians so often portrayed their enemies in Late Antiquity. Rather, what we have here is a self-consciously muted religious shape-shifting, one that assures the reader by emphasizing a

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103 Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat*, VI, p. 6-7; cited in Livne-Kafri, "Early Muslim Ascetics," p. 108 n. 33; later, Kaʿb mentioned this incident to ʿUmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb (r. 13-23/634-44), who was amazed, since "monasticism was an innovation among them" (*i.e.* the Muslims; *fa-kānat al-rahbāniyya bidʿa minhum*), the meaning of which is opaque.

104 See above, n. 1.

seamless transition, not rupture, between two discrete spheres. To play down the frontier between worlds in this way – between Christian and Muslim, monastic and military – was a master stroke on the part of the Abbasid-era authors who recorded them.

Given this, it is tempting to see the convert-monk as simply another literary motif from the golden age of medieval Muslim literature. At the same time, there is evidence that such stories may have had a basis in reality. Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), for example, noted in one of his canons that priests and deacons were sometimes dragooned into Muslim armies fighting the Byzantines.[105] Unlike the monks in Ibn Qutayba and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī's narratives, however, these Christians were apparently forced to fight against their wills. Furthermore, it is unclear from Jacob whether fighting for the Muslims also entailed converting. Based on the large numbers of non-Muslims who are known to have taken part in the conquests, it probably did not.[106] Still, in Jacob's canon, we have striking evidence that clergy did participate in *ǧihād*.

Just as there are stories of monks converting to Islam and waging holy war, so there are other stories of Muslims abandoning *ǧihād* and becoming monks. These stories are set in the seventh century, but clearly reflect the concerns of the early Abbasid milieu in which they were first written down and circulated. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that they may be fictional. On the Muslim side, for instance, we read about a mysterious figure named al-

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105 Syriac text and translation in Tannous, "Syria between Byzantium and Islam," p. 543-544 n. 1310; cf. Penn, *Envisioning Islam*, p. 146.

106 Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Non-Muslims in the Muslim Conquest Army in Early Islam", in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, eds. A. Borrut & F.M. Donner, Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2016, p. 83-128.

Mustawrid al-ʿIğlī, who was executed by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 35-40/656-60) for apostasy.[107] In one report, al-Mustawrid is said to have "waged *ğihād* for a long time then converted to Christianity."[108] In others, he is described as appearing before the caliph dressed in wool (*ṯiyāb al-ṣūf*) like a monk.[109] Therefore, al-Mustawrid left holy war as a Muslim to become a Christian ascetic. Similar information is found in a story by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1070), who states that ʿUṯmān b. Maẓʿūn declared to the Prophet: "O Messenger of God! The raids (*al-maġāzī*) cause us such distress. Can't you just let me be a eunuch and castrate myself?"[110] Naturally, the Prophet rejected his request. Although ʿUṯmān was not portrayed as having converted to Christianity, the story revolves around the same transformation from the life of *ğihād* to that of *rahbāniyya*.

Christian literature from the eighth and ninth centuries also furnishes a number of interesting examples which can help contextualize the *ḥadīṯ* with which we began this essay. The Arabic life of the martyr ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Ġassānī tells of a young Christian with roots in Naǧrān, who embarked for the Holy Land in the company of Muslim friends. He never made it to Palestine, however, but thoughtlessly wound up along the frontier with Byzantium. There he waged *ğihād* with his companions, "fighting, killing, plundering, and burning" for thirteen years.

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107 For discussion, see Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam*, Appendix 1.

108 al-Ṭabarī, *Tahḏīb al-āṯār*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Šākir, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, 1982, IV, p. 79, no. 140.

109 Abū Bakr al-Ḫallāl, *Aḥkām ahl al-milal*, ed. Sayyid Kisrawī Ḥasan, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994, p. 419-420.

110 Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, eds. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ & ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawǧūd, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya,1995, III, p. 166.

While on the frontier, he lived as a Muslim, "trampl(ing) every sacred thing as they did and pray(ing) alongside them." Later, the accidental warrior returned to Christianity and became a monk, ascending to the position of abbot at the Monastery of Mt. Sinai.[111] He was eventually discovered by his former raiding companions, turned over to the authorities, and executed for apostasy in Palestine. The incident is undated, though it is probably set in the late Umayyad or early Abbasid period and was written down shortly thereafter.[112]

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111 Sidney H. Griffith, "The Arabic Account of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Naǧrānī al-Ghassānī", *Le Muséon*, 98 (1985), esp. p. 362 (conversion to Islam and raiding); for commentary, see Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (forthcoming), Chapter 1; on the theme of *ǧihād* in this and the following text, see Thomas Sizgorich, "Mind the Gap: Accidental Conversion and the Hagiographic Imaginary in the First Centuries A.H.", in *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond: Papers from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar, University of Oxford, 2009-2010*, eds. A. Papaconstantinou, with N. McLynn and D.L. Schwartz, Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2015, p. 169-170.

112 Griffith ("Arabic Account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ," 351-359; cf. John C. Lamoreaux, "Hagiography", in *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700-1700*, eds. S. Noble & A. Treiger, DeKalb, IL, Northern Illinois UP, 2014, p. 114-115) originally dated the martyrdom to the 860s, though recent analysis of Sinai Ar. 542 as well as internal evidence in the text suggest that the incident may have happened around the 740s or 750s. In my judgment, this fits much better with the general milieu of the life, which is remarkably similar in style and content to other martyrologies set in the mid-eighth century. For more, see André Binggeli, "L'Hagiographie du Sinaï en arabe d'après un recueil du IX^{eme} siècle", *Parole de l'Orient*, 32 (2007), p. 75-77. The

The life of Anthony al-Qurašī is another hagiographical work written in Arabic in the early ninth century. It recounts the conversion of a Muslim aristocrat from Damascus after witnessing a Eucharistic miracle and receiving a vision of St Theodore. He was eventually baptized in the River Jordan and took up the monastic cowl. Upon professing his faith in public, he was handed over to the caliph Hārūn al-Rašīd (r. 170-93/786-809) in al-Raqqa. After learning that he would be executed for apostasy, Anthony told the caliph that he welcomed his sentence with open arms, for it would help expiate his three greatest sins: having gone on pilgrimage to Mecca, having sacrificed on ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā, and having killed Christians during raids against the Byzantines.[113] Once again, we see a Muslim convert trading *ğihād* for *rahbāniyya*. In contrast to Muslim accounts, however, this transformation is presented as not seamless at all, but a decisive rupture between old and new. Put differently, if Muslim authors of the early Abbasid period were quick to stress the ease with which a monk might become a *muğāhid*, then their Christian counterparts (like the author of the life of Anthony) were eager to raise a wall between Christianity and Islam and mark it with a martyr's blood.

Conclusion

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preface of the recension in British Library Or. 5019 also states that the martyrdom took place during the reign of the Umayyads (*qiṣṣat ʿAbd al-Masīḥ allādhī istashhada bi-l-Ramla fī mulk al-Umawiyya*): Ḥabīb Zayyāt, "Shuhadā' al-Naṣrāniyya fī l-Islām", *Al-Machreq*, 36 (1938), p. 463.

113 Ignace Dick, "La passion arabe de S. Antoine Rawaḥ néo-martyr de Damas († 25 déc. 799)", *Le Muséon*, 74 (1961), esp. p. 126 (raiding against the Byzantines); for commentary, see Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam*, Chapter 3.

It is difficult to say whether these stories are purely symbolic, or if they trade on an element of truth. Are they examples of polemical one-upsmanship between Muslims and Christians, or a reflection of a social reality, in which Muslims and Christians frequently converted, with the most pious shapeshifters drawn to the most demanding spiritual paths in the two religions — *rahbāniyya* and *ǧihād*? To my eyes, both seem possible.

The *ḥadīṯ* we have examined constitute a narrow slice of a much wider conversation about the sacred and the profane in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Though we may perceive a tension between *rahbāniyya* and *ǧihād*, men like Ibn al-Mubārak balanced these practices with seeming ease, battling the Byzantines by day and plunging to the depths of *zuhd* by night. Ibn al-Mubārak understood himself to be reviving the spirituality of Muḥammad's earliest Companions; but what he may not have known was that he was also operating in the tradition of Late Antiquity's great monastic stars.

At the same time, men like Ibn al-Mubārak broke decisively with the monks of Late Antiquity on a crucial point. Just as early Christian ascetics were terrified by the prospect of voluptuous young women tempting them away from the life of prayer, the holy warriors of the early Abbasid period dreamt of zaftig beauties caressing them in the throes of the death, in the moment of their ascetic triumph. Herein lies one part of the dramatic change wrought by the sexual revolution of early Islam: the eclipse of celibacy as a way of honoring God, and its replacement by a code of ethics based on the ideals of the holy warrior.

One suspects none of this was easy for Muslim ascetics like Ibn al-Mubārak. They lived in a world in which the example of the non-Muslim "other" was ubiquitous, enthralling, and threatening all at once. Their double challenge, therefore, was to metabolize the traditions of the

cultures they had conquered, but at the same time, to do so in a manner that left room for differentiation and separation. Thus, the ambiguity at the heart of the *rahbāniyya-ǧihād* traditions is both shocking and intelligible: it expresses a spiritual *koine* shared by Muslims and Christians alike – a consensus that man can come to know God through extreme acts of physical renunciation. But at the same time, it expresses a sense of distinctiveness – that despite mirroring Christian practices to a great extent, the asceticism of the Muslims had to be tempered by commitment to marriage and family and subordinated to a higher goal of holy war. This was a spiritual message the early Sunnī scholars of the eighth and ninth centuries could support, and they defended it vigorously with the *ḥadīṯ* on monasticism and *ǧihād*.