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What Makes a Source Historically Reliable?

A Case Study of the Reliability of *Sīrah* literature

Summary

This thesis addresses the question of what makes a source historically reliable, which it aims to answer through an examination of the publications of a number of prominent scholars who discuss whether a genre of Islamic literature called *sīrah* literature is reliable for knowledge of early Islam and the life of the founder or prophet of Islam. It searches the publications of the scholars for arguments for their views on whether *sīrah* literature is reliable, and it derives a list of criteria (that is, principles of reasoning) from the arguments that offer insight into what makes a source historically reliable. The examination takes place in the fourth chapter of this thesis, which is preceded by a chapter on historical method and a chapter that gives an overview of the scholars' research on whether *sīrah* literature is reliable, which both serve to prepare the reader for the subject matter of the fourth chapter.

Chapter One: Introduction

The year 1976 saw the release of a film called *The Message*, which was produced and directed by a Muslim named Moustapha Akkad (1930–2005). The film is about the early Islamic past, particularly the life of Islam's founder: Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdullāh (ca. AD 570–632). It is said that Akkad asked Muslim scholars from *al-Azhar* University in Cairo to “approve every

page” of the film’s script,¹ and the film itself notes that its “accuracy and fidelity” were approved by “scholars and historians of Islam” from the aforementioned university and the High Islamic Congress of the Shia in Lebanon.²

The film does not specify in what respect (that is, in relation to what) it was judged to be accurate and faithful. It portrays events that are believed to have happened almost fourteen centuries prior, so it must have drawn from extant oral or written sources regarding that distant time period, particularly the ones on Muḥammad’s life and early Islam, and the historians and other scholars who approved its accuracy and fidelity must have compared it with such sources, if not the same ones. However, we are not told what sources were used or to what extent Akkad and/or the scholars trusted that the sources recount the events as they actually happened. It is regrettable that the film does not make these matters known, because the scholarly tradition in which I have been trained recommends a distinction between the actual past and any source on the past, and I wonder whether the film was deemed accurate and faithful in relation to the former or latter, or both.

Two genres of writings by early Muslims are generally thought of as our primary and oldest extant literary sources for knowledge of Muḥammad’s life and early Islam.³ The first genre comprises the *’aḥādīṭ* (sing. *ḥadīṭ*), which are brief reports related to Islam’s origins.⁴ Every *ḥadīṭ* consists of *matn* (pl. *mutūn*) and an *isnād* (pl. *asānīd*). The former is information that

¹ Freek L. Bakker, “The Image of Muhammad in *The Message*, the First and Only Feature Film about the Prophet of Islam,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17, no. 1 (2006): 78.

² Sign Maker, “The Message 1976 Full HD Movie,” YouTube Video, 4:55, May 30, 2017, <https://youtu.be/6b597M4i8rE>.

³ The literary sources may contain much that was initially transmitted orally, but the expressions that constitute the oral traditions about Muḥammad’s life and early Islam are beyond the scope of this study and can be the subject of a separate study.

⁴ See Peter von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” *History Compass* 1, no. 1 (2003): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-0542.058>.

purportedly originates from Muḥammad or eyewitnesses of his life and early Islam, and the latter is a list of human transmitters through whom the information allegedly traces back to Muḥammad or the eyewitnesses, that is, through whom it is assumed to have been passed on before it was collected into the written material that we now possess.⁵ Ignaz Goldziher conveys that Muslims have traditionally assumed that the *ʾaḥādīṭ* are restricted to what Muḥammad said,⁶ but many *ʾaḥādīṭ* report Muḥammad's alleged conduct without attributing speech to him,⁷ or they attribute conduct or speech to the supposed eyewitnesses of his life and early Islam instead of him.⁸ Be that as it may, Muslims have also traditionally tended to the view that the *ʾaḥādīṭ* that are technically attributed to eyewitnesses ultimately originate from Muḥammad as well,⁹ and Goldziher appears to simplify this to the view that the *ʾaḥādīṭ* consist exclusively of Muḥammad's speech, but that should be amended to accommodate the *ʾaḥādīṭ* that mention only Muḥammad's conduct.¹⁰ Thus, in consideration of the Muslim view that even the *ʾaḥādīṭ* that are attributed to eyewitnesses of Muḥammad's life and early Islam ultimately derive from Muḥammad

⁵ For corresponding explanations of the composition of the *ʾaḥādīṭ*, see Ignaz Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," in *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, vol. 2 (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1971), 19–20; Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (1950; repr., Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 3; Harald Motzki, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Sean W. Anthony, *Analyzing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth*, Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 78 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 288.

⁶ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 18. For examples of *ʾaḥādīṭ* that feature words attributed to Muḥammad, see Sunan an-Nasa'i 2228; Sahih al-Bukhari 3681; Jami` at-Tirmidhi 851.

⁷ E.g., Sunan an-Nasa'i 1573; Sunan an-Nasa'i 1572; Sunan Abi Dawud 2559; Sunan Ibn Majah 2988; Sunan an-Nasa'i 5243; Sunan an-Nasa'i 1359; Sunan an-Nasa'i 1013; Musnad Ahmad 99.

⁸ E.g., Sunan an-Nasa'i 5296; Sahih al-Bukhari 4751; Sahih Muslim 1504j; Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 624; Sunan an-Nasa'i 1035; Al-Adab Al-Mufrad 1044.

⁹ See Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 25. Goldziher alludes to a *ḥadīṭ* to which Muslims applied this view.

¹⁰ See G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1; F. E. Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 3 (1991): 299. Juynboll defines a proper *ḥadīṭ* as one that ascribes words or behavior to Muḥammad, and Peters defines the *ʾaḥādīṭ* as reports of the words and, to a lesser extent, behavior of Muḥammad.

himself, it can be said that the *'aḥādīṭ* are restricted to what Muḥammad allegedly said and did.

The other genre of writings by early Muslims comprises the *siyar* (sing. *sīrah*), hereafter *sīrah literature*. *Sīrah* literature details Muḥammad's life and early Islam in a chronological manner, whereas the *'aḥādīṭ* are not chronologically arranged. Western scholars rarely regard the two genres as separate sources.¹¹ That is, they rarely think that *sīrah* literature and the *'aḥādīṭ* are parallel and independent of one another: the general presumption is that *sīrah* literature derives mostly from the *'aḥādīṭ*.¹² *Sīrah* literature also appears to include pre-Islamic poetry, but Henri Lammens says that this concerns "only those pieces where it believes it has found confirmation of its theories," that is, the poetry that the authors of *sīrah* literature deemed useful for asserting the validity of the beliefs they promoted.¹³

The main example of *sīrah* literature is the *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, a biography of Muḥammad by Ibn Ishāq (ca. AD 704–768). Patricia Crone implies that this particular *sīrah* is virtually the only one that Muslims have preserved until the present.¹⁴ Freek Bakker mentions that it is often attributed to Ibn Hišām (d. AD 833) as well as Ibn Ishāq.¹⁵ The reason is that the earliest extant manuscript of Ibn Ishāq's *sīrah* is actually a redaction by Ibn Hišām,¹⁶ hence F. E. Peters' remark that the *sīrah* written by Ibn Ishāq and edited by

¹¹ When I use the term *scholars*, I tend to refer to historians, philologists, and/or Islamicists.

¹² E.g., Henri Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition: How the Life of Muhammad Was Composed," in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. and trans. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), 169; Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14–15; Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," 304; Von Sivers, "The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public," 5.

¹³ Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition," 170. Concerning the authenticity of the poetry, see Wim Raven, "Sīra," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 9:662.

¹⁴ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 4.

¹⁵ Bakker, "The Image of Muhammad in the Message," 84.

¹⁶ Ibn Hišām mentions that he edited his predecessor's material in Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. A. Guillaume (1955; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 691. See also Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 6; Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," 298.

Ibn Hišām is “the oldest preserved specimen.”¹⁷ I mention this to indicate that the same biography is referenced in relation to either or both names. Parts of Ibn Ishāq’s material are also preserved in the *Annals* of al-Ṭabarī (AD 839–923), which, according to Fred Donner, are “virtually the same” as corresponding parts of Ibn Hišām’s redaction.¹⁸

The question may arise as to why I write *sīrah* (with an *h*) when the title of Ibn Ishāq’s *sīrah* says *sīrat*. Many Arabic words end with a letter (or symbol) called the *tā’ marbūṭa*, and *sīrah* is a transcription of one such word, namely سيرة. The *tā’ marbūṭa* is transcribed as an *h* or a *t* depending on whether it is followed by another transcribed word, and its transcription is regularly omitted, so the Arabic word سيرة is often written as *sīra* instead of *sīrah*.¹⁹ I should also note that I transcribe Arabic in accordance with the *international phonetic alphabet* (IPA), whereas some of the scholars I cite transcribe it differently. For example, Peter von Sivers writes *sīrah* as *sira* and *ḥadīṭ* as *hadith*, and Peters writes *Ishāq* as *Ishaq* and *Hišām* as *Hisham*—none of this is in accord with the IPA.²⁰ Others write *ḥadīth* instead of *ḥadīṭ*,²¹ or *Hishām* instead of *Hišām*.²² Here, either option is in accord with the IPA, which recommends the transcription of the relevant Arabic letters as either *th* or *ṭ*, and as either *sh* or *š*. I prefer to represent each Arabic letter with a single IPA letter rather than representing one letter with two, so I prefer *ṭ* over *th* and *š* over *sh*. I also prefer to transcribe the plurals of Arabic singulars, whereas some of the scholars pluralize the singular by suffixing

¹⁷ Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 301. See also pages 304 and 298.

¹⁸ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2021), 132, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1b9f5gk.8>.

¹⁹ *The Message* film claims to have been approved by the High Islamic Congress of the Shia in Lebanon, but it actually says “Shiat” instead of “Shia,” which reflects the question of when and how the *tā’ marbūṭa* should be transcribed. My mentor considers “Shiat” a spelling mistake, so I silently corrected it, as is permitted by the manual of style that my university recommends for my field of study (see CMOS 13.7 and 13.61).

²⁰ Von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 5; Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 298.

²¹ See Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 5; Goldziher, “On the Development of the Ḥadīth,” 17.

²² See Bakker, “The Image of Muhammad in the Message,” 84.

an *s*, or use the singular regardless of whether they refer to one *ḥadīṭ* or more. Thus, I use *ʾaḥādīṭ* as the plural of *ḥadīṭ* or *ḥadīth*, whereas, for instance, Crone and Goldziher use *ḥadīths*,²³ and Peters uses *hadith* to refer to one *ḥadīṭ* and all *ʾaḥādīṭ*.²⁴

Concerning *The Message* (the aforementioned film), critics tend to compare it with *sīrah* literature. For example, a Muslim critic has classified its details as accurate or inaccurate based on whether they are corroborated by *sīrah* literature.²⁵ Similarly, while analyzing the film's scenes in terms of fidelity and accuracy,²⁶ Bakker takes for granted that they ought to be compared with corresponding representations from Ibn Ishāq's *sīrah*.²⁷ Given the scarcity of alternative source material and the commonalities between the film's narratives and those found in *sīrah* literature (e.g., their chronologies), I deem it safe to assume that the film is based mostly on *sīrah* literature.

Bakker asserts that the film "follows Muslim tradition quite accurately."²⁸ He means that it is quite accurate in relation to Ibn Ishāq's *sīrah* because that is the only source with which he compares it. Perhaps he is correct, but accuracy in relation to a source on the past is not necessarily accuracy in relation to the actual past: *sīrah* literature may not be historically reliable. Consider that Wim Raven expresses his doubts regarding whether *sīrah*

²³ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 6; Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 17.

²⁴ Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," 299. See also Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition," 170. Lammens uses *Hadith* regardless of whether he refers to a particular *ḥadīṭ* or the *ʾaḥādīṭ* as a whole. I use an English translation of his work and it is possible that his translator, Ibn Warraq, has introduced this confusing practice instead of Lammens himself. Ibn Warraq's work is sufficient enough to be cited occasionally by scholars, but it may be found wanting in respect of preserving Lammens' precision. I cannot avoid Ibn Warraq because he is currently the only person who has translated Lammens' work.

²⁵ Sunnah Discourse, "Everything Wrong with The Message Movie," YouTube Video, 0:05, May 24, 2020, https://youtu.be/9Eo4A_zU828.

²⁶ Bakker, "The Image of Muhammad in *The Message*." Bakker speaks of "the fidelity of the film to Muslim historical tradition" and claims that it "follows Muslim tradition quite accurately" on pages 81 and 89, respectively.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81–86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

literature can “be used at all for a historically reliable biography of Muḥammad, or for the historiography of early Islam,”²⁹ that Peters implies that historians who focus on Muḥammad and early Islam are consistently “betrayed by the sheer unreliability of their sources,”³⁰ and that Stephen Shoemaker presumes it a general opinion among scholars that *sīrah* literature is “essentially worthless for reconstructing a historically credible biography of Muhammad or for the history of early Islam more generally.”³¹ I wonder whether they think that *sīrah* literature purports to inform us about a life that the actual Muḥammad did not live, and an Islamic past that did not occur, at least to the extent that it raises the question of whether *sīrah* literature is at all useful. Scholars such as Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler endeavor to provide a way forward: they aim to reconstruct a part of a *sīrah* from what they argue to be the “genuine material” of “the Muslim tradition,” in contrast to its “lots of spurious and false material.”³² About such endeavors, however, Shoemaker says, “at issue is the general reliability of the early *sīra* traditions for knowledge of Muhammad’s life and the beginnings of Islam: the historical veracity of these accounts stands very much in question.”³³

As indicated above, scholars have a tendency to invoke a concept of *historical reliability* as they examine and write about *sīrah* literature, but what does it entail? What do they expect from source material on allegedly historical events when they speak of the reliability of said material? That is the subject of this study. To elaborate, this study is about what makes a source historically reliable according to a selection of scholars. The notion

²⁹ Raven, “Sīra,” 662.

³⁰ Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 306.

³¹ Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad’s Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 87.

³² Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler, “Reconstructing the Earliest *Sīra* Texts: The Hīġra in the Corpus of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr,” *Der Islam* 82, no. 2 (2005): 211.

³³ Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 87.

of reliability pervades the study of history, particularly the debates of the historicity of sources such as *sīrah* literature, but there is insufficient clarity on how reliability is or ought to be understood; it is used so pervasively that one may think that what makes a source historically reliable is evident, but it is scarcely defined and demarcated. Hence, I will inquire into what makes a source historically reliable according to a selection of scholars, and I will use their publications about *sīrah* literature as a case study through which to answer this question.

While the scholars focus on whether *sīrah* literature is historically reliable, I will look instead into what criteria they put forward in light of that question. In other words, it is not my aim to answer whether or not *sīrah* literature is historically reliable, but I explore a separate and related question, which is as follows: what criteria do the scholars present as they attempt to establish whether *sīrah* literature is historically reliable? I aim to derive an answer from the scholars who are situated at the forefront of the discussions of whether *sīrah* literature is historically reliable, such as Goldziher, Lammens, and Crone—their prominence is the reason I examine their work.

At this point, it seems sensible to provide an example of *sīrah* literature, to illustrate what is *sīrah* literature. The following is about the birth of Muḥammad, which is taken from the *sīrah* of Ibn Ishāq (and Ibn Hišām):

Ṣāliḥ b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abdu’l-Raḥmān b. ‘Auf b. Yaḥyā b. ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abdu’l-Raḥmān b. Sa‘d b. Zurāra al-Anṣārī said that his tribesmen said that Ḥassān b. Thābit said: “I was a well-grown boy of seven or eight, understanding all that I heard, when I heard a Jew calling out at the top of his voice from the top of a fort in Yathrib [Medina] ‘O company of Jews’ until they all came together and called out ‘Confound you, what is

the matter?' He answered: 'Tonight has risen a star under which Aḥmad [Muḥammad] is to be born.'"³⁴

I selected the above paragraph for four reasons. Firstly, Muhammad's birth seems a good place to start. Secondly, it has the shape of a *ḥadīṭ*: it features an *isnād* (the part where Z said that Y said, etc.) followed by *matn*. This is common in Ibn Ishāq's *sīrah* and points to its derivation from the *'aḥādīṭ*. It is so frequent that the *sīrah* largely looks like a chronological compilation of many individual *'aḥādīṭ*. Thirdly, the inclusion of an *isnād* testifies of Ibn Ishāq's distance from (and unfamiliarity with) the past about which he writes, which, as will soon become apparent, is a basis for the proposition that *sīrah* literature is not reliable. Lastly, the paragraph serves a deeper or ulterior purpose than merely to relay the past, which raises questions concerning the actuality of what it would have us believe. It may be arguing to (or against) then-contemporary Jews (and, perhaps, future ones too) that Muḥammad was a genuine prophet, by means of portraying the Jews of Muḥammad's time as having anticipated or acknowledged Muḥammad. This literature does the same in respect of Christians, as can be seen in the passage below, which follows shortly after the one above:

A learned person told me that what urged his [the young Muḥammad's] foster-mother to return him to his mother, apart from what she told his mother, was that a number of Abyssinian Christians saw him.... They looked at him, asked questions about him, and studied him carefully, then they said to her, "Let us take this boy, and bring him to our king and our country; for he will have a great future. We know all about him."

³⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 70.

The person who told me this alleged that she could hardly get him away from them.³⁵

Apparently, *sīrah* literature is more than an account of Muḥammad's life and early Islam: it is also (if not primarily) an effort to validate Muḥammad's claim to prophethood, and it practically wields the past as a weapon against the Jews and Christians who discarded (or discard) that claim. My mentor, Clare Wilde, once remarked that *sīrah* literature is about making an Arab prophet. That is, its purpose is to convince people that a genuine prophet arose among the Arabs, which may be a fitting description.

Discussions of historical reliability feature a number of prominent terms that seem to have related meanings, and which are similarly ambiguous. A few of these terms have already occurred in the previous paragraphs, such as (*historically*) *accurate* and *historicity*. Dictionaries describe the former synonymously with *free from error* and *exact*, and the latter with *historical authenticity* and *historical actuality*,³⁶ which may not sufficiently elucidate their meanings. These and similar or related terms (e.g., *historical truth*, *factually correct*, *authority*) are used by the scholars without sufficient explanation, and I aim to elucidate them through this study of historical reliability.

It is prudent to provide a preliminary sense of direction in respect of historical reliability. I think that when a scholar says that a historical source is reliable, (s)he means that it is worth relying on, or that it ought to be relied on, not that it can be relied on in an arbitrary sense. For this reason, I think

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁶ "Definition of Accurate | Dictionary.Com," [www.Dictionary.Com](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/accurate), accessed 15 February 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/accurate>; "Definition of Accurate," Merriam-Webster.Com, accessed 15 February 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accurate>; "Definition of Historicity | Dictionary.Com," [www.Dictionary.Com](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/historicity), accessed 11 February 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/historicity>; "Definition of Historicity," Merriam-Webster.Com, accessed 11 February 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/historicity>.

that a statement on the reliability of a source is a judgment underpinned by argumentation, particularly within a dialectical context where opposing opinions (e.g., X does or does not represent the actual past) are weighed against one another. When a scholar says that a source is historically reliable, that statement may be underpinned by arguments that have been mentioned or have yet to be mentioned, and it may reflect the scholar's conviction that the arguments outweigh their counterarguments.

Other prominent terms in this study are *literature*, *account*, (*literary*) *source*, and (*Islamic*) *tradition*. The term *literature* refers to a writing that is consistent in respect of some pattern of expression and form, and which was written expressly to have a lasting merit and be read by potentially everyone.³⁷ Biographies, commentaries, diaries, novels, and poetry constitute literature. The term *account* refers to oral or written presentations of one or more past events by some person or group of persons. As for *source*, it denotes the starting point of an account, which can be a written source (e.g., a biography) or an oral one (a person). The last term, (*Islamic*) *tradition*, is used differently depending on the context: it can refer to as much as Islam in its entirety, or one or more of its categories, such as *sīrah* literature and the *ʾaḥādīth*. Whenever it is possible, I will aim to clarify the usage of (*Islamic*) *tradition*.³⁸

For this study, I will interact with scholarly works about *sīrah* literature that have been published in the English language, including those that have been translated into English.

This study is structured as follows: The second chapter deals broadly with historical method and touches on issues that affect history and the

³⁷ See "Definition of Literature," Merriam-Webster.Com, accessed 22 April 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literature>; "Definition of Literature | Dictionary.Com," www.Dictionary.Com, accessed 22 April 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/literature>.

³⁸ This term can prove particularly confusing in the works of Lammens or, at least, Ibn Warraq's English translation of Lammens' works.

study of sources in general. It is not particularly related to *sīrah* literature but serves as the backdrop for the subsequent discussions of the historical reliability of *sīrah* literature. The third chapter provides an overview of what scholars think in respect of the reliability of *sīrah* literature for historical research on Muḥammad and early Islam. The fourth chapter explores and scrutinizes the scholars' arguments relating to whether *sīrah* literature is reliable for historical research on Muḥammad and early Islam. It delves into their publications and details why they think that *sīrah* literature is reliable or not, it features my deductions as to what makes a source historically reliable in the arguments of the scholars, and it closes with a brief overview of the criteria that seem to determine historical reliability for them. Lastly, there is a concluding chapter, in which I summarize the thesis and my conclusions.

Chapter Two: Scholarly Discussions of Historical Reliability

Historians aim to study and reconstruct “the human past.”³⁹ As humans, we suffer from the shortcoming that we do not naturally know the past that precedes our respective births; such knowledge is neither inborn nor otherwise innate to us. This necessitates the study and reconstruction of the past, lest we know little or nothing beyond the recollections of our respective lifetimes.

But how is the past studied and reconstructed, or how ought that be done? The answer to these questions varies depending on who is asked, for reasons such as that different people have different understandings of the term *history*. A common understanding is that history is the past itself, and another is that it is an authoritative record of the past.⁴⁰ If it is the former, however, then it cannot be studied, let alone reconstructed. Consider Steve Mason’s point that, “for historians, history cannot be the past itself” because the past “is not available to be studied.”⁴¹ Historians cannot study the past itself because they cannot travel back in time and study it as it unfolded: the best they (and non-historians, for that matter) can do, I think, is to study the past through the sources that are available to them. As for the idea that history is an authoritative record of the past, Mason argues that this cannot be so because there is no authoritative record.⁴² A solution is to establish an authoritative record, but that seems impossible. Even if someone could travel back in time and compare our existing records with the past itself or derive a new record from it, there would be obstacles such as that (s)he would lack the omniscience and omnipresence to fully experience and

³⁹ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History: With Lectures 1926-1928*, ed. Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 209. See also Steve Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), 5.

⁴⁰ See Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*

comprehend everything as it unfolds. We already cannot establish an authoritative record of our present, and it is ambitious to think that we can do better with regards to establishing an authoritative record of the past, or that our ancestors did better when they created the records we now possess. While no authoritative record exists and one cannot be established, it is futile to think of history as an authoritative record.

Given that the common meanings of history imply that it is unavailable or non-existent, it seems prudent to address what history could mean, or what it means to historians and what it is that they do.

Generally speaking, historians search for the human past instead of learning some record of it.⁴³ To historians, history is what they do. Rather than viewing history as the past or its record(s), they see it as an activity, namely the search for the human past. Contrast this with the notion that historians merely or mostly learn facts about the past that are supposedly stored somewhere.⁴⁴ Mason suggests disapprovingly that, in school, we tend to obtain the impression that history is what precedes us in time, what resulted from “history-making people and events” and can now be learned by us, and that knowing it equates to being able to recite its key details from memory.⁴⁵ I think that this commonly-obtained impression is often extrapolated to the work that historians do, as that explains why Mason and other historians dispel rather than ignore the impression.⁴⁶ Mason argues that history is not a set of facts to be learned but something that is done: it

⁴³ See *ibid.*, 12. Mason says that “the idea that historians ... go out and search for the human past, as distinct from people who focus on learning ‘the historical record,’ remains universally shared in university departments of history.”

⁴⁴ See Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (A Caravelle Edition. New York: Vintage Books, 1953), 64.

⁴⁵ Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea*, 3. See also Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 234–238.

⁴⁶ See also Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1; Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 64–65.

is to inquire into issues regarding the past that intrigue us.⁴⁷ Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier mention for similar reasons that history is not waiting to be discovered but is sooner created by historians.⁴⁸ To be concise, historians search for knowledge of the past because it is not available to be learned in a ready-made state, hence the notion that history is about doing rather than learning, or, more specifically, searching rather than memorizing.

Another arguably common impression is that the past has come to us almost ready-made, in pieces that need only to be fitted together, as if the past is a solvable puzzle.⁴⁹ This impression has likely led to a practice that R. G. Collingwood calls *scissors-and-paste history*, which he does not regard as history.⁵⁰ Scissors-and-paste history is about reconstructing the past from excerpts of what various authorities say.⁵¹ Collingwood denounces it for reasons such as that it presupposes the existence of an authority, a person whose statement(s) a historian takes as true (*as is*, or at face value).⁵² Collingwood says that historians must remain independent and reach their own conclusions,⁵³ and the “so-called authorities” must conform to the historian’s thoughts, not vice versa,⁵⁴ where they serve merely as evidence, not as authorities.⁵⁵ He argues that truth is found in the historian’s critique of what a nominal authority says, as opposed to it being found ready-made in what is said,⁵⁶ and other historians advocate the same.⁵⁷ Collingwood

⁴⁷ Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea*, 6. See also Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 269–270.

⁴⁸ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 1.

⁴⁹ See Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 278.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 256. See also pages 238, 264, and 275–276.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 256. See also pages 234–238.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 237. See also pages 269 and 275–276.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 243. See also pages 269–270 and 275–276.

⁵⁷ See Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 3; Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, 64.

asserts that “history does not depend on authority,”⁵⁸ and he suggests that his views, which I have presented here, were commonly held by the historians of his time (the first half of the twentieth century).⁵⁹ Historians seem to continue to hold these views.

Mason and Collingwood regard imagination as a requirement for doing history.⁶⁰ Collingwood explains that it is not imagination in the sense of thinking up fictions,⁶¹ but of a sort for which he provides the following examples: to imagine that Caesar traveled from Rome to Gaul if he is said to have been in Rome on a particular day and in Gaul on a subsequent day; to imagine that a ship gradually moved from its last observed location to its newly observed location within the time that it has not been observed; and to imagine Collingwood’s friend entering his own home some time after he left Collingwood’s home.⁶² This imagination, which Collingwood defines as *a priori* imagination,⁶³ is seemingly about deriving the unsaid from what is said, or the unobserved from what is and/or was observed, based on what is considered probable (e.g., Caesar traveled rather than teleported). I previously mentioned that Collingwood claims that truth is uncovered by critically examining the nominal authorities: he also suggests that historians imagine the past between the fixed points (of truth) that are uncovered in that manner.⁶⁴ He believes that historians can reconstruct a past that represents the actual past if they appeal only to *a priori* imagination and if the fixed points occur at regular intervals.⁶⁵ He compares historians with

⁵⁸ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 238.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 264–266. See also Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 3.

⁶⁰ Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea*, 6; Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 240–242; *ibid.*, 245. See also Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, 64–65; Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 1. Bloch and Howell and Prevenier do not explicitly speak of imagination but seem to think the same way.

⁶¹ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 241.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 240–241.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 243. See also pages 242 and 244–245.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

novelists (writers of fiction) and asserts that while both use the same imagination and have similar aims (e.g., the creation of a coherent whole), there are three rules by which only the former must abide: their work must be situated in an actual time and place; it must agree with the evidence; and the past must be consistent in relation to itself (their work must be accordable with that of other historians, or vice versa).⁶⁶ To do history is to imagine the past against the backdrop of these rules, which are probably meant to keep historians grounded in the realm of non-fiction. I now move on to the topic of historical reliability.

Howell and Prevenier assert that neither a source nor its interpretation(s) can be “perfectly *reliable*” because neither “provides certain knowledge about the past.”⁶⁷ Relatedly, Mason implies that the expectation of certainty leads not to certainty but its absence with regards to history in its entirety.⁶⁸ So, we should not expect sources or history to be perfectly reliable, that is, we should not expect them to provide us with certainty, but why? Howell and Prevenier present several reasons, such as that the sources lack the required comprehensiveness and impartiality, that the time gap between historians and the sources may be so significant that the former cannot be familiar enough with the latter’s cultural milieu to fully comprehend it, and that the methods that historians employ are not faultless.⁶⁹ Perfect reliability is impossible to attain, but what about the sort of reliability that is less about certainty than probability or plausibility?

It can be argued that Howell and Prevenier think that reliability (the less certain sort) is likewise impossible to attain. The reason is that they seem to adopt the view that the actual past cannot be reconstructed from our sources and that we can only study the interpretations of the past that the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 245–246.

⁶⁷ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 2. See also page 79.

⁶⁸ Mason, *Orientation to the History of Roman Judaea*, 6.

⁶⁹ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*. See pages 2 and 79–82.

sources present to us.⁷⁰ To elaborate, they seem to think that the actual past cannot be known and that we must settle for studying the notional pasts that exist within our sources. This obstructs the assumption that sources can be reliable or unreliable (in relation to the actual past) because the actual past must be knowable to assume that.

Conversely, there are several reasons to assume that Howell and Prevenier think that reliability is attainable. Firstly, they say that reliability is a “stubbornly elusive” objective,⁷¹ which indicates that it is difficult but not necessarily impossible to attain. Secondly, some of their argumentation would be otiose or redundant if they think that reliability is unattainable. For example, if I assume that they think that reliability cannot be attained, then I wonder why they argue that sources “can never be made fully reliable” instead of arguing that sources cannot be made reliable at all.⁷² It is as if they think that sources can be partially reliable. Lastly, they say that “while perfect certainty is never achievable, there are gradations of plausibility,”⁷³ which can be rephrased (partially because they equate certainty with perfect reliability) as follows: although perfect reliability is unattainable, there are degrees of reliability. It is possible that Howell and Prevenier consider reliability attainable, but also that they do not, and it is difficult to arrive at a more definitive conclusion regarding this topic.

I gather from Howell and Prevenier that the general historian is now skeptical of his or her ability to reconstruct the past and the prospect of deriving facts from sources,⁷⁴ let alone the prospect of categorizing sources in terms of reliability. Howell and Prevenier mention that this has to with

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 79. Howell and Prevenier apply the idea of gradations of plausibility to evidence and interpretations, but it can be extended to the sources from which the evidence is taken, and on which the interpretations are based.

⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, 15–16; *ibid.*, 145–146.

“the status of the fact” and “the problem of objectivity.”⁷⁵ The former denotes the question of whether the interpretations of the past that our sources present to us are isolated from the actual past or whether aspects of the actual past can be reconstructed from the interpretations,⁷⁶ and the latter denotes the problem that historians cannot detach themselves from the influences of their lives and societies to study the past from a *God’s-eye view* or an *Archimedean point*, the viewpoint from which anything can be viewed in its entirety and without any biases or predispositions.⁷⁷ Howell and Prevenier convey that each historian is an individual with different abilities who has had different experiences and developed different ways of thinking that affect his or her inquiries concerning our sources and the past.⁷⁸ This individuality characterizes not only historians but also the people they study,⁷⁹ so historians lack objectivity and study the past through accounts from people who likewise lack(ed) objectivity. Howell and Prevenier mention that the capabilities of historians and the people whose accounts they study are determined by factors such as their fears, aspirations, political environment, and educational and ethnic backgrounds, and Howell and Prevenier claim that these factors determine so much as what is (and was) considered factual by historians and the people whose accounts are studied.⁸⁰

Relatedly, Collingwood suggests that historians approach the past from intellectual backgrounds that shift over time and across cultures,⁸¹ and he suggests that subsequent generations of historians do not improve upon one another towards a common conclusion (e.g., historical truth).⁸²

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 148–150.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 146–148.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 146–147.

⁸¹ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 248–249.

⁸² Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 321–334. Conversely, see Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, 58–59.

Historians have to confront problems such as these, which raise questions such as whether the past can be reconstructed from sources or whether sources can be categorized as if they are inherently reliable or unreliable, and even whether it is worthwhile to do history. Howell and Prevenier suggest that some historians currently feel that they cannot write “useful history” and that others refuse to acknowledge the problems and want to proceed as if historians reconstruct the past from an objective viewpoint.⁸³

A phenomenon called *the linguistic turn* or *literary criticism* has likely contributed to the prominence of the problems and questions that I have outlined above. Howell and Prevenier define the phenomenon as “the new attention to language and textual form generated by poststructuralist literary and cultural analysis,” and Judith Koren and Yehuda Nevo convey that it is about studying sources as literature, and to assume that sources do not contain “hard facts” but only their authors’ perspectives of the facts.⁸⁴ Koren and Nevo summarize eight propositions (which I shall soon address) that seem to relate closely with this relatively new approach to sources, this literary criticism. Indeed, they explicitly relate the first five propositions to literary criticism.⁸⁵ They also imply that the propositions comprise “the ‘revisionist’ approach” to the reconstruction of the early Islamic past.⁸⁶ The revisionist approach is about the critical analysis of the Islamic sources (as literature) and the emphasis on coins, inscriptions, and non-Islamic (e.g., Jewish, Christian) writings for the reconstruction of the early Islamic past.⁸⁷

Koren and Nevo have derived the eight propositions that comprise the revisionist approach from a 1986 lecture by John Wansbrough.⁸⁸ One might

⁸³ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 145.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15; Judith Koren and Yehuda D. Nevo, “Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies,” *Der Islam* 68, no. 1 (1991): 90. <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1515/islam.1991.68.1.87>.

⁸⁵ Koren and Nevo, “Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies,” 90.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 87–88.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

ask whether I should then refer to the propositions as those of Wansbrough. However, Koren and Nevo say that they have amended what Wansbrough said,⁸⁹ and I am unsure whether they sufficiently specify which words or thoughts are his and which are theirs, so it seems best to refer to all three whenever I am unsure, by the initials WKN.

The first proposition is that no written source can tell us what actually occurred; written sources can only tell us how their author(s) viewed the occurrences, how they wanted them to have occurred, or how they wanted their reader(s) to think about the occurrences.⁹⁰ Apparently, according to this proposition, we must think about every author's limited perspective and incomplete knowledge concerning what they write about, and his or her intentions, before we begin to ask whether they inform us about the actual past.⁹¹

The second proposition is that no writer except for an eyewitness possesses knowledge of the past about which (s)he writes, and even that knowledge may be contaminated by his or her inclinations.⁹² According to this proposition, we should compare sources with other sources—particularly “non-written remains” such as coins and inscriptions—from the same time period.⁹³ If we cannot do this, then we should study the work of our scholarly colleagues because they will eventually converge towards a consensus, but that option is problematic because it does not prevent us from building “cloud-capp'd towers on essentially unpinned foundations” or, as I would say, from planting our feet firmly in mid-air.⁹⁴

The third proposition is that past events are distorted by the act of writing itself, as it reduces them to words and presents a chronology that

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 89–90.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

may not have occurred.⁹⁵ Koren and Nevo do not assign much importance to this proposition: they seem to mention it only because Wansbrough did.⁹⁶

The fourth proposition doubts that ancient writings, particularly the ones that are incorporated into the works of later authors, have been passed on to the present without losses to their original contents.⁹⁷ WKN explain that this problem runs deeper than the issue of copyist errors because it is possible that the authors altered the sources to accord them more closely with the traditions or orthodoxies of their respective time periods.⁹⁸ WKN present the speculative example of an author who uses the word *Muslim* when the original word in his or her source is *Hagarene*, *Ishmaelite*, or *Saracen*.⁹⁹ This can create—or has already created—historical problems because there is evidence that Islam developed out of a movement whose adherents did not refer to themselves as Muslims, and who may have been called Hagarenes by their contemporaries.¹⁰⁰ Our perception of the past can be affected much by a change as subtle as the replacement of *Hagarene* with *Muslim*, as it inserts Muslims into a time period in which they technically did not exist.

The fifth proposition views all written sources as literature because they are supposedly devoid of “hard facts” and present only their authors’ perspectives of such facts.¹⁰¹ According to this proposition, sources must be corroborated by “material remains” such as coins and inscriptions, which

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ See *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Koren and Nevo also provide a concrete example in a footnote on the same page: they mention a twentieth-century scholar who paraphrases a seventh-century author and substitutes the original words “Kingdom of Ishmael” for “Islamic Empire.” See also Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Negev Archeological Project for Study of Ancient Arab Desert Culture (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), 133.

¹⁰⁰ See Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 8–9. See also pages 211 and 214 of Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*.

¹⁰¹ Koren and Nevo, “Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies,” 90.

apparently constitute “hard” or “concrete” facts.¹⁰² Wansbrough thinks that “hard facts” are unavailable, whereas Koren and Nevo argue that coins and inscriptions constitute such facts.¹⁰³ Koren and Nevo add Anthony Snodgrass’ remark that archaeological evidence represents “what somebody once did, not what some contemporary or later writer says that they did.”¹⁰⁴ They use this remark to argue that material remains are superior to written sources, which may be correct, but to what extent? It is unclear to me whether material remains are sufficiently self-explanatory, and Snodgrass mentions that archaeological evidence has no significant meaning in relation to the past until it has been put through a sequence of procedures, each of which may cause “the true facts” to “become as distorted, obliterated, even forgotten, as in any written account of past events.”¹⁰⁵

The sixth proposition holds that it is easier to reconstruct the actual past from material (archaeological, particularly epigraphic and numismatic) evidence than from written sources. Both suffer from the problem that what survives is only a part of a greater whole, but the reconstruction of the actual past from written sources is supposedly more complicated because of extra factors such as the need to uncover the personalities, intentions, perspectives, and levels of knowledge of their authors.¹⁰⁶ According to this proposition, we should prefer material evidence because it is “raw” and “unsieved,” and when material evidence and written sources are at odds with one another, the former should take precedence.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Ibid., 90–91.

¹⁰³ See *ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; Anthony Snodgrass, “Archaeology,” in *Sources for Ancient History*, ed. Michael Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 139. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511622229.004. See also Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Snodgrass, “Archaeology,” 139–140.

¹⁰⁶ Koren and Nevo, “Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies,” 92.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

The final two propositions of the revisionist approach are specific to the sources of Islam, and so is this thesis. For these reasons, I will now shift to a discussion of the historical reliability of the sources of Islam.

The seventh proposition argues that the written sources of Islam must be corroborated by other written sources or material evidence, to the degree that the absence of corroborative information is a reason to assume that the written sources of Islam do not represent the actual past.¹⁰⁸ WKN point out that this proposition is receptive to *the argument from silence*,¹⁰⁹ which is that a void of evidential support for a particular event is itself evidence that the event did not occur. This argument is problematic because not all evidence in support of past events has survived until the present: if the evidence may not have survived, then it is unsafe to reason based on the absence of evidence that an event did not occur. However, it is also unsafe to assume that an event without evidence did occur, because, as Koren and Nevo vaguely point out, if an event did not occur, then silence is the best discoverable evidence in support of the hypothesis that it did not occur.¹¹⁰ Perhaps it is best to reserve one's judgment as to whether an event occurred if there is no supporting evidence.

The last proposition asserts that the Qur'ān (the main text source in Islam, which purports to have a divine origin) is not exempted from literary criticism.¹¹¹ According to this proposition, we should critically examine the Qur'ān as a literary source, endeavor to discover how it likely originated and developed into the text that we have today, and subject its language to linguistic criticism.¹¹² This may be an appeal by WKN to the scholars who

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 12.

¹¹¹ Koren and Nevo, "Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies," 92.

¹¹² Ibid. Koren and Nevo also imply that scholars have been applying literary criticism to the Old Testament for a relatively long time. The Qur'ān is not being singled out for literary criticism. A substantial amount of scholarship presented in this thesis appears to relate to scholarship on the Bible.

hesitate to scrutinize the Qur'ān because it can offend Muslims, who tend to accept the Qur'ān's claim to divinity. The Qur'ān is an important source for the scholarly study of Muḥammad's life and early Islam because Muḥammad himself may have formulated much of its content, and, as the next two chapters of this thesis will indicate, it may be a superior source for knowledge of Muḥammad's life and early Islam than *sīrah* literature and the *'aḥādīṭ*.¹¹³

Koren and Nevo situate the revisionist approach over against “the ‘traditional’ approach.”¹¹⁴ They infer the latter from some scholarly publications that they do not specify.¹¹⁵ They divide the traditional methodology into six propositions. I will address this methodology succinctly because its propositions are little more than the antitheses of the propositions of the revisionist approach. Firstly, the traditional approach holds that the Islamic sources preserve facts about the pre- and early-Islamic past, to the extent that the past can be reconstructed from that material alone.¹¹⁶ Secondly, it holds that contradictions in the *'aḥādīṭ* can be resolved (and truth ascertained) through sufficient study of their elements, such as their *asānīd*.¹¹⁷ Thirdly, it neglects material evidence for supposedly being more open to interpretation than written sources, and for providing no meaningful information in addition to what the written sources already provide.¹¹⁸ Fourthly, it holds that the written sources inform us of events that happened even when there is no corroborating evidence, in contrast to treating the absence of corroborating evidence as evidence that the sources

¹¹³ It is primarily Western scholars who speculate that Muḥammad formulated a substantial portion of what became the Qur'ān, whereas Muslims tend to the view that he received all of it as divine revelations.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

are, in fact, dubious.¹¹⁹ Fifthly, it studies the Qur'ān in accordance with the Islamic scholarly tradition, such as that it accepts the traditional divisions of Qur'ānic passages as Meccan, Medinan, early, or late “revelations” and does not explore what is a revelation outside of the Islamic context.¹²⁰ Lastly, it avoids linguistic analysis in favor of the semantics proposed by the scholarly tradition of Islam.¹²¹

Koren and Nevo define themselves as “firm ‘revisionists’” and suggest that there is animosity between them and the scholars who take the traditional approach.¹²² For example, Koren and Nevo likely speak from experience when they share that “revisionism” has been opposed and ignored in scholarship and labeled “anti-Islam.”¹²³ Moreover, their description of traditionalism seems simplistic, as if it is a caricature instead of an accurate description of how individual scholars who are perceived to take this approach operate.¹²⁴ Be that as it may, the next chapter indicates that scholars have been—and that some continue to be—credulous towards the sources of Islam.

I will soon move on to the next chapter, but I will first attempt to elucidate (historical) reliability in reference to what was explored in this chapter, since the scholars do not define the term or concept but merely use it. Consider, for example, that Koren and Nevo mention that the traditionalists endeavor to establish the “reliability” of *asānīd*, or that they claim that the *asānīd* “cannot be relied upon to authenticate historical

¹¹⁹ Ibid. See also Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 12.

¹²⁰ Koren and Nevo, “Miszellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies,” 89.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 88.

¹²³ Ibid., 87–88.

¹²⁴ See Andrew Rippin, foreword to *Qurānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, by John Wansbrough (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), xii. Rippin says that the “bifurcation” of scholars into revisionists and traditionalists is “convenient for polemical purposes” but “hardly corresponds to the methodological diversity and independence of those who work in the area.” In a footnote on the same page, he presents Koren and Nevo’s article on the methodological approaches to Islamic Studies as an example of polemics.

data.”¹²⁵ They do not explain reliability before they make these claims, nor afterward.

I think that reliability overlaps or shares characteristics with plausibility and probability. Luis Renon mentions that “plausibility is a question of degrees on a scale,”¹²⁶ and I reckon that the same applies to reliability. Reliability is not binary in the sense that the question of “is X reliable?” has an answer that renders the question that it is not reliable untenable. Rather, reliability is about which of the possible answers that we imagine best fits our argumentation or the available evidence (if evidence is sufficiently self-explanatory). This happens within the context that the best answer may still be incorrect, since we suffer from what is called *the problem of uncertainty*, the problem that we possess limited knowledge and cannot be certain about much or anything. When a scholar says that a source is historically reliable, (s)he may be saying that it is worth relying on for knowledge of the past, or that it ought to be relied on, based on his or her conviction that the arguments in favor of relying on the source outweigh the arguments against it.

¹²⁵ Koren and Nevo, “Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies,” 96.

¹²⁶ Luis Vega Renon, “Aristotle’s *Endoxa* and Plausible Argumentation,” *Argumentation* 12, no. 1 (1998): 105.

Chapter Three: Scholarly Discussions of the Historical Reliability of *Sīrah* Literature

Raven writes that, “to Muslims, the *sīra* ... gradually became almost a holy writ, whose reliability was accepted almost without asking questions.”¹²⁷

Orientalists (a dated term for Western scholars who study the East) may have temporarily accepted it with a similar degree of credulity. Consider, for example, the following by Ernest Renan (1823–1892):

The birth of Islam is ... a unique and invaluable fact.... In place of the mystery under which the other religions have covered their origins, this one was born in the full light of history; its roots are on the surface. The life of its founder is as well known to us as that of any sixteenth-century reformer. We can follow year by year the fluctuations of his thought, his contradictions, his weaknesses. Elsewhere, the origins of religions are lost in dreams; the effort of the sharpest criticism is hardly enough to distinguish the real from under the misleading appearance of myths and legends. Islam, by contrast, born in the midst of advanced reflection, entirely lacks the supernatural.¹²⁸

Seemingly in reference to Renan’s confidence in the sources of Islam, Raven says that “it set the tune for the rest of the nineteenth century,” after which he says that Orientalists “were quite naive towards the sources on early Islam.”¹²⁹ Raven suggests that such Orientalists were naively convinced that they could eliminate the contradictions that are found in the “Islamic

¹²⁷ Raven, “*Sīra*,” 663.

¹²⁸ Ernest Renan, “Muhammad and the Origins of Islam,” in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. and trans. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), 128–129.

¹²⁹ Wim Raven, “*Sīra* and the Qur’ān,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen MacAuliffe, vol. 5, *Si–Z* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 48.

tradition” and that enough source material would remain to reconstruct the early Islamic past as it actually occurred.¹³⁰

Western scholars are less confident today, to the point that Raven doubts that scholars will produce a new biography of Muḥammad in the future.¹³¹ He views W. Montgomery Watt’s two-volume biography (*Muhammad at Mecca and Muhammad at Medina*) from the 1950s as “the last scholarly biography.”¹³² I think that he reasons that it is the last biography that scholars deemed worthy of working on or with.

It is peculiar that Raven regards Watt’s biography as the last scholarly one because subsequent biographies have been published, including some that are arguably scholarly (e.g., Maxime Rodinson’s *Mohammed* [1973] and Peters’ *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* [1994]).¹³³ Raven says that “Peters shows himself well aware of the nature of the sources and at the same time gropes his way towards a biography (Peters, *Origins*),”¹³⁴ and it is likely that he is also familiar with Rodinson’s biography, so why does he not regard either as the last scholarly biography instead? Perhaps he reasons that Watt’s biography was published in a scholarly milieu that, generally speaking, still had confidence in the prospect of a credible biography, whereas the other biographies were not. In any case, he indicates that Watt’s biography was published between two surges of skepticism towards *sīrah* literature, of which the first seems to have been interrupted by “the First World War in Europe,” and of which the second began in the 1970s and produced the notion that *sīrah* literature is not useful for reconstructing

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Raven, “Sīra,” 663.

¹³² Ibid. For a concise outline of this biography, see von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 3.

¹³³ F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammed*, trans. Anne Carter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973).

¹³⁴ Raven, “Sīra and the Qur’ān,” 49.

Muḥammad's life and the early Islamic past.¹³⁵ Raven suggests that scholars restarted the search for "what had really happened" in the brief period between the two surges of skepticism, and he calls Watt's biography the "apogee" of the scholarly biographies from that period.¹³⁶ It seems that Raven regards Watt's biography as the last and most significant work of a quest that scholars have since abandoned. He also says that the scholars who "continue deriving historical facts" from the sources are "driven perhaps by a *horror vacui*,"¹³⁷ an unwelcome feeling towards nothingness, which implies that the sources are so devoid of reliable information that it is almost or entirely futile to try and derive a credible biography from them.

Crone (1945–2015) has a similarly negative outlook regarding the usefulness of the source material. She thinks that it has a rigidity that manifests very visibly in contemporary scholarship, with the majority of scholarship becoming a mere rearrangement of the source material and the remainder consisting of reinterpretations that are ordered in a way that sooner reflects the concerns of our time than that it derives from the material.¹³⁸ She asserts that rearranging or reinterpreting the source material hardly helps us "uncover the landscape that we are all trying to see" and that reinterpretations hardly produce new research.¹³⁹ She is dismissive of Watt's biography because it is a reinterpretation of the sources,¹⁴⁰ and she states:

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48. See also pages 14 and 210 (endnote 82) of Crone, *Slaves on Horses*.

¹³⁶ Raven, "Sīra and the Qur'ān," 48. For the argument that Watt's biography reflects or is restricted to the scholarship or thinking of its time, see Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*; Von Sivers, "The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public," 3. The relevant page numbers for Shoemaker are 130 and 314, and for Crone they are 13 and 209.

¹³⁷ Raven, "Sīra," 663.

¹³⁸ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 209. This page features an endnote (#71) about Watt that connects to a sentence on page 13 that addresses the issue of reinterpreting the sources based on our own, modern concerns, so Crone presents Watt as an example of a scholar who reinterprets the sources based on modern concerns.

Watt's *Muhammad at Mecca, and Medina* ... and M. Rodinson, *Mohammed* ... merely happen to be about the same subject; Watt's book has found favour among historians ... and Rodinson's book is good for students to read, but nobody *works* on them: in fact modern scholars tend not to work on the Prophet [Muḥammad] at all (contrast the situation before the First World War).¹⁴¹

Apparently, Crone's stance is that the scholars who strive to uncover the landscape of the first two centuries of Islam "are forever shifting rubble" and do not produce research that their successors or peers can work on (or with), and she suggests that, regarding Muḥammad and early Islam, "we know as little as and understand no more than before."¹⁴²

Relatively many scholars have contributed with their research to the view that the source material on the first two centuries of Islam is not reliable, which, naturally, includes the material on Muḥammad's life and early Islam. The research of Goldziher (1850–1921) and Joseph Schacht (1902–1969) is prominent in this regard. Goldziher has been called "the great pioneer of research on Islamic origins,"¹⁴³ and Schacht considers his own work an extension of what Goldziher started.¹⁴⁴

Goldziher and Schacht focus mainly on what they categorize as legal or political *'aḥādīṭ*.¹⁴⁵ Such *'aḥādīṭ* are the same as others, except that they additionally appear to try and resolve disagreements that may have existed when they were composed. To elaborate, like all *'aḥādīṭ*, they relay what Muḥammad allegedly said and did,¹⁴⁶ but they portray Muḥammad as

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 209.

¹⁴² Ibid., 13.

¹⁴³ Von Sivers, "The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public," 8. See also Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, v.

¹⁴⁵ See Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 89; Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, v.

¹⁴⁶ This point was established in this thesis' introduction.

favoring a particular position in some disagreement, seemingly to settle that disagreement on Muḥammad's authority. Consider, for example, a *ḥadīṭ* that first has a Muslim insult an Islamic ruler and then portrays Muḥammad as having warned his early followers that their god will disgrace anyone who insults the Islamic ruler,¹⁴⁷ which may have served to foster obedience to the rulership and can be considered legal or political for that reason. Goldziher mentions a similar *ḥadīṭ* that he considers political, which instead fosters resistance to certain Islamic rulers.¹⁴⁸ Peters suggests that Goldziher and Schacht have cast so much doubt on the authenticity of the legal (or political) *'aḥādīṭ* that virtually every Western scholar is now skeptical of "the reliability" of all *'aḥādīṭ*.¹⁴⁹

Goldziher's and Schacht's research affects *sīrah* literature because *sīrah* literature arguably derives primarily from the *'aḥādīṭ*. Consider that Peters says that Ibn Ishāq's "*Life* [that is, *sīrah* or *biography*]" is hardly more than a collection of *'aḥādīṭ*, or that von Sivers seemingly refers to the same *sīrah* as a very selective ordering of *'aḥādīṭ* about facets of the origins of Islam.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Crone says that no historian has disputed "that the bulk of the *Sīra*" consists of *'aḥādīṭ* that originated in the second century of Islam and that "this point may be taken as conceded."¹⁵¹ Any skepticism regarding the reliability of the *'aḥādīṭ* extends to *sīrah* literature, hence the inclusion of discussions about the *'aḥādīṭ*.

Concerning the *'aḥādīṭ*, Goldziher says that Muḥammad's "pious followers" tried to conserve what he said "regarding the practice of the religious obligations prescribed by him, the conduct of life in general, and social behaviour," but, after he died, they began to attribute sayings to him

¹⁴⁷ Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2224.

¹⁴⁸ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 90.

¹⁴⁹ Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," 302.

¹⁵⁰ Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," 304; von Sivers, "The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public," 5. See also Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition," 169.

¹⁵¹ Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 14–15.

that they considered valid or thought he would have agreed with.¹⁵² Goldziher expresses that it is already unwise to try to carefully assess which pieces of the *'ahādīṭ* are more original than others, or which trace back to the first generations after Muḥammad's death.¹⁵³ I reckon that Goldziher considers this unwise because the *'ahādīṭ* that feature unoriginal material purport to be original, which makes it difficult or impossible to identify the ones with the actual original material, if there are any.

Goldziher concludes that the *'ahādīṭ* reflect the inclinations of a community (of Muslims or proto-Muslims) that was in the process of maturing into what we now call the Muslim community: it was in the process of forming its orthodoxy from what some "powerful mutually opposed forces" promoted at the time, which Goldziher finds reflected in the *'ahādīṭ*.¹⁵⁴ For this reason, Goldziher asserts that the *'ahādīṭ* "will not serve as a document for the history of the infancy of Islam."¹⁵⁵ He conveys that familiarity with the *'ahādīṭ* leads to skepticism rather than confidence regarding their contents, to the extent that those who familiarize themselves with the *'ahādīṭ* "will probably consider by far the greater part of it as the result of the religious, historical and social development of Islam during the first two centuries."¹⁵⁶ So, the vast majority of the *'ahādīṭ* are apparently not the preserved sayings (or deeds) of Muḥammad but later ascriptions to him from the first two centuries of his community's past, particularly the century in which it matured into the Muslim community.

Schacht praises Goldziher for discovering that "the great majority" of the *'ahādīṭ* originate from Islam's first centuries rather than their purported times, and he says that this discovery has become the foundation of all

¹⁵² Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19. Concerning the identities of the mutually opposed forces, see pages 41–56, 75, 99–100, and 121.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

earnest inquiries into “early Muhammadan law and jurisprudence.”¹⁵⁷ Schacht views his own research as a confirmation and expansion of Goldziher’s.¹⁵⁸ He expands upon it with arguments such as that there is no evidence that the legal *’ahādīṭ* existed before the hundredth year of the Islamic calendar (which equates to AD 718), that a number of *’ahādīṭ* still reflect that common practices from the late Umayyad period gave rise to legal-centered reasoning in Islam, that “a great many” *’ahādīṭ* were not known until after the time of Shāfi‘ī (the founder of one of Islam’s four prominent schools of law, who reportedly died in AD 820), and that the *asānīd* of the *’ahādīṭ* are noticeably prone to growing in reverse and claiming for themselves ever-greater authorities until they reach Muḥammad.¹⁵⁹ Peters indicates that most historians have accepted Goldziher’s and Schacht’s conclusion that “a great many” of the *’ahādīṭ* were “fabricated to settle political scores or to underpin a legal or doctrinal ruling.”¹⁶⁰

The research of Lammens (1862–1937) is related more directly to *sīrah* literature than that of Goldziher and Schacht, as it focuses on the *’ahādīṭ* that Peters categorizes as “the reports of purely historical events of the type that constitute much of the life of Muhammad,” in contrast to the ones “that are chiefly legal in character.”¹⁶¹ Lammens advises skepticism when the *’ahādīṭ* suggest to be a Qur’ān-independent source on Muḥammad’s life that resulted from the meticulous research of Muḥammad’s contemporaries.¹⁶² His argument is that the *’ahādīṭ* are not an independent, confirmative, and supplementary source to the Qur’ān, because the Qur’ān is actually their

¹⁵⁷ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 4.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 4–5. For a summary of scholarly responses and scholarly work related to that of Schacht, see Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), 57–58.

¹⁶⁰ Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 302. See also von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 7–8; Raven, “Sīra and the Qur’ān,” 48.

¹⁶¹ Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 302. See also W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (1953; repr., Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960), xiii.

¹⁶² Lammens, “The Koran and Tradition,” 171.

source and they merely expand upon it in a legendary fashion.¹⁶³ He says that too much time had passed before the originators of the *'aḥādīṭ* became interested in much of what now interests us the most, and he shows that, “too often,” they had as little knowledge as we do of aspects such as “the historical person of Muhammad,” or they refused to share the additional knowledge they did possess.¹⁶⁴ Lammens extends these conclusions to *sīrah* literature because it “derives primarily” from the *'aḥādīṭ*, and he asserts for the same reason that the Qur’ān is the only historical foundation of *sīrah* literature.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, he says that *sīrah* literature “is derived not from two sources, parallel and independent, mutually complementing and controlling each other, but from just one, the Koran [Qur’ān], servilely interpreted and developed by the Traditions [*'aḥādīṭ*] from preconceived ideas.”¹⁶⁶ I take this to mean that *sīrah* literature consists primarily of late, legendary material that expands upon the contents of the Qur’ān while pretending to trace back to Muḥammad’s time, since Muḥammad’s community realized that it should have preserved information about him and early Islam at a time when the Qur’ān was the only remaining source they could consult.

Lammens also identifies chronological problems and artificial patterns in *sīrah* literature. One problem is that the *'aḥādīṭ* portray the same companions of Muḥammad as eyewitnesses of events that are so distant from one another that they span beyond the average person’s lifetime, so *sīrah* literature can only chronologically arrange the *'aḥādīṭ* by assigning peculiar lifespans to specific companions. One such companion is Hakīm ibn Hizām, who is assumed to have lived “sixty years before and after

¹⁶³ Ibid., 169–170.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 182. See also Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 306.

¹⁶⁵ Lammens, “The Koran and Tradition,” 169.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 181.

Islam.”¹⁶⁷ Additionally, Lammens points to a contradiction in some information that is attributed to Hakīm, which is as follows: when Muḥammad’s grandfather nearly sacrificed Muḥammad’s father, Hakīm was mature enough to later serve as a witness of that event, but Hakīm is presented elsewhere as if he was still a boy during events that must be assumed to have occurred several decades later.¹⁶⁸ As for the artificial patterns, they are numerical symmetries such as that Hakīm lived the same amount of time before Islam as he did afterward, or that a girl named ‘Ā’ishah married Muḥammad at the age of nine and remained with him for nine more years.¹⁶⁹ In reference to such matters, Lammens asserts that *sīrah* literature can be rejected in its entirety, seemingly in light of the question of whether it can serve as a source for a credible biography of Muḥammad.¹⁷⁰

Peters says that Lammens was undoubtedly correct, and Shoemaker says that Lammens’ insights are now central to the study of *sīrah* literature.¹⁷¹ Shoemaker also implies that Wansbrough and Uri Rubin both examined *sīrah* literature in their own ways after Lammens and that they nonetheless reached Lammens’ conclusion that “the representation of Muhammad in the *sīra* traditions is essentially a reflection of Islam and its concerns during the eighth and ninth centuries, having little to do with the historical figure of Muhammad.”¹⁷²

The research of Goldziher, Schacht, Lammens, and others paved the way for theses about the origins of Islam that differ fundamentally from what is

¹⁶⁷ Henri Lammens, “The Age of Muhammad and the Chronology of the Sira,” in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. and trans. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000), 190.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 206. For a summary of Lammens’ argumentation, see Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 103.

¹⁷¹ Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 303; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 100. See also Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, v–vi. For a brief summary of Lammens’ work and his reception in scholarship, see Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, 47–49.

¹⁷² Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 100.

presented in the Islamic sources. Wansbrough (1928–2002) questioned even whether Islam originated in the Arabian places of Mecca and Medina; he was “the first” to do so, according to von Sivers.¹⁷³ Andrew Rippin implies that Wansbrough was also “the first person” to question whether the Qur’ān had been central to Islam from the get-go, and to analyze as literature the Islamic sources that purport to (1) originate within Islam’s first and fourth centuries and (2) record the origins of the Qur’ān and its immediate centrality in Islam.¹⁷⁴ Wansbrough is remembered mainly for two publications: *Quranic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu*. In both studies, he explains his aims but does not provide concise overviews of his conclusions,¹⁷⁵ so I present a summary by Raven, which is that Wansbrough assigned a late date of composition to the Qur’ān and identified a number of literary genres (and their purposes) in *sīrah* literature.¹⁷⁶

The notion that *sīrah* literature comprises literary genres is noteworthy because scholars seem to think that sources that have literary genres are less reflective of the actual past than sources that have none. Consider the following statements by Raven:

¹⁷³ Von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 9.

¹⁷⁴ Rippin, foreword to *Quranic Studies*, xii.

¹⁷⁵ See John Wansbrough and Andrew Rippin, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), xxii; John Wansbrough, and University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, London Oriental Series, vol. 34 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), ix. In the former, Wansbrough’s objective “is a systematic study of the formal properties of scriptural authority, as merely one (though possibly the major one) factor contributing to the emergence of an independent and self-conscious religious community,” and, in the latter, his aim is “to plot the position” of “several varieties of documentation” that early Muslims created.

¹⁷⁶ Raven, “Sīra and the Qur’ān,” 48. For additional summaries, see Maher Jarrar, “Exegetical Designs of the Sīra: Tafsīr and Sīra,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, eds. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 623–624; von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 9–10; Andrew Rippin, “Academic Scholarship and the Qur’an,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, eds. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 32–33. For information concerning the scholarly reception of Wansbrough’s research, see von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 10–11; Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, 69–75; Anna Akasoy, “Qur’anic Studies: Bibliographical Survey,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, eds. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 66–67.

Sīra narratives are neither police records nor eyewitness reports, nor transcripts of things said, but are structured along the lines of sometimes long established literary patterns. They belong to certain genres and, as all literature, display a good deal of intertextuality. In general one might say: the more intertextuality an account reveals, the less likely a source it is for historiography.¹⁷⁷

Raven implies that “many *sīra* genres” are regarded as literature today.¹⁷⁸

According to Raven, Wansbrough’s “literary approach” was adopted by Crone and Michael Cook in their book *Hagarism*, where they show “a fundamental mistrust” in the sources of Islam and focus on “extra-Islamic sources,” which the scholars before them had neglected.¹⁷⁹ Von Sivers refers to Crone and Cook’s “reconstruction of the secular history of the Arabs in the seventh century” in *Hagarism* as “the first such history.”¹⁸⁰ *Hagarism* hypothesizes that Islam developed out of an ethnic group that a number of Greek and Syriac sources seem to perceive as the descendants of Hagar and refer to as Hagarenes.¹⁸¹ Crone and Cook argue that the Hagarenes participated in a *hijrah* (migration) from Arabia to the Promised Land (Israel or Palestine)—not from Mecca to Medina, as is suggested instead in the Islamic sources—and that this event has to do with “the earliest identity” of what eventually matured into Islam.¹⁸²

Crone and Cook influenced Shoemaker, who expanded on their most prominent arguments. One argument is that sources from the seventh and eighth centuries imply that Muḥammad was still alive and leading his

¹⁷⁷ Raven, “*Sīra* and the Qur’ān,” 48–49.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* See also Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, viii. Crone and Cook mention that they are indebted to Wansbrough for providing them with “the substance” of what they present in their book.

¹⁸⁰ Von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public,” 9.

¹⁸¹ See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 8–9. For information concerning Hagar, see Genesis 16:1–16; 21:9–10, 14–21; 25:12; Galatians 4:24–25, 30–31.

¹⁸² Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 9.

community when it began to invade “the Roman Near East.”¹⁸³ Shoemaker says that this “is strikingly at odds with the traditional account of Muhammad’s death ... at Medina in 632, first recorded in the earliest Islamic biographies of the mid-eighth and ninth centuries.”¹⁸⁴ The reason is that the invasion apparently began in AD 634.¹⁸⁵ Shoemaker explores eleven independent sources and argues that all of them indicate that Muḥammad was still alive when the invasion began.¹⁸⁶

Crone and Cook also argue that Muḥammad’s community was focused initially on the Promised Land (rather than Arabia), which has “some tension” with the sources of Islam because those insist that the community already considered Mecca its permanent home base before it began to invade foreign lands.¹⁸⁷ Shoemaker expands on this argument, and sizeably. He “identifies evidence of significant ideological shifts in early Islamic eschatology, confessional identity, and sacred geography that profoundly transformed the nature of Muhammad’s original religious movement.”¹⁸⁸ He argues that Muḥammad and his community thought that the end of the world was imminent and that this incentivized them to conquer the Promised Land.¹⁸⁹ However, when Muḥammad died and the end of the world repeatedly failed to be imminent, his community transformed “from a religion expecting the end of the world to a religion that aimed to rule the world,” and it may have endeavored to disconnect Muḥammad from the invasion and reorient him more closely with the *Ḥijāz*, a region in Arabia that includes Mecca and Medina.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ See Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 7; *ibid.*, 12; *ibid.*, 25–26; *ibid.*, 69; *ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12–13; *ibid.*, 18; *ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸⁷ See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 8.

¹⁸⁸ Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 15.

Shoemaker's research on the sources that suggest that Muḥammad presented himself to his community as a herald of the end of the world has been well received by scholars. Abdullah Drury says that the sources "provide a fascinating insight into early perceptions of Muhammad" as a herald of the end of the world, and a view of "nascent Islam" that is worthy of further investigation.¹⁹¹ And Paul Neuenkirchen says that the sources are "unquestionably" important because of "the eschatological way they portray the new movement led by Muḥammad."¹⁹²

Koren and Nevo have developed a different hypothesis regarding the early Islamic past. They address the question of how Arabs were able to gain control of Byzantium's eastern provinces in the 630s and mention that the sources of Islam have it result from a sequence of military victories over Byzantium, which portray the Arabs as a unified army of Muslims and attribute their victories to Islam.¹⁹³ Koren and Nevo consider the Islamic explanation inaccurate and argue that Byzantium had actually withdrawn its official troops in the sixth century and partially replaced them with militias consisting of locals and Arabs that were, in turn, gradually replaced by a subsidized army consisting of Arab tribes.¹⁹⁴ Koren and Nevo argue that Byzantium imported Arab tribes into the regions between Arabia and "al-Šām (Syria–Palestine–Trans-Jordan),"¹⁹⁵ that it eventually stopped funding the tribes,¹⁹⁶ and that it stopped managing its eastern provinces.¹⁹⁷ Thus, contrary to the Islamic sources' portrayal of the Arab takeover of

¹⁹¹ Abdullah Drury, "The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, no. 1 (2013): 133, doi:10.1080/09596410.2012.712450.

¹⁹² Paul Neuenkirchen, "The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam, written by Stephen J. Shoemaker," *Studia Islamica* 111, no. 2 (2016): 318, doi: <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.1163/19585705-12341344>.

¹⁹³ Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 17. See also pages 134–135.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25; *ibid.*, 89.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50; *ibid.*, 83; *ibid.*, 87; *ibid.*, 90.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87; *ibid.*, 25; *ibid.*, 65.

Byzantium's eastern provinces as a conquest, Koren and Nevo argue that it was a transfer of responsibility.

Koren and Nevo think that the Arab tribes began to vie with one another for control over the provinces when Byzantium stopped managing them, with a tribal leader named Mu'āwiyah I (r. AD 661–680) becoming the victor and establishing the first Arab state.¹⁹⁸ They also think that Islam did not exist until after the Arab state was established,¹⁹⁹ and they argue that Mu'āwiyah I was the first ruler of the Arabs (as a unified ethnos) and that the *Rāšidūn*—four men who are traditionally thought to have succeeded Muḥammad and ruled before Mu'āwiyah I—never ruled in actuality.²⁰⁰ Koren and Nevo even argue that the person we call Muḥammad was largely invented by 'Abd al-Malik (r. AD 685–705), a successor of Mu'āwiyah I, for the purpose of providing the Arab state with a prophet (and, by extension, a religion and some history).²⁰¹ Additionally, Koren and Nevo argue that the Qur'ān was canonized in the latter half of the eighth century,²⁰² and that *sīrah* literature was created to supply the Arab state and its prophet with a history.²⁰³ As is evident, their hypothesis differs substantially from what *sīrah* literature and the *'ahādīṭ* claim to have happened.

Other scholars, however, endeavor to establish that the sources on Muḥammad's life and early Islam are reliable to some degree. G. H. A. Juynboll (1935–2010), promotes the *common link theory* to that end. Before I explain the theory and the results it may yield, I ought to explain Juynboll's view of the *'ahādīṭ*. Many *'ahādīṭ* are near-duplicates of one or multiple other *'ahādīṭ*: they feature almost the same *mutūn* but substantially different *asānīd*, so their contents are almost identical but they purport to trace back

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 87; *ibid.*, 155–156; *ibid.*, 96–97; *ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 171. See also pages 207–208.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 97. See also pages 132, 135, and 154.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 171; *ibid.*, 245–248; *ibid.*, 254–256; *ibid.*, 280–282; *ibid.*, 284; *ibid.*, 299.

²⁰² Ibid., 337–344.

²⁰³ Ibid., 344–345.

to Muḥammad through different lists of transmitters. Juynboll prefers to view such *ʾaḥādīṭ* as one *ḥadīṭ* that has multiple *asānīd* (as opposed to viewing them as multiple *ʾaḥādīṭ* that each have their own *isnād*), and he prefers to conflate their *mutūn* into one *matn*.²⁰⁴

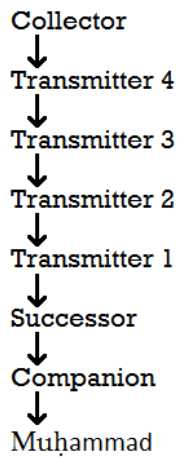
I also ought to explain that Juynboll categorizes *asānīd* as *single strands*, *spiders*, or *bundles*. If a *matn* is linked to only one *isnād*, that is, if a *ḥadīṭ* has no near-duplicates, then its *isnād* belongs to the category of single strands. Juynboll ignores single strands because their veracity cannot be gauged, seemingly because there are no relevant *asānīd* to compare them with.²⁰⁵ Moving on, if a *matn* is linked to one *isnād* that diverges into other *asānīd* that, in turn, do not converge back in the first *isnād*, then its *asānīd* comprise a spider. They are collectively called a spider because they diverge away from a single strand like the legs of a spider point away from its body and do not reconnect with the body or overlap with each other afterward (that is, they diverge by listing a unique transmitter and the subsequent transmitters are likewise unique). This is difficult to imagine, so I have illustrated it in Figure 1 (below).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ See G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), xvii, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004156746.i-804>; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 208.

²⁰⁵ Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, xix–xx.

²⁰⁶ See also *ibid.*, xviii–xix.

Single Strand:



Spider:

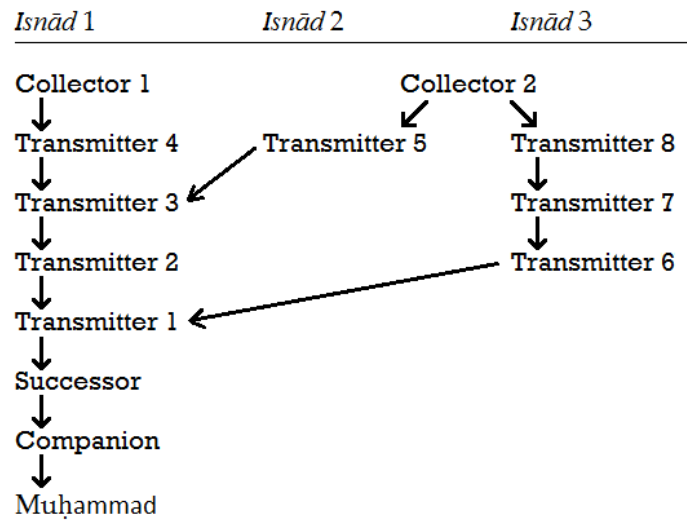


Figure 1 – the left column shows a single strand, whereas the right column shows a spider, which consists of a single strand that diverges into strands that do not converge back in the single strand up until the moment they were added to the collections of *'ahādīṭ* that we now possess.

Juynboll dismisses spiders because he thinks that the diverging strands were fabricated by competing *'ahādīṭ* collectors, who desired to outdo one another by pretending to have obtained the same *matn* through a greater number of independent transmitters.²⁰⁷

Lastly, if a *matn* is linked to one *isnād* that diverges into others that, in turn, converge back in each other, then its *asānīd* comprise a bundle. Consider the illustration in Figure 2 (below).²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Ibid., xxii.

²⁰⁸ See also *ibid.*, xix; *ibid.*, xxi.

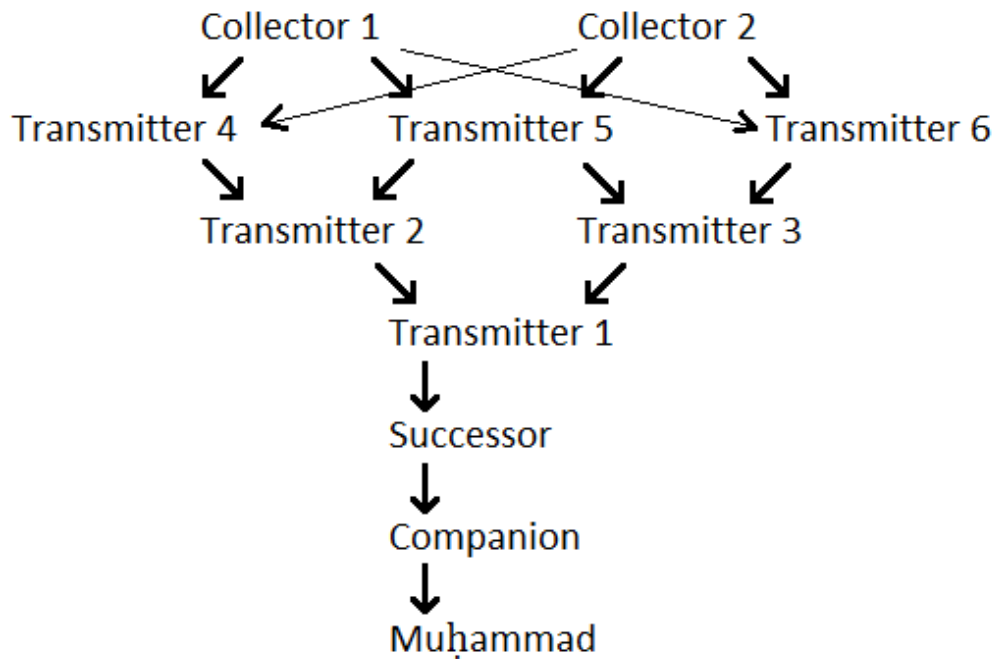


Figure 2 – a bundle consisting of *asānīd*.

Juynboll applies the common link theory to bundles.²⁰⁹ The theory postulates that the transmitter whose name is listed most frequently (ideally in every *isnād* of the bundle, such as transmitter 1 in the illustration above) is the common link between them and most likely the person who originated the *matn* with which the bundle is linked. Juynboll says:

The more strands of one particular bundle come together in one transmitter, either converging in him and/or blossoming forth from him, the more that moment of transmission, which can be seen as a ‘knot’, deserves to be considered historically tenable.²¹⁰

Thus, the common link theory may help us establish who created some of the *matn* that is attributed to Muḥammad or eyewitnesses of his life and early Islam.

²⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, xx–xxi; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 207–210.

²¹⁰ Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, xix. See also Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 206–210.

A weakness of the theory is that it is only applicable to bundles, and only if the bundles are sufficiently coherent, which is often not the case. Juynboll suggests that many *ḥadīṭ* have “numerous” *asānīd* that are so different from one another “that it is absolutely impossible to decide on a common link.”²¹¹

Another scholar, Harald Motzki (1948–2019), thinks “that the dating does not have to stop at the common link, who has so far been considered the limit in dating.”²¹² Motzki does not accept the notion that the common links are generally the fabricators of both the *mutūn* and the names that precede them in the *asānīd*: he finds it unreasonable to think that the common links arbitrarily attributed *mutūn* to the transmitters they list as their sources.²¹³ He has also developed a method called the “*isnād-cum-matn* analysis,” which, according to him, may “prove that a common link did indeed receive a tradition, i.e., the *isnād* and *matn* (not necessarily word for word) from the person whom he names as his informant.”²¹⁴

Motzki explains the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis as follows: its aim is to gather together all the variants of a *ḥadīṭ* and use them “to trace the transmission history” of that *ḥadīṭ*.²¹⁵ Its premises are that variants result to some extent from the act of transmission itself, that each variant’s *isnād* is at least partially truthful, and that a correlation or an affinity between the *mutūn* and the common links among the *asānīd* of all variants indicates that the *ḥadīṭ* in question was transmitted rather than fabricated, whereas the absence of correlation or affinity indicates that the *ḥadīṭ* was transmitted carelessly or tampered with.²¹⁶ The method of the analysis is to (1) gather

²¹¹ Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 214.

²¹² Motzki, Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Anthony, *Analyzing Muslim Traditions*, 211.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 210–211. See also pages 213–214.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

²¹⁵ Harald Motzki, “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq: On the Origin and Reliability of Some Maghāzī-Reports,” in *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, ed. Harald Motzki, vol. 32, *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 174.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

together all usable (some are unusable because they lack *asānīd*) variants of a *ḥadīṭ*, (2) determine the common links among the *asānīd* of the variants and use that to hypothesize about the transmission history of the *ḥadīṭ*, (3) determine how the *mutūn* of the variants relate to one another and are dissimilar in their structure and wording, and use that to once again hypothesize about the transmission history of the *ḥadīṭ*, and (4) compare the analyses of the *asānīd* and the *mutūn*,²¹⁷ presumably to determine how much correlation or affinity there is between them. According to Motzki, it is then possible to draw the following conclusions pertaining to the transmission history of the *ḥadīṭ* in question: when it must have been circulating among the Muslims or proto-Muslims, which of them transmitted it the earliest, and how its *matn* changed and who brought about the changes.²¹⁸

Motzki knows that his *isnād-cum-matn* analysis is laborious and that it yields little information in return.²¹⁹ He also expects that it will bore his peers,²²⁰ but he reasons that if it were applied to all aspects of Muḥammad's life, then it is possible to formulate "a true historical biography,"²²¹ although it "will probably be only a very small one."²²²

Motzki's *isnād-cum-matn* analysis has been adopted by Görke and Schoeler, who use it to argue that the *sīrah* traditions of a particular transmitter, 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr (AD 644–713), are genuine.²²³ They argue that some of the Islamic source material that we now possess, particularly

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 174–175.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

²²² *Ibid.*, 234.

²²³ Görke and Schoeler, "Reconstructing the Earliest *Sīra* Texts," 211–220. See also Andreas Görke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya. A Study of 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr's Account," in *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, ed. Harald Motzki, vol. 32, *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 240–275; Gregor Schoeler, "Foundations for a New Biography of Muḥammad: The Production and Evaluation of the Corpus of Traditions from 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr," in *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts*, ed. Herbert Berg, vol. 49, *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 21–28.

that which is attributed to ‘Urwah, originated in the first century of Islam and that it is possible to obtain from it some genuine information regarding Muḥammad’s life.²²⁴

Raven suggests that some other scholars have begun to adopt “a post-skeptical attitude” towards *sīrah* literature,²²⁵ which seems to mean that they do not have the confidence that it is reliable (as the nineteenth-century orientalists did) but also do not attempt to establish whether it is reliable or not, or which parts are reliable (as Shoemaker, Görke and Schoeler, etc. attempt to do). Raven presents Rubin as an example of such a scholar, who reconstructs Muḥammad’s life merely as it was imagined by early Muslims and says that he has wholly relinquished “the effort to isolate the ‘historical’ from the ‘fictional’ in the early Islamic texts.”²²⁶

It is peculiar that Raven says that Rubin’s attitude is post-skeptical, because it is skeptical in its premise that the sources of Islam may be substantially fictional. Schoeler regards Rubin’s attitude as “a strand of scepticism” instead, which I find more fitting.²²⁷

This summary will suffice as an overview of the scholarly discussions of the historical reliability of *sīrah* literature. I wonder whether scholars such as Görke and Schoeler will restore some confidence in the reliability of *sīrah* literature, or whether it will further diminish because of research such as that of Shoemaker, and whether Rubin’s strand of skepticism will become more mainstream.

²²⁴ Görke and Schoeler, "Reconstructing the Earliest *Sīra* Texts," 220.

²²⁵ Raven, "Sīra and the Qur’ān," 49.

²²⁶ Ibid. See also Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims: A Textual Analysis*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, vol. 5 (New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1995), 3.

²²⁷ Gregor Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 10.

Chapter Four: What Makes a Source Historically Reliable?

Whereas the previous chapter is an overview of what scholars think in respect of the reliability of *sīrah* literature, this chapter explores some of the arguments they put forward in support of what they think. My aim in this chapter is to summarize and scrutinize a number of their arguments, and to infer criteria from them for the question of what makes a source historically reliable. I will first explore some arguments for the conclusion that *sīrah* literature is not reliable for knowledge of Muḥammad's life and early Islam, and I will afterward explore some arguments to the contrary.

I will present my inferred criteria in a context of reliability when the research conveys its claims in the most exact terms (e.g., reliable, reliability, unreliable), but also when it does not. Ideally, I would opt to examine only the research that features these terms, but then I would have to neglect relevant and even pivotal research. Consider, for example, that Goldziher argues that the *'ahādīṭ* are not a source "for the history of the infancy of Islam" because they neither result from nor reflect that time period.²²⁸ Goldziher does not claim explicitly that the *'ahādīṭ* are not reliable as a source for the infancy period of Islam, but it is implied by his discussions of the *'ahādīṭ*. Indeed, Peters even credits Goldziher with producing widespread doubt concerning "the reliability" of every *ḥadīṭ*,²²⁹ and Koren and Nevo credit him with concluding that the *asānīd* of the *'ahādīṭ* "cannot be relied upon to authenticate historical data."²³⁰ When faced with the dilemma of neglecting the relevant research for lacking the most exact terms (but not the concepts), or inferring the criteria in the most exact terms even when they are absent from the research, the latter option seems wiser, so I have opted for it.

²²⁸ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 19.

²²⁹ Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," 302.

²³⁰ Koren and Nevo, "Miscellen: Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies," 96.

Raven lists five arguments for not using *sīrah* literature in endeavors to produce “a historically reliable biography of Muḥammad, or for the historiography of early Islam.”²³¹ His five arguments summarize much of the scholarly research on whether *sīrah* literature is reliable, so they can serve as a baseline for its examination, which is why I mention them. The arguments are as follows: “hardly any *sīra* text can be dated back to the first century of Islam;” “the various versions of a text often show discrepancies, both in chronology and in contents;” “the later the sources are, the more they claim to know about the time of the Prophet;” “non-Islamic sources are often at variance with Islamic sources;” and “most *sīra* fragments can be classed” with a genre.²³² I will be limiting my examination to the research of the first and fourth of these arguments because I am pressed for space in this thesis. I selected these two because I am most acquainted with their research. For both, I will explain what research they relate to, after which I will explore some arguments presented in the research and infer the criteria that are implicit in the arguments.

I mention Raven’s arguments mostly to provide a baseline for my examination of other arguments, but I can infer criteria from his arguments as well. For instance, his first argument reflects the criterion that *a source may not be reliable if it cannot be dated to the time period from which it purports to originate*. I reckon that the reasoning behind this criterion is that a source

²³¹ Raven, “Sīra,” 662.

²³² Ibid. Concerning the fifth argument, Raven explains the various genres on pages 661–662 of *ibid*. As for the second argument, it is peculiar because there is little reason to think that the oldest *sīrah* manuscript is not reliable on the basis that subsequent manuscripts are not reliable (for adding information). I can regard this as a mistake by Raven, or as an oversight in the sense that he forgot to mention that he thinks that the oldest extant manuscript was not the first one and that it may have expanded on a previous manuscript in the same manner that it was expanded on by subsequent manuscripts. I choose the latter option and will soon infer a criterion that takes this choice into account. For a summary of early *sīrah* literature, in which the oldest extant *sīrah* is not considered to have been the first, see M. J. Kister, “The *Sīrah* Literature,” In *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 354–357.

that does not originate from its purported time is too unfamiliar with that time and too tainted by the thinking of its own time.

The criteria of Raven's other four arguments are presented below:

- A source may not be reliable if it features chronological and substantive discrepancies across its manuscripts.
- A source may not be reliable if its oldest extant manuscript may not have been the first one, and if its posterior manuscripts purport to know increasingly more about the same subject matter.²³³
- A source may not be reliable if it conflicts with other sources.
- A source may not be reliable if its structure matches that of a literary genre.

These and all other inferred criteria are summarized at the end of this chapter. As for the above four, I assume that they hinge on the following reasons, respectively: discrepancies among a source's manuscripts show that not all manuscripts represent the actual past, but we may be unable to determine which ones (or how many) because we cannot compare them with the actual past; additional information about a historical period from later manuscripts is suspect because information tends to diminish rather than increase over time, except for fabricated information, and the oldest extant manuscript may have expanded on a previous manuscript that no longer exists; conflicts with other sources suggest that the source in question is less familiar with (or less honest about) the historical period than it alleges; and structural matches with literary genres suggest that the source was not authored primarily to chronicle the past as it happened or was thought to have happened.

²³³ See the previous footnote if it is unclear how this criterion reflects its argument.

I now return to Raven's first argument, which is that "hardly any *sīrah* text can be dated back to the first century of Islam."²³⁴ This relates to research that focuses on early manuscripts of *sīrah* literature (e.g., Fuat Sezgin's *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*), and to research that focuses on its origins and the material from which it mostly derives (e.g., the works of Lammens, Goldziher, Schacht). It appears that the research on early manuscripts has not been translated into English,²³⁵ so I will not address it further, since this study is restricted to English publications. I will focus on the research of Lammens, Goldziher, and Schacht, beginning with that of Lammens.

In one of his studies, Lammens' focus is on "how the life of Muhammad was composed," that is, how *sīrah* literature was composed.²³⁶ I expected it to be more about *sīrah* literature than the *'ahādīṭ*, but Lammens seems to prefer to study both about equally and almost interchangeably, which can lead to confusion because it is not always readily possible to conclude which one he examines at which time. Another confusing habit of his is that he tends to refer to the *'ahādīṭ* with the term *Tradition*, and he also makes use of its plural (*traditions*), which refers to the *'ahādīṭ* as well, but perhaps either or both terms refer occasionally and simultaneously to *sīrah* literature. In my examination, I will translate *Tradition* as *'ahādīṭ* whenever I can conclude that it refers exclusively to the *'ahādīṭ*.

In the previous chapter, I pointed to Lammens' proposition that *sīrah* literature effectively originates from the Qur'ān because it derives mostly from the *'ahādīṭ*, which derive from the Qur'ān.²³⁷ Lammens provides a number of arguments in support of this proposition, of which I will now present several.

²³⁴ Raven, "Sīra," 662.

²³⁵ See *ibid.*, 661.

²³⁶ Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition," 169.

²³⁷ See *ibid.*, 181. See also pages 169–170.

One argument concerns the belief that Muḥammad's soul existed (as a light) before he was born, which is "a favorite dogma" of the *'aḥādīṭ* and believed by *sīrah* literature.²³⁸ Lammens argues that this belief arose because of Platonism and Gnosticism and that the *'aḥādīṭ* and *sīrah* literature mistakenly read it into Qur'ānic passages that refer to the Qur'ān (not to Muḥammad) as a light.²³⁹ The passages also appear to be figurative, but the *'aḥādīṭ* and *sīrah* literature seem to have applied them literally to Muḥammad because they put forward beliefs such as that no shadows were produced in his presence.²⁴⁰ Lammens lists *sīrah* manuscripts that would have us believe that Muḥammad even had a light-based eye somewhere on his back that could see outward through his clothes.²⁴¹ Lammens views this belief as a proper example of "the fertility, the strange logic, and the legendary style of the Tradition," which stubbornly chases after a word it misinterpreted.²⁴² I find it reasonable to assume that beliefs that involve Muḥammad as a literal source of light result from a misreading of some Qur'ānic passages that was inspired by Platonism and Gnosticism, as Lammens thinks, particularly because I doubt that the belief that Muḥammad was a source of light could have thrived during his lifetime, the time in which people could straightforwardly determine whether it is worth believing.²⁴³

Lammens also argues that Muḥammad neither knew nor had the interest to know his age.²⁴⁴ He says that dates were not important until the Arabic

²³⁸ See *ibid.*, 171.

²³⁹ *Ibid.* See also endnote 10 on page 184.

²⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, 171. Examples of *'aḥādīṭ* that regard Muḥammad as a literal source of light are Jami' at-Tirmidhi 159; Sahih Muslim 611c; Sahih Muslim 860b.

²⁴¹ Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition," 171–172; *ibid.*, 184. I take Lammens' references to *sīrah* manuscripts at face value because they are stored in distant places that I cannot access.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁴³ Although it is theoretically possible that Muḥammad's contemporaries determined that he was a literal source of light, I deem it unworthy of consideration because of the problematic nature of the sources of Islam.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*, 188–195.

calendar was formulated, which begins counting from (and was composed sometime after) the *hijrah*,²⁴⁵ when Muḥammad and his earliest followers reportedly migrated from Mecca to Medina. Lammens conveys that *sīrah* literature was put together when dates had become important, and when Muslims had settled on the belief that Muḥammad died somewhere between the ages of sixty and sixty-five, with one *’ahādīṭ* testifying in favor of sixty-three years and another testifying for sixty-five.²⁴⁶ Lammens speculates that the number of years that Muḥammad lived was calculated as follows in *sīrah* literature: It was fairly well known (or sufficiently agreed upon) that Muḥammad spent the last ten or so years of his life in Medina.²⁴⁷ Roughly ten more years were applied symmetrically to the period between when Muḥammad first proclaimed to be a prophet (in Mecca) and when he and his earliest followers migrated to Medina,²⁴⁸ and a piece of poetry by Ṣirmah ’abū Qays, which ascribed “some ten years” to that period of Muḥammad’s life, was used to underpin that amount of time.²⁴⁹ A Qur’ānic passage (Q9:10) was used to calculate the remainder of Muḥammad’s years: the passage can be interpreted to say that Muḥammad grew up and lived in Mecca for an *’umur* length of time before the day he proclaimed to be a prophet.²⁵⁰ A variety of years was ascribed to the term *’umur*, including forty years,²⁵¹ and forty was selected over others because that number had become sacred.²⁵² Another Qur’ānic passage (Q46:15) suggests that forty is the year when people mature in respect of spiritual understanding, which may have stimulated the conclusion that Muḥammad was forty when he

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 172.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ See *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 193.

²⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 193.

²⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 172.

²⁵⁰ See *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 193.

²⁵¹ See *ibid.*, 193; *ibid.*, 195.

²⁵² See *ibid.*, 172.

proclaimed to be a prophet.²⁵³ Lammens points out that all this adds up to a minimum of sixty years, with Şirmah's remark of "some ten years" being vague enough to match "the calculations of the sira" because "it could signify 10, 13, or even 15."²⁵⁴

I struggle to find the above argument convincing, mostly because the idea that Muḥammad was uninterested in the calculation of years is challenged by the Qur'ānic passage that ascribes maturity to people who reach the age of forty. Lammens seems to anticipate this objection because he suggests that the Qur'ān took the concept of forty years from the Bible and uses it only in a vague sense.²⁵⁵ I think that Lammens is correct because he argues convincingly that Muḥammad did not know his age and had no interest to know, but Lammens should have explained more thoroughly how the Qur'ān can speak about the age of forty and yet remain the work of a man who did not know whether he was forty.²⁵⁶

Another argument of Lammens is that the authors of *sīrah* literature are wholly uninformed about Muḥammad's time of youth.²⁵⁷ The one exception is that they are aware that Muḥammad was poor and an orphan,²⁵⁸ which they could have derived from Qur'ānic passages (Q93:6; 93:8) that imply both.²⁵⁹ Lammens suggests that "the traditionalists" only knew what the passages imply and that every hardship that Muḥammad faces as a poor orphan in *sīrah* literature was imagined upon the passages.²⁶⁰

Lammens proposes that the Qur'ān is also the basis of "the Tradition's animosity" towards Abū Lahab,²⁶¹ and of the idea that the Arabs

²⁵³ See *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 193.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁵⁶ For additional information concerning the number forty, see Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 257.

²⁵⁷ Lammens, "The Koran and Tradition," 173.

²⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 181.

²⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 173.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

customarily buried alive their infant daughters (before the time of Islam, which is intended to elevate Islam above pre-Islam).²⁶² Lammens mentions that the Qur'ān affirms that the people of Mecca resisted Muḥammad, and he says that “the Tradition” interprets that as persecution and that it renders that period into “the age of the Muslim catacombs,” with Abū Lahab being “the typical persecutor, the soul [center] of all the conspiracies against burgeoning Islam,” because he is one “of only two men” whose names are mentioned all through the Qur'ān (Q111:1–3 indicates that Abū Lahab opposed Muḥammad).²⁶³ As for the burying of daughters, Lammens voices his doubts about whether this was as general as is suggested and whether fathers were so brutal that they buried their daughters alive.²⁶⁴ Lammens suspects “once again that the Tradition has interpreted literally the question about the father who has been told of the birth of a daughter, taken from the Koran [Qur'ān]: ‘Is he going to let her live, or bury her underground?’ [Q16:58–59].”²⁶⁵

Lammens’ arguments signify that the authors of the *’aḥādīṭ* and *sīrah* literature “were not (or refused to be) better informed than us,”²⁶⁶ since they apparently depended on the Qur'ān for knowledge of the same time period that we try to uncover. Lammens argues that the *’aḥādīṭ* and *sīrah* literature are not sources for Muḥammad’s life and early Islam because every part of them may depend on the Qur'ān, so we can infer the following criterion: *a source is not reliable if it depends entirely on another source*. This is the criterion that Lammens puts forward in his arguments. I shall now explore and assess Goldziher’s research and infer its criteria.

²⁶² Ibid., 174.

²⁶³ Ibid., 173.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 174.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 182.

According to Goldziher, the *ʾaḥādīṭ* contain “evidence for the evolution of Islam during the years when it was forming itself into an organized whole from powerful mutually opposed forces [e.g., the Umayyads, the ʿAlids, the ʿAbbāsids].”²⁶⁷ The first discernible example that he provides in support of this thesis is that the founder of the Umayyad regime, Muʿāwiyah I (r. AD 661–680), instructed a governor to “not tire” in his efforts to abuse and insult ʿAlī, and to defame and remove ʿAlī’s companions and “[omit] to listen to them (i.e. to what they tell and propagate as ḥadīths).”²⁶⁸ The governor was also instructed, in contrast, to draw ʿUthmān’s clan near to him, and to praise and listen to them.²⁶⁹ Goldziher considers this “an official encouragement to foster the rise and spread of ḥadīths directed against ʿAlī and to hold back and suppress ḥadīths favouring ʿAlī.”²⁷⁰ ʿUthmān and ʿAlī reportedly succeeded Muḥammad in leading the Islamic community, with the former’s reign spanning from AD 644 to 656, and the latter’s from 656 to 661.²⁷¹ ʿUthmān “was born into the ... Umayyad clan,”²⁷² whereas ʿAlī was a “cousin and son-in-law” of Muḥammad.²⁷³ They both died by assassination.²⁷⁴ Muʿāwiyah I was a relative of ʿUthmān who opposed ʿAlī for neglecting to punish ʿUthmān’s murderers, and he established the Umayyad regime after ʿAlī was assassinated,²⁷⁵ which led to a schism between the majority of Muslims and those who are now known as ʿAlids, regarding whether

²⁶⁷ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 19.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Rashidun," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rashidun>.

²⁷² Asma Afsaruddin, "Uthmān ibn ʿAffān," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Uthman-ibn-Affan>.

²⁷³ Asma Afsaruddin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "ʿAlī," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ali-Muslim-caliph>.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Donald P. Little, "Muʿāwiyah I," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Muawiyah-I>. See also Afsaruddin and Nasr, "ʿAlī."

someone other than a descendant of ‘Alī is eligible to lead the Islamic community.²⁷⁶ Given this milieu, I wonder whether the Umayyads and the ‘Alids competed for the right to lead the Islamic community and, perhaps, fabricated *’ahādīt* to that end, as Goldziher implies.

Goldziher also implies that the Umayyads created *’ahādīt* to validate religious rituals in their territory when rivals controlled the territories where the rituals were traditionally performed. For example, when the Umayyad ruler ‘Abd al-Malik (r. AD 685–705) decreed that it is also valid to perform “the obligatory circumambulation (*tawāf*)” at the *Qubbat al-Ṣakrah* (Dome of the Rock) in Jerusalem, as opposed to exclusively at the Ka‘bah in Mecca, he wanted to prevent Syrians from venturing on pilgrimages to Mecca because he feared that they would be forced to publicly honor ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (r. AD 683–692), who controlled that territory.²⁷⁷ A man named al-Zuhrī (AD 678–742) is a recurring authority in the *asānīd* of the *’ahādīt*,²⁷⁸ and Goldziher conveys that al-Zuhrī was tasked with validating the reform that ‘Abd al-Malik introduced, which he did “by making up and spreading a saying [*ḥadīṭ*] traced back to the Prophet, according to which there are three mosques to which people may make pilgrimages: those in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem.”²⁷⁹

I agree with Goldziher’s conclusion above because I find it suspicious that a *ḥadīṭ* that purports to originate from Muḥammad is beneficial to an Umayyad who reigned more than half a century after Muḥammad is

²⁷⁶ Narges Erami, "Islam, Shia and Sunni," Encyclopedia.Com, 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/islam-shia-and-sunni>.

²⁷⁷ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 44.

²⁷⁸ E.g., Jami` at-Tirmidhi 1009; Sahih Muslim 2388c; Sunan Abi Dawud 827; Sunan Abi Dawud 1476; Sunan Ibn Majah 660; Sahih al-Bukhari 5527; Sahih Muslim 1709b. See also Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 13; Raven, "Sīra," 660; Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*. Shoemaker refers to al-Zuhrī as "Ibn Ishāq’s teacher," Raven refers to al-Zuhrī as "a central figure in the transmission" of *’ahādīt*, and Ibn Ishāq wrote down information that he reportedly received directly from al-Zuhrī (pages 225 and 682 are examples).

²⁷⁹ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 44–45. See also Sahih Muslim 1397b.

commonly estimated to have died. Goldziher's implication that 'Abd al-Malik and al-Zuhrī were closely acquainted and that the latter fabricated the *ḥadīth* in question is also fairly convincing because I know of several other *'aḥādīth* that suggest this acquaintance. For example, al-Zuhrī says (or is portrayed as saying) in one *ḥadīth* that he dined with 'Abd al-Malik or the latter's son al-Walīd (he cannot remember which one), and another *ḥadīth* suggests that he once had a private conversation with al-Walīd.²⁸⁰ I will focus on al-Zuhrī again later, as he relates to a different criterion than the one I currently intend to illuminate.

Goldziher mentions that many *'aḥādīth* "have the purpose of demonstrating the special dignity of the Jerusalem sanctuary, which was brought to the fore during the Umayyad period."²⁸¹ He also says in a general sense that all *'aḥādīth* that address "the question of whether Syria [Umayyad territory] or Medina [which was in rival territory] had preference and answering it in favour of Syria are probably due to Umayyad influence."²⁸² In my opinion, it is particularly telling that the Umayyads referred to Medina as "the dirty one" and that one of their governors called it "the evil-smelling one, in contrast to the epithet ... the sweet-smelling one," which was given to Medina by "pious Muslims."²⁸³ Furthermore, "it was possible at the same time to hear widely spread popular songs in the streets of Medina which glorified this town at the expense of its rival, Damascus [the Umayyad capital], so that ... al-Walīd II [an Umayyad who reigned between AD 743 and 744] declared that he would have to abstain from the *ḥajj* [pilgrimage] since ... he had always to listen to such songs."²⁸⁴ I think

²⁸⁰ See Sunan Ibn Majah 490; Sahih al-Bukhari 4142. See also Sunan Abi Dawud 3254; Sunan an-Nasa'i 3755. For additional information regarding al-Zuhrī's connections with the Umayyads, see Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 47–49.

²⁸¹ Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 45.

²⁸² Ibid., 45–46.

²⁸³ Ibid., 46.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

that it is reasonable to assume that this rivalry existed and that at least some *ʿaḥādīṭ* that purport to trace back to Muḥammad stem from this time period instead.

Under the rule of the Umayyads also arose the issue of whether the ruler should sit down or stand up while performing the *kuṭbah* (a ritual of public preaching), which was performed twice a week. Goldziher shows that the first Umayyads reshaped this ritual to their liking.²⁸⁵ One alteration was that they could sit down while delivering one *kuṭbah* and remain standing for the other, for “prestige reasons,”²⁸⁶ but perhaps they also found it tiresome to remain standing. Some *ʿaḥādīṭ* were fabricated to support this alteration, which argue that ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī also sat down during one *kuṭbah*.²⁸⁷ Goldziher adds that the Umayyads even cited Muḥammad in support (that is, they fabricated a *ḥadīṭ* and linked it directly to Muḥammad), whereas their opponents fabricated a *ḥadīṭ* in which a companion of Muḥammad claims that anyone who says that Muḥammad sat down during a *kuṭbah* “is a liar.”²⁸⁸

Regarding the issue above, I think that it is evident that the Umayyads and/or their opponents were fabricating *ʿaḥādīṭ*. If we speculate instead that the *ʿaḥādīṭ* in question are genuine, then we must ask questions such as why some eyewitnesses thought that Muḥammad performed the *kuṭbah* seated while other eyewitnesses disagreed. The most straightforward conclusion is, in my opinion, that some to all *ʿaḥādīṭ* about this issue are the fabrications of opposing individuals or groups from the Umayyad time period, who falsely attributed them to Muḥammad and eyewitnesses.

There are also *ʿaḥādīṭ* that would have proven so convenient to certain people from a later time that one is prone to wonder if the *ʿaḥādīṭ* in question

²⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 50.

²⁸⁶ See *ibid.*, 51.

²⁸⁷ See *ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

are only ostensibly earlier and actually originated from that time. An example is a *ḥadīṭ* that appears to elevate the status of an Umayyad politician named Kālīd al-Qasrī, which it does by establishing a highly positive relationship between his tribe and Muḥammad.²⁸⁹ I summarize the *ḥadīṭ* as follows: a man of the tribe of *Taqaf* (which was linked to the ‘Alids) once asked Muḥammad in the presence of an assumed ancestor of Kālīd’s tribe whether a particular mountain belonged to the tribe of the former or the latter, and Muḥammad not only answered in favor of Kālīd’s ancestor but also prayed for Islam and its god to be victorious through that ancestor’s offspring, that is, people such as Kālīd.²⁹⁰ According to Goldziher, Kālīd “was abhorred by all true believers [in Islam or proto-Islam],”²⁹¹ for stories such as “his siding against the ‘Alids,” and “such stories had to disappear.”²⁹² Goldziher presents several other *‘aḥādīṭ* that arguably have a similar purpose.²⁹³

A criterion can be inferred from the previous paragraphs, namely that *a source may not be reliable if it appears to settle a disagreement that arose after its purported time of origin*. Goldziher illustrates that the Umayyads, ‘Alids, etc. were aided in their politics by certain *‘aḥādīṭ*, the rise and spread of which they appear to have fostered themselves, as that would explain why such *‘aḥādīṭ* exist, and from which I infer the above criterion.²⁹⁴

Returning to al-Zuhrī, there is substantial evidence that he aided the Umayyads in spreading some *‘aḥādīṭ* that they fabricated. Goldziher cites an account that reportedly goes back to ‘Abd al-Razzāq (AD 744–827), a

²⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, 53.

²⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 53–54.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁹³ See pages 123–125, 142–143, and 184 of *Ibid.* The examples on pages 124–125 and 184 feature mutually exclusive statements attributed to Muḥammad.

²⁹⁴ See Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” 299. Peters says that many *‘aḥādīṭ* “report remarks by Muhammad on personalities, parties, and religious and legal issues that could only have arisen as subjects of community concern after his death, and in some instances, long after his death.”

student of Ma‘mar ibn Rāšid (AD 714–770), who, in turn, was a student of al-Zuhrī. According to the account, an Umayyad ruler had fabricated a number of *‘aḥādīṭ* and asked al-Zuhrī if he could spread them as if al-Zuhrī had passed them on to him, and al-Zuhrī gave him permission with the following rhetorical question: “Who else could have told you the ḥadīths?”²⁹⁵ Goldziher adds that Ma‘mar ibn Rāšid also “preserved a characteristic saying by al-Zuhrī: ‘these emirs [rulers] forced people to write ḥadīths,’” which, according to Goldziher, “can only be understood on the assumption of al-Zuhrī’s willingness to lend his name, which was in general esteemed by the Muslim community, to the government’s wishes.”²⁹⁶ Apparently, al-Zuhrī allowed his name to occur in the *asānīd* of fabricated *‘aḥādīṭ*.

Goldziher also mentions that it is explicitly said that the renowned military commander al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra (ca. AD 632–702) had a concern for fabricating *‘aḥādīṭ* that would incentivize his army to fight against dissenters.²⁹⁷ Sources with information such as this and that involving al-Zuhrī indicate that the *‘aḥādīṭ* consist of fabrications (that is, information that does not go back to Muḥammad), and Goldziher uses the sources to argue for that conclusion, so I infer the following criterion: *a source may not be reliable if sources indicate that it consists of fabrications.*²⁹⁸

Moving on to Schacht, he considers it safe to assume that *‘aḥādīṭ* about legal issues would have been cited for support in relevant discussions once they had been “put into circulation.”²⁹⁹ In other words, we can assume that

²⁹⁵ See Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," 47.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 52.

²⁹⁸ It may seem odd that this criterion speaks of *sources* rather than *other sources*. The reason is that Goldziher not only takes his information from documents (e.g., historical and biographical works) from the first centuries of the Islamic past, but also from the *‘aḥādīṭ* themselves. I cannot refer solely to other sources because the *‘aḥādīṭ* indicate that other *‘aḥādīṭ* are fabrications and are thus a source against themselves.

²⁹⁹ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 140–141.

Muslims or proto-Muslims would have cited the *'aḥādīṭ* that benefitted their arguments (with one another) as soon as the *'aḥādīṭ* had spread. Conversely, Schacht reasons that “the best way of proving that a tradition [*ḥadīṭ*] did not exist at a certain time is to show that it was not used as a legal argument in a discussion which would have made reference to it imperative, if it had existed.”³⁰⁰ Both these ideas seem valid, primarily because Schacht shows through examples that Muslims reasoned in accordance with them. For example, when the jurist al-Shaybānī (ca. AD 749–805) had made his point in a discussion, he claimed to be correct unless his opponents could produce a *ḥadīṭ* in support of what they said, and he asserted that they could not do so because they would have done so already if they had one.³⁰¹

Initially, I hesitated to consider the validity of Schacht’s suggestion that the absence of citations of a *ḥadīṭ* in relevant discussions before a particular time is proof that it did not exist before then. My main reason was that it could have been unknown to the participants of the discussion, as opposed to it not yet existing. Schacht is aware of this concern and mentions a discussion in which one participant knows a *ḥadīṭ* that another does not, but he nevertheless dates the *ḥadīṭ* of that discussion to around that time, seemingly because its lack of circulation is likewise proof that it originated around that time,³⁰² and I consider this wise.

Schacht points to the peculiarity that “no trace” exists of *'aḥādīṭ* in “the dogmatic treatise of Ḥasan Baṣrī,” which was composed “in the later part of the first century A.H. [between AD 671 and 719].”³⁰³ Schacht adds that Baṣrī also “states explicitly” that all opinions that have no basis in the Qur’ān are incorrect.³⁰⁴ Baṣrī’s statement suggests that while Muslims already held

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 140.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid., 142.

³⁰³ Ibid., 141.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

different opinions regarding certain issues, there were not yet *ʾaḥādīṭ* to quote in support of their varying opinions. I wonder whether Baṣrī was, in fact, aware of some *ʾaḥādīṭ* and intended for his statement to apply to them as well, but that raises questions such as why his treatise shows no traces of their existence, so I am inclined to think that the *ʾaḥādīṭ* did not exist at the time.

We can infer a new criterion from Schacht's argumentation, which is that *a source may not be reliable if it purports to be anterior to sources that are expected to cite it but do not do so*. This can be inferred because, to Schacht, the absence of the legal *ʾaḥādīṭ* in sources where he expects to find them is evidence that they did not exist when those sources were composed.

Schacht also dates a sizeable number of *ʾaḥādīṭ* on the basis of their absence and seemingly evolving nature across several sources.³⁰⁵ For example, he refers to a *ḥadīṭ* that was unknown to the jurist Ibrāhīm Naḳāʿī (ca. AD 670–717) in al-Shaybānī's *Kitāb al-Āthār*, but which was known to the jurist Abū Ḥanīfah (ca. AD 699–767) in Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-Āthār*, although without an *isnād*, and which has a full *isnād* in al-Shaybānī's *Muwatta* and Mālik ibn Anas' (AD 711–795) work of the same name.³⁰⁶ Put simply, the *ḥadīṭ* was unknown to one man who is mentioned in one source, known without an *isnād* to another man who is mentioned in a subsequent source, and known in later sources with an *isnād* that traces back to Muḥammad—additional information was added to the *ḥadīṭ* over time. Schacht estimates that the *ḥadīṭ* in question originated in the time period between Ibrāhīm Naḳāʿī and Abū Ḥanīfah, seemingly because the former did not know it whereas the latter did.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 141–151.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Another one of Schacht's examples concerns an opinion of the jurist 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāh (ca. 646–733), which Abū Yūsuf (AD 738–798) allegedly obtained from 'Aṭā' through Ḥajjāj ibn Arṭāt. Schacht suspects that the opinion actually originated from Ḥajjāj instead of the earlier 'Aṭā',³⁰⁸ presumably because it would appear anachronistic if it originated from 'Aṭā' instead (its anticipation of then-upcoming disagreements is best explained as an after-the-fact attribution to 'Aṭā' by Ḥajjāj, as opposed to incredible foresight on the part of 'Aṭā').³⁰⁹ At the time of Shāfi'ī (AD 767–820), the opinion in question was expressed in the form of a *ḥadīth* attributed to Muḥammad.³¹⁰ So, the opinion of someone who lived after Muḥammad was eventually attributed to Muḥammad in the form of a *ḥadīth*, and Schacht estimates that it was turned into a *ḥadīth* sometime between the lifetimes of 'Aṭā' and Shāfi'ī.³¹¹

A criterion is inferable from Schacht's argumentation above. Schacht traces the development of a number of '*aḥādīth*' across specific sources and concludes that the '*aḥādīth*' go back to the time of those sources instead of that of Muḥammad, so I infer that *a source may not be reliable if it purports to be anterior to sources that indicate that it originated and developed during their time instead.*

I shall now focus on the research that relates to Raven's argument that "non-Islamic sources are often at variance with Islamic sources."³¹² Raven presents Crone and Cook's *Hagarism* in support of this argument,³¹³ so I will examine that source. I will also examine some related research of Shoemaker, and some of Koren and Nevo.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 142.

³⁰⁹ See *ibid.*, 250.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 142.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Raven, "Sīra," 662.

³¹³ Ibid.

Crone and Cook aim to reconstruct the early Islamic past mostly from sources other than those of Islam,³¹⁴ particularly the writings of Jews and Christians. Their sources tend to conflict with the Islamic sources regarding Muḥammad's life and identity and the nature of early Islam, hence Raven's argument and reference to their research.

Crone and Cook begin by examining the *Doctrina Iacobi*, a source that a Christian seems to have composed sometime between AD 634 and 640,³¹⁵ which is between two and eight years after Muḥammad is traditionally thought to have died. An interesting aspect of this source is that it suggests that Muḥammad was still alive at the time of its composition: it speaks of some Saracen who was claiming to be a prophet, which Crone and Cook interpret to be about Muḥammad.³¹⁶ Several independent sources support this interpretation.³¹⁷

According to Shoemaker, the Saracen mentioned in the *Doctrina Iacobi* is definitely Muḥammad.³¹⁸ He thinks that this source is credible because it is unusually knowledgeable of its subject matter and appears to give a genuine account of its own origins.³¹⁹ An example of its knowledgeability is that it is familiar with the geography about which it speaks, as opposed to feigning familiarity, and another example is that it accurately represents what it critiques, whereas sources generally strawman what they critique, according to Shoemaker.³²⁰ He also notes that "the *Doctrina Iacobi* has repeatedly shown itself to be a reliable" and argues that the notion that

³¹⁴ See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3ff. See also Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 2.

³¹⁵ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3. See also endnote 3 on page 152 of *ibid.*; Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 114; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 20.

³¹⁶ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4. See also Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*. On page 114, Koren and Nevo say that it is accepted by "most scholars ... as a reference to Muḥammad," whereas they themselves dispute that identification on pages 208–210.

³¹⁷ See pages 4 and 152–153 (endnote 7) of Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*.

³¹⁸ See Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 22.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

Muḥammad was alive after AD 634 and leading the Arab invasion in the direction of the Promised Land should receive “the benefit of the doubt.”³²¹

Two criteria can be inferred from the reasons Shoemaker provides for his conviction that the *Doctrina Iacobi* is reliable. One criterion is that *a source may be reliable if it accurately represents the geography that it describes*. The other criterion is that *a source may be reliable if it accurately represents what it critiques*. Shoemaker apparently considers these valid reasons for relying on the *Doctrina Iacobi* for knowledge of Muḥammad’s life and early Islam, particularly if the alternative is to rely on the sources of Islam.³²² These two criteria are not unfailing, but Shoemaker seems to reason that a source that is knowledgeable and accurate in relation to some information may be the same in relation to what interests us, namely what it says about Muḥammad and early Islam.

Regarding whether we should assume that Muḥammad was still alive in AD 634 and leading the Arab invasion, Shoemaker argues that this partially depends on whether other sources corroborate what the *Doctrina Iacobi* indicates, and he asserts that they do.³²³ In other words, he argues that we should assume that Muḥammad was still alive and leading the Arabs because the *Doctrina Iacobi* is not the only source in favor of this conclusion. He examines ten more independent sources that supposedly indicate the same, of which I will present the following one (as another example): the *Khuzistan Chronicle*, which is dated to ca. AD 660.³²⁴ This chronicle is thought to have been composed in Khuzistan (Iran) and details some “assaults against both Persia and the Byzantines in Syro-Palestine” by Ishmaelites who were led by someone named Muḥammad.³²⁵ It mentions the men who

³²¹ Ibid., 23.

³²² Ibid., 2.

³²³ Ibid., 23.

³²⁴ Ibid., 33.

³²⁵ See *ibid.*, 34–35.

led the Persian and Byzantine armies at the time, and Shoemaker argues that Muḥammad is mentioned in the same context, that is, the context that he led the Ishmaelites at the time.³²⁶

We can infer a criterion from Shoemaker's idea that information in a source is more worthy of consideration if it is corroborated by independent sources. I formulate it as follows: *a source may be reliable in the parts that are corroborated by independent sources.*

Moving on, Shoemaker conveys that the Khuzistan Chronicle's information about Muḥammad may be reliable because (1) it could have originated from eyewitnesses, (2) it does not have a polemical purpose, and (3) it is non-essential to the chronicle's grand narrative.³²⁷ These three reasons can be converted into criteria as well. The first reason reflects the criterion that *a source may be reliable in the parts that originated from eyewitnesses.* The second reason reflects the criterion that *a source may be reliable in the parts that are not polemical.* In other words, every piece or segment of a source that does not address a controversy may be reliable. As for the third reason, it reflects the criterion that *a source may be reliable in the parts that are not essential to its main narrative.* So, every bit of information that can be taken out of a source without it affecting the main narrative may be reliable. Shoemaker seems to reason that sources likely do not misrepresent what they do not polemicize or use to strengthen their main narrative.

The proposition that Muḥammad lived at least two years beyond his traditionally set year of death is hardly convincing, because the sources are inconclusive. Drury says that they are "terribly obtuse and extremely obscure," and he implies that Shoemaker's interpretations are "hopelessly

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., 35–36.

speculative.”³²⁸ Relatedly, Neuenkirchen says that half of the sources do not explicitly mention that Muḥammad partook in the invasion and that the earliest four “are extremely laconic and obscure.”³²⁹ The proposition is, in my opinion, also undermined by the possibility that Muḥammad presented himself as a herald of the end of the world: if his early followers thought that the world would end within his lifetime, which Shoemaker even presumes,³³⁰ then they would have had a reason to deny his untimely death, perhaps until their planned conquest commenced two years later. There is evidence that Muḥammad’s death was not anticipated, such as the report that one of his closest companions and successors, ‘Umar ibn al ḵattāb (r. AD 634–644), initially could not accept his death and assumed that he would return (or resurrect) in the near future.³³¹ The notion that his death was not anticipated also helps explain why, when he died, his followers seem to have apostatized to the extent that his remaining followers had to engage them in veritable wars: the *Wars of Apostasy*.³³² It may be more plausible that news of Muḥammad’s untimely death was delayed than that he was alive and leading the Arabs in AD 634.

I now turn to Koren and Nevo, who tend to use archaeological evidence together with written sources. One of their main arguments is that Mu‘āwiyah I (rather than Muḥammad or one of the *Rāšidūn*) was the first man to rule over all Arabs. For this argument, they point to two seventh-century writers: John bar Penkaye and Sebeos. The former says that Mu‘āwiyah I came to power and brought about unprecedented peace, and the latter says that Mu‘āwiyah I overpowered and united all Ishmaelites,

³²⁸ Drury, “The Death of a Prophet,” 133.

³²⁹ Neuenkirchen, “The Death of a Prophet,” 317–318.

³³⁰ Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 14.

³³¹ See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 682–683; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 91.

³³² T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Riddah,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/riddah>.

whereas previously they had been infighting.³³³ Additionally, Koren and Nevo argue that the inhabitants of the Arab-controlled territories did not think that there was an Arab empire or kingdom before the rule of Mu‘āwiyah I,³³⁴ and another peculiarity is that early sources do not mention any “caliph’s [ruler’s] name before Mu‘āwiyah.”³³⁵ Indeed, written sources, coins, and inscriptions feature the name Mu‘āwiyah, who “is the first historical Arab ruler to be fully archaeologically and epigraphically attested,” but a “silence” pertaining to previous leaders or rulers suggests “that until Mu‘āwiyah there was nobody to mention.”³³⁶

Sīrah literature and the *’aḥādīṭ* place Muḥammad at the forefront of early Islam, but Arab coins do not exclude the possibility that he himself was a later addition. Koren and Nevo say that the earliest coins are devoid of “Mohammedan religious texts,” that is, they feature no texts (and, assumably, also no depictions) that can be linked to Muḥammad.³³⁷ Koren and Nevo mention that “‘Mohammedan’ is not a synonym for ‘Muslim’ but denotes a particular set of religious formulae and the corresponding stage in religious development towards Islam,” which I interpret as follows: Muḥammadanism is a proto-Islam of a particular time period, or a particular phase in proto-Islam’s maturation towards Islam.³³⁸ Koren and Nevo argue that all of the first Muḥammadan coins originated during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. AD 685–705).³³⁹ The absence of references to Muḥammad on earlier coins indicates, at least to me, that he was less important in the beginning, or that he was added afterward. Koren and

³³³ Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 131–132.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

³³⁶ See *ibid.*, 154.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

³³⁸ *Ibid.* See footnote five.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

Nevo seem to think the latter because they argue that ‘Abd al-Malik practically invented Muḥammad.³⁴⁰

Koren and Nevo scarcely explain what constitutes a Muḥammadan text. The *šahādah* is the only example they provide, which features the declaration that Muḥammad is the messenger of a god named Allāh.³⁴¹ Nowadays, the *šahādah* is commonly viewed as the Islamic declaration of faith. Koren and Nevo could have added more examples, or they could have explained that the *šahādah* is the only known example (if that is the case). Additionally, their argumentation would have benefitted from an inquiry into the maturation process of the *šahādah*, especially since they mention only its mature version and thereby give the impression that it has remained the same from its inception, which somewhat challenges their hypotheses. Stuart Sears and Jere Bacharach have published articles pertaining to the growth of the *šahādah* (and its variations) on coins, and they show that Muḥammad does not appear in a *šahādah* before AD 685.³⁴² Sears also implies that “Muḥammad and his messengership are often not integral elements” in the early versions of the *šahādah* that do mention him,³⁴³ which raises the question of whether he and his function were non-essential at the time. Koren and Nevo could have capitalized on this.

A new criterion can be inferred from Koren and Nevo’s research. They argue that archaeological evidence and the sources of Islam (e.g., *sīrah* literature) are at odds with one another regarding how Islam originated, so the criterion is as follows: *a written source may not be reliable if it conflicts with archaeological evidence.*

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 171; *ibid.*, 245–248; *ibid.*, 254–256; *ibid.*, 280–282; *ibid.*, 284; *ibid.*, 299.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁴² Stuart D. Sears, "Before Caliphal Coins: Transitional Drahms of the Umayyad North," *American Journal Of Numismatics* (1989-) 15 (2003): 81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43580369>; Jere L. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty: The ‘Shahāda,’ Qur’anic Verses, and the Coinage of ‘Abd al-Malik," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25769690>.

³⁴³ Sears, "Before Caliphal Coins," 82.

I shall now examine some of Juynboll's and Motzki's research. They both argue for the reliability of certain aspects of the sources of Islam. They advance methods (the common link theory and the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis) that remain constant across their examples, and I have to consider the word limit of this thesis, so I will be limiting my examination to their best examples instead of a repetition of examples, beginning with what I deem Juynboll's best example.

Görke and Schoeler's research is also prominent, but they use the same method as Motzki (the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis) and an examination of their research alongside that of Motzki seems to yield the same criterion, so I will be limiting my examination to Motzki's research.³⁴⁴ I also concluded that Motzki's argumentation is more insightful: Görke and Schoeler copy and paste too much source material into their paper and provide relatively few arguments in favor of their position, whereas Motzki delves deep into the source material and thoroughly explains the method of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis. I shall now focus on Juynboll's research, and then on that of Motzki.

Juynboll's aim is to prove that the common link theory can indicate which transmitter mentioned in the *asānīd* of a *ḥadīth* is the originator of the *matn* of the same *ḥadīth*. He attempts to prove this through a *ḥadīth* that seems to have an unusually rich transmission history—he found it in the works of al-Ḳaṭīb (1002–1071) and Ibn al-Jawzī (1116–1201).³⁴⁵ The *ḥadīth* has many *asānīd* that list a transmitter named Sufyān al-Ṭawri (d. AD 776), so Juynboll considers Sufyān its common link and, therefore, the originator of its *matn*.³⁴⁶ Its *matn* also reveals relatively clearly where and when it originated (it purports to be a prophecy about the future of the city of Baġdād, which

³⁴⁴ See Görke and Schoeler, "Reconstructing the Earliest *Sīra* Texts," 211–212.

³⁴⁵ Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 207–208.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

is better explained as a later fabrication by someone from the area whose present was that ostensible future).³⁴⁷ Moreover, sources such as Sufyān’s biography indicate that he was a popular transmitter at the time and that he had a motive for fabricating a *ḥadīṭ* about Baġdād.³⁴⁸ Lastly, al-Ḳaṭīb and Ibn al-Jawzī provide commentaries on the *asānīd* of the *ḥadīṭ* in question, which hint that Sufyān fabricated its *matn* and contain some “transparently unsuccessful endeavours to obfuscate this fact.”³⁴⁹ I think that the common link theory is fairly convincing on its own, with reference to the hypothesis that Sufyān fabricated the *ḥadīṭ* about Baġdād, and the additional information about the *ḥadīṭ* solidifies the hypothesis and thereby displays the validity of the theory.

Juynboll elevates the common link above other transmitters because the *isnād* strands in a bundle most often diverge from and converge in the common link, hence the term, and he argues that the common link becomes more “historically tenable” whenever a strand diverges from it or converges in it, so he argues that its historical tenability increases with each iteration.³⁵⁰ Given this manner of reasoning, I infer the criterion that *a source may be reliable if other sources branch off from and/or converge in it.*

I now move on to Motzki, the last scholar whose research I examine in this thesis. He challenges the notion that *matn* and lists of transmitters are generally the fabrications of the common links.³⁵¹ His aim is to prove through the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis that a transmitter who precedes a common link in an *isnād* did pass on the accompanying *matn* and a list of previous transmitters to the common link.³⁵² Thus, he attempts to move beyond the terminus of the common link and aims to establish that a

³⁴⁷ See *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 207.

³⁴⁹ See *ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, xix.

³⁵¹ Motzki, Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Anthony, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 210–211.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 211.

preceding transmitter can be reliable. His example involves the variants of a *ḥadīṭ* about the assassination of a Jewish contemporary of Muḥammad, whose name was Ibn ʿAbī al-Ḥuqayq.³⁵³

Motzki begins by analyzing the *asānīd* of the variants of the *ḥadīṭ* about Ibn ʿAbī al-Ḥuqayq’s assassination that he has gathered together.³⁵⁴ He identifies three bundles of *asānīd* (and one single strand), which he seems to keep apart rather than merge because each has a different common link.³⁵⁵ He determines that a man named Abū Ishāq al-Sabīʿī (d. ca. AD 744) is the common link of one bundle and that al-Zuhrī (d. AD 742) is the common link of another, and he speculates that ʿAbd Allāh b. Unays (d. 674) is the common link of the last bundle.³⁵⁶ He is reticent about whether ʿAbd Allāh is the common link of the last bundle, seemingly because it consists of fewer *asānīd* than the other two.³⁵⁷ He suggests that the identification of the common links is “a first step towards dating” a *ḥadīṭ*.³⁵⁸

After analyzing the *asānīd*, Motzki begins his analysis of the *matn*. He reasons that a better date can be ascertained when the *matn* is thoroughly analyzed, and when that analysis is merged with that of the *asānīd*.³⁵⁹ He implies that “recent studies” have found common details among the *mutūn* of *asānīd* bundles, based on which he seems to argue that not all *asānīd* were arbitrarily fabricated by their common links and that some aspects of the *mutūn* derive from the transmitter(s) who precede the common links.³⁶⁰ Indeed, he asserts that some aspects of the *ḥadīṭ* in question “are older than the common link” and endeavors to show this through a comparison of the

³⁵³ Ibid., 212.

³⁵⁴ Motzki, “The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq,” 175.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 230.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 176–177; *ibid.*, 179; *ibid.*, 181; *ibid.*, 230.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 180; *ibid.*, 230.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 181.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 182.

mutūn of the three *asānīd* bundles.³⁶¹ He argues that the *mutūn* of Abū Ishāq’s and al-Zuhrī’s bundles are independent of one another, so one did not copy the other, and that they have details in common, so they must have consulted a common source,³⁶² which indicates that neither Abū Ishāq nor al-Zuhrī fabricated the *ḥadīṭ* about Ibn ‘Abī al-Ḥuqayq’s assassination.

Motzki also concludes that al-Zuhrī’s and ‘Abd Allāh’s bundles are independent of one another.³⁶³ Moreover, both bundles list a son of a companion of Muḥammad as a transmitter,³⁶⁴ so Motzki asserts that al-Zuhrī may have obtained the *ḥadīṭ* about Ibn ‘Abī al-Ḥuqayq’s assassination from a son of a companion of Muḥammad.³⁶⁵ Motzki also claims that Abū Ishāq and al-Zuhrī “certainly received their stories during the last third of the ... seventh century.”³⁶⁶

Motzki reasons that a common link’s claim to have received a *ḥadīṭ* from a predecessor is truthful if the *mutūn* of the *ḥadīṭ* is relatively constant across *asānīd* bundles that arose independently of one another, so I infer that *a source may be reliable if its information is relatively constant across it and independent sources that feature the same information.*

The Criteria

The two lists below feature all the criteria I have inferred from the amount of research that I managed to examine. The scholars whom I have examined arguably use the criteria to determine whether *sīrah* literature and/or its source material, the *‘aḥādīṭ*, are reliable. If the criteria are useful to that end, then we ought to ask at what point a source can be considered reliable. Should it immediately be considered reliable if it meets none of the criteria

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid., 231.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 177–179; *ibid.*, 180–181.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 231.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 231–232. See also Motzki, Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Anthony, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 212.

of the first list, or must it simultaneously meet one, some, or all criteria of the second list? Perhaps it is also possible for a source to simultaneously meet criteria from both lists, which would raise the question of whether some criteria are (or should) be considered more valid than others. Additional research is necessary if we need answers to these questions.

The criteria for non-reliability:

- A source may not be reliable if it cannot be dated to the time period from which it purports to originate.
- A source may not be reliable if it features chronological and substantive discrepancies across its manuscripts.
- A source may not be reliable if its oldest extant manuscript may not have been the first one, and if its posterior manuscripts purport to know increasingly more about the same subject matter.
- A source may not be reliable if it conflicts with other sources.
- A source may not be reliable if its structure matches that of a literary genre.
- A source is not reliable if it depends entirely on another source.
- A source may not be reliable if it appears to settle a disagreement that arose after its purported time of origin.
- A source may not be reliable if sources indicate that it consists of fabrications.
- A source may not be reliable if it purports to be anterior to sources that are expected to cite it but do not do so.
- A source may not be reliable if it purports to be anterior to sources that indicate that it originated and developed during their time instead.
- A written source may not be reliable if it conflicts with archaeological evidence.

The criteria for reliability:

- A source may be reliable if it accurately represents the geography that it describes.
- A source may be reliable if it accurately represents what it critiques.
- A source may be reliable in the parts that are corroborated by independent sources.
- A source may be reliable in the parts that originated from eyewitnesses.
- A source may be reliable in the parts that are not polemical.
- A source may be reliable in the parts that are not essential to its main narrative.
- A source may be reliable if other sources branch off from and/or converge in it.
- A source may be reliable if its information is relatively constant across it and independent sources that feature the same information.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I stated that scholars tend to invoke a concept of *historical reliability* as they examine and write about *sīrah* literature. For that reason, I formulated the thesis question of what makes a source historically reliable according to a selection of scholars, which I aimed to answer by examining their publications about *sīrah* literature. More specifically, I sought to determine what criteria they present in their publications as they attempt to establish whether *sīrah* literature is historically reliable. I chose to examine the scholars who are situated at the forefront of the discussions of whether *sīrah* literature is historically reliable, namely Lammens, Goldziher, Schacht, Crone and Cook, Shoemaker, Koren and Nevo, Juynboll, and Motzki.

Prior to examining the research of the scholars, which I did in chapter four, I wrote two preparatory chapters (two and three). In chapter two, I focused on discussions that pertain to the concepts of history and reliability because my question is largely about what scholars intend to say when they discuss the historical reliability of a source. I established that historians regard history as something that is done, not as a ready-made record that can be learned, because there is no such record. I also explored the question of whether sources are (or can be considered) reliable, since the trend of literary criticism and longstanding questions of whether facts can be derived from sources and whether historians can objectively reconstruct history raise doubts as to whether sources are classifiable in terms of reliability. I concluded chapter two with my attempt to define historical reliability based on what I know and what issues are current in the discussions of historical reliability: I concluded that when a scholar says that a source is reliable, he or she may be saying that the opinion that it is reliable has more argumentative support than the opinion that it is not.

In chapter three, I gave a summary of the scholarly discussions of the historical reliability of *sīrah* literature and its source material: the *ʾaḥādīṭ*. I showed that scholars were relatively credulous in respect of the reliability of the material in the nineteenth century, whereas skepticism increased in the twentieth century to the extent that scholarly efforts to reconstruct the Islamic past from *sīrah* literature and/or the *ʾaḥādīṭ* have largely been abandoned or postponed. I also summarized the progress of the “revisionists” and “traditionalists.” The former group of scholars aims to reconstruct Muḥammad’s life and the Islamic past mostly from non-Islamic sources and archaeological evidence, whereas the latter group endeavors to prove that *sīrah* literature and the *ʾaḥādīṭ* are more reliable than is currently thought. A third group is identified as post-skeptical, although they are, in fact, skeptical: they reconstruct Muḥammad’s life and the early Islamic past with little to no regard for what elements of *sīrah* literature and the *ʾaḥādīṭ* are historical or fictional.

In chapter four, I examined and scrutinized the research of the scholars, with the primary aim of deriving a selection of criteria from their arguments in respect of the question of what makes a source historically reliable. For each of the scholars I had selected, I presented the arguments that illustrate their position and added some commentary if I deemed it fruitful. I then inferred criteria and explained why and how I inferred them. I concluded chapter four with a summary of the criteria that I derived from the research of the scholars, as I had set out to do.

It also seems prudent to point out that the research I have examined and the criteria I have inferred reflect a Western manner of studying the sources on Muḥammad’s life and early Islam. The question ought to be raised as to whether this way of study is ultimately valid or advisable, and whether no other way, particularly that of the Muslim traditionalists, is valid or advisable. This question can be the subject of future research.

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